



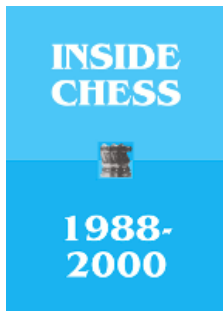
COLUMNISTS

Checkpoint

Carsten Hansen



Translate this page



Rating Chart

Awful –

 Utter rubbish

Poor –

 Inferior

Uneven –

 Mix of good and bad

Good –

 Worth buying

Great –

 Above and beyond average

Excellent –

 Everyone should own



Reviewed this Month

A Cunning Chess Opening Repertoire for White
by Graham Burgess

A Vigorous Chess Opening Repertoire for Black
by Or Cohen

Chess Developments: Semi-Slav 5 Bg5
by Bryan Paulsen

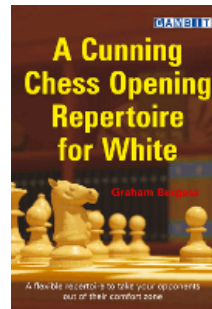
Grandmaster Repertoire 13: The Open Spanish
by Viktor Mikhalevski

A Welcome Return

After our little hiatus, it is nice to be back. This column also features another return: that of Graham Burgess to the ranks of opening book authors. Then we have three authors with whom we have not previously dealt in this column: the Israelis Viktor Mikhalevski and Or Cohen, as well as American master Bryan Paulsen.

A Cunning Chess Opening Repertoire for White by Graham Burgess, Gambit Publications 2013, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 256pp. \$23.95 (ChessCafe Price \$19.67)

FIDE Master Graham Burgess, who has now settled in the USA, is a co-director of Gambit Publications, a company he started in the late 1990s with Murray Chandler and John Nunn. In this, his twenty-third, book he presents an opening repertoire based on 1 d4 and 2 Nf3, choosing lines that aim to steer the game to positions that deny an opponent his preferred strategies. On the back cover we are told the following:



"Our aim is to give Black exactly the type of position he doesn't want. If he is seeking blocked positions with pawn-chains, we'll keep the game fluid. If he wants complex strategy, we'll attack him with simple piece-play. Simplifications? No thanks, we'll keep the pieces on and intensify the battle. Gambits? Hardly, as we simply prevent most of them!"

Of course, as with building any opening repertoire, there are certain limitations, particularly space restrictions to keep everything neat and tidy within the allotted number of pages, but also the format has to allow the intended reader to be able to follow the narrative, understand the

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recommendations, and be able to master the mix of lines chosen for the repertoire.

Let's take a look at how Burgess has divided the material:

- Symbols / Bibliography / Foreword (2 pages)
- Introduction: A Cunning Repertoire (5 pages)
- Queen's Gambit: Introduction (8 pages)
- QGD: Main Line with 5 Bf4 (21 pages)
- QGD without 4...Be7 (13 pages)
- Ragozin QGD (7 pages)
- Queen's Gambit Accepted (14 pages)
- Slav (25 pages)
- Semi-Slav and Triangle QGD (8 pages)
- 1 d4 d5 2 Nf3: Tarrasch et al. (10 pages)
- Torre Attack: Introduction (2 pages)
- Torre Poisoned Pawn (8 pages)
- Torre with ...d5 (7 pages)
- Torre without ...d5 (19 pages)
- Counter-Fianchetto: Introduction (5 pages)
- King's Indian (31 pages)
- Grünfeld (21 pages)
- Anti-Benoni (25 pages)
- Dutch and Other 1st Moves (20 pages)
- Index of Variations (2 pages)

The opening with 1 d4 can be a devil to cover in just one volume, presenting a more or less complete repertoire. As we can see, Burgess has done this via very specific coverage of the Queen's Gambit. The 5 Bf4 line was once popular, but has seen less action in recent years; against the Queen's Gambit Accepted, he uses the slightly unusual Qa4+ to stay clear of the most theory-laden lines and introduce something playable though much less mainstream. Against the Slav, he uses 3 Nf3 and 4 e3, followed up by set-ups with Nbd2, which shouldn't strike Black immobile with fear, yet the Chebanenko lines with an early ...a6 are not considered particularly accurate against this move-order. Then, of course, we have the Torre Attack, but not against the Fianchetto set-ups for Black, only after 1...Nf6 2 Nf3 e6 where it has some potency. Against the Fianchetto, he chooses Fianchetto set-ups for White as well. Overall, an interesting mix of lines.

Let's dive a little deeper. While the QGA lines with Qa4+ seem like the weaker link in this volume, they do serve White reasonably well in getting him out-of-book without carrying any theoretical risk.

I found the chapters on the Torre Attack to be the most interesting in terms of the analytical work. Burgess is keenly aware that this part of the repertoire could be considered theoretically inadequate for an advantage. While not assuming that White will be able to claim such a thing, Burgess has armed the reader with a number of new ideas, several of which are improvements over existing theory, along the way apparently overturning evaluations of John Cox and Richard Palliser, both of whom have covered the Torre in works of their own.

Against the Fianchetto set-ups for Black, Burgess has gone with lines that are decidedly harmless according to the official theory; e.g., **1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 g6 3 g3 Bg7 4 Bg2 0-0 5 0-0**, and now **5...d6** is countered with the unusual **6 a4!?**.




[FEN "rnbq1rk1/ppp1ppbp/3p1np1/8/P2P4/5NP1/1PP1PPBP/RNBQ1RK1 b - - 0 6"]

This shouldn't terrify Black, but Romanishin has used it repeatedly over the years so it carries some appeal. Burgess sticks to his reputation as a solid theoretician by not claiming an edge for White, rather showing that Black can keep the game balanced, but cannot let down his guard, because then White will have opportunities to gain the upper hand.

The same can be said of the lines that arise if Black instead opts for 5...d5, after which Burgess explores 6 c4, which takes the game into mainstream Grünfeld lines, and 6 a4, which Burgess also briefly covers.

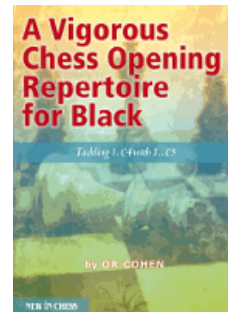
Burgess has done well to present a playable repertoire for White that does not pretend to knock Black out from the starting bell, but rather aims to avoid Black's favorite lines in a way that will keep the game on White's turf. If Black slips up, then there is the possibility of throwing heavy punches, but otherwise White achieves positions that lead to approximately even chances. This work will never be considered as the ultimate repertoire book, though calling the repertoire cunning is apt, because if someone is looking for a decent and relatively easy-to-learn repertoire, then *A Cunning Chess Opening Repertoire for White* will quite possibly fit the bill.

My assessment of this book: 

Order [A Cunning Chess Opening Repertoire for White](#)
by Graham Burgess

A Vigorous Chess Opening Repertoire for Black: Tackling 1.e4 with 1...e5 by Or Cohen, New In Chess 2013, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 318 pp. \$26.95 (ChessCafe Price \$22.07)

This is the first book by Israeli FIDE master Or Cohen. Cohen is long-time adherent of the Petroff Defense or Russian Game, which as we know opens with the moves **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nf6**. Naturally, the repertoire in this volume is based around Black utilizing this solid, yet combative way of meeting 1 e4.



The author has divided the material in a rather predictable fashion, having to cover a complete 1 e4 e5 repertoire from Black's perspective:

- Introduction (3 pages)
- Alexander Petrov (1 page)
- Acknowledgements (1 page)
- Explanation of Symbols (1 page)
- **Part 1 White Avoids the Petroff** (1 page)
- Portugese Opening and Centre Game (13 pages)
- The White Philidor (6 pages)
- The King's Gambit (11 pages)
- The Vienna Game (11 pages)
- The Bishop's Opening (6 pages)
- The Four Knights: Rare Continuations (11 pages)
- The Scotch Four Knights (11 pages)
- The Spanish Four Knights (10 pages)
- **Part 2 Petroff: The Classical 3.Nxe5** (1 page)
- Cochrane Gambit and Paulsen Variation (6 pages)
- Rare Fifth Moves for White (8 pages)
- The Ending after 5.Qe2 (5 pages)
- The Modern 5.Nc3: Minor Lines (5 pages)
- The Modern 5.Nc3 with 7.Be3 (14 pages)
- The Modern 5.Nc3 with 7.Bf4 (10 pages)
- Main Line 5.d4: the 'Incorrect' 7...Bg4 (13 pages)
- 5.d4, 7...Be7: The Obscure 8.Nc3 (5 pages)
- 5.d4, 7...Be7: The Popular 8.Re1 with 9.c3 (23 pages)
- 5.d4, 7...Be7: 8.Re1 with the Old 9.c4 (18 pages)
- 5.d4, 7...Be7: 8.c4 without 9.Be2 (12 pages)
- 5.d4, 7...Be7: 8.c4 Nb4 9.Be2 (22 pages)


- **Part 3 Petroff: Steinitz' 3.d4** (1 page)
- 3.d4 Nxe4: The Anti-Positional 4.dxe5 (9 pages)
- 4.Bd3: Murey's 4...Nc6 and 4...d5 5.dxe5 (9 pages)
- 4.Bd3 d5 5.Nxe5 Nd7: Rare and Old Moves (10 pages)
- Minor Continuations after 5.Nxe5 Nd7 6.0-0 (6 pages)
- The Immediate 6.Nc3 (7 pages)
- The Dangerous 6.Nxd7 Bxd7 7.Nc3 (9 pages)
- 7.0-0 Bd6: The Deferred 8.Nc3 (8 pages)
- The Main Line: 7.0-0 Bd6 8.c4 (16 pages)
- Bibliography (1 page)
- Index of Variations (3 pages)
- Index of Players (3 pages)
- Game List (3 pages)

The above is a rather detailed breakdown of all relevant lines that Black needs to be able to counter and play if interested in adopting a repertoire based on the Petroff. It also tells us a fair amount of the author: quite detail-oriented and bordering on the obsessive. As I worked my way through the chapters, this was evident on multiple occasions. Lines that should have received little or even no mention, such as **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 Nc3 Nc6 4 Nxe5?**, received a full page of coverage; or **4 Bc4?! Nxe4**, which received almost three pages; and **4 a3**, which has a main game's worth of coverage, with many similar examples throughout the book.

On top of this Cohen often spends too much time lingering on lines that he finds charming, rather than on what is relevant. He frequently quotes games that are rather poorly played by White, with blunders or other poor moves rather early on. Also, he has very little modesty when it comes to offering his own games as main examples. Of the many main games in this volume, forty-three are Cohen's, whereas well-known specialists in the Petroff are featured far less, despite having a greater influence on the development of this opening; for instance, Gelfand (thirty-one games), Karpov (thirty games), and Kramnik (thirty-one games).

While the coverage does have merit, there is an unusual volume of analysis. In many cases very long lines, unaccompanied by any text, just go on endlessly; several examples extend up to twenty (!) moves. Very rarely does Cohen quote sources, so either he is an amazing analyst or he is overly keen on letting Houdini run amok and blindly provide line after line. It becomes a little too much, even if the analysis is objectively correct.

Beyond the exorbitant analysis and self-indulgent use Cohen's own games, the book does have some value for those looking to build a Petroff repertoire, though it is not one I would buy for myself. The author needed to give more thought to his intended audience. If he was writing a book for strong players, then he could have forgone the irrelevant lines that do not directly concern the coverage of the Petroff proper. If the potential buyer was considered to be the strongest players, he should have spared the ridiculously long lines that litter the chapters on the main lines.

My assessment of this book: 

Order [A Vigorous Chess Opening Repertoire for Black](#)

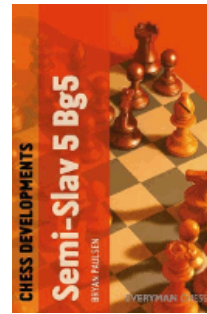
by Or Cohen

Chess Developments: Semi-Slav 5 Bg5 by Bryan Paulsen, Everyman Chess 2013, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 192pp. \$26.95 (ChessCafe Price \$22.16); Ebook \$19.95

The author of the present volume is a United States National Master, who is currently rated just below 2300 in the USCF and just below 2200 in FIDE. According to the "About the Author" section, "He has 10 years of experience coaching scholastic players and adults alike. He's also worked as an openings analyst for several titled players."

The focus of the book is the highly topical Semi-Slav

with 5 Bg5, which arises upon 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 Nc3 e6 5 Bg5



[FEN "rnbqkb1r/pp3ppp/2p1pn2/3p2B1/2PP4/2N2N2/PP2PPPP/R2QKB1R b KQkq - 0 5"]

This can lead to some of the sharpest and craziest lines: 5...dxc4 6 e4 b5 7 e5 h6 8 Bh4 g5 9 Nxc5 (Botvinnik Variation) and 5...h6 6 Bh4 dxc4 7 e4 g5 8 Bg3 b5 (Anti-Moscow Variation). Or the game can go in a more solid direction: 5...Nbd7 6 e3 Qa5 (Cambridge Springs Variation) and 5...h6 6 Bxf6 Qxf6 (Moscow Variation). All of these lines represent a massive complex of variations to which several individual books have been devoted.

The material is divided in a rather straightforward and rudimentary fashion:

- About the Author (1 page)
- Introduction (3 pages)
- The Queen's Gambit Declined Hybrid (21 pages)
- The Cambridge Springs Defence (25 pages)
- The Botvinnik Variation (53 pages)
- The Moscow Variation (37 pages)
- The Anti-Moscow Gambit (39 pages)
- Index of Variations (6 pages)
- Index of Complete Games (2 pages)

My first impression was that this is a fairly slim volume for theory-laden lines such as these. Chapter 3 and 5 are both very topical, have been heavily analyzed, and played repeatedly by numerous grandmasters and international masters over the last many years, not to mention it being ideal for use in correspondence play, where the players have the proper amount of time to navigate the many pitfalls and theoretical potholes. The Cambridge Springs Variation is rolled out regularly in grandmaster play, whereas the Moscow Variation used to be a relatively frequent guest back when the Anti-Moscow Gambit was considered suspect. Nowadays, however, it is a way to pull the hand-break before the theoretical madness and complications commence.

Nevertheless, the book is decently written, with plenty of narrative and a good amount of analysis. Still, there is too much verbal explanation for the intended audience: the master strength player who needs a refresher of the current state of affairs in these lines. Also, oddly absent is a bibliography, which would have seemed reasonable, because the author should have been referencing his material and commentary against what others have written.

I have not found any obvious flaws with the variations and the analysis on offer, but the book leaves me somewhat unsatisfied. It is surprisingly brief considering the lines covered and in comparison to other books in this series, while I find it problematic that the author did not take into consideration who the intended audience is.

My assessment of this book:

Order [Chess Developments: Semi-Slav 5 Bg5](#)

by Bryan Paulsen

Order [Chess Developments: Semi-Slav 5 Bg5 \(Ebook\)](#)

by Bryan Paulsen

Grandmaster Repertoire 13: The Open Spanish by Viktor Mikhalevski, Quality Chess 2013, Figurine Algebraic Notation, 381pp. Hardcover \$38.95 (ChessCafe Price \$31.47); Paperback \$29.95 (ChessCafe Price \$23.97)

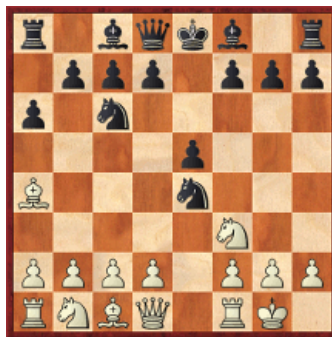
With the title *Grandmaster Repertoire*, it is clear that these books are intended for very strong and ambitious players. The author of the present volume is a grandmaster who has represented Israel at Chess Olympiads and in other team events, and is a renowned opening expert who has been writing for Chesspublishing.com for many years.



The material is divided as follows:

- Preface by the Author (3 pages)
- Key to Symbols used / Bibliography (1 page)
- **Sidelines 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6**
- 5 Bxc6 and 5 Nc3 (19 pages)
- 5 d4 exd4 Introduction and 6 e5 (18 pages)
- 5 d4 exd4 6 0-0 (23 pages)
- Worrall System (27 pages)
- 5 d3 Introduction and Sidelines (19 pages)
- 5 d3 Main Line with 7 0-0 (30 pages)
- **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0**
- 5 0-0 Nxe4 Sidelines (18 pages)
- 6 d4 b5 Sidelines (8 pages)
- 7 Bb3 d5 without 8 dxe5 (12 pages)
- **Main Lines 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Nxe4 6 d4 b5 7 Bb3 d5 8 dxe5 Be6**
- Sidelines (12 pages)
- 9 Re1!? (16 pages)
- 9 Be3 Introduction (7 pages)
- 9 Be3 Be7 10 c3 (19 pages)
- 9 Qe2 Introduction (11 pages)
- 9 Qe2 Be7 10 Rd1 (24 pages)
- 9 c3 Introduction (25 pages)
- 9 c3 Bc5 10 Nbd2 0-0 11 Bc2 (22 pages)
- 9 Nbd2 Introduction and Sidelines (22 pages)
- 9 Nbd2 Nc5 10 c3 Be7 11 Bc2 d4 12 Nb3 (34 pages)
- Index of Variations (8 pages)

The Open Spanish arises upon **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Nxe4**








[FEN "r1bqkb1r/1ppp1ppp/p1n5/4p3/B3n3/5N2/PPPP1PPP/RNBQ1RK1 w kq - 0 6"]

However, the first 142 pages feature other lines that are available for White as deviations prior to entering the Open Spanish (Ruy Lopez). I will not claim to be any kind of expert on this opening, but I was blown away by the detailed

coverage provided by the author in this fine volume. He has picked what is relevant and presented the material concisely to deliver precise evaluations. The many diagrams make the book easier to read and to get a grasp of the ideas without having to use a board, although both a board and computer should be used to gain a proper understanding of the lines.

As with all the books in this series, new moves and improvements over existing theory are indicated throughout the volume. The production value of the book is excellent, it is bound well and lies flat on the table. The paper, print, and choice of font make the book easy to browse through and read.

The book is easily the finest that has been written on this opening for many years and will be the go-to source for years to come. If you are a serious, strong, or ambitious player and you need to study the Open Spanish, either as black or white, then this is the book to get.

My assessment of this book:     

**Order [Grandmaster Repertoire 13:
The Open Spanish](#)**
by Viktor Mikhalevski

**Order [Grandmaster Repertoire 13:
The Open Spanish \(Hardcover\)](#)**
by Viktor Mikhalevski

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