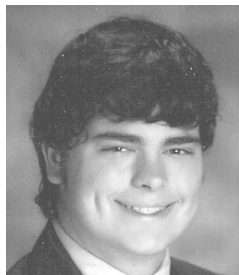
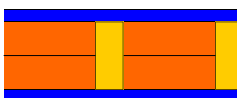


DOBB'S DIAGNOSIS: SEEKING THE TRUTH



SINCE THE DAWN OF man, the answers to, well, everything have been sought. Eventually, industriousness gave way to sloth, and man began to have an increasingly sedentary lifestyle. Then came the current age; the age of quick fixes and get-rich-quick schemes. Where a few, high-quality tomes once stood, massive shelves were built and filled with hastily written, often near-useless manuals. Unfortunately, chess books are no exception.



“I wonder how many CHESS BOOKS she has, and if there are any among them I don’t already have myself.”

David Surratt once said, “[When I watch a woman go down the street,] I wonder how many chess books she has, and if there are any among them I don’t already have myself.” In this modern day where there are more books published about chess than all other sports and games combined, chances are that if she has a chess library, she has numerous books that most players won’t have seen or heard of before. Most have enticing titles filled with false, consistently contradicting hopes and promises... *How to Bust the French, Winning with the French, Beating the Queen’s Gambit, The Infallible Queen’s Gambit Explained...* the list is endless.

How are beginning players supposed to navigate this sea of unhelpful literature that merely regurgitates theory? When a brand new player or the parent of a chess playing child doesn’t know the difference be-

tween a Nimzo-Indian and Pochahontas, how are they supposed to know which books are actually going to prove beneficial? Is the point of writing chess books not to assist those less adept than you with improving their game? If authoring a chess book is an auxiliary action, why is there such an abundance of low-grade material circulating the ever-expanding literary world?

The main issue is that some people forget the reason for writing a chess book. Too many authors now seek fame or quick money. This leads to known theory being repeatedly printed, without the addition of new analysis or background information. And all too often the strongest continuations or refutations to a lengthy variation will be completely neglected, saving the author the time it would take to include tedious analysis of complex lines, as well as being obligated to admit that in some lines the variation they are recommending is *not* winning. The author may think he is saving time and face, but this leaves the unfortunate reader in a state of shock over the board when after following what he was guaranteed was an overpowering continuation, he loses quickly to a move that wasn’t even mentioned in his book.

Let us return to the fame-seeking authors. In the words of Yuri Razuvayev, “Have you ever seen a chess article without a brilliant example of the author’s own play? ‘Silly question,’ you will say. Quite.” Some who we trust to pen our chess education, the ones we depend on to impart their wisdom upon us, will always include their own games in their analysis of an opening or type of combination. They will gradually build what the general public sees as an outstanding reputation and career, fooling many but earning the distrust of their colleagues and knowledgeable amateurs. The two authors who immediately come to mind are Raymond Keene and Eric Schiller.

Raymond Keene is an English Grandmaster, col-

umnist, organizer, and author. Although certainly a strong player to have earned the GM title, he uses the title and his record to promote himself and add more to his resume. Whether he deserves the title in the first place has been debated, leading an anonymous Soviet Grandmaster to say, “We have no Grandmasters weaker than Raymond Keene.” Keene is the author of more than *one hundred* chess books, one of which he claims was written in a *single weekend*. The question must be asked, however, whether that is something to boast about. Should he really be bragging that he authored an entire chess book in one weekend? There cannot have been any level of in-depth analysis performed, there cannot have been much research done, and there must be little to no original value. Such a work is undoubtedly of poor quality, and this is not something one should boast about. For ‘accomplishments’ such as this and various other reasons, many have spoken out with criticism directed towards Keene. One of these is the well known and respected chess historian Edward Winter. He states that the majority of Keene’s chess books have countless errors, including *World Champion Combinations*, which Keene co-wrote with Eric Schiller.

This brings us to the second culprit. Eric Schiller is an American chessplayer who was awarded the title FIDE Master, although he has since dropped nearly fifty rating points. He too has authored over one hundred chess books, many of which have faced harsh criticism. The critics claim the existence of an enormous number of errors with regard to facts, history, and spelling. Tony Miles has a famous review of one of Schiller’s tomes, *Unorthodox Chess Openings*, which contained a mere two words: “Utter crap.”

Fear not, for there is still hope! If you are now dubious of your entire chess library, or are wondering which books you can trust, there are several titles which are generally accepted as extremely well-written

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and beneficial. My recommendations include: *The Art of Attack in Chess*, by Vladimir Vukovic, and *The Mammoth Book of the World’s Greatest Chess Games*, by Graham Burgess, John Emms, and John Nunn.

There are no miracle cures in chess; to improve you must work diligently. If you keep losing pieces during trades, study a tactics book. Instead of seeking a magical manuscript that contains all the solutions to defeating openings you do not like facing across the board, consider changing up your repertoire. Thomas Codisotti once joked on this topic, saying, “Best play for White against the Sicilian? 1.d4!” Remember, every chess master and World Champion was a beginner once; with hard work and some guidance what you can accomplish is nearly limitless. ♦ ~Chris Dobbs

Christopher Dobbs is a chess essayist attending college at University of Miami at Oxford, Ohio. If you have a topic you’d like to see Dobbs cover, email KindlyCoach@gmail.com.