Motivation

When studying chess openings, you want to understand the ideas behind them and to memorize concrete lines. One without the other is usually not sufficient.

For me, the best way to achieve that was to browse through opening variations stopping at critical or simply interesting positions. I would then try to check my understanding and my memory in those positions.

I used PGN browsing software or web sites like lichess.com to view the variations, then transfer the position of interest to a program or a web page that allowed me to start a game with a chess engine from there.

You can do all that, for example, within the lichess web site. And one great thing about it is that lichess appears to randomize engine’s responses so you get a better variation coverage when practicing that way.

Here's an example of my experience learning the French Rubinstein variation.

The book I was learning from claimed that this position is equal. While this appears to be true, when I started a game against Stockfish from here, I quickly lost in just a few moves.

[…]

F5 was a mistake and Be7 was a blunder losing on the spot. I learned two things from this experience that I did not explicitly learn from the book.

One, before playing something like f5 make sure you counter the white rook on the d-file to prevent its uplift to the king side.

Two, failing that, defend against the mating threats by defending the e6 pawn, preparing f6.

[..]

Such a lesson remained permanently etched in my memory.

However, switching back and forth between the lichess studies and engine games was not a very smooth experience hence not really encouraging to adopt that method as a default way to study.

Hence, Source Forge. The free, open source, desktop application fully streamlines the process described above. When you test yourself against a variation tree, it will smoothly switch to a game against the engine if you stray off the book, so to speak, it will advise of what options were specified in your variation book, allow you to request evaluations, start a game against the engine at any point, bookmark positions etc. The details are the subject of the next video.