



# Playing for a Win with ...b6

Semko Semkov

Chess Stars Publishing

**Playing for a Win with ...b6**

Cover design by R. Taichinov

Copyright © 2023 by Semko Semkov

Printed in Bulgaria

ISBN: 978-619-7188-38-7

# Contents

Bibliography 4

Introduction 5

## 1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6

**Chapter 1.** Taking the Centre – e4 without ♖c3  
Step by Step 9 Annotated Games 16

**Chapter 2.** Taking the Centre – e4 with ♖c3  
Step by Step 25 Annotated Games 37

**Chapter 3.** The Cunning 3.a3  
Step by Step 47 Annotated Games 55

**Chapter 4.** The Dutch Set-up against 3.a3  
Step by Step 65 Annotated Games 77

**Chapter 5.** 3.♖c3 and 4.♗f3  
Step by Step 91 Annotated Games 100

**Chapter 6.** 3.♖c3 without 4.♗f3  
Step by Step 113 Annotated Games 127

**Chapter 7.** Queen's Indian with e3  
Step by Step 137 Annotated Games 147

**Chapter 8.** Sidestepping the mainline QID  
Step by Step 151 Annotated Games 156

## Deviations

**Chapter 9.** 1.d4 e6 2.♗f3 c5 3.g3  
Step by Step 161 Annotated Games 169

**Chapter 10.** 1.d4 e6 2.♗f3 c5 3.c4  
Step by Step 173 Annotated Games 179

**Chapter 11.** 1.d4 e6 2.♗f3 c5 3.e3  
Step by Step 185 Annotated Games 191

**Chapter 12.** London and Jobava Systems  
Step by Step 197 Annotated Games 207

**Chapter 13.** 1.c4 b6  
Step by Step 213 Annotated Games 219

**Chapter 14.** Petrosian System  
Step by Step 227

Index of Variations 231

# Bibliography

## Books

*1...b6*, Cyrus Lakdawala, Everyman Chess 2014

*The Petrosian System Against the QID*, Alexander Beliavsky and Adrian Mikhalchishin, Chess Stars 2008

*Understanding the Queens Gambit Accepted*, Alexander Delchev and Semko Semkov, Chess Stars 2015

*Play the Queen's Indian Defence*, Evgeniy Solozhenkin, Chess Stars 2018

## Periodicals

Chess Informant

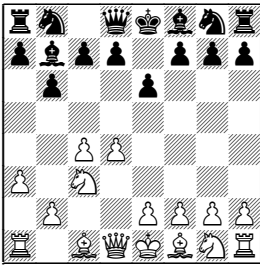
## Internet resources

The Week In Chess ([www.theweekinchess.com](http://www.theweekinchess.com))

Chess Publishing ([www.chesspublishing.com](http://www.chesspublishing.com))

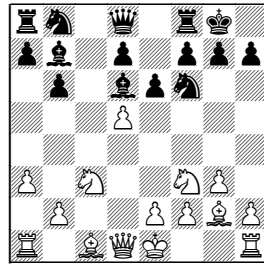
# Introduction

For many years my only experience with the fianchetto 1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 was from the White side. I did not study any theory as I was pretty confident that White is better after 3.a3 ♖b7 4.♗c3, followed by d5, g3, ♕g2.



Gradually I noticed that I was not getting any advantage as Black attacked the d5-pawn with too many pieces after ...c6, ...♗b8-a6-c7. I made some database research and found that indeed, 3.a3 was yielding some mildly positive score of 56.7%, while “normal” developing moves like 3.♗c3 and 3.♗f3 failed to even keep White above water! That stirred my interest and I analysed more thoroughly the diagram position.

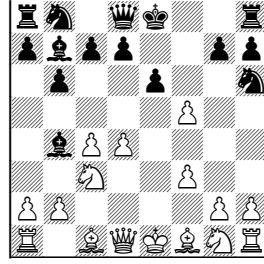
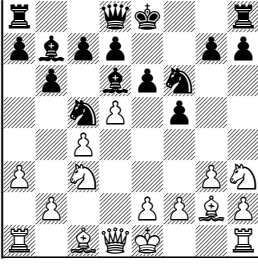
I discovered that Black does not have any theoretical problems in the following critical line:



The only drawback is that the move order 4...♗f6 5.♗f3 requires knowledge of the Petrosian System of the QID, so included Chapter 14 with a short survey of it.

Then I moved to the Dutch set-up 4...f5!. Basically I would play ...f5 only to undermine e4, but in this particular case the harmless move a3 gives us a vital tempo. We can even fight for the initiative in the rich positions that arise after 5.d5 or 5.♗f3. I cover them in Chapter 4. The typical set-up is with a bishop on d6, which we could shift to e5 or leave it on d6 after ♗b5:

## Introduction



This line is my favourite way to play for a win against 3.a3.

The initial results of my study were so encouraging, that I turned ...b6 into my only riposte to 1.d4 and 1.c4. Many hundreds (if not thousands) of blitz games later, I can claim that the English Defence is a perfect way to break free from the boring balanced lines of the modern main openings. I can only admire the intuition and guts of the Englishmen Tony Miles, Jon Speelman and Raymond Keene. They took up the invention of Philip Wallis and popularized it at high level in the seventies, when official theory would discard it as an “irregular” opening. Well, nowadays everybody plays it, even World champion Carlsen.

The critical line is of course 3.e4 ♖b4+!, when the fact that we saved ...♗f6 allows us to destroy the enemy centre with ...f5. The whole English Defence “hangs” on the evaluation of the following position, where Black’s last move was 6...♗h6!!.

I believe that exactly this discovery of Miles, who beat Panno in 1979, spurred the development of the system. The point is to sacrifice a second pawn after 7.fxe6 ♗f5!!.

I met this idea for the first time when playing for the Bulgarian national team against France. The move order was different:

Semkov-Bricard, Sofia 1990: 1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.e4 ♖b7 4.f3 f5 5.exf5 ♗h6!!.

Here I chickened out and traded queens with 6.♗xh6 ♕h4+ 7.g3 ♕xh6 8.♖d2, to eventually win an equal endgame.

Modern engines confirm that Black has fair compensation for the pawn. More importantly, he owns the initiative. That is often decisive, especially in rapid chess.

### Deviations from the main lines

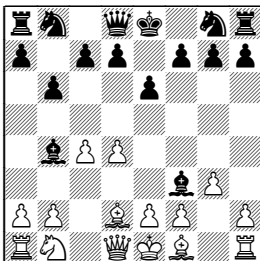
You can learn the most principled lines for just a few days. They took me only 3 chapters. However, when we start building a complete repertoire, we face a flood of transpositions to other open-

## Introduction

ings. I made my best to cover all the tricks White may try to drag you in the main line of the Queen's Indian Defence with g3. However, there is no way to prepare a standalone repertoire, based only on the English Defence.

Let's start with the first move. I definitely discarded 1.d4 b6 since White will get an excellent version of the Sicilian after 2.e4! and ...c5. And I do not want to hear about the Hippopotamus as an option. We should aim to win by playing best possible moves, not cafe chess. So we start with 1.d4 e6! (but 1.c4 b6! to avoid 2.g3). At this point White can still answer 2.e4, but the French 2...d5! is as viable as ever. If you do not play it, it would be a good occasion to start!. After all, if your opponents open the game with 1.d4, they are hardly the best connoisseurs of 1.e4 e6.

I frequently face 1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.♘f3 ♙b7 4.g3. White expects to transpose to the QID after 4...♘f6, but 4...♙b4+!? 5.♙d2 ♘xf3! always acts as a cold shower.



White does not perform well with split pawns after ...♘f6 and ...d5, and by all means this structure is not what he hoped for when playing 4.g3.

Even worse, he often drops a pawn after 5.♘bd2 ♘xf3! 6.exf3 ♘c6 7.a3 ♘xd2+ 8.♙xd2 ♗f6! with a double hit on f3 and d4 – 9.d5 ♘d4.

The biggest challenge is 1.d4 e6 2.♘f3. 2...b6 is still bad owing to 3.e4!, remember?

The only way to exploit White's passive approach to the centre is 2...c5!? (this also works against 2.g3). The point is that 3.d5 would pass the initiative to Black after 3...exd5 and ...♘f6. There is a catch though – 3.e4 converts to the Sicilian! If you are interested in it, you may look at my recent book *The Taimanov-Scheveningen Hybrid*. Here I cover in separate chapters:

Chapter 9. 1.d4 e6 2.♘f3 c5 3.g3

Chapter 10. 1.d4 e6 2.♘f3 c5 3.c4

Chapter 11. 1.d4 e6 2.♘f3 c5 3.e3

Chapter 12. London and Jobava Systems.

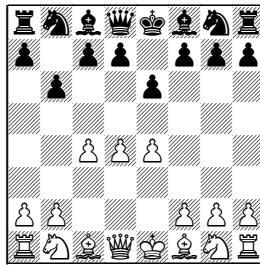
Chapter 13 is devoted to the English Opening 1.c4 b6, when White refrains from d2-d4.

Thus I propose a full repertoire against 1.d4 and 1.c4, which is theoretically sound and leads to sharp, strategically unbalanced positions.

*Semko Semkov, March 2023*

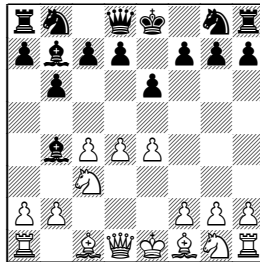
# Index of Variations

## Chapter 1. 1.d4 e6! 2.c4 b6 3.e4



3...♖b4+ 4.♗d2 (4.♘c3 25; 4.♙d2 10) 4...♗xd2+ 5.♙xd2 (5.♘xd2 10)  
5...d5! 11

## Chapter 2. 1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.e4 ♖b4+ 4.♘c3 ♗b7

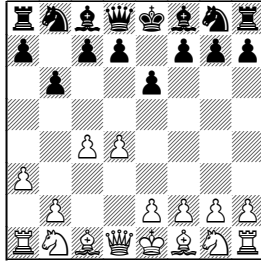


5.f3 f5 25 (5...♗xc3+!? 25)  
5.♗d3 30  
5.♙c2 34  
5.d5 35



## Index of Variations

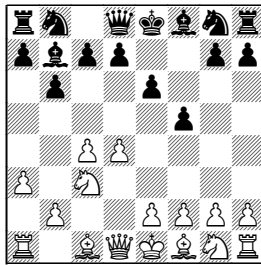
### Chapter 3. 1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.a3!?



3...♘f6 (3...♙b7 4.♘c3 f5 65) 4.♘c3 ♙b7 5.♙g5 48 (5.♘f3 227; 5.f3 48; 5.♙f4 48)

5.d5 50

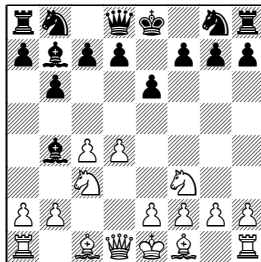
### Chapter 4. 1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.a3 ♙b7 4.♘c3 f5



5.♘f3 66

5.d5 68

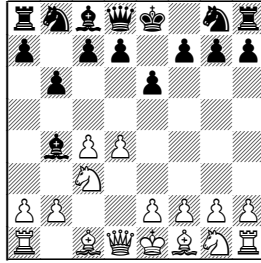
### Chapter 5. 1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.♘f3 ♙b7



## Index of Variations

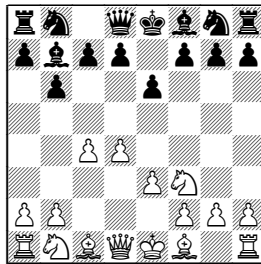
5.♔d2 92 (5.♚c2 ♖f6 115; 5.e3 ♙xc3+ 120; 5.♚b3 a5 125)  
5.♙g5 95  
5.g3 96

### Chapter 6. 1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.♖c3 ♙b4



4.♚c2 113 (4.f3 113) 4...♙b7 5.a3 ♙xc3+ 6.bxc3 ♖f6 7.♙g5 113  
7.♖f3 115  
7.f3 118  
4.e3 120  
4.♔d2 ♙b7 122  
4...♖f6 123  
4.♚b3 125

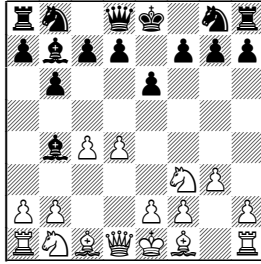
### Chapter 7. 1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.♖f3 ♙b7 4.e3



4...♖f6 (4...f5 137) 5.♔d3 (5.♖c3 137) 5...d5 6.0-0 138  
6.cxd5 140  
6.b3 144

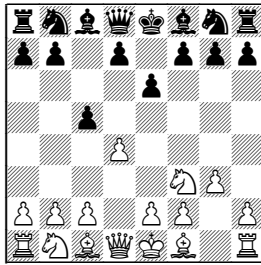
## Index of Variations

### Chapter 8. 1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.♘f3 ♙b7 4.g3 ♙b4+



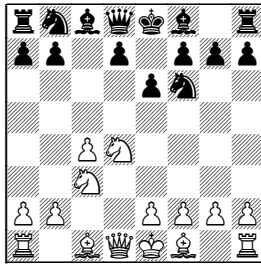
5.♙d2 (5.♘c3 96; 5.♘bd2 151) 5...♙xf3 151

### Chapter 9. 1.d4 e6 2.♘f3 c5 3.g3



3...cxd4 4.♘xd4 d5 5.♙g2 ♘f6 6.c4 162  
6.0-0 164

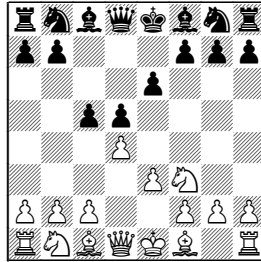
### Chapter 10. 1.d4 e6 2.♘f3 c5 3.c4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3



5...♘c6 (5...♙b4 173) 6.g3 (6.e4 ♙b4 173; 6.a3 173; 6.♘db5 174) 6...  
♙b6 7.♘b3 175  
7.♘db5 177

## Index of Variations

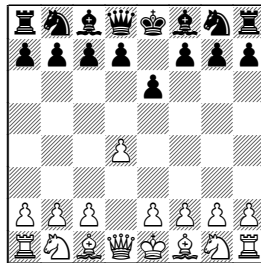
### Chapter 11. 1.d4 e6 2.♘f3 c5 3.e3 d5



4.c3 185

4.b3 186 4...♗f6 5.♙d3 ♗c6 6.♙b2 b6 7.♗bd2 ♙e7 8.0-0 187  
8.a3 188

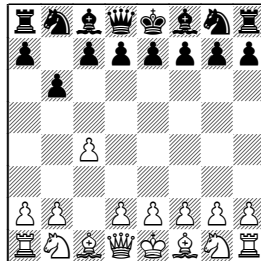
### Chapter 12. 1.d4 e6



2.♙f4 c5 3.e3 (3.c3 ♖b6 197) 3...♖b6 198

2.♗f3 c5 3.c3 d5 4.♙f4 ♖b6 200

### Chapter 13. 1.c4 b6

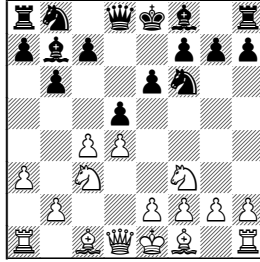


## Index of Variations

2.♖c3 ♗b7 3.e4 (3.♖f3 e6 4.g3 213) 3...e6 214 (3...e5 214)

2.♖f3 ♗b7 3.g3 c5 (3...♗xf3 217) 4.♗g2 g6 217

### Chapter 14. 1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 e6 3.♖f3 b6 4.♖c3 ♗b7 5.a3 d5



6.cxd5 227 (6.♗g5 227; 6.♖c2 227) 6...♖xd5 7.♖c2 228 (7.e3 228)