

**Grooten, H., 2017. *Chess Strategy for Club Players: The Road to Positional Advantage*. Alkmaar: New In Chess.**

How did I learn about chess strategy? Actually, perhaps just removing the 'how' would be a better question in my case. Looking back, I think three books influenced me. Alexander Kotov's *Think Like a Grandmaster* was one such book. What I took from this book was mostly about coming up with a plan based upon the pawn structure in the centre. Added to this, for some time I tried to establish my 'candidate moves' at the start of each thinking turn and tried, and failed, to analyse each 'branch' of the 'tree of analysis' once and once only. I also adopted the habit of writing down my move before playing it; a habit which, I believe, is now against the rules in OTB chess.

Second was Nimzowitsch's *My System*. Alas, I was not a good enough player to benefit fully from this book. I picked up a bit about open files, blockades, and one or two other things but, honestly, I'm not sure I really understood it. Poor Nimzowitsch! Misunderstood in his own time and not understood by a young man trying to improve his own game in the early 1980s.

I enjoyed far more success with Michael Stean's *Simple Chess*. Now that was, and is, a cracking book. Stean's wonderful explanations and informative annotations to illustrative games did more to help me have the foggiest idea of what I was, or ought, to be doing in a game than the other two. Stean's book also has the advantage of brevity. A mere 116 pages.

The subject of this review is, in contrast, a great big door stop of a book at 462 large (23.5 by 17cm) pages. I intended to review it for the last *EP* but had got nowhere near being able to put pen to paper.

Grooten sets out his material as an exploration of Steinitz's eleven permanent and five temporary advantages, what he calls elements of a position. Grooten then explores these chapter by chapter. Some of it is pretty hard stuff. Worse, each chapter ends with an exam! The 'Solutions' chapter alone runs to 73 pages where everything is explained.

The blurb on the back of the book pitches it to club players. Well, yes, possibly. My suspicion is that players graded higher than my mere 109 ECF will get more from it than I have so far.

It is not a book for an extended read. Rather, I find it a good book in which to dip in now and then when feeling brave. It is not a book for the lazy player. Grooten makes his readers work. Its sheer size and weight – 875g – make it an impractical choice for the bus or train ride to work. However, as the nights 'draw in' as my mother used to say, and we retreat to our homes in search of 'hygge' or whatever this winter's chic fashion might be, then I can certainly see myself setting up my 'proper' set and trying to learn a little more from this very well written (and translated) book.

**Adam Spencer**