

The Chess Journalist

Volume XLIX (Issue 166)

July 2026



CHESS JOURNALISTS OF AMERICA



“2019 Nature of the Game” exhibit, Reiman Gardens, Ames, Iowa.

“Food Web Chess” a larger-than-life, play on the game where the classic pieces were replaced with native animals and plants from the food chain: King=Grey Fox; Queen=Red-tailed Hawk; Bishop=Painted Turtle; Knight=Praying Mantis; Rook=Stink Bug; Pawns=Dandelions and Clovers.

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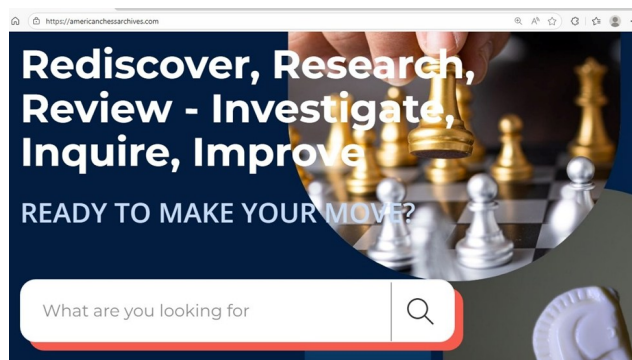
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Hello From the Editor

I have had a busy summer and it doesn't seem to be slowing down. It started with a quick trip to the Omaha Zoo. Then went to see an Indiana Fever game and unfortunately for the second year in a row the players I went to see were hurt and didn't play. Next time someone else can choose which game to go see! I just got home from a week long drumming camp in the Nashville area. My band, Juniper Street, has been playing out frequently this summer. Soon I am headed to the US Open in Grand Rapids. Despite all of this the issue will be out on time!

The entries have all been received by the judges and they are busy determining who they think has the done the best in the past year. The Award Winners will be announced at the annual meeting on Thursday August 6 in Grand Rapids at the US Open (see page 4 for more details and the zoom call in number if you can't be there in person).

Some sad news, Marty Grund passed away in June. Marty was instrumental in the formation of the Internet Chess Club (ICC). Good friend Brian Karen tells us a bit more. Rest in Peace Marty.

There is a new website for selling chess books and stamps (ad on page 4). We also continue to work on the American Chess Archives project.

Cindy Wister is back with another great review. We also have reviews from returning contributors Andy Ansel, Samika Nettem, Robert Irons, NM Randy Bauer, and editor Rex Gray. Patricio Robayo, James Hodina, Ayush Gaurav, and Lance Bark contributed their first book reviews. Welcome aboard all!

As for me, I bit off more than I could chew with the second 600+ page book in a row. I really intended on a second book, but I ran out of time. I will plan on doing a few shorter books for the October issue.

Chris Martinez G returns with the cool column *Resurfaced*. This installment make his fourth and thus one year. Congrats Chris! Keep 'em coming.

Awani Kumar helps us celebrate the nations 250th anniversary.

We put computer programmer Mike Leahy in the Limelight. Mike developed the program Bookup (now Chess Opening Wizard) and is creating new and exciting programs as we speak.

Pranav Srinivasula wrote a nice piece on the BlitzChamps tournament. A crossover event with the National Football League.

Bob Basalla provides a look at Chess in the Movies.

We have another of my favorite cartoons by Tony Sullivan.

Sriaditya Pendyala is back with a short opinion piece about how life and chess go together.

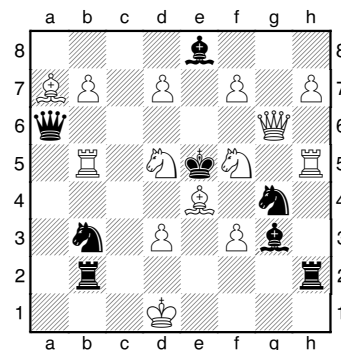
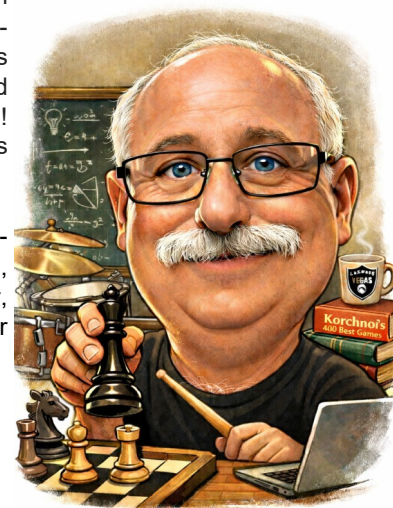
Thanks to Rex Gray and Joshua Anderson for their excellent proofreading and suggestions.

Please consider sending in an article or idea for an upcoming issue. More authors are always welcome and make the issues better!! Deadline for next issue is October 5.

Let me know how I am doing. Send your comments, suggestions, or even better, send me a story or idea for the next issue:

mcapron243@mchsi.com

—Mark Capron



White to mate in 1.

A T-Rex and a Velociraptor are sitting in a bar. And the Velociraptor points to a Triceratops in the corner and says, "Why is he first to get served?" And the T-Rex says, "Because he was Herbivorous!"

Topic: Annual Meeting

In person: DeVos Place Convention Center (Nelson Room); Grand Rapids, Michigan

Time: Aug 6, 2026 09:00 AM Eastern Time (US & Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81063264844?pwd=bmuPbbFw0bFtBJzPXJd3egmT5amig.1>

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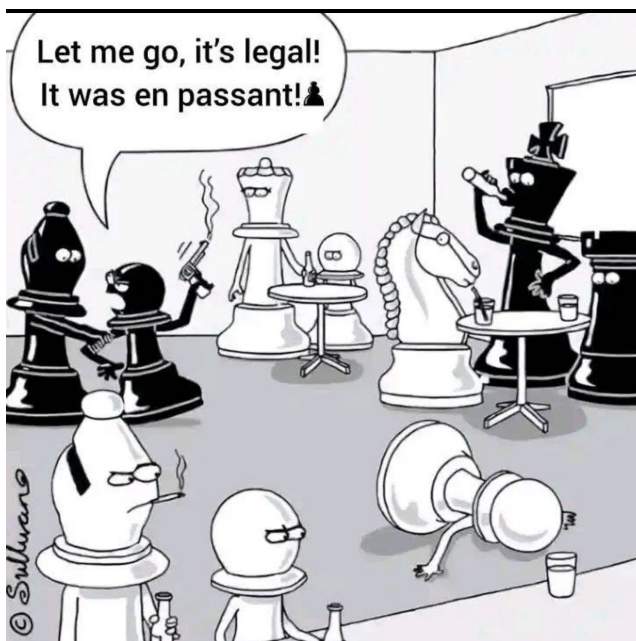
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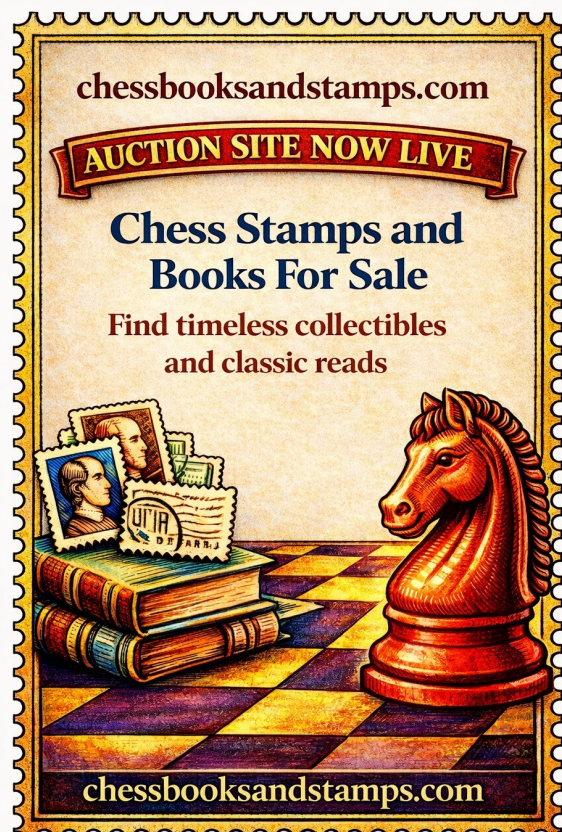
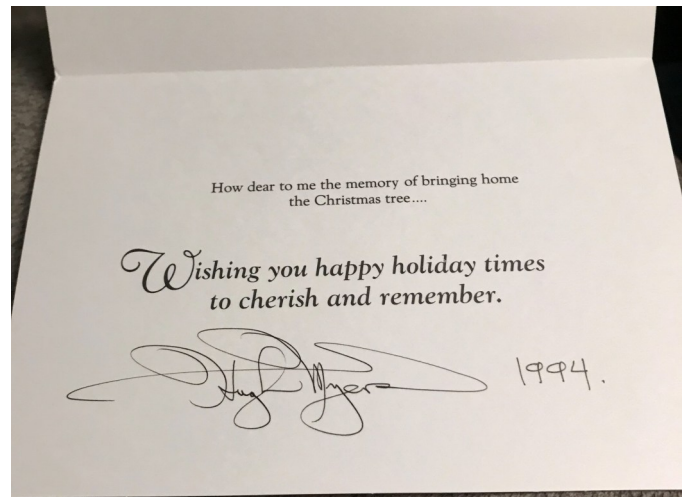
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“...if you didn’t understand the working of the sentence, he said, you had no chance of achieving precision and clarity, and if you aimed for the elegant and the poetic but couldn’t make subject and verb agree, you could produce nothing but mush. He preached internal harmony for all kinds of sentences, no matter what their content.”

—The Grouchy Grammarian.

Christmas card I received from Hugh Myers of the famed *Myers Opening Bulletin*—Editor (Mark Capron)



Internet Chess Club Pioneer Marty Grund Passes

by Brian Karen

First published on Brian's Facebook page [Brian Karen](#)

Rest in peace, Marty. My friend, you were a true pioneer.

Today (June 15, 2026), the chess world lost a legend, and I lost an old friend. Marty Grund passed away, leaving behind a legacy that transformed how millions of people experience the royal game.

Looking at this video, I'm flooded with memories of where we started. Long before the slick interfaces of modern websites, Marty and I were right there in the wild trenches of the 1990s. We were just a couple of guys navigating 300-baud modems, text-based ASCII boards, and astronomical dial-up bills, dreaming of a way to connect chess players across the globe. Together, alongside a few others, we eventually started the Internet Chess Club (ICC). I was an administrator, Marty was a partner. This was one of, if not the first, commercial businesses of any type on the internet.

Marty went from a 1400 rated self-described "stained glass guy from Des Moines" who loved chess and chess players, to a pioneering figure in the online chess world, who rubbed shoulders with World Champions. We were in the trenches together, managing the absolute chaos of broadcasting the 1995 Kasparov vs. Anand World Championship match from a glass booth at the top of the World Trade Center. We watched future greats like Magnus Carlsen and Hikaru Nakamura grow up on our server. The ICC even accidentally helped name "bullet chess."

But what I'll miss most isn't the history we made; it's the heart Marty brought to it. Whether he was getting hilariously roasted live on the air by Howard Stern, or single-handedly rallying the ICC community to fund national tournament trips for underprivileged kids from the West Side of Chicago, Marty lived to connect with people. He made the chess world smaller, kinder, and infinitely more fun.

Thank you for the memories, the late-night laughs, and the incredible ride, Marty. You made the world smile. You loved people and people loved you. Rest easy, my friend.

https://youtu.be/mrx_L1qwBT0?si=6h1o99C7Vc4sew_V

[Obituary](#) from Iles Funeral Homes in Des Moines, IA

Martin Jay Grund, 73, passed away on June 15, 2026, following a brief, but courageous battle with cancer.

He is survived by his beloved wife of more than 49 years, Marti Grund; his daughter, Alexis Bednyak (Jerry); his son, Jordan

Grund; his cherished grandchildren, Ava, Natalie, and Simon Bednyak; his brother, Larry Grund; his beloved mother-in-law, Connie Friedson; and many dear relatives and friends. He was preceded in death by his parents, Herman and Betty Grund.

Born in Des Moines, Marty or "Mr. Marty" as he was known, grew up in Urbandale and was a 1970 graduate of Hoover High School. After a brief stint at Grandview College, he sold his prized bicycle and decided to travel the world. Living in both Jamaica and Maui for extended periods of time and thoroughly enjoying the 1970s, he finally decided to return to Iowa. It was his friendship with his current brother-in-law, Jeff, that led him to meet the love of his life, Marti, at a birthday party. They married in 1978.

Marty spent his 20s with a variety of trades, but it was a self-taught hobby that led him to his decades-long career in stained glass. He and his business partner, Al McDermott, opened The Stained Glass Store in 1984 - a studio that focused on the craftsmanship, design, and restoration of stained glass windows in homes and places of worship across the US - including Terrace Hill, The Iowa State Capitol, and the Polk County Courthouse. He sold the business to trusted employees in 2017.

Chess became another one of Marty's great passions and led him to an unexpected second career. In 1995, he helped build the Internet Chess Club (ICC), the first commercial online chess club. Over the years, he rose from administrator to President, traveling the world to promote the game he loved. Along the way, he formed countless friendships, connected with many of the world's top grandmasters, and played a meaningful role in bringing chess to a new generation of players through his time with the organization.

Marty loved life. He was an avid Cubs fan and an athlete himself growing up. He and his family were life-long members at Beth El Jacob Synagogue which Marty proudly reengaged in both in religious and leadership roles. And he was a superb chef and showed his love for people by cooking and hosting them for a meal.

He didn't have a single enemy and had more friends than he could count. But more than anything, he cherished connecting with people. He said in his final days that getting people to smile at him was one of his greatest joys. There is not enough space in this obit to do him justice.

The family extends heartfelt appreciation to Josh Gustafson, Marianne, Dr. Hancock, Dr. Buroker, Dr. Stradling, and Dr. Mira for respecting his desire to fight. The deepest and most special thanks to Kelly and the girls at Care Companion and Suncrest Hospice. We are forever indebted to you all.

May his memory continue to be a blessing to all who knew and loved him.



Resurfaced: Las Huellas del Tablero

When Chess Was Illustrated Before It Was Standardized

by Chris Martinez G

There continues to be something unexpectedly rewarding about reading old chess magazines. Every issue seems to reveal another clue, another small detail patiently waiting to be noticed decades later.

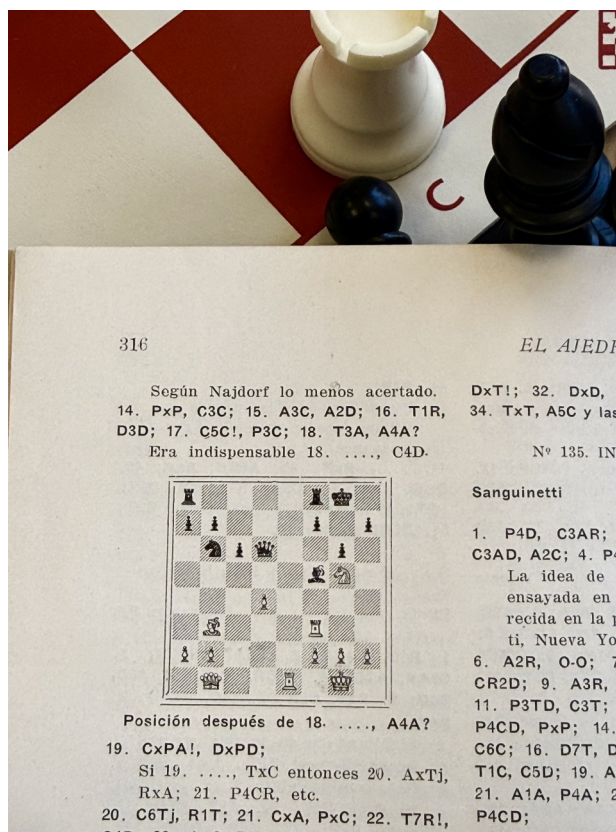
In this installment of *Resurfaced*, I continue my search for clues from another era, looking for what still has the ability to resurface. Every magazine I revisit becomes less about the games themselves and more about everything surrounding them: the advertisements, the typography, the paper, even the imperfections. Together, they tell a much larger story.

The more time I spend with these publications, the more convinced I become that they preserve far more than tournament results, as we like to think.

They preserve a way of thinking. *Preservan un modo de pensar.*

This time, what caught my attention wasn't an article. It wasn't a famous player. It wasn't even a game. It was the diagrams.

Not the positions themselves but the pieces (icons) used to represent them.



At first glance, viewed through the ordinary lens of flipping through a magazine, they appear unremarkable. After all, they're simply chess diagrams illustrating a position. But the longer I studied them, the more I realized I wasn't looking at symbols.

I was looking at illustrations. The kings wore elaborate crowns. The queens carried themselves with dignity. The bishops resembled church officials. The rooks looked unmistakably like castles. The knights weren't simplified silhouettes; they looked like medieval cavalry carved by hand. Each piece possessed personality. Each one seemed to carry the weight of history.

Looking at the pages of *El Ajedrez Argentino*, I couldn't help but feel that the artists weren't merely trying to show a chess position. They were trying to tell a story. The diagrams themselves became part of the reading experience.

That was the moment I stopped looking at the illustrations as decorations and started looking at them as evidence. Evidence of how another generation chose to depict chess, not to romanticize the past, but simply to understand how they saw the game.

A Tale of Two Magazines

Curiosity eventually led me to compare one of these diagrams with a much more recent issue of *Chess Life*. The contrast was immediate.



The Argentine magazine presents the position almost like an illustration from a storybook. The pieces possess texture, shadows, movement, and character. The diagram quietly blends into the page, inviting the reader to linger.

The modern *Chess Life* diagram speaks a different visual language. Large coordinates. Bold typography. Simplified pieces. A clean, unmistakable presentation. Everything serves one purpose: Communicating information as clearly and efficiently as possible.

Neither approach is wrong.

They're simply answering different questions.

One asks, "How can we make this page beautiful?"

The other asks, "How can we make this position immediately understandable?"

Somewhere between those two philosophies, something quietly changed. Chess diagrams stopped being illustrations. They became information. And somewhere along the way, we stopped asking whether they could be both.

A Brief Historical Look

That transformation didn't happen by accident.

In 1849, Nathaniel Cook introduced what would become known as the Staunton chess set, promoted by the English master, Howard Staunton. Before then, chess players throughout Europe used an extraordinary variety of regional designs: St. George, Régence, Selenus, Barleycorn—each reflecting the artistic traditions of the place from which it came.

They were beautiful. They were expressive. They were sometimes confusing. The Staunton pattern solved that problem.

Its pieces became immediately recognizable, making tournament play easier while creating a universal visual language for chess. By the twentieth century, it had become the international standard—a decision history has largely validated.

Yet history doesn't prevent us from asking another question.

¿Qué quedó atrás?

Today we live in a world that naturally gravitates toward standardization. Fonts become standardized. Street signs become standardized. Logos become simplified. User interfaces become standardized. Phone chargers become standardized.

Chess pieces became standardized too. There is tremendous value in that.

A player in California can sit across from someone in Poland, Argentina, Japan, or Mexico and immediately understand the same board without speaking the same language.

That is one of standardization's greatest accomplishments. But I wonder if every standard quietly asks us to surrender something in return. Perhaps ornament. Perhaps regional identity. Perhaps imagination itself.

The old diagrams seem almost unconcerned with universal acceptance. They simply existed as expressions of their time. They reflected what artists believed a king should resemble. What a castle should evoke. What a knight should become.

In that sense, they weren't merely depicting chess. They were documenting culture.

Something else occurred to me while comparing these two magazines.

Someone once decided those illustrated pieces deserved to be printed. An artist drew them. An editor approved them. A publisher gave them space on the page. Years later, someone else decided simplicity better served the reader.

Neither decision was necessarily wrong. But both reveal something about the people who made them. One generation valued artistic interpretation. Another valued immediate clarity.

Both choices became part of chess history.

What fascinates me most is that none of these thoughts came from reading an article inside either magazine. They came from looking at the margins. From studying details most readers would probably turn past without a second thought.

A small chess diagram printed decades ago managed to elicit more questions than many modern articles answer. Maybe that's what makes old magazines so compelling.

Long after the tournaments have ended... Long after the champions have passed... Long after the publishers have stopped printing them... The pages continue speaking. Ink survives. Paper survives. Illustrations survive.

*****Continued on page 11*****

In the Lⁱmelight: Mike Leahy

Interview by Mark Capron

Please tell us a little bit about yourself and your family.

I was born and raised in Ohio and I'm still happy to live here. My seven brothers and sisters are still doing well. I have five kids and seven grandkids, all of whom I'll see in a few weeks at Disney World, our favorite place to play.

Wow, you have a large family. When did you begin playing chess? And who taught you?

Starting in the third grade I spent a lot of time in the public library. I have always been fascinated by books, and I came across a children's book about chess. Nobody I knew played chess, but I decided to learn the game on my own just because I came across that book. I can still recall the colorful cover art of a castle and a knight.

Later in the Fischer boom I would spend my time with my nose in Edmar Mednis' *How to Beat Bobby Fischer*.

What are a few of your chess playing highlights?

In the first round of a Swiss, I had Black against an expert named Dale. I was rated maybe 1350. Dale was the strongest player I knew. At move seven I managed to skewer his queen to his king with my bishop, a crushing lead in material. My opponent just sat there staring at his blunder for about five minutes. The more I waited, the worse I felt about my opponent's misfortune. I started becoming embarrassed and nervous, and at some point I was shaking so hard that I was certain that I was either going to throw up or pass out!

Without looking up at Dale, I said, "I offer a draw." To say he was surprised was an understatement. He extended his hand saying, "I have no choice!" Little did he know that I did not have the nervous energy to continue playing if he had decided to.

Later in life, at around a 1700 rating, chess almost got me and my friends killed.

I had a knack for blindfold chess. I once beat three absolute beginners simultaneously by calling out my moves while keeping a conversation going at the same time. When I finished all three games they thought I was some sort of chess god.

Then one Sunday evening, my friend Mike Dixon was speeding down the highway, driving us all home from a weekend Swiss in Cleveland. My wife Sally and his wife Carol were in the back seat behind us. Mike and I decided

to play blindfold chess. We rattled off our usual Lasker-Pelikan line of the Sicilian and I played my novelty.

Mike went into a deep think - and started driving right off the edge of the highway into the median! His wife Carol yelled at him. He veered back onto the highway and attempted to calm his wife. Moments later he started thinking about the position again and drove right off the highway - **again**. Carol screamed, "Stop playing chess!"

She may have saved all of our lives that day.



Mike at Rise of the Resistance

What led you to developing the program Bookup back in 1984?

I kept myself busy in 1984 with a job doing computer programming and with my undergrad classes at Ohio State. My friends at the Dark Horse chess club seemed to have all the time in the world to prepare. My friend Bob Bainter would brag that he worked as a grave digger, and after he dug each new grave he'd sit on the edge of the hole and study chess for an hour.

I needed to compete with that, so in my spare time at work I crafted what would become Bookup. In those days, opening theory lived and died by those three-inch-wide tables of moves in books like *Modern Chess Openings* or *Batsford Chess Openings*. My software could print out those tables on green bar paper which is 15 inches wide. I made it so that you could tile the pages resulting in opening analysis that was the size of wallpaper. That software became what the world would know as Bookup.

Was Bookup the first major program you created?

Yes, Bookup was the first major program I created. I took out a classified ad in *Chess Life* magazine. They charged a dollar a word. I remember scraping together the \$54 for that first ad (this was back when first run movies cost a dollar) and then waiting two months for the issue of *Chess Life* to appear on newsstands.

The checks and money orders started filling my mailbox. To celebrate my good fortune, I took all of my chess playing buddies and their families (including the Dixons) to dinner at the finest restaurant in the city called the Kahiki. I went on to splurge for a full-page ad that cost \$1,000. I made raving fans of my customers and I never looked back.

Several years ago, you changed the name from Bookup to Chess Opening Wizard. Why?

Renaming the app from Bookup to Chess Openings Wizard was probably one of the bigger mistakes I made in the business. I did it purely to win the search engine wars. Nobody interested in chess openings knew to search Yahoo or Google for "Bookup."

But back in the day, every serious chess player knew that being "booked up" meant you had memorized a dangerous amount of opening lines. I should have kept the name.

What makes Chess Opening Wizard stand out in the marketplace?

What makes Chess Openings Wizard stand out is its extreme focus on getting you prepared. Whether you're studying openings or endgame theory, if there's a power tool that makes the job easier, COW has it.

Was Bookup really created to emulate Kotov's approach to learning, studying? Not really a question, but the strength of Bookup is its ability to recognize transpositions, which, as I understand it, successfully relied upon Zobrist key indexing, allowing Bookup instantly to recognize transpositions... and that set it apart then and now from ChessBase. Is that true, and can you elaborate on this architecture?

Early on, hard drive space was at a premium. ChessBase stored each move in a chess game in an encrypted format with just one byte per chess move. This was done by ordering the legal moves on the chessboard starting with all the possible moves from a1 to a8. So, a stored game of 1111 would stand for 1.a4 a5 2.Ra2 Ra7. This made it possible for ChessBase to store a million games on reasonably sized drives.

Bookup (and now COW) spent a byte storing the contents of each square in each position. Consequently, a Bookup file with the same 'moves' was more than 64 times larger than it was in ChessBase.

The upside came when Bookup could instantly find any transposition no matter how deep in the game you went. Stronger players knew the power of identifying transpositions and that kept Bookup competitive.

I got press credentials for the Karpov-Kasparov world championship match in New York. Each of the computers in the press room had ChessBase installed on them. I added Bookup. Whenever a novelty was played, reporters ran to their terminals to file their stories with the most interesting part being the position that was reached for the very first time in chess history (according to the massive ChessBase files).

Before Karpov or Kasparov would reach a new position in their game, I would search for games with the same ECO code and then import those games into Bookup. As often as not, Bookup would show that the "novelty" declared by the press was not actually new. Rather the world champions were transposing to another game from the ChessBase files, but through a move order that ChessBase missed in their opening keys.

You recently created another program called MasterChess 9000. What is it and how will people benefit from it? What makes it stand out versus other programs in the market?

The benefit of MasterChess 9000? You basically get most of the power and the games and the playing strength of ChessBase and Fritz, but you pay a tiny fraction of the cost. MasterChess also does not use opening keys, so it's very unlikely to miss a transposition when searching for all games that reach a certain position.

ChessBase has increased the quality of their opening keys over time by incorporating the moves of more games, but they still miss any new games that jump from one known line to another.

There are lots of programs out there that cover various aspects of the game. Has anybody ever tried to buy you out?

Not yet! I once was offered \$35,000 for the domain. That was another reason to rename the product, and I was willing to do it at the time. The offer fell through though.



Mike from Bookup with his grandson

How can an older person use COW or MC9000 to effectively re-enter over-the-board tournament play after a long lay-off?

This is my favorite question. I made a video about this which got a couple thousand views, but in my humble opinion it should get much more attention. It is one of my favorite study concepts.

Basically, I encourage leveraging emotional excitement. This can best be done with the Professional version of Chess Openings Wizard, but if you're looking to re-enter tournament play after a lay-off you should 1) play to the edge of what you know, 2) decide what you'll play in that position, and 3) yell into your microphone why you decided to play that move.

Do this while you are moving the pieces and drawing arrows to demonstrate your reasoning. You will find that your ability to memorize new ideas is way better than you think it is.

[Old school hack to remember all the chess you study - YouTube](#)

Do you have a story or two of someone's success story due to COW or MC9000 that you would like to share?

Peter Svidler once stayed with the Bookup team at the World Open. He paid full price for the Professional version as back then I didn't yet have the policy of giving it free to grandmasters. Peter noted our "200 point guarantee" and said that if he did that he'd be a hundred points stronger than Kasparov, the world champion at the time.

I told Peter that the guarantee still applied to him. Peter went on to beat Kasparov, but I can't say how much of that was due to using my app. He was making a habit of winning Soviet championships long before we met.

Peter did give me the only grandmaster endorsement I've ever gotten. It's still on the Bookup website somewhere. I have never paid for an endorsement, but when Peter said he wanted the latest Hootie and the Blowfish CD, I made sure he got one.

Do any of the World Championship contenders use COW or MC9000? If so, can you elaborate on some aspects of how they use it and how they got connected to the program?

While I can't say how many world championship contenders are using my apps, I can say that all correspondence champions have been using it for the last 40 years. Preparing openings for correspondence chess has become a brutal undertaking, and no one would want to take on that Herculean task without Chess Openings Wizard.

Do you recall what the first chess book you ever had was?

I don't recall the title of my first chess book, but I found it at my local library around age 8. No one I knew played chess at the time, so it was odd that I was drawn to this book.

What are some of your favorite books, chess and non-chess?

You'd think that my favorite chess book would be one on the opening. I recall trying to memorize Keene's *Opening Repertoire for the Attacking Player* over 40 years ago. My favorites these days all address with the thinking process of a tournament player. The first is Kotov's *Think Like a Grandmaster* which was the driving force behind the apps I created. More recently I've been diving into multiple titles by Jacob Aagaard whose opinions often contradict Kotov's.

For non-chess titles I'm drawn to practical psychology. Favorites would include Tony Robbins' *Awaken the Giant Within* and Andy Shaw's *Creating a Bug Free Mind*. Everybody has read the first one and it would seem no one has read the second one. :)

What is your personal chess library like and are you able to use it to help in the programming process?

Whenever I want to test some facet of Chess Openings Wizard (backsolving, overnight analysis, training involving repetition of position) I break out Larry Kaufman's *New Repertoire for Black and White*. He boldly laid out his entire opening preparation with analysis from multiple engines. I've talked with Larry about turning the book into an app, but nothing has come of it yet. I'm fascinated by the idea that a very complete GM repertoire is available to anyone, and given the fascination with opening preparation, why would a player not adopt a grandmaster's preparation wholesale?

Who is your favorite chess player and what makes them special to you?

I grew up in the Fischer boom. He still fascinates me because he prepared alone, in contrast to his peers who had incredible support. I'm also a fan of Tal, who (like Magnus) was unafraid to lead his opponents into questionable positions to create constant chances for errors.

What inspires you (besides burritos...LOL)?

I'm inspired by books and people who see the goodness in everything. I'm thinking of the books and workshops by Esther Hicks in particular. I'm reminded of the Albert Einstein quote:

"I think the most important question facing humanity is, 'Is the universe a friendly place?'"

Do you have a favorite quote?

One of my favorite quotes is from Tony Robbins. "To know, and not to do, is not to know." So, for example, I might say that I know exactly what to do to get six pack abs. Well, if I'm not doing it then I really don't know how to do it. That quote keeps me honest.

If you could provide one piece of advice to help others improve their game using either of your programs, what would it be?

Learn to love the game! If you can smile as much as Magnus Carlsen then you are winning at the board and at everything else in your life.

What new projects are you currently working on and when might we see them?

Currently I'm working on a project code named "Epic" analysis. It's basically having an engine like Stockfish go over your entire opening repertoire and point out improvements or enterprising side variations to spring on your opponent. Through gamification it would drive you to expand your repertoire. It will make the backsolving and novelty finding functions in Chess Openings Wizard Professional obsolete.

Here is a video of Epic Analysis which was made only for beta testers:

[AI can look through your opening repertoire and recommend improvements. This is a game changer.](#)

Look for that "soon" as we say in the software world.

Thank you. Anything you would like to add for our readers?

Thank you! I had fun with this interview. Fun may be the most important reason to do anything these days.

Find Mike's products on the internet at:

[Bookup.com – Professional Chess Openings Software](#)

*****Continued from page 7*****

And if we're willing to slow down long enough, they continue inviting new conversations with readers who weren't even born when they were first printed.

Perhaps that is the true value of resurfacing these publications. Not simply to remember the past, but to notice what the past quietly remembered about itself.

Perhaps the greatest thing these old magazines preserved wasn't chess at all. It was evidence that someone cared enough to make chess beautiful.

Maybe those old diagrams were never just diagrams. Maybe they were tiny works of art hidden inside instructional pages. Perhaps they remind us that chess has always been larger than sixty-four squares.

And perhaps the most interesting question isn't why the illustrations changed.

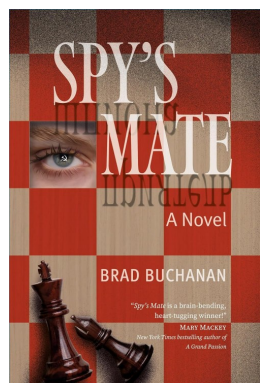
It's whether future generations will one day look at our own perfectly standardized diagrams and wonder what they reveal about us.

Two diagrams. Two eras. Two visual languages. One game.



Spy's Mate by Brad Buchanan

Reviewed by Cindy Wister



Growing up in the 80s, reminders of the Cold War were everywhere. Even as a child, I was cognizant that nuclear war was a threat, believed that the Soviets were the enemy of freedom, and wondered if spies were amongst us. It was even woven into our entertainment: GI Joe, Red Dawn, Ivan Drago vs. Rocky. And who could forget the many nemeses of James Bond? Nothing seemed more thrilling and simultaneously virtuous than taking down the KGB in those days.

So, when *Spy's Mate* by Brad Buchanan was introduced to me as a chesspionage novel, I could hardly wait to dive in. The book did not disappoint. Buchanan cleverly weaves an engaging story about the rise of a chess prodigy set against the convoluted power struggles and propaganda of the former USSR. Starting out with many separate and seemingly isolated characters and plot lines, Buchanan skillfully connects all the dots by its satisfying end.

Structured in three sections, Part 1 (appropriately named "The Opening") introduces us to a young, rural boy named Yasha whose sick mother shows him how to play chess. Her illness has reached a point of severity requiring her to be admitted into a hospital, where she will remain indefinitely. Distraught, Yasha makes his mother promise that she will not die until he becomes the World Chess Champion. This pact fuels Yasha, and his penchant for chess becomes a gift that catches the attention of his school and the Soviet officials invested in developing talented youth. Yasha is eventually recruited to study under an elite coach at a government-run institute in Moscow, where he is also "educated" in the importance of chess to the Communist regime.

In parallel, the reader weaves between multiple intriguing characters and story lines including an American World Chess Champion - Jimmy Hunter (loosely modeled after Bobby Fischer), numerous chess challengers who range from morally neutral to downright nefarious, and countless political personalities vying to ensure a Soviet champion unseats Hunter, and to gain for themselves power within the Communist party.

Winning by any means is a prominent theme, as spies and leaders plot and broker deals, leaving the reader constantly wondering who can be trusted. As Buchanan commented in a recent interview, "Soviets were willing to bend the rules to favor their own top players and managed to corrupt quite a few of chess's top officials." Thus, it is not only the challenges of the game itself that Yasha and his allies must contend with, but also the manipulation that is all around him, even within

his own circle. Without getting into spoilers, "Part 2: The Middle Game" follows our protagonists and villains playing their over-the-board games and being moved around like pawns (if you'll forgive the pun). Perceived enemies of the system are disgraced, ostracized, or worse.

One of the most interesting aspects of Buchanan's storytelling is his use of chess games to advance the storyline and show character development. We see Yasha learning, blundering, and struggling through his games. Chess diagrams and actual games are woven throughout the book, which gives us insights into the players' minds and the moments of brilliance (and conversely, the recognition of defeat). Buchanan's use of diagrams and chess games, move by move, conveys the palpable pressure and tension between the opponents.

Because I only casually play chess, I also engaged my personal chess expert - my nine-year-old son* - to review this book and its games with me. Coincidentally, he also briefly studied chess under a Russian enrichment program, so his perspective was interesting and insightful. While he thoroughly enjoyed the book and vouched for the accuracy of most of the games, he raised an interesting question of how e5** could be played as the opening move of a quite significant game in the storyline, whereupon a new World Champion of Chess is crowned. Given Buchanan's intimate knowledge of chess, we doubted this was a simple oversight and pondered if the move was symbolic of something deeper, perhaps of the intrinsic wrongness of the player who is the primary foe of the novel.

As with chess, the theme of perseverance plays a key role in *Spy's Mate*. Repeatedly, Yasha is shown fighting to win his games, even defying chess etiquette and refusing to resign when he knows his game is lost. However, this stubborn persistence reflects his character as a player, and as a person undeterred by injustice, intimidation, or betrayal. Loss is part of the game, just as it is a part of life, and Yasha never forgets his true purpose. The novel culminates in "Part 3: The End Game" - Yasha's tumultuous journey through the Candidates, the World Championship, and a touching final scene with his mother once again in the hospital.

Overall, *Spy's Mate* (Thinker's Publishing) is a thought-provoking story that elegantly incorporates chess as a representation of struggle, sacrifice, and strategy. Buchanan casually leaves us with a few ambiguous crumbs, making me, for one, very grateful that Buchanan has already confirmed a sequel is underway.

*Before you reach out to Child Protective Services, I would like it to be known that I censored the more gritty and salacious parts out while reading the book with my son.

**This occurs in Chapter 5 of Book 1: The Opening.

Movie Chess

by Bob Basalla

A short while after my book *Chess in the Movies* (2005) came out, I was giving a presentation about its contents to a small group of semi-interested parties at a shopping mall chess club. We were circled around a table with a board set in an actual position from one of the films I had chronicled. I pointed out all the problems, both legal and logical, of the position, which appeared in a well-known big budget movie, and mentioned further that such errors, in my extensive experience, were sadly more the norm rather than the exception.

Grandmaster Alex Shabalov who happened to be present at this moment, made a cogent remark. "Movie chess," he summed it up.

And he was right. There does seem to be a distinctive flavor (odor?) to the types of chess positions used in the preponderance of films, at least those whose positions can be discerned due to multiple angles, overhead shots, or close-ups. The goal of this article is to describe this flavor to the reader, both for the purposes of scholarly elucidation as well as the sheer entertainment of it. Welcome to the weird, wild world of Movie Chess!

Problems with game depictions in movies are not exclusive to chess, of course. As critic Roger Ebert once said, never take a specialist to a film featuring their specialty or they will inevitably pick it apart. Place the word "game" before specialist and you get an equally true corollary statement. The movie world is often only superficially similar to the real one which we inhabit. Royal flush hands in poker and triple jumps or more in checkers are common in films, but rare in reality. Chess in movies, however, differs from these and all other games, especially board games, in at least two ways. First, there are many more examples of chess in movies than any other board game—by far. I know. I've researched this topic for decades. This means there are that many more opportunities to screw chess up relative to checkers, backgammon, Parcheesi, etc. Second, chess is almost uniquely malleable to symbolic usage because of its stark juxtaposition of opposites: black and white, man and woman, good and evil, protagonist/antagonist and so on, so there can be attempts to mold a chess position to fit a film's plot. Such thematic possibilities are so strong that many screenwriters and filmmakers rush to employ chess to imbue their concepts with more visual meaning, even if they themselves are only tangentially aware of how chess is actually played. Some of these folks may be lazy and don't care, but I suspect most have no idea that they are making not only the game, but also the characters playing the game, look rather silly to the subset of the audience that is chess adept. In other words, chess is good enough to use for symbolism, metaphors, and allegories, but not necessarily good enough to get right.

Enough ranting for now. Here are my parameters. There are many aspects of Movie Chess that can be discussed that I won't be getting into. An example would be the types of chess sets commonly used. Aside from Staunton design or other types of traditional sets, movies have a strong penchant for figurine pieces, usually as a way of analogizing them to various groups in the plot. This makes a certain sense. But don't get me started about the clear glass versus frosted glass chess sets that are inexplicably popular in films. They are not visually superior to many, even

most, other styles. And what's more, you can't tell at a glance which side is supposed to be white! I've seen it both ways in different films. (There I go again. I guess this whole column will be one long rant.) I also won't get into the types of individuals playing in these movie games, or the contexts in which they play. That is for another time.

What I *will* focus on are discernible positions and actual moves played, buttressing my observations with diagrams in evidence. Let's begin, shall we?

How the board and men are set up should be a basic staple for the use of chess in film. After all, most chess set sightings in movies are opening position skylines. A prudent consultation with any elementary chess primer would settle any questions about how the board and men should be initially deployed. Simple, right?

Apparently not, if we go by the great number of movie chess positions, opening setup or otherwise, that don't subscribe to the student's rhyming "light on right" guideline for placing a chessboard. The square h1 should be a light square (or one could equally say the corner square a1 should be dark, but that doesn't rhyme). It is truly astonishing, not to say disheartening, how many instances there are, even in non-indie big budget productions where the square at h1 is a dark square, which of course makes every other square on the board the incorrect hue. Such errors are long standing. Consider the earliest example I have of a mis-set board: *Tillie Wakes Up* (1917), over a century ago! No decade since 1917 is devoid of such instances.

I am not the only one to have noticed. In his recent book *The Chess Revolution* (2024), Peter Doggers lists some films of significance that display the board wrongly: *The Great Escape* (1963), *Never Say Never Again* (1983), *The DaVinci Code* (2006), and *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994). I know of these and could add scads more.

"What's the difference?" is a challenge made by some apparent apologists for this sloppiness, further noting "The game plays the same whatever color the squares are." But would these same people ask, "What's the difference?" if the net on a tennis court were strung crosswise the wrong way, or the pins at the end of a bowling alley had the head pin in the back? A better analogy yet would be baseball. Imagine you watch a movie that was not trying to be funny, and a scene presents the players running to what we traditionally consider to be third base when they hit the ball. After all, the game would play the same way, right? No, they would vociferously object that convention has it that first base is off to the right of home plate and players circle the bases counterclockwise. Exactly! And h1 should be a light square; otherwise, it is wrong. (Technique tip: I found that it often was easier to check if the h3 or a6 squares were light rather than h1, which often was obscured by a rook. And light squares were more reliable to visualize in casual movie background chess positions than dark ones that tend to blend together in many shots.)

The other setup challenge, whose correctness seems to elude all too many filmmakers, or at least their prop people, is the opening

placement of king and queen. “Queen goes on her own color” is an alien concept to far too many. I don’t have actual data on this, but at times it seems the correct stationing of the Royal Family comes down to a matter of sheer luck. Sometimes the white royals are inverted, sometimes the blacks are, and sometimes both are flipped.

In fact, wrong color squares and incorrect king/queen lineups are so common in Movie Chess that for my book I devised special symbols for each so I would not have to find hundreds of different ways to mention these facts to the readers. If the board is set wrongly, I put a bracketed hashtag in bold **[#]** in my text. If the white king and queen are in reversed starting blocks, I label it **[KQ]**. If the black king and queen are inverted, I label it **[kq]**, and if both are placed incorrectly, I use **[KQkq]**.

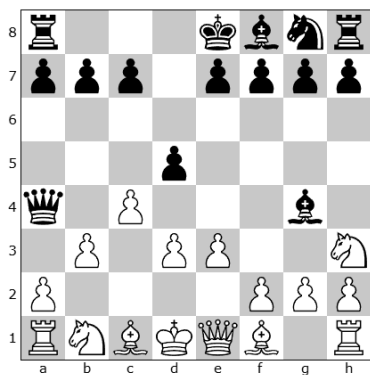
I would estimate that *at least* 40% of the movie chess positions where these parameters can be determined have the board and/or the kings and queens set wrong. (Although I am almost certainly in unique possession of the data set to research the incidence of these maladies to determine more exactly what percentage of movie chess sets are set incorrectly, I currently do not have the inclination to do so. Too many sightings are ambiguous. Plus having to rescreen so many data candidates to corroborate my first impression does not appeal to me. I am going here by my remembered experience. Take that into account when you evaluate my opinion.)

An amusing point is that if the board is 90 degrees out of phase **[#]** there is definitely the increased possibility of king/queen problems **[KQkq]** as well. There seems to be a relationship between the two screw ups which I explain thus: The person in charge of setting up the board did not know “light on right” but somehow *did* know the queen goes on her own color rule and placed the royals accordingly.

The False or Missed Call

Besides the directive “Your move,” the most common pronouncements during a Movie Chess game are “Check” and “Checkmate.” Neither call is necessarily the case during actual play. It is amazing to relate how often these calls are wrongly made in readily discernible positions. Did they think chess folk wouldn’t notice?

One example will suffice.

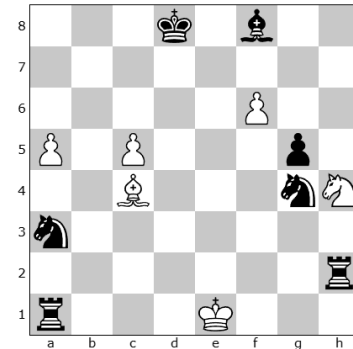


Position from *Carter's Army* (1970). White to move.

This position is from *Carter's Army* (1970), a TV movie about

American soldiers of color in WWII. I first note that the board is mis-set **[#]** (there is no easy way to display this with standard diagram forming programs) and white's king and queen appear to have begun reversed **[KQ]**. See how convoluted these problems are? At any rate, play continued 1.♔d1-d2 whereupon black went 1...♚a4-b4+ and announced “Mate,” even though two moves easily seen by novices, 2.♔d2-c2 or 2.♘b1-c3, stave off disaster. A small sampling of other films that falsely call checkmate: *The Lookout* (2007), *The Princess and the Cabbie* (1981), the critically acclaimed *Yentl* (1983), and the horror classic *The Thing* (1983), where the move, which is clearly shown on a computer screen, is not even check, let alone checkmate.

The inverse has also occurred.

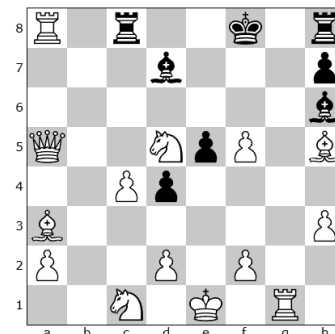


The *Week End Mystery* (1932). Checkmate ignored.

The Week End Mystery, a theatrical short from 1932, is the third film in the series of SS Van Dine's mysteries made by Warner. White finds his king in a mating net woven by the black rooks. Despite this, it appears to be black's move, and he plays ...♘a3-c2+, gleefully unaware that he has already won!

Calling check when it is not check, or mate when it is not mate, is not the only mistake in this regard. As we have seen, a king may stand in check when it is the opponent's move, and it may even remain in check or move into check on its own move. An especially disappointing setup occurs in the film *Woman in the Dark* (1951), where black illegally castles to escape a check! Impossible double checks are another problem.

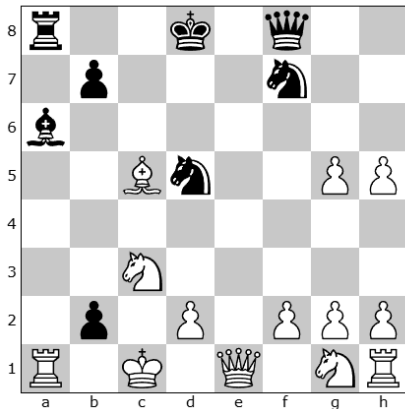
But the most egregious mistake in my mind occurs when *both* sides stand in check simultaneously. Let's look at some instances.



The *Whistle Blower* (1986). White helps black out of check!

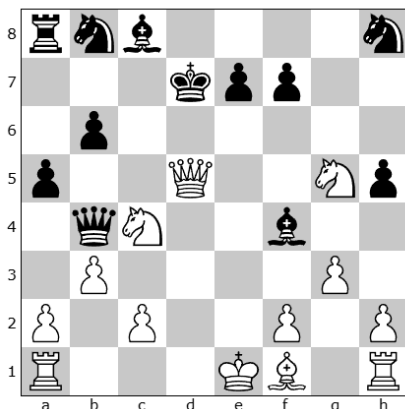
Black's king stands in check in *The Whistle Blower* (1986), even though it is white's move. But instead of pointing out this fact, white obligingly blocks his a3 bishop by 1.♗c4-c5. But black in-

sists on being in check as he responds with ...♖c8×♗c5, exposing His Majesty to the ♖a8! The game was being played in a prison if that is any mitigation.



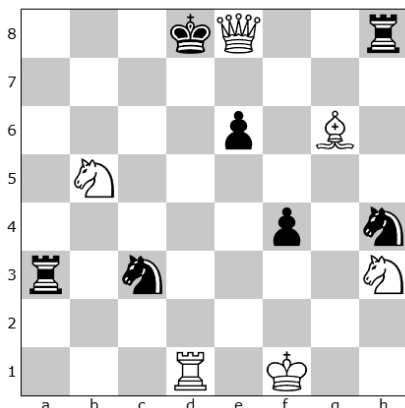
My Cousin Vinny (1982). White ignores the check.

In this judge's chamber position from *My Cousin Vinny* (1992) white plays 1.♗c3×♗d5, completely oblivious that his king remains in check (and that the white pawn configuration is impossible, making the position illegal).



DC Sniper (2003). Both sides stand in check.

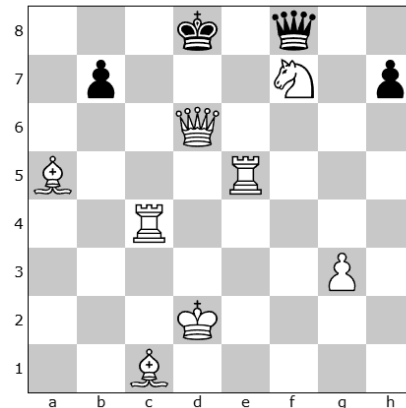
In this position from *DC Sniper* (2003 TV), both sides stand in check. Despite this, black plays ...♗b4-d2 and announces "Checkmate." Huh?



Flight of the Phoenix (2004). Oddball double check.

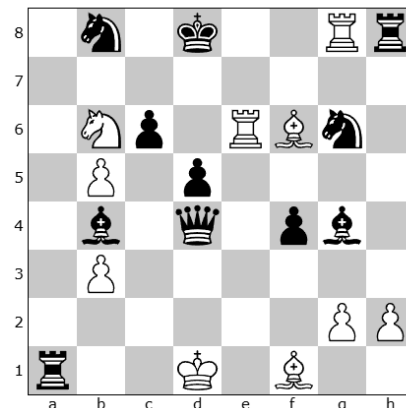
At first glance, this appears to be an impossible double check (and mate) in *Flight of the Phoenix* (2004), but a white pawn on d7 could have captured a black queen or bishop (or something underpromoted) and promoted to a queen on e8. Impossible? No. Ridiculously improbable? Yes.

There should be no excuse for chess position problems in animated features where all parameters of a scene are totally in control. Yet more than one exists.



Anastasia (1997). Impossible triple check.

This position from Disney's *Anastasia* (1997) shows black standing in an obviously impossible *triple check* (♗a5 ♗d6 ♗f7)!



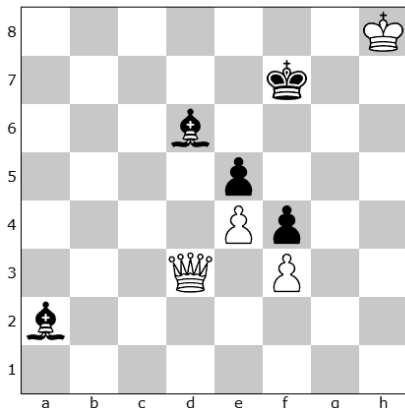
Our Holiday Story (2024). Impossible checks.

Even worse, in a position from the Christmas movie *Our Holiday Story* (2024 TV), *both* sides stand in impossible multiple checks (♗f6 and ♗g8 for black, ♗a1, ♗d4 and ♗g4 for white)! Did the designer of this position know nothing about chess?

Finally, a pet peeve that others have remarked upon is the infamous middle game check being met by a counter that instantly checkmates the opponent. "Check," says one smiling player. "Checkmate," responds the other, much to the first player's chagrin. Barring chess problem compositions, such nontrivial circumstances are almost impossible. Typically the positions aren't clear enough to verify the veracity of one or both claims, but here are a few I casually found in my files you can look up: *Friday the 13th, Part 2* (1981), *The Princess and the Cabbie* (1981 TV), *Cube Zero* (2004), and *Knights of the South Bronx* (2006 TV).

Super Powers Galore

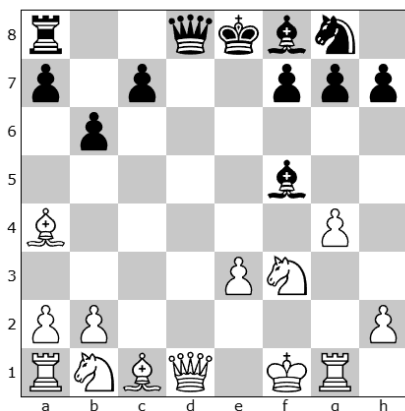
Illegal moves and positions of all sorts pervade Movie Chess. Kings can move like queens (more than one square, that is) as in *Final Move* (2006); bishops can move like knights as in *A Midnight Clear* (1991) featuring $\text{♜f4} \times \text{♜g2}$, and *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) featuring $\dots \text{♞d6-b5}$; and in *The Adams Chronicles* (1976) a pawn can move like a knight, a different pawn like a rook, and yet another pawn as a bishop. Do you see a pattern here? They don't have to make any chess sense at all.



Cass Timberlane (1948). A most curious position.

In the film *Cass Timberlane* (1948), the wife checks her husband's king by leaping her queen from d3 to g6 over the intervening white pawn e4 in a single bound (♞d3-g6+)!

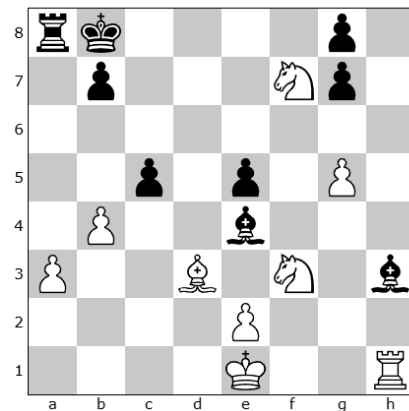
Regarding jumping pieces, the subgenre of chessmen being employed as checkers should also be mentioned. *The Fighting Kentuckian* (1949), *Finian's Rainbow* (1968), and *You're in the Army Now* (1941) are standout examples. They are hardly alone.



Spice World (1998). Unique way to escape check.

In *Spice World* (1998), black blocks ♞a4+ by playing $\dots \text{♞g8-d7}$, an extra-long "L!" (If you value your sanity, don't even begin contemplating how the h8 rook met its demise.)

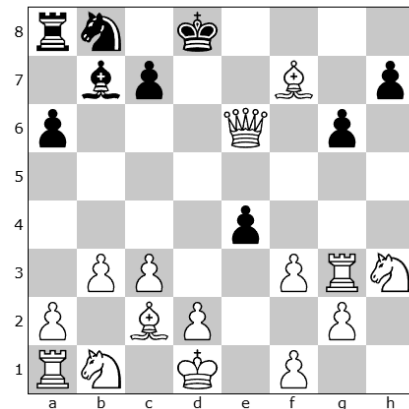
I've found more than a few instances of pawns illegally sitting on the first rank. Here's one from a big budget hit.



The Bodyguard (1992). Problematic position.

My guess is that "West Virginia Rules" must have been in force for a black pawn to stand on g8.

A wayward white pawn appears in *Revenge of the Nerds II: Nerds in Paradise* (1987), where we would have thought they knew better.



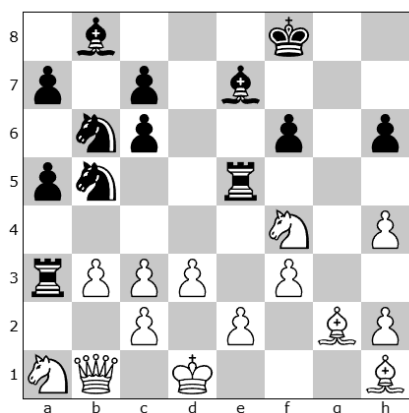
Revenge of the Nerds II (1987). What a position!

We should also note **♯** as well as the likelihood that the kings and queens began reversed. But this and the previous Bodyguard position also have a problem that is discussed next.

How many of you were ready to crank up your e-mail to triumphantly point out an error that I did not mention in the past two diagrams? Namely, in each case, two bishops on the same team stand on the same color squares (e4 and h3 for the black bishops in *The Bodyguard*, c2 and f7 for the white bishops in *Revenge of the Nerds 2: Nerds in Paradise*). Of course I was aware of this common Movie Chess illegality.

But just how common is it? Well, let me toss out a few more: *Big Red* (1962) has white bishops a7 and h4; *A Storm in Summer* (1999) has black bishops on b5 and c8 as well as illegal black pawns on b8 and h8; *C. A. T. Squad: Stalking Danger* (1986) has black bishops on a1 and f4; *Zig Zag* (1999) has white bishops on b1 and f1; *Chopin: Desire for Love* (2002) has black bishops on c5 and f6; *Wonderful World* (2008) has black bishops on f6 and f8. Even a Russian crime comedy, *Shkola Dlya Tolstushek* (2010) surprisingly has black bishops on b6 and f8. And so on. And on.

There's more. *Next Day Air* (2009) ups the ante even further.



Next Day Air (2009). What?

Both sets of bishops are on the same color (white: ♖g2 ♗h1, black: ♜b8 ♝e7) with the black b8 bishop standing illegally (unless we're talking Chess 960) due to the hemming a7 and c7 pawns. It couldn't have reached b8 in a game and therefore must illegally have started there.

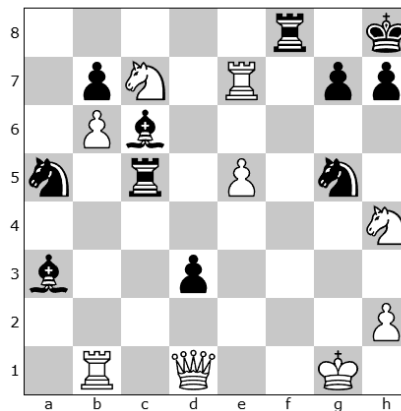
A similar example is the TV movie *Second Chances* (2013) where *all* bishops are on light squares; the whites on a4 and d7 and the blacks on d5 and e8. (It should be noted that this is the second chance that *Second Chances* had to make this article. The first was an illegal white knight move from f5-e5, incidentally undoing a check even though it was white's turn! As you can see, Movie Chess errors often come in bunches.) I should mention that not all these positions with same color bishops are strictly illegal. In some cases, retrograde analysis involving under-promoted pawns could verify the legality of the position, but just barely. For all practical purposes these positions can't occur in a rational game.

The same sort of analysis can be done for many odd pawn clusters one sees in Movie Chess. Often there haven't been enough captures by one or both sides to jumble the pawns to these positions. In addition, it is common in such pawn configurations for the majority of the pieces to be on their home squares, begging the question: how did all this mayhem occur without much, if any, development. Or did the pieces, like boxers, retreat to their first rank after the round?

A rarer malady concerns extra pieces. Sometimes, counting up pawns on and off the board reveal that one side or the other possesses more than eight. In the animated *Alvin and the Chipmunks: the Squeakquel* (2009), white has two rooks on the board and one off. Nobody must have noticed. Even the Russians can screw this up. During a simul, three white bishops appear on the board at the same time in the Soviet film *Welcome, No Trespassing* (1964) (b5, c1, and g1). One clearly belongs to a different set, so it may be barely excusable (but this is not the case with the black pawn resting on g8).

Nonsensical/Phantastical Setups

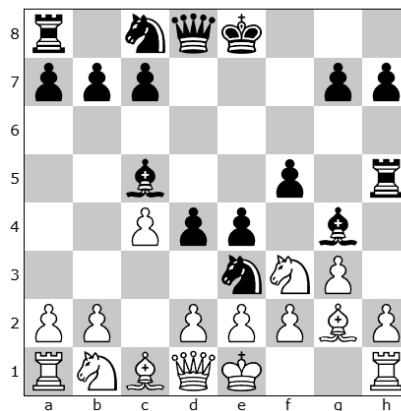
Some positions make no sense for an actual game, but were designed with symbolism in mind. The late IM Jeremy Silman's concoction for the first Harry Potter movie, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (2001) in the USA is a famous example.



Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone (2001). Composed position.

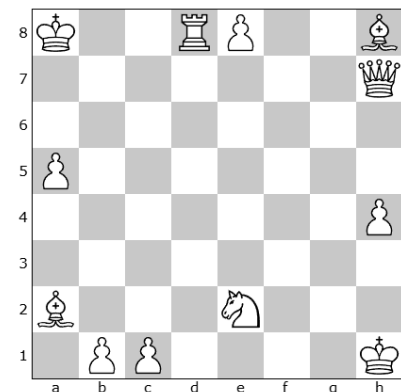
Silman had to work around the story's necessities such as the fact that Harry was riding the black ♞a3 and Ron was on the all-important black ♞g5.

The film *1984* (1984) presents a tableau to visually represent the idea of a nefarious government putting a boot in the individual's face forever.



Position from Winston Smith vs. The State, achieved in the film *1984*.

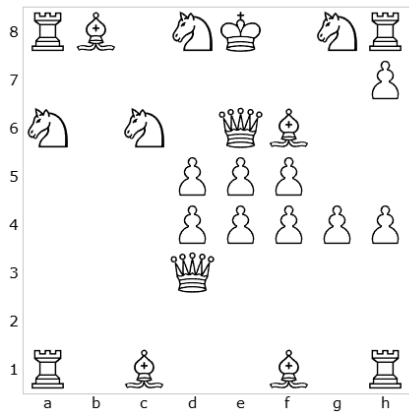
Passing into the fantasy realm, *The Most Dangerous Match* (1973 Columbo TV movie) puts a paranoid grandmaster on the misty midst of the next board.



The Most Dangerous Match (1973). A grandmaster's "knightmare" situation.

Yes, there are two white kings and no black pieces at all, and white pawns inhabit the first and eighth ranks, presenting the garbled reality of a dream sequence, not the stupidity of the chess controllers on the set.

Even more fantastic is the following position on the board in John Lennon and Yoko Ono's avant-garde film *Imagine* (1972).



Imagine (1972). "Imaginary" position.

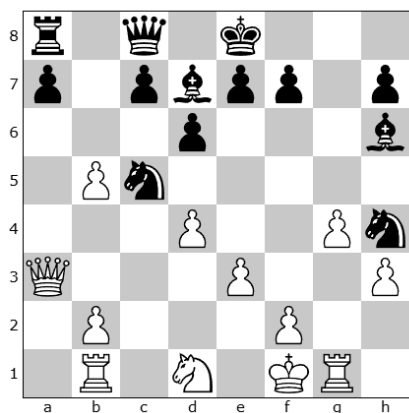
Yoko Ono's all white chess sets (men and squares) displayed in art galleries were meant to bring the world together as one. That they could be heartily endorsed by Arian Nations as well did not seem to have occurred to her.

Other examples, such as *Donald in Mathmagic Land* (1959), can be produced, but that's enough for now.

Illogical, Unrealistic, Borrowed

At times the games are so amateurish (beginner-like) that they make the supposedly smart players in the film (scientists, detectives, chess "masters" and so on) appear foolish, at least to the chess aware in the audience. Multiple pieces hang all over the place, center pawns remain unmoved, no piece coordination or logical pawn structures, easy mates in one going unseen, et cetera.

However, there are some positions that are clearly concocted, but at least they make some sense. I'm thinking about specimens such as *Bandidas* (2006).

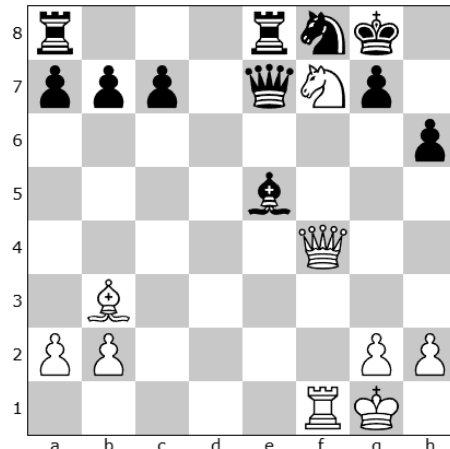


Bandidas (2006). Black to force mate.

Although the position is not particularly realistic, at least someone

bothered to create an actual forced mating sequence: 1... $\text{Qd7} \times \text{Ab5}+$ 2. Qf1-e1 (interposing the queen on d3 lasts a move longer) 2... $\text{Ah4-f3}++$. And who doesn't want to see Salma Hayak mating?

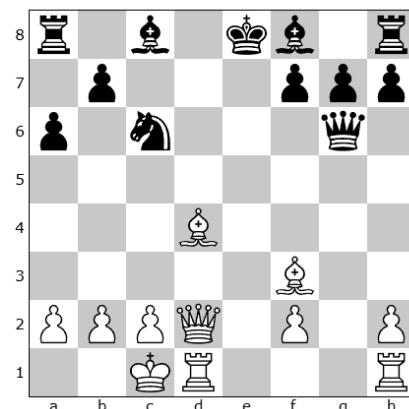
In lieu of making something up, some films put a readymade position from a famous game on the board (or at least attempt to). Below is a well-known example.



From Russia with Love (1963). White to move.

The position appears in the second James Bond picture, *From Russia with Love* (1963). We see it on a large display board in a huge hall where an important match is being contested. More pertinent to us is that the position is based on a real game: Spassky vs. Bronstein, Leningrad, 1960. I say "based on" because the position isn't exactly Spassky-Bronstein; two white pawns are missing from d4 and c5. This omission is serious enough that it might give black a way to defend. Many real game positions in movies are of this "based on" variety, and some of them, like the example above, don't work as advertised. Here white (Kronsteen) plays 1. $\text{Af7} \times \text{Qe5}+$ and after 1... Bg8-h7 2. $\text{Wf4-e4}+$, black (MacAdams) resigns, as in the actual game.

An example I believe I brought to the attention of the chess world at large is from *The Left Hand of God* (1955), a late era Humphrey Bogart film with the following position.



The Left Hand of God (1955). Bogart forces a win.

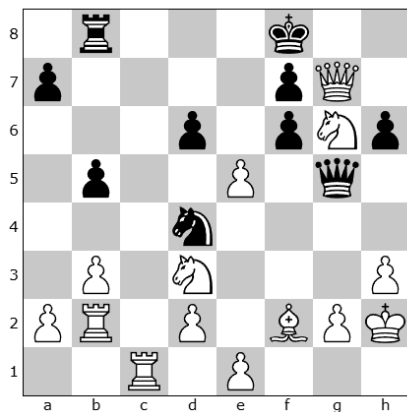
I had been examining the side shot of this game (the only vantage) between Bogart and actor Herbert Marshall for a while, following the play. Suddenly it dawned on me that Bogart was running through the last moves of Nimzovich vs. Alapin, Riga,

1913! Recognizing that, I was able to verify the position as the above, and the moves as: 1.♔d4-f6 ♚g6xf6 2.♖h1-e1+ ♕f8-e7 3.♕f3x♗c6+ ♜e8-f8 4.♗d2-d8+ ♕e7x♗d8 5.♖e1-e8++. Since Bogart was long known as a real-life chess devotee, is it too much of a stretch to think he suggested the brilliant finish he gets to play here?

As of this writing, I am closing in on 100 famous games (and a few chess problems) chronicled on celluloid and video so far. They don't always get it right, but at least they are trying.

Getting Ludicrous

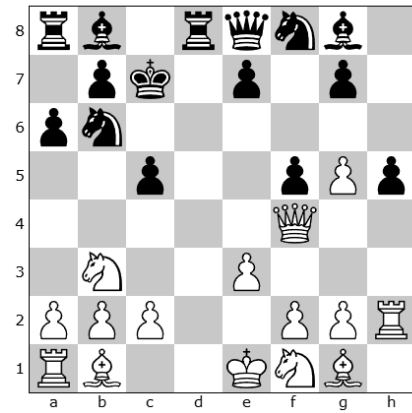
Despite all I've seen, some movies still surprise me now and then with unique ways to mis-portray chess. A fairly recent film short *Check Yourself* (2024) has a player resigning by turning down his queen! And look at this position from the cheesy sci-fi flick *Reptilicus* (1961).



Reptilicus (1961). Monstrous position, white to move.

Where do I start? With the wayward white pawn on e1? Or the fact that black's king stands in an impossible double check from a hanging queen and knight? Or that it was white's move, since the scene opens with white playing ♕f2-e3? But black, a Danish police chief, has more nefarious plans. We see him purloin the prelate from e3, never mind that he remains in check. But the way the theft is accomplished is unique in my experience. Perhaps the film makers forgot to shoot it or perhaps the footage didn't come out correctly, but after the fact they appear to have needed a shot of the Chief plucking the bishop. So instead of the expense of bringing everyone back for another take, they just reversed the image, slowed it down and ran it backward for just a moment to give the impression that a hand was grabbing the piece instead of letting it go! This of course made all the squares temporarily the wrong color [#], but who would notice? Me, that's who.

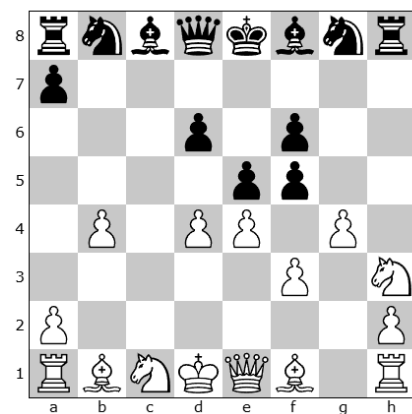
One might think that *Reptilicus* was the all-time best exemplar of Movie Chess, and it would certainly be a candidate. But many more vie for the worst filmic abuse of chess ever. It goes on till this very day. Even as I prepared this article, the following contestant appeared in my film scanning protocol.



Don't Trust the Couple Upstairs (2026 TV). Black to move.

This game, being played online, is riddled with problems. It's implied that black's king and queen started reversed [kq], but that is only surmised. Instead, note especially that all the bishops and knights clearly started in inverted positions! The ♕b1 is situated illegally as both a2 and c2 prevent it from sneaking there by ridiculous play. (This ♕b1 problem shows up from time to time. Another instance is *Mohre* (1998), a crime movie from India.) A more subtle error pertains to white's g5 pawn, which can only legally have arrived there by a promotion, probably an under-promotion of black's d-pawn on d1 to a knight and subsequent capture by white's h-pawn. Only a knight will do, because a bishop would have to be taken on g4, but this is obviated in the movie because we know white's first move to be ♖h2-h4! Anyway, black plays the silly ♗d8-d4, completely disregarding he is in check (♗f4, ...♗c7). White also ignores the check and takes the rook ♕e3x♗d4 and is later seen playing ♗f4-g3 (with some continuity difficulties of the positioning of a few white units, black units remaining intact). Then black finally sees the check and slides over ...♗c7-d7, but White insists on stupidity by replying ♗g3-c7+.

That's pretty bad. But over the years, when asked what the ultimate in Movie Chess was, I always answered with a relatively obscure Audie Murphy Western entitled *No Name on the Bullet* (1955). The booby prize winning position is given below.



No Name on the Bullet (1955). Black to move.

Mystery man Gant (Audie Murphy) rides into town, rumored to be gunning for someone in particular. The unpredictable Gant fancies chess, as it turns out, and he invites Doc Canfield (Charles Drake) for a game the next day. At the appointed time they convene in front of Lordsbury's hotel to have it out on a cheap red

and black board with bone white and blood red pieces. The box for the pieces sits open behind them rather coffin-like. Symbolically, so far so good. The black-hatted assassin has the red side, naturally. But the first time we get to see a shot of the game, problems sprout up every which way.

First, the board is set wrong [#]. One might readily notice that the white king and queen are reversed, almost certainly because of [KQ]. But that is hardly all. Both white bishops stand on light squares (b1 and f1), while the b1 bishop and c1 knight appear to have started in reversed positions. The only “developed” piece on the board is the ♖h3 in the gunsights of the ♜h8. So how did the black f-pawns get doubled? It must have been from a vanishingly unlikely promotion of probably white’s now missing c-pawn and its subsequent capture on f6 or f5. That means black’s first rank starting alignment must have been reconstituted *after* the white pawn promotion. (Coupled with the two white bishops on the same color, this makes the overall position illegal as the *two* pawn promotions required are not available.)

As to the play, Gant moves 1...♗b8-c6, which Doc counters with 2.♙f1-d3. The piece clacks with a decidedly plastic sound, hardly likely material for a 19th century backwater town Western! Next follows more nonsense, but not before a different shot of the position shows the white bishop formerly on f1 (and later d3) now on g1, and the white queen shifted from e1-c3! This eliminates the illegality of position (only one unlikely white pawn promotion now needed) but still adds continuity ([C] in my book’s parlance) difficulties to the list of sins. It also now appears that both sets of white bishops and knights began in inverted stations even though Fischer Random Chess was decades into the future. From here the moves are: 2...♙a7-a5 3.♙b4xa5 ♙c8-b7 4.♗c1-b3 as all the while Doc pumps Gant to disclose his intentions in town. And then one of the most remarkable maneuvers occurs in Movie Chess history. Using two hands Gant proceeds to castle with his queen (4...♚d8-b8 and 4...♞a8-c8)!!

Appearing surprised, as well he should, Doc remarks with stupendous understatement: “You play a very interesting game.” This was meant to have import concerning Gant’s intentions, but comes off as comical instead, considering the avalanche of gaffes that preceded it.

The survey can end here at this moment of high comedy. It’s good that our game gets singled out so often for symbolic usage. I like that. But be assured, as long as the Royal Game continues to be depicted in films (and on TV), Movie Chess will persist. (Sigh.)

My thanks to M. L. Steve for producing the diagrams that illustrate these oddball configurations.

Opinion: Getting Back Into It!

by Sriaditya Pendyala

Chess can be unforgiving to those of us who have sought reprieve from the 64-squares. When I was younger, I was on chess.com for more than 10 hours each day— this was the main way I improved. However, as I got older, and transferred my talents to vinyl boards and sticky clocks, I realized that I would have to put forth a lot more time towards theory, endgames, and tactics because playing online chess alone wouldn’t get me to the next level. Aside from discipline, classes at school became increasingly demanding and I was scrambling to find time for chess. Ultimately, I was faced with deciding between school or a serious commitment to chess. Fortunately, my parents made it easier and narrowed my choices... I was to focus on school, do the laundry, walk the dog, feed the cat... and at the very end of the list was time permitted for chess. At the end of my month-long hiatus, I had an insatiable desire to get back on the board. Improving had been so rewarding because I had to abstain from chess for so long. However, my enthusiasm was curtailed by the realization that as I got older, I would have to take breaks that would continuously increase in length and frequency. Soon, every break grew even more frustrating, and my subsequent return would be trailed by many more late nights trying not to tilt and frantically scheduling consecutive over-the-board tournaments. At some point I realized that I simply couldn’t play serious chess anymore; it had become a cat and mouse game of sprinting ahead, running back, resting, and repeating— I would keep undoing what I had done, and I didn’t have the time to maintain the level after each sprint.

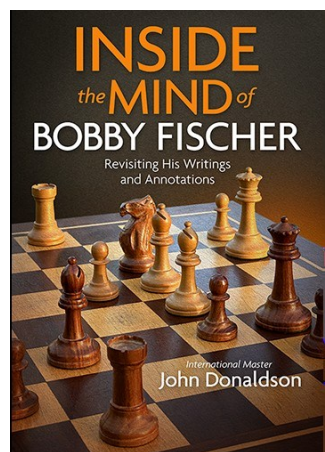
Fortunately, this story has a happy ending. After formally retiring and throwing in the towel, I feel chess has returned to my life in other forms. Now, I certainly can’t say I enjoy it at a serious level anymore, but I still find it fun to play with friends in ultra bullet and bughouse. At the end of the day, chess is a game that doesn’t take much to enjoy— life might get in the way, but chess always finds a way back in.

The most powerful alarm clock is PURPOSE. Build a life worth living and your PASSION will wake you before any alarm.

Inside the Mind of Bobby Fischer

by IM John Donaldson

Reviewed by Robert Irons



John Donaldson has done students of Bobby Fischer and his games a service – several of them, actually – with this book. First, he has gathered most (not quite all) of Fischer's written material into one publication. This is a service because, as Donaldson himself states in the introduction, Fischer's output is *very* relevant to today's chess players (his emphasis). The only one of Fischer's publications not

reproduced in full is his famous book *My 60 Memorable Games*. Instead, we are shown how the notes to 26 of the games changed between earlier drafts and the final draft; some show how Fischer's assessments changed over time, offering insight into his thinking process.

Next, Donaldson reviewed all of Fischer's analysis using computer software. He admits that his input (as well as the computer's) was minimal:

The game annotations are predominantly Bobby's. Comments by me or others are clearly indicated. I chose to restrict myself to using computer engines only when pointing out significant discoveries that overturn Fischer's judgments. There are relatively few of these which speaks to the quality of Bobby's analysis.

Further, he included more than a dozen new games never before seen in print, including "four long lost Fischer games" from 1956. In addition, he includes transcripts from a Yugoslav television show from 1970, in which Fischer analyzes three classic games (including the famous Morphy vs. Duke of Brunswick and Count Isouard game) and two more current games, including one of his own.

Beyond all of this, he included wonderful stories from throughout Fischer's life and career. My favorite is in the chapter titled Chess Meets of the Century; the section on the Herceg Novi blitz tournament of 1970, which Fischer won 4-1/2 points ahead of Mikhail Tal in second place. It includes Fischer's analysis of 12 of his games from that tournament, including his amazing win over Victor Korchnoi using his favorite King's Indian Defense.

After winning the tournaments at Netanya, Israel and Vinkovci, Croatia in 1968, Fischer withdrew from play for 18 months, during which time he wrote *My 60 Memorable*

Games. I learned the game of chess in the summer of 1969 (I was 10 years old), and at that time Bobby was out of the limelight. He returned in 1970 and agreed to play second board (Bent Larsen played first board) on an international team in a four-round match against a team from Russia. Playing against former world champion Tigran Petrosian, one of the most difficult players in history to beat, Fischer won the first two games and drew the last two. That match was my introduction to Bobby's games, and this book includes Fischer's notes on those games. Playing through the games with his notes brought me back to being 12 and looking them over while reading the game scores published in the newspaper. Few books have brought me that kind of pleasure.

But wait, there's more! Photos I have never seen, memorabilia from his passport photo to his score sheet from the "Game of the Century" against Donald Byrne in 1956, to an appreciation for the play of former world champion Mikhail Botvinnik that aired on Yugoslav television, to the interview in which Fischer lists the "Ten Greatest Masters in History." We get to see so much more of Bobby Fischer than just his chess games.

Throughout the 397 pages this book contains, the author consistently shows his respect and affection for his subject. For example, Fischer analyzed the games of the Steinitz – DuBois match (London 1862) for *Chess Life* magazine during 1964. Fischer had used a source for the games that was in common use, but was eventually determined to have mistakes in the order of games and in references to when certain openings were played. Donaldson printed the games in the correct order, removing mistaken references, and still found Fischer's notes to be "fascinating and deserving of study."

While much labor went into this tome, it is truly a labor of love. John Donaldson is the world's leading authority on Bobby Fischer, and we continue to reap the benefit of his expertise in the most entertaining ways. Highly recommended.

NOTE: The author was provided with a copy of the book for this review.

Here is a link to the book

[Siles Press](#)

BlitzChamps: How NFL Players Helped Bring Chess to a New Audience

by Pranav Srinivasula

When most people think of professional football, they imagine speed, strength, and athleticism. When they think of chess, they imagine strategy, calculation, and patience. At first glance, the two activities seem completely different. However, both require quick decision-making, pattern recognition, preparation, and the ability to perform under pressure.

In 2022, Chess.com created BlitzChamps, a tournament that brought together NFL players and former NFL players to compete in chess while raising money for charity. What started as a unique crossover event quickly became one of the most successful examples of chess reaching beyond its traditional audience. Over the next five years, BlitzChamps grew in popularity, featured increasingly strong players, and attracted fans from both the football and chess communities.

This article examines the history of BlitzChamps from its inaugural event in 2022 through BlitzChamps V in 2026 and evaluates its overall impact on the game of chess.

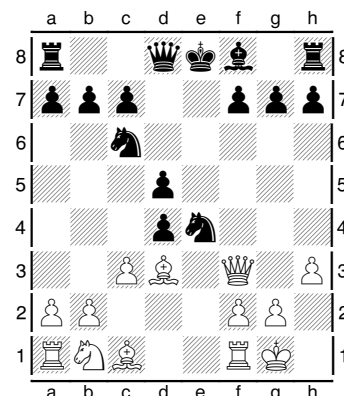
BlitzChamps I (2022): The Beginning

The first BlitzChamps tournament was held in July 2022 and featured six NFL players and former players competing for a share of a \$100,000 charitable prize fund. Participants included Chidobe Awuzie, Amari Cooper, Larry Fitzgerald, Kayvon Thibodeaux, Arik Armstead, and Will Davis. The tournament was designed to determine which NFL player was the strongest chess competitor while also raising money for charity.

The event featured a group stage followed by knockout rounds. Amari Cooper performed exceptionally well during the group stage and entered the championship bracket as one of the favorites. Meanwhile, Cincinnati Bengals cornerback Chidobe Awuzie steadily improved throughout the event and advanced to the final after defeating NFL legend Larry Fitzgerald.

The championship match featured a rematch between Awuzie and Cooper. Although Cooper had previously defeated Awuzie earlier in the tournament, Awuzie delivered his best performance when it mattered most. He won the final match 2–0 and became the inaugural BlitzChamps champion. His victory earned \$25,000 for the Awuzie Kickstep Foundation and established him as the NFL's first BlitzChamps winner.

One great tactic from the event occurred in the champion's first semifinal game, Awuzie vs. Fitzgerald.



In this position, instead of getting tunnel vision and taking the pawn which would have let Fitzgerald get his knight in, Awuzie plays ♖e1! This move pinned the knight and eventually led to Fitzgerald's king being stuck in the middle and checkmated.

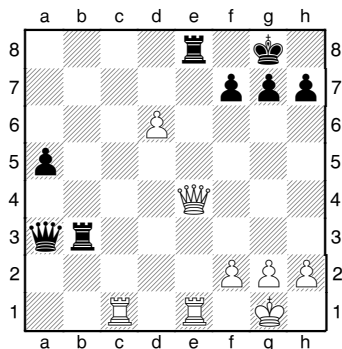
The success of the inaugural tournament showed that professional athletes could generate genuine interest in chess. Fans who originally tuned in because of football stayed to watch exciting games and learn more about chess strategy.

BlitzChamps II (2023): An Expanded Field

The second BlitzChamps tournament took place in 2023 and expanded to eight competitors. Defending champion Chidobe Awuzie returned to defend his title, but the field featured several strong challengers, including Kansas City Chiefs linebacker Drue Tranquill.

Throughout the tournament, Tranquill displayed excellent tactical awareness and composure under pressure. His strongest performance came in the championship match against Awuzie. Entering the final, Awuzie hoped to become the tournament's first repeat champion. Instead, Tranquill produced one of the most memorable combinations in BlitzChamps history.

During the first game of the final, Tranquill sacrificed his queen to force a back-rank checkmate. Tranquill later described the move, which immediately became the highlight of the tournament, as the "move of the day." After securing a draw in the second game, Tranquill won the match 1.5–0.5 and claimed the BlitzChamps II championship. The position of the sacrifice was this:



Tranquill sacrificed the queen (29.exd6!!) by taking the pawn and opening up an attack on Awuzie's rook. Even if Awuzie didn't take the queen and moved the rook to f8, he would still be much worse.

The queen sacrifice showed how much the level of play had improved since the inaugural event. While the competitors were not professional chess players, many had clearly spent significant time studying tactics and strategy.

The combination illustrates how sacrificing material can lead to a forced checkmate when the opponent's king lacks adequate protection.

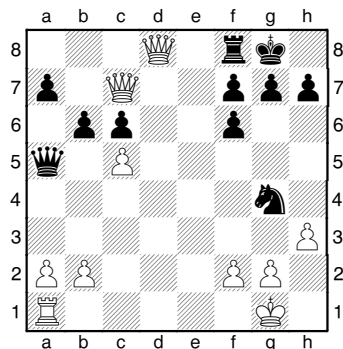
By the end of BlitzChamps II, the event was more than a novelty. Many participants had developed genuine chess skills, and viewers were becoming invested in both the games and the players.

BlitzChamps III (2024): Justin Reid Takes the Crown

The third edition of BlitzChamps marked another major step forward for the tournament. The field included previous champions Chidobe Awuzie and Drue Tranquill, along with Kyler Murray, Mack Hollins, Larry Fitzgerald, Michael Vick, Quenton Nelson, and Justin Reid. The event used an eight-player double-elimination format and continued its \$100,000 charitable prize fund.

Kansas City Chiefs safety Justin Reid entered the event with a reputation as one of the NFL's strongest chess players. Throughout the tournament, he displayed consistent strategic play and exceptional endgame technique. Reid defeated Awuzie, survived multiple tiebreakers, and eventually advanced to the Grand Final against Arizona Cardinals quarterback Kyler Murray.

Murray produced one of the tournament's most impressive moments when he executed a checkmate-in-two combination involving a queen sacrifice during his run to the final.



Though this was an easier tactic to find, Murray finding this mate-in-2 quickly demonstrated that NFL players were becoming increasingly comfortable with tactical ideas.

In the championship match, Reid dominated, defeating Murray 2-0 to claim the BlitzChamps III title. His victory earned \$30,000 for his charity, JReid InDeed, and established him as the new player to beat in future events.

Many fans praised Reid's performance online, noting that his games showed a clear understanding of chess principles and tactical themes. The tournament also attracted substantial attention from both football fans and members of the chess community.

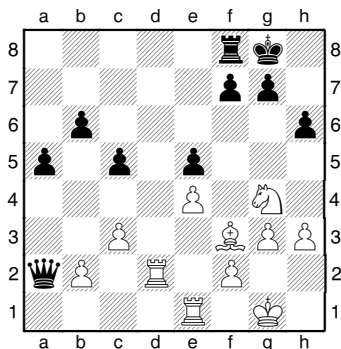
BlitzChamps IV (2025): The First Repeat Champion

BlitzChamps IV featured another strong field that included Justin Reid, Kyler Murray, Justin Herbert, Mack Hollins, Richard Sherman, AJ Dillon, Harrison Phillips, and Rashawn Slater. By this point, the tournament had become one of Chess.com's most recognizable annual crossover events.

As the defending champion, Reid entered the tournament with significant expectations. He responded by producing one of the most dominant performances in BlitzChamps history. Reid did not lose a match throughout the event and once again reached the Grand Final against Kyler Murray.

The championship match featured a rematch of the previous year's final. Once again, Reid emerged victorious, defeating Murray and becoming the first player in BlitzChamps history to win multiple championships. His second consecutive title further solidified his reputation as the strongest chess player currently competing in the BlitzChamps tournaments.

Reid's brilliance can be summed up in his last game which he won with 85.4% accuracy, no mistakes or blunders.



In this game, Reid was able to convert his winning position despite not having a queen on the board and his opponent having a queen, something that most beginners and early intermediates struggle with.

Reid's success also reflected a broader trend within BlitzChamps. The players were studying openings, improving their tactical awareness, and treating the competition more seriously than ever before.

BlitzChamps V (2026): Third Time's A Charm

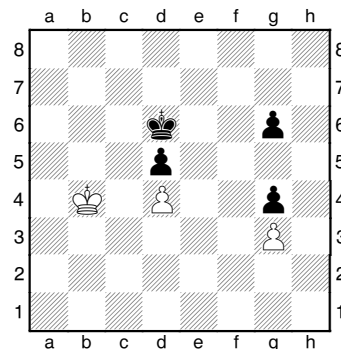
The fifth edition of BlitzChamps took place on May 26, 2026. By this point, the tournament had developed a rich history and featured several returning stars. The field included two-time defending champion Justin Reid, Kyler Murray, Justin Herbert, Mack Hollins, and several other NFL players.

Many observers expected Reid to continue his dominance and win a third consecutive title. However, Mack Hollins had other plans. After participating in two previous editions of the tournament, Hollins entered BlitzChamps V with significantly improved chess skills and a greater understanding of strategy.

Throughout the event, Hollins played confidently and defeated several strong opponents. His most important victory came against Reid, ending the defending champion's reign and opening the door to a new champion. Hollins then advanced to the Grand Final against Justin Herbert.

The final was highly competitive, but Hollins ultimately prevailed and captured his first BlitzChamps title. His victory earned \$30,000 for the Free The Feet Foundation and marked the end of Reid's two-year championship streak.

One of the tournament's notable lessons came from the endgame below in which a seemingly small mistake dramatically changed the outcome.



In this position, Herbert made what seemed to be a slight mistake by not following the king. But Mack Hollins capitalized on his chance and ended up winning the d5 pawn and the game despite being down three pawns to two.

Hollins' victory proved that improvement and dedication can pay off. After multiple years of participation, he had transformed from a competitor into a champion.

The Overall Impact of BlitzChamps on Chess

The significance of BlitzChamps extends far beyond determining which NFL player is the best at chess. The tournament has played an important role in expanding chess's audience and showing that the game appeals to people from many different backgrounds.

First, BlitzChamps introduced chess to thousands of football fans. Many viewers tuned in initially to support their favorite NFL players and encountered chess for the first time. The event showed that chess can be entertaining, competitive, and exciting even when played by athletes rather than grandmasters.

Second, the tournament helped break stereotypes about chess players. People have often viewed chess as a niche activity associated primarily with academics and professional players. BlitzChamps demonstrated that elite athletes can also enjoy and excel at chess. The event highlighted the mental side of professional sports and showed that strategic thinking is valuable in many fields.

Third, BlitzChamps emphasized the similarities between football and chess. Both games require preparation, planning, pattern recognition, adaptability, and the ability to make hard decisions under time pressure. Many players discussed how chess helped them think more clearly and develop skills that carried over to football.

*****Continued on page 27*****

Battling the French & Caro-Kann: A Practical Opening Repertoire for White

by Alexey Kovalchuk

Reviewed by Patricio Robayo



I've been playing chess for years, but I'm still what I call a longtime beginner improver. I was once around 1000 on Chess.com, and while I've gone up and down since then, I know exactly what it feels like to hit that wall where you know the opening names but don't really understand the positions.

That's why *Battling the French & Caro-Kann* surprised me.

I picked it up because I play the French Defense as Black. I wanted to see what White players were preparing against me. I expected another opening book full of computer lines that I'd forget five minutes later.

Instead, I found a book about ideas.

Right on the back cover, Kovalchuk says he recommends the Exchange French for players who want "a clear and understandable game," while also putting psychological pressure on French players who become impatient trying to create winning chances.

As someone who plays the French, I laughed.

Because he's right.

Whenever someone played 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5, I always felt relieved. "Good," I'd think. "They're not playing the sharp stuff."

Now I realize that was exactly the trap.

The Exchange Variation isn't boring if the White player actually understands it.

One thing Kovalchuk repeats throughout the book is that White isn't trying to blow Black off the board. White is trying to get better piece activity, control important squares like e5, use the open e-file, and slowly squeeze the position.

That sounds simple.

But that's what good chess usually is.

One of the first examples that caught my eye was the Carlsen-Nakamura game from Chess.com in 2018. Magnus didn't win because of some brilliant queen sacrifice. He simply improved his pieces, kept a pleasant position, and eventually outplayed Nakamura. As a 1000-rated player, that's encouraging because I always feel like I must find some tactical miracle to win games. This book reminds me that sometimes the best move is simply making your worst piece better.

The book uses games from correspondence chess, grandmaster events, and older master games. At first, I wondered why. Then I realized the point isn't who played the game. It's the idea behind it.

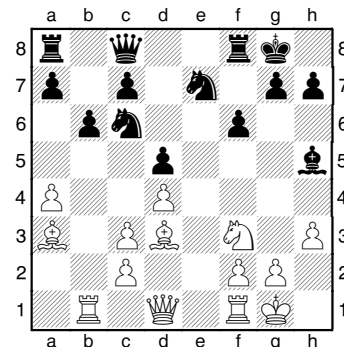
Take the section where White plays h3, g4, and later h4-h5 against Black's kingside setup in the Caro-Kann. My first reaction was, "That looks aggressive." Then Kovalchuk explains exactly why it works. White already has the space advantage, Black can't punish the slow pawn moves, and suddenly the attack almost builds itself. Those explanations are worth far more than memorizing another engine line.

I also noticed something I haven't seen in many opening books.

Kovalchuk constantly offers improvements over existing games.

Instead of saying, "Here's what happened," he'll write something like, "Now I recommend..." and introduce a novelty. Sometimes it's a quiet move like h3!, other times it's a rook lift or a pawn break. That tells me this isn't simply a collection of old games. He's been thinking about these positions himself.

One page that really stood out shows White expanding with 14.g4! during a correspondence game.



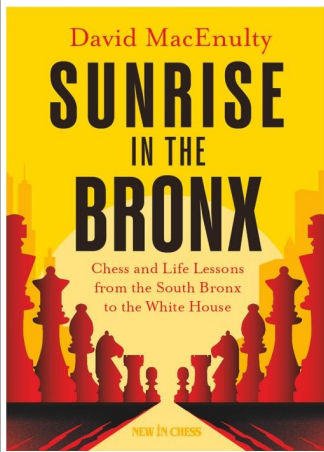
Kovalchuk explains that White has the two bishops, can use the f5-square, and later launch g4-g5 against the Black king. As someone who's spent years trying to understand why an attack works, not just how, those little explanations are incredibly helpful.

*****Continued on page 27*****

Sunrise in the Bronx

by David MacEnulty

Reviewed by Samika Nettem



At first glance, *Sunrise in the Bronx* may seem just like a memoir about chess. However, David MacEnulty's story reveals it is really a story about perseverance, the opportunities education can create, and the lasting impact a teacher can have on students' lives. Through his memoir, MacEnulty takes readers on a journey through his experiences teaching chess to children in the Bronx. Before becoming a

chess teacher, MacEnulty had worked in real estate and served in the Navy. Although these experiences seem unrelated to chess, they helped him develop communication and leadership skills that later shaped his approach to teaching. These skills became especially important when MacEnulty entered the world of education. After leaving his previous job, he began teaching at a school in the South Bronx, where he faced many challenges.

When he first arrived at the school, he discovered that not only did the children have little experience with chess, but most of them didn't even know how to play, let alone know the names of the pieces. MacEnulty reflected on one of his early lessons with the children, when he asked the class to put the rook in the corner, and he realized that none of them knew what a "corner" was. This moment made him realize he needed to approach his lessons differently. His mentor, Eric Whitney, gave him an important piece of advice: "You cannot start with what you think they know. You have to start with where they are."

This piece of advice made MacEnulty understand that teaching chess to the children was going to require more than just explaining how the pieces moved. It required a language that both he and his students could understand. To do this, MacEnulty built his chess lessons around the concept of straight lines to build their foundation in chess. "The board is made up of straight lines. All the pieces move in straight lines. Even the knight move can be talked of in two straight lines, a vertical and a horizontal joined by a right angle," MacEnulty explained. By starting with this basic concept, he could give them a vocabulary that they both understood and could work with.

Because chess is a game of logic, the students learned every move has a purpose and every decision has consequences. MacEnulty's explanations, like controlling the

chessboard, became easier for the students because they could see the reasoning behind the moves. Besides this, the lessons the students learned on the chessboard influenced how they approached real-life situations. MacEnulty recalled a time when he was teaching the students a ladder checkmate with two rooks. When the king was attacking one rook and the rook moved away out of danger, one student described the rook moving away as a "coward". MacEnulty used this opportunity to show the children that avoiding unnecessary danger was not a sign of weakness, but a smart decision. He compared this situation to crossing a street when a truck is barreling down and asked the students whether they would be brave and stand there, or be smart and get out of the way. Through these moments, MacEnulty showed the students that the skills they developed in chess could guide them to make good choices on and off the board.

Learning chess was only the beginning of the challenges MacEnulty and his students faced. As the team entered tournaments, they encountered many obstacles off the chessboard. Many of the students had never traveled outside their neighborhoods, and they didn't always have the resources they needed. Even paying the tournament entry fees became a financial struggle for them. During one of their first tournaments, one of MacEnulty's students lost a winning game because he forgot to press the clock. Because of the limited resources, the team had no clocks to practice with. MacEnulty found a way around this by teaching his students to tap a pawn after their move, but it still made it difficult for them to compete without the same resources as everyone else. After learning that the team could not afford clocks, a parent immediately took out his checkbook and wrote a check to help the team purchase clocks. MacEnulty told this story to one of his friends at the Chess Federation, and the Chess Trust immediately offered to let them pay half price for the clocks. Reflecting on this moment, MacEnulty said, "I was able to get six clocks instead of only three. That was one of my first indications that people wanted to help the children." These acts of generosity showed that the students' journey had the support of both MacEnulty and a community that believed in them.

With the support of the community, MacEnulty and his students continued to learn and improve. However, preparing the students for tournaments involved more than teaching them how to play chess. MacEnulty had to teach them how to handle losses, unfair situations, and the emotions that came with competition. Instead of allowing frustration to take over, he prepared them to stay calm, even when

things didn't go their way. MacEnulty's lessons helped the students to become more resilient and encouraged them to play their best, no matter what. MacEnulty's dedication extended far beyond chess. He always worked hard to raise money so his students could take part in tournaments, arrange transportation, and even make sure they didn't go hungry during the long tournaments. By removing these obstacles, his students could focus completely on learning, improving, and competing. Because of MacEnulty's support, his students continued to grow. They started winning team trophies and even got featured on television. What had once been a small chess program at a school with limited resources quickly turned into a nationally recognized program.

Although the awards, trophies, and recognition were truly amazing, they are not the accurate measure of MacEnulty's success. MacEnulty's greatest achievement was helping children to develop confidence, resilience, and a belief that they can achieve anything they set their mind to. He created meaningful lessons, supported his students, and gave them growth opportunities they never had before, changing their lives beyond the chessboard. To conclude, *Sunrise in the Bronx* is way more than just about chess. It's a reminder that one dedicated teacher can open doors for students to see what they can accomplish.

[New in Chess](#)

*****Continued from page 24*****

*****Continued from page 24*****

Finally, BlitzChamps raised significant amounts of money for charitable organizations. The tournament's \$100,000 prize fund each year allowed competitors to support causes they cared about while promoting chess to a wider audience.

Conclusion

From Chidobe Awuzie's victory in the inaugural tournament to Mack Hollins' breakthrough championship in 2026, BlitzChamps has evolved from an experimental crossover event into one of the most successful collaborations between chess and professional sports.

The tournament has showcased the intelligence and competitiveness of NFL players, introduced chess to new audiences, and helped challenge traditional assumptions about who plays the game. Each edition has featured memorable moments, including queen sacrifices, dramatic checkmates, intense tiebreakers, and inspiring stories of improvement.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of BlitzChamps is that it has shown chess's universal appeal. Whether someone is a grandmaster, an NFL player, or a complete beginner, the excitement of strategy, competition, and creativity remains the same. As BlitzChamps continues to grow, people will probably remember its legacy as an event that helped bring chess further into mainstream sports culture and inspired a new generation of players to pick up the game.

*****Continued from page 25*****

The full game shows that White played 14.♖b5 instead of the much stronger 14.g4!

Ghisi, Stefano (1945) - Alfaro de Hombre, José Manuel (2197)
[C01] DE10A /pr 17 ICCF, 05.04.2016

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♗c3 ♗b4 4.exd5 exd5 5.♗d3 ♗c6 6.♗f3 ♗g4 7.0-0 ♗ge7 8.h3 ♗h5 9.a3 ♗xc3 10.bxc3 f6 11.♖b1 b6 12.a4 0-0 13.♗a3 ♗c8 14.♗b5 ♗d8 15.♖e1 a6 16.♗d3 ♖e8 17.c4 ♗d7 18.♗e5 ♗xd1 19.♗xd7 ♗h5 20.a5 bxa5 21.♖b7 dxc4 22.♗xc4+ ♗f7 23.♗xf7+ ♗xf7 24.♖xc7 ♖a7 25.♖xa7 ♗xa7 26.♗b6 ♗b5 27.♗b2 ♖b8
1/2-1/2

I also appreciated how organized the book is.

Every chapter focuses on a specific Black setup. The French chapters break down different responses one at a time. The Caro-Kann chapters do the same, including the less common Steiner Variation, which I honestly knew almost nothing about before opening this book. Instead of feeling overwhelmed by dozens of branches, I always knew what position we were studying.

Another thing I liked is that Kovalchuk isn't afraid to think differently.

Against the Caro-Kann he builds his repertoire around 2.c4, the English Variation. On the back cover he explains that the idea grew from studying Oleksandr Bortnyk's games before the years of engine analysis and practical testing. That appealed to me because it feels like something a real player would do. He found an idea he liked, tested it, refined it, and eventually built an entire repertoire around it.

As someone who's spent years trying to improve, I don't need another opening where I'm expected to memorize thirty moves.

I need plans.

I need to know why a knight belongs on e5.

Why doubling on the e-file matters.

Why one pawn push is strong and another is too slow.

This author does a very good job answering those questions.

Ironically, I think it may actually make me a better French Defense player, even though it's written from White's perspective. Now when someone exchanges on move three, I won't automatically think they're trying to make a draw. I'll understand they're trying to slowly take away my counterplay and force me into making the first mistake.

The biggest compliment I can give the author of this book is that he didn't just teach me moves, he changed how I think about the position.

[Thinkers Publishing](#)

Dragon Masters II Resurrection

by Andrew Burnett

Reviewed by Andy Ansel



Published by [Thinkers Publishing](#) (2026) 382 pages. Hardcover price roughly \$46

Andrew Burnett, a Fide Master from Scotland, has embarked on a very ambitious project to cover the history of the Sicilian Dragon in three volumes. While this is volume two, covering 1974 to 1995, there may be occasional references to the first volume. He is also the au-

thor of the excellent book, *Streetfighting Chess*, which features many of his own games. I first enjoyed his enthusiastic writing style in this book and it continues in this series.

For those of us who grew up playing chess in the 70's and 80's, there wasn't a more romantic or fun opening to play than the Sicilian Dragon. David N. L. Levy's *The Sicilian Dragon* (published by Batsford in 1972) brought much of the theory to us, but constant updates from Informants were required to keep up with the ever-changing evaluations and novelties. It seemed everybody played either the White side, Black side, or both sides of the Dragon. Fischer's memorable comments about his game against Larsen (Game #2 in *My 60 Memorable Games*) contains the famous phrase "pry open the h-file sac, sac...mate!"

The Dragon, like Mark Twain: "The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated," has been given up for dead many times starting with Karpov's decisive win against Korchnoi in the 1974 Candidates covered in volume one of the series. But Black keeps finding resources and it is still very playable today.

This volume covers games played from 1974-1995, ending with the Kasparov -Anand match as well as before the serious computer era began. While an opening book, it also doubles as a game collection featuring fighting chess. Many of the chapters highlight key players in the evolution in the theory of the Dragon. This includes Miles, Mestel, Sosonko, Karpov, Hübner and others. The author did a fantastic job on his historical research and provided colorful commentary on many of the players. He notes the challenge of paring the many games down to around 100. His research went outside of just looking at databases as he provides context and corrections to existing files.

A question: what value does a historical presentation offer given the ever-changing theory of such a sharp line? While you can always look at a current database to find the most recent and best lines, I find this historical approach both deepens one's understanding of the opening as well as gives context to how theory has evolved. Remembering what was once old, can now be new.

An example of how older games can be useful to modern players is shown in Sigurjonsson—Miles Wijk aan Zee 1977 from the Chapter Miles Files Part 1 (see below). Here there are extensive notes on the line 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 g6 6.♗e3 ♗g7 7.f3 0-0 8.♗d2 9.0-0 d5! The author notes that this is still a critical line for theory and gives comments from Levy's book as well as the recent Chessable course by Anish Giri both saying this is Black's best choice. The notes on this one move cover over half a page.

The actual game annotations are incredibly deep, several times running pages per move, and the author constantly refers to modern chess books (and games) where needed to highlight changes in theory.

The Karpov chapter deserves special attention given his strong results against the Dragon. In fact, the author refers to him as the GOAT. The five Karpov victories against Dragon champions are impressive; however, many new alternatives are explored to extend the Dragon's life.

While the book is an excellent read as a game collection and providing opening understanding, there are a couple things that could be improved upon. First, I find the coloring Thinkers uses for the annotated lines, a lighter grey, sometimes hard to read. I also think an opening index given the unusual historical layout vs the traditional variation-based layout would be helpful. In fact, it appears that even the author got a little confused as he had the same note for a Sosonko variation in two different chapters on pages 88 and 130.

I highly recommend this book to lovers of the Dragon but also to all who enjoy looking at good fighting games. It is nice to see such an original book (series) being written and I am anxiously awaiting Volume 3.

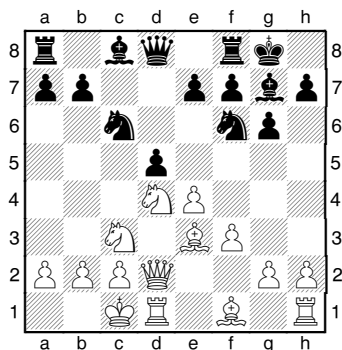
Example Game:

The year had started for Miles with the traditional Hoogovens tournament in Wijk aan Zee on the Dutch coast. An early win over eventual winner Efim Geller boded well for

the young Birmingham man but three losses crushed hopes of a high finish. His only other victory came against the three-time Icelandic champion...

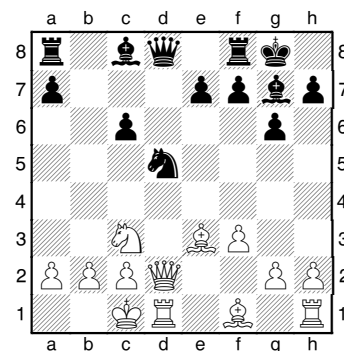
Sigurjonsson, Gudmundur (2520)—Miles, Anthony John (2555) [B76] Hoogovens Wijk aan Zee (7), 22.01.1977

1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♞xd4 ♟f6 5.♞c3 g6 6.♞e3 ♟g7 7.f3 0-0 8.♞d2 ♞c6 9.0-0 d5!



One of the most important Dragon positions for the viability of the opening from Black's perspective. The nomenclature for this particular move has seen various names appended to it — both Russian master Alexander Konstantinov and Ukrainian Alexander Konstantinopolsky have been in the frame for devising the clever retort, but it was the latter (who incidentally played 9...♞xd4 in this position against Smyslov in 1945 and was more often seen on the white side of things) who revealed the true identity of its creator: "The secrets of the Dragon were only revealed later, after the talented Dnepropetrovsk candidate master Ilya Konstantinovsky discovered the gambit line 6.f3 ♟g7 7.♞e3 ♞c6 8.♞d2 0-0 9. 0-0-0 d5!?" (Alexander Konstantinopolsky: *Obsession: A Chess Biography of Vsevolod Rauzer* pp. 179–180: Elk and Ruby).

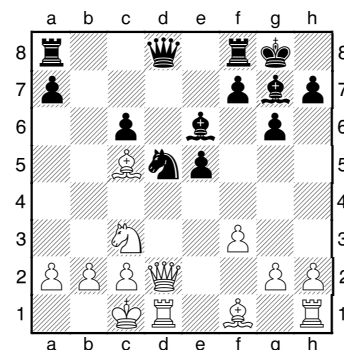
David Levy describes 9...d5 in his 1972 book *The Sicilian Dragon* as: "...probably the only equalising line to 9.0-0-0 at Black's disposal." Mikhail Golubev, a generation or more later, vents existential angst when he states in his 1999 Everyman book *Easy Guide to the Dragon*: "In my view, the position after 9.0-0-0 d5 remains the most critical for Dragon theory (and even for the fate of the Dragon.)" That verdict has changed many times over the years, but Anish Giri's *Chessable* course some 50 years later came to the same conclusion. The move involves a pawn sacrifice at its heart, with a couple of theoretical queen sacrifices and numerous exchange sacrifices from Black as well! We'll see them all over the course of the next two volumes and it's hardly surprising that the most tactical of all openings should hang on such creative material imbalances.



12.♞d4

12.♞xd5 cxd5 13.♞xd5 is the big pawn sac line, while the further 13...♞c7 14.♞xa8 is the oldest of the queen sacrifice variations White gaining two rooks for her Majesty after 14...♞f5 15.♞xf8+ (mate was threatened on c2) 15...♞xf8 White doesn't have to give up the queen, and 14.♞c5 will be covered in volume 3 when we see some fireworks in the game between Vassily Ivanchuk and Julian Hodgson.

12...e5 13.♞c5 ♞e6



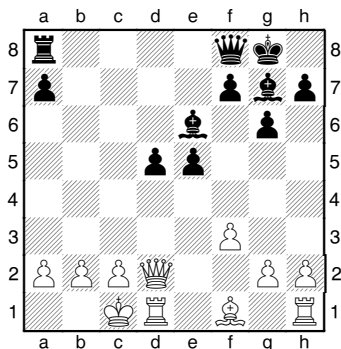
This offer of the exchange has gone through various phases of modishness since it first appeared in 1956.

13...♞e8 a move we have already met in Fedorowicz-Sosonko, is considered (by Giri at least) as more accurate.

14.♞e4

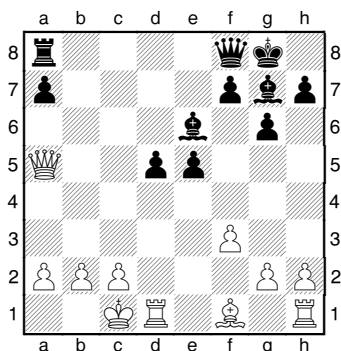
One of the earliest games in this line saw renowned DragonMaster Eduard Gufeld show the positive side for Black when White snaps off the exchange...

14.♞xd5 cxd5 15.♞xf8 ♞xf8

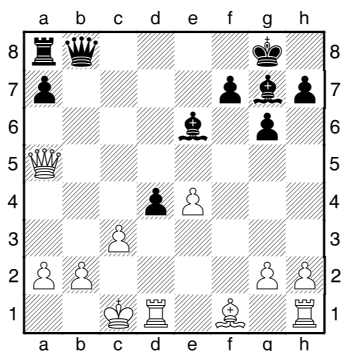


Even if this weren't good for Black (it is!) Black's setup is visually very attractive.

16. Wa5

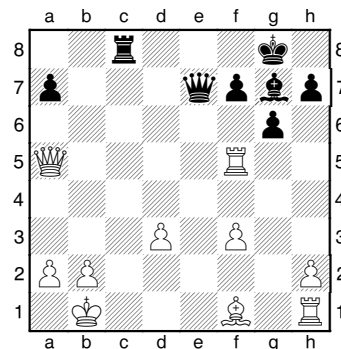


A) 16...e4 immediately is very strong and after 17.fxe4 Wa8! 18.c3 d4!



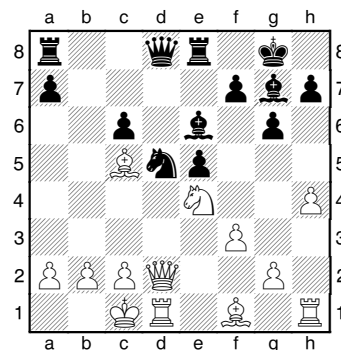
Opening lines and then picking on the resulting weaknesses in White's position, e.g. 19.cxd4 Wa7 20.Wb1 (20.d5?? Wa2#; 20.Wd3? Wxd4) 20...Wxe4+ 21.Wa1 Wxd4 White will almost certainly struggle to hold this.

B) 16...We7 17.Wd3 e4 (17...Wh4 is a thematic square for Black's queen in this line and equally as good as the text move, itself another thematic blow.) 18.Wb3 d4 19.Wb5 d3! 20.cxd3 Wc8+ 21.Wb1 exf3 22.gxf3 Wf5 23.Wxf5



23...gxf5?? (23...We3! was the killer intermezzo. For example: 24.Wh3 Wxd3+ 25.Wa1 Wxb2+! with a mating attack. 26.Wxb2 Wc2+ 27.Wa1 Wd4+ 28.Wb1 Wb2#) 24.d4 Wxd4 25.Wa6? (Natural, developing with tempo, but losing. Better was 25.Wd2) 25...Wb8 26.b3 and the weakening of the a1-h8 diagonal is deadly. 26... Wg7! 27.Wxf5? Wa3 28.Wc2 Wxa6 29.Wg1 Wf6! (0-1 Tokarev - Gufeld, Odessa 1957).

14...Wb8 15.h4!



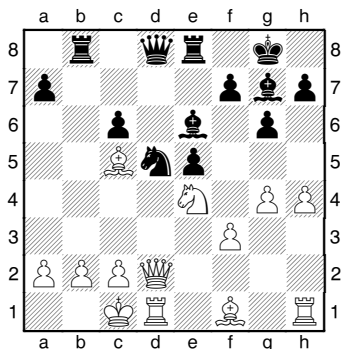
15...Wb8

A) 15...h6 is by far the most common response in this position, the move introduced by DragonMaster Eduard Gufeld against Yuri Sakharov in 1956.

Sakharov had one of those incredibly harsh lives one reads about in the time of Stalin's reign of terror, his father executed in 1938 during the Great Purge and Yuri himself later sentenced to 25 years imprisonment at the end of World War II. Released after 4 years, he would later become a two-time Ukrainian national champion.

B) 15...h5 is more rigid but may not be so bad, your author trying it recently and gaining a reasonable position from the opening. The fact that Ward, Golubev and Abdusattorov have also all used it successfully is a good sign.

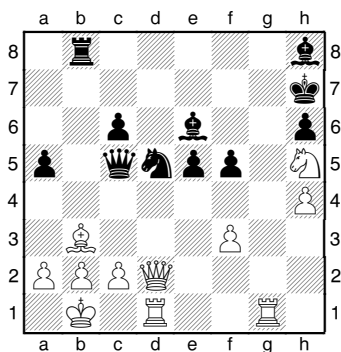
16.g4N



A few years later Sigurjonsson found himself in this position once again, this time facing another English Dragon-Master, William Watson. There the Icelander varied with 16.♖c4 h6 17.g4 Watson up with what may be the most unusual exchange sacrifice of all in the Dragon:

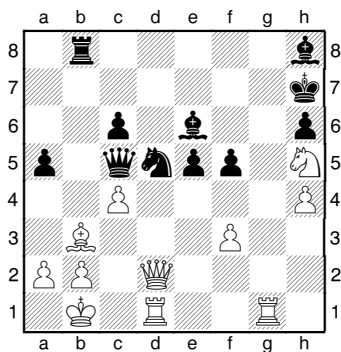
17... ♖e7!?

There followed 18.♖xe7 ♖xe7 19.♖b3 f5 20.gxf5 gxf5 21.♖g3 ♖h7 22.♖b1 ♖c5 23.♖hg1 a5 24.♖h5 ♖h8 and now:



A) 25.♖g3 was played in the game and Watson erred with 25...♖e7 when (25...a4! instead would have offered very good chances). After 26.♖dg1 ♖g8 27.♖xg8 ♖xg8 28.♖xa5 White went on to win (1–0 (34) Sigurjonsson — Watson, Brighton 1982), but;

B) 25.c4!



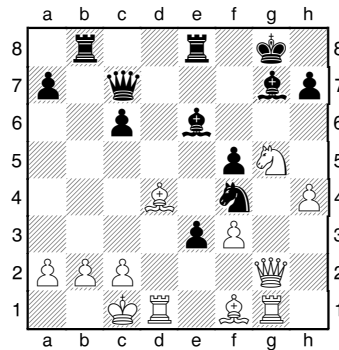
...would have won much more quickly.)

16...f5?

The move Black really wants to play but it shouldn't work here.

17.gxf5 gxf5 18.♖d6!

18.♖g5?! is less good on account of the direct counterplay Black gains after 18...e4 19.♖d4 e3! 20.♖g2 ♖c7 21.♖g1 ♖f4



In this position all three results are entirely possible.

18...♖f8

If you don't offer at least one exchange per game as Black you have no rights to the title of DragonMaster!

19.♖c4!

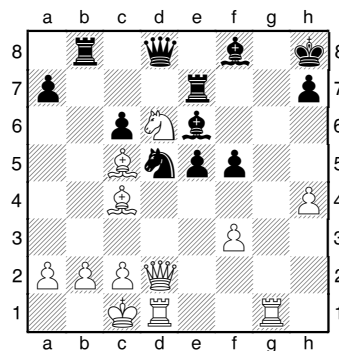
A) 19.c4 ♖xd6 20.♖g1+ ♖h8 21.♖h6 ♖b7 (21...♖f6 22.♖xf6+ ♖xf6 23.♖xd6 hitting both b8 and e5, with a won position.) 22.♖xd6 ♖xd6 23.♖xd5! when 23...cxd5 is mated by (23...♖f8 24.♖xf8+ ♖xf8 25.♖xe5+—) 24.♖f6+, and;

B) 19.♖g1+ ♖h8 20.♖c4 are both winning.]

19...Re7

19...♖xd6 20.♖hg1+ ♖h8 21.♖h6 ♖f8 (21...♖f6 22.♖xf6+ ♖xf6 23.♖xd6+—) 22.♖xf8

20.♖hg1+ ♖h8

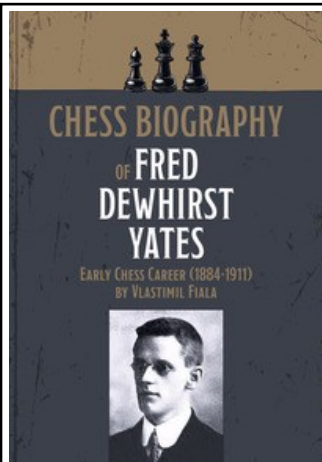


21.♖xd5

Chess Biography of Fred DeWhirst Yates: Early Chess Career (1884—1911)

by Vlastimil Fiala

Reviewed by Mark Capron



I was super excited when I heard about this book and bought it the first chance I had. Chess historian Vlastimil Fiala has compiled a look at the early chess career of one of England's historical chess figures, Fred Yates. Much of the 655-page book consists of what was written in the papers at the time of the events. Author Fiala interjects context and adds summaries to the events discussed.

Fred Yates was born January 16, 1884, in Birstall in West Riding. Most of Yates's relatives were also born in Birstall. Yates had 5 siblings. At 14 he became a municipal council clerk (accounting). Then in 1901 he went to London to be a journalist. This didn't last long and he went back home only a few years later.

He learned chess from one of his cousins. He played his schoolmaster and a strong Yorkshire player, most likely named Arthur Illingworth. Illingworth recognized Yates's aptitude for the game and introduced him to the County Arcade Cafe in Leeds in 1905. Shortly thereafter his chess career really started. In September of 1905, he joined the Leeds Chess Club and entered the Woodhouse Cup Minor Trophy tournament. Yates didn't stay in the second team for long and by December he was moved to first team. By the end of 1906, he was up to the 4th board.

By the fall of 1907, there was a marked increase in the number of his games being published, probably due to more tournament success.

Yates played some correspondence chess, but it didn't seem to keep his interest.

In 1909, he decided to move back to London and become a professional chess player and chess journalist.

Yates wrote for the *Manchester Guardian* newspaper chess column, then later for the *Yorkshire Weekly Post* and *Yorkshire Evening Post* after Frank Wildman (well-known chess player and correspondent) passed away. Yates also took over the daily chess reports in *The Yorkshire Post*. For years he was on the editorial board of the *British Chess Magazine*.

Yates co-authored the books *Grand International Masters' Chess Tournament at St. Petersburg, 1914*, *Modern Master Play*, and *The World Chess Championship 1927 and 1929*. Yates started working on his autobiography before he suddenly passed away. This was completed posthumously by William Winter and published by W.H. Watts and called *One-Hundred-and-One of My Best Games of Chess*.

Yates died on November 11, 1932, as a result of a gas leak in his home in London, but the book only goes up through 1911.

The author uses algebraic notation throughout for the games. However, on a few occasions the Czech system of S, D, V, J, K slips in. The annotations are mostly contemporary. Many times, Fiala presents material from multiple sources on the same topic so much is repeated.

The book is put together nicely. Hardback, sewn, lays flat while reading. It's rare for a book to not have any typos. Most books I review have at least a typo or two. This book was no exception, however there were quite a few. Nothing that you don't immediately just read over and ignore. An example "ache" instead of the intended "are". A good proofreader would have caught most if not all of these. Interestingly, most seemed to be found in the transcribed articles and not the original prose the author wrote considering the author's first language is not English.

The Woodhouse Challenge Cup team tournaments each year were the biggest stories in the book. Lots of coverage in the papers and, with ten rounds, it took several months each year to complete. Yates's individual results in these tournaments were not fantastic.

Yates did much better at the 1910 Northern Counties Championship in Blackpool where he won the event. Mr. G. Shories (Georg Schories in Wikipedia) finished a point behind. Yates won five out of the six games. Yates could have settled for a draw in the game vs. W. Butler as he held the advantage until the very end, but tried to push too hard and ended up losing.

In 1908, Yates beat both Joseph Blackburne and World Champion Emanuel Lasker in simul.

After Yates won the Yorkshire championship in 1909, Frank Wildman described Yates's play "...after an interesting game, ended in a victory for Mr. Yates, who thus gains the title of Yorkshire Champion for the year and wins

the Association's prize of four Guinea"... "Mr. Yates, who is in his 26th year, has for several seasons played with the Woodhouse Cup team of the Leeds Chess Club. His chess is of the combinatoric and enterprising type; he has a good knowledge of the openings but is at his best in attacking in the middle game."

There were some nice instances of humor. For example, when Mayor Chrimes of Scarborough gave the opening speech at the Sixth British Chess Federation Congress, the Mayor stated that in the solemn game of chess there are few jokes, but he hoped this would elicit a response from the crowd, "Why is Chess the oldest of all games, and how can you prove it? His reply being: - Because in the Garden of Eden Adam sacrificed a piece and obtained a mate."

Another funny comment was found in the description of the game J.A. Guy vs. H.B. Lund, Northern Counties Chess Championship, 1910. "Lund was a rook and a few embryo queens to the good, but a draw resulted."

Yates's first international competition came in 1910 in Hamburg, Germany. A very strong event that included players such as Saviely Tartakower, Frank Marshall, Carl Schlechter, Oldřich Duras, Aaron Nimzowitsch, Alexander Alekhine, and Dr. Siegbert Tarrasch, to name a few. Dr. Tarrasch opposed the inclusion of Yates in the event due to Yates's lack of international experience, but the organizers decided to allow it anyway. Yates did poorly in the tournament, scoring only one win, but it happened to be against Tarrasch!

In 1910 and 1911, he was chosen and competed in the prestigious (10 board) Anglo-American cable matches. In 1910, he won his board five, game vs. George Wolbrecht. In 1911, he defeated the American Herman Voigt, also on board five.

Up to 1911, Yates competed for the British Championship three times and placed 4th, 2nd, and a tie for first with Henry Atkins (6 times Champion). A short four game match to break the tie was to be played in 1912. To find out the result we will have to wait for volume 2?!

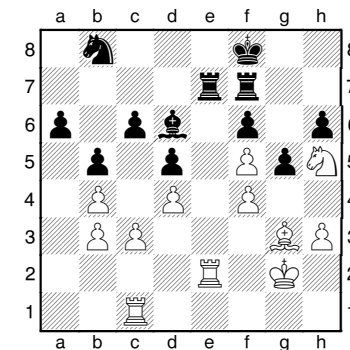
An interesting couple items I did not know about were that during most of the games there were tea breaks and a limited time for the game. If the game was not completed in the allotted time, it was stopped and the game sent to a player like Blackburne to adjudicate it. The result could be announced as much as a month later!

The book contains 137 games. If asked Fiala will send you a pgn file of all the games including annotation. An example game:

Yates, Fred Dewhurst. - Atkins, Henry Ernest [C87]

British Chess Federation Championship Oxford (8), 23.08.1910
1.e4 e5 2.d3 c6 3.b5 a6 4.a4 f6 5.0-0 e7 6.Bc1 d6 7.c3 0-0 8.h3 [The opening adopted is one of the slowest forms of the Ruy Lopez. /HT/] 8...b5 9.a2 [In an earlier round, Wainwright played 9.a3 in this position against Atkins. Either move is good. /HT/] 9...g8 10.d4 e8 11.b2 g8 12.f1 g6 13.e3 [Better than 13.g3. The Knight goes to d5 next move with good effect. /HT/] 13...f6 14.d5 d8 15.e3 f6 16.d2 c7 17.fxe7 dxe7 [Mr. Atkins suggested afterwards that 17...xe7 would have been better. /YO+T/] 18.h2 g5 [%08DA] 19.f1 [Both players seem fond

of retiring their Knights to the back row. On a crowded board the maneuver is sometimes necessary, but should be avoided whenever possible. In this case, however, f5 or h5 is the point aimed at, to use the Knight for its proper function, viz., attack. /HT/] 19...e6 20.g3 f7 21.e2 f8 22.h5 e7 [Black catches the infection, and also brings forth his Knight. /HT/] 23.h2 g6 24.g3 c8 25.b3 [A clever way of defending the h-Pawn. /YO+T/; This effectually prevents Black from obtaining any counter attack for the present. /HT/] 25...xb3 26.axb3 e7 27.f3 g8 [White has now slightly the best of matters. This move is necessary to prevent g5. /HT/] 28.f5 f5 29.exf5 f8 30.f4 d7 31.b4 h6 32.b3 c6 33.a2 f8 34.ea1 [%08DA] 34...b8 [A disagreeable necessity which hampers Black severely for the rest of the game. /YO+T/] 35.c1 exf4 36.gxf4 d5 37.f2 e7 38.g3 d6 39.g2 ad7 40.e2 de7



41.e6 [The sealed move at the adjournment, and a very powerful one. /YO+T/] 41...gxf4 42.fxf4 e6 43.g6+ [Very clever. This makes a neat finish to a very dry game. /HT/] 43...g7 44.fxe6 b7 45.d6 [A fine game on the part of Yates, who has adopted the champion's favourite opening and something of his methods for use against himself. /YO+T/; If 45...xg6 46.e1, and a piece has to be given up for the advanced e-Pawn. /HT/; If now 45...xg6 46.e7 f7 47.f6+ and wins. Most players with Black would have gone on a move longer, but Atkins gives his opponent credit for high intentions. White's conclusion is excellent. (/YO/ *The Yorkshire Observer*, 22 August 1910; /HT/ *The Hull Times*, 3 September 1910; /IT/ *The Times*, 25 August 1910; *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 25 August 1910; *The Year-Book of Chess 1911*, p116; *Manchester Guardian*, 25 August 1910 /move 28 to end/; *Weekly Irish Times*, 17 September 1910; /BDP/ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 25 August 1910; *Northampton Chronicle and Echo*, 25 August 1910; *Daily News*, 25 August 1910; *Batley Reporter and Guardian*, 26 August 1910; *Evening Mail*, 26 August 1910)] **1-0**

I enjoyed the book. I learned quite a bit about the history of chess in England. I was a bit surprised that Yates's results were so mixed, but I believe in the second volume his results will be much stronger. The book does suffer from several innocuous typos that could have been prevented with a proofreader. More thought and design could have prevented some of the repeated passages as well. If you enjoy chess history or learning about the players who set the table for us, I recommend the book. I would give the book three and a half stars out of five stars.

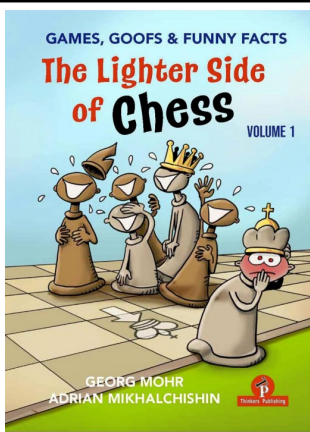
[Moravian Chess](#)

The Lighter Side of Chess Vol 1 Hardcover

by Georg Mohr and Adrian Mikhachishin

[Thinkers Publishing](#) 2026, 288 pages.

Reviewed by Lance T. Bark



The Lighter Side of Chess is a fantastic collection of great games, goofs, and funny facts in the world of chess. Everyone who enjoys chess will love this collection. Chess historians, chess nerds, and those who just love a good story involving the many facets of the royal game will get something out of this volume. If you enjoy books such as *The Complete Chess Addict* Vols 1 and 2, and *Chess Life*

and *Review*, Vols 1 and 2, you will love *The Lighter Side of Chess*.

The book itself is a very well-made hardcover edition. It has sturdy paper with a nice font which is easy on the eyes. All games are in algebraic notation. The book is divided into 64 sections (not listed as chapters). Each section has a very interesting title. Some sections provide themes about obscure historical, biographical, geographical, and just plain interesting stories about the game we all love and obsess over. Of course, stories of great players and great games are present, too.

The two authors, with whom I was not familiar, are both Grandmasters. Both have impressive resumes including lengthy tournament experience at the Olympic level and vast coaching experience with European team events. Both are authors of several chess books, active in the lecture circuit, and board members of several chess organizations throughout Europe. Their writing style is flowing, informative, comedic, and just plain fun to read.

Before I get into the nuts and bolts of the book, I will quote a small section from the introduction.

“This is a book for every chess lover, from absolute beginners to seasoned grandmasters. Over the years, we’ve collected these stories with great passion, and we’re certain this will not be our last—there are always more captivating tales waiting to be told. A final word of advice: Not everything in this book is meant to be taken at face value. Some stories remain unverified, passed down through generations of chess players. Some we’ve borrowed from other authors, while others have been shared informally for years. So, read with an open mind, a good sense of humor, and just a pinch of skepticism……but then again… what if it’s all true? “

I love authors who lay it all out front before you even start.

Let’s dig into some of the highlights listed by sections.

The Legends of Chess: Myths and Origins

Starts off with the legend of the grain of rice and the power of multiplication, then on to the Gods of chess, Mars and Caissa. We move on to India and the origins of the game. Next is the famous priest, Ruy Lopez, and the opening named after him.

Chess and Religion covers stories of Popes and priests who have much to say about chess and its effects on the populace.

You will next enjoy the section called Impact Atomic Bomb, which includes diagrams of explosive one move devastation.

We travel next to the famous Café de la Régence and meet great players from the 18th century.

I found the section Chess and the military quite full of interesting facts and stories from the American Revolution up to World War II.

There are biographical sections which include Anderssen, Steinitz, Lasker, Morphy, Alekhine, Capablanca, Euwe and many more. Many of their games are also included.

There is a captivating section called Chess streets and squares. It is about cities and towns that have named streets, bridges, and locations after great players.

The book is filled with interesting games, puzzles, difficult positions, and much more. Interesting tidbits of quirky personal facts about players we have come to know and idolize.

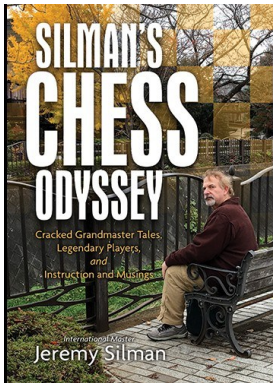
I found *The Lighter Side of Chess* a joy to read. I enjoyed playing through the games and would highly recommend the book to those who love uncommon stories and history related to chess.

I give the book a nine out of ten-star rating, subtracting one star because it did not include a bibliography and index. I would love to see the list of references they used.

Silman's Chess Odyssey

by Jeremy Silman

Reviewed by Robert Irons



When I was first starting out at chess, I got my hands on as many books as I could find, both at the library and at used book sales. While I always loved the game collections of both players and tournaments, I had a special place in my heart for books that shared different aspects of the game and introduced interesting people in its history. I remember fondly *The Fireside Book of Chess* by Fred Reinfeld and Irving Chernev, and I still own a copy of Chernev's *The Chess Companion*.

Those books have lots of stories, both fictional and true, and lots of games, including devastating moves and attacks that seem to come from nowhere. I could lose an afternoon sitting with those books and a chessboard.

Silman's Chess Odyssey is very much like those wonderful books, except that it is all told through the eyes of one man – who happens to be one of the premier chess teachers of my generation. The late Jeremy Silman earned his fame and popularity through his teaching of how to use imbalances to form plans and choose moves. What he offers here is a stroll through the life of a professional chess player, sharing countless observations, anecdotes, and games.

Part one of the book offers stories from his competitive days, including observations of such luminaries as Walter Browne, Miguel Najdorf, and former World Champions Tigran Petrosian, Vasily Smyslov, and Mikhail Tal. One of my favorite stories is titled “Silman Draws a Little Girl,” in which he recounts his meeting with 11-year-old Judit Polgar at the 1988 New York Open. The impression she left on him with that short game becomes clear when he writes that, in their post-mortem session, “...she took over the analysis! Her hands tossed the pieces here and there with amazing authority, and her comments made it clear that she was the one that fully expected to win and I was somehow fortunate to have survived!”

In Part two we are treated to IM Silman's take on many players over history, from Adolph Anderssen to Efim Geller. The section on Emanuel Lasker reflects his affection for the former World Champion, his reverence readily apparent: “Finally one more game from St. Petersburg – this game is one of the greatest of all time. It features moments of incredible brilliance, time trouble errors, frayed nerves, missed opportunities, and an incredible end by Lasker who finally drags his prey down. Play over it as if it were a movie, and let the emotional intensity of the violent battle wash over you.” That game is Pillsbury – Lasker, St. Petersburg 1895, and it is a battle royale.

Pillsbury, Harry Nelson - Lasker, Emanuel [D50]

St Petersburg Four Masters St Petersburg (4.1), 04.01.1896

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♖c3 ♖f6 4.♗f3 c5 5.♗g5 cxd4 6.♗xd4 ♖c6 7.♗h4 ♗e7 8.0-0-0 ♗a5 9.e3 ♗d7 10.♖b1 h6 11.cxd5 exd5 12.♗d4 0-0

13.♗xf6 ♗xf6 14.♗h5 ♗xd4 15.exd4 ♗e6 16.f4 ♗ac8 17.f5 ♗xc3 18.fxex6 ♗a3 19.exf7+ ♗xf7 20.bxa3 ♗b6+ 21.♗b5 ♗xb5+ 22.♖a1 ♗c7 23.♗d2 ♗c4 24.♗hd1 ♗c3 25.♗f5 ♗c4 26.♖b2 ♗xa3 27.♗e6+ ♖h7 28.♖xa3 ♗c3+ 29.♖a4 b5+ 30.♖xb5 ♗c4+ 31.♖a5 ♗d8+ 32.♗b6 ♗xb6#

0-1

Part three is my favorite, as it introduces a number of people from Silman's life who added color and content to his life, both on and off the board. The most interesting character to me is Steve Brandwein, a name I was unfamiliar with before reading this book. Silman describes Brandwein as “a man without an ego,” and yet “No one was able to nick him for even a draw.” He then offers two of Brandwein's games, one annotated, showing just how brilliant his play could be. Now I will never forget the name Steve Brandwein.

McKelvie, Neil - Brandwein, Steve [E78]

U.S. Open, 1964

1.d4 ♗f6 2.c4 g6 3.♖c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.♗e2 0-0 6.f4 c5 7.♗f3 cxd4 8.♗xd4 ♗bd7 9.♗e3 a6 10.0-0 e5 11.♗c2 exf4 12.♗xf4 ♗e5 13.♗d2 ♗e6 14.b3 b5 15.c5 b4 16.♗xb4 ♗a5 17.♗xe5 dxe5 18.♗d3 ♗fd8 19.♗b2 ♗d4 20.b4 ♗c7 21.a3 ♗b8 22.♗ad1 ♗xe4 23.♗xe4 ♗xe4 24.♗f2 ♗e3 25.♗xa6 e4 26.♗c1 ♗c3 27.♗g5 h6 28.♗h4 ♗xa3 29.b5 e3 30.♗e4 e2 31.b6 exf1♗+ 32.♗xf1 ♗c8 33.♗b5 ♗f5 34.c6 ♗e6

0-1

Part four, titled Musings, Theory, Instruction, and FAQs, is a cornucopia of things that Silman found interesting and chose to share. The first part contains his notes on the classic games that shaped him as a player. My favorite among them is Gligoric – Smyslov, Kiev 1959, a classic battle of the occupied center vs. the delayed counterattack. Next, he discusses one of his favorite openings, the Black Knights Tango (1.d4 ♗f6 2.c4 ♗c6; see example game below), and offers a number of annotated games exploring the line.

Brudno, Stephen - Benjamin, Joel (2587) [A50]

US Open-102 Framingham (6), 09.08.2001

1.d4 ♗f6 2.c4 ♗c6 3.♖c3 e5 4.d5 ♗e7 5.e4 ♗g6 6.♗e3 ♗b4 7.f3 ♗xc3+ 8.bxc3 d6 9.c5 0-0 10.♗d3 ♗d7 11.cxd6 cxd6 12.♗e2 ♗a5 13.0-0 ♗c5 14.♗c4 ♗d7 15.♗b3 ♗ac8 16.g3 f5 17.♗c2 fxe4 18.fxe4 ♗xf1+ 19.♖xf1 ♗h3+ 20.♖g1 ♗f8 21.♗d2 ♗xa2 22.♗e1 ♗c4 23.♗f2 a5 24.♗c1 ♗f3 25.♗e2 a4 26.♗g5 ♗xe4

0-1

He also discusses Frank Marshall's famous introduction of his Marshall Gambit in the Ruy Lopez, against Capablanca of all people! Next are several sections useful for practical play, including Psychology at the Board, Brutal Tactics and Positional Tactics, and Target Consciousness. Silman offers (and annotates) “The Greatest Amateur Game of All Time,” and I have no trouble believing his claim after playing over the game. This section has the feel of several snippets of other projects being combined, much like the end of the Beatles' Abbey Road album.

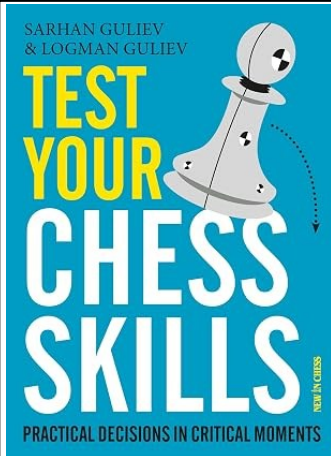
The book is filled with photographs, some historical, some personal, and all are attached to stories given inside. At over 500 pages, this book is not necessarily intended to be read from front to back. Rather, the reader can pick and choose what to enjoy based on their interests in the moment. In this way the book offers a lifetime of chess amusements. For those looking for chess-oriented entertainment, I give this book my highest recommendation. [Siles Press](#)



Test Your Chess Skills: Practical Decisions in Critical Moments

by Sarhan Guliev & Logman Guliev

Reviewed by Ayush Gaurav



Test Your Chess Skills by Sarhan Guliev and Logman Guliev is a chess puzzle and training book that aims to help players improve their decision-making during real matches. Instead of only teaching basic rules or simple beginner tactics, the authors give the readers different chess positions and ask them to find the best move or plan, and they also ask readers to evaluate the position. The main goal of the authors is to test how well a player can understand a position, calculate variations, and make useful decisions.

This was my first chess book, so I did not know exactly what to expect when I started reading it. I thought it might be more like a beginner's guide that explains rules, basic tactics, and simple strategies step by step. Instead, it felt more like an intermediate to advanced-level book. The book contains 224 problems with three choices for every question. Since the book is set up like so, the authors push the readers not just to memorize but to think hard, evaluate their decisions, and compare their answers with the provided solutions.

From my experience, this book felt very frustrating at times when I didn't understand the problem, regardless of how much time I put in. It does not feel like a normal beginner chess book that only explains how pieces move, what a fork is, or how to check-mate with basic patterns. Instead, it puts you into positions where you must decide what matters most. Sometimes the answer is an attacking move, but other times it is a quiet move, a defensive move, or a move that improves the position. That made the book feel more realistic because in actual chess games the best move is not always obvious.

One thing the authors did well was to provide clear and easy-to-follow diagrams. This is important because chess books are confusing if the positions are hard to read. The diagrams make it easier to stop and think about the position before looking at the answer. I also appreciated that the authors gave explanations after the positions. The explanations helped me understand why certain moves were good and why other moves did not work. For someone around my level (<1000), that is useful because I often see a move that "looks good," but I do not always understand whether it actually helps the position.

Another strength of the book is that it forces you to slow down. When I play online, I sometimes move too quickly and only notice my mistake after I have already made the move. Reading this book made me pause and look at more than one option. It reminded me to check what my opponent was threatening, look for tactics, and think about whether my pieces were being placed well. That was probably the most helpful part for me personally. It showed me that improving at chess is not just about learning more openings. It is also about building better thinking habits.

The book could be better in a few ways. Some of the positions felt too difficult for a lower-rated player. There were times when I had no clear idea what I was supposed to do. I could guess a move, but I did not always feel like I truly understood the position before reading the answer. Because of that, I think some explanations could have been longer or broken down more simply. The book would be easier for beginners if it explained the thought process step by step, such as what threats to notice first, which candidate moves to consider, and why some obvious moves fail.

My personal experience with the book was mixed but mostly positive. Since it was my first chess book, it took some time to get used to studying chess from diagrams instead of just playing games online. I liked that the author made me think harder than usual. This helped me realize that I often rush and do not fully understand what is happening in a position. When I got a position wrong, the answer usually showed me something I had missed, like a threat, a better piece placement, or a tactic. At the same time, I sometimes felt stuck because the positions were not always beginner-friendly. Still, I think that struggle was useful because it showed me the difference between guessing a move and analyzing it.

I would recommend this book to chess players who already know the rules, understand basic tactics, and want to improve their game decision-making. It is good for players who are intermediate and past the beginning stage and want to practice thinking through real positions. I think it is especially useful for players who keep making mistakes because they move too fast or only look for obvious attacks.

Overall, *Test Your Chess Skills* is a useful chess training book because it focuses on practical decision-making. It does a good job of giving clear positions and meaningful explanations, but it could be improved with more beginner-friendly guidance in some sections. As my first chess book, it was not the easiest starting point, but it did help me understand that chess improvement requires patience, perseverance, and determination.

[New in Chess](#)

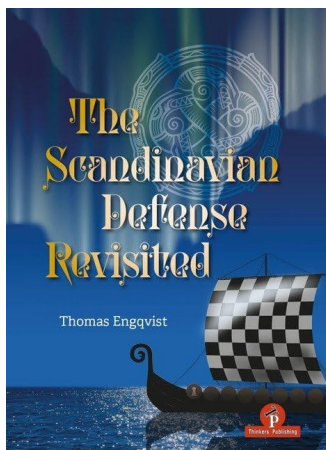
The Scandinavian Defense Revisited: A Cold-Blooded Counter to 1.e4!

by IM Thomas Engqvist

[Thinkers Publishing](#), 2026, 486 pp., \$44.00

Reviewed by NM Randy Bauer

Randy's Rating: 7.5



There are times when I get the impression a chess book's author hasn't given enough thought to their target audience. I suspect that is the case here, and from my work with it, *The Scandinavian Defense Revisited* suffers from trying to be a little bit of something for any audience. As a result, it loses focus in several places. Even with this concern, there is plenty to like about the book – if you're willing to wade into it.

The Scandinavian Defense (1.e4 d5) is a forcing black defense, as the immediate center counter (the name attached to the defense in the U.S. when I was growing up) significantly reduces white's options. In fact, it is well settled that only 2.exd5 offers white realistic chances to obtain an edge out of the opening with best play by black.

This makes the defense appealing to players who do not wish to master one of the many viable white systems that exist after, say, 1.e4 e5 or 1.e4 c5. While the defense has, over the years, existed on the periphery of playable defenses to 1.e4, its standing has been bolstered over the last 10-15 years by its regular use by super-GM Sergey Tiviakov. Many other strong players have followed his lead – including former World Champion Magnus Carlsen and world championship contender Fabiano Caruana. In fact, the book develops a repertoire for black based on 1.e4 d5 2.exd5 ♖xd5 3.♗c3 ♗d6, the variation that Tiviakov popularized.

One of the 'focus area issues' is the fact that, while it includes a black repertoire with 3...♗d6, it analyzes all variations for both white and black. So, besides the 'repertoire' 3...♗d6, the book spends a lot of pages on non-repertoire black choices. This includes 33 pages on the passive 3...♗d8, 70 pages on the more tactical 3...♗f6, and 95 pages on the former main line 3...♗a5. These make up about half the analytical pages of the book's 486 pages. The author suggests that this content is primarily for the white player, but I wonder how many white players are interested in a book that offers a repertoire for black, titled 'A Cold-Blooded Counter to 1.e4!'

Throughout, the author relies on a database of high-level games maintained by Chessbase.com. When introducing a possible move in a variation, he notes the number of games played with it in the database, its rank in popularity among all the possible moves at that point, and the percentage score associated with it. While this is semi-useful information, it's sometimes a bit haphazard. If you are going to continually describe this, it would make sense to cover them in order, either from the most popular or best score to the least. Instead, it jumps around. Further, the

author's repertoire choice isn't always the most popular or highest scoring percentage move, which calls into question some of the value of constantly referring to it.

The author relies on several semi-recent (and not-so-recent) books and other media on the defense, particularly the lines around 3...♗d6. In many instances, his analysis deviates from past recommendations, which is to be expected – and probably why 'Revisited' is appropriate within the title. The main repertoire variation has become fairly popular, so theory has grown as well.

In some ways, the variation has become a victim of its success. In the 'early years' of 3...♗d6, the limited theory was one of its selling points, but that is less the case now. In my own play, I decided to play this variation in a team tournament about a decade ago for its forcing nature and general lack of theory. It was a success, as I comfortably drew with a national master and defeated a class player. Now, though, things are less easy theory-wise.

There are things I like about the book. First, the author does not appear to 'sugar coat' lines in the repertoire. In particular, the theoretically critical 'Shirov Variation' (3...♗d6 4.d4 ♗f6 5.♗f3 c6 6.♗e5) and 'MVL's Approach' (6.g3) are recognized as dangerous lines for black (and the statistics presented bear this out). Second, the book, in its introduction, explains some of the key features that often drive black's play. They primarily include the more active role the queen can play on d6, where it may be deployed to either the king or queenside as well as maintaining pressure on the d-pawn – factors that are not present after ...♗a5 or ...♗d8. Third, there are a lot of yet-unexplored ideas presented. No doubt, many of these are the result of interaction with the 'silicon monsters' (Stockfish is mentioned, for example), but the author is a practitioner of the ...♗d6 variation, which is always helpful in authoring a book.

The book also benefits from very strong production values. It is hard cover, measures 9" x 7" and the stitching is particularly well done – the book lies flat throughout. There is excellent brilliant white paper and clear print, and the font is large enough to accommodate those of us with eyesight not as good as it once was. It also uses two sizes of chess diagrams to make it easier to follow main from side lines. While mostly two column format, it uses one column for chapter summaries and the introduction.

While there is a lot to like, the use of model games to present many lines made it harder for me to assimilate the material. The author writes that "The structure of the present book revolves around model games. I firmly believe that familiarity with both classical and contemporary examples provides a **holistic under**

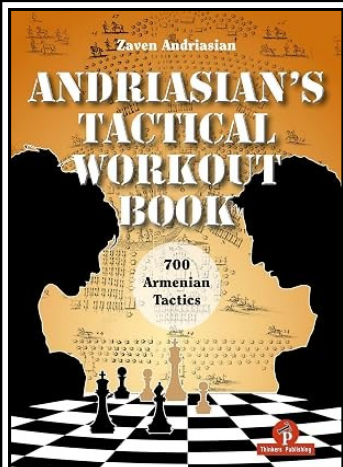
*****Continued on Page XX*****

Andriasian's Tactical Workout Book, 700 Armenian Tactics

by Zaven Andriasian

Published by [Thinkers Publishing](#), 2026

Reviewed by James Hodina



Andriasian's Tactical Workout Book, published in 2026 by Thinkers Publishing, is a collection of tactical positions taken from games played by notable Armenian chess players. Zaven Andriasian is, himself, a very accomplished player, most notably winning the 2006 World Junior Chess Championship, thereby earning his Grandmaster title. GM Andriasian reached a peak rating of 2645 in 2011 and is currently a FIDE Senior Trainer, rated at 2549 FIDE. He is definitely a well-credentialed author for this selective arrangement of tactics and solutions.

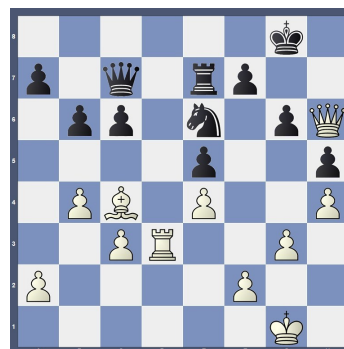
The tactics are presented over five chapters. The first three chapters are categorized by the player rating of the game the position was taken from, Chapter 4 contains the author's games, and Chapter 5 contains games of Armenian Chess Legends. In the Introduction, Andriasian states, "...this book is designed to be accessible to everyone from simpler exercises suitable for beginners, to more demanding positions that will test advanced and experienced players." Yet, as I progressed through the book, it remained unclear to me how this objective was met.

I found the games to be original and refreshing. As I went through each chapter, I found that some solutions were quite deep - potentially 10 moves or more ending in a "serious advantage" for the player on move. As with most tactics books, my approach to solving these exercises is visually from the diagram. I do not physically set up a board or on the computer to analyze. Being only a strong club player (1900), I cannot accurately analyze complex positions beyond four to six moves. With this approach, I quickly adapted to solving the tactical problems only deep enough to where I saw as an early advantage and then read the full solution to get the complete analysis of the best move and other moves I may not have fully considered. This approach worked for me as I was able to make steady progress through the entire book. Here are two examples from the book.

Chapter 1: Elo 2500 Exercises

□ 37

Anastasian, A - Toria, G.



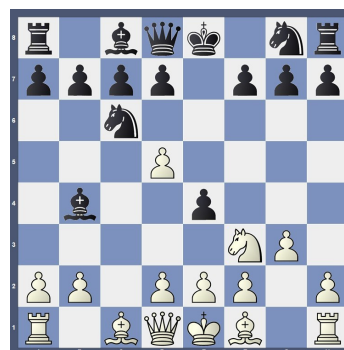
□ 29? +/-

How can we break through on the kingside?

Chapter 5: Exercises The Legends

□ 13

Petrosian, T - Ree, H



□ 7? +/-

Can you exploit Black's misplaced bishop?

Each position in the book was captioned with the insightful hint of a good coach: "The first move seems simple enough. Find the follow up!" or "Pick out White's main weakness and target it!" I found these short captions to be quite helpful. Just enough of a nudge to find a solution but not so much as to give it away. However, outside of the one-page introduction to the book, there was no additional narrative from GM Andriasian in any of the chapters.

While the author's stated intent was to include "exercises suitable for beginners," I found very few examples of this. Generally, there was no mention of a tactical motif often

found in beginner tactics books. Nor did I find the positions notably increasing in difficulty as I progressed through the chapters. (They were all adequately but equally challenging for me!) Rather, I believe that this book is best suited for players around my rating or stronger. If the “beginner” is keenly interested in these refreshingly new positions, I recommend they set up the board and analyze, much like an approach to a study, to gain practical knowledge from these positions.

Finally, this book pays homage to the great Armenian chess players by presenting their games and amazing tactical skills. Unfortunately, I was disappointed that the author did not provide more information on Armenian chess and Armenian players, too. What is the Armenian chess culture? Do the players of these wonderful games have any special place in Armenian chess history? How did these players develop to this high level? Many chess enthusiasts are familiar with the likes of GM Tigran Petrosian. However, I had to do my own research on “Anastasian, A.” who has over 30 positions at the start of Chapter 1. I was impressed to learn that GM Ashot Anastasian was an eight-time Armenian Chess Champion. I want to believe that GM Andriasian, as an Armenian, has some unique insights that he could share in this regard as well.

In summary, I identify this book as a large set of unique and strong tactical positions. Top players can visually analyze these positions to their conclusion. For the rest of us, we must find an approach best suited to our ability by either setting up the board or attempting to find the first few moves and then reading the full solution. In the end, we can all learn from these tactical exercises.

Solutions

Chapter 1: Elo 2500 Exercises - Diagram 37

Anastasian, A - Toria, G.
ARM-ch U18. 1983

29.g4 Bd7 [29...hxg4 30.h5 gxh5 31.♖xh5+-] 30.gxh5 Bxd3
31.hxg6! [The big tactical point.] 31...Bd1+ 32.♗h2 ♖d7
33.♖h7+ ♗f8 34.♙xe6 fxe6 [34...♖xe6 35.g7+] 35.♖h8+ ♗e7
36.g7 ♖d3 37.♖f8+ ♗d7 38.g8♖+- [1-0]

Chapter 5: Exercises The Legends - Diagram 13

Petrosian, T - Ree, H
Hoogovens. 1971

7.dxc6 exf3 8.♖b3+- if fxe2 9.♙xe2 ♙c5 10.cxb7 [1-0]

*****Continued from page 39*****

standing of the Scandinavian Defense (*bolded in the original text*). By studying entire games, you will gain insight into how this opening has been approached throughout different periods of chess history. This means the book is suitable for use by players of either side (White or Black)."

This is one of the accepted ways of organizing material, even for an opening book, but it requires a lot of guidance between games (and a very detailed table of contents, which is missing here) to help the reader navigate between games and understand what is covered in each. As an example, the chapter on the Marshall Gambit (1.e4 d5 2.exd5 ♖f6 3.d4 ♖xd5) contains six model games, with the names of the players, the tournament and year but no information on what each game covers. You basically have to create your own table while working through the games to identify the demarcation point between these games. That should be the author's job, not the reader's.

These games also call into question the editorial choices for presented games. This variation is moderately popular, but the sourced games are from 1858, 1914, 1915, 1912, 1918, and 1997. They feature great players from the past (Morphy, Lasker, Alekhine, Capablanca, Marshall, Larsen) but is this reflective of an opening book in the 21st century? I think the author goes overboard with the prior history lesson.

This is not an isolated example. In the old mainline after 3...♗a5 4.d4 ♖f6, there are six illustrative games, again, with no explanation of what is covered in each, and the games are from 1903, 1907, 1979, 1909, 1907, and 1906. You get games involving the likes of Tarrasch, Mieses (the variation is named after him), Larsen, Karpov, Spielmann and Chigorin, but this still doesn't seem like a representative sample of a book about a variation revisited – more like the original visit.

The author extends the history lesson to the introduction as well, where six pages are devoted to quotes about the Scandinavian Defense by players (mostly) past and present. It certainly traces the evolution of the evaluation of the defense, but it will probably be of little practical value to a current player.

Some of what I view as the historical excesses of much of the book do not extend as much into the repertoire, which is more focused on recent practice (although with a nod to its early practitioners). Here, I found the content to be easier to follow, as it relies less on model games and more on straightforward analysis.

In general, as a player of this variation with little interest in the rest of the content, I would probably rate it about a six. However, for those who enjoy the stroll down chess history lane and/or have use for the other content, it rises much higher, probably around an eight – hence, my settling somewhere in between, with the book's strong production values tilting it slightly higher. I would also note that I have found the book offered on websites in the range of \$30, which may reflect the fact that the book was published in 2025 – chess theory marches on!

Celebrating 250th anniversary of U.S. Independence Day

Awani Kumar, Lucknow, INDIA

"Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves"

— Abraham Lincoln, 16th president of the US

Freedom to shape one's destiny is innate in every society not only for humans but also for birds and animals. Independence Day in the United States is an annual celebration of nationhood held on the 4th of July. It is celebrated across the United States with parades, fireworks show – author witnessed a spectacular one at California in 2025 – concerts and other festivities. Posters are displayed and postage stamps have been issued to commemorate it.



Independence Day is also notable for its displays of patriotism, as many Americans commemorate the day by flying the American flag outside their home and dressing in red, white and blue. It commemorates the passage of the Declaration of Independence by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776. This document announced the separation of the 13 North American colonies from Great Britain and the author wishes to celebrate its 250th (semiquincentennial/ sestercentennial/ bicenquingenary) anniversary with interesting knight and leaper tours on 250 cell board, namely, 10x25, 5x5x10 and 2x5x5x5 board. Figure 1 and 2 are semi-magic open knight tours on 10x25 board. Sum of move numbers along columns is 1255. The tours are almost identical and only 8 underlined cells are different. Such twin tours are rare. Readers are urged to look for the more challenging closed tour. Figure 3 is a zebra {2,3} tour having 15 magic lines. Figure 4 and 5 are giraffe {1,4} and fiveleaper {0,5} + {3,4} tours respectively having 4 magic lines. Readers are urged to look for these fairy pieces tours having more magic lines.

Figure 6 is the longest path author could get for corsair {2,5}. Can there be a longer tour? Figure 7 is a semi-magic knight tour on 5x5x10 board.

25	228	97	186	27	202	95	188	73	204	93	242	69	214	91	240	67	150	89	236	57	156	87	218	59
100	183	128	173	102	179	118	1	136	167		17	126	171	144	15	112	3	140	161	108	11	124	159	146
201	48	193	30	199	24	229	34	213	76	225	66	151	74	205	44	243	70	219	60	239	54	149	80	237
178	117	20	131	176	99	184	127	172	103	180	113	2	135	168	107	10	125	158	145	14	111	6	141	162
23	230	33	196	39	232	49	192	37	206	45	248	35	208	77	224	53	148	81	222	63	244	83	220	61
98	185	26	227	96	187	28	203	94	189	72	215	92	241	68	211	90	235	56	155	88	217	58	157	86
129	174	101	182	119	22	133	166	115	18	137	170	105	16	121	4	143	164	109	8	139	160	147	12	123
194	29	200	47	190	31	198	41	226	51	212	75	234	65	152	71	216	43	246	85	210	79	238	55	154
21	132	177	116	19	130	175	104	181	120		134	165	114	9	138	169	106	13	122	5	142	163	110	7
32	197	40	231	50	195	38	233	46	191	36	207	42	247	52	209	78	223	64	153	82	221	62	245	84

Fig.6. Corsair {2,5} path visiting 248 cells

1	18	3	244	5	246	7	248	233	250	1255
240	243	238	17	236	15	234	13	8	11	1255
19	2	241	4	245	6	247	10	249	232	1255
242	239	20	237	16	235	14	231	12	9	1255
21	30	41	210	219	32	43	208	221	230	1255
A										
100	135	148	119	92	161	196	55	62	187	1255
117	150	133	102	165	86	67	184	191	60	1255
134	101	118	149	74	177	166	85	200	51	1255
151	116	103	132	171	78	73	178	49	204	1255
40	211	26	31	42	209	220	225	44	207	1255
B										
111	156	139	96	75	174	169	82	201	52	1255
138	97	110	157	170	81	70	181	48	203	1255
125	142	129	106	93	158	195	56	63	188	1255
128	107	124	143	164	89	68	183	190	59	1255
25	22	29	218	33	216	35	222	229	226	1255
C										
136	99	120	147	162	87	66	185	192	61	1255
121	146	137	98	91	160	197	54	65	186	1255
130	105	114	153	172	79	72	179	46	205	1255
115	152	131	104	77	176	167	84	199	50	1255
212	39	24	27	214	37	224	227	206	45	1255
D										
155	112	95	140	173	80	71	180	47	202	1255
126	109	122	145	76	175	168	83	198	53	1255
113	154	141	94	163	88	69	182	193	58	1255
108	127	144	123	90	159	194	57	64	189	1255
23	28	213	38	217	34	215	36	223	228	1255
E										

Fig.7. Semi-magic knight tour on 5x5x10 board

1	164	47	102	171		48	203	174	167	46
122	215	170	209	190		219	198	75	154	227
113	202	27	90	247		176	137	192	205	168
118	197	52	159	232		71	8	169	210	191
109	28	193	196	181		136	195	70	89	248
z1w1						z1w2				
114	103	172	165	50		175	166	49	204	173
105	32	51	160	233		132	7	66	85	62
110	163	18	99	238		127	146	57	80	43
121	214	185	208	189		220	199	74	155	228
112	201	180	187	184		177	212	183	206	179
z2w1						z2w2				
123	216	23	94	243		218	141	76	153	226
2	35	16	101	236		129	148	63	82	45
119	10	21	96	241		222	143	54	157	230
108	29	26	91	246		135	138	69	88	249
117	194	53	158	231		72	9	178	211	182
z3w1						z3w2				
104	33	14	161	234		131	6	65	84	61
115	162	19	98	239		126	145	56	79	42
106	31	24	93	244		133	140	67	86	59
111	36	17	100	237		128	147	58	81	44
120	213	186	207	188		221	200	73	156	229
z4w1						z4w2				
217	4	151	38	13		150	39	224	5	152
124	37	22	95	242		223	142	77	40	225
3	34	15	12	235		130	149	64	83	60
116	11	20	97	240		125	144	55	78	41
107	30	25	92	245		134	139	68	87	250
z5w1						z5w2				

Fig.8. Knight tour on 2x5x5x5 board

After tour in 3D, let’s look into knight tour in higher dimension. Manning [1] mentions that “The notion of geometries of n dimensions began to suggest itself to mathematicians about the middle of the 19th century.

Cayley, Grassmann, Riemann, Clifford and some others introduced it into their mathematical investigations.” Kumar [2] extended knight's tour in hyperspace and constructed magic tours in four and five dimensions. Before we go for tours in four dimensions it is important for the reader to visualize a 4D hypercube. If we move a unit square a unit distance orthogonal to its plane in 3D space and join the corresponding corners, we get a cube. Analogously, we can imagine moving this unit cube a unit distance in an 'orthogonal' direction in 4D space to produce the 4D equivalent of a 3D cube, which is known as a 'hypercube'. However we can only show this by means of a perspective drawing as shown in Figure 9. This way, we can visualize a hypercube and be comfortable (and confident) with its 'look'. The hypercube has 16 corners (derived from 2 cubes), 32 edges (2 cubes and joining lines) and 24 square faces. Figure 10 shows all the possible knight's moves from an inner cell in a $3 \times 3 \times 3 \times 4$ hypercube. Once the readers can visualize the jumps of the knight in hyperspace, they can count the possible number of knight moves from the various cell positions. Figure 8 is a diagonal knight tour in $2 \times 5 \times 5 \times 5$ hypercube.

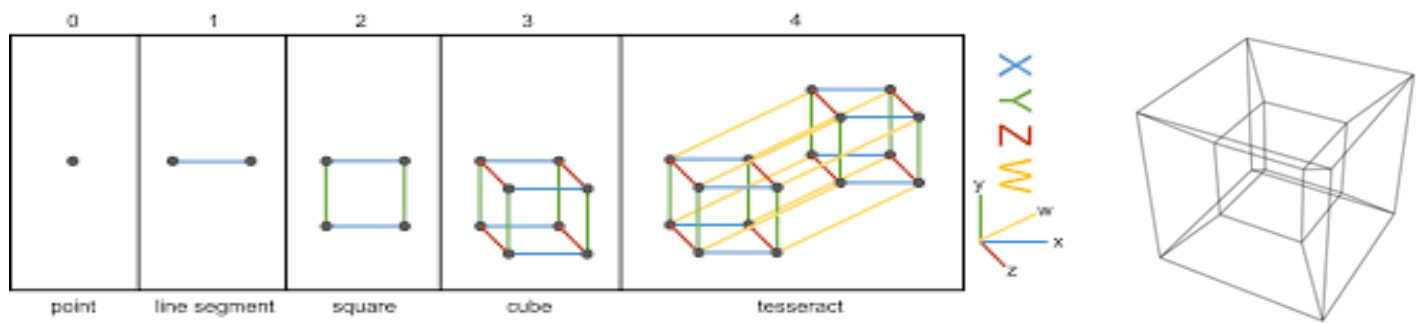


Fig.9. Visualisation of a 4-dimensional hypercube (or tesseract)

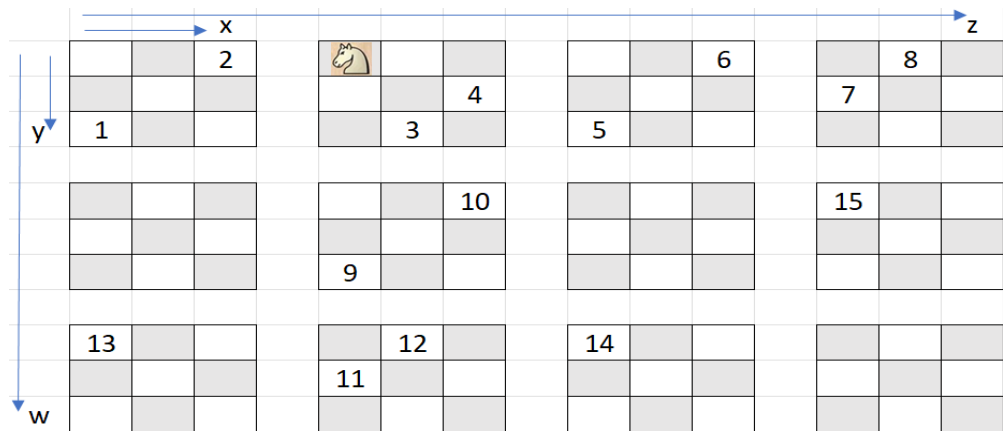


Fig.10. Knight moves in a $3 \times 3 \times 3 \times 4$ hypercube

Independence shouldn't be taken for granted. "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty", said Wendell Phillips over a century ago. The author wishes **Happy Independence Day** and congratulates Americans on its 250th anniversary.

References:

1. H. P. Manning, The Fourth Dimension Simply Explained, Dover Publications, New York, 2005, p.14.
2. A. Kumar, Magic Knight's Tours in Higher Dimensions, available at <https://arxiv.org/abs/1201.0458>.

