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Carsten Hansen



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**Reviewed this Month**

*A Strategic Chess Opening Repertoire for White*  
by John Watson

*The Strategic Nimzo-Indian: Volume 1*  
by Ivan Sokolov

*The Nimzo-Indian: Move by Move*  
by John Emms

*The English: Move by Move*  
by Steve Giddins

*The Torre Attack: Move by Move*  
by Richard Palliser

Strategic Opening Choices

This month offers a rare line-up of excellent authors and three books from the *Move by Move* series by Everyman Chess. Most of these books are based around the presentation of a repertoire, so without further ado, let's have a look at them.

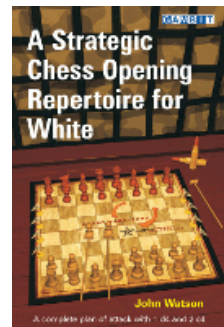
*A Strategic Chess Opening Repertoire for White* by John Watson, Gambit Publications 2012, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 271pp. \$26.95 (ChessCafe Price \$22.95)

American international master John Watson has long been recognized as one of our finest author, with several amazing books to his credit, including his series *Mastering the Chess Openings*, his books on the English, and the phenomenal *Secrets of Modern Chess Strategy*.

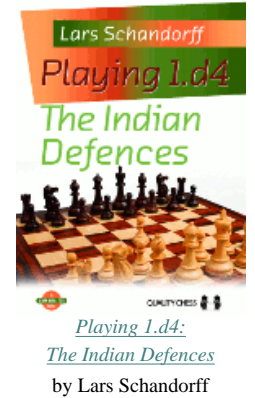
In the present book, he takes on the task of putting together a repertoire for White based on 1 d4 and 2 c4. Unlike many other repertoire book authors, Watson is not one to take short-cuts and with the repertoire he delivers here, he proves that this book is no exception.

The material is divided as follows:

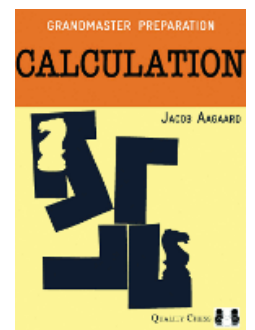
- Symbols / Dedication (1 page)
- Introduction (2 pages)
- Queen's Gambit Declined (21 pages)
- Tarrasch Defence (14 pages)
- Unorthodox Queen's Gambit (26 pages)
- Queen's Gambit Accepted (18 pages)
- Slav Defence (14 pages)
- Semi-Slav Defence (15 pages)
- Nimzo-Indian Defence (33 pages)
- King's Indian Defence (30 pages)
- Grünfeld Defence (17 pages)



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- Benoni Systems and Benko Gambit (29 pages)
- Dutch Defence (11 pages)
- Assorted Defences (33 pages)
- Index of Variations (4 pages)

Watson opens up with the Exchange Variation of the Queen's Gambit Declined, which is sharp, combative, and interesting. Against the Tarrasch, he chooses the Rubinstein Variation, which is the most theory-heavy and principled choice. In the Slav, he opts for 3 Nc3; while he in the Nimzo he goes for 4 e3, which, as we will discuss below, has an enormous complex of variations. Only when he hits the King's Indian, Grünfeld, and Old Indian does Watson start with the lesser lines.

In the Grünfeld, Watson decided to use the Exchange Variation, which is another labyrinth of variations; nevertheless, after 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5 4 cxd5 Nxd5 5 e4 Nxc3 6 bxc3 Bg7, he presents two choices 7 Qa4+ and 7 Bg5, neither of which are particularly popular nor frequently seen, but Watson makes a decent case, though I can't say that I was entirely convinced. That said, Black does need to know what he is doing. He also heads down a side line in the King's Indian, with 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 h3, but it still carries a punch and has been used by several grandmasters. However, his choice of line in the Old Indian seems rather strange: 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 d6 3 Nc3 e5 4 d5. Also, after 1 d4 d6 2 c4 e5, the choice 3 d5 is truly odd, but I guess it is only to avoid lines that are heavier in theory.

Still, Watson makes a good case for his recommendations and he weaves the repertoire pretty tightly. In addition to the theoretical coverage, Watson explains the choices, the strategic ideas, and provides a wealth of the original ideas, analysis, and improvements over existing theory.

*A Strategic Chess Opening Repertoire for White* is a great book. It provides an interesting repertoire, though some of the lines seem chosen simply because of the lower volume of theory, which offers less complexity. It is too complicated for most players rated below 2000, but for those rated above and up to around 2400, it can definitely provide the basis of a complete repertoire based on 1 d4 and 2 c4.

**My assessment of this book:** 

**Order [A Strategic Chess Opening Repertoire for White](#)**

by John Watson

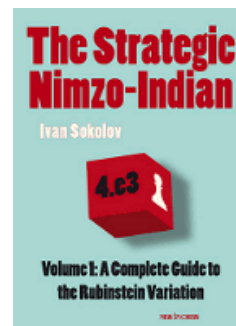
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*The Strategic Nimzo-Indian: Volume 1: A Complete Guide to the Rubinstein Variation* by Ivan Sokolov, New In Chess 2012, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 411pp. \$29.95 (ChessCafe Price \$22.95)

In recent years, Ivan Sokolov has authored a number of truly great books, including [The Ruy Lopez Revisited](#) and [Winning Chess Middlegames](#).

In this work he takes on the Rubinstein Variation of the Nimzo-Indian Defense. Having covered this topic in a book of my own some years ago, I know how thick a book on this opening can easily become. This is supported in the foreword to the present work where Sokolov shares that he originally intended this first volume to cover both the Saemisch (4 a3) and Rubinstein (4 e3), but the volume of material on 4 e3 soon made him realize

that it would be necessary to divide the material into separate volumes. He also tells us about his introduction to 4 e3 through the game collections of Botvinnik, Gligoric, and a variety of tournament books from the 1950s. And how the Rubinstein brought him one of the most beautiful moments in his chess career: when he beat Garry Kasparov in very convincing fashion in Wijk aan Zee 1999. Let's take a brief look at the game before we move ahead:



## Ivan Sokolov – Garry Kasparov

Wijk aan Zee 1999

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 0-0 5 Bd3 d5 6 Nf3 c5 7 0-0 Nc6 8 a3 Bxc3  
9 bxc3 dxc4 10 Bxc4 Qc7 11 Bd3 e5 12 Qc2 Re8 13 e4 exd4 14 cxd4 Bg4**

Here White embarks on a strange forced move order, which more or less allows Black to reach a better position. For someone who know the Nimzo-Indian as well as Ivan Sokolov this seems like a strange decision, especially against someone as well-prepared as Kasparov. Nevertheless, it all works out for our hero, in fact splendidly so.

**15 e5 Bxf3 16 exf6 Nxd4 17 Bxh7+ Kh8 18 fxg7+ Kxg7 19 Bb2 Rad8 20  
gxf3 Rh8 21 Kh1**



[FEN "3r3r/ppq2pkB/8/2p5/3n4/P4P2/  
1BQ2P1P/R4R1K b - - 0 21"]

This is the critical position, where Kasparov goes wrong. Admittedly, it is not immediately clear to see the right path here, but Kasparov has always been pretty good at steering his way through complex situations such as this. On page 276-277 in this book, Sokolov covers the present game and Black's alternatives at this juncture.

The correct move is 21...Kf8! 22 Qe4 f6 (also 22...f5 works for Black) 23 Bxd4 Rxd4 24 Qg6 Rxh7 25 Qxf6+ Qf7 26 Qxf7+ Rxf7 27 Rac1 c4, "Black's queenside pawns will move fast, while White is way behind with his kingside counterplay. In this kingside counterplay. In this pawn-down double rook ending Black was clearly better and soon won in B. Vladimirov-Lisitsin, Leningrad 1955."

**21...Rxh7?! 22 Rg1+ Kh8 23 Rg3 Qe5 24 Rag1 Rh4?! 25 Qc1 Kh7? 26  
Qb1+ Kh8 27 Qf1 Qe6 28 Qg2 1-0** "White has tripled on the g-file and will deliver mate on the next move. That was one of the most beautiful moments in my chess career."

A very nice win indeed.

The material on this massive opening complex is divided as follows:

- Foreword (2 pages)
- **Part 1 – 4.e3 Various (1 page)**
- Taimanov – 4...Nc6 (9 pages)
- Early ...b6 Lines – 4...b6 5 f3 (7 pages)
- Smooth Development – 4...b6 5 Bd3 Bb7 6 Nf3 (8 pages)
- Romanishin's 4...b6 5 Ne2 c5 (14 pages)
- The Early Knight Jump – 4...b6 5 Ne2 Ne4 (24 pages)
- The Slow – 4...b6 5 Ne2 Ba6 6 a3 Be7 (6 pages)
- Exchange – 4...b6 5 Ne2 Ba6 6 a3 Bxc3+ (11 pages)
- The Nimzo Knight Move – 4...b6 5 Ne2 Ba6 6 Ng3 (12 pages)
- The Original Rubinstein – 4...c5 5 Ne2 (11 pages)
- Development with Bd3 and Ne2 – 4...c5 5 Bd3 (17 pages)
- **Part 2 – 4...0-0 Minor Lines (1 page)**
- Reshevsky's Set-up – 5 Ne2 d5 6 a3 Bd6 (14 pages)
- The Retreat to e7 – 5 Ne2 d5 6 a3 Be7 (25 pages)
- The Baugio Variation – 5 Bd3 c5 6 d5 (8 pages)

- Hübner Variation – 5 Bd3 c5 6 Nf3 Nc6 7 0-0 Bxc3 8 bxc3 d6 (13 pages)
- Fixing the Centre – 5 Bd3 d5 6 a3 (16 pages)
- **Part 3 – The Main Line – 4...0-0 5 Bd3 d5 6 Nf3 (1 page)**
- The Delayed Fianchetto – 6...b6 (9 pages)
- Reykjavik Line – 6...c5 7 0-0 Nc6 8 a3 Ba5 (15 pages)
- The Flexible – 6...c5 7 0-0 Nc6 8 a3 Bxc3 9 bxc3 Qc7 (19 pages)
- Main Line – 9...dxc4 10 Bxc4 Qc7 11 Bd3 (16 pages)
- Main Line – 9...dxc4 10 Bxc4 Qc7 11 Ba2 (12 pages)
- Main Line – 9...dxc4 10 Bxc4 Qc7 11 h3 (10 pages)
- Main Line – 9...dxc4 10 Bxc4 Qc7 11 Bb2 (12 pages)
- **Part 4 – 4...0-0 5 Bd3 d5 6 Nf3 c5 7 0-0 – The Immediate 7...dxc4 8 Bxc4 (1 page)**
- Larsen Variation – 8...Nc6 (14 pages)
- Karpov Variation – 8...cxd4 9 exd4 b6 (42 pages)
- Parma Variation – 8...Nbd7 9 Qe2 (13 pages)
- Parma Variation – 8...Nbd7 9 Qb3 (9 pages)
- Parma Variation – 8...Nbd7 9 a3 (7 pages)
- Index of Variations (4 pages)
- Index of Players (6 pages)
- Bibliography (1 page)

As you can see, there is a massive amount of variations to cover, and even this only scratches the tip of the iceberg, there is a plenty beneath the surface as well. To begin to dig into the different variations and what specifically is covered compared to my own book or any subsequent book seems to be a pointless exercise. The reason for this is that this book is simply far superior to anything else I have seen written on this opening – my own book included. Of course, you can argue that Sokolov could have used more examples to illustrate the numerous sidelines, such as I did in my book, but Sokolov's understanding of these variations is so fine-tuned that he understands which games and lines to include to illustrate best play and the most interesting alternatives.

Furthermore, the narrative, the explanatory prose, the analysis, the countless improvements, new ideas and so on, makes this book phenomenally splendid. If you want to understand how to play this opening, then this book is a perfect place to start. Even after having studied this opening for hundreds of hours myself, I still feel that I learned a lot from reading this book. Admittedly, the level is pretty high, so I wouldn't recommend for players rated much lower than around 1900, even when taking the explanatory prose into consideration. For anyone playing 4 e3 against the Nimzo, playing the Nimzo as black, or wanting to learn more about chess, this book is a must-buy. I love it and can't wait to see the next volumes.

My assessment of the book: \*\*\*\*\*

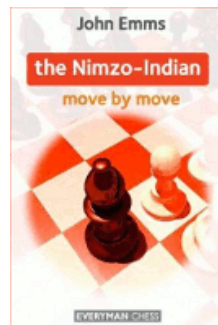
**My assessment of this book: ♦♦♦♦♦**

**Order [The Strategic Nimzo-Indian](#)**

by Ivan Sokolov

*The Nimzo-Indian: Move by Move* by John Emms, Everyman Chess 2012, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 368pp. \$29.95 (ChessCafe Price \$22.95)

Having just thoroughly endorsed the above book by Sokolov on the Nimzo-Indian, what could this book possibly have to offer to capture your attention? Well, for starters, Emms is an excellent author, one of my favorites over the years, and he has played the Nimzo-Indian for decades, and knows it exceedingly well. In addition, this book presents an entire repertoire for Black, and the level of the coverage and discussion allows players of less lofty levels to take part in the



fun.



In the Introduction, under the headline "The Attraction of the Nimzo-Indian," Emms writes as follows:

"I've been playing the Nimzo-Indian for over 30 years, starting as a junior all the way up to grandmaster level. I swapped around with other openings but always remained loyal to the Nimzo.

"I'm sure one of the reasons I'm still attracted to the Nimzo-Indian is that I'm always learning something new about it, even after all these years. I discovered quite a few new things during the writing of this book. The Nimzo-Indian is such a flexible opening with so many different possibilities and so many ways to play it. New ideas are always cropping up too, not just novelties in existing lines but whole new variations.

"Even so, probably the greatest attraction of the Nimzo-Indian is its reliability. The Nimzo-Indian is undoubtedly a sound opening and has no chance of being refuted anytime soon. Yet it also offers players enough imbalances in the position to be able to outplay opponents – the two most typical ones being superior pawn structure versus bishop pair and centre (see Chapter 1-2), and lead in development versus bishop pair (see Chapter 5). I feel it's these two qualities – soundness and imbalance – which have attracted virtually all the World's leading players to the Nimzo-Indian at one time or another.

"I've always thought that one of the most difficult periods of a game is when our opening knowledge runs out, when we are 'out of the book' – when we have to think for ourselves. This happens in 99% of the games we play, and I've tried to address the situation in this book by focusing on the following:

- Typical situations in opening and middlegame positions (and very occasionally thematic endings)
- Typical plans for both sides and how players react to these.
- Typical and thematic tactical opportunities for both sides.
- The principles and guidelines of each variation covered.
- The key questions we should be asking ourselves during study and in game situations.

"I've also presented the opening theory for each variation covered, and highlighted move-order issues and possible transpositions into other lines in the book.

"In general I've chosen to cover well-known lines, but I've also favoured lines which I feel teach us a great deal about the basic principles of the Nimzo-Indian, for example fighting against the doubled c-pawns or exploiting lead in development when White avoids the doubled pawns."


The material is divided as follows:

- Bibliography (1 page)
- Introduction (4 pages)
- Samisch Variation (39 pages)
- The 4 f3 Variation (37 pages)
- Rubinstein Variation: 4 e3 Main Line (49 pages)
- Rubinstein Variation: 4 e3 Other Lines (53 pages)
- Classical Variation: 4 Qc2 0-0 (64 pages)
- Classical Variation: 4 Qc2 with ...c5 (50 pages)
- Leningrad Variation: 4 Bg5 (32 pages)
- Kasparov Variation: 4 Nf3 (28 pages)
- Index of Variations (6 pages)
- Index of Games (2 pages)

As with any other book by Emms, you can't really go wrong. He has the uncanny ability to present the material in an easily digestible fashion, while

providing sufficient depth to confidently understand the material. Thus, preparing the reader to play the opening because of his expert tutelage in theory, strategies, and everything else you could possibly want to play this opening as black.

For those who have toyed with the Nimzo-Indian a little, and are ready to take a fresh leap in understanding by putting together an opening repertoire, this book is a wonderful place to start. If you are rated around 1500-1600 (or even considerably higher), then this book will take your understanding up another level.

**My assessment of this book:** 

**Order [The Nimzo-Indian: Move by Move](#)**

by John Emms

**Order [The Nimzo-Indian: Move by Move \(Ebook\)](#)**

by John Emms

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*The English: Move by Move* by Steve Giddins, Everyman Chess 2012, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 270pp. \$27.95 (ChessCafe Price \$22.95)

In the introduction, Giddins writes, 'Probably the main reason why the English has proved so popular over the years, with players of such diverse styles as Botvinnik and Petrosian on the one hand, and Tal and Kasparov on the other, is its great flexibility. It can be interpreted in many different ways, ranging from slow manoeuvring games to slashing kingside attacks. The great range of possible development plans, for both sides, also means that the English is much less prone to detailed, move-by-move analysis, than many forcing openings. This results in less pure "theory", which makes the opening a useful weapon against weaker players, who cannot simply learn by rote a forcing sequence, leading to a draw, as they can in some ultra-sharp openings. The English tends to be an opening where understanding is more important than theoretical knowledge, and this often makes it a favourite with more experienced players, who lack the time, energy or inclination to swot up on sharp theoretical variations, and prefer to lure their opponents into relatively quiet, strategical positions, where their own greater experience will turn the battle in their favour.'



Having played and written about the English Opening for more than thirty years, I concur with all of the above observations. Though I was a little perplexed with the very brief contents page:

- Series Foreword (1 page)
- Bibliography (1 page)
- Introduction (4 pages)
- ...e5 Lines (93 pages)
- ...c5 Lines (37 pages)
- The Mikenas System (20 pages)
- Anti-QGD, Slav and Hedgehog Lines (53 pages)
- Anti-Grünfeld, King's Indian and Dutch Lines (40 pages)
- Building a Repertoire (14 pages)
- Index of Variations (2 pages)
- Index of Games (1 page)

In the introduction, Giddins explains this as follows:


"The present volume is not intended to provide a complete coverage of all English lines. By the same token, nor is it a repertoire book. The reader will not find a complete, coherent set of recommended lines for

White against each possible black defence. Many such books have been published before, and I see little sense in trying to rival them.

"Instead what this book seeks to do, via a series of deeply-annotated illustrative games, is to instruct the reader in the main English Variations, and the different structures to which they lead. There is considerable emphasis here on the middlegame positions which result from the opening. As stated above, the English is an opening where understanding is more important than concrete theoretical knowledge, and the would-be English player, particular at club and congress level, will win far more points by understanding the positional and strategic ideas of the opening, than he will be rote-learning of specific sequences."

That said, and then returning to at the contents page, I find it remarkable that the chapter on the Symmetrical English is so much shorter than the first chapter on 1 c4 e5. Looking over the lines that are covered in the two chapters, it quickly becomes clear why. Lines such as the entire complex of variations that arise after 1 c4 e5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 d4 cxd4 are not covered. The double fianchetto is also missing, as are many other popular and lesser lines. While it seems tempting not to present a complete repertoire, writing a book on the opening as a whole is far more complicated, because you need to cover a greater amount of lines. And the English Opening, despite the author's neat words about specific variation knowledge being less important in the English than in other more forcing lines, there are still umpteen lines that need to be understood and deciphered, and move orders to be memorized and comprehended. One needs to know why one move order prevents certain variations, while another move order allows your opponent extra opportunities, etc.

Be that as it may, the lines that are discussed are covered in excellent fashion. The commentary and the Q&A format are both handled excellently, and for that the experienced author deserves praise. Nevertheless, there are many holes in the coverage, and I for one wish the book would have been a little more comprehensive.

**My assessment of this book:** 

**Order [The English: Move by Move](#)**  
by Steve Giddins

**Order [The English: Move by Move \(Ebook\)](#)**  
by Steve Giddins

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*The Torre Attack: Move by Move* by Richard Palliser, Everyman Chess 2012, Figurine Algebraic Notation, paperback, 302pp. \$28.95 (ChessCafe Price \$22.95)

Richard Palliser has for a long time demonstrated his ability to write excellent chess books, and he can now add to his curriculum vitae that he is the new editor of *Chess* magazine. He has written on Queen's Pawn Openings on more than one occasion, with two such examples being [Starting Out: d-pawn Attacks](#) and [Starting Out: The Trompowsky Attack](#).

It is hardly relevant to this book, but let me express my surprise that it is actually longer than the title on the English Opening (reviewed above) from the same *Move by Move* series.



The material is divided follows:

- Series Foreword (1 page)
- Bibliography (1 page)


- Introduction (2 pages)
- The ...g6 Torre Lines with ...d5 (51 pages)
- The ...g6 Torre Lines with ...d6 (51 pages)
- The ...g6 Torre: Other Approaches (21 pages)
- The ...e6 Torre: Defences with ...d5 (47 pages)
- The ...e6 Torre: Black Fianchettoes (34 pages)
- The ...e6 Torre: Two Forcing Lines (45 pages)
- Other Versions of the Torre (40 pages)
- Index of Variations (4 pages)
- Index of Games (1 page)

As Palliser readily admits, no matter how hard you try, you cannot play the Torre Attack in all your games as white. Not even after d4 Nf6 2 Nf3, because Black can then play 2...d5, when 3 Bg5 is no longer as interesting as after 2...g6 and 2...e6. Nevertheless, as Palliser also points out, there are enough opponents who want to play the Nimzo and King's Indian to make the opening worth the study.

With that in mind, there are plenty of reasons to start playing this opening. The Torre has a good deal of kick to it and enough poison to sting badly. There are many ways of playing the Torre, from a safe positional approach, to the sharp and tactical varieties, along with a nice mixture of both, which is the path that Palliser chooses. In fact, for positional players who are afraid of sacrificing material, Palliser pulls them right out of their comfort zone, in one line forcing White to be willing to sacrifice two or even three pawns for a massive initiative and attack.

All the while Palliser explains in detail what White gets in return for his offerings and why it is good for your chess education to step outside your comfort zone. Throughout the book, Palliser takes the reader through a journey of discovery to not only present a repertoire for White, but also to become a better chess player. The coverage is peppered with a solid presentation of the theoretical status of the various lines, explanatory prose, new ideas, and improvements over existing theory.

I like this book. It is a good starting point for those who want a repertoire based on 1 d4 without having to study a lot of the critical lines in mainstream openings such as the Nimzo-Indian, Queen's Indian, or King's Indian.

**My assessment of this book:** 

**Order [The Torre Attack: Move by Move](#)**  
by Richard Palliser

**Order [The Torre Attack: Move by Move \(Ebook\)](#)**  
by Richard Palliser

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