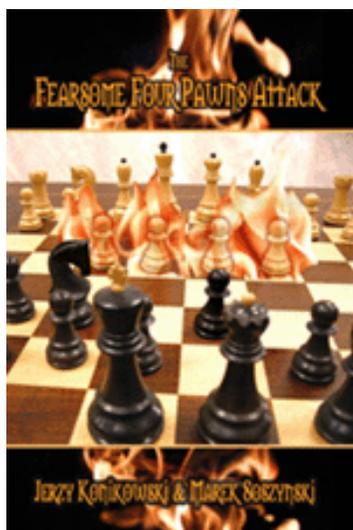




COLUMNS

Checkpoint

Carsten Hansen

**Rating Chart**

❖ – **A poor book.**

❖❖ – **Not very good.**

Reviewed this month:

Chess Openings for White, Explained
by Alburt, Dzindzichashvili & Perelshteyn

Starting Out: 1 e4!
by Neil McDonald

Starting Out: 1 d4!
by John Cox

Beating the Fianchetto Defences
by Efstratios Grivas

En Passant

White Repertoire 1.e4 - 2nd Edition (CD)
by Alexander Bangiev

Opening Repertoire for Black (CD)
by Alexander Bangiev

Dealing with d4 Deviations
by John Cox

Opening Repertoire Bonanza

The market for repertoire material has been saturated with a very high volume of books and CDs, so this month we have decided to introduce a new feature called *En Passant*, which will feature shorter reviews of recent releases. In this way we will be able to include more products in each column. Any comments are welcome.

Chess Openings for White, Explained by Lev Alburt, Roman Dzindzichashvili & Eugene Perelshteyn, CIRC 2006, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 548 pp., \$29.95

◆◆◆ – **A useful book.**

◆◆◆◆ – **A good book.**

◆◆◆◆◆ – **An excellent book.**

I reviewed *Chess Openings for Black, Explained* in [August 2005](#), and I, like many others, have eagerly waited for this volume to arrive.



So, let's see how the material is divided:

- Part I: Introduction (3 chapters - 14 pages)
- Part II: Development of Chess Openings (2 chapters - 50 pages)
- Part III: 1 e4 e5: The Open Games (8 chapters - 134 pages)
- Part IV: The Sicilian Defense (1 chapter - 40 pages)
- Part V: The French Defense (5 chapters - 142 pages)
- Part VI: Caro-Kann & Center Counter (2 chapters - 46 pages)
- Part VII: Pirc, Modern, Alekhine, Nimzo, & the Rest (5 chapters - 76 pages)
- Part VIII: Illustrative Games (1 chapter - 24 pages)
- Conclusion (1 page)
- Table of Main Lines (7 pages)

There is an amazing amount of pages, but as with the first volume there is an absolutely astounding amount of diagrams. No less than 1,644 have made their way into the presentation, which surpasses the total from the previous volume by 196 diagrams, while the page count is actually seven pages less! In all my years as a book reviewer and a reader of chess books, I have never seen so many diagrams.

Nevertheless, this book is very thorough with tons of new ideas in ancient openings. You can always question the choice of individual lines, such as the Italian Game and Grand Prix Attack, but this book is packed with intelligent discussions of lines rarely seen at the highest echelons of the chess world. The trio of authors certainly do their very best to promote these lines, and I will be very surprised if we don't see a resurgence of them in tournament play, however innocuous they may seem.

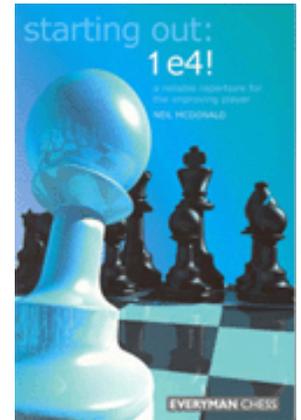
Club players will be retooling their repertoires based on the recommendations in this book, so players on the black side better get themselves a copy as well, because they need to prepare for what may otherwise be a one-sided onslaught. Go get the book!

My assessment of this book: ◆◆◆◆◆

Order *Chess Openings for White, Explained*
by Alburt, Dzindzichashvili & Perelshteyn

Starting Out: 1 e4! by Neil McDonald, Everyman Chess 2006, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 200 pp., \$23.95

In recent years, English grandmaster Neil McDonald has been one of the busiest writers of chess books. Some of them have been pretty good and some of them have been well below par. Unfortunately this book belongs in the latter category, and as we will see the back cover blurb is an exaggeration to say the least:



“Building and maintaining a chess opening repertoire can be a demanding task - for a start there are an enormous number of different lines to choose from. There’s a strong temptation amongst beginners and improving players to opt solely for tricky lines in order to snare unsuspecting opponents, but this approach has only short-term value. As you improve and your opponents become stronger, very often these crafty lines don’t stand up to close scrutiny, and suddenly you’re back to square one with no suitable opening weapons. In *Starting Out: 1 e4!* Neil McDonald solves this typical problem by providing the reader with a strong and 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 this book will give you the confidence to play these variations against all strengths of player and provide you with reliable opening armoury for years to come.”

So, with this in mind, let’s look at how McDonald divided the material:

- Introduction (2 pages)
- **Open Games**
- 1 1 e4 e5 (41 pages)
- **The Sicilian**
- 2 Sicilian: Introduction and Classical (10 pages)
- 3 Sicilian Scheveningen (11 pages)
- 4 Sicilian Najdorf (12 pages)
- 5 Sicilian Dragon (13 pages)
- 6 Sicilian Sveshnikov (and Kalashnikov) (14 pages)
- 7 Sicilian Taimanov (and other variations) (17 pages)
- **Black’s Other Defences**
- 8 Alekhine’s Defence (9 pages)
- 9 Caro-Kann Defence (12 pages)
- 10 Scandinavian (and 1...Nc6) (15 pages)
- 11 Pirc and other Fianchetto Defences (12 pages)
- 12 French Defence (21 pages)

- Index of Variations (5 pages)
- Index of Complete Games (2 pages)

It is easy to pick at the page allocation; for example, it is a bit surprising that the Scandinavian occupies more pages than the Caro-Kann, or that so many pages are invested on the relatively obscure Alekhine's Defense. However, this is a fairly minor issue compared to the actual coverage of the variations.

While I don't object to the choice of variations, the coverage of sidelines and alternatives is so sketchy that it is hard to believe that this is supposed to be a repertoire book. For instance, the Accelerated Dragon is given one note that encompasses less than one third of a page and doesn't even cover the main lines: 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 g6, and now:

“Black has been sneaky in delaying ...d7-d6, as he hopes that he can play ...d7-d5 in one go. So we'll spoil his day with 5 c4!, clamping down on the d5-square. This type of pawn centre is known as the Maroczy Bind, and will be discussed further in the section on the Kan Variation (but without ...Bg7). Here is a good way to handle it after 5...Bg7 [CH: there is no mention of the Gurgenzidze Variation, which arises after 5...Nf6 6 Nc3 d6 7 Be2 Nxd4 and is one of Black's most popular methods of generating counterplay in this opening] 6 Be3 Nf6 (6...Ng4 7 Qxg4 Nxd4 8 Qd1 e5?! [CH: McDonald only mentions this dubious move, while ignoring the better alternative 8...Ne6] 9 Nb5! is known to be good for White 7 Nc3 0-0 8 Be2 d6 9 0-0 Nxd4 20 Bxd4 Bd7 11 Qd2 Bc6 12 f3 a5 13 Rab1! (preparing to push back the knight with eventual b3-b4) 13...Nd7 14 Bf2! (an instructive move; White keeps his dark-squared bishop to fight on the queenside) 14...Nc5 15 b3 (not 15 a3? a4 when White's queenside pawns are crippled) 15...Qb8 16 Rfc1 Rc8 17 Rc2 Rc7 18 Bf1 h5 19 a3 b6 20 b4 axb4 21 axb4 Nd7 22 Nd5 Bxd5 23 cxd5 and White has a space advantage and the bishop pair in A.Volokitin-M.Leon Hoyos Cuernavaca 2006.”

It's odd to see an opening such as this 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 main 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.

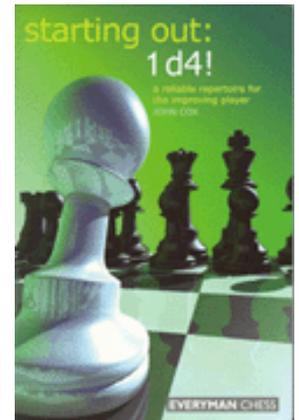
My assessment of this book: ❖❖

Order *Starting Out: 1 e4!*

by Neil McDonald

Starting Out: 1 d4! by John Cox, Everyman Chess 2006, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 240 pp., \$23.95

While the above book on 1 e4 may only skim the surface in its coverage, this book goes to the other extreme and may be a bit too complicated for its target audience.



First, let's have see how the material is divided:

- Bibliography (3 pages)
- Introduction (4 pages)
- **The Indian Defences**
- 1 The King's Indian (29 pages)
- 2 The Grünfeld (20 pages)
- 3 The Nimzo-Indian (25 pages)
- 4 The Benoni and Benko (18 pages)
- **The Queen's Gambit**
- 5 The Queen's Gambit Declined (21 pages)
- 6 The Queen's Gambit Accepted (20 pages)
- 7 The Slav (25 pages)
- 8 The Semi-Slav (25 pages)
- 9 The Albin and the Chigorin (10 pages)
- **Black's Other Defences**
- 10 The Dutch (15 pages)
- 11 Rare but Tricky Lines (15 pages)
- Index of Variations (4 pages)
- Index of Complete Games (3 pages)

English international master John Cox seems to have picked complex opening systems with loads of theory behind them. For instance, against the King's Indian, he recommends the Bayonet Attack in the Classical Main Line: 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 Nf3 0-0 6 Be2 e5 7 0-

0 Nc6 8 d5 Ne7 9 b4. Or against the Grünfeld, he plunges the reader into the jungle of the Modern Exchange Variation: 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5 4 cxd5 Nxd5 5 e4 Nxc3 6 bxc3 Bg7 7 Be2 0-0 8 Rb1. In opening after opening, be it the Classical Variation against the Nimzo-Indian, or the Modern Variation against the Modern Benoni, or the Anti-Meran Gambit and the Anti-Moscow Gambit in the Slav Defense, he presents lines that are among the most complicated, difficult to understand, and theory-laden of any openings starting with 1 d4.

What is going on? This book is supposed to present a workable opening repertoire for average players, yet a professional player would be wary to take up one or two of these lines, let alone seven of them ... at the same time!

The author tries to explain himself in the introduction, by stating that “everyone ought to play main line openings most of the time. If you want to be a strong player, then you have to play strong moves. It doesn’t make sense to approach that by deliberately playing moves in the opening that aren’t the strongest.” But I disagree with the approach of overwhelming lower-rated players with the most complicated lines in existence, just because they are currently considered in vogue.

Yet, despite my reservations, I really like this book, and I admire the author’s bold approach. The project is nothing short of incredibly ambitious. The author bravely puts himself on the line and has invested a considerable amount of effort, by presenting ideas suggested by others, and infusing his coverage with fresh ideas and analysis of his own. However, this raises the level of the book slightly above its target audience.

Each chapter begins with a relatively short introduction and then one or two complete games in which the theory is briefly discussed in the notes. There are a total of 36 main games that are generally annotated quite well, both in regards to references to alternative lines and to general instruction. Yet by choosing so many theory-heavy variations, the author has had to trim lots of material. Here is an example from the Benko Gambit: 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 Nc3 Bxa6 7 g3 d6 8 Bg2 Bg7 9 Nf3 Nbd7 10 Rb1! 0-0 11 0-0, and here only 11...Qa5 is examined. Yet in the position after White’s 11th move, I found seven other continuations, with 11...Qa5 having the worst scoring percentage among top players. Unfortunately, opening books often avoid the lines that question the validity of their recommended variation. At least in this case, the coverage after 11...Qa5 doesn’t skip anything important

Overall, this book can serve quite well as a source of ideas and as a reasonably successful repertoire book, although I suspect that the intended target audience will find the material too overwhelming because of the diversity and the complicated nature of the variations.

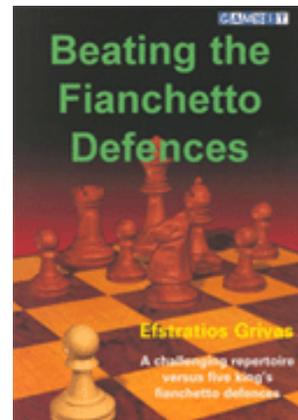
My assessment of this book: 

Order *Starting Out: 1 d4!*

by John Cox

Beating the Fianchetto Defences by Efstratios Grivas, Gambit Publications 2006, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 192 pp., \$26.95

In this book, Greek grandmaster Grivas focuses on the fianchetto of the kingside bishop to g7, and hence none of the queenside fianchettoes like the Queen's Indian or English Defense.



The material is divided as follows:

- Introduction (2 Pages)
- Overview (2 pages)
- 1 Beating the Grünfeld Defence: 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5 4 Nf3 Bg7 5 Bg5 (46 pages)
- 2 Beating the Benko/Volga Gambit: 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 Nf3 (30 pages)
- 3 Beating the Modern Defence: 1 d4 g6 2 c4 Bg7 3 Nf3 d6 4 e4 (19 pages)
- 4 Beating the Modern Benoni :1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 followed by h3 and Bd3 (34 pages)
- 5 Beating the King's Indian Defence: 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 Nf3 0-0 6 h3 (50 pages)
- Illustrative Games (4 pages)

In his quest to find good lines against these popular openings, Grivas has chosen less theory-laden lines that will certainly give Black something to think about, if not knock him out of his chair. He is incredibly detailed when it comes to variations and analysis, and very short in explanations of strategic ideas.

In the introduction, Grivas points out that he has tailored the repertoire to suit players who play 1 Nf3 and 1 c4 as well as 1 d4. He also writes:

“The book’s main purpose is to ‘train’ and educate the reader in territory that is ‘unknown’ to him. We must not forget that this is a theory book, where concrete reaction to the opponent’s moves is of primary importance. General principles and plans do merit a place in this project but, in my opinion, move-by-move

consideration is most significant.

It is not necessary to memorize all the variations and moves mentioned in this book. That is practically impossible! But then, you may ask, what is the reason for someone to deal with a theory book, one that he does not need to memorize in full? The theory of ‘subconscious education’ will help us answer this question. By playing through the moves and variations in this in the book, our subconscious processes and stores similar motifs, repeated moves and plans, and also ‘learns’ to avoid traps and unwelcome positions. Such proper ‘subconscious memorization’ will, at the critical moment, enforce the correct choice upon us.

Many of the opening books I have read mainly focus on the general characteristics of the opening or the variation I question and much less so on move-by-move theory. This can lead to unresolved questions in the reader’s mind, and the danger that he will mix things up at moments when it is necessary to find one specific concrete move or sequence. The recommended repertoire is that of a grandmaster, without any omissions or hidden secrets. On the contrary, it contains a great number of new, deeply analysed suggestions.”

That should tell you about the author’s aim and approach in this book. Each chapter has a very short introduction, with a description of the general characteristics, a historic game from earlier days, and then something very unusual – thematic and typical endgames that arise from that particular variation. While the student may not wind up in that exact endgame, he or she may recognize similar patterns, such as pawn structure and piece placement. This is a great way to prepare a player even further. Next follows the theoretical section. Heavy as it can be, Grivas has picked interesting lines that lessen the burden. Finally, each chapter is rounded off with a couple of thematic games, often from the authors own practice. Oddly enough I didn’t find an index of these games, although there is an index of variations.

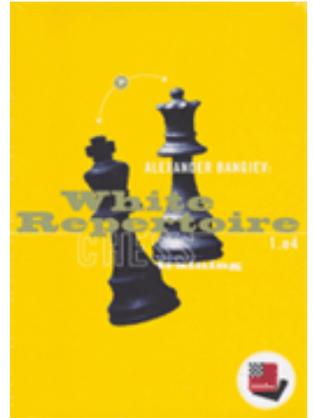
I highly recommend this book to ambitious players, it will be an excellent tool for those who want to be well-prepared and who play to win. There is a little bias for White’s cause, but Grivas supports his presentation exceedingly well, with loads of new ideas and original analysis, a tell-tale sign of an author strongly committed to his project.

My assessment of this book: 

Order *Beating the Fianchetto Defences*
by Efstratios Grivas

1 e4 White Repertoire - 2nd Edition (CD) by Alexander Bangiev, ChessBase GmbH 2006, Figurine Algebraic Notation, \$29.95

I reviewed the first edition of this work in [July 2003](#), where I praised the author for the amount of original input, but was critical of the large amount of misspellings. This CD is very much the same, although the original input has been updated and there are fewer misspellings.



Still, just try and make sense of this passage from the introduction on the Grand Prix Attack, after 1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 f4 g6 4 Nf3 Bg7 5 Bc4 e6 6 f5 Nge7 7 fxe6 fxe6 8 d3 d5 9 Bb3 b5!?, which is pretty critical for this line: “An [sic] very important position of this line. White should try to weaken the light squares in the area e6-c4-a6 to bring the bishop b3 back into the game. When he succeeds, he can count on good attacking chances. White can now choose between many options: 10.a3, 10.a4, 10.ed5, 10.0-0. As the practical games shows, White has a tough struggle for the initiative ahead. Furthermore White has to take high risks in the fight for the initiative.” There is much more of that on this CD as well.

Some of the analysis is a bit overoptimistic and it doesn't hold up to closer scrutiny, yet it provides fans of the Sicilian Grand Prix Attack and the Vienna Gambit with some fun lines. However, the notion that this is a complete repertoire is wrong, as certain lines are ignored, such as the topical 1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Qxd5 3 Nc3 Qd6. For those who like offbeat lines, I'm sure there will be some appreciation for the given material, but I'm not entirely convinced myself.

My assessment of this CD: 

[Order](#) *1 e4 White Repertoire - 2nd Edition* (CD)

by Alexander Bangiev

Opening Repertoire for Black (CD) by Alexander Bangiev, ChessBase GmbH 2006, Figurine Algebraic Notation, \$29.95

The beginning of this CD might make sense to those who own the author's *Squares Strategy* CDs. But the introduction left me confused to an extent that I did not know was possible. Ignoring that, there is some opening theory on this CD; some of it is interesting and some of it is awful, because it is based on the dubious squares strategy concept. This CD, like the one above, is screwball and fun, confusing, sometimes incredibly biased and nonsensical, and even wrong. But for fans of the Hyper-Accelerated Dragon, there may be some good pickings if you can locate them. Interestingly, the author manages to demonstrate a clear advantage for Black in the Grand Prix line mentioned above, at least that's what I think the mangled evaluation meant, but I'm not sure.



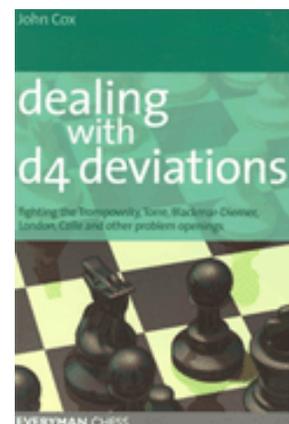
My assessment of this CD: 

Order *Opening Repertoire for Black* (CD)

by Alexander Bangiev

Dealing with d4 Deviations by John Cox, Everyman Chess 2005, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 144 pp., \$23.95

I apologize for not reviewing this book sooner, because it is in fact very good, with remedies against openings that I once thought should be outlawed as unsportsmanlike: the Torre Attack, London System, Colle System, Trompowsky, and Blackmar-Diemer Gambit. If you need an antidote to any of these annoying lines, this book may well provide the answers, as the material is well-researched with plenty of author input. For others, it may represent a book with good ideas that can be tested next time you wish to bother someone with one of these openings.



My assessment of this book: 

Order *Dealing with d4 Deviations*

by John Cox



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