

**Parallel Lives
By Neil Brennen**

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**Elmars Zemgalis:
Grandmaster Without the Title**

by John Donaldson. Paperback, 160 pages. Published by Pomeranian Publishing. \$16.00

Chess Without Borders: The Life and Games of ICCF-IM Sture Nyman

by John Knudsen. Paperback, 172 pages,. Published by [iUniverse](#). \$15.95

These are two books with much in common: Both authors are named John, and hold the International Master title in their respective chess spheres, Donaldson getting the title through his over-the-board play, and Knudsen for correspondence chess. Both books are on little-known players who may well have deserved the Grandmaster title, again in their own chess spheres, although neither received it. Both are literally labors of love - Knudsen was moved to write his book by his friend and subject's death, and Donaldson's friendship with his subject is obvious. Both feature interesting photographs and little-known information. Both books are of similar length, size, and price, and both open with games the subject drew in clock simul against GM Paul Keres.

Of course it's the differences that interest us here, and we'll get to those shortly. But first a brief introduction to the subjects of these two biographies would be useful, since neither is a household name.

Elmars Zemgalis was born September 9, 1923, in Latvia. He was displaced by World War Two, and after some spectacular results in European tournaments in the late 1940's, emigrated to the United States. There the pressures of work, and his pursuit of a college degree in mathematics, caused him to stop playing chess, aside from local events in the state of Washington, his adopted home.

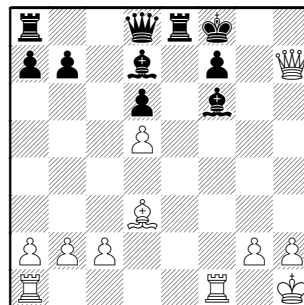
Donaldson makes a persuasive case that Zemgalis deserved to be awarded the International Master title, and perhaps the Grandmaster title, from FIDE. Zemgalis' games prove his point in an entertaining way. Like a rather better-known Latvian player, Mikhail Tal, Zemgalis had an attractive tactical style, as the following game from a Latvian Championship in Exile, played in Essiglin, Germany, shows:

Zemgalis,E – Pamiljens,J [B83]

Latvian Championship in Exile, 11.1949

Annotations by Elmars Zemgalis

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 exd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♘c3 d6 6.♗e2 e6 7.0-0 ♗e7 8.♗h1 ♗d7 9.f4 e5 10.♗db5 ♗b8 11.♗d5 ♗xd5 12.exd5 ♗d4 13.♗xd4 exd4 14.♗xd4 0-0 15.♗d3 ♗f6 16.♗e4 g6 17.f5 ♗e8 18.♗f3 g5 19.♗h5 ♗d8 20.♗xg5 ♗xg5 21.f6 ♗xf6 22.♗xh7+ ♗f8



23.♗g6!! ♗e7 24.♗ae1 ♗e6 25.♗xe6 fxe6 26.♗h8# Elmars Zemgalis: Grandmaster Without the Title, p.46 1-0

Sture Nyman, the subject of our second biography, was born in Brunne, Sweden, on October 1, 1919. He learned chess at age 14 from a worker in a local sawmill. Nyman's occupation was that of a civil engineer, and while he eventually became over the board chess Champion of Stockholm, his first love in chess was correspondence play. He advanced to the finals of the World Championship on three occasions, and finished as high as fourth. He died in 1997, and shortly thereafter Knudsen began writing what eventually became his Nyman biography.

Nyman had a great love of thematic tournaments, to judge from the large number of Latvian Gambits and Blackmar-Diemer Gambits among the 227 games Knudsen provides the reader. One such example is the following crush of a Latvian Gambit from an unidentified event.

Nyman,S – Larsen [C40]

Correspondence, 1988

1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 f5 3.♗c4 fxe4 4.♗xe5 d5 5.♗h5+ g6 6.♗xg6 hxg6 7.♗xg6+ ♗d7 8.♗xd5 ♗f6 9.♗c3 ♗e7 10.d3 exd3+ 11.♗e3 d2+ 12.♗xd2 ♗e5 13.♗ad1! ♗xd5? 14.♗xd5 ♗d6 15.♗c1 ♗f8 16.♗he1 ♗f5 17.♗h6 Chess Without Borders, p.76 1-0

We don't know the first name of Nyman's opponent in the previous game. It's not Bent Larsen, or is it? What event was it played in? This example underlines the biggest problem of the Nyman biography - there is a lack of attention to detail that at times frustrates the reader. The Zemgalis book has detail to burn - crosstables, contemporary reports on games, information on opponents, photographs, dates, etc. The only

crosstables in Knudsen's book are the three ICCF World Championship finals Nyman played in - surely others, such as the crosstable for the Potter Memorial, were available? The two Paul Keres clock simul games illustrate the biggest problem with the Knudsen book. Donaldson provides the location and date of Zemgalis' draw; this same information is missing from Knudsen's comments on Nyman's draw with the Estonian Grandmaster. Donaldson, one of the chess world's best historians, shows his practiced hand in his use of such documentary material

And partly because of that attention to detail, Donaldson's writing is sharper than Knudsen's; where Knudsen tells us about Nyman, Donaldson shows us Zemgalis. In many ways Zemgalis comes into sharper focus than Nyman does. Many of the annotations throughout the Donaldson book are by Zemgalis; Nyman's voice is almost entirely missing from Knudsen's book. - surely Nyman's own letters to Knudsen were available as source material?

Admittedly Knudsen was operating under several handicaps that Donaldson didn't face, such as having a deceased subject - the living are often much more cooperative than the dead. They can, usually, read their own handwriting on scoresheets, for instance - there was a second game between Keres and Nyman that couldn't be included because the scoresheet was unreadable. Also there is no evidence that Knudsen could read printed Swedish, and so he was dependent on others to do newspaper research, which is an awkward situation for a biographer to be in. And correspondence chess is a frustrating enough field for a historical writer without the additional handicaps that Knudsen labored under. That he was able to accomplish as much as he did, and as well as he did it, is miraculous.

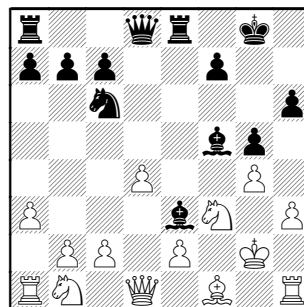
An ability to read Swedish might

have helped Knudsen avoid one curious blunder; the omission of what is arguably Nyman's best-known game. On page three of the biographical section Knudsen writes of Nyman playing games by telex for the benefit of various Swedish newspapers. Bent Larsen was one of the opponents in these telex matches, and the Danish Grandmaster chose his 1966 win over Nyman for his best game collection, *50 Udvalgte Partier, 1948-1969...* This book was subsequently translated into both English and Russian, so the score and Larsen's notes should have been available to Knudsen. We include the game here, for the benefit of purchasers of Knudsen's book, and because the game is incorrectly presented in Tim Harding's *MegaCorr2* database as from a "tournament" and has an incorrect ending. The punctuation in the gamescore is by Bent Larsen, taken from his book.

Nyman,S – Larsen,Bent [A02]

Dagens Nyheter correspondence game corr, 1966
Annotations by Bent Larsen

1.f4 e5!? 2.fxe5 d6 3.exd6 ♗xd6
4.♟f3 ♘f6 5.d4 0-0 6.♗g5 ♜e8
7.♞d3 ♚c6 8.a3 h6 9.♗h4? g5
10.♗f2 ♚e4 11.h3 ♗f5 12.♞d1
♗f4 13.g4 ♘xf2 14.♗xf2 ♗e3+
15.♗g2



15...♚xd4! 16.gxf5 ♘xf3 17.♞xd8
♘h4+ 18.♗g3 ♜axd8 19.♚c3

♚xf5+ 20.♗g2 ♗d2 "Nyman wanted to resign here, but for the benefit of the readers play continued." – Larsen 21.♜c1 h5
22.♚d1 ♗b6 23.♗h2 ♜exe2+
24.♗xe2 ♜xe2+ 25.♚f2 ♜xf2+
26.♗g1 ♜e2+ 27.♗f1 ♚g3# 50
Udvalgte Partier, 1948-1969, p.117 (republished in English as *Bent Larsen, Master of Counter-Attack*) 0-1

Despite some flaws, both books remain highly recommendable, not least of all for the fascinating annotations to many of the games... The Nyman biography features many extensively annotated games by ICCF-IM Allan Savage, light notes by Knudsen to other games, along with annotations by other players. The Zemgalis book includes notes by Zemgalis, Donaldson, Santasiere, and a plethora of Washington state chess masters, the last of these reprinted from regional chess magazines.

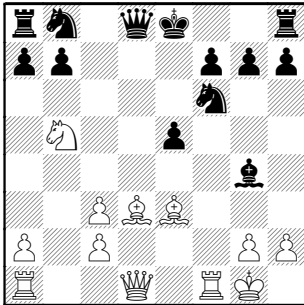
Knudsen refers to the following game as "perhaps [Nyman's] funniest." I doubt Black found it amusing, but I enjoyed it a great deal, especially Allan Savage's annotations, which are reproduced below.

Nyman,S – Confente,G [D00]

BDG thematic corr ICCF, 1991
Annotations by Allan Savage

1.d4 ♚f6 2.f3 d5 3.e4 dxe4 4.♚c3
exf3 5.♚xf3 e6 6.♗d3 The standard continuation is 6.♗g5 but the text is quite playable. While the Blackmar–Diemer continues to be a popular choice in correspondence play, its soundness still remains open to serious question. 6...c5!? This move is not common here but it has been tried on occasion. To me it seems illogical to further open up the position for White's better developed forces. Probably better is 6...♚c6 7.♗f4 (7.♗g5 ♗c7 transposes into standard lines)

♙d6. White's reply to the text is best, continuing to develop. **7.♙e3 cxd4 8.♗xd4 ♙b4 9.0-0 ♙xc3!?** This seems rather committal but should have turned out OK. Humphrey - Thomas, corr 1959, saw 9..0-0 10 ♗f3 ♗bd7 11 ♗c4 e5? 12 ♗f5 ♗c8 13 ♗xg7! with a terrific attack. **10.bxc3 e5 11.♗b5 ♙g4??**



Black would retain a small advantage after 11...a6 12 ♗a3 e4! (12...b5? 13 ♗f3) 13 ♙c2 ♗xd1 14 ♗axd1 b5. It is possible that Black didn't play 11...a6 due to the startling reply 12 ♙f5!?. However, after the sober 12...axb5 13 ♗xd8+ ♗xd8 14 ♙b6+ ♗e8! (14...♗e7 15 ♙c5+) 15 ♙xc8, Black has ♗bd7! 16 ♙xd7+ ♗xd7 and retains a big advantage in material and position! It is quite possible that one or both players missed Black's 15th move in this variation. **12.♗xf6!! ♙xd1 13.♗d6+ ♗e7 14.♗xf7+ ♗xd6 15.♗xd1 ♗c6** Amazingly, there is no adequate defense! Best may be 15...♗c6 16 ♙c4+ ♗b5 17 ♗xd8 ♗xd8 18 ♙xb7 ♗c6 19 ♙xa8 ♗xa8 20 ♗xg7, but of course White should win this without trouble. Interesting is the desperate 15...♗f6!?. 16 ♙c4+ ♗c6 17 ♙d5+ ♗b5 18 ♙b1+ ♗a5 19 ♗fxb7!! (19 ♗xf6 gf 20 ♙xb7 ♗d7 21 c4!?) [21 ♙xa8 ♗xa8 22 ♗b7 is better for White but not as clearly won] is more prosaic) and now the White Rooks and Bishops combine to produce a multitude of mating threats. For instance if

19...♗c6 20 ♗b5+ ♗a6 (20...♗a4 21 ♙b3+ ♗a3 22 ♙c1#) 21 ♙c4! +- . Black may have to try 19...♗c6, but is lost in any case. This variation is amusing for the way Black begs for his Queen to be taken and White's constant refusal. **16.♙f5+ ♗d4 17.cxd4 ♗g8** Another try is 17...e4! But the reply 18 c4! is crushing. The centralized Black King is too much of a target for the White forces. **18.♗d7+ ♗c6 19.d5+ ♗b5 20.♗b1+ ♗a5 21.♙d2+ ♗a4 22.♗dx7 a5 23.♙d7+ 1-0**

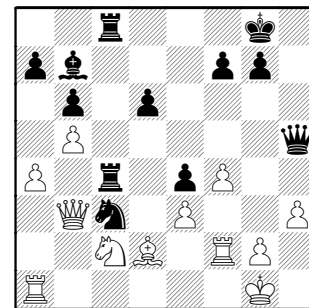
Correspondence chess had little place in Zemgalis' career; in fact, he played in only one correspondence tournament, an event organized by Latvian chessplayers displaced by the aftermath of World War II and the Soviet annexation of Latvia. Zemgalis took first prize in this event, and decades later wrote a two-part article about it for *Chess Mail* in 1998. All of Zemgalis' games from this tournament are included in the book. One of the correspondence games features annotations by Zemgalis, with brief comments by Donaldson. This game is included below.

Kalnins,I – Zemgalis,E [E39]

Latvian Exiles Correspondence Tournament, 1952
Annotations by Elmars Zemgalis

1.c4 ♗f6 2.d4 e6 3.♗c3 ♙b4 4.♗c2 e5 5.dxc5 0-0 [In the game Zemgalis–Endzelins Black chose 5...♙xc3+ and after 6.♗xc3 ♗e4 7.♗c2 ♗a5+ 8.♙d2 ♗xd2 ♗xd2+ eventually achieved a draw.The text move offers better fighting chances for Black.] **6.♗f3 ♗a6 7.a3** [Another option was 7.♙g5] **7...♙xc3+ 8.♗xc3 ♗xc5 9.e3 b6 10.b4 ♗ce4 11.♗d4 ♙a6!** This move reveals Black's plan: pressure on the Pawn at c4. **12.♙d3 ♗c8 13.0-0 d6 14.♙xe4** [What else? The threat 14...e5 is ominous and 14.b5 ♙b7 is

unacceptable because of positional considerations.] **14...♗xc4 15.♙xh7+ ♗xh7 16.♗b2** [16.♗d3 leads to a lost position after 16...♗f6 17.♗a2 ♗g4 18.♗xa6 ♗xf3 19.g3 ♗g5 20.♗c1 ♗d5] **16...♗c7 17.b5 ♙b7 18.♗e1 ♗c8 19.♙d2 ♗c5 20.f3** Black has a clear advantage with his tripled heavy pieces on the c–file, but how should he increase his advantage? – Donaldson **20...e5!** The plan becomes clear after this move. Black will play ...e5–e4, and either open up the position of the White King or gain control of the light squares. – Donaldson **21.♗f2 e4 22.f4 ♗f6 23.h3 ♗d5 24.♗b3 ♗c3 25.a4 ♗h5 26.♗c2**



Kalnins earmarks this move with a "?". However no entirely satisfactory options are available,e.g. [26.♗f1 ♙d5 27.♙xc3 ♗xc3 28.♗b4 ♗c5 29.♗d4 ♗5c4 30.♗d2 ♙e6 31.♗g1 d5 32.♗f1 d4 33.cxd4 e3 34.♗b2 ♗g6 35.♗a2 ♙xh3 with a winning attack.] **26...♗e2+ 27.♗h2 ♗xc2 28.g4 ♗d5 29.♗xd5 ♙xd5 30.♗xe2 ♗b2** The trade of Queens hasn't made life more pleasant for White. Now the threat to double on the seventh rank wins material. – Donaldson **31.♗g1 ♙b3 32.a5 bxa5 33.♗eg2 a4 34.♙b4 ♗xg2+ 35.♗xg2** [The other option 35.♗xg2 is hardly better. At any rate White's position is gradually deteriorating.] **35...♗c2+ 36.♗g3 d5 37.♗a1 ♗c4 38.♙a3 ♗c3 39.♗f2 d4! 40.exd4 e3+ 41.♗e1**

♙c4 [41...♙c4 After 42.♖c1 ♗xa3
43.♗xc4 ♗a1+ 44.♕e2 a3 45.♗a4
a2 46.♗xa7 ♗h1 47.♗xa2 ♗h2+ it
is all over.] **0-1**

Despite my recommendation of these books, it is fair to criticize both authors for not preparing a longer-length portrait of their respective subjects. While there may have been insufficient need or interest in preparing a 500 page Hilbertian tome on the order of *Shady Side: The Life and Crimes of Norman Tweed Whitaker*, surely there was a life rich enough in incident and wonder for more than the four pages that Donaldson used for Zemgalis, or the six pages Knudsen consumed in his biographical section about Nyman. Both biographers favor chess text over chess context, to the extent that context is, at times, slighted.

And this slighting of context carries a larger price than merely annoying a reader. Neither Zemgalis nor Nyman was a leading figure in chess. Neither of them became World Champion. Their chess careers did not make them internationally famous. Thus, there is never likely to be another book, or another article, written about either. And both Donaldson and Knudsen by default become the authoritative source for information on these players. Thus, the onus is on the author of a biography to run down sources and follow up leads, and to be as complete, and as truthful, as possible in the portrayal of his subject. That is a duty the biographer owes to the subject, to the reader, and to himself. - and it has been incompletely filled here.

But with that stricture noted, both authors are to be commended for bringing Elmars Zemgalis and Sture Nyman a measure of immortality through publications of their lives and their games. And also for bringing pleasure to the reader of their parallel lives.
