

Chess Update

VAISHALI VICTORIOUS

Indian Joy as Vaishali Rameshbabu Wins Women's Candidates to Earn World Title Shot.



A Clean Sweep — Andrew Ledger reports from the final 4NCL weekend



The Comeback — Magnus Carlsen finished strongly at the TePe Sigeman



Under the Hammer — John Henderson on the Lothar Schmid auction

Chess

Founding Editor: B.H. Wood, OBE. M.Sc †

Executive Editor: Malcolm Pein

Editors: Richard Palliser, Matt Read

Associate Editor: John Saunders

Advertising: Tao Bhokanandh

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60 Seconds with... Axel Smith



Born: 27th June 1986 in Ystad, Sweden.

Place of residence: Lund, Sweden.

Occupation: Chess writer.

Enjoyable? Absolutely! But I am mostly doing other things.

And home life? Three energetic kids.

But sometimes good to escape to: League weekends in Sweden or Denmark.

Sports played or followed: I run as much as I can, but stopped following sports when Zlatan quit.

A favourite novel? I learnt Norwegian through reading everything by Karl-Ove Knausgård.

Piece of music? I always forget listening to music, but like it whenever someone else does.

Film or TV series? Norwegian series without anything supernatural.

What's the best thing about playing chess? Competing and trying to improve.

And the worst? Doing the above things simultaneously – it inevitably leads to time-trouble and blunders.

Your best move? A queen sacrifice that I have prepared but probably never will play.

But less memorable than your worst move? In a GM norm tournament, I blundered a pawn after five moves: 1 e4 d6 2 d4 ♖f6 3 ♘c3 c6 4 f4 ♚a5 5 ♘f3?? ♜xe4.

And a highly memorable opponent? I played my future wife in my first tournament, when I was age 10. After two minutes, she had taken all of my pieces.

Favourite game of all time? Kasparov-Topalov, Wijk aan Zee 1999.

The best three chess books: I guess I should not mention my own! Jokes aside, *Queen's Gambit Declined* (Matthew Sadler), *Move First, Think Later* (Willy Hendriks), and *Excelling at Chess* (Jacob Aagaard). There are many more.

Is FIDE doing a good job? I have no clue, but I usually trust Peter Heine Nielsen's opinions...

Or your National Federation? Yes! (I was kind of employed by them for ten years, editing their magazine.)

Any advice for either? For clubs, don't start paying for non-profit work – it never ends up well. Encourage volunteers with dinners, education, books, free starting fees, and attention. Despite having made my living through chess, I cherish amateurism.

Can chess make one happy? If we allow it to, yes! And why shouldn't we?

A tip please for the club player: Use your opponent's time to look for plans, your own to calculate.

Ed. – Axel recently scored a most impressive +35 =12 -2 while giving a lengthy blindfold simul in Lund. We'll have a report next time. Until then, you may enjoy his new novel, The Grandmaster, published by New in Chess, retailing at £21.95 or £19.75 for Subscribers.

The Brightest Star?

Carl Strugnell on the specialness of 14-year-old Turkish superstar Yagiz Kaan

Sindarov and his upcoming match with Gukesh, “the youngest world champion of all time”, are the talk of the moment, with the possibility, dixit Kasparov, of bringing Carlsen back to the classical format. How could anyone steal the light of a star shining so bright? One might wonder, and yet...Yagiz Kaan Erdogmus may well be doing just that. With a 2708 live rating at the age of 14, he has set a new world record for precocity, one that is hard to imagine being broken any time soon (but who knows, with Faustino Oro around the corner).

Funnily enough, I have played both Sindarov and Erdogmus, so it is a pleasure to follow their rise – I was, as it were, an active component in their development, however minimal. The former I beat at the tender age of 8 (he was already 2000 FIDE, and a year later 2300!), while the latter I only managed to draw with (he was, after all, already 10 years old – a veteran!).

Today, I will speak only of Yagiz Kaan, in view of his recent match with former FIDE world champion Veselin Topalov, which he won by the crushing score of 5-1 (four wins, two draws). In all honesty, despite one or two mishappenings, the score does not really reflect the general impression one gets from the games. More often than not, Topalov held the balance, and in a few games even maintained a decent advantage. He had his chances, but there seemed to be a recurrent pattern of total breakdown on his part. One wrong step, and it was all over.

One could, of course, point to age as a factor not in his favour, but I believe it had more to do with the nature of the positions – a wilderness – which provoked this breakdown mechanism. We must not lose sight of the fact that Yagiz’s trainer is none other than Shakhriyar Mamedyarov, whose style of juggling imbalances can only remind us of another Azeri player, the one and only Garry K.

Y.Erdogmus-V.Topalov

2nd matchgame, Monaco 2026
Semi-Slav Defence

1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 d5 4 ♘c3 c6 5 ♕g5 h6 6 ♕h4 dxc4 7 e4 g5 8 ♕g3 b5 9 ♕e2 ♖b7 10 ♘e5 ♘bd7 11 0-0 h5 12 ♘xd7 ♗xd7 13 ♗c1 ♖g8 14 ♗e3 h4?!

I wouldn’t ideally call this dubious, nor imprecise, rather... human, all too human; inasmuch as it is the first decision which diverts from pure equality given by the computer, with a move which has rarely been played.

In this important line of the Anti-Moscow Gambit, 14...♘g4 15 ♕xg4 hxg4 16 ♖ad1

♕e7 has given many drawn outcomes in correspondence games, but I understand Topalov’s scepticism. The doubling of the pawns, with the promise of an open h-file, seems quite sterile with the white bishop planted on g3, with no possibility to uproot him in the foreseeable future. Black’s pieces are fixed to the defence, and play seemingly one-sided. The secret could well lie in the disappearance of the light-squared bishop, and Black’s counterpart, parked patiently on b7, awaits his glory days.

15 ♕e5 ♗d8 16 h3 ♘d7

With 16...g4!? 17 ♕xf6 ♗xf6 18 ♕xg4 0-0-0 19 e5 ♗h6, at the price of a pawn, Black grabs the bishop-pair, brings his king to safety with no loss of time, and has a choice of targets.

17 ♕h2 ♗b6 18 ♖fd1 e5 19 ♕g4 ♖d8



20 ♗f3?!

Ascribing punctuation is no easy task for the modern commentator. How is one to weigh the complexity of the human task, whilst quietly observing the transparency of objective truth?

The Botvinnik and Anti-Moscow variations have always been a battle of will, and evaluation here is secondary to imposing one’s ideas. Nevertheless, I find it hard to justify why Erdogmus didn’t grab a central pawn: for example, 20 ♕xd7+! (White also had at his disposal the thematic move 20 a4!?, to retain the maximum tension) 20...♗xd7 21 ♕xe5 ♖g6 22 b3 (profiting from the fact that ...b4 isn’t really an option) 22...cxb3 23 axb3 and White must be somewhat better with his central control.

20...exd4 21 e5 c5 22 ♘e4 ♕xe4 23 ♗xe4 ♕e7 24 a4 b4 25 ♗e2 d3!

Topalov’s play, we must note, has been exemplary, and shall continue to be such.

26 ♗e4 ♘f8 27 ♗xc4 ♖d4 28 ♗b5+ ♗xb5 29 axb5 c4 30 ♖xa7

Reason would lead us to believe that Black is in the driver’s seat, and we wouldn’t be far off the truth. Be that as it may, the nature of the position

(White retains the bishop-pair, there’s a passed pawn on b5, and Black’s king remains vulnerable) will forgive nothing less than perfection.



30...c3?

Blocking the opponent’s minor pieces was a must with 30...♘e6!, drowning out all attempts of activity. We can only speculate if Topalov saw 31 b6 ♕c5 32 ♖a8+ ♖d8 33 ♗xd8+ ♘xd8 34 ♖c1 ♘d7 35 ♖xc4 ♘c6 in his calculations and decided to reject it on the premise his pawn mass was shattered, or that he gave preference to the move played, believing he had a won game. In hindsight, this was his best chance.

31 b6 c2 32 b7! ♖d8 33 e6!

Evidently wrong is 33 ♖a8?? cxd1♗+ 34 ♕xd1 ♘d7!, but it gives clues as to why e5-e6 works.

33...♘xe6

The computer line 33...fxe6 34 ♕h5+ ♘g6 35 ♕c7! g4 is a miraculous attempt to stay alive. However, after 36 ♕xg4 ♘f4 37 ♖aa1 I really don’t believe this is humanly possible, whilst having to find only moves, each one more insane than the last and absolutely necessary.

34 ♖a8 ♘d7 35 ♗xd3+ ♘c6 36 ♕f3+



36...♕c5??

Topalov had played each of the last five moves



Yagiz Erdogmus is only 14 years old and the newest member of the 2700 club. He crushed Topalov 5-1 in Monaco, ending the former FIDE World Champion's long stay at over 2700.

in less than 30 seconds, including this one.

On 36...♖b6 37 ♜dxd8 ♜xd8 38 b8♗+ ♜xb8 39 ♜xb8+ the sequence ends in a perpetual after 39...♖a6 40 ♜a8+ ♖b6. It is possible that, under the assumption his position was favourable, Topalov rejected this by the method of elimination, and proceeded to play the alternative.

37 ♜dxd8

Only now did Topalov think for 13 of his remaining 14 minutes. Unfortunately for him, it is too late.

37...♞c7

If 37...c1♗+ 38 ♜d1 ♗xb2 then 39 ♜xg8 is the simplest.

38 ♜a5+ ♖c4 39 ♖e2+ 1-0

Mate is forced: 39...♖b3 40 ♜d3+ ♖xb2 41 ♖e5+ ♖b1 42 ♜a1#.

V.Topalov-Y.Erdogmus 5th matchgame, Monaco 2026



Again, the computer's evaluation here is '0.00'. During the game, Erdogmus had gone out of his way to put the furnace on full heat, by voluntarily picking a dubious line of the Caro-Kann just to mix things up. Topalov had weathered the storm until this relatively harmless-looking situation. The truth of the matter is, we are one move away from the king being toppled.

50 ♗h6+??

Instead, 50 ♜a7 ♜d1+ 51 ♖f2 ♖h4+ 52 ♖g2 ♗e4+ 53 ♗f3 ♜d2 54 ♗xe4 fxe4 55 ♖h3 (or 55 ♖f1 ♜d1+ 56 ♖g2 ♜e1 57 ♞f4) 55...♖f2 56 ♞d4 ♖xd4 57 cxd4 e3 58 ♖g3 is enough to draw comfortably.

50...♖g7 51 ♗xe6 ♜d1+ 52 ♖g2 ♗g4+ 53 ♖h2 ♗h4+ 54 ♖g2 ♗h1+ 55 ♖f2 ♗h2+ 56 ♖e3 ♗h3+ 57 ♖f2 ♜f1# 0-1

Game 6 was one-sided from start to finish, but let us go back to the first, where I believe I can detect a clue as to how to define Erdogmus' specialness.

V.Topalov-Y.Erdogmus 1st matchgame, Monaco 2026



The game proceeded:

43 ♖xf6 ♖xf3 44 h4 c5 45 dxc6 bxc6 46 ♖g6 h5 47 ♖g5 ♖e7 48 ♖g6 c5!

A timely counter, as now 49 ♖hx5?? ♖hx5 50 ♖hx5 d5! 51 cxd5 c4 would win.

49 ♖d3 ♖e6 50 ♖f4 ♖d1 51 ♖f1 d5 52 bxc5 bxc5 53 cxd5+ ♖xd5 54 ♖e3 ½-½

If holding the draw as Black could be seen as impressive, something in the analysis caught my eye: 43 ♖e4! could be seen as a good attempt to improve. After 43...♖e7 44 a4 ♖e8 45 a5 bxa5 46 bxa5 the computer evaluates this as a whopping '+4'.



The only trouble is, it fails to make any of

the lines advance. Following 46...♗h5 47 ♖f4 ♗e8 48 ♜f5 ♗d8 49 ♗e4 ♗d7 the top line consistently creates an infinity loop (i.e. 50 ♖g3 ♜f7 51 ♖g4 ♗e7, etc). This could mean one of two things. Either the computer prefers to postpone the best move, because by playing it, the evaluation will go down. In this case, the position is still breakable. Or we have the type of hermetic situation as composed by Josef Hasek.

Josef Hasek
1937



An engine will be of absolutely no help here.
1 ♖b1!! ♖g7
If you attempt to show this to your friends

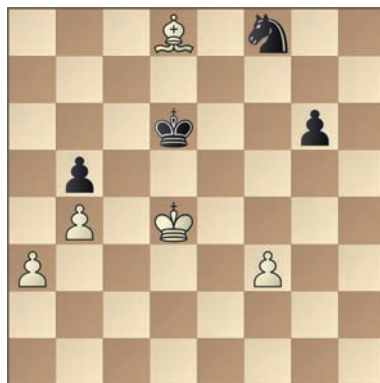
be sure that you get the sideline right! That should run 1...♞h8 2 ♞f8!.

2 ♞h6 ♖xh6 3 ♖c1 ♖g7 4 ♗d1 ♞h8 5 ♗e2 ♞h2 6 ♖f1 ♞h1+ 7 ♗e2

The draw is clear. This holistic mode of cognition is what we can still claim as humanly superior to the computer's sequential process, however otherwise useful.

Our final game was played during the Swiss Grand last year, where Erdogmus held another young star to a draw after 190 moves.

N.Abdusattorov-Y.Erdogmus
FIDE Grand Swiss, Samarkand 2025



69 ♗e4

The computer gives this as the best move, evaluating at '+4'. The same goes for 69 ♗f6! ♗d7 70 ♗d8! ♗f8.

69...♗d7 70 ♖f4

70 ♗d4! was correct.

70...♗e6

And here 70...♗d5!, holding.

71 ♗c7 ♗f6 72 ♖g5 ♖f7 73 ♗e5 ♗d5 74 ♗d4 ♗e7 75 ♖f4 ♗e6 76 ♗e4

This continued for another 115 moves (obviously a pawn moved at some point!)

Maybe this is, after all, merely a coincidence. But it is at least the beginning of a hypothesis: that Yagiz possesses this holistic mode as an inherent feature of his thinking. The ability to calculate sequentially and also the ability to stop – to find, for instance, a zugzwang at the end of a long sequence of moves – is the highest combination. As Alekhine once put it, one must be both a beast of prey and a monk.



Forthcoming Events

June 5-7 Edinburgh Congress
congress.org.uk/congress/653/home

June 5-7 Tunbridge Wells Congress
congress.org.uk/congress/750/home

June 6-7 AlphaChess Triathlon, Potters Bar
congress.org.uk/congress/688/home

June 6-7 Hastings Weekend Open
hastingschess.club/hastings-weekend-open-2026/

June 6 Fareham Rapidplay
farehamchessclub.co.uk/open-rapidplay-2026/

June 7 Ealing Rapidplay
londonfidecongress.com/ealing-rapidplay

June 9 Muswell Hill Rapid
chessengland.com

June 12-14 London League Weekender, Ravenscourt Park
londonchess.com

June 13 Petts Wood & Orpington Rapidplay
pwocc.org.uk/rapidplay-tournament/

June 14 Birmingham Rapidplay
birminghamchess.org.uk/rapidplay/

June 16 Muswell Hill Rapid
chessengland.com

June 20-21 Ilkley Congress
whiterosechess.co.uk/wrc6-ilkley-jun-2026

June 20-21 Southall Congress
londonfidecongress.com/southall-congress-1

June 20 Scarborough Rapidplay
scarboroughchess.org.uk/rapidplay.php

June 21 Frodsham Rapidplay
www.frodshamchess.co.uk

June 21 Ringwood Rapidplay
ringwoodchessclub.org.uk/rapidplay/

June 26-28 Crewe Congress
crewechessclub.co.uk/congress/

June 27 Stroud Summer Rapidplay
www.stroudchess.club/summer-2026-rapid-tournament

June 27 SCCU/London Club Championships
scu-chess.com/index.php/en/london-club-champs

And for the Online Connoisseur:

May 25 - June 6 Norway Chess, Oslo
norwaychess.no; Carlsen, Firouzja, Gukesh, Keymer, Pragg, So; Assaubayeva, Deshmukh, Ju Wenjun, Koneru, A.Muzychuk, Zhu Jiner.

June 7-15 UzChess Cup, Tashkent
uzchesscup.uz; Abdusattorov, Erigaisi, Mamedyarov, Nepomniachtchi, Niemann, Sindarov, Theodorou, Vidit, Vokhidov & Yakubboev

Congress organisers – Don't forget to email editor@chess.co.uk to ensure your event is listed, or if you really want to guarantee a good entry, contact matt@chess.co.uk to discuss having it advertised.



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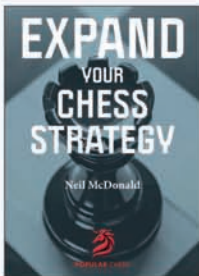
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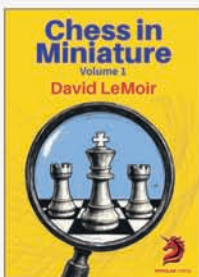
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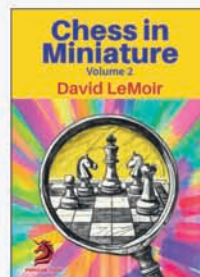
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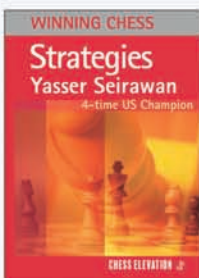
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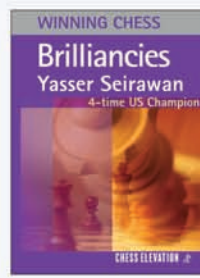
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How to Beat a Grandmaster

Paul Littlewood looks at an impressive game by a young Jonathan Speelman

When I was a junior there was a whole raft of young players who would go on to compete at the highest level. Among them was Jonathan Speelman who was a very good friend of mine as he often put me up when I ventured down South to play.

Jonathan was immensely talented and had a natural gift for chess as he understood from a very young age the more difficult aspects of the game. Consider this win against one of the most talented players of the 20th century.

J. Speelman-B. Larsen Lone Pine Masters 1978 *Old Indian Defence*

1 e4 c6 2 c4 e5

Larsen avoids the more well-trodden paths which arise after 2...d5. Instead the game proceeds along Old Indian lines.

3 d3 d6 4 d4 g4 5 e2 d7 6 d3 e7 7 0-0 g6 8 b1

Preparing to expand on the queenside by playing b2-b4 at some stage.

8...0-0 9 e1 e8 10 e3

If 10 b4 then 10...exd4 11 dxd4 ex2 12 xxe2 f8, with equal chances. Jonathan prefers to complete his development before commencing queenside operations.

10...h5!?

Intending to retain the light-squared bishops after d2. However, it is not clear that this is the best option for Black. Simpler is 10...exd4 11 exd4 f8 when the position is only slightly better for White. Clearly Larsen wants to retain the tension in the position.

11 d2!?

Probably better was to prevent any expansion in the centre by playing 11 d5. Then after 11...d4 12 d2 White has more space and a small but persistent advantage.

11...g6?!

Black continues with his plan, but it is faulty as after the next few moves White is clearly better. Instead 11...xe2 is best, but that would admit that his last move was wrong.

12 d5 a6 13 b4 h5 14 a4!? (see diagram at top of next column)

This gives Black a chance to break up White's pawn advance on the queenside by 14...a5, although the position is still good for White after 15 h3 b8 16 c2, when he will continue by doubling on the b-file and putting pressure on b7.



14...h4?

However, this is a mistake as White is now left with a free hand on the queenside to pursue his advantage there. It is also a potentially weak pawn in certain situations.

15 h3 c7 16 b3 a5?!

Too late as White now has a clever option.

17 b5!

Normally this would be met by 17...c5, closing the queenside, but then 18 g5 allows White to win the loose pawn on h4: for example, if 18...h7 then 19 ex7 xe7 20 f3, winning. Alternatively if 18...b6 then 19 exh4 ex4 20 dxe4 exh4 21 h5! f8 22 xg6 dxg6 23 h5 and White has a very strong kingside attack. Note here how White's space advantage allows him to easily switch operations across the board.

17...cxd5 18 dx5! dx5 19 cxd5 ec8 20 g4!



Larsen had underestimated this strong move which gives White a powerful initiative.

20...f8 21 c1

Now Black can only counter the possibility of White invading on the c-file by compromising his pawn structure. Otherwise, if 21...ac8 then 22 xc7 xc7 23 b6 wins.

21...d5 22 xc5 dxc5 23 b6!

Not 23 d4 immediately because of 23...b6.

23...d8 24 d4

White now has an overwhelming advantage, so Black makes a bid for freedom, but Jonathan has it all worked out.

24...xe4 25 xxe4 f5 26 xf5

The simplest, but in fact the combinative 26 d6! is also winning as after 26...g5 27 e1 fe4 28 xe4 the dominant position gives White a clear advantage, despite the exchange deficit. Note that care has to be taken in this line because one recommendation of 27 d1?! fe4 28 d5+ h8 29 xe5? (29 xb7!) allows Black to escape by 29...f6, when there is no winning line for White and he has to be extremely careful as Black has serious counterplay after 30 b1 ae8, etc.

26...xf5 27 d6! f6

If 27...exd6 then 28 d3 f6 29 dx6! xd6 30 c+ f8 (or 30...h7 31 h4+ g6 32 g3+ and wins) 31 xc5 is winning.

28 d1 d7 29 g4!



This pin is very dangerous for Black as if now 29...xa4 then 30 a3 d7 31 e3 wins.

29...d8 30 b5

Now White wins material and Black could easily resign. However, he plays on a few more moves, but Jonathan does not let him off the hook.

30...c8 31 xa5 f4 32 xc8 xc8 33 xf4 exf4 34 a7

Now if 34...b8 then 35 a5 and there is no sensible defence to all of White's threats.

34...e8 35 xxb7 h7

Hoping to get some counterplay if White plays, say, 36 a5 by 36...e1+ 37 h2 d4 when if White blithely continues 38 a6?? then 38...xf2 is a draw. Of course, White has other alternatives, but his next move extinguishes all of Black's hopes.

36 e7! 1-0

Black resigns because after 36... dxe7 37 dxe7 Kxe7 38 a5 a white pawn cannot be prevented from queening. A beautiful game by Jonathan which illustrates him at his very best. Bent Larsen was kept completely under control and never really troubled the scorers.

In 1980 Jonathan went on to become a GM and then, after winning the British Championship in 1985 and 1986, he was first equal at the 1987 Subotica Interzonal, so qualifying for the Candidates. He then reached the semi-final by beating Yasser Seirawan and Nigel Short. This took place in 1989 against Jan Timman and was a very close affair, but Jonathan eventually lost (+1, =5, -2). He did, however, achieve his highest ever FIDE rating and was fourth in the world that year.

He is a superb analyst, as well as a noted and well respected author. Nowadays he plays less, but nevertheless is still a force to be reckoned with when he takes part in the 4NCL. Meanwhile if you have any games where you have beaten a grandmaster then please send them to me (plittl@hotmail.com), and if they are suitable I will try to include them.



Jonathan Speelman back in 1977 by when he was already gaining a serious reputation as an analyst, as well as a very strong player. He first won the British Championship at Ayr in 1978, when he was just 21. To learn more about Jonathan, you may wish to peruse a recent release, *Unlock Your Chess Creativity*, in which he is one of six leading English Grandmasters featured.

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Overseas News

CROATIA – The European Schools Chess Championships took place in Trogir, Croatia (April 27 – May 5). There was some British success as Kayal Vijay of Bishop’s Stortford won the Under-9 Girls’ Championship, amassing 8/9 and edging out Turkey’s Ela Sirekbasan on tiebreak.

CZECH REPUBLIC – You might recall 16-year-old Vaclav Finek winning the Challengers Group at this year’s Prague Chess Festival, as well as a certain sparkling victory by David Navara in the Masters there. Both were in action at the Czech Championship in Brno (May 5–16), where they drew and tied for first on 7½/9, finishing two points clear of GM Stepan Zilka in this ten-player all-play-all. Navara took the title on tiebreak, his fourteenth Czech Championship success, while the adjacent Women’s Championship was run as a knockout and won by Joanna Worek, who prevailed come Armageddon to get the better of fellow WGM Kristyna Petrova.

FRANCE – Ahead of his Grand Chess Tour success (see below), Hans Niemann was in Paris, taking on fellow American Awonder Liang in a special match (April 10–15). Playing two games a day with the new ‘fast classical’ time control of 60 minutes for the whole game, plus 30 seconds a move, Niemann ran out a 7½–4½ winner.

GERMANY – Viernheim completed their domination of the Bundesliga, winning their final three matches (April 24–26), including defeating one-time powerhouse Baden-Baden 4½–3½, thanks to crushing wins from Jorden van Foreest and Alexey Sarana, over Etienne Bacrot and Alexei Shirov, respectively. Viernheim finished on 30/30, some seven points ahead of Baden-Baden and Wolfhagen. Egyptian GM Bassem Amin was the only ever-present for the champions, scoring 11½/15, while Sarana added 9½/13 and Jan-Krzysztof Duda 6/8.

ITALY – The Sardinia World Chess Festival (May 3–10) was headlined by a strong Open, won by German GM Frederik Svane with 7½/9, which left him half a point clear of top seed Ian Nepomniachtchi, as well as Armenian Grandmasters Mamikon Gharibyan and Haik Martirosyan.

The big news though was that back on 6/9 was Argentine prodigy Faustino Oro, who scored his third GM norm to become the world’s second youngest ever grandmaster at the age of 12 years, 6 months and 26 days (Abhimanyu Mishra set the record in 2021, when he was 12 years, 4 months, and 25 days old). Oro was even able to lose



You may well have watched Hans Niemann on Netflix of late. The American GM remains determined to reach the world top-ten and is still improving based on his excellent result at the GCT Super Rapid & Blitz Poland, which he won.

to Nepomniachtchi in the last round and still make a norm, having remained undefeated up to that point.

There was also a B Open, in which Edinburgh’s Tom Leah was the only non-Georgian to score 7/9 or more, as he tied for second on that score, half a point behind Shota Khodashneli.

POLAND – Hans Niemann sprang a small surprise as the determined 22-year-old American won the first event of the 2026 Grand Chess Tour, the GCT Super Rapid & Blitz Poland, which took place in central Warsaw at the Museum of the History of Polish Jews (May 5–9). Niemann dominated the initial three days of rapid chess, remaining unbeaten while amassing an impressive 6½/9 to finish half a point ahead of Wesley So. In light of his recent form, Gukesh probably wasn’t too unhappy to score 50%, which included a win over Javokhir Sindarov, who failed to bring his electric form from Cyprus and the Candidates with him.

41 g4?

This doesn’t exactly save the pawn. Instead, 41 ♖e2! ♙xg3 42 ♖f2 ♗h3 43 ♗e4+ ♖d8 44 ♖g2 would have cornered the black rook and so led to a draw after 44...f5 45 ♖xh3 fxe4 46 ♖xe4.

41...♗e5+ 42 ♖c3 ♖xg4?

42...♙xg4! should be winning, and if 43 ♙xg4 ♖xg4 44 ♖c4 g5!.

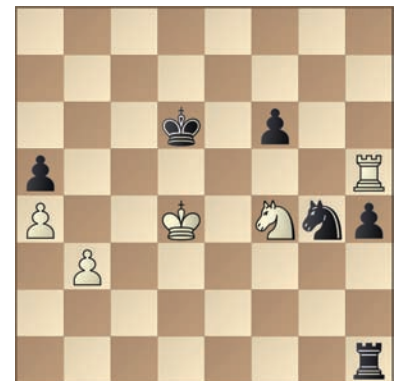
43 ♖c4

Gukesh seizes his chance to acquire some counterplay.

43...h5 44 ♖xb6 g5! 45 ♗d7+ ♖e6 46 ♗h7 gxh4 47 ♙xh5 ♗h1 48 ♖d5

There was also 48 b4!? when after 48...axb4+ the engines even just want to go 49 ♖b2 to prevent ...♗a1.

48...♖d6 49 ♖f4 ♖xe3 50 ♖d4 ♖g4



51 ♖e4?

A tactical oversight. 51 ♗d5+ ♖c6 52 ♗h5 was one better approach, 51 ♗h8 another, with a relatively easy hold in either case.

51...h3! 52 ♖f5

This is hopeless, but if 52 ♖xh3 ♗xh3! 53 ♗xh3 ♖f2+, winning.

D.Gukesh–H.Niemann Warsaw (rapid) 2026



52...h2 53 ♖h3 ♗g1 0-1

Come the closing two days of blitz, Sindarov to an extent and especially Caruana were back in the groove. The former did the double over Gukesh, as did the latter while racking up a huge 13/18. A power-packed finish of 6½/7 almost enabled Caruana to catch Niemann, but the younger American won his last two games to finish the blitz in third place on 9½ points (Alireza Firouzja was second on 11½). That meant Niemann took home the \$50,000 first prize after finishing on a combined score of 22½/36, a half-point ahead of Caruana, with So third on 21.

A month earlier, 17-year-old Ukrainian IM Roman Dehtiarov had sprung a major surprise by winning the European Individual Championship in Katowice (April 6-20). Dehtiarov was only the 126th seed in this 500-player Swiss, but finished most powerfully with 6½/7, en route to a 2781 performance, ending his superb run with victories over Maxime Lagarde and David Anton Guijarro. Sharing second on 8½/11 were three Azeri GMs, Nijat Abasov, Aydin Suleymanli and Mahammad Muradli, while all of Shreyas Royal, Matthew Wadsworth and Jonah Willow finished on 6½, a point ahead of Scottish teenage FM Rishi Vijayakumar.

RUSSIA – The 23rd Karpov Tournament is no longer the event it once was in its 'Poikovsky' glory days, but it still attracted a fairly strong line-up to Khanty-Mansiysk (April 11-16), and used the 'fast classical' time control. 19-year-old Belarusian star Denis Lazavik prevailed with an unbeaten 6/9, to edge out Hungarian GM Benjamin Gledura by half a point, with 15-year-old Russian GM Ivan Zemlyanskii involved in a four-way tie for fourth on 50%.

SPAIN – Ben Graff reports on the 5th Menorca Open (April 7-12) earlier in these pages, which was headlined by the Menorca Cerrado, a six-player rapid event won by Nihal Sarin with 6/10, which left him half a point ahead of Ruslan Ponomarev and Richard Rapport. Dommaraju Gukesh and Leinier Dominguez Perez were a further point back, followed home by Pentala Harikrishna on '-2'. Meanwhile in the pretty strong Open A, 17-year-old American star Mishra Abhimanyu



Denis Lazavik excels online at rapid and blitz, and is also climbing up from 2600 at OTB classical.

prevailed on tiebreak after finishing alongside Leon Mendonca, Li Di and Argentina's Tomas Sosa on 7½/9, half a point ahead of Alexei Shirov, Daniel Fernandez and five others.

THAILAND – Nigel Short was part of a large tie for first at the Bangkok Chess Club Open, which took place this year in Hua Hin (April 11-19). Yet another young player enjoyed a memorable result as 14-year-old Vietnamese IM Dau Khuong Duy prevailed on tiebreak after finishing on 7/9 alongside Short, Brandon Jacobson (USA), Surya Ganguly, Ghosh Aronyak (both IND), Loek van Wely (NED), Titas Stremavicius (LTU), Ido Gorshtein (ISR), and Saidakbar Saydaliev (UZB).

USA – While he has mainly been busy of late with his Take Take Take platform, which has partnered with Lichess, Magnus Carlsen still played in the Chess.com Open Playoffs (April 23-26), a qualifier for this summer's Esports World Cup. Played with a 10-0 time control, Carlsen defeated Shant Sargsyan and Vincent Keymer 2½-½, then Denis Lazavik 3-2 before, in the Final, overcoming Jan-Krzysztof Duda 3-2. However, the Polish no.1 would gain revenge in the subsequent Grand Final, winning 2½-½, before Carlsen took the Grand Final Reset 2-0.

Breaking News: As we prepared to go to press, 2022 British Champion IM Harry Grieve had won his last two games at the latest SixDays Budapest tournament (May 14-19). That meant Harry won the tournament by a point and a half, while, even more importantly, obtaining his third and final norm to complete all the requirements for the GM title.



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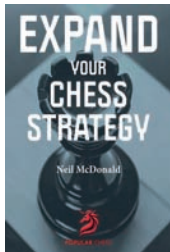
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GCT Super Rapid Poland – Warsaw – 5 - 7 May 2026 (Category 20, average rating = 2734)

	Player	Country	Rating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Pts	TPR
1	Hans Niemann	USA	2728	*	½	½	1	1	1	½	½	1	½	6½	2901
2	Wesley So	USA	2754	½	*	1	½	0	½	½	1	1	1	6	2857
3	Vladimir Fedoseev	SLO	2700	½	0	*	½	1	½	1	0	1	1	5½	2818
4	Dommaraju Gukesh	IND	2732	0	½	½	*	1	1	0	1	½	0	4½	2734
5	Fabiano Caruana	USA	2788	0	1	0	0	*	½	1	½	½	1	4½	2728
6	Jan-Krzysztof Duda	POL	2739	0	½	½	0	½	*	½	½	1	1	4½	2733
7	Maxime Vachier-Lagrave	FRA	2717	½	½	0	1	0	½	*	1	0	½	4	2693
8	Javokhir Sindarov	UZB	2776	½	0	1	0	½	½	0	*	½	1	4	2686
9	Alireza Firouzja	FRA	2759	0	0	0	½	½	0	1	½	*	½	3	2606
10	Radoslaw Wojtaszek	POL	2650	½	0	0	1	0	0	½	0	½	*	2½	2577

This Month's New Releases



Expand Your Chess Strategy

Neil McDonald, 328 pages
Popular Chess

RRP £24.99 **SUBSCRIBERS £22.49**

It is good to see Neil McDonald back with another book. He has an entertaining and highly instructive style of writing and his books essentially offer a large number of chess lessons. This one offers to help "Take your results and rating to the next level and beyond!" with the blurb continuing thus:

"Have you reached a plateau in chess? Do you ever struggle to find a plan, or learn after a game that your chosen strategy was all wrong? *Expand Your Chess Strategy* will dramatically enhance your ability in this vital area of chess, providing the key to unlock further improvement."

Complete, fully annotated games are used to provide illustrative material for nine topics, each of which enjoys a full chapter, namely: Overstretching a Defence, Exploiting the Superior Queen, Targeting the Queen, Restraint of a Pawn Structure, Breakthrough to Create Passed Pawns, Using a Knight to Break a Blockade, The Bishop in Siege Warfare, Improving your Powers of Resistance, and Long Range Manoeuvring.

Games by modern world champions such as Magnus Carlsen, Dommaraju Gukesh and Ding Liren rub shoulders with classics from the Steinitz-Lasker eras. After all, chess strategy does not depend on the latest trends in opening theory and McDonald has always kept one eye on the classics. In these days of never-ending online tournaments, which never stick in the memory, this book provides a useful reminder that players from former times also know how to play chess.

The book is replete with common sense advice and questions for the reader, entirely consistent with the standard style of instructive books from Popular Chess. In keeping with the theme of learning from the greats, a particularly noteworthy example is the 54th and final game in the book, which requires no fewer than 16 pages of explanatory notes as the author examines a fine example of long range manoeuvring.

I.Boleslavsky-I.Rudakovsky USSR Championship, Moscow 1945



Towards the end of a fabulous game in which Rudakovsky worked miracles to hold an inferior position together for such a long time and Boleslavsky had to produce some magic to finally breach the defence, this position was eventually reached.

The work is not yet done; players of the past certainly had extreme powers of resilience. The question is, to which square should Boleslavsky move his attacked knight?

47 ♖f3, as played in the game, is the obvious move. However, McDonald demonstrates that **47 ♖h7!!** is much stronger. The natural reaction is to reject this move because of the pin, **47... ♗h4**, but then **48 g4!** is very strong – **48... ♗xg4 49 ♖f6** allows White to occupy the optimum squares for his pieces. It is the sort of move found only with the help of a chess engine, as the author admits is indeed the case here. "In human thinking h7 doesn't exist as a square for the knight – only a square for the rook." There was still work to do after the move played in the game, but White got there in the end (1-0, 76).

This is typical of McDonald – he brings to light highly instructive games which would otherwise have been completely forgotten and that would be a real shame. *Expand Your Chess Strategy* offers a cornucopia of wonderful, highly accessible material, which should indeed help the diligent student to improve their understanding of chess strategy.

Sean Marsh



Pan Inspector:

A Chess Biography of Yuri Sakharov

Mykola Fuzik, 332 pages
Elk and Ruby

RRP £26.95 **SUBSCRIBERS £24.25**

Elk and Ruby's admirable resurrection of lesser-known Soviet era chess players continues, with this very interesting work on the life and games of Yuri Sakharov. A powerful Ukrainian player, coach and second, the vast majority of his chess was played inside the Soviet Union. Therefore, for most readers – even the diligent chess historians – Sakharov's name may scratch lightly on the memory, but with little attendant substance.

Mykola Fuzik, "in close cooperation with Vladimir Sergeev", plugs the gaps in admirable fashion, with a plethora of biographical material and a bonanza of previously uncelebrated games. Indeed, the games, which feature opponents including Mikhail Tal, Mark Taimanov, Leonid Stein, David Bronstein and Lev Polugaevsky, have excellent annotations from a variety of people, including Sakharov himself.

Sakharov's life story takes many extraordinary twists and turns. As his years spanned 1922-1981, he was, of course, active during the terrible times of the Second World War, falling foul of the authorities for various misdemeanours, including, bizarrely, buying a bucket of marmalade. Further trouble followed. As was customary when one was judged to be a criminal, his name was erased from official chess records at the time. He suffered badly in captivity, but somehow achieved rehabilitation and managed to return to a very active chess life in the 1950s.

There are many historical documents and rare photographs to be found throughout the text. The research has clearly been meticulous. Some lives always seem to be dogged by hardship and tragedy. Sakharov lost his life after being struck by a train. Was it an accident, suicide, or something else? We will never know.

Meanwhile, his legacy lives on through his amazing life story and his powerful play. He was unafraid of anyone and was quite

willing to stand toe-to-toe with Mikhail Tal in the Poisoned Pawn variation of the Sicilian Najdorf, for example (a draw). Elsewhere, he missed a win against former World Champion Vasily Smyslov in this highly combative King's Indian encounter.

V.Smyslov-Y.Sakharov
USSR Championship, Leningrad 1960



36...♙f7?

"This squanders the win. Black should have played 36...g2! 37 ♖xb6 gxf1+ 38 ♔xf1 ♘c5 39 f3 ♗h3+ 40 ♔e2 ♗g2+ with a decisive advantage. 37 ♗e1 is met with 37...f3!"

37 fxg3 ♗h3?

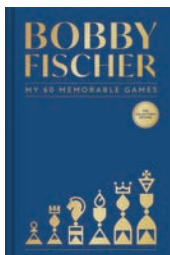
37...♗g4 still keeps things equal.

38 ♖b2!

"Now White has enough time to repel all the threats and retain the material advantage."

Summing up, chess historians should make this book a priority purchase and lovers of sharp, well annotated games will find plenty of interest here too.

Sean Marsh



My 60 Memorable Games – The Collector's Edition

Bobby Fischer, 392 pages
Batsford Chess

RRP £30.00 **SUBSCRIBERS £27.00**

Bobby Fischer's famous chess book – published before he even reached his peak – is, of course, an absolute classic which should already be in the collections of all chess fans. There is something about the way in which Fischer's voice and personality permeate the text which bring both him and his games so vividly to life. There have been various editions since its initial publication in 1969, including the infamous and highly controversial Batsford version of 1995.

Readers will surely be more than aware of the book's excellent contents, from Fischer's virtually exemplary analysis to his observations regarding

his opponents. Note the use of 'memorable' in the title instead of 'best', which permits Fischer to include nine draws and three losses amongst the wins. It is very unclear how many other top players would have the honesty to feature any games other than wins.

This short review is to assess the merits of the new "collector's edition". What does it offer that earlier editions do not? Is it worth a double-dipping upgrade?

The hardback binding is nicely done. There is also an introduction by Andy Soltis and eight pages of photographs. The text and format of the main text will be instantly familiar to everyone in possession of an earlier edition. As Batsford found out in 1995, some things are definitely best left well alone.

In conclusion, if anyone out there has somehow failed to buy a copy of *My 60 Memorable Games* then this is definitely a must-buy. As cliched as it sounds, no chess library is complete without a copy of this book. However, I do not think the upgrade makes for an essential purchase to anyone who already has a copy; yet, we know Fischer fans will lap it up anyway. Getting back to what really made Fischer tick – his love of and excellence at playing chess – makes for a refreshing, if overly familiar, change from the recently created sub-genre of books written by Fischer's former girlfriends.

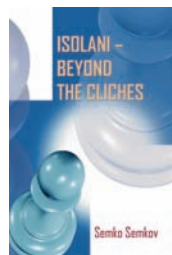
Sean Marsh



Fritz 21 (PC only)

ChessBase, PC, Booklet or download
RRP £59.95 **SUBSCRIBERS £53.95**

The latest version of the popular chess-playing program is now available, with the silicon monster having gained another 40 Elo points to apparently play at an incredible 3620 Elo! Fritz 21 also comes with a modernised, highly polished interface, making for an even more pleasant playing and analytical experience.



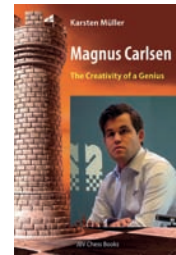
Isolani: Beyond the Cliches

Semko Semkov, 200 pages, paperback

RRP £23.95 **SUBSCRIBERS £21.55**

Chess Stars' latest book explores how the venerable isolated queen's pawn (the IQP or isolani) is viewed in grandmaster practice in the 21st century, with Semkov especially drawing on the practice of Magnus Carlsen. While there is a chapter on how the side with the IQP may

look to attack, there's also useful coverage of how best to blockade the isolani, as well as chapters on queenside pressure and deciding whether or not to create an isolated d-pawn. Each chapter contains a detailed examination of the key concepts followed by some complete model games. If you regularly find yourself playing or facing an IQP, Semkov's coverage should broaden your horizons and really help.



Magnus Carlsen:

The Creativity of a Genius

Karsten Müller, 192 pages, paperback
RRP £21.95 **SUBSCRIBERS £19.75**

While the world no.1 is known for his ability to play almost any opening and surprise opponents there, he is also more than capable of surprises and creative play later in the game, as shown clearly in this new work from JBV Chess Books. Karsten Müller has found a number of interesting trends in Carlsen's play, which we get to see here, including how he attacks against various castled situations and his use of certain pawn structures. There are also very interesting chapters on psychology and Carlsen's ability at rapid chess. Müller completes each mini-section with a number of exercises, while throughout the book each diagram has a QR code meaning they can be easily accessed via your smartphone.



Make Your Move!

Carsten Hansen, 274 pages, paperback
RRP £27.99 **SUBSCRIBERS £25.19**

This is the omnibus edition of two separate volumes with the same title, meaning that the reader now gets to enjoy more than 400 positions to solve, taken from Hansen's popular column in *Chess Life*. Each set of puzzles features three easy, three medium and three difficult positions, meaning that fans of our *Find the Winning Moves* feature may especially enjoy the format.

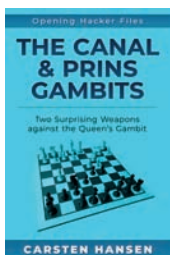


Master Class Vol.20: Bent Larsen

ChessBase, PC/MAC booklet or download;
running time: 10 hours

RRP £34.95 **SUBSCRIBERS £31.45**

ChessBase's star author team of Mihail Marin, Karsten Müller, Dorian Rogozenco and Oliver Reeh tackle one of the most creative players of all time, the mercurial 'Great Dane', Bent Larsen (1935–2010). Larsen was simply world-class in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, always fighting hard and capable of some impressive practical decisions. His style, middlegame strengths and endgame ability all come under the microscope in this welcome new production, while the plethora of fascinating material is rounded off by a fascinating recording from Peter Heine Nielsen, presenting his personal memories of his fellow Dane.



The Canal & Prins Gambits

Carsten Hansen, 200 pages, paperback
RRP £20.99 **SUBSCRIBERS £18.89**

Carsten Hansen has certainly been busy of late, with this new opening work featuring in his 'Opening Hacker Files' series. After 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♖c3 ♗f6 if White plays 4 ♙g5, a surprise may lie in wait with 4...c5, and if 5 cxd5 then either 5...cxd4 or 5...♗b6!?. Both of these dangerous lines for Black enjoy detailed coverage here, as Hansen looks to spice up readers' existing QGD repertoires.

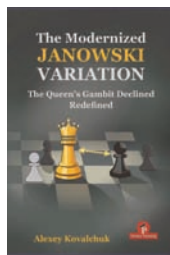
Also new from Carsten Hansen is *Three-Move Chess Problems and How to Solve Them* by Frederick Baird, which appears in his 'Alexander Game Book Classics' series. First published in 1902 and now updated by Hansen, this book provides a welcome description of the various types of mate in three and general chess problem terminology, as well as some very useful advice on how to solve them. Running to 95 pages, this new edition of Baird's book retails at £10.99 or £9.89 for Subscribers.



The Grandmaster

Axel Smith, 232 pages, paperback
RRP £21.95 **SUBSCRIBERS £19.75**

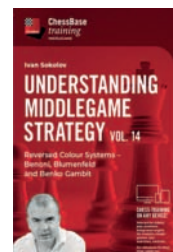
We learnt a little earlier in these pages about the Swedish GM and popular author, not least of *Pump Up Your Rating* and *The Woodpecker Method*, whose new work for New in Chess is something slightly different, a novel. As the blurb puts it, "The Grandmaster is a powerful novel of ambition, obsession, and the fragile boundary between brilliance and self-destruction." Smith's insight into high-level chess will resonate with readers, who may well enjoy this well-written fiction which clearly shows the cost of aiming for perfection at the chess board. If you prefer your fiction in hardback, *The Grandmaster* is also available in that format retailing at £25.95 or £23.35 for Subscribers.



The Modernized Janowski Variation

Alexey Kovalchuk, 320 pages, hardback
RRP £39.95 **SUBSCRIBERS £35.95**

Subtitled 'The Queen's Gambit Declined Refined', this is a detailed repertoire for Black from a Russian theoretician and Thinkers Publishing, centred around meeting both 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♖c3 and 3 ♗f3 with 3...a6. Kovalchuk mainly covers the Exchange variation, where Black often wants to play a quick ...♗d6, the QGA style 3 ♖c3 a6 4 ♗f3 dxc4, and 3 ♗f3 a6 4 g3, with then 4...dxc4 5 ♙g2 ♖c6 his choice against the Catalan. For anyone looking to spice up their solid QGD repertoire, the fashionable early ...a6 and this book may well be the answer.

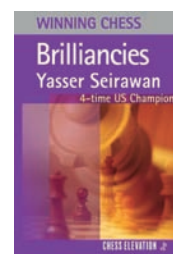


Understanding Middlegame Strategies Vol.14: Reversed Colour Systems – Benoni, Blumenfeld and Benko Gambit

Ivan Sokolov, PC/MAC download; running time: 5 hours, 50 minutes

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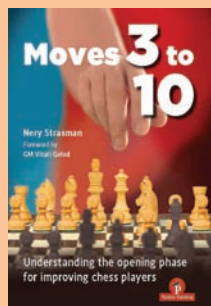


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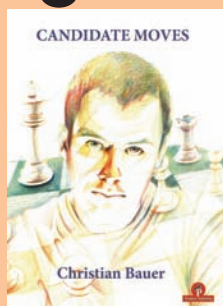
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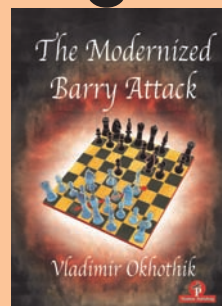
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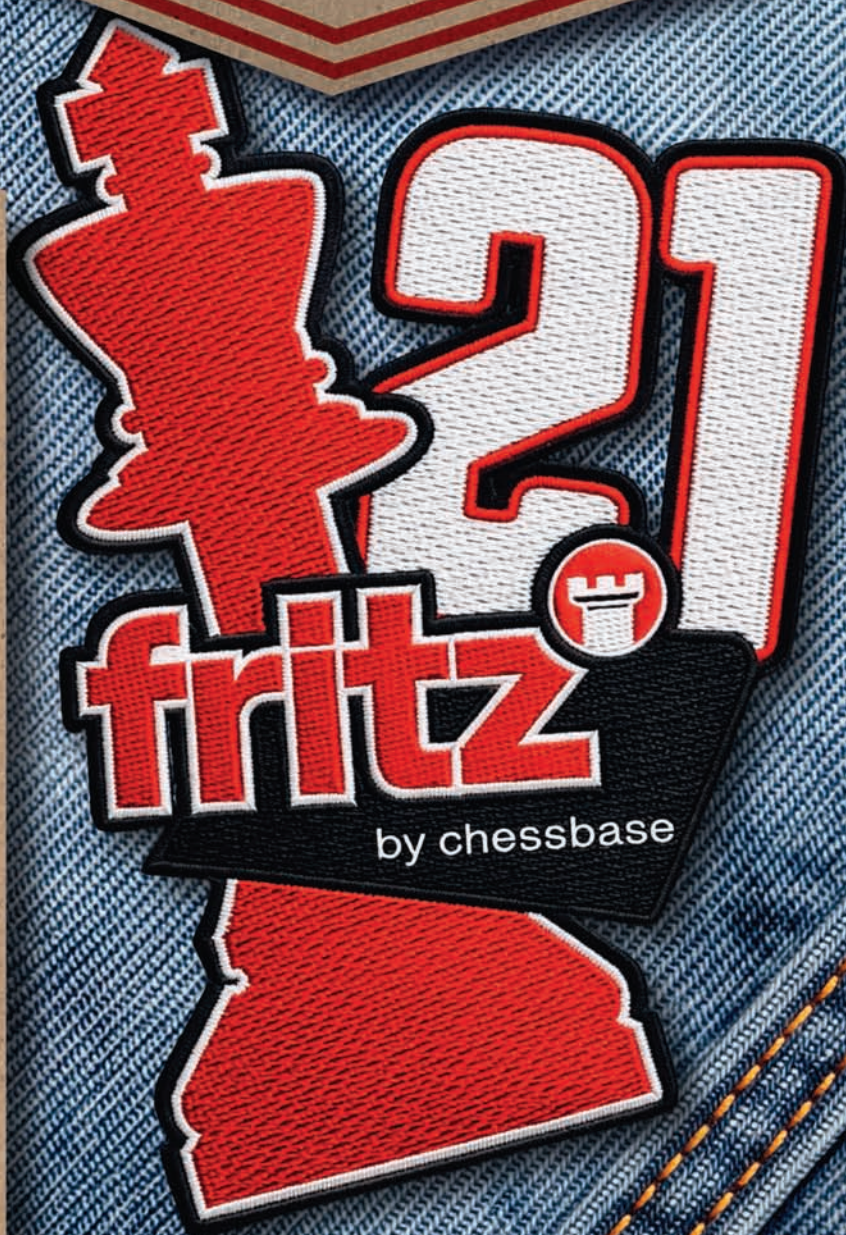
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