

# THE **GAMBIT** BOOK OF INSTRUCTIVE CHESS PUZZLES

**Graham Burgess**

Improve your chess with these  
300 carefully selected puzzles



Solving chess puzzles is one of the most effective ways to improve your game. This convenient book provides 300 exercises, with instructive points highlighted in the solutions.

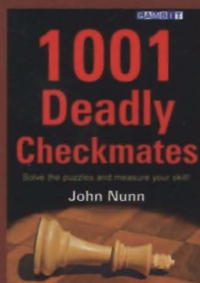
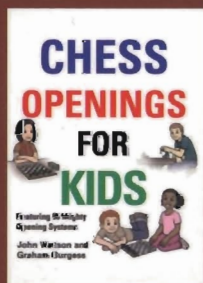
There is something here for everyone. The first 64 puzzles are based on a clear-cut tactic or checkmate, such as those explained in Gambit's best-sellers *How to Beat Your Dad at Chess* and *Chess Tactics for Kids*. In practice it is vital to defend resiliently and seek counterattacking chances – there is an innovative chapter on these rarely-covered themes, as well as endgame puzzles and ones where the reader must decide how to punch home an attack.

Later chapters develop your ability to make tough chessboard decisions. Attack, sacrifice, grab material, defend or simplify – you decide! Principles and guidelines are emphasized, together with common sources of error. The final section of puzzles will prove a stern challenge even for the best players, with the reader exposed to the full complexity of modern chess – with a few helpful hints along the way.

Gambit Publications has been publishing top-quality innovative chess books since 1998, winning numerous awards in several countries. FIDE Master **Graham Burgess** is Gambit's Editorial Director, and one of the founders of the company. He has written more than twenty books and holds the world record for marathon blitz chess playing. He lives in Minnesota.

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**Graham Burgess**

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# Introduction

The problem with many chess puzzle books is that they only teach you to become better at solving chess tactics puzzles. That's fine if a puzzle position happens to appear on your board during a game, but less useful otherwise.

The aim of this book is to help my readers make better chessboard *decisions*. On every single move of every chess game you will ever play, you need to make a decision. Tactical skills are vital if you are ever to make a good decision, but if you try to solve every situation with tactics, you will squander a lot of opportunities.

I tackled a lot of tactics puzzles when I was a junior. According to the scoring systems in those books, I performed extremely well – looking back over my answers, I wouldn't do much better now. Yet in my games back then, I found very few opportunities to use those apparent skills. I would feel uncomfortable as soon as the position became at all unclear, and throw an advantage away by the desire to regain control – a typical error of a type that we see players making many times in this book. I would often convince myself that an idea didn't work, simply because I couldn't analyse it to a finish.

A hallmark of strong chess-players is their ability to make good choices even when they can't analyse the position exhaustively. They are able to determine what helps their position most, and makes the opponent's task more difficult. They avoid releasing tension or exchanging pieces unless they have something to gain from it. As Jonathan Rowson indicated in *The Seven Deadly Chess Sins*, they “go with the flow”, seeing simply what is necessary without knowing the precise outcome. This rare ability that chess-players develop appears to be transferable to non-chess decision-making, and may be a reason why chess-players tend to be successful in other fields, such as business management, banking, mathematics and trading/stockbroking.

In this book, in addition to tactical exercises, I present positions that call for a calm decision, or for a good assessment based on intuition and analysis. The final three chapters in the book offer a chance to practice accurately visualizing positions several moves ahead – a vital skill that only

comes with experience. You may find some of these exercises frustrating, but it's useful training – and at least if you make a mistake here, it will be less painful than doing so in a tournament game. There are also puzzles where there is in fact little to calculate, but the challenge comes from seeing the key idea at all – creativity and imagination are required.

Throughout the book, in the solutions and sometimes the captions, I emphasize as many instructive points as I can. These include typical sources of error, principles, rules of thumb and thinking methods that could have been employed to find the solution.

To get the most out of this book, please tackle each position as if it arose in an important tournament game. Think carefully before making your decision, just as you would if a money prize, or victory for your team, hinged on the result of your game. Assume you have enough time on the clock (let's say 20 minutes) to make a careful choice. If you really have no idea, then decide on a move in any case, like you would have to at the board. *Please* don't just glance at the diagram, choose a move in a few seconds, and then look at the solution. That way you'll learn very little. It's your own effort that really counts – the harder you work, the more you'll expand your horizons. I'll also ask that you avoid reasoning of the type “this *is* a puzzle, so the solution must be [a dramatic move/sacrifice]”. Often it won't be – the whole point of a puzzle might be to *reject* such a move – and in any case, you're putting yourself in an artificial situation, rather than training for over-the-board decision-making.

Obviously, you shouldn't use a computer to analyse the position, or move the pieces around on a board. You're very welcome to set the position up on a real board, and by all means have a clock ticking if this helps you focus.

Once you've finished the book, I hope you'll experience improved results. You can also turn to page 159 to get some idea of how well you have done. But this is just for fun, and shouldn't be taken too seriously!



# Acknowledgements, Methods and Organization

All the puzzle positions in this book are from games played in 2010 or 2011, or in events ending in those years. To the best of my knowledge, they have not appeared elsewhere as puzzle positions, or featured prominently on chess news sites. Unless you follow modern chess extremely closely, you are unlikely to have seen many (or indeed any) of them before.

I generated all the puzzles from scratch by analysing unannotated games – mostly from classical time-limit grandmaster play. The main source was Mark Crowther’s TWIC (The Week in Chess), while I also examined games downloaded from [iccf-webchess.com](http://iccf-webchess.com) (correspondence chess) and [tcec-chess.org](http://tcec-chess.org) (computer games), to cast the net even wider. The first step was to set a computer to work, blunderchecking a large number of games. (I should thank my wife, June Stengel, for allowing me to commandeer her computer for prolonged periods for this purpose.) This helped identify missed opportunities and tactically interesting episodes. I was left with a few thousand games to examine by hand in search of good puzzle positions. I was looking for positions where the right path is hard to guess without seeing the main idea, and where there is only one solution. My goal was to find puzzles of a wide range of difficulties and themes, and featuring many instructive points.

I roughly categorized the positions with a variety of labels: Easy, Normal and Advanced are self-explanatory; the level of complexity was described as Clear, Tricky or Messy. And some puzzles were marked as Endgame or Attack/Defence/Counterattack. I then sent the shortlist of puzzles to two testers, who attempted the positions and sent their feedback to me. I am very grateful to these testers, as their responses greatly improved the final book. They were:

**Wolff Morrow**, who produces the cover images for many of Gambit’s books. He lives in Texas, and is an enthusiastic club-level player. He didn’t get through all the puzzles, but put a lot of time and effort into solving as many as he could, and provided some very useful thoughts.

**Sean Marsh** lives in England, and has done some online work for Gambit in addition to running a popular chess blog ([marsh Towers.blogspot.com](http://marsh Towers.blogspot.com)).

He is a strong club player who has been very close to breaking through the 2200 barrier. He tackled most of the puzzles, trying to solve them within the time constraints of a normal tournament game. His thoughtful comments also helped me to refine many of the puzzles and throw out some of the less satisfactory ones.

Naturally, at every stage of the work on this book, I also used computer engines to test and verify the analysis. My main workhorses were Houdini, Robbolito and Rybka 4, together with a big collection of tablebases. An upgrade to a powerful six-core computer towards the end of the work enabled a final round of even more rigorous checking. But nothing can replace human thought in a book designed to teach humans to play better chess.

My ratings of the puzzles, together with the feedback from the testers, formed the basis for the division into eight chapters and the ordering within them. Easy & Clear puzzles are in Chapter 1, while the Advanced & Messy ones found a home in Chapter 8. The large number of Normal & Tricky puzzles were split in two: Chapter 4 contains those where the main problem is seeing the idea at all, while Chapter 6 is the place for ones with a greater emphasis on calculation and logic.

Within each chapter, we start with puzzles with long captions, arranged three to a page. Then come ones with short captions (four per page), and finally there are ‘no clues’ positions, arranged six to a page. Within each of these three sections, the puzzles are arranged in very roughly ascending order of difficulty.

## Symbols

I shall assume that my readers are familiar with algebraic chess notation. A few other standard symbols are used in this book:

!!	brilliant move	+	check
!	good move	++	double check
!?	interesting move	#	checkmate
?!	dubious move	Ch	Championship
?	bad move	Corr.	correspondence game
??	blunder	( <i>n</i> )	<i>n</i> th match game