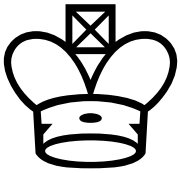
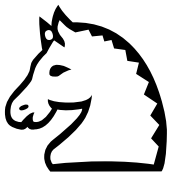
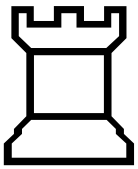




Anyone Can Learn to Play Chess

Len Lyon



I like ***"Anyone Can Learn to Play Chess"***. This is the same approach as Pelts and I use in our ***"Comprehensive Chess Course Volume I (Learn Chess in Twelve Lessons)"***, namely, teach only a little and then solidify that knowledge by playing games. Mr. Lyon teaches pieces in a different order than we do. In private lessons, I may use yet a third order depending on the needs of an individual student. But this incremental approach that we share is, in my opinion, the best way to learn.

Grandmaster Lev Alburt

Three-time U.S. Chess Champion

I like this book. The attitude is sound.
The pedagogy is sound.

FIDE Master Alex Dunne

***Chess Life* columnist**

This book is exactly what we are looking for.

Peter Kurzdorfer

Former *Chess Life* Editor

Reviewing your book, ***"Anyone Can Learn to Play Chess"***, I find it most aptly named. One could definitely learn to play "a decent game" just by reading this book, with its many beautifully diagrammed examples. They are explained with simplicity and clarity. So much so, that a chess set is not even a necessity .. I am thinking of doing a public access show on chess and would like .. to use some of your material.

W.J. MacLellan

Past President of the Boylston Chess Club, Boston

I have reviewed ***"Anyone Can Learn to Play Chess"*** and can very heartily recommend it.

Bob Smith

USCF Executive Board member and past President

About "Anyone Can Learn to Play Chess"

There are a number of *"How To Play Chess"* books for pure beginners. **So what's special about this book?**

Almost all other books take an identical approach: They first want the reader to learn how each kind of chess piece moves. Then they tell how to setup all the pieces on the board to begin a new game. If the reader thinks only about White's first move and Black's response, there are four hundred combinations to consider. For any reader with concerns about "Am I smart enough to play chess?", this can be an insurmountable beginning! **There is a better way to teach this game, and it is given here.** This has been successfully used with young children. It immediately provides beginners with the necessary self-confidence, it lets them play meaningful chess within an hour, and it gives them immediate success in this effort. As an early reviewer comments, this book is "a breakthrough in the teaching of chess to beginners".

"Anyone Can Learn to Play Chess" first teaches how to win an endgame with a King and two Rooks vs. a King, i.e., we learn only enough to play with two chess pieces.[#] In the author's classes, after the initial demonstration, students always play the King and two Rooks against him, and they always win. Not because he lets them, but because the **students are exposed to only a small amount of knowledge at a time, and that is easily mastered**. Such success solidifies and expands each student's initial desire to learn this game. Because students play real chess immediately, they build not only self-confidence, but also a certain intimacy with the pieces. They don't just know what the book says about how Rooks move, they *feel* how

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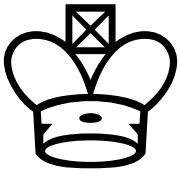
[#] Others, such as Tarrasch and Lasker, have taught endgames before openings and other aspects of the game, but they have still started by asking the student to learn how all the chess pieces move. They treat these endgames like studies rather than games for the student. ***"Anyone Can Learn to Play Chess"*** uses a different approach.

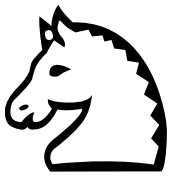
Rooks move, what power one Rook has, and how two Rooks can cooperate to have more than twice the power of one Rook.

The philosophy of ***"Anyone Can Learn to Play Chess"*** is to focus on the needs of a beginning player. This is seen in the above considerations and in the detailed contents such as the discussion of **handicapping that allows a chess-experienced parent to play complete games in a meaningful way with a chess-learning child**. This philosophy is also the reason why the number of diagrams in this book is much higher than in other chess books. In the beginning, diagrams are given every half move, and later are given every move or two. Standard texts usually provide diagrams with a number of moves separating them. This is fine for an intermediate player who may, or may not, have a board set up to play as he reads, but it is not good enough for beginning players who don't want to use a board as they read, because switching attention back and forth between the board and the text is distracting and makes the learning process more difficult.

The large number of diagrams serves an additional purpose. **The figures have a completely descriptive caption, allowing them to provide a "fast track" for those readers desiring a faster study pace**. By merely going from diagram to diagram, such readers can quickly learn most of the key ideas.

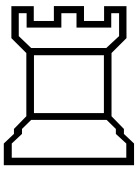
This book is meant to make it easy for anyone to learn to play chess. And it works! ***"Anyone Can Learn to Play Chess"*** **is perfect for anyone who wants to begin this great game**.





Anyone Can Learn to Play Chess

Len Lyon



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In memory of

La rs Lyon

my son

and

my first chess student

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Len Lyon
September 2004

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1. Chess is Exciting and Anyone Can Learn to Play

The soldier wondered if this was to be his day of glory or his day of death. His legs seemed heavier as they picked up the morning dew from the tall grasses he marched through. The sun was above the horizon, but its light was indirect, masked by the trees of the forest that surrounded the meadow, and the soldier could barely see the opposing army as it also lined up in its battle-ready formation on the other side of the wide open meadow. The invention of gunpowder, and the killing at a distance that it would make possible, lay far in the future; this fight would require that he stare into his enemy's eyes as they swung their broadswords at close range.

The same tension that wore upon the foot soldier pulsed through the veins of the king as he viewed the soon to become battlefield from atop the knoll a bit behind his front lines. His was the responsibility for directing his troops as they marched slowly forward to face his rival's forces. Only the king could position his knights, looking so formidable in their chainmail and sitting on their huge chargers, and his decisions would be critical as these knights must be able to quickly jump to the support of any developing weak spot in his lines, as well as being able to spurt through any opening in his enemy's wall of force.

The days of Camelot have always brought us excitement. Whether viewed through Theodore White's ***"The Once and Future King"***, Mark Twain's ***"A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court"***, or a more accurate history of the medieval age, the battles of knights in shining armor, the intrigue of bishops involving the church in royal affairs, and the courtship of kings and queens, have made us oblivious to the harsher realities of day to day living in those times. And that same excitement exists today for those who continue these ancient battles on the chessboard.

The exciting allure of chess is well known, but unfortunately along with that goes a reputation of chess being hard to learn, a game only for intellectuals or some other kind of oddball. What's worse, a number of people have even tried to learn chess and then given up because they believed this to be true. But it isn't true! **Anyone can learn to play and enjoy chess, even if they've tried before and given up**.

The problem is not that chess is too hard to learn, but that the way it is usually taught leaves many people feeling that they are faced with an insurmountable amount to learn before they can even begin. Almost any beginner's book of chess starts by explaining how each kind of chess piece moves, how to set them up on the chessboard to begin a game, and how to get started. There are a half dozen different kinds of chess pieces, and there are four hundred ways that White and Black can make their first move; this can leave the average reader wondering, "Am I smart enough to play this game?".

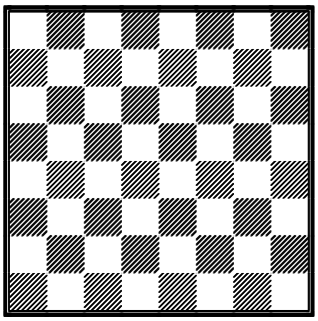
But there is another way to learn chess, one that involves taking only a small step at a time, and a way that is more fun. **We can do it backwards!**

What does this mean? It means that we will not try to start at the beginning of a chess game; we will start near the end of a chess game, after many of the pieces have been captured and removed from the board, but the game has not yet been played to its final position. **We will begin by learning how to win these partially played games**. In the next two short chapters we will learn just two of the chess pieces, and in the chapter after that we will play our first game of real chess. **Within the hour you can be part of this exciting world!**

2. The King and Notation

Like checkers, chess is played on a 64-square board; one that has eight rows of eight squares each (figure 2.1). While a checkers board usually has black and red squares, **chessboards are usually described using black and white squares**. The chessboard is placed between the two players and, if necessary, turned such that each player has a white corner square on his or her right hand side ("**white on right**").

Player # 1



Player # 2

Figure 2.1: A chessboard has sixty-four black and white squares arranged in eight rows of eight each. The board is oriented such that each player has a white square in the right corner.

Chessboards also come in other colors, for example, blue and white, green and ivory, even brown and yellow. In such cases, an obvious correspondence is made between these colors and the traditional black and white. The "white on right" convention becomes "**light on right**".

Unlike checkers, where all of the pieces are identical at the beginning of the game, chess is played with several different kinds of pieces. **The most important of these is the King**. There is one white King and one black King. The King is usually the tallest of the pieces, although a few chess sets do exist where other pieces are the same height. The King is the most important chess piece because **the object of the game is to trap the enemy King**. We say "trap", rather than "capture" or "kill", because you never make that last, fatal, move. You play until you are attacking the opponent King, it is your opponent's turn to move,

and no matter what move your opponent makes, you *could* then capture the King. In this kind of situation, your opponent makes no move. Instead, the game is already over and you have won. You are said to have **checkmated** the King.

Because the King is so important, he is not allowed to expose himself to capture. If your opponent moves the King to a position where you could capture it, you cannot go ahead with the capture and claim a win. Instead, you must point out that the move was illegal. Your opponent then puts the King back where it was and makes a new move.

You will have no trouble learning how to play with the King. It's very simple! **The King can move one square in any direction** unless, of course, another piece blocks him by occupying that square. For example, the King in figure 2.2 can move to any of the squares marked with an "x".

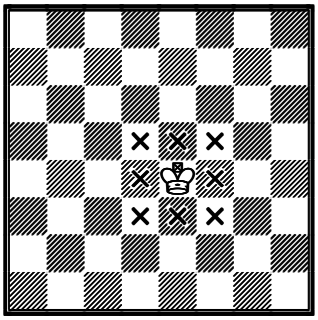


Figure 2.2: A King can move one square in any direction (unless blocked).

As we learn this game, **we'll need to describe moves that are made on the chessboard**. Sometimes we'll use figures showing the chessboard and the pieces on it. Whenever we do this, the board will be drawn as if the person playing the black pieces were sitting at the top of the figure and the person playing the white pieces were sitting at the bottom (figure 2.3).

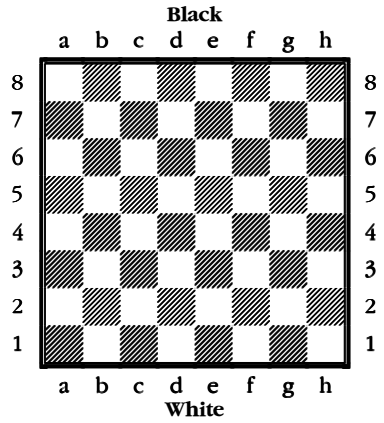


Figure 2.3: A rank and file notation is used with the chessboard. Black sits at the top of the figure, and White sits at the bottom.

In addition to the figures, we'll need to describe chess moves in the text we're reading. To help do this, we'll **number the ranks (rows) of the board from one to eight**, starting from White's side of the board, and we'll **use the letters "a" through "h" to identify the files (columns)** of the board, going from White's left to right. We can then identify any square on the board by giving its file and its rank. For example, in figure 2.3, the corner squares, starting at the lower left (White's left hand) and going around clockwise, are a1, a8, h8, and h1.

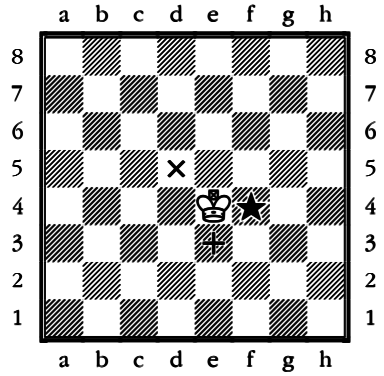


Figure 2.4: The moves Kd5, Ke3, or Kf4, for example, would reposition the e4 King on the squares marked with x, +, or star.

We can **describe a specific chess move by giving an uppercase letter to denote the chess piece (e.g., "K" for King) followed by naming the piece's starting and ending squares**. For example, in figure 2.4 there is a King on the e4 square. If that King moves to the d5 square marked "x", we could describe that move by writing "Ke4d5". By convention, we always **omit the starting square as long as no ambiguity results**; thus, the example move would actually be written more simply as "Kd5". Similarly, if the King in figure 2.4 moved to the square marked "+" or the one marked with a star, we would describe the move with "Ke3" or "Kf4" respectively.

There is one other conventional simplification we should be aware of, although we will not need it until we learn about pawns. After we find out how pawns move, we might first describe a specific pawn move with "Pa2a4" or, more simply, "Pa4". But **when pawn moves are described, the convention is to omit the "P"**; thus simply "a4" denotes the example move.