

Solid Self-Publishing

Self-published books can be hit or miss. Here are three titles you might want to consider.

BY IM JOHN WATSON



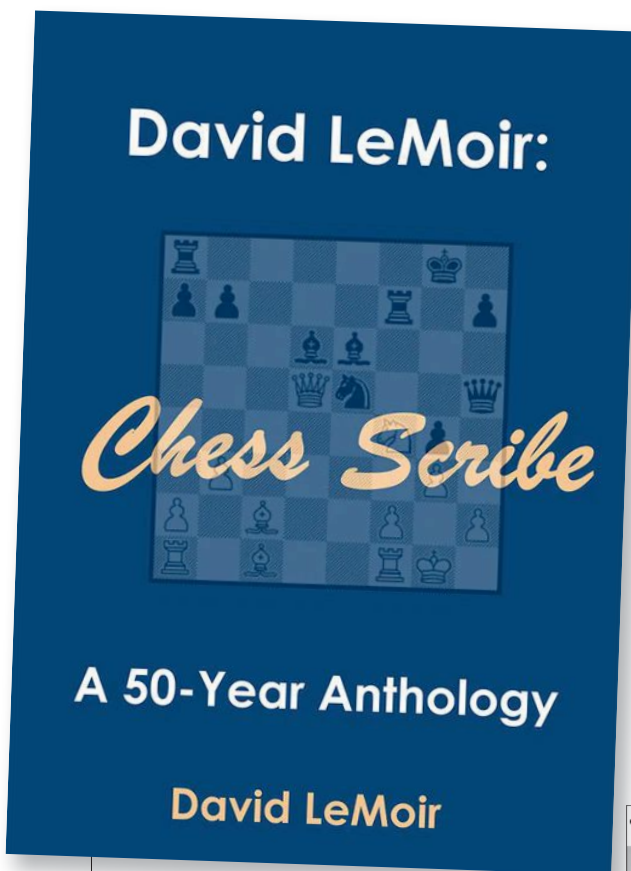
THE HISTORY OF self-published chess books is a rich one, encompassing countless obscure and

long-forgotten manuscripts in every country. Over the years, I've seen numerous annotated games collections by amateur players, usually passed around to friends but never reaching a wider audience. There must be hundreds of these productions out there.

Obscurity is the rule. I have made my own forays into self-publication, and suspect, for example, that there are very few copies left of my self-collated *2nd Marshall International Chess Tournament, New York 1979*. Nor of the first *Chessman Comics* (illustrated by Chris Hendrickson), which was churned out and stapled together in a local copy shop in Denver, then distributed by hand.

Today's technology has considerably eased the process of self-publication, and all the messy details of layout, finding a printer, storage, distribution/advertising, and even the upfront costs of publication can be bypassed by using ChessBase and one of a number of online services. It's also possible to avoid the print world entirely and go directly to ebook.

One of the books I'm reviewing here, *David LeMoir, Chess Scribe: A 50-Year Anthology*, is a collection of David LeMoir's chess writings over 50 years. It includes an informative 2020 article "You Too Can Be a Chess Author," which, in addition to describing some of the self-published books by his friends, gets into the details of self-publishing with Amazon's direct publishing services.



I can't even guess how many chess books have been published this way — I count 109 Kindle ebooks by Tim Sawyer alone, for example.

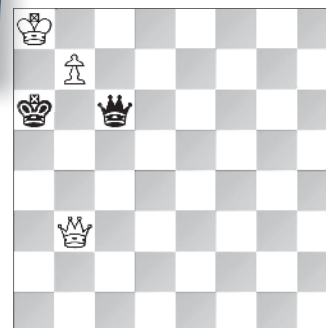
Chess Scribe itself is self-published, but LeMoir has also written several entertaining books for Gambit Publishing: *How to be Lucky in Chess*, *How to Become a Deadly Chess Tactician*, and *Essential Chess Sacrifices*. Excerpts from these books are included in *Chess Scribe*, with the bulk of the material coming from his articles which appeared in the British magazines *Chess* and *En Passant*.

Part of the fun is reading about LeMoir's experiences at *Chess*, where he worked

briefly and became familiar with the legendary B.H. Wood, and *En Passant*, a local magazine which he took over himself. LeMoir clearly loves old chess books and chess history, and the anthology includes items such as his lengthy and informative tribute to the fellow Norwich-based writer and strong player Owen Hindle.

Chess Scribe consists of tournament reports, anecdotes, and instructional articles, among others types of chess material. Le Moir's books are centered around tactics and practical play, and that applies to many of these writings as well. An example which illustrates both tactics and his love of chess literature is the following:

INGENIOUS!
Van Vliet, 1888



WHITE TO PLAY AND WIN

"I was recently re-reading Jenő Ban's wonderful 1963 book *The Tactics of Endgames*, when I came across this venerable but ingenious old 1888 study of Van Vliet," LeMoir writes. The solution is:

1. Qb4! Qh1!

The subtlest try. Slightly easier for White is 1. ... Qd5 2. Qa4+ Kb6, and now the pretty 3. Qb3+!! Qxb3 4. b8=Q+.

2. Qa3+ Kb6 3. Qb2+ Kc7 4. Qh2+! Qxh2

5. b8=Q+

And White picks up the queen.

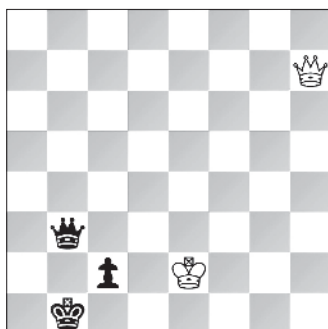
“Then I realized that I had seen the same tactic before...”

AGAIN!

Oskar Hackner

GM John Emms

British Championship, 2016



BLACK TO MOVE

64. ... Qe6+ 65. Kd2 Qh6+!, White resigned.

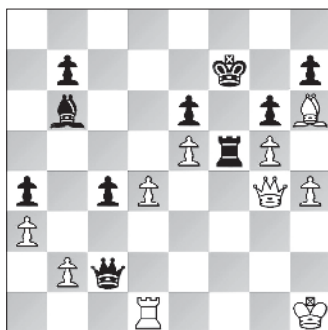
A typical LeMoir theme is the saving of lost positions, like this one by a 12-year-old Michael Adams:

IMPUDENCE!

Michael Adams

Thompson

West of England Championship, 1984



WHITE TO MOVE

1. d5 exd5 2. h5 Be3 3. Re1 Qf2??

Black is clearly winning after 3. ... Ke7 or 3. ... d4.

4. Rxe3 Qxe3??

Still missing the point. Black retains equal chances with 4. ... Qxb2.

5. Qxf5+! gxf5 6. g6+ hxg6 7. hxg6+ Kxg6

8. Bxe3, Black resigned.

Chess Life editor John Hartmann tells me that recently a number of players have been inspired to read older books written by masters in the pre-engine era, in order to gain a more ‘human’ understanding of how players think, uncluttered by the complex and counterintuitive improvements the engines offer. I suspect that even strong players grow tired of seeing dense analysis with moves that neither side would consider playing in a real over-the-board game, so this is a nice exercise which can benefit the practical player.

Two of the works considered here were written without the use of engines. The first is by Mike Read, a Senior International Correspondence Master who gave an overview

of his career in two self-published books: *My 120 Selected Correspondence Games* and *Triumph and Disaster (a second games collection)*.

His new book, *110 Instructive Chess Annotations*, is a collection of games by players from Norfolk County, all first published in *En Passant* (the magazine described above). Read’s tone is instructive, emphasizing typical mistakes and strategic misunderstandings. And because of an ongoing medical frailty, he does not use computers in his analysis.

This can be seen as a bug or a feature, depending on one’s perspective. In his Foreword to *110 Instructive Chess Annotations*, David LeMoir notes that Read “does not rely on a computer’s judgment of a position, which is often based on obscure tactical lines that few humans below Grandmaster level (and often not even a Grandmaster) would ever be able to reproduce. So he cannot fall into the trap that some modern authors fall into of occasionally giving random computer-generated variations and evalu-



SIM Mike Read

ations that they do not fully understand.”

While the games in Read’s collection are mostly by club players, a number of them include professionals. To wit: Read annotates a high-level game by local boy done good, GM John Emms:

RUY LOPEZ (C77)

GM Leonid Yudasin

IM John Emms

World Open, 1991

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5. Qe2 b5 6. Bb3 Bc5 7. a4 Rb8 8. axb5 axb5 9. Nc3 0-0 10. Nxb5? d5 11. exd5 e4 12. Ng5 Ne5

Read gives this a double-exclam, thinking it was a novelty. In fact, the move had been played in a couple of games 10 years earlier, although it’s quite possible that Emms came up with it independently.

This line actually goes way back, with the entertaining stem game Suechting – Johner (Vienna, 1908) continuing 12. ... Rxb5?! 13. Qxb5 Bxf2+ 14. Kxf2 Ng4+ 15. Ke1 Qxg5 (15. ... Nd4!) 16. Qxc6? (16. d4!) 16. ... Ne5 17. Qxc7 (17. Qb5) 17. ... Qxg2 18. Qxe5 Qxh1+ 19. Kf2 Qf3+ 20. Ke1 Qh1+ 21. Kf2 Qf3+ 22. Ke1 Qh1+, draw.

13. Nc3 Bg4 14. Qa6 Rxb3 15. cxb3 Nd3+ 16. Kf1 Nxf2 17. Rg1

Black has a winning position. A later game saw 17. Qc4 Bb6! 18. d4 exd3 *e.p.* 19. Rg1 d2! 20. Bxd2 Bf5.

17. ... Nd3 18. Qc4

On 18. Rh1 Qd7 and ... Qd7-f5+. Read gives the nice variation 18. h3 Nh5!! 19. Ncxe4 f5!! 20. Qe6+ Kh8 21. Nf7+ Rxf7 22. Qxf7 fxe4 threatening ... Nh5-g3 mate again.

18. ... Qd6 19. Ncxe4 Qf4+ 20. Nf3 Bxf3 21. Nxc5 Be4+ 22. Ke2 Qf2+, White resigned.

The game could end with 23. Kd1 Qxg1+ 24. Kc2 Nb4+ 25. Kc3 Nfxd5+ 26. Qxd5 Nxd5+ 27. Kc4 Nb6+ and mate soon follows.

Here’s a game by Read himself, with his notes. I’ve cut down on them for reasons of space, and added just a couple of improvements (in blue text) which an engine has no trouble spotting.

Right: The title page from Mike Splane’s posthumously published book, *Chess Wizardry: Thinking Outside the Box*.

RUY LOPEZ, EXCHANGE VARIATION (C68)

IM Michael Read

IM Janis Vitomskis

BPCF-Latvia (corr), 1996

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Bxc6 dxc6 5. 0-0 Qd6 6. d3

This is a main line, but 6. d4 exd4 7. Nxd4 setting up the ‘workable’ kingside majority against the ‘unworkable’ queenside majority, is perhaps more in the spirit of the variation.

6. ... f6 7. Be3 c5 8. Qe2 Be6 9. c3 Ne7 10. d4 cxd4 11. cxd4 exd4 12. Nxd4 Nc6!

New and very strong! At a stroke, White’s initiative disappears and Black’s queenside majority perhaps even gives him the advantage. After only a dozen moves White is forced to begin playing for a draw.

13. Nxe6

The alternative 13. Nxc6! Qxc6 14. Rc1 is awkward for Black, since 14. ... Qxe4 15. Nd2 Qe5 16. Nf3 Qe4 (16. ... Qd6?? 17. Bf4!) 17. Rxc7 is clearly in White’s favor.

13. ... Qxe6 14. Nc3 Bd6 15. Qh5+ Qf7 16. Qxf7+ Kxf7 17. f3 Rhd8 18. Rad1 Ne7

Getting ready to roll his queenside pawns.

19. Rf2 Be5 20. Rfd2 Rxd2 21. Bxd2 b5 22. b3 c5 23. f4 Bd4+ 24. Kf1 f5 25. e5!

Establishing a protected passed pawn, which will be a big asset in any ending. By accurate play over the last few moves, White has minimized his disadvantage.

25. ... Ke6 26. Ne2 Nc6 27. Nxd4+ cxd4?

Better was 27. ... Nxd4 when Black would still have the advantage, but White should hold with best play. With the text, Black tries too hard to win. His d-pawn, which cramps White at present, is a potential weakness in the long term.

It turns out that 27. ... cxd4 is in fact a

good move. 27. ... Nxd4 is probably okay, but Black has to play accurately after 28. Be3! g5! (28. ... Kd5 29. b4 Kc4 30. bxc5 Nc6 31. Rd7) 29. fxg5 Kxe5 30. b4 Ne6 31. bxc5 f4 32. Bf2 Nxg5.

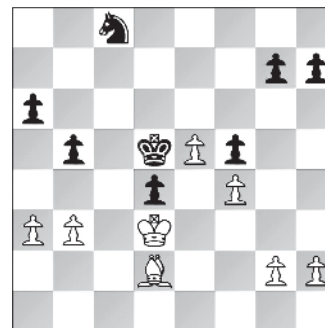
28. Rc1!

A good move. Sooner or later Black will have to play his rook to the c-file, and after the inevitable rook exchange White’s passed pawn will be stronger, and Black’s d-pawn more vulnerable.

28. ... Kd5 29. Ke2 Rc8 30. a3

Note that 29...Rc8? allowed 30. Bb4! Ke4 31. Bd6 with some real chances. Instead 29. ... a5! improves, validating Black’s 27th move.

30. ... Ne7 31. Rxc8 Nxc8 32. Kd3



Notwithstanding Black’s error on move 27, there is still, sadly, no way for White to win. Even if he wins Black’s d-pawn, all that Black has to do to draw is keep his king on d5 and his pawns on b5 and f5 whilst swapping his knight from c6 to e7 and back again (to prevent White playing his king to b4). White, however, decides to try a couple of tricks before acquiescing to the draw.

32. ... Ne7 33. Ba5 Nc6 34. Bc7 Kc5 35. g4 g6

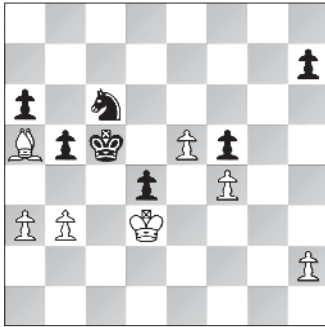
[If] 35. ... fxg4? 36. Ke4.

36. gxf5



White can win a pawn with 36. b4+ Kd5 37. g5 Ke6 38. Bb6 Kd5 39. h4 Ne7 40. Bxd4 but, as mentioned in the note to White's 32nd, after 40. ... Nc6 41. Bb6 Ke6 Black has set up a fortress and it is not possible to make any further progress.

36. ... gxf5 37. Ba5



Of course 37. ... Kd5 or any other sensible move allows Black to draw as per the note to White's 32nd, but isn't the pawn ending after 37. ... Nxa5 also a draw? After 10 days thought, Black decided that it was.

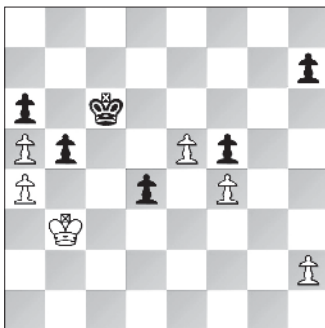
37. ... Nxa5?? 38. b4+ Kc6 39. bxa5 Kd5

At this point, Read gives a diagram of the position with the kings off the board and devotes two pages to a discussion of corresponding squares. I don't have room to include it here but, along with the game continuation, it is instructive, and useful for understanding pawn endings.

40. Kc2 Kc6 41. Kb2?! Kd5 42. Ka1!

Zugzwang! If Black now plays 42. ... Kc5, White will reply with 43 Kb1! and then after 43. ... Kd5 44 Kb2! or 43. ... Kc6 44 Kc2!. White wins as he now has the opposition.

42. ... Kc6 43. Ka2 Kd7 44. Kb3 Kc6 45. a4!, Black resigned.



Here Read gives one final note, which I've abbreviated:

"Black does have a shot that makes life difficult for White and that is 45. ... b4! 46.

Kxb4 Kd5 47. Kb3 Kc5 How does White now make progress? It transpires that Black's king still only has access to three key squares (d5, c5 and e6), and that despite the alteration of the pawn structure, the corresponding squares remain exactly the same! Therefore White plays 48. Kc2 Kc6 49. Kc1 and now 49. ... Kc5 50. Kb1! Kd5 51. Kb2 Kc6 52. Kc2! and wins. Black correctly decided that I'd seen all this so [he resigned]."

A final note about Read's book: it, like all of his titles, is very inexpensive, running about \$12 on Amazon for 500+ pages of content. Read says in the Introduction that he is forgoing royalties and selling at cost to allow more people to read them — an admirable gesture, and one that is only possible in a non-commercial situation.

The last book I'd like to mention, *Chess Wizardry: Thinking Outside the Box*, isn't in print or kindle format, but is freely available as a PDF file on the web. The author, Mike Splane, died last year, and before he passed, he put together his annotated games and extensive thoughts about chess in Word files.

Splaine's friends Dana Mackenzie and Ken Case edited these files, move-checked the games, and put the book into PDF format. Splane talks at great length about his theories of how to play chess, and has many opinions about chess principles, even inventing some new terminology to explain his ideas. He devotes time to pawn structures, defending, the endgame, the thinking process, and other topics.

Splaine, like Read, didn't use ChessBase or an engine, so sometimes his notes are off base, but this gives them a casual feel which is easy for the average player to relate to. Here's a game he was proud of, with his notes along with one of my own in blue:

SICILIAN DEFENSE, ALAPIN VARIATION (B22)

Mike Splane
GM Walter Browne
San Mateo, 1989

My final tournament in the Santa Cruz area was the World Action Championship. I faced 13 masters and senior masters in this event and more than held my own, playing several great games, which included wins over two grandmasters The highlight of any player's career must be a win against the strongest player in his country.

1. e4 c5 2. c3 Nf6 3. e5 Nd5 4. d4 cxd4 5. Nf3 Nc6 6. cxd4 d6 7. exd6 Qxd6 8. Nc3 g6

9. Nb5 Qd8 10. Bc4 a6 11. Bxd5 axb5 12. Qb3 e6 13. Bxc6+ bxc6 14. Bg5 Qa5+ 15. Bd2 Qa4 16. Qe3 Qc4 17. Ne5 Qd5 18. Qf4 f5 19. 0-0! c5?

If 19. ... Rxa2 20. Rxa2 Qxa2 21. Nxc6 Qxb2 22. Qc7 wins. After the game Walter said advancing the c pawn was his key mistake. At the time I did not understand this remark. Now I do. The point is my bishop is limited in scope by the d4-pawn; its removal turns a bad piece into a monster. I also get control of the open d-file. I thought he should have played 19. ... Ra7.

20. dxc5 Bxc5 21. Bc3 Bb7 22. Nf3 Rf8

I do not know why he did not castle.

Here's why: 22. ... 0-0 loses to 23. Rfd1 Qc6 (23. ... Qe4 24. Qc7) 24. Qe5 Kf7 25. Rac1.

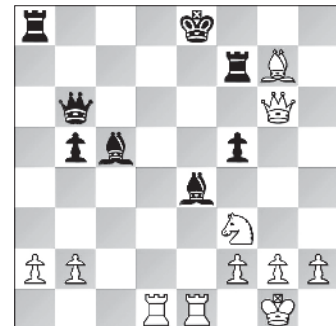
23. Rad1 Qe4 24. Qc7

Forking c5 and h7. Now his position quickly collapses.

24. ... Qc6 25. Qxh7 e5 26. Bxe5 Rf7 27.

Bg7 Qc7 28. Rfe1+ Be4 29. Qxg6 Qb6

He has been desperately playing for traps. I am guessing he saw my next move but decided to gamble that I would miss it.



30. Rxe4+ fxe4 31. Qxe4+ Re7 32. Qxa8+ Kf7 33. Qf8+ Kg6 34. Bd4 Bxd4 35. Qxe7, Black resigned. ♠

LeMoir, David. David LeMoir, Chess Scribe: A 50-Year Anthology. Self-published, 2021. ISBN 978-1527291188, 272 pages. Available on Amazon.com.

Read, Mike: 110 Instructive Chess Annotations. Self-published, 2021. ISBN 979-8466415964, 551 pages. Available on Amazon.com.

Splane, Mike. Chess Wizardry: Thinking Outside the Box. Self-published, 2021. Freely available at bus911.altervista.org/Chess_Wizardry/chess_wizardry.pdf. See also the July 2022 "My Best Move" in Chess Life for more of Splane's writing.