Motivation

What is Chess Forge and how does it help you to study chess openings? The idea for this software arose when we realized that no existing tools or web sites were offering the exact kind of experience that we were looking for.

The experience we were after was the ability to freely browse variations and, at any point of our choosing being able to test ourselves for both the understanding of what we have studied and for our ability to memorize concrete lines.

So … we ended up browsing various PGN files, either created by ourselves or found in places like lichess.com (they are called studies over there). We would copy positions of particular interest to us into lichess analysis boards. We would then run the Stockfish engine to get evaluations and also play against it to get a better feel for the nuances of the positions.

[*show the screen*]

Here's a very simple example of my experience learning the French Rubinstein variation that way. I have created a PGN file with selected variations from a book that I had on the French Defense, tried to memorize whatever I could and played against the engine from positions I considered critical.

The position that you are seeing now on the screen was declared in the book as equal. The engine agreed. Unfortunately, when I started a game against Stockfish from here, I lost pretty much instantly.

My first move was f5 which is already a mistake and after Qh4 I followed up with a losing blunder Be7.

I have learned two things from this experience that I did not explicitly learn from the book.

One, before playing f5 in this particular structure, make sure you counter the white rook on the d-file to prevent its uplift to the king side. Rfd8 was, therefore, the right move, maintaining equality.

And two, failing that, defend against the mating threats by protecting the e6 pawn, preparing f6 as a response to Ng5.

That was just a trivial example, but that kind of a process has worked for us to a great effect in more advanced cases too. However, it was rather clunky and slow. All the copying, starting games and evaluations, analyzing the results was taking a lot of time.

Source Forge is an effort to streamline this very process. It allows you to test your memory 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 you of what options were specified in your variation book, allow you to request evaluations and start a game against the engine at any point. And you can bookmark positions within the tree to return to them instantly. The details are the subject of the next video.