



COLUMNISTS

Checkpoint

Carsten Hansen

Reviewed this month:

Attacking with 1 e4
by John Emms

Attacking with 1 d4
by Angus Dunnington

Symmetrical English
by David Cummings

Concise Chess Openings
by Neil McDonald

1 e4, 1 d4 or 1 c4?

This month's *Checkpoint* features no less than four books from the very active British Publisher, Everyman. The first two are repertoire books for White, the third to some extent also, while the third is a general guide. Enjoy!

Attacking with 1 e4 by John Emms, 2001 Everyman Chess, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 160 pp., \$19.95

Other than being a strong GM, John Emms is also a popular chess writer with several fine works to his name, some of which have been reviewed in this column. His last few books have been published by Gambit, but this book marks a return for him to Everyman that published among others his *Easy Guide to the Nimzo-Indian*.

However, it is interesting to see that the approach with complete main games around which the body of theory is built, an approach that Everyman usually uses in this series of opening books, has been completely abandoned in this book. The index of variations has also found its way to the back of the book, where it ought to be, rather than being split up at the end of each chapter. These two factors make this book so much easier to navigate your way through compared to other books in this series. A welcome change, if you ask me.

The book is called *Attacking with 1 e4*, but as I first went through the book, I didn't feel particularly worried for Black, because the repertoire presented at first glance looks very tame:

- 1 Attacking the Sicilian: The Closed Variation (29 pages)
- 2 Attacking 1...e5: The Bishop's Opening (31 pages)
- 3 Attacking the French: The King's Indian Attack (39 pages)





- 4 Attacking the Caro-Kann: 2 c4 (19 pages)
- 5 Attacking the Pirc: The 150 Attack (13 pages)
- 6 Attacking the Modern: The 150 Attack (5 pages)
- 7 Attacking the Scandinavian (8 pages)
- 8 Attacking the Alekhine: The Exchange Variation (5 pages)
- 9 Other Black Defences (3 pages)

Would you be afraid to play Black against a repertoire like the above? Not me. But as usual when Emms goes to work on openings, something interesting comes out, and that is certainly also the case here. In the introduction, Emms makes the following points about his choice of lines:

- a) "In general I've opted for 'opening systems', in which learning the major ideas is just as important as learning the actual variations.
- b) "Even though I've often steered away from main lines, I've chosen openings with some pedigree."
- c) "I have, however, resisted the temptation for an 'all-in-one' solution. For example, the King's Indian Attack can be played against virtually every defence to 1 e4. However, it's generally thought that it's at its most effective when played against the French Defence; it's my choice here, but *only* against the French."
- d) "I've also avoided virtually all of Black's gambits, even if they are considered incorrect at the highest levels. It's just not most players' cup of tea to win an early pawn and then try and grovel out into an ending."
- e) He has used the variation by variation approach.
- f) In some lines Black may equalise, but in doing so he will never reach a dull equality, and White will still be able to play for a win.

Let's have a look at chapter one. His recommended Sicilian buster is the Closed Sicilian with Be3 and Qd2: **1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3**, and now every option for Black is met with 6 Be3. While 5...e6 and 5...Rb8, 5...d6 is obviously the main line, which is what I will examine. To assist me, I have picked up a little book by the Hungarian IM Attila Schneider: *Closed System of the Sicilian Defence* (Caissa 1999). A good little book on this opening, despite not mentioning a word about either 5...e6 or 5...Rb8. After a further **5...d6 6 Be3**,



we are at the start position. Here Emms has four main lines: a) 6...Nf6; b) 6...e5; c) 6...Rb8; d) 6...e6; as well as four minor alternatives: 6...Qa5, 6...Nd4, 6...b5 and 6...h5. Schneider mentions another three moves: 6...Bd7, 6...Nh6 and 6...b6, but doesn't mention 6...Qa5 and 6...h5.

In the line 6...b5, Emms' main line is 7 e5! Qd7, in which Schneider does nothing to contradict Emms. However, after the alternative 7...Bb7 and then 8 exd6 exd6 9 Nxb5 Nge7 (Ljubojevic-Miles, Plovdiv European Team Championship 1983) 10 Ne2 (Miles), Emms quotes an edge for White, but

Schneider continues with 10...Nf5 11 Nbc3 0-0 12 0-0 Re8 13 Qd2 Rb8 14 Bf4 Nb4,

with compensation, which seems right, and also 14...Ncd4 is fine for Black. On the other hand, White can try 13 Bd2, although Black still has some compensation for the pawn. After 6...Nf6, both Emms and Schneider quotes the same game, Emms evaluating it as better for White, Schneider as unclear.

After 6...e5, Emms presents much material that Schneider doesn't have, mainly because it couldn't include the games from 2000, that Emms has used. Nonetheless, several new ideas have been suggested by Emms, ideas that need to be tried out.

Then we have 6...Rb8, after 7 Qd2 b5 8 Nge2 b4 9 Nd1, Emms covers the following moves: 9...e5 (main line), 9...a5, 9...e6, and 9...Nf6. But Schneider has another couple of moves that deserves examination: 9...Nd4, quoting Yudasin-Gelfand, Munich 1991: 10 0-0 a5 11 c3 Nxe2+ 12 Qxe2 Ba6! 13 Re1?! Nf6 14 f4 0-0 15 Nf2 a4 (15...bxc3!?) 16 c4 Nd7 with a slight edge for Black. The other move is 9...Qb6, with the following analysis quoted: 10 0-0 a5 11 a3 h5 12 h3 e5 13 axb4 axb4, and now: a) 14 b3?! Nd4 =+ 15 Nb2 Bxh3! 16 Nc4 Bxg2 with a clear advantage for Black, Roos-Murey, French Team championship 1992; b) 14 f4 f6 15 f5 [CH: 15 fxe5 dxe5 16 b3 followed by Nb2 looks promising for White or even 15 b3!?] 15...gxf5 (15...g5) 16 exf5 Nge7 [CH: 16...Nh6!? looks better] 17 g4 hxg4 18 hxg4 d5 19 Ng3 d4 20 Bf2 Bh6 21 Qe1?! (21 Qe2!) 21...b3 22 c3 Ba6 23 Qe2 Kf7, which is given as unclear and not attributed to anybody.

The main line is 6...e6, which consistently is better covered by Emms. In every line the games are more up to date and plenty of new ideas and individual analysis is presented. In general, chapter one makes a real case for playing the Closed Sicilian, although a few things, some more important than others, have slipped through the cracks.


Chapter two and three is more of the same thing; the material is up-to-date with a lot of new input from Emms.

In chapter four, the Caro-Kann with 2 c4, presents the biggest problem for potential users of Emms' recommendations. In the other chapters, the lines are pretty straightforward with typical 1 e4 positions on the board, but after 2 c4, Black has the option of 2...e5, which will take play into the lanes of the Old Indian Defence (3 Nf3 d6 4 d4 Nd7 5 Nc3 Ngf6 6 Be2 Be7) or the Classical King's Indian (3 Nf3 d6 4 d4 Nd7 5 Nc3 Ngf6 6 Be2 g6 followed by 7...Bg7). Both of these openings are considered slightly better for White, but the play that arises is completely unlike anything the White player otherwise will come across. Therefore my personal opinion is that Emms should have invested some more time explaining the typical plans, without that, I think these lines will be a recipe for potential embarrassment for White.

Chapter five and six present the 150 Attack against the Pirc and Modern respectively. Again the coverage is good with a lot new material in print for the first time. Chapter seven on the Scandinavian is more of the same thing. Chapter eight is the Alekhine, against which the Exchange Variation is recommended. In repertoire books for White on 1 e4, this line is almost always the one of choice, which is very much due to the fact that it doesn't take up a lot of pages to explain, and the main lines after for example 1. e4 Nf6 2 e5 Nd5 3 d4 d6 4 Nf3, are only slightly better for White at best and not always particularly easy to understand. In the final Chapter, very brief coverage is given on 1...Nc6, 1...b6 and 1...a6.

At the end of each chapter (with the exception of chapter one), Emms has a little section called "Important Points". Here he explains the basic guidelines for playing the lines that have been presented. I think this makes a lot of sense given that the present book is aimed at not so strong players, who are not necessarily familiar with the ins and outs of the opening in question.

This book has a lot to offer: a well-chosen repertoire, generally good in-depth coverage, plenty of new ideas and independent analysis, as well as a reasonable amount of explanations of ideas and plans. For a lot of players, this book can come in very handy, as it presents a repertoire that is not too difficult to understand, while it has enough bite in it to present Black with plenty of challenges. Therefore this book can easily be recommended to players upto about 2000-2100 i rating, but even stronger players may be able to benefit from the many new ideas and downright improvements over existing theory. After reading this book, the repertoire of choice seems more dangerous for Black than I initially thought.

My assessment of this book: 

[Order](#) *Attacking with 1 e4*
by John Emms

Attacking with 1 d4 by Angus Dunnington, 2001 Everyman Chess, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 160 pp., \$19.95

Attacking with 1 d4 somehow doesn't sound completely right. But in the present book, British international master Angus Dunnington wants to prove to us that it is possible to build up an attacking repertoire based on the normally quite solid 1 d2-d4.



In the past several books have tried to prove the same claim, usually not with an awful lot of success. Soltis wrote "Winning with 1 d4"; Schiller has written a book that also failed to impress. Notable exceptions are Burgess/Pedersen's books *Beating the Indian Defences* and a similar book on the Queen's Gambit. But it certainly is not an easy task. However, Dunnington does not fall in the trap of trying to prove an advantage for White in every single line – instead he, as the back cover blurb tells us, "concentrates on constructing easy-to-learn systems against all of

Black's possible defences. He chooses lines which are fun to play, easy to learn and will pose your unsuspecting opponent problems."

In the preface, Dunnington elaborates: "...throughout the book the lines tend to be quite aggressive, mostly with an emphasis on space, fluid development, inducing weaknesses in the enemy camp, generating an initiative etc. Above all, however, it is important that a system is sound and that specific plans and features are relatively easy to understand." He also tells us that the present book isn't intended to be a watertight repertoire book, but a tool for the reader to open 1 d4 with confidence. Too many repertoire books have titles like "Winning with..." or "Beating the..." and then when it comes down to the critical lines, the books fail to deliver, because of shortcuts taken or laziness by the author, poor repertoire choices etc. By not claiming to be a complete repertoire, the author in this case distances himself from possible attacks from that angle.

The material is divided up as follows:

- 1 Queen's Gambit Accepted with 3 e4 (34 pages)
- 2 Queen's Gambit Declined and Slav Defences (26 pages)
- 3 1 d4 d5 2 c4: Black's Second Move Alternatives (13 pages)
- 4 King's Indian and Benoni: The Four Pawns Attack (21 pages)

- 5 Grünfeld Defence with 4 Bf4 (12 pages)
- 6 Nimzo-Indian Defence with 4 f3 (17 pages)
- 7 Dutch Defence (9 pages)
- 8 Other Defences (21 pages)

Looking at the distribution of pages to the above chapters, I find it mind-bugling how Dunnington invests 34 pages, the longest chapter, on the Queen's Gambit Accepted, when chapter two with theory-wise much heavier lines, only gets 26 pages.

When I tried to find some more details on how the lines were covered, I looked for the index of variations, but there is no index, not even in the traditional Everyman format at end of each chapter. That obviously deducts points from the overall impression, as it is highly annoying to have to look through an entire chapter to find one particular line.

In regards to chapter one, I must admit that I'm no great expert on 3 e4 in the QGA, but the coverage appears to be quite good, with new ideas, independent analysis and well-annotated games.

Moving on to chapter two, I find several things that worry me. His choice of the Exchange Variation against the regular Queen's Gambit Declined makes sense. However, in regards to the Slav, there are potholes as big as cars. His recommendation against the Slav is 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nc3, intending to meet 3...Nf6 with 4 Bg5, but 3...dxc4, about which Burgess in his excellent *The Slav* writes "This move is the principal argument against the 3 Nc3 move-order", isn't even mentioned at all by Dunnington. A major letdown. For comparison, Burgess spends 10 pages discussing the merits of 3...dxc4.

A further comparison of Dunnington's recommendation of 3...Nf6 4 Bg5 with Burgess' coverage, shows us that we have to proceed with care. Burgess gives 4 Bg5 a '?!' (= dubious). Dunnington's main line continues with 4...Ne4, which Burgess also calls dubious. Instead Burgess prefers 4...dxc4, which also receives some attention from Dunnington. After 5 a4, Burgess gives 5...Qa5 as the strongest move, both quoting the same game, but evaluating the position differently. However, Burgess also mentions 5...Nd5, which he calls greedy, but nevertheless Black has good prospects after 6 e4 (or 6 a5 f6 7 Bh4 e6 8 e4 Bb4 9 Qa4 Na6, Tamburini-Tarnowski, Leipzig OL 1960) 6...Nxc3 7 bxc3 b5 8 Nf3 a6. Also 5...Na6 is mentioned by Burgess, after 6 e4 both 6...Nb4 and 6...Be6 have proven fully playable or even good for Black. Neither 6th move alternative is covered by Dunnington.

Another hole, although less critical is 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nc3 e6 4 e4 Bb4!?, which is not mentioned by Dunnington either. In chapter 3, I'm missing coverage of 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c5, which was analysed by German FM Stefan Bücker in a *New in Chess* Yearbook a while back.

Chapter 4 sees the Four Pawns Attack in action against the King's Indian Defence and the Modern Benoni. Although I have played it against the King's Indian, I don't really trust it, but Dunnington makes a case for it, and I will leave it at that. However, looking at the Modern Benoni, I obviously have to compare notes with Watson's superb *Guide to the Modern Benoni*.

After the initial moves 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 f4 Bg7 8 Bb5+ Nfd7 9 a4, we have reached a critical position. Watson covers two moves: 9...a6 and 9...Qh4+, Dunnington also has two: 9...Qh4+ and 9...0-0. So here we have another problem for White, since Watson considers 9...a6!? fully adequate for Black. Furthermore, Dunnington's coverage of 9...Qh4+ is at best miniscule and

completely inadequate, with only one game example after 10 g3 Qe7 and one example on 10...Qd8. For comparison, Watson covers these moves on no less than 11 pages. After 10...Qe7 11 Nf3 0-0 12 0-0, Dunnington only mentions 12...Na6, while Watson entirely depends on 12...a6. In the line after 10...Qd8, Watson quotes the same game as Dunnington, only to follow up with a recommendation by Canadian IM Hébert, who improves on the main game. However, it is quite surprising that Dunnington focuses his attention on 9...0-0 and 8...Nbd7?!, both of which are plainly better for White.


Also worth mentioning is it that 7...Qe7, which Watson endorses as an alternative, is "refuted" by Dunnington's (who gives 7...Qe7 a '!') 8 Nf3! "and now 8...Nxe4? drops a piece to 9 Qa4+." For some reason Watson 'missed' 8...Nxe4 and instead analyses the less obvious 8...Bg4!?, which leads to very interesting and complicated play.

In chapter six, we are introduced to 4 f3 against the Nimzo-Indian, which is quite complex and an interesting choice in a repertoire. And chapter seven, the Dutch is being scrutinized. Also against the Dutch, Dunnington has chosen some very sharp lines for White: 1 d4 f5 2 c4 Nf6 3 Nc3 g6 4 h4!?, and 3...e6 4 f3!?.

The final, and eighth chapter, should then cover the rest of the openings that have not been covered in the previous chapters, right? Wrong! The last openings to be covered are: the Benko Gambit (4 f3 - but for some reason he hasn't covered 4...e6 5 e4 bxc4 6 Bxc4 exd5 7 exd5 d6 which is not problematic for Black), the Budapest Gambit (4 Bf4), the Modern Defence, and the Czech Benoni. The Black Knights' Tango (1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 Nc6) isn't mentioned, nor is 1 d4 e6 2 c4 Bb4+, as well as many other minor lines.

For a repertoire book I think there simply are too many loose ends, and even if he tells us that the present book is not watertight repertoire, the holes are much too large.

Nevertheless, the book presents many interesting ideas in many of the openings that are covered. For the same reason, this book could be a worthy buy for those who want to spike up their White opening repertoire with some aggressive new ideas. As always, it is recommended that you take the time to understand and analyse the opening before you start playing it.

My assessment of this book: 

[Order](#) *Attacking with 1 d4*
by Angus Dunnington

Symmetrical English by David Cummings, 2001 Everyman Chess, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 160 pp., \$19.95

Finally a book with a subject where I'm 100 % familiar with the material and what kind of ordeal the author had to go through to cram all the material into the final book.

David Cummings is also someone with whom I am familiar. He is a Welsh IM, currently residing in Canada. Prior to that he worked for the British (then powerhouse) chess publisher, Batsford, as editor. It was here I dealt with him during the latter part of my first book (with Peter Heine Nielsen) on the Sicilian Dragon.

Other than that he is in Great Britain known as a specialist on the English Opening. Therefore it was some excitement (and some nervousness, given my



most recent book is on the same subject) I anticipated the arrival of this book. However, when I saw the book, a skinny-looking 160 pages short book, I thought: "This is not possible, he must have left out a massive amount of material in order to fit the Symmetrical English into frames of this book."

Opening the book, I always read the introduction (or foreword, if you like) to see what the author is up to. A book without a foreword is usually not a good sign, although it by no means is a requirement. In the introduction of the present book, Cummings tells us the following:

"I had the following goals in mind for this book:

- 1) Give a 'feel' for the opening through games that illustrate the recurring themes, some of which often occur deep into the middlegame.
- 2) Cover the most critical lines and present theory that is up to date at the time of writing, together with suggested improvements over published works. Inevitably, given the huge volume of games available, something had to give, so I compromised on the depth of coverage of non-critical material. For example, if in a certain line there are four different lines that equalise for Black, I did not try to cover them all in depth.
- 3) Give an insight into the move order issues and transpositions (into and out of the Symmetrical English), which are such an important facet of this opening. The fact is that many of the main lines in the Symmetrical can be reached by almost any permutation of the first 7 or 8 moves!"

Point 1: He has chosen the complete games formula, which is pretty much standard in these books from Everyman. For weaker players it makes a lot of sense to study these complete games as it will aid during your games with the opening in question that you have seen previous games with the line and you therefore will have an easier time during the game finding the right moves and the right plan. However, there is a danger here in that all lines may not be covered, and you may be left hanging with nowhere to go. **Point 2:** This is as expected, although some authors don't introduce ideas of their own or even hint that some material may not be covered in sufficiently. Here at least we know that we have to be on the look out. Finally, **Point 3:** Very important for transpositional openings such as the Symmetrical English.

Particularly given the last point, it is very peculiar that the book doesn't have a proper index. As an example, let me show you the contents page:

- 1 The Hedgehog (21 pages)
- 2 The Double Fianchetto Defence (11 pages)
- 3 White plays an early d2-d4 (30 pages)
- 4 Black plays an early ...d7-d5 (30 pages)
- 5 Symmetrical English with g2-g3 (25 pages)
- 6 Symmetrical English Main Line with 5 Nf3 Nf6 (17 pages)
- 7 Breaking the Symmetry (18 pages)

Obviously you can guess what some of the chapters are about, but to find the exact details, you would turn to the Index of Variations, which should be found in the back, but in this book isn't. Instead, as usual in the Everyman books in this series, there is an individual index in each chapter. Therefore you may have to consult several chapters before you find what you're looking for.

Moving over to the contents itself, which as usual consists of a number of main

games, in this case 63 total, with the theory applied to the games. The games have been played, with few exceptions, during the last five years. This is clearly a testament to the popularity of the Symmetrical English, which has won the hearts of many of our strongest grandmasters, as White and Black.

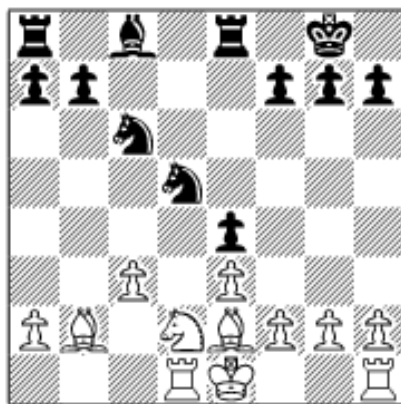
Although Cummings has been forced by space considerations to cut a lot of material, you never really get the impression that he has cut too much to get the topic covered. Obviously options for both sides are left out throughout the book, but this never claims to cover everything, nor does it intend to.

The lines are covered with plenty of insight for both sides. Therefore weaker and inexperienced players will be able to benefit considerably from this book, whereas for comparison, they will most likely find my book on the same subject more difficult to deal with, as it focuses more on a complete and technical coverage.

However, Cummings does provide us with a lot of new ideas and analysis of his own, which makes the present book interesting for stronger players too, although they usually will demand more details in the coverage, and here the book falls short.

Let's take a look at some of his analysis and new ideas. This first example is from chapter 3:

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 Nf3 cxd4 4 Nxd4 e5 5 Nb5 d5 6 cxd5 Bc5 7 N5c3 0-0 8 e3 e4 9 Be2, here the main game, Mikhalchishin-Kasparov, Soviet Championship 1981, continued with **9...Qe7. 9...Re8 10 Nd2**, and here Cummings mentions that "both ECO and NCO give **10...Bb4** as leading to equality on the bases of the reference **11 Qb3 Bxc3 12 bxc3 Qxd5 13 Qxd5 Nxd5 14 Bb2 Nc6**, Perkovic-Barczay, Subotica 1981." But Cummings finds that White's chances are slightly preferable after **15 Rd1** and gives the following lines:



a) **15...Nb6 16 c4** frees the b2-bishop.

b) **15...Bf5 16 g4 Bg6 17 h4 h6 18 Rg1 Rad8** [CH: while this centralization is perfectly logical, I think the redeployment of the d5-knight by **18...Nc7** is better, e.g. **19 h5 Bh7 20 g5 hxg5 21 Rxg5 Ne6** and the knight participates in the defence of the king, although White still holds the initiative] **19 h5 Bh7 20 g5 hxg5 21 Rxg5 f6 22 Rxd5 Rxd5 23 Bc4 Ree5** (or **23...Red8 24 Nf1 Ne7 25 Ba3 24 Nf3** winning material.

c) **15...Nf6 16 Nc4 Bg4 17 Nd6 Re7** [CH: Black seems to be able to do better with **17...Bxe2 18 Kxe2 Re6!?** (**18...Re7** transposes to the main line) **19 c4** (**19 Rd2 b6** appears to be okay for Black) **19...Ne8 20 Nf5 Ne7!** with approximately even chances] **18 c4 Bxe2 19 Kxe2** with good centralization.

Another example is the following:

1 c4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 Nc3 d5 4 cxd5 Nxd5 5 e4 Nb4 6 Bc4 Nd3+ 7 Ke2 Nf4+ 8 Kf1 Ne6 9 b4 g6 10 bxc5 Bg7 11 Bxe6 Bxe6 12 d4 Nc6 13 Be3 Qa5,



and now his main game Ftacnik-Pinter, Prague 1985, continued with the inferior 14 Qd2, but **14 Rc1!?** is more critical. However, **14...0-0-0 15 d5 Bxc3 16 Qb3 Bf6 17 dxe6**, which Stohl once gave as much better for White, but Cummings disagrees and states that Black has a great position after **17...Qa6+ 18Kg1 Rd3 19 Qc2** [CH 19 Qb1 is better, but still okay for Black] **19...fxe6**.

This is just a couple of examples, and even though I don't agree with all of his suggestions, comments, weighting of the material, he is in general doing a great job of presenting and adding

to the theory of the Symmetrical English.

For people who want to learn how to play the Symmetrical English, the present book is an obvious choice to start with. More experienced English players will also benefit from this book, which has a lot of qualities but falls a little short in the depth of the coverage.

My assessment of this book:

Concise Chess Openings by Neil McDonald, 2001 Everyman Chess, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 304 pp., \$15.95

As I was sitting and looking at this book after having received it in the mail, I didn't quite know what to think. It is about the size of a pocket book (4.5" x 5.5" x 1"), which is not the size of most chess books, but it makes it very suitable to bring along on a short trip, when you need something not too heavy to read.



Is it possible to cover all openings in a small book such as this, even if you are being concise? Before going through the book, I would say definitely no. But the publisher doesn't seem to have had the same doubts, if you look at the back cover blurb:

- written by a renowned openings expert
- every main opening is examined
- includes all the latest theory
- a pocket book ideal for club and tournament players alike

"Learning new chess openings can be an arduous task, even for seasoned players, never mind those with less experience. Finding the right openings to suit your style can be a very time-consuming task. In *Concise Chess Openings*, Grandmaster Neil McDonald provides the reader with a reliable and up-to-date reference work. On every single opening the reader is likely to face, there's enough information to play the variations with confidence, but not too much so as to drown the reader with waves of theory."

It sounds almost too good to be true, and it is. McDonald makes an attempt in the introduction to describe things more accurately: "It has taken hundreds of years of trial and error by great minds like Alekhine and, in our day, Kasparov to reach out current knowledge of the openings. As a reward for their efforts, many of these pioneers have had their names appended to different opening systems - some with more justification than others! This book seeks to explain their discoveries without becoming lost in a

maze of detail or becoming too generalised to be of practical value. You should regard this book as a tour through the openings, if you wish you can start right at the beginning or just join it when it reaches a point that particularly interests you. I hope whatever approach you choose you will find it interesting and rewarding."

The above doesn't tell us an awful lot, but enough to tell us that the author pretty much has decided to write a little bit of this and a little bit of that, with no clear distinction between what is important and how many pages each opening should cover.

This becomes even clearer when we move on to the main contents of this book, which is distributed as follows:

King Pawn Openings

- 1 Open games (40 pages)
- 2 Ruy Lopez (25 pages)
- 3 Sicilian Defence (69 pages)
- 4 French Defence (26 pages)
- 5 Caro-Kann Defence (9 pages)
- 6 Other Openings after 1 e4 (20 pages)

Queen Pawn Openings

- 7 Queen's Gambit (29 pages)
- 8 Nimzo-Indian Systems (15 pages)
- 9 Grünfeld Defence (14 pages)
- 10 King's Indian Defence (14 pages)
- 11 Other Openings after 1 d4 (19 pages)

Others

- 12 The English and Other Openings (15 pages)

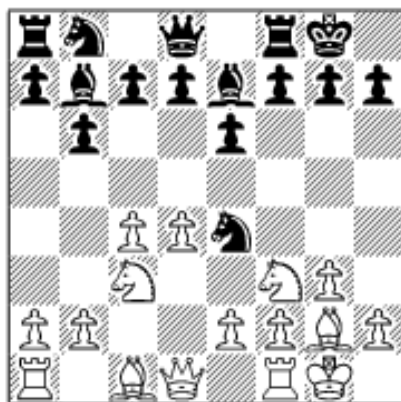
This brief overview already reveals that there is not a proper balance in the material. Openings starting with 1 e4 cover 189 pages, while openings starting with moves other than 1 e4 cover 106 pages. For comparison, the encyclopaedia devotes two volumes to 1 e4 openings, while the remaining openings are divided into three volumes. That being said, 1 e4 is more popular than other openings amongst weaker chess players. However, is it that much more popular? Also look at the French Defence compared to the Queen's Gambit: almost the same number of pages. Is that logical? Only if you consider that McDonald plays the French and not the Queen's Gambit.

Inspecting this a bit closer, the reasons for this odd gap become more evident. For example the King's Gambit (1 e4 e5 2 f4), a McDonald favourite gets 11 pages of coverage, the Danish Gambit (1 e4 e5 2 d4 exd4 3 c3 dxc3 4 Bc4 cxb2 5 Bxb2) 1.5 pages, Vienna Game (1 e4 e5 2 Nc3) (incl. the Frankenstein-Dracula Variation) 6 pages, Damiano Defence (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 f6) 1 page, this compared to the more topical openings Petroff Defence getting 3 pages, Two Knights' Defence (2 pages). The balance, if there is any, is way off.

However, when you move on to the Ruy Lopez chapter, you actually get the feeling of being informed about what's going on. The same goes for the chapters on the Sicilian

and the French, although much has been left out, e.g. in the coverage of the Sicilian Dragon, one of the main lines: 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 0-0-0 Rc8 11 Bb3 Ne5 12 h4 Nc4 13 Bxc4 Rxc4, the main line move 14 h5 isn't even mentioned, while the line 9 0-0-0 Bd7 gets coverage.

Moving further along in the book to the Nimzo-Indian Defence, McDonald calls the line 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 b6 5 Nf3 Bb7 6 Bd3 Ne4 7 0-0 f5 for the Fianchetto Variation, but in fact this is the Dutch Variation. The Flexible Variation 4 Nf3 is only mentioned in conjunction with 5 Bg5, not 4...b6 5 Qb3, which has been quite popular, nor is 4...c5 5 g3 mentioned. Even more farcical is the coverage of the Queen's Indian, where the main attention is given to 4 a3 and 4 Nc3, while 4 g3 is covered as follows: "After 4 g3 Black can equalise with sensible play: 4...Bb7 (4...Ba6!?) 5 Bg2 Be7 6 0-0 0-0 7 Nc3 Ne4!.



As a rule ...Ne4 should always be the response to Nc3 in this line. 8 Qc2 Nxc3 9 Qxc3 f5 10 b3 Bf6 11 Bb2 d6 12 Rad1 Qe7 13 Ne1 Bxg2 14 Nxc2 Nc6 and Black is equal." That's it! For the record, Damiano Defence (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 f6) gets more coverage than the Fianchetto Variation in the Queen's Indian! What is going on? Under the Bogó-Indian (1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 Bb4+), McDonald doesn't mention 4 Nbd2, and after 4 Bd2, he only really covers 4...c5!?!; 4...Qe7!?! is "interesting", and that's all.

Under the English Opening, his attention is focused on the pure Symmetrical English (1 c4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7), and therefore important lines such as the Rubinstein Variation, the Hedgehog, the Anti-Benoni remain unmentioned. Also after 1 c4 e5, he covers few lines and leaves us wondering how he chose which lines should be included and which not.

I will end this review by taking another look at the back cover blurb:

- "Every main opening is examined" - covered - yes, examined - no!
- "Includes all the latest theory" - hmmm...
- "A pocket book ideal for club and tournament players alike" - I don't think this book is ideal for anybody.
- "McDonald provides the reader with a reliable and up-to-date reference work" - up to date to what? And reliable for whom? Those that want to be confused perhaps.
- "On every single opening the reader is likely to face, there's enough information to play the variations with confidence..." - as I have pointed out, on some lines there is barely any coverage, so how can the reader be confident?

Without being unnecessarily mean-spirited, I can safely say that this is the worst book McDonald has written to date. I have praised several of his previous works, but this book will not help even the weakest players, it is frankly quite awful and a waste of paper. Should you need some basic guidance in the opening, a classic like Fine's *The Ideas behind the Chess Openings* would still serve well, as well as others.

My assessment of this book: ❖

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>The Ratings</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"> — A poor book, not recommended.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"> — Not a particularly good book, but perhaps useful for some readers.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"> — A useful book.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"> — Good book, recommended.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"> — Excellent book, highly recommended.</p>

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