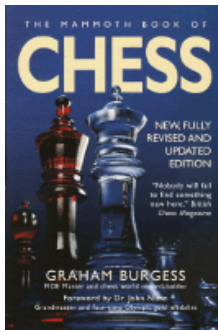


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The following excerpt of [The Mammoth Book of Chess](#) is from the chapter "Computer and Internet Chess," which was written from scratch for this third edition. The new edition also features a brand new section of sixty puzzles, many of them highly demanding and all with full solutions. We hope you enjoy ...

Computer and Internet Chess

by Graham Burgess

Playing Chess Online

Not everyone has a local chess club, or is able to attend regularly. Others would simply prefer to play from home. For them the only alternatives to playing social chess used to be to play against computers or to play correspondence chess. The Internet has changed all that. It is now possible to find opponents around the world, day or night, for real-time games of chess.

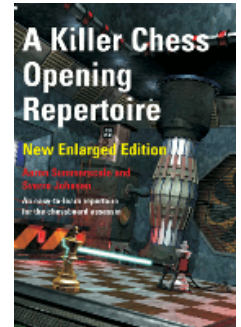
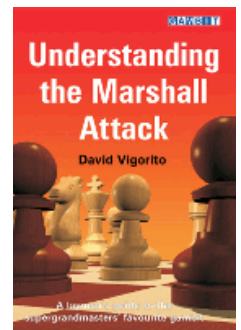
The best-known place for playing real-time chess on the Internet is the **Internet Chess Club** (ICC), which boasts a great many members worldwide and many thousands of games played online every day. For GMs and IMs the membership is free, but everyone else must pay. There is a free trial membership, and as far as I know there is nothing to stop you using this repeatedly, but if you find yourself spending a lot of time there, you will definitely want a proper account, as this offers extra features and means you can maintain a rating based on all your games at ICC. The ICC offers a vast wealth of features besides playing games; there are broadcasts (such as John Watson's excellent weekly show which features an interview with a chess VIP of some sort), lectures, simuls, live commentary and many titled players offering online training (for a fee, of course). The main alternative to ICC is the **PlayChess** server provided by ChessBase. This is also very lively, with many strong players from around the world online at all times (Garry Kasparov visits from time to time too), and lectures, etc. Again, there is a membership fee, but various ChessBase products come with a free one-year membership, and there is a free trial membership too. Try both ICC and PlayChess and see which you like best. As with almost any websites, you can find them using a search engine, but the URLs at present are www.chessclub.com and www.playchess.com. Note that at both sites, many players like to play at extremely fast time-limits, with just three minutes (or less) for all the moves. So you'd better be quick with your mouse, and give some thought to whether this highly addictive form of the game is really going to benefit your tournament play. You can play slower games, but may have to wait longer for an opponent of a suitable level.

However, not everyone wants to play in real-time at all. Just as some players prefer correspondence chess to the over-the-board variety of the game, so some of those who play online prefer a slower game. For them, e-mail is an ideal medium. This saves the delays and uncertainties of using the traditional post, and provides scope for playing a relatively fast form of correspondence chess. Some of the traditional correspondence chess organizations have now switched over to online transmission of moves, with **ICCF's** World Correspondence Championship now played via a server. See www.iccf.com for information and downloads.

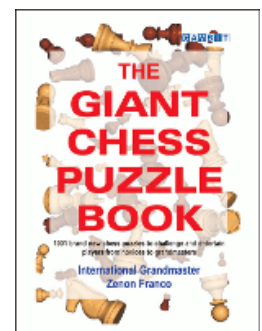
Chess News on the Internet

There is a great deal of chess news and information available online, and as with anything on the Internet, the best way to find what you're looking for is to search online - any attempt to list the most important sites is liable to go out

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by David Vigorito

[Giant Chess Puzzle Book](#)

by Zenon Franco

of date quickly; besides, typing in long URLs is a pain, whereas a search for a few keywords will find the right page more quickly and with less risk of error. So in this section I shall just mention a few of the more important resources.

The liveliest and also one of the best places for news is the **ChessBase** site (www.chessbase.com). It is updated most days, often with several new stories or articles. There are always plenty of photos, and most aspects of chess are represented. Reports on events will always include the basics, such as a crosstable and downloadable games, and often annotated games and interviews. Contentious issues of the day are frequently aired, with feedback from readers included with little or no censorship, making it a good forum for debate. Word has it that Kirsan Iliumzhinov reads the ChessBase site regularly, so this is the place to send your views if you want them read by the FIDE President. Frederic Friedel is in charge of the website - a man with a good sense of humour and who knows everyone who is anyone in the chess world - so contributions and opinions from the best players and most colourful characters in the chess world can be found here. Frederic also knows his audience well, and makes sure that there are pictures of attractive female chess-players as often as possible, which has led to some allegations of sexism ("Ukrainian Chess Babes in Bikinis!"), but also to an increase in the readership, no doubt. The ChessBase site also offers a large online game database and product support for the company's software and data products, and demo versions including ChessBase Lite.

The most essential site for those looking for hard chess information is **The Week in Chess** (which has the unfortunately cumbersome URL www.chesscenter.com/twic/twic.html - surely the final "twic.html" should be dispensed with, at least). Every week since 1994, Mark Crowther has been producing his online chess magazine, which as I write in September 2009 has just reached issue number 775. The jewel in TWIC's crown is the game file, which includes most of the important games from the week in question from around the world, often running into the thousands. It is neatly packaged each Monday evening (UK time) in PGN or ChessBase format ready to be loaded into a database program, with nicely standardized event and player data (rather than the inconsistent jumble that free data often suffers from). Crowther has a network of people who feed games from their region through to him, and he exercises a remarkable degree of quality control over the data, given the time constraints. TWIC also includes brief reports on the events covered, with full results and crosstables in text or html format. There are also links to sites for events and a wealth of other information about forthcoming events and news from the chess world. TWIC has so far provided chess enthusiasts with more than a million downloadable chess games - and all for free.

A different style of chess site can be found at www.chesscafe.com. Since 1996, **ChessCafe** has been providing a variety of monthly columns by noted chess writers, with two or three appearing each Wednesday, together with a weekly book review (or a review of a chess product of some other sort). The mainstays include the famous trainer Mark Dvoretsky and the renowned endgame theoretician Karsten Müller. ChessCafe also features an archive of previous columns, and an excellent collection of links to other chess sites of many types.

It is also worth mentioning that **Wikipedia's** chess pages have had some solid work put into them - the main chess page can be found at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chess, but there are individual pages for many aspects of chess and individual players. Additionally, there are individual wiki projects for some specialized topics, such as chessprogramming.wikispaces.com, which is recommended to anyone seeking more advanced information on the details of programming computers to play chess than I have felt appropriate to include in this chapter.

Pitfalls

In this section, I shall be pointing out some of the possible problems that may be encountered when using computers to assist with analysis, odd glitches in their play, and issues with data quality and sloppy analysis presented online.

Misassessment of Repetitions

In recent versions of ChessBase and the Fritz interface, moves that repeat a position from earlier in the game or variation are given an assessment of "0.00" - the same as a completely drawn position. This is regardless of the actual assessment of the position, and is for any repetition (not just threefold), whether forced or not, and there is no way to disable this behaviour. This can be extremely misleading, not to mention annoying. You can find yourself staring at a position trying to work out what spectacular drawing idea the machine has spotted before realizing there is none. Normally the assessment changes to the "real" one after the move has been executed, in which case it is merely a major irritation. But in a position where the opponent then has a move that brings about a position from earlier, this will also be reported as 0.00. In cases where a lot of the similar positions have arisen already, the only way to get a real assessment of the position is to cut off the earlier moves and have the engine analyse the position without any move history (or else use a different program entirely). Note that this is not an engine bug - it happens regardless of the engine being used - it is the interface that is at fault. Of course, it is possible to construct examples where the analysis is made into total gibberish by this bug (or rather misguided feature), but here is a typical example:

Huang Qian - Gunina

Russia-China (women), Sochi 2009



[FEN "4rk2/p4pp1/2p4p/P1Nn2q1/3p4/1B3Q2/1P3P2/1KR5 b - - 0 36"]

36...Qg6+ 37 Bc2 Qd6 38 Bb3 Nf6

Here a blundercheck gave the move 38...Qg6+ as apparently drawing. And an engine running in the position before this move will also be made to report this same evaluation. The position is clearly much too unbalanced for this to be anything other than a perpetual check, if the assessment really is correct, but a glance at the position suggests this cannot be so. Sure enough, when the "drawing" move is executed, the assessment jumps to "very good for White". Whether this assessment is correct is another matter, but at least the engine is now being allowed to provide its assessment based on its own analysis. So bear in mind that when you see the 0.00 assessment, it might not be all that it seems.

Assisted Analysis Failure

Yakovenko - Kramnik

Dortmund 2009

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 Nxe5 d6 4 Nf3 Nxe4 5 d4 d5 6 Bd3 Bd6 7 0-0 0-0 8 c4 c6 9 Qc2 Na6 10 a3 Bg4 11 Ne5 Bxe5 12 dxe5 Nac5 13 f3 Nxd3 14 Qxd3 Nc5 15 Qd4 Nb3 16 Qxg4 Nxa1 17 Bh6 g6 18 Nc3 Qb6+ 19 Kh1 Qxb2 20 Qf4



[FEN "r4rk1/pp3p1p/2p3pB/3pP3/2P2Q2/P1N2P2/1q4PP/n4R1K b - - 0 20"]

20...f6?

It has been pointed out that this move is probably losing, and due to an idea that had already occurred in a correspondence game. However, Yakovenko chose 21 Na4? and the struggle eventually ended in a draw. The whole line, up to and including Black's 18th move, had also occurred in a number of earlier high-level over-the-board games (including one with Kramnik as Black just two days earlier), so this looks like an error in both players' preparation, during which they no doubt used computer assistance.

So how did both players fail to find the right line in their preparation? This seems to be a case of them just letting the computer ineffectually analyse the current position, rather than pushing it down any critical-looking lines. If left to its own devices analysing the position after 20...f6?, even Rybka will take a very long time to rate the winning **21 e6!** as anything above equal. However, it will list the move among its top choices (true for Rybka at least, and you'd certainly expect the top players to be using the best engines), and a human looking alertly at both the position and the engine's output may well notice that this move ought to be considered "interesting" at least - it leaves a piece *en prise*, after all! The thing you need to do then is to execute the move, and then leave the computer to think about the position after the move. Once the assessments of the various possibilities in the new position have stabilized, you should then push the analysis forwards to any new critical positions. By these means, one very quickly finds that 21 e6! does indeed win. (20...f5 appears necessary, but that's a story for another day.)

After 21 e6! the computer will very quickly show that **21...Qxc3** is the only critical reply.



[FEN "r4rk1/pp5p/2p1PppB/3p4/2P2Q2/P1q2P2/6PP/n4R1K w - - 0 22"]

Once we are convinced there is nothing important being missed, we can soon push the computer on to analyse the position after this move. Now that it can concentrate all its efforts on this position (rather than it being one of many possibilities and so getting a fraction of its attention), it soon gets to the core of the issue, viz. **22 Qd6!** (22 Qc7? f5 doesn't give White much). This is a move that the computer took a very long time to find if starting its analysis in the position after 20...f6?, but now uncovers in less than a minute (I should mention that the current no. 2 engine, Naum, struggles a little more with this). Having found 22 Qd6, the lines are fairly straightforward: 22...f5 23 e7; 22...Rfe8 23 Qd7 f5 24 Qf7+ Kh8 25 e7 and Bg5; 22...Nb3 23 Qd7 f5 24 e7 Nc5

25 exf8Q+ Rxf8 26 Qe7; 22...dxc4 23 Qd7 f5 24 e7 Rfe8 25 Qe6+ Kh8 26 Bf4; or 22...Qxc4 23 Rxa1 Qc3 24 Rg1.

Data Errors and Opening Books

Human error can result in odd problems for the computers. Play over the following sequence:

Tiviakov - Galliamova

President's Cup, lista 1998

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 a6 6 Bg5 b5 7 Qd2 e6 8 0-0-0 Nc6 9 f4 Bd7 10 Bxf6 gxf6 11 Kb1 Qb6 12 Nxc6 Bxc6 13 Qe1 h6 14 Bd3 h5 15 Nd5

This is the course of the game as cited in both ChessBase Magazine and The Week in Chess. Given that this was a game between two strong human players, one realizes that there have been several gross data errors, and some detective work might determine that Black's 13th move was really 13...Qc5. The game as given in the databases continued absurdly too:



[FEN "r3kb1r/5p2/pqbppp2/1p1N3p/4PP2/3B4/PPP3PP/1K1RQ2R b kq - 0 15"]

15...0-0-0 16 Nb4 Bb7 17 c3 Rg8 18 Qe2 f5 19 Rhg1 fxe4 20 Bxe4 d5 21 Bf3 h4 22 Nd3 Qc7 (½-½, 66) However, once such an error has entered the databases, it will tend to crop up again and again in unexpected ways. It skews the statistics that the game database reports, and it may also get dumped into computers' opening books. Thus in the game Nimzo-Fritz, Microcomputers blitz Wch 2000, the diagram position occurred for real, together with the blunder-laden follow-up: Black's queen was left *en prise* and White didn't take it. Both computers were slavishly following their opening book (after all, 13...h6 and the later queen blunder had a 50% score according to the data!), and were not allowed to think for themselves.

Hash-Table Woes

I have already said much in this chapter about the value of the engine using hash tables. However, even this feature is not always trouble-free, as sometimes there is a glitch, and the engine reads garbage from its hash tables, rather than useful information.

Lafuente - Shredder 9

Olivos 2005



[FEN "5rk1/pB2qppp/1p1rpn2/1Pp5/2P5/P1Q1P3/3N1PPP/3R1RK1 b - - 0 19"]

19...Rfd8??

This otherwise inexplicable move, failing to recapture a piece for no good reason, was the result of a hash-table error.

The Authority of the Digitized Word

The last example in this section relates to electronic data. Just like the printed word having an exaggerated authority, so it is easy to imagine that information presented in electronic format will have been checked using electronic tools. This is not necessarily so. Indeed, ChessBase's own printed magazine has been known to suffer from errors in chess notation that the use of their own software should minimize, and that their programs can be used to detect in chess documents. The following comes from an online site, where a "prolific" chess writer recommended for White (in a set of three articles) a line against the Caro-Kann that has a dubious reputation.

Ker - L. Jones

Warwick (Fiji) Zonal 2002

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 Nf6 5 c5?!



[FEN "rnbqkb1r/pp2pppp/5n2/2Pp4/3P4/8/PP3PPP/RNBQKBNR b KQkq - 0 5"]

This is the Gunderam Attack, a line that tends to give well-prepared Caro-Kann players some rather easy wins. Indeed, as a junior in Britain in the 1980s, the fact that this had been recommended for White in a popular repertoire book was a good reason for choosing this opening! Naturally, I was curious to see what new development could possibly have rejuvenated this line - after all, computer analysis has in recent years resurrected some apparently very rustic opening lines.

5...e5! 6 Nc3 exd4 7 Qxd4 Nc6 8 Bb5 Be7!

This is a well-known improvement over Gunderam's original analysis, which continued with the "cooperative" 8...Bd7?, which just spends time misplacing the bishop.

9 Be3 0-0 10 Bxc6 bxc6 11 Qa4



[FEN "r1bq1rk1/p3bPPP/2p2n2/2Pp4/Q7/2N1B3/PP3PPP/R3K1NR b KQ - 0 11"]

This manoeuvre, played in just this one game won by White, was the basis for the recommendation. White's position looks shaky, but if one uses annotation by result, then the conclusion might be rosy for White. But it is nowadays the easiest thing in the world to avoid this pitfall, as the analysis engine is just a keypress away. But in this case, the key was not pressed...

11...Rb8 12 b4 Ng4 13 Bf4 Bf6 14 Rc1 Bxc3+

This is certainly convincing, though if Black wants a simpler alternative, then 14...Be5 is rather good.

15 Rxc3 Qf6 16 Ne2

The comment given at this point in the online article is "Phew! Holding everything. I leave it to you to judge whether this was luck or logic." The rest of the game is presented as if White is at least OK, and the line is difficult for Black in practice. In fact, White is dead lost.

16...Re8 17 0-0 Rxe2 18 Bxb8 Qxc3??

Now the game becomes less clear, though it takes several more poor decisions to lose the game. As any good analytical engine will indicate in a second or so, 18...Rxf2! wins by force:



[FEN "1Bb3k1/p4ppp/2p2q2/2Pp4/QP4n1/2R5/P4rPP/5RK1 w - - 0 19"]

- a) 19 Qd1 Rxf1+ 20 Qxf1 Qxc3 is hopeless for White.
- b) 19 Rfc1 Re2 20 Bg3 Qd4+ 21 Kf1 (21 Kh1 Nf2+ mates) 21...Rf2+ 22 Kg1 Rxa2+ wins heavy material.
- c) 19 Rf3 Rxf3 20 Rxf3 (20 gxf3 Qd4+ 21 Kh1 {21 Kg2 Ne3+ 22 Kh1 Qd2 23 Rg1 Bh3} 21...Qd3 22 Qd1 Nf2+) 20...Qa1+ 21 Rf1 Qd4+ 22 Kh1 Nf2+ 23 Kg1 Nh3++ 24 Kh1 Qg1+ 25 Rxg1 Nf2#.

That's pretty conclusive. So it is clear that a line that has long been considered very dubious for White has here been recommended on the basis of a single non-GM game without even a cursory computer check of the critical positions. **19 Qxc6 Bf5 20 Qxd5 Qf6 21 Bxa7 Re8?! 22 c6 Rd8 23 Qc5 Qe5? 24 f4 Qxc5+?! 25 Bxc5 Rc8 26 Rd1 h6 27 b5 Nf6 28 b6 Ne8 29 b7 1-**

0 In conclusion, while there is a lot of good free chess information available online, sometimes the quality is equal to what you are paying.

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