



The Modern English

Volume 1: 1.c4 e5

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The Modern English Volume 1: 1.c4 e5

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New in Chess Yearbooks

Internet resources

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Chess Publishing (www.chesspublishing.com)

Foreword

What is the best opening for White? I had always associated this question with complete beginners and never gave it much thought. Until December sixth 2017. On that day I read the news that Google's Deep Mind AI software Alpha Zero, based on neural networks, crushed in a match the best engine Stockfish. The result itself was sensational, but the biggest shock was the way Alpha Zero learned chess. For the first time in history we witnessed a purely inhuman understanding of the game. The AI has taught itself without drawing anything from the huge practical experience and knowledge, accumulated for centuries. It relied only on statistical analysis and the method of trial and error. After 8 hours of self-training on a supercomputer and many millions of games behind, Alpha Zero built its own theoretical libraries. And the best opening according to them was:

The English Opening!

Around the fifth hour of self-training the probabilities of winning with 1.c4 even peaked at several times higher than any other opening. Then the numbers dropped, but still remained more than two times higher than the Réti, for example.

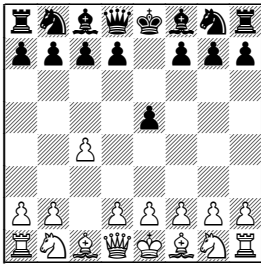
Thus, from a "flank" or "irregular" opening as they classified it some 100 years ago, the English has risen to the most promising way of starting the game!

There is much more to it. The central openings are extensively explored and, I would say, even exhausted. When we start with 1.c4, the play is more flexible, and the variety of move orders is enormous. Even best prepared opponents cannot remember many important lines. That makes the English a perfect choice for good players, capable of strategic thinking.

*Semko Semkov
August 2018*

Introduction

Building up an opening repertoire based on the English is a huge task. It is not like the Trompowsky, where you deal with just a few pawn structures. Black can choose virtually everything against **1.c4**. I decided to start my work with **1...e5**, since it has the reputation of the most principled retort to White's flank attack.

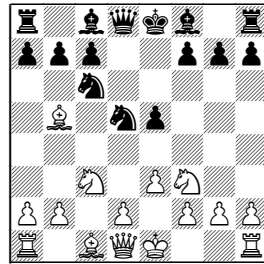


Bologan even claims in *New in Chess Yearbook* 126 that “for many years White has been unable to demonstrate even a slight advantage”. Indeed, Black has found reliable weapons against White's fianchetto. In lines like **1.c4 e5 2.g3 c6** and **1.c4 e5 2.d3 f6 3.f3 c6 4.g3 b4** or **4...d5** Black has learned to take the centre and hold it confidently.

Recently, tournament practice has seen a **new trend**, which our book investigates – White avoids systems with **g3** in favour of **e3, e2**.

This approach allows him to fight actively for the centre. For instance,

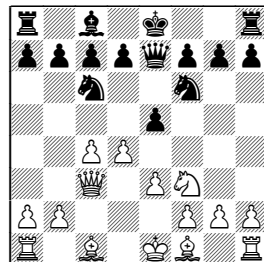
after **1.c4 e5 2.d3 c3 f6 3.f3 c6 4.e3, 4...d5 5.cxd5 xd5** is already dubious owing to **6.b5**:



The bishop's sortie has a great impact on the centre and forces **6... xc3 7.bxc3 d6 8.d4**. This position is an obvious improvement over the Dragon Reversed. White scores over 60% in it.

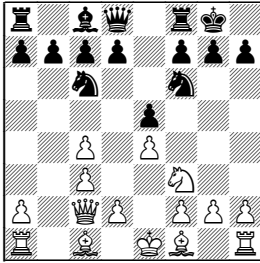
The fundament of our book is based on an active contest for the centre.

I suggest to attack the Rossolimo with **4...b4 5.c2 xc3 6.cxc3 e7 7.d4!**:



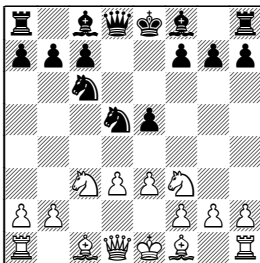
I discovered that the fashionable 7.b3 is suspicious, but found other ways to take the initiative.

Our book is not a scholastic research. It is oriented towards practical players so I often analyse backup lines. They could serve you to vary your play and to be less predictable. I do not think that White has an edge after 6.bxc3 0-0 7.e4:



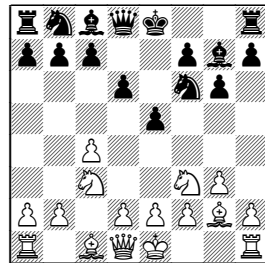
However, he scores 68%, which means that Black does not feel comfortable in this pawn structure. I devoted Chapter 3 on it.

A major alternative to 4.e3 is **4.d3**. Kramnik and Caruana adopted it in 2018 to bring this line to the fore. I consider it in Chapter 4. While 4.e3 is aimed mostly against ...d5, 4.d3 is a way to discourage 4...g4. White may not have an edge in terms of computer evaluations after 4.d3 d5 5.cxd5 ♖xd5 6.e3.



However, the Scheveningen Reversed yields him stable 56%. More importantly, it is famous with its double-edged nature of play. Kasparov won the world title with its original version. Why not try it with an extra tempo!?

There is a small catch about 4.d3. While 1.c4 e5 is technically a reversed Sicilian, I would like to treat set-ups with Black's dark-squared fianchetto as a pure King's Indian. That means to attack them with d2-d4. Chapter 7 deals with **1.c4 e5 2.♖c3 d6 3.g3! ♖f6 4.♗g2 g6 5.♖f3 ♗g7**



6.d4!.

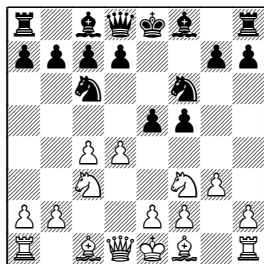
If we commit our pawn to d3, we should be ready to adopt an entirely different approach towards the centre, based on d3+e4. I provide enough information on it in the annotations to **Game 15** Kramnik-Ding Liren, Berlin 2018, but I felt I had to warn you about this inconsistency with the rest of the book.

Similar considerations stopped me from including a chapter on 1.c4 e5 2.♖c3 ♖f6 3.♖f3 ♖c6 4.a3. This move was employed twice by Topalov lately. It is even more radically

Introduction

aimed against ... $\text{g}6$ than $4.\text{d}3$, but it is completely useless against ... $\text{g}6 + \dots\text{d}6$. Therefore, it requires a considerable compromise from White, although practical results after $4.\text{a}3 \text{g}6$ are in his favour. Still, you could easily include it in your arsenal, because the main answer $4\dots\text{d}5$ should transpose to either The Scheveningen or the Taimanov, which I consider in the book.

Black's other popular set-up against the English is based on the early ... $\text{f}5$. We follow our general plan to push $\text{d}4$, but not immediately. I suggest the sophisticated move orders $1.\text{c}4 \text{e}5 2.\text{d}3 \text{d}6 3.\text{g}3! \text{f}5 4.\text{d}4!$ and $1.\text{c}4 \text{e}5 2.\text{d}3 \text{d}6 3.\text{f}3 \text{f}5 4.\text{g}3! \text{d}6 5.\text{d}4!$



The point of $\text{g}3$ was to enable the possibility of meeting $5\dots\text{e}4$ by $6.\text{d}4$.

I have seen advices to play $1.\text{c}4 \text{e}5 2.\text{d}3 \text{d}6 3.\text{e}3$ or $1.\text{c}4 \text{e}5 2.\text{d}3 \text{d}6 3.\text{e}3$, but these move orders are

not transpositions to my main lines. They have significant drawbacks against ... $\text{f}5$ or ... $\text{d}6$ so I do not discuss them at all.

Finally, I have not forgotten Karpov's pet line **$1.\text{c}4 \text{e}5 2.\text{d}3 \text{g}6$** , to which I devoted Chapter 5. My main line is $3.\text{d}5!$, but I also cover $3.\text{c}2$.

This book aims to arm you adequately against Black's most dangerous answer to $1.\text{c}4 - 1\dots\text{e}5$. It is written from White's standpoint, but it should also serve Black players since I often discuss several alternatives to the main lines. The focus is on the modern variations $1.\text{c}4 \text{e}5 2.\text{d}3 \text{d}6 3.\text{f}3 \text{d}6 4.\text{e}3$ and $4.\text{d}3$. In the last five years they have brought 56% and 58% respectively (compared to 55% for $4.\text{g}3$). My advice is to look firstly into $4.\text{e}3$, but you should make your choice depending on your style and opponent. "It doesn't matter whether a cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice". Listen to your heart and pick up what serves you best.

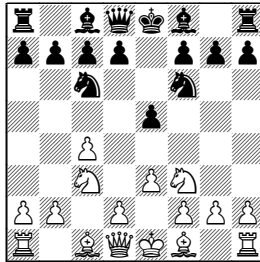
My work should continue with another one or two volumes to cover the other Black's answers to $1.\text{c}4!$.

*Kiril Georgiev
August 2018*

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1.c4 e5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.♗f3 ♘c6 4.e3



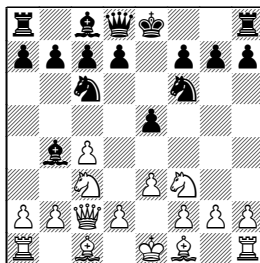
4...d5 15 (4...g6 14)

4...♗e7 17

4...d6 20

Chapter 2. The main line

4.e3 ♗b4 5.♖c2 (5.♘d5 31)



5...0-0 31 (5...d6 31; 5...♖e7 32) 6.♘d5 ♖e8 (6...♘xd5 32, 6...a5 32;

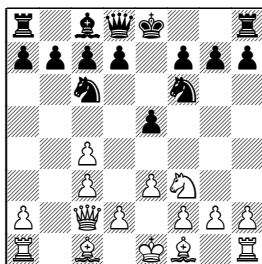
6...♗c5 33; 6...♗e7 33) 7.♖f5 33

7.♘g5 40

5...♙xc3 6.♚xc3 ♚e7 42 7.d4! 43 7...exd4 44 (7...d6 43)
 7...♞e4 45
 7.♙e2 49
 7.a3 50
 7.b3?! 52

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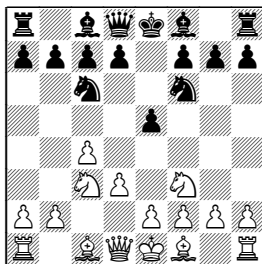
4.e3 ♙b4 5.♚c2 ♙xc3 6.bxc3



6...e4 82
 6...d6 83 7.e4 0-0 8.g3 84 8...♞d7 85 (8...♞e7 84; 8...a6 84)
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 8. ♙e2 88

Chapter 4. The Reversed Sicilian

1.c4 e5 2.♞c3 ♞f6 3.♞f3 ♞c6 4.d3

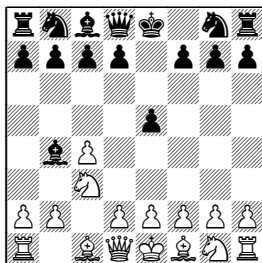


4...d5 (4...g6 99; 4...♙b4 99; 4...♙c5 100) 5.cxd5 ♞xd5 6.e4 101

6.e3 ♖e7 7.♗e2 0-0 8.0-0 ♗e6 9.♗d2 102
 9.a3 103

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3.♘d5!? ♗c5 116 4.e3 117

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6...♗b4 124

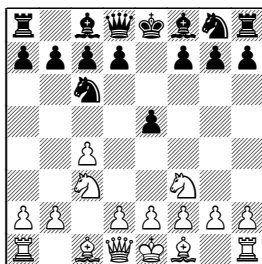
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4.a3 128

3.♖c2 130

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1.c4 e5 2.♘c3 ♘c6 3.♘f3



3...f5 146

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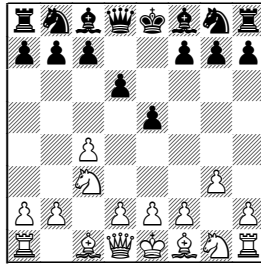
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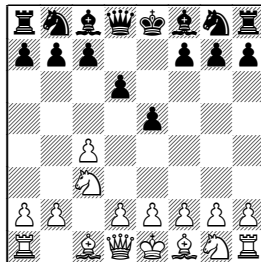
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