



COLUMNISTS

Checkpoint

Carsten Hansen

*Rating Chart* – A poor book. – Not very good. – A useful book. – A good book.

Reviewed this month:

Play the Caro-Kann

by Jovanka Houska

Caro-Kann Defence Panov Attack

by Anatoly Karpov and Mikhail Podgaets

Dangerous Weapons: The French

by John Watson

The Pirc in Black and White

by James Vigus

*En Passant**The French Advance (CD)*

by Sam Collins

The Pirc Defence (DVD)

by Nigel Davies

The Semi-Open Games

This month I will look at six recently released works on the semi-open games: including two titles on the Caro-Kann, two on the Pirc and two on the French. The authors vary from the renowned John Watson, to former world champion Anatoly Karpov, to two newcomers, Jovanka Houska and James Vigus. Though the target audience is different for each title, they are all very good.

Play the Caro-Kann by Jovanka Houska, Everyman Chess 2007, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 208 pp., \$23.95

Jovanka Houska is a young international master, who won the English Chess Federation Player of Year award in 2006. Her writing credentials include regular contributions to the British magazines *CHESS* and *ChessMoves*. She is also a lifelong practitioner of the Caro-Kann Defense.

This book presents a black repertoire based on some theory heavy lines, such as the Classical variation: 1 e4





– An excellent book.

c6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 dxe4 4 Nxd4 Bf5, and on rarer lines, such as 3...c5 in the Advance variation.



The material is divided as follows:

- Bibliography (1 page)
- Introduction (4 pages)
- 1 Main Line: Introduction and 11 Bf4 (29 pages)
- 2 Main Line: 11 Bd2 (14 pages)
- 3 Main Line: 6 Bc4 and Early Deviations (19 pages)
- 4 Panov-Botvinnik Attack: Introduction and 6 Nf3 (26 pages)
- 5 Panov-Botvinnik Attack: 6 Bg5 (13 pages)
- 6 Exchange Variation (10 pages)
- 7 Advance Variation with 3...c5: Introduction (12 pages)
- 8 Advance Variation: 3...c5 4 dxc5 (20 pages)
- 9 Fantasy Variation (5 pages)
- 10 Panov's Little Brother: 2 c4 (13 pages)
- 11 Two Knights Variation (17 pages)
- 12 King's Indian Attack (11 pages)
- 13 Unusual Lines and the Plain Bizarre (8 pages)
- Index of Variations (3 pages)

In the introduction Houska explains her method: "I have very much tried to write this book exactly like I like books to be written - with plenty of explanation of basic ideas and principles, along with some new theory. On the whole I have tended to avoid lines where I feel Black only has the chance of playing for 'two results' (a loss and a draw) and instead chosen lines with 'three results' on offer."

Subsequently, she has added explanatory prose wherever feasible, with some supporting analysis and a dab of theory. While this is not my preferred method, I admit that her approach works very well. If someone wants to learn to play this opening, this book will be a very good tool. It may even be useful for those who already employ the Caro-Kann, in that they can gain an additional understanding of how to play the opening, along with some well-researched repertoire suggestions.

Houska spends plenty of time explaining what both sides are playing for and the means they are employing to achieve their goals, as well as what to do to avoid playing along with the opponents intentions. There are a few loose ends here and there in regards to the theory, but for most players this book will make an excellent choice.

My assessment of this book: 

Order *Play the Caro-Kann*

by Jovanka Houska

Caro-Kann Defence Panov Attack by Anatoly Karpov and Mikhail Podgaets, Batsford BT 2006, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 276 pp., \$22.95

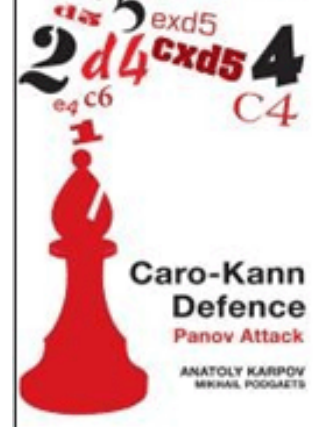
In [December 2006](#) I reviewed volume one in this series of books on the Caro-Kann by Karpov and Podgaets. I liked some elements of it and hated others. This



volume proved to be no different.

The material is divided as follows:


- Foreword (2 Pages)
- 1 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ed cd 4 c4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Nc6 6 Nf3 (29 pages)
- 2 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ed cd 4 c4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Nc6 6 Bg5 (26 pages)
- 3 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ed cd 4 c4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6!? (30 pages)
- 4 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ed cd 4 c4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e6 6 Nf3 Nc6 (11 pages)
- 5 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ed cd 4 c4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e6 6 Nf3 Bb4 (38 pages)
- 6 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ed cd 4 c4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e6 6 Nf3 Be7 (85 pages)
- Appendix: Steiner System - 1 e4 c6 2 c4 (31 pages)
- Illustrative Games (20 pages)



This looks rather comprehensive, although it is a little strange that the Steiner System, 1 e4 c6 2 c4, is offered as an appendix. The Steiner System is a very close relative to the Panov, and to make such an obvious distinction is more than a bit unusual.

As with the previous volume, there is an abundance of analysis, new ideas and improvements that makes this book attractive for those who have an interest in the opening. But at the same time, there are typos, misspelled names and places, mangled sentences and most importantly, no recent material. I didn't find any games from 2006 and some of the more important games from the latter part of 2005 are missing too. This is quite a gap for a modern opening monograph, particularly on an opening as sharp as the Panov Attack.

Another sign of the outdated material is that the introduction refers to the games in the Illustrative Games segment as "fresh practical material," although only four are from 2005, while the other six are from 2004. Nevertheless, the abundance of original material (which I attribute to Podgaets, rather than to Karpov) provides enough reason for those who are interested in this line to buy the book. You will just have to supplement the book's coverage with more recent material from your database.

My assessment of this book: 

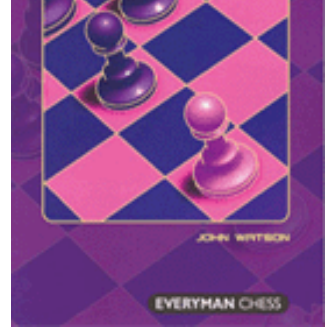
Caro-Kann Defence Panov Attack
by Anatoly Karpov and Mikhail Podgaets

Dangerous Weapons: The French by John Watson, Everyman Chess 2007, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 320 pp., \$25.95

John Watson has been one of my favorite authors for many years. His book, *Play the French* is in its third heavily revised edition and now he has authored the latest addition to the *Dangerous Weapons* series from Everyman Chess.



As with other volumes in this series, the idea is to present the reader with new ideas for both White and Black to spice up their opening repertoire with a surprise weapon or two. This is similar to the *Secrets of Opening Surprises* series, except that here only one opening per volume is covered, which allows for a deeper look at the variations in question, with more explanations, more examples and more analysis. Watson provides six variations for White and eight for Black.



The material is divided as follows:

- Preface (4 pages)
- Introduction (3 pages)
- **Systems for White**
- 1 A Confounding Retreat (3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 5 e5 h6 6 Be3) (26 pages)
- 2 A Beginner's Move? (3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Be7 5 e5 Nfd7 6 Bxe7 Qxe7 7 Qh5) (20 pages)
- 3 Down with the King! (3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 c5 5 Qg4) (20 pages)
- 4 Leaving the Unbeaten Path (3 Nc3 Bb4 4 exd5 exd5 5 Qf3) (21 pages)
- 5 A World of Difference (3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 Bd3 c5 6 c3 Nc6 7 Ndf3) (26 pages)
- 6 Breaking the Chain (3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 f4 c5 6 Ngf3 Nc6 7 Nb3) (18 pages)
- **Systems for Black**
- 7 Swearing in Church (3 Nc3 Nc6) (30 pages)
- 8 A Surprise in the Winawer (3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 cxd4) (16 pages)
- 9 Waiting and Outflanking (3 Nc3 h6) (15 pages)
- 10 Two for the Price of One (3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 Bf8; 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Ng8) (20 pages)
- 11 A Leap of Faith (3 e5 c5 4 c3 Nc6 5 Nf3 Nh6) (21 pages)
- 12 What Can You Do to Me? (3 Nd2 h6) (25 pages)
- 13 One Rook Pawn Deserves Another (3 Nd2 a6) (20 pages)
- 14 A Debassing Strategy? (3 Nd2 Nc6) (30 pages)

Each chapter begins with a brief introduction, followed by a few games with a light discussion of the theory, and then a closer look at some of the critical lines with deeper analysis of the variations. Each chapter concludes with an evaluation of the idea in terms of the following criteria: Difficulty, Attacking Nature, Positional & Strategic Nature, Risk, Reward, and Theoretical Depth, all weighed on a scale of 1-5 pawns. Of course, it is worth remembering that some of these lines are extremely risky for the player who is employing it, so it pays to do your homework before you decide to give it a go.

As with all of Watson's books, the quality of the writing is first-rate, the ideas are fun and engaging, and there is plenty of original analysis. Moreover, the book is rather inexpensive for the volume of work put into it and the benefits you are likely to reap from studying it. Anyone with an interest in the French, as black or white, should unhesitatingly buy this book. Although I must admit that I like his suggestions for Black more than those for White. Still, this is a great book.

My assessment of this book: 

Order *Dangerous Weapons: The French*

by John Watson

The Pirc in Black and White by James Vigus, Everyman Chess 2007, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 380 pp., \$25.95

Talk about making a good first impression, first-time author James Vigus has really gone all out and put everything on the table. This book is a massive 380 pages that pleasantly blends prose, theory, analysis and complete games, all with a fair chunk of original input from the author in the form of reevaluations, suggestions and improvements over existing theory.



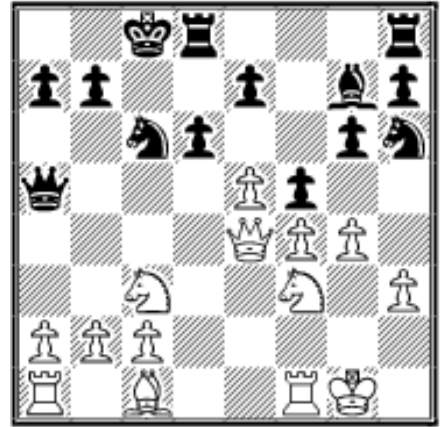
The material is divided as follows:

- Bibliography (2 pages)
- Preface (2 pages)
- Introduction (12 pages)
- **Part 1: The Austrian Attack - 4 f4 Bg7 5 Nf3 c5**
 - 1 Early Deviations: 6 e5, 6 dxc5, and 6 Bb5+ Bd7 7 Bxd7+ (27 pages)
 - 2 Maximum Complexity: 6 Bb5+ Bd7 7 e5 Ng4 8 Bxd7+ and 8 h3 (20 pages)
 - 3 The 5...c5 Main Line: 6 Bb5+ Bd7 7 e5 Ng4 8 e6 (21 pages)
- **Part 2: The Austrian Attack - 4 f4 Bg7 5 Nf3 0-0**
 - 4 Early Deviations: 6 e5, 6 Be2, 6 Be3 and 6 a3 (38 pages)
 - 5 The 5...0-0 Main Line: 6 Bd3 Nc6 and 6...Na6 (39 pages)
- **Part 3: White Develops Quietly**
 - 6 The Fianchetto Variation: 4 g3 (22 pages)
 - 7 The Classical Variation: 4 Nf3 Bg7 5 Be2 (55 pages)
- **Part 4: Modern Flexibility**
 - 8 The Accelerated Classical: 4 Nf3 Bg7 5 h3 0-0 6 Be3 (17 pages)
 - 9 The f3-System: 4 Be3 followed by f3 (28 pages)
 - 10 The 150 Attack: 4 Be3 and 5 Qd2 (46 pages)
- **Part 5: White Alternatives**
 - 11 Instant Aggression: 4 Bg5 (26 pages)
 - 12 Odds and Ends: 4 Bc4, 4 Bf4 and the Spike (21 pages)
- Index of Complete Games (2 pages)

As you can see, Vigus has covered this opening in depth. Let's look at one of his games, which can be found on page 49, with a fair amount of annotations, mainly concentrated on the interesting first part of the game, whereas the technical phase of Black winning is covered in less detail, thank you very much! The punctuation is from the book, while I have paraphrased some of his comments.

Moore-Vigus
Cambridge 2000

1.e4 d6 2.d4 Nf6 3.Nc3 g6 4.f4 Bg7 5.Nf3 c5 6.Bb5+ Bd7 7.e5 Ng4 8.h3 Bxb5 9.Nxb5 Qa5+!? 10.Nc3 cxd4 11.Qxd4 Nh6 12.g4 Nc6 13.Qe4 0-0-0 14.0-0?! f5!



[CH: Vigus tells us this move was an improvement over some analysis by Nunn and McNab] **15.exf6 exf6 16.Re1?** [CH: Vigus offers 16.Nd4 f5 17.Nxc6 Qc5+ 18.Be3 Qxc6 19.Qxc6+ bxc6 as a better option for White, although Black is better here as well] **16...Kb8 17.Qd5 f5 18.Qxa5 Nxa5 19.g5 Bxc3 20.bxc3 Nf7 21.Re7 Rhf8 22.Ba3 Rde8 23.Rae1 Rxe7 24.Rxe7 Kc8 25.Bb4?** [CH: Now things get truly dreary for White, who according to Vigus could stay in the game with 25.Nd2. The rest is just a prolonged show of Black's superior forces controlling White's game completely] **25...Nc6 26.Re3 Kd7 27.Kf2 Rc8 28.Ba3 Na5 29.Rd3 Nc4 30.Bc1 Rc5 31.Rd4 Nd8 32.Nd2 Nxd2 33.Bxd2 Nc6 34.Ra4 b5 35.Ra6 Rc4 36.Ke2 Kc7 37.Kd3 Kb7 38.Ra3 a6 39.Rb3 Ra4 40.Rb1 Kc7 41.h4 Rxa2 42.h5 Ra4 43.hxg6 hxg6 44.Rh1 Re4 45.Rh6 Ne7 46.Rh7 Kc6 47.Rg7 a5 48.Bc1 a4 49.Kd2 Kd5 50.Kd3 Ke6 51.Rh7 Re1 52.Ba3 Rf1 0-1**

A fine performance by Black.

This is a fantastic book. The author is thorough, enthusiastic, scientific, joyful, entertaining and very, very instructive. Given the book's length, you never get the impression that anything of importance was skipped, and it compares well with other theoretical materials on the Pirc. Anyone interested in this opening should buy this book, you will not be disappointed.

My assessment of this book:



Order *The Pirc in Black and White*

by James Vigus

The French Advance (CD) by Sam Collins, Everyman Chess 2007, Figurine Algebraic Notation, \$23.95

I reviewed the book that this CD is based on back in [July 2006](#). I liked the book, and the same goes for the CD, which is easy to navigate and enjoyable.

The material is divided as follows:

- Bibliography
- Acknowledgements



- About this publication
- Preface
- Introduction
- Chapter One: 4...Nc6 5 Nf3 Qb6 6 a3 c4
- Chapter Two: 4...Nc6 5 Nf3 Qb6 6 a3 Nh6
- Chapter Three: 4...Nc6 5 Nf3 Qb6 6 a3 others
- Chapter Four: 4...Nc6 5 Nf3 Qb6 6 Be2
- Chapter Five: 4...Nc6 5 Nf3 Bd7 6 Be2
- Chapter Six: 4...Nc6 5 Nf3 Bd7 without 6 Be2
- Chapter Seven: 4...Nc6 5 Nf3 Nge7 & 5...Nh6
- Chapter Eight: 4...Qb6 5 Nf3 Bd7
- Chapter Nine: Irregular Lines



For more specific criticism and comments to the contents, please consult my earlier [column](#). Meanwhile my previous conclusion still applies: “Overall, this book is well-written and offers very decent coverage of the opening. However, there are times when a little more explanation is warranted as to why certain lines have fallen out of favor.”

My assessment of this CD:



Order *The French Advance* (CD)

by Sam Collins

The Pirc Defence (DVD) by Nigel Davies, ChessBase GmbH 2007, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Running Time: 7 hours, \$32.95

As with the book by Vigus, this release is massive. It has the longest running time of *any* DVD by ChessBase, almost twice the norm. No less than seven hours of bliss for Pirc fans, and their guide is grandmaster Nigel Davies, who is a specialist on the Pirc and Modern Defenses.

The material is presented as a repertoire for Black and is divided into the following segments:

- Intro
- Austrian Attack I: 6 Bd3 Na6 7 0-0 c5 8 d5 Bg4 9 Qe1/a3
- Austrian Attack II: 6 Bd3 Na6 7 0-0 c5 8 d5 Bg4 9 h3/Kh1
- Austrian Attack III: 6 Bd3 Na6 7 0-0 c5 8 d5 Bg4 9 Bc4
- Austrian Attack IV: 6 Bd3 Na6 7 0-0 c5 8 dxc5
- Austrian Attack V: 6 Bd3 Na6 7 e5 Nd7 8 h4/Ng5
- Austrian Attack VI: 6 Bd3 Na6 7 e5 Nd7 8 Be3
- Austrian Attack VII: 6 Bd3 Na6 7 e5 Nd7 8 Ne4/Ne2
- Austrian Attack VIII: 6 Be3 Nbd7 7 Qd2 c5 8 0-0-0 Ng4
- Austrian Attack IX: 6 Be3 Nbd7 7 Qd2 c5 - other 8th moves
- Austrian Attack X: 6 Be3 Nbd7 - other 7th moves
- Austrian Attack XI: Other 6th moves



- Austrian Attack XII: Other 5th moves
- Byrne Variation I: 5 f4.../7 e5
- Byrne Variation II: 5 f4.../7 dxc5
- Byrne Variation III: 5 Qd2
- Byrne Variation IV: 5 e5
- Byrne Variation V: 5 Qe2
- Byrne Variation VI: 5 Nf3
- 4 Be3.../6 Bd3
- 4 Be3.../6 f3.../7 g4
- 4 Be3.../6 f3.../other 7th moves
- 4 Bf4
- 4 Be2.../5 h4 (5 g4)
- 5 Bc4
- 4 Bc4
- Classical Variation with 9 d5
- Classical Variation with 9 dxe5
- Classical Variation with other 8th moves
- Classical Variation with other 7th moves
- Line with 5 h3/6 Be3
- Line with 5 Be3/6 Qd2
- 4 g3
- 3 Bd3
- 3 f3
- Other white 2nd moves

Davies's presentation is very smooth and pleasant, almost like an uncle who reads you a good story. He has a friendly face and engaging tone in his voice, which makes you want to listen to what he has to say. Good narrators have that ability, but sadly very few chess masters share this trait.

The DVD features thirty-seven segments, with the Austrian Attack accounting for a fair amount of the coverage. There are a total of ninety-five games, the first two of which showcase world champions losing as white: Fischer-Korchnoi, 1962 and Karpov-Azmaiparashvili, 1983.

The suggestions and discussion of typical plans and strategies for both sides is very instructive, and most players will learn much from it, even those who already include the Pirc in their repertoire. This is easily one of the very best DVDs that I have seen to date. So go get it!

My assessment of this DVD: 

The Pirc Defence (DVD)
by Nigel Davies

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