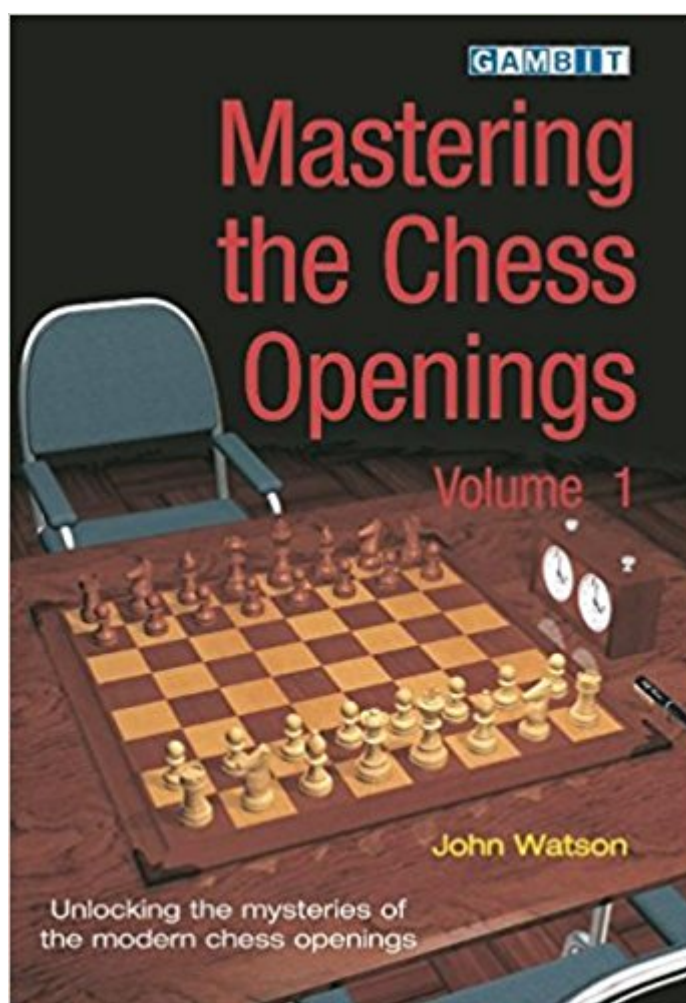


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# Mastering The Chess Openings: Unlocking The Mysteries Of The Modern Chess Openings, Volume 1



## Synopsis

For many chess-players, opening study is sheer hard work. It is difficult to know what is important and what is not, and when specific knowledge is vital, or when a more general understanding is sufficient. Tragically often, once the opening is over, a player won't know what plan to follow, or even understand why his pieces are on the squares on which they sit. John Watson seeks to help chess-players achieve a more holistic and insightful view of the openings. In his previous books on chess strategy, *Secrets of Modern Chess Strategy* and *Chess Strategy in Action*, he explained vital concepts that had previously been the domain only of top-class players. Moreover, he did so in ways that have enabled them to enter the general chess consciousness of club players. Here he does likewise for the openings, explaining how flexible thinking and notions such as 'rule-independence' can apply to the opening. In this major four-volume work, Watson presents a wide-ranging view of the way in which top-class players really handle the opening, rather than an idealized and simplified model. This volume, focusing on king's pawn openings, is a book that will make chess-players think hard about how they begin their games, while offering both entertainment and challenging material for study in openings such as the Sicilian and Ruy Lopez.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

International Master John Watson is one of the world's most respected writers on chess. His groundbreaking four-volume work on the English firmly established his reputation in the 1980s, and he has produced a string of top-quality works since. In 1999, *Secrets of Modern Chess Strategy*, Watson's first book for Gambit, won the British Chess Federation Book of the Year Award and the United States Chess Federation Fred Cramer Award for Best Book. His former pupils include the

1997 World Junior Champion, Tal Shaked.

It took joining a local chess club and repeatedly getting clobbered right out of the opening to realize that in order to stand much of a chance I needed to invest more time in the study of opening theory. I already have a copy of MCO but it is heavy on spewing out moves, light on explanation and has more than a few typos that sometimes make following the variations difficult. I researched books on opening theory and finally settled on Watson's Mastering the Chess Openings series. This is a somewhat more costly resource than many of the others available (four volumes instead of a single book) but it's a worthwhile investment. Volume 1 of the series deals with the majority of king pawn openings, 1. e4. It is certainly not exhaustive in that it does not cover every single variation of every king's pawn opening, but it has the large majority of what most chess players will encounter over the board. The openings covered include:- Giuoco Piano- Two Knights Defense- Philidor's Defense- Ruy Lopez- King's Gambit- Sicilian Defense- Caro-Kann Defense- French Defense- Pirc Defense. Watson does a great job of explaining all of these opening systems (or opening defenses as appropriate). That is, rather than give a summary blurb about the opening and then just prattling on with move after move, he walks the reader through the opening, explaining the purpose behind each move. Then, once finished with the main sequence of moves, he includes one or more instructive games with relevant analysis and variations. This is so much more helpful than a cold and clinical presentation of silent moves. Watson's writing style is very clear and approachable. He neither talks down to his readership nor does he assume that everyone has a doctorate in chess. This is a superb series on chess openings which will leave the reader with a much clearer understanding of not just the moves involved in the openings but also an understanding of the purpose and goals of any given opening and variation covered. Although the cost of the series is more than that of a single volume it is well worth it.

There are a number of good reviews for this book already. I would like to add that it is a good book for an average player (my rating is 1575), but it is one that requires a lot of work. The first 85 pages are introductory material, but they are very important and prepare the reader for the discussion of the specific king pawn openings that follows. If you are willing to do the work, you will learn a lot about opening theory and that should be a big help to your game. Watson's book is a modern, and vastly superior version of Fine's *The Ideas Behind the Chess Openings*. I never found Fine's explanations understandable. Watson's are excellent. I will be buying Volume 2.

Detailed and concise. My favorite chess author.

I bought this book largely because I am such a big fan of Watson's "Secrets of Chess Strategy" and "Chess Strategy in Action". To be clear, this is not a complete e4 repertoire (Alburt/Dzindzi aside, this is probably outside the scope of any single book), it simply talks about specific common openings in the larger context of modern opening theory, and how to play openings in general. The key quote from the Introduction is "It is important to understand that the games and analysis do not always represent current theory; they are intended to illustrate underlying properties of the openings". This I think it does very well. While it is far more concrete and in-depth, I think the intent is more like the classic (but outdated and incomplete) "Ideas behind the chess openings". As much as anything it takes its introductory chapters on basic topics like pawn structure and then uses certain lines to illustrate them. In other words this is a very theoretical book (which happens to be about opening theory instead of middle game), not a practical guide to openings. I'd recommend it simply because John Watson is one of the best chess writers working. If that doesn't appeal to you, skip it.

This volume covers the KP openings. Like Volume 2 it explains the concepts concerning pawn structure and piece placement, rather than give variations to memorize. If you want to understand WHAT to do in an opening, rather than HOW to do it, these are the books for you.

I have this volume and volume 2 of the series. My impression is positive, except for two things: 1. This is a four-volume set. The open games and the semi-open games comprise only this one volume! That means a lot less coverage for these openings than they should have for a work of this size. For instance, these openings get two of five volumes in the "Encyclopedia of Chess Openings" (40%). They get 386 pages out of 739 (52%) in "Modern Chess Openings". 2. Several openings are not covered whereas some less-common ones are covered. For instance, the Petrov and the Scotch are not covered, whereas the Philidor is. Several other open and semi-open games are omitted.

If you're a club player looking for a good starting point to actually understand the ideas behind the e4 openings, this is it. It may not go as deep as the standards like the Batsford/Modern/Nunn's Chess Opening manuals, but it's really not meant to. While there's a place for the more technical manuals listed above, they can be overwhelming to a club player. Watson goes out of his way to

make the openings approachable & understandable, as well as giving some additional ideas you can expand on by yourself. After you've read this and vol 2 of the series (about d4 openings), you should be able to learn enough to get a feel for openings that fit your style and expand your collection into specific opening guides if you feel you need to. Highly recommended.

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