

# The Man Behind *Forcing Chess Moves*

**Edwin Lam Choong Wai**

FM Charles Hertan is the author of the recently published *Forcing Chess Move*. This is a man of many talents, and quite rightly so, there is much more to him than just being a chess author. Professionally, he is a numismatist (coin dealer) besides being a practicing psychotherapist. He is also a passionate amateur color landscape photographer, which is not surprising, considering that he lives in the beautiful Pioneer Valley of Western Massachusetts.

He picked up the game of chess at the age of twelve, under the influence of his best friend – and, very talented junior player – Steve Feinberg. With a career high ELO rating of 2410, he became a FIDE Master in 1984 and twice came close to becoming an International Master thereafter. His competitive career also had one highlight that many of us could only dream of – the privilege of playing a two-game match against the legendary Sammy Reshevsky in 1983.

**Edwin Lam:** *You are now based in Massachusetts, but you were previously from New Jersey. Did you grow up in NJ?*

Charles Hertan: Actually, I currently live in Northampton, Massachusetts, a few hours drive from Boston. I did grow up in New Jersey, which gave me the chance to develop my skills in the vibrant New York chess scene. I moved from Boston to Northampton in 1996.

**EL:** *Boston's known primarily for its famous Tea Party and as the home to the Gillette Razors. What is the chess scene like there?*

CH: Compared with New York's many top players, the Boston chess scene is rather sleepy. However, it has always had a few stars, such as Jack Peters, Patrick Wolff, Ilya Gurevich, and Alexander Ivanov. There are few large tournaments in Massachusetts, but the competition is fairly strong. Northampton is another story; though great in other arts, it has no serious chess culture.



**Author Charles Hertan during a Boylston Chess Club lecture**

**EL:** *Did you idolize Fischer during your youth?*

CH: Not really! His style was rather sharp for my taste and I preferred the smoothness of Smyslov and Bronstein's creativity. Only recently have I fully come to appreciate Fischer's incredible genius and studied his games more closely.

**EL:** *What was your highest ELO rating and when did you achieve it?*

CH: My highest ELO rating was 2410, which I achieved in 1994 after scoring 4-0 against strong masters in a tournament at Northeastern University in Boston. Shortly afterwards, my USCF rating peaked at 2515.

**EL:** *When did you achieve the FIDE Master title?*

CH: I received the FM title in 1984, after making my second IM norm at the CCA Winter International in New York. My first IM norm came in March 1981, when I won the CCA March International in New York.

**EL:** *In Forcing Chess Moves you refer readers to the classic, Art of Checkmate, by Renaud and Kahn. Was that your first-ever chess book?*

CH: The first book I remember owning was one on opening traps by I.A. Horowitz. My serious chess friends soon corrected my ways, and got me reading *My System* by Nimzovitch and *Chess Informant*. I discovered the *Art of the Checkmate* much later, when I was a teacher trying to help my students with their tactical skills.

CH: There is an interesting story behind my two-game match with Reshevsky in 1983. After dominating U.S. chess for many years before Fischer, Reshevsky rarely appeared in American tournaments by the 1970s. But in '83, he decided to make one more run toward qualifying for the Interzonal. There was one problem; Reshevsky needed 15 or 20 rating points to qualify for the U.S. championship.

**EL:** *You had competed against the legendary Samuel Reshevsky during the New Paltz Quad back in 1983. What was he like, as a 71-year-old back then?*

CH: There is an interesting story behind my two-game match with Reshevsky in 1983. After dominating U.S. chess for many years before Fischer, Reshevsky rarely appeared in American tournaments by the 1970s. But in '83, he decided to make one more run toward qualifying for the Interzonal. There was one problem; Reshevsky needed 15 or 20 rating points to qualify for the U.S. championship.

So my friend Eric Horsboll arranged a couple of two game matches for Sammy, against my best friend at the time, the

strong master Robby Sulman, and myself. After getting crushed in game one, I achieved an utterly drawn, lifeless R+P ending in the second game, but the old wizard outfoxed me. He won all four games, and went on to just miss qualifying for the third spot in the Interzonal by tying for third in the U.S. championship.

Reshevsky was a rather strange fellow, very quiet and of the old school. He was not one to mix with other players. But over the board, he was intense and tough as a bulldog.

**EL: Did you still play competitively after the turn of the century?**

CH: I was very active until the late 1990s, winning many regional tournaments such as the New England Open (twice) and the Eastern U.S. Masters Championship (twice). Over the years, I played many of the top American players, including Dzindzichashvili, Benko, Shamkovich, Alburk, Rohde, Fedorowicz, Benjamin, De Firmian, Kudrin and many others, and managed an occasional win or draw against most of them.

Internationally, I played some interesting games against Gheorghiu, Glek, Razuvaev, Lerner, and Tkachiev, to name a few. After moving to rural Northampton, I became too busy with other pursuits and faded out of tournament play in 2001. I began focusing all my chess energy on writing the book and teaching.

**EL: What made you decide to begin teaching chess?**

CH: I always enjoyed the process of teaching, developing the skill to break down chess ideas so that average players could grasp them. I began teaching at age 16, and have worked with students ranging from age 5 to 90! I taught quite a bit at the scholastic level, mostly with children 8-14.

**EL: Have you any thoughts of expanding your chess teachings, via, say, a Forcing Chess Moves chess school?**

CH: No! Between my careers as a numismatist and writer, and passions as an amateur photographer, hiker and historian, I have no time for any new major projects!

**EL: As an author, I understand that you penned an article in New In Chess magazine. Have you contributed to other magazines as well?**

CH: Yes, on occasion. Last year I had an article in *Chess Life* about the mysterious disappearance in 1978 of the promising American junior player Peter Winston. I also wrote a piece for *Chess Life* outlining the key ideas of *Forcing Chess Moves*.

**EL: Am I correct to say that Forcing Chess Moves is your first chess book?**

CH: You are correct. *Forcing Chess Moves* grew out of my years of teaching, when I began noticing that my students were missing winning forcing moves in nearly every game. I realized that the most important skill that my students needed help with was learning a more correct way to analyze positions. I began thinking a lot about how to help them hone in on the most critical forcing options, and then develop the analytical skills to correctly evaluate them.

**EL: In the introduction, GM Joel Benjamin notes that you spent fourteen years collecting, selecting and codifying 650 tactical positions for the book. Can you share with us how you went about such tasks at a time when chess databases were still in their infancy?**

CH: It wasn't easy! At first I started putting together my own database of all the nice master combinations I could find. I drew them from magazines, games I witnessed, tactics and opening books, anywhere; but my favorite source became collections of master games.

As I researched, I began to think about a new way of classifying positions. Instead of the traditional categories of tactical motifs (pin, fork, etc.), my categories were based on different types of forcing moves that are especially difficult for players to find. Once I divided my database into different categories in this way, my research became more focused on finding examples from categories that were harder to locate, such as defensive forcing moves and *zwischenzugs*.

After about eleven years, I thought I had a nice book of about 150 pages, and I showed it to Jeremy Silman. He loved the positions, but he thought the book was too short and sparse on annotations. I decided he was right, and began a massive new round of research. Finding the right examples was still an enormous amount of work, but about this time, I quit my regular job as a psychotherapist and devoted much more time to finishing the book. I had come too far to turn back.

Soon I learned how to navigate my way through databases with millions of games to increase the odds of finding the kind of positions I needed. I promise the reader that you didn't ask me to say this, but ChessBase was an indispensable tool toward elevating the level of the material. After three more years of research and writing, I went back to Mr. Silman, but by this time he informed me that he was only producing books about Hollywood! So I turned to New In Chess, and the rest is history.

**EL: Would you recommend this book for self-study by junior chess players with at least a 1600 ELO rating?**

CH: Your 1600 cut-off suggestion has some merit, but I think that a really motivated, lower rated player could still get a lot out of the book. Junior players' ability to learn from new material often exceeds their ability to demonstrate it over the board, but experience quickly fixes that.

**EL: What about chess coaches? Should they start their students with materials from Chapter 10 first, before coming back to the materials in Chapters 2 and 3?**

CH: I would definitely recommend reading Chapters 1 and 2 first, since by giving the reader a strong grounding in recurring "stock" master combinations, they are designed to pave the way for greater understanding of the subsequent chapters.

**EL: In the book, you selected seventeen examples from Fischer's games, twelve from Short, and eleven each from Van Wely and Tal. Does this mean that the style of these players**

*Continued on page 44*

entry for chess masters, but Entry Fee deducted from prizes. Prize Fund: \$500 b/50 Multiple Sections if entries permit Prize Info: U1200 Trophy is an additional prize of U1500 Section. Byes: You play 4 rounds unless you get a 1/2 point bye for Round 1. Payable to: R.I. Chess Association P.O. Box 15444 Riverside, RI 02915 Questions: Eric Berkey (401) 334-1486 EMail: besenji57@aol.com Directions: Rhode Island College Donovan Cafeteria (Behind Mann Hall), 600 Mt. Pleasant Avenue, Providence, RI 02908. From North, take Exit 21 off I-95, turn right onto Atwells Ave. From South, take Exit 21 Broadway, at 2nd set of light, turn left onto Atwells Ave. Go 1.4 miles (Atwells), to the top of a long hill take a right at onto Mt. Pleasant Ave, go straight for 1.2 miles (through one light) and continue until you see RI College entrance on left. Once you have taken a left into the main entrance, follow on the main road through campus until you see Mann Hall, take a right into the student union/cafeteria parking lot. USCF membership required.

**Sat Dec 20 Harry Lyman Memorial:** 4SS; G/60 Boylston Chess Club - Somerville, MA Sections Prizes Open 1st \$125 2nd \$75 Under 1800 1st \$100 2nd \$50 Under 1500 \$50 EF All: \$25, \$20 to BCC members. Reg All: 9:00 to 9:50 Rounds: 10:00, 12:30, 2:50, 5:00 Prize Fund: \$400b/30 Questions: (617) 629-3933 EMail: boylstonchess@aol.com No smoking, no computers, wheelchair accessible. Bring chess clocks. Directions: 240B Elm Street, Suite B9, Somerville, MA 02144

**Sat Dec 27 Pioneer Valley Monthly Tournament:** 3 SS, G30 The Pioneer Valley Chess Club holds a monthly tournament on the last Saturday of each month. The tournament is unrated and open to everyone. The entry fee is \$5 and cash prizes will be awarded, based

on the number of entries. Games should begin between 6:30 and 7:00pm in the Community room in the back of the Burger King. Bring your set and clock please! Questions: Byron666@aol.com or 413-665-6900.

**Sat Jan 10 100th Rhode Island Pawn Eater:** 4SS, G/60 Rhode Island College - Providence, RI Entries after 9:30 AM will receive 1/2-point bye or be paired if w/other late arrivals. Advanced entries must be received prior to Tournament. Must be at site to confirm by 9:30AM. Please bring chess set/board & clock. Food available all day in cafeteria. Sections Prizes Open \$175-\$100 U1900 \$100-\$50 U1500 \$50-\$25 (U1200 Trophy) EF All: Only \$20 by mail/email, \$25 at site. Reg All: 9:00AM to 9:30AM Rounds: 1st: 9:30 EF Special: free entry for chess masters, but Entry Fee deducted from prizes Prize Fund: \$500 b/50 Multiple Sections if entries permit Prize Info: U1200 Trophy is an additional prize of U1500 Section. Byes: You play 4 rounds unless you get a 1/2 point bye for Round 1. Payable to: R.I. Chess Association P.O. Box 15444 Riverside, RI 02915 Questions: Eric Berkey (401) 334-1486 EMail: besenji57@aol.com Directions: Rhode Island College Donovan Cafeteria (Behind Mann Hall), 600 Mt. Pleasant Avenue, Providence, RI 02908. From North, take Exit 21 off I-95, turn right onto Atwells Ave. From South, take Exit 21 Broadway, at 2nd set of light, turn left onto Atwells Ave. Go 1.4 miles (Atwells), to the top of a long hill take a right at onto Mt. Pleasant Ave, go straight for 1.2 miles (through one light) and continue until you see RI College entrance on left. Once you have taken a left into the main entrance, follow on the main road through campus until you see Mann Hall, take a right into the student union/cafeteria parking lot. USCF membership required.

*Vigorito continued*

It was not completely by accident that I had this resource, as I had seen the possibility a couple of moves before. I just didn't think I would "need" it.

**39...hxg5 40.e6+ Ke7 41.exd7**

Time control. Now I'll be here all night. Sorry darling.

**41...gxf4+ 42.Kf2 fxe3+**

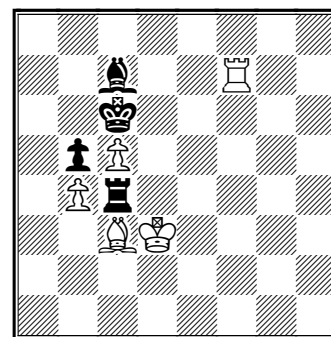
42...Kxd7 is better. Now my king comes up and I can dream of mating threats.

**43.Kxe3 Kxd7 44.Kd4 f4 45.Kxd5 Rg5+ 46.Ke4 Rh5 47.Rxa7 Kc6 48.Ra6+ Kb7 49.Ra2**

I actually had a chance here by switching to the right with 49.Rg6! Rxh2 50.c6+ Ka6 51.Bd4 and Black's king is very uncomfortable. But alas, the drastic change in the position had me off balance.

**49...f3 50.Rf2 Rh3 51.Kf5 Rxh2**

Black could also draw by 51...Bxh2 52.Kg4 Rg3+ 53.Kh4 Rg2 54.Rxf3 Bc7. **52.Rxf3 Rh4 53.Ke6 Rh6+ 54.Kd5 Rh5+ 55.Ke4 Rh4+ 56.Kd3 Rc4 57.Rf7 Kc6**



White cannot make any progress, so I decided to look for tricks.

**58.Bd4 Rxb4 59.Ke4 Bd8!**

My idea was 59...Rb1 60.Rf6+ Kb7 61.Kd5, when White can still dream.

**60.Ra7 Ra4 61.Rxa4 bxa4 ½-½**

Maybe someday I will learn....

Alex's resilience continued and he followed this game with wins against Curdo and Ivanov to tie for first!

*Lam continued*

*produces far more forcing moves than, say, Anand, Kasparov or Topalov?*

CH: Not necessarily. Even "positional" greats like Karpov, Petrosian and Capablanca produced many beautiful forcing moves. The examples I ended up with were the best I could find to illustrate the specific categories of forcing moves I devised. I also left out many "classic" combinations in the interest of having as many "fresh" positions as possible; for example, many of Alekhine's wonderful tactics were skipped over on this basis.

*EL: Moving on to the future, can you give us a hint on your next book project?*

CH: At the risk of giving away secrets, it might have something to do with *zwischenzugs*. True *zwischenzugs*, in which a capture is met by a stronger forcing move, are rare jewels of the chessboard. If anyone has seen or played any nice *zwischenzugs*, please email them to me!

*EL: Should we be on the lookout for a chess tactics DVD from you in the near future?*

CH: No plans for one yet. A German edition of *Forcing Chess Moves* is possible.

*EL: And, lastly, how can the readers contact you with feedback?*

CH: Readers are welcome to contact me via email, [cehertan@rcn.com](mailto:cehertan@rcn.com).

Visit [MassChess.org](http://MassChess.org) for crosstables, event information, a downloadable archive of New England master games, and more.