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Preface

The book you have in your hands contains more than 1,000 combinations from games played over the last two millennia. Many are classics, an important part of chess education for beginners and intermediate players. Some examples, like Anderssen-Kieseritsky, are so famous that practically any chess player has seen them. Yet there are many more. Huge chunks of chess history from the nineteenth century are omitted from textbooks. This book was designed to fill the gap. While it is hard to determine which games are the most famous, let alone the best, *Chess Gems* contains many beautiful combinations that have amazed and delighted chess fans.

When amateurs talk about sharp combinative play, they often refer to the greats of the past: Anderssen, Morphy, Chigorin, etc. Others have more contemporary heroes: Tal or Fischer. Many people from my generation could be called “Tal’s children”. I grew up on his games; in my childhood I tried to copy his style. There is a perception that today somehow professional chess has become dry and boring.

The way chess is played at the top level has changed quite a bit in the last few years. There are a lot more tactics involved, and the positions are much more complicated – that’s not a coincidence. Nowadays, thanks to computers, to get an advantage out of the opening, one has to go for complicated positions. It is much harder to win a game without taking risks; one cannot just slowly grind down an opponent, “playing for two possible outcomes”: win or draw. A lot of recent wins at high-level tournaments are achieved through enormous complications and tactics. In fact, in a future edition of this book covering the twenty-first century, I am sure quite a few recent games will be worth including.

No discussion of recent changes in chess can ignore the elephant in the room: computers. Here I want to dispel a popular myth: computers will make (or have already made) “human” chess less popular.

Cars can go much faster than the 100-meter world record holder, and farther than the best marathoner. Yet that hasn’t diminished interest in track and field. If anything, computers make chess more accessible to a broad circle of chess fans. They allow amateurs to spot errors of top professionals in real time, to explore all sorts of “what-if” scenarios, and to provide an instant (though imperfect) assessment of the game being played. One cannot ignore the benefits of training with a chess program at all levels. All in all, while computers make the life of a chess professional harder, their overall contribution to the game is positive.

I suppose one can distinguish between “computer chess” and “human chess.” Playing computer chess (really the only way to play against a computer nowadays) involves watching extremely carefully for your own mistakes. There is no psychology involved, no tactics based on intuition. One small error will bring your demise at the hands of the “silicon monster”; whereas against a human opponent, a mistake occasionally results in an interesting and entertaining twist. To me, chess has always been about competition between two people, with all their human emotions and blunders. Not surprisingly, only human games bring about spectacular intuitive sacrifices and memorable combinations.

One thing is clear: for as long as people play chess, for as long as there is appreciation of art, beauty, and logic, this book will not become obsolete.

*Vladimir Kramnik*

*May 2007*
Contemporary chess rules, which replaced shatranj, were introduced at the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century.

The first printed chess book based on the new rules was the treatise of the Spaniard Luis Ramires Lucena, *Love Resurrected and the Art of Playing Chess*, published not later than 1497. In that book Lucena analyzes 11 openings — “The best that I have seen in Rome and all over Italy, France and Spain” — and he includes 150 problems collected by him.

We are interested in his work mostly because he was the first to demonstrate a combination based on smothered mate, a combination which occurred subsequently in numerous guises in the games of players of various strengths.
black bishop on e7. The textbooks of the time are full of imprecision and mistakes, and we will encounter a lot more. These mistakes, however, do not diminish the importance of those texts’ contribution to the development of chess.

3 ... ♗g8 - h8

Once again Black cannot play 3...f8 in view of 4 ♗f7#.

4 ♗e6 - g8+!!

This is just brilliant. The queen sacrifice is aesthetically beautiful even 500 years later.

4. ... ♖b8xg8

Black’s rook smothers its own king at the corner of the board and a picturesque checkmate follows.

5 ♗h6 - f7#

In the year 1512, This Book Teaches You to Play Chess and It Includes Problems was published in Rome, in Italian, by Damiano, a Portuguese. In the chapter “16 fine points which occur in the game. It would be useful for you to know them, since they would improve your creativity” are some typical combinations. Here is one:

13

From the book of Damiano

White to move

In the original book, there was no white king in the diagram. We have added it on d5, so that White does not have 1 ♗d5+ ♗f7 2 gf+ ♗xf7 3 ♗h8+

...xh8 4 ♗xf7 and 5 ♗h1#.

1 ♗h1 - h8+! ♗h8
2 ♗f1 - h1+ ♗h8 - g8
3 ♗h1 - h8+! ♗g8xh8
4 ♗d1 - h1+ ♗h8 - g8

Black’s king is moving to and fro between g8 and h8.

5 ♗h1 - h7#.

This motive is often exploited in contemporary practice as well.

In the middle of the sixteenth century the famous Spanish theoretician Lopez de Segura played numerous games against the best Italian players. Lopez was one of the first masters of contemporary chess, and the author of A Book about Inventiveness and the Art of Playing Chess (1561). Here is a fragment from one of his games.

14

Lopez – Leonardo
Rome, 1560

White to move

The first tactical shot would happen nowadays only in games between beginners:

1 ♗c4xf7+! ♗e8xf7?

It might seem amazing that Black loses a second pawn after the first; it would have been better to follow with 1...e7. But it was considered a matter of honor to accept sacrifices at the time.

2 ♗f3xe5+ ♗f7 - e8

Here again, it is better for Black to continue with: 2...e7 3 ♗xg4 ♗f6.
However, even in this case it would be useless to continue in a position like this, being two pawns down.

3 \( \text{d1xg4} \) \( \text{g8} \rightarrow \text{f6} \)

Leonardo lost his composure and succumbed without a fight. He would not be out of the woods after 3...\( \text{e7} \), if only because of 4 \( \text{h4}+ \) (or 4...\( \text{f6} \) 5 \( \text{g6}+ \) \( \text{h8} \)), while after 3...\( \text{c7} \), White’s pressure would increase with every move; for example: 4 \( \text{e6} \) \( \text{c7} \) 5 \( \text{d4} \) \( \text{a6} \) 6-0 7 \( \text{f7}+ \) \( \text{d8} \) 8 \( \text{xf8}+! \) and White wins a piece.

4 \( \text{g4} \rightarrow \text{e6} \) \( \text{d8} \rightarrow \text{e7} \)

It is a disaster for Black to play 4...\( \text{e7} \) 5 \( \text{f7} \)\#.

5 \( \text{e6} \rightarrow \text{c8} \) \( \text{e7} \rightarrow \text{d8} \)

6 \( \text{c8xd8}+ \) \( \text{e8xd8} \)

7 \( \text{e5} \rightarrow \text{f7} \) followed by 8 \( \text{xf7h8} \) and it is curtains.

At the end of the sixteenth century Julio Chesare Polerio was considered to be the strongest chess player in Rome. He recorded the games of his contemporaries and they were later the basis of his manuscript which he completed in 1594.

15

From Polerio’s manuscript

Domenico – NN

White to move

This is one of the positions in which contemporary masters sacrifice the bishop on h7 without much thought. Thanks to the work of the sixteenth-century masters we know now that Black would hardly survive here:

1 \( \text{d3xh7}! \) \( \text{g8xh7} \)

After 1...\( \text{h8} \), White could have retreated his bishop to c2, keeping an extra pawn, but it would be more energetic for him to follow with 2 \( \text{g5} \).

For example, 2...\( \text{g6} \) 3 \( \text{xf7}+ \) \( \text{xf7} \) 4 \( \text{gxg6} \), and White maintains numerous threats.

2 \( \text{f3} \rightarrow \text{g5} \) \( \text{e7xg5} \)

It is also bad for Black to defend with: 2...\( \text{g8} \) 3 \( \text{h5} \) \( \text{xg5} \) (or 3...\( \text{f6} \) 4 \( \text{ef} \), and White mates in two) 4 \( \text{hg} \) \( \text{f5} \) \( \text{g6} \), and Black cannot avoid mate on h8. Instead, he should have played 2...\( \text{g6} \), but after 3 \( \text{h5}+ \) \( \text{h6} \) 4 \( \text{xf7}++ \), Black’s compensation for the queen is evidently insufficient. It is also possible for White to follow with 3 \( \text{c2}+ \), or 3 \( \text{d3}+ \), and only after 3...\( \text{f5} \) to play 4 \( \text{h5}+ \).

3 \( \text{h4xg5} \)+

and Domenico won, because Black would not have saved himself with 3...\( \text{g8} \) 4 \( \text{h5} \) \( \text{f5} \) \( \text{g6} \), with an unavoidable mate on h8, or 3...\( \text{g6} \) 4 \( \text{h5}+ \) \( \text{f5} \) \( \text{g6}+ \), or 5 \( \text{h7}+ \) with mate to follow.

Many of the games in Polerio’s book contain tactical motives. Here is a typical example:

16

From Polerio’s manuscript

Black to move
Chapter 2

1 ... g5 – g4!
Black sacrifices a knight for attack.

2 f3 – f4
White, of course, declines the “gift.” After 2 exd6? gf+ 3 h1 g2, White’s king is in a hopeless position: 4 g1 xh2+! 5 d2 h4#; or 4 d4 xh2+! 5 h2 h4+ 6 d2 g4+ and 7...d2#. 4...h2+! 5 d2 g7 and White cannot stop 6...h2+! 7 d2 g2#. Therefore he must give up his queen with 4...xa8 gxa8, but that is still not enough to save the game.

2. ... g4 – g3
3 h2 x g3?
Now White gets mated in two. He would not be out of danger after 3 d4 d4! 4 cd xd4. For example, 5 g2 b8 6 d5 g4+ 7 f3 g1 8 e2 h4 9 d2 g4+ 10 d3 xf1 11 f1 d1+ 12 d2 a1.

3 ... g8xg3+,
with the unavoidable threat 4...d8 – h4#.

A citizen of Naples, Alessandro Salvio, wrote an interesting treatise about chess in 10. The position in Diagram 6 is from that book.

We end the chapter with some examples from the legacy of the Italian player Gioacchino Greco, born in Calabria, one of the strongest players in Europe in the first half of the seventeenth century. He was the author of several treatises on chess published between 1619 and 1625. Greco’s works were in fact collections of games with comments on variations. Some of these games were not even played – Greco invented them in order to demonstrate some instructive combinations.

“The Italian school and, most of all, Gioacchino Greco, introduced the chess combination as an important component of chess skill. There were great masters after Greco who were quite adept at combinations – it would be enough to name Anderssen, Morphy, Alekhine, Tal, Fischer, Kasparov. Still,
Greco was the first!” (Mikhail Botvinnik)

18
From Greco’s manuscripts
Greco – NN

White to move

1 g6xh7+!!
This is a brilliant idea, which is often seen nowadays as well. In similar positions White often wins with 1 g7+ ♤xh5 2 gh♗, but Greco’s solution is more effective – and spectacular, too.
1 ... ♤f6xh5
2 ♤d3 – g6#

19
From Greco’s manuscripts

Black to move

1 ... ♜h4xf2+
2 ♤g1 – h1 ♜f2 – g1+!!
This is an interesting treatment of the theme of smothered mate. Now, after 2 ♤xg1, or 2 ♤xg1, Black finishes the job with 2... ♜f2#.

20
From Greco’s manuscripts

White to move

1 ♤c4 – e6+! ♜d7xe6
2 ♦h5 – e8+,
With 3 d4 – d5# to follow.

1620
Greco – NN

21

White to move

1 ♤c4xf7+!
“That is the first combination in this game, but it is not the last. Greco never overlooked possibilities like this. Now Black cannot play 1... ♤xf7, because of 2 ♦xf3+ and he loses his queen.” (Botvinnik)
1 ... ♜e8 – d8
2 ♦d1xf3 ♜h3 – d7
3 ♦h1xh7!
“The protection of the f8-square has been weakened, and that enhances White’s attack against Black’s king on d8.” (Mikhail Botvinnik)

Greco is not tempted by 3 $\text{d}5 \text{f}6 4 \text{xb}7.

3 ... $\text{h}8\text{xh}7 
4. $\text{f}7\text{g}8 \text{h}7 - \text{h}2 + 
5 \text{f}2 - \text{g}1

“White is indeed an exchange down, but he wins a piece, because Black is incapable of protecting both his pieces (the bishop on f8 and the rook on h2).

In case of 5...$\text{h}3 6 $\text{xf}8 + \text{d}7 7 $\text{f}7 + \text{c}6 8 \text{c}4 + \text{d}7 9 \text{e}6 + \text{xe}6 10 \text{xe}6 + \text{xe}6 11 \text{hx}2, White wins easily.” (Mikhail Botvinnik).

It is also bad for Black to play 8...$\text{b}6, because of: 9 $\text{b}4 + \text{c}6 10. \text{d}5 + \text{d}7 11 \text{e}6 + .

5 ... $\text{h}2\text{xc}2 ?

Now Black loses his queen. It was slightly better for him to defend with 5...$\text{e}7 6 \text{hx}2.

6 $\text{xf}8 +

White can also win after the move order 6 $\text{g}5 + \text{e}7 7 \text{f}8 + \text{e}8 8 \text{xe}7 + \text{d}7 9 \text{e}6 +! \text{xe}6 10 \text{xe}8.

6 ... $\text{d}7 - \text{e}8 
7 \text{c}1 - \text{g}5 + \text{d}8 - \text{d}7 
8 \text{g}8 - \text{e}6 +! \text{e}8\text{xe}6 
9 \text{f}8 - \text{d}8 + \text{d}7 - \text{c}6 
10 \text{d}4 - \text{d}5 +,

White won the queen and Black was checkmated soon afterwards.
How Would You Play?

22
From the book of Damiano, 1512

White to move

23
From the book of Damiano, 1512

White to move

24
From the book of Salvio, 1604

White to move

25
From Greco’s manuscripts, 1619-1625

White to move

26
From Greco’s manuscripts, 1619-1625

White to move

27
From Greco’s manuscripts, 1619-1625

Black to move