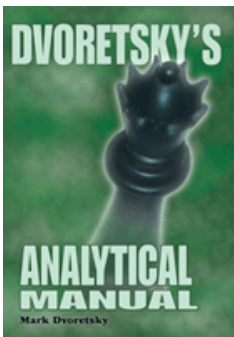




**BOOK REVIEWS**

*From the Archives*

Hosted by  
Mark Donlan



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From the Archives...

Since it came online many years ago, [ChessCafe.com](#) has presented literally thousands of articles, reviews, columns and the like for the enjoyment of its worldwide readership. The good news is that almost all of this high quality material remains available in the [Archives](#). The bad news is that this great collection of chess literature is now so large and extensive – and growing each week – that it is becoming increasingly difficult to navigate it effectively. We decided that the occasional selection from the archives posted publicly online might be a welcomed addition to the regular fare.

Watch for an item to be posted online periodically throughout each month. We will update the [ChessCafe.com](#) home page whenever there has been a “new” item posted here. We hope you enjoy *From the Archives...*

Diamond in the Rough

by Eugene Manchester

*A Strategic Opening Repertoire* by IM John Donaldson, 1998  
International Chess Enterprises, Paperback, Figurine Algebraic Notation, 148pp., \$14.95

The presentation of material in most opening books follows a standard pattern. Chapters are divided into main variations and sub-variations, with explanations and discussions of the particular moves appearing as the author sees fit. The depth and insight given by an author as well as the amount of original material determines in large part whether the book is intended for weaker, middling or advanced players and the overall quality of the book. Although authors stress time and again that the understanding of the opening is more important than memorization of lines, the fact is that in most cases for most players it is memorization and recall that counts. How many times have you seen a clearly weaker player take an opponent deep into well-charted opening waters? This is not understanding, but rote.



It is against that backdrop that the look at IM John Donaldson’s latest book becomes so interesting. In an introduction and thirteen chapters, Donaldson’s objective is to help shape an opening system for the 2000-2400 rated player that is based on an understanding, a true understanding, of the underlying system more than specific concrete lines. The system is basically an English Opening with White’s King Knight going to f3 and the fianchetto of the King Bishop. The recommended move order for White is 1 Nf3, 2 c4 and 3 g3, thus limiting the scope of Black replies.

The thirteen chapters are arranged according to Black’s responses to this system: Closed Sicilian Reversed, Symmetrical English, Catalan, Queen’s Indian, and so forth. Each chapter begins with a brief overview of the

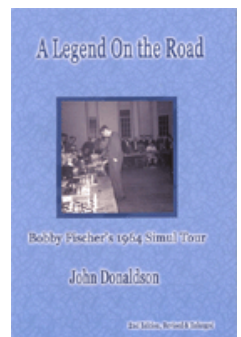
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[A Legend on the Road](#)  
by John Donaldson

strategic objectives for both sides and then a selection of complete games is presented with light notes designed to illustrate certain aspects of play in that line. For example, from Chapter Seven...

The Symmetrical English is light years removed from the Closed Sicilian Reversed. Here the two players jockey for small advantages and kingside safety is rarely an issue. After 1 c4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 many GMs today would prefer the elastic 5 a3, but our move-order doesn't allow such luxuries. The aim is to steer for the position arising after 5 Nf3 Nf6 6 0-0 0-0 7 d4 cxd4 8 Nxd4 (see chapter eight), but there are lots of ways for Black to try to break the symmetry early. Systems based on ...e6 and ...e5 tend to occur the most frequently by a wide margin.

**Victor Frias-Antonio Frois**  
Plasencia 1996

**1 Nf3 c5 2 g3 g6 3 Bg2 Bg7 4 c4 Nc6 5 Nc3 Nf6 6 0-0 d6**

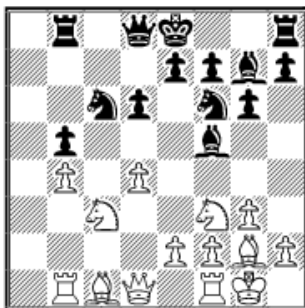


Black plays this move here, because he wants to meet 7 d4 with 7...cxd4 8 Nxd4 Bd7. If he castled immediately he wouldn't have this option after 7 d4. On the other hand, the text costs some flexibility. Witness Illescas-Anand, Dos Hermanas 1996, which saw 7...0-0 8 Rb1 d5!.

**7 a3 a6**

7...0-0 8 Rb1 d5?! 9 cxd5 Nxd5 10 Nxd5 Qxd5 11 d3 a5 12 Be3 Qh5 13 Qa4 (13 Rxc1 b6? (13...Bxb2 14 Rxc5+) 14 Ng5 Bd7 15 Bf3+) 13...Nd4 14 Nxd4 cxd4 15 Bxd4 Qg4 16 e3 Bxd4 17 Qxd4 Qxd4 18 exd4+ and White was a pawn up in the ending, Donaldson-D.Gurevich, Chicago, 1997.

**8 Rb1 Rb8 9 b4 cxb4 10 axb4 b5 11 cxb5 axb5 12 d4 Bf5**



Black's early ...d7-d6 comes back to haunt him. He would now much prefer to have castled on move six so as to be able to play ...d5 with only slight disadvantage. Now things go from bad to worse.

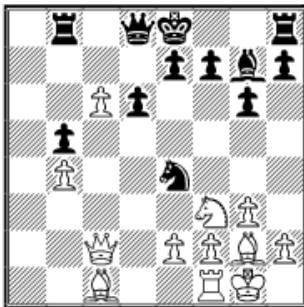
**13 d5!?**

This intuitive sacrifice by Frias is not totally necessary, but is certainly very attractive.

### 13...Bxb1 14 dxc6 Be4?

14...Bf5 15 Nd4 0-0 16 Ndx5 is very good for White who has two big passed pawns for his slight deficit.

### 15 Nxe4 Nxe4 16 Qc2



Oops! The double threat to capture on e4 or play c7 ends things quickly.

### 16...Nc3 17 Bb2 Rc8 18 Bxc3 Rxc6 19 Nd4 Rc4 20 Nxb5 0-0 21 Qd3 Qc8 22 Bxg7 Kxg7 23 Bb7 1-0

Those players who need clear “if ... then ...” lines to learn an opening may become a bit anxious with this book. They may find it is more productive to enter the book’s games into a database program such as [BookUp](#) for the purposes of mastering the opening repertoire. Of course, whether that actually turns out to be an effective method of learning this system remains to be seen, as it seems to run contrary to the author’s approach.

In this day and age when original play and ideas in some openings only begin after two dozen moves or more have been played, Donaldson, in his quiet, unassuming way, is breaking some new ground. It seems to this reviewer that an opening book that takes a relatively new path for presenting material runs certain risks for both the author and the publisher. And in this instance they are both to be commended. Donaldson has produced a little gem.

Players who regard their openings as a series of forced moves leading to the middlegame should avoid this book. However, if you do not mind being required to do some thinking about how the opening should be played, and welcome the opportunity to play thematically consistent lines that are understood more than they are memorized, this may be the diamond-in-the-rough you have been searching for.

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A review of the revised and enlarged second edition of *A Strategic Opening Repertoire* can be found [here](#).

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**[Order](#) *A Strategic Opening Repertoire***

by John Donaldson & Carsten Hansen

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