The London against the Dutch

Kiril Georgiev

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Preface

Bulgarian GM Spiridonov used to say that ...f7-f5 is always bad (unless it wins a piece or mates in two). I also grew up with the Soviet books and chess school (winning the World Junior Championship in the distant 1983 at the age of 18), and remember a jocular statement of World Champion Petrosian that the most important thing against the Dutch is not to hinder the opponent to play it! So I had treated it in the best positional traditions with g3, ♗g2 and short castling, reaching the promised by theory "small but lasting advantage". All this had been very good and bringing nice results, until Black has developed new ways of treating the Stonewall, featuring ...b6, ♗b7 or ...♗a6 and a subsequent ...c5. Somewhere along the way White's small advantage was beginning to disappear, and Black confidently held the draw. Even worse, Vladimir Malaniuk found rather aggressive plans in the Leningrad Dutch with ...g6. Although White still got a theoretical plus, tons of games and books

have taught Black players how to gradually neutralise it. Thus I began experimenting with different set-ups, and around 2014 I discovered the charm of meeting all forms of the Dutch in the spirit of the London System with 1.d4 f5 2.♗f4.
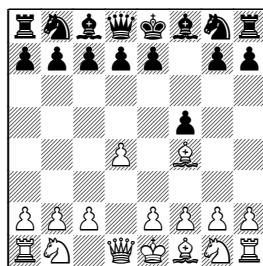

I also cover in this book the tricky move orders 1.d4 e6 2.♘f3 f5 3.♗f4, 1.c4 e6 2.d4 f5 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗e7 (4...♗b4 5.♗d2) 5.♗f4, 1.d4 d6 2.♘f3 f5 3.♗f4 to offer a complete repertoire with ♗f4.

It is in no way worse than the standard fianchetto lines, and has the huge advantage of being unexplored and barely mentioned in the books on the Dutch. White's bishop often proves to be our most important and active piece, especial-

ly when we carry out the thematic break c4-c5. At the same time I feel much safer having it to defend my castling position. In contrast to the worn-out main lines, White always has clear plans in the middlegame, which range from pawn advance on the queenside against set-ups with ...♗e7, to h4, ♕f3 and long castling against the Leningrad. Play is intuitive, and Black cannot easily prepare at home as the engines consistently show a fair advantage for White while top GM games are scarce. If it comes to that, they are even misleading. Here is a game of Magnus Carlsen (in blitz, to be fair, but have in mind that Magnus had played the ♗f4 System with White too):

Ambartsumova-Carlsen
chess.com 2023

1.d4 f5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 d6 4.e3 ♘c6 5.d5 (5.♘f3!? e6 6.d5) 5...e5?!
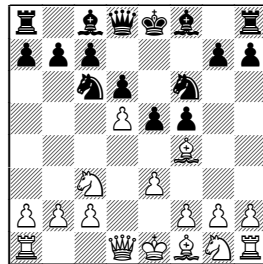
White could have won now a healthy pawn with 6.dxc6± exf4 7.♗b5, e.g. 7...♖b8 8.cxb7+ ♗d7 9.♗xd7+ ♕xd7 10.exf4.

On the White side we can see super GMs as Carlsen, Aronian, Topalov, Grischuk, Morozevich, Praggnanandhaa, Nihal, Najer, Grandelius and many others.

The ♗f4-System against the Dutch is not a tricky, one-game opening. It can stand deep analysis with the latest versions of Leela AI and Stockfish. That makes it perfect for a long-term repertoire and correspondence chess.

Kiril Georgiev
*June 2024*

Introduction

Theoretical survey

Before starting to write on the ♗f4 System, I checked the four modern books I had on the Dutch.
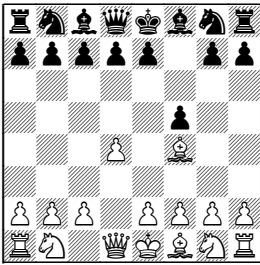
I tossed aside Marin's work at once as it covers only fianchetto systems, thus leaving his readers without a clue. Malaniuk/ Marusenko did only a trifle better – they give the line – 1.d4 f5 2.♗f4! ♘f6 3.e3 g6 4.h4!! h6, completely omitting the plan with 5.♕f3!! and long castling. By the way, after 5... d6 6.♘c3 White achieves about 70% in practice. Stockfish 16 and Leela 0.31 also reach a consensus that White has already a clear edge!
So much for the poor fans of the Leningrad Dutch! They are left on their own from move 2.

Moskalenko in the *Diamond Dutch* allocates just a couple of words on 1.d4 f5 2.♗f4!, his proposition being 2...♘f6 3.e3 d6 4.♘c3 c6
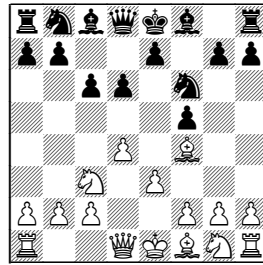

Here he mentions only 5.♘f3, while in Chapter 5/ line A1 I consider 5.♗d3. That makes just four moves that match my book. True, I also paid attention to his line 5.♘f3 ♕a5, only to show that instead of 6.♕d2 (Moskalenko), White can ignore the pin with 6.♗c4! since 6...♘e4? 7.0-0 would be difficult to defend.

Sedlak in his book on the Stonewall uses the clever workaround 1.d4 e6!, frankly admitting that it is more than risky to build the wall starting with 1...f5. Indeed, this is a challenging move order,

which has a glaring drawback – Black accepts to enter the jungles of the French Defence! Since I myself meet it with 2.♘f3 or 2.c4, I explored at great length the consequences of both approaches. It suffices to say that Sedlak's recommended line would support Black up to move 6! After 1.d4 e6 2.♘f3 (I also have a chapter on 2.c4) 2...f5 3.♗f4 ♘f6 4.e3 b6! (his mark, no alternatives given) 5.♗e2 ♗b7 6.0-0 ♗e7,
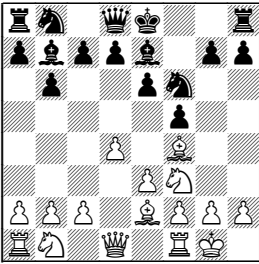
he considers only 7.h3. This is not bad, and I analyse it in **Game 5** Firouzja-Kamsky, chess.com 2023, which featured a good novelty, but my main proposition is to save this prophylaxis whenever possible.

Finally, I did not find a word on 2.♗f4 in *The Killer Dutch* by Simon Williams.

To sum it up, all five books on the Dutch together devote about half a page to 2.♗f4. Good luck to your opponents if they try to borrow some advice in their home preparation!

As rare as 1.d4 f5 2.♗f4! is, in my opinion it may be the best, and undoubtedly, the easiest to play system against all the Dutch variants. Even the engines assess it favourably compared to the main fianchetto lines. For instance, their mid-deep evaluation against the Leningrad is about 0.45 for the g3 System and 0.80 for ♗f4! The Stonewall is even worse, with 0.46 : 0.90. Best evaluation has 3...d6 4.♘c3 at 0.40, but Black's play requires so many subtleties, that it is far more probable to end up mated. In fact, I have never seen in another opening so many GMs to get horrible positions about move 10-15.

The Leningrad set-up

As I noted before, the main plan against the Leningrad is 1.d4 f5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 g6 4.h4!!, practically refuting Black's set-up.
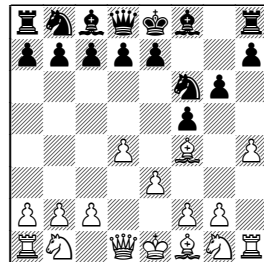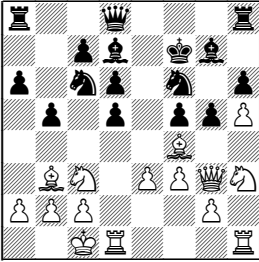

4...♗g7 is met by 5.h5 ♘xh5 6.♖xh5 with long and hopeless suffering. Thus 4...h6 is more or less obligatory, but it weakens g6. We play ♘c3, ♕f3, 0-0-0, ♗c4, ♕g3,

followed by e3-e4 and f2-f3. it is commonly enough to open a file on the kingside. Another typical motif is a piece sacrifice on g5:

Analysis

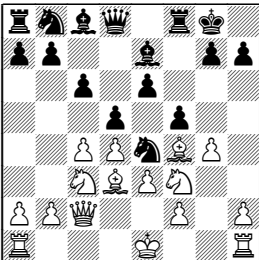15.♘xg5!+ (with a rook on g8 ♗xg5 is commonly more effective!) 15...hxg5 16.♗xg5 ♕g8 17.♗xf6 ♗xf6 18.♗xd5+ ♗e6 19.♕g6+ or 16...♗e6 17.♘xd5 ♖g8 18.♕h2 ♘e7 19.h6 ♘exd5 20.♖xd5 ♗h8 21.♖xf5.
In short, we meet ...g6 (or 3...d6) with ♘c3 and long castling.

The Stonewall

Putting the pawns on d5 and c6 against ♗f4 is a pure form of masochism. There are two main scenarios there – with ♗e2 and ♗d3.

We reach this position after 1.d4 e6 2.♘f3 f5 3.♗f4 ♘f6 4.e3 d5? 5.c4 c6 6.♘c3 ♗e7
If Black develops the bishop on d6, we let him take on f4 himself! Or force it with c4-c5.
7.♗d3 0-0 8.♕c2 ♘e4 9.g4. This is not a speculative attempt. With our bishop on f4, it is the best way to get quickly to the black king.

Since I recommend the move order 1.d4 f5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 4.♗e2, we would often get the Stonewall with ♗e2 instead of ♗d3. In that event we castle short and push c4-c5. Again, we do not take on d6!
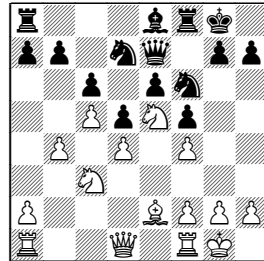
This plan is slower than the attack with g2-g4 but inexorable, as Black has no trace of counterplay.

Set-ups with ...e6 and ...d6

The most reasonable way to meet ♗f4 is to play ...e6 and ...d6. It allows tons of different move orders and it would take Black weeks to prepare against any of them. If I should point out the most thematic plan for us, I would choose the break c4-c5!. I have found that it
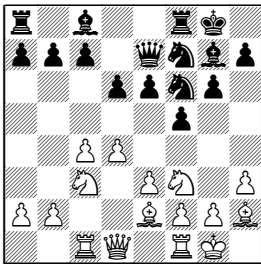
is possible against virtually anything, and it often does not need a lot of preparation. Sometimes we can just sac the pawn in order to open our e2-bishop.

A typical example of our set-up is seen on the following diagram after 9.c5!:
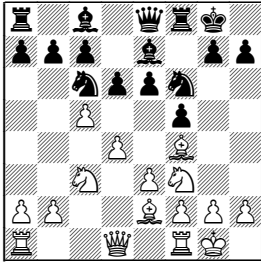
The same break is effective when Black combines ...e6 with ...g6:
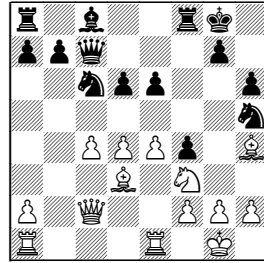
Le Quang Liem-Idani
Ashkhabad 2017

12.c5!±.

Do not be afraid that Black could entrap the f4-bishop. That usually happens only at the cost of fatal weaknesses and delay in development:

Analysis

The bishop is caged, but White gets a decisive attack in return – 18.e5 g5 19.♗g6 ♘g7 20.♗xg5 hxg5 21.exd6±.

Tricky move orders

A good part of the book is devoted to lines that feature an early ♘f3. That is a concession as we miss some of our most aggressive set-ups, but it does not mean we cannot get an advantage. It just leads to quiet positional play with a clear plan of pushing b2-b4 and c4-c5 or d4-d5 in the centre. That is the price we have to pay if we start with 1.♘f3 f5 2.d4 or 1.d4 e6 2.♘f3 f5.
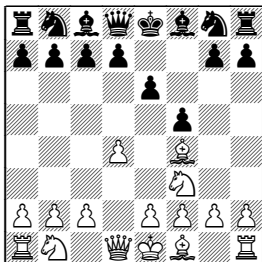On the other hand, in many systems the set-ups with ♘f3 are best anyway.

Index of Variations

Index of Variations

Chapter 3.   1.d4 e6 2.♘f3 f5 3.♗f4 ♘f6 4.e3
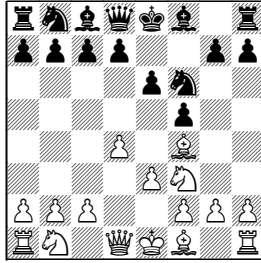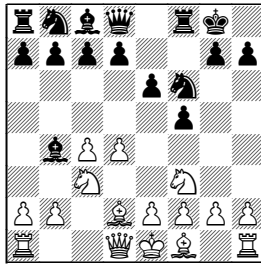

4...♘c6 *58* (4...g6 *59*; 4...c6 *57*; 4...c5 *57*; 4...b6 *58*)
4...d6 *59*
4....♗d6?! *62*

Chapter 4.   1.d4 e6 2.c4 f5 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 (4...b6   *76*) 5.♗d2! 0-0

6.g3 b6 (6...♕e7 *78*) 7.♗g2 ♗b7 8.0-0 *79*
                              8...a5 *79*
                              8...♕e7 *81*
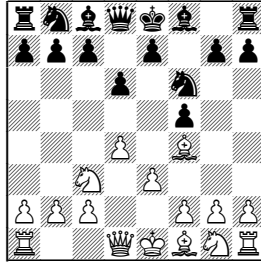   8...♗xc3 *83*
6.e3 b6 (6...d6 *86*; 6...♗xc3 *87*) 7.♗d3 ♗b7 8.0-0 *89*
                              8...d6 *90*
                              8...a5 *91*
                              8...♗xc3 *93*

Chapter 5. 1.d4 f5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 d6 4.♘c3!

Chapter 6.   1.d4 f5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 d6 4.♘c3! g6 5.h4!
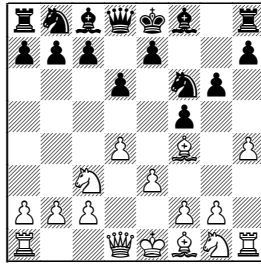
Chapter 7. Odds and Ends

Chapter 8.   1.d4 f5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 4.♗e2 d5
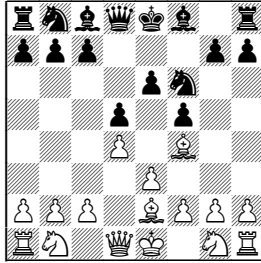
Chapter 9. 1.d4 e6 2.♘f3 f5 3.♗f4 ♘f6 4.e3 d5? 5.c4 c6 6.♘c3