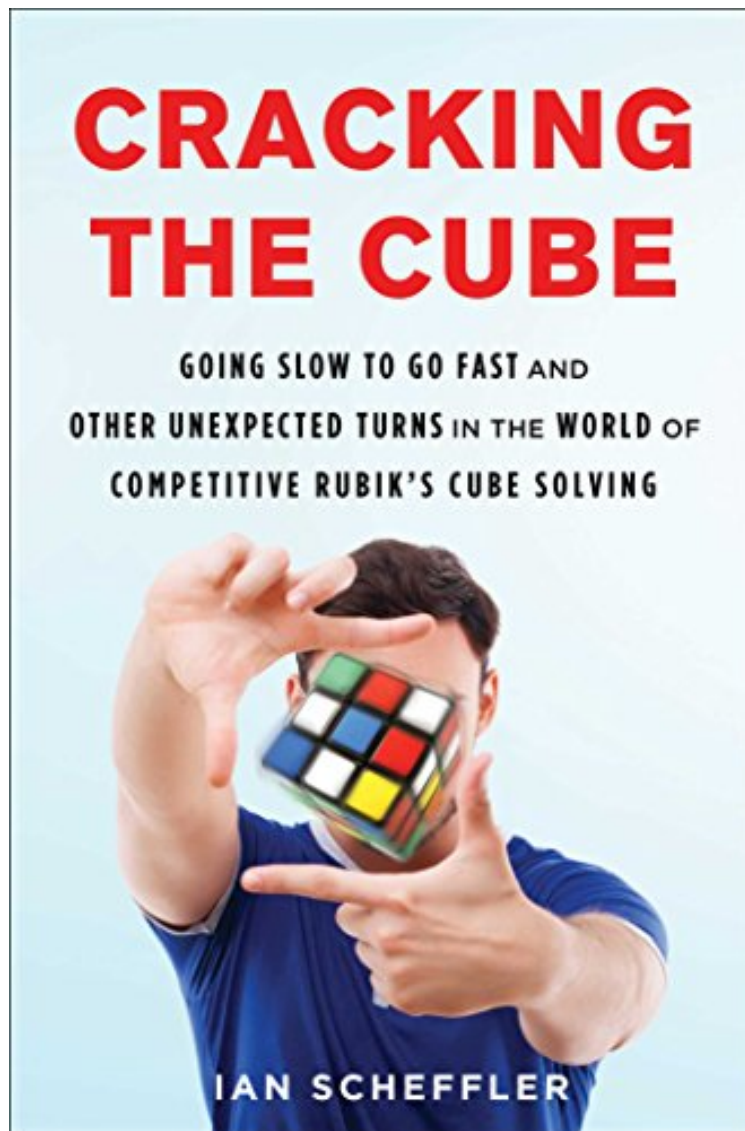


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Cracking the Cube: Going Slow to Go Fast and Other Unexpected Turns in the World of Competitive Rubik's Cube Solving

Ian Scheffler

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Ian Scheffler : Cracking the Cube: Going Slow to Go Fast and Other Unexpected Turns in the World of Competitive Rubik's Cube Solving before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Cracking the Cube: Going Slow to Go Fast and Other Unexpected Turns in the World of Competitive Rubik's Cube Solving:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great Read for CubersBy FrankI thoroughly enjoyed reading this book. As someone who is new to cubing, I really enjoyed reading about Ian's experiences at various competitions all over the world. The really great thing about cubing, and something I think is illustrated quite well in this book, is it's not you versus someone. It's you and everyone else against Rubik's Cube. Everyone is so willing to help others that it makes for a very special community.11 of 13 people found the following review helpful. A must read for speedcubers, puzzle lovers or simply minds enthusiast of testing the human limitsBy LuisI enjoyed this book like a child enjoys a candy. In this book, Ian not only shares with his readers his pursuit of a dreamed achievement, but he also encourages anyone with enough passion to follow his path beyond the limit of speedsolving the Rubik's cube under the 20 seconds. In his way down this limit, Ian deploys a very professional journalist work meeting, introducing and documenting all the main characters involved in the world of speedcubing. Like a Marlow searching his Kurtz, Ian travels all the connections down to Ern? Rubik himself, for a brief and exciting meeting. But the professor gives Ian more questions than answers...A book for all us who stares at the cube, its challenging simplicity, its mysterious beauty.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. I bought this for my 16 year old Grandson for ...By CustomerI bought this for my 16 year old Grandson for Christmas. He loves it!!

A journalist and aspiring "speedcuber" attempts to break into the international phenomenon of speedsolving the Rubik's Cube—think chess played at the speed of Ping-Pong—while exploring the Cube's rise to iconic status around the globe and the lessons that can be learned through solving it. When Hungarian professor Ern? Rubik invented the Rubik's Cube (or, rather, his Cube) in the 1970s out of wooden blocks, rubber bands, and paper clips, he didn't even know if it could be solved, let alone that it would become the world's most popular puzzle. Since its creation, the Cube has become many things to many people: one of the bestselling children's toys of all time, a symbol of intellectual prowess, a frustrating puzzle with 43.2 quintillion possible permutations, and now a worldwide sporting phenomenon that is introducing the classic brainteaser to a new generation. In *Cracking the Cube*, Ian Scheffler reveals that cubing isn't just fun and games. Along with participating in speedcubing competitions—from the World Championship to local tournaments—and interviewing key figures from the Cube's history, he journeys to Budapest to seek a meeting with the legendary and notoriously reclusive Rubik, who is still tinkering away with puzzles in his seventies. Getting sucked into the competitive circuit himself, Scheffler becomes engrossed in solving Rubik's Cube in under twenty seconds, the quasi-mystical barrier known as "sub-20," which is to cubing what four minutes is to the mile: the difference between the best and everyone else. For Scheffler, the road to sub-20 is not just about memorizing algorithms or even solving the Rubik's Cube. As he learns from the many gurus who cross his path, from pint-sized kids to engineering professors, it's about learning to solve yourself.

"Scheffler provides the first comprehensive book on the global phenomenon of speedcubing. Much has changed since the first world championship was organized in Budapest in 1982. But the emotions were all there already - good to see they haven't cooled in over three decades. The cubing community is growing ever larger, younger - and faster!" (Erno Rubik)"I just couldn't put *Cracking the Cube* down once I started reading - and I'm sure I'll read it again many more times. Scheffler's a great storyteller, and I think this book will be fascinating for both speedcubers and non-cubers alike." (Feliks Zemdegs, two-time world Rubik's Cube champion)"After I completed my first Rubik's Cube it quickly went from a challenge to a hobby to an obsession. Scheffler provides a unique perspective into the competitive sub-culture of cubing, investigating the timelessness of the Cube as he chronicles his incredible journey around the globe to gain a better understanding of it. This is a book that anyone with a curious mind will enjoy!" (Ryan Fitzpatrick, New York Jets quarterback)"Recommended." - *Scientific American*About the AuthorIan Scheffler has written for *The New Yorker*, *The Guardian*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Los Angeles of Books*. He holds a degree in English from Columbia University, where he co-edited the *Columbia*. *Cracking the Cube* is his first book.Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.*Cracking the Cube* TO GO FAST, YOU HAVE TO GO SLOW I put the petals on the daisy, solve the cross, insert the corners, then the edges. Veer right at the Jesus Fish and finish with an algorithm that makes it look like I'm trying to disarm a bomb, fingers flying every which way in a desperate attempt to stop the clock. 44.82 seconds. Not bad—the first time I've broken a minute in competition—but not nearly good enough. The barrier I'm trying to cross is twenty seconds, the equivalent, in this world, of the four-minute mile: go sub-20 and you join an elite club. Once, the barrier was all but impassable. Now it's the standard by which all comers are judged. Most people will likely never solve Rubik's Cube, so going under twenty seconds may not mean much if you haven't cubed, but in competition, a few seconds can make all the difference. * * * There are nearly six hundred cubers in this cavernous ballroom. All here at the Riviera Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas for the 2013 Rubik's Cube World Championship. Some, like me, are novices. This is only my second competition. Others have attended dozens, or even upward of one hundred tournaments. We will be ranked by the average of five solves, with the best and worst removed. This is to prevent a lucky (or unlucky) solve from skewing the results. The top two hundred will qualify for the second round. Each of us will start our solves from the same randomized positions. The scrambles, as they're called, are generated by TNoodle, a computer program. The scrambles are interpreted by the scramblers. And they

need interpretation. To an outsider, they look like complete gibberish: R' F2 R2 D2 L U2 R U2 R2 U2 B2 U L' F U2 F L U B' L' F', for instance. The finals are a moon shot for me, so like many here, I'm playing for a personal best, or PB. Everyone knows who stands a chance of winning the competition: Feliks, Mats, Cornelius. They are the professional athletes—they go by one name only, like Messi and Ronaldo—and have the sponsorships and devoted fan bases to prove it. My second solve is slower, much slower than my first. 54.01 seconds. It's hard to know what, if anything, I did wrong. Each solve is different, not by choice, but by necessity. Rubik's Cube can be arranged more than forty-three quintillion ways. One quintillion is one billion squared. One followed by eighteen zeroes. If you stacked forty-three quintillion Rubik's Cubes end to end, they would reach 261 light-years into space. That many Rubik's Cubes would cover the earth 273 times over, to the height of a five-story building. I'm solving Rubik's Cube like most of the competitors, one layer at a time. This is known as CFOP, an acronym for the steps involved—Cross, First Two Layers, Orientation, and Permutation of the last layer—as well as the Fridrich method, after Jessica Fridrich, the Czech woman who helped invent it and first put it online. The method resembles the assembly of a layer cake: you start on the bottom, by making the cross. The cross sets up the first two layers, after which you tackle the last layer. My third solve starts off well. I'm cruising past the first two layers—the pieces are favorably set up—when I throw a glance at the timer. It still reads below thirty seconds. My heart starts to race. I could wind up with a solve in the thirty-second range, a massive PB. Only my Cube refuses to cooperate. The last layer starts to fissure. I can see the innards of the puzzle, glistening and black. If your Cube “pops,” that is to say, if it explodes, during competition, you are allowed to pick up the pieces, but there's almost no point. Technically, I'm not solving the Cube invented by Ernő Rubik, the Hungarian professor and architect who brought Rubik's Cube to life in 1974. Instead, I'm using one of the latest speedcubes, the DaYan ZhanChi, designed by Daqing Bao, a Chinese puzzle maker. From the outside, the ZhanChi resembles Rubik's Cube: six sides, with nine stickers each, divided among six colors: red, green, yellow, blue, orange, and white. But inside, the ZhanChi is entirely different. If you were to disassemble Rubik's Cube, you would find that the pieces are as blocky inside as they are outside. There are axles hidden inside the puzzle, which hold the centers in place; the other twenty pieces are designed to support one another. The rear ends of the corners and edges interlock, allowing you to rotate the puzzle while maintaining its shape. From the right angle, hidden inside the puzzle, you will see the pieces connect to create a sphere. In a way, this makes sense. The sphere is the only shape whose every point is equidistant from the center. Just like continents migrating around the globe, each sticker of Rubik's Cube has to slide around the puzzle. But the original evinces only a rough semblance of a sphere, with the effect that the pieces are difficult to turn. The ZhanChi, by contrast, is all curves below the surface. The pieces are carefully machined to glide past one another with a minimum of resistance. Like a ball bearing set loose on a freshly waxed floor, it will keep spinning even after you let it go. The puzzle is to Rubik's Cube what speed skates are to regular ice skates, hence the term speedcube. But the speed comes with a catch: if you're not careful, you can turn the ZhanChi too fast, and threaten its integrity. The World Championship is sponsored by Seven Towns, Ltd., the British firm that owns the rights to Rubik's Cube. They know we're not using their puzzles, but they don't try to stop us: to anyone watching, we appear to be solving Rubik's Cubes. Even cubers refer to puzzles by that name, the way everyone refers to facial tissues as Kleenex. In the end, it's great publicity for the official brand. When I slam the timer to a halt, I hesitate to look at the clock. 40.13 seconds. If I had only turned the puzzle a little more carefully, I wouldn't have had to pause so often and would have ended up with a better time. * * * After my fourth solve—an uninspired 50.75—one of the scramblers catches my attention. He gives me a strange bit of advice. Go slower, he says. Like, 80 percent. The adrenaline, he explains, will push me to go faster without my realizing it. I'm reminded of a quote from one of the fastest cubers in the world, a seventeen-year-old Australian named Feliks Zemdegs, who's solved Rubik's Cube in 5.66 seconds: “You don't really think. You just do it.” * * * For my last solve I pick up my Rubik's Cube as if in slow motion. The first turns feel almost painfully lethargic, like I'm churning a barrel of molasses with a shovel. I'm going so slow I'm even having thoughts beyond the Cube in my hand. The solve appears to be proceeding automatically. For fear of throwing myself off course, like I did earlier, I don't dare to look at the clock. Still, it's hard to imagine this will be anything but my slowest attempt. When I stop the timer, I do so carefully, as if I were trying to touch the keys of a piano as softly as possible. It reads 33.24 seconds, or nearly seven seconds faster than my previous personal best. It's one of the fastest solves I've ever recorded, in competition or at home.