

Challenging the Nimzo-Indian

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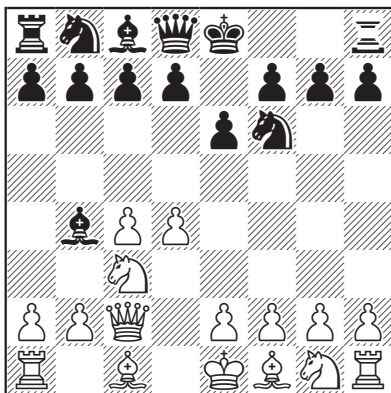
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List of symbols

†	Check
!	A strong move
!!	A brilliant move
!?	An interesting move
?!	A dubious move
?	A mistake
??	A blunder
□	The only move
1–0	White won
$\frac{1}{2}$ – $\frac{1}{2}$	The game was drawn
0–1	Black won
(ch)	Championship
(izt)	Interzonal
(ol)	Olympiad
(n)	n th match game
+–	With a winning advantage for White
±	With a large advantage for White
±	With a small advantage for White
=	With equal play
∞	With unclear play
∓	With a small advantage for Black
∓	With a large advantage for Black
–+	With a winning advantage for Black
∞	With compensation for the sacrificed material
→	With an attack
↑	With an initiative
↔	With counterplay
⊂	Better is
⊃	Worse is
Δ	With the idea
⊙	With a development advantage
×	Weakness

Chapter overview and recommendations:

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.♚c2



1) Endgame Variation: 4...0-0 5.a3 ♙xc3† 6.♚xc3 b6 7.♙g5 ♙b7 8.f3 main line

The endgame that arises after 8...h6 9.♙h4 d5 10.e3 ♖bd7 11.cxd5 ♖xd5 12.♙xd8 ♖xc3 13.♙h4 ♖d5 14.♙f2 is still popular and very important. Recent times have seen White play other systems, not because the endgame is so easy for Black, but because other possibilities are also interesting and offer some promise to White. This line is still a good choice if you want a safe line where you can hope to squeeze a little bit.

2) Avoiding the Endgame: 4...0-0 5.a3 ♙xc3† 6.♚xc3 b6 7.♙g5 ♙b7 8.f3 deviations

If White wants to play 8.f3, he still has some chances to avoid the endgame. Unfortunately most of these deviations are pretty harmless. This chapter is still very important because Black has several ways to avoid the endgame. The good news is that if Black varies from Chapter 1, White has good chances of getting an advantage.

3) The Old Variation: 4...0-0 5.a3 ♙xc3† 6.♚xc3 b6 7.♙g5 ♙b7 8.e3 d6 9.f3

This old variation is not considered to be very dangerous. It is not completely harmless however, and the theory is still important. A study of this chapter will help one understand the struggle of White's bishop pair and space vs. Black's lead in development and methods of achieving counterplay.

4) Bareev Variation: 4...0-0 5.a3 ♙xc3† 6.♚xc3 b6 7.♙g5 ♙b7 8.e3 d6 9.♖e2

Bareev's system is a very modern variation. It is an ambitious system which is still very popular, and it is currently White's top choice against 4...0-0.

5) Sokolov Variation: 4...0-0 5.a3 ♙xc3† 6.♚xc3 b6 7.♙g5 ♙b7 8.♖f3

This line was introduced by Ivan Sokolov. White intends to place his knight on d2. While this system probably does not give White much chance of achieving an advantage, the positions that arise are almost always interesting.

6) Rozentalis Variation and 7...c5: 4...0-0 5.a3 ♘xc3† 6.♗xc3 b6 7.♙g5 – 7...others

In this chapter we look at the popular alternatives to 7...♙b7, which are 7...♙a6 and 7...c5. White has good chances of achieving some advantage against either move, but it is not so simple and these lines should not be neglected.

7) Dutch and Vitolinsh Variations: 4...0-0 5.a3 ♘xc3† 6.♗xc3 – 6...others

Here we cover the ambitious lunge 6...♗e4 and Vitolinsh's gambit 6...b5. I do not think Black can easily claim equality in either line, but his play is very aggressive and White should be well prepared.

8) Central Variation: Main Line: 4...0-0 5.e4 d5

5.e4 was ignored by theory for a long time and it is not very well covered in chess literature. The play can become very sharp. After 5...d5, however, I believe that Black is doing quite well. Emms once said that the more he looked at this line, the more he liked it for White. Unfortunately, my feelings are rather the opposite and I think that Black has good chances if he knows his stuff.

9) Central Variation: Deviations: 4...0-0 5.e4 – 5...others

If, for whatever reason, Black is unhappy with 5...d5, he can play 5...c5 or 5...d6. If you want to employ 5.e4 as White, you must know these lines as well. The good news is White has a better chance of fighting for an advantage in the lines given in this chapter.

10) Zurich Variation (4...♗c6) and Black's rare 4th moves

The Zurich variation, as 4...♗c6 is called, is a solid line for Black. Although White has good chances of securing a theoretical advantage, the struggle in the middlegame is much more likely to be determined by ability rather than by knowledge of long variations. For that reason, this system is popular at club level. In this chapter I discuss the lines that I think give White the best chance of fighting for a tangible initiative.

11) Romanishin: 6.e3: 4...d5 5.cxd5 ♗xd5 6.e3

4...d5 is the move I would choose for Black. It is solid but also allows Black the chance to stir up trouble. This chapter looks at Romanishin's 5...♗xd5. The simple move 6.e3 has developed a large body of theory, but I think White has very little chance to achieve anything here.

12) Romanishin: 6.♗f3: 4...d5 5.cxd5 ♗xd5 6.♗f3

The best response to 5...♗xd5 is 6.♗f3. After 6...♗f5, the best move is the obvious 7.♗xf5, which gives White a small edge in an interesting endgame. If White avoids this with either 7.♗d1 or 7.♗b3 Black can already think about taking over the initiative.

13) Accelerated PCA Variation: 4...d5 5.cxd5 exd5 6.♙g5 c5

Black can also play 5...exd5. This can lead to complications which are discussed in Chapter 15. If Black wants to reach these positions while avoiding the fixed pawn structure of Chapter 14, he can play 6...c5. This used to be a sideline but this move-order has become popular.

14) Exchange Variation: 4...d5 5.cxd5 exd5 6.♙g5 h6 7.♙xf6

By taking on f6, White removes a lot of the dynamism from the position. This used to be considered a safe method of playing for a small edge. Although it is still not too dangerous theoretically, the positions that arise are not as dull as many believe.

15) PCA Variation: 4...d5 5.cxd5 exd5 6.♙g5 h6 7.♙h4

This is one of the sharpest lines of the whole 4.♞c2 Nimzo-Indian. Often both kings are in some danger. Although the theory has not been totally resolved, many of the complications that arise in this chapter lead to a draw. There are still things to be discovered here, but at the moment Black is doing fine. For this reason I prefer 5.a3 as covered in Chapters 16-18.

16) Romanishin Gambit and Short Variation: 4...d5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.♞xc3 – 6...others

This chapter introduces the sharp 5.a3. White refuses to make any positional concessions and grabs the two bishops. If Black wants to avoid the bulk of theory which is covered in Chapters 17 and 18, this is the place to look.

17) Adams Variation: 4...d5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.♞xc3 ♘e4 7.♞c2 – 7...others

This chapter covers 7...e5 and 7...♘c6. There is less to learn here than in Chapter 18, and while these systems are interesting, White has good chances of getting an edge.

18) Modern Variation: 4...d5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.♞xc3 ♘e4 7.♞c2 c5

The 7...c5 variation can be considered the main line of 5.a3. White has a choice of how to play. He can steer the game towards quiet positions, or he can grab a pawn and provoke a sharp battle across the whole board.

19) Knight Hop: 4...c5 5.dxc5 ♘a6

The uncompromising 5...♘a6 has had bouts of popularity. Black bets everything on piece activity and hopes to chase White's queen around. This line can lead to exciting chess. If White knows his stuff and plays to control the position instead of grabbing material, he has good chances for an advantage.

20) Macieja Variation: 4...c5 5.dxc5 0–0 6.a3 ♗xc5 7.♘f3 b6

This solid system of development has been popularised by Macieja. Black develops naturally and can often achieve a very comfortable hedgehog-type position. White must play very deliberately to achieve anything.

21) Deviations after 4...c5: 4...c5 5.dxc5 – 5...others

Something of an “odds and ends” chapter, here we look at less common Black 5th moves as well as an old “equalizing variation”. Many of the lines are quite tricky, so White should be well aware of these less common systems.