



Books for Christmas

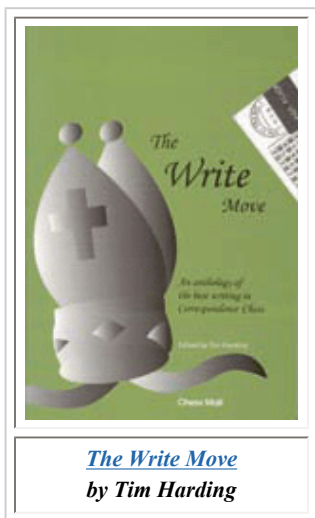
Last year I reviewed Christmas chess books in the December [column](#), but I thought I would do it a bit earlier this year to allow readers time to make their purchases, so I am devoting most of this column to book reviews.

First, however, I must wrap up the topic of chess problems that I dealt with last month, beginning with the solution to the problem that I left you at the end.

COLUMNISTS

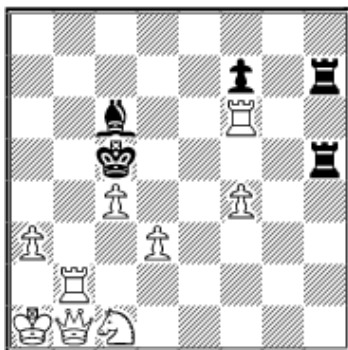
The Kibitzer

Tim Harding



[The Write Move](#)
by Tim Harding

White to play and mate in three



This problem by H. E. Kidson (*Illustrated London News*, 1902) celebrated fifty years of his submitting compositions to the paper.

On 1 November 1902 the paper's chess editor J. W. Abbott reported that very few of his correspondents had solved it, many proposing 1 Re2 to which there is only one defence (1...Rh8!). Originally, he said, there was a black knight on a8 and a solution by 1 Re2 was possible; removing the knight cured the problem – “as striking an illustration as we have ever seen of what may be called the accidental element in chess”. Actually that comment seems incomplete; the original must have been a four-mover; removing the knight gave a unique solution in three moves.

The correct solution is: **1 Rh2** and now if **1...Rh8**, **2 Ne2** and mate next move. Or if **1...Kd4**, **2 Qb2+** and **3 Qf2** mate.

The main point of the key move is to vacate the b-file for the queen to exert her power, but in order to prevent the mate being postponed by ...Rh1, the white rook must go to h2 rather than any other square on the rank. The prettiest line illustrating White's threat is **1...Rxh2 2 Qb5+! Bxb5**. Now the rook on f6 controls b6 and **3 Nb3** is mate. (This is why there was no mate in three with a black knight on a8, since 1 Rh2 would then be met by 1...Nc7 preventing the queen sacrifice.)

Of those readers who responded to our poll about whether you wanted to see more about problems in *The Kibitzer*, there was a slight majority in favour of *not*. So this is not a total repudiation of the idea, but we will not have them very often in the future. Now to the main topic of the month...

What makes a good chess book?

There is no simple answer to this question. Some people want a book they can actually read, one consisting wholly or chiefly of words telling stories about players (such as Sosonko's books that I have praised in the past), but few chess books are like that. Most are technical, whether instructional or works of reference. The reader is chiefly hoping to learn something that will help them gain more points in tournaments and a higher rating.

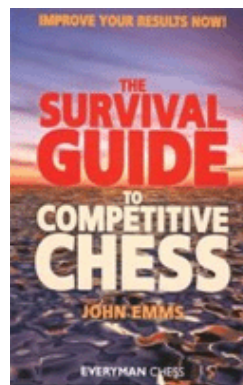
How much technicality a reader wants depends on the amount of time they have at their disposal and their current level of understanding. In this article a variety of levels will be (I hope) catered for from among the dozens of titles that have been sent to me in recent months. The ultimate choice is personal. I do not have time or the inclination to read all the chess books that are sent to me. Unfortunately, there do not seem to have been any new books on correspondence chess in 2007.

CHESS THEATRE
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Relatively easy reading

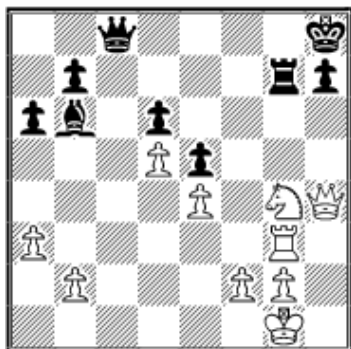
To start with books that require less intellectual effort, *The Survival Guide to Competitive Chess* by John Emms (Everyman Chess, ISBN 978-1857444124; US\$24.95, UK£14.99) is perhaps the ideal Christmas present book, especially for a friend or family member who is going off to play a tournament a day or two later. Written in a light chatty style, and easily digestible along with a couple of mince pies and a drink, it has plenty of diagrams, so moderately advanced players can probably read it without getting out the chess set.



The book deals with various practical issues that prevent most players obtaining the results they deserve – and teaches some mental tricks that may enable you to get a better score than you deserve. Like most ‘psychobabble’ self-help books, whose style it in some way resembles, Emms’s book does contain a valuable nugget here and there: in this case, a useful technique for avoiding silly mistakes when calculating combinations. This book is moderately recommended, therefore, but I would not buy it for myself or for an earnest young student who wants to get his teeth into heavy analysis. For such books, read on further.

Here is a nice example from the book: *Emms-Buckley*, Hastings Challengers 1995-6. As Emms does not print the moves leading to the critical position, I give them here.

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d6 3 d4 Nf6 4 Bd3 Qc7 5 Nf3 Bg4 6 Nbd2 cxd4 7 cxd4 Nc6 8 h3 Bd7 9 a3 e5 10 d5 Nc7 11 0-0 Ng6 12 Re1 Nf4 13 Bf1 g5 14 Nxc5 Rg8 15 Ndf3 Nxc3+ 16 Nxc3 Bxc3 17 Bg5 Be7 18 Rc1 Qd7 19 Qb3 a6 20 Bxf6 Bxf6 21 Nh2 Bg5 22 Rc4 Rc8 23 Rxc8+ Qxc8 24 Re2 Bd8 25 Rc2 Qd7 26 Rc4 Kf8 27 Qe3 Rg7 28 Qh6 Kg8 29 Rc3 Bg4 30 Rg3 Bb6 31 Be2 f5 32 Bxg4 fxg4 33 Qh4 Qc8 34 Nxc4 Kh8



White has an extra pawn and good winning chances with 35 Kh2, but instead he played.

35 Nf6??

“Maintaining a poker face is easier if... you are unaware of your blunder”, says Emms, and Buckley, short of time, didn’t see it.

35...Rf7??

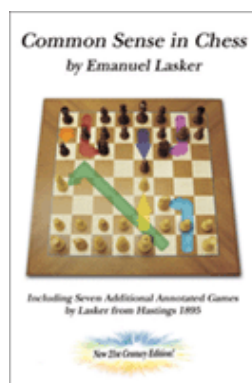
“I remember feeling disappointed that my opponent hadn’t allowed the pretty finish” 35...Qc1+ 36 Kh1 Bxf2

37 Qxh7+!! Rxh7 38 Rg8 mate, writes Emms.

36 Qg5 Bxf2+ 37 Kxf2 Qc5+ 38 Kf1 Qc4+ 39 Kg1 1-0

Only several days later, when inputting the game into ChessBase, did Emms realise that White is totally lost. When he input 35 Nf6, Fritz went wild for 36...Qc1+ 36 Kh1 Bxf2 and after 37 Qxh7 +!! Rxh7 ‘the annoying program wouldn’t physically allow me to play 38 Rg8 mate’ because, eventually he realised, Black’s thirty-seventh gave check!

Emms’s book does assume that the reader is a regular competitive player, in team matches and open tournaments. For somebody not in that situation, and is only starting on the road to chess expertise, the new edition of *Common Sense in Chess* by Emanuel Lasker (Russell Enterprises, ISBN 978-1-888690-40-9, \$19.85) could be useful. The book was originally based on a series of thirteen lectures Lasker gave for club players in London in 1895, the year after he became world champion. Bruce Albertson has added seven games annotated by Lasker from the 1895 Hastings tournament. The book is rather slim because of the small typeface used, but young eyes will have no trouble with it.

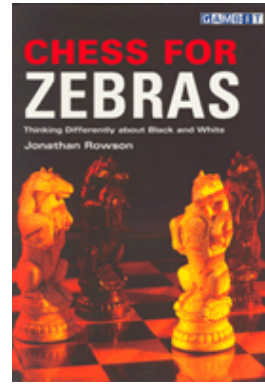


Also easy to read, and with numerous diagrams, so that no chess set is necessary, is *Back to Basics: Tactics* by Dan Heisman (Russell Enterprises, ISBN 978-1-888690-33-2, \$21.95). This is a beginner’s book, with many elementary test positions, and the only one I shall be recommending today for readers in that category. Even an eight-year-old should have no problem with it, though for young readers it might be better if Mum, Dad or elder sibling set up the positions on a chessboard in a

series of sessions over a few weeks.

Advanced chess psychology

On the other hand, if you want a practical chess psychology book that is deeper than Emms and requires more work from the reader, I can suggest [Chess for Zebras](#) by Scottish grandmaster Jonathan Rowson (Gambit Publications, ISBN 1-901983-85-4, UK£17.99). This was actually published in 2005 and should have been reviewed last year, or earlier, but unfortunately ended up in the wrong pile and was overlooked. It deals with a central issue for all advanced players – the different mind-sets required when playing with the colours above 2000 level – and, unlike the Emms book, some of the advice is also probably applicable to correspondence play, where blunders are not to be expected and your opponent may well be using a computer. If you enjoyed his earlier [The Seven Deadly Chess Sins](#), this book is for you.

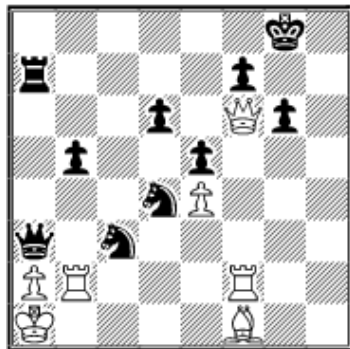


Rowson's offering is not just a book about the difference between having the first move or not. He discusses the question of 'why is chess so difficult' and many other deep issues. What makes this book such an excellent choice as a Christmas present for an advanced player is that maybe only over the Christmas/New Year period does one have enough time (assuming you are not playing a tournament starting December 26) to really work through the book slowly, thinking about all the issues. With a book like this to challenge you, you may decide not to take a beer or a glass of wine with lunch, but really enjoy thinking and only take that drink at the end of the day.

Incidentally, one pity about this book is that he has an incorrect position for the Estrin-Ivashin example starting on page seventy; White's pawn in the actual game was on b3 not on b2, though this fortunately does not materially spoil the example. It does mean that in the actual game White's choice was broader because his a4-pawn was not *en prise* in the starting position. (This is probably not the first book to have it wrong; Rowson took the position from Flear's *Mastering the Endgame* rather than my correspondence chess databases which have the game correctly.) If Gambit ever makes a reprint, they should fix this. Unfortunately, Gambit no longer sends me books for review, since I stopped editing a chess magazine, so I cannot comment on their more recent offerings.

Curiously, the book includes (on pages 27-8) an episode from a game between two authors whose books we have been discussing. Here is just the final stage.

Rowson-Emms, Gibraltar 2004



The time control has just been reached. A few moves earlier White had been lost but managed to escape and had just delivered queen checks on f6 and d8. His choice seems limited, since if it were Black's move, then 41... Nb3+! 42 Rxb3 Qc1+ would bring the proceedings to an uncomfortable close. Accidentally, as it might seem, White spotted in time the winning move, which had only become possible because Black had played ...e6-e5 during the time scramble. The game ended:

42 Bc4!! d5 43 Rh2 1-0

Game collections

This department is represented solely by Anatoly Karpov, whose *My Best Games* came out recently in English (Edition Olms, ISBN 978-3-283-01002-7). There are one hundred games, with a foreword by Igor Zaitsev and a pen portrait by Raymond Stoltze. Translations from Russian are by Ken Neat, probably the best in that business these days.

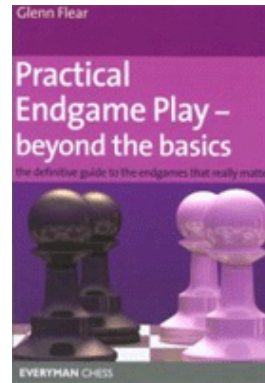
The games are arranged chronologically from 1968 to 2003 and so are intended to present a definitive record of his achievement, as judged by the former world champion. The average length of a game in this book is just over two and a half pages, so clearly we are not talking about the kind of analysis you get in books by grandmasters like Timman, Nunn, Stohl or Kasparov, let alone Hübner. For example, Game 70 (against Bönsch, Baden-Baden 1992) has no comment (just one diagram) until move eleven. On page 23, the game with Ulf Andersson from USSR-World 1974, from Black's fifty-first to White's seventy-first there is no comment. Why not? In several other places in the book, there are stretches of over ten moves without comment.

However, it is good to have all the games in one volume, and if you want more detailed analysis, I suppose that in most cases it is available elsewhere, especially for the many games in the book against Kasparov. In many cases there are longer (usually verbal) comments about opening

choices. Karpov's style was such that relatively few of his games turned on critical tactical moments; his triumphs were primarily strategic. Not being a great fan of Karpov, I leave it to readers to judge whether you want such a book, but it probably is the definitive account of his career.

An endgame book

Who's afraid of the big bad endgame book? Actually, in this case, it's the big *good* endgame book. Weighing it at 544 pages, here comes *Practical Endgame Play – Beyond the Basics* by English GM Glenn Flear (Everyman Chess, ISBN 978-185744-555-8; UK £19.99, US\$32.95). It is subtitled 'the definitive guide to the endgames that really matter' and he is right. This is not about the kind of stuff you normally find in endgame books; it is mostly about what he calls "nuckies" or NQEs (not-quite-endgames). These are defined as positions in which at least one side has two pieces and neither has more than two.



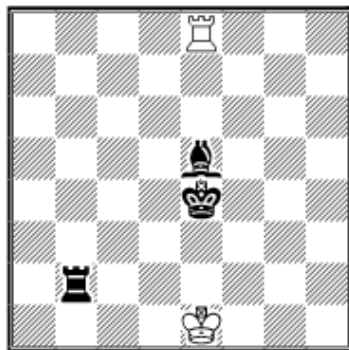
Such positions occur more frequently than any single type of 'pure' endgame other than rook endgames, and they can be extremely varied, from highly simplified and pawnless endgames requiring good technique, to positions that are almost middlegames (such as queen and rook each) with mating possibilities abounding. Endgames with rook and one minor piece each are particularly common and there are few books providing much guidance.

The positions are arranged systematically, depending on the balance of pieces. There are also plenty of positions with many pawns, whereas typical endgame books restrict themselves to small quotas of the little devils. A useful type of endgame that he covers is the double rook endgame; he reckons about two thirds of these reduce to single rook endgames but the other third are important.

Many years ago I bought from B. H. Wood a second-hand tome in Polish by Gawlikowski, solely because it dealt with these kinds of more complex endgames, but unfortunately I never learned Polish.

Admittedly, Flear's experience has been different from mine. I have probably played as much chess as him over a similar long period, but I have never had to deliver checkmate with bishop and knight against bare king in a serious game, or come to think of it, in any game. Nor with the bishop-pair.

Nor did I have ever to try to win or defend rook and bishop versus rook, whereas he has done both, and writes (on page 21): 'This is one of those fundamental technical positions that should be mastered by anyone who consider themselves to be a serious chess player'. (Something went wrong with the grammar, or proof-reading, of that sentence, but never mind. I know what he means.) Of course if you got one of these in the days of adjournments, you had plenty of time to learn what to do.



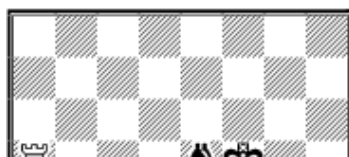
Flear-Branford, London 1978 (on pages 33-34). I remember watching Glenn play this; he spent most of the time standing up viewing the position sideways so that he could visualise it the way it was in the book he had studied. As he shows here, he made one mistake that should have cost the half point, but his opponent went wrong too and he drew after all. As this is a five-man position with no pawns, you can put the position into a tablebase program and see how the game should continue.

Here's what actually happened:

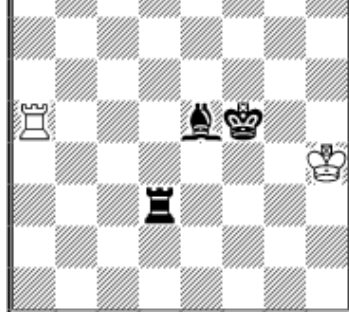
73...Kd4 74 Kf1 Bf4 75 Re2 Rb7 76 Re8 Kd3 77 Kg2
 Rf7 78 Re6 Rf8 79 Kh3 Rg8 80 Kh4 Kd4 81 Ra6 Ke4
 82 Ra4+?

This should have lost. 82 Ra5 Kf3 83 Ra3+ Be3 84 Ra4 is drawn (Szén's position, analysed in the book). 82 Ra7 Kf3 83 Ra3+ is also possible, says Flear.

82...Kf5 83 Kh3 Rg3+ 84 Kh4 Rc3 85 Ra5+ Be5 86 Rb5 Rd3 87 Ra5



Here Black missed his chance. The game continued 87... Rd2? 88 Ra3 (back to Szén) and White drew at move 102. Correct, as Flear shows, was:



87...Rd7 88 Kh3 Rd2 and there is a mating net, so White can resign.

I used to collect unusual semi-endings on a card index (this was long before computers), but I never got around to inputting them. Many of the pseudo-endgames were from Russian tournaments, found in *Shakhmatny Bulletin*. I may still have the cards somewhere; a project for the future...

If you are prepared to put in a bit of work, this is a very useful book that will help you score more points, especially these days when (as Flear points out) endgames have to be played quickly in over-the-board tournaments. Don't try to read it all at once, though; it will take a few weeks at least to study each type of endgame thoroughly.

Openings books

Books on openings still represent the majority of chess books published. Despite the wide variety of CDs and DVDs and online aids available, maybe most people still prefer a book, especially because it is easier to pick up for quick reference.

GM Nigel Davies has written a matching pair of books for people who like gambits: one with white and one with black. *Gambiteer I* (Everyman Chess, ISBN 978-1-85744-516-9, UK£14.99, US\$ 24.95) and *Gambiteer II* (Everyman Chess, ISBN 978-1-85744-536-7, same pricings) are based on annotated illustrative games: sixty and sixty-two respectively.

Davies warns that gambits with Black are more hazardous so he basically concentrates on two: the Schliemann against the Spanish (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 f5) and the Albin against the Queen's Gambit (1 d4 d5 2 c4 e5). The book for white is more varied and will probably get more takers. Davies recommends the Wing Gambit against the Sicilian (1 e4 c5 2 b4), the analogous line against the French (1 e4 e6 2 Nf3 d5 3 e5 c5 4 b4), the Danish Gambit against 1...e5 and miscellaneous weird ideas against other defences.



I would stress, however, that these books will really be useful for players below the 2000-rating level only, and primarily for those below the 1800-level. Many of the suggested lines, while likely to be effective at fast time-limit over-the-board and Internet chess, are not going to be good choices in correspondence play.

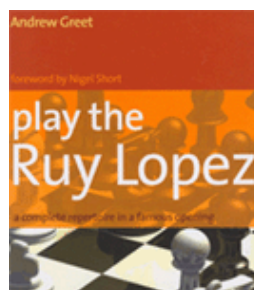
Also there is another Karpov book on offer, if you prefer to keep your pawns. *How to Play the English Opening* by Anatoly Karpov (Batsford, ISBN978-0-7134-9065-7). This consists of thirty annotated games with 1 c4, in eight of which Karpov played white and in nine he played black. The English is best learned by studying games rather than trying to learn lots of variations, so this could be useful for somebody thinking of taking it up or looking for a new way to meet 1 c4. I don't recommend buying both Karpov books, though; you can have too much of a good thing.



Finally, two books with bossy titles that may put you off. *Play 1...Nc6!* by Christoph Wisniewski (Everyman Chess, ISBN 978-1-85744-522-0; UK£14.99, US\$24.95) primarily deals with the Nimzowitsch Defence to the King's Pawn (1 e4 Nc6) and Chigorin's Defence to the Queen's Gambit (1 d4 d5 2 c4 Nc6 or 2 Nf3 Nc6), plus lines in the English arising from 1 c4 Nc6 (usually with ...e5 coming soon). These are all lines I have played myself. As for the Chigorin Defence, it is not so long since I reviewed Morozevich's [book](#) on that. His was primarily an ideas book; this one seems more objective. Serious Chigorin players will need to consult both and compare them very carefully.

Play the Ruy Lopez (Everyman Chess, ISBN 978-1-85744-427-8; UK£14.99, US\$23.95) is an ambitious topic for a first book by young British IM Andrew Greet. He starts by dealing with various defences other than 3...a6 and then concentrates on the Worrall Attack, used by Nigel Short to beat Karpov in two games of their world championship candidates match.

Actually after 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7, 6



Qe2 is the Worrall. The way Short played it, and 5 Qe2 (Greet's recommendation) used to be called the Wormald Attack. They usually transpose unless Black meets 5 Qe2 by 5...b5 6 Bb3 Bc5, but 5 Qe2 has the advantage that you don't have to learn anything against the Open Variation, 5 0-0 Nxe4, or (perhaps more of an issue these days) the Archangel lines resulting from 5...b5 followed by ... Bc5 and/or ...Bb7. So while 5 Qe2 is (possibly) slightly inferior objectively, it does have a great practical advantage for most players that there is a good deal less to learn and the lines avoided are extremely complicated.



When two books arrive at the same time dealing with the same variation, one from White's point of view and the other from Black's, it is very tempting to compare them, which we can do by comparing Davies's recommendations against these two bigger books.

Let us take the line **1 e4 Nc6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3** first.

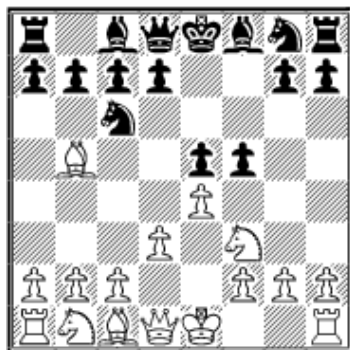


Gambiteer I devotes most of an eight-page chapter to dealing with 3...dxe4, with which I used to have a lot of fun and the occasional accident. Davies recommends 4 d5 Ne5 5 Qd4 Ng6 6 Bb5+ Bd7 and now 7 Nge2 Nf6 8 Bg5, which only emerged as a dangerous option for White after my book came out in 1981; White's eighth move is not mentioned there. Wisniewski however only recommends 3...e6 and does not consider 3...dxe4 at all.

After 3...e6, Davies recommends 'a new gambit line' 4 Be3!? dxe4 5 f3 which can transpose into the Blackmar-Diemer Gambit after 5...exf3 6 Nxf3. Wisniewski does not mention 4 Be3, but why should he? Black is under absolutely no compulsion to take the e-pawn because the move Be3 really does nothing in this closed position except shore up the d-pawn and block the e-file. With d4 thus overprotected, the line 4...Nf6 5 e5 Ne4 is probably inadvisable, but 4...Bb4 5 e5 Nge7 is perfectly thematic for Black in this variation. Or if Black really wants to try to refute Davies' idea, he can play 4...dxe4 5 f3 and now 5...Bb4 (not mentioned in *Gambiteer*). White is not threatening fxe4 because of the reply ...Qh4+. This needs tests, but I think Davies has lost that round.

For the more heavyweight match-up, let us see what Greet has to say about the line that Davies recommends in *Gambiteer II* against the Ruy Lopez. This is the dreaded Schliemann, with a twist. After **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 f5!?**, the crunch line in his book goes **4 Nc3 fxe4 5 Nxe4** and now he recommends **5...Nf6**, instead of the wilder lines with long variations that most books prefer, and for an option he suggests 4...Bb4!?

Greet avoids all this by **4 d3**:



According to Davies this move 'is nothing'. He says it is a very common reaction whereby White, uncertain of theory, thinks he will play 'something solid' to avoid 'nasties'. To be fair to Greet, he says that 4 d3 does not 'refute' the Schliemann. Let us see.

Davies considers this in Chapter Four (pages 76-85) and as he has the advantage that his book came out after Greet's. Instead of the usual 4...fxe4 (I confess I once played 4...d6? here, but still won.) 5 Nxe4 Nf6, Davies recommends the immediate:

4...Nf6

Treatment of this line amounts to just over two pages out of Greet's twenty-page chapter.

5 0-0

Of the other possible moves, 5 exf5 is the chief one. After 5...Bc5 (as in the Davies example game) 6 0-0 0-0, we are back in a line considered below. Greet says 5...Ne7!? is also interesting.

5...Bc5 6 exf5

Davies also looks at 6 Nc3 0-0 and other possibilities. Greet says '6 Nxe5 is an interesting alternative'; Davies continues 6...Nxe5 7 d4 c6 6 Be2 Bd6 9 dxe5 Bxe5 'is very comfortable for Black'. This may be slightly misleading as, after 10 exf5 d5 11 Nd2 Bxf5 12 Nf3, White is not worse, but I also note that 9 f4 Ng6 10 e5 Bc7 11 exf6 Qxf6 looks quite good for Black.

6...0-0 7 Be3

This is the move in the Greet book. Davies first considers 7 Nc3 (via 6 Nc3 0-0 7 exf5) 7...Nd4 annotating the game S. Kagan-Wedberg, Lucerne 1979.

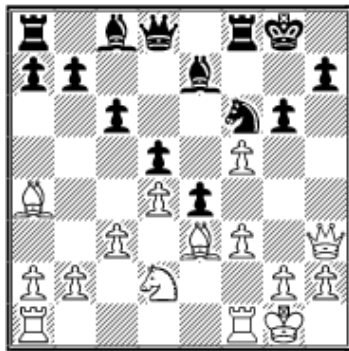
7...Nd4

Greet dismisses alternatives and Davies agrees this is the only correct move. Over the next few moves there are alternatives, but we are heading for the point where the authors disagree.

8 c3 Nxf3+ 9 Qxf3 Be7 10 Nd2 c6 11 Ba4 d5 12 d4 e4 13 Qh3 g6

To avoid Greet's variation, Davies also offers the option 13...Qb6!? 14 Bb3 a5.

14 f3!?



This is Greet's supposed improvement upon the dubious 14 g4 of J. Banas-B. Ivanovic, Stip 1979, when Davies recommends 14...gxf5 15 gxf5 Ne8.

After 14 f3, both books give a long variation extending to move twenty-four, which Greet claims is slightly better for White and Davies, with more justification, says dead equal. Here we come to a general problem with repertoire books. If a new line suggested is no good, it is soon found out, but, if it has some possibilities, then attention soon becomes focused on it and a way to defend (or circumvent) is found. This is why repertoire books are only suitable for lower-rated players for whom opening theory is on the whole irrelevant. Probably that is why

Greet did not try to over-complicate matters by trying to find a new wrinkle in a very complicated gambit line, but certainly Davies has won this round.

Postscript

I have set aside two books for later consideration. Next month, in the wake of the supposed 'unification tournament', I intend to write on the topic of the world chess championship, so Veselin Topalov's [book](#) about his match with Kramnik in Elista will be dealt with then.

Timothy Taylor's new book on *Bird's Opening*, 1 f4, is also not easy to cover in a summary review; this is a topic worth a whole column early next year so watch out for that, but you might consider buying this if you want a whole new departure with white.

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