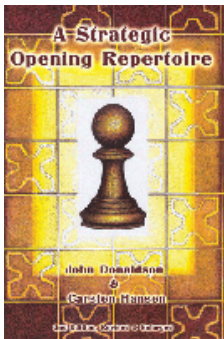




COLUMNISTS

Checkpoint

Carsten Hansen



Rating Chart

- ♦ – A poor book
- ♦♦ – Not very good
- ♦♦♦ – A useful book
- ♦♦♦♦ – A good book
- ♦♦♦♦♦ – An excellent book



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[The Complete DGT Product Line](#)

Reviewed this month:

Modern Chess Openings
by Nick de Firmian

The Ultimate Chess Strategy Book: Volume 1
by Alfonso Romero & Amador Gonzalez de la Nava

Play 1 b4!
by Yury Lapshun & Nick Conticello

New In Chess Yearbook, Vol. 87
by Genna Sosonko (ed.)

En Passant

Chesspublishing.com: 1 e4
by John Watson

Opening Encyclopaedia 2008
by ChessBase

Big Ambitions

Authors and publishers always have high opinions of their works, but, as we will see, they are not always warranted. This month's column should leave you much wiser on where to invest your time and money.

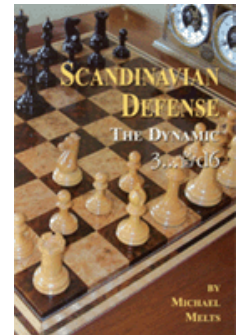
Modern Chess Openings, 15th Edition, by Nick de Firmian, McKay Chess Library 2008, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 748pp., \$29.95

With the last edition of *MCO* stemming back to 1999, a revision was certainly overdue, especially given the rapid pace of opening theory nowadays. For this edition, de Firmian was assisted by GM John Fedorowicz, IM Justin Sarkar and IM Yury Lapshun, which is a smaller team than for the previous volume. Overall, I found some parts of this book to be of decent quality, but I also found many typos, such as different spellings of the same name, or moves listed in the wrong column, or missing spaces between moves, etc. Before going any further, let's look at how the material is divided:

- Acknowledgements (1 page)
- Introduction (2 pages)
- Explanatory Notes (1 page)
- Tips for the Novice (1 page)
- I Double King Pawn Openings (156 pages)



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by Michael Melts



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by Jerzy Konikowski & Marek Soszynski

Read an excerpt [here](#).



[The Modern Morra Gambit](#)
by Hannes Langrock

- II Semi-Open Games (230 pages)
- III Double Queen Pawn Openings (104 pages)
- IV Other Queen Pawn Openings (24 pages)
- V Indian Openings (158 pages)
- VI Flank Openings (66 pages)
- Index (8 pages)

It is an impossible task to cover all the openings in one volume without skipping some material, even in 748 pages. So it would be all too easy to point out missing or insufficiently covered lines. However, the purpose of the book is to just give the reader an overview of the most important lines and their approximate evaluations.

Stylistically, *MCO* presents its material in vertical columns, with footnotes labeled by letters, occasionally all the way to “aa.” This presentation can be confusing at first, and I do not like the use of letters for the footnotes. Most other opening books, such as *ECO*, use superscript numbers for footnotes. I do like the fact that the columns and footnotes never cover more than two or three pages. This makes the book easy to navigate, as you don’t have to skip back and forth over a large number of pages.

As far as updating the material is concerned, the editorial team could have been much more meticulous. Many of the main lines remain unchanged, with only a recent game tacked on. For example, in the Open Variation of the Catalan, after 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 d5 4 Bg2 dxc4 5 Nf3 Be7 6 0-0 0-0 7 Qc2 a6 8 Qxc4 b5 9 Qc2 Bb7, there are six lines of coverage, three pertain to 10 Bf4, two to 10 Bg5 and only one to 10 Bd2. The latter is undoubtedly the modern main line; whereas the others are really only for those who don’t want to immerse themselves in too much theory. In the 10 Bf4 variation, a correspondence game of mine from 1990 is still given as a main line, despite the fact that Black can answer more accurately, and this has been known for some time. In the 10 Bd2 variation, the main line moves and the majority of the footnotes remain the same, despite the fact that this line has been contested a great deal over the last decade. Therefore, a greater substitution of material was obligatory.

A similar pattern can be found in other chapters, though it has to be said that many sections are as up-to-date as can reasonably be expected from a work of this magnitude. Still, you sometimes get the feeling that certain sections reflect a bygone popularity. For example, there are three sections on the Taimanov Sicilian (1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nc6), including a full section on 5 Nc3 a6 6 g3, whereas the Sveshnikov Variation (1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e5), only gets two sections, despite it being one of the most popular lines nowadays. I also found main lines still in place that should have been reduced to a footnote, because no one plays them anymore, while newer lines have been ignored. One example is in the Sicilian Dragon, Yugoslav Attack, where the old 10...Qc7 is recommended, but the Chinese variation, 10...Rb8, isn’t mentioned at all. Later in the same chapter, three main lines cover the Levenfish Variation, 6 f4, despite the fact that there hasn’t been any new material added since the previous edition.

You can also debate the relevance of having whole sections devoted to the Center Game, Danish Gambit, Latvian Gambit, Bishop’s Opening, and Ponziani’s Opening, or having three sections on the Vienna Game, whereas Petrov’s Defense only gets two sections. Thus, a greater effort could have been made to reflect modern opening preferences and a better balance of the material could have been achieved. Another problem is that the material is more or less exclusively based on games, with very little original analysis or improvements over existing theory.

The exaggerated claims on the back cover do not help either. It asserts this edition has been “completely revised and updated to reflect all of the latest changes in the game, including recent tournament matches [sic] and important works on theory. Whether you are a beginner interested in

learning the fundamentals, an intermediate player ready to elevate your game, or an International Grandmaster who wants to stay on top of all the recent chess innovations, MCO-15 is the best and most trusted tool for learning chess openings.” I cannot think of a single grandmaster who in his right mind would use this book to learn the details of a particular opening.

MCO-15 pretends to be everything for everybody, but it isn't; it pretends to be up-to-date and relevant in all chapters, but it isn't; it should be a good book, but it isn't. That said, it will still find a large audience, and many players will be happy with it, but only because they don't know there are better ways to spend their money than investing in this volume.

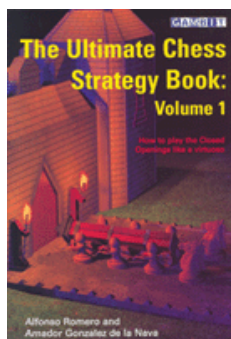
My assessment of this book: ❖❖

Order *Modern Chess Openings*

by Nick de Firmian

The Ultimate Chess Strategy Book: Volume 1 by Alfonso Romero & Amador Gonzalez de la Nava, Gambit Publications 2008, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 207pp., \$29.95

Alfonso Romero's *Creative Chess Strategy* was one of my favorite Gambit titles. Now he is back with another book, this time joined by FIDE master and certified FIDE trainer Amador Gonzalez de la Nava. Before discussing the details of the book, let's take a quick look at the contents:



- Symbols (1 page)
- Foreword by Veselin Topalov (1 page)
- Preface (1 page)
- Tests 1-90 (61 pages)
- Solutions (142 pages)
- Index of Players (1 page)
- Index of Openings (1 page)

Topalov's foreword very accurately describes the contents of the book, so I will quote it at length:

“This first volume of *The Ultimate Chess Strategy Book*, covering Closed Openings, is a practical book for every chess amateur who wants to improve his knowledge of chess strategy. This is, without a doubt, a key step in the improvement of the chess-player, in addition to training in calculating variations.

“The approach of this work is original. It is not a book with practical exercises. The authors introduce a critical position (there are 90 in this first volume) and they ask the reader how to continue the game by choosing one of several candidate moves. All of them are very logical, so it is difficult to find the strongest move and there is a very strict scoring system. As a matter of fact, sometimes we see in the solutions that the protagonists of the model games didn't find the best possible move. In the solutions, the authors explain the shortcomings of this and that choice and the suitability of the candidate moves, besides providing extensive analysis, giving on some occasions supplementary material to the model game. Their idea is that the reader may systematize ideas and strategic solutions at the time he checks his knowledge.

“The problems are classified according to the opening and level of difficulty, in increasing order. Likewise, in the solutions, the authors


make a classification according to the main strategic theme.

“Because of the aforementioned reasons, I think this book is the right choice for chess-players of medium level, and in fact there are exercises that require a master level in order to solve them. The reader will not only exercise his understanding of chess, but will also learn in a quick and entertaining way. I would even say this is a good method of improvement for teachers and higher-level students.”

Thus the authors annotate a game for ten, twenty, or thirty moves and then present a position where the reader is asked to choose between three or four alternatives, all with a brief rationale for each move. The reader can then check the answers to discover which choice was correct and why or why not. However, I wish that the authors had elaborated more on the reasons for each suggested continuation and been more comprehensive in the solutions as to why some moves were dismissed. Several times a move is rejected with just three or four words of explanation, under the assumption that the reader will understand why it wasn't a good choice. Furthermore, points are awarded for each chosen move, but there is no score chart or system to compare your results against.

That said, the authors did an excellent job in selecting the material. I have never seen many of the games included. Nevertheless, sometimes just knowing the names of the players made me recall the game in question and I could solve the puzzle without looking at the suggestions. For me the book would have been more challenging if the names of the players were given in the solution rather than with the question.

For players who are interested in improving their understanding of Closed Openings, this book will be a great step in the right direction. If you are an ambitious player or a coach with a talented pupil, this book is an excellent choice.

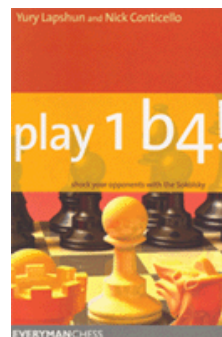
My assessment of this book: 

[Order](#) *The Ultimate Chess Strategy Book: Volume 1*

by Alfonso Romero & Amador Gonzalez de la Nava

Play 1 b4! by Yury Lapshun & Nick Conticello, Everyman Chess 2008, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 173pp., \$24.95

The Orangutan, a.k.a. the Sokolsky, is a rare guest in the games of top players, but it is played from time to time. For instance, the book features games by Alekhine, Bronstein, Fischer (in simul), Larsen, and Spassky. However, it is odd that there are no games from Miles and Bauer, the latter especially, as he is a 2600+ rated grandmaster who plays it more frequently than most.



The back cover tells us that Lapshun is an international master and an experienced coach who has guided individuals and teams to national championships. Conticello's involvement is explained in the introduction:

“My main function on this project has been to assist Yury, whose native tongue is Russian, to communicate ideas to an English-speaking public. But I have also contributed research and the occasional piece of analysis, so it can be said that this book is truly a cooperative effort.” We also learn, “Part of our mission in writing this book was to present the best of Sokolosky's work to the English-

speaking chess world. All the games played by Sokolsky (except Game 10) and several other pre-1970 games (5, 26 45, 47, 50, 68, 74, 76 and 77) include notes based heavily upon or directly translated from Sokolsky's book. Occasionally Sokolsky got something wrong, and we have corrected his analysis where necessary. But we have tried for the most part to retain the flavour of Sokolsky's writing in these games. However, the primary purpose was to put forth Yury Lapshun's games and ideas, as he is certainly one of the strongest active players who regularly plays the Sokolsky. Yury has annotated more than 60 games here, including 20 of his own best games, and I believe they are a valuable contribution to the literature of chess."

This last passage is somewhat conceited. Sure, you would like to think that your games are of lasting value, but to write it in the introduction seems a little over the top. Furthermore, the authors fail to attribute what material is from Sokolsky and what is their own. The book has eighty-four main games, of which fourteen are by Sokolsky, that itself is one-sixth of the book. Moreover, several of the other games, particularly those from Sokolsky's contemporary Katalymov, also appear to have been covered in Sokolsky's book. More than half of the games are from 1975 or earlier, and only two games after 1996 are not Lapshun's. A quick search in any database will turn up numerous recent fascinating games by grandmasters and international masters. Correspondence games are another worthy source of material, but the only two given as main games are from 1961 and 1950 respectively.

The material is divided as follows:

- Bibliography (1 page)
- Introduction (5 pages)
- 1 The Sokolsky Gambit (24 pages)
- 2 1 b4 e5 2 Bb2 Bxb4 (13 pages)
- 3 Black Plays ...e5 and ...d6 (25 pages)
- 4 Queen's Indian Systems (27 pages)
- 5 Black Plays ...d5 and ..e6 (21 pages)
- 6 Black Plays ...d5 and ...Bf5/Bg4 (22 pages)
- 7 1...c6, 1...f5 and Unusual Moves (28 pages)
- Index of Complete Games (3 pages)

I object to the division of the material in the first two chapters. The Sokolsky Gambit (1 b4 e5 2 Bb2 f6 3 e4 or 3 b5) is fairly rare, yet it gets twenty-four pages; whereas the line in Chapter 2, which is often recommended as the best answer against 1 b4, only gets thirteen pages of decidedly incomplete analysis. For example, a rook sacrifice for Black on move nine, which has been played in many correspondence games, gets dismissed by Lapshun, but the analysis is sketchy and no improvements are suggested for Black. Yet a little work with a chess engine proves that Black has more or less equal chances. I also found the analysis wanting in many other places in the book. For instance, in Game 74, Black makes several blunders, but none of them are pointed out, nor are obvious improvements for either side. This pattern is particularly evident in the older games from Sokolsky's book.

In many ways Chapter 2 is the most important chapter, but it is also the worst written. This doesn't bode well for the rest of the book. Another thing I found annoying is Lapshun's need to explain why he chose the opening for a particular game. We recurrently read redundant passages such as "My opponent was a young, talented Canadian chess master, who didn't have many games on my database. I decided that it was time to use my favourite weapon..." Or "Lev Milman is a very young and strong American master who has beaten many GMs... He knew his openings very well, so I decided to play 1 b4." Or "In this game I was playing against 12-year-old Senior Master Ray Robson, who according to Kasparov is an extremely talented player. I had no time to prepare for him and decided to use my favourite opening weapon." I could site many

more examples, but I'll spare you.

This book will undoubtedly find an audience amongst 1 b4 players, but it does a poor job of inspiring new players to take up the opening. The games are old, the analysis is insufficient, and it lacks objectivity. The fans of this opening deserved better. This is a remarkably bad book.

My assessment of this book: ❖

Order Play 1 b4!

by Yury Lapshun & Nick Conticello

New In Chess Yearbook, Vol. 87 by Genna Sosonko (ed.), Interchess BV 2008, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 247pp., \$28.95

I got a little surprise upon opening this volume, because my picture is actually featured in the opening highlights section. I'm in good company, too. Other featured players include Bobby Fischer, Teimur Radjabov, Vassily Ivanchuk, Sergei Tiviakov, Alexander Morozevich, Ian Nepomniachtchi, and Vladimir Okhotnik. For those who don't know, Nepomniachtchi is a young Russian grandmaster who recently won the strong Aeroflot Open in Moscow, and Okhotnik is a theoretician who has co-written two opening books with GM Bogdan Lalic.

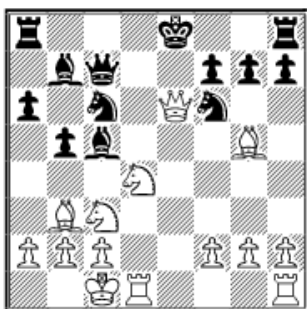


The material is divided as follows:

- Opening Highlights (2 pages)
- Forum and Sosonko's Corner
- Forum (16 pages)
- Sosonko's Corner (9 pages)
- Surveys (33 surveys, 206 pages)
- Service
- Book Reviews (5 pages)
- New In Chess Code System (1 page)

As usual, the Forum section is full of interesting contributions; some are very heavy on original analysis and therefore should be of great interest to those playing these openings. In his section, Sosonko discusses the legacy of Bobby Fischer in regards to his openings. Sosonko's take on any subject is always worth reading.

The survey section is the heart of each volume. The editors do a wonderful job of choosing relevant topics and keeping the material fresh in each issue. The section begins with Ivanchuk's revolutionary queen sacrifice in the Najdorf: 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bc4 b5 7.Bb3 e6 8.Bg5 Be7 9.Qf3 Qc7 10.e5 Bb7 11.exd6 Bxd6 12.Qe3 Bc5 13.0-0 Nc6 14.Qxe6+



This, of course, is very topical and not something you will expect to see in the games of average players, but the *NIC Yearbooks* feature lines that cater to all levels of players. There is something for everyone, and one will always find material that pertains to their own repertoire in one way or another.

Another interesting survey is on a line



that Steinitz once attempted to refute: 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 0-0 Nf6 5 d3 d6 6 Bg5, and now Steinitz's continuation goes 6...h6 7 Bh4 g5 8 Bg3 h5!. This survey is an interesting mix of very old games, and subsequent analysis by numerous strong players, theoreticians, and computers. Oftentimes surprising conclusions are reached when modern theoreticians reexamine these forgotten lines of opening theory.

Needless to say, there are so many ideas presented in the surveys that it leaves you with excellent opportunities to find new surprise weapons or to update your existing repertoire. For the ambitious player and the chess enthusiast alike, the *NIC Yearbook* should be on your shopping list every three months.

My assessment of this book: ♦♦♦♦♦

New In Chess Yearbook, Vol. 87
by Genna Sosonko (ed.)

Chesspublishing.com: 1 e4 by John Watson, Chess Publishing.com 2008, Subscription \$19.50-\$99.00 per year.

This section of Chesspublishing.com features openings such as the Caro-Kann, the Pirc, the Scandinavian, the Alekhine, the Modern, and a few other specialties like the Owen and Nimzovitch Defenses. Well-known international master John Watson has hosted this section since February 2007, prior to that it has been hosted by GM Rowson, IM Martin, GM Davies, GM Volzhin, and others.



Given the popularity of the Caro-Kann and the Scandinavian these days, Watson has no problems providing subscribers with plenty of interesting material. Each of the twelve updates per year usually contain up to ten games. The games are annotated with a mixture of theory, analysis, and prose. If you like Watson's books, you will enjoy this section; his game annotations are entertaining and instructive with a great theoretical focus to boot.

As with the other sections on chesspublishing.com, there are downloadable PDF, PGN, and ChessBase format files that cover all the games presented since 1999. Finally, there is an active forum with an exchange of ideas between subscribers of the page. This is an excellent way to stay on top of the latest developments in the opening.

My assessment of this site: ♦♦♦♦♦

Chesspublishing.com: 1 e4 e5
by John Watson

Opening Encyclopaedia 2008 (DVD), by ChessBase GmbH, Figurine Algebraic Notation, \$159.95

The *Opening Encyclopaedia 2008* features 3.05 million games, more than 78,000 annotated games, more than 4,300 opening surveys, and 349 special theory databases. On the surface this certainly looks good. However, there are deep pockets of missing or outdated information.

For example, a quick browse of the Symmetrical English revealed that the very popular Wedberg



Variation (1 c4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 Nf3 e5) isn't covered in any of the surveys. There are no less than 389 surveys on the Caro-Kann, but the 14 most recent ones are all from 2005. The vast majority of the others are dated 1993 or 1996, which is scary for an opening as popular as the Caro-Kann. None of the surveys on the Closed Sicilian have been altered since 1993! Nor have any of the 51 surveys on the Sveshnikov Sicilian. It is amazing that the material on one of the most popular lines in contemporary practice hasn't been updated for fifteen years! For the adherents of the Sicilian Dragon, the news is equally bad, I only found a handful of surveys that were written after 1993, but none of these were written after 1998. The same can be said about the Queen's Indian and many other openings.



There are some new developments. The 13 surveys on the Smith-Morra Gambit were updated in 2007 and the 12 surveys on the Sicilian Grand Prix Attack were updated in 2008. The section on the Petrov has been completely updated by Yusupov, and much of the section on the Ruy Lopez has been revamped, while nearly all of the Grünfeld has been updated over the last couple of years.

Still, it is reprehensible that large parts of important opening theory have remained unchanged in this product for up to fifteen years. This should not be tolerated. This product is an embarrassment in comparison with the standards set by many of the other ChessBase products.

My assessment of this DVD: ❌

Opening Encyclopaedia 2008
by ChessBase

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