

Fresh Leaves from the Bookshelf

By FM Carsten Hansen

Spring is upon us, and like flowers and cicadas out of the ground and leaves on the trees, new chess books are coming from every angle and seemingly all sorts of publishers. The selection this time includes a couple of releases by Maurice Ashley, the first African-American grandmaster, both rather unusual titles from publishers that don't usually publish chess books, but which speak loudly for Ashley's profile and prominence outside traditional chess circles. There are, of course, many more books published that we haven't room for this time. For example I could mention volume 159 of *Chess Informant* which is loaded with excellent material, and I will be so immodest as to include some of my own new releases *R. P. Michell – A Master of British Chess* which is a massively larger version (this hardcover edition has twice as many games and more than three times the number of pages) of the book written nearly eighty years ago by Julius du Mont, or *Stark Beauty – The Endgame Studies of Mattison* that I have co-written with the ultra-productive Cyrus Lakdawala. I hope you will check them out as they have been exciting to work on.



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

★★★★★

Move by Move

by Maurice Ashley (Chronicle Prism 2024)
- 02

★★★★☆

The Unknown Fischer

by Cyrus Lakdawala (Everyman Chess 2024)
- 03

★★★★☆

The Life-Changing Magic of Chess

by Maurice Ashley & Denis Angelov (Magic Cat Publishing 2024)

04

★★★★★

Games And Goals – Simen Agdestein

by Atle Grønn (New In Chess 2024)

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★★★★★

Dream Moves

by Miron Sher (New In Chess 2024)

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★★★★☆

Forgotten Talents

by Javier Cordero Fernandez (Russell Enterprises 2024)

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★★★★★

Korchnoi Year by Year – Volume II

by Hans Renette & Tibor Karolyi (Elk & Ruby 2024)

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★★★★★

Rock Solid Chess - Vol 2

by Sergei Tiviakov & Yulia Gokbulut (New In Chess 2024)

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★★★★☆

The English Opening – Volume 1

by Jerzy Konikowski and Uwe Bekemann (JBV Chess Books 2024)

10

★★★★☆

Studies for Practical Players – Book 2

by Oleg Pervakov & Mark Dvoretsky (Russell Enterprises 2024)

01

★★★★★

Move by Move – Life Lessons On and Off The Chessboard
by Maurice Ashley

In a column about chess books in a chess magazine, should we review a book without the inclusion of a single move? Sure, if its perspective is meaningful enough in the context of the world as we know it, viewed through the prism that is our game and those who play it, and explains what is seen. The latter is the case with this book. Maurice Ashley sees the world in which he lives and has lived through chess, but not exclusively so, and distils a set of life lessons that chess has taught him, and then passes on any advice that he has to offer to the reader.

The book is not a heavy read, because the text is presented with plenty of space between the lines and in the margins, but that is fine because this is not a book on opening theory where the publisher is trying to squeeze the maximum amount into the space on the page in order to limit the length of the book. Accompanying each chapter is also a set of quotes from various people, inside and outside of chess, which have some relevance or reference to the particular lesson that Ashley wants to give.

Why should we read or listen to life lessons from Maurice Ashley? Because the man knows what he is talking about. He knows what it is to struggle and still make it, what it is to not have and then have, to not see the meaning and then finding it, to be out and then be in. Ashley is, in many ways, the definition of not having been particularly special and then making it to become something unique.

This book is meaningful, it makes you say *ahh* and *aha*, when you connect two dots that seem separate but now become linked, much like when you follow the numbered dots on a page in a children's game book, where the end result is an image that wasn't apparent before you started to put pen to paper.

I loved this little book, and what it tells us about life and chess. It is far from being the first one of its genre, other recognizable chess names such as Pandolfini and Kasparov, as well as others, have attempted to draw lines between other worlds and chess. Some have made good sense, some have made hay, some have made me question why I picked up the book; this book fell into the former category.

That I mentioned Kasparov is not entirely

coincidental, because on the back cover, under the "Praise for Move by Move" heading there are some words from Kasparov, endorsing the book; yet, when reading the endorsement, it becomes clear that unlike us, he hasn't read the book.

02

★★★★☆

The Unknown Fischer
by Cyrus Lakdawala

Upon seeing this title, for those not in the know, the two first questions will undoubtedly be: what unknown Fischer? And didn't Lakdawala already write a book about Fischer? Obviously, the California IM and my regular co-author, Cyrus Lakdawala, isn't immune to criticism and is wont to ask such logical questions himself. He addresses both in the introduction to this book. "The vast majority of chess books, including my own *Fischer: Move by Move*, focus on his invincibility period..." [Lakdawala defines this period as being from the beginning of 1970 to the conclusion of his 1972 match with Spassky] and continues "This book is about the under-covered subject of the rest of his career, where the great majority of games are from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s, when Fischer was young and therefore not yet Fischer." Lakdawala also points to David Hooper's excellent *The Unknown Capablanca* as inspiration for writing this book.

The result is a collection of 81 games, some from his early tournaments, some from simul games, some from the famous 1970 blitz tournament in Herceg Novi, some against early chess computers, and some that he played in preparation for his 1992 match against Spassky.

The games are peppered with the usual dose of Lakdawala,

hundreds of exercises of all sorts, deep Lakdawala-style annotations, countless diagrams, and an overall solid mixture of prose and variations. If you are a fan of Fischer's games, and let's be honest: who isn't, and Lakdawala's writing, this is a must-read book, you will see many games you will be unfamiliar with, discussed in detail. My sole point of criticism of this book is the cover, which is a rather uninspired choice of a Fischer picture.

03

★★★★☆

The Life-Changing Magic of Chess
by Maurice Ashley & Denis Angelov (illustrations)

Now we return to Maurice Ashley. Every now and again, we are blessed with a children's picture book on chess. While I'm decidedly not the target audience, I'm no longer a child, I don't have any children, my nephews are too old and I'm also way too strong to be considered a beginner, for whom these books are typically created, I find them amazing and a blessing. Picture books tell stories to impressionable minds, stories that the kids who hear them will remember for the rest of their lives.

In the present book, from *The Life-Changing Magic of...* series, Maurice Ashley, superbly supported by illustrator Denis Angelov, shares some of his own experiences along with teaching the reader the basics of playing chess. On top of that, he weaves in where chess can take you, hence "the life-changing magic." I think it was the Dutch IM Hans Bohm who said that chess has an amazing ability to propel you forward to new opportunities – so long as you get out in time! He was partly joking, but also delivering

an honest truth: unless you're special at the game of chess, don't hang around, trying to make it something that it isn't. But while you're in it, make it special, enjoy it, because doing so will open surprising doors, just as it has for Maurice Ashley.

Later this year, we will see another children's picture book by another, more recent African-American icon, chess streamer and commentator, James Canty III. The publisher sent me samples of it, and I'm just as excited as they are. We need more books like this book, and the upcoming one by Canty, to welcome more young players into the game.

04

★★★★★

Games And Goals – The Fascinating Chess and Football Careers of Simen Agdestein
by Atle Grønn

Sjakken som var or translated into English *Chess as it was* had been released in Norwegian last year. It was written by Atle Grønn, a Norwegian chess player, who I competed against in Nordic scholastic events when I was a kid and who became a well-known name in Norway as chess made its way from chess clubs to television on the shoulders of Magnus Carlsen and his presence in World Championship finals, both at classic and faster time controls as well as numerous major tournaments. Chess went on to become very popular, after which those who promoted it made names for themselves. I'm not criticizing them, I'm applauding them, because they opened up more opportunities for chess to show its best side.

Atle Grønn seized the opportunity to write another

chess book, his third as far as I can recall. The previous two have not been translated into English, but now the third has, and in the competent hands of Jon Tisdall, the American-Norwegian grandmaster and journalist. When I first heard about the book, I wanted to get hold of it immediately, but not having been back to Denmark in a while, I was not able to pick up the stack of books that usually awaits me when I visit my brother, a stack that contains the Norwegian edition. With the appearance of this English version, the urgency to read the original one is less immediate, even if I see that several editorial changes have been made to the format and presentation of the material as well as the inclusion and exclusion of some material that was in the original book. That happens. The end result, nevertheless, is an excellent read, which is primarily about Simen Agdestein, Norway's biggest chess name before the emergence of Magnus Carlsen. It follows Simen from his earliest footsteps in chess through the many stages of his life which, as indicated on the cover, also included a stint in top football (or soccer, as we call it here in the States), wearing the Norwegian National jersey on eight occasions. Not many can claim to have achieved such excellence in two so different sports at the same time. Agdestein did. But then again, he also blazed a trail for other Norwegian chess players to succeed. After achieving accolades in chess and football, he seemed to slide out of both, apparently focusing on other things, but then re-emerging as coach and teacher at the Norwegian College for Top Athletes, the Norwegian equivalent of the Soviet "Institute of Physical Culture," if you like.

The funny thing is that through his obligations at the college, Agdestein suddenly rediscovered his joy and prowess in chess and, at an age when top athletes and certainly chess players do not make comebacks, he did make a comeback, starting to win international events, scoring against some of the top players in the world at Norway Chess and

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other events, even winning the Norwegian championship in 2023, 41 years after he first won it! As the author writes, this is a record that possibly only Simen will be able to break!

The book is not just about Simen Agdestein, it is also about his place in the chess world, and chess in Norway as a whole, first in his own time and then in that of Magnus. While the first nineteen chapters are not particularly heavy on chess games, what you do see is that they are only lightly annotated. This was also the case in the original Norwegian edition, but here nearly 30 pages featuring his greatest victories have been added for the English-language volume to make it more marketable for the rest of the chess world.

The end result is an absolutely wonderful book that I have enjoyed reading and will highly recommend.

05



Dream Moves – Eye Opening Chess Lessons for Improvers
by Miron Sher

When my friend, co-author of my first book, and later super-GM and coach to World Champions Anand and Carlsen, the Dane Peter Heine Nielsen began to be coached by Miron Sher around 1990, it didn't seem like an obvious choice. But it was clear that Peter benefited from their training sessions, despite both being “only” international masters, and it didn't take long before that was a thing of the past; Sher became a grandmaster in 1992, and two years later Peter also reached that goal. That's when their training relationship ended, but their friendship and contact endured well beyond that. Sher moved with his family to the US

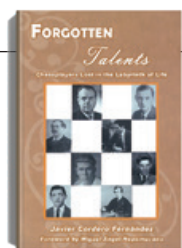
where he coached several strong junior players, including Fabiano Caruana and Robert Hess (who also wrote the foreword to this book) to name but a few.

According to the introduction, Sher had promised some of his students that he would write a book when he became a grandmaster, although this was never published and, sadly, Sher passed away in 2020 long before the release of the present work.

The book has five chapters, each containing a particular concept or idea, typically based on calculation, and which are illustrated by means of several carefully annotated games after which reader/students can test their understanding by solving a selection of puzzle positions that support the theme of the chapter. The solutions to these positions are similarly well-annotated.

The material in this book is not easy as it is designed for strong or ambitious players, but it can nevertheless be worked through by lower-rated players if assisted by a coach who is strong enough to understand the material. But the quality is high and you, as a student, are bound to learn a lot.

06



Forgotten Talents – Chessplayers Lost in the Labyrinth of Life
by Javier Cordero Fernandez

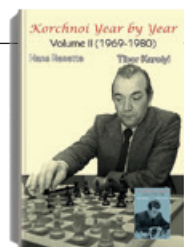
As mentioned above, I have just written a monograph on a forgotten master, the aforementioned volume on R.P. Michell, whom I stumbled upon by chance when I purchased a book on him published in 1947. This book contained wins against Bogoljubow, Reti, Sultan Khan and a selection of other interesting games. But when diving a little

deeper into Michell's chess career, I learned that he had drawn against Capablanca, Alekhine, Euwe, Botvinnik and played a number of fascinating games that for unknown reasons hadn't made it into that slim little commemorative volume. My work on this book inspired me to cover other players of the era, and I'm currently engaged on no less than five(!) other books about players from that era – such inspiration can truly be a curse for the perpetual chess author!

So what is a forgotten talent? The author of the present book defines this as players who perhaps were not regarded as world-class competitors, but who had a precious gift for chess without either realizing it or without finding the way to success. The reasons for this were many. The author has selected 23 players, some of whom seemed to me, as someone who has a keen interest in chess history, to be peculiar choices. Several of the choices have already had books devoted to them, several relatively recently, while others had been awarded the GM title and become successful tournament players. The last of the selected players is Viktor Kupreichik, a pleasing attacking player who played in many countries and against many of the best players of his generation. Then there is the attacking maestro Rashid Nezhmetdinov about whom several books have already been written, including a very recent one by Cyrus Lakdawala. He may not have reached the level of success or the title his play merited, but forgotten? Hardly.

That being said, the research and write-up for each selection is interesting. However, in terms of the selected games, I find these to be even more problematic than the selection of players. Most of the nearly 200 selected games have no annotations, while there are only light comments to those that are annotated. Thus, we don't get any clarity as to why the games were selected or the criteria for their brilliance. Or was this because they were just typical of the time in which they were played?

07



Korchnoi Year by Year – Volume II (1969-1980)
by Hans Renette & Tibor Karolyi

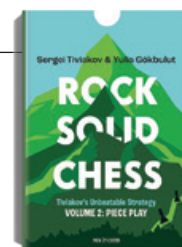
Aside from my compatriot Bent Larsen, Viktor Korchnoi was my first chess idol. His battle against Karpov in their 1978 world championship match, covered in such lively fashion in Raymond Keene's book on the match, made me an instant fan, and encouraged me to take up the English Opening, 1.c4, for my new first move as I embarked on studying chess on my own. While my preferences in terms of playing style have made me change my favorite players several times, even to Korchnoi's sworn enemy, Karpov, my connection to Korchnoi, much like a first girl- or boyfriend, remains since such bonds are difficult to break.

Korchnoi wrote several volumes (and versions) of his best games, and even on different phases in his life, and they are certainly still worth a read since games collections, annotated by the players themselves, tend to be the best chess books of all. But players are not always the best writers since their objectivity is often a point of contention. Luckily, in Korchnoi's case chess historians FM Hans Renette and Hungarian IM and coach Tibor Karolyi have teamed up for the ultimate Korchnoi biography. In a previous column, we already covered volume 1, but the present one is undoubtedly even juicier as it covers a period when Korchnoi had not only just escaped from the Soviet Union but also faced Karpov in two matches. The first of these was the 1974 Candidates Final where he narrowly lost to Karpov who then, due to Fischer's unwillingness to play, became World Champion, and the second match in 1978, Karpov's first title

defense, which saw Korchnoi come back to nearly knock Karpov off the throne. The book also covers his amazing run in tournaments, including Interzonals, Candidates and other top, and not-so-top, tournaments up to and including the final of the 1980/81 Candidates final against the German grandmaster Robert Hubner.

This is a fantastic book which will take me a long time to finish reading, but from what I have read, it delivers just as much as the first volume, and here the games are even more amazing.

08



Rock Solid Chess – Volume 2: Piece Play – Tiviakov's Unbeatable Strategy
by Sergei Tiviakov & Yulia Gokbulut

What do Marvel Comics, DC Comics, and New in Chess have in common? They love series and sequels. De la Villa Garcia's *100 Endgames You Must Know*, Kuljasevic's *How To Study Chess on Your Own* have been successful and have rightfully seen more books with similar themes in their series. Now they have turned their attention to Tiviakov's *Rock Solid Chess*. The original volume wasn't covered here, possibly due to several other interesting books being published by New In Chess at the same time. I extend my apologies to the author. As some will know, Tiviakov at one point had an unbeaten streak of more than 100 games, which is an enormous achievement in any tournament environment, let alone for a player who played as many open tournaments as Tiviakov.

So, as the back cover blurb rightly asks, who would be better to cover the topic of rock solid, if not unbeatable, chess than Tiviakov?

The first volume covered pawn structures, while this one deals with piece play, an equally important, but also very complex topic. No wonder they needed two volumes to cover these. The present book is formed of ten chapters, each containing a bucket-load of instruction in terms of deeply annotated games, training questions, and solutions. Personally, I think this book is a lot more accessible than the book by Sher reviewed above, but this is also because it is designed for a wider audience. Highly recommended.

09

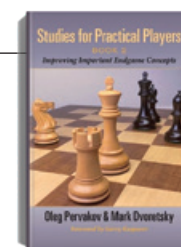


The English Opening – Volume 1: Symmetrical English – read – understand – play
by Jerzy Konikowski and Uwe Bekemann

The English, as mentioned above in connection with the Korchnoi book, has accompanied me ever since my earliest days as a chess player, and I have written several books on this opening for a variety of publishers. It is an incredibly flexible opening that allows both players to remain in traditional English Opening lines, but may also transpose to a whole host of other openings. This fact can scare some people away from the opening because how will they ever be able to learn the theory of so many possibilities while also having to understand them well enough to play with confidence? The present book, which covers the Symmetrical English, and its upcoming sister volume handling 1...e5 and 1...d6, aims to place its readers in the comfortable position of not only knowing the different variations but also being able to understand and play them well.

The material, particularly the heavy-laden theoretical lines, has been trimmed down to absolute essentials so as to avoid overwhelming the reader with variations and superfluous material. All that is great, however it is not always easy to follow the variations because the main lines are not highlighted in any way and thus tend to vanish amid the wave of information that is being imparted to the reader. I hope the publisher fixes this problem before future releases in the series. I should also mention that the authors have previously authored other books in the same vein, several of which are also worth checking out if you need assistance in understanding an opening that you contemplate adopting.

10



Studies for Practical Players – Book 2: Improving Important Endgame Concepts
by Oleg Pervakov & Mark Dvoretsky

“Nowadays, chess players spend almost all their free time preparing openings and rarely spend the time necessary to perfect the vitally important technique of calculating. Regular training, solving and playing out endgame studies is a good recipe for eliminating that shortcoming.”

These are the words of Mark Dvoretsky, the famous Russian coach who passed away far too early, although books from his hand and archives continue to be released by Russell Enterprises. However I'm not one to complain when the co-authors or compilers include such names as Artur Yusupov, Karsten Mueller, or as in this case the eminent grandmaster and former, four-time world

champion of composition, Oleg Pervakov. Actually the present volume is a sequel to the original *Studies for Practical Players* that was released more than a decade ago. The idea of using examples from practical games and then to modify or distill a particular theme into a study is not new, since it has taken place as far back as chess composition has existed, e.g. the famous Arabian from Aleppo, Stamma, is an example of this. But also, more recently, my first published study, an effort where current world champion in composition and grandmaster, Steffen Slumstrup Nielsen (see also his phenomenal book on endgame studies with Jacob Aagaard *Endgame Labyrinths* to learn more on this topic), transformed an idea I had discovered into a masterpiece of a composition that blew my mind. These endgame composers truly are artists in a way that is hard to fathom for average chess players.

In this new book, after the foreword by none less than Garry Kasparov(!), Pervakov discusses some amazing ideas from games that were similarly transformed into endgame studies. The practical application is obvious, by isolating a theme and adding precision and fireworks, but eliminating unnecessary pieces, you get a concoction of sheer brilliance which, when understood, helps practical players improve by adding the theme, tactics, and technique into something that can be used in practical play.

Aside from the fascinating opening chapter, and the equally interesting second one “The Foresight Effect”, the book contains a chapter with two sets of training studies and solutions, a chapter on the Dvoretsky Memorial endgame study composition competition, and a chapter called “A Tale of Three Studies”.

Even if the book is a little more uneven than some of the other Dvoretsky books, it is still an excellent read and provides an amazing amount of training material for both ambitious students and fans of endgame studies.