



COLUMNISTS

Checkpoint

Carsten Hansen

**Reviewed this month:**

Play the Queen's Gambit
by Chris Ward

Chess Explained: The Classical Sicilian
by Alex Yermolinsky

The Vienna Game C23-C29
(CD-ROM) by Gregory Huber

Win with the London System
by Sverre Johnsen and Vlatko Kovacevic

Chess Informant Vol. 95
by Zdenko Krnic et al.

Hodgepodge

This month's column lacks an overall theme, but we will examine popular author Chris Ward's latest treatise, as well as Alex Yermolinsky's inaugural opening book. Plus, we'll visit with our old friend Chess Informant, and make some new acquaintances: Canadian FM Gregory Huber, Norwegian Sverre Johnsen and Croatian GM Vlatko Kovacevic.

Play the Queen's Gambit by Chris Ward, Everyman Chess 2006, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 175 pp, \$23.95

Rating Chart

♦ – **A poor book.**

♦♦ – **Not very good.**

♦♦♦♦ – **A useful book.**

♦♦♦♦♦ – **A good book.**

♦♦♦♦♦♦ – **An excellent book.**

English grandmaster Chris Ward presents a repertoire for White in the Queen's Gambit: 1 d4 d5 2 c4. As with all repertoire books, there is a danger that the author will take shortcuts or disguise potential problems by disregarding those lines that demand too much work or are simply not straightforward enough for a firm assessment.



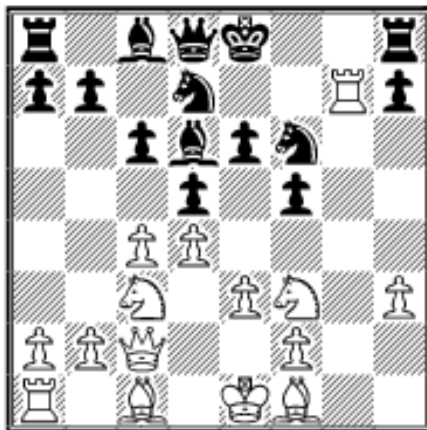
Let's see how the material is presented:

- Introduction (2 pages)
- 1 The Queen's Gambit Accepted (48 pages)
- 2 The Queen's Gambit Declined (52 pages)
- 3 The Semi-Slav (26 pages)
- 4 The Slav (22 pages)
- 5 Other Black Second Moves (16 pages)
- Index of Complete Games
- Index of Variations (3 pages)

First, the contents of the first four chapters needed to be divided even further, because there is so much ground to cover that lesser significant—but still equally important—lines are likely to get lost in the overall presentation. At least the author provides a complete index of variations, which is something opening books from Everyman Chess often neglect. More disturbing, however, is the low number of pages in the book itself. It is simply impossible to adequately cover the Queen's Gambit declined in only 52 pages or the Semi-Slav in just 26 pages.

A second concern is that Ward inexplicably splits his presentation in each chapter into two parts: theoretical coverage and illustrative games. This is old-fashioned and space-consuming, and it senselessly repeats the material. The problem is enhanced by the fact that the theoretical coverage is quite sparse and often ends prematurely; in many cases not even touching on the critical lines, which are not even mentioned in the illustrative games either.

For instance, against the Semi-Slav, Ward recommends the topical Shabalov Variation: 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 Nc3 e6 5 e3 Nbd7 6 Qc2 Bd6 7 g4!?, which is given a scant 11 pages, whereas in Sakaev and Semkov's book, *Latest Trends in the Semi-Slav: Anti-Meran*, the same line took up no less than 83 pages. But it gets even worse; Ward ends his theoretical coverage of the main line, 7...Nxg4 8 Rg1 f5 9 h3 Ngf6 10 Rxd7, with the comment:



For this position, White isn't even a pawn down! He has a useful rook on the seventh rank, though in short term Black will be able to expel it. In fact the main advantage lies in White's ability to complete his development and castle queenside, whilst Black struggles with his c8-bishop.

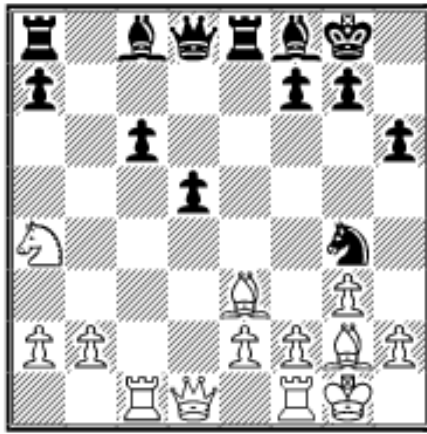
In the illustrative games section, there is one game, Aronian-

Stefansson, Antalya 2004, where the first moves pass without comment, then after Black plays 10...Ne4, the game continues with 11 Bd2 Qf6. Here Ward makes a passing reference to 11...Nf8 and 11...Kf8, and mentions that 12 Rg2 is the simplest response to both moves. In the game 12 Rg2 Nf8 13 0-0-0 Ng6 follows, reaching the next comment by Ward:

Upon 13...Bd7 both 14 Bd3 and 14 Be2 are sensible, but also quite testing is 14 Ne5!?, as 14...Bxe5 15 dxe5 Qxe5? runs into 16 f4 Qc7 17 Nxe4 with Bc3 to follow. Black's last move puts a stop to that, but now White responds in kind by preventing ...Bd7.

After 13...Bd7, he mentions that 14 Bd3 is sensible, but ignores that 14...Ng6 transposes to 13...Ng6 14 Bd3 (Aronian-Stefansson continues with 14 Qb3!?, and no mention is made of 14 Bd3) 14...Bd7, which Ward doesn't cover at all. Secondly, 14 Ne5 was played in Kasparov-P.Heine Nielsen, Reykjavik, and continued 14...Nxd2 15 Nxd7 Nxd7 16 Rxd2, and now Sakaev/Semkov give 16...dxc4 17 Bxc4 0-0-0 18 f4 Nb6 as fairly equal. Sakaev and Semkov also suggest improvements to the Aronian-Stefansson game, which were overlooked by Ward.


Another example is in the coverage of the Tarrasch Queen's Gambit, where after 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 c5 4 cxd5 exd5 5 Nf3 Nc6 6 g3 Nf6 7 Bg2 Be7 8 0-0 0-0 9 Bg5 cxd4 10 Nxd4 h6 11 Be3 Re8 12 Rc1 Bf8 13 Nxc6 bxc6 14 Na4 Ng4 he comments:



Probably it is a case of the best form of defence being attack, and certainly 14...Bd7 15 Bc5 is not much for Black. It is logical to trade off the dark-squared bishop to accentuate Black's holes, and one of my own encounters saw Black having to grovel via 15...Ne4 16 Bxf8 Kxf8 17 Bxe4 (in retrospect 17 Re1!? is less committal and may be more accurate) 17...Rxe4 18 Nc5 Re7 19 Re1 Kg8 20 Qa4 Be8!, but still rather annoyingly, go on to hold the draw in C.Ward-O.Jakobsen, Copenhagen 2002.

But oddly, he makes no mention of 15...Bxc5 16 Nxc5 Bg4 17 Re1 Qa5 18 h3 Bf5, which is the current battleground for this variation, where White has had problems showing a consistent advantage.

While the variations throughout the book are well-chosen and the ideas behind them are explained reasonably well, the book has several deep and obvious holes in the repertoire choices presented. Nonetheless, it can be used as a good repertoire guide to point you to areas for your own research. But if you simply rely on the suggested variations, you will soon find yourself in a precarious situation against a better prepared player.

My assessment of this book: 

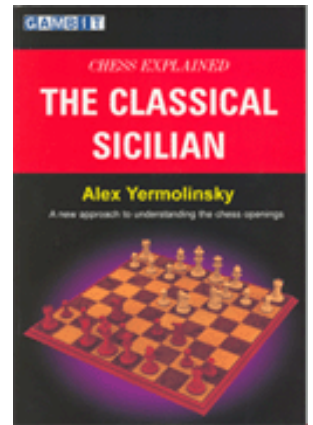
[Order](#) *Play the Queen's Gambit*

by Chris Ward

Chess Explained: The Classical Sicilian by Alex Yermolinsky, Gambit Publications 2006, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 111 pp, \$19.95

This series is aimed at competing with Everyman's *Starting Out* series and Batsford's *Revealed* series. The back cover explains it as follows:

Chess Explained is a new series of books about chess openings. They are not theoretical in the traditional sense, but more a series of lessons from a chess expert with extensive over-the-board experience with an opening. You will gain an understanding of the opening and the middlegames to which it leads, enabling you to find the right moves and plans in your own games. It is as if you were sitting at the board with a chess coach answering your questions about the plans for both sides, the ideas behind particular moves, and what specific knowledge you need to have.



- 25 recent and highly instructive games discussed in detail
- Chapter introductions emphasize the key points
- Full indexes of games and variations
- Extensive verbal explanations of plans and manoeuvres

Gambit could not have chosen a better author to inaugurate this series, yet oddly enough Yermolinsky himself writes that he never thought he would pen an opening book. It was only after serious consideration that he undertook the task, because he liked the concept of presenting the ideas, general strategies, positional motifs, and tactical considerations of an opening, rather than focusing on memorizing strings of moves. He has played this opening for three decades and understands it exceedingly well, as is evident in the coverage, where his discussions enhance the reader's understanding of the nuances of each variation.

The material is divided as follows:

- Introduction (1 page)
- Symbols (1 page)
- 1 Boleslavsky's Classical Approach (20 pages)
- 2 The Fischer-Sozin Attack (18 pages)
- 3 Richter-Rauzer: Early Deviations (20 pages)
- 4 Black Castles Kingside in the Richter-Rauzer (17 pages)
- 5 The Modern Treatment of the Richter-Rauzer (27 pages)
- List of Games (1 page)
- Index of Variations (3 pages)

Anyone with a bit of knowledge of these lines will know that it is impossible to cover the theory in such limited space, but this type of book is not written for those who want to know the theory, it is for those who want to understand the opening and, subsequently, the theory that

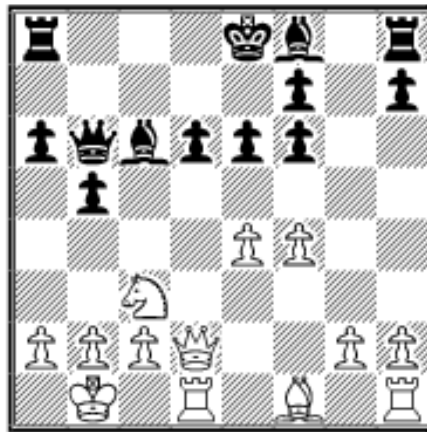
supports it. Yermolinsky indicates as much on numerous occasions, such as game 25, Kotronias-Kozul, European Team Ch (Leon) 2001, when he writes (after 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Nc6 6 Bg5 e6 7 Qd2 a6 8 0-0-0 Bd7 9 f4 b5):

Note that I'm skipping a lot of lines that can be found in theoretical monographs. I just want to get to the pawn structure in question as fast as possible.

10 Bxf6 gxf6

This is the key position of what I call the Kozul Suicide Variation, although having played about 60 games with this line myself, I'm also responsible for keeping the torch burning. Earlier in the book I mentioned that Botvinnik was the first top player who was eager to go for this structure. The virtues of it are multi-faceted. White has surrendered the valuable dark-squared bishop and has abandoned the e5 idea (well, almost entirely, because it could resurface later on as a tactical device). He's looking now at pushing f5 and bringing more pressure to bear against the e6-pawn. Should that pawn move, then the prized d5-square will fall in White's lap. From Black's perspective he has the bishop-pair and a massive pawn shield in front of his king. Those advantages are more likely to tell in the endgame, and that's what attracted me to this variation in the first place. Of course, I seem to remember Dr. Tarrasch's claim that the chess gods have placed the middlegame before the endgame. I hope one day I'll be able to say more about this fascinating variation, but here I shall content myself with providing an overview of typical ideas. [CH: Then Yermolinsky spends two pages covering a number of ideas for both sides]

11 Kb1 Qb6 12 Nxc6 Bxc6



Years ago the veteran American GM and one-time world championship candidate Robert Byrne played an enterprising pawn sacrifice, 13 f5!? What is Black to do now? Ignoring it with 13...Qc5 is one option, although White doesn't have to rush with the exchange on e6 (14 fxe6? Fxe6 15 Bd3 Bg7 16 Rhe1 0-0! - yes, with the

pawn still on h7 Black can do this, and he stands rather well) and should prefer 14 Bd3, leading to what we have already seen. The position of the queen on c5 is generally thought to be good, but it can sometimes become a target for White switching tracks to the queenside; e.g. 14...b4 15 Ne2 e5 16 c3! - remember this idea. It is more logical to chase the knight off by 13...b4 14 Ne2, but now the standard reaction 14...e5 15 Ng3 h5 comes short of its goals,

as White stops that pawn in its tracks with 16 h4 and wins it with Be2 and Nxe5. This is the problem with the Kozul Suicide Variation and chess in general: you know what you want, but you just don't have the time. Here if Black could only protect the d6-pawn with ...Ke7 and ...Qc5, he then would be able to play ...Bh6, chasing the white queen away and targeting the c2-pawn thereafter...

13 Qe1 Ra7 14 Bd3 h5 15 Qh4 Bg7

This bishop may come back to life after ...f5 at some point, while the e7-square may be used by the king. Black can afford to do this because there's no pressure against d6. As it happens all the time in such formations, there's a clash of conflicting ideas, and who gets there first is what counts...

Throughout the notes to this game I mention improvements for White usually followed by a favourable evaluation of his chances. Does that mean this whole variation is unsound? Yes and no.

White may be theoretically better, but one slip can turn the tables. From Black's perspective it's important to be aware of the dangers, but to be ready to take advantage of opportunity when it comes knocking.

16 Rhf1?

One move's hesitation wouldn't be that harmful, but unfortunately Kotronias got possessed by the erroneous idea of a rook-lift.

16...Qc5 17 f5 e5 18 Rf3 Rc7 19 Rh3 Kf8

Kozul's defences are economical: he only uses two pieces to protect the king, but they seem to do the job well. White's play reached an impasse, and Kotronias overreacts badly.

20 a3? a5 21 Ne2 b4 22 axb4 axb4 23 Nc1 Ba4 24 Nb3

Can Black checkmate with only three pieces attacking? Kotronias apparently didn't think so. Indeed, 24...Qa7 25 Be2 Ke7? is thwarted by 26 Rxe7 Ra8 27 Rxf7+.

24...Qf2!

A typical disruptive queen move, characteristic of this line.

25 Rf1 Qa7 26 Be2 Rc8 27 Rd3

It's too late for material gains: 27 Bxb5 Bxb3 28 cxb3 Qc5, and Black's queen and rook will complete the hunt.

27...Bb5 28 Rd2 Ra8 29 c4 bxc3 30 bxc3

White has been forced to open his king's fortress, and his chances of survival are minimal.


30...Qa3

Now White could resist by playing 31 Bxb5 Qxb3+ 32 Rb2 Qxc3 33 Rd1 Ke7 34 Qe1, so 30...Qa4 would have been more effective.

31 c4 Qxb3+ 32 Rb2 Qa3 33 cxb5 Ke7 0-1

This should illustrate what this book is about and how well it is written. Anyone that plays the Open Sicilian as White, or the Classical Sicilian as Black, should buy this book. There is always something to learn from someone like Yermolinsky, who has played the opening his entire life.

Even Scheveningen and Najdorf players can benefit from reading this book, as the pawn structures are similar. This title shows excellent potential for this new series by Gambit, and I eagerly anticipate future volumes.

My assessment of this book: 

Order *Chess Explained: The Classical Sicilian*
by Alex Yermolinsky

The Vienna Game C23-C29 (CD-ROM) by Gregory Huber, ChessBase GmbH 2005, Figurine Algebraic Notation, CD-ROM, \$29.95

This CD covers both the Vienna Game and the Bishop's Opening, and once you start reading through the material, you can tell that this is clearly a labor of love for Canadian FIDE master Gregory Huber. He has considered everything. Every time a database text refers to a game, it has been fully annotated, often by Huber himself, with explanatory prose and analysis and improvements for both sides.




The material is divided as follows:

- Introduction
- Common themes and patterns
- 1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 (1 text)
- 1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 Bc4 (1 text)
- 1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 Bc4 Nc6 4 d3 (5 texts)
- 1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 Bc4 Nxe4 (1 text)
- Frankenstein-Dracula Variation (2 texts)
- 1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 f4 (3 texts)
- 1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 g3 (2 texts)
- 1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 Bc4 (1 text)
- 1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 f4 (3 texts)
- 1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 (1 text)
- 1 e4 e5 2 Bc4 (1 text)
- 1 e4 e5 2 Nc4 Nf6 3 d3 c6 4 Nf3 (3 texts)

Furthermore, there is a database with 27,578 games, of which 294 have been annotated (in addition to the ones by Huber in the database texts), a training database with 54 examples, and a database tree.

Huber has made a phenomenal effort in exploring these openings in

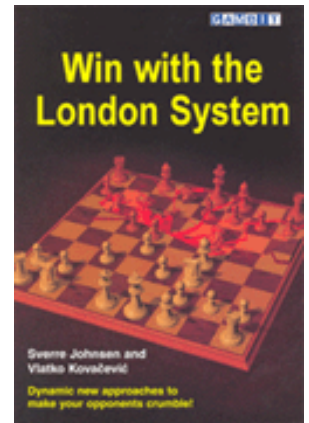
depth. He clearly presents all the current data, with all sidelines labeled and evaluated, along with adding hundreds of his own suggestions and improvements over existing theory. This is an excellent effort, which I hope will find a wide readership. Anyone playing these opening as White or Black will definitely want to obtain this CD.

My assessment of this CD: 

[Order](#) *The Vienna Game C23-C29*
(CD-ROM) by Gregory Huber

Win with the London System by Sverre Johnsen and Vlatko Kovacevic, Gambit Publications 2005, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 176 pp, \$25.95

This combination of authors seems like an odd pairing, a Norwegian with a low FIDE rating and a well-known Croatian grandmaster, with a long history of playing this wildly annoying opening. This may raise some concern about the authorship, but this is dealt with head-on in the preface, where Johnsen writes:



Whenever I see a chess book co-authored by a GM and an unknown player, I suspect the real author is the unknown one. With this book I know the whole story. And yes, by conventional standards I am the 'real' author:

- *I set up the general structure of the book, selected the original illustrative games and checked them over with the assistance of an analysis engine, adding some prose in the process.*
- *I created the original ChessBase files by picking what seemed the most relevant games from a game database, cut them off at a natural point (normally somewhere between move 10 and 25, added some suggestions and organized the game fragments according to their rough evaluations.*
- *I edited the final ChessBase files, imported them into a text editor and tried to make the analysis as comprehensive as possible.*
- *I wrote most of the prose, added diagrams and did a lot of other small things that made the script look a lot like a chess book.*

From the above your impression may be that Vlado played a rather minor role in the making of this book. That is definitely not the case. First of all the analysis of the illustrative games was more his work than mine. He also played an important role in the selection process – of the 40 original illustrative games only 26 still remain. And on a general level he contributed heavily to the book's content (and my chess education) by repeatedly pointing out positional features – in particular Black's problematic light-squared bishop – and endgame prospects when I was desperately looking for a kingside attack ... Even though tools like Fritz and Junior were excellent assistants in tactical positions, they were of less help in evaluating and working out the correct plans in quieter lines. Therefore the chess part of the book is to a great extent the work of Vlatko Kovacevic. He has examined every single chapter, turned some of them completely on their head and suggested improvements in most of them. And quite frequently his suggestions were annoying improvements for Black, generating a new search for an advantage for White, often forcing me to reconsider the entire structure of the book.

I give this extensive quote, which in fact is the majority of the preface, to make potential buyers understand the book in its proper context. Many people believe that anyone with a strong analysis engine can write an opening book these days. But that only goes so far. Therefore, it is safe to say that without Kovacevic's involvement this would have been at best been an average opening book.

The London System is extremely solid and is based upon White playing 1 d4, Nf3, Bf4 and usually e3 and c3. It can be exceedingly difficult, even against lower-rated opponents, to win with Black, who risks being completely torn apart if he goes slightly astray or overplays the position.

The material is divided as follows:


- Preface (1 page)
- Introduction (3 pages)
- **Part 1: Illustrative Games** (53 pages)
- Double d-Pawn Defence, The Chigorin Set-up, The Grünfeld Set-up, King's Indian Defence, Queen's Indian Defence, Anti-Benoni Lines, Dutch and Various Others.
- **Part 2: Analytical Section** (2 pages)
- 1 Introduction and 2...c5 (9 pages)
- 2 The Tarrasch Approach: 2...e6 (4 pages)
- 3 Pseudo-Chigorin and Minor Lines (5 pages)
- 4 2...Nf6: Introduction and 3...c5 (13 pages)
- 5 Common Ground: 3...e6 (15 pages)
- 6 The Slav Approach: 2...c6 and 3...c6 (7 pages)
- 7 Symmetrical: 2...Bf5 and 3...Bf5 (6 pages)
- 8 The Grünfeld Formation (5 pages)

- 9 The King's Indian Formation (14 pages)
- 10 The Pseudo Old Indian (5 pages)
- 11 The Queen's Indian Formation: 2...b6 or 3...b6 (7 pages)
- 12 Anti-Benoni: 2...c5 (8 pages)
- 13 1...e6 and the Dutch Connection (7 pages)
- 14 Early Divergences (4 pages)
- Index of Illustrative Games (1 page)
- Index of Variations (2 pages)

While it's a bit strange to begin with a 53-page section of illustrative games, it works well as an introduction, and after playing through the games you cannot help but feel inspired to try the opening for yourself.

The theory section focuses on White playing 1 d4 and 2 Bf4, with e3 and Nf3 being played later on, which could well prove to be a better move order than 2 Nf3 and 3 Bf4. However, this gives an artificial impression, especially in the last two chapters, which quite frankly are not that impressive. Still, the authors provide plenty of original analysis and new ideas in regards to theory, strategy and tactical possibilities.

Overall, this is an excellent book about an a solid opening, which is likely to become ever more popular because of it.

My assessment of this book: 

Order *Win with the London System*

by Sverre Johnsen and Vlatko Kovacevic

Chess Informant Vol. 95 (Book + CD-ROM) by Zdenko Krnic et al., Sahovski Informator 2006, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 341 pp, \$36.00

This is among my favorite series of yearbooks and it is a joy to receive each volume, which is jam-packed with interesting games, theoretical novelties, strategic masterpieces, amazing combinations, interesting endgames and painful blunders.

The material is divided as follows:

- Contributors (2 pages)
- The best ten games of the preceding Volume (1 page)



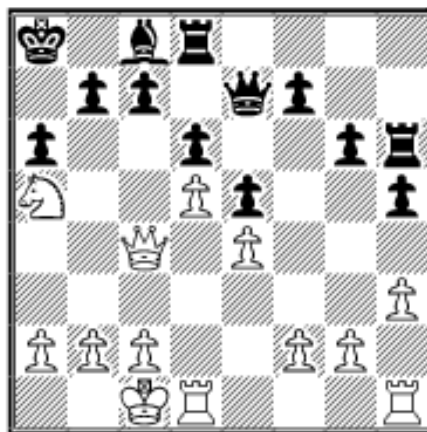
- The ten most important theoretical novelties of the preceding Volume (7 pages)
- System of Signs (3 pages)
- Games
- Classification of Openings (3 pages)
- A (26 pages)
- B (89 pages)
- C (58 pages)
- D (50 pages)
- E (38 pages)
- Index [of Players] (10 pages)
- Commentators (2 pages)
- Combinations (4 pages)
- Endings (7 pages)
- Studies (6 pages)
- Tournaments (9 pages)
- Fide Information (2 pages)
- The Best of Chess Informant – Alexei Shirov (27 pages)

While the English translation of each section could be better, this is the way it has been for 40 years, and I guess they're not going to change it now. Something that has changed is the fact that a greater amount of games by lower-rated players are making their way into the volumes, but this doesn't detract from its value. Recently, Hikaru Nakamura introduced 1 e4 e5 2 Qh5 into top level play and it seems to have gained a following. Now fun-loving players are venturing this rubbish in serious games, as witnessed by the following game. I have cherry-picked a few of the comments and the punctuation, but for the complete comments, you'll need to buy the book.

Gareev (2498) – Egin (2449)

Uzbekistan (Ch) 2005

1 e4 e5 2 Qh5 Nc6 3 Bc4 g6 4 Qf3 Qf6 5 Qd1 Novelty [5 Qb3; 5 d3; 5 Qxf6] **5...Bg7** [5...Qd8!?] **6 Nc3 d6 7 d3 Na5 8 Nf3 Nxc4 9 dxc4 h6 10 Be3 Be6 11 Qd3 a6 12 0-0-0 Ne7 13 h3 0-0-0** [13...0-0 14 Qd2 Bxc4 15 Bxh6 Bxh6 16 Qxh6 b5 17 Nd5 Nxd5 18 exd5 b4 19 Rhe1 a5 20 Kb1 += intending Re4] **14 Nd2?! [14 Nd5 Nxd5 15 cxd5 Bd7 16 Nd2 Qe7 17 c4 f5 18 f3 +=] 14...Kb8 15 Nb3 h5 16 Na5 Bh6 17 Nd5 Nxd5 18 cxd5 Bc8 19 Bxh6 Rxh6 20 Qb3 Ka8 21 Qc4 Qe7?**



[CH: Here Gareev gives a lengthy piece of analysis that concludes with perpetual check on move 39 starting with 21...Kb8 22 Rd2 g5 23 Re1 g4 24 Re3 gxh3 25 Rb3 Ka6 26 Nc6! Bd7 27 Qb4 Bxc6 28 dxc6 Rb8, and so on. It looks a bit fishy for Black to say the least, but I have yet to pick a proper hole in it.

Now, however, it goes rapidly

downhill.] **22 Rhe1 f5 23 Re3 Rh7 24 Rb3 Rf8 25 Nc6! Qg5 26 Kb1 Bd7 27 Qb4 Bc8** [27...b6 28 Ra3 Kb7 29 Rxa6+; 27...Bxc6 28 dxc6 Rb8 29 cxb7+ Ka7 30 Rxd6+-] **28 Qb5!** [intending Qxa6+] **1-0**

There are many other fascinating games, all annotated with *Informant's* trademark languageless symbols. It is only in the section on studies, edited by Afek, that you see prose in connection with the chess.

Chess Informant remains an important tool for serious players. I have always found it to be an excellent source of training material, and I have enjoyed them since I was 12 years old.

My assessment of this book:

[Order](#) *Chess Informant Vol. 95*

by Zdenko Krnic et al.

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