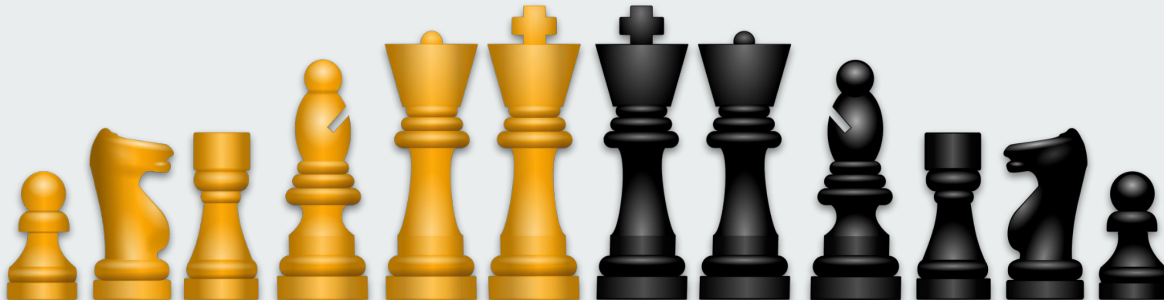
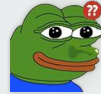




# A Catalog of Chess Openings

Compiled by Blunder Barry



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# What is this?

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**Goal** — Help you find a suitable and worthwhile chess opening to learn.

**Audience** — Beginner to intermediate-level players looking to pick up a new opening.

## Intended Use



1. Figure out what characteristics you want in an opening: [Choosing an Opening](#).
2. Filter openings by those characteristics ([how?](#)).
3. Skim through the openings' dedicated slides. You can look them up in the [main catalog](#).
4. Isolate the opening(s) that fits your needs.

## Features

- Covers a vast majority of common chess openings.
- Identifies openings by first move, nature of play (tactical or positional), popularity, and more.
- For each opening:
  - Gives a brief practical overview.
  - Explains high-level motifs and strategies.
  - Offers common continuations.

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# Introduction



## Which openings are included?

I combed through Wikipedia's [list of openings](#) and included every opening *except* those that I considered:

- **Too dubious.** Leads to an inferior position after natural play from both sides (e.g. the Damiano Defense).
  - I *have* included some openings which are objectively dubious, but set deadly traps against natural "human" play from the opponent (e.g. Blackmar-Diemer Gambit).
- **Too deep in theory.** Requires opponent to play a long series of specific and non-forced moves.
- **Too obscure.** Very little instructional material available on the Internet.

If you think I've left out something important, feel free to [contact me](#)!





# Catalog Structure

Chess openings are usually categorized by their **Encyclopaedia of Chess Openings (ECO)** code.

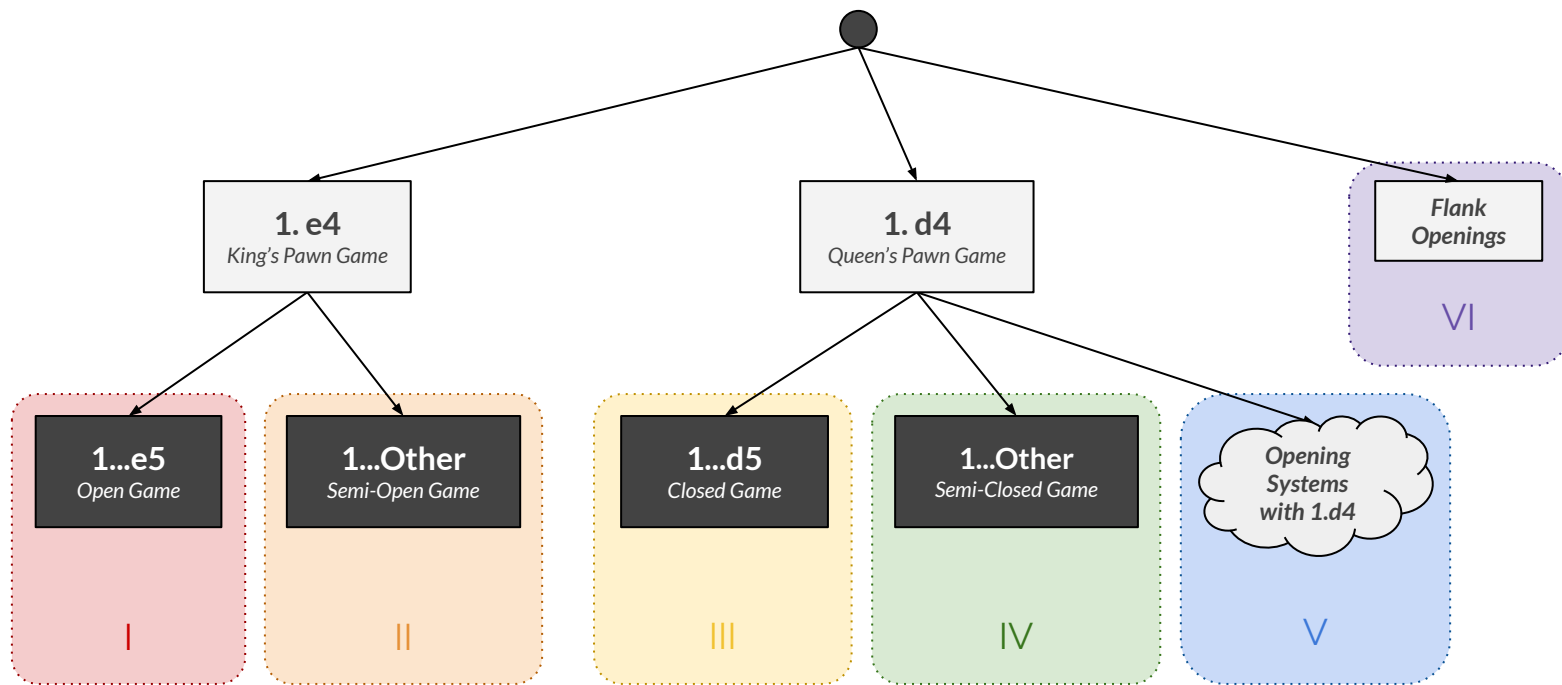
- ECO codes divide chess openings into five categories, lettered A through E.

However, I personally think the ECO system is nuanced and somewhat convoluted.

So I've categorized the openings in a more conventional way, as suggested [here](#):

- I. **Open Game** (1.e4 e5)
- II. **Semi-Open Game** (1.e4 other)
- III. **Closed Game** (1.d4 d5)
- IV. **Semi-Closed Game** (1.d4 other)
- V. **Opening Systems with 1.d4**
- VI. **Flank Openings**

# Move Tree – First Moves





## Supplementary Spreadsheet

To accompany this catalog, I created a Google spreadsheet filled with opening-specific data:



[Chess Opening Stats \(By ELO\)](#)

The spreadsheet contains three separate sheets:

- **Features** Filter openings by their characteristics to find one perfect for your style.
- **Winrates** Win-loss statistics for each opening. Can be filtered by skill level (based on lichess rating).
  - **Beginner:** 1200
  - **Amateur:** 1800
  - **Master:** 2200+
- **Data** Detailed info about each opening, including [prevalence and attainability](#). Sort using [filter views](#).

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# Choosing an Opening



## Opening Color

If your win-rate as one color is much higher than the other (>10% difference or so), consider learning a strong opening for the weaker color.

- To check your winrate by color, use the links below and replace `<USERNAME>` with your username:



lichess: <https://lichess.org/insights/<USERNAME>/result/color>



chess.com: <https://www.chess.com/stats/live/<USERNAME>>

As Black, it's worthwhile to know at least one opening against 1.e4 and another against 1.d4.



# Tactical vs. Positional

A **tactical** opening results in sharp, typically open, positions.

- A **sharp** position implies that there are few (possibly just one) good moves; other moves lose immediately.
- An **open** position is one where many pawns have been traded off, particularly the center pawns.
  - Many pieces get open lines for attack, because they are no longer blocked by pawns.
  - Because of this enhanced piece activity, open positions naturally create opportunity for tactics.
- A **gambit** opening intentionally sacrifices material (usually a pawn) to create and maintain a lead in development.
  - The goal is to attack and/or checkmate the opponent quickly, before the sacrificed material starts to matter; it definitely will in the endgame!
- Considered aggressive and double-edged. Can lead to quick wins and losses, as opposed to draws.
- Tends to require more theory, since play is very concrete. It is easier to memorize than calculate on the fly.
  - Gambits require even *more* theory, since there is immediate pressure to justify the gambited material.



## Tactical vs. Positional (cont.)

A **positional** opening results in closed, maneuvering positions.<sup>1</sup>

- A **closed** position is one where few or no pawns have been traded off, particularly the center pawns.
  - Pawns of opposite colors are typically blockading each other, so that neither side can advance.
- Positional chess involves three main strategies:
  - Gradually improve your pieces by maneuvering them to more active squares.
  - Deprive the opponent's pieces of active squares, a technique called [prophylaxis](#).
  - Prepare an eventual **pawn break**, which is an attempt to open the position by advancing one of your pawns to attack an opponent's pawn.
- Play tends to be slow-paced, as both sides act out their multi-step plans in the absence of short-term tactics.
- Knowledge of general strategic motifs is usually more important than memorizing concrete theory.

1. Note that closed positions are not necessary devoid of tactics. In fact, some openings intentionally close the center in order to focus on checkmating the enemy king, a highly tactical task!



## ? Tactical vs. Positional: How to Choose?

- **Gambits** call for a particular player that loves to sacrifice material and quickly overwhelm their opponent with risk-riddled and potentially unsound attacks in the style of [romantic chess](#).
  - If you play a gambit, the spotlight is immediately on you to prove that your sacrifice was worthwhile.
  - Gambits shine in speed chess (blitz, bullet), when you come prepared. Opponents will not have much time to refute your most aggressive and dubious ideas.
- If you enjoy the "battle of wits" that results from sharp positions, but aren't comfortable being down material so early in the game, you still have a lot of options. Look for **tactical** non-gambit openings which open the center quickly.
- **Positional** openings call upon a player that likes to play the long con by slowly outmaneuvering their opponents.
  - You often get to carry out your multi-move plans in peace, unlike the more tactical openings that force you to respond urgently to your opponent's threats.
  - At lower rating, some players are decent at tactics, but most will have no idea what to do in slower positions. They end up playing wild moves trying to force the position open, which leaves weaknesses that you can exploit.





## System-based vs. Theory-based

A **system-based** opening employs the same piece setup, regardless of what the opponent plays (within reason).

- Most system-based openings involve 1.d4 rather than 1.e4. For explanation, see slides dedicated to [1.e4](#) and [1.d4](#).
- **Pros**
  - Flexible move order. Less opening theory necessary to play.
    - Opening systems usually revolve around general ideas rather than concrete lines.
  - Less chance of committing a serious blunder in the opening.
- **Cons**
  - Often leads to more passive and defensive positions.
    - This makes sense: in order to play the same setup every game, you have to *really* ensure that your pieces are safe at all times.
  - May develop the habit of playing mindless chess.
    - System players frequently miss key attacking opportunities because they're used to making the same moves over and over.

A **theory-based** opening is any "regular" opening which isn't based on a particular system.

- Usually requires players to memorize some concrete lines, called "theory".
- Some openings naturally require more theory than others.
  - E.g. the Scandinavian Defense involves a relatively small body of theory, while the Grünfeld Defence is notorious for requiring rigorous opening preparation.



## ? System-based vs. Theory-based: How to Choose?

- **System-based** openings give you the opportunity to drill one position (or many similar positions) over and over, making them faster to learn.
  - Opening systems are naturally well-suited for beginners, whose time would be better spent developing skills like tactical vision and positional understanding rather than memorizing opening theory.
  - However, if you're focused on long-term chess development, it may be a bad idea to overuse opening systems. By using systems as a crutch, you will likely be depriving yourself of valuable experience in other positions.
- A vast majority of tactical openings are **theory-based**, given their concrete, short-term nature.
- If your memory is very good (particularly your [declarative memory](#)), consider picking up a heavily **theory-based** opening, especially a tactical one with many traps. You'll get to massacre many opponents straight out of the opening.



## ✨ Classical vs. Hypermodern

Two influential schools of chess thinking were the **Classical school** and the **Hypermodern school**.

Both schools understood the importance of controlling the center, but they differed in their approach:

- The **Classical school** advocated for physically occupying the center with pawns.
  - The goal was to use central pawns to maintain a space advantage, depriving the opponent of active squares in the center.
  - For example, 1.e4 immediately occupies a central square with a pawn.
    - As long as White can properly defend e4, White is controlling that square.
- The **Hypermodern school** challenged the idea that it was necessary to occupy the center. Instead, they proposed an alternative strategy: to control the center from a distance using pieces.
  - The goal was to lure the opponent to over-extend their center pawns, so that they can later become targets of attack.
  - A common hypermodern maneuver was the [fianchetto](#), allowing a bishop to control two central squares at a safe distance.



## ? Classical vs. Hypermodern: How to Choose?

A **hypermodern opening** is one that requires play according to principles of the Hypermodern school.<sup>1</sup>

- Some chess coaches discourage beginners from learning hypermodern openings, since they naturally result in more cramped positions. They're trickier and less intuitive to play well.
- Others think it's perfectly fine for beginners to learn hypermodern openings, and the positional challenge is a natural step in chess development.

Ultimately, I think it comes down to personal interest, and reflects tactical vs. positional preference.

1. Note that many hypermodern concepts (e.g. fianchetto, prophylaxis) are universally applicable, regardless of opening. However, the "hypermodern openings" embody these principles more strictly.



# Prevalence and Attainability

During my data analysis, I defined two statistics for each opening:

- **Prevalence:** How often do players enter this opening, when given the opportunity?
  - Intended to measure popularity.
  - Opponents are less likely to be prepared against openings with low prevalence.
    - Usually a good thing, though uncommon openings tend to have fewer learning resources.
- **Attainability:** How often are players given the opportunity to enter this opening?
  - Intended to measure practicality (i.e. will you actually get to play the opening?).
  - Assumes you get the color you want—which only happens half the time in practice.
    - Want to factor opening color into the calculation? Just divide the attainability by two.
  - When playing against random players, openings with higher attainability will generally be faster to learn.

**Note:** Both statistics account for transpositions, but most system-based openings have too many transpositions to account for. For those openings, take these two stats with a grain of salt.

**Note 2:** Also included in the data are the *inverse* prevalence and attainability, which each represent the probabilities in a more readable form: "1 in x games", where x is the inverse.

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# King's Pawn Game

Openings with 1.e4



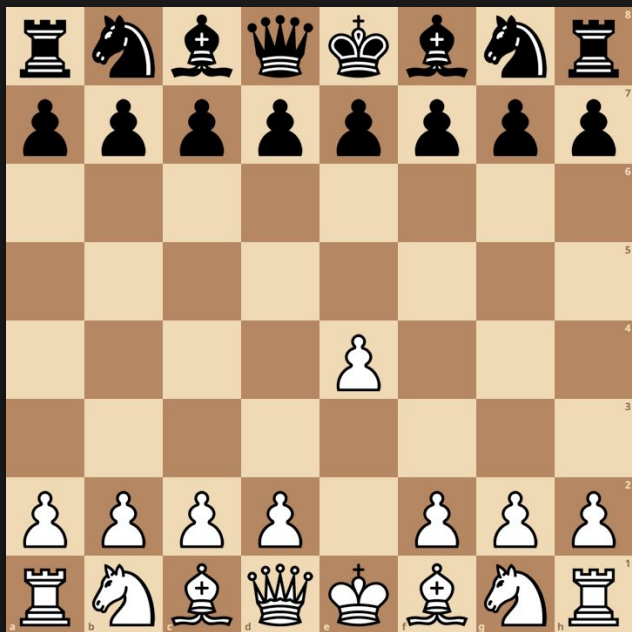
## ? King's Pawn Game: Why?

- Occupies the center with a pawn, adhering to **classical** chess principles.
- Controls the center: d5 and f5.
- Opens diagonals for the queen and light-square bishop.
- If allowed, White will control the entire center with 2.d4.
- Typically leads to more **aggressive** and **tactical** games.
  - The e-pawn often gets captured or traded off since it is undefended, which opens the position.
  - The e-pawn can be defended by bringing pawns to f3 or d3, but f3 weakens the king and d3 is rather passive.<sup>1</sup>
  - Compare to 1.d4, where the queen is defending the d-pawn, and both c3 and e3 are playable moves to support this pawn.<sup>2</sup>

1. The move d3 is actually common in more positional 1.e4 variations such as the Giuoco Pianissimo.

2. Indeed, several d4 openings do exactly this, such as the London System for White and the Semi-Slav Defense for Black.

# King's Pawn Game



Main Line: 1. e4

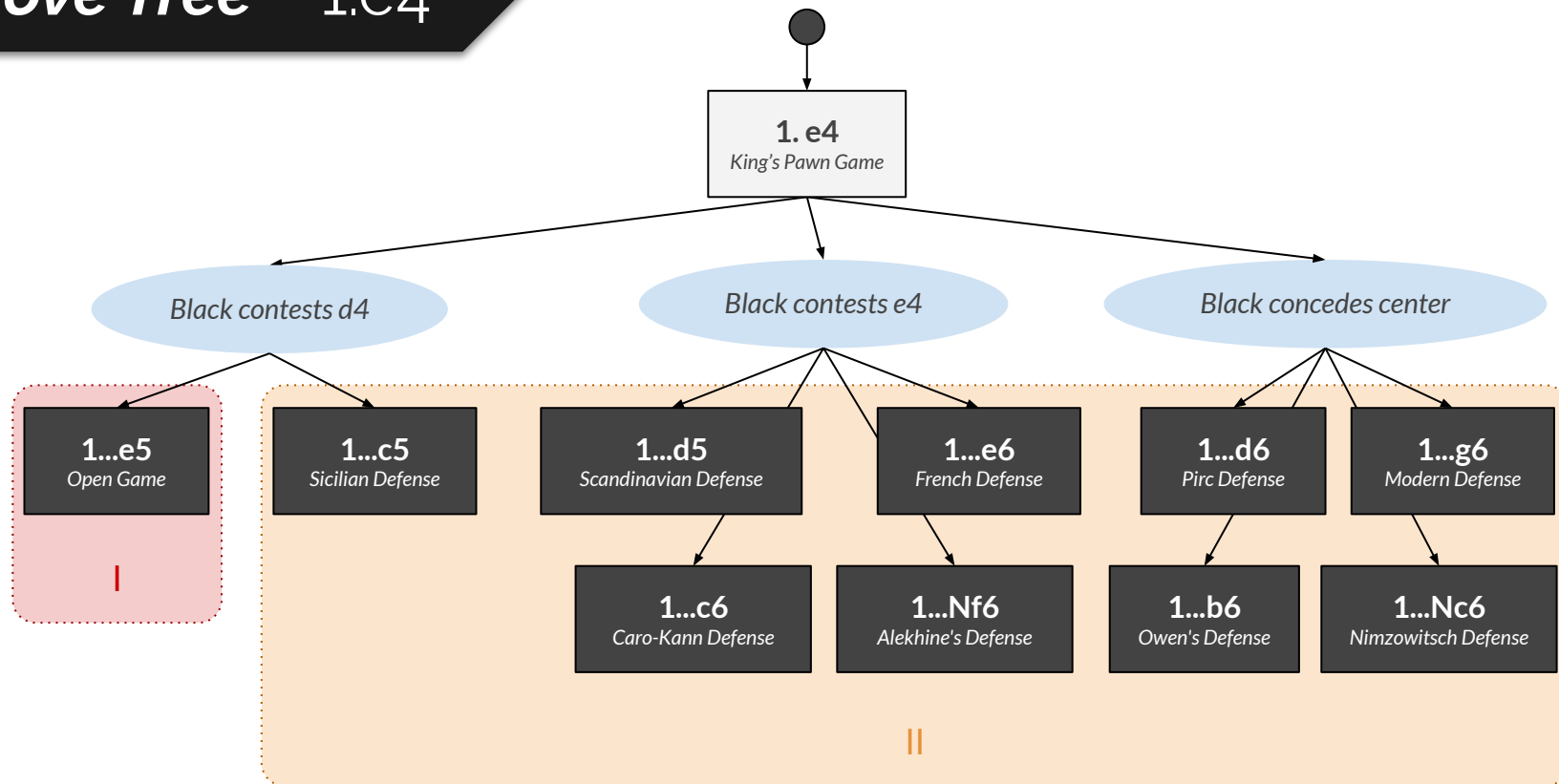
## Continuations of King's Pawn Game

Black's responses to 1.e4 can be divided into three categories.

- **Black discourages White from following with 2.d4:**
  - 1...e5 – [Open Game](#)
  - 1...c5 – [Sicilian Defense](#)
- **Black contests White's pawn on e4:**
  - 1...d5 – [Scandinavian Defense](#)
  - 1...c6 – [Caro-Kann Defense](#)
  - 1...e6 – [French Defense](#)
  - 1...Nf6 – [Alekhine's Defense](#)
- **Black allows White to establish the full d4-e4 pawn center:**
  - 1...Nc6 – [Nimzowitsch Defense](#)
  - 1...d6 – [Pirc Defense](#)
  - 1...g6 – [Modern Defense](#)
  - 1...b6 – [Owen's Defense](#)



# Move Tree – 1.e4

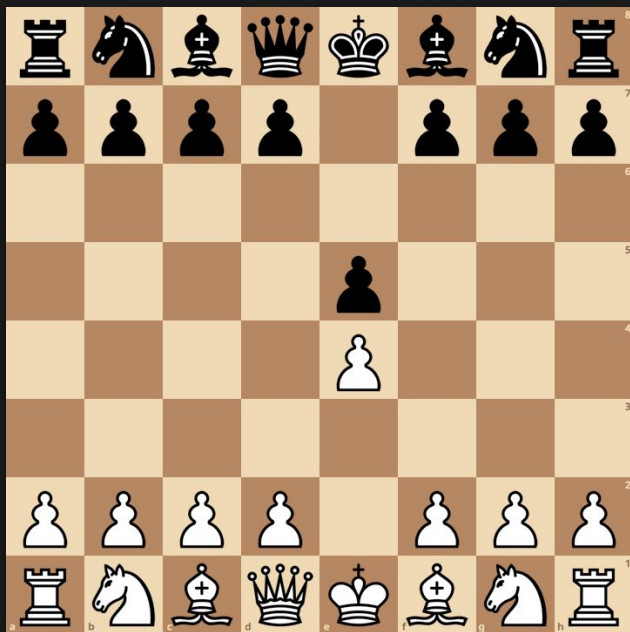


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# I. Open Game

Openings with 1.e4 e5

# Open Game



Main Line: 1. e4 e5

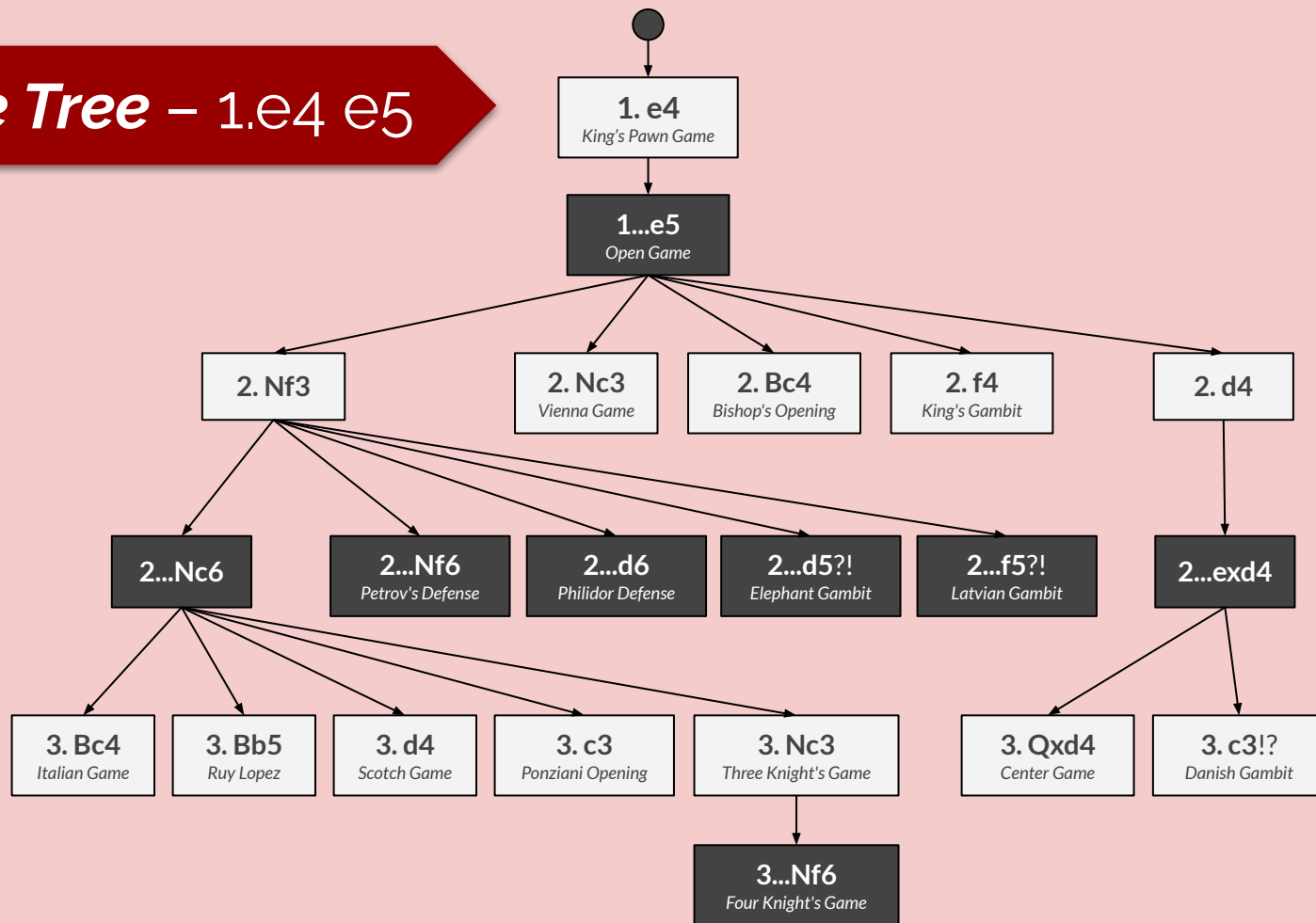
## Continuations in the Open Game

After 1.e4, 1...e5 is Black's attempt to develop symmetrically to White.<sup>1</sup>

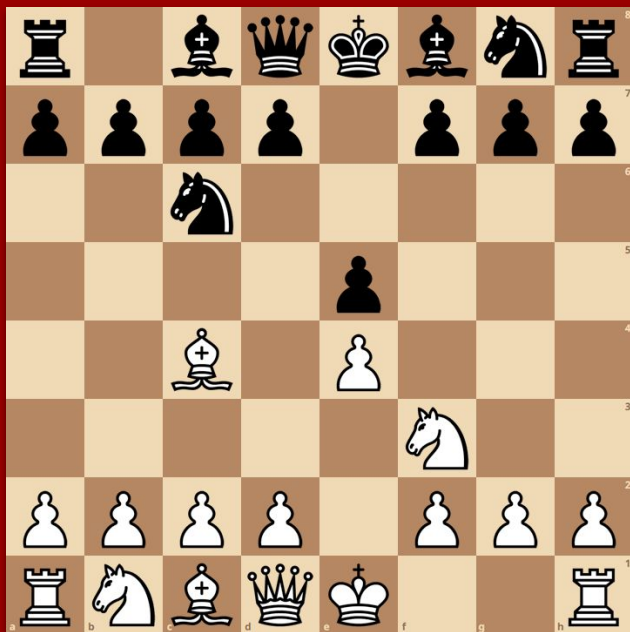
- **2.Nf3.** White's most common move. Develops the knight and threatens to capture Black's pawn on e5.
  - **2...Nc6.** Black's most common reply. Develops the knight and defends their e5 pawn.
    - **3.Bc4** — Italian Game
    - **3.Bb5** — Ruy Lopez
    - **3.d4** — Scotch Game
    - **3.c3** — Ponziani Opening
    - **3.Nc3 Nf6** — Four Knight's Game
  - **2...Nf6** — Petrov's Defense
  - **2...d6** — Philidor Defense
  - **2...d5?!** — Elephant Gambit
  - **2...f5?!** — Latvian Gambit
- **2.d4 exd4.** White immediately contests Black's e-pawn, and Black usually captures.
  - **3.Qxd4** — Center Game
  - **3.c3** — Danish Gambit
- **2.Nc3** — Vienna Game
- **2.Bc4** — Bishop's Opening
- **2.f4** — King's Gambit

<sup>1</sup> White always has a slight edge in symmetrical positions due to first-move advantage. However, if Black is simply interested in equalizing safely rather than gunning for an early advantage, then symmetrical play is a valid strategy.

# Move Tree – 1.e4 e5







# Italian Game



**Main Line:** 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4

The Italian Game is one of the oldest classical openings for White. With Bc4, White takes aim at Black's weak f7 pawn. In most variations, White has options to dictate the pace of the game, making the Italian a flexible weapon.

## Features

-  **Flexible.** May become wildly sharp, or slow and positional.
-  **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
-  **Prevalent.** Opponents will have experience against common lines.
-  **Attainable.** Frequent opportunities to play this opening.<sup>1</sup>

## Motifs

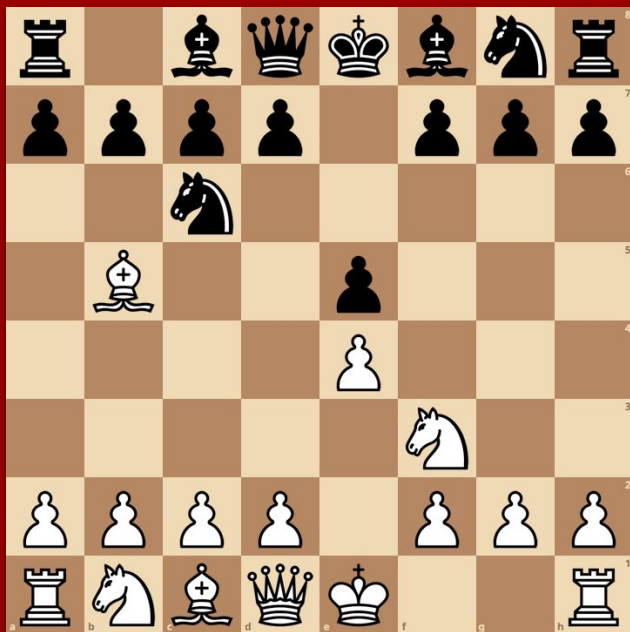
- White prepares the central pawn break d4 to open the position.
  - White can play this break right away to enter sharp positions, or delay the break (e.g. play d3 first) for quieter play.
- White preserves their powerful light-square bishop by playing a3 (making retreat on a2), or playing c3 (making retreat via c4-b5-a4-c2).
- In slower positions, White can route their b1 knight to the kingside by borrowing a common [Ruy Lopez](#) maneuver: Nbd2 to f1 to g3, and later to f5.
- Black often has attacking chances of their own on the kingside, involving their dark-square bishop on the dangerous a7-g1 diagonal.

## Common Lines

- 3...Bc5 – **Giuoco Piano** [ML]
  - 4.c3 – **Classical Variation** [ML]
  - 4.d3 – **Giuoco Pianissimo**
  - 4.b4 – **Evans Gambit**
- 3...Nf6 – **Two Knights Defense**
  - 4.Ng5 d5 5.exd5 Nxd5 6.Nxf7! – **Fried Liver Attack**

1. The attainability gradually drops off at higher ratings, as less players respond to 1.e4 with ...e5.





# Ruy Lopez



**Main Line:** 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5

The Ruy Lopez (or Spanish Game) is an opening where White continues to pressure Black's e5 pawn by undermining its only defender: the knight on c6. Theory in the Ruy Lopez is incredibly extensive, and it remains one of the most popular openings among players of all levels.

## Features

-  **Flexible**. May become wildly sharp, or slow and positional.
-  **Theory-Heavy**. Requires considerable opening preparation.
-  **Prevalent**. Opponents will have experience against common lines.
-  **Attainable**. Frequent opportunities to play this opening.<sup>1</sup>

## Motifs

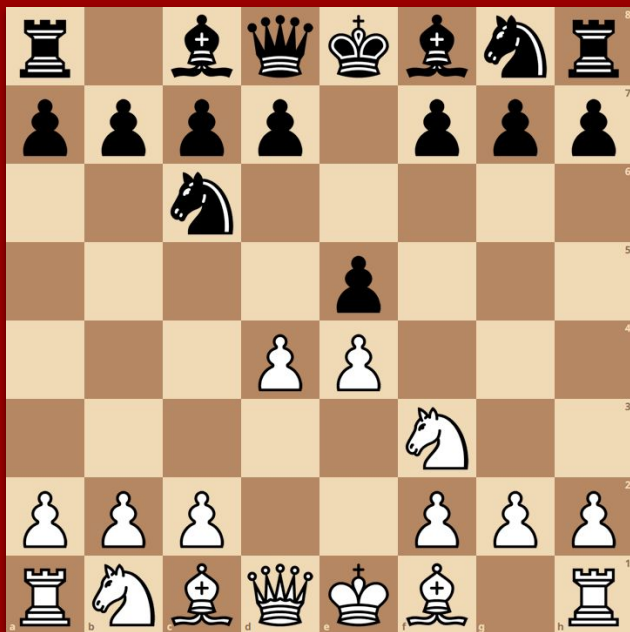
- Until White defends their own e-pawn and/or controls the d4 square, they usually cannot win Black's e-pawn with Bxc6 followed by Nxe5.
  - Black then has the resource Qd4, forking White's knight and e-pawn.
- A common knight maneuver is Nbd2-Nf1-Ng3 (or Ne3), gaining access to the f5 and/or d5 squares and assisting in a kingside attack.
- White prepares the pawn break d4, whereas Black will prepare ...d5.

## Common Lines

- 3...a6 — **Morphy Defense** [ML]
  - 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Be7 — **Main Line**
  - 4.Bxc6 dxc6 — **Exchange Variation**
- 3...Nf6 — **Berlin Defense**
- 3...Bc5 — **Classical Variation**
- 3...d6 — **Steinitz Defense**
- 3...f5!? — **Schliemann Defense**

1. The attainability gradually drops off at higher ratings, as less players respond to 1.e4 with ...e5.





# Scotch Game



**Main Line:** 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4

The Scotch Game occurs when White breaks in the center with 3.d4, immediately opening the center. Black is able to equalize with highly accurate play, but the Scotch offers plenty of opportunity for White to tactically outplay their opponent under practical conditions.

## Features

-  **Tactical.** Offers sharp, tactical play in the opening.
-  **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
-  **Prevalent.** Opponents will have experience against common lines.
-  **Attainable.** Frequent opportunities to play this opening.

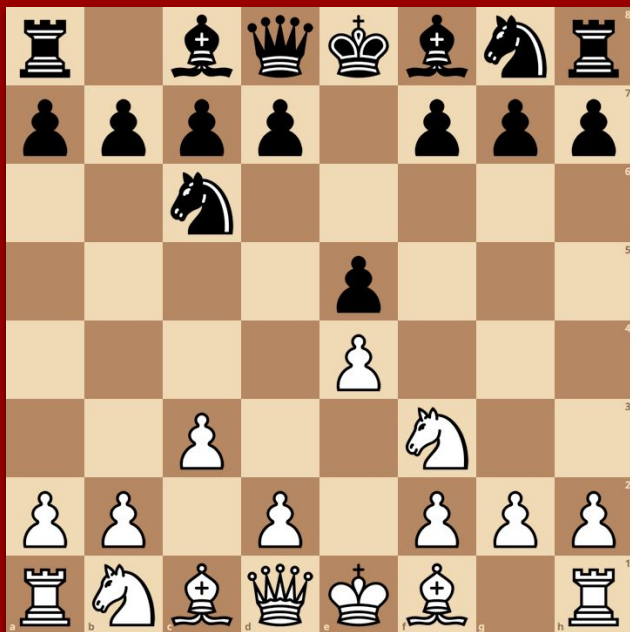
## Motifs

- If Black chooses to exchange central knights, White is comfortable recapturing with Qxd4 where their queen cannot be easily displaced.
- White will often play the kingside thrust f4 to assault Black's king.
- In return, Black usually plays in the center by preparing the ...d5 break or by directly trying to win White's weak e-pawn.

## Common Lines

- After main line 3...exd4:
  - After main line 4.Nxd4:
    - 4...Bc5 — **Classical Variation**
    - 4...Nf6 — **Schmidt Variation**
  - 4.Bc4!? — **Scotch Gambit**
  - 4.c3!? — **Göring Gambit**
    - May transpose from Danish Gambit lines.

# Ponziani Opening



**Main Line:** 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.c3

The Ponziani Opening occurs when White plays c3 instead of developing a piece. White is hoping to follow with the pawn break d4 and establish a formidable center. Most masters consider 3.c3 too slow, giving Black the opportunity to seize the initiative; therefore, the Ponziani is only used rarely as a surprise weapon at the top level.

## Features

- **Tactical.** Offers sharp, tactical play in the opening.
- **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
- **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.
- **Attainable.** Frequent opportunities to play this opening.<sup>1</sup>

## Motifs

- The move c3 preparing the d4 break is a common idea in other openings, such as the [Italian Game](#) and [Ruy Lopez](#).
  - In those openings, however, White prioritizes kingside development and castles before trying to open the center.
- The early c3 also frees White's queen, which can target Black's weak f7 and b7 pawns with Qb3, or pin Black's knight with Qa4.
  - In fact, the move Qa4 is the precursor to many Ponziani [opening traps](#), which can easily snare unprepared opponents playing Black.

## Common Lines

- 3...d5 — **Main Line**
- 3...Nf6 — **Jaenisch Variation**
- 3...f5!? — **Ponziani Countergambit**







# Four Knights Game



**Main Line:** 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Nc3 Nf6

The Four Knights Game is a symmetrical opening where both sides prioritize developing their knights to their most natural squares. Black usually has good chances of equalizing, which is why 3.Nc3 (the Three Knights Game) is considered unambitious for White.

## Features

-  **Transpositional.** Commonly transposes into other openings.
-  **Positional.** Offers slow, strategic play in the opening.
-  **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
-  **Prevalent.** Opponents will have experience against common lines.

## Motifs

- The central pawn breaks, d4 for White and ...d5 for Black, are more difficult to prepare since the c-pawns are both obstructed by knights.<sup>1</sup>
- A common plan for both sides is to pin the opponent's queenside knight (i.e. Bb5 and ...Bb5), undermining the opponent's e-pawn.
  - If Bxc6 or ...Bxc3, either side will gladly accept doubled c-pawns, as it becomes easier to prepare the central breaks d4 and ...d5.

## Common Lines

- 4.Bb5 — **Spanish Variation**
- 4.d4 — **Scotch Variation**
- 4.Bc4 — **Italian Variation**
  - Black equalizes easily with the so-called "[center fork trick](#)".
- 4.Nxe5?! — **Halloween Gambit**
- May transpose to and from several other openings in the Open Game.

1. Normally this positional concern is specific to Black, since White usually plays c3 rather than Nc3.

# Petrov's Defense



**Main Line:** 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nf6

The Petrov's Defense (or Russian Game) is a opening where Black counter-attacks White's e-pawn. Players will often use the Petrov to avoid entering the more theoretical openings that occur after 2...Nc6.

## Features

- **Positional.** Offers slow, strategic play in the opening.<sup>1</sup>
- **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
- **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.
- **Attainable.** Frequent opportunities to play this opening.

## Motifs

- The two e-pawns are normally traded off, resulting in a relatively simple position and symmetrical pawn structure.
- Black is often able to establish a strong central knight on e4, supported with moves such as ...d5 and ...f5 (or ...Bf5).
  - However, Black's knight can also find itself as White's target of attack, with moves like Bd3, Nc3, Re1, and c4 (undermining d5).

## Common Lines

- 3.Nxe5 — **Classical Variation** [ML]
  - After main line 3...d6:
    - 4.Nf3 Nxe4 — **Main Line**
    - 4.Nxf7!? — **Cochrane Gambit**
  - 3...Nc6?! — **Stafford Gambit**
- 3.d4 — **Steinitz Variation** (or "Modern Attack")
- 3.Bc4 — **Italian Variation**
- Transposes into the **Four Knights Game** after 3.Nc3 Nc6.

1. The Petrov usually leads to peaceful positions, but there exist sharp lines for both sides to choose from.




# Philidor Defense



**Main Line:** 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 d6

The Philidor Defense is a solid but somewhat passive opening for Black. With 2...d6, Black secures their e5 pawn and opens a diagonal for their light-square bishop, at the cost of blocking in the other bishop. The Philidor is popular at lower ratings, but rarely played among masters.

## Features

-  **Positional.** Offers slow, strategic play in the opening.
-  **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
-  **Attainable.** Frequent opportunities to play this opening.

## Motifs

- By delaying ...Nc6, Black retains more options with their c-pawn, notably ...c6 supporting the central break ...d5.
- Because of the passivity of Black's position, White often finds enough time to expand on the kingside with f4, especially since Black's dark-squared bishop cannot readily exploit the weaknesses created.

## Common Lines

- After main line 3.d4:
  - 3...exd4 — **Exchange Variation**
  - 3...Nd7 — **Hanham Variation**
    - 4.Nc3 Ngf6 — **Black Lion Variation**
  - 3...f5?! — **Philidor Countergambit**
- White can also avoid the bulk of Philidor theory by playing 3.Bc4, an unnamed but fairly common variation.
  - This variation can lead to the [Légal Trap](#).





# Elephant Gambit



**Main Line:** 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 d5?!

The Elephant Gambit is an offbeat opening where Black quickly breaks in the center with ...d5, ignoring the threat of White's previous move. Despite its dubious reputation, the gambit scores surprisingly well against unprepared opponents at all levels.

## Features

-  **Tactical.** Offers sharp, tactical play in the opening.
-  **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
-  **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.
-  **Attainable.** Frequent opportunities to play this opening.

## Motifs

- In most lines, Black calmly develops their pieces onto natural squares and plays for superior piece activity, rather than a chaotic all-out assault against White's king like the [Latvian Gambit](#).
- If White plays exd5, Black can reach a passive [Scandinavian](#)-like position after ...Qxd5, though this goes against the gambiting spirit.
  - Black usually recaptures with ...Qxd5 only after they have already secured a lead in development.

## Common Lines

- After main line 3.exd5:
  - 3...e4 — **Paulsen Countergambit**
  - 3...Bd6 — **Maróczy Gambit** (or "Elephant Gambit Proper")
- It is also perfectly viable and common for White to take Black's other central pawn with Nxe5, though these variations remain unnamed.

# Latvian Gambit



**Main Line:** 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 f5?!

The Latvian Gambit is a highly aggressive reply to 2.Nf3. The gambit is considered unsound; Black already has two pawns hanging and White can capture either with a slight advantage. Even so, the opening sees quick wins and impressive scores at the amateur-level.

## Features

- **Tactical.** Offers sharp, tactical play in the opening.
- **Theory-Heavy.** Requires considerable opening preparation.
- **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.
- **Attainable.** Frequent opportunities to play this opening.

## Motifs

- The advance of Black's f-pawn has weakened key light-square diagonals near their king, a theme similar to the [King's Gambit](#).
  - White's common threats are Qh5+ and, after castling, Bc4+.
- Black will often go to great lengths to seize the initiative, sacrificing both their e- and f-pawns, and sometimes even their rook on h8.
  - In general, many of Black's best ideas appear counterintuitive and downright absurd to inexperienced players. This makes theory preparation especially important in this opening

## Common Lines

- 3.Nxe5 — **Main Line**
- 3.exf5 — **Latvian Gambit Accepted**
- 3.d4 — **Mason Countergambit**

# Center Game



**Main Line:** 1.e4 e5 2.d4 exd4 3.Qxd4

The Center Game resembles a reversed [Scandinavian Defense](#) where White immediately contests Black's e-pawn. The opening is not used often at the master level, because it gives Black good chances of equalizing. However, it is generally considered a safe and active way for White to play.

## Features

- **Tactical.** Offers sharp, tactical play in the opening.
- **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
- **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.
- **Attainable.** Frequent opportunities to play this opening.

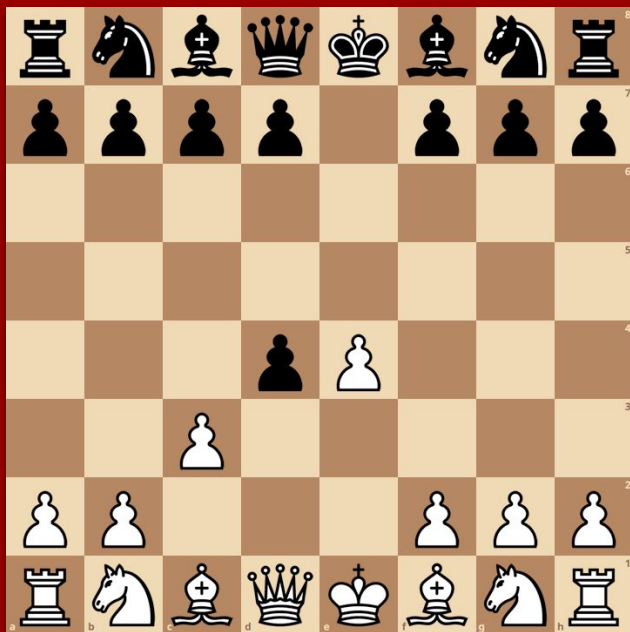
## Motifs

- After 4...Nc6, White's accepts a loss of tempo on their queen in exchange for an open position and a quick kingside attack.
- White usually castles queenside, which puts their rook on the semi-open d-file and sets the stage for a kingside pawn storm.
- Another common idea for White is to reposition their queen to g3, targeting Black's g7 pawn.
- Black looks to play the ...d5 advance, regaining space in the center.

## Common Lines

- After main line 3...Nc6:
  - 4.Qe3 — **Paulsen Attack** [ML]
  - 4.Qc4 — **Hall Variation**
- 3.Nf3 (instead of 3.Qxd4) — **Kieseritzky Variation**
  - Usually transposes into the [Scotch Game](#) after 3...Nc6.





# Danish Gambit



**Main Line:** 1. e4 e5 2. d4 exd4 3. c3!?

The Danish Gambit is an aggressive opening where White sacrifices up to two pawns in order to gain a significant lead in development and dangerous open diagonals toward Black's kingside. The Danish scores poorly among masters, but sees great success for amateurs and below.

## Features

-  **Tactical.** Offers sharp, tactical play in the opening.
-  **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
-  **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.
-  **Attainable.** Frequent opportunities to play this opening.

## Motifs

- Qb3 is a common idea for White, targeting Black's weak f7 pawn.
- White must stay attentive to the opportunity of playing the bishop sacrifice Bxf7+, followed by a queen check to fork the king and another piece—usually Black's dark-square bishop.
- After Black has played ...Nf6, it is common for White to advance in the center with e5 to threaten that knight.
  - In reply, Black often counterattacks White's bishop on c4 with ...d5.

## Common Lines

- 3...dxc3 — **Danish Gambit Accepted** [ML]
  - 4.Nxc3 — **Alekhine Variation**
  - 4.Bc4 — **Lindehn Variation** (or "Double Danish Gambit \*")
    - 4.cxb2 Bxb2 — **Danish Gambit, Twice Accepted**\*
  - Often transposes into the Göring Gambit in the **Scotch Game**.
- 3...d5 — **Sørensen Defense**






# Vienna Game



Main Line: 1.e4 e5 2.Nc3

The Vienna Game is an uncommon yet perfectly sound opening where White first develops their queenside knight. By delaying the move Nf3, White is able to stay flexible with their kingside development.

## Features

-  **Transpositional**. Commonly transposes into other openings.
-  **Flexible**. May become wildly sharp, or slow and positional.
-  **Theoretical**. Requires concrete opening preparation.
-  **Uncommon**. Opponents less likely to be prepared.
-  **Attainable**. Frequent opportunities to play this opening.

## Motifs

- White can enter tactical positions with the aggressive pawn break f4, which was only made possible by delaying Nf3.
- Alternatively, it is also common for White to play more positionally with g3, Bg2, and Nge2 (instead of Nf3, which obstructs the bishop).

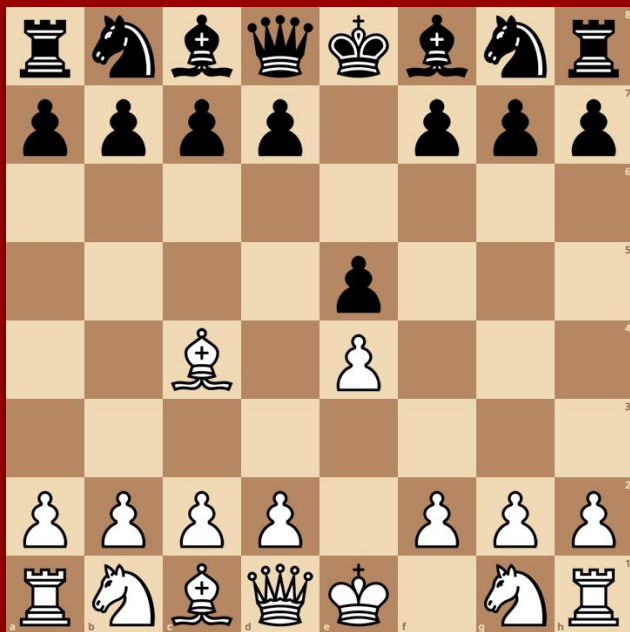
## Common Lines

- 2...Nf6 — **Falkbeer Variation**
  - 3.f4!? — **Vienna Gambit**<sup>1</sup>
  - 3.Bc4 — **Stanley Variation**
  - 3.g3 — **Mieses Variation**
- 2...Nc6 — **Max Lange Defense**
  - 3.Bc4 — **Main Line**
  - 3.g3 — **Paulsen Variation**
- Often transposes into **Petrov's Defense** or **Four Knights Game**.

1. The name "Vienna Gambit" can also refer to 3.f4 after 2...Nc6 instead of 2...Nf6. But in practice, the name usually refers to the 2...Nf6 variation.







# Bishop's Opening



**Main Line:** 1.e4 e5 2.Bc4

The Bishop's Opening is a line in the Open Game where White commits their light-square bishop relatively early, taking aim at f7. Since Bc4 is a common move in several openings, it is fairly common for the Bishop's Opening to transpose.

## Features

-  **Transpositional**. Commonly transposes into other openings.
-  **Flexible**. May become wildly sharp, or slow and positional.
-  **Theoretical**. Requires concrete opening preparation.
-  **Attainable**. Frequent opportunities to play this opening.

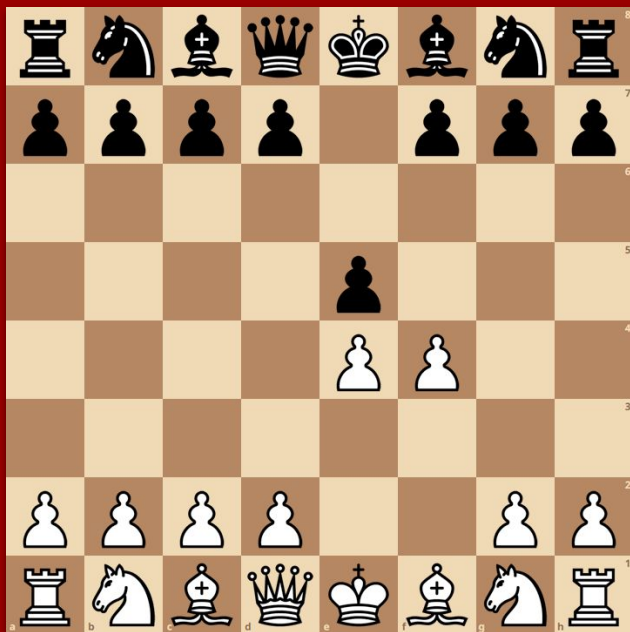
## Motifs

- Statistically, it is most common for the game to reach slower, closed **Italian**-like positions where Black has not played ...Nc6 yet.
  - However, the Bishop's Opening also offers White many ways to reach more aggressive positions, either by transposition or via independent variations (e.g. the Urusov Gambit).
- Like the **Vienna Game**, White has not played Nf3 yet, reserving the possibility of playing the **King's Gambit**-style pawn break f4.

## Common Lines

- 2...Nf6 – **Berlin Defense**
  - 3.d3 – **Main Line**
  - 3.d4!? – **Ponziani Gambit**
    - 3...exd4 4.Nf3 – **Urusov Gambit**
- 2...Bc5 – **Classical Defense** (or "Boi Variation")
- Commonly transposes into a large set of other openings, e.g. **Italian Game**, **Vienna Game**, **King's Gambit**, **Petrov's Defense**, ...

# King's Gambit



**Main Line:** 1.e4 e5 2.f4

The King's Gambit is one of the oldest and heavily-theorized gambits available for White. If Black accepts the gambit, White will usually develop their kingside with an Italian-like setup and target Black's weak f7 pawn. The King's Gambit enjoys the most popularity among amateur-level players, where Black is less likely to know the theory.

## Features

- ✂ **Tactical.** Offers sharp, tactical play in the opening.
- 🧠 **Theory-Heavy.** Requires considerable opening preparation.
- 💎 **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.
- ♣ **Attainable.** Frequent opportunities to play this opening.

## Motifs

- The opening resembles a mirrored **Queen's Gambit**, but the key difference is that White has taken a much greater risk by exposing key dark-square diagonals near their king.
  - Black can exploit this with ...Qh4+, or after White castles, ...Bc5+.
- By accepting the gambit, Black will have diverted their center control.
  - White aims to exploit this by pushing d4 at an opportune moment, seizing the entire center and threatening to recapture Bxf4.

## Common Lines

- 2...exf4 — **King's Gambit Accepted**
  - 3.Nf3 — **King's Knight Gambit** [ML]
    - 3...g5 — **Classical Variation** [ML]
    - 3...g5 4.Bc4 g4 5.0-0!? — **Muzio Gambit**
  - 3.Bc4 — **Bishop's Gambit**
- 2...d5 — **Falkbeer Countergambit**

---

## II. Semi-Open Game

Openings with 1.e4 without 1...e5



## ? Semi-Open Game: Why?

After 1.e4, Black can immediately break symmetry by playing a move other than 1...e5.

- When Black breaks symmetry, the position immediately becomes **unbalanced**, and it is no longer as simple to evaluate the position.
- In an unbalanced position, both players will have **different positional assets**, and one player will eventually come out on top by more efficiently converting their assets to a material advantage or checkmate.
  - For example, the [Sicilian Defense](#) unbalances the position by giving White more kingside control, while Black claims space on the queenside.
  - Players looking to win (rather than draw) with Black may find more success playing one of the asymmetrical openings listed in this section.
- These imbalances, no matter how small, are core to the identity of Semi-Open openings, such that Black's first move essentially decides the opening being played.

[ [Move Tree](#) ]

# Sicilian Defense



**Main Line:** 1.e4 c5

The Sicilian Defense gives Black great counter-attacking chances in order to play for a win. The Sicilian is an intensely theoretical opening, as there are countless sub-variations to choose from for both White and Black.

## Features

- 🏹 **Flexible.** May become wildly sharp, or slow and positional.
- 🧠 **Theory-Heavy.** Requires considerable opening preparation.
- 👤 **Prevalent.** Opponents will have experience against common lines.
- 🍌 **Very Attainable.** You'll get to play this opening extremely often.

## Motifs

- Sicilian theory is generally divided into two categories:
  - **Open Sicilians:** White plays 2.Nf3 and 3.d4 to open the center
  - **Anti-Sicilians:** White delays these moves to sidestep Open Sicilian theory.
- White's plan usually revolves around a kingside attack, while Black aims to counter-attack on the queenside.

## Common Lines

- After 2. Nf3:
  - 2...d6 3.d4 — **Open Sicilian**
    - After 3...cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3:
      - 5...a6 — **Najdorf Variation**
      - 5...g6 — **Dragon Variation**
      - 5...Nc6 — **Classical Variation**
  - 2...e6 — **French Variation** (or "Franco-Sicilian")
  - After 2...Nc6:
    - 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 g6 — **Accelerated Dragon**
    - 3.Bb5 — **Rossolimo Variation**
- 2.d4 — **Smith-Morra Gambit**
- 2.c3 — **Alapin Variation** (or "c3 Sicilian")
- 2.Nc3 — **Closed Sicilian**
  - 2...Nc6 3.f4!? — **Grand Prix Attack**

# Scandinavian Defense



**Main Line:** 1.e4 d5

The Scandinavian Defense is an opening where Black immediately challenges White's center with a pawn. Because of its urgently confrontational nature, the volume of theory in the Scandinavian is relatively small, and Black's ideas largely remain the same across all variations.

## Features

- **Positional.** Offers slow, strategic play in the opening.<sup>1</sup>
- **Systematic.** Can be played by broad motifs, over concrete theory.<sup>1</sup>
- **Very Attainable.** You'll get to play this opening extremely often.

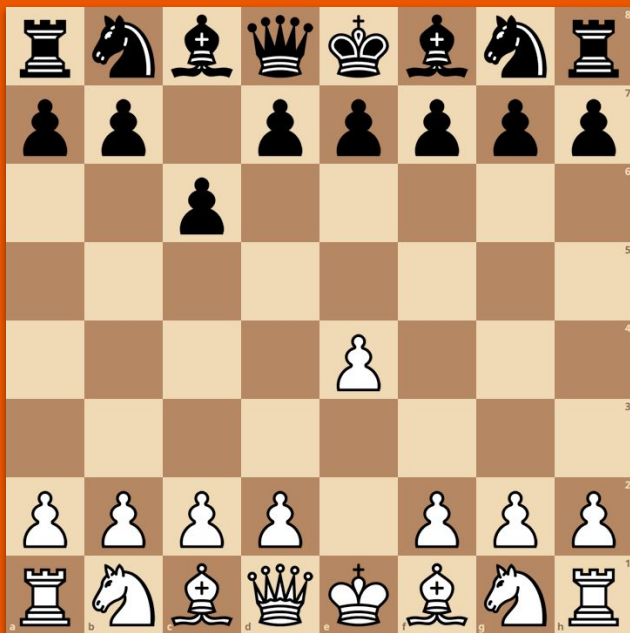
## Motifs

- The trade of pawns (2.exd5) is practically forced, resulting in a relatively open position.
  - White may sometimes advance with 2.e5, but this simply leads to an inferior version of the French Defense.
- While White gains a developmental lead in all main variations, Black maintains a long-term positional advantage in terms of pawn structure.
- Black intends to use their open d-file for attack, especially when White has a pawn on d4.
  - In this case, White may later regret playing 3.Nc3 to win a tempo on Black's queen on d5, as the knight on c3 blocks the c-pawn from reinforcing d4.
  - Black plays ...c6 and ...e6 to prevent White from advancing to d5.

## Common Lines

- After main line 2.exd5 Qxd5 3.Nc3:
  - 3...Qa5 — **Main Line**
  - 3...Qd8 — **Mieses-Kotroc Variation** (old main line)
  - 3...Qd6 — **Gubinsky-Melts Defense**
- 2.exd5 Nf6 — **Modern Variation**

# Caro-Kann Defense



**Main Line:** 1.e4 c6

The Caro-Kann Defense is one of the most positionally sound replies to 1.e4, in which Black prepares to contest White's center with 2...d5. The Caro-Kann is known for its defensive nature and solid pawn structure, making it difficult for White to find a target in Black's position to attack.

## Features

- **Positional.** Offers slow, strategic play in the opening.
- **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
- **Very Attainable.** You'll get to play this opening extremely often.

## Motifs

- Compared with the [French Defense](#), Black's light-square bishop is much easier to develop.
  - However, like in the [Slav Defense](#), the pawn on c6 is stopping Black from developing the queenside knight to its most natural square.
  - Thus, Black may prepare the pawn break ...c5, freeing the c6 square for the knight, but losing a tempo in the process with c7-c6-c5.
- Although White generally secures a space advantage and lead in development, Black has the superior pawn structure and comes out ahead if the game draws on to the endgame.

## Common Lines

- After main line 2.d4 d5:
  - 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.Nxe5 — **Main Line**
  - 3.exd5 — **Exchange Variation**
  - 3.e5 — **Advance Variation**
  - 3.f3 — **Fantasy Variation** (or "Tartakower Variation")

# French Defense



**Main Line:** 1.e4 e6

The French Defense is a solid opening for Black in the King's Pawn Opening. Like the [Caro-Kann](#), Black prepares 2...d5 to contest White's center, though in comparison, the French tends to offer Black more counterattacking chances (especially in the Winawer Variation).

## Features

- **Flexible**. May become wildly sharp, or slow and positional.
- **Theoretical**. Requires concrete opening preparation.
- **Very Attainable**. You'll get to play this opening extremely often.

## Motifs

- Because of their e6 pawn, Black's light-square bishop (dubbed the "French bishop") often remains passive until much later in the game.
- Similar to the [Caro-Kann](#), Black will play for the central break ...c5, sometimes following up with a queenside pawn storm.
  - After White has pushed e5, Black can also prepare the ...f6 break.
- White has more kingside space, and will usually try to launch a direct mating attack against Black's king.
  - The pawn break f4-f5 is a common way to start an attack. To facilitate this plan, White often delays Nf3 (or plays Nge7 instead).

## Common Lines

- After main line 2.d4 d5:
  - 3.Nc3 — **Paulsen Variation**
    - 3...Bb4 — **Winawer Variation**
    - 3...Nf6 — **Classical Variation**
  - 3.e5 — **Advance Variation**
  - 3.exd5 — **Exchange Variation**
  - 3.Nd2 — **Tarrasch Variation**



# Alekhine's Defense



**Main Line:** 1.e4 Nf6

The Alekhine's Defense epitomizes the style of hypermodern chess: Black will allow White to establish a formidable center by chasing the f6 knight around, hoping to later prove that White has overextended their pawns.

## Features

- ✨ **Hypermodern.** Concedes central space to opponent's pawns.
- ✂️ **Tactical.** Offers sharp, tactical play in the opening.
- ⌚ **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
- 💎 **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.
- 🍂 **Very Attainable.** You'll get to play this opening extremely often.

## Motifs

- After White has played Nf3, Black usually follows with the pin Bg4, temporarily immobilizing the piece responsible for defending White's center pawns on d4 and e5.
- The pawn push c4 is often a committal move for White, who may want to put a bishop on c4 instead.
- Black may get in serious trouble early on if White knows more theory.
  - For example, White can quickly assemble a dangerous attack on f7 with moves such as Bc4, Nf3-Ng4, Qf3, and the pawn advance to e6.

## Common Lines

- After main line 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6:
  - After 4.c4 Nb6:
    - 5.exd6 – **Exchange Variation**
    - 5.f4 – **Four Pawns Attack**
  - 4.Nf3 – **Modern Variation**

# Nimzowitsch Defense



**Main Line:** 1.e4 Nc6

The Nimzowitsch Defense is a rare but sound opening for Black. The most significant independent line for White is 2.d4, grabbing the entire center and compelling Black to play in hypermodern style.

## Features

- ✨ **Hypermodern.** Concedes central space to opponent's pawns.
- 🔄 **Transpositional.** Commonly transposes into other openings.
- ⚡ **Flexible.** May become wildly sharp, or slow and positional.
- ⌚ **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
- 💎 **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.
- 🔥 **Very Attainable.** You'll get to play this opening extremely often.

## Motifs

- Because ...Nc6 is such a common move in other King's Pawn openings, the potential for transposition is very high.
- After 2.d4, White's center already has some weaknesses. The d4 pawn is defended only by the queen, and the e4 pawn is not defended at all.
  - Black usually begins to undermine White's center immediately with moves such as ...d5 or ...e5.

## Common Lines

- After main line 2.d4:
  - 2...d5 — **Scandinavian Variation**
  - 2...e5 — **Kennedy Variation**
- 2.Nf3 — **Declined Variation**
- May transpose into **Scotch Game**, among other King's Pawn openings.

# Pirc Defense



**Main Line:** 1.e4 d6

The Pirc Defense is a complicated hypermodern reply to the King's Pawn Opening. Black's idea with 1...d6 is to follow 2...Nf6, without giving White the option to kick the knight by advancing with e5.

## Features

- ✨ **Hypermodern.** Concedes central space to opponent's pawns.
- 🏹 **Flexible.** May become wildly sharp, or slow and positional.
- ⏳ **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
- 💎 **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.
- 🔥 **Very Attainable.** You'll get to play this opening extremely often.

## Motifs

- Black employs a setup similar to the [King's Indian Defense](#), in which they will play ...Nf6, fianchetto their dark-square bishop, and play for the central pawn thrusts...c5 or ...e5.
  - The main difference between the KID and the Pirc is that in the KID, White usually has a pawn to c4, whereas in the Pirc, White does not.
- White has a variety of different setups which will usually dictate the pace of the game, from the aggressive and tactical Austrian Attack to the more positional Classical Variation.

## Common Lines

- After main line 2.d4 Nf6 3.Nc3 g6:
  - 4.f4 — **Austrian Attack**
  - 4.Nf3 — **Classical Variation**
  - May transpose into the **Black Lion Variation** of the [Philidor Defense](#).
- White can also employ a system with f3, Be3, and Qd2 (intending Bh6 to trade off dark-square bishops).
  - Against the Pirc, this system is called the **150 Attack**.
  - The same system is often used by White against the [Sicilian Dragon](#) (Yugoslav Attack) and [King's Indian Defense](#) (Sämisch Variation).

# Modern Defense



**Main Line:** 1.e4 g6

The Modern Defense (or Robatsch Defense) is a hypermodern setup that can be employed against most setups by White, including 1.d4 and 1.c4. Strategic ideas in the Modern tend to be complex, with little margin for error, making it a relatively difficult opening for beginners.

## Features

- ✨ **Hypermodern.** Concedes central space to opponent's pawns.
- ♔ **Transpositional.** Commonly transposes into other openings.
- ⚡ **Flexible.** May become wildly sharp, or slow and positional.
- ⌚ **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
- 💎 **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.
- 🔥 **Very Attainable.** You'll get to play this opening extremely often.

## Motifs

- Much like the [Pirc Defense](#), Black intends to play on dark squares with ...Bg7, ...d6, and the central thrust ...c5 (and occasionally ...e5).
  - The main difference is that in the Modern, Black delays the move ...Nf6, so there is no immediate threat on White's e-pawn.
- If White has played Nc3, Black can play for queenside expansion with ...a6 and ...b5, threatening to dislodge White's knight with ...b4.

## Common Lines

- After main line 2.d4 Bg7:
  - After 3.Nc3:
    - 3...d6 — **Standard Line [ML]**
    - 3...c5 — **Pterodactyl Defense**
  - 3.c4 d6 4.Nc3 — **Averbakh System**
- May transpose into [King's Indian](#), [Pirc](#), [Hippo](#), [Sicilian Dragon](#), or [Benoni](#) lines.

# Owen's Defense



**Main Line:** 1.e4 b6

The Owen's Defense is a hypermodern setup where Black immediately prepares to fianchetto their light-square bishop. The Owen has a dubious reputation, but is considered playable as a pet opening.

## Features

- ✨ **Hypermodern.** Concedes central space to opponent's pawns.
- ⚡ **Flexible.** May become wildly sharp, or slow and positional.
- ⌚ **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
- 💎 **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.
- 🔥 **Very Attainable.** You'll get to play this opening extremely often.

## Motifs

- Black's main strategy is to pressure the central light squares with ...Bb7, ...e6, and the central pawn thrusts ...d5, ...f5, or sometimes ...c5.
  - ...d5 often leads to pawn structures similar to the **Advanced French**.
- Similar to ...e6 **Indian systems** (e.g. NID, QID), White's Nc3 is often met with ...Bb4, where Black is comfortable trading off their bishop in exchange for greater control over light squares.
- The Owen appears to be a mirrored **Modern Defense**. However, ...b6 is slightly inferior as it does not facilitate kingside castling, and Black's pawn breaks are trickier to prepare.

## Common Lines

- Because of the scarcity in theory, there are no named variations in the Owen's Defense (i.e. no names which are in widespread use).
- Against 1.d4, 1...b6 is called the **English Defense**.
- May transpose into **Hippo Defense** systems.

# Hippo Defense



The Hippopotamus Defense describes an opening system that can be played against virtually any setup by White, due to its lack of early confrontation. In some respects, the Hippo is hypermodernism taken to an extreme: for nearly ten moves, Black completely neglects central occupation, instead aiming for an overly defensive yet flexible setup.

## Features

- ✨ **Hypermodern.** Concedes central space to opponent's pawns.
- ⚓ **Flexible.** May become wildly sharp, or slow and positional.
- ⚙️ **Systematic.** Can be played by broad motifs, over concrete theory.
- 💎 **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.
- 🍷 **Very Attainable.** You'll get to play this opening extremely often.

## Motifs

- The Hippo is frustrating to play against as White, since there are no clear targets of attack in Black's position. Black hopes to provoke a rash and positionally compromising advance by White.
- Black will generally wait for White to "show their cards", and then respond accordingly.
  - A common plan for Black is to wait for White to advance their pawn(s) to the fifth rank. Black will respond by closing the position and attacking the newly created weaknesses made by the advance.

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# Queen's Pawn Game

Openings with 1.d4

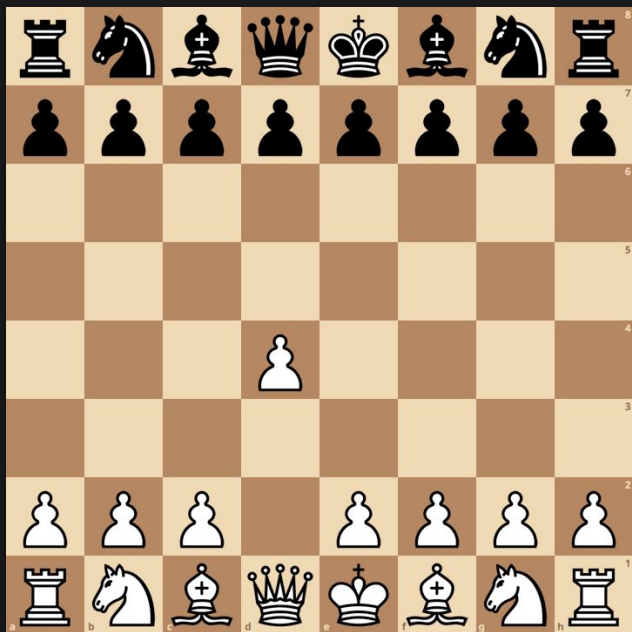


## ? Queen's Pawn Game: Why?

- Occupies the center with a pawn, adhering to **classical** chess principles.
- Controls the center: e5 and c5.
- Opens a diagonal for the dark-square bishop.
- If allowed, White will control the entire center with 2.e4.
- Usually leads to **slower**, more **positional** games.
  - The d-pawn is defended by the queen, and can easily be reinforced by pushing pawns to c3 and/or e3 without compromising the position.
  - Compare to 1.e4, which releases the queen but leaves the e-pawn undefended.
- A vast majority of **system-based openings** start with 1.d4, since its defensive nature usually allows both sides to reach their ideal piece setups without much interference.



# Queen's Pawn Game



Main Line: 1. d4

## Continuations in the Queen's Pawn Game

Black's responses to 1.d4 can be broken down into three categories:

- **Black stops White from following with 2.e4:**<sup>1</sup>
  - 1...d5 – Closed Game
  - 1...Nf6 – Indian Defense
  - 1...f5 – Dutch Defense<sup>2</sup>
- **Black pressures White's pawn on d4:**
  - 1...c5 – Old Benoni<sup>3</sup>
  - 1...e5?! – Englund Gambit
- **Black allows White to establish the full d4-e4 pawn center:**
  - 1...g6 – Modern Defense<sup>4</sup>
  - 1...b6 – English Defense<sup>4</sup>

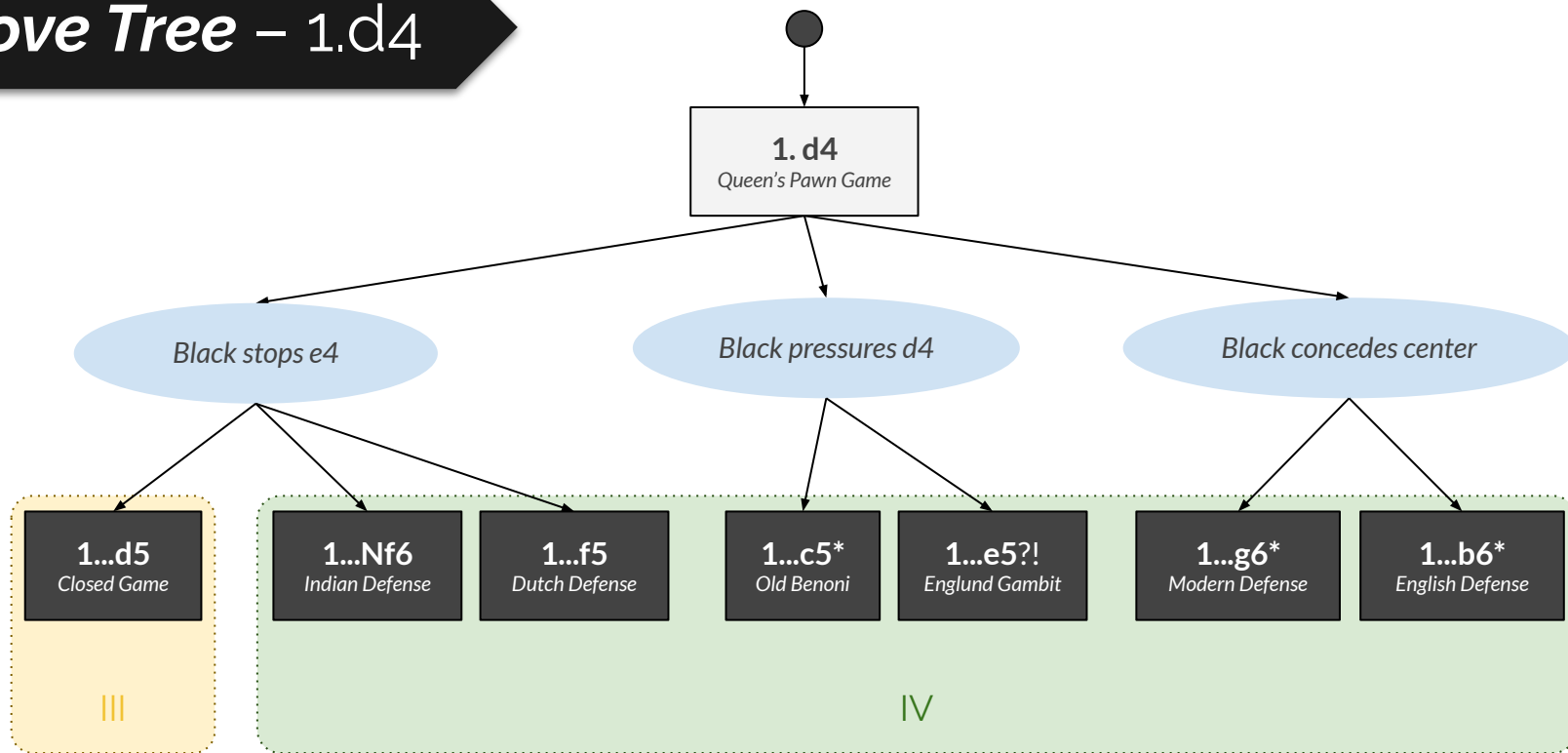
1. Note the difference in dynamic compared to 1.e4. Because e4 is not defended for White, this category of openings completely stops White from playing 2.e4 (unless they intentionally gambit their pawn).

2. An interesting exception. The Dutch does not actually stop e4 altogether, as White can still reach promising positions in the Staunton Gambit: 2.e4!?

3. The Old Benoni usually transposes to regular Benoni Defense, so there is no slide dedicated to it.

4. Covered in Semi-Open Game section, since White usually follows 2.e4 and transposes to 1.e4 lines. The English Defense transposes into the Owen's Defense after 2.e4.

# Move Tree – 1.d4



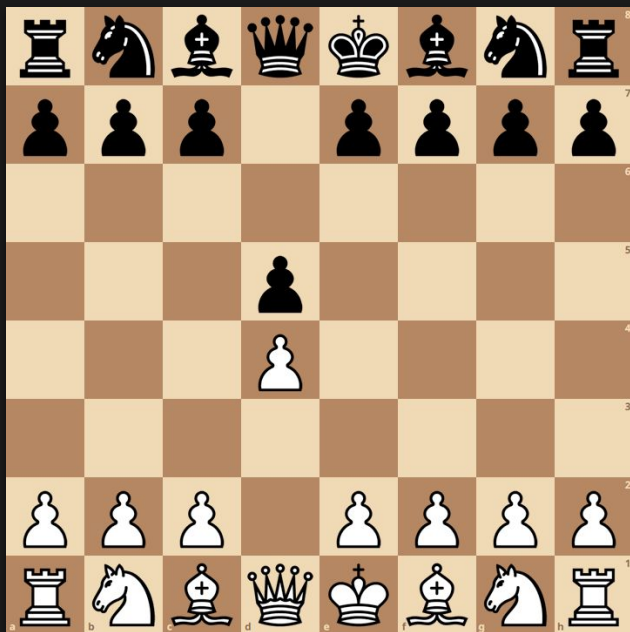
\* Not covered in this section.

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# III. Closed Game

Openings with 1.d4 d5

# Closed Game



Main Line: 1. d4 d5

## Continuations in the Closed Game

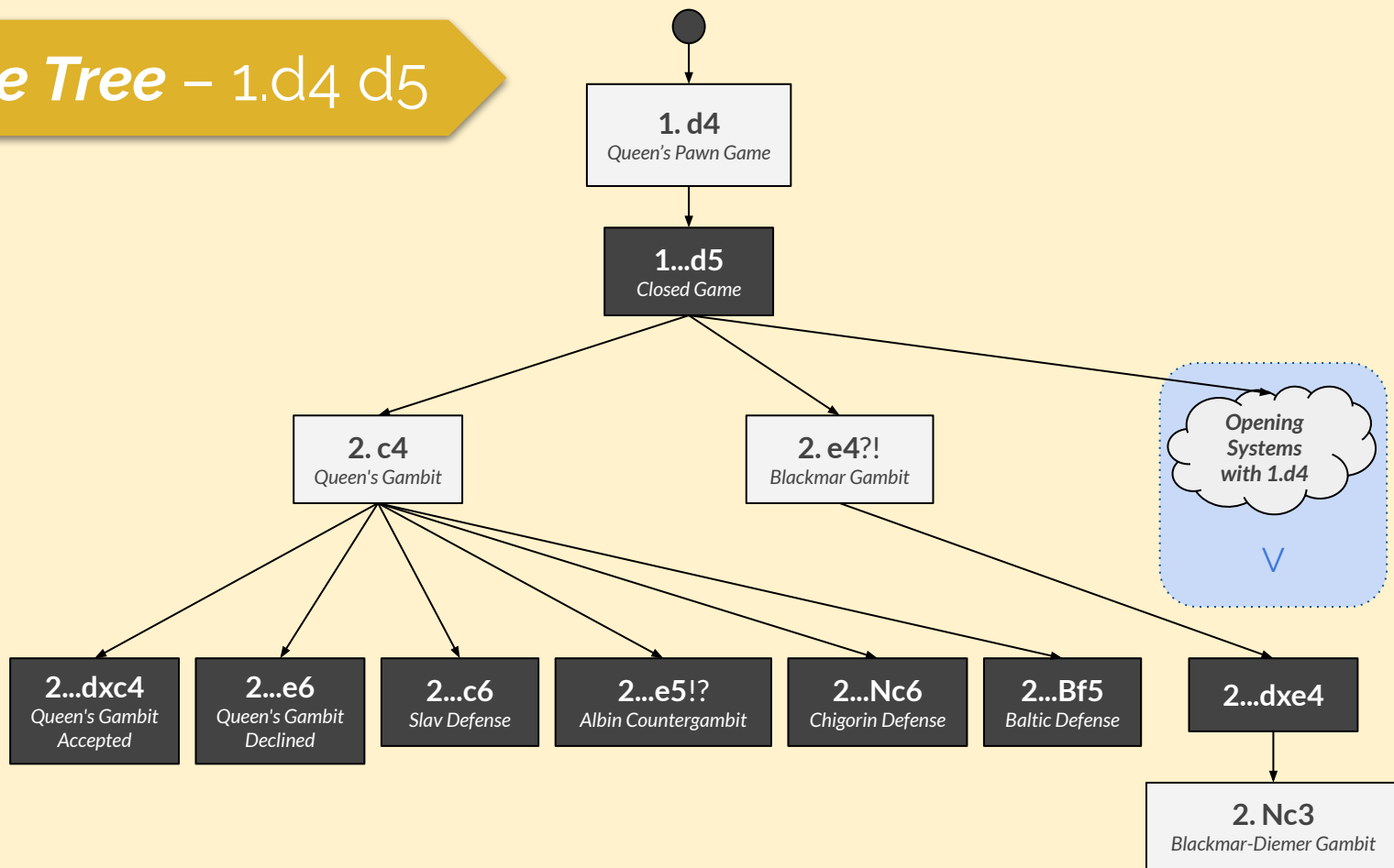
After 1.d4, Black can mirror White's move with 1...d5: the Closed Game.

- 2.c4 — Queen's Gambit
  - 2...dxc4 — Queen's Gambit Accepted (QGA)
  - 2...e6 — Queen's Gambit Declined (QGD)
  - 2...c6 — Slav Defense
  - 2...e5!? — Albin Countergambit
  - 2...Nc6 — Chigorin Defense
  - 2...Bf5 — Baltic Defense
- 2.e4?! — Blackmar Gambit
  - dxe4 3.Nc3 — Blackmar-Diemer Gambit (BDG)

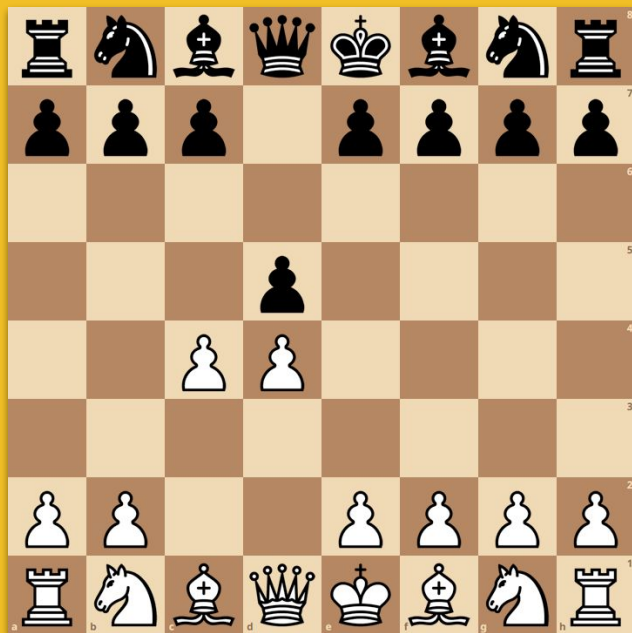
## ? Closed Game: Why?

Much like in the **Open Game**, Black choose to play symmetrically with 1...d5 to aim for a safe and roughly equal middlegame, accepting that they will likely accrue a small disadvantage in space and development.

# Move Tree – 1.d4 d5







# Queen's Gambit



Main Line: 1.d4 d5 2. c4

The Queen's Gambit (QG) is a common d4 opening for White, further popularized by the Netflix series to its name. Despite its name, the QG is not a "true" gambit: if Black captures the gambited pawn, White can easily regain the pawn with accurate play—or secure an advantage if Black stubbornly tries to hold on. To play the QG well, White must be prepared against a myriad of common responses by Black.

## Features

-  **Positional.** Offers slow, strategic play in the opening.
-  **Theory-Heavy.** Requires considerable opening preparation.
-  **Prevalent.** Opponents will have experience against common lines.
-  **Attainable.** Frequent opportunities to play this opening.<sup>1</sup>

## Motifs

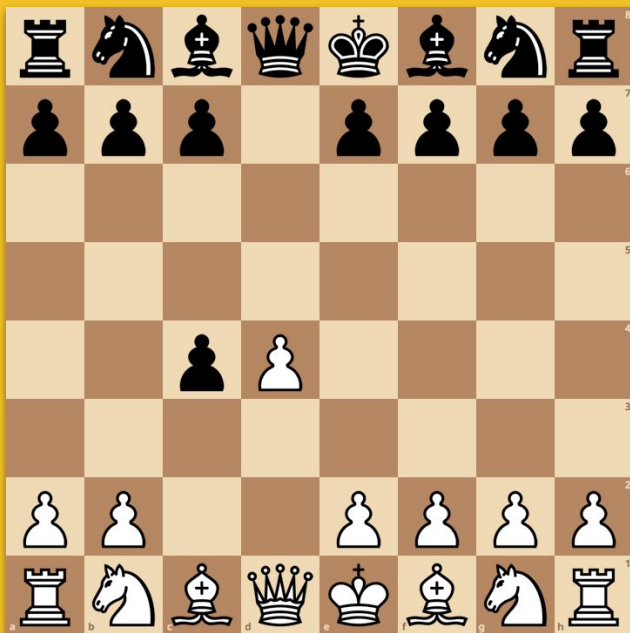
- White maintains a space advantage in most QG variations where Black declines the gambit.
- Black will prepare the pawn break ...c5 or ...e5 to free their position.

## Common Lines

- Refer to [move tree](#).
- May transpose into the [Catalan Opening](#) if White chooses to fianchetto their light-square bishop.

1. The attainability drops off at higher ratings, as more players respond to 1.d4 with the [Indian Defense](#).

# Q.G. Accepted



**Main Line:** 1.d4 d5 2. c4 dxc4

The Queen's Gambit Accepted (QGA) is a variation of the QG where Black chooses to capture White's gambited pawn. While this opening usually leads Black to more open positions, it comes at the price of diverting Black's central presence.

## Features

- 🏹 **Flexible.** May become wildly sharp, or slow and positional.
- ⌚ **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
- 👤 **Prevalent.** Opponents will have experience against common lines.<sup>1</sup>

## Motifs

- White can usually regain the gambited pawn by playing e3 or e4, and recapturing on c4 with the light-square bishop.
  - If Black tries to hold onto their pawn by playing ...b5, White's best reply is usually a4 to further undermine Black's queenside pawns.
  - The main reason White opts to play e3 rather than e4 is to overprotect their d-pawn, which was permanently weakened by the loss of the c-pawn, and prevent it from becoming a target of attack.
- As in most QG lines, Black's main pawn breaks are ...c5 and ...e5.

## Common Lines

- 3.Nf3 — **Main Line**
- 3.e4 — **Central Variation**
- 3.e3 — **Old Variation**

1. Only at lower ratings. The popularity of the QGA drops off drastically as rating increases.

# Q.G. Declined



Main Line: 1.d4 d5 2. c4 e6

The Queen's Gambit Declined (QGD) is one of the most common ways for Black to decline the QG, reinforcing their d-pawn in the process. Within the QGD, there are a large variety of solid and deeply-analyzed variations that Black can choose from.

## Features

- **Positional.** Offers slow, strategic play in the opening.
- **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
- **Prevalent.** Opponents will have experience against common lines.

## Motifs

- Black's pawn on e6 often interferes with the development of their light-square bishop, similar to the [French Defense](#).
  - White often avoids exchanging pawns on d5 for this reason, as this would free Black's bishop.
  - Black can eventually free their light-squared bishop with the pawn break ...e5, or by fianchettoing it.

## Common Lines

- After main line 3.Nc3 Nf6:
  - 4.Bg5 Be7 5.Nf3 — **Main Line**
  - 4.Bg5 Nbd7 — **Cambridge Springs Defense**
  - 4.cxd5 exd5 — **Exchange Variation**
  - 4.Nf3 Bb4 — **Ragozin Defense**
  - 4.Nf3 Be7 5.Bf4 — **Harrwitz Attack**
- 3.Nc3 c5 — **Tarrasch Defense**
- 3.Nc3 c6 — **Semi-Slav Defense**



# Slav Defense



Main Line: 1.d4 d5 2. c4 c6

The Slav Defense is another way for Black to decline the QG while defending their d-pawn. The Slav holds volumes of theory, rivalling that of the [Queen's Gambit Declined](#).

## Features

- **Positional.** Offers slow, strategic play in the opening.
- **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
- **Prevalent.** Opponents will have experience against common lines.

## Motifs

- Like the [Caro-Kann](#), the move 2...c6 has the drawback of depriving Black's knight from accessing its most natural development square on c6. Additionally, it makes no progress in terms of kingside castling.
  - Black's pawn break ...c5 also loses a tempo, since in other QG openings Black could have pushed ...c7-c5 in one go.
- Unlike the QGD, it is easy for Black to activate their light-square bishop, though Black must take care not to hang the b7 pawn to a move such as Qb3 from White.

## Common Lines

- After main line 3.Nf3 Nf6:
  - After 4.Nc3:
    - 4...dxc4 – **Alapin Variation** [ML]
    - 4...e6 – **Semi-Slav Defense**
    - 4...a6 – **Chebanenko Variation** (or "a6 Slav" or "Chameleon Variation")
  - 4.e3 – **Slow Slav** (or "Quiet Variation")
- 3.cxd5 – **Exchange Variation**




# Albin Countergambit



**Main Line:** 1.d4 d5 2. c4 e5!?

The Albin Countergambit is one of Black's most aggressive replies to the QG. Black gambits their e-pawn, in exchange for central space and a lead in development. If White accepts the gambit, which they usually will, Black will obtain a strong pawn wedge by advancing ...d4.

## Features

-  **Tactical.** Offers sharp, tactical play in the opening.
-  **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
-  **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.

## Motifs

- Black's pawn on d4 is a powerful offensive asset. It secures a spatial advantage, impairs the development of White's b1 knight, and it is not straightforward for White to get rid of (see Lasker Trap below).
- Black usually castles queenside, as in the main line, Black develops their queenside pieces before their kingside. The castled rook will also be well-situated on the d-file to defend d4.
- White's best plan is to fianchetto their light-square bishop, which will threaten Black's c6 knight, and consequently weaken their d4 pawn.

## Common Lines

- After main line 3.dxe5 d4:
  - 4.Nf3 Nc6 – **Main Line**
  - 4.e4 – **Spassky Variation**
  - 4.e3? Bb4+ 5.Bd2 dxe3 6.Bxb4?? exf2+! – [Lasker Trap](#)
- May transpose into [Chigorin Defense](#) or [French Defense](#) lines if White declines the gambit.

# Chigorin Defense



**Main Line:** 1.d4 d5 2. c4 Nc6

The Chigorin Defense is an offbeat but dynamic variation of the QG which violates the classical opening principle: "Don't block your c-pawn in double d-pawn openings". Black may also have to concede the bishop pair. In exchange, Black claims a lead in development and piece activity.

## Features

- **Tactical.** Offers sharp, tactical play in the opening.
- **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
- **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.

## Motifs

- Because Black has obstructed their c-pawn and neglected central space, Black must play actively and precisely to avoid getting steamrolled by White's central pawns.
  - If White is able to construct an ideal center with the natural moves Nc3 and e4, then Black has probably played too passively already.
- Black's move 2...Nc6 essentially ignores White's pressure on d5, instead choosing to counter-attack White's pawn on d4.
  - For example, if either cxd5 or ...dxc4 is played, the d-file will open for Black, and their queen will now pressure d4 a second time.
- Black should stay attentive to the opportunity to play the early break ...e5, piling even more pressure on White's d-pawn.

## Common Lines

- 3.Nf3 Bg4 — **Main Line**
- 3.Nc3 dxc4 Nf3 — **Janowski Variation**
- 3.cxd5 Qxd5 — **Exchange Variation**

# Baltic Defense



Main Line: 1.d4 d5 2. c4 Bf5

The Baltic Defense is a naturally tactical variation of the QG where Black develops their light-square bishop immediately. Black's idea is to get the bishop outside of the pawn chain—much like the [London System](#)—so that it will not be hemmed in by ...e6 such as in the [QGD](#).

## Features

- **Tactical.** Offers sharp, tactical play in the opening.
- **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
- **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.

## Motifs

- If White trades center pawns with cxd5, Black usually inserts the in-between move ...Bxb1, intending to follow with ...Qxd5 without letting White harass the queen with Nc3.
- Although Black is aiming to reach an improved QGD position, the move ...Bf5 has its own set of drawbacks.
  - Because Black's bishop has left the defense of the b7 pawn, White can often target this weakness with moves such as Qb3.
  - The bishop can become a target of White's pawns, with central thrusts such as e4.
- Black will often castle queenside since they have developed more pieces on that side. The castled rook will also be on the d-file, which is easy for Black to open in most positions (e.g. ...dxc4).

## Common Lines

- Because of the scarcity in theory, there are no named variations in the Baltic Defense (i.e. no names which are in widespread use).





# Blackmar-Diemer Gambit



**Main Line:** 1.d4 d5 2. e4?! dxe4 3.Nc3

The Blackmar-Diemer Gambit (BDG) is a perhaps the most aggressive option available to White in the Closed Game. Like most gambits, White's plan is to sacrifice one or more pawns in order to secure a lead in development and mount an early attack against Black's king.

## Features

-  **Tactical.** Offers sharp, tactical play in the opening.
-  **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
-  **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.
-  **Attainable.** Frequent opportunities to play this opening.<sup>1</sup>

## Motifs

- In the main lines, White gets open e- and f-files, which should quickly be occupied by rooks for a kingside attack.
- White usually castles queenside so that they can initiate a kingside pawn storm without jeopardizing the safety of their own king.

## Common Lines

- After main line 3...Nf6:
  - After main line 4.f3 exf3:
    - 5.Nxf3 — **Main Line**
    - 5.Qxf3?! — **Ryder Gambit**
  - 4.Bg5 — **von Popiel Gambit**
- May transpose into several other openings (e.g. [French Defense](#), [Caro-Kann Defense](#)) if Black declines the initial Blackmar Gambit.

<sup>1</sup> The attainability drops off at higher ratings, as more players respond to 1.d4 with the [Indian Defense](#).

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# IV. Semi-Closed Game

Openings with 1.d4 without 1...d5



## ? Semi-Closed Game: Why?

After 1.d4, ambitious players as Black can immediately **unbalance** the position by playing a move other than 1...d5.

- Just as in the [Semi-Open Game](#), players will start out with differing positional assets, and each player will try to convert their own assets more skillfully than their opponent.
- Among the options Black has in the Semi-Closed Game, the **Indian Defenses** are perhaps the most noteworthy.
  - The Indian Defenses are a highly theoretical group of hypermodern openings that occurs after **1.d4 Nf6**.
  - They sometimes transpose into Queen's Gambit lines if Black later plays ...d5.

### A Note on Organization

To minimize confusion, this section lists the non-Indian openings first (Dutch Defense, Englund Gambit), followed by a more detailed exploration of the Indian Defenses.

[ [Move Tree](#) ]

# Dutch Defense



Main Line: 1.d4 f5

The Dutch Defense is an aggressive response to the Queen's Pawn Opening. With 1...f5, Black accepts a weakened kingside in exchange for central pawn flexibility and attacking potential against White's king.

## Features

- **Flexible**. May become wildly sharp, or slow and positional.
- **Theoretical**. Requires concrete opening preparation.
- **Uncommon**. Opponents less likely to be prepared.
- **Attainable**. Frequent opportunities to play this opening.

## Motifs

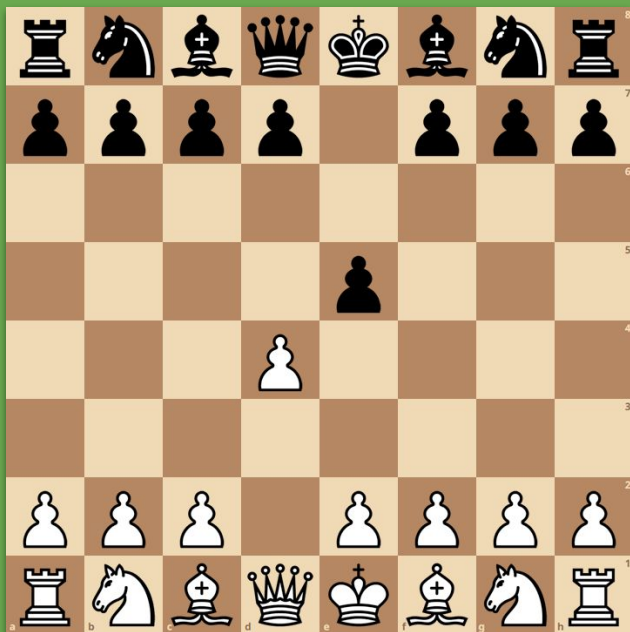
- Black hopes to establish dominance over central light squares (particularly e4), and launch a kingside attack after White castles.
  - With this in mind, White usually fianchettoes their light-square bishop to maintain control over these light squares.
- Black can choose between the more tactical Leningrad Dutch, and the more positional Stonewall Dutch. In between, the Classical Dutch contains a rough balance between tactics and positional strategy.

## Common Lines

- After main line 2.c4 Nf6 3.g3:
  - 3...g6 — **Leningrad Variation**
  - After 3...e6 4.Bg2:
    - Black plays ...d5 — **Stonewall Variation**
    - Black does not play ...d5 — **Classical Variation**
    - 4...Bb4+ — **Nimzo-Dutch Variation**
- 2.g3 — **Fianchetto Attack**
  - Usually transposes to main line if White later plays c4.
- 2.e4!? — **Staunton Gambit**







# Englund Gambit



Main Line: 1.d4 e5?!

The Englund Gambit is a tricky gambit for Black, which leads to wild positions straight out of the opening. Although the gambit is objectively unsound, there is considerable tactical opportunity for Black, and there are several traps that White may fall victim to with natural play.

## Features

-  **Tactical**. Offers sharp, tactical play in the opening.
-  **Theoretical**. Requires concrete opening preparation.
-  **Uncommon**. Opponents less likely to be prepared.
-  **Attainable**. Frequent opportunities to play this opening.

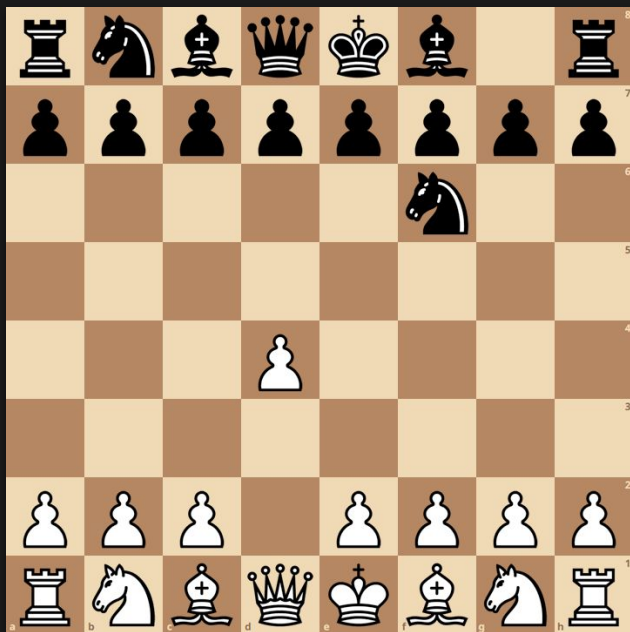
## Motifs

- White almost always captures on e5—this is White's best move.
- Black looks to either win back the pawn with ...Nc6, ...Qe7, and ...Nge7-Ng6, or focus on development with ...d6 or ...f6.
- White has several ways to hold onto their extra pawn, but more often that not, White returns the pawn in exchange for piece development.

## Common Lines

- After main line 2.dxe5:
  - After main line 2...Nc6 3.Nf3:
    - 3...f6 — **Soller Gambit**
    - 3...Nge7 — **Zilbermints Gambit**
    - 3...Qe7 — **Main Line**
      - 4.Bf4 Qb4+ 5.Bd2 Qxb2 6.Bc3?? Bb4! is an infamous trap in the main line.
  - 2...d6 — **Hartlaub-Charlick Gambit** (or "Blackburne Gambit")
  - 2...Bc5 3.Nf3 d6 4.exd6 Ne7 5.dxe7?? — "[Rosen Trap](#)"

# Indian Defense



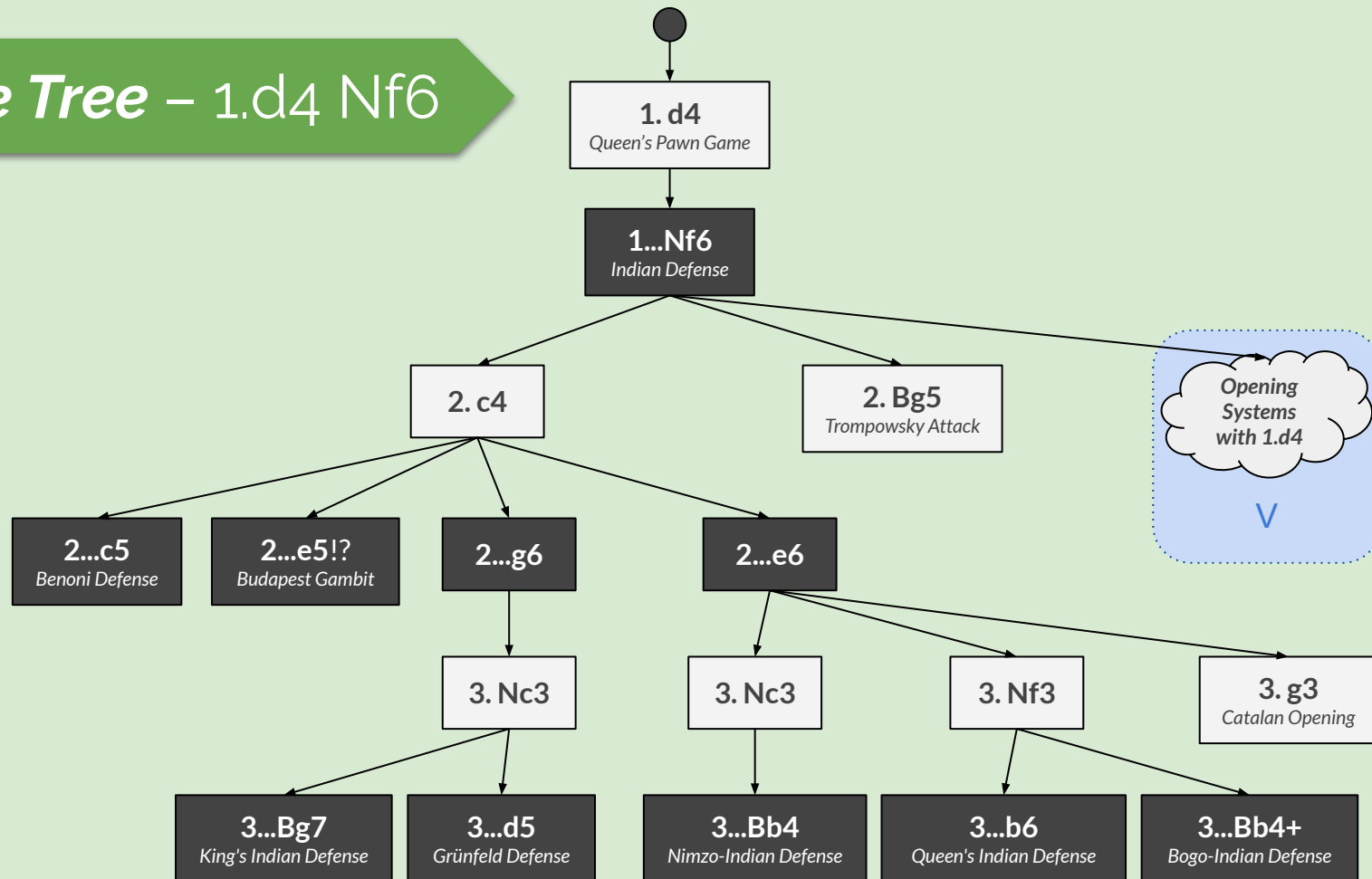
Main Line: 1.d4 Nf6

## Continuations in the Indian Defense

After 1.d4, 1...Nf6 marks the set of openings known as Indian Defenses.

- 2.c4. Most popular reply, carving queenside space and preparing Nc3.
  - 2...g6. Black intends to fianchetto their dark-square bishop.
    - 3.Nc3. Other moves such as 3.Nf3 are possible, but they generally do not change Black's intentions.
      - 3...Bg7 — King's Indian Defense
      - 3...d5 — Grünfeld Defense
    - 2...e6. Black opens a diagonal for their dark-square bishop.
      - 3. Nc3. White prepares to advance their pawn to e4.
        - 3...Bb4 — Nimzo-Indian Defense
        - 3...d5 — Transposes to QGD.
        - 3...c5 — Transposes to Benoni.
      - 3. Nf3. White delays Nc3, avoiding the Nimzo-Indian.
        - 3...b6 — Queen's Indian Defense
        - 3...Bb4+ — Bogo-Indian Defense
      - 3. g3 — Catalan Opening
    - 2...c5 — Benoni Defense
    - 2...e5!? — Budapest Gambit
  - 2.Bg5 — Trompowsky Attack

# Move Tree – 1.d4 Nf6



# King's Indian Defense



**Main Line:** 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7

The King's Indian Defense (KID) is a popular Indian system where Black chooses to prioritize their kingside development. Although the KID setup is flexible and system-like, Black must know several concrete ideas in the middlegame to be prepared against White's many replies.

## Features

- ✨ **Hypermodern.** Concedes central space to opponent's pawns.
- ⚡ **Flexible.** May become wildly sharp, or slow and positional.
- ⚙️ **Systematic.** Can be played by broad motifs, over concrete theory.<sup>1</sup>
- 👤 **Prevalent.** Opponents will have experience against common lines.
- ♣️ **Attainable.** Frequent opportunities to play this opening.

## Motifs

- After White plays 4.e4, Black usually follows 4...d6 to dissuade White's e-pawn from advancing to e5.
- Upon completing development, Black contents the center by preparing a central pawn thrust—either ...c5 or ...e5.
  - If White closes the center by advancing with d5, then Black will often prepare the pawn break ...f5 and attack on the kingside.

## Common Lines

- After main line 4.e4 d6:
  - 5.Nf3 — **Classical Variation** [ML]
  - 5.f3 — **Sämisch Variation**
  - 5.f4 — **Four Pawns Attack**

1. Highly dependent on rating. At lower levels, the KID can be played successfully with only general ideas, but there is a vast and complex body of theory necessary for higher-level play.

# Grünfeld Defense



**Main Line:** 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 d5

The Grünfeld Defense is an aggressive Indian setup which plays like a "positional gambit": Black allows White to establish a huge center with a 2-to-1 central pawn majority. In exchange, Black aims for active play to target White's pawns and potentially win material. The Grünfeld requires deep theory preparation against White's multitude of responses, making it a difficult opening to learn for beginners.

## Features

- ✨ **Hypermodern.** Concedes central space to opponent's pawns.
- ✂️ **Tactical.** Offers sharp, tactical play in the opening.
- 🧠 **Theory-Heavy.** Requires considerable opening preparation.
- 💎 **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.<sup>1</sup>

## Motifs

- In the main lines (after Black has ...Nxc3), Black typically targets White's weak c3 pawn with ...Bg7 and ...c5.
  - Understanding this, White may choose to develop their kingside knight to e2 (rather than f3) in order to defend c3.

## Common Lines

- 4.cxd5 Nxd5 5.e4 — **Exchange Variation** [ML]
- 4.Nf3 Bg7 5.Qb3 — **Russian System**
- Grünfeld setups where White does not play 3.Nc3 (for example, 3.g3 d5, or 3.Nf6 d5) are collectively called **Neo-Grünfeld Defenses**.

1. Prevalence peaks at ~1 in 8 games at master-level, but the Grünfeld is very uncommon at lower ratings.

# Nimzo-Indian Defense



**Main Line:** 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4

The Nimzo-Indian Defense (NID) is by far the most popular way for Black to meet 3.Nc3. With 3...Bb4, Black pins White's knight and prevents White from occupying the entire center with e4. The Nimzo-Indian is a highly theoretical opening, so much so that White often delays Nc3 just to sidestep NID theory.

## Features

- ✨ **Hypermodern.** Concedes central space to opponent's pawns.
- ⚡ **Flexible.** May become wildly sharp, or slow and positional.
- 🧠 **Theory-Heavy.** Requires considerable opening preparation.
- 👤 **Prevalent.** Opponents will have experience against common lines.<sup>1</sup>
- 🍀 **Hard to Attain.** Relatively few chances to play this opening.

## Motifs

- While White usually maintains their space advantage, Black gains a lead in development and can castle much more quickly than White can.
  - Because of this, Black usually has the initiative and tries to mount an attack while White's king is still stuck in the center.
- If coerced, Black is ready to trade off their dark-square bishop with Bxc3, preferably (but not always) doubling White's pawns.
  - This concedes the bishop pair to White. A common way for Black to try to counteract this is to keep the position closed, blocking out White's bishops.
- Black will fight for the light squares in the center, and to this end, they often fianchetto their light-square bishop—an idea native to the [QID](#).

## Common Lines

- 4.Qc2 – **Classical Variation** (or "Capablanca Variation")
- 4.e3 – **Rubinstein System**
- 4.Nf3 – **Three Knights Variation** (or "Kasparov Variation")
  - May transpose from [Bogo-Indian Defense](#).
- 4.f3 – **Kmoch Variation**

1. Prevalence rises drastically as rating increases, from 1 in 28 games at 1200 rating, to ~1 in 4 at master-level.

# Queen's Indian Defense



**Main Line:** 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 b6

The Queen's Indian Defense (QID) is a positionally solid opening where Black prepares to develop their light-square bishop to the queenside flank and pressure the central light squares. The QID shares many positional ideas with the [Nimzo-Indian Defense](#), and commonly transposes into it.

## Features

- ✨ **Hypermodern.** Concedes central space to opponent's pawns.
- 🏰 **Positional.** Offers slow, strategic play in the opening.
- ⏳ **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
- 💎 **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.<sup>1</sup>
- 🍀 **Hard to Attain.** Relatively few chances to play this opening.

## Motifs

- Like the NID, Black's main goal is to interfere with White's plan to play e4.
  - With 4...Bb7, Black's idea is to control the e4 square directly.
  - With 4...Ba6, Black's idea is to threaten White's c4 pawn, which they'll need to address before they can play e4.
- Black does not mind trading off their dark-square bishop, since they will simply control important dark squares with pawns instead, and in the process, gain open diagonal(s) for the light-square bishop.

## Common Lines

- 4.g3 — **Fianchetto Variation** [ML]
  - 4...Bb7 — **Old Main Line**
  - 4...Ba6 — **Main Line**
- 4.Nc3 — **Kasparov Variation**
- 4.a3 — **Petrosian Variation**
- Black can also employ an **Accelerated Queen's Indian** setup (2...b6 before ...e6).
- May transpose into Nimzo-Indian lines if Nc3 and ...Bb4 are played.

1. Prevalence peaks at ~1 in 5 games at master-level, but the QID is very uncommon at lower ratings.

# Bogo-Indian Defense



**Main Line:** 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 Bb4+

The Bogo-Indian Defense (BID) attempts to disrupt the coordination of White's queenside development, and also gives Black another chance of entering [Nimzo-Indian](#) theory. In practice, the Bogo-Indian shares many of the same positional ideas as the Nimzo-Indian and [Queen's Indian](#) defenses.

## Features

- ✨ **Hypermodern.** Concedes central space to opponent's pawns.
- 🪄 **Flexible.** May become wildly sharp, or slow and positional.
- ⚙️ **Systematic.** Can be played by broad motifs, over concrete theory.
- 🍀 **Hard to Attain.** Relatively few chances to play this opening.

## Motifs

- Similar to the NID and QID, Black usually doesn't mind trading off their dark-square bishop, and will put their pawns on dark squares to compensate.

## Common Lines

- 4.Bb2 — **Main Line**
  - 4...Qe7 — **Nimzowitsch Variation**
  - 4...Bxb2+ — **Exchange Variation**
  - 4...a5 — **Wade-Smyslov Variation**
  - 4...c5 — **Vitolins Variation**
- 4.Nbd2 — **Grünfeld Variation**
- Transposes into Nimzo-Indian if White blocks the check with Nc3.
- May transpose into Queen's Indian if Black fianchettoes their light-square bishop.



# Catalan Opening



**Main Line:** 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.g3

The Catalan Opening is a solid opening where White chooses to fianchetto their light-square bishop in a [Queen's Gambit](#)-esque position. The Catalan can be used to reach a sensible position against nearly all setups by Black.

## Features

- **Positional.** Offers slow, strategic play in the opening.
- **Systematic.** Can be played by broad motifs, over concrete theory.
- **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.
- **Very Attainable.** You'll get to play this opening extremely often.

## Motifs

- White slowly mounts queenside pressure and hopes to break through on that side at a later stage of the game.
- White may intentionally gambit their c4 pawn to gain an open diagonal for the light-square bishop.
  - Note that in the [QGA](#), White usually recaptures on c4 with the light-square bishop, but this is not possible in the Catalan.
  - Instead, White can choose to recapture the pawn with a knight, with Nf3-Ne5 and/or Nbd2.

## Common Lines

- After main line 3...d5:
  - Black plays ...dxc4 — **Open Catalan**
  - Black doesn't play ...dxc4 — **Closed Catalan**
- May transpose from several QG variations if White fianchettoes.




# Benoni Defense



Main Line: 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 c5

The Benoni Defense is an aggressive and ambitious opening where Black contests the center earlier than most other Queen's Pawn defenses. The Benoni leads to exciting and dynamic positions, and the variation that Black chooses to enter will usually dictate the pace of the middlegame.

## Features

-  **Flexible.** May become wildly sharp, or slow and positional.
-  **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
-  **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.<sup>1</sup>

## Motifs

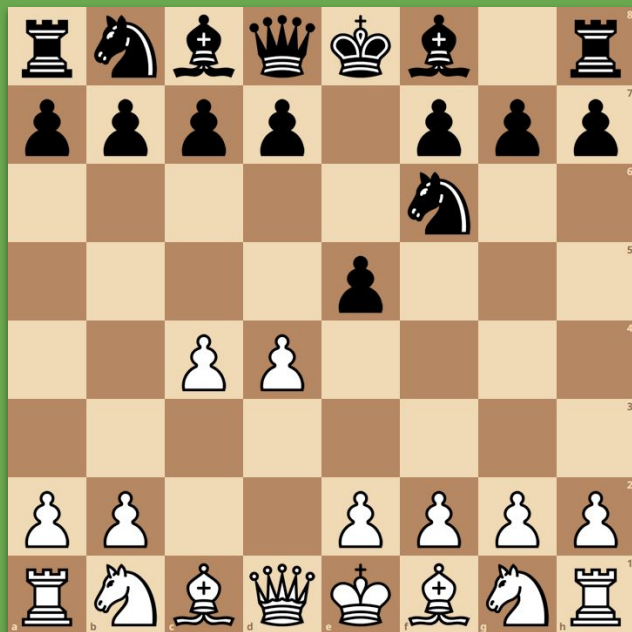
- 2...c5 appears to gambit the c-pawn, but it is not considered worthwhile for White to take this pawn at the expense of their central presence and piece development.
- In the Modern and Czech Benoni, Black gains an immediate edge if White plays dxe6 (either normally or en passant), as this allows Black to recapture with the f-pawn and support the central pawn break ...d5.
- Plans vary greatly between different Benoni variations, such that they could reasonably be treated as separate openings.

## Common Lines

- After main line 3.d5:
  - 3...e6 — **Modern Benoni**
  - 3...e5 — **Czech Benoni**
  - 3...b5 — **Benko Gambit** (or "Volga Gambit")
- 1.d4 c5 — **Old Benoni**
- May transpose into [English Opening](#) or [King's Indian Defense](#).

1. Prevalence peaks at ~1 in 8 games at master-level, but the Benoni is very uncommon at lower ratings.

# Budapest Gambit



Main Line: 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e5!?

The Budapest Gambit is an ambitious response by Black in the Indian Defense. Black gambits their e-pawn in exchange for an open position and superior piece activity, culminating in an all-out kingside assault.

## Features

- **Tactical.** Offers sharp, tactical play in the opening.
- **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
- **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.

## Motifs

- Black will try to regain the pawn on e5 with ...Nc6, ...Ng4 and ...Qe7.<sup>1</sup>
- Assuming there are no obstructing pawns on the sixth rank, Black can involve the a8 rook in a kingside attack by lifting it via ...a5 and ...Ra6. This maneuver gives the a8 rook its name: the "Budapest rook".
- White's open d-file often becomes a crucial attacking asset, and puts a great deal of pressure on Black's d-pawn.
  - White can look to establish a knight outpost on d5. Black cannot play ...e6, and if Black plays ...c6, their d-pawn is further weakened.
  - If Black trades off their dark-square bishop, White hopes to push c4-c5 to free the light-square diagonal and dissuade Black from advancing ...d6 or ...d5 (either would give them an isolated d-pawn).

## Common Lines

- After main line 3.dxe5 Ng4:
  - 4.Bf4 — **Rubinstein Variation**
  - 4.Nf3 — **Adler Variation**

1. These ideas are similar to the [Englund Gambit](#), where Black also gambits their e-pawn.

# Trompowsky Attack



**Main Line:** 1.d4 Nf6 2.Bg5

The Trompowsky Attack is a variation in the Indian Defense where White immediately questions the fate of Black's knight on f6. The Trompowsky is a good way for White to circumvent the more popular and theoretical Indian variations.

## Features

- 🏹 **Flexible.** May become wildly sharp, or slow and positional.
- ⌚ **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
- 💎 **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.
- 🍀 **Attainable.** Frequent opportunities to play this opening.<sup>1</sup>

## Motifs

- Black must decide whether to allow White to capture on f6, and if so, which piece or pawn to recapture with.
- Resulting positions are often unbalanced: pawn structures are likely asymmetrical, and White may have a bishop and knight against Black's bishop pair.
  - These imbalances will be best exploited by players with deep positional knowledge.

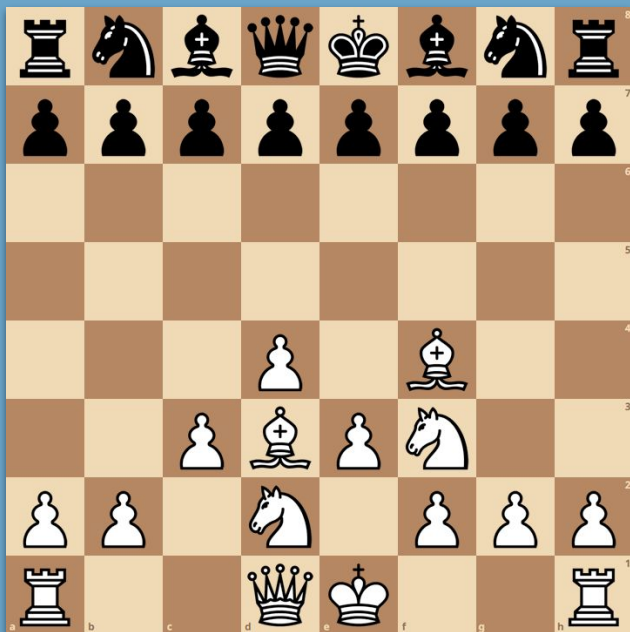
## Common Lines

- 2...Ne4 — **Main Line**
- 2...e6 — **Classical Defense**
- 2...d5 3.Nc3 — **Richter-Veresov Attack**
- May transpose into the [Torre Attack](#) if White plays Nf3.

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# V. Opening Systems with 1.d4

# London System



The London System is an opening system that has gained enormous popularity in recent years for its simplicity and consistency. The London piece setup is naturally well-suited for a kingside attack, with the light-squared bishop aimed at h7 and both knights ready to hop into action on the kingside.

## Features

- 🏹 **Flexible.** May become wildly sharp, or slow and positional.
- ⚙️ **Systematic.** Can be played by broad motifs, over concrete theory.
- 👤 **Prevalent.** Opponents will have experience against common lines.
- 🔥 **Very Attainable.** You'll get to play this opening extremely often.

## Motifs

- White usually meets ...Bd6 with the retreat Bg3. If Black trades bishops, White will gladly recapture with the h-pawn and end up with a dangerous rook on the semi-open h-file.
- Black aims for the pawn break ...e5, which is often a strong move because it threatens to fork White's minor pieces by advancing ...e4.
- White can play for a kingside attack with Ne5, which builds kingside pressure and stops Black from playing ...e5 themselves.
  - Alternatively, White can opt to play in the center by preparing the pawn break e4.
- It is not uncommon for White to postpone, if not completely forego castling. This is because the king is relatively safe in the center when it is closed, giving White time to focus their efforts on the kingside.

# Jobava-London System



The Jobava-London System is a relatively recent derivative of the traditional [London System](#); the queenside knight develops to c3 instead of the usual d2. Conventional wisdom states that the knight should not block the c-pawn in d4 openings. Yet, the Jobava-London is filled with ideas and opening traps which offer great practical chances for White.

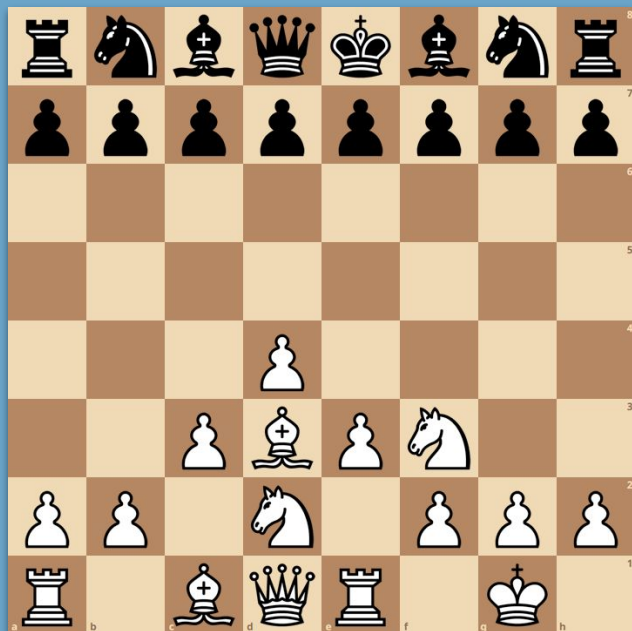
## Features

- 🏹 **Flexible.** May become wildly sharp, or slow and positional.
- ⚙️ **Systematic.** Can be played by broad motifs, over concrete theory.
- 💎 **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.
- 🔥 **Very Attainable.** You'll get to play this opening extremely often.

## Motifs

- White's usual move order is 1.d4, 2.Nc3, and 3.Bf4.
- Many motifs in the traditional London System carry over to the Jobava-London (e.g. kingside attack with Ne5, or prepare e4 break).
- After the natural-looking moves ...c5 and ...e6, Black's dark squares become very weak, making Nb5 a strong move. It establishes itself on an outpost and threatens Nc7+ forking Black's king and rook.
  - With this threat in mind, Black should play ...a6 preemptively to guard against Nb5.
- If Black plays symmetrically with ...Bf5, White may choose to respond with an aggressive kingside pawn storm: f3, g4, and h4.

# Colle System



The Colle System is a slow, solid opening system for White. It differs from [London System](#) in that the dark-square bishop remains inside the pawn chain, to be developed at a later time. The Colle has a passive reputation since it puts very little pressure on Black in the opening. However, the system plays consistently with ideas that are easy to understand, and is perhaps even more "systematic" than the London.

## Features

- **Positional.** Offers slow, strategic play in the opening.
- **Systematic.** Can be played by broad motifs, over concrete theory.
- **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.
- **Very Attainable.** You'll get to play this opening extremely often.

## Motifs

- White's usual move order is 1.d4, 2.Nf3, and 3.e3.
- White's most common idea is to prepare the pawn break e4 with moves such as Nbd2, Re1, and sometimes Qe2.
  - This pawn break unleashes the "potential energy" of White's pieces, opening lines for the dark-square bishop and rook.
- After e4, White can naturally proceed with a kingside attack.
  - White's pieces are well-placed for a [Greek gift sacrifice](#).
- Black plays for their own central pawn break, or Black may counterattack on the queenside with the pawn storm ...c5-c4 and ...b5.



# Colle-Zukertort System



The Colle-Zukertort System is a derivative of the [Colle System](#). Instead of leaving the dark-square bishop on c2, White chooses to fianchetto it with b3 and Bb2.

## Features

- ✨ **Hypermodern**. Concedes central space to opponent's pawns.
- 🛡️ **Positional**. Offers slow, strategic play in the opening.
- ⚙️ **Systematic**. Can be played by broad motifs, over concrete theory.
- 💎 **Uncommon**. Opponents less likely to be prepared.
- 🍷 **Very Attainable**. You'll get to play this opening extremely often.

## Motifs

- The main idea, like in the traditional Colle, is to prepare the pawn break e4 and launch an attack on the kingside.
- If breaking with e4 is not possible, White may also start their kingside assault with Ne5, f4, and lifting the rook on f1.
- In contrast with the usual Colle setup, it's important that White doesn't play c3 to build the usual pawn pyramid. This would obstruct the dark-square bishop.
  - Black usually has a knight on c6, with the looming threat of ...Nb4 to harass White's light-square bishop. The pawn on c3 originally addressed this threat in the regular Colle, so with a similar idea, White often plays a3 in the Colle-Zukertort.

# Torre Attack



The Torre Attack is a reliable opening system for White. It plays similarly to the [London](#) and [Colle](#), except the dark-square bishop develops to g5. White's intention with Bg5 is to subdue Black's knight, indirectly gaining influence over light squares in the center.

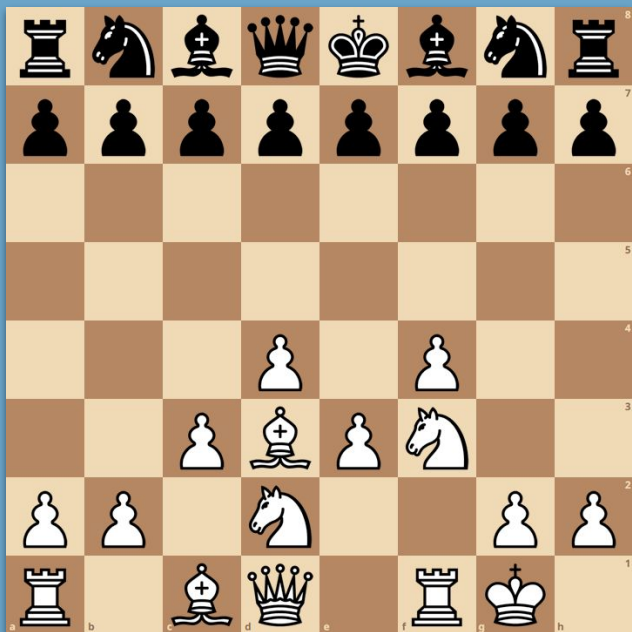
## Features

- **Positional.** Offers slow, strategic play in the opening.
- **Systematic.** Can be played by broad motifs, over concrete theory.
- **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.
- **Very Attainable.** You'll get to play this opening extremely often.

## Motifs

- Since they are so similar in piece setup, many ideas in the London also apply to the Torre (e.g. Ne5, e4 break, etc.).
- Because Black's knight on f6 is usually pinned, White can consider playing e2-e4 in one go. This results in a more open position.
- White should generally try to maintain the pin for as long as possible.
  - If Black manages to break the pin, it is common for White to trade the bishop for the f6 knight, eliminating a key defender on Black's kingside.
  - With the knight on f6 gone, it is a natural plan for White to build a queen-bishop battery and threaten checkmate on h7.
- Transposition from [Trompowsky Attack](#).

# Stonewall Attack



The Stonewall Attack is a solid opening system for White.<sup>1</sup> The Stonewall resembles the [Colle System](#), but the f-pawn is advanced to f4 before playing Nf3. It is usually weakening to push pawns in front of the king, but White plans on keeping the center closed for long enough to mate Black's castled king, before this weakness can fully be exploited.

## Features

- **Positional.** Offers slow, strategic play in the opening.
- **Systematic.** Can be played by broad motifs, over concrete theory.
- **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.
- **Very Attainable.** You'll get to play this opening extremely often.

## Motifs

- Black looks to break early in the center with ...e5, opening the position and diffusing White's attack.
  - White should stop this threat with f4, clamping down on e5.
- White's central pawns are all on dark squares, so the light squares tend to become weak. White must ensure that light squares are controlled with pieces (e.g. Bd3, Nbd2) before Black exploits them.
- White's common attacking idea of Ne5 is made even more powerful, since the e5 square is supported twice by pawns.
- Similar to the [Bird's Opening](#), White often lifts their rook on f1 to a more dangerous square (usually h3).

1. The Stonewall setup is also playable by Black against most non-e4 openings from White. In this case, the setup is called the "Stonewall Dutch", a variation of the [Dutch Defense](#).

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# Other first moves for White

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# VI. Flank Openings



# What other options does White have?

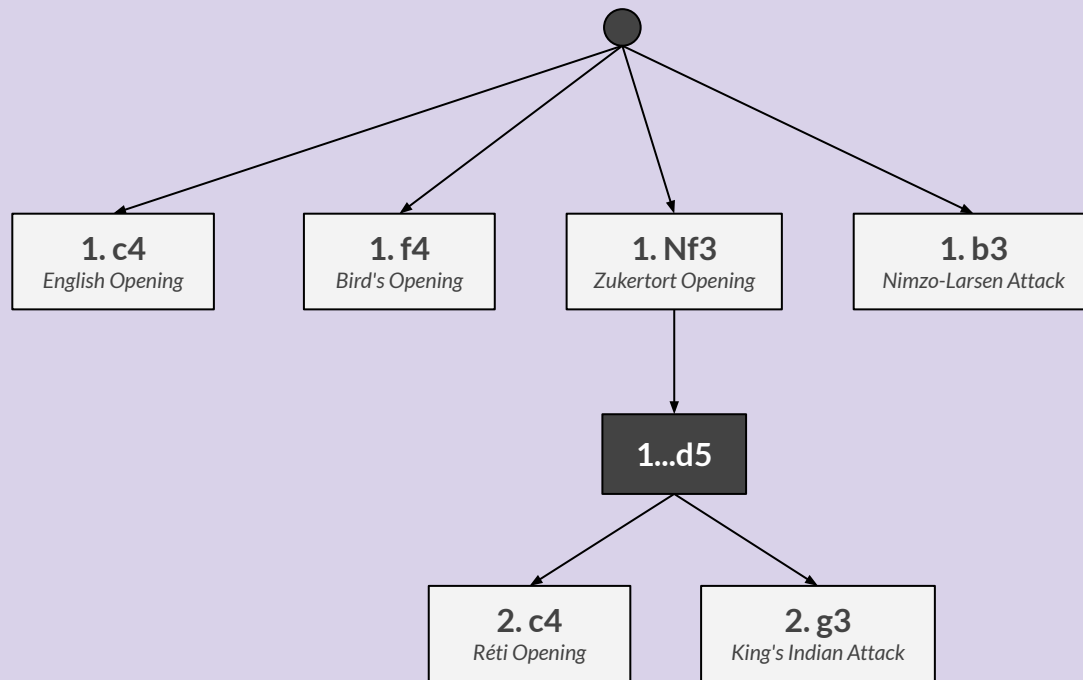
Besides 1.e4 and 1.d4, White only has a few other sensible first moves.

- 1.e3 and 1.d3 are playable, but have little practical merit because they neutralize White's first-move advantage.

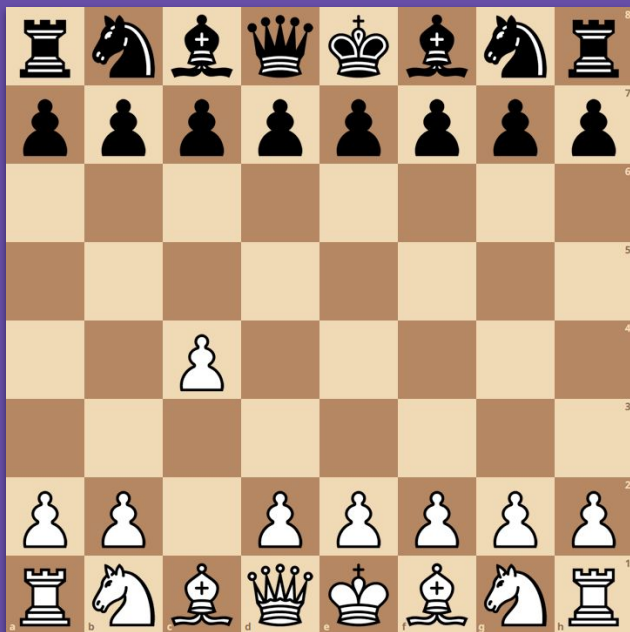
First moves which don't move the center pawns are called **flank openings**, since they play on the flanks, or sides, of the board. Flank openings generally aim to keep the center pawns flexible and encourage hypermodern play.

- 1.c4 — English Opening
- 1.f4 — Bird's Opening
- 1.Nf3 — Zukertort Opening
  - 1...d5. Black's most common reply, immediately staking claim in the center.
    - 2.c4 — Réti Opening
    - 2.g3 — King's Indian Attack
- 1.b3 — Nimzo-Larsen Attack

# Move Tree – On the Flanks



# English Opening



Main Line: 1.c4

The English Opening is one of the most popular flank openings. While 1.c4 doesn't facilitate development of any minor pieces, it gives White control of the center without committing any central pawns. The English often transposes into other openings, though there also exist many lines unique to the English.

## Features

- ✨ **Hypermodern.** Concedes central space to opponent's pawns.<sup>1</sup>
- 🔄 **Transpositional.** Commonly transposes into other openings.
- ⚡ **Flexible.** May become wildly sharp, or slow and positional.
- ⌚ **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
- 💎 **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.
- 🍷 **Very Attainable.** You'll get to play this opening extremely often.

## Motifs

- White controls light squares in the center with Nc3 and fianchetto of the light-square bishop.
  - Black often responds by building control over dark squares, with ...e5, ...Nc6, and fianchetto of their dark-square bishop.

## Common Lines

- 1...c5 — **Symmetrical Defense**
- 1...e5 — **Reverse Sicilian** (or "King's English")
- 1...Nf6 — **Anglo-Indian Defense**
- May transpose into **Queen's Gambit** or **Indian Defense** lines.

1. The English can be played in classical style, hypermodern style, or a combination of both.



# Bird's Opening



Main Line: 1.f4

The Bird's Opening is double-edged: the move 1.f4 doesn't help develop any pieces and it weakens White's king. However, it controls the center without committing any center pawns. It is also a clear indication of White's long-term plan: to launch an attack on the kingside. Though the Bird sports a relatively low win-rate for White, it can be a powerful weapon against unprepared opponents.

## Features

- ✨ **Hypermodern.** Concedes central space to opponent's pawns.
- 🏹 **Flexible.** May become wildly sharp, or slow and positional.
- ⌚ **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
- 💎 **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.
- 🔥 **Very Attainable.** You'll get to play this opening extremely often.

## Motifs

- White controls dark squares in the center with Nf3 and fianchetto of their dark-square bishop—a mirror setup of the [English Opening](#).
- White can castle quickly and lift the rook on f1 to an offensive square.
- If White overextends their pawns, Black aims to exploit White's light-square weaknesses, often by establishing an outpost on e4.

## Common Lines

- 1...d5 — **Dutch Variation**
- 1...e5!? — **From's Gambit**

1. The Bird can be played in classical style, hypermodern style, or a combination of both.

# Réti Opening



**Main Line:** 1.Nf3 d5 2.c4

The Réti Opening is a hypermodern opening that is a close relative of the [English Opening](#) and [King's Indian Attack](#). White is essentially gambiting their c-pawn in the spirit of the [Queen's Gambit](#), while preserving the flexibility of their center pawns.

## Features

- ✨ **Hypermodern.** Concedes central space to opponent's pawns.
- 🔄 **Transpositional.** Commonly transposes into other openings.
- 🛡️ **Positional.** Offers slow, strategic play.
- ⌚ **Theoretical.** Requires concrete opening preparation.
- 💎 **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.
- 🍀 **Attainable.** Frequent opportunities to play this opening.

## Motifs

- If Black accepts the gambit, White can win back the pawn in the same manner as in the [QGA](#), with e3 (or e4) and meeting ...b5 with a4.
- White's strategy revolves around controlling the central light squares, with Nc3 and fianchetto of the light-square bishop.

## Common Lines

- 2...dxc4 — **Accepted Variation**
- 2...d4 — **Advance Variation**
- May transpose into Queen's Gambit, [Catalan](#), or English lines.

**Note:** The "Réti Opening" sometimes refers to just the first move 1.Nf3. However, these slides refer to the Réti as the specific line after 1...d5 2.c4.

# King's Indian Attack



The King's Indian Attack (KIA, sometimes called the Barcza System), is a hypermodern opening system. Although it seems to be the mirror image of the [King's Indian Defense](#) for Black, White's extra tempo alters the nature of play. Like other system-based openings, White does not put immediate pressure on Black's position, allowing Black to develop flexibly.

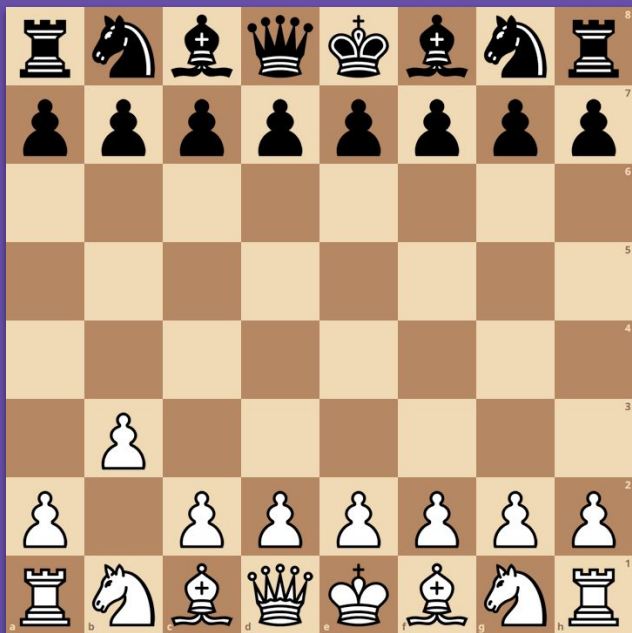
## Features

- ✨ **Hypermodern.** Concedes central space to opponent's pawns.
- ⚡ **Flexible.** May become wildly sharp, or slow and positional.
- ⚙️ **Systematic.** Can be played by broad motifs, over concrete theory.
- 💎 **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.
- 🍀 **Attainable.** Frequent opportunities to play this opening.

## Motifs

- A common move-order is 1.Nf3, followed by fianchettoing the light-square bishop and castling. White prepares the e4 push only after the minor pieces are developed.
  - Alternatively, White can reach the KIA against several [Semi-Open](#) responses from Black after 1.e4.
- If allowed, White plans to advance their e-pawn to e5, which opens the light-square bishop, closes the center, and sets the stage for a kingside attack.
- Black can try to play defensively by blunting White's light-square bishop with ...c6 and ...d5.

# Nimzo-Larsen Attack



Main Line: 1.b3

The Nimzo-Larsen Attack is a hypermodern opening where White immediately announces their intent to fianchetto their dark-square bishop. Like other flank openings, the Nimzo-Larsen delays commitment of center pawns, keeping White's setup flexible.

## Features

- ✨ **Hypermodern.** Concedes central space to opponent's pawns.
- 🛡️ **Positional.** Offers slow, strategic play.
- ⚙️ **Systematic.** Can be played by broad motifs, over concrete theory.
- 💎 **Uncommon.** Opponents less likely to be prepared.
- 🍷 **Very Attainable.** You'll get to play this opening extremely often.

## Motifs

- Against inexperienced opponents, it is not uncommon for Black to blunder their rook on h8 ([examples](#)).
- White can employ the same ideas as the [Bird's Opening](#), playing f4 and Nf3 to secure the dark squares in the center.
- White can maneuver their queen to the kingside via d1-e1-g3 to participate in the kingside attack.
- Black will try to blunt White's fianchettoed bishop with ...d5-d4 and ...e5, which White should actively try to prevent.

## Common Lines

- 1...e5 — **Modern Variation**
- 1...d5 — **Classical Variation**
- 1...Nf6 — **Indian Variation**
- 1...c5 — **English Variation**

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# Closing Notes



# Version History

## v1.0 — Initial Release

### v1.1 — Fixed typos, re-labeled openings:

- KID → “Systematic”
- Latvian → “Theory-Heavy”
- Center Game / Danish Gambit → “Attainable”

### v1.2 — QoL and navigation improvements:

- Added version history (this slide)
- Added coordinates to board images
- Added a [◀ Back] button to most pages, based on a tree-like navigation system
- Openings listed in the [main catalog](#), among several other places, now link to their respective slides

### v1.3 — Fixed typos in Center Game and Catalan Opening.

### v1.4 — Fixed typo in KIA, add more links.

- Catalan → “Hypermodern”

### v1.5 — Added public domain license (CC0).



## About this Project

I originally created this presentation for some Discord friends, hoping it would help us find some new openings to learn. Each slide was just supposed to contain a name, a picture, and a sentence or two describing the opening.

Then I figured it would be useful to collect some stats to know just how often we could expect to play the opening against random opponents. Mainly, I have a vivid recollection of us desperately trying to get a Stafford Gambit on the board, yet every game we'd get White, or our opponent would play 1.d4, and of course if they played 1.e4 they would never play 2.Nxe4, and so on.

Well, one thing led to another and now I'm left with this monstrosity, several months in the making. Even as I'm nearing completion, I don't feel like I've actually learned any of these openings I researched. But I *do* think I've picked up what makes each opening unique, and I think that'll make it much easier to learn new openings down the line.

I definitely didn't put off more important responsibilities to work on this project.





# Data Sources

All opening statistics were generated from PGN files, which were in turn collected from games played on Lichess.

## PGN Sources

- 1200 and 1800-rated games: [Lichess Open Database](#) (June 2019)
  - This data is admittedly pretty dated, but the newer files were just too big for me to handle.
- Master-level games: [Lichess Elite Database](#) (June 2021)

Games were filtered to *exclude*:

- Bullet games
- Games at non-preset time controls
- Games with unknown result (asterisk-terminated)

## Total Games Processed

- 1200-level 2,110,247 games
- 1800-level 2,515,750 games
- Master-level 780,718 games





# Contact

If you spot any errors, inconsistencies, or otherwise feel that I've left something out, please let me know:

 [blunderbarry251@gmail.com](mailto:blunderbarry251@gmail.com)

Plus, I'm always looking for new friends to chat, learn and play chess with.

 lichess: [blunderbarry251](https://lichess.org/blunderbarry251)

 chess.com: [blunderbarry251](https://chess.com/blunderbarry251)

—

*Fin.*

