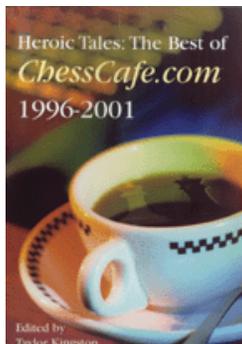




BOOK REVIEWS



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**The iPhone Chess Chronicles:
 Volume I: Chess Genius**

Eugene Manchester

Chess Genius, v2 for iPhone and iPod Touch, Lang Software Ltd., \$9.99

One of the most popular products to be released in recent memory is Apple's iPhone. Combining the musical functionality of the iPod with a mobile phone – all integrated with its trademark touch screen – it has been an instant hit worldwide. In June, the latest iPhone model was released, the 3Gs.



The iPhone is, however, much more than just a telephone with a music player. There are literally thousands of applications (or “apps” in Apple jargon) that may be run on the iPhone. The iPhone television commercial that proclaims (referring to just about anything) – “There’s an app for that!” may not be just wild hyperbole.

If “there’s an app for that,” chess engines are no exception. There are a number of them for the iPhone, including some higher profile programs such as [Shredder](#), [Fritz](#) and Chess Genius, and lesser known ones such as Glaurung and iChess, to name but a few. The prices range from free to \$9.99.

For those not familiar with the marketing policy of Apple, these applications are only available from the official Apple iTunes store, and all must be acquired and downloaded from that store. They are not available from any other retailer, online or otherwise, and they may only be downloaded, i.e., there is no hard copy available.

While this policy may appear to be restrictive (and it is hard to argue otherwise), the good news is that the prices for almost all apps are usually in the \$0.99-\$9.99 range, with the vast majority below \$5 per program. There is the occasional exception, of course, but still, the consumer is able to purchase most programs at very reasonable prices. In addition, there are thousands (yes, thousands) of programs that are absolutely free.

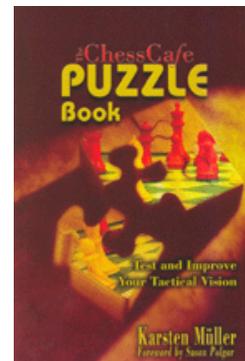
This review of Chess Genius for the iPhone is the first in a series of reviews taking a close look at the chess engines available for the iPhone and the iPod Touch. Each program has been or will be purchased at the Apple “Apps” store online. The programs are running on the new iPhone 3Gs, with 16 gigabytes of memory.

Chess Genius, while perhaps not a name as well known as “[Fritz](#)” or “[Shredder](#),” is no stranger to the world of chessplaying engines. In the early 1990s, it was one of the first master-strength programs available to the general public. This program is now offered by the Apps Store for \$9.99.

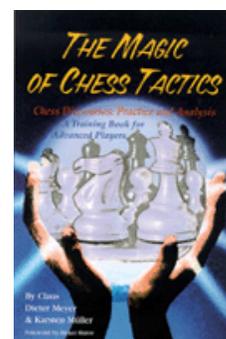
I purchased the program and it downloaded to my iPhone quickly and without incident. The program confirmed that I had version 2.0.02, and also indicated that additional help and information could be found at the Chess Genius website.



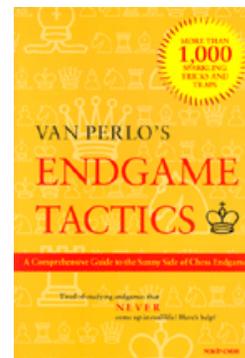
Visit [Shop.ChessCafe.com](#) for the largest selection of chess books, sets, and clocks in North America:



[ChessCafe Puzzle Book](#)
 by Karsten Müller



[Magic of Chess Tactics](#)
 by Claus Dieter Meyer & Karsten Müller



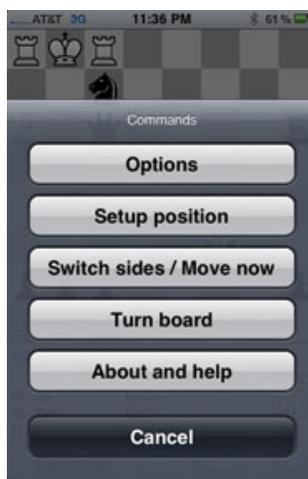
[Endgame Tactics](#)
 by Ger Van Perlo

(Please note that the images of the program used in this review, with the exception of the highlighting red circles, are actual “screenshots” from my iPhone.)

When the program is opened, the functions available are to be found in several menus.



At the bottom of the main screen, touching the icon that looks like an arrow coming from a box (circled in red above) takes you to the following screen:



The choices are self-evident, except for the Options button. Touching that takes you to a screen that allows you to fine-tune your choices for a particular game.



The Game button (circled in red above) give you additional choices:



When you have finished making your choices, you are ready to begin play. There are thirty-four playing levels: thirteen “easy” levels and twenty-one levels at pre-set time controls, ranging from “Instant” to “Game in 2 hours.”

There is an openings book in Chess Genius, and it will identify the opening played by name and by Informant ECO Code.

For example, take a look at the display after the first nine moves of a standard King’s Indian Defense:



The information about the opening is shown in blue just below the first rank. In this instance, the program indicates that it is still in its opening book, the next move in the book line is Nd3, and the opening is ECO Code E98, an orthodox King’s Indian. Note that the gray line below (with the VCR-like controls) allows you to move back or forward within any loaded game.

One of the trademark features of the iPhone is the ability to view the screen display in either portrait or landscape mode. If the display shown in the previous image is rendered in landscape mode, some of the information is lost, while other information (the games score, at least the previous dozen or so moves) are added.



Let’s set up a position. Going to the “Setup position” command, we are able to clear the board and quickly put in a position by touching on a piece and then touching the square on which it will be put. “Black to move” is also selected for this position. I also set a move number, indicate whether castling either side is allowed, and the same for en passant. The “Done” button is selected and Chess Genius goes to work.



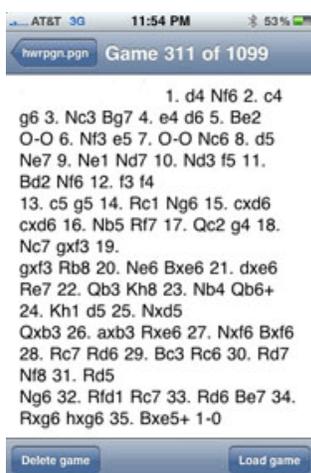
The position is from the famous game Rotlew-Rubinstein, Lodz 1907. White has just moved 22.g3. I have set Chess Genius to display the evaluation and the analysis. That is shown in blue just below the first rank.

Here is where the first shortcoming of this otherwise fine program may be seen. The evaluation is 3.06. With more conventional engines used on PCs, "3.06" would indicate an advantage for White of slightly more than three pawns (i.e., a large white advantage). However, in this case we know it is Black to move. In this position, "3.06" means that whichever side is to move in the given position has an advantage of 3.06 pawns. With, for example, [Fritz](#) or [Rybka](#) running on a PC, this same advantage would be indicated by -3.06, the minus sign meaning that it is a black advantage.

The next number seen is "8" followed by five moves, "Rxc3 Bxb7 Rxc3 Rf3 Rxf3". The "8" means that at this point in time, the program is analysing eight-ply deep (i.e., eight half-moves, or four full moves). The string of moves that follows begins with the program's suggested moves, the first being what it considers Black's best in this position, 22...Rxc3. The confusion is caused by the failure to include actual move numbers and any other convention (such as "...") to indicate whose move it is. What I would have like to have seen would have been 22...Rxc3 23. Bxb7 Rxc3 24.Rf3 Rxf3. Then everything would have been clear.

The lack of move numbers or clarification of who is on move is confusing and it does take some getting used to. The time the program has used so far is shown right above the VCR-like controls on the lower right. And, by the way, Rubinstein did in fact play 22...Rxc3!! and went on to win after 23.gxh4 Rd2!! 24.Qxd2 Be4+ 25.Qg2 Rh3 0-1. (Source: [The Magic of Chess Tactics](#) by Meyer and Müller.)

From a personal point of view, one of the most appealing features of Chess Genius is its ability to import PGN databases. If you have a database in PGN format that is already created, Chess Genius can import it to your iPhone. I did just that. Here is what a game score looks like in the program (please note I have discreetly taken out the names of the players to avoid embarrassment.)



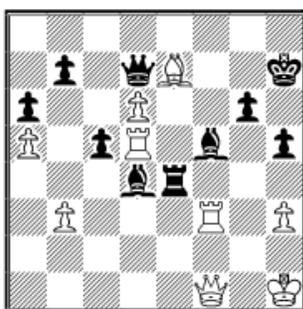
The game may be loaded, and then played through, or analyzed, as you wish.

Of course, what everyone would like to know is what is the strength of this program? I am not an expert at calculating the strength of software programs, and a check on the website reveals no reference to Elo rating. I can tell you that the Rubinstein position above was "solved" by Chess Genius easily. It found the initial move, 22...Rxc3, in seven seconds! I have an OTB rating that ranges between 2150 and 2250, and it has beaten me consistently at the game-in-two time control.

What now? Let's set up five positions, and see if it is able to solve them, and if so, how long it takes. (These same five positions will also be put to future iPhone chess engines, so a comparison may be made.)

The first three positions, with annotations, are taken from Karsten Müller's outstanding [The ChessCafe Puzzle Book: Test and Improve Your Tactical Vision](#).

(1) #306, Black to move
K. Müller – Z. Azmaiparashvili
 ECC Rethymnon 2003



Chess Genius found the key move in about seven seconds, and the main line win in about thirty seconds.

Solution (1) How to assess the position with Black to move? Black is winning by force: **1...Qe6! 2.d7** [2.Rxd4 Re1 3.Rd1 Rxf1+ 4.Rdxf1 Be4+; 2.Rxf5 Re1 3.Rf7+ Kg8 4.Rf8+ Kg7 5.Rf7+ Qxf7 6.Qxe1 Qxd5+ 7.Kh2 Qe5+ 8.Qxe5+ Bxe5+ 9.Kg2 Bf6+; 2.Rdxf5 gxf5 3.Qd3 Re1+ 4.Kg2 (4.Rf1 Qd5+ 5.Kh2 Be5+)] 4...Rg1+ 5.Kh2 Qe5+ 6.Rg3 Ra1+] **2...Re1 3.Rxd4** [3.d8Q Rxf1+ 4.Rxf1 Qe4+ 5.Kh2 Qe2+ 6.Kg3 Qxf1 7.Rxd4 cxd4 8.Bf6 Qxh3+ 9.Kf2 Qe3+ 10.Kg2 Qe2+ 11.Kg3 Qe1+ and Black mates; 3.Rdxf5 gxf5+] **3...Be4! 4.Qxe1 Bxf3+ 5.Kh2 Qxe1 6.Bh4 Qe5+ 0-1** Black's attack flew like an arrow!

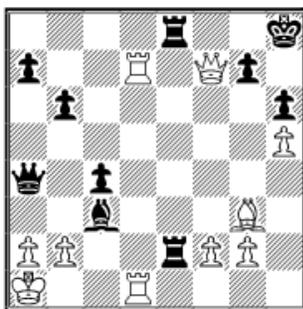
(2) #287, White to move
R. Vaganian – M. Wahls
 German Bundesliga 2001



Chess Genius found the key move and entire winning line instantly.

Solution (2) In Germany, Armenian GM Rafael Vaganian is often called "Mr. Bundesliga" because he has won so many games there. How did he axe Wahls? **1.Bxf5!! 1-0** 1...Rxf5 2.Qxg4+ Qg7 [2...Kh8 3.Rxh6+] 3.Rg6+-

(3) #438, White to move
A. Miles – C. Pritchett
 Lloyds Bank op London 1982

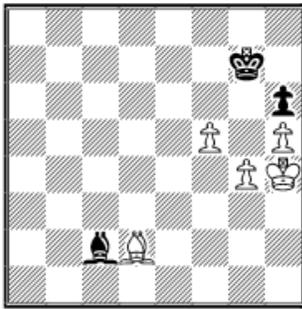


Chess Genius found the key move and the entire winning line instantly.

Solution (3) The interference **1.Be5!! 1-0** wins on the spot. A problem-like finish.

The next two examples, with comments, are from Van Perlo's excellent book [Endgame Tactics](#).

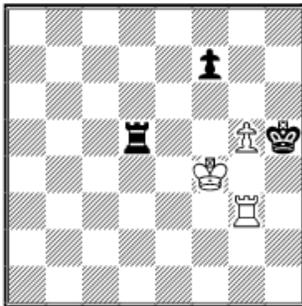
(4) #897, White to move
Aseev – Bagirov
 Leningrad 1989



Chess Genius had much more difficulty with this position. Endgames have traditionally been the Achilles' heel of chessplaying engines. It selected and stayed with 1.f6+, assessing the resulting position after 1... Kxf6 2.Bxh6 Bd3 3. Bd2 as +3.67 for White, but it is hard to see how White can avoid the draw, as Black will either sacrifice the bishop for both pawns or set up an impenetrable blockade on the white squares. After letting the program analyze this position for twelve minutes without any progress, the analysis was terminated. (Rybka 3.0, running on a moderately fast PC under Vista, with a gig of RAM, found the key move instantly.)

Solution (4) If the position appears to be blocked, a piece sacrifice may come in handy, and that's what we see in Aseev-Bagirov, Leningrad 1989. Black was abruptly put out of his misery with **1.Bxh6+! Kxh6 2.f6** (Quicker than 2.g5, which also wins.) **2...Bd3 3.g5+ Kh7 4.f7! Kg7 5.g6** and Black resigned.

(5) #334, White to move
Shamkovich – Bannik
 Soviet Championship, Kiev 1954



Chess Genius found the key move and winning line instantly.

Solution (5) **1.g6!** Obviously, Black cannot capture on account of 2.Rh3 mate. But there isn't anything better: 1...Rd8 2.g7 Rg8 3.Kf5, etc.

Overall, I would estimate the Elo rating of Chess Genius running on the iPhone to be at least 2400-2450, perhaps even stronger. Like most chessplaying engines, it is ferocious when it comes to tactics, while slipping a bit when faced with less tactical, more strategic positions. More rigorous testing with dozens of various positions would yield more accurate rating results, but for our purposes, it is clear that this is a very powerful program.

I especially like the idea that a PGN database may be imported. There is probably a limit to the size of such database – the one I imported was only 100k. Be that as it may, it opens up a whole new world of portable possibilities. Reasonably priced, easy to use, able to give all but the top two percent or so a formidable challenge – two thumbs up for Chess Genius.