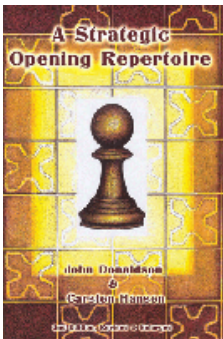




COLUMNISTS

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:

*Attacking the Spanish*  
by Sabino Brunello

*Fighting the Ruy Lopez*  
by Milos Pavlovic

*Chess Opening Essentials 2*  
by Stefan Djuric, Dimitri Komarov  
& Claudio Pantaleoni

*Chess Opening Essentials 3*  
by Stefan Djuric, Dimitri Komarov  
& Claudio Pantaleoni

En Passant

*The Scotch Game (DVD)*  
by Nigel Davies

*The ABC of the Vienna (DVD)*  
by Andrew Martin

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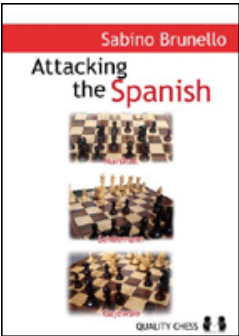
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The Scots don't like the Spanish

This month we look at two books with recommendations for Black against the Spanish Opening (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5), one examines multiple gambit options, while the other is a repertoire book. In the case of *Attacking the Spanish*, this is the third title from the Scottish powerhouse of chess publishing, Quality Chess, that deals with the Ruy Lopez from Black's perspective, and because of their efforts thus far Spanish enthusiasts on the white side of the board are surely looking forward to the publishers finding another opening to pick on. Incidentally, all the authors featured this month, aside from those on the DVDs, are from countries in close vicinity to the Adriatic Sea.

*Attacking the Spanish* by Sabino Brunello, Quality Chess 2009, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 284pp., \$29.95

The back cover tell us that the author "is one of the leaders of the youthful revival in Italian chess" and that he "is still a teenager, but his rating is already 2550 and increasing daily. By the time this book is printed he will probably be a grandmaster." This is an odd embellishment to say the least. A quick check on FIDE's website shows that he has yet to become a grandmaster (at least the title hasn't been awarded yet) and his rating is down. However, the poorly worded promotion was completely unnecessary, because he is already a stronger player than most authors today.

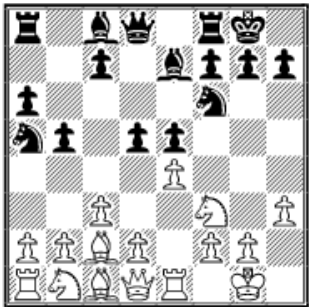


This title is different from most other opening books in that it focuses exclusively on three different variations. All three are gambit continuations that have been played several times by top ten players in recent years. The table of contents is as follows:

- Introduction (2 pages)
- **The Schliemann**
  - 1 Schliemann: 4 d3 (30 pages)
  - 2 Schliemann: 4 Nc3 (32 pages)
  - 3 Schliemann: Minor Lines (24 pages)
- **The Gajewski**
  - 4 Gajewski: 11 d3 and 11 exd5 (26 pages)
  - 5 Gajewski: 11 d4 (34 pages)
- **The Marshall**
  - 6 Anti-Marshall (30 pages)
  - 7 Marshall: 12 d4 (40 pages)
  - 8 Marshall: 12 d3 (34 pages)

- 9 Marshall: Modern Lines (22 pages)
- Index of Variations (5 pages)

To the average player with some knowledge of opening theory the Schliemann (1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 f5) and the Marshall (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 c3 d5) should be familiar names, whereas the Gajewski (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 c3 d6 9 h3 Na5 10 Bc2 d5!?) is of newer vintage, and may be unfamiliar to many.



While the Schliemann has been played by Radjabov, as well as Aronian and Adams, it has never been popular at top level. It lacks the dynamic potential of the Marshall Attack, and has mostly been used as a surprise weapon. In the eighty-six pages of coverage in this book, Brunello provides the most detailed and accurate coverage of this opening to date. However, his conclusion on the critical lines in the Schliemann is quite telling: “The critical test of our repertoire came in variation C2) after 7 Qe2! Be7 8 Bxc6 dxc6 9 Nxe5. Black must certainly demonstrate some precise knowledge here, but I believe his position to be quite defensible. It is important for the second player to understand when to swap down to an opposite coloured bishop position, and I hope that after absorbing the contents of the present chapter the reader will feel equipped to make that decision. When carried out correctly, this should lead to a position that the second player ought to be able to draw without many problems.”

Each of Brunello’s chapters begin with an introduction to the lines covered, the general themes, central ideas, and theoretical highlights. The theoretical coverage follows, and then he presents the reader with a conclusion that highlights the most important issues in the particular line. All in all, this makes the chapters a joy to read. However, in addition to just presenting the material on a given line, with the current theory and the established evaluations, Brunello goes much further, offering the reader a smorgasbord of new ideas, theoretical novelties and improvements over existing theory. He has been kind enough to assign them with the Informator novelty symbol, which helps draw our attention to these instances. I think that in a work of this kind, it can be quite useful for players of either color to see where they need to pay attention and put some extra work in if they intend to use the line in question.

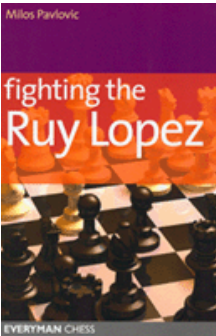
The material is very advanced, particularly in the coverage of the Marshall, which for a long time has been Brunello’s main weapon to counter the Spanish. The author warns the reader about the vast volume of variations in the main lines after 12 d4, whereas it appears that 12 d3 is currently more critical for the time being.

This is an important and very interesting book. The young author presents the material in a very mature fashion, while injecting plenty of youthful enthusiasm into the coverage and analysis. For anyone playing the Spanish from either side, this book is an absolute must buy.

**My assessment of this book:** ♦♦♦♦♦

*Fighting the Ruy Lopez* by Milos Pavlovic, Everyman Chess 2009, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 174pp., \$25.95

It should be clear to anyone who follows top chess tournaments and current theory that the Marshall is one of Black’s most important weapons against the Spanish. In the present book, by Serbian grandmaster Milos Pavlovic, it is Black’s main weapon and the central part of a complete repertoire for Black in the Spanish, or Ruy Lopez if you so prefer.



The material is divided as follows:

- Preface (1 page)
- Introduction (8 pages)
- **Part One: Gambit Lines**
- 1 The Main Line (11 pages)
- 2 The Modern Rook Shuffle: 15 Re4 (14 pages)

- 3 The Mysterious Retreat: 13 Re2 (5 pages)
- 4 The Kevitz Variation: 12 Bxd5 cxd5 13 d4 (4 pages)
- 5 The Dangerous 12 d3 (15 pages)
- 6 The Tricky 12 g3 (5 pages)
- 7 Declining the Marshall (6 pages)
- **Part Two: Anti-Marshall Lines**
- 8 The 8 h3 Anti-Marshall (21 pages)
- 9 The 8 a4 Anti-Marshall (11 pages)
- 10 The 8 d4 Anti-Marshall (12 pages)
- 11 The Steinitz Variation: 8 d3 (11 pages)
- **Part Three: Other Lines**
- 12 The Worrall Attack (7 pages)
- 13 The Delayed Exchange Variation (7 pages)
- 14 Early d4 and Nc3 Variation (12 pages)
- 15 The Exchange Variation (12 pages)
- Index of Variations (7 pages)

For a book that covers the Marshall, as well as all anti-Marshall sidelines for white, this volume seems incredibly slim, a mere 174 pages that are not exactly jam-packed with analysis. However, I have spent several hours with this book, and I don’t feel anything is missing, nor do I feel shortchanged when it comes to explanations of important ideas or strategic issues. This can only be because Pavlovic really knows his material exceptionally well and he manages to convey his knowledge and his message in perfect measure so as not to confuse and overwhelm the reader, which is something that can easily happen in the massive theory of the Marshall Attack.

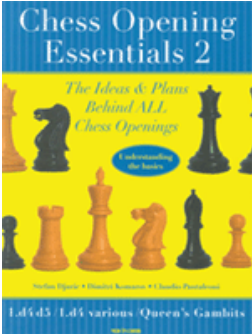
While this work will never become the definitive word on any of the lines covered in this book, the repertoire for Black is an excellent introduction for those wishing to combat the Ruy Lopez. The author is bit sparse when it comes to original analysis and novelties, but the confidence potential devotees can gain from reading this book will go a long way to counterbalance the lack of knowledge in the minor sidelines.

For players who already employ the Marshall Attack as black, the Marshall chapters may seem a little light, but, together with the rest of the repertoire, this book is still worth buying. For stronger players rated 2300 +, the material in this book will by and large be insufficient. However, this book is a great introduction for the rest of us.

**My assessment of this book:** 

*Chess Opening Essentials 2* by Stefan Djuric, Dimitri Komarov & Claudio Pantaleoni, New In Chess 2009, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 288pp., \$34.95

I wasn’t exactly enthusiastic in my [review](#) of the first volume in this series; however, I find this volume to be much better than the first. The series was originally released in Italian in 2004-2005, but has now been translated into English by the team at New In Chess.



Volume 2 primarily deals with the Queen’s Gambit, but other 1 d4 openings are also covered, including the Trompowsky, the Dutch, and some of the more exotic versions of the Benoni. The contents are as follows:


- Preface (1 page)
- Glossary of chess symbols (1 page)
- Introduction (3 pages)
- **1. d4 Other**
- 1 d4: Unusual Lines (3 pages)
- 1 d4: Minor Defences (15 pages)
- Dutch Defence (28 pages)
- 1 d2-d4 Queen’s Pawn Game without c2-c4 (9 pages)
- Trompowsky Opening (29 pages)
- Minor Defences after 1 d4 d5 2 c4 (15 pages)
- **Queen’s Gambits**
- Slav Defence (35 pages)
- Queen’s Gambit Accepted (23 pages)
- Queen’s Gambit Declined (1 page)
- Tarrasch Defence (15 pages)
- Minor Variations after 1 d2-d4 d7-d5 2 c2-c4 e7-e6 3 Nb1-c3 (4 pages)
- Queen’s Gambit Declined Exchange Variation (8 pages)
- Queen’s Gambit with Bc1-f4 (8 pages)
- Queen’s Gambit Declined Eingorn Variation (1 page)
- Queen’s Gambit with ...Bf8-b4 (11 pages)
- Semi-Tarrasch Defence (6 page)

- Semi-Slav Defence (39 pages)
- Queen’s Gambit Declined with ...Bf8-e7 (22 pages)
- Index of Players (4 pages)

Each section generally includes a short introduction, some coverage of the main lines and a number of unannotated illustrative games. Important moves and key positions are highlighted in color, while italics are used to underscore unsound lines. Graphic devices such as colored pieces or colored squares or arrows are used to emphasize moves, plans, and strong and weak points. However, I found the use of long notation for some lines and short notation for others somewhat disconcerting.

The premise of this series is to help beginners to develop a solid understanding of fundamental opening ideas and give casual players the ability to choose the openings that suit their style and taste, beyond that I’m not entirely sure who will truly benefit, because the theoretical coverage is quite sparse, although there is some explanation of basic ideas and strategies.

Of the content, my biggest objection is the numerous unannotated games that can be found through each chapter of the book. The purpose behind these games should be to illustrate typical ideas of the lines discussed, but how can that be done by giving a bunch of games that the reader will not have a chance to understand. There isn’t even any kind of punctuation or evaluations given to enhance one’s comprehension. That said, for players rated up to around 1800 it will undoubtedly be quite useful. My main objection is that it could have been much better.

My assessment of this book: 

[Order](#) *Chess Opening Essentials 2*

by Stefan Djuric, Dimitri Komarov & Claudio Pantaleoni

*Chess Opening Essentials 3* by Stefan Djuric, Dimitri Komarov & Claudio Pantaleoni, New In Chess 2009, Figurine Algebraic Notation, 336 pp, \$34.95

This volume in the *Opening Essentials* series covers the Indian Defenses, as well as the Modern Benoni, the Budapest and Benko Gambits. The material is divided as follows:

- Preface (1 page)
- Glossary of chess symbols (1 page)
- Introduction (3 pages)
- Minor Defences: 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 (11 pages)
- Minor Defences after 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 (17 pages)
- Modern Benoni Defence (27 pages)
- Catalan Opening (17 pages)
- Blumenfeld Gambit (4pages)
- Bogo-Indian Defence (9 pages)
- Queen’s Indian Defence (38 pages)
- Nimzo-Indian Defence (60 pages)
- Grünfeld Indian Defence (51 pages)
- King’s Indian Defence (85 pages)
- Index of Players (4 pages)



While my objection in regards to the unannotated games remain, this is by far the best volume in the series thus far. The amount of explanations of strategic and typical ideas is considerably higher in this volume and that alone will singlehandedly help the reader. The material in this book should appeal to players rated as high as 2000.

My assessment of this book: 

[Order](#) *Chess Opening Essentials 3*

by Stefan Djuric, Dimitri Komarov & Claudio Pantaleoni

*The Scotch Game* (DVD) by Nigel Davies, ChessBase GmbH 2009, Running time: Approx 5 hours, \$34.95

This is certainly one of Nigel Davies’s better ChessBase DVDs. This five hour presentation has no less than thirty-four segments on the Scotch Game (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4), as well as thorough coverage of the Scotch Four Knights, but not the Scotch Gambit.




Davies makes a number of recommendations on this DVD, including that less experienced players start out by playing the Scotch Four Knights, which is relatively easy to understand and play, as he demonstrates with some well-chosen games. Davies then moves on to the Scotch proper and first examines the terribly complicated Mieses Variation (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6), which Davies says that Black should stay away from unless one has plenty of time on their hands. Otherwise Black should go for 4...Bc5, which Davies has similarly discussed in detail, covering all the important lines and including many of the latest finesses that have developed over the last few years. Finally, he rounds off with some of the minor lines, including one of his own losses in the 4...Bb4+ line, where a young Gawain Jones tears him apart in the opening and tortures him mercilessly before picking up the full point in the end.



At times I felt that Davies browsed over critical choices a little too lightly, something that wouldn't have been done in a book, which is often the weakness of these DVDs. Attentive viewers will notice from time to time that Davies mentions a strong move, but doesn't analyze it fully. Instead, he moves on to discuss the game moves in detail, even if they are considerably weaker.

All in all, this is a very good introduction to the Scotch Game, which certainly deserves more attention than it is currently being given, and Davies makes many good points in its favor.

**My assessment of this DVD:** 

[Order](#) *The Scotch Game*  
by Nigel Davies

*The ABC of the Vienna* (DVD) by Andrew Martin, ChessBase GmbH  
2009, Running time 3 hours 42 minutes, \$34.95

There are twenty-seven segments on this DVD. In the Intro, English international master Andrew Martin predicts that the Vienna Game will once again become a popular opening; however, I have my doubts. His first game selection is Sheldrick (2161) - Rout (1949) from the 2009 Australian Open, which obviously is a very recent game and a nice gesture to the somewhat lowly-rated black player, but the opening phase of the game is riddled with mistakes, and what's worse, Martin doesn't notice. Let's take a look:



**1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 d3 0-0**

Martin calls this move a mistake, but it is probably still okay, especially after White's next move.

**5 f4(?)**

According to Martin, this is the main plan for White and the logical answer to Black's indiscretion on the previous move. However, this move is most likely just bad.

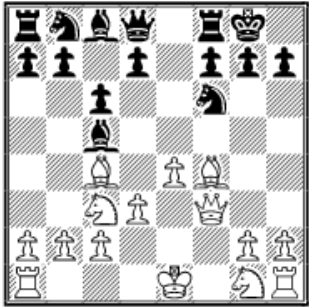
**5...exf4**

According to Martin, this is a fairly obvious choice for Black, as, after 5...d6, White will likely answer 6 f5, and Martin claims that it isn't easy for Black to stop White's attack by g2-g4-g5. However, Black may still be able to play 6...c6 and get counterplay. Yet unmentioned by Martin is the sharper retort 5...d5!?, which is difficult for White to meet; e.g., 6 exd5 Re8!? 7 Nge2 Ng4! 8 Ne4 exf4 9 Nxc5 Qh4+ 10 Kd2 Qe7, and Black wins the piece back with a strong initiative: 11 Ne4 Ne3 12 Qe1 Nxc4 and if White recaptures on c4, the knight on e4 will fall.

**6 Bxf4 c6**

Martin tells us that this is the first sign that Black wants to play ...d7-d5, yet at this point he already considers Black's position critical!

**7 Qf3**



With this move, White, according to Martin, restrains ...d7-d5. Martin further tells us that White is better because he has easy development, whereas Black has a much harder time getting his pieces into play.


7...Bb4?

This move in itself isn't a disaster, though the move is rather feeble and desperate, and furthermore Black could have obtained a large advantage with ...d7-d5, which Martin for some reason fails to consider, despite Black being able to develop most of pieces with tempo gains; e.g., 7...d5!, and now White cannot play 8 exd5 because of 8...Bg4 9 Qg3 Qb6 10 Nge2 Re8 11 Bb3 cxd5, and White is completely tied up. So 8 Bb3 is necessary, after which 8...Bg4 9 Qf1 (9 Qg3 dxe4 10 Nxe4 Re8 is also bad for White) 9...dxe4 (9...d4 is pleasant for Black), and White's position is quite awful, whereas Black has a lead in development and managed to tie the white king up in the center for some time.

I can't think of a worse way to start off a DVD, but it does display why you need to pay attention to what is being said and then analyze it for yourself afterwards. Blindly following the narrator's advice can prove hazardous to your chess health.

Another point of criticism is the contents page, which only lists the games being discussed, but not the variation covered in each game. This makes the DVD very difficult to navigate. Future DVDs should have an index of variations, where all the games are referenced. I don't think that this has ever been done, but it sure makes sense.

The rest of the DVD is a great deal better than the coverage of Sheldrick-Rout, but the annotations are often quite breezy and lacking in detail. I know that this series is aimed at lower-rated players, but it doesn't mean that the product should be second rate, and this DVD falls into that category.

My assessment of this DVD: 

[Order](#) *The ABC of the Vienna*  
by Andrew Martin