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More than a Magazine

It's not news that computers and the internet have revolutionized the study and play of chess. Millions play against computer opponents at home and against other humans online. Databases make it easy to find and play over games; plus chess engines put a Grandmaster analyst at your beck and call.

The effect on chess publishing has been of equal magnitude. Thanks to ChessBase you can put up a chess website or put out a newsletter from the comfort of your laptop. You can also find more fresh chess content online each week than could be delivered in a dozen print magazines.

This put the squeeze on print chess publications, many of which went under when they found they'd brought knives to what turned into a gunfight. The computer revolution also created a new market segment for chess content and ChessBase was quick to leap into it with ChessBase Magazine (CBM).



CBM is a CD-ROM product, not a paper magazine, although a handy pamphlet guide is included with each issue. It is released every two months and one issue/CD costs around 20 euros/dollars. A subscription for six issues costs around \$90.

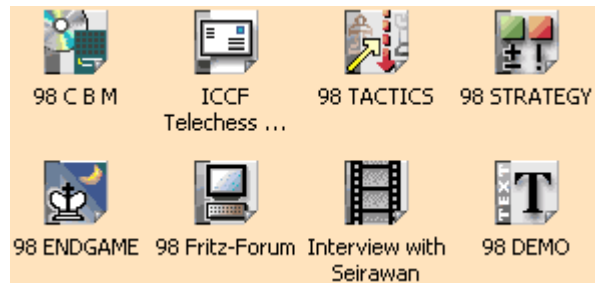
ChessBase does a good job of explaining the contents of each CBM so we'll take a look at what you can do to get full value from them. For our examples we'll use the late issue, #98.

The launch of CBM was pre-internet, which is most of the answer as to why they don't just distribute the content online, cut the distribution cost to zilch, and drop the price accordingly. Another factor is the inclusion of hundreds of megabytes of digital video. CBM 98 has over 400 MB of video, which would take around 20 hours to download on a dial-up connection. That's almost as long as the last Lord of the Rings movie. One consideration they don't mention is that they, like all content providers, are nervous about online distribution and copy protection.

The first thing to do with your new issue of CBM is copy the main game file to your hard drive. If you have the Mega or Big database you'll want to append the CBM games to it to bring it up to date. In ChessBase 8 this is as simple as right-clicking the "98 CBM" icon and choosing "Install to hard disk." That will let you append it to your defined reference database automatically. I get a lot of questions about how to keep a database up to date and a subscription to CBM is certainly the smoothest method.

For the many of us who are addicted to new games, getting them every two months might not satisfy the craving quickly enough. Yet if you download new games every week and add them to a big ChessBase database you quickly end up with duplicates and different spellings of various players' names. An added bonus of the

CBM is that it is standardized with the CB databases.



The way around this is to keep one database for your downloaded games and keep your Megabase pure with only CBM and other CB updates. That will also go a long way toward avoiding the inclusion of junk games. Just about every practical use of a large database is harmed by adding games between weak players. Statistics, opening theory, reference, etc., all validate Bent Larsen's comment that "big databases are full of bad games." It is quality and quantity that make millions of games useful.

The main database includes the games, annotated games, and tournament report texts. The sheer quantity of annotated games is impressive. #98 includes 540 of them, most annotated by the ChessBase "in-house" Grandmasters, plus 30 or 40 special ones annotated by the players themselves.

The extra databases fall into the traditional categories of opening theory, strategy, tactics, and endgames. These sections are eloquent demonstrations of the superiority of the computer format. You can scroll through tactics quizzes that wait for you to enter the winning move and give you a score and you can easily wade through a sea of opening variations that would make up a hefty book.

Some CBM subscribers never look at the videos but they are missing out. From priceless clips like Kasparov resigning game six against Deep Blue in 1997 to the manic glee of Vlad Tkachiev, these videos bridge the television gap that exists in chess. Few fans have any idea what their heroes sound like.



#98 has a long and interesting interview with American GM Yasser Seirawan. With several CB products already having made the jump it's probably only a matter of time before CBM switches over to DVD and includes many hours of full-screen high-quality video. Vlad and Yasser could certainly fill the space!

There are a few downsides. If you are annoyed by less-than-perfect English the occasionally quirky annotations might bug you. Some of the text annotations are only in German, although of course this doesn't affect the variations. Unless you're quick with your laptop you can't stuff a CBM into your pocket to read on the

subway or peruse in bed. And to paraphrase someone famous, there are variations of the Najdorf that can only be read in the bathroom.

You don't have to have ChessBase or Fritz to use CBM. Each CD comes with ChessBase Reader, an old version of ChessBase with limited functionality.

A few tips for using CBM with and without other programs:

- Run the ChessBase 8 repertoire scan to pick out the latest games and variations in your favorite openings. I like to set aside the complete games especially if they are annotated.
- In the symbols field; run a search for “!!”. #98 has dozens of brilliant and beautiful moves so honored by the GM annotators. Hours of entertainment
- Keep your eyes open for the games annotated by one of the players. These are usually bunched at the end of the main database.
- Flout convenience! If you play OTB at all, do at least a little of your studying with a real board and set. Print out a few of the annotated games if you can't set up a board near enough to your computer. If you go a few months with only a 2D computer screen board it can negatively affect your visualization and comfort level at a regular board. The latest 3D boards with the Fritz 8 family are great, even if not in Kasparovian X3D, but it's still not like having wood in your hand.

The E-mailbag

Question You've helped me get so much more out of my newly purchased Fritz 8. Unfortunately, the instruction book that came with my software is printed in a very small font. Where can I get an easier to read manual? Can you download one from the ChessBase site? – **Michael McCormick, (USA)**

Answer No, you can't, but since you are so kind I'll suggest a trick or two, although work may be involved. You could scan the manual and then print the pages out at letter-paper size, or whatever size you prefer. If you don't have a scanner, go to any photocopy shop and use the copiers enlarge feature to do the same thing. Copy each page of the manual at about 140%, enough to fit one page on letter size paper. Should cost just a few bucks and you can staple or bind it into a new extra-grande manual.

Question How do you obtain ducats in order to watch the Radio Chessbase broadcasts? Also, how much is a ducat? – Regards, **Kevin Harrison**

Answer The ducat is the Playchess.com online currency. You use them to buy access to lectures, events, private lessons, and special activities. Much of the Radio ChessBase content is free; other things cost a few ducats. High-ranking players can compete for ducats or charge others to play against them. The ducat coin symbol will appear on the seek that they send out to play. They are also given as prizes for winning tournaments, etc. Only specially registered players, mostly GMs and professional coaches, can sell ducats back to ChessBase for real cash.

You can buy them in the shop at chessbase.com in the playchess.com area. You get 100 for ten euros, or \$12.80. That makes a ducat worth 7.8 US cents. Since the price is based on the 100/10 euro formula, the dollar cost may fluctuate a little as if it were a real currency. Buy low, sell high, stick with the pound sterling.

Question I just ordered Hiarcs 9 and Shredder 8 from the ChessCafe online store. My question is: Can I play against Hiarcs 9 using the new Shredder hi-res wood board interface? Thanks and I appreciate your time answering this for me. – Sincerely, **James Babkes, (USA)**

Answer Sure. All the boards become part of the same common interface. You'll notice after you've installed them both that when you launch one it may tell you it is loading the other. There is no difference, they are the same program. Only the boards, opening books, and engines are different.

The more Fritz-family programs you have the more cool 3D boards you have available under the Tools → Options → Design → 3D board settings menu. And all the engines you have installed are available under Engine → Change main engine. It doesn't matter which icon you use to launch the program.

Question After two months of using Fritz 8 I still detect features I'm at a loss with which is okay because my level of play is somewhat mediocre and I don't need the more sophisticated stuff anyway. But it bothers me deeply that I'm not able to open Fritz 8 from my desktop while I'm watching an annotated game in room broadcasts. I'd like to check the database to find out if and by whom the opening moves have been played before, for example. How do I do it? – **Michael Tschoepke**

Answer Great question and it would be a handy thing to be able to do, but you can't. I imagine this is something of the old "it's not a bug it's a feature" syndrome. You don't want people to be able to access their database features while playing a game, for example. It would be nice to have access to them while kibitzing though. I always have to launch ChessBase 8 on the side to check these things when I'm commentating games at Playchess.com. That's why I have a 21-inch monitor!

The closest I could get was to use an opening book, which is a tab option in the notation window. If you load the Fritz 8 book or a Powerbook on the "Openings Book" tab you can go to the opening moves of the game and see the main lines. Not exactly what you're looking for, but somewhat useful.

It will jump you back to the game position, and probably out of the opening book, when a player moves. You can avoid this by pressing ctrl+u to "unplug" the transmission and you won't get any new moves until you press ctrl+u again.

All the ChessBase software described by Mig in this column, as well as many more ChessBase programs, are available in the [ChessCafe Online Catalog](#).

Mig wants your questions!! Send it along and perhaps it will be answered in an upcoming column. Please include your name and country of residence. [Yes, I have a question for Mig!](#)



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