



COLUMNISTS

Checkpoint

Carsten Hansen

**Reviewed this month:*****The Spanish Exchange Variation***

by Stefan Kindermann

Ruy Lopez Exchange

by Krzysztof Panczyk & Jacek Ilczuk

Petroff Defence

by Alexander Raetsky & Maxim Chetverik

Italian Game and Evans Gambit

by Jan Pinski

Chess Informant 93

by Aleksandar Matanovic et al.

Open Games

This month we'll look at a variety of books on the Open Game, a classification which comprises all openings starting with the moves 1 e4 e5. Most of the oldest openings fall into this category, including the Spanish Game (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5) or Ruy Lopez as it is called, named after the 15th century Spanish priest who first recorded it; and the Italian Game (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5). Openings of newer vintage include the Evans Gambit (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 b4) and the Petroff (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nf6), also known as the Russian Game, both of which were first played in the 19th century. I'll also briefly examine the latest Informant from Sahovski Informator in Belgrade and I would like to mention that the theoretical articles on the TWIC website have returned and I recommend that you check them out.

The Spanish Exchange Variation by Stefan Kindermann, Edition Olms 2005, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 124 pp., \$25.00

I was immediately excited at the prospect of this book because Kindermann's treatises on the French Winawer and Leningrad Dutch were simply outstanding. However, I was rather underwhelmed upon receiving it because it is such a slim volume. Still, we shouldn't let our first impressions guide us. It is prudent to examine the evidence before reaching a verdict.



The book begins with a historical introduction that is somewhat insipid and includes four very familiar games: Lasker-Capablanca, St. Petersburg 1914, Fischer-Unzicker, Siegen OL 1970, Fischer-Gligoric, Havana OL 1966, and Fischer-Spassky, Sveti Stefan 1992, each of which are only annotated by a few exclamation and question marks. The second chapter is titled "The structure of this book and how to use it," which fills only one page and informs us the book offers a repertoire for White with a recommendation for Black on how to best meet this opening.

We are told that Kindermann plays the opening himself (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Bxc6), which always adds to the credibility of a book; however, I only found eight games in which Kindermann played this opening with white and these all ended in draws. So it seems strange that he is recommending an opening in which he hasn't won a single game. Following the introduction, Kindermann, to his credit, doesn't just jump to the theoretical coverage as most books tend to do. Instead, he provides a chapter on typical positions: The Typical Pawn Ending, The Pawn Ending in Practice, White's Play on the Kingside: The Phalanx, White's Play in the Centre, White's Play on the Queenside and in the Centre, and White's Play on the Queenside. Yet, the material only takes up a total of thirteen pages with a lot of surrounding white-space, so the reader could certainly ask for more from this section.

The theoretical coverage is contained in part three, which comprises 69 of the book's 124 pages. The main flaw here is that there are far too many complete games in the notes and these games are often unannotated, making the book look too much like a database dump. There are a fair amount of insightful explanations and original pieces of analysis, which will be attractive to those practitioners of this opening, but compared to the overall content there simply isn't enough of the good stuff in this book.

As you work your way through it you can't help but get the impression that the author was struggling to fill the pages or perhaps was indifferent about putting in a good effort. The evidence is rampant: too many complete games in the notes, too many diagrams (often 3-4 per page), lots of white space on the pages – and a whopping 30 pages, nearly 25% of the entire book, are spent on indexes: index of variations (17 pages!), a translator's note (1 page), Index of players (4 pages), Index of games (6 pages), Key to symbols (1 page) and Bibliography (1 page).

The overall verdict is one thumb way down.

My assessment of this book: 

Order *The Spanish Exchange Variation*
by Stefan Kindermann

Ruy Lopez Exchange by Krzysztof Panczyk & Jacek Ilczuk, Everyman Chess 2005, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 192 pp., \$23.95

The authors of this book are the Polish tandem of Panczyk and Ilczuk, who wrote a very thorough work on the Cambridge Springs Variation in the Queen's Gambit Declined and a reasonably good book on the King's Indian. They are very good when it comes to author input, improvements over existing theory and original analysis, but their books tend to be short on strategic explanations and can be rather boring because of the straightforward presentation of the material. This book is no exception.



The contents are divided as follows:

- Bibliography (1 page)
- Introduction (4 pages)
- **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Bxc6**
- 1 Sidelines (29 pages)
- 2 4...dxc6 5 0-0: Fifth Move Alternatives for Black (24 pages)
- 3 4...dxc6 5 0-0 Bg4 (23 pages)
- 4 4...dxc6 5 0-0 Qd6 (39 pages)
- 5 The Main Line: 4...dxc6 5 0-0 f6 6 d4 Bg4 (30 pages)
- 6 The Main Line: 4...dxc6 5 0-0 f6 6 d4 exd4 (36 pages)
- Index of Complete Games (3 pages)

The authors cover what they think is most important and don't explore what they deem is unnecessary. If they take a game fragment or an evaluation from ECO, they credit ECO, which may be slightly excessive, but that's how they operate. They quote their sources and don't lay claim to the opinions of others. However, this book isn't a collection of borrowed evaluations; the authors have supplied us with hundreds of new ideas and re-evaluations over existing theory. Often it is only a move or two here and there, but other times they provide good chunks of analysis to support their opinions. This is great for people interested in this line and makes a worthwhile reason to buy the book.

The Ruy Lopez Exchange has the reputation of being a rather dull, drawish opening, but I was quite surprised to discover that a high percentage of the games between 2500+ rated players ended decisively. This is oddly similar to the book itself, it's not very exciting and somewhat dull, but once you're familiar with it, you get much more out of it.

The authors should have invested a little more space and time in explaining the strategic ideas, which might have motivated more players to take up this opening. As it is, it will most likely appeal only to those who already play it or those who allow it as Black. Nevertheless, these players will be satisfied with the high amount of original input by the authors.

My assessment of this book: 

Order *Ruy Lopez Exchange*

by Krzysztof Panczyk & Jacek Ilczuk

Petroff Defence by Alexander Raetsky & Maxim Chetverik, Everyman Chess 2005, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 191 pp., \$19.95

The Petroff Defence is another opening with a rather dull reputation, but this is far from the opening's fault because most lines in the Petroff are actually both complicated and fascinating. The opening's poor reputation comes from the top players only choosing the safest and most boring lines. However, if you read the present book or the excellent *Beating the Petroff* by Kotronias and Tzermiadianos you see a diverse panorama which is at times positional, tactical, messy, confusing and only occasionally boring.



Raetsky has played the opening for more than 20 years and knows it exceedingly well and obviously wouldn't continue playing it if he didn't firmly believe in the validity and solidity of the opening, so a slight bias for Black in the current volume can be excused. However, they would have been well-served by reading the book by Kotronias and Tzermiadianos, because the Greek authors managed to produce plenty of analysis to pose problems for Black in nearly all the lines. Many of their suggestions were deeply complicated and original, and when these ideas are not being challenged in a more recent book, it may leave some players stranded. Therefore, players from the white side might wish to consult this older work.

The material is divided as follows:


- Bibliography (1 page)
- Introduction (2 pages)
- **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nf6**
- 1 3 Nxe5: The Main Line with 8 c4 (27 pages)
- 2 3 Nxe5: The Main Line with 8 Re1 (13 pages)
- 3 3 Nxe5: Black Plays 6...Bd6 (22 pages)
- 4 3 Nxe5: Deviations from the Main Line (11 pages)
- 5 3 Nxe5: Fourth and Fifth Move Alternatives for White (24 pages)
- 6 3 d4: The Main Line (41 pages)

- 7 3 d4: 5...Bd6 and 5th Move Alternatives for Black (15 pages)
- 8 3 d4: Fourth Move Alternatives (10 pages)
- 9 3 d4: Black Plays 3...exd4 (10 pages)
- 10 Third Move Alternatives for White (11 pages)
- Index of Complete Games (3 pages)

The material is presented via complete main games with the theory built into the annotations. However, there is not much in regards to strategic discussions or highlighting of typical ideas. Therefore, the book's introduction is far too short, because it needed to serve as a strategic primer. While the games are annotated, the book mainly consists of chapters with relatively short introductions and then heavy doses of theory.

The authors certainly know their material well, it's up-to-date and there is plenty of original input. It is noteworthy that they address the line 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 Nxe5 d6 4 Nf3 Nxe4 5 Nc3 as being underestimated and one where Black should act carefully. And lo and behold, the line has become very popular and seen an extraordinary amount of action from the top players. For example, it was even tested a couple of times in San Luis at the recent World Championship tournament, although it seems like Anand managed to neutralize it as Black against Svidler.

I generally like this book, but it is aimed at a more experienced audience because of its great many pieces of analysis and the fair amount of suggested improvements over existing theory. If I still played the Petroff I would definitely buy the book. However, if you are new to the opening, this is not a starter guide.

My assessment of this book: 

[Order](#) *Petroff Defence*

by Alexander Raetsky & Maxim Chetverik

Italian Game and Evans Gambit by Jan Pinski, Everyman Chess 2005, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 160 pp., \$23.95

Aside from this volume, the young Polish international master Jan Pinski, has also recently published works covering the Four Knights and the Two Knight's Defense.

The material in the present volume is divided as follows:

- **Part One: Italian Game**
- 1 Introduction and the Italian Four Knights (6 pages)
- 2 The First Steps in the Italian Game (12 pages)
- 3 The Möller Attack and the Classical Italian Game (17 pages)



- 4 The Italian Regretted: White plays 5 d3
- **Part Two: Evans Gambit**
- 5 The Evans Gambit Declined (18 pages)
- 6 The Evans Gambit with 5...Be7 (13 pages)
- 7 The Evans Gambit with 5...Bc5 (15 pages)
- 8 The Evans Gambit: Introducing 5...Ba5 (17 pages)
- 9 The Evans Gambit: The Main Line with 5...Ba5 (20 pages)
- **Part Three: Other Lines**
- 10 The Hungarian Defence and Other Sidelines (19 pages)

It should be noted that the variation in chapter 3 is correctly spelled “Møller” and the name of chapter 4 is just poor English. I also find the contents of the book too lightweight and I don’t like it that Pinski has refrained from giving us a bibliography.

The first chapter doubles as an introduction and is practically worthless because it mostly only gives us a quote by Paul Keres, without providing the source, and tells us that 3...Nf6 is probably better than 3...Bc5, but then it may only be a matter of taste. Later, he calls 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 0-0 Nf6 5 d4 “another silly gambit,” despite the fact that it was used to great effect in Neubauer-Arlandi at the Calvia Olympiad in 2004. A game that White won rather effortlessly, using a 7th move not even mentioned by Pinski: 5...Bxd4 6 Nxd4 Nxd4 7 Bg5!?. This move was recommended by Estrin and duly mentioned in his book *Gambits*.

The next chapter discusses the line 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 c3 Qe7, which rather strangely is evaluated as equal in ECO, but Pinski, to his credit, claims an edge for White with two different 11th move alternatives to ECO’s main line.

In chapter 3, Pinski recommends a move and gives a piece of analysis without referring to the game in which the “improvement” was played or mentioning the name of the player who’s analysis he is improving on. The line in question is 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 c3 Nf6 5 d4 exd4 6 cxd4 Bb4+ 7 Nc3 Nxe4 8 0-0 Bxc3 9 d5 Na5 10 bxc3 Nxc4 11 Qd4, and now 11...f5!, which along with the moves 12 Qxc4 d6 13 Nd4 0-0 14 f3 Nc5 can all be found in ECO. Hmm!

Pinski gives other pieces of analysis that are supposed improvements over ECO, but without a bibliography we have no way of knowing what may have been “scissored” from uncredited sources. He usually doesn’t shy away from offering his own opinion and analysis, but the above material may trigger you to suspect foul play even if that’s not the case.

About 5 d3, Pinski writes in chapter 4: “Having stated once more that the line is harmless, it is important for me to repeat the old Russian distinction between drawn positions and equal positions. There are players far stronger than me who play this line regularly as White and with good results.” Yet, if they can play it with good results, the line is not harmless. It just leads to a balanced game where the player with the superior understanding of the line has better chances of winning. The coverage in this chapter is reasonably acceptable, but Pinski could easily have been more thorough given the popularity of this particular line compared to 4...Qe7 and the Møller Attack.

The coverage in the chapters on the Evans Gambit seems reasonable, albeit somewhat thin, which can also be said about the majority of the material in this book. I immediately noticed that Pinski doesn't even mention 5...Bd6!? which is becoming increasingly popular, possibly because of an article in *New in Chess* magazine. And while the move isn't mentioned in ECO, I found recently played games by five different grandmasters. This may not seem like a major flaw, but if it is a line that has been played on a grandmaster level in an opening as obscure as the Evans Gambit, then it should be cited.

The last chapter of the book covers the Hungarian Defense, which arises if Black plays 3...Be7. It is generally considered rather passive, but it's played quite frequently by grandmasters. However, the only line covered in this book is 4 d4, while the modern preference tends to be towards 4 d3 or 4 0-0 followed by 5 d3 and 6 c3. Oddly, this line was covered in Pinski's book on the Two Knights Defense, but it isn't mentioned at all in this book.

My overall impression is one of disappointment. The book is too thin and the presentation of the material is lackluster. There does seem to be a fair amount of original analysis, but its authenticity can be doubted because more than once Pinski has only added two or three moves to existing games or analysis without crediting his sources.

My assessment of this book: 

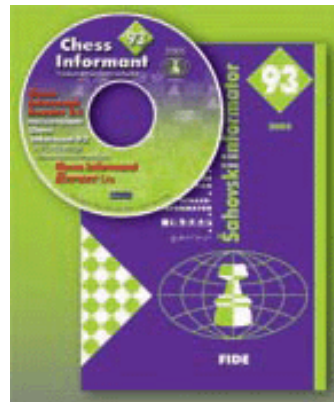
[Order](#) *Italian Game and Evans Gambit*

by Jan Pinski

Chess Informant 93 by Aleksandar Matanovic et al., Sahovski Informator 2005, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 382 pp., \$36.00

Chess Informant has been published for four decades, but they have provided me with enough chess to entertain me for another two or three lifetimes. The volumes are a source of great games that will continue to shine long after we are gone, which is essentially the value of any good book.

A highlight of the current volume, which is number 93 in the series that first began in 1966, is the section dedicated to Kasparov's numerous contributions called "Three decades of superlative contributions." Here they list the following facts that are indicative of just how much the chess world lost upon Kasparov's retirement:



- 1976: First published game - 22/730 [CH: this means volume 22, game 730]
- 1978: First annotated game - 25/97

- 2005: Linares - 7 annotated games
- 1192 published games: + 513 =587 - 92 [CH: meaning 513 wins, 587 draws, and 92 losses]
- 595 annotated games

There was a time when everyone in the top 10 or 20 annotated their games in Chess Informant, but this is no longer the case, and some games actually aren't even published nowadays. This is very unfortunate because Chess Informant should contain the best and most interesting chess that has been played. Therefore, I think they should seriously consider hiring a number of regular contributors to annotate the most outstanding games.

In the current volume, only the following elite players have annotated games (the parenthetical numbers tell how many games were published in this volume and how many they have annotated): Kasparov (9/7), Anand (12/7), Topalov (13/0), Leko (8/0), Ivanchuk (23/19), Svidler (5/0), Kramnik (6/2), Bacrot (3/0), Grischuk (7/5), and Adams (13/10). From this list we can see that there are very few games from the top players and often they are not even annotated.

Moreover, the lack of games from the younger generation of grandmasters is worrisome. US Champion Hikaru Nakamura and Alexander Volokitin from the Ukraine are barely represented. Amongst the ladies, Judit Polgar is completely absent, and only Kosteniuk seems to have made a contribution. None of the other top female players have annotated a game of their own for publication. This is indeed a sad development, which the folks at Chess Informant must try and rectify.

Chess Informant is one of the greatest chess publications and it should be read by every serious chess player because it contains so much terrific material. Buy one and see for yourself.

My assessment of this book: 

[Order](#) *Chess Informant 93*

by Aleksandar Matanovic et al.



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