



## COLUMNISTS

### Checkpoint

Carsten Hansen



#### Reviewed this month:

#### ***Modern Practice: 1...Nc6!?***

by Igor Berdichevsky

#### ***Orangutan 1.b4 A00***

by Viktor Ivanov

#### ***Challenging the Sicilian with 2.a3!?***

by Alexei Bezgodov

#### ***Tactics in the Chess Opening 2 - Open Games***

by A.C. van der Tak & Friso Nijboer

#### ***Chess Openings - the easy way***

by Nick de Firmian

## Offbeat Ideas

This month we review three titles from Russia, all devoted to unusual openings, and all written by very strong players, two are by grandmasters and one by an international master. The next title is aimed at average players and the last at beginners, but both books have a lot to offer. Enjoy!

*Modern Practice: 1...Nc6!?* by Igor Berdichevsky, 2004 Russian Chess House, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Hardcover, 198 pp., \$19.95

The previous three volumes in this series covered major opening systems such as the King's Indian Defence, the Sicilian Defence and the French Defence, so the present volume is a surprising choice. However, there are relatively few books written on this topic. I only recall a couple by Hugh Myers, one by Orlov, and I know of one other that is currently being written.



The author is a GM, rated above 2500, but has remarkably few games in the usual databases. Those that I found saw him playing 1...Nc6, so his knowledge about the opening could well be in order.

There are at least two pure 1...Nc6 openings amongst those covered in this volume, along with many related openings. Every game is constructed to fit into the framework of the given opening, and then later the true move-order is revealed. However, not all of these transpositions should really be covered to such a degree. For instance, 1 e4 Nc6 2 d4 e5 3 Nf3 exd4 4 Nxd4 is the Scotch Opening, but what sense does it make to include it if 4...g6 is the only move that is examined? This is not a repertoire book, but one which aims to illustrate typical ideas and plans, as well as offer some opening theory pertaining to the variation in question, and games from the Scotch don't belong in that group.

Like the other books in this series, the present volume contains very little textual content, aside from a preface and a brief introduction to each of the two parts. All text is given in four languages: English, German, Russian and Spanish, but it might as well have been absent. First of all, it is too brief to be of any value. Secondly, they are not particularly well-written, as is shown by the following selection from the introduction to part one:

“1.e4 Nc6 leads to the most varied and original likes of play, the choice of which depends on the taste of the player. Transpositions are subsequently possible into positions, the strategic essence of which is typical of the French Defence or Scandinavian Defence, the Pirc-Ufimtsev Defence or the Ruy Lopez. After 1 e4 Nc6 2 d4 e5 3 Nf3 play transposes into the Scotch Game which we illustrate with a variation that is rare but sound enough for Black.”

You can understand it, but it isn't pretty! The same, by the way, goes for the German translation. My Spanish and Russian aren't sufficient to give a qualified opinion on those translations, but hopefully at least the latter is okay.

I also need to comment on the preface which tells us:

“Of the great master from the past who made contributions to the development of the 1...Nc6 opening, we should mention in particular Aron Nimzowitsch and Efim Bogoljubow and of modern players - grandmasters Bent Larsen and Anthony Miles.”

It seems strange to mention Bogoljubow and then proceed to only include one game by him in the entire book. It would be more logical to mention those players who have made contributions to the development of 1...Nc6, such as Mestrovic or the American grandmasters Benjamin and Christiansen, who have both helped popularize

the Knight's Tango.

The contents of the book are given as complete games with language-less annotations, similar to Chess Informant, although they have a couple of symbols that are exclusive to this series like 'TM' which indicates a thematic plan or idea in a particular line.

The material is divided as follows:

- Preface (4 pages)
- Code System (2 pages)
- Part One: 1 e4 Nc6 (20 subsections - 118 pages)
- Part Two: 1 d4 Nc6 (13 subsections - 51 pages)
- Index (5 games)
- 50 Positions (9 pages)
- Solutions (5 pages)
- Contents (2 pages)

Each of the subsections is like a small chapter, numbered but without any kind of separate introduction. Because of the numerous transpositions to other openings, the author could have done a much better job pointing out which subsections are proper 1...Nc6 openings. I only found one example of him actually indicating the transposition. Less experienced players may not be familiar with the transposing possibilities and various ECO codes.

The book contains a total of 331 games, and all of the games contain some sort of annotation, although not all are annotated equally well. Many only contain a few references to other games from that particular opening and then have some sporadic annotation symbols, while others have more extensive comments. I wish the presentation had been somewhat more balanced, even at the cost of a few games, because barely annotated games serve no purpose.

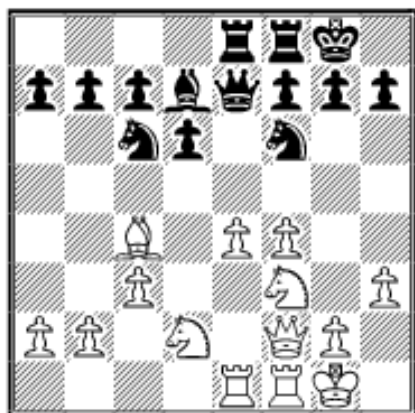
That being said, the book contains an overwhelming amount of interesting chess and it is a gold mine for those who love creative chess. I will present two games that deserve a wider audience. They received sparse annotations in the book, which are included, although I have translated the symbols to text.

Black's play in the first game would have made Nimzowitsch himself proud:

***M.Rytshagov-Valkesalmi, K***  
Jyvaskyla 1998

**1 e4 Nc6 2 d4 e5 3 dxe5 Nxe5 4 f4 Nc6 5 Bc4 Bb4+ 6 c3 Ba5 7 Nf3 Bb6!**  
[7...Qe7 8 Qe2 Bb6 9 Nbd2 d6 10 Bd3 Nf6 11 Nc4! with a slight advantage for White]  
**8 Qe2 d6 9 Be3 Bxe3 10 Qxe3 Nf6 11 Nbd2 Qe7 12 0-0 0-0 13 Rae1 Bd7 14 h3 Rae8 15 Qf2**

[With a slight advantage for White due to his space advantage]



**15...Kh8!**

[CH: Bravo! This move and the next are the key to Black managing White's space advantage.]

**16 e5 Ng8!**

[TM - Thematic manoeuvre]

**17 exd6 Qxd6 18 Ng5 Rxe1 19 Rxe1 Nd8!**

[TM - Thematic manoeuvre]

**20 Nde4 Qc6 21 Qc5 Re8 22 Rd1 Nh6!**

**23 Qd4 Re7 24 Nc5 Nf5 25 Qf2 h6 26 Bd5 Qg6 27 Nge4 b6 28 Nxd7 Rxd7 29**

**Bb3= 1/2-1/2**

The next game includes the late, great and always original Tony Miles, who wrote about the tournament that this game is from in his [ChessCafe](#) column. The article, *An Ohrid Time*, was featured in *Heroic Tales: The Best of Chess Café.com* and can still be found in the [ChessCafe Archives](#).

**Fedorchuk - A.Miles**

Ohrid 2001

**1 e4 Nc6 2 d4 e5 3 dxe5 Nxe5 4 Nc3 Bc5 5 f4 Nc6 6 Nf3 d6 7 Na4!?**

[To win the bishop pair]

**7...Bb6**

[7...Bb4 8 c3 Ba5 9 b4]

**8 Bd3 d5!**

[with counterplay - TM - Thematic manoeuvre]

**9 Nxb6 axb6 10 e5 Nge7**

[Weakness on f5]

**11 0-0 Bf5 12 Nh4 Bxd3 13 Qxd3 Qd7 14 Bd2 Qg4 15 Be1 0-0 16 h3 Qd7**

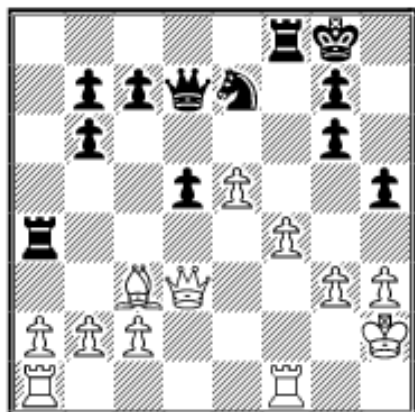
**17 Bd2 Ra4! 18 Bc3 Ng6! 19 Nxg6 fxg6!**

[TM - thematic manoeuvre]

**20 g3 Ne7 21 Kh2 h5!**

[With a slight advantage for Black. The bishop on c3, and the e4- and f5-squares]

[CH: This game is a great example of playing for domination of a color complex, one of the fundamentals of positional chess]



**22 b3 Re4 23 Rae1 Qc6 24 Bd2 Nf5 25**

**Qc3 h4! 26 gxh4 Nxh4 27 Qxc6 bxc6 28**

**Kg3 Nf5+ 29 Kg4 Kf7 30 Rxe4 dxe4 31**

**Re1 Rd8 32 Be3 Rd1! 33 Re2 Ke6**

[With a clear advantage for Black]

**34 Bf2 Rf1 35 a4 c5 36 a5 bxa5 37 Kg5**

[37 Bc5 Rf3 38 Rg2 Rc3 and Black is winning due to the king's far from ideal placing on g4]

**37...Rh1 38 Bxc5 Rxh3 39 Kxg6 Rg3+**

**40 Kh7 e3 41 Kg8 g5! 42 fxg5 Rxg5+ 43**


**Kh7 Rg7+ 44 Kh8 Rg3 45 Rh2 Kxe5**

[Black is winning]

**46 Ba3 Rg4 47 Bb2+ Ke4 48 Bc3 Rh4+ 49 Rxh4+ Nxh4 50 Bxa5 e2 51 Kg7**

## Nf3 52 Kf6 Ke3 0–1

The book is filled with gems like this one. While the overall presentation is rather uninteresting, and I find it unlikely that the target audience will learn much from just playing through a selection of loosely annotated games, there are plenty of interesting games to play over. If analyzed carefully, the games in this book can be an excellent source of inspiration. There are some ideas worth learning, especially if you want to throw some curve balls at your regular opponents at the local chess club. If these somewhat odd-looking variations can work for Miles against top grandmasters, maybe they can work for you as well.

**My assessment of this book:** 

[Order](#) *Modern Practice: 1...Nc6!?* by Igor Berdichevsky

*Orangutan 1.b4 A00* by Viktor Ivanov, 2003 Russian Chess House, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 59 pp.

This little book, or should I say pamphlet, from the same publisher has even fewer words than the one above. It has only 59 pages and is part of a series on openings that are “popular” on the club level. Other books in this series examine the Albin Countergambit, the Blumenfeld Gambit, 1.f4 (in general, and possibly excluding 1...d5?) and 1.f4 d5. I know a few players who have employed 1.b4 regularly, but I would never call it popular. The same can be said for all of these openings.



The contents are divided as follows:

- **1 b4**
- 1 1...c5 (1 page)
- 2 1...e6 (1 page)
- 3 1...f5 2 Bb2 (5 pages)
- 4 1...a5 (3 pages)
- 5 1...c6 (5 pages)
- 6 1...Nf6 2 Bb2 (7 pages)
- 7 1...d5 2 Bb2 (9 pages)
- 8 1...e5 (14 pages)
- Study Material (10 pages)

As you can see there are many short chapters, but this is okay. The material is bare text and analysis with evaluations, which tend to have a clear bias for White. In more general works this opening tends to be evaluated as equal or in some cases even better for Black. Although I don't agree that Black is better after White's rather weakening first move, neither do I agree with the notion that White gets an advantage. However, I have to applaud the author for being diligent in regards to collecting material,

analyzing and suggesting new ideas, which nearly always lead to a good game for White.

At the end of the present volume there is a selection of annotated games, but only with analysis and evaluations, so it is up to the reader to grasp what is happening, which can be difficult without verbal commentary. There are twenty games with a variety of strong players on the white side of the board, including familiar names like Reti, Alekhine, Tartakower (who named the opening), Dreev, Polugaevsky, Miles, Larsen, Spassky and the legendary 1.b4 player Sokolsky (after whom the opening is named in some places).

This small volume is clearly for enthusiasts of 1.b4, but if you feel like spicing up your repertoire with something off-beat, then this book could give you some ideas.

### My assessment of this book:

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*Challenging the Sicilian with 2.a3!?* by Alexei Bezgodov, 2004 Chess Stars, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 206 pp., \$24.95

My first reaction to this book was – has this guy lost his mind? The name Bezgodov may not immediately be recognized by the majority of chess fans, but he is a grandmaster, albeit one who hasn't played much in the West.

I don't recall having seen 2.a3 suggested previously, but as you can see from the number of pages, plenty of groundwork has already been done.



The author has divided the material as follows:

- Introduction (1 page)
- 1 2...e5 3 Nc3 (9 pages)
- 2 2...e5 3 f4 (18 pages)
- 3 2...Nc6 3 b4 (8 pages)
- 4 2...Nc6 3 b4 cb4 4 ab Nxb4 5 Ra4 (25 pages)
- 5 2...Nc6 3 b4 cb 4 ab Nxb4 5 d4 (10 pages)
- 6 2...d5 3 ed (11 pages)
- 7 2...Nf6 3 e5 (25 pages)
- 8 2...g6 3 d4; 3 b4 (23 pages)
- 9 2...g6 3 c3 (6 pages)
- 10 2...e6 3 b4 d5 4 ed; 3...b6 4 Bb2 (18 pages)
- 11 2...e6 3 b4 cb 4 ab (34 pages)
- 12 2...d6 3 b4 (7 pages)
- 13 Rare lines (3 pages)

Looking at the sheer number of pages in each chapter, it appears as if a mad scientist is feverishly working on some wacky scheme. For example, in chapter four, twenty

pages of coverage is given to 1 e4 c5 2 a3 Nc6 3 b4 cb4 4 ab Nxb4 5 Ra4, which is slightly extreme by any measure.

The present volume is packed with text and explanations. The author's excitement shines throughout the book, and if his words don't give you that impression, the amount of original analysis certainly will.

In the preface Bezgodov tells us how he produced this novel idea against the Sicilian:

“By the year 2002 I was already fed up with playing the old routine long theoretical lines of the Sicilian Defence with White. It was not that I had bad positions. No, not at all! I began to have the feeling that the universally familiar position after 1.e4 c5 should not necessarily lead to thoroughly analysed theoretical lines. Was not there any other way for White to fight for an opening advantage? I began to think that there might be some new original and untried ideas at White's disposal.

I usually play sharp tactical chess and I do not avoid complications at all. I was not attracted by timid solutions. I wanted to find a way to attack right at the very beginning of the game. I was thinking about the gambit 2.b4, but that was a bit too much and unfortunately that gambit would not withstand the analytical test successfully.

It came to my mind then “Why not prepare the move b2-b4?! This is fact has a very reasonable positional idea - to eliminate the annoying enemy c5-pawn! But not with the help of the usual d2-d4, but in some other way, so that White's d-pawn remained on the board. **Why not then 2 a3!?** [Author's emphasis]

At first it was immediately clear that White at least should not be worse after that move. Secondly the arising positions are so unusual and non-standard that practically every player might get confused right in the opening!”

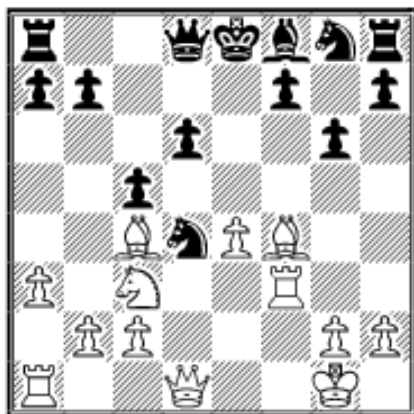
If you haven't heard about the Russian grandmaster playing this against his fellow GMs, it's because he hasn't played it in a regular tournament game yet! The only games I could find with the opening are with lower-ranked players, although it seems to have had quite a following in the Netherlands.

Since there are practically no over-the-board games to refer to, the author largely, and in some chapters nearly exclusively, draws from his own games played on the internet. He doesn't say at what time limit, but normally it wouldn't be more than three to five minutes. The game headings feature handles from the internet, rather than the names of the players. Therefore it's difficult to discern the strength of his opponents, but the ones I recognized indicate that the players are at least at a 2400+ level.

Obviously blitz games from the internet will never be a true and qualified substitute for real games, but if the players are reasonably strong, the games have some relevance. As with most other books on offbeat openings there is a strong bias for one side and a large amount of supporting analysis full of sacrifices and other exciting themes. Even books on mainstream openings like the Sicilian Dragon have suffered



from this tendency. Sacrifices and amazing lines are sexier than solid, dry lines, which is okay if the sacrifices are correct. But if one side has to play a series of fairly lame moves and it is then presented as the main line, then I have a problem with it. This book sometimes suffers from this disease, as in this line from the first chapter: **1 e4 c5 2 a3 e5 3 Nc3 Nc6 4 Bc4 d6 5 f4!? g6 6 Nf3 Bg4** (Bezgodov shows us that 6...exf4 is met strongly by 7 d4! Bg7 8 Bxf4, giving a long analysis that ends on move 22 with a winning advantage for White... Hmm) **7 0-0 exf4 8 d4! Nxd4 9 Bxf4! Bxf3 10 Rxf3!!**



**10...Nxf3+ 11 Qxf3 Bg7 12 e5+-.** The final position somewhat resembles one where White has played the Muzio Gambit in the King's Gambit Accepted and Black has had too much to drink to realize what was happening. This is not serious chess, but it is fun to play over and analyze.

Another thing I dislike is the extremely lengthy analysis that starts on move five and ends on move twenty-two, or thirty-one, or even longer. It is impossible to accurately analyze so deeply.

Such variations fill a great part of the book and along with the many blitz games by the author form the entire contents. Granted, this is the very first book written about this opening, so everything is virgin territory and given that the author is trying to present a viable alternative to the main line Sicilians I will allow some leeway, but sometimes it is overkill.

Yet, I do like the book. It is very entertaining and I'm amazed by the amount of work the author has put into it. It is no small accomplishment to write 206 pages about an opening that nobody has ever written about before, when you are the one people will be referring to when discussing this line in the future.

I still have my doubts about the true value of the opening, but it isn't bad. White is not worse in any of the lines I examined, and for gambit players or players, who, like Bezgodov, don't shy away from complications and thrive on messy positions, this book will be something you will enjoy. For stronger players, this line will most likely never be popular, but as a weapon on the internet with short time limits; this provocative line can be used to great effect and with only a little investment in time to study the material.

**My assessment of this book:** 

[Order](#) *Challenging the Sicilian with 2.a3!? by Alexei Bezgodov*

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*Tactics in the Chess Opening 2 - Open Games* by A.C. van der Tak & Friso Nijboer, 2004 InterChess BV, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 237 pp., \$21.95



The present volume is the second in a series of six books. The first was published last year and covered the Sicilian, and the remaining volumes are as follows: Semi-Open Games (vol. 3), Queen's Gambit (vol. 4), Indian Openings (vol. 5) and Flank Openings and Gambits (vol. 6). Both this and the first volume are revised from earlier Dutch editions that date back to 2001.



Each volume contains 250 fully annotated games featuring tactical aspects of the opening. The games are sequenced in accordance with the NIC Key, which is only used in New in Chess publications.

The openings are arranged as follows:

- King's Gambit 1 e4 e5 2 f4 (21 pages)
- Vienna Game 1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 (9 pages)
- King's Pawn Openings 1 e4 e5 (44 pages)
- Scotch Opening 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 (18 pages)
- Italian Game 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 (16 pages)
- Ruy Lopez 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 (99 pages)
- Petroff Defence 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nf6 (20 pages)
- NICKEY Open Games (2 pages)

Inside the book there is a further classification of the material by variation, so you can easily locate specific lines. The games are excellent and well-annotated with a nice mixture of familiar and lesser known games. But it is slightly strange that the authors have chosen to leave out an index of the games, which is always useful in game collections such as this. Unlike other books on tactics there are no tactical puzzles for the reader to solve, which I find to be the only thing missing in this book aside from an index.

Each game occupies a little less than a page and while they tend to be relatively short, they are not the parade of blunders often seen in collections of miniatures. Additionally, several draws are included in the book, which shows that this is not just an ordinary book by ordinary authors.

I enjoyed this book much more than I originally anticipated. The games are interesting, even when between lower ranked players, and the annotations are good and informative without being exhausting to read. This book is worth every penny, so if you happen to play 1.e4 or answer with 1...e5, then this may well be for you.

**My assessment of this book:** 

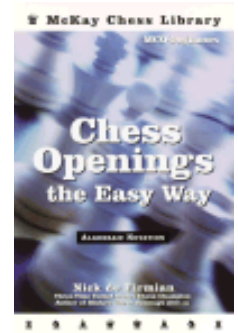
[Order](#) *Tactics in the Chess Opening 2 - Open Games*  
by A.C. van der Tak & Friso Nijboer

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*Chess Openings - the Easy Way* by Nick de Firmian, 2003 McKay, Figurine

Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 248 pp., \$15.95

This title is presented as a MCO (Modern Chess Openings) for beginners. I wasn't entirely enthusiastic about it at first sight, but the more I thought about it, the more sense it made to trim MCO into a thinner digest.



I'm always trying to convince my students that it is not necessary to spend endless hours studying reams of theory that you will never get a chance to use. It is much better to get out of the opening with an equal position, and then know how to play that position. This book gives you the chance to get a reasonable position, and then you'll have more time to study the positions that generally arise from these openings. You have no way of knowing every line you can encounter in the openings that you employ. And with this approach you will have studied the general ideas and it will be easier to make the correct decisions.

Here's how the chapters are divided:

- How to Use this Book (1 page)
- Algebraic Chess Notation (2 pages)
- List of Symbols (1 page)
- The Basics of Opening a Chess Game (14 pages)
- I. Double King Pawn Openings (18 sections - 50 pages)
- II. Semi-Open Games (13 sections - 70 pages)
- III. Double Queen Pawn Openings (6 sections - 34 pages)
- IV. Indian Defences (11 sections - 56 pages)
- V. Flank Openings (4 sections - 15 pages)
- Index (4 pages)

Each section constitutes a different set of openings, like the Sicilian Najdorf or unusual openings after 1.e4 e5. The major openings have a textual introduction followed by the variations, while lesser lines have no introduction. There were some openings that could have been given more space and some that didn't need as much space, but to make all of them fit within the framework of the present book is a considerable task. The variations are too generalized to warrant detailed discussion, but I will say that the obvious things are included, while many peripheral lines are not, which is the purpose of this book.

The book does very well meeting its target audience, although I would have done a few things differently regarding variation choices, but overall de Firmian has done a very good job. For players rated between 1400-1500 this book will serve as more than a sufficient guide, and a good building block for further opening studies.

When I started playing rated tournaments in the beginning of the 1980s I built my opening repertoire on the 1965 edition of *Åbningsspillet i skak* (Opening Play in Chess) by Bent Larsen, and despite having less than 20 pages of variations to cover all openings, it worked out well. This leads me to a higher appreciation of this book and I give it a higher recommendation than I did for the full 14<sup>th</sup> edition of MCO.

My assessment of this book: 

[Order](#) *Chess Openings - the Easy Way* by Nick de Firmian

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