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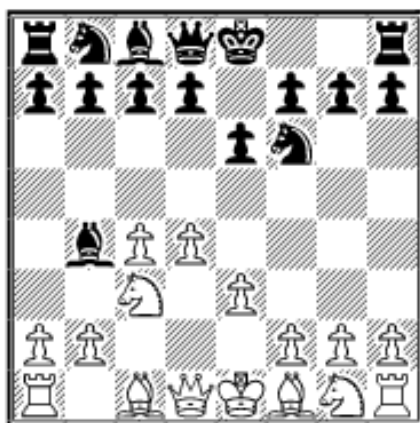
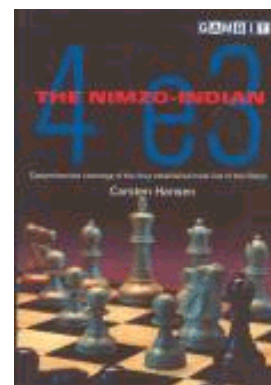


Nova Nimzo

Stephen Ham

The Nimzo-Indian: 4 e3, by Carsten Hansen, Gambit Publications Ltd., Soft cover, Figurine Algebraic Notation, 320pp., \$23.95.

More chess books exist than for all other games combined. And, the majority of these have primarily focused upon opening theory. So given this plenitude of opening theory books, it surprises me that we don't have greater coverage of one of the most popular of opening lines, namely the 4 e3 Nimzo-Indian. After all, since its inception, this has been considered one of the main lines, although recently 4 Qc2 seems more "fashionable." Yes, ECO E, NCO, MCO and the like cover this line, and there are several recent books that cover the Nimzo-Indian in general, such as Emms' *Easy Guide to the Nimzo-Indian* and *Starting Out: The Nimzo Indian*, by Chris. However, other than Pliester's comprehensive *Rubinstein Complex of the Nimzo-Indian Defense*, I'm unaware of any other recent book in English devoted specifically to the positions arising from 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3. Although Pliester's book is impressive, opening theory has evolved in the past seven years. Fortunately, the void in both specific and recent coverage has just been filled by [ChessCafe.com](#) columnist Carsten Hansen's third book for Gambit Publications, *The Nimzo-Indian: 4 e3*.



The Nimzo-Indian: 4 e3 begins with a short Foreword, dated as recently as September 2002. This is a clue that the contents may be very current. Next follows an ample bibliography of printed and electronic source materials, including Informator 83 and *The Week in Chess* #399. Although both Informator 84 and *The Week in Chess* #417 are available at the time of this review, this is additional evidence that the book's contents are "fresh." It's

also nice to see that correspondence chess materials were referenced, since [ChessCafe.com](#) columnist, Timothy Harding's Megacorr 2 was listed as well. Conspicuous by its absence though was any mention of the *New In Chess* Yearbooks, which Hansen has favorably reviewed in his *Checkpoint*



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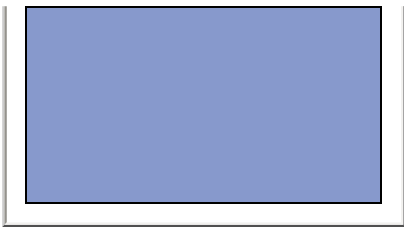
column.

The book is divided into two parts. Part One covers all responses after 4...0-0, with the following chapters:

- 1 Karpov Variation
- 2 Parma Variation and Related Systems
- 3 ...Ba5 Systems
- 4 Nimzowitsch Variation
- 5 Khasin Variation
- 6 Main Variation
- 7 Classical Variation
- 8 Averbakh Variation
- 9 Delayed Fianchetto Variation
- 10 Reshevsky Variation
- *Part Two covers all other 4th moves for Black:*
- 11 Fischer Variation and Related Systems
- 12 Dutch Variation
- 13 Keres Variation and Related Systems
- 14 Classical Fianchetto Variation
- 15 Hubner Variation
- 16 Modern Variation and Related Systems
- 17 Rubinstein Variation
- 18 Taimanov Variation and Odds and Ends

The book concludes with an Index of Variations that spans 4½ pages, filling the final half-page with an Index of Named Variations.

Personally I had never heard of most of these named variants until I read Gligoric's *Play The Nimzo-Indian Defense* (Pergamon, 1985). For example, Gligoric refers to the 4 e3 0-0 5 Bd3 d5 6 Nf3 b6 7 0-0 d5 line as Tal's Variation. The Introduction of Gligoric's book provides the following strange explanation for this nomenclature. "Certain names appear for the first time here - the Flexible Variation, Alekhine's Variation, the Dutch Variation, Tal's Variation, Nimzowitsch's Variation, Reykjavik Variation, Averbakh's Variation, the Delayed Fianchetto Variation, etc. Whether or not the author's method is justified is perhaps of lesser importance. The fact is that Nimzowitsch, Keres, Bronstein, etc., were responsible for several important continuations in this defense, but, for practical reasons, their names could be used only once each in this book." Hansen names his chapters similarly although not identically. Perhaps this is because his predecessor, Pliester, followed Gligoric's lead on this matter. Nevertheless, Hansen instead named the above line The Classical Fianchetto Variation (Chapter 14), although he does mention there that the line can be called the Tal Variation. I doubt that this arbitrary naming of variations and chapters is practical since I don't believe that chess players use this nomenclature. If I were to now write about the Khasin Variation, would you know what variation was being discussed? Instead, why not use the popular Informator coding system? For example, if we want to see Hansen's assessment of the theory regarding the latest



Kasparov-Kramnik 4 e3 Nimzo-Indian game (Botvinnik Memorial Rapid Match, 2001), it's far easier to look it up in a Chapter labeled E44 than it is to learn that it's found in the chapter entitled Fischer Variation and Related Systems. Finally I have one last hair to split regarding player's names. I find it odd that Hansen follows Gligoric's practice of using the Germanic spelling Nimzowitsch, rather than the anglicized Nimzovich. To my eyes, this spelling gives the book an archaic feel.

Hansen's earlier book, *The Symmetrical English* (Gambit Publications Ltd, 2000), begins each chapter with a "Quick Summary." While I find this summary really helpful, locating it prior to the chapter's contents felt strange. Instead, I prefer it at the end of the chapter. This is a just a personal preference; others may feel differently. However, I'm happy to report that *The Nimzo-Indian: 4 e3* provides a very handy "Conclusion" at the end of the chapter. The bad news though is that he only provides "Conclusions" for half of them (specifically, chapters 1,7,8,9,10,12,13,14 and 18). Why? In a book filled with as much data as this one, it's easy to become lost among all the detail, so these "Conclusions" provide a welcome "big picture" evaluation for the reader. It restates the best lines and gives some helpful assessments. Here is an example of the conclusion to the chapter entitled: Reshevsky Variation. "Of White's options on move 7, only 7 cxd5 offers him any realistic chance of obtaining an advantage. Line A (7...Nxd5) is much livelier than Line B and therefore this will be the choice for people who are playing for a win or like dynamic positions as Black. Even so, the end result is a fairly balanced position." The conclusion continues on in a similar manner, but I think you can get a feel for how helpful these "Conclusions" are for the reader.

Often books on opening theory devote some space to an historical review, showing how the system began and evolved into its present form. This adds some value but it also takes up space, since publishers often limit the amount of pages available to the author. Therefore I'm pleased that Carsten Hansen instead filled his pages with the opening theory for which most buyers really purchase such a book. Also, many recent opening theory books have displayed their contents as annotations to selected games. Fortunately, Hansen chose to omit this space-wasting practice. Instead, we are treated to approximately 309 pages of opening theory, packed into a double-column format.

Before we examine specific examples of the content quality, a comparison should be made with Pliester's *Rubinstein Complex of the Nimzo-Indian Defense*, since that's the most recent book (1995) to focus coverage specifically upon the 4 e3 Nimzo-Indian. While Pliester's book is slightly larger (375 pages with double columns per page of analysis) the emphasis there is primarily upon understanding the resulting positions and their related motifs. Pliester provides considerable textual instruction in exchange for slightly less theoretical data, although considerable theory is provided, including much original analysis from the author. In contrast, Hansen provides us with much less textual commentary in order to present as much theoretical information as possible. In his Foreword, Hansen

wrote, "The material in this book is mainly theory with some strategic commentary where relevant. This may make this book a little heavy to deal with for some players, and some of the moves may be difficult to understand." This is accurate. Pliester's book is the more instructional of the two while Hansen's supplies the most opening theory. But please don't confuse Hansen's large voluminous theory and limited commentary with a "database dump." This book is far from that. Instead the author provides a fine balance of theoretical quantity coupled with judicious commentary, all the better to maximize his available space. So my recommendation to anybody thinking of playing either side of this line is to buy both books. Study Pliester first in order to comprehend the concepts behind the various lines. Then study Hansen's book in order to arm yourself with massive amounts of the latest opening theory. The two books are truly complementary.

Now, let's examine some specific lines. One little trick that many reviewers can't resist, (OK, I can't either), is to examine an important game line that occurred subsequent to the publication of the book under review. Generally, such a practice is really unfair. Nonetheless, it can give some indication regarding whether the author also noticed the same possibilities discovered by the game's combatants. Therefore I selected a game played October 19, 2002. It was the stunning victory for Black in **Van Wely-Acs, Essent Crown Hoogeveen 2002**. That game began with, **1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 0-0 5 Bd3 d5 6 cxd5 exd5** (To my surprise, I had some difficulty locating this position in the Index of Variations. Again, the strange nomenclature wasn't helpful. It would have been much easier to find the line had the chapter been entitled E48. After several minutes I found this sequence to be a sub-line starting on page 237, in the chapter entitled Modern Variation and Related Systems. However, only a process of elimination accomplished finding this line, since White's 6th move wasn't mentioned in the Index of Variations.) **7 Ne2 Re8** (The book deserves credit for its thorough examination of 7 alternatives within this sub-line.) **8 0-0 Bd6** (Again, the author's thoroughness is evident due to devoting ample coverage to 6 alternatives at this juncture in the sub-line.) **9 a3** (The anonymous annotator of this game at *The Week in Chess* wrote, "There have been plenty of moves played here including 9 f3, 9 h3, 9 Bd2, and 9 Ng3." Hansen provides coverage of only 9 Bd2 and 9 f3. In my opinion, Van Wely's move deserves a "?" for allowing Black to play....) **9...Ng4!**



with a clear advantage. Black won in just 9-more moves. Rather than criticize this book for not mentioning 9 a3?, this test illustrates how broad Hansen's coverage was in a line that's clearly a sub-variation. While it would have been ideal to discuss the power behind the threat of 9...Ng4, and mention that it's a justification for 9 f3 and 9 h3, I'm certain that the Publisher's space limitations played a role here. 9 a3? is simply an error and a

book cannot be expected to cover errors to the extent that it covers best play for both sides. Given the depth of coverage for the various alternatives we encountered while reaching this position, I think it is more than adequate.

The next test will go right down the middle of a main line with a game played as recently as November 2002: **Radjabov-Ponomariov, Bled Olympiad 2002**. The game continued, **4 e3 0-0 5 Bd3 c5 6 Nf3 d5 7 0-0 Nc6 8 a3 Bxc3 9 bxc3 Qc7 10 Bb2 dxc4 11 Bxc4** (The book reaches this position via: 4 e3 0-0 5 Bd3 d5 6 Nf3 c5 7 0-0 Nc6 8 a3 Bxc3 9 bxc3 dxc4 10 Bxc4 Qc7 11 Bb2 in the chapter entitled "Main Variation.") **11...e5 12 h3 Bf5** (The main line in the book, 12...e4, favors White, as do most of the alternatives. The book then implies, by default, that 12...b6 is best.) **13 Qe2 Rad8 14 Rfd1 h6**



(Ponomariov's move deviates from the book line of 14...Rfe8 15 a4 e4 16 Nd2 Nd5 17 Nb3 cxd4 (Hort-King, Bundeliga 1985/6) 18 cxd4, which "leaves White with the upper hand." I agree that White has some edge here, although it seems microscopic.) **15 Ba2 Rfe8 16 Nxe5 Nxe5 17 dxe5 Qxe5**, when the position looks completely equal. Perhaps Radjabov should have instead followed Hort's plan noted in the book with 15 a4 Rfe8 and then play

16 Bb5! to force Black to either advance his e-pawn or exchange it on d4. The pawn advance seems thematic, but then 16...e4 17 Nd2 (17 Ne5?? Nxe5! 18 Bxe8 Nd3 19 Bb5 c4 20 a5 Rd5 21 Ba4 Bxh3! 22 gxh3 Rg5+ leads to checkmate.), when the position is more dynamic than the game line and White seems to have some advantage. After all, 17...a6 18 Bxc6 Qxc6 19 c4 gives White a passed d-pawn and 17...cxd4?! 18 cxd4 is even worse for Black. Then White is immediately given a passed d-pawn and an opening in Black's pawn wall that suits White's Bishop pair. Conclusion: Radjabov may benefit by reading Hansen's book.

Next we'll test the book's coverage of a rare line seen in the game **J. Ortiz-**

P. Coleman, Corr. 2000. The game continued **4 e3 b6 5 Ne2 Ba6 6 Ng3 Bxc3+ 7 bxc3 d5** (This time the position was very easy to locate in the Index of Variations. We are now in variation C12 in the chapter entitled: Fischer Variation And Related Systems.) **8 Ba3 Bxc4 9 Bxc4 dxc4 10 0-0 h5** (The main line continues with 10...Qd7, leading to generally unclear play after either 11 e4 or 11 Rb1!? Besides the main line and our game move, the book also provides coverage of 10...Qd5. Regarding the game move, Hansen writes, "10...h5!? has only been tried out once, by the adventurous Vasily Emelin...") **11 Qf3** ("11 Qa4+ Qd7 12 Qxc4 h4 13 Ne2 Qc6 is absolutely fine for Black.") **11...Qd5 12 e4 Qg5**



13 Rae1 (The book continues with, "13 Rfe1 Nc6 14 Rab1 h4 15 Nf1 h3 16 g3 Qa5 17 Ne3 Qxe3 18 Bb2 Nxd4 19 Qd1? Qxe1+! 0-1 Norri-Emelin, St. Petersburg 1997. This line deserves further tests." Indeed it does, in light of what happened in our game...)

13...Nbd7 14 e5 Nd5 15 Qe2 b5 16 Ne4 Qg6 and Black went on to victory after 20-more moves. Again the author does well in covering a rare line and also in concluding that this Black line

looks to be very effective.

So far, so good. However, I was disappointed when looking for coverage of the following important line: **4 e3 0-0 5 Bd3 d5 6 a3 Bxc3+ 7 bxc3 dxc4** (This E53 line was quickly found in the chapter entitled "Main Variation" and is variation B2.) **8 Bxc4 c5 9 Nf3**

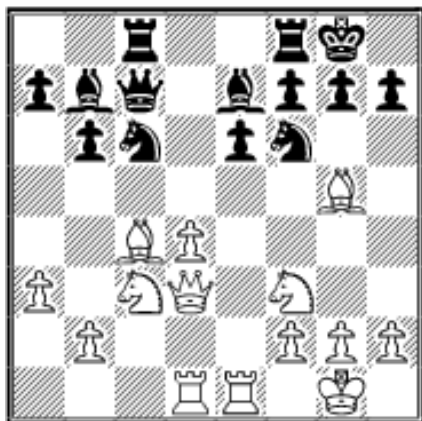


(The main line continues with 9 Ne2. 9 Nf3 is mentioned under variation a) with "9 Nf3 is likely to take us to Line A (9...Nc6 10 0-0 transposes immediately) and may be White's best move." I agree that it's probably White's best move and that its likely to transpose into Line A, which is normally reached by the move order 6 Nf3 (instead of 6 a3) 6...c5 7 0-0 Nc6 8 a3 Bxc3 9 bxc3 dxc4 10 Bxc4 Qc7. But where's coverage of the lines that

don't transpose? In short, line A can only be reached if Black soon plays ...Nc6. However, Black has a popular line that omits...Nc6 and continues with...) **9...Qc7 10 Ba2 b6** (even 10...b5!? is played in top-flight correspondence chess). This line has scored well for Black and is covered in some depth by Pliester in Rubinstein Complex of the Nimzo-Indian Defense, in the chapter entitled, "Remaining Systems of the Normal Complex" as variation 6B. There the move order is 4 e3 0-0 5 Nf3 d5 6 Bd3 c5 7 a3 Bxc3+ 8 bxc3 dxc4 9 Bxc4. Try as I might, I could neither

find coverage of this move order in the Index of Variations, nor could I find any coverage of the 9...Qc7 lines that omitted ...Nc6 via my move order. Since Pliester's book was reference material, it is puzzling that this position was overlooked via both move orders. This error of omission is troubling for an otherwise thorough book. However, Gligoric misses this line too.

One of the problems encountered when writing a book on the 4 e3 Nimzo-Indian is the frequency of transpositions. I reviewed Carsten Hansen's *The Symmetrical English* for ChessCafe.Com (see the [Archives](#)), covering an opening that probably has no rival for being the most transpositional. Given the space restrictions that Hansen worked with then, he guided the reader through the maze of transpositional lines, both in his Index of Variations and with his text comments, in a generally satisfactory fashion. So let's see how this book performs the same task. Our reference game won a First Brilliancy Prize, Szabo-van Seters, Hilversum Zonal 1947. The game began with **1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3 c5 5 Bd3 d5 6 Nf3** (The Index of Variations directs us to the chapter entitled: Modern Variation and Related Systems. However, only 6 Ne2 and 6 a3 are mentioned there. At this point, there is no direction for the reader, who must hope that subsequent moves lead to a familiar position.) **6...0-0** (OK, we've now transposed into a main-line Nimzo-Indian.) **7 0-0 Nc6 8 a3 cxd4 9 exd4 dxc4 10 Bxc4** (The observant reader will now see that the move order transposes into a chapter entitled, Classical Variation. This is accomplished only if the reader sorts this out, since the move order that reaches this position in the book is different: 4 e3 0-05 Nf3 d5 6 Bd3 c5 7 0-0 Nc6 8 a3 dxc4 9 Bxc4 cxd4 10 exd4. At this point Hansen wrote on page 99 that this position, "...is seen very rarely and has never been particularly popular at any level." I find this statement surprising in view of my next comment.) **10...Be7** (This isolated pawn position is reached by the Nimzo-Indian, the Tarrasch Queen's Gambit, 2 c3 Sicilian, the Caro-Kann and the Queen's Gambit Accepted. As such, owing to these transpositions, this position has been reached numerous times. It is therefore frequently discussed in books studying isolated d-pawn positions, such as Baburin's *Winning Pawn Structures* and Marovic's *Understanding Pawn Play in Chess*. Perhaps Hansen meant to suggest that this position doesn't occur frequently in modern times. Still, a review of my database shows that this position was reached seven times in 2001 and ten times in 2000. However, the Tarrasch Queen's Gambit and Queen's Gambit Accepted were fashionable not long ago; then this position was seen more frequently.) **11 Re1 b6 12 Qd3 Bb7 13 Bg5 Rc8 14 Rad1 Qc7**



The book diverges from the game's move order after the twelfth move, when only 12 Bd3 and 12 Bf4 are examined. However, the reader can transpose back into this line by backtracking to a sub-note to White's 11th move via 11 Qd3 b6. There we find sub-sub-line f22) which continues 12 Re1 Bb7, but then diverges from our game line with 13 Ba2 Rc8 14 Bg5 Rc7 and follows Najdorf-Giardelli, Buenos Aires 1975. Instead we can

find our line with sub-sub-note f23) where we see 12 Bg5 Bb7 and then select f231) which continues with 13 Rad1 Rc8 14 Rfe1 and then in brackets there is mention of 14...Qc7. To his credit, Hansen points out that 14...Qc7? is inferior to 14...Nd5. This is something that Szabo failed to do in game #27 of his book, *My Best Games of Chess* (Pergammon Press, 1986) and which Minev likewise failed to do in his annotations of that game in *Inside Chess*, November 1998. Hansen deserves additional credit for offering a refutation of 14...Qc7? that is even more efficient than Szabo's brilliant win, with 15 Ba2 Rfd8 16 d5!, as in Sarwinski-Przewoznik, Poznan 1986.

Often authors who propose a specific line exhibit a bias in their positional assessments, favoring the line they espouse. Since 4 e3 is a line initiated by White, one might assume that the author advocates this line for White. But the author's Foreword states that he enjoyed playing the Nimzo-Indian as Black. So does Hansen have a bias one way or the other? If so, I can't find it. Let's examine the author's evaluation of a position to confirm objectivity. After **11 Re1 b6** in the above line, Hansen recommended that White play **12 Bf4** as best, in the chapter's "Conclusion." This is because Black is able to reach equal and unclear positions after the 12 Bd3 mainline. His recommended line continues **12...Bb7 13 Ba2 Rc8 14 Qd3 Qd7 15 Rad1 Nd5 16 Bb1 g6 17 Bh6 Rfe8 18 Ne4**



"with a slight advantage for White, Najdorf-Reshevsky, Buenos Aires 1953." When I first had this position on my board, I couldn't see any tangible White edge, although Black is admittedly passive. After all, some passive positions are rock solid fortresses that the opponent can't storm, so an equal evaluation is then justified. But soon the correctness of Hansen's evaluation became apparent. Black has dark-square weaknesses in

front of his King while White's is immune from this affliction. White can hope to exploit this with a subsequent h4-5. All of White's pieces are actively positioned, including the Bishop on b1. Black's light-squared Bishop sits on a diagonal congested by his own Knights while his dark-

squared partner has no future other than to be exchanged for White's Bishop after ...Bf8. In short, White has more potential for victory than Black. Although this cited game line is 49 years old, it goes unmentioned by Gligoric, Pliester and NCO. It is even unmentioned by older books, such as Taimanov's *Nimzowitsch-Indisch bis Katalanisch* (Sportverlag Berlin, 1970). So credit goes to Hansen for citing this variation and for his objective assessment. For the record, Hansen also shows that White is superior after the 11 Qd3 b6 12 Bg5 lines as well. Therefore the position after 10...Be7 is assessed as favorable to White. Black should instead play 10...Bxc3.

So the result of our selected examination of the book's contents reveals that Hansen's research is thorough and his evaluations are objective and accurate. A very broad depth of coverage is provided - numerous sub-lines are cited. However, one important Black line seems to have been overlooked, even though Pliester covered it thoroughly in his book. Also, this reviewer found the chapter names to be unhelpful while the Index of Variations and the book's text failed to direct the reader through the many transpositions encountered in the Nimzo-Indian. Perhaps this lack of adequate transpositional direction was a result of an imposed space limitation. So possibly the author had to choose between using this space to provide guidance to the reader or instead pack in as much chess information as possible. If this was the situation, then Hansen made the correct choice. I think most readers will sacrifice some reading comfort in order to have as much high quality information available as possible.

However, unlike Hansen's previous book, *The Symmetrical English*, evidence of original analysis is minimal. Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that Hansen plays the English Opening as White. However, his Foreword stated that the Nimzo-Indian was his primary weapon only "...until I hit a rating of about 1900-2000, when other openings such as the Benko Gambit started catching my interest." So perhaps the author simply has less personal experience with the Nimzo-Indian, whereas he can obtain an English Opening at virtually every opportunity when he has the White pieces.

Typical of the Gambit Publications books I've read, diagrams are located in appropriate places and given adequate size and clarity. The book has a nice look and feel to it. The photograph on the cover is of the board position after 4 e3, as seen from the Black side, just over the shoulder of Black's Bishop on b4. So the position on the cover is from Black's perspective, but the book has equal value to those who play White as well as those who favor the Black side. However, this book will have meaningful value only to stronger players, say those rated 2000 and up. This is due to the general lack of detailed textual explanations of various motifs. Also, players unfamiliar with the many transpositions inherent in the Nimzo-Indian will struggle to know where to locate coverage of some lines.

I recommend this book to serious chess players (aren't we all?). Most of us

know and respect the quality of Carsten Hansen's reviews of opening theory books. So when such an individual writes his own books, it's natural to assume that the same high quality and the same devotion to objectivity remain. I can confirm this to be true. Sure, I've complained about the seemingly arbitrary use of Grandmaster's names to label certain variations, but then Hansen is only continuing the tradition set by Gligoric and Pliester. Yes, it's sometimes confusing trying to use the Index of Variations to locate theory because transpositions are frequent. However, this is excused if it's a case of using limited space to provide more data for the reader. Yes, it seems that one Black line was overlooked in the preparation of this book. This is indeed unfortunate. But on the whole, the book provides massive quantities of current opening theory with objective evaluations. Presently, no book on the market does this as successfully for the 4 e3 Nimzo-Indian Defense. This book is thus a valuable acquisition for serious chess players who play either side of this line.

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