

Preface

“There are no bad openings, only badly played ones”—Lajos Portisch

This is the fourth and final volume of our series on the opening phase of the game of chess; during our journey we have examined a wide array of openings and their individual and often very different peculiarities.

Which is the best opening of them all?

As any chess teacher can tell you, this perhaps naive but legitimate question is number one on the beginners’ FAQ list!

Luckily, there is no answer; it is wise to be wary of books in the series *Crush your Opponents with Defence X*, or *Make them Tremble and Cry with Opening Y* – if only it were that easy. Quite simply the ‘best’ opening and ‘perfect’ repertoire do not exist. However, there are undoubtedly openings which are better suited than others to a player’s individual strengths and weaknesses – and this is true for both patzer and grandmaster.

As with life, the old adage *to thy own self be true* applies and this concept is the cornerstone of chess improvement.

There are many chess players whose results suffer because they use openings which are completely incompatible with their style of play. Our ambition with this series of books was to supply the willing student with the information necessary to achieve an instructional overview of this intriguing part of the game. Once you have decided on the ‘perfect’ opening for you, it is possible to look at it more deeply by using one of the many monographs on individual openings and variations that are available on the market.

We have been very careful to try and achieve the right balance; we hope the book is deep enough to be meaningful, without being weighed down by an excessive number of variations.

Stefan Djuric
Dimitri Komarov
Claudio Pantaleoni

Note from the editor: The colours in this book serve to help the reader to navigate more quickly, and to distinguish between, for instance, main lines and others. **Coloured text** highlights important moves, and also key initial positions and positions arising after important sequences. **Bold type**, be it in black or in **colour**, indicates main lines, which are also classified and sub-classified. Lines given in *italics* are unsound lines that should be avoided. There are also numerous graphic features highlighting moves, plans, and strong or weak points.

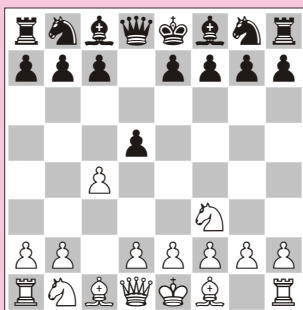
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Réti Opening

1.♘f3 d7-d5 2.c2-c4



After 1...d5, White can immediately apply pressure to the centre with 2.c4.

Made popular by the Bohemian **Richard Réti** in the **early 1920's**, it really came into its own after it was employed to defeat **Capablanca** in **New York** in **1924**.

In that game the actual move sequence was 1.♘f3 ♖f6 2.c4 g6 3.b4. However, what counts is the idea behind the moves: White does not physically occupy the centre but instead seeks to exert distant control with the hope of undermining Black's centre later on. This concept is part and parcel of any modern player's technical repertoire; yet 80 years ago it must have seemed revolutionary.

Black can choose from four principal replies. Please note that the last two are the most popular and are classified by the ECO as being part of the **English 1...c6** and the **English 1...e6** respectively. However, we have discussed them here because their themes are consistent with the Réti.

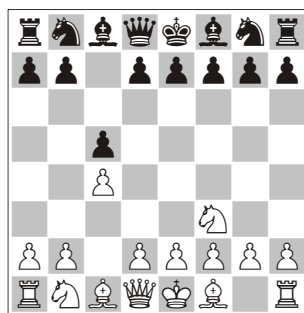
Transpositions arising from 1.♘f3 and 1.c4 (with the possibility of entering a **Queen's Pawn Game** true and proper) make classification difficult, which is indeed why these moves are so attractive and increasingly popular.

Kramnik's repertoire

Here is a nice opportunity to look at an interesting example of a highly transpositional repertoire; it was employed by the young **Vladimir Kramnik**, who used to like opening the game with the move 1.♘f3, but who would transpose to 1.d4 or 1.c4 openings depending on the circumstances.

Let's have a look in more detail.

Moving the king's knight out on the first move stops Black's ...e7-e5; we can safely presume that Kramnik did not like the idea of playing against the **1...e5 defences** that he would encounter after 1.c4. However, he was happy to play a **Symmetrical English** with 1...c5 2.c4.



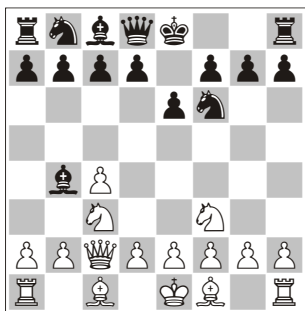
And in the event of 1...♘f6, we usually see 2.c4 c5.

Kramnik's preferred reply to **1...d5** was **2.d4**



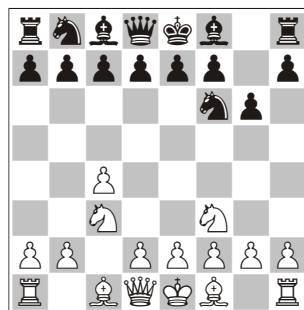
often followed by c2-c4 and a transposition to the **Queen's Gambit**.

If Black continued along the lines of the **Nimzo-/Queen's Indian** with **1...f6 2.c4 e6 3.f3 c3 b4** (3...b6 4.e4, though playable, has given White nice results), after **4.c2**



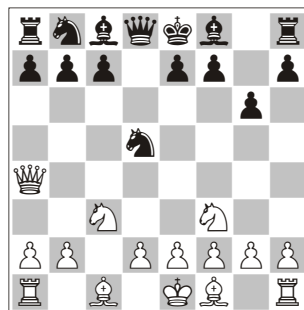
Kramnik was in a line of the **English** which is considered to be more promising for White than the analogous variation in the **Nimzo-Indian**.

If, on the other hand, Black shows aggressive ambitions with **2...g6**, the former World Champion was prepared to play against a normal **King's Indian** with **3.f3**.



3...g7 4.e4 d6 5.d4.

When faced with **3...d5** he preferred to adopt an interesting **Anti-Grünfeld** line with **4.cxd5 xd5 5.a4+**.

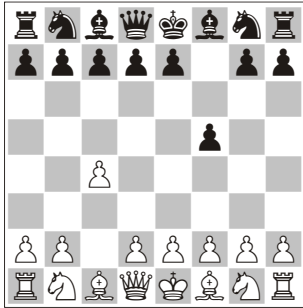


As you can see, this is an appealing method; it is true that it often leads to a **Queen's Pawn Game**, but at the same time you avoid three of the most aggressive and unpleasant defences to 1.d4, namely the **Benoni**, the **Benko** and the **Grünfeld**.

Specialists in these defences have frequently displayed a certain discomfort when faced with this approach. For example, the Scottish grandmaster **Jonathan Rowson**, a noted expert on the **Grünfeld**, has confessed to having problems when facing 1.f3, and since this admission his adversaries have chosen to play it more and more often!

English against the Dutch

G) 1. ... f7-f5

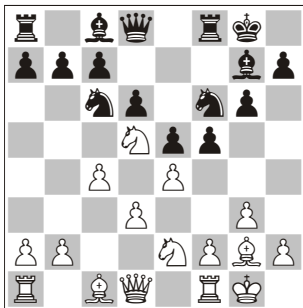


Black wishes to establish a Dutch-type set-up. d2-d4 will now transpose to the **Dutch** proper (1.d4 f5, Vol. 2).

At this point there is also another interesting idea: playing c2-c4 and not d2-d4, keeping in reserve the option of preparing e2-e4 with d2-d3.

2. ♖g1-f3

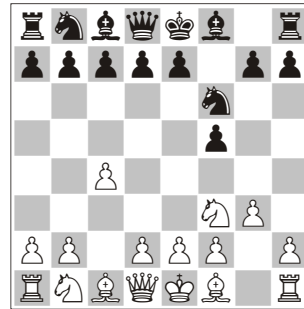
Stopping ...e7-e5. The move 2.g3 could be nice, with perhaps the knight going to e2. Indeed, the formation created by g3, ♖g2, ♜ge2 and e4 (a favourite way for **Botvinnik** to play the **English**) proves to be particularly tricky for Black if he too fianchettoes on the kingside. After 2...♞f6 3.♙g2 g6 (3...e5! with the plan of developing the bishop on b4 or c5 is probably better) 4.♞c3 ♙g7 5.d3!? d6 6.e4 e5 7.♞ge2 0-0 8.0-0 ♞c6 9.♞d5



White has scored excellently from this position.

2. ... ♞g8-f6

3. g2-g3



Here, as in a normal Dutch, Black can either fianchetto his bishop or continue classically by playing ...e7-e6.

Now we will take a glance at two lines; for more information please look at the related sections in the chapter on the Dutch in Volume 2.

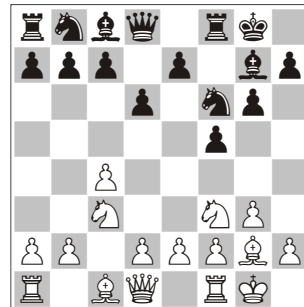
G1) 3. ... g7-g6

This variation is played along the lines of the **Leningrad Dutch**.

4. ♞b1-c3 ♙f8-g7

5. ♙f1-g2 0-0

6. 0-0 d7-d6



Here White can prevent Black from playing ...e7-e5 with **7.d4**, transposing to the **Dutch**; his other option is **7.d3** which

will take him, after Black plays ...e7-e5, into an **English 1...e5**.

- G2) 3. ... e7-e6**
4. ♖f1-g2 ♗f8-e7

It does not make much sense to establish a Stonewall set-up with 4...d5, when White still has the possibility of controlling e4: after 5.0-0 c6 6.d3! ♗d6 7.♗c3 0-0 8.e4, the opening of the centre helps White's initiative.

- 5. 0-0 0-0**
6. ♗b1-c3 d7-d6
7. d2-d3

Naturally, transpositions abound: after 7.d4, we are in the **Dutch** (Volume 2).

- 7. ... ♗b8-c6**
8. e2-e4 e6-e5

Black has lost a tempo in comparison to the **English** 1...e5 as it has taken two moves to get the pawn to e5.



- 9. h2-h3 ♖g8-h8**
10. e4xf5!? ♗c8xf5
11. d3-d4

White's position is slightly preferable.

Agrest, Evgeny
Kanep, Meelis

Plovdiv Ech-tt 2003 (9)

- 1.c4 e6 2.♗c3 b6 3.e4 ♗b7 4.♗f3 ♗b4 5.♗d3 ♗e7 6.♗e2 ♗bc6 7.a3 ♗d6 8.♗c2 f5 9.d4 fxe4 10.♗xe4**

- 0-0 11.♖c2 ♗f5 12.h4 h5 13.♗g5 ♖e8 14.0-0-0 ♖b8 15.♖he1 ♗a5 16.d5 ♗a6 17.♗ed4 ♗xd4 18.♖xd4 e5 19.♗d3 b5 20.c5 ♗xc5 21.♖xe5 ♖xe5 22.♗xe5 ♗xd4 23.♗h7+ ♖h8 24.♗g6+ ♖hx7 25.♗e7+ ♖h8 26.♖g6 ♗b3+ 27.♖b1 1-0**

Provotorov, Ivan
Chernyshov, Konstantin

Voronezh 2004 (1)

- 1.c4 b6 2.e4 ♗b7 3.♗c3 e6 4.♗f3 ♗b4 5.♖b3 ♗a6 6.♗e2 ♗e7 7.0-0 0-0 8.d3 f5 9.e5 ♗g6 10.a3 ♗c5 11.♗g5 ♖c8 12.♖ad1 h6 13.♗c1 ♗xf3 14.♗xf3 ♗h4 15.d4 ♗xf3+ 16.gxf3 ♗e7 17.♗e2 c6 18.♖h1 ♗c7 19.♖g1 ♖h7 20.♖g2 ♖g8 21.♖dg1 ♖e8 22.♖e3 g5 23.h4 ♖f7 24.♖h2 ♖g7 25.♗f4 ♖f8 26.♗h3 f4 27.♖e4 b5 28.♖hg2 ♖h8 29.♗xf4 bxc4 30.♗d2 ♗d5 31.f4 gxh4 32.f5 exf5 33.♖f3 ♖b8 34.♖g6 ♖b3 35.♗c3 a5 36.e6 dxe6 37.♗f4 ♗f6 38.♖xf6 ♖xf6 39.♖g6 ♖f7 40.♗xe6+ 1-0**

Polugaevsky, Lev
Tal, Mikhail

Moscow ch-URS 1973 (3)

- 1.c4 g6 2.e4 e5 3.d4 ♗f6 4.♗f3 ♗b4+ 5.♗d2 ♗xd2+ 6.♗bxd2 d6 7.dxe5 dxe5 8.♗xe5 ♖e7 9.f4 ♗bd7 10.♗xd7 ♗xd7 11.e5 0-0-0 12.♗e2 ♗c6 13.exf6 ♖e3 14.♖f1 ♗xg2 15.♖f2 ♗h3 16.♖c1 ♖he8 17.♗f1 ♖e6 18.♖c3 ♗g4 19.♗g3 h5 20.♖d1 h4 21.♖xd8+ ♖xd8 22.f5 gxf5 23.♖d3+ ♖c8 24.♗xf5 ♖xf6 25.♗e3 ♗xe2 26.♖xe2 ♖g7 27.♗d5 ♖g1+ 28.♖d2 ♖g5+ 29.♖c2 ♖e6 30.♖f3 b5 31.♖g2 ♖e5 32.♖g8+ ♖b7 33.♗c3+ c6 34.cxb5 ♖xh2+ 35.♖b3 1-0**