The Chess Journalist

Volume XLIX (Issue 167) October 2026

CHESS JOURNALISTS OF AMERICA



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Table of Contents: Page
Hello From the Editor 3
2026 Chess Journalists of America Award Results by Joshua Anderson 4
Resurfaced: Mexico 1978 by Chris Martinez G 14
Checkmate Cancer 2026 by Nikhal Murugan 16
Incomplete Assumptions in Chess, Part 1 by NM Michael Takahashi 25
Duchamp Exhibit at MOMA in NY by Dr. Anthony Saidy 33
The Livonian Knight: Selected Games of Alvis Vitolins by Zigurds Lanka, Edvins Kengis, Janis Klovans and Janis Vitomskis, Reviewed by Mark Capron 34
Queen of Chess Reviewed by Cindy Wister 36
Library Focus: Thierry Lafargue interviewed by Mark Capron 37
Bobby Fischer and His World by John Donaldson, Reviewed by Robert Irons 44
Fischer by Andrew Soltis 45
The Day Donn Rogosin Beat Bobby Fischer by Patricio Robaya 47
A Move From the Heart by Sriaditya Pendyala 49
American Dream: The Best Games of Hikaru Nakamura by Cyrus Lakdawala, Reviewed by Robert Irons 50
The Lubyanka Gambit by Sergei Grodzensky, Reviewed by Joshua Anderson (with help by Gemini) 51
Understanding Before Moving 3: Sicilian Structures Part 3 by Herman Grooten, Reviewed by Robert Irons 52
The Modernized Catalan, Volume 1 by Balázs Csonka, Reviewed by James Hodina 53
Capablanca: The Great Minimalist by Cyrus Lakdawala, Reviewed by Robert Irons 54
The Ellie Gambit: When A Good Chess Story Outruns the Evidence by Mary Giannone 56
The Original Arkhangelsk: Take Control of the Ruy Lopez as Black by IM Tibor Karolyi, Reviewed by NM Randy Bauer 58
Merry Christmas 2026 by Awani Kumar, Lucknow, India 61
Oddities and Peculiarities (and Obscurities): I Have Made Chess Objectively Worse by Nicholas Cooke 64

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Hello From the Editor

Happy Halloween!!

This issue has probably been the most difficult one I have ever produced. Why? Microsoft discontinued their program Publisher near the beginning of October. This is the program myself (30+ years) and many, many others have used to create chess newsletters and magazines. At first, I thought I would try to use the program called Canva. This was a miserable failure. The program is not meant for newsletters or magazines. Next up was a program called LaTex. This program is very good and can do anything that needs done except that in order to use it you must know how to program (basically writing computer code). The advice I received on Adobe InDesign was that it was very difficult to use and expensive. Due to how these other programs were going I decided to bite the bullet and use Microsoft Word for this issue. I had written a thesis in Word (30 years ago!) so I have remembered some. Word can't do many of the things Publisher could or if it can it takes 20 times as long to do it. Next issue will be in InDesign. If some items do not look as professional as they used to in this issue I am sorry…but let's all blame Microsoft!!

The Award Winners were announced at the annual meeting back in August at the US Open. Joshua's annual report on the awards leads off this issue. Joshua has been experimenting with A.I. He chose Gemini as his writing pal for the awards article and a book review later in the issue. Gemini did an amazing job on these two. Joshua's approach was interesting and you can read more about it inside.

We also continue to work on the American Chess Archives project and recently spoke at the St. Louis Chess Conference about it.

We have several book reviews again thanks to Elk and Ruby, Thinkers Press, and Silman-James for putting out such outstanding books. Thanks to Robert Irons, James Hodina, NM Randy Bauer, and Joshua Anderson for the book reviews. Cindy Wister is back with another great review, but this time it is on the *Queen of Chess* Netflix documentary.

Thierry Lafargue is a book collector extraordinaire from France. Come check out his amazing library with us.

Chris Martinez G returns with the column *Resurfaced*. In this installment he touches on the fascinating world of philately (stamp collecting). Our vice-president, Jon Edwards, should be excited about this. If folks do not know Jon is one of the world's largest stamp collectors. Jon recently collected a huge treasure trove that he will be writing about so stay tuned. In the meantime, allow Chris' article to whet your appetite.

I am really excited that we have a few more new authors! Mary Giannone gives us some interesting research. Nikhil Murugan contributes a summary of the amazing Checkmate Cancer initiative. Nicholas Cooke wants to give Bob Bassalla a run for his money looking at the humorous side of chess. NM Michael Takahashi is allowing us to reprint one of his recent blogs.

Also new, at least since I have been editor, an article by GM Andy Soltis.

Awani Kumar helps us celebrate Christmas. Sriaditya Pendyala contributes a short piece from the heart. Dr. Anthony Saidy gives us a glimpse into the Duchamp Exhibit. Patricio Robaya interviews Donn Rogosin about a Fischer autograph.

I pushed a few articles out to the January 2027 issue due to how long this issue was becoming.

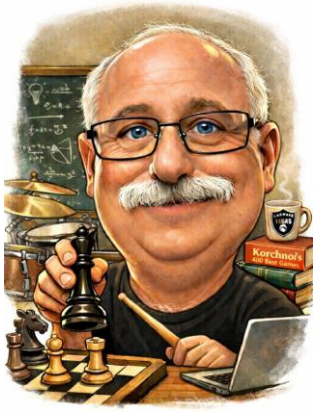
Thanks to Rex Gray for his excellent proofreading and suggestions.

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 January 5, 2027.

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



2026 Chess Journalists of America Award Results

by Joshua Anderson (with Gemini)

A few notes on this year's awards.

The Top Journalist of the Year was **Joseph Asik**, who has run *American Chess Magazine* for the last 10 years. He edged out **Jon Jacobs**, who won an honorable mention. For those of you who did not attend the chess journalists meeting at the US Open, someone discussed whether the Chess Journalist of the Year should be a person born and living in a foreign country. The magazine they produce is available for sale in the US. It's read by many Americans- well, about 2,000 anyway. It covers US top players predominantly, but has also done a good job covering a few local events, as well as numerous historical events related to American chess. Therefore, I believe he deserves to receive the Chess Journalist of the Year award.

Some would suggest that living in Serbia would be a deterrent; not because it's Serbia, they would say the same thing if he were living in Timbuktu, or if he were living in India. The fact of the matter is that we live in a day and age where you can work with someone in Timbuktu or in Serbia or in India or in Rio de Janeiro as easily as you can work with the person down the street. In fact, I routinely meet with people in Tanzania and India far more often than I meet with other businesses in my business in our own club development area for Tri-Bridges Chess Club. The other argument is, well, he lives there, again, in Serbia rather than the United States. While this is certainly true, I consider this a matter of his business, not mine.

Furthermore, my understanding is that he lives there in part because he has family there, including two children. I find it disturbing that we would push for someone to live in the US and away from their family so that they might better qualify to win the award.

Another interesting CJOY issue. Traditionally, though, the word " Year is part of the title; it was a lifetime award, which is why one free entry and lifetime membership were included. In the early 2000s, no one ever got a second. Then Dan Lucas kept using Mike Klein and Al Lawrence, two great writers, to cover many of his stories. This made sense from his perspective, but it made it pretty impossible for some random person to win the award when Klein and Lawrence wrote most of the major stories. It got to where each won three CJOY awards. In 2020, John Hartmann basically did everything for US Chess during COVID and won the award, then repeating in 2021. In both years, he did a great job, but he also had almost no one writing (this changed as 2021 went on, and CJA ran a half year behind) and was being expected to do all of CLO and CL.

With JJ Lang taking over CLO and doing much great work, it is hardly surprising that he would win two awards, but it is also hardly surprising that the judges, many of whom are aware of the evolution of the award, will not be overly motivated to have the same person win it again and again. There has even been discussion of writing it into the rules that people who have won previously, or maybe two or three times, are not allowed to enter the competition as they are in the "Hall of Fame" persay. This may make sense especially because US Chess has several full-time writers on staff and pretty much no one else has time to do more than dabble.

Much of the award's summary was done by AI; it seems like the sort of thing AI actually should be doing, as opposed to whatever people seem to use it for these days. There are a couple of points I would like to address, though.

1) We had a frustrating time with judges in large categories not wanting to judge a 4th entry worth a point. While I understand that this can be harder than judging first, it's amazing how often 1 point can make the difference in a category.
2) Another issue is that with *American Chess Magazine* and *Chess Life* entering just an item or two in each category, we have a paucity of print material. Originally, we included "magazine" pdfs as online, because they were not printed, but in reality, they are much more similar to the audio/videos that often are a major part of categories like Best Interview.

Executive Summary

We analyzed the **2026 Chess Journalists of America (CJA) Awards** dataset across all award divisions. The dataset consists of **252 official entries** evaluated across **59 award categories** by a panel of **75 judges**.

Key Takeaways

1. **Northwest Chess & Saint Louis Chess Club Lead Overall Wins**
    - **Northwest Chess** (edited by Jeffrey Roland) and the **Saint Louis Chess Club** emerged as the most recognized entities, each winning **9 category awards**.
    - *Northwest Chess* dominated state and regional journalism (winning 6 out of 10 categories in the Cramer Awards division).
    - *Saint Louis Chess Club* dominated online, social media, and video broadcast categories (winning Best Overall Chess Website, Best Instruction Lesson, Best Non-Instructive Video, Best Twitter Feed, and Best Tournaments/Match Coverage).
2. **Cramer Awards & Selection Focus: "Best State Champion Report"**
    - In your active sheet (**Cramer Awards**), the selected category **Best State Champion Report** awarded **First Place Winner** to **Northwest Chess** (Jeffrey Roland, Editor) for the *2026 Oregon Closed*

State Championship coverage with a score of **23 points**.
    - Alaa-addin Moussa submitted the second-place entry in this category for *Rank & File Summer 2025* with **17 points**.
3. **High Volume in Online & Social Media**
    - The **Online & Social Media Awards** division had the largest volume of submissions, with **118 entries** (46.8% of all submissions across 22 categories).
    - Print Article Awards was the second-largest division, with **44 entries** across 13 categories.

Overview of Submissions by Division

Across the entire awards program, submissions are divided into 7 core divisions:

- **Online & Social Media Awards**: 118 entries (22 categories, 24 winners, 18 honorable mentions)
- **Print Article Awards**: 44 entries (13 categories, 15 winners, 6 honorable mentions)
- **Visual Arts Awards**: 25 entries (5 categories, 5 winners, 1 honorable mention)
- **Cramer Awards (State & Regional)**: 22 entries (10 categories, 10 winners, 4 honorable mention
- **Junior Awards (Under 21)**: 17 entries (3 categories, 1 winner)
- **Book Awards**: 14 entries (4 categories, 4 winners)
- **Top 3 Major Awards**: 12 entries (3 categories, 2 winners, 4 honorable mentions)
-

Active Sheet Focus: Cramer Awards

The **Cramer Awards** recognize outstanding state and regional chess journalism. The table below outlines all ten categories in this division along with their winners and scores:

Category	Winner / Honorable Mention	Entrant / Outlet	Score
Best State Champion Report (Selected Cell)	🏆 **Winner**	Northwest Chess (Jeffrey Roland, Ed.)	**23**
	Nominee	Alaa-addin Moussa	17
Best State Magazine Photo	🏆 **Winner**	Northwest Chess (*Pupols at WA Champ*)	**20**
	🎗️ Honorable Mention	Northwest Chess (*Sophia Michael*)	17
Best Scholastic Coverage in State	🏆 **Winner**	Alaa-addin Moussa (*Rank & File*)	**21**
	🎗️ Honorable Mention	Northwest Chess	17
Best State Facebook Page	🏆 **Winner**	Texas Chess Association	Winner

Best Overall State Website	🏆 **Winner**	Paul Covington (*oklahomachess.org*)	**21**
	🎗️ Honorable Mention	Texas Chess Association (*texaschess.org*)	19
Best State Magazine/Newsletter Print	🏆 **Winner**	Northwest Chess	**23**
Best Personal Narrative	🏆 **Winner**	Scott Varagona	Winner
Best State Tournament Coverage	🏆 **Winner**	Northwest Chess	Winner
Best Photograph	🏆 **Winner**	Northwest Chess (*Tom Booth*)	**21**
	🎗️ Honorable Mention	Northwest Chess (*Siana Razmov*)	19
Best State Magazine/Newsletter Online	🏆 **Winner**	Northwest Chess	**23**

Top Performing Entrants & Outlets

The top entrants receiving multiple **Winners** and **Honorable Mentions** across all divisions include:

1. **Northwest Chess (Jeffrey Roland, Ed.)**: **9 Wins**, **3 Honorable Mentions** (12 total awards)
    - *Wins include*: Best State Champion Report, Best State Magazine Photo, Print Magazine, Tournament Coverage, Photograph, Online Magazine, Photojournalism Article, Humorous Contribution (Print).
2. **Saint Louis Chess Club**: **9 Wins**, **2 Honorable Mentions** (11 total awards)
    - *Wins include*: Best Overall Website, Best Instruction Lesson, Best Non-Instructive Video, Best Documentary, Best Educational Lesson, Best Tournament/Match Coverage, Best Interview, Best Weekly Video Program, Best Twitter Feed.
3. **Jon Jacobs**: **3 Wins**, **4 Honorable Mentions** (7 total awards)
    - *Wins include*: Best Historical Article (Print), Best Feature Article (Print), Best Blog.
4. **John Hilbert**: **2 Wins**
    - *Wins include*: Best Book of the Year Overall (*George H. Mackenzie*), Best Book - Other.
5. **Sabina Foisor**: **2 Wins**
    - *Wins include*: Best Podcast, Best Single Podcast Episode.
6. **JJ Lang**: **2 Wins**, **1 Honorable Mention**
    - *Wins include*: Best Tournament Report – State/Local, Best Tournament Report – National/International.
7. **Texas Chess Association**: **1 Win**, **1 Honorable Mention**
    - *Wins include*: Best State Facebook Page.

Refer to the **"Top Performing Entrants & Outlets (Winners & Honorable Mentions)"** chart for a breakdown of top recipients.

2026 Chess Journalists of America (CJA) Awards Report

This comprehensive report details the official **Winners** and **Honorable Mentions (HM)** across all award categories and divisions in the 2026 CJA Awards.

1. Top Major Awards: Chess Journalist of the Year.

- **Winner:** Josip Asik (21 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** Jon Jacobs (18 pts)

Best Story of the Year

- **Winner:** Mike Klein – *Danya* (*Chess Life*, Dec 2025) (21 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** Jon Jacobs – *The Long-Forgotten Master Behind Chess's Climactic Checkmate* (19 pts)

Best Column

- **Winner:** Joel Benjamin – *Naroditsky Endgames / Pole Endgames* (*Chess Life*) (18 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** Salskis – *American Chess Magazine* (17 pt)

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2. Cramer Awards (State & Regional Journalism)Best State Champion Report

- **Winner:** *Northwest Chess* (Jeffrey Roland, Editor) – *2026 Oregon Closed State Championship* (23 pts)

Best State Magazine Photo

- **Winner:** *Northwest Chess* (Jeffrey Roland, Editor) – *Old School at 2025 Buckendorf Senior Championship* (20 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** *Northwest Chess* (Jeffrey Roland, Editor) – *Sophia Michael at 2025 Detective Cookie Chess Classic* (17 pts)

Best Scholastic Coverage in State

- **Winner:** Alaa-addin Moussa – *Rank & File* (Winter 2026) (21 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** *Northwest Chess* (Jeffrey Roland, Editor) (17 pts)

Best State Facebook Page

- **Winner:** Texas Chess Association

Best Overall State Website

- **Winner:** Paul Covington – *oklahomachess.org* (Oklahoma Chess Association) (21 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** Texas Chess Association – *texaschess.org* (19 pts)

Best State Magazine/Newsletter (Print)

- **Winner:** *Northwest Chess* (Jeffrey Roland, Editor) (23 pts)

Best Personal Narrative

- **Winner:** Scott Varagona

Best State Tournament Coverage

- **Winner:** *Northwest Chess* (Jeffrey Roland, Editor)

Best Photograph

- **Winner:** *Northwest Chess* (Jeffrey Roland, Editor) – *Tom Booth at 2026 ICA January Alchemist Coffee House* (21 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** *Northwest Chess* (Jeffrey Roland, Editor) – *Siana Razmov at 2025 National K-12 in Spokane, WA* (19 pts)

Best State Magazine/Newsletter (Online)

- **Winner:** *Northwest Chess* (Jeffrey Roland, Editor) (23 pts)

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3. Book Awards Best Book – Instructional

- **Winner:** Dan Heisman – *Maximize Your Chess Potential*

Best Book of the Year (Overall)

- **Winner:** John Hilbert – *George H. Mackenzie: A Chess Biography* (25 pts)

Best Book – Self-Published

- **Winner:** Jon Crumiller – *The Horta-Osório Collection of Antique Chess Sets, Volume 1: India* (25 pts)

Best Book – Other

- **Winner:** John Hilbert – *George H. Mackenzie: A Chess Biography* (23 pts)

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4. Visual Arts Awards Best Single Chess Photo

- **Winner:** Kelly Centrelli – *Calculation* (19 pts)

Best Cartoon

- **Winner:** Navied Mahdavian – *Scholar's Mate* (*Chess Life*, Apr 2026) (23 pts)

Best Art

- **Winner:** Charan Perumalla – *The Chess Journalist* (Vol. XLIX, No. 164)

Best Photojournalism Article

- **Winner:** *Northwest Chess* (Jeffrey Roland, Editor)

Best Single Chess Magazine Cover

- **Winner:** Natasha Roberts – *Chess Life* (Jan 2026 cover) (19 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** David Llada – *The Chess Journalist* cover (17 pts)

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5. Junior Awards (Under 21) Best Personal Narrative by a Junior

- **Winner:** WGM Zoey Tang – *No Stepping Back* (*American Chess Magazine* #047) (18 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** Jason Liang – *Persistence Prevails* (*American Chess Magazine* #046) (17 pts)

Best Print Article by a Junior

- **Winner:** Maximilian Lu – *Continental* (*Chess Life*, Aug 2025) (23 pts)

Best Photo by a Junior

- **Winner:** Jack Aronian – *SuperNats Color Winners* (12 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** Jack Aronian – *Best in Chess* (10 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** Samika Nettem – *The Unknown Chess Player* (10 pts)

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6. Print Article Awards Best Regular Newspaper Column

- **Winner:** David R. Sands – Chess Column (*The Washington Times*)

Best Historical Article

- **Winner:** Jon Jacobs – *Alan Trefler: The Underdog Who Scraped the Sky* (25 pts)

Best Feature Article

- **Winner:** Jon Jacobs – *Alan Trefler: The Underdog Who Scraped the Sky* (16 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** Jon Jacobs – *The Long-Forgotten Master Behind Chess's Climactic Checkmate* (14 pts)

Best Single Article of Local Interest

- **Winner:** Irene Bantigue – *Sporting Chance* (*Chess Life*, Sept 2025)

Best Analysis

- **Winner:** Nikolaos Ntirlis – *Slippery Steinitz* (*Chess Life*, Feb 2026) (21 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** GM Spyridon Kapnisis – *When Modern Means Classical* (*American Chess Magazine* #049) (19 pts)

Best Review

- **Winner:** Carsten Hansen – *Fresh Leaves* (*American Chess Magazine* #047) (21 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** John Watson – *Good Thinking* (*Chess Life*, Aug 2025) (19 pts)

Best Tournament Report – National/International

- **Winner:** GM John Burke – *Five-Star Fabiano* (*American Chess Magazine* #048) (15 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** Jennifer Yu – *Doubled Over* (*Chess Life*, Apr 2026) (13 pts)

Best Club Newsletter

- **Winner:** Frisco Del Rosario – *Menlo Park Chess Club Newsletter*

Best Personal Narrative

- **Winner:** Tatev Abrahamyan – *Fighting Back* (*Chess Life*, Aug 2025) (23 pts)

Best Interview

- **Winner:** Pete Tamburro – *How Chess Saves Lives* (*American Chess Magazine* #049) (22 pts)

Best Tournament Report – State/Local

- **Co-Winner (Tie):** Andrew Squitiro – *Rail Good Time* (*Chess Life*, Jan 2026) (16 pts)
- **Co-Winner (Tie):** David Mehler – *Remembrance Reunion* (*American Chess Magazine* #046) (16 pts)
- **Co-Winner (Tie):** *Northwest Chess* (Jeffrey Roland, Editor) – *2025 Oregon Open* (16 pts)

Best Instructive Lesson

- **Winner:** Rick Massimo & Alexander Chernin – *Coaching Counts* (*Chess Life*, May 2026) (21 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** Alex Fishbein – *Hours of Learning and Fun* (*American Chess Magazine* #046) (19 pts)

Best Humorous Contribution

- **Winner:** *Northwest Chess* (Jeffrey Roland, Editor) – *The Chess Friends: Chess Smiles* (21 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** Nathan Smith – *Pandemic Gambit* (*Chess Life*, Feb 2026) (19 pts)

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7. Online & Social Media Awards Best Blog

- **Winner:** Jon Jacobs (20 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** Ray Linville (17 pts)

Best Humorous Contribution

- **Winner:** Bob Basalla – *The Snarky Dictionary–The Chess Journalist* (Vol. XLVIII, No. 163) (15 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** Ray Linville – *New Year Predictions 2026 Chess* (12 pts)

Best Feature Article

- **Winner:** John Brezina – *October 2025* (*Colorado Chess*) (12 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** David Heiser – *Cops & Kids Chess Community Engagement Event* (*US Chess*) (11 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** Rebecka Ratcliffe – *The Chess Journalist* (Vol. XLIX, No. 164) (10 pts)

Best Overall Website – Small Organization (<500 Members)

- **Winner:** Joshua Milton Anderson – Tri-Bridges Chess Club (*tribridgeschessclub.com*) (21 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** Jesse Cohen, Earle Wikle & Kevin McConnell – Colorado State Chess Association (*coloradochess.com*) (18 pts)

Best Non-Instructive Chess Video

- **Winner:** Saint Louis Chess Club – *Danya* (25 pts)

Best Tournament Report – State/Local

- **Co-Winner (Tie):** Dennis Norman – *Awonder Liang Sweeps 2026 Charlotte Open* (*Charlotte Chess Center*) (14 pts)
- **Co-Winner (Tie):** JJ Lang – *Nebraska Hall of Fame Tournament Celebrates Past, Present, and Future Midwest Chess* (*US Chess*) (14 pts)

Best Single Podcast Episode

- **Winner:** Sabina Foisor – Episode 5 (19 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** Bryan Tillis – Episode 4 (16 pts)

Best Overall Chess Website

- **Winner:** Saint Louis Chess Club (*saintlouischessclub.org*) (23 pts)

Best Documentary

- **Winner:** Saint Louis Chess Club – *Resilience* (20 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** Saint Louis Chess Club – *2018* (18 pts)

Best Instruction Lesson

- **Winner:** Saint Louis Chess Club – Video Lesson (25 pts)

Best Tournament Report – National/International

- **Winner:** JJ Lang – *USA Ties 6th in 2nd FIDE Chess Olympiad for People with Disabilities* (*US Chess*) (21 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** JJ Lang – *2026 Memorial Day Weekend Wrap* (*US Chess*) (19 pts)

Best Analysis

- **Winner:** Ray Linville – *Grandmaster Chess Blunders 2025* (18 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** Rebecka Ratcliffe – *Chess: The Difference Between the Genders* (16 pts)

Best Personal Narrative

- **Winner:** Kostya Kavutskiy – *2025 Spring Eurotrip* (17 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** Gene Salomon and Diane Dahl's *Pomar, Alekhine and Me* (15 points)

Best Educational Lesson

- **Winner:** Saint Louis Chess Club (18 pts)

Best Tournament/Match Coverage (Video Series)

- **Winner:** Saint Louis Chess Club – Tournament Coverage Playlist (17 pts)

Best Interview

- **Co-Winner (Tie):** Samika Nettem – *Queen's Corner: Katie Kormanik Interview* (13 pts)
- **Co-Winner (Tie):** Saint Louis Chess Club – Video Interview (13 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** Mark Capron – *In the Limelight: Tibor Karolyi Interview* (12 pts)

Best Club Newsletter

- **Winner:** Azim Ahmad Julkipli – Tri-Bridges Chess Club (*October 2025 Newsletter*) (21 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** Saint Louis Chess Club – *News, Insights & Press* (19 pts)

Best Online Review

- **Co-Winner (Tie):** Miguel Ararat – *Book Review: My Life in Chess* (12 pts)
- **Co-Winner (Tie):** Mark Capron – *George H. Mackenzie: A Chess Biography Review* (12 pts)

Best Weekly Video Program

- **Winner:** Saint Louis Chess Club – Weekly Video Program Playlist

Best Podcast

- **Winner:** Sabina Foisor (21 pts)
- **Honorable Mention (HM):** Bryan Tillis (19 pts)

Best Historical Article

- **Winner:** Mark Capron & Anthony Saidy – *Remembering Vlatstimil Hort – The Chess Journalist* (Vol. XLVIII, No. 162) (12 pts)

Best Twitter Feed

- **Winner:** Saint Louis Chess Club (@STLChessClub)

1. Top Major Awards

Chess Journalist of the Year

Josip Asik claimed the premier award for chess journalism in 2026, finishing in first place with 21 points for his outstanding contributions to the craft. Jon Jacobs took the runner-up spot and earned an Honorable Mention with a competitive score of 18 points, while JJ Lang also contended in the category, receiving 11 points.

Best Story of the Year

Mike Klein won this marquee category with his feature *Danya*, published in the December 2025 issue of *Chess Life*, tallying 21 points. Jon Jacobs earned an Honorable Mention for his piece *The Long-Forgotten Master Behind Chess's Climactic Checkmate* with 19 points, edging out Jack Moore's *New York School* entry from the July 2025 issue of *Chess Life*, which earned 10 points.

Best Column

Grandmaster Joel Benjamin won the category with 18 points for his *Chess Life* endgame instruction columns (*Naroditsky Endgames* and *Pole Endgames*). Close behind, Salskis secured an Honorable Mention with 17 points for column contributions in *American Chess Magazine*, finishing ahead of Andy Soltis (*Footnote Fame and Butterfly Effect*, 13 points), *Northwest Chess: The Chess Friends* (6 points), and Azim Ahmad Julkipli (1 point).

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2. Cramer Awards (State & Regional Journalism)

Best State Champion Report

Northwest Chess, edited by Jeffrey Roland, achieved first place with 23 points for its extensive coverage of the *2026 Oregon Closed State Championship*. The second entry in this category, submitted by Alaa-addin Moussa for coverage appearing in the Summer 2025 issue of *Rank & File*, earned 17 points.

Best State Magazine Photo

Northwest Chess took top honors in this category with its photograph *Old School at the 2025 Buckendorf Senior Championship*, capturing the winning score of 20 points. *Northwest Chess* also secured the Honorable Mention for its photograph, *Sophia Michael at the 2025 Detective Cookie Chess Classic* with 17 points, competing alongside nominations featuring Viktors Pupols and photography from *Rank & File*.

Best Scholastic Coverage in State

Alaa-addin Moussa took first place and the category win for scholastic reporting in the Winter 2026 issue of *Rank & File* with a total score of 21 points. *Northwest Chess* received the Honorable Mention with 17 points, while George Foote's coverage in *Florida Chess* placed third with 12 points.

Best State Facebook Page

The Texas Chess Association won this category outright, earning unanimous approval for its social media presence, regular community updates, and active tournament coverage on its official Facebook page.

Best Overall State Website

Paul Covington secured the category title for the Oklahoma Chess Association's official domain (*oklahomachess.org*), winning with 21 points. The Texas Chess Association (*texaschess.org*) finished second and earned an Honorable Mention with 19 points.

Best State Magazine/Newsletter (Print)

Northwest Chess, edited by Jeffrey Roland, won the category with 23 points for its print edition. The publication finished ahead of Alessandro De Marchi-Blumstein (16 points) and George Foote's *Florida Chess* (11 points).

Best Personal Narrative

Scott Varagona took top honors in this category, earning the win for his personal narrative submission published in regional chess journalism.

Best State Tournament Coverage

Northwest Chess, edited by Jeffrey Roland, won for its dedicated on-site and retrospective coverage of state tournament play across the Pacific Northwest.

Best Photograph

Northwest Chess earned first place with 21 points for the photograph of *Tom Booth at 2026 ICA January Alchemist Coffee House*. *Northwest Chess* also captured the Honorable Mention in the category with 19 points for its photograph of *Siana Razmov at 2025 National K-12 in Spokane, WA*.

Best State Magazine/Newsletter (Online)

Northwest Chess, edited by Jeffrey Roland, won with 23 points for its digital periodical issues. It led a field that included the Colorado State Chess Association's entry (15 points) and Paul Covington's *Oklahoma Chess Monthly* (12 points).

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3. Book Awards.

Best Book – Instructional

Dan Heisman won the category for *Maximize Your Chess Potential* (published by New In Chess), receiving unanimous approval for its clarity and practical guidance for improving chess players.

Best Book of the Year (Overall)

Dr. John Hilbert won overall chess book of the year honors with a perfect score of 25 points for his historical work *George H. Mackenzie: A Chess Biography* (McFarland). The title finished ahead of Jon Crumiller's *The Horta-Osório Collection of Antique Chess Sets, Volume 1: India* (15 points), Luis Fernández Siles's *The Stories, Games, and Intrigues of Capablanca & Alekhine* (7 points), Fabrizio Zavatarelli and Hans Renette's *William N. Potter and John Wisker* (6 points), and Jennifer Shahade's *Thinking Sideways* (1 point).

Best Book – Self-Published

Jon Crumiller captured first place and the category win with 25 points for *The Horta-Osório Collection of Antique Chess Sets, Volume 1: India*, a specialized research publication documenting historic Indian chess sets. The runner-up entry by Luis Fernández Siles (*The Stories, Games, and Intrigues of Capablanca & Alekhine*) earned 15 points.

Best Book – Other

Dr. John Hilbert secured his second book category victory with *George H. Mackenzie: A Chess Biography*, leading the field with 23 points. Other notable entries evaluated in the category included Jon Crumiller's antique chess set study (17 points), Luis Fernández Siles (10 points), Jennifer Shahade's *Thinking Sideways* (3 points), and Fabrizio Zavatarelli and Hans Renette's work on Potter and Wisker (2 points).

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4. Visual Arts Awards.

Best Single Chess Photo

Kelly Centrelli won the category with 19 points for the photograph . Centrelli also had several other entries featured in the field alongside submissions from David Llada (whose portrait of Garry Kasparov reached 9 points), the Saint Louis Chess Club (6 points), Samika Nettem (3 points), Joshua Milton Anderson (2 points), Lance Bark (1 point), and George Foote (1 point).

Best Cartoon

Navied Mahdavian won the category with 23 points for *Scholar's Mate*, published in the April 2026 issue of *Chess Life*. The cartoon prevailed over illustrated entries from George Foote in *Florida Chess* (16 points) and *Northwest Chess* (11 points).

Best Art

Charan Perumalla took top honors in this category, winning for original artwork created for *The Chess Journalist* (Vol. XLIX, No. 164).

Best Photojournalism Article

Northwest Chess, edited by Jeffrey Roland, won the category for its integrated photojournalism feature documenting regional competitive tournament scenes.

Best Single Chess Magazine Cover

Natasha Roberts captured the win with 19 points for the January 2026 cover of *Chess Life*. Renowned photographer David Llada was awarded an Honorable Mention with 17 points for his cover work on *The Chess Journalist*, followed by George Foote's Summer cover for *Florida Chess* (14 points).

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5. Junior Awards (Under 21)

Best Personal Narrative by a Junior

WGM Zoey Tang won first place with 18 points for *No Stepping Back*, published in *American Chess Magazine* #047. Jason Liang earned an Honorable Mention with 17 points for *Persistence Prevails* in *American Chess Magazine* #046. The field also featured five narrative entries from Felix Guo and an entry from *Northwest Chess* (8 points).

Best Print Article by a Junior

Maximilian Lu secured first place with 23 points for his article *Continental*, published in the August 2025 issue of *Chess Life*. Ella Guo placed second in the scoring with 17 points for *The World Schools Team Championship*.

Best Photo by a Junior

Jack Aronian claimed the category title with 12 points for the photograph *SuperNats Color Winners*. Aronian also picked up an Honorable Mention with 10 points for *Best in Chess*, sharing Honorable Mention honors with Samika Nettem, who also scored 10 points for *The Unknown Chess Player.*

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6. Print Article Awards.

Best Regular Newspaper Column

David R. Sands won the category for his weekly chess column appearing in *The Washington Times*, recognized for continued coverage of contemporary and historical games.

Best Historical Article

Jon Jacobs won first place with a perfect 25 points for *Alan Trefler: The Underdog Who Scraped the Sky*. Jacobs also had two other pieces evaluated in the category. Henrik Malm Lindberg finished runner-up with 13 points for *The Disappearance of Fischer* in *American Chess Magazine* #046, alongside entries from Rick Massimo and David R. Sands.

Best Feature Article

Jon Jacobs led this category, winning first place with 16 points for *Alan Trefler: The Underdog Who Scraped the Sky*, and also claiming the Honorable Mention with 14 points for *The Long-Forgotten Master Behind Chess's Climactic Checkmate*. They finished ahead of *American Chess Magazine*'s *Queens over Kings* by Dusan Krunic (10 points), Maurice Ashley's *Long Time* (9 points), and John Hartmann's *Online or On Paper* (6 points).

Best Single Article of Local Interest

Irene Bantigue took first place and the category win for *Sporting Chance*, published in the September 2025 issue of *Chess Life*, profiling community chess activities.

Best Analysis

Nikolaos Ntirlis won first place with 21 points for his theoretical survey *Slippery Steinitz* in the February 2026 issue of *Chess Life*. GM Spyridon Kapnisis was awarded an Honorable Mention with 19 points for *When Modern Means Classical* in *American Chess Magazine* #049, while George Foote's analysis in *Florida Chess* scored 10 points.

Best Review

Carsten Hansen earned first place with 21 points for his regular column review *Fresh Leaves* in *American Chess Magazine* #047. IM John Watson received an Honorable Mention with 19 points for his review, *Good Thinking,* in the August 2025 issue of *Chess Life*, while Miguel Ararat's review in *Florida Chess* placed third with 10 points.

Best Tournament Report – National/International

GM John Burke won the category with 15 points for *Five-Star Fabiano* in *American Chess Magazine* #048. Jennifer Yu captured the Honorable Mention with 13 points for *Doubled Over* in the April 2026 issue of *Chess Life*, heading a group that included Nico Chasin, John Hartmann, and Joseph Levine (10 points), GM Nikola Nestorovic (6 points), IM Grayson Rorrer (5 points), and a second report by Burke (5 points).

Best Club Newsletter

Frisco Del Rosario took first place in the *Menlo Park Chess Club Newsletter category*, praised for its accessible instruction and local club event summaries.

Best Personal Narrative

Tatev Abrahamyan earned the category victory with 23 points for *Fighting Back*, published in the August 2025 issue of *Chess Life*. Abrahamyan topped a competitive field featuring IM Grayson Rorrer's piece on Woodward's run in *American Chess Magazine* #048 (14 points) and an entry from *Northwest Chess* (13 points).

Best Interview

Pete Tamburro captured first place with 22 points for *How Chess Saves Lives*, featured in *American Chess Magazine* #049. Tamburro finished ahead of Jon Jacobs's interview with Alan Trefler (16 points), John Hartmann's interview in *Chess Life* (9 points), and a feature by *Northwest Chess* (8 points).

Best Tournament Report–State/Local

This category ended in a three-way tie for first place, with each entry scoring 16 points and sharing Winner honors: Andrew Squitiro (*Rail Good Time*, *Chess Life*, Jan 2026), David Mehler (*Remembrance Reunion*, *American Chess Magazine* #046), and *Northwest Chess* (*2025 Oregon Open*). George Foote's coverage in *Florida Chess* placed fourth with 7 points.

Best Instructive Lesson

Rick Massimo and Alexander Chernin won first place with 21 points for *Coaching Counts* in the May 2026 issue of *Chess Life*. Alex Fishbein received an Honorable Mention with 19 points for *Hours of Learning and Fun* in *American Chess Magazine* #046.

Best Humorous Contribution

Northwest Chess took top honors with 21 points for *The Chess Friends: Chess Smiles*. Nathan Smith earned an Honorable Mention with 19 points for *Pandemic Gambit*, published in the February 2026 issue of *Chess Life*.

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7. Online & Social Media Awards

Best Blog

Jon Jacobs won first place with 20 points for his chess writing and social commentary. Ray Linville earned an Honorable Mention with 17 points, followed by the World Chess Hall of Fame (13 points).

Best Humorous Contribution

Bob Basalla won the category with 15 points for *The Snarky Dictionary*. Ray Linville was awarded an Honorable Mention with 12 points for *New Year Predictions 2026 Chess*, leading an active field that included video shorts from the Saint Louis Chess Club (8 and 6 points), *Northwest Chess* (5 points), and entries from Tibor Karolyi and Jon Jacobs.

Best Feature Article

John Brezina claimed first place with 12 points for his *October 2025* article published by the Colorado State Chess Association. Two Honorable Mentions were awarded in this competitive category: David Heiser received 11 points for *Cops & Kids Chess Community Engagement Event* (*US Chess*), and Rebecka Ratcliffe received 10 points for her work in *The Chess Journalist* (Vol. XLIX, No. 164).

Best Overall Website – Small Organization (<500 Members)

Joshua Milton Anderson won first place with 21 points for the Tri-Bridges Chess Club website (*tribridgeschessclub.com*). Jesse Cohen, Earle Wikle, and Kevin McConnell took an Honorable Mention with 18 points for the Colorado State Chess Association website (*coloradochess.com*), with entries from the Space Coast Chess Foundation (11 points) and Chess in 1 Day (5 points) rounding out the field.

Best Non-Instructive Chess Video

The Saint Louis Chess Club captured first place with a maximum score of 25 points for its video feature on *Danya*. The club also took the remaining top placements with its *DNA* feature (12 points) and short-form video releases (6 and 5 points), ahead of Bryan Tillis (7 points).

Best Tournament Report – State/Local

A tie for first place resulted in shared Winner honors between Dennis Norman with 14 points for *Awonder Liang Sweeps 2026 Charlotte Open* (*Charlotte Chess Center*) and JJ Lang with 14 points for *Nebraska Hall of Fame Tournament Celebrates Past, Present, and Future Midwest Chess* (*US Chess*). Michael Rohde (*US Chess*) and Peter Dyson each recorded 8 points, while Rachel Schechter and Joshua Milton Anderson each registered 4 points.

Best Single Podcast Episode

Sabina Foisor won the category with 19 points for Episode 5 of her podcast series. Bryan Tillis earned an Honorable Mention with 16 points for Episode 4 of his show, followed by alternative submitted episodes from both Foisor (11 points) and Tillis (9 points).

Best Overall Chess Website

The Saint Louis Chess Club (*saintlouischessclub.org*) earned first place and the category win with 23 points for its comprehensive digital portal, tournament hubs, and news coverage, outscoring the World Chess Hall of Fame & Galleries (*worldchesshof.org*), which garnered 17 points.

Best Documentary

The Saint Louis Chess Club swept the top honors in this category, winning first place with 20 points for *Resilience* and earning an Honorable Mention with 18 points for *2018*. A third Saint Louis Chess Club documentary entry focusing on Hikaru Nakamura scored 12 points.

Best Instruction Lesson

The Saint Louis Chess Club achieved first place with 25 points for its digital video instruction lesson. Azim Ahmad Julkipli's instructional writing for the Tri-Bridges Chess Club followed with 13 points, and Awani Kumar's tribute article scored 12 points.

Best Tournament Report – National/International

JJ Lang won first place with 21 points for *USA Ties 6th in the 2nd FIDE Chess Olympiad for People with Disabilities* (*US Chess*). Lang also earned an Honorable Mention in the same category with 19 points for the *2026 Memorial Day Weekend Wrap*.

Best Analysis

Ray Linville won the category with 18 points for *Grandmaster Chess Blunders 2025*, published on Chess.com. Rebecka Ratcliffe secured an Honorable Mention with 16 points for her research article *Chess: The Difference Between the Genders* on USCF Sales.

Best Personal Narrative

Kostya Kavutskiy won first place with 17 points for *2025 Spring Eurotrip*, published on Substack. The category featured a wide range of submissions, including Gene Salomon and Diane Dahl's *Pomar, Alekhine and Me* (15 points), Daaim Shabazz's retrospective *25 Years of The Chess Drum* (10 points), and video and written accounts from the Saint Louis Chess Club, Jon Jacobs, and Joshua Milton Anderson.

Best Educational Lesson
The Saint Louis Chess Club took first place with 18 points for its educational video lesson. Dan Heisman followed with 12 points for his YouTube instructional lecture, while Jon Jacobs earned 11 points each for two educational social media lessons, ahead of Frank Elley (4 points).

Best Tournament/Match Coverage (Video Series)
The Saint Louis Chess Club won the category with 17 points for its official tournament playlist broadcast coverage. The club also placed second and third in alternative series coverage (13 and 9 points), ahead of submissions from US Chess (9 and 3 points) and Dennis Norman (4 points).

Best Interview
This category saw a tie for first place with 13 points each, awarding co-Winner titles to the Saint Louis Chess Club for its video interview and Samika Nettem for *Queen's Corner: Katie Kormanik Interview*. Mark Capron earned an Honorable Mention with 12 points for *In the Limelight: Tibor Karolyi Interview*, followed by additional interviews conducted by Capron, Nettem, WIM Alexey Root, and Jon Jacobs.

Best Club Newsletter
Azim Ahmad Julkipli won first place with 21 points for the October 2025 edition of the *Tri-Bridges Chess Club Newsletter*. The Saint Louis Chess Club received an Honorable Mention with 19 points for its *News, Insights & Press* newsletter series.

Best Online Review
First place resulted in a tie at 12 points, awarding co-Winner honors to Miguel Ararat for *Book Review: My Life in Chess* in *Florida Chess* and Mark Capron for his review of *George H. Mackenzie: A Chess Biography*. Jon Jacobs scored 9 points for his review, followed by Mark Capron (8 points), Pranav Srinivasula (6 points), and Akshaj Bodla (3 points).

Best Weekly Video Program
The Saint Louis Chess Club won the category for its recurring weekly video broadcast and lecture playlist, recognized for production quality and consistent programming.

Best Podcast
Sabina Foisor won the category with 21 points for her ongoing chess podcast series. Bryan Tillis was awarded an Honorable Mention with 19 points for his show playlist.

Best Historical Article
Mark Capron and Anthony Saidy took first place with 12 points for their historical piece in *The Chess Journalist* (Vol. XLVIII, No. 162). Todd Bardwick and John Brezina (*History of Denver Chess*) and Jon Jacobs each tied with 9 points, ahead of entries by Ray Linville (8 points), Rebecka Ratcliffe (8 points), and Azim Ahmad Julkipli (3 points).

Best Twitter Feed
The Saint Louis Chess Club (@STLChessClub) won the category outright for its real-time tournament commentary, game highlights, and community updates on X (formerly Twitter).

Remember you can't win if you don't play!



Calculation. Best Single Photo by Kelly Centrelli. Taken at Resident Culture Brewing. Originally appeared on Instagram here: Calculation



Resurfaced: Mexico 1978

by Chris Martinez G

For the past few installments of *Resurfaced*, much of my digging has taken place inside the aging pages of the Argentine chess magazine collection. This time I wanted to follow a different kind of paper trail, one small enough to fit in the corner of an envelope.

Some time ago I came across a Mexican postage stamp from 1978. It immediately caught my attention. A rook and pawn occupied the foreground, while behind them stood a figure from Mexico's ancient past. Across the top appeared the words: *I Campeonato Mundial Juvenil de Ajedrez por Equipos.*



I eventually purchased one of the stamps. Fittingly for a column called *Resurfaced*, somewhere between acquiring it and finally sitting down to write about it, I managed to misplace it. Fortunately, the question it left behind proved harder to lose: What was happening in Mexican chess in 1978?

The stamps were issued in two denominations, 1.60 and 4.30 pesos, both marked *Aéreo*. Their designs mirror one another: one features a white rook and black pawn, the other a black rook and white pawn. Both commemorate the First World Youth Team Chess Championship held in Mexico in 1978.

At first, I thought the story might simply be the stamp itself. Chess has appeared on postage stamps around the world, and here is another attractive example. But the inscription led me backward.

A year earlier, Mexico City had hosted another significant international chess competition: the XXIV World Student Team Chess Championship, held August 7–22, 1977. Suddenly the stamp began to look less like an isolated curiosity and more like a surviving piece of a larger moment.

Mexican International Master Raúl Ocampo Vargas, who captained the Mexican team at the 1977 championship, later wrote a fascinating recollection of the event and the state of Mexican chess surrounding it. The names alone demonstrate the strength of the competition.

The Soviet team included Oleg Romanishin, Rafael Vaganian, Iosif Dorfman and Alexander Beliavsky. England brought John Nunn, Jonathan Mestel and Jonathan Speelman. The American team included Kim Commons, Nick de Firmian, Kenneth Regan, Danny Kopec and Ron Henley. Mexico's team included Marcel Sisniega, who would become one of the country's most important chess figures.

The Soviet Union won the championship, followed by Cuba and England. The United States finished fourth. Mexico placed ninth. But the tournament table may be the least interesting part of the story.

Ocampo's recollections describe a period when Mexican chess seemed poised for something bigger. The 1977 championship received support from Mexico's Instituto Nacional del Deporte, and Ocampo specifically credited its director, Guillermo López Portillo, with supporting chess and helping make international tournaments possible. He also remembered significant attention from newspapers and television.

Perhaps even more striking was what was happening at the university level. Ocampo recalled that the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) and Instituto Politécnico Nacional together supported more than 50 chess clubs and nearly 2,000 affiliated players. Those numbers deserve some caution because they come from Ocampo's later recollection, but they provide a glimpse of the environment surrounding Mexican chess at the time.

And Mexico wasn't finished. After the 1977 World Student Team Championship, Ocampo notes that Mexico went on to host the World Youth Team Championships in 1978 and

1979. He also recalled the efforts of CREA, an institution devoted to Mexican youth, to promote chess during this period.

That brings us back to the stamp.

What initially looked like a small philatelic commemoration now seems to belong to a succession of international chess events taking place in Mexico. Contemporary chess magazines leave additional footprints. The Spanish magazine *Jaque* was already reporting on tournaments in Mexico. Its May 1977 issue included coverage of the *I Torneo por Equipos Revista Jaque en México* and the *II Torneo Internacional Ciudad de México*. In August 1978, the magazine carried *"Shamkovitch triunfa en México,"* and later that year published international news sent from Mexico by Everest Rossell.

Piece by piece, a different picture begins to emerge.

This is what fascinates me about old chess material. A stamp can be easy to dismiss. It is small. It contains only a few words. Without context, the two Mexican stamps from 1978 tell us almost nothing beyond the fact that a chess championship took place. But start asking questions and the world surrounding that stamp begins to reappear.

Mexico had hosted a major international student championship the previous year. Some of the strongest young players in the world had traveled to Mexico City. Universities supported active chess clubs. Government institutions were involved. Newspapers and television were paying attention. International chess publications were reporting from Mexico. And then, in 1978, chess appeared on Mexican postage.

Could It be? Mexican chess on the verge of something larger?

Ocampo, looking back years later, remembered a similar feeling—that the activity of the period appeared capable of producing a breakthrough for Mexican chess, although things did not ultimately develop as many had hoped.

Perhaps that is what makes these stamps more interesting today. They commemorate a tournament, certainly. But they also preserve something harder to see: a moment of optimism.

For a brief period in the late 1970s, Mexico was repeatedly welcoming international chess, developing young players and putting the game before a wider public. Nearly fifty years later, I encountered that history, not through a tournament book or a famous game, but through a postage stamp.

Actually, two of them.

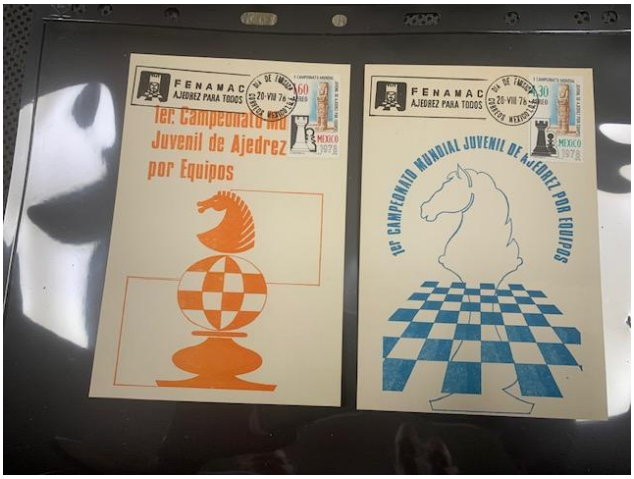
One carries a white rook. The other, a black rook. Behind both stands Mexico's past, while in front of it sits the game that, for a moment, seemed to be pointing toward its future.

I still need to find where I put my stamp. But at least the story behind it has resurfaced.

Editor's Note:

CJA Vice-President Jon Edwards runs the Chess-on-Stamps Study Unit (COSSU). I asked him if he had any other photos of Mexican stamps and I found out that the stamps in 1978 were the only stamps issued by Mexico in its history. In addition, I found out that that is one more than the zero that the United States has issued!

Jon did provide a picture of two covers:



Check out COSSU's website linked above. They have an outstanding publication called Chesstamp Review.



⚑ AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY CLUB · CARMEL HIGH SCHOOL ⚑

CHECKMATE CANCER 2026

RECAP BY NIKHIL MURUGAN

JULY 16 & 18, 2026 • CARMEL & WESTFIELD, IN

It has been a few weeks since Checkmate Cancer 2026, and now that everything has settled down a little, I wanted to look back at what we were able to accomplish and, most importantly, thank everyone who helped us.

Across the GM Sam Khanin Simultaneous Exhibition on July 16 and the Scholastic and Open tournaments on July 18, our community raised **$5,132.78** for the American Cancer Society.

When Arnav and I first started planning this, we really didn't know how big it would become. What started as an idea between two high school students eventually brought together chess players, parents, local businesses, volunteers, a Grandmaster, and organizations from around Central Indiana. Seeing so many people come together to support the cause was probably the most rewarding part of the whole experience.

♛ How Checkmate Cancer Started

Checkmate Cancer was organized by the **American Cancer Society Club at Carmel High School**, with the help of **Summit Chess Club**, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit based in Carmel.

Arnav Samuel and I co-founded the American Cancer Society Club at Carmel High School and serve as its co-presidents. We started the club because we wanted to create a way for Carmel High School students to support the American Cancer Society through fundraising, awareness, and community involvement.

When we started thinking about our first major fundraiser, we wanted to do something that could actually bring a community together instead of simply asking people for donations. I founded Summit Chess Club in 2023 and had already been organizing chess tournaments, free chess meetups, lessons, and other community chess programs through SCC. So chess seemed like a natural way to do it. We thought, why not bring the two together and use chess to raise money for the American Cancer Society? That simple idea eventually became Checkmate Cancer 2026.

The ACS Club organized the fundraiser, while Summit Chess Club helped us with the chess side of the events, including tournament organization, equipment, directing, registration, and connections within the Indiana chess community. Arnav and I also spent a lot of time reaching out to businesses, finding sponsors and donors, promoting the fundraiser, and working through all the details needed to make the events happen. We honestly didn't know how people would respond when we started reaching out for support. The response ended up being much bigger than we expected.



Nikhil with his CHS friends and volunteers at Checkmate Cancer 2026

♛ Thank You to Our Sponsors

One of the biggest surprises for me was how many businesses and organizations were willing to support an event being organized by high school students. For some of them, it really was as simple as sending an email explaining who we were, what we were trying to do, and where the money was going. Businesses that had never met us before trusted us and wanted to help.

We are forever grateful to all of our amazing sponsors. Some supported us financially, while others donated products, gift cards, services, or venue space — every contribution helped us get closer to our goal:

IMI ✦ Brite Systems ✦ Metamor Systems ✦ AV Tech Solutions ✦ UTZ Brands ✦ Magdalen Bergeron Realtor ✦ Forthright Real Estate, LLC ✦ NIAM Realty & Property Management ✦ Kid City, Westfield ✦ Carmel Christian Church ✦ Full Moon Rentals ✦ Carmel 100 ✦ Josephine ✦ Savor ✦ Matador ✦ Puccini's ✦ Monterey Coastal Cuisine ✦ St. Louis Chess Club ✦ Merrimac Chess Club ✦ Penn & Beech Candle Co ✦ Tyler Mason Salon + Spa ✦ GourmetGiftBaskets.com

♛ GM Sam Khanin Simultaneous Exhibition

Checkmate Cancer began on July 16 with a simultaneous exhibition by Grandmaster Sam Khanin at Carmel Christian Church. GM Khanin volunteered his time and took on 28 players at once.

For several players, this was their first opportunity to ever sit across the board from a Grandmaster, which made the evening even more special. A special shoutout goes to John Herr, James Graham, and Jayden Peters for putting up great fights against GM Khanin.

This was also GM Khanin's second time supporting an event with Summit Chess Club, and I really appreciate his willingness to come back and help us with this fundraiser. The simul alone raised **$560**, with every dollar going toward the fundraiser.

Thank you so much, GM Sam, for donating your time and your talent to this cause. Having a Grandmaster show up and take on 28 players at once for a charity fundraiser is not something every club gets to say, and we are so lucky to have you in our corner.





Top Left: GM Sam takes on players during the Checkmate Cancer simul; Top Right: Jayden Peters battling it out against GM Sam Khanin; Bottom Left: James Graham putting up a great fight against GM Sam Khanin; Bottom Right: John Herr, the last player standing against GM Sam Khanin





♛ Thank You to Our Venue Sponsors

We could not have held these events without **Carmel Christian Church** and **Kid City USA, Westfield**.

Carmel Christian Church's tagline is “Come as you are!” and honestly, that's exactly how they've treated Summit Chess Club from the very beginning. They opened their doors to a high school student running a chess club out of nothing, and they've kept opening them every single Thursday since for our free weekly chess meetups, no membership fees, no meeting fees, just kids and adults showing up to play and learn. Carmel Christian Church also hosted this year's GM simul. Having a dependable, welcoming space every week has been a huge part of allowing us to keep chess accessible to the community, and I'm endlessly grateful for their trust and support.

Kid City USA, Westfield hosted both tournaments on July 18. We had the Scholastic tournament in the morning and then turned around and ran the Open tournament that afternoon. Hosting two tournaments back to back takes a lot of space and coordination, and Kid City made it possible for us to do both comfortably.

Thank you to both venues for believing in our programs and supporting this fundraiser.

♛ Checkmate Cancer Scholastic

Saturday morning started with the Checkmate Cancer Scholastic, with young players competing across four sections: Reigning Royals, Bold Bishops, Noble Knights, and Rising Pawns. There were some great games and several very close finishes. Congratulations to our top finishers:

Reigning Royals

1st Parker Andrew Reehling 3/3

2nd–3rd Ivan Lu & Jadon L Fernando 2.5/3

Bold Bishops

1st Adam Li 3/3

2nd Varun Viswanathan 2.5/3

3rd–4th Viyan Magizhan Sakthivel & Kristopher Ratzburg 2/3

Noble Knights

1st Dhruv Thakkar 4/4

2nd Yuvaan Kararaparthi 3/4

3rd–6th Olivia Law, Paxon Laflower, Isha Arun & Ian Li 2/4

Rising Pawns

1st–4th Chanave Newton Laojavachakul, James T Parsons, David Ciorciari & Ayush Banerjee 3/4

Congratulations to all of our Scholastic winners and to every young player who participated. For some, this was another tournament in a long list of events. For others, it was one of their first tournament experiences. Either way, every player who entered was also helping us raise money for the American Cancer Society.

Full crosstable: ratings.uschess.org/event/202607180103





Top Left: Reigning Royals Scholastic Section Winners; Top Right: Bold Bishops Scholastic Section Winners; Bottom Left: Noble Knights Scholastic Section Winners; Bottom Right: Rising Pawns Scholastic Section Winners





♛ Checkmate Cancer Open

Once the Scholastic tournament wrapped up, we reset the rooms and got ready to do it all over again for the Checkmate Cancer Open that afternoon. The Open featured three sections, Pro, Reserve, and Novice, and gave us another afternoon of competitive chess.

Pro

1st–4th Mohamed K Elshazly, Dominic Xavier Bobay, James A Mills & Madison Brown 3/4

5th John Martin Hawkins 2.5/4

Reserve

1st Aarush Dolli 3.5/4

2nd–4th Jerika Lenore Eppel, Donald Edward Winslow & Jayden Peters 3/4

Novice

1st–2nd Alvin Yang & James S. Hiatt II 3.5/4

3rd–5th Saket Sharma, Vaidyanathan Viswanathan Saunak & R Michael Dugdale 3/4

Congratulations to all of our winners and, just as importantly, to everyone who came out and played. A few of our prize winners even chose to donate their prize money back to the fundraiser. We never asked anyone to do that, which made those gestures mean even more. It really showed what this event was about: competing hard over the board while coming together for something much bigger outside of it.

Full crosstable: ratings.uschess.org/event/202607180913

The feedback was great across the board. Parents especially appreciated the little things: we set up tents for extra shaded space, had complimentary cookies and water out, and ran a discounted sale on chess sets and gift cards. The venue itself was well lit with plenty of room for players and parents to hang out between rounds. We also set aside a separate room for the pro-level players, and a few of them told us afterward that it really helped them without the noise and traffic of the main hall.





Above Left: James Mills, part of the four-way tie for 1st place in the Open Section, takes on Top U2000 winner John Martin Hawkins: Above Right: Madison Brown part of a four-way tie for 1st place in the Open Section; Below Left: Mohamed Elshazly and Dominic Bobay, part of a four-way tie for 1st place in the Open Section; Below Right: Aarush Dolli, clear winner of the Reserve Section









Top Left: Jerika Eppel, part of a three-way tie for 2nd place in the Reserve Section; Top Right: Alvin Yang, Co-winner of the Novice Section; Below Left: James Hiatt II, Co-winner of the Novice Section; Bottom Right: Jayden Peters, part of a three-way tie for 2nd place in the Reserve Section





♛ Individual Donors and Community Support

Beyond our sponsors, a number of people made personal donations simply because they wanted to help. Some of them couldn't even make it out to play in the tournaments themselves, but they gave anyway, purely out of love for the game and a desire to support the cause. A special thank you to:

Robert Banta ✦ David Airey ✦ Kevin Lee ✦ Mrs. Minner ✦ Riley McCulloch ✦ Sahitya Mallipeddi & Abhiram Maddela ✦ Nathaniel Criss ✦ Tony Passwater ✦ Jay Carr ✦ Ganapathi Vaddadi ✦ R Michael Dugdale ✦ Terrence LeMaster ✦ Gabriel Hawkins & John Martin Hawkins ✦ James Ramp ✦ Donald Winslow ✦ Anonymous Donors ✦ All Participants

♛ Thank You to the Parents

I also want to thank all of the parents. Chess tournaments don't happen without parents driving players to the venue, waiting through rounds, helping younger players, finding lunch between games, and staying much longer than they probably expected. Many parents also donated, volunteered, helped clean up, and stepped in whenever we needed an extra hand. Thank you for supporting your players and for supporting what we were trying to accomplish.

♛ Volunteers and Friends

There were also a lot of people working behind the scenes. A big thank you to Viresh Dolli and family, Kumaran Murugiah and family, Arnav, and Ashok Kurup, along with everyone else who helped with setup, teardown, registration, tournament logistics, and all of the little things that come up when you're trying to run multiple events.

A special thanks to all my friends who volunteered: Abdul Wasif, Suvan Vaddadi, Arnav Samuel, and Krishna Chouturi. I also want to thank Madison Brown's family for voluntarily helping us spread the word about Checkmate Cancer.

♛ Photo Credits

Every photo in this recap was taken by three Carmel High School friends who also happen to be really talented photographers. Rethika (@rethikas.photography on Instagram), Drithi Raipet, and Kodai Fujita (@fujitaflicks on Instagram) volunteered their time and their skills to help us cover the event. Because of them, we have photos of the players, volunteers, awards, and moments throughout the fundraiser that Arnav and I probably didn't even get to see while we were busy running everything.

♛ $5K+ Raised Together

$5K+	3	22
RAISED FOR ACS	EVENTS, 1 CAUSE	BUSINESS SPONSORS

A GM simul, a Scholastic tournament, and an Open tournament, all in one weekend, all for the American Cancer Society.

At the end of everything, Checkmate Cancer 2026 raised **$5,132.78** for the American Cancer Society. Seeing that final number was pretty incredible.

When Arnav and I started talking about doing a chess fundraiser, we had no idea whether it would raise a few hundred dollars or a few thousand. We just knew we wanted to try something that combined an important cause with a community I had been part of for years. But the final amount isn't something the two of us could have raised on our own.

It came from businesses that answered our emails and agreed to sponsor us. It came from GM Sam Khanin volunteering his time. It came from Carmel Christian Church and Kid City giving us places to hold the events. It came from individual donors, volunteers, parents, friends, and everyone who helped spread the word. And, of course, it came from every player who signed up and sat down at a chessboard.

A special thank you as well to all the **local chess clubs** who helped spread the word about Checkmate Cancer within the Indiana chess community. That kind of support from fellow clubs made a real difference in getting players to show up.

To all of our tournament winners, congratulations. To everyone who played, thank you for participating. And to everyone who sponsored, donated, volunteered, shared our fundraiser, provided a venue, took pictures, helped set up tables, stayed late to clean up, or supported us in any other way: thank you for helping Arnav and me turn an idea we had at Carmel High School into more than $5,000 for the American Cancer Society.

Chess gave us a way to bring everyone together. The community is what made it work.

TOGETHER, WE CHECKMATED CANCER

Summit Chess Club • summitchessclub.com • Facebook (facebook.com/summitchessclub) • "Win or Learn"

American Cancer Society Club · Carmel High School • In partnership with Summit Chess Club, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit



Nikhil welcomes scholastic players and reviews tournament rules before round 1.

Incomplete Assumptions in Chess, Part I

Substack Blog by NM Michael Takahashi

Link to the original Substack

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I'm excited to share my newest article, Incomplete Assumptions in Chess, Part I, which explores an important question I have been thinking about extensively in my own training and coaching:

When a player makes a calculation mistake, why did the mistake actually occur?

Simply showing a player, the correct move does not necessarily address the underlying problem. Perhaps they discarded an important candidate move too quickly. Maybe they stopped calculating before reaching a position they could evaluate confidently. They may have treated a variation as a single path and overlooked an important branch or failed to consider a critical candidate move altogether.

In this article, I explore four types of "incomplete assumptions" that can interfere with our calculation and decision-making. I examine these tendencies through examples from my students' games, challenging endgame studies, and a complex position from one of my own training games that eventually developed into an extensive calculation exercise.

I also discuss how I use difficult exercises with developing players. I do not believe success always requires solving an entire exercise perfectly. For a particular student, calculating a manageable portion of a very challenging position accurately—while maintaining strong visualization, identifying critical branches, and following a disciplined analytical process—can represent significant progress.

More broadly, the article reflects a principle that has become increasingly important in my coaching: rather than merely correcting the mistakes our students make, we should try to understand the thinking processes that produced them. Once we identify the underlying deficiency, we can design training that addresses the cause rather than only the symptom.

If you are interested in chess improvement, calculation training, or coaching methodology, I hope you enjoy the article. I would also be very interested to hear your thoughts and experiences with these ideas.

For those interested in working with me, feel free to visit my Lichess coaching page or contact me at mrcapture02@gmail.com. Have a great day

Incomplete Assumptions in Chess, Part I

We all have natural instincts. When do they become dangerous?

While training many promising students, I have had the distinct privilege of observing my pupils' calculations during our long, intense sessions together. These sessions often consist of reviewing the students' games and then constructing some extremely challenging exercises for the player to solve. After this process is finished, I typically assign homework problems that cover everything we have discussed.

On September 2, 2026, I was set to meet with a student in Ohio whom I had reconnected with after working with him throughout 2023. Since then, he had improved quite a bit, raising his OTB rating from 957 to over 1800.

So you can imagine that when his father first contacted me in July to ask me to work with him again, I was quite excited. For several years, I focused on improving my system, working with top-level trainers (GM Max Illingworth), and observing typical tendencies among my students to help improve both their decision-making skills and their understanding of the game as they progressed to higher and higher levels.

Yet when I received the call, I knew I had to get right to work. Unfortunately, I would not be receiving the games from him for a couple of days, so I had to figure out what else I could do in the meantime to be as prepared as possible for our first session.

After searching all over the internet, I finally found Om's Lichess account.

He was a Lichess streamer.

At that moment, there was no time to waste. I quickly searched for his streams on YouTube, and underneath several layers of videos, I found what I was looking for:

Access to one of his streams.

Excitedly, I then spent my time from 10 p.m. to midnight carefully watching his stream, observing how he made decisions and came up with moves. Something peculiar caught my eye.

As I was reviewing the tapes of his games on Lichess and following the logic that he explained to his audience, I noticed that Om would often choose moves based on what looked good at first. Only after playing through the subsequent variations, without actually calculating them beforehand, would he uncover new resources.

There was one particular game where he went down a complicated variation and thought he was winning, then realized he would only win a piece—and then that his opponent would checkmate him a few moves later!

At that point, I knew exactly what to do.

Since our first session together, I've tried extremely hard to help Om value the importance of calculating variations. Through this process, I have continually stressed that we must be as thorough as we can, not just attempting to find the first move, but also finding the entire main solution and correctly refuting the critical branches that emerge.

Of course, changing someone's approach so radically is not simple, and one must credit Om tremendously for being open to constructive criticism and taking my feedback to heart.

So now, let us take a look at one of the positions from his most recent tournament to delve deeper into these "incomplete assumptions" and the trouble they can cause if we do not address them.

Chatterjee, Om — Mackowiak, Andrew

81st Ohio Chess Congress (U2200 Section), Cincinnati 2026

★★☆☆☆☆ Tier 2: The Beginnings of Commitment



☐ Task: Find White's best continuation. Time to think: 5 minutes.

If you have carefully assessed this position, you should conclude that White is already in a bit of trouble. For starters, Black has already achieved the critical d6-d5 break in this Sicilian structure, and prepares to continue with moves like …♗c5 and …0-0 next.

For this reason, it is important for White not to waste any time and make use of Black's lack of king safety, the one imbalance pointing in his favor.

14.c4?

This is no doubt an attempt to continue actively, but it leads to a worse endgame for White that my student unfortunately failed to evaluate.

During our lesson, Om indicated that, in fact, he did spot the correct move, but missed the key idea attached to it:

14.♘f4!

This was White's best try, but whether you play this move or not depends on whether you can understand its true value.

14…♘×e3

(14…Nxf4 is the move that my student saw, about which he expressed doubts regarding the continuation 15.♗×f4! e5?? when, in fact, White can win with 16.♗c4! e×f4 17.♖he1+ ♗e7 18.♘f5! +−)

15.♘d×e6!!

This is the move that I would imagine most players would have trouble spotting. During our session, Om stated that he had not even considered this sacrifice, raising a crucial point in the development of our calculation abilities.

Many students calculate variations one by one and focus on extending their variations only through the moves that come naturally to them. The problem with this method is that they often fail to consider critical alternatives when the new position demands them, thereby missing improvements in their variation entirely. As trainers, we should work hard to eliminate this bad habit in the early stages of a player's development before it becomes too ingrained.

(The immediate 15.♕×e3? was actually played in a 2001 master game, when White quickly found himself in big trouble after 15…♕b6! 16.♗c4 0-0-0 −+ Firman, Nazar — Jansen, Ruud, 0-1, Stork Young Masters 2001)

15…f×e6 16.♘×e6 ♘×d1 17.♘×d8 ♔×d8 18.♕×d1 ⇄ and a highly imbalanced position has reached the board, with White having a queen and two pawns for Black's rook and two minor pieces.

14…b×c3 15.♘×c3 ♗b4 16.♘c2

My student stopped here, assuming that Black would just keep the tension with a move like 16…♗a5, as he described during the lesson. However, had he calculated further, he would have realized the problems arising in the endgame after:

16…♗×c3 17.b×c3 ♘×e3 18.♕×e3 ♕b6+! 19.♕×b6 ♘×b6 −+ (see diagram below):

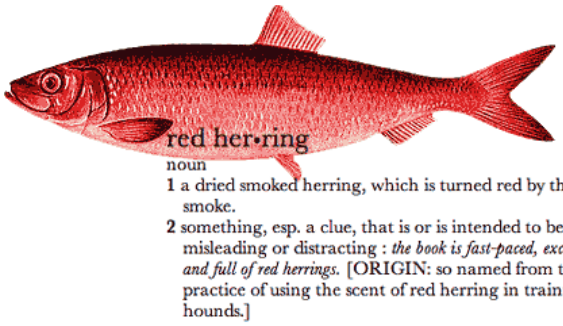


Position after 19…Nxb6

Now that the position has been stripped down to the endgame, it is clear that White is not doing well. For starters, the f3- and c3-pawns are big targets for Black. Because White is lagging in development, it will not be easy to generate sufficient activity to compensate for his static weaknesses. Interestingly enough, Om also mentioned in the opening position that he knew he had to get rid of the knight, but indicated in his analysis that he discarded 14.♘f4 without any further questioning. As you will understand in the next exercise we explore, this type of thinking can repeatedly lead us down the wrong path because we are not generating candidate moves and subjecting each to the same standard of verification. While it is perfectly reasonable to form initial impressions about our candidate moves, we should be careful not to treat those impressions as conclusions before our calculations have sufficiently tested them. Otherwise, we risk giving undeserved weight to moves that "look good" while prematurely discarding alternatives that deserve further investigation.

That being said, this short game fragment gives us the perfect launching point to discuss in depth what "incomplete assumptions" are, so let us define some critical terms and related concepts before moving further.

How Do These Assumptions Impact Our Play?



Red herring. Definition from The New Oxford American Dictionary.

1. We prematurely discard candidate moves

I already mentioned this in the analysis of Chatterjee — Mackowiak, but generally, this type of bias occurs when we become initially attracted to a specific candidate move and allow that preference to influence how seriously we investigate the alternatives. Instead of subjecting each candidate to the same standard of verification, we may hastily dismiss moves that do not fit our initial impression of the position.

2. We do not go as deep into our variations as is required

This was also discussed in the earlier analysis, as Om himself admitted to calculating the line up to a certain point but did not follow the string of forcing moves to its conclusion. As a result, his assessment of the position became progressively more pessimistic as the continuations played out over the board. In general, when meaningful forcing moves remain in a variation, we should continue calculating until we reach a position that we can evaluate with reasonable confidence. If the forcing sequence leads to an unfavorable outcome, there is usually little reason to spend time investigating quieter alternatives earlier in that same variation.

3. We feel that our analysis contains no meaningful branches

As you will see in the next endgame study from RB Ramesh's book *Improve Your Chess Calculation*, we must make sure to cover all critical branches that arise after our initial candidate move. I have noticed that many students will impulsively calculate each variation as though it were a single straight path, missing critical moments where the analysis diverges into several meaningful possibilities. When such a situation occurs, we must pause to note all meaningful candidate moves from that position, and only after carefully examining each one can we move on.

4. We leave out important moves from our list of candidates

Although slightly different from the first three points, you might notice this tendency arise even more frequently in your own calculation. Whenever I talk to my students about this exact issue, I often use the phrase **"do your work early."** In short, we should take as much time as necessary to accurately generate the critical candidate moves that deserve consideration, even if they look awkward or inferior at first glance. The main requirement for our candidate moves is that they address the needs of the position.

Of course, there are many more instances in which our incomplete assumptions can lead to inaccurate decision-making, but let us stick with the current list for now. In the subsequent exercises, I will mark different moments where each example of an incomplete assumption appears using the corresponding numbers. That way, we can gain a better understanding of **why** we made our mistake rather than merely **what** mistake we made. I have found that, when training students, correctly identifying the underlying deficiencies in their decision-making can greatly aid their development and help them avoid similar mistakes in the future.

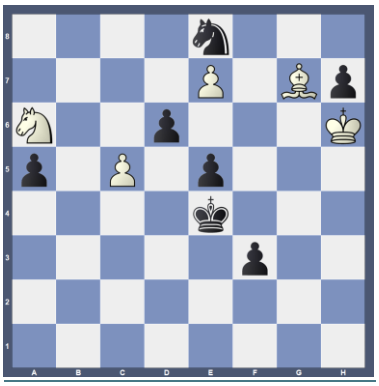
After showing Om the mistake he made in our lesson together, I presented the following endgame study from RB Ramesh's book *Improve Your Chess Calculation*. I had actually solved the exercise myself earlier that day and realized it would be the perfect example to continue our discussion of "incomplete assumptions."

For those of you looking to test your own decision-making skills, I highly recommend setting this position up on a board and attempting to solve it yourself before consulting the answer provided in the article. Make sure you write out all your ideas and continuations before consulting the solution. Ideally, we should not only come up with the first move, but also the full main line, along with the correct refutations of the critical alternatives and the reasoning behind them.

Leonid Kubbel,

Study, 1941

RB Ramesh Level 4 (2400-2600 OTB)



☐ **Task:** *White to play and win. Time to think: 15 minutes.*

At first glance, White's situation seems desperate. Black's f-pawn is very close to promotion, and there seems to be nothing White can do about it. Yet White's main trump consists of his own passed pawns on e7 and potentially c5, which should offer him considerable counterplay. Let us see what Om and I calculated, and where our variations diverged.

1.♘c7!!

This is a fantastic move that deflects Black's knight from its critical square. Interestingly, Om completely missed this when he generated his list of candidate moves and did not even mention it at the start **(4)**.

To improve candidate generation, I strongly suggest that students first ask the key question, "What is the position asking of me?" before calculating variations. By doing so, we can reduce the likelihood of omitting critical moves from our list of candidates **(4)**.

Instead, Om thought that the main decision came down to comparing the moves 1.c6 and 1.c×d6, the latter of which is a blunder that loses the game once the knight recaptures. White's real task is to eliminate the knight so that his passed pawns can advance, meaning that 1.c×d6? does not meet the position's needs **(4)**.

1.c7? was the move chosen by Om, which is followed by:

1…f2! 2.c7 ♘×c7?!

This move was correctly rejected, but for the wrong reasons.

(In fact, the move 2...f1♕! wins on the spot after 3.c8♕ ♕h1+! 4.♔g5 ♕g2+ 5.♔h4 ♘×g7 −+ and White cannot promote their pawn due to ...♘f5+ followed by mate on the next move.)

3.♘×c7 f1♕ 4.e8♕

And here is where we reach the main bottleneck in Om's calculation. Because he immediately considered the move 2…♘×c7?! bad, he failed to realize that Black has a critical resource from this point.

4…♕c1+! =

Black wins the knight on c7 due to a fork. In general, I strongly feel that when we prematurely label moves as good or bad before diving into the variations, we create biases that are difficult to remove. This can cause us to stop searching seriously for Black's best continuations because we have already concluded that 2…♘×c7?! results in a bad position before completing our calculation **(1)**.

1…♘×c7

Also losing was:

1…f2?! 2.♘×e8! f1♕ 3.♘×d6+ ♔d5 4.e8♕ ♕h3+ 5.♕h5 ♕×h5+ 6.♔×h5+− and White will win the bishop and knight vs. king endgame after rounding up the rest of Black's pawns.

2.c×d6 f2

2…♘e8?! 3.d7 f2 4.d×e8♕ f1♕ 5.♕c6+! +−

3.d×c7 f1♕ 4.c8♕!

Again, White must not rush here; the order of promotion matters **(3)**.

Wrong would have been 4.e8♕? due to ♕c1+!=, when Black wins the c7-pawn.

4…♕f4+!

It is important to spot this move as well. Most students will opt for 4…♕h3+?, which loses after 5.♔g5! ♕g2+ 6.♕g4!+−.

There are two main reasons why students may miss moves such as 4…♕f4+. Firstly, I have often seen students search energetically for their own best moves while giving much less attention to the opponent's resources.

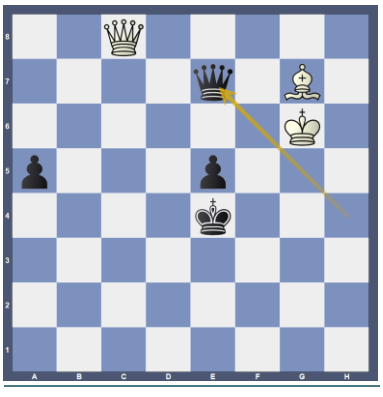
However, the other main reason is that players will assume that their variation contains no meaningful branches and therefore will not investigate the alternatives **(3)**.

5. ♔×h7!

5…♔h5? 6.♕f7+! ♔h4 *(6...♔h6?? ♕g6#)* 6…♕×e7+ 7.♔h3 ♕×g7∓

5…♕h4+ 6.♔g6! ♕×e7

Black has managed to win White's e7-pawn, but there is one final sting in the tail (see diagram below):



7.♗f8! ♕a7

7…♕h4 8.♕c4+ +−

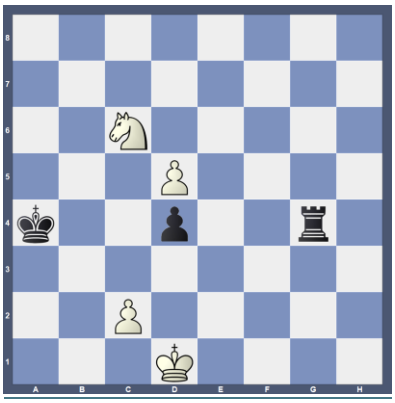
8.♘c5!+−

And White's pieces coordinate themselves beautifully to trap Black's queen. I should also note that many players, myself included, might miss this nice idea at first, leading us to abandon this variation and look for alternatives earlier in the line. The remedy for this problem is to continue searching for resources as we calculate, rather than ending a variation before reaching a position that we can evaluate with reasonable confidence **(2).**

Reflecting on the process I used to solve this exercise reminded me of a similar endgame study I failed to solve in December of 2025. Let us take a look at the analysis and draw some comparisons between the two positions.

V. & M. Platov, *Study, 1914*

★★★☆☆☆ Tier 3 — Extending The Line



☐ **Task:** *Find the winning line for White. Time to think: 5 to 10 minutes.*

1.d6!

This move is not hard to spot, but of course we cannot consider ourselves successful if we just managed to spot the first move. There are several twists and turns in this endgame position that we must account for to understand the full value of White's aim to use his passed pawn.

As I mentioned in my last Substack article, *How I Choose Lesson Materials for Students*, many students solve a lot of puzzles on Lichess or Chess.com at a high level and wonder why it doesn't translate to their OTB games. The main problem is that, because the puzzle trainer immediately reveals the opponent's move, the pupil is not held accountable for identifying the opponent's most critical resources. For this reason, many players will freeze at the first sign of resistance and not continue looking for ideas **(2).**

1…d3!?

This is an interesting pawn sacrifice that poses serious practical problems for White—problems that, unfortunately, I was unable to solve. I should mention that around this time I was terribly out of form with my own calculation practice, so it is no surprise that I saw ghosts in the position.

It is also important to note that Black's pawn sacrifice is not random: he must give up his only pawn in the position to increase the odds of getting stalemated. Often, when we play strong players, they are very resilient defensively and pose many practical problems, so it is critical to maintain our focus even in seemingly winning positions.

2.c×d3!

Unfortunately, I ended up not choosing this move, for reasons that you will understand once we play through more of the position. Instead, I opted for:

(2.c3? This is not a good move, as Black can eliminate White's d-pawn by means of a sequence of checks. After 2…♖g1+! 3.♔d2 ♖g2+ 4.♔×d3 ♖g6!= gives Black equality, as he will play …Rd6+ once the White d-pawn moves)

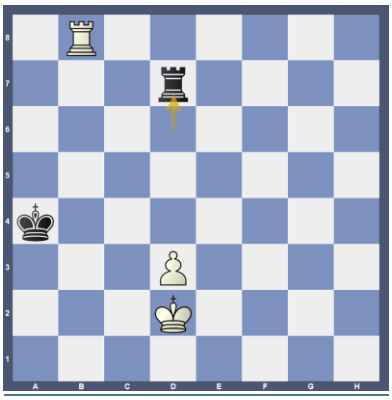
2…♖g6 3.d7 ♖d6

This is the next critical moment in this study.

4.d8♖!

This is the first critical idea White must spot. The key point is that the alternative move 4.d8♕?? runs into 4…♖×d3+!! 5.♕×d3= stalemate.

4…♖×c6 5. ♖b8! ♖d6 6. ♔d2 ♖d7 (see diagram below):



I stopped here, assuming that the position was drawn. Why?

The reason is that, in typical situations, Black can hold equality thanks to the fact that the White pawn has not crossed the midline.

Why is this important?

The problem White will face is that the moment he wants to advance his pawn by moving the king to either side, he will be subjected to continuous frontal checks, to which he must keep defending the d-pawn. This is good logic, but there is one problem with this reasoning:

*This is **not** a typical position **(2).***

When you are solving endgame studies, keep in mind that every unit on the board has meaning and will play a role in the final solution. This is why endgame studies are so powerful for exploiting incomplete assumptions. We think we understand a position because we have seen the main ideas before, and we do not

investigate our conclusion further by looking at what is actually happening on the board **(2).**

So what is the key feature of this position?

A careful inspection will no doubt point to the Black king on a4, which is secluded from the rest of its army as it is trapped on the a-file. How does White take advantage of this?

7. ♔c3! ♖c7+ 8. ♔d4 ♖d7+

I saw the entire study up to this point, but completely overlooked:

9. ♔c5!! ♖×d3 10. ♔c4!+−

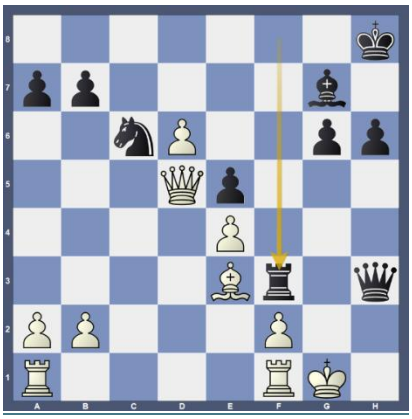
White wins, as he is threatening both checkmate and the rook on d3, and Black cannot parry both threats at once. While it is disappointing that I was not able to solve the study correctly, it serves as an important reminder to always interrogate your initial suspicions until a clear verdict emerges. It is not sufficient to make a final decision based on intuition alone; we must carefully examine the main continuations and prove the validity of our conclusions through concrete calculation **(2).**

So now that we have laid the basic foundations for how "incomplete assumptions" appear in simpler, more accessible positions, let us turn to a significantly more complicated example to see how they can arise in a messy practical game.

Grandmaster, Allround — Takahashi, Michael

Fritz 19 Training Game, Iowa City 2026

★★★★★☆ Tier 5 — Navigating the Chaos



☐ **Task 1:** *Analyze the position as deeply as possible. Time to think: 30 minutes.*

This position was taken from a training game I played in April of 2026 in preparation for the 2026 Americas Continental Championships in Oaxtepec, Mexico. Since then, I have tried to extract as much juice as possible from this fascinating position and have subsequently shared the analysis with my friends and students.

After realizing this position would make an excellent calculation exercise, I showed it to Om Chatterjee during our lesson on September 4, 2026, to help him reduce the number of premature assumptions he makes in the analytical process.

Let us hear what he had to say:

For starters, it became clear to Om that the main question was where to move the rook on f1. After all, Black's threat of …♕g4+ followed by mate on the next move must be parried, and there is no other logical manner to prevent this. After this, however, he said something interesting.

After about 4 minutes of thought, he said, "Well, obviously White is looking to win because he is up an exchange and already has a very powerful passed d-pawn."

We will discuss this in Part II of our series, but many players overvalue material when assessing positions, causing them to overlook their opponents' resources. Let us now take a look at the three candidate moves Om came up with, and the pros and cons of each of them:

A. 24. ♖fe1??

This was the move Om originally chose to prevent Black from playing …♖×e3, which would secure a perpetual after …♕g3+. The problem with this logic is that it assumes Black's only route is to try to draw the game, and therefore a player who supplies this reasoning likely believes that their variation goes in a straight line with no meaningful branches **(3).**

However, Black has a simple way to win now:

24…♕g4+! 25.♔f1 ♖h3! −+ There is no defense to …♖h1 mate.

B. 24. ♖fd1?

This was the move chosen by the Fritz 19 personality, but it (and I!) missed a crucial detail in this variation.

24…♖f4!!

We will see this motif recur throughout this analysis. During the game, I actually saw this move, but rejected it for the wrong reasons. Instead:

(24…♖×e3? 25.f×e3 ♕g3+ = was the line played in the game, but I had already missed a massive chance to seize an advantage)

25.♗×f4 e×f4 26.♖d3

This is the move that White had counted on during the game, but it fails due to the precise insertion:

26…♕g4+!

I completely missed this in-between move. Now, White is simply worse after:

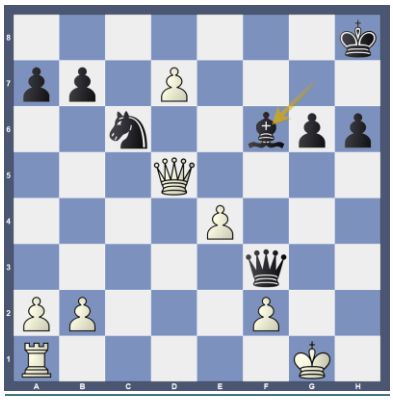
27.♔f1 f3! 28.♖×f3 ♕×f3−+ And Black is now winning because White can no longer play the move d6-d7 due to the threatened skewer on the first rank.

This is why Black needed to force the White king to the f1 square so that the h1 square is now undefended. Unfortunately, I missed

the …♕g4+ resource entirely, so I discarded the entire variation because I did not investigate whether my line had any possible branches **(3).**

Shortly after the game concluded, I presented the analysis to the Cuban Grandmaster Reynaldo Vera during a private lesson, and he decided to investigate whether Black could still claim an advantage after the immediate:

26…f3?! 27.♖×f3! ♕×f3 28.d7 ♗f6!? (see diagram below):



☐ **Task 2:** *Find the sequence leading to equality for White. Time to think: 5 to 10 minutes.*

29.♕f7!

Taking advantage of the drawback of Black's last move. Now the queen no longer guards the f7-square, allowing White's queen to penetrate.

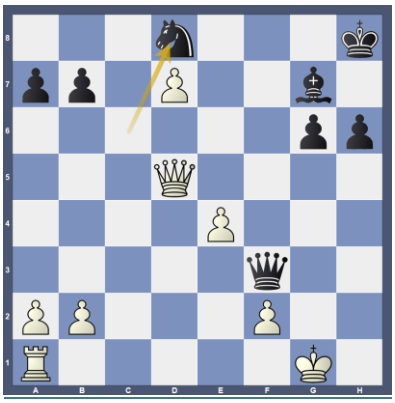
29…♕g4+ 30.♔f1! ♕g5

And now White must prevent the blockade on the d8-square:

31.d8♕+! ♘×d8 32.♕e8+ ♔g7 33.♖d1!=

White has enough compensation for the sacrificed pawn, as Black will have a difficult time dealing with White's pressure on the 7th and 8th ranks.

After establishing that White had equality in that line, Reynaldo and I turned our attention to the position after 28…♘d8 (see diagram below):



☐ **Task 3:** *Play as actively as possible. Time to think: 5 minutes.*

It may sound counterintuitive, but a position like this one is deceptively simple. Even though the move itself is not flashy, the concept behind it is difficult to grasp as you try to visualize the continuations in your head from the very beginning. I suggest that anyone attempting to solve these exercises in full not move the pieces while searching for the right answer; instead, try to picture each task in your head as you analyze the position from the beginning of the exercise.

This is not an easy process, but I strongly believe that this practice builds the up-and-coming player's mental strength in difficult moments, as they consider moves beyond their natural instincts.

29.♖e1!

White must not passively defend the b2-pawn and instead continue as actively as possible, creating the threat of ♖e1-e3. It is important that White manages to remove the Black queen from the f3-square, as it currently hinders the advance of the e4-pawn.

29…♗×b2 *(29…♗f6!? 30.♖e3 ♕f4 31.e5! ♗e7 32.♕d3∓)* 30.♖e3! ♕f4 31.e5! ♗a3!?

Of course, White cannot capture the bishop on a3 due to …♕c1+

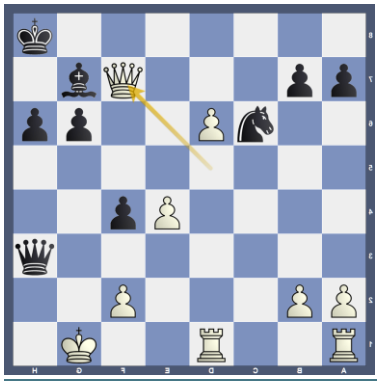
32.♖g3 g5 33.♕d3! ♗e7 34.♕g6!=

Once again, White has managed to infiltrate Black's kingside by means of weakening the light squares in Black's position.

From tasks 2 and 3, we can successfully determine that, indeed, Black did not have a path towards a significant advantage after 26…f3, meaning that the move …♕g4+! on move 26 was his only correct option.

After I completed my lesson with GM Reynaldo Vera, my Canadian second, Andrew Harris, took interest in the position and found an instructive refutation of the continuation:

24. ♖fd1!? ♖f4! 25. ♗×f4 e×f4 26. ♕f7 (see diagram below):

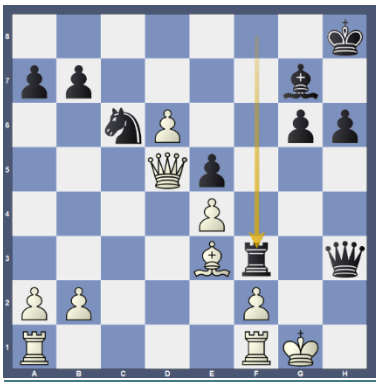


■ **Task 4:** *Find the winning continuation for Black. Time to think: 3 minutes.*

26…f3! *(26…♘e5?? 27.♕×f4! ♘f3+ 28.♕×f3 ♕×f3 29.d7= throws away the win)* 27.♕×g6 ♗e5! 28.♕e8+ ♔g7! −+

And White has run out of checks and cannot stop checkmate; therefore, he is lost.

While the refutation was not that difficult to spot, it is important to keep in mind the different elements that made Black's mating attack successful, because we will come back to a very similar position later in the analysis.



Returning to Om's analysis, I want to point out an important message I shared with him as he was trying to figure out Black's main ideas.

Many times, up-and-coming players struggle to spot their opponents' ideas because defending against a threat feels unnatural to them, **especially when** much of their improvement has come from launching direct attacks themselves. In such instances, many trainers will feel the need to overemphasize recognizing the **opponent's** resources when working with a young student, but I have seen that this often has a negative effect:

Students now feel the need to prevent every idea their opponent has, and thus lose the trust that they gained in making sacrifices and taking risks.

For this reason, I believe it is important to simply make students aware of their opponents' ideas so they can choose for themselves how to respond. In addition, I feel that when teaching students concepts that may not come naturally to them, it is critical that we present the topics through a lens that students will naturally understand.

As Om was trying to decide where to move his rook from f1, I told him to put himself in the shoes of the attacking side (Black) and ask what Black needed to do to keep the attack going. After thinking for a while, Om correctly pointed out that Black needed to bring more pieces into the attack, noting that the bishop on g7 and the knight on c6 **were** not participating in Black's plan.

I have found this method of teaching extremely valuable because it helps me individualize the lessons based on my students' natural tendencies, while still contributing to the development of their chess skills. If you are interested in exploring this phenomenon of "learning defense through the eyes of the attacking player" more deeply, I highly suggest **that** you take a look at Josh Waitzkin's book *The Art of Learning* and read **Chapter 8,** titled "Breaking Stallions."

Returning to the position, if we can recognize Black's key move to unite all of his pieces, we will begin to appreciate White's only move in the position:

C. 24.♖fc1!

This is the only move that works in the position, but one can only find it if **one correctly anticipates** Black's follow-up:

24…♖f4!!

Many players found it extremely difficult to spot this backward rook move, which brings up an important psychological point:

Material is just one of many imbalances on the chessboard, and we must not prematurely eliminate candidate moves before we have a chance to consider them ***(1).***

25.♗×f4 e×f4 26.♖×c6!!

This is the point. Because Black had opened up the e5-square for his knight, it was critical for White to disallow this by sacrificing his rook for the knight on c6. This is why White needed to bring his rook to c1 in the first place.

26…b×c6

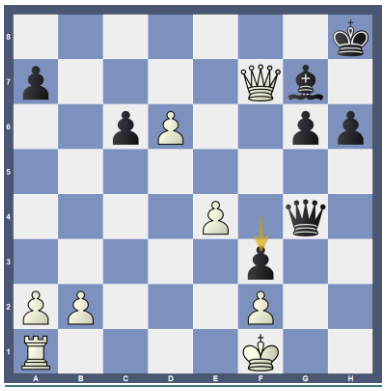
(26…f3?? loses to 27.♖c8+!! ♕×c8 28.d7! **+−***, and by deflecting Black's queen away from the kingside, White has diffused Black's attack and reached a winning position. This sideline was found by Om himself, revealing his progress in identifying critical branches in his calculation process* ***(3)***

27.♕f7! ♕g4+!

Without the knight on c6, Black is forced to play this check.

(27…f3? 28.♕×g6! ♗e5 29.♕e8+! ♔h7 30.♕f7+! ♔h8 31.♕f8+! ♔h7 32.♕f5+! **+−** *White wins by forcing a decisive queen trade — Om Chatterjee.)*

28.♔f1! f3 (see diagram below):



☐ **Task 5:** *Find White's critical move and calculate the lines as thoroughly as possible. Time to think: 15 minutes.*

29.♕c4!

Many players, including Andrew Harris, managed to spot this move for the sole reason that Black is threatening to continue with …♕g2+ and …♕g1, so White needs to be able to block the check on g1 the moment it comes. While there is nothing inherently wrong with this manner of finding the first move, we should not forget that finding

the first move does not constitute solving the problem. Even if we would not calculate this deeply in a practical game, I feel that by challenging ourselves to look more deeply into the position, we can uncover insights into our own analytical tendencies, which will make us better players capable of solving harder problems that require extensive calculation.

In fact, the Cuban GM Reynaldo Vera also reached this point in the analysis and found a logical, yet flawed idea:

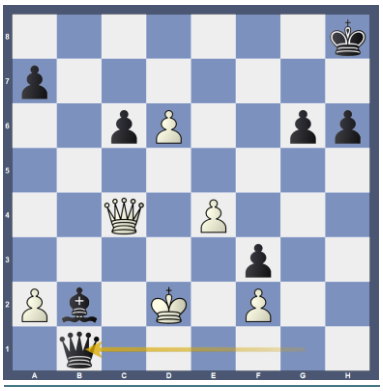
(29.♕×a7? was the move suggested by the GM, but it fails due to 29...♕g2+! 30.♔e1 ♕g1+ 31.♔d2 ♕×a1 32.♕b8+ ♔h7 33.d7 ♗×b2!!, and now White can promote his pawn with 34.d8♕, only to be mated after 34...♕c1+ 35.♔d3 ♕c3#.)

Interestingly enough, I had not seen the possibility of White capturing the pawn on a7 heading into my lesson with GM Vera, so when he posed the move as a potential candidate, I had to refute the variation myself, which I'm proud to say I successfully did. But this, too, only supports the logic of calculating beyond the first move, because in my mind, a great deal of positive development can come from forcing ourselves to think in difficult situations, as it develops the underlying skills we will need in our over-the-board games.

29...♕g2+ 30.♔e1 ♗×b2 31.♖b1! *(31.♖d1? ♕g1+! 32.♕f1 ♗c3+! −+)*
31...♕g1+

And now, the pendulum swings once more. Now it is Black who is seemingly winning a full rook, and if White cannot find an effective response, he will almost certainly lose. After showing my second the extension to the line he prematurely pruned **(2),** he admitted to me that he should have calculated this line further, because if we do not, we risk being surprised by an unexpected resource later in the variation, which can cause us to react in the wrong manner. Clearly, because the move ♕c4-f1 does not work, it leaves White with only one option that he must calculate to the finish:

32.♔d2 ♕×b1 (see diagram below):



Here comes the real point behind the entire exercise:

33.d7!

Mobilizing the d-pawn and taking advantage of Black's temporarily misplaced pieces to seek one final active solution.

33...♗f6 34.d8♕+!! ♗×d8 35.♕d4+ ♔h7 36.♕d7+! **=**

At long last, White finally uses his powerful passed d-pawn to set up a string of continuous checks.

While this exercise is not easy, kudos go out to anyone who made a sincere effort to solve it by calculating all the main variations and branches as deeply as required. Om Chatterjee himself managed to calculate the entire main line and crucial sidelines all the way to the position after 28...f3, which, in my eyes, represents a huge success in the development of his calculation skills.

To conclude, I believe that every chess player has biases in their logical thinking, and the more diligently we work to expose these gaps in our training by solving complex exercises that push us just beyond our **current** capabilities, the more meaningful progress we can make in our analytical abilities.

Want to learn more? If so, be on the lookout for Part II of this series, as we will continue our research on "incomplete assumptions."

For those interested in working with me, feel free to visit my Lichess coaching page or contact me at mrcapture02@gmail.com. Have a great day!

Duchamp Exhibit at MOMA in NY

by Anthony Saidy

Article in May 4 New Yorker by Hilton Als, "The Trickster," confirmed my backwardness in art theory. But I had already tabbed Franco-American Marcel Duchamp as the deepest philosopher of art of the 20th century. As a clueless teen, I spent an evening in the mid-1950s in his NY chess club, London Terrace, while hearing whispers of what an important man was among us. We did not speak. I had my hands full with trying to subdue a Caro-Kann Defense for my Marshall C.C. team.

My coffee-table book "The World of Chess" has two Duchamp paintings - one a lush traditional depiction of two men playing chess while two women gaze away; the other a cubist bombshell in the vein of his famous "explosion in a shingle factory" that wowed the celebrated Armory Exhibit of 1913 - "Nude Descending a Staircase." He was a shapeshifter who impinged on all the trendy art movements.

It was a myth that he gave up art for chess, having played on the French Olympic team; he never stopped working on art.

An art "expert" in NYT directly contradicted Duchamp by denying that chess is an art. Duchamp declared, "All chess-players are artists."

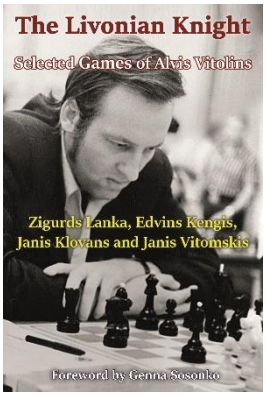
The exhibit, which I have not viewed, includes all his works but the permanent two in Philly. It closes on August 22 and opens at Philadelphia Art Museum on October 10. Seeing it is not so much to dazzle the eye as to stimulate the brain.

eBay has dozens of books about Duchamp, one from a chess angle. Current catalog runs $75. I may skip it, having recently purchased "Man Ray & Chess" for a lot more than it costs online. From artist/photographer Man Ray, I had one degree of separation, thru famed musician Artie Shaw (also a chess buff).

The Livonian Knight: Selected Games of Alvis Vitolins

by Zigurds Lanka, Edvins Kengis, Janis Klovans and Janis Vitomskis

Reviewed by Mark Capron



When I first saw *The Livonian Knight: Selected Games of Alvis Vitolins* advertised on the Elk and Ruby website I knew I recognized the name. I realized that Alvis Vitolins (Vitolinsh) was one of the people who helped modernize the Cochrane gambit. As a long time Petroff (Russian Game) Defense player, I wanted to see what the authors had to say about it.

The authors mention the work Vitolins did in the Cochrane but unfortunately did not include any Petroff games. On the plus side, they did include other gambits that Vitolins found or developed in openings such as the Alekhine's Defense, the Sicilian Defense, and the Nimzo-Indian Defense.

Vitolins played very dynamic chess. Constantly looking for ways to mix it up, a draw was the last thing on his mind.

Alvis Vitolins was born June 15,1946, in Sigulda, Latvia. He learned to play at six and was a candidate master by the age of 15. He became a master a year later. Vitolins won the 1963 USSR Youth Championship and was predicted to become an outstanding player. Vitolins never achieved the grandmaster title, however. He was best as an analyst, finding new ideas and new ways to approach positions. His creative mind allowed him to be very good at rapid and blitz, many times holding his own against players such as Mikhail Tal. It is said that if he got engrossed by a position, he might sit at the board for 48 hours without sleeping or eating!

The first game of chapter one is actually a loss, not because of the opening, but due to Vitolins's later play. Vitolins was white vs. V. Bagirov. The opening was an Alekhine's Defense with an early d5 (1.e4 ♘f6 2.e5 ♘d5 3.d4 d6 4.♘f3 ♗g4 5.c4 ♘b6 6.d5!?, Riga 1981,0-1). One of Vitolins's weaknesses was that his concentration waivered sometimes in the later middlegame or endgame, especially if he felt the position was boring. In some cases, he would simply resign out of the blue just because he didn't feel the position held anything left to interest him.

The book contains 25 stem games with many more embedded in extensive notes. The book is arranged such that each chapter discusses an opening idea or strategy. There are ten chapters. Much of Vitolins's work occurred in the Sicilian Defense, but before we get to the Sicilian, he also had interesting ideas in the Caro-Kann Defense where he would force his opponent to castle short or move their king.

One of his biggest discoveries was playing …c5 in the Bogo-Indian (1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 ♗b4+ 4.♗d2 c5!?). An amateur had played the move and got crushed with it before Vitolins saw it. But thereafter he breathed new life into it and was helped by fellow Latvians Victor Korchnoi and Predrag Nikolic. Sometimes this variation is called the "ViKoNi" variation.

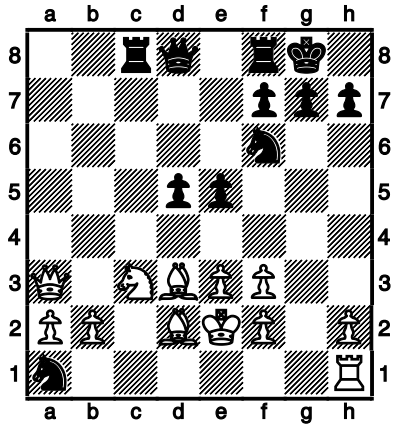
His games are very fun and exciting. Vitolins was always looking for ways to spice things up. Here is an excerpt from one of his Nimzo-Indian games:

Kaunas,K - Vitolins,Alvis [E32]

Riga Riga, 1975

[E. Kengis,Z. Lanka and A. Vitolins]

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♕c2 0–0 5.♘f3 b5!? 6.c×b5 a6 7.e3 ♗b7 8.b×a6 ♗×f3 9.g×f3 d5 10.♕a4 ♘×a6 11.♗d2 c5 12.d×c5 ♗×c5 13.♕c6?! ♘b4! 14.♕×c5 ♘c2+ 15.♔d1 ♘×a1 16.♗d3 e5 17.♔e2 ♖c8 18.♕a3 *{up to this point the book contains over six pages of analysis-MAC}*

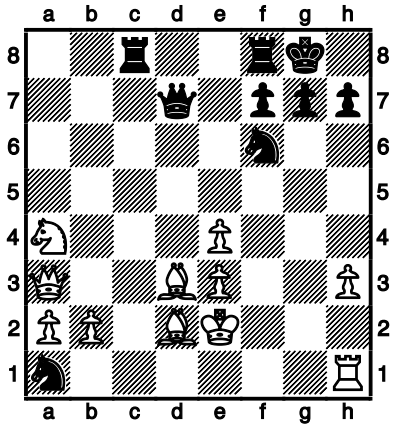


18. … d4! [When a dynamic pawn center moves forward, the opposing king doesn't feel too comfortable in the center of the board.]

19.♘a4?! [19.♖×a1 was safer - 19...d×c3 20.♗×c3 ♖e8 with very complicated play.]

19...d×e3 20.f×e3 e4! [Black throws more wood on the attacking fire.]

21.f×e4 ♕d7 22.h3

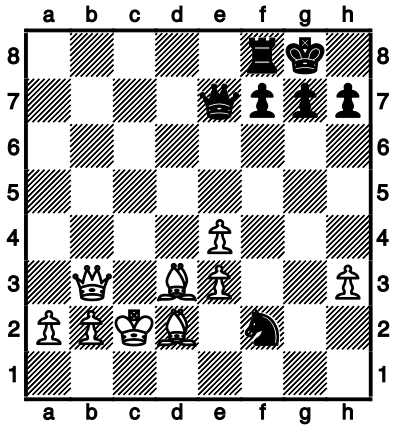


22. … ♘c2 [Vitolins: "It wasn't too late to blunder: 22...♘h5? 23.♘b6 ♕c7 24.♘×c8 ♘g3+ 25.♔d1 ♘×h1 26.♘e7+ ♔h8 27.♘g6+!+– ."; 22...♕c7!?–+]

23.♕b3 ♘h5 24.♘b6 ♕c7 25.♘×c8 ♘g3+ 26.♔d1 ♘×h1 27.♘e7+? [The decisive mistake.]

[Vitolins: "The correct move was 27.♕×c2 ♘f2+ 28.♔e2 ♕h2 ." He stops the analysis at this point writing that "black will be in serious trouble after the attack"; after the forced 29.♘e7+ ♔h8 30.♗b4 ♘×e4+ 31.♔d1 ♘f2+ 32.♔e1 ♘×d3+ 33.♕×d3 ♕×h3 34.♕d4±, white's position is better, since black can't create any threats against the white king.]

27...♕×e7 28.♔×c2 ♘f2



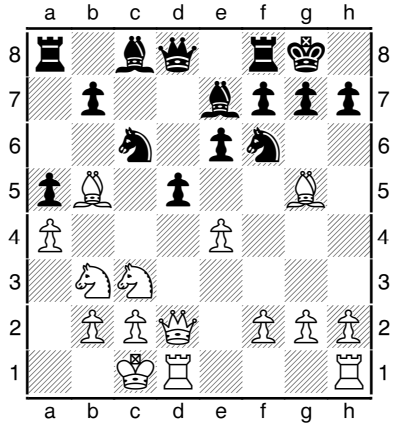
29.a4? [29.♗c3 ♖d8 30.♗d4∓]

29...♖c8+ [29...♖d8–+]

30.♗c3 ♘×e4 31.a5 ♘×c3 32.b×c3 ♕×e3 33.♕d5 g6 34.a6 ♕f2+ 35.♔b3 ♕d2 36.a7 ♕×c3+ 37.♔a2 ♕d2+ 38.♔b3 ♕d1+ 39.♔b4 ♕a1 40.♕d7 ♖a8 **0–1**

Another idea that Vitolins used frequently was sacrificing on b5. One of these ideas, 11.♗b5! in the Sicilian Rauzer Variation, gave him the novelty of the year in 1985.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 c×d4 4.♘×d4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♗g5 e6 7.♕d2 ♗e7 8.0–0–0 0–0 9.♘b3 a5 10.a4 d5 11.♗b5!



In the Scheveningen Sicilian, he liked to play 6.♗b5. Although not popular in the computer age, it gave many interesting choices.

Vitolins spent lots of effort to bust Fischer's Sicilian Najdorf poisoned pawn variation. He was not successful, but tried very hard and tried for a long time. He did find many improvements in other lines of the Najdorf for both white and black, just not in the poisoned pawn variation.

In many ways the book is an opening manual with its many new moves and ideas that Vitolins came up with. I found the resulting middlegame positions to be fun and exciting. I wish the book had a bit more biographical content, but what is there is good. I would recommend the book to intermediate to advanced level players and or anyone who has an interest in soviet chess or chess history.

The book may be purchased here: Elk and Ruby

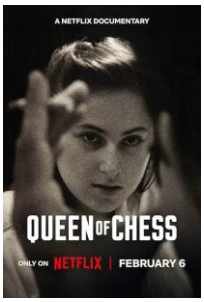
"I play every game as if it were the game of my life!" – Alvis Vitolins



Queen of Chess

Netflix Documentary

Reviewed by Cindy Wister



Taylor Swift. Eileen Gu. Judit Polgar.

Three enormously different women operating in vastly different fields. Taylor Swift sells out arenas larger than some cities. Eileen Gu is the most decorated freestyle skier in Olympic history. And for those of us in the chess world, Judit Polgar needs no introduction. She is one of the greatest chess players of all time - full stop.

Often when we see larger-than-life achievers, we are swept away in the sensationalism of their accomplishments. We bypass the countless hours of toil and tell ourselves that they possessed a natural born talent, a raw innate gift that is the catalyst for their success. But Rory Kennedy's documentary, *Queen of Chess*, reminds us that the blueprint for these iconoclasts was not to toe the line. Like Swift and Gu, Judit Polgar didn't just play the game, she fundamentally shook up the rules to come out at the top.

Chess is a 1000+ year old game, but in 1972, a match sparked a global boom. The "Match of the Century" people called it - between Bobby Fischer and Boris Spassky. Suddenly, chess was on the front page of global news, capturing the attention of people far beyond the chess community. The media circus turned top chess players into cultural icons and celebrities. Well into the 70s, 80s, and even 90s - these personalities were predominantly men.

But László Polgar, Judit's father, was a contrarian. He believed that women could play as well as men and that genius was purely a product of upbringing. In fact, he famously told the Washington Post, "A genius is not born but is educated and trained." He believed it so firmly that he tested this hypothesis on his own children. This was revolutionary, because he was challenging widely accepted psychological and gender norms of that period. It was subversive because he was homeschooling, rather than submitting them to the public schooling system that Communist Hungary required.

As shown in the documentary, the girls trained together with various coaches for up to 8 or 9 hours a day. They woke at 6am to train at chess games and memorize thousands of index cards of positions and tactics. But interestingly, Judit says she never wanted to go to "normal school". The fact that her older sisters were already playing before she was born, made this lifestyle her normal. While my own children treat completing their daily chess puzzles like a direct violation of the Geneva Convention, the Polgar sisters reflect in the film that they were happy, enjoying their training together and loving their ensuing success at chess.

Still, there were doubters. Most chess clubs were heavily male-dominated, and women were treated with patronizing attitudes or downright hostility. Judit, after playing alongside her sisters in the Women's Chess Olympiads in 1988 and 1990, fully spurned women's only events. As a child, Judit describes her wins against IMs as being downplayed and attributed to "luck", grown men refusing to shake her hand after losing to her, a fundamental part of chess etiquette. Through archival footage, we see Garry Kasparov remark that "chess does not fit women" because women are "weaker fighters." Doubling down, we see Bobby Fischer smugly comment to an interviewer that women are "terrible chess players." In fact, he had previously gone as far as to say, "They're all weak…They're stupid compared to men." *

Yet, to the shock of the chess community, at the age of 15 years and 4 months, Judit Polgar became the youngest Grandmaster in history, breaking Bobby Fischer's previous record.

But that is only one, albeit magnificent, step in the ascent of Judit's remarkable career as the Queen. From there, the film shifts focus to her tumultuous and complex journey with Garry Kasparov - someone who Judit had idolized since childhood. The documentary examines the tension resulting from the Linares controversy and traces their relationship as they get to know each other beyond the board, building tension as they repeatedly play each other, and ultimately come to respect each other as chess players. While the film culminates in her victory against Kasparov in a rapid game, I wish it had highlighted how many GMs she subsequently also defeated: Anand, Kramnik, Karpov, and even Magnus Carlsen, to name a few. How these victories upended the chess establishment. How her unrelenting drive to be accepted in that establishment and dominate it, led to a massive influx of young girls entering the sport worldwide with the ambition of becoming unrestricted Grandmasters.

Rory Kennedy, though not a chess player, is a compelling storyteller. In fact, for Judit, it was a positive that Rory was a layperson. When Judit chose Kennedy to produce her biographical documentary, her goal was for a wider audience to appreciate the drama and tension of the sport, as well as to have a woman's perspective tell her story. What the documentary does well is capture the audience's attention - an underdog's story told with flashy graphics and upbeat music. In fact, Kennedy explained that because Judit Polgár and her sisters were entering a fiercely male-dominated world and "blowing it up," she wanted music that felt intentionally disruptive and energetic.

Judit Polgar circumnavigated the existing framework, ignoring critics and haters, to rise to an unprecedented level of success. Shadowing the success of its subject, *Queen of Chess* has now reached the Top 10 on Netflix in over 30 countries. I found it to be an inspiring documentary that brings to light one of the most remarkable women of our time, and I hope it will ignite the flame for future disruptors in kind.

===

*Ralph Ginzburg. "Portrait of a Genius as a Young Chess Master," Harper's Magazine, January 1962.



Library Focus:
Thierry Lafargue

Interviewed by Mark Capron

Long Room at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland. Photo by Mark Capron



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

Hi, I am Thierry Lafargue, 60 years old, single with no children. I live in France.

What do you do for a living?

I am a podiatrist.

When did you begin playing chess? And who taught you?

I learned to play chess in middle school, at the age of 11, thanks to a math teacher.

What is the state of all things chess in France?

1) **Are there lots of clubs?**
2) **Are there lots of tournaments?**
3) **Does France have its own rating system or does it use FIDE?**

Fédération Française des ECHECS: 988 CLUBS and 91,626 registered members as of 01/07/2026.

The Federation is in good health, with a steady increase in membership. Numerous tournaments are also organized by the clubs, including many international open events. The FFE uses the FIDE Elo rating system.

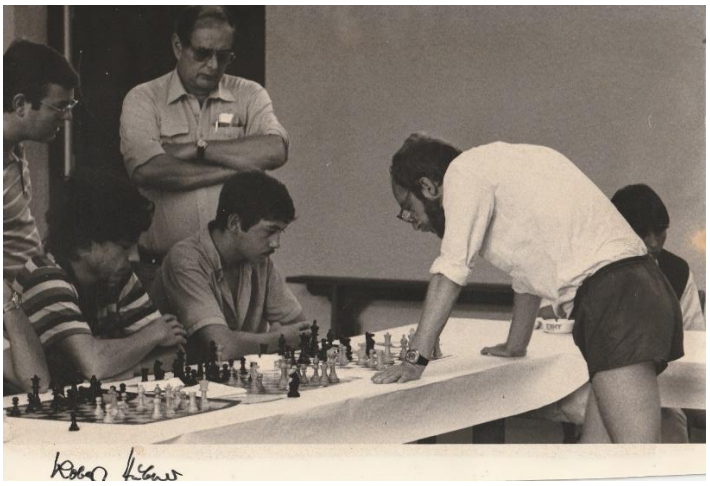
What are a few of your chess playing highlights?

My highest rating has been 2200. I really enjoy simultaneous exhibitions, as they offer the chance to meet great champions. I've had the pleasure of playing against Karpov, Hübner, Shirov, Fressinet…Wonderful memories, despite some heavy defeats!

Who was most fun to play against?

The most entertaining simultaneous exhibition was the one against Hübner. It was in the middle of summer, back in '82 or '83. He was number three worldwide, after the two "K's", at this time. He stepped off the train wearing shorts and a short-sleeved shirt and played in that outfit (against 40 players—winning 40–0). A truly remarkable character who gave the impression of being a bit "spaced out." Certainly, a superior mind, but a bit "offbeat."

Here are two photos:



- Simul against HÜBNER, Elo 2620 (third in the world: 25/09/1983). I was 17 years old ...and I lost the game after a nice sacrifice.



-Simul against FRESSINET, Elo 2715 (French Champion in title, this year, 18/07/2015) I took a lucky draw!

Do you have a favorite chess game you played?

My favorite game is definitely this one:

Petit 2246 - Lafargue 2180 [E81]
Interclubs Bordeaux-Aspom (5), 04.01.2004

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 e5 4.♘c3 d6 5.e4 g6 6.♗d3 ♗g7 7.f3 a6 8.♗e3 ♘bd7 9.♕d2 ♘h5 10.♘ge2 0–0 11.g4 ♘f4 12.♘×f4 e×f4 13.♗×f4 ♘e5 14.♗e2 b5 15.c×b5 a×b5 16.♘×b5 ♖a4 17.0–0 f5 18.e×f5 g×f5 19.g5 ♕b6 20.♗e3 f4 21.♗f2 ♗a6 22.♘c3 ♖b4 23.♖ab1 ♗d3 24.♔h1 ♗×b1 25.♖×b1 ♖b8 26.b3 ♕d8 27.♘e4 ♕f8 28.♖g1 ♔h8 29.h4 ♕f5 30.♔h2 ♖×e4 31.f×e4 ♕×e4 32.♗g4 ♖f8 33.♕d1 f3 34.♗h3 ♘d3 35.♕f1 ♕×d5 36.♗g4 ♘×f2 37.♕×f2 ♗d4 **0–1**

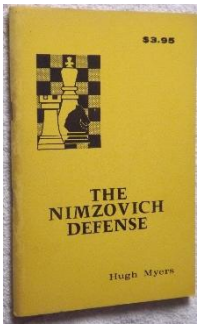
Of course, I have to ask if you play the French Defence? Ha Ha!

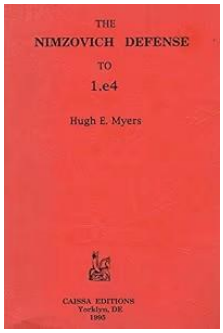
No, I never played the French Défense, too passive in my opinion. Against 1.e4 I played 1. ...e5 or 1. ...Nc6!

Do you know of Hugh Myers? I was a friend of his when he lived in Iowa. He was an Openings Theorist and specialized in offbeat openings such as the Nimzovitch that you mention above. Do you happen to have Myer's book on the Nimzovitch?

I play the Nimzovitch defense against 1.e4 and of course I have the Hugh Myer's book.

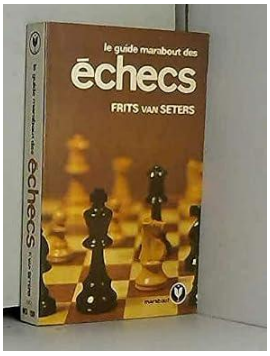






Do you recall what the first chess book you ever had was?

Certainly. "Le guide Marabout des Echecs" by Frits Van Seters , and "Le Bréviaire des Echecs" by Tartakover. Two simple and efficient books for the beginner!





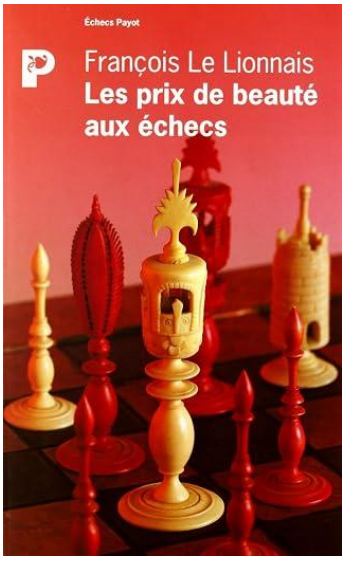
When did you begin collecting Chess books?

I think I was thirty years old.

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

I read a lot of books about the history of France, speculative fiction, detective short stories, and comics!

My favorite chess books are biographies of champions and collections of beautiful games. The ultimate book (the one you're supposed to take to a desert island!) is "Les Prix de Beauté aux Échecs" by François Le Lionnais (roughly translated to "Chess Beauty Prizes").



What draws you to a book? Cover? Title? Subject? Something else?

I love the book—the object itself. The smell of the paper, the beauty of the bindings, the quality of certain covers. And if the content interests me, all the better!

Tell us a story or two about how you got some of these books.

My initial focus for research was French chess magazines. I began, of course, with "Europe-Echecs"; I was fortunate enough to know one of the magazine's founders, Mr. Sorhouet, who gifted me his personal collection dating back to 1959. I then became passionate about tracking down all the old French magazines, starting with "Le Palamede", the first magazine ever (1836) created by La Bourdonnais.

One of my greatest achievements was assembling the complete run of "La Strategie" (74 years 1867 to 1940) spanning 72 bound volumes. Then, I also began collecting books, purchasing them online. Finally, I had the exceptional opportunity to acquire a large part of the collection belonging to Alain Bienabe, who passed away in 2021. He was undoubtedly one of the three or four greatest French collectors—primarily of books on chess composition, in all languages.

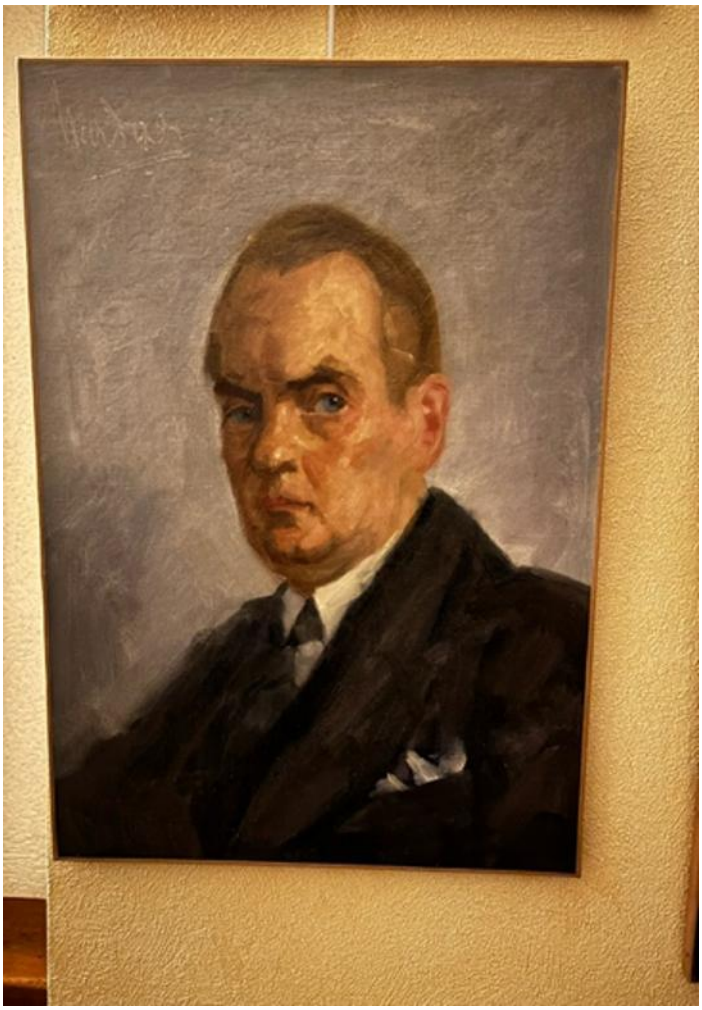
I remember renting a truck to pick up over 10 cubic meters of boxes filled with books and magazines. Quite an adventure! Opening those boxes—which had been stored for a few weeks in a garage I'd rented specifically for the purpose—was like a waking dream for me.

And finally, I had the incredibly good fortune to meet the heir of the Nardus family. Leonardus Nardus was the famous patron of the 1930s who organized matches for Janowski, his friend Marshall, and Emanuel Lasker.



This enabled me to acquire some magnificent pieces: a painting—a portrait of Alekhine by Nardus (who was not only an art collector but also an acclaimed painter)—and a travel chess set (from Delaire in Paris) that Alekhine gave to Nardus during a visit to La Marsa, Nardus's residence near Tunis.







My collection of magazines—primarily French, but also “Lasker's Chess Magazine” and “The London Chess Magazine”.



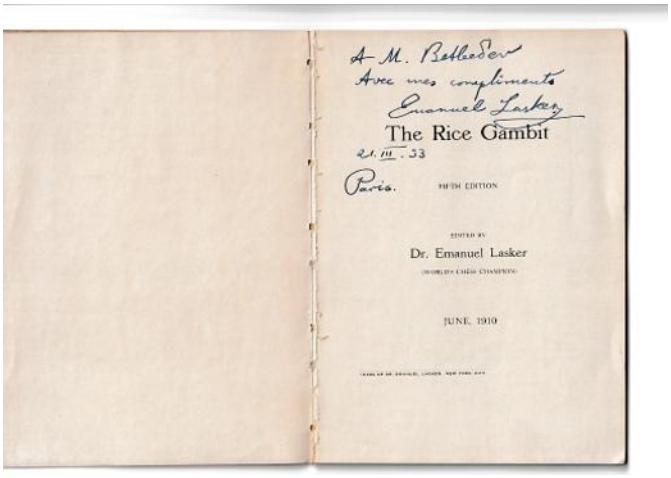
Do you have many autographs?

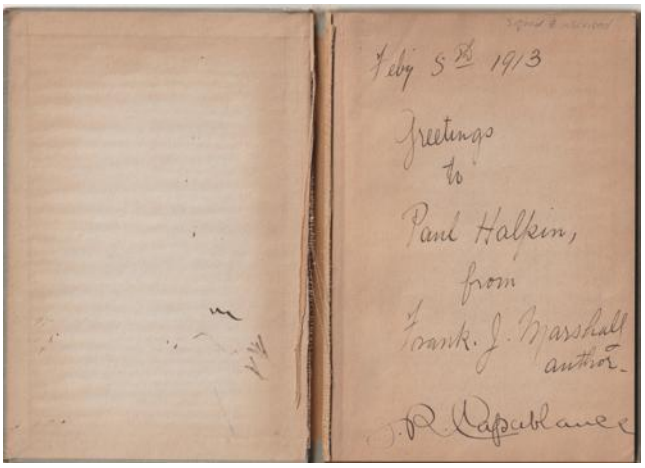
I have a few autographed books.

One is Marshall's “Modern Analysis”, bearing both his signature and Capablanca's.

Another is Emanuel Lasker's “The Rice Gambit”, with a dedication to Louis Betbeder Matibet, a French champion.

But the item I cherish most is undoubtedly a photograph of all the participants in the 1970 USSR vs. Rest of the World match in Belgrade, signed by everyone involved.

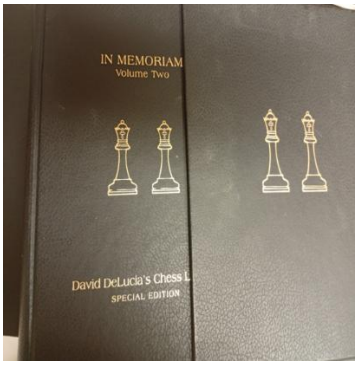


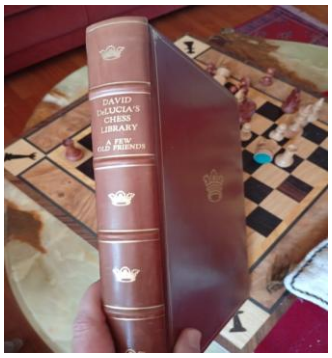


I also particularly love David De Lucia's books, which showcase his fabulous collection with superb photographs on high-quality paper.

"In Memoriam" in two volumes, and "A Few Old Friends" with a beautiful leather cover (probably only 10 copies).







France has had many important tournaments in its history like Paris 1867, 1878, and 1900, for example. How about the historical Café de la Régence in Paris?

Since last year, I have been a member of the French Chess Federation's "Art, Culture, and History" committee, chaired by Jean-Olivier Leconte. He has written two superb volumes on the history of the “Café de la Régence”. They feature all the champions of the era—Philidor, Deschapelles, La Bourdonnais, Jules Arnous de Rivière, and others. An essential work!

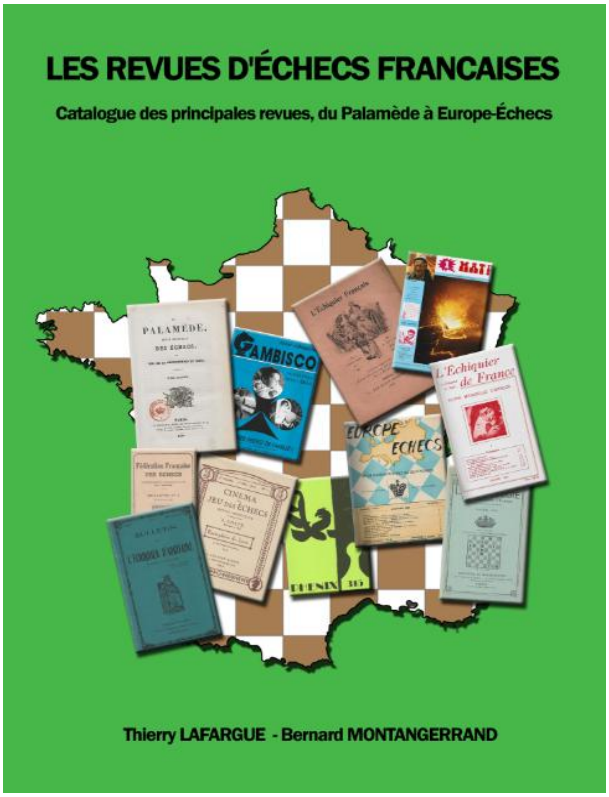
Thanks to his intervention with certain "authorities," we were able to save the famous Philidor chessboard—which a family member had wanted to get rid of—from being sold off.

A French museum exercised its right of pre-emption at the auction and acquired the chessboard (Musée Carnavalet in Paris).

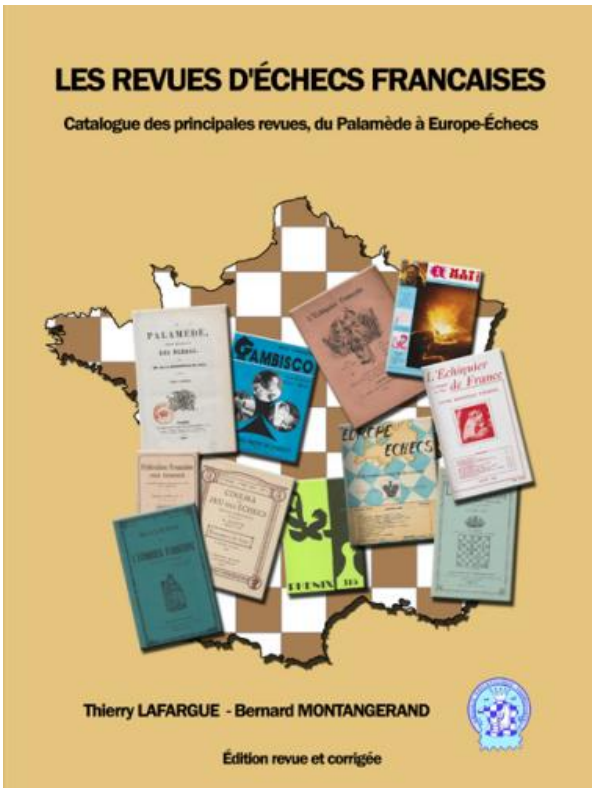
What strategies have you used to obtain books?

I search online, using well-known sites like eBay or Rakuten. However, I often visit auction sites (online) such as Calle Erlandsson's CHESSLUND and KLITTISH. Unfortunately, the prices rise too quickly for me!

My passion for French chess magazines has enabled me to assemble a collection comprising virtually everything ever published in this field. Naturally, a friend and fellow collector, Bernard Montangerand, and I, compiled a catalogue listing and describing every single French magazine (75 of them!).



Here it is—though both editions are now out of print!





What is your favorite biography book?

My favourite biography book, is Tal's *My Life and Games.*

A great deal of talent, of course, a remarkable sense of humor, and an admirable gift for self-criticism. A "must."

What is your favorite tournament book?

The finest tournament book in my collection is the one on San Sebastián by Mieses, in the French version by Delaire. A magnificent tournament... and a magnificent book, superbly bound.

Do you have all your books catalogued?

Regarding my collection, I have listed my old books and magazines (see my lists).

I estimate I have around 250 antique or valuable books on my shelves (in French, Spanish, and English).

In my garage, I believe I still have over 500 books in foreign languages in boxes—mostly books and journals on composition.



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

My favourite player is certainly Alekhine for his chess genius, despite his controversial career and regrettable opinions.

Do you have a favorite game someone else played?

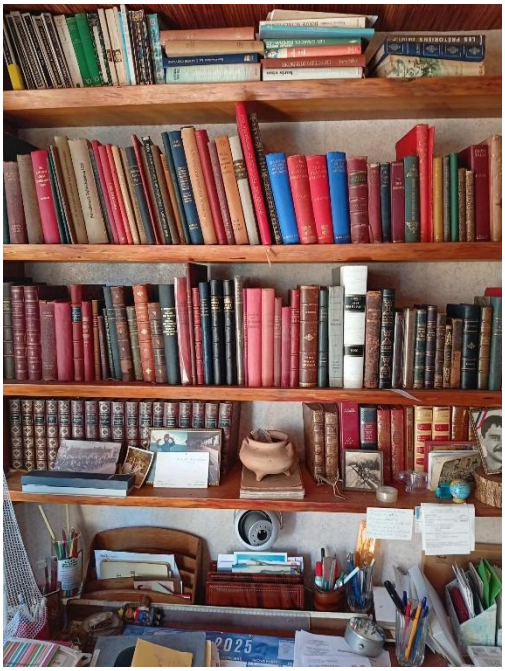
My favorite game—I'm afraid I'm not being very original here—is certainly Rubinstein's Immortal:

Georg Rotlewi - Akiba Rubinstein [D32]
Lodz Lodz RUE (6), 26.12.1907
1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 e6 3.e3 c5 4.c4 ♘c6 5.♘c3 ♘f6 6.d×c5 ♗×c5 7.a3 a6 8.b4 ♗d6 9.♗b2 0–0 10.♕d2 ♕e7 11.♗d3 d×c4 12.♗×c4 b5 13.♗d3 ♖d8 14.♕e2 ♗b7 15.0–0 ♘e5 16.♘×e5 ♗×e5 17.f4 ♗c7 18.e4 ♖ac8 19.e5 ♗b6+ 20.♔h1 ♘g4 21.♗e4 ♕h4 22.g3 ♖×c3 23.g×h4 ♖d2 24.♕×d2 ♗×e4+ 25.♕g2 ♖h3
0–1



Do you have a favorite quote?

Naturally, the quote that comes to mind is:
"Happiness is not found in the goal, but in the journey itself."



If you could provide one piece of advice to help others, what would it be?

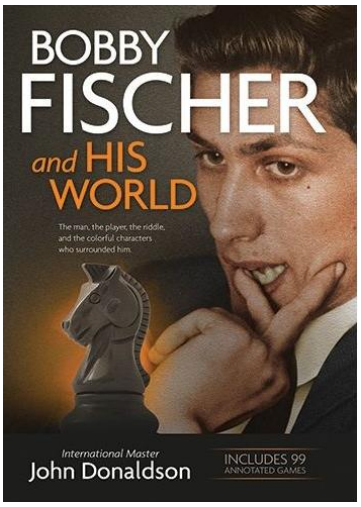
If I had just one piece of advice for new collectors, it would be to arm themselves with patience and tenacity! It took me nearly 30 years to build this collection, and I am still constantly looking to complete it!

Thank you! It was a pleasure to meet you and hear your story.

Bobby Fischer and His World

by John Donaldson

Reviewed by Robert Irons



Recently I wrote a review of another John Donaldson book about Fischer (*Inside the Mind of Bobby Fischer*), so while I did expect to be entertained, I didn't expect to learn much. I couldn't have been more wrong.

Inside the Mind is a new look at the materials Fischer published during his career. There are some great stories, and having access to all of his work is fantastic. But this work follows Fischer's life in depth, from his time growing up in Brooklyn until his last interview in Iceland in 2006. I learned as much about his personal development as I did about his chess development.

It starts with Fischer's mother writing to the chess column of the local paper in search of other players for her son to play against. That letter indirectly led to Fischer meeting with Carmine Nigro, who was at the time the president of the Brooklyn Chess Club. Then Donaldson introduces a blitz game that Fischer lost at the club in 1953, a King's Gambit Accepted that forced his resignation in 17 moves, a game not previously published. Following that, he shows an offhand game of Fischer's using the King's Indian Defense.

Fischer, Bobby - Altusky, Jacob [E90]
Brooklyn (offhand), 1955
1.d4 g6 2.c4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 0–0 5.♗g5 d6 6.♘f3 ♘bd7 7.e5 d×e5 8.d×e5 ♘g4 9.♘d5 ♘g×e5 10.♘×e7+ ♔h8 11.♘×g6+ h×g6 12.♗×d8
1–0

The first part of the book ends with the Third Lessing J. Rosenwald Trophy tournament, the one where Bobby played the "Game of the Century" against Donald Byrne, and part two begins with the match against former World Champion Max Euwe. It includes a thoroughly annotated score of the second match game, wherein Fischer faced Euwe's favorite Open Variation of the Ruy Lopez. Fischer's record against the Open variation is less than impressive, but in this game he held his own against one of the world's best.

Part three covers the years following his entry into the grandmaster ranks, while part four includes the early sixties, with the Samuel Reshevsky match and the candidates match at Curacao, and ends with the Capablanca Memorial tournament in 1965, where Fischer played by telegraph. Part five includes the writing of *My Sixty Memorable Games*, and ends with a chapter on how Bobby played as Black against the Maroczy Bind, a lesson in a fascinating line in which Donaldson is an expert.

Part six is all about the time and games up to and including the World Championship match in 1972. It includes my favorite part of the book, the three chapters on the candidates matches. The Mark Taimanov chapter includes the "Fischer Dossier" put together by Mikhail Botvinnik when he was preparing to play a match against Fischer. He includes a story from the first game against Bent Larsen about how Fischer changed the way his hand moved the piece when he began the assault with 19.f5!, and how Fischer was mortified when told of the change. And for the Tigran Petrosian match he includes an analysis of the famous 7th game of the match by Boris Spassky.

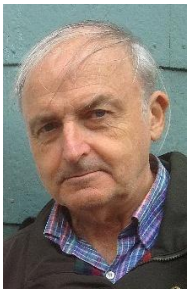
Part seven is titled "The Dark Years," and it covers the period immediately after winning the title, the 1970s and 1980s. The chapter titled Alienation is fascinating in its discussion of how Fischer managed to push away virtually everyone who was trying to help him. Part eight is about Fischer's return to play Spassky again, this time in Sveti Stefan, and all of his preparation for the match. My favorite part of this section was his training match with Svetozar Gligoric. Their ninth match game showed how Fischer's play had not dimmed in the past 20 years.

Fischer, Robert James (2780) - Gligoric, Svetozar (2450) [A30]
Sveti Stefan Training m1 Sveti Stefan, 1992
1.c4 c5 2.b3 ♘c6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 d5 5.c×d5 ♘×d5 6.f4 e6 7.♗b2 h5 8.♘h3 ♘f6 9.♘f2 h4 10.♘c3 h×g3 11.h×g3 ♖×h1+ 12.♗×h1 ♗d7 13.e3 ♕a5 14.g4 0–0–0 15.g5 ♘e8 16.♕h5 f5 17.♗×c6 ♗×c6 18.♕f7 ♘c7 19.♘d3 ♖×d3 20.♕×f8+ ♘e8 21.♕e7 ♖d6 22.0–0–0 ♕d8 23.♕×d8+ ♖×d8 24.♘a4 b6 25.♗e5 g6 26.♘b2 ♖d7 27.♘c4 ♗f3 28.♖f1 ♗d5 29.♖d1 ♖h7 30.a4 ♖h3 31.♔c2 ♔b7 32.♔c3 a6 33.b4 c×b4+ 34.♔×b4 ♖h2 35.a5 ♗f3 36.♖c1 b5 37.♘b6 ♗c6 38.♘c8 ♖×d2 39.♘e7 ♗d7 40.♘×g6 ♖a2 41.♘e7 ♖a4+ 42.♔b3 ♖e4 43.♖d1 ♖×e3+ 44.♔b2 ♖e2+ 45.♔c1
1–0

Part nine outlines the period right before the sad end to his life, including how he lost virtually everything he owned when his belongings were sold by the storage facility that held it. I learned much about what made Bobby turn sour on his fellow man, and none of it was flattering. Donaldson pulls no punches, yet at the same time you can feel his empathy and affection for his subject. We are fortunate to have John Donaldson working to keep the legacy of the first American World Chess Champion alive. **Highly recommended.**

DISCLAIMER: I did not purchase this book; it was provided by the publisher.

This book may be purchased here: Silman-James Press

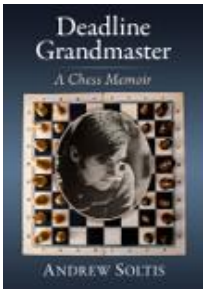


Fischer

by Andrew Soltis

Author of "Deadline Grandmaster," a memoir of his life as a reporter and a chessplayer.

Photo credit to Marcy Soltis



As a recovering journalist, I start each day with the Google news filter. I search for chess stories published in the previous 24 hours. Up pops dozens of fresh reports, about the latest victories of Praggnanandhaa R., the world championship plans of Javokhir Sindarov, the most recent quotes from Gukesh D. It goes on and on.

And I wonder, "Why didn't we have this avalanche of coverage when there was a more newsworthy subject – Bobby Fischer? And why was so much written about Bobby that was dubious or just plain wrong?"

Part of the blame belongs to non-chess journalists. While highly professional, their lack of a chess background led to annoying lapses. They often called a match a "tournament" and referred to a game as a "match." Technical terms like "grandmaster" were randomly misused.

OK, this was minor, but some mainstream media reporting was mystifying to people who took chess seriously. The 2008 Associated Press report, that told the world that Fischer had died, put his significance in the eighth paragraph by quoting the "noted French chess expert Olivier Tridon." *Who??* In contrast, Garry Kasparov's reaction didn't appear until much later in the widely-read story.

The main responsibility for clumsy Fischer coverage was Bobby. He repeatedly refused to cooperate with journalists. He treated friends who spoke with reporters as if they had violated the code of Omerta.

Before his 1972 world championship match the *New York Times* sent one of their best reporters to the Catskills resort where Fischer was training to get interviews and lots of Bobby details. The best the *Times* got was how he walked around with "a big red book" of champion Boris Spassky's games.

(Full disclosure: In early 1972 while working as a reporter for the *New York Post*, I got a call from an editor of *Sport* magazine, then the hot rival to *Sports Illustrated.* He asked me to get Fischer to talk and pose for photos for a cover-story profile. I gave up trying after months of being stonewalled by Bobby and his entourage.)

In the Cold War, Soviet players were coached on how to say "No comment" to Western reporters. Some of Fischer's Soviet rivals, especially Spassky and Mikhail Tal, enjoyed being interviewed. When Tigran Petrosian became world champion, American fans could learn what he was like by reading an extensive interview in *Chess Life.* Leonard Barden's quote-packed profile of Spassky, also in *Chess Life*, is a classic of chess journalism.

Bobby was MIA. After a controversial *Harper's* profile of him in 1962 he only agreed to two substantive interviews in the several years before the Spassky match. Both appear in John Donaldson's splendid *Inside the Mind of Bobby Fischer*.

One Q-and-A was conducted by an Argentine simul opponent of Bobby's. Fischer's replies were somewhat stilted. For example – Q: Would you have beaten Tal when he was at his best? A: "I cannot answer because it is a mere hypothetical possibility."

The other, much better interview, was conducted by Bobby's friend Lubosh Kavalek in 1972. But we are left with few revealing Fischer quotes from all of his contacts with journalists. As a result, Bobby was the most newsworthy figure in chess for decades – yet the real Fischer personality was the most under-reported.

Chess publications did provide ample detail of the technical nature of Fischer's career. Many of his games are preserved in today's databases because they were recorded by journalists at the time they were played.

That may explain some bogus Bobby moves. For example, when chessgames.com launched in 2001, Fischer fans could call up the fifth game of his 1971 Candidates semifinals match with Bent Larsen. They saw 1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 d6 3. d4 c×d4 4. ♘×d4 ♘f6 5. ♘c3 ♘c6 6. ♗c4 e6 7. ♗b3 ♗e7 8. ♗e3 O-O 9. O-O ♗d7 10. f4 ♕c8 11. f5 ♘×d4 12. ♗×d4 e×f5 13. ♕f3 f×e4 14. ♘×e4 ♘×e4.

Bobby played 15. ♕×e4. After 15…♗e6 16. ♖f3 ♕c6 17. ♖e1 he soon enjoyed a favorable endgame.

But four years after this appeared on the website, someone asked why Fischer failed to insert the winning 15. ♗×f7+ before recapturing on e4.

Months went by before another fan consulted a book and pointed out that Fischer actually played 13. ♕d3, not 13. ♕f3.

There is also this mystery: Bobby led the 1960 U. S. Championship with two rounds to go. His next opponent, Pal Benko, offered him a draw before their game. Fischer "made some mumbling noises that I took as an agreement," Benko recalled in his memoirs. But when the game began, Fischer tried to make strong moves "with no draw offer coming."

Benko felt betrayed. "I thought the [expletive] is trying to beat me! Perhaps he can hold it, but he can't do better than equality," he recalled.

Finally, he asked Fischer, "Do you want a draw or not?" When Fischer agreed, Benko complained, "You were trying to beat me. I thought we had an agreement."

"You said that, I didn't!" Fischer replied.

Nice story but here is the entire game as it appears in various sources: Fischer- Benko, U. S. Championship 1960, **1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. d4 c×d4 4. ♘×d4 g6 5. c4 ♘f6 6. ♘c3 ♘×d4 7. ♕×d4 d6 8. ♗e2 ♗g7 9. ♗e3 O-O 10. ♕d2 ♗e6 11. O-O ♕a5 12. f4 ♖fc8 draw.**

What happened to the sharp middlegame that Benko described? Both Fischer and Benko often left unintelligible scoresheets. Did whoever transcribed their moves simply give up at move 12?

The most mysterious interaction between Fischer and a journalist appeared in *The New York Times* on September 27, 1981. Harold Schonberg, the *Times* Pulitzer-prize winning music critic and sometimes chess writer, recalled how he talked to Fischer ten years before, after Bobby won a "tournament" against Larsen. (He meant the 1971 Candidates match.)

Schonberg said he asked Fischer how he managed to beat Larsen 6-0. "Well, you have to know that Larsen is a romantic. He likes wild positions. He likes to throw you off with crazy moves," Schonberg quoted him as saying. (How Schonberg managed to get full quotes was unclear. Bobby hated to be tape recorded.)

According to Schonberg, Fischer went on: "Anyway we started our first game and around the tenth move he threw something at me. He figured to catch me by surprise. But when I looked at the position, I remembered it was something Steinitz had tried against Lasker in the 1894 [world] championship match."

Hold on. The first Larsen-Fischer game began **1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. ♘c3 ♗b4 4. e5 ♘e7 5. a3 ♗×c3+ 6. b×c3 c5 7. a4 ♘bc6 8. ♘f3 ♗d7 9. ♗d3 ♕c7 10. 0-0.**

Those were normal moves in 1971. There is no record of Steinitz, Lasker – or anyone in their era – playing anything like this.

The article has Fischer continuing: "If I hadn't known that position, I might have spent a lot of time figuring it out and maybe couldn't have done it on my clock." But because Fischer had analyzed it before, Larsen "was dead," he said. This is more than strange. The moves of the Fischer–Larsen match were hardly secret. When the *Times* article appeared, anyone could have looked them up and realized that Fischer was wildly off base.

The article continued with Schonberg asking, "How about a game?" and Bobby agreeing to play one. Schonberg was maybe a 1400 player. He said he proceeded to play the best game of his life and lasted "almost 30 moves as White in a Queen's Gambit."

When it ended Fischer said: "Know what was interesting about this game? Up to the 19th move it was an exact duplicate of a game I played against [Henrique} Mecking in Brazil nine years ago. You and Mecking played the same 19th move, and it looks natural, but it loses in all variations. Let me show you."

The only known games between Fischer and Mecking were played 11 years before and not in Brazil. As White, Mecking drew a Gruenfeld Defense. As Black he lost to Fischer's 1. b3.

Could Fischer's recollection have been that faulty? Unlikely. His memory was legendary. In fact, Schonberg used the Larsen and Mecking comments to illustrate how remarkable it was. His article was mainly about the 1981 Karpov-Korchnoi world championship that was about to start. He mentioned Fischer at the end of it, to underline the photographic memory of certain chess masters.

This is one of the many mysteries of Bobby Fischer. He was a very difficult person to know. We journalists tried to enable readers to know him well. We didn't do a very good job.

The Day Donn Rogosin Beat Bobby Fischer

by Patricio Robayo

When Bobby Fischer resigned his game against Donn Rogosin, there were still other players waiting for him.

It was 1964, and Fischer was taking on 50 opponents at once in Los Angeles. Rogosin, a young player who had grown up watching his father play chess, had beaten the American champion.

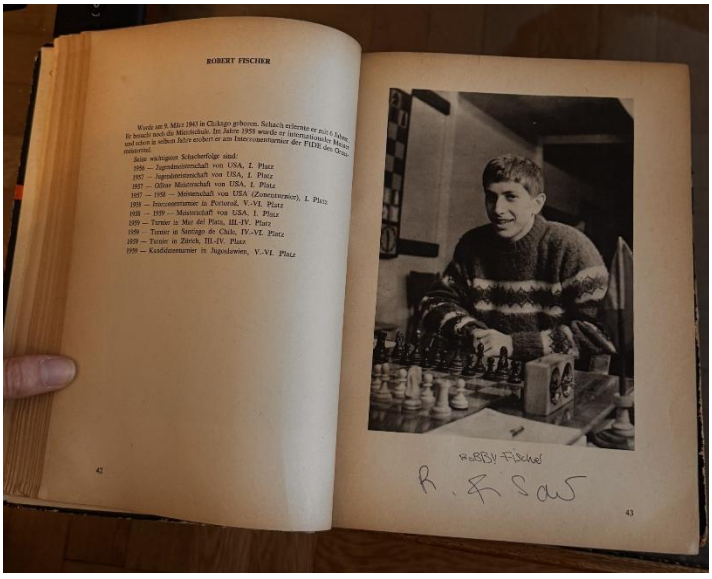
Fischer continued around the room, moving from board to board. Rogosin stepped away from his table and waited.

“I felt good, obviously,” Rogosin recalled.

The Los Angeles Times reported that Fischer won 47 games, drew two and lost only one at the Knickerbocker Hotel. The only winner was Rogosin, a junior member of the Herman Steiner Chess Club, which sponsored the event.

His friend Andy Sacks, another young player from the club, drew his game against Fischer, Rogosin said.

Years before Fischer became world champion, Rogosin had a win against him. He also had a chess book filled with signatures, including one he says he collected directly from Fischer.



More than six decades later, that book brought him back to those early chess years when an attempt to sell it stalled over whether the Fischer signature could be authenticated.

But long before there was a question about the autograph, there was a father who loved chess.

Rogosin grew up in Los Angeles. His father had played at New York’s Marshall Chess Club before moving west after World War II.

“I grew up in a chess-playing family as a kid,” Rogosin said.

He accompanied his father to the Herman Steiner Chess Club, where he watched him play fast games. At MacArthur Park, his father played for quarters. Once Rogosin learned to drive, he would drop his father off and return a few hours later.

Chess became part of his own life, too. He competed in tournaments and said he won the Los Angeles all-city high school tournament with a perfect score. He also became the Steiner club’s junior champion.

“I was a fairly good player, but I wasn’t a grandmaster, of course,” he said.

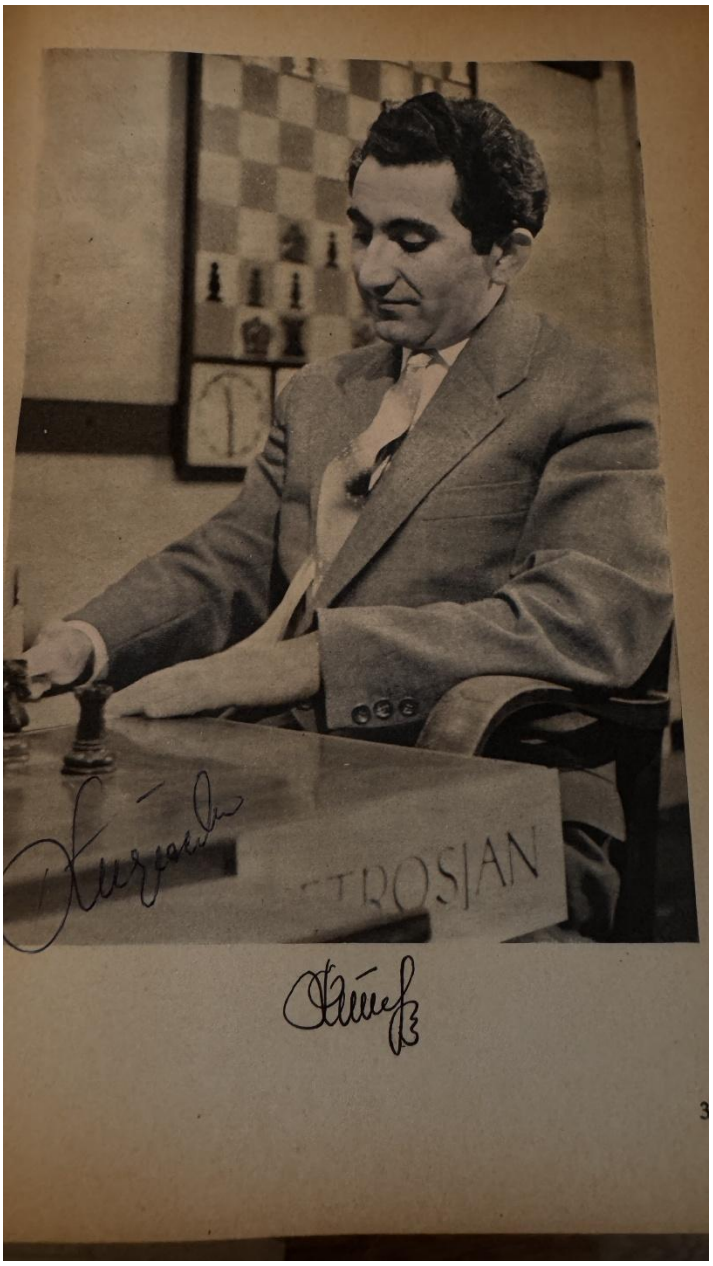
In the summer of 1963, some of the world’s strongest players came to Los Angeles for the first Piatigorsky Cup.

Jacqueline Piatigorsky, a chess player and patron married to cellist Gregor Piatigorsky, helped bring the international competition to the Ambassador Hotel. Eight players from five countries competed, including world champion Tigran Petrosian and Paul Keres, who shared first place, according to the World Chess Hall of Fame.

For Rogosin, it meant a chance to be close to players he had studied in books.

He worked as a “wall boy,” watching the moves at the players’ tables and repeating them on a large board so spectators could follow the games. He remembers Piatigorsky buying blazers for the boys, who wore them with gray slacks.

He brought a book about the 1959 Candidates Tournament, a competition that helped decide who would challenge for the world championship. He asked players to sign near their photographs. Others signed the back pages.



It was a young chess player's collection of names from a world he was getting to know firsthand.

Fischer's signature came later. Rogosin believes he obtained it at the 1964 exhibition, though he cannot recall the exact exchange.

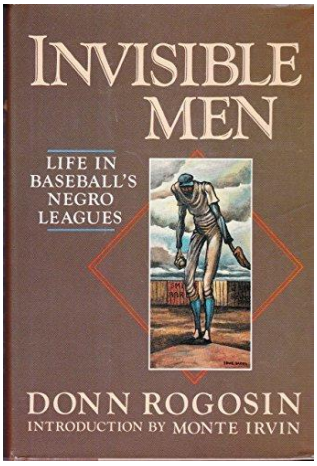
What he remembers more clearly is what followed his win. A teacher congratulated him after reading about it in the newspaper. His father was proud.

"My dad was enormously happy," Rogosin said.

Fischer would defeat Boris Spassky in Iceland in 1972 to become world champion, ending 24 years of Soviet control of the title. Rogosin took another path.

When he went to college, he stopped playing competitive chess. He enjoyed the game, but understood how much work it would take to reach the next level.

"I realized that the amount of study and work that I have to do to be a really good chess player would consume me," he said.

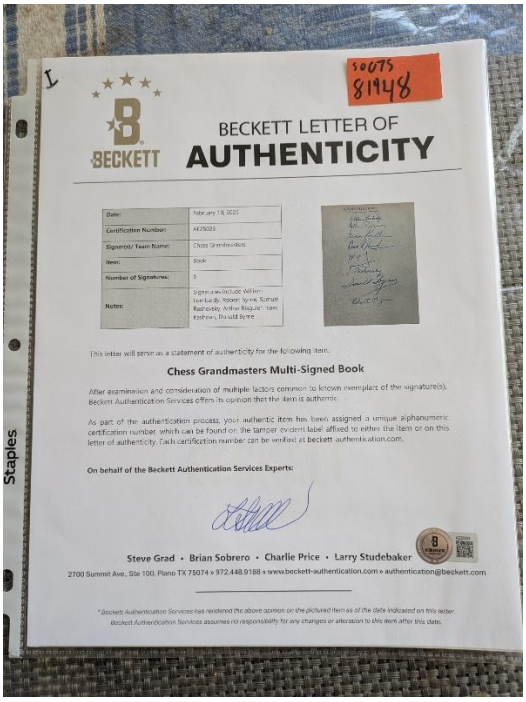


He later wrote a history of the Negro baseball leagues. The chess book remained with him or his family, he said.

His effort to sell it began through another collection: signed baseballs. A memorabilia dealer offered him $1,000 for the chess book, subject to authentication. Rogosin instead brought it to Heritage Auctions, which had handled other items for him.

An auction listing supplied by Rogosin records a sale on Feb. 23, 2025. He said the book attracted a $2,100 bid, but the transaction fell through after Beckett Authentication Services would not authenticate the Fischer signature.

A Beckett letter dated Feb. 10, 2025, lists eight authenticated signatures and pictures the book's back page. Its named signers include William Lombardy, Samuel Reshevsky and Isaac Kashdan. Fischer is not listed.



Auction houses often use outside authentication companies. PSA, one such company, says it examines ink, the structure of the autograph and the signed object, and compares signatures side by side. Its submission materials say leading auction houses hire it to authenticate catalog items before sale.

Rogosin sent Beckett photographs, accounts of his Fischer game and repeated requests for an explanation. In an April 2025 email, a Beckett customer service representative offered another review and described full authentication as a more extensive examination that could include historical research and additional fees.

By August, the representative said the certification team was still reviewing the case. Rogosin was still seeking reconsideration in March 2026.

Heritage Auctions did not respond to a request for comment. The correspondence supplied for this story does not explain the specific basis for Beckett's decision on Fischer's signature.

Rogosin said he remains satisfied with Heritage's handling of the matter and still wants to sell the book. For now, he still has it, along with the memory of stepping away from a chessboard while Bobby Fischer continued playing.

A Move From the Heart

Sriaditya Pendyala

Last week I hosted a tournament at my local library and I'm really happy to say that it was a great success. We had turnout across the board, with players ranging in age from 6 to 84. It was truly a fun– albeit stressful– experience to put something together for my community. In the end, we donated a dozen competitive tournament chess sets, and $250+ of materials, including prizes, to the local library.

But why?

Chess has been a part of my life since I was young. I used to go to tournaments almost every weekend at the Mechanics Institute in San Francisco, California. I met many friends and have had lots of positive experiences with the chess community. However, I've since taken a break from chess due to school and it's hard to tell when I might return. Over the last year, I've enjoyed volunteering at youth chess summer camps and teaching chess in after-school chess programs near me. I've found it incredibly satisfying to teach chess because it reminds me of learning chess at similar camps in my youth. It's always fun to see everyone get excited when the pairings for the next round are posted or when we give out awards. Organizing this tournament where we gave away prizes, donated chess sets, and hosted a fun event was my way of giving back to my local chess community that has given me so much over the past decade. It's my way of expressing gratitude before I'm off to college. I would've loved it if some folks had hosted free-entry chess tournaments at my local library when I was a child—organizing this event is how I can pay it forward.

How it happened

Unfortunately, this event wasn't easy to organize. The *ImpactChess Community Open* took place on September 26th, but planning started seven months earlier in February. I volunteered several times at our library's weekend chess club and noticed that they had two chess toy chess sets that weren't very good and a single chess clock. I didn't think much of it then, but over the next few weeks I realized that I could put an event together because I knew that my community has a lot of interest in chess programs. Planning happened over the course of several months. I got trophies, awards, clocks, and even a few donated retired chess sets from Bay Area Chess—a regional chess club in California. *ImpactChess*—the nonprofit I work with—paid for more boards and pieces so that participants could have access to the boards and sets used in real tournaments. A special shoutout to Joanna from *ImpactChess* to make this happen!

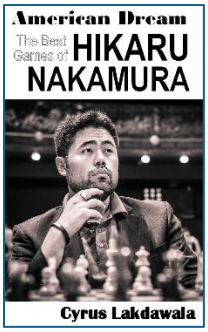
What I learned

This experience taught me about putting together an event for a large audience. I also learned about getting out of my comfort zone to manage 40+ people— especially children. The kids can't help but have fun, and the parents want the best for them, which usually comes with several dozens of questions before each round. I honestly wish my parents cared this much about the tournaments I went to as a child. Reflecting on this, I think it taught me a lot about how to appeal to different audiences' interests under pressure. It was stressful trying to put everything together, answering all the questions, setting the pairings, and arbitrating illegal moves. During the tournament a player remarked to me, "It's hard being a tournament director. Huh!" and I think it gave me a new kind of appreciation for the work that tournament directors do.

Certainly, putting together something fun for your community is great and all, but I believe these experiences can teach us a lot, especially when we are young. There were a lot of hoops I've had to jump through such as pushing for something I was told wasn't possible, or making sure materials arrive on time. There were times when I had to come up with a creative solution to a nontrivial problem or communicate with several people at once about the same issue. These skills are indispensable in the world and I'm glad I could use this opportunity to sharpen them.

American Dream: The Best Games of Hikaru Nakamura
by Cyrus Lakdawala

Reviewed by Robert Irons



I own at least a dozen books by Cyrus Lakdawala, mostly because I enjoy his writing style and his analytical style. I just recently began reading his first book in an intended three-volume series on Capablanca, and it is absolutely sublime. I look forward to writing that review! In the meantime, I chose to review this book, hoping to learn more about Hikaru Nakamura, both as a man and as a chess player. I knew little about Nakamura beyond some of his more famous games, and almost nothing about his upbringing, so I was looking forward to learning about how he grew up around chess, how he developed, and how he got good. What I found was satisfying, but not completely. Let me explain.

The book consists of 72 of Nakamura's best games, grouped by five different themes: attacking games, counter-attacking and defensive games, what Cyrus refers to as "Chaos and the Dynamic Element," accumulating advantages, and exploiting imbalances. The author uses these themes to delve into how Nakamura creates chess ideas, and at this he is quite successful. One constant in Lakdawala's books is the analysis; not only does he explain clearly, but he does so entertainingly. That tends to make the lessons stick.

In the first section on attacking games, I was pleased to see one that I was familiar with, Nakamura's deluge of queen sacrifices (!) against Boris Gelfand at the World Team Championships in 2010. Gelfand attacked Nakamura's queen on his 24th move, and the queen remained under attack until move 28. It is a lesson on how to keep up the pressure on a world-class player, and Cyrus' notes do it justice.

Gelfand, Boris (2761) – Nakamura, Hikaru (2708) [E97]
WchT 7th Bursa (5.1), 09.01.2010
1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.♘f3 0–0 6.♗e2 e5 7.0–0 ♘c6 8.d5 ♘e7 9.♘d2 ♘e8 10.b4 f5 11.c5 ♘f6 12.f3 f4 13.♘c4 g5 14.a4 ♘g6 15.♗a3 ♖f7 16.b5 d×c5 17.♗×c5 h5 18.a5 g4 19.b6 g3 20.♔h1 ♗f8 21.d6 a×b6 22.♗g1 ♘h4 23.♖e1 ♘×g2 24.d×c7 ♘×e1 25.♕×e1 g2+ 26.♔×g2 ♖g7+ 27.♔h1 ♗h3 28.♗f1 ♕d3 29.♘×e5 ♗×f1 30.♕×f1 ♕×c3 31.♖c1 ♕×e5 32.c8♕ ♖×c8 33.♖×c8 ♕e6 **0–1**

The second section, on counterattack and defense, is surprisingly populated only with games in which Nakamura played the white pieces! That caught me off guard, until I read the list of names he faced off against in this section; names like Bacrot, Carlsen, Grischuk, Short, and Nepomniachtchi. These games were played at tournaments with such well-known names like Biel and Wijk aan Zee. Once again, the analytical notes make the games understandable and fun.

The chapter titled "The Dark Side of the Moon – Chaos and the Dynamic Element," is the reason why I don't normally study Nakamura's games; the man can calculate like a supercomputer. The depths to which he is able to accurately calculate during a tournament game is absolutely astounding. His game against Emanuel Berg at Bermuda 2003 is a perfect example of the kind of chaos that would make my head spin and my bowels loosen. This is why I so appreciate his play, but have no desire to emulate it.

Nakamura,Hikaru (2520) - Berg,Emanuel (2527) [C18]
Bermuda-B Bermuda (8), 02.02.2003
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.e5 c5 5.a3 Bxc3+ 6.bxc3 Qc7 7.Qg4 f5 8.Qg3 Ne7 9.Qxg7 Rg8 10.Qxh7 cxd4 11.Kd1 Bd7 12.Qh5+ Kd8 13.Nf3 Qxc3 14.Ra2 Nbc6 15.Rb2 Kc7 16.Rb5 a6 17.Bb2 axb5 18.Bxc3 dxc3 19.Bxb5 Rxa3 20.Ke2 Rxg2 21.Rb1 Ra2 22.Kf1 Rg4 23.Bd3 Rb2 24.Rc1 Nb4 25.Qh6 Nxd3 26.cxd3 d4 27.h3 Ng8 28.Qf8 Rf4 29.Qd6+ Kd8 30.Kg2 Ne7 31.Ra1 Nc8 32.Qf8+ Kc7 33.Kg3 Rxf3+ 34.Kxf3 Rd2 35.Ra8 Rxd3+ 36.Kf4 Rxh3 37.Rxc8+ Bxc8 38.Qd6# 1–0

The chapter on accumulating advantages was an education for me, and the games were easier for me to follow. These games show Nakamura's positional play, without as much of the drama (or chaos!). This was a side of Nakamura's play I was unfamiliar with, and so these games were of particular interest. I will be spending more time with these games, as well as those in the last section.

The final section, on exploiting imbalances, was an eye-opener for me. In the first game of this section Nakamura takes on Walter Shawn Browne, six-time US Champion known for fighting to the death. Nakamura takes Brown down in a queenless middlegame, requiring only 28 moves. In the final position of the game, material is even and there are no direct threats, but Browne chose to resign rather than face the coming endgame.

Nakamura, Hikaru (2494) – Browne, Walter Shawn (2492) [E32]
Imre Konig Memorial 1st San Francisco (2), 05.09.2002
1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.Qc2 0–0 5.a3 Bxc3+ 6.Qxc3 b6 7.Bg5 Bb7 8.e3 c5 9.dxc5 bxc5 10.f3 Nc6 11.Bd3 h6 12.Bh4 d5 13.Ne2 d4 14.exd4 cxd4 15.Qd2 e5 16.Ng3 Ne4 17.Bxd8 Nxd2 18.Kxd2 Raxd8 19.b4 g6 20.Rae1 Rfe8 21.Ne4 Re7 22.c5 Bc8 23.Nd6 Be6 24.Re2 Kg7 25.Rhe1 f6 26.Bb5 Rc7 27.f4 Bg4 28.Rf2 1–0

My only real disappointment with this book is that the author spent very little time and effort introducing his subject. There were little vignettes disbursed throughout the games, but I wanted to know more about Nakamura's development and his influences. Unfortunately, the author only included two pages of background material before moving on to the games. That being said, the games are excellent, and Lakdawala's annotations are exceptional, as usual. **Recommended.**

DISCLAIMER: I did not purchase this book; it was provided by the publisher.

The book can be purchased here: Elk and Ruby

The Lubyanka Gambit

by Sergei Grodzensky

Reviewed by Joshua Anderson (with help from Gemini)



Published in Russian over two decades ago, *Lubyanka Gambit* arrives for Western audiences as a compelling, if occasionally disjointed, historical document. Nearly a century removed from the tragic events it chronicled, the book evokes less raw outrage and more of a profound, reflective sadness. Yet, reading it within the current landscape of global and American politics, one is inescapably reminded of the enduring necessity to guard against the overreach of state authority and the suppression of free expression.

The title itself derives from the KGB's notorious headquarters on Lubyanka Square in Moscow. In the opening section, Alexander Yakovlev—an academician and former chairman of the Presidential Commission for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repression—sets a forceful tone. Yakovlev pulls no punches, critiquing the oppressive ideology of Bolshevism and the systemic purges that targeted intellectuals and sports figures alike from the 1920s through the 1940s. While his passionate anti-Leninist foreword provides crucial ideological context, its heavy-handedness frames the entire work through an intense political lens before the reader even encounters the individual biographical sketches.

The core of the book consists of brief, novella-like vignettes profiling various chess masters, problemists, and figures whose lives were upended or cut short by state terror. Among these are Nikolai Solomon, a talent whose life was ended at age 30, and Lazar Zalkind. In 1931, the Soviet magazine *64* published scathing condemnations demanding Zalkind's expulsion, branding him a "traitor to the cause of the working class." The profiles consistently highlight how Soviet state apparatuses forced a class-based, ideological framing onto the game of chess, turning publications and clubs into arenas for ideological denunciation.

The book spans a wide chronological arc, concluding with figures like Natan Sharansky. Arrested in the 1970s, Sharansky endured 13 years of imprisonment and labor camps before his release. His narrative culminates on a triumphant note: his famous 1996 simultaneous exhibition game against Garry Kasparov in Jerusalem, which serves as Game #72 in the volume's game selection.

For chess enthusiasts, the work offers substantial technical value alongside chess history. It contains 138 chess problems and compositions, many of which won international accolades—such as problem #131, which secured first place in the 1935 Barcelona Radio Competition. The composition section concludes with works by Mikhail Barulin, offering readers a rich collection of two-movers and complex tactical puzzles that showcase the brilliance of creators who worked under extraordinary pressure.

The book fails in contextual bridging for non-Russian audiences. The translation itself is clean and readable, but the narrative frequently assumes a granular familiarity with Soviet geography and cultural history. References to events like the 1926 Stockholm-Leningrad match on 12 boards or passing mentions of regional geography (such as the Neva River) are presented without explanatory footnotes. Without an endnote apparatus or detailed historical commentary, American and European readers in 2026 may find themselves disconnected from the specific background that informed the original Russian edition.

In the afterword, the author expresses the hopeful wish that "all the variations of the Lubyanka Gambit will stay in the past." Ultimately, despite its minor gaps in editorial annotation, the book stands as an essential, moving tribute to the chess players and composers caught in the gears of totalitarianism, blending rich tactical studies with a sober warning from history.

The book can be purchased in all formats: Hardback, Paperback, Forward Chess and Kindle. Elk & Ruby

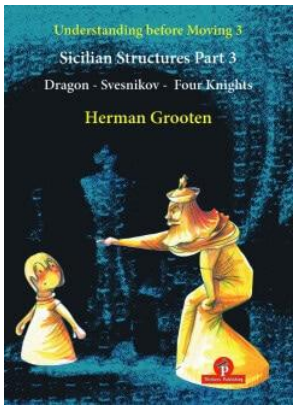
Author note: I took notes while reading the book and then fed the notes to Gemini and asked it to write a review of the book. The review Gemini wrote was pretty good, but I did some minor editing it to make it a bit more “mine”. Interesting experiment that was pretty successful.

The book may be purchased here: Elk and Ruby

Understanding Before Moving 3: Sicilian Structures Part 3

by Herman Grooten

Reviewed by Robert Irons



I am a fan of Herman Grooten's work – his Chess Strategy for Club Players is a monumental work, and one every aspiring club player should study. I also own one of the titles in this series – Understanding before Moving 2: Queen's Gambit Structures – which is one of my favorites. His discussion on tabiyas1 helped me to focus my efforts when learning a new opening variation. And while I expected lessons centered around the pawn structures, I didn't anticipate the extent to which he would introduce the plans supported by the pawn structures. It made it easier for me to understand the differences in the structures.

This is what intrigued me about this new work; focusing on pawn structures built around a ram (the d4 and d5 pawns) is natural, but here Grooten is taking on five separate lines in the Sicilian Defense, and in some cases, distinctly different lines. They are all Open Sicilian lines, but the associated plans are not the same, even for similar variations. I asked myself, "How will he help the developing player study these complex lines?" I was not disappointed.

Grooten teaches these lines using "Ideas and Concepts," typical ideas for pawn breaks or piece groupings. For example, in the first section (the Dragon variation), for White he discusses the typical pawn break h4-h5, then the maneuver f2-f3 and g2-g4 if Black responds to h2-h4 with h7-h5. Fairly typical stuff. However, he then shows the maneuver Rh1-h2!, which not only defends the queenside laterally, but also makes room for the future doubling of rooks on the h-file. He then shows some tactical and even sacrificial maneuvers (such as the "pseudo-sacrifice" Nd4-f5). After a few more examples for White, he turns the board around and gives typical maneuvers and sacrifices for Black as well. Each maneuver introduced has its own example from professional practice and also refers to other model games for the readers to follow up on their own.

The variations covered in this tome include the Dragon, the Accelerated Dragon (a related system), the Sveshnikov, the Kalashnikov (related to the Sveshnikov), and the Four Knights. While the first and second pairs of variations covered are themselves related, each is not terribly similar to the other pair, or the odd-line-out, the Four Knights. Nonetheless, Grooten's explanations get to the heart of each variation and how it is played. At the end of each section, he also offers exercises to evaluate your understanding of the material.

I have been playing the Four Knights variation for years now, and so I was quite interested in his analysis of the line. Again, I was not disappointed. There are two main lines in the Four Knights variation (6.Ndb5 and 6.Nxc6), and each of them is covered in depth. He outlines the major conflicts in the opening, from both sides, and shows the relevant follow-up lines for each one. For example, his section on the "Curious King March" thoroughly explains what I love about this line; White's king gets stuck in the center, out in the open, and Black has fun rallying the troops for the attack!

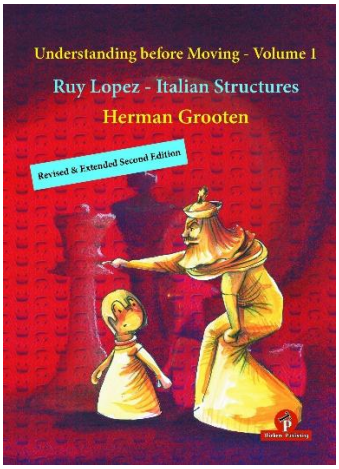
Each section includes numerous model games that are fully annotated at a level suited for developing players. Most of the games are recent, but some classic examples are given as well. In every case, Grooten's explanations show the strategic intent of these lines, as well as the tactical opportunities. There is more depth in this analysis than I expected (476 pages!), but his explanations are thoughtful and thorough. I have yet to see a chess book by Herman Grooten that I wouldn't recommend to others, this one included. For a general-level opening book, there is much to learn here. Highly recommended.

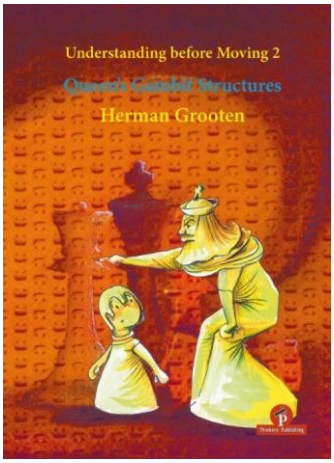
NOTE: I was provided with a copy of this book by the publisher for purposes of this review.

A tabiya is a key position in chess openings reached after standard moves, from which multiple strategic continuations are possible, and the term originates from Arabic meaning "arrangement" or "mobilization."

The book can be purchased here: Thinkers Publishing

Other books in this series:



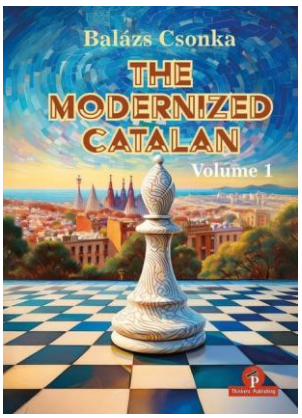


The Modernized Catalan, Volume 1

by Balázs Csonka

Published by Thinkers Press, 2026

Reviewed by James Hodina



At 28 years of age, International Master Csonka introduces his first book with a massive endeavor – an opening book on the Catalan. As Grandmaster Horvath states in the preface, "writing an opening book is always a challenging endeavor." With computer analysis and tournament practice, continuations may come and go. Having played the Catalan at club level for 25 years or more, I have developed my preferred lines. However, IM Csonka introduces many new less traveled lines for White that are supported by deep analysis that often reach endgame positions that give White at least the initiative in the endgame. Yes, fashion may dictate which lines are more often played, but …

This book, at over 600 pages, is the first of two volumes. Volume 1 covers the open lines of the Catalan with 4…dxc4, reserving the closed lines (where Black does not immediately capture on c4) for Volume 2. Admittedly, there are transpositional possibilities here that would be nice to see. But I'll just have to be patient and wait for the sequel. In the meantime, I did enjoy reading the "sidelines" with over 100 pages on the Tarrasch Defense, the "triangle" defense with pawns on c6, d5, and e6, and the bishop on d6.

As with most opening books, the early chapters start with various sidelines and slowly work their way to the more established main line. IM Csonka shows why 5…b5 is "more-or-less refuted." The author then moves on to more solid lines for Black such as 5…♗d7 (Ch 5) , 5…c6 (Ch 6), and 5…♘bd7 (Ch 7). Along the way, his recommended move order of an early castle and delaying development of the queenside knight is seen. As with all things in the opening, there are exceptions by Csonka, most notably 6.♘e5 in response to 5…c6 and 6.♕a4 in response to 5…♘c6 (Ch 10). Regardless, the author is complete in his analysis showing the many lines both players have tried.

It's at this point that I would like to comment how well I liked the layout of the book. So many opening books and courses are in electronic format. The obvious reason is that the opening analysis involves many lines and with that a reset of a physical board with each line when reading a book. (Computer analysis makes this task so much easier). Thinkers Press does a great job, though, of using numerous diagrams along the way. The main line always shows diagrams in a larger size with sidelines shown with small analysis diagrams. This makes it very easy to go through the main line quickly and then go through a second time reviewing the sidelines. I was able to read through this book without going through the previously mentioned use and reset of a physical board.

Chapter 6 is where the innovative analysis of Csonka is at its best. In the main line: 1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 e6 3. g3 d5 4. ♗g2 d×c4 5. ♘f3 c6 6. ♘e5 ♗b4+, (Diagram)

After 6.…♗b4+



the author recommends the "old" 7. ♗d2 over the more contemporary 7.♘c3, where 7… ♗e7! is Black's best reply. Here, Csonka recommends continuing along the main line of 8. e3 b5! 9. a4 b4 (which seems to be scoring well for Black) Csonka recommends the innovative 10. a5!?N (Diagram) to cut off the black pawns. (rather than 10.O-O or 10.♘×c4).

After 10. a5!?N



Play may continue 10. …O-O 11.O-O ♘d5 (better than 11... ♗a6 12. ♗×c6! For example: 12…♘×c6 13. ♘×c6 ♕c7 14. ♘×b4) 12. ♘×c4 ♗a6 13. b3 ♘d7 with equality.



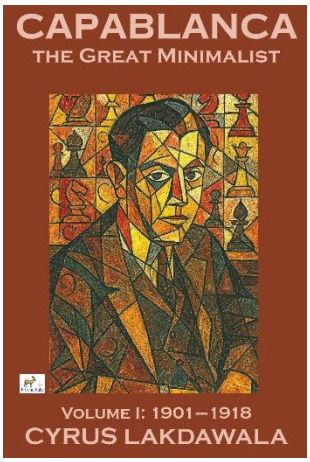
Chapter 9 is dedicated to the mainline 1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 e6 3. g3 d5 4. ♗g2 d×c4 5. ♘f3 c5 6. O-O ♘c6 7. ♘e5 ♗d7 8. ♘×c4 c×d4 9. ♗f4 ♗e7 10. ♘d6+ ♔f8! 11. ♘×b7 ♕b6 12. ♘d6 ♕c5 13. b4 !? ♕×b4 14. a3 ♕c5. (Diagram)

********************Continued on page 60 ******************************

Capablanca: The Great Minimalist

by Cyrus Lakdawala

Reviewed by Robert Irons



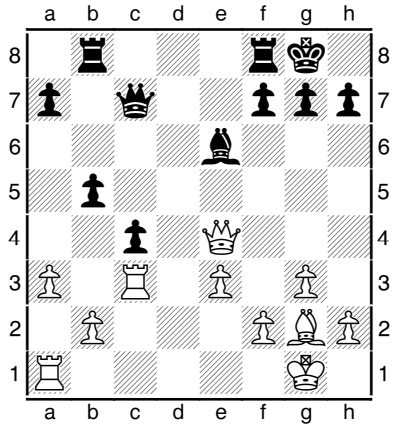
I chose to review this book for two reasons: first, Capablanca is my favorite player, and second, Cyrus Lakdawala is currently my favorite chess author. From that starting point, this journey of mine was pure pleasure.

This Elk and Ruby book is volume one of an intended three volume series, the first covering the period 1901 – 1918. I am quite familiar with the games in the first half of this book, as they are among my favorites to relive, and I can often learn something when I get to see old games through new eyes. That was very much the case here, as IM Lakdawala is a fantastic analyst. He never misses a tactic, but more importantly, he also takes the time to describe strategic issues quite effectively. I find his analysis easy to follow and helpful, giving me new insights into games I already thought I knew. For example, Cyrus analyzes my favorite game from the Marshall – Capablanca match, the final game. This game taught me the value of a queenside pawn majority, and how to use it to play for a win.

Marshall, Frank James - Capablanca, Jose Raul [D34]
Match Capablanca-Marshall +8–1=14 New York (23), 23.06.1909

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 c5 4.c×d5 e×d5 5.♘f3 ♘c6 6.g3 ♗e6 7.♗g2 ♗e7 8.0–0 ♘f6 9.♗g5 ♘e4 10.♗×e7 ♕×e7 11.♘e5 ♘×d4 12.♘×e4 d×e4 13.e3 ♘f3+ 14.♘×f3 e×f3 15.♕×f3 0–0 16.♖fc1 ♖ab8 17.♕e4 ♕c7 18.♖c3 b5 19.a3 c4 (Diagram) 20.♗f3 ♖fd8 21.♖d1 ♖×d1+ 22.♗×d1 ♖d8 23.♗f3 g6 24.♕c6 ♕e5 25.♕e4 ♕×e4 26.♗×e4 ♖d1+ 27.♔g2 a5 28.♖c2 b4 29.a×b4 a×b4 30.♗f3 ♖b1 31.♗e2 b3 32.♖d2 ♖c1 33.♗d1 c3 34.b×c3 b2 35.♖×b2 ♖×d1 36.♖c2 ♗f5 37.♖b2 ♖c1 38.♖b3 ♗e4+ 39.♔h3 ♖c2 40.f4 h5 41.g4 h×g4+ 42.♔×g4 ♖×h2 43.♖b4 f5+ 44.♔g3 ♖e2 45.♖c4 ♖×e3+ 46.♔h4 ♔g7 47.♖c7+ ♔f6 48.♖d7 ♗g2 49.♖d6+ ♔g7 **0–1**

After Capablanca played 19…c4, the following position arose:



IM Lakdawala's note here I found quite instructive:

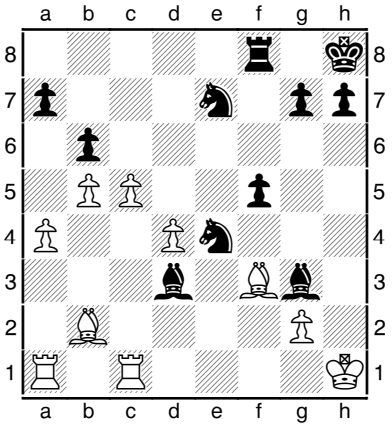
> Now you may be asking: "Doesn't this violate the Principle: *Don't place your pawns on the same colour as your remaining bishop?"* Actually no, the move doesn't violate that principle, mainly, since they are not *fixed* permanently on that colour. Black's queenside majority will later roll forward, changing colours. In fact, Capa's move actually follows the Principle: *Rapidly push your pawn majority forward.*

Cyrus' analysis is designed to help students change the ways they think about the game, and his books have been quite helpful for me in that way. Some of you may know that I published a book in 2025 titled *San Sebastian 1911*, about the famous tournament that introduced Capablanca to the world. That tournament is also covered in this book, and I have to admit that, in some situations, Cyrus did a much better job of finding the lessons in the material than I did. For one example, his analysis of the game Nimzovich – Capablanca, played in round 8, asks a strategic question after White's move 32.b5:

Nimzowitsch,Aron - Capablanca,Jose Raul [C00]
San Sebastian Int Masters–01 San Sebastian (8), 03.03.1911

1.e4 e6 2.d3 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.♘gf3 ♘c6 5.♗e2 ♗d6 6.0–0 ♕c7 7.♖e1 ♘ge7 8.c3 0–0 9.a3 f5 10.♗f1 ♗d7 11.e×d5 e×d5 12.b4 ♖ae8 13.♗b2 b6 14.d4 c4 15.♘c4 d×c4 16.♗×c4+ ♔h8 17.♘g5

♗×h2+ 18.♔h1 ♗f4 19.♘f7+ ♖×f7 20.♗×f7 ♖f8 21.♗h5 ♘g8 22.c4 ♕d8 23.♕f3 ♕h4+ 24.♕h3 ♕×f2 25.♖e2 ♕g3 26.♕×g3 ♗×g3 27.c5 ♘ce7 28.♗f3 ♗b5 29.♖c2 ♘f6 30.a4 ♗d3 31.♖cc1 ♘e4 32.b5 (Diagram) ♖f6 33.♗×e4 ♗f2 **0–1**



Cyrus chose this moment to offer an exercise in strategic judgment:

> ***Exercise 48 (planning/critical decision):*** Should Black try and blockade White's passed pawns? Or should he go after the White king?
>
> ***Answer:*** Step 1: White's king lacks defenders and Black forces mate in 5 with a rook lift.
>
> 32…♖f6!
>
> For White's king this is an ominous development, since a mating attack begins to assume form.
>
> 33.♗×e4
>
> 33.c6 ♖h6+ 34.♔g1 ♗f2#.
>
> 33…♗f2! **0-1**
>
> White's king is placed in solitary confinement before his execution.
>
> Step 2: Zwischenzug. ♔g1 is denied and Black threatens mate on h6 with the rook. White is mated in 3 moves at most.

That one taught me something about writing chess books as well.

The thing about IM Lakdawala's books is his analysis; he writes clearly, using plain language that make the strategic ideas understandable. His opening manuals are not only well written but also fun to read. Not everyone appreciates his sense of humor, but I do. Even if I didn't, I would buy his books, as he is an effective chess teacher. But, unlike his opening manuals, here he is writing about his favorite chess player, and his affection for the creator of the games shows through in his notes. In his annotation of the game Bernstein – Capablanca, NY Masters, 1915, he includes the following note after one of Capa's infrequent mistakes:

> Legends and myths are embellishments which future generations love to believe. Capa was nicknamed "the Chess Machine," which implied error-free play. And he was indeed the most accurate player of his era. However, the hateful chess engines of today exposed the numerous errors of the great players of the past. Capa did indeed commit errors, only fewer of them than his opponents. In this case Capablanca got tempted by the lure of materialism, which should have thrown away his win.

This work is clearly a labor of love, and I can hardly wait for volumes two and three. Highly recommended.

The book can be purchased here: Elk and Ruby



RICHARD RETI (LEFT) AND CAPABLANCA

First Appeared in "The Graphic" August 19, 1922.



The Ellie Gambit: When A Good Chess Story Outruns the Evidence

By Mary Giannone



My cat Ellie often sits on my lap while I play chess. Petting her makes me feel calmer.

From a writer's point of view, the next sentence is almost irresistible: Ellie makes me play better.

It is also a sentence I cannot support.

That gap is the Ellie Gambit. It is not really a story about proving that a cat improves chess. It is about what happens when an appealing chess story arrives before the evidence needed to tell it.

Chess journalism has a particular vulnerability to stories built from results. A player changes a routine and wins. Someone adopts a new training method and gains rating. The tournament goes well after a change in preparation. The sequence is real. The explanation may be right. But chronology is generous with narratives that evidence has not earned.

My own version begins with an observation I trust: Ellie sits with me, I pet her, and I feel calmer. Everything after that requires reporting.

THE STORY WE WANT

Chess is not physiologically uneventful just because the players are sitting down. In a small 2009 study by Nicolas Troubat and colleagues, 20 male players showed changes in heart rate and heart rate variability during play. Average heart rate rose from about 75 to 86 beats per minute.

Heart rate variability, or HRV, measures variation in the time between heartbeats and is used to investigate aspects of autonomic activity. It is useful information. It is not a tiny biological engine evaluation telling us whether the next move will be good.

A 2016 meta-analysis by Grant Shields and colleagues found that acute stress, on average, impaired working memory and cognitive flexibility. Those capacities plainly matter when a player must hold a line in mind, discover that it fails, and consider another. But the effects varied with circumstances. The research does not establish that anything which feels calming automatically produces stronger chess.

Still, the narrative assembles itself beautifully:

Chess can be stressful.
Stress can interfere with thinking.
Petting a familiar cat feels calming.
Therefore, Ellie helps my chess.

For a writer, that is exactly the moment to become suspicious.

THE SOURCE THAT SPOILS THE HEADLINE

A 2023 study by Nagasawa and colleagues recruited 32 owners to interact with their own cats at home. On separate days, in randomized order, owners spent ten minutes interacting freely or resting while their cats remained present.

After interacting with their cats, owners reported lower emotional arousal.

That sounds promising for Ellie.

Then the physiological measurements complicate it. During interaction, heart rate rose and high-frequency HRV, a measure associated with parasympathetic activity, decreased. Movement and the timing of the measurements complicate interpretation further.

The owners were not necessarily wrong about feeling calmer. The problem is that a report of feeling calmer cannot quietly become a measurement of the nervous system.

And neither can be evidence of better chess.

That leaves three different statements:

I feel calmer.
My physiology is calmer.
I play better.

The first describes my experience. The second requires physiological evidence. The third requires chess evidence.

A neat feature can collapse those distinctions in a sentence. Responsible reporting has to keep them apart.

There is a closer chess lead. A small 2026 randomized pilot by Yunus and colleagues studied ten minutes of paced breathing with HRV biofeedback before timed chess problems. Twenty participants were divided between intervention and control groups. Reported improvement within the intervention group is interesting, but within-group improvement does not by itself establish that the intervention outperformed the comparison group.

And paced breathing is not petting a cat.

The study is relevant because it asks a neighboring question about physiological regulation and chess performance. It cannot be recruited as evidence for Ellie merely because the resulting story would be better.

BETTER CHESS IS ALSO A REPORTING PROBLEM

Suppose I played ten games with Ellie beside me and won seven. What could a chess writer responsibly conclude?

Not much.

An opponent can blunder. Pairings can differ. A player can lose a well-played game and win a badly played one. Result and decision quality overlap without being interchangeable.

Engine analysis seems to offer a cleaner answer, but even that requires choices. Positions create different opportunities for error. Analysis settings matter. A few excellent games can be ordinary variation. If I choose the measure after seeing the results, I can keep shopping until the hypothesis looks attractive.

The clock introduces another complication. If petting Ellie makes me feel composed but consumes calculation time, an effect under time pressure might differ from an effect in a leisurely game.

The claim has to become smaller before it can become testable.

A manageable first experiment might compare repeated sessions in which a player has a short period of voluntary interaction with a familiar cat before play against sessions with an equal period of quiet rest. The order would be randomized, followed by matched sets of unseen timed chess positions.

Before collecting results, the investigator would choose the primary outcome, perhaps the proportion of positions solved within the time limit under a fixed scoring rule. Perceived calm would be recorded separately. Sleep, caffeine, practice and time of day would need attention.

The cat creates its own methodological problem. A familiar cat cannot reliably be scheduled to interact. Forcing contact would change the experience being tested. Sessions in which the cat declines to cooperate cannot simply disappear from the record because they make the result inconvenient.

The player also knows whether the cat was there. Expectations could affect effort or confidence.

And even a carefully run personal experiment would say something about one player and one cat under specified conditions. It would not establish a feline performance principle for chess players everywhere.

THE LESS PERFECT STORY

The strongest ending for the Ellie Gambit may be the one a writer is least tempted to pitch:

Maybe Ellie makes me feel calmer and does nothing measurable to my chess.

That would still be information.

Comfort does not have to earn a rating point to matter. It simply should not be awarded one without evidence.

That is the part of this small question that interests me most as a writer. Evidence does not merely verify a story after we have written it. Sometimes it changes which story we are entitled to tell.

I can say Ellie sits on my lap while I play. I can say petting her makes me feel calmer.

Whether she improves the next move still has to be decided on the board.

SOURCES

Troubat et al. (2009), “The stress of chess players as a model to study the effects of psychological stimuli on physiological responses,” European Journal of Applied Physiology.

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The Original Arkhangelsk
Take Control of the Ruy Lopez as Black
by IM Tibor Karolyi

Elk and Ruby, 2025, 321 pp.,

Reviewed by NM Randy Bauer
Randy's Rating: 6.5/10

The Ruy Lopez (1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5) is a durable chess opening that has been played on one side or the other (or both) by nearly every world class chess player. This is both a blessing and a curse: there is no doubt about the sound nature of it from both sides, but it also means that there is extensive theory associated with it.

This is a black method to deal with what is generally considered the main play for both sides, after 3…a6 4.♗a4, ♘f6 5.0-0. While the most common continuation for black at this point by far is 5…♗e7, the variation that is the subject of this book varies with the forcing 5…b5 6.♗b3 ♗b7 (diagram).



This is an aggressive way for black to play, and it often relies on piece activity (and even giving up material) to create unbalanced positions.

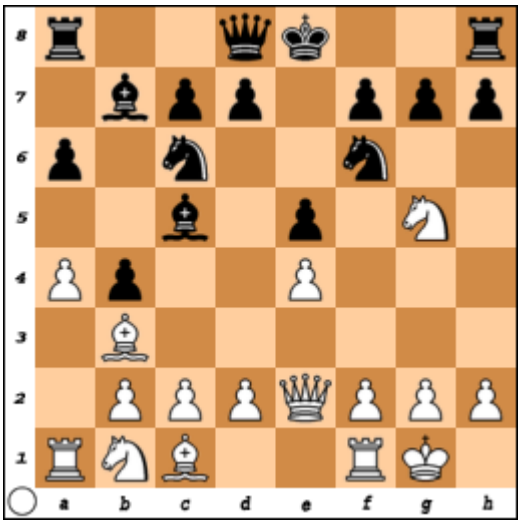
The variation is clearly sound. Among the illustrative games are multiple examples of the black play by Carlsen, Beliavsky, Shirov, and Grischuck, as well as black games by Anand, Caruana, Ivanchuk, and Svidler.

From the diagrammed position, white has a number of typical Ruy Lopez continuations, such as defending the e4 pawn by 7.d3, 7.♖e1, 7.♘c3, or 7.♕e2. There are also (given black's slower kingside development), options with 7.c3, 7.♘g5 or 7.d4, as well as the typical lever 7.a4. In practice, the most common white moves are 7.d3, 7.♖e1, and 7.c3.

The first thing to note about this book is that it is not a complete repertoire for a black player after 1…e5. That means that the necessary theory associated with the King's Gambit (2.f4), the Vienna Game (2.♘c3), the Bishop's Game (2.♗c4) and 3.♗c4 are not covered. It also means that earlier tries in the Ruy Lopez are not covered, including the Exchange Variation (4.♗×c6), the Delayed Exchange Variation (5.♗×c6) or tries like the Mackenzie Variation (5.d4). Interestingly, I reviewed FM David Gertler's book on the Mackenzie (released by the same publisher) in a prior edition.

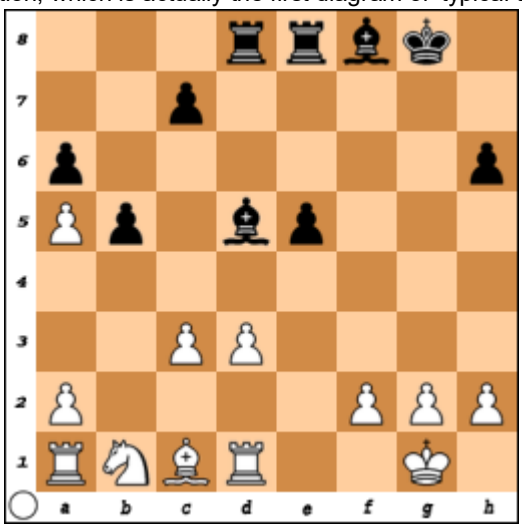
In the introductory chapter, the author touches on the positional soundness of the defense while underscoring its flexibility. The author also promises, whenever possible, to provide two alternatives in the key lines, one more adventurous, and one more reliable. That is certainly something to aspire to: many times a suggested line in a repertoire book comes under a cloud, which can lead the reader on their own in devising a different line of play.

The introduction closes with diagrams and continuations from 19 typical themes and 18 key lines. Some of the typical themes are good fits, such as this position, where the attack on f7 seems



daunting. However, black can play 9…♘d4 "and game over!" The author also notes that "this knight move sometimes also solves Black's problems by exchanging the f3-knight, though in this diagram it is exchanged for the b3-bishop.

While this is a thematic continuation, some of the other "typical themes" are far outside the realm of the opening and are really middlegame discussions. That is not necessarily a bad thing, but this position, which is actually the first diagram of 'typical themes',



doesn't seem very typical. According to the author, here, with 19…♖ad8 "and although he could end up three pawns down in the resulting position, he has sufficient play for the pawns." That may well be, but this doesn't really seem like a 'typical theme' of the opening to me.

The 18 key lines that follow provide some basic commentary on white's options on move seven. The less oft-played lines 7.a4, 7.♘g5, 7.d4, 7.c3, and 7.♕e2 all are represented by one diagram and a paragraph or two of what is likely to follow. The remaining diagrams are devoted to more testing responses from white. 7.♘c3 is covered in two diagrams, while the two more oft-played moves, 7.d3 and 7.♖e1 are represented by two and seven diagrams, respectively. As the author notes, 7.♖e1 is the most conventional approach, and, in fact, it occupies about one-third of the pages in the entire book.

I think this chapter could have been improved by reversing the order and including the typical themes diagrams within the key lines, which would provide better connectivity between the key lines and the typical themes.

The next chapter, "Quick Opening Disasters for White," provides 25 wins by black of between 12 and 21 moves. The shortest is worth noting, as it demonstrates the quick development and piece play that can arise.

Avgousti, Petros – Uzman, Cavit
Olympiad Final E, Siegen (2), 1970

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4, ♘f6 5.0-0, b5 6.♗b3, ♗b7 7.♖e1, ♗c5 8.c3, ♘g4 9.d4 e×d4 10.c×d4? **(Diagram)**



"The naïve capture 10.e×d4 was played 26 times by White according to the database, and this is the first game that ended quickly following that mistake. However, had White played 10.h3! instead of 10.c×d4 he would have gained a clear advantage." 10…♘×d4! "Black diverts White's knight on f3 away from defence of the king by sacrificing his own knight." 11.♘×d4 ♕h4 12.♘f3 ♕×f2+ **0-1** "After 13.♔h1 ♕g1+! would lead to a smothered checkmate, as White can do nothing to prevent the knight check on f2."

The rest of the book is split into chapters, with Chapter 2 covering the rare moves 7.a4, 7.♕e2, 7.♘g5, and 7.d4. The author rightly notes that the sidelines aren't particularly challenging for black, which means that if white wishes to have a reasonable chance at an advantage, it will have to be in the main lines. Even though there isn't a lot of danger here, the author devotes 30 pages (and the pages are filled more with moves than explanation).

Chapter 3 covers 7.♘c3, and one of the more interesting set of games concerns black's plan of playing …♗d6. This corresponds with the author's intent to identify a more unbalanced approach, as he also analyzes lines where black plays more conventionally with …♗e7. This chapter contains 29 games and encompasses 50 pages. One of the annoyances with the complete game approach is demonstrated by the game Kovalev-Chovan, Czech Open, 2017: the game includes typical annotations until move 21, when there is no other comment until it ends in a draw on move 126. Does anybody ever play through games like this in an opening book? I highly doubt it, and it is just filler.

Chapter 4 covers 7.c3, which can involve a pawn sacrifice and leads to sharp play. This line is covered in 21 games over 47 pages. The final two chapters, cover 7.♖e1 and 7.d3, make up the primary tests of the variation and about half the book's pages and 74 of its 166 games.

Having spent some time with the book (in a defense I have never played), I'm not confident that it would provide me the level of understanding – and having to separate the wheat from the chaff – to really learn the defense. For one thing, it is difficult from the complete game layout to know what exactly a player needs to play

through and what they might skip to save time and brain cells. The many lengthy games also do not help. Finally, the notes are more descriptive than explanatory.

In the age of databases, I question whether a book like this has much value. For a player wishing to explore as many games as are in this book, a database is much easier to use and update. While not a database dump in the spirit of books with little or no notes, the explanations here don't strike me as all that helpful in figuring out a repertoire based on the variation.

There are things to appreciate in the book. First, the production values are very strong. It is a hardcover book that lies flat and is very well bound, with decent paper, and clear print. Most pages have between 2 and 4 diagrams, and there is a detailed index of games and lines at the front of the book. There are also a lot of games from the last five years among the illustrative games, including from 2024 and 2025. The commentary is clear and comprehensible.

All things considered, this is likely a book for a very specialized audience. The material is probably too dense for the weekend or club player, and the need to learn a lot of 1.e4 e5 openings beyond this one also limits the value to those who do not already play 1.e4 e5. That said, for a fairly strong player who already plays this (or is looking for a solid alternative to what they currently play), there is something to be said for it. It could also be useful for a fairly strong player of the Ruy Lopez main lines as white. For the vast majority of players, however, this is probably not a great investment.

The book may be purchased here: Elk and Ruby

**********Continued from page 53 **********

If you question how deep Csonka's analysis goes, seven pages are given to the sidelines and another twelve pages cover the mainline.



Csonka's mainline starts with 15. ♘d2 e5 16. ♘2e4 ♘×e4 17. ♘×e4 ♕b6 18. ♖b1 ♕c7 19. ♗d2 f5! 20. e3! "Sacrificing a full piece when Black comes under the immense attack following 20…f×e4 21. ♗×e4 ♖c8 22. ♕f3+ ♔e8 and concludes with his recommended 23.♕h5+!N (Diagram). Only 23.♖fc1 has been played here.

Then we come to the last and longest chapter in the book on 4…d×c4 and 5…a6. Here Csonka gives two very different options to the reader. The first is a standard Catalan structure with a queenless middle game. Material is maintained with less risk for both players. The second line involves aggressive play where White gives up material for activity…a theme embraced by the young IM throughout the book.

Let's start with 1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 e6 3. g3 d5 4. ♗g2 d×c4 5. ♘f3 a6 6. ♘e5 (Diagram)



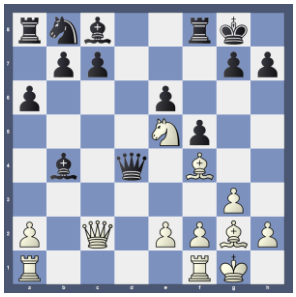
Although by far the most played, Csonka found 6. O-O ♘c6 to be very difficult for White to find any opportunities to play for an advantage. But as I repeat his sentiment on this position, the White player has found winning paths in this line this year.

For the positional player (like me) after 6.♘e5 c5 7.d×c5 ♕×d1+ 8. ♔×d1 ♗×c5 9. ♘d2! (Diagram)



Csonka cites four GMs playing this move since 2021 scoring 3.5 points! He continues, "White is generally happy to recapture on c4 with the d2-knight if possible and here, once it's accomplished, the other knight on e5 can come to d3, dislodging the bishop from the active c5-square." The author gives the following continuation showing Black's best response 9. …♘bd7! 10. ♘e×c4 O-O with White's 11. ♘b3! =.

And for the player looking to mix it up, the more popular



6…♗b4+ 7. ♘c3! ♘d5 8. O-O O-O 9. ♘e4 c3 10. b×c3 ♘×c3 11. ♕c2 ♕×d4 12. ♗f4 ♘×e4 13. ♗×e4 f5 14. ♗g2 (Diagram), Csonka opines that "the dust has settled" White is down two pawns but all of his minor pieces are excellently placed: meanwhile, Black virtually has no development."

Obviously, with a 600-page book, I had to skip many chapters. But I hope that I have given you some insight to this very thorough opening book on the open Catalan. In summary, I think that this book is very well done and, as a Catalan player, I can't wait for Volume 2 to come out. Csonka's preface that theory develops quickly is absolute. But the master will appreciate the depth and completeness of the analysis given and the club player will find very good material to serve them well for a long time.

The book can be purchased here: Thinkers Publishing

Merry Christmas 2026

Awani Kumar, Lucknow, India

Enjoy! Rejoice!! Celebrate!!!

Festivals encourage inclusion, reduce stress and make our lives happy. Christmas, which commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ, is an occasion of festivities and celebrations around the globe. Besides get-togethers and parties, decorating the Christmas tree is a joyous activity. Postal authorities frequently come out with Christmas tree theme stamps. The author plans to join in the festivities and wishes to celebrate and commemorate 2026 Christmas with interesting knight and leaper tours. Figure 1 is a knight tour on 20x26 board (which relates to the year 2026) and the line joining the square numbers 1^2, 2^2, 3^2, …, 22^2, namely, 1, 4, 9, …, 484 delineates a Christmas tree.

91	96	105	110	117	98	133	122	153	150	135	172	155	176	137	180	157	164	161	140
106	109	90	97	104	123	118	151	134	121	154	175	136	181	156	177	138	141	158	163
95	92	107	116	111	132	99	120	149	152	171	182	173	186	179	142	165	162	139	160
108	89	94	103	114	119	124	147	130	145	174	185	170	143	192	187	178	159	214	189
93	86	115	112	125	128	131	100	81	148	169	144	183	194	209	166	191	188	211	216
88	75	84	127	102	113	82	129	146	201	184	197	208	167	230	193	210	215	190	213
85	72	87	46	83	126	101	80	205	198	207	168	229	224	195	234	231	212	217	220
74	45	76	23	78	47	64	49	200	227	202	225	196	233	254	251	222	219	236	249
71	22	73	60	69	50	79	204	65	206	199	228	255	252	223	232	235	250	221	218
44	57	70	77	24	61	48	63	260	203	226	257	284	321	290	253	294	319	248	237
21	54	59	68	51	36	25	66	263	258	283	322	289	256	363	320	291	328	295	318
58	43	56	53	26	67	62	259	282	261	288	285	362	323	326	329	364	293	238	247
55	20	15	8	35	52	37	262	287	264	419	360	325	402	397	292	327	330	317	296
42	7	40	27	16	9	266	281	270	1	286	417	420	361	324	403	396	365	246	239
19	14	17	34	267	38	269	2	265	418	359	512	507	416	401	398	331	404	297	316
6	41	28	39	10	3	280	271	358	509	**520**	421	504	399	506	415	366	395	240	245
13	18	33	4	29	268	357	492	519	422	511	508	513	414	503	400	405	332	315	298
32	5	30	11	356	279	272	423	510	477	440	495	502	505	514	413	394	367	244	241
275	12	277	426	273	424	491	476	493	518	497	516	499	438	501	406	333	242	299	314
428	31	274	355	278	461	464	473	478	441	494	439	496	515	412	393	368	379	334	243
451	276	427	460	425	490	475	488	463	472	517	498	437	500	407	410	387	392	313	300
352	429	450	455	354	487	462	465	474	479	442	471	408	411	388	391	380	369	378	335
449	452	353	430	459	454	489	480	469	444	483	436	389	382	409	386	377	336	301	312
348	351	346	453	456	431	486	445	466	481	470	443	374	385	390	381	370	309	304	307
345	448	349	458	343	446	433	468	341	484	435	482	339	372	383	376	337	306	311	302
350	347	344	447	432	457	342	485	434	467	340	373	384	375	338	371	310	303	308	305

Figure1. An axially-symmetric figured knight tour on 20x26 board (closed tour)

Christmas is celebrated on December 25 and Figure 2 to Figure 5 are fairy leaper tours on 12x25 board. Readers are urged to look for tours having more magic lines. Can there be closed zebra and flamingo tours on 12x25 board? The author conjectures there can't be. Readers may look for them.

61	154	119	186	111	242	59	156	121	188	109	172	57	158	129	190	107	272	55	160	131	204	97	280	139
152	25	226	19	220	23	254	71	224	17	244	47	250	51	246	13	170	49	**300**	11	206	81	270	9	282
185	112	241	60	155	120	187	110	173	58	157	128	189	108	273	56	159	130	191	98	279	138	161	132	203
118	219	62	153	26	225	18	243	46	253	122	223	16	171	48	249	54	285	106	271	8	281	140	205	96
227	20	151	24	255	72	221	22	235	70	251	52	245	14	169	50	247	12	207	80	299	10	283	82	269
240	27	184	113	218	31	260	123	288	35	174	101	274	127	286	105	264	99	278	**1**	192	133	202	137	162
63	256	117	228	21	236	45	252	73	222	15	234	69	248	53	208	79	168	7	284	83	268	95	298	141
150	217	40	259	28	183	38	175	30	261	126	287	34	263	100	275	4	293	104	195	136	295	86	193	134
215	114	239	42	257	148	289	32	177	124	181	36	291	102	197	6	277	2	265	92	297	88	163	84	201
116	229	64	237	44	213	74	231	66	179	146	211	76	233	68	167	144	209	78	199	90	165	142	267	94
41	258	149	216	39	176	29	182	37	290	33	262	125	276	3	292	103	196	5	294	85	194	135	296	87
238	43	214	115	230	65	178	147	212	75	232	67	180	145	210	77	198	91	166	143	266	93	200	89	164
1806	1674	1806	1652	1604	1734	1652	1744	1682	1772	1790	1820	1806	1896	1782	1688	1806	1806	1762	1828	2072	1950	1974	2072	1972

Figure 2. Zebra {2,3} tour on 12x25 board with 5 magic lines (open tour)

4	153	2	67	232	201	8	171	20	155	262	287	230	117	210	173	18	137	264	289	228	223	216	127	98
233	200	7	170	5	154	275	68	231	116	211	172	19	60	263	288	229	222	215	126	97	136	265	290	227
150	37	278	39	234	11	190	23	250	47	276	69	298	13	178	15	252	51	86	53	226	221	180	103	96
235	10	191	22	151	256	277	40	203	12	177	16	251	48	285	70	297	220	179	102	95	50	87	54	225
152	3	66	**1**	202	9	192	21	156	255	286	261	120	209	118	17	174	49	138	75	224	217	124	99	128
199	188	169	6	157	274	45	**300**	115	242	165	212	59	254	61	74	121	182	125	214	135	266	139	78	291
36	149	38	279	198	189	24	249	158	273	46	299	114	241	14	213	58	253	52	85	108	181	104	91	134
197	236	25	248	27	146	257	64	41	204	161	176	31	284	71	294	107	296	219	94	101	88	55	82	109
28	145	258	65	186	193	244	167	30	143	260	63	184	119	208	175	268	141	72	293	76	123	218	129	100
187	194	245	168	29	144	259	44	185	164	243	166	269	142	73	62	183	122	207	130	267	140	79	292	77
148	35	280	43	238	195	246	159	272	33	282	113	240	163	206	131	270	57	80	111	84	105	92	133	90
237	196	247	26	147	34	281	42	239	162	205	160	271	32	283	112	295	106	93	132	89	56	81	110	83
1806	1546	1806	1134	1806	1806	2298	1348	1900	1806	2574	1994	2086	1682	1970	1624	2272	1836	1730	1704	1730	1806	1640	1588	1658

Figure 3. Giraffe {1,4} tour on 12x25 board with 6 magic lines (closed tour)

8	261	234	267	228	7	262	235	252	229	86	263	192	251	18	167	158	241	46	49	166	157	116	97	48
141	232	255	76	281	142	197	254	75	182	143	220	203	74	183	144	219	204	91	72	145	218	205	92	71
122	285	2	179	38	121	108	3	180	291	120	107	4	137	290	119	54	63	136	129	214	55	210	135	130
227	258	195	270	15	230	257	266	193	272	17	168	293	242	87	264	191	294	117	96	133	190	295	50	165
282	13	198	9	260	233	268	85	6	175	236	253	244	153	28	45	250	19	184	159	240	47	90	185	156
77	280	109	140	11	66	79	178	221	138	201	26	181	64	247	202	73	146	211	206	53	70	115	98	217
224	231	256	35	284	103	196	39	274	111	102	265	40	273	62	169	132	213	88	51	162	131	128	93	58
123	286	**1**	226	37	194	271	16	21	292	277	106	5	20	289	118	243	152	29	186	215	56	209	134	189
10	259	80	269	14	83	174	33	148	65	84	171	32	147	298	25	154	31	44	95	24	155	296	207	164
283	12	199	78	177	110	139	200	67	176	237	248	245	68	27	238	249	246	69	160	239	212	89	52	161
36	279	104	223	124	287	278	105	222	125	288	61	112	101	126	187	60	113	100	127	188	59	114	99	216
225	82	173	34	149	**300**	81	172	275	150	299	22	41	276	151	170	23	42	297	208	163	30	43	94	57
1758	2478	1806	1806	1618	1876	2310	1586	1934	2206	2090	1910	1592	1806	1806	1848	1806	1764	1412	1538	1942	1380	1910	1336	1632

Figure 4. Fiveleaper {0,5} + {3,4} tour on 12x25 board with 5 magic lines (closed tour)

55	152	119	154	123	156	125	160	67	168	63	224	59	226	117	230	103	234	95	238	93	240	91	242	89
126	159	76	167	62	223	54	185	118	189	122	193	98	161	66	169	84	245	88	227	116	231	106	235	96
53	184	51	188	49	192	45	296	75	176	79	222	**1**	206	111	202	107	198	97	162	71	170	83	246	87
44	295	42	177	136	179	138	207	112	209	108	263	46	285	74	299	82	221	2	205	4	201	8	197	12
139	272	141	268	143	264	33	292	37	**300**	135	214	21	212	5	210	9	260	13	286	131	288	133	216	23
32	279	30	277	28	275	150	271	148	267	146	259	34	291	38	289	134	215	22	251	18	253	16	255	14
151	56	153	120	155	124	157	68	165	64	173	60	225	58	229	104	233	102	237	94	239	92	241	90	243
158	127	166	77	174	61	182	57	186	121	190	99	194	69	164	65	172	85	244	115	228	105	232	101	236
183	52	187	50	191	48	283	128	297	78	175	80	181	114	203	110	199	100	195	70	163	72	171	86	247
282	43	294	41	178	137	180	113	208	109	262	47	284	129	298	73	220	81	248	3	204	7	200	11	196
273	140	269	142	265	144	281	36	293	40	219	26	213	20	211	6	261	10	257	130	287	132	217	24	249
280	31	278	29	276	27	274	149	270	147	266	145	258	35	290	39	218	25	250	19	252	17	254	15	256
1776	1790	1806	1690	1780	1830	1902	1962	1976	1868	1938	1832	1614	1806	1806	1796	1822	1776	1748	1800	1806	1808	1752	1718	1748

Figure 5. Flamingo {1,6} tour on 12x25 board with 4 magic lines (open tour)

Figure 6 is corsair {2,5} path visiting 287 cells. Can there be a longer path? The author believes not.

1	-	7	188	35	144	5	102	269	172	43	-	273	176	-	148	283	98	27	170	53	136	15	180	213
194	-	74	247	88	113	202	219	58	117	196	233	72	249	90	111	200	217	66	119	198	235	70	251	92
159	4	103	268	173	2	133	272	189	36	149	282	99	26	171	52	135	18	179	214	153	284	97	28	169
114	203	220	59	116	195	232	73	248	89	112	201	218	57	118	197	234	71	250	91	110	209	226	65	120
243	132	261	80	-	158	281	84	25	162	49	134	259	-	239	-	253	96	21	168	51	126	19	-	215
8	187	38	143	6	105	34	145	42	101	270	175	44	151	274	177	30	147	54	121	16	181	212	137	14
75	246	193	264	77	244	87	260	81	240	157	278	83	22	163	50	125	258	199	216	67	252	93	236	69
104	267	160	3	-	271	174	37	150	275	190	-	146	-	100	17	166	45	152	255	178	29	154	285	122
221	60	115	204	231	40	141	10	185	32	223	62	107	206	229	56	139	12	183	210	225	64	109	208	227
262	79	242	131	276	191	266	161	280	85	24	165	48	129	254	95	238	155	286	123	20	167	46	127	256
39	142	9	186	33	222	61	106	205	230	41	140	11	184	31	224	63	108	207	228	55	138	13	182	211
192	265	76	245	86	263	78	241	130	277	82	-	156	279	124	23	164	47	128	257	94	237	68	**287**	-

Figure 6. Corsair {2,5} path on 12x25 board visiting 287 cells



The author wishes **Merry Christmas**. May it bring health, wealth, love and happiness to all. Amen.



Oddities and Peculiarities (and Obscurities):

I Have Made Chess Objectively Worse

by Nicholas Cooke

Chess has rules. This has generally been considered one of its strengths.

For several hundred years, players have relied on the comforting assumption that when they move a pawn, they have chosen to move the pawn. This allows for planning, positional understanding and the occasional illusion of personal responsibility. Chess is, after all, largely a game about control: controlling squares, controlling space, controlling the centre and, on a good day, controlling yourself sufficiently not to play something obviously stupid.

One September Wednesday, sitting on the toilet, I decided that White had enjoyed this privilege for long enough, and that something had to be done.

The idea came from the Battle of Hastings, specifically the bit where the Saxons were doing reasonably well and then some of them became excited. I was thinking about the shield wall and the familiar schoolbook account of troops leaving a strong defensive position to chase the Normans downhill. It occurred to me that this would translate very neatly into chess, provided one was prepared to use the word “neatly” in a fairly irresponsible way.

The chess version seemed obvious. White would play normally, build a position and perhaps begin to feel quite pleased with it. Then, at some uncertain point, the infantry would lose all sense of proportion and charge. The player would not be asked. In the Year eight history version of events, Harold Godwinson was not asked either. This seemed appropriate.

I found this inherently funny. Chess players spend enormous amounts of time learning not to make impulsive pawn moves. Hastings Chess would eventually make several of them on your behalf. Unfortunately, once you have decided to make a chess army disobey its player, a surprising number of practical questions arise. Most of them make the situation worse.

The obvious first question was what, precisely, a Saxon army consisted of. Pawns alone felt inadequate. There were Housecarls, and once I remembered the Housecarls there was no realistic prospect of leaving them out. This is one of



the dangers of historical research, even at the extremely modest level required here, which was essentially zero. You remember one additional fact and suddenly two pawns have been removed from the board and replaced by men with enormous axes.

That created its own problems, chiefly because their original movement and capturing rules turned them into eleventh-century Terminators and they subsequently had to be nerfed. However, the larger problem came from the charge itself. I had designed it as a compulsory strategic disaster. Testing revealed that White had not understood the assignment. A mass advance of several pawns can be disruptive, certainly, but it can also seize an alarming quantity of space. The Saxons would abandon their structure, hurtle forwards and

then occasionally discover that their reckless decision had left them with an excellent position.

This offended me on several levels.

The Normans therefore required some means of exploiting the moment. Cavalry was the historically obvious answer, so the knights initially received the counterattacking role, giving them two bonus moves after Black's initial response. They proved rather less decisive than their eleventh-century counterparts, chiefly because there were only two of them and chess players have an irritating habit of capturing things.

The Norman pawns were consequently authorised to join in and allowed to capture directly forwards during the counterattack phase. This turned them into horrible little bastards that were absolutely awful to play against.

Perfect.

This is roughly how the rules developed. Whenever the game behaved sensibly, I left it alone. Whenever it behaved sensibly in a way that undermined the joke, I made the rules worse.

Once the basic rules settled down, I started running blind games through a chess engine. This was mainly intended to identify the exact point at which the whole thing fell apart. Annoyingly, it did not.

It behaved oddly, certainly, but the oddness had structure. Good positions still tended to be good. Bad ones could still become fatal. The charge did not replace chess so much as interrupt it with a temporary administrative, and possibly nervous, breakdown. Players still had to calculate, still had to manage space, still had to think several moves ahead, except now part of that thinking involved the possibility that a large section of their army might shortly stop accepting instructions.

The fact that this worked was deeply inconvenient.

If the tests had shown that Hastings Chess was hopelessly unbalanced or tactically empty, I could have laughed, deleted everything and returned to ordinary life. Instead, they suggested that underneath several layers of historical foolishness there was something people might genuinely enjoy playing.

The blind tests left me with an inconvenient conclusion: if the thing was producing interesting positions, I wanted to play it properly. This required a computer opponent, and that in turn required the computer to understand that the board in front of it was only temporarily trustworthy. The charge might happen soon or it might not, but by move thirty it definitely would, so both sides had to play the present position while making allowances for a future one in which several pawns had suddenly developed ideas of their own. The computer therefore had to prepare for a catastrophe that was certain in principle but uncertain in timing, which is a surprisingly demanding amount of strategic dignity to grant something that began as a joke about Saxons getting overexcited.

Once the computer started planning around the charge rather than simply reacting to it, Hastings Chess developed another layer. White had to decide how much structure it could afford to lose; Black had to decide where the damage would be most useful; and both sides still had to play ordinary chess in the meantime. Better opponents did this better, which was obvious in retrospect and irritating in practice. Before long there were multiple difficulty levels, replay functions and enough testing to suggest that the game was not going to collapse merely because somebody looked at it seriously.

I had intended to make chess slightly worse. Instead, I had made the mistake of giving the stupidity infrastructure.

This also taught me something slightly unwelcome about my own chess. I have been playing since I was about seven and have played countless games without ever becoming particularly good. At my best I have hovered around 1600–1700, which is high enough to recognise a positional mistake and generally low enough to make it anyway. I eventually accepted that getting substantially better would require treating chess like a second job, and I already have one of those.

Unfortunately, Hastings Chess punishes exactly this sort of attitude. White must think seriously about pawn structure because at some point that structure is going to be forcibly stretched across the board. Black must look at the same structure and work out where it will be weakest afterwards. A really strong player therefore has to calculate the position in front of them and, simultaneously, the ridiculous future position lurking inside it. I mostly manage the first part and then watch events develop with the expression of somebody who has just remembered he designed the events himself.

There is something satisfying about making a game partly to mock positional chess and then discovering that it requires more positional awareness than I personally possess.

Eventually I released Hastings Chess, partly because it worked and partly because keeping a fully functional chess variant to myself after all that effort would have introduced an entirely different kind of silliness. It is now available for anyone sufficiently curious, reckless or bored to download. Some people have.

This continues to surprise me.

The fact that it exists is, ultimately, the joke. Not merely that somebody thought of compulsory Saxon overconfidence, but that the thought was repeatedly subjected to sensible decisions until it became a real game. Every stage should have been unnecessary. Every stage made the next one easier to justify. Somewhere along the way, pointless escalation became a design method.

And apparently the process is still continuing. People are playing it. Chess journalists are asking about it. I am now writing approximately fifteen hundred words for a serious chess publication in an attempt to explain why any of this happened. I still do not have a particularly good answer, except that absurd things become much funnier when treated with completely inappropriate seriousness.

There is no lesson in any of this, which is reassuring. Hastings Chess was not intended to improve chess, advance historical understanding or demonstrate anything useful about game design. It began because I found an absurd idea funny and continued because treating that absurd idea with increasing seriousness made it funnier.

The result is now sitting on the internet, freely available for people to play. Somewhere, potentially, a perfectly competent chess player is carefully considering a position that only exists because I once spent too long thinking about 1066.

I am quite pleased about this.

If, for some reason, you also have a serious lapse in judgement, you can download it here:

https://github.com/HastingsChess/HastingsChess

Part of a game score, follow the diagrams

