



COLUMNISTS

Checkpoint

Carsten Hansen



Reviewed this month:

The Fearsome Four Pawns Attack
by Jerzy Konikowski & Marek Soszynski

Play 1...b6
by Christian Bauer

Bird's Opening
by Timothy Taylor

The Hippopotamus Rises
by Andrew Martin

The Chigorin Defence
by Valery Bronznik

Fearsome and Fun Openings

When you think about it, chess is really an amazing game; there is a constant supply of books being released on opening theory, and yet there is a nearly endless amount of territory to cover. In this column we will be dealing with five recent books that deal with openings that have not been written about for quite some time.

The Fearsome Four Pawns Attack by Jerzy Konikowski & Marek Soszynski, Russell Enterprises 2005, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 283 pp., \$24.95

The Four Pawns Attack in the King's Indian has never been particularly popular, but it has always had a steady following amongst those who want to grab an immediate initiative, with the aim of crushing Black's counterplay before it gets started. However, this is easier said than done and if Black knows his stuff, he should be perfectly okay. Still, as with many sharp openings that are not popular at grandmaster level, there are plenty of ideas and alternatives that have not been sufficiently explored, and books like this one aim to make up for this deficiency.



Jerzy Konikowski is a renowned theoretician, who often contributes to *ChessBase Magazine* and is the author of numerous books on a great variety of openings. His co-author, Marek Soszynski, also co-wrote (with Jan Przewoznik) the highly acclaimed and very interesting book, *How to Think in Chess*.

Let's look at how they divided the material:

- Foreword (1 page)
- Introduction (9 pages)
- **1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 f4 0-0 6 Nf3 c5**
- 1 6...e5 (8 pages)
- 2 6...Na6 (14 pages)
- 3 6...Bg4 (7 pages)
- 4 7 dxc5 (18 pages)
- 5 7 Be2 (9 pages)
- 6 7...b5 (21 pages)
- 7 8 dxe6 (9 pages)
- 8 9 exd5 (21 pages)
- 9 9 e5 (19 pages)
- 10 9...Bg4 (32 pages)
- 11 9...b5 (13 pages)
- 12 9...Na6 (5 pages)
- 13 9...Nbd7 (5 pages)
- 14 10 Nd2 (31 pages)
- 15 12 0-0 (7 pages)
- 16 12 Bg5 Qa5 (7 pages)
- 17 12 Bg5 f6 (14 pages)
- 18 12 Bg5 Qb6 (23 pages)
- Index of Variations (2 pages)
- Index of Annotated Games (3 pages)

My objection to the contents page is that after chapter five it is not immediately apparent which moves preceded the ones being discussed. For people with an intimate knowledge of the opening, it is possible to discern without too much difficulty, but newcomers will have to check

each individual chapter or the index in the back of the book.

In the Foreword, the authors write:

This is a traditional opening work rather than a one-sided repertoire book or a wordy primer, although we do explain some typical plans and maneuvers along the way. We based the book closely on tournament practice and printed analysis, but we reassessed an enormous amount of material and added fresh suggestions and further analysis of our own, printed here for the first time.

While this may have been their original intention, I get the distinct impression that the authors decided which moves were currently the most critical for Black to face and gave preference to these, while moves that were not considered as problematic have been pushed aside.

The introduction starts out by explaining some of the basic ideas, but then becomes a rundown of lines not discussed further in the book, which I found rather odd. Meanwhile, the chapters themselves vary in quality; some seem thoroughly researched and are filled with new ideas and original pieces of analysis, whereas others look like they were hurriedly written and contain more-or-less complete games, with a few suggestions here and there, but nothing substantial.

Generally speaking, the authors do a reasonably good job of avoiding blunders, but offering original analysis is not always rewarded, particularly when the analysis proves to be faulty or insufficiently explored, as interesting possibilities sometimes lie just below the surface. One such example is the following:

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 f4 0-0 6 Nf3 c5 7 d5 e6 8 Be2 exd5 9 exd5



This is generally considered harmless, but I was once fascinated with White's attacking possibilities and it was relatively easy to obtain an advantage, since most King's Indian players did not know it very well.

9...Bf5 10 0-0 Ne4 11 Nxe4 Bxe4 12 Ng5 Re8 13 f5 Bxf5

13...Bd4+ 14.Kh1 Bxf5 15.Bd3 Bxd3 16.Qxd3 (the alternative 16.Nxf7 is

interesting, but ultimately better for Black after 16...Bxf1 17.Nxd8 Be2 18.Qe1 Nd7) 16...Bf6 (this is a suggestion by the authors as an

improvement over 16...f6?!, for which they quote a game that led to a clear advantage for White) 17.Ne4 Be5 18.Bg5, and White has nearly full compensation for the pawn. This line is far more interesting than the line given in the book.

14.Bd3 Bxd3

Also after 14...h6 15.Nxf7 Kxf7, there is much more work to do: 16.Bxf5 (16.g4 is, as the authors indicate, not as good as some theorists claim: 16...Bd4+ 17.Kh1 (17.Kg2 doesn't make much difference: 17...Qh4 18.gxf5 g5 19.h3 h5 20.Qf3 Nd7 with a pleasant game for Black) 17...Qh4 18.gxf5 g5 19.Qf3 Nd7, and Black has absolutely nothing to worry about) 16...gxf5 17.Qh5+ Kg8 18.Bxh6 Re7 (according to the authors "Black should be alright" after this move, but I don't think it's that clear. The alternative 18...Re5, isn't too promising either: 19.Bxg7 Kxg7 20.Rxf5 Rxf5 21.Qxf5, and Black will be struggling to both defend his king and get his pieces properly in play before it is too late) 19.Bxg7 Rxg7 20.Qxf5 Qg5 21.Qf8+ Kh7 22.Rf2, and although White only has two pawns for piece, Black will not be able to develop his pieces on the queenside without further material loss.

15.Qxd3 Bf6

This is given an exclamation point and called "the best defense." However, Black also has a good option in 15...Re7!?, which isn't mentioned by the authors, who only give the worse 15...Rf8?. A possible continuation is: 16.Ne4 f5 17.Ng5 Bd4+ 18.Kh1 Qb6 19.Ne6 Nd7, with a decent game for Black.

16.Ne4

As the authors correctly point out, 16.Nxf7 Kxf7 17.Bg5 Nd7 18.Rxf6+ Nxf6 19.Rf1 Kg8 20.Bxf6 Qd7 is relatively unproblematic for Black.

16...Bd4+ 17.Kh1 Nd7

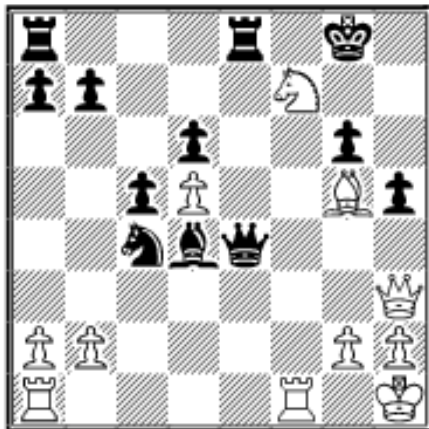
17...f5 18.Ng5 Nd7 19.Ne6 Ne5 20.Qg3 the authors state that White has compensation for the pawn, quoting the game Malich-Paehtz, Bad Woerishofen 1998. However, Black appears to have a very pleasant game after 20...Qd7, threatening the pawn on c4 and in some lines even ...Rxe6, with more than adequate compensation for exchange. Given how many games have been quoted extensively, even after the opening battle was decided in favor of one of the players, it certainly would have made sense to give us a little bit more of this game.

18.Bf4 Ne5 19.Qh3 Nxc4 20.Ng5 h5 21.Nxf7 Qe7

An interesting alternative is 21...Qc7 22.Bxd6?! (the authors only

examine 22 Ng5!?, which they correctly deem as “hard to assess” after some analysis) 22...Nxd6 23.Qg3 Bg7 24.Qxd6 Qxd6 (24...Re7 may actually be even better for Black) 25.Nxd6 Red8 26.Nxb7 Rxd5, and Black has slightly better chances in the endgame.

22.Bg5 Qe4



This is the main line.

a) 22...Qc7? 23.Nh6+ Kh8 24.Rf7 Qa5 25.Qh4 Bg7 26.Bf6 Rg8 27.Bxg7+ Rxd7 28.Qf6, winning.

b) 22...Qxf7? 23.Rxf7 Kxf7 24.Rf1+ (CH: 24.g4!? can also be considered) 24...Kg8 25.g4 Rf8 26.gxh5 Rxf1+ 27.Qxf1 Ne5 28.Be7, and White is winning.

c) 22...Qe2!? goes unmentioned in the book, but it may be a worthwhile alternative, as the main line holds some stumbling blocks for Black that have yet to be resolved. One line goes 23.Qd7 Ne3 24.Bxe3 Qxe3 25.Qxb7 Qe7 26.Qc6 Bxb2 27.Rab1 Rf8 28.Rxb2 Rae8 29.Rbb1 Rxf7 30.Rxf7 Qxf7 31.Qxd6 c4, with a complicated endgame ahead.

23.Nh6+?!


This more or less forces the draw, but White has an excellent possibility at this juncture: 23.Qd7! Bxb2 24.Rab1 Rf8 25.Bh6 Qg4 26.Qxb7 Rfb8 27.Qc6 Kh7 28.Nxd6 Nxd6 29.Bf4, and White should have a reasonably big advantage.

23...Kh8

As the authors indicate, 23...Kh7 is dangerous for Black on account of 24.Qd7+ Kh8 25.Nf7+ Kg8 26.Nd8, e.g. 26...Ne3 27.Rf3 Rxd8 28.Bxd8 Nf5 29.Raf1 with clearly better chances for White.

24.Nf7+ Kg8 25.Nh6+ with a draw by repetition.

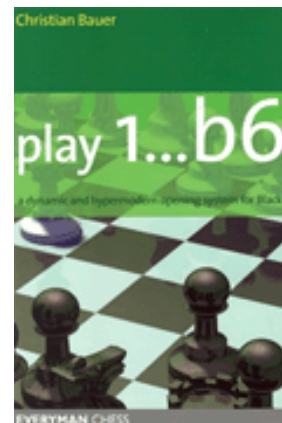
As we can see, the authors definitely explore plenty of ground, but with a little more effort they could really have pushed the boundaries even further. Despite some excessive and over-long game references, as well as some loose analysis, this is a very interesting work that fans of the Four Pawns Attack will appreciate. Overall, I like the book very much and recommend it, no matter which side of the board you play, since Black is likely to face some pretty scary stuff from opponents armed with ideas from this book.

My assessment of this book: 

Order *The Fearsome Four Pawns Attack*
by Jerzy Konikowski & Marek Soszynski

Play 1...b6 by Christian Bauer, Everyman Chess 2005, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 224 pp., \$23.95

The subject for French grandmaster Christian Bauer's first English-language book is 1...b6, which encompasses both Owen's Defense (1 e4 b6) and the English Defense (1 c4 b6 or 1 d4 e6 2 c4 b6). I'm not aware of any book that has covered all of these lines in one volume, nor of any recent book that has devoted a considerable amount of space to Owen's Defense. Furthermore, it is rare for a top grandmaster to write about an opening that he actually plays; I guess they are not overly keen on revealing their opening secrets.



The material is divided as follows:

- Introduction (2 pages)
- **Part 1: 1 e4 b6**
 - 1 e4 b6: Introduction (17 pages)
 - 1 e4 b6 2 d4 Bb7 3 Bd3 (18 pages)
 - 1 e4 b6 2 d4 Bb7 3 Nc3 e6 4 Nf3 Bb4 5 Bd3 (19 pages)
- **Part 2: 1 d4 b6**
 - 1 d4 b6 2 c4 Bb7 3 Nc3 e6 4 a3 f5 (20 pages)
 - 1 d4 e6 2 c4 b6 3 Nc3 (11 pages)
 - 1 d4 e6 2 c4 b6 3 e4 Bb7 (22 pages)
- **Part 3: 1 c4 b6**
 - 1 c4 b6: Introduction (26 pages)
 - 1 c4 b6 2 Nc3 Bb7 3 e4 e6 4 Nf3 (26 pages)
- **Part 4: 1 Nf3 b6**
 - 1 Nf3 b6: Introduction (16 pages)
 - 1 Nf3 b6 2 g3 Bb7 3 Bg2 g6 4 0-0 Bg7 (12 pages)
- Index of Complete Games (7 pages)
- Index of Variations (3 pages)

Bauer, in his introduction, states:

1) First of all the theory of 1...b6 is not as well-developed as for (sic) more orthodox systems. Openings that are not played by the

world's top players can be underestimated; this often means your opponent will be badly prepared and will soon have to think for himself, which is always good news!

2) Another point for Black is the flexibility of his formation. He may use his f-pawn to gain extra control of the e4-square, decide to put his dark-squared bishop on g7 or on e7, or sometimes even on b4, depending on White (sic) does. All in all this will leave a free course to imaginative players.

Bauer certainly believes in the validity of his opening and has played it against very strong opponents such as Khalifman, Akopian, Bareev, Psakhis, and several other grandmasters. It's clear that he knows what he is talking about and his enthusiasm is infectious. Let's have a look at a one of his relatively recent games against a fellow grandmaster:

Czebe-Bauer, Bastia (rapid) 2004

1.d4 b6 2.c4 Bb7 3.Nc3 e6 4.e4 Bb4 5.f3 f5 6.exf5 Nh6 7.fxe6 Nf5 8.Bf4 0-0 9.Bd3 Nh4 10.Bg3 Nxg2+ 11.Kf2 Nh4 12.Be4 Bxe4 13.Nxe4 dxe6 14.c5 Nc6 15.a3 Nxd4 16.axb4 Nhxf3 17.Nxf3 Rxf3+ 18.Kg2 Qd5 19.Re1 Rb3 20.Qd2 Nf3 21.Qxd5 exd5 22.Nf2 Nxe1+ 23.Rxe1 Rxb4 24.Re7 Rf8 25.Rxc7 bxc5 26.Be5 Rf5 27.Bc3 Rbf4 28.Rxg7+ Kf8 29.Nd3 d4 30.Nxf4 Kxg7 31.Bd2 Kf6 32.b3 Ke5 33.Nd3+ Ke4 34.Nb2 Rf8 35.Nc4 Kd3 36.Bh6 Rf6 37.Bg5 Rf5 38.Bh6 Kc2 39.Kg3 Kxb3 40.Nd2+ Kc2 41.Kg4 Rf2 42.Ne4 Rg2+ 43.Kf3 Rxh2 44.Bf4 Rh5 45.Bd6 c4 0-1

This is primarily a repertoire book, built around 82 main games, all annotated in detail, with hundreds of fresh ideas and improvements over existing theory packed into the notes. Nearly all of White's options are covered, and a multitude of choices for Black are discussed, so Black has several alternatives to choose from should a crisis emerge in one or more lines. For anyone with a taste for something slightly offbeat this book can definitely be recommended. It allows free-thinkers to play something fun without risking an immediate disaster in the opening.

My assessment of this book: 

[Order](#) *Play 1...b6*

by Christian Bauer

Bird's Opening by Timothy Taylor, Everyman Chess 2005, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 224 pp., \$23.95

International master Timothy Taylor has considerable experience with Bird's opening (1 f4), as evidenced by the fact that twelve of his own games are featured as main games in this book. Very few top players play it regularly, so hardly anybody knows how to meet it properly, which gives those who do play it excellent chances of success.



Very few books have been published on this opening and the only book exclusively on Bird's Opening in the bibliography is a German title from 1960! So it is safe to assume that Taylor was pretty much on his own when writing this book. This can be both a blessing and a curse; a blessing because reviewers have nothing to compare him with, and a curse because there is such a small amount of structured material to follow.

The material is divided as follows:

- Preface (2 pages)
- Introduction - The Historical Bird (20 pages)
- **Part I: Reversed Dutch Systems, 1 f4 d5**
- 1 The Classical Bird (23 pages)
- 2 White's Queenside Fianchetto (15 pages)
- 3 The Recipe - Black Plays an Early ...Bg4 (18 pages)
- 4 The Leningrad Bind (25 pages)
- 5 The Antoshin Variation (14 pages)
- 6 The Stonewall (13 pages)
- **Part II: From's Gambit**
- 7 From's Gambit, Lasker Variation (21 pages)
- 8 From's Gambit, Mestel Variation (20 pages)
- 9 Other Froms (9 pages)
- **Part III: Sicilian and Less Usual Defences**
- 10 Black Adopts a Sicilian Set-Up (16 pages)
- 11 Unusual Defences (19 pages)
- Index of Complete Games (2 pages)
- Index of Variations (3 pages)

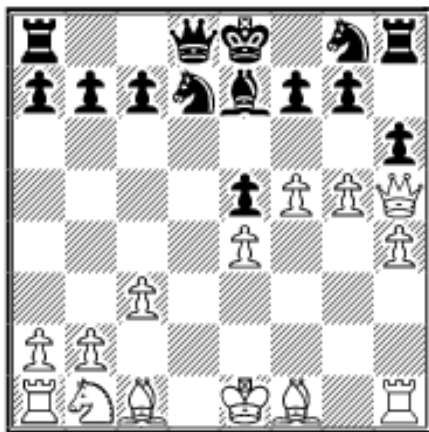
The historical introduction is very good and presents some of the games by the giants who made the opening what it is today. The annotations to these introductory games are just perfect; they keep the reader entertained, while still allowing one to understand what is going without getting bored. The division of the material seems in order and there are plenty of guidelines for how both sides should handle this opening, with a slight focus on White.

The following game was played by one of the current heroes of the opening, Danish grandmaster Henrik Danielsen, who demolishes a

former German champion in spectacular style.

H. Danielsen-T. Luther Schwerin 1999

1.f4 d5 2.Nf3 Bg4 3.e3 Nd7 4.h3 Bxf3 5.Qxf3 Ngf6 6.g4 e6 7.d3 Bb4+ 8.c3 Bd6 9.e4 dxe4 10.dxe4 e5 11.g5 Ng8 12.f5 h6 13.h4 Be7 14.Qh5!



Unlike Ftacnik in *ChessBase Magazine*, Taylor doesn't award Black's previous move with a question mark, while he does indicate, like Ftacnik, that 13...Qe7 is better. Although neither point out that White still holds the better chances after 14 Bc4, possibly followed by Qh5 on the next move. However, in the case of this game, Taylor's variations strongly resemble

Ftacnik's, but no credit is given for any of the lines. This can, of course, be a coincidence.

14...Nb6 15.Be3 Qd6 16.Na3 c6 17.Nc4 Nxc4 18.Bxc4 0-0-0 19.Rh2 Qc7 20.Bxf7 hxc7 21.Qxh8 Nh6 22.Qxg7 Ng4 23.f6 1-0

This game is particularly important because the line chosen by Black is often recommended in basic opening books as a good way of countering the Bird. A bit tongue-in-cheek, Taylor titled the chapter, "The Recipe." However, it is likely to be a recipe for disaster, if all Black shows up with is such basic knowledge.

This is a very well-written book with plenty of original input, along with lots of enthusiasm for the opening. Taylor, like other authors, has a weakness for quoting branch-games much further than necessary; often without supporting comments, which only makes it harder for the reader to understand why certain moves were played. In theory, 1 f4 should not lead to any advantage, but this can be irrelevant in practice against an ill-prepared opponent, and who seriously prepares for Bird's opening?

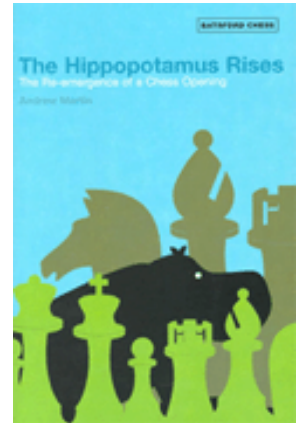
My assessment of this book: 

[Order](#) *Bird's Opening*

by Timothy Taylor

The Hippopotamus Rises by Andrew Martin, Batsford B.T. 2005, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 140 pp., \$21.95

The Hippopotamus is a very flexible opening where Black aims for the following setup: pawns on a6, b6, c7, d6, e6, f7, g6 and h6; the bishops go on g7 and b7; while the knights should be developed to e7 and d7. After that Black can punch forward with ...c7-c5, ...g6-g5 or something else, depending on White's setup. Tiger Hillarp-Persson's devoted 26 pages to it in his excellent book, *Tiger's Modern*, and his material was so succinct and instructive that it seemed impossible to expand on it.



Yet, here, we have 140 pages, divided as follows:

- Introduction (4 pages)
- The Modern Approach - and Game Plan (12 pages)
- Bc4 Systems (16 pages)
- Austrian Attack (23 pages)
- Quiet System (22 pages)
- Systems with an early Be3 or Bg5 (17 pages)
- A Hero of the Hippo (12 pages)
- Friends of the Hippo (22 pages)
- Index of Players (4 pages)
- Index of Variations (4 pages)

This might seem impressive until you realize that the layout uses a larger than normal font, that there are only two pairs of moves per line, and that the line spacing between moves and commentary is rather enormous. Each of these tricks is aimed at stretching a thin amount of material to fill space. This could be forgiven if it was packed with new ideas, improvements over existing theory, and original analysis; however, that is not the case.

The material is built around main games with very little analysis. The analysis that is provided is often given without accompanying commentary, and the comments that are included tend to be chatty. This is a very bad opening book, which can only be recommended to fools desperate to give away their money.

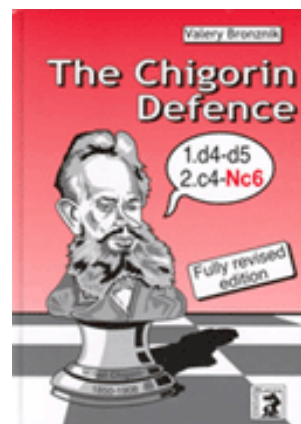
My assessment of this book: ❖

[Order](#) *The Hippopotamus Rises*
by Andrew Martin

The Chigorin Defence by Valery Bronznik, Schachverlag Kania 2005,

Figurine Algebraic Notation, Hardcover, 335 pp., \$28.95

This book was originally published in German in 2001. At that time, the author set a new standard for opening books because never before had an opening been covered in such painstaking detail, with so much research and original analysis. Now the material has been translated into English, thoroughly revised, corrected and updated. I will not delve into too much detail, but recommend that the reader peruse my [review](#) of the previous edition.



The material is divided as follows:

- Introduction (3 pages)
- 1 d4 d5 2 c4 Nc6 3 Nc3 dxc4 4 e3 (11 pages)
- 2 1 d4 d5 2 c4 Nc6 3 Nc3 dxc4 4 d5 (30 pages)
- 3 1 d4 d5 2 c4 Nc6 3 Nc3 dxc4 4 Nf3 (54 pages)
- 4 1 d4 d5 2 c4 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 (15 pages)
- 5 1 d4 d5 2 c4 Nc6 3 Nf3 Bg4 4 cxd5 Bxf3 5 gxf3 (23 pages)
- 6 1 d4 d5 2 c4 Nc6 3 Nf3 Bg4 4 cxd5 Bxf3 5 dxc6 Bxc6 6 Nc3 (15 pages)
- 7 1 d4 d5 2 c4 Nc6 3 Nf3 Bg4 4 Nc3 (12 pages)
- 8 1 d4 d5 2 c4 Nc6 3 Nf3 Bg4 4 e3 (5 pages)
- 9 1 d4 d5 2 c4 Nc6 3 Nf3 Bg4 4 Qa4 (7 pages)
- 10 1 d4 d5 2 c4 Nc6 3 Nf3 e5 (14 pages)
- 11 1 d4 d5 2 c4 Nc6 3 cxd5 Qxd5 4 Nf3 e5 (11 pages)
- 12 1 d4 d5 2 c4 Nc6 3 cxd5 Qxd5 4 e3 e5 5 Nc3 Bb4 6 Bd2 Bxc3 7 bxc3 (54 pages)
- 13 1 d4 d5 2 c4 Nc6 3 cxd5 Qxd5 4 e3 e5 5 Nc3 Bb4 6 Bd2 Bxc3 7 Bxc3 (37 pages)
- 14 1 d4 d5 2 c4 Nc6 3 e3 e5 4 dxe5 (6 pages)
- 15 1 d4 d5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bf4 (3 Bg5, 3 e3) 3...Bg4 (14 pages)
- 16 1 d4 d5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 g3 (13 pages)
- Index of Players (2 pages)
- Bibliography (1 page)
- Index of Variations (3 pages)

This book offers Black an excellent chance of playing for a win without risking a horrible position right out of the opening, and Queen's Gambit players should seriously consider investing in it, if they intend to obtain any kind of advantage from the opening. It is an extraordinarily fine treatise that can be highly recommended.

My assessment of this book:

Order *The Chigorin Defence*

by Valery Bronznik

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