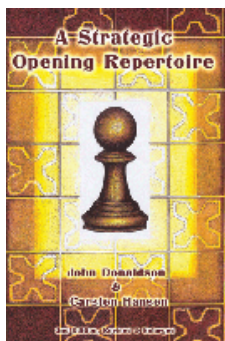




COLUMNISTS

Checkpoint

Carsten Hansen



Rating Chart

- ♦ – A poor book
- ♦♦ – Not very good
- ♦♦♦ – A useful book
- ♦♦♦♦ – A good book
- ♦♦♦♦♦ – An excellent book



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**Reviewed this month:**

*Mastering the Chess Openings, Vol. 3*  
by John Watson

*Dangerous Weapons: Flank Openings*  
by Richard Palliser, Tony Kosten & James Vigus

*The English Opening (DVD)*  
by Nigel Davies

**En Passant**

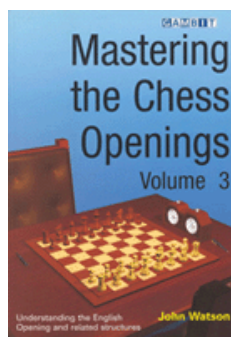
*Chesspublishing.com: Flank Openings*  
by Carsten Hansen

Flank Openings

Though the topic of this column is Flank Openings, it is the English Opening that features most prominently. This is the subject of *Mastering the Chess Openings, Vol.3* and it is found in the majority of the chapters from *Dangerous Weapons: Flank Openings*, as well as on the new DVD by Nigel Davies. One thing is clear, if you study all the material reviewed in this month's column, you will find your understanding of the English Opening taken to a whole new level.

*Mastering the Chess Openings, Volume 3* by John Watson, Gambit Publications 2008, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 351pp., \$29.95

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, American international master John Watson made quite a name for himself by authoring a groundbreaking four-volume series on the English Opening. Prior to Watson, no one had written anything so detailed on English and he is an undisputed authority on it. This third volume of the *Mastering the Chess Openings* series was originally supposed to cover all Flank Openings, but it only covers the English Opening and related structures. A fourth volume has been designated to cover 1 Nf3 and moves such as 1 b3, 1 b4, 1 f4, 1 g3, 1 Nc3, in addition to a few lines with 1 c4, where Black doesn't play 1...c5, 1...e5 or 1...Nf6, but instead gives preference to 1...c6, 1...b6, 1...g6 and 1...f5. For my review of the previous two volumes see my [August 2007](#) column.



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*Danish Dynamite*  
by Karsten Müller & Martin Voigt



*The Fearsome Four Pawns Attack*  
by Jerzy Konikowski & Marek Soszynski

Read an excerpt [here](#).



*The Modern Morra Gambit*  
by Hannes Langrock

In the introduction Watson writes, "As in previous volumes, I shall work from the ground up, starting with very elementary choices on the first couple of moves, including ones that you will seldom or perhaps never see, in order to explain the elementary properties of the English Opening. For a primer or refresher on the first principles of the opening play in

general, see Chapter 1 of Volume 1. ... This investigation of fundamentals is hardly the whole story, however. By the time that I get deeply into a given chapter, the complexity of my presentation increases and there will be material that should be sophisticated enough to appeal to players of all levels. Even in those sections, I have tried to talk about variations and typical positions on a very broad and basic level before plunging into details.”

He concludes, “My objective with this work is to provide instruction and analysis ranging from that appropriate for a low-rated developing player with, say, one or two years’ experience, to a long-time player who is familiar with a good deal of theory. That is an ambitious goal, to be sure, and whether this volume fulfils is a matter I leave for you to judge.”

With this in mind, let’s look at how the material is divided:

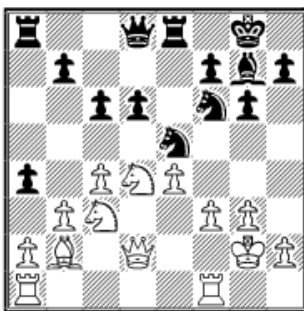
- Symbols/Dedication/Acknowledgements (1 page)
- Bibliography (2 pages)
- General Introduction (2 pages)
- Introduction to the English Opening (3 pages)
- Reversing the Sicilian: 2nd Moves (15 pages)
- Introduction to 2 Nc3: Black Plays Flexibly (35 pages)
- 2...Nf6 and g3 Systems (42 pages)
- Four Knights Variation (33 pages)
- Three Knights and Closed English (35 pages)
- Pure Symmetrical Variation (44 pages)
- Main Lines with 2 Nf3 and d4 (52 pages)
- Asymmetrical Variation (27 pages)
- The Hedgehog Variation (16 pages)
- Mikenas Attack and Nimzo-English (22 pages)
- King’s Indian Variations (10 pages)
- Index of Variations (5 pages)
- Index of Players (2 pages)

While the book as a whole is a bit overwhelming in size, the presentation of the theory is rather bare bones compared to what it could have been. If you compare it with my books on 1 c4 e5 and 1 c4 c5, released in 1999 and 2000 respectively, I spent more than 500 pages on those two moves alone, and Watson had to include 1...Nf6 too. When you add the amount of significant games played with the English Opening since then, the “few” pages spent by Watson only appears to scratch the surface.

Nevertheless, there are a lot of surprises in the text, both in what is included and what is not, and also in regards to how Watson has chosen to give certain lines more attention than they seem to merit compared to other lines that are played frequently. For instance, the line 1 c4 e5 2 Nf3, which rightfully can be considered offbeat, gets a surprising five pages of coverage, whereas the far more popular and topical Reversed Dragon: 1 c4 e5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 Nf3 Nc6 4 g3 d5 5 cxd5 Nxd5 6 Bg2 also gets five pages, despite the fact that there are theoretically important games played in this line nearly every month. So why is it that Watson, who should know better, decides to give them nearly the same amount of coverage? Watson provides the answer himself: “The move 6...Nb6 mirrors the Classical Dragon Sicilian, also covered in Volume 1. Since the ideas in these two systems tend to be the same, I’m not going to go into the Reversed Dragon very deeply, but the set-up is popular with leading players and if White plays the English Four Knights he definitely should know the fundamentals themes and strategies.”

Sometimes Watson seems to be drawn in by the complexity of a certain variation, such as the line 1 c4 e5 2 Nc3 d6, where he really delves into the tactics that arise, mostly for Black, after the ambitious 3 d4 exd4 4 Qxd4. While Watson does spend a considerable amount of space analyzing the ramifications of the different lines, he also produces lengthy segments explaining the strategies and fundamentals to give the reader a deeper insight. For instance, Watson writes after **1 c4 e5 2 Nc3 d6 3 d4**

exd4 4 Qxd4 Nc6 5 Qd2 g6 6 g3 Bg7 7 Bg2 Nf6 8 e4!? 0-0 9 Nge2 Ne5  
10 b3 Bh3! 11 0-0 Re8 12 f3! Bxg2 13 Kxg2 a5 14 Bb2 a4! 15 Nd4 c6!



“You could do worse than to study such positions in order to broaden your command of pawn-structures. Notice that the absence of light-squared bishops distinguishes this position for some other English Opening variations, as well as from the Maroczy Bind variation of the Sicilian Defence. Superficially, one might think that the trade of bishops would favour White. In formal terms, after all, it is his bad bishop that is exchanged. The question in such positions, however, is whether Black can summon up the piece activity to counter White’s significant long-term advantage. This often involves attacking light squares that can no longer be guarded by White’s bishop. Here those squares include h3, d3, f3 and often, depending upon specifics, b3 (...axb3), which might be followed by ...Nfd7-c5, hitting d3 and b3. Finally, the moves ...f5, ...b5 and ...d5 can be said to attack the most important light squares of all.

“This all sounds very nice, but if Black isn’t able to succeed in creating outposts and/or weaknesses at a fairly early stage, White can slowly drive back Black’s pieces, advance his pawns, and steamroll Black without much effort. The move 15...c6 fulfils the needs of the position described. Given even one extra move here, White could probably consolidate. Thus Black concedes a weakness on d6 in return for activity. He can create threats with his queen from a5 or b6, and simultaneously cause White to worry about ...d5, the ultimate line-opening move. Whether this works is a matter of timing and the skill of the respective players.

“Incidentally, some people think that the side with more space should avoid exchanges, but that is poor rule at best. Here White would love to trade a few minor pieces and then utilize his space advantage.”

You can truly learn a lot from comments of this caliber, and they are scattered throughout this book. Incidentally, this book is not just written for low-rated developing players, because the complexity of the material increases as Watson delves deeper into particular positions. Still, his aim is to instruct and in doing so Watson demonstrates typical ideas from both sides, what their plans are, what they should avoid and exactly why it is so. Watson presents many complete games, both as main games and in the notes, but many games are also cut short when their relevance no longer supports the general theme of the opening variation being discussed. In cases where the game is given to its conclusion, Watson cuts the annotations short so as not to waste space on matters outside the scope of the book.

This volume can be read separate from the other two in this series; however, I recommend reading all three books. They will truly take your game to the next level and help you understand the opening phase so much better, as well as help minimize the risk of starting the game out from an inferior position. Those who play the English Opening should buy this book without out any hesitation. This book is a modern classic. It is genuinely instructive and provides numerous examples of original analysis and improvements over existing theory.

**My assessment of this book:** ♦♦♦♦♦

*Dangerous Weapons: Flank Openings* by Richard Palliser, Tony Kosten and James Vigus, Everyman Chess 2008, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 253pp., \$24.95

The very popular *Dangerous Weapons* series has finally turned its attention to the Flank Openings. However, as Palliser points out in the preface, many of the obscure openings can be considered dangerous weapons in their own right, so rather than dabble in those lines, it makes more sense to find appropriate dangerous lines in some of the more common starting moves: 1 c4, 1 Nf3 and 1 f4.



Thus, the authors settled on the following topics:

- Preface (1 page)
- Series Introduction (3 pages)
- Fun Times with Nimzowitsch's 4 e4 (1 c4 e5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 Nf3 Nc6 4 e4 – 23 pages)
- Fighting Back against Kostenites: Part 1 (1 c4 e5 2 g3 c6 3 d4 e4 – 28 pages)
- Fighting Back against Kostenites: Part 2 (1 c4 e5 2 g3 Nf6 3 Bg2 c6 4 d4 exd4 5 Qxd4 Na6 – 15 pages)
- Disaster on the Dark Squares (1 c4 Nf6 2 Nc3 e6 3 e4 c5 – 18 pages)
- Further Aggression with the Mighty Mikenas (1 c4 Nf6 2 Nc3 e6 3 e4 d5 – 20 pages)
- An Improved Lowenthal (1 c4 c5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 e5 5 Nb5 a6 – 18 pages)
- The Kasparov Gambit (1 c4 c5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 e5 – 34 pages)
- Slaying the Slav (1 c4 c6 2 Nf3 d5 3 e3 Nf6 4 Nc3 e6 5 b3 Bd6 6 Bb2 Nbd7 7 Qc2 0-0 – 21 pages)
- Kramer's Gambit (1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 e4 – 11 pages)
- An Enhanced Benoni (1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 e6 3 b3 Nf6 4 Bb2 Be7 5 g3 0-0 6 Bg2 c5 7 0-0 Nc6 8 e3 d4 – 11 pages)
- Larsen's Antidote to the From (1 f4 e5 2 fxe5 d6 3 exd6 Bxd6 4 Nf3 Nf6 5 Nc3 – 18 pages)
- Beware the Polar Bear (1 f4 d5 2 Nf3 g6 3 g3 Bg7 4 Bg2 – 23 pages)

Of the above, Kosten wrote chapters 1, 4, 5, 8, 9, and 10; Vigus wrote chapters 11 and 12; and Palliser contributed chapters 2, 3, 6, and 7. While as a whole I'm quite happy with the selection of lines, I'm also a little surprised by a couple of the selections. For example, the line covered in chapter 1, the Nimzowitsch 1 c4 e5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 Nf3 Nc6 4 e4 isn't that rare a bird and has been played at top level with some frequency. Of course it is rather unusual-looking and carries a punch that isn't immediately clear to the untrained eye. The treatment Kosten gives the line in this chapter is certainly far superior to what I saw done in a recent volume of *Secrets of Opening Surprises* and it perfectly encapsulates the potential for White.

Another surprising choice is the so-called Kasparov Gambit, which is featured in chapter 7. It has never really fallen out of favor since Kasparov took it up in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Generally speaking, this gambit (4...e5 5 Nb5 d5 6 cxd5 Bc5) promises Black decent compensation for the pawn, though the line 7 N5c3 0-0 8 g3!? is currently considered critical for Black. Palliser presents a number of

interesting ideas for Black, showing that there are numerous paths that have yet to be explored. Though I wish that the authors had a recommendation for Black after 1 c4 e5 2 Nc3, which is the most common move in the King's English. Similarly, a chapter for Black after 1 c4 e5 2 Nc3 would also have been nice.

Still, there are many truly fascinating and surprising choices. Kosten's recommendation for White in chapter 4 may come as a surprise for players of either side of this line. One of the advantages of having a specialist such as Kosten author this section is that you will get insights that only a true insider will know. The same can be said of the two chapters written by Vigus. The ideas covered in that chapter aren't particularly revolutionary, but Vigus does point out a number of benefits that White will have when employing this particular line.

Of the seven books in this series, this is one of the very best. Adherents of Flank Openings as white must buy this book. The recommendations for White will help introduce some spice into otherwise solid openings. Just as important is the fact that White will need to know about the recommendations for Black in this volume; you don't want to have to face these lines without any preparation. Meanwhile, Black players will want to try these lines in must-win situations, especially amongst average players, where Black will have better than average chances of success. Bottom line, go get it – now!

**My assessment of this book: ♦♦♦♦♦**

**Order *Dangerous Weapons: Flank Openings***

by Palliser, Kosten & Vigus

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*The English Opening* (DVD) by Nigel Davies, ChessBase GmbH 2008, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Playing time: approx. 8 hours, \$34.95

Over the last few years ChessBase has gone from releasing CDs of opening theory to producing DVDs with video presentations. One problem with video presentations is that it tends to be less detailed than a CD simply because it takes far longer to present the material verbally than it does textually. While the DVDs have varied tremendously in length, none of them are as long as this one, which runs an absolutely astounding eight hours.



It also has far more segments than most DVDs:

- Intro
- 1.c4 e5 2.g3 Nf6 3.Bg2 d5 4.cxd5 Nxd5 5.Nf3 Nc6 6.0-0 Nb6
- 1.c4 e5 2.g3 Nf6 3.Bg2 d5 4.cxd5 Nxd5 5.Nf3 Nc6 6.0-0 Be7
- 1.c4 e5 2.g3 Nf6 3.Bg2 c6 4.d4 exd4 5.Qxd4 d5
- 1.c4 e5 2.g3 Nf6 3.Bg2 c6 4.d4 exd4 5.Qxd4 Na6
- 1.c4 e5 2.g3 Nf6 3.Bg2 c6 4.d4 Bb4+
- 1.c4 e5 2.g3 Nf6 3.Bg2 Nc6 4.Nc3 Bb4
- 1.c4 e5 2.g3 Nf6 3.g3 Nc6 4.Nc3 Bc5
- 1.c4 e5 2.g3 Nc6 3.Bg2 g6 4.Nc3 Bg7 5.e4 d6 6.Nge2 Nge7
- 1.c4 e5 2.g3 Nc6 3.Bg2 g6 4.Nc3 Bg7 5.e4 d6 6.Nge2 f5&Nf6
- 1.c4 e5 2.g3 Nc6 3.Bg2 g6 4.Nc3 Bg7 5.e4 d6 6.Nge2 Others
- 1.c4 e5 2.g3 d6
- 1.c4 e5 2.g3 Others
- 1.c4 c5 2.g3 g6 3.Bg2 Bg7 4.e3 Nf6
- 1.c4 c5 2.g3 g6 3.Bg2 Bg7 4.e3 e5
- 1.c4 c5 2.g3 g6 3.Bg2 Bg7 4.e3 Nh6
- 1.c4 c5 2.g3 g6 3.Bg2.Bg7 4.e3 e6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Nge2 Nge7 7.d4

- cx d4 8.Nxd4 d5 9.cxd5 Nxd5
- 1.c4 c5 2.g3 g6 3.Bg2 Bg7 4.e3 e6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Nge2 Nge7 7.d4 cx d4 8.Nxd4 Nxd4 9.ex d4 d5
- 1.c4 c5 2.g3 Nf6 3.Bg2 d5 4.cxd5 Nxd5 5.Nc3 Nc7 6.Qb3 Nc6
- 1.c4 c5 2.g3 Nf6 3.Bg2 d5 4.cxd5 Nxd5 5.Nc3 Nc7 6.Qb3 Nd7
- 1.c4 c5 2.g3 Nf6 3.Bg2 d5 4.cxd5 Nxd5 5.Nc3 e6
- 1.c4 e6 2.g3 Nf6 3.Bg2 d5 4.Nf3 Be7 5.0-0 0-0 6.b3 b6 7.Bb2 Bb7 8.e3 c5 9.Nc3 Nc6 10.cxd5
- 1.c4 e6 2.g3 Nf6 3.Bg2 d5 4.Nf3 Be7 5.0-0 0-0 6.b3 b6 7.Bb2 Bb7 8.e3 c5 9.Nc3 dxc4
- 1.c4 e6 2.g3 Nf6 3.Bg2 d5 4.Nf3 Be7 5.0-0 0-0 6.b3 c5 7.e3 Nc6 8.Bb2 d4
- 1.c4 e6 2.g3 Nf6 3.Bg2 d5 4.Nf3 Be7 5.0-0 0-0 6.b3 c5 7.e3 Nc6 8.Qe2
- 1.c4 e6 2.g3 Nf6 3.Bg2 d5 4.Nf3 Be7 5.0-0 0-0 6.b3 b6 7.Bb2 Bb7 8.e3 Nbd7
- 1.c4 e6 2.g3 Nf6 3.Bg2 d5 4.Nf3 dxc4 5.Qc2 Nbd7
- 1.c4 e6 2.g3 Nf6 3.Bg2 d5 4.Nf3 dxc4 5.Qc2 c5
- 1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.Bg2 dxc4 4.Nf3 a6
- 1.c4 Nf6 2.g3 c6 3.Bg2 d5 4.Nf3 dxc4 5.Qc2 b5
- 1.c4 Nf6 2.g3 c6 3.Bg2 d5 4.Nf3 dxc4 5.Qc2 Nbd7
- 1.c4 Nf6 2.g3 c6 3.Bg2 d5 4.Nf3 dxc4 5.Qc2 Qd5
- 1.c4 Nf6 2.g3 c6 3.Bg2 d5 4.Nf3 dxc4 5.Qc2 e6
- 1.c4 Nf6 2.g3 c6 3.Bg2 d5 4.Nf3 Bg4
- 1.c4 Nf6 2.g3 c6 3.Bg2 d5 4.Nf3 Bf5
- 1.c4 c6 2.g3 d5 3.Nf3 dxc4 4.Bg2 Nd7
- 1.c4 c6 2.g3 d5 3.Nf3 dxc4 4.Bg2 b5
- 1.c4 Nf6 2.g3 g6
- 1.c4 f5
- 1.c4 b6

While I'm largely pleased with Davies' choice of lines and recommendations for White, several of the lines are admittedly quite dull and don't offer White much. Yet this is tolerable if White is more familiar with the lines than the opponent. However, there are also a fair amount of shortcuts. In several of the chapters not all of Black's options are covered and the most critical lines are not necessarily discussed. For instance, in one of the last segments, Davies covers 1 c4 Nf6 2 g3 g6, which in conjunction with 3...d5, has become one of Black's more popular lines against the English in top level chess. Davies dismisses it with the line 3 Bg2 d5 4 cxd5 Nxd5 5 Qb3, which is a bit obscure to say the least. Furthermore, what if Black instead chooses a King's Indian set-up with 3...d6 and avoids playing ...Nb8-c6 later, then we have a position that doesn't transpose to any of the above lines. Also, I don't see any lines against 1 c4 e5 2 g3 c6, which is one of the recommendations in the *Dangerous Weapons* book reviewed above.

Of course, more of a concern is flimsy or superficial analysis, because the viewer relies on Davies being objective and not trying to cover-up or skate over things too lightly. This, however, happens quite frequently. Often I found myself wondering what happens here if Black plays so and so, and Davies didn't offer any answers.

Here are some examples:

***Davies-Yakovich***

Gausdal 2000

**1 c4 e5 2 g3 Nf6 3 Bg2 d5 4 cxd5 Nxd5 5 Nf3 Nc6 6 O-O Nb6 7 b3 8 Bb2 f6 9 d3 O-O 10 Nbd2 Be6 11 a3 a5 12 Qc2 Qd7 13 e3 Rfd8 14 d4 ex d4**



### 15 Bxd4

Here Davies also discusses the alternative 15 Nxd4 Nxd4 16 Bxd4 c5 17 Bxc5 Rac8 18 b4 Nd5 19 Nb3 b6 20 e4, and concludes, "It's complicated." But Black appears to be able to claim a fairly large advantage with 20...Nxb4! 21 axb4 axb4 22 Rfd1 Qc7, and Black will end up with an extra pawn.

### 15...Nxd4 16 Nxd4 Bd5 17 Nc4 Bxg2 18 Nxb6 cxb6 19 Kxg2 Qd5+ 1/2-1/2

In the very next segment, Davies discusses the merits of 6...Be7 (instead of 6...Nb6 in the above example) and gives the following game:

*Davies-Thiel*  
London 1994

### 1 c4 e5 2 g3 Nf6 3 Bg2 d5 4 cxd5 Nxd5 5 Nf3 Nc6 6 0-0 Be7 7 d4



### 7...exd4

In his annotations Davies only briefly mentions 7...e4, giving 8 Ne5 Nxe5 (if 8...f5 9 Nxc6 bxc6 10 Qc2) 9 dxe5 Bf5 10 Bxe4 Bxe4 11 Qa4+ with White recapturing on e4, leaving him a pawn up. However, the line with 8...f5 is actually the critical line after 7 d4 and should have been given more attention. 8...f5 has been played in several recent top games. Noteworthy is the suggestion of 10 Qc2, which is played far more infrequently than the main line of 10 Qa4. I only found a few games with 10 Qc2 and it appears to promise White an edge. Nevertheless, it deserved to be featured more prominently.

### 8 Nxd4 Nxd4 9 Qxd4 Nb4?

9...Nf6 10 Qxd8+ Bxd8 11 Nc3 is slightly better for White, but is the right way for Black to go.

### 10 Qxg7

Surprisingly, in subsequent games White has avoided (or perhaps overlooked) 10 Qxg7 and instead opted for 10 Qe4 0-0.

10...Bf6 11 Qh6 Nc2 12 Nc3, and here Black resigned!




What could have happened is 12 Nc3 Nxa1 13 Rd1 Qe7 (13...Bd7 14 Nd5 Be5 15 Bg5 Qc8 16 Nf6+ Bxf6 17 Qxf6 0-0 18 Bh6; 13...Bd4 14 Bg5 Qd6 15 Qxd6 cxd6 16 Rxd4 Nc2 17 Rxd6 0-0) 14 Nd5.

In the fifth segment, Davies bypasses a recommendation of the *Dangerous Weapons* book in mere seconds, not mentioning one of two options for Black, and certainly not giving the other option adequate coverage. I suppose I could find something wrong with each segment, but that would be pointless. While this is supposed to be a complete repertoire, it cannot cover every nook and cranny, even when taking eight hours and numerous shortcuts.

Overall Davies has done a very good job in presenting a ready to play repertoire that allows White very good opportunities to play for a win without taking too many risks. The added benefit of the chosen repertoire is that many of the lines are somewhat offbeat. Even players who employ the variations discussed as black may not know how to handle Davies' recommendations and that makes the repertoire a little more potent than it may appear at first glance.

If you are looking to reconstruct your repertoire or need a solid alternative as white that allows chances to play for a win, then the repertoire suggested on this DVD may well be the answer. I may try several of the ideas myself. The target audience is up to around 2000, but even stronger players can benefit if they are willing to do a little extra work on the loose ends here and there.

**My assessment of this DVD: **

**[Order The English Opening \(DVD\)](#)**

by Nigel Davies

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*Chesspublishing.com: Flank Openings* by Carsten Hansen, Chess Publishing.com, Subscription \$19.50-\$99.00 per year.

I have reviewed all the pages from Chesspublishing.com over the past year, but I saved the page I write for last. I will not review my own work, but will simply mention that prior to my taking over the helm in the Flank Openings section, the updates were written by Tony Kosten and John Watson. Both are two leading experts on the English Opening, so you can't go wrong on that front.

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