

WHAT'S NEW · NOVEMBER 2026

ShashChess 42

The engine that calculates.
The teacher that explains.

Introducing The Master's Verdict, created by FIDE Master Massimiliano Botta

Every engine can tell you the score. **ShashChess 42 tells you what the score means.** With the strength of the latest Stockfish generation, this release brings something you do not expect from an engine: **The Master's Verdict**. Ask about any position and, before a single number, you get the explanation a master would give a student: what matters now, which pieces to improve, which trades to seek, and the plan to follow.

The Master's Verdict was created by **FIDE Master Massimiliano Botta**, who has joined the ShashChess team. It is the heart of version 42, and the reason for its motto: **the engine that calculates, the teacher that explains.**

8	199	50.5%	0
plain-language sections in every verdict	of 325 hard positions solved in 1 minute (Stockfish 19: 179)	against Stockfish 19 over 300 games at 25 min + 10 s	effect on play: the trace never touches the search

01 The Master's Verdict: a teacher inside the engine

Send `eval` with `UCI_ShowWDL` enabled and ShashChess 42 opens with a verdict in plain English, addressed to the side to move ("you", "your"). Only after it, behind a clear separator, come the technical parameters the verdict is built from. You read the position first, and study the numbers when you want to.

Section	What it tells you	How to use it
Overall evaluation	Evaluation and expected score; material; quiet or sharp position; what the network's judgement rests on; game phase; most likely result; Shashin's advice.	Choose the character of your play: manoeuvring, concrete calculation or defence.
Urgent matters	Check, the opponent's threat and its cost, a winning tactic, a sacrifice; otherwise "Nothing urgent".	Deal with it before anything else.
Piece evaluation	Your most and least active piece, the opponent's problem piece and best unit, opposite-coloured bishops.	Makogonov's principle: improve your worst piece.
Trades and simplification	Whether a queen trade or trading all the rooks helps; the most useful exchange; the exchanges to avoid.	Choose your trades.
Geometry and structure	Weaknesses, passed pawns, tension and breaks; space and files; key squares and colour complexes.	Find targets, outposts and the files for your rooks.

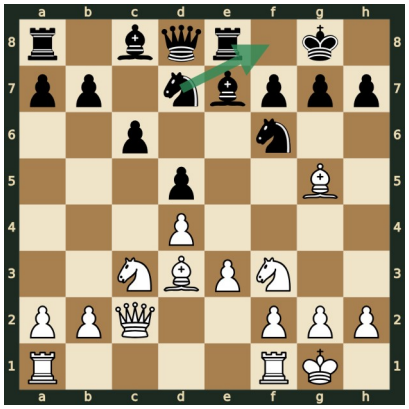
Section	What it tells you	How to use it
King safety	Your king and the enemy king: missing shield pawns, attacks on the squares around them.	Decide whether to attack or defend first.
The plan	The move to play, with the evaluation after it and why; the alternatives; the next steps; prophylaxis against the opponent's best idea.	The concrete plan for the next moves.
In a nutshell	The position and the plan in one sentence.	The summary to remember.

Designed by a master

FIDE Master **Massimiliano Botta** created The Master's Verdict and is now part of the ShashChess team. The verdict follows the order in which a master looks at a position: urgent matters first, then pieces, trades, structure and kings, and finally the plan, ending with one sentence to remember.

See it in action

A classic of opening theory, the Carlsbad structure of the Queen's Gambit Declined. This is what ShashChess 42 says, word for word (lines shortened where marked […]):



Queen's Gambit Declined, Exchange Variation: 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.Bg5 Be7 6.e3 O-O 7.Bd3 Nbd7 8.Qc2 Re8 9.Nf3 c6 10.O-O. Black to move.

Arrow: the regrouping the verdict proposes, … Nf8.

What a master sees. The knight heads for f8, Black's rooks belong on the half-open e-file, the c-file is White's, and …c5 must wait: textbook Carlsbad, in plain words.

All of it from a static analysis that takes a few hundredths of a second.

```
SHASHCHESS 42 · eval · UCI_ShowWDL = true
>>> COMPLETE HUMAN EVALUATION (The Master's Verdict) <<<
Seen from Black's side: Black is to move.

OVERALL EVALUATION:
White is slightly better (evaluation +0.29 from White's point of view,
expected score 52% for White). Material is level. […]

URGENT MATTERS:
Nothing urgent: neither side has an immediate tactic, so there is time
to improve the position.

PIECE EVALUATION:
Your most active piece is the rook on e8; your least active is the
knight on f6: improving it is the first positional task (Makogonov's
principle). […]

GEOMETRY AND STRUCTURE:
Pawns: Both structures are healthy, without passed or weak pawns; the
break c5 is premature: prepare it first; […]
Space and files: White controls more space; your rooks belong on the
half-open e-file, while White will use the c-file.

THE PLAN:
  1. Play Nf8 (your evaluation afterwards: -0.38): it makes a small all-
     round improvement […]
  2. Good alternatives: h6 or g6.
  3. Then improve the knight on f6.
  4. Prophylaxis: watch White's idea h3, its most useful move if it had
     a free tempo.

IN A NUTSHELL:
White is slightly better: play Nf8 and improve the knight on f6.
```

Players

Read any position the way a master explains it: what matters, what to do, and why.

Coaches

Ready-made explanations for training positions, with the technical part to go deeper.

Developers

A documented output with a formal grammar (EBNF), ready for GUIs, apps and LLM tools.

02 Under the hood: technical parameters and details

Every sentence of the verdict can be traced back to the data printed after it. For analysts, coaches and developers this is where ShashChess 42 opens its mind:

Block	What you learn
NNUE Mechanistic Trace	Explainable AI for the neural network, rebuilt to reproduce the engine's output exactly: the value of each piece (what the evaluation loses if it is removed) and its role (Keystone, Active, Standard, Passive, Liability, Blindspot); the layer stack in use; Shapley attribution to piece relations, pawn structure and placement; key attacks and defences; pawn pairs; a pressure map; latent outposts; pairwise synergy; finally, the same in natural language.
Shashin Static Analysis	Piece activity in the spirit of Makogonov, with the worst unit marked, and the legal moves ordered by static activity, with captures resolved by a quiet search.
Strategic Synthesis	Evaluation, win probability, WDL and Shashin zone; drawability and volatility; strategic directives; a training snippet for each level of player.
Advanced Shashin Modules	Counterfactual analysis: what the opponent would do if you passed; outposts and colour complexes; piece importance and trade advice; files, pawn breaks and tension; king safety and prophylaxis; game plans and piece manoeuvres.

A formal specification (EBNF syntax and semantics) describes every line of the output: doc/ShashChessTraceSpecification.docx. Parsers and LLM tools can rely on it.

03 Honest by design

- **Static, and it says so.** `eval` does not search. Values come from the NNUE evaluation, and every "what if" is settled by a small quiescence search (depth 8, captures that do not lose material, all evasions in check, at most 20,000 nodes). Deep tactics remain the job of the search (`go`), so the plan of the verdict can differ from the engine's best move.
- **Zero impact on play.** The trace never changes the search: the bench signatures are identical with and without it.
- **Now also in check.** The verdict focuses on the answer to the check, and the technical part is flagged as indicative. Up to version 41.2 the output in check was a single line.

04 Stockfish 19 strength, with a teacher on board

325 hard positions, 1 minute each

A suite of very hard tactical and positional positions, courtesy of Peter Martan.



+20 positions (+11%) solved compared with Stockfish 19.

300 games against Stockfish 19 at 25 minutes + 10 seconds

Fifty selected opening “nuggets”, courtesy of Afro Ambanelli, each played with both colours. Results from ShashChess 42’s side:



Score **50.5%**, Elo **+3.5** (95% confidence interval −13.7 to +20.6, pentanomial), likelihood of superiority 65.5%, draw ratio 60.3%. Statistically a dead heat with Stockfish 19: the teacher costs nothing in strength.
Explore the details: interactive dashboards · position-by-position report · match report · Tests Results on the wiki

05 More in ShashChess 42

- **Stockfish 19 inside.** Search, threads, NUMA and shared memory, Syzygy probing: ShashChess 42 is aligned with the latest Stockfish generation, with Shashin’s strategic layer on top.
- **One network, fully explained.** The NNUE network nn-1a298aa575a0 (HalfKAv2_hm + FullThreats + PP_3Wide, 2 × 1024 accumulator, 8 layer stacks) is the very network the Mechanistic Trace opens up.
- **Universal build.** The new universal x86-64 build (`universal.sh`, `universal.bat`) packs 8 CPU-optimised builds into one executable that picks the right one at start-up. Keep the network file next to it, or point `EvalFile` at it.
- **Fixes.** Mate detection at the horizon of the quiescence probes and king-shield detection in the trace; unique experience file names for concurrent instances.

06 Try it in thirty seconds

In any UCI console, or in the engine window of your GUI:

```
setoption name UCI_ShowWDL value true   # the full analysis
position startpos moves d2d4 d7d5 c2c4 e7e6   # or: position fen <FEN>
eval   # the Master’s Verdict first, then the details
```

With `UCI_ShowWDL` off, `eval` prints the short NNUE trace. Programs should read the output up to the `readyok` that answers an `isready` sent right after `eval`.

07 One family, one language

Alexander 9, ShashChess’s sibling with a classical evaluation, ships its own Master’s Verdict and tunes it to the player’s Elo. The Alexander Avatar Analyzer shows both verdicts in its player cards, next to every position to study, with ShashChess’s second opinion for players from International Master level up.

08 Acknowledgements

- **FIDE Master Massimiliano Botta**, for The Master's Verdict: the teacher inside ShashChess 42.
- **Intel**, for the hardware support: validating an engine with this level of statistical confidence takes enterprise-grade computing power.
- **Peter Martan** (the 325 hard positions) and **Afro Ambanelli** (the 50 opening nuggets), for the test material.
- **The Stockfish developers and community**, for the foundation ShashChess is built on.

ShashChess 42

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Download and documentation: github.com/amchess/ShashChess

Test results: ShashChess wiki · Tests Results