



COLUMNISTS

Checkpoint

Carsten Hansen



Translate this page



Rating Chart

- Awful –
- Poor –
- Uneven –
- Good –
- Great –
- Excellent –

Reviewed this Month

Play the Benko Gambit
by Nicolai V. Pedersen

The New Old Indian
by Alexander Cherniaev & Eduard Prokuronov

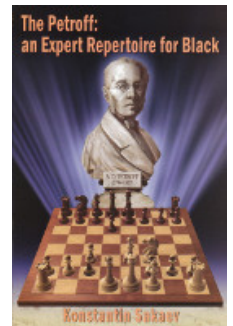
Declining the Queen's Gambit
by John Cox

*Grandmaster Repertoire 8:
The Grünfeld Defence, Vol. 1*
by Boris Avrukh

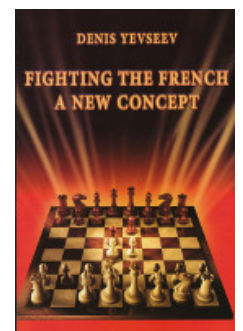
*Grandmaster Repertoire 9:
The Grünfeld Defence, Vol. 2*
by Boris Avrukh

A Universal Weapon 1 d4 d6
by Vladimir Barsky

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The Petroff: an Expert Repertoire for Black
by Konstantin Sakaev



Fighting the French: A New Concept
by Denis Yevseev

Fighting Back Against 1 d4

The move 1 d4 can signal all sorts of approaches from White: a solid player, a positional player, a dynamic player, or an attacking player. Whichever it is, Black isn't guaranteed an easy game. This month we examine cases where Black takes destiny in his own hands with direct approaches such as the Grünfeld Defence and the Benko Gambit, or via some offbeat variations based on set-ups with an early ...d7-d6, or by the classical Queen's Gambit Declined, which has undergone many transformations in the last few decades. One thing all the books have in common is that they are better than average.

Play the Benko Gambit by Nicolai V. Pedersen, Everyman Chess 2011, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 208pp. \$26.95 (ChessCafe Price \$22.95)

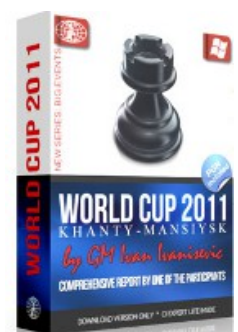
Rated around 2500 and just one norm short of the grandmaster title, Danish international master Nicolai Pedersen debuts as an author with the present volume. The Benko Gambit is an opening he employs in his own games, even against the strongest Danish player, Peter Heine Nielsen, who, aside from being a very strong grandmaster, works as a second for World Champion Anand. A position Nielsen held at the time of the following game.

The truncated annotations below are based on Pedersen's:

Peter Heine Nielsen – Nicolai V. Pedersen
Danish Team Championship 2006

1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 c5 3.d5 b5 4.c4

Now the game becomes a Benko Gambit. The alternatives for White are also



World Chess Cup 2011
by Ivan Ivanisevic



covered in a later chapter in the present book.

4...g6 5.cxb5 a6 6.b6 Qxb6 7.Nc3 d6 8.e4 Bg7 9.Nd2

"If White is intending to play this way he might as well do so at once, ruling out any ideas of ...Bg4."

9...0-0 10.Be2 Nbd7 11.Nc4 Qc7 12.Bf4 Rb8

"A thematic move, bringing the rook to the half-open b-file. At this point I saw that the forthcoming sacrifice was probably problematic for White."

13.Qd2?!

Here Pedersen offers 13 0-0 as sounder, offering a part game and some additional analysis.

13...Nb6 14.Ne3?



[FEN "1rb2rk1/2q1ppbp/pn1p1np1/2pP4/4PB2/2N1N3/PP1QBPPP/R3K2R b KQ - 0 14"]

"Other moves allow Black to equalize; e.g. 14 0-0 Nxc4 15 Bxc4 Ng4 and Black is doing fine."

14...Na4!!

"The idea is to take the pawn on e4, check on a5, and then play ...Rb4. Then White has weaknesses at a4, b2, f2 and f4, while his king is prevented from castling. Back in 2006, the engines I tested this position on after the game were unable to see that 14...Na4 is good for Black."

15.Nxa4 Nxe4 16.Qc2 Qa5+ 17.Kf1 Rb4

"Attacking the knight on a4, and with a veiled threat against the bishop on f4."

18.Nc4

"Not 18 Nc3? Nxc3 19 bxc3 Rxf4, while after [sic] 18 Bc4 Qxa4 19 Qxe4 Bf5 20 Nxf5 gxf5 Black regains the piece with a clear advantage."

18...Qxa4 19.Qxe4 Bf5



[FEN "5rk1/4ppbp/p2p2p1/2pP1b2/

"Now White can't cover the knight on c4 in a good way."

20.Qxe7

"If 20 Qe3 Rxc4 21 b3, then 21...Qd7! 22 Bxc4 Bxa1 and Black is better."

20...Re8 21.Qxd6 Bxb2! 22.Nxb2

"22 Re1 would be met by 22...Bc3 with a decisive advantage."

22...Rxb2 23.Be3

"This fails spectacularly to defend the e-file."

23...Rxe2 24.Kxe2

"Or 24 Qc6 Bd3 25 Qxa4 R2xe3+ 26 Kg1 Re1+ and mates."

24...Qc4+ 25.Ke1 Qc3+ 26.Ke2 Bg4+ 27.f3 Qxe3+ 28.Kf1 Bf5 0-1

"There is no serious defence to 29...Bd3+ and mates."

An impressive display. After this game, the Benko Gambit became a more regular feature in Pedersen's repertoire.

The material is divided as follows:

- Bibliography (1 page)
- Introduction (7 pages)
- **Benko Accepted**
- The Fianchetto Variation (21 pages)
- The Classical Variation (40 pages)
- The 'Quiet' 5 e3 (12 pages)
- **Benko Declined**
- The 5 f3 Variation (14 pages)
- White plays b5-b6 (15 pages)
- Other Options for White (35 pages)
- **Anti-Benko**
- The Kasparov Gambit (24 pages)
- The Topalov Variation (29 pages)
- Index of Variations (5 pages)
- Index of Complete Games (2 pages)

It is odd that relatively few pages are devoted to the critical Fianchetto variation, which is currently the main headache for Black in the Benko. Pedersen circumvents the most critical lines by choosing a somewhat unusual move order: **4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 Nc3 Bxa6 7 g4 Bg7 8 Bg2 d6 9 Nf3 Nfd7!?**




[FEN "rn1qk2r/3nppbp/b2p2p1/2pP4/6P1/2N2N2/PP2PPBP/R1BQK2R w KQkq - 0 10"]

10 0-0 Nb6 11 Qc2 N8d7 with a decent game for Black, though obviously Pedersen goes into much more detail.

The material is presented around forty-nine main games, with the theory weaved into the annotations. Pedersen writes with passion and it is clear that he has a strong attachment to the black cause. Occasionally, this sways his objectivity, but not so much to concern the reader. Pedersen, as you should expect from any serious author, presents a great deal of new ideas and improvements over existing theory, but he really puts everything on the table.

I am very impressed by this book. With the choices of lines recommended for Black, and with the amount of work Pedersen has put into the volume. After studying the material and the lines recommended by Pedersen, I am ready to reinstate the Benko to my repertoire.

For players rated 1700-1800, the introduction details typical ideas and indicates which of the main games employs these ideas, and the annotations allow one to follow the narrative without too much trouble. For even very strong players, the analysis the lines makes the material worthy of study. I highly recommend this book to all levels of Benko Gambit devotees. [Play the Benko Gambit](#) is also available as an ebook.

My assessment of this book: 

Order [Play the Benko Gambit](#)

by Nicolai V. Pedersen

The New Old Indian by Alexander Cherniaev & Eduard Prokuronov,
Everyman Chess 2011, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 160pp.
\$26.95 (ChessCafe Price \$22.95)

This book by grandmaster Cherniaev and FIDE master Prokuronov is a bit of an oddball. It is called the 'New Old Indian,' but very little of the content has anything to do with the Old Indian, which is typically arrived at via **1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 d6 3 Nc3 e5**, followed by 4...Nbd7 and 5...Be7. As we will see, this book doesn't deal much with these lines.



The content is divided as follows:

- Bibliography (1 page)
- Preface (4 pages)
- **Part I: The Old Indian**
- Gheorghiu's 4...e4 (32 pages)
- 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 d6 3 Nc3 e5 without 4 Nf3 (33 pages)
- Preventing e2-e4 with ...Bf5 (36 pages)
- **Part II: Completing the Repertoire**
- 2 Nf3 d6 without 3 c4 (22 pages)
- White's Other Second Moves (29 pages)
- Index of Variations (1 page)
- Index of Complete Games (1 page)

In the preface, Cherniaev writes, "In this book I will show you some fascinating new ideas that have been developed by modern grandmasters in the Old Indian Defence. Studying them will give you a very practical approach with Black after 1 d4. The main move order of our suggested repertoire is 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 d6, but then to navigate away from the classical Old Indian lines with ...Nbd7 and ...e5. The concept of this book is that on the one hand it offers a complete, independent repertoire for Black, and on the other hand King's Indian players may use our flexible move order to avoid some undesirable systems."

Then, in the preface, he continues, "Our repertoire will focus on active piece play, control of the centre, in particular the e4-square, and we have in store some surprise for unsuspecting opponents! Moreover, you won't be required to learn endless theory playing these lines. Why? Well simply, sometimes

there is not yet a lot of existing theory.

"There are many unexplored paths in this opening, even within the critical lines. So this book contains a considerable amount of original analysis, with emphasis on the critical positions."

Indeed, at the first opportunity Black has to enter the classical Old Indian, he immediately steers away from it: **1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 d6 3 Nc3 e5 4 Nf3 e4!?**



[FEN "mbqkb1r/ppp2ppp/3p1n2/8/2PPp3/2N2N2/PP2PPPP/R1BQKB1R w KQkq - 0 5"]

If you think this move looks a little odd, you are not alone, even if it has some merit. You will quite possibly be surprised to find that it was employed successfully by English grandmaster Jon Speelman against then world champion Garry Kasparov.

The first game of the book, sets the tone:

Zoltan Gyimesi – Andrei Volokitin

German League 2005

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 d6 3.Nc3 e5 4.Nf3 e4!?! 5.Ng5 Qe7 6.Qc2 Nc6!?!

Also the more solid 6...Bf5 is covered in this book, e.g. 7 g4 Bg6! 8 Bg2 Nc6 9 e3 0-0-0 with a complicated game.

7.d5 Nd4 8.Qb1 e3!




[FEN "r1b1kb1r/ppp1qppp/3p1n2/3P2N1/2Pn4/2N1p3/PP2PPPP/RQB1KB1R w KQkq - 0 9"]

9.fx3 Nf5 10.e4 Nh4 11.Bf4 Ng6 12.e3 h6 13.Nf3 Nxf4! 14.exf4 g5 15.c5! a6! 16.Bd3? gxf4 17.Qc1 Nd7? 18.cxd6 Qxd6 19.0-0 Bg7 20.Kh1 Ne5 21. Bb5+ Ke7 22.Qxf4? axb5 23.Nxe5? Bxe5 24.Qxf7+ Kd8 25.Nxb5 Qe7 26. Qf2 Ra6! 27.d6? Bxd6 28.Rad1 Bd7 29.Nxd6 Rxd6 30.Qa7 Bc8 31.Qa5 Re8 32.h3 Qe5, and Black has consolidated his position and went on to win in fifty-three moves.

There are many other curious lines throughout the book, such as **1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 d6 3 Nf3 g6 4 Nc3 Bf5** and **1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 d6 3 Bf4 Nh5!?**. The book is full original ideas and combative chess, but I find it hard to believe average players will feel confident in all the different types of positions the authors propose for Black. The positions vary too greatly with regards to pawn

structures, type of play (strategic or tactical), kingside or queenside castling, etc. It can be quite confusing; even well-rounded players will find themselves uncomfortable with the diversity of the recommended lines. However, unsuspecting white players will rarely find themselves in comfortable territory either, because anything coming from Black's side of the board will be faced for the very first time. Indeed, I have played 1 d4 for years and never faced any of the lines the authors propose.

This is a fascinating book, albeit confusing and a little difficult for much of the target audience. If you are the type of player who likes to explore and don't mind thinking on your own, then this book is for you. However, if you are traditional type of player, who likes a fairly predictable position from the opening, this book will not be to your liking. [The New Old Indian](#) is also available as an ebook.

My assessment of this book: 

Order [The New Old Indian](#)

by Alexander Cherniaev & Eduard Prokuronov

Declining the Queen's Gambit by John Cox, Everyman Chess 2011, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 208pp. \$26.95 (ChessCafe Price \$22.95)

Presenting a repertoire for Black based on the Queen's Gambit Declined can seem like a daunting task, primarily because there is an unbelievable amount of games and analysis to go through. Understanding the types of positions that arise is a whole other task and it is not for the weak-willed. Rest assured though, because English international master John Cox has proven that he is very competent author who understand how to pick the right lines and how to present the material in a way that the reader will be able to follow and comprehend.




The material is divided as follows:

- Bibliography (2 pages)
- Introduction (2 pages)
- The Tartakower Variation (56 pages)
- The Lasker Defence (18 pages)
- Alternatives to the Main Line (38 pages)
- The 5 Bf4 Variation (31 pages)
- The Exchange Variation (27 pages)
- The Catalan (26 pages)
- Index of Variations (2 pages)
- Index of Complete Games (2 pages)

I'm surprised that the author offers both the Tartakower Variation and Lasker Defence for Black, as each line could easily meet Black's needs. But Cox manages capably to present plenty of theory without drowning the reader in unnecessary material and irrelevant game references. Throughout the book Cox proposes lines for Black that are solid, make sense, do not carry an overwhelming burden of theoretical must-know-knowledge, and yet is of a pedigree that it can stand the test of even very strong players.

This all makes for a book that offers a Black repertoire that should be attractive to many players. After reading this book, I feel compelled to study the opening in more depth and try it out for myself. Despite Cox's best efforts to explain typical ideas and strategies in some detail, this may be too complicated for players rated below 1700-1800. [Declining the Queen's Gambit](#) is also available as an ebook.

My assessment of this book: 

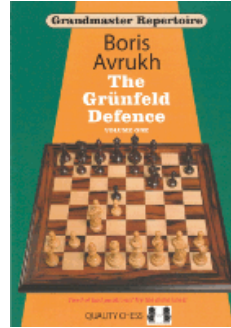
Order [Declining the Queen's Gambit](#)

by John Cox

Grandmaster Repertoire 8: The Grünfeld Defence, Vol. 1 by Boris Avrukh, Quality Chess 2011, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 349pp, \$29.95 (ChessCafe Price \$25.95)

Grandmaster Repertoire 9: The Grünfeld Defence, Vol. 2 by Boris Avrukh, Quality Chess 2011, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 349pp. \$29.95 (ChessCafe Price \$25.95)

The Grünfeld is a very dynamic opening that has been in the repertoires of champions, including Fischer, Kasparov, and Anand, and it is still a go-to opening for a number of the strongest players today: Carlsen and Svidler to name just two. The premise of the opening seems somewhat simple: hand the center to White and then try to generate sufficient counterplay, while White tries to defend his center pawns. Yet, the Grünfeld is an incredibly demanding opening, with boundless amounts of theory to cover, and many of the lines are long, sharp, convoluted, and strategically complicated. Therefore, while it has a great deal of appeal because of the pedigree of the players employing the opening, understanding the opening sufficiently well to play it confidently is a whole other story.



The material is divided as follows:

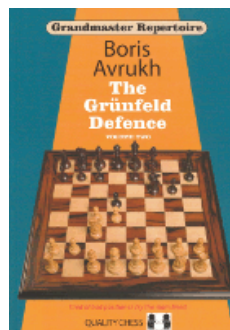
Volume One

- Preface (1 page)
- Key to Symbols used & Bibliography (1 pages)
- Early Deviations: 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 (2 chapters – 30 pages)
- Fianchetto Systems: 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 g3 d5 4 cxd5 Nxd5 5 e4 Nb6 (4 chapters - 48 pages)
- Various 4th Moves: 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5 (3 chapters – 30 pages)
- Closed Variation: 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5 4 e3 Bg7 (2 chapters – 33 pages)
- 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5 4 Bf4 (5 chapters - 78 pages)
- 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5 4 Bg5 (6 chapters - 65 pages)
- 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5 4 Nf3 Bg7 (1 chapter - 5 pages)
- 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5 4 Nf3 Bg7 5 Bg5 Ne4 (2 chapters - 21 pages)
- 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5 4 Nf3 Bg7 5 Qb3 dxc4 6 Qxc4 0-0 7 e4 Nc6 (2 chapters - 24 pages)
- Variation Index (9 pages)

Volume Two

- Preface (1 page)
- Key to Symbols used & Bibliography (1 pages)
- Various 5th Moves: 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5 4 cxd5 Nxd5 (4 chapters – 50 pages)
- Various 7th Moves: 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5 4 cxd5 Nxd5 5 e4 Nxc3 6 bxc3 Bg7 (4 chapters - 32 pages)
- 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5 4 cxd5 Nxd5 5 e4 Nxc3 6 bxc3 Bg7 7 Be3 (3 chapters - 55 pages)
- 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5 4 cxd5 Nxd5 5 e4 Nxc3 6 bxc3 Bg7 7 Nf3 (1 chapter - 16 pages)
- 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5 4 cxd5 Nxd5 5 e4 Nxc3 6 bxc3 Bg7 7 Nf3 c5 8 Rb1 (4 chapters - 41 pages)
- 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5 4 cxd5 Nxd5 5 e4 Nxc3 6 bxc3 Bg7 7 Bc4 (5 chapters - 52 pages)
- Variation Index (7 pages)

Thus, Volume Two covers the critical Exchange Variation, while Volume One covers everything else. As you can see, there is an amazing amount of material to study, memorize, and understand. Pretending that this will be a manageable task for the average player is to do them an injustice. In the recent World Cup, Grünfeld expert Svidler, who has played the opening for years, managed to get himself into trouble very early on against Ponomarev in a relatively innocuous line, simply because he couldn't remember what to do and evidently it wasn't that easy to figure out at the board.



That said, Avrukh does a fabulous job of piecing together a repertoire, presenting it in digestible format, and then analyzing the chosen lines in incredible detail. All while offering hundreds of improvements over existing theory. The reader is notified of these new ideas by the presence of an 'N' whenever they appear. The variety of moves goes from simple alternatives to outright improvements that change the evaluation of the line as a whole. The latter are obviously the ones that make the study and subsequent use of the lines exciting. Playing against a reasonably well-prepared opponent in this opening can be difficult, but facing them packing the armory in these volumes will be a whole different ball game.

For the strong to elite players who employ the main lines of the Grünfeld, these books are must-buys. Such players will love these books and refer to them repeatedly. Those ranking just below that will also be able to benefit, while others will likely do better with something aimed at their level.

My assessment of these books: ♦♦♦♦♦

Order [Grandmaster Repertoire 8: The Gruenfeld Defence, Volume One](#)
by Boris Avrukh

Order [Grandmaster Repertoire 9: The Gruenfeld Defence, Volume Two](#)
by Boris Avrukh

A Universal Weapon 1 d4 d6 by Vladimir Barsky, Chess Stars 2010, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 224pp. \$26.95 (ChessCafe Price \$22.95)

I guess you truly don't know the value of something before you really need it. In this past week, I had no time to prepare for a league game, but I had checked what kind of openings my opponent would likely throw at me. After a bit of thought, I decided to play an opening I had employed several times in my youth, and which didn't demand too much theoretical knowledge or preparation. Yet, I had to get myself up-to-date with the latest developments and at least know what to play in the main lines. So I armed myself with the present book, which has each chapter divided in the following sections: Quick Repertoire, Step-by-Step, and Complete Games. In the past, I have been very critical of this division, because I found it to be largely a waste of space. However, in my preparations to the game, which consisted of browsing through the book whenever I stopped at a traffic light, I found that the Quick Repertoire segments did the job admirably well. When it came to game time, my "preparation" worked like a dream and I equalized fairly effortlessly. However, I hope few players will find themselves preparing like that.




Let's have a quick look at the contents:

- Preface (5 pages)
- **1 d4 d6 2 c4 e5**
- 3 dxe5 (20 pages)
- 3 g3, 3 b3, 3 e4 (22 pages)
- 3 d5 (27 pages)
- 3 Nc3 (28 pages)
- 3 Nf3 e4 4 Ng1, 4 Nfd2 (17 pages)
- 3 Nf3 e4 4 Ng5 (24 pages)
- **1 d4 d6 2 Nf3 Bg4**
- Various w/o 3 Nbd2, 3 e4 and 3 c4 (15 pages)
- 3 Nbd2 (14 pages)
- 3 e4 (15 pages)
- 3 c4 (13 pages)
- **1 d4 d6**
- 2 Bg5, 2 Bf4, 2 g3 (20 pages)
- Index of Variations (2 pages)
- Index of Complete Games (2 pages)

The repertoire proposed in this book isn't too complicated and it contains a fair amount of sting, particularly in the **1 d4 d6 2 c4 e5** lines. There is a fair amount of original author input, mostly consisting of analysis, though not too many improvements are suggested. The ideas, both tactical and strategic, are explained quite well, which makes it much easier for average players to follow and understand the lines discussed and recommended.

I like the book as a whole, with some elements not entirely ideal, but most very good. Neither the ideas, nor repertoire are new, but the presentation is well put together, and very easy to follow. In many ways that is the strength of this little book.

My assessment of this book: 

Order [A Universal Weapon 1.d4 d6](#)

by Vladimir Barsky

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