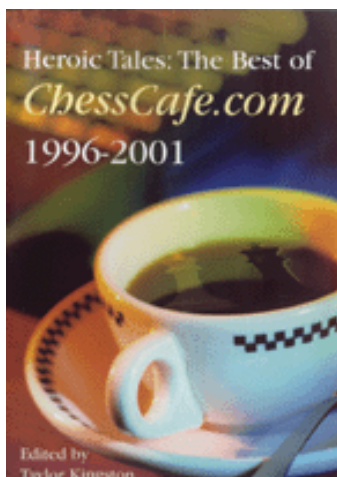


**BOOK
REVIEWS**

Bi-Puzzled

Baldomero Garcia

Beat the Grandmasters by Christian Kongsted, 2005, Gambit Publications, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 176pp., \$25.95.

Chess Exam and Training Guide by Igor Khmel'nitsky, IamCoach Press, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 320pp., \$24.95

For this review, I will look at two different chess puzzle books. I'm not familiar with either author, so let's turn to the back covers of their respective books: Christian Kongsted "trained at the Danish School of Journalism, and is an experienced chess writer. His correspondence chess rating is over 2500, and his Elo rating is above 2200." Alternatively, International Master Igor Khmel'nitsky "is a 3-times participant in the exclusive U.S. Chess Championship, a winner of numerous tournaments in Europe and the United States. Igor is a very experienced chess coach; he works with students of all levels."

Moving on to the books: *Beat the Grandmasters* is a traditional style puzzle book. The bulk of the book is made up of 351 puzzles and their solutions. It is organized as follows:

- Chapter 1: Beat the Masters
- Chapter 2: The Master Challenge - Test Yourself
- Chapter 3: Beat the Grandmasters
- Chapter 4: The Grandmaster Challenge - Test Yourself
- Chapter 5: The Final Challenge

Chapter 1 consists of 51 positions and serves as a warm-up for the first test in Chapter 2. This test consists of 10 positions. You are graded accordingly, and based on your results, your rating is estimated. In this first test I scored at the 1800 level, even though my USCF rating is just over 2000. So don't expect a cake walk with these puzzles.

Chapter 3 consists of 140 positions to prepare you for the nine tests in Chapter 4. All ten tests start you off with a few easy positions and then it gets

increasingly more difficult, until it becomes downright hard.

For the true masochist, Chapter 5 has the hardest positions in the book (but the puzzles are not graded, thank goodness).

This kind of puzzle book is an excellent source of material for those who wish to improve their ability to calculate. The majority of the easy positions will concentrate on a tactical shot, while the more difficult positions require that you see some subtlety that requires you to calculate accurately.

Many examples come from games played in recent years, but you'll also see examples from the last few decades.

Let's take a look at some of the problems.



White to play

“White has a strong initiative. How can he exploit his advantage?”

Let's walk through the solution: material is even, but the white bishop on b5 is attacked by the pawn on a6. Ignoring that threat for a second, you can see that you have control of the c-file with the doubled-rooks, and one of them is on the seventh rank. Black's king is in a difficult

situation because of his kingside pawn structure. The fact that the white bishop is being attacked should give you a clue that whatever your move is needs to allow the bishop to be captured, unless there is a strong move to be made by the bishop. (Obviously, this is an artificiality created by puzzle books. In a real game no one is going to tell you that you have a winning move on hand.) You should be able to see that the bishop doesn't really have any moves that will cause White to win rapidly. So moving over to the kingside you can determine that Black's king is exposed, his pawns have advanced too far, and White's queen and knight are ready to invade. But unfortunately, there doesn't seem to be a direct way to create a threat by either piece. You'd like to play 1. Nxf5 to threaten 2. Qg7 checkmate, but the bishop on c8 defends the pawn on f5. Aha! There is a possibility to explore. You can try 1. Rxc8 Rxc8 2. Nxf5. Happily, you turn to the solution page, and to your amazement, you found the correct move. But there are more moves in the analysis! Here is the solution as given on page 22:

Avrukh-Vlasov, Moscow 2003

1. Rxc8! Rxc8 2. Nxf5 Ne5 3. Rxc8 Qa5

If 3...Qxc8 then 4 Ne7+, and White also wins a piece after 3...Qf6 4. Rxf8+ Kxf8 5. fxe5 Qxf5 6. e6.

4. Rxf8 Kxf8 5. fxe5 Qxb5 6. Kf2 and White won.

Here are a couple of harder problems. The following is from chapter 3, page 70.



Black to play

Solution from page 93:

Timman-Piket, Amsterdam (6) 1995

Here Black wrongly played 1...g2? and lost after 2. Qg6+ Kf8 3. Qxg2.

However, **1...Rf1!** would have won the game for him:

2. Rxf1

2. Qg6+ Kf8 3. Qd3 g2 wins for Black, and after 2. Qd5 Rxd1+ 3. Qxd1 g2 Black

gets a new queen.

2...Qxf1+ 3. Kb2 Qf2+!

3...g2 is less clear as it allows White to play 4. Qg4+ and start checking. The text-move keeps control.

4. Kc3 g2 5 Qg6+

Or 5. Qg4+ Kf8 6. Qc8+ Kg7 7. Qg4+ Kf6. This line shows why the queen is better placed on f2: White has run out of checks.

5...Kf8

White cannot stop Black from getting a new queen.

I enjoyed the following position very much. It's from Chapter 5, page 149.



White to play

“White is a piece down and Black threatens to exchange queens. Is White losing?”

Occasionally, the author will ask you tricky questions, but this is not one of them. He wants you to find a winning move for White.

After scratching your head for awhile, you can look at the solution:

Jevtic-Prokopisin, Hungarian Cht 1995

“No, White is winning.” (We kind of expected that).

1. e6!!

**1...d6**

Black has no defence:

a) 1...Qxe6 2. Rhe1.

b) 1...fxe6 2. Qe7#.

c) 1...dxe6 2. Rd8#.

d) 1...Qxg7 2 exd7+ Nxd7

(alternatively, 2...Bxd7 3. Rhe1+

Qe5 4. Rxe5+ Be6 5. Rd8#) 3.

Rhe1+ Qe5 (3...Ne5 4 Rd8#) 4.

Rxe5+ Nxe5 5 Rd8#.

2 Rxd6 f6 3 Rd8+ 1-0

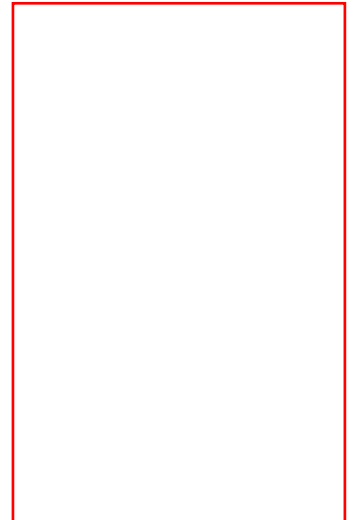
Black is getting mated; for

example, 3...Kxd8 4. Qxf8+ Kc7 5. Bf4+ Kb6 6. Qc5+ Ka6 7. Qa5#.

Beat the Grandmasters was nicely produced. There are four diagrams per page and they are easy to see. A minor complaint is that the problems were counted vertically, and not horizontally (i.e., the puzzle to the right of #46 is #48. Puzzle #47 is under #46).

Meanwhile, *Chess Exam and Training Guide* is a different type of puzzle book. This book attempts to pinpoint your weaknesses in a variety of areas. There are 100 test positions, plus a few humorous positions that made me chuckle.

The book has some introductory text on how to take the exam and the training philosophy behind it. After that, you are presented with 10 sub-tests, 10 questions each. Once you've taken the test, you can see how you rank in different areas. The nice thing is that you can get feedback after each sub-test you take.



You are graded in the following areas:

- Endgame
- Middlegame
- Opening
- Calculation
- Standard Positions
- Strategy
- Tactics
- Threat
- Attack
- Counterattack
- Defense
- Sacrifice

As you can see, you'll be able to determine your strengths and weaknesses

with a fair amount of accuracy.

The biggest plus I see is the training value you obtain when reviewing the solutions (after you've attempted the positions, of course). I don't want to give away too many positions, since that's the main value of the book. But let's look at a well-known position with a complete answer to understand the book's methodology.

The following is question #4 from page 29:



White to Move!

4-I What result do you expect?

- A. White Wins
- B. Draw
- C. Another white pawn on a2 would change the outcome
- D. Both B and C are correct.

4-II If allowed, White would want to...

- A. switch places of his king and bishop
- B. switch places of his king and pawn
- C. switch places of his bishop and pawn
- D. do either one of the above

Now let's turn the page to the solution: the first thing to notice is that the author included a chart that tells you how players of different rating classes answered this question. For example, for question 4-I, answer A gets -1 (minus one) point, answer B gets 5 points, and answers C and D get 0 points. Players rated 0-1000 answered in the following manner: 5% chose A, 61% chose B, 5% chose C, and 29% chose D. Statistics are also given for five other rating classes. But players rated 1400 and up all got the correct answer. Hence, if you get the wrong answer in this question, either you didn't read it right, or you've never seen this basic position before (indicating you're a beginner).

For question 4-II the correct answer is D, but there is a bit more variability in the answers selected by the lower rated classes. Again, players 1400 and up answered correctly. Let's turn to the instructive comments provided by the author:

"4-1. This is a very important basic endgame position. To win, White needs to promote the pawn and, thus, must force [the] Black king out of the corner. Since [the] White bishop can't attack the square of promotion (a8), White won't be able to succeed. [The] Black king will move between a8 and b7 and any attempt to force him away would result in *stalemate*. If you thought that White could win, you lose 1 point. Adding one or several extra pawns on the a-file won't make any difference. The correct choice is - 5 points.

Remember that the pawn on the rook-file (a or h) and a bishop on the “wrong” color can’t win against the lone king, if the latter could reach the square of promotion.

4-2. White would welcome with great enthusiasm any of the proposed changes. Either <A> or or <C> would transform a theoretically drawn position into an easily won one. Since either the bishop would become the “right” color (<A>), or the pawn would be switched from the rook-file to either the b-file () or c-file (<C>). No matter what, White should win with minimal accuracy. You get 5 points for <D>.”

As you can imagine, this was probably one of the easiest problems in the book. There are similar well-known positions, while others can be quite difficult. You need to use your intuition and calculation to answer these tests.

At the end of the book, you are given some recommendations for further training (now that you’ve figured out what your weaknesses are, you can spend your time more wisely).

My only gripe is that the book could have been edited better. The author refers to certain books with inaccurate names (my guess is that he is translating the title into English or relying on memory). For example, David Bronstein’s book *Zurich International Chess Tournament 1953* is referred to as *1953 Interzonal*, while Rudolf Spielmann’s book *The Art of Sacrifice in Chess* is referred to as *Theory of Sacrifice*.

However, the enthusiasm and the sense of humor that the author displays make up for whatever editing flaws the book might have. Take a look at this tip from IM Igor Khmelnsky, near the end of the book:

“8. Every game is a lesson - never skip one. Don’t agree to a draw in a position where you are not worse. Exceptions - when you physically can’t continue playing (i.e. sick, have to leave, etc...), or when Draw assures a successful tournament result (money, title, qualification, etc...)”

My recommendations: if you need to practice calculating variations, then *Beat the Grandmasters* should fit the bill. It’s not ground-breaking in its approach, but it’s solid and well-produced.

If you are in the under-2200 category and would like to know how to economize your limited training time, then *Chess Exam and Training Guide* is for you. It’s simply one of the best instructional books I’ve read in years. It’s a labor of love, so don’t let this one pass you by.

As a side note, U.S. Army Major David Hater informed me that IM Khmelnsky donated eight copies of this book to deployed military members. As a member of the military, I would like to thank him for this gesture. (His

actions didn't influence my review, though).

[Order](#) *Beat the Grandmasters* by Christian Kongsted

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