Sam Collins

The Réti

move by move

About the Author

Sam Collins is an International Master with three Grandmaster norms, and a former Irish and Japanese Champion. He has represented Ireland at eight Olympiads, winning an individual old medal at Bled 2002. He has a wealth of teaching and writing experience, and has produced many books, DVDs and magazine articles on chess.
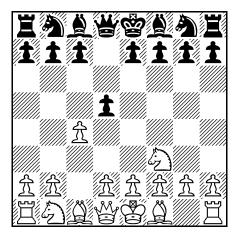
Also by the Author
The French Advance
Gambit Busters
The Greatest Ever Chess Strategies
The Tarrasch Defence: Move by Move
Karpov: Move by Move

Contents

Introduction

1 ♘f3 d5 2 c4

This book discusses the position after 1 ♘f3 d5 2 c4 (the Réti), with some brief bonus coverage of 2 g3.

I have selected examples where White generally plays g3 over the next couple of moves, avoiding alternatives such as systems with an early e3. If you're interested in those lines, I can recommend *e3 Poison* by GM Axel Smith (Quality Chess, 2017). Instead, g3 in combination with e4 signifies the King's Indian Attack, already discussed in a book in this series by GM Neil McDonald.

I have not aimed to create a complete repertoire for White, which was admirably accomplished by GM Demuth (and, before him, GM Delchev) in recent works. Instead, I have sought to find and analyse the most interesting recent games in the above terrain, with a particular focus on instructive middlegames (and, in some cases, even typical endgames). These games are roughly distributed across all of the main lines you're likely to meet after 1 ♘f3 d5 2 c4. But it's important to note that this book does not form a full repertoire, and is best used as a compliment to one of the repertoire series given in the bibliography.

When I started working on this book I made liberal use in particular of the games of Aronian and Kramnik. In his preview of the Candidates tournament in Berlin 2018 (which,

famously, did not go well for either of these players), Jan Gustafsson praised Aronian's White repertoire, saying, "I don't think there's a tougher draw in chess than Black against Levon Aronian. He's so well prepared. Even though he's not a 1 e4 player, in this 1 d4/ 1 ♘f3/ 1 c4 complex he keeps coming up with fresh ideas. He has a great support system."

Regarding Kramnik, Gustafsson commented, "Opening preparation is still an asset for him... With White, he will come armed. I've no idea what he's going to do, if he's going to go for 1 ♘f3 and 2 g3, 1 e4, 1 d4, 1 c4, but that's also a strength. No one really knows, we only know that he will be extremely well prepared."

Certainly, in this book, we'll see games where both of these players managed to set their opponents huge problems out of the opening and they have used these systems as a very useful complement to their main repertoire. Of course, Kramnik has now retired, and Aronian is increasingly essaying 1 e4 in his games, but I don't think the problems they posed in the Réti were reliably or consistently solved by their opponents.

Looking at the new guard, the top younger players like Duda, Artemiev and Rapport make frequent use of the Réti and other closed systems, so we can confidently expect further developments in these lines, although I must confess that I was disappointed not to find any examples from the AlphaZero-Stockfish matches.

I won't suggest that principled chess with 1 e4 or 1 d4 has had its time and that the lines discussed in this book are the best way to play with White. However, I think that a good understanding of what both sides are trying to achieve in these systems will make you a better all-round player and help in understanding current top level chess where such lines make a frequent appearance. My particular focus is on typical middlegames arising from the Réti. Many of the themes are relevant to other openings, the Catalan in particular.

Sam Collins,
Dublin, September 2020

29 gxf5 ♗f6 30 ♖g1 ♖e8??

30...♔h8 had to be played. I do not believe that the position can be held after 31 ♖g6 ♕f8 32 ♖cg1 ♖d6, but Black had to try this.

31 ♕xh6

Winning an important pawn and breaking Black's defences on the kingside.

31...♖bd8 32 ♖ce1 ♖e7 33 ♖e3! 1-0

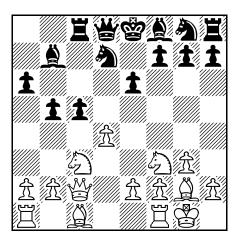The rook comes to g3 or h3, with mate.

Game 12
L.Aronian-V.Ivanchuk
FIDE World Cup, Tbilisi 2017

I watched this game live online and could not recall a previous occasion on which Ivanchuk had been caught so badly in the opening. The Ukrainian genius is one of the most prolific innovators and experts across his extremely broad repertoire, and the featured opening is one of his pet lines: in his best games collection, Vishy Anand tells a story of Ivanchuk sharing novelties in the Catalan when they were both juniors.

1 c4 e6 2 g3 d5 3 ♗g2 dxc4

3...♘f6 4 ♘f3 and then 4...dxc4 is more usual. Ivanchuk seeks to delay ...♘f6, accelerating his queenside play with a view to achieving ...c5.

4 ♕a4+ c6 5 ♕xc4 b5 6 ♕c2 ♗b7 7 ♘f3 ♘d7 8 ♘c3 ♖c8 9 0-0 a6 10 d4 c5?!

10...♘gf6 would transpose to a line of the Catalan which has been defended by Aleksandrov but, as indicated above, Ivanchuk's intention was to push ...c5.
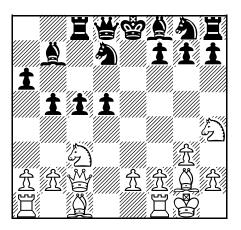
Question: How should White respond?

11 d5!

Answer: No prizes for other moves. 11 dxc5 ♗xc5 is a dream Catalan for Black, who has effortlessly achieved ...c5 and might already have the more comfortable game.

11...exd5

11...♗xd5 avoids pins on the long diagonal, but giving up this bishop is too high a price to pay. 12 ♘xd5 exd5 13 ♖d1 ♘gf6 14 e4! and White decisively opens the centre.
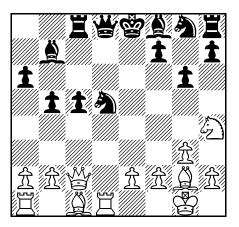
12 ♘h4

12...♘df6?

Compounding the problems. 12...♘gf6 occurred in T.Nguyen-S.Gvetadze, Ekaterinburg 2007, when White should proceed by analogy with the text game: 13 ♖d1 ♕b6 14 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 15 ♗xd5 ♗xd5 16 ♖xd5, with the better game.
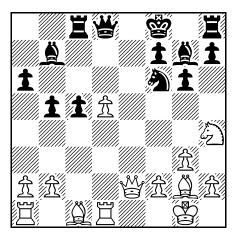
13 ♖d1 g6

This loses, but Black's play was not making much sense around this point.

14 ♘xd5! ♘xd5

15 e4!

An easy tactic, even if the engine suggests that starting with 14 a4 was even stronger.

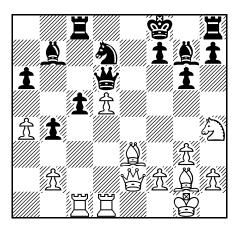**15...♗g7 16 exd5 ♘f6 17 ♕e2+ ♔f8**

> **Question:** How can White create further weaknesses in the black position?

18 a4!

Answer: Not the only move, but a very good one. White is unlikely to succeed with a direct attack against the black king, but the black queenside pawns are exposed and cannot be supported by the pieces locked on the kingside.

18...b4 19 ♗e3 ♕d6 20 ♖ac1 ♘d7

> **Question:** How can White break the blockade of the d5-pawn?

21 ♘f3!

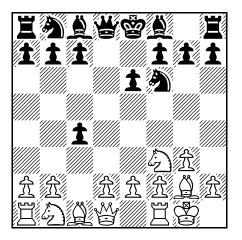*Answer:* Bringing the knight, via d2, to c4 or e4. 21 ♖e1, threatening ♗f4, was also good enough to win.

21...h6 22 ♘d2 ♚g8 23 ♘e4 ♕f8 24 d6 1-0

Resignation appears slightly early, although against Aronian the chances of survival from such a position are not good at all.

<div style="background:#e0e0e0;">

Game 13
L.Aronian-A.Naiditsch
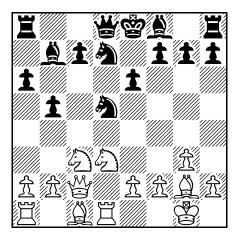Grenke Chess Classic 2017

</div>

This game is remarkable in a number of respects. First, a 2700+ player gets into severe trouble from the opening. Secondly, Aronian's play (in particular, in the endgame) is excellent. Finally, Aronian himself annotated this game for several sources, and I highly recommend you go through his notes!

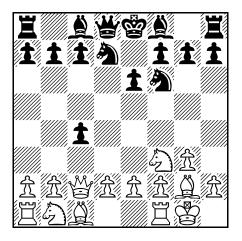**1 c4 e6 2 g3 d5 3 ♗g2 ♘f6 4 ♘f3 dxc4 5 0-0**

5...♘bd7

Aronian points out that after 5...a6 6 ♕c2 b5 White has 7 ♘e1!? "with the intention of counting on his compensation after d2-d3, c4xd3, ♘e1xd3 on account of the excellent position of the knight on d3 and his good development." For example, 7...♘d5 8 d3 cxd3 9 ♘xd3 ♗b7 10 ♖d1 ♘d7 11 ♘c3

and now:

a) 11...♗d6 12 ♘xd5 exd5 13 ♗f4 (13 ♘f4 c6 14 e4 is also possible, with promising compensation for the sacrificed pawn: D.Bocharov-A.Esipenko, Taganrog 2018) 13...0-0 (13...♕e7 14 ♖ac1 0-0 15 ♗xd6 cxd6 16 ♕c7 was excellent for White in S.Mareco-N.Abdusattorov, Moscow 2018) 14 ♗xd6 cxd6 15 ♘f4 ♘b6 16 ♘xd5 ♖c8 17 ♕b3 ♗xd5 18 ♗xd5 ♘xd5 19 ♖xd5 with an enduring advantage in S.Sjugirov-A.Pridorozhni, Khanty-Mansiysk 2014.

b) 11...♘xc3?! 12 ♕xc3 ♗xg2 13 ♔xg2 ♕c8! 14 ♕c6 ♗d6 15 ♗f4. Now Black should castle, with a playable position, since 15...♔e7? 16 ♖ac1 ♖b8? 17 f3 ♕b7? 18 ♘b4 forced resignation in A.Pridorozhni-V.Korchmar, Taganrog 2017.
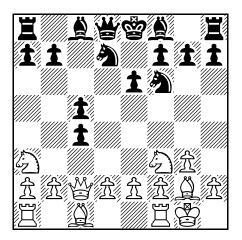
6 ♕c2

6...c5
Alternatives:

a) After 6...♘b6, Aronian recommends ♖d1 and d3, with or without 7 ♘a3. An interesting example of this plan, albeit with ♖xd3 prepared in a different way, was shown by one of Aronian's strong GM compatriots: 7 a4 a5 8 ♘a3 ♗xa3 9 ♖xa3 0-0 10 d3 (we will see Wei Yi take a different approach in his game with Ponomariov) 10...cxd3 11 ♖xd3 ♘bd5 12 ♖dd1 ♕e7 13 ♘e5 ♖a6 14 b3 ♘b4 15 ♕c4 ♖d6 16 ♗a3 ♕d8 (16...♖xd1 17 ♖xd1 c5 looks okay for Black) 17 ♖c1 (17 ♖xd6!?) 17...♘d7? (17...♘fd5 is much more solid) 18 ♘d3! (leaving Black's pieces very badly co-ordinated) 18...c5 19 ♘xc5 ♘xc5 20 ♗xb4 axb4 21 ♕xc5 b6 22 ♕xb4 e5?? (a final blunder, but the position was very difficult) 23 ♖xc8! and Black resigned in H.Melkumyan-F.Peralta, Sitges 2017.

b) Aronian also gives the long line 6...a6 7 a4 ♘c5 8 ♕xc4 ♕d5 9 ♕a2 ♕xa2 10 ♖xa2 e5 11 ♘xe5 ♗e6 12 b3 0-0-0. I suspect Aronian and his team are working with much more powerful hardware than mine, which gives White a good advantage after 13 ♖b2.
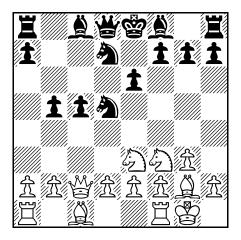
7 ♘a3

7...♘d5?

Aronian gives 7...b6 as acceptable for Black.

Black could also try 7...♖b8 8 ♘xc4 b5 9 ♘ce5 ♗b7 This is a much better version of what happened in the game, for example 10 ♘xd7 ♘xd7 11 b3 ♗e7 12 ♗b2 0-0 13 ♖ac1 ♕b6 14 ♘e5 ♘xe5 15 ♗xe5 ♖bc8 16 ♗xb7 ♕xb7 17 d3 ♖fd8 18 ♕b2 ♗f8 19 ♖c2 ♖c6 and a draw was agreed in Y.Galburd-A.Huzman, Israel 2012.

8 ♘xc4 b5 9 ♘e3

9...♗b7?

Categorised by Aronian as "an almost decisive mistake!" Instead:

a) Aronian gives 9...♘b4 as best.

b) After 9...♘xe3 Aronian was planning to recapture with the f-pawn, but in his notes suggested 10 dxe3 ♗b7 11 ♖d1 with a more pleasant position for White: after b2-b3 with further development he has not only active pieces but also a slight target to attack-the c5-pawn "which is hanging in mid air".

10 ♘xd5! ♗xd5

10...exd5 11 b4! is a powerful suggestion by Aronian.

11 e4 ♗b7 12 d4 cxd4

Forced according to Aronian, in view of 12...♗e7 13 d5 exd5 14 exd5 0-0 (14...♗xd5 15 ♖d1 wins) 15 d6 ♗f6 16 ♘g5 ♗xg5 17 ♗xb7 ♖b8 18 ♗xg5 ♕xg5 19 ♗c6 and "the d-pawn will probably decide the outcome of the struggle."
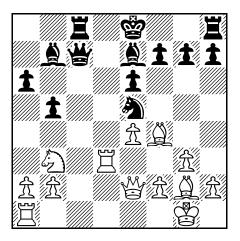
13 ♘xd4 ♖c8

Aronian gives 13...♕b6 14 ♖d1 ♖c8 15 ♕e2 b4 as more stubborn, "with a bad, but at least an active, position."

14 ♕e2 a6 15 ♖d1 ♗c5

Aronian intended to meet 15...♗e7 with 16 ♗h3 when sacrifices on e6 are difficult to parry.

16 ♘b3 ♗e7 17 ♖d3 ♕c7 18 ♗f4 ♘e5

19 ♖c3

Starting here White commits some inaccuracies, resulting in a late chance for Naiditsch and, ultimately, a very instructive opposite-coloured bishop endgame. 19 ♖c1 ♛b8 20 ♖xc8+ ♝xc8 21 ♘a5 is given by Aronian as a simpler win.
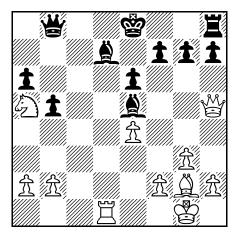
19...♛b8 20 ♛h5 ♝d6

Aronian gives the nice lines 20...♝f6 21 ♖xc8+ ♝xc8 22 ♖c1 g6 23 ♝xe5 ♝xe5 24 ♖xc8+ and 20...♖xc3 21 ♝xe5 ♖c7 22 ♝xg7, winning in both cases.

21 ♖xc8+

Aronian's original intention was 21 ♘c5, which he rejected in view of 21...♖xc5 22 ♖xc5 ♝xc5 23 ♝xe5 g6 24 ♛g5 ♝e7 25 ♛f4 g5 with "only a "lost" ending", remarking wryly that "If I had known that in the future course of the game I would have to use every shred of my knowledge in order to almost manage to draw the game, I would probably rather have gone into the easily won endgame mentioned above with an extra pawn."

21...♝xc8 22 ♖d1 ♝c7 23 ♘a5 ♝d7

23...0-0 24 ♝xe5 ♝xe5 25 ♘c6 ♛c7 26 ♘xe5 g6 is another variation given by Aronian where Black loses a pawn, with the instructive comment: "Naturally in this case too the white position would be winning, but as Boris Gelfand appositely remarks in such cases, play would move into the "one-mistake-zone"."
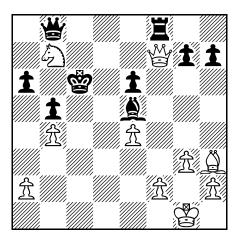
24 ♝xe5 ♝xe5

25 ♖xd7!

A very natural sacrifice, wholly in Aronian's dynamic style.

25…♔xd7 26 ♕xf7+ ♔d6 27 ♗h3 ♖e8 28 ♘b7+

Aronian had intended 28 f4 here, only to realise that there is no mate after 28…♗xb2.
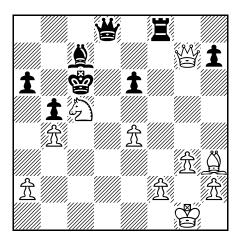
28…♔c6 29 b4 ♖f8

30 ♕e7?

Aronian gives the beautiful line 30 ♘a5+ ♔b6 31 ♕e7 ♕c8 32 ♘c6!! when 32…♔xc6 33 ♗xe6 wins material, and 32…♕xc6 33 ♕xf8 leads to similar positions to those which arose in the game.

30…♗d6?

30…♗c7 31 ♘c5 (31 ♘a5+ ♗xa5 32 ♗xe6 ♗xb4 33 ♕xb4 ♖f6 and Black survives) 31…♗d8 32 ♕xg7 (32 ♕xe6+ might be a better attempt, but Black should hold after 32…♕d6)

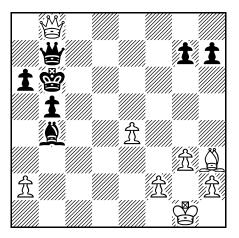This looks decisive, but in fact Black has a big chance in this position.

Question: What should Black play after 32 ♕xg7?

Answer: 32...♖xf2!! 33 ♔xf2 ♕d2+ with perpetual check.

31 ♘a5+ ♔b6 32 ♕xe6 ♖e8

Aronian gives 32...♖f6 33 ♕b3 with a continuing attack.

33 ♕d7 ♗xb4 34 ♘c6 ♕d6 35 ♕xe8 ♕xc6 36 ♕b8+ ♕b7

I was tempted to give this position as a puzzle, but Aronian's solution is both really difficult and (probably) not the only winning move.
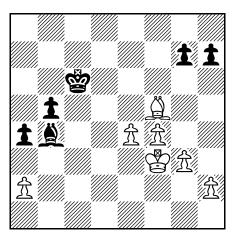
37 ♕xb7+!!

For me, the most impressive and difficult move of the game. It would be so easy, simply on instinct, to retain the queens, but Aronian has assessed the resulting opposite coloured

bishop endgame as winning. His comment regarding the previous move is one of the most instructive of the game, in terms of elite players suffering from the same natural reactions as normal players, but overcoming them: "I had almost played 36 ♗d7 like lightning and without my head taking any part in the decision. But then I took some time and after ten minutes thought convinced myself that I did not need to fear an exchange of queens-which later turned out to be correct."
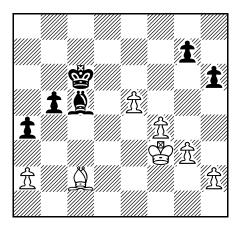
37...♔xb7 38 f4

Aronian: "The white plan is simple: force h7-h6, achieve the pawn structure h5-g4-f4-e5, hold up Black's queenside pawns on a5-b4 and push forward g4-g5. Although some strong players were of the opinion that Black could hold on here, I would gladly get this position again because of late I have had less and less belief in fortresses." Another instructive comment, even with the final joke (Magnus Carlsen's comment that he didn't believe in fortresses received huge attention in the chess media).

38...♔c6 39 ♔f2 a5 40 ♔f3 a4 41 ♗f5

41...h6

"41...g6 does not save him on account of 42 ♗e6 ♗c3 43 e5 b4 44 ♔e4 h5 (or else by means of g3-g4 and f4-f5 White creates a pair of passed pawns) 45 ♔d3 followed ♗e6-f7 and the collection of the pawns." (Aronian)

42 ♗g6 ♔d7 43 e5 ♗c5 44 ♗d3 ♔c6 45 ♗c2

45...♔d5

Aronian gives 45...♗g1 46 h4 ♔d5 47 h5 ♗d4 48 ♗g6 b4 49 ♗f7+ ♔c5 50 ♔e4 and al-though "Black manages to exchange his a- and b-pawns for the a2-pawn, he does not suc-ceed in bring his king back to e7 in time."

46 ♗e4+ ♔c4 47 ♗c6 ♗g1 48 h4 ♔c5 49 ♗e8 ♗d4 50 h5 ♗c3 51 ♔e4 ♗e1 52 g4 ♗d2 53 ♔f5 a3 54 g5 b4 55 ♗a4 ♔d5 56 gxh6 gxh6 57 ♗b3+ ♔c5 58 ♔e4 1-0

> *Game 14*
> **Wei Yi-R.Ponomariov**
> Danzhou 2017

1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 d5 4 ♗g2 dxc4 5 0-0 ♘bd7 6 ♕c2 ♘b6 7 a4 a5 8 ♘a3 ♗xa3 9 ♖xa3 0-0 10 e4!?