



C O L U M N I S T S

Checkpoint

Carsten Hansen

**Reviewed this month:**

Bashing the Sicilian with Bb5 - Volumes 1 + 2
by Murray Chandler

Survive and Beat Annoying Chess Openings - The Open Games
by John Watson & Eric Schiller

Starting Out: English Opening
by Neil McDonald

Starting Out: Ruy Lopez
by John Shaw

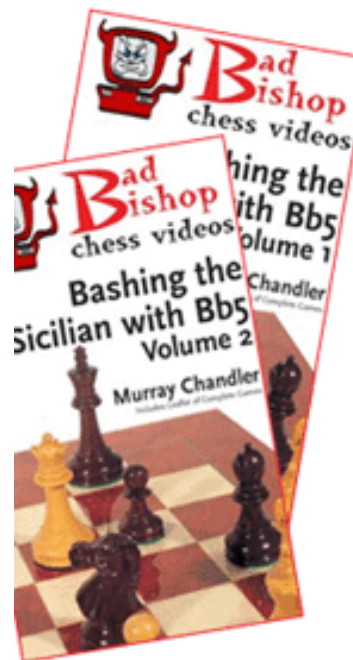
Annoying Chess Openings

This month we are going to look at a number of books and. The Bb5 Sicilian, along with the 2 c3 Sicilian, used to be my least favorite moves to face when playing the Sicilian. The English Opening easily fits into that category, mostly because most people dislike facing the English Opening. Then we have the Ruy Lopez, which is one of the most difficult openings to face in the open games. Finally we have a volume that claims it can help you survive and beat annoying double king pawn openings (1 e4 e5).

Bashing the Sicilian with Bb5 - Volumes 1 + 2 by Murray Chandler, 2003 Bad Bishop Ltd., Figurine Algebraic Notation, VHS Video Format, Running Time: Vol.1: 90 minutes - Vol.2: 120 minutes, \$29.95 (each)



Grandmaster Murray Chandler is nowadays probably best known for one of, if not *the* best-selling chess books of the last decade, *How to beat Your Dad at Chess*, a work that recently has been followed up by *Chess Tactics for Kids*, a book that I also found very instructive. But before these recent efforts, he produced some of the early efforts on the 2 c3 Sicilian and was one of players on the highly successful English teams in the late 1980s and early 1990s, including some crucial and memorable wins against the Soviet teams. At that time, he was rated around 2600, but then other things started taking up his time, (e.g., he edited *British Chess Magazine* for a number of years) and he also started Gambit Publishing together with John Nunn and Graham Burgess. The company that publishes the videotapes reviewed here is Bad Bishop Ltd., a related company of Gambit Publishing.



The variations that are covered have not been that well-documented in chess books; in fact I only recall a couple of books devoting themselves exclusively to the topic, with Steffen Pedersen's *Easy Guide to the Bb5(+)* Sicilian, but this already goes back some years, and theory has developed quite a bit since then. Especially with the surge of popularity of first the Najdorf Sicilian (1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 a6) and later the Sveshnikov Sicilian (1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e5), White has been looking for ways to sidestep these theoretical mine fields, which no non-full time chess player probably has time to study in detail. I used to play it on occasion myself, when I couldn't be bothered to prepare something in the main lines, but currently several of our strongest grandmasters play Bb5 lines, including Kasparov, Anand, Ponomarev and

several other very highly rated players.

The first tape deals with the Rossolimo Variation, which starts with 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5, and is, in my opinion, the most dangerous of the Bb5 Sicilians.

The contents of the tape is divided up as follows:

- Volume 1: 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5
- Introduction: 3...Qb6; 3...Qc7; 3...Nf6 4 Nc3 Qc7
- 1: 3...Nf6 4 Nc3 e5; 3...Nf6 4 Nc3 g6; 3...Nf6 4 Nc3 Nd4
- 2: 3...e6 4 Bxc6
- 3: 3...g6 4 Bxc6 bxc6
- 4: 3...g6 4 Bxc6 dxc6

After a short introduction by Chandler, we go to the electronic board, which remains visible on the screen for the rest of the tape. The presentation is very smooth, going quickly from game to game. In fact sometimes I had to stop the tape to digest what had just transpired on the screen. But that is a positive feature about video tapes, you can always pause or even rewind if you didn't catch what just happened.

The presentation is built up around 16 main games, all of which are well-chosen and instructive. There are some flashy wins in between but only when it is a consequence of typical plans from White and somewhat inferior play from Black.

The critical lines in the Rossolimo Variation are traditionally 3...g6 and 3...e6, both of which have become very popular over the last decade, and in both cases Chandler has chosen White's play based on the simple, yet reasonably effective 4 Bxc6. This limits the number of variations to cover, and the lines are also far easier to understand and get a theoretical grasp of than the other main lines.

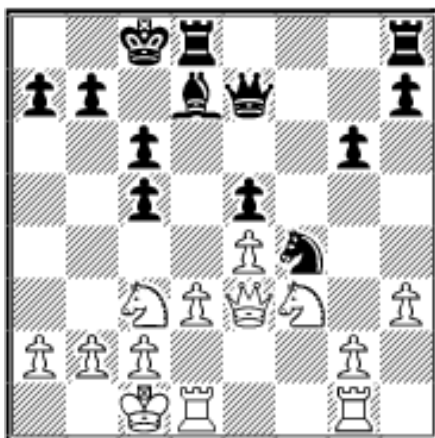
Chandler hasn't attempted to put a repertoire together that

will blow Black off the board in all variations, and does at some points stress that the positions are unclear, but then tells us what the typical plan is, making it possible for us to venture out with some confidence.

On the tape, there aren't any real theoretical novelties presented, but that's not really the aim of the tape either; the goal is rather to present a playable, easy-to-learn repertoire that you can acquire the knowledge to employ in less than two hours. I didn't find any pitfalls of any magnitude that should concern White. In fact, Chandler navigates well around the recommendations of Rogozenko in his recent *Anti-Sicilians - A Guide for Black* (which incidentally is published by Gambit Publishing), and shows that White has good possibilities of obtaining an edge, even in the lines recommended by Rogozenko.

As an appetizer, I will show you the game Psakhis-Röder, Vienna 1991, which is still retains both theoretical and instructional topicality.

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 g6 4 Bxc6 dxc6 5 h3 Bg7 6 d3 e5
7 Nc3 Qe7 8 Be3 Nf6 9 Qd2 Nd7 10 Bh6 f6 11 Bxg7 Qxg7
12 Qe3 Qe7 13 Nd2 Nf8 14 f4 Ne6 15 fxe5 fxe5 16 0-0-0
Nf4 17 Rhg1 Bd7 18 Nf3 0-0-0**



Now Psakhis finds a highly instructive maneuver.

**19 Nb1! g5 20 Nbd2 h6 21 Nc4
Ng6 22 b4! g4 23 hxg4 cxb4 24
Qxa7 Bxg4 25 Rdf1 Rde8 26
Nfd2! Rhf8 27 Nb3 Be6 28
Nba5 Qc7 29 Nb6+ Kd8 30 Na8
1-0 Beautiful play with the
knights by Psakhis.**

While the material on the tape doesn't contain any major

revelations, and therefore will probably be too light in the coverage for players over 2100, those rated below this level should have an interesting presentation that you can easily use.

Therefore I have no problem recommending it for those that need a quick, but perfectly respectable fix against the 2...Nc6 Sicilian.

My assessment of this book: 

[Order](#) *Bashing the Sicilian with Bb5, Volume 1*
by Murray Chandler

Volume 2 covers the Moscow Variation, which I find less critical for Black, but it was nonetheless Kasparov's choice in his game against the world on the Internet some years back. Nowadays the line isn't tremendously popular, but does feature prominently in the repertoires of players like English GM Michael Adams, Russian GM Rublevsky and GM Bologan, who won this year's tournament in Dortmund ahead of Anand, Kramnik, Leko and others.

The contents of this tape:

- Volume 2: 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 Bb5+
- 1: 3...Nc6
- 2: 3...Nd7
- 3: 3...Bd7 4 Bxd7+ Nxd7
- 4: 3...Bd7 4 Bxd7+ Qxd7

In the first part, Chandler chooses to meet 3...Nc6 with 4 d4 and on 4...cxd4, he opts for 5 Qxd4, which is a position that is usually reached after 3 d4 cxd4 4 Qxd4 Nc6 5 Bb5. It is generally not considered particularly dangerous for Black, but Chandler does manage to show several interesting

options for White, options that clearly need testing by strong players and therefore are quite ideal for everybody else to experiment with as well. The presentation starts with the amazing game Vasiukov-van Wely, Moscow 2002

As previously mentioned, the Moscow Variation is considered less critical than the Rossolimo Variation, as Black has more options that are supposed to be satisfactory for him. Perhaps for this reason, Chandler goes far more in depth with his coverage (the tape is 30 minutes longer than volume 1) and explains the typical ideas, both positional and tactical, very well, making this tape not only worthwhile as a study of an opening variation, but also one of positional chess in general.

Here players with Black may be let down by Rogozenko, as after 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 Bb5+ Bd7 4 Bxd7+ Qxd7 5 c4 Nf6 6 Nc3 Nc6 7 d4 cxd4 8 Nxd4 g6 9 Nde2 Bg7 10 f3 0-0 11 0-0 a6 12 a4 e6, the move recommended by Chandler, 13 Bg5 isn't even mentioned by Rogozenko, despite being played in several high level encounters.

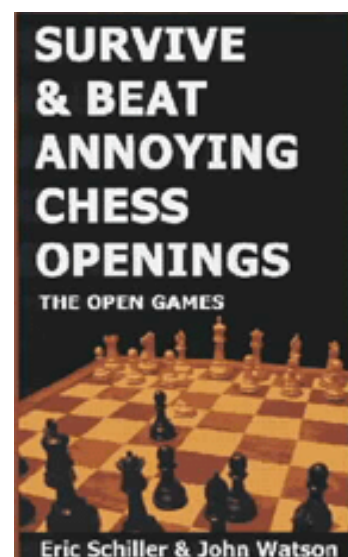
I very much enjoyed this tape, and in fact found myself considering taking up this line again based on the lines carefully picked and excellently presented by Chandler. The options White has in hand in this opening are far more dangerous for Black than generally considered. Like volume 1, this tape will suffice for most players when it comes to learning a quick system against the Sicilian and as companion volumes, they work very well. The presentation runs very smoothly and you will not come across sequences of 'eh-eh-eh-eh' like the ones that can be found on the tapes by Dzindzhi that were reviewed in my September column. This tape is also recommended for White players rated for players rated under 2100, but even players rated higher may benefit from the fine coverage.

My assessment of this book: 

[Order](#) *Bashing the Sicilian with Bb5 - Volume 2*
by Murray Chandler

Survive And Beat Annoying Chess Openings - The Open Games by John Watson & Eric Schiller, 2003 Cardoza, Figurine Algebraic Notation, paperback, 266 pp., \$17.95

Most chess books are written by a single author, but occasionally two authors get together and combine their efforts to write what is hopefully going to be a good book. A familiar duo is Jeremy Silman and John Donaldson; they have co-authored several truly excellent opening books on the Slav, the Sicilian Dragon and the Sicilian Accelerated Dragon. My first book, also on the Sicilian Accelerated Dragon, was co-authored with my good friend and grandmaster Peter Heine Nielsen. Working together with someone you respect should inspire you to put in a little extra effort than you might otherwise have.



In this book, we have an author combination that is perplexing. On one hand we have Eric Schiller, who at least appears to be a popular author, but whose output for the most part hasn't been worth the paper it was printed on. I noted a remarkable improvement on his CD-ROM on the Tarrasch Queen's Gambit, but in comparison to his "effort" on the Frankenstein-Dracula Variation in the Vienna Game, which by far is the worst book I have reviewed in this column over the last three and a half years, things could only get better.

On the other hand, we have John Watson, who is one of the authors I respect most. His books are inspiring, intelligent and well-written. He is one of those authors for whom I readily shell out my hard-earned money, whether it is a book about an opening I don't play or an instructional and inspirational manual like *Secrets of Modern Chess Strategy*. Putting these two together makes as much sense as making Bing Crosby and David Bowie sing a Christmas carol together; in theory you can do it, but as Crosby and Bowie demonstrated, the result isn't necessarily great.

That being said, this isn't the first book that Schiller and Watson have co-written. Some years ago they wrote *Big Book of Busts*, so for them to get together again, both of them must have gotten something out of it; For Schiller it's probably credibility, but for Watson I'm not so sure.

The theme for this book is annoying openings in the open games, characterized by the starting moves 1 e4 e5. Before I opened the book, I gave myself the task of considering which openings I myself find annoying in the open game as Black or White. My list includes the following lines:

- The Berlin Wall Variation in the Ruy Lopez (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Nd6 6 Bxc6 dxc6 7 dxe5 Nf5 8 Qxd8+ Kxd8)
- The Spanish Exchange (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Bxc6 dxc6)
- Qe2 against the Petroff (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 Nxe5 d6 4 Nf3 Nxe4 5 Qe2)
- Italian Four Knights (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 Nc3 Nf6)
- Bishop Game (1 e4 e5 2 Bc4 Nf6 3 d3)

That's it!

Arguably writing a book about these lines would hardly be a bestseller, but rather draw more than a few yawns from both

bored readers. Perhaps my definition of annoying openings isn't the same as others, but in a book on the subject, they should be included, boring or not. When I looked at the list of opening lines covered in the present book, I found that some are intriguing at best, some noteworthy, the majority either ridiculous or a waste of time, because they will *never* be faced in a tournament game. I played 1 e4 for years, starting as a scholastic player and ending when I was ELO-rated around 2300. In all of those games I played as White, I faced only two of the lines that they have presented as annoying for White, while I would have welcomed the vast majority of them. Who considers a move like 2...f6 (after 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3) as annoying??? And what makes this move worthwhile of inclusion in this book, along recognized popular openings such as the Arkhangelsk Variation and Marshall Attack in the Ruy Lopez, when, for example, the Norwegian Variation (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 b5 5 Bb3 Na5) or 3...Bb4, which Swedish GM Hector has played with some frequency, have not made the cut.

In fact, I could go on, and put a question mark with every single line and suggest another line worthy of inclusion instead of or in addition to the chosen one. The same, by the way, goes for those seen from Black's point of view. Anyway, let's have a look at the overall contents and page distribution in the book:

- Introduction (1 page)
- The Open Games as White (1 page)
- Sharp Black Lines in the Spanish Game (47 pages)
- Sharp Black Lines in the Italian Game (3 pages)
- Against the Calabrese Countergambit (2 pages)
- Sharp Black Lines in the Philidor Defense (13 pages)
- Minor Black Alternatives (5 pages)
- Against the Russian Game (12 pages)
- Against the Elephant Gambit (7 pages)
- Against the Latvian Gambit (18 pages)
- The Open Games as Black

- Defending the Spanish Game (10 pages)
- Defending the Italian Game (35 pages)
- Defending the Scotch Game and Gambits (39 pages)
- Defending Three Knights (4 pages)
- Defending the Schuelze-Muller Gambit (1 page)
- Defending the Russian Game (18 pages)
- Defending the King's Gambit (8 pages)
- Defending the Center Game and Gambits (12 pages)
- Defending the Vienna Game and Gambits (6 pages)
- Defending the Bishop's Game and Gambits (2 pages)
- Defending the Minor White Openings (9 pages)
- Your Next Move (1 page)
- Index of Opening Moves (2 pages)

Regarding the choice of contents of the book, the above is trademark Schiller material, so are the index pages, which don't always indicate the correct page numbers for the covered lines. One example: "Defending the Russian Game" which supposedly is featured on the same page as the utterly pointless Schuelze-Muller Gambit (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nxe5?? - is this an annoying or an idiotic move?), can't be found there.

I note that a bibliography is missing. Throughout the book numerous sources are quoted by the name of the author only, e.g. Kosten, Palkovi [sic], Emms, Rohde and many others. While Schiller normally doesn't necessarily mention his sources, he rarely if ever has a bibliography, while Watson in his books usually has one with numerous references.

The introduction must have been written by Schiller, because it is so poorly written and full of odd statements, compared to the eloquent and smooth style of Watson's writing. Let me give you some examples from the introduction:

(1) "This handbook to t [sic!] popular traps and pitfalls of the open games (1.e4 e5) shows you to

survive and beat annoying chess openings!"

(2) "If you play the opening [sic! I think he means 'open'] games as White or Black you know that opening traps are the single most annoying stratagem if you are not prepared to combat them."

(3) "There is nothing worse than getting caught in an initial trap and falling for a quick defeat."

The above is quite typical for Schiller productions, but not for Watson. The introduction goes on and on about dealing with and responding to 'your opponent's clever moves' and the like, but little of it makes any sense. In fact it wouldn't be far off the mark to say that it ought to have been re-written.

After the introduction, we enter the section 'The Open Games as White', which starts with an overview that is another kind of introduction, but is replete with similar kind of verbal rubbish that again cannot have been written by Watson. For example: "The path to the main lines of the Open Games is littered with traps and pitfalls for both sides. Although White has the first move, Black has tried many different gambits and sharp lines to keep the game from reaching the confines of the Spanish (a/k/a 'Ruy Lopez') or Italian games, which White presumably knows to play with confidence. In this first section, therefore, we adopt White's point of view and assume that he is aiming for either a classical line of the Italian Game or a main line "Spanish Inquisition". This means that, after 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6, White will play either 3 Bc4 (Italian) or 3 Bb5 (Spanish). Instead of 2...Nc6, Black can play the Philidor Defense (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 d6), which is too cramped to be "annoying" to White unless Black chooses sharp irregular lines like 3 d4 f5!? We will analyze those carefully in separate sections."

I have several problems with this. First of all, why are the

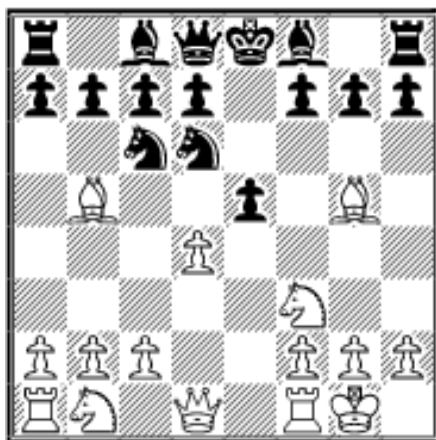
Scotch Game, Four Knights, Bishop's Game, Vienna Game or for that matter the King's Gambit not considered for White. These are all legitimate possibilities for White, and on lower levels many of them are more popular than the main lines in the Ruy Lopez, which, in my opinion, no lower rated player should essay without a sound foundation of strategic and positional understanding. Then we have the so-called Calabrese Countergambit (1 e4 e5 2 Bc4 f5 - but how is this a countergambit? White hasn't gambited a pawn), and the statement that 2 Bc4 is often used to reach the Italian Game is also a non-starter. So is the comment that follows, that in answer to 2 Bc4, the only confrontational line you are likely to run into is 2...f5, as 2...d5 "can accepted safely by capturing with the pawn", but no mention is made of 2...b5, which both Anderssen and DeVere played in the middle of the 19th century; and what about 2...Qf6 as played by Hector? Very inconsistent.

Next I would like to address the summary charts that you can find on nearly every line. For some reason not all of the lines are included in the summary charts, which to some extent resembles the charts that are used in *ECO*, *MCO*, or *NCO*. But resemble is all they do, because in this book: (1) there isn't any assessment at the end of the variations; (2) the variations do not follow any particularly logical pattern; and (3) not all of the variations, given in the text, are to be found in the chart, and vice-versa.

In the introduction, there are numerous indications that much of the text inside in the book is exclusively written by Schiller, as exemplified by the language together with the decisions taken in the text. For example, under Sharp Lines in the Philidor Defense: "Black might want to head for the fighting Larsen Variation on 3 d4 dxe4 [sic - illegal move, the correct move is 3...exd4] 4 Nxd4 g6, but we recommend 4 Qxd4, since 4...Nc6?! allows White to gain an advantage with 5 Bb5. The play after capturing with the queen is positional, with no tactical pitfalls." That's correct, but no

variations?! What if Black plays 3...Nf6, inviting 4 Nc3 exd4, then 5 Qxd4 no longer offers the same opportunities for obtaining an advantage. This line is also all White can get if Black has chosen to use the move order recommended By Dzindzhikhashvili on the tapes we reviewed last month: 1 e4 d6 2 d4 Nf6 3 Nc3 e5, and with 4 Nf3 exd4, we have reached the desired position.

Then we have the situation where a recommended line has actually been refuted. Here is the line recommended against the Berlin Wall: **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Nd6 6 Bg5**



This move has been played by several GMs as the text points out. Polish GM Socko had played this line on several occasions prior to his game against Lautier in the European Team Championship in 2001, which was *two years prior* to the release of this book. In the annotations to the game in

ChessBase Magazine, Stohl wrote in his comments to White's last move "A sideline, which may disappear after this game." Indeed, when checking in Chessbase's MegaBase 2003, it has only been played once since. Before continuing with the refutation, I also have to take issue with the coverage of the main line, which continues 6...Be7 7 Bxc6 dxc6 8 Bxe7 Qxe7 9 dxe5 Nf5 (9...Ne4 is also possible, Schiller says: 10 Qe2 Nc5 11 h3 0-0 12 Nc3 "was probably objectively even in DeFirmian-Zhang Zhong, Elista 1998. But there is plenty of scope for both sides, and it's easier to play for White, who has space", forgetting that this is typical for this line chosen by Black; by the way, the ECO gives a few more moves that indicate how Black should obtain equality) 10 Nc3, and now on 10...0-0, a position that has been reached in several GM games, he only offers us: 11


Qe2 (normally 11 Qd2 is preferred by the GMs) 11...Qb4 12 Rab1 Nd4 (is Black okay? this is just wrong, clearly he has no competence in this line) 13 Nxd4 Qxd4 14 Rfd1 with an initiative for White, Celis-Bustos, Buenos Aires 1995.

Let's go back to the refutation:

6...f6!

This move is covered by Schiller, but not in very much depth. Schiller gives **7 Bxc6 dxc6 8 dxe5 fxe5 9 exd6**, "and here **9...Bxd6 10 Re1+ Kf7 11 Nc3 Rf8 12 Ne4** looks promising for White", but it happens that if Black follows the line given by Stohl: **11...g4 12 Ne5+ Bxe5 13 Rxe5 Qxd1+ 14 Rxd1 Kf6** followed by ...Bf5, with an extra pawn and slightly better position for Black? Stohl by the way gives 7 Nxe5! as White's strongest, although Black, after some complications end up with the better chances as analyzed by Stohl.

There are some good pieces of analysis here and there, but the majority of this book is well below average. Again I ask, what did Watson do and why did he get involved in project such as this with Schiller?

My assessment of this book: 

Starting Out: English Opening by Neil McDonald, 2003
Everyman Chess, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback,
191pp., \$16.95

As regular readers of this column may know, I have a special relationship with the English Opening, the first opening I taught myself, and about which I have written two books. So therefore it was with some interest I approached this book by the English grandmaster Neil McDonald, who has been a regular visitor in the pages of this column in the past few years. Not all books have been equally good, but there have been a couple of pearls, including the book he co-authored with Speelman on the Modern Defence; and, I really didn't like his *Concise Chess Openings*, despite the fact that it has sold well enough to be labeled a bestseller on the back cover of the present book.



The English Opening isn't an easy opening to understand or for that matter play, therefore immediately distrust anybody who says otherwise. Strategically it is far more complicated than any other opening. The contents:

- Bibliography (1 page)
- Introduction (2 pages)
- Move Order in the English (2 pages)
- 1 Symmetrical English 1: Black's Kingside Fianchetto (23 pages)
- 2 Symmetrical English 2: Early Action in the Centre (23 pages)
- 3 Symmetrical English 3: The Hedgehog (18 pages)
- 4 The Nimzo-English (15 pages)
- 5 The Four Knights: Black plays without ...d7-d5 (25 pages)
- 6 The Reversed Dragon (11 pages)
- 7 Black Plays a King's Indian Set-Up (24 pages)
- 8 Reti Lines (20 pages)
- 9 Other Variations (17 pages)
- Index of Complete Games (2 pages)
- Index of Variations (3 pages)

In the bibliography, I found it rather odd that none of Watson's books on the English, Cummings' on the Symmetrical English, Bagirov's book on the English, or for that matter none of mine were listed. Instead he has a number of much older books, and some on the Dutch, Reti and other things. I don't understand. Later on in the book, he quotes some Kasparov analysis from Chess Informant, but Chess Informant isn't mentioned in the Bibliography either. Hmmm!


Moving on to the move-order discussion, the best I can say is that it is brief, because there isn't any advice for the White, only really for Black to be alert to the possibilities of transpositions in to 1 d4 openings. But what about Black's transpositional possibilities, as for example after 1 c4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 Nf3 Nf6 6 0-0 0-0 7 d4, and if Black instead of 7...cxd4, which is standard Symmetrical English stuff, now opts for 7...d6!?, inviting White to play either 8 dxc5 or 8 d5, in either case with a King's Indian on the menu

Throughout the book, McDonald shows some competence when explaining typical ideas and strategies, but on occasion for forgets that there are actually two sides of each issue. For Example in the Rubinstein Variation (1 c4 c5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 Nc3 d5 4 cxd5 Nxd5 5 g3 Nc6 6 Bg2 Nc7), he only really explains the ideas from Black's point of view and only discusses a pawn sacrifice in detail, while fundamental ideas regarding White's play and attempt to penetrate on the light squares are barely mentioned.

In addition, he often ignores established theory. Many times critical lines are ignored, while space is filled on things better spent on other topics. For example, in the Four Knights variation, found in the 1 c4 e5 part of the book. The line with 4 e3 is discussed in some detail, but the majority of the space is spent on two McNab games in the 4...Bb4 5 Nd5 line, whereas the much more complicated and

strategically interesting 5 Qc2 0-0 6 Nd5 Re8 7 Qf5 isn't covered with a game, but with a comparison to the Kan variation and a couple of evaluations that are fairly easy to call into question.

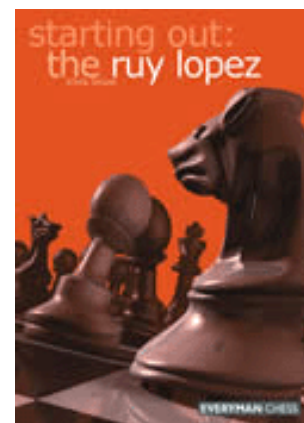
It would be unfair if I didn't extend some praise in McDonald's direction, because there is a lot of good material in the book, a lot of good explanations of strategy, typical ideas as well as a lot of well chosen games, but as already noted, there are some serious bumps in the road along the way.

My assessment of this book: 

[Order](#) *Starting Out: English Opening*
by Neil McDonald

Starting Out: Ruy Lopez by John Shaw, 2003 Everyman Chess, Figurine Algebraic Notation, paperback, 144 pp., \$16.95

Scottish International Master John Shaw is on the brink of becoming a grandmaster, but still needs one more GM norm to get the title; his rating has been around 2500 for a while, so I'm sure he'll succeed in this endeavor sooner rather than later. He has already written one book in this *Starting Out* series from Everyman Chess, on the Queen's Gambit. That book was one of my least favourite books in this series.



This, however, is not the case with this on the Ruy Lopez, an opening the author plays with White. Let's see how the material is presented:

- Introduction (1 page)
- 1 Third Move Options for Black (34 pages)
- 2 Fourth Move Options (22 pages)
- 3 Fifth and Sixth Move Options (27 pages)
- 4 The Marshall Attack and Rare Closed Lines (21 pages)
- 5 Main Line Closed Ruy Lopez (31 pages)
- Index of Complete Games (2 pages)
- Index of Variations (2 pages)

The way he has chosen to structure the material in this book makes good sense, first introducing the minor lines, and then gradually going deeper into the main lines, ending with the principle lines of the Closed Ruy.

The only thing I found missing was a bibliography, but he doesn't seem to make any references to other sources anywhere in the book, so that is probably the reason.

As with his previous effort, he has a very short introduction and then follows up with the theoretical sections.

Despite the limited number of pages (144) and wide scope of the topic, I found myself entertained and enlightened. Take for example, the game Bonnet-Kramnik, Lyon (blitz) 2001:

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Nd6 6 Bxc6 dxc6 7 dxe5 Nf5 8 Qxd8+ Kxd8 9 Nc3

This is the starting point of the Berlin main line. The first point for White to note is that a plan of simple exchanges to exploit his 'better structure' is misguided. The position may appear similar to a technical Exchange Variation ending but the advanced e-pawn makes a huge difference - in a quiet ending the e-pawn may be vulnerable to the black king. Instead the correct plan for White is to play in aggressive, middlegame style. The

displaced black king may be attacked with both pieces and White's kingside pawn majority.

9...h6

This prepares ...Be6 without allowing Ng5, but it is just one of a range of playable moves. 9...Ke8, 9...Be6, 9...Ne7 and 9...a5 are just some of Black's other options. When one notes that Black often has a similarly wide choice on moves ten and eleven, it becomes clear that it is practically impossible for White to have a theory line memorized for every possibility. White's preparation should instead consist of a knowledge of a number of standard attacking plans and piece manoeuvres.

10 Bf4

Usually this bishop finds a home on b2 (after b2-b3). The possible problem with 10 Bf4 is that it blocks White's normal pawn storm plan involving g2-g4 and f2-f4. However, the idea of h2-h3 then Bf4-h2 clearing a path has occasionally been tried. The most common move is 10 h3 - see the next game.

10...Be6 11 Rad1+ Kc8 12 Ne4 b6

Now Black's king finds a safe haven.

13 Ng3

It was now difficult to think of an attacking alternative.

13...c5 14 Rd2 Kb7 15 Rfd1 Nxc3 16 Bxc3 Be7

Black is already better. White's pieces may appear reasonably placed but he has no way to improve his position.

17 Kf1 a5 18 a3 Kc6 19 Ke2 b5

Black's pawn majority advances smoothly whereas White can't even get started.

20 Bf4 Rhd8 21 Rxd8 Bxd8 22 Ke3 Be7 23 Nd2 b4 24 a4

This later gives Black the chance to exchange his doubled pawn and so remove his position's only

flaw. 24 Ne4 was worth trying.

24...Rd8 25 Ke2 c4 26 Nf3 Rxd1 27 Kxd1 Kd5

A classic example of the squares lost due to the e4-e5 advance.

28 Kd2 c5

Not even allowing White the possibility of 28...Bd8 29 e6.

29 h4 Bd7 30 b3 cxb3 31 cxb3 c4

Now the win is simple.

32 Kc2 cxb3+ 33 Kxb3 Bc5 34 Bg3 Be6 35 Kc2 Kc4


A slight misstep but it doesn't spoil anything.

36 Nd2+ Kd5 37 Kd3 Bf5+ 38 Ke2 Bc2 0-1

A memorable example of the dangers if White treats the Berlin as a quiet endgame. I must admit that it is unfair to the talented young Frenchman playing White to use a blitz game against Kramnik as an example but he did lose in wonderfully thematic fashion.

Instructive annotations like these can be found throughout the book, but often accompanied with just the right dose of analysis and variations as well. The games in book are well-chosen and at the same time, they are relatively recent. Only four games are from before 2000, and none older than 1996.

If you want to learn the basics of this interesting opening, there isn't a better book on the market right now. Even if you have played the opening for some years, there still may be aspects of this opening you may not be familiar with. I have played the Ruy Lopez myself and even instructed some of my students in playing the Ruy Lopez, and I felt learned something new from each chapter. Therefore I have absolutely no problem giving this book a high recommendation.

My assessment of this book: 

Order *Starting Out: Ruy Lopez*
by John Shaw

The Ratings

 — **A poor book, not recommended.**

 — **Not a particularly good book, but perhaps useful for some readers.**

 — **A useful book.**

 — **Good book, recommended.**

 — **Excellent book, highly recommended.**

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