



C O L U M N I S T S

Checkpoint

Carsten Hansen

**Reviewed this month:*****The Trompowsky***

by Nigel Davies

The Queen's Bishop Attack Revealed

by James Plaskett

The Sicilian Bb5 Revealed

by Neil McDonald

Catastrophe in the Opening

by James Plaskett

Understanding the Chess Openings

by Sam Collins

Bishops Before Knights

One of Tarrasch's dictums was to always develop knights before bishops. However, chess understanding is constantly developing and being redefined. Nowadays, the Trompowsky has evolved from a somewhat irregular opening that was only played by a select few, to being a valid option in the repertoires of world class players such as Adams and Ivanchuk. Two other openings are enjoying a similar renaissance, the Queen's Bishop Attack, or the Pseudo-Trompowsky as it is also known, and the 3 Bb5 Sicilian. The former has long been a favorite of several top English players and the latter is primarily an attempt to avoid the heavily analyzed Sveshnikov Sicilian. In this month's column I will look at books on each of these openings.

The Trompowsky by Nigel Davies, 2005 Everyman Chess, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 144 pp, \$19.95

One of the most thankless jobs in the world is to write a book about an opening after a phenomenal book has already been written on the same subject. This is the situation that Davies found himself in, following the release of *Winning with the Trompowsky* by Peter Wells, which was one of the best opening books written in recent years.



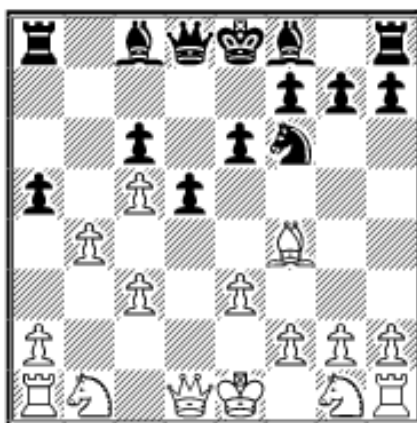
Whereas Wells had proposed a couple of repertoires for White, Davies outdoes him by suggesting three for White (two attacking and one positional) and three for Black (one aggressive, one active positional, and one positional) and even specifies which repertoire could be useful to the reader based on the other openings one plays as Black against 1 d4. Davies has also chosen a different method of presentation by using complete games and updating the coverage with new games, while peppering it with plenty of his own ideas and original pieces of analysis.

Davies has selected 67 main games, which is a lot considering the book is only 144 pages long, but some of the games are very short and the annotations are rather sparse in certain games. Yet, the book is of good quality and Davies knows the material quite well. He's not afraid to make his own suggestions and advance independent ideas.

However, we can see from the following example that it is worth critically scrutinizing his suggestions before putting them into practice. The game is one of the key lines for Black from the so-called 'active positional repertoire' for Grünfeld players. I will only concentrate on the suggested improvements Davies has given.

McShane-Sutovsky, Pamplona 2003

1 d4 Nf6 2 Bg5 Ne4 3 Bf4 d5 4 e3 c5 5 Bd3 Nf6 6 dxc5 Nc6 7 Bb5 e6 8 Bxc6+ bxc6 9 b4 a5 10 c3



10...Ne4

“The following piece sacrifice appears to fall short so perhaps Black should consider other options here. One variation which comes to mind is 10...Ba6!? 11 Ne2 Nd7 (11...Nh5!?) 12 0-0 axb4 13 cxb4 g5 14 Bd6 Bxe2 15 Qxe2 Bg7 16 Nd2 Bxa1 17 Rxa1 when White has compensation for the exchange.”

CH: I agree with the evaluation of the final position, but both sides may be able to improve along the way. Considering that the improvement given below doesn't work for Black he should consider 14...Bg7 and 12...Qf6, while White might try 11 Nf3.

11 f3 Nxc3?!

“Very creative, but it doesn’t quite seem to work. An interesting possibility here is 11...e5!? 12 Bxe5 (12 fxe4 exf4) 12...Qg5! 13 fxe4 Qxg2 14 Qf3 Qb2 winning the rook on a1, although this may not be the end of the story after 15 Ne2 Qxa1 16 0–0. I’m going to chicken out with a comment that this ‘deserves further tests’...”

CH: This is indeed “chickening out” and at a crucial moment at that. Black obviously has to address the mounting threats on the f-file and his poor state of development. But a solution is difficult to find, e.g. 16...Ra7 17 exd5 f6 18 Nd4, and the situation is getting very dicey for Black; one continuation is 18...Ba6 19 b5! cxb5 (19...Bxb5 20 Nxb5 cxb5 21 Qe2! doesn’t inspire confidence either) 20 Bb8! Re7 (or 20...Rb7 21 Qe4+ Re7 22 Qc2! and Black’s queen is trapped) 21 d6, and Black’s position is positively being destroyed.

12 Nxc3 axb4 13 Na4 Ba6 14 Nb6 Ra7 15 Qd4 f6 16 Qxb4 e5 17 Bg3 Bb5 18 Kf2 Ra6 19 Qc3 d4 20 exd4 exd4 21 Re1+ Kf7 22 Qb3+ Kg6 23 a4 d3 24 axb5 Bxc5+ 25 Kf1 Ra3 26 Qc4 d2 27 Rd1 Re8 28 Qc2+ Kf7 29 Nc4 Rd3 30 Nd6+ Bxd6 31 Qxd3 Bxg3 32 Qc4+ Re6 33 hxg3 cxb5 1-0

The book is otherwise readable and enjoyable and can serve as an update to Wells’ book or stand on its own. Trompowsky fans will want to have it and those facing the Tromp may consider it, too.

My assessment of this book: 

[Order](#) *The Trompowsky*

by Nigel Davies

The Queen’s Bishop Attack Revealed by James Plaskett, 2005 Batsford B.T., Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 219 pp, \$22.50

The Queen’s Bishop Attack, or the Pseudo-Trompowsky, arises after the moves 1 d4 d5 2 Bg5, which looks odd at first glance, but Black cannot play ...e7-e6 and ...Ng8-f6 transposes to a Trompowsky. The latter happens quite often and is duly covered in this volume; however, Black can try a variety of other moves. The main line is 2...h6 3 Bh4 c6 and now after both 4 Nf3 and 4 e3, Black plays 4...Qb6. Other choices include 2...c5, 2...f6, 2...Nc6, 2...Bf5, 2...Qd6 and 2...h6 3 Bh4 c5. These are the continuations given by Plaskett at any rate. Yet, neither 2...Nd7 (intending 3...Ngf6) nor 2...g6 or 2...f5 (with a transposition to the Dutch) are mentioned, and when digging even deeper there are more flaws in this book than I can count.



It's quite obvious that Plaskett hasn't bothered to research which moves are the most popular, whether at grandmaster and international master level or with lower ranked players, for whom this book is supposedly written.

Unlike other books in this series, this is almost exclusively a selection of complete games with very few in-depth comments or independent pieces of analysis. Too often the annotations are based on a few loose comments, uninterrupted game quotes or fragments (i.e. no suggestion of improvements or other tries), and moves given without any attempt to make an exact evaluation.

The physical size of the book has been needlessly increased, seemingly only in order to compete with the size of books published by Everyman Chess. This makes the one column format a waste of space, because there is simply too much white-space on the pages. Another odd thing is that the back cover states Plaskett: "is the author of *Playing to Win*, *The Grand Prix Attack*, *The English Defence*, *Can You Be A Tactical Chess Genius?* and *The Scandinavian Defence*, also published by Batsford." Only two of these books (the English Defence and the Scandinavian Defence) were actually published by Batsford and the rest were published by Everyman Chess.

In the introduction Plaskett writes:

"Although most of the players who buy this book will be intending to learn how to play it from the white side, I have been objective in my assessments. I haven't pretended it is a forced win for White, in the style of some so-called 'Repertoire' books. Here you get the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

Sadly this isn't so. This book just doesn't hold water, and it looks like it was written in a hurry, without consideration for prospective buyers. The material isn't covered properly and there is too much missing, no matter what level the reader is at. The concept for this series of books is almost ridiculously easy for an author to follow, yet Plaskett has failed to do so. It's not the worst book I have read, but overall it is a rather poor showing for the first book written about this opening.

My assessment of this book: 

[Order](#) *The Queen's Bishop Attack Revealed*
by James Plaskett

The Sicilian Bb5 Revealed by Neil McDonald, 2005 Batsford B.T., Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 211 pp, \$21.95

This is English grandmaster Neil McDonald's second book in the Revealed series. The first was on the Benko Gambit, which I thoroughly enjoyed and highly recommended. In this book he examines the very popular Bb5 Sicilian. Many players seem eager to steer clear of the theory-laden mainlines of the Sveshnikov Sicilian, and the variation 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 (and 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bb5) is currently seeing lots of action at the top level.



The material is divided as follows:

- Introduction (2 pages)
- First Moves (8 pages)
- Heroes and Zeros (25 pages)
- Strategy (80 pages)
- What's Hot? (34 pages)
- Tricks and Traps (31 pages)
- Test Positions (6 pages)
- Solutions (12 pages)
- Details (6 pages)
- Definitions of Symbols (2 pages)
- Before the Fight (2 pages)

In the *First Moves* chapter McDonald gives all the different main lines and explains some of the basic ideas to give the reader a better understanding of the opening. His ability to explain ideas and concepts clearly shines through in the presentation of the material in this book.

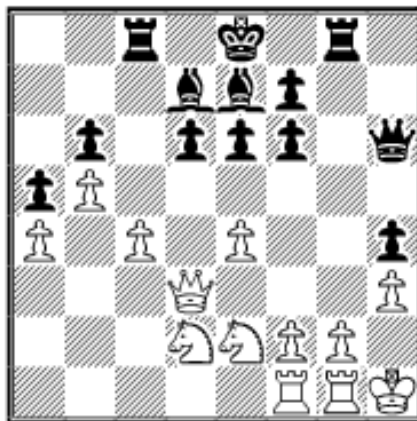
Heroes and Zeros starts out with some classic games by Rossolimo, who first promoted these lines, then McDonald continues with some questionable choices in Fischer, Ivanchuk and Kasparov, all of whom have only played the lines infrequently. Players such as Michael Adams, Rublevsky, Svidler, Bologan and Baklan seem more deserving of the hero moniker, whilst Kramnik, Anand and Leko have made efforts to strengthen Black's side of the argument. However, McDonald makes a good case why his choices should be included in this section.

He names Ivanchuk an accidental hero based on his win against Kasparov at Linares in 1991. It seems Ivanchuk had arrived late in Spain and had no time to prepare for the first round encounter with Kasparov. McDonald's notes to the game are very instructive and full of prose explaining the ideas. Here's the game, but you will have to read the book for the notes, and they are great.

V.Ivanchuk - G.Kasparov

Linares 1991

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 Bb5+ Nd7 4 d4 Ngf6 5 0-0 cxd4 6 Qxd4 a6 7 Bxd7+ Bxd7 8 Bg5 h6 9 Bxf6 gxf6 10 c4 e6 11 Nc3 Rc8 12 Kh1 h5 13 a4 h4 14 h3 Be7 15 b4 a5 16 b5 Qc7 17 Nd2 Qc5 18 Qd3 Rg8 19 Rae1 Qg5 20 Rg1 Qf4 21 Ref1 b6 22 Ne2 Qh6



23 c5 Rxc5 24 Nc4 Kf8 25 Nxb6 Be8
 26 f4 f5 27 exf5 Rxf5 28 Rc1 Kg7 29
 g4 Rc5 30 Rxc5 dxc5 31 Nc8 Bf8 32
 Qd8 Qg6 33 f5 Qh6 34 g5 Qh5 35 Rg4
 exf5 36 Nf4 Qh8 37 Qf6+ Kh7 38
 Rxh4+ 1-0

It's very rare that Kasparov gets outplayed in this fashion.


The *Strategy* section gives a solid education in the understanding of this

opening and the positions that arise from them. It offers a feast of instruction not only on these lines, but on chess in general. This chapter should be read by anybody wanting to learn more about how to play better chess.

What's Hot? is reasonably well done, but after the climax reached in the previous chapter, it felt like a slight comedown. He could have shown more of the topical lines and less complete games, but that's just my taste.

The *Tricks and Traps* chapter is another good effort as it shows various positional tricks and traps, and how pieces can get caught in a quagmire. It's particularly useful because there are many positions to stay clear of that will doom you to passively awaiting your execution if you stumble into them with either color. The puzzle section has a good selection of test positions and McDonald's comments to the solutions are very instructive.

All in all, this is an excellent introductory guide to the Bb5 Sicilian. It arms you with enough theory to play the opening and so much understanding of the ideas behind it that you will excel. Buy it and see for yourself.

My assessment of this book: 

[Order](#) *The Sicilian Bb5 Revealed*

by Neil McDonald

Catastrophe in the Opening by James Plaskett, 2005 Everyman Chess, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 144 pp, \$23.95

It's hard to imagine that there could be a worse book than Plaskett's effort on the Pseudo-Trompowsky, but sadly this is the one.



The introduction states:

“Nobody likes defeat, but losing almost before the fight has started hurts even more. But it's happened to the very best and it happens to the rest. GM Lajos Portisch thought the opening to be perhaps the most difficult stage of a chess game. ‘We can never be safe against novelties prepared against our favourite opening systems.’ Jonathan Speelman suggested that to reach a position which is actually lost, rather than inferior or critical, requires at least ‘medium-sized mistakes’ or from a minimum of three. But, of course, the nature of the beast is such that just one true howler can suffice to end the whole thing. The character of a middlegame is, naturally, dictated by the nature of the opening. When Black strives to generate counterchances, rather than merely equalise, then things tend to hot up. So if there is to be a debacle, then it is more likely to occur from such a beginning, as many of the examples here will illustrate. This volume seeks to point out some classic pitfalls in the hope that the student may note them and escape such disasters himself.”

The first part is typical, but it's the last sentence that really bothers me. How about actually doing some work for the potential buyer of your book?

The material is divided as follows:

- Introduction (1 page)
- 1 Positioned Pawns (11 pages)
- 2 Castling Into It (25 pages)
- 3 Trapping the Queen (9 pages)
- 4 Theory (23 pages)
- 5 Attacks on the Uncastled King (29 pages)
- 6 Structural Superiority (11 pages)
- 7 Eye Off the Ball (25 pages)
- Index of Complete Games (3 pages)
- Index of Openings (2 pages)

While these chapter headings seem to bear some relevance to the subject matter, the actual coverage leaves much to be desired. The introduction in each chapter rarely pertains to how you can avoid a catastrophe, or how to provoke one. Nor are the annotations particularly enlightening. Let me give a couple of examples.

Page 106: Hübner-Miles, Havana 1998, after the moves 1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 b5:

“In the early 1980s Miles wrote that he had espoused the Benko Gambit when younger, but he had given it up ‘because it loses a pawn’. Yet, he later

used it now and again. Old habits die hard.”

But this game doesn't follow the Benko move-order, where other games in the book by Miles do, so why mention the Benko here?

Page 18: Euwe-Alekhine, Groningen 1935, after the moves 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5 4 Bf4 Nh5? 5 Be5! f6 6 Bg3 Nxg3 7 hxg3 c6 8 e3 Bg7 9 Bd3 0-0?:

“Asleep in a World Championship. But not his worst failing. Alekhine, whose achievements were cited by Botvinnik as the greatest of any player he ever knew, once urinated on stage during a tournament.”

Do we really need to know this and how does it pertain to the subject at hand?

There are also several cases where he recycles material from other books he authored. The entire game below can also be found in his book on the Queen's Bishop Attack and many of the comments are nearly identical.

Nguyen Ngoc Trungson-T.Banusz, Budapest 2004

1 d4 d5 2 Bg5

Catastrophe in the Opening (CITO): The rare Queen's Bishop Attack.

2...f6 3 Bf4 c5

CITO and Queen's Bishop Attack (QBA): Nobody seems to have gambited here with 3...e5!? 4 dxe5 Nc6!? or 4...fxe5!? 5 Bxe5 Nc6. I think I might.

Carsten Hansen (CH): It has been tried! Better research would have uncovered the game Senoner-Jurkovic, Oberwart 1999, which continued: 3...e5 4 dxe5 Nc6 5 exf6 Nxf6 6 e3 Bc5 7 Nf3 0-0 with a Blackmar-Diemer Gambit with the colors reversed.

4 e3 Nc6 5 Nf3 Qb6

CITO: As so often in the Queen's Bishop Attack, Black makes this early queen move, probing away at the queenside which is now minus a key defender. But White perceives that here he may just carry on developing!

QBA: As so often in the Queen's Bishop Attack, Black makes this probing move, arguing that the white queenside is minus a key defender. But here White spotted that he could just carry on developing!

6 Nc3!



6...e6?

CH: Both books have a diagram in this position.

CITO: Losing the plot at move six. He ought to have preferred something like 6...cxd4 7 exd4 e5!? with interesting complications, as White cannot here win material with 8 dxe5 (8 Nxd5? Qa5+ wins) because of 8...d4 and then Black may capture on e5, since White unable [sic] to take twice there as a check on a5 would win a piece.

QBA: Losing the plot at move six. He ought to have preferred something

like 6...cxd4 7 exd4 e5!? with interesting complications since White may not here win material with 8 dxe5 (8 Nxd5? Qa5+ wins) because of 8...d4 followed by recapture on e5 with the pawn, with White unable to take twice there as ...Qa5+ would win a loose piece.

7 Nb5!

CITO and QBA: Straight in!

7...Qa5+ 8 c3 Kf7 9 Bc7!

CITO: I presume that it was this that Barnusz underestimated. 9 dxc5 Bxc5 10 b4 Nxb4! gave him good value, and 9 Nc7 Rb8 is not leading anywhere for White.

QBA: I presume that it was this that Barnusz underestimated. 9 dxc5 Bxc5 10 b4 Nxb4! granted him good counterchances, and 9 Nc7 Rb8 does not lead anywhere.

9...b6

CITO: Or if instead 9...Qa6 White responds with 10 Nd6+.

QBA: 9...Qa6 10 Nd6+ wins.


10 dxc5 Bxc5 11 a3! 1-0

QBA: The win with b4 is now unstoppable, so Black resigned.

CITO - has a diagram and then: The win with b2-b4 is now unstoppable.

There are further similarities between these two books. As other writers have discovered, the copy and paste function can be quite useful, but please give us a little more credit, we are not that stupid.

This is Plaskett's fourth really bad book in a row and his use of recycled material brings to mind comparisons that he wouldn't find flattering. I suggest he start doing some honest hard work, because what he has produced this past year is downright embarrassing.

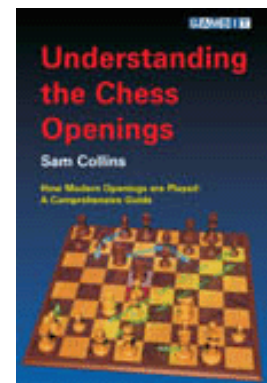
My assessment of this book: 

Order *Catastrophe in the Opening*

by James Plaskett

Understanding the Chess Openings by Sam Collins, 2005 Gambit Publications, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 224 pp, \$28.95

When I first received this book I didn't understand the purpose of publishing an overview of all the openings without going into depth about any of them. But the more I read the book, the more I liked it, and the more I wanted to recommend it.



The back cover states:

“This major new work surveys all chess openings, providing a guide to every critical main line and featuring descriptions of the typical strategies for both sides. These commentaries will be welcomed by all club and tournament players, as they will help them to better handle the middlegame positions arising from each opening, and will equip them to find the best continuation when their opponents deviate from the standard paths. As it covers all openings, Understanding the Chess Openings will also prove invaluable to those who are seeking to create a repertoire. At a glance, readers will get a feel for the character of an opening, and an idea of whether it might suit their style. Potential theoretical problem areas and move-order issues, so critical when creating a repertoire are also highlighted.

Features include:

- Main lines explained move by moves
- Guidance against rare but dangerous sidelines
- Special emphasis on lines popular at club level
- Brief description of both sides' aims at the end of each main line
- General introduction to each major opening
- More than 400 diagrams”

This is one of those rare occasions where the book backs up the cover blurb 100%. Players around 1700 won't find a better or easier way to survey openings to include in their repertoire. At the same time Collins provides honest objective opinions about the merits of each opening. Granted there are many unexplored sidelines and main lines that could have been explored further, but that's not the purpose of the book. It will also help you determine whether you would like to play certain openings, because you get the opportunity to see where the main lines will take you and not just some soulless evaluation of the position on move 28. Instead you get a thorough explanation of the pros and cons for each side at move 12, and then a few more moves of the main line.

Another thing I enjoyed is the fact that Collins doesn't overload us with unnecessary information about what each sideline is called or with needless game references. He even adds a touch of humor when commenting about variation names:


“Variations have been called by silly names, often after obscure players who made little or no contribution to their theory. The summit of idiocy in this field, however, is occupied by the variation [CH: after 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6] 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Bxc6 dxc6: the Delayed Exchange

Ruy Lopez Deferred. Such an inelegant title should be sufficient to shame anyone who wants to play this opening.”

I also applaud him for calling out the Blackmar-Diemer Gambit, which is unfittingly popular amongst lower rated players. Collins writes:

“I’ve seen more promising players lured into incompetence by this opening than I care to remember. The basic pattern is this - player learns BDG, tries to get it in every game, thus limiting his chess experience (and, since the opening isn’t good, he loses too many games, meaning that his rating stays low and he can’t get games against better players). **Nobody who plays good chess plays this line, and nobody who plays good chess ever will.**”

Anyone rated under 1700 should own this book and even higher rated players who are looking to fill in the blanks in their repertoire can benefit. It arms you with the knowledge of where to focus your resources when investing money on other opening books.

My assessment of this book: 

[Order](#) *Understanding the Chess Openings*
by Sam Collins

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