



Chess for Vikings

By Derek Grimmell

Attacking Manual 1 (Second Edition), by Jacob Aagaard, 2010 Quality Chess, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 260pp. \$34.95 (ChessCafe Price: \$28.95)

"But sir, we'll never survive!"

"Nonsense! You only say that because no one ever has!"

Chess shares more with boxing than is perhaps comfortable. Both have a World Champion; both sometimes have more than one. In both, the champion defends the title against a single challenger. In both, the rules for choosing a challenger can change without notice. In both, the governing body's main function is to bring the sport into disrepute. And both are largely ignored in the mainstream media.

But boxing and chess share one thing that has probably kept them both alive, through even their most disreputable seasons: *we love* a good fight, and idolize a good fighter. In boxing, the "scientific" fighter may hold the title with his jabs and his footwork and his ring savvy, but fans go wild for the attacker, the mauler, the one who lands punches by taking punches, the one who wades in throwing bombshells while blinking off roundhouses, the ones whom pulp writer Robert E. Howard once dubbed "Iron Men." In the same way, chess fans may respect or even fear a Kramnik or a Karpov, but entire cults of personality surround the likes of Tal, the chess equivalent of Jack Dempsey or Rocky Marciano. We love the attackers and the games they play, the lines ripped open, the sacrifices, the checkmate threats emerging from nowhere, the risks they take and the sense of danger they evoke. And when we dream of winning a key game ourselves, we don't imagine collecting small advantages and converting them into a winning endgame. No, we imagine a slug-fest, an all-out assault springing from nowhere and culminating in a sacrificial attack that will make the Battle of Austerlitz look like Woodstock.

Then we return to reality at the next tournament, and our one-piece attacks are quickly rebuffed, our centers collapse, and we chalk up more goose-eggs next to our names. Attacking play certainly inspires, but *how do they do it?* And how can we do it ourselves?

Jacob Aagaard must have pondered that question for himself at great length, because he's produced a *great* attacking manual. Several years ago Aagaard produced two Fritz Trainer DVDs, *Attacking Chess*, which were the rough draft for the present book and its companion volume. In reviewing that product almost six years ago I led off by saying, "Before going further, it's worth saying plainly that Aagaard has created a terrific course here. There are a number of works available on the subject of attack, ranging from Vukovic's *Art of Attack in Chess* and Spielmann's *Art of Sacrifice* mentioned above, to modern works like *Essential Chess Sacrifices* and Colin Crouch's underrated *Attacking Technique*. This set is the equal of any of them, and probably better than most for sheer instructive value."

These comments still hold for the DVDs. The books are even better. Oh, they're not for everyone, to be sure. If people spit through forked fingers and rub St. Christopher medals the moment they realize they are paired against you, you probably don't need these books. But if you have trouble getting and keeping the initiative, if your games have too much wood-pushing while waiting for the opponent to blunder, then you need these books. They are the single best resource available for learning how to play aggressively.

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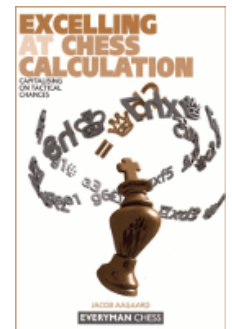


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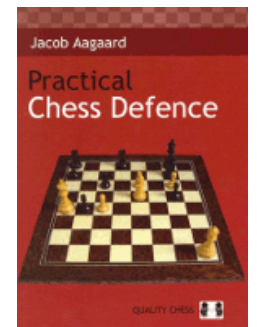
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[Attacking Manual 2](#)
by Jacob Aagaard



[Excelling at Chess Calculation](#)
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by Jacob Aagaard

Sound extreme? Not really. Because Aagaard doesn't approach the topic the way other writers have. There are, of course, many valuable tactics training manuals, but they don't teach a player how to create the position that contains the combination. On that score, Vukovic and Spielmann and Znosko-Borovsky are more useful, but they tend to focus on specific patterns of attack, like the classic bishop sacrifice, the Lasker sacrifice, and so on. Modern works such as David LeMoir's *Essential Chess Sacrifices* do the same thing at a more detailed and contemporary level. Great, if you happen to get those kinds of positions – and if you want to get most of them, you'd better play 1.e4 as white and the Sicilian as black. But not much guidance if, say, you prefer the Nimzo-Indian or English.

Aagaard covers attacking play with a different objective: to isolate those principles that undergird successful attacking play in *all* positions – principles not quite so general as *develop your pieces toward the center, nor yet so specific as sacrifice a knight on e6 in the Sozin*, but exactly halfway between. He is not interested in principles that would be just as true in positional games, such as *exploit the open file to invade on the seventh rank*. He is not interested in calculating tactics (having already written a fairly good manual on the topic). He is interested in *how to construct attacks on the opposing king and see them through to completion*.

Aagaard covers seven principles in his first book and five in the second. The seven in the present volume are

- Involve all the pieces in the attack
- Pile on the pressure when attacking
- Exploit weak color complexes when they occur
- Relative value of the pieces in the attack
- Attack the enemy where weakest
- Attack the enemy where strongest
- Use evolutionary and revolutionary methods by turns

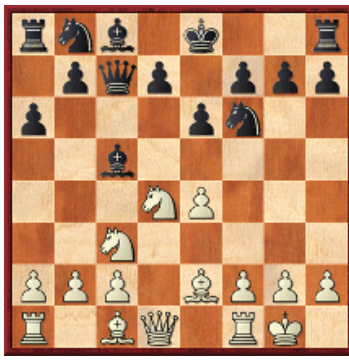
As usual, Aagaard writes a manual for the serious student who wants to make serious improvements to his or her play. Thus, each section opens up with several positions taken from the chapter to follow. The student is well advised to spend ten minutes on each of these positions to form some independent conclusions. The chapter then develops its primary theme through several very densely-annotated games, which include the positions given for pre-study.

Aagaard's great strength as an author has always been the utility of his practical examples. Few chess authors do a better job than he of finding just the right example, exercise, or game to illustrate a given point. To show you what I mean, let's look at a sample from Chapter Six, "Chewing on Granite." To his credit, Aagaard begins the chapter by mentioning that Igor Zaitsev came up with the idea of attacking the opponent's strong point, and Mark Dvoretzky first explained it to Aagaard. He describes listening to Dvoretzky's lecture and observing (through the examples given) that attacks against the strong points usually hinge on two factors: disrupting the enemy's coordination, and using the strong points as springboards to the weak points. Here is his third example game from his chapter, with Aagaard's comments in plain text and editorial remarks in italics:

Ortega, Lexy – Khenkin, Igor

Lido, 20033

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 a6 5.Nc3 Qc7 6.Be2 Nf6 7.0-0 Bc5



[FEN "rnb1k2r/1pqp1ppp/p3pn2/2b5/3NP3//
2N5/PPP1BPPP/R1BQ1RK1 w kq - 0 8"]

"A rare move that did not bring Black a lot of joy in this game. I assume that Igor wanted to answer 8. Nb3 with 8...Be7, a well-known trick, when the knight is placed on a less active square on b3 and Black can therefore look forward to a pleasant version of the Scheveningen."

8.Be3 d6 9.Qd2 0-0!

"9...Nc6 10.Rad1 would be quite problematic for Black. He has real problems with the d6-square."

10.Rad1 b5 11.Bf3 Bb7



[FEN "rn3rk1/1bq2ppp/p2ppn2/1pb5/3NP3//
2N1BB2/PPPQ1PPP/3R1RK1 w - - 0 12"]

Aagaard makes clear in the introductory text that Black's play is based on the d6- and e6-pawns holding down the fifth rank and making it hard for White to push forward. If we followed the usual principle of attacking where Black is weakest, we might have pushed f4 earlier to try to create a central weakness, or tried to develop a major piece assault on g7, or even started playing for a kingside pawn storm with g4-g5. But Ortega sets out to attack Black's strength, the d6-e6 pawn pair, and does so with dash and élan.

12.e5! Bxf3! 13.exf6!

"This was White's idea. By sacrificing the exchange he is weakening the squares around the black king. The surprise in this game is that the exploitation of the dark squares is found through an attack on the stronger light squares. 13.exd6 Qdx6 is not dangerous for Black at all."

13.Bxd1 14.Nf5!! gxf6?

"It is very difficult for black to find his way through the labyrinth of variations provided for him here and it feels harsh to criticize Khenkin for failing to do so. But this mistake is the only one he commits in the whole game." *Aagaard now devotes more than a page to analyzing Black's options at move fourteen, with many instructive comments embedded in the variations, to conclude that 14...Bxe3 is the best way to defend.*

15.Nd5!! Qd8 16.Bxc5



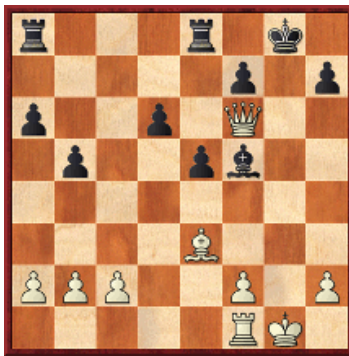
[FEN "rn1q1rk1/5p1p/p2ppp2/1pBN1N2//8/8/PPPQ1PPP/3b1RK1 b - - 0 16"]

"A brilliant image. Black was in full control over the 5th rank, or so he thought, but in this position he cannot capture any of the white pieces without serious consequences." *In this case, perhaps because we are in the realm of pure tactics, Aagaard does not show the variations, which are left as an exercise for the student. An omission? Perhaps. More likely this is the sort of thing an ambitious player should figure out personally, rather than receive from a grandmaster's lips.*

16...Nd7 17.Bd4 Bh5 18.Nde7+ Qxe7

"A bitter admission, but 18...Kh8 19. Qg5 Rg8 20. Qxf6+ would be reminiscent of the Immortal Game, so Khenkin tries to make the end boring to stay out of the instructional manuals. But even this fails..." *Another feature I enjoy in Aagaard's work is his dry wit, which crops up at unexpected moments and makes for lively reading.*

19.Nxe7+ Kg7 20.g4 Bg6 21.g5 Rfe8 22.gxf6+ Nxf6 23.Qg5 e5 24.Nf5+ Kg8 25.Qxf6 Bxf5 26.Be3 1-0



[FEN "r3r1k1/5p1p/p2p1Q2/1p2pb2//8/4B3/PPP2P1P/5RK1 b - - 0 26"]

Sigh. Now *that's* the kind of attack we all want to play.

Aagaard deserves credit for several achievements, not the least of which was finding this game and recognizing its instructive value. As he says himself: "It is the nature of a book to try to make the biggest possible impression on the reader by using examples that get our attention and thus have real staying power in our minds." For the past ten years, Aagaard has excelled at finding just such examples and putting them together into valuable manuals.

Another point on which he deserves full credit is his refusal to write an attacking manual using famous or familiar games. The book ends with fifteen very deeply-annotated attacking games, none of which is Kasparov-Topalov or anything of the sort. Half of the games include one player of whom I had never heard before, and all the games were new and unfamiliar. Aagaard in no way implies that these fifteen are the *greatest* attacking games in history. Rather, they are *vivid* games, good for illustrating how to carry on an attack, and likely to stick in the student's mind as models for future play.

Finally, he rounds out the book with fifty positions for study and perhaps play against a computer, with "possible solutions" in the back. As we would

expect, the positions have excellent instructive value, in part because they are in no way combinational gems, but genuine, sometimes messy attacking positions in which the absolutely correct line of play is still not certain. It is for this reason that Aagaard (strangely humble about his best ideas) names the section "possible solutions."

The reader will note that this is the second, revised and expanded edition. The first edition was marred by several printing and editing errors, and was bound so that the text near the spine of the book was a bit hard to read. Aagaard convinced his editor John Shaw to let him release this corrected and improved edition, and he added three sample games in the process. Much of the rest is unchanged, except that typographical errors are corrected and the production values are even higher. The result is a very well-edited book that just feels good in your hands. And even though my copy is new, I can lay it flat in front of me while playing over the games, then close it with no creasing to the spine or tendency to fall open to the same spot again. It's a large floppy book that's easy to work with and feels like it will give years of use.

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by Jacob Aagaard

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