



FRESH LEAVES FROM THE BOOKSHELF



By FM Carsten Hansen













There never seems to be a shortage of new excellent chess books, and if there is any doubt then the batch in this column should serve as a reminder of what a wonderful age of chess literature we live in. The chess book was never more alive than it is today. Masterpieces are coming at us from all angles, by authors from countries around the world and covering all sorts of topics: memoirs, tournaments, openings, endgames, games collections, studies, problems, instructional works, puzzle books, etc. And the journey we are on is by no means about to cease or even slow down, in fact if anything it is accelerating. The only 'victims' of this phenomenon are the chess book collectors who have to justify to their spouses and loved ones discretionary spending and shelf space!



Carsten Hansen is a FIDE Master and FIDE Trainer, residing in Bayonne, New Jersey. He has written more than forty books, mostly on chess openings and chess tactics. You can find his work on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

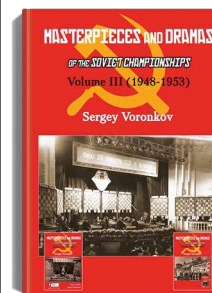
10 NOTEWORTHY BOOKS

- 01 **Masterpieces And Dramas Vol III**
by Sergey Voronkov (Elk & Ruby 2022)  ★★★★★
- 02 **Albert W. Fox**
by John S. Hilbert (Moravian 2022)  ★★★★★
- 03 **Anthology of Miniature Endgame Studies**
by Yochanan Afek (Chess Informant 2022)  ★★★★★
- 04 **The Chess Battles of Hastings**
by Jurgen Brustkern & Norbert Wallet (New In Chess 2022)*  ★★★★★
- 05 **Checkmate!**
by Ben Graff (White Star Publishers 2022)  ★★★★★
- 06 **The Killer Dutch Rebooted**
by Simon Williams (Everyman Chess 2022)  ★★★★★
- 07 **The Pawn Study Composer's Manual**
by Mikhail Zinar (Elk & Ruby 2022)  ★★★★★
- 08 **Life At Play**
by Lubomir Kavalek (New In Chess 2022)  ★★★★★
- 09 **Keep It Simple for Black**
by Christof Sielecki (Chessable 2022)  ★★★★★
- 10 **Squeeze Play**
by Cyrus Lakdawala (Everyman Chess 2022)  ★★★★★

01 Masterpieces and Dramas of the Soviet Championships Vol III (1948-1953)

by Sergey Voronkov

\$ 40.95 (hardback)



Here we have the third volume in a series by Russian chess historian Sergey Voronkov covering the Soviet Championships. This time around the story starts in 1948 and ends in 1953, two years

which should evoke memories in the minds of chess fans. 1948 was the year when Mikhail Botvinnik was crowned world champion after winning the tournament for the title that had been vacant since Alekhine's death two years earlier. In 1953, of course, where this volume ends, the memorable Candidates tournament in Zurich took place.

However, this book is not about world champions and candidates for the title,



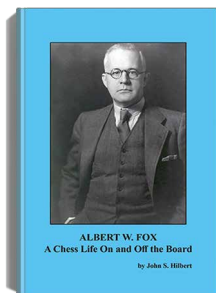
although many of them took part in the championships in this period, it is about the Soviet chess explosion, where their players advanced from being relatively unknown quantities to world-beaters. Moreover the title of the series is no exaggeration, since there were many brilliant games, while the drama was not confined to the stage on which these were played as so much more went on behind the scenes. Thus, although many of the participants may be well-known to later generations of players and fans, the backstage drama will not be, and for that we are fortunate to have a historian as qualified and diligent as Voronkov, who has been digging through endless archives – official, private, and even those that were formerly secret.

This volume is easily as good as the two earlier ones in the series: the games and annotations are great, the stories compelling, the research and unveilings breathtaking, the drama intense, and the joy seemingly never-ending. What a book! Now, the wait for the next volume begins because, as I understand, it will be the first that has not yet been published in the Russian language.

02 Albert W. Fox – A Chess Life On and Off the Board

by John S. Hilbert

\$45.95 (hardback)



From the foremost Russian historian to his American counterpart, John S. Hilbert, who, thanks to his many years of research and writing, has elevated himself into heights that can only be compared to those reached by

the best practical players of both today and yesteryear.

The present book is the result of years of research into a player who most chess fans have probably never heard of and who I must admit I only became aware of last year, when I read the book on the 1904 Cambridge Springs tournament where Albert Fox first made his presence felt to a wider chess world by defeating luminaries such as Chigorin, Janowski, and Schlechter. The reason why his name is not more widely known is that he subsequently pursued a more lucrative career

in business and journalism instead of chess.

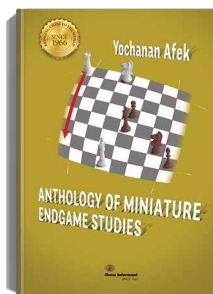
The work that has gone into this book is absolutely mind-blowing; it would have to be to produce such a volume of more than 600 pages. For obvious reasons, I haven't read it in its entirety yet, but I will certainly do so in the future. However what I have read is truly excellent, thoroughly footnoted and indexed, as well as illustrated with high-quality pictures, along with hundreds of games, most of them quite lightly annotated, but others in more detail and with more insight.

My only criticism of this book is its binding, which is already feeling less sturdy than I would like it to be. Whether this is a single-standing issue with my copy I can't tell, but even so, it is a little worrisome. Nevertheless, that has nothing to do with what is between the covers which is so fantastic that I struggle to find the right words to describe how I feel about it. Truly a treat for fans of chess history!

03 Anthology of Miniature Endgame Studies

by Yochanan Afek

\$59.95 (hardback)



I must confess, a couple of years ago I would have relegated this book to a pile that I ought to read but would probably never get round to doing so. Yes, I am ashamed to admit that I have been so afflicted. That,

however, will no longer be the case. Now, I find endgame studies truly fascinating and something that will help me become a better chess player. Therefore, I took note when I saw this book announced on a couple of Facebook groups as well as by the author himself, Grandmaster of Chess Composition and IM of regular over-the-board chess Israeli-Dutch Yochanan Afek.

So what is a miniature endgame study? It is a composition of seven or fewer pieces. As Timman writes in the foreword, while quoting some of the great composers, "it is chess in its purest form" and even "chess poetry."

The material in this anthology has been created by the best composers of the last 150 years, some by the author himself. It is

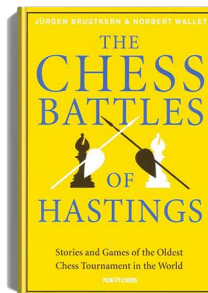
divided by subject into 32 chapters, each of which has an introduction before serving up several studies for the reader to solve or just simply to enjoy. The only minor criticism I can make is that the solutions are presented in the wordless Chess Informant style. This, of course, can be overcome but might be intimidating for those unfamiliar with it.

Nevertheless, the book is excellent and well-produced in a sturdy hardback format.

04 The Chess Battles of Hastings

by Jurgen Brustkern & Norbert Walley

\$32.95 (hardback)



How do you cover the history of a tournament with roots as deep as those in Hastings, England? Curiously, you get a couple of Germans on the job – only one of whom I was familiar with: FM Brustkern, who

is a Hastings regular, having competed there every year since 1977!

The initial event, way back in 1895, is widely considered the first super tournament, being won by Harry Pillsbury ahead of the Russian Chigorin and World Champion Lasker as well as other top players of the day.

However, it wasn't until 1919 that the second event took place, after which it has been held annually, apart from the years of the Second World War. Curiously, for a work covering such a long series, I didn't see the inclusion of a single tournament table, although at the end of the book, in an appendix, is an overview of all the top finishers. But is that really a satisfactory substitute? Not really, but it does solve the problem of which tournament does merit a full table and which not. However, instead there is a focus on stories, games, and portraits of interesting personalities who have participated over the years. For the most part, the authors have done a really diligent job at covering these players, some of them winners, some notable also-rans, with only a few comments here and there that seemed off the mark. Naturally, I read the segment on my compatriot the late Danish GM Bent Larsen, who participated no less than six times and



won on three occasions. His bio ends with “From 1980 he lived with his wife in Buenos Aires and only played a few tournaments.” But this comment disregards the fact that he was still a top player for several years after that, and is particularly odd given that one of his tournament wins was at Hastings 1986/87 – and he even finished in third place the year after that too.

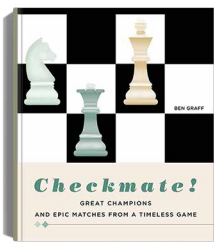
Nevertheless, overall, the authors have done a pretty credible job at covering this tradition-filled event, which is one that I myself have taken part in a couple of times, including the year when a very young Judit Polgar came, saw and conquered the Challengers Group in amazing style.

For those chess fans who love tournament books, this is a decidedly different take from the usual but one that I have enjoyed reading. In fact for those who haven’t had the experience of playing in the Hastings Congress, the descriptions of its historic happenings will take you there virtually and enable you even to hear the rattling of coins in the audience’s pockets!

05 Checkmate! Great Champions and Epic Matches from a Timeless Game

by Ben Graff

\$ 29.99 (hardback)



This is a gorgeous, well-produced, over-sized, and well-illustrated volume, with pictures in color, large diagrams, and exciting stories narrated by an experienced journalist

and author, who crafted the excellent *The Greenbecker Gambit*, which has previously been reviewed in this column.

I can only hazard a guess at the budget for publishing this book, but it will surely far exceed any other to be released this year. It looks stunning. Moreover the narrative is well-written, dealing with all the male world champions and some notable female players, Vera Menchik, Nona Gaprindashvili, and Judit Polgar.

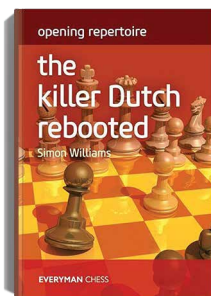
Also included are some fascinating positions to accompany the stories and pictures, even if some of these will already be familiar to ardent chess fans.

All in all it has the size and look of a coffee table book, and in that respect it more than fits the bill, the more so that it is a very enjoyable read. Pricewise, I think it is a bargain. So, if what I have described above whets your appetite, I can wholeheartedly recommend what is a beautiful production.

06 The Killer Dutch Rebooted

by Simon Williams

\$ 28.95 (paperback)



English GM Simon Williams, the Ginger GM, is no stranger to regular readers of this column as he has authored many excellent chess books, usually on openings or attacking play – and this book falls into the former category.

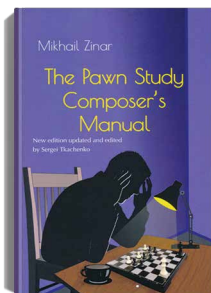
It actually started its life as a popular *Chessable* course and has now been brought to life in book format as well, with the author presenting a full repertoire for Black in the Dutch Defense, an opening he enjoys playing himself with the black pieces. The material is well-balanced between theory and explanations of typical ideas, themes, and plans, making it ideal for those rated in the 1500-2200 bracket, albeit mostly for the lower half of players in that rating category.

07 The Pawn Study Composer's Manual

by Mikhail Zinar

\$25.00 (paperback)

35.00 (hardback)



Zinar’s manual of compositions was

Who is Mikhail Zinar? Why is this book being published? And why is this book important? Zinar was no Tal, but he was a magician in his own right as a composer of endgame studies, particularly those of the pawn endgame

first published in the Ukraine in 1990, before the fall of the Soviet Union and long before Russia attacked his country. The book was printed in no less than 100,000 copies – and sold out!! It has now been updated and revised by Sergei Tkachenko. Sadly, Zinar passed away in 2021, exactly two years before I am typing these words.

The book carefully examines hundreds of endgame studies, explaining basic themes, maneuvers, and more complex themes, including many I had never even heard about, much less seen exemplified. The study of this part of the book will help open your eyes to new possibilities in your own games and make you a better endgame player because your vocabulary of understanding this phase of the game will increase manifold.

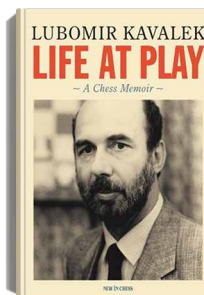
For aspiring endgame composers – and some of us will surely fall into this category – there are sections covering artistic requirements, practical tips, etc., that you need to know and understand before you embark on this wonderful adventure.

In other words, this book is for artists who produce such masterpieces, those who enjoy trying to solve them and others who simply marvel at the ingenuity that has gone into their creation.

08 Life At Play – A Chess Memoir

by Lubomir Kavalek

\$ 34.95 (paperback)



For those new to our game, it can be difficult to grasp how important a character was Czech-American GM Lubosh Kavalek. Not only was he a strong grandmaster, with many excellent results, both

individually and as a team member, but he worked wonderfully well behind the scenes when assisting other chess greats, including Fischer and Short. He was an accomplished journalist, contributing to *Voice of America*, *Washington Post* (from 1986-2010), and *Huffington Post* (2010-2021). He was editor-in-chief for chess at RHM Press and had articles published in many magazines. Indeed a true legend in many ways who was justly

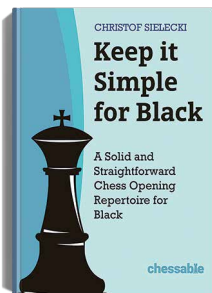
inducted into the World Chess Hall of Fame in 2001.

The book is very personal and well-written, amply demonstrating Kavalek's excellent literary skills, telling stories with an equal measure of emotion, love, excitement, humor, and anything else you might dream about. Sadly, Kavalek didn't have the opportunity to see his book through to publication as he died suddenly in 2021 leaving others, notably Jan Novak, to help it across the finishing line.

All in all, a wonderful read that I hope finds the audience that it truly deserves.

09 Keep It Simple for Black – A Solid and Straightforward Repertoire for Black
by *Christof Sielecki*

\$34.95 (hardcover)



German International Master Christof Sielecki, also known as ChessExplained, is one of the uncrowned kings of Chessable.

He possesses an amazing selection of courses, either created by himself or

in cooperation with other authors – including myself as I co-authored two with him on the English Opening. His Keep It Simple Courses have proved particularly popular – in fact he has constructed one for 1.e4 (for which an updated version is soon to be released and may, in fact, already be available when you read these words) and another for 1.d4.

For Black, he has taken the bold step of creating a full repertoire in just one course, albeit with far fewer training lines than is usual. But, does it work, and is it effective? I would say yes. In this case, I actually bought the course and went through it in its entirety. Some of the lines may not always stand up particularly well against very strong opposition, such as I typically face in online play, but at other times they are simply a pleasure to unleash against worthy opposition. So, considering how effective it has been in my games, I can imagine how well it will work for players at lower levels. Because Sielecki selects his material very well, Black players will only rarely have to study long variations to obtain reasonable positions. In many of the

scariest and most theory-heavy lines, he offers solutions for the student that will negate the need to memorize enormous chunks of theory and instead take the opponent into unfamiliar territory. For example, I participated in an online competition consisting of two separate tournaments. I faced the same player in both events, each time as Black. For the first game, my opponent, an IM, chose a line against which I knew Sielecki had something sharp ready; however, I couldn't remember it and bailed out into a playable but somewhat boring position, where I swindled my way to a win. However, in the second game, after I had prepared some lines of play between the two tournaments, I crushed my opponent in a mere 14 moves! Such drops of poison exist in many places in the course, despite the chosen lines being as seemingly dull as the Queen's Gambit Declined and the Caro-Kann Defense.

For those who want to solve a gigantic problem, what to play as Black, this book and its associated course is an excellent solution. It is, of course, not entirely without weaknesses, but for at least 95% of all players, these will never become an issue because your opponents will not have the knowledge or strength to exploit such soft spots. For those remaining 5% who like the shortcut but are concerned about the weaknesses, I can assure you that they are not so problematic that they cannot be solved with a little elbow grease and work with a strong engine.

10 Squeeze Play
by *Cyrus Lakdawala*

\$29.95 (paperback)



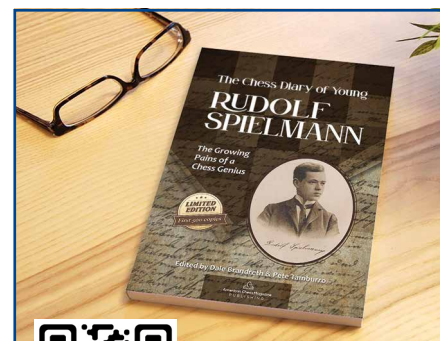
The busiest chess author in the world, Californian IM Cyrus Lakdawala, who I suspect is outpacing serial novelist James Patterson, and is probably the chess author with the largest total word count output of all

time, despite having fewer books to his credit than Reinfeld, Soltis, Keene, and Schiller. Aside from the books he has co-authored with yours truly, we now have a new one out on the Grob, 1.g4, as a tribute to that warrior of unorthodoxy, English IM Mike Basman who sadly passed away last year. He also has a new

release on the Richter-Veresov (1.d4, 2.♘c3, and 3.♗g5) and the present book, which shows how to squeeze something out of equal positions. Surprisingly, this is a relatively under-served topic in chess literature, even though we all marvel at how the strongest players, including the reigning triple world champion Magnus Carlsen, somehow manage to score full points out of equal or even dull positions. Appropriately, the book opens with a game that inspired the book: Magnus Carlsen's win in game six from last year's world championship match against Ian Nepomniachtchi. This game, however, is just a shot with the starting pistol to a Lakdawala-Carlsen bromance. There are a lot of Carlsen games in this book, but also plenty of examples from Lakdawala's cabinet of favorite positional squeezers: Capablanca, Karpov, Andersson, Kramnik, as well as a select few from other players of renown: Fischer, Alekhine, Spassky, Petrosian, and other non-world champions.

Positional and technical squeezes can be difficult to understand for those of us who live our lives in lower echelons, and therefore Lakdawala has placed greater emphasis on explaining why moves were played rather than providing tons of analysis to demonstrate the validity of the ideas. The art of revealing and defining ideas is even more important than the ability to calculate every single move, and that is why this book is such an effective instructor.

In my humble opinion, this is easily one of Lakdawala's best books. Therefore, if you are up for learning about positional chess, and the whys and wherefores behind the decision-making of the best players in the world, it is a great place to take your knowledge to the next level.



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