



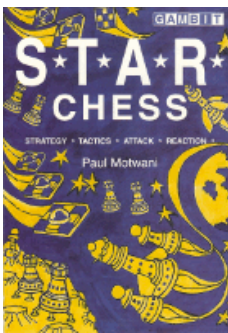
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The Mnemonic Gambit

*S\*T\*A\*R\* Chess* by Paul Motwani, 1998 Gambit Publications, Softcover, Figurine Algebraic Notation, 240pp., \$24.95 (ChessCafe Price: \$7.95)

It is quite possible that, as a boy, Scottish Grandmaster Paul Motwani spent a wee bit too much time hanging around libraries and thumbing through dictionaries. Perhaps his parents thought they had a mnemonically challenged child and decided to rectify the matter. Or, perhaps he simply had too much free time. At any rate, his latest work, *S.T.A.R. Chess - Strategy, Tactics, Attack, Reaction* - is packed with these petit word tricks.

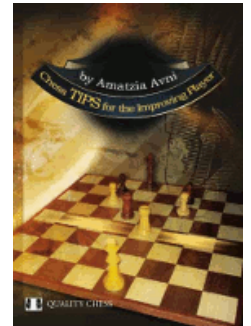
This is nothing new. His first two books, *H.O.T. Chess* and, of course, its logical sequel, *C.O.O.L. Chess*, used the same technique to bring readers into his world of deeply annotated games, interesting anecdotes and brain teasers. He has continued along this unique path with his third book. Twenty thoroughly annotated games combine with amusing anecdotes, the occasional brain teaser (having nothing to do with chess) and chess puzzles to produce another highly entertaining book.

When we first took a look at this book, what immediately struck us was the high energy level and enthusiasm evident throughout. It's almost as if the author struts into the room, tells you to strap yourself in and to get ready for the chess ride of your life. Here he challenges you to solve a cryptogram; there he throws a math puzzle at you; and, then he invites you to listen to his conversation with an extraterrestrial. Chess books seeking to raise your level of play have come a long way since the days of Fred Reinfeld.

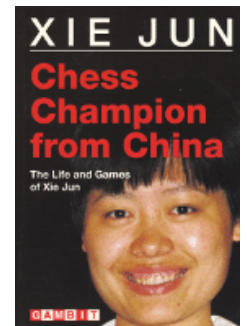
It would be easy to dismiss this book as a self-indulgent tour by the author into his stream-of-consciousness. That would be a mistake, for in fact it is a very useful, instructive and eminently readable book that most players up to about 2100 Elo range (and perhaps even higher) will certainly enjoy. Time and again, while annotating the games, Motwani takes the reader on a digression to elaborate an important point relating to the opening, tactics, strategy, etc.

So, for example, after White's fourth move in Game Six, Motwani- Rowson: **1 e4 d6 2 d4 Nf6 3 Nc3 e5 4 Nf3**

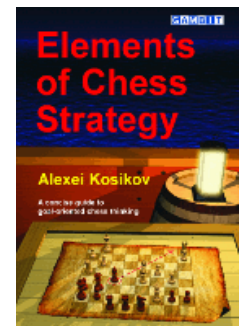
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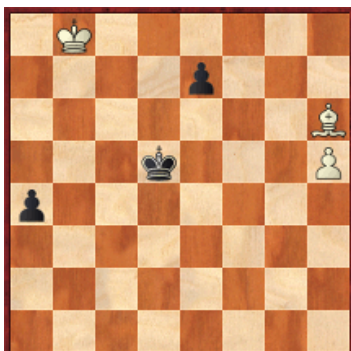
we read that "Jonathan Rowson and I do not consider **4 dxe5 dxe5 5 Qxd8+ Kxd8 6 Bc4** to be troublesome for Black. After **6...Be6 7 Bxe6 fxe6**, these points come to mind: (a) Black can follow up with ...Bd6, ...Nc6 and ...Ke7, after which his king is safe and ideally placed for getting quickly to the centre or either wing, especially as the endgame phase draws near. (b) The position is by no means a 'dead draw'. On the contrary, Black enjoys the use of a partly open f-file as a result of having doubled e-pawns, and those useful units on e5 and e6 control, in particular, the important squares d4 and d5."

This is precisely the kind of advice that the aspiring player needs, not simply the proverbial equal sign without explanation that dominates many "instruction" books. It is not, of course, original with Motwani. But this approach, gently explaining and elaborating, is used frequently and with good effect throughout the book.

Then, of course, there are also passages such as "The Galaxy, of which our Solar System is just a tiny part, is slightly similar in shape to two fried eggs clapped together back to back. The yokes pointing upwards and downwards contain millions of stars, while the main white plane in between is roughly where the Earth is ... to me, having a diet consisting of only fried eggs is like playing the same opening too often, and seems neither appealing nor healthy. So how about considering other galaxies too?" Earth to Paul, earth to Paul. Come in please!?

The book is divided into six chapters; the first and the last are devoted but to one game each, the others at least four each. We found the first chapter to be the most intriguing, perhaps even curious. It centers around the game van Kempen-Johnson, a 1997 correspondence game played in the Pelikan Memorial Tournament. The opening is a Sicilian Dragon and Motwani spends thirty pages extolling the virtues of this super-sharp opening, with deep notes and insight into strategy and tactics, turning the chapter into a virtual advertisement for the Dragon. And then, in the midst of it all, we are told that the author has never played the Dragon himself, but is now seriously considering it, as if he has talked himself into it. Very unusual, to say the least.

Other chapters deal with the concept of time in a game, spotting the right piece to move, and in general, enthusiastic encouragement to keep your mind sharp and your ideas fresh. Among the many puzzles and positions to solve is the following:



[FEN "1K6/4p3/7B/3k3P/p7/8/8 w - - 0 1"]

Motwani writes: "In that 1981 endgame study composed by M. Dukic, White wins with **1 Bf8!!** and now: (a) 1...Ke6 2 h6 Kf7 3 h7 followed by 4 h8Q. If White had played 1 Bg7?, then 3 h7 could be answered by 3...Kxg7, whereas 3 Bb2 Kg6 4 Bc1 a3 5 Bxa3 Kxh6 is a typical line in which Black draws by using his passed a-pawn to divert the bishop away from defending the h-pawn. (b) 1...a3 2 h6 a2 3 Bg7 e5 4 Bxe5! Kxe5 5 h7 a1Q 6 h8Q+, a neat skewer which wins the queen on the next move."

This third major work turned out by the gifted grandmaster is a Good Read, Energetic And Thorough. That having been said, it may be hoped that the good Scottish grandmaster has played the mnemonic gambit for the last time. He has the energy and will to capture the imagination and instruct. Now let's see if he can do it without a gimmick.

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by Paul Motwani

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