

Convekta "Opening Instructor" english CD review

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Test Machine:

Intel® Pentium® 4 CPU, 3.00 GHz, 448 MB RAM, Windows XP SP2.

The CD comes wrapped up in a colorful box, with the installation CD, and the standardized 32-page instruction manual for tackling the interface. It contains 400 megabytes of data, Convekta's latest Catalogue, nine selected demo versions of previous releases, a CQL database, and Internet Club support. A direct tree, based on 1.000.000 games, with CAP data, is included as a free add-on.

Highlights:

1. Easy installation. The installation process is automated, and takes around two minutes only, does not require a restart. An optional online registration query makes you eligible via email, for announcements about new versions or upgrades.



Remark:

The "K" instead of the "C" in the splash screen, reminds me of the three famous K's in chess: Karpov, Kasparov and Kramnik. Will this CD prove to be the "fourth K"?

Convekta's essential requirements for this CD are high: IBM-compatible PC, 128 MB memory (RAM), Hard Disk (1 GB of free disk space for the program), VGA graphics, Windows 2000/NT/ME/XP, CD-ROM drive, Microsoft-compatible mouse.

I don't recommend using the essential requirements, but instead - the recommended ones, from the booklet manual: IBM compatible PC, 512 MB or more RAM, 1 GB of free disk space for the databases and trees, Super VGA graphics with 16 bit colors and 1024x768 screen mode, DVD drive.

Program requirements provided at Convekta's website (as of 15.1.2006), seem to be not enough.

Full installation of the program absorbs around 272 megabytes.

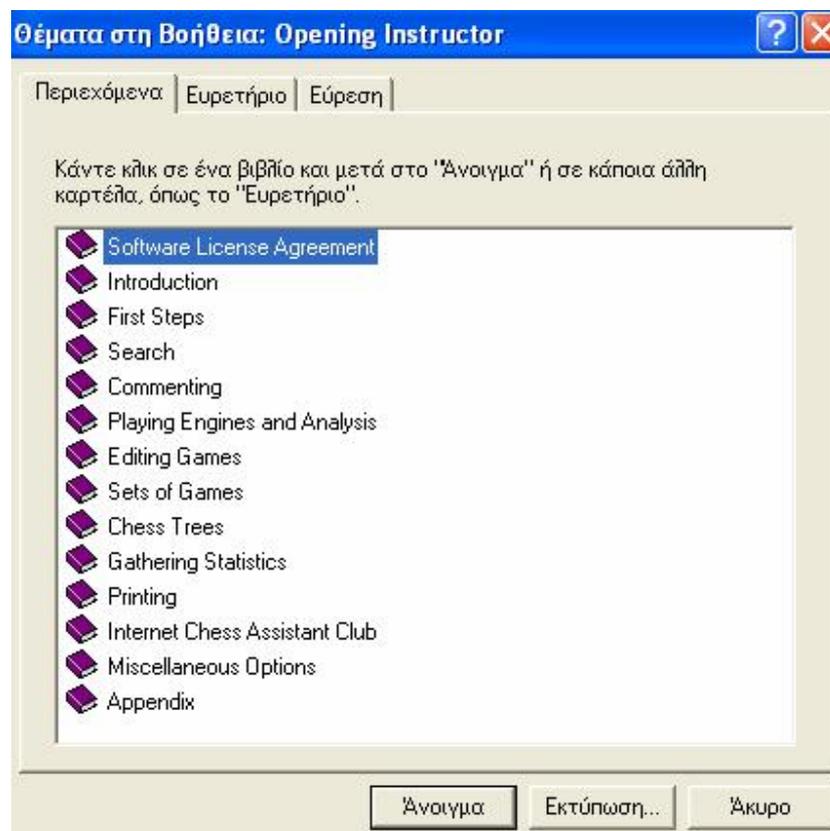
2. Language.

Remark:

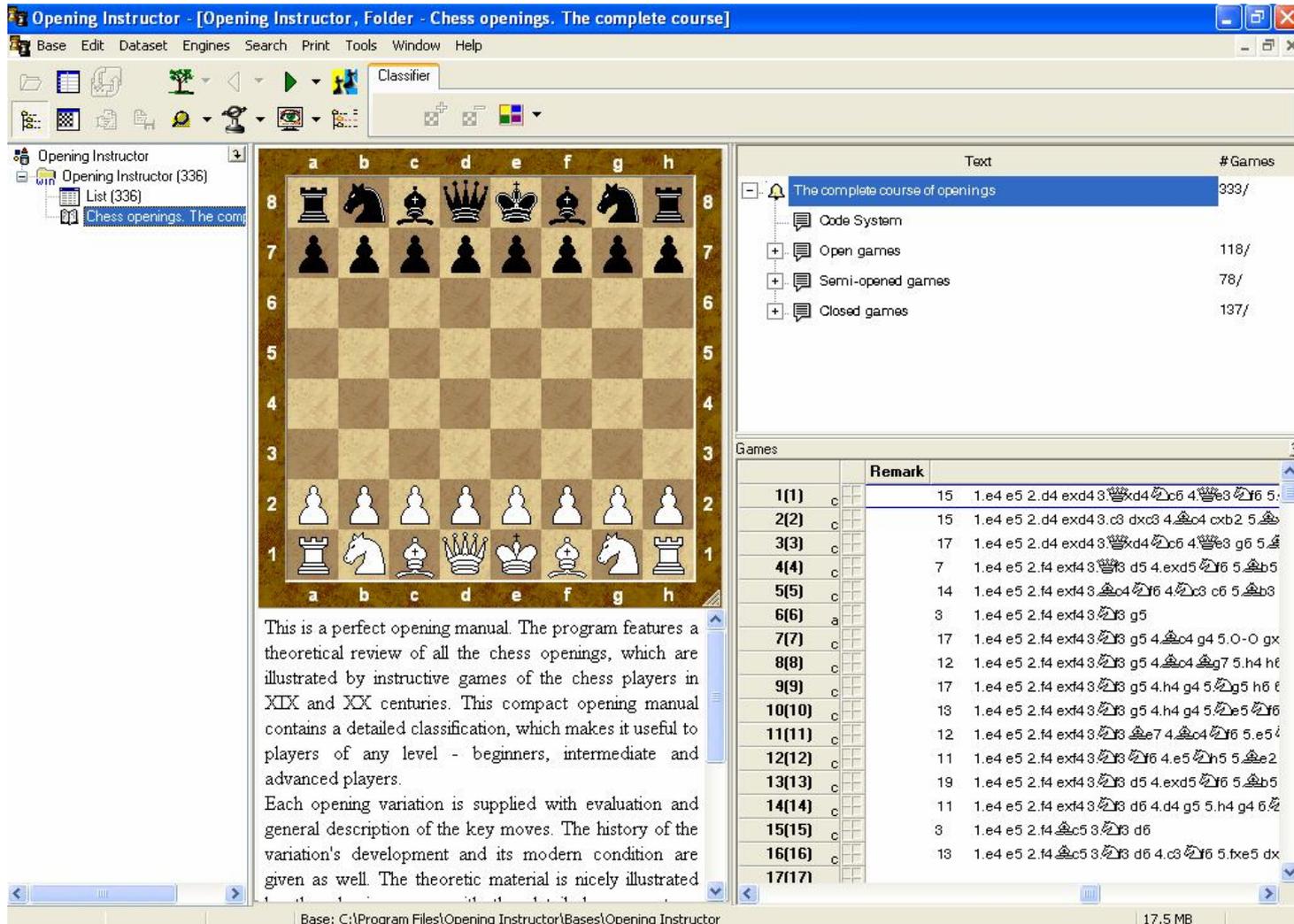
The CD I am reviewing automatically installs English language support only. Hopefully, more languages will be supported, as an installation option.

3. Help

Pressing F1 did not produce a usual help file. Browsing through the menu, however, under Help/Contents, an extensive interface support file is accessible (some words may hint my using a Greek version of windows).



4. The interface is identical to Convekta's previous professional releases. Here is a screenshot of the "newborn".



Remark: The introductory text starts with "This is a perfect opening manual"! We shall see...

There are two sections, a database called "Chess Openings: The complete course" and another base of 336 games. Among hundreds of possibilities, the interface offers the user to analyze, or even play (!) any position against a built-in engine.



5. Chess Openings: The complete course.

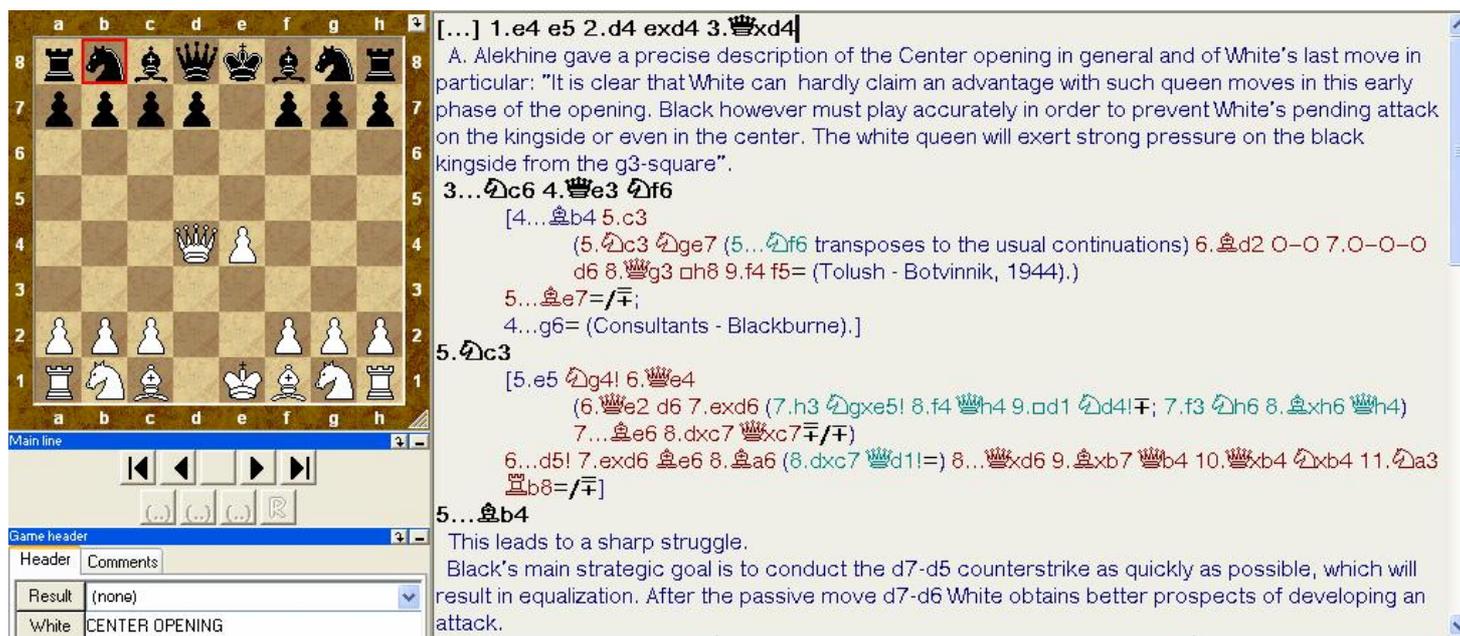
The Complete Course starts with a traditional introduction to the symbols used in the annotations. The Openings are classified under three groups, Open, Semi-Open, and Closed games, with classical opening systems analyzed.

Convekta emphasizes that the program features a full theoretical review of all the openings in chess, illustrated by instructive examples of players of the 19th and 20th century.

The Course is connected to the 336 annotated game databases, with examples popping out, when one browses a selected opening.

Each Opening commented has one or more Introductory theoretical sections, with exemplary games to follow..

I'll try out the very first example in the Open games section. It is the well-known "Center Opening", where White develops the Queen a bit too early, with an incomplete screenshot given below.



The screenshot displays a chessboard on the left and a list of moves on the right. The chessboard shows a game in progress with White's Queen on e4 and Black's King on e5. The moves listed are:

[...] 1.e4 e5 2.d4 exd4 3.♔xd4

A. Alekhine gave a precise description of the Center opening in general and of White's last move in particular: "It is clear that White can hardly claim an advantage with such queen moves in this early phase of the opening. Black however must play accurately in order to prevent White's pending attack on the kingside or even in the center. The white queen will exert strong pressure on the black kingside from the g3-square".

3...♟c6 4.♞e3 ♟f6

[4...♞b4 5.c3
(5.♟c3 ♟ge7 (5...♟f6 transposes to the usual continuations) 6.♞d2 O-O 7.O-O-O
d6 8.♞g3 ♟h8 9.f4 f5= (Tolush - Botvinnik, 1944).)

5...♞e7=♞; 4...g6= (Consultants - Blackburne).]

5.♟c3

[5.e5 ♟g4! 6.♞e4
(6.♞e2 d6 7.exd6 (7.h3 ♟gxe5! 8.f4 ♞h4 9.♟d1 ♟d4!♞; 7.f3 ♟h6 8.♞xh6 ♞h4)
7...♞e6 8.dxc7 ♞xc7♞/♞)
6...d5! 7.exd6 ♞e6 8.♞a6 (8.dxc7 ♞d1!)=) 8...♞xd6 9.♞xb7 ♞b4 10.♞xb4 ♟xb4 11.♟a3
♞b8=♞]

5...♞b4

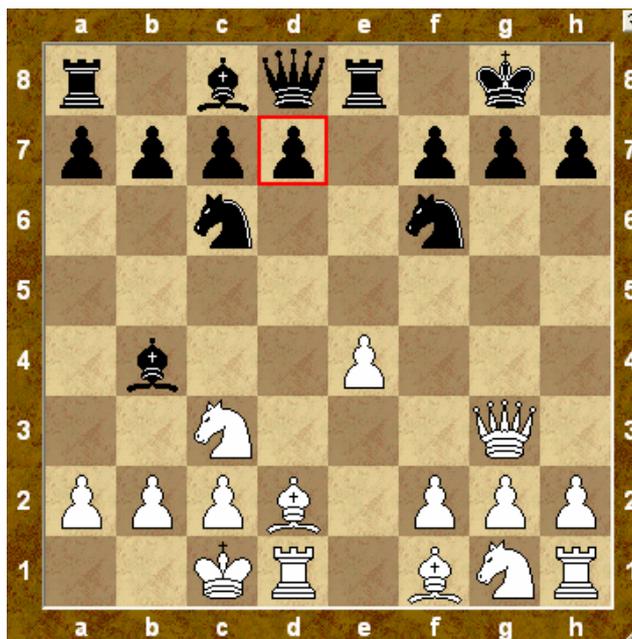
This leads to a sharp struggle.
Black's main strategic goal is to conduct the d7-d5 counterstrike as quickly as possible, which will result in equalization. After the passive move d7-d6 White obtains better prospects of developing an attack.

The introduction features an excellent remark of former World Champion Alexander Alekhine, words which can often help more in understanding the ideas than the actual moves themselves. The CD quotes Alekhine on many occasions.

However, the variations given, seem rather unclear for learning the opening itself. The main line leads to a better position for white, while many sidelines offer better opportunities for black, yet are given a lower level of value, having in mind the "standardized" way of learning openings. In these, the main line is a try for the perfect play for both sides, usually leading to equality.

There are evaluations and variations you will probably not find in an encyclopaedia of chess openings, all made in an attempt to bring the user more closer to understanding the positions. However, some variations given here are outdated, as theory has developed further in the past decade.

For example:



[8. ♖g3! ? d6 (8... ♜xe4 9. a3! ♜g4 10. ♞e3 ♙f8 11. h3 ♜g6 12. ♙d3±/± (Xie Jun - Flear, 1996.); 8... ♗xe4 9. ♗xe4 ♜xe4 10. ♙f4 ♞f6! 11. ♗h3 d6 12. ♙d3 ♗d4! 13. ♙e3 ♜g4 14. ♙xd4 ♜xd4 15. c3 ♙xc3 16. bxc3 ♜g4∞ Mieses - Capablanca, 1913) 9. f3 ♗e5 10. h4 ♗h8 11. ♗h3 ♗h5! = (Shirov - Karpov, 1995).]

Modern theory “proves” that 8... Rxe4, for, example is more than playable for Black, additionally being the most popular “main line” in practical play, with more than 50% of all games played in this variation (approximately 300, from Convekta’s updated Hugebase, not included in the CD). Convekta’s master evaluations also recommend 8... Re4 as promising black an equal position, unlike the evaluation given in the Opening Instructor!? In the screenshot above, after 12.Bd3, the “fun just begins”, as White has sacrificed two pawns and has to prove the compensation exists in practice, not only in theory. As an experienced International Master with one Grandmaster norm, I can agree with the evaluation given, but improving players may question the evaluation, which needs additional explanatory notes.

Questioning existing theory and recommendations is an ongoing process that may never end, yet here it was relatively easy proving my point.

The program offers one beautiful annotated exemplary game (which black won), from the old masters.

[Or 9. ♗xd5 ♗xd5 10. exd5 ♞xd5 11. ♙b4 ♞xa2! (it is stronger than 11... ♙xb2) 12. ♙xf8 ♞xb2 13. ♗d2 ♗xf8 and Black obtains two pawns for the exchange while retaining an attack.]

9... ♗b4 10. ♙c4 ♙f5 11. ♙b3 ♗exd5 12. ♗xd5?

This losing move allows Black to finish the game effectively.

[Necessary was 12. ♞f3 forcing the simplifying exchanges after 12... ♗xc3 13. ♙xc3 ♞e7]

12... ♗xd5 13. ♞f3 ♞f6!

This move was omitted by the consultants together with the rest of the game.

14. c3 ♗b4! 15. ♙c4]

15... ♞a6!!

Black “sacrifices” the queen that is actually immune thanks to mate in one.

16. g4

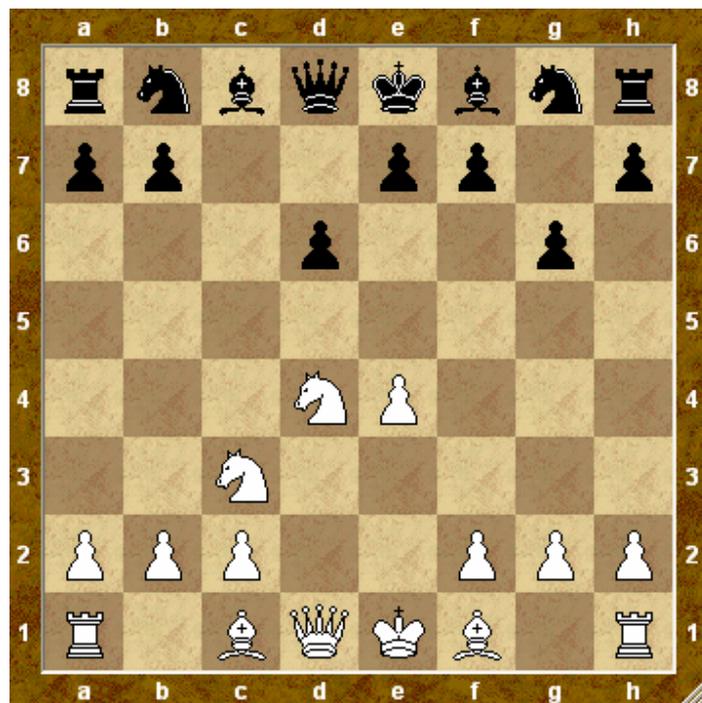
[White also lost after 16. cxb4 ♞xc4 17. ♙c3 ♙xc3! 18. ♞xc3 (♞c4 18. bxc3 ♞xa2) 18... ♞xf4 19. ♞d2 (or 19. ♙d2 ♞e4 20. ♗d1 ♞fe8) 19... ♞e4]

16... ♞xa2 17. ♙e3 ♙xc3! White resigned.

The Sicilian defense, under Semi-Open games, is divided into 10 systems, as can be seen below. To say the truth, I could never recite all the Sicilian Opening variations names, hope I can get them all in one place now.

[-] Sicilian defense	27/
[-] Closed system	1 (1)
[-] Rubinstein variation	1 (1)
[-] Dragon variation	1 (1)
[-] Najdorf variation	2 (2)
[-] Boleslavsky system	1 (1)
[-] Rauser attack	2 (2)
[-] Sozin attack	1 (1)
[-] Scøveningen variation	2 (2)
[-] Chelyabinsk variation	2 (2)
[-] Paulsen system	1 (1)
[-] Exemplary games	13 (13)

Not all systems, such as, for example, the Dragon, have a historical introduction, which I had (secretly) expected.



The move 5...g6 with the following fianchetto defines the Dragon variation leading to sharp struggle. As it has been shown in the recent tournament practice, White's chances are preferable there.

Looking back to see if I had missed something, I noticed the black Knight on g8, instead of f6. A rare error. The comment "White chances are preferable here" is a statement made too early. An IM/GM might understand the meaning, but not the others, aiming to become. Especially in junior chess, the Sicilian Dragon is a highly valued system for Black, bringing many victories for youngsters, teaching them the secrets of opposite side castling, counterplay, exchange sacrifice, etc. It is an underestimated opening on a GM level, with over 30.000 recorded chess games (and growing) played and analyzed.

Many selected positions, inside the theory sections, are (modestly) annotated textually, on a professional level. Ending evaluations are occasionally commented, as well as ideas behind certain moves and piece maneuvers.

The exemplary games are annotated and chosen well. Here is an example in the screenshot below.



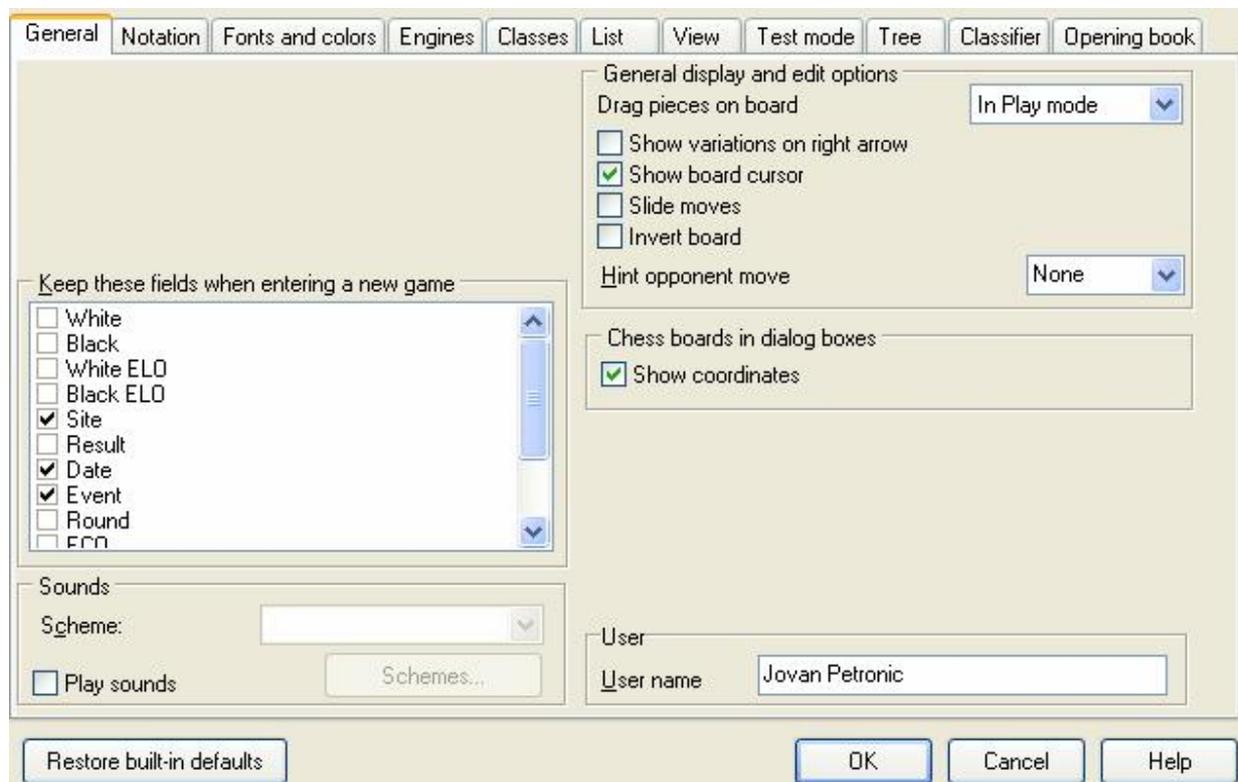
The screenshot shows a chess board with a red arrow pointing to a white knight on d4. The board is annotated with moves and their consequences. The interface includes a main line, game header, and a list of moves with detailed annotations.

13... ♖xh5 | 14. ♗h6
 [White may also play 14.g4, since the piece sacrifice by 14... ♗xg4 (after 14... ♗f6 15. ♖dg1 b5 16. ♗h6 ♖xc3 17. ♗xc3 ♗xc3 18.bxc3 Black obtains full-fledged play, Kauranen - Estrin, (corr.) 1968-70) 15.fxg4 ♗xg4 16. ♖df1 appears to be extremely risky for Black; D. Bronstein implemented an astonishing novelty in his game against B. Parma (1971): 14. ♗d5!? By exchanging the queens White want to deprive his opponent of chances on the queenside and then to continue with an assault on the opposite side of the board. 14... ♗xd2 15. ♖xd2 ♗f8 16.g4 ♗f6 (in the source game Black tried to pay off with a piece 16... ♗xg4 17.fxg4 ♗xg4 but after 18. ♗g5 ♗g6 19. ♗xf6 ♗xf6 20. ♗f3 ♗g7 21. ♗xf6 ♗xf6 22.e5 White's advantage was obvious) 17. ♖e2 e6 18. ♗xf6 ♗xf6 19. ♖xh7 a5 Black retains sufficient defensive resources.]

14... ♗xh6
 [An extremely sharp situation arises after 14... ♗d3 15. ♗b1! ♗xb2 (15... ♗xd4 is not good due to 16. ♗d5) 16. ♗xb2 ♗xh6 17. ♗xh6 ♗xc3 (17... ♖xc3 is weaker in view of 18.g4 ♗f6 19.e5! ♖xb3 20.axb3 dxe5 21. ♗e2 ♗c6 22.g5 ♗h5 23. ♖xh5! with a winning attack for White) 18. ♗b1]

15. ♗xh6 ♖xc3
 Black must act energetically, otherwise White will outstrip him in

I strongly recommend switching on the "Show variations on right arrow"(switched off by default), as you might miss some of many variations included.



The screenshot shows the 'General' settings window of a chess software application. The window has several tabs: General, Notation, Fonts and colors, Engines, Classes, List, View, Test mode, Tree, Classifier, and Opening book. The 'General' tab is selected, showing various options for display and editing.

General display and edit options

- Drag pieces on board: In Play mode
- Show variations on right arrow
- Show board cursor
- Slide moves
- Invert board
- Hint opponent move: None

Chess boards in dialog boxes

- Show coordinates

Keep these fields when entering a new game

- White
- Black
- White ELO
- Black ELO
- Site
- Result
- Date
- Event
- Round
- FEN

Sounds

Scheme: [dropdown menu]

Play sounds [Schemes... button]

User

User name: Jovan Petronic

Buttons: Restore built-in defaults, OK, Cancel, Help

"Weaker systems", of unorthodox nature, are "hidden" inside other systems. For example, the Grob, Van Geet, and others, can be found, modestly introduced and annotated, inside the "Sokolsky Opening".

[...] 1.b4

This opening was implemented back in the XIX century by the Russian player N. Bugaev and later by grandmaster S. Tartakower. In modern practice it has been introduced by the Soviet master A. Sokolsky who developed its theoretical base.

In this opening White intends to seize space on the queenside. Black must oppose this plan with an active system of counter play.

[1.g4 Grob attack.

By attempting to seize space on the kingside White takes a serious risk, he is weakening the kingside and conceding to Black control of the center. 1...d5 (1...e5 2.d3 d5 3.♘g2 ♖c6 4.h3 ♗ge7 ♞ Larsen) 2.♘g2 c6 (2...♘g4 3.c4 c6 4.cxd5 cxd5 5. ♞xh1 ♚d6 7. ♘d5 ♗h4 965) 4...e4 ♗xd5 9.♚b3

Select variation and press Enter

Main) 1.b4 e5 2.♘b2 f6 3.b5 d5 =

A) 1.g4 d5 2.♘g2 c6 ♞

B) 1.♗c3 c5 2.♗f3 d5 =

C) 1.g3 e5 2.♘g2 d5 =

OK Cancel Help

In the brief overview of the Grob, the "Opening Instructor" offers an improvement of Convekta's master evaluations, which indicate white's 1.g4 master evaluation, as leading to equality. Variations given here tend to change the overall evaluation as slightly favorable for black, an evaluation with which I personally agree!? New games may prove us wrong, as I recently read about GM Anatoly Karpov winning former Women World Champions GM Susan Polgar in an exhibition match, where the honorable first move made "forced" the former World Champion to play 1.g4!?

Conclusion:

Tackling Opening Theory is almost always a pioneering task, and I would rarely recommend anyone such a gigantic try, as it can prove to be a labyrinth out which one can never get out of. Convekta Ltd gave it a try with it's "Opening Instructor".

I can't agree that it is the perfect opening manual, as I don't believe such can ever be written. Theory develops too fast, and at the same time too slow, devouring the old, introducing the new, then bringing out the old again, etc.

Some Opening conclusions can be made, though, and this CD aims exactly for these. There is no revolutionary approach in trying to establish a new system of opening classification, but rather to summarize the existing ones, using brilliant master games, combined with master quotes and master annotations.

I have to admit that one can get a fairly good classical view of the "opening tree in chess". Unorthodox chess players can argue that their preferred systems are not amplified enough.

All will find new information to enrich their chess knowledge, whether it about opening chess history, or even some new (or forgotten) lines, that can prove effective in reaching the goal – to win.

The past and present do not seem to be connected well enough, as the authors emphasize the illustrations based on games played a (relatively) long time ago. Professionals will not benefit from the newest developments in their favorite chess openings.

Youngsters and especially trainers can, on the other hand, benefit from being able to quickly asses important elements of the opening tree, enriched by theory, as imperfect as it will always be.

From an ideal standpoint, I would guess that many of the covered historical overviews could have been explored better and presented in more detail. There are excellently done overviews, too.

The theoretical lines given do not necessarily represent the current status of the opening, and are on many occasions organized in an illogical way, relatively difficult to get to the immediate right paths.

The interface offers, as usual, fantastic possibilities, allowing the user to do practically anything and everything with the material presented, analyze, play, print, add, delete, test, search by the most complex criteria, etc.

I cannot even start to imagine the immense work put into this CD. To get a rough idea of how much material fits into the 336 exemplary games and theoretical articles, I tried a print preview which produced more than 530 A4 pages (with very small diagrams, two columns)!

It is impossible to review the exact theoretical value of the data provided. This would take months!? As a professional player, I know that I will not mind checking out if there is anything of professional value hidden inside the theory lines I play, as this is relatively easy to do, with the interface provided.

Only practice and time can show how effective studying the Openings will be, using the Opening Instructor.

In the end, after approximately 5 hours of browsing (typing included) - I can recommend the CD for FIDE instructors, and players FIDE rated, ranging 1400-2000, and/or above 10 years of age, in the average.