

*Grandmaster Repertoire 4*

# The English Opening

Volume Two

By

**Mihail Marin**

with invaluable help from Valentin Stoica

*TO LUIZA*



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## Grandmaster Repertoire 4 - The English Opening Volume Two

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# Series Foreword

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Creating the Grandmaster Repertoire series seemed a natural idea. There is a glut of opening books at the *Starting Out* level. These books have certainly been refreshing, but they have almost completely replaced high-level opening books.

As chess fans, we felt we were missing out, and because we can, we decided to do something about it.

The books in the Grandmaster Repertoire series are written by grandmasters, edited by grandmasters, and will certainly be read by grandmasters. **This does not mean that players who are not grandmasters cannot read them.** We have worked hard to make our books clear in their presentation and to make it possible for the readers to decide the depth to which they want to study them.

When we were young and trying to be up-and-coming, we understood that you do not have to remember everything in an opening book in order to use it. It is our hope that those readers who find this repertoire too extensive and detailed, will ignore many of the details. Even now that we are grandmasters, we see the bolded moves as what we want to memorize, and the notes as explanations and illustrations.

It is our conviction that you will eventually be more successful by playing the main lines, simply because they are based on better moves. Instinctively most players know this, but they fear losing to a prepared line and thus turn to unambitious systems, or unhealthy surprises. The opponent will not be able to use his preparation but, sadly, will not need it. These sidelines generally end in uninspiring positions almost automatically.

Possibly the main reason why high-level opening books have disappeared is the rise of databases. It has been assumed that there is no point in having traditional opening books anymore, as you can look it all up in the database. Some rather lazy authors have a system: collect a few hundred games from the database, give Fritz a few moments, then hit Print. Such books add nothing to chess literature. We have seen enough of them and have never wanted to add to that pile.

In these days of multi-million game databases, we all have access to information, what is lacking is understanding. In the Grandmaster Repertoire series, very strong players will share their understanding and suggest strong new moves that are in no one else's database.

We are excited about this series and hope that the reader will share some of that excitement.

John Shaw & Jacob Aagaard

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# Foreword

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## By the author

I have always regarded building up a *perfect* opening repertoire, suitable for one's style and skills, as no easier a task than the Argonauts' search for the Golden Fleece.

There is a whole series of aspects to be clarified before even starting thinking about picking specific openings. Should we approach the opening in the same way irrespective of colour, or would it be wiser to display our main ambitions with White, while playing in a more restrained style with the black pieces? At all levels, we will find adherents of both these methods.

There are also several ways to give the repertoire a coherent character. We may be guided by the same general principles in all *our* opening variations (such as fighting for space and the initiative, or, on the contrary, aiming for solid but somewhat passive positions). This is the widest approach, which can lead to the coexistence of systems that bear absolutely no optical similarity to each other. It has frequently been the choice of the greatest players in history, but it is not easy to handle for mere mortals.

Many prefer to develop and exchange their pawns and pieces according to the same general patterns, irrespective of the opponent's play. In order to achieve this with Black, they utilize tandems of related openings such as the Slav and the Caro-Kann, or the King's Indian and the Breyer Ruy Lopez. This is likely to lead to a high degree of specialization in the respective systems, but risks limiting one's chess horizon.

When building up my repertoire with White, I treasure space and the initiative, but also the possibility of keeping play within a relatively limited range of structures, which I tend to study in depth. I also make major changes in my repertoire every five, ten or fifteen years, to avoid the risk mentioned in the previous paragraph.

As a child and teenager I only played 1.e4, but at the age of 18 I switched to 1.d4. For several years I employed aggressive set-ups, but in the early '90s I started to be attracted to the schemes involving a kingside fianchetto. Without me being aware of it, this was the moment when the book you are holding in your hands started its unusually long period of gestation.

The Catalan and the Fianchetto variations against the King's Indian and Grünfeld yielded me many wins, but I failed to find adequate related schemes against the Slav. Experience taught me that 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 c6 followed by ...♘c8-f5 or ...♘c8-g4 offers White nothing but trouble. I was amused to find out that, a long time ago, a certain Valentin Marin (!) managed to

hold his own by employing this set-up with Black against the great Saviely Tartakower. It is also ironical that, together with other games played by Tartakower at Barcelona in 1929, that game convinced theoreticians to baptize the system based on 1.d4 and 2.g3 “The Catalan Opening”.

In order to avoid the aforementioned problems, I started employing 1.♘f3 followed by 2.g3 and 3.♙g2 as my main move order, delaying the direct fight for the centre. After a few years I understood that this works well if Black develops in the spirit of the Indian Defences, but does not offer chances for an advantage if Black occupies the centre with 1...d5 (or 1...♘f6 and 2...d5).

After having had enough of 1.♘f3, I decided that the d5-square should immediately be taken under observation with 1.c4. Thus was initiated the most consistent period of success with White in my whole career. Against most of Black’s answers I would generally develop according to my own taste, with g2-g3, ♙f1-g2, etc. If allowed, I did not hesitate to transpose to the Catalan or the Fianchetto King’s Indian and Grünfeld, by playing d2-d4 at the right moment. The Slav Opening remained somewhat aside from this point of view, but I usually answered 1...c6 with 2.e4, transposing to the aggressive Panov Attack.

When I first considered writing a book dedicated to a *pure* English Opening repertoire, I was afraid that I would face insurmountable problems proving an advantage for White in *every* line while avoiding recommending a transposition to 1.d4 at various points. This over-ambitious quest, which I had secretly been dreaming of, was against the long-established views of official theory and looked nearly impossible to accomplish.

After more than one year of deep analysis with Valentin Stoica, I managed to make a step I had never dared to try before, by building a viable repertoire based on 1.c4 followed by 2.g3 irrespective of Black’s answer!

That White refrains from an early d2-d4 in all these lines does not mean that he gives up the fight for the centre. Once White has eliminated the danger of Black’s counterplay, or achieved some other sort of advantage, White will strive to occupy the centre. You will find the spirit of this general strategy throughout this book and its companion volume.

I completed the initial analytical work shortly before participating in the 51st edition of the Reggio Emilia tournament, as 2008 turned into 2009, and felt ready to give the brand new repertoire a thorough practical testing. The result was more than encouraging: with White I scored 4 out of 5, the equivalent of a rating performance of over 2800. Moreover, I had the better position in the only game I lost.

I cannot anticipate how my understanding of chess will change in, say, ten years, but for the moment I feel confident that, after almost 20 years of research, I have finally found *my* Golden Fleece.

By writing this book, I wish to share my conquest with you, dear reader.

Mihail Marin  
Bucharest, August 2010

# How to Use this Book

I have noticed that many chess players seem to read books by dipping in and out of various chapters, as the mood strikes them. I have a request – the first time you read this book, please read it in order. I ask this because I often introduce strategic ideas in one chapter that will be relied upon in later chapters. My plan is to build the reader's understanding of the English gradually, as the story unfolds.

This book supplies the second part of our complete repertoire for White with 1.c4. I may point out possible transpositions to other openings, but I will not rely on them for our repertoire. This does not necessarily mean that I would always choose to play certain lines in the English instead of playing the Catalan, as an example. But as a great guide for the Catalan already exists in Boris Avrukh's 1.d4 repertoire, it does not make sense for me to cover the same ground. And besides... This is a book on the English after all!

In the English Opening, where direct contact between the pieces is often delayed, both sides often have a wide range of moves. I mention every significant variation, but covering every possible move would be neither practical nor especially helpful to the reader. What is important is to cover all of the key ideas. Thus, even though you may encounter unfamiliar moves from time to time, you will not be "all at sea" – your new understanding of the English will be a reliable compass. I have decades of experience in playing and analysing the English and yet I am often surprised in the opening – it is the nature of the beast.

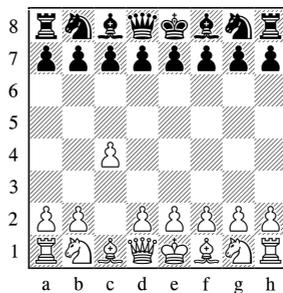
I have marked some moves with N for Novelty. This means the move is new to me and I cannot find it in my database or books. However, there is always a possibility that the move could have been played in some obscure game, unbeknown to me. Should the reader encounter any such examples, I would ask him to remember that it is almost impossible to acquaint oneself with every possible source of chess games. In any case, this book contains a great deal of original analysis, which I hope will prove useful to the reader.

I have delayed you long enough – I hope you enjoy the book.

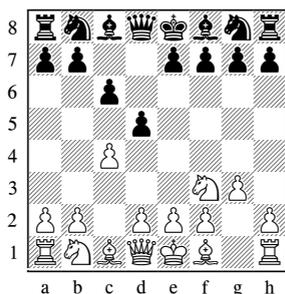
# Chapter 1

# The English

## Introduction

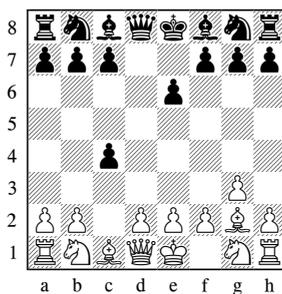


Chapters 3-11



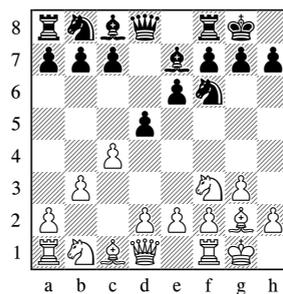
Anti-Slav Systems

Chapters 12-18



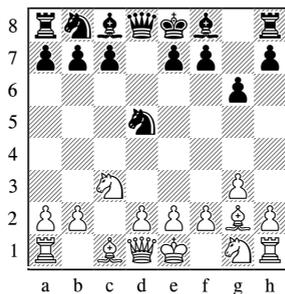
Anti-QG Systems

Chapters 19-25



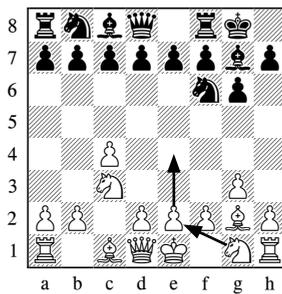
Anti-QGD Systems

Chapter 26



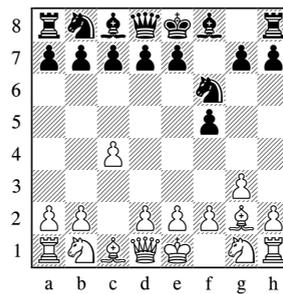
Anti-Grünfeld

Chapter 27



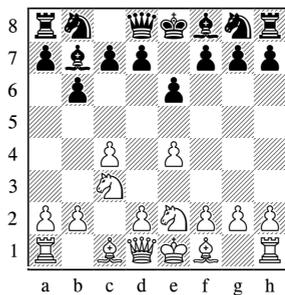
Anti-King's Indian

Chapter 28



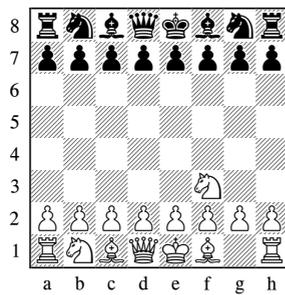
Anti-Dutch

Chapter 29



Anti-Owen

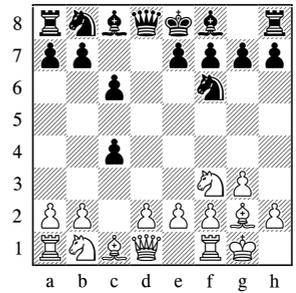
Chapter 30



Reti Move Order

# Chapter 3

## Anti-Slav Systems



### 5th Move Various

#### Variation Index

1.c4 c6 2.g3 d5 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♙g2 dxc4

5.0-0

A) 5...g6 6.♘a3	23
A1) 6...♙d5	23
A2) 6...♙g7	24
A3) 6...b5	26
B) 5...b5	28
C) 5...♙e6 6.♘g5	30
C1) 6...♙f5	30
C2) 6...♙d5 7.e4 h6 8.exd5 hxg5 9.dxc6 ♘xc6 10.♘a3	32
C21) 10...e6	33
C22) 10...♙d3	34
D) 5...♘bd7 6.♘a3 ♘b6 7.♙c2	38
D1) 7...♙e6 8.♘g5 ♙d7 9.b3! cxb3 10.axb3 ♙g4!?	
11.♘c4! ♘xc4 12.♙xc4 e6 13.♙b2 ♙h5 14.♖a5	39
D11) 14...♙e7	43
D12) 14...♙g6	43
D2) 7...♙d5 8.♘e1!	44
D21) 8...♙d4	45
D22) 8...♙h5	45
D23) 8...♙f5	46
D24) 8...♙e6 9.d3! cxd3 10.♘xd3 g6 11.e4!N ♙g7 12.♙f4	47
D241) 12...♙g4	49
D242) 12...♘fd7	50
D25) 8...♙f5	51

15. ♖xb5!

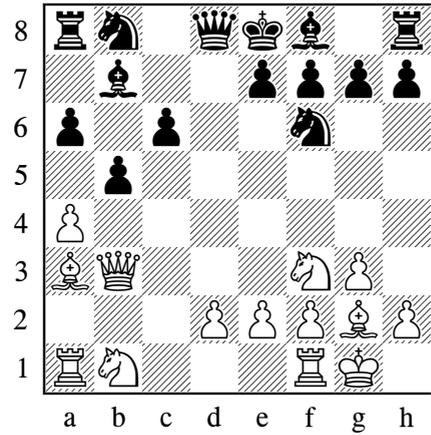
This resolute move completely changes the picture. White sacrifices his knight in order to create two dangerous passed pawns and prevent Black from castling.

15...axb5 16. ♖xb5† ♖d7

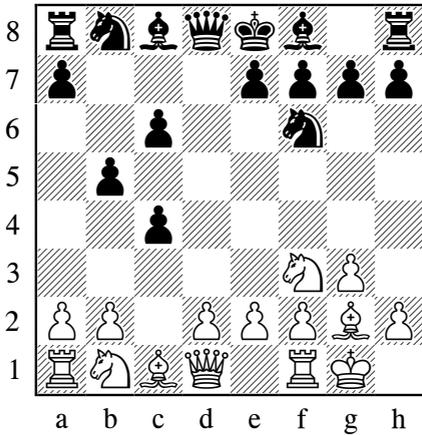
16...♙f8 17.a4♞ is similar.

17. ♗f4 h5 18. ♖d1 ♖c8 19.a4♞

Black's position is very dangerous. He has no easy way to complete his development, while the white queenside pawns are threatening.



B) 5...b5



Needless to say, this is the most committal move. In order to defend a pawn that was not yet under attack, Black weakens the long diagonal, which allows White to orientate his further actions quite easily.

6.a4 ♗b7 7.b3 cxb3 8. ♖xb3 a6 9. ♗a3

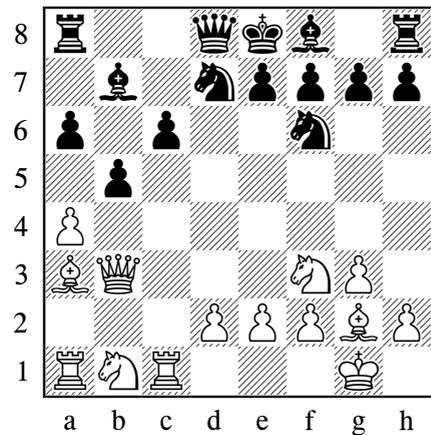
Having avoided the loss of time ♖d1-c2xb3, White is a whole tempo up (he has castled) if compared with the aforementioned line 5. ♖c2 b5, etc. Black's queenside is under pressure and the inevitable ...e6 will lead to the loss of the right to castle and chronic weaknesses on the dark squares.

9...♖bd7

9...e6 10. ♗xf8 ♙xf8 11. ♖c1 g6 12. ♖b2 ♙g7 13. ♖e5± left Black under pressure on both wings in Vukanovic – Barle, Ljubljana 1996.

Note that 9...g6 would not avoid playing ...e6, because of 10. ♖e5!.

10. ♖c1



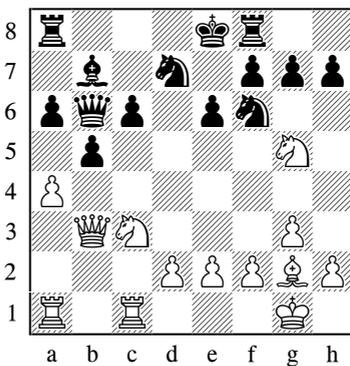
This move, with which we are familiar from a comment to the ninth move, seems to be the best way to develop White's initiative. The mechanical occupation of the centre with 10.d4 is less constructive. The text move puts the c6-pawn under severe pressure and keeps the long dark diagonal open for the queen.

**10...e5**

A risky move. Black deprives the white knight of the d4-square, but weakens the a2-f7 diagonal.

The more restrained 10...e6 loses the c6-pawn to 11.♘d4±, without solving the problem of evacuating the king from the centre in view of 11...♙xa3 12.♚xa3.

Vuksanovic mentions 10...♚b6!? as Black's best defence, aiming to keep the queenside together without creating weaknesses on the other wing. She provides the following variations: 11.♘g5 (forcing the opening of the a3-f8 diagonal) 11...e6 12.♙xf8 ♜xf8 (12...♙xf8 would allow White win time with 13.axb5 cxb5 14.♚b4† ♙e8 15.♘c3±, while 12...♘xf8 leaves the c5-square undefended. 13.♘c3± I would continue her analysis with 13...♘8d7 14.axb5 axb5 15.♜xa8† ♙xa8 16.♚a3 ♙b7 17.♚d6±, or 14...cxb5 15.♙xb7 ♚xb7 16.♚b4±.) 13.♘c3± (Vuksanovic).



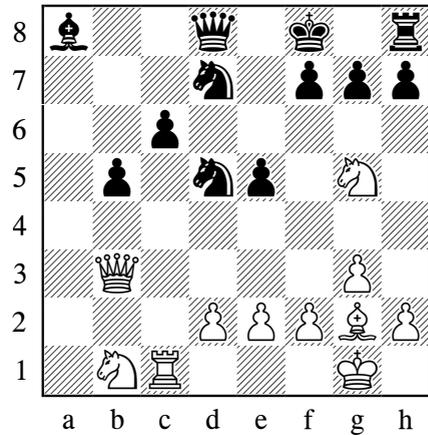
White is fully developed and prepared to start fighting for the c5-square (♘ge4). With his rooks uncoordinated, Black faces a difficult defensive task.

**11.♘g5! ♘d5 12.♙xf8 ♙xf8 13.axb5**

The start of a typical exchanging operation, which aims to leave the enemy bishop passive and vulnerable.

**13...axb5 14.♜xa8 ♙xa8**

14...♚xa8? would lose material to 15.e4+–.



**15.♙xd5!N**

During an over-the-board game it is not easy to spot the surprising queen manoeuvre allowed by this move.

15.e4 is also strong. 15...c5 16.exd5 ♚xg5 17.♚xb5 ♚d8 18.♘c3± White has restored material equality and enjoys a huge lead in development, Vukanovic – Acs, Hungary 1996.

**15...cxd5 16.♚f3!**

White forces the next move, which clears the seventh rank for the attack.

**16...♘f6 17.♚a3† ♙e8 18.♚a7 ♜f8 19.♜c7+–**

