

The Modernized Stonewall Defense

First edition 2020 by Thinkers Publishing
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All sales or enquiries should be directed to Thinkers Publishing, 9850 Landegem, Belgium.

Email: info@thinkerspublishing.com
Website: www.thinkerspublishing.com

Managing Editor: Romain Edouard

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Software: Hub van de Laar

Cover Design: Iwan Kerkhof

Graphic Artist: Philippe Tonnard

Production: BESTinGraphics

ISBN: 9789492510730

D/2020/13740/4

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Milos Pavlovic

Thinkers Publishing 2020



Key to Symbols

| | | | |
|----|---|----|--------------------------------|
| ! | a good move | ± | White stands slightly better |
| ? | a weak move | ∓ | Black stands slightly better |
| !! | an excellent move | ± | White has a serious advantage |
| ?? | a blunder | ∓ | Black has a serious advantage |
| !? | an interesting move | +− | White has a decisive advantage |
| ?! | a dubious move | −+ | Black has a decisive advantage |
| □ | only move | → | with an attack |
| N | novelty | ↑ | with initiative |
| ⊙ | lead in development | ↔ | with counterplay |
| ⊙ | zugzwang | Δ | with the idea of |
| = | equality | ⊃ | better is |
| ∞ | unclear position | ⊂ | worse is |
| ∞ | with compensation for the sacrificed material | + | check |
| | | # | mate |

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Introduction

The Dutch Defense is an old opening. A seriously old opening. So old, in fact, that in large part it currently has the reputation of not really causing a well-prepared White player to fear losing. That is especially the case with the variant of it I am analysing in this book: the Stonewall (in which Black continues with ...e6 and ...d5). I intend to show that that impression is mistaken.

First things first: it's a **very** positional opening. In contrast to the King's Indian (which shares the feature of having few early piece or pawn exchanges) play moves slowly and despite there obviously being some sharp lines, the absolute prerequisite for playing the Stonewall Dutch is that you understand positional chess. The first person to really understand the strategic themes at play here, and develop decent plans for Black was sixth world champion, Mikhail Botvinnik. From which it should be clear that *positional* doesn't necessarily mean *easy*.

After Botvinnik, the next few top players to develop the system were Jussupow (previously transliterated 'Yusupov'), Dolmatov, Predrag Nikolic and Nigel Short. Then came another break, and only now the Stonewall is emerging from the shadows, championed by Teimour Radjabov and the World Champion at time of printing, Magnus Carlsen.

There have been many revolutions in how chess players view tactical play or opening strategy. However, for me it is fitting that the resurgence of the Stonewall is coming at the exact time that *strategic* chess is being redefined by Carlsen. It is an echo of when the opening was first introduced: Botvinnik, the 'Patriarch' of the Soviet chess school, with its discipline and its principles, produced a similarly seismic shift in how people viewed positional play at the time.

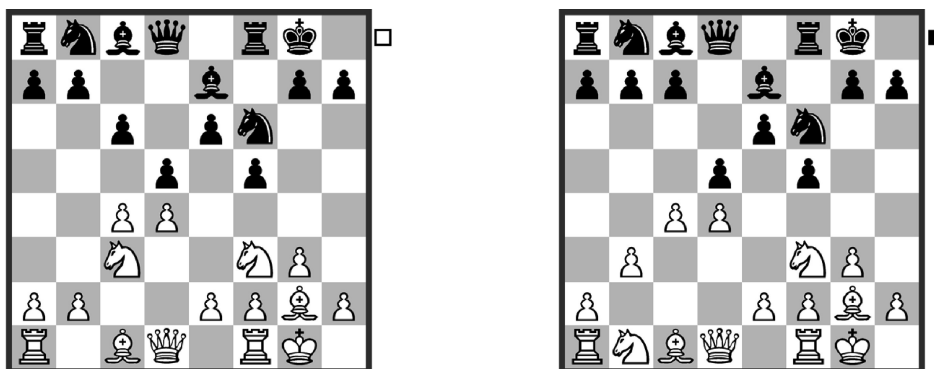
The positional themes in this opening are incredibly complex. We'll get into it more later (obviously) but let me just explain some of the confounding factors. From Black's perspective, playing with a hole on e5 is very much an 'acquired taste', in spite of the ideas that have already been found to counterbalance it, such as a queen (or bishop) transfer to h5, or launching the f-pawn against the enemy king.

From White's perspective, the seemingly amazing g2-bishop, which is so well placed in other Dutch lines, can often find itself biting on granite (hence 'stonewall') and therefore he's best off trying to leverage his extra space and the time it takes Black

to develop the c8-bishop. Interestingly, both sides often trade their ‘good bishops’ for the knights that entrench themselves just over the half-way line on e4 and e5 respectively. Since this is a book for Black, I’ll occupy myself more with his plans and ideas, but both sides would benefit from thinking flexibly and pragmatically.

One thing that (in my opinion) hadn’t really been done before is a really thorough look at the Stonewall using modern computer engines (and over a thousand hours of analysis.) While the opening is definitely all about understanding, wouldn’t you prefer to benefit from some fresh ideas and knowledge of which the best move-orders might be, as well as which plans have hidden holes in them? Thus, the idea for this book was formed. I’ll be looking at both the ‘classical’ approach where Black plays ...♗e7, and the ‘modern’ approach with ...♗d6. In openings that are based on understanding, it’s always helpful to look at older approaches to the same problem, and compare our thoughts with those of our predecessors.

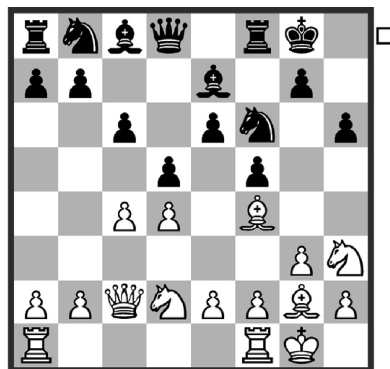
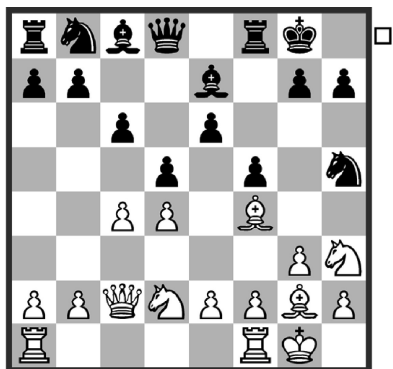
The Classical approach (Chapters 2 & 3)



It’s not easy to find your way through the different move-orders in the Stonewall and even if you intend to develop the bishop to d6 every time, it can quite often happen that it ends up on e7, for instance because you avoided a trade of bishops on f4 or because White’s knight was on c3, causing worries about ♘b5. Still, it’s also possible (and fully playable) to place the bishop on e7 by choice. The right diagram shows such a scenario, where White has not developed either minor piece on the queenside and therefore retains ideas of ♗a3.

Now let’s look at the possible White plans against the modern approach with ...♗d6.

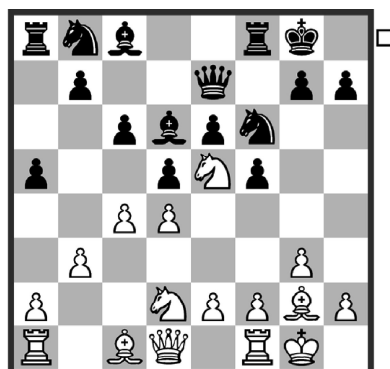
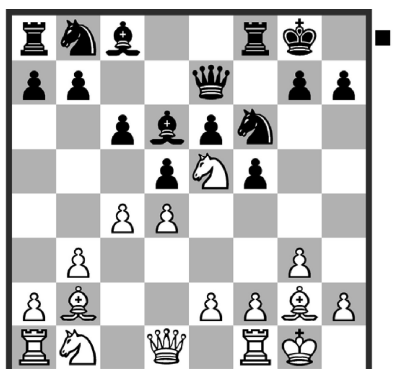
Typical plan I: $\text{N}h3$ (Chapter 1)



This is the standard setup White is aiming for with $\text{N}h3$. He avoids blocking the f-pawn, so as to allow a knight manoeuvre to d3 or else the pushes f3 and e4 in the center. The two diagrams illustrate two different counter-plans Black can choose.

Plans II, III and IV below don't belong to any individual chapter but occur throughout chapters 5, 6, and 7; and despite being different can overlap to a certain extent.

Typical plan II: $\text{N}f3$ -e5 with play on the c-file



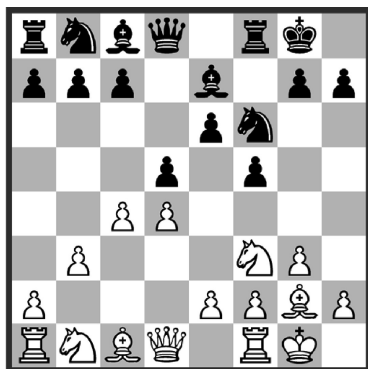
White aims to lock down the b8-knight by pressuring Black's c6- and f5-pawns, take on d5 (timed to force $\dots cxd5$), and play along the c-file with queen, rook or both.

Typical plan III: ♖a1-b1 followed by b4-b5



This is one of the most dangerous plans for White, and can be stated with disarming simplicity: push b4-b5 and use the e5-square to target a weak c-pawn in the future. Many Black players were understandably worried by this plan but I have found ideas that will satisfy them and keep the balance!

Typical plan IV: ♞f3-e5 followed by ♞b1-d2-f3



The knights will head to e5 (or d3) and f3 as fast as possible, and White plans to propose a bishop trade on f4 at some stage. This is a very interesting plan worth knowing about, and Black has to be ready to respond sharply, e.g. with ...g5.

In the remainder of the book I will tie up some loose ends (chapters 8-11) without which it would simply not be a complete work. I would like to thank everyone who made this book possible, and hope that the reader has as much fun with it (and the opening) as I have done!

Milos Pavlovic
December 2019

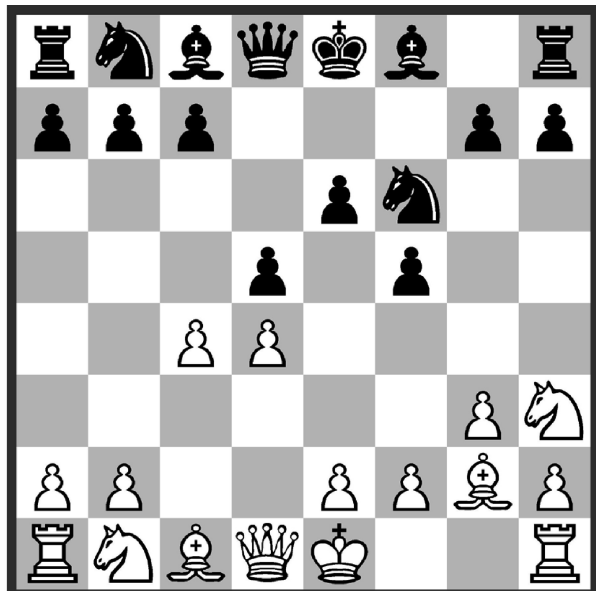
Part I

Systems with
g3 and  h3





















5. h3

1.d4 f5 2.g3  f6 3.  g2 e6
4.c4 d5 5.  h3



Chapter Guide

Chapter 1 – 5. h3

| | |
|--|----|
| 1.d4 f5 2.g3  f6 3.  g2 e6 4.c4 d5 5.  h3 c6 | |
| a) 6.  d2 | 17 |
| b) 6.0-0  d6 7.-- | 21 |
| c) 6.0-0  d6 7.  c2..... | 23 |
| d) 6.0-0  d6 7.  f4  e7 8.  d2 0-0 9.  c2  h5..... | 30 |
| e) 6.0-0  d6 7.  f4  e7 8.  d2 0-0 9.  c2 h6..... | 34 |