

Book Reviews

by Miguel Ararat



In this edition of floridaCHESS, I will review three books and a DVD set

Understanding Middlegame Strategies Vol 1-4 by FST Ivan Sokolov (ChessBase)

The Hidden Laws of Chess by IM Nick Maatman (New in Chess)

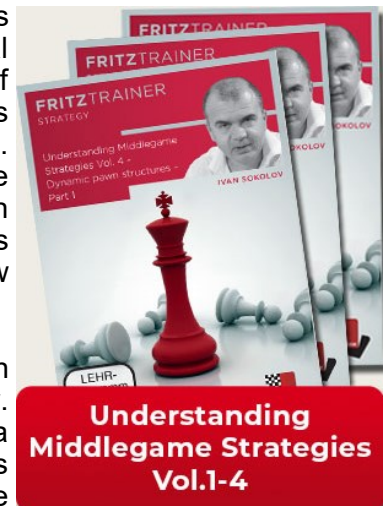
Rock Solid Chess by GM Tiviakov and FM Gökbulut (New in Chess)

Beating the Hedgehog System by WFM Hanna Ivan-Gal & IM Hazai (New in Chess)

The main topics in all materials under review are pawn structures and the positional factors that influence them. Two of the key positional factors associated with pawn structures are space and piece exchanges. Amateur players will benefit from all the books. Advance players and amateurs that play the English and the Sicilian will get the most out of Sokolov's DVD and Beating the Hedgehog System.

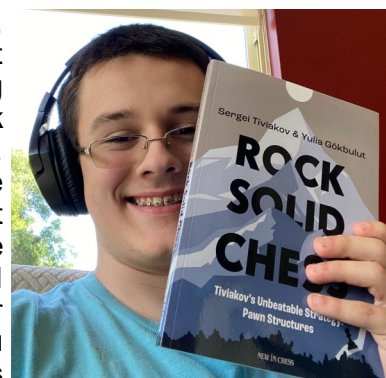
Understanding Middlegame Strategies Vol 1-4 by Dutch GM and Chess Trainer Ivan Sokolov. In this set of DVDs, the author discusses several middlegame themes such as pawn play, decision making, the advantage of space and the practical approach to the game among other themes. Sokolov is considered a great calculator by my former chess coach Lars Bo Hansen. However, in this work Sokolov does not rely on calculation as the main resource to understand and play a chess position. Sokolov explains very model game in detail and critical positions are assessed in words and variations. Sokolov's explanations are not "nuggets" of chess wisdom but a way to clarify and show how to play for and against a particular positional feature.

From **Understanding Middlegame Strategies Vol 1-4**, I absorbed enough material in one session to impress my trainer from **Ivanchuck Chess Academy**. During one lesson, we were working on a complicated middlegame from a Sicilian Defense. I managed to find several viable alternatives to the moves played in the game. Although precise calculation was required to analyze the game identifying the relevant factors in the position (dark squares and weak king) helped me to understand what was happening in a chaotic position. I explained to my trainer that our game was similar to Anand – Nikolic, 1997 and the key was to play against black weak dark squares. My coach was surprised that I was talking about a structure coming from a French Defense in a Sicilian middlegame, raise his eyebrow and searched the game online. My coach went over the Anand – Nikolic game, acknowledged my answer and added the game to his coaching file. Sokolov's vast experience as a player and coach helps to make the material in **Understanding Middlegame Strategies Vol 1-4** understandable and useful to chess players rated 1800 and up. Easy 5 stars.

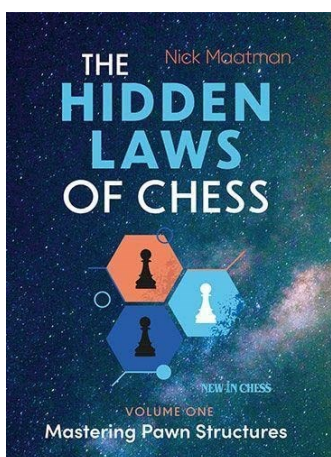


In **Rock Solid Chess** Sergey Tiviakov and Yulia Gökbulut explain pawn structures under the premise that understanding chess by the study of typical positions has more practical value than following a chess engine recommendation. **Rock Solid Chess** provides the reader with high-quality examples and special playing methods associated with a particular pawn structure. Examples are explained and assessed based on the experience and skills of a top GM. The evaluation of the positions according to Tiviakov's skill instead of computer evaluation is one of the strongest features of Rock Solid Chess. Amateur players are in most cases unable to discern when a computer suggestion is beyond human or practical feasibility resulting in confusion. Tiviakov and Gökbulut show the amateur why and how to develop their own analytical and evaluation skills to get better practical chances in their games.

A fun fact about my own experience while reviewing this book. Last year, **ScholasticChess.org** invited me to coach their top players on a series of eight Sundays. The game Karpov – Sax, 1983 was featured in two of the training sessions on open files. A year forward, I finish reading my review copy of **Rock Solid Chess** and recommended it to one of my top students from Jacksonville. To my surprise, he pointed out the Karpov’s game mentioned above after more than a year! I am happy about three things regarding this story. One, at least couple of the students out of eight suggested 13...0-0. Second, a game can be the example of different themes to different trainers and finally, we analyzed extensively with the kids the decision to keep or not the black king in the center which turned out to be a great coaching point. **Rock Solid Chess** will teach you a lot about pawn structures and how to think on your own while evaluating chess positions. As a result of working with this book you can become a better chess player and chess coach. A must read this summer after the school is over. :)



North Florida scholastic chess standout, Brooks Chandler.

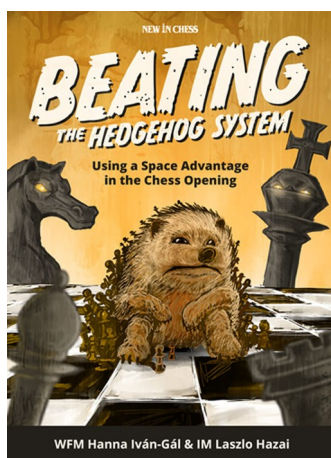


The Hidden Laws of Chess Volume One by IM Nick Maatman is a book on pawn structures and several aspects that influence their evaluation such as space and pieces exchanges. Maatman is an international chess master and trainer with degrees in business and philosophy. The author annotates forty-five master games as well as seventy-four training positions blended with clear explanations (90% in words) to make an amateur friendly book about pawn structures.

As the book progresses, the reader learns about the fundamental pawn structures and how to play them according to the “hidden laws of chess.” Maatman, together with Tiviakov and Gökbulut in **Rock Solid Chess**, warn the reader of the danger of following the chess engine evaluations without questioning it. For example, Maatman makes a good case about the misleading valuations of a chess engine in openings like the Indian Kings where the machine overestimates space. The author supports his point of view with the game Gelfand- Nakamura, Bursa 2010. At move 12.f3 the author indicates why the computer assessment of the move does not reflect the

practical value of the position. This is the only game out of forty-five in which the author enters the nitty-gritty of a single chess game with a significant number of variations.

The author’s discussion of the role of space and all the chess areas it influences is worth the price of the book. This key feature of the book is very important to developing players in the 1400 – 1600 rating range. Improving players have difficulty grasping the concept of space in chess, particularly, when a space advantage is relevant and when is not and to what extent the computer evaluation reflects the practical value of space in a given chess position.



It is important to note that advanced players also have blind spots when it comes to the importance of space in a given position. As mentioned by Sokolov in **Understanding Middlegame Strategies**, the hedgehog is a challenging structure to play, particularly the estimation of space. A training complement to Sokolov material is **Beating the Hedgehog System** by Ivan-Gal & Hazai. Beating the Hedgehog System emerged as a Chessable course and the book is the printed version. In **Beating the Hedgehog System** the writers help the reader to develop the positional skills to successfully play against the hedgehog. For example, the authors explain the methods of active control against the d5 and b5 thematic black liberation pawn breaks. Importantly, the writers give a verbal explanation at the end of each suggested variation. The inclusion of words at the end of long variations helps the reader to understand what he needs to do next and the nature of his advantage. **Beating the Hedgehog System** is more than a traditional opening manual. It bridges an overlooked gap between opening study and middlegame play

in the Hedgehog. **Beating the Hedgehog System** is worth the reader's time and effort, no doubt about it.