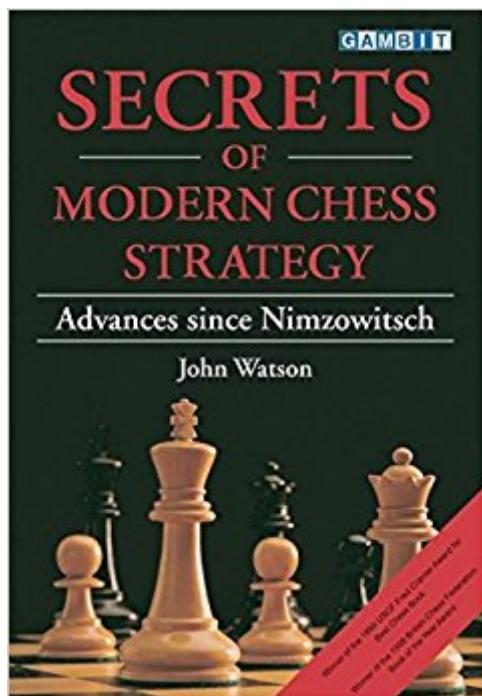


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# Secrets Of Modern Chess Strategy: Advances Since Nimzowitsch



## Synopsis

It is now seventy years since Nimzowitsch wrote his monumental work *My System*. While it remains a fundamental work on chess strategy, the way chess positions are handled has changed greatly since Nimzowitsch's time - both refinements to existing ideas, and completely new concepts. John Watson's book fulfils the need for a thorough, profound work on the modern handling of chess positions, and how Nimzowitsch's theories - still controversial and revolutionary at the time *My System* was written - have been refined and used alongside classical concepts. The first section of the book discusses how the understanding of classical themes, such as pawn majorities, the centre, and structural weaknesses, have been refined. Watson then moves on to discuss new concepts, including the willingness of modern players to accept backward pawns in return for dynamic play, the idea of a good 'bad' bishop, knights finding useful roles at the edge of the board and the exchange sacrifice idea that became prevalent with the post-war Soviet champions. This profound yet thoroughly practical work is rounded off with sections on prophylactic thinking, dynamism, modern concepts as they apply to the critical contemporary opening systems, and some thoughts on the future of chess.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

International Master John Watson is one of the world's most respected writers on chess. In 1999, his *Secrets of Modern Chess Strategy* won 'Chess Book of the Year' awards in the USA and the UK. He reviews chess books for *The Week in Chess* and hosts a weekly radio show on the Internet

Chess Club. As a trainer, he has worked with many talented pupils, including Tal Shaked.

The first book I read by this author was on French Defense, so I was aware of his penchant for details. If you have read 'My System' by Nimzowitsch then you could almost leaf through the first part of the book. But when the author explains concepts like 'doubled pawns' & expounds it with some examples by old & new players, the magic starts to unfold! I'd suggest that the reader goes through this part of the book unhurriedly, with chess board. I am quiet sure that such endeavour will enrich your chess understanding. At times you'd be in awe of how deeper the author has dived to explain. Ofcourse you may or may not agree with everything he says but that should not be a hindrance in enjoying this book. This is not an opening, middlegame or endgame theme book. But you are going to like it if you love the the game of chess. regards,

I am about half way through Watson's book. It is very clearly written. I like it because it contributes to two areas. As a student of the game, I am interested in chess's history. It is intriguing to learn more about Nimzowitsch's contributions and to learn how chess theory has advanced in recent years. Second, I am already seeing Watson's lessons influence my play and understanding of the game. All in all Watson is a good teacher.

I've not finished this book and will reconsider if I find it gets better. John Watson is my favorite modern chess author and this book won a number of awards. But it is pretentious and over the top in many of its claims. It is quite unlike his other works and I'm not sure what the fuss is about. He makes claims about the past masters and grandmasters of the game that really are not shared by players who are much stronger than himself. He certainly has the right to make such claims if he backs them up but so far I don't see him doing it. It reads more like wishful thinking as if he as a modern master (international master) would be able to pound Capablanca and Alekhine because of his superior understanding of the principles of chess. No, he doesn't make that claim directly (at least not yet) but the claims made do seem extravagant and over the top. Certainly any modern master would have a tremendous advantage in the opening due to the accumulated years of theory but that is not the claim that's being made. Instead it is a claim that modern master's understand the game in a fundamentally different and deeper way than those of the past. That may be a truism of sorts in the way that modern physicists understand physics better than Newton.

IM John Watson states several times that this book is not a text book. Nonetheless, it is a great

learning tool and shows many examples of modern play. While I'm not sure where his target audience was, as a class C player, I found it useful and informative. I especially liked the part on Petrosian and the exchange sacrifice. Spend your money on this book and then study it like a priceless textbook even if the author says it isn't.

I liked this book: it can give you clear ideas about a set of topics on strategy. The first part is built upon the discussion of the ideas given in "My System", by Nimzowitsch, as seen from a modern master's point of view. Despite of this other-source-dependence, the book is self-sustaining: you do not need to read Nimzowitsch's book to understand J. Watson's. If you want to improve your strategic skills on chess, buy it (and read it!).

I had put off reading this book for 2 years because of all the hype that surrounded this book, but the curiosity got the better of me & I have finally read this book. I have to admit it is an epic effort to try to explain how chess has evolved or de-evolved, depending on your point of view, since what I call the golden era of chess (1851-1930). My review will not do this book justice because it is so vast in ideas, so please consider my review to be succinct & that it should be complemented by other reviews. First of all, I would like to explain my theory on chess, which like man, is a duality:1. Positional considerations & Tactics2. Principles & Rule-independence3. Modernism & Hypermodernism4. Symmetry & Imbalances5. Activity & Passivity6. Knights & Bishops7. Logic & Imagination8. Science & Art9. Dynamic & static10. Queenside & Kingside11. Calculation & IntuitionThis book attempts to give as much explanation & examples of the difference between point number 2. The author throughout this book explains the principles of the golden era of chess as codified by players such as Steinitz, Tarrasch, Reti, Lasker, Capablanca, Rubinstein & of course, Nimzowitsch, amongst others. He then goes on explaining how chess has changed & become more dynamic since this era, this includes the 2 things that Bobby Fischer talked about towards the end of his life which in his view has killed the novelty & fun in chess & that is memorisation & pre-arrangement. The author believes that chess started to become more dynamic when Alekhine starting experimenting & it was developed further after that by Mikhail Botvinnik's analytical approach to studying chess which is still alive today. I would like to point out that a lot of the ideas that are still in use in chess today, came from the golden era of chess e.g. pawn sacrifices, prophylaxis & the exchange sacrifice, however, it is true that since 1930, these ideas have become more refined & have been extended into more situations/positions. If you would like to know more about this sub-topic, I highly recommend reading "Technics of positional play: 45 Practical methods

to gain the upper hand in chess" by Valeri Bronznik. The author has referenced around 30 to 40 books in producing this epic book. The book that he references more than any other is the awesome "Knights vs Bishops" book written by Steven Mayer. Because I have already read this book, I felt that I was going over a lot of ground I already knew. The second most referenced book is Pachman's Modern Chess Strategy. If you have read both of these books, I would not recommend reading this book because you will find that you are repeating a lot of ground that you have already covered. After reading this book, my head was spinning with the thought of "how do Grandmasters come up with some of these ideas?" This book is not for players who are either novices or have a fairly low rating. I would recommend this book to players with a minimum of a 1800 rating. I believe that a lot of this material would go over your head & you may consider some of the analysis is quite deep in regards to games, if your rating is low. So what is my verdict on the theme of this book?

Well, I believe in the duality of chess. What I mean by that is that when you are looking at any given position, you should consult the principles, but also think outside the box i.e. rule-independence. The bottom line is, it's all about ideas! Think about it, the principles are ideas that have become conventional & have a lot of logic behind them, however, the principles are not the only ideas, so one must use his/her imagination & think outside the box e.g. placing your knight on the rim, accepting a bad bishop for the compensation of strengthening a pawn chain, exchanging a rook for a monster knight or a good fianchettoed bishop, exchanging a minor piece for 2 pawns, sacrificing a pawn for the initiative etc. In chess, I like to study the history of the game & the statistics of the game. The author goes into these 2 things quite a bit, along with the analysis of Nimzowitch's book "My System" & the anthology of games, particularly post 1930. Thank you Mr Watson for your contribution in this field. I can tell that you put a lot of thought into this book & that you researched it thoroughly. I am sure that you would have wanted to have doubled the content of this book or made it into a 2 volume set, however, you have made your points... & my head is still spinning.

A little difficult to work through but I know it will up my game!

The book is extremely difficult to read, most of the moves get lengthy and difficult to keep up with. If this is what most chess books are like then is there any hope for beginner learning chess theory?

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