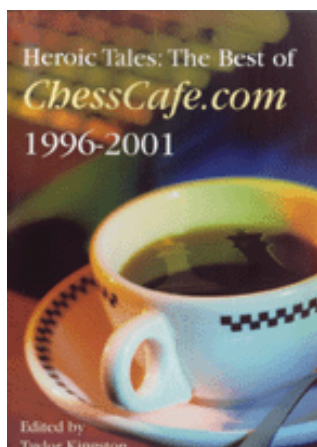




BOOK  
REVIEWS



## A Cornucopia of Chess

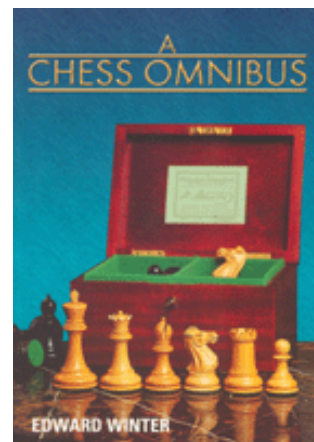
... and then some.

John S. Hilbert

**“Anyone aware of the treasures contained in old magazines will find it strange —lamentable, even — that so few of the highlights therefrom are currently available.” *A Chess Omnibus*, p. 160**

*A Chess Omnibus*, by Edward Winter, 2003 Russell Enterprises, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 468pp., \$24.95

When one of the world’s leading chess historians releases a new volume of chess facts, biographies, games, positions, barbs and quotations, those interested in the history of our game and its accurate portrayal are undoubtedly thrilled. In some instances, as in the present one, some readers, this reviewer included, are overwhelmed. Edward Winter’s *A Chess Omnibus* clearly ranks as one of the finest chess history productions of the decade, if not of many decades. If by some necessity I were forced to spend the next full year with only one chess book at hand, this is the one I would select. As it is, I expect to spend many months sampling the extraordinary range and fruitful diversity this volume has to offer, despite full access to the many other volumes in my collection.



First, some hard facts and a few judgments concerning this collection’s form. The volume is an oversized paperback, approximately ten inches high by seven inches wide (25.4cm x 17.8cm), with over 400 pages of actual chess reading (more with indexes, described below). The cover, an exceptionally fine photograph, shows an elegant chess set, some pieces and pawns standing on what appears to be a marbled surface while others remain in the box, all before a blue-green background. Unlike some recent publications, the cover appears well-balanced between text and photograph, and is tastefully done. The book falls open nicely, and after a little leafing through can be conveniently left open while playing over games or setting up positions. The margins are adequate, but are not overbroad, as is so common the case with chess book publishers who attempt to puff essays into full volumes. There are indeed hundreds of black and white photographs and line drawings (my quick count turned up 241, although the publisher announced 260, but then I could easily have missed some—there are plenty regardless). The chapter “Games” alone contains over 120 full contests, with additional games and positions abounding

throughout the text. There is no question the purchaser will receive more than his money's worth in terms of chess content.

The general organization of material in *A Chess Omnibus* follows fairly closely on that established by two of Winter's earlier volumes, *Chess Explorations* (Cadogan 1996) and *Kings, Commoners and Knaves* (Russell Enterprises 1999). And indeed, all three volumes have as their backbone Winter's *Chess Notes* series. All three volumes have chapters devoted to positions, games, mysteries, gaffes and quotes. The chapter readers will not find in *A Chess Omnibus*, however, though present in both previous volumes, is one given over to reviews. It appears Winter has significantly curtailed, if not abandoned, the full length book review as an art form, although some of his material in the chapter "Gaffes" approaches book review length. Sad as this will be to learn for readers who particularly enjoy Winter's pen at its sharpest, those same readers should find more than enough pointed barbs puncturing the pretenses of would-be chess historians in other sections of *A Chess Omnibus* to make up for the absence of a chapter devoted wholly to the ritual slaying of the absurd.

For those most familiar with Winter through his *Chess Notes* series, it should be remembered that he has provided the chess world with arguably the finest full-length study of a world champion ever written, namely his *Capablanca* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland 1989). That work, accurately subtitled *A Compendium of Games, Notes, Articles, Correspondence, Illustrations and Other Rare Archival Materials on the Cuban Chess Genius José Raúl Capablanca, 1888-1942*, set a new standard for historical chess research, one that unfortunately has almost invariably remained out of reach for other writers on the game's history. For several years before and certainly many after the publication of *Capablanca*, Winter has devoted himself to decidedly shorter writing forms. His longer efforts have appeared as essays in several publications, including *Inside Chess*, *New in Chess*, and, most recently, at **ChessCafe**. His *Chess Notes* series, as detailed in *A Chess Omnibus*, p.4, has had a varied publication schedule, running first self-published from 1982 through 1989, then resuming four years later, to run from 1993 through 1998 as a syndicated column. The series appeared as a column in *New in Chess* from 1998 through 2001, and has since found a home on the internet at **ChessCafe**. *Kingpin's* "Forum" has also been a repository for some of Winter's material.

The bulk of *A Chess Omnibus* is made up of individual Chess Notes, although these are liberally supplemented by longer essays. There is a wide variety in length and hence detail provided in individual notes. Those individual notes, now rapidly approaching 3000 in number, range from single line examples of hilarious if not hideous chess gaffes, such as Eric Schiller's uncorrected assertion that Steinitz did not become world champion until May 26, 1894 (no doubt the shortest reign in world championship history, since Steinitz also lost the nineteenth and final game in his first match with Lasker later that same day) (p.288), to extended pieces, such as the six pages devoted to the translation of two Alekhine interviews relevant to the Nazi Articles affair, published in Madrid on September 3, 1941 (pp.277-282).

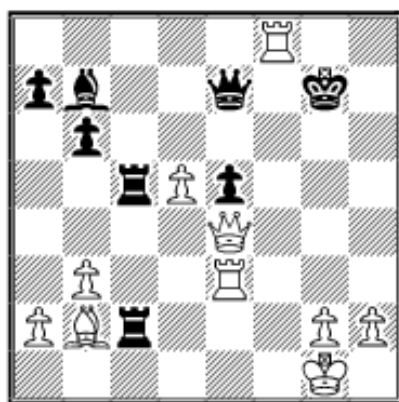
Reorganization of the individual notes along with his other essays has allowed Winter to present his material with focus and form, although one may well quibble with the placement of a few individual pieces as well as the usefulness of more detailed indexing. For instance, in Chapter VII, "Quotes" (I would have preferred the more formal "Quotations," although the selected chapter title is consistent with

his earlier volumes), Winter includes from his archives a fascinating, nine-page, hitherto unknown memoir on Richard Réti written by his brother Rudolph (pp.373-381). The length and detail of the material would seem to make it better suited for inclusion in Chapter IV, “Biography”, but regardless, the material is easily found through reference to the extensive General Index (pp.446-468). While subentries in the General Index would have helped for several of the entries (mention of “Alekhine,” for instance, is to be found in over 70 places in the text, but the General Index provides only page numbers, without suggesting the subject matter for any of the references; the same could be said for entries such as “American Chess Bulletin” and even more so for “British Chess Magazine” and “Capablanca”), no doubt space considerations prevented their inclusion here, unlike in Winter’s volume *Capablanca*.

Before leaving the subject of indexes and other aids to the reader, it behooves me to mention that despite the absence of subentries in the General Index, Winter’s volume is more thoroughly indexed, and in more ways, and certainly more usefully, than any other author’s in the field. One handy feature for the historically minded is his index “Games and Positions Chronologically” (pp.431-436), in addition to his index of games and positions by the more commonly used method of identifying them by player (pp.437-442). He provides as well an index of openings and an index of illustrations, besides including a massive “Book List” (pp.420-430), which certainly could be used by many readers to good effect in their efforts to develop their own chess libraries.

But, of course, it is the meat of the volume, the chess itself, to which most readers will immediately turn. And every chapter is indeed a cornucopia of chess, an overflowing tribute to the game’s diversity, subtlety, beauty and fascinatingly complex fecundity. In short, to its fun.

And the fun begins with the first diagram, on the first page of text. There we are immediately thrown into a discussion of the position after Black’s thirtieth move in Zukertort – Blackburne, London 1883:



**Zukertort – Blackburne, London 1883**  
**Position after 30...Kg7**

Zukertort won with 31.Bxe5+, a move, as Winter informs us, given “two exclamation marks by Reinfeld on page 34 of *The Chess Masters on Winning Chess* (New York, 1960). However, a forced mate in seven with 31.Rg8+ had already been put forward by Edgard Tchélébi of Beirut (1928-1963) on page 60 of the March 1957 *BCM*” (p.5).

So far, Winter is quoting his own *Chess Note* 2193 (all such references are, of course, supplied in the book). What is interesting here, besides learning that Reinfeld did not know of Tchélébi’s published analysis of three years earlier, as well as puzzling out the mate in seven beginning with 31.Rg8+ (which, by the way, my own chess computer confirms is present), is what Winter adds to the discussion. This isn’t, after all, your typical chess “puzzle” book, it is a sophisticated treatment of chess. Winter poses a series of interesting questions to the original readers of his series and thus, indirectly, to the readers of this volume.

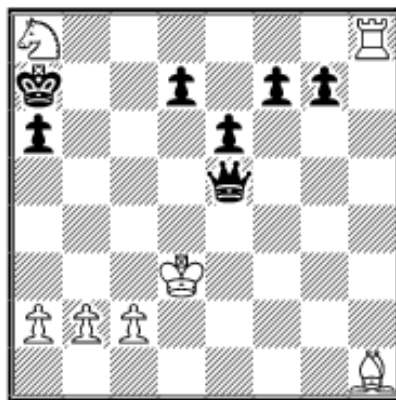
He writes that “It may not be long until somebody brings out a book of computer ‘busts’ of famous positions, and some general questions are worth contemplating. Are such wins ‘important’? Should annotators systematically look for, and point out, these discoveries? Should the use of a computer, and perhaps even its identity, always be acknowledged? Should new editions of old books aim to represent ‘the current state of chess knowledge’?”

Difficult questions indeed, and enough to provoke many a discussion around the chessboard, ideally with one’s favorite beverage in hand. And because Winter’s *Chess Notes* was originally interactive, long before the internet made such terms as “news groups” and “bulletin boards” common, he can and does provide some thoughtful answers to his questions, in this case formulated by reader Martin Sims, culled from *Chess Note 2228*. Following those comments, Winter provides positions from two more games illustrating how computers could find much shorter mates than were originally believed possible, as taken from *Chess Note 2270*.

The above discussion should show the effort and extent Winter has gone to in order to form his material into a coherent whole, as well as to make it intriguing. Three separate *Notes*, spaced significantly apart in time when originally published, have been brought together to provide a coherent and interesting set of positions, related information and penetrating questions that almost literally beg the reader blessed with his own computer-driven chess software to start examining complicated combinative positions in other games. For readers less inclined to pursue their own studies, the effect is still that of a nicely turned whole. Winter’s book can be enjoyed actively as well as passively, for he frequently asks readers explicitly to participate in the search for specific games or facts, as well as implicitly to enjoy in the kind of twists he gives his material. Clearly, even in the first two pages of *A Chess Omnibus*, which is all that has been mentioned above, a reader may find the kernel of an idea for an article or even book of his own, as well as an enjoyable way of considering how older games and newer technology can be made to complement our enjoyment of chess.

Winter’s Chapter I, “Positions,” from which the discussion above is taken, is replete with entertaining examples of curious and forgotten chess combinations, themes, and lore. The reader will find positions where stalemate was missed, where more elegant wins have been found, and even where one player convinced another, after a draw was agreed and recorded in the tournament, that he should have in fact won and the other resigned ... and where the players convinced the tournament committee to change the result (though happily, it appears, that was finally not allowed) (p.50). This chapter alone will satisfy many chess cravings.

Chapter II, “Games,” as mentioned above, includes over 120 games culled from all periods of chess history. The contents offer a wide variety of treats: unknown Fischer games, Wing Gambits (1.e4 c5 2.b4), hitherto forgotten speed games, including a loss by Capablanca to Kupchick, three additional unknown Capablanca games, Janowski opening a game with 1.h4 and following up, naturally, with 2.h5 (he won), multiple games by Nimzowitsch, and games of extraordinary material imbalance, including one with the following diagramed position (p.92):



*P. Voltti – J. Kanervo*

**Championship Tournament of Lapua, 1934  
Position after 38...Qxe5**

Those interested in the American prodigy James A. Leonard (a sketch of whom appeared in *Kings, Commoners and Knaves* at pp.133-140, Winter also informs us), will be pleased to find ten additional games by this tragic figure who died in 1862 six weeks before his twenty-first birthday. Included among them are two games played against a young Sam Loyd, who

we learn “was about nine months older and was to live a half a century longer” (p.95).

One nice addition is a game by a very young Reshevsky (accompanied by a very nice photograph of the little boy). Winter writes that “The ‘complete games’ collection Samuel Reshevsky by Stephen W. Gordon unfortunately overlooks four scores given on pages 122-127 of the June 1920 *La Stratégie*. Of these the liveliest is given below, and it is quite a game. Played in a 20-board simultaneous exhibition (+18-1=1), it shows the prodigy fighting back strongly after throwing away his queen to an elementary knight fork:”

*Reshevsky – L. Schwarz* [C00]

**Paris Simultaneous (1:20)**

**June 8, 1920**

1.e4 e6 2.d4 c6 3.Nf3 d5 4.e5 h6 5.Bd3 Bb4+ 6.c3 Ba5 7.0–0 Ne7 8.Re1 Nd7 9.Nbd2 Nf8 10.Nf1 Nfg6 11.Ng3 0–0 12.Nh5 Kh7 13.Qd2 Ng8 14.g3 Bd7 15.Nh4 Be8 16.f4 Kh8 17.Ng2 Qe7 18.g4 Nh4 19.f5 Nf3+ 20.Kh1 Nxd2 21.Bxd2 exf5 22.gxf5 Qd7 23.Nhf4 Bd8 24.h4 Ne7 25.Ne3 f6 26.e6 Qd6 27.Neg2 Bc7 28.Be3 g5 29.fxg6 Rg8 30.h5 Kg7 31.Nh4 b6 32.Rad1 c5 33.Bb1 Bc6 34.Kg1 Rae8 35.Bc2 Qd8 36.b4 cxd4 37.cxd4 Rgf8 38.Bf5 Qb8 39.Rf1 Rd8 40.Rf2 Bb5 41.Re1 Bd6 42.a3 Rc8 43.Kh1 Rc3 44.Bd2 Rxa3 45.Rg1 Ra2



46.Nfg2 Bc4 47.Bb1 Ra1 48.Ne3 f5 49.Nexf5+ Nxf5 50.Nxf5+ Rxf5 51.Rxf5 Ra3 52.Rf7+ Kg8 53.Bf5 Bf4 54.g7 Bg5 55.Bxg5 hxg5 56.Rf8+ Qxf8 57.gxf8Q+ Kxf8 58.h6 g4 59.Bxg4 Bd3 60.Rf1+ Kg8 61.e7 Be4+ 62.Kh2 Ra2+ 63.Kh3 Bg6 64.Be6+ Kh7 65.Rf7+ 1–0

*A Chess Omnibus*, p.98

One can only wonder how L. Schwarz, Reshevsky’s opponent, felt after this game. And the mix and variety of games in this chapter continues unabated, including a game by Walbrodt, incidentally correcting an error this reviewer had made in one of his articles (pp.112-113).

Chapter III, “Miscellaneous”, provides a number of intriguing pieces, including over thirty (30!) attempts by various authors to describe, as precisely as possible and in as few words as possible, just how a knight moves (pp.135-137). (Try this

yourself, without first checking the examples in the book; I suspect you'll find it as difficult as I did.) Brief passages of Fisher's early column in *Chess Life*, "Fischer Talks Chess", are included, suggesting the largely forgotten fact that at one time "Fischer was quite a prolific writer" (p.166). And then there are of course any number of questions: When was the first chess broadcast? Which chess book has sold over one million copies? What, exactly, did Alekhine think of Capablanca's financial requirements as set forth in the London Rules of 1922? How much effort did Amos Burn put into his chess column in *The Field*? And what was Morphy biographer David Lawson's real name? Such questions are answered, in whole or in part, in this section. A piece of particular interest to chess historians, and which first appeared at ChessCafe in 1999, is simply entitled "Wanted" (p.159-161), a concise though certainly not exhaustive discussion of works future chess historians should tackle. The short but powerful essay is, as Winter states it, about areas "where future authors might well make a genuine contribution to chess knowledge" (p.159). Chess historians worldwide are advised to read this piece. Many times.

"Biography", Winter's fourth chapter, includes several of his longer pieces first published at ChessCafe, *Kingpin*, and *New in Chess*. "The Genius and the Princess" (pp.211-219), details material Winter obtained through exchanging dozens of letters with the great Cuban's widow, Olga Capablanca Clark. Other essays include, for example, "Napoleon Bonaparte and Chess" (pp.219-226), an essay on W.H.K. Pollock (pp.227-233), an essay on Samuel Rosenthal (pp.238-244), and extensive materials on Frederick Edge (pp.245-260). Briefer material on many figures fills out the chapter, including, for example, material on Daniel Starbuck and Henry Nelson Pillsbury's poverty, the latter which, according to Albert B. Hodges, saw the grandmaster at the end selling trophies to cover living expenses (the photograph accompanying this brief note on Pillsbury's poverty (p.237) is, to my taste, the finest known of the great player).

Chapter V, "Gaffes", runs fifty-two pages long, each one chock full of the sorry, though fascinating and at times hilarious, tale of errors committed by chess writers, players and publishers. None are spared, as none should be. Readers who appreciate Winter's delicate scalpel—excuse me, pen—will find much to applaud here. Examples really aren't necessary, although a few words would not be amiss regarding Winter's emphasis, indeed insistence, on accuracy in chess writing. For his wit is not designed simply to humiliate writers unwilling to check facts or question secondary sources, relied on again and again in what passes for much of chess history writing.

For those who have followed Winter's heated exchanges over the years with a variety of chess writers there is a delicious, although simultaneously lamentable, irony implicit in the general run of criticism that has been thrown up surrounding him. His insistence on accuracy in chess writing has been attacked as quibbling, as fury over petty points of minor concern to the chess community and readers at large. Yet such attacks, ironically enough, have often been perpetrated by writers who, while minimizing the many errors Winter brings to light, would take great offense at shoddy game analysis, superficial opening evaluations, or cooked chess problems.

The point of Winter's writing about the errors, the awful prose, and the outright plagiarism that exists in chess literature, at least as far as I understand it, is not only to bring to light specific transgressions, but to illustrate, again and again, that the act of writing about chess, its history, its players, and its beauty, is every bit as

important and in need of precision as is the quality of the games and analyses that appear within such books. Only when the two are combined, the play of the game itself as well as the language and factual truth of the commentary surrounding it, can the finest writing on chess emerge.

Critics who attempt to dismiss Winter's insistence on accuracy by minimizing its importance fail to understand (or refuse to understand) that the two elements, truth in chess and truth in writing about chess, cannot really be separated, no more than one can separate the paint Leonardo da Vinci used from the canvas of his Mona Lisa. The two are inseparable, if one's intention is to retain the work of art. But the notion that the two really can be separated is an implicit belief that permeates much of the chess world in terms of accurate language and accurate analysis. In a review recently appearing at this website, for example, the reviewer remarked in essence that the book under discussion was good if one could get past the hideous translation. In what other field of learning could such a statement be made? Isn't this much like saying that the food is excellent, if one can get past the cooking? The number of poorly written, poorly researched, poorly organized, and poorly presented chess books is legion. And Winter, for one, refuses to accept this as a condition of the literary chess world that should go unchallenged and unremedied. For that reason alone, sadly enough, he has earned the enmity of more than a few chess authors. Whether one considers some of Winter's criticisms excessive is a matter each reader must decide for himself. In my opinion, in most cases, Winter's criticisms are not only valid, but refreshing.

Lest readers forget this is a review and not a debate, perhaps moving on to Chapter VI, "Mysteries", would be in order. This chapter brings together a wide variety of curiosities and questions seeking answers and answers seeking elaborations. Was Albert B. Hodges the first chess master to act in film? His likeness, sporting top hat and gloves, and a brief summary of his acting credentials appear at p.341. Can more information regarding another forgotten American chess prodigy, George H. Derrickson, be unearthed? A start is made at pp.343-344. The curious story of the disappearance of David Andrew Mitchell is recounted in depth on pp.349-352. Was Pillsbury's brain ever the subject of an actual autopsy? Whatever happened to Philip Woliston, 1939 California State Champion and competitor at New York 1940, the first USCF run United States Championship? Who is the author of the mysterious composition before which Emanuel Lasker sits in one of his photographs? These and many other questions make this chapter interesting reading, if not a challenge to one's own research abilities. Chapter VII, "Quotes", offers fifty-one pages of material much more detailed than mere quotations, and entries range in length from humorous one-liners to extensive biographical material running several pages.

On the whole, *A Chess Omnibus* is refreshingly free of the kinds of errors that plague so many chess books. Are there things one might wish changed? Of course. Although space no doubt accounts for it, the size of many of the illustrations could have been larger. As it is, many were placed in the book opposite chess diagrams, which by nature limits the size the images could attain. This works well for many of the line drawings, as the images of P. Richardson (p.6), G.H. Mackenzie (p.17), and B. Lasker (p.201), for example, show. However, other images, such as the those of T. von Scheve (p.20), R.J. Fischer (p.30), and M. Euwe (p.102), suffer either from lack of sharpness or too much detail for such small size. This is no doubt less a complaint to the author than to the publisher, and it is also likely true that some images, no matter the size, simply would not transfer well to the medium

used. The image of G. Beyer (p.128), for instance, although larger than the ones mentioned earlier, is less clear than many due to poor lighting in the original photograph.

Another point, although no doubt minor if non-existent for most readers, regards the inclusion of submitted games. On occasion, more would have been useful. For instance, only one of all six games of the aborted Kupchik – Bogoljubow match appear in the text, although all six were recovered and sent to Winter (p.83). Only one of “a number” of games by Derrickson found by chess historian Neil Brennen are given in the text (p.343), and only one of four early Reshevsky games, the one included in this review, were provided by Winter although none of the four appeared in Gordon’s *Samuel Reshevsky*, the largest collection of games by the grandmaster yet assembled. No doubt each of these decisions to provide only a sampling of games submitted was based on the quality of the games and, quite possibly, space limitations in the printed columns (although with the Derrickson games, for instance, the Chess Note involved appeared at [ChessCafe](#), where space considerations would seem to be a much less valid reason for their omission). As a student of chess history myself, it would have been nice to have all the recovered games made available. Not only for the present, but for future generations of readers.



Such minor points aside, *A Chess Omnibus* is an exceptional piece of work. Well-written, well-crafted, entertaining and lively, *A Chess Omnibus* deserves a place of honor in every chess library.

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