

## The Future of Books

At the London Classic I asked a foreign grandmaster why he was buying so many opening books? He pointed out that although there is chessbase, the ability to learn lots of different lines to avoid preparation is quite tough and felt that this was a short cut. In other words, a database might have 10 thousand games offering solutions to a line in the Ruy Lopez but a book can offer a single answer.

The problem is that when looking at lots of games you can't help wondering for example why certain lines were stopped being played by the top players in the 1990s but now something is back in vogue. A book will usually point out an important game or just casually that Kasparov started playing a different line.

There was a time when reading a book on a train or commute was standard for chess players who wanted to improve. There were many with a pocket set just like Fischer to go through the side-lines if required. Nowadays, this is more tricky, so some publishers have resorted to a different approach such as Batsford who boasted that their latest version of Keres's classic *Practical Chess Endings* had 500 extra diagrams. This certainly helps but what has really proved a game changer for books is apps that allow you read the book on an electronic device such as phone or ipad but crucially the ability to press on the move and instantly see a chessboard. In simple terms it is an advanced book reader.

I will try to cover the more well known chess apps available.

Gambit Chess Studio 2 is the app that allows to read the **Gambit Chess** books. This publishing company has over 100 titles available on the app and many bestsellers were written by the founders John Nunn, Murray Chandler and Graham Burgess. It is basically an e-reader but you can also see the board when highlighting the moves, which is exactly what you want. The second version has fixed up one or two problems and added an engine for analysis. It is a nice design but the obvious drawback is that you can only use it with Gambit books and if you want to look it up at the app store search for chess studio. **Everyman Chess** which is currently associated with English IM Bryon Jacobs also has an app called Chess Viewer which can be highly recommended. **Batsford** are a grand name in the chess publishing world but their books seem to be only available as an e-book, which is not as impressive.

One of the pioneers of the genre are **e+books** ( look up ePlusChessBooks for the app) which were welcomed by New In Chess who put their entire library at their disposal. It is a long process to input the books and it seems to have slowed in recent years. A big supporter is Jeremy Silman and his endgame book is available. They started in 2010 and have some impressive classics, as they are out of copyright, such as *My System* by Nimzowitsch. I am slightly biased seeing as I wrote a book just for them called *Gary Lane's Chess Puzzles*, consequently I have taken a keen interest in e-books ever since. A big reason for

downloading their app is that while rivals offer you brief samples to look at, they just give you Capabalanca's *Chess Fundamentals* for free.

**Chessable** takes a slightly different slant by trying to create a unique selling point by portraying itself as a chess education website. It was founded a few years ago by Americans IM John Bartholomew and David Kramaley who have successfully used YouTube training videos as a way to advertise. This modern approach sees Bartholomew reaching out to his regular 94 thousand subscribers and it seems to be very effective. The prices vary from cheap to expensive as for example the new book *Keep it simple 1 d4* by Christof Sielecki is priced at \$39.99 but if you add in 28 hours of video it is \$199.98! Perhaps, their best known book is *Kasparov's My great Predecessors volume 1*. They provide the text and a series of interactive puzzles as a way of trying to help the reader improve. It is in general a good source for keen players but the big difference is that there is no iOS or Android app for Chessable which means you have to use their website.

Finally, the most exciting app is by **Forward Chess** because of its varied library. Now, the finer details of an app can be argued about but there is no getting away from that the company is on to a winner simply by offering different stuff. It currently stocks the latest British Chess Magazine and has a long list of different publishes including Everyman, Mongoose Press and Quality Chess.

I would suggest downloading the free apps and see which one suits you best. The prices for titles seem quite high to me considering that there is no paper printed and in some cases the publishers distribute it, which avoids having to sell it at a discount to shops. Still, hopefully in time demand will lead to cheaper prices.

The future of chess books is electronic.