



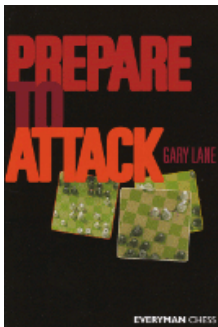
## BOOK REVIEWS

### From the Archives

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## From the Archives...

Since it came online in 1996, [ChessCafe.com](https://www.chesscafe.com) has published thousands of articles, reviews, and columns. This high quality material remains available in the [ChessCafe.com Archives](#). However, we decided that the occasional selection from the archives might be a welcome addition to the regular fare. We hope you enjoy *From the Archives*...

## Making Sense of the Frenzy

Taylor Kingston

*Storming the Barricades*, by Larry Christiansen, 2000 Gambit Publications, Figurine Algebraic Notation, 174pp. \$19.95

Larry Christiansen has been one of America's top chessplayers for over twenty years. Originally from California (born 1956), a resident of Germany 1990-97 and currently living in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Christiansen attained the grandmaster title in 1977. He has played in sixteen U.S. Championships, winning twice and placing second five times. He has won about a dozen international tournaments, notably Linares 1981 (equal first with Karpov, ahead of Spassky, Gligoric, Larsen, Portisch, Ribli, Kavalek, Ljubojevic et al), Munich 1991 (over Beliavsky, Gelfand, Hübner, Nunn, J. Polgar et al), Vienna 1991 (over Nunn, J. Polgar, Epishin, Ribli, and Kindermann), and Reykjavik 1998 (over I. Sokolov, De Firmian, Hector, Nijboer, Gallagher, Ward and Hansen). He has represented the U.S. in nine Olympiads, and was a member of the gold-medal-winning U.S. side at the 1997 World Team Championships. His FIDE rating has gone as high as 2630 and he has ranked as high as thirteenth in the world.

One does not get that far in chess without knowing chess tactics and how to use them. In his own games Christiansen shows a sharp, aggressive style, and with this book he shows himself a connoisseur of good attacking play in general. The book is aimed at serious, experienced players of above-average strength, say Elo 1700 or 1800 and up, who want to improve their attacking prowess.

There are about ninety games, some given in part but most in full, with extensive notes. They are divided into six main themes:

- General Considerations
- Ripping Apart the King Position
- King-Hunting
- How Not to Attack
- Seizing Opportunities
- Creating and Exploiting Weaknesses

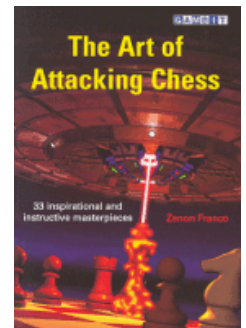
Discussion focuses almost solely on middlegame topics; there is very little about openings or endgames. About thirty of the ninety games are Christiansen's own, about sixty are by other players, most of them currently active, high-ranking GMs such as Kasparov, Anand, Ivanchuk, Kramnik, Lautier, Gulko, Shabalov, Shirov, Topalov; a few deceased greats such as Tal are included. The great majority of games are from the 1990s, most others from the '80s or '70s; none is earlier than 1960.

What sets this apart from some other similar books we've seen recently are Christiansen's clear, detailed explanations. Too often today one sees

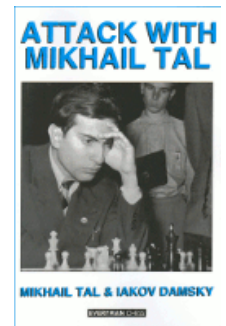
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annotations like "This is the sort of position where a good player like me can do some really exciting stuff. Here 20.Bxh7+, 20.Rb5+, and 20.0-0-0 are all good, but even I had to think for a whole five minutes before I found the amazing 20.Na1!!". Pretty cool, huh?" Eventually the reader realizes that he's being patronized rather than educated, and that the author wants to brag more than teach.

Instead Christiansen's primary aim is no-nonsense, practical instruction. If, as Hans Ree said, chess today resembles "the headhunting frenzy of axe-wielding savages," Christiansen helps one make sense of that frenzy by explaining, clearly and at length, the factors indicating whether an attack is feasible, unfeasible, optional, necessary or impossible. Typically he presents a full game, but without notes for the first fifteen to thirty moves, until reaching a critical middlegame position. Critical not in the sense of a decisive combination being available; rather that a point of decision about if and how to attack has arrived. He then gives a thorough general assessment of the position, concentrating on attack-related factors, followed by detailed analysis of the remaining moves. This is best illustrated by a lengthy excerpt. In the chapter "Seizing Opportunities" Christiansen discusses "a memorable slash-and-burn slugfest," **Shirov-Gulko**, Groningen PCA Qualifier 1993:



[FEN "4r1r1/k2nn2q/1p2pp1p/p2p3P/b1p1BP1/P1P1N3/2P1QPBI/2R2RK1 w - - 0 24"]

He writes, "A very complicated position has been reached from a Winawer French. Black anticipates creating play on the g-file by means of ...Qg7 followed by the thrust ...e5 or ...f5. White would like somehow to open the position to the benefit of his bishop-pair but he is not well placed to do that. That annoying bishop on a4 helps to keep the position closed while tying White's pieces to the defence of the c2-pawn. The rook on c1 makes a sad impression and a logical move would be the obvious 24.Rb1, simply putting this piece on its best square before taking concrete action. Another reasonable move here would be the sophisticated 24.Bd6!? in order to provoke 24...Nc8 25.Bg3, when White has improved the position of his bishop while Black has moved his knight to a more passive square (which is why 24.Bd6 is better than the immediate 24.Bg3).

"Of course, White can also consider the violent sacrifice 24.Nxc4, which, if accepted, opens the h1-a8 diagonal for his dormant bishop and gains two pawns with increased activity. Black then has essentially three replies:

"1) 24...Bb5 can be swiftly discounted: 25.Qxe6 dxc4 (there are no promising discoveries for the knight on e7) 26.Rb1 and it is abundantly obvious that White has a raging attack and initiative bubbling around Black's king. He is certain to have full compensation.

"2) 24...dxc4 gives White two options (there are no other forcing moves available):

"2a) 25.Qxc4 looks attractive, since it seems that the bishop on a4 is in trouble, but it neglects kingside defence. Black returns the piece for a vigorous attack with 25...Nd5! 26.Bxd5 exd5 27.Qxa4 Rxc4+ 28.Bg3 f5!.

"2b) So White must turn his attention to 26.Qxe6. From e6 the queen works on both sides of the board and in the centre, where it helps dominate Black's restless knights. But Black is not without resources. After 25...Rc8 26.Rfe1

Rg7 27.Bd6 Alexei Shirov gives the line 27...Ng8 28.Be4 [as being clearly better for White] in [Informator 59/334](#), missing the effective but difficult-to-find answer 27...Qg8! 28 Bxe7 (28.Qxg8 Nxg8) 28...Rxb4, when Black gets his piece back thanks to the pin on the g-file." Christiansen continues at some length before coming to the actual game continuation, **24 Nxc4?! e5!?**, and analyzes the remaining moves (½-½, 41) in considerable depth.

It should be clear from this excerpt that his style of annotation is not for the inexperienced, who would be better off with, say, [The Amateur's Mind](#) by Silman. However, for sufficiently advanced readers it provides excellent instruction, both in terms of general considerations and tactical specifics. It's also clear he has a better command of English than many writers being published these days (in the second sentence of the excerpt he even avoided splitting an infinitive!). Readers looking for more emphasis on general ideas might prefer, say, Vukovic's [The Art of Attack](#) or Spielmann's [The Art of Sacrifice](#), but of course in those classic works there will be no games by today's GMs.

The book includes a brief autobiography, and Christiansen discusses some of his own games, but not in an egotistical fashion. Quite the opposite, in fact, in the chapter "How Not to Attack", where he presents as Exhibit A the "kamikaze attack" of **Christiansen-Rogoff**, Pasadena 1978:



