

ChessBase Cafe

Mig Greengard



A Better Opening Book

As we discussed [here](#) two years ago, the chess book has come a long way. The printed versions aren't much different from those produced fifty or one hundred years ago, except that the bindings are worse and the contents inferior.

The advance has been in electronic books, the best of which are far more than simple electronic versions of a printed book. Why imitate the limitations of the printed page when you can do so much more on a computer? The main advantages to the electronic format are multimedia and interactivity. Today's current crop of ChessBase products get good marks on the first, but are lagging behind in the second department.

Like many people I actually enjoy reading the printed word, and it's a less satisfying experience when you're sitting in front of the computer. Reading pages and pages of text on a screen is recommended only by optometrists. But you can't argue with how much more information you can process at the computer versus the old book+board combo.

The DVDs with hours of video are getting all the attention these days, and they are definitely the future of computer chess training. Meanwhile, ChessBase still finds itself with a bunch of chess writers and trainers who for reasons of technology, language, or poor fashion sense, aren't ready for the jump to video.

So we still have a steady supply of opening CDs in the venerable e-book format. There are plenty of texts with diagrams, the main advantage being the hyperlinks that let you launch a game in a separate window. The only downside is that it's debatable what this does to your visualization skills. When every single move is made in front of you on a board, your ability to see moves in your head might atrophy.

When you have a printed book with a few diagrams you have to be able to follow the analysis in your head to get much value from the material. The problem is that many readers, I would even say most, don't work at this and settle for just skipping from diagram to diagram. That's the worst of all worlds.

The best-of-breed opening training CDs are by Romanian GM Mihail Marin. His “quality not quantity” attitude has produced another excellent CD to complement his first on the English, this one on the Catalan. If only every chess author had this philosophy we would have far fewer books but they would certainly be much better. The technology of these CDs hasn’t advanced much in the few years since the CD on the English came out, but he uses it to the maximum.



There are hundreds and hundreds of game links in the dozens of database texts that are the book part of the CD. This is where the work really comes in. For every description and suggestion there are a few actual games you can look at immediately to reinforce the instruction. I was amazed at the sheer quantity of written material and the amount of original analysis and commentary. It’s so in-depth and of such quality that, were this a printed book, it would definitely be a candidate for the few awards available for chess books. (And why not expand the awards to include e-books?) It almost made me want to play the Catalan!

In addition, there is a database of 46 training questions that are well organized and described. Then there is a huge tree of almost 30,000 Catalan games for rapid review. The practical problem is the same as with print books, and that is keeping track of all the transpositions and variations. (This was obviously much tougher in the CD on the infamously amorphous English.) It is also easy to lose the forest for the trees. Plowing through so many games and so many separate database texts can leave you confused about the general principles of the opening in preference to many variations. It’s important to keep the key text files open so you can refer back to them as needed, or just to avoid getting lost.

There is also much to be said for creating your own variation guide in a game board. You can drag and drop key games into it to build up a single “master game” that contains the lines you are most interested in as variations. Then you have a one-stop repository to review the key lines. This could rapidly grow huge in an opening as broad as the Catalan, but it’s still valid. You will likely choose a few lines over others so it’s handy to have these preferred variations all in one place instead of scattered across a dozen database texts and games.

This also provides the interactivity that will help you learn the material much more efficiently than just browsing. I can’t emphasize enough how much more effective any type of training is when you work actively with the material instead of just reading. You can keep working on your master game by adding your own notes and comments, and of course merging in your own games. It’s also a good place to jot down refutations of mistakes that usually aren’t mentioned in books.

The E-mailbag

M. L. Morrison of the **UK** sends in a tip regarding the sluggishness of the new Reference Search pane in ChessBase 9 that I discussed [last month](#). As I said, if your reference database is the Mega or something similarly huge, it can take 10-

20 seconds after each move for the reference search to work. His tip is to first create a small database of games in a particular opening and set that as the reference database.

This seems like a lot of work, but it could be handy if you are browsing through many games of the same opening, or if you're on a slow computer. Just remember to switch your reference database back to your big base or you'll get many curious results in other searches.

Question When doing a reference on a position CB9 came up with “no games found” and it turned out to be a damaged search booster. I decided to search online: “Find on www.chessbase-online.com” [under the edit-search menu] and to my amazement it found four games within three seconds. After repairing the search booster, I did shift+F7 and had to wait for 61 seconds for the same result. I run CB9 on a laptop 2,6Mhz, 512MB internal P3 on XP-Home. The Internet connection is a cable with 2Mb download. Could you please explain why running local is far slower than on the Internet or what might be wrong on the local machine. – Kind regards, **Leo de Jager (Netherlands)**

Answer Nothing is wrong, but I'm not sure if that's good news or bad news. First off, laptop searches are notoriously slow compared to searches on similar desktop machines. This is because one of the often unmentioned differences: hard drive speed. Most notebook hard drives run much slower than their desktop cousins and this has a major impact on database search speed.

The online database is incredibly fast because of the way it is cached on the mighty server used for these searches. If you run the same search again, or even a similar one (e.g. any name search or any position search), your computer returns results much faster the second time. That's because the database index info is still sitting in your computer's memory, which is a hundred times faster than the hard drive. On the online machine it's that way all the time because of all the searches. Plus, it's a very fast computer.

Question I can't figure out how to enter a game into Fritz 7 that I haven't played either on PlayChess.com or with Fritz for analysis. Just today, a friend of mine e-mailed me a game that he had played so I could run it through Fritz, but I had to play it out in Chessmaster first with both sides set as human, save it as a .pgn file, and then open it in Fritz for analysis. Is there a way to input a list of moves or play out a game in Fritz without the engine? Thanks. – **Peter Le Gere (United States)**

Answer It sounds like you're not only reinventing the wheel, but the entire bicycle! First press ctrl+n for an empty board. Now shift+ctrl+m to turn off the engine. (Or go to the Engine menu.) This will stop Fritz from answering your moves and allow you to enter all the moves. Then you can save the game with ctrl+s (or under the File menu) to the database of your choice.

You may want to create a new, empty database first. Press F12 (or under Window) to open the database pane. Then ctrl+x to create a new database. What's more, you can analyze with Fritz while you enter the moves, not just

when you are done. You do this with ctrl+k, or “Add Kibitzer” under the Engine menu. Then Fritz will give its evaluation of the position on the board as you enter the moves.

Those commands are for the Fritz 8 generation of programs. You can do the same thing in your Fritz 7, but with different commands. Ctrl+n for a new board/game. Now alt+F2 will turn on “infinite analysis mode” which is basically a kibitzer engine. That stops Fritz from playing against you so you can enter in the moves of a game and watch the analysis as you do. If you can’t see the analysis pane, open it with ctrl+alt+e or under the Windows – Panes menu. The next time you start a new game it will revert to play mode.

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!](#)

 [TOP OF PAGE](#) [HOME](#) [COLUMNS](#) [LINKS](#) [ARCHIVES](#) [ABOUT THE
CHESS CAFE](#)[\[ChessCafe Home Page\]](#) [\[Book Review\]](#) [\[Columnists\]](#)[\[Endgame Study\]](#) [\[The Skittles Room\]](#) [\[Archives\]](#)[\[Links\]](#) [\[Online Bookstore\]](#) [\[About ChessCafe.com\]](#) [\[Contact Us\]](#)

Copyright 2005 CyberCafes, LLC. All Rights Reserved.

"**The Chess Cafe®**" is a registered trademark of Russell Enterprises, Inc.