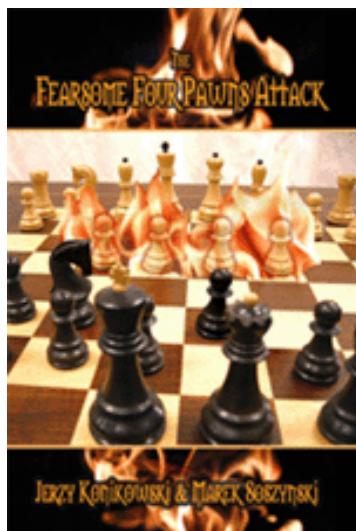




C O L U M N I S T S

Checkpoint

Carsten Hansen

*Rating Chart*

– A poor book.



– Not very good.



– A useful book.



– A good book.

Reviewed this month:*Secrets of Opening Surprises, Vol. 6*

by Jeroen Bosch (ed.)

Chess Informant, Vol. 98

by Z. Krnic & A. Matanovic (ed.)

Opening Encyclopaedia 2007

(DVD) by ChessBase

Fritz Powerbook 2007

(DVD) by ChessBase

Corr Database 2006

(CD) by ChessBase

*En Passant**The ABC of the Czech Benoni*

(DVD) by Andrew Martin

The ABC of the Modern Slav

(DVD) by Andrew Martin

My Best Games in the Slav and Semi-Slav

(DVD) by Alexei Shirov

A World Champion's Guide to the Petroff

(DVD) by Rustam Kasimdzhanov

Play 1 e4 e5!

(CD) by Nigel Davies

Starting Out: The Scotch Game

(CD) by John Emms

Starting Out: 1 e4!

(CD) by Neil McDonald

Play the Queen's Gambit

(CD) by Chris Ward



Digital Round-up

This month I will look at a baker's dozen of new releases, including titles from Rustam Kasimdzhanov, Alexei Shirov, and Nigel Davies, as well as the latest *Chess Informant* and *Secrets of Opening Surprises, Volume Six*. I will be reviewing many more items than usual in order to do a little catching up and to make room for a couple of old-fashioned solid book reviews in the coming months.

Secrets of Opening Surprises, Vol. 6 by Jeroen Bosch (ed.), New In Chess 2007, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 143pp., \$21.95

Secrets of Opening Surprises began as a series of articles in *New In Chess* magazine, from where it grew into a series of books offering fun lines that can be used as effective opening weapons in your own games. The survey-style articles are written mostly by grandmasters and international masters, and edited by Jeroen Bosch, who also contributes some of the surveys. Volume 6 features sixteen new articles, sometimes intriguingly named (The Tarzan Attack, anyone?), which only serves to increase the readers curiosity. The lines often look somewhat dubious, but the fact that have been played at an international level lends them credibility.



The contents are divided as follows:

- 1 The SOS Files (Bosch)
- 2 Triple Trouble for the Gruenfeld (Rogers)
- 3 Sicilian: the Aussie Attack (Bosch)
- 4 No Panov - Play an Early Queen Move (l'Ami)
- 5 3.h4 in the Hyper-Accelerated Dragon (Donaldson/Silman)
- 6 The Tarzan Attack (Kogan)
- 7 Making Short Work of the Najdorf (Bosch)
- 8 The Dory Defence (Mikhalchishin)
- 9 Bishops First Please! (Flear)
- 10 The Chigorin Attack (Bosch)
- 11 The Queen's Gruenfeld Line (Part I) (Kogan)
- 12 The Queen's Gruenfeld Line (Part II) (Kogan)
- 13 A Spanish SOS (Mikhalchishin)
- 14 The French Advance with 5...a6 (Bosch)
- 15 A Slav Surprise (Rogozenko)
- 16 Scandinavian with 3...Qd6 (Tiviakov)
- 17 Caro-Kann with a Slav Touch (van der Wiel)
- 18 Who is Who?

The first chapter of each volume gives an update on the most significant developments of lines covered in previous volumes and includes some of the best games played in those lines, even awarding a prize for the best game – providing further encouragement to test these for yourself.

As you can see, most of the survey writers are familiar opening experts, who you

can rely on to recommend lines that will survive closer examination. If you like to live on the wild side when playing chess, then you must do yourself the favor of buying this book. You will enjoy countless hours of fun playing the suggested openings.

My assessment of this book: 

[Order](#) *Secrets of Opening Surprises, Vol.*

6

by Jeroen Bosch (ed.)

Chess Informant, Vol. 98 by Zdenko Krnic & Aleksandar Matanovic (ed.),
Sahovski Informator 2007, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 332pp., \$36.00

This is the twenty-first volume of *Chess Informant* that I have reviewed, yet my love of this series has not diminished in any way. Each volume contains the best or most important games from the previous four months, often annotated by the players themselves or one of their colleagues.

Volume 98 includes games annotated by amongst others (in alphabetical order): Anand, Bareev (who annotated all the games from the Topalov-Kramnik match), Beliavsky, Bologan, Gelfand, Grischuk, Ivanchuk, Karjakin, Kasimdzhanov, Kramnik, Krasenkov, Leko, Morozevich, Navara, J. Polgar, Ponomariov, Rublevsky, Sasikiran, Shirov, Short, Svidler, van Wely, and Volokitin.



The contents are divided as follows:

- Contributors (2 pages)
- The ten best games of the preceding Volume (2 pages)
- The ten most important theoretical novelties of the preceding volume (4 pages)
- System of Signs (3 pages)
- **Games**
 - A (28 pages)
 - B (75 pages)
 - C (39 pages)
 - D (58 pages)
 - E (42 pages)
- Index (11 pages)
- Annotators (2 pages)
- Combinations (6 pages)
- Endings (7 pages)
- Studies (3 pages)
- Tournament Results (14 pages)
- The Best of Chess Informant - featuring Boris Gelfand (25 pages)

To get a feel for the contents of each volume, check out the Informant@ChessCafe.com column, where they often have an advance look at the latest offerings. I love this yearbook, and you may too. By the way, it is also available on CD.

My assessment of this book: 

Order *Chess Informant*, Vol. 98

by Z. Krnic & A. Matanovic (ed.)

Opening Encyclopaedia 2007 (DVD) by ChessBase, ChessBase GmbH 2006, Figurine Algebraic Notation, \$129.95

My reviews of earlier incarnations of this product ([2004](#) and [2005](#)) were not very positive, and while this year's version has been substantially updated compared to previous years, it is still mostly a big rip-off.

Despite the many new additional games and opening surveys, there are certain details that are appallingly unacceptable. For example, for popular and highly topical openings such as the Sveshnikov Sicilian, Sicilian Dragon, Sicilian Najdorf, and Caro-Kann Defense, there are hardly any surveys written after 1997. Developments in these openings have exploded just in the last two years, yet there isn't an opening survey written inside the last decade. Absurd! I could carry on, but I would just be repeating myself from my earlier reviews.



Of the new 2007 surveys, nearly all of them were written by Ftacnik, who must have been either incredibly busy or extremely superficial in his coverage. I will hint at the latter. If you already have ChessBase's [Mega Database](#) and [ChessBase Magazine](#), both of which are good products, *do not* waste your money on this one.

My assessment of this DVD: 

**Order *Opening Encyclopaedia 2007* (DVD) by
ChessBase**

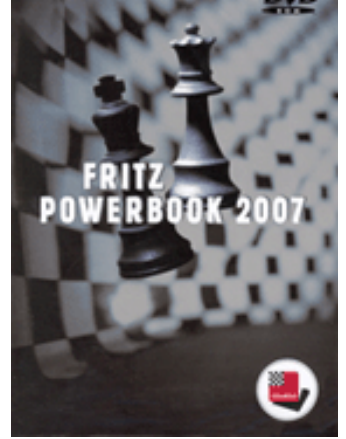
Fritz Powerbook 2007 (DVD) by ChessBase, ChessBase GmbH 2006, Figurine Algebraic Notation, \$59.95

It is not clear to me as to exactly what the *Fritz Powerbook* does. I understand that it provides a deeper and more sophisticated opening book for




when you are playing against Fritz 9 or 10, but is that all? The back-cover blurb states:

The current openings theory with 1 million games The Fritz Powerbook 2007 contains 18 millions opening positions, derived from 1 million highclass tournament games. Together with each position all relevant information is stored: all moves that were played in the position, by players of what average rating, with what success and performance results. The games from which the Fritz Powerbook 2007 were derived are also included on the DVD. This means that in any position of the openings tree you can load and replay the games in which the position occurred. The Fritz Powerbook 2007 represents the state of the art of current openings theory. Discover exciting and tricky new lines and practice them against Fritz. In addition the DVD has a small but very exclusive book with the strongest GM games from the past 100 years (900,000 positions).



This is precisely the same poorly written text that can be found on the *Fritz Powerbook 2006* and *Fritz Powerbook 2004* with the exception of the year, of course. I imagine that this latest version includes more recent games and positions, but it is not clear how it otherwise differs from these earlier versions. It is very odd. Furthermore, if you already have a big database and the ChessBase database program, you can generate a powerbook by yourself. So this product appears to be rather pointless.

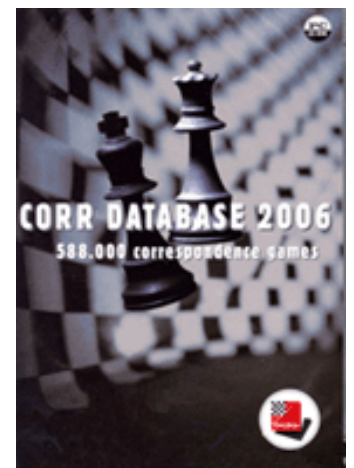
My assessment of this DVD: 

Order Fritz Powerbook 2007
(DVD)
by ChessBase

Corr Database 2006 (CD) by ChessBase, ChessBase GmbH 2006, Figurine Algebraic Notation, \$89.95

Just how does one review a database? I guess that's the question that has kept this product backlogged on my shelf for so long! According to the (again poorly written) back-cover blurb:

Corr Database 2006 is an extensive collection of correspondence games, featuring classical correspondence games played by mail as well as email games. The CD contains 588,000 games from 1804 until 2006 including all games of the correspondence chess world championships 1-18, correspondence chess olympics 1-15, correspondence chess european championships, national championships (AUS, CSR, DEN, GER, NED, USA) and memorials (1965 SUI jub75, 1991 FIN jub30, NED jub 25, NBC



Millennium Email, ICCF 50th Jubilee Elite and ICCF 50th Jubilee World Champions). Corr 2006 also features a correspondence chess playerbase, which includes about 63,000 names. A must for every player of correspondence chess!

This all sounds nice, but this product is incredibly expensive considering the number of games provided. In contrast, Tim Harding's *UltraCorr* offered more than 800,000 games, as well as extra features, at a significantly lower price. Aside from containing some newer material, I can't find a reason to recommend this product.

My assessment of this CD:



Order Corr Database 2006

(CD)

by ChessBase

The ABC of the Czech Benoni (DVD) by Andrew Martin, ChessBase GmbH 2007, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Running Time: 4 hours, \$34.95

The Czech Benoni arises after 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5, followed by ...d6, ...Nbd7 and ...Be7 (rather than Bg7 as in the King's Indian). It is quite a rare opening, with only a few grandmasters playing it on occasion. Its reputation is a solid, but rather passive opening, which mainly offers chances to White. Yet, Black can, with a minimum of theoretical knowledge and a good understanding of the basic positional ideas, get decent positions where there is little chance of getting blown off the board by a strong novelty. This is exactly why this DVD is of such value, because it offers something that you can't find in many books, and it focuses on instruction, rather than presenting long theoretical lines. Therefore, Martin is also the perfect presenter for this opening, with the theory largely being a non-factor he can get into "instructor-mode" where he excels.



The DVD has thirty-two segments (thirty games plus introduction and afterword), and I must admit that I quite enjoyed watching Martin's presentation. It is his best in a quite a while, and he provides a very good look at this opening. The game selection is top-notch and his annotations match the games very well. Meanwhile, Martin looks like he is really enjoying himself and his enthusiasm can't help but rub off on the viewer. The mix of instructional games and quizzes to test your newly gained understanding works incredibly well on DVD.

While this product may not appeal to the strongest players, I think it will be of interest to many. The discussion of closed pawn structures and the related themes of kingside and queenside pawn breaks, maneuvering, restriction of your opponent's pieces, prophylaxis and many other positional themes should be part of everyone's curriculum when learning to play chess. I'm pleased to give this product an enthusiastic recommendation.

My assessment of this DVD: 

Order *The ABC of The Czech Benoni* (DVD)
by Andrew Martin

The ABC of the Modern Slav (DVD) by Andrew Martin, ChessBase GmbH 2007, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Running Time: 4 hours, \$34.95

The format of this series is mostly aimed at improving players who want to learn a new opening. In previous efforts, I have found Martin's coverage to be insufficient, but it seems like he has taken his presentation up a couple of notches.

The Modern Slav arises after 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 Nc3 a6 or 3 Nc3 a6 and is played by nearly every top player. You would think that an opening such as this would cause problems for the presenter, who has to avoid holes in the theory, along with putting together a playable repertoire, but Martin has carefully crafted a solid repertoire that carries a firm punch. Also, the lines chosen are easy to understand for inexperienced players.



I found this DVD to be very enjoyable, with a good presentation of the different sub-variations of the opening. There were a few minor flaws, but these will not cause any significant setbacks for the target audience; another good effort by Martin.

My assessment of this DVD: 

Order *The ABC of The Modern Slav* (DVD)
by Andrew Martin

My Best Games in the Slav and Semi-Slav (DVD) by Alexei Shirov, ChessBase GmbH 2007, Figurine Algebraic Notation, DVD, Running Time: 5 hours 20 minutes, \$39.95

It seems that Shirov is in the process of releasing separate DVDs covering his best games in every conceivable opening. I got a little excited about this one, because Shirov has been instrumental in the development of several lines in the Slav and Semi-Slav. Even if you know the games, the thought process behind the development of the ideas in these popular opening is quite fascinating, and in this aspect Shirov doesn't disappoint. He provides background stories behind the variations, how he prepared for certain opponents, what his preparation




was and how his opponents surprised him before he got a chance to play his own preparation, etc. It all makes for interesting viewing.



Although Shirov seems to be gaining more confidence as a presenter, he still makes many mistakes and occasionally seems unprepared. Often he gets ideas that he hadn't properly analyzed, leading him to shuffle his prepared manuscript around, looking for the particular line, and then trying to work things out as he goes along. This does add to the charm and makes it seem more like personal lesson with Shirov, but it is also clumsy and somewhat unprofessional.

For those who play the Slav or Semi-Slav, this product isn't a must-buy theoretically speaking, but it is worthwhile, mostly because of Shirov's status in the chess world and his deep familiarity with the material. The viewers will undoubtedly benefit from his insights presented here.

My assessment of this DVD: 

Order *My Best Games in The Slav and Semi-Slav*
(DVD) by Alexei Shirov


A World Champion's Guide to the Petroff (DVD) by Rustam Kasimdzhanov, ChessBase GmbH 2007, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Running Time: 3 hours 20 minutes, \$37.95

In his previous effort, former FIDE World Champion Rustam Kasimdzhanov presented the viewers with his take on the King's Indian, but it was only useful in conjunction with further theoretical materials. This issue seems to have been addressed on this DVD, which has annotated games, along with specific segments on theory that provide plenty of ideas on how to approach each line.

The Petroff Defense, or Russian Game, arises after 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nf6 and is considered to be one of Black's most solid answers to 1 e4. This has given the opening a reputation of being somewhat dull, and this may well be the case at a grandmaster level, but at lower levels of play the opening offers excellent prospects of playing for a win with either color, as Kasimdzhanov ably demonstrates.



The only flaw in the presentation is the unevenness of Kasimdzhanov's tone of voice. He wavers in pitch to such an extent that he sometimes sounds like a teenage girl, which can be annoyingly distracting. Still, for players who want to gain a good rudimentary understanding of this opening in regards to theory and strategy, this DVD will take you a step towards that goal.

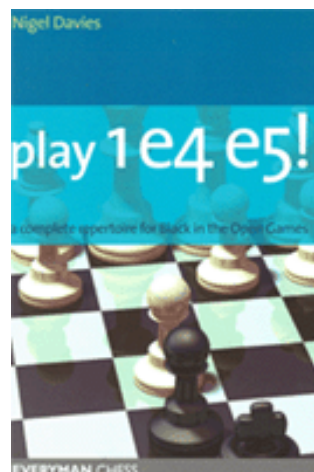
My assessment of this DVD: 

Order *A World Champion's Guide to the Petroff*


(DVD) by Rustam Kasimdzhanov

Play 1 e4 e5! (CD) by Nigel Davies, Everyman Chess 2007, Figurine Algebraic Notation, \$23.95

I reviewed the book version of this product in [January 2006](#) and quite liked it. My conclusion was: “This book is mostly for experienced players who can memorize some variations and who don’t need everything explained because it focuses more on the theoretical presentation than it does on the basic strategic elements. The material is well-selected, well-annotated and Davies has injected a lot of his own ideas and analysis to the presentation.”



I’m still of that opinion, although it appears that Black has run into a fair amount of problems in the main line of the Keres Variation of the Chigorin Ruy Lopez, which Davies recommends. This is, of course, quite unfortunate. Nonetheless, as a repertoire book, it offers many ideas for Black and is therefore still quite relevant.





My assessment of this CD: 

Order *Play 1 e4 e5!* (CD)
by Nigel Davies

Starting Out: The Scotch Game (CD) by John Emms, Everyman Chess 2007, Figurine Algebraic Notation, \$23.95

English grandmaster John Emms is one of my favorite authors and this CD only serves to confirm that opinion. While the material is aimed at improving players, there is a plenty of content from which stronger players will benefit. Emms adds many of his own ideas about this opening, both in regards to explanations and analysis of the numerous variations Black can choose between. There have not been many books written about this opening, but this is easily one of the very best. So if you are thinking about taking this opening up as White or would like to further understand its subtleties, this product is the answer you have been seeking.



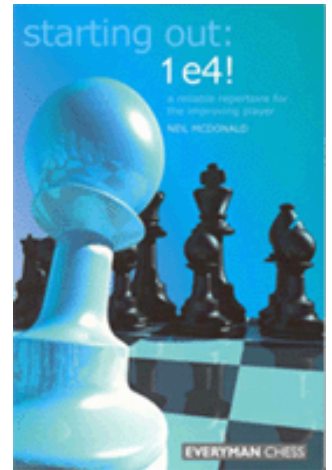
My assessment of this CD:    

Order *Starting Out: The Scotch Game* (CD)
by John Emms

Starting Out: 1 e4! (CD) by Neil McDonald, Everyman Chess 2007, Figurine Algebraic Notation, \$23.95

Hyperbole isn't an unknown concept when it comes to promotion, but this CD takes it to the extreme in stating that:

Building and maintaining an opening repertoire can be a demanding task for an improving player. In Starting Out: 1 e4! Neil McDonald solves this problem by providing the reader with a strong a trustworthy repertoire with the white pieces based on the popular opening move 1 e4. The recommended lines given here have stood the test of time and are regularly employed by Grandmasters. Reading Starting Out: 1 e4! will give you the confidence to play these variations against all strengths of player and provide you with a reliable opening armoury for years to come.



When I reviewed the book edition in [October 2006](#), I wrote: “It’s a bit odd to see an opening such as this [the Accelerated Dragon] dismissed in so cavalier a fashion. However, the Petroff is also dispatched over the course of just a few pages, where McDonald doesn’t even discuss the critical lines after 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 Nxe5 d6 4 Nf3 Nxe4 5 Nc3 Nxc3 6 dxc3. In the Improved Hanham Philidor: 1 e4 d6 2 d4 Nf6 3 Nc3 e5 4 Nf3 Nbd7, he recommends the fun gambit 5 g4!?, which Shirov has employed a couple of times. Yet to uphold it as White’s weapon in a repertoire book looks like cutting corners that weren’t meant to be cut. And I can easily mention another dozen examples that required more comprehensive coverage.

“I like his choice of variations and the annotations to the 56 games are rather instructive. Yet when you present sharp variations as repertoire choices, it is a disservice to the reader if you do not delve a bit deeper into the analysis. This book may provide the reader with the outline of a repertoire that will require further research, but this is far from the promise to provide everything needed to play the opening with confidence against strong opposition.”


My assessment of this CD:  

Order *Starting Out: 1 e4!* (CD)
by Neil McDonald

Play the Queen's Gambit (CD) by Chris Ward, Everyman Chess 2007, Figurine Algebraic Notation, \$23.95

This CD asserts that it will arm you with enough information and self-assurance to begin playing the Queen's Gambit as White. However, in my [June 2006](#) column, I didn't quite share that notion and wrote: "While the variations throughout the book are well-chosen and the ideas behind them are explained reasonably well, the book has several deep and obvious holes in the repertoire choices presented. Nonetheless, it can be used as a good repertoire guide to point you to areas for your own research. But if you simply rely on the suggested variations, you will soon find yourself in a precarious situation against a better prepared player." Given that the material on the CD is identical to the book, it will be rated accordingly.



My assessment of this CD: 

[Order](#) *Play the Queen's Gambit* (CD)
by Chris Ward

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