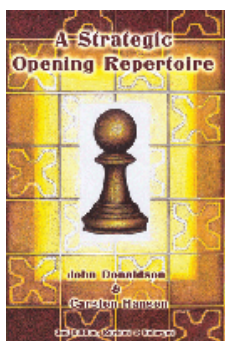








COLUMNISTS

Checkpoint

Carsten Hansen



Rating Chart

-  – A poor book
-  – Not very good
-  – A useful book
-  – A good book
-  – An excellent book



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Reviewed this month:

Grandmaster Repertoire 1

1.d4, Vol. One

by Boris Avrukh

Playing the Queen's Gambit

A Grandmaster Guide

by Lars Schandorff

Secrets of Opening Surprises, Vol. 10

by Jeroen Bosch (Ed.)

New In Chess Yearbook, Vol. 90

by Genna Sosonko (Ed.)

Grandmaster Repertoires

This time around we will take a look at the first volume in a new series called *Grandmaster Repertoire* from Quality Chess. In addition, another book from this publisher is designated as *A Grandmaster Guide*. To round everything off, we have two old friends from New In Chess: their latest yearbook and volume 10 in their *SOS* series.

Grandmaster Repertoire 1 – 1.d4, Vol. One by Boris Avrukh, Quality Chess 2008, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 458pp., \$29.95

For those who are not familiar with the author, this is his first book, he is a grandmaster from Israel, an Olympiad gold medalist, former World Junior Champion and apparently also an analysis partner of World Championship finalists.



This is the first of two volumes on a repertoire for White based on 1 d4. The aim of the series is to provide the reader with a repertoire that will last a lifetime; one that is good enough for elite tournaments as well as the club championship. Avrukh notes that the repertoire presented in this book is an improved version of the one that elevated him to the top fifty in the world.

When I first picked up this book I was astounded by the sheer number of pages as well as the fact that there is so much analysis in this thick volume. It really took my breath away.

The material is divided as follows:

- Key to symbols used & Bibliography (1 page)
- Foreword by Grandmaster Boris Gelfand (1 page)
- Foreword by the Author (5 pages)
- The Catalan: 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 g3 (12 chapters – 234

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NIC Yearbook 82

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- pages)
- The Slav: 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nf3 (9 chapters – 96 pages)
- The Queen's Gambit (5 chapters – 62 pages)
- The Queen's Gambit Accepted (3 chapters – 45 pages)
- Index of Variations

In the author's foreword, he discusses the structure of the book along with the reasons behind several repertoire choices. As you can see from the above, the Catalan takes up the majority of this volume, but, as Avrukh points out, the advantage of playing the Catalan as white is that you eliminate many of Black's options after 1 d4. Avrukh writes, "It is a common misconception that the Catalan is an opening where White is trying to achieve a slight edge and squeeze the life out of his opponent. This is no less true than it is for the Spanish Opening. In both cases Black has the possibility of taking a defensive stand and exchanging his chances of counterplay for a passive hope of equalizing. However, if Black is ready for a fight, so is White! The sharp lines in Chapters 6 and 7 only differ from the sharp lines of, say, the Marshall Attack by being less likely to end in a draw by force."

Avrukh has chosen a somewhat modest repertoire against the Slav, recommending 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 e3, seeking a small positional advantage rather than going for the immediate kill in the immensely complicated lines such as the Botvinnik and Anti-Moscow Variations. In the Queen's Gambit Accepted section, Avrukh went for 3 e3, rather than duplicate lines considered in Schandorff's book. This is a surprising concession, but definitely very considerate for those of us who will read both works. However, there are a few overlapping lines. Both authors have chosen 5 a3 in the Albin (1 d4 d5 2 c4 e5 3 dxe5 d4 4 Nf3 Nc6) and the somewhat rare 5 Bg5 in the Chigorin (after 1 d4 d5 2 c4 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Nf3 dxc4), certainly giving the players of those systems as black some homework, because they will very like face these lines consistently over the next few years.

Unlike in most other opening books, the explanatory prose takes up almost no space at all. Avrukh explains this by telling the reader that he has definite limitations as far as literary skills, but also that the book is an example of how he approaches chess, in a very concrete and analytical fashion. This obviously makes it difficult for some readers, because most of it will be far too complicated for them to comprehend. With this in mind, I think players rated below 2000 should most likely stay clear of this book, at least for now.

On the back cover, the publisher promises the reader "hundreds of novelties" and that this volume "Busts many recommended lines." Neither statement is an exaggeration, as every single page seems to contain a novelty or original analysis that improves upon previous suggestions by other specialists or outright refutes such suggestions. While the vast majority is for White, there are also many improvements suggested for Black, though they eventually don't lead to equality, but only to something better than what was previously known.

Many books that provide such a high volume of original material have a tendency towards weak analysis or exaggerated evaluations; however, I have not been able to find anything similar in this volume. I picked ten random novelties and improvements, and in each case I found the author to be astonishingly accurate and objective, in some cases even a little too modest, when I consider White's advantage to be more significant than Avrukh leads to believe.

There is such an abundance of original material that it is completely astonishing. The author has gone so far to prove even the smallest points to ensure that White holds the better chances in every line he presents. While you can expect to see improvements for Black in many of the critical lines, Avrukh has made sure that Black will have his work cut out for him and that there are no easy answers when facing the repertoire

presented in this book. For ambitious players who play 1 d4 as white or answer it with 1...d5 as black, this book is an absolute must-buy.

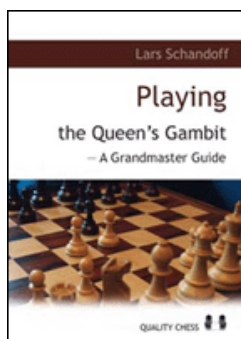
Although the year is still young, in this volume we have already found the best opening book of 2009.

My assessment of this book: ♦♦♦♦♦

Grandmaster Repertoire 1 – 1.d4, Vol. One
by Boris Avrukh

Playing the Queen's Gambit – A Grandmaster Guide by Lars Schandorff,
Quality Chess 2009, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 248pp.,
\$27.95

Those who are familiar with the Danish author of this volume know that he is usually extremely well-prepared and very knowledgeable on opening theory. The present volume is his first book, but has been a chess columnist for a major Danish newspaper for many years.



The material is divided as follows:

- Preface
- Key to symbols used & Bibliography
- Introduction
- 1 Queen's Gambit Declined (28 pages)
- 2 Queen's Gambit Accepted (32 pages)
- 3 The Slav (40 pages)
- 4 The Semi-Slav (52 pages)
- 5 The a6-Slav (18 pages)
- 6 The Tarrasch (24 pages)
- 7 The Chigorin (14 pages)
- 8 Minor Lines (22 pages)
- Index of Full Games (2 pages)
- Index of Variations (6 pages)

While the above topics are what you expect in a volume that presents an opening repertoire for white in the Queen's Gambit, it doesn't even come close to conveying the true nature of the content. Schandorff makes no compromises in his approach to each variation. This means answering the Slav (1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 Nc3 dxc4) with the topical and highly popular 5 Ne5 and the Semi-Slav (1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 Nc3 e6) with 5 Bg5, which is ridiculously popular at grandmaster level and therefore possibly not particularly advisable for average players. However, Schandorff doesn't shy away from the enormous challenge it is to present it as part of a repertoire.

In the Introduction he writes as follows:

“The repertoire is entirely based on big mainlines [sic], which guarantees reliability and strength. Firstly, you cannot expect to get anything against well-respected openings like the Queen's Gambit Accepted and the Semi-Slav by trying a little sideline or just playing it safe. The main lines, on the other hand, have not become main lines by chance. They have slowly but surely evolved and proved their strength over the years, so by choosing main lines you gain reliable weapons.

“Secondly, the main lines are sharp and put the maximum pressure on the opponent, both theoretically and in practice. This corresponds

perfectly with the philosophy behind this work, which is that White should strive for the initiative and show that moving first matters. Developing the pieces fluidly to active squares and trying to take the centre with pawns to seize space – these are key elements in the various White set-ups presented here.”

He also compares playing White to having the serve in tennis, it gives you an opportunity to either win directly or gain the initiative. Once you go over the material in the respective chapters, you will notice that while the opening lines are quite aggressive, Schandorff has a keen eye for possibilities that take the game into an advantageous endgame for the first player.

This is an intelligently written work. In some chapters there hardly seems to be any text, while in others there is plenty, but the author doesn't waste space with needless chit-chat, where it counts, he often goes into some detail. That said, I find that he frequently takes it for granted that the reader has a fundamentally strong understanding of many different types of positions. Therefore, I'm a little concerned that players rated below 2100 will have a hard time understanding all of Schandorff's evaluations and comments. In regards to the actual analysis of the variations, Schandorff navigates the reader through what can easily be considered mazes of material and variations that would otherwise be nearly impossible to sort out on your own. In addition, there is a good balance of theory and original analysis. There are countless improvements over existing theory as well as numerous other suggestions. In many cases, he offers alternatives to the main line. This can well come in handy in the Botvinnik Variation and the Anti-Moscow Gambit. I found Schandorff's comment at the end of the section on these two lines quite amusing: “The Moscow Variation is at the very cutting edge of modern opening theory. Many of the lines are strangely balanced: White has a good long-term initiative for the pawn, but perhaps not more than that. In a practical game, however, it will be difficult for the black player to find his way through this tactical maze. And that's why it often pays off to play razor-sharp chess with White – you will dictate events and psychologically it is much more pleasant to attack than to defend. Of course the Moscow and Botvinnik Variations both lead to hair-raising complications and there is a lot of theory, but you don't have to know everything by heart to play them. And please remember that even though FIDE has made the game faster and faster over the years, you are actually still allowed to think at the board.”

This book is very well-written and an excellent choice for ambitious players. It provides the reader a very good repertoire against all of Black's potential choices in the Queen's Gambit. It is not an easy-to-play repertoire; it demands a good all-round understanding from the first player, along with a thorough study of the material in this book.

My assessment of this book: ♦♦♦♦♦

Playing the Queen's Gambit
A Grandmaster Guide
by Lars Schandorff

Secrets of Opening Surprises, Vol. 10 by Jeroen Bosch (Ed.), New In Chess 2009, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 143pp., \$21.95

The SOS series of books has become of favorite of mine. The fun, sharp, curious and often highly surprising lines covered in this series are nearly always worth a try, whether in casual games online or in more serious encounters. Sometimes the suggested lines are just one notch below accepted main lines, but most of



them have been tested by fairly strong players. Although other lines look so dubious that some serious convincing by the respective authors is needed before the reader can feel confident enough to give the line a go.



The material in the present volume is divided as follows:

- 1 Bosch: The SOS Files (14 pages)
- 2 Rogozenco: The Blumenfeld Gambit (7 pages)
- 3 Bosch: The Lewis Gambit (5 pages)
- 4 Reinderman: The Retreat Variation (7 pages)
- 5 Mikhalechishin: Steinitz's Anti-French (3 pages)
- 6 Kogan: Slav: the Bellon-Murey Variation (10 pages)
- 7 Bosch: Slav: a Marshall Gambit of sorts (6 pages)
- 8 Finkel: Queen's Fianchetto in the Alekhine (6 pages)
- 9 Lysyj: Gruenfeld Indian: Kruppa Variation (7 pages)
- 10 Khenkin: SOS in a Flexible Caro-Kann (6 pages)
- 11 Tiviakov: Queen's Indian: Double Fianchetto (10 pages)
- 12 Mikhalechishin: Sicilian: Romanishin Variation (4 pages)
- 13 Bosch: Modern Provocation (7 pages)
- 14 Navara: Tricky Line vs the Slav (16 pages)
- 15 Finkel: Taking Chances in the Volga (7 pages)
- 16 Cohen: Petroff for Beginners (12 pages)
- 17 Bosch: Winning Ugly in the Tarrasch (9 pages)

There are several ideas in this volume that I have seen discussed in mainstream works, such as the Double Fianchetto in the Queen's Indian, as covered in some detail by Tiviakov in chapter eleven, or the "Modern Provocation: 1 e4 g6 2 d4 Bg7 3 Nc3 Nc6 intending ...d7-d5, as discussed in chapter thirteen by Bosch. Some of the other chapters cover ideas that can well be played at grandmaster level; for instance, chapter fourteen written by David Navara of the Czech Republic, who accounts for the ideas in a side line in the Semi-Slav: 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 Nc3 e6 5 Qd3, which he has employed on several occasions himself, including once when he beat Kramnik in a rapid play game with the line. Grandmaster Lysyj in chapter nine discusses the line: 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5 4 cxd5 Nxd5 5 e4 Nxc3 6 bxc3 Bg7 7 Bg5!?, which he too has played himself.


Mikhalechishin has written two very short chapters, one on Steinitz's ridiculous-looking 1 e4 e6 2 e5, which cannot be a threat to the French, yet reading the chapter, he only has a few suggestions for Black that appears to give unclear play, the rest of the lines all seem to favor White! The other chapter is on a Romanishin invention, 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 Bb5 Bd7 4 c4. I'm quite unhappy with the length of these two chapters, because if they merited enough attention to make it to this book, surely more than three or four pages can be written about them. If you don't have enough relevant games, then do a bit of analysis yourself. I think that's the least we can expect of a contributor to this series.

Then we have the Alekhine Retreat: 1 e4 Nf6 2 e5 Ng8, which is a curiosity, but hardly anything that White should be worried about. More of interest is the chapter called Petroff for Beginners, which discusses the merits of 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 Nxe5 Nxe4, the so-called Damiano Gambit. This is supposed to be inferior for Black, if not clearly better for White. But the article's author, Or Cohen, makes many interesting points and illustrates a number of pitfalls for White that gives Black plenty of opportunities to collect a quick effortless point on the score board. To his credit he has played this line several times himself with very decent results. It is ideas like this that makes this series so relevant for many lower-ranked players; you can study up on the material in a couple of hours and you have an excellent surprise weapon.

While my impression of this series is very favorable, it can be improved without too much effort. The SOS series is suffering from many of the

maladies the NIC Yearbooks once did in that there is some inconsistency in the quality of the surveys. The editor should be more proactive in rejecting below par material, both in terms of length and original input. Furthermore, the text overuses phrases, such as “Better is”, “Inferior is,” etc.

For fun-loving chess players that like to live on the wild side, this series can be highly recommended.

My assessment of this book: 

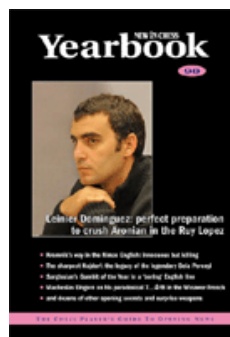
[Order](#) *Secrets of Opening Surprises, Vol. 10*
by Jeroen Bosch (Ed.)

New In Chess Yearbook, Vol. 90 by Genna Sosonko (Ed.), Interchess
2009, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 246pp., \$28.95

The Yearbooks from New In Chess are a true joy to read. The material never fails to entertain, inform, or spark my curiosity.

The material is divided as follows:

- Opening Highlights (2 pages)
- Your Variations (2 pages)
- Forum (11 pages)
- Sosonko’s Corner (6 pages)
- Surveys (211 pages)
- Book Reviews (6 pages)
- New In Chess Code System (1 page)

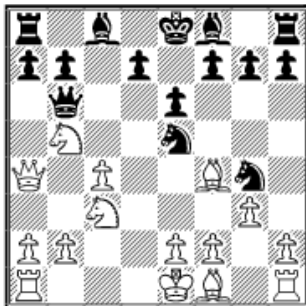


The cover of this volume gives us the following headlines:

- Leinier Dominguez: perfect preparation to crush Aronian in the Ruy Lopez
- Kramnik’s way in the Nimzo English: innocuous but killing
- The sharpest Najdorf: the legacy of the legendary Bela Perenyi
- Sargissian’s Gambit of the Year in a ‘boring’ English line
- Viacheslav Eingorn on his paradoxical 7...Kf8 in the Winawer French

Usually, there will be an associated survey inside the volume, but rather surprisingly the first of the above is only an entry in the Forum section. By the way, in another entry in the Forum section, Peter Boel discusses an interesting counterpunch in the new Shirov Gambit in the Philidor Defense: 1 e4 d6 2 d4 Nf6 3 Nc3 e5 4 Nf3 Nbd7 5 g4, and here the German IM Jens-Uwe Maiwald played the surprising 5...d5!? against the Swedish GM Jonny Hector.

The “Gambit of the Year” in the English is comes after the moves 1 c4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nxd4 e6 6 g3 Qb6 7 Ndb5 Ne5 8 Bf4 Nfg4, and with the threat against f2, you will be surprised to find out that White’s new idea is 9 Qa4!?.



The exact consequences of the move are still being worked out, but it has already been tested in several high-level encounters such as Aronian-Leko, Morelia/Linares 2008. One possible line, as given by survey author GM Alexey Kuzmin, is 9...Qxf2+ 10 Kd2 Qc5 11 Ne4 Qc6 12 Bg2 Kd8 13 Rac1, and White has the initiative. Therefore Black should play either 9...g5 (as played by Leko), 9...Bc5 or 9...a6. Fascinating stuff.

The thirty-three surveys in this volume are jam-packed with interesting material and the quality is topnotch. Nikolay Ninov discussion and analysis of some new ideas and discoveries in the Traxler (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 Ng5 Bc5) is absolutely amazing. It is beyond me why anybody would spend the necessary time to grasp the variations in the sharp opening, but if you have time to spare, it must be a fascinating research project. Other contributors for this volume include GMs Rogozenco, Marin, Eingorn, Moskalenko, Ikonnikov, Avrukh, Golubev, Vladimirov and L.B. Hansen, along with a host of familiar names and well-known theoreticians.

The surveys cover the following openings: Sicilian Defense (6), Pirc (1), King's Fianchetto (1), French (2), Scandinavian (2), Ruy Lopez (2), Two Knights (2), Queen's Gambit Declined (1), Slav (3), Nimzo-Indian (3), Queen's Indian (1), Gruenfeld Indian (2), King's Indian (2), Dutch (2), English Opening (3), and Reti Opening (1).

Sosonko's Forum has an excellent article about openings where Black sacrifices material to reach an endgame he can't win, but where he isn't likely to lose either. In the Service section, grandmaster Glenn Flear reviews five recent books.

For the ambitious player, the NIC Yearbook is the premier publication. It is a catalogue of ideas that can easily provide material for players at any level to enhance their opening repertoire.

My assessment of this book: ♦♦♦♦♦

New In Chess Yearbook, Vol. 90

by Genna Sosonko (Ed.)

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