

CHESS BOARD OPTIONS by Larry Kaufman, New in Chess, 223 pp., publ. 2021.

Kaufman is probably best known for his work in computer chess and as the author of a number of highly-acclaimed repertoire books (also largely based on his work with computers); here he presents us with a memoir of his life in chess.

It is divided into five large, self-explanatory, parts:

1. 20th century champions I have known
2. My non-chess career: options, shogi and other games
3. My chess career and my students
4. Computer chess
5. Various chess-related topics

Part one features luminaries such as Larsen, Korchnoi and Spassky, about whom Kaufman writes with respect and disarming honesty ('Larsen made me look like a novice'). He also writes about a number of less well-known US masters, such as Steve Brandwein, a player of great promise who retired early from competitive play, but of whom the author speaks very highly ('the best-liked chess master I've ever known'). To illustrate what a strange place the chess world can be, Kaufman relates that the Jewish, openly Communist Brandwein was a friend and one-time room-mate of the virulently anti-Semitic, anti-Communist Bobby Fischer. This part is a thoroughly enjoyable read, full of the kind of anecdotes and insights which only personal acquaintance and encounter can provide.

Part three is a trip through the author's career at the board, including his World Seniors Championships (where victory brought him his GM title), young players he has coached and a selection of his games which are all the more interesting for being relatively unknown.

Talking of games, there are a very appropriate sixty-four in all, including odds games and human v machine games, some quite unlike what you're used to seeing!

Part four's contents should be obvious – a very detailed look at his half century in computer chess – and part five covers the likes of ratings, openings and reforms to the game. Two areas to which Kaufman devotes a lot of attention are ways of making Armageddon games fairer and draws. His background is in maths, and he works in a fair amount of basic maths in these sections to back up his ideas, but I couldn't help thinking that some of the suggested cures were worse than the disease, e.g. I'm certainly not a fan of awarding a $\frac{1}{4}$ point for some types of draw (but I'm with him 100% when he calls the 3-1-0 scoring system 'a terrible solution').

The problem with the 'draw problem', assuming you think it's a problem, is that it's nothing new. There was the 'draw death' in Capablanca's heyday, draws were seen as a problem when the cautious Petrosian was on the throne, and now they're allegedly a problem because of the use of increasingly sophisticated computers, in fact the 'draw problem' seems to rear its head about every fifty years. At least he concedes it's not a problem in amateur chess. Anyway, whatever your views, it's thought-provoking stuff and healthy debate never does any harm.

Part two is the one I have my doubts about. Sure, the clue is in 'my non-chess career', but I wasn't expecting twenty-odd pages on the financial markets, shogi and other games in a chess book, and I'm not sure that its inclusion is apposite.

The reasons for its presence are obvious. Kaufman made most of his money (enough to devote himself to chess and shogi) on the financial markets and is the top US shogi player, one of the strongest non-Asian players in the world. Plus it's his memoir, so he can include whatever he likes! But it struck me like a book on French cuisine including a chapter on pakora – vaguely relevant, but a bit out of place. I can imagine some readers might skim this and get back to the chess.

A couple of other issues. The title is a bit misleading. I initially thought it referred to different versions of the game, but in fact it's a nod to Kaufman's 'other' profession as an options trader (which you won't know until you read the book).

The index is names only, and human names at that. There are some surprising omissions. Computers are conspicuous by their absence. Much of Kaufman's chess life has been bound up with the machines, but there is no mention of Komodo, Stockfish, Rybka or any other mechanical monster, or any way of cross-referencing his considerable work with them. Likewise he is a big Chess960 fan, and

mentions it a lot throughout the text, but there's no way of finding place or context.

Even the names which appear are often treated superficially. The fictitious Beth Harmon gets two references, one of which refers the reader to the whole of chapter seven, called... Finding Beth Harmon! There is no at-a-glance cross-referencing to, say, Harry Beltik, drugs or personality changes. You have to go back to the chapter and dig them out for yourself.

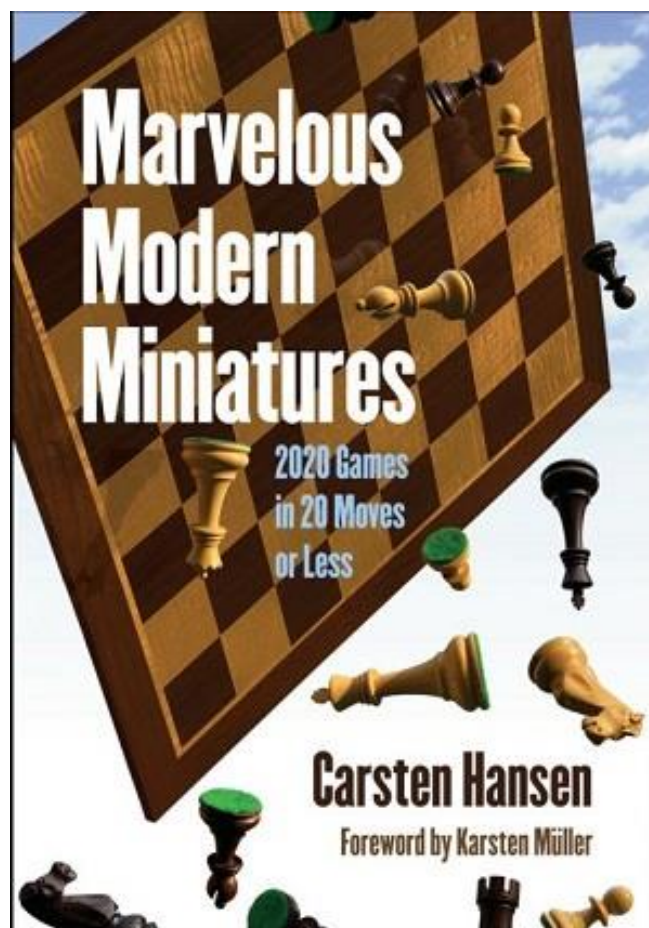
There are no games or openings indexes. If you want to track down, say, a specific human v machine odds game (and the type of odds) you're gonna have to do some thumbing.

Those reservations apart, *Chess Board Options* is an insightful and enjoyable look at the author's life-long involvement in chess, highly readable and informative throughout, and written in an easy, chatty style. It's just the sort of thing if you enjoy chess lore and want a change from the usual run of chess publications. Kudos to New in Chess for making books like this available to the chess public.

One final thing. The binding on my review copy started to disintegrate halfway through reading, in fact by the time I'd finished pages were starting to fall out. Unusual nowadays, especially for NiC who are noted for their high production standards, so maybe it was just a fluke.

Ian Marks

April 2022



MARVELOUS MODERN MINIATURES by Carsten Hansen, Russell Enterprises Inc., 520 pp., publ. 2020.

The sub-title of this hefty tome tells you what to expect: *2020 Games in 20 (sic) Moves or Less (sic)*. I loved this kind of book when I was a kid – the games were always great fun and helped plant ideas in your head – although in those days they usually featured a more modest hundred miniatures. The idea is not to show you how to bash the other guy flat before s/he's got warmed up, but to illustrate typical tactical motifs and shots, and how to be prepared for them when the opportunity arises. The flip side of the coin is to illustrate that positions often contain overlooked defensive resources. The guiding premise is that a game begins on move one, something which players seem to forget.

The players featured are all >2100 – so disabuse yourself of the notion that it's full of patzer stuff – and go all the way up to top GMs

and world champions. Amongst the losers we find some of the most tactically-savvy players of recent times. If they can play the sort of game that makes them want to sneak out without being noticed, so can we all.

The material is divvied up by opening: flank openings, lesser QP openings, lesser e4 openings, tons of Sicilians, French, 1 e4 e5 sidelines, Ruy Lopez, QG, Nimzo, KID etc., so there is something for everyone.

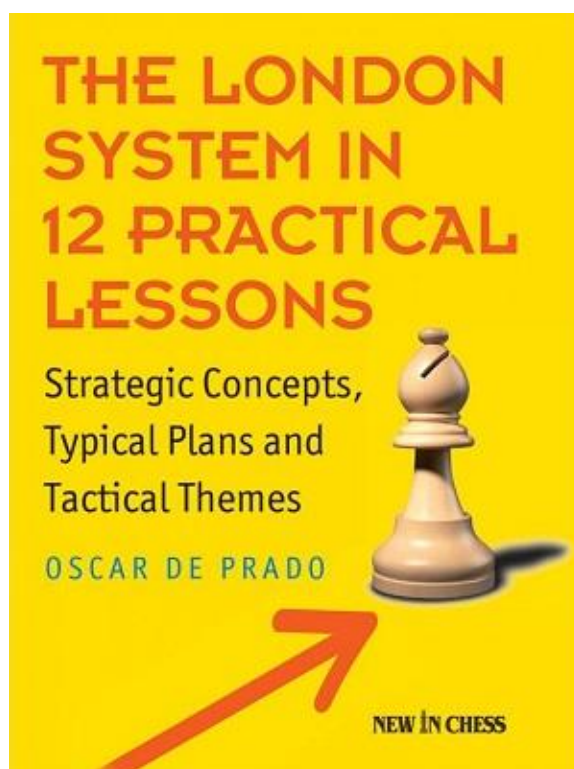
The index is players' names. It might have been an idea to provide an index of the most common tactical themes, or maybe that would have been too big an undertaking!? It would certainly have been helpful.

How to approach the book is a matter of taste. I'd be inclined to go by theme (which would involve a lot of hunting), others might prefer to look at their favourite lines. You could use it as a manual of attacking ideas or as a tactical exercise book – the diagrams are of the White/Black to play and win variety. It's up to you. I doubt if many readers would tackle it in linear fashion. It would take months.

In many ways this is still the sort of fun book I enjoyed as a junior, but one with a serious purpose. It would be daunting for beginners, but more experienced players looking for material to keep their tactical eye sharp and be ready for banana skins would not be short of material. Nor would coaches! The games are all recent, from the last thirtyish years or so, so no hackneyed stuff.

Ian Marks

March 2022



THE LONDON SYSTEM IN 12 PRACTICAL LESSONS by Oscar de Prado, New in Chess, 272 pp., publ. 2021.

Several years ago I heard an IM – who shall remain nameless – taking an unwittingly humorous pop at the London System. “This is very bad!”, she frothed, referring to the position after 1 d4 Nf6 2 Bf4. “Now there will be no advantage!” One of her peers who played 2 Bf4 against me explained that she did so *because* it gave good chances of an advantage! Presumably Carlsen and other open-minded GMs who have investigated the opening and incorporated it into their practice agree with the latter lady.

In many ways this is the sort of book that doesn’t need a review; it really is one of those what-it-says-on-the-cover works. The author published a previous work on the subject in 2016, but stresses that it is not merely an update, but a new book covering specific themes, plans and ideas. ‘The aim is to help the amateur player to understand the London System and play it correctly and easily.’ The twelve lessons of the title into which he divides his material give a good idea of what to expect:

Lesson 1 General ideas and move-orders

Lesson 2 The attack on the b2-pawn

Lesson 3 The early exchange of the f4-bishop

Lesson 4 An interesting scheme with f2-f4

Lesson 5 Typical Attacks in the London System

Lesson 6 Ideas with a quick h2-h4

Lesson 7 Play on the queenside

Lesson 8 Good knight v bad bishop

Lesson 9 Typical queen manoeuvres in the London System

Lesson 10 Typical London System endgames

Lesson 11 Latest theoretical developments in the London System

Lesson 12 Exercises: tactics, theory and strategy

While the focus is on White's side, it is anything but a 'winning with'-type offering. The coverage is objective; if Black has good options, or if White could have done better, the author says so. The material is presented via forty-five games, often with GMs on both sides, annotated in great detail, but with plenty of clear, explanatory prose and diagrams at key moments to light the way. (And it's always nice to see games from Scottish events!) Not surprisingly, the bulk of the games and references are from the last few years, although Rubinstein-Treybal, Breslau 1912, proves that there's nothing new under the sun. The most referenced players are Kamsky and Carlsen, and much can be learnt from their games. The former has been playing the London all his life, while the current world champion's more freestyle approach shows that there is still much

waiting to be discovered. The Russian GM Boris Grachev's contribution also deserves close attention. The styles of these three players show just how widely the London can be interpreted and handled. The range of unresearched positions and the variety of play which can arise make you wonder why Chess 960 is needed to escape opening theory!

The book has a labour-of-love feel about it; the author's writing has a lightness of touch which conveys his passion and enthusiasm to the reader. Overall it is a very readable and worthy addition to the literature on the London System, and one which devotees of the opening will no doubt add to their libraries. I hope our IM friend above picks up a copy. J

Ian Marks

March 2022

<https://www.chessable.com/mastering-chess-strategy/course/74643/>



Another one of those excellent books that I didn't finish reading 10 years ago!

Questions posed in the blurb include:

"Should I launch the attack, or do I need more preparation?"

"Should I trade this bishop for that knight?"

"Should I change the pawn structure, or keep it?"

The publishers tell us "Such questions dominate the making of chess strategy, but general rules of thumb you learn here and there are difficult to apply in every circumstance. Chess strategy can only be mastered by knowing when to apply which concept in a given scenario - and to do that, you need a rich understanding of many types of positions. That's where Swedish Chess Champion and Grandmaster Johan Hellsten comes in. This renowned pro is one of the leading names when it comes to chess strategy books, and he has the experience to back it up: he's not only won the top spot in his own country, he's represented the Swedes on their national team in the Chess Olympiads and European Chess Championships".

So what does Chessable bring to the table? Rather a lot, I would have to say!!

I am not convinced we retain ideas from an opening survey just by repetition. But by playing through middlegame strategic structures, then seeing the same “Chess Chunk” (abstract combination of the pieces) later, it appears to work. I seem to remember first hearing that phrase in a documentary where Susan Polgar described the cognitive learning process. This is one of the very few training methods where I have really experienced it working.

The practical examples are clear and well selected. Johan Hellsten’s comments are limited to the essentials and deeper analyses are the exception only when required to illustrate a point. I think this is intended so as not to tire the student and to sharpen the eye towards the more essential positional aspects.

There are an incredible **67 Chapters** to this course – focussing on each individual piece in turn

e.g. from the section on Rooks: The following diagram speaks for itself:

Mastering Chess Strategy > Chapters > The rook - Exercises

Exercise 54: J.Woda vs. A.Sznapiak, Slupsk 1989



Black to move, Initial position

1... ♖d2!
Blocking the d-file as a preparation for the doubling of rooks.

2. f3
Or 2. ♖b1 ♗e4! 3. ♗h2 ♞d7 with similar play. At this point 4.f3? fails to 4...♗e3+.

2... ♞d7 3. ♗f2 ♞ad8 4. b3 b6 5. ♖b1 b5!
Creating an outside passed pawn.

6. axb5 cxb5 7. ♗a3 ♞b8 8. ♗e1 ♗b4! 9. ♞a1
After 9...♗xb4 axb4 10. ♖b1 ♞a8, followed by Ra2, White is under pressure.

9... ♗xe1 10. ♞fxe1 ♞d2
Seizing the seventh rank with a clear initiative.

FEN: r2r2k1/1p2pp1p/2p1n1pb/p1n1P3/P7/2N3BP/1PP1NPP1/3R1RK1 b -- 0 1

Find position in course

I doubt I would have even thought about that idea to double my rooks! What an instructive example and when the idea presented itself in one of my online games a few days later, I found it instantly and soon built up a crushing position.

Here is another strategy example. White has just played Rc1 -> a1 with the idea of opening the a-file. How many players would have considered this plan:



When a few moves later, we can see the effects:



After examining how to maximise each piece, we turn our attention to numerous selected examples illustrating common chess themes like:

- Realising a positional advantage
- Eliminating Key Pieces
- Facilitating an attack
- Facilitating the defence
- Reducing enemy activity
- Series of exchanges
- Dynamic Exchanges
- Pawn Play
- Gaining Space
- Creating weaknesses
- Pawn Chains
- Prophylaxis
- Provocation
- Weak Squares
- Doubled Pawns
- Blockade
- The initiative

This course really makes learning such topics a lot of fun! They have been covered in many, many books but the sheer power of Chessable system shines through when you are able to play the moves out!

Mastering Chess Strategy > Chapters > 3.5 Facilitating the defence

V. Simagin vs. T.V. Petrosian, Moscow 1951



Another common target for the 'defensive' exchange is the king's bishop, which tends to play an important role in many kingside attacks. Let's see two examples.

As often is the case in such structures, the side with the isolated pawn aims at a kingside attack. Petrosian finds a great defensive measure.

23... ♖a8!
Preparing **Be4** to swap the attacking bishop on **b1**.

24. ♜e2 ♗e4! 25. ♜e1
If White sidesteps with **25... ♗a2**, then after **25... ♗d6** the black bishop becomes excellent along the **b1-h7** diagonal, both for defensive and aggressive purposes.

25... ♗xb1 26. ♜xb1 ♜d5
In the absence of his light-squared bishop, White's attacking prospects have worsened considerably, something that he now fails to accept.

Black to move, Initial position

See in chapter Previous Page Next Page

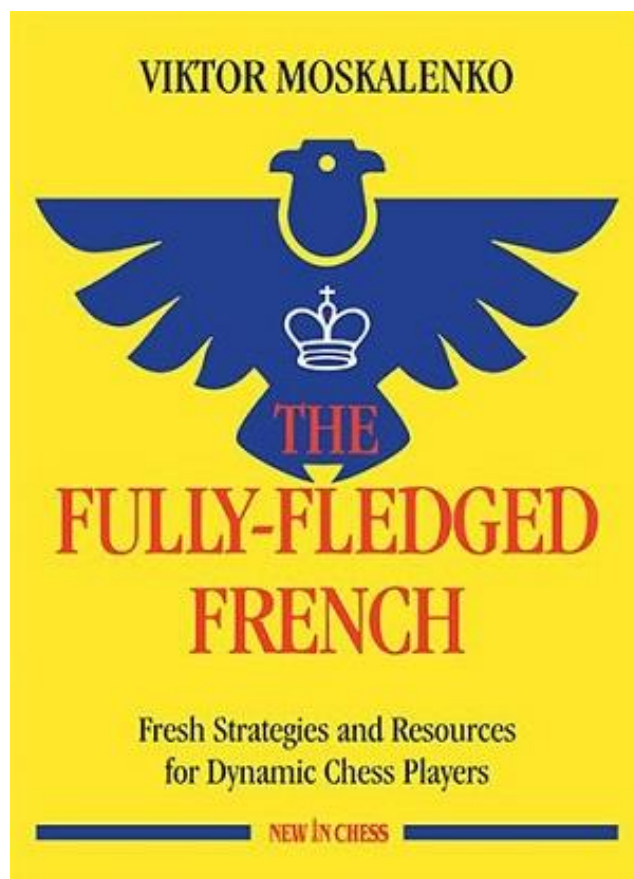
Any negatives? It would be unfair to say this is a negative, but I would strongly suggest that you run through the course using the Chessable Trainer before looking at any of the videos!

I feel that the videos say too much of *"What would you do here? Yes, absolutely that's correct"* when I've barely had time to hit the pause button. As you may know from my previous Chessable reviews, I am very usually very complimentary of the videos which do come at an additional and sometimes hefty cost. However, this particular Chessable course **is so good** I have not needed to spend time watching them. If you struggle with some of the concepts, however, the videos would be an excellent way of illustrating them. Johan Hellsten doesn't come across like a robot reading from a script. Instead, he is adept with arrows and highlights on the board to hammer home the important ideas.

This course is exceptional and I would have no hesitation recommending it to anyone.

William Hulme

February 2022



THE FULLY-FLEDGED FRENCH by Viktor Moskalenko, New in Chess, 368 pp., publ. 2021.

The author has already written extensively on his favourite opening (*The Flexible French, The Even More Flexible French, The Wonderful Winawer*) so if you're familiar with those you'll have an idea of what to expect from this one. Some of the material appeared in the earlier works, but the new games, updates and improvements galore have resulted in what is essentially a new book. As it happens, a lot of the developments which have taken place are attributable to its predecessors!

Like them, its aim is *"to offer a combative repertoire to black players"*, and the author's approach is *"more of a strategic nature, with lots of practical pieces of advice that reveal the key resources of the opening"*. 'Strategic', however, does not preclude violence, and there is plenty of sharp, tactical stuff to whet the bloodthirstiest of appetites.

While Moskalenko provides lots of analysis – you can't write an opening book without it – the book is not theory-heavy; as the subtitle *Fresh Strategies and Resources for Dynamic Chess*

Players suggests, the focus is on handling the French in an active, dynamic way. With the help of seventy-two illustrative games (the most recent from 2020 and eighteen the author's own) he covers a selection of his favourite lines in each of the main French variations – Advance, Tarrasch, Classical and Winawer – presenting all sorts of new ideas showing where and how Black can create interesting play and enjoy his share of the fun without getting bogged down in a theoretical swamp. To give a specific example: he indicates that Qg4 systems are White's best bet for an advantage v. the Winawer, yet shows that there is far more to them than deeply theoretical Qxg7 mayhem and that Black has no reason to be afraid.

Each part of the book is split into a historical introduction to the variation, a presentation of the main ideas, analysis of the most interesting lines, illustrative games and conclusions. As in his previous books, his trademark 'tricks', 'puzzles', 'weapons' etc. pointers both reinforce what he is saying and encourage you to think. His style of writing is light and fluent and his enthusiasm infectious, but he never descends into flippancy or wastes words – his analysis and comments are spot-on. The text is sprinkled with lots of recent references, including 2021, but the author does not neglect older games by French 'greats' such as Petrosian and Uhlmann. As he stresses, "*Focus your attention on the games played by the experts!*".

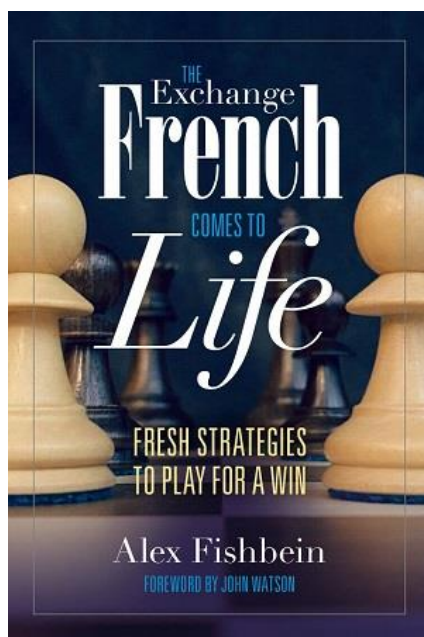
Like its forerunners, this well-thought-out and well-produced book brings the French alive. Openings books can sometimes be a tad heavy or dry, but *The Fully-Fledged French* is quite simply entertaining.

When a writer puts his heart and soul into his work, as Moskalenko does here, you know you're on to a winner. *The Fully-Fledged*

French is worthy of a place on the shelf of all French fans – anyone who owns the author's previous works will probably buy it without any prompting from me! In addition it would be of interest to newcomers to the opening, and for anyone who has never given the French a thought there is more than enough to inspire you to give it a try. With Moskalenko as your guide you could easily become addicted.

Ian Marks

January 2022



THE EXCHANGE FRENCH COMES TO LIFE by Alex Fishbein, Russell Enterprises Inc., 240 pp., publ. 2021.

You might have raised your eyebrows at the title. You might raise them further if I tell you that the sub-title is *Fresh Strategies to Play for a Win*. Play for a win!? The Exchange has never been considered a variation to strike terror into the hearts of French defenders. It's boring, equal, leads to a draw etc. etc.

Well, that depends.

In this book the American GM looks at 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 exd5 4 Nf3, a line he has been analysing and playing for over thirty years. What he offers here is a distillation of his work. The positions arising are far removed from 'traditional' Exchange lines and in general the play is much richer.

On the white side we find the likes of Carlsen, Kasparov, Grischuk and Anand, not players renowned for their boring play. Sometimes they reached the positions from a different move order, e.g. via the Petroff, Queen's Gambit or English, but that's irrelevant. What's important is that they were prepared to play them, and play them for a win. If any of those openings are in your toolbox, it would be

worth looking at Fishbein's work. As he says, *'the reason to learn different openings is that some ideas are ubiquitous'*.

The variety of possible move orders suggests that, up to a point, the cliché that understanding the positions and ideas is more important than knowing a load of variations is true. With this in mind, two key chapters (the longest in the book) cover 'IQP-lite' and symmetrical structures. They contain a lot of chess wisdom, and players who understand them better than their opponents will score points.

Which leads to the practical consideration of playing the Exchange Variation: because of its 'harmless' reputation, players of Black are less likely to have prepared a response to it (they might not even think it's necessary). Denied the chance to play a beefy Winawer, or whatever they had up their sleeve, they can get lulled into a false sense of security and wonder where their easy equality went when their position starts to head south after fifteen moves. As French guru John Watson says in his foreword, *'...any player of the Black side of the French will benefit by reading it'*.

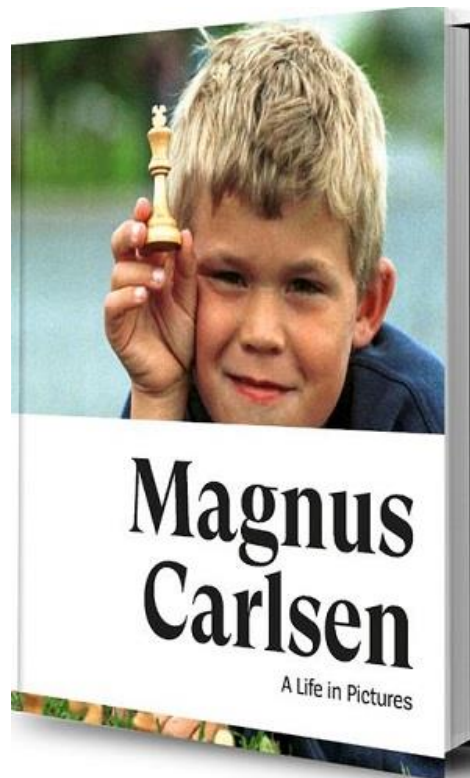
This is a refreshing book on what is almost a sideline in the French and the author clearly shows that there is more to it than meets the eye. One feature I particularly liked was chapter eleven, Your Repertoire File, a sort of vade mecum providing all you need to know in easily accessible form.

I also liked the list of frequently occurring strategic themes, but was surprised at the lack of an index of players. Strange.

All in all, something different and worth considering if you're looking for another string to your white bow.

Ian Marks

January 2022



MAGNUS CARLSEN A Life in Pictures, New in Chess, 160 pp., publ. 2021.

Just as Magnus retains his crown against Nepo comes this timely offering from New in Chess, a pictorial compilation covering Carlsen's life from pre-toddler to grinning world champ on a tropical beach.

The sources range from the Carlsen family archives to the work of many of the prominent chess photo-journalists of today, including Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam, Lennart Ootes, David Llada and Alina l'Ami. They capture a whole range of moods and situations, from carefree youngster taking his first steps in bigtime chess to the intensity of a world championship match. We see Magnus not only at the board, but also in relaxed mode, e.g. at the poker table, shooting the breeze with Bill Gates and kicking off at the Bernabeu. They permit us a glimpse of the champ in his down time and illustrate the changing ways in which the world chess champion is viewed. It is hard to imagine Botvinnik modelling a range of leisurewear or hanging out with movie stars. If there is one thing

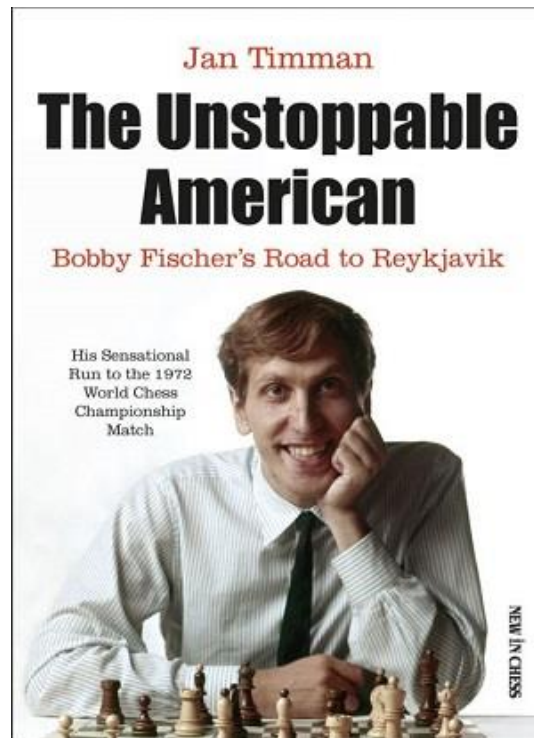
which strikes the reader, it is the sheer concentration and focus which Carlsen brings to every competitive activity, be it the world championship, elite tournament or bounce game of basketball. He has *winner* written all over him.

Photo accounts or retrospectives of a player's career are few and far between; all the more interesting when one on such a prominent practitioner of the game comes along. The photos really do speak for themselves; the minimal text is illuminatory and does not intrude. Production is excellent – high quality glossy paper in a sumptuous hardback do the contents justice. If I have one teeny reservation it's that it would have been nice to see more of the people and places attributed.

Not only is this a super production, but with Christmas just around the corner it would make the ideal stocking-filler for chess buffs everywhere. Show this review to your s.o., parents or chums and drop a hint.

Ian Marks

December 2021



THE UNSTOPPABLE AMERICAN by Jan Timman, New in Chess, 254 pp., publ. 2021.

During lockdown I spent a lot of quality hours reacquainting myself with Fischer's games from the 1970 Palma Interzonal and 1971 Candidates matches, savouring some of the most remarkable chess ever played by a remarkable player. When I had finished I thought, "It would be great if there was a book on this".

Lo and behold!

The sub-title, *Bobby Fischer's Road to Reykjavik*, sums up the contents, Timman's chronicle of that unique period in chess history. It might be worth reflecting on the time frame here. For players of my generation (that includes Timman), Fischer's rampage remains clear and vivid. I could tell you what I was doing when I heard about the 6-0s v. Taimanov and Larsen in the same way that I could tell you what I was doing when JFK was shot.

But it's fifty years ago now. For today's juniors, or any other newcomers, it is ancient chess history in the same way that the

tournaments and matches that the likes of Capablanca and Alekhine played in back in the 1920s are ancient chess history to me.

I mention this to put Timman's work into some sort of context. It is not just a simple historical treatise or a mere collection of games, but more a reconsideration of the period which the comfort and objectivity of half a century allow.

The story really starts – as Timman discusses in his prologue – with Fischer's withdrawal from the 1967 Sousse Interzonal when he was on 8/9 (8/10 if you toss in a disputed default) and clearly heading for victory. Had he won that event and qualified for the 1969 world championship match, would he have beaten Petrosian? His 1970 and 1971 results against him suggest that he would; the real hurdle would have been overcoming the formidable force which was the late '60s Boris Spassky in the Candidates. What a match that would have been. Had he done so, and beaten Petrosian, chess history might have turned out differently. Had he lost to Spassky, and qualified again from Palma three years later, it would probably have been the same. Or would he have packed chess in? Such are the fascinating ifs and maybes of life.

After dropping out of Sousse, Fischer hardly played for three years, and it is upon his return in 1970 that Timman begins his coverage. In chapter one he looks at RjF's participation in the USSR v. Rest of the World match, the Herceg Novi blitz tournament, the powerful GM tournaments at Rovinj/Zagreb and Buenos Aires and the Siegen Olympiad. This punishing schedule was Fischer's warm-up for Palma which began at the end of the year.

Chapter two is an in-depth look at Palma and chapters three, four and five deal with the matches against Taimanov, Larsen and Petrosian respectively. Timman's notes are a model of good annotation. Where some writers provide screeds of computer-

generated analysis, he offers the relevant stuff to show what is going on, but, more importantly, provides plenty of accompanying text to *explain* what is going on, and references the researches of other players such as Kasparov, Hübner, Korchnoi and Averbakh. He is particularly good at drawing out the tension of the three matches, and is not afraid to criticise Fischer if he erred or could have done better, unlike some authors who treat writing about a famous player as an act of hagiography.

A case in point is Fischer's famous 22 Nxd7+ in the seventh game of the Petrosian match. (Old lags like me will know the position I'm referring to; others will have to consult the book.) This exchange, giving up a fantastic knight for a so-so bishop, has appeared in countless books to the point of being hackneyed as a brilliant, unprejudiced example of trading one advantage for another. Timman is having none of it: 'The praise with which this move has been showered is unbelievable...I am almost certain I would have opted for Najdorf's move...22 a4 would have given White a winning advantage'. He provides analysis both to back up his claim and show that Petrosian would have had chances to hold after 22 Nxd7+ if he had played correctly. There are lots of similar instances throughout the book.

What comes across in virtually every game is the remorseless power of Fischer's play. Draws were not on his agenda; he played every game to win, often taking risks to the point of flirting with defeat (Timman illustrates that he was in fact lost in some games), confident that he could handle the psychological pressure better than his opponents. Ally that to virtually perfect technique and you truly have an unstoppable winning machine.

There are nine pages of photographs and Timman brightens his narrative with plenty of anecdotes, often from a horse's mouth. The story of Rona Petrosian taking her hand across Alexey Suetin's face has passed into chess mythology, but my favourite illustrates how

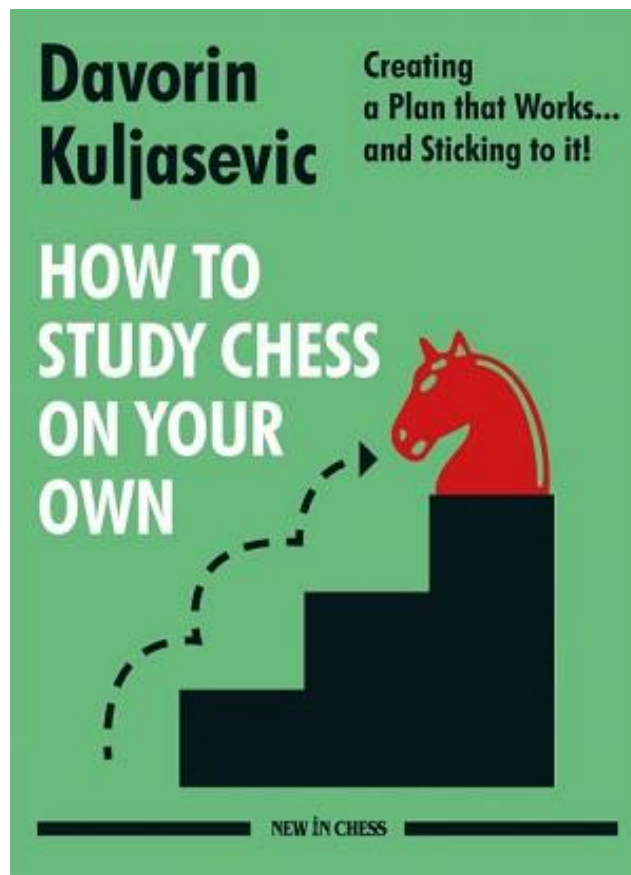
the availability of chess information has changed in the last fifty years. When Fischer was in Denver for the Larsen match, he borrowed some books off a local player! Can you imagine a top player of today having to borrow books off a random hacker!?

The translation gets high marks and reads well overall; the odd little hiccups, e.g. with prepositions and word order, don't detract too much.

Overall this is a super piece of work on several levels. It vividly brings the period and personalities – not just the main protagonists – to life, will reawaken memories for older players and introduce juniors and newcomers to this remarkable period in chess history. There is also much to be learnt from the games and Timman's lucid annotations. One wonders how many of them Fischer would have included had there ever been a sequel to *My 60 Memorable Games*. Alas, we will never know; Timman's work is as close as we will get. Definitely one to add to your library. With Christmas not far off, put it on your letter to Santa.

Ian Marks

November 2021



HOW TO STUDY CHESS ON YOUR OWN by Davorin Kuljasevic, New in Chess, 380 pp., publ. 2021

The author's first book, *Beyond Material*, was a bit different and one that I enjoyed, so I was keen to see what lay between the covers of this one. I was not disappointed.

His basic premise is that things go better if you have some sort of structure to guide you. Everybody knows this, but not everyone sticks to it, for reasons real or imaginary. If you find yourself in that category, his book may be for you. How he outlines and develops the topic can probably be best illustrated by a look at the chapter titles:

1. Do you study with the right mindset?
2. Fifteen study methods
3. Identify your study priorities
4. Choose the right resources for your study plan

5. Study your openings deeply
6. 'Dynamize' your tactical training + tactics test
7. Make your endgame study more enjoyable
8. Systemize your middlegame knowledge + Test on exchanges
9. Get organized – create a study plan

Plus a final chapter containing solutions to the exercises.

The author cannot be accused of leaving stones unturned; this is a very wide range of topics, designed, he says, *"...so that anyone from a casual club player to a chess professional could... take away a reasonable number of original learning methods"*.

That is a very laudable aim, but there is a vast gulf between club player and pro. For one thing, club players tend to have a non-chess job, and the waking hours not devoted to it are probably devoted to the myriad family matters that we all have to deal with.

For example, the author talks about how he studied two books carefully for several months, analysing every single example for himself on a board and going over relevant passages again. Desirable, yes, but the sort of thing that Joe Average might find hard to factor into his schedule as he tries to juggle home and work commitments. Likewise when he talks about one of his own study plans involving four to five hours a day during the week and six to seven a day at the weekend, you wonder how applicable this sort of thing can be to someone struggling to find even an hour a week.

Time allocations clearly have to be tailored to meet individual situations, and, to be fair, it is something of which the author is well aware:

"You should design your own study plans with a format and to the extent that is appropriate to your own taste, level of commitment, and resources"

and

"It is highly unlikely that you will actually be able to execute your chess activities exactly as you had originally planned in your schedule because the circumstances in life inevitably change and cannot be predicted. Thus, you want to always leave some room for adjustments in case of contingencies, in other words, plan dynamically."

That said, the book is full of good advice. Here is an example from chapter five, 'Study your openings deeply':

"Keeping up with ever-increasing amounts of opening theory can be too time-consuming and ineffective for many chess players. Instead, a more practical approach is to focus on middlegame and endgame competence and learn only as much opening theory as you need to get a position you like, even if it is not the most critical by the highest opening theory standards. This, however, does not mean that you should go out of your way to avoid mainstream opening theory. In fact, I would recommend playing as principled lines as possible." He then gives a nod of agreement with Sam Shankland: *"...playing the middlegames that arise from mainline openings is an incredible learning experience for which there is no substitute."*

This simple, yet profound, advice is only one part of one paragraph in one chapter. The book is oozing with such stuff. Here's another example from chapter seven, 'Make your endgame study more enjoyable'. He's talking about players who don't bother to look at endgames:

"The logic goes something like this: 'I don't get endgames much in my games, anyway. Why should I bother studying some theoretical endgame that I will maybe never get in a game?'... This kind of thinking

is wrong on several levels. Firstly, it testifies to the study mindset of not being objective enough... Secondly, lack of endgame study will definitely affect your results adversely... weak endgame fundamentals decrease your overall potential as a chess player."

If you liked these, you'll like the book.

The main thing which strikes you is the amount of text. It is a heavy book, both in weight and content, but is highly readable. The author illustrates his points with lots of examples which, even if he recommends blindfold reading as one of his study methods, should definitely be pondered and gone over on a board.

Throughout, the author's philosophy is very much that of teaching you to fish rather than giving you a fish, and, even if your study time is limited, there will be something between the covers that will be of benefit.

It is written in the same easy, conversational style as his previous book and, like that one, is different from the general run of chess books. It is well worth a look by players looking for a guide to how to structure their chess study and what to include in it.

Does it do what it sets out to do? With a bit of individual tailoring, certainly. Even if it gets you to draw up and work with a study plan of your own, whatever your time constraints, it will have achieved its objective. And it'll make you think.

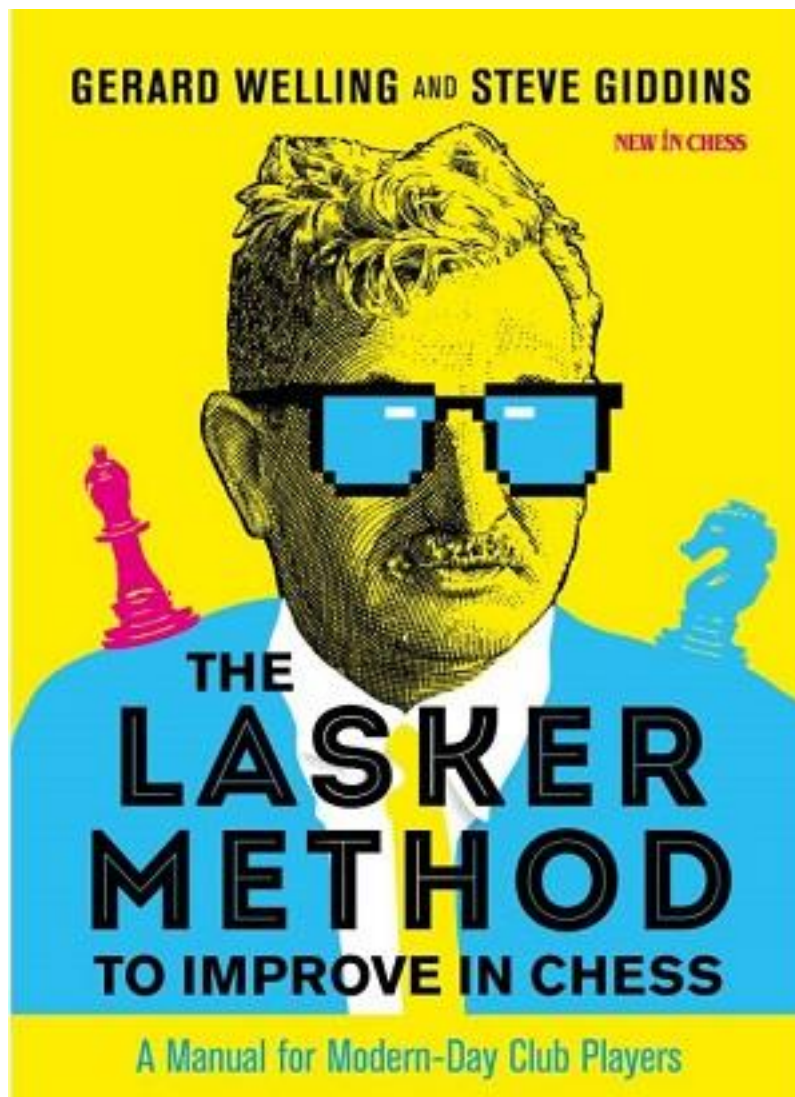
A final note. I've had a pop at NiC in the past for their indexes. I shall have to stop. I've just finished a 600+pp. non-fiction book the subject of which is not important to this review. When I'd finished I wanted to go back and re-read a couple of passages about one of the characters. I turned to the back of the book. There was no index. You heard. No index in a non-fiction work from a long-established, reputable publisher. I won't repeat my reaction – there

might be children reading – but what should have taken me a few seconds took over ten minutes' flicking and skimming.

So I shall henceforth be kinder to our friends at NiC. Yes, there's an index, names only.

Ian Marks

November 2021



THE LASKER METHOD TO IMPROVE IN CHESS by Gerard Welling
and Steve Giddins, New in Chess, 240 pp., publ. 2021

The idea behind this book can be summed up in one phrase: to make the average player's life a lot simpler. The authors' inspiration comes from Lasker's classic *Common Sense in Chess* (the 'method'), based on a series of lectures the great man gave away back in 1895 (and, as a classic work, essential reading). In it, the World Champion outlined an approach to the game for ordinary players based on playing sensibly and adhering to general principles, in the words of the authors *"...an efficient and independent approach to chess, with nothing superfluous, which is diametrically opposed to what many players do in practice, by storing as much information in their brains as they can"*. Chess is perhaps too concrete a game to allow for such an

approach exclusively, but the underlying philosophy of keeping things simple is certainly nothing new. As the American philosopher Thoreau put it: *"Simplify, simplify, simplify! * I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb-nail."*

(*You could argue he could have simplified that by using only one 'simplify'.)

It's easy for ordinary players to become overwhelmed by the sheer volume and range of books, DVDs, courses, downloads, software, online resources etc. etc. available nowadays. The authors seek to redress this information tsunami by indicating how players can try to declutter their chess minds and reappraise their approach to the game. Maybe not quite back to basics, but along those lines.

They do so via chapters on general chess philosophy and common sense, strategy and positional play, the endgame, attack, defence, Ns v Bs, amorphous positions, the opening, then games for study and tactics. Their watchwords are 'simple' and 'sound', an echo of Portisch's *"I can recommend the following: simplicity and economy"*. Good advice is timeless.

In each chapter they illustrate how each aspect of the game can, certainly to an extent, be handled in a no-frills manner. Ask me for my favourite and I think I'd plump for chapter seven which deals with amorphous positions, basically keeping your position flexible, not committing yourself, and waiting to see what your opponent's up to, which, as the authors point out, can be an excellent way to play for a win.

The authors provide seventy-three games and fragments, many of them by Lasker himself, but featuring an impressive collection of other big (and not so big) names, from Alekhine and Capablanca up to Kasparov and Carlsen. In keeping with the nature of the text,

words (sensibly!) take precedence over moves: *"Our approach has been to annotate games largely with verbal explanations, adding concrete detail only when this is essential to understand what is going on"*.

Chapter eight, *An approach to the openings* (sic), is a useful overview of how openings-obsessed ordinary players could trim back their workload. You don't necessarily have to agree with the authors' every word or suggestion, but it should at least set you thinking. Curiously, though, the openings index omits references to those which appear in this chapter! The index would have you believe there's nothing on, say, the Evans Gambit or Vienna, yet they're covered on pp. 98-9 and 103-5 respectively. In similar vein, the King's Gambit reference is to a game on p.65, not the coverage on pp. 105-7. Talking of the Evans, the authors 'get it out of the way' with the unusual 4...d5!?, rather strangely, since Lasker's no-nonsense suggestion of declining it with 4...Bb6 transposes directly into their line in the Giuoco Pianissimo on p.101, where they even cite a game by... Lasker! Anomaly aside, this is a good illustration of the 'common sense' philosophy at work: spending ages mugging up on the sharp stuff after 4...Bxb4 v. just playing 4...Bb6 and getting on with your G/75 league game in peace.

The authors have done a good job of setting Lasker's common sense approach in a contemporary context and bringing it to a new readership. I suspect it will find greater resonance amongst players who learnt their chess with books and a board, rather than the computer generation. The beauty of books like this is that they require you to *think* about chess and hopefully understand the game better. Those whose chess consists of robo-clicking through reams of trainable variations will find much food for thought and no small amount of wisdom between its covers. The target readership – 'average amateurs' – is probably around 1500-2200. At the lower end a certain amount of knowledge is assumed (as the authors

write in the endgame chapter, “...we will assume the reader has mastered these ‘essential positions’ for himself”), at the higher end, stronger players will most likely be savvy to this sort of stuff already.

The authors write smoothly and with a lightness of touch which reads easily without ever drifting off-message, and the book is presented in crystal-clear double column format. The psychedelic cover featuring a funkily beshaded Lasker appealed to me, but I’m a fan of quirky stuff like this. I can imagine it might have others reaching for the paracetamol. Overall, a thoroughly enjoyable, highly readable and highly recommended piece of work.

Ian Marks

November 2021

<https://www.chessable.com/the-road-to-chess-improvement/course/51794/#positions>



Chessable > Courses > Chess Strategy

The Road to Chess Improvement

MoveTrainer™ Strategy/Tactics course by Gambit Publications

& by GM Alex Yermolinsky ★★★★★

Now for something completely different - a classic Gambit Publications book from 1999: *'The Road To Chess Improvement'* has been given the Chessable makeover and a 43 hour video extravaganza by author GM Alex Yermolinsky himself.

Reviews for the book included:

- GM Paul Motwani, THE SCOTSMAN:

"Yermolinsky's masterpiece also really gets to grips with numerous crucial elements such as decision-making, emotions, tactical mastery, strategic skills, deep knowledge and understanding of all phases of the Royal Game...so vital for the practical player wanting to progress far along the road of improvement."

- IM John Watson, TWIC: "For anyone looking to improve and to understand the modern game in a fresh way, I believe that this is one of the most exciting and provocative works to appear in years".

So how does the electronic version square up against the printed book and are there any advantages of buying this Chessable course if you already have the book – please read on!

My first impressions were not great and I wondered what this course was trying to achieve after I had watched some of the first

chapter entitled “A sneak preview into what this book is really about”. I watched and listened carefully when Yermo refers to graphs of trends then runs through moves from several games referring to critical moments but the chessboard remains setup in the initial position throughout. Later I discovered that you needed to play through the movie trainer first to see what he was on about.

About 10 mins in, Yermo tells us to stop studying classics like the principles of Nimzovitch once you are around 1700 strength because they stop being helpful then – and that opening books are not so useful for learning to play better chess. This didn't really inspire me even if what he is trying to say has some truth in it.

However, I continued to watch but there was still the initial position after 34 mins of chat. While I do respect the insights of such a great player and teacher, I didn't feel it was particularly suited to the video abilities of Chessable. The chat on how emotions (emotional shifts) can affect your play was relevant perhaps more for 2200-2400+ players looking to improve, but I was left feeling I needed more explanations.



However, soon after 34 mins, a game position appeared on the board (at last) and we were off! To be completely honest, I found Yermo's presentation a little dry and I couldn't really get into it like I have been able to with other Chessable courses.

After forcing myself to complete "a sneak preview..." section of 2Hrs 30, I found myself skipping onto something which looked a bit more interesting – "Openings and early Middlegame structures". In the first video, the author states "Before we get to this you are going to have to tolerate another 30mins of talking" (really?!). What followed was a fairly interesting review of IM John Watson's book *"Secrets of Modern Chess Strategy"*. I noticed that Yermo tends to ramble off topic quite frequently e.g. "I'm delving into an area where I have no business giving anybody advice in / learning a language which is not your native one / Ok, we'll go to chess now".

Just when I was just about to give up, he turned his attention to the Exchange QGD and the Carlsbad structure – examining it from both sides – but explaining how he needed it to fit into his 3.Nf3 move order back in the 80s/90s. This was really interesting and I began to enjoy the discussion! Once Yermo gets into the swing of it, the quality of his genius really does kick in.

Carlsbad, the Exchange QGD structure

I've had it explained to me many times before (from various videos and in several books) but there was something in the way that Yermo explained it here which really hit home.

He places a huge emphasis on true understanding:

- the purpose of 9.h3
- White's four main plans

- what works – and why!
- what doesn't work - and why!

all in great detail.

The author says “learn it, don't try and memorise it” and it will stay in your head forever. I certainly hope it does but the beauty of this type of training is that we can re-watch it over and over again!

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Tools ▾

The Road to Chess Improvement > Chapters > Openings and Early Middlegame Structures I

The Exchange QGD II

Black to move, Initial position

↺
⏮
⏪
⏩
⏭

☐

See in chapter
Previous Page
Next Page

FEN:
Find position in course

What does White do here? What plans does he have at his disposal? Here's a short list in descending order of relative importance.

- The minority attack.

- White plays for a **b4-b5** advance.

- The centre-breaking pawn advance.

- White plays **e3-e4**. It creates an isolated pawn on **d4** with all its typical implications.

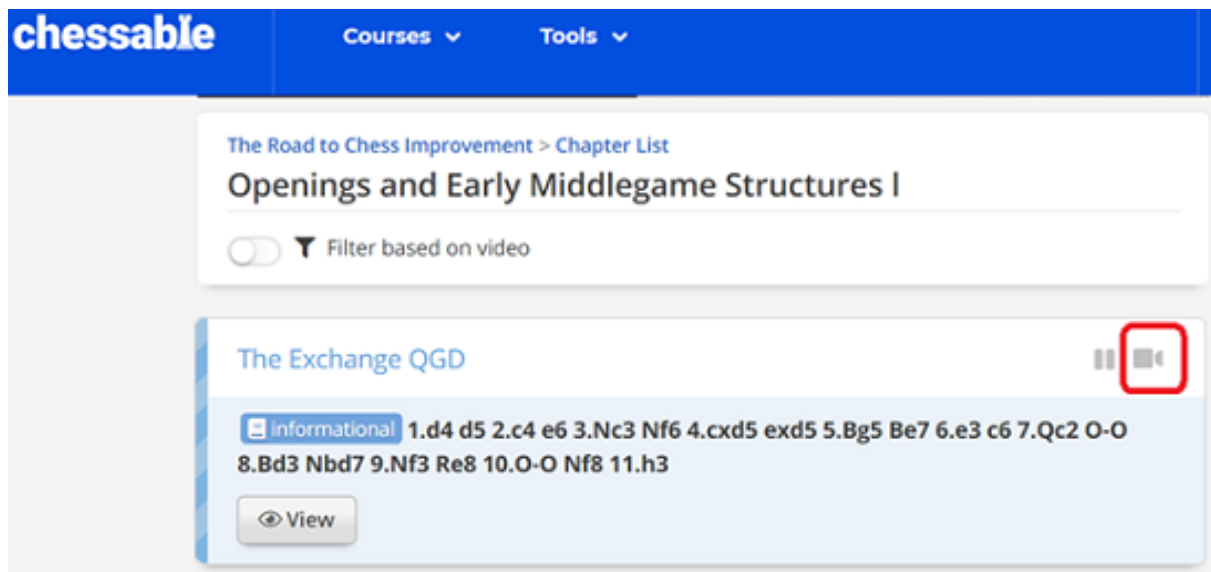
- The centre build-up.

- White plays **f3** and **e4**.

- The post-up.

- White puts his knight on **e5**, and supports it with **f4**.

Chessable offers a unique way to dive straight into the relevant part of the video lecture by clicking a button here:



This takes you straight to the relevant part which discusses that position and cuts out all the other chat(!) – very clever use of the interface and technology.

Alternatively, you can choose an option called **filter based on video** which takes you straight to the training notes/book section that you have paused the video on here:

The Road to Chess Improvement

Openings and Early Middlegame Structures I

[Back to chapter list](#)[The Road to Chess Improvement > Chapter List](#)

Openings and Early Middlegame Structures I



Filter based on video

Yermolinsky vs. Hergott



informational 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.Bg5 Be7 6.e3 c6 7.Qc2 O-O 8.Bd3 Nbd7 9.Nf3 Re8 10.O-O Nf8 11.h3 Nh5 12.Bxe7 Qxe7 13.Rfe1 Qf6 14.Ne5 Ng6 15.f4 Nxe5 16.dxe5 Qh4 17.Bxh7+ Kh8 18.Bf5 d4 19.Bxc8 Raxc8 20.Ne4 dxe3 21.Nd6 Qg3

This makes it simple to play through the moves on the Chessable board while reading the text (like a book only with moving pieces!). The author's highlighted colours hammering home the points he is making.

At any point, you can switch on a strong (Stockfish) engine and check any analysis in that way!

chessable Courses Tools

The Road to Chess Improvement > Chapters > Openings and Early Middlegame Structures I

The Exchange QGD II

this particular position many times.

In the Exchange Variation Black nearly always seeks to exchange the dark-squared bishops, because he needs to free his play and complete development. In our case, however, White can refuse to cooperate.

He chooses

11... ♗f4

instead, the move that keeps the bishop, and incidentally, leaves the black centralized knight lacking support.

There's a lot to be said about mutual chances in this position, but I'll try to concentrate on other possibilities Black has in the diagrammed position.

I have had a vast amount of experience on the white side of this opening, and some of those games may well illustrate the complexity of the featured pawn-structure.

Black to move, last move: Bf4

FEN: r1bqnrk1/pp2bppp/2p5/3p4/3PnB2/2NBPN1P/PPQ2PP1/R4RK1 b - - 2 12

Find position in course

The full list of Openings covered in these three chapters (Openings and early middlegame structures) are as follows:

- **Queens Gambit Exchange (Carlsbad)**
- **Central pawns against Grunfeld**
- **Side stepping the 'real' Benko with 6.Qc2**
- **Modern Defence. It's just a Benoni**
- **How to face the Sicilian Grand Prix attack**
- **Sicilian counterattack with ...d6 then e6**
- **Pros and Cons of the White double fianchetto**

What sets this course apart is the volume of work - almost 43 hours worth of video. It's slow in places (both the first and last chapters

have 40 mins of talking before a move is shown on the board!) but the discussions are very deep and detailed when it gets going – especially the three middle chapters on openings which I have to say are exceptional chess training.

The rest of the course may not be everyone's cup of tea.

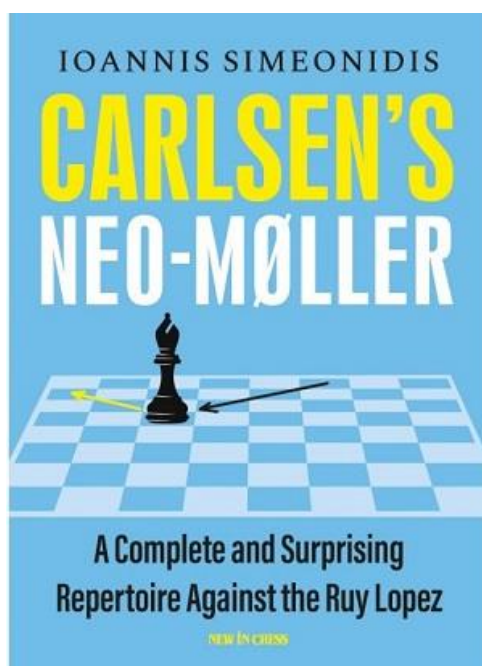
Here are all the chapter names and video times:

- A sneak preview into what this book is really about (2Hrs 30) 4 game positions
- Trends, Turning points and Emotional shifts (5Hrs 30) 8 game positions
- Trends, Turning points and Emotional shifts II (5Hrs 20) 7 game positions + 6 other games
- **Openings and early Middlegame structures I (5Hrs 50)**
- **Openings and early Middlegame structures II (5Hrs 24 mins)**
- **Openings and early Middlegame structures III (6Hrs 4 mins)**
- Tactical Mastery and strategic skills (4Hrs 37)
- Tactical Mastery and strategic skills II (6Hrs)
- Let's talk computer Chess (1Hr 22)

Conclusion: without the videos, I wasn't particularly impressed with the course. However, by adding the videos in those three sections (highlighted above) and make it much more desirable.

If you are interested, then do keep an eye on Chessable offers, where you can pick up the video course for £99.98 and the basic one for £19.99 with nearly 4 Hrs free video included.

William Hulme, September 2021



CARLSEN'S NEO-MØLLER by Ioannis Simeonidis, New in Chess, 158 pp., publ. 2020.

Lest the names might not be household, let me start by introducing the author and the opening. The former is a Greek FM and FIDE trainer, and the latter refers to the line of the Ruy arising after 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Bc5.

Prefixing 'Neo-Møller' with 'Carlsen's' is a sales pitch, but a perfectly legitimate one, explained by the fact that the author's motivation to start looking at ...Bc5 systems in the Ruy again was rekindled by the big game Karjakin-Carlsen, Stavanger 2018.

His aim with what he calls *"Black's most uncompromising system against the Ruy Lopez"* is *"to achieve...an ideal position with black (sic) in the Ruy Lopez, where my pawns occupy a sufficient part of the centre and my pieces are active or at least potentially so"*, and his intention is *"to provide a repertoire for Black after 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6, with the general idea to place the black bishop on c5 on the next move, refraining from ...b7-b5 unless it is necessary"*. The positions arising are complex, sharp and open, with

lots of tactical play, so if that sounds like your Ruy Lopez worldview, this could be the book you've been waiting for.

The author is certainly thorough. He devotes seven chapters to the main line arising after 3...a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.O-O Bc5 6.c3 O-O 7.d4 Ba7, seven to sidelines, one to the Exchange Variation and two to exercises. There is no dedicated illustrative games section, but there are lots of detailed game references in the notes, featuring most of the big names, with the majority from recent years, including some from 2020. Can't get much more up to date than that!

He also digs deep: analysis in the main line chapters begins on move eight, and often runs well into the twenties, and his research is extensive, with classical, correspondence and online references, even a titbit with Fischer on the black (!) side of an Exchange Ruy. This being largely terra incognita until now, he has not worked alone, and has called on Houdini 6.03, Komodo Dragon, Stockfish and Chessbase Cloud for assistance. It is no surprise that the text is move- and variation-heavy, and although there are enough words at critical junctures to light the way, a fair level of chess understanding will still be required to figure out what is going on in places. It is impressive, not just from a potential practical point of view, but given how effectively the author has synthesised his material into a structured whole.

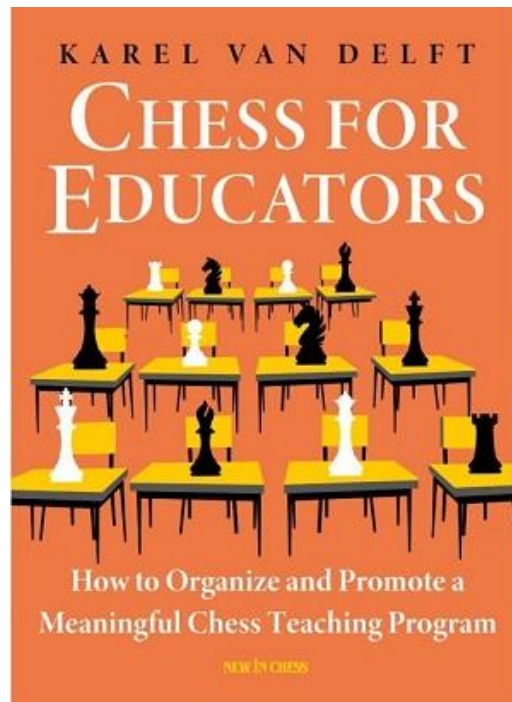
Clearly it is not play-in-a-day coverage; it is going to require serious time investment. The range and depth of the coverage pretty much defines who the book is best suited for. As the back cover blurb says, you are more likely to get the Neo-Møller, an early deviation, on the board compared to other Ruy lines, but that is not a given in the gambit/Scotch/Bishop's etc.-infested waters of club and weekend chess (whenever it starts again!). Ordinary club players might thus want to think about the likely practical return on their time investment.

The book is well produced in clear, easy-to-follow double column format, with around three diagrams per page. One niggly thing, though, which grates on the eye (at least this reviewer's eye) is the use of round brackets within round brackets. We were taught at school that this was an absolute no-no (and you'd have been pounced upon for it). Why not use square brackets? Has something changed?

Having said that, Simeonidis's trail-blazing research is undoubtedly the go-to work for serious and ambitious players looking for coverage of this interesting and hitherto neglected line of the Ruy.

Ian Marks

August 2021



CHESS FOR EDUCATORS by Karel van Delft, New in Chess, 270 pp., publ. 2021.

There has been increasing interest in the educational benefits of chess in recent years, and in this book the Dutch author presents a thorough overview of the present state of affairs, a task for which his background as a chess teacher, organiser and holder of a Master's in Psychology eminently qualifies him. He casts his net far and wide, and covers just about every aspect of the subject. A few chapter headings at random:

- Didactics in school chess
- Pre-school chess
- Organization of a school chess club
- The role of parents
- Chess for the blind and partially sighted/deaf and hard of hearing
- Chess and autism/dyslexia
- Girls' and women's chess
- Class management

- Research into the benefits of chess instruction

He also discusses, inter alia, chess and high IQ children, gifted children, those with Down's Syndrome, ADHD and so on. Remember, though, that chess in the Netherlands enjoys greater prestige and a higher public and media profile than it does here, so the author's Dutch angle might not necessarily be directly applicable to Scotland.

The general tenor of the text suggests that the author is writing with younger children in mind, although by no means exclusively. This throws up the issue of how young (chapter three even discusses two-year-olds) and what methods to use. The author addresses both of these, but I can imagine differences of opinion over whether toddlers should have formal instruction (however informal, if you see what I mean), and, in a text which naturally advocates the use of chess engines and videos, whether in front of a computer screen is the best place to plonk them.

While some sort of formal chess provision in schools might arguably be desirable, it should be borne in mind that time on a school timetable is finite: something comes in, something drops out. Existing expressive arts subjects such as music (which, like chess, has many spin-off benefits) are already under pressure. In these days when subjects have to 'sell themselves' (pupils are now evidently consumers), anyone wanting to embed chess in the school curriculum is going to have to make a pretty hard pitch. And everything costs money.

Could after-school clubs, which the author covers, be the answer? In an ideal world, quite possibly, but this is a hot potato with ramifications beyond the scope of a review which I am going to leave well alone.

Chess for Educators is not a chess book as we know it (only ten diagrams!), and could not have been an easy text to translate, and Peter Boel has produced a generally smooth translation. However translating from one's own language into a foreign language is much more demanding than the other way round, and the text is dotted with odd we-know-what-you-mean misspellings (e.g. 'trainings', 'arithmetics'), awkwardness (e.g. 'pleads for', which occurs several times, as in "*He pleads for a holistic approach*" – why not 'advocates a holistic approach?') and, on occasion, non-English (e.g. 'mind sporters', which I surmise is a literal translation of the Dutch 'denksportler', practitioners of a mind sport).

Nor do prepositions always get the careful handling they require, e.g. 'He grew out to become the strongest player of his time', and I lost count of the number of times I read 'on school', another literal translation from Dutch.

A much bigger issue, though, is the use of educational terminology in English, a minefield for the unwary, the most egregious example (the author is talking about autism) being "*This handicap may be combined with retardedness*". Leaving aside the issue of whether autism is a 'handicap' or not, the use of 'retarded' or its relatives in an educational context has been a no-no for decades. It is offensive in the same way that certain words in other fields are now regarded as offensive. In similar fashion (and leaving aside the semantics of 'handicap'/'disability') I would call Down's Syndrome a chromosomal disorder, not an 'intellectual disability'.

There are a few possible reasons for this. Perhaps the original Dutch words have different shades of meaning and are acceptable in Dutch; it might be wrong vocabulary choice; it could be inconsistency between UK and US usage (in America autism is still referred to as a 'handicap', and they refer to Down's Syndrome as 'Down Syndrome'; 'practice', the verb, is spelt the American way, but other words, e.g. 'behaviour', are spelt ours).

But I suspect the most likely reason is lack of a proofreader, at least none is credited. The text would have benefited from being vetted by a native English speaker, preferably one familiar with current educational thinking.

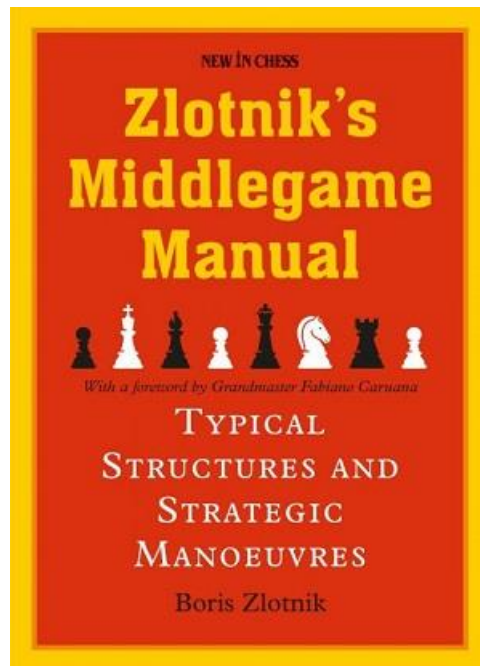
Who is the intended readership? As the title hints, it's more an educational text than chess book, but any potential reader would have to have some knowledge of the game. Another point is that anyone who has spent any time reading educational texts/reports/papers soon realises that they are not the most gripping of genres, and so it is with *Chess for Educators*. While the breadth and depth of the author's research are impressive, and his work is undoubtedly the go-to book on the current state of the art, it is not a white-knuckle read. I can more readily imagine it on the shelf in a college library than on a chess player's bedside cabinet, and I say that with no hint of criticism. It is insightful and anyone interested in the subject will find it full of ideas, suggestions and inspiration. Agree or disagree with the author, you will never be short of food for thought.

It is well produced and there is an extensive bibliography, but the names-only index does not cite the likes of topics, reports or studies. Unless you know the names of the people involved, then it's going to take you ages to find, say, 2005's *Chess Development in Aberdeen's Primary Schools: a Study of Literacy and Social Capital*. Strange.

In short, *Chess for Educators* is a comprehensive survey which would interest anyone wanting to know where chess and education stand at the present time. Credit to NiC for commissioning it and putting it in the public domain.

Ian Marks

August 2021



ZLOTNIK'S MIDDLEGAME MANUAL by Boris Zlotnik, New in Chess, 400 pp., publ. 2020.

I was wondering how to describe this one by the well-known trainer when I realised that a better player than I had done so for me. To quote Fabiano Caruana (whose early coach the author was) in his foreword: *"Zlotnik's Middlegame Manual is a book with a highly didactic, explanatory character, in which all evaluations and conclusions are supported by deep computer analysis. The book is a thorough study of three important types of pawn structures and three main motifs that return in many openings. Together, these are six essential themes that form an integral part of modern chess, and they have been very thoroughly investigated by Boris. The result is an interesting and productive study for chess players of all levels, including coaches."*

I could stop there, but I'll add some flesh to Caruana's words. The three types of pawn structures he mentions are the IQP, Carlsbad and symmetrical structures. Each gets a lengthy chapter of 50+ pages, split into a number of smaller sections. To give you an idea

of the thoroughness Caruana mentions, consider the six main sections on the IQP:

- Plan A: kingside attack
- Plan B: opening the game by advancing the isolated pawn
- Plan C: advancing the isolated pawn in order to fix an enemy pawn on an adjacent file
- Plan D: developing activity on the queenside
- Plan A for the defending side: simplification of the position
- Plan B for the defending side: transformation from an IQP structure to a structure with hanging pawns

Not lightweight fare! The author uses complete games, fully annotated, to exemplify his material, not the sort of stuff you can skim through and think, yeah, I got it. The games are a pleasing mixture of classic and modern, featuring all the great players from the likes of Alekhine and Capablanca through Botvinnik, Fischer and Kasparov to current greats like Carlsen, Anand and So. As Caruana mentioned, the contents have been thoroughly computer checked, so the notes are certainly not short on variations. However Zlotnik uses lots of lucid prose to explain the thinking behind the moves. Here is a simple example, describing an h2-h3 move in one of Carlsen's games, the sort of thing that can easily go unremarked: *"With this modest pawn advance, Carlsen begins a plan of kingside expansion, aimed at opening the position and giving his pair of bishops more scope"*. There you have it, a succinct outline of a middlegame plan in one sentence.

Moving on to the three opening motifs, we find chapters on restricted mobility in the King's Indian Defence, whether to exchange the fianchettoed bishop and the d5-square in the Sicilian. These are also sub-divided into sections of around forty pages, and

are treated in depth. For example, in the King's Indian chapter we find

- The manoeuvre Nf3-h4
- Pinning the Nf6 with Bc1-g5
- Playing an early g2-g4
- Exchanging pawns with exf5 gxf5, followed by f2-f4/f3
- The exchange ...Bg7xNc3

Again, this is hardly bedtime reading. I've reviewed books before which require serious time investment, and given the depth and nature – even philosophy – of this one, it certainly will. Having said that, the benefits to be gained are commensurately greater.

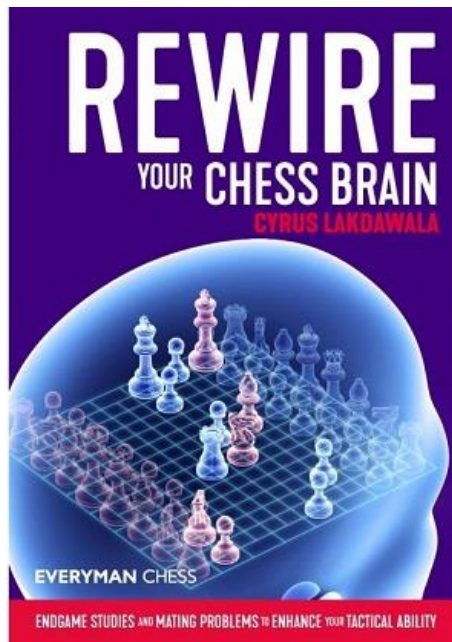
One caveat, and it applies to lots of other chess books too. Publishers like to pitch their books as suitable for 'a wide range of players', or 'players from 1600-2400' or some such. This, of course, is just sales patter. Chess books are no different from any other text books; you wouldn't put a university text into the hands of an S1 high school pupil, and I wouldn't let inexperienced or low-rated players near this one. Caruana calls it "*an interesting and productive study for chess players of all levels*", and, while I wouldn't dispute his first claim, I would certainly ca' canny with the second. The content, presentation and level of authorial discussion make this a work for experienced players who already have a decent handle on the positional and opening ideas under discussion. If that's you, there is much to learn from Zlotnik's wisdom; it is serious instruction for serious players. If not, I would urge you to read some lighter middlegame texts and only then consider this one.

In conclusion, this sturdy tome is well worth the attention of ambitious or experienced players looking for high-level material intelligently discussed and presented. The subject areas listed above are only part of the story; there is a lot to be learnt about the

game in general here. Despite its size, it is not an overly daunting book, and the examples chosen are generally striking or memorable enough to plant their lesson in the reader's head. It crosses my mind, as the covid situation mercifully now seems to be improving, that *Zlotnik's Middlegame Manual* would have been an ideal lockdown companion. But don't let your new-found freedom stop you reading it now!

Ian Marks

July 2021



REWIRE YOUR CHESS BRAIN by Cyrus Lakdawala, Everyman Chess, 528 pp., publ. 2020

This is Lakdawala's fiftieth book in the last decade, roughly one every ten weeks. That's how long you get to research, collate, check, draft, edit and write a 2,000-word essay at uni. Lakdawala manages a book in that time. Factor in the production process and he must actually be writing a book about every six weeks.

With his latest offering he enters the world of endgame studies, to which he turned in 2019 after retiring from active play for health reasons.

By way of intro, he lists three of the complaints levelled against chess compositions: stipulation to solve in X moves, artificiality and difficulty. I've heard of others, e.g. the jargon involved, but it strikes me that the issue of *why* players are put off might have been worth greater consideration if you're trying to sell problems as a learning tool.

He devotes the rest of the intro to the benefits of solving and how best to use the book before launching into the real meat, ten

chapters in which he discusses 326 studies, plus twenty positions from real games. The studies are not arranged in order of difficulty, but by type. The chapter headings should be self-explanatory:

1. Old School
2. The Containment Field Holds: Drawing Studies
3. Realism
4. Mates in One Move
5. Mates in Two Moves
6. Mates in Three Moves
7. Mates in Four or More Moves
8. Unchess
9. Life Simulates Art
10. The Wunderkind

The composers featured range from greats such as Troitzky, Kubbel and Loyd to contemporary composers. Lakdawala's selection showcases many outstanding works, and he deserves credit for putting it all together. However he seems to have ignored endgame study databases and foreign language sources; the bibliography contains only English-language books. Strange.

I confess that, for purposes of this review, I did not tackle all 300+ problems, but enough to confirm that the selection covers everything from the straightforward to the fiendishly perplexing to the bizarre, with enough variety to interest solvers of all levels. You might be wondering how strong you have to be to work on them. I don't see why there need be a 'lowest' rating level. If you have some experience of the game, you should be able to make a go of at least the more straightforward examples. As Lakdawala explains, it's not the solving that's important, but making the effort to do so.

The layout is study-solution-study-solution, so you'll need a couple of pieces of paper to hide the answers. A case could have been made for grouping the solutions at the end of each chapter; you'd still have needed the paper, but it would have facilitated browsing the studies. I guess the layout chosen allows the text to flow more smoothly.

Lakdawala discusses each problem and its solution in a generally concise, instructive and, to his credit, jargon-free manner. *"1...b6 2 a6! now wins for White, despite the wrong-coloured bishop, since Black's king is denied entry to the corner..."* and *"If 1...Bc4 2 e7 Bb5 then 3 Nc3 gains time on the bishop, allowing the knight to come to the support of the pawns..."* are succinct, effective commentaries, but there's no escaping his inability to self-edit. It's hard to believe that those came from the same keyboard as

"Chess compositions are just too difficult for me to solve. I will stick with normal, solvable chess puzzles."

This complaint is like the story of the isolated tribe visited by an explorer who doesn't look or speak like them. The tribe takes him for a god, treating him with fear and holy deference, and makes him their king. Then one day the explorer cuts himself shaving. The tribe suddenly realizes his mortality and kills him.

I used to view chess compositions the same way. Now I know they can be killed. It was a 16th Century philosopher, Michel de Montaigne, who wrote: 'My life has been full of terrible misfortunes, most of which never happened.' Stop thinking that you will fail when solving. You can and will be able to solve, no matter how low your rating. It only requires determined practice."

His encouragement is in the last three sentences; everything from 'This' to 'happened' is padding. By the time we get there we've forgotten what the complaint was. (Amusingly, he says much the

same thing in three sentences [!!] in bullet point six in the next section!) In terms of content and relevance it could easily have been omitted.

If that could have been omitted, this should have: *"All I got for my efforts were – I apologize for this indelicate imagery! – analytical turds floating all over the board."*

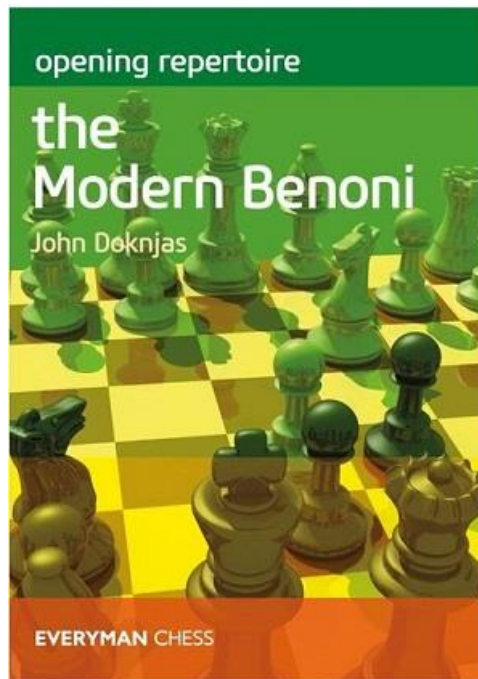
To the absence of self-editing, we can add poor judgement. Lakdawala obviously thinks that stuff like this is appropriate for a chess text, for he used the same term on p.255 of *In the Zone*, where he also informed us (p.146) that *"Capa kicked the crap out of Marshall"*. It beats me how an author can think that locker room chat like this improves his work or enhances his reputation.

Lakdawala comments that *"...there cannot be even an atom of redundancy or extraneous matter"* in a solution. If only the same could be said of his writing.

Overall *Rewire Your Chess Brain* is one of Lakdawala's better books. There is more of himself in it than in some of his others, and he has juggled his material well. It would serve as a good introduction for newcomers to studies and problems, and as a source of head-scratchers for experienced solvers, providing both entertainment and a tough cerebral work-out.

Ian Marks

June 2021



THE MODERN BENONI by John Doknjas, Everyman Chess, 448 pp.,
publ. 2020

Standard format Everyman opening monograph providing detailed coverage of the opening on the cover. The Modern Benoni has never quite attained long-term respectable status, despite the patronage of some high-level practitioners, and rumours of its demise tend to crop up every so often, but with the help of thirty-two illustrative games, and many more references in the notes, the Canadian FM demonstrates that it is still a viable defence *“which can serve as a way to truly enjoy the game”*.

In his introduction he outlines some of the basic ideas and piece placements before turning to the individual variations, the most critical of which have traditionally been regarded as those involving an early f4, followed by either Bb5+ or e5, and the more recently popular Bd3/h3. The author devotes the first three of the nine chapters, around 40% of the book, to these, and shows that Black is still very much alive and kicking. Each chapter is prefaced with a helpful overview of the concepts and ideas involved, the summaries at the end gather together the salient points, and there are plenty of questions and exercises to keep the reader involved.

The material is heavy-duty, and is definitely aimed at more experienced or stronger players. Text is largely explanatory in terms of the variations presented, and although it would be easy to get bogged down, Doknjas does a good job of explaining the key moments, ideas, developments etc. clearly and succinctly.

The problem with a book of this kind and size lies in making it visually attractive. While the text and diagrams are crystal clear, the single-column format, with large chunks of text/moves, creates a dense effect and is not particularly appealing. The only 'white' is at the side of the diagrams. Perhaps double columns, or the inclusion of analysis diagrams, might have helped? It certainly *looks* daunting and, to be honest, not particularly inviting, at least not to this reviewer.

The most recent illustrative games – four of them – are from 2019, with a further thirteen from the latter half of the decade, so although they are pretty recent, a degree of updating is going to be necessary, especially given the dynamic nature of the opening.

If you're a Benoni fan, or want to check out developments in your pet line as White, then it will certainly be of interest. As I said earlier though, it's aimed at stronger players, so if you're new to the Benoni it might be advisable to look around for something more basic to get up and running.

Ian Marks

June 2021

Lifetime Repertoires: Sam Shankland's 1.d4 (in three parts) by Chessable.

It was a pleasure to review this epic three volume 1.d4 opening course from world Top 50 player, Sam Shankland (peak rating 2731). In a nutshell, this is a very strategic 1.d4 repertoire focussing on e3 lines and a strong centre with carefully chosen lines explained in the American's original, sometimes witty but serious, style.

Taking the complete set as a whole (you can purchase them individually) along with the optional training videos, Sam Shankland makes his work very listenable by throwing in lots of human-style assessments.

In the videos, Sam uses the phrase "approximately no counterplay" a lot, and that sounded strange to me at first as we are more used to hearing there is counterplay or there is no counterplay. I have assumed he means "very little counterplay" or maybe he does just mean "no counterplay" with a touch of humour?

Another phrase which Sam uses a lot is, "In practice, I think humans are gonna struggle playing the Black side of this position". This is very welcoming as there is nothing worse than a repertoire backed by fancy computer analysis that is incomprehensible to us. Sam gives numerous lines which the engine can hold without too many problems but a human player would find difficult. He explains why this is the case and what the plans are for the White player.

Unlike many other authors, Sam does not cut corners to avoid the theoretical route, if it promises even just a small edge. However, a lot of his comments are sweeping like "I just could not imagine any player of the Black pieces going in for this" which may be true at elite GM level but for us amateur club players – you are going to reach these positions a lot!

One example from my own games is the following position which I have reached a several times over the years:



When play usually continues with 8...Be7 9.O-O O-O 10.e4 Nbd7 reaching this position:



I was particularly interested to hear Sam's assessment when this turned up in the recommended Queen's Indian line as White. Sam gives it as 'clear advantage to White and says *"Black has an awful Benoni. That plan with b6 and Bb7 was not great, as the bishop will be biting on granite on d5"*.

Switch on a strong engine like Houdini and it tells me that white is only 'slightly better' by about 0.3 of a pawn!

Although I have always considered this particular position to be a clear edge for White, I have struggled to put away the full point against opponents of similar strength on more than one occasion! This might just be more indicative of my playing strength than the given position, but the point I am making is that these positions require some additional chess playing (strength) to reap the benefits from them. If you are looking for an opening repertoire to provide some quick tactics which you can memorise for fast wins then you are looking at the wrong course!. This repertoire should certainly improve the reader's understanding of chess in general, but don't expect a quick return. These positions will leave the White player with a sound foundation to play for an advantage.

There are also several lines which the author analyses deeply into an endgame and conclusions like this are commonplace: *"I wouldn't be surprised if a thoroughly exhaustive analysis of machine vs machine games concluded that Black can hold, but for a human, it looks like a very difficult defence to me and that is after making it to move 30 of your preparation in the first place"*.

Moving on from the quotes, here are the lines Sam recommends from each volume:



Chessable > Courses > Chess Openings

Lifetime Repertoires: Sam Shankland's 1. d4 - Part 1: Sidelines

MoveTrainer™ Opening course by GM samshankland ★★★★★

[Browse](#) [Learn](#)

<https://www.chessable.com/lifetime-repertoires-sam-shanklands-1-d4-part-1-sidelines/course/47519/>

Part 1

- Introduction
- Quickstarter Guide
- Owen's Defence (1.d4 b6)
- Wade Defence (1.d4 d6)
- English Defence (1.d4 e6 2.c4 Bb4+ or b6)
- Modern Defence (1.d4 g6 2.e4 g6 3.c4)
- Earliest Benoni (1.d4 c5)
- Holy Wholly (1.d4 Na6)
- Saint George Defence (1.d4 a6 2.e4 b5)
- Dutch Leningrad
- Dutch Stonewall
- Dutch Classical
- 1..Nf6 Sidelines
- Budapest
- Accelerated Queen's Indian (1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 b6 3.Nc3)
- Benoni Sidelines
- Modern Benoni (1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 e6 4.Nc3 exd5 5.cxd5 d6 6.Nf3 g6)
- Benko Gambit (1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.bxa6 e6 6.Nc3)

- 1...d5
- Albin Counter Gambit (1.d4 d5 2.c4 e5)
- Chigorin (1.d4 d5 2.c4 Nc6 3.Nf3)
- Englund Gambit (1.d4 e5 2.dxe5)
- Annotated games

So, lots of interesting names, some of which may be new to a lot of readers. I had never heard of the Holy Wholly either! I have listed what they are briefly after the name.

An experienced player won't find many surprises with Sam's way of meeting these mainly offbeat lines but the explanations are very clear and often to the point.

We follow classical lines against the Benoni and the Benko accepted – so no surprises there.

Against the Dutch, the lines given are straight forward and seem very logical and strong.

e.g. for the Stonewall, Sam recommends 1.d4 f5 2.c4 Nf6 3.g3 e6 4.Bg2 c6 5.Nf3 d5 6.O-O Bd6 7.b3 with main idea of exchanging off the dark squared bishop.

Facing the Leningrad we head for 1.d4 f5 2.c4 Nf6 3.g3 g6 4.Bg2 Bg7 5.Nf3 d6 6.Nc3 O-O 7.O-O c6 8.d5 e5 9.dxe6 Bxe6 10.b3 when Sam is arguing that *"Black is unable to make any trouble on the long diagonal"*.

Finally, the classical Dutch, where Sam follows well trodden paths with 1.d4 f5 2.c4 Nf6 3.g3 e6 4.Bg2 Be7 5.Nf3 O-O 6.O-O d6 7.Nc3 – all very well explained

Likewise, the Chigorin line follows mainstream theory 1.d4 d5 2.c4 Nc6 3.Nf3 Bg4 4.Nc3 e6 5.cxd5 exd5 6.Bg5 Be7 7.Bxe7 Ngxe7 8.e3 O-O 9.Bd3 and as Sam says he prefers a line that *“leads to a nice edge without a ton of effort as opposed to remembering a lot of concrete lines to win right out of the opening”*.

The image is a screenshot of a webpage from Chessable. On the left, there is a small thumbnail image of a man (Sam Shankland) with a glowing aura, labeled 'PART II'. To the right of the thumbnail, the text reads 'Chessable > Courses > Chess Openings' followed by the course title 'Lifetime Repertoires: Sam Shankland's 1. d4 - Part 2'. Below the title, it says 'MoveTrainer™ Opening course by GM samshankland' with five yellow stars. At the bottom of this section are two green buttons: 'Browse' and 'Review'.

<https://www.chessable.com/lifetime-repertoires-sam-shanklands-1-d4-part-2/course/53465/>

Part 2

- Introduction
- Quickstarter Guide
- Blumenfeld Gambit
- Bogó Indian
- Queen's Indian Sidelines
- Queens' Indian 4...Bb7
- Queens' Indian 4...Ba6
- King's Indian Gligoric 7.Be3 sidelines
- King's Indian Gligoric 7.Be3 Ng4
- King's Indian Gligoric 7.Be3 exd4
- Grünfeld Russian System Sidelines

- Grunfeld Russian System 7...Na6
- Grunfeld Russian System 7...Nc6
- Grunfeld Russian System 7...a6
- Annotated games

I enjoyed this one the most from the three volumes, so if you are only going to buy just one of these courses, this is the one to go for!

The analysis of the Grunfeld Russian Qb3 system is totally outstanding. I have always struggled to settle on a good line against the Grunfeld but the way Sam dismantles the suggestions of some very strong GMs (Avrukh, Zerebukh, etc) is shocking. I also liked Sam's explanation of what makes the Russian system so difficult to meet for Black. In short, you don't trade the knights and still keep a strong centre while black struggles to get in their c5 break. Also, Sam explains the optimal piece setup and middlegame plans and gives us an idea of what to do and what not to do. I think this came across particularly well here and pulls together the deep strategic nature of this work.

Against the King's Indian, Sam recommends Be3 (Gligoric's system) which is quite interesting although won't be to everyone's taste. Sam does not try to pretend it is the best way to play as White, or that it leads to any massive advantage, but instead emphasises the practical advantage of preventing Black's standard kingside aggression. Fair point – as anyone who has played the Bayonet attack (1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.e4 d6 5.Nf3 O-O 6.Be2 e5 7.O-O Nc6 8.d5 Ne7 9.b4) will be familiar with building up a huge advantage on the queenside (engines can even confirm the position is technically 'winning' for white) only to get mated on the king side five moves later! It's all to do with how difficult it is for us club players to find an accurate defence. The Gligoric system, on the other hand, proposes a small but stable edge, resulting in positions the average KID player may not be accustomed to. None of the Mar

Del Plata races, just simple, strategic chess. Another thing I quite liked was that in pretty much all cases when our e3 bishop is threatened we retreat to Bc1 (or Bg5 and then Bc1). This makes memorising ideas from within the repertoire a bit easier.

Against the Blumenfeld & Bogo, his suggestions seem to be quite strong.

There has been some criticism elsewhere of the Queen's Indian coverage and it's not without justification. However, I found Sam's coverage of 4...Bb7 to be really good and as he mentions that as Black he has lost almost every Queen's Indian game which he's played, so I would have expected his analysis here to be top notch! The Ba6 Queen's Indian defence does appear to be more patchy. The explanations and examples are less detailed and some serious lines recommended elsewhere (for Black) have not been covered.

e.g. one line not covered is: 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 b6 4.g3 Ba6 5.b3 **b5** as played by Karpov and Carlsen and recommended by Andrew Greet in Play the QID.

Another popular line not mentioned is: 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 b6 4.g3 Ba6 5.b3 Bb7 and now 6.Bg2 Bb4+ 7.Bd2 **a5** (played by Karpov, Anand etc) and recommended in QID: Move by Move by Lorin d'Costa.

I'm sure these can be addressed in a future update but it looks like updates are not going to happen as fast as with other Chessable courses and Sam released the following statement a few weeks ago:

"I don't foresee myself being able to keep up with course updates nearly as well as I could in the past. Classical chess is just starting to return, and this is my life's calling. After 15 months and counting of inactivity, I can't begin to express how happy I am to get to play the Prague Masters and World Cup in the next couple months. As the tournament schedule

picks up again, that will obviously be my top priority. Still, I thought I would leave this message on all 3 of my 1.d4 courses as a forum where people can post any requests for updates and new lines that may not have been covered in the original course. I can't promise I will cover everything requested, or that it will come quickly, but if there are serious lines that are missing and should be covered, I will do my best to make sure they are included."

The screenshot shows a course page on the Chessable website. On the left is a thumbnail image of a man (Sam Shankland) with a glowing aura, labeled 'PART III'. To the right of the image, the text reads 'Chessable > Courses > Chess Openings', followed by the course title 'Lifetime Repertoires: Sam Shankland's 1.d4 - Part 3' in bold. Below the title, it says 'MoveTrainer™ Opening/Tactics course by GM samshankland' with a five-star rating. At the bottom of this section are two green buttons: 'Browse' and 'Review'.

<https://www.chessable.com/lifetime-repertoires-sam-shanklands-1d4-part-3/course/58696/>

Part 3

- Introduction
- Quickstarter
- Slav
- Vienna
- Queen's Gambit Accepted
- QGD Sidelines Part 1
- QGD Sidelines Part 2
- QGD 4.Be7
- Ragozin
- Semi-Tarrasch
- Semi-Slav Meran Part 1
- Semi-Slav Meran Part 2
- Annotated Games

Sam is recommending a 1.d5 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 Nf6 4.Nc3 Be7 5.Bf4 Be7 6.e3 Nbd7 7.Be2 move order to fit in with the rest of the repertoire.

He advocates Bf4 against the Queen's Gambit Declined (instead of the more popular Bg5 reaching these type of positions:



These lines are relatively new (therefore less analysed) compared to the classical Bg5 lines exhausted elsewhere.

The QGA is also well done but I can't help feeling the variations shown tend to end up so close to 'level' that you may need to play like Karpov to realise anything from the resulting positions.

Slav and Semi-Slav are presented with an honest assessment. It is well known Sam Shankland is a world renowned expert on the Black side of these openings, so there is not going to be any startling revelations here.

Sam manages to explain the reasons why moves should be made in a certain way which makes it easier to remember. To have a world-class 2700 player convey his understanding is amazing.

I found the courses very fast in places – especially in the video sections. I really did need to rewind and play through things several times. Often Sam throws in something important at the end of his explanations. e.g. Queen's Indian Bb7 **3:31** he sums up with *"I don't think there is much discussion to whether these knights are worse than these Bishops. I think White's minor pieces are better despite black having the bishop pair. The Bishops are so bad and Ne5 is on the way. So this seems easy enough..."*. I had to take some time to digest all that although Sam brushed through it in about 5 seconds!

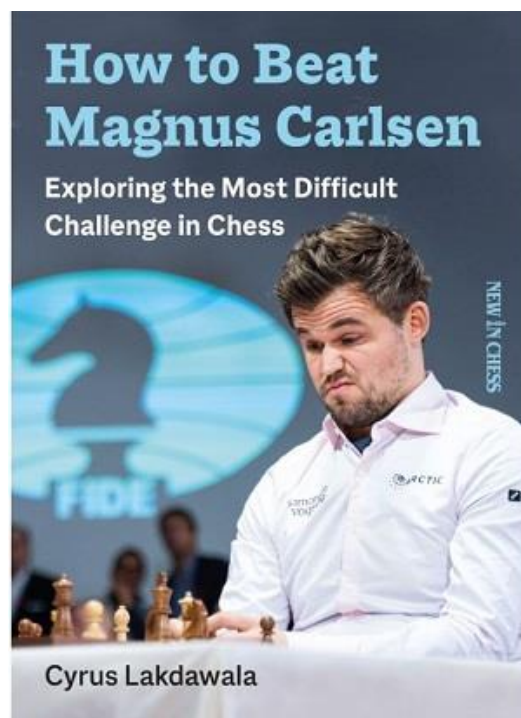


If you are a positional player anywhere in the region of 1800-2200+ and willing to do the work – this course would be absolutely perfect for you.

I'm sure a keen improving player at lower rating levels would also gain a lot from this excellent piece of work.

William Hulme

June 2021



HOW TO BEAT MAGNUS CARLSEN by Cyrus Lakdawala, New in Chess, 304 pp., publ. 2020

In this one Lakdawala takes a look at an esoteric subject – the current World Champion's losses. Hardly a best games collection, but, as Lakdawala points out, if Carlsen can benefit from examining his losses, so can we.

The obvious question about a work like this is how a markedly weaker player ('weaker' being relative, of course – Lakdawala is a retired IM) can meaningfully comment on the losses of the strongest player in the world. To be fair to the author, he addresses it in his introduction. Lakdawala clearly understands chess well enough to elucidate the games of a better player in much the same way that Busby, Shankly, Stein and Ferguson enjoyed no more than average playing careers, but understood football, could handle players better than they, and went on to become the most successful managers of their time.

Our guide turns his spotlight on eighty-five games and fragments in most of which Carlsen came a cropper for one reason or another.

These are the same reasons for which you and I come a cropper, albeit at a rather different level, such as being outplayed, overpressing, bad planning, lousy openings and plain blunders. Lakdawala has put plenty of thought into his potentially tricky subject matter and does an insightful job of peeling away the layers of the Champ's defeats, pointing out where the seeds were sown, where a principle was violated and so on. His comments are pertinent and elucidatory without being over-long (*"Even stronger than taking the e5-pawn. This way White wins the h6-pawn."*; *"1. Open the game when you own the bishop pair; 2. Create confrontation on your strong wing."*), and he includes annotations by other players and writers as well. Overall, he does a very decent job.

However every Lakdawala text falls into two parts: the chess and the 'writing'. Like others of his books, *HtBMC* is full of verbose passages which serve only to stifle the flow of a game's narrative and confirm the author's inability to self-edit, e.g.

- *"What? Your writer is normally a fierce defender of the tactically short-sighted, the easily cheapoed and the downtrodden of the chess world. This book is about a god-like .00000000001 percenter, who plays virtually perfect chess. Yet even he proves that he is human after all and, on incredibly rare occasions, is subject to boneheaded mistakes a club player may make while short on the clock."*

His next paragraph explains what happened. The above adds nothing to it.

His trademark sledgehammer metaphors are also on display, e.g.:

- *"The white rooks are the clichéd military commandos, crawling stealthily toward their target, with guns in each hand and a knife between teeth, just itching to plug holes into soft flesh and slit throats."*

Lakdawala seems to have a thing about guns (*"Nothing lubricates compliance more than a gun pointed at the opponent's head."*) and killing people. Back in **1 d4 with 2 c4** he told us

- *"When I unearth a theoretical novelty, I imagine myself as the Indian Jason Bourne, as he infiltrates CIA headquarters, makes a digital copy of top secret classified information, and then escapes, leaving ten or twelve unconscious or dead bodies behind."*

He certainly doesn't caress his keyboard with a velvet glove.

He also has a thing about prostitutes. On p.283 we find

- *"A shady, semi-sound attack is like a low-cost prostitute who hopes to compete financially with high-end prostitutes, via high volume."*,

an echo of ***Winning Ugly in Chess's***

- *"Our dying attack is like an aging prostitute who experiences difficulty picking up customers, due to her declining looks."*.

Not only does he have a bizarre view of what's appropriate for a chess text, he's rehashing disturbing analogies.

That paragraph on p.283 is not untypical of his flimflam. It starts with the aforementioned ladies of negotiable affection, segues through Magnus and the abode of sinners and finishes with what Lakdawala calls the War Crimes Commission (sic – I assume he means the International Criminal Court) in The Hague. It begs questions of structure, relevance, appropriateness, effect and accuracy. I doubt if it would survive a high school English class, and, as we have seen, it is not alone. As Orwell reminds us, if a word can be cut, cut it.

He's also big on nicknames. Caruana, mercifully, is no longer 'Caru', but here we meet 'Woj'. Who is Wodge, I hear you ask. Radosław

Wojtaszek, so not Wodge at all, but Voy. In his books on Botvinnik and Korchnoi I don't recall Lakka talking about Botty or Korch, so it's strange that other random players are given this treatment. Maybe it's something best awojded.

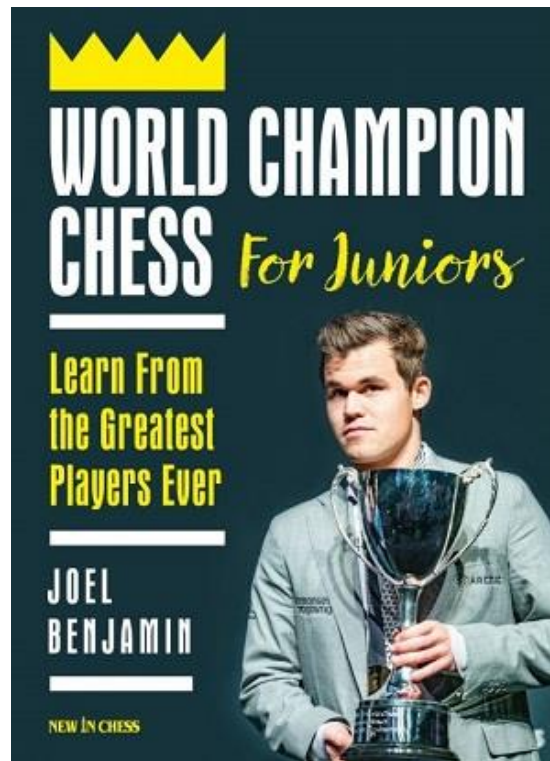
Talking of names, our hero is generally referred to as Magnus, but the possessive Magnus', rather than Magnus's, is a bit niggly. The rule of thumb is to let natural pronunciation decide. In this case your brain wants to say Magnus's, so why not go with that?

How to Beat Magnus Carlsen is an interesting topic handled, from the chess point of view, enthusiastically and with no small degree of insight, and contains much good chess. (If you're going to beat Carlsen you're going to have to play good chess.) It is well produced in line with NiC's high standards, viz. good quality paper, clear printing and diagrams and easy-on-the-eye double column text. Lakdawala has many fine points as a writer, e.g. enthusiasm and ability to cut to the nub of a position and impart information, but he is a victim of his own verbosity. More rigorous editing would result in leaner, more focused and all-round better books.

If *HtBMC* piques your interest because of the subject matter, my advice would be to concentrate on the chess and skip the large chunks of text. You're not missing anything, and you'll enjoy the book more.

Ian Marks

May 2021



WORLD CHAMPION CHESS FOR JUNIORS by Joel Benjamin, New in Chess, 256 pp., publ. 2020

In many ways, Joel Benjamin is the antithesis of Cyrus Lakdawala. His output is far smaller and the gap between his books is measured in years, not weeks. (In the five years since I reviewed his *Liquidation on the Chessboard* I've reviewed ten by Lakdawala.) You get the impression he *wants* to write his books, rather than feels he *has* to.

This one is what it says on the cover. Benjamin devotes a chapter of roughly ten pages to each of the world champions, examining their play from a gently didactic point of view, specifically what it might teach young players who, as the author laments, are not always as up on their chess heritage as they ought to be.

Each features a pen portrait of the player and his times, then a selection of key games illustrative of his style and what made/makes him great. Each one is highly readable; if I had to pick a favourite I'd plump for the one on Topalov which reminds us just

how formidable he was at his peak, and how much a young player can learn about the initiative from a study of his games, indeed Benjamin generously compares his attacking play to that of the all-time greats and remarks that during the first decade of this century, he was *“playing as well as any player in history”*.

Benjamin (a ‘Bobby boomer’) also gives Fischer, despite his flaws, very sympathetic treatment. Not quite the polar opposite of Topalov, but Benjamin illustrates how ‘correct’ chess and formidable technique on the one hand and an insatiable thirst for the initiative on the other can both get you to the top.

Most of the games will be familiar to those of us who have been around for a while, e.g. Fischer’s brace against the Byrne brothers in 1956 and 1963, but so? Introducing youngsters to these great players means exposing them to the classics!

With his readership in mind Benjamin’s notes are mainly explanatory; the variations tend to support the words. Only on a few occasions does he dive deep, e.g. Capablanca-Marshall, New York 1918 and Spassky-Tal, Montreal 1979. He also dispenses little pearls of wisdom along the way, e.g.

- *True material values depend on the phase of the game.*
- *Patient, proper play can lead to tactical rewards. Attacks do not have to be forced from wild play.*

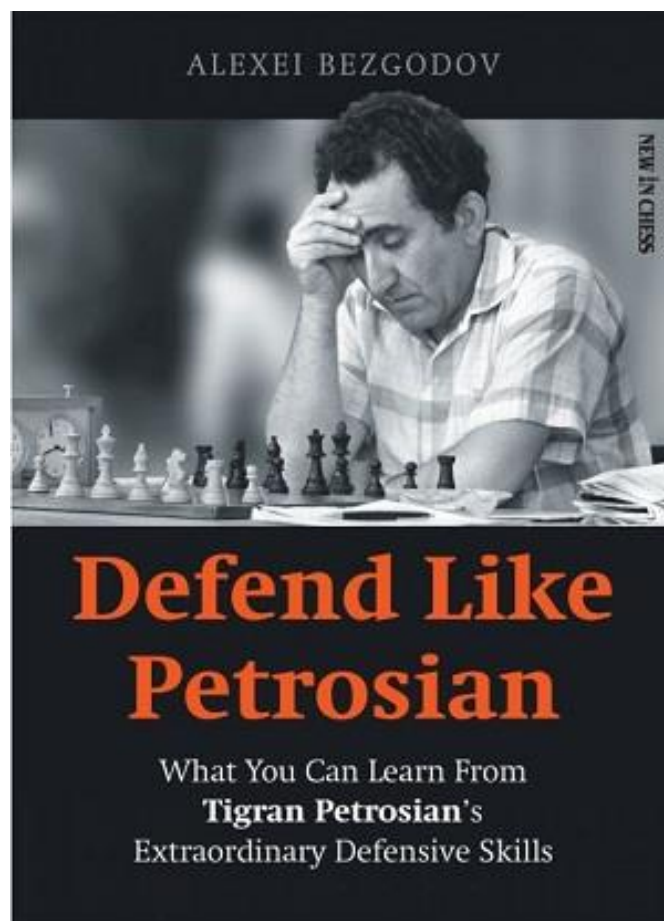
Benjamin writes fluently and I noticed, *en passant*, that he got the date of FIDE’s foundation correct, in contrast to his more prolific compatriot’s why-bother-to-check approach in *In the Zone*. He is adept at painting a striking image with a few verbal brush strokes, as in this touching passage which, in essence, sums up the tragedy of Tal:

- *“He looked like a very old and withered man, though he was younger than I am now...I had looked forward to our game, but when he proposed a draw, I didn’t have the heart to make him fight. He died the next year.”*

Not a heavy or demanding book, but a very pleasant read which does exactly what it sets out to do, and in which the nice balance of background, anecdote and reminiscence does a good job of introducing youngsters to players they might not know much about. In many ways it reminded me of Réti’s *Masters of the Chessboard*, in which the author looked at the games and styles of the leading players of his past and present. I can easily see this one firing a youngster’s imagination in the same way that Réti’s classic fired mine.

Ian Marks

May 2021



DEFEND LIKE PETROSIAN by Alexey Bezgodov, New in Chess, 269 pp., publ. 2020.

Both title and subtitle *What You Can Learn From (sic) Tigran Petrosian's Extraordinary Defensive Skills* might suggest a manual with chapters on, say, defending against sacrificial attacks, defending cramped positions, exchange sacs, counterattacking and so on. It's not. It's a collection of 176 annotated games, split into two large sections, part one tracing Petrosian's evolution as a defender and part two presenting a selection of his games against the elite of his career such as Botvinnik, Tal, Spassky, Larsen... This one is divided into chapters, but by player, not theme.

The author's overall idea is to present a picture of Petrosian the defender, and while Tigran is regarded as one of the finest defensive players ever, he was not immune to the dreaded bad day at the office, as not a few of the games indicate.

Looking through the games, I was struck by the similarity to another player who was the subject of a recent review, Sultan Khan. Both were formidable positional players whose creative juices often only started to flow in dubious or difficult positions, i.e. when they had to dig themselves out of a hole or if their survival depended on it.

This, of course, is 'active defence', and Petrosian was a master of it, producing some of his finest creative achievements when he was under the cosh. As Bezgodov points out, Petrosian was blessed with a sharp tactical mind and keen eye for counterplay, and many of the games in here belie the charge of boredom so often levelled against him. The 'boredom' arose when he was comfortable with his position; when provoked, he knew how to show his claws.

There is thus a lot of fighting spirit in these games, indeed that is the main lesson of the book, to appreciate the role of creativity and resilience in defence.

Bezgodov's writing is trim, engaging and always interesting. He does not waste his words, and says what he has to say succinctly and lucidly. No translator is credited, so if he did write in English, that's all the more impressive.

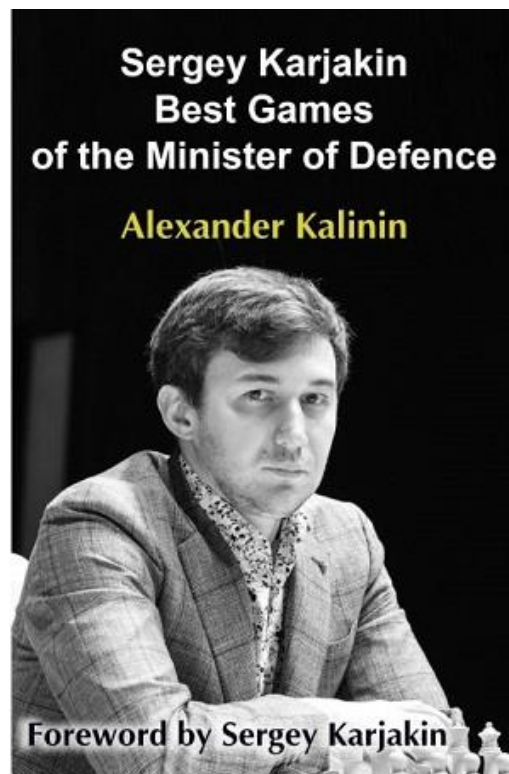
He annotates the games smoothly and tends to concentrate on the later stages once they have heated up. It is not openings-heavy! This makes for a very pleasant read; you could work your way through the book, dip into it at leisure, or just see how Petrosian coped against particular opponents.

There are indexes of openings and players, but the bibliography, while extensive, is completely haphazard. It is hard to understand why. The bibliography in, for example, Danny King's book on Sultan Khan which I alluded to earlier, also published by NiC, is in perfect 'alphabetically by surname' format, but the entries here are all over the place. Strange.

To sum up, a different type of book on one of the great players of chess history, always interesting and frequently eye-opening, and certainly worth considering for the Petrosian shelf in your library.

Ian Marks

May 2021



SERGEY KARJAKIN: BEST GAMES OF THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE by Alexander Kalinin, 230 pp., is a retrospective of Karjakin's career so far, from prodigy in 2000 to top pro in 2019, via 75 games and fragments. The games are not ordered chronologically, but by theme or content, e.g. attack, positional sacs, defence and counterattack and endgames, and showcase some of his finest achievements in those fields.

Given the level at which Karjakin operates, the opposition includes most of the contemporary elite, thus the play is of a very high order, but the author's notes do a tremendous job of explaining what's going on, being an ideal blend of variations and explanatory prose. As Karjakin says in his foreword, *"...the author provides practical explanations so that the reader can use this games collection to study all three stages of the chess game"*. The inclusion of Karjakin's own comments in several of the games makes it all the more interesting.

Karjakin is essentially a classical player, and his best games here show a healthy respect for classical precepts, the centre and clarity of calculation, but *"Anyone who wants to achieve serious success*

should be a universal player, able to do it all". Thus his style has become more positional; he has evolved into one of the game's top defenders, and one thing which comes through in many of the games is his composure and resourcefulness when under pressure. If some of that rubs off on the reader, that alone would make the book worthwhile!

Needless to say, the author devotes a chapter to the pinnacle of Karjakin's career so far, the 2016 World Championship match, analysing what went right – and wrong. Even only a few years after the event it seems to have slipped the collective mind just how close he came to dethroning Carlsen.

The book also provides numerous insights into the life of a prodigy and top professional, for example when Karjakin was ten his family upped sticks and relocated to enhance his chess development: *"The decision to move to Kramatorsk was a tough one...I had to leave my childhood home, my parents had to leave their jobs..."*, however *"our family was given a government apartment, I received a scholarship...I studied a lot with professional coaches"*. A scholarship at the age of ten to study chess! What were you doing with chess when you were ten!?

The pay-off wasn't long in coming – Karjakin still holds the record as the youngest-ever grandmaster at 12 years and 7 months.

Overall an enjoyable, well-produced book, well written and smoothly translated. The format is easy-on-the-eye double column, and there is a selection of photos. The only thing missing is page numbers to locate the games. Games numbers are all very well, but involve a lot of thumbing to find what you're looking for.

Ian Marks

May 2021



PETROSIAN YEAR BY YEAR Volume 1 (1942-1962) by Tibor Karolyi and Tigran Gyozyalyan, 484 pp.

One of the first chess books I bought was Peter Clarke's *Petrosian's Best Games of Chess 1946-1963*, one of those lovely Bell hardbacks that were a joy to hold and just made you *want* to play chess. I bought it in the incomparable Grant's book shop in Union Street in Glasgow, a favourite haunt, now sadly long gone, which always boasted a well-stocked chess section. As a kid you have little idea of style; to me, Petrosian was world champion, so must have been pretty good, and the classy wins in Clarke's book confirmed this.

This latest work on the man covers Petrosian's life and career from his days as a junior to his triumph at the Curaçao Candidates in 1962, the last step on the road to the world championship match with Botvinnik. The IM and FM authors present 111 games and fragments, plus another 37 on Petrosian's handling of exchanges and test positions. Most of the years are illustrated by around half a dozen games, some more, some fewer, depending on how active Petrosian was at the time. The authors do an excellent job of dissecting the games, which are annotated with lots of words and not overburdened with variations, although they do not hesitate to

dive deep if necessary, e.g. the well-known R+P ending of Petrosian-Fischer, Portoroz Interzonal 1958, gets twelve and a half pages, and the similar ending of Petrosian-Tal, Curaçao Candidates, gets six. Many of the games are new and those which are better known are given a modern once-over. They illustrate everything from Petrosian's trademark solid positional style to fighting games and sacrificial attacks. A lovely quote from Averbakh sums up Petrosian's approach as well as any: *"He conducts the fight in a manner that guarantees him total safety, even though playing for complications might have been the quickest way to the goal."* Many of the games are of historical interest, e.g. no. 17 is the very first Petrosian-Korchnoi encounter, played in the Soviet U-18 Ch. in 1946, a rout in which Petrosian made the Stonewall look like a forced loss.

The games are interwoven with a biographical narrative and lots of background on the likes of tournaments and the influence of other players such as Ebralidze, Petrosian's early trainer, Lilienthal and Boleslavsky. The background material conveys the image of an amiable, good-humoured family man, an exceptional player ready to advise and support lesser colleagues, whose drive to the top was not that of, for example, Fischer or Kasparov, but more an inner resolve deriving perhaps from his difficult childhood. The overall impression is of someone for whom not sweating the small stuff paid off.

(The contrast between Petrosian's and Karjakin's upbringings could hardly be starker. While the latter enjoyed the encouragement of a stable family background and generous state sponsorship, Petrosian was orphaned at the age of thirteen, taken in by an aunt who was a cleaner, and eked out an existence in a Soviet Union ravaged by the effects of war. Clearly there is more than one way to reach the top.)

Book production is a team effort; a huge amount of work has gone into this sumptuous hardback and a wide range of people have been involved, e.g. Levon Aronian wrote a very generous foreword, Petrosian's son Vartan provided photos and background, and amongst the Georgians acknowledged (Petrosian was born in Tbilisi) is someone weel-kent to us in Scotland. The text is highly readable and sprinkled with insights and trivia (did you know that Keres kept all his scoresheets?), and, while it generally reads smoothly, the occasional niggly mistake has slipped through, e.g. *"his talent shined through"*.

The format is double column, with pages of pure text in single. There are sixteen pages of photos, an afterword and an index of themes, but no bibliography or page numbers for the games.

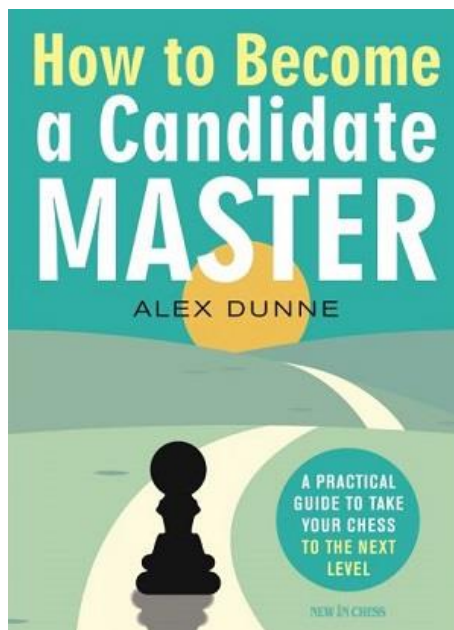
The most annoying omission, however, given the nature of the text, is that of a biographical index. It is impossible to track down anything concerning either Petrosian himself or any of the other major characters, of whom there are plenty. Ditto tournaments, matches and key occasions, the more so since the contents are based on years. Thus if you want to look up, say, the Soviet Union's matches against other countries, you're stymied unless you know the relevant years.

That apart, this is the sort of book you could lose yourself in for hours, a great games collection, fascinating text and real page-turner. If you're a Petrosian fan, find a space for it on your bookshelf. If you're a junior, get your hands on a copy; you'll learn a thing or two. Roll on vol. 2.

(These reviews appeared previously in the February [SCM](#))

Ian Marks

May 2021



HOW TO BECOME A CANDIDATE MASTER by Alex Dunne, New in Chess, 269 pp., publ. 2020.

This is a new and updated version of the work first published in 1985 in which the American FM and Correspondence Master set himself the task of helping players reach CM level. Not every player, of course. No-one's going to go from 1200 to >2000 just by reading a book. Dunne's target readership is players around 1800 (*"ambitious club players"*) who might benefit from a gentle shove in the right direction.

His book consists of fifty-two games played between players rated mainly in the 1800s v. players of CM level. These are not GM games, so they are far from error-free (by both sides!), but that is the author's point: being games played at a lower level, it is much easier for the reader to identify with them and with the issues they throw up, and they make excellent teaching material in that their flaws show the difference in understanding within even a small rating range. Dunne's philosophy is very much along the lines of give a person a fish/teach a person to fish; he gives the reader the tools

with which to improve. It is up to the reader to decide what to do with them.

Dunne's main vehicle of instruction is – quite rightly – the written word. Variations are minimal. He uses them to illustrate only that which absolutely needs to be demonstrated. He dispenses, and repeats, lots of good, solid advice; amongst the topics he draws the reader's attention to are the two bishops, keeping your position sound, activity, self-belief, nerves, 'digging in' etc. etc. – in other words the everyday things which crop up during a game of chess. All of this is presented in clear and effective prose. Here's an example which caught my eye, about draws and draw offers, a topic to which the author returns several times throughout the book. An 1800 has just accepted a CM's bail-out draw offer in a position in which he had good winning chances: *"...the 1800 player who expects to make progress must learn to beat – or at least try to beat – his CM opponent...Taking a draw in such positions is a good way to remain an 1800 player."* Telt!

However, the author doesn't spoon-feed his readers. Each game has points where the reader is invited to pause and analyse a position, with the answers at the end of the game. It all adds up to a nice blend of explanation and the good ol' Socratic method.

In recent reviews I've taken a pop at NiC for their indexes. This book doesn't have one (!) – but it hardly needs it. It's neither an openings nor an endgame book, so no particular need to index those areas. It's a middlegame book, and, while you could argue that an index of, say, themes might have been useful, the games and the lessons to be absorbed from them are the thing. The absence of an index hardly hurts.

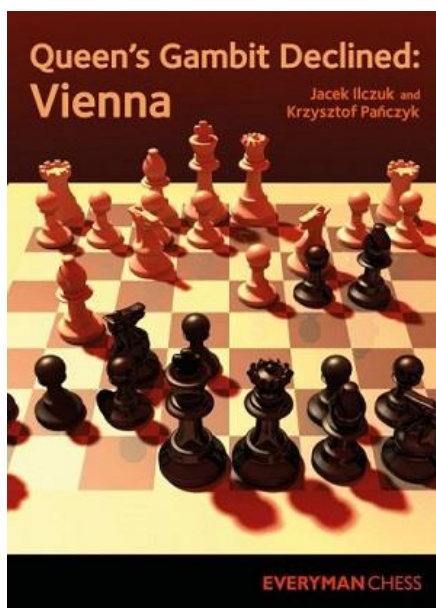
There might be players outside the target readership wondering if the book's for them. Hard to say. Sure, improving players in the 1600-1700s would find it of interest, as would rapidly-rising juniors,

but I wouldn't recommend it to players around 1300-1400 or so. For them it would be much more beneficial to get a firmer grasp of the positional and tactical nuts and bolts which the author discusses in the present work. But once they've got their rating up a bit, sure, go for it. Alternatively, a lower-rated player could consider going through it with a higher-rated friend who could go over any unclear points.

By way of summary, this is a thoughtful and well written book which would surely benefit anyone taking the time and trouble to absorb its contents, the sort of book you could profitably spend some quality time with during this covid-enforced hiatus from OTB play. One reading won't turn you into a 2000+ player, but it will set you on the right path. The rest is up to you.

Ian Marks

April 2021



QUEEN'S GAMBIT DECLINED: VIENNA by Jacek Ilczuk and Krzysztof Pańczyk, Everyman Chess, 336 pp., publ. 2018

When I first saw this one, my initial thought was, "Who's gonna buy it?". A monograph on a specific line which can only arise from a specific move order and which rarely appears in the London-infested waters of club chess doesn't seem destined for the bestseller lists.

For dinosaurs like me who associate 'Vienna' with 1 e4 e5 2 Nc3, I'd better point out that this one deals with 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Nf3 dxc4 5 Bg5 Bb4, a sort of QG/Nimzo/Ragozin mongrel. The in-depth coverage (chapter one begins at move fifteen) is based on seventy-one illustrative games divided into eleven chapters, with countless other game references in the notes. Moves dominate; there is little explanatory text, and such that there is along the lines of *"looks interesting"*, *"a complicated ending with mutual chances"*, *"with an excellent position"*, *"seems more logical"* etc. Nor is there much evidence of analytical creativity, bar the odd unattributed brief line. Although the Polish theoretician authors hope the reader will enjoy *"a fascinating journey through the rich and sometimes fairly* theoretical lines of the Vienna variation"*, he/she will have to do a lot of figuring out for him/herself.

(*For 'fairly' read 'massively'.)

Although the book was published in 2018, the vintage of the most recent illustrative games – 2012 (four) and 2013 (two) – indicates that the cut-off point for collation of material was five years prior to publication, with only a smattering of references up to 2017 inserted later in the notes. It's clear that any potential reader will have a fair bit of updating on his/her hands before venturing such a sharp and complicated line.

The presentation is more or less one diagram per page amongst dollops of moves and game references. It is not particularly appealing. As I mentioned above, moves and analysis are the order of the day; there is very little prose to lighten the fare. There is a seven-page index of variations and an index of games, but no bibliography, so the reader has no way of knowing which works the authors consulted or which engines they used, a huge omission for a complex line like this. An example which caught my eye was illustrative game six, an exhibition game played in Warsaw in 1941 between Alekhine and Frank on the white side and Bogoljubow and Pfaffenroth on the other. It's a fairly well-known game, rumours that it was concocted or just an analysis session notwithstanding. I mention it because although the authors comment in the theoretical section that "*12...Bd7!? was condemned by Alekhine*", they fail to cite the source, either here or later. (It could have been his annotations in the *Deutsche Schachblätter*, December 1941, or his *107 Great Chess Battles*, amongst others.) Simply put, knowing a source provides the reader with a starting point for further research.

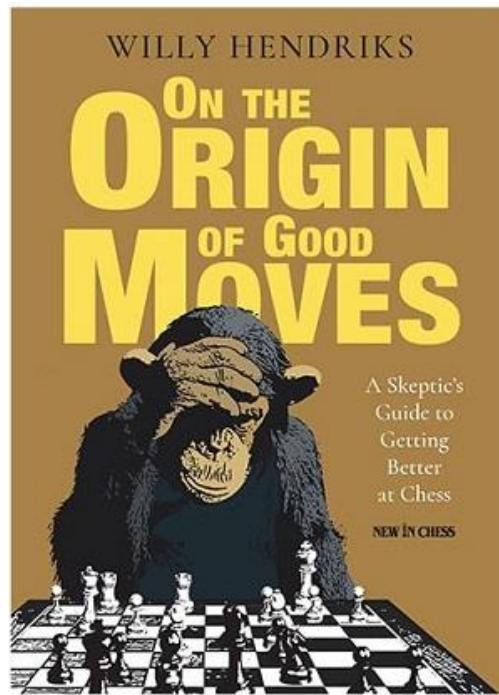
Another thing the authors don't mention in their bland introduction to the game on p.13 (maybe they didn't think it was relevant, but some historical background is always nice) is that Alekhine's partner was Hans Frank, Hitler's Governor-General of Poland during the war, who, besides being a nasty piece of work, was a serious chess

buff. As overseer of the Holocaust and other atrocities in that country, he was tried for war crimes and crimes against humanity and sentenced to death at Nürnberg in 1946. Bogoljubow's mucker was SS Major Helmuth Pfaffenroth, Frank's adjutant, who later served time in prison for his wartime activities. I found myself wondering if it's the only game by a leading Nazi to appear in a theoretical work.

To answer the question I posed at the start, the book will likely be of interest to strong players involved in the line with either colour, or hard-core correspondence players looking for in-depth, albeit dated, coverage. I can't see the chess public at large storming the bookstalls to panic buy a copy.

Ian Marks

April 2021



ON THE ORIGIN OF GOOD MOVES by Willy Hendriks, New in Chess, 429 pp., publ. 2020

Eight years after the Dutch IM and trainer's first book, *Move First, Think Later*, comes his second, a thoroughly and extensively researched look at the development of chess. Hendriks is not the first to try to get to grips with the evolution of the game. Réti and Euwe did so in their time, and more recently Kasparov got on board with his *Predecessors* series. Big names, but Hendriks has no qualms about calling them out or disagreeing with them when he feels it is warranted.

Writers on the history of the game usually start with Morphy, or perhaps Philidor, but Hendriks goes back to Greco in an interesting first chapter which makes a number of observations which set the style and tone of the book (e.g. "*If you play over all the games by Greco you cannot but be amazed by the enormous strength of this player and the importance and variety of his ideas.*").

Hendriks divides his work into thirty-six chapters, in which he considers topics as diverse as

- How good/strong were the top players of yore?
- How positionally savvy were players like Morphy and Anderssen?
- Doubled c-pawn formations
- The early days of chess magazines
- The evolution of tournaments
- Stereotypes
- Was Steinitz the father of positional chess?

and many more besides. Some of his findings will raise an eyebrow. To take the first topic above, he takes "*a wild guess*" on p.318 that the top players of the earlyish 19th century were around 2000, rising to around 2400 at the end – and were prone to the most incredible blunders, e.g. in the 23rd game of his 1892 *World Championship* match v Steinitz, Chigorin – under no time pressure – blundered a mate in two which would have embarrassed even your club bottom board.

Based on the 'evidence' of the book, there is little doubt that a professional from 2020 would slaughter most of these guys if he could travel back in time. In fact Carlsen could probably have given a simul to a random dozen masters of the day.

There are lots of interesting insights along the way, e.g. in the late 19th century the noble way to settle a difference of chess opinion was through the pages of a magazine. Compared to a humorous exchange of tweets nowadays between, say, Magnus and Anish, some of the stuff which the likes of Steinitz and Zukertort launched at each other is weapons-grade vitriol. We likewise learn of the fluke which gave the Winawer variation of the French its name (coincidentally answering a question I posed in a review back in 2013!).

Hendriks stops his research somewhere around the end of the 19th/start of the 20th century. I suppose he had to draw conclusions somewhere, but it kind of leaves us wondering how he might have continued. Lasker is a sort of bridge over that period, so I surmise it's because the players who followed suddenly 'got good' (to use Fischer's phrase), with geniuses like Capablanca, Rubinstein and Alekhine synthesising what had gone before. On the other hand, thinkers like Réti, Breyer and Nimzowitsch continued to challenge and refine previous thinking and/or push the boat out further. Chess didn't stop developing!

Perhaps the chapter which will cause most tut-tutting is no. 32, *Study Openings*. It is exactly that. When Hendriks says "*There is no better way to improve in chess than by studying openings*" I can imagine other coaches the world over reaching for the smelling salts, but when you read what he has to say, you can see his point. It reminded me of a pre-covid, pre-Hendriks interview I read earlier this year with an IM rated around 2400 (yes, a 2400!) – I forget who, I wish I had taken a note of it – who was asked the standard question "What do you recommend in order to improve?". Quick as a flash he replied "Study openings", and went on to explain that all the usual things we are advised to do – study the classics, work on tactics, endings etc. – had taken him to around 2100, at which point he had stalled. Deciding that drastic action was necessary, he spent a summer working exclusively on openings. Within two seasons he put on 300 points and gained a title. This proves nothing, of course, but having read Hendriks's chapter it struck a chord. There is more to studying openings than, well, studying openings.

The text reads smoothly overall, and, since no translator is credited, we have to assume that Hendriks wrote it in English, which is both impressive and makes the occasional linguistic wrinkle excusable. However a few things slipped through the net, e.g. on p.85 the reference to La Bourdonnais's magazine *Le Palamède* manages to

get the definite article both right and wrong within the space of four lines, and while Hendriks might well have consulted Knoch's *Die Kunst der Bauernführung* in the original German, it would have been a good idea to mention its English title, *Pawn Power in Chess*.

Instances of German word order (and resulting appalling English) also pepper the text, e.g. "*Strong would have been 32.Rxb7*", "*No good either was 14...g6 15.Rad1*" and the breathtakingly egregious "*Equally attractive looks 19...Nf3+ first*". It's the sort of stuff that could have come from the pen of Yoda. Clumsy it is, and easily remedied can it be, indeed things like this appear 'normally' elsewhere, which makes examples like these grate all the more.

With eight years between books you expect something a bit special, and that is what you get. *On the Origin of Good Moves* is the antithesis of the conveyor-belt style of chess writing. It is an impressive piece of research (check the bibliography!) covering nearly 300 years of chess history, well structured and thoughtfully argued, an intelligent and ambitious piece of work which is not only full of great and often little-known chess, but introduces us to a number of hitherto walk-on characters on the chess stage such as Gustav Neumann, Elijah Williams and Marmaduke Wyvill. I wouldn't say it deliberately sets out to be polemic, but it casts many new lights on the history of the game, and forces the reader to rethink traditionally accepted views. In essence it is a very human book into which Hendriks has poured a lot of himself.

However, paradoxically and unfortunately, given the sheer amount and depth of research on display, the book's strength turns out to be its weakness: it has the inescapable air of an academic text. 'Gripping' is not a word I would use to describe it, and, I will admit, there were times when I found it hard to get back into it and pick up from where I'd left off. Hendriks's style reminded me of that lecturer you had whose stuff was good, but in whose lectures you sometimes found yourself drifting, so that you finished up doodling

instead of taking notes. It is not an easy text to get through; you will need a generous infusion of staying power and a well-filled coffee pot.

On the Origin of Good Moves would probably be of most interest to chess historians, and for readers who already have some knowledge of the great names and their place in the chess firmament. I doubt if you'd get much from it if you'd never heard of, say, Tarrasch or Lasker or where they were coming from. On the other hand, I still remember the buzz I got as a kid when I discovered Réti's *Masters of the Chessboard* and *Modern Ideas in Chess* (still two of my favourite chess books), so it would be nice to think that readers might enjoy a similar reaction to Hendriks's opus.

Given the book's subtext that a player's development mirrors that of the game itself, will it help you improve? I'm not convinced. There are other books out there better designed to achieve that.

Before I go, I'd like to mention two things in particular. First, the creative, highly original cover echoing the play on Darwin. I loved it. If it's not in the running for the Chess Book Cover of the Year award, there ain't no justice. Second, NiC's currently-favoured names-only index, which requires more considered comment.

There are books where a names-only index might suffice. *On the Origin of Good Moves* is not one of them. It gives me no pleasure to say it, but its four-page, names-only index is hopelessly inadequate for a work of this nature and scope. Some specific examples.

Steinitz gets fifty-eight references across twenty columnar lines. There is no indication of what any of them refer to, nor is it necessarily the case with multiple pages (e.g. 181-185) that they refer specifically to Steinitz. (In fact, Steinitz only gets a few mentions on those pages. Neither of the two games references is his, while the photo on p.183 is of...Max Euwe. And, when you check

'Euwe' in the index, there's no mention of him on p.183!) There is no way of telling which page numbers are games references, tournament references, references to positional ideas, debates with other players – nothing.

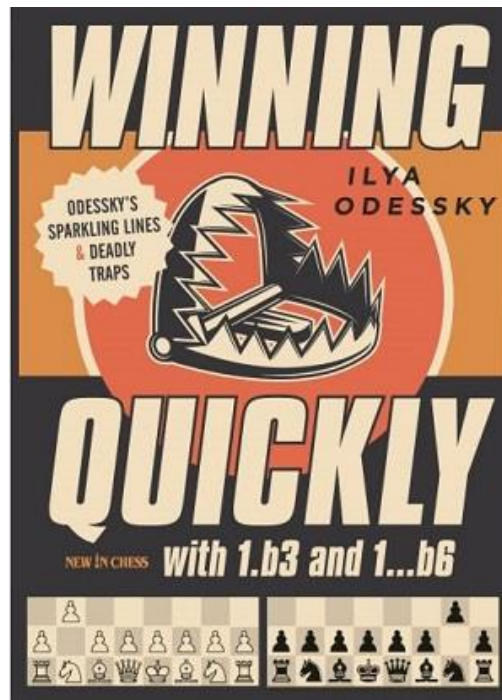
There is no tournament index (the only overt reference to a tournament is in the contents, chapter seven – London 1851) or crosstables and, incredibly, no openings index. The Evans and King's Gambits, to name but two, are discussed at length and in not inconsiderable depth in various chapters, but there is absolutely no way to find them. On one occasion when I went back to check a Sicilian by Anderssen I had no alternative but to flick back and forth around where I thought I had first seen it. It took me several minutes.

Nor, in a book which discusses the historical handling and development of a wide range of positional and tactical features, e.g. the centre, pawn structures, various sacrificial ideas etc. etc., is there an index of themes.

I'm currently reading a (non-chess) book which deals with the development of various societal issues, so comparable in its own area. It's about half the length, but has an index twice the size, eight pages, listing names, topics, themes, places etc., many complete with sub- and cross-references. It is a model of what would have done justice to *On the Origin of Good Moves*. NiC really need to address the matter of how they index their publications.

Ian Marks

March 2021



WINNING QUICKLY WITH 1.b3 AND 1...b6 by Ilya Odessky, New in Chess, 463 pp., publ. 2020.

Twelve years after his last work on 1.b3, the Russian IM returns with a bigger offering which looks at his pet set-ups from both sides of the board.

"I left chess in 2012. I did not touch it for several years. Having accidentally learned about chess.com, I decided to test my strength in Internet blitz...My opponents – among them lots of players with big names, strong, solid professionals – played chess better than me. Surprisingly, though, I knew more...I was better equipped...In all games, I opened with the moves 1.b3 and 1...b6."

As his new book shows, he has not been lazy.

It's not specifically about the title's 'winning quickly', or about crushing people, as per the back cover blurb (*"Crush your opponents in the opening, with both White and Black"*). While it's full of games, diagrams and analysis, it's more than just an opening, or even chess, book. Sometimes it has the air of a confessional, sometimes it reads like a novel about a tempestuous relationship between the

author and his beloved openings, and at others it reads like a collection of essays and philosophical musings on chess, the universe and everything.

Odessky covers largely the 'main lines', if such things exist in an offbeat opening, viz. 1.b3 e5 2.Bb2 and now mainly 2...d6 and 2...Nc6 3.e3, while after 1.b3 d5 2.Bb2 he covers the Litus Gambit ("*...unsound. But it is fresh and interesting...*") – 1.b3 d5 2.Bb2 Bg4 3.f3 Bh5 4.e4!? dxe4 5.Qe2 – in depth. 2...c5 and 2...Nf6 also get a look.

From the black side, he covers two- and three-pawn centres, viz. 1.e4 b6 2.d4 e6 and now 3.Bd3, 3.Nc3 and 3.Nf3, and 1.d4 b6 2.c4 e6, where after 3.e4 he pays generous tribute to Tony Miles's pioneering work: "*...if every line were called by his name, it would be like Lenin in Soviet times.*" This being pure b3/...b6, he doesn't cover transpositions to other openings, but to give an idea of the scope of his research, he devotes two games to 1.b3 a5.

In all of this there is much that has yet to be seen in a game. Who needs Chess960!? J

There are eighty-two illustrative games, with many more in the notes, most of them played online by the author against strong titled opposition whom he allows the cloak of transparent anonymity, e.g. "*A famous English GM (and doctor of mathematics)*", "*A Danish-Scottish GM*" and "*A Norwegian GM, and second of the World Champion*".

Odessky is certainly candid; on p.17 he fesses up that "*the move 1.b3 is second-rate*" and "*1...b6 in reply to 1.e4 or 1.d4 is, strictly speaking, lousy*". By p.18 he has sunk even further into the quagmire of honesty: "*I said the move 1...b6 was lousy. No, it's a catastrophe.*" And in the last chapter he reminds us that "*You can get used to the fact that the move 1.b3 does not lead to an advantage and that 1...b6 does*

not promise equality. It's harder to get used to the fact that the move 1.b3 does not promise equality and that 1...b6 leads to defeat".

Given the nature of the subject matter, he stresses the need to think for one's self, e.g.

- *"We make the most natural moves in the opening, and it suddenly turns out that no one has played like that before."*
- *"This contradicts everything that we were taught in chess school...But life forces one to look at things as they are, without scholastic dogma."*

and can also be painfully honest:

- *"A crushing and very useful defeat, which forced me to re-examine a whole complex of positions."*

He offers lots of insights, e.g. *"Respect for the bishop on the long diagonal is the main positional principle in playing the opening 1.b3 (1...b6)".*

and is up on his classics, both chess and literary, e.g.

- *"Euwe's penchant for sacrifices on empty squares"*
- *"I will remember the Keres-Averbakh game (from Zürich 1953 – IM) until the end of my days"*
- *"There is a lack of self-confidence. I miss the energy of delusion." (Tolstoy), prompting the author to reflect that "...openings like 1.b3 or 1...b6 are driven solely by the energy of delusion".*

His writing is chatty and conversational. It's easy to imagine him showing you this stuff down at the club, and he has a nice line in often self-deprecating humour, e.g.

- *"It seems this book is more and more coming to resemble a list of mistakes and how to avoid them."*

and

- *"...the greatest book that has not yet been written could have the title: 'What prevents a chess player from making the right decisions at the board?'"*

He knows how to tell a good story, recalling Sosonko's tale about prolific authors, when one such *"...presents his recently-published book to Tigran Petrosian. The latter's icy reply: 'I have a library, not a waste-paper dump.' will remain as...a perfect sentence in relation to books of this kind."*

But what elevates the book to the realms of literature is Odessky's overall style and handling of themes reminiscent of the great Russian literary tradition. Feel the suffering in the following passage, where he is talking about a grandmaster friend who has just lost a game in his pet variation. It could have come straight from the pages of Dostoevsky:

"...he sat alone, looking down and depressed. I wanted to leave quietly, but he gestured to me to stay. Finally he raised his eyes. 'You think I'm worried because I lost? Nonsense. I have lost hundreds of times and will do again. That's not the point.'

A heavy sigh. '...The truth is that I have just replayed the game in my head and you know, I realize that if I had to play it again, I would make the same moves. The same ones, you understand?'"

Is there any one of us who has never felt like that? In the GM's lament lies the absurdity of the chessplayer's existence: *"...you realize that you played all the most powerful moves...And these moves lose."*

Indeed existential issues permeate the book, literally to its conclusion: *"...we set up traps, look for exceptions to the rules...but with each new round of analysis, we confirm that the rules exist, that they*

are unshakable, victorious and true; that our attempts to refute them are doomed to failure; doomed fundamentally, in some way doomed forever."

As chessplayers we can only accept this...then do it all over again.


There are writers and there are *writers*. Odessky is a *writer*. He is at home with language and knows how to use it. Steve Giddins deserves credit for a smooth translation (although punctuation is sometimes a bit dodgy). *Winning Quickly with 1.b3 and 1...b6* is a chess book with a difference, literary, idiosyncratic and readable. You could spend ages with it and not get bored, whether you play 1.b3/1...b6 or not.

I've called NiC out in the past for their indexes, but kudos on this occasion. There's a detailed four-page index of variations, and the index of names, in this case, does the job admirably.

BTW, does the cover remind anybody else of Led Zeppelin's *Mothership* album?

Ian Marks

March 2021



Chessable > Courses > Chess Openings

The Fierce Nimzo-Indian

MoveTrainer™ Opening course by **WFM MaaikeKeetman**

(2203 FIDE) ★★★★★

<https://www.chessable.com/the-fierce-nimzo-indian/course/49442/>

I had the pleasure of playing through another Chessable online book over the Christmas break and that combined with the release of the new Chessable App for iPad/iPhone, my lockdown blues were painted a brighter colour!

This repertoire for Black is based around the ever flexible Nimzo-Indian defence 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 and chooses plans based on ...b7-b6 and ...d7-d6, following up where possible, with Bb7 and Ne4 before launching a kingside push. This works particularly well in the lines where White has played Bg5 and black can play h6 followed by g5. Your pawns on d6 and e6 really do hold back White's centre and allow you to prepare for well timed pawn breaks.

Last week, the author released 7 updates (with trainable lines) on the 6.a3 Bxc3+ variation – originally suggested by a reader like myself. This shows a huge advantage these online books have over a printed one – in that it can be kept up to date and improved as new things are discovered. It also confirms the authors are serious about what they recommend and the student feels closer to the trainer whom you can message on the Chessable forum.

As we know, the Nimzo-Indian is one of the most flexible openings Black can choose against 1.d4 because it can be played in several ways – Black squared strategy; White squared strategy; early d5

then c5 centre liquidations – so what exactly is recommended in this repertoire?

- Introduction
- QuickStarter Guide (very helpful overview in an hour!)
- 4.Qc2 with 5.a3
- 4.Qc2 with 5.e4, 5.Nf3 and others
- 4.e3 (with 7 new updates for 2021!)
- 4.Nf3
- 4.Bg5
- 4.f3
- 4.a3
- 4.Bd2
- 4.b3
- 4.Qb3
- Rare moves
- Model Games (very inspirational to play through!)

The MovieTrainer system (see my previous Chessable reviews if you don't know what that is!) is complimented with lots of text explanations which I found to be very helpful indeed. Gone are the typical cop-out "*and Black is fine*" summaries in the middle of a tactical mess. The author has put effort into explaining things clearly and showing the strategic and future goals of the positions. The reader cannot help but gain a better chess understanding by spending time working through a course like this.

The (optional) video instruction is clear and to the point. I found the author's voice pleasant and easy to listen to. Chessable has once again produced a high quality product which is much better than a

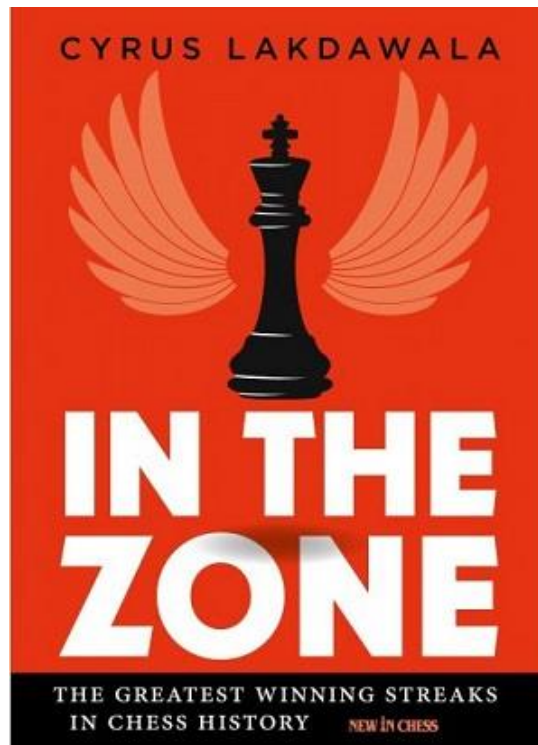
lot of the free video courses we find on the internet. If you are already a Nimzo-Indian or Ragozin player who finds the super solid positional route with ...d5 and ...O-O a little too dry and drawish, then these ideas are much more dynamic and will add another dimension to your play and perhaps make you less predictable to your opponents!

If you prefer to 'try before you buy' there is a cut down free version called the 'Short and Sweet: Nimzo-Indian' which really does give you an excellent introduction to the course and definitely leaves you wanting more! Chessable also offer a no quibble money back guarantee within 30 days if for any reason this course turns out to be not for you.

To sum up, I quote the words of the author "*Forced draws? Perpetual checks? Not here! Ruthlessly Fight For The FULL Point*" – absolutely!

William Hulme

February 2021



IN THE ZONE by Cyrus Lakdawala, New in Chess, 397 pp., publ.
2020

In the Zone looks at what happens when chess players in a state of flow pull off outstanding achievements. It covers “*peak performances and monster winning streaks from some of the greatest players who ever lived*”. Lakdawala devotes a chapter to each of

- Morphy at the First American Chess Congress in 1857
- Steinitz 7 Blackburne 0 in 1876
- Pillsbury at Hastings 1895
- Lasker at New York 1924
- Capablanca at New York 1927
- Alekhine at Bled 1931
- Botvinnik at the Hague/Moscow 1948
- Fischer’s 11-0 at the 1963-64 US championship
- Tal’s victory in the 1979 Riga Interzonal
- Kasparov at Tilburg 1989

- Karpov at Linares 1994
- Caruana at the 2014 Sinquefeld Cup
- Carlsen at the 2019 Grenke Classic

Each features a crosstable/results and an essay on the achievement. Not much to quibble about, bar Caruana and Carlsen being "*great players of the past*" J, but since Lakdawala includes recent events, how about Hou Yifan's 1st place at Biel in 2017? It might have been an idea – and inspiration for girls – to showcase a 2810 performance by a woman in our male-dominated sport. Just a thought.

The Fischer choice is the most contentious. Lakdawala rejected RJF's 6-0s v Taimanov and Larsen on the grounds that "*most of the readers are already familiar with that*". I'm not so sure. Fischer's 1971 streak is nearly half a century ago now, ancient chess history to readers not born then, so maybe it's worth mentioning that it consisted of his three Candidates matches against Taimanov, Larsen and Petrosian, where he played twenty-one games (not nineteen, as Lakdawala claims), scoring +17, =3, -1, including the two 6-0s and a run of 13-0 if we include the first game versus Petrosian.

Given the choice between 11-0 at the US championship (according to the crosstable Bobby actually scored 11½/11, a truly unique performance) and 13-0 against three of the world elite, your grizzled old reviewer knows which one he'd pick.

There are 119 games and fragments, many of them classics offering great learning potential, which allow us to see how chess styles and understanding have evolved over the past 150 years. They are analysed in enough detail to illustrate what's going on, but not so deeply as to dull the reader's interest, and feature Exercises, Principles (sensible advice) and Moments of Contemplation (stop and think), useful features for getting salient points across.

Lakdawala's enthusiasm is evident, and, as an experienced coach, he knows how to explain things effectively.

"After 33.dxc5 Bxc5 34.Nc6 Bb6 35.Kh2 Ke6 36.Nb4 a5 37.Nd3 Kd5, not only is White down a pawn, but his b-pawn is fatally weak and vulnerable to a raid from Black's king."

and

"If simple works, then stick with simple: 34.Qa8+ Qd8 35.Qxd8+ Rxd8 36.Rxf4 Rd2 37.Rf5 Rxa2 38. Rc5 Rb2 39.Rxc7 Rxb3+ 40.Kg2 g5 with an easily won rook ending for Black."

are clear, succinct annotations of the type from which one can learn.

If this was Lakdawala's norm, his books would be excellent, but there's no escaping his chronic over-writing, even in the notes (the above being two which escaped). A couple of examples:

- *"It's no joke to gambit a pawn in the opening with the black pieces. Jimi Hendrix would ask: 'Hey Joe, where you going with that gun in your hand?' Today this gambit (with the black pieces!) is considered a touch sleazy and borderline unsound, and I regard such lines as overconfident as a rat who demands that a cat bow before him."*
- *"The viability of the Sveshnikov mystifies my lower-rated students, since White's control over the d5-hole, coupled with the weak, backward d6-pawn, reminds them of a supermodel who breaks her front two teeth and thinks to herself: 'Dentists and orthodontists are expensive. I will save money if I just keep my teeth this way and will continue to dazzle everyone with my smile!'"*

That second one contains a favourite Lakdawala device – 'reminds them of...'; 'reminds the reader of...' etc. No it doesn't; it's the sign of yet another verbal onslaught. There are also lots of shorter pieces of poor English, e.g. *"unheard-of levels of depth"*, *"Black has two*

rebuking continuations” and “...that soldier from Saving Private Ryan...who takes a bullet between the forehead...”.

The book is full of stuff like this.

In terms of figures of speech, Lakdawala is a big fan of hyperbole (“*If I were a thousand-armed god and wrote simultaneously on 500 laptops for an eon...*”) and similes and metaphors:

- “*White’s pathetic ‘attack’ is like an affronted, discarded lover...*”
- “*For Reshevsky the sky boils with flames...*”
- “*It’s a peanut butter sandwich without the jelly.*”

but in this verbal swamp I found “...he now tastes the Reaper’s cold kiss”, a little gem describing a player’s imminent defeat. Anyone capable of producing that is clearly not without writing ability, but, alas, it’s only a fleeting sparkle amongst the verbiage.

Poor writing is one thing, but laziness is inexcusable. Evidence of Lakdawala’s cavalier approach to factual accuracy and attention to detail permeates the book. Some of these are trivial, e.g. it was to the door of the church in Wittenberg, not ‘Wittenburg’ that Luther nailed his theses, but some are downright egregious, and really should have been picked up on at the editing or proofreading stage:

- Talking of the interregnum following the death of Alekhine in 1946, Lakdawala writes: “*So who replaces him? The unprecedented situation created the need for a world-governing chess body. FIDE was formed, and they decided...*”

This implies that FIDE was formed to find Alekhine’s successor. It wasn’t. It was formed in 1924.

- Discussing Mieses-Pillsbury, Hastings 1895, Lakdawala shoehorns two mistakes into “*The German GM Mieses*”: (i) in 1895 Mieses was German, but not a GM, and (ii) when he was awarded the GM title in

1949 – fifty-four (!) years later – he wasn't German, but a naturalised British citizen. Bogoljubow and Vidmar were similarly only anointed after the war.

- In his notes to R.Byrne-Fischer, Lakdawala says “...*the grandmasters in the analysis room...announced to the spectators that Byrne stood a shade better in the complications when he resigned.*”

No they didn't. If Lakdawala had bothered to consult *My 60 Memorable Games* (cited in the bibliography) he would have found Byrne's own words: “...*at the very moment at which I resigned, both grandmasters who were commenting on the play for the spectators in a separate room believed that I had a won game!*”.

- On p.171, he says “*I read too many of Nimzowitsch's books...in my youth*”.

As far as I know, Nimzowitsch only wrote *My System* and *Chess Praxis*, plus a couple of booklets, *Blockade* and a selection of games from Carlsbad 1929. What other books is Lakdawala referring to?

- Names are frequently botched (and on one occasion he has the wrong player resign). Blackburne appears as ‘Joseph Henry’, ‘Henry’ and ‘Henry Joseph’; in a note to Marshall-Capablanca, New York 1927, the former appears as ‘Nimzo’; the Laskers get mixed up in game 38, as do the Byrne brothers in the first (!) note to game 70, while Raymond Weinstein was ‘Norman’ in the book's introduction.

(Weinstein was later committed to a psychiatric institution for murder, which circumstance allows Lakdawala to work in a tasteless remark about mental illness.)

Lakdawala has previous for winging it like this. His frequent speculation (“*I read that...*”, “*some chess historians claim...*”, “*apparently...*”, “*if...might...*”, “*some GM...*”, “*may have been...*”) further suggests that he can't be bothered to check anything or

revise what he's written. Slapdash barely describes it. About the only thing he includes (to back up his view that Carlsen is in contention for being the greatest player of all time) is... a Facebook post by one of his mates:

- *"Carlsen isn't human. If he had the same cage skills he'd be 6'8", 400 lbs., 7% body fat, tenth degree black belt, long fangs and The Wolverine's claws. He's absolutely terrifying. He's treating the best in the world pretty much the way they treat U2200's. He's arguably the greatest player ever. And he's only 28. Holy cheese wiz!"*

Humorous inclusion or not, this is as close to 'research' as we get.

The text is also littered with misspellings, e.g. 'reneg' and 'fameous', tautologies ("*...a successor heir*", "*...about to promote in just a few moves*") and a couple of ghastly neologisms, "*Botvinnikification*" and "*deparadisation*".

German word order abounds, e.g. "*Amazing is the fact that...*", "*Also played today are...*", and there are loads of random howlers, e.g.

- *"The reasons is..."*
- *"contention of"/"contended over"* (neither correct)
- *"perpetual chess"* (!)
- *"the relative unknown player"*

Much is made of the humour in Lakdawala's books. If domestic abuse, infertility, gun ownership, suicide, prostitution and mental illness tickle your ribs, you'll enjoy this one. Then again, you might consider them poor taste or inappropriate, which could also be said of some of his vocabulary choices.

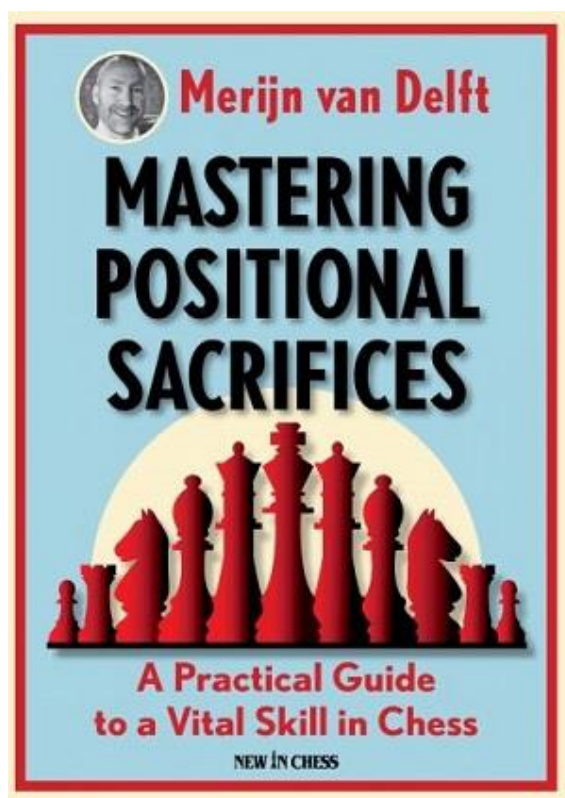
Lakdawala's fans lap this up, so you might be wondering why I bother with it. Simple. My task is to review the book. Quality of

writing, accuracy and attention to detail are as much part of the book as the chess content. It would be remiss of me not to.

It's not all Lakdawala's fault though; his editorial team must also shoulder some of the responsibility. He clearly needed much more guidance and support in terms of both writing and fact-checking, and errors and inaccuracies which should have been picked up on do not reflect well on a reputable publisher like NiC.

In the Zone won the American Chess Journalists Award for the Best Instructional Book of 2020. Their website doesn't say what the criteria were, but it doesn't look like language, accuracy and care were amongst them.

If you like Lakdawala you'll buy this one; if you don't, you won't. Otherwise caveat emptor.



MASTERING POSITIONAL SACRIFICES by Merijn van Delft, New in Chess, 315 pp., publ. 2020

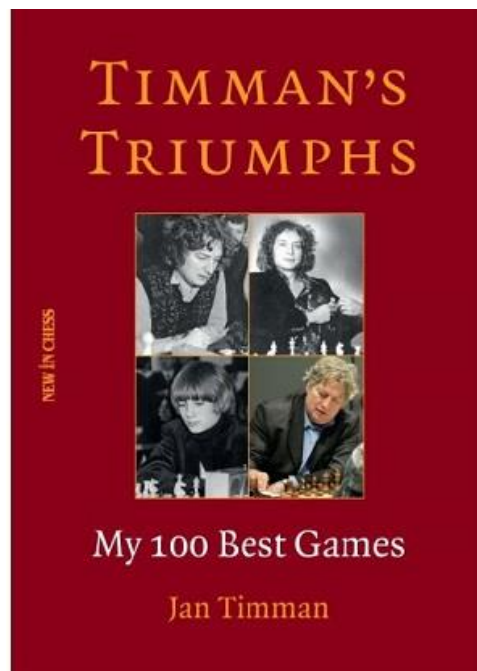
In this book the Dutch IM and trainer looks at what might be a rather hazy concept for many players, positional sacrifices. Perhaps I should rephrase that. It's not so much that positional sacrifices are a hazy concept, more likely that players make them without realising that they're positional sacrifices. Some examples (all of which are covered in the book): if you're a Benko fan, your 3... b5 is a positional sac, ditto ...d5 if you play the Marshall. If you've ever played ...Rxc3 in the Sicilian, it was a positional sac, as is giving up an exchange to plonk a mighty knight on, say, e6.

While these are things which experienced players will pick up as they go along, there is obviously a lot more to positional sacrifices, given their long-term and often amorphous nature, and the author does an excellent job of discussing the different types (e.g. opening lines, pawn structure, exchange sacs, domination), thereby opening

the reader's eyes to the myriad occasions and circumstances when they might arise.

As you might have surmised, this is not basic fare, and I would not place this book in the hands of a beginner, but anyone wanting to explore the topic, or, indeed, anyone just seeking some pure chess enjoyment would find it interesting. It strikes me as the kind of book you could learn from subconsciously, in much the same way that many of the things we learn are things we never set out to learn in the first place. If you want proof, look no further than chapter one, game one, the well-known Schulten-Morphy, New York 1858. The author remarks that Morphy's 6... e3! is the earliest memory he has of a positional sacrifice, when he saw it in a book aged about twelve. I could have said exactly the same thing myself. Once seen, never forgotten.

This is a different sort of book, well written, with lots of examples and not heavy on variations, ideal for reading cover-to-cover, or, as the author says, dipping into. The material is bang up to date, and the examples include a look at the creative output of the latest engines and dynamic young GMs like Dubov. However the author does not neglect the classics, and most of the great players of the past feature too. Apart from the subject matter, another thing I liked was the bibliography, where the author not only lists the books, but explains *why* they were useful/meaningful to him. A very nice touch to round off a very nice book.



TIMMAN'S TRIUMPHS My 100 Best Games by Jan Timman, New in Chess, 349 pp., publ. 2020

There was a time when games collections were a standard feature of the chess shelves in any self-respecting bookstore. Guys of my vintage – the same as Timman's, it has to be said – cut our teeth on collections by the old masters. Then along came the openings books explosion, doing to the games collection pretty much what grey squirrels have been doing to red squirrels these past few decades. Thus the publication of a traditional '100 best' by a player of Timman's calibre is all the more welcome. His impressive credentials alone – Dutch no. 1 for twenty-odd years, former world no. 2, 'Best in the West', World Championship candidate – ensure the quality of the material, as does the calibre of his opponents. During his career he crossed swords with elite peers such as Spassky, Tal, Hort, Karpov, Korchnoi, Andersson and Ivanchuk, as well as a host of other household names. Like all great players, Timman could play any type of game, and the collection features everything from classical attacking play to technical conversions. His opening repertoire was very wide, so the chances are the reader will

find something featuring his or her pet line. It might be a cliché, but there is something for everyone in here.

Timman was not only an outstanding player, but is an excellent writer with a fine literary style. Each of the six broad chapters has a lengthy introduction and each game – they span his entire career – is prefaced by a couple of scene-setting paragraphs. In similar fashion his annotations – detailed, but not overly so – contain lots of explanation as to what is going on. I loved his touching, harmless self-belief, e.g. *'I played an excellent technical game...'*, *'...this was a model attacking game'*, *'...a flawless positional performance'*, *'...no flaws in my technique'*, but it never lapses into egotism, and he is generous to his opponents when credit is due. There are also lots of stories and anecdotes, many of which reveal the author's often bohemian lifestyle – perhaps a reason why he never quite made it to the very very top? – and which are full of gentle humour (*'My nights were filled with alcohol abuse again, and this had a positive effect on my play'*).

If I have one mild quibble about his writing, it is that, like some chess authors, he occasionally seems to assume that what is evident to him will be equally evident to the reader. A brief example amongst others: of an early opening move in one game he remarks that it is *'a strategically risky decision not very often seen in practice anymore'*, without elaborating. Given that many 'ordinary' players will no doubt be interested in his book, a little elucidation would not have gone amiss.

The other minor irritation concerns the translation. Although Timman's English is fluent, the book has been translated from the original Dutch, and, while it is generally up to NiC's usual high standards, there are little tell-tale signs, often concerning prepositions (always tricky customers) and phrasing, e.g. *'...he invited me and Ulf Andersson at his home'*, *'Every night, I went to a dancing named 'Golden Gate'...'* and one which is always a big

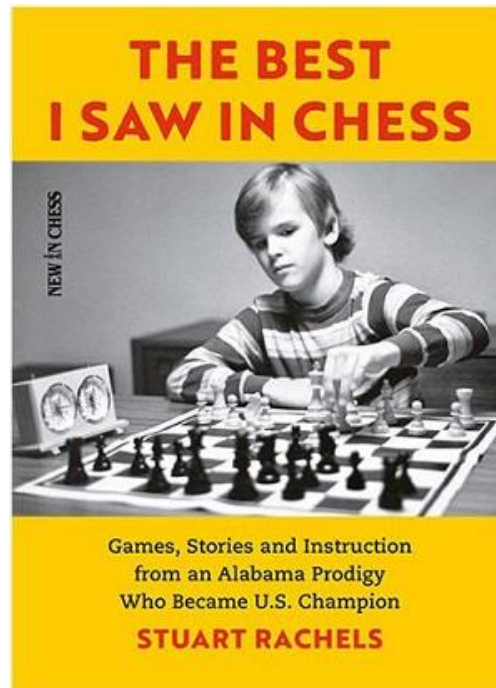
giveaway, the word 'since' – *'Since 2014, Loek van Wely is the tournament director...'*. Not drastic, but niggly.

The index also needs a mention. It is NiC's currently favoured index of players, not games. If you want to track down a game you have to sift through the names for a dash between the page numbers. A tad clunky, methinks. Why not have a separate games index/list of opponents?

These apart (some reviewers are never happy J), this is a tremendous collection by one of the world's best from a career spanning half a century; that alone should make you think about finding a space on your shelves for a copy.

Ian Marks

February 2021



THE BEST I SAW IN CHESS by Stuart Rachels, New in Chess, 416 pp., publ. 2020.

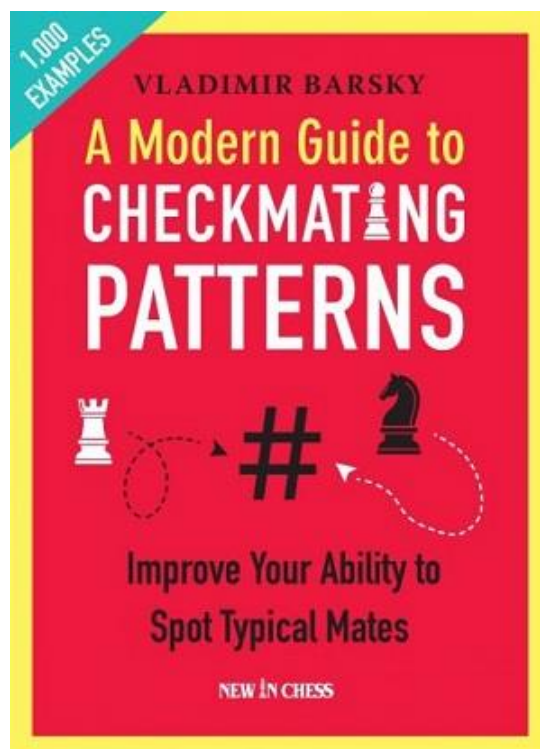
As the author wryly admits, the chances are that you will have no idea who he is (*'...you may not know me.'*) and, by implication, perhaps be wondering how an 'unknown' can write a 400-odd page book on the game?). So let me fill you in. Stuart Rachels was the youngest-ever US master and the youngest-ever US Junior Open Champion, both at an age younger than Fischer. In 1989 he tied for the US Championship, became an IM, was on his way to GM, and played in the 1990 Interzonal. Not a bad CV, and clearly a player to watch, so how come you haven't heard of him? Because he retired from competitive play to pursue an academic career, which is why he is Stuart Rachels, philosopher, not Stuart Rachels GM.

But, as his book demonstrates, no-one ever really retires from chess, and Rachels is still clearly in love with the game. Between its covers you will find lots of good chess, opinions, thoughts, musings, everything from openings to endings, tactics, blunders, cheating – the lot. Much of the material will be new to readers (*'A benefit of studying my games is that you've never seen them before.'*), and it is

very good chess indeed. There are also lots of reminiscences and stories of the good and great, mainly older players to whom Rachels looked up such as Najdorf and Korchnoi, but also of peers such as Short and Anand.

His analysis is sometimes very detailed, but his commentaries contain lots of waffle-free, often humorous, explanatory text, so not only do you never lose the thread of a game or example, but you get a real feel for the circumstances in which it was played. Surely this is something that might provide some other writers with food for thought? And the players he faced over the board constitute a considerable chess Who's Who: Adams, Anand, Browne, Gelfand, Ivanchuk, Miles and Spassky. With names like that the games have got to be good. (And, if you remember our own Ian Mackay, he's in here too.)

This is a fairly short review of a big book, but it really is a bit of everything – great chess, great reading and lots of interesting insights into the game and its players. I guess it's the sort of book that could only be written by someone who has retired from the game, who has nothing to hide and feels he can open up about his experiences. 'Nice' is an overworked word, but this is a very nice, different kind of book. I thoroughly enjoyed it.



A MODERN GUIDE TO CHECKMATING PATTERNS by Vladimir Barsky, New in Chess, 255 pp., publ. 2020.

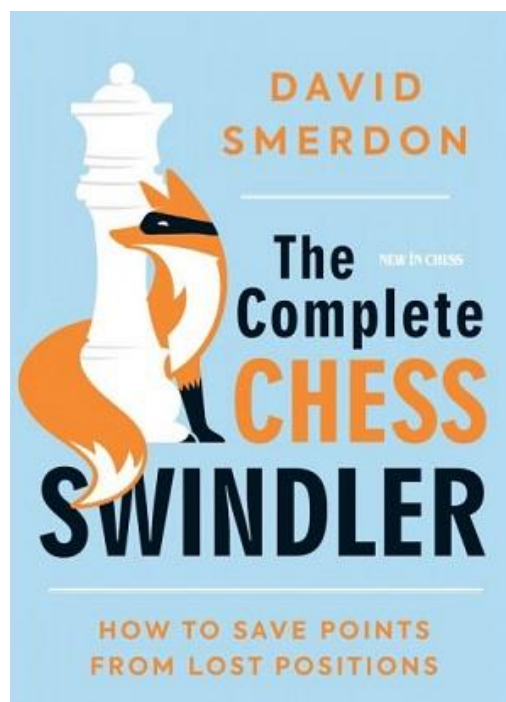
As I've said in previous reviews, this is what it says on the cover, 851 exercises (1,000 including the examples) on all the mating patterns involving different combinations of pieces: rook, queen, minor pieces and pawns, two rooks, R+B, R+N, Q+B, Q+N, Q+R and three-piece patterns. It's the sort of stuff that every player should be au fait with, especially juniors and those starting out.

The bulk of the book is taken up by the exercises, but Barsky doesn't let the reader loose on them without an introduction to each chapter setting the scene for what is to follow. Having said that, he doesn't do the work for you. You still have to work on the positions! The examples are of recent vintage, so no hackneyed stuff, and many feature the beautiful sort of ideas that stick in the mind. There's not a great deal of text, but there doesn't have to be, and what there is is adequate.

As I said above, this really is the sort of bread-and-butter stuff that every player should be aware of. A lot of chess is all about pattern recognition: you know your patterns, you'll do better than the guy who doesn't (and you'll beat him or her). Youngsters should be devouring books like this, either on their own or with a coach. Certainly one worth adding to your library. Just one complaint: no player index. ?

Ian Marks

December 2020



THE COMPLETE CHESS SWINDLER by David Smerdon, New in Chess, 361 pp., publ. 2020.

Now this one's different, a whole book devoted to the fine yet somehow maligned art of swindling! Swindling is as much a part of the game as anything else, but is largely ignored in chess literature, perhaps because it is mired in murkiness, unworthy of noble antagonists. However chess, like life, can kick us in the teeth when we least expect it, and if we're prepared, then we're better placed to do something about it. That's where the Aussie GM comes in, treating swindling like any other part of the game, looking at the elements and how chessplayers can train – yes, train – them.

He divides his material into twenty-three chapters over six large parts. Swindles are a bit like combinations in that we all know one when we see one, but trying to define one is another matter, so Part I discusses what a swindle consists of. With the way paved, Part II deals with the psychology of swindles, Part III the swindler's toolbox, Part IV core skills, Part V looks at swindles in practice and Part VI is a collection of exercises. To take just one part to give you an idea of what's involved, Part II discusses, inter alia, impatience, hubris, fear, the urge to be in control, the swindler's mind and optimism. Clearly,

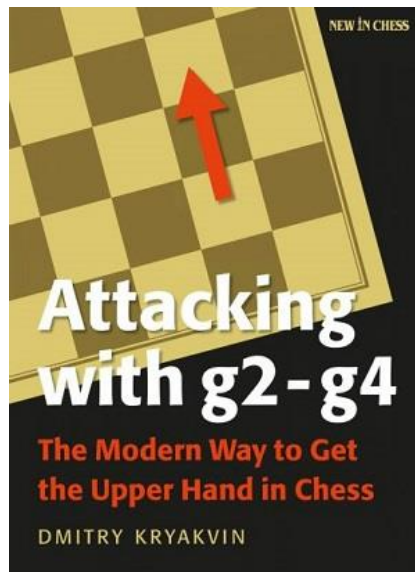
as this part (the longest, with eight chapters) suggests, psychology plays a huge role in the swindling scenario, and if you're not aware of the psychological factors, you are going to be (a) swindled and (b) unprepared to play for a swindle yourself should the occasion/need arise. The hundreds of examples feature players from world champions down, which has the effect of making this a very human book, after all, when it comes to blundering or being swindled, the top players are down here with the rest of us.

The style is light, chatty and often humorous, but, as I've said in other reviews, humour is often a more effective instructional tool than gravitas, so if you're thinking that this is just a light-hearted romp through the subject, you're mistaken.

The production is excellent, but I spotted a curious double blooper in exercise 41, Keres-Eliskases, Noordwijk 1938, where the author refers to the 'Estonian legend who would later win the World Championship' (he didn't) and 'his Argentinian opponent', who wasn't. Eliskases was Austrian and after the Anschluss in early 1938 played under the German flag. He only finished up in Argentina after the Buenos Aires Olympiad of 1939. It's always strange that things like this slip through the editing process.

My other, admittedly tiny, gripe is that 'Swindler' is printed throughout with upper case at the start. I understand why, but every time I saw it I read it as 'Svidler'. I had my eyes tested not so long ago, so maybe it's just my stupidity showing through.

This witty, thought-provoking and highly readable book should help you pick up (wonderfully undeserved!?) half and full points when you find yourself in one of those lousy positions that we all end up in at one time or another. Definitely one you should consider.



ATTACKING WITH g2-g4 by Dmitry Kryavkin, New in Chess, 288 pp., publ. 2019.

Even before AlphaZero came along to push the limits of what is and isn't possible on the chessboard, an early g2-g4 was already starting to crop up in all sorts of unusual places. As the Keres Attack it was already part and parcel of the Sicilian, but when it started to appear in Queen's Gambits and Slavs, people began to wonder.

As the author points out in his preface, his objective in this book is to illustrate the role of an early g2-g4 in closed openings. Thus, while the Sicilian is conspicuous by its absence, he covers the thrust in the Dutch, Queen's Gambit, Nimzo, the anti-Nimzo English, Slav, King's Indian and Grünfeld. He doesn't leap straight into the 21st century, though. In Part I, 'Botvinnik's Heritage', he pays tribute to the Patriarch's pioneering work with an early g2-g4 – decades before computers were ever thought of – in the likes of the Nimzo, QGD and English, where some of his games with the move have become classics.

Parts II-VIII are devoted to the openings mentioned above. Some early g2-g4s have now become more or less mainstream (e.g. 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Nf3 e6 5 e3 Nbd7 6 Qc2 Bd6 7 g4), but in other instances it is still regarded as a bit dodgy, e.g. 1 d4 f5 2 g4!?.

(In case you're wondering, the author also takes a look at more 'respectable' g2-g4 ideas against Stonewall formations.)

Kryavkin covers the g2-g4 idea in open-minded fashion, explaining the concrete pros and cons of the move in given situations and stressing that it is neither necessarily a winner nor a loser; it has to be weighed up on its merits. (The sub-title of the book refers to 'getting the upper hand', not 'winning'.) Given that the situations and positions arising from an early/unexpected g2-g4 can be unusual, and the play might often seem confusing, the author uses plenty of text to clarify and explain what's going on. With the idea still in its infancy, the majority of the eighty-four illustrative games are of recent vintage with most of the current luminaries being represented.

Steve Giddins's translation reads smoothly, and the format is easy-on-the-eye double column. The bibliography draws heavily on 21st century sources, mainly Kasparov, and there is a detailed index of variations. Only blemish on the index front is that there's no games index, just an index of players' names, so if you're wanting to track down a particular game, you're going to have to do a bit of cross-checking. Maybe not a huge issue with single references, but when a player has multiple references (e.g. Kramnik twenty, Carlsen thirteen) then you're gonna need extra hands while you thumb the pages.

This is an interesting book on a relatively unusual and novel topic. If you think that g2-g4 is just crude caveman stuff, then it offers plenty of material to convince you otherwise (and besides, crude caveman stuff was never Botvinnik's forte).

A good one if you're looking for something a bit different.

Ian Marks

November 2020



Chessable > Courses > Chess Openings

The Principled Queen's Gambit: Part 1

MoveTrainer™ Opening course by **FM Daniel Barrish** ★★★★★

<https://www.chessable.com/the-principled-queens-gambit-part-1/course/35735/>

The Principled Queen's Gambit: Part 1

This course was very interesting to review...so much so it has taken me several months to get through it.

The idea is to be 'principled' and play the best chess, the most forcing chess, the chess that will win you games and improve your game!

The explanations are great and the author really does make an effort to ensure you understand the reason behind the moves. The Plans, Structures and Pawn Breaks section is simply amazing – why hasn't anyone else attempted this before!!

The reader also gets the feeling that the author invested a lot of time preparing and updating it (more of that later!). The core repertoire, like many other 1.d4 repertoires, is based around the super solid Exchange Variation of the Queen's Gambit Declined. What sets this one apart is the quality of instruction presented here. I know many books recommend the Exchange Variation with Nge2 but this course is the first time the f3/e4 break has been explained in such a lucid way – pointing out when and why you need to play e4 - as well as when it's preparation with h3 is needed.

What else is recommended in this repertoire?

Here is the full list of chapters with my notes on which lines he has chosen to recommend:

- **Introduction**
- **Quickstarter guide** Summary of the whole repertoire (Video version is over 2Hrs long)
- **Plans, Structures and pawn breaks** A great new idea (Video is 1Hr 25 mins long)
- **Queen's Gambit Accepted** 1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e4
- **Queen's Gambit Declined** 3...Be7 and others – exchange then Bf4
- **Queen's Gambit Declined** 3...Nf6 – main line exchange variation with Nge2 (see later below)
- **Tarrasch & Semi-Tarrasch** 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 c5 4.cxd5 exd5 5.Nf3 Nc6 6.dxc5 d4 7.Na4 Bxc5 8.Nxc5 Qa5+ 9.Bd2 Qxc5 10.Rc1
- **The Exchange Slav (Backup Weapon)** 1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.cxd5 cxd5 4.Bf4 Nc6 5.e3 Nf6 6.Nc3 a6
- **The Slav** 1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Nc3 dxc4 4.e3 and in a recent addition, the Marshall Gambit 4.e4 against Triangle variation
- **The Semi-Slav** Main line Qc2 lines - 1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.e3 e6 5.Nf3 Nbd7 6.Qc2 Be7 7.b3 O-O
- **The Dutch Defence** 1.d4 f5 2.Bg5 – The Chessable Movie Trainer comes into its own here!
- **1...e6 Lines** including Dutch, 1...e6 with ...b6 system, etc
- **1...d5 Miscellaneous** Baltic Defence 2...Bf5, Von Hennig-Schara Gambit, Albin Countergambit, Chigorin's Defence
- **Miscellaneous First Moves** 1...d6, 1...c5, 1...b6, 1...e5, etc
- **Model Games** 15x annotated model games which illustrate plans in middlegames and endgames which can arise from the opening repertoire

- **Sample Games** 50x unannotated games to study
- **Puzzles** 32x Puzzles from the repertoire for you to play out

The author has committed to updating this repertoire every three months, at least for the first year after its release. This is quite a task and the author welcomes suggestions and potential improvements – quoting his readers for their suggestions as he updates the course!

Examples of the type of updates are:

- Added 4 lines on the Marshall Gambit for White as an alternative. This was prompted by the fact that I realised players who chose to play the Exchange Slav exclusively (I recommend learning both options) could get move-ordered by ...d5, ...e6 and ...c6. Adding the additional option of 4.e4 will solve that issue now.

- Added two lines in the 3...e5 Winawer Countergambit in the Slav, which was originally omitted. Thanks to Thomas_Logan_Ritchie for pointing this out.

- Adding a line covering GM Kotronias' recommendation in his book on the Tarrasch, 16...Be6 in the mainline. It's certainly a good recommendation and Black isn't doing too badly here at all, but I'm not entirely convinced that it equalises. Black can hold the endgame with good defence of course, but White is pushing for a win relatively risk-free there.

- Added a line covering 13...Nh5 in the QGA which was recommended for Black in Burgess' "An Idiot-Proof Chess Opening Repertoire". Thanks to starbreeze and Stigma for mentioning this. It's a solid line, and probably Black's best bet – but I still favour White's chances.

There is even a section on 'Repertoire Clashes' a guide to how this course matches up against some of the best Black repertoires available.

All in all – a fabulous course with fantastic explanations – a really great piece of work!

William Hulme

November 2020



The Principled Queen's Gambit: Part 2: The companion volume to Part 1 continues by covering lines where Black answers 1 d4 with 1...Nf6.

<https://www.chessable.com/the-principled-queens-gambit-part-2/course/37576/>

White's general strategy in these lines is to:

1. Take over the centre. Play f2-f3 and e2-e4 to build the ideal e4-d4 pawn duo
2. Develop pieces. Maximize activity while keeping the centre solid
3. Advance pawns. Gain space. Push the enemy back. Take over the game!

KID or Grunfeld – attempt to blow your opponent off the board 3.f3 (in particular, the standard KID plan with ...e5 and ...Nc6 could well be in trouble here).

The standard course comes with almost 2Hrs of instruction video but the full version has over 17Hrs of video included.

- **Introduction**
- **Quickstarter guide** Summary of the whole repertoire
- **Plans, Structures and pawn breaks**

- **Nimzo-Indian Backup Weapon** 4.e3 O-O 5.Bd2
- **Nimzo-Indian with 4.f3 Introduction** 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.f3 d5 and others
- **Nimzo-Indian with 4.f3 c5** the main line
- **Miscellaneous Benoni** Czech Benoni, Snake, 1.d4 c5, delayed Benoni
- **Modern Benoni** Knight's Tour (main line) 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 e6 4.Nc3 exd5 5.cxd5 d6 6.Nf3 g6 7.Nd2 Bg7 8.e4 O-O 9.Be2 Re8 10.O-O
- **Benko Gambit** Accepted then 5.e3 - 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.e3
- **Grunfeld with 3.f3 introduction**
- **Grunfeld with 3.f3 d5**
- **Update #2 Grunfeld Alternative** 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 d5 4.f3 Bg7 5.h4
- **King's Indian introduction** 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.f3 Bg7 4.e4 d6 5.Nc3 into a Samisch
- **King's Indian ...c5 lines**
- **1...Nf6 Miscellaneous** Budapest Gambit, Black Knights Tango, Accelerated QID
- **1...d6, Old Indian and Philidor** 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 d6 3.Nc3 Nbd7 4.e4 e5 5.Nf3 Be7 **or** 1.d4 d6 2.e4 Nf6 3.Nc3 Nbd7 4.Nf3
- **1...g6, Pirc & Modern** 1.d4 d6 2.e4 Nf6 3.Nc3 g6 **or** 1.d4 g6 2.e4 Bg7 3.c4
- **Model Games** 15x annotated model games which illustrate plans in middlegames and endgames which can arise from the opening repertoire
- **Sample Games** 50x unannotated games to study

- **Puzzles** 28x Puzzles from the repertoire for you to play out

An extract from the plans section:

Nimzo-Indian with 4.e3

White Plans

- If Black doesn't play ...0-0 and ...**d5**, develop with **Nge2**, intending to kick Black's bishop away from **b4** with **a3** without allowing the double of the **c3** pawns after ...**Bxc3+**
- In the event of ...0-0 and ...**d5**, we develop with **Bd2**, followed by natural moves like **Nf3**, **cxd5**, **Rc1**, **Bd3** and 0-0
- In the ensuing QID-like structure with ...**b6**, White has two main plans. The first of these is **Ne5**, followed by securing the knight on **e5** with **f4**
- The second plan, and my preferred one, is to play against the hanging pawn structure with pawns on **c5** and **d5**. After **dx c5 ...bxc5**, we intend to break up the 'hanging pawns' with **e4**, which should leave Black with a weak pawn on **c5**

Black Plans

- Develop naturally with ...0-0, ...**d5**, ...**b6**, ...**Bb7** etc
- Aim for counterplay with ...**c5**
- Sometimes ...**Ne4** is another idea, intending to grab the bishop pair since our bishop is on **d2**

Once again, the (optional) video part of the course is exceptional here with 17.5 Hrs in the full version and almost 2Hrs in the smaller version.

The idea to provide a comprehensive repertoire incorporating the move f3 is very ambitious! I really welcomed author's work giving alternatives like Nimzo-Indian 4.e3 with 5.Bd2 and the Grunfeld

alternative (perhaps too committal / aggressive for some?) as they are excellent for adding some variety to the repertoire when needed.

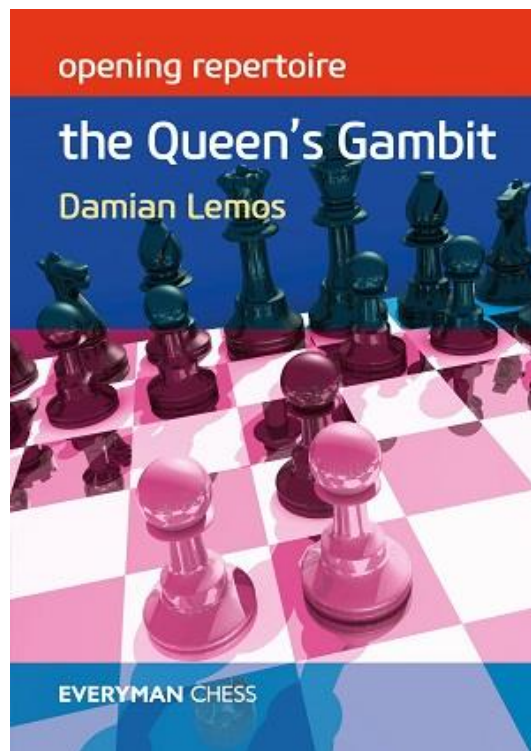
To be honest, I found this part of the repertoire a bit heavy going. There's a wealth of material here and it will take a lot of time to master it all. I am sure, however, anyone who manages to work their way through this repertoire, will find their chess abilities stronger than before they started it!

I'll leave you with the words from the author:

"We will be playing f3 whenever it is decent, in order to prepare to get that 'perfect centre' of e4 and d4. Compared to g3 lines, which are obviously very good but often require subtle play and strategic understanding to play optimally, f3 variations I think are more direct, forcing and maybe even more ambitious" - FM Daniel Barrish on his repertoire.

William Hulme

November 2020



THE QUEEN'S GAMBIT by Damian Lemos, Everyman Chess, 252 pp.,
publ. 2019

In this addition to Everyman's 'Opening Repertoire' series, the Argentinian GM looks at one of the game's oldest and most enduring openings. The seven chapters cover the QGD, Tarrasch, Slav, QGA, Chigorin, Albin and Others, the first four deservedly getting about two-thirds of the page allocation (although amusingly if you go by the page headings from pp. 88-206, you'd believe they were all devoted to Chigorin's Defence). He uses a games-based format, with over forty of his sixty games drawn from the present century. Only one sticks out by its vintage, a 1920 demolition by Tarrasch of Tartakower's Albin Counter-Gambit (a game I remember first seeing as a junior longer ago now than I'm prepared to admit ?).

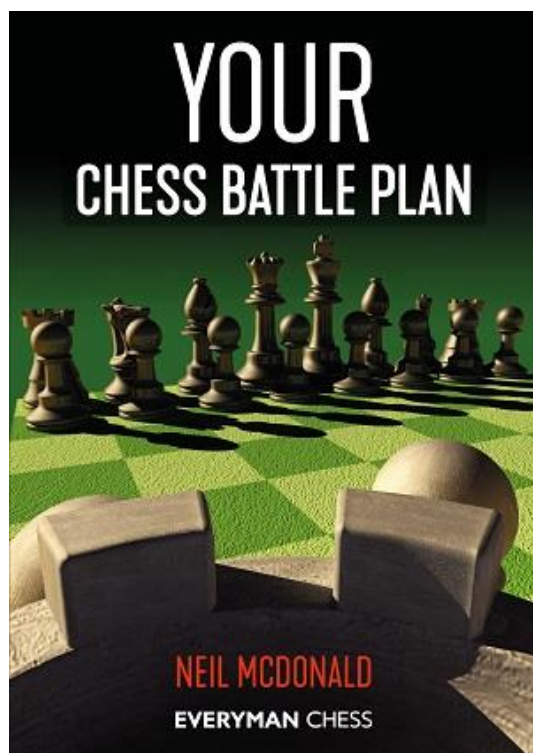
The book is not a heavy theoretical introduction to the QG. The author describes his goal in his preface: "...to create a repertoire that allows us to reach the middlegame with a solid foundation while not depending too much on 'exact theory'". As such, he

provides plenty of moves in his annotations, but couched within easily understandable explanatory prose.

This book would be of interest to players up to and beyond Elo 2000, but particularly to lower-rated players looking for a grounding in the QG, or more casual players who maybe only play a handful of league games or the odd tournament a year. I mention the latter category for a couple of specific reasons. Every year I see games which begin with something like 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 c5, presumably with the laudable intention of stopping Black from developing his bishop 'actively' on d6, but ignoring every other positional consideration in the opening. (Even more surprising is the number of Blacks who fail to hit the c5-pawn with ...b6.) Equally common are the guys who defend the QGD but fail to get in the standard breaks, so finish up with their light-squared bishop battering its head off pawns on c6 and e6. If you recognise yourself here, consider investing in this book!

Although the book is primarily written from White's point of view (Black only scores two draws and a rather jammy win from the sixty games), Lemos offers plenty of suggestions as to where Black could have improved, or at least played a reasonable alternative, so even prospective defenders from the black side might find it useful.

The Queen's Gambit is never going to be refuted, and it's always worth a fresh look at the opening every so often. Lemos's book is a worthwhile review of where it's presently at.



YOUR CHESS BATTLE PLAN by Neil McDonald, Everyman Chess,
318 pp., publ. 2020

This is another training/improvement manual from the English GM in which he looks at strategy. Strategy is often defined as knowing what to do when there's nothing to do, which essentially defines the author's aim – to show you how to play when “there is nothing to attack and no threat to deal with”.

He divides his work into ten chapters of 20-30 pages each, covering a whole range of well-known strategic themes including piece activity, exploiting holes and pawn promotion, but the ones which caught my eye were those which, arguably, feature least in the ‘average’ (or casual) player's armoury, viz. stopping your opponent playing good moves and sacrificing for the initiative. The former contains many striking examples of the need to be alert to what your opponent is up to, while the latter discusses something that less experienced players – often bound by the ‘points’ value of the pieces we learn as beginners – are reluctant to do, viz. give up material in return for time or some other advantage.

Another interesting chapter is devoted to what he calls 'Full Grovel Mode' (a Magnusism), i.e. the fine art of hustling in bad positions and using any legal means to save the game. I mention this one because it is a fact of chess life that, the lower down the leagues you go, the more players just roll over and toss in the towel when they're losing. I've never really understood this. If you're losing anyway, what's the worst that can happen to you? That's the time to hunker down, look for banana skins and open manhole covers to put as much distance between the other guy and the full point as you can. Therein lies the way to saving half, or even full, points. And besides, everybody likes a good swindle.

All but one of the seventy-seven illustrative games are from this century, with an impressive twenty-nine from 2019, so what you get is how contemporary players are handling these topics. It's always a good idea to look at modern examples, rather than rely on games played decades ago (as the author himself says). He also stresses that the games were chosen not just for instructional value, but for aesthetic appeal, and what struck me about many of them was the way in which the clash between the players trying to impose their will/plans/ideas often comes through. Sometimes textbooks make a player's ideas look like one-way traffic, and we all know that ain't true, and striking examples stick in the mind.

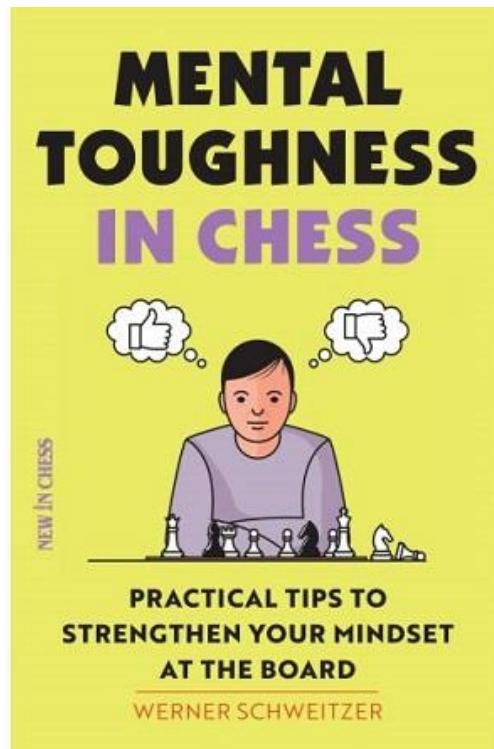
McDonald writes with his usual clarity in a style which shows empathy with the reader (unlike some writers). "I remember sitting helplessly at the board, knowing that something disastrous was going to happen but with no idea of how to prevent it. That is often the case when players learn theory but don't understand the plans and motivations behind it." If that sounds familiar, then you really should check out his last chapter, 'Deciding the Character of the Game in the Opening'.

As I've said in many other reviews, you get out of a book what you put into it. There is much in this book that will benefit players who

still view the game as develop-attack-mate; working through it steadily and absorbing its lessons should certainly put a few points on to the old rating.

Ian Marks

September 2020



MENTAL TOUGHNESS IN CHESS by Werner Schweitzer, New in Chess, 143 pp., publ. 2020.

This little volume covers an important but rather neglected part of the game, as the sub-title explains: *Practical Tips to Strengthen Your Mindset at the Board*. The author is, amongst other things, a mental coach, in which capacity he has worked for several years with the Austrian national team.

The book is divided into four large parts: Mental Toughness, Preparation, Playing Successfully and More Practical Tips. Within these we find topics such as knowing yourself, fear, decision making, tension, concentration, luck, fighting spirit and confidence, in other words pretty much everything that might go through a player's mind – for good or ill – before, during and after a game.

The author doesn't do the work for you, but provides plenty of tips and advice. Much of it is basically common sense (however you

choose to define common sense), and applying it would go a long way, but a lot is really only relevant to tournaments, and one-round-a-day tournaments at that. To take an example, if you're heading straight from work to a league match in the evening, you are unlikely to be able to (a) have a nap before the game, (b) partake of an optimally balanced meal or (c) arrive at the board in a relaxed frame of mind if you've just spent twenty minutes fretting in a traffic jam or unable to find a parking space (although arguably relaxation techniques would help). OK, I'm stating the obvious, but you have to be aware that some of the subject matter is not immediately applicable to the sort of bread-and-butter chess that tends to constitute the average club player's agenda.

One thing which caught my eye was chapter 24, *Beating Your 'Angstgegner'*. Plenty of German words have crept into English (and chess!), one of them being angst, but Angstgegner doesn't seem to have slipped into everyday parlance (at least it's not in my fat 2,000-page dictionary). Perhaps the inverted commas – usually a reliable indicator – suggest that translator and publisher thought the German word looked or sounded classier than 'bogey opponent'.

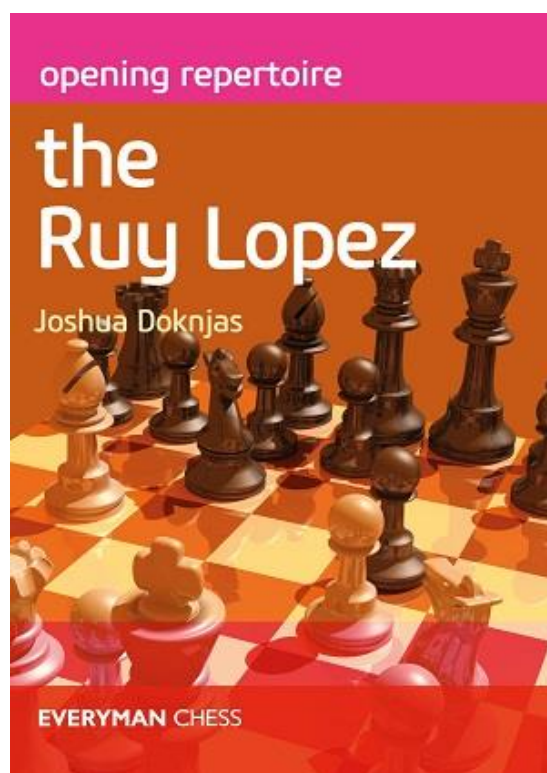
Back at the start I called this a little volume. It is based on a series of articles that first appeared in the Austrian magazine *Schach Aktiv*, thus lots of pages are only half pages of text, while those introducing a chapter carry a drawing, so it's not 143 pages of full text. I mention this just to point it out, not criticise. It is well produced with key paragraphs, clear text and illustrations. There is no index, but there is a detailed bibliography amongst which I noticed Timothy Gallwey's *The Inner Game of Tennis*, one of the classic (and forerunner) texts on improving at anything, not just the sport of the title.

The book is a quick read (no moves or diagrams), but not a quick fix. You could easily get through it in one sitting, but the issues raised

demand much more time, thought and dedication. You will truly get out of it what you put into it.

Ian Marks

August 2020



THE RUY LOPEZ by Joshua Doknjas, Everyman Chess, 287 pp., publ. 2019

In this book the Canadian FM presents a very detailed repertoire for White in the Ruy. He splits his material into three broad sections – Classical Systems (Zaitsev, Chigorin and Breyer), Fashionable Lines (4 d3 v the Berlin, the Open and the 8 a4 Anti-Marshall) and Sharp Tries and Sidelines (pretty much everything else).

He does so by means of forty illustrative games which are impressively up-to-date, including ten from 2019. The oldest is from 2006, and only because it illustrates a relatively rare sideline. His notes are immensely detailed, right down to the dreaded-but-unavoidable b3221) type variations, and while he communicates clearly, using plenty of words, a certain level of understanding is clearly assumed.

Target readership? This is heavy duty fare, clearly not for dilettantes. Such depth is obviously aimed at higher-rated players looking for lots of contemporary material. I'm talking around 2200

and upwards, or those taking part in strong(er) events where ignorance is likely to be punished, and those players would have to invest a huge amount of time to derive maximum benefit from the material. Players inhabiting the lower echelons of the rating list can easily survive without it. Even if you get the first three Spanish moves on the board, the chances of reaching the key line you've prepared for at move 18 are slim to non-existent. You could argue that you could derive benefit from playing over such high-level GM games – many of the ideas can be applied in other, similar types of positions – but there are other books specifically designed for that.

Given the vast amount of material contained in the book, the bibliography is surprisingly short, only four books, one of which is Everyman's own volume on the Schliemann (which gets twenty-one pages here). I can only assume that the author drew most of his material from the online and database sources cited.

Presentation is Everyman's usual clear text and diagrams, although the single-column format creates quite a dense impression.

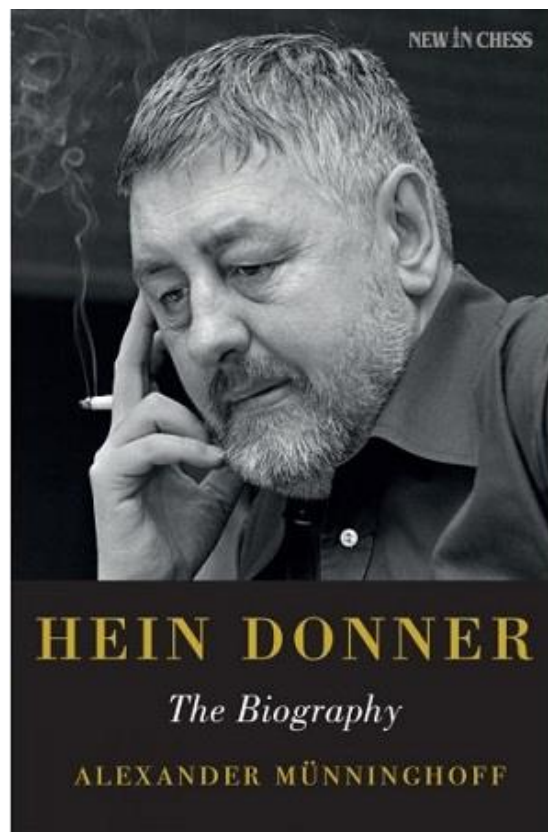
Overall, a work which can be recommended to stronger players wanting to keep au fait with current developments in the Ruy, and with the time (= lack of other commitments!) to devote to it, but I imagine that 90% of the readers of this review could easily survive without it.

Ian Marks

August 2020

Chess biographies are rare, perhaps because chess players don't feature in the public eye, although the biography stacks in any bookstore are full of books about people you've never heard of, so there's no particular reason why chess bios should be so thin on the ground.

Anyway, New in Chess have recently brought out two biographies, so let's take a look at them.



HEIN DONNER The Biography by Alexander Münninghoff (272 pp.) looks at the strongest Dutch player of the mid-'50s to the mid-'70s. Münninghoff is an award-winning Dutch writer and it shows in his style and handling of language and vocabulary. Like all good biographers he brings to life not only his subject, but also his background and times, thus besides Donner's chess career, the book digs into things like his upbringing in The Hague, the German occupation, his law studies, family life and artistic leanings. Donner had a life-long interest in literature and writing; it is said that he

started out as a chess player who wrote and finished up as a writer who played chess. There's an element of truth in this, in fact he spent his final post-stroke years in a nursing home typing with one finger.

He was also politically engaged, involved in the social upheavals of the '60s and demonstrating against American involvement in Vietnam.

What of his chess? As a young man he was on friendly terms with Euwe, who was something of a father figure to the new arrival in Amsterdam, and later enjoyed good relations with Timman, but he could be blunt and cantankerous, and his relationship with other Dutch players and the powers that be was often tetchy.

Although a strong grandmaster, he lacked the necessary discipline and dedication to make it to the very top (too many other interests?), and was never world championship candidate material. In his only Interzonal, Gothenburg 1955, he finished a disastrous last equal with $5\frac{1}{2}/20$. The Soviets of course clocked this and marked his card as a 'non-serious practitioner of chess'. He had a 'thing' about the USSR which didn't help, and never played in the Soviet Union; it is reasonable to assume that if he had, their GMs would have hung him out to dry. His career score of only three wins against Soviet players certainly did not augur well. His preparation, or lack thereof, was the stuff of legend. What other strong player could lose to the same opponent twice with the same colour in the same variation in fourteen and thirteen moves, with the same first eleven moves each time!?

The narrative also allows us glimpses into the lives of many of Donner's contemporaries, e.g. he was good friends with Larsen and got on well with Fischer. In his later years it became evident that the latter was suffering from mental health issues, but an intriguing passage here reveals that the teenage Bobby was already

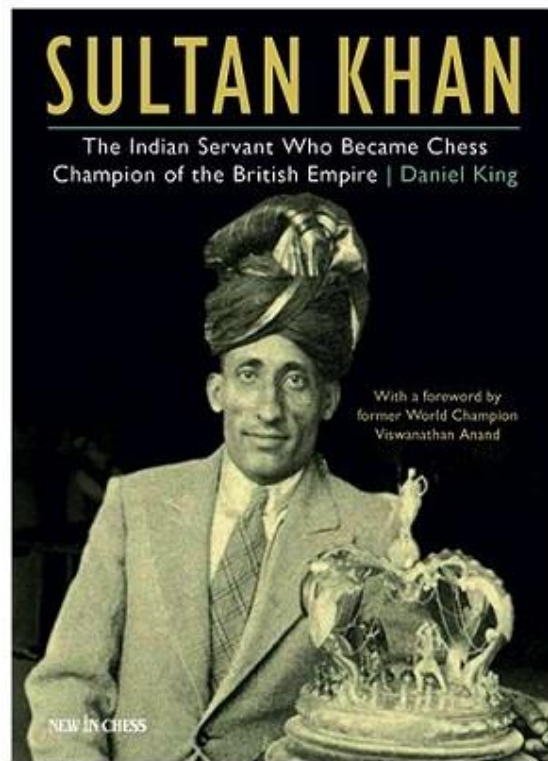
embarrassing people with his anti-Semitic comments and referring to documentaries about the Holocaust as 'sentimental crap' (a view from which Donner himself did not demur at the time).

There is a selection of lightly-annotated games and nine pages of photographs, but the best one is on the cover, a study worthy of the great portrait photographer Karsh.

It is fascinating stuff, hard to put down, but not without its blemishes. In many instances the English is not up to NiC's trademark excellent standard. The text is peppered with errors, on a scale of trivial to hefty, which should have been picked up somewhere in the production process. The Dutch writer Harry Mulisch's egregious reference to David Livingstone as an Englishman goes unremarked. (Or maybe it was Stanley... but he was Welsh.) Granted, this one isn't NiC's fault, but a little acknowledgement of the error wouldn't have gone amiss.

A word also has to be said about the names-only index. A biography needs something more detailed, and since it's people's names only there's no way of cross-referencing, say, Fischer – Holocaust, views on, or Donner – attitude to Soviets, or any means of finding places, tournaments or events. And some entries don't appear by surname.

Overall an engrossing account of a colourful character which would have benefited from more TLC.



Danny King's **SULTAN KHAN**, 384 pp., chronicles the life of one of the most enigmatic (and, as it turns out, interesting) chess players of the twentieth century.

Sultan Khan (henceforth referred to as SK) was a humble villager from the Punjab employed as a servant in the household of the Indian nobleman Sir Umar Hayat Khan, a keen chess enthusiast and regular visitor to Britain. Between 1929 and 1933 he took up residence several times in London to attend – as a loyal pro-British politician – conferences on Indian independence. Naturally he was accompanied by his retinue and faithful servant.

SK's background was in Indian chess, the rules of which differed slightly from the western version of the game, (e.g. pawns could only move one square on the first move, hence 'Indian defence'), but he had some experience of the western version and had won the All-India Championship in 1928. Sir Umar recognised his talent, and saw these visits to London as the perfect opportunity for SK to

test himself against strong European opposition. What happened next was extraordinary.

Despite having little experience of the game as we know it, and, since his English was almost non-existent, no access to manuals or theoretical works, within a few months of his arrival in 1929, SK won the British championship, in fact he won it three times in four years. He regularly took part in strong tournaments across Europe, generally finishing amongst the prize-winners and holding his own against the leading players of the day. He played on board one for 'England' at three Olympiads. In reality this was still the British Chess Federation team, hastily relabelled the 'British Empire' in order to accommodate SK (and producing an interesting clash at Folkestone in 1933 when the 'British Empire' played... Scotland).

Amongst this hectic international activity, SK turned out regularly in the London league, generally shredding the opposition.

What makes this so remarkable is that, although SK received some coaching from Yates and Winter, he was otherwise on his own and had another job, so time for study and preparation must have been extremely limited.

It showed. His openings were often unsophisticated to the point of naive, e.g. as Black in the Caro-Kann 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 (or 3 e5) e6; on the other hand, he was something of a pioneer, e.g. playing the 'Indian' pawn move a3 against the Queen's Indian long before Petrosian or Kasparov made it their own. He was a positional player and tough defender, and no slouch when the tactics started. A typical SK game might consist of an indifferent opening, then, once he got himself sorted out, a steady positional build-up leading to either a big squeeze or winning endgame.

Then in 1933 it all finished as quickly as it had started. Sir Umar returned to India for the last time, and SK went back to his village,

his career over. The loss of such a talent is tinged with sadness, but for SK, returning to India must have been an escape from difficult circumstances. For Sir Umar, SK was a means of demonstrating that Indians were not intellectually inferior, and his profile represented an entrée into London society (Sir Umar was a bit of a party animal). I'm trying to avoid saying he was a pawn in a bigger game, but can't. At the chessboard he enjoyed freedom away from the stifling atmosphere of Sir Umar's household, yet he *had* to do well to please his master. Playing under this additional pressure and scrutiny makes his achievements all the more amazing.

How good was SK? According to chessmetrics.com he was in the world's top ten for at least a couple of years, peaking at no. 6. As a career achievement that would be outstanding; for someone with little prior experience of the game, no easy access to theoretical material, and who was holding down a day job in an alien environment, to achieve it within four and a bit years is beyond remarkable.

King also does a great job of setting SK's career within the context of the times. Contemporary sources and reports give the reader a vivid feel for the background to Sir Umar's visits: political and religious tension and unrest, the air of Establishment and imperial superiority, the notion that Britain could not afford to 'lose' India, and the pervasive undercurrent of racism (SK was a 'subject', not a citizen, and can you imagine a tournament report nowadays mentioning the colour of a player's skin?). This all happened a long time ago, but it crosses your mind that some things have changed little in ninety years. (King points out that SK has never been awarded the GM title retrospectively. The BCF could have applied on his behalf... but didn't.)

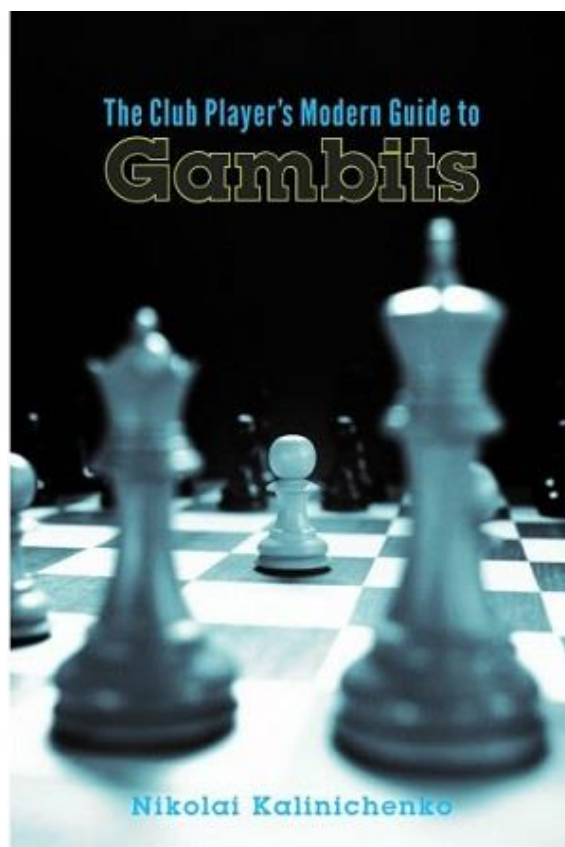
This wonderful book is enjoyable in so many ways – as an account of a meteoric chess career, a chronicle of the times, or a games collection. There is an extensive bibliography, eleven pages of

endnotes (some of them interesting reading in themselves), crosstables and a selection of photographs. My only gripe is that, like the Donner book, the people's-names-only index is of little use. There is no way to find or cross-reference places, tournaments, news events, topics etc. Sir Umar Hayat Khan appears under 'Sir' and, unless I'm missing something, there's no entry for Sultan Khan – incredibly, there is no way of tracking down *anything* relating to the subject of the book. Nor is there a games index. Given that the book presents lots of SK's games, I'd have thought a games index would have gone without saying.

Having got that off my chest, *Sultan Khan* is an excellent biography and one of the best chess books I've read in recent years. Highly recommended.

Ian Marks

July 2020



THE CLUB PLAYER'S MODERN GUIDE TO GAMBITS by Nikolai Kalinichenko, Russell Enterprises Inc., 255 pp., publ. 2019.

This book looks at the current status of a wide range of gambits, either pure gambits where one side gives up material early on, or lines which involve a later sacrifice of material, such as the Poisoned Pawn, Botvinnik Variation etc. It is divided into sections on the open, semi-open and closed games, each represented by white and black gambits, and each gambit is illustrated by a handful of games lightly analysed and with explanatory text.

It's worth bearing in mind that there are gambits and there are gambits. Openings such as the Benko and Marshall have become respectable and mainstream. Some, such as the King's Gambit and Budapest, tend to be met with a raised eyebrow nowadays, but are still considered, well, sort of OK if you fancy a punt. Going to extremes you have stuff like the Englund (1 d4 e5) and Latvian (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 f5) which usually elicit a disapproving tsk-tsk and are pretty

much regarded as coffeehouse. All of these types feature, but the emphasis is by far on the 'saner', more respectable, gambits.

The main objective is to illustrate that typical gambit themes such as rapid development, use of open lines, king safety, time etc. etc. are still as viable as ever despite the rise of the machines, indeed amongst the games, most of which are from the present century, including many from the teens, there are a couple of Leela/Stockfish/AlphaZero efforts from 2018-19. There are also plenty of games involving current big names, illustrating that gambits or gambit-type play is not just the preserve of the club hacker.

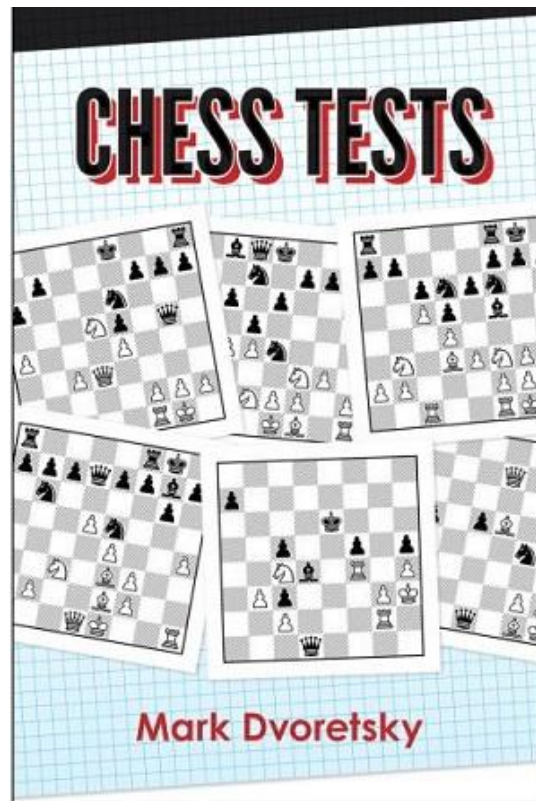
Overall the book is well produced, although, as often the case with Russell publications, there seems to have been no proofreader, as evidenced, for example, by the uncertainty over how many games it contains. The blurb says '*Almost 140 games...*', while the author's intro claims '*Almost 135 games...*'. It's 138, so I guess they're both right, depending on your point of view.

More irksomely, only the gambits are page numbered in the table of contents, so if you want to find an individual game, you've to do a bit of thumbing. And there's no index of player's names; you have to hunt for them in the contents.

This is the type of book which could provide inspiration for youngsters, providing they don't make the same mistake as I did. I recall finding a similar sort of effort in my local library back in the days when I was starting out as a kid. It was full of gambits and quickies, and made me think that chess was easy and I'd win all my games in about twenty moves. You could say I missed the point!

Ian Marks

June 2020



CHESS TESTS by Mark Dvoretsky, Russell Enterprises Inc., 208 pp., publ. 2019.

This posthumous work by the great Russian trainer is what it says on the cover – a collection of test positions designed to train seven areas of the game: combinational vision, candidate moves, calculation, attack and defence, positional play, realising an advantage and the endgame. The exercises are designed not only to instruct, but to provide pleasure in the solving process. Each chapter generally starts with a few easier, warm-up puzzles before moving on to meatier examples which, as the author warns, are often demanding enough to test the strongest of players.

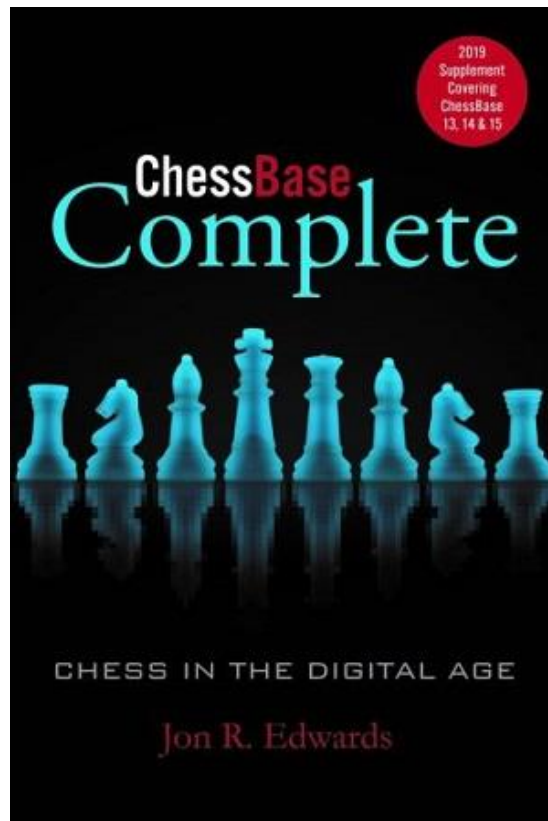
This caveat more or less defines the target readership. This is not a book for inexperienced or casual players, but is aimed at more ambitious or stronger players looking for challenging material. The implication is that you're not going to get everything right, but, equally, it is fair to assume that revisiting difficult exercises will bring its rewards.

The solutions are very detailed and provide deep insights into the topic under discussion and amount to virtually a mini-textbook in their own right.

It's not a big book in terms of pages, but it is a big and absorbing book (easy to get drawn into the positions!) in terms of content and potential benefits for the diligent reader. It is well produced with clear diagrams and text; I only have one gripe – there is no index of either players or themes addressed in the solutions.

Ian Marks

June 2020



CHESSBASE COMPLETE by Jon Edwards, Russell Enterprises Inc., 93 pp., publ. 2019.

This 2019 supplement of the author's original work covers all that's new in ChessBase 13, 14 and 15. If you want to know about, for example, the Cloud or ChessBase on the web, this is the place to look. The author, a CCIM, guides you through these and more and discusses their uses and implications. There are plenty of screenshots to illustrate what he has to say, always a good idea in a field where a picture really does often paint a thousand words, and a comprehensive index of all the features covered. If you're looking for a handy one-stop guide to what's new in ChessBase, this is it.

Ian Marks

June 2020

Lifetime Repertoires - The Nimzo Ragozin by Chessable.com



Lifetime Repertoires:
The Nimzo - Ragozin

Chessable > Courses > Chess Openings

Lifetime Repertoires: The Nimzo-Ragozin

MoveTrainer™ Opening course

by FM Daniel Barrish and by IM Chessexplained ★★★★★

<https://www.chessable.com/lifetime-repertoires-the-nimzo-ragozin/course/17354/>

This book is not available in any paper format – it's completely online www.chessable.com

It uses the ChessAble 'Movie Trainer' technology to teach you the concepts and there is an optional 13+ Hrs of Video lecture which you can purchase to compliment the training. Like other ChessAble courses, the video parts could be considered expensive but the quality of training provided here is very high. ChessAble also offer an unconditional 'money back if not completely satisfied' guarantee and if you keep an eye on promotions - special offers and discounts come up frequently. For what exactly ChessAble is and the differences using this software instead of a printed book, please see my previous review **Chess Structures - A Grandmaster Guide**, May 2019 (below).

Lines that knit together well:

At the heart of this book is the Nimzo-Indian defence **1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4** which has been combined with the Ragozin to deal with **3.Nf3** via **d5 4.Nc3 Bb4**.

The ever popular Catalan **1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.g3** is tackled alongside the London, Veresov, Trompowsky, Torre, Colle and all the deviations you need are covered in surprisingly good detail.

I say 'surprisingly' because usually book repertoires that attempt to encompass everything fall short on the sidelines. I checked what it

suggested against the London system and the authors go straight down one of the theoretically best main lines with ease (early Bd6) explaining the equalising plans so lucidly that I understand this better now than when I looked at it from the white side some years ago! I found equally excellent explanations for the mainline 4.e3 Nimzo and particularly clear explanations as to when Black's Bishop is better placed on a6 rather than it's natural home on b7.

I don't think anyone can doubt the soundness of the Nimzo-Indian Defence itself (almost all top players have played it – often with both colours) so I'm not going to comment on that.

The Ragozin's strengths seem to lie in the combination of classical Queen's Gambit ideas (a solid d5 pawn in the centre) with the dynamics of the Nimzo-Indian (Bb4 pin) and after moves like c5 and Qa5 can put real pressure on White's position.

The given Ragozin line against the ever popular Catalan **1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 d5 4.Nf3 Bb4+ 5.Bd2 Be7 6.Bg2 0-0 7.0-0 c6 8.Qc2 Nbd7** is also very interesting. This is the real starting position of this variation, which can be reached via a variety of move orders. The author goes into some details explaining the concepts and plans for both sides! e.g. the White plans

- Note Bd2 - usually in the Closed Catalan, White plays Nbd2 then e4 with a good position but here this isn't possible because of Bd2
- White may try to make use of Bd2 or move it to Bf4 (or sometimes Bc1)
- Often, White wants to see what black is doing with Bb7 or Ba6 before committing his queenside knight e.g. with Ba6 pressurising c4 - then Nc3 is not good
- So, in most cases we will be developing our light bishop to a6 so that it can pressurise c4, as this limits White's options
- White's main waiting/improving moves are Bf4, Rd1 and b3 - the order of these can be swapped around quite easily

The same points also contribute to what some may call the weaknesses of the Ragozin in that drawish or equal positions with 3-fold repetition can be reached in a few of the recommended lines. If White is not inclined to play aggressively, you could easily get an equal (some may say slightly boring) position and need to be patient to outplay your opponent later in the game. In my opinion this is hardly ever a problem at club level so I think most players will like the mix of solidness and active piece play that make up these lines.

The Chapters in this book are:

- **Overview**
- **Nimzo-Indian with 4.e3**
- **Nimzo-Indian with 4.Qc2**
- **Nimzo-Indian with 4.a3 and 4.f3**
- **Nimzo-Indian Deviations**
- **Ragozin with 5.Bg5**
- **Ragozin with 5.cxd5**
- **Ragozin with 5.Qa4+**
- **Ragozin Deviations**
- **Catalan (Bb4+ then Be7)**
- **1.d4 Deviations (Colle, London, Trompowski, etc)**
- **1.Nf3**
- **Model Games**

PROS:

Complete Repertoire for Black against 1.d4

Core Solid lines unlikely to be refuted

Clear and straightforward explanations

The course works well with Move-Trainer and helps us understand the ideas

IM Christof Sielecki does another excellent job with the (optional) videos!

CONS:

Some Ragozin lines tend to be drawish or 'too equal' and some players may prefer more exciting or dynamic play early on.

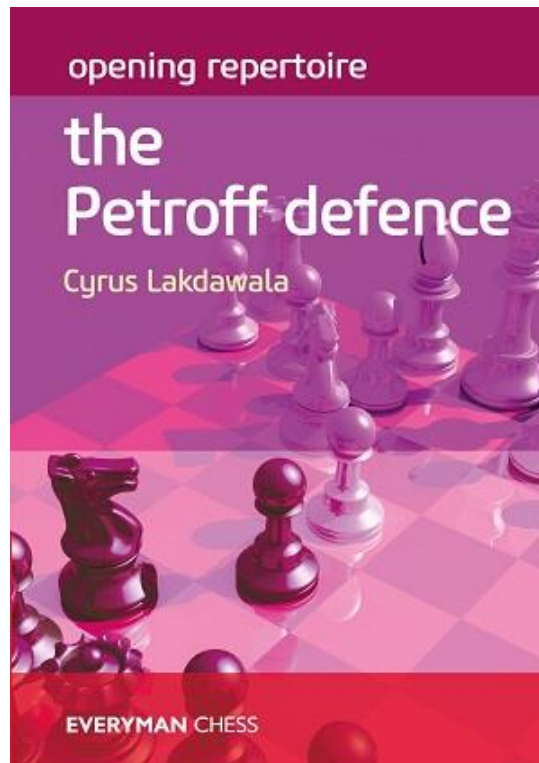
SUMMARY:

I have completed this course from start to finish and I am now running through it for the second time in review mode – it's that good!

Highly recommended.

William Hulme

May 2020



THE PETROFF DEFENCE by Cyrus Lakdawala, Everyman Chess, 320 pp., publ. 2019

This is Lakdawala's second book on the Petroff. A lot has happened since his first one published back in 2015, not least Caruana making it his go-to weapon in elite events and in the 2018 World Championship match. (Six of his games from 2018 appear amongst the illustrative games.)

Lakdawala examines 58 illustrative games (all new, bar one reannotated) in six large (or large-ish) chapters covering the Cochrane Gambit (4 Nxf7!?), the Scotch Petroff (3 d4), the Main Line (3 Nxe5), Main Line Sidelines, the New Main Line (5 Nc3) and the Three Knights Petroff (3 Nc3). The Petroff is not a wham-bam opening and although Black scores his fair share of quick points, longer games are often the order of the day, and fourteen of the games are of 60 moves or more. Lakdawala reminds the reader that *"The Petroff isn't one of those instant gratification lines. Our reward often comes after long plodding and toil. So don't expect the joyous surge of an attack by move 15."* Sage words, and fair comment, but is

it really necessary to follow some of them to the very end of their 97, 98 and 104 moves? I guess if you didn't, they wouldn't be complete games. Having said that, the games are good examples of the lines in question, twenty-four of them from 2015 or later, and despite the opening's dull reputation, there is plenty of fighting chess.

Lakdawala's trademark style is much more under control in this one. There are far fewer rambling digressions, and the writing is all the better for it, although '*When your stocks are quoted at ten times their actual worth, then every good broker will tell you not to delay and sell, since a market crash is coming and you may find yourself selling pencils on the street corner.*' suggests that he's not going down without a fight. His notes and explanations are generally short, sweet and relevant, and he relies more on words than tons of variations.

The bibliography raises some interesting questions. It consists of four (!) books, all published by this publisher, only two of which are Petroff-specific. One of those was published in 2005 and the other is Lakdawala's own previous Petroff work from 2015. The others are general 1 e4 books, one a 'Starting Out' title. Conspicuous by its absence is Cohen's detailed work of 2014, which, even apart from the depth of its coverage, you'd have thought might have been worth a shufti, given that it's more recent than 75% of anything else on the author's list.

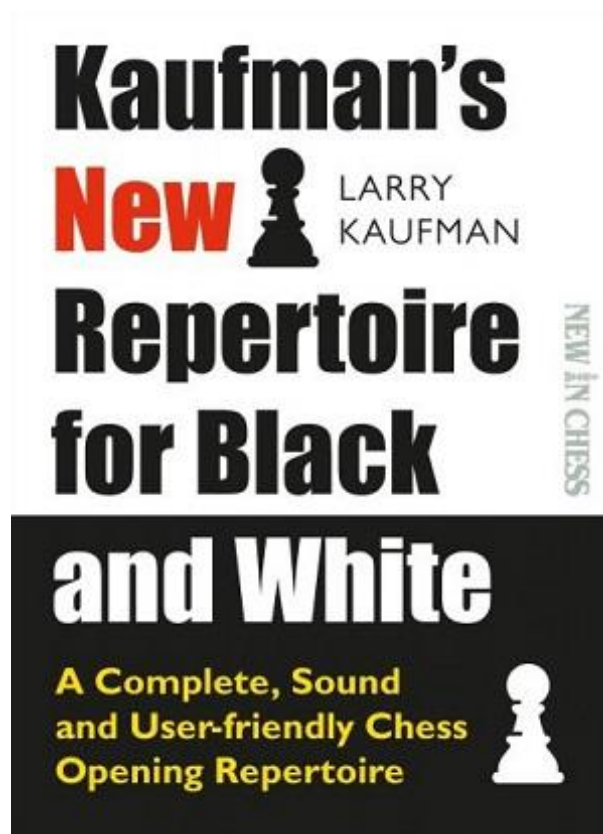
It also seems that no online or digital sources were consulted, which I find hard to believe, nor is there any mention of which engines were used in the writing process. In short, the reader has next to no way of doing any independent checking of his or her own, and knows not where to continue further research. In short, as bibliographies go, it's disappointingly threadbare.

If you glance back at the contents in paragraph two, you'll see that everything's pure Petroff. It crosses my mind that one thing worth including would have been the author's advice for those occasions when inconsiderate Whites punt a second move which renders these 320 pages irrelevant (as Cohen does in his book). A few ideas versus the Bishop's Opening or King's Gambit would surely not have gone amiss, the more so since many Whites, even (or especially) strong players, tacitly acknowledge the qualities of the Petroff by playing 2 Bc4. You could argue that it says 'Petroff' on the cover, but you don't want to '*study the living daylights*' out of the Main Line, only to get suckered by 2 Bc4. Perhaps the prodigious author will devote a future volume to non-2 Nf3 open games.

Despite these reservations, overall this is a very nice work on the Petroff, with enough material in it to get the reader up and playing the opening, and probably playing it well.

Ian Marks

May 2020



KAUFMAN'S NEW REPERTOIRE FOR BLACK AND WHITE by Larry Kaufman, New in Chess, 457 pp., publ. 2019.

If ever a book title needed no further elucidation, it's this one! But I'll elucidate anyway. This is Kaufman's third black and white rep book. For those of you unfamiliar with the format, he avoids theory-laden mega main lines, opting instead for reliable safe lines with a proven track record that will provide a modest edge going into the middlegame, which is really all you can expect from any mainstream opening anyway. This he does in a genuinely accessible fashion without battering you to death with endless variations. In short, you get something that will stand you in long-term good stead without massive time investment.

For this volume he has reverted to 1 e4. He advocates lines with an early d3 against the Ruy Lopez, 3 Bb5 v the Sicilian (with some 2 Nc3 lines as variety) and the French Tarrasch. It's hard to argue with

these; they are all sturdily reliable, enjoy the patronage of leading players and are not going to be refuted tomorrow. He also covers less common lines and gambits so you know how to deal with those pesky southpaws down at the club.

Things are a little trickier with Black, where trying to avoid or play down theory is liable to land you on the wrong side of a big white edge, thus Kaufman goes for the Grünfeld and 1 ... e5, maintained and updated from the second book. You might be wondering how this squares with his philosophy of avoiding mainlines; in this case the principle is to reduce the theoretical baggage where possible (not easy, but he makes a good job of it) and restrict White to the most minimal of edges. This black rep gets slightly more space (pp. 195-443) than the white (pp. 17-194).

What I like about this approach is that he's not afraid to grasp the nettle. His repertoire isn't based on 'winning' with some snake oil gambit or magic bean sidelines that have hitherto been mysteriously under-rated, but have suddenly been revealed as The Way Forward. He treats his readers like intelligent beings who can be trusted to understand the main-ish lines he advocates, and appreciate why he does so. Furthermore, he often offers a choice of lines within the repertoire in case problems arise with some of his suggestions. You are certainly not left high and dry.

The selection of games is bang up-to-date, including the 2018 World Championship match and 2019, with many others from the last few years, so no quibbles there.

I won't say any more about his opening choices – no spoilers! – but I'll say a word about his methods. Kaufman has been involved in computer chess for over fifty years and is well to the fore in the present-day use and development of engines, being heavily involved with KomodoChess, so he knows exactly what to use and how to use it effectively. (He explains his *modus operandi* in great

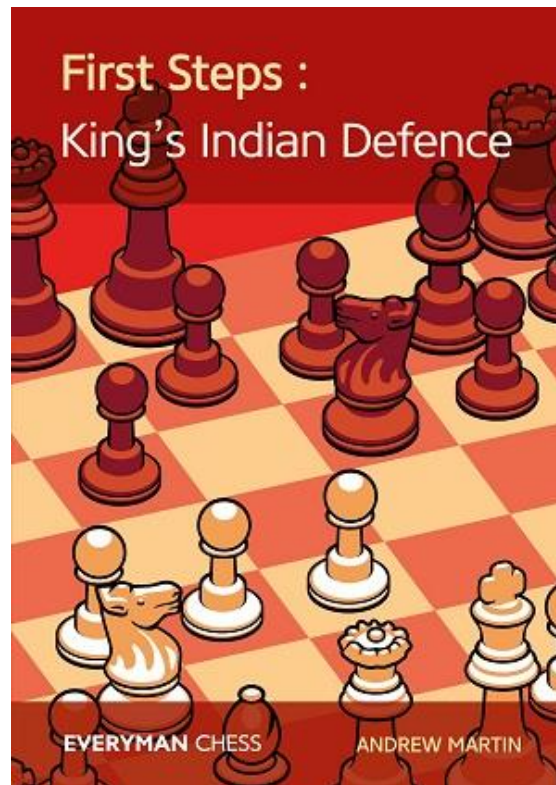
detail in his introduction.) Thus much of his material is based on computer-generated suggestions and improvements on existing theory (based on the Monte Carlo Tree Search). That said, the book is most definitely not a soulless computer dump. Kaufman uses plenty of words to explain his lines and evaluations; his prose is lean and to the point, not a word is wasted.

Production is superb, with clear text and plenty of diagrams in a very friendly double-column layout. There is a detailed bibliography of books, periodicals, databases and engines, eleven pages indexing the variations covered and two indexes of names, white and black.

His two predecessors were good; this one is even better. If you've seen them you'll no doubt buy this one without my bidding. If you haven't then you're in for a treat. You'd be hard put to find a better, more user-friendly all-inclusive repertoire book. Highly recommended.

Ian Marks

May 2020



Two quite different offerings on the ever-popular King's Indian.

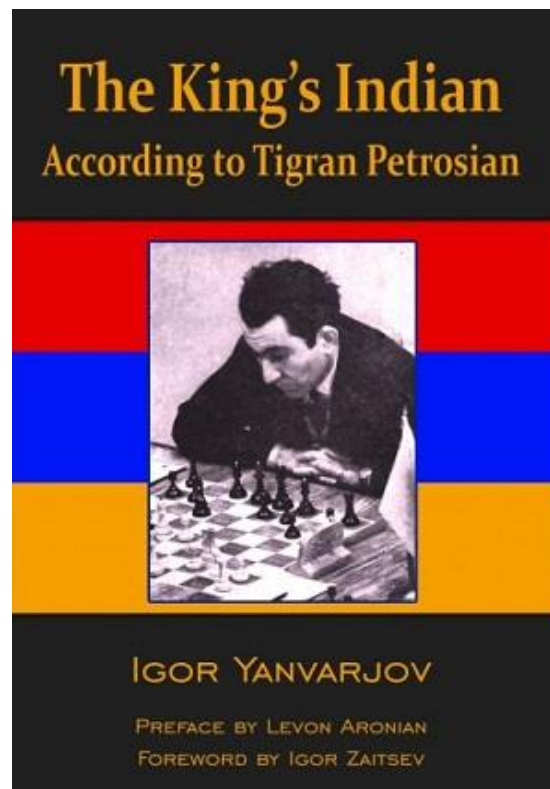
From Everyman Chess comes **FIRST STEPS: KING'S INDIAN DEFENCE** by Andrew Martin, publ. 2019, 335 pp.

Martin is a King's Indian buff and has written on the opening before. As the title suggests, this is an introduction to the KID, but even so, it still weighs in at >300 pp., no surprise, given the scale of the subject. As the author says it doesn't, and cannot, cover everything, but it will be enough to get the reader playing the opening. All the main systems are covered in chapters of around 30-40 pages, as are less common systems and sidelines. In addition there are chapters on inspirational games and pawn structures.

The book is based on illustrative games, 111 main ones with more in the notes. Inevitably this means there are an awful lot of moves, and, although it is an introduction to the subject, text takes something of a back seat. As the author says, "*...if you like any of the lines I suggest in this book, you should follow it up with further research*". That sounds like a bit of a cop-out, but Martin is simply

reiterating that you can't cover everything on such a huge topic within the confines of an introductory volume. If his prose isn't extensive, his comments, summaries and advice are spot on, e.g. *"I like 6...c6 for the simple reason that it blocks the long diagonal and reduces the influence of the bishop on g2"*, or *"I would recommend 7...e5 to club players, simply because Black's plan of campaign is easy to understand"*. That sort of thing lets the reader home in on ideas he/she finds attractive and do some more of the necessary research mentioned (which would certainly be required in the line where Martin comments *"...if you don't like learning theory or want an easy life, this line is probably the wrong one for you"* – can't fault him for honesty!).

Most players past beginner stage know what the King's Indian is, and overall this is a good intro to it, full of exciting chess of the kind designed to whet the appetite. I wouldn't recommend it to any brand newcomers, but it would certainly be worthwhile for any player with a grounding in the game looking for a defence to 1 d4. I made my early acquaintance with the King's Indian through Fischer's games; a book like this would have done the spadework for me!



THE KING'S INDIAN ACCORDING TO TIGRAN PETROSIAN by Igor Yanvarjov (Russell Enterprises, publ. 2019, 424 pp.) is a completely different proposition. This whopper grew out of the author's college thesis – serendipitously aided and abetted by Petrosian himself – and is basically what it says on the cover –the King's Indian as interpreted by the 9th World Champion from both sides of the board. (I was surprised to see just how often Petrosian appeared behind the black pieces; I'd always thought of him as a KI-crusher rather than defender, so it's interesting to see how he handled the opening himself. It merely emphasises how great minds are flexible and receptive to different ideas.) It contains 289 deeply annotated games, including some that weren't in the databases, along with lots of comments, thoughts, musings etc. The annotations and comments are often by one or both of the players, or by other GMs and chess luminaries. It goes without saying that Petrosian's notes to the games and other comments are highly insightful; when he speaks, you listen.

If you're thinking 'Oh no, not another King's Indian book', then stop. This is no theoretical work full of variations; it is a celebration of Petrosian's achievements on both sides of the opening and, on a wider front, an attempt to teach (or improve the reader's understanding of) positional chess. As such, words are the thing, and there is lots of explanatory prose, divided into three large sections. Part I, *Tabiyas*, looks at a number of position-types such as the Classical and Sämisch, Part II, *Elements of Success*, deals with topics such as the exchange, pawns and manoeuvring, and in Part III, *Experiments*, you will find inter alia a consideration of the King's Indian Reversed.

The translated text reads pretty smoothly, albeit with stylistic wrinkles that could/should have been ironed out, and occasional outbreaks of dodgy/clumsy English (e.g. '*he fatherly watched over me*', '*Not yet clear are the exact details*', 'comparing to' rather than 'compared to'). In some ways it has an academic feel to it, perhaps not surprising, given its origins. The sheer amount of text, plus relatively small number of diagrams for a book of its size (about 1-2 a page, sometimes none) gives it a dense, 'heavy' appearance, not helped by Russell Enterprises' trademark tight spacing. However, the denseness is alleviated somewhat by the sensible use of double columns.

There is a detailed two-page bibliography, an eight-page index of tabiyas (Petrosian studied the opening from tabiya backwards), an openings/tabiya index and an index of Petrosian's opponents. One thing I would have loved, though, is missing – an index of annotators or commentators. Trying to track down a particular author is a nightmare.

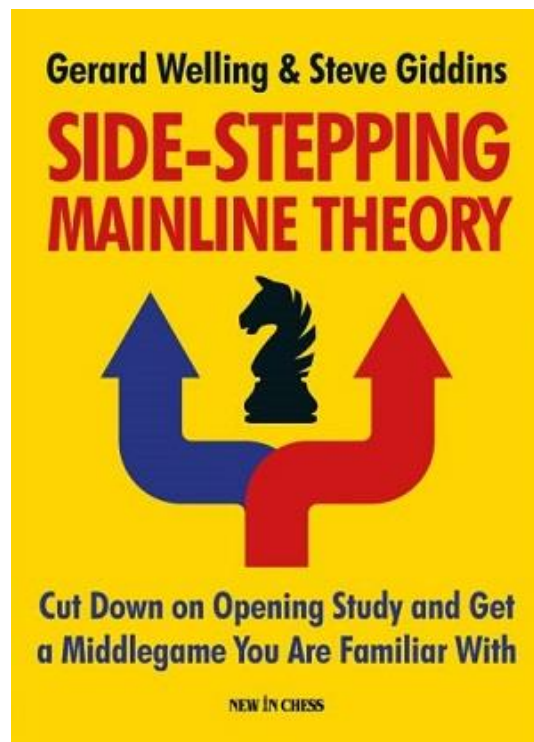
Pure chess/KI content aside, the book contains lots of good, interesting reading. We learn, for example, that Petrosian did a PhD thesis ('Problems of Logic of Chess Thinking'). Now there's something I never knew – every day's a school day! – but we're told

no more than that. Intriguing! Did he qualify? Was he really Dr Petrosian!?

King's Indian (or Petrosian) fans will probably add this one to their libraries without needing any recommendation; for others, if you're looking for a solid, thorough piece of work full of positional, psychological and sporting insights based on the games of one of the great players of the 20th century, then this could be it.

Ian Marks

April 2020



The sub-title of **SIDE-STEPPING MAINLINE THEORY** by Gerard Welling & Steve Giddins (New in Chess, publ. 2019, 269 pp.) offers a clue as to what it's about: *Cut Down on Chess Opening Study and Get a Middlegame You are (sic) Familiar With (sic)*. The idea is to provide 'average' players with comprehensive coverage of a particular middlegame structure to enable them to get playable positions without having to spend hours on theory. The authors advocate a Philidor/Old Indian set-up, perhaps not the most exciting of openings, but which is reliable, not susceptible to constant change, and can be played with both colours. This is an eminently sensible idea; the issue is, of course, that you have to be happy/comfortable with such structures, so user beware! Cynics might also argue that a defence is a defence, so you shouldn't be playing one with White, but that is a philosophical issue beyond the scope of a review.

The book starts with a useful chapter on the keys to successful opening play, and covers do's (sic) and don'ts (somebody wasn't sure how to apostrophise that and still got it wrong! 9), typical plans and ideas and understanding move orders (mysteriously hyphenated). Of the openings themselves, the Old Indian gets

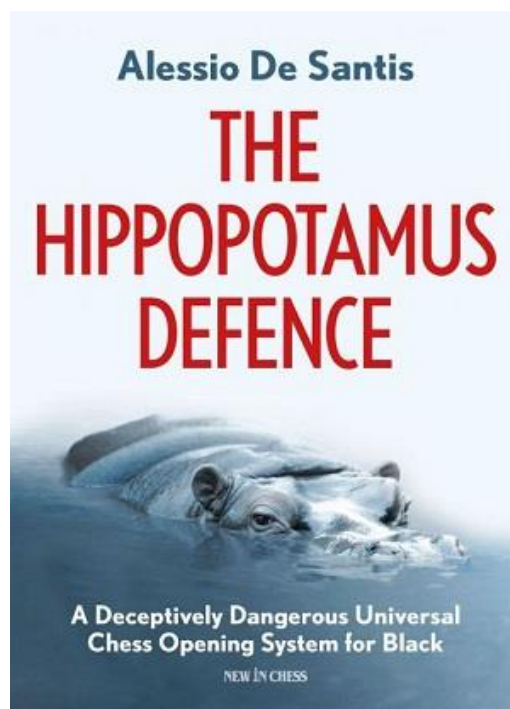
eighty pages, the Philidor nearly fifty, and the system as White forty-odd. Each chapter is broken down into strategy, move orders, pawn play, illustrative games (ninety-two in total) etc. The final chapter is forty-plus pages of variations in tabular form, a handy reference if you're looking for a particular move or line.

You may well be thinking that there are two possible objections to this sort of repertoire: (i) Old Indian/Philidor structures are cramped/passive, and (ii) shouldn't White really be more adventurous? The authors admit as much in their introduction and address the practical considerations, so it is something they have taken into account when putting the repertoire together. It is a repertoire that requires a degree of patience to handle correctly; if you're an attacking player with eyes only for the enemy king, then you really should be playing something else. However, the structure is a sturdy one, and, with their guidance, you certainly won't lose because you played the Philidor or OI (or at least you'll be less likely to get mugged compared to playing Black in a wild Sicilian). Such a book requires plenty of explanations, and it is noticeable that there is more helpful explanatory prose than reams of variations. Such variations as there are are relatively short.

There is an extensive bibliography, not only indicating that the authors have cast their net far and wide, but enabling the interested reader to do further research of his/her own. If Philidor/Old Indian structures appeal to your style or chess worldview, or if you are looking for something to stand you in good stead without lots of chopping and changing, this one is well worth a look.

Ian Marks

March 2020



THE HIPPOPOTAMUS DEFENCE by Alessio De Santis, New in Chess, 320 pp., publ. 2019.

More people are killed by hippos every year than by more traditional dangerous animals such as lions, crocs, snakes, charging elephants etc. Maybe it's something to do with their sedate, laid-back appearance, just sort of chilling there in the water. A bit like the eponymous defence, in fact, a harmless ten-move arrangement of pawns on a6, b6, d6, e6, g6 and h6, bishops on b7 and g7 and knights on d7 and e7. Harmless? Well, seemingly. As the Italian FM sets out to demonstrate, the Hippo and its relatives can be dangerous creatures for the unwary.

In sixteen chapters he covers everything the curious mind could want to know about his favourite opening, such as its development, strategic elements, structures, pawn centres, transitions, use of pawns etc. etc. His discussion of pawn centres is crucial; the wisdom of the crowd seems to suggest that White can question the Hippo's viability with the creation of a three-pawn centre, be it c4, d4 and e4, or d4, e4 and f4, in fact this latter, the Austrian Attack, is often

touted as a 'refutation' of the beast. The author addresses these and similar issues in convincing fashion and shows that Black can render this claim hyperbolic if he knows how to handle the arising structures correctly.

Another charge levelled at the Hippo is that it is cramped, but as the author points out, Black tends to spend the early stages of other, more mainstream, openings like the French and Sicilian operating within his back three ranks, so the Hippo is no different in that respect.

He also devotes a lot of attention to move order nuances. This is a major issue. The Hippo is not a theoretical opening like, say, the Dragon, susceptible to column after column of rigorous analysis. It is a system which can be reached via a wide range of move orders, each with their own implications. A very basic one is whether to start with 1...g6 (usual), or 1...b6 (more esoteric). Both are valid, but can lead to subtle changes in structure which an adept could exploit to jump an unsuspecting opponent.

In addition to showing the reader what to do, the author also shows him what *not* to do. It can be all too easy to play the first ten Hippo moves on auto-pilot. Therein lies the road to perdition. Black has to be ready to adjust his move order, or indeed structure, in response to how White sets up. This leads us to the semi-Hippo, where some Hippo features are retained, but not all. Thus Black can end up with, for example, a sort of Hippo-Sicilian, Hippo-Nimzo and so on, depending on what features from other openings creep in. I'm sure I even saw something that looked like a Hippo-Hedgehog, and if you think the Hippo is cool, wait till you make the acquaintance of the Super-Hippo. Much of this may seem a tad abstract, but there are loads of illustrative games to illuminate the way.

Lest you think the Hippo is junk, bear in mind that Spassky considered it good enough to play twice in the 1966 world

championship match (amongst other occasions). Other big names seen on the black side include Ponomarev, Radjabov and McShane (and Roddy McKay!). These guys are not fish, nor is the former long-time Women's World Champion, Nona Gaprindashvili, in whose repertoire it was a mainstay for many a year (in fact she's still playing it in Seniors' events). Carlsen and Caruana have both lost trying to beat it. It is an opening for the open-minded and, as the author points out, scores a highly respectable 48%, well in keeping with any 'proper' black defence.

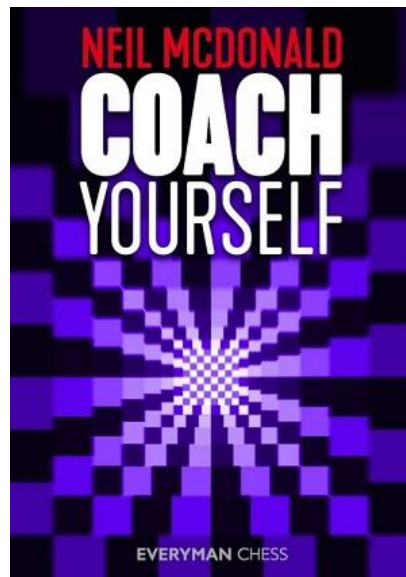
This interesting and thought-provoking book is well produced in easy-on-the-eye double column format with crystal-clear text and diagrams, alphabetical player index and bibliography. Just one thing niggles me. Since the material is clearly presented from Black's point of view, why do the diagrams have White at the bottom? It's not as though it's NiC in-house policy (unlike some publishers); Black was at the bottom in Adorjan's *Black Is Back!*. There's nothing sacrosanct about the White-at-the-bottom convention; in a 'black' book it jars. Guys, adapt as necessary, please!

That niggle apart, *The Hippopotamus Defence* is, above all, a fun book. Openings books can be dry and technical. Not this one. I highly recommend it as a great read, whether you're interested in pachyderms or not (and I mean read; there are lots and lots of words and diagrams to get you through it without a board). The author's enthusiasm shines through on every page; it is obvious that he is in love with his subject matter. If just a little of his enthusiasm rubs off, hey, you might find yourself with a new pet opening.

A pet hippo?

Ian Marks

February 2020



COACH YOURSELF A Complete Guide to Self Improvement at Chess by Neil McDonald, Everyman Chess, 304 pp., publ. 2019

I sometimes wonder to what extent the average player (whoever that is) is able to study the game. By the time he or she has put in a day's work, commuted, eaten, done more work at home, attended to odd jobs around the house, taken the dog to the vet, gone to a parents' night, shared quality time with his/her spouse/kids, then plopped exhausted in front of the television, I suspect it's either not much or haphazard. Whatever 'study' is done probably consists of a quick look at some opening line that'll never see the light of day or maybe a few tactical puzzles. And so to bed.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to schedule that sacred, golden, interruption-free hour every night to actually be able to address those issues that would help us improve? Of course. Even if you can't, *Coach Yourself* might give you a few ideas on how best to use whatever time you can scrape for the game we love. McDonald divides his book into thirteen chapters of about 20-30 pages each covering, inter alia, calculation, the initiative, positional mistakes, pawn structure and the endgame. It might be no coincidence that his first chapter is devoted to blunders and their avoidance, given that in the hurly-burly of club and league chess they are probably

the most common way of losing (or winning!) a game. Each chapter is sub-divided into relevant features of the topic under discussion, e.g. chapter two, Training Your Tactical Imagination, is split up into trapping pieces, skewers, overloading, pins, back rank mates, line clearance etc. The examples are pertinent and designed to stick in the mind. (There is some tremendous positional stuff in here.) The vast majority are recent and feature more or less the entire who's who of contemporary chess, although it was nice to find an example featuring a couple of Scottish lads!

The explanatory side apart, the examples (often given in full) are designed to make the reader think about what's happening (plenty of questions), presumably so that he/she can think all the better about what's happening in his/her own games.

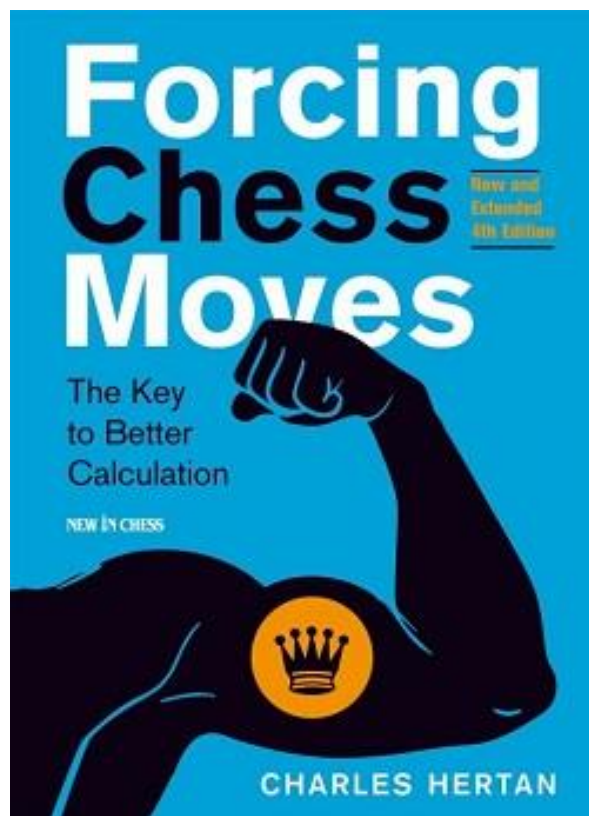
McDonald writes clearly and can generally be relied upon not to leave potential questions in his readers' minds unanswered. (Nor is he slow to criticise himself if the occasion warrants it, a good self-improvement method in itself.) There are lots of pieces of good advice scattered throughout the text, one of which – as he stresses – is the importance of studying classic games. If that's the only thing you take from the book, it'll have been worth it.

If you recognised yourself in my introductory paragraph, and/or have been wondering how exactly to go about 'working on your game' (sounds like golf) in the time you have available, *Coach Yourself* could provide the scheme of work you've been looking for. It's well thought-out and put together; my only gripe is that there are no indexes of openings, themes or players, an absolute scunner if you're trying to track down that game or sac that caught your eye.

Ian Marks

January 2020

As Christmas thunders ever closer, here are some gift suggestions for those of you who haven't shouted up the lum to Santa yet. First up, a trio from New in Chess, all published this year.



FORCING CHESS MOVES by Charles Hertan (432 pp.) is the fourth edition of the award-winning work.

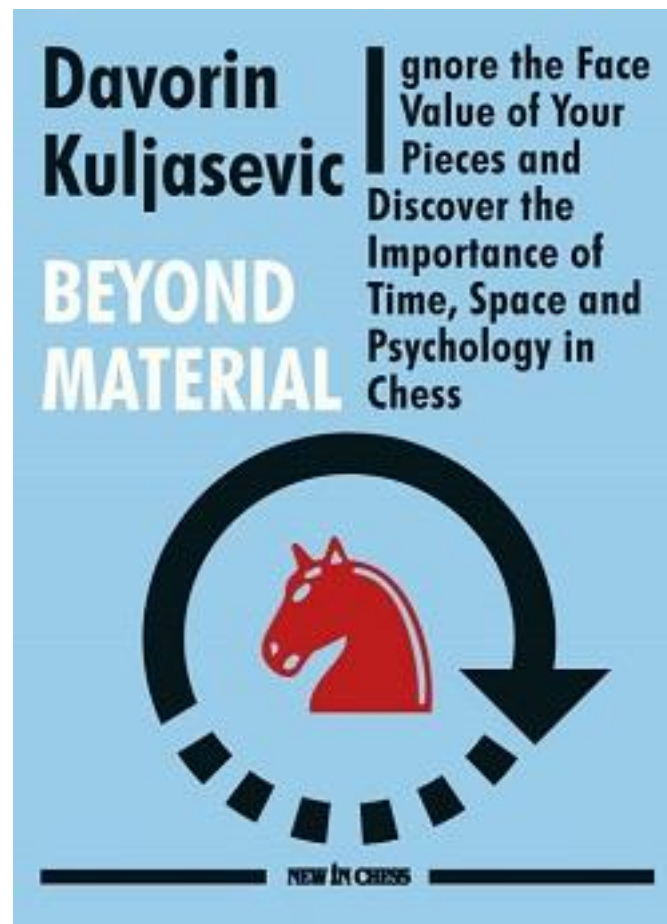
It's essentially a guide to looking for Big Moves, moves which finish the game. Big Moves can be unusual, weird, surprises, shots, sacs, anything at all in fact, and Hertan's book is full of them. It's a sort of Rolls-Royce tactics book, with lots and lots of combinations illustrating how to finish the other guy off – and how to find the moves to do so. His main premise is to try to look at positions through 'computer eyes', i.e. to cast aside our innate biases and inhibitions and think outside the human box. It might sound strange, but it can undoubtedly pay dividends.

Besides the examples there are lots of exercises, but it's far from being just a puzzle book; the author takes great care to get his

philosophy across and ensure his readers understand what he's getting at. I recall hearing lots of good things about this book when it first appeared in 2008 (offhand I can only remember one moaner; some people are never happy), and when you go through it you can see why it was so well received. It is a real eye-opener, full of surprising ideas and often beautiful chess.

Ian Marks

December 2019



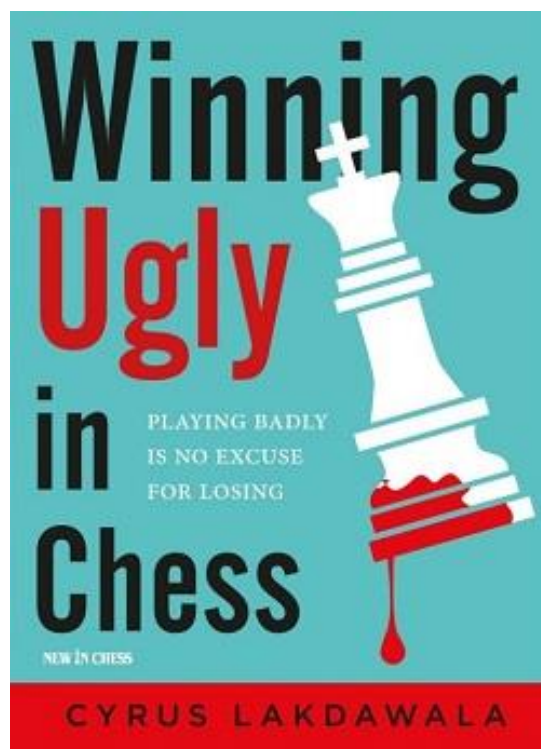
Davorin Kuljasevic's **BEYOND MATERIAL** (336 p.) deals with an often-ignored aspect of the game, especially amongst amateurs, viz. the importance of non-material factors such as time, space and psychology.

His six chapters discuss attachment to and the relative value of material, how time and space can beat material, greed, and the psychology of non-materialism, and encompass things like attacking, sacs, poisoned pawns, risk, space, time, harmony etc. These can often be abstract concepts, and it certainly sounds like heavy-duty stuff, but it makes for an interesting read which, as the author says, will make the reader better understand and look again at the values of the pieces as they fluctuate during a game. There are over a hundred illustrative extracts, all explained not just with moves but, given the subject matter, *lots* of words. The author's relaxed, conversational style makes what could be heavy going an

enjoyable and thought-provoking read, quite different from more 'normal' chess book fare. It's a super piece of work, and an excellent take on a neglected area of the game. I certainly wouldn't put it into the hands of a beginner, but for experienced players looking for something a bit different, highly recommended.

Ian Marks

December 2019



From the indefatigable Cyrus Lakdawala comes **WINNING UGLY IN CHESS** (336 pp.), subtitled *Playing Badly Is No Excuse for Losing*.

This is not a book of perfect games and silky smooth chess; it is full of messy positions, errors, cheapos, oversights, swindles, luck and fluky wins and draws. If this sounds like normal league chess, you're not wrong, and you're bound to identify with some of the atrocities the author presents. Been there, done that. Lakdawala looks at topics such as boldness, grabbing material, rational and irrational decisions, traps and messing with the opponent's mind. His examples are often weird and wonderful, where backs are to the wall and miracles are born of desperation. There is a very nice chapter on the psychology of provocative opening play and its often disorientating effect on the 'victim'. (Amongst the gems you will find Carlsen-Dreev, 1 Nh3!?. Yes, he won.) Those of us long enough in the tooth to remember the unique genius of Duncan Suttles will have an idea of what to expect.

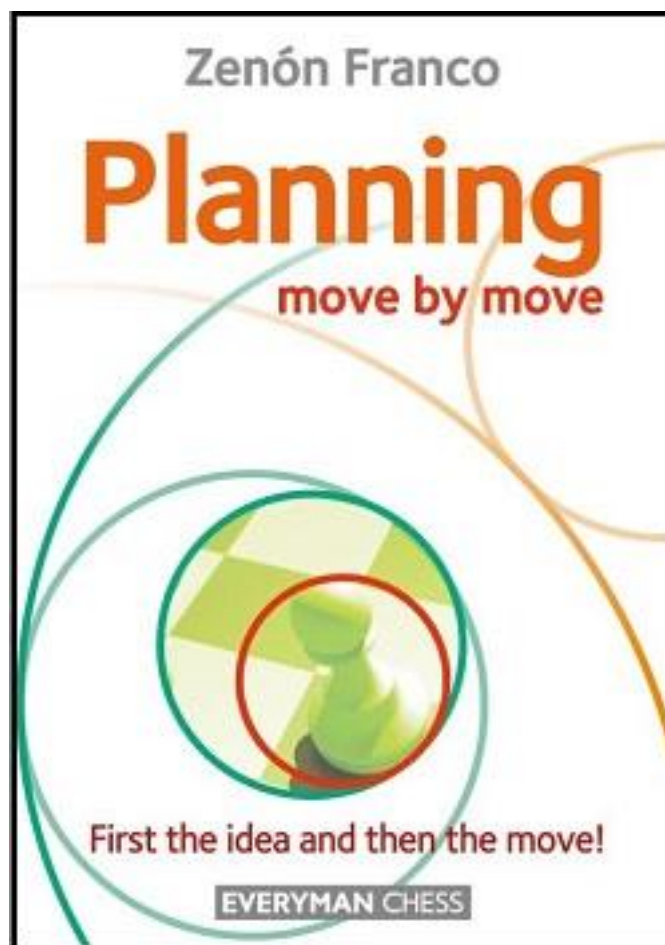
In many ways, this is a fun book, but, as is often the case, the fun conceals serious points and learning opportunities. The bottom line

is that winning is what matters, and a dip into this one could inspire you to score undeserved points or half points, and will remind you that, as the saying goes, it ain't over till it's over.

Each of these is produced to NiC's usual high standards with clear text and diagrams, indexes and (except the last one) bibliographies.

Ian Marks

December 2019



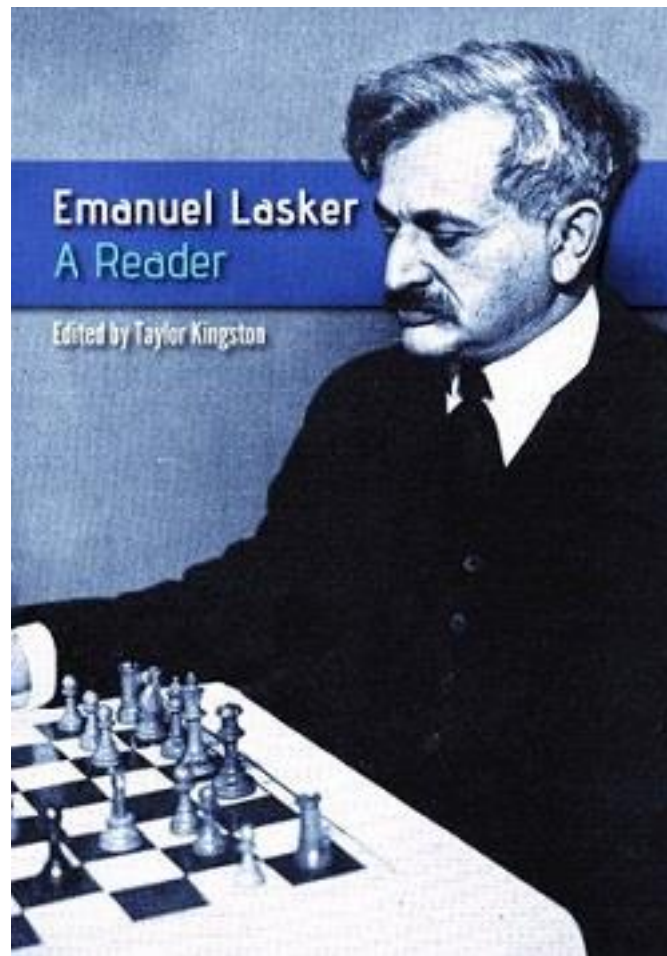
Zenón Franco's **PLANNING MOVE BY MOVE** (Everyman Chess 2019, 414 pp.) is the author's attempt to help fill a surprisingly sparse field in chess literature. He divides his book into five large chapters which give you an idea of what exactly it's about: Typical Structures, Space Advantage, The Manoeuvring Game, Simplification and Attack and Defence. In this way he systematically covers five key areas of the middlegame where players are beset with the question of what to do (and how to do it). Each chapter contains many examples of the topic under discussion, the majority from contemporary practice, but quite rightly also featuring the classics and players such as Lasker, Capablanca, Petrosian and Karpov, in short if you want to learn, why not learn from the best? The examples all feature questions and exercises to involve the reader to the max.

As the author points out in his introduction, notes which feature prose and few variations are not overly helpful, while the opposite, more common in these computer-assisted days, is also inadequate, thus he ensures that his own annotations are a healthy mix of words and moves. In this respect he succeeds admirably; explaining a complex idea effectively requires simple, lucid prose, and the author does this very well.

If you find yourself wondering what to do (and that's all of us), then this could be one for you. It's not a beginner's text, but for anyone with some knowledge and experience of the game it could prove a helpful and beneficial read.

Ian Marks

December 2019



A totally different sort of chess book is **EMANUEL LASKER A READER**, edited by Taylor Kingston, publ. Russell Enterprises Inc. 2019, 400 pp. This labour of love really is one for chess historians or anyone interested in the great players of the past. The sub-title tells you exactly what to expect (and could probably save me writing any further!): *A Compendium of Writings on Chess, Philosophy, Science, Sociology, Mathematics and Other Subjects by the Great World Chess Champion, Scholar and Polymath Emanuel Lasker (1861-1941)*. Phew! From a purely chess perspective it covers three world championship matches, several tournaments, and annotations galore by Lasker to contemporary games which give a wonderful feeling for both his style of writing and the style of annotation of the time. Many of the literary extracts are printed as facsimiles, which likewise give a neat glimpse into the styles and presentations of the past.

Unlike many great players both past and present who are focused solely on chess, Lasker's intellect was deep and wide-ranging, and while it is interesting to have a glimpse into some of the other areas which absorbed his attention, there will inevitably be those which some readers will find less than gripping.

Emanuel Lasker A Reader contains a vast amount of material, the bulk of it probably unknown or little-known, and all credit is due to both editor and publisher for collating and bringing it to the public. You could get lost in it for ages, reading it or dipping into it a chapter or section at a time. It is a huge book, overall well produced, but spoilt by the presentation – the small font and tight spacing favoured by Russell Enterprises make for a very dense and unattractive production, not at all easy on the eye. As I typed that, the book happened to be open at pp. 194-5: a solid body of text, broken only by four diagrams, and the moves in bold an unappealing mass of black type. These pages are by no means untypical. Such a wealth of interesting material deserved a little more space and light, in fact a little more TLC. There are extensive indexes and a two-page bibliography.

Ian Marks

December 2019

<https://www.chessable.com/reign-supreme-the-kings-indian-attack/course/26170/>



Chessable > Courses > Chess Openings

Reign Supreme: The King's Indian Attack

MoveTrainer™ Opening course by **FM Kaldas90** (3060 Online Rating, 2347 FIDE) ★★★★★

If my last two Chessable reviews seemed like hard work - then please read on! This time, I am reviewing a repertoire for White based around the King's Indian Attack.

I really liked the author's honesty when describing some lines as objectively level but with plenty of play in the position to enable the stronger player to outplay their opponent. There are several lines which look fine for both sides and the author makes no attempt to convince you that 'every line leads to advantage' for White. This opening is based more on plans and understanding than precise calculations or forced variations so the Chessable system really does make it both fun and easy to learn for any player rated 1200 strength upwards. There are 12 chapters in total and it's all presented in a very easy to digest format.

- **Introduction**
- **2x vs French**
- **3x vs Sicilian**
- **3x vs Caro-Kann**
- **1x vs e5 and others**
- **Model games**
- **Authors games**

I found the chapters (and videos) on the vs French lines particularly enjoyable as well as the model games. The only chapter I wasn't so convinced with was that on 1...e5 and others. The lines given don't seem to present the same challenges for the Black player – for

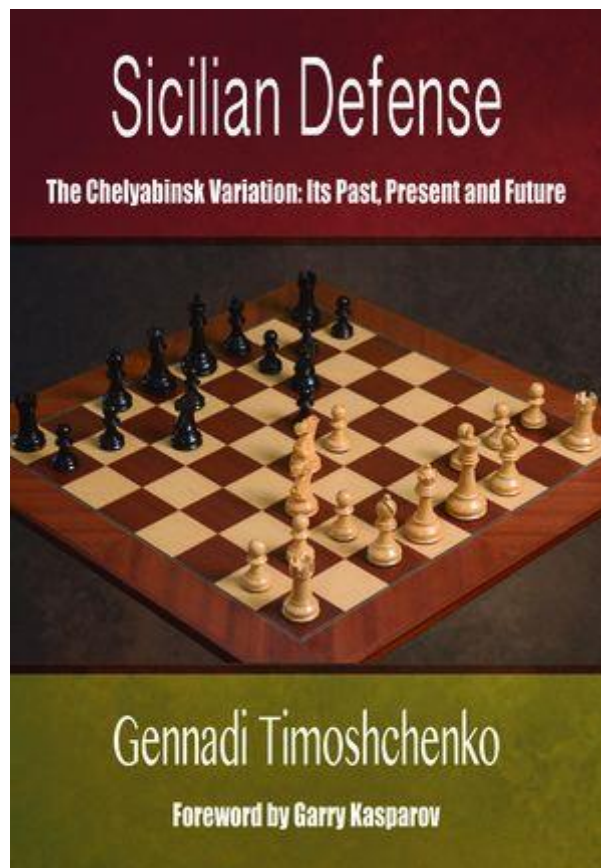
example 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d3 and no mention of Bologan's recommended 3...d5! move order here although it is likely to transpose to later lines. This is where the more experienced White player may need to change ideas and look for an alternative against these lines as the KIA doesn't appear to be effective against 1...e5 or 1..d5, etc. The author needed to include something as it's a complete repertoire so what he has given does fulfil that task.

The (optional extra) video tutorials are again high quality and total more than 15Hrs instruction. If you have tried the free Chessable books and like the idea of KIA, then I would suggest this one is a great place to start – but be warned - you could get hooked for hours! There are several practical advantages to learning this way including: no need to pack a load of books for a tournament (everything available online in one place); the software saves where you left off in each book including where you last watched a video. This one in particular is not available in traditional book form so there is no alternative to Chessable here.

You may also have heard in the news recently that Magnus Carlsen has invested in Chessable, so this version of online books software is likely to be around for many years to come! Chessable are planning both an iOS and Android App (hopefully with some download / offline functionality) and I noticed Chessable leaflets at the SNCL last weekend, so watch out for this format growing in 2020!

William Hulme

December 2019



**SICILIAN DEFENSE: THE CHELYABINSK VARIATION ITS PAST,
PRESENT AND FUTURE** by Gennadi Timoshchenko, Russell
Enterprises Inc., 440 pp., publ. 2018

This is a big book in every respect – concept, size, scope, depth, philosophy, chess worldview – but before going any further, let's clarify what it's about. The Chelyabinsk Variation is what is known in general chess parlance as the Sveshnikov Variation, 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e5. Chelyabinsk is a city in Russia, home town of both Sveshnikov and the author. They are much the same age, were friends who played as juniors together, came through the ranks together and often trained together. They were both involved in the early days and development of the variation. The fact that Timoshchenko doesn't call it the Sveshnikov Variation might tell you something Read on.

For your money you get a heavy 440-page tome consisting of 200 (!) chapters featuring analysis of often exceptional depth and thoroughness, e.g. chapter 200 starts at move 23 (!). It provides as much computer-checked detail as one could realistically expect, with lots of explanatory prose and novelties, but, caveat emptor, it's out of date. It was, I believe, originally published in Russia in 2016, and this English-language version was published in 2018. Unless I've missed something, the most recent games quoted are from 2014, thus there are two two-year periods during which no updating seems to have taken place, and four years is an awfully long time for such a dynamic and constantly evolving opening.

The book is divided into two parts. Part I devotes sixty-odd pages to the history and development of the variation. The author covers its early years, his own input, and analyses a number of hitherto unknown games of his from the '70s. There is also an essay on the name of the variation, a harbinger of the tone of the huge analytical sections of part two, because what becomes evident early on, and permeates the entire book, is Timoshchenko's feelings about his eponymous colleague's part in the popularisation of the variation, about which Sveshnikov wrote a book back in 1988. Timoshchenko doesn't just reference this work; he does a hatchet job on it. He has found 'hundreds' of mistakes between its covers, and is not backward in pointing them out. Something obviously happened to cause such ill-feeling. We're not told what it was, but we can infer it from his comment in the introduction *'...many people, especially in the Western countries, forgot that I was one of the authors of the variation'*. Call it what you like – sour grapes, rancour, needle, grievance – the animosity is almost tangible. Here are some examples. This isn't just commenting on the work of another; this is the boot going in:

'Here Sveshnikov gives a short variation with four errors in it'
'Sveshnikov also explored the move 9...f5...but, unfortunately, with

serious blunders.'

'I have discovered more than 20 errors...and then lost count.' (Note, en passant, an example of incorrect tense of the kind I'll mention later – it should be 'I discovered'.)

'I wanted to show how many mistakes can be possibly be (sic) contained in the games that Sveshnikov quotes'

'...it seems a bit unusual to call a variation after himself even before others have done that. "The Variation Named after Me" sounds somewhat immodest, doesn't it?'

'...do not let blunders surprise you, because Mr. Sveshnikov has made a little muddle of things.'

'...within the range from move 15 to move 19 there are seven errors.'

'...it turned out that the maestro was once again wrong'

'...it was only another PR stunt of his'

It's almost a leitmotif. In his afterword, Timoshchenko explains his motivation: *'Many of you may think that I have devoted too much space both to mere enumeration and analysis of errors committed by Evgeny Sveshnikov. It was done to demonstrate the ridiculous results that the widespread method of thoughtless copying of others' games and analyses leads to.'* Fair enough, but it borders on the obsessive and sometimes flirts with the sarcastic; after a while I found myself thinking, OK, you've made your point; don't keep going on about it. Even Kasparov, in his foreword, felt moved to draw attention to it: *'The author's criticism of Sveshnikov's book is perhaps too strict, but it is candid (and only rarely looks like nitpicking), and the reasons for such a great amount of errors has its place'.* That last clause is illuminating. Kasparov is generous enough to acknowledge that, back in 1988, Sveshnikov did not have computer help available, never mind computers of the strength that Timoshchenko had to fillet his work. The path of the pioneer is always hard.

Polemics apart, Timoshchenko's work is clearly aimed at strong players; our mythical friend, the 'average club player', could easily

live without it, and probably should. S/he's neither going to need nor encounter stuff of this magnitude in a league match or club game. On the other hand, any strong/serious player interested in the variation would find much of interest and undoubtedly learn a great deal, but, given its out-of-dateness, would need to do a lot of research to keep up to speed. When the author writes '*Magnus Carlsen has been known to employ this move in several of his games*', he's not referring to the champ's current adoption of the line, but to games played pre-2010.

For such a large book, the lack of a bibliography is surprising, in fact the only book Timoshchenko refers to in detail is the aforementioned Sveshnikov work, and, as we've seen, he clearly has ulterior motives for doing so. Other books are occasionally mentioned, but not referenced, and although the variations are listed in great detail in the contents, there are no indexes.

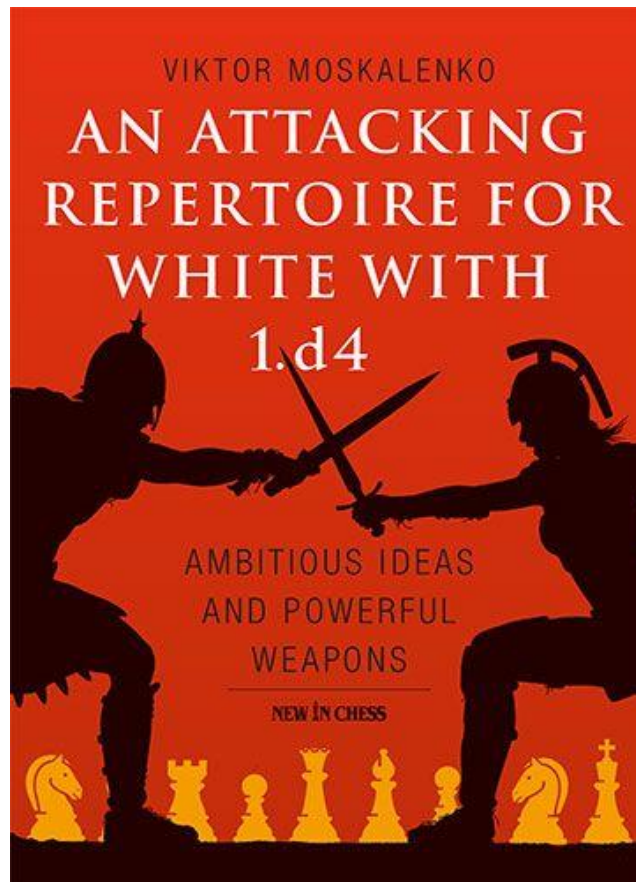
The standard of production is reasonably high; the double-column format is clear enough, but the fairly small font, along with the relatively small number of diagrams (about 2-3 a page), creates quite a dense impression. The text itself does not always read smoothly. Some of this may be down to the translation, which was done by Boris Gleizerov, whose name leads me to surmise that English is not his first language. I make this point because translating from your native tongue is always fraught with more danger (and is a much more demanding skill) than translating into it. This is where the editorial staff come in, but, on the evidence of other Russell Inc. publications I've reviewed on this site, editing and proofreading are not their forte (see, for example, their re-issue of Réti's classic, *Masters of the Chessboard*, which I reviewed here back in December 2013). This one is no exception; it is sprinkled with careless punctuation, incorrect use of tenses, awkward sentence construction, typos, clumsy style etc. Maybe chessplayers don't care

about things like this ('All we're interested in is the moves'), but publishers should.

Overall, the author has invested a huge amount of time and effort in this work and put a lot of himself into it – always welcome to see – and, despite my reservations, its tone provides an edge which increases the interest level. There's not much wrong with it that some updating and a little TLC wouldn't put right.

Ian Marks

November 2019



AN ATTACKING REPERTOIRE FOR WHITE WITH 1.d4 by Viktor Moskalenko, New in Chess, 367 pp., publ. 2019

1 d4 with 2 c4 by Cyrus Lakdawala, Everyman Chess, 448 pp., publ. 2019

d4 rep books are like buses - you wait for ages then two come along at the same time. These ones are devoted to d4/c4 main lines, almost a breath of fresh air in these times when the London System is all the rage and AlphaZero is pushing the boundaries of what has hitherto been considered playable or not. Both lean towards an active/aggressive repertoire: Moskalenko's subtitle promises '*Ambitious Ideas and Powerful Weapons*', while Lakdawala is aiming at the '*aggressively-minded player, who craves confrontation, both strategic and tactical*'.

The first thing to be aware of is that, while Moskalenko has been researching and playing his lines for ages, his book isn't a complete

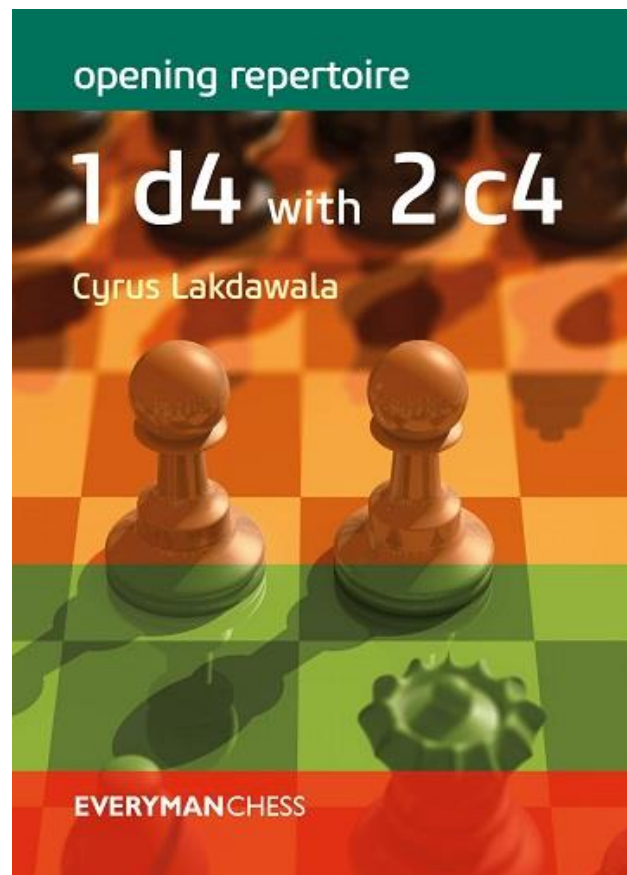
repertoire. As he explains in his foreword: *'These opening choices...are an important factor in my personal approach to chess'*, thus what's on offer is more a reflection of his own interests and fields of activity than the whole 1 d4 spectrum. His aim is *'to help you understand (and play) the main opening systems that arise after White's first move 1.d4'*, and he presents *'a selection of opening variations...10 fundamental openings plus 4 original defensive systems for Black'*. The key words are 'main' and 'selection'. There's no Dutch, Tarrasch, Budapest or sidelines. Since Moskalenko has written extensively on two of these, my initial (unkind) thought was that he wants you to shell out for those books too! It seems I wasn't far off the mark, since he also says *'for anti-Dutch lines for White, see my book The Diamond Dutch, New in Chess 2014'*.

The four black defensive systems referred to are the Snake Benoni (1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6), the Baltic Defence (1 d4 d5 2 c4 Bf5), Chigorin's Defence (1 d4 d5 2 c4 Nc6) and the Albin Counter-Gambit (1 d4 d5 2 c4 e5). While the last two have attracted the attention of creative spirits such as Morozevich, it's legitimate to ponder why such rare birds should merit coverage while the likes of the Tarrasch and Dutch don't. Presumably it's to do with his personal approach mentioned above.

Anyway, you're probably wondering what his 'ambitious ideas and powerful weapons' are. Against the main replies to 1 d4, he suggests the Exchange Variation of the Queen's Gambit, the Four Pawns Attack versus the King's Indian, 4 f3 versus the Nimzo and Taimanov's aggressive 7 f4/8 Bb5+ against the Benoni. No quibbles with that; all healthy, overtly aggressive lines (although a cynic might suggest that if the Four Pawns Attack doesn't come off it tends to end up as a Four Pawns Defence). But when we come to the Grünfeld, we find 4 cxd5 Nxd5 5 Bd2!?, and against the Slav he proposes the Exchange Variation, both of which offer more positional aggression. While these lines might deprive Black of a lot

of fun, it strikes me that if positional squeezes and playing for a tempo aren't your cup of tea, you might be inclined to look for something else against these two sturdy openings.

Having said that, the book contains lots of interesting ideas, a Moskalenko trademark, is well produced in an easy-on-the-eye double column format, and will provide d4-players with plenty of new ammunition.



Lakdawala is a newcomer to d4/c4 main lines (see his introduction) and this, his 40th (in the last decade, let's call it four books a year, one every three months, which to this reviewer seems a tad conveyor-belt, but, hey, what do I know?) covers everything that White is likely to face after 1 d4, including the absentee Dutch, Tarrasch and Budapest, and even junk like 1...e5 (which gets half a column!). Comparing his suggestions with Moskalenko's, we find that he too advocates the Exchange QGD, f3-Nimzo and Taimanov's sharp anti-Benoni line, but against the KID he suggests Petrosian's 7 d5 in the main line, Bf4 lines v. the Grünfeld and the gutsy Meran in the Slav. This is fairly high-maintenance stuff. As he points out in his introduction, *'If you are a theory hater, this repertoire may not be right for you'*, and, in the Slav chapter, he says that *'the variations are forcing, with little or no leeway for personal taste'*, thus some solid homework and memorisation is going to be the order of the day. (I found it amusing that the first game in this chapter featured Rausis on the white side. I wondered *en passant* if it was one of those he won with

computer assistance before he was rumbled!?) Kudos to Lakdawala for taking this approach. I'm convinced that lots of openings authors advocate less-played lines just so they have less research to do!

You get plenty of meat for your money (how could it be otherwise with such a rep?), but, given the amount (and occasionally depth) of material, I found it strange that Lakdawala's bibliography contained only six books, one of them not an openings volume (but written by him) and the most recent (openings one) of which was published in 2012. Seven years is a long time in theory. Clearly he must have used other sources; they should have been referenced. (By comparison, Moskalenko's features twelve books, the NiC yearbooks, databases and internet resources.)

One thing which bugged me was the index of variations, where moves are listed by 'see game such-and-such'. This is useless; you still have to go and hunt for game such-and-such with no clear idea of where it might be, the more so since game numbers only appear in the text, not, say, at the top of the page. Why not give the page ref, for heaven's sake? An index is supposed to take readers to a location quickly and efficiently.

In terms of style, Moskalenko writes with what I'd call controlled enthusiasm. It's obvious he cares deeply about his lines (as per his foreword), but he doesn't hit you over the head with them, e.g. talking of life on the white side of the King's Indian, he says, '*...the Four Pawns Attack was exactly what I was looking for: underdeveloped theory and active play for White...I would like to share with the reader a few secrets that have been discovered during a long period*'. Good sales technique which makes you want to know what's coming next! His explanations of themes and ideas are clear and succinct.

Lakdawala writes with his usual, often irrelevant and distracting, prolixity ('*When I unearth a theoretical novelty, I imagine myself as the Indian Jason Bourne, as he infiltrates CIA headquarters, makes a digital*

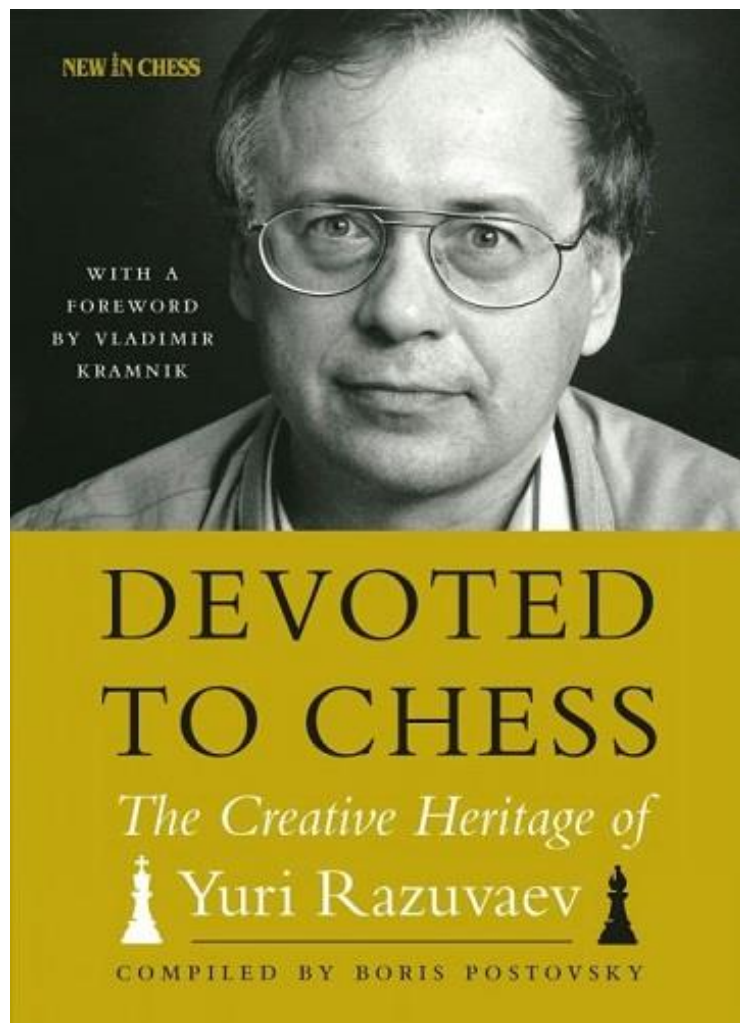
copy of top secret classified information, and then escapes, leaving ten or twelve unconscious or dead bodies behind.'), which, as I've said in previous reviews of his books, could easily be omitted to the overall benefit of his work, since, when he cuts to the chase, his wisdom is generally pretty much on the money. I sometimes wonder if his books are edited; there are no attributions. This is obviously a matter of taste; lousy style might sit well with some publishers (why!?), but it clearly doesn't with guys I've heard mutter that they couldn't stand the thought of another Lakdawala book. Concentrating on the chess content, there is much of interest for any d4-player either looking at their existing lines or for something new.

In terms of production, both feature clear, easy-to-read text, although I give the nod to NiC's double column format. Everyman's current single column house style looks awfully 'spread out'. They used double columns in the past. I wonder why they dropped them. Everyman uses a larger font, so the books are in effect about the same length.

Which to buy? If you're a d4-player you'll probably be interested in both; no harm in the pick 'n' mix approach to building your opening repertoire. In terms of content there's not a lot to choose. Both feature aggressive lines designed to put Black under pressure and, if you're more familiar with them than your opponent, then you're bound to rack up a few points.

Ian Marks

October 2019



DEVOTED TO CHESS The Creative Heritage of Yuri Razuvaev,
compiled by Boris Postovsky, New in Chess, 365 pp., publ. 2019

This is a collection of interviews with, memories of, and articles and games by the well-known Russian GM who, like so many talented individuals, was taken from us far too early at the age of 66 in 2012. Those remembering him include stellar names like Carlsen, Kasparov and Spassky, and there are numerous historical flashbacks to the days of Botvinnik and Smyslov. (Razuvaev rubbed shoulders with all the good and great of Soviet/Russian chess.) The reminiscences paint a picture of a warm, friendly, erudite human being, genuinely interested in others and, as the title says, devoted to the game he loved.

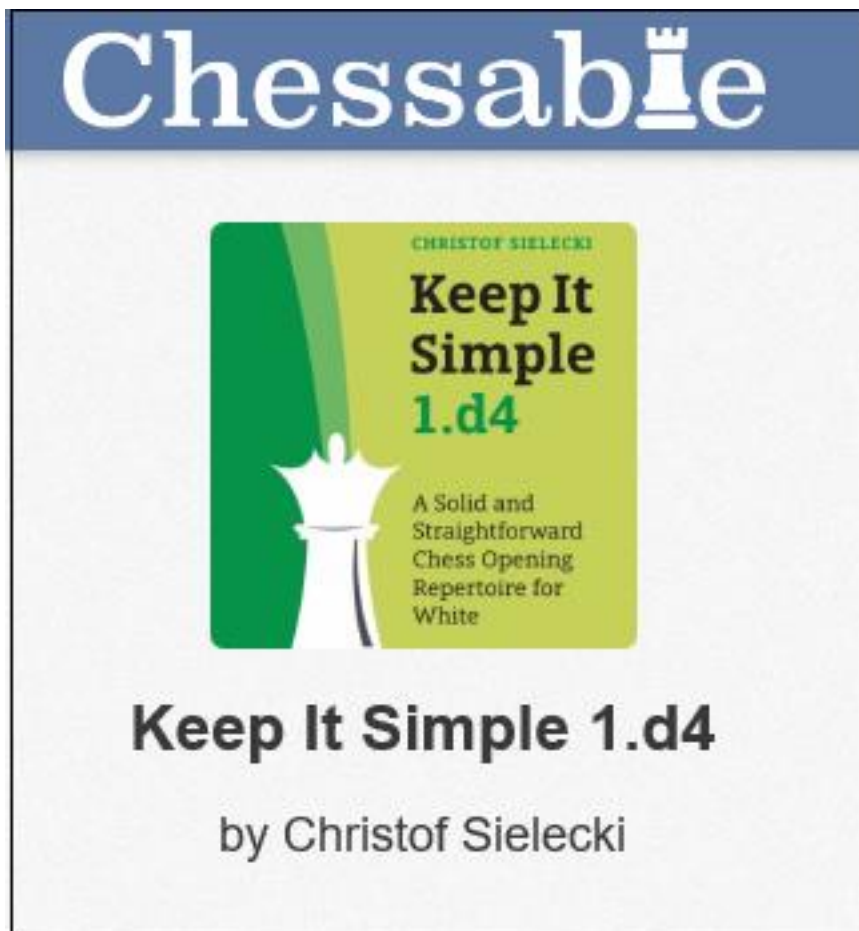
The fifty-two selected games (just under half the book) are crisp and clear, and those annotated by Razuvaev himself often reveal a touching honesty and baring of the soul. This begs the question: since he was obviously a powerful GM, why did he never achieve the very top results? The answer is hinted at by many of those who knew him well: he lacked the killer instinct; too nice and probably interested in too many other things. (Apart from being a GM, Razuvaev was also a history graduate, a theoretician, a writer and trainer of renown, and enjoyed a wide range of interests from football to art. In his later years he was heavily involved with children's chess and the use of chess as an educational tool.)

Devoted to Chess has been put together with love, care and attention. It is a great chess read with lots of insights into Soviet and Russian chess life, and features lots of incidental (or not so incidental!?) good advice. It is presented in a common-sense blend of single column format for text and double column for games and similar-type articles, and is sprinkled with a generous selection of photos. Chess biographies aren't that common, but this is a good 'un.

Recommended.

Ian Marks

September 2019



Chessable: Keep it simple 1 d4

IM Christof Sielecki

Link to course <https://www.chessable.com/keep-it-simple-1-d4/course/23396/>

This is a 1.d4 opening repertoire based on the Catalan for white but covering much, much more!

For what exactly Chessable is and the differences using this software instead of a printed book, please see my previous review *Chess Structures - A Grandmaster Guide*, May 2019 (below).

When I started reading this, I was a bit bored with the repetition during the introduction - playing 1.d4 d5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.g3 over and

over. However, once I got past that part, the repertoire began to unfold and started making sense.

It's clear the author has put a great amount of time and effort into the move orders and transpositions (something which is really difficult to do in a book!) and the software has a great feature called Repertoire Tree which lets you play the moves on screen then shows you the chapter to jump to – amazing for transpositions and understanding various move orders!

This course offers a very strategic repertoire based on the moves d4, Nf3, g3, Bg2, 0-0 and c4 usually in that order. It also has some original ideas in meeting Black's other openings e.g. b3 against the King's Indian and a really interesting idea of dxc5 idea against the early g6/c5 move orders.

The main chapters deal with:

- **Tarrasch**
- **Reversed Grunfeld**
- **Main Catalan**
- **Bf5, Bg4 Setups**
- **Grunfeld**
- **King's Indian**
- **Benoni**
- **b5 to stop c4 idea**
- **Queens Indian**
- **Dutch**
- **Odds & Ends**

The author has done a great job explaining the motives while trying to maintain the 'keep it simple' concept. However, do not mistake simple for 'easy work' as you will need to invest a lot of time to gain the maximum benefit from this repertoire. There are over 1,000 lines to play through and although a lot contain similar themes – there really is a lot of material here! I have been working though it

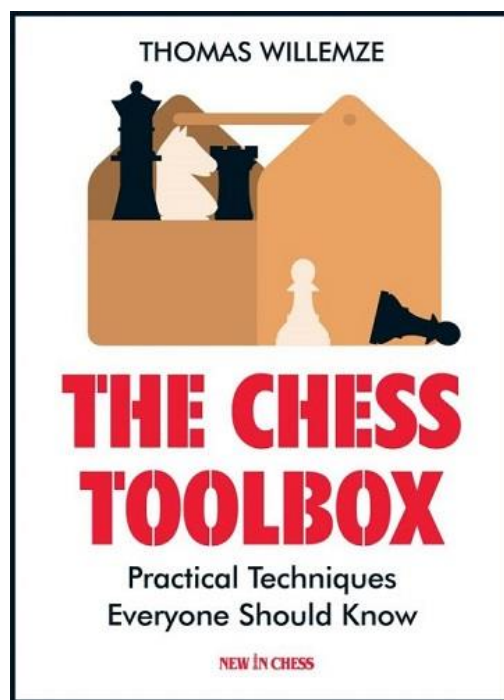
for about 3 months now (average an hour a week) and I am only about 25% through. There is a (more expensive) version of this course where the author has recorded Videos walking you through the lines. In fact, there are almost 29Hrs of video covering every detail of the repertoire and if you can get into it it's very motivating stuff!

Although there are hundreds of chess training clips on YouTube for free – you just need to look at the quality and effort put in here – to conclude that this really is incredible tuition! I personally have enjoyed many of the lectures CS/QualityChess, etc organised in the past and this is of similar quality but for 29 Hrs! Taking this into consideration and (more importantly) if you are going to watch them, the cost may not seem so bad after all.

All in all, I have enjoyed working through this one and I fully intend to complete it in the coming months as the later chapters are very relevant to other 1.d4 repertoires as well.

William Hulme

August 2019



THE CHESS TOOLBOX by Thomas Willemze, New in Chess, 399 pp., publ. 2019.

This sturdy tome is a sort of positional battle manual (the 'toolbox' of the title) covering not everything – that would be impossible – but a number of key areas, viz. exchanging, using rooks, attack and defence and the IQP. Each area comes with a selection of exercises.

Part I, Exchanges, is a good starting point. We probably all remember our early days when we chopped anything and everything without much thought (as the author reminds us!). Some people never get over this (and, of course, you should shamelessly use it against them if you find one sitting opposite you), and they would do well to digest what this part has to say.

Part II on the use of rooks reminded me of a weekender a couple of years ago where I was looking at some of the games in the minor section. One player had a promising middlegame position where all he had to do was open some lines for his rooks and get them into the enemy position. When I looked again later, the position had hardly changed. It was clear he had no idea of how to proceed. He

eventually lost. He – and anyone else for whom this sounds familiar – would benefit from this part of the book.

Part III on attack and defence dissects such staples as the Greek gift and the double bishop sacrifices, while Part IV on playing with and against the IQP struck a personal cord. I was once the proud possessor of one such against a Russian IM, and (rather naively, I guess) fancied my chances. Ha! He swatted my 'attack' aside like a bug and, in the post-mortem, gave me a friendly tutorial on how to defend IQP positions. I think I learnt more about the subject in that hour than I'd learnt in all the books I'd read beforehand. Anyway, Part IV will give you an idea of what he was on about.

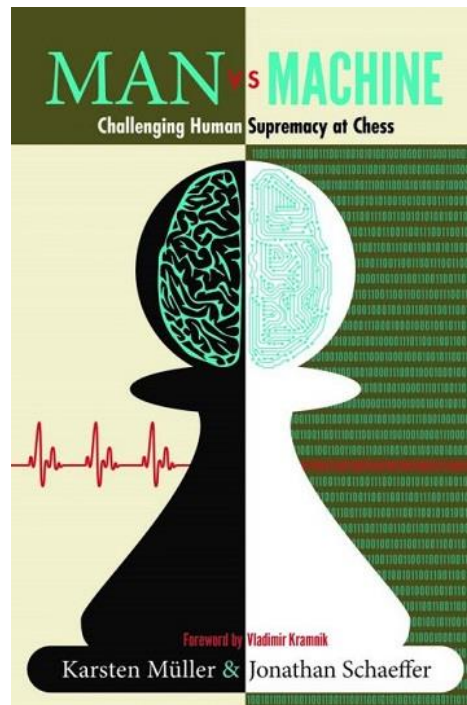
All of this is presented in a light and often chatty style; the author explains his material well without being over-didactic or letting the fare become too heavy to digest.

There are lots of exercises and quiz-type material, plus many questions embedded in the games. This is always tricky; with the best will in the world it's hard to avoid letting your eyes drift ahead and see the answer. If you suffer from this malady you could always do the old cover-the-page-with-a-piece-of-paper thing, but that can be unwieldy. (I just cover the text with my hand.) Apart from this fun element, each chapter finishes with a series of 'flash cards' focusing on key moments of the topic being discussed.

I used the word 'sturdy' at the start, for 'Toolbox' will require some stamina and commitment to get through, but, as with many things in life, the greater the effort, the greater the rewards. Overall, a very enjoyable offering.

Ian Marks

August 2019



MAN vs MACHINE by Karsten Müller & Jonathan Schaeffer, Russell Enterprises Inc., 479 pp., publ. 2018.

As the subtitle *Challenging Human Supremacy at Chess* suggests, this work charts the development of computers in the field of our noble game. It starts at the beginning, with the primitive early machines, and leads on to the days (around the 1960s) when they became 'recognisable', for want of a better word. (Those of us who are a bit longer in the tooth will no doubt remember the joys of FORTRAN!) And so on through the years, up to the present day (when it gloomily, if justifiably, laments that the result of any games between AlphaZero and humans '*is a foregone conclusion*'. And, of course, development continues inexorably).

The dramatis personae include all the major machines of their time, such as (in alphabetical order) Belle, Deep Blue, Deep Junior, Fritz (in various incarnations), Hiarc, Hitech, Hydra, MacHack and Mephisto amongst many others, as well as those whose pioneering work made them possible – Levy, Greenblatt, Hsu, Turing and the Deep Blue team inter alios.

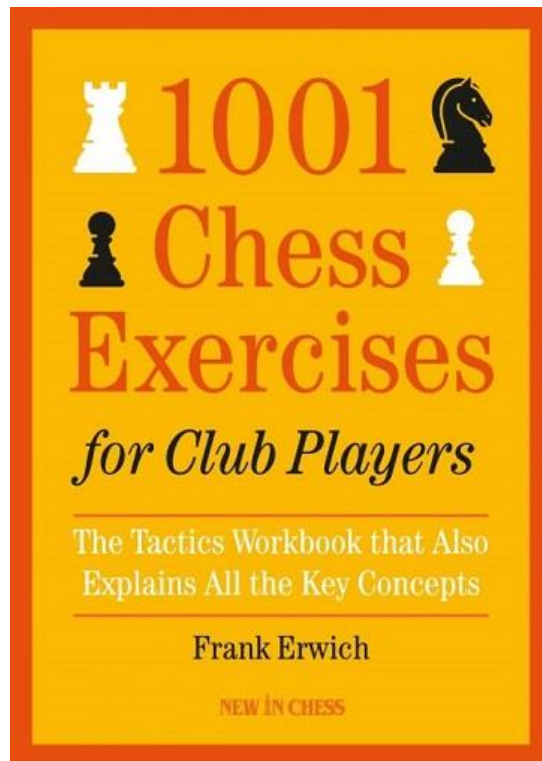
There is a comprehensive selection of games between humans (quite a Who's Who) and machines, and who can forget, for example, the Kasparov-Deep Blue and Adams-Hydra matches?

This is a fairly short review of a big book, but, essentially, it is what the title says it is. I reckon it would be of interest to computer people who might not necessarily be interested in chess, after all, they're to blame for kicking it all off!

One thing I must mention is the very dense text. The font is small (with even smaller boxed text), and the layout is overwhelmingly single-column. It's not visually appealing, and the effect is barely lessened by the diagrams and photos. Given the often demanding content, it does not make for ease (or enjoyment) of reading. The feeling I was left with was one of academic textbook rather than readable account. Keep a headache tablet handy.

Ian Marks

August 2019



1001 CHESS EXERCISES FOR CLUB PLAYERS by Frank Erwich, New in Chess, 187 pp., publ. 2019.

What it says on the cover, 1001 puzzles grouped by chapter on the usual range of tactical themes, e.g. Double Attack, Pin, Trapping a Piece, Promotion etc. etc. Each chapter begins with a brief intro and examples of what it's about, then *lots* of exercises of increasing difficulty for the reader to solve. The 'club players' at whom the book is aimed cover a vast range, arguably 1200-2200 (the book says 1500-2000), and players at the lower end of that scale would benefit from spending some time with a book like this. If they did, the number beside their name would soon show a marked improvement. After all, guys who are now 2200 were way down the scale once too; I'm willing to bet that working on tactics contributed greatly to their improvement.

If 1001 sounds daunting, chunk it. Ten exercises a day will get you through it in a little over three months. Too many? OK, make it five and you'll be done in six. Three a day will get the I've-got-a-job-and-family player through it in a year. It depends on how long you feel

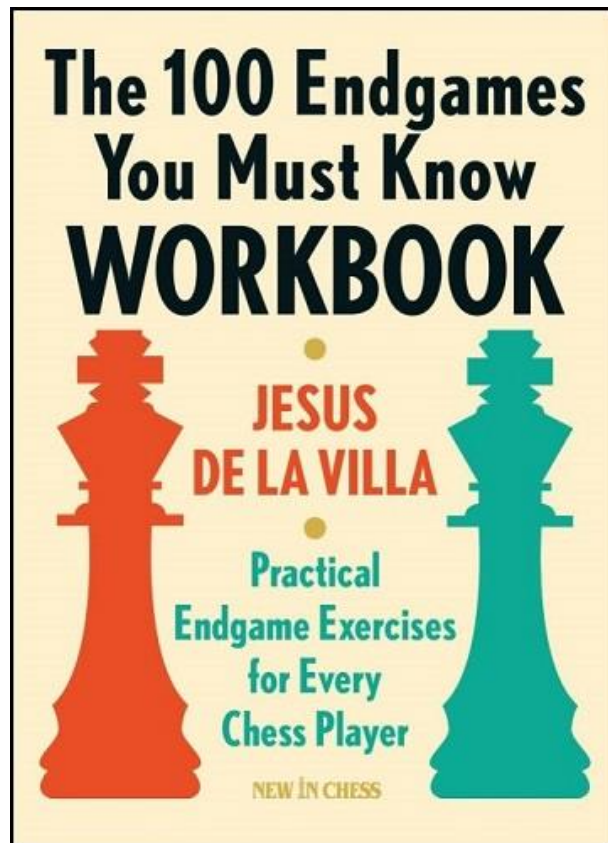
you need to tackle the examples without rushing. However long you take, you'll improve your tactical vision, build up an arsenal of patterns, and have fun doing so. The vast majority of positions are from contemporary practice, with a sprinkling of older examples thrown in, e.g. I recognised no. 662, a classic that every generation deserves to enjoy.

There's not a lot of text, but it's not really necessary, and such text as there is, e.g. in the solutions, is pertinent and to the point.

There are tons of puzzle/tactics books out there; they're useful and don't age in the way that openings books do. The Dutch FM/trainer's work is a worthy addition to their ranks.

Ian Marks

July 2019



THE 100 ENDGAMES YOU MUST KNOW WORKBOOK by Jesus de la Villa, New in Chess, 287 pp., publ. 2019.

This is a companion volume to the Spanish GM's *100 Endgames You Must Know*, and provides training material in the shape of 300 exercises to supplement the theoretical meat of its highly acclaimed predecessor. The exercises start with basic endings, move on to pieces v. pawn, minor piece endings, R + P v. R endings, then finally pawn endings. Some of them are straightforward, presumably to check if you're on your toes (and believe me, there are plenty of illustrious names who weren't, even with the basics!), but the majority will require you to set the position up on your board and settle down for a spot of analysis. It's not a book to be rushed through, in fact I imagine that the more time you devote to working on each position, the more you'll gain from it. Contemporary practice features predominantly amongst the positions, but the 19th and 20th centuries are not neglected, after all, instructional play in this area is not time-dependent.

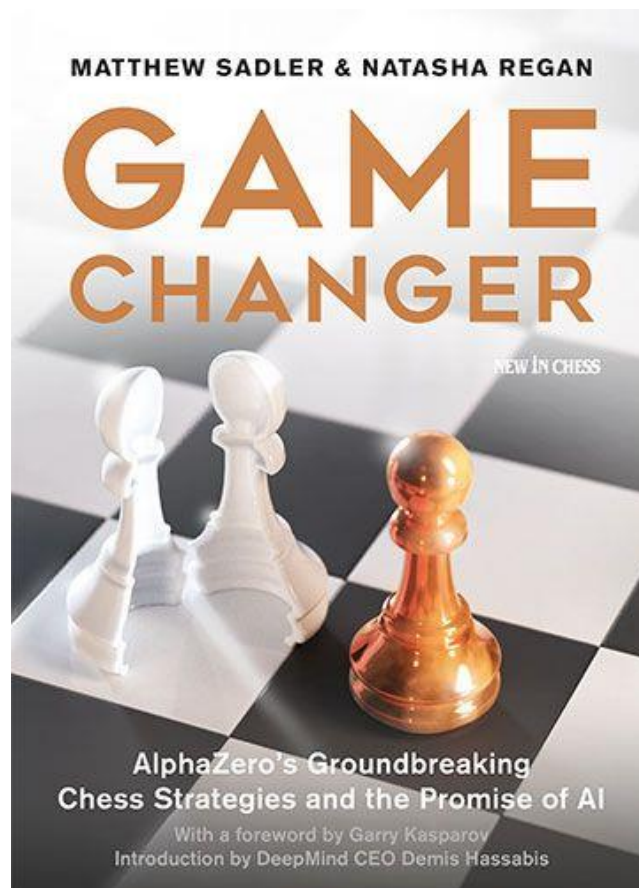
The question naturally arises: do you need to have read *100 Endgames You Must Know* before looking at this one? Answer, no, but, as the author occasionally suggests, it would certainly help to have done so, to get a better handle on where he's coming from with his specific examples. The exercises certainly imply some degree of acquired knowledge.

The solutions (nearly 200 pages) form a sort of mini-course on endings. They are a mixture of succinct prose and tight, relevant variations.

As far as endgame training books go, this is a good one and, if you already have (and have read!) its predecessor, then it makes sense to add this one to your collection. The blurb says it's '*Ideal for every post-beginner, club player and candidate master...*', but it's probably more suitable for players at the higher end of that spectrum. Less experienced players really should get up to speed on the basics before turning to a work like this.

Ian Marks

July 2019



GAME CHANGER by Matthew Sadler & Natasha Regan, New in Chess, 415 pp., publ. 2019.

The subtitle - *AlphaZero's Groundbreaking Chess Strategies and the Promise of AI* - sums it up, a look at the all-conquering AlphaZero in five broad sections: a history of AlphaZero/computer chess/AI, how AlphaZero thinks, themes in its play, its opening repertoire, and a conclusion.

It's fascinating stuff. AlphaZero wasn't 'taught' how to play chess; using only the rules of the game it taught itself by playing against itself until it had figured out the 'best' way of doing things. As an example, while preparing for its match against Stockfish, it played forty-four million (44,000,000!) games against itself over a nine-hour period, or more than 1,000 games a second. To put that into perspective, an active human GM will play around 3,000 games in his entire career. Some of its early 'games' must have been pretty

random, but the important thing was that the machine was 'learning' from them. What emerged was a chess-playing entity of awesome power unfettered by the emotions and preconceptions which blight human players. Unburdened by such human foibles, AlphaZero has produced chess which really is pushing the boundaries of what we have traditionally considered possible on the chessboard.

AlphaZero's style is classical, but from those classical beginnings it shows itself to be a ruthless attacking machine which has produced some breathtaking creative ideas. On the other hand, it's not just a high-class crusher. It is also capable of squeezes that Petrosian or Karpov would have been proud of. In short, it has synthesised, to an extent, all that goes to make up a modern, flexible, top GM, albeit at superhuman level. In Part III on Themes in AlphaZero's Play, the authors home in on many of these ingredients, in particular its handling of the pieces and attacks on the king. In the latter category they concentrate on rook's pawns, colour complexes, sacs, opposite-side castling and defence. The labels may be familiar, but the uninhibited way in which the machine introduces new ideas and handles familiar settings provides plenty of food for thought, not to mention lots of sheer entertainment.

Its opening repertoire is interesting. As a classical player, it meets 1 e4 exclusively with 1 ... e5 (and the Berlin Defence!), and 1 d4 with ...Nf6/...e6 lines. As White, it favours 1 d4, with the occasional 1 Nf3 thrown in, usually transposing to normal 1 d4 lines. (Given its adherence to what it considers 'best' in other areas of the game, might we infer that these represent the acme of opening perfection? Well, probably not, since we humans are emotional collections of atoms who can find any excuse or reason to 'justify' our opening choices, preferences and biases.) How it interprets the positions arising from these classical lines is probably unlike anything you've ever seen before, though, especially as Black in the

traditional open games. Again, there is a lot of food for thought here.

Earlier on I used the word 'fascinating', and that is the word which sticks in my mind after reading *Game Changer*: a fascinating glimpse into the world of AI and its implications, not just for chess, but for other fields too, and a fascinating (not to say refreshing) look at the directions in which chess might go in the future. It is a well put-together tome which makes for an easy read, although it takes a bit of digesting, and you'll want to go through it again the better to absorb it and spend more time on the more detailed games and fragments. It is a real eye-opener and insight on where computer chess is going and its implications for the game (and humans!?). If a non-technical guy like me can think *Wow!*, so can you.

One small quibble - there's no openings index, so if you're trying to locate, say, that killer line in the Queen's Indian, you're going to have to do a bit of flicking.

Ian Marks

June 2019

ELECTRONIC BOOK REVIEW - Chess Structures - A Grandmaster Guide



Chessable > Courses > Chess Strategy

Chess Structures - A Grandmaster Guide

MoveTrainer™ Strategy course by GM Mauricio Flores Rios & Quality Chess ★★★★★

Buy for \$34.99

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE 30 DAY

I should start by saying I already had the printed version of this book from Quality Chess and it is one of my favourite chess books!

It is essentially a middlegame book with 140 carefully selected model games explaining plans and ideas grouped into common 'structures' like

- Isolated Pawn Structure / Hanging Pawns
- Caro-Kann Formation / Slav Formation / Carlsbad Formation
- Stonewall Structure / Grünfeld Centre
- Najdorf Type / Hedgehog / Maroczy Bind
- Benoni Structures / King's Indian Structures
- French Structures
- 3-3 vs 4-2 Structure
- Panov Structure / Dragon Formation
- Scheveningen Structure / Benko Structure
- Ruy Lopez Structures

The book goes on to explain various strategic patterns to observe and typical pitfalls to avoid. There are 50 test exercises with detailed solutions which are really rewarding to play through.

About four years ago (!) I worked my way through the first few chapters of this book. My bookmark is still inside p.68 waiting to start the Slav formations. Although I do remember thoroughly enjoying the read, I don't think I was able to remember much of it six months down the line.

So if, like me, you find yourself buying a great chess book and reading a chapter or two then not getting round to coming back and completing the book (or having the time to!), ChessAble might just be the answer you didn't know you needed!

I started with the ChessAble version of the book back in April and I have found it difficult not to look at it almost every day since! According the ChessAble app on my phone I now have 'a 60 day streak' running!

You simply log into www.chessable.com from your mobile or web browser and it remembers where you left off. I felt this works particularly well on an iPad or laptop web browser because you can see the board and the text side by side. On a mobile you need to flick between the two but it's easy enough to get the hang of.

There are various free ChessAble books you can download and play with. The tactics trainer on last year's Olympiad was particularly enjoyable but there are loads of online tactics trainers out there. You do need to purchase this book but the Chessable team offer a no quibble 30 day money back deal if you are not completely satisfied.

So what is the difference using this software instead of a printed book?

The key difference is the ability to quickly practise what you read from both sides of the board and set it back to the reference position instantly. This concept perhaps leaves you more time to digest the material rather than setting up the board over and over

again! There are also 600 additional exercises which are only really noticeable using the ChessAble version. These are the mini lines referenced in the book which you get to try out using what they call 'Movie Trainer', a board on the screen which allows you to point and click moves on the screen to 'play' the position. A great feature I haven't seen on other software is that it recognises an alternative decent move if you don't play in the same way the tutor is advocating. It's very annoying with other software which tells you a perfectly good alternative move is 'incorrect'.

Another incredibly helpful feature is that this software shows the board from the appropriate (B or W) side when you are required to make a move during the training exercises. For example, when you are trying to defend a position from the other side, and the book says "not hxg5 as White has winning attack", we can now play this out and see the winning attack - can't get this training from a printed book!

Another strong example from the first chapter on isolated pawns. Say you are the style of player who likes playing against an isolated d-pawn and tries to avoid accepting one yourself. This software allows you to 'see it from the other side' and practise using the space for fluid attacking piece play. In books, I often skip that part thinking 'I'll not get those types of positions' anyway, so this software has big advantages in this area too.

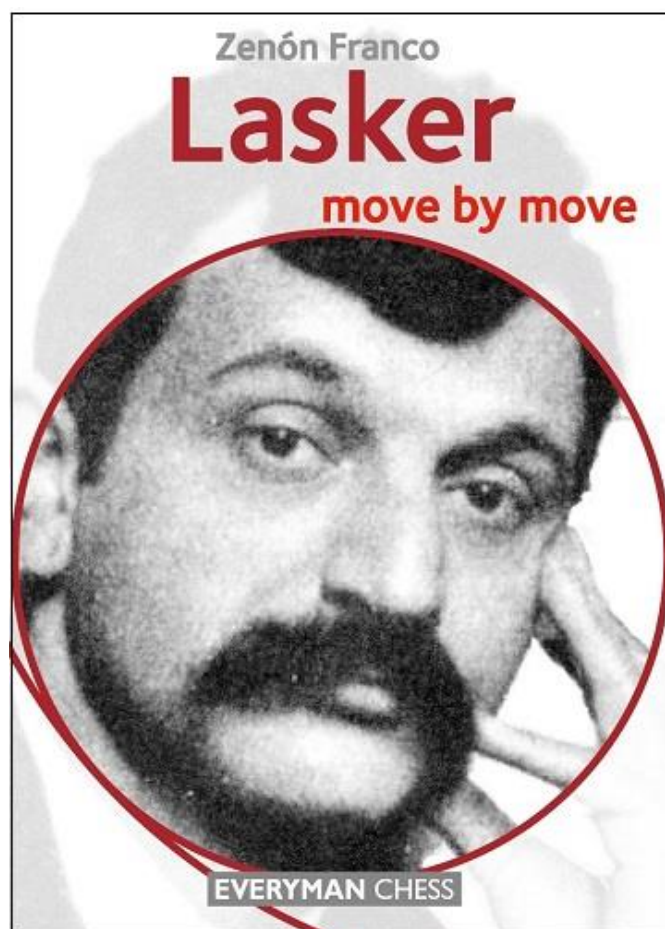
The MovieTrainer system allows you to 'practise' not only playing the main line moves but tests you on the little sub lines too, thus hammering home the points often missed unless you spend a lot of time referencing the printed version of the book! By means of playing the positions out on screen and by repetition we are forced to learn the ideas.

All in all, I feel this particular electronic version of the material works really well – so welcome to the 21st century learning chess!

Does this mean I won't buy another book? Of course not, I will almost certainly take the book on holiday and see how much I have retained by playing it out with a real board but I really think this course works well with Chessable's MoveTrainer in helping us remember the important plans and ideas. I am certainly looking forward to finishing the Structures book then starting another Chessable electronic book, so watch this space.

William Hulme

May 2019



LASKER MOVE BY MOVE by Zenón Franco, Everyman Chess, 448 pp., publ. 2018

As I've said before, I like games collections. They're timeless. Reason enough to think there should be more of them, but nobody gets rich writing chess books, and writers of games collections get even less rich than those pumping out openings books, ergo...

I assume you've heard of Lasker, a polymath good enough at chess to become world champion. Franco examines forty-six of Lasker's games in five broad periods from 1889 to 1936, a career of almost half a century. In recent history only Korchnoi could boast such long (and successful) longevity.

Lasker was one of the great practical players. He was never a great openings researcher (although he did enough to have a number of systems named after him and was a spiritual forefather of the

currently all-the-rage London System), but was probably the first great player to explore and espouse the role of psychology in the game. And he was one of the great defenders. Sound familiar? Think Magnus.

Franco does a good job of dissecting the games, drawing together comments and analysis from both contemporaries of Lasker such as Tarrasch and Capablanca and modern commentators such as Kasparov and Nunn. These comments are always illuminating and it is interesting to note the shifts in emphasis between the two, for example nowadays more stress is placed on dynamics than in days of yore. The openings, of course, are not quite contemporary fare, but so what? What counts is the middlegame and endgame meat, and there's plenty of that.

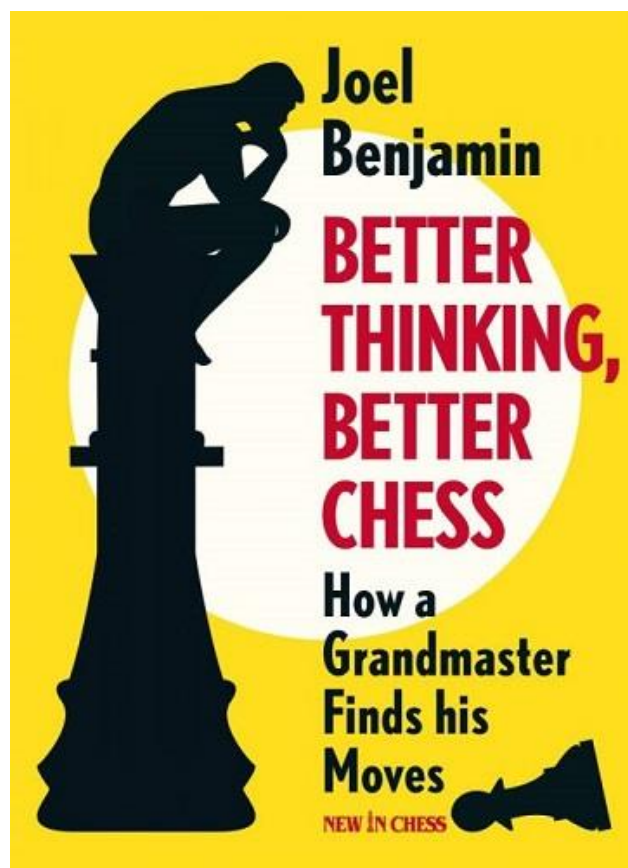
Inevitably some of Lasker's classics feature, but that detracts from neither the games in question nor the book. A great game is always worth revisiting.

The book is well produced and once again smoothly translated by Phil Adams. Translators often (if ever) get due credit, yet can make or break a text, so kudos to him. The text is easy on the eye with lots clear diagrams and a pretty comprehensive bibliography. One detail that snuck under the proofreader's radar is the insistence on calling the Danish player From (inventor of the eponymous gambit) 'Fromm'. Wonder where the extra 'm' came from?

I said above that you've probably heard of Lasker. If you haven't, or are unfamiliar with his legacy, this would be a good place to start.

Ian Marks

May 2019



BETTER THINKING, BETTER CHESS by Joel Benjamin, New in Chess, 223 pp., publ. 2018.

The subtitle, *How a Grandmaster Finds His Moves*, is a clue to the contents. Benjamin analyses 118 games, many his own, including 76 'challenges', where the reader is asked to find candidate moves, a winning continuation, a defensive idea etc. His basic aim is to improve the reader's thinking process, hence find better moves. Maybe you're thinking that you're not a grandmaster, so what relevance has this for you? The answer is: a lot. By working on the flaws in your own thinking, you should (in theory anyway) be able to improve your performances and results, which is exactly what GMs have to do to earn a living. Also, numerous examples are by the author's own students, so (a) it's not all stratospheric stuff and (b) he knows exactly what they, i.e. players closer to you and me, were thinking or not thinking.

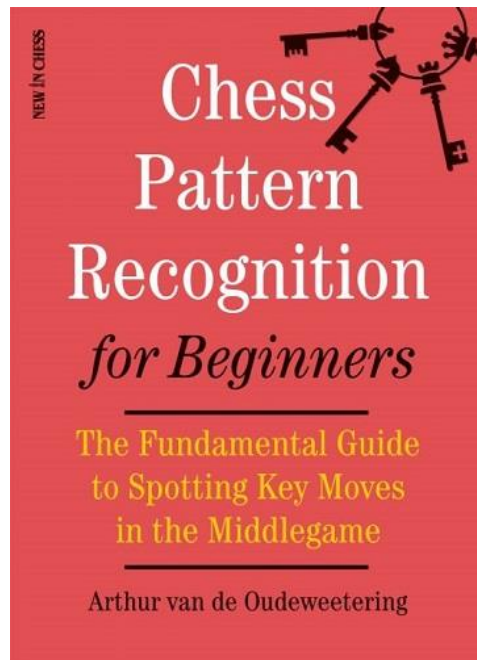
The up-to-date material, drawn mainly from the 2000s or late 20th century, is divided into ten chapters. Openings, endgames and tactics get a dedicated chapter each, while others (in fact probably my three favourites) include calculation (and its problems), winning a won game, and swindling. Chapter nine is called 'Words of wisdom: tips for better chess thinking' and contains forty assorted pieces of solid advice which alone would make a handy little vade mecum for less experienced (or even experienced!) players. There are also lots of hints and insights scattered throughout the main body of the text. A couple which caught my eye: '*The fundamental goal is to be in a position where good moves are easier to find for you than for your opponent*' and '*You can't find what you don't look for...Players often find tactics because they are more motivated to make them work than their opponents are to spot and prevent them*'. Even just letting things like that sink in would improve many players' results.

Since the author's objective is to assist with the reader's thinking processes, there's lots of lucid, easy-to-follow prose. Benjamin's writing is tight and focused; there's no flannel. Throughout the book he homes in on the topic at hand, explains what's going on and gets his point across. There are also lots of anecdotes to lighten the fare and enough diagrams for less experienced players to practise visualising their way through the book *sans* board.

Overall, a thoroughly enjoyable book, just a little bit different, and a good old-fashioned read.

Ian Marks

May 2019



CHESS PATTERN RECOGNITION FOR BEGINNERS by Arthur van de Oudeweetering, New in Chess, 240 pp., publ. 2018

It might be an idea to start this review by saying what this book isn't about. It's not about standard tactical patterns, e.g. mates, pins, skewers etc.; it's more about the middlegame and focuses on strategic patterns, e.g. planting a minor piece on a strong square, attacking ...g6 with h4 (or g3 with ...h5), rooks on open files, sacrificial patterns etc. And, despite the title, the material is a bit advanced and abstract for raw beginners. (The author – a Dutch IM and trainer – says that the book is 'designed for beginners', after previously warning that it 'could hardly be for absolute beginners'.) Bottom line: you'll need some experience under your belt to get anywhere with it.

The work is divided into four broad parts –

- Typical pawns and pieces
- When pawns meet
- When to exchange and when not to

- Sacrifices – the classics

and each of these into chapters on a particular theme or topic, e.g. in the last one we find a discussion of standard sacs such as Bxf7+, Bxh7+, ...Rxc3 and various attacking knight sacs. You might think that this contradicts the claim that the book is about strategic, not tactical, patterns, but remember that sacs are generally based on sound positional considerations. Each chapter contains well-selected material, good explanations and summary, and each of the four main sections concludes with a set of exercises. Although the chapters are not particularly long (around seven pages on average), the concise repetition should help the particular topic sink in. There is also plenty of good advice sprinkled throughout, e.g. from the chapter on opposite-coloured bishops: *'Control the squares that you can't control with your bishop with your pawns'* and, from the chapter on isolated doubled pawns: *'the structural weakness of the IDP comes to the fore in the endgame'*. The material covers a healthy time span from the McDonnell-De Labourdonnais match of 1834 (!) to the present day, and features examples from the creative output of most of the greats.

I sometimes wonder about the wisdom or necessity of including the whole game when you could easily discuss the topic from a starting diagram, but in this case I think it is a good idea; it allows the reader, especially the less experienced player, to see how the position came about and gives him/her an idea of how to handle similar lead-in play him-/herself. When we get to the meat of the diagrams the emphasis is on explanatory prose rather than variations, also a sound idea given the nature of the book and the target readership.

One thing I found interesting is how the author handled what I would call more amorphous patterns. Most players with some experience can sniff out a Bxh7+ sac; trying to clarify the right circumstances for a favourable exchange is much more difficult.

Where there is no pattern, the human mind instinctively seeks one (which is why people see the face of Elvis in a slice of toast, or teapots in the clouds). The author tackles this head-on in part III, which should prove beneficial to anyone who thinks, for example, that only wusses exchange queens 'cos it's boring. (How long had you been playing chess before you realised that that was a load of codswallop?)

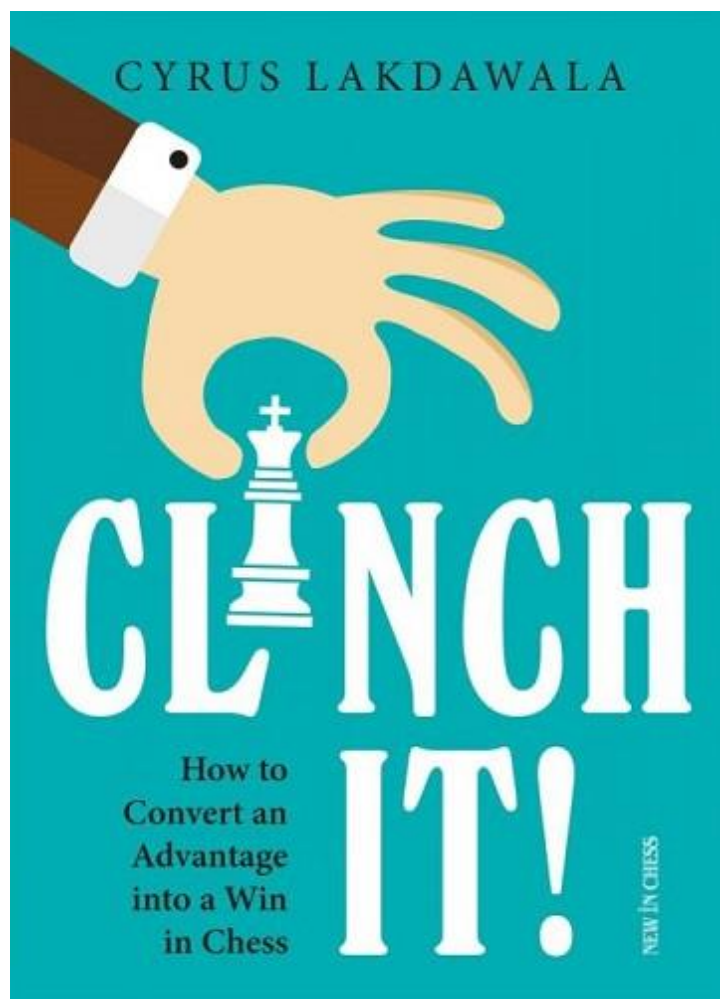
The author writes with a lightness of touch. His style is *sympatico* and not without a dash of humour (I liked the nod to Motörhead in chapter 20) and his simple and concise explanations show that he obviously wants his readers to understand and benefit from his work. Another key element in the teaching/learning process lies in anticipating the pupil's questions, and van de Oudeweetering does a good job of this too.

I certainly wouldn't place the book in the hands of anyone who has just learnt the moves, but players with some experience of the game, rated say $\geq 1300/1400$, would find a lot of useful material in it. I can also imagine it being useful for rapidly-improving juniors or their coaches.

(That was going to be my concluding sentence, but I've decided to go out on something which niggles the living daylight out of me: why do English-language texts often insist on Kortchnoi and Jussupow, when the accepted English versions are Korchnoi and Yusupov? You could argue that J-u-s-s-u-p-o-w is how Artur spells his surname in his adoptive Germany, but given that his own English-language works use the English transliteration, I just don't get it. Rant over. Thank you for listening.)

Ian Marks,

March 2019



CLINCH IT! By Cyrus Lakdawala, New in Chess, 253 pp., publ. 2018
The latest offering from the Lakdawala production line takes a look at (as the sub-title says) how to convert an advantage into a win via five large chapters – Exploiting a development lead, Exploiting the attack, Defense and counterattack, Accumulating advantages and Converting favourable imbalances. As always when you read a Lakdawala book, the first thing that hits you is the waffle. Bearing in mind the adage that every word has to justify its place in a sentence, ask yourself what stuff like this doing in the text:

'Karpov's move is like a sluggish man who has just consumed a 3,000 calorie Christmas dinner, to the manic junkie who has just scored a hit of angel dust.'

'I played the KID for about a decade, all through the 1980's, but gave it up when the thought arose: "How can I remember such long lines when I can't even remember the lyrics to Stairway to Heaven in the shower?"'

'In truth, this is a boy-who-called-wolf situation, the way North Korea threatens to "drown the United States in a sea of nuclear ash" on a weekly basis.'

'...anomaly tends to follow orthodoxy like a hungry hyena' (this one's actually quite neat, once you've paused to figure out what he's talking about)

Another Lakdawala trademark is his frequent references to popular culture. Nothing wrong with that. Good to keep up. But there are a couple of problems with committing references to popular culture to print: (i) they become dated, and (ii) they convey nothing to anyone not au fait with the reference. If you haven't read the books or watched the series, the convoluted *'The thing I learned from the Dothraki in Game of Thrones (although GOT wasn't even there in book form when this game was played)...'* is meaningless. (I love the way he feels it necessary to explain that the thing he's referring to didn't exist at the time.)

A friend recently commented to me that he was 'reluctant to suffer Lakdawala's prose again'. You can understand why.

What highlights this sort of verbiage even more is that, once you've macheted your way through it, you find gentle prose with a lightness of touch which is both easy to read and conveys what the author wants to convey. Compare the following little pieces of advice to the stuff above.

'Sometimes obvious moves are the wrong ones.'

'Even a few indifferent moves can turn a relatively easy win into a potential draw for the opponent.'

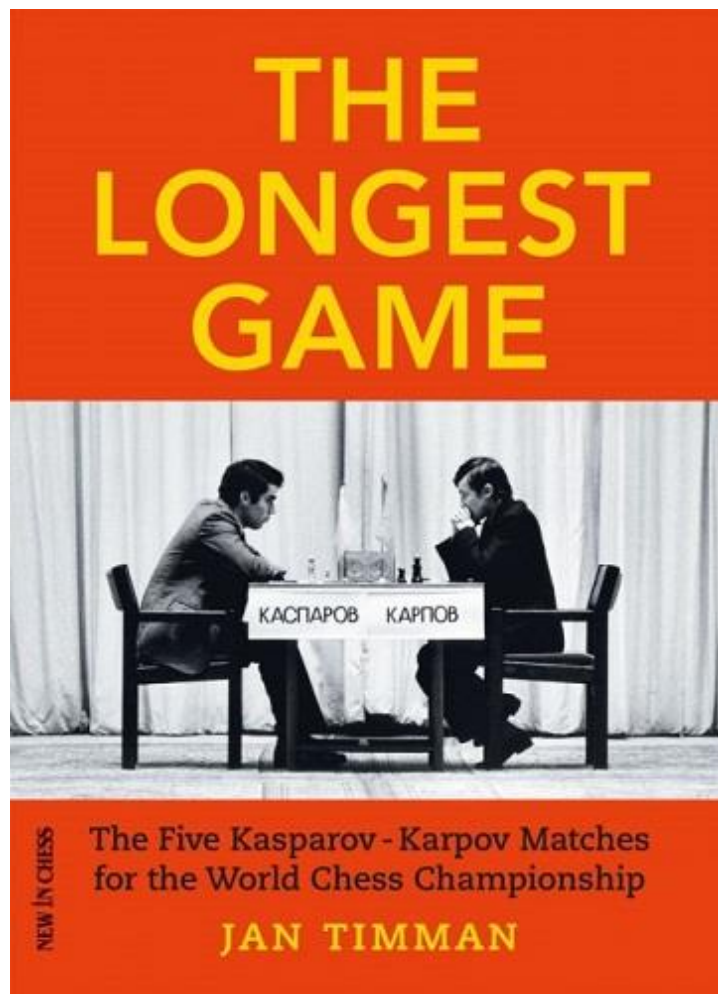
'Be constantly aware of the question: is my initiative expanding or contracting?'

All things worth remembering during the heat of battle, expressed clearly and succinctly. Could be a different person writing. When he trims the prose, Lakdawala is a more enjoyable read than many other authors. He comes across as genuinely interested in imparting information and helping his readers derive benefit from his work. He is the antithesis of those overtly didactic textbook-style writers and, dare I say it, those whose writing barely conceals their superciliousness.

Overall, *Clinch It!* is a pleasant book on a somewhat neglected topic and I can imagine many players, say in the under 2000 range, would benefit from it. Just be prepared to skim over large chunks of waffle.

Ian Marks,

March 2019



THE LONGEST GAME by Jan Timman, New in Chess, 365 pp., publ. 2019 The longest game of the title isn't one game at all, but the 144 games contested by Karpov and Kasparov in their world championship matches between 1984 and 1990 which, Timman argues, can be regarded as one long game. Timman doesn't analyse every game, but has selected fifty of the most significant, with seventeen fragments, and annotated them in detail. Timman's detail, however, is much lighter than the analytical jungle which Kasparov devoted to the matches in his own work, thus it is reader-friendlier and besides shows us the games through the eyes of a third party. His notes (computer-backed, of course) and insights are of a standard one would expect from a former world no. 2, but while strong players often seem to exist in a world out of touch with lesser mortals, Timman is blessed with the gift of being able to explain things in a clarity of prose accessible to everyone. In

addition to the games, Timman weaves a highly readable narrative replete with lots of background, insight and anecdote, with lengthy discussion of the key moments and factors surrounding the games. All the major characters in the chess world of the time are brought to life, some in starring, some in walk-on roles, and an interesting cast they make. Given the nature and intensity of chess at this level, paranoia is never far from the surface, political intrigue is rife and, of course, who doesn't love a good conspiracy theory, be it the abrupt termination of the first match or the bizarre conclusion to game nineteen in 1990. Timman's taut, focused writing, smoothly translated, often lends the narrative the air of a thriller rather than a chess text, and its robustness is worthy of note. In this day and age, when some people have elevated being offended to a breach of their human rights, it is refreshing to read a passage like this (from the London leg of the 1986 match): *'Karpov did not have a clear delegation leader, but he did have a press attaché: the Yugoslav Dmitri Bjelica. That was a strange choice, as Bjelica was known as a gutter journalist who wrote books that were full of printing errors and plagiarisms'*.

A minor disappointment in this otherwise super book is the relative absence of photographs, of which there are very few; most are of the two Ks in action, and one is of... a stamp. A little more illumination of settings and characters would have been welcome.

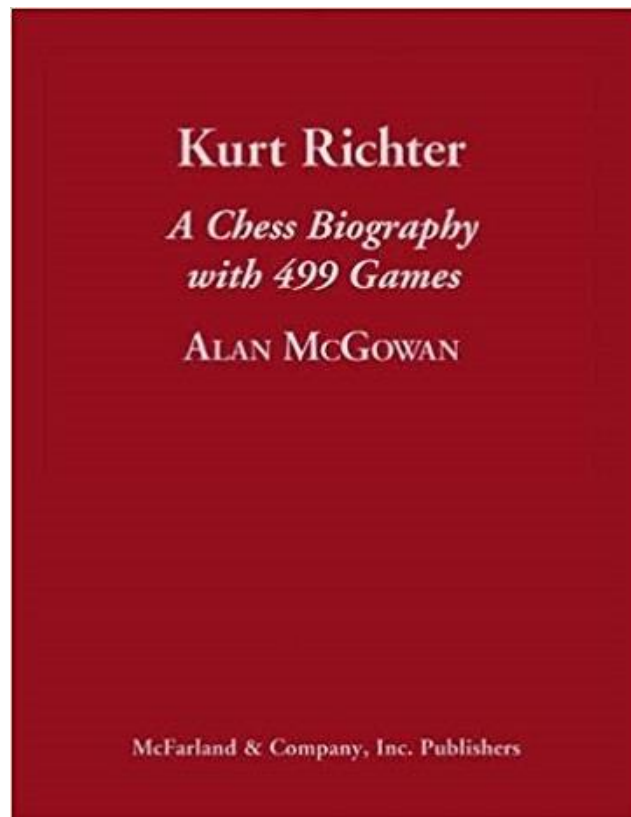
For some of us, the K-K battles are a large part of our chess lives, for others they will represent a life span, while for yet others they will be a chunk of history that took place before they were born, thus it occurs to me that, besides being an excellent retrospective on a great rivalry, Timman's book is also something of a historical document; it is hard to separate the chess from the times.

Jan Timman has established a reputation as a fine writer whose books have something to say. His one-volume coverage of one of

the greatest rivalries in chess is no exception. Highly enjoyable and highly recommended.

Ian Marks,

March 2019



KURT RICHTER A Chess Biography with 499 Games by Alan McGowan, McFarland & Company Inc., 368 + xii pp., publ. 2018.

When one thinks of the great players of the first half of the twentieth century, one instinctively thinks of the World Champions – Lasker, Capablanca and Alekhine – or their illustrious peers such as Rubinstein, Nimzowitsch or Spielmann, to name but three. It is easy to forget that, while these stellar names were the elite of their day, and have had books written about them, there were many other strong, talented masters who have been unjustly neglected in chess literature. I remember former World Champion Max Euwe talking about the composer Mattison (or Matisons in his native Latvian) and saying, “He was a strong player”, (strong enough, in fact, to have beaten the likes of Alekhine, Capablanca, Rubinstein and Vidmar, but virtually unknown nowadays). To this group belongs the subject of this work, the German master Kurt Richter.

For the benefit of non-Scottish readers, the author, Alan McGowan, is the Chess Scotland historian, a long-time devotee of the history

and lore of our wonderful game. Before I go any further it is only right that, as per a job application, I declare an interest. Alan and I have known each other since we were juniors at Cathcart Chess Club in Glasgow, indeed it was at school that the first seeds of Alan's interest in chess history, and Richter in particular, were sown. I can recall visits to his flat forty-odd years ago and finding the floor strewn with old chess magazines and books, many of them foreign. Even then, one name was starting to crop up more and more – Kurt Richter. As he enthused about the games in Brinckmann's *Kurt Richters beste Partien*, or about a game he had found in some old German magazine, he would often ask me what something meant. This eventually led, when his project was up and running, to a guy with my name being inveigled into doing the translations from German, and, if I was playing in a tournament where I might bump into anyone who had known, or had information about, Richter, into finding out that little bit more. I mention all of this for one reason: I can personally attest to how much time, energy, effort, commitment and thoroughness Alan has invested in this project. (No, on second thoughts I'm probably only aware of a fraction of it.)

So to our subject. Kurt Richter was a German master whose life spanned the first seven decades of the twentieth century (1900-1969). He thus lived through some of the century's most turbulent times – the First World War, the political and economic turmoil of the '20s, the rise of fascism in the '30s, the Second World War, the division of Germany, the Cold War and the building of the Berlin Wall (all of which you will find woven into the narrative). He was undoubtedly a strong player; you don't win the German championship and play in the Olympiad team if you're not. He was feared by many and respected by the elite (both Alekhine and Keres, for example, openly regarded him as a worthy opponent and certainly not someone to be trifled with). His style of play was overtly tactical; he played chess on the edge and not for nothing was known by the nickname 'the executioner of Berlin'. He once

stated (you can find it in here on p.103) that "*the point of an individual game is not to produce a work of art, but simply to defeat your opponent*", and the games reveal exactly what he meant. Playing the man was natural to him; creating uncertainty and confusion in his opponent's mind was a prime weapon in the Richter arsenal. Think of a synthesis of, say, Tal and Rapport and you might get an idea of the Richter *modus operandi*. And yet he was capable of creating chess beauty, as many of his stunning combinations testify, or of the most filigree touches in the endgame.

As befits a natural attacking player his main weapon with White was 1 e4, where he favoured main-ish lines with his own little twists (one of his weapons of mass destruction was the 'harmless' 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Be7 5 Bxf6 Bxf6 6 e5 Be7 7 Qg4, where he banked on being able to handle the complications better than his opponent could balance the needs of defence and counterattack), but he also honed 1 d4 d5 2 Nc3 (or 1 d4 Nf6 2 Nc3) into an effective point-scorer. This has never attained main line respectability, but to dismiss it out of hand tells us more about the dismisser than about the move. It is hard to believe that a move which attracted the attention of the likes of Spassky, Tal and Bronstein can be stupid. Part of Richter's white repertoire was later to become the victim of Soviet cultural imperialism. 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 d6 6 Bg5 and 1 d4 Nf6 2 Nc3 are generally known nowadays as the Richter-Rauzer and Richter-Veresov respectively, but are sometimes unforgivably and quite inexcusably truncated to the Rauzer and the Veresov. To do so is to ignore Richter's considerable input; this topic is covered at length in the book.

While Richter's white openings could claim general respectability, his black rep was hardly mainstream. He usually countered 1 e4 with the 2 ... Nf6 Scandinavian, while against 1 d4 he normally

unleashed the Budapest Gambit, most often in its Fajarowicz incarnation – 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e5 3 dxe5 Ne4 – and dabbled in lines with an early ... b5 if White avoided 2 c4. Probably not the greatest openings ever invented, but Richter was savvy enough to know that they suited him perfectly and allowed him to get his opponents on their own and lead them places they might not want to go. It would be interesting to speculate how he would have adapted his repertoire had computers been around; it is unlikely that his favourite black systems would have withstood silicon scrutiny. One possibility lies in ... g6 systems, with which he occasionally flirted.

Of course, such a style and repertoire, by its nature, can be accident-prone; the losses he often suffered as a result not infrequently cost him a high finish in tournaments, or even robbed him of first, but never prevented him from sticking to his guns.

(Not only do tastes in openings change with the times, but so too does chess itself, not least with regard to players' ages. Richter was no prodigy [he trained as an insurance agent] and didn't start to emerge as a player of note until his early twenties. Likewise, at Swinemünde in 1932, Stoltz, at twenty-eight, and Rödl, twenty-five, were still amongst the more 'youthful' players. Nowadays, if you haven't made GM by your teens, you might as well pack it in.)

Richter's other great contribution to chess was writing and journalism, in which he was involved in some capacity or other for about half his life, in fact he turned increasingly to this after the war. He edited or wrote for a number of magazines, and authored several chess books which went on to become classics. He had a marked literary style, and was blessed with the good teacher's knack of being able to explain, communicate and stimulate without ever being condescending. His writings also betray a man of strong opinions, e.g. on draws, on the proliferation of titles (he'd probably go apoplectic nowadays) and on chess composition, but while his arguments were cogent, they were always well and reasonably put,

and you will find many examples in the book. It is no exaggeration to say that Richter was a true giant in this field, one of the finest chess writers who has ever lived, but unfortunately for English speakers, the bulk of his oeuvre still exists only in German, so the wonderful examples in the book will give you a real and welcome flavour of his style.

But this is a highly readable chess biography, not just a collection of games, and what the book does incredibly well is relate Richter's career to the context of the times and, indeed, recreate the ambience of those often extraordinary years. It is lavishly illustrated with a treasure trove of contemporary photos which take readers into the chess clubs, cafes and streets of pre-war Berlin, to matches and tournaments of the day and put faces to names. The extensive background material is detailed and vivid; the post-1933 section is especially chilling, as the Nazis increasingly tightened their grip on German cultural life, from which chess was not exempt. This must have been a particularly difficult time for the largely apolitical Richter, impinging as it did upon his literary activities; to say that he had to choose his words carefully to avoid falling foul of Nazi censorship is an understatement, but he came up with a way to play the system, and some of his journalistic output of those years features cunningly disguised little barbs directed against the regime. He was too old for active service in the war, but didn't escape the draft. He was stuck in a uniform and sent round military establishments and hospitals to promote the game and give morale-boosting simuls. (And yes, the book takes us there too.)

Apart from the games and the main body of the text, there are extensive notes, a four-page bibliography and four appendices devoted to additional games, tournament and match results, and one each on Richter's white and black repertoires, with extensive discussion of his lines and an ECO-type presentation of them. The

sheer amount of material – much of it original – which Alan has processed throughout the work is phenomenal.

By way of conclusion: *Kurt Richter* allows us to share the life and times of a quiet, unassuming man, content to play the game he loved and bring it to others via his writing. He lived through difficult times; we get the impression that chess provided him with some sort of anchor, a framework for his life. One of the questions going through my head is how much further he could have gone (the talent was clearly there) had he enjoyed better health (his was not the strongest constitution) and devoted himself less to journalistic activities, but, in retrospect, it's probably a silly question. Richter was who he was because he had found the sort balance in life that others seek but seldom attain. Playing without writing, or writing without playing, would have been anathema to him. He was comfortable with his chess life; it allowed him to mix socially and provided an outlet for his writing talents. This is borne out to an extent by the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, which, overnight, cut Richter, a cradle-to-grave Berliner (he grew up and lived his life in what was to become the eastern part of the city), off from personal contact with his friends and contacts in the West. Is it perhaps coincidence that he was to die relatively young only eight years later?

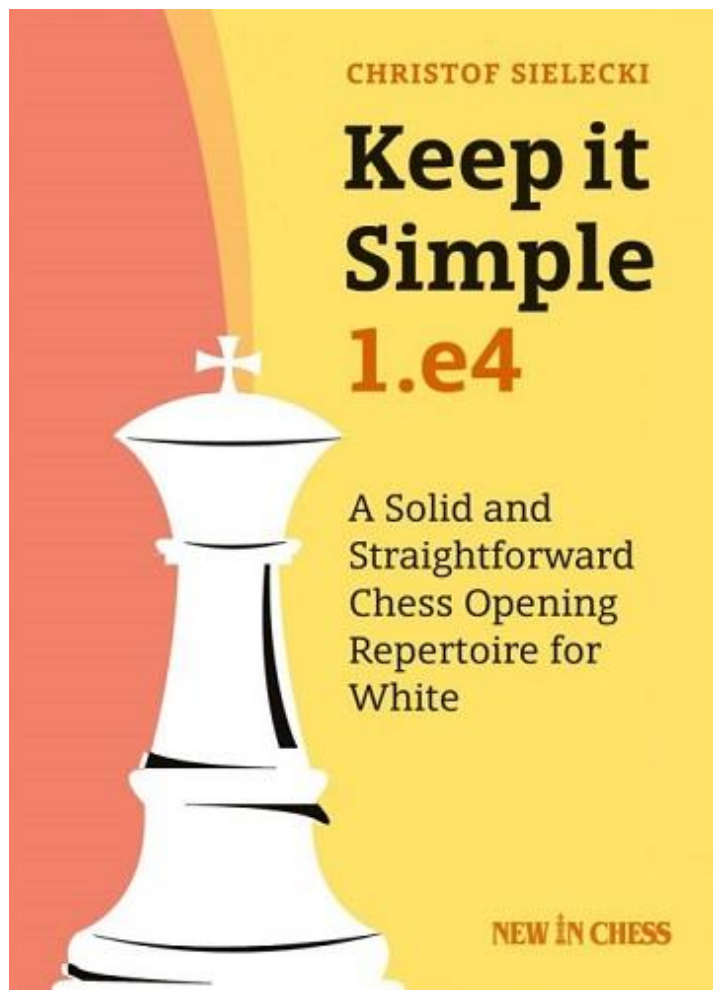
As with everything else in life, you get what you pay for. This sumptuous hardback will set you back about the same as four openings books, but while those frequently meretriciously modish offerings are out of date before they're printed, and will probably lie unopened on your bookshelf anyway, Kurt Richter is timeless; it provides a fabulous biography of a sadly under-rated and neglected player, a wealth of wonderful chess and a journey back to a time now long gone. In this day and age, when some chess authors churn out a book every four months, it is a pleasure to be able to

immerse oneself in a work to which the author has devoted four decades of his life.

I cannot recommend Alan's opus highly enough. It is superb. Go on, treat yourself.

Ian Marks,

January 2019



KEEP IT SIMPLE: 1.e4 by Christof Sielecki, New in Chess, 365 pp.,
publ. 2018

This is a repertoire book by the German IM and trainer aimed (as the blurb says, and I concur) at players of 1500 or above, based on lines which, while not the absolute main lines, are reliable and have a sound pedigree. You're probably wondering what they are, so here are his suggestions versus the Big Four:

After 1 e4 e5 he recommends the Four Knights with 4 d4; against the Sicilian it's 3 Bb5; against the French he suggests the Exchange Variation with 4 Nf3 and an early(ish) c4 and against the Caro-Kann he goes for the Two Knights.

Perhaps you're groaning, or on the verge of complaining that these are hardly designed to deliver an advantage. Well, fair enough, but

before you fall to the ground frothing at the mouth, ask yourself what advantage White derives from any 'main' main line. The answer is not much, if Black has any idea what he's doing. As the author reminds us, chess is a draw if Black plays perfectly (which ain't gonna happen), thus his aim is to provide simple, yet still respectable, lines which the player of White can get to know better than his opponent, and consequently stand a better chance of reaping more points. Bear in mind also that these lines are largely bulletproof and have enjoyed (and, in some cases, still enjoy) the patronage of top players, from World Champions down – think 3 Bb5 v. the Sicilian – so it's about as far from a snake oil rep as you could get.

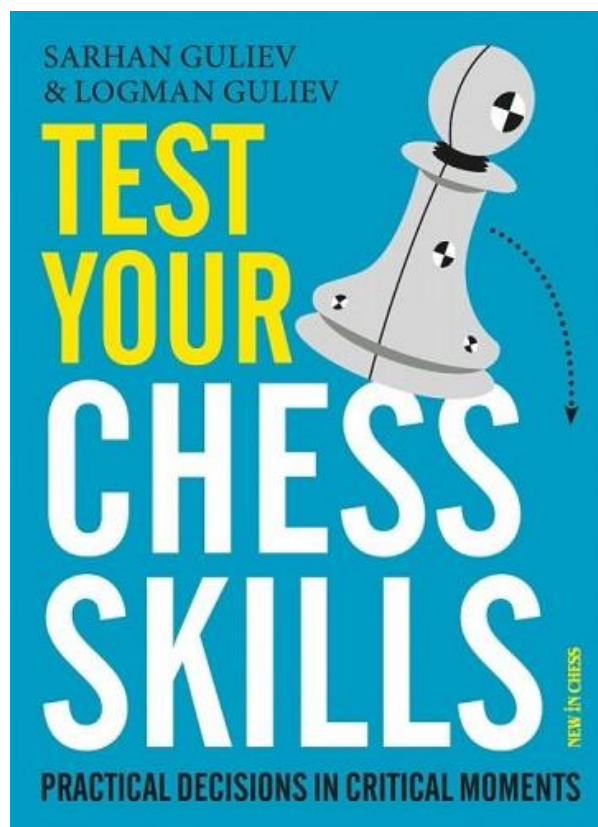
The material is presented, not via mindless columns of moves, but in manageable sections dealing with each line and numerous illustrative games, and, although it's a repertoire book, what struck me was the *relatively* small amount of analysis and variations. Don't get me wrong – there's plenty of meat on the bones – but it is the sheer amount of explanatory text which is impressive. Sielecki's experience as a coach and teacher comes across in ensuring that his readers understand the foundations of what they're playing.

His English is thoroughly fluent and idiomatic (better than that of some of the native English speakers I've reviewed). The occasional inconsistency/dodgy construction catches the eye, e.g. 'I recommend to play...'/ 'I recommend playing...', and 'resemblance with'/'resemblance to', but these are mere ticks on the hide of a rhino. (In case you think I'm in grumpy old man mode, I give a hearty thumbs-up to the subtle use of the correct modal verb in the likes of 'you may play', as opposed to 'you can play'.) The style is chatty yet not condescending, and, overall, the text is extremely smooth and a pleasure to read.

In short, this is an attractive piece of work which really should give anyone taking the time to become acquainted with the material a solid, dependable, low-maintenance repertoire.

Ian Marks,

January 2019



TEST YOUR CHESS SKILLS by Sarhan Guliev & Logman Guliev, New in Chess, 206 pp., publ. 2018

About forty years ago, the Vlastimils Hort and Jansa wrote a book called *The Best Move*. It wasn't your average puzzle book where you had to find, say, a mate or a sac or a combination, but a collection of 230 positions where you were invited to assess a position, choose moves and continuations and supply variations. It was timeless, and became a classic.

Test Your Chess Skills embraces the same idea, in fact the fraternal authors pay tribute to their great predecessor in their foreword. In the 224 positions (from their own practice, so nothing hackneyed) they ask you to decide whether a player is better, worse, equal, winning, hopeless etc.; to find the strongest move or assess the move played and so on, in other words, it's about decision making. By its nature it's probably more strategical than tactical, although the examples cover pretty much everything – openings, tactics, endgames, surprises, missed wins... It's not a solve-at-a-glance

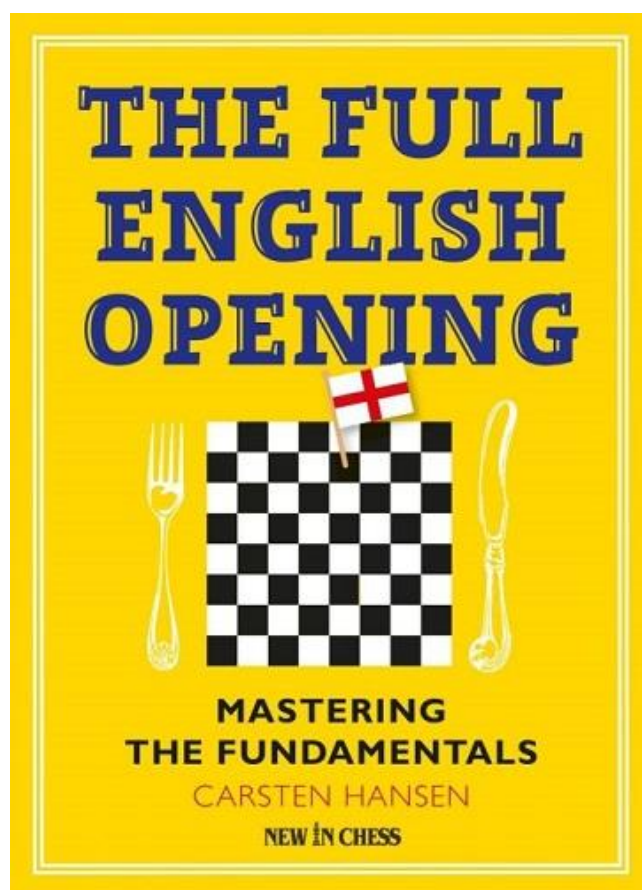
book; the point is to get you to sit down at your board and think as you would during a game.

The detailed solutions, which are written in a chatty, personal style, take up about two-thirds of the book and are sprinkled with little homilies, e.g. 'Routine thinking is a great enemy!' and 'Try to look at the position through the eyes of the opponent', stuff everyone should know, but often forgets in the heat of battle.

This enjoyable work isn't for beginners, but if you're a more experienced player, or want to push yourself, you'll surely get out of it what you put into it.

Ian Marks,

January 2019



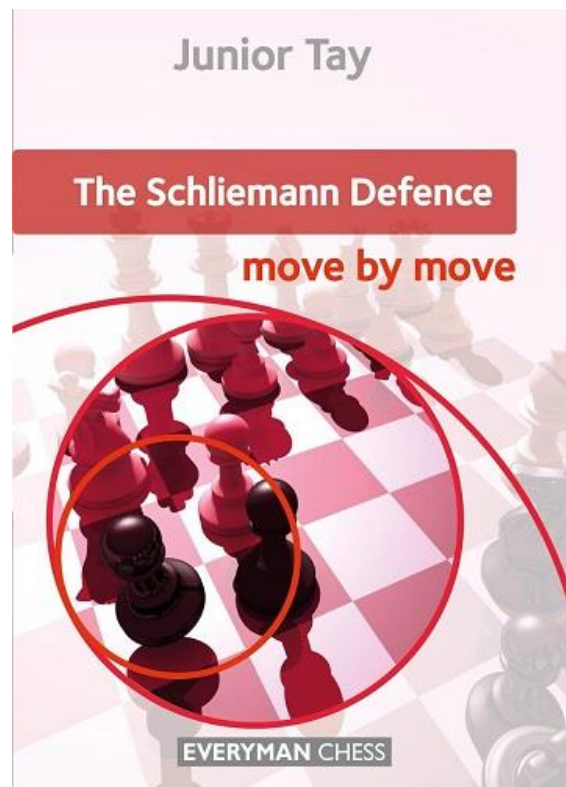
THE FULL ENGLISH OPENING by Carsten Hansen, New in Chess, 464 pp., publ. 2018, covers everything you could want to know about the English. It's not a repertoire book, but aims to impart the basics of pretty much everything that could arise after 1 c4. All major lines and structures are covered: 1 ... e5, the Symmetrical and all the assorted systems that Black might punt that don't fall into one of those two huge categories, e.g. Nimzo, Slav and Dutch-type set-ups. This is an important inclusion; all too often books on the English omit such lines as the author cops out with something like, 'Unfortunately the (insert set-up) lies beyond the scope of this volume'. Not so here!

Hansen has extensive experience of the English, and of writing about it, so what he has to say is obviously worth reading. I did permit myself a wry smile when I saw that it takes 464 pages to deal with the 'fundamentals'; it's moot whether that amount of coverage is necessary for club players looking for a grounding in the opening.

That apart, if you play, aspire to play, or are just interested in the English, then this attractive volume, well up to NiC's high standards, merits your attention.

Ian Marks

December 2018



Light years away from the English is what Anglophones call the Schliemann and the rest of the world the Jänisch Defence to the Ruy Lopez, a wild and woolly line which has never really attained complete (some might say any) respectability, but which continues to attract those of a more caveman persuasion. **THE SCHLIEMANN DEFENCE** by Junior Tay, Everyman Chess, 400 pp., publ. 2018, covers 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 f5 via forty-four illustrative games, exercises and odds and ends. While it might never be a regular guest at elite level, it has received some high-level patronage (amongst those on the black side we find Carlsen, Radjabov and a number of other GMs), and it's easy to imagine it as a points-scorer in the new brutal time controls of league chess. The positions are sharp and often irrational, but Tay does a pretty good job of talking the reader through what's going on, and how to deal with the myriad pitfalls along the way, either as setter or victim.

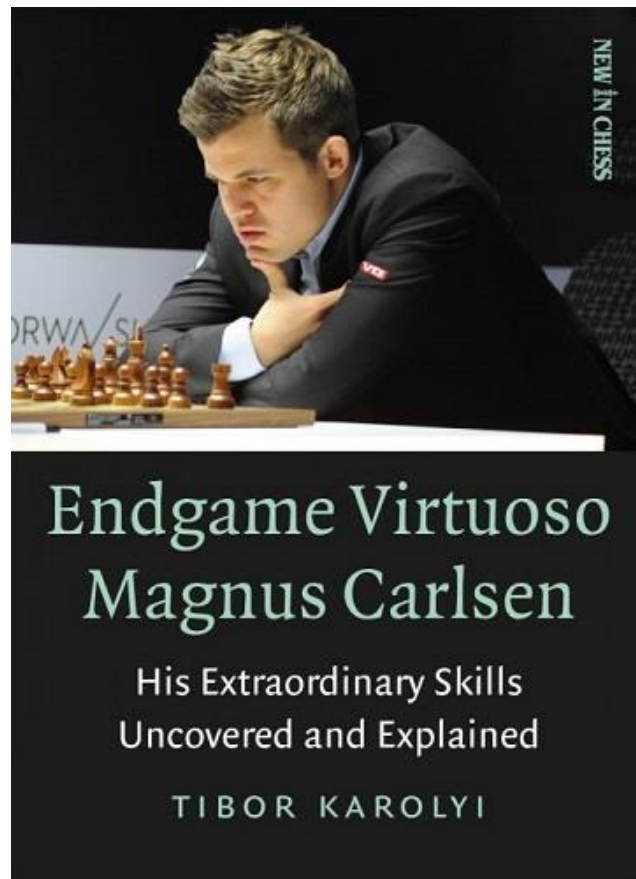
One of the problems of playing the Schliemann is how to deal with the forced draw after 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 f5 4 exf5 e4 5 Qe2 Qe7 6 Bxc6 dxc6 7 Nd4 Qe5 8 Nf3 Qe7 9 Nd4 Qe5 etc. If this was all

there was to it, then it would be useless as a winning attempt (cynics might argue it's useless as a winning attempt anyway), but Tay suggests a way of handling this; whether you agree with him, or like it, well, you'll have to buy the book and see for yourself.

If your tastes are tactical, or if you're looking for something different against 1 e4, then you could do worse than consider this well-produced volume. Even if you don't fall into one of those two categories, there's still a lot of fun chess between its covers which can be enjoyed without the risk of getting your fingers burnt.

Ian Marks

December 2018

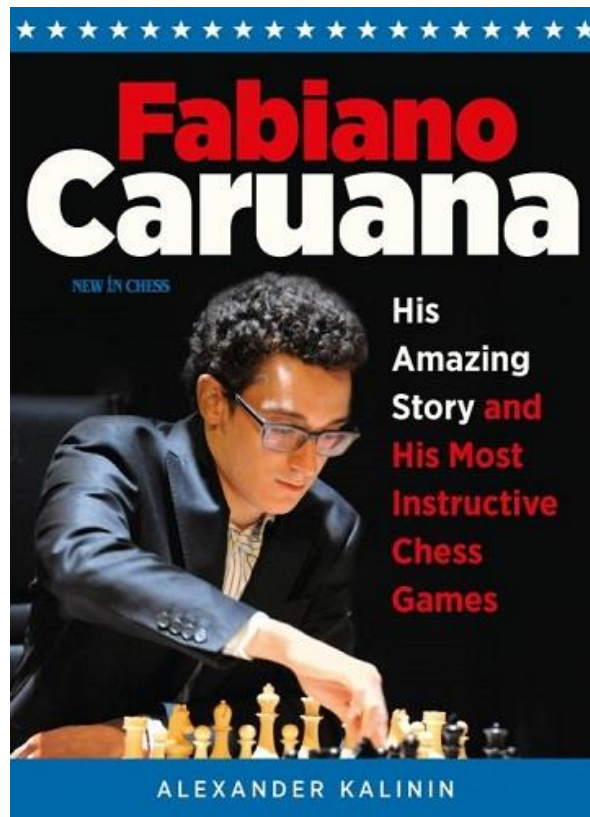


The approaching World Championship match has, not surprisingly, seen the publication this year of a number of books devoted to the contenders. Tibor Karolyi's **ENDGAME VIRTUOSO MAGNUS CARLSEN** (New in Chess, 267 pp.) puts ninety-one of the Champ's endings spanning the years 1999-2017 under the microscope in five broad chapters – junior years, young superstar, world-class player, world number one and World Champion. Karolyi makes the interesting point that Carlsen is probably the first World Champion who has never played an adjourned game. Think about that. All the previous greats – Capablanca, Rubinstein, Botvinnik et al. – had the luxury of being able to work out plans and strategies during an adjournment, often with the help of their seconds. Carlsen has to keep plugging away at the board, after several hours' play, which makes his endgame achievements all the more impressive. His endgame knowledge has come, not from hours of adjournment analysis, but from computers and tablebases. Whether you think that's a good or a bad thing hardly matters; time moves on.

Each ending is analysed with a combination of explanatory prose and variations, the former lucid and the latter detailed enough to show what's going on without losing the reader in a morass of analysis. The complexity of some examples occasionally demands greater analytical detail, but Karolyi keeps things under control, and each example finishes with a neat little summary of what happened. In many examples Carlsen's opponents miss key moves, lines or ideas and eventually go under, but this merely underlines how difficult it is, even for top players, to resist in the face of determination and supreme confidence. In fact you could argue that keeping the other guy at the board for as long as it takes is simply another aspect of Magnus's chess-is-a-game philosophy.

Amongst the many great examples, no. 49 sticks in my mind. Kramnik must be wondering how Carlsen managed to wriggle out with a draw a B for P down. (And although it's not a direct comparison, it made me wonder if Magnus would have been able to draw the famous Spassky-Fischer first match game where Bobby played the notorious ...Bxh2.)

This is a thoroughly enjoyable book, well produced with crystal clear double-column format, alphabetical index of players and classification of themes. The only 'thing' about the index is that it's what it says – a list of players, not necessarily games players. This is helpful, obviously, if you're looking up a player in general, but doesn't make it easy to find a specific game. If the names of players in the actual examples had been highlighted or italicised, say, that would have been a big help.

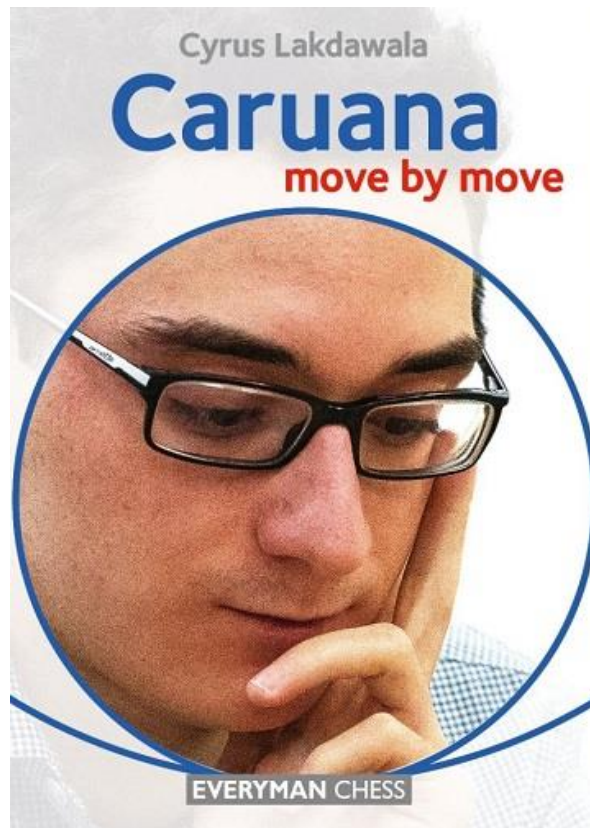


From the keyboard of Russian trainer Alexander Kalinin comes **FABIANO CARUANA** (New in Chess, 207 pp.), a chess biography of photos, interviews, background material (although I think he got the date of birth wrong) and sixty-two annotated games. The first part is devoted to Caruana's rise to the top and contains twenty-five games; the second part is intended as a conscious instructional tool, with the remaining games grouped in chapters devoted to, for example, attacking the king, centralisation, play on two flanks, defence and counterattack and queen sacs. Caruana's style is more 'scientific' (for want of a better word) than Carlsen's, and the games generally feature contemporary mainstream theory of the kind and level one would expect of a true chess workaholic. What comes across is how often Caruana manages to make it look easy, even against the strongest opposition. Of course it isn't, but the ability to make it seem so is the mark of all truly great players. The games feature a bit of everything – all-out attacks, positional build-ups, complicated battles and simplified positions. In other words Caruana is at home

in every type of position, as he admits in one of the interview passages: *"I'm a good fighter. It gives me pleasure to play different positions, both tactical and strategic...I have nothing against the endgame."*

It's interesting to conjecture how far Caruana would have developed without the extensive support he received in his formative years. From early on his parents devoted themselves to the cause, bringing him to Europe and relocating from country to country to foster his development. He had a sponsor by his early teens and the trainers he worked with as a youngster would make a respectable Olympiad team: Sher, Zlotnik, Chernin, Razuvaev and Beliavsky. (Chuchelov and Kasimdzhanov got on board in later years.) Is it possible to make, say 2750+, without such support nowadays?

If you're interested in what makes the challenger tick, this is a good place to look. Overall production is of the same high standard as the Karolyi book above, and the translation by Steve Giddins reads very smoothly, but the index is the same as in the Karolyi book, names and not game players. Call me old-fashioned, but surely a games collection should have, well, a games index? That apart, well worth a look.



Another Caruana offering is the latest from Cyrus Lakdawala, **CARUANA MOVE BY MOVE** (Everyman, 365 pp.), a collection of fifty-one games and eleven endings annotated in the author's inimitable style. Talking of which, he seems to have toned down the verbosity in this one, although the trademark weird metaphors, similes and imagery are still there. (*'It almost feels as if Topalov isn't governed by the laws of a capitalistic society, money being completely meaningless to him'* and – a stoater, this one! – *'...the early part of the game is the equivalent of watching a Western movie where there are no horses, guns or villains, and the first hour of the movie involves the townsfolk chatting amiably in the General Store. Then, in the second half, it gets exciting when the villains ride into town, packing guns and ammo and looking for trouble.'* Even if that chunk was relevant, it could have been better edited. Just sayin', like.) Overall, though, his writing is leaner and the better for it.

Something I got thinking about is nicknames. Nicknames (or even the use of first names) tell you something about a person's

popularity. Everyone knows who 'Vishy', 'Misha', and 'Bobby' are. (And it tells you something about the popular view of Botvinnik that he was 'The Patriarch', and not, for example, 'Big Mike'.) Anyway, Caruana seems to be known by all and sundry as 'Fabi', but that doesn't stop Lakdawala (who christened Ulf Andersson 'Ulfie') calling him 'Caru'. Why not go with the flow!?

This and Kalinin's book are arranged in broadly the same way. Kalinin's Part II consists of eight theme-based chapters, Lakdawala divvies his material up into six. Themes common to both are attacking/attacking the king, defence and counterattack and the endgame/Berlin endgame. His material covers games up to this year, presented in the usual move-by-move format with variations, lots of verbal explanations and questions at various stages to get the reader thinking (if s/he has the willpower not to glance further down the page!), all good teaching technique. One thing I liked about the questions was that Lakdawala is ready to give the reader little morale-boosters in case a particular question is beyond her/him (*'Don't worry if you don't get it, since if you do, you are probably a 2800-rated player'*). It can be all too easy for a student (or, in this case, reader) to get discouraged if s/he just doesn't 'see' it.

All in all, a nice production that you could happily work your way through or dip into just for the sheer enjoyment of it.

Ian Marks

November 2018



CHESS LESSONS by Mark Dvoretsky, Russell Enterprises, 274 pp.,
publ. 2018

Mark Dvoretsky wrote serious books for serious players, and this posthumous work is no exception. Chess Lessons is a collection of games, most deeply annotated, covering a wide range of topics, of which a random selection: Passivity in the Opening, Overestimating Your Position, Intuition and Calculation, Unobvious Candidate Moves and Cold-blooded Defense (sic; it's an American publication). The games have built-in highlighted key moments and questions designed to encourage reader participation and get you thinking about what's going on. This inevitably leads to variations galore, but, as the author says in his foreword, *'every statement in the text should be proven; verbal evaluations alone are insufficient'*. So it is clearly a book that will require some serious commitment, one for stronger players who can better appreciate what is on offer. Having said that,

the style is relatively relaxed; it's easy to imagine Mark delivering this material in one of his training sessions.

The author quotes from many other writers, but does so in manageable chunks, creating a two-way commentary on their work. Portisch-Timman, p.58 ff., and Hillarp-Persson-Grooten, p.147 ff., are good examples. On the other hand, he doesn't flinch at pointing out what he perceives as shortcomings, e.g. Gulko gets his knuckles rapped for being '*not really careful while checking his variations with the help of computer (sic)*', which thus '*contain more than a few omissions and direct tactical errors*', while Timman's '*conclusions seemed overoptimistic – and at times even obviously erroneous*'. Some might see this as big-headedness; I see it as an objective way of setting the scene for analysis and dissection of their work.

While the material gets a healthy thumbs-up, it has to be said that the production doesn't do it justice. The double-column format is definitely a plus (albeit the columns aren't uniformly formatted throughout) but the text is dense and the long algebraic used for the game moves looks clumsy, especially since it's printed in linear rather than columnar style. (Inserting a space before and after the lines of text moves would have created some daylight.) Overall, the book could simply have benefited from more attention. While the translation is OK, there are numerous occasions where words, phrasing, punctuation and use of verb tenses are all on the iffy side, plus several instances of random use of lower/upper case. The biggest blooper, though, is the lack of a games index. How can a games collection not have a games list!? I decided to count how many there were and made it forty-eight games and fragments, but my eyes could have been deceived in the textual jungle. Nor, in a book where middlegame themes abound, is there any index of those either. How any non-fiction book can be published without an index or indices is beyond me.

Creating a perfect chess book is nigh-well impossible, but there are things in here that could and should have been spotted before the MS got to the printer. Shame.

Blemishes aside, *Chess Lessons* contains much that a more experienced player could beneficially spend a lot of quality time on.

Ian Marks

October 2018



THE MAGIC OF CHESS TACTICS 2, Intuition, Imagination & Precision by Claus Dieter Meyer & Karsten Müller, Russell Enterprises, 192 pp., publ. 2017

This isn't a find-the-solution puzzle book. It's a look at the role of tactics and tactical operations in five broad areas – (i) attacking with queen and knight, (ii) with knights, (iii) with bishops of opposite colours, (iv) pins and (v) exchanges and transformations, plus a

chapter entitled *Learn from the World Champions* (the ones in question being Carlsen, Kasparov and Anand). Each topic is investigated in depth with numerous examples, commentary and exercises. The material is well thought out and well covered, chapter six in particular, a consideration of a rather neglected topic, exchanges and transformations.

The commentaries are accompanied by lots of variations – no doubt the material was checked by computer – which, despite the otherwise pleasant two-column format, are unattractive to the eye. Flicking through the book at random, pp. 12-13, 32, 81 and 146-7 are good (?) examples of dense analytical foliage, complete with the dreaded (b12231)-type variations, and they are not the only ones. I'm not sure how this could have been addressed, but it sure is visually daunting.

The editing is also a bit iffy (no editorial credit is cited, but you have to assume someone did it). Besides stray (and missing!) words and brackets, there's a fair amount of avoidable sloppiness. A few examples:

'White could take his pick' (p. 29, twice [!]) White is Valentina Gunina.

'...the Caro/Kann [sic]...Exchange Variation' (p.67) It was a Panov.

'Attempts of playing on the kingside...' (p.94)

'The world champion has past the point of no return.' (p.102)

There are also nuances in the translation, including remnants of German sentence structure, that should have been nailed, e.g.

'Now, Black's first rank becomes tenuous as well.' (p. 28)

'This solution is hardly satisfying' (p.62).

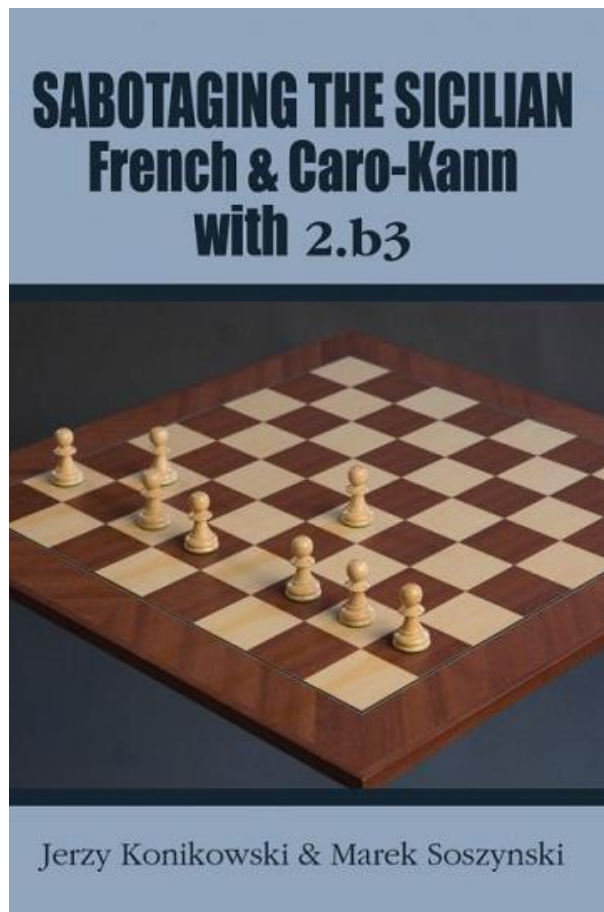
Without having seen the original German, I'm willing to bet it should be 'weak', not 'tenuous', and 'satisfactory', not 'satisfying'. In any case, 'tenuous' and 'satisfying' just don't fit there.

You get the idea.

To sum up: interesting material generally well covered that readers could no doubt benefit from, but let down by tea-break editing and presentation.

Ian Marks

October 2018



SABOTAGING THE SICILIAN, FRENCH & CARO-KANN WITH 2.b3 by Jerzy Konikowski & Marek Soszynski, Russell Enterprises, 144 pp., publ. 2018

What it says on the tin, a complete off-beat repertoire against the three most common semi-open defences. The Sicilian gets sixty-three pages, the French thirty-seven and the Caro-Kann thirty-two. There's even a page-and-a-half afterthought on 2. b3 v. the Scandinavian. Each section covers all the likely black responses with analysis and a selection of illustrative games (twenty for the Sicilian

and five each for the French and Caro-Kann). A surprising number of big names have given 2. b3 an occasional punt, e.g. Carlsen, Kramnik, Morozevich and McShane, and the fact that these guys don't play junk, and that 2. b3 v. the French was one of Réti's brainchildren, suggests that 2. b3 should be worth a look. It's by no means a dense theoretical work, but provides enough ammunition (backed by an extensive bibliography) for anyone looking for a change from the main lines, or just for something to confuse their opponent in the next club or league game.

Production seems a bit tighter than in the tactics book above, but a couple of fairly obvious bloopers have got through: no space between 'French' and the ampersand on the cover, and in the Scandinavian afterthought, Black's second move appears as 2 ... exd5. Oops!

And one thing I found really amusing: after 1 e4 d5 2 b3?!, the authors say, *'Certain other moves will merge into lines we have already seen, which Black should avoid.'*

(a) 2 ... c6 see Section 3.

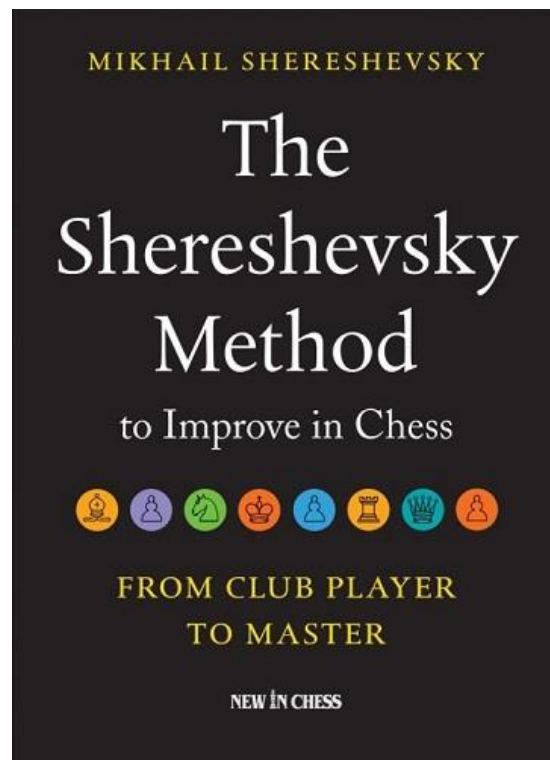
(b) 2... c5 see Chapter 6.

(c) 2... e6 see Section 2.'

Think about this. Logically, given that it's the same positions which arise, they're saying that Black should avoid 2... d5 after 1 e4 e6 2 b3 or 1 e4 c6 2 b3, and shouldn't entertain one of the Sicilian chapters. I'm sure that's not what they mean, but it gave me a chuckle as I closed the book.

Ian Marks

October 2018



THE SHERESHEVSKY METHOD TO IMPROVE IN CHESS by Mikhail Shereshevsky, New in Chess, 352 pp., publ. 2018

I've already had a look at this one (henceforth referred to as TSM), but I'd like to elaborate on some of the points I made in my original review, so let me just clamber up to my candlelit garret, dip quill in ink, and start scratching.

TSM is different from other books I've reviewed in that it contains a lot of previously published material. As I said in the first review, there's nothing inherently wrong with that. Knowledge is not static; writers frequently revisit and update their work. The back cover blurb makes it absolutely clear what to expect: *'two instructional classics condensed into one practical volume', 'a totally reworked compendium of his acclaimed classics Endgame Strategy and The Soviet Chess Conveyor, with many new examples, exercises and discussions of various training methods'*. Thus whether you come at it wondering what all the fuss was about the original books, or if you want to see what Shereshevsky has to say that's new, you should find something of interest between the covers. Balance-wise I said in the

first review that '200-odd pages' featured material based on the original two books. This was a wee bit on the high side (although not by much); based on the original two texts it's 187, still over half of the new publication. If you feel I exaggerated wildly and misled you, I offer my humble and profuse apologies.

In part I Shereshevsky looks back at *The Soviet Chess Conveyor*, with two excellent chapters on constructing an opening repertoire and studying the classics. The former is full of wisdom, and contains much that club players could learn from. The latter is an insightful essay on the importance of studying the games of great players of the past, the sort of thing that should be compulsory reading for juniors who have never heard of Tony Miles, or 2600s who couldn't tell you the year of the Fischer-Spassky match.

Part II is a condensed version of his highly-acclaimed *Endgame Strategy* (ES). I decided to use it to check the old/new contents balance, simply because there were more chapters to look at.

ES consists of an introduction and thirteen chapters; after a new two-page preface, TSM condenses this to the introduction and seven chapters. Curiously, the missing chapters are the last six of ES sequentially; there's no prima facie reason why this should be so, but it is. I then looked at three random chapters common to both books to check for changes and updates. In ES, 'Centralization of the king' consists of five exemplar games, one of which appears in TSM along with one new game and three exercises. In ES, 'Do not hurry' consists of nine games, five of which appear in TSM, augmented by five new examples. Finally, ES's 'The principle of two weaknesses' consists of ten games, four of which appear in TSM; there are no new games, but a study has been added. So the balance is a bit uneven, but, as Shereshevsky explains, ES was devoted to knowing and understanding. This approach has been retained in TSM; reading what Shereshevsky has to say will get you thinking more about the endgame and hopefully benefit your play.

The new part is part III, 'From the 20th century to the 21st', ten chapters covering 142 pages on topics such as, inter alia, the status of chess players and trainers, chess books, calculation and intuition and logic. There is a lot of good stuff here. For example chapter 10 is an eye-opening discussion on chess life in the old Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and Russia today which I thoroughly enjoyed. (And it provides the answer to what would be a great trivia question: which World Champion never won a world championship match?), while if you've ever wondered why some players are better than others, chapter 17 morphs into a discussion on the nature of genius in chess.

However, what is striking about this part are the extensive quotes from other chess writers such as Tukmakov, Beim, Nunn, Dorfman and Dvoretsky. That's not an issue per se. Authors in every field constantly reference their peers and predecessors; what matters is how it's done. For example, chapter 11, a look at the state of chess literature, draws heavily on Beim's *How to Calculate Chess Tactics*, while chapter 12 quotes the game Nunn-Pribyl more or less verbatim from Nunn's *Secrets of Practical Play* (the origin of the abbreviation DAUT: Don't Analyse Unnecessary Tactics). Shereshevsky does so 'to show how difficult it is to use DAUT in a practical game', but, bar some additional comments and analysis by Sakaev, the amount of discussion is moot. This chapter also includes extensive quotes from Beim.

Then we come to chapter 13, which, as I pointed out in the original review, is essentially the 'Books on offbeat openings' section of Nunn's *Secrets of Practical Play*. The chapter in TSM is seven and a bit pages long, of which six (a 'rather large passage' – Shereshevsky), give or take a few paragraphs, are straight outta Nunn. There's little, if any, discussion, as Shereshevsky himself lets slip: 'I quote this long enough excerpt from John Nunn's book entirely because...he

illustrates... and *'he demonstrates...'*. He. Nunn. Not Shereshevsky. What's chapter 13 called? 'Laziness'.

Chapters 14 and 15 again draw heavily on Beim and Nunn, while in chapter 16, Shereshevsky refers at length to the work of Dorfman. His aim, clearly, is to discuss the ideas and thoughts of these writers, but by giving them so much column space, he limits input of his own, and so lively discussion rarely (or barely) takes off.

It could be that you don't see writer X quoting large chunks of writer Y as a problem, but I'd imagine that someone reading a book by Shereshevsky is expecting Shereshevsky's take on things, not someone else's. Selection of key passages and source references is basic stuff. If Shereshevsky had encountered some of my old university tutors, and quoted at such length without bibliography, footnotes or acknowledgements (titles are mentioned only when they appear in the text), his work would have had a red pen taken through it and been literally thrown back at him. Believe me, I know whereof I speak.

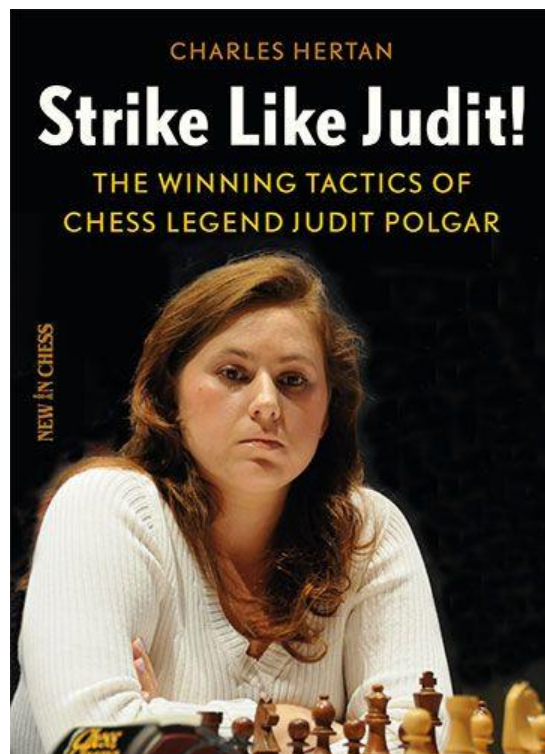
Given the above, I closed the original review by wondering if Shereshevsky *'sought permission – or is litigation pending? Curious readers want to know!'*. This was meant rhetorically (and humorously, check the exclam), but it's a legitimate point to ponder. Personally I couldn't give a pig's burp whether he did or not, but NiC have since told me that they did indeed seek permission from other publishers to use their material, so all is well.

TSM is by no means all gloom and doom. Each part offers excellent examples of a renowned trainer's work, and much enjoyment and instruction. Shereshevsky writes in a clear and accessible style, and his prose is often quite gripping (a word not usually associated with chess books). The book is well-produced with easy-on-the-eye double column format, clear text and diagrams and a handy

alphabetical player index. Well worth a look, whether you already have ES or *The Soviet Chess Conveyor* or not.

Ian Marks

September 2018



STRIKE LIKE JUDIT! By Charles Hertan, New in Chess, 255 pp., publ. 2018

Lest you are wondering who 'Judit' is, the sub-title reveals all: *The Winning Tactics of Chess Legend Judit Polgar*. Strongest woman player of all time, and likely to remain so until Hou Yifan gets anywhere near the world top ten.

Judit has been retired for four years now, but she bequeathed to the chess world a legacy of brilliant attacking games, on which Hertan has based his latest book.

There are 110 examples divided into six thematic chapters dealing with chessboard geometry, the Sicilian, calculation, endgames, shots and a selection of her very best. The examples are presented with lots of diagrams and words, facilitating reading the book without a board, although it would do no harm to set up the pieces and enjoy some great chess in the format in which it was played. Polgar was an attacking player par excellence, and many of the examples feature play of ruthless, brutal efficiency. Hertan does a

fine job of peeling away the layers of the complexity onion and homing in on the relevant points. The chapter on the Sicilian in itself provides a mini-arsenal of ideas which the reader could file away for dealing with 1... c5. Likewise, chapter 5, Shots!, is another collection of awareness-raising tactical ideas for dispatching unsuspecting opponents. The moral of this one could well be *seek and ye shall find*.

Something which struck me, in fact it's a thread running throughout the book, was Polgar's sheer fearlessness; she was clearly no respecter of reputations. Of course, all strong players are fearless, but, like her spiritual predecessor Tal, Polgar was adept at handling tension and boldly going where others might hesitate to tread. In Herten's words, she would habitually walk the tightrope. Her play was not perfect, but by golly it got results. It's an amorphous subject, but something worth pondering as you look at the examples.

Bloodlust is all good and well, but nobody hacks their way to world no. 8. All-round skill of a higher order is required, and Judit knew when to swap sledgehammer for scalpel, as the chapter on endgames testifies. There are still plenty of little tactical twists and turns in the simplified positions, but what comes through are her calculating skills and a clarity of play which the author compares to that of Fischer.

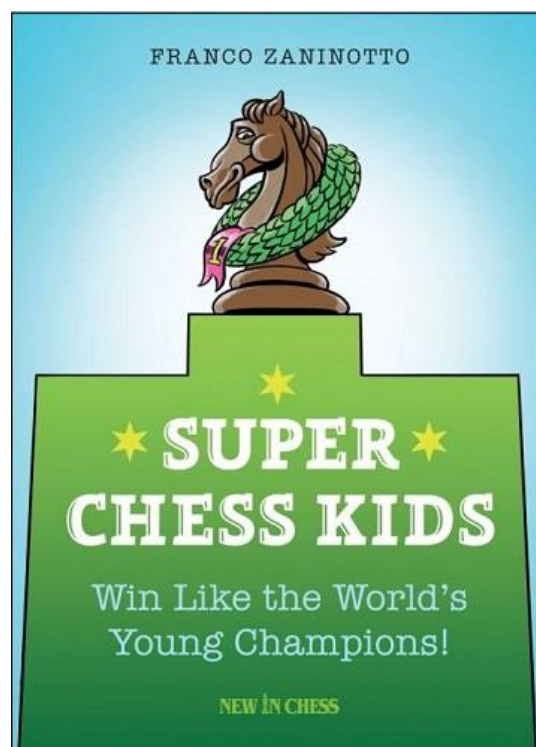
The list of Polgar's victims reads like a who's who of modern chess: amongst those put to the sword are Anand, Ivanchuk, Karjakin, Kasparov, Shirov, Short and Topalov. Of the older guard, Korchnoi and Spassky suffer in here. Amongst this list of superstars, there's also a bruising demolition of a Scottish player, whose blushes I will spare, but I don't suppose he lost many rating points that day.

Overall a very enjoyable and user-friendly book about a great player. You could use it as a training manual, doing the old cover-

the-page-and-figure-out-the-next-move thing, or you could simply work your way through it and enjoy some fantastic chess. Either way something is bound stick for use in your own games. Coaches would also find plenty of excellent material between the covers. And, at the risk of being accused of playing the sexist card, I'd suggest it would be of special interest to female players. Judit, with her sisters, shattered the glass gender ceiling in chess. There can be no better model or inspiration for any girl starting out in the game.

Ian Marks

September 2018



SUPER CHESS KIDS by Franco Zaninotto, 139 pp., publ. New in Chess 2018.

This is a nice little book. The author, an Italian FM and trainer, says that his aim is '*to improve your understanding of the game and your practical skills*' (which I guess is the aim of every chess coach). He sets out to do this by divvying his material into two sections,

Strategy and Tactics, each of five roughly equal chapters. Leaving aside the tests and solutions (one of each in each section), the topics covered are Weaknesses, Piece Play and Evaluating the position and planning (under Strategy), and Calculation, Attack and Defence under Tactics. Each chapter is around ten pages long, so there's obviously a limit as to how deep he can go. Having said that, a tight page allocation forces the writer to home in on the essentials; there's no room for waffle.

In the chapter on Calculation, for example, the author concentrates on only five positions, in each of which the reader has to identify sensible candidate moves and pick the strongest. The play is then thoroughly dissected – with plenty of words – and key points summarised in black boxes. This is an effective way of getting a point across, and I believe the author does it well. Other chapters follow a similar pattern. It's worth mentioning that the author doesn't just home in on brilliant play, but also draws attention to players' mistakes, and how we can learn from them. As the saying goes, it's good to learn from your mistakes, but even better to learn from other people's.

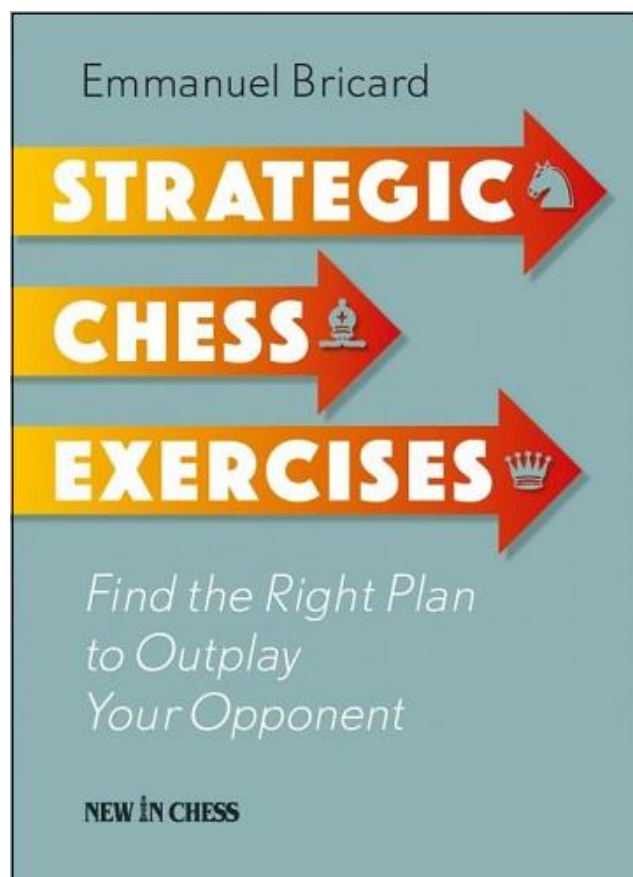
The Tests and Solutions which I mentioned earlier constitute a large chunk of the book. There are forty strategical test positions and fifty tactical ones. The detailed solutions take up around twenty pages for each section. It may be a slight book, but it is not lacking in focus or content!

Will reading it make you, as the subtitle says *Win Like the World's Young Champions!*? Probably not, for a couple of reasons: (1) the world's top juniors are coached to within an inch of their precocious young lives, and you're not, and (2) if you're coming at the book as an adult, these kids have probably got thirty years on you. But, hey, who knows?

Overall a very nice book, well produced, which will give enthusiastic youngsters a shove in the right direction and an insight into what is needed to develop their talents to the max, while those of us longer in the tooth can enjoy the play of the new generation and perhaps reflect on what might have been.

Ian Marks

August 2018



STRATEGIC CHESS EXERCISES by Emmanuel Bricard, New in Chess, 221 pp., publ. 2018

Compared to tactics, strategy is massively underrepresented in the puzzle book field. I've never quite understood why. Since it's easier to spot a shot or mate than it is to formulate a plan or assess a position (how often have you sat there wondering what to do next?), you'd think that would be reason enough for more strategy puzzle books, not fewer.

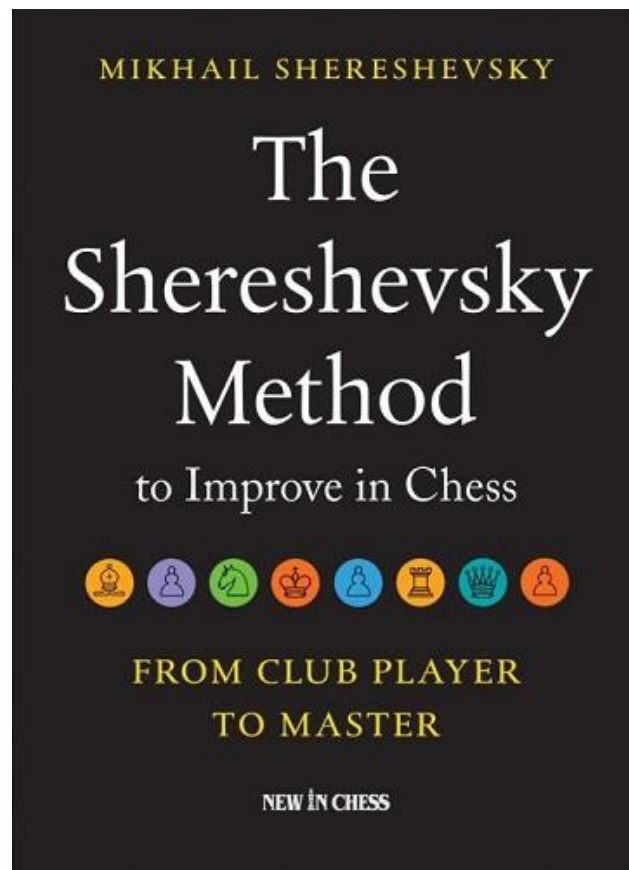
French GM Emmanuel Bricard addresses the issue with this work. In two broad sections (middlegame and endgame) he provides ninety exercises of varying difficulty covering planning, assessments, move selection, finding the win, handling advantages etc. etc., featuring themes such as pawn majorities, N v B, piece exchanges, suppressing counterplay and weaknesses, in other words the nuts

and bolts of strategic play.

If ninety examples seems a small number (some tactics books manage a thousand), bear in mind that a lot more explanation is required, and the solutions take up about 87% of the book. They are detailed, often running to three pages per exercise, and contain lots of words to ensure that the author gets the point across. I was impressed by the clarity of his explanations and the way in which he anticipates potential questions; his aim is clearly to help his readers improve. Some writers (or teachers!) have difficulty suppressing their egos; not so here. The material is drawn from his teaching experience, so he should know where problems of perception lie. Strategic Chess Exercises won't provide the immediate buzz some players get when they pick up a new openings book, but quality time spent with it is likely to be far more beneficial in the long run. As I've said in other reviews though, the players who would benefit most from it are those who probably wouldn't even think of looking at it in the first place, and therein lies the pity – and their loss. Good book, well put together. Good material well explained. Well worth a look.

Ian Marks

July 2018



THE SHERESHEVSKY METHOD TO IMPROVE IN CHESS by Mikhail Shereshevsky, New in Chess, 352 pp., publ. 2018

Shereshevsky is the author of two highly-acclaimed books, *The Soviet Chess Conveyor* and *Endgame Strategy*, so a new work from him should be a major chess publishing event. The question is: how new is new? In the introduction Shereshevsky says, '*In the first part of this new (sic) book, I present an extract from The Soviet Chess Conveyor...*', and '*The second part of this book is a concentrated version of Endgame Strategy...*', so clearly a lot of the new stuff has gone before, albeit it's presented here in a revised and updated version. There's no harm in that – books might be published in one country and not in another, and knowledge doesn't stand still – but 200-odd pages, more than half the book, seem a lot for a 'new' book.

It gets curiouser. Iosif Dorfman's written work gets a lot of references/quotations, and Shereshevsky is a big John Nunn fan, so big, in fact, that he lifts large chunks of Nunn's *Secrets of Practical*

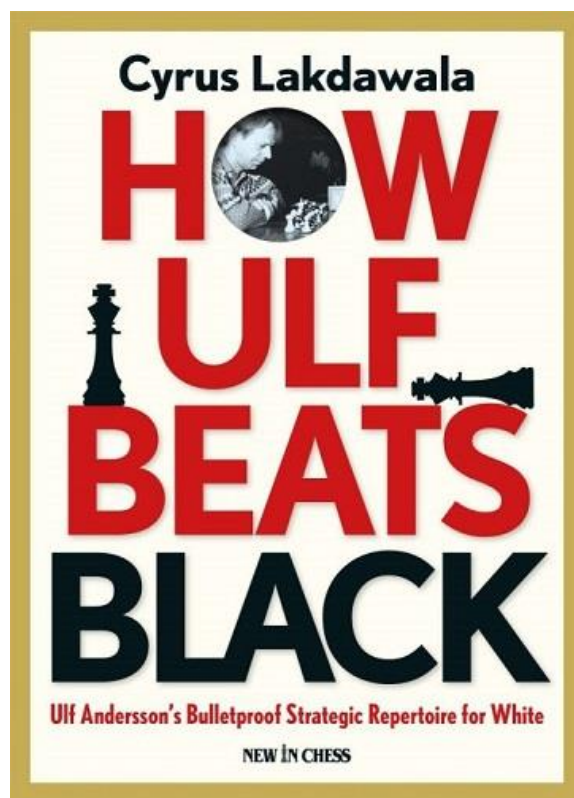
Play straight into his own book. Nunn's chapters on DAUT, Laziness and his famous bust of a Latvian Gambit line all appear in generous quantities, both textual and analytical (albeit enhanced and in a translation slightly different as a result of having come back through Russian). Shereshevsky justifies his generous Nunn selections and makes no bones about the Latvian Gambit section: *'The next rather large passage from Nunn's book is one I did not hesitate to include...in full'*. Citing your own work is one thing; lifting material (and lots of it) from someone else's is another.

And, in the conclusion, Shereshevsky gives *'a few quotations'* as he effervesces about Gelfand's *Positional Decision Making in Chess*. The 'few quotations' colonise a rather excessive page and a half. (Curiously, the Russian publishers get the pat on the head for this one, not Quality Chess.)

You get the idea. This 'new' book is a curious compendium over which there surely hang ethical and potential legal questions. It contains an awful lot of previous material plus large extracts lifted from other writers. You have to assume that Shereshevsky sought permission – or is litigation pending? Curious readers want to know!

Ian Marks

July 2018



HOW ULF BEATS BLACK by Cyrus Lakdawala, New in Chess, 287 pp., publ. 2018

This is the eighth book by Lakdawala which I've reviewed, and I'm aware that it's becoming more difficult to say something original with each title, so apologies if anything I write here echoes what has gone before.

How Ulf Beats Black is a collection of Ulf Andersson's games with White, with a sprinkling of games by other players, primarily the author. As befits one of the world elite of the '70s and '80s, it goes without saying that the games are of high quality, and the opposition includes most of the big names of the day.

Lakdawala presents model games to show how Andersson tackled (and still tackles!) the King's Indian, Grünfeld, Queen's Indian, Hedgehog and the Pirc/Modern/Accelerated Dragon, and his handling of the Catalan, Tarrasch Dutch, Slav and English. He generally reached his favoured systems via 1 Nf3, which explains,

for example, why there are no Nimzos in there. Of fireworks there are few; these games represent high class patient, controlled positional play. Steady build-ups rather than hefty sacs are the order of the day. However, like all great technicians, Andersson knew how to wield a knuckleduster if the occasion warranted it, as not a few of his opponents found out.

The annotations – moves and words – go deeply enough to show what's going on, but not so deeply as to lose the thread (or bore the reader). Lakdawala's talent is in cutting to the nub of a position and providing clear, succinct elucidations, for example

- *'Endgame principle: the pawn-up side should keep knights on the board, since pure rook endings tend to be harder to convert.'*
- *'14... Be5! This is a good defensive idea. Black wants to transfer his bishop to the other wing to help defend his queenside.'*
- *'The following variations demonstrate Black's helplessness'* followed by two short, apposite variations.

Comments like these abound. The problem, as ever in a Lakdawala text, is that they are all too often mired in chunks of the irrelevant verbiage which has, alas, become something of the author's trademark. I've discussed this at length in previous reviews of his work, so I won't labour the point. Just a quick example. Tell me what contribution something like this makes to a chess text:

- *'A portion of them [CL's students] fail to appreciate his laid back style and accuse Ulf's opening choices as a false play-act of a kind of ostentatious humility, similar to Mao Zedong wearing factory worker/peasant's garb, despite living in a palace, frolicking with multiple teen mistresses one quarter of his age and dining on lobster chow mein, while the rest of the nation was starving.'*

It's not even good writing.

Humorously, Lakdawala (unwittingly?) acknowledges his insatiable need to ramble: *'Black's last move appears to be one of those 'Hurry-up-my-time-is-valuable' gestures which I get from my doctors, when I*

launch into a 15-minute story, which is completely off topic from my ailment.' Omit the last three words and you could be discussing his books.

I've often wondered if I was the only person who noticed this sort of thing, but when the subject of Lakdawala's books comes up when talking to other players, the general feeling is *Why does he spoil his books with all that stuff?* Author and editor really need to team up and address the issue, although strangely, this book doesn't seem to have had an editor! (And while they're at it, do something about the neologisms. Anderssonite sounds like a make of suitcase; Ulfieite at best looks weird and you really don't want to know what I think about Ulfieization.)

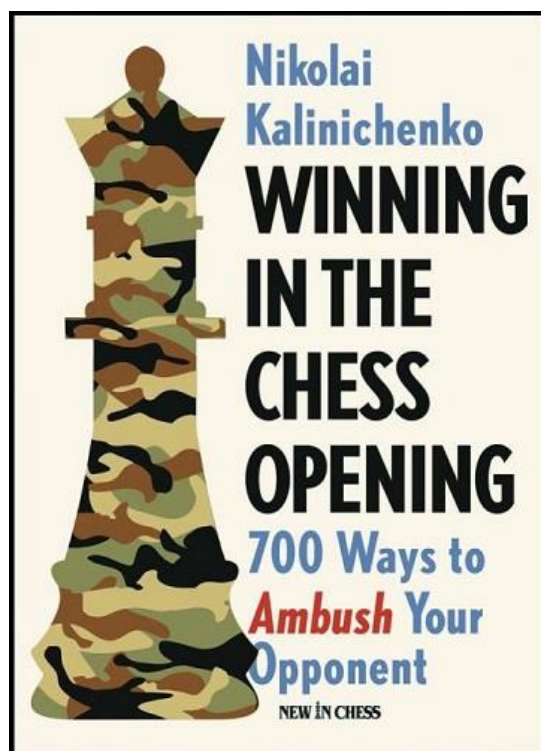
One specific grain of sand under the fingernail about this one was the author's insistence – from the title onwards – on the use of his hero's first name. He tells us that he has played UA thirty-nine times online, so maybe they're big mates and Ulf was cool about the use of his first name, but even so, I can't help but think that the traditional use of the surname would have lent the book a little more gravitas, for want of a better word.

To sum up: if you enjoy steady positional play, you'll enjoy the book. If you don't, you'll probably learn something! And if you're new to the game and aren't familiar with Andersson's unique style (or don't know who he was), it'll be an eye-opener. I'd love to see a similar collection with his black rep.

Ian Marks

June 2018

P.S. Kudos to NiC for the sensible, easy-to-use alphabetical list of players!



WINNING IN THE CHESS OPENING by Nikolay Kalinichenko, New in Chess, 457 pp., publ. 2018

When I was a kid one of my favourite chess books was called something like 101 Opening Traps. I loved it. I had it on almost permanent loan from the library. But it probably did little for my chess. It planted in my head the idea that I would be able to win all my games in about ten moves and that my opponents would all be stupid and overlook stuff. Chess was easy.

Of course none of this happened. With the naïveté of a child I had missed the point. It wasn't about tossing a banana skin in front of your opponent and hoping he'd come a cropper; it was about recognising tactical patterns and positions which you could then use in your own games if the opportunity arose.

Which is what this one is all about. The 753 miniatures (most under twenty moves) cover a whole range of tactical motifs and ideas which catch players of all strengths (the cast ranges from amateurs to World Champions) out all the time – snap mates, pawn grabbing,

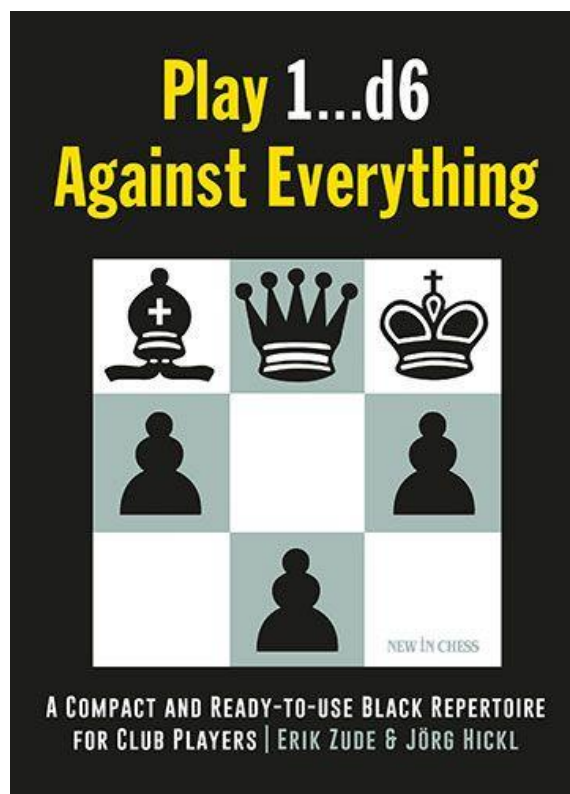
loose pieces, forks, queens getting trapped – the list is endless. Some of the mistakes are crass; some are plausible moves of the what-could-possibly-be-wrong-with-that? variety, but are punished no less severely. Assimilate these often quite striking examples and you'll be better placed to recognise such possibilities should the chance arise. The notes are a mixture of short, relevant variations and helpful prose.

The book is divided into five large chapters according to type of opening, then sections within each chapter based on specific openings, so you can easily start with the openings that interest you.

Or you can just dip into it for fun and hope the next victim won't be you.

Ian Marks

June 2018



PLAY 1...d6 AGAINST EVERYTHING by Erik Zude & Jörg Hickl, New in Chess, 207 pp., publ. 2017

And why not indeed? The authors' (German IM and GM) aim is to prepare you to do exactly that. I can imagine you're thinking that 1...d6 against everything implies some sort of Pirc or King's Indian, but you couldn't be more wrong. In fact in this one fianchettoed bishops are rarer than hen's teeth; the bulk of the repertoire consists of the Philidor v 1 e4 and Old Indian v 1 d4. (Was that a yawn I heard? Boredom is what you make it.)

The suggested backbone of the Philidor is the Antoshin Variation, 1 e4 d6 2 d4 Nf6 3 Nc3 e5 4 Nf3 exd4 5 Nxd4 Be7, maybe not the sexiest way to defend v 1 e4, but the authors do a good job of covering pretty much everything that White can throw at it, and Black is certainly not without his share of the fun. There is one potential drawback, though, viz. that if you want to play the Antoshin, you have to be happy with the endgame variation 1 e4 d6 2 d4 Nf6 3 Nc3 e5 4 dxe5 dxe5 5 Qxd8+ Kxd8 (which the authors

cover). If you're not, then you have to consider the move order 1 e4 d6 2 d4 Nf6 3 Nc3 Nbd7 (which they don't), in which case you rule out the funky ...Nc6 Antoshin lines (as well as allowing White the option of 4 f4!?, which may or may not be an issue, depending on your p.o.v.). The authors show that Black has little to fear in the resulting endgame (they have to, otherwise their repertoire is a non-starter), but it's still a little philosophical/practical problem that potential proponents of the repertoire would have to address. And that alliteration was unintentional, by the way.

There are two ways of looking at the Old Indian: (a) as the poor man's King's Indian; (b) as a Philidor where White has wasted a developmental tempo on c2-c4. Hear the bishop on f1 giving the c-pawn a mouthful for getting in its way? The authors' preferred sequence is 1 d4 d6 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 c4 Nbd7 4 Nc3 e5. This is important, since it avoids 2...e5, which can be played after 1 d4 d6 2 c4 e5, and if White goes 3 Nf3, 3...e4, entering a whole new universe. Anyway, whichever view you espouse, the authors show that Black can land plenty of punches of his own in all the main lines after 5 e4, 5 g3, 5 Bg5 and after an early d4-d5. This could be a fertile area for anyone looking for a sound yet less well known defence to 1 d4.

That leaves sidelines and flank openings where the authors again provide decent lines which give Black plenty of play, mainly of a ...d6/e5/f5 variety.

Talking of sidelines, I decided to check up on what they had to say about those aggressive, less theoretical, lines popular at club level. Sure enough, on p. 77 they cover 1 e4 d6 2 f4 Nf6 3 Nc3 (or 1 e4 d6 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 f4), the sort of club-to-skull stuff often successful at fast time controls between club players where sophisticated defensive ability rarely ranks high amongst the protagonists' core skills. Not only do they cover the basic stuff, they devote a four-page annotated game to the line! (A GM game at that, just to prove that this sort of stuff is floating around up there too.) They even provide

a game covering the whacky 1 e4 d6 2 d4 Nf6 3 Bc4 (move unpunctuated!). No book can cover everything, but I couldn't find any stones left unturned. Impressive.

The repertoire is presented via forty-nine illustrative games with enough variations/analysis in the notes to navigate the less likely stuff, all explained in easy-to-follow, smoothly translated prose. By its nature this repertoire concedes early space, so is more suitable for counter-punchers, those with the patience to give their opponents all the rope they need to hang themselves. Please note that it's not one of those 'winning with..' type of books (which always strike me as odd; you don't 'win' with any opening); the authors are honest enough to admit when their suggested lines leave Black on the wrong side of a nearly equal position. But that's academic. The point is that Black will always have chances in the complex positions arising, which is what chess is all about.

The book is well written (not a word wasted), impressively streamlined and features an extensive bibliography. The double-column format is easy to follow. You already know what I think about the non-alphabetical, page-number games 'index', so I'll say no more. I would like to mention two things, though, one sensible, one contentious. Sensible first. In black rep books, it's helpful to have an index based on the black players' names, after all, if you want to see how the top guys are handling the rep, whose names do you look for? In this case, fourteen of the illustrative games were played by the authors (putting their money where their mouths are), and amongst the other black players we find big names such as Carlsen, Rapport, Grischuk and Andreikin. I've seen such indexes in other books; it's an idea well worth considering, methinks.

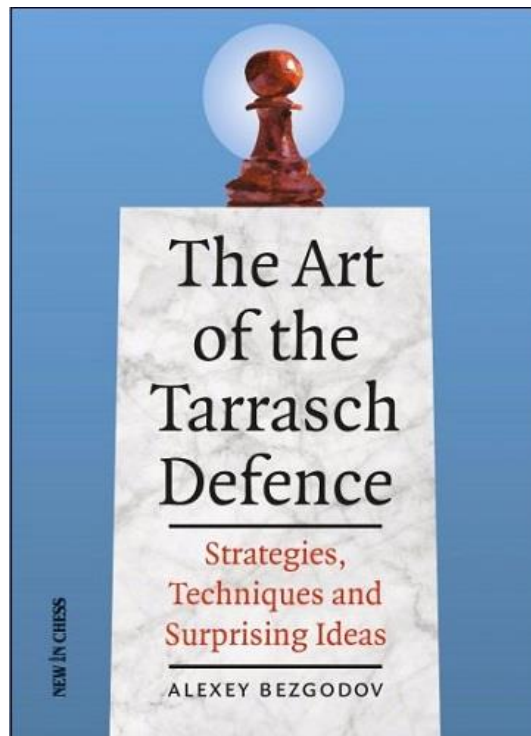
Now the contentious. The diagrams are printed in the conventional White-at-the-bottom manner. Even the cover design is from White's side. This reviewer struggles to see the sense in putting White at the bottom of the diagrams in a book clearly written from Black's

perspective. As I said, it's a convention, not chiselled in stone. All it does is pander to the mantra 'we've always done it like this', an obstacle on the road to innovation and fresh thinking if ever there was one. I'm not going to change the chess publishing world, and 'black' books will still appear tomorrow with White at the bottom, but my reviewer's remit allows me to opine that the presentation of the book would have been enhanced by an icing-on-the-cake flip of the diagrams.

To summarise, this is a very good openings book on a range of lines that are not so well known, hence could well provide hefty surprise clout in the hands of those familiar with the material. It's well worth a look if you already play 1...d6 or are looking for another string to your black bow.

Ian Marks

March 2018



THE ART OF THE TARRASCH DEFENCE by Alexey Bezgodov, New in Chess, 317 pp., publ. 2017

Bezgodov's previous books have looked at off-beat openings – 2 a3 v the Sicilian, the Fantasy Caro-Kann, 1 d4 d5 2 c4 Bf5 and 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c5, and while you could hardly accuse the Tarrasch (1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 c5) of being a wallflower, it's never quite attained mainstream status despite the patronage of some illustrious names.

In this one, via 217 games, most of them deeply annotated, the author sets out to reveal the essence of the defence, based on his thirty years' experience, rather than provide a comprehensive theoretical survey. He divides his material into five parts –

- I. Four 'bad' lines that are actually good
- II. White surprise lines – and what to play against them
- III. The Kasparov System
- IV. Giants of the Tarrasch Defence
- V. Training

Part one is something of a teaser, and I loved it. I won't tell you what the 'bad' lines are, but they illustrate what must apply to lots of other openings – that there are plenty of decent, unjustly neglected lines which are perfectly playable and could repay a spot of research.

In part two the author covers assorted white deviations from the main line. As an example of the nuances involved, chapters nine to thirteen devote forty-two pages alone to the location of White's c1-bishop – g5, f4, e3 (early and later) and b2.

Part three deals with the author's favoured main line, and the one espoused by GK earlier in his career, viz. 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 c5 4 cxd5 exd5 5 Nf3 Nc6 6 g3 Nf6 7 Bg2 Be7 8 0-0 0-0 9 Bg5 cxd4 10 Nxd4 h6. He prefers 9...cxd4 to the currently more popular 9...c4 because of '*...the simple reply 10 b3, after which it seems to me that Black faces a difficult defence in an unpleasant position*'. That, of course, is only an opinion, as Bezgodov readily admits, and you can agree or disagree with it all you want. In any case, 9...c4 doesn't feature here; what you get is an in-depth look at the line favoured by such giants as Spassky and Kasparov.

Part four is self-explanatory, a tribute to the great names who have played the defence, and part five is a collection of ninety-six exercises for solving and analysis.

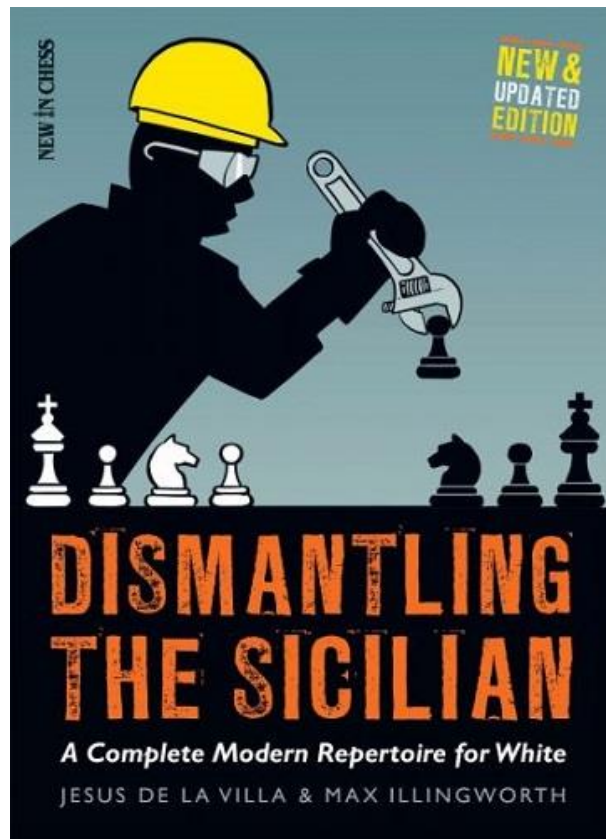
Given the dynamic nature of the opening, and the author's desire to showcase its fighting qualities, it was surprising to see how many games ended in a draw, or comments such as '*Black lacks sufficient grounds to play for a win*' or '*Black has good chances of a draw*', and references to '*drawish simplifications*', but I guess you could lay these charges at other openings too. And, to be fair, you'll also find comments like 'The game shows the great potential of even a slightly inferior black position'. As Hamlet observed, the play's the thing.

A word about names. Despite publishing in English, NiC always go for the Germanic Kortchnoi and Jussupow. It's hard to understand why; they're German transliterations from Cyrillic. The 'justification' that they're the versions used in the databases is a cop-out. (A database – especially one originating in Germany – isn't an English-language book!) You could argue that 'Jussupow' is how Artur spells his name in his adoptive German, but an English speaker unfamiliar with that language might think it was Jussuhpoh. Factor in that his English-language work appears with 'Yusupov' on the cover and the insistence on 'Jussupow' becomes even flimsier. The English transliterations Korchnoi and Yusupov are the accepted versions of the names in English. Why not use 'em?

In conclusion, the whole work conveys the author's infectious enthusiasm for his pet defence. Some strong players write books into which they put very little of themselves to fulfil a contract or in an attempt to make a few bob. You can generally spot them a mile away. They are not writers. Bezgodov is a writer; he has style, and can express himself clearly and succinctly. You might or might not agree with his choice of material or his opinions, but he can write. 'Nice' is a limp, overused word, but on this occasion it fits: this is a very nice book, lovingly written and produced to NiC's usual high standards. The author hopes that it *'will be read with unhurried pleasure'*, which probably sums up how to get the most out of it. A sort of desert island book, in fact.

Ian Marks

March 2018



DISMANTLING THE SICILIAN by Jesus de la Villa & Max Illingworth,
New in Chess, 367 pp., publ. 2017

This is a new edition of de la Villa's 2009 original, revised and updated by Australian GM Max Illingworth. The original concept and structure remain the same – to provide a full variation-by-variation repertoire for White with the open Sicilian – but MI has wielded the surgeon's knife, merging some chapters and adapting the repertoire where he deemed it necessary. The impression is thus that of a new book, not the rehash of an old one. (Chapter seventeen, the rather cheekily entitled *What others recommend... and why I disagree*, where MI compares and contrasts his selections with those of others who have written on the subject, e.g. Negi, Kotronias, gives the reader an idea of his thinking and rationale behind the previous sixteen chapters.)

What does it do? Let's clarify what it doesn't. It doesn't show you how to bash the Sicilian flat; that ain't gonna happen. If you're

expecting a collection of wham-bam white victories you're going to be disappointed. What it does is attempt to give lines where White has an edge (a phrase which crops up again and again) and can play the resulting middlegames with confidence. In fact in some lines you're going to be nursing a tiny endgame advantage (which has implications beyond the scope of an openings book). Of course there are examples where Black gets shot down in flames – that's the nature of the Sicilian beast – but the reader will have to be happy with positional plusses such as structural advantages, better pieces etc. There is much in the material to whet the appetites of positional players as well as cavemen.

What does he recommend? I'll just mention his suggestions against the biggies: 6 h3 v the Najdorf, with 6 Be2 as back-up, 9 0-0-0 v the Dragon, 9 Nd5 v the Sveshnikov (*'After my futile efforts to make 9. Bxf6 work, I saw the positional approach is both safer and stronger.'*) and 7 Qf3 v the Taimanov. Two of those are trendy, and all carry a ton of theoretical baggage (you'll see things like the dreaded C4232 or D2237 cropping up occasionally). However the author provides lots of explanatory text and a selection of illustrative games for each line to serve as a sort of fast track to getting to grips with the analysis. He also often points out occasions where the engines just don't 'get' a position, a useful caveat to those who think the machine has all the answers. There's an impressive number of recent (2017) games, so you can't say it's not up to date.

The major issue with the suggested lines is, of course, whether you like them or not. No point in playing, say, 6 h3 v the Najdorf if it's too quiet for your tastes. And to tell the truth, when I played through some of the lines, I was surprised at how technical many of the resulting positions tended to be. This could be an issue for the more active player who likes to chuck stuff at his/her opponent's king. It goes back to the phrase I mentioned above, and which MI uses frequently, - 'an edge'.

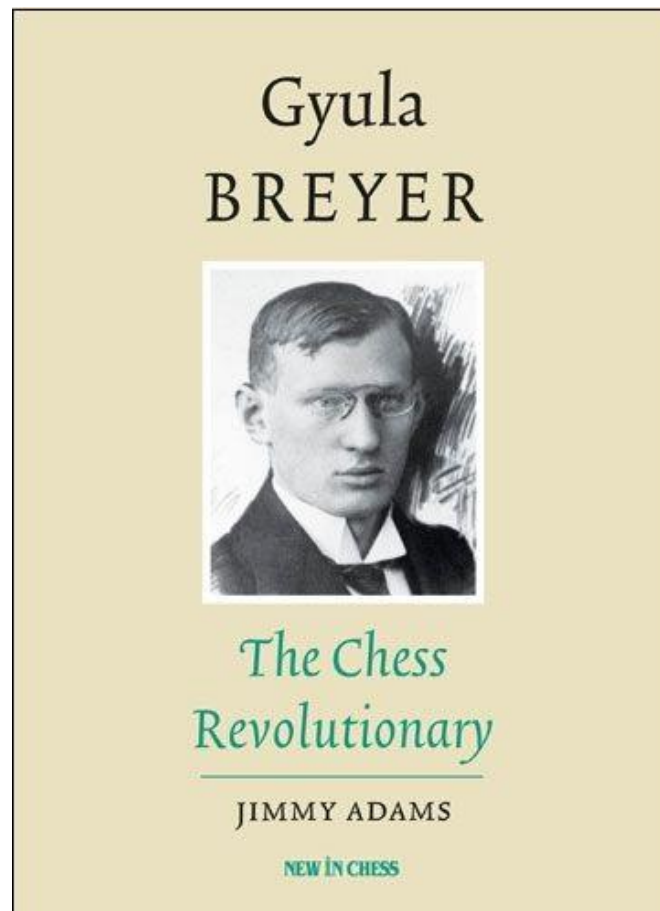
You may or may not agree with MI's suggestions (nothing says you have to play them all), but it's evident that a lot of thought has gone into them. The extensive bibliography includes everything of interest on the Sicilian from recent years. Titled players would find much of interest, and club players who digest even a fraction of the material are going to be well placed to face their next Sicilian.

Production is of the usual NiC high standard: clear text and diagrams, and easy-on-the-eye double column format. And credit where credit is due for the alphabetical index of players which allows you to locate a game in no time at all. Yaaass! Well done, guys.

In short, this is a book that 1 e4 players should consider adding to their libraries. Ditto Sicilian players, who might otherwise find out the hard way what it's all about. It is a fine piece of work, or, as we say in Glaswegian, a stoater.

Ian Marks

February 2018



GYULA BREYER *The Chess Revolutionary*, compiled and edited by Jimmy Adams, New in Chess, 876 pp., publ. 2017

This is a big book in every respect: size (876 pp., 4 lbs/1.75 kg, 2"/5 cm thick), scope (in-depth coverage its subject's life, times, games and legacy) and in the making (some contemporary authors average a book every fifteen weeks; this one was almost forty years in the making).

So who was Gyula Breyer? He was a Hungarian master, active in the early years of the twentieth century until his death in 1921 at the appallingly early age of twenty-eight. Having suffered from a life-long heart condition, Breyer must have known his days were numbered, for, besides his profession as an engineer, he crammed more into his short chess career as player, writer, researcher, journalist, publisher and composer than most players do into a more traditional lifespan. An early death is often a good career

move (James Dean, Marilyn Monroe), but Breyer would probably be forgotten today were it not for the eponymous variation which he bequeathed to the Ruy Lopez: 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 and now Nb8, a ridiculous retreat in the eyes of the prevailing Classical school, but now regarded as one of the most resilient defences to the Ruy.

The work consists of forty-one chapters covering three broad areas: biography, games and 'other stuff'.

The engrossing **biography** contains everything you could want to know about Breyer (even down to his address). We meet not only him, but dozens of his contemporaries, well-known and less so, at tournaments and in chess clubs, coffee houses, bars – and casinos! They are a motley collection of characters; it would have been interesting to meet some of them. The photos which pepper the text put faces to names, and contemporary pictures and postcards bring locations alive. Nor is it without its share of excitement. Writing about the Mannheim tournament of 1914 which was curtailed by the outbreak of the First World War, Breyer says that the Russian players '*complained how German soldiers had roused them from their sleep by breaking down their door and pointing bayonets at their chest*', not the sort of thing you read about in your average tournament report.

Talking of the First World War, the narrative covers the effects of its political and social aftermath on those who lived through it, including our hero (who, not surprisingly, was exempt from military service).

Chesswise, Breyer was what we would now consider a late developer. At Cologne in 1911 he calls himself an '*18-year-old youth*', and a contemporary report of 1914 talks about '*Young Breyer*'. He was twenty-one at the time! In these days of twelve-year-old GMs, guys that age are practically washed up. It's easy to forget that in

times when there was little chess publishing, let alone coaching, computers and an information explosion, players developed much more slowly. It's fashionable nowadays in certain circles to dismiss players of yore as weak and unsophisticated. Writers, artists and composers of the past seldom attract such criticism. Why chessplayers? We're not comparing like with like, and besides, in chess there is the competitive element missing from other artistic/creative endeavours. As Breyer observes *'Let the foreign matadors smash up the young eager beavers, since this would brighten up the names of the old masters'*. Anyone would look bad on the receiving end of a hammering from a big name, but don't infer too much from that. These 'weak' players were the ones whose ideas, researches and games helped shape, indeed, revolutionise, chess as we know it today. The good were still good. Dismiss that at your peril.

This material would be of interest to anyone interested in biographies and properly formatted might even make a worthwhile book of its own. Biopics have been made about less likely characters.

There are 287 **games**, the overwhelming majority by Breyer. They are annotated in depth, generally from contemporary sources, by both Breyer himself and many of the leading players of the time. Some appear several times with notes by different players, in line with Breyer's own suggestion that a game should be published to reflect different points of view.

1 e4 is the predominant first move, with the Ruy and the French to the fore, and after 1 d4 most feature some version or other of the Queen's Gambit. This was in the days when the Classical school still held sway. Nimzo had yet to unleash his Indian, and all the cool stuff that we take for granted nowadays is largely missing, e.g. there are only ten Sicilians and two (!) embryonic King's Indians (with Breyer on the black side, where else?). Still, players seem to have

been as hung up on openings then as they are now, as evinced by the perennial howl *'I forgot/didn't know the theory'*. Whatever would they have made of engines and multi-million game databases?

The pleasure and value of the games lie in the annotations and how they reflect the spirit of the times. A couple of examples: on pp.459-60 Breyer discusses why, after 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6, 3 Bc4 is *'weak'*, and 3...Bc5 *'even weaker...tantamount to two mistakes'*, which (a) contradicts everything we were told as beginners and (b) makes nonsense of what all the top guys are playing these days.

Annotating a game against Réti, he discusses at length the positions arising after 1 e4 c5 and 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 Nxd4 g6. His views are cogently argued, thought-provoking, and, to today's eyes, surprising. Consider the circumstances and what's at work here.

These were times of great social and political upheaval. It is unavoidable that that spirit would manifest itself in the arts and culture of the time. Chess was no exception. When he devotes a couple of pages to, say, 3 Bc4 Bc5 (there are countless other examples), Breyer does two things: (a) he gives us a glimpse into the prevailing creative and revolutionary zeitgeist, yet at the same time (b) shows up the inherent weakness of a revolution, viz. the urge to dismiss all that went before, regardless of intrinsic value. Babies are thrown out with bathwater. It took the genius of an Alekhine to synthesise the best of Hypermodern thought with Classical teaching. Advances in knowledge reveal that Breyer wasn't right about everything (who is?), but you can't deny that he was a rebel with a cause.

If the 3 Bc4 Bc5 stuff is a bit too out there for you, some of Breyer's other thoughts are much more mainstream. In 1917 he wrote *'against the Sicilian Defence, 3 d4 is not the best continuation, because it gives up the centre d-pawn for the somewhat less valuable c-pawn'*. Fast forward to the '70s, when Larsen called 3 d4 *'a positional error'* for the same reasons – and got all the credit for it. Obviously

Bent was suss to what had gone before. I doubt if he thought these guys were weak.

There are also signs that players of a century ago were ahead of their time (9...Nb8!). What do you think is '*a tricky opening that should not be underestimated!*'? A Hippo! And in a game from 1916 Breyer plays what is now known and enjoys modest popularity as the Black Lion, basically Philidor's Defence with ...h6 and ...g5 attitude. The Philidor Hanham was a favourite set-up with Breyer, both with Black and White, as with Jobava nowadays. There will always be room in chess for the free spirit and those who want to go their own way.

Breyer's was a dynamic style, given to originality and counterattack. The openings and set-ups which became his favourites were based on building up positions with latent power to be released when the time was ripe, rather than dissipation through early activity and exchanges. Réti sums it up: '*It is surprising in his games how, when the decisive breakthrough occurs, the pieces which had appeared shut in, suddenly become alive*'. He modelled himself on Rubinstein, as Boris Gelfand did in his younger years. In his last two tournaments, Berlin 1920 (virtually an elite tournament of the day) and Vienna 1921, he finished first and third respectively in powerful fields. He was clearly on the way to becoming a major force in chess in the 1920s and '30s.

Other stuff

There are lots of essays by Breyer and others (e.g. Euwe, Réti and Tartakower to name but three) on all manner of topics. Some examples: the Breyer Variation, the Budapest Defence, A Complicated Position (a discussion of the starting position), 1 d4!! d5??, Simultaneous Blindfold Play, discussions of draws and a thought-provoking piece called 'A little chess maths' in which Breyer discusses the value of squares and the fluctuating values of the pieces in relation to squares. At one stage I thought he had lost his

mind when, prior to the 1921 World Championship match between Lasker and Capablanca, he wrote '*Capablanca is not intelligent enough to be World Champion*', then I realised it was punditry, and, as with so many other pundits, humble pie wasn't long in following.

Many of Breyer's newspaper columns and magazine articles appear, and, as if chess wasn't enough, he also founded, wrote and edited *Intellectual Sport*, a magazine containing all sorts of puzzles and brain-teasers. One incredible example – given in the original Hungarian, for obvious reasons, but with translation – is a whole palindromic text, a phenomenal piece of creativity. There is a chapter devoted to his compositions, mainly two- and three-movers, but also more esoteric fare, including a retro-problem where it takes 102 moves to reach the diagram position!

Given the scope for confusion over people and places in the linguistic and geographical hodgepodge that was the Austro-Hungarian Empire, it was pleasing to see that names are handled well. Personal names are rightly left alone, e.g. the Polish Lowcki, which looks to us like 'Loaky', rather than the phonetically realistic 'Lovtsky'. (I suspect that 'Lowtzky' and 'Lowtsky' slipped through unnoticed.) And full marks for including accents, e.g. Maröczy, Szabó, Sämisch, Réti, Földeák, Grünfeld. Too often publishers take the lazy option and ignore them. No excuse!

Place names should be the version familiar to English-speaking readers, e.g., 'Vienna', not 'Wien', or the name at the time of an event, e.g. the German 'Breslau', not the Polish 'Wrocław'. (For some reason, though, Cologne is left as the perhaps unfamiliar Köln.) Issues arising with post-First World War changes are generally made clear, e.g. the (now) Slovakian town of Košice, which Hungarians know as Kassa (the version used here since it was still Hungarian) and Germans as Kaschau. I can't recall a single instance of confusion over who was playing or where.

There are several moving tributes to the late master, and the book concludes with his tournament and match record, twenty pages of crosstables, an index of openings, an index of games (NiC page-number style L), an index of studies, a six-page index of names and three pages each of acknowledgements and sources, the latter covering newspapers, magazines, books, tournament books and the Chess History website, more than enough for any reader who feels the urge to conduct further research of his/her own. (I'm intrigued by the demise of von Balla, who died in 1942 *'when he suffered a fatal car accident involving a Russian tank'*. Because I'm sitting at my computer, I had a quick shufti at Wikipedia – not my usual source of information – which confirmed his exit, but gave the date as 1 April 1945. That makes more sense to me; the Soviets were in Hungary by that time, not in 1942. Typo?)

Production standards are high. A lot of care and attention has gone into this sturdy hardback. Presentation is very easy on the eye; narrative, essays, articles etc. are presented in single columns, games in double, and translations from the original languages generally read very smoothly. Textual accuracy is very high, although in a book of this size, the odd hiccup will appear. From the crosstables, for example, it looks like the pairs of tournaments at Cologne/Budapest 1911 and Berlin 1920/Vienna 1921 took place at the same time. Must have made playing in each pair difficult!

A review can only scratch the surface of a tome like this. You might reasonably ask why, in this day and age, when some juniors have never heard of Tony Miles, you would want to invest forty quid of your disposable income in a book about a virtually forgotten player of a century ago. Let me turn that round. Why not? For the price of a couple of openings books that will probably end up gathering dust on a shelf, you can have a fine hardback which brings to life a bygone era and pays tribute to a great player and remarkable mind. The sheer amount and variety of material on offer makes £40 a snip

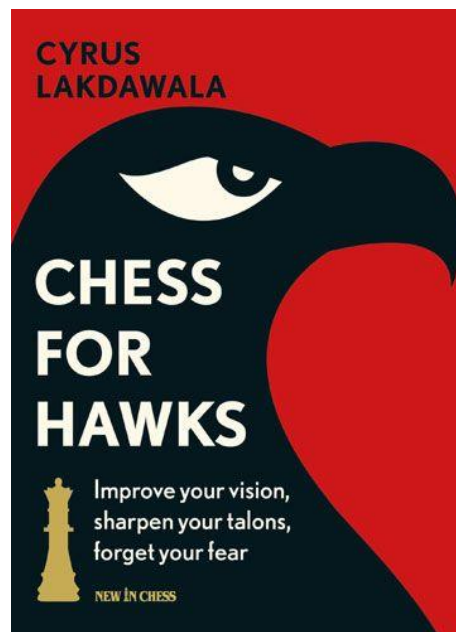
(less than 14p a game, and that's just the games!). It is an outstanding work. All credit to Jimmy Adams and New in Chess for making it possible.

Ian Marks

January 2018

Two from Cyrus Lakdawala: **CHESS FOR HAWKS**, New in Chess, 282 pp., publ. 2017 and **FIRST STEPS: FUNDAMENTAL ENDINGS**, Everyman Chess, 272 pp., publ. 2017.

I make these the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth books in eight years from the prolific Cyrus, one every fifteen weeks. Consider the time needed for research; selection and organisation of material; analysis; checking; drafting and redrafting; editing, proofing etc. and you wonder about the care and attention devoted to such works and the standard of the finished article. Still, a reviewer has to approach a book with an open mind, be it the author's first or twenty-somethingth, so...



Chess for Hawks looks at style, positional v aggressive chess. It consists of games which made an impression on the author in his youth, plus games of his own which show their influence on him, and has a personal, confessional (*'Why oh why do I play this way?'*) feel. His introduction, in which he discusses the differences between hawks and doves, would help players see where their stylistic strengths and weaknesses lie.

One thread running through the text is that patience is not the same as passivity. You can still play positional chess and strike (indeed have to), as demonstrated, for example, by Petrosian-Lutikov, Tbilisi 1959, pp. 184-8, one of the many classic games in the book. The sources and references for these are sketchy. There are only five books in the bibliography, none of which seems pertinent, for example, to the classic Réti-Alekhine, Baden-Baden 1925. Not even Alekhine is referenced. A couple of notes caught my eye. Lakdawala gives 9...Na6 a '!' and says *'This is a time-wasting exercise. Perhaps Alekhine feared 9...c5 10 Nc2'*. Hmm. I reached for my trusty copy of Alekhine's *My Best Games of Chess 1924-1937*, turned to game six, and found the Great Man calling 9...Na6 *'comparatively best'*, with no mention of fearing anything. Of 36...Rxf3!, Lakdawala says that the game feels like *'one enormously long combination'* (but contradicts himself on the next page when *'Alekhine sets up his final combination'*). If he had checked *MBGoC 1924-1937*, he'd have found that Alekhine saw it as a number of combinations – *'31...Ne4! The beginning of a new combination'*.

Talking of the old masters, Lakdawala joins the list of moderns quick to rubbish those who have gone before. Apropos Anderssen-Kieseritzky, London 1851 (not the Immortal Game), he opines that *'an average club level player of today is several magnitudes higher in defensive skill than a strong master at the time of the Great Romantics'*, having earlier taken time out from Sämisch-Nimzowitsch, Copenhagen 1923, to tell us that *'I have a feeling that B-level club players of today possess better strategic understanding than strong masters of the past, like Sämisch or John '*. That's the sort of drivel you can get away with when mortality has ensured that you won't be playing Anderssen or Sämisch any time soon.

Lakdawala is often succinct and offers good advice, e.g. discussing a sharp opening line, he says *'Don't blame the opening for your poor score. Instead, work to improve your understanding of the line, and you*

will eventually beat it'. However, there is no escaping his incurable logorrhoea. Some examples (there are plenty more where these come from):

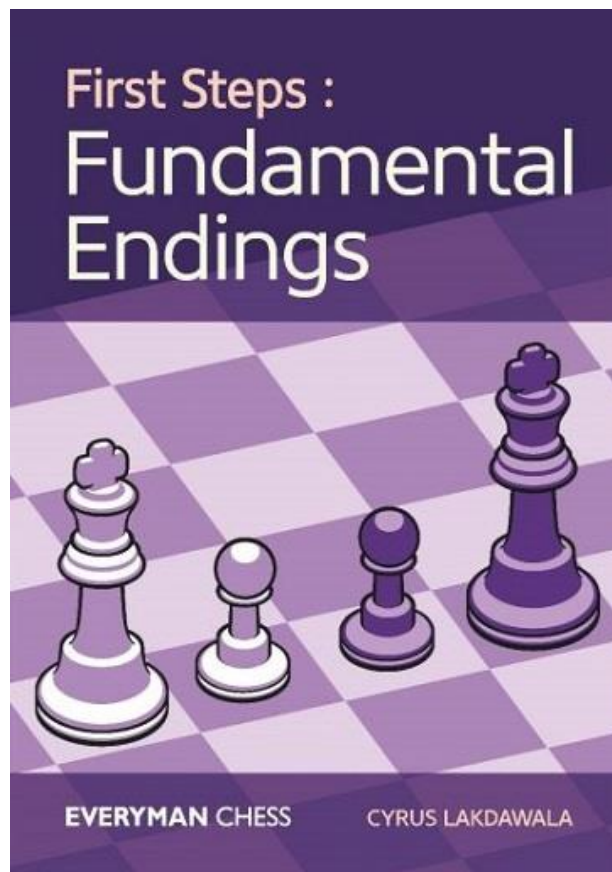
p.128: *'White is faced with a dystopian bureaucracy of requisitions, appropriations and distribution dilemmas'*. Get that? Be honest.

p.165: *'The bishop greets his d4 non-guest with the same feeling of resigned despair as I do, when a salesperson, ignoring the prominent No Solicitors sign on my door, rings the bell in the hopes of selling me magazine subscriptions.'*

That was in pole position until p.213: *'His move is made with the philosophy that honesty isn't always the best policy when you want to win. I guess sometimes this is true. For example: if your wife or girlfriend asks you: 'Does this dress make me look fat?' then if you value your piece of mind, for the love of God, never, never answer with the double question mark response: 'Yes, it kind of makes you look fat!''*

A striking image, simile or metaphor can be an effective teaching tool; verbiage like this destroys the flow of a text. His editor should give him a nudge.

The 'index' is NiC's page-order list. Yuck.



The chess content of ***First Steps; Fundamental Endings*** is excellent. In nine chapters Lakdawala covers the basics that an inexperienced player (the author mentions club-level) needs to make him/her 'a functional endgame player'. The chapters cover all the piece endings and each deals with the features relevant to that ending, e.g. chapter two, Pawn Endings, deals with K+P v K, the opposition, standard draws, losing a tempo, the square, majorities, king position, breakthroughs, fortresses, corresponding squares, triangulation and obstruction. The author writes '*I dislike endgame books with too many composed studies*', comparing them to performance art, so most of the exemplar positions are from tournament practice, drawing heavily on the games of Capablanca, Fischer and Carlsen. The striking nature of many will help imprint them in the reader's mind. Where *Chess for Hawks* had a skimpy five-book bibliography, this one has an extensive list featuring many standard endgame texts, such as Averbakh's five-volume series (although curiously only vols 1, 2 and 5).

The book has the deliberate aim of instructing, and, as in *Chess for Hawks*, when Lakdawala homes in on key points and provides short, crisp explanations he comes across as an effective teacher, e.g.

'Sliding the king to h6 creates the mating net.'

'This way he opens the g-file to prepare the way for a future ...Rd7 and ...Rg7.'

'White is in trouble due to the following factors:

White's knight is out of play and lacks targets.

White's queenside pawns are vulnerable to the knight manoeuvre ...Nd2! and ...Nc4.'

But – and it's a big but – the standard of editing leaves a lot to be desired. Lakdawala acknowledges Richard Palliser *'for his edit of this book'* and Nancy (his wife?) *'for her proofreading'*, but the countless solecisms which litter the text (e.g. punctuation issues, incorrect use of 's/s', incorrect use of who/whom, random words) suggest a less than conscientious job. Two passages in particular are confusing. In his notes to Eliskases-Fischer on p.193, Lakdawala writes *'Fischer found a path for White's knight to halt Black's passed pawn'*, suggesting that Fischer was White and had the knight, whereas it was Eliskases. (I find it ironic that Eliskases, presumably one of the author's 'painfully weak' older school, was good enough to beat a Fischer who had already played in an Interzonal and a Candidates' tournament.)

Even more confusing is Geller-Fischer on p.266, where Lakdawala writes *'Fischer is up a clean pawn...'*. Nope, material is level. I checked the game in case the diagram was wrong. It isn't. *'...Geller's hope is that his queen, bishop and h-pawn...'*. Geller doesn't have an h-pawn; Fischer does. When Geller wins a pawn, Lakdawala says *'So now it's two pawns up'*. No, only one. *'Fischer's next job is to break the blockade...'*. No, it's Geller's. Fischer's blockading on b7.

It seems that Lakdawala was so intent on showcasing Bobby's talent that he juxtaposed who was who. I can think of no other explanation. It's sloppy writing of the kind an editor should have spotted a mile away.

The biggie, though, is the plague of adverbs, the most over-used and least-necessary of words. More often than not, the verb or adjective manages on its own. Some examples:

'absolutely pays off'

'virtually ensures'

'crushingly disheartening'

'absolutely critical'

and my favourite, which elicited a loud chuckle, *"Aaargh!" I said to myself, internally*. Well, how else would you say something to yourself?

Lakdawala even coins a neologism in the guise of an adverb, and it took me a few shots to read it. See how you rate with Capablanca's *'Mozartianly smooth games'*. I still read that as 'Martians'. Awful.

To be fair, not all adverbs are redundant. *'Capa methodically cuts off White's king'* is grand, and, on another positive note, kudos for getting 'fewer' correct, as in Rubinstein's *'fewer pawn islands'*.

Nor do Lakdawala's references to popular culture escape. Two that stick in mind are a rambling, irrelevant chunk about *Goodfellas* (complete with misused apostrophe, poor punctuation and unnecessary adverb) and a reference to a Bananarama song (first recorded by a session band called Steam in '69, by the way), which manages to butcher the title. At least make an effort to get it right!

And although, given the nature of the work, opportunities for flannel are fewer, there's still plenty of it. A quick example: *'The*

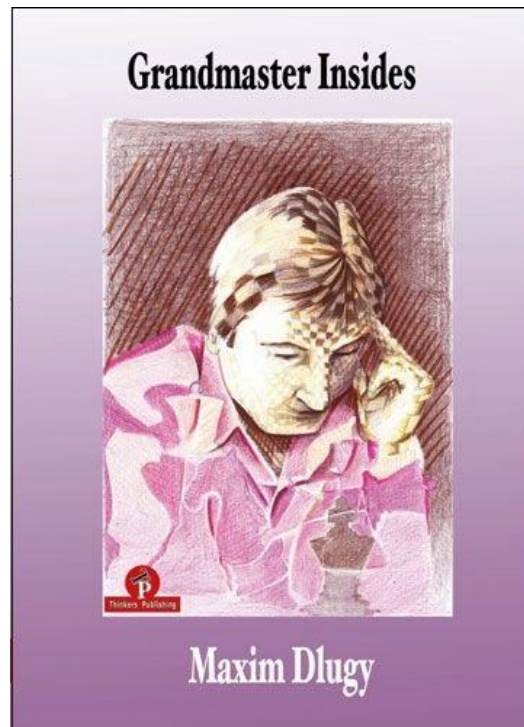
expression on the constipated white king's face says: "I eat a high fiber muffin every morning. Why isn't it working?"". How can that justify its place in the text?

The pity is that there is much to like and enjoy in Lakdawala's work. His coaching talents are evident in his light touch, gentle humour and knack for imparting useful advice, but there is also much that indicates haste and inattention to detail. In chapter one he compares unfamiliarity with K+P endings with *'the kid who attempts to finish his or her term paper on the bus, on the way to school'*. The same might be said of some of his writing. His editor should be helping him out, but, alas, he seems happy to play along.

One final point. There's no index. No players, no themes, no material distribution. Nada. How a publisher can publish a book like this without an index is beyond me.

Ian Marks

January 2018



GRANDMASTER INSIDES, Maxim Dlugy, Thinkers Publishing, 425 pp, publ 2017

I was much taken by Gilbert Alomenu's impassioned piece in the October magazine on one of his favourite books on 'adult improvement': "Rapid Chess Improvement", by Michael De la Maza. In this Gilbert touched on a wide range of issues, including the mega-debate as to whether chess learning should be based primarily on 'tactics' (the De la Maza theme) or 'position' (a view that he attributed to a De la Maza critic, Jeremy Silman).

The sparks flew and the read was engrossing! I was, however, slightly surprised to read the 'complaint' towards the end of Gilbert's article that there was 'a gaping gap in the market' for many more books on 'adult improvement'. What have I been writing my own books for all these years, I wondered, if not to instruct as well as entertain? What's he getting at?

Aren't adults, and most aspiring youngsters, for that matter, able to find anything that might promote their own 'improvement' in grappling with the ground-breaking chess thinking of the greatest

players in my most recent 'Everyman Chess' books on "Wilhelm Steinitz", "Heroes of Classical Chess", "Giants of Innovation" and "Great Chess Romantics"?

Indeed most serious chess writers would be aghast at the implied charge that they don't write books that might 'improve' the attentive reader, be their subjects technical, chess historical or on virtually any interesting aspect of the game, including openings. Moreover most chess writers actually wield their pens less to make a fast buck (wishful thinking) than to improve their own understanding, while at the same time communicating the hard-won fruits of their labour and sense of wonder to a wider audience.

One of the best books of this kind to appear in recent years is "Grandmaster Insides", by Maxim Dlugy ('Thinkers Publishing'). If you can't find anything in this book that improves and inspires you, take up tiddlywinks! Dlugy, junior world champion (1985) and still one of the world's top grandmasters at Blitz chess, provides readers with a wide-ranging book that is biographical, entertaining and immensely instructional.

In this book you enter the 'inner-world' of a very strong player who also has the gift of clear and insightful communication. Dlugy lucidly penetrates essentials, even including a valuable early chapter on 'Integration of Chess into Normal Life' to forewarn you of the importance not just of dedicated hard work but also life-balance.

You want to understand the inter-relationship between tactics and strategy, how to study openings, learn an entirely new Opening System, prepare for games, analyse well (and avoid its attendant risk of 'paralysis'), enjoy amazing games and combinations and much more besides? It's all here.

Having dealt at commendably fulsome, yet disciplined length with these and other fundamentals, Dlugy then treats the reader to

extended chapters on his games and relationships with a long list of great names, from Smyslov, Spassky and Tal, via the Deep Blue team, to Karpov, Kasparov, Anand, Kramnik and Carlsen.

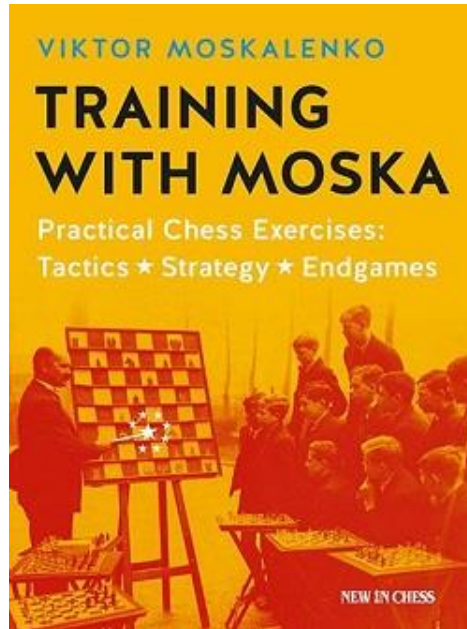
In all of this, Dlugy writes economically and well, with considerable sympathy for the game and all of its adherents. He explains ideas with a minimum of fuss, using plenty of words and pares down variations to the absolute, necessary minimum. At just over 400 packed pages, the book is a manual in itself that can be studied at length but throughout reads quite delightfully.

Oh, and Dlugy is a talented amateur artist, a selection of whose lively, colourful and playful abstracts are reproduced in a 16 glossy page insert in the middle of the book. A nice touch! Dlugy's work was even exhibited at Moscow's world-famous, Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, during the Gelfand-Anand world championship match that took place there in 2012.

Craig Pritchett, December 2017

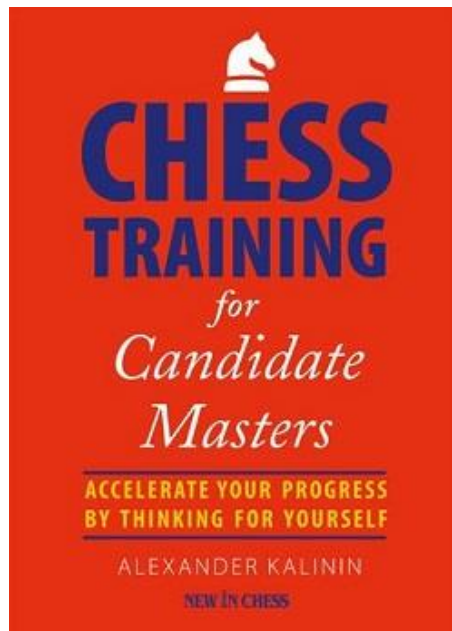
(See the full review in the December issue of *Scottish Chess* e-Mag)

Three training manuals this time, all from New in Chess, all published in 2017. I'll take them in order from lightest to heaviest (content, not weight).

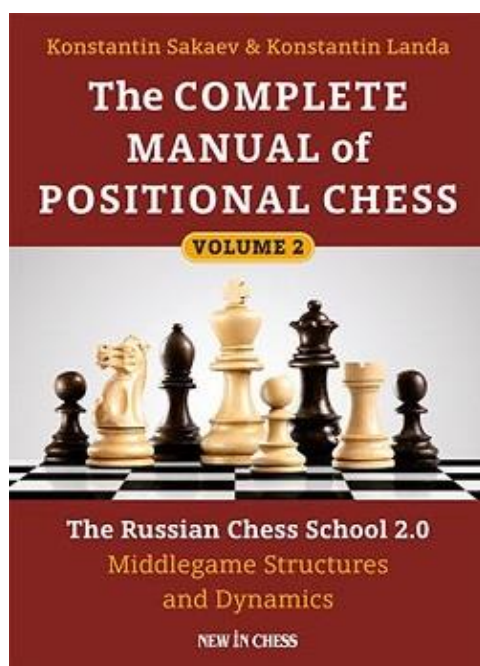


TRAINING WITH MOSKA by Viktor Moskalenko, 349 pp.

This is the most 'accessible' (I hate that word) of the three. The subtitle is *Practical Chess Exercises: Tactics, Strategy, Endgames*, so it contains a bit of everything. There are three parts covering tactics, strategy and endgames. Each part consists of exercises, an 'exam', and solutions. The exercises, particularly the tactical ones, tend to be bright and breezy, a sound teaching device. Memorable examples stick, and come to mind more easily when similar situations arise in one's own games. The sub-sections within each part, (e.g. intermediate moves, decoy, promotion) come in bite-size chunks, so home in on the key issues being discussed. There is lots of good explanatory prose to ensure the reader grasps what's behind each example. I like Moskalenko's bright and enthusiastic writing style; a lightness of touch often succeeds where 'serious' didacticism fails (and turns the reader/student off). I can imagine that mythical abstraction, the 'average club player', deriving a lot of benefit and enjoyment from this one.



Moving up a notch or two on the heavyweight scale, we come to **CHESS TRAINING FOR CANDIDATE MASTERS** by Alexander Kalinin, 208 pp. This sounds like heavy-duty stuff, but there's a clue as to the contents in the subtitle *Accelerate Your Progress by Thinking for Yourself*. It transpires that it's a kind of personal odyssey on the author's part through chess understanding and achievement. The games, positions and exercises are held together by a rather gripping narrative which casts lots of interesting insights into the old Soviet way of doing things. There's a whole mind-set at work here, and I think that is what the author is trying to do – offer a means for his readers to improve by synthesising what has gone before. With that in mind, he brings his various strands (e.g. The Classical Heritage, Personal Influences, Lessons at the Chessboard) together pretty successfully. Do you need to be a CM, or aspirant, to benefit from his work? Not really. I certainly wouldn't feed it to a beginner, but any player with a bit of experience could derive lots of food for thought from this one. Which bring us neatly back to the subtitle!



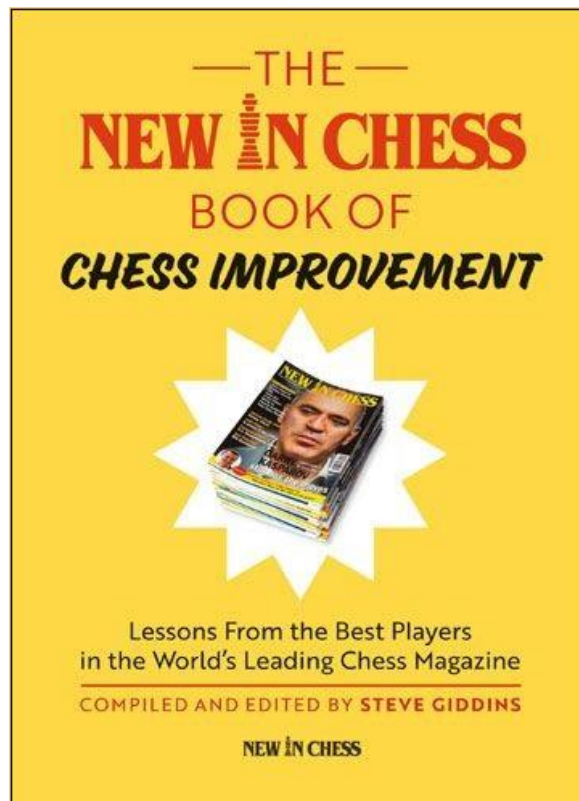
Now we come to the biggie, **THE COMPLETE MANUAL OF POSITIONAL CHESS vol. 2** by Konstantin Sakaev & Konstantin Landa, 368 pp., 1½ lbs, nearly 750g, of Russian middlegame thinking. There are fifty-eight (!) chapters, albeit short ones of around 5-10 pages, consisting of 374 examples on all manner of middlegame topics. For example Part I, 'Pawns are the soul of chess', features topics such as pawn wedges, hanging pawns, pawn breaks etc., while Part II, Dynamics, features the likes of pins, forks, seesaws, eliminating defenders etc. The examples are elucidated by words and enough analysis to illustrate what's going on, i.e. not too much. Even the introduction alone contains lots of good advice! The structure of the book is such that you could work your way through it from start to finish, or dip into it at random. I found myself pausing over examples that caught my interest, and enjoyed them all. As with the Kalinin book, anyone with a bit of experience looking for good material on middlegame topics would find much of interest in here.

Caveat emptor: all three books feature the currently-favoured NiC 'index' based on chronological order of pages. It is particularly bad in the case of Moska, where first names, second names, initials,

'study', 'exercise' 'analysis' and 'theoretical position' all jostle for your eye's attention in a nine-page quagmire of awfulness. And there doesn't even appear to be any sort of in-house uniformity. While studies appear under 'study' in the Moska book, in Sakaev/Landa they appear under the composers' names. I'm sure the NiC crew are a great bunch of lads, but they really need to get their act together in terms of how to do an index.

Ian Marks

December 2017



THE NEW IN CHESS BOOK OF CHESS IMPROVEMENT, Steve Giddins (ed.), New in Chess, 350 pp., publ. 2017

I was about to start thumping out this review when I got side-tracked by Anish Giri talking about his game against Lupulescu in the European Team Championship. Here's Anish:

'The other day I walked in on my wife reading a book. There's a collection of New in Chess articles over thirty years. Basically there's a guy collected some New in Chess articles, games, and sorted them by themes like exchange sacrifice, queen sacrifice, and there was a game of Larsen sacrificing a queen with this English structure as well and he got a very similar domination, he also won very easily. It's under material imbalance.'

And I figured that was my review more or less handed to me on a plate. Steve Giddins (the 'guy') has collated a hundred games from the pages of *New in Chess* since its inception, a sort of *New in Chess's* Greatest Hits, if you will. The game Giri is referring to is no.

19, Larsen-Chandler, Hastings 1987-8, and, if one of the top players in the world can find something of interest amongst the material, then so can you.

The themes under which the games are sorted are 1. Attacking the King, 2. Defence, 3. Sacrifices and Material Imbalance, 4. Pawn Structures, 5. Specific Pawn Structures, 6. Sundry Positional Themes and 7. Endgame Themes. Given that the games are played and annotated by a Who's Who of the chess world from the last thirty-odd years, it is quality material. With such a wide range of annotators, it's interesting to compare styles. Some rely mainly on verbal explanation while others prefer variations, with varying shades in between. I found Timman and Aronian the most sympathetic writers; Karpov was a little dry for my tastes, Gelfand was engaging, and I enjoyed Grischuk's humour. I am less enamoured by a welter of variations (no names). Still, when Kramnik is talking about R+P endings, you sit up and take notice. As Giddins points out, it is easier to learn something when words are used rather than languageless symbols. A good teacher should be a good explainer.

This is a real potpourri which you could either read your way through or dip into as your interest is piqued. Will it live up to the 'improvement' label? Depends. No experience is ever wasted, so even if you were reading casually, there's no doubt that stuff would stick, as Giri proved. You don't need (or necessarily want) to make a conscious effort to 'improve'; just absorb the material and trust your memory. Don't try too hard.

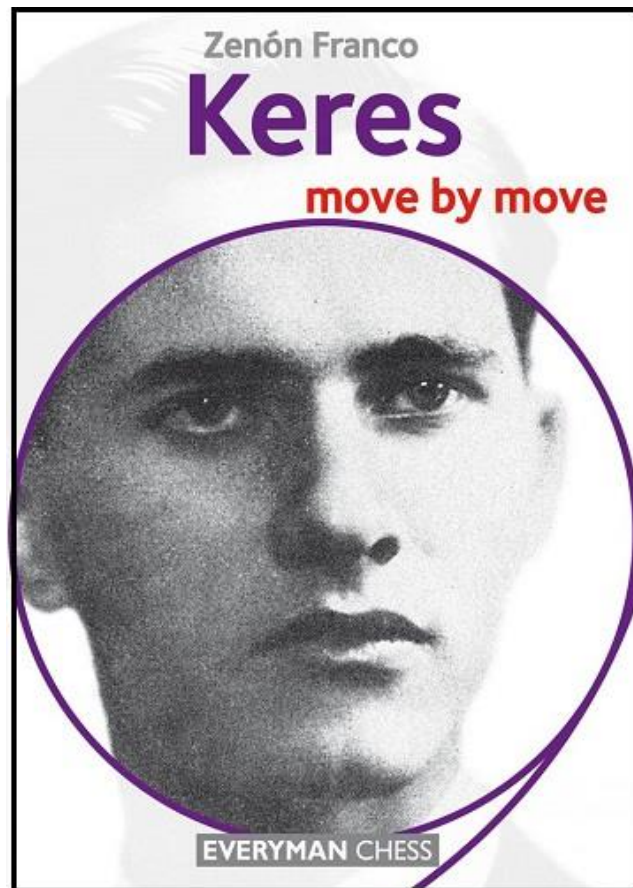
The index of games is the currently favoured NiC list in chronological page order, not a lot of help in finding anything quickly. Lest you mistake me for a grumpy old man on whose corns someone has just trodden, I've shown a few of the books with this type of index to non-chess-playing friends and, their reaction, without exception, was, 'That's not an index', or words to that effect.

One more laconic acquaintance simply responded with a Glaswegianism frequently used to indicate perceived inferior quality or nonsense, but since children might well be reading these reviews, discretion dictates that I refrain from quoting it. My suggestion would be to forget about the index and just thumb through the book till you find what you're looking for. Talking of indexes, an index of annotators would have been a real asset, as would (thinking outside the box) an openings index. Matching up, say, Tiviakov and the Tarrasch French would be well worth while.

To sum up: excellent material, well compiled and well produced, but a challenge to find what you're looking for. That strong players like Mr and Mrs G are reading it seems recommendation enough.

Ian Marks

November 2017



KERES MOVE BY MOVE by Zenón Franco, Everyman Chess, 464 pp.,
publ. 2017

Another in Everyman's series on great players, this time devoted to the legacy of arguably the best player never to become World Champion, Paul Keres. Franco presents thirty-eight of the great Estonian's games, deeply annotated, with many more supplementary games and thirty-eight extracts illustrating key moments from others. The selection spans his entire career, from early correspondence efforts to his last-ever tournament game.

Quite why Keres never became World Champion has been a rich field for conspiracy theorists, but Franco, rightly in my opinion, concentrates on the chess. As he says, '*...it should be treated as a separate topic, which could well merit a book of its own*'. He does quote the opinions of several of Keres's peers, of whom Spassky

probably comes closest when he touches upon the historical/political factors at work.

Keres was one of the great classical players, viz. 1 e4 with White (with enough pet 1 d4 systems to keep his opponents on their toes), and 1 e4 e5 and 1 d4 Nf6 & ...e6 as Black, thus if you're looking for a grounding in such classical systems, look no further. Likewise, especially in his earlier years, he could be a ruthless attacker, and there is plenty of attacking inspiration to be derived from his games. A couple of examples. Keres-Winter, Warsaw Olympiad 1935 (game two), has become an anthology piece, and with good reason; it's a prime example of how Keres (still a teenager) could deal with lesser mortals. If you're thinking, well, Winter was pretty lightweight, then have a look at game twenty-nine, where the mature grandmaster sacs a rook v Korchnoi for a whole-board attack which not even the great defender was able to deal with. A gem of measured attacking play.

One little thing caught my eye. Game 23 (and supplementary 23.1), Fischer-Keres, Candidates 1959, is a Caro-Kann, the only game in the book where Keres doesn't reply to 1 e4 with 1...e5. Franco passes over this without comment, but the legitimate question is: why did he deviate? There is an answer, for which I'll let the interested reader of this review ferret through chess history.

The last game in the book, Keres's last-ever game, saw him defending his beloved Ruy Lopez v Walter Browne to win the Vancouver Open in May 1975. Browne was in his twenties and amongst the top players in the world at the time; Keres was old enough to be his father. Obviously he could still play. A mere twelve days later he succumbed to a heart attack.

The author frequently cites Keres's comments, but they are unattributed. A little checking revealed that they come from Keres's own games collection, which appeared in Russian, Spanish and as a

fabulous hardback trilogy in English. When the topic of Greatest Games Collection of All Time crops up, the two usually quoted are Alekhine's and Fischer's. In my opinion, Keres's deserves the medal. As Franco observes, *'the sheer profundity of Keres's analyses raises a problem...how can we add anything of value to what Keres has already said?'*. It's a valid point. Franco explains that he attempted to help the reader derive the max from Keres's teachings specifically by the Q & A format. (And in the absence of a dedicated question, it does no harm – and will benefit your chess – to pause and ask yourself questions of your own.) In general, Keres's play was direct and clear cut; there is much to be learnt from his games compared to those of 'more flamboyant' masters.

As I've just mentioned, quotes and citations are not attributed. This niggles. I'm a fan of footnotes; it's nice to know where and when somebody said something, especially when it's a blast of egotistical super-confidence from Botvinnik: *'...in the 1940s and 1950s he (Keres) could become (World Champion) only by pushing aside the author of these lines'*. Hey, tell it like it is!

One other slight niggle concerns the openings index. Ruy Lopezes and Sicilians account for about half of the total number of games, so it would have been helpful to have a breakdown by variation. Keres contributed much to the development of both openings (there's a Keres Variation in both), and was a notorious Sicilian slayer, so a little elucidation would have been nice.

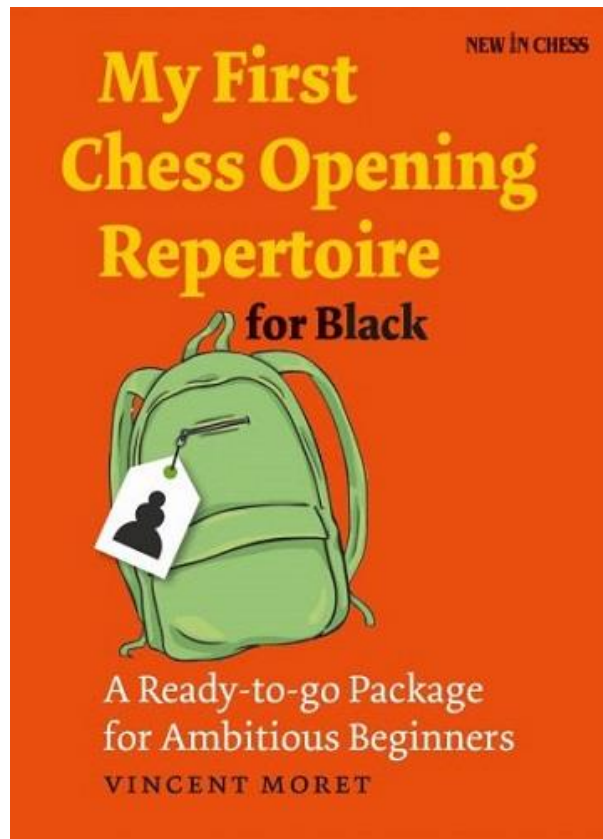
On the other hand, a tip of the hat. Like me, Keres has a surname that ends with s. When your name ends with s, you get used to people getting into a fankle trying to show that something belongs to you. Yep, it's our little friend, the apostrophe. Basic stylistic guideline is that a proper name ending with s is treated like any other name, viz. as singular, thus kudos to Everyman for getting Keres's correct. Try pronouncing it – ker-ez-es. Not difficult, is it? I've seen (e.g. in Fischer's *My 60 Memorable Games*) Keres' (looks like

the plural of a surname Kere) and Kere's, an abomination so execrable it's difficult to know where to begin with it. (And despite my gripe above about attributions, I've forgotten where I saw it. Perhaps just as well.)

Anyway, enough waffle and grammar lessons. This is a good book about a true legend full of great chess, well produced in a translation by Phil Adams so smooth that it reads as though it was written in English. What's not to enjoy?

Ian Marks

November 2017



MY FIRST CHESS OPENING REPERTOIRE FOR BLACK by Vincent Moret, New in Chess, 240 pp., publ. 2017

This book, by a French trainer, aims to provide an aggressive (the author's word), simple-to-learn opening repertoire '*mainly intended for amateurs or young children starting out*', and '*to offer ideas and points of reference to players – young and less young alike*'.

Throughout this review, I'll refer to this target group as 'less experienced players', many of whom, even if they've been playing for a few years, have still not got to grips with a personalised set of openings. So what's the repertoire?

Against 1 e4 he recommends the Scandinavian, specifically the 'Portuguese Variation', 1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4. This can lead to wild positions if White tries to hold on to the extra pawn with 4 f3 (which gets twenty-two pages), or to quieter waters if s/he opts for 4 Be2 (thirteen pages) or 4 Nf3 (twenty-three pages). Of course, we've got to get past move three, when White can try to hold his/her

booty with 3 c4. The normal panacea is 3...c6, transposing into a Caro-Kann after 4 d4 cxd5, but that would involve another opening, an option not open to the author, so he suggests 3...e6! (his punctuation), the so-called Icelandic Gambit (thirteen pages). White can now decide whether to get fruity with 4 dxe6, or play it safer with 4 d4, after which 4...exd5 gives what should be a harmless line of the Exchange French.

While preparing the 4 f3 lines won't do the reader's tactics any harm, the problem, as with so much sharp black stuff, is that it's White who gets to decide how much fun the game is going to be. Still, non-critical lines are unlikely to pose an existential threat to Black, so Black should have no qualms about facing moves other than 4 f3.

There's a minorish issue, though. Since this book arrived on my desk, I've witnessed three games between less experienced players where Black played 2...Nf6. In all three White played 3 Nc3. Moret devotes one game to this on pp.103-4 in the 'Odds and Ends' section. I agree when he calls it 'unambitious', but, based on my own admittedly limited empirical evidence, it's likely to be encountered more often than *'fairly frequently'*. The illustrative game itself features the silly 4 Nxd5; the most common move, 4 Bc4, is dismissed in a brief note as *'playable'*. Within that note Black plays 4...Nb6, which, we must assume, is the author's silent recommendation; there's no mention of, say, 4...c6, maintaining the knight on its good central square. IMO, 3 Nc3 deserved more coverage than it gets.

Against 1 d4 d5 2 c4, the author recommends the Albin Countergambit, a decent suggestion in keeping with his advocacy of active lines, and with plenty of banana skins for unsuspecting Whites. The Albin chapter is full of the sort of fun chess Black can expect when s/he punts this gambit.

The problem is, of course, what if White doesn't play ball with 2 c4? Moret suggests the Stonewall Dutch. I must confess, my eyebrows shot up when I saw this, after all, the Albin and Stonewall are not exactly from the same mould. Granted, the Stonewall can lead to hefty black attacks, but it can also lead to blocked, manoeuvring positions, so how to reconcile an open, trappy line with a solid, no-nonsense alternative? The author explains: *'Playing the Stonewall against the Queen's Gambit (1.d4 and 2.c4) would require the study of additional variations which we will mention at the end of the chapter, but which we cannot afford to tackle within the limited scope of this book'*.

To give the author his due, he does provide lots of words to explain the rationale behind the Stonewall, and gives lines of the active variety, but I get the impression he's not quite as happy here as he is with the other two pillars of the rep. I went hunting for the tricky lines where White gets in an early g2-g4, having a go at Black's pawn on f5 and aiming to open the g-file for an attack. This can border on the terminal if Black doesn't know his onions. As far as I can see (there's no index of variations!) this gets a mention in a note (!) on p.166. The author calls the basic idea *'one of the most serious threats to the viability of the Stonewall'*, and when g2-g4! appears on the board, he says *'the position becomes very sharp'*. The line he gives, down to 12 Ke2, is fraught with risk for Black, and to 'deal' with it by offering a fairly transparent trap does not do a critical line justice, in fact, it's a cop-out. If it's a *'serious threat'*, then it cries out for more attention. Having said that, I'd imagine the chances of this key line landing on a board in, say, a Minor tournament are virtually nil.

Another issue is his coverage of Colle and London systems, particularly popular these days. I scoured the book for these and their ilk (remember, there's no openings index), and could only find a couple of games (nos 72 and 73) featuring an early Bf4, and in the former White soon followed up with c4 anyway. So, unless I'm

missing something, this is a huge gap in the suggested repertoire. It's not necessarily fatal, but it would have been nice for the less experienced player to be offered some guidance on what can be pesky systems.

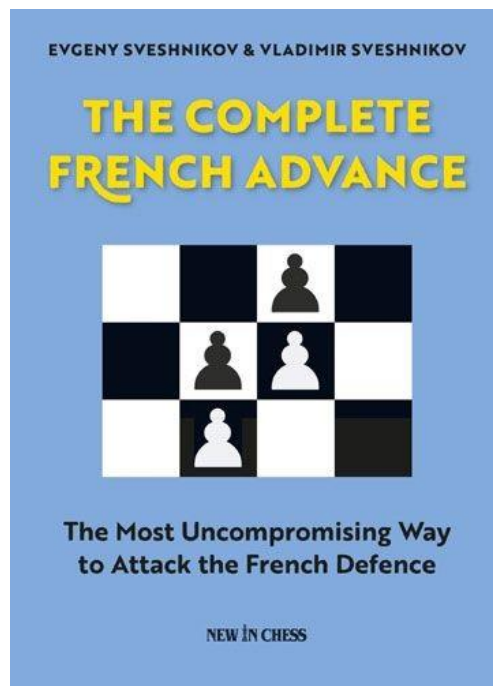
One sideline he does mention is 1 d4 d5 2 Nc3, which, he admits, *'poses some specific problems in order to reach our usual Stonewall'*. He addresses these problems with 2...f5, but then only 3 Bg5. The positionally desirable 3 Bf4, clamping down on the hole on e5, gets precisely two (!!) lines. I'll quote them: *'After 3 Bf4 the correct move order is 3...c6! to prevent Nb5'*. So now you know. Our less experienced player is on his/her own after three moves in a line which poses 'specific problems', hardly what you'd expect with a perfectly plausible option.

Overall, I applaud the author's idea to provide a good, active repertoire for beginners, juniors and less experienced players, and I can imagine that those who put in the effort and follow his suggestions will chalk up plenty of points. The bulk of his work (excellently translated by Tony Kosten) is presented with lots of thought and it's clear that he is passionate about his mission. It's just that at times he deals with irritating possibilities by skating over them. So, praiseworthy though his intentions are, there are gaps which need more plugging.

The index is the same duff first name/page number currently featuring in other NiC titles and, as I've said, for an opening book, there is, incredibly, no index of variations.

Ian Marks

October 2017



THE COMPLETE FRENCH ADVANCE by Evgeny Sveshnikov & Vladimir Sveshnikov, New in Chess, 286 pp., publ. 2017

This is an updated edition of Sveshnikov's 2007 work on the topic. He is still the principal author (*'the majority of ideas came from one person, i.e. myself'*) but has been joined for this one by Sveshnikov fils as IT man, researcher and new eyes. The book pretty much does what it says on the tin, i.e. covers everything you need to know about the Advance French, be you attacker or defender.

Having said that, it's not – despite the portentous title – a theoretical tome of page after page of variations. It surveys 3 e5 via 131 illustrative games, with exercises based on another eighty-two. Nearly half of the games are by three players: forty-five by Sveshnikov himself and nine each by Grischuk and Shirov, the players whom he recommends one study in the Advance French. It took me a while to find and count these, since the present work features the same awful first name (with some initials thrown in)/page number 'index' as other current NiC titles. A work like this, where you want to check the big names at a glance, is just crying out for the traditional alphabetical index.

The style is that of the author giving a presentation or lecture. Depending on the presenter this can run the risk of boredom or info overload, but Sveshnikov is in command of his material and presents it lucidly and at a level sufficient to get his points across without overkill.

He is also engagingly frank with his opinions. 1...e6 is *'strictly speaking, not the strongest move'* and *'3. e5 is not the strongest move'* against it (so why is he writing a book about two inferior moves? he he). He gives Bareev and Dreev, both well-known adherents of the French, a ticking off for playing 1...e6 – *'on the first move, both GMs made a mistake'* (and their alternative defence, the Caro-Kann *'is also not the best move'*). Sveshnikov's reasoning is that *'if a player does not have either 1...e5 or 1...c5 in his repertoire against 1 e4, then sooner or later he runs into the buffers'*. This helps explain why Keres never won the Big One: *'In my opinion, one of the reasons Keres did not become World Champion was that Paul Petrovich stuck with 1...e5'*.

While Sveshnikov can't account for other players blundering with 1...e6, he can explain why he turned to 3 e5. *'...by playing 3.Nc3, one concedes the opponent an obvious advantage in preparation and knowledge'*, and 3 Nd2 is a non-starter since *'...it is clear that the move sharply breaks the principles of opening play'*. (Obviously no-one ever told Karpov that.)

And that's just about the opening. He's equally free with his thoughts on other matters, e.g. *'...surprising as it may seem, our modern grandmasters and masters do not play the endgame very well'*. Ouch! Or *'...in closed positions, one must still treat the advice of the machine with great caution. I am used to trusting my own intuition'*. Gotta love that little dusting of self-belief, which surfaces again when he is recommending which players to follow in the Advance. Having suggested that *'...those who want to play the 3.e5 French as White should carefully study the games of Grischuk and Shirov'*, he

adds *'And it probably makes sense to look at mine too.'* Great stuff! (I could stop the review here by saying that if this style appeals, you'll like the book.)

Of course opinions are just opinions, and Sveshnikov is as entitled to his as the rest of us are to ours. 1...e6 might not be *'the strongest move'*, but that doesn't stop lots of people playing it. If there was a 'best' reply to 1 e4, we'd all be playing it. And anyway, why should you care what anyone thinks of your favourite openings?

Although the material is presented from White's point of view, Black's ideas are also thoroughly considered, when *'I generally pay close attention to Lputian's games, because I know of no other player who handles the black side of these positions as well as he does...'*

The book is organised in six chapters, as follows:

Chapter 1, 'For' and 'against' 3. e5, a brief but interesting historical overview of the Advance.

Chapter 2, the longest, deals with plans and pawn structure. The games (almost half of the total) are grouped by theme, e.g. attack, pawn sac for the initiative, play on the dark squares, pawn breaks etc. This is an instructive and particularly worthwhile chapter. Too many players get wrapped up in variations. I've said in previous reviews that words are often more valuable than moves, and this is an excellent example. Reading this chapter is like having Sveshnikov sitting at your elbow, going over the games with you. It is virtually a little book within a book.

Chapter 3 is an interesting diversion into the world of the blockade and a consideration of Nimzowitsch's influence. It's short but thought-provoking, and features openings other than the French, but which have blockade as their main theme.

Chapter 4 is a collection of eighty-two positions to test how much you've assimilated from what went before. 'All' you have to do is find the strongest move; no hints!

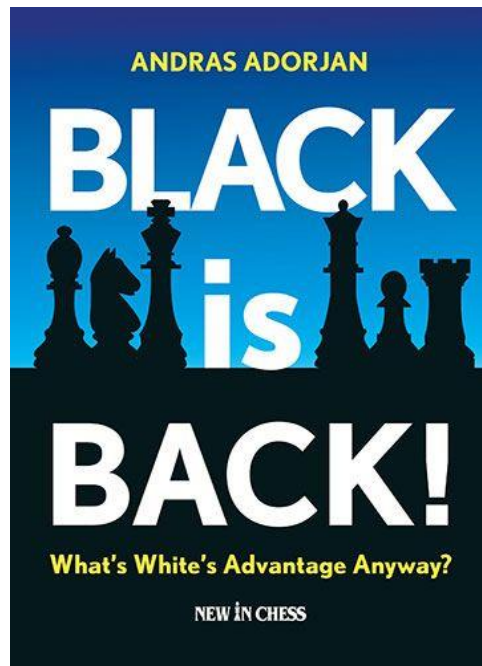
Chapter 5 deals with recent theoretical discoveries. In keeping with the rest of the book it's not theory-heavy, but looks at some recent ideas in the context of games.

Chapter 6 is a six-page summary probably good enough to get you up and running while you get to grips with the main body of the book, and written not without a little humour.

To sum up, this is not just a very good opening book, it's a very good chess book, well written, well assembled and smoothly translated by Steve Giddins. There's more to it than just a bunch of Advance French games; there's a lot of wisdom and instruction in it too. If you play 1 e4, and another line against the French, it would definitely make you consider adding 3 e5 to your tool box. Recommended to those who defend the French, those who play, or are thinking of playing, the Advance, and to anyone just looking for a lot of interesting chess well explained.

Ian Marks

October 2017



BLACK IS BACK! by Andras Adorjan, New in Chess, 319 pp., publ.
2016

This is Adorjan's latest book on his thesis that Black is OK. In his foreword, 'Swan Song', he tells us that it might also be his last: *'I hope this is not only going to be my last opus, but also my best. It is a pleasant duty to conclude my 30-year mission of BLACK is OK!'*, but on p.251 he's talking about 'Swan Song Nr 2'. Is he teasing us? Time will tell.

Adorjan's writing is many things: outspoken, polemic, humorous, thought-provoking, warm, breezy, self-deprecating, inspiring... It's never boring. He may or may not be your cup of tea, but you can't deny he's different. Here are some random examples. Decide for yourself which category they best fit.

'Whatever I do is perfect, and so am I. Many people hate me for this but I can't help it.'

'Honesty and modesty don't pay as well as noisy dilettantism does.'

'One sometimes sees booklets that promise a 'complete repertoire' for Black. I don't like such garbage.'

'...our stupid team captain...'

(Upon winning a court case against the Hungarian Chess Federation's 'gangsterism'): *'I used the b*st*rds' money for organizing tournaments and helping handicapped chess players.'*

And one about a player-turned-arbiter which made me chuckle, as I thought of Alex and Andy: *'I don't believe this was his dream. I think he deserves something better from life.'*

His writing is also confessional. He refers to his bipolarism, and talks openly about the sudden illness which nearly claimed his life at the start of 2016. Respect, Andras, for broaching these subjects.

On a lighter note, he admits to not possessing a mobile (*'I may be a Stone Age man in people's eyes, not having a smartphone'*), but provides his home phone number (!) and his wife's mobile (!!). Now there's a first in a chess book.

The structure of the book is alternating chapters of text and games (206 of them). The former is readable, engaging and unfailingly interesting; the latter include some wonderful dynamic, creative chess. His battles with Barczay, Meister (*'Do not play over the last 13 moves!'*) and Giorgadze in particular appealed to me for a variety of reasons. A huge amount of time has gone into the games and their notes; you could easily and happily lose yourself in them for hours. (And profitably: *'I hope you agree it was worth the trouble to study all these lines. Even if this only means you will win or save one extra game, then your time hasn't been wasted.'*)

In the last chapter, *Connections*, Adorjan pays tribute to the people, famous and not so famous, who have influenced him during his chess life. I found this fascinating and revealing. They range from

big names, e.g. Garry, down to players who dropped out to pursue 'proper' jobs (e.g. Adorjan's dentist). He recalls many with great affection, e.g. correspondence IM Sandor Dobsa as '*an unforgettable man whom I remember with gratitude and love. Such a personality, who found me worthy of his friendship*', and of the little-known player Antal Papp, he says '*Thank God I was able to say goodbye to him, holding his hand, sitting by his deathbed. Rest in Peace, Toni!*'. What lovely writing.

In other cases you get the impression some dirty linen needs airing. Of Peter Leko, whom Adorjan trained and worked with for many years, he says '*I've never seen another talent like him, except for Kasparov*', but something must have happened to affect the '*strong emotional connection*' between them, for he concludes with '*Later he became a person who was easier to respect but harder to love*'. Similar sentiments arise re Portisch, for whom he has '*friendly emotions*', but finds it '*easier to respect him than to love him*'. As is often the case, what's left unsaid is as significant as what is said. It would have been interesting to know what happened to engender these feelings. I can understand why the author chose not to elaborate, but if you don't want to say, don't drop hints.

There are three things I want to mention in particular. First, the standard of language, which is higher – fluent, colloquial and idiomatic – than that of some native English authors, chess and non-chess, I've had the misfortune to read. English is not Adorjan's mother tongue. Some of his earlier works were translated from Hungarian, but no translator is accredited in this one, so we can assume he wrote it in English. Only a few minor glitches suggest that the writer isn't working in his own medium, e.g. '*I am inactive since 2000*' instead of '*I have been inactive...*'. A purist might quibble; people who should get out more probably will. I'll content myself by saying that ironing out wrinkles like this makes a good book better, even if they hardly detract from the overall high standard. With

such a creative, fertile mind as Adorjan's the MS must have needed a fair bit of editorial input, so credit to Peter Boel for his hand in the process (and for chapter 6, which he wrote, a discussion of why games between Gelfand and Nakamura have produced a large plus score for Black).

Next, the diagrams, which have Black at the bottom. Does that send you into paroxysms of apoplexy? Does it rob you of the power of speech? I have found that diagram orientation can be a touchy subject, up there with road rage and forgetting to take bread out of the freezer. When we open our first chess book we meet the convention of White at the bottom, but it's not chiselled in stone. Is it too much trouble to flip? (Rhetorical question. I know the answer.) Where's the logic in having White at the bottom when the subject matter is presented from Black's point of view? (Do players who prepare their black openings from White's side bunk up beside White during their games!?) As Winnie-the-Pooh observed, bouncing down the stairs on his head for the umpteenth time: *'sometimes he feels that there really is another way, if only he could stop bumping for a moment and think of it'*. Kudos to NiC for putting Black at the bottom. Even if it was at the author's behest, I salute you.

Having praised the publishers for doing something differently where it's appropriate and works, I move on to an issue where different = disastrous. The games index is a shambles. The normal surname-based index allows you to find what you're looking for in seconds. Not this one, which is arranged by chapter, first name (mainly, see later) and page number. Thus if you're looking for, say, Pritchett-Adorjan, it helps to know that it's chapter five, that you're looking for 'Craig', not P for 'Pritchett' (there are no Ps, and assuming you know the white player's first name), then you have to check the page numbers. To make matters worse, some players are listed by second name only (!!). By what measure is this efficient? Alas and alack, judging by other titles, this looks like NiC's default

'indexing' system. Guys, what are you playing at? This does nothing to enhance your products. Do your readers a favour and stick to the accepted indexing system. (At least the right-hand margin page numbers are aligned correctly in hundreds, tens and units, but the left-hand margin chapter numbers on p.5. aren't. Other publishers are guilty of this too. They probably blame it on their computer program rather than admit that it's easily remedied and avoidable.)

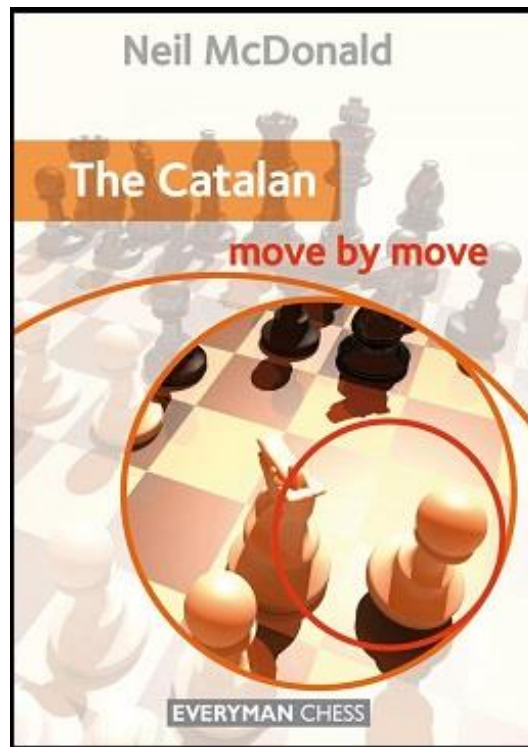
Talking of indexes, an openings index and an index of themes or topics would have been useful. If you want to track down, say, a particular line in the Sicilian (of which there are lots), the only way is to go through every page painstakingly until you find it.

The verdict? Since Adorjan isn't responsible for the index, I'll draw a veil over it and say that *Black is Back!* delivers a great deal for your investment: lots of dynamic, inspirational chess, lots of creative ideas, an often edgy text and an engrossing excursion into the philosophy of playing Black. If you've never thought about this before, it could easily affect how you look at the game. Your attention will not flag. If, by any chance, it does, you could try to track down the four ('or more – I've forgotten') errors which the author claims he included in the text. I've found one, possibly two, but I've no intention of spoiling things by telling you what they are. The author hoped that it would be his best book. He could well be right.

By the way – nothing to do with chess – is the catchy title a little nod to AC/DC's *Back in Black* album? Rock on.

Ian Marks

September 2017



THE CATALAN MOVE BY MOVE by Neil McDonald, Everyman Chess,
300 pp., publ. 2017

Let's define what we're talking about first of all. In case anyone doesn't know, the Catalan is basically a Queen's Gambit where White develops his KB on g2, viz. 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 g3 and Bg2. Therein lies a major issue for would-be exponents: reaching 'your' position is move-order dependent. McDonald devotes an introductory chapter to this, dealing with common alternatives 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 d5 and 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 d5 4 g3. The problem here, of course, is that 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 (or Nf3) Bb4+ is a Bogo-Indian and 3...c5 a Benoni (maybe even an English), and 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 b6 is a Queen's Indian, which McDonald doesn't spell out. Perhaps this is assumed knowledge, but in an introductory volume, the distinction is worth making. Golden rule when working with students: never assume anything.

White can also try 1 c4 or 1 Nf3 to avoid certain pesky black lines, e.g. an early disruptive ...Bb4+, but that risks swapping one nuisance for another. 1 c4 e5 is an English, and 1 Nf3 can run into

all sorts of evasive stuff such as 1...c5, 1...g6 etc. So the Catalan is not a one-size-fits-all opening. The message is clear: choose the move order you're happiest with and have something ready for dealing with non-consenting opponents.

One other thing worth being aware of, as McDonald again points out ('abandon hope all ye who want to smash your opponents in 20 moves'), is that the Catalan is not a weapon for duffing people up in short order; it is an opening designed to give Black rope and hang himself, rich in boring potential. ('g3? Eugh. I already feel like my will to live leaving me when he plays the Catalan.' – Jan Gustafsson) Having said that, I was surprised at just how many meaty attacking games there are in the book, not a few which end in the 20s.

OK, having got your Catalan on the board, what can you expect? Black is not short of options. He can take on c4 and play an open type position. He can dig in with ...c6 and a more solid set-up. He can flick in an early ...Bb4+ if he wishes. He can attack White's centre with an early ...c5, or he can go for active piece play, even gambits, with an early ...Nc6. McDonald covers all of these in ten chapters in four large parts:

1. The closed centre after 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 g3.
2. When Black concedes the centre with 4...dxc4.
3. Various lines after 5 Bg2.
4. The main line after 4...Be7 5 Bg2 0-0 6 0-0 dxc4.

Given its nature, the Catalan isn't an opening likely to suffer from explosive TNs, but there's one set-up which is new and worthy of attention by both White and Black, and that is for Black to castle queenside (yep, you heard me), e.g. 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 g3 dxc4 5 Bg2 Bd7 6 Ne5 Bc6 7 Nxc6 Nxc6 8 0-0 Qd7 9 e3 0-0-0 voilà! This seems to defy common sense. Black's king stares down the barrel of the Bg2, and White is invited to open lines to mate him,

but it seems to work, which is all that matters in these modern times. McDonald covers this new idea in depth in chapter six.

The material is bang up to date. Thirty-nine of the forty-three games were played in the last five years, seventeen of them from 2016-7. This, of course, reflects the opening's current popularity amongst the big guys, and where the big guys go, lesser mortals follow.

A word about the author's style. I lauded him earlier for addressing the move order issue, but this is merely one aspect of McDonald's thoroughness and clarity. How often do you see stuff like 'move X is better'? Full stop. No elucidation. Silence. Not so here. If something needs explained, he explains it. If something is unclear, he clarifies. Of course, you can't do the reader's work for him/her (think for yourself!), so some notes are akin to the above, but, overall, he wants to make sure his reader knows what's happening. Here's an example:

"In order to break up Black's queenside pawns and open lines for the white pieces. After 9...bxa3 10 Nbxa3 White's pieces are coming alive. Then, as usual, simplification doesn't help Black escape from a Catalan bind: 10...Qa5+? 11 Qd2 Qxd2+ Kxd2. White's rook on a1 has an open file, his bishop on g2 a clear diagonal, and his knights are about to join up with central domination after 13 Naxc4."

That's good, succinct, helpful writing. It would have been easy to stop after the first or second sentence. Many a writer would have done so. Another which caught my eye relates to a pair of before-and-after diagrams on p.245, where White has just played an early Bc1-f4, met by the very reasonable ...Be7-d6. The question which I can imagine many players wanting to ask (and it's not!) is 'Why doesn't Black play ...Nd5, hitting the B on f4?'. Fear not! Neil has this one covered too with a line where Black does get ...Nd5xf4 in: 'At first you might think Black has achieved a lot through gaining the bishop-pair and in the process splitting the white kingside pawns. In

reality, White has a grip on the centre...His king is in little danger and it is Black, not White, who has to fear a possible attack down the g-file...' Another succinct and sensible explanation for any less experienced readers wondering why Black just couldn't bag a buckshee bishop.

The Q & A format has become a staple with Everyman, so the question must be asked: how effective is it? The answer is: as effective as the reader wants to make it. I wonder how many readers have the will power to stop when they come to one of the grey boxes and put some effort into the question? I suspect the minority! Even if you lack said will power, you can still derive benefit by mulling over the question and its answer. Just don't skate over it. The wisdom is there. It's up to you to assimilate it. Choose the way that suits you.

The other issue is: how effective are the questions? Some are open-ended, to get the reader thinking ('What's the point of this move?'), some involve pouring yourself a coffee and settling down for a spot of analysis ('Can you work out which of 13...Bb7, 13...Rb8 or 13...e5 is the best move for Black?'), while some are just plain loaded, e.g. 'Is this a strong and sensible move?'. Well, obviously, otherwise the wording would have been different!

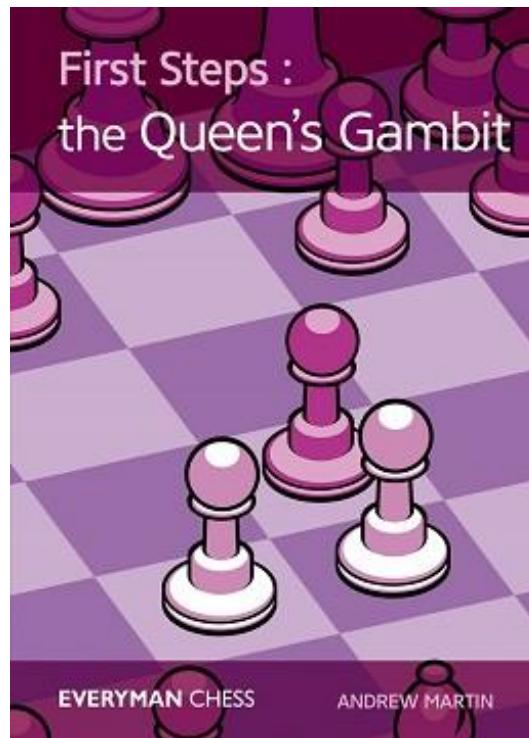
The Catalan Move by Move works on a number of levels: (i) as an introduction to the opening; (ii) as a source of material and ideas for those who already play it and (iii) perhaps surprisingly, and despite the author's claims to the contrary, as a collection of exciting attacking chess. One thing missing, rather annoyingly, is a bibliography. It's always worthwhile to know an author's sources. In matters Catalan, it would have been nice to know if he had referred to Avrukh. I suspect (am sure) he did, but I'd like to have known!

For whom would this one be suitable? The publisher's blurb says that the Catalan is for players who '...prefer to rely on their strategic

and positional skills'. Now, no disrespect to anyone, but the further down the pecking order, the less these skills are in evidence, so I'd say players >1800 would benefit most from it, but, hey, if you just fancy some good, contemporary attacking chess, why not go for it?

Ian Marks

August 2017



FIRST STEPS: THE QUEEN'S GAMBIT by Andrew Martin, Everyman Chess, 224 pp., publ. 2016

This is one of a new series from Everyman aimed at, as the title suggests, less experienced players looking to pick up the nuts and bolts of an opening.

It's an excellent idea. When I were a lad, the only book which aimed to provide a basic grounding in the foundations was Reuben Fine's *The Ideas Behind the Chess Openings* (and it was already dated when I was starting out). This covered all the mainstream openings in 200-odd pages, a herculean task of compression, with, inevitably, severe limitations on how many pages could be devoted to any specific opening (and how much you could actually explain). What struck me as an untutored youngster, though, was that there were ideas behind the openings. To me you just played sensible (hopefully!) moves and got on with it.

I mention this because it stands to reason that, the clearer the idea you have of an opening, the better you're going to do. Let me give

you an example (which happens to be the last in the book, game 63), 1 d4 d5 2 c4 Nf6?! I've seen this frequently in games between less experienced and casual players, in other words players who would benefit from a book such as this. After 3 cxd5 Nxd5 4 Nf3 White builds up a big centre, develops easily and gets a ready-made attacking position against the black king. Black's best (mentioned in a note) is probably 4...g6, when he can wriggle out with a dodgy Grünfeld after 5 e4 Nb6, but this is getting into subtle stuff of the kind beyond the book's coverage.

I'm getting ahead of myself a bit, but the point is that if Black had better understood what he should be doing after 1 d4 d5 2 c4, he would never have finished up in a dubious position so early on. Which is where a book such as this comes in.

By means of sixty-three games, Martin covers all you need to know about the basics of the Queen's Gambit: piece deployment for White and Black, Exchange lines, the QGA, QGD, Slavs, Tarrasch and less common stuff (e.g. 2...Bf5). It's fair to say that if you're new to the game, or the opening, you'll find something of use. Most of the illustrative games are of recent vintage, but there are several older games, no bad thing with such a venerable opening. As the author says, 'The study of classic games is essential if one wants to understand chess and make significant improvement'.

Each game has plenty of supporting analysis, but what caught my eye – and this is important in a book like this – is the amount of succinct advice dispensed. Here's a good example, from the section on Lasker's defence, after Black has played an early ...h6:

'A useful move in the modern Queen's Gambit for two reasons: Back rank mates are less likely.
The battery of a white bishop on d3 and queen on c2 is less

effective.

Small things, but they all add up.'

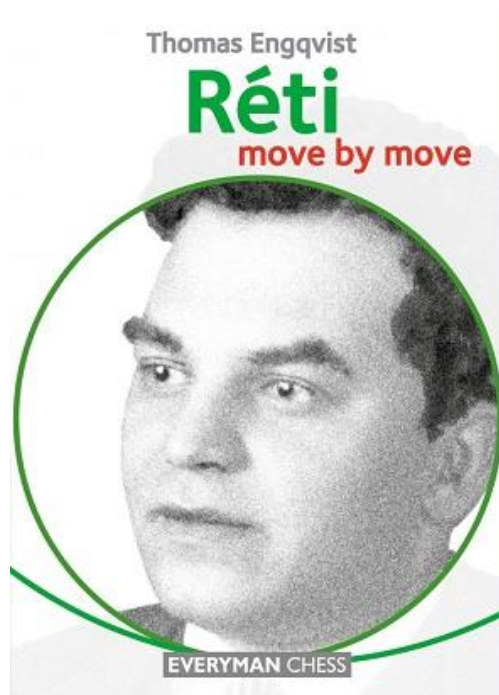
That's a good, bite-size dollop of advice, as is this on p.188, in the chapter on less common lines:

'There are many gems to be found for the club player among this selection of unusual defences. Don't worry what the book says. If you like an opening and it is playable (not completely unsound), then go for it!'

There is one caveat, though, which players at the lower end of the rating list should be aware of. You can study a book like this all you want, and be ready for whatever White throws at you in your pet QG line, but still be jumped by a pesky London, Colle or Torre, not to mention the good old Blackmar-Diemer Gambit, 2 e4, which tends to score well against inexperienced players whose defensive skills are less than stellar, so be ready for them too! Having said that, this is a solid and readable introduction to one of the fundamental chess openings. Martin writes with a light and engaging touch; he doesn't overdo the didacticism, which makes it all the more effective. If you're a less experienced player wanting to move on, or simply looking for some 1 d4 d5 games well-explained, cast your eyes at this one.

Ian Marks

June 2017



RÉTI MOVE BY MOVE by Thomas Engqvist, Everyman Chess, 432 pp., publ. 2017

Lest anyone be unfamiliar with the subject, Richard Réti was one of the top players in the world in the 1920s, a member of an élite which included the likes of Capablanca, Alekhine and Lasker. He was also a renowned composer of studies and wrote two of the great chess classics, *Modern Ideas in Chess* and *Masters of the Chess Board*, both still well worth reading in these hi-tech digital days.

Engqvist presents forty-six of Réti's games, annotated in depth, often running to twelve pages or more. (No. 15, Schelfhout-Réti, clocks in at 103 moves [of which the last sixty are a fascinating B+P ending] and fourteen pages.) He provides lots of analysis, but also lots of prose to give an overview of positions and explain what's going on. As befits a player of Réti's calibre, many of the games are truly superb. No. 39, Réti-Romanovsky, Moscow 1925, is a great battle in which our man doesn't move his e-pawn until move 30, and when Romanovsky resigns on move 47, neither White's d- nor e-pawn has got beyond the third rank. Game 21, Przepiorka-Réti,

Bad Pistyan 1922, is another engrossing encounter in which Réti (as Black!) plays the forerunner of the KIA set-up which was to become all the rage with White in the '60s and a staple in Fischer's repertoire. There is certainly something 'modern' about many of these 'old' games. Réti's style at its best was one of what I'd call unhurried determination. Once he had established an advantage, he was generally lethal in converting it in his own patient manner into a win. There is much to be learnt from such an approach.

Engqvist doesn't let his subject off lightly, though, and attaches plenty of !s, ?s and even ??s to Réti's moves if he feels they warrant them. I like to see this. Some authors assign a degree of papal infallibility to their subjects.

(À propos Romanovsky. One of the strongest early Soviet players, and twice Soviet champion, he was awarded the IM title in 1950, but never made GM. Engqvist says it was because his many other interests denied him the necessary time and effort, a claim apparently borne out by Romanovsky's own comments. This might be true enough, but he could surely have mentioned that the Soviets did in fact apply for Romanovsky to receive the GM title, only to withdraw it for political reasons.)

English is not Engqvist's native language, so it's reasonable to ask how well his text reads. The answer is very well. An editor's guidance is, of course, essential in the provision of a smooth text, but, overall, if you didn't know that Engqvist was a Swede, you'd be hard pressed to guess that English wasn't his first language.

There are, however, a few solecisms of the kind which slip through the net all too readily these days, and not only in chess books. (I've just read in a history book a list of three items with a reference to 'the latter' when the author really means 'the last'.) E.g. on p.228 we read of 'Felix Fischer, who we met in the previous game'. Now, I'm not an out-and-out grammar fascist. I don't curl up at the likes of

'Who were you talking to?'. In everyday usage, especially speech, that's acceptable, but in a text, the third word in the example above really should be 'whom'* (object of the verb 'met', OK?). The brain expects it. 'Who' interrupts the flow of reading and is just wrong. (I'm sure Engqvist knows it's 'whom', and wrote 'whom', but had it changed by his editor.) In similar fashion, on p.79 we learn that Walter John is 'probably most well known for a game he lost...'. 'Most well? Best known! These sorts of things should be spotted by an editor. If he doesn't spot them, he ain't doin' his job; if he spots them and lets them pass, or changes right to wrong, (house rules?), then it reflects on the publisher's standards. They don't bother you? They bother me. As I've said in previous reviews, you wouldn't accept faults or blemishes in any other product. Why accept them in a book?

(*My spellchecker insists on 'who', which illustrates exactly why it sometimes pays to ignore spellcheckers. Don't rely on 'em, kids!)

Talking of editors, I had trouble finding out who the editor actually was. There's no accreditation on the info page, and it was only while reading the acknowledgements that I found a name.

There are a number of other things which suggest the editor took his eye off the ball. Some examples:

The biography tells us that Réti was born on 28 May 1889 and died on 6 June 1929 'at the young age of 39'. Erm...nope, forty.

Several errors creep in when talking about Semmering 1926. On p.368 the author writes, '...held at the Grand Hotel Panhas in the south of Vienna'. It's actually the Grand Hotel Panhans (a typo?), but it was the preposition 'in' which caught my eye. Semmering is 60 miles to the south of Vienna, and I put it down to a slip (despite my comments above) by a non-native speaker of English. 'In' clearly implies, well, in Vienna. Then it clicked. Simmering ('i') is one of

Vienna's southern districts. Obviously writer and/or editor are muxing the two places ip. Shoulda been checked and corrected.

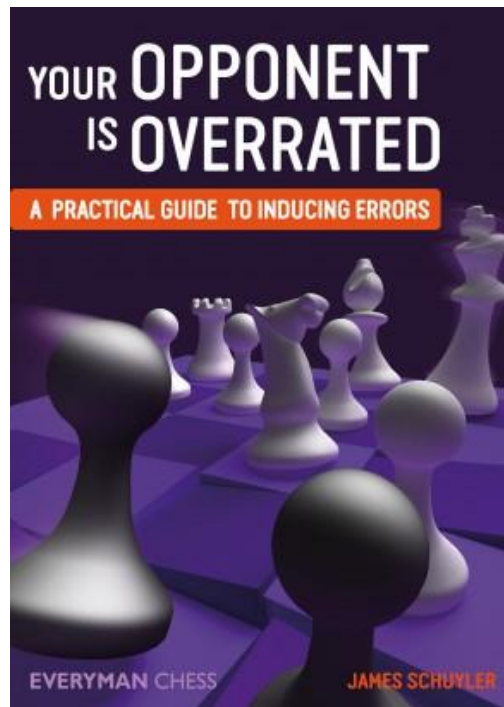
Chesswise, one thing which bugs me is authors making a bland statement like '... is better', but failing to explain why. On occasion Engqvist is no exception. For example, in game 43, Réti-Nilsson, London Olympiad 1927, he says, 'Either 16...c6 or 16...Rfc8 is preferable', '... 17 Be3 is very good for White too' and 'It is better to play 17...Rac8', with no further elucidation. Given his target readership, presumably 'average' players, it would have been helpful to clarify the reasons for his preferences. Talking of clarification, on p.117 it says that Réti (in 1919) 'had arrived in Holland as a political refugee'. This was something of which I was unaware, and was keen to know more, but that's all we're told. I surmise that it was as a result of upheavals in Central Europe after the First World War, but it would have been nice to know. That prompts the question: what nationality was Réti? He was born in Bazin in Hungary which, after the break-up of Austro-Hungary, found itself in Czechoslovakia as Pezinok and is now in Slovakia. He is often labelled as 'Czech', even though he spent most of his life as a citizen of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Just to confuse the issue, he died in Prague and is buried in Vienna (in, to add even more confusion, the aforementioned district of Simmering).

On a side note, I was amazed at how many players in the early part of the 20th century met untimely or tragic deaths, Réti himself amongst them. (Modern antibiotics would have cured the scarlet fever to which he succumbed.) E.g. the English master Yates died as the result of a gas leak, his less well-known compatriot Drewitt fell from a train, and the Austrian master Perlis died from exposure following a climbing accident. (This has nothing to do with the book under review, but while the above are certainly unfortunate accidents, they pale into insignificance compared to the bizarre – and Darwinian – demise of Agnes Stevenson, former British

women's champion, who, en route to the Women's World Championship in Warsaw in 1935, walked into an aeroplane propeller, with the inevitable consequences.)

To summarise: a lot of time and effort has gone into this one; it's full of interesting, well-annotated games, historical insights and snippets of chess lore, but also contains a number of niggly errors and omissions. Overall a fine effort about a great player, worthy of your attention.

Ian Marks, April 2017



YOUR OPPONENT IS OVERRATED by James Schuyler, Everyman Chess, 220 pp., publ. 2016

The subtitle provides a clue to the contents: *A Practical Guide to Inducing Errors*. It's a trip into the sometimes murky waters of chess psychology, reminiscent of Simon Webb's classic *Chess for Tigers*.

This is an aspect of the game often ignored by less experienced or more casual club players, who overlook that chess is not just about swapping moves, but is a game played by two fallible human beings, about playing the (wo)man and not the board, getting your opponent out of her/his comfort zone, skulduggery etc. etc. Lasker (there's a chapter on him) was renowned for it. Nowadays the mantle has been taken over by the likes of Carlsen, Nakamura and Rapport, although it's a part of every strong player's armoury.

Amongst self-explanatory chapters (The Opening, Manoeuvring, The Clock and The Endgame), you'll find topics which smack of the dark side, such as Harassment, Hating Your Opponent and Provocativeness. These are things that you at least need to be aware of if you want to win, and that, basically, is the author's

intention – for the reader to chalk up more points, to be aware of the competitive issues involved, and the dirty tricks that you can try on your opponents – and they on you. He calls this ‘nettlesomeness’, the art of irritating the other guy. I like to think of it as messing with his mind.

Schuyler writes clearly and his book reads easily, his examples – many from his own practice – are to the point, and he takes pains to explain his ideas in words rather than just bare variations. Lots of pearls of wisdom leap off the page. Herewith a few:

‘Your mind is your tool and your weapon, so regardless of what is happening in your mind, it pays to be aware of it.’

‘You don’t beat better players without taking some risks.’

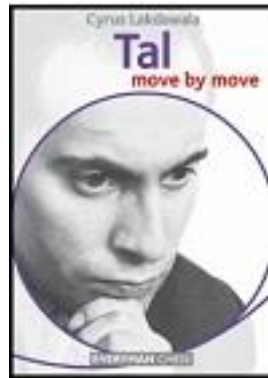
‘There is no such thing as a winning position unless it is accompanied by enough time on the clock for you to win it.’

‘We all know what “should” is worth in chess.’

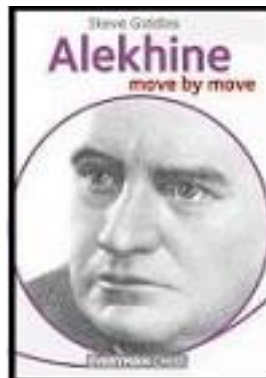
‘If your opponent loses on time, or through a blunder, these are just chess results like any other.’ (I mention this for the guy I know who often offers his opponents a draw if they’re about to lose on time because he doesn’t like winning on time. Why are you playing chess, chum!!?)

As I said at the start, the book deals with aspects of the game that more casual players might not be fully aware of. For them Schuyler’s book would be a real eye-opener, and I’m sure that if they read it their play and results would improve. But, as I’ve commented in other reviews, the player who would benefit most from a book like this tends to be the player who doesn’t read chess books. Guys! Shake off your sloth!

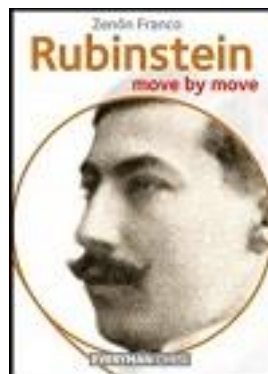
Ian Marks, Feb. 2017



TAL MOVE BY MOVE by Cyrus Lakdawala, Everyman Chess, 396 pp.,
publ. 2015



ALEKHINE MOVE BY MOVE by Steve Giddins, Everyman Chess, 298
pp., publ. 2016



RUBINSTEIN MOVE BY MOVE by Zenón Franco, Everyman Chess,
400 pp., publ. 2015

Another in Everyman's expanding series on great players. I've already reviewed several of these titles, so, before looking at this one, here's a little philosophical digression into why I think the series is such a good idea.

When I was starting out in the late '60s, chess books were largely games collections. Works by or about Capablanca, Alekhine, Euwe, Botvinnik, Smyslov, Keres, Reshevsky and Tal were readily available, often in reprint, a testimony to their enduring popularity. Writers such as Clarke, Golombek, Alexander and the oft-maligned Fred Reinfeld were excellent chroniclers. Two of my first 'proper' chess books were Alekhine's 1924-1937 and Clarke's book on Petrosian.

Then the '60s became the '70s, and Batsford gave birth to the openings monograph, which, like an invasive species, threatened the very existence of the games collection. Fischer's and Larsen's *magna opera* apart, it became more or less a conveyor belt of one openings book after another. The reason was simple. Nobody gets rich writing chess books, and such money as was to be made was more likely to come from the openings manual. Who wanted to play through a dusty QGD by some old guy from the past when they could mug up on the first fifteen moves of a hot King's Indian that they might (but probably wouldn't) face in their next tournament?

And that is why a series like Everyman's is so worthwhile. Chess isn't just openings, it's two minds at work, and games collections show the finest achievements of great players in this light; done correctly they not only present games but also shed light on the characters and times of the players.

Giddins gives us thirty-five games by Alekhine, Franco thirty-four of Rubinstein's plus supplementary games, and Lakdawala fifty-three of Tal's. While Giddins presents them as 'straight games', the other two categorise them by theme. Franco looks at Rubinstein's play in

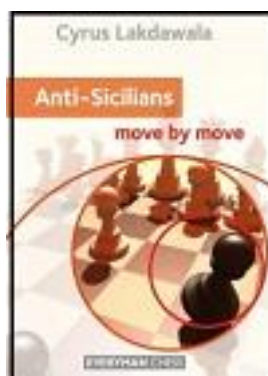
terms of Positional Play, Initiative and Attack, Endgame Mastery, Rook Endgames and Linking the Opening and Middlegame. Lakdawala divvies Tal's into three broad categories: The Early Years, World Champion and 1960-1970, and The Later Years. This makes sense. Rubinstein is acknowledged as one of the great positional players, while Tal's career fell neatly into those three periods. (Curious point: why is Giddins's book so much shorter [and only two quid cheaper!]? Kind of strange, given that Alekhine is one of the most chronicled players of all time.)

The notes in each volume are detailed, but not so dense that you lose sight of the wood for trees. Each author uses lots of explanatory prose, one of my hobby horses. It is interesting to compare writing styles. Giddins is probably the chattiest of the three; it is easy to imagine two guys discussing the games. Lakdawala's is the floweriest and most verbose. It's likeable in its own way, but, as I've said in other reviews of his work, it's easy to overdo it. The occasional flowery image or analogy is all very well, but it can become overdone, and you end up thinking 'not another one'. The Tal book is no exception. On p.191 we're told that *'the only thing missing is Benny Hill banjo chase music'*. If you don't get the reference to Benny Hill – and many young readers, or readers unfamiliar with English-language popular culture, might not – that's meaningless. On p.131, discussing Donner's insistence on seeing through an e4-e5 break v. Tal's Benoni, he writes, *'A single cell amoeba is attracted to an unfamiliar source of light and heat. Moral: living organisms are creatures of curiosity'*. I'm still not sure I get that one, even in the context. That sort of thing apart, Lakdawala packs a lot of chess wisdom into his writing; it's just a pity it has to compete with stuff like this. Franco pretty much gives it to you straight; he discusses the games without too many frills or exuberant wordplay. Perhaps this is because English is not his native language, and this is how he writes. Or could it be down to translation? (There's no mention of a translator.) Either way his writing comes across well,

and if he did write it in English, then kudos to him; I've read worse by native speakers.

Anyway, each book is a solid piece of work and a worthwhile read. Players doubting the value of dipping into the rich heritage of chess could do a lot worse than cast an eye in their direction.

Answer to last review's trivium: as far as I know, Spassky's sole Scottish smiter in tournament play is Phil Giulian, Glenrothes blitz, 1988. Phil also had Tal on toast there too, but the other Big Man wriggled his way out. What a double that would have been.



ANTI-SICILIANS MOVE BY MOVE by Cyrus Lakdawala, Everyman
Chess, 448 pp., publ. 2016

I chuckle nowadays at the term 'anti-Sicilians'. There are so many of them being played so often that they are fast becoming just as normal way of meeting 1...c5 as 2 Nf3 and 3 d4. I find it gently ironic that there is an increasing number of theoretical works on lines based on avoiding theory. Anyway, to our subject matter.

I'll start with the contents, so you know what your potential purchase covers:

2 c3

Rossolimo/Moscow

2 Nf3 move orders

Closed

King's Indian Attack

The Grand Prix

Tiviakov's Variation (1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 Bb5)

b3 lines

Morra and Wing Gambits

Odds and Ends (1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Qxd4; 2 f4; 2 g3; 2 Ne2; 2 Na3; 2 c4; 2 Bc4)

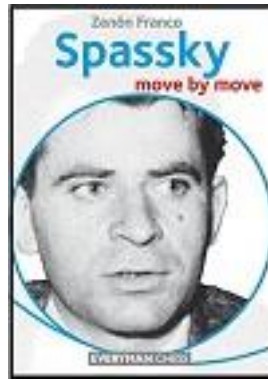
That seems to cover pretty much everything White might throw at you (although, as far as I can see, there's no mention of 2 a3, about which a couple of books, one of them 500+ pages, have been written!). 2 c3 is almost mainstream nowadays; Lakdawala's suggested antidote is 2...Nf6 with ...b6 to follow. This is a perfectly viable system designed to get a grip on the light squares weakened by White's early e5, but it raises the point that there have been so many anti-Sicilian books in recent years that it becomes increasingly difficult for an author to suggest something different without running the risk of rehashing what has gone before. Depending on which anti-Sicilian book you're holding in your hands you'll find both 2...Nf6 and 2...d5 recommended; some other non-Sicilian-specific volumes suggest stuff like 2...g6. Which of these you play depends on how happy you are with them.

The Rossolimo/Moscow lines with 3 Bb5(+) can present a bit of an issue over the 2...Nc6/2...d6 move order, which is of course why people play them. Lakdawala kills those two birds with the 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 Bb5+ Nc6/2...Nc6 3 Bb5 d6 sequence. This is perfectly valid, although, once again, you've got to be happy with the positions arising.

And so on. Practicality is a major consideration throughout, combining workload with lines which will provide reasonable chances. Lakdawala writes in his trademark highly descriptive style, often with the personal touch. I liked a comment to one of his own games, *'I twirled my moustache evilly, in silent movie-villain fashion, as I made this move'*. Haven't we all known this moment when we realise we're about to make the final twist of the knife in our opponent's position?

This is an excellent attempt to get to grips with all the pesky Sicilian sidelines, and if you play 1...c5, you'll probably want to add it to your shelf.

Ian Marks, October 2016



SPASSKY MOVE BY MOVE by Zenón Franco, Everyman Chess, 464 pp., publ. 2015

When I was starting out, one player was the man of the moment – Boris Spassky. The Botvinnik/Smyslov era was over, Tal had had his shot, Petrosian was minding the shop, and Fischer wasn't yet the finished article. Spassky, trampling over giants like Keres, Geller and Tal, was the man everybody had their eyes on. Years later, when I got to meet the Great Man (at Glenrothes!, no disrespect to Glenrothes, but still), it was like meeting Elvis.

If you think about it (I didn't until this one landed on my desk), Spassky is the World Champion least chronicled in print. He wrote little or nothing himself, and has failed to attract the attention of authors in the way that, for example, Tal and Fischer have done. For one of the truly great players of the latter half of the 20th century, this is remarkable. Perhaps it has something to do with his losing the '72 match to Fischer, and subsequently being eclipsed by the emerging Karpov, but, whatever, it is a gap in chess publishing that needs filling. Thus it is pleasing to see this sturdy effort from the Paraguayan GM.

After a short chapter on Spassky's career and longer one on his style, the author divides his material up into chapters on Universal Style and the Initiative and Attack, then seven more grouped according to opening – the Ruy Lopez, Sicilian, Exchange Grünfeld, Sämisch King's Indian, Queen's Gambit, King's Gambit and

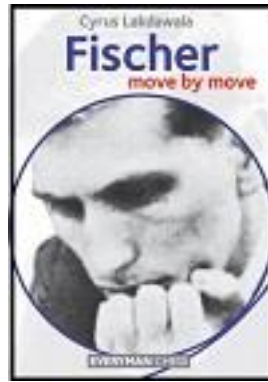
Leningrad Nimzo. Don't groan, though. It is far from being 'just' another openings book. These were the workhorses of Spassky's career, the canvas for some of his greatest creative achievements. Strangely, for a player with a fairly limited, but deep, repertoire, Spassky was never considered a great theoretician, and bequeathed the chess world no 'variations' (although it could be argued that his use of the Marshall in the 1965 Candidates final against Tal kick-started the subsequent interest in the line which has endured to this day).

The forty main games are annotated in great depth, but with a pleasing amount of explanatory prose, and many feature supplementary games to illustrate points arising. If there is a common thread, it is a quest for the initiative. Spassky was never boring (unless he was giving or taking short draws in the twilight of his career); his games were generally full of an energy which we could all benefit from by trying to inject into our own games. Even compared to other top GMs (whom he could make look ordinary when he was at his best), he had a remarkable feel for the interplay between time and material. For example, look at his games v Evans (Varna 1962) and Larsen (Belgrade 1970, though it has to be admitted Bent rather asked for it). And there are plenty of others.

If you're looking for a collection of inspirational initiative chess, this is it. I'll leave you with the words of GM Ivan Sokolov, no slouch himself when it comes to attacking chess: *'Spassky was a brilliant attacker, and every chess player is well advised to study his games.'* What are you waiting for?

To finish off, a little trivium. Who is the only Scottish player (as far as I know!) to have beaten Spassky in a competitive tournament game? Answer next review.

Ian Marks, July 2016



FISCHER MOVE BY MOVE by Cyrus Lakdawala, Everyman Chess,
427 pp., publ. 2015

The prolific Cyrus is becoming a true chess Stakhanovite; this is his twenty-second book in the last few years, a prodigious feat. In fact, I'm starting to wonder how he finds time for the mundanities of everyday life, like taking his car to the garage, going to the shops, coaching his students, talking to his wife...

He has taken on a Big Name in this one, arguably the Biggest Chess Name ever. Fischer is probably the player who has had more words devoted to him than any other. It is said in the publishing world that if you want a book to sell, put 'Hitler' in the title. In similar fashion you could argue that, for chess books, use 'Fischer'. (And before any professional easily offended people write in, I'm not trying to compare those two gentlemen in any way whatsoever.)

Lakdawala starts with an eighteen-page introduction, half of which is devoted to the classic Fischer-Stein game, Sousse Interzonal 1967. This is, and will remain, one of the greatest no-holds-barred brawls between two top GMs the chess world has ever seen. If you don't know it, you should! Thereafter he divvies his material into six chapters, Fischer on: ...the Attack, ...Defence and Counterattack, ...the Dynamic Element, ...Exploiting Imbalances, ...Accumulating Advantages and ...the Endgame. The games are annotated in great depth over many pages (this is not a book for beginners) in Lakdawala's trademark chatty, flowery style. As I've said in other

reviews of his work, this is very much an acquired taste; you either love it or you loathe it. Despite my reservations, I like it. Successful writing is writing which engages the reader, and Lakdawala's prose certainly does that. On the other hand there are occasions when Cyrus gets a tad carried away, e.g. on p.184 when Smyslov's king 'makes a sound eerily similar to the startled yelp by that citizen of Tokyo (circa early 1950's), when he first caught a glimpse of Godzilla entering the city limits'. Depending on whether you find that hilarious, delightfully original or a waste of words will go a long way to informing whether you'd like his style or not. Cyrus himself takes a gentle swipe at '*misguided readers who hate my writing style and punish my books with a hateful review!*' (Er...lot of hate going on in there; if they hate your writing style, surely they wouldn't be buying your books, Cyrus?) Clearly he's not going to change, but why should he? Used in the right way at the right time, humour and a touch of levity can be highly effective teaching tools. Flowery prose aside, there is a lot of good chess instruction in here.

The danger with a book on Fischer is that so much has already been written about him, never mind his own classic collection *My 60 Memorable Games*, that it is hard to say anything new and you end up rehashing what has gone before. This in itself isn't such a problem, after all just because you've heard one orchestra perform, say, Beethoven's 9th doesn't mean you can't hear how another one interprets it. But it is an issue, one that Lakdawala acknowledges. Thus of the book's fifty-six games, exactly half, twenty-eight, were played after the 1967 cut-off in *My 60 Memorable Games*. Of the other twenty-eight, only ten appear in *M60MG*: Sherwin, Reshevesky, Tal, Benko, R. Byrne, Smyslov, Portisch, Bednarsky, Larsen and Stein. (Most of those will be familiar names, except Bednarsky. You might be wondering why a game against a relatively unknown journeyman GM appears in both books. Answer: it's a brutal attacking gem which illustrates with crystal clarity how Fischer tended to deal with members of the lower orders.) The

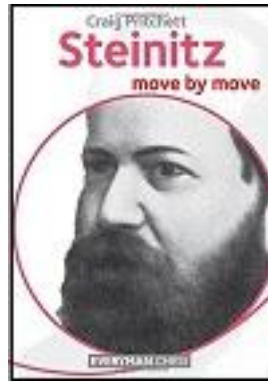
reason for their inclusion is simple: it would be heresy to omit some of Fischer's finest achievements. (If you go to a gig, there are always certain songs that the band simply *has* to play. You get the idea.) Anyway, if you're wondering whether you'd just end with a bunch of clichéd games, the answer is no.

Fischer was a complex character. In his later years it became clear that he had (and had had) serious mental health issues. Lakdawala doesn't gloss over this, and deals with it sympathetically, if briefly.

The big question, of course, is: Was Fischer the Greatest? It's an impossible question to answer, which is what makes it such a great source of debate in any field of sporting endeavour. Lakdawala makes his pitch by comparing the great champions under various categories, e.g. creativity, attacking ability, defence, feel for the initiative etc., a fun and different way to try to come up with an answer (which I'm not divulging here). Whether you think Fischer was or not, it's worth reflecting that his retrospective *average* rating of 2783 (Chessmetrics) would still put him in today's top ten.

All in all, a good, sturdy book on a true giant. It occurs to me that Fischer is probably just a name to today's younger generation, so if that's the case, you know what to do about it!

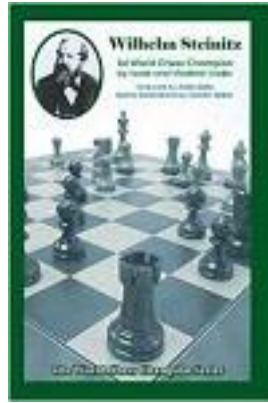
Ian Marks, June 2016



WILHELM STEINITZ First World Chess Champion by Isaak and Vladimir Linder, Russell Enterprises Inc., 200 pp., publ. 2014
and **STEINITZ MOVE BY MOVE** by Craig Pritchett, Everyman Chess, 288 pp., publ. 2015

A brace of books about the first World Champion and father of positional chess. I assume that most readers of this review will know who Craig Pritchett is; the Linders are a Russian father and son historian/sports writer team.

Both books provide lots of biographical and background material. The Linders do so via five broad chapters: Life and Fate; Matches, Tournaments, Rivals; Chess Art: The Game and Discoveries; Writer and Journalist and Forever and Beyond. The headings alone give some idea of Steinitz's life and career. He certainly wasn't born with a silver spoon in his mouth. He spent his childhood in a Jewish ghetto in Prague, his mother died when he was nine, he lost his own daughter at the age of only twenty-one and, four years later, his wife. In his later years he suffered from mental health issues which saw him committed to a psychiatric hospital.



In addition to their narrative on Steinitz, the Linders also paint pen pictures of many of his contemporaries such as Anderssen, Bird and Zukertort, to name but three, and there are lots of fascinating insights into the chess life of the times.

Pritchett also covers his subject in five chapters, but takes a linear approach: Early Years; Achieving Supremacy; Attaining the Unchallenged Crown; Remaining at the Pinnacle and Gradual Decline. Background material is provided in the introduction to each chapter, while the game intros flesh out the specifics.

There are 89 games in the Linders' book, annotated by GM Karsten Müller, and 35 in Pritchett's. The annotations in the latter are much more detailed and bring the games more to life. I also enjoyed the summaries he provides at the end of each chapter.

The games themselves are often quite an eye-opener. First, for someone often thought of as a stodgy, quirky positional player, Steinitz was a great attacker, many of whose best efforts could compare easily with those of modern times. There is a tremendous zest about many of his attacking games. One which sticks in the mind is Steinitz-Paulsen, Baden Baden 1870 (game 25 in Linder), where Steinitz takes six of his first eighteen (!) moves to get his king to g1 (Ke2-e3-f3-e3-f2-g1) and goes on to win a real cracker.

Pritchett doesn't give this as a main game, but quotes it in the notes to game eight, Steinitz-Zukertort. Both these games began with the infamous Steinitz Gambit (1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 f4 exf4 4 d4 Qh4+ 5

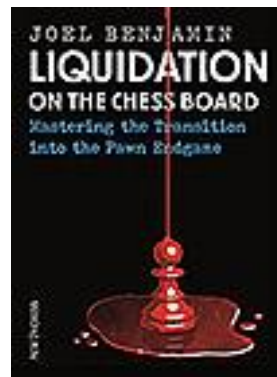
Ke2). You might be inclined to dismiss this as a piece of whacky 19th century tomfoolery, or you could ponder this: <https://youtu.be/s-CbEbTHneg>

Of course, apart from many tremendous attacking games, there are lots of steadier positional efforts, as Steinitz's 'theories' crystallised and became reflected in his play. Besides being a top player, Steinitz was also a prolific writer and publisher, something unthinkable amongst contemporary professionals.

Both books are well-referenced, but there is the occasional huh!? moment. For example, re Baden Baden 1870, the Linders say, 'for the first time ever, draws were not replayed'. Yet a few pages earlier, talking about Paris 1867, they said, 'draws did not count and were not replayed and instead were counted as a loss for both contenders'. Clearly, one of these must be wrong (or am I missing something?). It gets curiouser when you look at the Paris scoretable and see lots of ½s and no double 00 results. Confusing!

I enjoyed both of these books and learnt a lot about a great player and his times. To a certain extent they complement each other. If I had to plump for one, I'd plump for Craig's. It's better produced, has a 'meatier' feel to it, and, knowing the interest Craig has always had for Steinitz, he deserves our support!

Ian Marks, May 2016



LIQUIDATION ON THE CHESS BOARD by Joel Benjamin, New in Chess, 253 pp., publ. 2015

The clue to the content is in the sub-title: *Mastering the Transition into the Pawn Endgame*. That immediately gives you an idea of the level. This is the chess equivalent of a further education textbook, not the sort of thing a beginner or casual club player should be unwrapping on their birthday.

The author explains that the seed for the book was planted following a rebuke from Korchnoi ('It is the ABCs of chess!') about a gap in his knowledge of pawn endings (when he was already a GM!). That led to Benjamin working on his understanding of pawn endings, and the various ways in which they can be reached forms the meat of his book.

Of course, pawn endings don't just appear by magic; they are arrived at once the other pieces have departed, so the author divvies his chapters up into how they can be reached from various piece, and combinations of pieces, endings. This in itself assumes a high level of understanding. It's quite one thing to trade down from, say, a rook ending, quite another to liquidate from a queen v three minor pieces scenario, as in chapter nine.

The author discusses in detail the whens and when nots of deciding whether to liquidate to bare pawns and, since pawn endings are the

most concrete of all endings, there is lots of analysis, but also plenty of prose when verbal explanations are necessary.

I guess the target readership would be serious/advanced players who are already conversant with the nuts and bolts of not just pawn endings, but endings in general, so we're looking at the higher end of the rating scale. There is no way I'd recommend it to anyone who hasn't heard of, or isn't familiar with, say, triangulation, tempo play etc. (If that's you, read a more elementary book and learn about them!) Having said that, there's plenty of lovely play in the many examples to entertain if flat-out improvement isn't the name of your game. As with most books nowadays, there are test positions at the end of each chapter.

Amongst the vignettes which I enjoyed were 'one of the all-time great triangulations' and 'the worst blunder of Fischer's career' (and it's not 29...Bxh2 v Spassky).

As with all New in Chess publications, well presented, but with a rather weird cover which reminded me of that old Castrol GTX advert with a trickle of oil flowing along, here over a pawn.

Ian Marks

March 2016

For starters, I thought it might be worthwhile to consider just what a 'post-beginner' is. The author (a Ukrainian IM and FIDE Senior Trainer) says in his preface that his book is aimed at the 1400-2200 group. That is a huge range of ability, from lower range club players to players with master aspirations, the latter at least way past the post-beginner stage. (A pedant might point out that, strictly speaking, we're all post-beginners, but, come on.) So who exactly is the book for? Here are the twelve chapters into which the author divides his material; they might shed some light on the matter.

1. Pieces cut off from play
2. Open files
3. Strong and weak squares
4. Weak complexes and weak diagonals
5. Pawn majority on the (queen-)side
6. The strength of the passed pawn
7. Weak pawns
8. The king in the middle
9. Good knight versus bad bishop
10. Good bishop versus bad knight
11. The advantage of the bishop pair in the endgame
12. The advantage of the bishop pair in the middlegame

My hunch is that for most 'post-beginners', say around 800-1000, these could be pretty abstract concepts. Since the author's treatment assumes a degree of understanding, I'm not so sure that players in this range would get too much from the book. Thus I find myself thinking that the book would be of more use to players around 1200-1500, the lower end of the author's spectrum.

Anyway, if these topics *are* shrouded in mystery, then you could do a lot worse than have a look at this one. Lots of basic positional stuff covered in easy-to-follow detail which would benefit any less-skilled player wanting to improve. There's only one problem – as I've said in previous reviews, the hole in the bucket is that players who would benefit from a book like this tend not to read chess books. Indeed, a player around 1300 once boasted to me that they had never read a chess book in their life. When I asked why, they said, 'All those variations'. I've heard similar on other occasions. Guys, is it a badge of honour not to read books?

This indicates two things. (i) Variations can indeed often appear daunting. In this respect the author does well, since he provides lots of verbal explanations to clarify his generally brief and pertinent variations. (There are exceptions, though, as p.83 reveals!) (ii) Laziness on the part of the reader. You get out of a text what you put into it. If you're put off by variations, you're not going to get the gist of a position, or make much progress. (And anyway, when you play a game, what are those things going through your head as you figure out your next move? Variations!)

So, assuming you're neither lazy nor put off by moves, would you put on the 100 points the author claims you'll gain by reading his work? Depends. (Opponents tend to get in the way.) I am pretty certain though that a player who reads and assimilates the contents of this book will certainly benefit from a better understanding of the topics covered, and that in itself would surely lead to improved results.

Ian Marks, March 2016



THE OLD INDIAN by Junior Tay, Everyman Chess, 496 pp., publ. 2015

The Old Indian (...Nf6, d6, e5, Be7) is often regarded as the poor relative of the King's Indian (...Nf6, g6, Bg7, d6). Conventional wisdom says that the bishop on e7 is nothing compared to its funky colleague on g7. Fast forward twenty moves. What often happens? The guy on g7 is now stuck behind a wall of pawns on d6, e5, f4 and g5, and often has to recycle via f8 to, yep, e7 to clear the way for the heavy pieces and see daylight again (or even cover a weak pawn on d6 after a cxd6/cxd6 exchange). So why not put it on e7 in the first place!?

Of course, there's more to it than that: questions of style, absence of mega-theory, the element of surprise, all of these play a part. The author makes an excellent case for his subject, and many of the games are every bit as violent as any King's Indian.

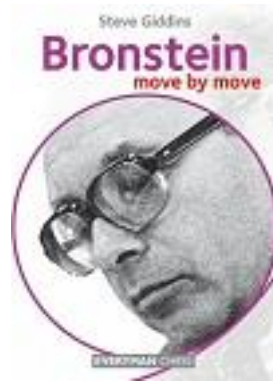
Perhaps one of the 'problems' deterring would-be proponents of the Old Indian is the number of 'easy' ways to get an advantage against it as seen in many white repertoire books. Tay covers all the likely 'refutations', i.e. central tension where White plays neither d5 nor d4xe5, early d5s, Sämisch-type positions with an early f3, g3 systems and lines with Bg5 and e3. As he shows, these have as many pros as cons, so any reader of a white rep book expecting an easy point could be in for a rude awakening.

And if you're still not convinced, a glance at the players on the black side reveals Morozevich, Jobava, Aronian, Andreikin and Topalov. Clearly, creative minds are open minds.

I don't know if Tay's work will lead to an explosion of interest in the Old Indian, but he shows that it ill-deserves its second-rate status, and there is much between the covers that would set an open mind thinking.

One thing which bugged the bejabbers out of me – the page numbers are located at the spine, making them all but useless. Why do publishers do this?

Ian Marks, March 2016



BRONSTEIN MOVE BY MOVE by Steve Giddins, Everyman Chess, 288 pp., publ. 2015, and **KARPOV MOVE BY MOVE** by Sam Collins, Everyman Chess, 288 pp., publ. 2015

Two more in Everyman's move-by-move series on great players. The subjects could scarcely be more different; one the son of a Jewish 'enemy of the people', the other Brezhnev's golden boy. Let's start with the older player.

David Bronstein will go down in chess history as the man who almost became World Champion, having tied the 1951 match with Botvinnik 12-12. Such a huge disappointment could understandably have affected any player, but he continued to create works of genius and artistry throughout a long and illustrious career. (*"I'm more than a few numbers. I'm not Zürich '53 and 12-12!"*)

Giddins, who got to know Bronstein late in his career, starts with a lengthy and warm appreciation of his subject. He doesn't delve into chess politics, but nor does he hide blemishes when we are introduced to Bronstein the grumpy old man. We get a picture of someone who loved and was endlessly fascinated by chess. Maybe that's why he was so popular; don't we all feel a bit like that?

The games span 1939-97 and feature not just games from the world championship match and elite tournaments, but also evening bashes in the London League. (Bronstein made his nomadic home in Kent in the '90s and often turned out for Charlton. He also

popped up in East Kilbride in 1992!) The difficulty in selecting games (this applies to the Karpov book too) is in avoiding too many hackneyed examples while including enough of the gems to show the player at his heights. In this respect Giddins does a good job; the only two which could really be accused of falling into this category are Zita-Bronstein, Prague 1946, and Bronstein-Ljubojevic, Petropolis 1973, games you really should know. The first is a combinational stunner, the second a complex and sustained punch-up.

Bronstein's love of the game shines through in all thirty games. If some of his infectious enthusiasm rubs off on the reader, that'll be no bad thing. Highly enjoyable.



Collins's treatment of Karpov is rather different. Playing over a Karpov masterpiece you do not get a sense of creativity in action. Let me qualify that, because Karpov was obviously creative in his own way. In many a game, if Bronstein was given the choice of finishing prosaically or finding a combination to go out on, he would often seek the latter. Karpov wouldn't hesitate to choose the former. Where Bronstein was a chess artist, Karpov was a winning machine. Collins's notes tend to reflect this, with their discussion of piece placement, planning, structure and so on.

Collins divides his selection of games into Middlegame Themes, Key Structures, Openings and Linares 1994 (one of the greatest tournament victories of all time) and Recent Battles. The games

cover all of Karpov's career and, in a neat echo of Bronstein's appearances in the London League, we see some examples of Karpov duffing up lesser GMs in the Bundesliga in 2014. One game it would have been almost impossible to omit is the 9th game v Spassky in 1974, where Karpov ties his illustrious opponent up with the brand of positional play which was to become his hallmark. If the games are less flamboyant than Bronstein's, so what? There is much to be learnt from studying Karpov at his best. Another highly enjoyable book.

Ian Marks, January 2016



PLAY UNCONVENTIONAL CHESS AND WIN by Noam A. Manella & Zeev Zohar, Everyman Chess, 387 pp., publ. 2014

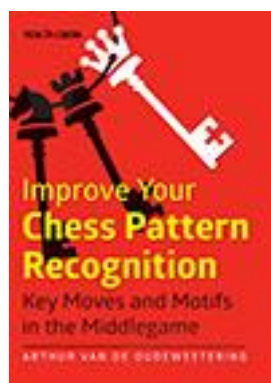
When I saw the title my heart sank. Surely not a book recommending stuff like 1 h4 – ‘and win’!! But when I opened it, I found otherwise. It’s a book which seeks to illustrate the depths of creativity of which top players and composers are capable. This includes the likes of weird moves, outrageous ideas, ugly retreats, wandering kings, anti-positional play and so on. The analogy is made between inspiration and drunkenness (they both free the inhibitions!), and the three main sections are headed Beer, Red Wine and Vodka. Most of the contemporary elite are represented, as are stellar names from the past and many study composers.

The authors have both worked in the field of creativity and how the mind thinks. The former is a study composer and the latter the author of a paper on ‘The Influence of Computer Software on Top Chess Players’ Creativity’, upon which this work is based.

It’s the sort of book you could dip into without having to read page by page (well, I think so), so would be useful for browsing. I’d put it into the wouldn’t-buy-it-but-would -look-for-it-in-the-library category.

Ian Marks

November 2015



IMPROVE YOUR CHESS PATTERN RECOGNITION by Arthur van de Oudeweetering, New in Chess, 301 pp., publ. 2014

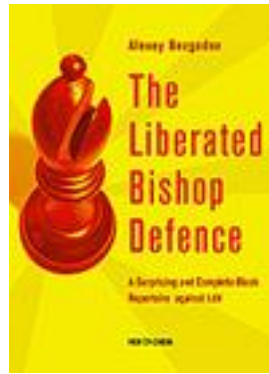
Chess, as we know (or should!), is a game of patterns, and this volume gathers together lots of the basic themes that crop up in the middlegame. A random selection will give you a taste: the 'Octopus' (a knight in the heart of the enemy camp), ...Qxb2, central pawn rollers, Nd5 sacs, offside pieces, Ng5!, centralised queens, king walks, e5-e6!... in short, loads of ideas which you could easily find lurking in your own games, and which less experienced players should beef up on if they want to improve.

Most of the examples are given in complete game format, others start from the position under consideration. This is a matter of taste. I prefer to cut to the chase; I know lots of guys who like to see how the position arose. I guess if you're like me you could just start from the diagram. Exercises at the end of each section test how much you've taken in.

The author is a Dutch IM and trainer, and this is an enjoyable work.

Ian Marks

November 2015



THE LIBERATED BISHOP DEFENCE by Alexey Bezgodov, New in Chess, 331 pp., publ. 2014

The Russian GM author specialises in works on offbeat openings (e.g. 2 a3 v the Sicilian and 3 f3 v the Caro-Kann). What he calls the 'liberated bishop defence' is 1 d4 d5 2 c4 Bf5, not your everyday reply to the Queen's Gambit. The author considers this 'a perfectly viable opening', an opinion not shared, perhaps, by top professionals, not that that should deter lesser mortals from having a look at it.

The main recipe against it is 3 cxd5, when Black's liberated bishop quickly becomes his disappeared bishop after the forced 3...Bxb1 (figure out why). Giving up the bishop pair on move three in an openish position is obviously a major step, and the author devotes chapter eleven (the last!) to it. I have a bit of an issue with this. Since 3 cxd5 is the critical line, within which lurk Black's main problems, why not start with it? It seems odd to provide a prior 222 pages of analysis which you might never need against a reasonably clued-up opponent. Of course, the lower down the congress sections you go, the less this will be of moment, so 2...Bf5 could safely be punted there with little risk.

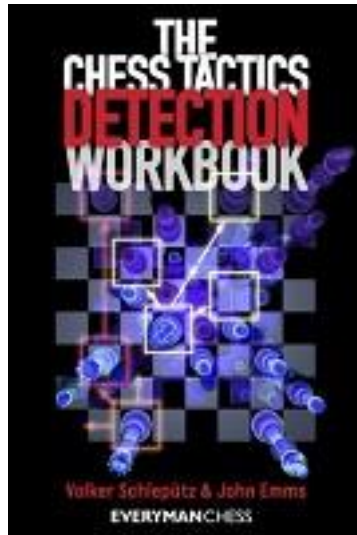
One fairly large caveat for would-be proponents is that White can more or less force a draw after 1 d4 d5 2 c4 Bf5 3 Nf3 e6 4 Qb3 Nc6 5 Qxb7 Nb4 6 Na3 Rb8 7 Qxa7 Ra8 8 Qb7 etc. Black can go for it with 8...Rxa3, but the author himself says, 'I personally cannot

recommend readers to avoid 8...Rb8 9 Qa7 Ra8=’. This is clearly a problem. Since White’s first five moves above are perfectly natural, it renders 2...Bf5 unplayable as a winning attempt against a weaker player.

Overall, an interesting work, but prospective 2...Bf5ers would clearly have to choose their opponents carefully and give a lot of thought to what line they’d be likely to face.

Ian Marks

November 2015



THE CHESS TACTICS DETECTION WORKBOOK by Volker Schlegel
& John Emms, Everyman Chess, 330 pp., publ. 2014

I've often felt that there's a niche (or huge gap!) in the market for a book of *ordinary* players' games, and I've heard guys lower rated than me (yes, they do exist) say the same. (I've also heard it pooh-poohed in no uncertain terms by strong players who seem to think that anything less than, say, a collection of Kramnik's games isn't worth the time, an opinion which I will politely call 'élitism'.)

TCTDW is a collection of one hundred and twenty games by players rated 1100-1700 (divided into sections 1100-1300, 1301-1500 and 1501-1700) in which the reader is invited to find the tactical opportunities missed by the players then check her/his efforts with the detailed solutions (which are rich in helpful explanation). The further down the rating scale you go, the more tactical oversights go unpunished, so the book should be useful for players at that level wanting to improve their tactical vision. Many of the tactical oversights are of the elementary variety – basic pins, checks, forks etc. – but no harm there since these are the bread-and-butter things which cost (and gain!) points.

A little quality time spent with this one would benefit John or Mary Average far more than a collection of GM X's games (that can always

come later). Recommended for players who have got beyond the basics and for those trying to climb the slippery ladder of chess improvement.

Ian Marks

September 2015



CHESS PROGRESS from beginner to winner by Erik M. Czerwin,
Everyman Chess, 334 pp., publ. 2014

This book aims to take the absolute beginner from raw tyro to confident player. The author is a high school teacher and award-winning chess coach (Illinois Chess Coaches Association Coach of the Year in 2012) with a USCF rating of 1452.

The contents comprise five large sections:

1. Beginning with the Basics
2. The Fundamental Elements of Chess Strategy
3. Applying the Elements of Chess Strategy
4. The Rules of Chess
5. Over the Board (a useful inclusion, since it is often overlooked).

The first thing which struck me is that, for a beginner's book, there is very little about the presentation to make it visually attractive. Take away the diagrams and you are left with large dollops of text. There are, for example, no boxes or shading to highlight important stuff, no gimmicks like stars or exclams to draw attention to key points (as Everyman have used in other publications), no variety in the layout. It is not uncommon to find single pages or double-page spreads consisting of nothing but dense prose, e.g. pp.126-7,

pp.234-5, p.244 and others. This might be OK in a university text, but in a beginner's book you want to grab the reader's attention from the word go; this is a visit to Dullsville.

Clarity of language and expression is also vital, especially in a beginner's book, thus my heart sank when I read on p.14 (the first actual page of instruction), referring to the board, '*...there are actually many layers of perspective*', a phrase I've never heard of in decades of playing the game, yet here it is in the *third line* of a beginner's book. Are you wondering what a 'layer of perspective' is? In answer to a student's hand going up, the author explains: layers of perspective are squares, lines, regional, queenside, kingside and space. So now we know – but why use an obscure phrase (not for the only time) in the first place?

Or take this example. On p.16, he says, "*...we must learn to open the lines, block the lines, or hold the lines*". Here, 'hold' seems to mean 'control', e.g. on p.24 we read, "*...the bishop holds (author's emphasis) space*". But fast forward to p.184, where he tells us, "*A **pin** (author's emphasis) in chess is a position where one piece is held (author's emphasis) against a piece of greater value*". Different meaning (and I'm not sure what it is here). As Humpty Dumpty said, "*When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean*". Even if we're not sure what that is.

Sometimes the author goes too far in the other direction. In Principle #1 on p.160, *Exchange when you have a material advantage*, he writes: '*The first, and simplest, principle is that a player who has a material advantage should look to exchange material*'. Fair enough, but he makes no distinction between exchanging pieces and exchanging pawns. The advice thus becomes simplified to the point of generalisation and doubtful usefulness.

On other occasions, he contradicts himself. On p.143, he defines an open file as '*one without any pawns*' and a half-open file as '*one with*

a pawn (or pawns) of only one colour, meaning that only one player has a pawn on that file'. No quibble with that. Then, referring to the diagram on p.152, he contradicts this: *'White's rooks are on open and half-open files'*, when both are on half-open files. In similar vein, referring to bishops, he says, *'White's bishops are poised to slice into the black queenside'* (no, the one on e2 is stuck behind a pawn on d3, and, after the author's line of play, an unassailable black knight appears on d4, rendering the Be2 is the baddest bishop you ever saw); *'Black's dark-squared bishop is bad'* (only in terms of the kingside pawns; it usefully chops off a strong white knight on c5). What's more regrettable is that this is an example intended to explain aspects of *structure*.

Another fundamental technique of teaching/learning is to go from the simple to the complex and build on previous knowledge. Axiomatic? The diagrams on p.20 are labelled 'Bishop Mobility' and 'Knight Mobility', illustrating what the author told us on the previous page about space. There's only one problem – he doesn't explain how these pieces move until pp.36 and 37 respectively. There are even exercises involving the moves of pieces which have yet to be explained. Granted, the relevant squares are marked with stars, but this only serves to underline my point – if the moves had been explained, you wouldn't have needed the stars in the first place. It's akin to setting a class a piece of homework based on things not covered in class.

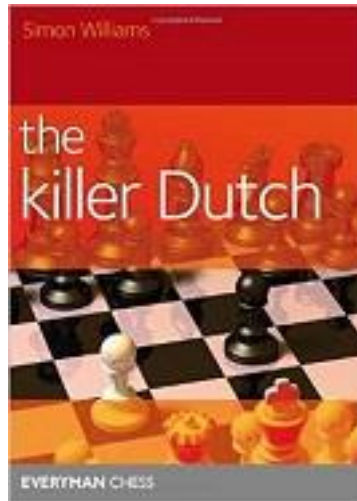
There is also stuff which will be confusing (or plain irrelevant) to readers on these shores. Starting the section called *Handling the Equipment* on p.257, the author informs his readers, *'At the beginning of the game, it is the responsibility of the player of the black pieces to provide the equipment'*. Well, maybe in the USA, but not here. In fact, of all the countries I've played in, only in Ireland did players have to provide their own equipment, and only domestic players at that. This should have been specified.

This often cumbersome and unclear language badly needed tidying up. Had a student submitted this sort of stuff to me, I'd have told her/him to go and redraft it. Since the content is generally sound, it is hard to blame the author; it strikes me that he didn't get the requisite support from his editor(s).

I mentioned academic textbooks earlier, and I think this is how the book might work best – as a textbook in the hands of a teacher working with a class. The content (which, as I said, is generally sound) often requires sifting, verbal clarification and explanation. There is no way I would recommend it to a beginner (and certainly not a youngster) setting out to learn on her/his own.

Coda: Since this is a beginner's book, and I'm a bit long in the chess tooth, I gave it to a couple of non-chessplaying friends to read, one with a background in engineering, the other in education, both with vast experience of structuring, presentation, layout etc. of material. Apart from their general feedback being reflected in my comments, they both stressed specifically the points referred to above. And, by pure coincidence, when one of my guinea pigs returned the book, they happened to have an academic text book with them; its layout was identical to and as appealing as what I've just reviewed.

Ian Marks, September 2015



THE KILLER DUTCH by Simon Williams, Everyman Chess, 468 pp.,
publ. 2015

The Dutch has been Simon Williams's lifetime pet, so what he has to say about it should be worth reading. It is.

By 'Dutch', Williams means the Classical line, 1 d4 f5 2 g3 Nf6 3 Bg2 e6 4 Nf3 Be7 5 0-0 0-0 6 c4 d6, or variations thereof. There are no Leningrads, and Stonewall set-ups only appear in the odd example. He also covers early deviations such as 2 Nc3 and 2 Bg5. In other words, he deals with pretty much everything your opponent is likely to throw at you.

The Dutch is a bit of a wallflower on the dancefloor of opening theory, so you might be wondering if it's worth playing. The answer is yes. If it's good enough for the author to dispatch GMs of the calibre of Gelfand and Wojtaszek (the latter in twenty moves!), then it's obviously worth a punt against that guy whose name you can never remember in your next league match.

Williams gets the balance of analysis just right – enough to explain what's going on, but not so detailed that you are beaten into submission by variations. There is lots of explanatory prose, although sometimes you get the feeling he could have elaborated a bit. E.g. when he writes on p.200, 'I was more concerned about 16

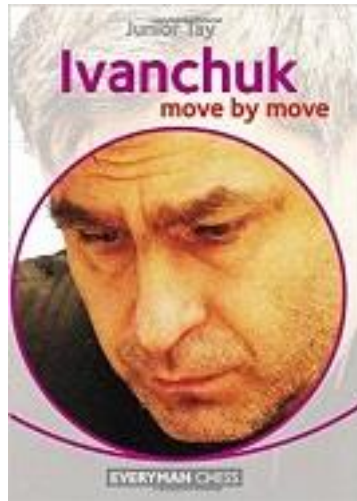
Qb1 which I consider to be critical', you can't help but wish he had developed this. Each chapter finishes with a test section, a good idea spoilt by the solutions coming immediately after each question. They should have been at the back of the book, or at least after the test positions. Forty-five illustrative games exemplify the subject matter.

The layout is the now (seemingly) standard Everyman format, single-column text, large diagrams and lots of white. At least the diagrams are in the right place, but I still have my doubts. It looks very 'clean', but after a while becomes wearing on the eye (at least mine). To this reviewer at least, a double-column format with smaller diagrams would make for a more visually-friendly production (and fewer pages, ergo a cheaper book!?). I don't suppose they're gonna change for me, but still.

The cover features fold-over flaps akin to the dust jackets of yore (mainly to plug other Everyman products, it seems). These are handy for marking the page, but otherwise floppy and a bit of a nuisance. On balance, we could do without them.

Williams writes with verve, enthusiasm and humour, and makes an excellent guide. Even if you've never been that interested in the Dutch, you'll enjoy this one. You might even make a new opening friend for life.

Ian Marks, June 2015



IVANCHUK MOVE BY MOVE by Junior Tay, Everyman Chess, 512 pp., publ. 2015

I've always liked games collections. One of the first chess books I ever bought was a games collection (Clarke's *Petrosian*), so I'm always interested in new ones.

Arguably, Ivanchuk, with his reputation for weirder and more complex ideas than his peers, is a tough subject to deal with, so Tay deserves credit for grasping the nettle. On the other hand (and I've asked this before), how competently can a 2230 Candidate Master hope to explain the workings of a 2700+ chess superbrain? It's a legitimate question, one which I'll answer by suggesting that while your English teacher probably wasn't a Renaissance genius, he/she was perfectly able to explain the works of Shakespeare. (Or, if you will, never playing professional football at a high level hasn't stopped Jose Mourinho being a top manager.)

The book follows Everyman's familiar move-by-move format. Tay discusses forty of Ivanchuk's games spanning his entire career and covering the likes of strategic play, classical attacks, defence and pragmatism. Each game is annotated to a depth of 10-12 pages, with lots of words to clarify the moves (it's impossible to explain Ivanchuk's ideas by moves alone) and questions at key junctures to get you thinking for yourself. A test chapter at the end invites you to

step into Chukky's mind, not something I found particularly easy! (Quiet, all you cynics.) It's hard to pick a favourite game, but his clinical endgame technique is impressive.

This is a (fairly) short review of a big book, but if you enjoy games collections, or are interested in one of the most creative minds of the last thirty years, then it's one you should consider adding to your collection.

Ian Marks, June 2015



MAGNUS FORCE by Colin Crouch, Everyman Chess, 286 pp., publ. 2013

This niftily-titled volume is a dissection of Carlsen's games at the London Classic 2012 and Wijk aan Zee 2013, the period when he was surpassing Kasparov as the highest rated player of all time, and en route to his first World Championship match with Anand. You might justifiably ask what light a relatively inactive 2300 IM can shed on the games of the world no. 1, rated 500 points higher. The answer is simple: you don't need to be a great novelist to be a good literary critic; you don't need to be a sub-10 seconds 100 metres runner to be a good sprint coach. It's all about how skilfully you do your job, and Crouch handles his task pretty well.

There are twenty-nine games in all, each examined in detail and receiving up to sixteen (!) pages of analysis. By analysis I mean verbal discussion. Crouch clearly subscribes to Bronstein's view that variations are useful if they reveal the inner workings of a game (beyond that it becomes a case of not seeing the wood for the trees). So often half a page or more (sometimes a page!) is devoted to a discussion of a position, with key variations to illuminate the words. It resembles a documentary of this period in Carlsen's career. If you prefer hard analysis, well, there's nothing to stop you digging deeper for yourself. Who knows what you might find?

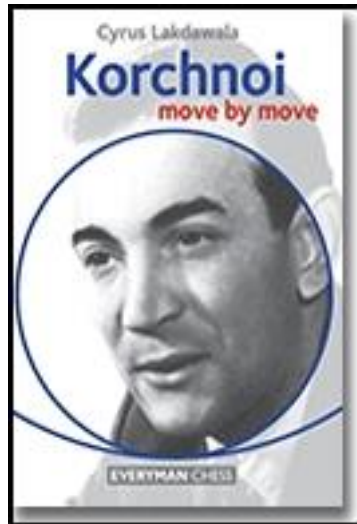
Crouch highlights many aspects of his hero's play, e.g. his Lasker-like ability to create practical problems for his opponents where none appear to exist; his pragmatism; his skill in defence. (see Kramnik-Carlsen from the London Classic, where Carlsen defends heroically to thwart the mastergrinder in a long endgame and which shows why Magnus is probably the hardest player in the world to beat.) Many of the games show classic Carlsen at work, improving his position tiny bit by tiny bit until his opponent realises he is in trouble, gaining points almost out of nothing. Carlsen-Karjakin from Wijk aan Zee shows that even the strongest opposition is not immune to this sort of attrition. I mentioned Lasker above; in this respect he is like Capablanca. Come into my parlour, said the spider to the fly.

Magnus Force is far from being a hagiography. Crouch is not afraid to criticise where he feels criticism is due. It is not uncommon to find a ?! as early as move five or six when he feels Carlsen is being slipshod in his handling of the opening (although you could argue that Magnus does not see this as the most important part of his game).

Overall, a good chess read. If Santa brought you a book token or Amazon voucher for Christmas, you might want to consider using it on this one.

Ian Marks

December 2014



KORCHNOI MOVE BY MOVE by Cyrus Lakdawala, Everyman Chess,
461 pp., publ. 2014

Cyrus is the Stakhanovite of chess publishing (I make this his 15th in the last few years). I've said before that prolificity often comes at the expense of quality, but he continues to maintain standards.

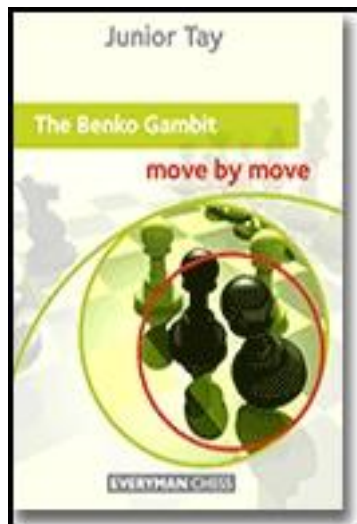
He has certainly picked a toughie this time. Survivor, free spirit, rebel, dissident, defector and ultimately survivor again, Korchnoi is one of the most complex personalities in a world that has never been short of complex personalities. Like Botvinnik, fellow Leningrader and Lakdawala subject, Viktor has written extensively on his life and career, but there ends the similarity. During the war, while the Patriarch was shipped off to safety east of the Urals, Viktor was a kid trapped in the horror that was the siege of Leningrad. Such an experience could not fail to leave its mark. Little wonder he grew up with the sort of feisty independence which did not go down well with the authorities (and for which he frequently suffered). It is this which, arguably, helped shape his career and nurture his longevity.

Lakdawala structures the book in similar fashion to his earlier works, looking at his subject's games (sixty-one spanning all of Korchnoi's career, from 1956 to 2011) in the context of Attack,

Defence, Dynamics, Imbalances, Advantages and Endings. He focuses on the complexity and often randomness of the typical Korchnoi game (if there is such a thing), e.g. only one person could have been behind the white pieces in game five, Korchnoi-Arnason, Beersheba 1987, which borders on the surreal at times. He also highlights the way that a Korchnoi game is peppered with !?s and ?!s (and often !!s and ??s) in a way that no other GM's could be. In short, in Korchnoi's games there is often a high level of tension and edge that you won't find anywhere else. With Viktor you certainly got your money's worth.

It's hard to pick a favourite game, but the brace from the 1977 Candidates' final v Spassky are phenomenal brawls, two old lions having a bare knuckle, no-holds-barred go at each other. Great chess!

If you want a collection of complex games full of ideas that only a truly original mind could come up with, handled with sympathy and respect, look no further.



THE BENKO GAMBIT by Junior Tay, Everyman Chess, 335 pp., publ. 2014

The first thing which caught my eye about this one was the author's name – I've never heard of him. (In fact, those of us who grew up on the south side of Glasgow in the 1960s will remember the Junior Tay as one of the Castlemilk gangs.) Anyway, he's a FIDE CM and ICCF Senior IM from Singapore (currently rated 2230), so not without credentials. That said, there remains the nagging doubt that, the stronger (or more qualified) the author, the better he'll handle his subject matter. That could be a moot/blinkered p.o.v., so rather than get embroiled in philosophical discussion, I'll get on with my job and review what's before me.

Tay covers all the main and not so main lines in nine chapters and forty-eight games, plus a set of exercises. The lines are covered in depth with enough prose to clarify what's going on. His writing style is clear and he takes care to point out where problems might be lurking, so he's not trying to sell you snake oil. There are plenty of GMs and IMs featured, but since the Benko is not played (trusted?) at the highest levels, you'll find none of the elite, bar Mamedyarov with a couple of Whites. (What you will find, though, is Alan Tate taking down Hungarian wunderkind Richard Rapport, well worth a look!)

If you ignore the snootiness alluded to above, this is a good, all-round intro to the Benko, and one which existing Benko fans will probably buy anyway. My only mild concern is that the author seems not to have referenced the recent ChessBase DVDs by Alejandro Ramirez on the subject. Given that AR is probably the strongest GM with the Benko currently in his repertoire (hence should know what he's talking about), this struck me as a strange omission. However, the games are predominantly current (ten from 2013!) with a few older ones to give some historical background. If you're looking for something aggressive to 1 d4, try this one.



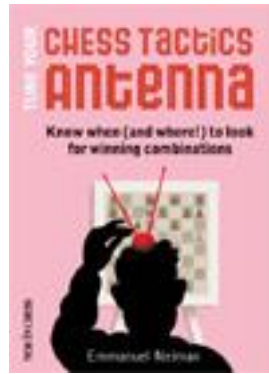
STREETFIGHTING CHESS ONLINE MAGAZINE ed. Andrew Burnett

I thought I'd give this worthwhile venture a plug. Some of you (at least Scottish readers) will know that Andy brought out a book called *Streetfighting Chess* a few years ago, a kind of manifesto for his view of chess. He's now taken this a stage further and set up the eponymous mag. It is clear from the book that Andy is passionate about encouraging weaker players to improve, and that philosophy underpins much of what the mag is all about. Amongst tournament reports, openings, endings, photos, interviews and chess chat, there are three features called Blue Belt, Red Belt and Black Belt, each featuring material aimed at players in the 1000-1500, 1500-1800 and 1800+ rating groups. Such differentiated material is rare in chess publishing, so all the more welcome that someone is attempting to put matters right. Any lower-rated players in particular digesting this material couldn't fail to pick up tips and pointers to help them improve.

Check it out at <http://www.streetfightingchess.com/homepage/>. For a knockdown £1.50 you get lots of material in online, pgn and pdf versions, a steal at the price. Andy's project deserves your support (and he's not paying me to say so). What are you waiting for?

Ian Marks

June 2014



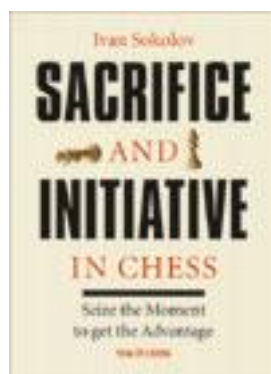
TUNE YOUR CHESS TACTICS ANTENNA by Emmanuel Neiman,
New in Chess, 237 pp., publ. 2012

This interesting take on the tactics book is divided into four parts: The Seven Signals, Find the Relevant Theme, Looking for the Right Move and a Final Test. The first two cover things such as king position, unprotected pieces, knight forks and defence, part three is candidates and calculation and part four is self-explanatory. The author covers his material well and his examples and verbal explanations are to the point. But I have one main beef with the book: nearly every example is prefaced by all the previous moves of the game. I know that some people like this and find it helpful; personally I'm not that interested in what went before; I like authors to cut to the chase. (My old tutors at university would never have stood for such padding.) A few examples: on p.169, in the section on Calculation, the key position from Ilyin-Zhenevsky-Botvinnik, Leningrad 1938, appears half a page after the previous 65 moves; on p.197, one of the test positions is preceded by the previous 64 moves which take up nearly a whole column; on pp.190-1, it's 71 moves; on p.133 there are three test positions – and a total of 111 moves! But the daddy of them all is on p.122 where the solitary test position is preceded by (are you ready for this?) **118** previous moves. Really, the presentation needed a lot more TLC than it got. Page after page is nothing more than column upon column of bold face uncommented moves.

I liked the material, and I liked what the author had to say, but getting rid of the visual clutter would have improved the book immeasurably (and made it cheaper).

TECHNIQUES OF POSITIONAL PLAY by Valeri Bronznik & Anatoli
Terekhin, New in Chess, 254 pp., publ. 2013

A short review, because it does exactly what it says on the cover: 45 'techniques' divided into nine chapters covering aspects of positional play such as restriction, pawn formations, open files, activating your pieces etc. Within the chapters you'll find sub-sections such as attacking on the h-file, passed pawns, artificial castling etc. It's highly readable and not particularly heavyweight and could be of benefit to anyone (juniors? club players?) looking for something contemporary on positional play. Also (and mercifully), the examples appear from their 'starting point' in the relevant diagram; there is none of the visual cacophony of the Neiman book.



SACRIFICE AND INITIATIVE IN CHESS by Ivan Sokolov, New in Chess, 255 pp., publ. 2013

Sokolov has created quite a name for himself as an author these past few years such that any book with his name on the cover is worth a look, and when he says in his preface, '*Sacrifice and Initiative* is a book I have wanted to write for a long time', you know that it's personal and not going to disappoint.

He covers the whole panoply of attacking techniques in 16 chapters. I thought of quoting them all, but will make do with a selection to give you an idea of his range: Keeping the Momentum, Sensing the Moment, The King Chase and a whole range of types of sacrifice. Most of the material is contemporary; as Sokolov explains, in the old days defenders just didn't defend very well, thus attacking ideas rarely met with the sternest test. Talking of the preface, two other comments caught my eye. Sokolov calls Tal 'the real deal', and points out that 90% of his sacrifices have withstood examination by today's engines! The other is his respect for Spassky, whom he calls 'a brilliant attacker' and says that 'every chess player is well advised to study his games'. Take heed.

Anyway, on to the material which Sokolov selected from over 1,000 games. Quite simply it is good, relevant and on the money. If something needs analysis, Sokolov analyses it; if it needs explained, his explanations are always apposite. You would be hard put to

emerge from one of his examples not knowing what was going on. He comes across as a good teacher.

At the end of each chapter is a worthwhile, feature – a selection of tips re what has gone before. These little nuggets of wisdom include ‘Don’t stick to safe, simple solutions – you may miss the best move’; ‘Tempo moves centralizing pieces are the first you should examine’; ‘Look out for small surprising moves to throw your opponent off balance’. Sort of chess fortune cookies, if you will.

His examples are normally given in full, something I moaned about in the Neiman review above, but there’s a world of difference between quoting not-very-relevant moves just to get to a diagram, and quoting relevant moves to get the reader into the flow of a game.

You’ll probably have guessed that I liked this one. I think you would too.

Ian Marks

May 2014



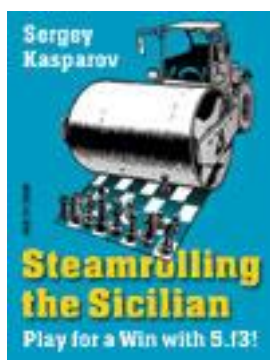
MASTERING ENDGAME STRATEGY by Johan Hellsten, 537 pp.,
Everyman Chess 2013.

A companion volume (or final part of a trilogy?) to the author's *Mastering Chess Strategy* and *Mastering Opening Strategy* which I've reviewed before (March 2011 and August 2012 resp.). Same format: *lots* of material (in this case 500 examples and 240 exercises!) well and succinctly explained. It's not a manual or how-to book; the author breaks his material down into themes based mainly on the pieces, e.g. under King Themes we find Opposition and Obstruction, under Pawn Themes he discusses four types of passed pawns, under Queen themes Centralization and Checking, and so on. Each example is explained in sufficient depth to get the point across, but not so much that you lose sight of the wood for the trees. Good teaching technique: don't flannel! A reassuring proportion of the examples are culled from the 21st century.

It's not a book for beginners or inexperienced players, but stronger competitive players could easily benefit from it.

Like the companion volumes it's a heavyweight production, weighing in at a chunky 2½ lbs/ 1 kg+. That could be an issue if you suffer from arthritis!

Ian Marks, February 2014



STEAMROLLING THE SICILIAN by Sergey Kasparov, 239 pp., New in Chess 2013.

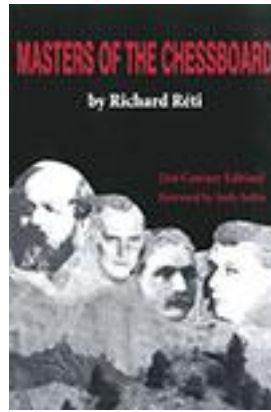
So how do we steamroll the Sicilian? With 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3, that's how, something for the player who wants to avoid the heavy main lines after 3 d4, but doesn't want to wimp out with an anti-Sicilian. The Belarus GM author points out that it tends to lead to slower, positional games, so if you see yourself as a bit of a Tal, maybe it won't be for you.

The author covers both theory (such as it is) and structures (Dragon and Hedgehog) by means of 167 games and a collection of exercises. The annotations are not over-heavy on variations; there are lots of words to explain what's going on. He writes in a drily humorous and self-deprecating style (*'Both games are taken from the Russian team championship; one of the most awful failures in my chess practice.'*), and often makes little digressions away from his subject matter. It might sound strange, but it works (well, I think it does!), although when I read the following I thought I'd picked up some tabloid or other (the author is talking about the difficulties of travelling from Belarus to tournaments in the EU): *'It is a little surprising to see in Europe (and America) a great deal of the Asians having visas or residence permits'*. Maybe I'm just getting a smidgin overly p.c. in my old age, but I'm surprised that a piece of pub chat like that made the final edit.

The author has put a lot of thought and effort into his work and, as I said at the outset, if you're looking for something to get away from the main lines, you might want to give this a look. One caveat: despite the catchy title, 5 f3 is really only playable after 2...d6, so you'll still need something for those inconsiderate so-and-sos who play 2...Nc6 or 2...e6.

Ian Marks,

February 2014



MASTERS OF THE CHESSBOARD by Richard Réti, Russell Enterprises Inc., 216 pp., publ. 2012

Masters of the Chessboard (hereinafter referred to as Masters) is one of the true classics of chess literature. It was first published over 80 years ago and was one of the first chess books I bought (the old G. Bell edition, a lovely hardback with the distinctive knight on the dust jacket; ah, those were the days). It is good to see such an important work available again.

Réti set out to make Masters a textbook, thus it is rich in explanatory prose and lucid insights into the contributions made to the game by the masters of the title. These he divides into Older Masters and Masters of Today. The former are Anderssen, Morphy, Steinitz, Tarrasch, Lasker, Schlechter and Pillsbury; the latter (bear in mind 'today' is the late '20s!) are Maroczy, Marshall, Rubinstein, Spielmann, Nimzowitsch, Vidmar, Tartakower, Capablanca, Bogoljubow and Alekhine. He also includes an essay on the opening system which came to bear his name. Each chapter features biographical info and a selection of games. Over the years, errors have come to light; some of these are referenced by Andy Soltis in his foreword.

Each chapter is highly readable and instructive, but the one on Lasker is the most contentious, for it is there that Réti gave birth to a notion that has passed into chess mythology. Concluding a

paragraph of psychobabble, he says, 'Lasker often deliberately plays badly'. Huh? How on earth could a major player, a world champion no less, achieve success by playing badly? Did Réti really believe this? When considering his words, it should be borne in mind that Masters, as published, was (a) a translation, of (b) not a final manuscript, but (c) a draft in progress. Perhaps Réti might have refined or reworked his contention for the final version; we'll never know. (He died before finishing the final draft.) My own take is that the comment has been interpreted too literally. I see it as a kind of shorthand for the 'psychological' aspect of Lasker's style, viz. that chess is a fight where it often pays to play the man. Where Réti the strategist preferred to search for the most appropriate move in a position, Lasker was always ready to look for ideas which would get his opponent out of his comfort zone; he knew he could handle complications and tension better than the other guy. Deliberately bad play? Nah, just another way of doing things.

While the publishers are to be commended on reissuing this work, they really should have shown it a lot more TLC. Am I being harsh? Maybe Mr Russell was beavering away on his own, and fair play to him if he was, but the pages are still peppered with bloopers involving verbs, punctuation, misspacings, wrong words and many more, including (of course!) that bane of the linguistic fascist's life, its/it's. A few examples:

- In the contents, Rubinstein appears as Runbinstein, bad enough, but the correct version appears literally right underneath the wrong one!
- In Soltis's foreword, Réti's other great work, Modern Ideas in Chess, appears as Modern Ideas of Chess.
- Commenting on 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 a6, Réti says, 'This method of play was effective as long as White continued with the simple development of his pieces, e.g. with 5 Nc3. But by

playing for position...5 b4! Which was first used by the present author against Tartakower (Mannheim 1914)...’ Even just reading that it should be pretty obvious that 5 b4 loses a pawn; surely it should be 5 c4 ? I checked. It is. Such notational mistakes are not uncommon, and could be confusing to a less experienced player.

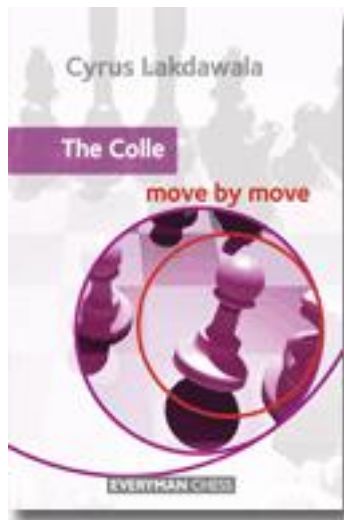
In general, the assorted typos are not deep or subtle; they can be spotted at a glance. I’m struggling to understand how they made the final version.

To sum up: if you’re wondering why you should bother with a book that’s older than God’s dog, well, that’s like asking what’s the point of old paintings, or old composers, or old literature. What the great writers, artists and composers of the past did for their fields, the great players in Masters did for chess. It will give you a wonderful insight into what they were about and, who knows, perhaps inspire you to delve deeper into their legacy.

A great piece of work. If you haven’t read it, you should. Then read it again.

Ian Marks

December 2013



THE COLLE MOVE BY MOVE by Cyrus Lakdawala, Everyman Chess, 416 pp., publ. 2013 and



BOTVINNIK MOVE BY MOVE by Cyrus Lakdawala, Everyman Chess, 398 pp., publ. 2013

Lakdawala is becoming prolific. Prolific often equates with cranking out potboilers. This isn't the case with Cyrus; you can tell he's invested time in them, but it makes you wonder how many books a writer can produce in a year and still maintain standards.

His Colle book is an addition to the 'move by move' series, a vehicle for getting an opening across by means of the Socratic Q & A method. The Colle is not a particularly mainstream opening, but can

fire loyal devotion in its practitioners, especially those who see it as a one-size-fits-all opening. Lakdawala points out that this is not the case, and covers its various manifestations, particularly as a reversed Semi-Slav and the similarity of some lines to the Tarrasch French. Lower-rated Colle devotees could do well to ponder this. There is more to the Colle than d4/Nf3/e3/Bd3/Bxh7+/mate.

I've always thought that an early ...g6 was a good way to handle Colle set-ups, so headed for Lakdawala's coverage of that first. Predictably, most of the book is devoted to set-ups with ...e6, and ...g6 lines are tucked away near the end, where he seems to favour 1 d4 Nf6 2 Nd2, aiming to transpose into 'normal' lines after ...d5, or Modern-type positions after ...g6. I'm not totally convinced, but maybe that's just me.

Lakdawala writes in a light and humorous style which I personally quite like, although I can see that it might be an acquired taste. He also packs in more metaphors, similes and flowery prose than any other writer. This has become a trademark. I have more of an issue with this. Sometimes the flowery stuff is unnecessary and just obfuscates. It would certainly be more effective if there was less of it. He sets the tone for this one as early as p.28: *"I conjecture that if Dr. Conrad Murray, Michael Jackson's doctor, had the foresight to prescribe a steady dose of my chess games as a cure to Jackson's insomnia (rather than the lethal doses of Propofol!), then the king of pop would still be here with us today, spinning about, moon walking and refreshed after a good night's sleep"*. Apart from the wrong verb tense ('had had'), that's just unnecessary verbiage. (Besides Jacko, other celebs referenced include Kim Kardashian, Justin Bieber and Elmer Fudd.)

On the simile front, here's an example on p.196 which caught my eye: *"White's structure looks awkward, like a man who inadvertently and loudly passes gas while on a first date with the woman of his dreams"*. As similes go, that's rank. He would have done better to

explain why White's structure looked awkward. On the other hand, when he keeps his prose under control, he does dispense good advice. Here's a nice example on p.82: *"Bb2 develops a piece, but a2-a3 stabilizes our b4-pawn and prepares a quick c3-c4. Both are playable, so it's a matter of taste...My suggestion is that you experiment with both, and go with the one which scores higher for you"*. That's a good, simple note. Too many players expect an openings book to give them all the answers.

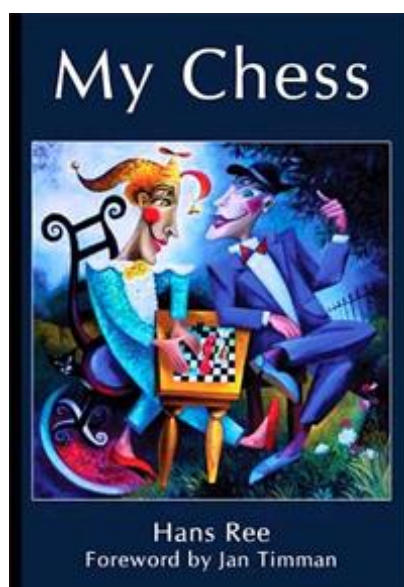
Overall a decent piece of work. Colle players will want to buy it (and would learn a thing or two from it!), but whoever reads it should be prepared for dollop after dollop of flowery verbosity.

Oh – one of Andy Muir's games gets a mention, but I'll let you find it yourself.

The Botvinnik book is a collection of 60 of Big Mike's games annotated in Q & A format (and given the same flowery treatment). Botvinnik himself wrote extensively on his career and took three volumes (which, curiously, the author doesn't appear to have referred to!) to cover 381 (!) of his best games, so obviously Lakdawala had his work cut out (to say the least) drawing up a leet of 60. Thus he cuts to the chase and homes in on various aspects of Botvinnik's legacy as follows: Attack, Defence, the Dynamic Element, Exploiting Imbalances, Accumulating Advantages and Endings.

There's not a fantastic amount of background, but the games span the '20s to the '70s, i.e. the whole of Botvinnik's career, and are annotated helpfully enough. His opponents read like a who's who of 20th century chess. The book is a good read and would be a good introduction for today's newcomers to one of the great world champions and dominant figures of mid/late 20th century chess.

Ian Marks, December 2013



MY CHESS by Hans Ree, Russell Enterprises, Inc., 240 pp., publ.
2013

The chess world is full of characters, personalities, stories, lore and apocrypha, so books like this collection of essays by the Dutch GM/journalist/writer are always welcome. Ree spreads his net wide. He writes about most of the Dutch prominente (Donner seems to have been a bit of a character; in one bizarre episode he wanted to donate a prize which turned out to be non-existent [!] to the Vietcong), and big names from the past (e.g. Tartakower, Bronstein, Fischer) and present (Anand and Carlsen). There are also essays on topics such as alcohol, chess cafés and Donald Duck. His touch is light and often tinged with both humour and sadness, but he is always sympathetic and perceptive and he's not afraid to tell a story against himself. You'll also come across such trivia gems as

- Which Russian GM got plastered the night before a game with Fischer – and won the game?
- Which elite GM was prepared to play 1 e4 e5 2 Qh5 against Kasparov? (And if 'Nakamura' is on the tip of your tongue, remember that he didn't scale the heights until after GK's retirement.)

- Which GM met his wife while giving a simul dressed as Santa?

In general the translation from the Dutch reads smoothly, although there are wrinkles which could have done with smoothing out, e.g. 'Dutch top players' rather than 'top Dutch players'. This sort of thing is like that piece of apple peel that you can't quite dislodge from between your teeth – mildly irritating. The proofreading could also have been tightened up. One particular example which rather slaps you around the chops appears on p.174, when Woody Harrelson morphs five lines later to Woody Harrison, but regains his identity by the foot of the page. One minor quibble about the production – the cover is floppy. A firmer cover would have been more professional.

Overall, My Chess is a jolly good read. As we hurtle towards Christmas, if your husband/wife/boyfriend/girlfriend/s.o./sprog is wondering what to get you as a stocking filler you could do worse than point them in its direction.

Ian Marks

November 2013



CHESS SECRETS: GREAT CHESS ROMANTICS by Craig Pritchett,
Everyman Chess, 319 pp., publ. 2013

This is the third volume in Craig's trilogy covering great players unified by a common characteristic, in this case the spirit of romanticism. Before I reveal those who made the cut, how do you define 'romantic'? Some old guy playing the King's Gambit? In the 19th century, quite possibly, but, IMO, that's a stereotypical view. I've always thought of a romantic (in any field) as someone prepared to cock a snook at convention and do things the way he thinks they should be done. That implies freedom of thought and willingness to experiment, plus a readiness to suffer (for want of a better word) for one's art (if we accept that there is an artistic dimension in chess).

The five big names in this volume are Anderssen, Chigorin, Réti, Larsen and Morozevich. Already this raises an interesting point. Heroes of Classical Chess featured three World Champions, the player who would arguably have become World Champion had it not been for the First World War, and probably the next World Champ. (We'll know in a few weeks.) Giants of Innovation featured another three, a multi-finalist and a player who could well have been World Champion but for his nerves. Of the five Romantics, we have 'only' a challenger, a candidate and a finalist. The inference is

clear: intuition and emotion are all good and well, but they're not going to bring you the Big One.

Great Chess Romantics has the same format as its predecessors – seven games per player with detailed pen portraits and historical background (and lots of other complete games in the notes, some of which could easily have been main games). As with any of Craig's books you get good material (much of it probably not very well known) well-researched and well-written. Also, tucked away in the notes, you will find lots of little nuggets of practical advice helpful to less experienced players.

An interesting aspect of the trilogy is to compare the influence of the great players on each other. A few examples:

It is evident that Fischer was thoroughly au fait with the ideas of his predecessors, e.g. his use of Steinitz's 9 Nh3!? in the main line of the Two Knights (featured here in Steinitz-Chigorin, World Ch. 1892), and his later adoption of Larsen's 1 b3.

Botvinnik's absorption and development of Réti's ideas.

Morozevich's use of Chigorin's Defence early in his career.

Clearly, a great mind is an open mind.

Equally interesting are the ideological differences, e.g. it is hard to imagine Steinitz regarding Chigorin's 1 d4 d5 2 c4 Nc6 as one of chess's wow! moments.

As with the other books in the series, highly recommended, especially for juniors and anyone wishing to learn more about our great chess heritage.

Ian Marks

November 2013



CHESS STRATEGY Move by Move by Adam Hunt, Everyman Chess,
415 pp., publ. 2013

Does what it says on the cover! Here are the contents, so you know exactly what you're getting for your £19.99:

Central Control

Looking After the King

Decisive Development

Classic Pawn Structures and Play

Holes, Outposts and Weak Squares

Improving the Worst Piece

The Initiative

Prophylaxis and Overprotection

Evaluating Positions

Winning Won Positions

Defensive Resourcefulness

Chess Psychology and Practical Tips

Lots of writers have covered these topics since Nimzo penned *My System*, so if you've read that, or folk like Euwe or Watson or Pachman, why bother with another? The answer's simple. Chess isn't static. Like other branches of art, science or sport (however you choose to label it) it develops, and will continue to do so. Three years ago at Dortmund, Mamedyarov played 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 Nc3 Be7 5 g4!? against Ponomarev. Cue collective spinning in graves by Tarrasch, Capa, Rubinstein et al. Nope, there's clearly always going to be room for fresh looks at strategy.

The author's material is drawn from games up to 2012, including the Anand-Gelfand World Championship match, but he also includes many classics, e.g. Botvinnik-Capablanca, AVRO 1938 and D.Byrne-Fischer, New York 1956. I've heard players (strong ones at that, who really should know better) diss the rehashing of 'old 'stuff' like this. Never understood where they're coming from. You wouldn't (or shouldn't) dream of studying art or music without learning from the great masters and works of the past, so why should chess be any different?

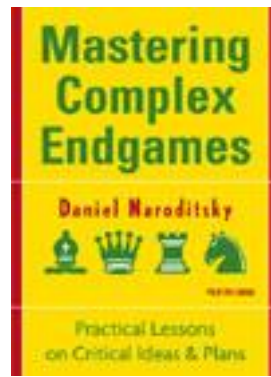
Hunt (an IM and chess teacher, so his credentials are good) does an excellent job of presenting and discussing his material, especially for a first book, and his explanatory text is good. As a move-by-move work, it features questions at key moments to engage the reader more fully, but, as for similar books, you really need a will of iron not to let your eyes ramble on and see the answer. I've always felt that this could be a layout problem, but there's no obvious way round it short of having questions and answers scattered all over the book, which would be an even bigger layout problem! So it's back to the piece of paper to cover the page. (The other issue is that the Socratic method won't work for everyone. Some people benefit from being told rather than asked. Is that necessarily an inferior way of learning?)

The book is well produced with clear text and diagrams on good paper. There were a couple of things I noticed which slipped past the editorial eye, though. On p.30, the author refers to the D.Byrne-Fischer game mentioned above as 'Here we see a 13 year-old (!) Fischer defeating Grandmaster Robert Byrne...' when it was brother Donald (as is correctly assigned in the game heading on the next page and in the index). On p.119, in the intro to the fantastic R.Byrne-Fischer, US Ch. 1963, Hunt says 'Witness Bobby taking down Robert Byrne once again'. Well, he didn't half take him down (and if there are any juniors out there who don't know the game, check it out now), except that he didn't take him down before!

Niggly things apart, highly recommended.

Ian Marks

September 2013



MASTERING COMPLEX ENDGAMES by Daniel Naroditsky, New in Chess, 304 pp., publ. 2012

I reviewed the author's first book, *Mastering Positional Chess*, back in March 2011. I was impressed then that one so young could write so well; his new book confirms that it was no fluke. The author's trademarks make this another strong piece of work: carefully chosen examples, enough moves and variations to guide the reader through what's going on, and lots of lucid explanatory prose. There are older and more experienced chess writers out there who could learn a thing or two from Naroditsky about what it takes to write a good chess book, believe me. Libel laws prevent me from naming names, but no doubt you'll be able to think of a couple too.

Back to the book. After an introductory discussion of what constitutes complex endings, the author tackles rook + minor piece endings, queen endings and queen + minor piece endings before rounding things off with a discussion of weaknesses, passed pawns, defence, calculation and king activity. The bulk of his material is millennium-contemporary, but, as befits any good endgame book, there is plenty of homage to the likes of Capablanca, Alekhine, Fischer and Karpov, to name but a few. Most of the material, however, is drawn from the author's own games. This is not to say he puts himself on the same pedestal as the above giants, but it lets him reveal his own shortcomings and mistakes, a strength in any author's writing (and he's not slow to excoriate himself when the

occasion demands it). As the saying goes, it's nice to learn from your mistakes, but it's nicer to learn from the mistakes of others.

In short, the book's a winner – excellent material and excellent prose well written and well explained in enthusiastic and infectious fashion. Production is up to NiC's usual high standards – clear text and diagrams in double-column format, easy on the eye. Pure gold.

Ian Marks

September 2013



CHESS PSYCHOLOGY: THE WILL TO WIN! By William Stewart,
Everyman Chess, 204 pp., publ. 2013

The author isn't a household name (well, not in this household anyway); 'About the Author' tells us he's a USCF NM whose only tournament victory of any note seems to be joint 1st in the U-2200 at a World Open. He has six years' chess teaching experience and is the founder of a couple of chess websites. Not the strongest player ever to open a new Word document, but the highest-rated players don't always make the best teachers or writers. A book should be judged on its merits, not the author's rating.

It's a fairly lightweight tome, aimed, the author explains, at beginner and intermediate players. With that in mind, it's full of good, sensible advice of the kind which such players often badly need, e.g. review your games, keep an eye on unprotected pieces, consult chess engines as a last resort, have confidence in yourself etc. etc. These are things which stronger players tend to be aware of, which explains, I guess, why they are stronger players. I suppose this is the psychology part, having to train yourself to do the right things at the board.

The longest of the nine chapters (almost half the book) is called 'Dominate the Opening'. This confused me a bit, since the opening is the least important part of the game for beginners. His aim is laudable: to provide his target readership with a working knowledge

of systems to get them into playable middlegames, i.e. a White opening and black replies to 1 d4 and 1 e4.

As White, he suggests the Stonewall Attack. My heart sank. Apologies to all Stonewall-as-White fans everywhere, but it's not something I've ever thought was geared to strike terror into the opponent. I thought, I bet there's a Bxh7+ in there somewhere and, sure enough, a consenting Black gets fried with 13 Bxh7+ in a game which finishes with White's QR and QB still on their home squares (so much for developing all your pieces). To the author's credit, he explains that the Stonewall isn't a one-size-fits-all opening, and gives a section entitled When NOT to Play the Stonewall.

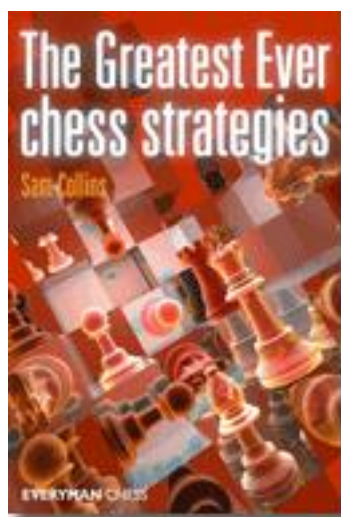
Which is where the going gets tough. On p.32, he touts the Stonewall as a 'powerful opening system by White that puts immediate and consistent pressure on Black'. On p. 44, in the section where White should avoid this 'powerful system', 'White maintains the balance'. By p.45, it's White who has to 'play very energetically'. In fact he devotes more pages (18) to when *not* to play his powerful system than he does to selling it (6)! Makes me wonder if he'd have been better off suggesting something else, but his point is to provide a framework based on a c3/d4/e3 triangle. This is mirrored in his suggestion for Black v 1 d4, a line of the Slav, where it's ...c6/d5/e6, and v 1 e4, the French, where it's a ...d5/e6 chain. However, this slips a bit after 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 when the author recommends ...dxe4, on the grounds that ...Nbd7/b6/Bb7/c5 'promise good chances'. Since they also promise a quick demise if Black isn't careful, I'm a bit sceptical about this.

I'm also not convinced that chapters 7 (Benefits of Playing Chess) and 8 (Chess and Business) are really relevant to the aims of the book.

To sum up, it reads well and I'd recommend it to his intended readership for the advice it contains. I have my reservations,

though, about the wisdom of advocating what are essentially closed opening systems for beginners and the less-experienced. Caveat emptor!

Ian Marks, August 2013



THE GREATEST EVER CHESS STRATEGIES by Sam Collins, Everyman Chess, 176 pp., publ. 2012

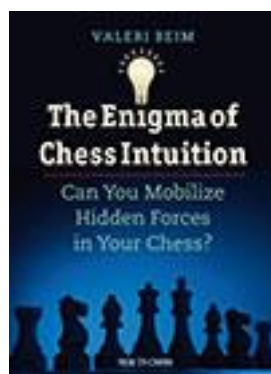
Like me, you're probably wondering what Collins can do in 176 pages that Nimzo, Euwe, Watson et al. have devoted thousands of pages to, but there's actually quite a neat little book hiding behind the grandiose hyperbole of the title.

It's not an attempt to go where such luminaries have gone before. In his introduction, Collins says that his book is *'my attempt to make sense of some of the chess concepts which are floating around in my head'*, and that he has *'tried to avoid covering material which is very well covered elsewhere'*. Amongst these concepts are e6-pawns, a queenside space advantage, using rook's pawns, material and time, and panning through them, you find little nuggets that make you think. A simple example from the chapter on Pawns: *'I'd like to mention a relatively little-discussed theme, namely the value of a black pawn on e6 against a white bishop on the a2-g8 diagonal'*. The point the author is making is that Black often feels the need to advance with ...e6-e5, when the bishop might come into its own. In the same chapter he also discusses an overestimation of outposts without consideration of the other factors in a position. There are also nice musings on quiet moves and, one of my favourites, the initiative in queenless middlegames.

So it's an eclectic and, as the author says, 'quirky', collection of mini-essays on various features of the middlegame, written with a lightness of touch and pleasing dash of self-deprecation. I liked it.

Ian Marks

June 2013



THE ENIGMA OF CHESS INTUITION by Valeri Beim, New in Chess,
268 pp., publ. 2012

This is an interesting piece of work, although, as Bill Clinton might have observed, it depends how you define 'interesting'. I found it interesting enough when I had it open in front of me; the problem was that when I put it down I didn't feel particularly motivated to pick it up again. It certainly doesn't fall into the 'unputdownable' category. Well, not for this reviewer anyway.

To an extent the title is self-explanatory. We all know – or think we know – what intuition is, but as per good practice, the author defines (or attempts to define) it. In his first chapter, 'First Explorations', Beim gives several examples by way of considering different aspects of what goes on in a player's head when he plays 'intuitively'. Of the many ingredients he suggests, I thought one defined it pretty well: '*An intuitive decision is one taken without a reasoning process*', and in the notes to his examples he talks about 'guessing' and 'feeling'.

The second chapter, 'Successful Use of Intuition', is the longest, and features lots of examples by great players from Morphy on. His third chapter, 'The Elements of Chess Intuition', attempts to pin down the nature of the beast. Here he touches upon such topics as inspiration, nerves and intuition, and intuition and speed of play.

These are all – to go back to my first paragraph – interesting enough, yet (as you might have guessed) I found it difficult to get too het up about the book. The best reason I can offer is that there's something of the thesis about it. For all the author's enthusiasm for his subject matter, it comes across rather drily. His prose seems a bit 'wordy', and I can't recall any particular wow! moment.

Stronger players, say rated over 2000, might find the book of interest, but overall it's the sort of book you might want to borrow from the local library, but wouldn't put at the top of your Christmas list.

Ian Marks

June 2013



THE FRENCH WINAWER by Steve Giddins, publ. 2013, 287 pp.
Another 'move by move' title, same format as other publications in the series: a collection of games (25 in this instance) covering the nuts and bolts of the opening, with lots of questions and answers.

Before I get on to the book, I wondered about the eponymous begetter of the opening (pr. Vee-náh-ver). I'd have thought that a major criterion for bequeathing your name to an opening would be a solid back catalogue of games, but a quick glance in ChessBase turned up a mere 10 Frenches with Winawer on the black side, of which only four featured 3 Nc3 Bb4, three of them continuing 4 exd5 with a solitary 4 e5 c5. Winawer actually seems to have been a 1 ...e5 man (96 of those). So how come he gets paternity rights?

Anyway, to the book. You might be wondering: Giddins isn't a top GM, but an FM rated 2188, so what can he tell us? Quite a lot, actually. Peers, or those closer to us, often make the best teachers, for the simple reason that they better understand the problems and difficulties. Think Oxford don in front of a 1st year high school class and you get the idea. Also, on the assumption that the Move by Move series is aimed primarily at less experienced players, Giddins is still way higher rated than, presumably, 90-odd% of his target readership, plus he's been playing the Winawer for 25 years, so presumably he's picked up a thing or two along the way.

(Kasparov once wondered of Peter Wells's book on the Semi-Slav *'how such a weak player could write such a good book'*. Wells was a 2500 GM!)

The games. It would be unthinkable to study the Winawer without looking at the games of Uhlmann, Botvinnik and Korchnoi, and nearly half – 11 of the 25 – are by them. Toss in the two by Petrosian and that's over half. (It crosses my mind that there will be newcomers nowadays for whom these giants are just names. I must be getting old.) The games span the period 1944-2011, a good blend of historical and contemporary. The notes and variations are backed up with lots of prose, which is always welcome. Giddins has a smooth, gently explanatory writing style well-suited to this sort of work.

Balance. Black wins 24 of the games, and the white win was a jammy escape by Karpov. OK, I suppose the Winawer is a 'black' opening, and that's what Giddins is trying to sell, but White is the one who allows it and often the one who decides which path will be taken, so a bit more parity would have been welcome. When White does well here, he tends to do so in the notes.

Sidelines? You spend ages mugging up on 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 c5, and the other guy plays 4 exd5, 4 Bd3 or some such. Giddins deals with some of these pesky sidelines in the context of two illustrative games. While I was checking up on these I noticed an unfortunate typo. The index runs 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 Ne7 5 a3 Bxc3+ 6 bxc3 Ne7. Clearly that first ...Ne7 should be ...c5, but if you're hunting for the variation 4...Ne7 5 a3 Bxc3+ 6 bxc3 b6, it's confusing. In fact that variation doesn't appear. Also, if memory serves, Uhlmann considered 4...Ne7 the more accurate move order (e.g. it cuts out the 4...c5 5 Bd2 stuff for a start). Giddins should really have discussed this on p.45 in game 5, Suetin-Uhlmann, Berlin 1967 (the first time 4...Ne7 is played), but only gets round to it nearly 200 pages later on p.234, and that in relation to 4...b6.

Normally it won't matter much, but surely this was the ideal opportunity for a 'question'?

Computers? Nobody writes chess books nowadays without the machine switched on, and Giddins is no exception, although there's a touch of good and evil about it. I'll take game 10, Bogdanovic-Uhlmann, Sarajevo 1965, as an example. In his note to move 14, Giddins suggests that Black's move was not the best and quotes three possible improvements from a previous work, adding (without further analysis!) *'all of which may offer reasonable chances'*. That's a cop-out. In a book aimed at players less well-versed in the French, a little elucidation would have been helpful. In the next line though he says, *'However, the computer's suggestion 14...Qxd2! 15 Bxd2 e4 may be best of all'*. Now that's a potentially decent use of the machine, so you have to wonder why he didn't use it to put some flesh on the other suggestions too.

Later in the same game though Giddins can't resist the seemingly obligatory computer-inspired pot-shot at great players of the past. Referring to one of Uhlmann's original lines, he tells us that *'the computer shows his analysis to be full of holes'*. First, this isn't that relevant within the context of the opening (it's on move 22) and second, much of Giddins's commentary is based on Uhlmann's original analysis, so it seems pretty low-level to use the guy's material, then have a pop at him when the machine finds flaws.

Summary: Overall a well-produced, solid piece of work, worth a look if you're interested in, or thinking of taking up, the French.



BREAK THE RULES! by Neil McDonald, publ. 2013, 160 pp.

The title is obviously a sales pitch, but since most games are lost because someone, well, broke the rules, it was with trembling hand that I opened the book. Nor was my confidence boosted by the subtitle, 'A Modern Look at Chess Strategy'. It's not that long since John Watson published his take on the subject, *Secrets of Modern Chess Strategy*, a book that wouldn't be out of place in a pile of magna opera, so where, I wondered, was McDonald coming from?

In his introduction, he says, *'The purpose of this book is to investigate ways of playing and ideas that often escape our rule-blinkered notice'*. Sounds good. In any area of human creativity, it's easy to become bound by rules and convention. It's when people cut loose that things start to happen. Here's the author again. *'If you haven't made as much progress in chess as you feel your capabilities deserve...the problem might be you have too strong impressions of what a good move or plan should look like.'* You might, of course, just be a self-delusional chump, but nonetheless that is something worth thinking about.

Amongst the topics he covers are ugly pawn moves, use of the king, provocation, using the edge of the board and an interesting chapter

called Time Is Not of the Essence, which I'll take as an example of his approach.

We have it drummed into us as beginners to get our pieces out, control the centre, castle, not mess about etc. Those of us weaned on the teachings of Fred Reinfeld (juniors – ask one of the old lags who he was) will be familiar with the 'proper' scheme of development, essentially Pd4 & e4, Nc3 & f3, Bc4 & f4, Qd2 or e2, Rd1 & e1, and, of course, we'll have 0-0ed somewhere along the way. The problem is that this ignores the other guy! (See Kavalek-Suttles, Nice Olympiad 1974, for a wonderful example of all that can go wrong with the Reinfeld scheme.) So we learn that development has to take these awkward things called circumstances into account. That is essentially what McDonald aims at in this chapter, albeit in a more sophisticated way.

I've said in previous reviews that I like books which drip-feed little nuggets of information or points to ponder, and McDonald is very good at this. Some examples:

1. *"'Rapid' development and 'efficient' development might contradict each other."*
2. *"If there is no violent struggle taking place, the aim is to develop the pieces as slowly and carefully as safety allows."*
3. *"We have to take into account that the pieces and pawns will react differently in accordance with the amount of freedom of action granted to them in various opening set-ups."*
4. *"There can be no 'one size fits all' attitude to development in the opening."* (A little caveat to d4/Nf3/e3/Bd3-against-anything players the world over!)

Simply pondering comments like those would do a lot of players a lot of good.

Within this chapter he also discusses inter alia

- Putting pawns before pieces
 - Bishops are happy at home
 - The difference between piece activity and formal development
 - Matching the tempo of the opponent's development
- all with pertinent examples. Reading this chapter alone would be of benefit to those players who might never really have given the matter much thought. The other chapters are all similarly illuminating.

There are 50 largely recent illustrative games, briefly but clearly annotated, plus 24 exercises at the end to test what you've read, should you wish. My only mild gripe is that each game is given in full, without comment, until the relevant position is reached. Thus the first 42 moves of game 2 take up most of a column, game 20 it's half a column for 25 moves, game 35 half a column for 30. Since the material is basically devoted to the middlegame, these chunks could easily have been omitted, allowing us to cut to the chase without any detriment to understanding what was going on.

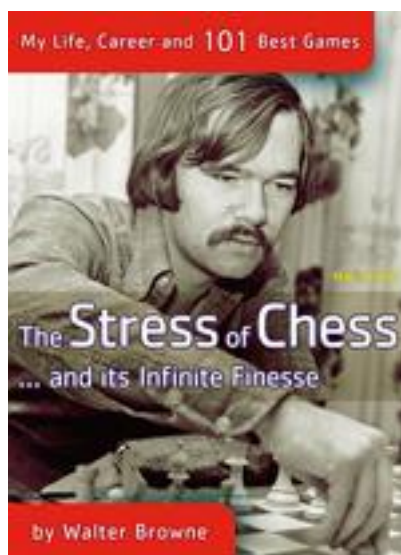
To sum up, I was initially a tad sceptical about this one, but the more I read it, the more I liked it. It may be 'only' 160 pages, but that simply means that the author has to convey his ideas lucidly and succinctly, and this McDonald does. He has a nice style and doesn't talk down to the reader; to use the trendy word (which I loathe), it's 'accessible'. His book contains lots of advice, information and wisdom that could only benefit anyone who cares to digest it. Given that there are much weightier tomes on chess strategy out there, I'd guess that this one is aimed mainly at (yet again!) that mythical abstraction, the average club player. I would certainly recommend it to players around, say, 1300-1600. Even stronger players would find it a good read.

Both books are well produced with clear text and diagrams (in the right places!), although Everyman are still chopping and changing

their paper. The Giddins is printed on nice, smooth paper whereas McDonald's is of a coarser texture, rough to the touch. Strange.

Ian Marks

April 2013



THE STRESS OF CHESS...and its INFINITE FINESSE By Walter Browne, New in Chess, 463 pp., publ. 2012

This is a memoir and games collection by Fischer's successor as the strongest player in the US, a position he held for most of the 70s and 80s. The games occupy 309 pages, the memoir 112, with 12 pages of photographs. The rest is forewords, indices etc. It is divided into four large chapters – 1. Early Development, 1953-1969; 2. Elite Tournaments and Simul Tours, 1970-1978; 3. International Success and Semi-retirement, 1979-1989 and 4. Blitz, Opens and Poker, 1990-2011.

The games span the author's career from 1963-2006, each prefaced by a pen picture of the opponent and occasion. Browne had a pronounced aggressive style, but besides complex attacking games, there are positional squeezes, delicate endgames, brevities and lengthy grinds. His opponents range from unknowns on the US circuit to luminaries such as Korchnoi and Spassky. He doesn't give any losses (unlike his idol Fischer in *My 60 Memorable Games*), but does give seven draws. Each game is annotated in detail and Browne uses plenty of words to flesh out the variations. The tone is enthusiastic and there is emotion in accounts of games against heroes such as Tal. Browne clearly respected his GM colleagues (although Nakamura is a 'punk').

The editing (more of which later) could have been tightened up. Some of the annotations are both 1st and 3rd person, and the games index, organised by page number rather than surname, is pretty useless; if you're looking for a particular opponent, you've got to hunt for him. Also, there is no indication of whether a game described in the narrative appears in the games section. A reference would have been nice. Overall, though, this part of the book could pass muster as a worthwhile games collection.

Now for the memoir, which is so awful it requires lengthy consideration. It's hard to know where to start, so if you'll permit me, I'll cast my net randomly and wide.

We've all heard youngsters say things like 'He won my queen, but I won his back, then he took my rook, but I checkmated him'. Here's Walter: 'I was simply better, if only slightly, despite an extra pawn. He had an outside passed pawn. Suddenly my e-pawn was also very strong and everything held in the balance. Then I lost a piece, but regained it'. The same goes for accounts of tournaments: 'Flew to X, played in the Y Open, beat Z with a nice sac, won \$1,000'. There is page after soporific page of stuff like this. As one of the top grandmasters in the world for over a decade, Browne travelled widely and rubbed shoulders with the good and great (*inter alios* Sinatra), and must have a fund of stories to tell, but it's mainly stuff like the above or dollops of minutiae. An example: He is obviously fond of Argentina (he met his wife there). On p.72, talking about the 1978 Olympiad in Buenos Aires, he opines that Argentina has 'the best beef in the world'. To reinforce that, on the next page he says that Buenos Aires has 'the best steaks in the world'. Don't worry if you were out of the room when he was telling us this; on p.216 we learn that Argentina has 'incredible beef'. He also frequently enthuses about seafood and fine wine. Colourful? Maybe. Repetitious? Definitely. Interesting? Not really.

When he tears himself away from matters of the stomach and turns to chess, he often displays inconsistency and inaccuracy. On p.47, he mentions that Ken Rogoff became chief economist at the International Monetary Fund. By p.59, however, 'Ken Rogoff...would later go on to become, *I believe* (my italics – IM), an IMF *chairman* (my italics again – IM)'. You'd think the author could have *checked*.

On p.141 he attributes 'Passed pawns need to expand' to Alekhine. Maybe my memory is going, but I always thought it was Nimzo who said 'passed pawns must be pushed' (because of their 'lust to expand'). So not only does Browne get the attribution wrong, he manages to mix up two phrases and ditch Nimzo's sultry personification in the process.

There are also issues with book titles. IM Anthony Saidy's *The Battle of Chess Ideas* transmogrifies into *The March of Chess Ideas*, (and slips from being 'a must read' to merely a fond recollection). Co-authors also suffer. He refers to Lubosh Ftacnik, 'my friend and co-author of *Champions of the Millennium*', not only omitting co-author Danny Kopec, but also butchering the title of his own book (*Champions of the New Millennium*). Talking of Kopec, he (DK) tells us in his foreword that Browne doesn't refer to *Champions of the New Millennium* in the book, which makes you wonder if he read p.447, scene of the above mutilation. Talking of book titles, Browne makes sure that Danny's *Best Games of the Young Grandmasters* gets a couple of plugs, although you'd never know that it was co-written by Craig Pritchett.

In a particularly revealing passage, he refers to *666 Games* 'by a German writer named Kurt Richter'. I assume this is Richter's *666 Kurzpartien: Eine Hohe Schule der Schachtaktik* (*666 Brevities: A Manual of Chess Tactics*). This work never appeared in English. (Thanks to Alan McGowan for confirming.) Perhaps there's a bootleg American edition, but I doubt it. Anyway, it looks like another title being

trampled upon, or maybe he saw 'Partien' and thought that 'Games' would be good enough. Second, the indefinite article and 'named' suggest that Richter was just a random hack. You'd have expected Browne to know that he was one of the top German players of the '30s and went on to become one of their most respected writers on the game. Change the phrase to 'by the German writer Kurt Richter' and see the difference.

However, the Oscar-winner in this eyebrow-raising welter of inconsistency and inaccuracy is his reference to the 'a1-g8 diagonal' (!!). Even excusing this as a slip, given that 'g' and 'h' are keyboard neighbours, it's incredible that no-one picked up on it.

Language gets mangled too: cringeworthy spelling, e.g. 'fazing out', 'hoards of spectators', 'rapped attention' and (one that I cherish) 'quardened off'; solecisms including to/too and the timeless its/it's; dodgy punctuation; random phrases; non sequiturs and irrelevant passages. (He segues from describing a tournament in Iceland to telling us that his mother's name was Hilda, her great-grandfather was Lord Chief Justice under Gladstone, and that he [WB] is related to Bertrand Russell.) Sometimes he doesn't quite hit *le mot juste*, as in a 'very credible' result and a 'long-winding' manoeuvre, and he botches the classical allusion 'Veni, Vedi (sic), Vici': the second word should be 'vidi', and the phrase translates as 'I came, I saw, I conquered', not 'he came, he saw, he conquered'.

Clichés abound. All hell frequently breaks loose and after a bad result, the author bounced back no fewer than fifteen times! In fact, on p. 348, he bounced back twice! And a third time on p.349! (And he rebounded quite a few times too.)

And the neologisms: in one of the pictures he is 'speeching', he talks about 'septupticide' and refers to not relishing a playoff any more than 'a marathoner running the 25th mile'. Given that a marathon is

run over 26 miles 385 yards, I'd have thought a 'marathoner' would be readying for the finish by mile twenty-five.

I've been asked why I bring up stuff like this. To me, the answer is self-evident. It's evidence of carelessness and lousy editing which shows no respect for the purchaser (and perhaps not even for the writer). You wouldn't accept poor quality or sloppy production anywhere else, so why in a book?

It would be easy to lay the blame for all of this at Browne's door, but he badly needed the guidance and support of an experienced editor and obviously didn't get it. In fact, there doesn't appear to have been an editor at all. (Check the credits.) Some anonymous hand *was* involved though, just enough to show how shoddy the effort is. Back at the Rogoff passages, the second reference is followed by the cryptic 'XXXHerhaling?'. This furrowed my brow until it dawned on me. 'Herhaling' is Dutch for 'repetition'. Bear in mind that New in Chess is a Dutch concern and you realise that somebody at NiC spotted the repetition (but apparently not the change of 'fact'/opinion), put in a note to that effect, but not only didn't deal with the repetition, even left in the reminder! You couldn't make it up.

Let's move on to the chess. When it comes to competition, Browne is not short of the usual pick 'n' mix' of chessplayer's excuses. Bad results involve faulty clocks, seconds not doing their job properly, doubtful pairings (lots of them, albeit sometimes with justification), lighting etc. Nor is his paranoia found wanting. Organisers plot to deprive him of a rest day; he is double-crossed; Glek wins a tournament 'under suspicious circumstances'; 'such a thing would never have happened if another American...had won'; Soviet political influence over *Informator* stops him winning a game of the year award (now *there's* something we'd like to have heard more about) and so on.

Mention of seconds gives us one of the most memorable passages in the book. John Fedorowicz, Browne's second at the Taxco Interzonal in Mexico, didn't want to watch the games because 'there was a pig in the playing hall' (!?). That is either a truly memorable image or stunning allegory, but Browne doesn't enlighten us.

Probably the biggest imbalance is the devoting of over five pages to a 'record breaking' simul tour in 1975, detailed right down to the exact length of time a gig took. I suspect it's in here because Bobby did a tour in '64, and anything Bobby did... This part includes the most baffling passage of all. He took his son with him on this 'incredible 40-state journey, covering 15,500 miles'. Since Browne got married in 1973, and figuring his son might be about 18 months old, I wondered why he would want to take a kiddie with him, the more so since Mrs B seemed not to be part of the undertaking. No matter, I thought, who am I to question? Then, a few days into the trip, 'Marcelo drove the car'. Whoa! Have I missed something? If his son was old enough to drive, he must have been born when Browne was about, let's see...eight or nine! It's not until much later that we learn that Browne's wife is quite a bit older, so presumably it was his stepson. Why not say so?

The tour section is a drag and reads as though it was lifted straight from a diary. It could have been dealt with in a couple of paragraphs, the more so since major areas that did merit development are glossed over or ignored altogether. Some examples:

His early development. Very little is said about this. He tells us 'by age 15 my hard work was starting to pay off as I became a master', but doesn't elaborate on what the hard work was, bar studying some games collections and hustling.

His relationship with Fischer. They seem to have enjoyed a genuine friendship until Fischer left in the huff after being told off for using

the phone during a visit chez Browne ('he was on the phone five to six hours straight!'), but more insight would have been welcome.

US chess politics. It is clear that Browne had issues with the USCF, e.g. over team selection (he was dropped to fourth board at the Thessaloniki Olympiad) and invitations. As the strongest GM in North America, he strangely didn't get an invitation to Montreal in 1978, the strongest tournament in North America for decades. This looks a fertile area for elaboration, but all we get is the hardly insightful 'I was totally shocked that I was not invited'. He also comments that, when he played for Australia in the '70 and '72 Olympiads (he was born in Sydney and held dual nationality until his mid-20s), their 'team unity dwarfed that of the US teams that I played'. Clearly some dirty linen needs airing. Since Browne isn't slow to knock others whose conduct, in his opinion, doesn't measure up, e.g. organisers, arbiters and seconds, it's strange that he didn't go public on these weightier matters.

His travels. Browne seems to have enjoyed the many places he visited, but once again, it's shallow. After a tournament in Norway, he and his wife rented a car and 'drove to the fishing village Bergen on the west coast'. I always thought Bergen was one of Norway's major cities. (I checked; it's the second-biggest with around 300,000 inhabitants and is the major port. Maybe to an American that's a village.) On a visit to Yugoslavia, he quaintly informs us 'I almost bought some beautiful crystalware'. It would hardly have been worth a mention if he *had* bought it. Why tell us that he didn't!?

Reflection. Nowhere does Browne ponder the pertinent question: Would he have been a better player if he hadn't played in so many Swisses? (Maybe he didn't want to, or maybe it never occurred to him.) Top GM that he was, he stumbled more than once at the Interzonals, which suggests something lacking in his armoury or development. Of course, he wasn't the only one, but he attributes his failure to his seconds (q.v.) and inadequate preparation. He

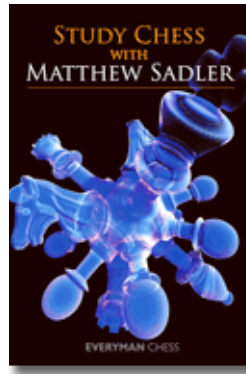
never contemplates that playing in so many Swisses or playing the last round of a US Swiss then flying straight to a GM tournament in Europe might not have been ideal prep for facing the chess elite. We can only surmise that he was what he was – a chess addict who thrived on the clash over the board, be it against Karpov in Milan or Joe Schlub in the Hicksville Open.

One thing I haven't mentioned is the poker part of the book, for the simple reason that I didn't read it. I'm not sure why the poker sections are there. I can't see many poker buffs buying a chess book just for the poker sections, while chessplayers who aren't interested in poker (e.g. your reviewer) will skim them. Browne does provide a glossary of pokerspeak, but I couldn't be bothered. A glance revealed it to be much the same as the chess – went to Vegas, won/lost a stack, met 'Oklahoma' Johnny Hale...

The truly great shame is that there *are* examples of fine writing. 'The secret of success is to be a little more talented and to do a lot more homework' or 'Chess symbolizes everything that is artistic and beautiful. This is why, in spite of dismal results, I continued playing' hint at what might have been and reveal more of the writer than any list of tournaments or results. What a pity that Browne didn't get away from patchy reportage and really tell us something. Perhaps he didn't want to?

By way of conclusion: in his foreword, Danny Kopec calls Browne's book a 'prodigious work' and a 'magnum opus'. This is just hyperbolic pally flimflam. It's nothing of the kind. It's a potentially decent games collection spoilt by a narrative which might have been useful as an early draft, but in published form is an embarrassment.

Ian Marks, January 2013



STUDY CHESS WITH MATTHEW SADLER by Matthew Sadler,
Everyman Chess, 140 pp., publ. 2012

A little background for juniors or newcomers for whom the author's name is unfamiliar. Sadler was one of the strongest English GMs of the '90s, one of the world top 20, and habitué of elite tournaments. Then he quit professional chess to get a proper job. (I've always wondered exactly what a 'proper' job is. I can think of plenty of 'proper' jobs which are anything but.) After a decade in the chess wilderness he resurfaced a few years ago, playing some tournaments in Norway, Spain and the Netherlands, and is now back in the world top 100. During his time as a pro, he also wrote a number of highly-acclaimed books, so his reappearance in the printed word is no surprise. (I bought his *Tips for Young Players* for £1 in a second-hand shop years ago, mainly to help keep the place open, and would recommend it, not just to young players, but to anyone around 1400 and under. Packed full of good advice.)

The title is something of a misnomer, since it's not a study course as such, more a personal account of his trials and tribulations on his return to chess. Roughly half of the book is devoted to his experiences in sorting out his rusty opening repertoire, the rest covers middlegames and endings.

The openings are a mixture of mainstream and whacky. Since Sadler had been out of the theoretical loop for so long, he experimented with the less orthodox as a way to avoid being

jumped and as a means of keeping fresh, e.g. with assorted Moderns and ...b6s. Anybody (i.e. everybody) who has suffered through opening highs and lows will know where he's coming from.

In his middlegame material he discusses different ways of thinking, e.g. active, reactive and prophylactic, and provides assorted exercises to get you, well, thinking.

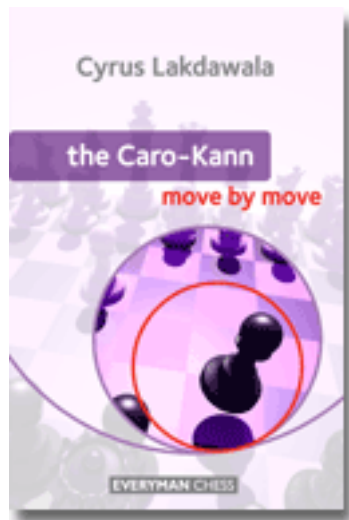
In the endgame section he addresses the 'simple' question "Why are endgames difficult?", and relates his own experiences as well as looking at some modern examples.

There are a total of 53 games, over 30 of them the author's, all annotated with lots of words and ideas rather than lengthy variations.

Sadler writes well in a chatty yet informative style and puts a lot of himself into his work. I've said before that my favourite books are ones where the author's personal touch comes across, so *Study Chess*...scores well in that category. I also enjoy books where the author drip-feeds little nuggets of wisdom (you've sometimes got to be alert to spot them), and Sadler does a lot of that. A few examples: *"Don't automatically shy away from lines where you might have to give something up"*; *"The more time I spent trying to develop 'warmth' for an opening, the better I played it"*; *"I also learnt how important it is to pay attention to your inner calmness"* and he talks on more than one occasion about the importance of getting your mindset right.

I enjoyed this one, not just for the chess, but as a good read. Will it improve your play? I don't know; that's up to you! Will it get you thinking? Definitely, and that's a good thing.

Ian Marks, November 2012



THE CARO-KANN MOVE BY MOVE by Cyrus Lakdawala, 432 pp.



THE TORRE ATTACK MOVE BY MOVE by Richard Palliser, 302 pp.

Both of these (publ. 2012) are part of Everyman's move by move series, an interesting idea to use Socratic debate as a means of teaching chess openings. Any teacher will tell you that it's not just the right answer that matters but the right question. The problem is, of course, that while the series attempts to replicate a one-to-one lesson, the student is absent, so the teacher has to formulate the question himself. Thus the success of the enterprise stands or falls to a large extent on how well he does this. But more of this later. Both use complete game formats, the former 53, the latter 25.

There has been a spate of CK books lately, so it is legitimate to ask what will be achieved by another. The answer lies partly in the first paragraph, how the Q & A session pans out. It also lies in the content, since there would be little point (as I see it) in going where other authors have gone before. Then there is the author himself, what he brings to his subject matter and how he presents it. On each of these counts I'd say Lakdawala (a US IM and coach) does a good job.

Let's look at the content. The big question is what he suggests (remember, especially as a means of learning the opening) after the Classical 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 dxe4 4 Nxe4. Recent authors have all gone for 4...Bf5. Lakdawala goes for 4...Nd7. This move has been championed by Nimzowitsch, Smyslov (our eponymous hero) and Petrosian, so it is clearly not a diddy variation. He devotes 152 pages – nearly a third of the book to it – so the reader doesn't want for detail. His justification lies in one of his early questions, basically why not cover 4...Bf5? His answer is that he prefers playing lines which are not in vogue to avoid booked-up opponents. This is reasonable enough, although my concern from the point of view of someone new to the CK is that there is more scope for being on the end of a hammering with 4...Nd7 if you don't know what you're doing than with 4...Bf5, especially in the 5 Ng5 lines (which Lakdawala calls 'Into the Abyss'). To be fair, Lakdawala is aware of this and does a decent job of talking his students round the banana skins and showing that Black is not without his own chances.

The big growth area in the CK in recent years has been the Fantasy Variation (3 f3) and here Lakdawala suggests the interesting 3...Qb6!? This chapter would be worth a look by anyone looking for 'something else' against the Fantasy.

Now the questions. As I said above, without a student present, it is vitally important for the teacher to anticipate the question, and I think Lakdawala does a good job. The questions aren't just straight

whys or whats, but cover various aspects of tactics and planning too. The great difficulty is that it's awfully difficult to avoid letting your eyes run down the page before you've answered the question, so to get the most out of the book, you'd better have a sheet of paper handy to cover the answers and explanations.

Lakdawala's style is different from that of most chess authors. His touch is lighter and less didactic, and he's not afraid to inject a shot of humour. I like it.

Overall I enjoyed this one. Anyone willing to invest some time and effort in it would have a useful, solid defence to 1 e4.

I had a go at Palliser's writing style in a previous review, so even before I got on to the content, I was interested to see if he's still spraying his prose with pleonastic ands. He seems to have curbed this tendency (I noticed more semi-colons), although perhaps the more conversational style (which comes off well) helped. I've noticed, though, that Everyman books don't seem to have a proofreader, at least not one that gets a mention, so it came as a bit of a duh!? moment to find that Smirin morphs into Shirov within only five moves of game 1, a pretty basic howler. (He morphs back again!)

The Torre is often denigrated as a not-very-dangerous opening, but amongst black players coming a cropper we find Smirin, Leko, Radjabov and Volokitin, while Carlsen, Gelfand and Morozevich are amongst the luminaries punting it with White, so clearly it has something going for it. Palliser does a good job of covering all the main tries with ...g6 & ...e6, as well as lesser lines and gambit possibilities. Like Lakdawala, he formulates the questions well and I liked the largely chatty nature of his 'replies' (often much better than a this-is-how-it-is type answer). I noticed that one answer

explains why an early ...c4, hitting a B on d3, is rarely a good idea for Black in Torre/Colle-type set-ups. (I see it about half a dozen times a year in league matches and in junior and minor tournaments. Please, guys, read this!)

If Lakdawala's book will give the reader a reliable defence to 1 e4, Palliser's will give him or her something useful and potent as White. For 1 d4 2 c4 players it would be a useful surprise weapon.

Production standards for both are high: sturdily bound, good quality paper and clear print and diagrams (in the right places!).

Ian Marks September 2012



PLAY THE BENKO GAMBIT by Nicolai V. Pedersen, 208 pp.,
publ.2011.

What it says on the tin, the current state of affairs after 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5, plus a section on anti-Benkos. All the main lines are covered – Fianchetto, Classical (e4 Bxf1/Kxf1), 5 e3, 5 f3, b5-b6 and ‘others’. In Benko books I always have a look for lines with an early f4, just to see if the author’s on the ball; game 18, p.67 suggests he is.

The double column layout means that the diagrams are in the right place, but the paper quality is awful. Everyman seem to have major paper issues. In here it feels like a recycled mix from an old East German paper mill (think anorexic cardboard and you get the idea), where you half expect to see the ink coming off on your fingers. Smoother paper would be a godsend. Anything would be better than this.

An easy one to sum up. Benko players will buy it, d4 players might buy it, and everybody else’ll probably pass.

Ian Marks August 2012



MASTERING OPENING STRATEGY by Johan Hellsten, 365 pp., publ. 2012.

Not an 'openings' book in the traditional sense of the term, but, as the title indicates, a survey of the main 'ingredients' of opening play: Development, Crime and Punishment (e.g. pawn grabbing, exposed king, premature attacks etc.), The Battle for the Centre, Restriction and Preparation. Hellsten covers these with over 200 games, which are split up so that the reader can consider how to proceed before continuing. Each section contains a whole range of openings, a reminder that the topics covered apply to all openings, not just certain ones. This avoids the sort of blinkered thinking you find in, say, "Well, I don't play the French, so it (whatever it is) can't happen to me". Of course it can, and probably will, if you think like that!

It's not the sort of book you can dip into, or skim for the more interesting bits. Like his previous volume, *Mastering Chess Strategy*, you would need to spend a lot of quality time with it to derive maximum benefit.

It's an impressive piece of work, but I'm wondering just who the target readership is. I'd guess that U-1500 club players who have been stuck in their ways for decades would find it daunting, and I don't mean that in an insulting sort of way. Daunting, yes, but

beneficial if they worked at it. I'd imagine that 2200+ players would already be pretty au fait with what the author has to say. I think young(er) aspiring/improving players would find it useful as a complement (antidote!?) to their computer-based openings study.

Paper quality in this one is streets ahead of that in the Benko book – smooth to the touch and a lot more flexible.

If you're looking for something a bit different in the openings field, this might what you're looking for.

Ian Marks August 2012

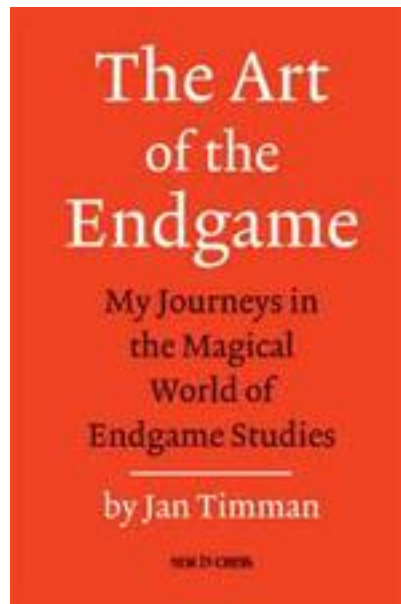


CHESS SECRETS: GIANTS OF INNOVATION by Craig Pritchett,
Everyman Chess, 288 pp., publ. 2011

This is a companion volume to Craig's *Heroes of Classical Chess* which I reviewed last time – same concept, same format, same entertaining read. The innovators are Steinitz, Lasker, Botvinnik, Korchnoi and Ivanchuk, each represented by biographical commentary and seven games annotated in helpful depth. It struck me that the protagonists in this volume were/are all quirkier than the players featured in other volumes in the series; maybe that's something that comes with pioneering turf. I particularly enjoyed the chapter on Korchnoi, a sympathetic look at one of the most complex chess personalities of the last half century. It is also curious that two of the giants, Lasker and Botvinnik, had successful parallel careers, and that Lasker was also something of a polymath. Compared to the obsessive chess single-mindedness of Korchnoi and Ivanchuk, it really does show that there is no specific template for a top player. (And, without wanting to get into politics, there's the polar opposition between Botvinnik, child of the Revolution and loyal communist, and Soviet defector Korchnoi. Strangely, both took the paths they did in order to be able to play chess.)

Anyway, a grand collection illustrating innovation – however you care to define it – from the 19th century to the present day. Well worth a punt, especially to players who, say, have never played through a Lasker or Botvinnik game in their lives.

Ian Marks – July 2012



THE ART OF THE ENDGAME My Journeys in the Magical World of Endgame Studies by Jan Timman, New in Chess, 269 pp., publ. 2011

Hands up all those who have never looked at a study in their lives... hmmm... that's a lot of hands. All the top trainers, from Dvoretsky down, recommend solving studies as part of a chessplayer's daily diet; it focuses thought and, since studies are very concrete, improves calculation. And yet...

Perhaps there's a mystique about studies that puts people off; for example Timman discusses the Novotny and Plachutta themes, the Valladao Task, the Karstedt Fortress and the Prokes (and Double Prokes!) Manoeuvre. No, I'm not au fait with them either. Jargon tends to have an alienating effect. Or perhaps it's because studies often bear no apparent relation to practical play (see Lommer on pp.86 and 112). This should be irrelevant, but often isn't.

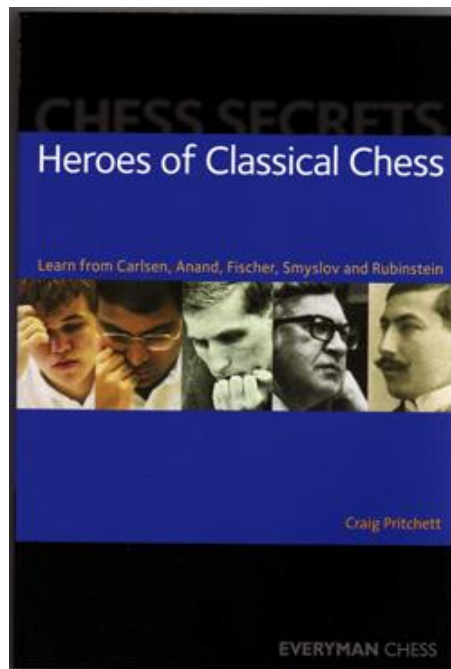
Having said that, there are very many practical studies in here, and the ideas they contain show the amazing depth of our game. To get a picture of Timman's material, here are some of the topics covered: promotions, mating patterns, zugzwang and fortresses. These are going to crop up in your games this season, and you could well get some ideas of how to handle them in here.

Timman is a 'solid' writer; he expresses himself clearly and eloquently, and is not afraid to use lots of explanatory prose. He has a likeably healthy ego ("My intuition told me I could make an award-winning study..."), but, like a lot of people high up in their field, there are times when he seems to forget that others are not as gifted as he, and uses words like 'obvious' and 'simple', when it might be anything but. Any good teacher will tell you that those are dangerous words. Things are only obvious or simple if they're, well, obvious or simple.

Production values are up to New in Chess's usual high standards – high quality paper, clear print and diagrams and tidy double column layout. There is more space between main lines and variations than in their opening books, which tend to suffer from clutter.

Will this book help improve your play? I don't know. That's up to you. What it will do is reveal the hidden beauty of the game and provide you with lots of 'Wow!' moments.

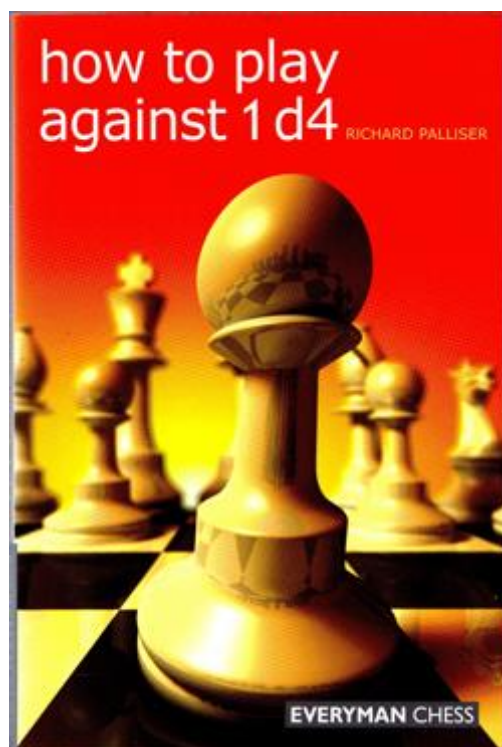
Ian Marks – July 2012



CHESS SECRETS: HEROES OF CLASSICAL CHESS by Craig Pritchett, 224 pp., publ.2009. When I was starting out, games collections were the thing. There were tomes on or by Alekhine, Capablanca, Botvinnik, Tal, Petrosian and Keres (a trilogy, pure gold), to name but a few. Fischer's *My 60 Memorable Games* was the last big collection. Perhaps subsequent writers wondered how they could follow that? With the arrival of Batsford and *The Opening Book* in the early 70s, it seemed that the games collection had gone the way of the dodo. Anyway, things now appear to be coming full circle, as this recent work by Craig indicates. It features a selection of games (seven each) illustrating the play and (in some cases continuing) legacy of Rubinstein, Smyslov, Fischer, Anand and Carlsen. As always with Craig's work, it is well researched, well-written and, to use the trendy word, accessible. I like chess books that have lots of words, not just endless variations, and there is lots of elucidatory prose in here. It strikes me that, to today's younger players, three of these giants might be no more than names. I would direct them to this book. The same goes for anyone else who skipped *Chess Heritage 101*. Apart from broadening your chess culture, there are simply some wonderful games to be enjoyed. I thought of listing a few favourites, but gave up. I will say, though, that if you are not

blown away by Fischer-Stein, Sousse Interzonal 1967, one of the greatest and most intense fighting games by two top GMs of all time, then you have no soul for chess. The interesting thing is how Magnus will evolve to compare with his illustrious predecessors. Perhaps something for a chess author in forty years' time? Highly recommended.

Ian Marks, May 2012



HOW TO PLAY AGAINST 1 d4 by Richard Palliser, 256 pp., publ. 2010

A treatise on how to handle the black side of the closed games? Nope, a book on the Czech Benoni. Presumably it's a marketing ploy. Given the opening's popularity, How to Play the Czech Benoni wouldn't be likely to shift enough copies to pay the author's mortgage. Palliser gives plenty of detail: 163 pages on 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5 (and how to avoid it), 46 on 1 d4 c5 2 d5 e5, and the rest on White's ways of avoiding 2 d5. There is very little 'white' but we still have the Everyman in-house problem – putting diagrams where they belong (or don't belong!). They're placed two abreast, often with no relation to the nearby text. To use a good Scots word, it's a scunner. Everyman have been doing this for years in single-column openings books. Why not change to double?

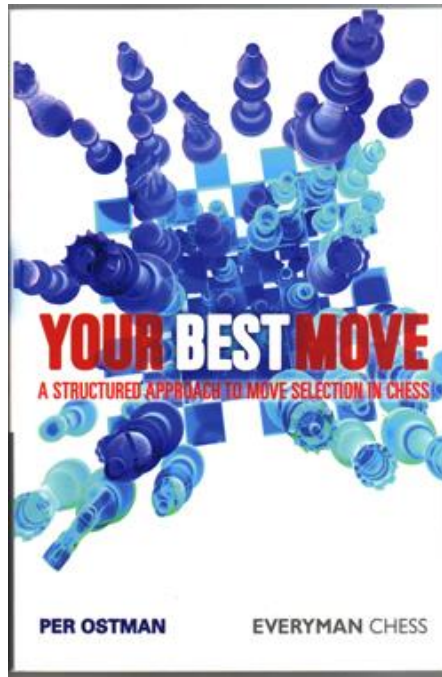
One thing irks me about Palliser's writing – overuse of the word 'and', often just plain wrong. Examples. First, correctly: 'Black accepts that he must play slowly and aim to gradually neutralize White's small edge' (p.43). There, 'and' does its job, joining two

clauses. Now, dodgy. 'Returning the favour and I suspect that both players missed the tactic...' (p.144). 'Not forced and a fianchetto player might begin with,,, ' (p.146). Each of these could be improved by ditching 'and', using a full stop and starting a new sentence. Try it. See? There are plenty of others. You can even spot it in works by other writers which have passed through Palliser's editorial hands. Ugh.

Another thing which caught my eye was the all-too-prevalent contemporary tendency to belittle the past. After 1 d4 c5 2 d5 e5 3 e4 d6 4 Nc3 a6 5 a4 f5? the author tells us on p.196 that 'Nowadays no self-respecting club player would lash out with ...f7-f5 so early, wrecking Black's light squares, but this just reminds us how much understanding of the game has advanced since the Thirties'. Palliser must have seen enough club games to know that this is piffle. So who was the perpetrator of this horrendous gaffe? Chap called Alekhine, v Euwe in 1934. I can't help thinking that the positionally inept, temporally-challenged World Champion could teach today's Joe Clubplayer a thing or two, but I could be wrong. (Incidentally, there's another great example of the Palliser 'and' in the notes here after 5...f5? 6 f4!?: 'ambitious and there's nothing at all wrong with...'. Delete 'and', replace with semi-colon. Sorted.)

I found it hard to get het up about this one and was more irritated by the author's style than anything else. Unless you want to bone up on old Benonis (and then be hit by a Colle), you could pass on it.

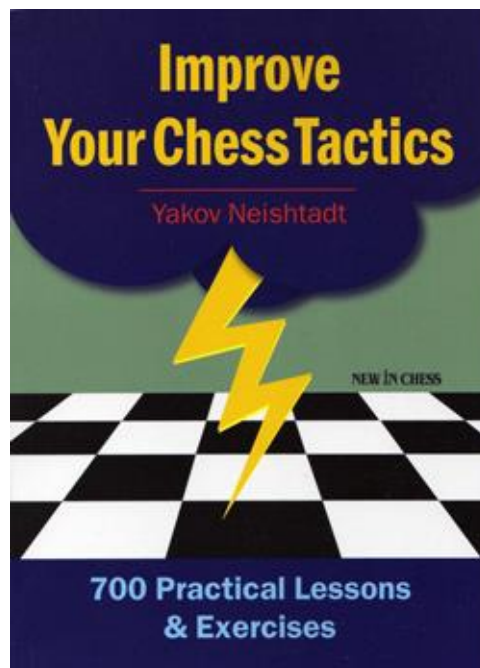
Ian Marks, May 2012



YOUR BEST MOVE by Per Ostman, 222 pp., publ. 2011

I haven't heard of the author either, but the blurb tells us he's an 'experienced chess teacher and analyst' from Australia and he gets a nice encomium from the young Australian GM Zong-Yuan Zhao, so we'll trust his credentials. Basically, the book does what it says on the tin, setting out to provide a framework of ways to improve move selection. There are five parts: Process, Potential Candidate Moves, Knowledge, Skills and Preparation. Some of these owe a nod to Kotov's *Think Like a Grandmaster*. It can be easily read without a board, nearly all prose and very few moves. It contains a lot of basic common sense that would be of value to inexperienced players, but, like all books, you'd get out of it what you put into it.

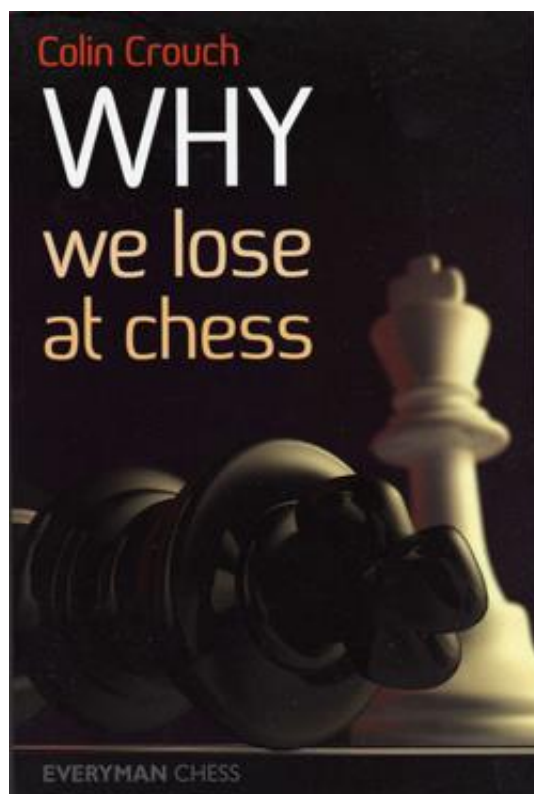
Ian Marks, May 2012



IMPROVE YOUR CHESS TACTICS by Yakov Neishtadt New in Chess
2011, 383 pp.

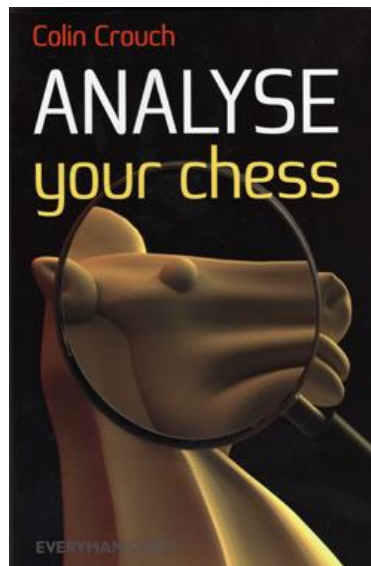
This book is divided into two main sections, Combinative Themes and Combining Themes. The former introduces the basic themes of Deflection, Decoying, Eliminating Defenders, Clearing Squares & Lines, Pinning & Unpinning and Interference & Shutting-off, and looks at them individually. The latter deals with them in various combinations with each other. Each sub-section has an introduction with examples followed by 30, 40, 50 or so test positions, 700 in all. The whole is rounded off with an 'examination'. Standard tactics book fare? Pretty much. What I liked about this one was the clear-cut nature of the examples and the way in which the author explains what's was going on in straightforward and (to use the 21st century buzz-word) accessible fashion, ditto the answers. No risk of not seeing the wood for the trees. You often come across books where the examples are groaning under the weight of the surrounding prose; that's not the case here. From that point of view, it would be a worthwhile read for less experienced or weaker players. Their stronger brethren would find excellent training material within the covers. The introduction refers to it as a self-

tutor and sparring partner, as apposite a way of describing it as any. As with all New in Chess publications, production standards are high and layout and printing are clear. Recommended.



WHY WE LOSE AT CHESS and **ANALYSE YOUR CHESS** by Colin Crouch, Everyman Chess 2010 & 2011, 187 & 235 pp. resp.

This brace came about when the amiable English IM was recovering from serious illness. Unable to play competitively, he turned his attention to his games, analysing them and, as the first title says, examining why we lose. The first one consists of fifteen 'tests' of multiple choice move selection in positions from his games. In this respect it pays homage to one of my all-time favourite chess books, *The Best Move*, by the Vlastimil twins Hort and Jansa. If you do not possess a copy of this wonderful opus, log on to eBay or your favourite second-hand book site and be prepared to shell out several hundred quid/bucks/Euros for a copy. But I digress. Crouch invites you to choose, then discusses the whys and wherefores of each. The games frequently crop up at various stages throughout the book, so you can see the progress of each and how the choices impinged on the play.

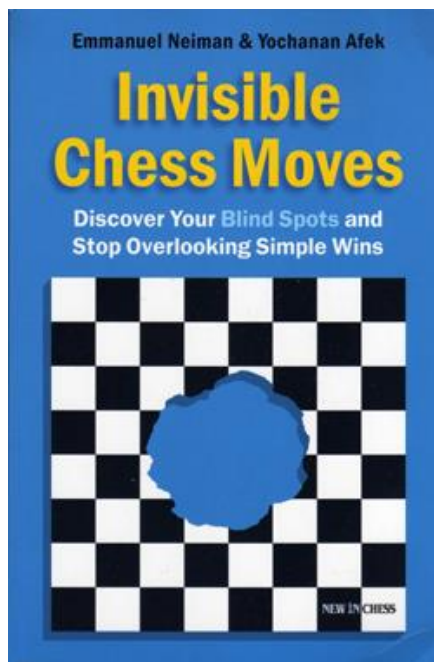


The second is not dissimilar, although this time the author looks at games (28 of them) in their entirety, again seeking to find what went right or wrong, the reasons for players' choices, types of error etc. The games are generally analysed in detail (ten pages or so in some cases), so a lot of searching has gone on! He discusses factors such as fatigue, the effects of a poor start to a tournament, losing winning games, endings, opening disasters, time etc. etc. We've all been there; we can empathise. There are lots of little spot-on quotes which stick in the mind, e.g. "You are not 'unlucky' in losing from a winning position. On the contrary, you have blundered in the worst way."

I enjoyed these. The author has done what we are all advised to do – study your games, especially your losses, and find out what went wrong. In each book there are lots of words, good, relevant explanatory prose, which not only elucidates the variations, but allows us into the setting of the game, the better to appreciate what was going on.

It's not often an author bares his soul as much as Crouch does here. I liked these books. I think you would too.

Ian Marks, February 2012



INVISIBLE CHESS MOVES by Emmanuel Neiman & Yochanan Afek,
New in Chess 2011, 240 pp.

Strange title, I thought. The subtitle shed a little more light: Discover Your Blind Spots and Stop Overlooking Simple Wins. (If we could all do the last four words, life would be just ducky.) The contents brought things into better focus, albeit if the terminology sounded a bit heavy: Part I – Objective Invisibility (hard-to-see moves and geometrically invisible moves), and Part II – Subjective invisibility, (invisible moves for positional and psychological reasons). If the words seem a tad heavy, the first two examples should give you the idea, viz. Petrosian chucking his queen v Bronstein in the 1956 Candidates, and Kramnik missing *that* mate in one by Deep Fritz. There are lots and lots of games, extracts and exercises all devoted to why we miss moves (for us or the other guy) and the occasions/conditions when such oversights are likely to occur, e.g. sudden moves on the opposite wing, blindness, anticipating the result, residual image etc. etc. I found my own speciality in here, but you don't expect me to tell you what it is, do you!?

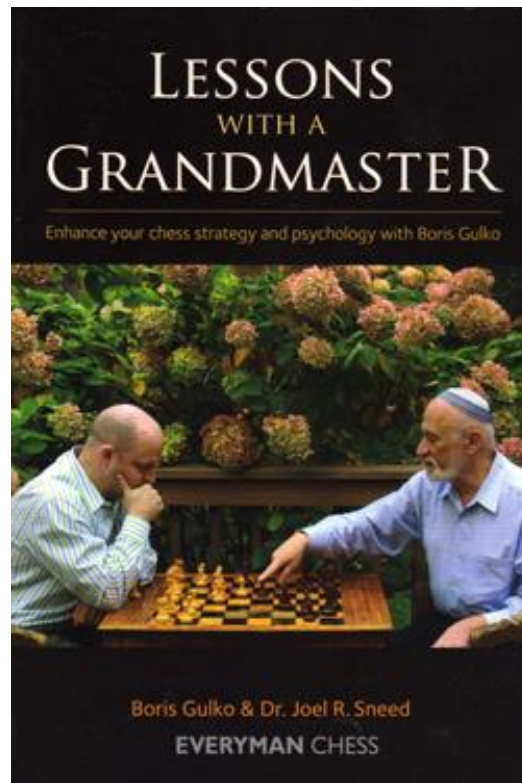
The aim is to make us aware of when the gremlins might strike and, *en passant*, I guess make us feel better by seeing that players

with large numbers beside their name are as capable of making the same crass oversights as the rest of us.

It's always nice to see Scottish players feature in chess books, but I've already sworn secrecy to the victim featured in this volume, cracking finish notwithstanding.

You could treat this as an improvement book, I guess, but it also lends itself to dipping into, which is always nice. It's also the only chess book I know which manages to reference the underrated black American crime/social novelist Chester Himes.

Ian Marks (26 Jan. 2012)



LESSONS WITH A GRANDMASTER by Boris Gulko & Dr Joel R. Sneed, Everyman Chess 2011, 298 pp.

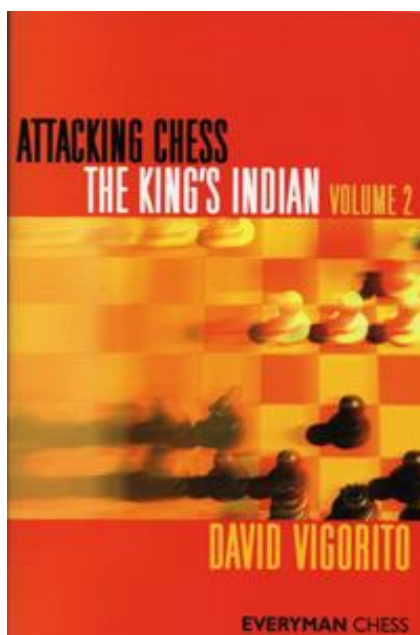
Twenty-five of the GM's games analysed Socratic-style with his co-author, a New York psychology professor and chess amateur. The quality of the material – a top GM's games – is not in question and, at an average of around ten pages a game, there should be plenty of depth. However, each game has lots of diagrams (no bad thing for assisting visualisation without a board, you might say), but they are HUGE and colonise an awful lot of space. A random example: Gulko-Seirawan, US Ch. 1999 (65 moves), covers an impressive 16½ pages, but the nineteen diagrams account for about six or seven. With so many large diagrams, there's a consequential awful lot of white. (By way of contrast, Fischer's *60 Memorable Games* devoted 14 pages to his comparable marathon [68 moves] with Botvinnik, with nine small diagrams. A different type of book, granted, but you get the idea.) Perhaps it would have been better to feature exercise diagrams only and in smaller format. (In the Seirawan example, only eight diagrams relate to exercises.)

OK, on to the meat. The most striking feature is the absence of lengthy variations. Each game is a discourse/conversation/Q & A session between Gulko and Sneed, so what you get are detailed verbal explanations by the GM to illustrate what was going on, his thought processes, the rights and wrongs, the whys and wherefores etc. There really is a lot of *text*, which is pretty uncommon in games collections. This, I think, is where the book scores. A paragraph of good, explanatory prose is often worth a heap of variations. Anyone who has felt like reaching for the tablets after toiling through a page of Hübnerian analysis will know where I'm coming from. There are occasions, perhaps not unnaturally, where the GM's level of understanding shows in a laconic, almost dismissive appraisal, e.g. "This is bad!", but, equally, there are occasions when his enthusiasm for a good suggestion by his straight man redresses the balance. I mention this because one of the worst things a teacher/coach/trainer can do, in chess as in any other discipline, is to diss a student's suggestion out of hand. Perhaps this was missing in the original face-to-face encounter; after all, the printed word cannot convey tone of voice, gesture, facial expressions etc.

I read recently that *Lessons with a Grandmaster* has been short-listed for Book of the Year award. I don't know if I'd rate it that highly, but it's certainly an interesting piece of work and, I think, one that Everyman should have trumpeted more loudly amongst their usual fare of openings books. I have no idea how it's selling, but the Everyman publicity machine should be pushing it as one of their top offerings of 2011.

Ian Marks (26 Jan. 2012)

Three (more) opening manuals (all publ. 2011) from Everyman: **Attacking Chess The King's Indian vol.2** by David Vigorito, **The New Old Indian** by Alexander Cherniaev & Eduard Prokuronov and **How to Beat the Sicilian Defence** by Gawain Jones.



Attacking **Chess The KID** (368 pp.) is the second of Vigorito's tomes on the said opening. This one covers the Fianchetto (142 pp.), Four Pawns (52 pp.) and Averbakh variations (48 pp.), h3 lines (39 pp.) and assorted others such as 5 Bd3 and 5 Nge2 (66 pp.). The coverage is detailed, dense and almost overwhelming.

The author adopts a repertoire approach, e.g. against the fianchetto he recommends the Panno Variation with ...Nc6. This has pros and cons. Pro, in that he can go into everything in great depth; con, in that if your pet is ...c6 and queen out to a5 or b6, well, nothing to see here folks. Then again, you might experience some sort of chessic Pauline conversion. Who knows?

I reckon the book is aimed at players > 2100. The depth of coverage is way beyond anything Jack or Jill Average would need, the more so since the London and Colle Systems seem to hold half the d4 players in Scotland in a vice-like grip.

A couple of words about the production. The printing is large and

clear and diagrams are in the right place (something Everyman has not always been guilty of), but the paper is rough to the touch, reminiscent of the stuff they used in the old Socialist Eastern Europe, and the book is so sturdily bound that there's no question of it lying flat, in fact, I nearly sprained my wrist trying to hold it open. A little more flexibility and better paper would have been welcome.

I have one fairly major beef with this (and other publishers') repertoire-type books. It would be a huge advantage to have page numbers included along with the variation references. It's a nuisance to come to D22 and then have to start to hunt for it x-pages further on. Would it hike production costs that much to print D22 p.171 instead?

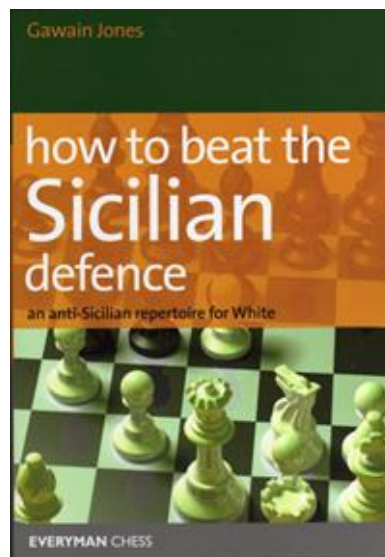


The Old Indian has traditionally been the KI's poor cousin, so a book called **The New Old Indian** (160 pp.) catches the eye. Rather than

the usual 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 d6 3 Nf3 stuff (which they deal with by morphing into a sort of KI with 3...g6 4 Nc3 Bf5), it covers more adventurous ground, e.g. 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 d6 3 Nc3 e5 4 Nf3 e4!? and other lines with an early ...Bf5. They also give interesting coverage of lines without c2-c4. If you're thinking that this is dodgy stuff, the presence of players such as Ivanchuk, Akopian, McShane and Volokitin on the black side suggests otherwise.

The same production comments apply to this as for Vigorito's KI book, although, with fewer pages, it's easier to manipulate.

If you're bored with your present opening v 1 d4, this might be worth a look.



Bb5 Sicilians have had a lot of coverage recently, and **How to Beat the Sicilian Defence** (350 pp.) is the latest offering. About two-thirds of the book is devoted to the Moscow (82 pp.), Hybrid (31 pp.) Rossolimo (114 pp.) and other (33 pp.) Bb5 variations; the remaining third to the King's Indian Attack v 2...e6 plus odds and ends. Jones has been playing these lines himself of late, so he's putting his money where his mouth is, and isn't afraid to share new moves and ideas with the reader. Both this and *The New Old Indian* are based on games rather than variations, which tends to make them user-

friendlier. There's also more verbal explanation than in the other two, always important. Page after page of notes and game extracts can be uninspiring and not pleasing to the eye. Paper quality in this one is better, and you're less likely to sustain muscle damage opening it.

If you're interested in any of these openings, or looking for a change, then you could do worse than cast an eye in the direction of these three.

Ian Marks (October 2011)

Film Review: Bobby Fischer against the World

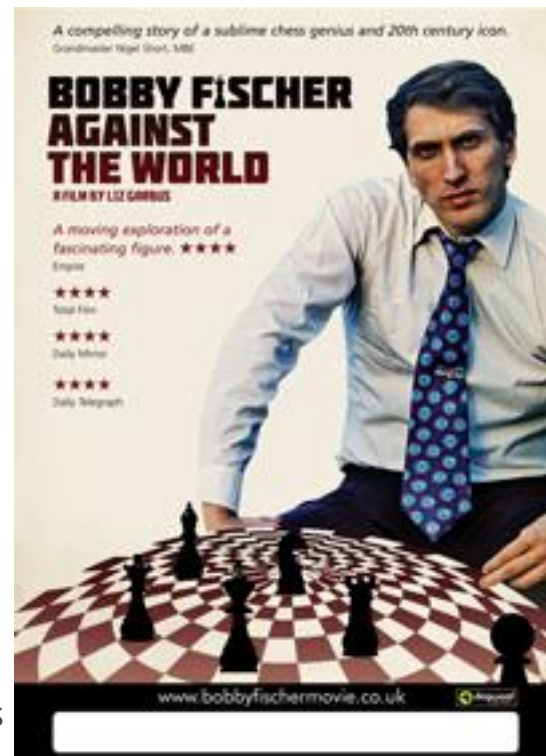
Bobby Fischer Against the World charts the late American chess grandmaster's rise to international celebrity, his 1972 defeat of Boris Spassky which broke the Soviet stranglehold on the world chess championship, and his sadly precipitous downfall.

Based on a compilation of news clips covering all the major public moments in Fischer's life going back to the 1950s, this compelling [film documentary](#) – directed by [Liz Garbus](#) – provides a unique record that handles the often harrowing subject matter just about as objectively as possible. Given, that is, Fischer's complex personality, his tendency towards reclusiveness and the all too obvious struggle with debilitating personal demons.

For much of his later life, Fischer's public persona betrayed a near-broken mind that seemed increasingly to be teetering on the brink of total breakdown.

[The film](#) draws heavily on the calm and measured testimony of several key figures in Fischer's life, to tease out these more hidden vulnerabilities. Of course, the later Fischer's horrific anti-semitic and [anti-US](#) rants were unquestionably abhorrent – but they didn't fundamentally define the man. To those who knew him or who had followed his chess career closely over the years, [Fischer](#) (1943–2008) was, for much of his life and particularly in his later decades, profoundly ill at ease with himself and distinctly troubled.

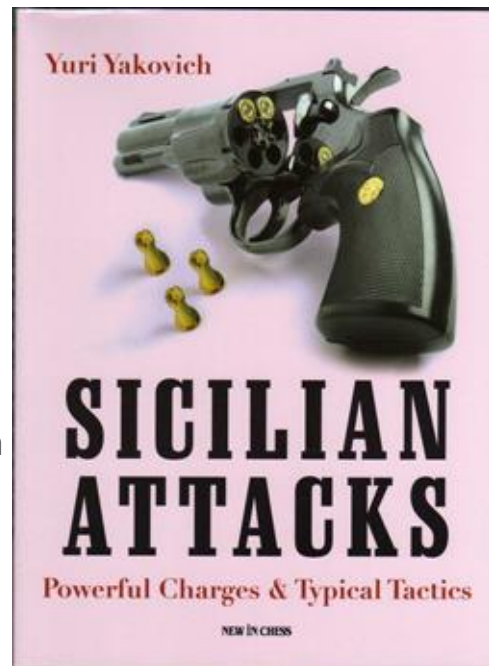
Craig Pritchett (September 2011)



Sicilian Attacks by Yuri Yakovich, New in Chess 2010, 208 pp.

The Wonderful Winawer by Viktor Moskalenko, New in Chess 2010, 272 pp.

My favourite chess books are those where the author puts heart and soul into his work, enthusiasm shines through and the desire to reach out to the reader is evident on every page. These two NiC publications both score highly in this category.



Sicilian Attacks by the Russian GM and trainer is a detailed look at the various attacking methods arising from the typical Scheveningen, Taimanov, Rauzer, Dragon and ...d6/e5 pawn structures. If that sounds a bit techy, it's not. Yakovich's lucid treatment of his subject matter elevates his work to virtually a manual of attacking chess.

It is serious stuff. Each section has an introduction covering the basics and a summary recapping the main points. As for the real meat, game 1 sets the tone. Yakovich sits you down and gives you a no-nonsense ten-page lesson on the famous Tal-Larsen 10th match game from their 1965 Candidates match.* It's not a one-off. Other monsters include Fedorov-Kobalia, Maikop 1998 (9 ½ pp.), Areschenko-Jimenez, Khanty-Mansiysk 2009 (9 pp.), Tal-Mohrlok, Varna 1962 (8 ½ pp.) etc. There are also loads of 4/5-page tiddlers. There are thirty-two main games with large chunks of others buried in the notes and tons of diagrams. The layout is less cluttered than with some other NiC publications.

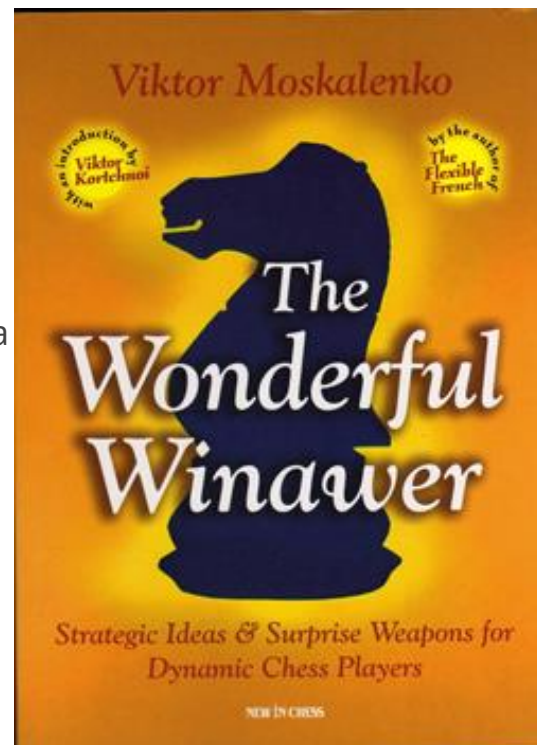
Obviously, this is not the sort of book you can have a swatch at over a cup of tea; you need to spend serious time with it, biting off only

what you can chew and digesting it carefully. As I indicated above, don't be put off if you're not a 1 e4 or Sicilian buff; you'll find loads of great material on the middlegame and on attacking chess between the covers.

Sicilian Attacks is great stuff, essential reading if you find yourself on either side of the Sicilian and recommended even if you don't. For active tournament competitors playing, say, in opens, it's well worth a look. The major caveat is that the more social player and players at the lower end of the rating spectrum would probably find the depth a bit daunting.

The Wonderful Winawer is another book by Moskalenko on his favourite opening. This one is devoted to practically everything arising after 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4. The bulk of it, c. 200 pages, is devoted to the main lines after 4 e5 (except 4...b6, which I found a little strange), and most of that to what happens after 7 Qg4. The writing is enthusiastic and infectious, and he isn't afraid to pepper his material with plenty of new ideas. I like the inclusion of lots of photos (there's even a pic of one of our own), but, as with other NiC openings books, the layout is a bit cluttered. Variations tend to be bunched in the main text; toss in italicised 'Weapons', 'Tricks' and quotes and it's not terribly easy on the eye. A little more 'white' would have been helpful, but that, of course, would have racked up the price. That apart, I would definitely point French fans in the book's direction.

* * * * *



*Great story about this game that doesn't appear in the annals, so I'll share it with you. The Danish IM Ole Jakobsen once told me that, as a young IM, he was sent to Bled to cover the match for the Danish press. A daily routine soon developed where Tal would find him and they would play blitz until it was time for the game to start. The morning of the tenth game was no different. With the score tied at a winner-take-all $4\frac{1}{2}$ - $4\frac{1}{2}$, Tal buttonholed Jakobsen. "Ole, blitz, blitz!" Several hours of five-minute stuff later, with the start of the 10th game looming ever closer, an increasingly alarmed Ole said, "Eh, Misha, don't you think maybe you should get something to eat?" Tal went, oh, right, headed for the canteen, grabbed a sandwich, then wandered into the tournament hall where he proceeded to play one of the great attacking games of the 20 th century.

Aye, there was only one Misha.

Ian Marks (June 2011)

New in Chess magazine has been with us for 20 years and has established itself as the leading international chess publication (and a huge stimulus to the English language amongst the chess fraternity). For those not familiar with it, you get top coverage of top events by top players, features and articles, interviews, tactics, openings, reviews etc. etc.

The issue I have lying beside me is #1 of 2011, 106 pp.

featuring the London Classic, the Russian Super Final, the Women's World Championship, an interview with Ken Rogoff and articles by Short, van Wely, reviews by Rowson... Easy to dip into; easy to spend time lingering over the games and analyses.



The big difference is that this is the first new-style NIC. Gone is the smaller format of yore; in is a new, larger, slicker style reminiscent (to me anyway) of *Rolling Stone*. It's floppier than the old style (which *felt* right) and seems somehow gaudier and glitzier, more 'magaziney'. I can't explain it any better than that. I'm not sure I like it, but NIC aren't going to change back, so, like all changes to the familiar, we'll have to get used to it.

Still, it's what's between the covers that counts. With eight issues a year and over 800 pages of top-quality chess, it's still far and away *the* window on international chess.

Ian Marks (May 2011)

Secrets of Opening Surprises
vol. 13, ed. Jeroen Bosch,
New in Chess 2011, 143 pp.

Secrets of Opening Surprises is the chess equivalent of those *Now That's What I Call Music* compilations – it appears at regular intervals and you never quite know what you're going to get by way of eclectic content.

Amongst the seventeen surveys in no. 13, we find The North Sea Defence (1 e4 g6 2 d4 Nf6 3 e5 Nh5, as played by Carlsen against Adams at the last Olympiad), the Anti-Gr ü nfeld (1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 h4) as well as saner stuff like the Slav (1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 Nbd2) and an old main line of the Pirc (1 e4 d6 2 d4 Nf6 3 Nc3 g6 4 f4 Bg7 5 Nf3 0-0 6 e5 Nfd7 7 h4). The underlying theme, as the title suggests, is the element of surprise, although being surprised by 7 h4 against the Pirc is a different matter from being surprised by 4 Nbd2 against the Slav!

This series is great fun. You could do worse than check out the contents of each issue and see if anything catches your eye. You probably wouldn't want to base a repertoire on these sorts of lines, but they could certainly provide a useful banana skin (especially in a 30/1 league match) for unwary opponents.

Ian Marks (May 2011)



Chess Movies 1 Quick

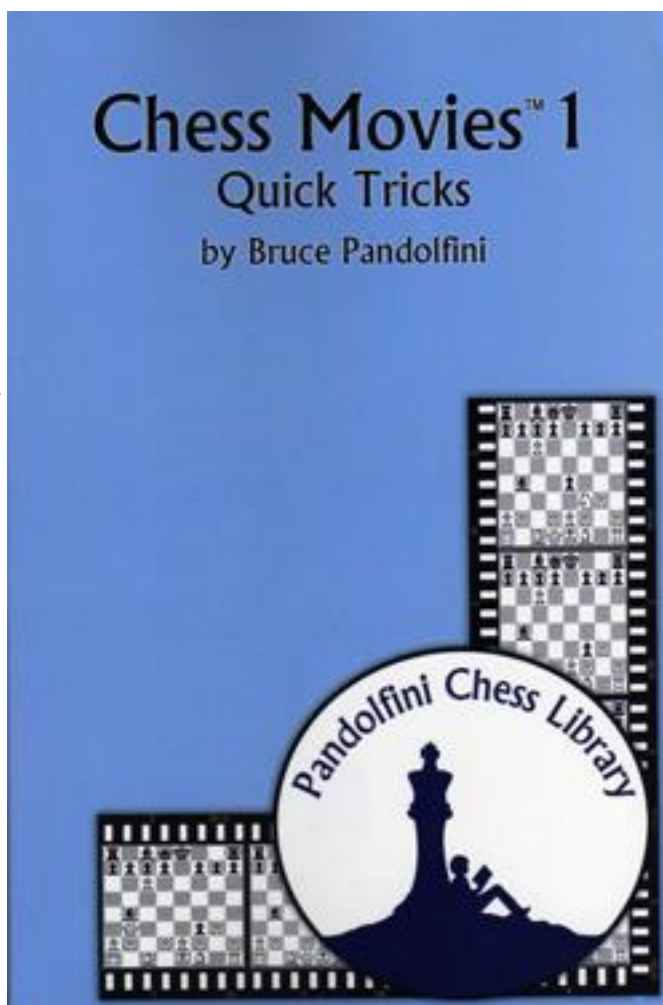
Tricks by Bruce Pandolfini,
Russell Enterprises 2010, 208
pp.

My original review for this one was 'Recycle'. Then I thought maybe I should explain myself in case any fastidious readers were less than impressed with my laconicism. So here goes.

Chess Movies 1 Quick Tricks is a collection of sixty-four blunderful games of nine moves or fewer, every move with a diagram and a comment. I'm not a great fan of the comment-after-every-move idea. It soon becomes

awfully difficult to say something relevant or different about, say, 1 e4, and this book suffers from that malaise, e.g. in game 22, after 1 e4 Bruce tells us that '*White commences by moving the e-pawn two squares*' (Duh!), while by game 46 he is clearly struggling: '*No comment on the move, no comment on the comment*'. The book is full of this sort of guff.

Then there's the diagram after every move. Fine for helping weaker players visualise what's going on (the 'instructional material' the preface mentions), but it becomes self-defeating – the work is done for the reader! If the book was designed to look at why players blunder so early, then it falls down through lack of real discussion of why such errors occur. It's an awkward halfway house.



But the above is just one man's (i.e. my) opinion, so let me move on to what's demonstrably cruddy about the book.

First up, it suffers from overwriting and clumsy style. Rambling, multi-clause sentences, lack of clarity of expression, loads of unnecessary adverbs *inter alia* are all crying out for an editorial blue pencil.

Next (and rather humorously), author and publisher can't agree on what it is! Pandolfini says it's '*a collection of 64 games, of nine moves or less*' (I'll ignore the redundant comma and misuse of 'less'), whereas on the back cover his publisher says it's '*games of ten full moves or more*'. Oops.

When we open the book to see for ourselves, we are assaulted by all manner of typos, spelling mistakes, grammatical howlers and inconsistencies. A few from my list:

Game 1: '*He was so struck by the creature (who wouldn't be), that...*'. Missing question mark.

Game 2: '*The principle warning...*' Principal! Oh dear.

Game 40: '*queen-two*' Why a descriptive reference in an algebraic book? And why not just Q2?

Game 64: After 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 f3 0-0 6 Be3 e5 7 d5 Ne8 8 Qd2 f5 Bruce tells his readers that '*Black continues as planned, attacking the base of the pawn chain at e4*'. Erm...the base of the pawn chain is at g2, innit?

I also spotted the verb 'to lossen' somewhere, but right now I can't put my finger on it. Trust me. And don't get me started on the *Two Knight's* (sic) *Defense*.

This is only a selection of the solecisms that litter the book. You get the feeling Pandolfini cranked it out in a couple of hours, fired in the diagrams – *et voilà* ! There doesn't appear to have been an editor or proof-reader involved. Oh, how it needs them. A publisher should be ashamed of such sloppiness and carelessness; they're an insult to potential purchasers.

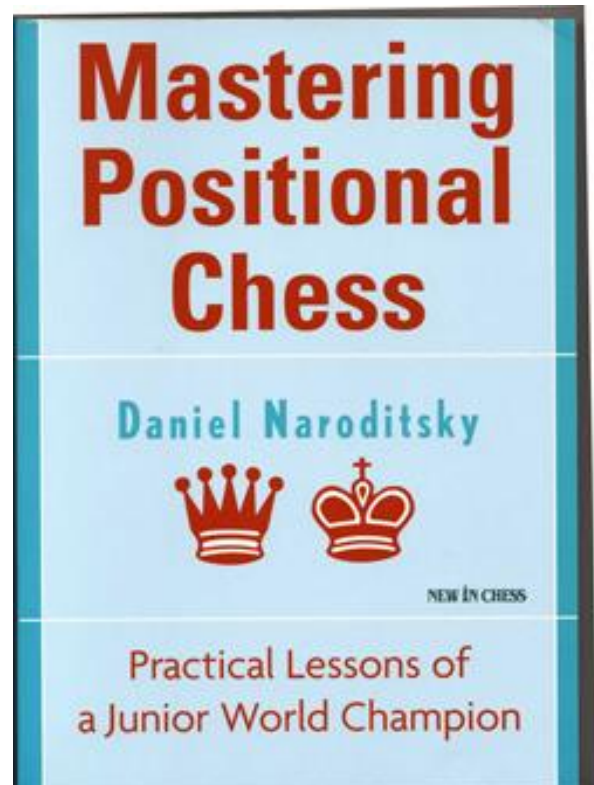
So, having outlined the reasons for my thoughts on the book, I'll return to my original review.

Recycle.

Ian Marks (May 2011)

Mastering Positional Chess by Daniel Naroditsky, New in Chess
2010, 239 pp.

It was the indefinite article which caught my eye: “Practical Lessons of *a* Junior World Champion”. I thought there was only one – *the* JWC. So I flipped over and learnt that the author “became World Junior Chess Champion in 2007”. Hmmm... Ahmed Adly of Egypt was World Junior Champion in 2007. Looked to me like the publishers were telling fibs. (Is there a Trades Descriptions Act in the Netherlands!?) Then, in John Donaldson’s foreword, all is revealed. The author won the World Boys’ U-12 Championship in 2007. Big difference!



I mention all of this because it seems that the publishers are doubtful whether people will splash for a book by a kid. That’s a pity, because his work stands on its own merits. They really should have shown more confidence in their product on the cover! Essentially, what you get is the way the author addressed his lack of positional understanding. He is now a 2400+ IM, so he must have done something right!

What the author (it was published when he was 14) lacks in experience, he makes up for with a clear, fresh style and a willingness to call things as he sees them. He covers Prophylaxis, Defense in Worse Positions, Building and Breaking Fortresses, Positional Sacrifice, Paralysis in the Middlegame and Maneuvring. Older heads and bigger names have looked at these before, but the author uses plenty of modern examples (although Reshevsky-

Petrosian, Zürich 1953 is still in there!) and – importantly – lots of words to explain them. His patience with his readers could be emulated by those GM writers who assume that their readers are as erudite as they are and lose them in masses of variations and flowery prose.

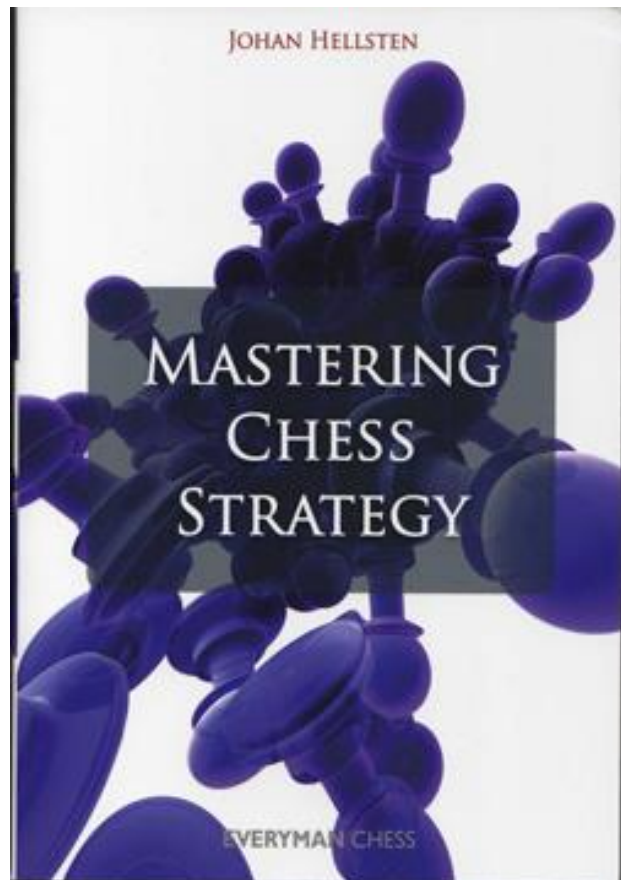
The book contains lots of good advice and insight and would be of benefit to any player who feels as unsure of his/her positional understanding as the author did when he started out. Alas, I have the feeling that such a player is likely to be kind who doesn't read chess books in the first place.

Well worth a look.

Ian Marks (March 2011)

Mastering Chess Strategy by Johan Hellsten, Everyman Chess
2010, 489 pp.

Hard to review this wristcruncher without just stating what it is: 240 examples on various strategical themes (e.g. pieces and pawns, exchanging, prophylaxis, squares etc.) followed by 382 exercises. The examples are all explained in detail and, perhaps surprisingly for such meaty material, it's fairly easy to read without a board. (Good visualisation practice anyway.) The solutions to the exercises are likewise well commented. The bulk of the material is from the first decade of the 21st century.



The book is based on the author's training practice, so you know that the material has been tried and tested. It's not an easy book to deal with without a large investment of time and commitment, but, on the other hand, you could profitably dip into sections at random, e.g. based on your last loss!, and glean some benefits. I enjoyed the chapters on Improving the Pieces and Exchanges, but the whole thing looks very sound.

Definitely the kind of book where you get out of it what you put in. If you're looking for a book to spend a lot of quality time with, this could be the one.

Ian Marks (March 2011)

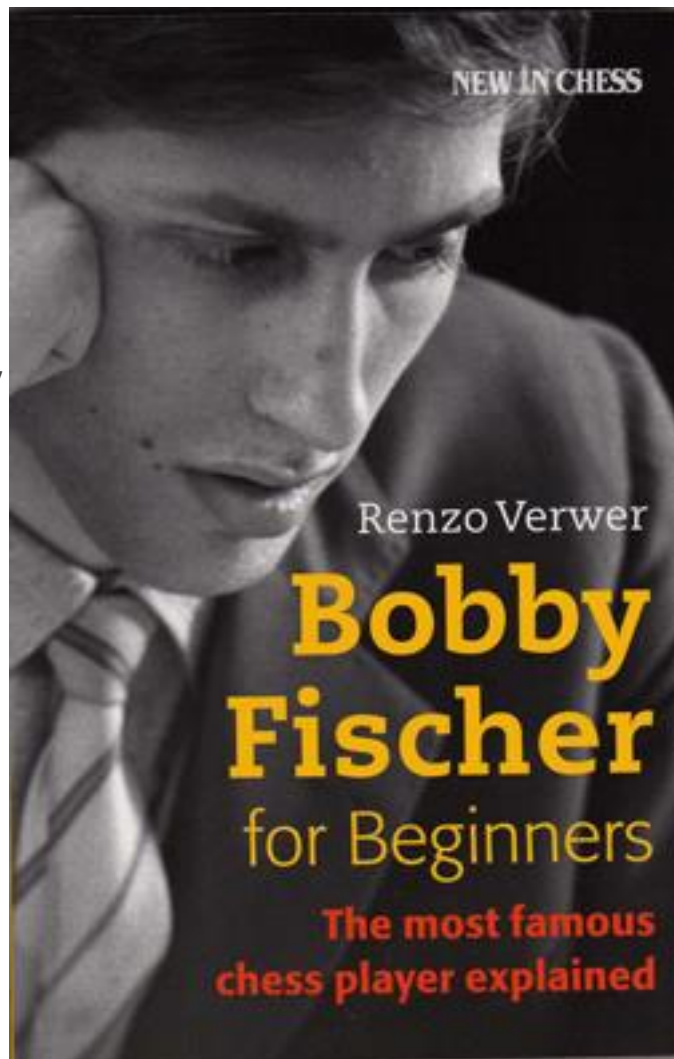
Bobby Fischer for Beginners by Renzo Verwer, New in Chess 2010, 128 pp.

A brief (67 pp.) survey of the life and career of RJF with 40 more devoted to ten of his games and the rest sundry. Sixty-seven pages don't allow for major insights, and the level is often pretty superficial, e.g. *"A talent of his class has to be the result of heredity – and sure enough, he had intelligent parents"*. There must be thousands of talented individuals in all sorts of fields who are the offspring of ordinary parents, but no matter.

Most players will be familiar with the content, while Joe Public could do with more biographical detail. If he's a non-player, the games will be meaningless. There's even a glossary at the back.

At the start of the games section, the author thanks GM Karel van der Weide, who *'has studied existing analyses'*, for his *'great contribution'*, but the comments to the games are verbal and sparse, and variations are, at most, a couple of moves deep, so it's not obvious how *'great'* KvdW's contribution was.

There's little in here for seasoned campaigners, so it would probably be best suited to newcomers to the game looking for a



quick intro to Fischer. Or you could pass an hour on the train with it, as I did.

Ian Marks (Jan 2011)

BOTVINNIK – PETROSIAN: The 1963 World Chess Championship Match , Mikhail Botvinnik, New in Chess 2010, 142 pp.

The economics of the limited market have rendered tournament and match books virtually extinct, hence this book is all the more welcome. The 1963 match never caught the attention of, say, Tal-Botvinnik or Spassky-Fischer. There was a feeling that Petrosian bored his way to the title against an ageing giant past his best, but the games show that Botvinnik did not surrender 'his' title lightly.

The value of tournament and match books lies in the importance of seeing all the games in context rather than just individual 'best' games, and in bringing to life the psychological ebb and flow of the event, and that's all in this book.

Although Botvinnik's name is on the cover, his challenger and other GMs such as Kasparov and Akopian also provide annotations and comments. In addition, there's Botvinnik's essay 'Why Did I Lose the Match?', training games and opening notes for his abortive match against Fischer.

A worthwhile historical record, worth a look if you fancy something different from the latest openings manual.

Ian Marks (Jan 2011)

