



## COLUMNISTS

**Checkpoint**

Carsten Hansen

**Reviewed this month:*****Mastering The Opening***

by Byron Jacobs

***An Explosive Chess Opening  
Repertoire for Black***

by Jouni Yrjölä and Jussi Tella

***Meeting 1 d4***

by Jacob Aagaard and Esben Lund

***Meeting 1 e4***

by Aleksander Raetsky

## Repertoire Books

The repertoire book phenomenon is something that has been around for some time. Every now and again we see some master, IM or GM presenting a error-proof repertoire for Black or White or against a particular line. Several classics in this genre have been produced such as Nunn's *Beating the Sicilian* books. However, a number of horrible books have also been published over the years, and unfortunately, the horrible books heavily outweigh the good ones in this category.

The main problems in repertoire books are that space limitations, too many short-cuts by the author and no or little consistency in the choice of lines (an odd combination of tactical and positional lines) while quite often the author



browses too quickly over the critical lines. Here in the *Checkpoint* column we have seen a little bit of all of the above in some of the more recent specimens we have examined, such as for example *Attacking with 1 d4*, while its colleague *Attacking with 1 e4* did a much better job.

Generally speaking, I don't fancy repertoire books too much as they all too often fail to deliver what they promise. However, I often use repertoire books to pick an idea or two that can be used in addition to my existing repertoire.

This time around, I will review three repertoire books, all three covering the Black side of the board. In addition, I will look at a more general treatise on openings.

***Mastering The Opening* by Byron Jacobs**, 2001 Everyman Chess, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 176 pp., \$19.95

"The opening phase of the game throws up difficult questions for those keen to study and improve their chess. Should I open with 1 d4, 1 e4, or choose something else? How should I meet these moves when I am playing Black? Are systems based on immediate counterattack my best bet [sic!], or should I concentrate on developing the pieces? In *Mastering the Opening*, international master Byron Jacobs outlines the key plans and strategies in all major openings and helps the reader to decide upon an opening repertoire."



That's what the backcover blurb tells us. In the introduction, Jacobs elaborates: "What I will do in this book is to look at all the major openings and the most important and popular lines within them. This is with a view to giving a feel for what openings are like, what the main themes of play within them are, and what sort of positions they usually lead to. Unavoidably, some areas of the theory will only be skirted

over or even avoided altogether. However, I hope there will be sufficient material here for you to gain a good feel for many different opening variations and thus to decide which systems might work best for you."

The idea behind this book as such is very worthwhile, because there are not that many books that have tried to do exactly this, perhaps with the exception of Reuben Fine in his classic *The Ideas behind The Openings*. However, the problem with Fine's book is that it is very dated. There are of course other books that have attempted similar things over the years, but in my memory none of them really stands out. It should here be mentioned, that Neil McDonald in his horrible *Concise Chess Openings* to some extent did the same, but failed miserably.

Who is this book written for? This is difficult to determine, but I would say players with a rating below 1500-1600, who have not quite yet formed an opening repertoire and have no idea which openings will appeal to them. I think that very few players above this rating will find the book much use. The material in the present book is divided up as follows:

- **King Pawn Openings**

- 1        The Sicilian with d2-d4 (19 pages)
- 2        The Sicilian without d2-d4 (10 pages)
- 3        1 e4 e5: The Spanish and Others (14 pages)
- 4        The French Defence (15 pages)
- 5        The Caro-Kann Defence (10 pages)
- 6        1 e4: Other Defences (14 pages)

- **Queen Pawn Openings**

- 7        The King's Indian Defence (15 pages)
- 8        The Indian Defences (25 pages)
- 9        The Queen's Gambit Declined (16 pages)
- 10       1 d4: Other Defences (21 pages)

- **Other Openings**

- 11       The English Opening (11 pages)

From the above, I quickly gather a couple of things: 1) A lot of openings have been left out; and 2) There is not a sufficient balance in the openings that are covered.

First of all, with the exception of the English Opening, no flank openings are covered, and clearly a lot of the less common lines in the openings mentioned above have been ignored. However this is pretty much consistent with what Jacobs told us in the introduction, so I will excuse him for that. There would simply not be room to cover everything in a book of this size. Regarding the second point, the first clue is that the French Defence is covered in 15 pages, while 1 e4 e5 is covered 14 pages. Hmmm.

Each chapter is divided in sub-chapters. For example, in Chapter One, the material is divided up into four sub-chapters: The Sveshnikov Sicilian, The Scheveningen Variation, The Dragon Variation, and The Taimanov Variation. By now, you are probably already yelling so loud that I can hear you from where I sit in Los Angeles. Yes that's right, there is no coverage of the Najdorf. Jacobs has of course thought about this: "Alert readers will note that I have chosen not to include the highly popular Najdorf variation here. The reason for this is that the themes that occur in the Najdorf are frequently seen in Scheveningen and Sveshnikov variations. Indeed, several of the illustrative games chosen for the Scheveningen actually started out as Najdorfs."

For the similarity to the Scheveningen, that's true, but the Sveshnikov comparison is a bit of a stretch. Although the pawn structures are somewhat similar, the play that arises is very different.

In each sub-chapter Jacobs first makes a short introduction, then asks *What is White's Strategy?*, *What is Black's Strategy?*, *Tactical/Strategic/Dynamic?*, *Theoretical?*, *How Popular is it?*, and then moves on *Illustrative Games*.

While all openings get equally deep (or superficial)

coverage there is an imbalance when it comes to the illustrative games, where some lines get quite good coverage with usually four games. Let's take a closer look at the 1 e4 e5 chapter, mentioned above.

The chapter is split up in three parts: The Spanish: The Classical Main Lines; The Spanish: Other Variations; Others after 1 e4 e5. Personally - and I don't think I'm alone here - I find the division rather crude and the coverage too general. How can you help somebody choose an opening if openings as different as the Italian Game, Three Knights Defence, King's Gambit, Vienna Game, Bishop Game, Four Knights, Scotch Opening, Latvian Gambit, Philidor's Defence as well as many others are covered under one heading? You can't. It's impossible. These openings have been squeezed under one heading - four pages - in this book! For comparison, Alekhine's Defence gets four pages and the Scandinavian Defence gets 4.5 pages! In addition, the illustrative games that are given, two of which are with the Evans Gambit, while the remaining two feature the Scotch Opening with 4...Nf6! The very least the author could have done was to give four different openings. In addition, I have to say that the annotations to the games are very light and of no real benefit except the weakest players.

This fact alone should make a lot of people stay away from this book, and quite justifiably so.

A final point of criticism is the usual lack of indexes. Of course you save a page or two in each book, but it makes it terribly difficult to navigate through the book and find a specific line you're after, or to determine if it's there at all. An index of complete and partial games should be obligatory, and it usually can be found in Everyman books, but this time, it's missing completely. Sad, but true.

**My assessment of this book:** 

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***An Explosive Chess Opening Repertoire for Black* by Jouni Yrjölä and Jussi Tella, 2001 Gambit Publications, Figurine Algebraic Notation, 272 pp., \$23.95.**

Who wouldn't like to have an explosive opening repertoire as Black? I wish I had, and I'm sure a lot of other people feel this way as I have heard that this book is selling very well. After looking through the book I understand why, it is filled with interesting ideas to be used independently as well as a part of repertoire.



The two players who wrote this book may not be familiar to most people, but GM Jouni Yrjölä, who wrote the solid *Easy Guide to the Classical Sicilian* and IM Jussi Tella, both from Finland, will, judging from their effort in the present book, soon be household names in a lot of homes.

The repertoire is based on the Pirc Defence and the variations 1 d4 d6 2 c4 e5 and 1 d4 d6 2 Nf3 Bg4. But in addition to these lines, there are literally dozens of ideas that Black may want to make use of.

Looking at the contents, I notice that there are no less than 33 chapters! Therefore, I will only list the six parts, and roughly what is covered (if an explanation is needed) in each part:

- **Part 1: 1 d4 d6 2 c4 e5** (65 pages)
- **Part 2: 1 d4 d6 2 Nf3 Bg4** (73 pages)
- **Part 3: Other 2nd Moves for White** (16 pages)
- **Part 4: The Pirc** (54 pages)
- **Part 5: Other First Moves for White** (19 pages - covering 1 Nf3, 1 c4 and rare first moves)
- **Part 6: Other Options for Black** (31 pages - covering

Old Indian with ...Bf5, 1 d4 d6 2 c4 Nf6 3 Nc3 e5 4 Nf3 e4 and other ideas)

Aside from the Pirc, most of the lines covered above have not been covered particularly often in recent theoretical works, and as the authors point out in the introduction, even ECO has failed to cover some of the most critical lines.

The line covered in part 2 caught my interest as I used to play in myself. They call it the Hodgson Variation, I have seen it being called the Wade System on a couple of occasions as he was one of the early pioneers in this system, while Hodgson took it up in the late seventies and as far as I can see has played it with some frequency since. Personally I got interested in this line after it appeared four times in games at the annual Wijk aan Zee tournament in 1987. Therefore in my little notebook from back then, I called it the Wijk aan Zee System.

The coverage is done in the traditional variation tree style, although several complete games are given as part of the coverage in these trees. Each part in this book start with an introduction which shows some examples of positions that may arise in the lines that are to be covered as well as who the specialists are in the particular line, and finally they include some statistics, which show how often the various lines are being played, how White scores with it, what the average rating of White is (this is of course a relative, since to the games played prior to 1970, the players did not have any ratings, so if the line had been played by a bunch of heavyweight GMs, this wouldn't reflect in the rating average) and finally White's performance rating.

My knowledge of most of the lines covered in this book is fairly limited, with the exception of those lines that are classified under the English Opening, such as for example 1 d4 d6 2 c4 e5 3 Nc3 or 3 Nf3, and 1 c4 d6 2 Nc3 e5 3 g3 f5 to mention three of the most important ones. When I



compare their coverage with the coverage I had in my own *Guide to the English Opening: 1...e5* (Gambit 1999), I must admit they have included a lot of new material, original analysis as well as dozens of improvements or suggestions over the existing theory. However, at some points, it appears as if they have not consulted my book as they have not even mentioned some moves that I considered stronger than the ones given by them. But on the other hand, it isn't mentioned in the bibliography. (Oh, sorry, I forgot - there is no bibliography. I don't know why one wasn't included as the Gambit books are usually very well-documented.)

Overall this book is one that I can sincerely recommend to everybody. It contains so many exciting lines that haven't been covered in detail many times before, and it is jam-packed with new ideas and improvements over existing theory. At the same time there isn't so much theory in the lines that you will drown in them. The biggest problem you will have is to choose which of the exciting lines you want to play.

My assessment of this book: 

[Order](#) *An Explosive Chess Opening  
Repertoire for Black*  
by Jouni Yrjölä and Jussi Tella

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*Meeting 1 d4* by Jacob Aagaard and Esben Lund, 2002  
Everyman Chess, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback,  
176 pp., \$19.95



In the present book two of my compatriots present "an all-in-one solution to the popular opening move 1 d4 and other White systems that do not involve 1 e4". This little quote is taken from the backcover blurb. About the authors we are told that "Aagaard is a strong International Master", which is somewhat of an exaggeration, but less than on a previous book, where the publisher told us he is Grandmaster candidate; with an ELO of 2356 we can safely say he is neither. However, he has written several interesting opening books for Everyman, all of which have been reviewed here in this column. His co-author, Esben Lund, I have not heard of before except from tournament results from Denmark, so the "Lund is a young Danish International who is well respected as an opening theorist" from the back cover may well be true.



In the introduction, the authors tell us how they have covered the material: "It is our conviction that the different lines in an opening repertoire should be learnt differently. Some lines are critical and require some theoretical knowledge to be played, while others are less critical and require a more basic understanding of where the pieces belong. This difference becomes even clearer when you work with a repertoire book of this sort, where a third of a full tournament repertoire is explained in only 176 pages. In practice this means that we have been very theoretical in the handling of the Tarrasch Defence, which is our main defence against 1 d4, while we have been writing more generically about the sidelines like the Reti, the Trompowsky and so on."

With that statement out of the way, let's look at the contents and how it's divided up:

- **White plays 1 d4**
- 1            Tarrasch Defence: Main Line with 9 Bg5 cxd4

10 Nxd4 h6 (33 pages)

- 2 Tarrasch Defence: Main Line with 9 Bg5 c4 (19 pages)
- 3 Tarrasch Defence: Main Line with 9 dxc5 (18 pages)
- 4 Tarrasch Defence: Other Ninth Moves (14 pages)
- 5 Tarrasch Defence: Sixth Move Alternatives (19 pages)
- 6 Tarrasch Defence: Fifth Move Alternatives (10 pages)
- 7 Tarrasch Defence: The Hennig-Schara Gambit (5 pages)
- 8 Tarrasch Defence: 3 Nf3 Systems (7 pages)
- 9 Other Systems after 1 d4 d5 (15 pages)
- **White Avoids 1 d4**
- 10 Reti Systems (18 pages)
- 11 Less Important First Moves (10 pages)

To start with the last first, I laughed out loud, when I noticed that the English Opening (1 c4) falls under less important first moves, and it only gets a bit more than four pages of coverage, two of which are spent on the middle- and endgame of Salov-Timman, Sanghi Nagar 1994. In addition the two others that discussed both feature the move order 1 Nf3 and then 2 c4. Aside from that the authors suggest that "on 1 c4 play 1...e6 2 Nf3 d5. Normally people here play 3 g3 Nf6, but they can, of course, also transpose back to the Tarrasch with 3 d4 c5." However, after the moves 1 Nf3 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 d5 4 Bg2 dxc4 5 Qa4+ Nbd7 6 Qxc4 a6, they only give 7 d3, 7 Qc2, 7 Qb3 and 7 0-0, while 7 d4 which transposes into the Catalan Opening isn't mentioned at all. On my database I have over 300 games starting from this position, including games by Capablanca, Alekhine, Smyslov, Denmark's Curt Hansen and several other Grandmasters. Misses like this is what often happens in repertoire books, and I have my doubts that many Tarrasch players will enjoy playing the Black side of a Catalan. The

other "less important first moves" are similarly poorly covered and can only serve as a rough guide for Black.

In Chapter Nine, I also noticed that the Blackmar-Diemer Gambit isn't covered. Although this opening is not popular at IM level or above, it is seen with some frequency at lower levels and definitely should have been included. In the same chapter, they also mention the Catalan Opening and give the following 'impressive' coverage:

"One of the great things about playing the Tarrasch is that you do not have to think too much about how you want to encounter the Catalan. You just play the Tarrasch! And if White does not want to transpose into the main lines, he must do something silly to avoid it. In most cases this will not happen, but below we shall look at a deviation.

**1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 g3 Nf6 5 Bg2 Be7 6 0-0 0-0** Now White can transpose into normal Tarrasch lines with **7 cxd5 exd5**. The one main deviation is **7 dxc5** but Black should not be any worse after **7...Bxc5 8 a3 Nc6 9 b4 Be7 10 Qc2 Bd7 11 cxd5 exd5 12 Bb2 Qc8 13 Rc1 Bf5** as in Marjanovic-Kosic, Tivat 1994."

As you might expect, I don't quite agree with this. Instead of **7 dxc5**, White can play **7 b3** or even **7 cxd5 exd5** and not follow-up with **Nc3**, but instead choose a set-up with **Nbd2**. This isn't discussed anywhere else in the book. Also after **7 dxc5 Bxc5**, White can choose **8 Bg5**. This has been tried by amongst others Romanishin, and Black has scored miserably against it (or, on my base, rather not scored at all!).

To jump back to the beginning, the first three chapters are really good. Not only is the theoretical coverage is in-depth, but the narrative and illustrations of typical ideas, both tactically and positionally, are truly excellent. The games are well-chosen and the theoretical overview is very decent too.

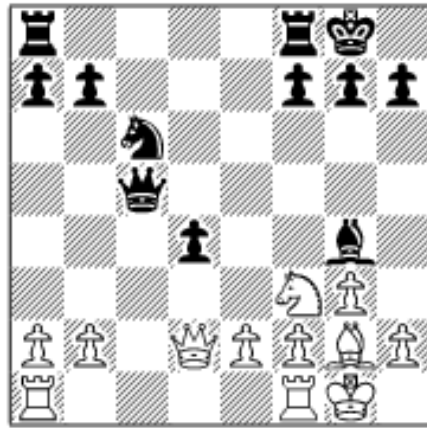
On the other hand I would argue against Chapter Seven

being included. While it's an interesting gambit and the authors come up with several interesting new ideas, the coverage is far too superficial and really doesn't do the gambit justice, whether or not it's sound.

Throughout the book the authors, do well to offer their ideas, improvements over existing theory as well as their own original analysis.

Let's take a look a couple of their new ideas:

**1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 c5 4.cxd5 exd5 5.Nf3 Nc6 6.g3 Nf6 7.Bg2 Be7 8.0-0 0-0 9.dxc5 Bxc5 10.Bg5 d4 11.Bxf6 Qxf6 12.Ne4 Qe7 13.Nxc5 Qxc5 14.Qd2 Bg4**



a) 15 Qf4, after which they suggest 15...Qf5! as best, intending 16 Qxf5 Bxf5 17 Rfd1 Rad8 18 Rd2 Rfe8 19 Rad1 f6 20 Kf1 Be4! "and Black has achieved complete equality".

b) 15 h3, which gets an '!' by the authors who write "this is the only real try White has for an

advantage". Now they quote the game Kron-Bezgodov, Pavlodar 1991, which continued 15...Bh5?!. However, they suggest the improvement 15...Bxf3 and continue 16 Bxf3 Qb6 17 Rfd1 Rfe8 18 Rac1 Rad8 "and we don't think White can claim an advantage." I'm not sure why they didn't quote the game Uogele-Goldenberg, Corr 3/4 Wch Final 1983-85, which lead to a quick draw after 15...Bxf3 16 Bxf3 Rfe8 17 Rac1 Qb5 18 b3 Rad8 19 Rc4 d3 20 Bxc6 dxe2.

**1.d4 d5 2.Nf3 c5 3.c4 e6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.g3 Nf6 6.Bg2 Be7 7.0-0 0-0 8.Nc3 Nc6 9.dxc5 Bxc5 10.Bg5 d4 11.Bxf6 Qxf6 12.Nd5 Qd8 13.Nd2 Bh3 14.Bxh3 Qxd5 15.Qb3 Qh5 16.Qxb7 Ne5 17.Qe4 Rae8 18.Kg2**, which was played in Ivanchuk-Marjanovic, Yerevan 1989. Here Black continued

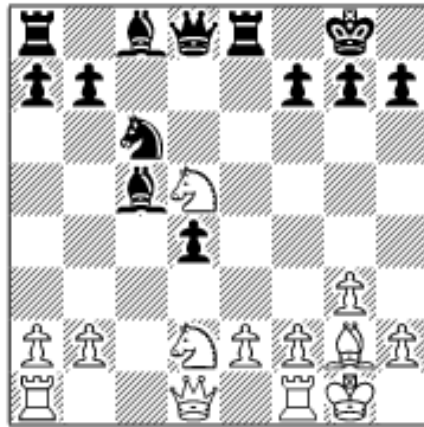
18...Nc4? and gradually lost. Instead the authors give "Black could have escaped into an only slightly worse endgame if he had held his patience and played 18...Bb6! 19 Rfd1 Nc4 20 Qf3 Qxf3+ 21 Kxf3 Nxb2 22 Rdb1 Na4 23 Bd7 Nc3 24 Bxe8 Nxb1 25 Rxb1 Rxe8. The knight is still superior to the bishop as well as the d-pawn is slightly weak. All in all, White will have good chances to win the game if he manages to bring his knight to a good square. Not necessarily d3, but this would be ideal." Aside from sentence construction, the observations and the line are correct. However, the entire line can be found on ChessBase's Megabase. In fact they add 26 Ne4 +=, as well as 18...g5! [their punctuation] 19 Bf5 f6 'unclear'. This should have been mentioned by the authors.

Finally: **1.d4 d5 2.Nf3 c5 3.c4 e6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.g3 Nf6 6.Bg2 Be7 7.0-0 0-0 8.Nc3 Nc6 9.dxc5 Bxc5 10.Bg5 d4 11.Bxf6 Qxf6 12.Nd5 Qd8 13.Nd2 a6!/? 14 Ne4 Ba7 15 Qd2**, which according the authors "is a fresh idea presented recently in a *New In Chess Magazine*", "...but we managed to find a clear refutation: 15...f5 16 Ng5 f4! 17 gxf4 (17 Ne4 f3 18 Bxf3 Rxf3 19 exf3 Qxd5 clearly favours Black) 17...h6 18 Ne4 a5!! (removing the knights only escape route) 19 Ng3 (19 f5? trying to get the knight home, loses violently to 19...Rxf5 20 Nf4 Qh4 21 Nd3 Bb8 22 Ng3 Rh5 23 h3 Bxh3!! 24 Nxh5 Bxg2 25 Kxg2 Qh2+ 26 Ke4 Bc7 and the white king is in deep trouble) 19...Be6 20 e4 dxe3 21 fxe3 Nb4 22 Rad1 Nxd5 23 Bxd5 Bxd5 24 Qxd5 Qxd5 25 Rxd5 Bxe3+ 26 Kg2 Rxf4 and Black has a slightly better endgame. Only slightly because White is quite active and the rook on a8 still needs to join the action. Probably White will be able to draw somehow." Well, if White is able to draw somehow, how is this an outright refutation? That aside, I haven't found anything wrong in above line, despite it being terribly long.

As I have mentioned many times before, a book such as this, where the theoretical material is built up around main games, of which there are 69 in this book, authors can easily 'forget' a critical line or two without it being easily discovered by the

reader. Therefore I decided to check the coverage in chapter three.

In general the coverage is pretty good, but I fell over some discrepancies. After **1.d4 d5 2.Nf3 c5 3.c4 e6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.g3 Nf6 6.Bg2 Be7 7.0-0 0-0 8.Nc3 Nc6 9.dxc5 Bxc5 10.Bg5 d4 11.Bxf6 Qxf6 12.Nd5 Qd8 13.Nd2 Re8**



a) 14 Re1 Bg4 15 Nb3 Bb6 16 Rc1 (Also 16 Nxb6 and 16 Qd2 are mentioned, but covered particularly well) 16...Ba5 17 Nxa5 Qxa5 18 b4 Nxb4!, and now they only quote the game Yusupov-Petursson, Reykjavik 1986 (my database has it as 1985), which ended after 19 Qd2 Nc6 20 Qxa5 Nxa5 21 f3 d3 22 Ra1 Bd7 ½-½. But the more critical 19 Qxd4 isn't mentioned with one word, despite it having been played by Milov, Hodgson, Halkias, Kasimdzhanov and Lerner.


b) 14 Rc1 Bb6 15 Nc4 (at this point also 15 Re1, 15 Nb3, 15 a3?, 15 Ne4?!, 15 Nf4 are covered as well) 15...Bg4 (this is the only move given although 15...Bh3!? as played in Paunovic-Todorovic, Yugoslav Team Ch 2001 is also interesting) 16 Re1 Bc5 (they also briefly mention 16...Be6!?, but ignore to mention 16...Ba5 17 Nxa5 Qxa5 which transposes to 'a') 17 a3 a6 18 b4 Ba7 19 Nf4 (sufficient attention has also been paid to the alternatives 19 Qd2 and 19 Nb2) 19...Rc8 etc.

Also 14 Nb3, 14 Nf4?! and 14 h3? are covered briefly, but adequately. Therefore, all in all, a decent coverage with a few minor slips.

As usual, there are problems with the indexes. In the present book, there is no index of variations, not even the annoying ones they usually have at the end of each chapter. How a book can do without that is beyond me. There is an index of complete games, but there are a lot of partial games that are used for illustrations of typical ideas; they are not indexed

either.

With the very good coverage of the Tarrasch, people who play this as Black will want to have this book, but if you don't have any interest in Tarrasch, this book isn't an obligatory buy.

My assessment of this book: 

[Order](#) *Meeting 1 d4*  
by Jacob Aagaard & Esben Lund

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*Meeting 1 e4* by Aleksander Raetsky, 2002 Everyman Chess, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 159 pp, \$19.95

The author's name may not be a familiar one to most of us, but from the back cover, we learn that "Raetsky is a Russian International Master and an experienced competitor on the tournament circuit. He's also a skilled writer and has been a frequent contributor to the famous Russian magazine *64* and the internationally renowned publication *New In Chess*."



Well, enough for introductions. The present book presents us with a repertoire against 1 e4 based on the Sicilian Defence. This of course is not the first time that has happened; several books have done so, books by authors such as Silman, Gufeld, Marovic as well as several others. This book is, however, the first one to base it on the Four Knights Variation. This should make it interesting for a greater number of people as this line isn't one that most people are familiar with and therefore it will be, or at least it should be, relatively easy to obtain a good game or equalize with it. In



contrast, the other openings that have been chosen by other repertoire book authors are usually lines that many will already be familiar with.

In the introduction, we are being told that the book is co-authored by Maxim Chetverik, which, if true, makes me wonder why he isn't mentioned on the cover.

The contents of the book is divided as follows:

- **White Plays with d2-d4**
- **(1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e6)**
- 1 Four Knights: Main Line with 7 Nd6+ (6 pages)
- 2 Four Knights: Main Line with 7 Bf4 (8 pages)
- 3 Four Knights: Main Line with 7 a3 (15 pages)
- 4 Four Knights: 6 Nxc6 (16 pages)
- 5 Four Knights: 6 Be2 and 6 a3 (9 pages)
- 6 Four Knights: 6 Be3 (7 pages)
- 7 Four Knights: 6 g3 (9 pages)
- **White Avoids d2-d4**
- 8 Rossolimo Variation (24 pages)
- 9 c3 Sicilian (26 pages)
- 10 Closed Sicilian (7 pages)
- 11 Morra Gambit (6 pages)
- 12 Grand Prix Attack (8 pages)
- 13 2 g3 (6 pages)

A few lines seem to be missing from the curriculum: the Wing Gambit 2 b4, the King's Indian Attack 3 d3, as well as the lines with 3 b3 and 3 c4. In my opinion, all of these should be covered in a proper repertoire book for Black in the Sicilian, but in this book we have to do without them. Fortunately, none of these lines are seen particular often.

Going through the main line chapters 1-3, I have to compliment Raetsky for his thorough coverage and choice of main games. In chapter two, I did find a minor thing. He is quoting the following game:

**Polgar,J - Maskova,J** Novi Sad OL (Women) 1990  
**1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e6 6.Ndb5 Bb4 7.Bf4 Nxe4 8.Qf3 d5 9.0-0-0 Bxc3 10.Nc7+ Kf8 11.bxc3 g5 12.Bg3 Nxc3 13.Qxc3 Rb8 14.Bb5**, and here Black continued with 14...Qe7?!, but after 15.Bxc6 bxc6 16.Nxe6+ Bxe6 17.Qxb8+ Kg7 18.Qg3 Rd8 19.Rhe1, Black had no compensation for the exchange. Instead of 14...Qe7?!, Polgar suggested 14...f5! as improvement, giving 15 h4!? f4 16 Qxc3 Qxd7 17 Bxc6 bxc6 18 Qf6+ Kg8 19 Rd4 e5 20 Re1 Qg7 21 Qd8+ Qf8 22 Qg5 with a draw. This has been quoted by Raetsky, but to me it seems like 19...h6! intending ...Qg7 is much better. The point is that 19...h6 takes the g5-square away from the White queen and he therefore will not have the perpetual available after ...Qg7. In any case, I think White will have hard time proving sufficient compensation for the piece.

In Chapter Three, the critical line of the Four Knights Sicilian is presented. After a page long discussion of the positional and strategical elements of the pawn structure that usually arises in this line (1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e6 6 Ndb5 Bb4 7 a3 Bxc3+ 8 Nxc3 d5 9 exd5 exd5), we are presented with the main games. In the first game though, we see Shirov play 9 Bd3 against Grischuk, who replied with 9...d4. Raetsky also covers 9...dxe4, which he considers better for White and 9...Ne5 which he finds adequate for Black. But on this last point, I think he a little dismissive of White's chances. He writes: "After 10 exd5 Nxd3+ 11 Qxd3 Nxd5 12 Nxd5 Qxd5 13 Qxd5 exd5 14 Be3 (Moldovan-Chernov, Bucharest 1992) the opposite-coloured bishops rendered White's advantage insignificant." But in the game White won rather convincingly, and although Black gave himself more trouble than absolutely necessary, it is clear who has the edge and who is playing for a win.

After 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e6 6 Ndb5 Bb4 7 a3 Bxc3+ 8 Nxc3 d5 9 exd5 exd5 10 Bd3 0-0 11

0-0 d4 12 Ne4 Bf5 13 Bg5 Bxe4 14 Bxe4 h6, Raetsky cover two moves 15 Bh4 and 15 Bxf6. While the former is considered fine for Black, the latter scores quite well for White, which I think Raetsky fails to make the reader sufficiently aware of. After 15 Bxf6 Qxf6, he looks at 16 Bxc6, 16 Qf3 and 16 Re1, all of which fail to produce any tangible edge for White. But what he doesn't mention is that 16 Qd3 scores well for White, and led to a win for White in Zapata-Lima, Santos 2001, and 16 f4!? as played in Pyhälä-Kivisto, Finnish Ch (Helsinki) 1987, is another noteworthy idea, taking away the e5-square from Black's knight on c6. Also if White continues with 12 Ne2, I found several cases where Raetsky has ignored lines for White that clearly are more critical than the ones given in the book.

However, in general his coverage is pretty thorough and despite the approach of building the theory up around main games (instead of the, in my opinion, superior variation tree), he includes most required lines.

Before rounding off this review, I have to mention that against the Morra Gambit he has recommended the dubious (at least in my opinion) Siberian Variation: 1 e4 c5 2 d4 cxd4 3 c3 dxc3 4 Nxc3 Nc6 5 Nf3 e6 6 Bc4 Qc7 7 0-0 Nf6, that in its early days led to several quick disasters for White after 8 Qe2 Ng4 9 h3?? Nd4! 0-1 (which is how I even once won a game). Raetsky fails to mention some of the more critical choices for White, such as 7 Qe2 Nf6 8 e5 Ng4 9 Bf4 d5 10 Bd3!?.

Overall, Raetsky has done a good job of covering a repertoire for Black in the Sicilian, and although he has missed a few of the minor sidelines and some critical choices for White here and there, this is a good repertoire book.

**My assessment of this book:** 

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by Aleksander Raetsky

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<i><b>The Ratings</b></i>
 — <b>A poor book, not recommended.</b>
 — <b>Not a particularly good book, but perhaps useful for some readers.</b>
 — <b>A useful book.</b>
 — <b>Good book, recommended.</b>
 — <b>Excellent book, highly recommended.</b>

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