

**Sadler, M., and Regan, N., 2016. *Chess for Life*. London: Gambit Publications**

As chess players we can change many things. How much we study, our openings, our lucky underpants. One thing we cannot change, however, is the passage of time. Young players may sit at the board confident, prepared, looking at you thinking “Come on old man, how long do you need over move seven?” but we older players know that time will catch up with them for, to paraphrase our former Prime Minister, we were the future once.

In *Chess for Life*, Matthew Sadler and Natasha Regan look at thirteen players who have maintained or improved considerable playing strength over many years. For the reader they say ‘Through our study of how players develop and change throughout their careers, we have compiled a wealth of ideas for experienced players to continue improving their game.’ Wow, OK, I’m sold. What’s in it?

With the exception of two cases, Capablanca and Miles, who for obvious reasons were not available in person, the book has interviews with players about their approach to chess. A pleasing note is that female players (Cramling, Polgar, Lauterbach, and Gaprindashvili) form a decent proportion of the cases chosen. Most of the cases are then analysed to varying degrees by Sadler. There is some great material in these sections. If you want to know how Keith Arkell wins so many weekend tournaments, the secret is in this book. Indeed, I found the chapter on Arkell one of the most instructive. I learned that I have been playing the QGD badly for over twenty years. Sadler takes you through Arkell’s approach theme by theme and really helps give an improved understanding of the QGD but also of that other Arkell speciality, the rook and pawn ending.

In the chapter about Pia Cramling, Sadler goes through the evolution of Pia’s opening choices and gives some great tips on move orders and notes how a change in your approach to one defence might force you to change your approach to others. The chapters about the British players, Nunn and Speelman are about approach. The key lesson here is to be yourself, to strive for positions where you feel comfortable. However, as the chapter on John Nunn notes, if you are a sharp player you will make more mistakes as you get older. The compensation is that your older opponents will too!

In a short review, there is just space to mention one more case, that of Sergei Tiviakov. In this chapter, Sadler examines, in microscopic detail, Tiviakov’s approach to playing the rather odd 3...Qd6 Scandinavian and shows just how Tiviakov manages such a plus score with a supposedly weaker opening.

There is so much in this book. I highly recommend it. There are enough ‘wordy’ sections to make it a good read on the train. Plus some serious analysis that makes you want to get the board out and study in greater detail. I think this is the chess book of 2016 and the only surprise is that it was not written earlier given the universal experience of ageing. Sadler and Regan write with such clarity and, as with Houska’s book that I reviewed last time, they do not assume that they are addressing grandmasters.

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