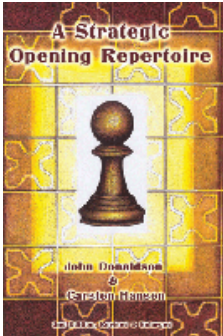




COLUMNISTS

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:**

*Chess Explained – The Main Line Slav*  
by David Vigorito

*Chess Explained – The Grünfeld*  
by Valentin Bogdanov

*Play the Queen’s Indian*  
by Andrew Greet

*En Passant*

*Opening Encyclopaedia 2009*  
by ChessBase

*Corr Database 2009*  
by ChessBase

Openings Well Explained

This time around we have a couple of new volumes in the popular *Chess Explained* series from Gambit Publications. As you will see below, despite starting out with the same format, the authors have gone in two completely different directions in their approach to covering the material. Both are popular and topical openings, and yet the results in both cases are decidedly noteworthy. Furthermore, we have another repertoire book from Everyman Chess, before rounding off with two database products from the ChessBase powerhouse. I haven’t always been a fan of their products of this kind, so we have to see if they have taken notice of my previous criticism.

*Chess Explained – The Main Line Slav* by David Vigorito, Gambit Publications 2009, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 112 pp., \$24.95

Prior to the release of this volume, the American International Master David Vigorito authored two very detailed works: [Challenging the Nimzo-Indian](#) (Quality Chess 2007 – reviewed in February 2008[link]) and [Play the Semi-Slav](#) (Quality Chess 2008 – reviewed June 2008[link]), both received the highest marks in this column because they contained an amazing volume of details in both game theory and author input. Therefore the present volume is quite a departure, considering that the books in this series from Gambit Publications rarely extend more than 112 pages and usually focus on a concise presentation of the opening in question with a fine-tuned balance between game theory and plenty of explanations of positions and plans rather than a theoretical investigation. The books are thus aimed at a lower-rated audience than what Vigorito has previously targetted.

The Main Line Slav is characterized by the moves 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 Nc3 dxc4



and therefore in the present work you will not find any coverage of the Semi-Slav lines with 4...e6 nor the currently quite popular Chebanenko Variation 4...a6. The 4 e3 line, the Exchange Slav or lesser lines are also not covered. However, given the space limitations, the author has a difficult task ahead of him. He has broken the material up in the following chapters:

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- Symbols/Dedication/Acknowledgements/Bibliography (1 page)
- Introduction (3 pages)
- 1. Dutch Variation: White Plays 9 Qe2 (21 pages)
- 2. Dutch Variation: White Plays 9 Nh4 (13 pages)
- 3. Central Variation: Black Plays 6...Nbd7 7 Nxc4 Qc7 (12 pages)
- 4. Central Variation: Black Plays 6...Nbd7 7 Nxc4 Nb6 (12 pages)
- 5. Central Variation: Black Plays 6...e6 (12 pages)
- 6. Black Avoids 5...Bf5: Bronstein and Smyslov Variations (18 pages)
- 7. White Avoids 5 a4: The Quiet 5 e3 and the Geller Gambit (13 pages)
- List of Games (1 page)
- Index of Variations (2 pages)

As Vigorito mentions in the introduction, the Main Line Slav has been played by an impressive list of World Champions as well as most of today’s top grandmasters, which makes the theory of this opening an area of constant motion and developments. It is also an opening where a solid understanding of the pawn structures and piece-play will be the main factor in the success of any player who takes on this opening.

Each volume in the *Chess Explained* series contains 25 recent master games, and that is of course also the case for the book. The earliest games date back to 2001, whereas the most recent ones are from 2008. The introduction is quite brief and can best be described as an overview of what is to come. Nevertheless, as presented, I don’t think it adds much to the value of the book and therefore should either have been cut shorter or not included at all.

The two chapters on the Dutch Variation cover what I consider the “old” main line, the lines that arise after 6 e3 e6 7 Bxc4 Bb4 8 0-0, where Black either plays 8...Nbd7 or 8...0-0. These chapters are very competently written with a fine balance between a thorough theoretical coverage and instructive prose to help the reader understand what is happening in the games.


Following these chapters are three chapters on the Central Variation, the topical 5 a4 Bf5 6 Ne5, after which Black has a number of interesting options, including the piece sacrifice in the line 6...e6 7 f3 Bb4 8 e4 Bxe4 9 fx e4 Nxe4 10 Bd2 Qxd4 11 Nxe4 Qxe4+ 12 Qe2 Bxd2+ 13 Kxd2 Qd5+ 14 Kc2



which has been played a numerous times at grandmaster level and is, according to Vigorito still theoretically viable, although Black recently has been following Kramnik’s lead and now has started opting for 7...c5 8 e4 Bg6. But nowadays, it seems 6...Nbd7 has taken over as the more popular choice for Black. One of the main lines is 7 Nxc4 Qc7 8 g3 e5 9 dxe5 Nxe5 10 Bf4 Nfd7 11 Bg2, and now Morozevich’s crazy-looking 11...g5!? is sharpest and probably best. Needless to say, both sides really need to know the theory and be further prepared for surprises from the opponent. The three chapters on the Central Variation have considerably less narrative text than the two on the Dutch Variation, and for the lower-rated players in the target audience, this may cause some problems, because the play is extremely complicated and rarely self-explanatory. This is one of the very few flaws I can find in this book.

As usual with the books from Gambit, the production value is excellent with good paper quality, clear print and easy-to-read diagrams, though surprisingly there is a diagram error on page 14 (Black has three rooks).

As an introductory work to the Main Line Slav, this book is an excellent place to start, although those rated below 1800 will likely have a hard time understanding everything, because, despite a good deal of explanatory prose, the games and the opening analysis are fairly advanced.

My assessment of this book: 

[Order](#) *Chess Explained – The Main Line Slav*  
by David Vigorito

*Chess Explained – The Grünfeld* by Valentin Bogdanov, Gambit Publications 2009, Figurine Algebraic Notation, paperback, 128 pp., \$24.95

Whereas the above title on the Slav is relatively heavy on theory, this volume in the same series is incredibly light on this aspect which seems almost unimaginable. However, the author has chosen an approach that I find both somewhat surprising yet very good, considering that the target audience in this series are players rated up to around 2100. Most books on the Grünfeld, which normally arises after 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5



are written for fairly advanced players, which is not entirely surprising, because the opening is strategically very complex. In light of this, I find it mildly bizarre and peculiar when I see players rated below 1500 study and play this opening as Black. Nevertheless, this volume may open the door to the understanding of this opening for relatively lower-rated players.

The material is split up as follows:

- Symbols (1 page)
- Introduction (1 page)
- 1. Fianchetto Grünfeld (18 pages)
- 2. Non-Standard Lines with cxd5 (14 pages)
- 3. Classical Exchange Variation: White Plays Ne2 (14 pages)
- 4. Modern Exchange Variation: White Plays Nf3 (9 pages)
- 5. Modern Exchange Variation with Rb1 (22 pages)
- 6. Russian System: White Plays Qb3 (15 pages)
- 7. Lines with Bf4 or Bg5 (18 pages)
- 8. Closed Systems: White Plays e3 (9 pages)
- List of Games (1 pages)
- Index of Variations (2 pages)

As already mentioned, the author treats the theory in this theory-heavy opening lightly. Rather he focuses on explaining all major plans and ideas in the various lines. While the aim of the series is to provide the reader “an understanding of an opening and the middlegames to which it leads, enabling you to find the right moves and plans in your own games,” then the approach in this volume is a departure from what we have previously seen from previous books in this series. There had been an approximate 50/50 balance of theory and supporting/explanatory prose, but in this volume it is more like 20/80. Whether you as a reader prefer one approach over the other is a matter of taste, but in this volume it works.

This has possibly something to do with the background of the author, a virtual unknown. According to the back cover, he is an International Master from Ukraine and has over thirty years’ experience as a chess trainer, with several of his pupils reaching grandmaster level. Having experience in explaining and defining ideas for young and inexperienced players can certainly help determine what needs attention and emphasis and what can be covered somewhat more superficially. However, as it is also pointed out on the back cover, that this opening is very much “an opening of grand ideas, which need to be understood well in order to get to grips with the theory and handle the resulting positions.” While I have never played the opening as Black myself, I have faced it many times as White. Yet I feel that having read through this volume and studying the instructive main games, I have gained a deeper understanding of the opening, which will certainly help me in future games.

It should also be noted that the book includes a contribution by Grandmaster Viacheslav Eingorn on the key ideas of Rb1 in the Modern Exchange Variation, a variation Eingorn helped develop in the late 1970s and early 1980s. While this contribution includes more theoretical references compared to the rest of the book, it is still written in the same tone and with the same focus, so as not to digress from the overall guideline too much.

While some Grünfeld enthusiasts may be disappointed in the lack of theoretical references and original analysis, I find this book to be the best on this opening for an audience rated below 2000. It is very detailed yet very broad in its coverage, and it covers everything that is important to know about for players on either side of the board in this opening. For

higher-rated players, this book may not exactly offer what you want or need, and you may have to look for a monograph that is more focused on the theoretical perspective of the opening.

**My assessment of this book:** 

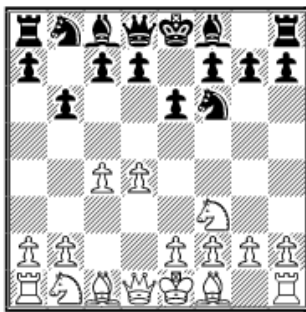
**Order *Chess Explained – The Grünfeld***  
by Valentin Bogdanov

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*Play the Queen's Indian* by Andrew Greet, Everyman Chess 2009,  
Figurine Algebraic Notation, paperback, 256 pp., \$ 24.95

English International Master Andrew Greet is quickly becoming one of my favorite new authors. His previous works, [\*Play the Ruy Lopez\*](#) and [\*Starting Out: The Accelerated Dragon\*](#) were both excellent and with the present work, *Play the Queen's Indian* he is continuing down the same path of excellence.

The Queen's Indian, which arises after 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 b6



has for more than 80 years been one of the best and most solid ways of countering 1 d4 from White; it is one of the openings developed by Aron Nimzowitsch. The opening has never really lost its popularity, and at various times has been featured in the repertoires of nearly all the top players.

This work is presented as a repertoire book for Black, which has certainly helped the author cut down on the number of pages because he has been able to bypass an enormous amount of theory through his choices. Nevertheless he has not entirely stayed away from topical main lines, but rather found a good balance in his presentation:

- Bibliography (1 page)
- Preface (2 pages)
- 1. Early Bishop Developments (12 pages)
- 2. The Straightforward 4 e3 (17 pages)
- 3. The Hybrid System: 4 Nf3 Bb4 (12 pages)
- 4. The Hybrid System: 5 e3 (9 pages)
- 5. The Hybrid System: 5 Qb3!? (21 pages)
- 6. The Hybrid System: 5 Bg5 (11 pages)
- 7. The Main Line Hybrid: 5 Bg5 with e3 (22 pages)
- 8. The Petrosian Variation: 4 a3 Ba6 (8 pages)
- 9. The Petrosian Variation: 5 e3 (9 pages)
- 10. The Petrosian Variation: 5 Qc2 (18 pages)
- 11. The Petrosian Variation: 10 Bf4 & 10 Bg5 (18 pages)
- 12. The Fianchetto Variation: 4 g3 Ba6 (16 pages)
- 13. The Fianchetto Variation: 5 Qa4 (21 pages)
- 14. The Fianchetto Variation: 5 Qc2!? (21 pages)
- 15. The Fianchetto Variation: 5 b3 (5 pages)
- 16. The Fianchetto Variation: 5 b3 b5!? 6 cxb5 (18 pages)
- Index of Variations (7 pages)

The number of pages allocated for each chapter seems more or less in order, though some of the chapters seem rather long, considering the line being discussed. However, this is on account of how the author has decided to present the material. In many ways, this book is a combination of the approaches in the two books reviewed above, with the perspective of a repertoire book. While offering a lot of theory and analysis, it also has ample explanatory prose to help guide the reader through the maze of variations and to gain a greater understanding of the opening as a whole.

In regards to the repertoire choices for Black, it is hard to come with any significant objections to the selections made in made in the first seven chapters. Then in chapter 8, where the author begins coverage of the Petrosian Variation, 4 a3, he opts for the sharp 4...Ba6, which is played a less frequently than 4...Bb7, but this obviously allows Black to stay away from the main lines after 4...Bb7, which are both heavy on theory and not as interesting for Black to play as 4...Ba6.

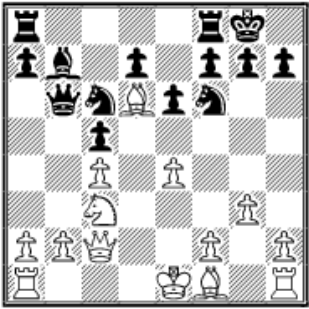
The same can be said of his choice against the Fianchetto Variation, where he plays 4...Ba6 after 4 g3, but then after 5 b3, he opts for the off-

beat 5...b5!?



which has been particularly popular for Black, used by quite a few International Masters and Grandmasters since it was introduced some years back. It is also worth noting that after 4...Ba6 5 Qc2, he has chosen to avoid the sharp and very topical pawn sacrifice (for White) 5...c5 6 d5 exd5 7 cxd5 Bb7 8 Bg2, which is quite dangerous for Black even at grandmaster level. Instead, he offers 5...Bb4+ for Black, steering the game to a variation that somewhat resembles a Catalan.

As in his other works, Greet is not afraid to offer new ideas and go deep into the analysis of moves suggested by others. For instance in chapter 11, he analyses an idea that was originally suggested by Dutch Grandmaster Jeroen Piket, but that has yet to be tested: 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 b6 4.a3 Ba6 5.Qc2 Bb7 6.Nc3 c5 7.e4 cxd4 8.Nxd4 Bc5 9.Nb3 Nc6 10.Bf4 0-0 11. Nxc5 bxc5 12.Bd6 Qb6!?



giving White the opportunity to pick up an exchange. However accepting it allows Black ample compensation, e.g., 13.Bxf8 Nd4 14.Qd3 Rxf8, and now 15.f3 d5 16.exd5 exd5 17.0-0-0 Bc6! gives Black the better chances. But as Greet points out, White should probably play 13 e5!?, which leads to an easier game. However, he offers a fair amount of original analysis in this spot, and does so several places in the book, which makes this book an excellent read for a wider audience. Lower-rated players will be introduced to the opening and have all the explanations they need to understand and play the opening well, while higher-rated players will be able to go further with the original ideas and analysis provided by the author in this book.

Overall, I find this book an excellent read and can only highly recommend it to everybody already playing this opening as Black and those who are thinking about taking it up. It is well-written, entertaining and instructive.

**My assessment of this book:** ♦♦♦♦♦

*En Passant*

This time around we will take a very brief look at two new and quite pricey products from our friends at ChessBase.

*Opening Encyclopaedia 2009* by ChessBase, ChessBase GmbH 2009, Figurine Algebraic Notation, DVD-ROM, \$ 105.95

The back cover blurb tells us the following:

“The ChessBase Opening Encyclopaedia 2009 features the complete coverage of all opening sectors, offering an optimal start for opening training. Many well-known specialists have made contributions in their field of expertise, such as Anand, Avrukh, Dr Huebner, Jussupow, Kortschnoj, Krasenkow, Marin, Postny, Ribli, Rogozenko and Stohl. The DVD contains a separate directory with 437 (78 of them are new) special theory databases from the CBMs. For each of 500 opening sectors according to ECO standard there is at least one opening survey, so that the database is the ideal tool for building up a complete opening repertoire. The game database includes 3.3 million games, about 79.000 of them with annotations.

- more than 3.35 million games, all featuring ECO codes
- more than 79.000 of them annotated
- more than 4.500 opening surveys
- access to the games with a big opening key
- 437 special theory databases
- big tree of all games for quick overview and statistics
- ChessBase 9 Reader with access to all databases”

Compared with the 2008 version of the product, the new version contains approximately 300,000 extra games, 1,000 extra annotated games, 200 extra opening surveys and 12 extra “special theory” databases.

This makes it sound like a very interesting product, but as I have pointed out when reviewing previous editions, there are several major flaws that have still not been corrected, in particular outdated material. Some examples:

- The majority of the Caro-Kann coverage dates back to 1993
- All of the Sveshnikov Sicilian opening surveys are from 1993
- No survey on the Ruy Lopez Zaitsev Variation dated after 1998
- There are only 2 (out of 84) surveys on the Orthodox Queen’s Gambit (D50-D69) dated after 1997.
- On the Queen’s Indian only three surveys are written after 1997, but the vast majority of the rest is from 1993-94.

These are just some of the more serious issues, but there are similar issues in the coverage of other openings. I just don’t understand why some of the material is so outdated for highly topical openings, especially when you are paying more than \$100 for the product.

I’m not aware of any software products that directly competes against this DVD-ROM from ChessBase, but a complete subscription to the Chesspublishing.com website costs less than this DVD-ROM, and with the subscription you get no less 144 new updates per year and have access to all previous updates in addition to a bunch of other bonus features.

#### My assessment of this DVD: ❖❖

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*Corr Database 2009* by ChessBase, ChessBase GmbH 2008, Figurine Algebraic Notation, CD, \$ 85.95

From the back cover:

“Corr Database 2009 is an extensive collection of correspondence games, featuring classical correspondence games played by mail as well as email games. The CD contains 670,471 games from 1804 until 2008 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 2009 also features a correspondence chess playerbase, which includes about 65,000 names. A must for every player of correspondence chess!”

The typos and misspellings are as they appear on the back-cover, I’m not sure why the text editor has not bothered to catch and correct the quite obvious mistakes.

The description sounds at first fairly extensive, but it should be compared to its direct competitor, *UltraCorr2* which has been assembled by my fellow columnist Tim Harding, and contains more than 900,00 games, is priced more moderately at EUR 27.50, and which further contains several bonus features such as entire books in PDF-format. In addition, despite its name that includes 2009, the most recent games on the CD are from April 2008; this is quite surprising and also somewhat disappointing.

I find *Corr Database 2009* to be far too expensive for what it delivers, and I think that prospective buyers should consider *UltraCorr2* first before deciding on this product.

#### My assessment of this CD: ❖❖

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