

Ivan Sokolov

# The Strategic Nimzo-Indian

Volume 1: A Complete Guide to the Rubinstein Variation

New In Chess 2012

# Contents

Foreword .....	9
<b>PART I – 4.e3 Various .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Chapter 1.1 .....</b>	<b>12</b>
Taimanov – 4...♖c6	
<b>Chapter 1.2 .....</b>	<b>21</b>
Early ...b6 Lines – 4...b6 5.f3	
<b>Chapter 1.3 .....</b>	<b>28</b>
Smooth Development – 4...b6 5.♙d3 ♘b7 6.♗f3	
<b>Chapter 1.4 .....</b>	<b>36</b>
Romanishin’s 4...b6 5.♗e2 c5	
<b>Chapter 1.5 .....</b>	<b>50</b>
The Early Knight Jump – 4...b6 5.♗e2 ♗e4	
<b>Chapter 1.6 .....</b>	<b>74</b>
The Slow 4...b6 5.♗e2 ♙a6 6.a3 ♙e7	
<b>Chapter 1.7 .....</b>	<b>80</b>
Exchange – 4...b6 5.♗e2 ♙a6 6.a3 ♙xc3+	
<b>Chapter 1.8 .....</b>	<b>91</b>
The Nimzo Knight Move – 4...b6 5.♗e2 ♙a6 6.♗g3	
<b>Chapter 1.9 .....</b>	<b>103</b>
The Original Rubinstein – 4...c5 5.♗e2	
<b>Chapter 1.10 .....</b>	<b>114</b>
Development ♙d3 with ♗e2 – 4...c5 5.♙d3	

<b>PART II – 4...0-0 Minor Lines</b> .....	<b>131</b>
<b>Chapter 2.1</b> .....	<b>132</b>
Reshevsky's Set-up – 5.♘e2 d5 6.a3 ♖d6	
<b>Chapter 2.2</b> .....	<b>146</b>
The Retreat to e7 – 5.♘e2 d5 6.a3 ♖e7	
<b>Chapter 2.3</b> .....	<b>171</b>
The Baguio Variation – 5.♖d3 c5 6.d5	
<b>Chapter 2.4</b> .....	<b>179</b>
Hübner Variation – 5.♖d3 c5 6.♘f3 ♘c6 7.0-0 ♗xc3 8.bxc3 d6	
<b>Chapter 2.5</b> .....	<b>192</b>
Fixing the Centre – 5.♖d3 d5 6.cxd5	
<b>Chapter 2.6</b> .....	<b>208</b>
The Forcing 6.a3 – 5.♖d3 d5 6.a3	
<b>PART III – The Main Line 4...0-0 5.♖d3 d5 6.♘f3</b> .....	<b>221</b>
<b>Chapter 3.1</b> .....	<b>222</b>
The Delayed Fianchetto – 6...b6	
<b>Chapter 3.2</b> .....	<b>231</b>
Reykjavik Line – 6...c5 7.0-0 ♘c6 8.a3 ♖a5	
<b>Chapter 3.3</b> .....	<b>246</b>
The Flexible 6...c5 7.0-0 ♘c6 8.a3 ♗xc3 9.bxc3 ♔c7	
<b>Chapter 3.4</b> .....	<b>265</b>
Main Line – 9...dxc4 10.♖xc4 ♔c7 11.♖d3	
<b>Chapter 3.5</b> .....	<b>281</b>
Main Line – 9...dxc4 10.♖xc4 ♔c7 11.♖a2	
<b>Chapter 3.6</b> .....	<b>293</b>
Main Line – 9...dxc4 10.♖xc4 ♔c7 11.h3	
<b>Chapter 3.7</b> .....	<b>303</b>
Main Line – 9...dxc4 10.♖xc4 ♔c7 11.♖b2	

**Part IV – 4...0-0 5.♙d3 d5 6.♘f3 c5 7.0-0 –  
The Immediate 7...dxc4 8.♙xc4 ..... 315**

**Chapter 4.1 ..... 316**  
Larsen Variation – 8...♘c6

**Chapter 4.2 ..... 330**  
Karpov Variation – 8...cxd4 9.exd4 b6

**Chapter 4.3 ..... 372**  
Parma Variation – 8...♘bd7 9.♙e2

**Chapter 4.4 ..... 385**  
Parma Variation – 8...♘bd7 9.♙b3

**Chapter 4.5 ..... 394**  
Parma Variation – 8...♘bd7 9.a3

**Index of Variations. .... 401**

**Index of Players ..... 405**

**Bibliography ..... 411**

## Foreword

My research on the Nimzo-Indian Defence started in the mid-1980s. A few factors contributed to this.

In Yugoslavia at the time, there was a widely studied analytical work by Mikhail Botvinnik, a trilogy of his own games. Nimzo-Indians were regularly featured in these games – like for example in his World Championship matches against Vasily Smyslov, but also in many other games by Botvinnik.

Svetozar Gligoric was a big protagonist of the Nimzo with 4.e3 and an active player at the time, and his games were always closely followed in Yugoslavia.

Sometime in these years I also received a number of books: on the finals of the Soviet Championships of the 1950s (featuring games by Efim Geller, Alexander Kotov et al), David Bronstein's *Zürich 1953*, and Gligoric's game collection *I play against pieces*, with many Nimzo games with the moves 4.e3 and 4.a3 analysed in them.

At that time I was starting to build a 1.d4 repertoire. From a practical point of view, employing the Nimzo-Indian with the white pieces (contrary to the Queen's Indian) made my opening preparation considerably easier since now I did not have to study so many different opening variations, like the Vienna Variation, the Ragozin, the Semi-Tarrasch, etc.

Some of my first successes, like winning the Yugoslav championship in 1988 and the Crown Group in Biel that same year, I can ascribe to a considerable extent to my wins in the 4.e3 Nimzo Indian. Later on, perhaps the most beautiful moment of my career was when I beat Garry Kasparov in Wijk aan Zee 1999 – also with a Nimzo-Indian with 4.e3.

Starting from 1985, I have broadened my knowledge of the 4.e3 lines over the years, and ultimately I played all of them with white. It always seemed to me that for White 4.e3, the Rubinstein Variation, or 4.a3, the Sämisch Variation, were the most logical, the most classical (although in theoretical manuals the 'Classical Variation', also known as the 'Capablanca Variation', is considered to be the one with 4.♖c2) ways for White to meet the Nimzo-Indian.

With 4.e3 (the Rubinstein Variation) White plays a natural developing move, ignoring for the time being Black's bishop on b4 and keeping his options open.

With 4.a3 (the Sämisch Variation) White forces Black to execute his 'threat' of taking on c3 and double White's b- and c-pawns. In return for this doubled pawn, White is to build a strong pawn centre. This always seemed more important to me than the 'meaningless' weakness of White's c4 pawn. Of course this preference is purely personal! Rather often, White also starts with 4.e3 and at a later stage, i.e. usually a move or two later, he plays a2-a3, transposing to Sämisch positions.

## The Strategic Nimzo-Indian

The original idea of this book was to cover both the 4.e3 and the 4.a3 lines. During the process of analysing and writing, it transpired that I had underestimated the quantity of the material, and that the 4.e3 variation alone was going to considerably exceed the originally earmarked total number of pages! It was therefore decided that the Sämisch Variation will be dealt with in a separate book, which will be published in the beginning of 2013.

White has many different options to fight in the Rubinstein Variation. He can develop his knight to e2 early (with the bishop still on f1), or later (after playing  $\text{♗d3}$ ), or he can develop the knight to f3 (which is the most popular) – he can play with an isolated pawn, or with connected hanging pawns in the centre, or establish a central pawn symmetry, etc, etc.

Black, on the other hand, can choose between an early bishop fianchetto with 4...b6, a line loved by great players like Smyslov and Fischer, or 4...c5, attacking the white centre right away, or the flexible 4...0-0, which is the most played in recent top tournaments. The choices that are made on both sides are – or should be – motivated by the players' preferences for certain pawn structures that arise further on in the respective lines. Understanding the pawn structures and the strategic rules that are connected with them is more crucial than a pure rehashing of variations here.

A majority of pawn structures in the 4.e3 lines and their related strategic choices I have tried to explain in my book *Winning Chess Middlegames* (New In Chess 2009). I strongly advise the reader to study the strategic ins and outs of the respective pawn structures, and find out where his own preferences lie before taking the final decision as to which line to pick up for his personal opening repertoire.

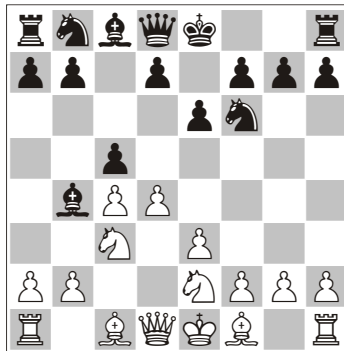
In this book I have tried (successfully, I hope) to explain the ideas in the Nimzo-Indian with 4.e3 and to give an objective view of the state of affairs in this opening, irrespective of my personal preference for the white side.

I hope that you, reader, will enjoy this book and that you will be able to successfully employ the knowledge you gain from it in your tournament play.

Ivan Sokolov  
January, 2012

## Chapter 1.9

### The Original Rubinstein – 4...c5 5.♞e2



With the early 5.♞e2, White gives pawn d4 as well as the knight on c3 extra protection, and thereby prevents Black from playing the Hübner Variation. The drawback is that the bishop on f1 is temporarily locked in, so often in this line White puts the e2 knight on g3 and modestly develops his bishop to e2.

#### 5...cxd4

● **5...d6** is an inferior move. White has a number of ways to get an advantage after this: **6.a3** White can also obtain an easy, risk-free advantage with **6.dxc5 dxc5 7.♞xd8+ ♔xd8 8.♙d2 ♚e7**. On e7 the black king will turn out to be unfortunately placed, but it could not stay on d8 forever. **9.♞f4 b6 10.a3 ♙a5 11.b4! cxb4 12.axb4 ♙xb4 13.♞cd5+ ♞xd5 14.♞xd5+ exd5 15.♙xb4+ ♚f6 16.cxd5** with a large advantage for White in Smyslov-Stoltz, Bucharest 1953. **6...♙a5** and now:

A) **7.♞g3 0-0 8.d5! ♜e8 9.♙e2 ♙xc3+ 10.bxc3 ♞a5 11.♙d2 ♞bd7 12.0-0 ♞b6 13.e4 exd5**



**14.cxd5!** Very often in such positions it is much better for White to be a pawn down and have the long a1-h8 diagonal open for his d2 bishop, rather than not to sacrifice anything and have the doubled c-pawns. I have explained this phenomenon in my comments on the game Keres-Spassky in my book

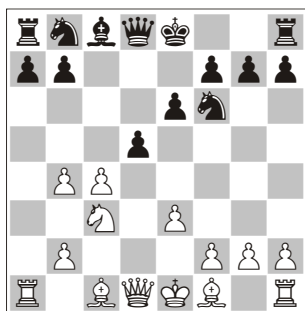
*Winning Chess Middlegames.* **14...♗xe4 15.♗xe4 ♜xe4 16.♙d3 ♜h4** The rook on h4 prevents a direct onslaught on the black king, but this rook now remains out of play. On **16...♞e8?** comes **17.c4 ♜a6 18.♞h5** with a winning attack – note that Black’s ♜a6 and ♗b6 are out of play. **17.♞e2 17.c4 ♜a4 18.♞xa4 ♗xa4 19.♞fe1 ♙d7 20.f4** and it would take a long time for the ♜h4 to return into play. **17...♙d7 18.c4 ♜a4 19.f4 f5 20.♞fe1** and White went on to win in Gligoric-Hort, Moscow 1963;

B) **7.♞b1 0-0 8.b4 ♙c7 9.g3** is also better for White: **9...cxd4 10.exd4 ♗bd7 11.♙g2 ♗b6 12.♞b3** as in Volkov-Chepukaitis, St Petersburg 1997.

C) **7.g3** is another idea for White here.

● **5...d5** is the most common alternative to **5...cxd4**. It is definitely playable; the resulting positions (in the main line here) are isolated pawn structure-related. White should have a small advantage. **6.a3** (**6.cxd5 ♗xd5** is good for Black) and now:

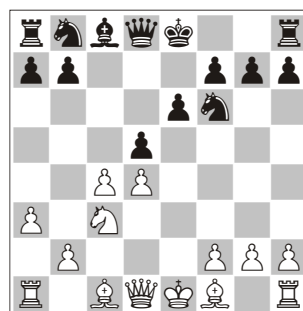
A) **6...cxd4** leads to positions with a stable, risk-free advantage for White: **7.axb4 7.exd4 ♙e7 8.c5 0-0** is also possible, though it leads to more complicated play, where White’s advantage is far from risk-free and the tables can easily turn. **7...dxc3 8.♗xc3**



**8...dxc4** Or **8...0-0 9.b5 b6 10.♙e2 ♙b7 11.♙f3 ♜c7 12.cxd5 exd5 13.0-0 ♞d8 14.♗e2 ♗bd7 15.♗d4** as in Bogoljubow-Matanovic, Belgrade 1952. **9.♞xd8+ ♗xd8 10.♙xc4 ♗c6 11.b5 ♗e5 12.♙e2** White has the bishop pair, more space, pressure along the a-file, and Black still has problems to develop. **12...♗e7 13.f4 ♗ed7 14.b3 ♞d8 15.♙a3+** and White had a clear advantage and went on to win in Botvinnik-Smyslov, Moscow 1952;

B) **6...♙a5** has been tried and it can be played, though it remains passive for Black and this is not to every black player’s taste. **7.dxc5 dxc4 8.♞xd8+ ♙xd8 8...♗xd8?!** is an inferior move after **9.♙d2 e5 10.♗e4 ♗c6 11.♗2g3** and Black’s c4 pawn falls. **9.♗d4 ♗bd7 10.♙xc4 ♗xc5 11.f3 a6 12.b4 ♗cd7 13.e4 ♗e5 14.♙e2** as in Aronian-V. Babula, Germany Bundesliga 2004/05.

C) **6...♙xc3+** is the most played move here: **7.♗xc3 cxd4 8.exd4**

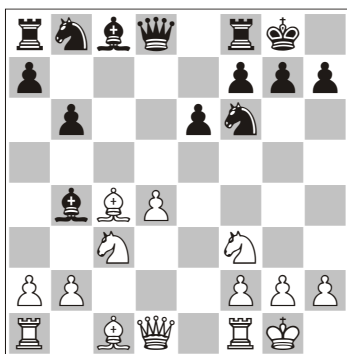


C1) Keeping the central tension with **8...♗c6** has proved not to equalize: **9.c5 0-0** The positions after **9...♗e4 10.♙d3 ♗xc3 11.bxc3** have also proved to be better for White. **10.♙f4** This bishop is heading for d6. **10.♙e2** also leads to a white advantage. **10...♗e4 11.♗xe4 dxe4 12.♙d6 ♞e8**



## Chapter 4.2

### Karpov Variation – 8...cxd4 9.exd4 b6



This is one of the most important theoretical lines of the 4.e3 Nimzo, the more so because exactly the same position can be reached via the Panov Attack in the Caro-Kann: 1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4 ♘f6 5.♗c3 e6 6.♘f3 ♕b4 7.♗d3 dxc4 8.♗xc4 0-0 9.0-0. Black has here no less than five theoretically established moves at his disposal and we will analyse all of them. A good general understanding of isolated pawn positions is a must for any player willing to master this line either from the white or the black side. Very often, transformations to pawn structures with hanging pawns in the centre (Black takes ...♗xc3 and White responds bxc3) or (less frequent in this line) with a central pawn symmetry (Black jumps ...♘d5, White takes ♘xd5 and Black responds ...exd5) occur in this line. I have analysed this subject extensively in my book *Winning Chess Middlegames*.

#### 9...b6

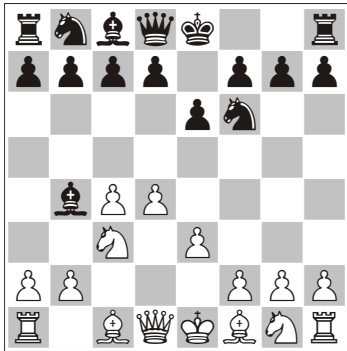
This is considered to be Black's main move here. 9...a6 has been popular lately, while three other moves are relatively less frequent nowadays:

- The alternative 9...♘c6 mostly transposes to another line after 10.a3, which in my opinion is White's strongest reply. A relatively independent continuation here is 10.♗g5.



# Index of Variations

**Nimzo-Indian Defence 4.e3**  
**1.d2-d4 ♘g8-f6 2.c2-c4 e7-e6 3.♘b1-c3 ♙f8-b4 4.e2-e3**



## 4...♘c6



5.♘f3		12
5.♘e2		12
5.♙d2		16
5.♙d3		17
5.a3		19

## 4...b6



5.f3	- 5...0-0	21
	- 5...♘c6	21
	- 5...c5	22
	- 5...♘h5	23
	- 5...♙a6	23
5.♙d3 ♙b7 6.♘f3	- 6...0-0	28
	- 6...♙xc3	28
	- 6...♘e4	29

4...b6 5.♘e2



5...c5 6.a3 ♘a5 - 7.♖b1	36
- 7.♘d2	36
- 7.g3	42
5...♘b7	50
5...♘e4 - 6.f3	56
- 6.♘d2	57
- 6.♖c2	63
5...♘a6 - 6.a3 - 6...♘e7	74
- 6...♘xc3+	80
- 6.♘g3 - 6...♘xc3+	91
- 6...h5	91
- 6...0-0	95
- 6...c5	98
- 6...♘c6	98

4...c5



5.♘e2 - 5...cxd4	103
- 5...d6	103
- 5...d5	104
5.♘d3 - 5...0-0 6.♘e2 d5	114
- 5...♘c6 6.♘e2	115

4...0-0 5.♘e2 d5 6.a3



6...♘d6 - 7.♘g3	135
- 7.c5	135
6...♘e7 - 7.cxd5	146
- 7.♘f4	146
- 7.♘g3	154

**4...0-0 5.♙d3 c5**



6.d5 - 6...b5.....	172
- 6...exd5 7.cxd5 - 7...♞xd5.....	172
- 7...h6.....	174
- 6...d6.....	175
6.♞f3 - 6...b6 7.d5.....	179
- 6...♞c6.....	179

**4...0-0 5.♙d3 d5**



6.cxd5 exd5 7.♞e2.....	192
6.♞e2 dxc4 7.♙xc4 e5.....	193
6.a3 - 6...dxc4.....	208
- 6...♙xc3 7.bxc3 - 7...c6.....	209
- 7...dxc4.....	209

**4...0-0 5.♙d3 d5 6.♞f3 b6**



7.a3.....	222
7.0-0.....	222
7.cxd5 exd5 8.0-0.....	226

**4...0-0 5.♙d3 d5 6.♞f3 c5 7.0-0 ♞c6 8.a3 ♙a5**



9.cxd5.....	231
9.♞e2.....	232
9.♞a4.....	232
9.h3.....	233

**4...0-0 5.♙d3 d5 6.♘f3 c5 7.0-0 ♘c6 8.a3 ♙xc3 9.bxc3 ♖c7**



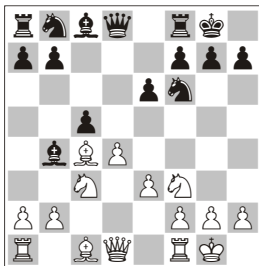
10.♙b2 .....	246
10.cxd5 exd5 - 11.a4.....	247
- 11.♘h4.....	250
- 11.h3 .....	254
10.h3 .....	254
10.a4 .....	255
10.♖c2 .....	255

**4...0-0 5.♙d3 d5 6.♘f3 c5 7.0-0 ♘c6 8.a3 ♙xc3 9.bxc3 dxc4 10.♙xc4 ♖c7**



11.♙b5 a6 .....	270
11.a4 ♖d8 12.♙a3.....	273
11.♖e2 .....	274
11.♙d3 e5 12.♖c2 .....	274
11.♙a2 - 11...b6 .....	281
- 11...e5 .....	281
- 11...♖d8 .....	285
11.h3 - 11...e5 .....	293
- 11...♖d8 .....	293
- 11...b6 .....	294
11.♙b2 e5 - 12.h3.....	303
- 12.♙e2 .....	304

**4...0-0 5.♙d3 d5 6.♘f3 c5 7.0-0 dxc4 8.♙xc4**



8...♖e7 - 9.♖e2 ♘c6 10.♖d1 .....	316
- 9.a3 ♙a5 .....	317
8...♘c6 9.a3 - 9...cxd4 - 10.axb4.....	321
- 10.exd4 .....	321
- 9...♙a5 - 10.♙a2 .....	323
- 10.♖d3 .....	324
- 10.♙d3.....	325
8...cxd4 9.exd4 - 9...b6.....	330
- 9...♘c6 .....	330
- 9...♘bd7 .....	331
- 9...♙xc3.....	335
- 9...a6 .....	336
8...♘bd7 - 9.♖e2.....	372
- 9.♙d3.....	372
- 9.♖d3 .....	374
- 9.♖b3 .....	385
- 9.a3 .....	394