

Books and Bases

by *Glenn Flear*



*with additional
contributions by
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Nowadays most serious wood-pushers have access to large databases with hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of games. Detailed archives (even with annotations!) and recent games are available in vast quantities for the modest effort of a few mouse-clicks. So it seems reasonable to ask the question: Why do we still need chess books?

My personal view is that books about general strategy, endgames and publications such as *New In Chess* are more digestible on paper and I suspect that most folk would probably agree. Computer-use is still developing in the chess environment, but I believe that the main area still concerns opening preparation. If these suppositions are true then it may be that non-opening books pass the test, but... do we really need opening books these days?

There is a readiness (and a temptation!) for some authors to reproduce on paper what their search engine finds on their computer and virtually leave it at that. Unfortunately (apart from getting bad reviews!) they are likely to leave their readership unfulfilled.

An author's job is not just to obtain and present information, it is surely to analyse and interpret the consequences of events and then enable his readership to understand and gain benefit. So he should portray several qualities; those of a scientist and scholar added to the talent of an educator, having a sense of humour and so on. Naturally, being a decent ana-

lyst with a practical sense helps, however the most fundamental is being able to write.

By writing I mean creating text that's worth reading!

So for me, for an opening book to maintain its rightful place it must have human input: practical ideas, feelings, anecdotes, comparisons, personal experiences and analysis, to enhance essential game references.

The three books that I review this time all contain plenty of these so that's good news for those who still like the experience of a real (rather than virtual) opening book!

Peter Wells
Winning With The Trompowsky
Batsford 2003
240 pages, paperback

When Peter Wells puts pen to paper (or should this be updated with 'finger to keyboard'?) he doesn't skimp. His epic *Complete Semi-Slav* from 1994 comes to mind, which is so full of fundamental logic it's still useful today for explanations behind ideas and move-orders.

Here again Batsford support his creative talent to publish 200-odd pages of meaty discussion.

The author's expressed motive behind his recent book is '...providing a means for normal balanced human beings to do continued battle with the database fanatics...'

An important principle for any chess book!

He is naturally not content to just reproduce output from some recent database, nor abridge the process of human thought with a timely chess symbol. No, Peter (a leading practitioner of this opening) is one to give us his own sentiments about just about every variation in the book. His logic is spot on, well-combined with appropriate references (up to early 2003) and explained with clarity. It's great reading and makes playing through each of the 52 annotated games a genuine pleasure. As if that isn't enough, we are given conclusions, as well as supplementary sections entitled 'illustrative non-repertoire games' or 'analytic and theoretical articles' at various moments. 'Winning with...' books are sometimes economical with the truth in their quest to promote an opening, but the author has bent over backwards to give both sides of the argument. This is hardly surprising as Peter Wells is a master in the art of illuminating the ins and outs of an opening and the work makes convincing reading. The reader will not only be able to develop his understanding of this popular (well, at least amongst English players) way of playing, but I feel that it will enable the or-



WINNING WITH THE
TROMPOWSKY
PETER WELLS

dinary mortal to better grasp the thought processes of a Grandmaster.

I took a couple of critical lines and investigated how well the book stood up to a closer look. Rather well actually...

1.d4 Af6 2.Äg5 Ae4 3.Äf4 c5 4.f3 ©a5 5.c3 Af6 6.d5 ©b6 7.Äc1 e6 8.c4 ed5 9.cd5 c4 10.e3 Äc5 11.®f2 0-0 12.Äc4 Öe8

Here after the alternative continuation 12...d6 13.Äe2 Äbd7 14.Äbc3 Ae5 15.Äa4 ©b4 16.b3 (the author states: 'A strong move which to my mind pretty much refutes the line for Black') 16...b5!? (a recent novelty) 17.Äd2! (instead 17.a3 ©a5 18.b4 ©a4 19.Äb3 ©a6 20.bc5 dc5 21.e4 Äd7 was only equal in S.Buckley-Gormally, Portsmouth 2003) 17...Äeg4 (17...Äe3 18.®e3! Äc4 19.bc4 Öe8 (19...©a4 20.©a4 ba4 21.®d4! Äa6 22.Äg3ä) 20.®f2 ©a4 21.©a4 ba4 22.Äd4Ç) 18.fg4 Ae4 19.®e1 Äd2 20.a3! ©a5 21.©d2 ©d2 22.®d2 ba4 23.b4 Äb6 24.g5Ç. These sample variations are probably not the end of the story, but White seems to retain some advantage.

13.©b3 ©d8 Wells suspects that this move is best.

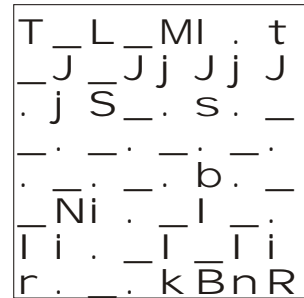
14.Äe2 d6 15.Äb5!/? Instead Wells recommends 15.Äbc3 a6 16.a4 Äbd7 17.Äg3 Ae5 18.Äe2. 15...Äbd7 16.Äbc3 a6 17.Äd7 Äd7 18.Äg3 18.©b7?? Äb6ï 18...b5

with practical compensation, Chernin-Volokitin, Warsaw rapid 2002

Peter Wells' coverage of the typical Trompowsky endgame from the following diagram (pages 62-73) is little short of superb.

1.d4 Af6 2.Äg5 Ae4 3.Äf4 c5 4.f3 ©a5 5.Äd2 Af6 6.c3 cd4 7.Äb3 ©b6 8.©d4 Äc6 9.©b6

ab6 Typical play continues as follows:



10.Äd4 e5 11.Äc6 ef4 Hebden's 11...dc6!/? is a double-edged gambit.

12.Äd4 d5 Wells considers 12...Äc5?! to be inferior.

Now 13.e3 or even 13.g3 come under the English GM's microscope. No game played in the last few months seems to challenge his work in this line.

Each twist and turn in the opening adventure is given a personal brand of Wells's scrutiny. You'll have to get the book to see what I mean, but it's really good stuff! The whole section deserves attention even by non-Tromp players, as Peter's comments are just so stimulating!

A word of warning however, Wells has not aimed to be comprehensive and so some lesser variations are excluded from this 'repertoire' (1.d4 Af6 2.Äg5 Ae4 3.h4 and 3.Äh4 for example, although to be fair in his introduction Peter does explain why the latter is considered inferior these days). The author's 'personal journey through the Trompowsky' appealed to me, but I suspect that some will regret the exclusion of such off-beat lines.

In his own games Wells, after 1.d4 d5, plays 2.c4, but a number of Trompowsky players like to try 2.Äg5, which despite being better known these days still leads to fairly untheoretical play. Peter

omits this altogether, but it may have been worth a game or two, as not all 'Tromp' fans are going to want to bother learning the Slav and Queen's Gambit.

All players who may face the position with 1.d4 Åf6 2.Åg5 on the chessboard will benefit from Peter's work and should buy it. Definitely one of those books that people will talk about for years to come.

Chris Ward
Nimzo-Indian:
Kasparov Variation
Everyman 2003
160 pages, paperback

The title is intriguing: Kasparov Variation? What's that then? Hmmm, didn't hear of that one before!?

Everyman and the author have clearly 'jazzed-up' the title to help sell their product. But who can blame them as there is no easy alternative to hand!?

In fact, Chris Ward deals with a selection of systems based around the Nimzo-Indian with 4.Åf3. The 'hybrid' Nimzo-Queen's Indian with 4...b6 5.Åg5 (so-called as it also arises via the QID) and the fianchetto line with 4...c5 5.g3 are

each allocated a third of the book. The rest consists of bits and pieces: 4...0-0 and 4...d6 as well as 4...b6 5.©b3!? (with the intention of 6.Åg5) which gives some variety, but doesn't stray too far from Ward's repertoire.

A variety of variations that illustrate Chris Ward's efforts over the years to challenge the Nimzo.

Ward is well-known as a specialist in these, and other aggressive 1.d4-lines. He uses no less than 10(!) of his own encounters (8 with White, 2 with Black) as part of 68 complete games that are presented in the typical Everyman format. For the uninitiated each chapter is rounded-off with a skeleton of variations and a brief summary. The variations are dealt with in sufficient detail, but emphasis is made to present the material in a reader-friendly approach.

Ward's chatty down-to-earth approach exudes an easy-going nature. His books are 'fun' to read and, perhaps because of this, they retain one's attention. I found myself skimming through the pages looking for the next cheeky remark, and that in turn stimulated me to play through the whole game. The excellent game selection is also geared towards entertainment as well as instruction.

As I've written before, Chris Ward is an excellent author when dealing with a subject that he knows well, so I'm overall happy with the book, but a couple of points that I had to mention.

I don't want to gripe for gripe's sake, but bearing in mind his likely readership, I had to speak out! The main (and understandable) omission is 4.Åf3 d5 which despite being an important reply, does directly transpose to the Queen's Gambit. There is no-way he could cover the Ragozin or Vienna in full, but he could have offered a game or two to give

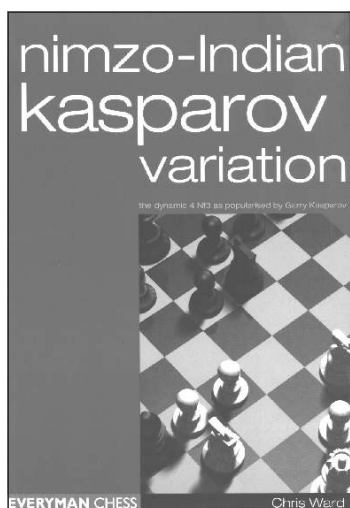
club-players the gist of a White set-up, but with 160 pages already chock-a-block he was probably under instructions not to overdo it. Throughout the book, the author has a propensity to include whole games in his notes with virtually no comments. This seems out of place in an Everyman environment. I would have preferred citing the next ten moves (instead of 30-50!) but with a few succinct annotations. This wouldn't have abused space constraints but would have helped round-off one's general understanding.

This is almost certainly the first major tome that concentrates on these variations, and as Ward himself has added so much individual interpretation to the theory the book is ground-breaking. There is something here for all standards as he deals both with the fundamental strategy and the latest quirks.

There must be a slight danger that not that many White players will be enthused by a less-than-fashionable system, but nevertheless it's a recommended read for all Nimzo players (White or Black!).

Dorian Rogozenko
Anti-Sicilians:
A Guide for Black
Gambit 2003
192 pages, paperback

Believe it or not, it's nearly ten years since Joe Gallagher brought out his fine Batsford book *Beating the Anti-Sicilians* (1994). That approach hit the right note and these *Countering the Anti-Fun Variations* type books are now commonplace. Learning the Open Sicilian is a major undertaking, so many players opt to avoid it, so-much-so that Raetsky's recent *Meeting 1.e4* (an Everyman book proposing a Sicilian Four Knights repertoire) consecrated as much as half the book to these Anti-Sicilian lines. Joe Gallagher's preference as a

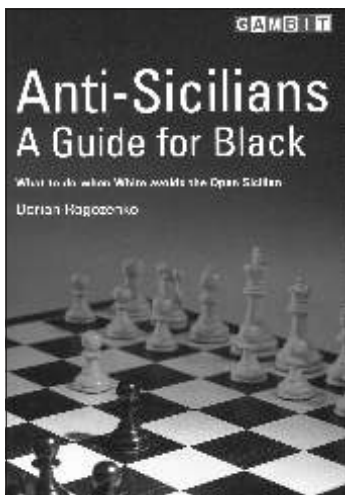


Najdorf-player was to slant his work towards a Sicilian 2...d6 approach. Rogozenko has gone a stage further handling these lines from the point of view of 2...Ac6 and 2...e6 as well as 2...d6, i.e. Black's three principle second moves.

Chapter Seven is another bonus, 2.Af3 d6 3.d4 cd4 4.©d4 which I haven't seen covered in other Anti-Sicilian works. An annoying system which despite being 'open' stops the Sicilian player getting into his pet-line.

East European authors are a mixed bunch, but there is a tendency for them to stick to variations, assessments and the strict minimum of explanations. Perhaps they don't feel confident in English or something gets lost in the translation. However, Rogozenko's book is not like that at all! His English is impeccable (no suggestion of a translator), full of useful hints and is not afraid of spending a couple of paragraphs to develop his argument.

In general, Gambit books are prone to get bogged down in excessive detail and end up with variations such as B33222. There is a hint of this (see page 81!) in the cutting-edge variations of the



Alapin and Rossolimo, but even here the author's logical and highly instructive text wins the day. Because of the nature of the book he has cut-out the superfluous, thus concentrating on certain lines, a nice mix of the practical and the principled. Not everyone will agree with his choice of variations but in certain cases he picks out two ideas: One solid (but sometimes dull), the other spicy (but a shade risky). The lines he chooses are given a thorough coverage including his own analyses (both literary and chess) and sentiments. I found a few 2002 references so the book is reasonably up-to-date. Particularly noteworthy is the widespread use of practical advice on move-orders and general aims, without doubt a great help for the less-experienced Sicilian player.

All-in-all, an excellent first book which Sicilian players of all strengths would be wise to get hold of.

Harald Keilhack
Der Linksspringer 1.Sc3
Schachverlag Kania 2003
400 pages, hardcover
(in German)

At last the book of which I had hoped someone would find the time to do it, has been written. Not exactly as I would have wished it, of course; but after three years of unflagging industry Harald Keilhack has published an elaborate, fairly all-embracing book of almost 400 pages about 1.Ac3. More than four times the size of mine.

It is a waste of time to go looking for missing games or variations. In seven chapters the author treats almost all the relevant aspects of his subject, and he does so by discussing 99 games, richly illustrated with diagrams and comments that,

besides the highways, also include a great many byways. He set himself the task of including every independent variation that could possibly occur after 1.Ac3, which is also the reason why he offers a lot of transpositions to other openings as well, such as the French, the Caro-Kann, the Philidor, etc. – far more than I did. He also takes out time to compare the structures and positions of the different openings.

I find it praiseworthy that, in doing so, he also aims at building bridges between the worlds of the 'official' opening theory and its 'alternative' cousin, claiming that this opening is excellently suited for this purpose, unlike openings like 1.b4. According to the author, the problem of unorthodox openings is not so much their inferior quality as the lack of reliable theory underpinning them, and to his mind this is the main reason why professional players refuse to take these openings seriously.

The book is very much a product of German Gründlichkeit (so much so that at times you'd almost think you were reading a doctoral dissertation), and you'd sometimes wonder whether all of it is really relevant and who precisely is waiting for a serious analysis of variations like 1.Ac3 e5 2.Af3 Ac5; 1.Ac3 Af6 2.b3 or 2.g4 (the 'Tübinger Gambit'), etc. Nor is he particularly selective in choosing his games: besides games like Morozovich-Kasparov he also seriously discusses games of unrated amateurs and games that were never meant to be taken seriously. As in any book, there are also inaccuracies: the author is rather inclined to put his own gloss on things, for instance by assuming decisive influences like time-trouble or emotion without adducing any reasons for doing so. He also tends to jump to conclusions regarding results, overlooking that these may have nothing to do with the opening play. But all this is of

minor importance – no book is perfect.

What I find more serious, however, is that he fails to present a ‘philosophy’ of the move 1.Äc3 itself; its specific characteristics compared to other opening moves. In some places (e.g. p.180) he admittedly describes the ‘intellectual surplus value’ of 1.Äc3, but we look in vain for a systematic exposition of its merits and drawbacks, and this also applies to the transpositions to other openings and alternative third moves there. Because of this, many moves just seem to have fallen out of the sky, as if they were no more than accidental tactical tricks. Just one example: after 1.Äc3 e5 2.Äf3 Äc6 3.d4 ed4 4.Äd4 g6(?) the move 5.Äd5 is born out of the philosophy that Äc3 is a developing move in itself, in contrast to 1.e4, which just prepares the development of a piece (Äf1); this makes 5.Äd5 impossible in the Scotch Opening, of course. Although the author presents some interesting strategic concepts (partly his own) about good and bad bishops and the relative values of side and central pawns, etc., you can’t but feel that to a large extent he is just describing and comparing other people’s ideas (and I surely have little reason to complain about the credit he

gives to me as the pioneer of this opening, and it is a good thing he doesn’t always do so).

Since we are virtually the only people who have dealt with this opening in a serious way, it might be useful to say a few words about the basic differences between our approaches. In my books I was mainly concerned with the basic ideas, while the variations and games I gave mainly served as illustrations of these ideas and to invite the reader to compose games out of all this (without any further pretensions: a bit like Fine’s famous book). Keilhack is much more concerned with the moves themselves. To put it strongly: whereas I tried to describe the weapons, he describes the battle. Maybe some day a book should be written about ‘The Ideas behind Alternative Chess Openings’. Surprisingly enough, Keilhack seems to have missed this difference in approach, thus creating unnecessary misunderstandings. In some of his other criticisms, however, he is quite right; he fine-combs everything for errors and finds them everywhere, also in books by people like me, who wrote in the pre-computer era. But sometimes our judgments differ fundamentally. A good example would be the position on p.267;



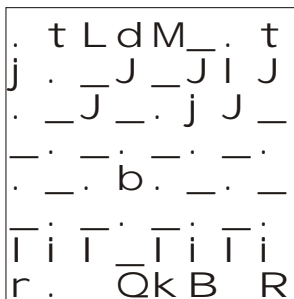
NIC ARCHIVES

Dick van Geet (1970)

greater spirits than ours have held divergent views. Moreover, they are only incidental; in some 90 per cent of cases we seem to agree.

To sum up then, this is a top-class book, despite my minor quibbles. That is to say, as long as he sticks to chess and stays away from chess players or tournaments. But unfortunately he doesn’t, so he constantly exposes himself as a real closet scholar with little idea of the real world. His character descriptions and the motives he ascribes to chess players are all demonstrably wrong. A ‘fun tournament’ with nothing at stake near a farm in France in the Ardèche is described as if it was a kind of world championship, without the slightest idea that in such a wonderful environment some players might have other priorities than chess results. Also, the world of correspondence chess seems quite alien to him. But if we just pass over this nonsense, as we do over the non-relevant variations and games, more than 200 pages with a lot of valuable information remain.

I hope that both regular and alternative players will read and enjoy this book. I myself certainly did, and not only because it was a pleasure to see the concepts I had developed so long ago worked out in so many different ways. The most



Whereas I prefer the white position, Keilhack seems to be slightly in favour of the black one, an opinion he bases on considerations of dynamism, etc., which I cannot go into here. But in chess history

important thing is that this book may stimulate more players to play this opening, for I know from both my own and other people's experience that it can give a lot of playing pleasure and fun.

(review by D.D. van Geet)

Glenn Flear
The ...a6 Slav
Everyman 2003
176 pages, paperback

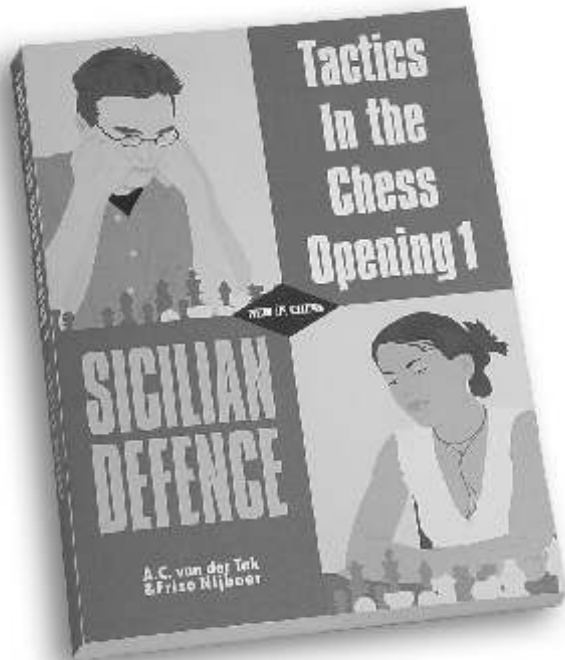
In my Checkpoint column at ChessCafe.com, I have reviewed other books by Flear such as the Open Ruy Lopez and Offbeat Spanish, and he has also authored some worthwhile books on the endgame. While you may only know Glenn Flear as your favourite book reviewer, I had the pleasure of playing him some 15 years ago. Needless to say, as he was a grandmaster and I was just a young punk, he won the game without much effort. However, after the game he gained my admiration by taking the time to examine the game with me and show me where I went wrong. In fact, the ideas from that post mortem have in the years since then helped me put some nice wins together.

In his latest book, Flear takes on what are at present arguably the hottest lines in the Slav, namely those lines in which Black plays an early ...a6. For the uninitiated, there is more than one line:

- 1) 1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Äf3 Äf6 4.Äc3 a6
- 2) 1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Äf3 Äf6 4.e3 a6
- 3) 1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Äc3 Äf6 4.e3 a6
- 4) White does not play d2-d4.

These lines were once considered offbeat and somewhat dubious alternatives to the main lines in the Slav; Kortchnoi, on one memorable occasion, even awarded 4...a6 a

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question mark. A lot has changed since then; in fact it seems likely that it was the ...a6 variation that convinced Kasparov to take up the Slav.

However, even before Kasparov showed any interest in this line, it was a hot commodity for many of today's strongest grandmasters such as Shirov, Bologan, Morozevich, Bareev, I. Sokolov, Piket and M. Gurevich, to mention but a few. They have all helped develop these lines into what they are today. It isn't too difficult to understand why these lines are so popular: With a solid foundation, Black can create dynamic play as well as unbalanced positions, allowing the second player to play for a win without taking too many unnecessary risks. Black's aim is to develop his light-squared bishop outside his pawn chain and defend a possible attack against his queenside with either ...b5 or the more odd-looking ...Oa7!?. But he can also take a different tack, keeping the bishop at home at c8 with the intention grabbing space on the queenside with ...b7-b5.

In the introduction, Flear tells us that this book was really inspired by French GM Eric Prié, for whom this system is a favourite. Incidentally, Prié has provided Flear with a lot of his analysis in these lines. Prié and Flear's new ideas and original analysis are present everywhere in the book, making it especially valuable for anyone who might enter these lines. The material is divided into 12 chapters, nine of which arise after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Äf3 Äf6 4.Äc3 a6 (alternative 1 above), while the remaining three chapters are split up with a chapter each for the line where White avoids or delays Äc3, one where he delays or

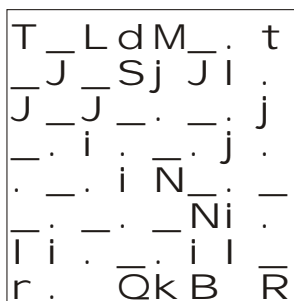
avoids Äf3 and finally one where he delays or avoids d2-d4.

For some reason, some obvious reference works such as Burgess's 2001 volume, *The Slav*, Rogozenko's CD, published by ChessBase or even Sadler's 1997 book on this opening are not cited. The author does seem to rely upon the reference database Megabase 2000, which is at least two years old. As a result, some interesting ideas and worthwhile analysis are omitted.

This, however, is more than outweighed by new and original input by the authors. Here is one of the many examples:

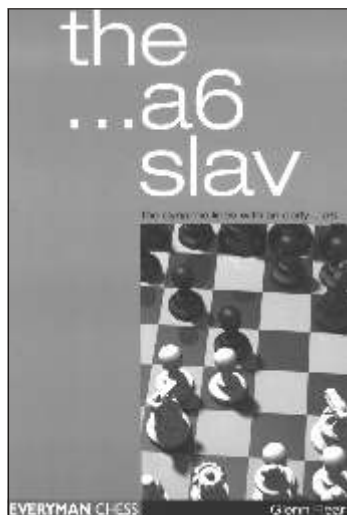
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Äf3 Äf6 4.Äc3 a6 5.c5 Äbd7 6.Äf4 Äh5 7.Äg5 h6, and now:

'After 8.Äh4 [CH: The main line continues with 8.Äd2] 8...g5 9.Äg3 Äg3 10.hg3 Äg7 11.e4?! (11.e3 is more solid) 11...de4 12.Äe4 Black is doing rather well:



1) 12...©a5 13.Äc3 g4 14.Äh4 Äc5! 15.Äe2 (in event of 15.dc5 Äc3 16.bc3 ©c3 17.®e2 the strongest is 17...©e5! 18.®d2 Äe6 19.Äd3 0-0-0 which seems to be winning for Black) 15...Äe4 16.Öc1 and Black was a clean pawn up in S.Williams-Sinkevich, Millfield 2002.

2) 12...g4 13.Äg1, when in Laurain-Prié, Béziers 2002, instead of 13...Äf8, Black should



have played 13...©a5! 14.Äc3 Äc5 15.dc5 Äc3 16.bc3 ©c3 17.®e2 ©e5 18.®d2 Äf5 and wins (Prié).'

The games annotations are accessible and understandable, something that is absolutely essential to make a book like this work to its optimum. The annotations to the illustrative games are well-written and informative, and you really feel when studying the annotated games that your understanding of chess in general has been enhanced, while you are full of confidence about this opening in particular.

In short, this book has up-to-date coverage, lots of improvements and original analysis and well-written and informative game annotations.

I expect you will enjoy the effort the author has put into this book, and perhaps you will feel as I did after my game with Flear 15 years ago: enlightened and full of hope. I can highly recommend this book. (review by Carsten Hansen)