



COLUMNISTS

Checkpoint

Carsten Hansen



Translate this page



Rating Chart

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

Reviewed this Month

Play The French: 4th Edition
by John Watson

*The Modern French:
A Complete Guide for Black*
by Dejan Antic and Branimir Maksimovic

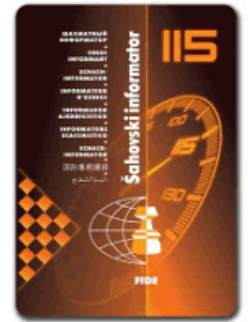
The Triangle System
by Ruslan Scherbakov

Complete Slav I
by Konstantin Sakaev

En Passant

The Caro-Kann: Move by Move
by Cyrus Lakdawala

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Chess Informant 115
by Chess Informant



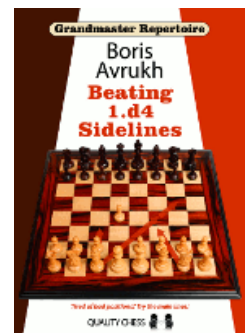
Encyclopedia of Chess Problems
by Chess Informant

Semi-closed Openings and Triangles

Very few openings are either solid and boring or sharp and complicated. The French and the Caro-Kann are known as solid responses, as is the Slav Defence when facing 1 d4; however, solid does not have to mean non-combative. Equally present are complicated lines, must-be-memorized long theoretical variations, and even sharper alternatives hidden in the notes. In contemporary opening theory all reasonably popular openings contain a good mix of solid and sharp variations. This is definitely the case for all of the openings we look at this month.

Play The French: 4th Edition by John Watson, Everyman Chess 2012, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 432pp. \$29.95 (ChessCafe Price: \$22.95)

Now in its fourth incarnation, *Play The French* is still the book that all other repertoire books wish to become. The fact that Watson has been able to roll out a new edition of his repertoire as black in this opening reflects the enduring quality and attraction these book have delivered. The first edition was published by Pergamon Press in 1984 (though the bibliography lists it as Everyman Chess, because Pergamon later became Everyman, but I digress). The second edition was published in 1996, the third in 2003, and now the fourth edition after nine more years. The total has been an amazing twenty-eight years, enduring quality indeed! In fact, it was the first edition that made me take up the French as an alternative to my Sicilian Dragon. What attracted me back then was Watson's infectious writing style, the promise of good chances for Black to play for a win, and the volume of original input in terms of improvements over existing theory and new analysis. I am happy to say that this book is no different in all of these aspects.



Beating 1.d4 Sidelines
by Boris Avrukh

Watson answers why a new edition was necessary in the introduction:



"Over the past two or three years, after all, numerous books on the French Defence have appeared, most of them written by very competent and insightful authors. As is the wont with modern opening works, these books usually centre their recommended variations around an instructive and/or entertaining game, without great depth but with sufficient detail to show the main branches and explain basic ideas. This is absolutely legitimate and is in fact the direction towards which I have gravitated in some of my own works. But it leaves room for a book in the French with fewer generalities and more nitty-gritty chess substance, one in which you have a better chance of finding precisely how your latest adventure corresponds to a set of moves in the book, whether or not those moves are flawed. *Play the French 4* is first of all a repertoire book, with a wider-than-normal choice of lines; but it is also a reference work which tries to anticipate as many of your opponent's logical moves as possible."

The material is divided as follows:

- Bibliography (2 pages)
- Introduction (2 pages)
- Advance Variation: Introduction and Traditional Lines (33 pages)
- Advance Variation: 6 a3 (20 pages)
- Advance Variation with 5...Nh6 (20 pages)
- Tarrasch Variation: Introduction to 3...Nf6 with 5 Bd3 (31 pages)
- Tarrasch Variation: Main Lines with 5 Bd3 (28 pages)
- Tarrasch Variation with 5 f4 (26 pages)
- Winawer Variation: Fourth Moves (38 pages)
- Winawer Variation: Fifth Moves (24 pages)
- Winawer Variation: Poisoned Pawn Variation (32 pages)
- Winawer Variation: Positional Main Lines (26 pages)
- Winawer Variation: Portisch-Hook Variation (24 pages)
- Exchange Variation (26 pages)
- Classical Variation with 4 e5 (27 pages)
- MacCutcheon: Introduction (15 pages)
- MacCutcheon: Main Lines with 6 Bd2 (16 pages)
- King's Indian Attack (18 pages)
- Uncommon Early Moves (16 pages)
- Index of Variations (4 pages)

In the introduction Watson also covers what is new in this edition compared to *Play the French 3*:

"It's been nine years since *Play the French 3*, seemingly a lifetime given the rapidity with which theory changes in such a popular opening. I have therefore updated and re-analysed the great majority of variations, often in depth. I've also presented new solutions. For example, in the Advance Variation (3 e5), apart from changing some fundamental ways of playing 5...Qb6 in the main line, I have added a chapter on 5...Nh6. Versus the Tarrasch (3 Nd2), I have returned to 3...Nf6, not only on the basis of proven merit but also because very little, if anything, has changed in a fundamental sense in the 3...c5 lines. In the Winawer (3 Nc3 Bb4), you will see a new chapter on 6...Qa5 (which I call the 'Portisch-Hook Variation'), and a return to the Winawer Poisoned Pawn in the main 7 Qg4 line. There are two new chapters on the MacCutcheon Variation (3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4, replacing 4...dxe4), which is an active approach in the spirit of the Winawer; and you'll also find a new main line in the Classical System (3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5).


These variations and similarly new approaches in lesser systems by no means indicate the failure of corresponding solutions from previous editions; on the contrary, most of them are still fully playable. But they do show how wonderfully flexible the French Defence is, and how you needn't despair of it should a particular system fail to satisfy your needs. Finally, in terms of coverage, I have tried to pay deeper and more respectful attention to variations which are not currently in fashion and/or which have a strong following at lower levels of play."

I will also add that because the suggested repertoire finds a large audience, as with the recommendations from other prominent authors of repertoire books,

that the theory develops by leaps and bounds and thus expands far beyond the coverage of the previous volume. That has indeed been the fate of several lines that have received Watson's stamp of approval. As Watson admits, some of the lines have proven critical to the point that they are mostly fun for White to play, and therefore it makes little sense to continue to endorse those particular lines.

This book is amazing and complicated, and amazingly complicated. Watson steers the reader through the material with a steady hand, though without losing the "Watson touch," which is where he heads off on a tangent along a line he finds fascinating, even if the overall coverage of the main line neither requires it nor supports it. In this fashion, he covers countless minor lines that would otherwise have been ignored. These lines can then be explored further by the reader and on the appropriate occasion be used as a surprise weapon.

This book is well beyond the level of most players rated below 1800, but for ambitious players, both those employing the French as black or playing 1 e4 should invest in this book without hesitation.

My assessment of this book: 

Order [Play The French: 4th Edition](#)

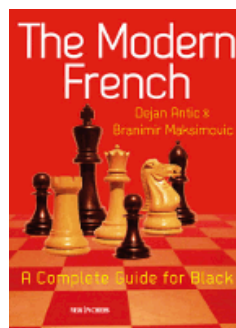
by John Emms

Order [Play The French: 4th Edition \(Ebook\)](#)

by John Watson

The Modern French: A Complete Guide for Black by Dejan Antic and Branimir Maksimovic, New In Chess 2012, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 365pp. \$32.95 (ChessCafe Price: \$22.95)

With such glowing words about Watson's French repertoire book, one can wonder why we would even need to consider another book on the same opening. However, this one mostly covers different lines than Watson book.



The contents are divided as follows:

- Foreword (2 pages)
- Your French Repertoire in a Bird's Eye View (2 pages) King's Indian Attack (1 e4 e6 2 d3) (34 pages)
- The Exchange Variation (1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 exd5) (14 pages)
- The Advance Variation (1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5) (90 pages)
- The Tarrasch Variation (1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Be7) (72 pages)
- The Steinitz Variation (1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5) (76 pages)
- The McCutcheon [*sic*] Variation (1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4) (50 pages)
- Bibliography (2 pages)
- Index of Variations (6 pages)
- Index of Players (8 pages)
- New In Chess Code System (2 pages)
- About the Authors (1 page)


With regard to the misspelling of MacCutcheon Variation, at least the authors and editors were consistent and misspelled it throughout the book, though it is a strange lapse for a line that they purportedly have played for many years.

The authors are well-known chess professionals. Antic is a grandmaster from Serbia and Maksimovic is an international master and has been a chess coach for more than thirty years. According to the back cover, they have, in their long practice as chess professionals, "developed many unconventional ideas in the French. Now they have teamed up to present their findings in a complete and up-to-date guide for players of all levels. The authors explain

strategic concepts and attacking plans, present new concepts and reveal numerous novelties in topical main lines. They also turn various sidelines into deadly surprise weapons."

By and large, this is fairly accurate description of the contents, though I will take a few exceptions. They skate a little too casually over the explanatory prose. Sometimes their explanations are excellent, detailed and insightful; other times they cut a little too close to the bone and some things are lost. I do like their conclusions at the end of each chapter, where they sum up the key elements of each line. However, there are many long lines where the only guidance the reader will receive is some occasional punctuation to support the analysis. This hardly helps those on the lower-rated rungs of "the players of all levels" they were talking about. Though higher rated players may enjoy it considerably more. A further problem is the use of deep variation trees, sometimes heading up along a branch as deep as A22131, which does not bode well for understanding or readability. This should have been taken care of through better or different editing.

Otherwise, I have to say that the authors have done a very good job overall and fans of the French Defence will definitely want this book, particularly if the above-mentioned lines are part of your repertoire.

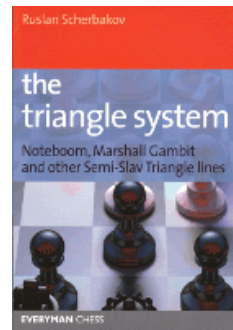
My assessment of this book: 

Order [The Modern French](#)

by Dejan Antic and Branimir Maksimovic

The Triangle System by Ruslan Scherbakov, Everyman Chess 2012, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 448pp. \$29.95 (ChessCafe Price: \$22.95)

The Triangle System arises after 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 and 3...e6, or 2...e6 and 3...c6. The intention will typically be to play the Noteboom Variation, 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nc3 e6 4 Nf3 dxc4, which is insanely strategically complicated with the lines often running beyond move twenty. White can avoid it with 4 e4 (instead of 4 Nf3), but then the lines in the Marshall Gambit will likely become tactically complicated. Black gains at least one pawn and sends the queen out for an excursion, and in return White gets a lead in development, while Black's king gets stuck in the center. Needless to say, these lines require a heady knowledge of a massive amount of theory, which is not for the faint-hearted.




The material is divided as follows:

- Bibliography (1 page)
- Introduction (3 pages)
- **Part One: The Noteboom Variation** (3 pages)
 - 5 e4 (13 pages)
 - 5 Bg5 (12 pages)
 - White Plays an Early g2-g3 (17 pages)
 - 5 a4 Bb4: Various Deviations (17 pages)
 - On the Road to the Main Line (9 pages)
 - 8 axb5: Introduction and 11 d5 (21 pages)
 - Approaching the Main Line (6 pages)
 - The Main Line with Qc2 (31 pages)
 - The Main Line with 15 Nd2 (23 pages)
 - The Main Line with 15 Re1 (33 pages)
- **Part Two: The Marshall Gambit** (2 pages)
 - 4...Bb4 and Other Deviations (15 pages)
 - 4...dxe4 5 Nxe4 Bb4+ 6 Bd2 Qxd4 7 Bxb4 Qxe4+ 8 Ne2 (15 pages)
 - 8 Be2: Various 8th Moves (11 pages)
 - 8 Be2 c5 (11 pages)

- 8 Be2 Na6 9 Bd6 (20 pages)
- 8 Be2 Na6 9 Bc3 (14 pages)
- 8 Be2 Na6 9 Ba5! (46 pages)
- **Part Three: Anti-Triangle Systems** (1 page)
- The Triangle Stonewall (26 pages)
- 3 Nf3 c6 4 Nbd2 (8 pages)
- 3 Nf3 c6 4 Qc2 (28 pages)
- 3 Nf3 c6 4 Qb3 (35 pages)
- White doesn't Protect c4 (16 pages)
- Index of Variations (7 pages)

Never has one book covered all of these lines in such detail, with so much original analysis, countless improvements over existing theory, and innumerable impossibly complicated long lines of must-know theory. Russian grandmaster Ruslan Scherbakov has written about these lines on Chesspublishing.com for years and he is an excellent guide. He does provide some prose alongside the many pages of heavy theory, but it does not make this an easy book to read. This is complicated stuff.

If you a strong player, and ambitious as well, then you will be able to extract excellent value from this truly amazing and detailed book.

My assessment of this book: 

Order [The Triangle System](#)

by Ruslan Scherbakov

Order [The Triangle System \(Ebook\)](#)

by Ruslan Scherbakov

Complete Slav I by Konstantin Sakaev, Chess Evolution 2012, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 347pp. \$29.99 (ChessCafe Price: \$22.95)

Grandmaster Sakaev is a strong player and analyst, who in recent years has primarily focused on writing and coaching. As an active player, the Slav Defense, 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6, was Sakaev's primary weapon as black against 1 d4, and he is rightfully consider one of the leading experts on the opening. It is not entirely clear how many volumes will be used to cover this opening in its entirety.



The contents are divided as follows:

- Key to Symbols (1 page)
- Preface (1 page)
- Exchange Variation (18 pages)
- Winawer counter-gambit (6 pages)
- Alekhine variation, side line (12 pages)
- Structures looking like "Stone Wall" (10 pages)
- Noteboom variation, side lines (14 pages)
- Marshall gambit (38 pages)
- 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e3 Variations, that are not the Meran (16 pages)
- 3 Nf3 Variations, without early night development Nf6 (18 pages)
- 3 Nf3 Nf6 What happens if White declines to follow the "main" road (18 pages)
- Schlechter variation (12 pages)
- Rare lines, without early development of the knight to Nc3 (18 pages)
- Variation 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 e3 Bf5 (26 pages)
- Variation 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 e3 Bg4 (20 pages)
- 4 Nc3 rare variations (6 pages)
- Chebanenko variation (107 pages)

As you will notice, most of the lines are of the non-topical main line variety in that they are not super-heavy theory-wise, but still large enough to be


considered separately. Though a couple of dense lines are included in this volume: The Marshall Gambit, 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nc3 e6 4 e4 dxe4 5 Nxe4 Bb4+ 6 Bd2 Qxd4 7 Bxb4 Qxe4+, and the Chebanenko Variation, 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 Nc3 a6, both of which are topical lines that are played frequently.

In the preface Sakaev makes it clear that this book is for advanced players only:

"Over a number of years I have played various lines of the opening with both colours and analysed it both individually and in cooperation with many well-known grandmasters. Now I have decided to give the opportunity to anyone who feels like it to enter a grandmaster's laboratory and see my professional approach to various opening lines.

"Measures have been taken lest the work should swell to enormous size. Textual annotations to variations and evaluations are not given throughout the book but only in cases where I thought it to be important and not too obvious. As for the rest, a conventional abridged evaluation system has been used."

I can testify to the fact that the analysis is indeed both deep and impressive. Novelties and improvements over existing theory abound and make this volume very interesting reading if you play the Slav as either black or white, particularly if you are rated at a reasonably high level. Players with at least with a 2200 rating and even strong grandmasters will be able to use this volume to their advantage.

My assessment of this book: 

Order [Complete Slav I](#)

by Konstantin Sakaev

The Caro-Kann: Move by Move by Cyrus Lakdawala, Everyman Chess 2012, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 432pp. \$29.95 (ChessCafe Price: \$22.95)

In the last couple of years, Californian international master and coach Cyrus Lakdawala has been exceedingly productive, particularly after the introduction of this *Move by Move* series, where he appears to consistently have another book on the way.




The topic of this volume, as the title indicates, is the Caro-Kann Defence, 1 e4 c6. As with his other books, it is written in a very casual, chatty style that is meant to resemble the intimacy of a lesson. This makes the book easy to read and absorb, even if it is extraordinarily long. Though much of the length of the book is due to layout decisions more than content.

Given the recommendation of the Smyslov Variation in the Main Line Caro-Kann, 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 dxe4 4 Nxe4 Nd7, the division of the material is fairly predictable:

- Series Foreword (1 page)
- Bibliography (2 pages)
- Introduction (11 pages)
- Smyslov Variation: The Quiet 5 Nf3 (35 pages)
- Smyslov Variation 5 Bc4: The Old Line (48 pages)
- Smyslov Variation 5 Ng5: Into the Abyss (52 pages)
- Advance Variation: Nunn-Shirov Attack (33 pages)
- Advance Variation: Short's Line (38 pages)
- Advance Variation: Fourth Move Alternatives (38 pages)

- Panov-Botvinnik Attack (45 pages)
- Quasi Panov-Botvinnik (21 pages)
- Exchange Variation (31 pages)
- Two Knights Variation (22 pages)
- Fantasy Variation (23 pages)
- King's Indian Attack and 2 Ne2 (25 pages)
- Index of Variations (8 pages)
- Index of Complete Games (2 pages)

This book is decidedly for the lower-ranked players, say, from around 1500 to 2000. It is an easy and enjoyable read if you want to understand the Caro-Kann from Black's perspective. In addition to having a repertoire served on a platter, this book is a great starting point.

My assessment of this book: 

Order [The Caro-Kann: Move by Move](#)
by Cyrus Lakdawala

Order [The Caro-Kann: Move by Move \(Ebook\)](#)
by Cyrus Lakdawala

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