



COLUMNISTS

Checkpoint

Carsten Hansen



Translate this page



Rating Chart

- Awful –
- Poor –
- Uneven –
- Good –
- Great –
- Excellent –

**Reviewed this Month**

*The Catalan (DVD)*  
by Victor Bologan

*Killer c3 Sicilian (DVD)*  
by Sam Collins

*Killer Dragon 1 (DVD)*  
by Simon Williams

*Killer Dragon 2 (DVD)*  
by Simon Williams

*The Meran & Anti-Meran Variations*  
by Alexey Dreev

*The Gambit Book of Instructive Chess Puzzles*  
by Graham Burgess

Catching Up

This month, we catch up with titles that I received during the last year. These products all merit attention, even though we are only taking a brief look at them.

*The Catalan: A Complete Repertoire for White* (DVD) by Victor Bologan, ChessBase GmbH 2011, Running time: 5 hours 29 minutes, \$36.95 (ChessCafe Price \$30.95)

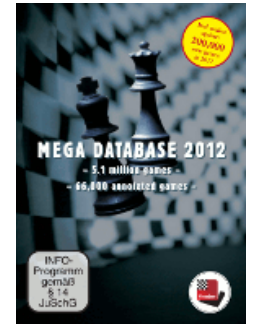
The Catalan is a very solid opening for White, but it is strategically complicated. Play can turn from quiet to tactically complicated in an instant and vice versa. In the introduction, Bologan tells us that he is the perfect guide for presenting this opening because he plays it himself and can even speak a few words in the slightly obscure language that is Catalan.

The material is divided into nineteen segments:

- 01: Introduction
- 02: 4...b6: Miton – Brownscombe
- 03: 4...c5: Gelfand – Grischuk
- 04: 4...c6 5.Nf3 Nbd7: Miron – Chrzaszcz
- 05: 4...Bb4+ 5.Bd2 Be7: Tkachiev – Filippov
- 06: 4...Bb4+ 5.Bd2 Bd6: Meier – Ponomariov
- 07: 4...Bb4+ 5.Bd2 Bd7: Gleizerov – Horvath
- 08: 4...dxc4 5.Bg2 b5: Buhmann – Bologan
- 09: 4...dxc4 5.Bg2 c6: Iskusnyh – Yemelin
- 10: 4...dxc4 5.Bg2 c5: Fominyh – Ruban
- 11: 4...dxc4 5.Bg2 a6: Kopylov – Solleved
- 12: 4...dxc4 5.Bg2 Bb4+: Eljanov – Fedorchuk
- 13: 4...dxc4 5.Bg2 Nc6: Khalifman – Ivanov
- 14: 4...dxc4 5.Bg2 0-0 6.0-0 Nbd7: Meier – Ghaem Maghami
- 15: 7.Qc2 a6 8.Qxc4 b5 9.Qc2 Bb7 10.Bd2: Dydyshko – Petrik
- 16: 7.Qc2 a6 8.Qxc4 b5 9.Qc2 Bb7 10.Bd2 Ra7: Shirov – Jakovenko



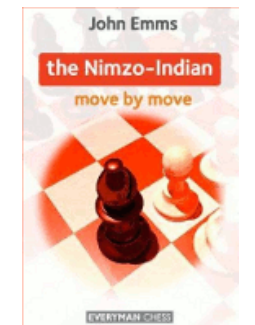
Purchases from our [chess shop](#) help keep [ChessCafe.com](#) freely accessible:



*Mega Database 2012*  
by ChessBase



*First Steps in Opening Play*  
by Andrew Martin



*The Nimzo-Indian: Move by Move (Ebook)*  
by John Emms



- 17: 7.Qc2 a6 8.Qxc4 b5 9.Qc2 Bb7 10.Bd2 Be4 11.Qc1: Grischuk – Solomon
- 18: 7.Qc2 a6 8.Qxc4 b5 9.Qc2 Bb7 10.Bd2 Be4 11.Qc1 Qc8: Kramnik – Leko
- 19: 7.Qc2 a6 8.Qxc4 b5 9.Qc2 Bb7 10.Bd2 Be4 11.Qc1 Bb7: Nielsen – Hou Yifan

The first thing to note is that Bologan has a very distinct Slavic accent that is occasionally difficult to understand. It would seem to be for this reason that he avoids long explanations of what is happening on the board and limits himself to terse, safe statements.

The repertoire in itself is interesting and will undoubtedly provide some players with ammunition in particular lines. However, the DVD is mainly aimed at players rated below 2000 and it is not simplistic enough in its approach to be of any great value for players of that strength, nor does it provide enough detail in the variations to be of interest to players who are much stronger. As someone who has played the Catalan Opening regularly, I found myself wanting to get specifics in various lines, but almost every time Bologan stopped short of what I would have wanted.

Overall, this is a decent DVD, but it could easily have been considerably better.

**My assessment of this DVD:**

**Order [The Catalan \(DVD\)](#)**

by Victor Bologan

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*Killer c3 Sicilian* (DVD) by Sam Collins, GingerGM Publishing 2011 2011, running time: 4 hours 30 minutes, \$29.95 (ChessCafe Price \$23.95)

Irish international master Sam Collins presents himself well on this DVD. He exudes confidence in the repertoire for White based on the c3-Sicilian. His words are measured and to the point, almost as if the entire presentation had been rehearsed in advance, which remarkable for a chess DVD.

Collins explains that he was inspired to pick up the opening after the following beating:

**Paul Motwani – Sam Collins British**  
Championship, Edinburgh 2003

**1.e4 c5 2.c3 Nf6 3.e5 Nd5 4.Nf3 e6 5.d4 cxd4 6.Bc4 d6 7.cxd4 Be7 8.0-0 0-0 9.Qe2 Nc6 10.Qe4 Re8 11.Re1 Nb6 12.Bd3 g6 13.Nc3 Nb4 14.Bb1 N4d5 15.Qg4 Nxc3 16.bxc3 Qc7 17.h4**

Collins concedes that in practical play, Black's position is almost impossible to defend at this point, and that is without any major errors on Black's part. As Winants analyzes in ChessBase Magazine, here 17.Bg5 is an interesting alternative. One line runs 17...Bf8 18.Qh4 Qxc3 19.Bf6 Qxa1 20.Ng5 h6 (or 20...h5 21.Qxh5!! gxh5 22.Bh7 mate) 21.Nxf7 Qc3 (21...Kxf7 22.Bxg6+! Kg8 23.Bf7+! and it is game over for Black) 22.Qe4 Bg7 23.Nxh6+, and it is over for Black once more.

**17...Nd7**

Collins confirms Winants analysis that Black can likely survive with 17...Qxc3, but the lines are far too complicated for normal human beings to find their way through the maze. The conclusion is that White's attack will only be sufficient for a perpetual check, but I will not reproduce the analysis here.

**18.h5 f5 19.Qg3 Kg7 20.hxg6 hxg6**





[FEN "r1b1r3/ppqnb1k1/3pp1p1/4Pp2/3P4/2P2NQ1/P4PP1/RBB1R1K1 w - - 0 21"]

**21.Bxf5!! exf5 22.exd6 Bxd6 23.Bh6+ Kxh6**


Or 23...Kh7 24.Ng5+.

**24.Qh4+ Kg7 25.Rxe8 Nf8 26.Rae1 1-0**

Collins explains that Black's two main moves are 2...Nf6 and 2...d5, but in either case, he feels that White has excellent chances to obtain an advantage. While I don't agree with all of his conclusions and evaluations, I must admit that he makes a very impressive case for White. His measured delivery makes it almost impossible to not jump on the c3-train, in part because Collins really believes in what he presents to the viewer.

In terms of production values, I find it a little distracting to see the background contrast around the edge of Collins's silhouette and, on occasion, the floating background images make it look like Collins has a sombrero hanging behind his head.

In general, I find this DVD to be of a very high quality and the presentation top-notch. I recommend it to those who are looking for an effective way to meet the Sicilian as white. This will be useful for players rated between 1700 and 2200.

**My assessment of this DVD:** 

**Order [Killer c3 Sicilian](#)**

by Sam Collins

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*Killer Dragon 1* (DVD) by Simon Williams, GingerGM Publishing 2011, running time: 6 hours 30 minutes, \$29.95 (ChessCafe Price \$23.95)

*Killer Dragon 1* focuses on the Yugoslav Attack in the Dragon, which arises after 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3, usually followed by Qd2 and 0-0-0, or with Bc4 inserted before 0-0-0. These are the most complicated lines of the Dragon complex. These lines are theory-laden, so it is no wonder that this DVD runs 6.5 hours. If you are not keen on memorizing theory, you should definitely stay clear of these lines with either color. However, by using the suggested repertoire given on *Killer Dragon 2*, which appears reasonably playable for Black, one can avoid much of this theory.



Returning to the lines covered on this DVD, the material is divided as follows:


Introduction and move order pointers (1 segment)

- **Part 1**
- Model Games (2 segments)
- Dragon Concepts (6 segments)
- Defensive Concepts (3 segments)
- **Part 2: The Yugoslav Attack 9 Bc4**
- Chinese Dragon (6 segments)
- The Soltis Variation (5 segments)
- A less theoretical possibility for Black (1 segment)
- **Part 3: The Yugoslav Attack with 9 0-0-0**
- 9 0-0-0 d5 (6 segments)
- 9 0-0-0 Bd7 (3 segments)
- 9 g4 (4 segments)
- Other Systems White many use with Queenside castling (2 segments)
- Conclusion (1 segment)

As mentioned, these lines are complicated, demand accurate play, good understanding, and the ability to memorize *many* long lines. Williams confidently steers the viewer through the lines and demonstrates why Black is OK.

In addition to the normal main lines, he covers the Chinese Variation, which is a relatively new invention. This is to offer Black a variation with a bit less theory. Similarly in the lines with 9 0-0-0, he offers "a gambler's choice" with 9...Bd7 as an alternative to the sharp main line 9...d5. To Williams's credit, he admits that 9...Bd7 is somewhat dubious, but playable if White is not fully up on the theory. Also in the main lines after 9...d5, he tells the viewer that 10 Qe1 gave him more headaches than any other line on the entire DVD. He continues by demonstrating how he eventually determined that 10...e6 is probably Black's best choice, ending in an equal or only slightly disadvantageous position, though the winning chances are absolutely minimal as well.

Overall, Williams does an admirable job at steering the reader through the complicated lines that constitute the Yugoslav complex of the Sicilian Dragon. Even if you are a reasonably strong player and have some experience in the Dragon, there will be plenty to pick up from watching this DVD. Admittedly, he does occasionally skate over the lines and conclusions too quickly, but this is absolutely necessary in order not to bore the viewer to death. I played the Dragon Variation for years and I enjoyed watching this DVD. I think many other players will feel the same way.

**My assessment of this DVD:** 

### **Order [Killer Dragon 1](#)**

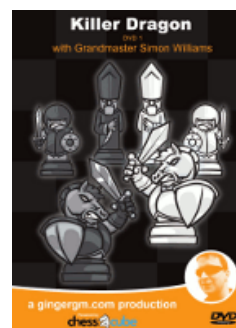
by Simon Williams

*Killer Dragon 2* (DVD) by Simon Williams, GingerGM Publishing 2011  
2011, running time: 5 hours 30 minutes, \$29.95 (ChessCafe Price \$23.95)

In *Killer Dragon 2* Williams covers the Dragadorf lines as Black against the Yugoslav set-ups, the so-called classical lines, and miscellaneous lines such as 6 g3 and 6 f4.

The material is divided as follows:

- Introduction (1 segment)
- Move Order (1 segment)
- **Part 1**
- 6 Bc4 (4 segments)
- The Classical Dragon (5 segments)
- An Early g3 (5 segments)
- The Levenfish Attack: 5 f4 (4 segments)
- Any Other Possibilities (4 segments)
- **Part 2**




- The Accelerated Dragadorf: Introduction and Basic Concepts (1 segment)
- The Problem with the Standard Dragadorf (1 segment)
- The Accelerated Dragadorf – Model Games (6 segments)
- The Accelerated Dragadorf: 8 a4 (4 segments)
- The Accelerated Dragadorf: 8 Qd2 Bb7 9 a4 (4 segments)
- The Accelerated Dragadorf: White avoids Playing a4 (4 segments)
- Black Employs the Dragadorf (3 segments)
- Conclusion & End Credits (2 segments)

I must admit that I find it interesting that Williams already holds the normal Dragadorf to be somewhat dubious and instead seeks refuge in the accelerated version of the variation. From a technical aspect, I found this DVD a little less well-produced than others. Sometimes Williams's voice sounds tinny and some of the edits are pieced together crudely.

As mentioned in my evaluation of *Killer Dragon 1*, Williams is a very capable guide in the labyrinth of lines that make up the Dragon complex. Many of his recommendations are not mainstream theory, which is a good practical choice for several reasons. First and foremost for presentation purposes, it limits the volume of variations he has to demonstrate, and, secondly, there is less for the viewer to memorize, which is good if you are new to the Dragon.

While the Dragon Variation can look scary from a study standpoint because of the sheer volume of variations, Williams manages to present a repertoire for Black that is functional, understandable, and not too difficult to memorize. For newcomers to the Dragon, and even those who have a fair amount of experience with it, this DVD, and indeed the set, represent a great choice for players rated up to 2200.

**My assessment of this DVD:** 

**Order [Killer Dragon 2](#)**  
by Simon Williams

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*The Meran & Anti-Meran Variations* by Alexey Dreev, Chess Stars 2011, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 208pp. \$29.95 (ChessCafe Price \$25.95)

Grandmaster Alexey Dreev is one of the world's leading theoreticians on the opening complex covered in this book. The Meran and Anti-Meran Variations have been under the microscope for the better part of twenty years and have undergone a massive amount of development. Consequently, there is a ridiculous volume of game material to consider. An inexperienced author could easily have filled 500 pages on these lines, but Dreev has only used just over 200 pages. One reason for this is that he primarily presents a repertoire for Black; another is that he is keenly aware of what works and what doesn't, and what's relevant and what isn't.



The material is divided as follows:


- Preface (4 pages)
- **The Meran Variation** – 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 Nc3 e6 5 e3 Nbd7 6 Bd3 dxc4 7 Bxc4 b5
- Early Deviations (2 chapters – 20 pages)
- The Classical System: 8 Bd3 Bb7 9 0-0 a6 10 e4 c5 11 d5 Qc7 (6 chapters – 52 pages)
- The Modern System: 8 Bd3 Bb7 9 e4 b4 10 Na4 c5 11 e5 Nd7 (4 chapters – 50 pages)
- **The Anti-Meran Variation** – 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 Nc3 e6 5 e3

Nbd7 6 Qc2

- The System 6...b6 (3 chapters – 25 pages)
- The System 6...Bd6 (5 chapters – 44 pages)
- Rare Lines (1 chapter – 7 pages)

While the presentation of the material is quite detailed, it is also to the point. The reader is rarely overwhelmed with too many lines. Dreev focuses on what works best and this makes for a very effective repertoire book, one that is likely to last Black for quite a while. There is a very reasonable amount of original analysis, both in the opening and in the annotations to the main games. However, the language is stilted at times, though still understandable.

This book is for those rated 2100 or so, but even much stronger players will benefit. Those who employ these lines with either color should definitely invest in this book.

**My assessment of this book:** 

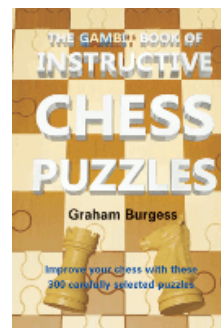
**Order [The Meran & Anti-Meran Variations](#)**

by Alexey Dreev

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*The Gambit Book of Instructive Chess Puzzles* by Graham Burgess, Gambit Publications 2011, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 160pp. \$16.95 (ChessCafe Price \$12.95)

The first thing to comment on about this book is its very affordable price. Even at its full list price, it is a bargain, at the [ChessCafe.com](#) discount price it is ridiculously inexpensive. Yet, if the price doesn't inspire prospective readers to pick up the book, the contents will.



The back cover blurb tells us the following:

"Solving tactical puzzles is one of the most effective ways to improve your chess. This convenient book provides 300 exercises, with instructive points highlighted in the solutions.

"There is something here for everyone. The puzzles in the first two chapters are based on a clear-cut tactic or checkmate, such as those explained in Gambit's best-sellers *How to Beat Your Dad at Chess* and [Chess Tactics for Kids](#). The endgame challenges highlight tactics and principles in action. In practice it is vital to defend resiliently and seek counterattacking chances – there is an innovative chapter on these rarely-covered themes as well as puzzles where the reader must decide how to punch home an attack.

"Later chapters help readers develop a vital skill: the ability to make tough chessboard decisions. Attack, sacrifice, grab material, defend or simplify – it's for you to decide! Principles and guidelines are emphasized, together with common sources of error. The final section of puzzles will prove a stern challenge even for the best players, with the reader exposed to the full complexity of modern chess – with a few helpful hints along the way."


The material is divided as follows:

- Introduction (2 pages)
- Acknowledgements, Methods and Organization (1 page)
- Symbols (1 page)
- 1 Not Just for Beating Your Dad! (8 pages)
- 2 Putting Your Knowledge to Work (6 pages)
- 3 Endgame Skills (13 pages)
- 4 Creativity (13 pages)

- 5 Attack, Defence and Counterattack (10 pages)
- 6 Vision (13pages)
- 7 Leaving the Comfort Zone Behind (7 pages)
- 8 A Tough Day at the Office (10 pages)
- Answers (74 pages)
- Conclusion (1 page)
- Self-Rating Table (2 pages)

All the positions in the book are from 2010-2011, so are likely to be unfamiliar to most readers. The skill level required to solve the puzzles varies quite a bit, and there are some that even quite strong players will have a very hard time with. Indeed some of the very strong players involved in the games occasionally missed the possibility that we are now asked to find.

There will always be a market for good puzzle books, because a thorough understanding of tactics is required to become a strong player. This book fits the bill as both trainer and entertainer. It is a handy accompaniment to bring along on a commute to sharpen your combinatorial skills. For the price of the book, you will be hard-pressed to find better value for your money and you will enjoy reaping the benefits of what you learn.

**My assessment of this book:** 

**Order [Gambit Book of Instructive Chess Puzzles](#)**  
by Graham Burgess

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