HIARCS Chess Explorer

By Joe Petrolito

The developers of the chess engine *HIARCS* have released a new chess database and playing system. Two versions are available depending on whether the single-processor or multi-processor version of *HIARCS 14* is included. With multi-processor computers now virtually standard, it makes sense to buy the multi-processor version to get the maximum strength and analysis capabilities. *HIARCS* has always been a strong engine with a human-like style of play, and it won the 2011 World Championship on equal hardware. The new version is estimated to be 100 Elo points stronger than the previous version. The style of the engine can be changed by various options to make it play either solidly, actively or aggressively. It is also a strong tactical engine that performs very well on test suites, and there is an option to look for combinations during play. An extensive opening book with around 7 million positions is included for opening study. Further opening books can be accessed automatically on the developer's website to provide extensive statistics on opening variations. The engine uses the standard UCI protocol, and this allows it to run in many other chess systems. Other UCI-based engines can also be used in the system if desired.

The *Chess Explorer* part of the package is a complete playing and analysis system with many features. The system allows users to play games against the engine with various time options. Since the engine is far too strong, it's possible to specify an Elo strength for the engine as well as giving the user more time to think. Alternatively, the engine can be set to adaptively change its strength to match your performance against it, and the system keeps track of your rating as you play. Finally, the opening for the game can be specified, which is very useful for studying your favourite openings. A coach feature warns of any impending mistakes during the game. Automatic analysis of any game allows the user to pick up the critical points in a game. Endgame analysis is enhanced by having access to all six-man tablebases on the developer's website, and these are automatically used if the user is connected to the internet. Alternatively, the system can use tablebases that are stored on the user's computer.

The system includes five databases of games in the standard PGN format. The main database contains around 35 thousand top-class games. The others databases include around 1000 annotated games, various world championship games and a tactical suite. The user can add to this collection with any other database in PGN format. Various database search and analysis options, such as searching for specific players or positions, are provided. In summary, this is an excellent chess system that is suitable for players of all strengths. It has a lot of features, comes with a super-strong engine, and it is very easy to use. **Highly recommended.**