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MAGICAL MAGNUS!

The Champ roared back to form
with back-to-back victories

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Return to the Rock – John Saunders reports from the Women's Grand Prix at Gibraltar



Room with a View - Steve Barrett had an unusual stay in a Beth Harmon themed room



'Tal on Acid' - Julian M Way introduces the attacking genius that was Albin Planinc

Chess

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He's Back!

Out of form? Certainly no longer as Magnus Carlsen won back-to-back Tour titles

In truth he never went away, but Magnus Carlsen was still delighted to win back-to-back events in the Meltwater Champions Chess Tour. Back in November when the Tour began, Carlsen was defeated by Wesley So in the final, that same scenario occurring at the Opera Euro Rapid. In-between there was, of course, the Airthings Masters, where an off-colour Carlsen was sensationally dispatched by the in-form Daniil Dubov at the quarter-final stage.

Come March and the champ's signature event, the Magnus Carlsen Invitational, Carlsen would be eliminated by Ian Nepomniachtchi in a dramatic blitz play-off ahead of rallying to crush So in the ensuing third-place play-off. That left Carlsen second in the overall standings, but boy have things improved for the champ since then, who now leads the Tour with 271 points to So's 203.

Carlsen was back in the groove at the New in Chess Classic, pretty much dominating from beginning to end, as we'll see in detail later in these pages. He wasn't in first gear in the subsequent FTX Crypto Cup, but still fought through to reach the final, where he described gaining revenge over So as a "massive, massive relief".

The champ proved too strong for Hikaru Nakamura in the New in Chess final, but required a blitz play-off to get by his old rival in the quarter-finals of the FTX Crypto Cup, where the pick of his wins was arguably the following.

M. Carlsen-H. Nakamura FTX Crypto Cup 2021 Giuoco Piano

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♙c4 ♙c5 4 0-0 ♚xd5 5 d3 0-0 6 h3 h6 7 c3 d6 8 ♖e1 a5 9 d4

Upping the ante.

9...♙b6 10 ♙e3 exd4

The right way to react. 10...♘xe4?! 11 dxe5 favours White.

11 cxd4 d5!

And again, especially as 11...♘xe4?? 12 d5 would win a piece thanks to the loose knight on e4.

12 exd5 ♗e7 13 ♘c3 ♗exd5 14 ♖d2



14...c6

An engine-approved novelty, Nakamura having previously come under pressure after 14...♘xe3 15 ♖xe3 c6 16 ♖d1 ♘d5 17 ♘xd5 cxd5 18 ♙b3 ♙f5 19 ♘e5 in Caruana-Nakamura, Carlsen Invitational 2020, where he was able to hold. Note too that 14...♙f5? wouldn't be wise: 15 ♙xh6! gxh6 16 ♖xh6 when ♖e5 will be a killer. Likewise, 14...♙e6? 15 ♙xh6! gxh6 16 ♖xh6 is one to avoid.

15 ♙xh6!?

A practical choice. Carlsen must have been aware that Black was now OK with best play, but was quite happy to test Nakamura's recollection of his earlier analysis.

15...gxh6 16 ♖xh6 ♙f5?

The decisive mistake. Black needed to play 16...♘h7! to prevent ♘g5 when 17 ♘e4!? (17 ♘xd5 cxd5 18 ♙d3 f5 has to be OK for Black and receives the standard '0.00' from the engines) 17...♙f5 18 ♘g3 ♙g6 19 ♘h5 ♙xh5 20 ♖xh5 ♖f6 21 ♖e4 ♘f4 22 ♖g4+ ♘g6 23 h4 ♘h8 (Pein) leaves White with definite compensation, but is objectively no more than unclear.

17 ♖e5 ♙g6 18 ♖g5



Carlsen is content to pin. 18 ♘h4!? would also have been very strong, and if 18...♙xd4 19 ♘xg6 fxg6 20 ♘xd5! cxd5 21 ♖g5 with a devastating attack.

18...♘h7 19 ♖g4 ♖e8

Freeing f8 for the knight, but Black's position is going to implode on g6 at some point in any case.

20 ♘xd5 cxd5 21 ♙d3 ♘f8 22 ♘e5 ♖e6 23 ♙f5 ♖d6 24 ♘xg6 fxg6 25 ♙xg6 ♖xg6 26 ♖xg6+ ♘xg6 27 ♖xg6+ ♘h8 28 ♖h5+! ♙g8 29 ♖g4+ ♘h7

29...♘f7 30 ♖e1 would also have decisively brought up the reserves, and if 30...♖f6 31 ♖e5.

30 ♖e1 ♖c8 31 ♖e6 1-0

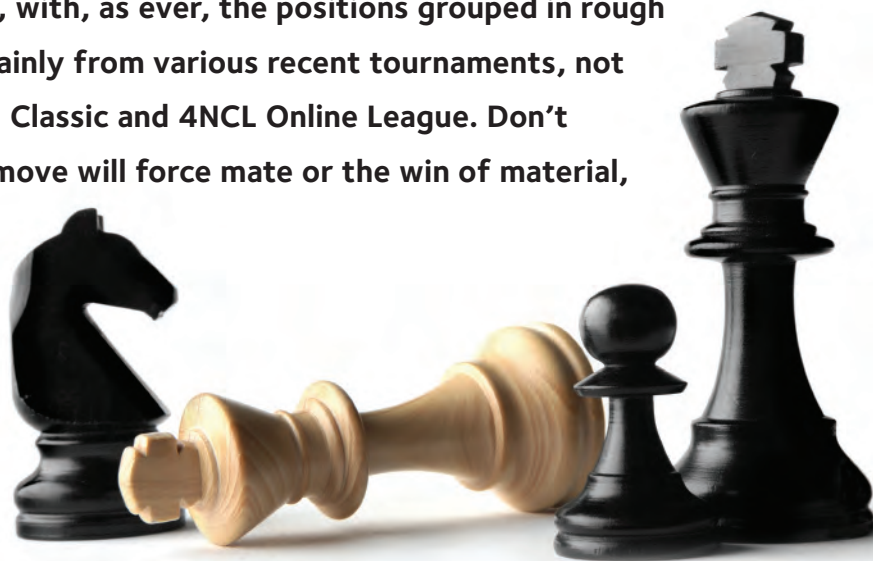


Raw emotion. Magnus's relief is clear as he battled back from losing the first blitz play-off game to defeat big online rival Wesley So in the final of the FTX Crypto Cup. Carlsen changed his t-shirt ahead of the second blitz game (see page 49), which he won and then also the Armageddon.

Find the Winning Moves

24 puzzles to test your tactical ability, with, as ever, the positions grouped in rough order of difficulty. The games come mainly from various recent tournaments, not least the Candidates, the New in Chess Classic and 4NCL Online League. Don't forget that whilst sometimes the key move will force mate or the win of material, other times it will just win a pawn.

Solutions on pages 54.



Warm-up Puzzles



(1) L.Webb-M.Handley
4NCL Online League 2021
White to Play



(2) V.Mikhalevski-M.Bartel
European Online Club Cup 2021
Black to Play



(3) G.Zhao-A.Krishnan
Junior Online 4NCL League 2021
White to Play



(4) A.Saric-M.Sebenik
Austrian League 2021
Black to Play



(5) J.Cole-D.Deary
4NCL Online League 2021
Black to Play



(6) A.Suarez Real-C.Sielecki
4NCL Online League 2021
White to Play

Intermediate Puzzles for the Club Player - Solutions on page 54



(7) V.Fedoseev-J.K.Duda
European Online Club Cup 2021
Black to Play



(8) M.Vachier-Lagrave-Wang Hao
Yekaterinburg Candidates 2021
White to Play



(9) N.Krishna Teja-M.Savic
Arandjelovac 2021
White to Play and Draw



(10) E.Karumazondo-J.Adair
4NCL Online League 2021
White to Play



(11) L.Aronian-J.K.Duda
New in Chess Classic 2021
White to Play



(12) M.Vachier-Lagrave-K.Alekseenko
Yekaterinburg Candidates 2021
White to Play



(13) R.Wojtaszek-G.Gajewski
Polish Championship, Bydgoszcz 2021
White to Play



(14) R.Praggnanandhaa-L.Tristan
Titled Tuesday Blitz 2021
White to Play



(15) I.Lysyj-Z.Tekeyev
Sochi 2021
White to Play

Harder Puzzles for the Club Player – Solutions on page 54



(16) V.Sanal-P.Nikac
Niksic 2021
White to Play



(17) N.Abasov-M.Iskandarov
Nakhchivan 2021
Black to Play



(18) M.Mosadeghpour-A.Daghli
Iranian Online Championship 2021
Black to Play and Draw



(19) P.Talsma-J.Adair
4NCL Online League 2021
White to Play



(20) L.Aronian-W.So
New in Chess Classic 2021
White to Play



(21) L.Aronian-W.So
New in Chess Classic 2021
Black to Play and Draw



(22) K.Alekseenko-Ding Liren
Yekaterinburg Candidates 2021
White to Play



(23) A.Grischuk-M.Vachier-Lagrave
Yekaterinburg Candidates 2021
White to Play



(24) I.Nepomniachtchi-M.Carlsen
Magnus Carlsen Invitational 2021
Black to Play



Never Mind the Grandmasters...

Here come the amateurs - by Carl Portman (carl.portman@hotmail.co.uk)

We chess players are very fortunate. During 'Covid Lockdown' many of us, short of fresh games, took the opportunity to dig into our databases or notebooks and examine games from years long passed. We can scrutinise the 'then' and apply the 'now' to our games and in most cases learn where we have matured in both thinking and playing strength. As I scrolled down, I arrived at the year 1988, where a county game caught my eye.

There is only one line of annotation and it declares "My first ever game for the county first team, and a win at that." The county was Shropshire and we were paired against the Lincolnshire first team. I have commented before that back in the day it was a massive privilege to represent the county and one actually received a letter saying words to the effect of 'Congratulations, you have been selected'.

I thought that I would analyse and annotate the game today, over three decades later. I was in my early twenties. I used to wear a red leather jacket and I grew my hair. Heavy metal and chess were a very potent and influential mix, and remain so. I provide an admittedly poor-quality photograph from my days wearing that jacket at GKN Sankey chess club in Telford. Those really were the days.

Let us look at the game, but cut me some slack please. I was only graded 126 BCF and the game will reveal errors on either side. I note that my opponent was graded 138, which at the time seemed to be quite strong to me.



No, it's not Tony Miles, but rather a young Carl Portman facing a rather offbeat opening.

M.Smith-C.Portman

Lincolnshire vs Shropshire 1988

French Defence

1 e4 e6

The trusty French Defence. It was lambasted in many quarters back in the 1980s, but here in 2021 it seems to be making a comeback even at elite levels.

2 d4 a6!?

Now try to contain your laughter, dear reader. This is a viable if very curious move. It aims to put the opponent off balance. It's also flexible and can transpose into other openings. I note that French GM Christian Bauer plays this on occasion.

3 ♖c3 d5

I am amused to see that *Fat Fritz 2* recommends 3...b5 here.

4 ♗f3 ♟b4

4...♟f6 is the first choice, but I wanted

something different.

5 e5 c5 6 a3 ♟xc3+

6...♟a5 is also possible. I recall watching a tournament online where Alexander Grischuk was interviewed. He said that in Russia this was considered a "Joke" line, but I don't think it can that bad, can it? 7 dxc5 ♟xc3+ 8 bxc3 ♖c7 9 ♖d4 ♗e7 10 ♟d3 ♗bc6 11 ♖g4 ♗g6 was the sort of line I used to get into. I mean, White has an advantage, I will admit that, but there is nothing forcing and the game is afoot.

7 bxc3 ♖a5

Going through some of the games of the late, great Wolfgang Uhlmann, he used to play the queen to a5 in many of his French games. It's a key square and often better than b6, which is also a natural square to place the queen, exerting pressure as it does on d4.

8 ♟d2



I didn't quite understand some of the nuances of my favourite opening. What should Black play now? White might want to play c3-c4 himself, with the threat to the queen (so why did she go to a5 anyway?), and it looks a bit nervy.

8...c4?!

This move is about as 'Anti-French' as you can get. It flies in the face of the point of the opening, which is to pressure the centre on d4. Instead, Black closes the queenside. If he castles, White will literally throw the kitchen sink at the black monarch on g8, often with successful results. On the other hand, he cannot put his bishop on d3, attacking the pawn on h7. He must therefore do something else with his bishop. Yet how and where is Black ever going to create an advantage, let alone win? As always in chess a move provides both benefits and drawbacks, and we have to weigh those up as we battle.

What then if I had played something else? 8...♟c6 and are we worried about 9 c4 now? The queen slips back to c7 and after 9...♖c7 10 cxd5 exd5 White has the bishop-pair, but Black has some choices also. I think that this is the sort of position that masters would labour over for hours trying to work out who is better, and why.

9 ♟e2 b5

Looking back, there is actually no need for this move. I should be thinking about developing a piece first, but I wished to prevent a3-a4, not that White can't play it anyway.

10 0-0

10 ♖g5 is a *Fat Fritz* recommendation and now, Black will need to be careful. There are several moves available including 10...♗a7, 10...♘c6 and 10...h6, but you have to have some nerves to play it from here. 10...h6 11 ♖h3 ♘d7 with an advantage for White or, instead of 10 ♖g5, 10 a4 bxa4 11 ♗a2 ♘d7 and game on.

10...h6 11 h4!



I am giving my opponent an exclamation mark. His king is perfectly safe, and Black's pieces are some way away from their own king. This gives the green light for White to begin operations, and the king hunt is on. Black doesn't sneer, but believes he will be fine. Much of the French Defence is about counterattack. Let White have his day in the sun first, but he will have to put up with the blisters.

11...♗e7 12 h5

Harry the h-pawn existed long before he was officially awarded that name. He is a child of time. Welcome to the new world, Harry!

12...♗bc6 13 ♖h4

White wants to break in somehow.

13...♘d7

Now, Black has a choice of castling options or he can keep his king in the centre.

14 f4

Like a greyhound from the traps, the f-pawn froths at the mouth to catch the rabbit.

14...0-0-0

Black finally gives his address to the opposition. My king is here, do your worst, but be careful not to overreach in desperation! With this one move, instead of moving pieces closer to the king, Black moves the king closer to his pieces.

15 ♗g4



15...g6!

Now I am affording myself the luxury of an exclamation. Black wants to open some lines towards the white king, since he has created so many entry squares into his own headquarters. I am not saying that I am much better at this skill today, but back in 1988 I didn't have the savviness to open up the opposition position efficiently enough. Today I focus on themes like 'removing the defender', such as a knight on f3 or f6.

16 hxg6

Computer engines help and they don't help. *Fat Fritz* suggests (amongst other options) 16 ♗f2, but who would play that in a real game? You would? OK, you are stronger than me, well done.

16...fxg6 17 ♗f3?!

Now look. I am not saying this is dubious, blame *Fritz!* Let's look at why (as if I know). First of all it tells me that the queen has been moved to the wrong wing and if anything she should go to c1 or b1. Why? Well, engines don't tell us why, do they? That's why I prefer human coaches to be honest. What I can say is that with this move, White has changed from a slight advantage to equality, but I don't really care – we are never going to be able to fathom why.

In human terms all I recommend is that we ask, what is Black trying to do? What is White trying to do? How will they get there? I can see that moving the queen to b1, for example, simply switches the attack, Capablanca style from one wing to another. After all, that's where the black king is.

17...♗dg8 18 ♗h3

Breaking news. The queen was played to f3 and h3 to intimidate the pawn on e6. There's nothing wrong with White's approach to my mind, but as ever in the French, Black has resources.

18...♗f5



White is about to suffer from cognitive dissonance. He thinks that after such a good opening he should be winning, but he cannot see a way through. He still believes he holds the advantage and despite the evidence to the contrary before him on the board, he tries to drive a tank into the enemy territory.

19 ♗xf5?!

It's not good. It opens lines. Chess players love open files.

19...gxf5

This is exactly the kind of position I would show to my beginner students. I would

remove everything from the board except the pawns and discuss structure, pawn islands, connected, passed and doubled pawns. Then we would play the position only with pawns to see who could win, if anyone.

20 ♗e3 ♗g4

Greedy, materialistic, soulless *Fritz* wants to play 20...♗a4 and target the little soldier on c2. Come on, we are but human. We don't care for pawns. Why open a tin of sardines when a fresh trout lies before us?

21 ♗e1 ♗hg8 22 ♗h2

White's promising opening position has evaporated and it looks like someone threw a black blanket over the fire, smothering and sucking the energy out of his position.

22...♗d8 23 ♗h3

23 g3 was perhaps a better choice.

23...♗e8



Now it is Black who smells blood. The position is tense now and White has to be careful.

24 a4??

A catastrophe. What was he thinking of? Now was not the time to try to start a counterattack. Clearly White believed his defensive work to have concluded, leaving him room to advance across the battlefield. Many a General has been deluded in this way.

24...♗h5 25 axb5??

White still has scales over his eyes and they are responsible for the downfall of the empire. Blinded by the urge from the very first move to prove superiority over the mighty French Defence, he continues to pistol whip his way through the jungle of the a- and b-files. Sadly, the real action concludes elsewhere. White's 25th move simply allows mate in three.

25...♗xh4+!

Avast, ye varlet.

26 ♗xh4 ♗g4+ 27 ♗h2 ♗xg2# 0-1

A nice little finish. Black can and does live on the edge in the French Defence, but counter-offensives, especially when White becomes frustrated, can be great fun.

I cannot remember how I felt after this battle. I suspect I would have been very happy, and my captain would have congratulated me for securing a point for Shropshire in my first game. I still have a red leather jacket, but not the original. I might just wear it at a tournament to see who reads this column.



Solutions

to Find the Winning Moves (pages 38-40)

1) Webb-Handley

It's back-rank mate: **1 ♖f8+! 1-0**

2) Mikhalevski-Bartel

White has just blundered with the most unfortunate **1 ♖h1**: **1...♗c3+! 2 ♖xc3 ♖xe1+ 3 ♗c2 ♖ce8** picked off the exchange whilst giving Black a huge attack.

3) Zhao-Krishnan

1 ♖xc5! ♖xc5? (even **1...♖d7 2 ♖xe7 ♖xe7 3 ♗h5** should be winning with the threats of f4 and ♗xf6+) **2 ♗e6 ♖d6 3 ♖xg7# 1-0**

4) Saric-Sebenik

White has just blundered with **1 ♗f6-f5** (**1 ♗c3** would have won): **1...♗e7+! 2 ♗xe7 c3 3 ♗g6+ fxg6+ 0-1**

5) Cole-Deary

1...♖xf2+! 2 ♗f1 (**2 ♗xf2?** ♗g4+ is a royal fork) **2...♖ce8** left Black with an overwhelming initiative, with one threat simply **...♗g4** followed by **...d4**.

6) Suarez Real-Sielecki

1 b3! ♖a5 (or **1...♖a3 2 ♗c4**) **2 ♗c4 ♖c5 3 ♗xe5 ♖xe5 4 ♗d6! a5 5 ♖d4 1-0**

7) Fedoseev-Duda

1...♖c5+ 2 ♗h2 ♖g1+! 3 ♗xg1 ♖b6+ 4 ♗h2 ♖xe4 5 ♖ae1 ♖d4! 6 d6+ ♗h8 7 d7 left Black queen for rook ahead and now the simplest way to win was **7...♖d8**, but remarkably Duda even went on to lose after many adventures.

8) Vachier-Lagrave-Wang Hao

1 ♗xb5! 1-0 **1...♖xd2** (**1...♗xb5 2 ♖xd8** and **1...♗d5 2 ♗c7+!** are quite hopeless) **2 ♗xc7+ ♗d7 3 ♖xd2+ ♗xc7 4 c3** followed by ♗e4 and f5 is an easy win.

9) Krishna Teja-Savic

1 ♖xf7+! ♖xf7 (**1...♗h6!?** **2 ♖h7+!** ♗xh7 **3 ♖h5+** is similar) **2 ♖h5+!** (it's going to be stalemate) **2...♗g8 3 ♖h8+ ♗xh8 ½-½**

10) Karumazondo-Adair

1 ♖b6! fxe5 (a bolt from the blue, but if **1...♖xb6 2 ♖xd7#**) **2 ♖xd8 ♖xd8 3 ♖d2 ♗ac6 4 f4** left White significant material ahead and still with the initiative.

11) Aronian-Duda

1 ♖xc7+! (the more complex **1 ♗c5!?** ♖a5+ **2 ♖c3** also seems to do the trick) **1...♗xc7 2 ♖c5** (threatening ♖f8+; Black is simply too weak on the dark squares) **2...♖c4** (**2...♖h8 3 ♖e7 ♗e8 4 ♗c5 ♖a5+ 5 ♗f1 ♖b5+ 6 ♗g2** will shortly force mate) **3 ♖f8+ ♗b7 4 ♗c5+ ♗b6 5 ♖xc7+ ♗b5**

(or **5...♗xc7 6 ♖e7+ ♗b6 7 ♖b7+ ♗a5 8 ♖a3+**) **6 ♖xa8 1-0** White will be able to evade the checks: **6...♖c1+ 7 ♗e2 ♖c2+ 8 ♗f1 ♖d1+ 9 ♗g2 ♖g4+ 10 ♖g3**.

12) Vachier-Lagrave-Alekseenko

1 e5! ♖c7 (or **1...♖f8 2 ♗e4 ♖h6 3 ♖d8 ♖f8 4 ♖c7 ♖e7** when one way to win is to calculate **5 ♖d6** – or **5 ♗f3 ♗f5 6 ♗g3** and only then **♖d6** – **5...♖xd6 6 exd6 ♗xd6 7 h3!** followed by f5 or **7...♗e6 8 h4! ♗f6 9 ♗d5 ♗f5 10 ♗xc5** when the best that Black can achieve is a lost queen endgame, two pawns down) **2 ♗e4 ♖a5 3 ♖g5 ♖b6 4 ♖h6! 1-0** If Black isn't already in zugzwang, he soon will be in a fatal one following **4...♖c7 5 ♖f8 ♖b6 6 ♖d6 ♖a7 7 ♖c7 ♗d7 8 ♖a5 ♗e6 9 h3**.

13) Wojtaszek-Gajewski

1 ♖xh6! ♖g4 (**1...gxh6 2 ♖xh6** is devastating, with ♗g5 one threat, ♖c4 and ♖c5 two others) **2 ♖xg7! ♗xg7 3 ♖g5+ ♗h8 4 ♖h6+ ♗g8 5 ♖e3!** (there's simply no defence) **5...♖e8 6 ♗g5 ♖d5 7 ♖h7+ 1-0**

14) Praggnanandhaa-Tristan

1 ♗e4! ♖xc4? (**1...♖c6** had to be tried when **2 ♗xf6+ ♖xf6 3 ♖xh7+ ♗f8** isn't totally clear, but **2 a3! ♗bd5 3 ♖xd5 exd5 4 ♗xf6+ ♖xf6 5 ♖xf6! gx6 6 ♖xc6 ♖xc6 7 ♗d2** should be a winning rook ending) **2 ♖xc4 ♗d3+ 3 ♗e2 ♖xc4 4 ♗xf6+ gxf6?** (**4...♖xf6 5 ♖xc4** is also trivial) **5 ♖xh7+ ♗f8 6 ♖h8# 1-0**

15) Lysyj-Tekeyev

1 ♖g5+! (**1 ♖c7+ ♗e6 2 ♖c8+ ♗e7 3 ♖b7+?** followed by further checks let Black off the hook in the game) **1...♖xg5 2 ♖c7+ ♗e8 3 ♖xf7+ ♗d8 4 ♖g8+! ♗c7 5 ♖f7+** forces mate, as with **5...♗c6 6 ♖c8+ ♗b6 7 ♖b7+ ♗a6 8 ♖a8#**.

16) Sanal-Nikac

1 ♖xh5! ♖h8 (**1...gxh5 2 ♖xh5 b4 3 ♖c4** followed by ♖d4+ is crushing) **2 ♖c3+ ♗g8 3 ♖hd1! ♖xh5 4 ♖d8+ ♗f7 5 ♖xc8! ♖xc8 6 ♖d7 1-0**

17) Abasov-Iskandarov

1...♖xg3+! (**1...♖xf4! 2 gxf4 ♖e2+!** also does the trick) **2 ♗xg3 ♖e3+ 3 ♗g2 ♖e2+! 4 ♖xe2 ♖xe2+ 5 ♗h3 ♖g4+ 6 ♗h2 ♖xf4+ 0-1** The finish would be **7 ♗g2 ♖g4+ 8 ♗f1** (or **8 ♗h2 ♖e5#**) **8...♖f3+ 9 ♗e1 ♖f2#**.

18) Mosadeghpour-Daghli

1...♗c2! (Black's king is exposed and Harry powerful, and in the game the knight dropped off after **1...♗e2? 2 ♖g5+ f6 3 ♖e3 ♖c7+ 4 g3 f5 5 ♖f3 1-0**) **2 ♖xc2** (**2 ♖g5+ f6**

3 ♖c1 ♖c8 is fine for Black, since he will immediately regain a pawn if White takes twice on c2) **2...♖xh4+! 3 ♗g1 ♖h8 4 ♗f1 ♖c4+! 5 ♗g1** (and not **5 ♖e2?? ♖h1#**) **5...♖h4** would have forced a repetition, as pointed out by Sam Collins in his ChessPublishing column.

19) Talsma-Adair

1 ♖xh7+! ♗xh7 2 ♗g5+ ♗g6 (**2...♗g8? 3 ♖h5 ♖e4 4 f5!** is crushing) **3 ♖d3+! f5 4 exf6+ ♗xf6 5 ♗h7+ ♗f7 6 ♗g5+** (**6 ♗h8?** ♗xf8 **7 f5 ♗g8** would be pretty much winning, but for Black, not White) **6...♗f6** and now White settled for a repetition, but **7 f5!** would have left him with a decisive attack: **7...♗d6** (not, of course, **7...♗xg5? 8 ♖g3+**, heading for g6, or **7...exf5?? 8 ♖xf5#** and **7...e5 8 ♖g3** is also a killer, followed by ♖h4 or **8...♖h8 9 ♖ce1 d6 10 ♖e3!** and simply ♖f6; Black is simply far too tied up and playing without two of his pieces) **8 ♖ce1! g6** (again, not **8...♗xg5? 9 ♖g3+** and **8...♖ae8? 9 fxe6+! ♗xg5 10 ♖e5+** now forces mate too, while **8...♗xf5 9 ♖xf5+! exf5 10 ♗h7+ ♗f7 11 ♖xe7+ ♗xe7 12 ♗xf8 ♖xf8 13 ♖g3** should be a fairly easy win with such a rampant queen) **9 ♗h7+ ♗g7** (**9...♗f7 10 fxe6+ ♗g7 11 ♗xf8 ♖xf8 12 ♖xf8 ♗xf8 13 ♖xg6** is no real improvement, White's initiative just being too strong) **10 f6+ ♖xf6 11 ♗xf6** would have won the exchange, while maintaining strong pressure and definite attacking chances.

20) Aronian-So

1 e8♗+! (and not **1 e8♖?? ♖g5#**) **1...♗h6 2 ♖xf6 ♖xe8 3 ♗d6** left White with a winning attack: **3...♖c7 4 ♖b6!** (**4 ♗h4!** also works) **4...♖b8** (or **4...♖xb6 5 ♗xf5+ ♗h5 6 ♖h4#**) **5 ♖d4 1-0**

21) Aronian-So

1...♖b7! (**1...♖ff2? 2 ♖xa6 ♖g2+ 3 ♗f1** was winning for White in the game: **3...♖xh2 4 ♖xa7+ ♗e8 5 ♗c6+ ♗f8 6 ♖f3+ ♗g8 7 ♗e7+ ♗g7** – or **7...♗h8 8 ♗g6+! hxg6 9 ♖f8#** – **8 ♗d5+ ♗g8 9 ♗f6+ ♗h8 10 ♖xh7+! ♖xh7 11 ♗xh7 ♗xh7 12 ♖g3 1-0**) **2 c6+!** (of course, not **2 ♖xa7?? ♖g2+ 3 ♗h1 ♖f1#** and **2 ♖ae1 ♖g2+ 3 ♗h1 ♖ff2** would unsurprisingly only force White to be careful to draw) **2...♖xc6 3 ♖xa7+ ♗d6 4 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 5 ♖xh7** leaves White two pawns to the good, but with a most sub-optimal king position. Indeed, it's no surprise that Black has sufficient counterplay, as shown by **5...♖d1+ 6 ♗g2 ♖d2+ 7 ♗g3 ♖g8+ 8 ♗h3 ♖gg2**.

22) Alekseenko-Ding Liren

Poor Alekseenko found himself totally lost after **1 ♖c5? ♖b8 2 ♖b4** (or **2 ♖d1 ♖b1 3 ♖d2 ♖f4**) **2...♖xb4! 3 ♖xb4 ♖xd3 4 ♗f3 ♖f1+ 5 ♗g1 ♖d4**, but the calm (and tricky) **1 ♖b2!** would have avoided such back-rank issues: **1...c5 2 ♗f3! ♖xd3** (and not **2...♖xc3? 3 ♖xd8+ ♗h7 4 ♗g5+**) **3 ♖xe5 ♖d1+ 4 ♗h2 ♖xe5+ 5 ♖xe5** when White's material advantage should really be a decisive one.

23) Grischuk-Vachier-Lagrave

1 ♖xh5! gxh5 and now the ultra-calm 2 ♖h3! (2 ♖xh5? was preferred in the game where 2...♗d4! 3 ♖h1 ♖xa4+ 4 ♗b1 ♗d5 – 4...♖h4! was even simpler – 5 ♗h5 ♗xh1+ 6 ♗xh1 ♖g4 saw Black staying on the board, although the defensive task would prove too much for Vachier-Lagrave in the run-up to the time control) 2...♗d4? (2...♗e6 3 ♖xh5 ♗g7 4 ♗e4 is also devastating and even

2...♖a1+!? 3 ♗xa1 ♗d1 4 ♗xd1 ♖xd1 5 ♗xe5 should be winning with h5 set to fall) 3 ♗xd4 ♗xd4 4 ♖xh5 would have won.

24) Nepomniachtchi-Carlsen

1...♗d3!! (1...♗f7 2 ♖f4+ is not progress, with ♖e4 or ♗e4 to follow) 2 ♗xe6+ ♗xe6 3 ♗xe6 d2 4 ♗d6 c5? (allowing White a study-like chance to save himself; the pawns would simply have proved too strong after

4...♗f7 5 g4 ♗e7 6 ♗d3 c5 when there's no ♗d5+ and if 7 ♗g3 ♖c3!) 5 g4 c4 6 ♗g3 c3 7 ♗h4? (7 ♗d5+! ♗f8 8 ♗b3! would have saved the day after 8...♖c1 9 ♗f2 or 8...♖b2 9 ♗d1 c2 10 ♗xc2 ♖xc2 11 ♗f3) 7...♗f8 8 ♗f3 ♖c1 9 ♗d3 ♗e7! 10 ♗g5 ♖f1 11 ♖e3+ ♗d6 12 ♗d3+ ♗e5 13 ♖xc3 ♖xf3 14 ♖xf3 d1♗ 15 ♖f5+ ♗e4 16 a5 ♗d6 17 ♗h4 g6 0-1

This Month's New Releases

The Fully-Fledged French

Viktor Moskalenko, 368 pages
New In Chess

RRP £26.95 **SUBSCRIBERS £24.25**

Viktor Moskalenko is back, with another book on his favourite subject, the French Defence, which is subtitled 'Fresh Strategies and Resources for Dynamic Chess Players'. It shows how quickly time is passing when we consider the age of his three previous books for New in Chess on the same subject, namely: *The Flexible French* (2008), *The Wonderful Winawer* (2010), and *The Even More Flexible French* (2015). As the back-cover blurb puts it, "Time has not stood still, and the popular French Defence has seen a lot of new developments, not in the last place thanks to Moskalenko's books."

Essentially, this book is a thoroughly revised version of *The Even More Flexible French*. The original version's coverage of virtually all French Defence lines – enabling readers to pick and choose their favourites in order to construct a full repertoire against 1 e4 – remains intact. There has been a restructuring of material, the addition of 56 new games, "updates and expansions in every chapter" and "hundreds of improvements, alternatives and new ideas."

The book will look familiar to readers of the previous books, but as Moskalenko says "We can speak of new wine in old bottles!". It is good to see photographs in the book as they help to bring the chess personalities off the pages. However, the reproduction of the photographs is poor in some cases and those of lesser quality should have been omitted altogether.

It is not such an easy task to pick out the new material and some of the changes are more substantial than others. I would have preferred a new volume to bring the story up to date, which would have solved the problem of trying to see the wood for the trees.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to see which lines have been amended by Moskalenko. One example sees new coverage of a rare

move in the Tarrasch variation: 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♗d2 c5 4 exd5 ♗xd5 5 ♗gf3 cxd4 6 ♗c4 and now, instead of the well-worn 6...♗d6, there has been recent interest in 6...♗d7.



This has been seen before, of course, but there are some extra twists both players need to know. One idea is to play an early ...♗d6 and ...♗e7. This gives Black the extra idea of playing the knight to g6, offering a slightly different way of protecting the kingside than the standard placement of ...♗f6.

It's the little quirks such as these which can be especially potent at club level, as they disarm copious amounts of preparation and throw opponents back on their own resources. Speaking of which, fans of the French need to keep an eye the expanding developments in the variation 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♗d3 which is suddenly becoming popular and receives good coverage here.

I admire Moskalenko's dedication and commitment to the French Defence. Fellow fans of 1 e4 e6 will no doubt buy this new book on trust – although they will be acquiring a significant amount of duplicate material. French Defence novices will find this book inspiring and accessible, as is the case with all of Moskalenko's works.

Sean Marsh



The Livonian Knight:

Selected Games of Alvis Vitolins

Zigurds Lanka, Edvins Kengis, Janis Klovans
and Janis Vitomskis, 132 pages, Elk and Ruby
RRP £14.99 **SUBSCRIBERS £13.49**

Who was Alvis Vitolins and why do we need a book about him?

According to the authors, in their foreword: "This book is dedicated to one of Latvia's greatest players; his name is well-known in Latvia and the former Soviet Union, but has remained relatively obscure in the West – except maybe to Cochrane Gambit fans."

The mention of that gambit (1 e4 e5 2 ♗f3 ♗f6 3 ♗xe5 d6 4 ♗xf7) already gives an indication as the style of Vitolins. His creativity is highlighted by this second quote from the authors: "The goal of this book is to remind those who started to forget about the existence of this outstanding master and show Vitolins's achievements to those who'd never heard about one of Latvia's most original players. His ingenious opening ideas and creative, uncompromising play must be preserved for future generations of chess fans."

The book was first published in Latvia in 2008 and we should be thankful that Elk and Ruby have once again brought an interesting volume to a whole new audience. Genna Sosonko has added a new foreword for this English edition and he stresses the influence of Vitolins on other Latvian players, including the most famous of them all.

"As I watched the games, I saw exactly what Tal meant when, during analysis, he would sacrifice material for an initiative and, rubbing his hands together, said, 'And now, let's play like Vitolins...'"

There are 10 chapters, featuring 25 illustrative games. These span from 1960 to

1989 and the last game in the book is, rather fittingly, against the rising Latvian star of the time – Alexei Shirov. The chapters are arranged thematically, according to the new opening ideas played by Vitolins. Categories include Labyrinths of the Najdorf Sicilian, The Nimzowitsch-Vitolins Gambit and, intriguingly, Vitolins Versus Fischer. The last-named of the three shows Vitolins in action against the Poisoned Pawn Variation – a Fischer favourite – rather than games against the 11th world champion himself.

The annotations are a balanced mixture of prose and variations, with plenty of eye-catching diagrams. Incidentally, anyone looking to spice up the Nimzo-Indian may want to investigate 1 d4 ♟f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♞c3 ♟b4 4 ♚c2 0-0 5 ♟f3 b5!? and 1 d4 ♟f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♞c3 ♟b4 4 e3 0-0 5 ♟e2 b5!?, which are both perfect examples of the Vitolins style.

Why isn't Vitolins more famous? Partly because he fell some way short of reaching his potential. He was obsessed with chess and would analyse new variations for many, many hours. Yet somehow he never became a grandmaster. Sosonko cites a lack of tournament opportunities, which is certainly a valid point. There is also a case to be made for various elements of impracticality in Vitolins' play, the onset of boredom in dull positions and a certain amount of nerves.

The elephant in the room is the mental illness suffered by Vitolins, which led to his death by suicide in 1997 at the young age of 50. This book skirts around the issue and keeps the spotlight on his games. This is a fault, as it leaves the story of his life unfinished. Sosonko notes that Vitolins "didn't have any other biography, any other life besides that involving games, tournaments and endless analytical work." This is clearly untrue and it is a shame that more detail wasn't added for the English edition of the book. How many more books will we see on Vitolins? Probably none, so the opportunity of telling the full story has more than likely been missed completely.

Nevertheless, given the stance of the authors, the book will either stand or fall by the quality of the games – and here, the reader will find copious amounts of entertainment. A small sample:



This game shows what happens when fire meets fire; the board is ablaze. Vitolins has several ways to draw, but only one path to victory.

42...♗d8!, protecting the d-pawn with tactics (43 ♟xd8 ♟d4+ is clearly unacceptable for White). Shirov did not manage to last much longer (0-1, 50).

There are plenty more similarly startling moments in this book, which can be recommended to seekers of chess tactics and entertainment, although further reading will certainly be required to learn more about the life of Vitolins.

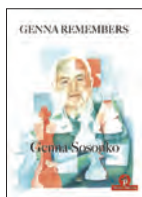
Sean Marsh



Bishop Versus Knight: The Eternal Battle Volume 1

Boroljub Zlatanovic, 232 pages, paperback
RRP £26.95 **SUBSCRIBERS £24.25**

The first volume in the latest series from Thinkers Publishing aims to help the reader appreciate better how to handle the bishop and knight, as well as the relationship between the two. Serbian IM Zlatanovic examines mistakes by even the world's best, as he looks at both those endgame positions in which the bishop is dominant and more closed ones which favour the knight. The examples are clear and well-explained, so if you'd like to improve your endgame technique or handling of the minor pieces, this new work could well come in handy.



Genna Remembers

Genna Sosonko, 260 pages, paperback
RRP £28.95 **SUBSCRIBERS £26.05**

We suspect that this release from Thinkers will prove very popular. Genna Sosonko is, of course, well known not only as a former world-class player, but especially these days for the window his writings have opened for a western audience into life in the USSR and especially the Soviet chess world. Ben Graff chatted with Genna in our February pages and here Sosonko looks back on his rich life. He recounts some of his favourite anecdotes, while reflecting on what it was like to emigrate to the west and reminds the reader all about the chess world of the twentieth century. As he puts things so well, "It was an intriguing and colorful world, and I saw it as my duty not to let it disappear into that empty abyss."

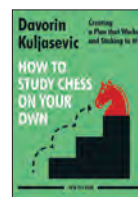


Grandmaster Repertoire: Leningrad Dutch

Mihail Marin, 344 pages, paperback
RRP £22.50 **SUBSCRIBERS £20.25**

It's great to see post-Brexit quality works once again flying off the Quality Chess presses. They include this repertoire by a world-class author and theoretician on one of his favourite and most uncompromising defences, the Leningrad Dutch, 1 d4 f5 2 g3 ♟f6 3 ♟g2 g6 4 ♟g2 ♟g7 5 0-0 0-0 6 c4 d6 7 ♞c3 ♚e8. Marin's coverage is unsurprisingly comprehensive, while featuring not just a number of new ideas for Black, but a wealth of strategic explanation.

Do note that it's possible to prefer a hardback version of *Grandmaster Repertoire: Leningrad Dutch*, available for £26.99 from Chess & Bridge, with the same being true for Marin's companion volume, *Grandmaster Repertoire: Dutch Sidelines* (paperback: £22.50; hardback: £26.99). There he completes his repertoire with 1 d4 f5, aiming to defang those dangerous sidelines, 2 ♞c3, 2 ♟g5 and 2 e4, while also taking a good look at 1 ♟f3 f5 and 1 c4 f5 move orders.



How to Study Chess on Your Own

Davorin Kuljasevic, 368 pages, paperback
RRP £22.95 **SUBSCRIBERS £20.65**

This topic must be of interest to virtually every reader, so we will have a full review in our August pages. For now we note that the Croatian GM and experienced coach – a product of Texas Tech University – explains how to optimise your studying and learning, while looking at what types of material are suitable for different levels. Kuljasevic has clearly thought deeply about the subject and presents many original thoughts, which should at least serve to make readers consider certain topics. Notably he is happy to help with studying "your openings deeply", while the work contains a number of exercises to help drive home the more important points.



How to Study the Classics

Ardan Mikhalchishin; PC-DVD,
running time: 5 hours
RRP £26.95 **SUBSCRIBERS £24.25**

This is also an important topic for the aspiring player and one which the highly-experienced Slovenian Grandmaster knows all about, having made good use of the classics in his teaching for many decades. Mikhalchishin demonstrates how viewers should study the classics, while presenting a run-down of which world champions were especially good at what. He takes a look at a number of important topics, with the aim of, for instance, helping the viewer to better understand Maroczy Bind positions or appreciate more how to know when to change the central pawn structure.



Komodo Dragon 2

Larry Kaufman and Mark Lefler, PC-DVD
RRP £89.99 **SUBSCRIBERS £80.99**

Komodo Dragon 2 is based solely on Neural Network Chess Evaluation, programmers Larry Kaufman and Mark Lefler having completely switched approach since *Komodo 14* to move to a deep-learning approach. That older program was, however, used for a great many training games, with the result that *Komodo Dragon 2* excels at positional play and also boasts ginormous tactical power. Interestingly, it's now possible to ask *Komodo* what the best move is in a position from a practical point of view, while the whole package comes with the *Fritz 17* interface.

Also recently released by ChessBase is *ChessBase Magazine 201*, which is also a PC-DVD and retails at £17.99, or £16.19 for Subscribers. Inside there's a special tribute to Vasyl Ivanchuk, as well as contributions from the likes of Anish Giri, Mihail Marin and Peter Heine Nielsen.



New in Chess Yearbook 138

Peter Boel, René Olthof & Jan Timman
(eds.), 256 pages, paperback

RRP £26.95 **SUBSCRIBERS £24.25**

The forum section of the *Yearbook* continues to grow and is, perhaps unsurprisingly, dominated by opening developments from this year's Wijk aan Zee,

while also featuring an intriguing sideline against the Najdorf. Elsewhere Erwin L'Ami looks at some very important opening trends from the correspondence world – ones which should be of help to the theoretically keen OTB player. There are also all the usual opening surveys, including four on the Caro-Kann and Gawain Jones examining a recent trend in the Advance French. Incidentally, Gawain recommends that opening in his, as we went to press, soon-to-be-published *Coffeehouse Repertoire* for Quality Chess – see the inside back cover.



Puzzle Quest 2020

Ivan Ivanisevic, 304 pages, hardback
RRP £26.95 **SUBSCRIBERS £24.25**

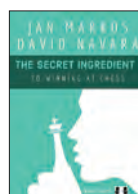
In this latest Chess Informant hardback work, the Serbian Grandmaster aims to show readers not so much how to solve tactical positions, but rather how to evaluate all types of position, ahead of deciding what needs doing. As such, while some of the 500 positions feature a sacrificial finish, others require the reader to come up with the right plan. All the games come from 2020, with the positions arranged from one star to five star difficulty categories.



The Saemisch Variation against the King's Indian and Benoni

Jan Werle; PC-DVD, running time: 7 hours
RRP £26.95 **SUBSCRIBERS £24.25**

Dutch GM Jan Werle is quietly developing a reputation for his clear but detailed presentations in the ChessBase studio. Here he takes a good look at one of his favourite lines, 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♗c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 f3. Werle maps out a repertoire for White, one which he is keen for the viewer to remember, since each section ends with a number of helpful memory markers, exercises and even a drill, where the viewer has to make use of the interactive feature of these DVDs to play out the opening moves against the program. Notable too is the recommendation of the modern 5...0-0 6 ♗ge2 move order, and if 6...c5 7 d5 e6 8 ♗g5.



The Secret Ingredient to Winning at Chess

Jan Markos & David Navara, 224 pages, hardback

RRP £26.99 **SUBSCRIBERS £24.29**

The identity of the authors certainly make one sit up and take note with this new release from Quality Chess. Slovakian GM Jan Markos has already made quite a name for himself and here teams up with world-class Czech Grandmaster David Navara. They explore a number of little discussed but very important topics, not least how to prepare, how best to work with the computer, how to allocate your time at the board and, especially, what magical ingredient sets the very best in the world apart from the average grandmaster. The material is fresh, well written and most certainly thought-provoking.

Also recently arrived at Chess & Bridge is *I was a Victim of Bobby Fischer* by Mark Taimanov (248 pages, hardback, RRP £26.99, Subscribers – £24.29), a timely Quality Chess translation of the legendary Russian Grandmaster's work from the early 1990s. Inside Taimanov not only analyses Fischer's chess in some detail, but takes a good look at all six games from their infamous 1971 match in Vancouver, one which was initially anything but one-sided.

Finally, last month we listed an exciting new work, *The Queen's Gambit – Accepted!* by Jonathan Arnott and Rosie Irwin. If you were thinking of buying this as a gift for someone new to the game, do note that Chess & Bridge now have a few hardback and signed copies in stock, retailing at £19.99 or £17.99 for Subscribers.

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