



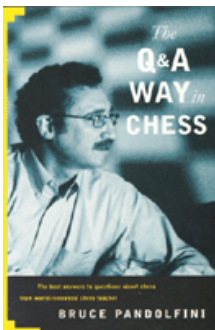
COLUMNISTS

The Q & A Way

Bruce Pandolfini

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Book Draws and Drawbacks

**Question** I've often read this statement: "It's a book draw." Is there a book on Book Draws? How does one utilize the computer to study chess openings? I've read that the young GMs learn quicker via the computer. Again, how is this done? I cannot find anything that tells exactly how to do it. Chess instruction is light years behind golf instruction for either the beginner or the intermediate player in my opinion. Major golf magazines are loaded with constructive tips and strategy. How come chess magazines do not do this? Having a few tactics to solve each month is not worth the price of the subscription. Thank You. **Mike Venia (USA)**

**Answer** I may be a poor reader, but it seems to me that your question actually consists of several questions. The first question you raise concerns the term "book draw." A book draw is a position that should result in an actual draw if both sides play the best moves or the right ones. In other words, it's a draw that chess theory has determined is a draw. Thus, a book draw is also known as a theoretical draw.

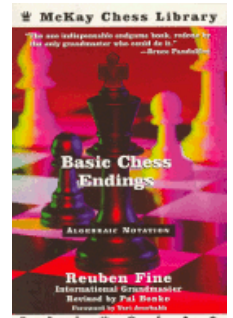
Some commentators may loosely use (usely loose?) these terms in relation to openings and middlegames. But really the term "book draw" predominantly applies to endgame positions. To that end, there's also a companion term, which is "book win." A book win is an endgame position that theory has determined should produce a win. That is, it's a win if correctly handled by the dominant side, even if the opponent counters with the very best defensive moves possible.

To my knowledge, no book deals entirely with book draws, listing and classifying every known case. There are various books that try to assemble gads of essential or worthy material to incorporate into one's general arsenal. Most of them are endgame books, attempting to classify simple positions into basic wins and draws. While it doesn't grapple with book draws per se, *Domination in 2,545 Endgame Studies* by Genrikh M. Kasparyan is one of the great books dealing with the classification of certain aesthetic chess concepts. Another book that attempts to gather together a horde of grandmaster info-bits is Rashid Ziyatdinov's *GM-RAM*. That's a fun book, too, but it doesn't revolve around book draws either. Who knows, it's never too late to write one.

You also pose a question about how to use a computer to study openings. I wouldn't know where to begin here, though I have a sense that here would be a good time to end. Let's say you'd like to study openings using a computer. Let's just say it. Let's also say that you have [ChessBase software](#) or something comparable. You could input the [ECO code\(s\)](#), signifying the lines in which you're interested and see what games are generated. You could look at all of that information (at high speed, if you so choose), and by the end of that exciting journey, which could take some time, I'm willing to bet you'll know more about your preferred opening variations. If I were you, however, I'd probably winnow that mass of material down to a manageable size, concentrating on specialized subsets of ideas within a particular code range.

You could also input specific pawn configurations to see if there are other lines, superficially unrelated to the variants of initial spotlight, but that somehow cloak commendable and useful transpositions. Who knows? Maybe you could make it seem as if you've stumbled into giving your opponent an apparently attractive looking situation, while really luring him or her into something unspeakably dreadful. Computers can better help you find such transpositions. Moreover, with a computer, you could also check the latest games and opening wrinkles played by the world's top players as they occur or practically so. Sites such as PlayChess.com are an excellent source of the

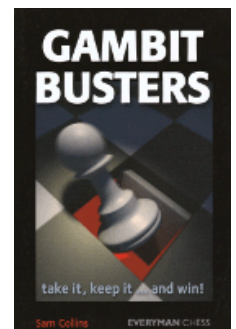
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latest developments. But there are many other online attractions to aid your study efforts. Much of that can provide backup and fresh thinking for your openings and how you prepare them. Naturally, I'm assuming that you do attempt to prepare them.

I think you also ask something about why chess magazines don't offer what golf magazines provide. You mention how much more is made available in golf publications for beginning and intermediate players than is offered in similar chess publications. You go on to suggest that much of what appears as standard chess fare is designed for superior players. I can't quite agree with your assessment of the situation. Many chess publications actually cater to the introductory and intermediate elements. In fact, it seems to me that the opposite is true, that there's not enough out there for strong players. That's the complaint I always hear from experts, masters, and beyond. Whether it's *Chess Life*, or any of the countless chess publications with decent readerships, they appear to concentrate on beginning and middle range players. You feel as if you're wasting your money for a few tactics to solve. Masters often feel the converse, that there isn't anything to solve. I suspect they'd like to get more for their money too. I have it, maybe they should try golf.

**Question** I am an average player and a retired judge. I have seen over and over the argument for the opening being the hardest phase to teach and study. I have also seen the argument for the endgame getting that claim. I believe neither argument is correct, that the middlegame is the hardest phase to learn and master. Recently I had some trouble trying to defend my position with a few friends. Could you help me on this? **Samuel West (USA)**

**Answer** It's because I couldn't defend my own positions that I gave up playing serious chess. But no matter, I'm willing to play misdemeanor and answer your question. Besides, I think I agree with you anyway. In my own teaching, I usually emphasize the endgame, for all the right and wrong reasons. But I guess you could say that the opening is easier to study because you always start your study from the same position, with the pieces setup from the beginning (though actually, the most interesting opening positions usually occur later, often when you're in transition to the middlegame). Anyhow, this way you could say that a student could find his or her place easily enough. Furthermore, you could say that the endgame is easier to study because there usually are fewer pieces on the board (though, the truth is, it can be harder sometimes to find your way through the labyrinth of space on a virtually empty board). You could complete your stance, I suppose, by saying that the middlegame is harder in those two respects. It's not like an opening, with all the pieces starting in the same place; and it's not reduced to bare bones like many endgames. Maybe those arguments will work with your friends, but I wouldn't bring them to court.

**Question** People always debate about the strongest chess player of all time. Answers usually devolve back to world chess champions. In your opinion, who was the weakest world chess champion ever? **Peter Prendon (USA)**

**Answer** I'm going to go out on the limb and say Damiano.

**Question** In recent months my rating jumped from 1600 to 1800. My chess style is to sacrificing material for the initiative. My question is should I be worried that some of my attacks in OTB or online chess are not fully sound, but usually work even against 2000+ rated players? Should I return to a scientific study of chess square by square, and not be proud of the beauty of the attacks and complications created during the game? **H. Shant (USA)**

**Answer** You say that your rating has gone up 200 points in recent months, doing what you've been doing. I have to admit, I'm not sure what it is you've been doing, but a full USCF rating class is a significant gain. I would have to say you've been highly successful, doing what you've been doing. You even indicate that what you've been doing has worked against players of the expert class. So why would you want to change anything? In more erudite terms, "if it ain't broke, why fix it?" But look, don't let me stop you from returning to a scientific study of each square, even if it does mean that you're not proud of what you've been doing. I know a lot of people who would take great pride in gaining a full rating class, acquired unsoundly or not. I like what you've been

doing, even though I can't adequately describe it. Keep it up.

**Question** In a November 2010 [talk at Google headquarters](#), Garry Kasparov discussed how, in the early '90s, there was a sort of a revolution in chess, and that as a result, he had to face a newer generation of players. Can you explain how chess theory had evolved during that time? Were the newer players just more aggressive or were there simply more openings that Kasparov needed to memorize? (If the latter, can you give us one or two examples?) **Sean Fakheri (USA)**

**Answer** I don't want to presume anything with regard to Garry Kasparov because his thinking is on a very much higher plane. He has taken on things beyond the comprehension of even most grandmasters. Nor will I attempt to offer specific lines that may have befuddled or posed tricky problems for Kasparov. Indeed, that would be ridiculous. But from my one-horse surface level, I will essay a more general answer.

I think that the players of the early 1990s, right up to the present, weren't and aren't necessarily more aggressive. Chess players have always been aggressive, at times, perhaps too aggressive. If anything it seems that the new generations of players, inspired by Fischer, Karpov, and Kasparov, wound up becoming super careful. They began to realize that material is much more precious than it had been viewed before. So they stopped sacrificing it frivolously. But I'll say more about this in a minute.

Overall, it seems to me that the chess of today is very much more demanding. You really have to be a full-time professional to succeed. The truth is, of course, even back in the old Soviet days, when supposedly chess was merely an avocation (which we know to be baloney) and every grandmaster supposedly had a real job (in journalism, science, education, the arts, or whatever), top players still devoted themselves to the pursuit of chess excellence.

But today's topflight grandmasters – even, and especially with all the high-tech tools available to them – really have their work cut out for them. Perhaps they're successful with an idea one day. The next day, that very idea might be obsolete, with every major player having seen it and developed a counter or refutation to it. That's what the Internet has done: it's sped up the dissemination of information so that there is no rest for the weary. What's more, there are so many more opportunities for top players to try things out than there used to be. In the old days, you might not have the chance to play against a leading adversary, or others like him or her, for years. There are many more tournaments in today's world. Think how many GMs, in some cases rated 3000 or more, come electronically face to face online every single day (it's frightening).

Obviously, chess literature has improved greatly, and there's much more of the quality stuff out there, from Dvoretsky to Kasparov himself. But it's possibly the advent of computers that has provided the greatest spark. Indeed, computers have altered the way we think about the game and chess theory. They've made all kinds of considerations possible that in the past were unthinkable. As I said earlier, the last twenty years or more has proven the value of material. No high-level player is going to sacrifice material without real compensation. He or she knows that computers have demonstrated all kinds of resourceful ways to hold onto it. The new respect for material, and the way computers go nuts to keep it, with the most painful and intricate variations, has impacted the new generations to factor such concerns into their own reasoning and preparation: to think differently. To be sure, computers will often violate conventional chess wisdom, playing moves that few top players would have considered in the past. Computers play them because their analytic algorithms determine that deep down, most profoundly, such ideas work. In order to find and appreciate these ideas, today's grandmasters have had to work harder and test better than ever before. The result is that the top players have become stronger than ever before, and there are many, many more of them. Who knows where it's all going to lead.

#### **Question of the Month**

The best answers will be published below.

*How is chess going to change in the future?*

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**The Q & A Way** is based in large part on readers' questions. Do you have a question about preparation, strategy or tactics? Submit your questions (with you full name and country of residence please) and perhaps Bruce will reply in his next **ChessCafe.com** column...

*[Yes, I have a question for Bruce!](#)*

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