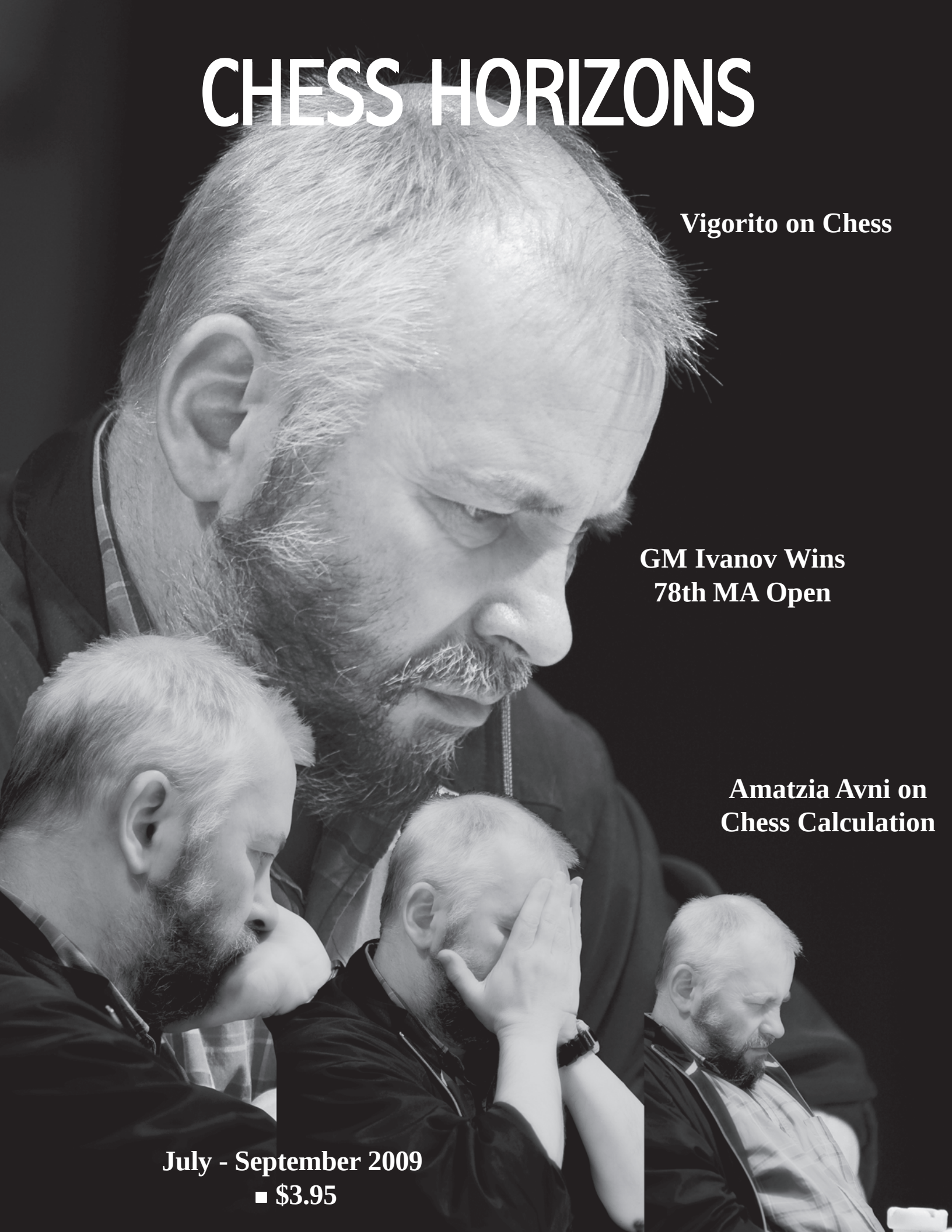
# CHESS HORIZONS



**Vigorito on Chess**

**GM Ivanov Wins 78th MA Open**

**Amatzia Avni on Chess Calculation**

**July - September 2009**
**■ $3.95**

# About MACA

**The Massachusetts Chess Association** is an educational non-profit organization whose purpose is to promote chess in Massachusetts and represent the interest of chess players within the state to the governing body of chess in the United States, **The United States Chess Federation (USCF).**

As part of its role as a state organization, MACA has programs in place to support the existing chess community as well as promote chess among schools and the general public. Highlights of these programs are:

**Providing at least four major tournaments each year:**

Massachusetts Open (State Championship)
Massachusetts Game/60 Championship
Greater Boston Open
Harry Nelson Pillsbury Memorial

Running a scholastic program, which consists of a series of tournaments to determine the state's scholastic champions as well as "warm up" tournaments throughout the year. Free boards and sets are provided to schools and clubs through MACA's **Living Memorial Chess Fund (LMCF).**

Quarterly publication of the award winning ***Chess Horizons***, a journal of regional, national and international chess news and features.

Promotion and development of chess in correctional institutions through our Prison Chess program.

We hope you will chose to join MACA and enjoy the benefits of membership while knowing that you are helping to promote chess throughout Massachusetts.

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# IN THIS ISSUE

***Cover Photo by Tony Cortizas:***
GM Alexander Ivanov, first place, 2009 MA Open



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# Less is More

**Amatzia Avni**

The general public is under the impression that top chess players devote most of their allotted thinking time to calculating variations. People believe that grandmasters are superior to average players not only in terms of *quality* (they calculate more accurately), but also of *quantity* (they see more variations, analyze deeper).

Contrary to this widespread belief, strong players usually invest little time in analysis. They tend to examine fewer lines, concentrating on general considerations and assessments of resulting positions. Russian psychologist Viktor Malkin, cited in *Secrets of Chess Intuition* by Beliavsky & Mikhalchishin (2002) states that the higher a player's rating, the less he actually calculates.

So far, nothing new. However, this well-known observation contains some interesting implications.

We usually think along the lines of "the more, the better." A champion sprinter is supposed to be stronger than his rivals, with longer strides, more powerful motion. We believe he possesses an improved technique and more stamina. Most of us believe that champions are doing basically what an average sprinter does but *more* and *better*. Likewise, a tennis champion is seen as having a stronger serve and quicker reflexes than standard players. It seems as if the relation between winners and losers is *linear*: in each important skill winners do more (quantity) and better (quality) than their adversaries.

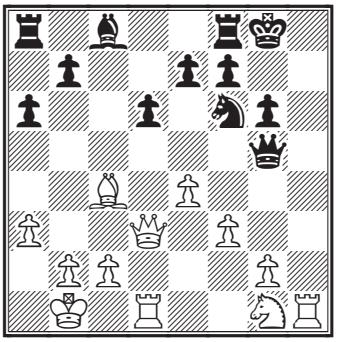
However, when it comes to the specific issue of chess calculation, this is not so. A club player indeed examines more lines and looks at them deeper than a beginner; yet a master researches fewer lines and doesn't bother to check as many moves ahead as a club player does.

**Amatzia Avni**

Let there be no misunderstanding: in critical positions, when analysis is absolutely essential, stronger players will indeed perform thorough calculations. When they do that, their analysis will be superior to that of club players: wider, deeper and more accurate. But in the vast majority of positions, champions engage in less calculation than average players.

Lest a reader reach a faulty conclusion – that in order to improve he should analyze less during his games, I hasten to clarify that this phenomenon works only the other way around. *First* you become stronger, *then* you reduce the time and energy dedicated to analysis, because you already *know*, or *feel* what is right.

To demonstrate my point, I invite you to glance at the following three positions, taken from games I played many years ago, and focus on the possibilities to which I direct your attention. Check your train of thought: would you undertake a detailed analysis of these positions in a practical game?

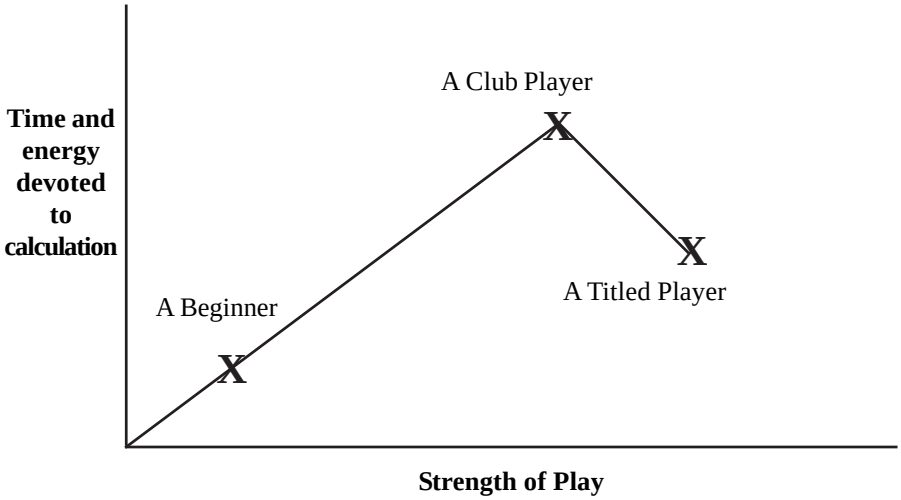


Black to play

Playing white, I am definitely better, and Black's chances lie in hurrying with his counterplay, by 19...b5 20.Ba2 b4! (21.axb4 a5). In the game he chose **19...Kg7? 20.g4 Bd7 21.Nh3 Qe5 22.f4! Qxe4 23.g5**, lost a piece and the game. The rest was **23...Qc6 24.gxf6+ exf6 25.Bd5 Qc7 26.Nf2 Rac8 27.f5 Bxf5 28.Qxf5! Rh8 29.Qd3 1-0**.

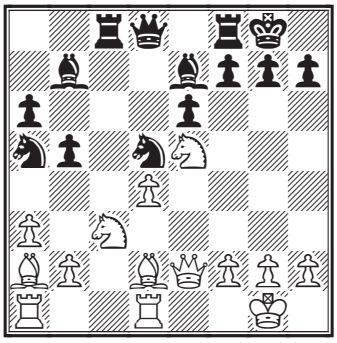
During the game and in the *post mortem* I asked myself (this and the subsequent positions were played in the pre-computer era) what happens after **19...Qxg2**. I worked out the variation 20.Nh3!? Bxh3 21.Rdg1 Qf2 22.Rxg6+ Kh7 23.Rgg1 Nh5 24.Qf1!?.

Now, notwithstanding that this fancy variation gives White nothing (24...Qxf1




Amatzia Avni is an Israeli psychologist, who is a FIDE Master in both game and composition. He is the author of eight chess books, including *Chess Tips for the Improving Player* (QualityChess, 2008).

25.Bxf1 Rg8!), every strong player will find it crazy to look at, let alone seriously analyze, such a line. 19...Qxg2 looks suicidal and after **20.Ne2** one can safely abandon the line with the verdict "winning for White," as it is unlikely that Black can withstand the combined threats of 21.Rdg1, 21.Qd2, and 21.Nf4. The average player might analyze 19...Qxg2 to its ultimate, decisive conclusion, as I did at the time. A master will make an immediate assessment, without analyzing.



White to play

In the above mundane position I continued **16.Rac1**. Play went **16...Bg5 17.Nxd5 Rxc1 18.Rxc1 Bxd2 19.Qxd2 Bxd5 20.Bxd5 exd5 21.Nc6 Nxc6 22.Rxc6**, with a slight edge for White, which I succeeded in converting forty moves later.

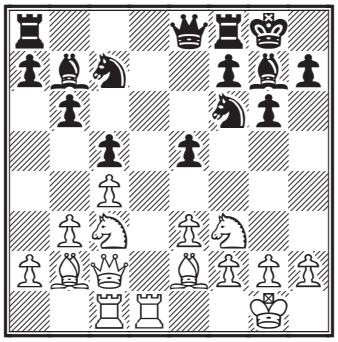
When the game was over, a young kibitzer approached me, inquiring why I hadn't played **16.Nxb5!?**, as after 16...axb5 17.Qxb5 White gets back his sacrificed piece with interest.

I admit that I had completely overlooked this resource. I assume that a stronger player would have spotted it, but would he have spent time analyzing its merits?

I am inclined to think that the answer is negative. 16.Nxb5!? doesn't look "right." Black's position appears solid enough and he doesn't seem to deserve losing. A grandmaster will probably glance briefly at **16...Rc2**, and conclude on the basis of 17.Bxa5 Rxe2 18.Bxd8 Rxd8, or 17.b4 Nf4, that the resulting positions are too murky to hold out much promise for White, in comparison with my safe line.

So, in the last two diagrams, I dare suggest that a strong player would hardly put the tactics involved to the scrutiny of deep analysis. He would spare himself the effort, as he senses that he knows the right answers, without backing them with concrete proof

In the next example things might be a bit different, but not substantially so.



White to play

How do you evaluate the consequences of **14.Nxe5!?**

Let us analyze: 14...Qxe5 15.Nd5 Qg5 (15...Qxb2?, hoping for 16.Qxb2 Nfxd5, fails to the intermediate 16.Ne7+! Kh8 17.Qxb2) 16.f4 Nfxd5!? (16…Qh4 17.Nxc7; 16…Ncxd5 17.fxg5 Nxe3 18.gxf6!) 17.fxg5 Nxe3 18.Qb1 probably doesn't yield Black sufficient compensation for the queen.

Black has a better option: **14...Bxg2!**

Now, if 15.Kxg2? (which I played in the game) then 15...Qxe5 and Black is safe, as after 16.Nd5? he plays 16...Qg5 with check. After 16.Bf3 Rad8 17.Kh1 Qg5 18.Rxd8 Rxd8 19.Rd1, the game soon petered out into a draw.

However, White can improve with **15.Nxg6!**

Would a grandmaster delve into analytical mode in the face of this variation, or skip the tactical skirmish altogether, abandoning 14.Nxe5!?

Intuition tells me that strong players would indulge in *some* analysis in this case, since it is a *critical position*, whose handling affects the overall result. Still, even here, I believe that their effort would be marginal. They might look at 14.Nxe5 Bxg2 15.Nxg6 fxg6 16.Kxg2; stop at this point and ask themselves if the gain of a pawn is worth White's weakened king's position. Then they'll make a decision, without much ado.

In summation, strong players naturally analyze more accurately than their lesser brethren. But they check fewer lines and pursue them only as far as they deem necessary. In approximately 95% of cases they will make decisions based more on intuition, judgement and their knowledge reservoir, than on concrete analysis.

That said, the implication that the present article tries to impart is that climbing the ladder from beginner to a really strong player, at least in regard to the narrow aspect of calculation, is not linear. Sometimes *less* leads to *more*. As one advances in knowledge and understanding, one's dependence on hard analytical evidence is reduced. At this level, indulging in less calculation improves one's performance, as it enables one to concentrate on the important elements.

The U.S. Chess Federation has announced that two MACA members, Michelle Chen of Concord, Massachusetts, and Stuart Finney of Barrington, Rhode Island, have qualified to participate in the 2009 World Youth Chess Championship, scheduled for November 11-23 in Antalya, Turkey.

Chen, who turned 12-years-old on May 2, is qualified to participate in the section for Girls under 12. Finney, who turned 14 on January 30, is qualified to take part in the section for Boys under 14. The two youngsters are the only players from New England to qualify among the fifty-eight U.S. youngsters invited to participate in the tournament, which is being organized by the Turkish Chess Federation under the aegis of the World Chess Federation (FIDE).

As reported by *Deseret News*, 10-year-old Kayden Troff, won the Utah state chess championship. It's the first time a child has ever won the title. Earlier in the year, he won the Utah Blitz championship. Kayden's blitz rating is 2125. He is one of eight children in the country to be invited to the U.S. Chess School in New York this summer.

# Interview with Andrew Rea

**Mark Donlan**

**Mark Donlan:** How did you come to name your book *Chess on the Ledge* and why?
**Andrew Rea:** The goal was to convey the idea that not all goes according to plan, that all is not smooth sailing, and you sometimes have to fend off the disaster of defeat. Most players are reasonably proficient when things are going their way, but handling adversity is not everyone's forte – myself included! The title *Chess On The Edge* came to mind, but that had already been used.

**MD:** In the introduction you write that "dealing with error is a crucial element of this book" and that all the games are given from Black's perspective since "most players have problems playing defense." Is this mostly a treatise on how to defend in chess? What is the primary instructional theme?
**AR:** Defense is a critical theme throughout the book, but not the most important. The most critical theme I have tried to tackle is chess awareness! By putting the reader in the most difficult situations and then demonstrating that these are not hopeless but reasonably playable, even for non-masters. The readers can take heart that they too can handle adversity ... and, with further progress, be better equipped to avoid such situations. While elements of defense are important and should always be considered, this is not strictly a technical matter. A comparison I can make is from the late Swedish adventurer Goran Kropp talking about climbing Mt. Everest. There is no doubting his technical mastery, but when you listen to – or read his book – you are aware that there is more to climbing Mt. Everest than the technical elements! (I have climbed nothing so grand as a few 14ers and one glacier in Colorado, just for the record.)

**MD:** The subtitle is "The Unreal Chess of Andy Rea" and GM Alexander Shabalov writes in the preface that "Andy's 'pictures from an exhibition' is an amazing 'teaching without teaching' concept." Both are evocative statements, could you explain in more detail?
**AR:** While demonstrating the elements necessary for successful defense, I wanted to be sure that recognition of the opponents plans is included, and that this awareness can be used in all elements of the chess struggle. That is what Alex is referring to – that reading *Ledge* can increase your chess awareness without formal tutorial blocks of instruction. Rather, the reader immerses themselves into the topic and is able to absorb a lot of subject matter. If all goes well, their application of the material will be enhanced for having read the book!

**Andrew Rea,**
**author of *Chess on the Ledge***

**MD:** Is there a particular benefit in using examples that are not from actual games?
**AR:** I did not want to borrow from others labors and I wanted the readers to understand they can accomplish more than they might realize. It took me well more than a decade to accumulate the material. Though there are two games from the real world in the introduction, and it can be observed that the play in those games is not ordinary.

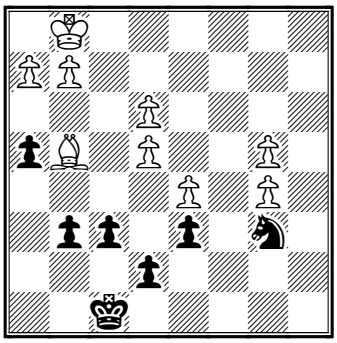
**MD:** Did you accumulate the material specifically for the book or was it originally designed for students and then compiled into book form? What is your chess background?
**AR:** The idea for the book occurred about eight years ago, as I had compiled several dozen positions and games for my study and occasional use with students (it should be no surprise that most of these did not make the cut for *Ledge*). I have been selective with chess teaching, less than twenty students total, one of whom was Ryan Millisits circa 1996/1997.

I have been much more active as a player. I am a native of Pittsburgh, but have lived in California, Colorado, Germany, Kuwait, and now Virginia. I have taken advantage of my travels to play throughout much of the US – including four events in New England in the summer of 1984 – as well as domestic German events and international tournaments in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Dubai, Canada, Hungary, and Greece. I was a Team Captain for the US Virgin Islands at the 1988 Olympiad.

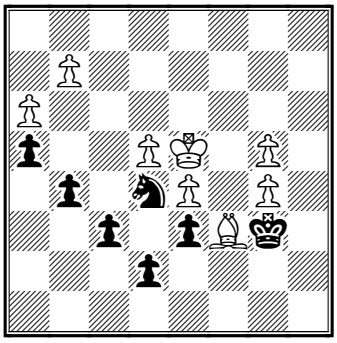
But showing up is not the whole story, I have had occasional strong results – six times I earned a spot for the US Army Chess Team; 1993 Pennsylvania State Champion (with a win against IM Igor Khmelnitsky); 2000 Colorado Closed Champion – an eight player invitational, I was the eighth highest rated player that year, but all went well in the tournament as I scored 6½! Additionally, I won the Colorado Tour Championship six consecutive years, 1999-2004. At least three times I have reached US Elo of 2200+, but I haven't quite managed to maintain that rating – and I am not willing to retire for the sake of retaining that rating. I continue to strive to improve my game, my results, and my rating!

**MD:** In *New In Chess* 2009/3 Jonathan Rowson wrote, "the most tangible thing the games show, and this is a major contribution, is the prevalence of effective exchange sacrifices." Did you set out to showcase this motif?
**AR:** This was incidental, not by design – but the idea of demonstrating the power of the pieces led to several of these situations!

**MD:** Of the seventy games, can you share an example that you feel typifies the character and content of the book?
**AR:** I would suggest Game #17, where after forty moves of changing fortunes, Black lands in an ending two pawns down:



It would seem that White should have little problem scoring the full point – yet the game has fifty-one more moves. Black covers a surprising amount of territory in maintaining the balance and can press for more if White is not careful! After much difficulty for both players, the following position is reached on move eighty-seven:



Black reaches equality with 87...Kc7, but makes one more attempt to confuse matters with **87...Ng6** – yet no shorthanded goals here, the game is still drawn after **88.Ke3 Nf4 89.Kf3 Nh5 90.Kg4 Ng3 91.Kf3**, with White passing on further adventures with 91.Be8, when Black can avoid missteps with **91...Kc7**. This demonstrates that "simple" positions are usually more complex than they first seem!

**MD:** Many of the games are quite long. Can one assume that the middlegame and endgame take a greater priority than the opening and that strategic motifs take precedence over tactics?

**AR:** Chess history is replete with opening successes that did not score the full point. Just one example would be the FIDE title match between Ivanchuk and Ponomariov, a match won by Ponomariov, but not on account of stellar opening positions. Recently Robert Hess has been on a tear, due to his deep positional understanding and his exceptional fortitude in difficult positions. It was exhilirating to see how simple he made his round eight endgame victory against Shulman look!

I will finally note that a few years ago I was at a weekend Swiss in Oberlin,OH that featured a lecture by Maurice Ashley. Ashley made no bones about most games being decided in the middlegame, to include endgame transitions, and that players study habits should be geared accordingly.

Regards tactics, one has to always be aware of these possibilities! However, it seems to me that in most closely contested games the players see the tactics more evenly than the strategic elements. The tactics are more immediate and their impact somewhat simpler to assess than strategic elements – so there can be a greater difference of opinion about the strategic elements. A concrete example could be from New York 1924, I doubt that Tartakower would allow a Greco sacrifice, but allowing Capablanca to sacrifice two pawns to infiltrate his position with rook and king, that was another matter altogether! Evidently that worked well for Capablanca, and it was easy afterwards to second-guess Tartakower.

**MD:** Did you use any chess engines when constructing the games or for analysis?
**AR:** I did not, but the publisher, Bob Long, used Fritz in the course of proofreading, and advised me when there were problems. So there was indirect use of silicon to identify problems, but not in their resolution.

**MD:** What attracts you to chess?
**AR:** The logic and the beauty! Actions are rewarded and punished with minimal reliance on luck. Meanwhile there are so many exceptions to principles that a player need not despair when all looks lost, as there are usually still ways to confuse matters before conceding defeat! Win, lose, or draw, its much more a matter of skill than the turn of a card or roll of the dice.

**MD:** Why should chess players buy your book?
**AR:** When we see a wonderful attack by Nakamura, a brilliant ending from Korchnoi, etc, players think that it is because they are GMs being GMs, they can do this routinely while ordinary players have no chance of being half so good... yet here I am, not even a chess tourist in Tal Shaked's class, but I am able to show that finding resources and having fortitude is not limited to only a few players. In fact, these possibilities are available, in any given position, to all players. The information is always there on the board, ready to be recognized, and I can help you with that process!

**MD:** What are some of your favorite chess books?
**AR:** I have so many great books to choose from! Probably the most influential have been *New York 1924* by Alekhine and *Zurich 1953* by Bronstein, as those showed there are several ways to win, several opinions put on the line by great players, as well as a great deal of fortitude in handling inferior positions – and the matter of not letting an opponents pedigree get in the way of your generating a strong positions. For example, Réti knew of Capablanca not having lost a game since 1916, but this did not prevent him from setting out to defeat Capa in round five of New York 1924 – and not crumbling when victory was in view! Among other favorites would be *Dynamic Chess Strategy* by Mihai Suba, *Fire On Board* by Shirov, and Cheron's *Lehr-und Handbuch des Endspiels* series!

> The difference between a good performance and an extra-special one is often not to be found in the technical aspects of the game, but in sporting characteristics such as will-power and resilience under pressure.
>
> Viswanathan Anand,
> *My Best Games 2001*