# Fundamental Chess Openings

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GAMBIT

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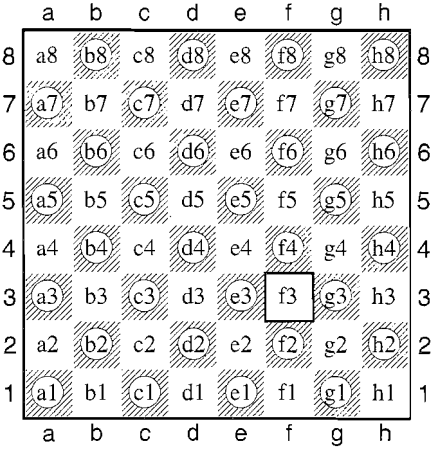
# Symbols and Notation

| | |
|---|---|
| x | capture |
| + | check |
| ++ | double check |
| # | checkmate |
| !! | brilliant move |
| ! | good move |
| !? | interesting move |
| ?! | dubious move |
| ? | bad move |
| ?? | blunder |
| 0-0 | castles kingside |
| 0-0-0 | castles queenside |
| D) | see next diagram |

| | |
|---|---|
| ♔ | king |
| ♕ | queen |
| ♖ | rook |
| ♗ | bishop |
| ♘ | knight |

## Algebraic Notation




Moves are shown by giving the piece symbol followed by the destination square. For instance, if a knight moves to the square marked in the diagram, this is written as ♘f3 in algebraic notation. If two pieces of the same type can move to the same square, more information is given. For instance, if there are knights on g1 and e5, then the one on e5 moving to f3 is written as ♘ef3.

For pawn moves, only the arrival square is given (for example, e4 means that a pawn moves to the e4-square). For pawn captures, the file the pawn is leaving is also given. Thus exf4 means that a pawn on the e-file makes a capture that brings it to the f4-square.

# Introduction

In the colossal body of chess literature, no aspect of the game has been treated as extensively as th openings. In varying degrees of expertise, clarity and depth, thousands of books discuss ever imaginable and unimaginable opening the game of chess has to offer. This is a process that wil never stop. As long as a particular opening is being played, its variations will be worked out deepe and deeper and assessments will be modified on the basis of these new experiences. As long a chess is alive, its opening theory will also be alive and new books will be needed to document all o this new life.

This book intends to introduce the reader to this strange but fascinating world, the world of open ing theory. There will be no long sequences of moves, no complicated analysis and no real attempt t keep up with the very latest developments. Instead I shall attempt to clarify the background, the gene sis and the development of all major openings and try to show how they are much more intercon nected and based on the same ideas and insights than many people think. This approach makes thi book a very different one from the usual opening manuals. It could perhaps be said to precede them. I it has the effect on the reader that it whets his appetite for these 'usual' opening books, or at leas makes him understand them a little bit better, this book will have fulfilled its purpose.

## What is Opening Theory?

Everyone who devotes even the tiniest amount of thought to his first move not only makes a star with that particular game but also with the development of opening theory. From that moment on every new game will confront him with the starting position again and therefore with his earlie thoughts on it. Also he will sooner or later find out that millions of other players have pondered ex actly the same problems and, whether he wants to or not, he will to some extent start comparing hi own ideas about how to start a game with theirs.

This means that opening theory arises quite naturally with the start of a game. No one can avoi it. It ends, equally naturally, with the end of a game. If we pursue our thinking about the openin position logically and systematically, while accepting only the highest possible degree of certainty as a satisfactory result, we cannot end our investigation unless we are sure we have reached either winning or a drawn position. Seen in this light, thinking about the starting position involves a thor ough examination of the middlegame and endgame as well.

It could be said then, that opening theory does not really exist, at least not as something separat from other aspects of the game. Ultimately, opening theory comprises *all* theory.

However, since the human brain and even the computer is still not capable of completely seein through (and thereby destroying) chess as a whole, in practice opening theory does not end with a empty board but in positions where there is a certain consensus about how they should be assessed for instance 'chances are equal' or 'White (or Black) has the advantage'.

Sometimes a question can be answered with total confidence. In the position after 1 e4 there i some room for discussion on how good or bad 1...g5 is (though not much), but if White continues d4 here, there can be no question on the value of 2...f6 because 3 ♕h5# is then mate. End of game end of theory.

But in most cases an assessment is merely a temporary stop. The moment somebody starts ques tioning it, the argument continues. Until the next temporary stop is reached.

And so, ever since the beginnings of chess, every single chess-player has contributed something to that gigantic construction called opening theory. This brings us to the next question.

## How Much Theory Should a Player Know?

The most severe answer to this has to be 'everything', the softest 'as much as you like' and the profoundest 'nothing'. All three are correct.

Knowledge of opening theory is a double-edged sword. The player who knows a lot will undoubtedly profit by his knowledge, but he may also live in constant fear of meeting an opponent who knows even more. Everyone who has studied opening theory in depth will have learned that, no matter how well you do your work, there is always the possibility of having overlooked something or of not having looked deep enough. Trying to keep abreast of the latest developments, reading everything, keeping a close watch on the Internet, makes you very knowledgeable but also acutely aware of the possibility of missing something. In short, he who lives by the sword shall die by the sword.

It is therefore of the utmost importance for a chess-player to find his own personal balance between knowing too much and knowing too little. The purpose of studying opening theory should not be accumulating any set amount of knowledge, but being content with whatever knowledge one has. For someone with a natural flair for study, it may be perfect to work on openings all the time. For someone who is much less scientifically minded, even the slightest attempt to study openings may well be superfluous and even detrimental to his game.

But there is another aspect of studying opening theory to be mentioned. Anyone with even the slightest intellectual bent of mind (and which chess-player isn't?) may find getting to know a little bit about opening theory very interesting. Even without any ambition to improve your results and independent of your level of play, you may simply find the study of openings very enjoyable. You may also discover that this has absolutely nothing to do with memorizing variations or the need to occupy yourself with chess more than you want to.

This sheer fun is in my view an essential element of studying opening theory. It is my hope that this book will make some of this pleasure visible and perceptible. The book contains an overview of all major openings, how they have evolved through the years and how they are looked upon today, early in the 21st century. I shall be just sketching the outlines and will be very concise, but perhaps this is precisely the way to convey the fascination that opening theory has always had for me. Opening theory has been an almost inexhaustible source of pleasure for me throughout my active chess years. I sincerely hope it may be the same for you.

# The First Move

The two most important opening moves by far are **1 e4** and **1 d4**. By playing either of these classical moves, White uses his right to open the game to occupy as large a portion of the centre as possible. He also opens lines and diagonals for his queen and one of his bishops and creates a possible square of development for one of his knights.

Slightly more modest, yet still very respectable, are **1 c4** and **1 ♘f3**. With these moves, White does not immediately occupy any of the centre squares (e4, d4, e5 and d5) but he controls them, which is strategically just as important. He does this from the side or, in military terms, on the flank. That is why these two opening moves are called Flank Openings.

It is mainly on these four moves that the grand structure of opening theory has been erected. Bordering on that structure (in the grounds so to speak) are the modest cottages of **1 g3**, **1 b3**, **1 f4** and **1 ♘c3**, while with other moves we gradually get bogged down in the marshlands surrounding the estate, lands which have hardly been made inhabitable and perhaps had better remain so.

We shall start our investigation with 1 d4.

# 1 d4

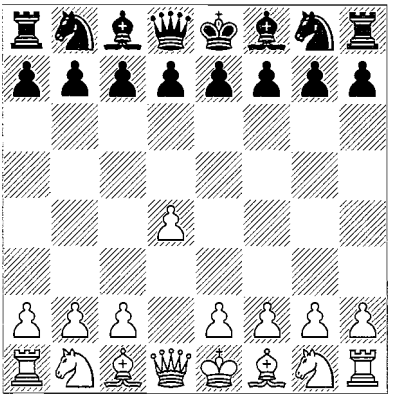
Speaking in very general terms, one might say this is the more strategically orientated of White's two main opening moves. If, on your classical opening move, the equally classical symmetrical reply is what you expect, then you know that after 1 e4 e5 you will immediately be able to attack an undefended pawn with 2 ♘f3 (or the much more radical 2 f4). White then has an obvious object of attack which makes the situation relatively clear and straightforward.

After 1 d4 d5 things are very different because Black's pawn on d5 is securely defended. Yet on closer inspection it turns out that White is able to attack Black's central stronghold, mainly because of the possibility of 2 c4. This attack has a different feel and is slower than White's plans in the equivalent position after 1 e4 e5. It is based on a long-term positional plan and therefore more of a strategic nature. That is why 1 d4 did not really flourish until the rise of positional play in the late 19th century. Until then 1 e4 was by far the most popular move.

This means that practically from the start, theory of the 1 d4 openings has been developed by players whose general outlook on chess was similar to ours today. That is why almost all of these openings are still very much alive, which can hardly be said of the 1 e4 complex. Especially in the 1 e4 e5, section quite a lot of the old theory has by now been shelved permanently.

**1 d4** *(D)*

*B*



Black's most classical reply has already been mentioned: **1...d5**. Until about 1920, this was by far the most highly regarded and in some periods practically the only 'approved' move. The crucial position arises if White then plays **2 c4**, the **Queen's Gambit**. Black's principal defences to this set-up have grown into three major, independent openings: the **Queen's Gambit Declined** (**2...e6**), the **Slav Defence** (**2...c6**) and the **Queen's Gambit Accepted** (**2...dxc4**). These openings will be the subject of the first three chapters of this book. In the fourth I shall give an overview of Black's less popular replies to 2 c4 and of White's alternatives to 2 c4.

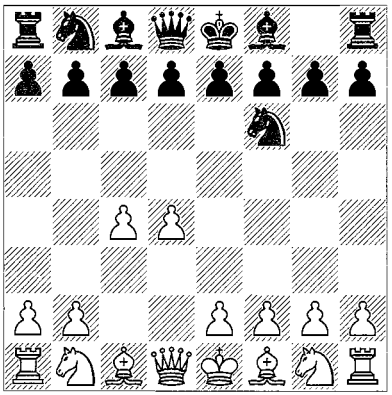
Around 1920 the classical move 1...d5 began to be seriously challenged by the rise of an alternative: **1...♘f6**. Hesitant at first, suffering much scorn and sarcasm, then quickly gathering momentum and eventually quite triumphantly, this move has risen to the top of the bill.

Traditional theory had stated that 1...♘f6, although it does have the merit of controlling e4 and thus preventing 2 e4, had little more to offer against the logical **2 c4** *(D)* than a hasty retreat to the safe ground of the Queen's Gambit with 2...e6 followed by 3...d5 and therefore had little independent significance.

In due course it became clear, however, that Black does not have just one, but several important possibilities. In fact, the position after 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 turned out a real goldmine of new openings. Most of these rose to prominence shortly after World War II and 1...♘f6 has been Black's most popular defence to 1 d4 ever since.

To begin with, it was discovered that Black has **2...e6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4**, the **Nimzo-Indian Defence**. Then it turned out that Black has two alternatives to 3...d5 if White plays **3 ♘f3** instead

B



of 3 ♘c3, namely **3...b6**, the **Queen's Indian Defence**, and **3...♗b4+**, the **Bogoljubow Defence** or **Bogo-Indian**. All three have developed into very reliable openings, which are unlikely ever to disappear again.

Even more spectacular was the gradual acceptance of **2...g6**. No fewer than two new openings were introduced here, both equally important today and equally forceful: after **3 ♘c3** the move **3...♗g7** produces the **King's Indian Defence**, while **3...d5** is the **Grünfeld Defence**.

Finally, Black also has the possibility of **2...c5**, which is called the **Benoni**. This opening contains a surprisingly large number of subvariations, all offering Black an interesting game.

All of these openings will get a chapter of their own. We shall then consider some minor alternatives on Black's second move and we shall see what happens if White refrains from playing 2 c4.

Apart from 1...d5 and 1...♘f6, Black has several other replies, of which **1...f5**, the **Dutch Defence**, is the most important, at least in a historical sense. In the 19th century, this opening was considered the only reasonable alternative to the classical 1...d5. It was ranked far above 1...♘f6 until that move became popular around 1920. The rise of the Indian openings pushed the Dutch Defence into the background, but there it has held a respectable position ever since.

1...d5, 1...♘f6 and 1...f5 are moves that prevent the opponent from taking up the ideal central pawn-formation by playing 2 e4, which is what White would undoubtedly do if Black were to push his clock without making a move. And yet, the term 'ideal central pawn-formation' is perhaps a misleading one. It is not only a matter of *how* White (or Black) places his pawns in the centre, it is equally important (and perhaps even more so) what he can *do* with those centre pawns in any given situation. A broad pawn-centre can be strong, but it can also be vulnerable. It is strong if it cramps the enemy position or if it forms a base for an attack. It is vulnerable if it is *being* attacked, and it is weak when it crumbles as a result of that attack.

It is a perfectly legitimate opening strategy for Black to let White build up a central pawn-formation to his liking. If he does so without a plan and the necessary determination to fight back at the first opportunity, however, opening theory will regard this as a betrayal of its principles and turn its back on the offender. But if he acts with a plan and with determination, the result may be a fascinating opening struggle. In that case Black allows his opponent to form a broad pawn-centre only with the firm intention to annihilate it.

The major representatives of this category of openings are **1...e6**, **1...d6** and **1...g6**. A respectable body of theory has been developed around all three of these moves, especially in the last three decades, but to put this into perspective (for, after all, this is still only a fraction of the theory attached to the 'big' 1 d4 openings) I have condensed this into a single chapter.