



COLUMNISTS

Checkpoint

Carsten Hansen



Rating Chart

❖ – A poor book.

❖❖ – Not very good.

❖❖❖ – A useful book.

❖❖❖❖ – A good book.

❖❖❖❖❖ – An excellent book.

Reviewed this month:

Play 1...Nc6!
by Christoph Wisniewski

Gambiteer 1
by Nigel Davies

Play the Grünfeld
by Yelena Dembo

Beating the Open Games
by Mihail Marin

A Spanish Repertoire for Black
by Mihail Marin

Repertoire Reinforcements

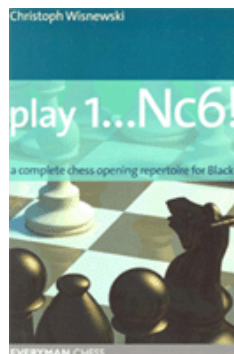
In all the time I have played chess, I have never been completely satisfied with my opening repertoire, and I suspect many players share such sentiments. Thus there will always be a demand for repertoire books. This month we will look at a number of new titles: two from first-time authors, two from award-winning author Mihail Marin, and one from veteran Nigel Davies, who presents a sharp and dynamic gambit repertoire for white based on 1 e4.

Play 1...Nc6! by Christoph Wisniewski, Everyman Chess 2007, Softcover, 268pp., \$24.95

German international master Wisniewski makes quite a debut with this publication. He has specialized in the Nimzovitch Defense and Chigorin Queen's Gambit for years and it shows. The book is split into four parts and has fifteen chapters.

The material is divided as follows:

- Bibliography (2 pages)
- Preface: Why 1...Nc6? (2 pages)
- **Part One: Black vs. 1 e4 – Nimzowitsch Defence** (2 pages)
 - 1 1 e4 Nc6: Rare Second Moves for White (14 pages)
 - 2 1 e4 Nc6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 (27 pages)
 - 3 1 e4 Nc6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 f6 (10 pages)
 - 4 1 e4 Nc6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 e6 (7 pages)
 - 5 1 e4 Nc6 2 Nf3 Nf6 (20 pages)
- **Part Two: Black vs. 1 d4 – Chigorin Defence** (2 pages)
 - 6 1 d4 d5 2 Nf3 Nc6 and other Rare Second Moves (31 pages)
 - 7 1 d4 d5 2 c4 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 (4 Bg5; 4 cxd5) (13 pages)
 - 8 1 d4 d5 2 c4 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Nf3 dxc4 (19 pages)
 - 9 1 d4 d5 2 c4 Nc6 3 Nf3 Bg4 (4 Qa4; 4 e3; 4 Nc3) (15 pages)
 - 10 1 d4 d5 2 c4 Nc6 3 Nf3 Bg4 4 cxd4 Bxf3 (12 pages)
 - 11 1 d4 d5 2 c4 Nc6 3 e3 and 3 cxd5 (27 pages)
- **Part Three: Black vs. 1 c4 – 1...Nc6** (1 page)
 - 12 1 c4 Nc6 – Rare White Second Moves (10 pages)
 - 13 1 c4 Nc6 2 Nc3 e5 (3 e3; 3 g3) (12 pages)
 - 14 1 c4 Nc6 2 Nc3 e5 3 Nf3 Nf6 (21 pages)
- **Part Four: Black vs 1 Nf3 – 1...Nc6** (1 page)
 - 15 1 Nf3 Nc6 (6 pages)
- Index of Complete Games (5 pages)



As you can see, Wisniewski sidesteps the main premise of the book in some respect by answering 1 d4 with 1...d5 and only then 2...Nc6. If you want to play 1...Nc6

against 1 d4 you should pick up Richard Palliser's excellent book *Tango!*. As Wisniewski indicates in the introduction, many of his suggested lines are likely to transpose into other opening systems, but you shouldn't let this scare you, nor should you be disappointed that some of the lines lose the unorthodoxy provided by 1...Nc6, such is the nature of chess. He is even a little cheeky by suggesting that White can play these lines in reverse by opening 1 a3 and 2 Nc3, with an extra tempo to boot! I wouldn't go that far, but it gives a good indication of the spirit in which the book is written. He also warns that the recommended repertoire will not provide you with easy wipe-outs, nor will it be a panacea against all future maladies. Rather, by studying the material provided, you increase your chances of improving your score with black. This is true with most opening books: careful study will improve your results, depending on the effort you invest.

To some extent the Chigorin Queen's Gambit section stands on the shoulders of Bronzik's fantastic [book](#), with personal touches and analysis added by Wisniewski, so it is pretty good and reliable. As for the section on the Nimzovitch Defense, I must plead complete ignorance. I have only played it a couple of times in blitz games, usually transposing to the French after 1 e4 Nc6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 e6, as recommended by Wisniewski. I compared notes with other opening books to see how Wisniewski fared in the individual lines, and he does a very decent job in suggesting lines that are playable and dynamic, and mostly avoiding those lines that cause Black undue risk. Since very few players actually go for the main lines of the Nimzovitch, Black will find himself far better prepared in these variations. Also, given that Wisniewski recommends 2...Nf6 in response to 2 Nf3, inviting an unusual variation of the Alekhine, Black has decent chances of getting a playable position with more or less even chances.

It isn't until he begins dealing with transpositions to the English Opening that I find the material lacking. Wisniewski skates through the English Four Knights, 1 c4 Nc6 2 Nc3 e5 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 g3 Nd4!?, so haphazardly that it leaves me utterly puzzled. Critical lines for both sides are ignored, and there are times when he fails to mention the best moves for Black. Even in his analysis of the basic 5 Nxe5, he only quotes a line that doesn't represent best play by White, when there is a recent game between two grandmasters in which White's best play is tested and proven more than adequate. In my August update on Chesspublishing.com, I indicated a dozen or so errors in just one of the chapters from this part of the book. Unlike the first two sections, these chapters seem to be written without much passion. However, in the final part of the book, Wisniewski returns to form and presents Black with exciting ways to counter some of White's rarer ideas.

Overall I find this book reasonably well-written, though somewhat flawed. Those who are interested in the Nimzovitch Defense and the Chigorin will not be disappointed, while players interested in the English Opening will have to put in a bit of additional effort.

My assessment of this book:

Play 1...Nc6!
by Christoph Wisniewski

Gambiteer 1 by Nigel Davies, Everyman Chess 2007, Softcover, 176 pp, \$24.95

International master Cornelis van Wijgerden once told me that the main reason why I would not become a strong player was that I hadn't played 1 e4 and gambits in my formative years. Mind you, I was only fifteen years old at the time. Well, I immediately decided to sharpen my game and began employing a number of gambits. Most of them were somewhat unsound, but they carried a punch. Nevertheless, I got his point, playing for dynamic compensation helps one locate resources you may otherwise overlook for both you and your opponent.

This book is written for players who like sharp play and complications or for those who need to learn the value of dynamic compensation. It is mostly written for club level players; however, stronger players may find it entertaining.


The material is divided as follows:

- Bibliography (1 page)



- Introduction (2 pages)
- 1 Sicilian Defence, Wing Gambit (33 pages)
- 2 Danish Gambit (31 pages)
- 3 French Defence, Wing Gambit (17 pages)
- 4 Caro-Kann, Fantasy Variation (24 pages)
- 5 Alekhine's Defence with 3 Nc3 (19 pages)
- 6 Pirc Defence, Austrian with 5 a3 (13 pages)
- 7 Scandinavian Defence (12 pages)
- 8 Nimzowitsch Defence (8 pages)
- 9 The Pseudo-Philidor and Other Defences (11 pages)
- Index of Complete Games (2 pages)

I'm amused by some of the repertoire choices; for example, the Wing Gambit against the French or Sicilian is hardly dangerous if Black is only half-way decently prepared. The same can be said about the Danish Gambit if it is declined with 3... d5. But if it is accepted, then it can be highly hazardous, as Davies ably demonstrates in his main games. His recommendation of 5 a3 in the Austrian Attack and 3 f3 against the Caro-Kann have been played by stronger players and are certainly playable by the book's target audience. There are other opening choices that can be taken with a grain of salt, but even these will work reasonably well for players rated up to about 2000, especially against unprepared opponents.

My assessment of this book: 

[Order Gambiteer 1](#)
by Nigel Davies

Play the Grünfeld by Yelena Dembo, Everyman Chess 2007, Softcover, 192pp., \$24.95

Yelena Dembo has already made quite a name for herself in Europe. She is only twenty-four years old, but she has acquired the women's grandmaster title, as well as the men's international master title and has earned one norm towards the men's grandmaster title. She finished third in the 2005 European Women's Championship and her rating has been as high as 2470, so she is a very strong player.



Given that this is her first book, one would expect that this is an opening she plays frequently, but surprisingly that is not the case. It appears that since 2002 she has adopted the King's Indian instead. She admits as much in the introduction, but promises the reader that she has kept on top of the developments in the Grünfeld.

The material is divided as follows:

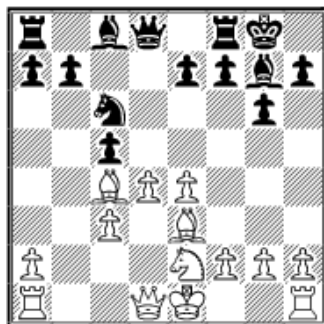
- Bibliography (3 pages)
- Introduction (5 pages)
- **Part One – The Exchange Variation**
 - (1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5 4 cxd5 Nxd5 5 e4 Nxc3 6 bxc3 Bg7)
 - 1 Introducing 7 Nf3 c5 (6 pages)
 - 2 The Critical 8 Rb1 (17 pages)
 - 3 Be3 Systems (16 pages)
 - 4 The Fashionable 7 Bc4 (20 pages)
 - 5 White's 7th Move Alternatives (10 pages)
 - 6 4 cxd5 Nxd5 without 5 e4 (11 pages)
- **Part Two – 3 Nc3 Without the Exchange**
 - 7 The Russian System (10 pages)
 - 8 Qa4+ Systems (4 pages)
 - 9 Bf4 Systems (21 pages)
 - 10 Bg5 Systems (18 pages)
 - 11 The Solid 4 e3 (10 pages)
 - 12 Offbeat 4th Move Alternatives (5 pages)
- **Part Three – White Postpones Nc3**
 - 12 The Fianchetto System (20 pages)
 - 13 Angling for a Sämisch: 3 f3 (5 pages)
- Index of Variations (4 pages)

The page allocation between the various lines is encouraging, because with an

opening the magnitude of the Grünfeld, it would only be too easy to dive thoroughly into some of the most popular lines and then skimp on those that are less relevant at the top level. She doesn't appear to have done this.

I find the book to be competently written. Dembo strikes a good balance between prose and theory targeted exactly at the intended audience, players rated 1600-2200. It is not overloaded with theoretical details, but I took a look at a couple of the variations to see how they hold.

In the ultra-popular main line of the Exchange Variation: **1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5 4 cxd5 Nxd5 5 e4 Nxc3 6 bxc3 Bg7 7 Be4 c5 8 Ne2 Nc6 9 Be3 0-0**




Dembo splits her coverage between 10 Rc1 and 10 0-0. After the latter, the most popular lines are 10...Bg4, 10...Qc7 and 10...Bd7. Wisely, Dembo has chosen a fourth move: **10...Na5**. This has been played by a few top players, including Ivanchuk (who lost to Carlsen with it), Sutovsky, Kurnosov and Jansa. Now her main line runs **11 Bd3 b6 12 Rc1 e5 13 dxc5 Be6 14 e4 bxc5 15 Bxc5 Bh6!?**, when the remainder of her coverage is her own analysis, focusing on three moves: 16 Bxf8, 16 Rc2 and 16 f4. The third choice was tested in the game Harikrishna-

Sutovsky, Montreal: **16 f4 Re8** (also Dembo's choice) **17 f5** (Dembo only analyses 17 Be3, 17 Rc2 and 17 Rc3, the analysis of which looks accurate and to the point, but the move played by the Indian grandmaster is critical) **17...Qc7 18 Bf2 Bxc4 19 Bxc4 Nxc4 20 Nc3 Nb2 21 Nd5 Qxc1 22 Nf6+ Kg7** (22...Kh8 is possibly more accurate) **23 Nxe8+ Rxe8 24 f6+** (Now Black has a back rank problem) **24...Kg8 25 Qxc1 Bxc1 26 Rxc1 Nd3 27 Rc3 Nxf2 28 Kxf2 h5 29 Rc6 Re6 30 Rxe6 fxe6 31 g4 hxg4 32 Kg3 Kf7 33 Kxg4 Kxf6 34 Kh4 a5 35 a4 Ke7 36 Kg5 Kf7 37 Kh6 Kf6 38 h4 Kf7 39 Kh7 Kf6 40 Kg8 1-0**

There is a little work to be done for Black in this line, and the same goes for her main line in the Modern Exchange Variation, 7 Nf3 c5 8 Rb1 0-0 9 Be2, where Black took a beating in the game Wang Yu-Timofeev. Yet overall I find her lines to be well-chosen and well-considered. They are dynamic with a positional flair, not too sharp or overly positional. However, in the last chapter, in answer to 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 f3, Dembo has chosen 3...e5!?. Leko defeated Kramnik with this move about a decade ago and it is theoretically sound, but it is monumentally different from the rest of her recommendations. It puzzles me that she did not choose a more Grünfeld-like variation in reply to 3 f3.

Although the Grünfeld is not an easy opening to learn, Dembo makes a good case for her repertoire as black, and the reader will generally be well-armed in most lines. This book can carry you a good distance towards mastering this opening.

My assessment of this book: 

Order *Play the Grünfeld*

by Yelena Dembo

Beating the Open Games by Mihail Marin, Quality Chess 2007, Softcover, 288pp., \$25.95

The Romanian grandmaster Mihail Marin has won many accolades as a chess author, including the 2005 ChessCafe.com Book of the Year award for [Learn from the Legends](http://LearnfromtheLegends.com). The blurb from the backcover of the present book sounds promising:

"Many players would like to play the main lines of the Ruy Lopez with Black, but fear answering 1 e4 with 1...e5 because of White's great variety of deviations. In this book acclaimed author Mihail Marin presents a repertoire for Black against the Open Games, meaning the Italian Game, Evans Gambit, Scotch, Vienna, Spanish Exchange Variation, Spanish and Scotch Four Knights, Bishop's Opening, Centre Game, Ponziani and not



least, the notorious King's Gambit.

"In this book Marin reveals his own opening repertoire, which he prepared for high-level international competition. But besides giving concrete answers to any worries players might have about facing the Open Games, Marin uses his renowned skills to lucidly convey the main strategic ideas. This way Marin has succeeded in writing a middlegame book, disguised as an opening book. No one can read this book without being entertained and educated at the same time."

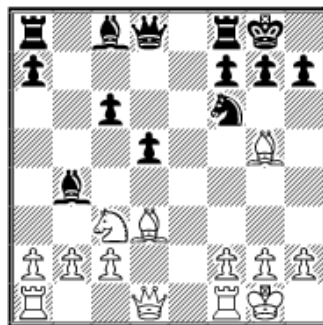
The material is divided as follows:

- List of Symbols (1 page)
- Bibliography (1 page)
- Foreword (6 pages)
- 1 The King's Gambit (28 pages)
- 2 The Vienna Game (12 pages)
- 3 The Centre Game (6 pages)
- 4 The Ponziani Opening (12 pages)
- 5 The Four Knights Game (22 pages)
- 6 The Glek System (10 pages)
- The Giuoco Piano (2 pages)
- 7 The Evans Gambit (12 pages)
- 8 The Two Knights Defence (10 pages)
- 9 The Max Lange Attack (14 pages)
- 10 Giuoco Piano – the Classical Main Line (10 pages)
- 11 Gioco Pianissimo (24 pages)
- The Scotch Game (4 pages)
- 12 Scotch Four Knights (26 pages)
- 13 The Mieses Variation (24 pages)
- 14 Scotch Opening – Others (6 pages)
- 15 The Ruy Lopez Exchange Variation (47 pages)
- Postscript – Two Games (6 pages)
- Index of Main Lines (1 page)

The bibliography struck me as a bit unusual because it lists so many foreign language titles that are not readily available in the West, as well as Quality Chess' new edition of *My System*, which to my recollection isn't particular heavy on 1 e4 e5 material. I also found the design of the book somewhat deficient in that the size of the font, albeit perfectly legible, is smaller than those regularly used in chess books, and the spacing between the words is at times absolutely minimal, almost making some of the sentences look like one very long word.

The presentation of the material is also unusual in that the chapters are constructed as follows: first a short introduction in prose, then some examples of the variations, either a game or two or an interesting variation that is indicative of the lines covered. Next follows a variation grid similar to volumes of ECO or MCO, complete with footnote references. However, the footnotes are superior to those given in ECO, because they blend prose with variations, giving the reader a better understanding of what is really happening, rather than merely offering variations. Here is an example, with the footnote references in parenthesis. Keep in mind there are 136 footnotes to this particular chapter grid!

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 d4 exd4 5 Nxd4 Bb4 6 Nxc6 bxc6 7 Bd3 d5 8 exd5 cxd5 9 0-0 0-0 10 Bg5 c6



Now I will follow line four of the grid:

11 Na4 (22) h6 12 Bh4 Re8 (23) 13 c4 (24) Bd6 (25) 14 Nc3 (26) Be6 (27) 15 cxd5 Bxd5 16 Nxd5 cxd5 17 b3 (28) Be5 18 Rc1 Qd6 (29)

The footnotes are:

22 This looks like a more adequate activation of the knight than 11 Ne2. White takes the c5-square under control, but on the other hand the position of the

knight on the edge of the board is not without risks.

23 Black makes a useful half-waiting move, leaving the decision of where to retreat with his bishop for later. In principal, d6 looks like the most natural square, but why not keep the e1-square under control for just one more move?

24 The development of the knight on a4 is almost always followed by this pawn break. After the more restrained 13 c3 Black has fewer problems keeping the enemy knight under control [CH: Marin now gives many variations that I will not repeat here.]

25 Black prevents the possibility of White cutting off this bishop with c5, and creates some threats on the kingside.

26 This move has not been seen in practice yet, but is probably no worse than 14 Rc1.


27 Black continues developing, increasing his control over the centre at the same time. After the voluntary retreat of the knight, he could probably maintain equality with the slightly simplistic 14...dxc4 as well, when his piece activity would compensate for the structural defect [CH: Marin then goes on to discuss 14...dxc4 and 14...Be5.]

28 17 Rc1 Rb8 18 b3 Rb4 =

29 With equality.

I find this presentation valuable because all the relevant lines are discussed in detail, while the strategic, tactical and typical ideas are also highlighted, thus bridging basic awareness and detailed opening knowledge in one work. I am deeply impressed by the quality of the material presented in this book. Marin expertly guides the reader through intricacies that would otherwise be overwhelming.

This book provides something for every level of player, from around 1500 to even strong grandmasters. If you play 1 e4 as white or 1...e5 as black, you will not regret purchasing this book, it is well worth it and then some!

My assessment of this book: 

[Order](#) *Beating the Open Games*

by Mihail Marin

A Spanish Repertoire for Black by Mihail Marin, Quality Chess 2007, Softcover, 232pp., \$25.95


This is meant to be the companion volume to Marin's book on the Open Games. It was originally intended to be one book, but the manuscript was too lengthy to be released as one volume.

The contents are presented as follows:

- List of Symbols (1 page)
- Bibliography (1 page)
- Foreword (2 pages)
- 1 The Chigorin Variation –General Aspects (16 pages)
- 2 The Rubinstein Variation (72 pages)
- 3 The Petrosian System (36 pages)
- 4 The Yates Variation (4 pages)
- 5 The Yates Variation – 10 d5 (12 pages)
- 6 The Yates Variation – 10 Be3 (20 pages)
- 7 The d3-system (20 pages)
- 8 The Worral Attack (8 pages)
- 9 The Delayed Exchange Variation (12 pages)
- 10 The a4-system (8 pages)
- 11 The System Based on Nc3 (8 pages)
- 12 The Central Attack (7 pages)
- Index of Main Lines (1 page)



This book follows the same structure as its companion volume, yet I find the presentation even better, because Marin uses more complete games and more detailed annotations in the introduction of each chapter. The depth and thoroughness of these introductory comments is absolutely astounding. I now know that my knowledge of the deeper strategies behind these lines was very superficial and left much to be desired on several levels. This book is simply phenomenal and a must buy for anyone playing either side of the Ruy Lopez. This is easily one of the very finest opening books of the year.

My assessment of this book: 

[Order](#) *A Spanish Repertoire for Black*

by Mihail Marin



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