

# FRANCESCH VICENT

## First Author and Master of Modern Chess



Script: José A. Garzón  
Art: Dani Salvador

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## **FRANCESCH VICENT, First Author and Master of Modern Chess**

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Excmo. Ayuntamiento  
de Segorbe

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# INTRODUCTION

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The challenge of capturing the life of Francesch Vicent and his profound contribution to modern chess in a comic was a highly complex one. Despite having written several monographs, articles and book chapters about Vicent, summarizing everything, including the latest research, has been an extraordinary task.

I would like to thank Miguel Ángel Malo for his immense, invaluable work over many years, working with Vicent and his legacy at the epicenter. Working with him and Daniel Salvador has been a very rewarding experience, the fruits of which we share today, thanks to the Fundación Valencia Cuna del Ajedrez.

Approaching Vicent and his celebrated book, which is widely considered the Holy Grail of chess, in this format and language has required the utmost rigor and care. Therefore, as the comic itself points out, we have attempted to fill in the gaps in the Segorbian's biography as accurately as possible.

The comic is structured in 4 parts. We begin with Vicent's childhood in Segorbe (1) and his adult life in Valencia (2), which culminates in the publication of his book, the first modern chess treatise, in 1495. Later we explore his Italian period (3), under the protective wing of the Borgia family, where he became Lucrezia's chess teacher, and his contribution to the international expansion of modern chess is recognized in the Book of Damiano (Rome 1512). In the final section (4), we quickly travel through the five centuries that have passed since. Vicent's greatness has only been truly preserved through complex research works, which have made his current recognition possible. Having recovered the contents of the book in 2005, we do not renounce the discovery of the "incunabula" itself, which inaugurated the Modern Age of the king of games.

Incidentally, the comic has various layers or levels of interpretation. As such, it shows the ancient and modern rules, the genesis of the changes, recovering historical concepts and terms that have since been lost to history. Famous figures walk through its pages, such as the poets of "Scachs d'amor," -the founding text of modern chess, which we celebrate on the 550th Anniversary (1475-2025)- the Pope Borgia and his children, great ladies of the Renaissance, distinguished men of the Enlightenment, and renowned bibliophiles, all coming to life on the board of life.

The noble game, so often vilified by other media such as film, advertising, or literature, finds its restitution in this short comic: each chosen position has meaning and is motivated by honor or homage. It is the reader's task to perceive these nuances.

Finally, this work compels us to spare no effort in vindicating the figure and contributions of Vicent, a bulwark of Modern Chess, an extraordinary master, and the first teacher of "Axedres de la Dama". The man who codified and gave to the world the modern way of playing, which millions of chess players globally engage in every day.

**José A. Garzón**



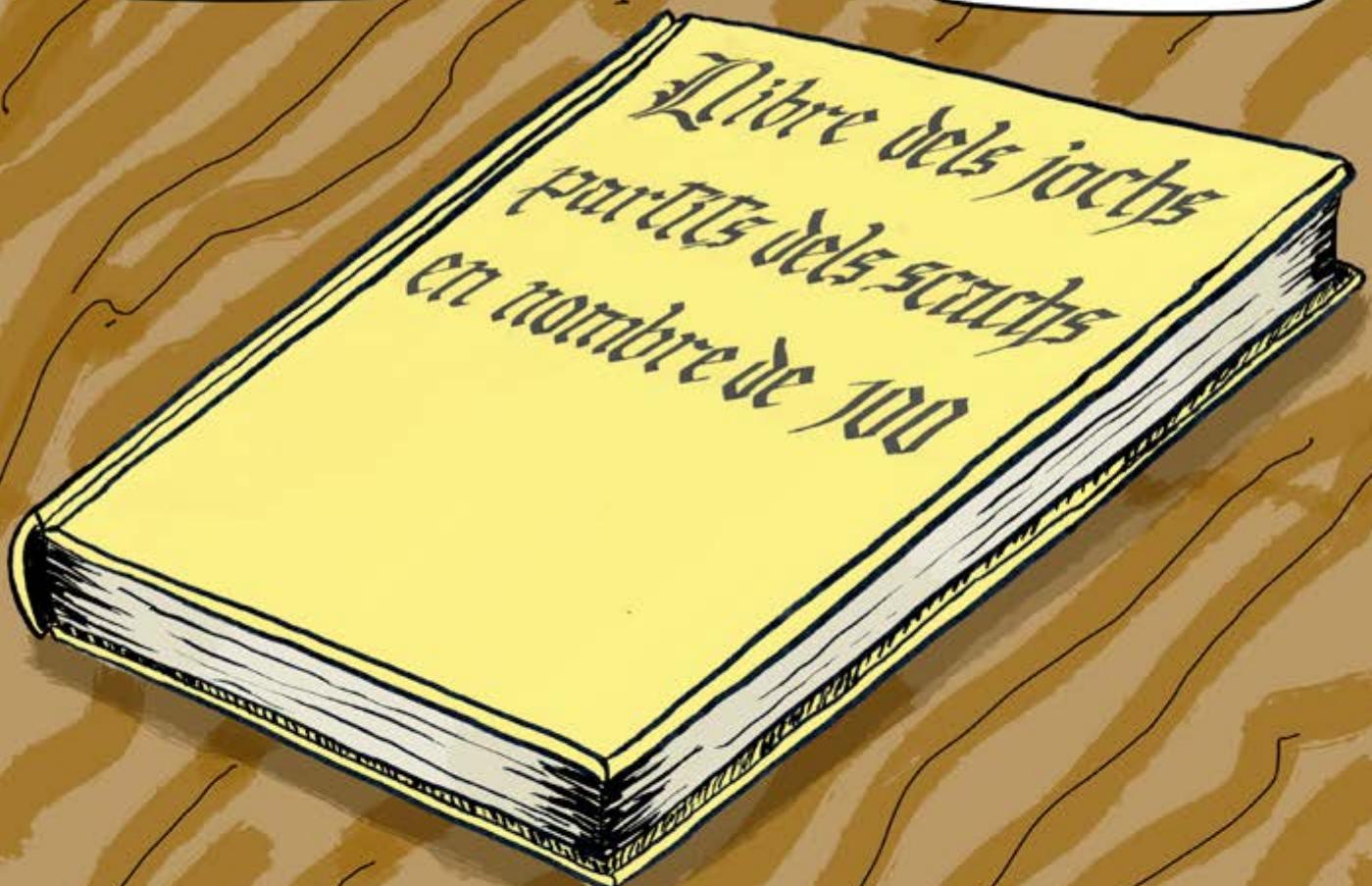
Graphic representation of Valencia in the second half of the 15th century, seen from the Turia River at the height of "Torres de Serranos"

VALENCIA, MAY 15, 1495  
HOUSE OF THE BOOKSELLER PERE TRINCHER

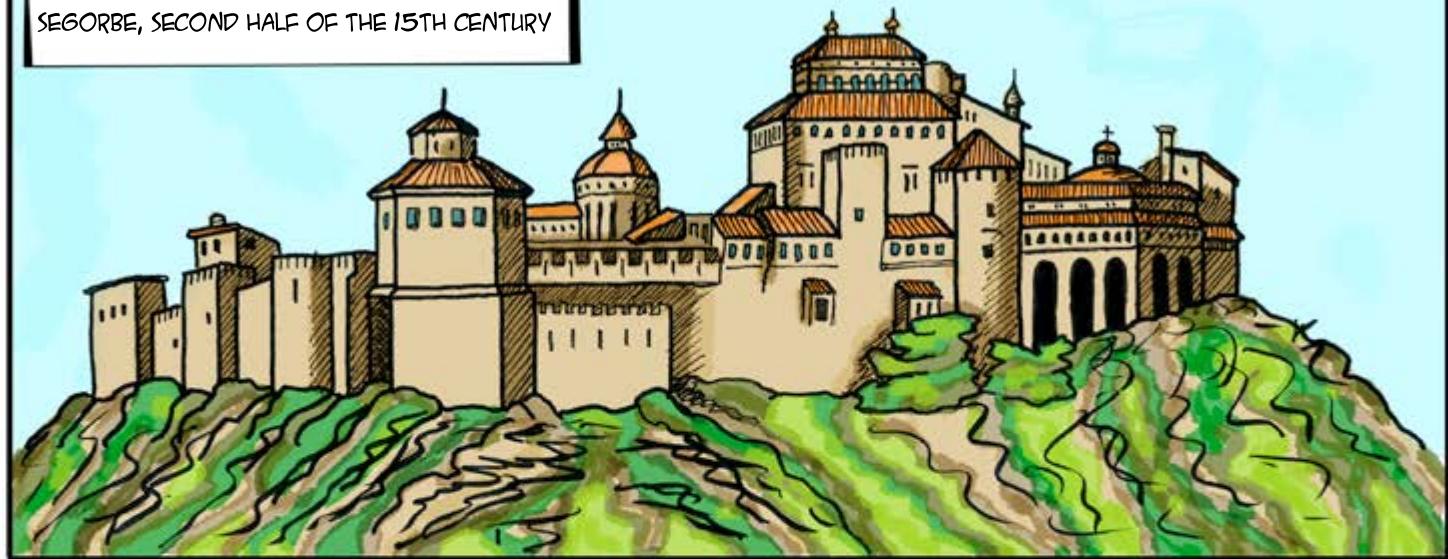
VICENT, WE HAVE IT.  
AS WE AGREED, WE HAVE USED  
LOPE DE ROCA'S GOTHIC TYPES.

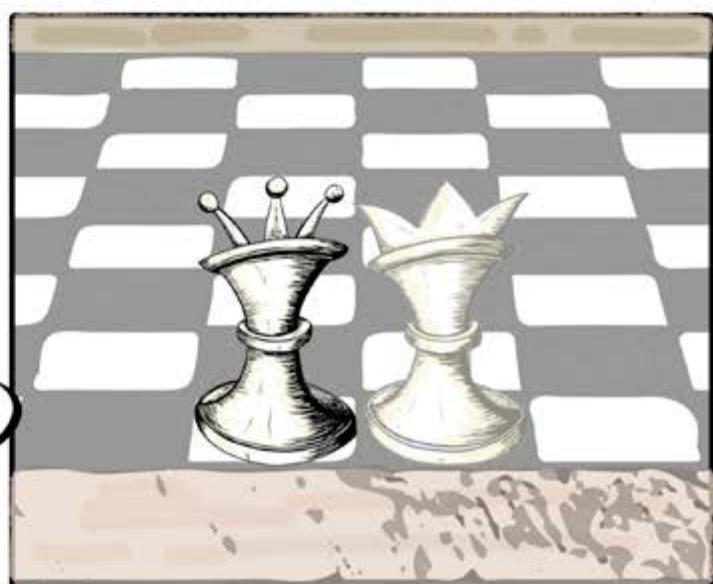
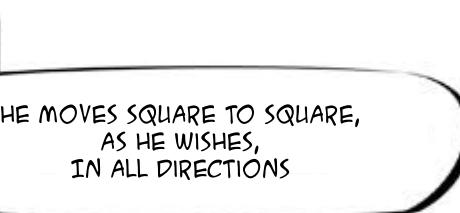
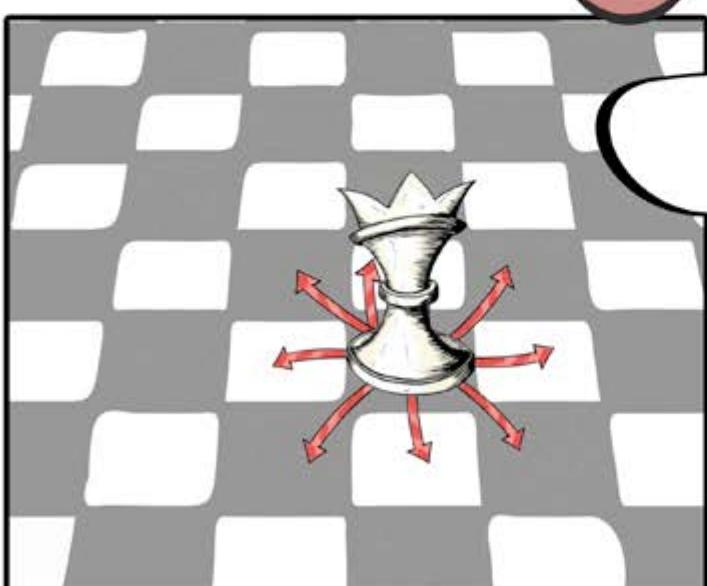
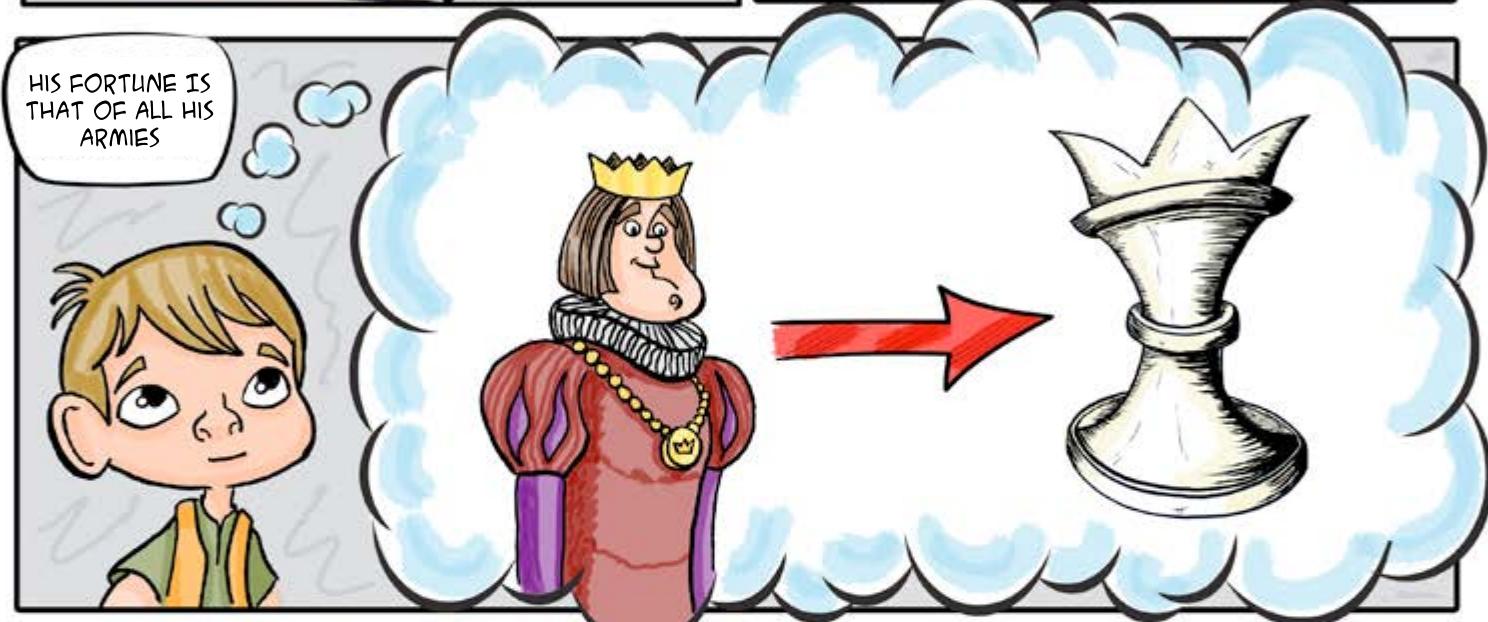
THANK YOU VERY MUCH,  
PERE, GREAT JOB.

NOW THE DIE IS  
CAST FOR THE NEW CHESS GAME



SEGORBE, SECOND HALF OF THE 15TH CENTURY





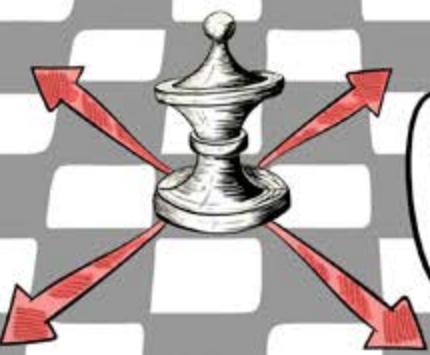
ALTHOUGH THE BEST PLAYERS PREFER TO CALL IT "ALFERZA"\*, SINCE IT WAS A MALE PIECE WHEN THE ARABS BROUGHT THE GAME OF "AXEDRES" TO OUR LAND

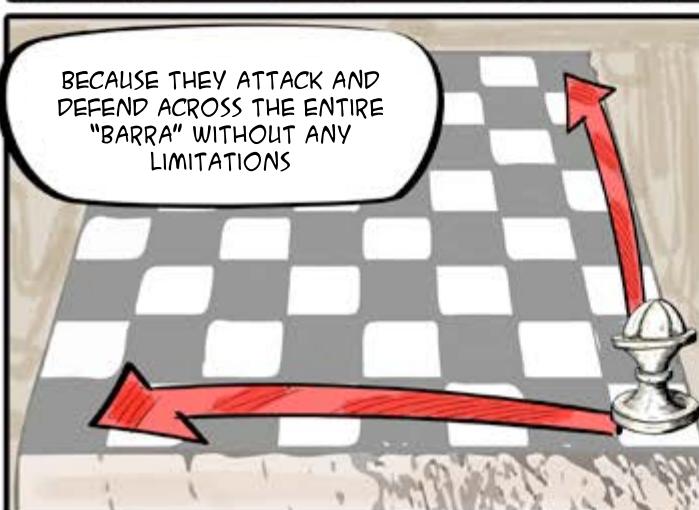
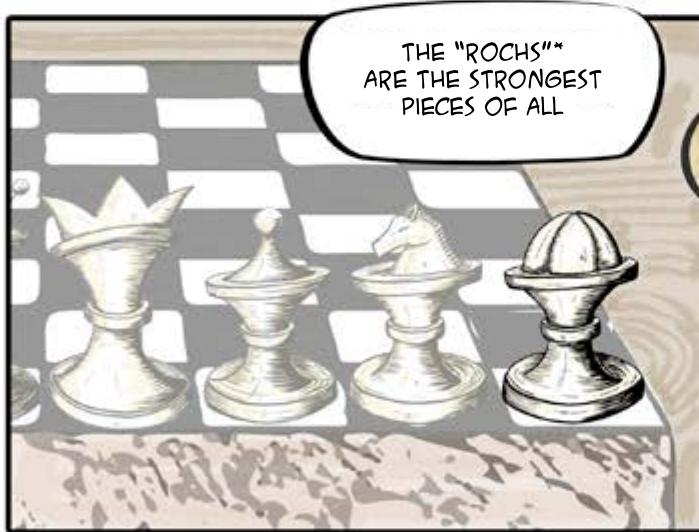
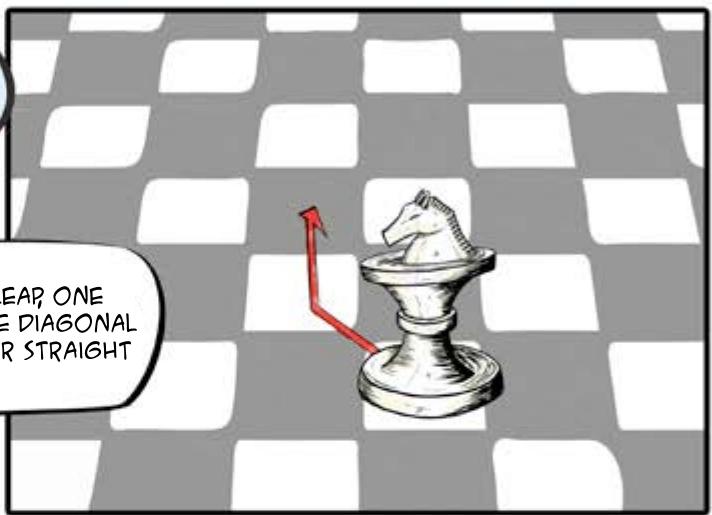


NEXT, THE "ORFILS"\*\*  
ARE "ARRANGED"



WHICH MOVE BY  
LEAPING TWO  
SQUARES, IN  
"SOSQUINO"





THE HUMBLEST ARE THE "PEOPLE'S PIECES",  
THE "PAWNS"



THEY GO UP FROM  
SQUARE TO SQUARE ALONG  
THE "BARRA"



THEY SETTLE ON THE  
SECOND "BARRA"



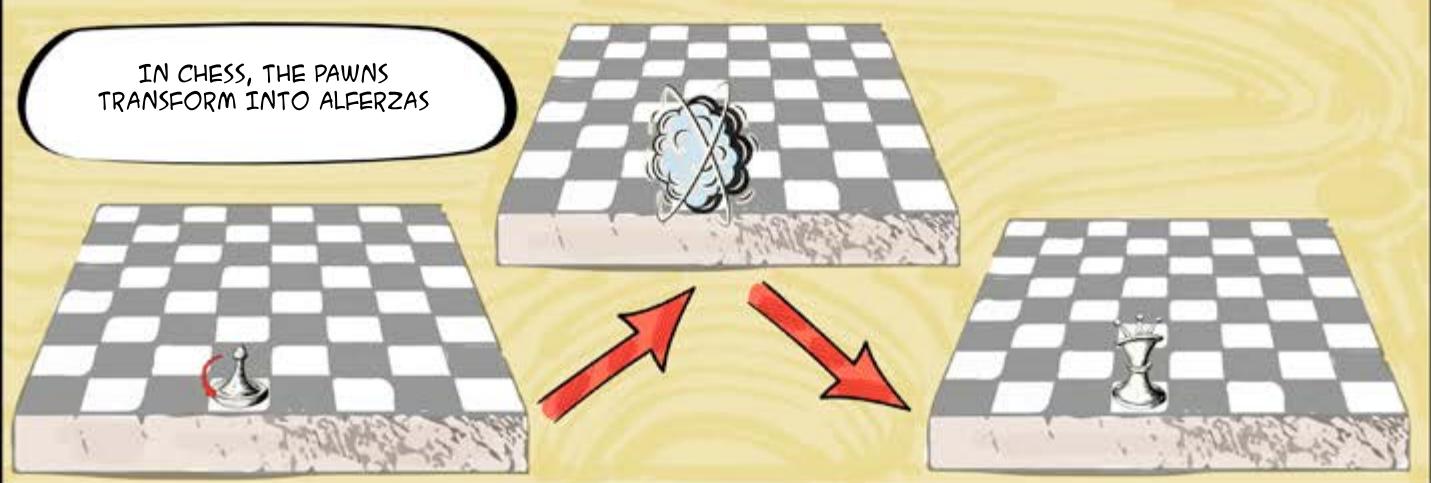
AND WHAT HAPPENS WHEN  
THEY REACH THE END OF THE  
BOARD? DO THEY RETURN  
AGAIN?

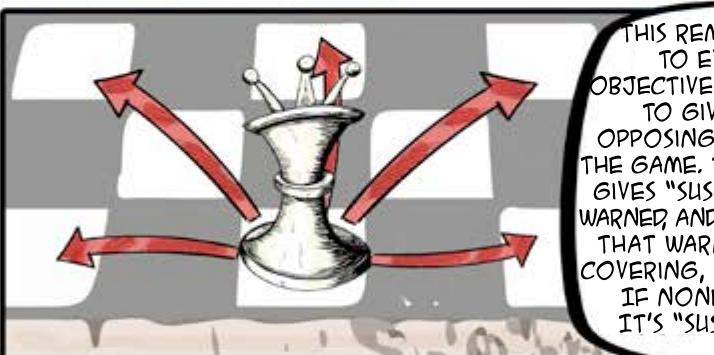
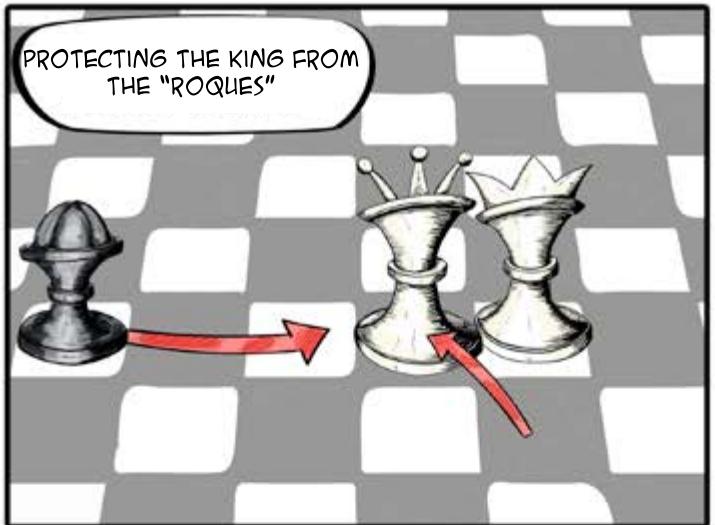
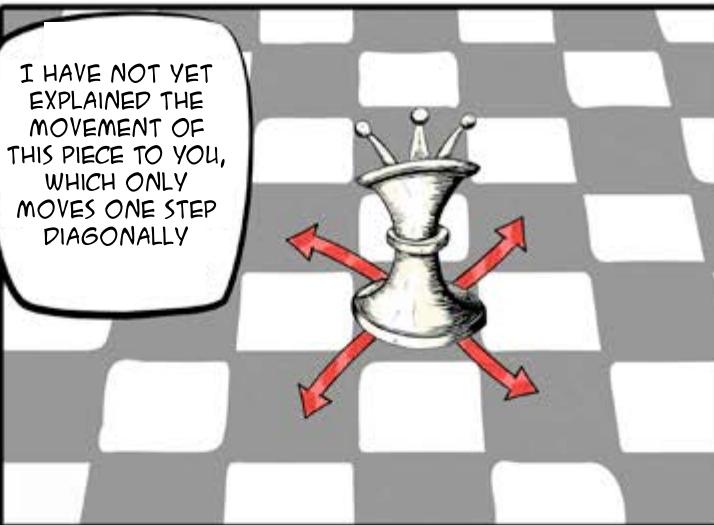


THIS HAPPENS IN ANOTHER  
GAME WE CALL "MARRO"  
AND IN CASTILLE THEY  
CALL IT "ALQUERQUE"



IN CHESS, THE PAWNS  
TRANSFORM INTO ALFERZAS





DAYS LATER....

FRANCESCH, YOU'RE TOO YOUNG TO BE ABLE TO GIVE AN OPINION ABOUT VERY ANCIENT RULES THAT WERE APPARENTLY CONCEIVED IN INDIA.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND THE "QUEEN'S" MOVE.  
IF SHE'S NEXT TO THE KING, HER POWER SHOULD BE MUCH GREATER, DON'T YOU THINK, FATHER?

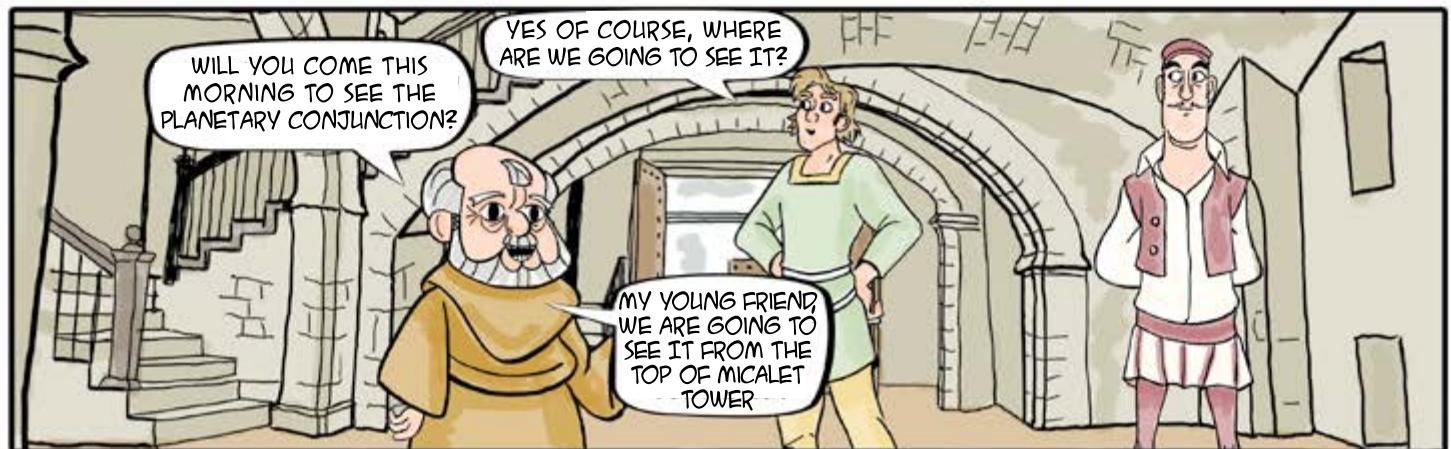
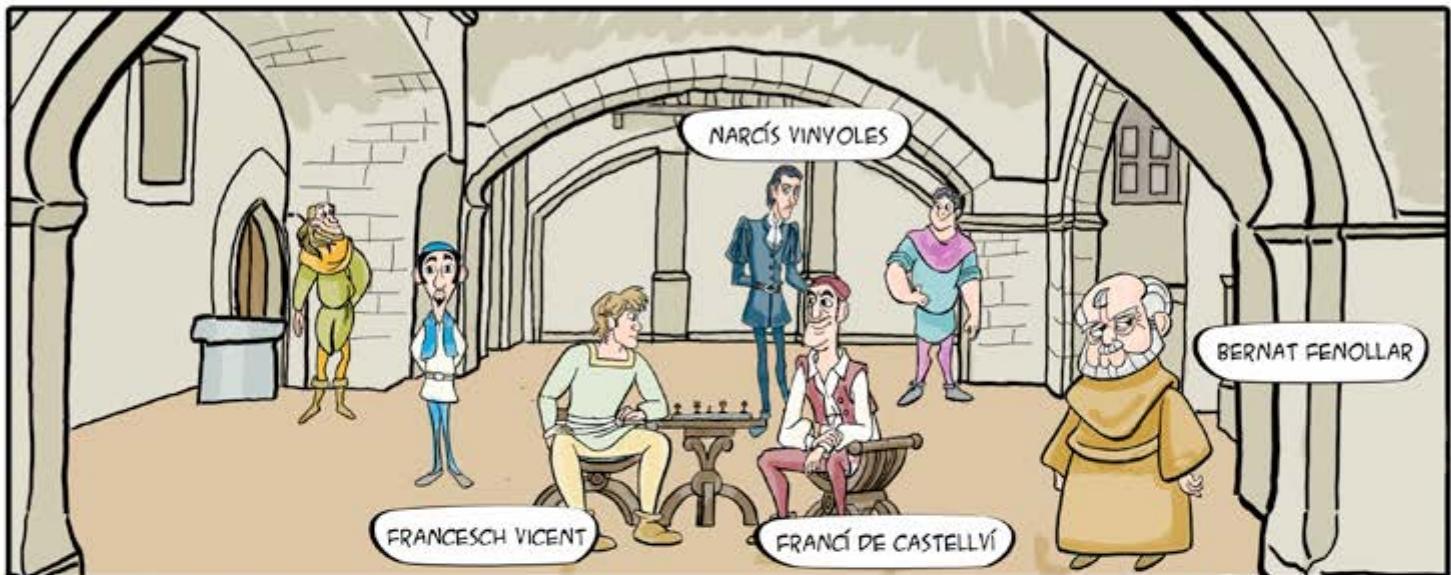
SOON WE'LL BE LIVING IN VALENCIA, WHERE THE BEST CHESS PLAYERS IN THE KINGDOM ARE! I'M SURE THEY'LL TEACH YOU THE RULES AND HISTORY OF THIS MAGICAL GAME BETTER THAN I CAN.

WHO KNOWS IF ONE DAY YOU'LL BECOME A MASTER...

VALENCIA, 6/29/1475

BERNAT, WHAT AN ENTERTAINING DISCUSSION TONIGHT BETWEEN INTELLEGITALS AND POETS. YOU MUST SEE HOW "THE YOUNG FRANCESCH" STANDS OUT ALONGSIDE "EL JOCH DELS SCACHS"

YES, AND THAT'S EVEN CONSIDERING THAT FRANCÍ DE CASTELLVÍ IS AN EXPERIENCED CHESS PLAYER



\*\*CHECK WITH A PAWN AND MATE WITH THE OTHER ONE

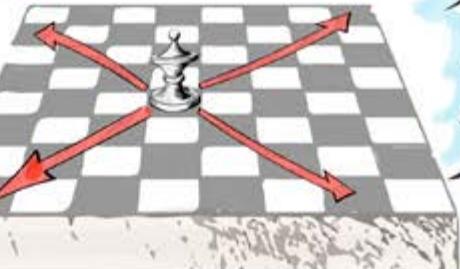
THAT SAME NIGHT, AROUND 4:30 A.M.



EVER SINCE I LEARNED TO PLAY, I'VE ALWAYS FOUND THE GAME TO BE INCOMPLETE...

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, FRANCESCH?

A PIECE IS MISSING THAT COMPLETELY DOMINATES THE DIAGONALS. SIMILAR TO THE ROOK WITH THE RANKS AND COLUMNS. I WOULD GIVE THIS POWER TO THE BISHOP, WHICH LEAPS TWO SQUARES DIAGONALLY.



THE GAMES ARE VERY SLOW. IT CAN BE SPED UP BY GIVING STRENGTH TO THE COMMON PEOPLE. LET'S PROMOTE THE DOUBLE STEP OF THE PAWN WITHOUT ANY RESTRICTIONS

IN BATTLES, THE INFANTRY IS THE FIRST TO FIGHT

EXACTLY! THE PAWN WON'T BE ABLE TO "PASSAR SENS BATALLA"\*



I SEE THESE CHANGES AS VERY WISE. CONGRATULATIONS

THAT'S NOT ALL... THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS MISSING...

WHAT'S THAT?

THE "REYNA" OR QUEEN



WHO STANDS NEXT TO THE KING IN COURT?

THE QUEEN COMMANDS MORE THAN THE KING HIMSELF IN MANY WAYS

IF WE TAKE IT TO THE BOARD...

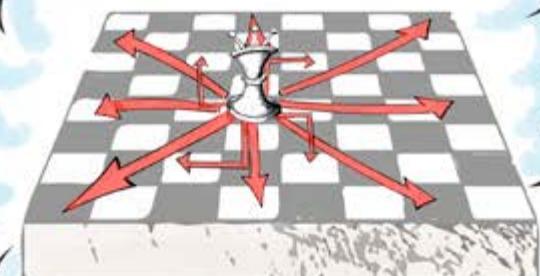
THE QUEEN HAS HARDLY ANY POWER



OUR PROPOSAL IS VERY SIMPLE: THE QUEEN HAS THE POWER TO MOVE AROUND THE BOARD WITH THE MOVEMENTS OF ALL THE PIECES



THAT IS AN IMMENSE, ALMOST ABSOLUTE POWER, WHOSE ONLY LIMITATION IS THE CONFINES OF THE BOARD



ALSO AS A KNIGHT?



NO, IT WOULD BE TERRIFYING. SHE COULD MATE HERSELF



IT WOULD BE ENOUGH FOR THE QUEEN TO USE THE ORDINARY MOVEMENT OF ALL THE PIECES EXCEPT THE KNIGHT. THAT WAY IT GREATLY INCREASES ITS POWER AND DOESN'T BECOME UNGOVERNABLE

SO,

WHAT SHALL WE TITLE THE POEM?



D'ins que la Reina ruge  
casse com tots sinó l'escut  
I say that the Queen has the movement of  
all the pieces except the knight.

THIS IS HOW IT IS WRITTEN!!

WE WILL CALL IT...  
"SCACHS D'AMOR"!!



1490...

FRANCESCH, EVER SINCE WE WROTE "SCACHS DAMOR," THROUGH THE YEARS, HAVE YOU REALIZED THAT IN VALENCIA, AND FROM WHAT FRANCI\* HAS TOLD ME, IN THE ENTIRE COURT OF ARAGON

ONLY "AXEDRES DE LA DAMA" IS PLAYED, ACCORDING TO THE RULES WE ESTABLISHED IN THE POEM

YES, I HAVE NOTICED IT. IT SEEMS THAT THE ANCIENT GAME THAT THE ARABS BROUGHT TO OUR LANDS HAS DISAPPEARED

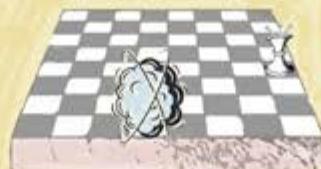
YOU SHOULD PREPARE A TECHNICAL WORK TO CONSOLIDATE AND ESTABLISH REFORMS TO THE GAME

AT HOME, I KEEP MANY MANUSCRIPTS WITH IMPORTANT QUESTIONS REGARDING THE GAME AND OTHER VARIANTS, SUCH AS STARTING THE GAME WITH 2 QUEENS

IN THE BOOK, I WILL INCLUDE RULES THAT HAVE BEEN CONSOLIDATED THROUGH PRACTICE, SUCH AS THE PROMOTION OF THE PAWN TO THE QUEEN, WHICH WAS ONE OF THE ISSUES THAT CAUSED US THE MOST PROBLEMS

YES, THAT ISSUE IS IMPORTANT

I HAVE SOLVED IT. THE CORONATION IS POSSIBLE EVEN IF THE ORIGINAL QUEEN EXISTS



FRIEND, I'VE BROUGHT YOU HERE SO YOU CAN MEET THE BEST PRINTERS IN VALENCIA AND THEIR INNOVATIVE TECHNIQUES. THEY ARE AMONG THE FEW IN THE ENTIRE KINGDOM WHO HAVE A PRINTING PRESS LIKE GUTENBERG'S

THEY ARE LOPE AND PERE

HELLO, I'M FRANCESCH

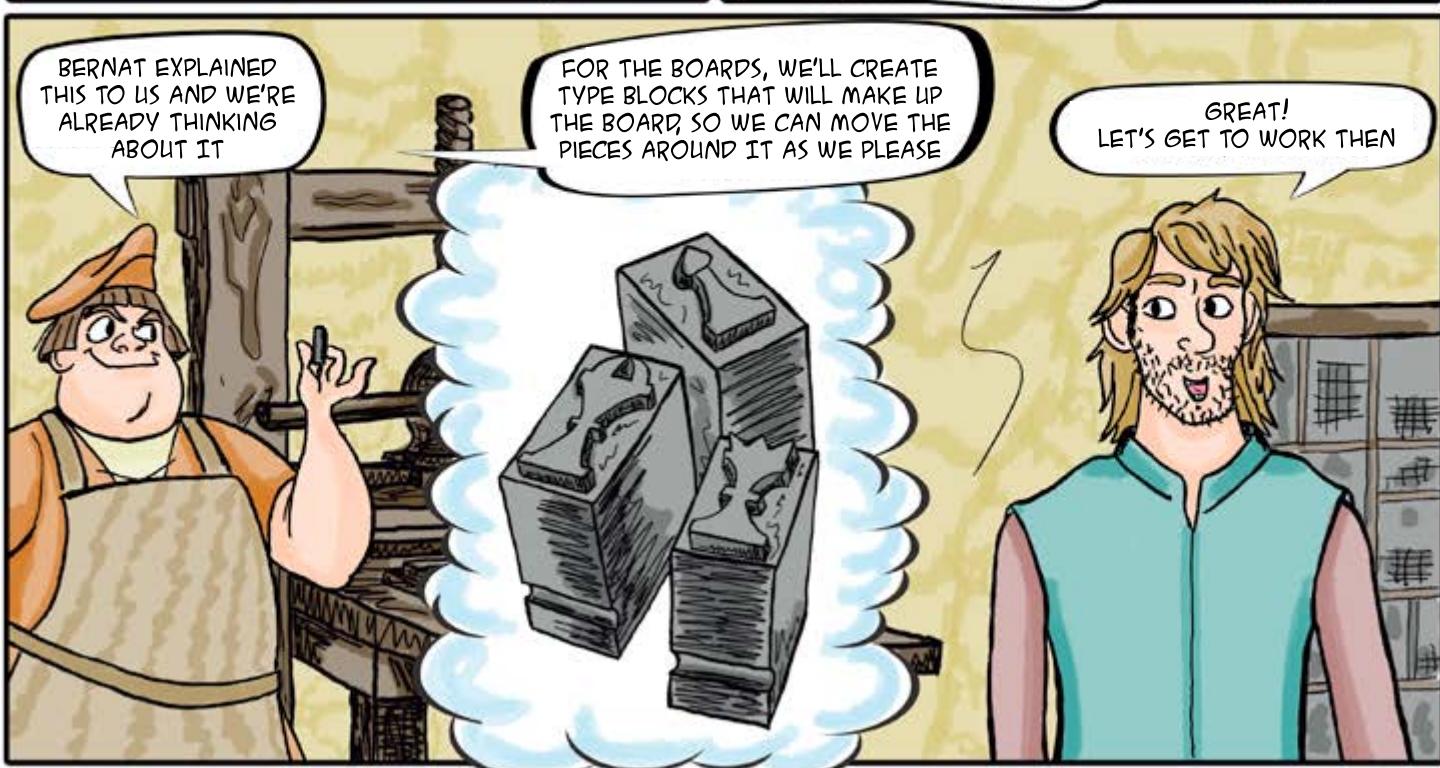
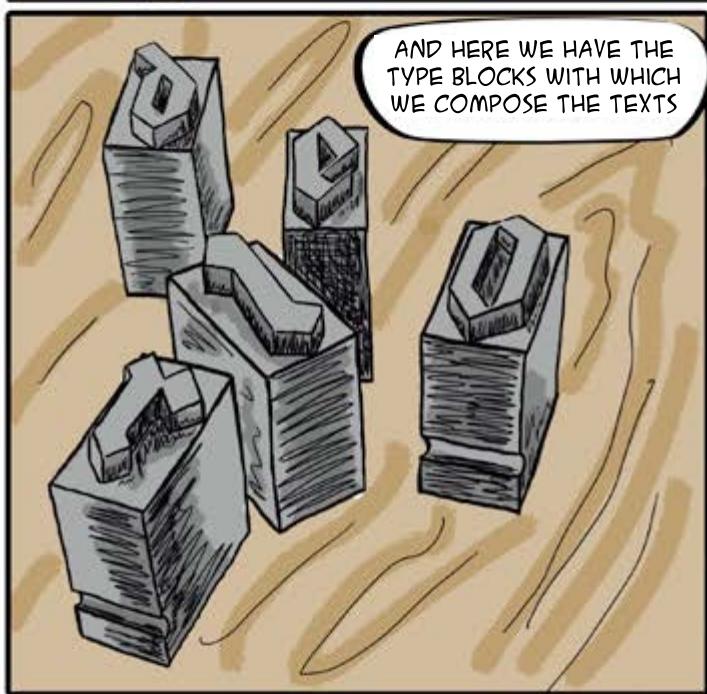
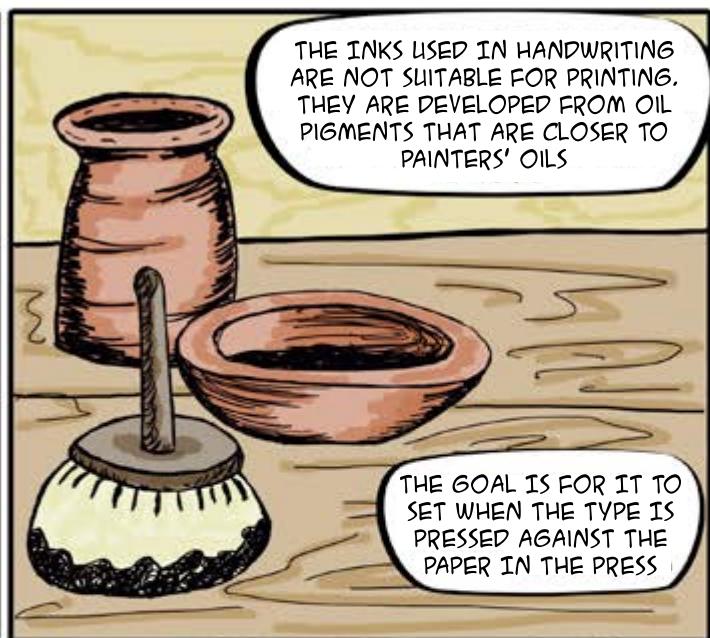
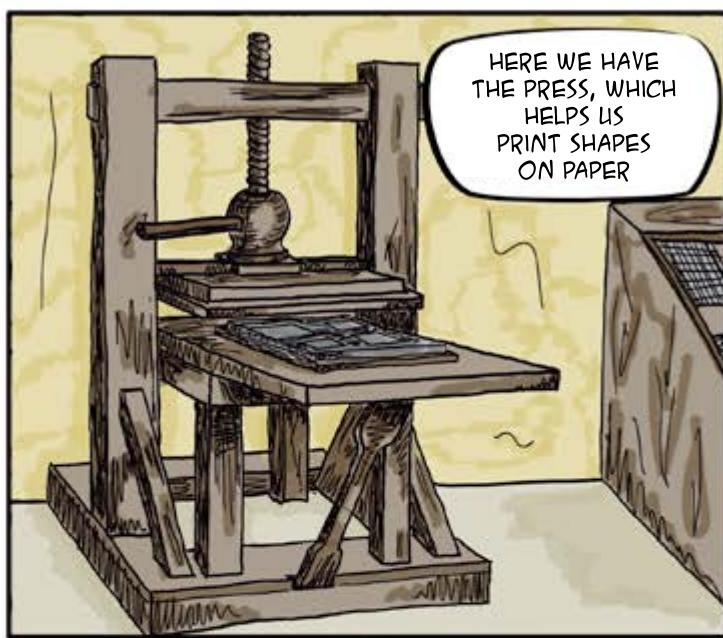
HELLO, BERNAT HAS ALREADY TOLD US ABOUT THE GREAT IDEA YOU HAVE. COME IN AND WE'LL SHOW YOU OUR WORKSHOP

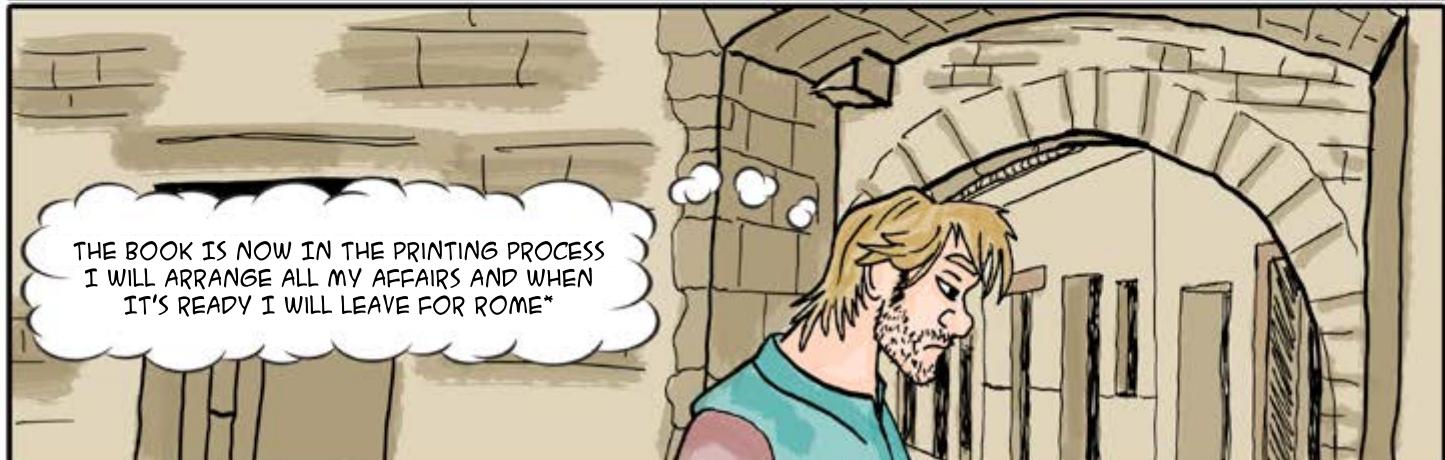
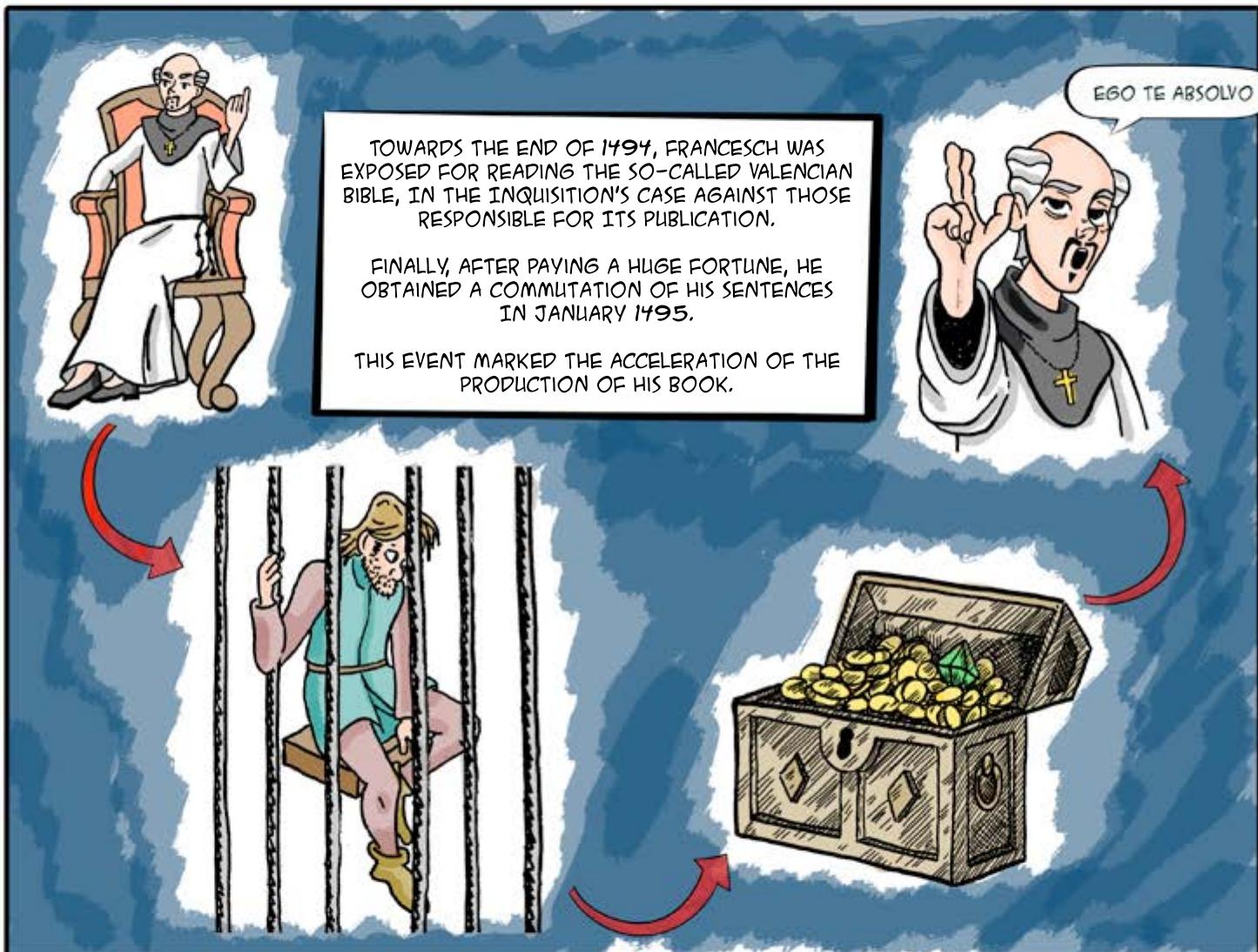
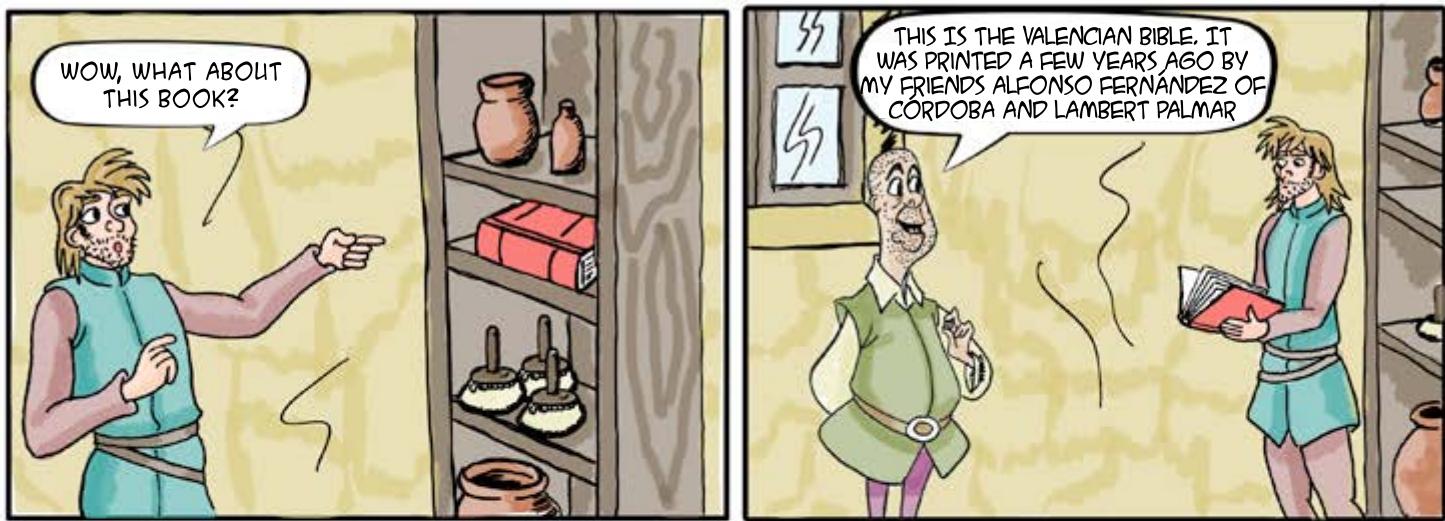


LOPE DE ROCA

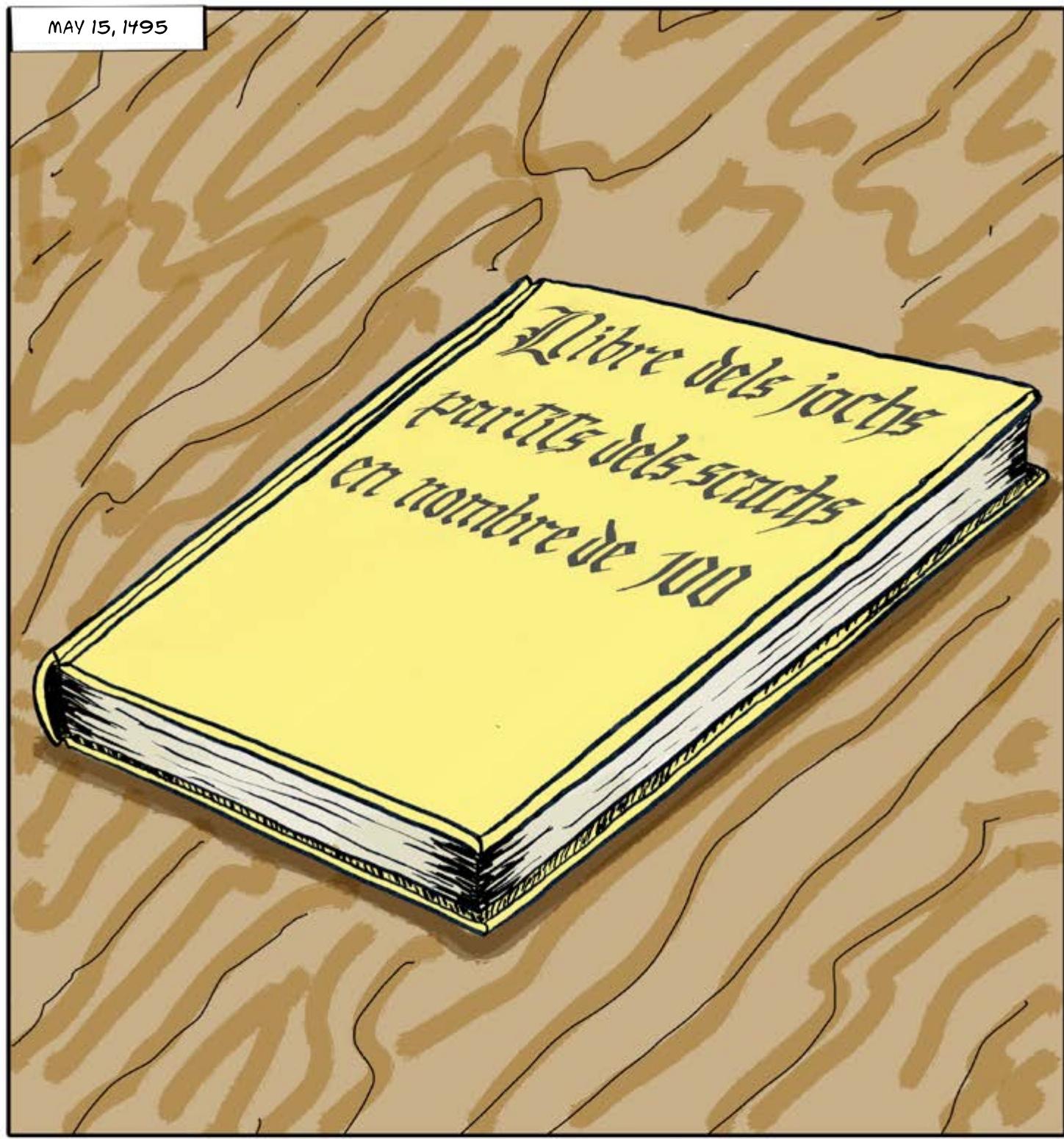


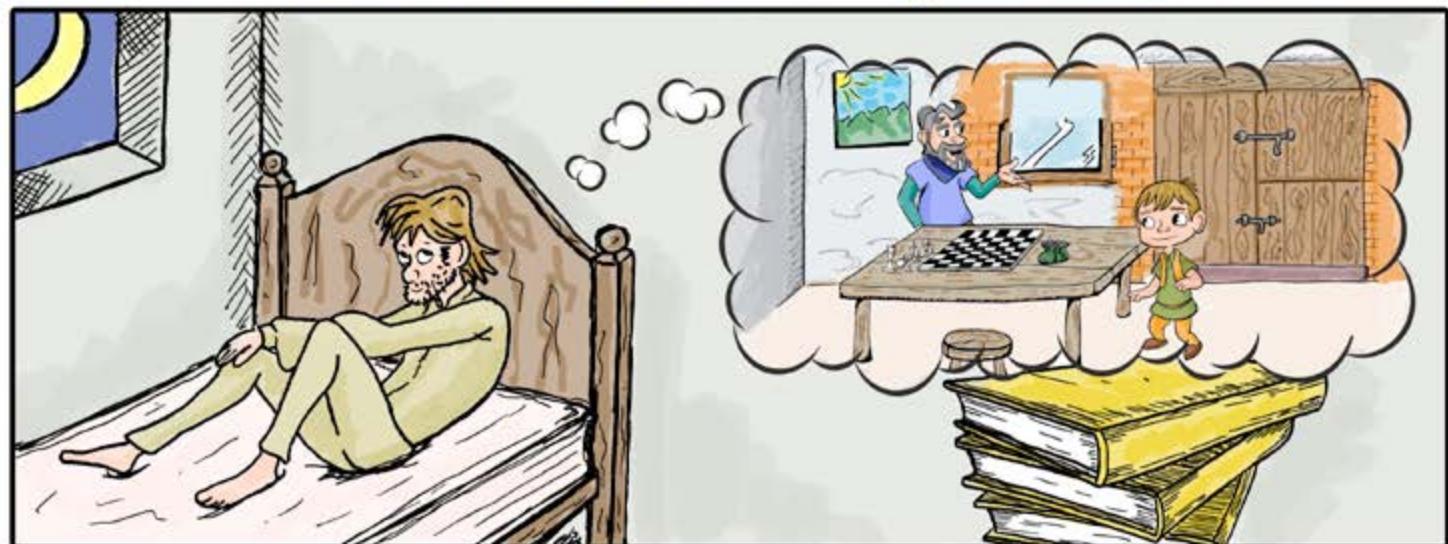
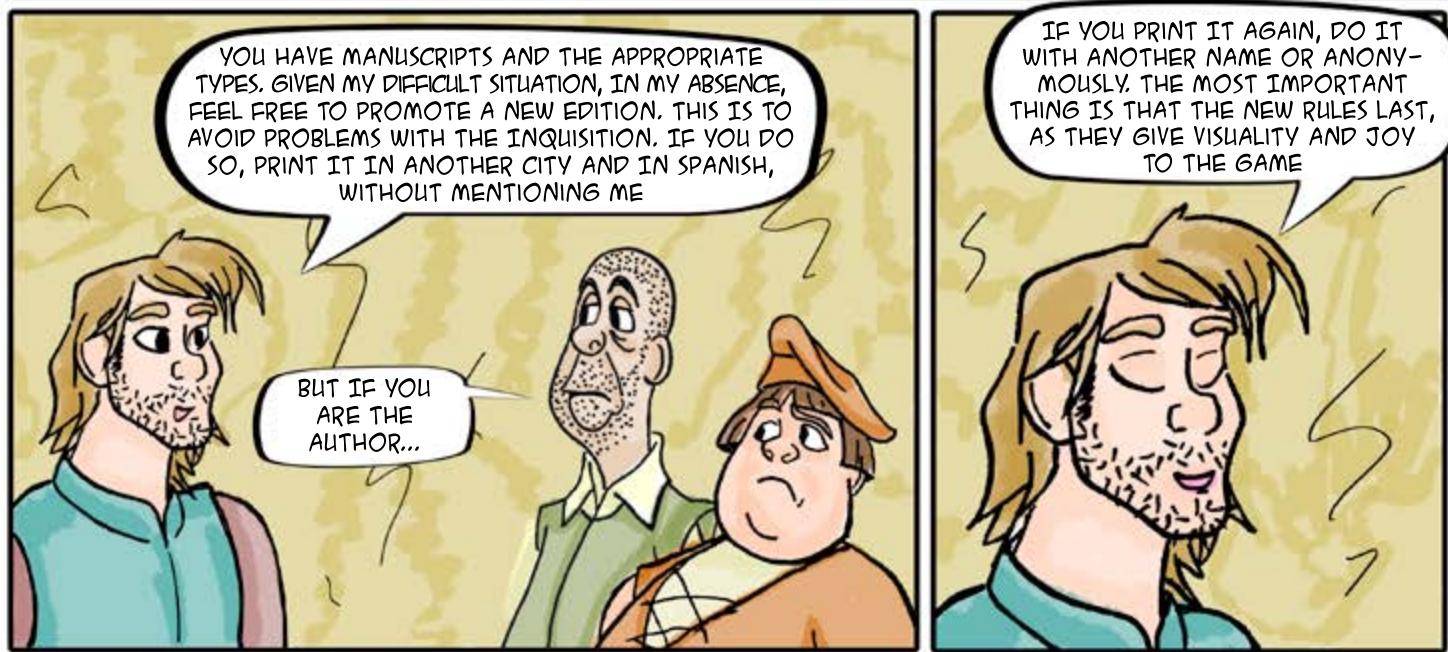
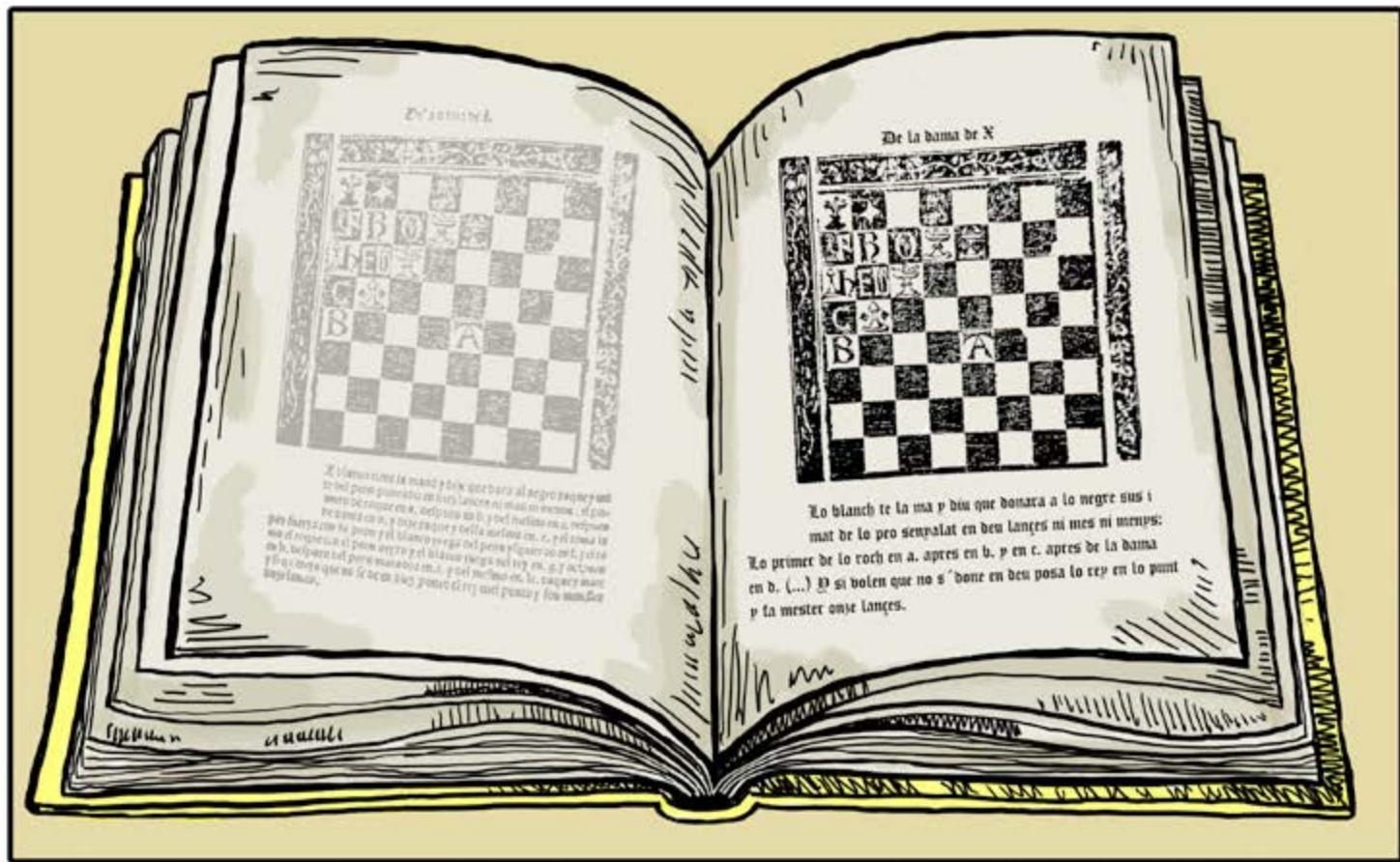
PERE TRINCHER





MAY 15, 1495





ROME, VATICAN HALLS,  
LATE 15TH CENTURY

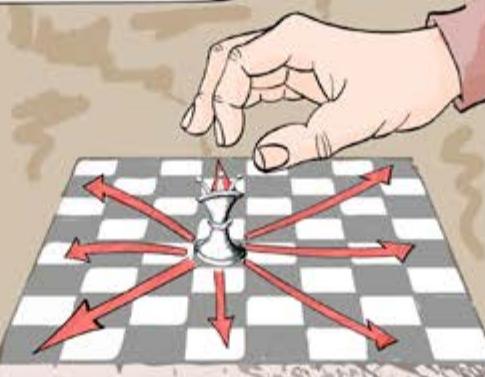
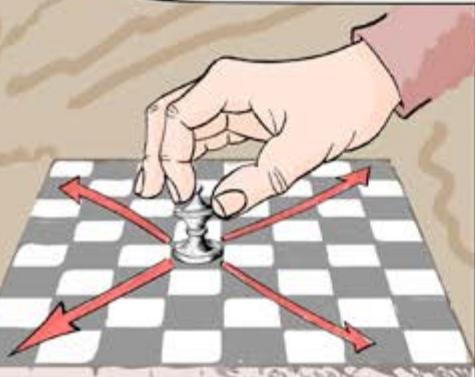


I'VE BEEN  
WANTING TO MEET YOU,  
MASTER FRANCESCH, AND  
FOR YOU TO TELL US  
ABOUT HOW LIFE IS IN  
OUR BELOVED VALENCIA,  
BUT FIRST, I WANT TO  
LEARN FIRST-HAND ABOUT  
THIS GREAT INVENTION  
OF YOURS

POPE ALEXANDER VI\*

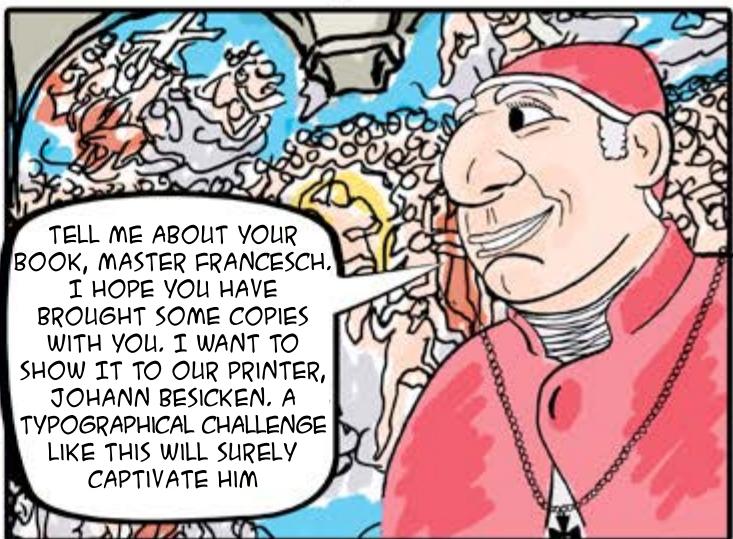
CESARE BORGIA

THESE ARE THE MOVES OF THE BISHOP AND THE QUEEN



I THINK IT IS SUBLIME, IF  
CHESS MAGNIFICENTLY REPRESENTS  
THE ART OF WAR, THE NEW  
MODALITY IS INGENIOUS. IT  
WILL BE OF GREAT USE TO ME,  
MASTER FRANCESCH

THIS IS THE NEW CHESS WE CALL "AXEDRES DE LA DAMA."  
IN VALENCIA IT IS PRACTICED EVERYWHERE, NO ONE  
PLAYS IT THE OLD WAY



TELL ME ABOUT YOUR  
BOOK, MASTER FRANCESCH.  
I HOPE YOU HAVE  
BROUGHT SOME COPIES  
WITH YOU. I WANT TO  
SHOW IT TO OUR PRINTER,  
JOHANN BESICKEN. A  
TYPOGRAPHICAL CHALLENGE  
LIKE THIS WILL SURELY  
CAPTIVATE HIM

CESENA, PAPAL STATES  
C. 1500



THE IDEA OF THIS "PARTIDO" IS THAT DESPITE APPARENT EQUALITY, THE PLAYER WHO STARTS WINS. THE KEY IS THAT NOW EVERY PAWN TRANSFORMS INTO A QUEEN. IN A SINGLE MOVE, TWO REVOLUTIONS MERGE: THE WOMEN'S AND THE SOCIAL

YOU KNOW, MY LORD, THAT CHESS IS LIKE LIFE ITSELF WE ARE ALL A KING IN OUR OWN LIVES AND A PAWN IN THAT OF OTHERS

A SUBVERSIVE IDEA THAT WILL EXALT THE COMMON PEOPLE

I'VE TALKED ABOUT YOU TO MY SISTER LUCREZIA. SHE WANTS TO MEET YOU. PERHAPS YOU COULD TEACH HER THE RULES, THE BEAUTY AND THE WONDERS OF THIS GAME. HER SISTER-IN-LAW, ISABELLA D'ESTE, IS A GREAT ENTHUSIAST OF THE GAME

ISABELLA D'ESTE? I THINK SHE'S THE MARCHIONESS OF MANTUA. THEY PROBABLY STILL PLAY THE OLD CHESS THERE

MASTER, TEACH ME MORE MOVES OF THE GAME, ESPECIALLY OPENINGS, SINCE IT'S NOT EASY TO FIND YOUR WAY WITH THE NEW RULES

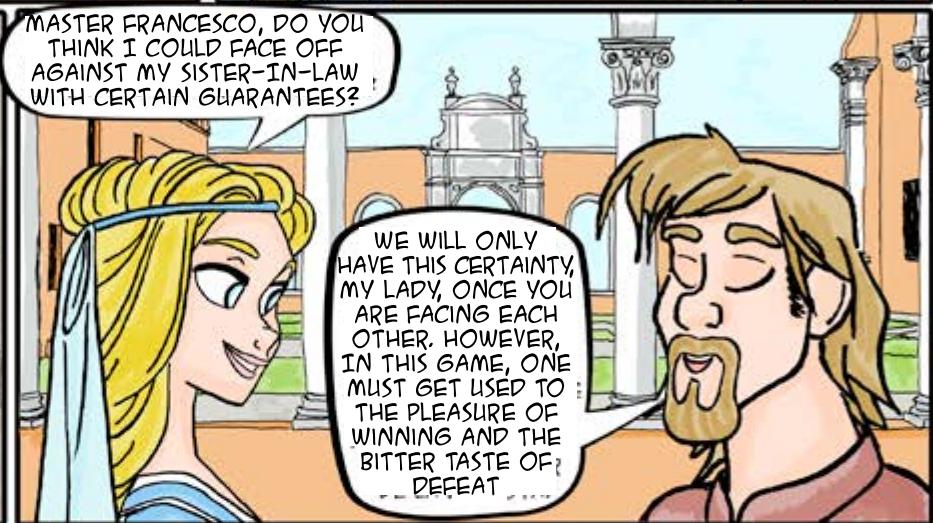
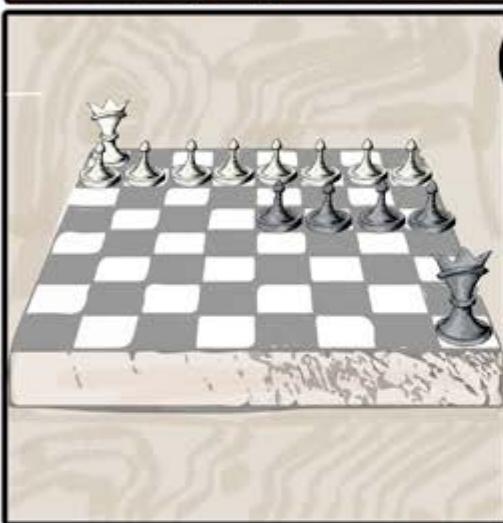
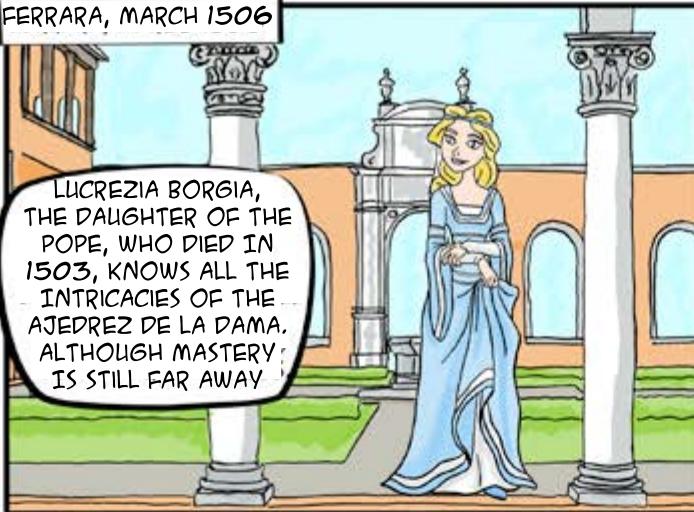
VICENT TEACHES HER THE OPENING THAT LATER BECAME KNOWN AS DAMIANO'S GAMBIT, WHICH ALLOWS HIM TO SHOW THE NEW POSSIBILITIES OF THE QUEEN AND THE BISHOP

1.E4 E5 2.0-0 F6 3.CxEx5 Fxe5 4.Qh5+



"YEARS LATER, THE MATHEMATICIAN LUCA PACIOLI INTENDED TO DEDICATE A BOOK ABOUT GAMES, INCLUDING CHESS, TO HER AND HER HUSBAND, FRANCISCO GONZAGA.

FERRARA, MARCH 1506



ROME, 1512



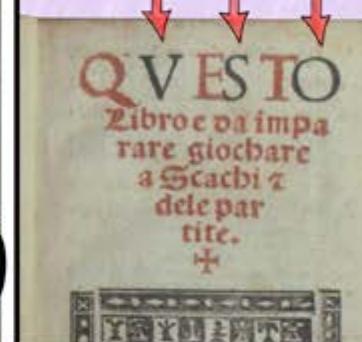
A BOOK IS PUBLISHED THAT WILL BE A TRUE BESTSELLER. THE WORK OF A MYSTERIOUS PORTUGUESE AUTHOR WHO CALLS HIMSELF "DAMIANO." IN REALITY, ALL THE PROBLEMS AND SUBTLETIES COME FROM VICENT'S BOOK AND HIS MANUSCRIPTS

ROME, 1518



ON THE TITLE PAGE OF THE SECOND EDITION OF DAMIANO'S BOOK, IT SEEMS THAT A CODED MESSAGE HAS BEEN INSERTED, WHICH WOULD HIDE THE TRUE AUTHORSHIP OF DAMIANO'S TECHNICAL MATERIAL:

V.S.O  
VICENT Scriptor Operum  
(VICENT IS THE AUTHOR OF THE WORK)



ROME, 1524



THE PLACE AND DATE OF VICENT'S DEATH ARE UNKNOWN.

THE TITLE PAGE OF DAMIANO'S THIRD EDITION STATES THAT IT HAS BEEN REVISED BY THE BEST PLAYERS, WHICH SUGGESTS THAT THE TRUE AUTHOR COULD NOT HAVE CARRIED OUT THIS WORK, SO HE MIGHT HAVE DIED BEFORE THAT DATE (1524).

THE ENGRAVING USED ON THE TITLE PAGES OF DAMIANO'S BOOK FROM 1524 ONWARDS, WITH ITS REFERENCE TO A RELIGIOUS FIGURE AND A HUMANIST OR COURTIER, SUGGESTS JOINT AUTHORSHIP OF THE WORK: PERHAPS A PORTUGUESE RELIGIOUS FIGURE AND VICENT HIMSELF

VICENT, 500 YEARS LATER



TRAGEDY IS INNATE IN VICENT'S BOOK, TODAY THERE IS NO CATALOGED COPY OF THE WORK, WHICH CHANGED THE HISTORY OF CHESS

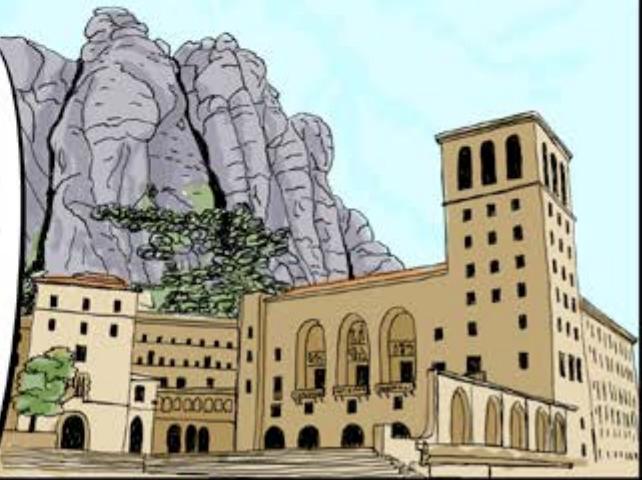
ITS TRUTH AND GREATNESS COULD ONLY BE ACHIEVED THROUGH COMPLEX RESEARCH, PROMOTED WITH GREAT PERSONAL SACRIFICE BY GREAT SCHOLARS, WORK WHICH WE NOW SUMMARIZE



JOSE A. GARZÓN

MONTSERRAT ABBEY (BARCELONA), LATE 18TH CENTURY

A PERFECTLY DESCRIBED COPY WAS IN THE FAMOUS ABBEY LIBRARY, AS RECORDED IN THE FIRST REPERTOIRES OF IBERIAN INCUNABULA FROM 1795 AND PREVIOUSLY IN A LETTER FROM JOSEP VEGA TO JUAN ANTONIO MAYANS, DATED NOVEMBER 15, 1783



AUGUST 1799

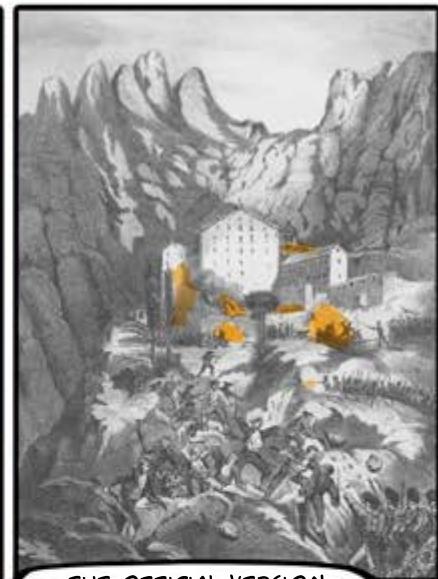
...DURING MY VISIT TO THE ABBEY OF MONTSERRAT, I REVIEWED ELEVEN INCUNABULA, INCLUDING A TREATISE ON CHESS, IN WHICH MOST OF THE DIAGRAMS FEATURED THE LEGEND "DE LA DAMA"...



GASPAR MELCHOR DE JOVELLANOS



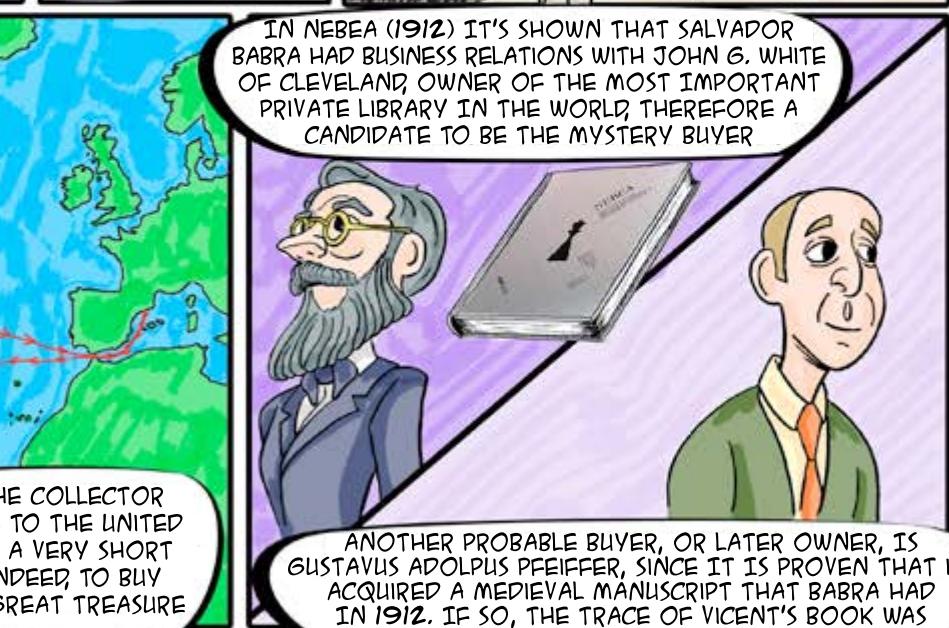
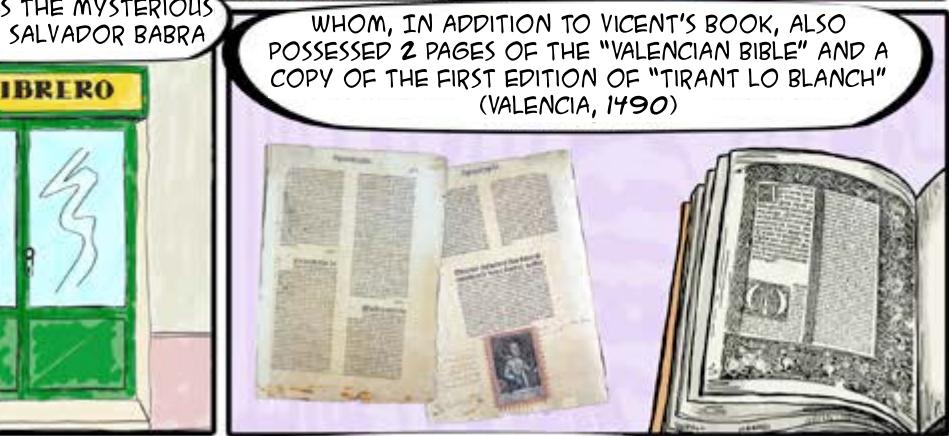
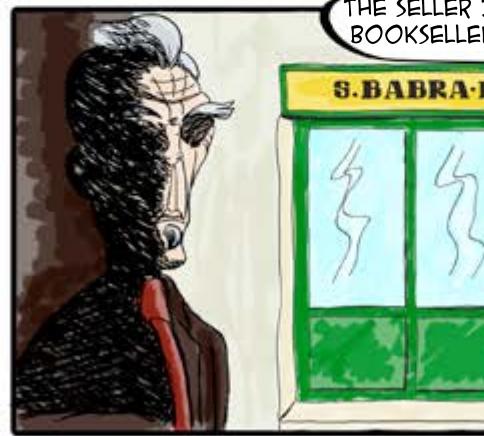
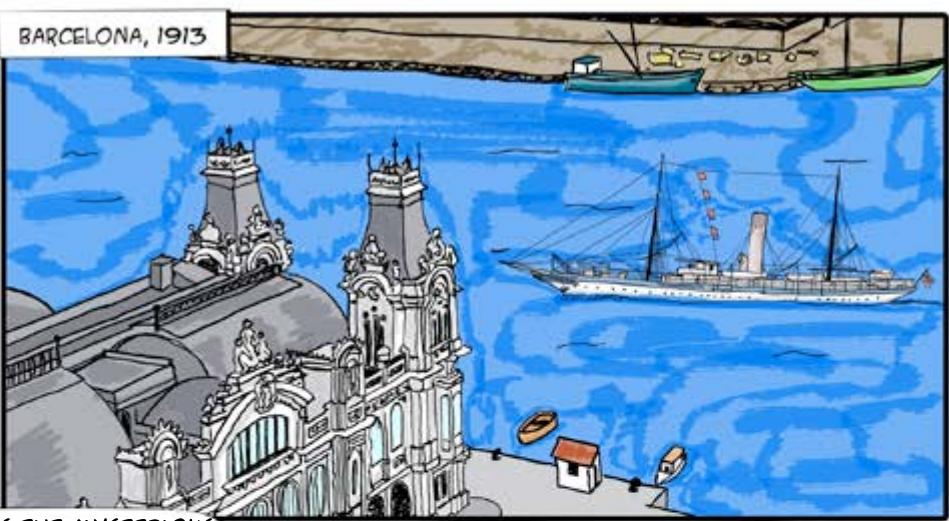
JOSÉ VARGAS PONCE



THE OFFICIAL VERSION INDICATES THAT THE BOOK MAY HAVE BEEN DESTROYED IN THE FIRE THAT HIT THE LIBRARY DURING THE ASSAULT BY FRENCH TROOPS IN 1811



HOWEVER, TODAY WE KNOW THAT MANY INCUNABULA WERE SAVED AND RETURNED TO THE LIBRARY OF MONTSERRAT IN THE FIRST DECADES OF THE 20TH CENTURY



2005

FIVE CENTURIES LATER, IN THE BOOK "THE RETURN OF FRANCESCH VICENT"



IT IS PROBABLE THAT THE AUTHOR WAS VICENT DURING THE TIME HE LIVED IN ITALY.

SEVERAL PROBLEMS SURVIVE IN VICENT'S ORIGINAL WRITING IN THE VALENCIAN LANGUAGE

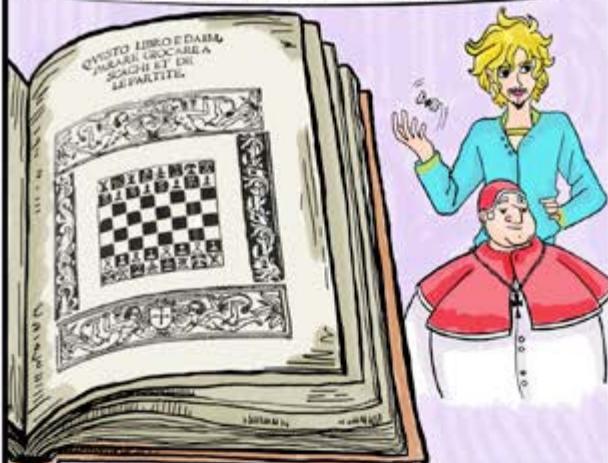
*Si fayor de los temps mat mes lo en mar si no i  
se d'una m'posar dar principio lo de iug de la prima*



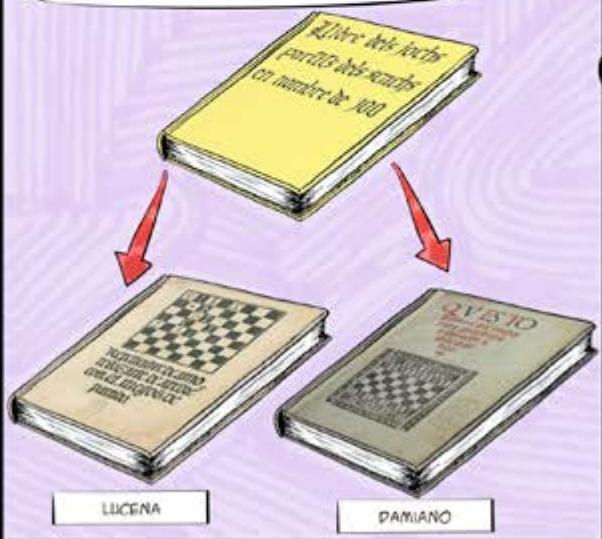
THE CESENA MANUSCRIPT CONTAINS THE TECHNICAL CONTENT OF DAMIANO'S TEXT, CONFIRMING VICENT'S PARTICIPATION IN THE CREATION OF THE BOOK AS THE PRINCIPAL, AND PERHAPS ONLY SOURCE

THE CONTENT OF VICENT'S BOOK, ITS 100 GAMES, PRESENT IN THE CESENA MANUSCRIPT, WAS ACCREDITED

ACCORDING TO NEW DISCOVERIES, THE ENGRAVING FROM THE FIRST EDITION OF DAMIANO'S BOOK LINKS THE WORK WITH THE ENTOURAGE OF POPE BORGIA, HIS SON CESARE, AND THE PRINTER OF HIS PHYSICIAN, GASPAR TORRELLA



TODAY WE ARE CERTAIN THAT THE LATER BOOKS BY LUCENA (1497) AND DAMIANO (1512) ARE TRANSLATIONS OF VICENT'S BOOK

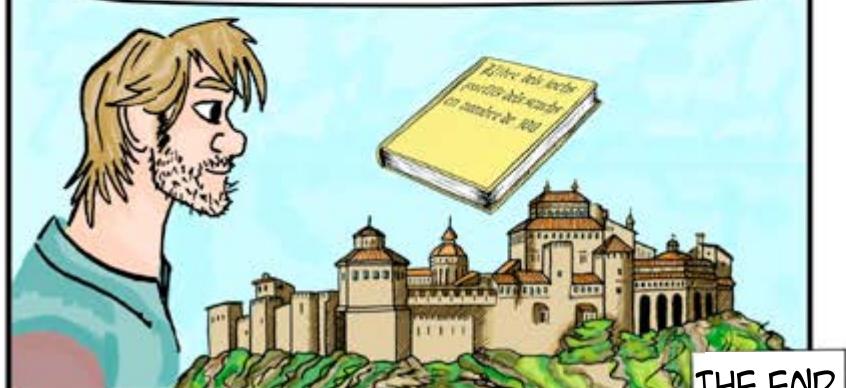


VALENCIA, DECEMBER 11, 2012



THE 2012 CALL FOR ENTRIES FOR THE INTERNATIONAL "VON DER LASA" PRIZE FOR THE SEARCH FOR VICENT'S BOOK MADE GREAT PROGRESS, INTERNATIONALIZING THE SEARCH AND RAISING AWARENESS OF ITS IMPORTANCE

BUT THE MOST BEAUTIFUL PAGE IS YET TO BE WRITTEN. THE BOOK'S CONTENT HAS BEEN REBORN, BUT THE PHYSICAL ENCOUNTER WITH THE MYTHICAL "INCUNABULUM", THE PRINTED GEM, THE HOLY GRAIL OF CHESS, WRITTEN BY FRANCESCH VICENT, FROM SEGORBE IS STILL PENDING





Graphic representation of the upper part of the Micalet Tower, as we assumed it was in the second half of the 15th century.

The story of Francesch Vicent, his  
legendary book, key to  
the birth and expansion of  
Modern Chess.

