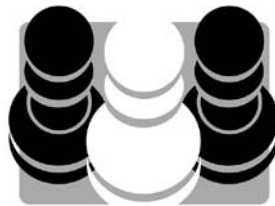


Isaac Lipnitsky

**QUESTIONS OF  
MODERN CHESS THEORY**

**- A Soviet Classic**

Translated by John Sugden



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Lipnitsky was eternally grateful to his patron. In *Questions of Modern Chess Theory* – his new book which was to become famous – he pointed out that in analysing the game Alekhine – Mindeno (Holland 1938), “the Kiev chess enthusiast A. Eremenko” had “unearthed some subtleties which had so far gone unnoticed, and found some possible ways for Black to defend.” (See page 96-97)

Quoting the variations that the enthusiast had indicated, Lipnitsky comments: “This analysis must be valued very highly, for Alekhine very rarely made analytical mistakes. Eremenko forces us to reconsider our assessment of this famous game of Alekhine’s.”

Nor did Lipnitsky forget the author of these reminiscences, to whom he donated his book with the following inscription: “To Efim Markovich Lazarev, with sincere thanks for the help he gave in working on the book – from the author. I. Lipnitsky, 16 March 1956.”

And one further detail: the book’s manuscript for submission to the publishers was typed out by the legendary Berta Iosifovna Vaisberg – seven times Ukrainian Women’s Chess Champion (a record!). The text was read through, checked and corrected by her son, Senia Vaisberg – a First Category player known everywhere in Kiev chess, both for his phenomenal erudition and for his fantastic eccentricities. One day when Lipnitsky visited him at home to collect the proofs, Senia said:

“Why do you write that in some critical positions there aren’t any chess laws that apply? I mean, if some laws *don’t* apply, it means there are others that *do!*”

Lipnitsky was delighted! Thanking Senia, he promptly reworked an entire section in accordance with this advice.

The book came off the printing press in 1956, and the whole edition was instantly bought up by enthusiasts. In the same year Lipnitsky became Champion of the Ukraine for the second time. However, his pleasure was soon to be marred by acute pains which no medical treatment could remedy. It was said that he must somewhere have been exposed to some form of radioactive rain and had contracted leukaemia, for which there was then no cure.

Three years of torment, at home and in hospitals – and then the funeral at the end of March 1959, at Baikov cemetery. He had only lived for a little more than 36 years. Incidentally, almost exactly three years later, who do you think succumbed quickly to what would seem to have been exactly the same form of radiation? It was Grandmaster Ragozin himself, the author of the opening system to which Lipnitsky devoted his work. But then, the patriarch was over 53...

Lipnitsky’s best memorial is his *Questions of Modern Chess Theory*. To those questions, the book gives many striking and convincing answers. To this day it remains one of the world’s best hand-books for the strategy of the “game of the wise”.

Efim Lazarev, Master of Sport  
Kiev 2008

# Foreword

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*Habent sua fata libelli* – “Books have their own destiny.” This was said in the ancient world. The destiny of Isaac Oskarovich Lipnitsky’s book *Questions of Modern Chess Theory* is one that you would not by any means call happy. It is something of a legend, yet enigmatic and inexplicable. For all that, the destiny of the book has been far happier than that of its author...

The Great Fatherland War was over. The decorated front-line soldier Isaac Lipnitsky was returning to peacetime life. In 1950 he had his moment of glory: in the final of the 18th Soviet Championship Lipnitsky shared 2nd-4th places, finishing only behind Keres and outperforming Smyslov, Petrosian, Geller, Averbakh... He was only 27, he had his whole life ahead of him, his career was taking off, he was sure to become one of the best players in the country ... but already a terrible illness was looming. It too was ready to make its most powerful move.

Isaac Oskarovich was to die in 1959, having lived a mere 36 years. He took part in one more USSR Championship final, but was no longer able to concentrate on the game properly. Fully aware of what was happening, Lipnitsky gradually withdrew from practical play. He taught – and wrote his book.

Appearing in 1956, it was on the sidelines in every respect: it was published in Kiev, in a small edition (by Soviet standards of course) and with many misprints. From the very moment of its appearance the book seemed condemned to oblivion. But ... something extraordinary ensued.

“Lipnitsky recommends...”, “in Lipnitsky’s view...” – we find such utterances in the works of Botvinnik and Fischer. Two great Champions, so unlike each other, took Lipnitsky’s book very seriously. “Widely known within narrow circles”, inaccessible to the mass of readers, the book occupied a place of honour in the home libraries of grandmasters and coaches. Yet it aroused perhaps the greatest enthusiasm in people who ... had never read it, but had only heard about it or seen individual chapters which someone had adapted. The book was becoming a legend. What then is so special about it?

In a striking, indeed fantastic way, it is the reverse of banal. Have a browse and read through any two pages at random, and you will see this for yourself. There are some books – conscientious compilations – whose authors strive to convince you that two and two make four and the Volga flows into the Caspian Sea. And then there are some books which stimulate thought.

Such a book is the one before you. Fifty years from the day of its first appearance, it has found its second birth.

Anatoly Karpov  
World Champion 1975-85, FIDE World Champion 1993-9

# Foreword by the UK Publisher

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Time has moved on since Isaac Lipnitsky wrote *Questions of Modern Chess Theory*. This can be seen if you look at the theory of the Botvinnik variation of the Semi-Slav as given on page 141 and compare with the latest issue of Chess Informant. Or if you read Chapter 15 “How long does a Novelty last?” In Lipnitsky’s era a new move might remain secret for many months, while in our Internet-infested age information is updated continuously, in chess as in other areas of life.

But there is a great difference between merely acquiring information and achieving real understanding. In this book you will find much that is as vibrant and relevant as ever, because Lipnitsky wrote with intelligence and lucidity. He was a champion who could play chess and also explain how he played chess. Technology might have changed the way we look at chess, but the pieces still move in the same way they did sixty years ago.

Many highly acclaimed modern chess writers, especially those from Eastern Europe, proudly acknowledge Lipnitsky’s influence on their work. Though he does not have the name-recognition in the West of such established brands as Nimzowitsch, Reti or Kotov, he is worthy of a place in the pantheon. Studying Lipnitsky will make it easier for the reader to make the leap from the ideas of Nimzowitsch to works by Lipnitsky’s modern admirers such as, to choose just one example, those of Mark Dvoretsky.

As Anatoly Karpov mentions in the Foreword, the great Bobby Fischer quoted Lipnitsky’s views in *My 60 Memorable Games*. This is natural: every chess thinker builds on the efforts of the previous generation. However, Fischer had to learn Russian to reap the benefit. For the less linguistically gifted, the lack of an English translation of *Questions of Modern Chess Theory* left a missing link in the chain of thought.

Russian International Master Ilya Odessky extensively edited this edition of Lipnitsky’s “Superbook” with a 21st century audience in mind. The original edition from 1956 included about 120 pages of analysis on the Ragozin variation of the Queen’s Gambit, for which Lipnitsky held much affection (see for example page 189), but which held little relevance to a modern reader. This opening is still defended by top class players such as Carlsen, Mamedyarov, Morozevich and so on, but the theory now is obviously quite different.

Quality Chess was founded four years ago in order to make a contribution to chess literature, one specific plan being to publish this book in English. Thanks to the help of our Russian partners this is finally a reality. I hope that the reader will agree with the greatest players of the last half-century that *Questions of Modern Chess Theory* is a Soviet classic, if not *the* Soviet Classic.

John Shaw  
Quality Chess

# Introduction

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This book focuses on those general problems of opening and middlegame theory which are of paramount importance for a player to understand properly in order to manage a game successfully. Under this heading we should place the problems of the centre, mobilization of the pieces and the initiative. These problems do not exist by themselves, in isolation from each other; in various forms they are closely interwoven.

The basis for a game of chess is a purposeful plan which, beginning in the opening, is consistently developed in the middlegame. A highly characteristic feature of modern opening play is that from the very start of the game the players will try to predetermine the channels in which the middlegame fight will be conducted. Thus the link between opening and middlegame is of topical significance.

Together with these issues, we shall consider the problem of assessing a position and analysing – undoubtedly the paramount question of chess theory. It should be borne in mind that any of these problems can only be studied successfully given a critical, imaginative approach to them. In the examples cited in the text, very extensive use is made of the work and achievements of Alexander Alekhine and Mikhail Botvinnik. Their merit in presenting and resolving the problems of the opening in contemporary terms is especially great.

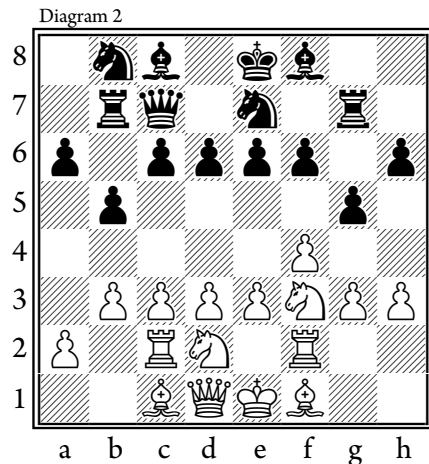
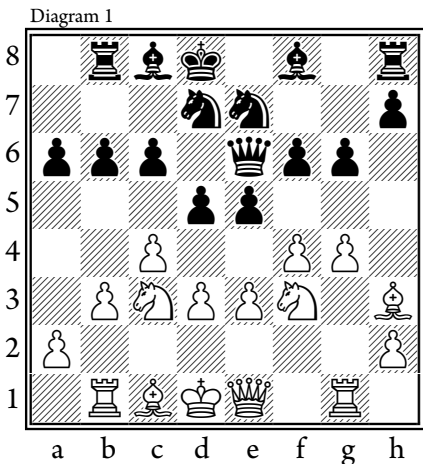
# Chapter

## On the Opening

The opening is the initial stage of the game. This definition of the opening as such dates from the second half of the 15th century, which saw the transformation of the Arabian *shatranj* into the modern game of chess. Let us recall that *shatranj* was played with the same pieces on the same board as the modern game, but with somewhat different rules.

Thus for example the movements of the pieces according to the rules of *shatranj* were extremely slow (the queen moved only one square along the diagonal, there was no castling, etc.) and it took a great deal of time for the opposing forces to come into contact. As a result, openings in the modern sense of the word were absent from the Arab game in the final centuries of its existence. A thousand years ago, play would begin not from the original starting position but from one where the initial development was already completed.

Thirty-one such positions have come down to us. They were called *tabiyat*. In addition each *tabiya* had a name of its own.



When the modification of the rules of *shatranj* had created modern chess, with its possibilities for fast development of the pieces at the start of the game, *tabiyat* were no longer needed. But at once the question arose as to how the pieces were to be developed correctly. From attempts to find an answer to this question, the study of chess openings arose.

The opening has been an object of special attention for chessplayers for close on 500 years. Small wonder that openings were a major topic in the very first chess books to appear. Thus for example in the Göttingen Manuscript (a text of French origin dating from around 1490, discovered in Göttingen University library), thirty parchment pages are devoted to twelve different openings, including those now called the Petroff, the Ruy Lopez, the Giuoco Piano, the French Defence, the English Opening, the Queen's Gambit and others.

Dozens of books devoted to chess openings have been written since; hardly a single contemporary chess author passes over the questions of the opening. Yet even today no unanimity has been reached on the treatment of the basic opening problems.

Questions about the tasks and aims of the opening, and the chief principles and methods of playing it; the question of how long the opening lasts, and how it is linked to the middlegame; these questions remain topical. It is therefore important to explain what is characteristic and distinctive about the modern approach to solving the various opening problems.

The opening as distinct from the other phases of the game has its own unique peculiarities. The most characteristic fact about the starting position is that the armies of both sides are still, so to speak, occupying rearguard posts. This suggests what the basic strategic task for both sides must be: to mobilize their forces as expediently and quickly as they can. In the process of mobilization the opposing armies will inevitably clash and begin a fight to seize favourable points.

*Thus, the rationale of the fight which is joined in a chess game right from the start consists in developing your own forces to good positions as fast and effectively as possible, while trying your hardest to stop your opponent from doing the same.*

It is not difficult to see that the most favourable points are located in the centre of the board – the central squares represent the most convenient stronghold for stationing the forces. The issue of the centre is all the more crucial in the opening because, in the starting position, this sector of the board is vacant – which presents both sides with an imperative to fight for it and conquer it. For this very reason the centre is the principal theatre of warlike actions in the opening phase.

*Thus, combined with the fight for the centre, the mobilization of the pieces is the fundamental, unique law for playing any chess opening.*

Let us examine the constituent parts of this law in more detail.



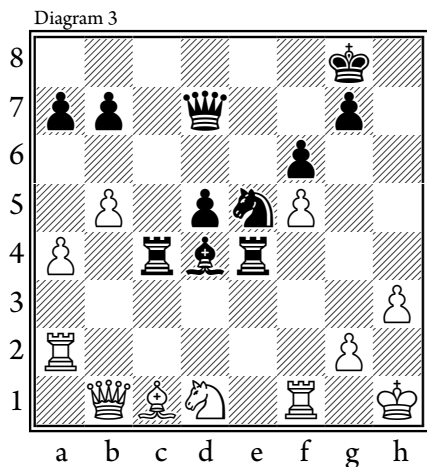
# Chapter 2

## The Centre

As we know, any piece placed in the centre (with the exception of the rook) is “hitting” more squares than it would elsewhere, which means that this is where it possesses its greatest fighting value. Furthermore it is from the centre that pieces can be transferred to either of the flanks in the smallest number of moves. These two circumstances make the centre the most important place on the whole chessboard.

### M. Stolberg - M. Botvinnik

Moscow 1940



What stands out when you look at the diagram is the radical difference in the placing of the two sides' forces. Black has gained total control of a stronghold in the centre. Making a mighty striking force out of his pieces there, he dominates the entire board.

White's forces are scattered and have been driven into rear positions. He can no longer get them co-ordinated to resist his opponent's fearsome and constantly mounting pressure. The outcome of the struggle is a foregone conclusion.

The final moves were:

33.a5 ♔c5 34.b6 a6 35.♘b2 ♜c3 36.♙d2 ♜b3 37.♚c2 ♚b5 38.♞c1 ♙f8 39.♞d1 ♞e2 40.♚c1 ♞xh3†!! 41.gxh3 d4!

White surrendered.

In this game the principle of centralization comes across vividly and impressively. Even the mortal blow that is irresistibly threatened would come from the central square d5.

But Black did not succeed all at once in gaining such a colossal preponderance in the centre. It resulted from focusing attention on the

centre from the very first moves, in contrast to his opponent who did not give the central terrain its due importance.

The game whose finale we have just examined started as follows:

**1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗c3 ♖b4 4.e3 0-0  
5.♙d3 d5 6.cxd5 exd5 7.♞ge2 c5 8.0-0  
♞c6 9.a3 cxd4 10.exd4 ♙d6**

From here the bishop controls e5, while White's surveillance of this important point has been weakened by developing his knight on e2 rather than f3.

**11.h3**

Contributing nothing to the fight for the centre. A better move was 11.♙f4!, at once neutralizing the pressure from the black bishop.

**11...h6 12.b4 ♜e8 13.♞b3 ♙e6!**

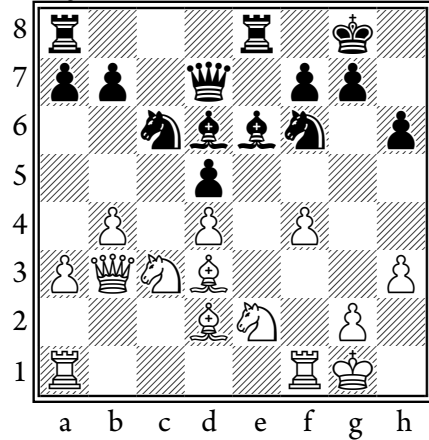
This move impedes the action of Black's own rook on the e-file. Is it necessary? Doesn't it reduce his pressure on the centre? It turns out that it does not. Furthermore this move has a deep idea behind it; Black is commencing a manoeuvre aimed at weakening the influence of White's pieces on the centre, and afterwards conquering it. At the same time he facilitates the further mobilization of his queenside forces.

**14.♙d2 ♞d7 15.f4**

Many players (especially young ones) will notice a danger to their own king before anything else. Stolberg probably wanted to shut off the bishop on d6 and prevent a possible sacrifice with 15...♙xh3. But now the e4-square is weakened even more, and Botvinnik gives a textbook example of how to exploit this kind of weakness.

(see next diagram)

Diagram 4



**15...♙f5!**

Obviously the more weak points your opponent has, the easier it is to break into his camp. With a central pawn position of this type, the centre squares adjacent to the pawns are usually the weak ones. For White this means e4 and c4, and for Black, e5 and c5.

The natural defenders of these weak points are the bishops of the corresponding colour. Botvinnik deprives his opponent of the defender in question, and gaping holes arise in the middle of White's position, on the squares e4 and c4. Black's manoeuvre is not fortuitous. It was prepared by his foregoing play which was oriented to seizing the central ground, and which proved all the more effective since White did not give due attention to securing his own central points.

**16.♞c2 ♙e4**

The immediate 16...♙xd3 was possible too, but Black has no objection to 17.♞xe4 dxe4. In that case he would obtain a strong passed e-pawn and an excellent post on d5 for a knight, while White would be left with a pawn weakness on d4.

**17.b5 ♙xd3 18.♞xd3**