

Preface

Dear readers,

You are holding in your hands the second edition of the third volume of the book “Opening for White, according to Kramnik”, in which we have been analyzing practically all the opening systems, arising after the moves 1.♘f3 c5. The exceptions are only the “Hedgehog” system and the Maroczy system, which are so specific strategically that we have analyzed them in some other volumes of our books. Some of the set-ups, dealt up in these volumes, are so peculiar that Black does not comply with playing second fiddle and he presents voluntarily his opponent with space advantage. Accordingly, if White wishes to fight at least for a minimal edge, he needs to have a profound knowledge of the specific nuances of the arising situations.

In the first part of this volume, we have analyzed positions of the four knights system (1.♘f3 c5 2.c4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 ♘c6 4.g3). It is worth mentioning that starting from the moment our first volume came out of print, the focus of attention in this system has changed radically. The discussion earlier, particularly at a higher level, was centered on the moves 4...d5 and 4...e6, but later 4...g6 began to be played by Black much more often. Naturally, this does not necessarily mean that the former two variations have been refuted. They remain to be quite reliable from the point of view of contemporary theory, but in both cases White has good possibilities of fighting for a slight edge, which can be turned eventually into a full point later. Meanwhile, Black’s opportunities to create active counterplay in all these variations are nearly non-existent. Accordingly, nowadays theory focuses on the line with 4...g6, so we have paid thorough attention to it in our volume. Black’s King’s Indian bishop and his quite flexible pawn-structure provide him with multiple options of organizing counterplay, but White has his meaningful trumps. He has space advantage and dominates in the center, so he has all the reasons to be optimistic about the future middle game. The play is very sharp in multiple lines (naturally, there can be no comparison to the Sicilian Defence, or the Botvinnik variation, but the game remains quite lively for the English Opening); therefore players for both sides require tremendously profound knowledge of all the theoretical lines.

In the second part of our volume, we are dealing with numerous variations, which have not been analyzed at all in the first edition of our book. I recommended to White, after 1.♘f3 c5 2.c4 ♘c6, to play 3.d4, but opening theory does not remain idle and Black has managed to find quite purposeful options to counter that order of moves. It is worth mentioning in that aspect the not so popular variation 3...cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.g3 e5!? Having in mind the theoretical discoveries during the present year 2011, I would venture to recommend to White to play the move 3.♘c3, after which if Black is not happy with the four knights system (see Part 1), then his most principled choice would be between 3...♗d4, 3...g6 and 3...e5. The unusual knight-move used to be considered as Black's simplest road to quick and natural equality, but then chess common sense triumphed and White found a rather straightforward and clear way of obtaining an opening advantage. It may not be so great, but Black's task to play the arising positions is a bit dull and not easy at all. On the contrary, the move 3...g6 was considered insufficient for equality, starting from the moment of its appearance, but lately some of the leading chess players in the world made it a part of their opening armour and quite deservedly at that. It seems to me that White maintains the edge, but I would not be surprised if there appear new interesting developments in the nearest future. Finally, we deal with 3...e5, which used to be considered as the main line for Black after White's move 3. There arises a very peculiar pawn-structure in the centre after it and in the majority of cases it is preserved like this for long and the position remains rather closed. It is essential that the calculation of numerous variations, or the extensive opening knowledge is not of paramount importance, while the profound understanding of the positional and strategic fine points becomes crucial. I believe, this should be very attractive to all the players who build their opening repertoire "according to Kramnik".

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