



# The Modern Triangle

Semko Semkov

Chess Stars Publishing  
Current Theory and Practice Series

## **The Modern Triangle**

Cover design by Kaloyan Nachev, Semko Semkov

Copyright © 2020 by Semko Semkov

Printed in Bulgaria  
ISBN: 978-619-7188-27-1

# Contents

Bibliography 4

Introduction 5

**Chapter 1.** The Noteboom System – Sidelines

Main Ideas 9 Step by Step 13 Annotated Games 26

**Chapter 2.** The Noteboom System – Main Line

Main Ideas 33 Step by Step 40 Annotated Games 55

**Chapter 3.** The Marshall Gambit

Main Ideas 71 Step by Step 77 Annotated Games 93

**Chapter 4.** The Catalan Way

Main Ideas 101 Step by Step 106 Annotated Games 119

**Chapter 5.** The Cunnning 4.♠bd2

Main Ideas 129 Step by Step 132 Annotated Games 141

**Chapter 6.** 4.♙c2

Main Ideas 151 Step by Step 153 Annotated Games 163

**Chapter 7.** 4.♙b3

Main Ideas 169 Step by Step 171 Annotated Games 180

**Chapter 8.** The Carlsbad Structure

Main Ideas 187 Step by Step 190 Annotated Games 196

**Chapter 9.** 3.♠f3 c6 4.♙g5

Main Ideas 1201 Step by Step 202 Annotated Games 205

**Chapter 10.** Fighting the Reti and the KI Attack

Step by Step 207 Annotated Games 211

Index of Variations 213

# Bibliography

## Books

*The Triangle System*, Ruslan Scherbakov, Everyman Chess 2012

*The Triangle Setup*, Michal Krasenkow, ChessBase 2015

*Playing 1.d4*, Lars Schandorff, Quality Chess 2012

*Attacking the English/Reti*, Alexander Delchev and Semko Semkov, Chess Stars 2016

*A Practical Black Repertoire with d5, c6. Volume 1: The Slav*, Alexei Kornev, Chess Stars 2017

*The Meran & Anti-Meran Variations*, Alexey Dreev, Chess Stars 2011

## Periodicals

Chess Informant

New in Chess Yearbook

## Internet resources

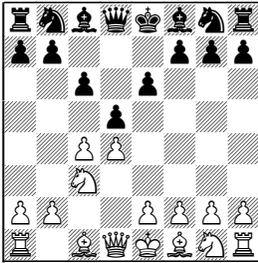
Databases

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

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

# Introduction

This book is devoted to the Triangle set-up, which arises after **1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3/♗f3 c6**.



I have been playing it all my life, at first in OTB tournaments, then in blitz.

My concept for the Triangle set-up can be summarised in 3 principles:

1. We do not plan to entrench ourselves around the d5-square. On the contrary – we aim to take on c4 in order to play double-edged positions with open centre and asymmetrical pawn structures.
2. We do not cling to the extra c4-pawn. It serves us only to distract the opponent's forces from the centre. In many lines we return it with ...c5 to open our bishop.
3. We never play ...f5 or any form of the Stonewall.

I understand that Number 3 of this list is controversial. It implies that if White defends c4 with e3, we should enter the Meran. On the other hand, I do not regard that as a drawback. The Meran is one of the most solid and theoretically sound systems in chess. You can study it from Chess Stars' book *The Meran & Anti-Meran Variations* by Alexey Dreev. And if you want a more lazy way to build up a complete repertoire around the Triangle System, you should look at Kornev's book *A Practical Black Repertoire with d5, c6. Volume 1*. It offers a Black repertoire with 4.e3 ♘f6 5.♗f3 a6.

Why am I against the Stonewall? I must admit that I played it many times with good results against e3. However, compared to the Meran, it is a second-rate opening. Against a really strong opponent, you are likely to struggle for many moves, with poor chances to win. Even more importantly, playing the Stonewall could hamper you to improve your chess understanding as you'd be getting one and the same closed pawn structure all the time. The spirit of the Triangle is quite the opposite – we seek sharp unbalanced play.

So I omitted 4.e3, but paid enough attention to the Marshall, the Noteboom, and all the other 4th moves after 3.♟f3 c6 – 4.♞bd2, 4.♞c2, 4.♞b3, 4.g3, 4.♞g5, 4.b3, the Carlsbad structure with cxd5.

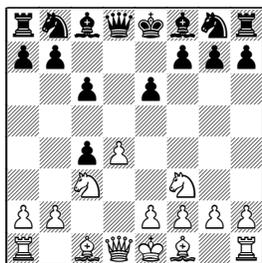
I also added a chapter on the Reti and the King’s Indian Attack, although it is beyond the scope of the Triangle System.

### What do we gain with the Triangle move order?

#### We avoid:

the Slav and the Exchange Slav;  
the Botvinnik Variation;  
the tremendously popular Catalan;  
the Queen’s Gambit Declined;  
the Classical Carlsbad with 3...♞f6 4.cxd5.

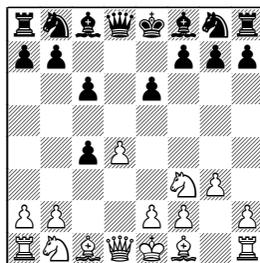
**We also set a psychological trap:** Many players believe that the Noteboom is clearly better for White. This is a very old myth. As you will see, Black does not have any theoretical problems. Furthermore, statistics show that after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♞c3, 3...c6 is the best scoring move for Black. Then 4.♟f3 dxc4 brings Black 54.2%!



In blitz I often meet players who

stubbornly repeat some poor Noteboom line only because some book promised them an advantage! But if you look closely in the database, you could notice that top players choose 3.♟f3 c6 and now almost everything but 4.♞c3.

I especially like the fact that the Triangle is effective against the Catalan. It is always difficult to impose double-edged play against the fianchetto, but 3.♟f3 c6 4.g3 dxc4! is again the best practical decision.



The open centre promises lively play with plenty of tactical tricks.

I tried to explain the most important plans and key positions in the “Main Ideas” sections, so please do not skip them! Anyway you will not be able to memorize the variations from the “Step by Step” sections, although I selected only the most topical information.

On the opposite, some annotated games present alternative lines, which could enrich your repertoire, but are not vital for the start.

Now I’d like to present you the most unusual game in my career. Besides

the fun, it displays the enormous potential of the Triangle System to face White with nontrivial strategic tasks. I won both my Triangle games in this closed GM tournament, and that was decisive to share first place with Bareev.

---

**P.Lukacs – Semkov  
Vrnjacka Banja 1987**

---

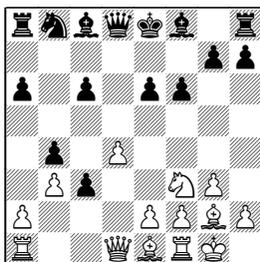
1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 c6 3.c4 e6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.♙g5



**5...f6**

My opponent was a decent grandmaster, famous with his erudition in the openings. So it was impractical to enter the Botvinnik Variation. Nowadays I'm wiser, so I recommend 5...♙e7. Instead I decided to create more imbalances:

5...f6 6.♙d2 a6 7.g3?! (7.a4! e5) 7... b5 8.♙g2 ♘e7 9.0-0 ♘d5 10.b3 ♘xc3 11.♙xc3 b4 12.♙e1 c3

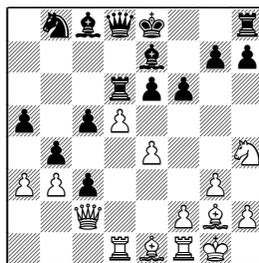


It looks like Black forgot how the pieces moved... But I was already happy with my position.

13.♙c2? (13.a3 c5 14.♙c2 ♖a7 15.dxc5 ♙xc5) 13...a5 14.a3 ♖a6! 15.♙d1 ♙e7 16.♘h4

This is the first line of Houdini, so do not condemn this move.

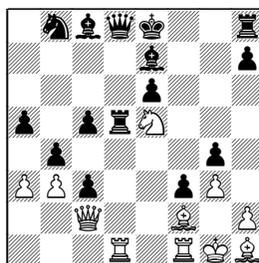
16...c5 (16...g5! 17.♘f3 0-0) 17.d5 ♙d6 18.e4



**16...g5!**

Mirroring the queenside pawn storm to the other wing.

19.e5 (desperation) 19...fxe5 20.f4 exf4 21.♘f3 ♖xd5 22.♙f2 g4 23.♘e5 f3-+ 24.♙h1



An amazing picture! I won the game almost without my minor pieces.

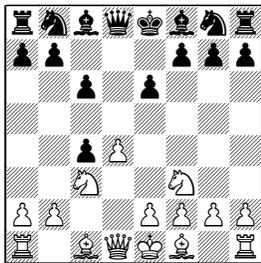
24...♙d2 25.♖xd2 ♙xd2 26.♙e4 ♙d5 27.♙e3 ♖f8 28.h3 ♖f5 29.♘g4 ♙g5 30.♙e1 ♙d2 31.♙b1 ♙a6 32.♙d1 ♙d3 33.♙a1 e5 34.axb4 c2 0-1



## Chapter 1. The Noteboom System – Sidelines

# Main Ideas

The Noteboom System arises after:  
**1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 c6 4.♗c3 dxc4**



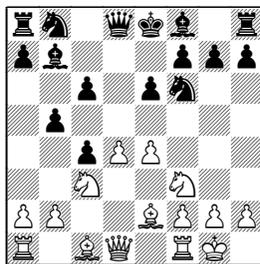
It is one of the most extraordinary openings. In many senses the Noteboom defies the classical rules of positional chess. It is the antipode of Botvinnik's principle that if Black bolstered up the d5 square against 1.d4, he should maintain even chances. Furthermore, Black neglects development!

The move 4...dxc4 breaks the symmetry and begins the fight for an opening advantage! That is not the way to play for a half point. You should display ingenuity and concrete thinking.

The obvious aim of our last move is to hang to the c4-pawn with ...b5.

White can still regain the pawn by 5.a4 ♗b4 6.e3 b5 7.♗d2 a5! 8.axb5 ♗xc3 9.♗xc3 cxb5 10.b3 ♗b7 11.bxc4 b4 12.♗b2 ♘f6, but at the cost of accepting two connected passed pawns on the queenside. That is the main line, and we are going to study it in the next chapter.

In this chapter I'll confine myself to variations where White plays in a gambit style with e4. Let's consider:  
**5.e4 b5 6.♗e2 ♗b7 7.0-0 ♘f6**



The most popular approach is to lead out the bishop – 8.♗g5?!. White hopes to see ...♗e7, when e5 will trade bishops and White will get the d6-square at his full disposal. That is not too dangerous, but Black will have to defend passively, which is not in our plans. As a rule, we should meet ♗g5 by 8...

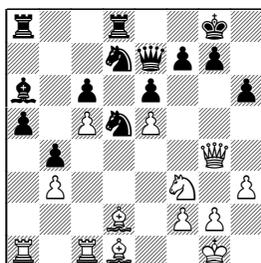
♖bd7 (planning ...h6). Then 9.e5 h6 10.♗h4 g5 11.♗g3 ♖d5 is excellent for us.

An alternative way is 8.♙c2 ♗e7 9.e5 ♖d5 10.♖e4



I suggest to treat this pawn structure with 10...h6. It looks dangerous to provide a lever on the kingside, but my idea is to quickly undermine the e5-pawn with ...f6 or ...f5:

Analysis



20...f5! 21.exf6 ♖5xf6♠.

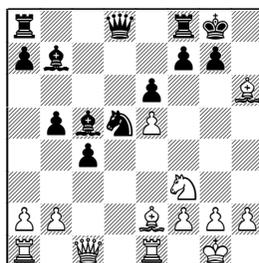
In this example White activated his queen via e4-g4. He might also build the battery ♗d2+♙c1 with the unequivocal intention to take on h6. It is often impossible to calculate all the consequences of such sacrifice.

---

I suggest to save this effort and simply answer ♗xh6 with ...f6:

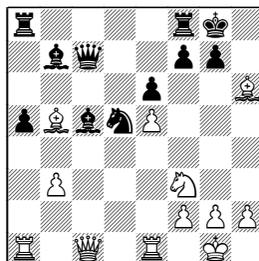
---

Analysis



16...f6! 17.exf6?! (17...♗d2 ♙b6♠) 17...gxh6♠.

Analysis



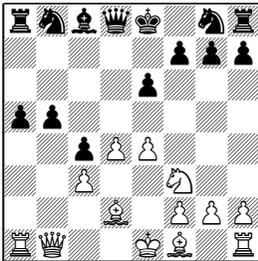
19...f6♠.

The bottom line of the above explanations is that White lacks enough resources to decide the game solely on the kingside, mostly because his light-squared bishop cannot join the attack. Therefore, he should undermine the c4-pawn with a4 and b3.  
**5.a4 ♗b4 6.e4**



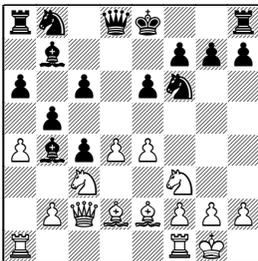
Here a reliable equaliser is 6...♘f6 7.♙g5 ♕xc3+!, which is a sideline of the Botvinnik Variation. I suggest to stay true to the Noteboom spirit with **6...b5!**. Then we have to deal with the following pawn structures:

After 7.♙d2 a5 8.axb5 ♕xc3 9.bxc3 cxb5 10.♖b1



Although ...♙a6 is possible, I suggest in such situation to always keep the bishop closer to the kingside: 10...♙d7.

Another typical pawn structure is:



My recommendation is to open the b7-bishop as early as possible: 10...c5!? 11.dxc5 0-0.

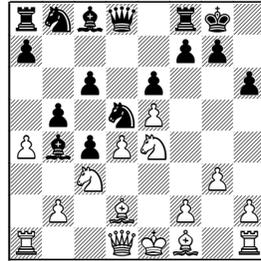
---

Always prefer counter-attack rather than a passive stand even when the engines claim the opposite.

---

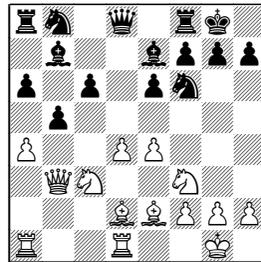
Here is more of the same:

### Analysis



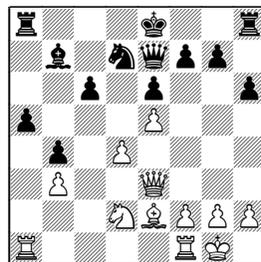
11...c5! 12.dxc5 ♘d7↑.

### Analysis



15...c5!?=.

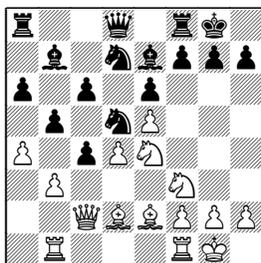
### Analysis



17...c5! 18.dxc5 0-0!♣.

After b2-b3 we often can take over the initiative with a break in the centre:

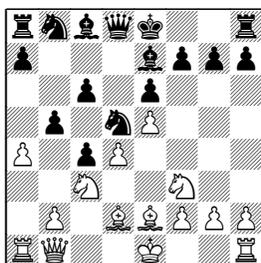
Analysis



14...c3! 15.♙xc3 c5!↑. Or 15.♘xc3 c5.

Sometimes the engines prefer to keep the extra pawn, relying on their amazing defensive capabilities. However, we should take into account human limitations and opt for active counterplay whenever possible:

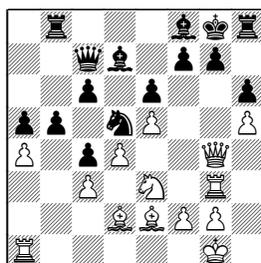
Analysis



The best practical approach is 10...

b4! 11.♗e4 ♕a6 12.♙g5 f6 13.exf6 gxf6.

The passive alternative 10...♙d7 (or 10...a6) preserves the status quo on the queenside, but gives White a lasting initiative. For instance, he could play 11.h4 a5 12.♞h3 h6 13.♞g3 ♖f8 14.h5 ♗a6 15.♙f1 ♗ab4 16.♙g1 ♗xc3 17.bxc3 ♗d5 18.♞e4 ♙g8 19.♞g4 ♙f8 20.♗h2 ♞b8 21.♗f1 ♞c7 22.♗e3



Black lacks any constructive plan, while the opponent has several ways to improve his pieces. For instance, ♞b1, ♙d1-c2, ♗g4.

**Theoretical status**

Many club players still believe that the Noteboom is positionally dubious and happily allow it. That is our chance! Statistics show 46% for White after 5.a4, 44% after 5.e3, and mere 38% after 5.e4.