The Ultimate 1.e4 e5 Primer

A Complete Practical Guide

Volume I

Copyright © 2026 Thinkers Publishing, Belgium

Author: Izyslav Koza & Alexander Delchev

Editorial Director: Adrien Demuth

Assistant Editor: Daniël Vanheirzeele

Proofreading: Andrew Burnett

Software: Hub van de Laar

Cover Design: Dirk Dewitte

ISBN: 9789493435339
D/2026/31732/21

First edition 2026 by Thinkers Publishing

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission from the publisher.

All sales or enquiries should be directed to Thinkers Publishing, 9850 Landegem, Belgium.

Email: info@thinkerspublishing.com
Website: www.thinkerspublishing.com

This book is printed on environmentally friendly paper.

The Ultimate 1.e4 e5 Primer

A Complete Practical Guide
Volume I

Izyaslav Koza
Alexander Delchev

Thinkers Publishing 2026



Key to Symbols

!	a good move
?	a weak move
!!	an excellent move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
□	only move
N	novelty
⟳	lead in development
⊙	zugzwang
=	equality
∞	unclear position
⩱	with compensation for the sacrificed material
±	White stands slightly better
∓	Black stands slightly better
±	White has a serious advantage
∓	Black has a serious advantage
+−	White has a decisive advantage
−+	Black has a decisive advantage
→	with an attack
↑	with initiative
⇆	with counterplay
Δ	with the idea of
⩲	better is
≤	worse is
+	check
#	mate

Table of Contents

Key to Symbols 4
Preface 6
Introduction 8
Basic Training 16

Chapter 1 – Scholar's Mate 21

Chapter 2 – Petrov's Defense 47

Chapter 3 – The Fork Trick 79

Chapter 4 – The Four Knights Game 115

Chapter 5 – Legall's Mate 171

Chapter 6 – The Italian Game 193

Chapter 7 – The Two Knights Defense 237

Chapter 8 – The Evans Gambit 285

Chapter 9 – The Blackburne-Schilling Gambit 331

Chapter 10 – The Ponziani Opening 359

Exercises 373

Preface

Last year I was invited to join Izyaslav — "Slava," as I know him — as co-author and consultant on his first book.

During our very first meeting on Zoom we spent several hours comparing our experiences as trainers. I have coached at the Chess Bomb club in Plovdiv since 2015, and I was immediately struck by how different his approach was from my own.

I first walked into a chess club in 1982, and I still remember how restrictive our coaches could be. Whenever someone made a mistake, the coach would come straight over to the board, interrupt the game and demonstrate the best move. The Bulgarian school — and, I believe, the Russian school as well — was built on teaching standard patterns from the very beginning. If you wanted a place in the team or a shot at the national championships, you were expected to follow those principles almost to the letter.

Everything was free in those days, but it came with an unwritten obligation: you had to accept the system. You could reject it, of course. You might decide on your own to play the King's Gambit, the Morra Gambit, or even Larsen's 1.b3. That kind of experimenting might even make you the strongest player in the club — but it also made it considerably less likely that you would be picked for the prestigious tournaments.

Many years have passed, and yet most Bulgarian coaches, myself included, still take a demanding line when it comes to building proper chess vision and culture in a student from the very first steps.

Slava's method is quite different. For the first couple of years at least, he avoids imposing a way of playing on his students. He gives them the freedom to find their own path, and offers only a kind of life preserver: guidance on what they should not do — even though they will probably do most of it anyway! — before letting them swim out into the vast and sometimes messy ocean of chess.

Children today learn remarkably quickly that becoming a strong player is not a matter of memorizing rules or patterns. What matters is understanding what is actually happening on the board.

That is the heart of Slava's method: the ability to explain, in very simple language, what is going on in a position. Reading his annotations for the first time, I had the feeling of standing in the middle of a battlefield, watching the pieces fight one another.

Another trait of this younger generation is that children are reluctant to accept authority unquestioningly and do not much enjoy being told what to do. In that respect Slava's method is thoroughly practical, and I believe it has the potential to bring many more children into their local clubs.

My own contribution was to make the book interactive by adding the exercises. They are gathered at the end, each one labelled with the chapter it belongs to. Once you have finished a chapter, work through its exercises and see how much has stuck. Depending on how it goes — success or failure — you can decide whether it is worth going back over the chapter or whether it is time to move on.

I thoroughly enjoyed working with Slava, and I am proud to be the co-author of a book I consider both genuinely innovative and inspiring.

GM Aleksandar Delchev

Introduction

This book attempts to summarize twenty years of my humble existence teaching chess to students of all ages, from kindergarten through senior citizen. While those twenty years may seem like a lot, in truth it is but of a fraction of the time chess has actually been around. Even with the amount of knowledge I have attained and tried to cram into this book, it only barely begins to scratch the surface of the noble pursuit itself. The game, like humanity, has evolved, and will keep evolving, as long as we humans will be around.

Whenever a new student first comes to me, one thing I hear on a regular basis, and mostly from kids, is that they already "know everything". My standard response to this (perhaps somewhat intimidating statement – what can you really teach someone who knows everything?) is, "there isn't, or wasn't a chess player in the world, Magnus Carlsen, current world champion included, that knows everything." There is too much to remember and consider to make that claim, and I don't know if a day will ever come when even the world's most powerful computer can say that. Heck, even I can't remember, or recognize, every single idea in this book, or every single move of a game.

The thing is, besides being naturally gifted, the reason most players like Magnus Carlsen, and other Grandmasters like him, attain the level of success they do is they know more than the average player. A person who starts out, or casually plays chess as a hobby, doesn't consider the volumes of chess history and information that exists letting any, even say mediocre, student of the game beat them so easily. Maybe they chalk it up to "he's just better than me," or maybe they don't care to even bother with that, but this is really a major difference between an amateur, and a scholar. Tigran Petrosian, the ninth world champion of chess, once claimed, "in order to really appreciate the game one needs to study it," with which I wholeheartedly agree.

One area I myself focus a lot of my attention with students on is "mistakes." Colloquially called "blunders" in the game of chess, mistakes are the soul of any decisive game where one player comes out on top. The quality, and quantity of mistakes often determines who wins or loses, although at the end of the day, whoever makes the last one will always be the one going down in defeat. Some

students incorrectly assume world-class players never make mistakes, which is simply untrue. There is an intimidation factor when a beginner sits down against a stronger player and assumes his opponent will never err in judgement and anything they try will not work. The bottom line is ALL players, no matter their skill level, make mistakes, including Magnus, and the only question is, will the other player make the next mistake by not punishing his opponent's first one. World class players make fewer mistakes than most average players, and the sorts of mistakes they make are usually more complex in nature than the ones players of a lower rank typically encounter. However, before you throw in the towel, remember everybody blunders — everybody! The ones who triumph are the ones who learn from their defeats and never "lose the same game twice."

With that, and as a way to set the tone for this book, here are a few examples of the world's best players making exactly the sort of mistakes I have seen in scholastic tournaments for most of the last twenty years and partly the sort of stuff this book is about:

First up is my colleague GM Alex Stripunsky from the International Chess Academy.

♙ Stripunsky, Alexander (2562)
♟ Onischuk, Alexander (2660)
Saint Louis 2012



Here Alex blundered with

11.d3??

…and immediately resigned the game without waiting for Onischuk's response. (Can you figure out why?)

The thing is, after d3 the black queen swoops in and takes the bishop on c1. This sort of mistake where a piece is just lost happens often in scholastic-level events and honestly may not even decide the game as five moves later the other person would make a similar, or even worse mistake. When this stuff happens (and it happens a lot at the novice levels) no amount of book knowledge can help. Seeing the board and not letting anything be taken for free (yes even a pawn! Some kids will say "it's just a pawn," which is patently untrue), is step one to becoming a better player.

What makes this unique is it happened at the "grandmaster" level and, though it was certainly possible, it was very unlikely GM Onischuk would make a mistake in a similar way. Notice this was still early in the game and there was no time pressure: if there is little time on the clock, moves are played faster and the probability of mistakes increases so a "blunder" like this is more common even at the highest levels. Which brings us to another important point: most kids who start playing chess are making moves almost at the speed of light even though they aren't anywhere near time trouble. When that happens the probability of a "blunder" becomes sky high.

Hopefully Alex won't be too mad at me but respectfully he is about to be in good company (furthermore I added one of his better moments in a later chapter).

♙ Christiansen, Larry Mark (2620)
♟ Karpov, Anatoly (2725)
Wijk aan Zee 1993



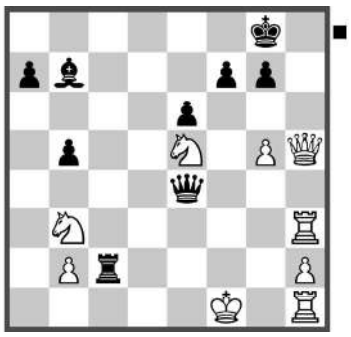
In the following example, former world champion, Anatoly Karpov, has just played 11…Bd6. There is no question that he is a far more accomplished than his grandmaster opponent, Larry Christiansen, and was definitely a stronger player at that point. I once saw a video where Karpov jokingly explains the strategic virtues of this move only to resign after Christiansen plays a very simple move in response. (Can you guess it?)

12. Q**d1 1-0**

Christiansen "forks" (that is attacks both) Karpov's knight on h5, and the bishop on d6. The "fork" tactic is one of the first basic things most beginners are taught, and grandmasters in choosing their moves usually smell out when they can and can't play certain strategic moves (strategy is a long-term plan, tactics are short-term, sometimes decisive blows) because of tactics like this. Students looking over Grandmaster games (as well as their own) should be asking these questions and trying to constantly figure out why certain seemingly good moves weren't played (was it an oversight? More likely the grandmaster was avoiding a tactical disaster). In Karpov's defense, it is somewhat weird for the queen to play a winning move by returning to the square on which she starts the game, especially so early on in the game.

However, these are mistakes of a losing nature. What about mistakes where you miss a chance to punish your opponent and win?

♙ Anand, Viswanathan (2720)
♟ Ivanchuk, Vassily (2695)
🌍 London 1994



In this infamous example, GM "Divine" Vassily Ivanchuk, played an absolutely stunning rook sacrifice a few moves earlier to create an almost unstoppable attack against the white king. He is down a rook at the moment (White has two rooks, Black only has one since he gave the other up to get here) but there is a chance in this position. If you watch the video on youtube, GM Maurice Ashley, who was the commentator for this event, and in an attempt to make things exciting says something along the lines of, "can Anand thread the needle with his king and escape?" as soon as Ivanchuk gives up the rook.

The answer was a definitive "no" which I sometimes ask students to figure out in class. In GM Ashley's defense the action was happening too quickly, and he probably had no computer assistance to check the variations. Ivanchuk may have done this intuitively but all variations lead to a win for Black so in that sense giving away the rook was one hundred percent correct which my students are tasked with figuring out in class. But anyway, back to the position in hand…

Here Ivanchuk played:

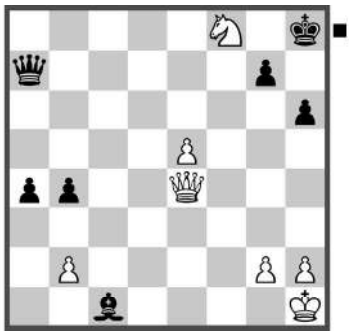
29... ♕f4+??

Going on to lose the game on time. (Can you spot the blunder?)

Incredibly, Ivanchuk had a checkmate in one move here if he would have just played 29…♕h1#. Anand was the one who made the first mistake, and yet went unpunished.

Last, and loudest of all is the following example by then reigning world champion Vladimir Kramnik from 2006.

♙ Comp Deep Fritz 10
♟ Kramnik, Vladimir (2750)
🌍 Bonn 2006



Playing against the computer engine "Deep Fritz 10," the world champion Kramnik has just played…

34... ♕e3??

Offering to trade queens. While strategically it makes perfect sense given his bishop and two pawns on a4, and b4 will be hard to stop since the white knight and king are way too far away, can you guess what the problem is?

35. ♕h7#
1-0

A simple enough refutation.

Embarrassing or not, I'm glad I can share these examples with my students, and in

teaching them explain that everyone makes all sorts of mistakes, and that you making them says nothing about the sort of player you are, or have the potential of becoming. This all depends on how well you learn from your mistakes, and the mistakes of those that came before you. It depends on how well you fight, going forward based on your past experiences.

This book utilizes a mix of examples from my student's games, as well as the games of the most legendary titans of chess, plus a few of my colleagues, and friends, and lastly a few of my own online adventures. The book is written mostly for players who already have a basic understanding of the rules and are looking to improve their game, and I would say are rated anywhere between 100-1500 USCF. For players rated higher, the book may be entertaining to read but they may be familiar with most of these concepts (I wouldn't put money on it though), and where it can help them, as I envision it, is assisting to teach their own students – which is what many players do, or can in theory do, when they reach that particular level of around 1500. If I had a book like this when I was starting out maybe I would have trained my first generations of students more effectively. Each chapter, or even game (depending on length) can be used as a guideline for an hour lesson (or a couple of hour-long lessons a few weeks in a row). You can't cram too much into an hour, but I do feel it is important to have some general idea of what you want to cover in that given amount of time with a novice to intermediate player.

The book is broken down by chess openings but does reference similar ideas in previous sections so a student can compare and reinforce the things they may have already seen. The first chapter focuses on introducing, or reviewing terminology, or ideas that will then be referenced throughout the rest of the book.

The openings themselves will be dealt with in a brief overview format without a super-detailed analysis of each one (whole books are devoted to just certain variations of each!) but some brief commentary on how this opening may play out at the 800-1200 USCF level which is based on games I personally saw, or analyzed involving my students over the course of many years. We will also cover some very common opening traps, again based on student games, and mostly for the purposes of avoiding falling into them in your own tournament adventures.

Most importantly don't try to memorize everything (it's impossible) and don't beat

yourself up if you forget. Sometimes these things have to be reviewed or play out in your own game to make sense and that can help cement the knowledge. Nobody remembers everything 100% of the time and blaming yourself for not living up to this standard only serves to distract you from concentrating on playing your best game (i.e. instead of “ok I should probably take his bishop as that may win a pawn in two moves” students think “I’m so terrible I forgot that in the ‘Four Knights Game’ you don’t play the bishop to “c4.”). Mistakes will happen, let them go during the game, and analyze and learn from them afterwards.

That being said, I can’t wait for you to write us to say something in this book helped you win a game! If you only win one game because of these pages, we would already consider our job well done! I’m willing to bet you win a lot more.

Happy reading!

Izyaslav “Slava” Koza, July 2026

Basic Training

This book assumes the reader knows the moves of the pieces and the basic rules. This section introduces symbols, point values, and key terminology. If you are already familiar with this material, feel free to skip ahead and use this chapter as a reference. Most of the book is tactic-heavy, since that is how most student games are decided, though strategic elements are discussed as well.

Point Values

The traditional point values for the pieces are:

King the whole game

Queen 9 points

Rook 5 points

Bishop 3 points

Knight 3 points

Pawn 1 point

These values apply on a mostly empty board. In practice, pieces have a “strategic value” depending on the position. A good rule of thumb: the more squares a piece controls, the more valuable it is. A knight dominating the center may outweigh a rook trapped in a corner, regardless of nominal values.

General Terms

Attack – To put an enemy piece in danger, threatening to capture it on the next move.

Capture – To take an enemy piece off the board. Students often confuse “attack” and “capture” — an attack is a threat; a capture is the act itself.

Check – An attack on the king. The player in check must respond immediately.

Checkmate – An attack on the king from which there is no escape. The ultimate goal of the game.

Stalemate – A draw that occurs when a player has no legal moves and is not in check.

Threefold repetition – A draw claimed when the same position has occurred three times. A position cannot repeat after a pawn move or a capture.

Perpetual check – Repeated checks that cannot be avoided without worsening one's position, resulting in a draw. Often used to save a lost position.

En passant – A special pawn capture: if an enemy pawn advances two squares and lands beside your pawn, you may capture it as if it had moved only one square. This option is available only immediately after the advance.

Blunder – A mistake where a player fails to see an obvious threat — usually leaving a piece undefended.

Sacrifice – Deliberately giving up material for compensation — tactical (short-term, with a clear payoff) or strategic (long-term, harder to calculate).

Trade – Exchanging pieces of equal value (pawn for pawn, rook for rook, etc.).

The exchange – Trading a rook for a minor piece. Winning the exchange means gaining a rook for a minor piece; losing it means the reverse.

File – A vertical column on the chessboard (e.g., the a-file, the b-file).

Rank – A horizontal row on the chessboard (e.g., the 1st rank, the 8th rank). The "back rank" refers to the 1st or 8th rank.

Tactics

Basic tactics occur frequently and decide most games at the student level. Advanced tactics are less common but well worth knowing.

Fork – A move that simultaneously attacks two or more pieces. The knight fork is the most common example.

Pin – A piece is pinned when moving it would expose a more valuable piece behind

it. An absolute pin on the king means the piece cannot legally move at all.

Skewer – The reverse of a pin: the more valuable piece is in front and must move, exposing the piece behind it.

Discovered check – A piece moves out of the way, revealing a check from a queen, rook, or bishop behind it.

Double check – Both the moving piece and the revealed piece give check simultaneously. The only legal response is to move the king.

Discovered attack – Like a discovered check, but the revealed attack targets a piece rather than the king.

Deflection – Forcing a defending piece away from the square or piece it is guarding.

Removing the defender – Capturing or eliminating the piece that protects a key square or another piece.

Decoy – Usually a sacrifice that lures an enemy piece to a specific square where it can be exploited.

Zwischenzug – An unexpected intermediate move — often delaying a recapture — that changes the evaluation of the position. Also called an in-between move or intermezzo.

Overload – A piece is overloaded when it must defend too many things at once and cannot fulfill all its duties.

Interference – Placing a piece between an enemy piece and whatever it is guarding, cutting off its defensive function.

Clearance – Sacrificing a piece to vacate a square or line so another piece can use it more effectively.

Strategy

When no immediate tactic is available, the advantage is built through strategic play — creating long-term problems for the opponent while improving your own position.

Development – Bringing knights, bishops, and rooks to active squares early. Leaving pieces on their starting squares is one of the most common beginner mistakes.

Bad piece – A piece with very few squares to move to, unable to attack or defend effectively.

Good piece – The opposite: well-placed, controlling many squares, with multiple threats or defensive functions.

Improving a piece – Repositioning a passive piece to a more active square, even at the cost of a tempo.

Outpost – A square on the opponent's side where a piece cannot easily be chased by pawns. Knights on outposts are especially powerful.

Zugzwang – A position where any move makes things worse. From the German for "compulsion to move."

Simplification – Trading pieces to convert a material advantage into a won endgame.

Tension – Keeping the option to capture without doing so immediately, preserving flexibility.

Doubled pawns – Two pawns of the same color on the same file. Generally a weakness, as they cannot protect each other.

Passed pawn – A pawn with no opposing pawns blocking it or on adjacent files. A major asset, especially in the endgame.

Isolated pawn – A pawn with no friendly pawns on neighboring files. A long-term weakness and target.

Backward pawn – A pawn that cannot safely advance and has no connected pawns to support it.

Bishop pair – Having two bishops while the opponent has a bishop and a knight (or two knights). Generally an advantage on open boards.

Space advantage – Controlling more of the board gives your pieces more squares and restricts the opponent's mobility.

Control of the center – Occupying or controlling d4, e4, d5, e5 gives pieces access

to all parts of the board.

Exposed king – A king vulnerable to attack along open files, ranks, or diagonals.

Open file – A file with no pawns. Rooks and queens are most effective on open files.

Breakthrough – A pawn advance sequence, often involving sacrifices, that creates a passed pawn.

Pawn storm – Advancing pawns toward the side where the opponent's king has castled, opening attack lines.

Weak squares – Squares left permanently unguarded after pawns advance. An opponent's piece settling there can be very difficult to dislodge.



1

Scholar's Mate