
CHRISTOF SIELECKI
Keep It Simple
1.d4
A Solid and Straightforward Chess Opening Repertoire for White
NEW IN CHESS

Christof Sielecki

Keep It Simple: 1.d4

A Solid and Straightforward Chess Opening Repertoire for White

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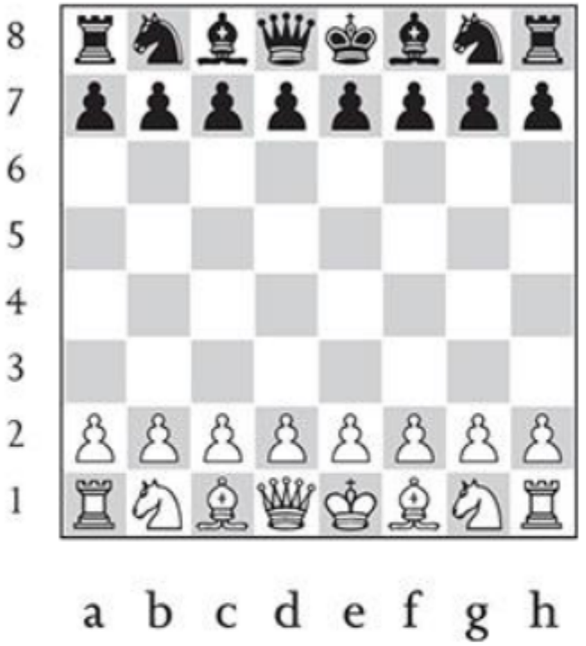
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Explanation of symbols

The chessboard
with its coordinates:



♔	King
♕	Queen
♖	Rook
♗	Bishop
♘	Knight
±	White stands slightly better
∓	Black stands slightly better
±	White stands better
∓	Black stands better
+–	White has a decisive advantage
–+	Black has a decisive advantage
=	balanced position
!	good move
!!	excellent move
?	bad move
??	blunder
!?	interesting move
?!	dubious move

Preface

Welcome to *Keep it Simple: 1.d4* !

Keep it Simple: 1.e4 was released in 2018. Right after the release, people asked me if a similar book for 1.d4 was a future project, and here it is! This book outlines a complete repertoire for White based on 1.d4.

Before we discuss some points of the repertoire, I'd like to explain the 'Keep It Simple' approach. Most opening books nowadays have reached enormous complexity, often comprising of several volumes, totalling 1000+ pages. This depth of analysis is useful for very strong players, but not so much for amateur players. I felt that it must be possible to 'Keep It Simple' instead, being more practical than scientific in the choices. White does not get an advantage anyway against the main line defences–for example the drawing percentage in top level correspondence chess speaks for itself.

My main 'KIS' guidelines are:

- The chosen lines are simple to learn;
- It must be possible to find your way if you forget your lines;
- Choose lines that may not be most critical, but uncomfortable for the opponent.

Compiling the repertoire according to these guidelines has led to a very classical, sound and reliable repertoire. You will get good endgames frequently, or positions with long-term assets like the bishop pair. You won't get unsound gambits or tricky lines that can be refuted – all lines are playable up to a very high level. In fact, most of the repertoire has been played by top players, at least occasionally or in quicker time controls.

The lines chosen share many common themes and ideas and are therefore easy to learn as a whole. You will see many concepts multiple times, which makes it easier to learn them. The repertoire also includes many new dangerous ideas that will surprise your opponents early on.

I'd like to address one point about the term 'Simple'. There are some lines in the book that are not simple in the sense that there is no complexity in the play. Sometimes the only way to pose problems is to enter complex play, and it is part of chess improvement to accept challenges at least in some lines. It is important to emphasize that our repertoire choices will often get opponents out of their mainstream theoretical knowledge and therefore we enter more complex situations with a head start, being on our home turf.

Compared to *Keep It Simple: 1.e4*, I made one change in the structure of the book. The 1.e4 version included 30 complete games to showcase typical middlegame ideas and plans. For the 1.d4-version, I decided instead to continue many lines

deeper than it would be strictly necessary for opening study purposes only. This deeper look gives you the necessary insight on how to proceed after the initial opening moves. There are some variations easily going beyond move 20. This does not mean that you need to learn all these moves by heart, but having seen the key ideas unfold after the first moves is valuable and will add to your arsenal of middlegame plans. I also decided to cover some sidelines in more detail, when I felt that the play is particularly instructive in them.

The final important point I need to mention is that *Keep It Simple: 1.d4* was developed first as an online, interactive book on the platform www.chessable.com. On the website, you can learn the moves based on text and videos. This product was released in June 2019. The book you are now reading has the same content, only adjusted to fit the format better. Based on the feedback of Chessable users, I have added some lines that were played right after the release or that I simply forgot initially – having hundreds of readers before the book goes in print is excellent quality assurance!

So just one more thing. Always remember: 'Keep It Simple for you, make it difficult for your opponents!'

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Building a 1.d4 repertoire

What's the main difference between building an opening repertoire based on 1.e4 and one based on 1.d4 ?

There are mostly two key points. The first one is the topic of 'move orders'. In a repertoire starting with 1.d4, move orders and transpositions are of paramount importance, while these concepts are less dominant in 1.e4-based repertoires. I guess it is best to explain this point with an example. If you start with 1.e4, right after Black's reply on move one, you most of the time know what opening you will play. If they choose 1...c5, it is a Sicilian and it won't transpose to a Caro-Kann any more. If they play 1...e5, you know that you won't play a French Defence. This also means that your options against Black's defences have very little dependence on one another. For example: you dislike your choice against the French and want to change your lines. This has no relevance for the rest of your repertoire, as there are no or very few connections between your lines.

Now, compare this to the 1.d4 universe. After 1.d4, Black might play the immensely popular flexible move 1...♘f6. Now, contrary to, for example, 1.e4 e6, you don't know yet what opening you are going to play. Black might intend to play ...g7-g6 next, or ...e7-e6, or even ...d7-d5, which he could have done already on move one. He might intend to play the moves ...e7-e6, ...d7-d5 and ...♘f6, but he has various move orders to do so. Starting with 1...d5, 1...e6 or 1...♘f6 is all possible and perfectly sound. Your move selection early on, even on move two, is relevant for many different openings that may arise. Every choice needs to fit, making sure that you get 'your' lines and that you are not being tricked into something you did not want to play in the first place. Of course, this works both ways: choosing your move orders correctly might lead your opponent into unknown territory, giving you an advantage.

Let's discuss the second difference between 1.e4-based and 1.d4-based repertoires. The character of the play is often slower at the very beginning, which gives added flexibility to both sides. There are exceptions, of course, but there are many openings that don't lead to an early confrontation within the 1.d4-universe, but rather have the character of a 'set-up' that features a slower development of the action. It is not uncommon that the first exchanges only happen after some moves, while early captures are very usual in 1.e4 lines. Due to this less forced nature of the play, you need to look at more black options in the initial moves. This is the main reason why this book has more pages than the 1.e4 version.

Now let's talk about some specific lines. If we go back to move one after 1.d4, it is clear that we already have opened up the bishop on c1. But what about the bishop on f1? The bishop development on f1 is actually the most important decision that White has to take in the next moves. You may play the e-pawn soon and develop it on the starting diagonal, or you may play an early g2-g3 and fianchetto the bishop. My initial concept was to go for the first approach and play main lines in the

Queen's Gambit and King's Indian, for example. However, I needed to stop these plans rather quickly. The move orders were very tricky and going for a more main line approach also invites many sharper openings, like the Benko Gambit or the Modern Benoni. Then I checked the idea of playing with a kingside fianchetto. This approach is used in one of the most popular and famous d4-repertoires created by GM Boris Avrukh. Avrukh's repertoire has four volumes, totalling more than 1500 pages. This already suggests that the fianchetto approach is rather complex as well. A closer inspection, however, led to the concept for *Keep it Simple: 1.d4*. I noticed that many lines are complex for one reason: the early move c2-c4, which is usually played on move two. Black has many options based on the c4-pawn to steer the game into his territory, for example lines like the Queen's Gambit Accepted or the Catalan with 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4. What if we just don't play c2-c4 early on, but rather delay this move until we play it 'on our terms'? I wondered if it is possible to basically play the sequence of 1.d4, 2.♘f3, 3.g3, 4.♗g2, 5.0–0 and in most cases 6.c4, pretty much regardless of Black's moves? I had seen some impressive games by Kramnik with this approach, and he knows what he is doing! If this could be the standard set-up, it would be much easier to handle the early move orders. In this case, you would only need to learn the exceptions, instead of completely different approaches to each and every defence Black may play. This idea fascinated me and I wondered what drawbacks this approach might have?

My conclusion after a thorough analysis is: Black has some ideas to exploit our move order, but none of them put us in any danger. Black gets close to equality or equalizes with best play in some lines, but this should not discourage us too much. The important point to realize is: we are playing a slightly offbeat move order. **Black might have seen some idea against our move order, but he won't be a specialist!** If we know exactly what to do and have some new ideas to pose problems, it does not matter at all that the more mainstream move order is 'supposed to be better'. **We want to fight on our ground. Not on the ground the opponent chooses.**

I'd like to emphasize that this repertoire does not consist solely of sidelines. I am covering main lines in the Catalan, Grünfeld and the Dutch, for example. We will also reach very well-tested main-line ground in the Tarrasch Defence of the Queen's Gambit (by transposition) or the Queen's Indian. This is very useful knowledge that will benefit you a lot in the long run, as you learn commonly-played structures and strategies that will improve your overall understanding of closed openings. This way it is much easier to later expand your repertoire or replace some parts of it. Contrary to a pure sideline repertoire (think of the Colle System for example), you learn concepts close to main-line openings that will be very valuable in the long term. The lines may easily fit into other move orders if you desire to do so later. You are not 'stuck' in some theoretical backwater that you need to completely abandon at some point because you want to broaden your chess knowledge and get more variety in your middlegames.

A final point that can be valuable in the long run: our standard set-up involves a quick kingside fianchetto after we have started with 1.d4. The lines analysed in the book are an excellent foundation to add 1.♘f3 to your repertoire at a later stage, as there are many possible transpositions to lines already covered here. In my own practice, I have frequently reached lines featured in the book via move orders like 1.♘f3 d5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 c6 4.d4 ♗f5 5.c4 or 1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.g3 g6 3.b3, which will very often transpose to our Anti-King's Indian approach. The main added option that you would need to check is 1.♘f3 c5, after which there is no overlap to KIS 1.d4.

PART I

Black's classical/symmetrical set-ups:

1.d4 d5 2. ♘f3

Introduction and overview 1.d4 d5



Part I deals with Black's set-ups involving the early move ...d7-d5, playing in classical fashion. I am presenting these lines starting with the most common move order of 1.d4 d5, but of course Black may also choose move orders like 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 d5 or 1.d4 e6 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 d5. Our task against these move orders is not difficult, as we will play 2.♘f3 and 3.g3 anyway unless we must react to a specific line, like 1.d4 c5 or 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5, which requires a non-fianchetto approach. This is discussed in the 'Building a 1.d4 repertoire' part at the start of the book.

With 1...d5 Black signals his intention to play against the Queen's Gambit. He has a very wide range of possible variations to choose from in case of 2.c4, but as mentioned in the introductory text we won't comply.

I need to emphasize that on a conceptual level playing c2-c4 at some point is almost mandatory. We need to increase the pressure on Black's centre and c2-c4 is the reasonable way to do it. Our repertoire concept is to still play c2-c4, but do it later. As a rule of thumb for our repertoire, keep in mind: against ...d7-d5-based set-ups we want to play c2-c4. Our approach is only about delaying the move until we play it on our terms.

2.♘f3



As expected, we play 2.♘f3. This prevents some lines specific to 2.c4, in particular the Queen's Gambit Accepted. It is not so easy to play against this opening and Black often chooses his line of defence, knowing it better than we do. You don't face the QGA frequently, so often you will not be as well prepared as your opponent. The QGA is off the table in our repertoire. Another important reason for delaying c2-c4 are cases related to later captures on c4, in particular in the Slav Defence and the Catalan. Before we have a look at the chapters, I'd like to discuss one particular move order choice.

After 2...♘f6, my recommendation is to play 3.g3. With this move, we are sticking to the repertoire concept of delaying c2-c4. This particular move order decision is probably the most controversial one in the whole repertoire. Let's look at the pros and cons compared to the main line move 3.c4. After 3.c4, Black has a wide choice. He can play a Slav with 3...c6. It is possible to play g3-based set-ups against this opening, but it is a complicated affair. After 3.c4 c6 4.g3, Black might take on c4, with an unclear gambit, for example. White may play lines like 4.♕c2 and 4.♕b3, but these don't feature kingside fianchettos all of the time. Black may also play the QGA again with 3.c4 dxc4, which requires us to learn quite a bit of theory. There are also no reasonable lines in the QGA in which White plays with a fianchetto. On the contrary, there are lines with White getting an IQP, which is very unusual for our repertoire. Don't get me wrong: I am not saying that this is bad for White, but you need to be much more versatile in term of structures against this line. Of course, Black may play 3.c4 e6 and after 4.g3 he has a wider range of lines against the Catalan compared to our move order. We are talking about 4...♗b4+ and, most importantly, 4...dxc4, which requires an enormous effort to study. Against this line, 5.♕a4+ is a 'Keep it Simple' solution, but I think Black equalizes too effortlessly. It is likely that a player who plays 4...dxc4 knows these lines and I found nothing there to play for. So 5.♗g2 must be the critical move, but now Black has more than half a dozen lines that are playable and need to be studied. In particular, 5...a6 and 5...♘c6 are tricky to handle. So we see that (obviously) 3.c4 is not a bad move, but it allows lots of complexity with Black choosing the line. Now, with 3.g3 we stay on

our territory.

What are the drawbacks of 3.g3 ? There are three arguments against this move order. The first one is the most aggressive idea 3...c5. Black just handles the game like a Grünfeld with reversed colours and attacks the centre. As explained before, we have c2-c4 on the agenda, so it is only natural that Black plays the same pawn break. I agree that 3...c5 is a good choice for Black, but he needs to know it well. These lines are discussed in Chapters 4 to 6.

The second argument is that Black is very solid in the ...c7-c6 set-ups that are usually combined with ... ♗f5 or ... ♗g4. This might be true, but solid does not mean it is easy to play. I am confident that our lines will pose problems that are not easy to solve for Black. In most cases, he will have to figure it out over the board, which will prove to be difficult in many situations. Chapters 11 to 14 cover these lines.

There is a third approach against our early g2-g3: to play a quick ...b7-b5, stopping c2-c4 for the moment. This set-up is recommended in some important books, so we need to check it. I believe that this approach is actually tricky for Black to handle and White has good chances to press for an advantage. The ...b7-b5 set-up is examined in Chapter 10.

After listing these lines, I'd still like to note that most players below master level will respond to 3.g3 in similar spirit to their response to 3.c4. They won't have any special reply ready, but rather stick to a set-up they know anyway. It is most likely for a Slav player to play 3...c6 and for a Queen's Gambit Declined player to go 3...e6.

Now, let's have a look at the various moves and the chapters that cover them.

Chapter 1: 2... ♘c6



Black is hoping for 3.c4, transposing into a Chigorin Defence that most of the time arises after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 ♘c6 3.♘f3. As usual in our repertoire, we delay the c2-c4 move and play 3.g3 first. This line gives White good chances to gain an advantage, in particular against the more ambitious 3...♗g4. The positions might get a bit murky, but we are better for sure. The Anti-Chigorin is covered in Chapter 1.

Chapter 2: 2...c5



This is a rare move, but an important one for us to check. Now, 3.g3 is not very convincing (please see the dedicated chapter for details), which only leaves 3.c4. After 3.c4, Black most of the time plays 3...e6, which is the Tarrasch Defence. The Tarrasch is covered in Chapter 3, while Chapter 2 contains offbeat tries for Black like 3...cxd4 and 3...dxc4.

Chapter 3: 2...c5 3.c4 e6



This is the Tarrasch Defence to the Queen's Gambit. I suggest playing the main line 4.cxd5 exd5 5.g3 against it, which features a fianchetto set-up and keeping this in line with our repertoire concept. This is the main line against the Tarrasch, promising White a slight advantage. The Tarrasch is an important opening to study because you might get it on the board via lots of move orders. For example, you frequently see Black starting with an early ...e7-e6, ...♗e7 and ...0-0, only to later play ...c7-c5 and we transpose to the common Tarrasch IQP structure. The Tarrasch is covered in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4: 2...♘f6 3.g3 c5 4.♗g2 cxd4 5.0-0



The 3...c5 line is one of Black's most active responses to our preferred move order. He is basically stating: 'You failed to play your c-pawn, so I am going to do it!' The game will now resemble the Grünfeld Defence with colours reversed, but there is a twist. Let's compare with the Grünfeld after 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5. After 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.e4, Black is able to play 5...♘xc3 6.bxc3 and attack the centre quickly with ...c7-c5. In our line with reversed colours, Black has not played ...♘c6 yet. This is a significant difference, because it is not desirable to retreat the knight to a passive square like b6 for Black or b3 in our case with reversed colours.

Therefore, it is very important to avoid 5.♘xd4 e5 6.♘b3, as this is exactly the scenario described above. We need to retreat to a less than ideal square and Black manages to play the e-pawn to e5 in one move. By castling first, we ask Black about his intentions. The most popular move for Black here is actually 5...♘c6, leading to the attractive proper reversed Grünfeld lines after 6.♘xd4 e5 7.♘xc6 bxc6 8.c4. This is the move most players would choose if they don't know theory from here, as it is the most natural move. This is covered in Chapter 5.

What's critical then? Theoreticians recommend sophisticated moves like 5...h6 or 5...♗d7. I agree that these moves are fine and Black has good chances to equalize with them. However my point is: firstly, it is very unlikely to get these lines on the board, unless you regularly play master-level players that are heavily prepared. Secondly, the arising positions might offer Black equal chances, but we are still on our territory and will know the details much better. You are still able to outplay weaker opponents and have a sound position against stronger ones. I have played this move order with 3.g3 in many blitz games and the sophisticated lines never appeared, as far as I can remember. At the club level, you will get lines with ...♘c6 (Chapter 5) most frequently, and these are fun to play for White.

Chapter 5: 2...♘f6 3.g3 c5 4.♗g2 cxd4 5.0-0 ♘c6



This is the most frequently-met set-up at the club level, as ...♘c6 is a very natural move. However, the analysis in Chapter 5 shows that Black does not have an easy game at all. In the Grünfeld structures, a tempo matters much more and White has excellent chances of getting an advantage.

Chapter 6: 2... ♘f6 3.g3 c5 4.♗g2 ♘c6 5.0-0



Black may decide to not capture on d4, but rather keep the tension in the centre with moves like 5...♗f5, 5...♗g4 or most importantly 5...e6. The most important part of this chapter is 5...e6 6.c4 dxc4, after which I suggest the active move 7.♘e5. This line will net you many wins, as it is very tricky for Black to play against it.

Chapter 7: 2... ♘f6 3.g3 e6



First of all, it is probably useful to define what the 'Catalan' actually is. The Catalan involves the moves d2-d4, c2-c4 and g2-g3 on the white side, while Black plays ...d7-d5, ...e7-e6, ...♘f6 and emphasizes the development of the kingside with moves like ...♗e7 and ...0-0.

An early combination of the moves ...e7-e6 and ...c7-c5 instead would lead to the Reversed Grünfeld (Chapters 4-6) or even the Tarrasch (Chapter 3). A way to even transpose out of Part I of the book is an early ...b7-b6, which leads to Chapter 22 or 23 on the Queen's Indian. It sounds complicated at first, but you will just play the

normal system moves of castling and c2-c4 in any case.

Now, with 4.♗g2, we are delaying the move c2-c4 and avoid many complex lines in the process, most notably 4.c4 dxc4, which requires a significant effort to learn. Again, please note that we are only delaying c2-c4 for move order reasons – this move is firmly on our agenda. Now Black has many possible set-ups. The good news is that we are going to play 0-0 and c2-c4 next against all of them, unless they stop us by playing ...b7-b5 (Chapter 10). Chapter 7 deals with the sidelines that Black may play, mostly involving an early ...♗d6, ...♘bd7 and ...c7-c6.

Chapter 8: 2...♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 ♗e7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4



With 6...c6 or 6...♘bd7, Black chooses the Closed Catalan, avoiding the capture on c4. The capture on c4 leads to the Open Catalan, which is discussed in Chapter 9. The Closed Catalan is very frequently seen at the club level, because Black often does not have a specific preparation for the Catalan, but will rather play what they had intended to play against a conventional Queen's Gambit. The good news for us is that the Closed Catalan is a difficult line to play for Black. Many obvious approaches lead to very unappealing positions for Black and even the best lines from Black's point of view are a lot easier for White to handle.

Chapter 9: 2... ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 ♗e7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 dxc4



After 6...dxc4, we have reached the main line of the Catalan at the professional level. Black captures the pawn, being ready to return it at a proper moment. I suggest playing White's main reply 7.♕c2, which will regain the pawn quickly in almost all cases. Black has reasonable chances to equalize, but it is not easy to do and there are many ways for Black to go wrong.

Chapter 10: 2... ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 b5



This is one of Black's ideas to exploit our approach of delaying c2-c4. With the early ...b7-b5, Black stops c2-c4 for the moment and gains space on the queenside. This set-up has been recommended in some popular books and should be taken seriously. It is not a line somebody would just think of over the board, but rather the product of home preparation, most likely helped by the repertoire books. We therefore should have something prepared, and I believe that Black's game is not easy to conduct after my recommendation of playing a quick a2-a4.

Chapter 11: 2... ♘f6 3.g3 ♗f5



Combining ...d7-d5 and ... ♗f5 is a very popular set-up for Black. One point to take note of is that Black has many move orders to enter a ... ♗f5 set-up. For example, it is very common for Black to start with 3...c6, followed by ... ♗f5. They also may play 1.d4 d5 2. ♘f3 c6 and ... ♗f5 next. Against this line, we need to alter our move order slightly and avoid the early 0-0, but should play c2-c4 one move earlier than usual. Please see Chapter 11 for details on this subtle point.

Chapter 12: 2... ♘f6 3.g3 ♗f5 4. ♗g2 c6 5.c4 e6 6. ♘c3



Black's most popular set-up connected with ... ♗f5 is the pawn triangle with c6/d5/e6, which leads to the main line of the ... ♗f5-complex. Here, Black's main moves are 6... ♗e7, 6...h6 or 6... ♘bd7. They are answered with the same sequence of moves: 7. ♕b3 ♕b6 8.c5 ♕xb3 9.axb3. This queenless middlegame leads to a fascinating struggle. This structure is the reason why omitting castling makes sense. I believe that superior knowledge of these positions will pose Black some problems that are not easy to solve. Please see Chapter 12 for more details.



This is a very natural development scheme for Black and somewhat similar in nature to ...♗f5 set-ups at first sight. Black may play an early ...♗g4 with various move orders. Similar to the ...♗f5 set-ups, Black often plays an early ...c7-c6 and only then develops the bishop, for example, 3...c6 and ...♗g4 next is a common move order.

We use the same general approach as against the early ...♗f5 set-ups, playing c2-c4 before castling. The most common and natural move sequence of 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 ♗g4 4.♗g2 c6 5.c4 is discussed in the next chapter, while Chapter 13 discusses less frequently seen move orders and ideas by Black.

Chapter 14: 2...♘f6 3.g3 ♗g4 4.♗g2 c6 5.c4



This is the most commonly-seen scenario after an early ...♗g4 by Black. Black combines ...♗g4 with an early ...♘f6, ...c7-c6 and most of the time ...e7-e6 soon after. This is again comparable to the main line of the ...♗f5 set-up. A difference compared to ...♗f5, however, is the versatility of the middlegames. The ...♗f5-complex is all about playing an early ♕b3, while the ...♗g4-lines have some more variety. I think that Black has a solid position, but there are still many pitfalls and ideas that we can try. A surprisingly dangerous approach is to take on d5 in many lines – please see Chapter 14 for more information.

Black starts with 1.d4 d5, but it transposes out of Part A

I'd like to mention some less common move orders that start with 1.d4 d5, but actually transpose into other parts of the book.

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 g6?! – this is an imprecise move that should be exploited by 3.c4. This line is covered in Chapter 21 via a different move order.

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 – this will transpose into one of the Grünfeld Chapters (17-19).

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 f5 or 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 c6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 f5 – this transposes into a Dutch Stonewall (Chapter 32).

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 b6 – this will very likely transpose to the Queen's Indian after a sequence like 4.♗g2 ♗b7 5.0-0 e6 6.c4 ♗e7 7.cxd5 exd5 8.♘c3 0-0 9.♘e5, which is covered in Chapter 23.

CHAPTER 1

Anti-Chigorin: 2... ♘c6

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘c6



This move signals Black's intention to play a Chigorin Defence to the Queen's Gambit. We will not oblige and play 3.g3, which leads to an interesting and at times rather sharp fight if Black gets aggressive early on.

3.g3

This fits perfectly with our general repertoire approach and happens to be an excellent move, regardless of general concept considerations. After 3.g3, Black usually plays either 3...♗g4 or 3...♗f5, covered under A and B below. Sometimes, Black decides to play 3...♘f6 first. After 4.♗g2, Black has a choice of possible transpositions: if he plays 4...♗g4 or 4...♗f5, we will transpose into lines A or B. After 4...e6, we reach a line that is covered in Chapter 7 on Catalan sidelines via 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 ♘c6.

A) 3...♗g4

This line often leads to sharp play. Black quite frequently elects to castle queenside, an uncommon sight in 1.d4 d5 openings.

4.♗g2

Now, Black most of the time plays for queenside castling with 4...♕d7 (line A1). Instead 4...e6 (A2), 4...♘f6 (A3) and 4...♗xf3 (A4) are calmer options, usually leading to an edge (or more) for White.

A1) 4...♕d7

This is the most popular move for Black. It is the most principled one, going for ...0-0-0 and, on a very good day, checkmate White in caveman style with ...h5-h4, ...♗h3 etc. It is advisable to study this line carefully, because Black's attacking idea might be crude, but it is also very dangerous if you are careless. Fortunately, White is a lot quicker if you play the aggressive ideas suggested in this repertoire.

5.0-0

This is the most aggressive move, preparing to play c2-c4 next. The lines will be

messy most of the time, but they are good for White. I believe this whole complex is a case of 'fight fire with fire'. Black initiated hand-to-hand combat, but we are well-equipped for the ensuing complications.

A11) 5...0-0-0



6.c4

This is according to our basic set-up actually, but it is not so obvious that it indeed works here. Black has some pressure on the d-file after queenside castling. As we will see, White opts for aggressive countermeasures against Black's attacking ideas.

A111) 6...dxc4

This was the move that I was afraid of before I had a closer look at it. After some deeper analysis, I am sure that White is substantially better here as well. But one thing is clear: it is not an intuitive solution, so it's not easy to come up with it over the board. Fortunately, the most critical point is right now, on move 7. Once you remember the key idea, the rest is possible to work out over the board.

7.♘bd2



This is surprisingly strong. I don't see a fully satisfactory solution for Black against it. We need to check some lines to better understand the benefits of 7.♘bd2.

7...♘xd4

By far the most likely move to be played.

1) The direct central counterstrike 7...e5 fails to impress: 8.dxe5 ♗xf3 9.exf3 ♘xe5 10.f4 ♘c6 11.♕a4, with a strong attack for White;

2) 7...f6 covers the e5-square and prepares the pawn push: 8.♘xc4 e5 9.♕a4 e4 (9...exd4 10.b4 (don't waste any time with slow moves!) 10...♗xb4 11.♖b1, and we open the b-file against Black's king) 10.d5 (the next blow, forcing the black queen to d5) 10...♕xd5 11.♘e3 ♕e6 12.♘xg4 exf3 13.♗xf3 ♖d4 14.♕b3 ♕xb3 15.axb3 ♗d6 16.♘e3. Black is substantially worse, but managed to avoid immediate defeat in Petenyi-Tari, Antalya 2017.

8.♘xd4 ♕xd4 9.♕a4

We are just playing for the attack on Black's king. Defending against our onslaught is not easy at all.

9...c3

This fails, but not to simple means.

1) 9...♗d7 10.♕c2 ♗b5



is met by a very attractive refutation: 11.a4 ♗a6 12.b4 (a great move!) 12...♕xa1 13.b5. The bishop on a6 won't go anywhere. This means that we have effectively only sacrificed an exchange for a murderous attack. I'll show a nice line to illustrate the possibilities: 13...♗xb5 14.axb5 ♕a5 15.♘xc4 ♕xb5 16.♗f4.



This looks a bit like some game from the 19th century. Black never got around to develop his kingside and is completely lost. Some more moves? 16...♖d4 17.♘e5 ♘h6 18.♖c1 c6 19.♘xc6, and White crashes through;

2) 9...♘f6 10.e3 ♕c5 11.b4 (again this move. We are opening up the position very quickly against Black's king) 11...cxb3 12.♘xb3 ♕b6 13.♗b2, and Black won't survive this attack.

10.♘c4 ♗xe2



Have we gone too far? No, this position is actually already winning with precise play!

11.♕b5

The killer move.

11...♕xc4 12.♕xb7+ ♔d7 13.b3 ♕d3 14.♗e4 ♕d6

Black needs to cover c6.

15.♗a3 ♕b6 16.♖fd1+ ♗xd1 17.♖xd1+ ♔e6 18.♖xd8 ♕xb7 19.♗xb7 ♘h6 20.♖d3



White will win all the queenside pawns and the game. This is a very long line and it is good to know it, but it's not strictly necessary. In the lines after 5.0-0 0-0-0 6.c4 dxc4 7.♘bd2, White has a very dangerous attack and this attack will be much easier to conduct than it is for Black to defend. If you forget some detail of this analysis, it won't mean that you will lose the game. Black has a much harder task to solve – you need to keep in mind that he does not know the lines beforehand. If he did, he wouldn't have entered them in the first place!

A112) 6...e6



7.c5

This move has never been played in *Megabase 2019*, but it is strong and gives White a dangerous attack. The idea is to play b2-b4 next, even as a pawn sacrifice. We don't have any game examples, so I will examine some sensible looking moves.

7...h5

This is probably the most likely move to be played.

1) 7...f6 (Black covers e5 and prepares future ...e6-e5 or ...g7-g5 advances) 8.b4 (don't waste time with preparing this move. We will get an excellent position after Black takes – and he has little choice) 8...♘xb4 9.♘c3 ♘e7 10.♖b1 ♘bc6 11.♕a4

(this flows very naturally. Just getting pieces near the black king is a good plan) 11...♔b8 12.♖b3 g5 (this is not best, but it shows how close Black is to disaster) 13.♘xg5 fxg5 14.♗xg5 ♔a8 15.♖fb1 ♖b8 16.e4. White has a winning attack. We have ALL the pieces in the attack, which is impossible to withstand. There are many attractive lines to finish the game from here, one being the following: 16...dxe4 17.♗xe7 ♗xe7 18.♗xe4. Now, 19.♖xb7 is the deadly threat. Black has no defence against it;

2) 7...♗e7. I doubt that this move will be played by a human player, but it is suggested by the engines. It is directed against the b2-b4 idea. 8.♗e3 (you should avoid 8.b4 ♗xf3 9.exf3 ♘xd4!, showing the idea of 7...♗e7) 8...♗f6 9.♘bd2 (this slower approach of supporting the centre is enough for some advantage. Black can't avoid b2-b4 in the long run anyway) 9...♘ge7 10.h3 ♗xf3 11.♘xf3 ♘f5 12.♕d2, and White is finally ready for the b2-b4 idea. Black needed to lose a lot of time to prevent the quick b2-b4, and didn't get an attack going in the first place. White's b2-b4-b5 will be on the board soon and Black has no clear counterplay.

Of course White now plays

8.b4 ♗xf3

More or less forced. We were threatening b4-b5 and ♘e5.

9.exf3

This move and 9.♗xf3 are of about equal strength.



9...♘xb4

Black wants a pawn for his misery – very understandable.

After 9...e5 10.♕a4, White is just far too quick with the attack. The relatively best line that I can see for Black is still terrible for him: 10...♔b8 11.dxe5 ♘xe5 12.♕xd7 ♘xd7 13.♗b2. Black is almost lost from a strategic point of view. We have strong bishops, much more space and natural plans like ♘b1-d2-b3-d4.

10.♘c3 ♘c6 11.♕a4

Our plan is the simple ♖b1 and ♕b5.

11...e5 12.♖b1

Still this move! I don't see how Black saves himself. I'll show two attractive lines, but won't present all possible moves. If you have some free time, it's fun to look at more of these lines!

12...♘xd4

12...exd4. I did not have the patience to wait, but I guess this is probably 'mate in x' territory! I am sure it wins quickly at least: 13.♕b5 b6 14.cxb6 axb6 15.♕a6+ ♔b8 16.♗f4 (threatening 17.♖xb6#!) 16...♗d6 17.♗h3, and it's going to be over soon! In fact, now my engine shows 'Mate in 17', which seems like a lot of moves, given how bad Black's position looks.

13.♕xa7 ♕c6 14.♗h3+ ♘e6 15.♗g5 ♗e7 16.♘e4 dxe4 17.♗xe6+ ♕xe6 18.♕a8+ ♔d7 19.♖fd1+ ♔e8 20.♕xd8+ ♗xd8 21.♖xd8#

I got a bit carried away with this line, but it's fun! This whole concept with b2-b4 looks great for White and makes the whole line look very dubious for Black.

A12) 5...♗h3



The only serious alternative to ...0-0-0, and probably the better move. We still get a comfortable advantage, though.

6.c4 ♗xg2 7.♔xg2 e6 8.♕a4 ♘f6

8...0-0-0 9.c5. Please take note of this idea. We are preparing a quick b2-b4-b5 to get a dangerous attack. We play in a very similar way against 5...0-0-0 6.c4 e6 with 7.c5!.

9.♘c3 ♗e7 10.♗g5

White is slightly better here. We have more space and Black is still not fully organized.

A good plan is to go ♖fd1 next, intending ♘e5.

A13) 5...h5

If Black has these kind of plans, he usually castles queenside first. Still, I'd like to know what to do against the caveman approach.

6.c4

Strike in the centre and play c2-c4 against d5 – the usual recipe. I'll show some lines that feature key motifs.

6...e6 7.♘c3

Note that 7.♕a4 does not work, due to 7...♗xf3 8.♗xf3 ♘xd4. This is possible because Black has not castled yet and a7 is still defended.

7...0-0-0

Black has the alternative 7...dxc4.



8.b3. There are some other good moves, such as 8.♕a4 or 8.♘e5. But the most aggressive move is most fitting to the 'fight fire with fire' attitude you need to display against early attacks such as 5...h5. After 8.b3, Black has some moves available, but no satisfactory one: 8...♗xf3 (let's have a look at this try to grab the d4-pawn) 9.♗xf3 ♘xd4 10.♗xb7 ♖b8 11.♗g2 cxb3 12.axb3. White has enormous pressure on the queenside now and a clear advantage. I am stopping here, because there is no clear main line from here and you need to cut it at some point. We are a pawn down, but use your engines to explore a bit more if you have doubts about the compensation, as it will be helpful to better understand the dynamics of these

positions.

8.♕a4 ♔b8

1) 8...♘ge7 9.♘e5 (again this move is very strong, probably even already winning) 9...♘xe5 10.♕xa7 ♘5c6 11.♕a8+ ♘b8 12.♘b5 ♘ec6 13.♗f4, and White has a fantastic attack that should win quickly;

2) 8...dxc4 9.♘e5 (we have seen this killing idea before) 9...♘xe5 10.♕xa7 ♕xd4 11.♗xb7+ ♔d7 12.♕xd4+. Just one quick way to end the game after Black has blundered with 8...dxc4.

9.cxd5 exd5



10.♘xd5

A nice shot!

10...♕xd5

10...♗xf3 11.♗xf3 ♘e5 12.♕xd7 ♘xf3+ 13.exf3 ♖xd7 14.♘c3 ♖xd4 15.♗f4. White keeps a strong initiative even after the queen trade.

11.♘e5

This wins immediately for White.

A2) 4...e6

This is a rather unprincipled move, but still a move you might meet against players who just play without any particular opening preparation.

5.0-0 ♘f6

Whenever Black combines an early ...♗g4 and ...♘f6 in the Chigorin-style lines, you need to consider the reply ♘e5. As we will see, this motif is a key in the following lines.

The alternative 5...h5 doesn't quite fit with 4...e6, but it is important to not play timidly against this early aggression. 6.c4 (always go for c2-c4, increasing the pressure on the centre) 6...dxc4 7.♕a4 ♕d7 8.♘c3. I'd like to show one very important idea for these ...0-0-0 lines: 8...0-0-0.



This move loses immediately. 9.♘e5 ♘xe5 10.♕xa7, and White wins quickly. The key line is 10...♘c6 11.♕a8+ ♘b8 12.♗xb7 mate!

6.c4

As usual: the d5-pawn needs to be attacked with c2-c4.

A21) 6...♗e7

Black anticipates a possible ♗g5, but neglects the control of the e5-square.

7.♘e5

As mentioned: a key idea for White.

7...♗h5 8.♘c3 0-0 9.cxd5 ♘xd5

After 9...exd5 10.♘xc6 bxc6 11.♕a4, Black is again suffering with his pawn weaknesses.

10.♘xc6 bxc6



11.♘a4

Black is stuck with doubled c-pawns and has no compensation for this structural deficit.

A22) 6...♗d6 7.♘c3 0-0 8.cxd5

White gets some advantage by concrete play.

1) 8...♘xd5 9.h3 ♗h5 10.e4. White builds up a nice pawn centre and Black has little counterplay;

2) 8...exd5 9.♗g5 ♗e7 (the d5-pawn was under pressure, so this pin had to be broken) 10.♘e5. White has a comfortable advantage and will damage Black's structure with ♘xc6.

A3) 4...♘f6

This position is reached surprisingly often, given that White has simple means to gain a substantial advantage.

5.♘e5 ♗f5

Here, Black may also play 5...e6, but he is in trouble after 6.c4. There is no adequate antidote to the simple ♕a4 idea. I'd like to mention that 6.♘xg4 ♘xg4 7.e4 is also a lot better for White.

6.c4 e6 7.♕a4

And White is a lot better.

A4) 4...♗xf3 5.♗xf3 ♘f6

This approach was suggested by Simon Williams in his *Chessbase* DVD on the Chigorin. Black's idea is to get in a quick ...e7-e5.



6.c4

The most active move. I think Black is fine after something slow like 6.0-0 e5.

6...e5

The critical move, and in the spirit of the Chigorin.

1) 6...dxc4 7.♘c3 ♕d7 (instead, 7...e6 8.♗xc6+ bxc6 9.♕a4 is also better for White) 8.d5 ♘e5 9.♗g2 e6 10.♗f4 ♘g6 11.dxe6, and White opens up the position for the bishop pair;

2) 6...e6 7.♘c3, and now the capture on c4 leads to line 1 above.

7.cxd5 ♘xd4 8.♗g2 ♗b4+ 9.♘c3

Here, 9.♗d2 ♗xd2+ 10.♘xd2 ♘xd5 11.e3 is also fine and leads to an edge.

9...♘xd5 10.♗d2

This pawn sacrifice is only temporary.

10...c6 11.♘xd5 ♗xd2+ 12.♕xd2 cxd5 13.e3 ♘e6 14.♗xd5

White is slightly better after the capture on f3, but this still looks a lot more reliable for Black than the lines with 0-0-0.

B) 3...♗f5



Compared to 3...♗g4, this is the more conservative approach by Black. A typical

idea is to follow up with ...♘b4, trying to misplace the white knight on a3.

4.♗g2

B1) 4...♘b4 5.♘a3 e6 6.0-0 h6

Black has the alternative 6...♗e7. 7.♘e5 (we play in the same way after 6...h6. White's idea is to kick the knight with c2-c3 and force it to a6) 7...f6 8.♘f3. In his New In Chess Yearbook 128 Survey, GM Gonda recommends 8.g4, but I am not convinced about this line. After the simple retreat, I am happy with White's position, as ...f7-f6 is not a useful move for Black. We may try to play for e2-e4 (♘d2 first) or harass the bishop with ♘h4.



7.♘e5

Looking at the c6-square. We'd like to play c2-c3 and force the annoying knight to a6.

7...♘f6 8.c3 ♘a6 9.♕b3 ♕c8 10.c4

White enjoys a nice initiative on the queenside. ♗f4 and ♖ac1 are useful moves to continue with.

B2) 4...e6 5.0-0 ♘b4

Usually, Black starts with 4...♘b4, rather than going 4...e6 first. White may try to exploit that, but it is unclear if this is better than just transposing with 6.♘a3 – I

recommend the transpositon.

6. ♘a3

And this position we have examined via the 4... ♘b4 move order.

B3) 4... ♘f6 5.0-0 e6

Black did not bother with the knight sortie ... ♘b4, but now we have an easy game with standard moves.

6.c4

B31) 6... ♗e7 7. ♘c3 0-0 8. ♘e5

Black is under some pressure here, and White has easy moves to follow up with. Note that you don't need to take on c6 quickly. ♗f4 and ♖c1 are useful moves to play first.

B32) 6...dxc4



7. ♘bd2

I like this simple solution. We regain the pawn with a nice central advantage. Black can't hold the c4-pawn or grab the d4-pawn, as we will see.

7...b5

A terrible move, but let's check why trying to hold on to the pawn fails.

After 7... ♘xd4 8. ♘xd4 ♕xd4 9. ♗xb7 ♖b8 10. ♗c6+, White has a huge advantage and realistic chances of a quick win.

8.a4 a6 9. ♘h4

And Black is lost on move 9.

Conclusion

Our overall approach to play g2-g3 first and opt for a later c2-c4 pawn push is an excellent and very dangerous line against Black's attempt to reach a Chigorin Queens's Gambit. The lines with ...♗g4 will get rather sharp, so pay extra attention to them.

CHAPTER 2

Rare lines: 2...c5

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 c5



This is an interesting move order for Black that I have played myself as a surprise weapon. It is not played very frequently, but is very relevant for our repertoire, as the usual g2-g3-based recipe is somewhat problematic to play.

3.c4

I recommend playing the main line against 2...c5 and avoiding 3.g3. I tried to make it work, but there is one specific line that made me decide against it. I need to emphasize that I don't think Black is better after 3.g3, but it is not a line that I like to recommend in a repertoire like this.

Let's briefly check: the only problem line is 3.g3 cxd4 4.♗g2 ♕a5+! – please also compare with 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 g6 3.c4 ♘f6 4.cxd5 ♗g7 5.♕a4+!, which is part of our repertoire for White (see Chapter 21). Now after 4...♕a5+!, we need to sacrifice a pawn. I checked 5.c3 and 5.♗d2 ♕b6 6.c3. In both cases, I think White has enough for the pawn, but I am not very keen on recommending central pawn sacrifices. Giving away a central pawn is a very critical decision and not for everyone.

Given that 3.c4 is actually not that much of an effort to study, and slightly better for White, I decided to go for this approach. I believe it is actually simpler in this case to play the main line, as you don't place the burden of any early pawn sacrifice on yourself. That being said, feel free to explore the gambit lines mentioned: they are fun to analyse.

Now after 3.c4, Black most of the time plays 3...e6, which leads to the Tarrasch Defence. This is covered in Chapter 3. We need to check Black's alternatives on move three. Black may take the pawn on d4 or c4, which is covered under A and B.

A) 3...cxd4 4.cxd5

A1) 4...♘f6

This position may also arise via the less common move order 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 c5 3.c4

♘f6 4.cxd5 cxd4.

5.♘xd4

Here, 5.♕xd4 ♕xd5 6.♘c3 ♕xd4 7.♘xd4 is the most frequently-played line. As mentioned before, I have played this 2...c5 variation once as Black and did not feel too scared of this approach. One additional issue for White is that Black has three different lines on move seven – 7...a6, 7..♗d7 and 7...e5 – and each one requires a unique reply by White. I felt that 5.♘xd4 is also quite dangerous and easier to handle.

5...♘xd5

Black may also play 5...♕xd5 6.♘c3 ♕a5 7.♘b3. This transposes to 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 c5 3.c4 cxd4 4.cxd5 ♕xd5 5.♘c3 ♕a5 6.♘xd4 ♘f6 7.♘b3.

6.e4



A11) 6...♘f6 7.♗b5+ ♗d7 8.♕e2

We aim for swift development, trying to exploit the open files quickly.

8...e5

A radical attempt, but weakening the light squares is risky.

1) 8...a6 9.♗xd7+ ♕xd7 10.♘b3 e6 11.0-0. We will continue with moves like ♘c3, ♗f4 and putting the rooks on the open files. Black does not have an easy defensive task. Note that ...a7-a6 has weakened some crucial squares, in particular b6 of course;

2) 8...♕b6 9.♗xd7+ ♘bxd7 10.♘b3. We will gain time with ♗e3 and enjoy a useful initiative on the queenside.



9.♘f5

This must be critical. Instead, 9.♘f3 was played by Anish Giri against Peter Svidler in 2017, but f5 looks like a much more tempting square.

9...g6 10.♘h6

An odd square, but this knight is extremely annoying for Black. We are in uncharted waters, and there are many lines possible. I'll show one that is interesting: 10...♕a5+ 11.♘c3 ♗xb5 12.♕xb5+ ♕xb5 13.♘xb5 ♘a6 14.f3, and Black has some problems dealing with the active knights.

A12) 6...♘b4

This looks a bit more active for Black, rather than just retreating to f6, but White retains a comfortable edge here. Please note that Black is threatening to take on d4, so you can't just play 'any move'.

7.♗b5+ ♗d7

7...♘8c6 8.0-0 e5. Black accepts a structural weakness, but there was no great solution available (the position after 8...♗d7 9.♘f3 is also quite uncomfortable for Black. The knights are standing on each other's toes and development is bad). 9.♘xc6 bxc6 10.♗a4, and White has an excellent long-term target on c6.

8.♗c4

Avoiding further trades. Tempting the bishop to d7 mostly took care of the ...♕xd4 threat.

8...♘8c6 9.♘xc6 ♘xc6 10.0-0 e6 11.♘c3 ♗e7 12.♗e3



And White enjoys a nice advantage. We have more space and some options: playing on the open files is a simple idea, while going for f2-f4 and playing on the kingside seems even more dangerous.

A2) 4...♕xd5

This looks a bit naive, but it is not that bad for Black. Mamedyarov played it in some rapid games, so you can't just refute it easily.

5.♘c3 ♕a5 6.♘xd4 ♘f6 7.g3

This is the most challenging move. The bishop will be well-placed on the long diagonal. We need to acknowledge that Black lost some time with the queen, but the structure is entirely symmetrical. We need to prove that the more-active pieces mean something and play very concretely.

7...e5 8.♘b3 ♕c7 9.♗g5

This is the most aggressive move, trying to weaken the d5-square by capturing on f6. There is also the simple idea of playing ♖c1 soon, opposing the black queen.

9...♗b4



Black at least makes sure there is no knight coming to d5 soon.

10.♗xf6

Avrukh recommended playing 10.♖c1 here, but taking on f6 seems more powerful to me.

10...♗xc3+

Black wants to avoid 10...gxf6 11.♖c1.

11.bxc3 gxf6 12.♕d2

Stockfish assesses this position as about equal, but I don't ever see Black getting a safe king. One sample line goes as follows:

12...♕c6

This is probably not the optimal defence, but otherwise White has easy moves like ♗g2, 0-0 and then we'll see where Black intends to place the king.

13.♖d1

Mate on d8!

13...0-0



14.♖g1

It is important to keep in mind that ♖g1 is not a concession here at all. ♗g2 might be a useful tempo and g3-g4, intending ♖g3, looks even scarier.

B) 3...dxc4



This position also frequently arises via the Queen's Gambit Accepted: 1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.♘f3 c5.

4.e4

White has some decent alternatives at this point, in particular 4.d5. This is rather complicated though, and not clearly superior to 4.e4, which is quite easy to play.

4...cxd4 5.♕xd4 ♕xd4 6.♘xd4



White tries to prove that the superior development counts for something. I believe that White indeed retains a slight advantage.

B1) 6...♗d7 7.♗xc4 ♘c6 8.♗e3

Now our basic set-up is to play with f2-f3 and ♘d2 (aiming for ♘c4 or ♘b3-c5 later), keeping the king in the centre with ♔f2 or ♔e2. We have some space advantage and chances to press on the queenside.

8...♘f6 9.f3 e6 10.♘xc6 ♗xc6 11.♘d2



A typical line. White intends to continue with ♘b3 or ♗e2 followed by ♘c4 and has an easy, comfortable game.

B2) 6...a6 7.♗xc4 e5

A rather radical approach that weakens d5 and keeps the a2-g8 diagonal wide open.

It is better to play ...e7-e6, which would lead to similar positions as after 6...♗d7 instead of 6...a6.



8.♘b3

Instead, 8.♘f3 also seems to be a bit better for White, but I think it is more logical to stay close to the main battleground on the queenside. I also like to keep the option of covering e4 with f2-f3, making the centre very stable.

8...♘f6 9.♘c3 ♗b4 10.♗d2

The best reply, not minding Black's idea of grabbing e4.

10...♗xc3 11.♗xc3 ♘xe4 12.♗xe5



And we regain the pawn with a nice edge due to the bishop pair.

Conclusion

The rare lines 3...dxc4 and 3...cxd4 are not terrible for Black, but White is able to maintain at least a small advantage or some initiative.

CHAPTER 3

The Tarrasch Defence: 2...c5 3.c4 e6

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 c5 3.c4 e6

This is the most popular move at this point, transposing to the Tarrasch Defence of the Queen's Gambit. We don't mind this transposition as the Tarrasch can be reached via multiple move orders of our repertoire, for example 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 c5 5.0-0 ♘c6 6.c4 ♗e7 7.cxd5 exd5.

4.cxd5 exd5 5.g3



The fianchetto is the main line against the Tarrasch Defence. It is important to understand that the Tarrasch is more of a set-up rather than a concrete string of moves. Black's set-up consists of the moves ...d7-d5/...c7-c5/...e7-e6/...♘f6/...♘c6/...♗e7 and ...0-0. The particular move order is rather flexible – we will see transpositions to the Tarrasch from many chapters.

The usual pawn structure that we will reach is a black Isolated Queen Pawn (IQP). Black enjoys easy development, but the pawn is a long-term liability. The IQP will arise after White takes on c5 or Black trades on d4. These two scenarios share the same structure, but require a slightly different approach. Now, Black mostly plays 5...♘c6, but we also need to check a different move order starting with 5...♘f6, in which Black delays ...♘c6 for a while. This scenario mostly occurs when the Tarrasch is reached via transposition, for example after 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 ♗e7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 c5 7.cxd5 cxd5.

Line A covers the mostly-played version of the Tarrasch with an early ♘c6, while line B shows the alternative and less popular version without ♘c6.

A) 5...♘c6 6.♗g2 ♘f6

6...c4 is an ambitious idea that is used in some Tarrasch lines, trying to gain space on the queenside. This is a premature version: 7.0-0 ♗b4 (Black may also play 7...♘f6: 8.♘e5 (a key idea to remember. Against an early ...c5-c4, it is promising to pressure the black pawns with ♘e5 and b2-b3) 8...♗e7 9.♘xc6 bxc6 10.b3 cxb3

(Black needs to accept an inferior pawn structure) 11.axb3, with a comfortable game for White. ♗a3 will trade the bishop, exposing the dark-square weaknesses, in particular c5, even more).



7...♗b4 looks a bit odd, but Black anticipates ♘c3 and intends to capture on c3 at the right moment. As we will see, this will never materialize with the right response. 8.b3 (White may also play 8.♘c3 here, which also leads to some advantage. The lines are somewhat tricky, though. Our choice is easier to learn and still good for White) 8...cxb3 (Black can't support the pawn on c4 and has to take. The resulting structure is at least slightly better for White, as Black has the potential weakness on d5 and White has useful pressure on the open files as well) 9.♕xb3 ♘ge7 10.♘c3 0-0 11.♗a3 (trying to trade this bishop makes sense, as the dark squares in Black's camp are rather weak) 11...a5 12.♖fc1. We have good pressure on the queenside in this position. An idea to take note of is playing e2-e3 to relocate the f3-knight. It would be nice on d3 or f4, for example.

7.0-0



A1) 7...♗e7

The main move by a mile, but Black has tried many inferior moves. It's not

necessary to cover all of them, but it is useful to know some ideas. In my experience, it happens quite often that Black plays into the Tarrasch by accident, in particular against our choice of move order. People who play 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 c5 go for the Tarrasch intentionally, but many players, in particular at club level, play ...c7-c5 in combination with ...d7-d5 without realizing what they will get on the board. They will often play a suspect line that can be punished severely, so it's worth checking out some of these deviations.

8.dxc5 ♗xc5

I am not sure what the motivation behind 8...0-0 is, to be honest. Black is in trouble after the obvious 9.♗e3, and we keep the pawn! 9...♘g4 10.♗d4 ♘xd4 11.♕xd4. I see no compensation for Black.

9.a3



This line has become very popular in recent years. White plans an expansion on the queenside with b2-b4, forcing a commitment by the c5-bishop. It is very important to understand that White is not aiming for ♘bd2-b3-d4, but rather wants to use the knight on c3 to attack the weakness on d5. An additional point is that ♗g5 is still possible, so you don't have to play ♗b2 in all cases. White has achieved excellent results with this approach, so it was a natural candidate for this repertoire. An added bonus is that Black's best reply is not obvious at all. Routine moves quickly lead to very comfortable positions for White.

A11) 9...♘e4

This enjoys the best theoretical reputation, but is not an obvious move at all.

10. ♘fd2

I think this straightforward move is best. White challenges the intruder immediately and starts forcing play. After the alternative 10.b4 ♗e7 11.♗b2 ♗f6, we see one idea of ...♘e4: the relocation of the bishop. White might still be a bit better in this line, but I prefer the direct solution.



10...f5

This looks like Black's best bet.

1) 10...♘xd2 11.♘xd2 (11.♕xd2 isn't bad either, but 11.♘xd2 has an interesting point I'd like to show) 11...0-0 12.b4 (12.♘b3 ♗b6 13.♗xd5 ♗h3 gives Black good compensation and should be avoided) 12...♗b6 (12...♗d4 13.♖a2. We don't mind this move at all. It prepares ♗b2, and the rook might be lifted to d2 later) 13.♘b3 ♕f6 14.♖a2.



This is the point I mentioned. A set-up with ♖d2 and ♗b2 is highly desirable and prepared with this elegant move. White has annoying pressure against the IQP;

2) 10...♗f5 11.♘xe4 ♗xe4 12.♗xe4 dxe4 13.♕c2. 10...♗f5 allowed this sequence, giving Black a weak pawn on e4. White is better now, for example in the following line: 13...♕e7 14.♘c3 e3 15.♗xe3 ♗xe3 16.♘d5, and White wins a pawn, because

Black can't take on f2 now. 16...♗xf2+ 17.♖xf2.



Now the queen has no good square. If the queen moves on the d-file, ♖d1 is going to be devastating, and 17...♕e5 18.♖f5 doesn't help either.

11.♘xe4

I didn't find anything too clear after the more complicated lines starting with 11.♘b3. The issue with 11.♘b3 is the line 11...♗b6 12.♘c3 ♗e6 13. ♘a4 d4!, which seems satisfactory for Black. Fortunately, the capture on e4 leads to a small advantage in my opinion.

11...dxe4

The move 11...fxe4 is too ambitious: 12.b4 ♗b6 13.♘c3 ♗e6 14.♘a4. We will get the important bishop on b6, securing some advantage.

12.♕xd8+ ♘xd8 13.♘c3 ♗e6 14.g4

A key part of White's play. We should attack the pawn chain immediately.

14...g6 15.gxf5 gxf5 16.♗f4



I think White is slightly better here. We have more active possibilities, for example on the queenside based on moves like ♘b5, ♖c1 and b2-b4. Another idea worth noting is playing ♔h1 and continuing with f2-f3 next. That opens the long diagonal

and gets us closer to attacking the f5-pawn, which is more exposed than the e2-pawn. Black has many possible moves now, so I'd like to stop at this point. It is an interesting position to explore further, together with a human or silicon partner.

A12) 9...0-0 10.b4



10... ♗b6

The more active bishop post. Compared to the line with the early ...a7-a6 and ... ♗a7, Black is saving a tempo, but the bishop is far more exposed on b6, in particular to ♘a4 ideas. The ♘a4 plan is yet another argument in favour of playing the b1-knight to c3.

Black may also play 10... ♗e7, which looks a bit passive. We'll get a nice advantage without any problems: 11. ♘c3 (again, play this first! 11. ♗b2 would allow ... ♘e4 and ... ♗f6. This is not the end of the world, but I'd rather keep Black's pieces passive) 11... ♗e6 12. ♗b2 ♖c8 13. ♖c1 ♕d7 14.e3 ♖fd8 15. ♘e2.



We keep d4 nicely controlled and have ♘f4 next – a very comfortable position for White.

11. ♘c3

Playing this first keeps the ♗g5 option.

11...h6

11...♖e8 12.♗g5 (Black ignored the pin, so we are happy to play this) 12...♗e6 13.b5 (we need to play this first. 13.♗xf6 ♕xf6 14.♘xd5 ♗xd5 15.♕xd5 leads nowhere, due to 15...♖xe2) 13...♘a5 14.e3 (securing the e-pawn). Now, Black can't prevent the sequence starting with ♗xf6 and he is in trouble.

12.♗b2 ♖e8 13.♘a4 ♗c7 14.♖c1

With an excellent position for White. Black is passively placed and we have multiple ideas to increase the pressure, such as ♘c5 or ♕c2 to prepare ♖fd1.

A13) 9...a6 10.b4 ♗a7 11.♘c3



As mentioned, we want to attack the IQP directly. It is best to play the knight now, instead of ♗b2, and still have the option to pin with ♗g5. In fact, Black needs to react to this threat.

11...d4

1) 11...0-0 12.♗g5. Black ignored White's idea and is in grave trouble now. White threatens to take on f6 and d5, winning the central pawn. 12...d4 13.♘e4. Black's kingside will be shattered now, giving White a clear advantage;

2) 11...h6 12.♗b2 (eventually, the bishop settles on b2, but only after having provoked the move ...h7-h6) 12...0-0 13.e3 (now, the idea is to play ♘e2 next, followed

by ♘f4) 13...d4 (this principled move needs to be checked, of course. After 13...♗f5 14.♘e2, White has a nice advantage. ♘f4, ♕b3 and a rook to d1 are easy follow-up moves) 14.♘xd4 ♘xd4 15.exd4 ♗xd4 16.♕d2. White is better here, because Black is not able to develop the c8-bishop easily.

12.♘a4 0-0 13.♗b2



White is better as the d4-pawn is rather weak after a potential ♘c5.

A14) 9...a5

Stopping b2-b4 once and for all, but weakening the queenside beyond repair. White is better now with more than one line, but the one I suggest seems very convincing.

10.♕c2 ♗b6

After the move 10...♗e7, we get the following: 11.♖d1 0-0 12.♘c3. I know it sounds harsh, but this is close to a winning position. White threatens e2-e4 already, and neither I nor the engines see a way for Black to maintain a playable position.

11.♗g5

Black has huge problems to keep d5. Let's check one line.

11...h6 12.♗xf6 ♕xf6 13.♘c3 ♗e6 14.♕b3 ♕d8

Sad, but it was a double attack on b6 and d5.

15.♘a4 ♖a6 16.♖fd1



With a large advantage for White.

A2) 7...cxd4

This capture is premature, but a rather common occurrence.

8.♘xd4

This position or the one after 8...♗e7 9.♘c3 often arises from different move orders, e.g. 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 c5 4.♗g2 cxd4 5.0-0 ♘c6 6.♘xd4 d5 7.c4 ♗e7 8.cxd5 exd5 9.♘c3.

A21) 8...♗e7 9.♘c3 0-0



10.♗e3

Considered to be best here. White also scores well with alternatives like 10.b3. The move to avoid is 10.♗g5, as this gives Black the opportunity to play 10....h6, after which he has nothing better than returning to e3, giving Black the useful ...h7-h6 move.

To compare, we should have a brief look at the line 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 c5 3.c4 e6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.g3 ♘c6 6.♗g2 ♘f6 7.0-0 ♗e7 8.♘c3 (I recommend dxc5 here) 0-0 9.♗g5, which is the traditional main line of the Tarrasch. Here, 9...cxd4 10.♘xd4 h6 11.♗e3 is Black's best reply. The early capture on d4 basically means that Black is

playing this main line, but without the useful move ...h7-h6. This seems like a rather minor point at first, but closer inspection shows that the consequences are severe. One important point is that ...h7-h6 prevents a later ♗g5, pinning the knight. This could be relevant in particular after a ...♖e8/...♗f8 sequence, which is very common. Now, why does White play 9.♗g5 in the main line then? Why not 9.♗e3, angling for 9....cxd4 10.♘xd4 ? The issue is 9...c4!, which gives Black a decent game.

Back to the position on the board. The bishop move to e3 covers the d4-knight and helps to control the blockade square. I suggest aiming for a set-up with ♖c1/♕b3 and ♖fd1 in most cases, putting immediate pressure on Black's IQP. Black now usually plays a combination of the moves ...♖e8, ...♗f8 and ...♗e6/g4, ...♕d7. If you remember the general set-up with ♖c1/♕b3/♖fd1, you should be fine. There is one situation where ♕a4 is even stronger, and we need to look at some sample lines.

10...♖e8

1) 10...♗e6 11.♖c1 ♕d7 12.♕b3 ♗h3 13.♖fd1 (the standard set-up has been completed) 13...♗xg2 14.♔xg2.



This is one of the positions where Black would love to have ...h7-h6 already played – ♗g5 is an important idea now, increasing the pressure on the IQP;

2) 10...♗g4 (against early ...♗g4 sorties, I recommend always playing h2-h3, which turns out to be useful) 11.h3 ♗e6 12.♖c1 ♕d7 13.♔h2. The engines even prefer 13.g4, but the simple king move is fine. One idea that I'd like to show is the following: 13...♖fe8 14.f4 ♖ac8 15.♗f2.



The idea is to take on e6 and continue with e2-e4, opening up the position for the bishop pair.

11. ♖c1

This universally-useful move should be played first before any other commitment.

11... ♗f8

An alternative is 11... ♗e6 12. ♕b3 ♕d7 (12... ♘a5 13. ♕c2 ♘c4 14. ♗g5 is one line where ♗g5 comes in handy. We play ♖fd1 next, with enormous pressure on the IQP. Another important idea is to play ♘f5 at the right moment) 13. ♖fd1. Again, we have useful pressure against the IQP.

12. ♕a4

Here, this move is even stronger than the usual ♕b3.

12... ♗d7

This move is Black's resource against ♕a4 in the position with the extra move ...h7-h6. Here, it fails completely due to a tactic. If ... ♗d7 does not work, Black is short of a good reply.

13. ♘xd5 ♘xd5 14. ♗xd5

White just grabbed a pawn. The only move worth checking now is 14... ♘e7, but it fails miserably.

14... ♘e7



15.♗xf7+ ♔xf7 16.♕b3+ ♔g6

After 16...♔f6 17.♖fd1, White's attack is deadly, with ♘b5 being the immediate threat.

17.♘e6 ♗xe6 18.♕xe6+

Here's the difference of the h-pawn! Black does not have ...♔h7 and gets checkmated.

18...♔h5 19.♕f7+ ♔g4 20.♕f3+ ♔h3 21.♕h5#

It is not completely impossible to get that in a game – fingers crossed!

A22) 8...♗c5

This looks more active than 8...♗e7, but it has multiple drawbacks.

9.♘xc6 bxc6 10.♕c2

This is the most direct way to tackle 8...♗c5. Black can't move the bishop again as c6 is unprotected.

10...♕b6 11.♘c3

We are threatening 12.♘a4 now.

11...♗e7 12.e4

With an excellent position for White. Note that Black can't play 12...d4 now: 13.♘a4 ♕b5 14.♖d1, and d4 drops because of 14...c5 15.e5. Yes, it's a strong bishop on g2!

A23) 8...♕b6 9.♘xc6

It looks like we are helping Black with fixing the IQP structure, but the resulting c6/d5 formation is still weak and will be attacked quickly.

9...bxc6 10.♘c3 ♗e7



11.e4

This is even stronger than 11.♘a4, as played in the classic game Rubinstein-Salwe, Lodz 1908. This is one of the games every player should study – Rubinstein exploited the black pawn and square weaknesses superbly.

11...dxe4 12.♘xe4

White is better due to the superior pawn structure. Moves like ♕c2 and ♗e3 are effective follow-ups.

A3) 7...♗e6



Black delays the development of the kingside. The point to remember about this approach is to not take on c5 if Black is able to recapture with the bishop from f8, saving a tempo on the usual ♗f8-e7xc5 sequence. In other words, ...♗e7 is the move that signals we should take on c5.

8.♘c3

A31) 8...h6

Taking the waiting game to the extreme. This is a quite rare line, but it is relevant to our normal approach of taking on c5 and playing a2-a3 and b2-b4 next. This position may also arise after 7...h6 8.♘c3 ♗e6.

9.a3 ♖c8

Still playing the tempo game with the bishop on f8.

The 9...c4 advance does not work well here: 10.b3 cxb3 11.♕xb3. Now, the pressure on b7 and d5 is very serious. Black actually has no reasonable move to defend b7.

10.♗e3 c4

It was tough to still wait – c5 was attacked.

11.♘e5

Instead, 11.b3 ♘a5! is a lot worse.



Now White is clearly better, as we have multiple ideas that are tough to defend against. The tactical idea is ♘xc4, followed by d4-d5. This opens up the game very favourably for the bishops. Another dangerous plan is based on h2-h3/f2-f4 and g3-g4, attacking on the kingside.

A32) 8...♖c8

Black keeps waiting. After 8...♗e7, we take on c5, getting a good version of the main line.

9.♗g5

This is very awkward to meet for Black.

9...♗e7

Another move for Black is 9...h6, but after 10.♗xf6 ♕xf6 11.e4, Black will wonder if delaying the kingside development paid off.

10.dxc5 0-0

10...♗xc5 11.♗xf6 ♕xf6 12.♘xd5 ♕xb2 13.♘g5, with a strong attack for White.

11.♖c1

And White is a lot better, as Black does not get the pawn back.

11...♗xc5 12.♗xf6 ♕xf6 13.♘xd5

The ♗c5 is hanging, preventing Black from grabbing on b2.

B) 5...♘f6

Black delays ...♘c6 and prioritizes kingside development. This line has little independent value, because the natural move ...♘c6 will be played very often for a transposition. We need to examine one particular line where it matters:

6.♗g2 ♗e7 7.0-0 0-0 8.dxc5 ♗xc5



9.a3

This position occurs far less frequently than the version with ...♘c6 being played instead of ...0-0. It is obviously quite transpositional, for example, after the most popular move 9...♘c6, we transpose directly. The only move that should be checked in more detail is 9...♘e4, as this is quite substantially different from the other version.

9...♘e4

9...♘c6 10.b4 transposes to line A.

10.♘fd2

We are going for the same approach as in the other version of this line with ...♘c6 played instead of castling kingside.

B1) 10...♕e7 11.♘xe4 dxe4 12.♘c3 ♖d8

Here, Black may also play 12...f5.



13.♗g5 (a nice shot, giving White a sizeable advantage) 13...♕f7 (13...♗xf2+ 14.♖xf2 ♕xg5 15.♕d5+ ♔h8 16.♘xe4 ends in a disaster for Black) 14.♖c1. White's huge development lead is worrisome for Black. We threaten 15.♘d5 and

15.♘xe4.

13.♕a4

The more obvious 13.♕c2 has been played in a grandmaster game, but after 13...f5 14.g4!?, White needs to enter some complications that I did not want to play into. 13.♕a4 is easier to handle.

13...e3

This is better than 13...f5. Then, we play 14.♗g5 (this idea again! It is a bit different to the earlier one, though) 14...♗xf2+ 15.♖xf2 ♕xg5 16.♕c4+ ♔h8 17.♖af1. Compared to the other ♗g5 line, we don't have the immediate ♘xe4, but the rook move threatens the capture due to the back-rank mate. Black does not have a fully satisfactory reply now.

14.♗xe3 ♗xe3 15.fxe3 ♕xe3+ 16.♔h1 ♘c6 17.♖ad1



White enjoys a slight advantage, due to his better piece activity. I would be happy to play this position. If you'd like to fight for even more, I'd like to point you to 13.♕c2, which is more principled, but I did not want to go beyond move 20, in particular not for a sideline.

B2) 10...f5

This is a lot worse compared to the other version.

11.♘b3

This line now gains some strength. The point will become clear shortly.

11...♗b6 12.♘c3 ♘xc3

12...♗e6 13.♘a4. Here is the difference between ...0-0 and ...♘c6. With ...♘c6 being played, Black has the move ...d5-d4!, which is not possible now. Now Black is in trouble – we gain control over d4 and likely will be able to take on b6, netting the bishop pair.

13.bxc3 ♗e6 14.a4



White is a lot better in this position. We have ideas of playing a4-a5 and ♘c5, ♗a3 or just piling up on d5 with ♕d3 and ♖d1.

B3) 10...♗f5 11.♘xe4 ♗xe4 12.♗xe4 dxe4 13.♘c3

This simple sequence after 10...♗f5 nets some advantage. How does Black save the e4-pawn?

B4) 10...♘xd2 11.♘xd2 ♘c6 12.b4

We have transposed to line A again.

Conclusion

The Tarrasch Defence does not equalize for Black if we are precise. White has useful pressure, most of the time in anti-IQP positions. It is important to study the Tarrasch, because you will rather frequently get it on the board from other move orders. Quite often, Black transposes into this opening without any concrete knowledge, a fact that we should exploit as best as possible.

CHAPTER 4

Grünfeld Reversed – Black takes on d4 without ... ♘c6: 2... ♘f6 3.g3 c5 4. ♗g2 cxd4 5.0-0

1.d4 d5 2. ♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 c5 4. ♗g2 cxd4 5.0-0



This and the two subsequent chapters deal with the Reversed Grünfeld. After the initial moves 1.d4 d5 2. ♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3, the move 3...c5 is probably the most active and ambitious line available to Black at this point. The game now quite frequently takes the shape of a Grünfeld Defence with reversed colours. I am usually quite sceptical of 'colours reversed' openings, as the extra tempo often does not matter that much. In this particular case, however, the situation is different. The Grünfeld is a very concrete, tempo-sensitive opening and the extra tempo matters a lot. The Reversed Grünfeld scores excellently for White, also due to the fact that black players usually only have a vague idea about the theoretical details.

I need to mention that the starting moves of the Reversed Grünfeld are quite similar to the Tarrasch Defence from Chapter 3. In the Tarrasch, Black also plays the moves ...d7-d5 and ...c7-c5, but the move order matters here. Chapter 3 examines 1.d4 d5 2. ♘f3 c5 3.c4 e6, after which we are able to take on d5 and create a usually favourable IQP situation, typical of the Tarrasch. In the Reversed Grünfeld, Black plays ...c7-c5 and then captures on d4 before White is able to play c2-c4. The most common example is 1.d4 d5 2. ♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 c5 4. ♗g2 cxd4, the move order examined in this chapter.

1.d4 d5 2. ♘f3 ♘f6

Black may also start with 2...e6 and 3...c5 and delay ... ♘f6 for a few moves, but this knight development is very natural and it makes little sense to avoid it. We continue with our normal development scheme of the kingside fianchetto and Black will play ... ♘f6 at some point to transpose.

3.g3 c5



The defining move of this chapter. Black attacks our d4-pawn, which is the most aggressive option available to him. Black often combines ...c7-c5 with ...e7-e6, so it is no surprise that 3...e6 first and a later ...c7-c5 is met frequently. I decided to cover these set-ups via 3...c5 as well. There is no independent value in going 3...e6 first if Black has ...c7-c5 in mind.

4.♗g2

I'd like to mention that 4.c4 is an interesting alternative here. This position has been mostly reached by a completely different move order: 1.c4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 d5 4.d4. Black should equalize with 4...dxc4, but still this line is something to check if you like to vary your play. Now, after 4.♗g2, Black has two main approaches: to take on d4 or keep the tension for the moment.

4...cxd4

This particular move order is important to study. One key element of the Reversed Grünfeld concept is that the knight on d4 would like to capture on c6 after being attacked by ...e7-e5. The best sample line for this concept is 4...cxd4 5.0-0 ♘c6 6.♘xd4 e5 7.♘xc6 bxc6 8.c4, as examined in Chapter 5. Here, Black takes before placing a knight on c6. Therefore, White has to worry about being hit by ...e7-e5 and then being forced to retreat under unfavourable circumstances.

We also need to examine the move 4...e6 (this position may have arisen via different move orders, like 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 c5 4.♗g2 d5). We play the normal 5.0-0. Now, Black will most likely play 5...cxd4, which transposes to 4...cxd4 5.0-0 e6 (line A below). Another option is 5... ♘c6, which transposes to Chapter 6 after our standard move 6.c4. Black has one independent option: 5... ♗e7 will not transpose elsewhere in this chapter. 6.c4 dxc4.



This is a rare line and not that great for Black, but I always like to check what to do if they decide to take on c4. How do you get the pawn back? In the far more popular position with ....♘c6 being played instead of ...♗e7 (Chapter 6), we have ♘e5 available. Here, this makes little sense, so we need something else.

7.♕a4+ (I also like 7.dxc5 here. This is already a good option with ...♘c6 played instead of ...♗e7, and here ...♗f8-e7xc5 takes two moves to regain the pawn. Still, just checking on a4 will regain the pawn with a good game) 7...♗d7 (after 7...♘bd7 8.♕xc4 0-0 9.♖d1, we transpose into Chapter 9, where this position is reached via 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 ♗e7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 dxc4 7.♕c2 ♘bd7 8.♕xc4 c5 9.♖d1) 8.♕xc4 ♗c6 (this looks like Black's best bet to develop the bishop, but it has a concrete problem) 9.dxc5 (now, Black has to worry about getting the pawn back) 9...♘bd7 10.♗e3 (please avoid the premature 10.b4 a5, when 11.a3 is not possible and 11.b5 ♗d5 also fails) 10...♖c8 11.♘c3 b6 12.♖fd1 0-0 13.♖ac1, and Black now can't avoid ...bxc5 anymore, giving us the much better pawn structure.

5.0-0

This is very important. We should avoid 5.♘xd4 e5, which gives Black a good game. We will see that 5.0-0 e6 6.♘xd4 e5 is a respectable line for Black, and losing a full tempo on this is a bad idea. It is also interesting to compare our approach to the line 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 g6?! 3.c4 ♘f6 4.cxd5, which is part of our repertoire (Chapter 21). Here, Black lacks the crucial tempo to castle, as 4...♗g7 is hit by 5.♕a4+, and 4...♘xd5 5.e4 is excellent for White, as the black knight needs to retreat to the passive b6-square. Now at this point, rather often Black plays the most natural move 5...♘c6 (Chapter 5), after which 6.♘xd4 is the comfortable reply. More cunning are Black's tries to delay the knight move.

A) 5...e6 6.♘xd4



After Black has played ...e7-e6, it gets a bit more attractive to take on d4. Yes, Black might kick the knight to the b3-square, but it is a time-consuming affair with first ...e7-e6 and then ...e6-e5, losing a tempo. Please note that this position may arise from various move orders, for instance, via 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 c5 4.♗g2 cxd4 5.0-0 d5 6.♘xd4 or 1.d4 e6 2.♘f3 c5 3.g3 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♗g2 d5 6.0-0.

A1) 6...e5 7.♘b3

Black has built up a nice centre, but lacks development. We need to put pressure on the black pawn centre and ideally destroy it. We will continue with c2-c4 in most cases, attacking the d5-pawn immediately. There is one line where piece pressure is even more effective. Let's check the details.

A11) 7...♗e6 8.c4

Attacking the centre with the pawn makes the most sense to me. I need to mention that 8.♘c3 is also frequently played and is an interesting alternative.

8...♘c6 9.cxd5 ♘xd5

Another move for Black is 9...♗xd5.



10.♗h3 (I like this unconventional move. We avoid the trade and plan to attack the d5-bishop with ♘c3 next. That being said, the simple 10.♘c3 is slightly better for White as well – the d5-square is a bit weak) 10...♗e7 11.♘c3 ♗c4 12.♗g2. We are

slightly better here. The g2-bishop helps to build play on the queenside with moves like ♗e3 and ♕c2 to come.

10. ♘1d2

Our idea is to play ♘e4 and threaten ♘c5 and/or ♘g5.

10... ♗e7

The most obvious and frequently-played move. Black may also play the rare, but ambitious 10...♕c7, going for an early ...♖d8: 11.♘e4 ♖d8 12.♘g5 (you may also play 12.♗d2, intending ♖c1 and ♘c5 later. The knight jump leads to a fascinating queen sacrifice) 12...♘e3 13.♘xe6 fxe6 14.♕xd8+ ♕xd8 15.♗xe3.



Stockfish evaluates this position as equal. I would prefer White here, despite the material deficit. We have excellent pieces, are ahead in development and will very likely win one or more pawns as the pressure mounts after the rooks arrive on c1 and d1. I actually believe White is risking very little here, but if you feel uncomfortable with this position, there is 12.♗d2 for more conventional play.

11. ♘e4 b6

The alternative 11...♕b6 12.♘g5 is also quite annoying for Black: 12...♗xg5 13.♗xg5 h6 14.♗xd5 ♗xd5 15.♕xd5 hxg5 16.♖fd1, and Black's weakened pawn structure is not easy to handle.

12. ♘c3

This is more of a challenge than 12.♘g5 ♗xg5 13.♗xg5 f6, when Black equalizes quite comfortably.

12... ♘db4



13.a3

This initiates a forced sequence, leading to an interesting endgame. The following lines are a bit deeper than usual for this book, but there are only few alternatives along the way and you need to drill a bit to get a clearer verdict.

13...♕xd1 14.♖xd1 ♗xb3 15.axb4 ♖c8

Forced after 13.a3.

16.♗h3

I checked some alternatives here, but this is the most testing it seems.

16...♗xd1 17.♗xc8 ♗b3 18.♗b7 ♔d7 19.b5 ♘a5 20.♗d5 ♗xd5

In the game Cosma-Hoolt, Hersonissos 2017, 20...♗c2 21.♗xf7 was played. Probably, Black miscalculated some line after 20...♗xd5 and discarded the move. This, however, is just lost.

21.♘xd5



Black now should equalize with 21...♗d6. I am stopping at this point, being beyond move 20. Black may equalize at the end, but it is not an easy task to master, in particular over the board.

A12) 7...♘c6



8.♗g5

This move is even stronger than 8.c4. The reason is that after 7...♘c6, Black has forfeited the option to reinforce the knight on f6 with ...♘bd7. This is a key difference to 7...♗e6 8.♗g5 ♘bd7!, for example. Now, the pressure on d5 is mounting quickly – the c6-knight is not connected to the defence of this pawn at all.

8...♗e6 9.♘c3

Black is unable to defend d5 anymore and needs to advance in the centre.

9...d4 10.♘e4 ♗e7 11.♗xf6 gxf6

An alternative for Black is 11...♗xf6 12.♘bc5 (the knight is not misplaced on b3 all of the time!) 12...♗c8 13.♘xf6+ ♕xf6 14.c3. Black is under severe pressure. Our minor pieces are excellent assets.

12.♘ec5 ♗c8 13.♖c1



Stockfish suggests this new move, preparing to recapture with the rook after a future c2-c3 pawn move. The immediate c2-c3 is also promising for White.

A13) 7...♗e7 8.c4 d4

8...dxc4 9.♕xd8+ ♗xd8 10.♘3d2, with an excellent position for White. The g2-bishop is a monster and the knight on c4 will be very annoying for Black as well.

Note the weak square/pawn on d6 and e5.

9.e3

Attacking the centre quickly is best here. Now, Black either loses d4 or needs to advance the pawn again.

9...d3

After 9...♘c6 10.♗xc6+, I see no reason not to grab the central pawn. Yes, we give up the strong bishop, however it is not some unimportant flank pawn, but the d-pawn we win. 10...bxc6 11.exd4 exd4 12.♕xd4. I don't see sufficient compensation for the pawn. Our development is fine and the weakened light squares around the king are not going to be relevant anytime soon.

10.♘c3

Black's main problem is that the d-pawn is in danger of being cut off from the rest of the camp. After ideas like e3-e4 and ♘d5, the pawn is almost indefensible. ♘d2/♘d5 and ♕b3 is another way to corral the lone soldier on d3.

10...♗g4

The most interesting try.

11.♗f3 h5 12.e4 ♘c6 13.♗xg4 hxg4



14.♘d5

White enjoys a nice advantage, as both d3 and g4 are weak. There are promising alternatives here and on move 13; it's tough to choose the best one.

A2) 6...♘c6

This is quite inconsistent, but still frequently played.

7.c4

The standard move to attack the centre. Now, there are some possible transpositions to the Tarrasch, for example after the frequently-played 7...♗e7 8.♘c3 0-0 9.cxd5 exd5 10.♗e3. This is a promising line for White.

A21) 7...♗c5 8.♘b3

The alternative 8.♘xc6 bxc6 9.♕c2 is also quite promising. We need to know 8.♘b3 anyway, though. The reason is that there are other move orders. Here is an example: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 c5 4.♗g2 ♘c6 5.0-0 cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♗c5 7.♘b3 ♗b6 8.c4 d5, with a transposition!

8...♗b6

8...♗e7 9.♘c3 dxc4 10.♕xd8 ♗xd8 11.♘d2 leads to the same position as after the main move.



9.♘c3

This is a lot better than taking on d5, as White increases the pressure on d5 without allowing ...♗e6 to protect d5.

9...dxc4

Black may also play 9...d4 10.♘b5 e5 (otherwise, d4 would drop) 11.c5 ♗c7 12.♗g5. This looks very bad for Black – the pawn structure will suffer serious damage soon.

10.♕xd8+ ♗xd8 11.♘d2 ♘a5

Otherwise, we'd get the pawn back with a dream Catalan position.

12.b4

Continuing with the powerful play. Black is under huge pressure after the following forced sequence.

12...cxb3 13.axb3 0-0 14.♗a3 ♖e8 15.♘b5

White has a great position for just one pawn.



This pawn deficit will only be temporary – the pressure on the queenside is just too much to stand.

A22) 7...♕b6 8.♘xc6

The more tactically-focused 8.♘b5 is good too, but the position type after ♘xc6 is very common and you should know how to handle it.

8...bxc6 9.cxd5 cxd5

9...exd5 10.♘c3 transposes into a very promising line of the Tarrasch Defence, examined via 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 c5 3.c4 e6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.g3 ♘c6 6.♗g2 ♘f6 7.0-0 cxd4 8.♘xd4 ♕b6 9.♘xc6 bxc6 10.♘c3 in Chapter 3.

10.♘c3

White now has two dangerous ideas. One is to play e2-e4, the other is to play ♗e3, followed by a2-a4 and ♘b5. Black can't stop both of White's options.

10...♗b7 11.♗e3 ♕a6 12.a4



White has a dangerous initiative, with ♘b5 to come.

A3) 6...♗e7

This is surprisingly popular at this point, but quite clearly inconsistent with Black's earlier moves. Now, White reaches a very comfortable Catalan or Tarrasch type of

position.

7.c4 0-0 8.cxd5 ♘xd5

8...exd5 9.♘c3 leads to a favourable line of the Tarrasch. Black has captured on d4 too early.

9.♕b3

This is not the only move to keep a nice advantage, but it is quite natural. We intend to go ♖d1 next and enjoy the great bishop on g2.

B) 5...h6



A clever idea. Black plays a waiting move that actually turns out to be useful after 6.♘xd4 e5 7.♘b3 ♘c6, as the annoying pin ♗g5 is prevented. Again, it is useful to compare with 1.d4 g6 2.♘f3 d5 3.c4 ♘f6 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.e4 ♘b6 (Chapter 21), when 6.h3 is a key idea.

6.b3

We have some cunning waiting moves available as well! Now, it is not obvious what Black's best choice is, and we don't have many game samples to check. I'd like to mention that 6.♗f4 is a fine alternative waiting move.

6...♘c6

Black is playing the knight to c6 after all.

After 6...e6, I am briefly showing the following line to highlight an important idea for White: 7.♗b2 ♗c5 8.♘xd4 0-0 9.c4 dxc4 10.bxc4.



This is the idea I was hinting at. White should not be afraid of the isolated c-pawn. We have excellently-placed bishops and open lines, giving plenty of compensation for the structural deficit.

7. ♘xd4 e5 8. ♘xc6 bxc6 9.c4

And we have reached the typical reversed Grünfeld structure with the insertion of ...h7-h6 and b2-b3.

9... ♗e6 10. ♗b2

I slightly prefer White here, as Black needs to take care of the e5-pawn and the natural move 10... ♗d6 is not great.

10... ♗d6 11. ♘c3

Now, d5 is simply hanging and there is no ideal solution for Black.

11... ♗e7 12. ♖c1 0-0

This is a mistake, but it is useful to see how quickly Black may get into trouble in these structures.

13.cxd5 cxd5 14. ♘b5



With an excellent position for White.

C) 5...g6 6. ♘xd4 ♗g7



7. ♘b3

This is not the most obvious move, and certainly not the only playable one. In fact, White has a wide range of options to choose from at this particular point. Let's consider the moves:

1) There is also 7.c4, attacking the centre with the c-pawn. The main reason I did not choose this line is that Black usually replies 7...0-0, leading to a symmetrical position after 8.cxd5 ♘xd5. White can try to play for an advantage in this line, but this often requires very deep lines up to the endgame. The open nature of the position leads to many trades and you need to be very precise to exploit the extra tempo;

2) The other option is 7.♘c3, which is similar in nature to 7.♘b3. Both moves try to put piece pressure on the centre. The concrete issue with 7.♘c3 is the line 7...e5 8.♘b3 d4, which seems fine for Black.

The move 7.♘b3, my recommen-dation, actually prepares ♘c3 next, stopping the advance of the d-pawn. Note that this set-up with knights is well known in the Fianchetto Grünfeld: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘f3 ♗g7 4.g3 d5 5.cxd5 ♘xd5 6.♗g2 ♘b6 is a popular line. We are a tempo up of course.

c1) 7...♘c6 8.♘c3 e6 9.e4

Certainly the most principled move. However, I'd like to mention that this push is often delayed in similar positions with reversed colours. One way to delay it is to push the a-pawn, which is not a plan I'd consider to be particularly obvious. This idea is actually quite liked by the engines, so feel free to explore 9.a4!? as an interesting alternative. One peculiar point is that after a sequence like 9.a4 0-0 10.a5, it is not so obvious what Black's next move is if he wants to keep the option of ...d5-d4 alive against a future e2-e4 by White. This is quite interesting, but I don't see an issue with the more straightforward main suggestion.

9...d4

This is consistent, but Black may also play 9...0-0, which after 10.exd5 leads to a position we have checked via the move order with castling first on move seven.

10.♘a4

A knight on the rim is dim! Well, this one is no problem at all, as we will see.

10...0-0 11.c3

C11) 11...e5 12.cxd4 exd4 13.♖e1

In the annotations to the Nakamura-Anand game, GM Alex Yermolinsky mentioned this position and regarded it as 'too ambitious' for Black, but did not provide any further analysis. I actually understand why he stopped here, as Black now has many moves, and there is no obvious main line. I will pick a continuation that seems reasonable to me, but let's talk about ideas for a moment. White faces the passed d-pawn, but this will usually be stopped by ♘a4-c5-d3. White would like to push the e-pawn forward and probably needs to play f2-f4 to support it. This, however, weakens the dark squares, in particular e3 – so watch out for ...♘f6-g4-e3 ideas.

13...♖e8

As mentioned, there are many alternatives, but this is logical, stopping the e-pawn.

14.h3

White prepares f2-f4 without having to worry about ...♘f6-g4-e3.

14...♗e6

This is not the most intuitive move, but it is strong, as it fights against f2-f4 by subtle means.

15.♘ac5

Please avoid 15.f4, as 15...d3 is very problematic. We should blockade the pawn first, and only later go for f2-f4 if appropriate.



I am ending the line at this point, as it is already quite deep. We have now reached an interesting and sharp position with about equal chances.

C12) 11...dxc3

This is the move that was played in the two games that reached this position, but I think it is too accommodating and gives White a pleasant pull.

12.♘xc3 e5

Black needs to do something against White's possible expansion with f2-f4 and e4-e5, and prepares to develop the bishop on c8.

13.♗e3 ♗g4 14.f3 ♗e6 15.♘c5 ♕e7 16.♘xe6 ♕xe6



17. ♖f2

This improves on 17.♕d2 of Nakamura-Anand, London 2017. White intends to play ♕f1 and ♗h3, also clearing d1 for the a1-rook. White is slightly better, due to the bishop pair.

c2) 7...0-0

Black castles first, which is a substantial difference to 7...♘c6. Now, Black is not able to push the d-pawn forward after White's e2-e4 break in the centre.

8.♘c3 e6 9.e4



C21) 9...dxe4

Black may also take with the knight, leading to the same line.

10.♘xe4 ♘xe4 11.♕xd8 ♖xd8 12.♗xe4

White is slightly better here, which is also confirmed by the excellent score – *Megabase 2019* shows 7 wins and 4 draws, and no losses for White. Let's look at some more moves to show some ideas.

12...♘c6 13.c3 e5



14. ♗g2

This is the clever engine suggestion, improving on the moves played so far. The main point is that after the more obvious move 14. ♗e3, Black has 14... ♗e6, intending ... ♗d5 next. Now after 14. ♗g2, this reply is not possible.

14... ♗f8

This move covers the c5-square.

1) 14...f5 15. ♗g5 (after ...f7-f5, this is an attractive tempo move) 15... ♖e8 16. ♖fd1, and White is better, with useful pressure on the queenside and the d-file under control;

2) 14... ♗e6 15. ♘c5. Now, Black has no good reply, as 15... ♗d5 is not possible, due to 16. ♘xb7. Now, we see the difference: the bishop on g2 is protected, compared to the sequence 14. ♗e3 ♗e6 15. ♘c5 ♗d5, when the piece on e4 is attacked.

15. ♗g5 ♖e8 16. ♖fd1



Again, White is more comfortable, exerting annoying pressure.

c22) 9... ♘c6

This is a rarely-played move, but it is not bad at all. It is important to check, because it looks like a basic oversight by Black... but it is not.

10.exd5 exd5 11.♗g5

Black did not blunder d5, as the line 11.♘xd5 ♘xd5 12.♗xd5 ♘b4 13.♗e4 ♗h3 shows. Please avoid this, as it gives Black great compensation for the pawn.

11...h6 12.♗e3

Again, a pawn grab like 12.♗xf6 ♕xf6 13.♕xd5 ♗f5 gives Black too much play. Now, ♕d2 will come with a useful tempo. White should be slightly better here.



D) 5...♗d7

Yet another waiting move, anticipating the capture on d4.

6.♘xd4

We don't have such a useful waiting move available now. After something like 6.b3 ♘c6 7.♘xd4 e5 8.♘xc6 ♗xc6!, we reach a structure where the bishop is useful on c6 and b2-b3 looks slow. The simple capture on d4 is fine here.



D1) 6...e5 7.♘b3 ♗c6

This is consistent with the earlier moves, but it seems that 7...♗e6 is stronger. This move would take us to the line 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 c5 4.♗g2 cxd4 5.0-0 e6 6.♘xd4 e5 7.♘b3 ♗e6 8.c4. Please see this move order for details.

8.c4

Just the same recipe as after 7...♗e6.

D11) 8...d4 9.e3 d3 10.e4

A strong idea, isolating the d3-pawn from the rest of Black's camp. After a future ♘b1-c3-d5, the pawn is basically lost.

10...♘xe4 11.♖e1 ♘f6 12.♖xe5+ ♗e7 13.♗g5 0-0 14.♖e3

And White wins the adventurous d-pawn.

D12) 8...♗e7

Black is keeping the tension. I show this line mostly to discuss the instructive position after move 12.

9.cxd5 ♗xd5 10.♘c3 ♗xg2 11.♕xd8+ ♗xd8 12.♔xg2



This position looks rather equal at first, but closer inspection shows that White has a pull. Note that the d5-square is weakened and might be an excellent post for a knight. White is also able to get to the crucial open files somewhat quicker than Black does. White has easy moves like ♗g5/♗e3 and access to the open files for the rooks while Black has to find a good defensive set-up.

D2) 6...♘c6

This is not very consistent, and bad for Black.

7.c4

D21) 7...e5 8.♘xc6 ♗xc6 9.cxd5 ♘xd5

I know it sounds harsh, but 9...♗xd5 gets Black into an almost lost position: 10.♕a4+ ♕d7 11.♕xd7+ ♔xd7 12.♖d1 ♔e6 13.♗h3+ ♔e7 14.♘c3. Black is badly coordinated and his king is vulnerable. White is clearly better.

10.♕b3

White is much better here, with 11.♖d1 being the main threat. Black is in trouble to stay in the game.

D22) 7...dxc4 8.♘xc6 ♗xc6 9.♗xc6+ bxc6 10.♕c2

With a great structural advantage for White. Note that we won't take on c4 with the queen, but rather with the knight.

10...e6 11.♘d2 ♗e7 12.♘xc4



And Black will suffer with his eternally weak queenside pawns.

Conclusion

Black has good chances of equalizing in some lines of this chapter, but he needs to know the details well to get there. It is important to note that these lines are not very common at club level at all, as some moves for Black are not very natural. I advise focusing on learning the ...e7-e6 lines (A above) first, as they arise most often and frequently via other move orders, for example, after 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 c5.

CHAPTER 5

Grünfeld Reversed – Black takes on d4 with ... ♘c6: 2... ♘f6 3.g3 c5 4. ♗g2 cxd4 5.0-0 ♘c6

1.d4 d5 2. ♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 c5 4. ♗g2 cxd4 5.0-0 ♘c6



After 5.0-0, Black has the choice to delay ... ♘c6 or play this natural move. Chapter 4 covers Black's attempts to play without ... ♘c6 and also includes a detailed discussion of the moves up to this point.

6. ♘xd4

This position is also very frequently reached via the move order 1.d4 d5 2. ♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 c5 4. ♗g2 ♘c6 5.0-0 cxd4 6. ♘xd4.

6...e5

After the less consistent 6...e6 7.c4, we reach a position we examine via 1.d4 d5 2. ♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 c5 4. ♗g2 cxd4 5.0-0 e6 6. ♘xd4 ♘c6 7.c4 (Chapter 4).

7. ♘xc6 bxc6 8.c4



The starting position of the Reversed Grünfeld main line. Compared to the proper Grünfeld line 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3. ♘c3 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.e4 ♘xc3 6.bxc3 ♗g7

7.♘f3 c5, we have the extra move 0-0, which is universally useful. The nature of the position, with the immediate struggle in the centre, suggests that a useful extra tempo might change the evaluation significantly compared to the regular Grünfeld. Concrete analysis confirms this assumption: Black in fact needs to be very precise to avoid immediate problems, facing moves like ♗g5, ♘c3 and ♕a4 to pressurize the pawn centre. Black has tried a range of moves in this starting position, basically the same moves that White has available in the Grünfeld. However, the extra tempo is so significant that many of those moves actually land Black in trouble quickly. One important point is that Black might reach this position without any specific knowledge, and this is almost a sure recipe for disaster.

A) 8...♗e6

Looking at the alternatives suggests that this is the most challenging move. We are better as well after 8...♗e6, but it requires more precision to prove it.

9.♕a4

White also has 9.♘c3, which will often lead to the same main line that we reach after 9.♕a4. There is just a small difference: after 9.♕a4, we more or less force ...♕d7, when 10.♘c3 ♖c8 is the main line. Now, after 9.♘c3 ♖c8!, 10.♕a4 does not work, due to 10...d4!.

We could instead trade on d5 with 10.cxd5 cxd5 11.♕a4+ ♕d7 12.♕xd7+ ♔xd7, transposing to the main line again. Now, after first 9.♕a4 ♕d7 10.♘c3 ♖c8, I recommend trading on d5, but this is not a forced move and White has an interesting alternative that I will only briefly show.

In summary, 9.♕a4 first doesn't have a drawback, but gives an extra option.

9...♕d7 10.♘c3



10...♖c8

This is more or less forced.

1) 10...♖d8 11.♗g5 ♗e7 12.♗xf6 ♗xf6 13.♖fd1, and White wins the d5-pawn with a great position as well;

2) 10...♖b8. Black has ...♖b4 in mind, but it fails to address White's main

intention: 11.cxd5 cxd5 12.♕xd7+ ♔xd7 13.♖d1 (in the main line 10...♖c8, we get this position with the rook on c8 instead, which is a huge difference) 13...♗c5 (Black drops d5, trying to be as active as possible in the endgame; 13...d4 14.e3 ♗c5 15.♘a4, and Black loses the pawn after all) 14.♘xd5 ♘xd5 15.♗xd5 ♖hd8 (now we see the main difference with having the rook on c8. Black is not able to take on d5) 16.♗c4+ ♔e7 17.♖xd8 ♖xd8 18.♗d3, and White retains the extra pawn with good chances for conversion in the endgame.

11.cxd5

It was actually quite difficult to decide what to recommend here, as there is an interesting alternative to the endgame. I also like the move 11.♗g5, which leads to a complicated position with queens on the board. Black's task is not easy at all after 11.♗g5, given that he very likely needs to figure it out over the board. Here is a quick overview as a starting point for your own analysis: Black needs to go 11...d4, after which 12.♖ad1 is the most critical. Now, many moves get Black into serious trouble, for example, 12...♕b7 13.♗xf6 gxf6 14.♘d5 is good for White, as is 12...♕c7 13.♘d5. The best for Black seems to be 12...♗e7, after which 13.e3 0-0 14.♗xf6 or 14.exd4 are interesting and easier for White to play. So 11.♗g5 is a fine move, but you will see that the endgame after the main move 11.cxd5 is no picnic for Black either.

11...cxd5 12.♕xd7+ ♔xd7 13.♖d1



13...♗c5

The only move, but not an easy decision for Black – unless you know it beforehand, of course. With 13...♗c5, Black sacrifices the d5-pawn, correctly arguing that the active pieces will compensate for the material loss. We don't need to accept this challenge, though. We have a much better move available that still sets serious problems.

1) 13...d4 doesn't work, but has been played frequently, even by a GM in 2018: 14.e3 ♗g4 (14...♗c5 15.exd4 ♗xd4 16.♘b5, and White wins) 15.f3 ♔e8 16.exd4 exd4 17.fxg4 (of course, not 17.♖xd4? ♗c5) 17...dxc3



18.♖e1+, and White is winning again. The bishops on the wide open board will be deadly for the black king;

2) 13...♖c5 14.♗g5, and we win the d5-pawn, unless Black goes for Steinitz' king: 14...♔c6 15.♗e3 ♖c4 16.♖ac1, and White wins. Black has no answer to the threats of b2-b3 and ♘xd5;

3) 13...♔c6 is far too risky and is punished by simple means: 14.♗g5 e4 15.♖ac1 ♔b7 (this was forced after 13...♔c6) 16.f3. A useful idea to remember. White activates the bishop and breaks down Black's central pawns.

14.♘a4

This is the testing move, but what happens if the pawn gets taken? After 14.♘xd5 ♗xd5 15.♗xd5 ♗xd5 16.♖xd5 ♔e6 17.♖d2 ♖hd8 18.♔f1 ♗b6, Black is threatening ...♖xc1+, which forces 19.♖xd8 ♖xd8, and now White has no good way to convert the pawn. Please note that this concept is very tough to develop over the board for players on the black side. This is why many strong players did not play 13...♗c5, giving up the pawn. I'd like to add that 14.♗g5 leads nowhere after 14...♘g4!.

Now, back to 14.♘a4. I am not sure what Black's best reply is actually. White has a pull everywhere, so let's have a look at some possibilities.



A1) 14...h6

This was played in the latest classical time control game that reached this position.

Black covers g5 and plans to retreat the bishop comfortably next.

15. ♘xc5+

We happily grab the bishop pair.

15... ♖xc5



16.f4

This is the improvement on the game Karsay-Neukirchner, Germany tt jr 2018, which featured the move 16. ♗d2. This is not a bad move at all and keeps a slight edge, but the f-pawn push is stronger.

A11) 16...e4 17.h3

We'd like to play g3-g4 next, threatening to trap the e6-bishop.

17... ♖c2

An alternative for Black could be 17...h5 to stop g3-g4: 18. ♗e3 ♖c2 (18... ♖c7 19. ♗d4 is a disastrous position for Black. We push the queenside pawns, supported by the fantastic bishops: e2-e3, and ♗f1 is coming soon) 19. ♗xa7 ♖xe2 20. ♗d4, and Black won't have much fun here, fighting against the pawns.



18.g4 ♔e7 19.♗e3

Now I don't see a fully satisfactory solution for Black. Taking on e2 and b2 does not work, and playing 19...a5 seems to be the relatively best move.

19...a5

An alternative for Black is 19...♖xe2 (Black might also take the b-pawn first; it leads to the same position): 20.♗c5+ ♔d8 21.♗xa7 ♖xb2 22.a4, and White has a winning position here already, as the a-pawn is just too strong.

20.♖ac1

It's move 20 and I need to cut at some point. White is better here, based on the better pieces and the potential passer on the queenside. But wait, what happens if Black snatches a pawn now?

20...♖xb2

The other option is 20...♖xe2 21.♗c5+ ♔d8 22.f5 ♗d7 23.♗d4, and the black rook is trapped!

21.♖c7+ ♔d6



22.♖a7

And White has a winning attack. If you are unsure about assessments like that, analyse a bit yourself, then ask the computer for assistance. It helps a lot to understand the positions better if you put in some analysis work yourself.

A12) 16...exf4 17.♗xf4

White threatens both e2-e4 and ♗e3 and is better. We should check the active reply 17...♖c2.

17...♖c2 18.e4 ♖xb2 19.exd5 ♗f5 20.♗e5 ♖e2 21.♗xf6 gxf6 22.♖f1

We are winning f6 with a large endgame advantage.

22...♖e5

This saves the pawn, but...

23.♖xf5 ♖xf5 24.♗h3

Not a good day at the office for the black rook.

A2) 14...♗d6

Black keeps the bishop, but a forced line leads to a large advantage for White now.

15.♗g5 ♖c2

Black can try to save the pawn with 15...d4, but this leads to other problems: 16.e3 dxe3 (otherwise, we'd simply win d4) 17.♗xe3, and Black has no reasonable reply now. The a7-pawn is attacked and ♘c5 is an additional nuisance, for example after the following: 17...♖c7 18.♘c5+ ♔e7 19.♘b7, and Black loses material.

16.♗xf6 gxf6 17.♗xd5

And again we pocket the d5-pawn.

17...♖xe2

A mistake, but it is tough to spot what is wrong with it.

After 17...♔e7 18.♗e4 (again ♗e4, using the idea of trapping the rook) 18...♖c4 (18...♖xe2 19.♗d3, and the rook is trapped) 19.♘c3, White has a comfortable advantage.



18.♗e4

Wow, this is an easy move to miss! The bishop can't be taken, due to 19.♘c5+ and we threaten to trap the rook with 19.♗d3. Black is completely lost!

18...♗c4 19.♖ac1 ♗xa2 20.♗f3

And it is trapped!

A3) 14...♔e7

Black finally wants to leave the d-file, but the cure is even worse than the disease in this case.

15.♘xc5 ♖xc5 16.b3

And Black can't avoid returning to the d-file now – ouch!

16... ♖c2 17. ♗a3+ ♔d7 18.e4 d4



19.f4

With a clear advantage for White.

A4) 14... ♗e7

It's understandable that Black wants to keep this piece.

15. ♗g5



15... ♘g8

This is an inventive defence, but it is very slow. We were threatening to simply take on f6 and d5, winning a pawn – so it's a case of what else?

1) 15... ♖c2 16. ♗xf6 ♗xf6 17. ♗xd5 ♗xd5 18. ♖xd5+ ♔e6 19.e4, with an extra pawn and ♖a5 to come;

2) 15...d4 16.e3 h6 17.exd4 hxg5 18.dxe5+ ♔e8 19.exf6 ♗xf6 20. ♗d5, and again White keeps the extra pawn.

16. ♗e3 d4 17. ♗d2

White wants to play e2-e3 next.

17...♘h6 18.e3 ♘f5



Black's idea behind 17...♘h6.

19.♗c3

I'll stop at this point. Black still has a hard time protecting the d-pawn and White has persistent pressure.

B) 8...♗e7



This looks like a normal developing move, but it does not relate to the pressure on d5 and already leads to severe problems for Black.

9.♘c3

B1) 9...♗e6 10.♗g5 e4

After 10...♘g8 follows 11.cxd5 cxd5 12.♕a4+ ♕d7 13.♕xd7+ ♔xd7 14.♗e3 ♘f6 15.♖fd1, and Black loses the d5-pawn.

11.♕a4 0-0 12.♖ad1

White exerts enormous pressure on the black centre. The concrete threat is to trade on f6 and win the e-pawn with 14.♗xe4.

12...♕e8



13.e3

You already have the option to go for a clear endgame advantage with 13.♗xf6 ♗xf6 14.cxd5 cxd5 15.♕xe8 ♖fxe8 16.♘xd5, but I wonder what Black's move is after this waiting move? We just intend to go for the endgame, including the useful extra move e2-e3.

B2) 9...d4

A well-known idea in the Grünfeld, but it is not sufficient here.

10.♗xc6+ ♗d7 11.♗xa8 ♕xa8

Black has given up some material, but intends to get the exchange back with ...♗h3.

12.♘d5

It is important to play actively, not minding to return a pawn.

12...♘xd5 13.cxd5 ♕xd5 14.♕b3 ♕a8 15.♗d2

This is a good solution. Black now may win back the exchange, but the resulting position is terrible for him.

15...♗h3 16.♕b5+ ♔f8 17.f3 ♗xf1 18.♔xf1



Black is lost here. The e5-pawn is attacked, and ♖a1-c1-c7 will lead to a decisive attack.

B3) 9...e4

This move is already an admission of failure in a strategic sense (the d4-square!), but the concrete issues are even more serious.

10.♕b3

There are other fine moves as well, but this is particularly strong.

10...♗e6 11.♖d1

Now, there is pressure on e4 as well, due to the pin on the d-file.

11...♕b6 12.cxd5 cxd5 13.♗e3 ♕xb3 14.axb3



The a-pawn is attacked, but ♘b5 and ♗d4 ideas are very annoying as well. Black has no satisfactory reply anymore.

C) 8...h6

Black decides to stop the annoying pin once and for all. Still, this is not exactly a developing move and leads to a clear advantage for White.

9.♘c3 ♗e6 10.♕a4



c1) 10...♗d7

This is more testing than the more natural ...♕d7.

11.cxd5 cxd5 12.♕a6 ♗c8

12...♗e6 13.♘b5, threatening 14.♕c6+, followed by ♘c7+. After a further ♗e3, we might just win the a7-pawn. Black is in severe trouble.

13.♕d3 e4

13...♗e6 14.♖d1, and the d5-pawn drops.



14.♕c2

Our next move will be ♖d1, threatening ♘xe4. There are ideas of ♗e3 and ♘b5 as well. Black will have a hard time keeping material equality.

c2) 10...♕d7 11.cxd5 cxd5 12.♕xd7+ ♔xd7



13. ♖d1

It is useful to compare this position with the one after 8... ♗e6 9. ♕a4 ♕d7 10. ♘c3 ♖c8 11.cxd5 cxd5 12. ♕xd7+ ♔xd7 13. ♖d1. Here, ...h7-h6 is clearly the less useful move, rendering the pawn sacrifice insufficient.

13... ♔c6

I found 11 games with this move in *Megabase 2019*, with a convincing 100% score for White. The pawn sacrifice does not work now: 13... ♗c5 14. ♘xd5 ♘xd5 15. ♗xd5 ♖ad8 (with the a8-rook on c8 already, instead of ...h7-h6, Black would be able to take on d5) 16. ♗xe6+ ♔xe6 17. ♗d2. White is a pawn up and Black has no compensation.

14. ♗e3

And ♖c1 is coming next. Black is helpless against the threats mounting up.

D) 8... ♖b8



In the proper Grünfeld, 8. ♖b1 is a sharp and ambitious move. It is therefore no surprise that it has been employed here as well. Closer inspection, however, shows that Black has some problems.

9. ♗g5

This is an important point to remember! The other standard moves lead to nothing special. 9.♕a4 can be answered with ...♗d7, and 9.♘c3 d4 shows one point of Black's rook move to b8. The latter line is not 100% clear, but anyway 9.♗g5 is stronger. The main issue for Black is that taking on b2 now does not work out too well.

D1) 9...♖xb2

Much to my surprise, the database shows that super-GM David Navara played into this as Black in a 2017 classical time control game.

10.cxd5

This is better than 10.♘c3 ♕a5!, as played in the Navara game. 10.♗xf6 first and cxd5 on the next move amounts to the same as my suggestion.

10...cxd5 11.♗xf6



D11) 11...gxf6 12.♗xd5

Just as after 11...♕xf6, here 12.♘c3 is a very worthy alternative. I prefer the recapture on d5, though. We have a great position after this simple move, without any material deficit or other risk.

12...♗e7

The only still somewhat playable move according to the engines, but it still does not solve Black's problems.

13.♕c1

A great move! It attacks the rook, frees up d1 for ♖f1-d1 and eyes the important squares e3 and, more importantly, h6.

13...♕xd5

Another option that Black may play is 13...♖b6 14.♖d1 ♖d6 15.♘c3 0-0 16.♕e3. Black needs a heroic defence here to stay in the game.

14.♕xc8+ ♗d8 15.♘c3 ♕e6



16.♕c5

And again Black is on the ropes.

D12) 11...♕xf6 12.♗xd5

I also analysed 12.♘c3, which is very dangerous as well. After 12...d4, White has the engine move 13.♕c1!, leading to a strong attack. However, I think that taking with the bishop is easier to play. Note that we also have the idea ♗b3 in some lines, trapping the rook on b2. ♘c3-e4 is a useful tempo in many lines. One possible continuation is the following:

12...♗d7 13.♘c3 ♗e7



14.♗b3

With a trapped rook on b2 and ideas of ♘e4 or ♘d5, White is close to winning already.

D2) 9...♗e7

This is bad, due to a forced line.

10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.cxd5 cxd5 12.♗xd5 ♖xb2

After 12...0-0 13.♗b3, White keeps the pawn. Black has slight compensation with the bishop pair, but I don't think it is enough.

13.♕a4+ ♗d7



14.♕xa7

From here, you have a simple plan: promote the a-pawn!

D3) 9...♗e6 10.♘c3

Black's set-up does not add up at all. We are simply threatening to take on f6 and win d5. I see no reasonable way for Black to continue.

10...e4 11.♕a4 ♕d7

This position was reached in a blitz game between two very strong players. In this game, Cheparinov played 12.♗xf6 and his opponent Le Quang Liem survived. There is a much stronger move, but it is not something you find in a blitz game.

12.a3

White stops ...♖b4 and will put a rook on d1 next.

12...♖xb2 13.♗xf6 gxf6



14. ♖fd1

Now, the main threats are 15. ♘xe4 and 15. ♗xe4, which are just devastating.

ε) 8... ♗b7

Black tries to support d5 from b7, but the bishop is very passive and the pressure on Black's centre is mounting quickly.

9. ♕a4 ♕d7 10. ♗g5 ♗e7 11. ♘c3

Black is already facing the threat to the d5-pawn. It seems best to advance, but there is no good solution anymore.

11...d4 12. ♖fd1 0-0



13.e3

Black has huge problems with the d-pawn and will most likely lose it. Note that White has ideas like ♗xf6 followed by ♘e4 and c4-c5, increasing the pressure.

Conclusion

White has excellent chances to emerge from the Reversed Grünfeld with ... ♘c6 with an advantage. Even if Black is very knowledgeable, he will have a very hard time against the presented lines. Any second-rate play will lead to severe trouble for Black.

CHAPTER 6

Grünfeld Reversed – Black does not take on d4: 2...♘f6 3.g3 c5 4.♗g2 ♘c6 5.0-0

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 c5 4.♗g2 ♘c6 5.0-0



Black often captures on d4 in this position, leading to the previous chapter. But there are other options that keep the tension, most importantly the move 5...e6, which covers the c5-pawn. In this chapter, we will examine these alternatives for Black. It splits into four segments:

A) Black plays 5...e6 – 6.c4:

A1) 6...dxc4 – this is by far the main line of this chapter;

A2) 6...♗e7 – after 7.cxd5, this leads to the Tarrasch or Semi-Tarrasch.

B) Black plays 5...♗g4 – an ambitious move that leads to sharp play;

C) Black plays 5...♗f5 – a natural move, but it does not equalize.

Of these four lines, the only theoretically fully-sound line is line A1, but our reply forces Black to play very precisely. Let's check A to C one by one.

A) 5...e6 6.c4



Black now has an important choice to make. He can keep the tension with 6...♗e7 or take one of the pawns. After 6...cxd4 7.♘xd4, we reach a favourable position that we examine via the move order 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 c5 4.♗g2 cxd4 in Chapter 4.

A1) 6...dxc4

White has an amazingly wide choice of interesting lines here. I am recommending 7.♘e5, because it is – in my opinion – easy to play and it contains some traps that will make it a heavy scorer, in particular at club level. Excellent alternatives are 7.♕a4, 7.♘a3 and 7.dxc5. The move 7.dxc5 leads to endgames that force Black to be precise to hold a draw. This would also fit well with the 'Keep it Simple' concept, but you will see that 7.♘e5 is also simple, just in a different way. The knight jump plays for utmost piece activity at the cost of a pawn, if Black knows/finds the best reply. You will see that it is a lot simpler for White to play, as we have standard moves to build up the initiative, while Black needs to defend precisely. Still, 7.dxc5 is an excellent alternative if you love endgames.



7.♘e5

A11) 7...♗d7

This is by far the best move, but it is only played in about half of the games if you look at all levels of play. If you only look at games with a black rating below 2200, it shows a different picture. White scores close to 80% with 7.♘e5, because most players choose 7...♘xe5, getting them into immediate trouble.

8.♘a3

I like this best, but 8.♘xc4 is an interesting alternative.

8...cxd4

Black may also play 8... ♖c8.



This is rare and quite bad, but the refutation is not obvious at all! 9. ♘exc4 looks odd, but White has the simple idea of playing ♘b5 and delivering a deadly check on d6. Black has no good reply anymore and will be clearly worse: 9... ♘xd4 (at least stopping ♘b5, but it's not much fun either) 10. ♗xb7 ♖b8 11. ♗g2, and White is a lot better, with ♗f4 or ♗e3 to come.

9. ♘axc4

And we have reached the position type that I mentioned in the annotation to 7. ♘e5. White is a pawn down, but we have very good, active pieces. What I like about this line: White has a standard set-up for the next moves. Unless Black's play requires a particular reaction, we will play ♗f4, ♕b3 and put the rooks on c1 and d1. Usually, this pressure is enough to win the pawn back – at least. I feel White is risking very little with the pawn sacrifice and it is rather simple to play. After 9. ♘axc4, Black's main moves are 9... ♗e7 and 9... ♗c5, preparing to castle.

A111) 9... ♗e7



10. ♕b3

As usual, White has a good alternative in 10. ♗f4, if you like to add more variety to

your repertoire.

A111a) 10...♕c8

The most likely move to occur in a practical game. Black also has 10...♕c7, but this is less likely to be played by someone who tries to find the best solution over the board.

11.♗f4 0-0 12.♖ac1

The typical play based on ♗f4 and ♖ac1 is very logical. We increase the pressure on the c-file and against the c6-knight.

12...♖d8

12...♘d5 will most likely transpose to 12...♖d8 on the next move, but there is an independent possibility that is worth looking at: 13.♖fd1 ♘xf4 (of course, 13...♖d8 would be the transposition back to 12...♖d8) 14.gxf4. This is a structure that arises quite frequently in this line. The doubled pawn is not all that weak and helps to support the knight on e5. White will now very likely win a pawn back: 14...♖d8 15.♗xc6 (it is possible to keep the tension, but regaining the pawn is fine here) 15...♗xc6 16.♘a5 ♖d5 17.♘axc6 bxc6 18.♘xc6 ♕d7 19.♖c4. We have restored the material balance. I'd still prefer White here, but the engine shows an equal evaluation. It definitely makes sense to explore a position like this even more, but I don't want to extend this analysis beyond move 20.



13.♖fd1 ♘d5 14.♘xc6

Here, White also has 14.♗xd5 exd5 15.♘a5, which leads to enormous complications. I could not quite make it work, but it is very interesting to analyse. Instead, I recommend regaining the pawn with the simple capture on c6.

14...♗xc6 15.♗e5

White is regaining the pawn on d4 and keeps the slightly more active position. Black is probably fine with precise play, but we have the easier job with the more active pieces.

A111b) 10...♕c7

This move is probably stronger than 10...♕c8, but it is not played as often. We'll see why right after the natural reply.

11.♗f4

White is obviously threatening various knight discoveries, which will persuade many black players to avoid 10...♕c7. Black has only one way to deal with the threats.

11...♘h5

Black needs to allow the discovery with this move or 11...♘d5. They both lead to the same position after 11...♘d5 12.♘xc6 ♘xf4 13.♘xe7. The move 11...♘d5 allows 12.♗xd5, but I couldn't find an advantage, so just handling it identically to 11...♘h5 is the best option.

12.♘xc6 ♘xf4 13.♘xe7 ♘xg2



When deciding on 10...♕c7, Black needed to know or foresee that the ensuing complications are satisfactory.

14.♖fd1

Not exactly the most obvious move! White has some interesting moves here. I checked 14.♖ac1 and 14.♖fc1; both are possible and pose some problems for Black. However, the more subtle 14.♖fd1 immediately poses a question that is very easy to get wrong.

14...♕c5

This seems to be the only satisfactory move! 14...♔xe7 leads to trouble for Black:

15.♕b4+ ♔f6 (15...♔d8 16.♖xd4 wins immediately for White, with ♖ad1 being the most menacing threat) 16.♖xd4. Defending this position is going to be terrible for Black. It is not lost by force, but one misstep will be fatal:

1) 16...♗c6 17.♕c3 ♔e7 18.♘e5 (a nice shot!) 18...♖hc8 19.♖c4, and we will take on c6 and win the piece back with a nice edge. Black's king is still unsafe and the pawn structure is also problematic after the capture on c6;

2) 16...♖hd8 17.♘d6 ♗c6



18.♖ad1. The main point to be aware of: just play like you are NOT a piece down. Currently, the knight on g2 is trapped and Black faces a tough defence. The knight will most likely drop in the complications. One idea is to play e2-e4 and cut it off from the defending bishop.

15.♕xb7

This leads to complicated play that is hard to evaluate. However, I need to mention that White also has 15.♖xd4, which basically forces a draw! This may come in handy if you play a much stronger opponent and are happy with a peaceful result. The main point is 15...♕xd4 16.♖d1 ♕c5 17.♖xd7 ♔xd7 18.♕xb7+ ♕c7 19.♘e5+ ♔d6 20.♘xf7+ ♔e7 21.♘e5+, with a forced draw.

15...♔xe7 16.♖ac1

The intruder on g2 is not going to escape. Now, Black has more than one move and we are already rather deep on move 16. I'll show some more moves for a sensible line.

16...♖hc8 17.♕xg2 ♗c6 18.♕h3 ♕d5 19.f3 ♗b5 20.b3 ♗xc4 21.bxc4 ♖xc4



22.♕xh7

It's equal according to the engines, but I'd still rather be White, having the safer king.

A112) 9...♗c5



This looks a bit more 'active' than 9...♗e7, as it lends additional cover to the d4-pawn. The bishop is unprotected, though, and quite often we can use this to play moves like ♕b5 or ♘d3 with tempo.

10.♕b3

The first move of the standard set-up with ♕b3/♗f4/♖ac1/♖ad1. Now, Black needs to decide what to do about the b7-pawn. The best line for Black is probably either 10...0-0 11.♗f4 ♕c8 or 10...♕c8 11.♗f4 0-0, leading to the same position.

A112a) 10...0-0

This is probably best, but is not an easy move to make if you need to find it over

the board. Black recognizes that 11.♕xb7 is not such a big threat, so castling is possible.

11.♗f4

Increasing the pressure instead of prematurely regaining the pawn. I'd like to mention that it is not bad to take on b7, but it is not too promising after 11.♕xb7 ♘xe5 12.♘xe5 ♖b8 13.♕f3 ♘d5. The position is about equal.

11...♕c8

Black may also return the pawn with 11...♖c8: 12.♕xb7 (it's time to take the pawn now. Against a slow move like 12.♖ac1, Black has 12...b6, which saves the b-pawn and covers the c5-bishop for further consolidation) 12...♘xe5 13.♘xe5 ♖b8 (compared to the earlier 11.♕xb7, we now have the extra move ♗f4, but of course, b2 is hanging, due to that extra move) 14.♕f3 (14.♕a6?? ♗b5!, and 14.♕xb8 does not seem to be that promising either) 14...♖xb2



15.♖fc1. We are already on move 15 and Black now has more than one sensible move. I don't want to go much deeper, but let's look at the move that was played in the GM game Sasikiran-Bacrot, Moscow 2010: 15...♗d6. Sasikiran played 16.♘c4, which was not bad at all either. Taking on f7 leads to crazy complications, of which I'd like to show one entertaining line: 16.♘xf7 ♖xf7 17.♗xd6 ♗b5 18.♗c5 ♗xe2 19.♕a3 ♖d2 20.♗b4 ♖d3 21.♕a5, and White is winning now, surprisingly! Against a queen move on the back rank, White has ♖e1 and ♗f1 next, trapping the rook! 21...♕xa5 leads to mate! 22.♖c8+ ♕d8 23.♖xd8+ ♘e8 24.♖xe8+ ♖f8 25.♖xf8#. What a nice job by the white rook. This long line was mostly given due

to entertainment value, and you don't need to know all this by heart. White has good compensation for the pawn in all lines after 15.♖fc1, and analysing every possible black reply against it is not practical.

12.♖ac1



12...♘d5

This is by far the best move.

1) 12...b6 looks bad at first sight, and even worse after a closer look: 13.♘d6 ♕c7 14.♘dxf7, and White is winning quickly;

2) 12...♖d8 is also punished quickly: 13.♘xf7 ♔xf7 14.♗xc6 ♗xc6 15.♘e5+ ♔g8 16.♖xc5, with a great position for White;

3) If Black plays a slow move like 12...h6, we have the already familiar ♘d3 idea: 13.♘d3 ♗e7 14.♘d6 ♗xd6 15.♗xd6 ♖e8



16.♖fd1. We will play ♘e5 next and win back the d4-pawn later, enjoying a sizable advantage.

13.♘d3 ♘xf4

This move makes a lot of sense: Black avoids the ♘d6 invasion and gets the bishop pair.

Black's alternative 13...♗e7 looks worse than taking on f4, but it does not seem to be terribly bad for Black. White has good compensation, but it is not much more than that: 14.♘d6 ♗xd6 15.♗xd6 ♖d8 16.♕a3. This is not the only move to keep the pressure up, but I like it most here. The queen is covering the d6-bishop, and ♗c5 is an idea, attacking the d4-pawn. Alternatives like 16.♖fd1 or the creative 16.g4 are interesting as well.

14.gxf4

We are fine with the doubled pawn. It will support the knight on e5, which is more important than the small structural deficit.

14...♗e7



15.♘ce5

White is already applying severe pressure to c6, and it may well increase after, say, ♖c4 and ♖fc1.

15...♖b8

A clever move, anticipating the possible sequence. After a slow move like 15...♕c7 16.♘xd7 (you may also keep the tension with 16.♖c4, keeping more pieces on the board, as happened in a GM game. I'd like to show a common way to get the pawn back instead) 16...♕xd7 17.♗xc6 bxc6 18.♘e5 ♕c7 19.♘xc6 we have regained the pawn and still have the easier play here, in my opinion. The knight on c6 is very

annoying for Black.

16.♖c2

A line like 16.♘xd7 ♕xd7 17.♕a4 ♖bc8 18.♖fd1 will always win the pawn back some moves later, but keeping the tension is a good alternative. White has far too much pressure to allow Black to 'convert' the extra pawn. Both sides now have some options on each move, so I'll stick to one sensible sample line.

16...♖d8 17.♖fc1 h6 18.♘xc6 ♗xc6



19.♕c4

And again, White will easily win the pawn back and keep some nagging pressure.

A112b) 10...♕c8

This is the most likely move if Black has to play this position over the board.

11.♗f4 ♘d5

This move has a flaw, based on the vulnerable bishop. Black should play 11...0-0 instead, transposing to 10...0-0 11.♗f4 ♕c8.



12.♘d3

The tempo on the bishop is very important, as we threaten ♘d6+ as well.

12...♗e7

Here, Black may also play 12...♘xf4. After 13.♘xc5 ♘xe2+ 14.♔h1 (we threaten 15.♘d6+, and at the same time the knight on e2 has no way out) 14...0-0 15.♘xd7 ♕xd7



16.♕d3, we win the knight with a large advantage.

13.♘d6+ ♗xd6 14.♗xd6



And White has a very dangerous attack against the uncastled black king.

A112c) 10...♖b8

This is a huge mistake, but it has occurred in blitz games of mine.

11.♗f4

This is rather embarrassing. Black has no good reply to the threat to the b8-rook.

A113) 9...♘xe5

Black tries to relieve some pressure by trading.

10.♘xe5 ♕b6



The only move to justify the trade on e5. White was attacking both d4 and b7, and only the queen move addresses both threats.

11. ♘xd7

This is played most of the time. White nets the bishop pair and has a concrete follow-up on the next move.

11... ♘xd7 12. ♕a4

This is the main idea behind taking on d7. White pins the d7-knight, making it difficult for Black to castle.

12... ♖d8

The alternative 12... ♕b4 returns the pawn and leads to a one-sided endgame: 13. ♕xb4 ♗xb4 14. ♖d1 ♗c5 15. ♗xb7 ♖b8



16. ♗a6. This is going to be an unattractive defensive task for Black. We have the bishops, a 2 to 1 majority on the queenside and play against the d4-pawn. Ideas like b2-b3 and ♗b2 next come to mind.

13. ♖d1

This new, but rather natural, move has been suggested by Stockfish. It is actually not that easy to determine the best choices here, as many lines offer promising play. The bishop pair and active pieces give White long-term compensation.

13...♗c5

Here, Black may also play 13...e5.



This looks dubious, as it does not speed up development and weakens the light squares even more. Now, 14.e3 is just one good line among many, for instance, 14.♗d2 is also strong. I'll show one principled line now, involving Black grabbing material: 14...♗c5 15.exd4 ♗xd4 16.♗e3 ♗xe3 (otherwise, we'd get d4 back, with an ongoing initiative) 17.fxe3 ♕xe3+ 18.♔h1 ♔e7 19.♕h4+. I'll stop here. White has an excellent attack for the material deficit. The engines manage to defend Black's position, but it's terrible to play over the board.

14.♗g5 ♗e7

Another possibility is 14...f6 15.♗d2. After Black has played ...f7-f6, his king safety is severely compromised. We will always have good play for the pawn here. 15...d3 16.e3 ♕xb2 (this is the most principled continuation after 14...f6) 17.♕e4. Three pawns are now attacked, which means Black is not able to defend all of them. We keep a pleasant initiative.

15.♗xe7 ♔xe7 16.♖xd4

16.♕a3+ is a fine alternative.

16...♕xb2



17. ♖dd1

This is an important move and not at all obvious. White retreats from the central post, but prepares ♖ab1 now.

17... ♘c5 18. ♕xa7 ♖xd1+ 19. ♖xd1

And White still has an annoying initiative after regaining the pawn.

A114) 9... ♖c8



This natural move is the third most popular after the bishop moves to c5 and e7.

10. ♕b3

We play ♕b3 against the bishop moves as well, so this is easy to remember.

10... ♘xe5 11. ♘xe5 ♗c6

This is played here almost exclusively, but leads to a pleasant game for White.

The move 11... ♗d6 seems to be stronger than 11... ♗c6, but still gives White a pull: 12. ♗f4 ♗c6 (this has to be played. White was threatening ♘xf7, so it makes sense) 13. ♖fd1 ♗xg2 14. ♔xg2 0-0 15. ♖xd4, and White still has a nagging advantage.

12.♘xc6 bxc6 13.♖d1 c5 14.e3 ♗d6 15.exd4 c4

This is the point of Black's set-up. With the pawn on c4, the knight gets a potential outpost on d5.

16.♕b5+ ♕d7



17.a4

White is better, intending 18.♗d2 and 19.♖ac1 next. The c4-pawn proves to be rather vulnerable.

A12) 7...♘xe5

This move is the most frequently-played one below GM level – and it is bad! This simple fact is a huge incentive to play 7.♘e5 – it will just net you many easy points. Let's see why it is so bad.

8.dxe5

Black now trades queens most of the time, but the immediate ...♘d5 and ...♘d7 are also played. A common theme of all these lines is that Black struggles to get the queenside developed. The g2-bishop is just a fantastic piece! An additional problem is the pawn on e5, which takes away important squares for Black and supports a later knight jump to d6. White frequently plays ♘a3 to regain the pawn, but also to place the knight on the attractive c4-square, increasing the pressure on the queenside. Black's score in this line is about 20% – it is not only objectively bad, but it's also extremely tough for Black to avoid a quick defeat.

A121) 8...♕xd1 9.♖xd1 ♘d7

An alternative for Black is 9...♘d5.



10.♘c3. It is more common to play ♘a3 in these lines, but here 10.♘c3 is good for concrete reasons. Let's continue the line, as it is rather forced: 10...♘xc3 11.bxc3 ♗e7 12.♖b1 ♖b8 13.♗c6+ (this is important to remember. Black now loses castling rights) 13...♔f8 14.♗e3 (threatening to take on c5, playing for the weak back rank) 14...g5 15.h4 h6 16.h5 ♔g7 17.♗b5. I continued the line a bit longer to show this idea. We get the pawn back and keep the overwhelming position. Black still lacks coordination.

10.♘a3

10.f4 is not bad either, but as in some other lines, we don't need to protect the e5-pawn.

10...♘xe5

After 10...♗e7 11.♘xc4, we get back the pawn and it is just a fantastically one-sided affair: 11...♖b8 (11...0-0 12.♗xb7 ♗xb7 13.♖xd7, and White should win easily) 12.a4, and again White has a huge advantage.

11.♗f4 f6 12.♗xe5 fxe5 13.♘xc4 ♗e7



14.♖ac1

Black is completely passive in this position. We will win back e5 first and then keep

up the pressure on all the targets, like c5, b7 and e6.

A122) 8...♘d5



9.♘a3 c3

Black tries to at least keep the extra pawn for his suffering.

10.bxc3 ♘xc3 11.♕c2 ♘d5 12.♖d1

White threatens e2-e4, but the queen moves to b6, a5 and c7 all run into knight jumps.

12...♗d7 13.♗xd5

I was a bit sceptical at first – is it really worth giving up the bishop for a pawn? In fact, the concrete lines suggest that the tactics work perfectly for White.

13...exd5 14.♖xd5

The idea is to play ♘a3-c4-d6 next. Black has huge problems with his king in the centre. Just playing for castling is unsuccessful.

14...♗e7 15.♘c4 0-0



16.♕d2

And White wins the unlucky bishop on d7.

A123) 8...♘d7



9.♘a3

Many players play 9.f4 instead, but we don't need to protect the pawn, as we will see.

9...♘xe5

This fails, but is certainly critical. Black's position becomes completely unacceptable if he allows us to take on c4 to restore material equality.

With 9...♗e7, Black just returns the pawn, allowing White a fantastic game without any material sacrificed: 10.♘xc4 0-0 11.♕c2 (playing for the d6-square is an obvious plan) 11...♕c7 12.♖d1 ♖b8 (12...♘xe5 13.♗f4 f6 14.♗e4 h6



15.♕c3. By now, Black certainly regrets some choices in the opening!) 13.a4 b6 14.♘d6 (this is no fun for Black. He shouldn't touch the e5-pawn now) 14...♘xe5 15.♘b5, and the queen is trapped.

10.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 11.♖d1+

11.♗f4 is strong as well. One word of advice about this type of gambit play: don't worry too much about perhaps not being able to find the 100% perfect lines. You have a huge initiative and the defence will be a lot harder for Black to conduct. Just

try to find the best moves, but don't be a perfectionist and burn time – playing good moves quickly is better than playing perfect moves slowly, only to blunder in time trouble.

11...♔e7

After 11...♔e8 12.♗f4, we transpose to 8...♕xd1 9.♖xd1 ♘d7 10.♘a3 ♘xe5 11.♗f4.

12.♗e3 ♘d7



13.♘xc4

And Black will fall apart quickly.

A13) 7...♘xd4



This is the second trap we have set with 7.♘e5. This move is even worse than 7...♘xe5.

8.e3

And Black could resign with a clear conscience. After a knight move a rook is lost!

8...♘f5 9.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 10.♘xf7+

Yes, you can win quickly with this repertoire!

A14) 7...♘d5

This is rare, but at least better than 7...♘xe5 and 7...♘xd4. White still gets a promising position, though. The following line is rather long, but forced and easy to recall.

8.♘xc6 bxc6 9.♘a3 ♗a6 10.♕a4 ♕b6 11.dxc5 ♗xc5 12.♘xc4 ♕b5 13.♕xb5 cxb5 14.♘e5

With a comfortable advantage for White. The black queenside is weakened and we have easy moves like ♖d1, ♗d2 and ♖ac1 available to keep up the pressure.

A2) 6...♗e7 7.cxd5

Now, 7...exd5 8.dxc5 transposes to the Tarrasch (Chapter 3), but Black may also take with the knight.

7...♘xd5



This position and the comparable one after 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 ♗e7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 c5 7.cxd5 ♘xd5 are usually associated with the term Semi-Tarrasch. However, the proper Semi-Tarrasch is reached after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 c5, after which 5.cxd5 ♘xd5 is the defining move of the opening. In this 'pure' Semi-Tarrasch, there is a white knight on c3, which is quickly traded for the d5-knight, simplifying the position and getting Black closer to equality. Not having a knight on c3 makes a substantial difference. In the position we have reached in our repertoire, Black is not even close to equality.

8.dxc5

This is a lot stronger than the frequently-played 8.♘c3.

8...♗xc5

8...0-0 9.a3 ♗xc5 10.♕c2 leads to the same position.

9.a3 0-0

The move 9...a5 weakens the queenside and leads to an even worse version of the main line for Black: 10.♕c2 ♗e7



11.♖d1, and we have moves like e2-e4, ♘c3 and ♗f4 coming. Black will probably not survive this position for very long.

10.♕c2

A useful tempo on the bishop. Now, we also see why 9.a3 was a useful move. We will play e2-e4 soon, kicking the knight away from the central post. The move a2-a3 was needed to cover the b4-square.

10...♗e7

Black may also play 10...♕e7. This move signals Black's intention to place the bishop on b6. With the bishop on b6, our idea to play e2-e4 becomes a bit less attractive. Black might play ...e6-e5 and use the bishop on the now weakened d4-square. The move a2-a3 had an additional idea, though: 11.b4 ♗b6 12.♗b2 ♗d7 13.♘bd2 ♖ac8 14.♕b3, and White has a comfortable edge. We have ♘c4 next, followed by ♖ac1 and ♖fd1. Black has little space and needs to take care of the weakened d6-square.

11.♖d1 ♗d7 12.e4 ♘b6



13. ♘c3

White's play is very simple to conduct. We intend to play e4-e5, ♗f4 and ♘b1-c3-e4(b5)-d6. Black has little to show in return.

B) 5...♗g4



This is one of the more ambitious tries, and one where the extra tempo makes a difference in White's favour.

6.c4

Our typical move, blasting open the centre and freeing the bishop on g2. 6.♘e5 is also possible, but I think that Black is quite alright after 6...cxd4 7.♘xg4 ♘xg4 8.e3 ♘f6. After our choice, Black has to solve more problems and will often end up in severe trouble if further inaccuracies creep in.

B1) 6...cxd4 7.♘xd4

Here, White has a more conservative alternative with 7.cxd5 ♗xf3 8.♗xf3 ♘xd5 9.♕b3 ♘b6 10.a4. I think that White is slightly better in this line, but 7.♘xd4 leads to fascinating play and is extremely dangerous for Black.



7...♘xd4 8.♕xd4 ♗xe2

Black had to go for the pawn on e2, as there was no sensible alternative.

9.cxd5

Amazing! White is able to sacrifice the exchange for excellent play. Let's check some lines.

9...♗xf1 10.♗xf1



10...a6

Basically the only move. Black needs to cover b5.

We need to check why the move 10...♕xd5 fails: 11.♕a4+ ♘d7 12.♘c3 ♕f5 13.♗e3 (Black is helpless against this attack) 13...a6 14.♖d1 ♖d8 15.♗g2. On top of everything, White is threatening 16.♗b6 – Black is lost.

11.♘c3 g6

This is the best try for Black.

1) 11...e5 (Black desperately tries to develop his kingside) 12.♕xe5+ ♕e7 13.♗f4 (this is very strong. Even after the queen trade, White has excellent compensation)

13...♕xe5 14.♗xe5 ♗c5 15.♗h3 0-0 16.d6. The simple idea is to play ♗xf6 and d6-d7, with a huge pawn on d7;

2) 11...e6 also fails directly: 12.♕a4+ b5 13.♘xb5 axb5 14.♗xb5+ ♔e7 15.d6+ ♔xd6 16.♗f4+ e5 17.♕d4+ ♘d5 18.♖d1, and we are in 'Mate in x' territory already.

12.♕a4+ ♘d7 13.d6 e6 14.♘e4

White has an extremely dangerous attack. Stockfish now sees only one defence for Black: covering g5 against ♗g5 threats.

14...h6



15.♕d4

Black now has to move the rook, granting White a lasting attack. There is simply no coordination in Black's camp. I am stopping at this point, but of course you might use this position as the starting point of your own analysis and practicing your general attacking play.

B2) 6...♗xf3

This looks tempting, but is already bad for Black.

7.♗xf3

B21) 7...cxd4 8.♕b3

8.cxd5 ♘xd5 9.♕b3 would transpose to the line 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 c5 4.♗g2 ♘c6 5.0-0 ♗g4 6.c4 cxd4 7.cxd5 ♗xf3 8.♗xf3 ♘xd5 9.♕b3, something I mentioned in the context of line B1 above. This is better for White as well, but I think the immediate 8.♕b3 is even more promising.

8...e6

Basically forced. Now, we enter a promising endgame.

9.♕xb7 ♕c8 10.♕xc8+ ♖xc8



11. ♘d2

White is better here. We will continue with ♖d1, intending to take on d5 and follow up with ♘b3. The d4-pawn is a liability and we have the bishops as a long term asset.

B22) 7... ♘xd4



8. ♗g2

We simply preserve the bishop and threaten to take on d5 with the pawn. There is no good solution for Black anymore.

8...e6

White has a huge advantage after 8...dxc4 9.♗xb7 ♖b8 10.♗g2. There are problems on the light squares, with ideas like e2-e3, followed by ♕a4+/♗c6+ – on top of all this, we have the bishops and c4 is terminally weak.

9. ♘c3

We will always be able to get the pawn back with a nice advantage by just playing

e2-e3 on the next moves. In some cases, there are even more promising ideas. Here's a sample line:

9... ♗e7 10.cxd5 ♘xd5 11. ♘xd5 exd5



12.b4

White has a huge initiative here with a great bishop pair. The pawn on d5 will drop soon.

B3) 6...dxc4

This has never been played according to my database, but it is worth checking why it is bad.

7. ♘e5



That's the problem! Black has no good reply now.

7... ♗d7 8. ♘a3 cxd4 9. ♘axc4 e6 10. ♗f4

And White has a huge initiative. We are actually a full tempo up on the line 1.d4 d5 2. ♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 c5 4. ♗g2 ♘c6 5.0-0 e6 6.c4 dxc4 7. ♘e5 ♗d7 8. ♘a3 cxd4 9. ♘axc4, which is dangerous for Black anyway. A full extra tempo for us can easily turn danger into disaster.

c) 5...♗f5



Systems for White against the Grünfeld with ♗f4 have a solid reputation. Again, one tempo is a substantial difference as we will see.

6.c4

Our standard move is very strong here. Black now has no good solution.

6...dxc4

Black may also play 6...e6 7.cxd5 exd5 8.♘c3, after which we have reached a Tarrasch type of pawn structure with a misplaced black bishop on f5. It is vulnerable on f5 and serves no particular role. White is comfortably better with standard moves like ♗g5 to follow.

7.♘e5

I think this is simpler to handle than the alternatives. 7.♗e3 or 7.♕a4 are also better for White, but require more study or lead to some unusual positions. 7.♘e5 is just a one-sided advantage for White.

7...♖c8

We checked 7...♗d7 8.♘a3 via 5...♗g4 6.c4 dxc4 7.♘e5 ♗d7 (line B).

8.♘xc6 bxc6 9.dxc5

White has the better pawn structure, and it is easy to play. One sample line runs as follows:

9...♕xd1 10.♖xd1 e5 11.♘d2 c3 12.bxc3 ♗xc5



13. ♘c4

And Black is under pressure. It's already difficult to defend the pawns.

Conclusion

Black's path to a reasonable game in this chapter is narrow. Many lines that look natural are risky or downright bad for Black, which will result in excellent positions out of the opening against players who are not prepared exceptionally well. If Black knows or finds the best defence (line A11 above), it is still an interesting game with White having very good compensation for the pawn.

CHAPTER 7

Catalan – Introduction and sidelines: 2... ♘f6 3.g3 e6

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6



The Catalan chapters are about all set-ups where Black plays ...d7-d5 and then prioritizes kingside development with ...♘f6, ...e7-e6, ...♗e7 (d6) and castling. Our play against this black set-up is very straightforward: we will play our standard moves 1.d4, 2.♘f3, 3.g3, 4.♗g2, 5.0-0 and 6.c4, almost no matter what specific move order Black chooses. I need to mention that the initial moves 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 lead to positions examined in the Catalan chapters most of the time, but a quick ...c7-c5 by Black will transpose into chapters on the Reversed Grünfeld or the Tarrasch. There are two other noteworthy options. Black may play a quick ...b7-b5, stopping our c2-c4 break. Please refer to Chapter 10 for details. Finally, the third possible transposition happens in case of a quick ...b7-b6, which leads to the Queen's Indian and is dealt with in Chapter 23. I need to emphasize that these transpositions are actually not very common at club level, as most players just opt for the same moves that they would play if we played a regular Queen's Gambit or Catalan move order with c2-c4 played on move 2 or 3.

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6

Black sometimes starts with 2...e6 and delays ...♘f6. There are some possible reasons for this, the most common being the idea to still being able to play the f-pawn for a Stonewall formation. Other possibilities are lines like 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 e6 3.c4 c6 4.♘c3 dxc4 or 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 e6 3.c4 a6. These lines are rather tricky for White to handle. We are not bothered at all by these ideas, and are able to play our standard set-up. Ultimately, we will transpose into the main line Catalan or a different chapter, for example after ...f7-f5 on move 3 or 4 we will transpose into the Dutch Stonewall (Chapter 32).

3.g3 e6

4.♗g2

Here, 4.c4 would be the main starting position of the Catalan via the more

common move order 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3. This move order allows 4...dxc4, leading to very intricate and sharp play, where Black gets to select among many possible lines after 5.♗g2. Of course, White is fine in these lines, but it requires a lot of memorization to do that. The second annoying option is 4...♗b4+, which is less theory-heavy than 4...dxc4, but still good to avoid for simplicity reasons.

After our main move 4.♗g2, Black's main and most likely best option is to play 4...♗e7 and 5...0-0 (see Chapters 8 and 9) to castle quickly. There are some alternatives to this approach, most importantly the set-up with ...♗d6, usually paired with the moves ...♘bd7 and ...c7-c6. This set-up is examined via the 4...♗d6 move order. We also look at some oddities like 4...♘c6 and 4...c6 5.0-0 ♘bd7, intending to snatch the c-pawn after 6.c4. Note that 4...♘bd7 is purely transpositional, as a later bishop move would lead us to 4...♗e7 or 4...♗d6. Speaking of transpositions: if Black plays 4...b5, 4...b6 or 4... c5, we castle and transpose out of the Catalan chapters.

A) 4...♗d6

A set-up with ...♗d6 is Black's main alternative to going with ...♗e7. These ...♗d6 set-ups are also often started with 4...c6 or 4...♘bd7, ultimately combining all moves (...c7-c6,....♘bd7,....♗d6). I will examine all ...♗d6 based positions starting with 4...♗d6.

5.0-0



Against the ...♗d6 set-up, our approach involves the moves c2-c4, ♘c3, ♘d2 and ultimately e2-e4. This early e2-e4 push, supported by the knights, is a very effective way to meet ...♗d6. In most lines, we will capture on e4 with a knight and attack the bishop on d6, which gains a useful tempo. An important point to note: you need to be aware of a small move order pitfall to avoid. Let's have a look.

A1) 5...0-0 6.c4 c6

I always like to check what happens if Black takes: 6...dxc4 7.♘fd2. White is also better after more obvious moves like 7.♘e5 or 7.♘bd2, but this is a clever move, stopping any ...b7-b5 ideas and just regaining the pawn with a good game. Always

compare the guys on g2 and c8!

7. ♘c3

Playing 7.♘fd2 first is not a mistake, but taking on c4 is rather welcome after 7.♘c3, so there is no reason to stop it.

7... ♘bd7

After 7...dxc4 8.♘d2, we regain the pawn easily: 8...e5 (Black has no way to keep the pawn and at least frees up the bishop on c8; 8...b5 9.♘xb5 – ouch!) 9.♘xc4 exd4 10.♕xd4 ♗c7 11.♕h4, and White has an excellent game. ♖d1 is a useful tempo and Black has a hard time to defend against ♗g5 ideas.



8. ♘d2

White scores a devastating 80% from this position in *Megabase 2019*! It is not a surprise that White is better, but the actual games show how difficult Black's position is to play in a practical game. The bishop on c8 is just a bad piece and will often end up being the main reason for Black's demise.

A11) 8... ♖e8 9.e4 dxe4 10. ♘dxe4 ♘xe4

1) 10... ♗e7 11. ♗f4 ♘xe4 12. ♘xe4 is a different route to the same position;

2) 10... ♗c7 11. ♗e3 e5 12.d5 (a key idea for White. The d-pawn is going to be very strong) 12...cxd5 13.cxd5 ♗b6 14.d6 ♘xe4 15. ♘xe4, and White is much better here. The d-pawn is a nuisance for Black and White's play is easy to conduct. We will play ♖c1, ♕d2, maybe b2-b4 and ♘c5, depending on what Black does.

11. ♘xe4 ♗e7 12. ♗f4 ♘f6 13. ♘c3

Again this move, avoiding trades.

13... ♗d6



14.♗e5

A strong move! White is keeping the tension and tries to tempt Black into capturing on e5. Black can't afford to take, as this gives White a pawn on e5, supporting the fantastic outpost on d6. But what should Black play? He is basically just sitting in a very passive position, while we have easy moves to improve, like ♕e2 and centralizing rooks.

A12) 8...e5

White has too much pressure on the centre for this move to work. We win an important central pawn now.

9.dxe5 ♗xe5

After the alternative 9...♘xe5 10.cxd5 cxd5 11.♘xd5, White is a pawn up and Black has no compensation at all.

10.cxd5 ♗xc3



11.dxc6

The only important move to remember. This *zwischenzug* secures a clear advantage.

11...♗xd2 12.cxd7 ♗xd7 13.♗xd2

Again, White is a central pawn up, with the bishop pair as well.

A13) 8...♗e7

A sad retreat, but this is one of the better defences.

9.e4 dxe4 10.♘dxe4 ♘xe4 11.♘xe4



A131) 11...♘f6 12.♘c3

You should avoid trades if you have more space. This rule of thumb works well most of the time, and this is no exception.

12...♕b6

This looks like the most interesting try. Black intends to put some pressure on the d-pawn.

13.a3

I like this move a lot. We prepare ♗e3 this way.

13...♖d8



14.♗e3

White has a comfortable advantage... just compare the bishops! Black cannot take on b2 now.

14...♕xb2 15.♘a4

And the queen is trapped! We needed a2-a3 to take away squares for the queen.

A132) 11...e5



Black tries to free up the c8-bishop this way, but we have a powerful reply.

12.d5

White establishes s strong passed pawn and threatens d5-d6 immediately. This threat limits Black's options quite considerably.

12...f5

This is better than the capture on d5: 12...cxd5 13.cxd5. Taking with the queen also leads to a nice advantage. After the pawn recapture, the next moves are more or less forced: 13...f5 (we were still threatening d5-d6. Black has no other move to handle this idea) 14.d6 fxe4 15.dxe7 ♕xe7 16.♕d5+ ♔h8



17.♕xe4, and we have a clear advantage, with the better pawn structure and the bishop pair.

13.♘c3

Here, 13.d6 does not promise that much, compared to the version without c-pawns. The difference: we don't have the crucial check on d5.

13...e4 14.f3 exf3 15.♕xf3

We certainly have the better chances: more active pieces/better development/d-pawn count for something. Still, this is a rather complicated position and not as one-sided as many others in the ...♗d6-complex.

A2) 5...♘bd7 6.c4 c6



7.♘fd2!

This is the important moment I mentioned! You need to avoid 7.♘c3, as Black might muddy the waters with 7....dxc4!. Most Black players are not aware of this possibility and just play 7...0-0, after which 8.♘d2 leads to the position we are aiming for. By playing 7.♘fd2! first, we alter the move order in our favour.

7...0-0

There is nothing better available for Black.

8.♘c3

And we reach the main position of our anti-♗d6 recipe. This position is examined via the move order 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 ♗d6 5.0-0 0-0 in line A1 above.

B) 4...♘c6



This is quite rare at this point and somewhat odd, as usually you don't want to block your c-pawn in double Queen's Pawn openings, in particular not if ...e7-e6 is already on the board.

5.0-0

Our standard move order is not a surprising choice, but I need to mention that here it is crucial to not play 5.c4 first, as then Black may play 5...dxc4 and all of a sudden we have transposed to a line of the Catalan that we intend to avoid with our specific move order, namely 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 ♘c6. Of course, this line is not bad for White, but it requires a lot of knowledge to play well and most importantly: Black should not get away with his strange ...♘c6 move so easily!

B1) 5...♗e7 6.c4 dxc4

Against slow moves, we have the usual set-up to prepare e2-e4 with moves like ♘bd2, a2-a3 and ♕c2. You may also play a quick b2-b3 to go ♗b2 and cover c4.

7.♕a4 0-0 8.♕xc4 ♕d5



9.♕a4

The only point to remember! Don't trade on d5, but keep the queens on the board and occupy the centre next. Natural moves like ♘c3 and a later e2-e4 give White a stable advantage.

B2) 5...♗d6 6.c4 dxc4

After 6...0-0 7.♘bd2, we just cover the pawn and aim for e2-e4 next, with moves like a2-a3 and ♕c2 as preparation first.



7. ♘bd2 b5

This fails, not quite unexpectedly. If Black plays a slow move, we just regain the pawn with an excellent game.

8. ♘e5 ♘xd4 9. ♘dxc4

A nice point.

9...bxc4 10. ♕xd4

And Black should not see move 20 from here.

C) 4...c6 5.0-0 ♘bd7

Black delays the development of the kingside, angling for a specific line.

6.c4 dxc4



This is the idea behind this move order: Black just grabs the pawn! Fortunately, this is not a great line for Black, but we need to know what to do. Of course, Black may also develop the bishop instead and transpose to lines that we examine via 4... ♗e7 or 4... ♗d6.

7.a4

This is important to remember. This move either enables us to get the pawn back comfortably or provokes further weaknesses, should Black decide to try to hold on

to his booty.

C1) 7...a5 8.♕c2 b5

This is too risky for Black, but it is the only challenging move.

After 8...♘b6 9.♘bd2 ♘fd5 10.♘xc4 ♘b4 11.♕b3 ♘xc4 12.♕xc4, White enjoys a comfortable advantage. Black has not solved the c8-bishop issue and a later e2-e4 will establish a nice centre for White.

9.♘e5

The most powerful move amongst some promising lines.

9...♘xe5 10.dxe5 ♘d5 11.axb5 cxb5 12.♘c3

This position is forced after 9.♘e5. Now, Black is in some trouble. The engines recommend returning the pawn now, but White is obviously better then.

12...♘b4

12...♕b6 (the engine's defence) 13.♘xd5 exd5 14.♗xd5, and White is much better.



13.♕d2

This is a strong move! Black falls apart now.

13...♕xd2 14.♗xd2 ♖b8 15.♖xa5 ♗d7 16.♖fa1

White's attack is already winning with precise play.

C2) 7...♗e7 8.♘bd2

White will get the pawn back with a pleasant advantage. Black has no particular compensation for the dreadful c8-bishop and lack of central control. White will easily get e2-e4 in soon.

8...b5

Well, this way Black keeps the pawn for the moment, but it does not work.

9.axb5 cxb5 10.♘e5 ♘d5 11.♘c6 ♕c7 12.♘xe7 ♔xe7



13.b3

With a winning attack for White. One interesting variation that may happen is 13...c3 14.e4! cxd2 15.♕xd2 ♘5f6 16.♗a3+ ♔e8 17.e5 ♘d5 18.♕g5, with a strong attack. Note that 13.e4 is a strong move as well. Black's 'centralized' king will never find a safe place again.

C3) 7...b5

This is by far too greedy, and swiftly punished.

8.axb5 cxb5 9.♘e5 ♘d5 10.♘c3

We are threatening on b5 and d5. Black is in real danger of losing the game quickly now.

10...♘xe5 11.dxe5 ♘xc3

This loses immediately. Black needed to return the pawn instead, but admittedly this is not an attractive prospect either.

12.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 13.bxc3 ♖b8



14. ♖xa7

And White has a winning attack.

Conclusion

White enjoys an advantage in all Catalan sidelines. The most important idea to remember is how to fight the ...♗d6 set-ups by moving the f3-knight to d2. This gives White a very pleasant game against this quite popular set-up.

CHAPTER 8

Catalan – Closed Variation:

2... ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4. ♗g2 ♗e7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4

1.d4 d5 2. ♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4. ♗g2 ♗e7



This is the most common choice at this point. Black's alternatives, for example 4... ♗d6, are discussed in the previous chapter.

5.0-0

We are heading for the main line of the Catalan after 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4, but the immediate 5.c4 is also possible and might be an interesting later addition to your repertoire. After 5.c4, the capture with 5...dxc4 is less attractive for Black compared to 4.c4 dxc4. The bishop on e7 is not particularly useful for the more concrete play initiated with the capture. After 5.c4, Black will most likely play 5...0-0, after which 6.0-0 leads to our main line. You don't need to transpose, but may also vary with 6. ♘c3 or 6. ♕c2, which are interesting sidelines. So keep this move order in mind if you seek options in the future.

Now, Black usually just castles after our move 5.0-0, but there are some ways to transpose out of this chapter. They could play 5...b5 to transpose into Chapter 10, 5...b6 would lead to the Queen's Indian (Chapter 23) and 5...c5 would transpose into a Reversed Grünfeld or Tarrasch.

5...0-0 6.c4



This position is the starting point of the Catalan main line. The next move by Black defines the further course of the game. The main line and very likely the best move is 6...dxc4. Black's idea is to take the pawn, but usually not to gain any material. White will regain the pawn, but it takes some time, and Black intends to use this time to complete development. This is called the Open Variation and will be examined in the next chapter.

I need to emphasize that 6...dxc4 might be the best move, but you will also encounter the Closed Catalan a lot. The Closed Catalan usually starts with 6...♘bd7 or 6....c6, and signals Black's intention to bolster the centre and later play ...b7-b6 and develop the bishop to b7 or a6. This set-up is very popular at club level, mostly because the Catalan is not studied much at that level and often players just react in the same manner as they would have against a classical Queen's Gambit approach by White. For example, they have studied lines like 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♗g5 ♗e7 5.e3 0-0 6.♘f3 ♘bd7 and just play the same moves against the Catalan. The good news for us is that the Closed Catalan is objectively slightly better for White – if Black knows what he is doing! Any second-rate move by Black, however, will give us a great position, as we will examine shortly.

Other options by Black on move six, like 6...b6 or 6...c5, will transpose to other chapters. I'd like to note that these moves are rather popular at club level and studying the chapters on the Queen's Indian or Tarrasch for those options will result in many promising positions.

I have split the coverage of the Closed Catalan into two sections: there is the move order 6...c6, looking at lines where Black opts to develop his b8-knight to a6 – the other, far more common set-up, involves ...♘bd7 and is examined via the 6...♘bd7 move order. Our set-up will be quite similar against both options.

Closed Catalan without ...♘bd7

6...c6



Black goes for the Closed Catalan, avoiding 6...dxc4. What is the idea behind ...c7-c6 ? Well, Black would like to solve his problem of the passive c8-bishop. There are two basic ways to do that. The first one is to try to play ...e6-e5 and use the bishop on the starting diagonal. This plan does not look very realistic at all, as White controls e5 reliably. This leaves the other option to try to develop the bishop to b7 or a6. What about 6...b6 then? This will quickly transpose to the Queen's Indian after 7.cxd5 exd5 8.♘c3 ♗b7 9.♘e5 – and this is definitely more comfortable for White (see Chapter 23 for details). Now, we are getting closer to the point of ...c7-c6. Black anticipates a possible trade on d5 and wants to be ready to recapture with the c-pawn, avoiding the non-symmetrical central formations that usually lead to hanging pawns, as it is commonplace in the Queen's Indian main line.

7.♕c2

White's standard set-up in the Closed Catalan is ♘bd2/♕c2 and e2-e4, trying to open the centre favourably. Why is ♘bd2 preferred to ♘c3-based play? The main reason is that the c-pawn needs additional cover. With the knight on c3, Black may capture on c4 at an opportune moment or play a quick ...b7-b6 and ...♗a6, increasing the pressure on c4 – even in case White has played b2-b3 for additional cover.

So we have established that ♘bd2 and ♕c2 should be played – now the question you probably have anticipated already: which move first? There is a difference between 6...c6 and 6...♘bd7 in that regard. Here, against 6...c6, after 7.♕c2 Black might play 7...dxc4, which transposes to 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 ♗e7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 dxc4 7.♕c2 c6. If you want to avoid that possibility, you might as well play 7.♘bd2 here, as it has no drawback.

7...b6

Black avoids 7...♘bd7, which is actually the most frequently-played move. This line is examined via 6...♘bd7 below in the segment on the Closed Catalan with ...♘bd7.

8.♘bd2 ♗b7

Black's intended set-up is ...♗b7 and ...♘a6. After 8...♘bd7 9.e4, we transpose into the Closed Catalan with ...♘bd7, which is covered via 6...♘bd7. An

independent option to check is 8...♗a6.



9.♘e5. The most natural way to prepare e2-e4 is to play 9.b3, but after 9...♘bd7 10.e4, Black has tricked us into a line that is not part of our repertoire. The line I am referring to is the following: 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 ♗e7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 ♘bd7 7.♕c2 c6 8.♘bd2 b6 9.e4 ♗a6. Now, I recommend 10.e5 instead of 10.b3, which is exactly what we would get after 9.b3 here. Fortunately, 9.♘e5 is a good option instead.

9...♘fd7 (Black wants to get rid of the knight immediately. This is played most of the time) 10.♘d3 (this is a strong move, and instructive. Black is now stuck a bit with his queenside development) 10...♘f6 (this is slow, but how else can the traffic jam on the queenside be solved?) 11.♖d1 ♘bd7 12.e4, and we have reached a fairly normal position type for the Closed Catalan. White is better due to his space advantage.

9.e4 ♘a6

The point of Black's move order. The knight is a bit more active on a6 than on d7 and, more importantly, the d7-square is still available for the f6-knight. For comparison: after 9...♘bd7 10.e5, Black needs to retreat to the less desirable e8-square.

A frequently seen move is 9...dxe4, but after 10.♘xe4, Black usually plays 10...♘bd7 or 10...♘xe4 11.♕xe4 ♘d7, which is covered via the Closed Catalan move order starting with 6...♘bd7. These lines are excellent for White and frequently seen, in particular at the non-professional level.

The move 9...c5 looks a bit premature, but it is not terrible for Black. We are able to keep a nice edge after 10.exd5 exd5 11.dxc5 ♗xc5 12.♘b3 ♗e7 13.♘fd4, with a nice position. We have useful pressure on d5 and ♘f5 is always a tasty prospect.



10.a3

Very important to remember. This is a slow, but necessary move. We need to restrict the knight and also prepare the sequence we are about to examine after Black's only challenging reply.

10...c5

1) The alternative 10...dxc4 is nice for White and quite easy to handle: 11.♘xc4 c5 12.e5 ♘d5 13.dxc5 ♘xc5 14.b4 ♘d7 15.♗b2. A logical and almost forced sequence after 11...c5. White has excellent chances, based on the substantial space advantage. One key idea in the future may be to play for the d6-square ... or even the c6-square with a b4-b5 + ♘f3-d4-c6 manoeuvre;

2) 10...♖c8 11.b4 c5 12.dxc5 bxc5 13.b5 also looks promising for White. Let's check a possible line: 13...♘b8 14.exd5 exd5 15.♘h4, with a useful initiative for White.



11.exd5

It is important to remember this sequence, leading to a good game for White. Other lines don't promise much.

11...exd5 12.dxc5 ♘xc5

Black is happy to get the knight into the game, but White's pieces are still more active and better coordinated after the next moves.

13.b4 ♘e6 14.♗b2 ♖c8 15.♘e5



White is slightly better here, based on the more active pieces. It is a complicated position, though. I'll show some more moves to illustrate an important idea.

15...♕c7

This is certainly sensible. Black protects the bishop to allow ...dxc4.

16.♖ac1 dxc4 17.♕xc4 ♕xc4 18.♘dxc4 ♗xg2 19.♔xg2



In this type of position, Black is always suffering somewhat because of the weak c6-square and White's idea to play ♘c4-e3-f5.

Closed Catalan with ...♘bd7

6...♘bd7



Black is going for the Closed Catalan with this move, at least in the vast majority of cases. I have discussed some basic concepts of this line in the notes to 6...c6 – let's look at some specifics of the move order.

7.♕c2

Our set-up involves ♕c2 and ♘bd2, so again the question to answer is: what to play first? Against 6...c6, the difference is minor, but here the queen move is more precise. The reason is that Black is not committed to ...c7-c6 yet, and moves like 7...b6 and 7...c5 gain in strength against the more passive knight placement on d2. So, as a rule of thumb you could use: play ♕c2 first and ♘bd2 on the next move.

A) 7...c6 8.♘bd2

White is planning to play e2-e4, making substantial progress in the centre. Black can't stop e2-e4 anymore and needs to decide how to handle this move. The theoretical status is fairly clear in one aspect: all lines in which Black takes on e4 are excellent for White, and sometimes lead to an overwhelming advantage quickly. This is very relevant, as taking on e4 is by far the most popular reaction at club level! You will get those hugely favourable lines on the board very frequently.

Black's best reaction to e2-e4 is to keep the tension and try to initiate some counterplay on the queenside. In those lines, we will often advance the e-pawn, leading to a central pawn structure quite similar to a French Defence. This is also better for White, but not as hopelessly bad as the early ...d5xe4 lines.

All in all, the Closed Catalan is one of the lines that you are happy to face. White is objectively better, even after best play by Black. And 'best play' is not all that obvious, so Black often finds himself in huge trouble quickly.

A1) 8...b6



9.e4

The most important parting of the ways in the Closed Catalan. The most popular move at non-professional levels is 9...dxe4, which gives White an excellent game. I think one reason for its popularity is that it is difficult to keep the tension, and this in particular applies to less experienced players. They take the pawn, just because they want clarity and maybe hope that trading a pawn makes it simpler to play. The opposite is actually true, as Black is in serious danger after 9...dxe4. The best moves for Black are the ones that keep the tension, namely 9...♗b7 and 9...♗a6. Black also has the option to take on c4, which is actu-ally quite reasonable, as we will see.

A11) 9...♗b7



10.e5 ♘e8 11.cxd5 cxd5

An alternative may be 11...exd5.



A rare, but interesting choice for Black, trying to play ...c6-c5 and ... ♘e8-c7-e6 to put pressure on d4.

12. ♘b1. The d2–knight is clearly misplace here, boxing in the bishop on c1. The usual way to play for White is to regroup the knight via f1 to e3. The retreating move 12. ♘b1 is suggested by both LeelaZero and Komodo and it looks like a fine idea. I have a soft spot for regrouping knights via their original squares – think about the Breyer Ruy Lopez – so it was too tempting to not recommend. Of course, it looks slow, but Black needs some time to regroup as well: 12... ♘c7 (12...c5 13. ♗e3 ♘c7 will lead to the same position) 13. ♘c3 ♘e6 14. ♗e3 c5 15. ♖ad1.



This sequence feels very natural, but a closer look shows that Black is under heavy pressure. Our centre is stable, due to ♗e3 being played. The next steps for White are moves like h2-h4, ♖fe1 and ♕f5. Black of course has to also watch out for the simple dxc5, attacking the d5-pawn.



12.♖e1 ♖c8 13.♕d1

There is nothing wrong with the main line 13.♕a4, but in my opinion it makes sense to keep the queen closer to the kingside, where the long-term play is going to take place. White's main strategy in this position is to build up an attack on the kingside, while fending off Black's counterplay on the c-file and queenside. There is an obvious similarity to a French structure, but it is very important to note that Black has very passive pieces for this pawn formation. It is almost impossible for Black to play ...f7-f6, for example, getting rid of the strong pawn on e5 that cuts the board in two halves. Let's have a look at some lines:

13...♕c7

This is by far the most popular and obvious move, looking at the c2-square.

With the alternative 13...♗a6, Black tries to activate the bishop.



The important word is 'tries', because a closer look reveals that it is just placed on an empty diagonal. This is actually a common phenomenon: bishops on a3/a6 are often great if they stop castling, but after the king is castled, they point into thin air. 14.♘f1 (this knight is heading to g4 later and is often excellently placed on e3, covering the c2-square) 14...♘b8 15.h4 ♘c6 16.a3.



Now, Black's play on the queenside comes to a standstill. We will get a dangerous attack by concentrating pieces on the kingside. The attacking ideas are actually quite similar to lines of the King's Indian Attack, which features the same white formation on the kingside. One important idea is to play ♗h3 and ♘g5, even followed up by ♕h5. We'd love to provoke a pawn move on Black's kingside to get a clearer target.



14.♘b1

I like strong retreating moves with the knights! This move has been played by Boris Gelfand, one of the great Catalan experts. The idea is to regroup the knight to c3, plugging the c-file. At the same time, it prevents ...♕c2.

14...b5

This was played in both games that reached this position. I don't see any clear improvement on it.

The move 14...♕c2 is a huge mistake: 15.♕xc2 ♖xc2 16.♘c3 (the rook on c3 is trapped!) 16...♗b4 17.♖e3, and 18.♘e1! will seal the fate of the rook.

15.♗f1

This bishop is ideal on d3, so White starts this repositioning right away. I think it is quite funny that we have only one piece on the third rank and still Black's position is worse.

15...b4 16.a3

This is even stronger than Gelfand's 16.♗d3. After 16.♗d3, Black still had 16...♕b6, going for ...♗a6.



Now after 16.a3, it is not clear to me how Black organizes the defence. White intends to play a set-up like ♗d3, h2-h4, ♗f4, ♘bd2 and ♘g5, with a crushing attack. The engines give White a clear advantage and don't recommend anything good for Black either.

A12) 9...dxe4

As mentioned above, this is played very often, but is excellent for White.

10.♘xe4

Black now chooses between taking on e4 or developing with 10...♗b7. Both moves lead to very similar positions or might even transpose.

A121) 10...♗b7 11.♘xf6+ ♘xf6

Another option for Black may be 11...♗xf6 12.♖d1 (the rook is best on the d-file, fighting against ...c6-c5 and ...e6-e5) 12...♕e7 13.♗f4 ♖fd8 14.h4 (♘g5 is a useful idea now) 14...h6



15.♖e1. Now that the queen is on e7, this move makes a lot of sense. It's hard to give Black some advice here. He can't play ...e6-e5 or ...c6-c5, and White may still just improve step by step with ♖ad1 or try for a set-up with pawns on a3, b4 and c5. 15...c5 16.d5 (I just wanted to show why 15...c5 failed).

12.♖d1 ♕c8



13.c5

A key move in these structures, killing off the b7-bishop. Black controls d5, but a knight on this square is actually not that powerful. It has no targets at all, which is not the case for our knight coming to e5.

13...♖d8 14.♗f4

This is not the only good move here. I also like 14.♗g5, which scores excellently as well.

14...♘d5 15.♗g5 ♕c7 16.♗xe7 ♕xe7 17.♖ac1



White has a fantastic position here. The knight will be very strong on e5 and we are spoilt for choice on what to do next. Black will quite often play ...b6-b5, after which we reach a structure that we examined in the line with the early ...b7-b5: 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 ♗e7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 ♘bd7 7.♕c2 c6 8.♘bd2 b5 9.c5 a5 10.e4 dxe4. Often the focus will be on the kingside, with h2-h4 coming. We have multiple ideas to build up on the kingside, for example, with ♗e4 to create a further weakening and then go from there. Note that we also have a much better structure in any endgame, as the bishop on b7 remains a huge problem.

A122) 10...♘xe4 11.♕xe4 ♗b7



12.♖d1

White has more than one promising move here, but 12.♖d1 is the most effective one it seems. White's main goal at the moment is to prevent Black from playing ...c6-c5 altogether or make this move very unattractive. The pawn on c6 restricts Black's bishop, making the whole black position passive.

12...♕c8

This is better than the more obvious 12...♕c7, as it avoids getting attacked with ♗f4 immediately. The most often played move actually is 12...♘f6, after which 13.♕c2 transposes into a position we cover via 10...♗b7 11.♘xf6+ ♘xf6 12.♖d1.

12...♕c7 13.♗f4 ♗d6 14.♗xd6 ♕xd6



15.c5. This is textbook play in the Closed Catalan. White loves to get this advance in and here it is possible due to some neat tactics: 15...♕e7 (15...bxc5 16.dxc5 ♘xc5 17.♕b4 ♕e7 18.♖ac1, and we win the knight) 16.♖ac1. Black's position is very tough to defend. The b7-bishop is terrible forever, and we have easy moves to increase the pressure. Next on the agenda is ♘e5 and pawn advances on the queenside.



13.♕e2

This is the most conservative move, leading to a small, but stable advantage. The alternative 13.♗f4 is a lot sharper, as after 13.♗f4 c5 14. d5 ♖e8 15.♕c2 exd5 16.cxd5, you get a complicated middlegame with the d-pawn being the most important factor. This line is also good for White and therefore a good option if you like a sharper game.

13...♖e8

This covers the bishop and prepares ...c6-c5. Directly playing 13...c5 is not an option:



14.d5. Here, we see why 13.♕e2 was played: it prevented 13...c5.

14.♗g5

A strong move, again directed against ...c6-c5.

14...♗f8

This is the best defence.

1) 14...♗xg5 15.♘xg5, and we are threatening both ♕h5 and ♘g5-e4-d6, which gives White a large advantage;

2) 14...c5 15.♗xe7 ♖xe7



16.d5. This is very dangerous for Black. Our main idea is to play ♘g5 and/or ♗h3 soon, for example, in the following line: 16...♖e8 17.♘g5 ♘f8 18.♕h5, and Black is under serious pressure. Note that ♘g5-e4-d6 is an option for White as well.

15.♘e5 ♘xe5

More or less forced, and an important moment, as now the d-file is opened.

16.dxe5 c5 17.h4 h6

Black needs to play this sooner or later to fight for the d-file.

18.♗f4



This position may look harmless for Black at first, but White has an annoying pull with zero risk here. We will play h4-h5, fixing more of Black's pawns on dark squares, and gain more space later on the kingside. A set-up with pawns on e5, f4, g4 and h5 is ideal in the endgame.

This type of position is well known from the Caro-Kann actually, with the game Geller-Hort, Skopje 1968, serving as a classic example. There are dozens more, but this is a good one to look at if you'd like to learn more about this structure. I also point out the much sharper alternative 13.♗f4 if you are more at home in this kind of play.

A13) 9...dxc4



This is not the most logical move ever in my opinion, but the engine shows that it is playable for Black. We still have some advantage, but this line is not worse than 9...♗b7 or 9...♗a6.

10.♘xc4 ♗b7 11.♖d1 c5

The idea of the whole 9...dxc4 operation. Black needs to free up his bishop and now the time is exactly right. He can't wait any longer, as looking at different moves suggests, for example, 11...♖c8 12.♘fe5 c5 13.d5. The d-pawn is a huge

problem for Black in this position.

12.e5 ♘d5



13.♕e4

I think this move is dangerous for Black, particularly in a practical game. The idea is to swing the queen to g4, starting an attack on the king.

13...♔h8

A good prophylactic move. An alternative may be 13...♖c8 14.♕g4 (Black now needs to react to the ♗h6-idea) 14...♔h8 15.♗g5, and the knight on c4 is ready to jump to d6, with a very good game for White.

14.h4

This move prepares ♘g5 ideas.

14...h6 15.♕g4



I am going to stop here, concluding that White has pressure building up against the black king.

A14) 9...♗a6



10.e5

This is a good alternative to the main line 10.b3. This main line is fine for White, but it requires lots of memorization, in particular the positions after 10.b3 ♖c8 11.♖d1 c5 are very sharp. White is better in these complications, but we also get a comfortable position after 10.e5 with much less effort. Note that we also play 10.e5 after 9...♗b7, which is an additional argument in favour of choosing this approach.

10...♘e8 11.♖e1

White needs to remove the rook from the scope of the a6-bishop.

A141) 11...♖c8 12.cxd5 cxd5 13.♕b3

This is not an easy choice, but White is better with all queen moves here, as the lack of space and counterplay is just a permanent issue for Black. ♕b3 prevents ...♗d3, even though you could argue that this is not a threat at all.

13...♕c7 14.♘f1 ♕c2 15.♕xc2 ♖xc2 16.♘e3 ♖c6 17.♗d2



White is better due to his space advantage. Black has no counterplay against d4, which makes it easy to regroup.

A142) 11...♘c7



This move was played by yours truly in a game against IM Van der Stricht, in the Dutch League in 2010. At the time, I had put some effort into the Closed Catalan for Black, trying to get a more complicated position than in the main lines of the Open Catalan (the next chapter). I quickly dropped that idea, seeing that it is an uphill struggle. My opponent played 12.b3 in this game, which is a fine move. I recommend playing differently, mostly to be more in line with the other lines that we get after 9...♗b7.

12.cxd5

We always take on d5 in comparable lines, so why not here as well?

12...cxd5

Black may also take with the knight with 12...♘xd5. This leads to a different structure than usual, but it is good for White: 13.♘e4 (we are going for ♗g5 or ♘g5 ideas) 13...♘b4 14.♕b3 c5 15.♗d2 ♘c6 16.♗c3. White must be better here, by just having the far more active pieces.

13.h4



I am stopping here, because this position type is basically the same as after 9...♗b7 10.e5 ♘e8. Please have a look at this line for more on how to proceed

further.

A2) 8...♖e8



This bad move has been played hundreds of times in *MegaBase 2019*. Why is it so bad? Let's see.

9.e4

Now, we already see the problem. Black has no reasonable move to keep the tension and has to take, because the move ...♖e8 has taken away the possible retreat square e8 from the knight.

9...dxe4 10.♘xe4 ♘xe4 11.♕xe4

And we have reached the favourable scenario described earlier.

11...♘f6 12.♕e2

How is Black going to free his position?

12...c5

Black does not want to sit and wait, but opening up the position fails quite badly.

The alternative 12...♕c7 does not work either: 13.♗f4 ♗d6 14.♗xd6 ♕xd6



15.c5. This idea is very important. Advancing the c-pawn looks controversial, as the d5-square is given up and the white d-pawn becomes a 'backward' pawn. This is

not relevant, however. We have gained the option of playing ♘f3-e5-c4-d6 in some cases, and made sure that the c8-bishop never gets active.

This structure with the white pawn on c5 would be good for Black if the two minor pieces were off the board. Then, Black could actually pile up on d4, but with the minors on the board, he is never able to put any pressure on that pawn. 15...♕c7 16.♘e5 leads to a clear advantage for White, as described in the notes to move 15.

13.♖d1 cxd4 14.♘xd4 ♕b6 15.♗e3 ♗c5 16.♘b5 ♗xe3



17.♕xe3

And White is already winning here, entering with the knight decisively.

A3) 8...♕c7 9.e4 dxe4 10.♘xe4 ♘xe4

The move 10...e5 is the only reason why 8...♕c7 is worth looking at.



Now, only one line refutes Black's idea convincingly: 11.♘xe5 ♘xe5 12.♗f4 (this is the point that is easily missed) 12...♘fd7 13.dxe5 ♘xe5 14.♖fe1, with a clear advantage for White. We have ideas like ♕c3 or c4-c5, threatening ♘d6. The pin on the knight is just terrible to handle for Black.

11.♕xe4 ♘f6 12.♕e2

And we have reached the favourable scenario frequently seen in this line. Please

have a look at the line with 8...b6 9.e4 dxe4 10.♘xe4 for more on this important structure.

A4) 8...b5



An interesting choice by Black. It is good for White, but we need to play in the right way, otherwise Black's idea works well.

9.c5

This is the main point to remember. Don't play 9.b3, which gives Black good play after 9...bxc4 10.bxc4 ♗a6.

After going c4-c5, we are still aiming for e2-e4, but we need to watch out for Black's counterpunch ...e6-e5. Let's have a look.

A41) 9...a5 10.e4 dxe4 11.♘xe4 ♘xe4 12.♕xe4 ♘f6 13.♕c2

Please avoid 13.♕xc6, as after 13...♗d7, we need to play 14.♕b6, which helps Black a lot.

13...♘d5 14.♖e1 ♗f6 15.h4

The queenside is closed, and therefore our main battleground will be the kingside. We will develop a strong initiative with moves like ♘e5 and ♗e4. Note that the knight on d5 looks strong, but does not actually do all that much.

A42) 9...♕c7 10.e4 e5

The only critical move, but it falls short. 10...dxe4 11.♘xe4 is very similar to 8...b5 9.c5 a5 10.e4 dxe4 11.♘xe4.



11.exd5 ♘xd5 12.♖e1 exd4 13.♘xd4

White is just much better equipped for the fight with an open centre. The Catalan bishop is immensely strong. Black can take on c5, but this does not solve his problems:

13...♗xc5

The alternative 13...♘xc5 fails immediately:



14.♖xe7 ♕xe7 15.♘xc6 ♕d6 16.♗xd5, and White wins decisive material.

14.♘2b3

White has enough pressure on the weak pawns to always regain one with a great position.

14...♕b6 15.♘xc5 ♘xc5 16.♗d2

With the idea to play ♖ac1 next, winning the pawn on c6. We will be a lot better in the resulting position. The remaining queenside pawns on b5 and a7 are still weak, and we have the active pieces to attack them.

A43) 9...e5 10.♘xe5 ♘xe5 11.dxe5 ♘d7 12.♘f3

We see that Black's operation has failed. Taking on c5 does not work now.

12...♗xc5

Or taking with the knight: 12...♘xc5 13.♗e3 ♘e6 14.♕xc6, and White wins.



13.e6 fxe6 14.♘g5

And White wins.

B) 7...c5

This is a mistimed attempt to open up the position.

8.cxd5

B1) 8...♘xd5 9.♖d1

Black has a hard time developing now.

9...b6 10.a3 ♗b7 11.e4 ♘5f6



12.♘c3

And White has excellent chances. Black still lacks space and we have many ideas, like pushing d4-d5.

B2) 8...exd5



9.♘c3

This is why it pays off to not play the knight to d2 earlier. White exerts much more pressure on d5 with the knight on c3.

9...b6 10.♖d1 ♗b7 11.dxc5 bxc5 12.♘h4

This is a very typical move that is worth remembering. White unmasks the g2-bishop, attacking d5. At the same time, the knight is heading toward the juicy f5-square. Black is already on the ropes on move 12.

C) 7...b6 8.cxd5 exd5

We have already checked 8...♘xd5 9.a3 ♗b7 10.♖d1 via the move order 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 ♗e7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 ♘bd7 7.♕c2 c5 8.cxd5 ♘xd5 9.♖d1 b6 10.a3 (line B1 above).



9.♕c6

There is nothing wrong with 9.♘c3, of course. I see no reason to avoid 9.♕c6 though, as White is a lot better with a forced line.

9...♖b8

9...♗a6 10.♘c3 is awful for Black as well. We have easy moves like ♗f4, ♖d1 and ♕a4 if needed. It will be difficult for Black to not lose a pawn shortly, as there is just too much pressure on his position.

10. ♗f4

Black now loses a pawn, but gains some temporary activity.

10... ♗b7 11. ♕xc7 ♕xc7 12. ♗xc7 ♖bc8 13. ♗f4 ♖c2



Boris Avrukh assesses this position as reasonable for Black, but the compensation is clearly insufficient after the best reply by White:

14. ♖c1

This is very strong.

14... ♖fc8

After 14... ♖xb2 15. ♖c7, Black is lost already. White's active rook is much more of a menace than Black's invader on b2.

14... ♖xe2 15. ♖c7 ♖b8 16. ♘bd2, and again Black is lost, as there are too many loose ends. Note that the rook on e2 is very short of squares.

15. ♘c3 ♖xb2



16. ♘e5

And again, White is clearly better. How is Black going to hold the d5-pawn?

D) 7... ♘e4

Black intends to transpose into a Stonewall structure with ...f7-f5 next.

8.♘c3

This is better than 8.♘bd2, as it puts additional pressure on d5. This way we stop ...f7-f5 altogether, and force Black to lose time with the knight again.

8...♘xc3

The alternative move 8...f5 does not work: 9.cxd5 ♘xc3 10.dxe6. This is the issue. This intermediate move gives us a clear advantage.

9.♕xc3

It's tough to say if 9.bxc3 or 9.♕xc3 is stronger. In any case, we have a distinct advantage. Black has lost time and is nowhere near solving the problem of the passive c8-bishop.

Conclusion

The Closed Catalan is an important part of our repertoire, because it will appear frequently in your games, in particular against club-level players. Most of the time, you will reach the very favourable ...dxe4 structures, but even against the more respectable lines, White has a promising game.

CHAPTER 9

Catalan – Open Variation: 2... ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 ♗e7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 dxc4

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 ♗e7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 dxc4



As mentioned before, this is the main and very likely best line for Black in the Catalan.

7.♕c2

White would like to regain the pawn, of course. There are two main moves to try that: 7.♘e5 and 7.♕c2, the move I am recommending. I also looked at 7.♘e5 in some detail, but felt that 7.♕c2 is the line that is most suitable for the spirit of this repertoire. After 7.♘e5, best for Black is 7...♘c6!, after which White either gives up his 'pride and joy'-bishop on g2 with 8.♗xc6 or goes for 8.♘xc6 bxc6 9.♘a3. This line is fashionable of late, but I felt that it does not fit well with the other repertoire choices. This line may be an interesting addition to your repertoire at a later stage – but be warned: it is interesting, but anything but simple!

Now, after 7.♕c2 we will look at seven(!) moves, which sounds scary at first. I need to emphasize that the Open Catalan is a very important part of a g3-based repertoire and therefore the coverage is rather detailed. You don't need to study every single move of every line in one go, but you should probably get an overview first and later study everything move-by-move. Against second rate lines like 7...c5, 7...♘bd7 or 7...♗d7, just natural moves suffice. I have sorted the moves in order of urgency to study: look at A first, B next, and so on.

A) 7...a6

The main line by a huge margin, but you will face other moves for sure, in particular at club level. With 7...a6, Black anticipates 8.♕xc4 and intends to play 8...b5 9.♕c2 ♗b7 against this natural option.

8.a4

This line currently seems to be the most testing for Black. White has also played the simple recapture with 8.♕xc4, which is answered by 8...b5 9.♕c2 ♗b7. Here,

White has a wide choice, and I checked 10.♗d2 and 10.♗g5 as potential candidates for this repertoire. If you like to vary your play, I can recommend 10.♗d2 as leading to the most complicated positions and 10.♗g5 as one of the most solid lines in all of chess. 10.♗g5 is the kind of line that should win some games and never lose under normal circumstances. However, the equalizing lines are 'very equal' and I couldn't find any improvements. Therefore, the 8.a4 line is my recommendation. If you like to vary your play, go for 10.♗d2, and 10.♗g5 if you like to play super-solid against a strong player.

A1) 8...♗d7



9.♕xc4 ♗c6

Black has activated his problem piece, but still has not solved all his opening issues yet.

10.♗g5

First of all, we need to discuss why 10.♘c3 is to be avoided. After the strong reply 10...b5, White will regret his natural-looking knight move.

The main moves in this position are the two bishop moves to g5 and f4. I consider them to be of about equal value, so the choice comes down to other factors than just the quality of the move. My main reason for suggesting 10.♗g5 is that 10.♗f4

was already covered in Boris Avrukh's 2015 book on the Catalan, and I'd like to present a line that has not yet been covered as extensively. An added benefit for you is that you can easily add 10.♗f4 at a later stage, using Avrukh's analysis as a starting point.

Now, back to 10.♗g5. The idea of this move is to fight for the e4-square and ideally set up a full centre with d4 and e4. One straightforward idea to realize this plan is to take on f6 and play e2-e4 next. This requires a move like ♘c3 or ♖e1 first, of course, to lend additional cover to e4. Let's explore some possibilities from this important starting position.

A11) 10...♗d5



11.♕c2

We are now threatening to take on f6 and play e2-e4 next, so Black's reply is almost forced.

11...♗e4 12.♕c1

We are ready now to play ♘c3 next, asking the bishop on e4 about its intentions. In most cases, Black will eventually take on f3, leading to a position type that we are familiar with from other subvariations of 10.♗g5.

12...h6

The only frequently-played alternative to 12...h6 is 12...♘c6. Black tries for counterplay on the b4-square: 13.e3 ♘b4 14.♘c3 ♗c6 15.♖d1 (now, White is ready to take on f6 and play e2-e4 next) 15...h6 16.♗xf6 ♗xf6 17.e4. This looks like a rather standard position for this line. One plan to consider next is to play h2-h4, ♕f4, and later try to expand on the kingside.

13.♗xf6 ♗xf6



14.♖d1

I prefer this move to the more usual 14.♘c3. I think that by playing 14.♖d1, we will get a slightly more favourable version of the ...♗xf3 position type.

14...a5

Black is freeing up a6 for the knight, as usual in this line.

15.♘bd2 ♗xf3 16.♗xf3 c6 17.♘c4



Compared to other versions of this structure, we have already improved the knight. I discuss the ideas for both sides in the notes to line A121 below.

A12) 10...♘bd7



Black 'connects' the knights, allowing a recapture on f6 with a knight.

11. ♘c3 h6

1) Black may play 11...♖c8 to protect the c-pawn after a future ...♘e4, ♘xe4 ...♗xe4 sequence: 12.♕d3 (I like this move. It stops 12...♘e4 and supports a later e2-e4) 12...♗b4 (Black stops e2-e4 again) 13.♖fe1 (now, White will manage e2-e4 shortly, with a small advantage, due to his nice central control, for example, after the following sequence) 13...h6 14.♗xf6 ♘xf6



15.e4. And we have realized the strategic goal to set up the pawn duo in the centre;

2) 11...♘e4 is a strategically desirable move (trade pieces when having less space), but there is a direct problem: 12.♗xe7 ♕xe7 13.♘xe4 ♗xe4 14.♕xc7, and this important pawn drops.

12. ♗xf6 ♘xf6 13. ♖fe1

Sticking with the general plan to play e2-e4.

13... ♗d5

13...♘e4 does not stop e2-e4 in the long run, as we will see: 14.♘e5 ♘d2 (the careless move 14...♘xc3 leads to a terrible position for Black: 15.♗xc6 ♘xe2+

16.♖xe2 bxc6 17.♘xc6 ♕d7 18.d5, and White is already winning) 15.♕d3 ♗xg2 16.♔xg2 ♘b3



17.♖ad1. White is better here as well. Black's knight is offside, and White will establish a strong centre.



14.♕d3

Instead, 14.♘xd5 exd5! establishes a pawn on d5 and thus makes e2-e4 impossible for White. Now, White is threatening e2-e4, limiting Black's choices.

A121) 14...♗xf3

This is the radical solution, leading to a position type that we will encounter more than once in the 10.♗g5 complex.

15.♗xf3 c6 16.e3 a5 17.♕c2



This position type arises quite often in the a2-a4/♗g5 lines of the Catalan. The opposite-coloured bishops don't necessarily mean that the draw probability is increased. In fact, some of White's ideas are based on play on the light squares, the colour complex that Black's bishop can't defend.

What are White's ideas? One is to improve the knight on c3. It is useful to redirect it to c4 or d3, looking at important squares like c5 and e5, or the pawn on a5. On c3, it is not doing all that much. A long-term plan for White is to start play on the kingside. Black has weakened himself slightly with ...h7-h6, which is helpful for a g3-g4-g5 based attack. This is only possible after due preparation, of course. This kingside idea may also be combined with transferring the bishop to the b1-h7 diagonal.

It needs to be emphasized that Black is mostly waiting in the meantime. He has few active plans, mostly because there is no reasonable pawn play available. It makes little sense to move the b-pawn or the c-pawn, obviously. Black could think of going ...e6-e5 at some point, but this might backfire as well. After ...e6-e5, the light squares are weakened, and White's bishop might find a useful post on the a2-g8 diagonal, putting pressure on f7. It is also difficult in the ...e6-e5 dxe5 scenario for Black to ever move his majority. The pawns on c6 and b7 are targets for the white bishops, while after White plays b2-b3, the black bishop can't attack any pawn. All those points sound like minor issues, but it all adds up to a situation in which White can try little things without taking any risks.

A122) 14...c5

It definitely makes sense to get the c-pawn involved, so this move needs to be considered. The play gets quite tactical now.

15.e4 ♗b3

This odd move seems to be best, but I wouldn't expect this to happen in a game against a human player. That being said, White still has the easier game now.

1) 15...cxd4 does not solve Black's problems: 16.♘xd5 exd5 17.exd5 (the alternative 17.e5 is also promising, but this simple approach is very annoying for Black) 17...♘xd5 18.♕xd4. We want to play ♘e5 next, using the strong bishop. Black has

a hard time to defend against this;

2) 15...♗c6 16.d5 exd5 17.exd5 ♗e8 (17...♘xd5 18.♘xd5 ♗xd5 19.♖xe7 ♕xe7 20.♕xd5 shows why 16.d5 was tactically justified) 18.♘e5. White has an excellent position, based on the dangerous d-pawn.

16.♘b1 c4



17.♕e3

We intend to play ♘bd2 next, asking the bishop about its future plans. White is still slightly better.

A13) 10...a5



White's a2-a4 move weakened the b4-square, and Black intends to use this square for the knight. This looks like a logical plan, but we will see that the knight is actually not that effectively placed on b4.

11.♘c3 ♘a6 12.♗xf6

Black's play did not address the centre all that much, so we are happily going for the full pawn centre.

12...♗xf6 13.e4 ♘b4 14.♖fd1

How do we place the rooks correctly? This is often a tricky problem and might cost a lot of time to determine – and then you still often get it wrong! Here, ♖fd1 is the best move, as the following line shows.

14...b6

Black has multiple ideas with this move. It creates an escape square on b7 for the bishop and supports a future ...c7-c5.

With 14...g6, Black frees up the retreat square on g7. This move also weakens the dark squares around the king, so the reply makes a lot of sense: 15.h4 ♗g7 16.h5 b6 17.hxg6 hxg6 18.♘h2. A strong move! White's ideal set-up would be ♘g4/e4-e5 and ♘e4, ultimately getting a knight to f6! Black is under some serious pressure.



15.♘e1

A very nice idea, showing why ♖fd1 was the right rook move. What is White's idea? Have a look at the next moves.

15...♗b7 16.e5 ♗xg2 17.♔xg2 ♗e7 18.d5

White has managed to successfully fight for the d5-square and develops a dangerous initiative in the centre. Also keep the regrouping ♘e1-f3-d4-c6 in mind – it would probably be too much to handle for Black.

A14) 10...h6

Black immediately forces the action.

11.♗xf6 ♗xf6 12.♘c3 ♗xf3

The idea of Black's move order and the only principled move. Otherwise, we would play the intended e2-e4 and most likely get an improved version of one of the other lines on move 10.

13.♗xf3 c6 14.e3 a5

Black wants to get in ...♘b8-a6-b4, but we are not going to allow it.

15.b4 axb4 16.♕xb4 ♖a7



17.a5

White has annoying pressure on the queenside. Black is quite solid, but it is a game of two results. We either grind Black down or he will grovel successfully for a draw.

A2) 8...♘c6



This looks odd and should be favourable for White.

9.♕xc4 ♕d5

With 9...♘b4 10.♗d2 a5, Black has the idea of establishing the outpost on b4. It looks quite reasonable, but we still have a nice central advantage (Black may also

play 10...b5 11.♕b3. It's always good to be aware of the ...b7-b5 trick. We can't capture, but ♕b3 is better for White. Black's queenside is just too weak): 11.♖d1 b6 (the only way I can see to develop the problem bishop) 12.♗xb4 ♗xb4 13.♘e5, and White enjoys a comfortable edge. The weaknesses on the queenside, like c6, are a headache for Black.

10.♘bd2 ♖d8 11.e3

A21) 11...♕xc4 12.♘xc4

Black accepted the transition into this queenless middlegame, which is much easier for White to play. Black still has difficulties with the c8-bishop and is confined to rather passive defence. White has multiple plans to pursue. We can play for b2-b4 (not easy to realize) or a later expansion in the centre or on the kingside. I'll show a sample line to illustrate these concepts.

12...♗d7 13.♘fe5 ♘xe5 14.♘xe5 ♘d5 15.♗d2 a5

Black has managed to stop b2-b4.

16.♖fc1 ♗e8



17.b3

White will go for ♘e5-d3-c5 next, which is an additional idea not yet mentioned. In the long run, pushing e3-e4 is on the agenda, given that d4 is not getting weak. You have time to prepare those actions carefully – Black is confined to waiting anyway.

A22) 11...♕h5

Black avoids the bleak endgame, but the queen is not well placed on h5.

12.h3

This is not the only good move, but probably the strongest. By getting g3-g4 into

the picture, White prevents Black's central break.

12...♘d5

The move 12...e5 is desirable, but fails to concrete play: 13.g4 ♕g6 14.♘xe5, and we win a central pawn.

13.e4 ♘db4



14.♘b3

We have a substantial advantage in the centre, and I don't see any counterplay for Black.

A3) 8...c5



Black tries to open up the centre for concrete play. There are some similarities to 7.♕c2 c5, but also one important difference, which makes this line slightly more attractive for Black compared to the version without the a-pawn moves.

9.dxc5 ♗xc5

9...♘c6 10.♘bd2 ♗xc5 11.♘xc4 leads to the same position as after our main move 9...♗xc5 10.♘bd2 ♘c6 11.♘xc4.

10.♘bd2

We play in the same way as we do in the version without the a-pawn moves being played. Taking on c4 with the knight is a very attractive prospect.

A31) 10...♘c6

The most popular move and the one I'd mostly expect to meet at non-professional levels.

11.♘xc4 ♕e7 12.♘fe5

We just play in the same fashion as after we do without ...a7-a6 and a2-a4 inserted.

12...♘xe5 13.♘xe5 ♘d5

Black tries to use the weakened b4-square, an idea that is impossible in the other version of this line.

14.♘d3 ♗d6 15.♗d2 ♗d7



16.♕b3

White keeps some nagging pressure on the queenside. It's important to check if 16...♗c6 is playable now. It is not:

16...♗c6 17.e4 ♘c7 18.e5 ♗c5 19.♗xc6 bxc6 20.♕c4

White has a clear advantage.

A32) 10...b5



This move only became somewhat fashionable since 2016, and for example was not mentioned at all in Boris Avrukh's Catalan book, written in 2015.

11.axb5

I have also checked 11.♘g5 ♖a7 (here, we see why a2-a4/...a7-a6 makes a difference compared to 8.a4 c5 9.dxc5 ♗xc5 10.♘bd2, when 10...b5?? fails, due to 11.♘g5) 12.♘de4 ♘xe4 13.♘xe4. This is an interesting option, because now Black needs to know/find 13...♗d4!. Instead, 13...♗b6 is risky because of 14.♘g5. Now, after 13...♗d4!, I could not find an advantage, but 14.♘g5 g6 15.axb5 axb5 16.♖xa7 ♗xa7 17.b3 will win the pawn back, and this position is impossible to lose with all the pawns being on the kingside. In fact, White is still a bit more active, and it's rather Black who needs to be careful. I'd only expect strong players to go into this line in the first place, so having this super-safe option is not bad. The line I suggest instead wins a pawn for White, but is not so easy to play.

11...♗b7 12.bxa6 ♘xa6 13.♘xc4

It's good to be a pawn up, but Black has adequate compensation.

13...♘b4 14.♖xa8 ♕xa8



15.♕c3

Black is very active here, and it is clear that the extra pawn won't move anytime soon. On the other hand, it is hard to imagine that anything worse than needing to return the pawn will happen. Black has some moves now that make sense. I'll show one reasonable looking line.

15...♘e4 16.♕a3 ♕xa3 17.bxa3 ♘a2 18.♗e3 ♘ac3 19.♖e1 ♗xe3 20.♘xe3 ♖a8 21.♘c2

And it's difficult to make much headway, but Black is just playing for a draw and never more than that.

A4) 8...♘bd7



9.♘bd2

The only point you need to remember is that 9.♕xc4 b5! is to be avoided. As ...b7-b5 is now impossible, we will get the pawn back with a nice advantage.

9...c5 10.♘xc4 cxd4 11.♖d1

We should be happy here, as this is already a model Catalan disaster for Black in the making. Let's check a line to illustrate further.

11...♗c5 12.♘xd4 ♕e7 13.♘b3 ♗a7 14.♗e3 ♗xe3 15.♘xe3



The d6-square is an excellent target for a knight, and Black has no way to free himself. Positions like this are the Catalan equivalent to what happens if Black loses three tempi in a Sicilian main line: it's not going to be pretty, just in a different way.

A5) 8...b6



A very rare move. Without the inclusion of 7...a6 8.a4, the move ♘e5 is playable, but Black's exchange sacrifice 8... ♕xd4 gives sufficient compensation. Here, this sacrifice does not work so well.

9.♘e5 ♖a7

As mentioned, the idea 9...♕xd4 is dubious: 10.♗xa8 ♕xe5 11.♕xc4. The point is that the inclusion of the moves 7...a6 8.a4 severely restricts Black's options. For example, the move ...♗a6 is no longer possible.

10.♖d1 ♗b7 11.e4

With a sizable advantage for White – having a perfect pawn centre is useful.

B) 7...b5



This line was extremely rare until the early 2010s, when it was discovered that Black gets good play for the exchange after 8.a4 b4 9.♘e5 ♕xd4. Nowadays, White has worked out the best reply and obtains a strong initiative in the better-explored lines. A new concept for Black was presented in a very recent game by Magnus Carlsen against Ding Liren, leading to fascinating play:

8.a4 b4

The move 8...c6 is met by a well-known refutation: 9.axb5 cxb5



10.♘g5 (Black has no way to block the diagonal and loses the exchange) 10...h6 11.♗xa8 hxg5 12.♗xg5 ♕xd4 13.♗e3, and we will pick up the a7-pawn as well for a decisive material advantage.

9.♘fd2

This has been established to be the best line against 7...b5.

B1) 9...c6

The most frequently-played move, which essentially wins a pawn.

10.♘xc4

There is no other way, as 10.e3 b3 11.♕xc4 ♗a6 must be avoided. On the other

hand, we are happy to sacrifice the pawn for excellent compensation.

10...♕xd4 11.♖d1 ♕c5 12.♗e3 ♕h5

The move 12...♕f5 is worse than 12...♕h5 and gives White a large advantage after the queen trade: 13.♕xf5 exf5 14.♘a5 ♗e6 15.♘d2 ♖c8



16.♖ac1. There is tremendous pressure on Black's position. Note that we don't need to take the c-pawn at the first opportunity, but rather we want to build up even more with ♘d2-c4-e5 or ♘d2-b3-c5, for example.

13.♘bd2 ♘g4

Black's best move, at least trading one piece to reduce the pressure a bit.

13...♗a6 14.♗f3 ♘g4 15.♗xg4 (we have a concrete idea in mind, otherwise giving up the strong bishop would be a strange decision) 15...♕xg4 16.f3 ♕g6 17.♘e4. That's the idea. Now, Black is completely paralyzed on the queenside. The next step is to play ♖ac1 and cover the queen, so that moving the e4-knight becomes possible.

14.♘f3 ♘xe3 15.♘xe3 a5



16.♘c4

White has very good compensation for the pawn. We are going to play moves like

♖ac1 and ♘fe5 next, increasing the pressure on Black's undeveloped and weakened queenside.

B2) 9...♘d5

Black blocks the diagonal with the knight and returns the pawn.

10.♘xc4 c5

Black tries to get rid of the backward pawn.

11.dxc5

Now, we have a split into the new move 11...♗a6 and the simple recapture, which is better for White.

B21) 11...♗a6

This new idea was introduced by World Champion Magnus Carlsen against Ding Liren in the Zagreb GCT in July 2019.

12.♘e3 ♘d7 13.♘xd5 exd5 14.c6

This is stronger than 14.♗xd5, after which 14...♖c8 15.c6 ♘e5 will eventually win the c6-pawn with active play for Black.

14...♖c8 15.♗f4 ♘c5



Ding Liren had used 50 minutes up to this point, while Carlsen was still blitzing, clearly still relying on his preparation. Black's idea is to activate the pieces as much as possible and pick up the c-pawn later. Overall, this is a fascinating line to analyse and great preparation by the World Champion. Finding the best way over the board for White is extremely difficult.

16.♖d1

This is the engine's improvement on Ding Liren's move 16.c7, which ultimately returned the c-pawn. It seems that White retains a small advantage now in an interesting position.

16...d4 17.h4

A surprising move, but it makes sense upon closer inspection. White would like to play ♘d2, but the immediate 17.♗f3 runs into a remarkable line: 17...♘e6 18.♗e5 d3! 19.exd3 ♗d6 (Black is fighting for control over the d4-square) 20.d4 ♗xe5 21.dxe5 ♘d4 22.♕e4 ♘xf3+ 23.♕xf3 ♕g5, and Black is fine.

17...h6

This puts the ...g7-g5 idea back on the map. Two alternatives don't convince.

1) 17...d3 18.exd3 ♗xd3 19.♕c1. Now, 19...♘b3 leads nowhere after 20.♕e3. White picks up the bishop on d3 and keeps the fantastic c6-pawn for a huge advantage;

2) 17...♘e6 is no problem, compared to 17.♗f3 above. After 18.♗e5 d3 19.exd3 ♗d6 20.d4 ♗xe5 21.dxe5 ♘d4, Black has no fork on the bishop on f3 and 22.♕d2 is possible now, with a large advantage. This obviously can be analysed further, but it's already a very deep line.

18.♗f3 ♖e8

1) 18...g5 19.hxg5 hxg5 20.♗xg5 is simple;

2) 18...d3 19.exd3 ♗xd3 20.♕d2 ♘b3 21.♕xd3 ♕xd3 22.♖xd3 ♘xa1 23.♖d7 is not as simple, but still very good for White.

19.♘d2 d3 20.exd3 ♗xd3 21.♕c1 ♗f8 22.♖e1

You can still continue from here, but you need to make a cut. This whole line with 11...♗a6 is a new way of playing and is worth analysing more if you face very well prepared opponents.

B22) 11...♗xc5

This is comfortably better for White.

12.e4 ♘b6



13.♘cd2

A very strong move. Now, Black has no satisfactory reply. I'll show two sample lines:

13...♘a6

13...♗e7 14.a5 ♘6d7 15.e5, and White wins.

14.♘b3

This is going to be a long variation from here, but it is rather forced.

14...♕e7 15.a5 ♘d7 16.e5 ♖b8 17.♘1d2 ♘xe5 18.♘e4 ♗d6 19.♖d1 ♗c7 20.♗g5 f6 21.♗e3

And again, White is clearly better.

B3) 9...b3

Black tries to solve his task with direct, tactical means. It is a playable line, but White's edge after the following sequence is indisputable.

10.♕xc4 ♗a6 11.♕xb3 c6



This is Black's idea: he will win a pawn back as both d4 and e2 are attacked.

12.♘e4

This gives White a comfortable advantage.

B31) 12...♗xe2

This is relatively best at this point.

13.♖e1 ♗a6 14.♘xf6+ ♗xf6 15.♗e3

Black is still suffering, due to the weak pawn on c6. We will continue with moves like ♘b1-c3-e4 and have comfortable play. We need to check what happens if Black grabs on d4, though.

15...♗xd4 16.♖d1 ♕b6 17.♕xb6 ♗xb6



18.♘a3

We will play ♖ac1 and ♘c4 next. Black's knight on b8 is a sad piece.

B32) 12...♕xd4

This capture is the worst option for Black.

13.♘xf6+ ♗xf6 14.♘c3

Black has huge problems with development of the queenside now. I'll show you one impressive line suggested by LeelaZero.

14...♕c4 15.♖a3 ♗e7 16.♖d1

White gives up the exchange, but in return completely freezes Black's queenside.

16...♗xa3 17.♕xa3

How does Black ever move the knight?

17...e5 18.♕e7

With the brutal threat of 19.♖d8.

18...♕e6 19.♕xe6 fxe6



20.b4

White is winning here. Black is paralysed and will drop material shortly.

B33) 12...♘xe4 13.♗xe4 ♗xe2

Black may also play 13...♕xd4 14.♘c3 ♕b6 15.♕c2, but it gives White a huge advantage, as Black is weak on the queenside and White's moves like ♗e3 come with tempo.

14.♖e1 ♗a6 15.♘c3 ♕xd4 16.♘b5

And White enjoys a huge advantage again.

C) 7...b6



This is one the freshest and, looking at the current state of theory, best defences in the Catalan for Black. It was invented by Ivan Bukavshin, one of the most promising Russian junior players at the time, who tragically died at the age of only 20 years. The most obvious idea against it is 8.♘e5, but Black obtains sufficient compensation after 8...♕xd4. The natural move 8.♕xc4 seems too lame, so we need to be more cunning to pose problems.

8.♗g5

This seems to be the most dangerous move at the moment.

C1) 8...♘d5 9.♗xe7 ♕xe7



10.♖c1

At the time of writing, this move is yet untested. This is a surprise, as it is a top choice of the engines. White has tried many other moves here, but could not find a convincing path to an advantage. My main reasoning behind 10.♖c1 is that you will only get this position on the board against someone who specifically prepared the line. Against someone so well-prepared, I'd like to play a relatively early new move to (hopefully) make him think.

Why 10.♖c1 ? It is a waiting move, asking the c8-bishop about its destination. After 10.♕xc4, Black has the useful tempo 10...♗a6 and after 10.♘bd2, the simple 10...♗b7 is OK for Black.

C11) 10...b5

The most principled move, I guess.

11.b3

One of the few real gambits in our repertoire. White retains very good compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

11...cxb3 12.axb3

The pressure on the open files makes it difficult for Black to organize his position. This has never been played over the board, so we need to rely on some sensible-looking sample lines, not on game examples.

Let's have a look at the most natural move in my opinion.

12...♗b7 13.♘e5 c6 14.♘c3 ♘b4 15.♕d2 a5



16. ♘e4

This is just a sample for the type of position you will get. White has good pressure for the pawn, but it is hard to evaluate if White is better. I'd rather play White, but Stockfish calls it equal. I think this 10.♖c1 poses some fresh problems and is worth trying out.

c12) 10...♗a6 11.♘bd2 ♘d7

This looks more reasonable than 11...b5. After 11...b5, Black keeps the pawn, but White will get excellent compensation:

12.b3 and now:

1) 12...c3 13.♘e4 b4 14.a3. Black's queenside construction b4/c3 now falls apart, leaving behind more weaknesses on a7 and c7;

2) 12...cxb3



13.axb3. White has great play, using all the weak squares. ♘e5 or the manoeuvre ♘d2-e4-c5 comes to mind.

12.♘xc4 c5 13.♕a4 ♗b7 14.♘fe5 ♘xe5



15.dxe5

This is the important point, giving us the great square for the knight on d6. This is not easy for Black to defend.

c13) 10...♗b7 11.♕xc4

Now, we are able to take with the queen in a ...♗b7 set-up, exerting some pressure on the c-file quickly.

11...♖c8 12.♘c3 c5 13.dxc5 ♖xc5 14.♘xd5 ♗xd5



15.♕f4

We are a bit quicker on the c-file, giving us a small advantage.

c2) 8...♗a6

This is less flexible than 8...♘d5, and leads to a small advantage for White.

9.♘bd2 ♘d5

The alternative 9...b5 falls short for Black: 10.a4. Now, 10...c6 does not work, and White will regain the pawn with an advantage: 11.axb5 cxb5 12.♗xf6 ♗xf6 13.♘e1, and White wins!

10.♗xe7 ♕xe7 11.♘xc4

Black needs to play ...c7-c5 soon, otherwise it might happen that he is stuck with the backward c-pawn forever.

11...c5 12.♖ac1 ♖c8



13.♕d2

I think White has a small advantage after this new move. Black still struggles a bit to organize his forces. I'll show two sample lines.

13...♘d7

After 13...♘c6 14.dxc5 bxc5 15.b3, White has the better pawn structure here and certainly at least a small advantage.

14.b3 ♖d8 15.e4 ♘5f6 16.e5 ♘e8

Passive, but Black needs to cover d6.

17.♕e3

White has a useful initiative, based on the more active pieces and the vulnerability of the c6-square. This makes it difficult for Black to capture on d4.

c3) 8...♗b7



This is the move we prevented with 8.♗g5.

9.♗xf6 ♗xf6 10.♘g5

And White wins the house.

D) 7...c5



8.dxc5 ♗xc5 9.♘bd2

There is nothing wrong with 9.♕xc4, but c4 is an excellent post for the knight, so this makes a lot of sense.

9...♘c6 10.♘xc4



D1) 10...♕e7 11.♘fe5

White is stopping the e-pawn, keeping the c8-bishop passive.

11...♘xe5 12.♘xe5

A Catalan dream position – Black is stuck with the bad c8-bishop, and White has easy moves to strengthen the position.

12...♕c7

This is not the only move, but it is the most popular one. It is not really necessary to check a variety of moves here, as the strategic outline is basically the same. We

will restrict the c8-bishop and go for a set-up with ♖ac1 and ♖fd1 later, almost no matter what Black does.

13.♗e3 ♗b6 14.♕xc7 ♗xc7 15.♗d4 ♖d8



16.♖fd1

This is just a typical sample line to illustrate a common development of the play. If you employ the Catalan regularly, you will get these types of position quite frequently. Black's situation here is probably even worse than it looks at first sight. How is he ever going to develop?

D2) 10...♘b4

This is a rare move, but it demands some precision from the white side.

11.♕b1 b5 12.♘g5

This is a key move to remember. White probably also retains a slight pull with other choices, but this sets the most problems.

12...♘bd5 13.♗e3

A very useful tempo move.

13...♗xe3 14.♘xe3 h6

14...♘xe3 15.fxe3, and White wins! All of a sudden, 16.♖xf6 is the winning threat.

15.♘xd5 exd5



16.♘f3

White has reached a favourable anti-IQP position. Black has some additional weaknesses on the queenside in addition to the d-pawn.

E) 7...c6



This move recently gained some popularity after it was successfully employed by Sergey Karjakin in the Candidates Tournament, Berlin 2018, to win against Levon Aronian. We will actually follow Aronian for some moves and then improve on his play.

8.♕xc4

I also looked at 8.a4, but ultimately decided to go for 8.♕xc4. The main reason is that I analysed the lines below in 2016 while compiling my English repertoire for Chess24/Chessable, which leads to the same positions after 1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 dxc4 5.♕a4+ c6 6.♕xc4 b5 7.♕b3 etc.

8...b5 9.♕b3

I always liked the queen on b3 in these lines. After ♕c2, quite often a later ...♖c8 proves to be annoying.

9...♗b7

Black's idea is to play a set-up with ...♘bd7/...a7-a6 and ultimately ...c6-c5 to neutralize White's g2-bishop.

10.♖d1

It is important to get the move order right. We need ♖d1 and ♘e5 next, immediately opening up the bishop to increase the pressure on the queenside.

E1) 10...♘bd7



11.♘e5 ♘xe5 12.dxe5 ♘d7 13.♘c3

This is the deviation from the Aronian-Karjakin game. Aronian played 13.♗f4, which is actually not bad either. White's idea is to play ♘c3-e4-d6 as soon as possible.

13...♕c7 14.♗f4 ♖fd8

This move has been played in all three games that reached this position. As we will see, it is not enough to give Black a decent game.

Taking the pawn on e5 is bad, and not only for one reason. 14...♘xe5



15.♗xe5 (White also has the very strong move 15.♖ac1, increasing the pressure. This is also clearly better for White, but winning material is more straightforward) 15...♕xe5 16.♖d7 ♗c8 17.♖xe7 ♕d6 18.♗xc6 ♖b8 19.♕a3 ♕xc6 20.♕xa7. A pretty remarkable sequence that ultimately netted us a pawn. The long diagonal can always be closed by f2-f3, should Black try to set up a battery there: 20...♗b7 21.f3. Black has no counterplay here.

15.♕c2

We are threatening 16.♘xb5 now.

15...a6

According to Mihail Marin, this is better than 15...♕b6, but he did not provide any further analysis. This is odd, as Black is in trouble after the natural reply 16.♘e4 c5 17.♗g5 (this is excellent for White) 17...♗xg5 (sad, but probably relatively best) 18.♘xg5 ♘f8 19.♗xb7 ♕xb7 20.♕xc5, with a clean extra pawn, as already seen in two GM-level games.



16.♘e4

I don't see a good defence for Black now.

16...c5

1) 16... ♘xe5 17. ♘c5 ♗xc5 18. ♕xc5 looks terrible for Black as well;

2) 16...h6 17. ♘d6 is also a lot better for White.



17. ♘f6+

This is the point, leading to a great position for White.

17... ♗xf6 18.exf6 e5 19. ♕f5



19...g6

19... ♗xg2 20. ♖xd7 ♕xd7 21. ♕g5 g6 22. ♕h6 leads to mate!

20. ♕g5 ♔h8 21. ♗xb7 ♕xb7



22. ♗xe5

White is close to winning here.

E2) 10...♕b6

This is rare compared to 10...♘bd7. It is indeed more logical to play the knight first and only later decide what to do with the queen.

11. ♗e3

Of course, we would like to prevent ...c6-c5 if possible. Connecting the bishop with this square makes a lot of sense.

11...♘bd7 12.♘c3 ♖ad8

The natural-looking move 12...a6 is a mistake – 13.♘e5 and unfortunately there are now just two options for Black:

1) Now, managing ...c6-c5 under favourable circumstances is no longer possible: 13...c5 14.♘xd7 ♘xd7 15.d5. This is excellent for White. Black certainly does not want to take on d5 now, but allowing White to play dxe6 is also terrible;

2) 13...♖ad8 14.♘xd7 ♘xd7



15.♘e4 and we have stopped ...c6-c5, which means that Black's opening concept has failed. His b7-bishop will end up being a bad piece.

13.a4 b4 14.a5 ♕a6 15.♘a4

I prefer White in this interesting position. We are clamping down on the c5-square, trying to prevent this freeing move.

15...♕xe2

This capture has to be checked, of course.

16.♖e1 ♕b5 17.♘c5 ♘xc5 18.dxc5

The threat is 19.♗f1, winning the queen.

18...♗a8 19.♗f1 ♕b8 20.♗f4

White must be better here, based on the bishop on a8.

F) 7...♘bd7



This is quite frequently seen at club level, but it does not solve Black's opening problems.

8.♕xc4 c5

After 8...a6, now 9.♕c2 is an important move! Instead, 9.a4 does not help due to 9...b5!, and 9.♖d1 b5 is quite reasonable for Black. After 9.♕c2, however, Black has nothing better than 9...c5 10.♖d1, which transposes to 8...c5.

9.♖d1 a6 10.♕c2

White avoids ...b7-b5, hitting with tempo. Unsurprisingly, Black has scored terribly from here. I'll just show one example that featured a nice tactic.

10...cxd4 11.♘xd4 ♗c5 12.♘c3 ♕e7 13.h3

A good move, preparing ♗e3 without having to worry about ...♘g4.

13...♖d8 14.♗e3

White will play ♖ac1 next, often followed by ♘a4. Black still has no clear way of coordinating his queenside development.

14...♘f8



This position was reached in a master game.

Now, it's White to play and win! White missed it in the game unfortunately.

15.♘c6

A nice shot!

15...♖xd1+ 16.♘xd1 bxc6 17.♗xc5 ♕c7 18.♗xf8 ♔xf8 19.♕c5+ ♔g8 20.♕xc6

White wins a crucial pawn and should win the endgame.

c) 7...♗d7



An inferior line for Black. One way to evaluate this move is to compare it to 7...a6 8.a4 ♗d7, a sequence in which ...a7-a6 is more useful than a2-a4, as we will see.

8.♕xc4 ♗c6 9.♘c3

This move is not possible after 7...a6 8.a4 ♗d7 9.♕xc4 ♗c6 10.♘c3, as 10...b5! is a tactical blow that White should not allow.

9...♘e4

Or 9...♘bd7 10.♖e1 ♘e4 11.♕d3 ♘xc3 12.bxc3, leading to the same position as after 9...♘e4.

10.♕d3 ♘xc3 11.bxc3 ♘d7



12.♖e1

It is important to avoid 12.e4? ♘c5!. I had the position after 12.♖e1 on the board in the game Sielecki-G.Kovacs, Rogaska Slatina 2011, and was better due to the better central control.

Conclusion

This is the main line of the Catalan for a reason. If Black plays perfectly, he will get equal play or very close to it. White still has a pull in many lines against non-perfect (the more usual instance) play, but risks very little in the process. This is an important consideration: what can go wrong if I forget the theory or make a small mistake? A very sound and solid opening like the Catalan is not going to fall apart due to a small slip, which more frequently happens in riskier lines.

CHAPTER 10

Black stops c2-c4:

2... ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4. ♗g2 b5

1.d4 d5 2. ♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4. ♗g2 b5



This chapter features attempts by Black to stop the move c2-c4 by playing ...b7-b5. This idea is rather dubious if White is not yet committed to a g2-g3 set-up, but we will usually have played g2-g3 on the third move in our repertoire, after which ...b7-b5 becomes a more serious option. I decided to cover all the ...b7-b5 set-ups in a dedicated chapter, as they don't quite fit anywhere else and are a rather principled choice against our preferred move order.

1.d4 d5 2. ♘f3 ♘f6

Black may also play 2...e6 and after 3.g3 play ...b7-b5. Still, it makes little sense for Black to delay ... ♘f6 forever, so this will ultimately transpose. We will play our standard moves anyway, and a2-a4 next, as we do in the chapter's main line.

3.g3

This is our preferred move order. We'd like to play a Catalan, but want to avoid the early complications after the capture on c4, in particular after 3.c4 e6 4.g3 dxc4. Delaying c2-c4 sometimes prompts Black to go ...b7-b5, clamping down on the c4-square. He can do that right now, on move three, or wait a bit and go for ...b7-b5 on move four or five. This sounds complicated, but in fact it is not that difficult. We will complete our set-up with kingside castling and then attack the b5-formation with a2-a4, basically no matter what Black did in addition to ...b7-b5. Black might have played ...e7-e6 and ... ♗e7, or ...e7-e6 and ... ♗b7, or some other combination of moves. Our play will be the same and various move orders will still lead to the same positions. Let's have a look at some of these move orders.

3...e6

Most of the time, Black plays 3...e6 first and only later goes ...b7-b5. The early 3...b5 is possible and will transpose to the other move order. Black can hardly play without ...e7-e6 soon. A typical way to transpose is 3...b5 4. ♗g2 e6 or 3...b5 4. ♗g2

♗b7 5.0-0 e6.

4.♗g2 b5

Black sometimes plays 4...♗e7 first and opts for 5...b5 only after 5.0-0, which reaches the main line just with a switch of moves 4 and 5. The same thing is possible with 4....♘bd7 first and 5...b5 next.

5.0-0

We have completed our standard set-up. Now, Black has a choice between some logical moves, like 5...♗e7 or 5...♗b7. Our approach is basically the same against all of them: we need to get c2-c4 in, so we need to play the sequence 6.a4 b4 7.c4. We need to check all the options now, but I will focus on the lines that have been recommended for Black in two books by Quality Chess. The ...b7-b5 lines were first covered by Boris Avrukh in *Beating 1.d4 sidelines* (2012) and later by Nikolaos Ntirlis in *Playing 1.d4 d5* (2017). The ...b7-b5 lines are most likely to be played by booked-up opponents – and they will have those books for sure.

A) 5...♗b7



This is Avrukh's and Ntirlis' main recommendation. They both cover a second option that we will examine as well.

6.a4 b4 7.c4 c5

This is the move suggested by both Avrukh and Ntirlis. I agree that it is better than the alternatives here, but disagree with the assessment that Black is completely fine after 7...c5. Let's have a look at the inferior alternatives.

1) 7...bxc3 8.♘xc3. This is the worst version of this structure, compared to the ones with ...♗e7 or ...♘bd7 played instead of ...♗b7. We play in the usual way and are better: 8...♗e7 (after 8...♘bd7 9.♗f4 a6 10.a5, Black is in danger of being stuck

with the pawn on c7. 10...c5 11.♘a4 c4 12.b3, and Black is in trouble, facing the quick white attack on the queenside. He hasn't even castled yet) 9.♗f4 0-0 10.♕b3 ♕c8 11.♖fc1.



We have gained a large advantage with simple moves. ♘b5 and ♘e5 are coming quickly;

2) 7...dxc4 is rare, but it has an interesting point: 8.♘bd2 c3 (after 8...♗d5 9.♕c2, we get the pawn back easily) 9.bxc3 bxc3. Now, the simple 10.♘c4 is fine, as the c3-pawn will fall eventually, but there is the fascinating move 10.♕b3, which gives White huge compensation after 10...cxd2 11.♕xb7 dxc1♕ 12.♖fxc1 ♘bd7 13.♘e5. The engines basically give White a close to winning advantage already, but it is obviously not trivial to prove.



8.♗g5

The two authors analyse mostly 8.♘bd2, but I don't understand why I should play this slowly. White is some tempi up, because Black has played a ton of pawn moves and has a slightly unstable centre. White is better after 8.♗g5, and it is just a question of how much:

8...♘bd7

This seems to be best.

1) 8...♗e7 9.dxc5 0-0 10.♘bd2 ♘bd7 (or 10...♗xc5 11.cxd5 ♗xd5 12.e4, and White wins with e4-e5 next) 11.c6 (an important nuance, misplacing the black bishop) 11...♗xc6 12.♘d4 ♗b7 13.cxd5 ♘xd5 14.♗xe7 ♕xe7 15.♘2b3.



White has a pull here. The b4-pawn is a liability, but more importantly White has ♘a5 ideas that are very annoying to meet;

2) 8...dxc4 9.♘bd2. I don't think that Black should open the position himself and give White even more development. White is better here: 9...c3 10.bxc3 bxc3 11.♕b3 ♗d5 12.♕xc3. Black is in trouble and in danger of losing a miniature.

9.♘e5 ♗e7 10.cxd5

Here, 10.♘xd7 is also possible and slightly better for White.

10...♗xd5

Black may also take with the pawn: 10...exd5 11.♘xd7 ♘xd7 12.♗xe7 ♕xe7 13.♘d2 0-0 (13...c4 14.♘xc4, we didn't just allow ...c5-c4!) 14.♖e1 ♖fd8 15.e4.



White is better here, using the opposition of rook and queen on the e-file nicely.



11. ♗xd5 ♘xd5 12. ♘c6 ♕b6 13. ♘xe7 ♘xe7 14.dxc5

Please avoid 14. ♗xe7 ♔xe7. This is no problem at all for Black, whose king is quite safe in the centre.

14...♕xc5

14... ♘xc5 15. ♘d2, and the knight coming to c4 will be huge for White.

15. ♗e3 ♕d5 16. ♘d2 0-0 17. ♘b3



White is slightly better here. It does not look like much, but a closer look shows that Black's queenside is still vulnerable. With f2-f3, ♗f2 and e2-e4, we will control the important d5-square and limit the black knights. I don't want to go any deeper, but if you want to learn more, play this position out against engines with both colours. This will certainly be very instructive.

B) 5...c5



Black's most active-looking move. It will often transpose to the Avrukh/Ntirlis line analysed via the 5...♗b7 move order.

6.a4 b4 7.c4

Our standard response against all Black set-ups with ...d7-d5 and ...b7-b5.

B1) 7...♗b7 8.♗g5

And we have indeed transposed to the Avrukh/Ntirlis line 5...♗b7 6.a4 b4 7.c4 c5 8.♗g5 (A above).

B2) 7...bxc3

This is actually the most popular move here, but I think it is risky for Black. White has a huge lead in development and easy moves like ♗f4, ♘b5, ♕b3 and ♖c1 to develop a strong initiative.

8.♘xc3

B21) 8...♘c6 9.♗f4 a6

Black is behind in development by about three to four tempi – this won't work out well.

10.dxc5 ♗xc5 11.♖c1

I don't see a decent way to defend against the threat of 12.♘xd5.

B22) 8...♗b7 9.♗f4 ♘a6

1) 9...♘c6 10.♘b5 ♖c8 11.♖c1 (I don't see a good defence) 11...c4 (after 11...a6 12.dxc5 axb5 13.axb5, Black gets completely destroyed by the pawn duo) 12.b3 (White opens up the position with decisive effect) 12...a6 13.bxc4 axb5 14.axb5 ♘e7 15.c5.



Chess can be a really fun game to play – at least if you are White here!

2) 9...a6 has never been played, but seems relatively best. White still has a large advantage: 10.♕b3 ♗c6 11.dxc5 ♗xc5 12.♘e5 0-0 13.♖fd1.



White is aiming for e2-e4, opening the position while Black is still disorganized.

10.♕b3 ♕b6 11.♘b5 ♗c6 12.♖fc1 c4 13.♕d1 ♗xb5 14.axb5 ♕xb5 15.♘d2

White is threatening ♘xc4, amongst others.

15...♖c8 16.e4 ♗e7 17.b3 c3 18.♗f1

And White wins quickly.

c) 5...♘bd7



6.a4 b4 7.c4 bxc3 8.♘xc3

Now, 8...♗a6 gives this position an independent flavour. I decided to cover the positions after 8...♗e7 or 8...♗b7 via other move orders.

8...♗a6



This line is covered in Avrukh's book, so we better have something ready here. Black also frequently plays the moves 8...♗e7 or 8...♗b7. Both are answered with the natural move 9.♗f4 and are covered via the move order 5...♗e7/5...♗b7.

9.♘e5

Avrukh makes a case for 9.♗f4 c6. The knight jump to e5 has not yet been played in tournament chess, but is a suggestion of the engines. Black needs to react very precisely to stay in the game.

9...c5

This is best for Black, but not an easy decision to make.

1) 9...♘xe5 10.dxe5:

1.1) Now 10...♘d7 is met with a brutal refutation:



11.♘xd5 exd5 12.♕xd5 ♖b8 13.e6 fxe6 14.♕xe6+ ♗e7 15.♕xa6. A good day at the office;

1.2) 10...♘g4 11.♕d4 h5 12.h3 c5 13.♕f4 ♘h6 14.♘b5, and White has a very strong attack against Black's discombobulated position.

2) 9...♗d6 10.♗f4 0-0 11.♘c6 ♕e8 12.♗xd6 cxd6 13.b4 ♗c4 14.b5.



And White is a lot better on the queenside. Note the idea of playing ♕d1-b1-b4.

10.♗g5

The alternative 10.♘b5 is also dangerous for Black. Black's overall issues are his lack of development and the weak squares like c6. I think Black has a tough task ahead in a practical game.

10...♖c8

10...cxd4 is probably not a good idea, as it gives the white queen an easy way to jump into action: 11.♘xd7 ♕xd7 12.♗xf6 gxf6 13.♕xd4 ♗g7 14.♕g4. Black will never have a safe king now, because the normal move 14...0-0 fails.



15. ♘xd5.

Ouch!

11. ♘b5 h6 12. ♗f4

White has many interesting possibilities in these lines. Here, 12. ♘xd7 ♕xd7 13. ♗xf6 gxf6 14. ♖c1 is fun to explore as well. After 12. ♗f4, Black has no obvious way to keep the a7-pawn.

12... ♘xe5 13.dxe5 ♘d7 14. ♘xa7 ♖a8 15. ♘b5



Stockfish still thinks Black is okay here, but I don't see many Black players going into this with much enthusiasm.

D) 5... ♗e7



6.a4 b4 7.c4 bxc3 8.♘xc3

D1) 8...0-0

This line is featured in Ntirlis' book. It is certainly one of the better options for Black within the ...b7-b5 complex.

9.♗f4 a5

This move, which had not yet been seen in practice, was Ntirlis' suggestion in his book. Subsequently, it has been tried in a classical time control game of 2019.

Let's also check two reasonable-looking alternatives:

1) 9...c6 10.a5 (I think White is also better after 10.♘e5 or 10.♖c1, but this plan is tempting. We open a route for the queen to a4, and in some cases might even be able to play a later b2-b4 for a bind on the c5-square) 10...♗a6 11.♘e5 ♕c8 12.♕a4. With ♖fc1 coming next, we have good play against the weakened queenside;

2) 9...♘bd7 (Black ignores White's ♘b5 ideas and gets punished immediately) 10.♘b5 ♘e8 11.♖c1 c5 12.dxc5 ♗xc5 13.♘e5 (White has a huge advantage on the queenside) 13...♘xe5 14.♗xe5 ♕e7 15.e4. Black is falling apart already.

10.♖c1

Ntirlis does not examine this, but focuses on 10.♘b5 instead, which leads to equality.

10...c6



11. ♖e1

In the game Gukesh-Howell, Gibraltar 2019, the Indian prodigy playing White went for 11. ♘e5. This does not lead to much, as Black has ... ♘fd7 soon to trade off the centralized knight.

11. ♖e1 obviously prepares e2-e4.

11... ♘a6

This looks sensible, aiming for b4.

I have also analysed 11... ♗a6 12.e4 ♖a7 (or 12... ♘bd7 13.exd5 cxd5 14. ♘b5, with some pressure for White. We have good chances on the weakened queenside squares, and ♗f1 is coming soon to make use of this bishop again) 13.exd5 ♘xd5 14. ♘xd5 cxd5 15. ♖e3.



A very interesting position that reminded me a lot of some of the games between AlphaZero and Stockfish. White's queenside structure is not ideal, but we have attacking chances on the kingside! h2-h4 and g3-g4 may be coming quickly, and the rook is ready to join via the third rank. LeelaZero gives White a clear advantage, while Stockfish thinks it is about equal. I think it is easier to play White.

12.e4 ♘b4 13. ♘e5 ♗a6 14.exd5 cxd5

What about 14...exd5 ?



This is a blunder, surprisingly: 15.♘a2. Easy to miss! Now, Black is falling apart immediately.

15.♗f1

And here I prefer White, an assessment that LeelaZero supports. We have the useful outpost on b5 and are more active. I think that the ♖e1 and e2-e4 plan is an interesting way to play against Ntirlis' 9...a5 move.

D2) 8...♘bd7

This position may also be reached via Black playing ...♘bd7 first and then ...♗e7, of course.

9.♗f4

Black needs to react to White's 10.♘b5 threat now.

9...c6

This looks like the best option, but White is still a bit better.

1) 9...a6 10.a5 (this is often a good reply against ...a7-a6. White is preparing ♘a4 now, trying to stop ...c7-c5 completely) 10...0-0 11.♕c2 c5 (just before White manages to play 12.♘a4 and fix the weak pawn on the c-file) 12.♘a4 c4



13.♘d2. Black is under pressure here, facing the threat of 14.♘xc4;

2) 9...♘h5 10.♗d2 ♘hf6 (Black offers a repetition, but we don't comply) 11.♕c2

and now:

2.1) 11... ♗b7



12.b4 (a nice shot! White stops ...c7-c5) 12... ♗xb4 13. ♖fb1 ♗xc3 14. ♗xc3 ♕c8 15. ♗b4, and White has excellent compensation for the pawn;

2.2) 11...c5 12.dxc5 ♗xc5 13.b4 (again this move, using the lead in development) 13... ♗xb4 14. ♘b5 ♗c5 15. ♗f4 0-0 16. ♘c7 ♖b8 17. ♘xd5, and White wins.

10.a5 ♗a6 11. ♕a4

We are activating the queen and preparing b2-b4 at the same time.

11... ♖c8 12. ♖fc1 0-0 13.b4



White has the better chances here. We have a useful target on c6 and just more active ideas than Black, due to the advantage in space.

Conclusion

Playing an early ...b7-b5 is a principled approach by Black. Stopping c2-c4 for the moment is a serious accomplishment, but it comes with a price tag. Black is behind in development and often the queenside is weakened. I think White gets a good game and often a very dangerous initiative that is tough to defend against in a

practical game. The ...b7-b5 line was featured in important books, so you might encounter it more frequently than you expect at first.

CHAPTER 11

... ♗f5 set-ups – Introduction and early deviations: 2... ♘f6 3.g3 ♗f5

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 ♗f5



This chapter is about black set-ups involving ...d7-d5 and ...♗f5, usually combined with the pawn moves ...c7-c6 and ...e7-e6. You will encounter this set-up quite frequently if your opponent's main defence to 1.d4 is the Slav Defence: 1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6. Slav players are very accustomed to the triangle pawns in the centre d5/c6 and e6 and prefer to develop the bishop outside of the pawn chain, either to f5 or g4. I decided to examine the Slav style set-ups in separate chapters, as our reply against ...♗f5 is quite different to ...♗g4.

How do we handle the ...♗f5 lines? When I analysed the ...♗f5 set-up, it quickly emerged that White has two principled ideas in it. One of these involves playing for the pawn push e2-e4, prepared by c2-c4, ♘c3 and ♘f3-d2. A possible line with this approach is 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 c6 4.♗g2 ♗f5 5.0-0 e6 6.c4 h6 7.♘c3 ♘bd7 8.♘d2 and e2-e4 next. This whole concept certainly has some logic, but the resulting positions are not that dangerous for Black in my opinion. Black can often trade pieces on e4 and simplifies the position. This whole approach is very solid for White, but I found the second principled plan to be much more interesting.

The second plan and the one that I chose for this book involves White playing an early c2-c4 and ♕b3, attacking the undefended b7-pawn. Now, the most common reaction for Black is to play ...♕b6, creating a vis-à-vis situation of the queens on b3 and b6. We will play the pawn to c5, forcing a commitment. Now, it seems to be most reliable for Black to trade on b3, creating a complex queenless middlegame. This position type is generally considered to be satisfactory for Black, but I think I have found enough ideas to pose some problems. I need to emphasize that there are many ways for Black to avoid this queenless middlegame, and these are usually not that great for Black – there are many, not very obvious, pitfalls. If they know the best line and play into the queen trade, we are going to know the ins

and outs a lot better and will make their life as hard as possible.

Now, about concrete moves and move order: we play our usual set-up with the kingside fianchetto and a later c2-c4, but there is one very important twist that I'd like to mention right at the start of the chapter. We are delaying 0-0 in this line, and going for a quicker c2-c4/♘c3/♕b3 sequence. I will discuss the reasoning behind this move order once we reach the specific positions.

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6

The knight move is the most popular move if Black has a ...♗f5 or a Slav-style set-up in mind. Sometimes, Black plays 2...c6 first or even develops the bishop to f5 right away.

A) 2...c6. Black plays ...c7-c6, aiming for a Slav Defence to the Queen's Gambit after the most common reply 3.c4. Most Slav players start with 2...♘f6 and only after 3.c4 reply with 3...c6. The main reason why they might play 2...c6 on the second move is to play into a sideline like 2...c6 3.c4 dxc4 or they prefer a triangle set-up with 3...e6. As usual, we don't play along, but follow our concept of developing the kingside first (no 0-0, as mentioned in the introduction on move one) and only later play c2-c4. In this particular move order with 2...c6, Black sometimes tries to delay ...♘f6 in favour of queenside development. Still, it will almost always transpose into lines that we examine via ...♘f6. After all, ...♘f6 is a very natural move and deviating often means playing artificial moves for no good reason. We'll look at one line that avoids ...♘f6: 3.g3 ♗f5 4.♗g2 e6



We need to play 5.c4 first, instead of castling. Please see the main line 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 c6 4.♗g2 ♗f5 5.c4 for the details on this move order twist.

5...♗xb1 is a bad move, but it is a case where it makes a difference if Black has played ..e7-e6 or ...♘f6, as in the main line. Of course, 5...♘f6 or a sequence like 5...♘d7 6.♘c3 ♘gf6 7.♕b3 transposes to the main line (5...dxc4 6.♘e5 regains the pawn comfortably). 6.♖xb1 ♕a5+ 7.♗d2 ♕xa2. Very greedy play! It does not work at all, keeping my faith in the value of developing pieces intact. 8.c5. There are some other good moves available, but this is strong and the only move that you need to remember. The queen is cut off and we have many ways to develop the

initiative. One interesting line is as follows: 8...b6 9.b4 ♕a6 10.b5 cxb5



11.e4 (very nice! White opens up the diagonal with decisive effect) 11...dxe4 12.♘e5, and Black is completely lost. Note that ♗f1 is a threat as well!;

B) 2...♗f5.



Black prioritizes the development of the c8-bishop, usually aiming for a set-up based on ...c7-c6 and ...e7-e6 in the style of the Slav Defence. This is a quite viable sideline that has been played by some strong players as a surprise weapon or in rapid time controls.

3.g3. I recommend this very pragmatic approach. After 3.g3, we will transpose to set-ups that are part of our repertoire anyway. This means that 2...♗f5 requires no additional study at all, as we don't attempt to refute Black's sideline. In fact, White has no crushing reply against 2...♗f5. The main line for White at this stage is to play 3.c4, after which 3...e6 4.♘c3 ♘f6 is the most popular continuation. From

here, there are multiple complicated lines that are completely different from our usual set-ups. These still only give a slight edge, so in my opinion it makes little sense to devote a lot of time to this rare line. Let's just stick to our guns and play the standard set-up. There are multiple transpositions from here. Any ...c7-c6 or ...♘f6 leads to the main line of this chapter, while ...♘c6 is also possible and examined in the chapter about the Anti-Chigorin (Chapter 1).

3.g3



If Black intends to play ...♗f5, he now has a choice between playing an early ...c7-c6 (the most popular and reliable) or trying to omit this move.

A) 3...♗f5

Let's examine the scenario of Black avoiding ...c7-c6 first.

4.♗g2

Now, Black's main way of avoiding ...c7-c6 early on is to play 4...e6. If Black plays 4...c6 or a line like 4...h6 5.c4 c6, we will transpose into B below and most likely enter a main line in the next chapter.

A1) 4...e6



5.c4

Now, 5...c6 is the main move by a mile, but a quick look at the others can't hurt:

5...♗e7

5...♘bd7 6.♕b3 (the routine 6.♘c3 would allow Black to transpose to the main line with 6...c6. In this particular case, it is a lot stronger to play the queen first, as Black does not even have ...♘c6 available as a tactical defence of the b7-pawn) 6...♕c8 7.♘c3 c6 8.♘h4, with a very favourable transposition to the line 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 c6 4.♗g2 ♗f5 5.c4 e6 6.♘c3 ♘bd7 7.♕b3 ♕c8?! 8.♘h4.

6.♘c3 0-0

6...c6 7.♕b3 may transpose to the main line. Castling is less precise.

7.♘h4

This move is often worth considering if Black has not played ...h7-h6 and we already have developed the b1-knight to c3. This is important, as otherwise the answer ...♗e4 is annoying, intending to take on b1 after f2-f3.

7...♗e4

At least provoking the weakening move f2-f3, but this move has an upside as well.

8.f3 ♗g6 9.♘xg6 hxg6 10.cxd5 exd5 11.e4 c5 12.e5 ♘fd7



13.f4

With an excellent position for White. It is interesting to compare this line to the main line, starting with 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 c6 4.♗g2 ♗f5 5.c4 e6 6.♘c3 ♗e7. The difference to the move order examined here is that Black has played ...c7-c6 instead of castling. If we try the same ♘h4 idea now, it continues 7.♘h4 ♗e4 8.f3 ♗g6 9.♘xg6 hxg6, and now 10.cxd5 is answered by 10...cxd5!, highlighting the difference. This reply defangs 7.♘h4 in the main line and shows why an early ...c7-c6 is a very sensible choice for Black.

A2) 4...h6

This is a bit early, but this move is a regular part of Black's set-up and will usually transpose to a main line if he follows up with ...c7-c6 quickly.

We'll check a line where Black avoids this.



5.c4 e6 6.♘c3 ♗e7

This is rare, as Black basically ignores the ♕b3 idea. Usually, they play 6...c6, allowing ...♕b6 for the typical queen vs queen situation.

7.♕b3

Now, Black has a problem with defending both b7 and d5.

7...♘c6 8.0-0

You should avoid taking on b7, as 8.♕xb7 ♘b4 9.0-0 ♖b8 leads to a perpetual on the queen and a draw.

8...♖b8 9.cxd5 exd5



10.♗f4

White is slightly better here, due to the pressure on Black's queenside.

B) 3...c6

Black usually combines ...♗f5 with both ...c7-c6 and ...e7-e6, completing the pawn triangle in the centre. Most Slav players start with ...c7-c6 first, and then develop

the bishop to f5. Usually, it amounts to the same thing if they begin with 3...♗f5, as a later ....c7-c6 is very natural anyway. I decided to make 3...c6 the main move order, and for 3...♗f5 to focus on possible ways to omit ...c7-c6 (A above).

4.♗g2

I recommend delaying/omitting castling, and playing a quicker c2-c4. The main line we are about to examine is 4.♗g2 ♗f5 5.c4. I'd like to point out that you may also play the 'hyper-accelerated' 4.c2-c4 immediately. This position usually arises from the proper Slav move order 1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 and has been played quite frequently in recent grandmaster practice. This even quicker c2-c4 has some points, most notably in lines like 4...♗f5 5.♘c3 e6 6.♘h4 or 6.♕b3 ♕b6 7.c5, when 7...♕a6 is fully prevented, due to 8.e4. So, what's the catch? Black may take on c4, of course. After 4...dxc4, there is no way to regain the pawn and it is a true gambit. This is fully playable for White, but also very complicated and committal. I felt that this does not fit too well with the spirit of this repertoire. However, this move order might be a welcome addition to your repertoire at a later stage. It obviously shares many themes with the lines presented here, and therefore is certainly easier to add than something entirely different in nature.

4...♗f5

Here, Black may still transpose to other chapters, of course, with moves like 4...e6, 4...♗g4 or even 4...g6. Besides the obvious 4...♗f5, there is one more move that is relevant to ...♗f5 set-ups.

Black sometimes plays 4...h6 first. It has little independent value, as ...♗f5 will happen on the next move almost all of the time: 5.c4 dxc4 (this is rather illogical, but I always like to check how to handle the pawn grabs. The main option for Black is to play 5...♗f5, of course) 6.♘e5 ♗e6



7.♘a3, and we will get the pawn back comfortably. As a general rule, you never have to worry about the capture if you regain the pawn easily. This is not just material equality, but an advantage for White. Black has traded the d-pawn for the c-pawn and does not get any compensation for this strategic concession. If you compare this to the Classical Slav main line 1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4

♗f5 6.e3 e6 7.♗xc4, you will recognize that White needed to weaken the queenside with a2-a4 to get the pawn back. These weaknesses are the compensation for the central disadvantage – here, we did not need to make any concession like that.



5.c4

As mentioned before, I recommend playing this instead of castling first. Of course, 5.0-0 is not a mistake, but in my opinion it is less precise than 5.c4 if you intend to follow up with the ♕b3 plan. As discussed in the introduction, I think this is the most dangerous approach available. So, why is 5.c4 more precise? There are two main points.

The first one is best explained with a sample move sequence. Let's say you play 5.0-0 e6 6.c4 ♘bd7 7.♘c3 h6 8.♕b3 ♕b6 9.c5. Now, Black does not need to take, but also has 9...♕a6. This is a reasonable way to play, intending ...b7-b6 soon. I was not able to find an advantage against this idea. Now, let's check what happens if we omit castling: 5.c4 e6 6.♘c3 ♘bd7 7.♕b3 ♕b6 8.c5. Now, 8...♕a6 is not a good idea, because of the tricky retreat 9.♗f1!, threatening e2-e4. This is not only strong, but also very easy to miss by Black. So this way, we set a little trap and avoid an otherwise annoying line.

The second point of 5.c4 instead of castling first is the queenless middlegame after the trade on b3, for example, after 5.c4 e6 6.♘c3 ♘bd7 7.♕b3 ♕b6 8.c5 ♕xb3 9.axb3. In this position type, it is favourable to still have the king on e1. First of all, ♘c3 is more relevant for the queenside play (b3-b4-b5) than 0-0, and we are slightly faster on that side of the board. Additionally, White has the plan of playing a set-up with h2-h3 and g3-g4, which is also more powerful with the king still on e1. These points will become clearer once you study the lines featuring this structure in the next chapter.

5...e6

The most logical move and by far the main one.

1) 5...dxc4.



As usual, we need to check the pawn grab. It is useful to compare this to a line I mentioned in the comments to 4.♗g2. There is the related line 1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4, which I regard as critical. Here, Black has not committed the bishop to f5, which makes a huge difference. Black's capture only makes real sense if he either keeps the pawn for good or forces some concession by White to regain the pawn. Now, ...♗f5 does not help at all in keeping the pawn, as ...♗f5 and ...b7-b5 do not go well together. The move ...b7-b5 weakens the light squares on the queenside enormously, squares that the bishop could cover from b7 – but it is on f5. That being said, we need to be precise now, since the best reply is not so obvious:

6.♘bd2 is even stronger than the more usual 6.♘e5, which is also enough for an advantage. Now, the only critical moves are the ones trying to hold the pawn. If Black plays something non-forcing, we simply take on c4, with a comfortable advantage in the form of the central pawn majority:

1.1) 6...b5 (critical, but it fails miserably) 7.a4 (now, the threats of axb5 and ♘e5 are already impossible to address. Engines already assess this as clearly winning for White, remarkably) 7...♕a5. Relatively best according to the engines. At least it stops the immediate 8.axb5. Let's check an entertaining sample line: 8.0-0 e6 9.♘e5 ♕a6 10.e4 (here, the spectacular 10.axb5 also wins by force, but this is simpler and instructive) 10...♗g6



11.d5. This central breakthrough is deadly for Black;

1.2) After the alternative move 6...♗e6, we will get the pawn back: 7.♘g5 (Black can't allow ♘xe6 and needs to move the bishop again, giving up the protection of c4) 7...♕xd4 8.♘xe6 fxe6 9.♕c2 b5



10.a4 and Black's position is in ruins.

2) 5...♗xb1 6.♖xb1 ♕a5+ 7.♗d2 ♕xa2 (I am not sure if anybody will ever dare to snatch that pawn, but it's not bad to be prepared. There is a similar line starting with 2...c6 3.g3 ♗f5 4.♗g2 e6 5.c4 ♗xb1 – both versions are far too risky for Black) 8.c5 (there are other good options like 8.♖a1 or 8.♘e5, but this move works in both versions of the pawn grab) 8...b6 9.b4 ♕a6 10.b5 cxb5



11.e4. This works, even with a knight on f6: 11...dxe4 12.♗f1. The point. Black won't survive this attack – a well-deserved rout!

6.♘c3



The starting point of the main ...♗f5 set-ups. In the next chapter, we will examine the main moves 6...♘bd7, 6...♗e7 and 6...h6. Besides these lines of about equal value, Black has also played two inferior lines that I want to briefly show here.

B1) 6...♗d6

This is a bit naive, but we can't refute it right away. I am using 'naive', because placing the bishop on the diagonal b8-h2 against a fianchetto set-up usually makes little sense. We'll see one drawback right away.

7.♕b3 ♕b6 8.c5 ♕xb3 9.axb3 ♗c7

It is better to play 9...♗e7, heading towards a main line a tempo down.

10.b4 a6 11.b5 ♘bd7 12.b6 ♗d8



13.♗f4

This whole line is not very relevant theoretically, but it has good comical value. Black is completely busted on the queenside, waiting for ♘f3-d2-b3-a5 or a sacrifice on a6 or c6.

B2) 6...dxc4

This capture is badly timed. We regain the pawn easily, with a nice central advantage.

7.♘e5 ♘bd7 8.♘xc4

The trade of c-pawn vs d-pawn is favourable for us. We have gained a central superiority without having to make any concessions.

Conclusion

Within the ...♗f5-set-up, the main line in Chapter 12 is by far the most frequently-played line for a reason. The early deviations for Black are all good for White, but it is useful to have seen some details. You should in particular look at lines with ...dxc4 to be confident that you either regain the pawn or obtain good compensation.

CHAPTER 12

...♗f5 set-ups – Main line: 2...♘f6 3.g3 ♗f5 4.♗g2 c6 5.c4 e6 6.♘c3

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 ♗f5 4.♗g2 c6 5.c4 e6 6.♘c3



Please refer to the previous chapter for some general information about the ...♗f5 set-ups and possible deviations up to this point.

Black now has three main moves of about equal strength: 6...♗e7, 6...h6 and 6...♘bd7. It might not seem like a big difference, but the details are very important here. Black players will usually only have some general ideas about this line, while studying the subtle points will give you good chances to pose Black serious problems that he has not expected. I need to mention that some points apply to all three moves. We will play 7.♕b3, and the best reply for Black is 7...♕b6 8.c5 ♕xb3 9.axb3. Deviating from this sequence is worse for Black and the way to punish these deviations is also somewhat similar. I'll point out the differences, of course.

The endgame after 9.axb3 is very interesting to study. Its three versions are somewhat transpositional, but one important distinction is the placement of the b8-knight. The endgame with the knight coming to a6 is sharper and more concrete, while the placement on d7 leads to a quieter game. I'd like to emphasize again that studying the endgame is important, because it will appear frequently as the moves leading to it are so natural.

I decided to structure this chapter a bit differently. I will not check the three moves one-by-one, but rather split the chapter into 3 scenarios:

- First Scenario: after 7. ♕ b3 Black avoids 7... ♕ b6;
- Second Scenario: after 7. ♕ b3, Black plays 7... ♕ b6 and avoids the trade on b3;
- Third Scenario: the endgame.

Let's check these three ways that the game may unfold.

First Scenario: after 7.♕b3 Black avoids 7...♕b6

A) 6...♘bd7



This is the most popular move here.

7.♕b3

White has an interesting alternative in 7.♘h4 here. As mentioned, this idea is worth checking if Black has omitted ...h7-h6 and the knight is on c3 already. I was not able to find any tangible advantage, so I decided to stick to the usual recipe with 7.♕b3. The idea ♘h4 will still be important in some lines, though.

7...♕c8 8.♘h4

A1) 8...♗e4 9.♘xe4

It is important to avoid 9.f3 dxc4 10.♕xc4 ♗d5, and Black is better off than after the correct move.

9...♘xe4

After 9...dxe4 10.♕c2, we'll win the e4-pawn.

10.♗f4

This is stronger than 10.0-0. We are immediately threatening to take on d5.

10...♗e7

Black's alternative 10...g5 leads to a favourable pawn structure transformation: 11.♗xe4 gxf4 12.cxd5 cxd5 13.♗d3, and Black has a damaged pawn structure.

11.cxd5 cxd5

11...exd5 12.♘f5 is already decisive – Black has no good reply anymore.

12.♘f3

With a comfortable bishop pair advantage. Instead, 12.♖c1 ♕d8 13.♗c7 ♕c8 14.♗xe4 dxe4 15.0-0 is a very interesting attempt to aim for more. Black would need to find 15...♘c5 here, leading to favourable complications after 16.♖xc5 ♗xc5 17.♕b5+ ♕d7 18.♕xc5 ♖c8 19.♕e5. A good choice here on move 12.

A2) 8...♗g6

This already leads to very serious problems.

9.cxd5

This capture often gains in strength after Black has committed the knight to d7. An

open c-file is much tougher to defend with a knight on d7.

9...exd5

Black may also play 9...cxd5 10.♘xg6 hxg6



11.♗f4 and the ♘b5/♖c1 threats are deadly – White is winning.

10.♗f4

The simple plan of 0-0 and ♖fc1 is very difficult to defend against, as is shown by the following sequence: 10...♗e7 11.0-0 0-0 12.♖fc1 ♘b6 13.♘xg6 hxg6 14.a4 ♕d7 15.a5 ♘c4 16.e4, with a huge initiative for White.

B) 6...♗e7 7.♕b3 ♕c8 8.♘h4

Black does not have ...♗h7, so grabbing the bishop pair is a good option.

8...♗e4

After 8...♗g6 9.♘xg6 hxg6 10.♗f4, White has a long-term edge with the bishop pair. Note that in the similar position with the knight on d7 instead of ...♗e7, the capture on d5 is strong, while here this leads nowhere. After 10.cxd5 cxd5!, Black is fine, because he still has ...♘c6 available. Please compare this with line A above.

9.♘xe4 ♘xe4 10.♘f3

We have netted the bishop pair and are better long-term. Of course, Black is not going to fall apart soon, but it is very comfortable to know that the bishop pair will be useful in an open position – and positions tend to get more open, not the other way around!

C) 6...h6 7.♕b3 ♕c8 8.♗f4

A key idea of ...h7-h6 is of course to free up a retreat square for the f5-bishop. This is a difference to 6...♘bd7 and 6...♗e7, when ♘h4 is an important resource. Here we are slightly better with simple development.

8...♘bd7 9.0-0 ♗e7 10.♖ac1

Now, Black needs to worry about the ♖c1 vs ♕c8 situation. Taking on d5 might become a relevant threat.

10...dxc4 11.♕xc4 ♘b6 12.♕b3 ♘bd5



13. ♗d2

Such a position is always slightly better for White. Black has traded the d-pawn for the c-pawn and given White a central edge without clear compensation, like a weak square on b4, for example. This is the scenario in the Classical Slav: 1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5.

Second Scenario: after 7.♕b3 Black plays 7...♕b6 and avoids the trade on b3

A) 6...♘bd7 7.♕b3 ♕b6

This is the best reply, but it is not always played. You will also meet the passive (and bad) 7...♕c8 frequently. This is the first scenario in this chapter.

8.c5

Now, Black's best option is to enter the endgame with trading on b3. The second scenario sees Black avoiding the trade.

A1) 8...♕c7

Not everybody is keen on trading queens, but we are going to be better after this move.

9.♘h4

Black has no retreat for the bishop. There is little difference between the 6...♗e7 and 6...♘bd7 versions in this case – we'll get to the same position in most cases.

9...♗g6 10.♗f4 ♕c8 11.♘xg6 hxg6 12.0-0 ♗e7



13.♕c2

We will consolidate the queenside with b2-b4 and a2-a3, trying to build up even more space later. f2-f3 and e2-e4 is a long-term plan to play for.

A2) 8...♕a6



Not a good idea, but even some GMs have stumbled into it. The issue with 8...♕a6 is not that obvious!

9.♗f1

Retreating moves are always tough to spot. Now e2-e4, winning the bishop, is the brutal threat.

9...♗e4

This is the best defence and keeps Black in the game.

1) 9...♘e4 10.e3 b5 11.♘h4. We will get the bishop pair and enjoy a sizeable space advantage. The pawn on b5 is sticking out and should be attacked with a2-a4 at the

right moment. I'll continue with a plausible sequence of moves: 11...♕b7 (leaving the awkward f1-a6 diagonal) 12.f3 ♘xc3 13.bxc3 ♗g6 14.♘xg6 hxg6 15.e4, with a great position for White;

2) 9...b5 10.♘h4 ♕b7 11.♘xf5 exf5 12.♗g2, and White is better here. A plan to go for is f2-f3 and e2-e4, trying to break open the long diagonal and play against the black queenside.

10.♘xe4 ♘xe4

After 10...dxe4 11.♘d2, the e4-pawn is very weak now and will drop.

11.♘d2 ♕a5 12.♗g2

Please avoid 12.♕xb7 ♖b8 13.♕xc6 ♗xc5!, and Black is attacking all of a sudden.

12...♘xd2 13.♗xd2 ♕c7



14.0-0

We have a comfortable advantage with the bishops and the space, but Black is still quite solid. This is the best Black can get after erring with 8...♕a6 – not an easy task, given that you don't play into this willingly as Black and need to find the solution over the board.

B) 6...♗e7 7.♕b3 ♕b6 8.c5

B1) 8...♕c7 9.♗f4 ♕c8 10.♘h4

Black has no retreat for the bishop. There is little difference between the 6...♗e7

and 6...♘bd7 versions in this case – we'll get to the same position in most cases.

10...♗g6 11.♘xg6 hxg6 12.0-0 ♘bd7 13.♕c2

We will consolidate the queenside with b2-b4 and a2-a3, trying to gain even more space later. f2-f3 and e2-e4 is a long-term plan to play for. This position may also occur via the 6...♘bd7 move order.

B2) 8...♕a6



This is bad for Black, but the refutation is not obvious.

9.♗f1

The kind of move that you want to play in over-the-board chess and check your opponent's facial expressions. All of a sudden, e2-e4 is a serious threat.

9...♗e4

9...♘e4 10.e3 b5 11.♘xb5. This tactic works in the 6...h6 and 6...♗e7 versions of this line, because ♗xb5 is a check!

10.♘xe4 ♘xe4 11.♘d2 ♘xd2 12.♗xd2 b6 13.e4 ♕b7 14.exd5 exd5



15.♗h3

With a clear advantage for White, due to all the static advantages (space, bishops)

and the lead in development, which is very relevant with an open central file. Please note that this line works the same with 6...h6 played instead of 6...♗e7. With 6...♘bd7, Black has 11...♕a5 as an additional option.

C) 6...h6 7.♕b3 ♕b6 8.c5

c1) 8...♕c7

Compared to the 6...♗e7 and 6...♘bd7 versions, Black has created a retreat square on h7, defusing ♘h4.

9.♗f4 ♕c8



10.♘d2

This idea is surprisingly strong. The plan is to push e2-e4.

10...♘bd7

10...♘h5 11.♗e5 (we need to keep the e2-e4 idea alive. Don't go to e3, stopping your own attacking plan) 11...♘d7 12.e4, with a strong initiative. Black is in huge trouble.

11.e4 dxe4 12.♗xe4

This is the creative point! We don't mind giving up this bishop, because we need knights to exploit the weak d6-square. This position is tough to defend for Black.

12...♘xe4 13.♘dxe4 ♗xe4 14.♘xe4

We will get to d6 now with great effect.

14...♗e7 15.♘d6+ ♗xd6 16.♗xd6

Black might get the knight to d5, but his king will never be safe.

c2) 8...♕a6



The worst option at this point, but the refutation is easy to miss.

9.♗f1

Ouch! White is threatening to play e2-e4, winning a piece. Black is clearly worse now.

9...♗e4

This is relatively best, but still not sufficient to get a reasonable game.

1) 9...b5 10.a4 ♕a5 11.♗d2, and Black is in terrible shape here too;

2) 9...♘e4 10.e3 b5 11.♘xb5. This tactic works in the 6...h6 and 6...♗e7 versions of this line, because ♗xb5 is a check!

10.♘xe4 ♘xe4 11.♘d2

Against 11.e3, Black still had 11...♕a5+ to stay in the game. Now, this move is a real threat.

11...♘xd2 12.♗xd2 b6

Black needs a square for the queen ASAP!

13.e4 ♕b7 14.exd5 exd5



15.♗h3

With a clear advantage. Please note the similarity to line B above.

Third Scenario: the endgame

A) 6...♘bd7 7.♕b3 ♕b6 8.c5 ♕xb3 9.axb3

We have reached the previously mentioned endgame. There are three versions of the endgame, depending on Black's sixth move. Here, Black has already committed to the knight placement on d7, which means the endgame will be less sharp and based on concrete lines, compared to the other versions where Black might play a quick ...♘a6. Let's have a look at how play develops with the knight on d7.

9...a6

Black plays this move almost all the time. Not just here on move 9, but also most of the time at a later stage. Black wants to make the rook on a8 mobile and is afraid that White may play b2-b4 and even b4-b5 quickly. By going 9...a6 now, he makes sure that the b4-b5 push is prevented after 9...a6 10.b4 ♖c8.

The alternative 9...♗e7 is not as frequently seen as the early 9...a6. Black does not fear the quick b2-b4-b5 push, and we will see that it is indeed not that much of a problem. This position may also arise from 6...♗e7 and 9...♘bd7, of course. 10.b4 0-0



11.h3. A very important moment. White should not play b4-b5 here, even though this is often perceived as a threat by Black – see the cautious 9...a6/10...♖c8 line. After 11.b5 cxb5 12.♘xb5 a6 13.♘c3 b6, Black is fine. The idea of h2-h3 is to play g2-g4 next and continue with ♗f4. I'll stop here, as the strategy is basically the same as after 9...a6. Here, Black has not played ...a7-a6, but it is not much of a difference – quite often Black might play ...a7-a6 soon anyway.

10.b4 ♖c8

Black stops any b4-b5 ideas. As we have seen in the 9...♗e7 line, this b4-b5 idea is not even on our agenda.

11.h3

Here, you may also play 11.♘h4, but it is essential to understand the general plan of h2-h3 and g3-g4. This plan is relevant for all versions of the endgame with ...♘bd7, and may also appear from other move orders. We are dealing with various set-ups here, rather than concrete move orders.

11...h6

Black will play this move at some point, getting the h7-square for the bishop.

12.g4 ♗h7 13.♗f4

After h2-h3 and g3-g4 have been played, we have gained this convenient place for the bishop. It has a safe retreat now, if necessary. The pawn expansion is also useful for later play on the kingside, as we will see.

13...♗e7



14.♘d2

This move finally reveals what White should do on the queenside. He starts a knight tour to a5, ultimately eyeing the b7-pawn. This position is slightly better for White, because Black has less space and very few active ideas. Of course, he is solidly placed, but it is not much fun to just sit and wait. White also has the idea of expanding in the centre later. Let's examine some possible continuations to illustrate.

14...0-0 15.♘b3 ♗d8

Black needs to react to the ♘a5 idea.

16.♗d6 ♖e8 17.f4

White stops ...e6-e5 and gains even more space.

17...♗e7 18.♗xe7 ♖xe7 19.e3

I prefer White here, being a huge believer in space. If Black does not show some clear idea, we will play ♗f3 and h3-h4. This whole line also shows the point of delaying castling and playing c2-c4 on move 5. This kingside expansion does not work after White has castled.

B) 6...♗e7



7.♕b3 ♕b6 8.c5 ♕xb3 9.axb3

Just as in the 6...h6 line, Black now has the choice to go for a passive approach with ...a7-a6 and ...♘bd7, or 9...♘a6 for more concrete play.

9...♘a6

Black may also play 9...0-0 (9...♘bd7 10.b4 would immediately transpose into the slow endgame type covered via the 6...♘bd7 move order), which keeps options open: 10.h3 (this fits into the slow set-ups with ...♘bd7. Note that 10.b4 ♘a6 is something I'd rather avoid. It's not terrible for White, but nets no benefits either. After 10.h3, we will transpose to a ...♘bd7 set-up most likely) 10...♘a6 (a delayed ...♘a6 usually does not work all that well. This case is no exception. Most of the time Black plays 10...♘bd7 here, transposing into the slow endgame type covered via the 6...♘bd7 move order. Yet another way to get to this scenario would be 10...h6 11.g4 ♗h7 12.♗f4 ♘bd7 13.b4. There are various move orders possible, but we have the same set-up against the slow approaches: play h2-h3 and g3-g4, followed by ♗f4. Later, ♘f3-d2-b3 is a key idea) 11.♘e5 ♘b4 12.0-0 (the idea of ♗d2 and ♖a4 is difficult to meet) 12...a5 13.♗d2 h6



14.♖a4. The threat is ♘a2 now, ultimately getting at the a5-pawn. I don't see how Black keeps the pawn, which means he is in trouble.



10.♖a4

I recommend playing this move against both 9...♘a6 lines, namely the one examined here with 6...♗e7, and the one with 6...h6. We stop ...♘b4 and have the long-term plan of castling kingside and ultimately getting b3-b4-b5 played. It is also an idea to sideline the knight with ♗f4, taking away the c7-square. I have also checked 10.♘e5, intending to answer 10...♘b4 with 11.♖a4. This is not bad at all, but I couldn't find an advantage for White and I felt that 10.♖a4 sets more problems.

B1) 10...♘d7



A good move, preventing ♘e5.

11.h4

After 11.♗f4 f6!, Black is right in time for ...e6-e5 and ...g7-g5 ideas. Now, the position is very complex and interesting. I'll analyse some possible lines to show the key concepts.

B11) 11...f6 12.0-0

Again, 12.♗f4 e5! is bad for White.

12...e5

We can always handle 12...♗c2 by sacrificing the pawn: 13.♗d2 ♗xb3 14.♖a3 ♗c2 15.♖fa1. The b2-b4-b5 idea gives us excellent compensation, as usual.

13.b4

We need to stabilize c5.

13...♗c2

The conservative move for Black here is 13...♘c7: 14.dxe5 fxe5 15.e4 dxe4



16.♘g5. Here I'd rather be White, but Black is certainly solidly placed.

14.♖xa6 bxa6 15.♗e3

White has enough play for the exchange here. I was really stunned by how often

these sacrifices work. Quite clearly, this is already very deep analysis and you need to cut it at some point. I definitely recommend exploring these positions a bit more on your own. They might not appear on the board often, but they make very interesting study material. Let's have a look at a reasonable line for Black to show some ideas.

15...♗e4 16.♖a1 0-0-0 17.♗h3

This looks more interesting than taking the weak a6-pawn.

17...♔b7 18.♘d2 ♗g6 19.f4 e4 20.f5 ♗e8



21.♗f4

White has enough compensation here. This is just one line after the exchange sacrifice – there are many interesting alternatives along the way.

B12) 11...e5 12.b4

This covers c5 and makes dxe5 possible. Black needs to take care of the e5-pawn.

12...♗c2

This is a mistake, but certainly a tempting move. 12...f6 13.dxe5 fxe5 14.e4 dxe4 15.♘g5 looks slightly better for White. We get control over the e4-square.



13.♖xa6 bxa6 14.dxe5

White is in great shape here, with 15.♘d4 being the immediate threat.

B13) 11...h6 12.♗f4

We examine this position via the move order with 6...h6.

B14) 11...0-0

This is a slow approach. I think Black should prioritize ...f7-f6 ideas and keep options open for the king.

12.♗f4 f6

Note that Black threatens ...e6-e5 now, so we need to go for the following amazing idea.

13.b4 ♗c2



If Black does not play this principled move, we manage ♔d2 next, further preparing ♖fa1 and b4-b5.

14.♖xa6

A remarkable concept. Let's see why we have enough play for the exchange here.

14...bxa6 15.♗h3 ♔f7 16.♔d2 ♗e4 17.♖a1

Black now can't allow 18.♖xa6 to happen and needs to go with the following.

17...♗xf3 18.exf3 ♘b8 19.♗f1

We will win the a-pawn and have enough compensation for the exchange. The

c-pawn is always going to be dangerous for Black, due to b4-b5 breakthrough ideas.

B2) 10...0-0



11.♘e5

Black failed to prevent this move, so we go ahead and play it. 11.♗f4 is a good alternative here.

11...♘b8

A drastic measure, and I doubt many human players would go for it. Still, the alternative is worse: 11...♖fc8 (we were threatening 12.♘xc6, so some cover of c6 is needed) 12.♗f4 h6 13.f3 ♗h7 14.♔d2. Now we are threatening ♖ha1, so 14...♘b8 is necessary after all. We are somewhat better with e2-e4 next, gaining more space. Compared to 11...♘b8, Black has lost some time.

12.f3

We are slightly better here, with e2-e4 and b3-b4 coming for a good space advantage.

B3) 10...♗c2



One great point of 10. ♖a4 is that this reply looks very tempting, but leads nowhere at best.

11.0-0

We ignore the threat to the pawn. We will see that Black should not take the pawn, but I don't think many players will go 10... ♗c2 and then, after 11.0-0, all of a sudden decide not to capture. We have to check both scenarios, of course.

11... ♗xb3

If Black now refuses to take with a move like that, we just continue with useful moves that we would play if he hadn't played ... ♗c2 in the first place: 11...h6 12.h4 0-0 13. ♗f4, and now we are ready for ♖c1 and force the issue. I don't see many players going for 10... ♗c2 and then refusing to take the pawn.

12. ♖a3

B31) 12... ♗c2



13. ♗f4

Our plan is very straightforward. Just play ♖fa1 and b2-b4 next.

13... ♘d7

This is sensible. It covers e5 against ♘e5 ideas and prepares ...f7-f6.

13... ♘b4 is a huge mistake, as the knight has no way back: 14. ♖fa1 a6 15. ♘e1, and Black is in huge trouble.

14. ♖fa1 f6



15.b4

This is the key point. We are very quick on the queenside after Black has lost time with the pawn grab.

15...g5

15...♘xb4 16.♖xa7 ♖xa7 17.♖xa7, and we will win b7 as well, having a clear and almost winning advantage.

16.♘e1 ♗g6 17.♗d2 ♘db8

Going to ultra-passive mode, but it is the most resilient defence. One important piece of practical advice is to simply ignore the fact that you are a pawn down. White does not need to rush anything here, because Black is completely stuck on the queenside. White has a number of ideas here, I'll show one of them:

18.h4 gxh4 19.gxh4 ♖g8 20.♔h2

With ♗h3 and ♘e1-g2-f4 next.

B32) 12...♗c4



I'd rather expect 12...♗c2, but this has some merit. The bishop might be useful in defending the queenside from b5 or a6.

13.♘e5

Our intention is to play 14.♘xc4 and then 15.♖a4, getting the pawn back with a huge advantage.

13...♗b5

After 13...0-0 14.♘xc4 dxc4 15.♖a4, White is much better, enjoying the bishop pair in an open position.

14.♘xb5

This is a bit easier to handle than 14.♗f4, which is also very promising.

14...cxb5 15.♖a5

Now, the threat is c5-c6, which is far more serious than taking on b5.

15...♘c7

Black may also play 15...♗d8 16.♖xb5 b6



17.♗f4. White is winning here already. The coming ♖a1 will be devastating.

16.♗f4

The bishop is taking aim at the knight, threatening to take on f7. White has great compensation for the pawn now, and you could easily analyse this a lot deeper. I'll show two sensible lines to illustrate the key ideas for White:

16...♘h5

Black may also play 16...♗d8 17.♖c1 a6 18.♖aa1 (threatening ♗c1-d2-a5 and c5-c6 next, similar to the 16...♘h5 line) 18...a5 19.♗f1. This bishop will be aimed at the new weakness on b5. A set-up with ♗d2/e2-e3 and later f2-f3 and g3-g4 is very

promising. Black's extra pawn is worthless and we have multiple ideas to improve our position.

17.♗d2 a6 18.♖aa1

The rook has done its job on a5.

18...♘f6 19.♗a5 ♖c8 20.c6 bxc6 21.♖fc1

And I can easily imagine that Black will lose c6, a6 and finally b5 to the white pressure.

C) 6...h6 7.♕b3 ♕b6 8.c5 ♕xb3 9.axb3



We have reached the endgame with the early ...h7-h6. Here, the most common move is 9...♘a6, which is the more active way for Black to play this formation. I think that most of the time this move is played because Black is trying to figure it out over the board and recognizes that it is impossible to stop b3-b4-b5 by means of ...a7-a6. In fact, b3-b4-b5 is not a problem all of the time, and 9...a6 or 9...♗e7 are still playable and will likely transpose to the slow endgame that we examine via the 6...♘bd7 move order.

9...♘a6

1) 9...a6 (very rare, but actually not that bad) 10.b4 ♗e7 (the only good move! After 10...♘bd7 11.b5!, we get the favourable scenario examined via 9...♘bd7 10.b4 a6 11.b5)



11.h3. Remarkably, 11.b5 cxb5 12.♘xb5 0-0 is perfectly OK for Black. If a draw wins you life-changing money you can play 13.♘c7 ♖a7 14.♘b5 and retire. There is no way to get an advantage though.

After the slow 11.h3, we will very likely transpose to the ...♘bd7 complex soon. Our plan is g3-g4, ♗f4 and ♘f3-d2-b3-a5 in any case;

2) 9...♘bd7. It is tough to tell them apart, I know. But this is the only version that is good for White – in the other cases, we want to play b3-b4, but b4-b5 nets nothing. Let's check why this particular case is favourable for us: 10.b4 a6 (10...♗e7 11.b5 0-0 12.bxc6 bxc6 13.♖a6 is horribly wrong for Black, as a7 and c6 are terminal weaknesses) 11.b5 cxb5 12.♘xb5 (with the bishop on e7 already, instead of having played ...h7-h6 or ...♘bd7, Black could castle. Here, he needs to move the rook) 12...♖c8 13.♘c3 ♗e7 14.0-0 0-0



15.b4 with an excellent position for White. Black's queenside is weak, and we have many ideas to attack on this side of the board. A set-up with h2-h3/♗e3/♖fc1 and a later b4-b5 comes to mind;

3) 9...♗e7. Again, a very rare move, but it sets an interesting move order task: 10.h3 (we don't want to castle, as this does not fit with the slow set-ups featuring h2-h3/g3-g4 and ♗f4 against ...♘bd7 formations. In fact, we will very likely transpose to

such a slow formation now, as we will see) 10...♘a6 (this move order of ...♗e7 and ...h7-h6 first, and only then ...♘a6, is too slow. ...♘a6 has some annoyance value, because it may threaten a quick ...♘b4, but here we are able to fend it off easily. Better for Black would be to transpose into the slow endgame with 10...a6 11.g4 ♗h7 12.♗f4 ♘bd7 13.b4. The slow endgames with ...♘bd7 are examined via 6...♘bd7) 11.g4 ♗h7 12.♗f4 ♘b4

13.♖a4. The knight tour didn't net much. This is a much worse version of the ...♘a6 lines on move 9.

10.♖a4

I recommend playing this move against both 9...♘a6 lines, the one examined here with 6...h6 and the one with 6...♗e7. We stop ...♘b4 and have the long-term plan of castling kingside and ultimately getting b3-b4-b5 played. It is also an idea to sideline the knight with ♗f4, taking away the c7-square. I have also checked 10.♘e5, intending to answer 10...♘b4 with 11.♖a4. This is not bad at all, but I couldn't find an advantage for White and I felt that 10.♖a4 sets more problems.

c11) 10...♘d7



Black prevents ♘e5 and adds support for a later ...e6-e5.

11.h4

This is absolutely necessary here. Black was threatening ...g7-g5, controlling f4 and preventing our key move ♗f4.

11...♗e7

This position could also be reached via the 6...♗e7 move order.

After 11...f6 12.h5, we get a very complex position. As usual, the main question is what happens after 12...e5 ? The conservative 13.♗d2 is fine here. The engines also suggest the wild 13.♘h4 ♗c2 14.♘xd5!?, but I didn't want to extend the line beyond move 20. The idea of 13.♗d2 is to just hold the centre with e2-e3 and play for ♘h4 and ♗h3 ideas. Black's set-up has weakened the light squares, so this makes a lot of sense.

12.♗f4 f6 13.b4

Now, Black needs to play the most challenging move, otherwise we just manage to play b4-b5 and are much better.

13...♗c2



14.♖xa6

A recurring theme in these lines. White again obtains interesting compensation for the exchange.

14...bxa6 15.h5

This is an important move, securing the f4-square for the bishop. White's idea is to pick up the a6-pawn later and put pressure on the remaining pawns on the queenside. There are many possible lines now, I'd like to explore two:

1) 15...♗f5 16.♔d2 ♗g4 (Black tries to play ...♗xf3 and ...e6-e5) 17.e4 dxe4 18.♘xe4.



White has enough compensation here, as there are so many weak spots in Black's camp. A white piece coming to d6 will be very powerful;

2) 15...a5. Black decides to just jettison the a-pawn, as it is so weak anyway. This way, the a-file remains closed: 16.b5 cxb5 17.♗h3 ♔f7 18.♘xd5, and again we have enough play for the exchange.

c12) 10...♗c2 11.0-0 ♗xb3 12.♖a3 ♗c2

The move 12...♗c4 is playable in the 6...♗e7 version, but not here: 13.b3 ♗b5 14.♘xb5 cxb5



15.♖a5. If Black had played 6...♗e7 (instead of 6...h6), he would have had ...♗d8. Without this option, he is in huge trouble: 15...♘c7 16.♗f4 ♔d8 17.♘e5, and Black will lose a pawn, leaving him with a clear disadvantage.

13.♗d2

This is a difference to the 6...♗e7 version of this line. 13.♗f4 would run right into a quick ...♘d7 and ...g7-g5.

13...♘d7

Black anticipates ♘e5. Black may also ignore the ♘e5 idea: 13...♗e7 14.♘e5. The threat is 15.♘xc6. Black needs to retreat now, but the resulting position is much

better for White: 14...♘b8 15.♖c1 ♗h7 16.♖b3, and we win the b-pawn.

14.♖fa1

White now has the idea of playing b2-b4-b5, but also the more pedestrian e2-e3 and ♗f1. White is better here. One possible line runs as follows:

14...g5 15.b4 ♗g7 16.b5 cxb5



17.♘xb5

We have ♗c3 and ♘d6 next, with enormous pressure.

Conclusion

Black's best bet in the main line is the endgame after the trade on b3. The lines after ...♘a6 are fascinating to study and contain many surprising ideas. I am aware that the play in this chapter is not simple in the true meaning of the word, but I would like to emphasize that having studied the ideas, you have a huge headstart over your opponent, who very likely has never studied this system at all.

CHAPTER 13

... ♗g4 set-ups – Introduction and early deviations: 2... ♘f6 3.g3 ♗g4

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 ♗g4



This chapter is about black set-ups involving ...d7-d5 and ...♗g4, usually combined with the pawn moves ...c7-c6 and ...e7-e6. You will encounter this set-up quite frequently if your opponent's main defence to 1.d4 is the Slav Defence (1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6). Slav players are very accustomed to the triangle of pawns in the centre (d5, c6 and e6) and prefer to develop the bishop outside of the pawn chain, either to f5 or g4. I decided to examine the Slav style set-up in two separate chapters, as our reply against ...♗f5 is quite different to the one against ...♗g4.

How do we handle the ...♗g4 lines? We are aiming for the familiar set-up with the early kingside fianchetto and a delayed c2-c4. Quite similar to the ...♗f5 chapter, I recommend playing c2-c4 before castling kingside. One reason for this decision is that after a later h2-h3, Black might drop back to f5, a scenario in which I prefer to not have castled. For more on that, please see the ...♗f5 chapter. So, unless Black plays something strange that needs and warrants a special reply, we will play 1.d4, 2.♘f3, 3.g3, 4.♗g2, 5.c4 and 6.h3 next, asking the bishop about its intentions. Most of the time, Black keeps it on the board and retreats to h5. In the majority of cases, we will play exactly these six first moves.

There are actually very few other cases, as Black has the same mindset that we have: aiming for a set-up that consists of moves like 1...d5, 2...♘f6, 3...c6, 4....♗g4, 5....e6 and 6....♘bd7, with some twists about the move order. In fact, the next chapter will deal with the exact position that occurs after both sides have completed their set-up: 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 c6 4.♗g2 ♗g4 5.c4 e6 6.h3 ♗h5 7.0-0 ♘bd7. In this chapter, we will discuss sidelines and early move orders that Black might try.

One important point to note is that ...♗g4-based set-ups have a wider range of pawn structures and ideas, compared to the ...♗f5 Slav-style lines. The ...♗f5 lines

are all about the ♕b3/♕b6 standoff lines and the frequently-arising queenless middlegame positions. In this chapter, we will see many different ideas, depending on specific move orders. One example: it is a key idea for White to trade on d5 in many lines. After the trade, Black may recapture with the e-pawn or c-pawn, which leads the game to completely different paths and gives it a lot more variety compared to ...♗f5 set-ups. Let's check some details.

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3

Now, Black most of the time only plays ...♗g4 after he has played ...♘f6 and ...c7-c6 first, but there are other options. Black may play the premature 2...♗g4 (A), start with 2...c6 and delay ...♘f6 in favour of 3...♗g4 (B) or play 2...♘f6 (C) first.

A) 2...♗g4



This is a rare and quite questionable line. We need to check it briefly, mostly because our standard g2-g3-based approach does not make much sense now.

3.♘e5

Against our routine move 3.g3, Black might take on f3. These doubled pawns are not terribly weak, but our pawn structure loses some flexibility. On a general note: it is fine to have a standard set-up, but you should still try to refute bad lines. 3.♘e5 is just a stronger move than 3.g3.

3...♗f5

After the move 3...♗h5, Black is already in danger of losing quickly: 4.g4 ♗g6 5.h4

(White now threatens to trap the bishop with h4-h5 and f2-f3) 5...e6 6.♗g2 (6.h5 ♗e4 7.f3 f6 is less convincing). I don't see a playable line for Black now. One possible line is as follows: 6...♗d6 7.h5 ♗e4 8.f3 f6 9.♘f7 (a very nice shot, getting the king to move) 9...♔xf7 10.fxe4 dxe4



11.♗xe4. Please note that the move ...♗g3+ is no problem at all for White, here or on the previous move. We play ♔f1 and will pick up a crucial tempo on the bishop on g3, most likely with ♕d3. White has a huge advantage, and Black's position is difficult to defend.

4.c4

Putting some immediate pressure on the centre makes a lot of sense here. The next moves are played almost all of the time, as there are few sensible alternatives for Black.

4...f6 5.♘f3 e6 6.♘c3 c6



It is interesting to compare this position to the one after 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♗f5 3.c4 e6 4.♘c3 c6. Black has an extra move ...f7-f6, but this is a very unappealing move. It takes away the natural square for the knight and weakens the pawn structure for little benefit.

7.g3

This fits well with our general development concept and makes a lot of sense here as well. A standard plan to follow now is to prepare e2-e4, exposing the weakness on e6 in the long run. Therefore, the next moves will be ♗g2, 0-0 and moves like ♖e1 or ♘d2, followed by e2-e4.

B) 2...c6

Black plays ...c7-c6, aiming at a Slav Defence to the Queen's Gambit after the most common reply 3.c4. Most Slav players start with 2...♘f6 and only after 3.c4 reply with ...c7-c6. The main reason why they might play 2...c6 on the second move is to play into a sideline like 2....c6 3.c4 dxc4 or they prefer a triangle set-up with 3...e6. As usual, we don't play along, but follow our concept of developing the kingside first and only later play c2-c4. In this particular move order with 2...c6, Black sometimes tries to delay ...♘f6 in favour of queenside development. Still, it will almost always transpose into lines that we examine via ...♘f6. After all, ...♘f6 is a very natural move and deviating often means playing artificial moves for no good reason.

3.g3 ♗g4

3...♘f6 is of course also possible, and very likely will transpose to the main line examined via the main move order 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 c6 4.♗g2 ♗g4 5.c4 (Chapter 14).

4.♗g2 ♘d7

Queenside first. This happens most of the time, but of course Black may develop with ....♘f6 as well, which would transpose to our main line. There is also 4...e6, but after 5.c4, Black will play either 5...♘f6 or 5...♘d7, transposing either into the main line again or 4...♘d7, the move examined here. Just remember our order of moves to play c2-c4 on move 5 and all is fine.



5.c4

I'd like to point out that at this juncture that White has a very respectable alternative in 5.♘bd2, intending to castle and play ♖e1 and e2-e4 next. This line would

also have worked well in the 'Keep it Simple' context, but sticking to the usual recipe of playing c2-c4 against ...d7-d5 based set-ups has obvious merit as well.

5...e6

Black delays ...♘gf6, avoiding the transposition to the main line via 5...♘gf6 6.h3 (Chapter 14).

The capture should always be checked: 5...dxc4 6.♘bd2 ♘b6 7.0-0 ♘f6 8.♕c2. The standard way of handling the capture on c4. This is examined via the move order 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 ♗g4 4.♗g2 ♘bd7 5.c4 dxc4 6.♘bd2 ♘b6 7.0-0 c6 8.♕c2 (line C1 below).

6.h3 ♗h5

1) 6...♗f5 7.♘c3. After the unusual ...♗f5, we basically get a ...♗f5 line with the extra move h2-h3;

2) 6...♗xf3 7.♗xf3 dxc4 (Black usually plays 7...♘gf6 here, after which we just castle, transposing to Chapter 14) 8.♘d2 (the usual way to get the pawn back) 8...♘b6 9.e3 ♘f6



10.♕c2. This set-up with ♕c2 is seen frequently after Black plays ...dxc4. We will get the pawn back, with some advantage.

7.0-0 ♗e7

This is a clever move order that is designed to avoid the line 7...♘gf6 8.cxd5 exd5 9.♕b3 ♕b6 10.♕e3+, which is covered in Chapter 14. If White tries the same idea now, it is not as good: 7...♗e7 8.cxd5 exd5 9.♕b3 ♕b6 10.♕e3 ♘f8!, and ...♘e6 is fine for Black.

1) 7...dxc4 8.♘bd2 ♘b6 9.♕c2 (the standard procedure after the pawn grab on c4) 9...♗g6 10.e4 ♘f6 11.♖d1. We will get the pawn back or obtain excellent

compensation;

2) 7...♗d6 8.♘c3 ♘gf6 9.♕b3 (this idea is particularly tempting against ...♗d6 set-ups. The c4-c5 push will gain an important tempo) 9...♕b6 10.c5 ♕xb3 11.axb3 ♗c7



12.b4. This is a nice version of a familiar structure. We are immediately threatening b4-b5, which is tough to prevent.

8.cxd5 exd5 9.♘c3

As mentioned, 9.♕b3 is not very effective because of 9...♕b6 10.♕e3 ♘f8!, and ...♘e6! will solve the problems.

9...♗xf3

This is the most solid choice at this point, avoiding any ♘e5 ideas. If Black plays the natural 9...♘gf6, we again transpose to Chapter 14.

10.♗xf3 ♘gf6

Black is about equal here. His structure is fundamentally solid, but he has given up the bishop pair.

11.♖b1 a5 12.a3 0-0



13.♕c2

A typical sequence. White has more active ideas, but Black is solid. One important point is that White would like to manage b2-b4, followed by b4-b5, the well-known minority attack. What we want to avoid is a situation where Black manages to answer b2-b4 with ...b7-b5, followed by a knight tour to c4. Therefore White should be patient about b2-b4 and prepare it slowly. Of course, there is also e2-e4, opening up the position for the bishop pair, but accepting an IQP. This might be an option, depending on the piece placement. If we have enough control over d5 in the IQP structure, it is very well worth considering.

c) 2...♘f6 3.g3 ♗g4

Most of the time Black plays 3...c6 first, but developing the bishop is a natural move as well and will often transpose. We will check some attempts by Black to avoid or delay ...c7-c6.

4.♗g2 ♘bd7

If Black wants to avoid ...c7-c6, he will most likely play this move or 4...e6 and then 5...♘bd7. After 4...e6, we will just play 5.c4 as usual, and then 5...c6 leads to Chapter 14 again. 5...♘bd7 is covered via 4...♘bd7 5.c4 e6. It's rather easy for White, as you just need to play the same moves every time.

5.c4

Now, 5...c6 looks very logical and would still transpose to the next chapter, but we need to check two independent options:

C1) 5...e6 6.♕b3

Black failed to play ...c7-c6, preparing ...♕b6 in reply to the typical queen move. Now he needs to play a more passive defence.

1) 6...♕c8 7.♘e5. Black is in severe trouble already. How does he defend his d5-pawn now? It seems there is just one move: 7...c6 8.♘xg4 ♘xg4 9.cxd5 exd5



10.♗f4. This position is worse for Black than it looks. The coming ♘c3 and ♖c1 will be very awkward – and we have the bishops already as a long-term asset;

2) 6...♖b8 7.♘c3 dxc4 (7...c6 is even worse than taking: 8.cxd5 exd5 (other

recaptures have the same issue, of course) 9.♗f4, and the black queenside collapses) 8.♕xc4. White is slightly better, as usual in the ...dxc4 scenarios where Black has no particular compensation for having a central disadvantage.

C2) 5...dxc4 6.♘bd2 ♘b6 7.0-0 c6



8.♕c2

This is the way to play against the early captures. We are making sure of getting the pawn back.

8...e6 9.♖d1 ♗e7 10.h3

The more cautious 10.♘xc4 is possible, but after 10...♗f5! 11.♕b3 ♘xc4 12.♕xc4 ♗e4, Black manages a useful regrouping. I think White still has a pull, but 10.h3 seems more testing.

10...♗h5 11.e4 0-0 12.g4 ♗g6 13.♘e5

And White has some initiative. Note that Black can't take on d4.

13...♕xd4 14.♘dxc4 ♕c5



15.b4 ♕b5

Black can't capture the pawn: 15...♕xb4 16.♗a3. That was the idea of playing

b2-b4.

16.a4 ♕a6 17.♘xg6 hxg6 18.♘e5 ♗xb4 19.a5

And White is already winning.

Conclusion

The lines based on ...♗g4 are a solid choice for Black in general. This chapter covers some of the earlier deviations that are a mixed bag. Some are unsound, but some are very reasonable (line B). As usual, I recommend looking at lines with ...dxc4 – it's good to know what to do if they just snatch the pawn.

CHAPTER 14

... ♗g4 set-ups – Main line:

2... ♘f6 3.g3 ♗g4 4.♗g2 c6 5.c4

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 ♗g4 4.♗g2 c6 5.c4



As mentioned in the previous chapter, our preferred move order is to play this before castling kingside.

Before we look at the two main moves, we should briefly check 5...dxc4. This version of the pawn capture is rather easy to handle, because Black has no reasonable way to try to keep the c-pawn. After 6.♘bd2 b5, 7.♘e5 is very bad for Black, because the bishop on g4 does not help at all to defend the queenside. Now, Black can still try 7...♗d7, but after 8.a4, Black has no good reply to the threat of axb5. This means that after 6.♘bd2, we will just regain the pawn with a good game, due to the central pawn advantage.

Now, the main moves after 5.c4 are 5...e6 (A) and 5...♘bd7 (B).

A) 5...e6 6.h3

It is important to play this move for more than one reason. The main one is that after the usual reply of ...♗h5, this bishop may easily get sidelined in some lines. Also note that the main line involving the later ♕d1-b3-e3+ idea only works with the bishop on h5. Of course, Black may also take on f3 or retreat to f5, after which we reach a ...♗f5-based line with the extra move h2-h3.

6...♗h5

An alternative for Black is 6...♗xf3 7.♗xf3 ♘bd7 8.0-0. Now, the only principled move for Black is to take on c4. Of course, he may also play something slow and just hold the centre, but this should always be a slight pull for White. Let's have a look at those two scenarios.

1) 8...♗d6 9.♘d2 0-0



10.♗g2 (I like to delay playing e2-e4 for a more opportune moment. The bishop is better on g2, because of a potential ...e6-e5 push. After ...e6-e5 dxe5 ♘xe5, the bishop is attacked, which is uncomfortable). Now, I'd continue slowly with moves like e2-e3 and ♕c2, and perhaps b2-b3 and ♗b2. You can always open the position for the bishops later;

2) 8...dxc4 9.♘d2 (our usual approach, but 9.♕c2 ♘b6 10.♖d1 is a good alternative) 9...♘b6 10.e3. We will get the pawn back with ♕c2 and ♘xc4. One line is interesting, though: 10...♘fd5 (Black intends to play ...c4-c3) 11.♕c2 ♘b4



12.♕b1, and, we'll get the pawn back eventually after a2-a3 and ♕c2 next.



7.0-0

A1) 7...♘bd7

This is the most popular move by far.

8.cxd5

This capture has a lot more venom than you'd think at first. The key point is that 8...exd5 9.♕b3 leads to interesting play for White, as we will see.

A11) 8...exd5 9.♕b3 ♕b6

The most natural and popular move. An alternative is 9...♘b6 10.♘e5. 10.a4 is strong as well, but centralizing immediately is very powerful. White gets a strong initiative, mostly due to the idea of playing f2-f4 and g3-g4. Black's sidelined bishop is his most serious problem:

1) 10...♗d6 11.f4 (we are just threatening g3-g4 and f4-f5, winning the offside bishop on h5) 11...h6 12.♘c3 ♗g6 13.♘xg6 fxg6 14.e4, with a decisive attack for White;

2) With 10...♘fd7, Black tries to free up some space for the bishop, but we have a straightforward reply: 11.e4. We should open up the centre against the uncastled king. Now, the only challenging line is the following: 11...♘xe5 12.dxe5 ♗e2 13.♖e1 ♗c4 14.♕c2 d4 (this keeps the centre closed for the moment) 15.b3 ♗a6



16.♖d1. Black is under pressure here, due to the badly placed pieces on b6 and a6.

We will play a2-a4-a5 next and have the easier game, in my opinion.



10.♕e3+

This idea still comes as a surprise to many players. White is going for very concrete play.

10...♗e7 11.♘h4

Now, ♘f5 will be extremely annoying, basically forcing Black's next reply.

11...♗g6 12.♘c3 ♕d8

Most popular and best. Black prepares castling. 12...♔f8 leads to the same structure as the main move 12...♕d8, but with Black being less organized: 13.♘xg6+ hxg6 14.♕d3 ♖e8 15.♖b1, and White is better here. We can start queenside play quickly, while Black is not organized to generate any counterplay. Compare this to 12...♕d8 to see the difference.

13.♘xg6 hxg6 14.♕d3 0-0



15.h4

This is an interesting idea that was recently played by the creative Russian GM Grigoriy Oparin. White's idea is to play ♗f3, ♔g2 and ♖h1 next, trying to open the h-file! This looks primitive at first, but try defending against it... it's not harmless at

all. This is my recommendation, but you may also want to explore an idea like 15.♖b1, leading to slower play on the queenside. Compared to the line 12...♔f8, Black is better placed to deal with this plan, as there are ideas to answer a later b2-b4 with ...b7-b5. In any case, this is a solid alternative. Still, I advise trying the Oparin plan – it's dangerous. Note that Black does not have many active ideas himself. Play on the flank should be countered in the centre, but ...c6-c5 is tough to play against the unopposed g2-bishop.

A12) 8...cxd5 9.♘c3

White enjoys some initiative in this pawn structure, based on ideas with ♕b3 and ♘e5.

9...♗e7

With the alternative 9...♗d6, Black prevents ♘e5, but ♕b3 is still possible: 10.♕b3 ♕b6 11.♕xb6 ♘xb6 12.♘e5, and we have managed ♘e5 after all. White develops some initiative now with moves like g3-g4, ♗f4 and ♖fc1. In some cases, a2-a4-a5 is also on the cards. Let's check a possible line: 12...♖c8 13.♗f4 (13.g4 ♗g6 14.♗f4 is also fine. After 13.♗f4, we are threatening 14.g4 ♗g6 15.♘xg6, winning a piece) 13...♗b8 (securing the bishop against the mentioned threat) 14.♖fc1 ♔e7



15.b3. White has a comfortable pull in this position. With g3-g4, we are always able to get the bishop pair, and opening the centre with e2-e4 could be an idea as well.

10.♘e5

The knight centralization prepares a kingside expansion with g3-g4 and possibly f2-f4, playing against the bishop on h5.

10...0-0

Black may also play 10...♗g6. I faced this move in an important league game. This game was actually played some weeks before this chapter was written, and I did not play in the best possible way. 11.♘xg6 (this was my move, but 11.♕b3 also makes

a lot of sense. I think both moves are of about equal value) 11...hxg6



12.e4. This is an improvement on my move 12.♗f4. The bishop move is not bad, but the central break is more powerful. My opponent in the game, FM Bodo Schmidt, managed to hold the game after some suffering and mistakes on my part: 12...dxe4 13.♘xe4 ♘d5 14.♕b3 ♕b6 15.♕xb6 ♘7xb6 16.♘c5. This is the move that I did not consider during the game. White has a good, active game here, with some advantage.

11.g4 ♗g6 12.f4

A powerful move, gaining lots of space and trying to pressurize the exposed bishop on g6.

12...♖c8

A try to improve on Gledura-Keymer, Wijk aan Zee 2019, in which 12...♗d6 was played: 13.♕b3 ♘b6 14.a4 ♖c8 15.f5 (15.a5 was fine as well) 15...exf5 16.gxf5 ♗h5



17.♗g5, and White had some advantage and later won the game. White has enormous pressure on the d5-pawn.

13.f5

This leads to sharp and original play.

13...exf5 14.gxf5 ♗h5



15.♕d3

This is a very interesting position. White's idea is to build up with ♗f4, ♔h2, ♖g1 and start to play on the g-file. I'd prefer White, but it is certainly complicated.

A13) 8...♗xf3 9.dxe6

Just don't automatically recapture! White wins a pawn with this zwischenzug.

9...♗xg2 10.exd7+ ♕xd7 11.♔xg2

And we are a pawn up.

A2) 7...♗e7

This only became popular after it was established that 7...♘bd7 8.cxd5 is an interesting option for White.

8.♘c3

Here, taking on d5 is not promising, as after 8.cxd5 cxd5! Black still has c6 available for his knight.



A21) 8...0-0 9.♕b3

White has some interesting moves here. The alternatives 9.♘e5 and 9.g4 ♗g6 10.♘e5 are worth exploring as well.

9...♕b6 10.♘e5 ♖d8

This move prepares ... ♘bd7.

The normal-looking move 10... ♘bd7 fails! 11.g4 ♗g6 12.g5, and we win material, quite surprisingly.

11.g4 ♗g6 12.c5

I suggest this move, playing in the spirit of the early ... ♗f5 lines. White may also play 12. ♘xg6 hxg6 13. ♖d1, which gives a small pull as well.

12... ♕xb3 13.axb3 ♘bd7 14. ♘xg6 hxg6



15.b4

We have reached a complex queenless middlegame/endgame. I'd prefer White, but Black is solid of course, without any serious weaknesses.

A22) 8... ♘bd7



9.cxd5

This move becomes more attractive after ... ♘bd7.

9...exd5

9...cxd5 10. ♘e5 is a transposition to 1.d4 d5 2. ♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 c6 4. ♗g2 ♗g4 5.c4 e6 6.h3 ♗h5 7.0-0 ♘bd7 8.cxd5 cxd5 9. ♘c3 ♗e7 10. ♘e5.

10.♘e5

This knight hop is not easy at all for Black to handle. We are threatening to squash the bishop on h5 with f2-f4 and g3-g4.

10...♗g6

This was played by GM Elshan Moradiabadi, the strongest player who got into this position.

Another option is 10...♘xe5 11.dxe5 ♘d7 12.f4 f5.



This is not a happy move, but the alternatives are no better. After 13.♗e3, the position looks dreadful for Black. We have the strong pawn on e5 and chances to pressurize the queenside.

11.f4 ♗e4

Black makes sure that the bishop is not getting trapped, but he is still a lot worse after the coming forced sequence.

12.♘xe4 ♘xe4 13.♗xe4 dxe4 14.♕b3 0-0

The relatively best defence, compared to 14...♘xe5 15.dxe5 ♕b6+ 16.♗e3. This is excellent for White. The e4-pawn is weak and we are much faster on the d-file.

15.♕xb7 ♘xe5 16.dxe5 ♗c5+ 17.♔g2

This is a bit better than 17.♔h2, as played in the game Gauri-Moradiabadi, Greensboro 2018. White is clearly better with the extra material, but there is one interesting move to check now.

17...♕d5



Black covers c6 and centralizes the queen.

18.♕b3

This is very strong. Black needs the queen for any counterplay, but now it is hard for him to avoid the trade.

18...♕xb3 19.axb3 ♖ab8 20.♖a4

A nice move to get rid of the e4-pawn, after which it will be easy to convert the advantage.

B) 5...♘bd7



This move has little independent value and often transposes to 5...e6. The only interesting line is related to the pawn capture on c4.

6.h3

This follows our usual move order approach to play c2-c4 before castling and then play h2-h3 first. In this particular case, Black has the option of taking on f3 and c4, and we won't get the pawn back easily. I think that we have good compensation and therefore should not avoid this, but rather encourage Black to grab the pawn. Still, I'd like to mention that 6.cxd5 is not bad here either. This capture gains in strength after Black has committed to the knight on d7 and there might be a

transposition to line A above. I like my suggestion of 6.h3, but this is a valid alternative.

6... ♗xf3

This is the option I mentioned on move five. The most common move however is 6... ♗h5, which leads to line A in this chapter after 7.0-0 e6 8.cxd5.

7. ♗xf3 dxc4

The natural 7...e6 8.0-0 is covered via 5...e6 first (line A above). This version of the pawn grab is a bit different to other scenarios, because Black is able to play ...e7-e5 in one move.



8. ♘d2

We have seen this approach in other lines. 8.0-0 is also possible, but this very likely transposes, as after 8...e5, 9. ♘d2! is the best move, leading to 8. ♘d2 e5 9.0-0!. After 8.0-0, Black may also play 8... ♘b6, after which 9.a4 leads to good compensation. The 8.0-0 move order is a good alternative if you rather want to play into this line instead of 8. ♘d2 ♘b6. All in all, we have good play, in my opinion, and some options to choose from. I am going to show some key lines, but it is a good idea to explore further on your own if you are interested. It will be beneficial not just for your opening play, but it will also help you to understand dynamic positions better in general.

B1) 8...e5

The most likely move in my opinion.

9.0-0

This position has been tested in practical play in some games. These games had a different move order though. Have a look: 1. ♘f3 d5 2.g3 c6 3. ♗g2 ♗g4 4.0-0 ♘d7 5.d4 ♘bd7 6.h3 ♗xf3 7. ♗xf3 e5 8.c4 dxc4 9. ♘d2 – remarkable!

9...exd4 10. ♘xc4 ♘b6

This looks very natural and was played in the majority of the games.

Another option is 10... ♗c5 (Black is clinging on to the pawn) 11.b4 (the most powerful move. This is how you need to play to keep the initiative) 11... ♗xb4 12. ♖b1 ♕e7 (Black can't allow ♖xb7, which would leave Black's queenside completely

shattered)



13.♕xd4, and White has excellent compensation for the pawn here. Please note that Black is unable to move any of the pawns on the queenside easily, as there is so much pressure on them.

11.♕b3

We are putting some pressure on the queenside and preparing ♖d1 to target the d-pawn. Note that ♘a5 is also possible in some lines, and therefore it makes sense for Black to trade on c4.

11...♘xc4 12.♕xc4 ♕b6 13.♖d1 ♖d8



14.♗f4

This improves on the game Sychev-Popov, Moscow 2018. The idea is to play ♗e5 and get the pawn back. White is at least slightly better here.

B2) 8...♘b6

Black covers the pawn and attacks our d4-pawn.

9.e3

Now, Black needs to act forcefully, as otherwise we will get the pawn back, with the idea of playing ♕c2 and ♘xc4.

9...e5 10.dxe5 ♘fd7



11.e6

It is very important to return this pawn on our terms. Black's pawn structure needs to be damaged first.

11...fxe6 12.0-0 ♘e5 13.♗e2

We are targeting the c4-pawn with this move, of course. White is a pawn down, but Black has given up the light-squared bishop and given us good play on this colour complex. Note that we have the idea of playing f2-f4 and ♘xc4 next. On a general note: this is not a risky pawn sacrifice at all, as Black's pawn structure is weak long-term and we have the bishop pair. There is no need to look for a quick knockout 'because we are a pawn down'. Just play the position and don't count pawns.

13...♕d5

Black lends additional cover to the pawn.

14.f4

The most direct choice.

14...♘d3



15.♘xc4

And we get the pawn back with a good game.

Conclusion

White has good chances to claim a small advantage in the strategic lines examined in line A above. It was surprising to me that trading on d5 carries so much poison. Line B is a less explored and much sharper alternative. I think that White has a dangerous initiative, but the play is more dynamic than usual, and it pays off to study it to be ready.

PART II

Black's ...g7-g6 based set-ups:

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3



1.d4 ♘f6

Black stays flexible with 1...♘f6 and will only reveal more information about his set-up on move two, when he will commit to a pawn move. Part II deals with Black's set-ups involving ...g7-g6. We will also examine the move order 1...g6, which might transpose after a later ...♘f6 or lead to some independent lines.

2.♘f3 g6

Black is going for a kingside fianchetto. Now we know a little bit more about his intentions, but he has not yet committed to a pawn set-up in the centre.

3.g3

On the next moves, Black will usually play either with ...d7-d6, ...d7-d5 or with ...c7-c5. All of these concepts have dedicated chapters.

Move orders are not that complicated in these lines. There are some rules of thumb to guide you.

We complete our kingside castling with 2.♘f3, 3.g3, 4.♗g2 and 5.0-0, unless Black plays ...c7-c5, after which we should take the pawn on c5 (Chapter 20).

If Black plays ...d7-d6, we don't play c2-c4, but go for b2-b3 and ♗b2 to fight ...e7-e5 (Chapter 15 and 16).

If Black plays ...d7-d5, we aim to play c2-c4 after castling to attack d5, similar to the play in Part I (Chapter 17-19).

Chapter 15: 3...♗g7 4.♗g2 0-0 5.0-0 d6 6.b3 e5



The double fianchetto set-up, starting with 6.b3, is an excellent choice for our repertoire. We are skipping huge amounts of theory, compared to 6.c4, and play a poisonous line that will catch many opponents unawares. One very important point that I like to emphasize: the King's Indian is a very popular opening on club level. Most players choosing this opening want to play aggressive chess, attacking the white king in closed centre situations with a later ...f7-f5 and ...g6-g5-pawn storm. The prime example of this type of play is the main line Classical King's Indian after 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.♘f3 0-0 6.♗e2 e5 7.0-0 ♘c6 8.d5 ♘e7 9.♘e1 ♘d7 10.♗e3 f5 11.f3 f4 12.♗f2 g5. We are not going to play along and give Black this type of scenario.

In Chapter 15, we discuss the reply 6...e5, after which we will capture on e5. This line offers White good chances for at least a slight pull in a situation that many Black players will not feel at home.

Chapter 16: 3... ♗g7 4. ♗g2 0-0 5.0-0 d6 6.b3



Black has a wide range of moves after 6.b3. The most challenging one is 6...c5, but you will also encounter set-ups with ...c7-c6 and ... ♘bd7 frequently. In most lines, White maintains at least a small advantage or enjoys good control over the game, keeping Black's active ambitions at bay.

Chapter 17: 3....d5



Black plays into a symmetrical formation, combining ...d7-d5 and ...g7-g6. This combination of moves is typical of the Grünfeld, but we have not played c2-c4 yet. As mentioned several times throughout the book: whenever Black plays a pawn to d5, it is strategically desirable to attack this central pawn with the move c2-c4. After 3...d5, the same principle applies, but similar to other lines we don't need to rush this pawn move. Chapter 17 discusses early deviations by Black and sidelines after 1.d4 ♘f6 2. ♘f3 g6 3.g3 d5 4. ♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4.

Chapter 18: 3...d5 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 dxc4



After having completed the kingside castling, we finally play the move c2-c4. This line is classified as a Grünfeld Defence now, usually arising from move orders like 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘f3 ♗g7 4.g3 0-0 5.♗g2 d5 6.0-0. After 6.c4, Black has two mainlines, the more dynamic 6...dxc4 and the Slav-style 6...c6. Chapter 18 discusses the capture on c4.

Chapter 19: 3...d5 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 c6



This solid set-up with ...c7-c6 is a tough nut to crack, but I still managed to compile some interesting ideas for White, which are discussed in Chapter 19.



This is an interesting moment to play ...c7-c5. Compared to 1.d4 c5 or 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5, we are already committed to the move g2-g3, which is not very attractive in a Benoni structure. We therefore need a different solution than 4.d5. I suggest playing 4.dxc5, which will come as a surprise for your opponent on move 4! This line is basically unexplored and this book is the first publication to discuss it, as far as I know. With 4.dxc5, we will reach a completely different position to the one Black intended to play. He will need to solve problems early on, as there is no 'theory' that he might know. I think these lines are fascinating to study and play. Please see Chapter 20 for more on this dangerous new idea.

Chapter 21: 1.d4 g6



Against 1...g6, I suggest playing our usual move 2.♘f3. Similar to the situation after 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3, Black has to decide on his central pawn formation. The lines after ...d7-d6, ...d7-d5 or ...c7-c5 next are similar to the chapters above and often transpose, because ...♘f6 is a very natural move for Black. Still, there are some independent options to discuss in this chapter.

CHAPTER 15

King's Indian:

3... ♗g7 4. ♗g2 0-0 5.0-0 d6 6.b3 e5

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3 ♗g7 4.♗g2 0-0 5.0-0 d6 6.e5



This chapter deals with black set-ups in the spirit of the King's Indian Defence. The King's Indian involves an early kingside fianchetto by Black, usually accompanied with the move ...d7-d6, preparing further action in the centre with ...e7-e5 or ...c7-c5. For this book, I have decided to devote a separate chapter to the ...c7-c5 approaches, so this chapter features other ways for Black to continue. In the vast majority of cases, ...e7-e5 will be the set-up that you will face. Speaking about a set-up... what are we going to play?

Well, the first moves will be easy – we are going to fianchetto on the kingside and then decide how to continue. The position you usually reach against King's Indian players will be the one after 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3 ♗g7 4.♗g2 0-0 5.0-0 d6. Now, White's most popular move is 6.c4, which leads to a main-line Fianchetto King's Indian. This is of course perfectly acceptable for White, but I am still recommending a different move. I suggest playing the move 6.b3, which has enjoyed some popularity in recent years after Kramnik employed it with impressive results. The line 6.b3 is an excellent weapon for a number of reasons. The most important one is that it is still not particularly well known, and therefore Black quite often answers with schematic moves – an approach that will backfire badly most of the time. I have employed this line against the King's Indian on multiple occasions and my experience is overwhelmingly positive. I need to mention that it has also been employed by many former and current club- and teammates of mine. Some of the analytical efforts that I was involved in over the years actually did not end up in my games, but in the games of my friends.

I need to mention one general point about the King's Indian. This opening derives a lot of its popularity from the spectacular games that often occur in the Classical King's Indian main line. This line arises after 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7

4.e4 d6 5.♘f3 0-0 6.♗e2 e5 7.0-0 ♘c6 8.d5 ♘e7. In this variation, the closed centre often leads to uncompromising play, featuring a pawn storm on White's king after a later ...♘d7, ...f7-f5-f4, ...g6-g5 etc. Very often, aggressive players are attracted by the prospect of reaching this type of position. A very strong point about our choice of line against the King's Indian is that it is as far away from this scenario as possible. Our king will be very safe with the guardian bishop on g2, and the centre will usually be opened early, so there are no 'who gets there first' attacking games on the cards. We enjoy excellent control, and the solidity of our position will frustrate many King's Indian devotees.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6

Most King's Indian players opt for this move, but 2...d6 first and a later ...g7-g6 will transpose to our main line. Other set-ups with ...d7-d6 are discussed in Chapter 34.

3.g3

Now and on the next moves, Black of course may transpose out of this chapter by going ...d7-d5 or ...c7-c5, covered in later chapters. After 3.g3, there is also the rare move 3...b6 for the double fianchetto. I have covered the double fianchetto set-up in Chapter 22.

3...♗g7 4.♗g2 0-0 5.0-0 d6

Black is finally committing to the King's Indian formation. I'd like to mention a little move order twist. Black may also play 5...c6, after which 6.b3 will either be answered with 6...d6 – staying in the King's Indian – or by 6...d5, transposing to a Grünfeld.

6.b3

In my mind, this system is one of the reasons for choosing the move order 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 over a main-line approach versus the King's Indian. It has more than a drop of poison and the best lines for Black are not very much in the spirit of most King's Indian fans. That being said, Black has many possible options now. In this chapter, we will cover 6...e5, while Chapter 16 contains all the alternatives for Black.

6...e5 7.dxe5

A) 7...dxe5



Black just recaptures on e5. This line has always enjoyed a good theoretical reputation, but Kramnik has shown some new ideas for White in recent years. These discoveries brought the whole 6.b3 line back on the map. On a very general note: the move 7...dxe5 is not very popular on the club/amateur level, as most King's Indian players try to play aggressively and want to avoid a queen trade.

8.♗a3

A1) 8...♕xd1 9.♖xd1 ♖e8 10.c4

I am sticking with Kramnik's move, which is not a bad general approach while preparing any opening. But 10.♘c3 also scores well and is a reasonable way to vary your play.

10...e4

An alternative is 10...♘c6. I am sceptical about this move. In the main line, Black manages to play ...c7-c6, covering the d5-square. This is not going to be possible here, as we will see: 11.♘c3 e4 (Black more or less has to play this move. Against anything slow, we play ♘e1 anyway, with ♘e1-c2-e3-d5 or ♘d3 next) 12.♘e1 ♗f5



13.♘c2. White has the simple, but strong idea of playing ♖ac1 and ♘d5. Black also has to worry about ♘e3 and ♘b5, while the e4-pawn needs permanent piece protection. White is better here. 13...♘g4 is met by a powerful reply: 14.♘d5 ♗xa1

15.♖xa1 (now Black can't keep the material, as both ♘xc7 and h2-h3 are threats) 15...♖ac8 16.h3 ♘ge5 17.♘f6+ ♔g7 18.♘xe8+ ♖xe8 19.♘e3, with an overwhelming advantage for White. The bishop pair is devastating and e4 is very weak.

11.♘d4

A11) 11...c6

That was the choice of Vocaturo in the stem game against Kramnik at the 2016 Baku Olympiad.

12.♘c3 ♘a6

An alternative for Black is 12...♘bd7.



Here, the 'creative' move 13.g4 is suggested by LeelaZero and I like the idea a lot! Of course, you may also play something slow like 13.♖ac1, with a typical small edge. The g-pawn move is just a lot more powerful!

1) 13...♘xg4 14.♘xe4 and ♘d6 is the idea, of course;

2) 13...h6 14.h3 ♘f8 15.e3, and we have the plan to corral the e4-pawn. The g4-pawn helps a lot, preventing ...♗f5;

3) 13...e3 14.f3 ♘f8 15.♖d3, and we have successfully isolated the e-pawn, with a nice advantage.

13.e3

Kramnik stops the e-pawn. As we have seen, the advance to e3 is not an issue in most cases. However, Kramnik intends to double on the d-file next and does not want to face ...e4-e3 with a rook on d2.

13...h5

This seems better than Vocaturo's move. 13...♗g4 was played in the Kramnik-Vocaturo game: 14.♖d2 ♖ad8 15.h3 ♗c8 16.♖ad1. White has two threats now: a strategic one in g3-g4 and a tactical one. It is impossible to stop both. 16...h5



17.♗e7 (a nice shot by Kramnik) 17...♖xd4 (17...♖xe7 18.♘xc6 wins immediately) 18.♖xd4 ♖xe7 19.♖d8+ ♘e8 20.♘xe4, and White had a huge advantage. The whole game is worth studying, but you need to cut at some point.

14.h3 ♘c7



15.♖d2

White is slightly better. We have the more active pieces and have more options to improve. It is easier to play on the queenside, for example. Black has no active plan that I can see, but he is certainly quite solidly placed.

A12) 11...e3



12.f3

Please avoid 12.f4 ♘g4, which is irritating. After 12.f3, White is just slightly better, but Black needs to play the right move now.

12...a5

This is the best move, but it was not played by any of the four GMs who had this on the board. 12... ♘a6 13. ♘c3 c6 14. ♖ac1 h5 15. ♖d3, and we are starting to corral the weak pawn on e3, enjoying some advantage.

13. ♘c3 ♘a6

Black's set-up is directed against 14. ♖d3, which is now defused by 14... ♘b4.

14. ♖ac1 c6 15. ♗d6

With the idea of playing ♘c3-a4-b6 next. White has the easier game here, but Black is putting up a much better defence than without ...a7-a5 being played.

A13) 11... ♘g4

Black tries to solve his opening problems tactically. I am actually surprised that this move is not tried more often, as it leads to complicated play. There is no way to dodge the mess, but Black's game will be hanging by a thread the whole time.

12. ♘c3 e3



13.♘d5

Only this works! It gets very messy now, but even in a tactical mess, you should take into account that we have all pieces in play, and Black not so many. The engines find some miracle solutions for Black, but this is not very relevant for practical play. Still, let's have a look at some of the miracles.

13...exf2+

After the lame move 13...♘a6, we are better without any problems: 14.fxe3 ♘xe3 15.♘xe3 ♖xe3 16.♖ac1 ♖e8 17.b4 ♗f8 18.c5, with a useful initiative on the queenside.

14.♔f1 ♘xh2+

This is the human choice. Admittedly, the whole line with 11...♘g4 and 13.♘d5 is very computer-like anyway, but you need to establish that White is OK here.

The move 14...c5 is what Stockfish wants to play: 15.♗xc5 ♘d7 (Black is giving up the c-pawn for a tempo) 16.♗d6 ♘df6 17.♘e7+ ♔h8 18.♖d3 ♘xh2+ 19.♔xf2.



Now, the engine finds a way to save itself with a fantastic resource: 19...♗h3 (wow! What a move!) 20.♗xh3 ♘e4+ 21.♔g2 ♘xd6 22.♘d5 ♗xd4 23.♖e1 ♗c5 24.♔xh2, and Black has equalized after some outlandish play!

15.♔xf2 ♘g4+ 16.♔g1

It is still messy, but here White seems to have good compensation for the pawn. I'll show two lines to illustrate my point:

16...♘a6

Another possible line is 16...♗e5 17.♘e7+ ♖xe7 18.♗xe7 ♘e3



19.♘f3 (a great move pointed out by the engines) 19...♘xd1 20.♖xd1 ♘c6 21.♘xe5 ♘xe7 22.♖d8+ ♔g7 23.♔f2. Black has no way to untangle the queenside and is in trouble.

17.♘e7+ ♖xe7 18.♗xe7 ♘e3 19.♖d3 ♘f5 20.♘xf5 ♗xf5 21.e4 ♗xa1 22.exf5 ♖b8



23.b4

And White has a strong initiative for the pawn.

A2) 8...♖e8

White is better after this natural move with a rather forcing line, which surprised me quite a bit.

9.♕xd8 ♖xd8 10.♘c3

The development advantage reaches alarming proportions. Black needs to quickly support the e5-pawn.

10...♘c6

Black may also play 10...e4 11.♖ad1 (yet another tempo move) 11...♖e8 12.♘d2 (12.♘g5 is also better for White. After 12...♗f5 13.♘gxe4 ♘xe4 14.♘xe4 ♘c6, we have won a pawn, but Black gets some play with ...♘d4. 12.♘d2 leads to easier play for White) 12...♗f5 13.h3 (after 13.♘cxe4, we transpose to the line mentioned via 12.♘g5. White is fine there, but it is complicated) 13...h5



I suggest 14.♘c4 instead of grabbing the weak e4-pawn. We threaten ♘b5 and ♘e3, with a nice advantage.

11.♖ad1 ♗f5

Black's best defence, attacking c2.

12.♘h4 ♗d7

After 12...♗xc2 13.♖c1 ♗f5 14.♘xf5 gxf5 15.♗xc6 bxc6 16.♖c2, Black's pawn structure is permanently wrecked, giving White an advantage.

13.♖d2

This position is very awkward for Black to defend. White has annoying ideas and Black is condemned to a passive sit-and-wait defence. Let's continue this line for a few moves.

13...♗e8 14.♖fd1 ♖xd2 15.♖xd2 a6



16. ♘f3

I wanted to show this idea. White now intends to play ♘f3-e1-d3, aiming for e5 and c5. I am not sure how Black should defend against this concept. Waiting does not help, as the following sequence shows.

16...h6 17. ♘e1 b6 18. ♘d3 ♖d8 19. ♗c1

And now, ♗xc6 and ♘xe5 is on the cards. How does Black defend the e-pawn now? I don't see how he stops ♗xc6 and ♘xe5.

B) 7... ♘g4



The idea to play ...e7-e5 and answer dxe5 with ... ♘g4 (or ... ♘d7) is very common in the double fianchetto set-up. In fact, it is seen via various move orders, for example 6.b3 ♘bd7 7. ♗b2 e5 8.dxe5 ♘g4 or 6.b3 ♘c6 7. ♗b2 e5 8.dxe5 ♘g4. A closer examination shows that White should be better against all lines of that type – but we need to be precise to prove it.

8. ♗b2

The most obvious move now is probably 8... ♘xe5. However, we also need to check 8... ♘c6 and 8... ♘d7.

I should mention again that Black often starts with 6... ♘bd7 or 6... ♘c6, and after 7. ♗b2 e5 8.dxe5 ♘g4, these positions are reached via a different move order.

B1) 8... ♘c6



9.♕c1

Again this move, preparing a quick ♖d1 after a possible d-pawn capture on e5.

9...♘gxe5

Playing here 9...dxe5 is probably the worst version of ...dxe5 available for Black, as the following line shows: 10.h3 ♘h6 11.♖d1 (Black has no fully satisfactory answer to this move) 11...♗d7 (11...♕e8 is also better for White: 12.♘c3, with the obvious intention of playing ♘d5. We don't need to worry about the e-pawn pushing forward: 12...e4 13.♘g5 e3 14.f4, and Black is in huge trouble, as ♘d5 and ♘b5 are serious threats)



12.♘c3, and again ♘d5 will be very annoying for Black. In the long run, we may consider pushing the c- and b-pawn up the board.

10.♘xe5

This is more precise than the immediate 10.c4, as Black would have 10...♘xf3+ 11.♗xf3 ♘d4 in that case.

10...♘xe5

10...dxe5 11.♖d1 (yet another version of this structure) 11...♗d7 12.♗xc6 (White is also better after other normal moves, such as 12.♘c3, for instance. Maybe this is even better in engine terms, but I wanted to show this idea. The resulting position

is truly depressing for Black) 12...bxc6 13.♘c3 ♕c8 14.♘e4 ♗f5



15.♕e3. We have followed the game Svane-Smirin, Hersonissos 2017. White has a significant advantage that he converted quickly into the full point. Black has too many weaknesses to defend. It is amazing to see a legendary King's Indian player like Ilya Smirin losing against the double fianchetto without a fight.



11.c4

We have reached a very favourable position type now. I laid out some points about it in the comments on a similar position that is reached after 6.b3 e5 7.dxe5 ♘g4 8.♗b2 ♘xe5 9.♕c1 ♘bd7 (line B32 below).

11...♖e8

The move 11...♗g4 ultimately leads to even more problems, as h2-h3 is a useful tempo for White later. 12.♘c3 ♖b8 13.h3 ♗e6 (the tactical shot 13...♗xe2 is flawed. After 14.♘xe2 ♘d3 15.♕d2 ♘xb2 16.♘c3, the b2-knight is trapped) 14.f4 ♘c6



15.♔h2. White's idea is to play e2-e4 next. The king move is useful and we have time to improve our pieces, as Black is stuck with a passive position. He will probably play ...f7-f5 soon, but after our eventual reply e2-e4, the game opens up in our favour, given that Black's king is weak and we control the important d5-square.

12.♘c3 ♖b8 13.♕d2 a6



14.♖ad1

Surprisingly, this position was reached in the game Mamedov-McShane, Batumi 2018. Usually, strong GMs are aware of the dangers of these structures, but somehow Luke McShane was on the black side of this position. Let's follow this game for some more moves.

14...♗e6

Here is the reasoning behind 14.♖ad1: 14...b5 15.c5, and the d-pawn will be lost.

15.f4 ♘g4 16.h3 ♘f6 17.e4 b5 18.c5

Mamedov played 18.f5 instead, which is less convincing. White was still better, but

he later lost the plot and ultimately the game as well. White in fact has many good options here, but I like 18.c5 best.

18...dxc5 19.♕f2 ♕e7 20.g4 b4 21.♘a4 c4 22.f5

And White wins.

B2) 8...♘xe5



9.♕c1

This move is a key idea in the dxe5 ...♘g4 sequences. We cover the bishop on b2. Now, Black usually plays 9...♘bc6 or 9...♘bd7, leading to positions that we cover via 8...♘c6 or 8....♘bd7.

9...♘xf3+ 10.♗xf3 ♗xb2

This sequence is an independent option, but the resulting type of position is very well known to us and discussed via 8...♘d7 or 8...♘c6.

11.♕xb2



After the coming c2-c4 and ♘c3, White has a comfortable advantage.

B3) 8...♘d7



9.♕c1

White has some choices in this position, and it is difficult to evaluate the pros and cons of each move. Instead of 9.♕c1, the move 9.♕d2, intending 9...♘gxe5 10.c4, looks a bit more natural. However, there is a drawback in 9...dxe5. With the queen on c1, we are able to play a quick ♖d1, applying annoying pressure on the d-file. This is not as easily possible with the queen on d2. The third option is 9.c4, which I like the least. Of course, 9...♘gxe5 10.♕d2 would be fine, but after 9...dxe5, the move c2-c4 is not useful at all. Remember that the trade dxe5 ...dxe5 is less attractive with a pawn on c4.

B31) 9...dxe5 10.h3 ♘h6 11.♖d1 f6 12.a4

As usual, we should avoid playing a pawn to c4. The quick a-pawn push is an interesting idea, but 12.♘c3 with a later set-up of a2-a4 and ♘f3-d2-c4 is fine as well.

12...♘f7 13.a5 a6



14.♘fd2

White has a simple, but annoying plan. We will play ♘c4 and ♘c3, intending ♘d5. This is difficult to stop, as ...c7-c6 will cover d5, but weaken the d6-square enormously. Black has to solve serious problems.

B32) 9...♘gxe5 10.c4 ♘xf3+ 11.♗xf3



This type of position is very comfortable to play for White. We complete the set-up with a later ♘c3, ♕d2 and ♖ad1. Black has no active play, while we will play ♘d5 and ask Black how he wants to deal with this annoying piece. It is very difficult to ever play ...c7-c6, as it weakens the d6-pawn too much. Taking the knight on d5 with a piece is also problematic, as after cxd5, the half open c-file will be useful for White. Another frequently-seen idea is to play e2-e4 and f2-f4, attacking on the kingside. This particular position was reached 10 times in *Megabase 2019* and White scored 9.5 points – not too shabby. Let's check a typical continuation.

11...a5 12.♘c3 ♘c5 13.♘d5 ♗e6 14.♗xg7 ♔xg7 15.♕c3+ f6 16.a3

White is comfortably better and is able to press with little risk.

B4) 8...dxe5?

This is just a mistake.

9.h3



And Black loses the important central pawn.

c) 7...♘fd7



8.♗g5

There is nothing wrong with playing the schematic 8.♗b2 here. It may transpose to other lines, for instance after 8...♘c6 9.♕c1. After 8...dxe5, Black gets a slightly more favourable version of the dxe5 ...dxe5 structure, as we don't get ♖d1 played quickly. Still, I'd prefer White after 9.♘fd2. So why look at 8.♗g5 in the first place? I think that 8.♗g5 is objectively stronger and it sets some pitfalls that Black may fall into.

8...♕e8 9.♘c3



This is the point: we want to play a quick ♘d5, using our development advantage.

9...dxe5

The only move basically, but Black needs to either know the coming exchange sacrifice or devise it over the board, so it is not an easy move to make. 9...♘xe5 is wrong here. It is one of the pitfalls I mentioned.



10.♘d5 (now, ♘xc7 and ♘f6+ is a terrible double threat) 10...♘xf3+ 11.exf3 ♕e5 12.♕d2 ♘a6 13.f4 ♕d4 14.♕xd4 ♗xd4



15.♖ad1. That was the game Wen Yang-Vogt, Hanoi 2018. Black, a 2402 rated GM, resigned here. There is no way to stop 16.♘e7+, 17.♘xc8 and 18.♗xb7.

10.♘d5 ♘a6 11.♗e7

To use a poker term: this is calling Black's semi-bluff. He's got some compensation for the exchange, but I don't think it is fully sufficient. That being said, 11.♘e7+ ♔h8 12.♘xc8 ♖xc8 13.e4 is a worthy alternative that is comfortably better for White. Note that ♕e2, ♖ad1 and ♗h3 are simple moves to exert pressure. So if you want a simpler game, this is a fine way to play.

11...c6 12.♗xf8 ♕xf8 13.♘c3

The engine's improvement on the previously-played 13.♘e3. Now, I think that Black needs to start concrete play. If we get e2-e4 played to prevent Black's ...e5-e4, I don't believe Black has enough compensation at all. The King's Indian bishop needs to be active for Black to justify the sacrifice.

13...♕b4

Otherwise, we get in e2-e4.

14.♘a4

This is why Black's sacrifice makes some sense: the knight needs to go to the edge of the board. However, the concrete tactics work in our favour.

C1) 14...e4 15.c3 ♕a3 16.♘d4 b5



Slow moves don't help, but this does not solve the problems either.

17.♘xc6 bxa4 18.♗xe4 ♘b6 19.♕d8+ ♗f8 20.b4 ♗b7 21.♕f6

With a clear advantage for White. Black's pieces are just too uncoordinated. This is an extremely long line and not exactly simple! I need to emphasize that 11.♘e7+ is indeed a simple way to play, but I felt the lines after the principled 11.♗e7 are interesting to analyse. If you expect your opponent to play into this line, it is an option to study it in depth. If you are surprised by this line and don't remember it fully, just play 11.♘e7+. You have a very convenient choice at this point, depending on the situation.

C2) 14...b5 15.a3 ♕a5



16.b4

A great idea, leading to a sizeable advantage for White.

16...♕xa4 17.♘g5

Now, Black is forced to play 17...e4, as we are threatening ♗xc6 and also ♘g5-e4-c3 in some lines, trapping the queen!

17...e4 18.♗xe4 ♗xa1 19.♕xa1 ♘xb4

After 19...♖b8 20.♗xc6, White is winning. The nicest line is the following: 20...h6 21.♘xf7 ♔xf7 22.♗d5+ ♔e7 23.♗b3, and we trap the queen.

20.axb4 ♕xa1 21.♖xa1

We have reached a very favourable endgame. Black is very passive and needs to defend the queenside weaknesses.

As mentioned at the end of C1 above, this is a fascinating line, but you have a simpler earlier solution if this is preferable.

Conclusion

The move 6...e5 may lead to an early queen trade, but we are still able to pose some problems in a position that many King's Indian fans will not fancy that much. Black often chooses a knight move after 7.dxe5, but these lines are all favourable for White and important to study: you will encounter them very frequently.

CHAPTER 16

King's Indian: other 6th moves

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3 ♗g7 4.♗g2 0-0 5.0-0 d6 6.b3



A) 6...c5

Black plays this advance at precisely the moment when we can't answer with moving our d-pawn, as this would allow a discovery by the f6-knight. I think this is one of the best replies Black has available against our b3-system, but it is not going to be enough for the second player to just know the move and make things up from here – we are still able to set some problems that are not going to be easily solved over the board.

7.♗b2

7.c4 is also a fine move of about equal value.

A1) 7...cxd4 8.♘xd4 d5

Undoubtedly the best and most challenging move.

Black sometimes plays a slow move like 8...a6, trying to prepare a set-up with ♕c7: 9.c4 (we need this pawn on c4 to control the vital squares on b5 and in particular d5) 9...♕c7 10.♘c3 ♘c6 11.♖c1 ♘xd4 (with 11...e6, Black does not stop ♘d5 ! 12.♘d5, a standard idea that you will get on the board in some shape or form, 12...exd5 13.cxd5, with a clear advantage for White) 12.♕xd4 ♗e6



13. ♘a4. This very direct approach, aiming to push the c-pawn, is suggested by Komodo and was played by Alexey Dreev, admittedly in a blitz game. Dreev is an outstanding opening expert and his choices are always worth noting. That being said, White is also comfortably better after a move like 13. ♕d2.

9.c4

As usual, a pawn on d5 should be attacked with c2-c4.

9...e5

With 9...e5, Black avoids a remarkable transposition. By playing 9...dxc4 10.bxc4, he could have transposed to a different chapter – surprisingly, this position frequently arises from the Grünfeld! The move order via the Grünfeld is 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3 d5 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 c6 7.b3 dxc4 8.bxc4 c5 9.♗b2 cxd4 10.♘xd4. I decided to cover this position in Chapter 19, so please see there for details. I'd like to mention that here, in the King's Indian move order, the move 10.♘a3 is possible after 9...dxc4, and quite interesting, so this is a possible alternative to explore. I think that 10.bxc4 poses more problems and is part of our repertoire anyway, so this choice is understandable. Still, it is good to have alternate routes to explore if desired.



10.♘f3 e4 11.♘d4

A11) 11...dxc4 12.♘d2

I prefer this pawn sacrifice instead of 12.bxc4. After the capture I disliked 12...e3, which is a better version of this idea compared to 11...e3. It is not worse for White, but I felt 12.♘d2 is just simpler to play, despite involving a pawn sacrifice.

12...cxb3

Taking the pawn seems best to me, but strong players on the black side have preferred other moves:

1) 12...c3 (Black returns the pawn for tempi) 13.♗xc3 ♘d5 (Kotronias recommends 13...♕e7 here, but after 14.♕c1! I prefer White. The queen is on c1 to allow the idea ♗b2-a3, defusing ...♘d5 this way) 14.♗b2:

1.1) 14...e3 15.♘c4 (it is important to have this resource available) 15...exf2+ 16.♖xf2 (White's structure is not ideal, but look at the pieces!) 16...♘b6



17.e3. A key novelty, improving on the existing games. This move is very strong and not obvious at all. White covers the knight on d4, enabling ♗a3. Engines already claim a winning advantage for White, but let's check a possible human sequence of moves: 17...♘xc4 18.bxc4 ♘d7 19.♗a3 ♖e8



20.♖xf7. A nice shot, giving White a winning attack. The rook can't be taken and White threatens 21.♖xg7+! and ♗b2, getting the black king into a deadly crossfire of the bishops;

1.2) 14...f5 15.♘c4. I prefer White, as Black's position feels somewhat overextended. Note that f2-f3 at the right moment is a key idea, opening up the bishop on g2 again.

2) 12...e3 13.♘xc4 exf2+ 14.♖xf2 (we have seen a similar position after 12...c3 13.♗xc3 ♘d5 14.♗b2 e3 15.♘c4 exf2 16.♖xf2. White has excellent activity for the structural deficit on the kingside) 14...♘g4 (Black needs to initiate concrete play. After some slow move, ideas like ♘b5 are very annoying to face) 15.♖f4 ♘e5 (the move 15...h5 was played in the game Hausrath-Polzin, Germany Bundesliga 2010/11. With 16.♕c2, we prepare ♖d1 next and keep the pressure on. White is substantially better. My former teammate played 16.♘b5 instead, allowing a queen trade) 16.♗a3 ♘xc4 (after 16...♖e8 17.♘d6, Black is collapsing quickly) 17.bxc4 ♗h6 18.♖f3 ♖e8



19.♘b5, and again White has a huge initiative.

13.♕xb3

White has good compensation for the pawn. His pieces are all active and we have

simple moves to follow up with. Rooks to c1 and d1, ♘c4, ♗a3 all suggest themselves. This whole line is rather fresh, and thus this position was only reached twice in my database. I will briefly check these examples and an additional third move that made sense to me.

13...♘c6

A very principled approach, immediately trying to get of the strong knight on d4.

1) The move 13...♘a6 makes a lot of sense in my view, trying to secure an outpost on c5. I'd like to show one sample line: 14.♖fd1 ♕e7 15.♗a3 ♘c5 16.♕c2 b6 17.♘2b3 ♘fd7



18.♖ac1. White will get the pawn back and retain an active position. The engines evaluate it as equal, which seems reasonable.

I wouldn't worry too much about such a scenario. White's play is easy and Black has to defend, and very likely he will have to do this with a time disadvantage;

2) 13...♖e8 14.♖fd1. This is more powerful than 14.e3, as played in the stem game Pantsulaia-Iljiushenok, St Petersburg blitz 2018. I decided to stop the analysis here, as Black has some possible moves and White's play is quite simple as outlined before.

14.♘xc6

14.e3 is also possible, keeping more pieces on the board. White has compensation for the pawn, but no advantage.

14...♕xd2 15.♘e7+ ♔h8 16.♘xc8 ♖axc8 17.e3 ♕d3 18.♖fd1 ♕xb3 19.axb3



White was slightly better in Malakhov-Amin, Zagreb 2018. The e4-pawn will drop and Black's remaining pawns on the a- and b-files are weak. Black should hold, but it's a one-sided affair.

A12) 11...e3

This is very rarely played and probably for good reason. We still need to examine it carefully, because the arising positions are very non-standard. They are good for us, but tricky to handle over the board without prior study.

12.fxe3 ♘g4



This is Black's idea. White's structure is seriously weakened and immediately attacked. We have an extra pawn for the moment though. The following moves are not very intuitive, and it took me a while to understand why the engines give White a rather large advantage.

13.♕c1!

This is not obvious at all, but ♕c1 is stronger than ♕d2. The reason is the line 13.♕d2 dxc4 14.h3 ♘e5 15.♘c3 ♘bc6, when Black uses the unprotected queen on d2 to develop. This line is also promising, by the way, but 13.♕c1 is more convincing.

13...dxc4

After 13...♕e7, we have the strong move 14.♘c3. Now, Black is facing the threat ♘(x)d5 and is forced to take on e3: 14...♕xe3+ 15.♕xe3 ♘xe3 16.♘xd5 (this is now mandatory, but also advantageous for White) 16...♘xf1 17.♘e7+ ♔h8 18.♖xf1.



And White has a sizeable advantage. We will get the b7-pawn, and two pawns plus the bishop pair are more than enough for the exchange.

14.h3 ♘e5 15.♘d2

As mentioned before, the best moves are not intuitive in this line. White returns the pawn, restoring the material balance.

15...cxb3

If Black does not take the pawn, we may get the following line: 15...♘bc6 16.♘xc6 bxc6 17.♘xc4 ♕c7 18.♘d2. Again, a nice move. White plans to play g3-g4 and ♘e4, using the open f-file to the advantage.

16.axb3



This is a position that puzzled me for a bit. I love tidy structures, but here White's pawns are a mess and we are not material up. Still, the engines love White and claim a sizeable advantage. It is obvious that White has very good activity, but I

was sceptical. After some analysing, I have to agree with the engine's assessment: White is better, because Black's development issues persist. We are already rather deep down the rabbit hole, but I'd like to show some moves to illustrate the play. I am aware that this type of position is not what you usually want from a KIS repertoire, but sometimes there is just no other option if the best reply to a dubious move is basically forced.

16... ♖e8

White has ♕c3 and ♘e4 after 16... ♘bc6 17. ♘xc6 bxc6 18. ♗d4, and Black is under severe pressure.

17. ♘e4 ♘bc6



18. ♕c5

And White has a great initiative. The idea is to increase the pressure with ♖d1 next.

A2) 7... ♘c6



This move is played surprisingly often. White enjoys a good game with simple moves now.

8.d5

I am not a huge fan of playing Benoni structures with a bishop on g2, but this advance is just too tempting. Black loses time with the knight and will often end up with that piece being out of play on the queenside.

8...♘a5

Black tries to play in the spirit of the line 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.g3 ♗g7 4.♗g2 0-0 5.♘f3 d6 6.0-0 c5 7.♘c3 ♘c6 8.d5 ♘a5, but there is a key difference. Our b1-knight is not yet committed and will be useful on the d2-square, reliably covering the c4-pawn.

With the alternative 8...♘b4 9.c4 b5, Black tries to make some sense of the knight on b4, getting in ...b7-b5 without any further preparation moves. 10.a3 ♘a6 11.♘bd2 ♖b8 12.♗c3 is the typical set-up to employ against this line. We move out of the b-file and keep the c4-pawn supported by the knight. The usual plan to follow up with is e2-e4, often the queen is placed on c2. The advantage in space gives White a comfortable game.

An alternative for Black is 9...♗f5, eyeing the c2-square, but our reply renders the idea dubious: 10.a3 ♘a6 (10...♘c2 starts a journey with no return ticket, so Black wisely retreats) 11.♘bd2 ♕d7 12.♖e1 ♗h3



13.e4, and again we enjoy a good game due to the space advantage and the unlucky knight on a6. Black also needs to worry about a quick e2-e4-e5 advance by White.

9.c4 a6 10.♘bd2 b5



11.e4

White has scored about 80% from this position in *Megabase 2019*. I am not surprised, as White is a lot better in the centre and the a5-knight is just a bad piece. However, there is one interesting line to check:

11...e6

This is rarely seen, but it has an interesting point.

The usual move here, 11...♖b8, leads to huge trouble for Black: 12.e5 (this is even stronger than the more restrained 12.♗c3) 12...♘g4 13.♖e1

1) 13...bxc4 14.exd6 (the important *zwischenzug* to remember) 14...exd6 15.♗xg7

♔xg7 16.bxc4, and Black is in terrible shape here. White's main idea is to combine the moves ♕c2/c1 to c3 and ♘e4;

2) 13...♘xe5 14.♘xe5 ♗xe5 15.♗xe5 dxe5 16.♖xe5 bxc4 17.♕c2 (of course, 17.bxc4 is better for White as well, but I wanted to show this interesting engine suggestion. It is not a commonly-seen idea) 17...cxb3 18.axb3.



White has excellent play for the pawn and will very likely regain the material soon, while keeping a strong initiative. Black has just too many weak spots to cover at the same time.

12.♕c2

I recommend playing a strengthening move instead of directly trying to refute Black's play with 12.dxe6 ♗xe6 13.♘g5 ♗d7 14.e5 dxe5 15.♗xa8 ♕xa8, which an engine might like for White, but is unsuitable for practical play. Black gets good compensation for the exchange. One idea I'd like to point out is to play b3-b4 at some point. For illustrative purposes, let's assume Black plays the e-pawn again.

12...e5



13.b4 cxb4 14.c5

With excellent play for White on the queenside.

B) 6...c6



This move usually indicates that Black intends to play the queen on one of the next moves. One idea might be ...♕c7, to support a later ...e7-e5 or even play a ...♕d8-a5-h5 switch to the kingside.

7.♗b2

Now, Black usually plays the moves ...♘bd7 and ...♕c7 next, preparing ...e7-e5. There is an independent option in 7...♕a5, and finally 7...a5 8.c4 is covered via 6...a5.

B1) 7...♘bd7



8.♖e1

White often plays 8.♘bd2 here instead, but the rook move is a bit more aggressive, as we will see. Sometimes, it is possible to manage a quick e2-e4-e5-pawn push.

B11) 8...♕c7

This is better than 8...♖e8. Black makes sure to be able to answer 9.e4 with 9...e5, stopping the white e-pawn.

9.e4 e5



10.dxe5

I decided to recommend this simple approach, but here White has a rather wide choice of good lines. You may also play 10.♘bd2, keeping the tension, or even 10.c4. Playing the c-pawn is not very common in the anti-KID lines of our repertoire, but here it makes some sense. Black has already committed to an old-fashioned set-up with ...c7-c6/...♘bd7 and...♕c7, which makes a transposition to a standard fianchetto King's Indian position quite attractive. It's good to have options and here is a position where you can easily vary your play.

10...♘xe5

This recapture is better than 10...dxe5, it seems: 11.a4 ♖e8 12.a5. We have the useful knight outpost on c4 and a comfortable advantage.

The almost automatic reaction 11...a5 in this particular position is bad: 12.♗a3 ♖e8 13.♗d6 ♕d8



14.♘a3. Black is in grave trouble. How can Black untangle this awkward position?

11.♘bd2 ♗g4 12.h3 ♘fd7

A nice tactical idea. Now, we will trade some pieces, but Black still does not equalize completely.

13.♖b1 ♘xf3+ 14.♘xf3 ♗xb2 15.♖xb2 ♗xf3 16.♕xf3

White still has a pull with play against d6 and ideas with h3-h4 against Black's weakened kingside.

B12) 8...♖e8

This rather normal-looking move is actually imprecise, which shows a benefit of playing 8.♖e1 instead of 8.♘bd2.

9.e4 e5

This has a tactical flaw, which renders the move 8...♖e8 dubious.

An alternative is 9...♕c7 10.e5 dxe5 11.dxe5 ♘d5 12.c4 ♘5b6



13.♕e2. White enjoys a large advantage in space, and Black has no particular compensation for this deficit. It looks a lot like an Alekhine Defence gone wrong. White has many promising ideas here, but I'd feel drawn to play h2-h4-h5 soon if possible.

10.dxe5 dxe5

10...♘xe5 11.♘xe5 dxe5 12.♕xd8 ♖xd8 13.♗xe5 is an even simpler way to an extra pawn for us.



11.♘xe5

A well-known motive, but it is a bit trickier here than usual.

11...♘xe4

A little tactical skirmish, but it does not work for Black. Another move is 11...♘g4 (a nice desperado, but we have a refutation) 12.♘xc6 bxc6 13.♗xg7 ♘xf2 14.♔xf2 ♔xg7 15.♕d4+, and White emerges with an extra pawn after the complications.

12.♘xf7 ♔xf7 13.♗xg7 ♘xf2 14.♖xe8 ♕xe8



15.♕d4

This is the star move that gives White the advantage!

15...♕e1+ 16.♗f1 c5 17.♘a3

And that's it! This whole sequence is basically impossible to find over the board, so learning this line by heart makes a lot of sense.

B2) 7...♕a5

Black intends to switch the queen to the kingside quickly, copying an idea from the fianchetto King's Indian main line. In this line, White has played c2-c4 and ♘c3 instead of b2-b3 and ♗b2, which is quite a substantial difference.

8.♘bd2 ♕h5 9.e4

White may also try to play 9.♖e1, avoiding the pin with ...♗g4. We will see, however, that we don't need to worry about ...♗g4 all that much.

B21) 9...♗g4 10.♖e1 ♘bd7



11.♕e2

It is very important to remember this idea. The queen goes to f1 to unpin and challenge the bishop with h2-h3 soon.

11...e5 12.♕f1

White is ready for h2-h3 now.

12...exd4 13.♘xd4 c5 14.♘e2

This is a clear improvement over 14.♘4f3 of the stem game Efimenko-Mamedyarov, Porto Carras 2018.

14...♘xe4 15.♘xe4 ♗xb2 16.♖ad1

White will win both d6 and b7 and enjoys a clear advantage.

B22) 9...♗h3 10.♖e1 ♗xg2

Another option is 10...♘bd7 11.♗xh3 (there are other ways to keep an edge, but this is a forced way to a nice advantage) 11...♕xh3 12.♘g5 ♕h5 (Black can't avoid the queen trade) 13.♕xh5 ♘xh5



14.e5. White is in good shape here – the knight on h5 is just too much of a liability for Black.

11.♔xg2 ♕a5

Black will have to return at some point, but here this move leads to severe trouble.

12.e5 dxe5 13.♘c4 ♕c7 14.dxe5 ♘d5 15.e6

Black is much worse here. Note that we have a quick h2-h4-h5 as well.

c) 6...♘c6



7.♗b2 e5

The consistent move after 6...♘c6. Now, we will transpose to the line 6.b3 e5 in most cases.

8.dxe5 ♘d7

Most often Black plays 8...♘g4 here, which after 9.♕c1 transposes to lines covered via 6...e5 7.dxe5 ♘g4 8.♗b2 ♘c6 9.♕c1 in Chapter 15.



9.♕c1

A recurring idea. We cover the bishop and force a decision about the e5-pawn. Interestingly, we can only get this precise position via the 6.b3 ♘c6 7.♗b2 e5 8.dxe5 ♘d7 9.♕c1 move order, but not after 6.b3 e5 7.dxe5 ♘fd7, as 8.♗g5! is a strong option that we should use (see Chapter 15 for details).

9...dxe5

After 9...♘dxe5 10.♘xe5, we get a position covered via 6.b3 e5 7.dxe5 ♘g4 8.♗b2 ♘c6 9.♕c1 ♘gxe5 10.♘xe5.

10.♖d1

Another point of 9.♕c1, quickly getting the rook on the open file.

10...♖e8 11.♘c3

This is a strong move, intending to quickly play ♘d5. A lot worse, as usual, is the pointless move 11.c4. Here, 11...e4 is fine for Black. As mentioned several times in this book, it is not very desirable to have a pawn on c4 once the d-file is opened after a dxe5 dxe5 sequence.

11...e4

The only critical move. Against slow moves, we play 12.♘d5. 11...♘d4 is refuted by 12.♘xd4 exd4 13.♘e4 c5 14.c3, and Black falls apart.

12.♘g5 f5

After 12...e3 13.f4, Black's pawn push has accomplished little.

13.f3 h6 14.♘h3 exf3



15.exf3

Black's position is tough to play. He still lacks coordination and the king's safety is compromised by ...f7-f5 and ...h7-h6.

D) 6...♘bd7



This move is very popular, in particular at the club level. After our natural reply, there is quite a wide choice for Black.

7.♗b2

Now, the most interesting move for Black is the preparatory move 7...♖e8. This is not a popular move, but some King's Indian experts have taken it up. Most of the time, you will face other moves, often transposing to favourable lines covered via other move orders.

Let's have a look at Black's less critical options. Most of the time, Black will play 7...e5, which after 8.dxe5 ♘g4 9.♕c1 transposes to lines examined via 6...e5 7.dxe5 in Chapter 15. Note that in this sequence, 8...dxe5 9.♘xe5 ♘g4 10.♘d3 is just an extra pawn for White. Another frequently-seen option is the slow 7...c6, which we cover via 6...c6. There is only some independent value in 7...♖e8 and 7...c5, which is comfortable for us.

D1) 7...♖e8



8.♖e1 e5

The slow 8...c6 is again covered via the 6...c6 move order.

9.dxe5

D11) 9...♘g4



10.♕d2

I know this is tough to remember. We play ♕c1 in those situations all the time, but here we don't! There are two reasons for that, so let's check the details.

10...dxe5

Black could also take with the knight: 10...♘dxe5. We know that the lines with a knight recapture on e5 are good for White, but there is a very important tactical twist here. The insertion of ♖e1 and ...♖e8 may allow nasty tricks that we need to avoid: 11.c4 ♘xf3+ 12.♗xf3 ♘e5.



Here's where you can spot one difference that the rook moves make if the queen was on c1. With the queen on c1, Black would threaten ...♘d3! here, which White has no good reply to.

13.♗h1. Wait... why to h1? Again, the rooks on e1 and e8 make a difference. After 13.♗g2, Black has the stunning 13...♘d3! 14.♗xg7 ♘xe1.

After 13.♗h1, Black should play a developing move, but this only leads to a type of game that we know is favourable for White. Please see the lines with 6.b3 e5 7.dxe5 ♘g4 for details. The tactical strike 13...♘d3 fails: 14.♗xg7 ♘xe1 15.♗b2. If we had

moved the bishop to g2 instead, Black would have a way out now by simply taking the bishop. Here, the unlucky knight is trapped, and White is winning.

11.e4



Let's talk about the second point of ♕d2 instead of ♕c1. Usually, without ♖e1 and ...♖e8 inserted, I recommend ♕c1. In this situation, we get to play ♖d1 quickly, with annoying pressure on the d-file. Here, we would be a tempo down, as we need two rook moves to get to d1, while Black has the useful move ...♖e8 included. Therefore, 11.e4 looks more sensible. White is slightly better in these positions, as we have more options to play on the d-file and Black's g4-knight will lose even more time. I found no games with this particular position, so let's look at some sample moves.

11...c6 12.a4 f6



13.a5

We secure the good spot on c4 for the knight and are slightly better.

D12) 9...dxe5



This move is rarely played, probably because Black is afraid of 10.♘xe5, which actually does not work!

10.e4

You need to avoid 10.♘xe5 ♘g4 11.♘d3 ♗xb2 12.♘xb2 ♕f6, which again showcases the significance of ♖e1 and ♖e8 being played.

10...♕e7

Now, e5 is attacked for real, so Black needs to cover it.

11.♕e2

We have a small pull in this almost symmetrical position. The pressure on e5 gives us a little something. I'll show some sample lines.

11...♘c5

Another possible line is 11...b6 12.♗a3 ♘c5 13.♘c3, with the intention of ♘a4 and a small advantage.

12.♗a3 c6



13.♘bd2

This is also slightly better for White. The pin is annoying for Black.

D2) 7...c5



8.c4

In a structure with ...cxd4, it makes a lot of sense to play c2-c4 and ♘c3, controlling the d5-square. Against earlier ...c7-c5 pushes (see the Benoni chapter on these), I recommend capturing on c5, initiating concrete play, as Black needs to spend some time to regain the pawn. Here, c5 is safely covered, so taking on c5 does not bring White much.

8...♖b8

Or 8...a6 first and then 9...♖b8.

Black may also play 8...cxd4 9.♘xd4. This pawn structure with a knight on d7 and four minor pieces on the board is quite favourable for White. Black lacks space and ideas for counterplay. Most of the time, ...a7-a6/...♖b8/...♗d7 is played to prepare ...b7-b5: 9...♘c5 10.♘c3 ♖b8 11.♕d2 ♗d7 12.♖ac1 a6



13.♘d5. A common idea in this structure. We place the knight on d5 and ask Black how to handle this annoying piece. Going ...e7-e6 weakens the d6-pawn, taking on d5 is answered by cxd5, getting even more space and better prospects on the c-file. 13...b5 14.♖fd1 bxc4 15.♘xf6+ ♗xf6 16.♖xc4. This whole sequence is not forced, of course, but shows typical play. The rook is well placed on c1 for a potential open c-file and now is able to recapture on c4. White is better here, due to the

weaknesses on Black's queenside.

9.♘c3 a6



10.a4

Black wanted to play ...b7-b5, so we simply stop it. Of course, weakening b4 and the b3-pawn is not ideal, but stopping the opponent's main/only idea is more important.

That being said, some strong players have opted for 10.dxc5 ♘xc5 11.♘d4, basically reaching the favourable structure after 7...c5 8.c4 cxd4 9.♘xd4 ♘c5, but losing a lot of time in the process. This is a decent alternative, but I think 10.a4 is a stronger move.

10...b6

10...cxd4 11.♘xd4 ♘c5 12.b4 (an interesting idea that I wanted to show) 12...♘e6 13.♘b3 (our idea is to play ♘d5, often combined with a4-a5) 13...b6 (Black stops a4-a5) 14.♕d2 a5. This fails, but it needs to be checked, as 15.b5 ♘d7 is OK for Black. Here, the move 15.♘d5 is strong, but grabbing the pawn is the clearest solution:

15.bxa5 bxa5



16.♘b5, and the a5-pawn drops.

11.♕c2 ♗b7 12.d5

Now, the b7-bishop is misplaced. Black needs to get some play going, otherwise White will just build up more space and prepare a central breakthrough with e2-e4-e5 in the long run.

12...b5



13.♘d2

White should avoid 13.axb5 axb5 14.♘xb5 ♗xd5, which allows Black to solve the bishop problem. 14.♘d2 would be fine as well, but I suggest not opening the a-file, as the open file would probably lead to rook trades in the long run. With this huge advantage in space, keeping material on is very important.

13...bxc4

An alternative is 13...b4 14.♘d1. No trades after 14.♘ce4, please. Now, we intend to play e2-e4, ♘e3, f2-f4 etcetera, with a comfortable advantage.

14.bxc4 ♗c8



15.♖fb1

White's idea is to get a set-up with e2-e4, ♘c3-d1-e3 and ♗c3. Pushing the pawn to a5 might also be useful, restricting Black even more. Black has very few active ideas, while we continue to expand in the centre and on the kingside.

E) 6...a5



Pushing the rook pawns against fianchetto set-ups has gained a lot of ground in modern chess. This does not only apply to playing the h-pawn against the kingside after castling, but is also frequently seen on the queenside. The key point to remember for White is to not answer this with 7.a4, as the insertion of the a-pawn moves favours Black quite significantly. One of the many examples is a line like 7...e5 8.dxe5 ♘g4 9.♗b2 ♘c6 10.♕c1 ♘gxe5 11.♘xe5 ♘xe5, when you would like to play c2-c4 and ♘c3 next, which is a lot less attractive with the queenside weakened so much (b3 and b4). There are actually many more cases, but this alone would be enough to discourage me from playing a2-a4.

7.♗b2 a4

Black may also play 7...c6 first, after which 8.c4 a4 9.b4 leads to the same line.

8.c4

We rarely play this move, but I see no good alternative against the early ...a7-a5 line. I arrived at this conclusion by a process of elimination. We need to develop the knight on b1 soon. This is difficult to do without having a pawn on c4. Against 8.♘bd2?, Black has 8...a3 9.♗c3 ♘d5. Therefore, no 8.♘bd2 then... 8.♘c3 does not fit into any reasonable set-up, so it's 8.c4. With 8.c4, we take control over d5, therefore preparing the knight development. I'd like to mention that we frequently play the move 9.b4, for example, after 8.c4 c6, we play 9.b4. This prompted me to investigate 8.b4 as well. It is not a bad move, but Black has 8...d5 9.a3 b5 for a complete queenside shutdown. We avoid this scenario by going 8.c4 first.

E1) 8...axb3 9.axb3 ♖xa1 10.♗xa1

Black simplifies on the a-file, which is the most promising strategy after the early a-pawn push.

10...c6 11.♘bd2 ♘a6



12.♗c3

Black has some moves now, and it is not rewarding to analyse such a 'non-contact' position. White's general plan is to expand on the queenside or in the centre. We have some more possibilities in that regard, but Black is rather solid. Please note that ♕a1 and ♖b1/♖c1 is a good way to coordinate. Quite frequently, Black will play ...d6-d5, which makes the game look a lot like the symmetrical Grünfeld, starting with 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.♗g2 d5 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 c6 7.b3 (Chapter 19).

E2) 8...c6



I think that it is more precise for Black to take on b3 first.

9.b4

We are gaining some useful space on the queenside, and try to isolate the a4-pawn to later attack it, for instance, with a later a2-a3 and ♘c3 set-up.

9...♗e6

9...d5 10.c5 leads to the same structure.

10.♘fd2

A good way to set up the pieces. We keep the option of playing the a2-a3 and ♘c3 idea.

10...d5 11.c5 b5

Black will probably not be able to play without this move in the long run. After a later a2-a3 and ♘c3, the a4-pawn needs protection anyway.

12.cxb6 ♕xb6 13.a3

White enjoys a slight advantage. The a4-pawn is still a liability, and c5/c6 are more exploitable weaknesses than the c4-square.

E3) 8...♘bd7 9.b4

Again this move, after Black has avoided trading on b3.

9...e5

We need to check this direct move. Against slow moves, the plan with a2-a3 and ♘c3 is critical and good for White.

10.dxe5 ♘g4 11.♕c2

We know this dxe5 ...♘g4 idea from lines like 6.b3 e5 7.dxe5 ♘g4, when we play 8.♕c1. Here, we have the very comfortable move 11.♕c2, leading to a clear advantage.

F) 6...b5



Wow, this looks odd! But I need to include it, because just days before these lines were written, it was played by Magnus Carlsen against Georg Meier at the Grenke Chess Classics 2019. It is an extremely rare move and will very likely not occur all that often, even after Magnus played it.

7.♘bd2

Meier played 7.♗b2, 8.♘bd2 and 9.c4, but LeelaZero's suggestion of skipping ♗b2 makes a lot of sense. Here's a sample line:

7...♗b7 8.c4 bxc4 9.bxc4

And here, having not played ♗b2 is useful. We have ideas like ♖b1 and ♕a4, with

play on the open b-file.

Conclusion

Black has many alternatives at move 6. I advise studying lines with ...♘bd7 and ...c7-c6 with some priority, as they are played often at club level. The move 6...c5 is the theoretically most critical one, but its main path leads to the main line of Chapter 19 on the Grünfeld, a surprising transposition.

CHAPTER 17

Grünfeld sidelines: 3...d5

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3 d5



This is the first chapter that deals with Black playing a combination of the moves ...g7-g6 and ...d7-d5. This seems very reasonable, after all we are doing the same thing by playing d2-d4 and g2-g3 early on! The lines discussed in this chapter are classified as a Grünfeld Defence and they often arise via a different move order. For example, 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘f3 ♗g7 4.g3 0-0 5.♗g2 d5 6.0-0 is a way to reach the position we discuss in a later main line chapter. In our repertoire, a ...g7-g6/...d7-d5 set-up may arise via various move orders. The most common one is 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3, and now Black may play 3...d5 or delay it after ♗g2 ♗g7 and 0-0 0-0. This symmetrical scenario also arises after 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6. A third possible move order is 1.d4 g6 2.♘f3 ♗g7 3.g3 d5, which is slightly different, because Black might choose to develop the knight to a different square instead of the more natural f6-square. These Grünfeld-like lines starting with 1...g6 are discussed in Chapter 20.

One important general point to mention is that we always play c2-c4 to attack the d5-pawn. In most cases, we will play it on move 6 after we have played the standard moves of 1.d4, 2.♘f3, 3.g3, 4.♗g2 and 5.0-0, but there is one important point to remember. If Black plays ...c7-c6 early on, it is advisable to prepare c2-c4 with b2-b3. Against an unprepared c2-c4, Black might answer by grabbing and keeping the c4-pawn. This point is discussed in detail later.

4.♗g2 ♗g7

Very natural, and played almost always. 4...c6 is a clever move order if Black intends to play with ...c7-c6 anyway: 5.0-0 ♗g7



6.b3 (this is important for our repertoire concept. After 6.c4 dxc4, we reach an unclear gambit position that is not part of our repertoire) 6...0-0 7.c4 and we have transposed to Chapter 19.

5.0-0

Now, Black castles most of the time, but Black has interesting alternatives. We already know that after 5...c6, we should prepare c2-c4 first with 6.b3.

A) 5... ♘bd7



I was not aware of this move before starting this project. It is a sophisticated idea, which is directed against White's plan of c2-c4.

6.c4

I decided to recommend this move after all. The alternatives did not convince me all that much. If you try to prepare c2-c4 with 6.b3, Black has 6...c5. Similarly, 6.♘bd2 0-0 7.c4 c5 does not lead to much either. Some strong players have tried 6.a4, which is an interesting alternative.

6...dxc4

This is the principled move. Black intends to protect the c4-pawn with ♘b6.

Although 6...c6 is not a logical follow-up to 5...♘bd7, this move should be checked. It is useful not just for the concrete line, but also for the general understanding of 1.d4-positions.



7.b3 would transpose to Chapter 19, but the exchange on d5 is a lot stronger. The reason is that Black has already committed to the knight on d7, while White still has ♘c3 and a later ♗f4 and ♕b3 available.

Black has a hard time defending the opened c-file. Here's a sample line to illustrate Black's troubles: 7.cxd5 cxd5 8.♘c3 0-0 9.♗f4 (9.♕b3 is also strong and leads to a clear advantage) 9...a6 10.♕b3 e6 11.♖fc1, and White has a fantastic position that will be very tough to hold for Black.

7.♘bd2 ♘b6 8.e4

We don't play many gambits in our repertoire, but this is one of them. I believe that we have to go this way to play ambitiously. If you absolutely don't want to sacrifice the pawn, there still is 8.♘xc4 ♘xc4 9.♕a4+ c6 10.♕xc4, but Black equalizes in this variation, something that is not easy to accomplish in the recommended line.

8...c6 9.♕c2 0-0 10.a4 a5



Black can hardly avoid this move. If we manage a4-a5, the pawn on c4 will drop,

giving White a great central advantage.

11.b3

This move makes the pawn sacrifice permanent, but our compensation is not in doubt.

11...cxb3 12.♘xb3

White has very good play for the pawn. We have a great pawn centre and easy development. The a5-pawn is a useful target, and Black has no clear way to free the position. I think that even a very conservative player would be happy to take White in this position.

B) 5...c5

A rare move, but it is useful to check it briefly.

6.dxc5

This is best and similar in spirit to Chapter 20.

In most cases, we will transpose to the line 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3 d5 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 c5 (C21 below).

6...♘a6

Here, 6...0-0 7.c4 transposes to line C21.

7.c4 ♘xc5

7...0-0 8.♘c3 again transposes to C21.



8.♘c3

Black has no good reply now, and he probably has to take on c4. I'll show one sample line:

8...dxc4 9.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 10.♗e3 ♘fe4 11.♖fd1+ ♔e8 12.♘b5

White has a decisive attack already.

c) 5...0-0

The most natural move and by far the main choice for Black.

6.c4

We have reached the most important juncture in the Grünfeld chapters. Here,

Black has two main lines, namely the solid Slav-style move 6...c6 (Chapter 19) and the more dynamic 6...dxc4 (Chapter 18).

Black has some other options that we will check now.

C1) 6...c5



In some ways, this is the most principled move! Black tries to clear the centre and trade down to equalize.

7.dxc5 dxc4

The alternative 7...♘a6 is slightly worse than the symmetrical 7...dxc4. We need to be precise to prove it, though: 8.♘c3 dxc4 9.♕a4 (I also checked 9.c6, but Black seems to hold after 9...♘b4. After the queen move, White retains a comfortable edge) 9...♘xc5 10.♕xc4. Black has cleared the centre. Without any pawn play, it's all about piece activity and coordination. We will see that White is better equipped for that fight. 10...b6 11.♖d1 ♕e8 (the tactical solution 11...♗a6 is no solution actually! After 12.♖xd8 ♗xc4 13.♖xa8 ♖xa8



14.♘d2, White wins decisive material) 12.♗e3. White develops with tempo. Black's position is not much fun to play. I'd like to show some more moves for an interesting try by Black: 12...♗b7 13.♗xc5 ♖c8 14.♕a4 ♕xa4 15.♘xa4 bxc5 16.♖ac1,

and Black will suffer for the rest of the game. The c-pawn is the obvious problem.

8.♘a3

This position often arises from a different move order: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3 d5 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 dxc4 7.♘a3 c5 8.dxc5.

8...c3

This is Black's best bet at equalizing. The resulting positions will be somewhat dry, but they are also completely one-sided. White often plays for a win in a risk-free situation.

An alternative is 8...♕xd1 9.♖xd1, but compared to 8...c3, this seems inferior. White is basically two tempi up in a symmetrical position, and White has a much easier task to win c4 than Black has to grab c5. 9...c3 (after 9...♘e4 10.♘xc4 ♘xc5 11.♗e3 ♘ba6 12.♘d4, Black is under heavy pressure in a symmetrical pawn position. It is not at all easy to organize the black camp, and therefore White is better) 10.♘b5 cxb2 11.♗xb2 ♘a6



12.♗a3, and again White retains serious pressure. After the coming ♘fd4, it will be tough for Black to develop the queenside at all.

9.♘b5 ♘a6

The main move and the best one. Taking on b2 instead gives White too much development: 9...cxb2 10.♗xb2 ♗d7 11.♕b3 ♗c6 12.♖fd1 ♕c8 13.♖ac1, and White had the initiative in Kramnik-Topalov, London 2016. Kramnik converted his nice position into a win in 28 moves.

10.♘xc3 ♘xc5



Black has managed to clear the centre of pawns and will be close to equality. We are still able to set some problems, though.

11. ♗e3

Any small advantage must be based on the development advantage, so we need to develop with tempo.

11... ♘fe4 12. ♘xe4 ♘xe4 13. ♗d4

We are trading Black's best piece.

c11) 13... ♗xd4

This is the most popular and best move in this position.

14. ♕xd4 ♕xd4 15. ♘xd4 ♘d6 16. ♖ac1

We are following one of Kramnik's grinding masterpieces against Wei Yi, played in Wijk aan Zee 2018.

16... ♖d8 17.f4 ♔f8 18. ♔f2 ♗g4 19.h3 ♗d7



20. ♖c7

This is my/the engine's suggested improvement on Kramnik's 20.e4, after which Wei Yi could have played 20... ♘b5! to free himself. He did not take this opportunity and was ground down later in instructive fashion.

20...♖ac8 21.♖fc1 h5 22.b4

White retains a nagging pull, intending e2-e4-e5 later. It is important to have the right attitude about lines like that. Black is playing for a symmetrical structure, pretty much accepting that he is not going to win the game unless White blunders. We are playing for two results and this is a welcome scenario. You will win some games against weaker players (who usually do not even know/play a line like that), and if a stronger player goes for it, make him suffer as much as possible.

c12) 13...♗f5

This is a bit more ambitious than taking on d4, but less reliable. The knight on e4 is not a stable piece, as we will see.

14.♖c1 ♕a5

We need to act now, otherwise ...♖fd8 will be annoying.

15.♗xg7 ♔xg7 16.♕d4+ ♘f6

16...♔g8 17.g4. Ouch! Black is losing a piece.

17.♕e3

This is a strong move, clearing the d4-square for the knight and attacking e7.

17...♕xa2

We should check this direct solution.

Against slow moves, White is just slightly better with moves like a2-a3, b2-b4 and ♘d4.

18.♘d4 ♗d7 19.♗xb7 ♖ab8 20.♖a1 ♕c4 21.♖xa7

White has won a pawn in the complications.

c13) 13...♘g5

This flashy move does not equalize.

14.♗xg7 ♘xf3+ 15.♗xf3 ♔xg7 16.♕b3

We are clearly more active in this symmetrical position.

16...♕c7 17.♖ac1 ♕e5



18.h4

This improves on the 2018 PRO Chess League rapid game Meier-Vidit, where

18.♕c3 was played. 18.h4 is a strong move, as it makes a possible ...♗h3 tempo move a lot less attractive. Black has no useful move now.

c2) 6...♘c6



A rare move, but it does not seem to be bad.

7.♘a3

We just accept a possible transposition to a main line with this somewhat odd-looking move. Covering the c4-pawn from a3 is preferable to ♘d2, as we keep the important option to play ♘e5.

7...♗f5

A possible move to avoid a transposition, but it does not convince. Black's best choice is to play 7...dxc4, after which 8.♘xc4 transposes to the line 6.c4 dxc4 7.♘a3 ♘c6 8.♘xc4.

Black may also play 7...a5, a waiting move, establishing support for a future knight jump to b4: 8.cxd5 ♘xd5



9.♘b5. A strong move! We use the weakened b5-square and have ideas with e2-e4 and ♗f4 next. White is comfortably better.

8.♘e5

This is one reason why 7.♘a3 makes sense. The d-pawn remains protected now, compared to a situation with a knight on d2.

8...♗e6 9.e3

White bolsters the centre and intends a set-up with ♕e2 and ♖d1. It's good to know that 9.♘xc6 bxc6 looks excellent at first sight, but these pawn weaknesses are not easy to exploit, due to the wrong position of the knight on a3 for this structure. Keeping the tension for the moment is better.

9...dxc4

The most Grünfeld-like solution in this position, going for activity.

10.♘xc6 bxc6



11.♕c2

In a duel of two Russian hopefuls for World Championship titles between Goryachkina and Artemiev, played in Skopje 2017, White chose 11.♕e2, which was also good for an advantage. The engines suggest 11.♕c2, which makes even more sense to me. We will win at least one of the c-pawns and the structure on the black queenside remains weak.

Conclusion

The theoretically most challenging line in this chapter is C1, after which we need to be precise to retain a small pull. Other sidelines are not convincing for Black, but

we should be aware of the early ...c7-c6 ideas (play b2-b3 first, then c2-c4) and have a look at the rare, but tricky line A.

CHAPTER 18

Grünfeld:

3...d5 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 dxc4

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3 d5 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 dxc4



Black is not able to hold this pawn. We will win it back quickly. Black's main idea with the capture is to open up the position and attack the d4-pawn either with piece pressure (...♘c6) or with a quick ...c7-c5.

7.♘a3

The way to get the pawn back safely. Here, White has no other decent alternative, so let's play the well-established main line. Now, Black has a fundamental choice regarding the captured pawn. He can either let White take on c4 or push the pawn to c3, provoking bxc3.

A) 7...c3 8.bxc3 c5



Black has returned the pawn on c3 and now attacks our central pawn. One key idea for Black is to use the weakened c4-square. In many lines after the traditional main move 9.e3, Black plays ideas like ...♘f6-d5-b6 and ...♘a5 to make use of this

square. I am recommending a more recent idea that looks to be promising for White.

9.♖e1

This is fashionable at the moment, and for good reason. White intends to play e2-e4 in one move and occupy the centre with the ideal pawn duo.

9...♘c6

The most straightforward and most popular move. The knight is clearly placed best on c6, and therefore it is played first.

1) 9...♕a5. Black is tempted to quickly play the rook to d8, but this does not work out all that well: 10.♗b2 ♖d8 11.e4 ♘c6



12.♕b3. White is just better here, with a huge centre and easy play ahead. We have ♘c4 coming, and pushing the d-pawn is on the agenda as well;

2) 9...♘d5 10.♗b2 ♘c6 11.e4. I decided to cover this line via the move order 9...♘c6 10.♗b2 ♘d5 11.e4.

10.♗b2

A1) 10...♕b6

This looks natural and is the most popular move by far.

11.♘c4 ♕a6 12.♘cd2

White has also tried 12.♘ce5 and this is indeed a fine alternative. I prefer 12.♘cd2

though. It is more consistent with the plan to install a broad centre.

12...♖d8

Black has tried the pawn sacrifice 12...e5, but it is not fully correct: 13.♘xe5 ♘xe5 14.dxe5 ♘g4 15.♘e4 (this counterattack is the right recipe against 12...e5. Please avoid the greedy 15.f4 ♘e3, which is awful for White) 15...♘xe5 16.♘xc5. I don't see enough compensation for a pawn. Note that the knight often has a useful post on d4 here (♘c5-b3-d4).

13.e4

We have accomplished our strategic goal, and White is slightly better in my opinion. This is maybe also a matter of preference: a classical player likes to have a classical pawn centre. The whole line with 9.♖e1 is still rather fresh, and therefore we don't have many game examples to rely on. I'll show some moves of a recent game:

13...♗g4 14.♕b3 e6



15.a4

This is LeelaZero's suggested improvement on 15.♗f1, as played in Haria-Howell, London 2018. Haria's move was good enough to draw against the 250 points rating favourite.

15...♕b6 16.♕a3

This is the idea of 15.a4. White avoids the queen trade and now has ♘c4 ideas again. As mentioned before, I prefer White due to his central advantage.

A2) 10...♘d5 11.e4

Mamedyarov played 11.♕c2 at the Candidates 2018 against Grischuk. This move

also seems fine, but I like the more straightforward central pawn push.

11...♘b6



12.♖b1

This is a useful move. It covers b2 and allows White to play d4-d5 and c3-c4 next.

12...cxd4

Black should definitely insert this trade, as we will see.

12...♗g4 13.d5 ♘e5 14.c4. Now, the move 12.♖b1 makes perfect sense! White already enjoys a substantial advantage. It is probably best for Black to trade now, but the resulting position is no fun for him: 14...♘xf3+ 15.♗xf3 ♗xf3 16.♕xf3 ♗xb2 17.♖xb2. We enjoy a nice central space advantage, and the awkward position of the b6-knight does not help Black either.

13.cxd4 ♗g4 14.d5 ♗xb2 15.♖xb2 ♘e5

This is better for Black than the comparable position with c-pawns on the board. He has some counterplay on the open file at least.

16.♕b3 ♘xf3+ 17.♗xf3 ♗xf3 18.♕xf3 ♖c8 19.h4 ♕d6



20.♘b5

We have been following the game Giri-Grandelius, Doha 2014. Here, Giri played 20.♔g2, but after 20...♕e5 21.♕e2 f5, Black had enough counterplay. The engines suggest 20.♘b5 instead, preventing this idea.

20...♕e5 21.♕e2

Now a7 is attacked, so Black has no time to play the ...f7-f5 break.

A3) 10...♗f5



This looks like a normal move, but I doubt that many Black players who go for it anticipate White's nice reply:

11.d5 ♘a5

The only move Black has ever played here. We need to check the captures on d5, though. It looks silly to run into the fork, but it takes some precision to actually prove White's advantage.

1) 11...♕xd5 12.♕xd5 ♘xd5 13.e4 ♘db4.



This might be irritating if you haven't checked it beforehand. 14.exf5 ♘d3 15.♖ab1 (15.fxg6 is also possible, but rather complicated) 15...♘xe1 16.♘xe1 gxf5 17.♘d3. We will win c5, and have a substantial advantage;

2) 11...♘xd5 12.e4 ♗xe4 13.♖xe4 ♘xc3. Black gets 3 pawns for the piece in this

line. The following moves are rather forced: 14.♗xc3 ♗xc3 15.♖b1 ♕xd1+ 16.♖xd1 ♖ad8



17.♖b1. I wanted to show this move. White should keep pieces on the board and pressurize the black pawns. I know that many players are afraid to play with a piece against a pawn mass, but here White's job is not that difficult. The pawns are not far advanced and immobile. If you feel unsure about such a situation, it is a good idea to practice the position against an engine. Play it with black first, then try to learn from the engine's play and take the white side to practice.

12.c4 a6 13.♘d2

White has a great position here. We are much better in the centre, and the a5-knight is offside.

13...♖e8



14.♗c3

I just wanted to show this slow move. Please don't play 14.e4 and get hit with 14...♘xe4!. Black can't prevent e2-e4 anyway, so we just need to prepare it correctly.

B) 7...♘c6

Black opts for a very hypermodern approach of playing against the opponent's pawn centre with pieces. This line was quite popular about 20 years ago, when I played it with black against the late chess legend Tony Miles in Groningen 1997. Unfortunately, I lost the game score and it is not in the public databases. I only remember that I lost quite badly, but Miles was very friendly in the later analysis. The idea of the line is best understood after the next moves.

8.♘xc4 ♗e6 9.b3



B1) 9...♗d5

This is the first part of Black's concept. He controls the light squares in the centre for the moment. The second element is the push of the a-pawn, trying to nibble at the b3-pawn. When I played this line with black, I quite often managed to get a scenario with ...a7-a5-a4, followed by bxa4 by White. Then, Black has the idea of playing ...♖a6 and ...♕a8, which I was quite attracted to. Nowadays, White has found ways to completely avoid this scenario, and the whole concept looks a lot less appealing.

10.♗b2 a5



11. ♘e3

I like this idea a lot. White manages to prevent/defuse one of Black's key ideas, the a-pawn push to a4.

11... ♗e4 12.a3

Now, we are always able to answer ...a5-a4 with b3-b4, and Black's operation has just created a weak pawn on a4. One recurring idea is to later reposition the knight on e3 with ♘e3-c4-d2 and ultimately manage to play e2-e4 or, more likely, force Black to take on f3 to give up the bishop pair.

B11) 12... ♕c8

This is the most popular move, clearing the d8-square for the rook.

13. ♘c4 ♖d8 14.e3

We need this move to stabilize the centre.

14... ♗d5



15. ♖c1

Black was threatening ...a5-a4, so we need to protect the knight with this useful move. Our general plan is to prepare e3-e4 next, for example, with ♕c2 and ♖e1.

15... ♘e4

Stopping the e-pawn, but the pieces on e4 and d5 are not stable in the long run.

16. ♕c2 ♕e6 17. ♖fd1 f5 18. ♘e1

White has ♘d3 and f2-f3 in store, pushing the pieces back.

B12) 12... ♘d5



This more or less ignores the idea of regrouping the e3-knight.

13.♘c4 ♘b6 14.♘cd2 ♗d5 15.e3

The immediate 15.e4 ♗e6 is premature. Black has too much pressure on d4. After 15.e3, White can slowly build up to advance e3-e4 later. Black probably has to play ...f7-f5 soon to stop the advance. Here's a possible line:

15...f5 16.♖c1 e6 17.♕e2 ♕e7



18.♘c4

White is better here. Black certainly does not want to take on c4, but allowing the capture on b6 is also problematic. Another idea for White is to play ♖fd1 and ♘f3-e1-d3-c5 next.

B13) 12...♗h6 13.♘c4

That was the plan anyway.

13...♗d5



14.♘cd2

This is a strong novelty, suggested by LeelaZero. It offers a pawn, but taking it is far too risky for Black.

14...♘e4

This is much wiser than grabbing the pawn: 14...♗xd2 15.♕xd2 ♗xb3 16.♕h6. This is already indefensible for Black. White's attack is too strong, as illustrated by two sample lines:

1) 16...♘g4 17.♕h4 f5 18.d5 ♗xd5 19.e4 ♗xe4 20.♘g5 h5 21.♖ad1 ♕e8 22.f3, and White wins!;

2) 16...♗d5 17.♘g5 ♗xg2



18.d5 (the attacking trio of ♕h6, ♘g5 and ♗b2 is devastating) 18...e5 19.dxe6 fxe6 20.♘xh7 ♗e4 21.♘g5, and White is winning, as there are just too many threats.

15.e3 ♘xd2 16.♕xd2

We don't want to trade the bishop just yet. Black still can't take the b3-pawn.

16...e6

Taking on b3 is a huge mistake: 16...♗xb3



17.d5 ♗xd5 18.♖ad1 e6 19.♕c3, and White wins quickly.

17.♕c2 f5

Black can't avoid this weakening move in the long run.

18.♖ac1

After we have provoked ...f7-f5, we may prepare ♘d2 or ♘e1 next, moving the knight to the square c4 or c5.

B2) 9...a5

Black may also play this move first, instead of 9...♗d5. It has little independent value, as we will see.

10.♗b2 a4

Black's idea is to avoid, amongst others, the ♘e3 lines that we intend to play. Fortunately, the quick 10...a4 has a concrete flaw. Black should play 10...♗d5, transposing to the main branch of the 6...dxc4/7...♘c6 line.



11.♘g5 ♗d5

We need to check 11...♗xc4. If you need to capture, you are basically admitting that the opening was a failure. We just need to examine if Black has any concrete counterplay to irritate us: 12.bxc4 a3 13.♗c3 ♘d7 (Black prepares ...e7-e5 and ...♘b6) 14.♘f3 (we are withdrawing from the unstable g5-square and protect the centre)

14...e5 15.d5 ♘a5



16.♘d2, with a large advantage for White. We have many static advantages: more space, the bishop pair and a useful target on a3.

12.e4 ♗xc4 13.bxc4

Black provoked e2-e4 first to try to weaken the d4-pawn. White is still clearly better, though.

13...h6 14.♘h3 ♘d7



15.♖b1

White is also better with other moves, but this makes a lot of sense. The rook is fine on the half-open file, and the bishop is protected. White is better with his huge centre and the bishop pair.

To sum up the line with 6...dxc4 and 7...♘c6: it is an interesting approach by Black, but with careful play, White seems to be at least slightly better in B1, while B2 seems even riskier for Black.

c) 7...♘a6



8.♘xc4 c5

Black tries to clear the centre of pawns and equalize this way. Our concept against this line is to not take on c5, but rather keep the tension. Black does not want to take on d4, activating our knight. Therefore, we will enter a contest of who has the better strengthening moves. This will be White, as we have more space and more options.

9.b3

c1) 9...♗f5

Black plans to put the bishop on e5, trying to neutralize our fianchetto bishop.

10.♗b2 ♗e4 11.♖c1 ♖c8 12.♕d2 b6 13.♖fd1

This line is a good example of my earlier statement that White has the higher-quality improvement moves. We have already centralized our rooks, and ideas like ♕f4 and ♗h3 are annoying for Black.

c2) 9...♗e6 10.♗b2 ♗d5

1) 10...♖c8 will usually transpose to the line 10...♗d5 11.♖c1 ♖c8. 11.♖c1 ♗d5 and we have transposed;

2) 10...♗xc4 (Black plays for a pawn structure with this capture, but it does not solve all of his problems) 11.bxc4 cxd4 12.♘xd4 ♘c5 (Black has managed to isolate and blockade the c-pawn. This looks like a substantial achievement, but there is a problem with this set-up. This will become clearer after some more sensible moves) 13.♕c2 ♖c8 14.♖ab1 ♘fd7



15. ♖fd1. The issue with Black's position is the passive nature of this set-up. Black needs to keep the knight on c5 to cover b7. If you can't move the knight on c5, you will never get any pressure on c4. Black would like to play ...b7-b6 to make the knight mobile, but this obviously weakens c6 and allows a knight jump to c6. White on the other hand has ways to improve. There is ♗a3, for example, putting more pressure on the queenside.

All things considered, I am happy with White's chances here.

11. ♖c1 ♖c8 12.dxc5 ♘xc5 13. ♘e3

The start of an excellent regrouping.

13... ♗e4



14. ♗h3

Gaining a tempo on the rook.

14...e6 15. ♘d2

And finally, we are able to move the knight without allowing the trade.

15... ♗f5 16. ♗g2

White has a nice advantage here. We have sidelined the bishop on f5 and have good prospects on the queenside.

D) 7...c5

This move is currently in fashion. Black's main idea is to clear the centre and trade pieces to get closer to equality.

8.dxc5



This leads to a very slight advantage for White. I decided to cover this position via a different move order: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3 d5 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 c5 7.dxc5 dxc4 8.♘a3. Please see this move order in Chapter 17 for detailed coverage of this line.

E) 7...c6

This move is too passive and allows White an easy game with some advantage.

8.♘xc4 ♗e6 9.♕c2

There is nothing wrong about 9.b3 either, but I prefer this move. Our idea is to play for a quick e2-e4, and controlling e4 is more important for that plan than fianchetto-ing on the queenside.

9...♘bd7 10.♖d1 ♘b6



11.♘cd2

We manage e2-e4 next and are better. It's a full centre with all four minor pieces on the board, which makes Black's task quite awkward. Such a structure is not that promising with just one or two minor pieces left, but Black lacks space with all of them on the board.

Conclusion

I am happy with White's chances in this line. 7...♘c6 looks favourable for White if we play precisely. 7...c3, 7...c5 and 7...♘a6 are reasonable for Black, but I think White has good chances for a small edge in positions that are comfortable to play.

CHAPTER 19

Grünfeld:

3...d5 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 c6

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3 d5 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 c6



This is Black's solid choice, stabilizing the d-pawn.

7.b3

A natural move, lending support to the pawn and preparing to fianchetto the bishop. White has a wide range of options in this position, but our whole repertoire approach basically commits us to play 7.b3. There are multiple reasons for this, mostly clever move orders by Black like 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3 ♗g7 4.♗g2 0-0 5.0-0 c6, when our repertoire concept demands 6.b3, when 6...d5 7.c4 leads to the line examined here.

After 7.b3, Black has two fundamentally different choices. The most critical one is 7...dxc4 8.bxc4 c5, which radically changes the structure and leads to complicated and interesting play. The second approach is holding the centre and playing moves like ...♘e4, ...♗f5 and maybe ...a7-a5 at some point. This concept is very solid for Black and limits White's edge to a minimum if Black plays perfectly.

I'd like to make one general remark about this slow strategy. Black quite often plays ...♘e4, leading to a trade of knights on c3. This is usually combined with ...♗c8-f5-e4. In such a scenario, it is beneficial for White if Black has played ...a7-a5. With ...a7-a5 on the board, it is, for example, a bit more difficult for Black to play ...c7-c5 (the b5-weakness) or play a sequence like ...dxc4 bxc4 e5 (the weakened b-file). This seems minor, but details matter in such a slow position.

A) 7...dxc4 8.bxc4 c5 9.♗b2 cxd4

With 9...♕b6, Black delays the capture on d4 and gains some additional options if we respond with 10.♕b3.

I suggest playing a different move, though: 10.♕c1 (this move more or less forces Black to take on d4, which transposes to 9...cxd4 10.♘xd4 ♕b6 11.♕c1):

1) 10...cxd4 11.♘xd4 (and we have transposed to 9...cxd4 10.♘xd4 ♕b6 11.♕c1);

2) 10...♘e4 is the only somewhat reasonable way to avoid 10... cxd4, which seems very natural in the first place. After 10...♘e4, White gains a nice advantage: 11.e3 ♘c6



12.♘e5 (the important move to remember. We attack the unstable knight on e4) 12...♘d6 13.♘xc6 (the immediate 13.♘d2 is also better for White) 13...bxc6 14.♘d2 (White now threatens ♗a3 and ♘b3, playing for the c-pawn fork) 14...♘f5 15.♗a3 (we initiate a forced line that is good for White) 15...cxd4 16.e4 ♘h6 17.♗xe7 ♖e8 18.♕a3, and White is much better. Black is badly coordinated, and in particular suffers from the offside knight.

10.♘xd4

This position may also be reached via a different move order. Amazingly, we can get here via 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3 ♗g7 4.♗g2 0-0 5.0-0 d6 6.b3 c5 7.♗b2 cxd4 8.♘xd4 d5 9.c4 dxc4 10.bxc4. I am very grateful that both move orders take 10 moves, so the move counts are identical for both starts!

Back to the position itself: it's very interesting and unbalanced. We have the isolated pawn, but open lines and active pieces. Note that the g2-bishop is very strong, and Black has no obvious way to develop the queenside. Now, Black's main line by far is 10...♕b6, but you will also meet others over the board. The only other challenging move is probably 10...♘c6, as we will see. It is important to recognize the difference between all the possible knight moves, in particular between 10...♘bd7 and 10...♘fd7. Let's check the details.

A1) 10...♕b6



11.♕c1

The main line at this point is 11.♕b3. This move is interesting as well, but I decided to recommend the other queen move. I think the resulting positions are somewhat easier to handle and often promise White a pull without any risk taken. Black now mainly has the choice between playing 11...♘c6 immediately, accepting a small pawn structure damage, or preparing this move with 11...♗d7.

A11) 11...♗d7

This is more ambitious than 11...♘c6. Black does not accept any structural damage and wants to develop with 12...♘c6 next.

12.♘d2 ♘c6 13.e3 ♖ac8



Black has completed his set-up, but we still have some ideas to try.

14.♗c3

This move clears the b-file and allows ♕a3 in some lines. You'll find 3 games with this position in *Megabase 2019*. Black has tried 14...♘xd4 and 14...♕a6, but both moves don't equalize in my opinion. LeelaZero suggests 14...♕c7, and this seems better to me. We'll check all three moves.

A111) 14...♕c7

This more conservative move is suggested by the engines.

15.♕a3

After 14...♕c7, I could not find an advantage for White, but there is certainly lots of play left. I'll show one line that feels logical:

15...♖fd8 16.♖fc1 b6



17.c5

I don't see a better move, but Black may equalize fully now. Let's make a small exercise out of this position: how exactly does Black make it 0.00? Can you find it?

It's not that obvious in my opinion.*

I am not unhappy with this analysis result: if Black plays such an excellent defence, equality is certainly acceptable in a mainline opening. *(the answer by the way is 17...♕b8)

A112) 14...♕a6 15.a4

This improves on 15.♕b2, which was played in two games. One key idea of the move is to prevent Black from playing ...b7-b5 after taking on d4, as it is possible after 15.♕b2 ♘xd4 16.exd4 b5.

15...♘e5

Black attacks the c4-pawn for direct play. Against a slow move, we'd play 16.♕b2 next, with some pressure.

16.♕b1 b6



17.♖c1

And now, Black can't take on c4, and White still has play on the queenside. Let's check why the capture is not possible:

17...♘xc4 18.♗f1 ♘xd2 19.♗xa6 ♘xb1 20.♗xc8 ♖xc8 21.♖axb1 ♗xa4 22.♗b2

And White has a clear advantage in the endgame. We will enter with a rook on the seventh rank, with decisive effect.

A113) 14...♘xd4 15.exd4 ♗f5 16.♖e1

The move 16.♕a3 was played in Mamedyarov-Radjabov, Shamkir 2018. Black managed to equalize after 16...♗d3. After the improvement 16.♖e1, this is not so easy to do.

16...♘d7



According to the engines, this is the only move to equalize, but White still has interesting options.

17.g4

Black allowed 17.♖xe7, and it indeed seems OK for Black. 17.g4!? leads to interesting complications.

17...♗xg4 18.♖b1 ♕f6 19.♖xb7

I'd still rather be White here, but the situation is not that clear obviously. Still, we can conclude that the game remains interesting after 14...♘xd4, and it's rather White who calls the shots.

A12) 11...♘c6



12.♘xc6 bxc6 13.♘d2

White's advantage here is small, but it is clear that we still have a little something. The c6-pawn is weaker than the c4-pawn, and we have tempo-gaining ideas like ♘b3, ♗d4 or ♖b1. Black has tried about every move here that makes any sense. Let's check some ideas:

A121) 13...♖d8

This was played by Wesley So in one of the most recent games with this line, in an online PRO Chess League game against Vidit in 2018.

14.♖b1

This seems stronger than Vidit's 14.♘b3.

14...♕c7

14...♕a6 15.♗c3. We have seen this idea already. White is going for the ♖b1-b3-a3-rook lift and builds up some pressure.



15.♗c3

Now, ♕a3 is the point, targeting e7 and intending ♗a5. White retains a slight pull here without any risk involved.

A122) 13...♗e6



14.♗c3

The engines suggest this novelty. I like it a lot, intending to play the queen to the annoying a3-square.

14...♕a6 15.♖b1

Very nice! White now has ♖b1-b3-a3 in store, which is awkward to meet.

A123) 13...♗f5

Controlling b1 definitely makes a lot of sense.

14.♘b3 ♖ac8 15.e4 ♗e6



16.♖b1

In the game Ding Liren-Caruana, Wijk aan Zee 2015, White played 16.e5 instead. 16.♖b1 is the computer improvement, which poses more problems. You could easily continue the analysis up to move 30, but this is a bit too deep. I'll show

some moves and then cut it. If you have some time to spend, it's interesting to analyse a bit here, and it is helpful for your overall assessment of complicated positions.

16...♕b4 17.♘d4 ♕xc4

The move 17...♗xc4 clearly fails tactically: 18.♘f5 (a nice shot!) 18...gxf5 19.♗xf6 ♕d6 20.♗xe7 ♕xe7 21.♕xc4, and White has a clear advantage.

18.e5 ♘g4 19.♘xc6

And White is better here as well.

A2) 10...♘bd7

This move and 10...♘a6 are quite similar and will often transpose to the same position. Black's idea is to blockade the isolated c-pawn, but this is easier said than done.

11.♘d2

This is the right square. The knight needs to connect to b3 and later c5. If we manage to prevent the blockade, Black's strategy has failed miserably.

11...♘c5 12.♘2b3 ♘fd7



13.♕c1

This is a very strong move! White prepares ♖d1 and covers b2. The queen is also right on a dark square and ready to help on b2, c3 or a3 later.

13...♕b6 14.♖d1 ♖d8 15.♘b5

Black is under terrible pressure and clearly worse.

A3) 10...♘a6 11.♘d2 ♘d7

Of course, Black may also play 11...♘c5, which is covered via 10...♘bd7 11.♘d2 ♘c5.

12.♘2b3 ♘dc5 13.e3

This move prepares ♗a3, fighting for the blockade square c5.

13...♗d7 14.♗a3 ♖c8 15.♖c1

Again, White has annoying pressure on Black's queenside.

A4) 10...♘g4



An interesting move. Black opens up the g7-bishop and intends to play the g4-knight to e5 most of the time.

11.e3

This is an important move. With 10...♘g4, Black attacked the d4-knight, and we definitely need to be able to move our queen and develop the knight on b1. There is no other way: d4 needs to be protected.

11...♘e5

After Black plays 11...♘a6, the move 12.♗a3 keeps the a6-knight sidelined. We follow up with standard moves like ♕b3 and ♖d1 next.

12.♕b3 ♕b6

After the line 12...♘bc6 13.♘xc6 ♘xc6 14.♗xg7 ♔xg7 15.♘c3, White's position is preferable again. The bishop on g2 and the lead in development are significant assets.

13.♘c3

White threatens both ♘d5 and ♘a4 for a clear advantage. Black is far away from organizing any defence.

A5) 10...♘fd7



This is in some way similar to 10...♘g4, as it opens up the g7-bishop. There is a key difference, though... The d4-knight is not attacked. Therefore, we are able to clear the d1-square for the rook quickly.

11.♕c2

Please avoid 11.♕b3?? ♘c5!, and Black wins!

11...♘a6 12.♖d1 ♕b6 13.♘b5

One way to maintain the advantage. The idea is to play ♘b1-c3-d5 next.

13...♗xb2 14.♕xb2 ♘dc5 15.♘1c3

White has a strong initiative again. The idea of playing ♘d5 is hard to stop without any concession.

A6) 10...♘c6



In some way, the most principled move! The strong pressure on the diagonal makes it difficult to develop, but Black does it anyway. The resulting positions are marginally better for White, but Black hopes to hold a draw with precise play. It's a 'two results' play – we either win or draw.

11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.♘d2

12.♗xc6 ♖b8 13.♗e5 ♗h3 leads to a dead position after some tactics. It's not

necessary yet to pull the plug on the game, and we keep an risk-free edge with 12.♘d2.

12...♕c7

12...♗g4 was played by Grünfeld guru Peter Svidler in 2018. Black gives up c6 and plays for activity. 13.♗xc6 ♖c8 14.♗f3 ♗xf3 15.exf3 ♕d3 16.♖c1 ♖fd8 17.♘b3. The engines' improvement on Shankland-Svidler, Hoogeveen 2018. White just seems to be clearly better, which is a bit puzzling. What did Svidler have in mind here? I don't think he devised 12...♗g4 over the board, but what did he prepare here? In any case, I am happy to take White in this line!



13.♘f3

I suggest playing this novelty, instead of the tested 13.♕a4. After the queen move, Black managed to hold in three top-level games, so why not try something else? The idea of 13.♘f3 is to play on the dark squares with ♗e5 and ♘d4/e5 in some lines.

We don't have any game samples, so I'll check two lines that make sense to me.

13...♗e6

An interesting idea after 13...♗f5 is 14.c5. This seems to preserve some advantage: 14...♕b7 15.♗e5 ♖fd8 16.♕b3, and White maintains a pull. Note that we have ♘g5 ideas if the black queen moves away.

14.♕a4 c5 15.♗e5 ♕d7



16.♕b5

Black still has to solve some problems here. I am stopping at this point, as the line is already quite deep.

10...♘c6 is one of those lines played by professionals to completely kill the game off by trading everything. It is not a line you will face often (if at all), and having an idea like 13.♘f3 up your sleeve is more than enough.

B) 7...♗f5



Black goes for a natural developing move. In our theoretical overview, this move has little independent significance, as Black very often follows up with ...♘e4, and I cover these set-ups via the 7...♘e4 move order.

8.♗b2

After this natural move, most continuations transpose. It is easy for us, as we will play e2-e3 and ♕e2 anyway, unless Black plays ...a7-a5, which should be answered by ♘c3. As mentioned in the annotation to move 7, it is helpful to only allow the knight trade on c3 after ...a7-a5 is played. Having this in mind, sequences like 8...a5 9.♘c3, 8...♘e4 9.e3 or 8...♘bd7 9.e3 ♘e4 10.♕e2 are easy to play. Instead of

these transpositions, we will check two alternatives for Black:

8...♕c8

This is a move that does not transpose to lines covered elsewhere. Black intends to play ...♗h3 obviously.

An alternative is 8...♕b6. A rare move, threatening to take on c4. I decided to include it mostly due to the instructive answer: 9.♘e5 (this make a lot of sense. 9.♘bd2 is rather passive. Now, we still retain the option of playing ♘b1-c3-a4) 9...♘bd7 10.♘c3 ♖fd8 11.♘xd7 ♖xd7 12.♘a4. This is a sample line to show the idea. The knight has more prospects here than on d2, giving White a small edge.

9.♘c3

Some players have tried 9.♖e1, intending to answer 9...♗h3 with 10.♗h1. I am a bit sceptical about this slow set-up and suggest a simpler approach.

9...♗h3 10.♖c1 ♗xg2 11.♔xg2 e6



12.♕c2

After the coming e2-e4, we will be slightly better, due to the space advantage.

c) 7...♘bd7

This is rarely played at professional level, because Black is blocking the c8-bishop for no good reason.

8.♗b2

There is the rule of thumb that after an early ...♘bd7 in Slav structures, the exchange on d5 gains strength. Here, 8.cxd5 cxd5 9.♘c3 is possible, but not as good as in some other cases, because we have the pawn on b3 already. White would like

to have ♕b3 available, but this option is gone. For comparison, let's look at the following: 7.♕b3 ♘bd7? 8.cxd5 cxd5 9. ♘c3. Here, White is clearly better, with the immediate pressure on the d5-pawn.

I recommend playing 8.♗b2. As explained, 8.cxd5 is not a clearly better move and there is an additional reason: after 8.♗b2, Black's best option is 8...♘e4, after which 9.e3 transposes to 7...♘e4 8.♗b2 ♘d7 9.e3. This is actually not very likely to happen – if Black wanted to put the knight to e4, he could have done that one move earlier. Many opponents will play a slow move like 8...♖e8, which gives White a substantial advantage.

8...♖e8



A waiting move, and a bad one. Against this and similar moves like 8...e6 or 8...b6, we will prepare the move e2-e4 with ♘bd2 and ♕c2, quite similar to the Closed Catalan (replace ...g7-g6 and ...♗g7 with ...e7-e6 and ...♗e7 and it's identical!).

9.♘bd2 e6 10.♕c2 b6 11.e4 dxe4 12.♘xe4 ♘xe4 13.♕xe4

White has a comfortable advantage in this position. We have more space, and the ideas are indeed quite comparable to the Closed Catalan structures.

D) 7...a5



Nowadays, using the flank pawns against a fianchetto is very commonplace. Black starts with this idea right away, before committing any other piece.

8. ♘c3

It makes some sense to stop Black's idea for the time being.

Therefore, we play 8. ♘c3 first instead of 8. ♗b2.

8... ♘e4

A very logical choice. Black activates the knight, opens up the g7-bishop and, by trading on c3 later, allows ...a5-a4. Sometimes, Black plays 8... ♗f5 first, but after 9. ♗b2, 9... ♘e4 is the usual follow-up.

9. ♗b2

Now, Black has two reasonable moves: taking on c3 or ... ♗f5.

D1) 9... ♗f5 10. ♘e5

This is better than the more standard 10.e3, which is slightly better for White as well.

10... ♘xc3 11. ♗xc3

Now, we see a benefit of the early ♘e5. White has some pressure on d5, hindering the natural ... ♘d7 development.

11... ♗e6



Black covers d5 and prepares ...♘d7 next. It is met with a powerful reply that is worth remembering.

12.♘d3

Very nice! White ignores the threat to c4 and has ♘c5 and ♘f4 in mind.

12...dxc4 13.♘c5 ♕c8

Black can't allow a doubled pawn on e6, so this is forced basically.

14.♘xe6 ♕xe6 15.d5 cxd5 16.♗xg7 ♔xg7 17.bxc4

White has an excellent game here, with cxd5 coming next. Black has huge problems on the queenside/b-file as well. We need to check what happens if Black takes on c4.

17...dxc4 18.♗xb7 ♖a7 19.♕d4+

And White wins the rook.

D2) 9...♘xc3 10.♗xc3

As mentioned in the introduction to this part of the repertoire about the move 7.b3, I regard this position type (trade on c3 and ...a7-a5 played) as slightly better for White. Let's explore some lines to show typical ideas. In general, it is tough to analyse positions like this move-by-move, as there is a wide choice for both sides.

10...♘d7

Black directs the second knight towards e4.

1) I am sceptical of the pawn push 10...b5. It gains some space, but also weakens the queenside and c-file considerably: 11.cxd5 cxd5 12.♖c1 b4 13.♗d2 (this is much better than going to b2. The bishop is best on f4) 13...♗b7 14.♗f4 ♘c6



15.♕d2. White has a very comfortable advantage in this position. Note that White also has ideas like ♗h6 and h2-h4-h5, combining play on both flanks;

2) 10...a4 11.e3 axb3 12.axb3 ♖xa1 13.♕xa1. White is slightly better here again. We have options like ♕a7, and in general more possible ideas for improvement on the queenside. We might play b3-b4-b5, take on d5 or manoeuvre with pieces, such as ♘f3-e5-d3-c5, for instance. Black has no active possibilities and needs to defend this only slightly worse position.

11.e3 ♘f6 12.♘e5 ♘e4



13.♗e1

I wanted to point out this idea. This move looks awkward at first, but a future f2-f3 gives this piece a fresh perspective. I'll show one line to illustrate this idea.

13...♕d6 14.f3 ♘f6 15.♖c1 c5 16.g4

With a nice advantage for White, mostly due to his extra space and central control.

E) 7...♘e4

This is a key element of Black's play and is often played right away on move 7. In some cases, Black starts with 7...♗f5 or 7...♘d7, playing ...♘e4 next. I cover all these cases via the 7...♘e4 move order.

8.♗b2



E1) 8...♗f5

8...a5 is answered by 9.♘c3, which is covered via the early 7...a5 move order.

9.e3

We should wait with ♘c3 until Black has played ...a7-a5.

E11) 9...♘d7 10.♕e2

We should wait with ♘c3 until Black plays ...a7-a5.

10...a5

Black does not have any universally useful moves anymore, so he plays ...a7-a5 after all.

An alternative could be 10...♕a5. Black prevents ♘c3 for the moment and connects the rooks: 11.♖c1 ♖ac8 12.♘c3 (there is no other way to develop after ...♕a5, but the resulting position is nothing to complain about) 12...♘xc3 13.♗xc3. There are some possibilities for both sides from here. I'll show a good set-up for White: 13...♕b6 14.♖d1 (the rooks are best on c1 and d1, so we start this regrouping) 14...♖fd8 15.♖ac1 ♕a6



16.♘e1. White is slightly more active, and the idea ♘e1-d3-f4 can be quite annoying for Black.

11.♘c3

According to the general recipe to play ♘c3 only after ...a7-a5.

11...♘xc3 12.♗xc3 ♗e4

After 12...a4, I recommend going for concrete play. Of course, you may also keep the tension, but I think taking on d5 is promising.



13.cxd5 cxd5 14.♕b5 (14.bxa4 ♖xa4 15.♕b5 ♕a8 16.♘h4 will win a pawn, but White's position looks too unharmonious to me in this line. You may explore for yourself, but for this repertoire 14.♕b5 looks fine. We exert risk-free pressure with this move) 14...♕b6 15.♕xd5 ♗e6 16.♕e4 axb3 17.axb3 ♕xb3 18.♗a5. The b-pawn is a useful target, and our pieces are more active. Black's g7-bishop is biting on granite, while taking on d5 freed up our fianchetto bishop.

13.♖fc1

A good square for the rook. It covers the bishop on c3 and frees up f1 for a potential ♗f1 later.

13...e6

Here, 13...a4 is even more mistimed than one move earlier: 14.cxd5 cxd5 15.♕b5 (this is very awkward for Black to meet) 15...axb3 16.axb3 ♖xa1 17.♗xa1 (I don't see how Black defends the b6-pawn in a satisfactory way) 17...b6



18. ♗b2. The bishop will be great on a3. White has an overwhelming position.

14. ♗f1 ♗xf3 15. ♕xf3



You will reach this position type frequently after 7.b3 if Black chooses not to take on c4 and holds the centre. Black's position is quite solid. He has a dark-squared bishop, and almost all pawns are on light squares, which makes a harmonious impression. The downside of Black's game is its passive nature. Black does not have any active plan available and will mostly wait and hope for counterchances if White overpresses. We should try to play a very slow game, improving the position step by step. One plan I'd like to point out is to play a2-a4 first, then continue to open the queenside with b3-b4 next. This should be prepared with moves like ♖ab1 and ♕d1.

Some general advice about the slow lines after 7.b3: studying some complete games is helpful to better understand the plans for both sides. I believe White has more options and easier play, but Black can surely put up a resilient defence.

E12) 9...a5 10.♘c3



According to the general rule of thumb: ♘c3 only after ...a7-a5.

10...♘xc3 11.♗xc3 ♗e4 12.♕e2

This is a good position to examine regarding the ...a7-a5 move and the timing of ♘c3. Here, with ...a7-a5 being played, it is less attractive for Black to take on c4, as it opens the b-file against the backward pawn. It is important to understand that White ideally wants to avoid the trade of bishops on g2 and e4, further simplifying the position. The way to do this is to play the g-bishop to h3 or f1 and only then play ♘d2 or ♘e1.

12...a4

Black may also play 12...♘d7 here, which after 13.♖fc1 transposes to the move order 7.b3 ♘e4 8.♗b2 ♗f5 9.e3 ♘d7 10.♕e2 a5 11.♘c3 ♘xc3 12.♗xc3 ♗e4 13.♖fc1. Quite clearly, nobody learns all the possible sequences by heart. It is most important to get a feel for the piece placement in the first place.



13. ♗h3

I recommend this move, fully aware that Black may get very close to equality if he finds the right reply. If you'd like to avoid 13. ♗h3 c5, you may also play a less committal move like 13. ♖fc1.

13...c5

This seems to be the only move that gets Black close to equality.

13... ♗xf3 is more likely to occur in a practical game. After 14. ♕xf3 e6 15. ♖fb1, White retains a small, but permanent edge, due to the bishop pair and more options to change the pawn structure. This is an important factor to take into account. It is not that easy for Black to play ...c6-c5 or ...e7-e5, as this would weaken d5 quite a bit, a pawn that our bishop can easily put under pressure.

14. ♖fd1 ♘c6



15. ♖ac1

The trades in the centre will simplify the position a lot, getting Black close to equality. The move 13...c5 has never been played in my database, not even by GMs, so I am willing to accept this roughly equal position if someone indeed manages to find it. We are better if Black plays a more standard move instead, which is far more likely.

E2) 8... ♗e6



Black puts some pressure on the c4-pawn. Now, a routine move like 9.♕c2 would be fine, but the best move is considerably stronger.

9.♘bd2 ♘xd2

The principled move, but not the best choice. Black should probably play 9...f5, which gets us into a Dutch structure that is quite familiar to us. We use this b2-b3/♗b2/♘bd2 set-up against the Leningrad Dutch as well.

10.♕xd2

That's the real point of 9.♘bd2. Now, Black should not take on c4.

10...dxc4 11.♘g5 ♕c8

The move 11...cxb3 is not playable in my opinion: 12.♘xe6 fxe6 (I'm rather shocked that a strategic genius like Levon Aronian had this on the board as Black. He is already in dire straits, suffering from this terrible pawn structure) 13.♕b4 ♕d7



14.♕xb3. White is a lot better and in a higher sense probably winning. Note that after a later e2-e4-e5 and f2-f4, Black's bishop is boxed in forever – and this is not the only problem he has.

12.♘xe6 ♕xe6 13.bxc4 ♕xc4



14.d5

The excellent point of the whole line.

14...♗xb2 15.♕xb2

White is clearly better here. Let's see the proof with two key lines. In both of them, White wins the pawn back with interest:

15...♕b5

15...♕a6 16.♖fb1 ♖d8 17.♕xb7 ♕xb7 18.♖xb7 cxd5 19.♖xe7, and White will win d5 and/or a7 soon.

16.♖fb1 ♕xb2 17.♖xb2 cxd5 18.♗xd5 ♘d7 19.♖xb7

And White is clearly better in this endgame, winning a pawn soon.

E3) 8...♘d7

Black intends to transfer the b8-knight to f6, but there is a flaw in this idea. The knights are standing on each other's toes, as long as White does not play ♘c3.

9.e3 ♘df6

As usual after 9...a5, we are more inclined to play ♘c3. There are good alternatives, but it's good to have a general rule of thumb. After 10.♘c3, we will transpose to positions examined via 7...a5.



10.♘e5

White should avoid 10.♘c3, allowing Black to trade. It is much better to centralize with ♘e5 and prepare to play f2-f3 at the right moment.

10...♗e6 11.♕e2

Amazingly, Black has scored zero percent out of the nine games in my database. This is certainly a bit much but White definitely has an edge.

11...a5 12.♘a3

An interesting choice by Boris Gelfand. White also had other promising options, like 12.a4, for instance.

12...a4 13.f3 ♘d6 14.c5 ♘f5



15.b4

White had a comfortable advantage in Gelfand-Korobov, Poikovsky 2018.

Conclusion

In line A, Black reaches equality with perfect play, but as usual this is not that easy to do, in particular without deep preparation by Black. We are still able to maintain a pull in many lines that have been played by very strong players, and risk very little while doing so. Line B is entirely different in nature, as Black accepts a very slightly worse position in a slow game, quite untypical of the Grünfeld.

CHAPTER 20

Black invites a Benoni: 3...c5

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3 c5



This chapter is about black set-ups involving ...c7-c5 after both sides have already committed to a kingside fianchetto. Due to our repertoire approach of an early ♘f3 and g2-g3, it happens that Black plays ...c7-c5 right after we have already committed to a kingside fianchetto. This fundamentally changes the assessment of the advance d4-d5 as a response. For example, after 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3 c5 4.d5, Black has the option of playing 4...b5, after which we get into problems supporting the pawn. It is useful to compare this to 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5 3.d5 b5. The additional moves g2-g3 and ...g7-g6 clearly favour Black. His move is universally useful, while we don't really need the bishop on g2 badly. White's most common approach against these move orders is to play a quick c2-c4 and allow Black to take on d4, for example, 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3 c5 4.c4. This is a fine line for White, but I discovered a very interesting alternative in 4.dxc5, which leads to a very 'non-Benoni' structure. In my mind, this line sets Black some problems that are not easy to solve over the board. I need to emphasize that this line is based solely on fresh analysis and has never been covered in a book, so Black players are unlikely to know anything about it, but rather have to figure it out on their own.

I'd also like to point you to Chapter 21, which, amongst others, discusses 1.d4 g6 2.♘f3 ♗g7 3.g3 c5, which is similar in nature and will often transpose into the following lines.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3

Black may play ...c7-c5 on move three, four, or five. Besides the immediate 3...c5, there also is 3...♗g7 4.♗g2 c5 and 3....♗g7 4.♗g2 0-0 5.0-0 c5. In all cases, I recommend taking on c5. As we will see, ...c7-c5 on moves three and four are very similar, due to the fact that Black's best reply is ...♕a5+ in both cases. In the version on move five, Black does not have a check anymore, which changes the situation drastically. This line is actually quite dubious for Black, which sparked my

interest in the capture on c5 in the first place. Then, I checked the earlier dxc5 lines and found many interesting ideas, which led to the repertoire recommendation of 'always take on c5 if ...g7-g6 and g2-g3 are already played'.

We'll first check the ...c7-c5 push on move 3 and then discuss the differences to the later ...c7-c5 move.

Black plays ...c7-c5 on move 3

3...c5 4.dxc5 ♕a5+

This is by far the most popular move. Black makes sure to regain the pawn.

The move 4... ♘a6 here is worse than one move later, where the resulting position is just somewhat better for White: 5.♗e3

1) 5...♕c7 6.♕d4 ♗g7



7.♘c3, and Black is just a pawn down with no compensation to show for it;

2) 5...♕a5+ 6.c3, and White will keep the c5-pawn easily;

3) 5...♗g7 6.a3 (we need b2-b4 to cover the pawn) 6...0-0 (or 6...♕c7 7.b4 ♘g4 8.♗d4 e5 9.♗b2. This line shows one reason why 6.a3 is stronger than 6.c3)



7.♗d4. Black is not getting the pawn back anymore, and he needs to try to play ...d7-d6 or ...b7-b6 soon to get the bishop out. I'll show you one line the engine suggests: 7...♘c7 8.♗g2 ♘e6 9.c3 ♕c7 10.b4 ♖d8 11.♘bd2 b6 12.♗e5 d6 13.cxd6 exd6 14.♗d4. This is not forced at all, but just a line to illustrate the play. I don't think Black gets enough play for the pawn, even though the engine displays some compensation.

5.♘fd2

It looks odd, I know! But hang on, it makes perfect sense just three moves later. The knight will gain a useful tempo on the queen on c5, and by moving this knight, we also open up the long diagonal for the bishop on g2.

5...♕xc5

Black may play 5...♗g7 first, but after 6.♘c3 ♕xc5 7.♗g2, we reach the main line of the chapter anyway.

6.♗g2 ♗g7



7.♘c3

This position is very important, as it may arise from various move orders. First example: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3 c5 4.dxc5 ♕a5+ 5.♘fd2 ♕xc5 6.♗g2 ♗g7 7.♘c3.

Second example: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3 ♗g7 4.♗g2 c5 5.dxc5 ♕a5+ 6.♘fd2 ♕xc5 7.♘c3. Third example: 1.d4 g6 2.♘f3 ♗g7 3.g3 c5 4.dxc5 ♕a5+ 5.♘fd2 ♘f6 6.♘c3 ♕xc5 7.♗g2. I need to emphasize that this whole line is completely unexplored prior to this book. There is just ONE game in the database that reached this position, so your opponent will know no theory here, as there is (or was) none!

Now, what is the idea of White's odd set-up? We will see that it is rather versatile, depending on Black's choice now. One peculiar point is that we have not yet castled kingside, which allows us to play h2-h4-h5 in some lines, going for a quick mating attack. This may sound surprising at this moment, but you will see how easily Black may get into precarious situations in this line. Let's look at moves to make things clearer.

A) 7...0-0 8.♘b3

A1) 8...♕c7



This is the most stable and safe square for the queen, and the most likely move to be played. We need to guess, as there are basically no games to base our analysis on.

9.♗g5

White is again setting up the idea to take on f6 and play ♘d5. Black could retreat the queen to d8 now, which we have covered already via 8...♕b6 9.♗g5 ♕d8.

9...♘c6

With 9...d6, Black ignores White's idea completely: 10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.♘d5, with a clear advantage for White.

10.♕d2

I also checked 10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.♘d5 ♕e5 12.♘xf6 ♕xf6. Here, 13.c3 is not the most aggressive continuation, but definitely not bad for White. If you like a slow game with a small pull, this is not a bad option. After the more aggressive 10.♕d2, Black might again just retreat the queen, transposing to 8...♕b6 9.♗g5 ♕d8 10.♕d2 ♘c6, after which both 11.h4 and 11.♗h6 are fine. We will check two additional independent ideas:

10...♘g4

This is Stockfish's suggestion, but I doubt that a human would ever play it. Black moves the knight to avoid any ♗xf6 ideas, and ♘f6-g4-e5-c4 is an active idea. And one thing is also certain: we are not playing 0-0-0 now, because f2 is eyed by the knight as well!

An alternative may be 10...a5.



A somewhat radical option, but it is a common idea in the Sicilian, and this position certainly has a Sicilian flavour. 11.a4 ♘b4 (this is the idea: Black has provoked the weakening of b4 to put a knight there and increase control of the d5-square) 12.♖c1 (this prepares ♘b5 and c2-c3, expelling the intruder on b4) 12...d6 13.♘b5 ♕d8 14.c3 ♘c6 15.0-0. I prefer White here. White has a useful space advantage, and Black has weaknesses on the queenside. One idea that comes to mind is to play ♖fd1 and c3-c4-c5 next.

11.♘d5 ♕d8 12.c3

I like this restraining approach against the bishop on g7.

12...d6 13.h3 ♘ge5 14.♖d1 ♘c4



15.♕c1

I slightly prefer White in this position. The knight on d5 is still very annoying, and it is not clear how Black will get rid of it without some concession. One idea for White is to play 0-0 and ♘d4 soon, trying to play b2-b3.

A2) 8...♕h5



Placing the queen on h5 against a kingside fianchetto is sometimes reasonable, but it does not work well here. White has not castled, which allows the strong reply...

9.h3

The queen has just very few squares left on the fifth rank.

9...♘c6 10.♗f4

And now we are threatening g3-g4, leaving Black short of a satisfactory reply.

A3) 8...♕b6 9.♗g5 ♕d8

Black decides to move away from the ♗xf6/♘d5 ideas. Please note that this position may also occur after 8...♕c7 9.♗g5 ♕d8.

1) 9...h6 10.♗e3 ♕d8 11.♕d2 ♔h7



12.h4 (White has built a dangerous attack with simple means) 12...♘g4 13.♗d4, and White is a lot better after the trade of the bishops. We have h4-h5 coming, and our king will be perfectly safe after castling queenside;

2) 9...♘c6



10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.♘d5 (this is a key idea of White's set-up. Black's development is not easily completed, and he always needs to watch out for this sequence) 11...♕d8 12.♘xf6+ exf6 (Black's pawn structure is fatally weakened, giving White a huge advantage) 13.♕d6. The most powerful move, but White is better with many others as well. The structural defects of Black's position are beyond repair.

10.♕d2

White is just in time to prevent ...h7-h6 and prepare ♗h6. Black's position is not at all easy to play. On the next move, White has a fundamental choice. Pushing h2-h4 is obviously the most aggressive move, but not the only playable option. If the

coming complications are too sharp for your taste, you may play 11.♗h6 and go for kingside castling after trading on g7. After a later e2-e4, intending to play ♘d5, you'll get a more strategic and slower game. I recommend 11.h4, because it will pose more direct problems for Black, who will most likely need to solve it over the board.

A31) 10...d6



11.h4

As mentioned, you may also play 11.♗h6 for a more conservative game.

A311) 11...♘c6 12.♗xf6

I also looked at 12.h5 ♘xh5 13.♗f3 ♘f6 14.♗h6. After this forced sequence, Black needs to play the only move 14...♗h8, an exchange sacrifice well known from the Sicilian Dragon. After 15.♗xf8 ♕xf8, Black retains enough compensation and his position seems to be fairly easy to play. I wanted to recommend this at first, but I think the capture on f6 is more dangerous for Black.

12...♗xf6 13.h5

We have achieved a lot with the advance of the h-pawn. At a suitable moment, we might take on g6 and open the h-file. One important point is that we had to give up our dark-squared bishop, which makes the f6-bishop a strong defender. Still, White has good attacking chances, as we will see. I looked at some possibilities for Black now:

13...a5

1) 13...♗e6 is too passive, as the following line shows: 14.0-0-0 ♖c8 15.hxg6 hxg6 16.♕h6 ♖e8 17.♘c5, and Black is falling apart quickly;

2) 13...♗f5 is better than 13...♗e6, positioning the bishop against the white king after queenside castling. White still gets a dangerous attack: 14.0-0-0 ♖c8 15.e4 ♗e6 (or 15...♗g4 16.f3 ♗e6 17.hxg6 fxg6 18.f4, which leads to the same position) 16.hxg6 fxg6



17.f4. We are already rather deep, but let's look at one sample line. The engines believe White is better, but it is complicated: 17...♘b4 18.♔b1 ♕c7 19.f5 gxf5 20.a3 ♘c6 21.♘d5 ♗xd5 22.♕xd5+ ♔h8 23.♕xf5, and here White's attack has crashed through.



14.hxg6 hxg6

14...fxg6 seems worse than 14...hxg6: 15.0-0-0 a4 (this is the principled move, but it does not work, due to a tactical shot) 16.♘c5 (White's attack is very strong now. The worst piece, the knight on b3, joining the party, often means the beginning of the end) 16...dxc5 17.♕h6. White threatens mate, and the black queen is attacked – too much to handle.

15.a4 ♗e6 16.0-0-0 ♗xb3

Black should probably take the knight on b3, otherwise it could give problems. 16...♖c8 17.♘c5 (an important tactical shot!) 17...♗f5 18.g4 ♗xg4 19.♘xb7 ♕d7

20.♘c5 ♕d8 21.♕h6 ♖e8 22.♗f3 (White's attack is already too strong, but this sets a neat trap) 22...♗xf3 23.♘e6 fxe6 24.♕xg6+ ♔f8 25.♖dg1, and it's mate in three!

17.cxb3 ♖c8



18.♔b1

White's attack seems more dangerous here. White's king is a lot safer than Black's.

A312) 11...h5



This move is met with an ingenious reply.

12.♗xf6 ♗xf6 13.g4

A nice shot! Now, Black either needs to sacrifice material or will face a murderous attack.

13...♗xg4

This gives up material, but it seems better than 13...hxg4: 14.h5 g5 15.0-0-0 ♘c6 16.♘e4. I'll stop here, concluding that White has excellent chances. You need to cut it somewhere, in particular if you analysis a line that is basically virgin territory from move 4.

14.♗xb7 ♘d7 15.f3 ♗e6 16.♗xa8 ♕xa8 17.♘d4 ♗d5



18.0-0-0

Black has some compensation for the exchange. The dark-squared bishop is strong and helps to protect the king. I'd rather be White here, but it is messy. You need to take into account that you will most likely reach it with a huge time advantage on the clock, as Black has been on his own for quite a while already.

Still, if such a position feels too random, you may think about employing 11.♗h6 instead – it's good to have options according to taste, opponent and setting of the game.

A32) 10...♘c6



11.h4

As mentioned before, a less brutal approach with 11.♗h6 is also viable. Going for the throat is very tempting, though! Black now has the choice of stopping the h-pawn or playing 11....d6, which we have covered via 10...d6 11.h4 ♘c6. In this case, 12.♗xf6 and h4-h5 next is dangerous for Black.

11...h5 12.♗xf6

Sticking with the caveman approach. We are taking some strategic risks to expose the black king.

12...♗xf6 13.g4 hxg4 14.h5 g5 15.♘e4

There is a similar position in our repertoire, with ...d7-d6 being played instead of ...♘c6. Here, Black's defence is a bit easier, as he has the following move.

15...e6

This line is very unclear to me. We have attacking chances, but I could not find a definite advantage. I'll show you my main line:

16.♘xf6+ ♕xf6 17.h6

Intending to play ♖h5 next.

17...d5 18.♖h5 ♔h8 19.0-0-0 ♖g8 20.h7 ♖g7



21.e4

And the game remains very complicated. I think we can conclude that 11.h4 after 10...♘c6 is dangerous for Black, but not better for White in this line. I would choose between 11.h4 and 11.♗h6 according to the circumstances of the game. If you have already a huge time advantage by move 11 and you feel your opponent does not like to defend in a messy position, go h2-h4 ! If you see better chances of outplaying your opponent in a slow game, 11. ♗h6 is your move.

B) 7...d6



This is a clever move, anticipating the sequence of 8.♘b3 ♕c7 9.♗g5. In this case, Black now has 9...♘bd7 to connect the knights.

8.♘b3 ♕c7

This looks like the most reasonable move. The queen is exposed elsewhere: 8...♕h5



9.h3. The queen is just badly placed on h5. A future ♗f4 would even threaten g3-g4, almost trapping the queen.

9.♗g5 ♘bd7

The idea of delaying castling and playing 7....d6 first. Now, 10.♗xf6 is harmless, as Black simply recaptures with the knight. I analysed some possible plans now, as White has a rather wide choice.

10.♘b5

At the end, I decided to recommend the knight hop to b5, leading us to positions that are quite comparable to other parts of the repertoire. I also checked the idea of

playing in Sicilian style with e2-e4 or delaying any central pawn commitments and start with a2-a4, gaining some ground on the queenside. Ultimately, I went for ♘b5 because the later c2-c4 leads us to more familiar structures, but feel free to explore the other mentioned ideas – they are all playable and interesting.

10...♕b8

1) 10...♕b6 looks more active than 10...♕b8, but the queen is exposed on b6: 11.c4 0-0 12.♗e3 ♕d8



13.0-0. I wanted to show this line mostly to demonstrate that you should not grab on a7! After 13.♘xa7? ♘g4! and 13.♗xa7?! ♘e5, you will regret your greed quickly.

After castling, I'd slightly prefer White, due to the space advantage and a possible later ♘b5-c3-d5, which is always annoying for Black;

2) I am not sure if anybody would dare to play 10...♕c4, but it prevents c2-c4! We have an excellent reply though: 11.♕d3. This forces the queen trade, and leads to a very nice position for White: 11...♕xd3 12.cxd3 (we are much better-equipped to play on the c-file. Black's defence is not easy at all) 12...0-0 13.0-0 a6 14.♘c7 ♖b8



15.♖fc1. Black is in trouble here. White has easy moves to increase the pressure, and it's all defence for the second player.

11.c4 0-0 12.0-0

We have reached a common pawn structure, but with a slightly unusual piece placement. The bishop on g5 and the knight on b5 are a bit off, but the queen on b8 and the knight on d7 don't look well placed either. White will retreat the b5-knight to c3 to connect it to the d5-square. I generally prefer White in these pawn structures, but it seems to be roughly equal here.

Black plays ...c7-c5 on move 4

3...♗g7 4.♗g2 c5

Let's check the delayed versions of ...c7-c5.



This will mostly transpose to the same positions as 3...c5 if Black responds with the natural ...♕a5+ to regain the pawn. In case of ...♘a6, there is a difference to 3...c5 – let's have a look at concrete moves.

5.dxc5 ♘a6

This attempt to regain the pawn is downright bad after 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3 c5 4.dxc5 ♘a6 5.♗e3, when Black is just a pawn down for nothing. Here, 5...♘a6 is still not great, but not as dubious as one move earlier. The most obvious move, however, is 5...♕a5+. After 6.♘fd2, we reach a position that we examine via the move order 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3 c5 4.dxc5 ♕a5+ 5.♘fd2 ♗g7 6.♗g2.

6.♗e3 ♕c7 7.♘c3

White would like to cover the pawn with 7.♕d4, but this is refuted by 7...♘h5!. This reply is not possible in the comparable line with 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3 c5 4.dxc5 ♘a6 5.♗e3 ♕c7 6.♕d4, and now 6...♘h5 obviously fails, and White keeps the pawn after 6...♗g7 7.♘c3.

7...♘xc5

White was now ready to play ♕d4 again, so Black needs to take the pawn.

8.0-0



8... ♘e6

This covers the d4-square and removes the knight from its unstable position (compare with 8...0-0 9.♘b5).

1) 8...0-0 9.♘b5 transposes to the worst version of ...c7-c5, the one on move five. In concrete moves, this reads 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3 ♗g7 4.♗g2 0-0 5.0-0 c5 6.dxc5 ♘a6 7.♗e3 ♕c7 8.♘c3 ♘xc5 9.♘b5. White has a great game in this variation;

2) 8...d6 9.♗d4 (a strong move, threatening both 10.♘d5 immediately and 10.♗xf6 followed by 11.♘d5) 9...♘cd7.



More or less the only move to address White's idea.

10.a4 (a tough call! Here, 10.♘b5 ♕b8 11.c4 or 10.♘d5 ♕d8 11.c4 are nice for White as well. Pushing the a-pawn is quite annoying though, as Black does not have many constructive moves after he has castled) 10...0-0 11.a5. I am not sure what Black's next move is. The engines recommend 11...a6, but after 12.♘a4, White's bind on the queenside is annoying for Black. A good opening result, and we even had good alternatives on move 10.

9.♘b5

There are interesting alternatives available, like 9.a4. The knight jump is a simple

solution to get an at least slightly better middlegame.

9...♕b8 10.c4 0-0 11.♘c3

And White has the better chances, based on a later ♘d5 idea. The knight on e6 is certainly not ideal.

Black plays ...c7-c5 on move 5

3...♗g7 4.♗g2 0-0 5.0-0 c5



Playing 5...c5 at this particular moment is just dubious, it seems! Let's see why exactly:

6.dxc5

Well, you certainly expected that. Now, Black needs to find a way to get the pawn back. It is not just the issue of being a pawn down, but also of development. If the c5-pawn stays on the board, neither the b- nor the d-pawn can move easily.

A) 6...♘a6 7.♗e3 ♕c7

1) 7...♘e4



8.♕d5. This is the direct refutation of 7...♘e4. Surprisingly, it was only played once out of 20 games in *Megabase 2019*. 8...♗xb2 (this fails, but what is Black supposed

to do? Return to f6?) 9.♕xe4 ♗xa1 10.c3 The point! Now, Black is already in grave danger, as not only the bishop is trapped on a1, but the black king is devoid of any defenders. Let's check a sample line: 10...d6 11.cxd6 ♕xd6 12.♗d4 (preparing ♘bd2 to attack the bishop on a1 and ♕e4-e3-h6 to attack the king) 12...♘c5 13.♕e3 ♘e6 14.♘bd2 ♘xd4 15.♘xd4 ♗xc3 16.♕xc3, and White has a large, probably decisive advantage;

2) 7...♕a5



8.a3 and Black's operation 'Regain c5-pawn' has failed miserably.

8.♘c3

8.♕d4 leaves b2 hanging after 8...♘e8 or 8...♘h5. We need to prepare ♕d4, forcing Black to take on c5.

8...♘xc5 9.♘b5

Now, Black's best defence still leads to a large advantage for White. Let's check the queen moves one by one.

9...♕a5

This looks odd, but it is playable.

1) 9...♕c6 is probably the worst of the queen moves: 10.a4 ♘g4 (White was threatening 11.♘e5) 11.♗d4 ♗xd4 12.♘fxd4 ♕b6 13.b4 ♘a6 (after 13...♘e6, Black's position does not improve: 14.a5 ♕d8 15.♘xe6 fxe6 16.♕d4, and it's over) 14.♕d2 d6



15.c4. White had an overwhelming position in Meier-Bacrot Pro Chess League Rapid 2017;

2) 9...♕b6 10.a4 ♘g4 (Black needs to do something quickly to counter the threat of b2-b4) 11.♗d4 ♗xd4 12.♕xd4 d6 13.b4:

2.1) 13...♘a6 14.c3, and again White is much better. The pressure on the queenside and the offside knight on a6 are tough to handle for Black;

2.2) 13...♘xa4 14.c4 ♕xd4 15.♘fxd4 e5.



This position was reached in a game between two strong GMs: Vakhidov-Kovalev, Baku Olympiad 2016. Now, 16.♘b3 is much simpler than 16.♘c7, as played in the game: 16...♘b6 17.♘xd6. The black queenside is falling apart, giving White a winning position.

10.♗xc5 ♕xb5 11.♗xe7 ♖e8 12.♗a3 ♕xe2 13.♕xe2 ♖xe2



14. ♖ad1

A nice move! Now, c2 is tactically covered, and Black faces a thankless task of defending this endgame.

14... ♖xc2

Let's check why this fails.

15. ♘d4 ♖c4 16.b3 ♖c7 17. ♗d6 ♖c3 18. ♘b5 ♖c2 19. ♘c7 ♖b8 20. ♘d5 ♖a8 21. ♘e7+ ♔h8 22. ♖c1

White has some alternative wins, but this is enough to net decisive material.

B) 6... ♕a5 7. ♗e3 ♘g4

The only interesting try. Otherwise, we will just keep the pawn easily with a2-a3 and b2-b4.

8. ♗d4 e5 9. ♗c3 ♕xc5 10.h3 ♘h6 11.e4

This forced sequence after 8. ♗d4 has netted White a nice advantage. Black's piece placement is unfortunate, in particular in view of the weaknesses on the d-file.

11... ♘c6



12. ♕d5

This is the engine improvement on a GM game between Romanishin and

V.Sergeev, Ordzhonikidze 2001. Romanishin was better with 12.♗d2, but the queen move is a lot more powerful. I don't see a good continuation for Black now.

Conclusion

The idea of playing dxc5 is a completely new approach. Black needs to solve new problems over the board and faces an original concept that is not easy to figure out. White retains excellent practical chances in my opinion.

CHAPTER 21

Move orders with 1...g6: 1.d4 g6

1.d4 g6



Black sometimes starts with 1...g6, staying flexible and keeping the long diagonal open after 2...♗g7. This allows some independent lines in addition to just playing ...♘f6 later, which would transpose into the previous chapters starting with 1....♘f6 and 2...g6.

2.♘f3

We stay true to our approach with 2.♘f3 and 3.g3. However, I need to mention that after both 1...g6 and 1...d6, I think that you should also consider to play 2.e4, transposing into a Pirc/Modern/Philidor. Those openings are not terrible for Black, of course, but White enjoys a comfortable game and has a wide range of lines available. I have covered some fine suggestions in *Keep It Simple: 1.e4*, so please check there if you are interested in expanding your repertoire beyond the typical 1.d4 positions. Now, after 2.♘f3 and 3.g3, Black has various ways to transpose away from this chapter. For example, if they play ...f7-f5, it is going to be a Dutch Defence. If they play ...♘f6, we head to the first chapters of this part of the book.

Within this chapter, the lines split as follows:

A) 2...d5?! is a questionable move order that we should punish with 3.c4!;

B) 2...♗g7 3.g3:

B1) 3...d5 often leads to a Grünfeld after a later ...♘f6, but we have a look at Black's offbeat tries;

B2) 3...d6. Black plays in King's Indian style, but postpones or omits ...♘f6;

B3) 3...c5. Black plays in the spirit of Chapter 19, but without ...♘f6.

A) 2...d5



A rare and dubious line/move order that we should try to exploit. Black tries to combine ...g7-g6 and ...d7-d5 in the spirit of the Grünfeld, but the timing is wrong. You will also sometimes reach this position via 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 g6. If Black intends to get to a Grünfeld after 1.d4 g6, the way to go is 2.♘f3 ♗g7 3.g3 d5, only playing ...d7-d5 after g2-g3 is already on the board. This is examined in line B of this chapter.

3.c4

There is nothing 'wrong' with playing 3.g3, which will likely transpose into positions from Chapters 17-19. However, this is a case where 3.c4 is a lot stronger and should be preferred. It does not require much memorization and leads to a rather one-sided advantage for White. Let's check some lines to understand why 3.c4 is better for White.

A1) 3...c6

Black supports the centre in Slav style, but White has a simple yet effective reply.

4.cxd5 cxd5 5.♘c3 ♗g7 6.♗f4 ♘c6 7.e3

We simply play the Exchange Slav after Black has committed to the bishop on g7. The fianchetto is not a good set-up for Black here, because the bishop is just looking at a well-defended d4-pawn and is often missed as an important defender of the queenside. Let's explore a sample continuation.

7...♘f6 8.h3

This is useful in many ways. It provides a good square on h2 for the bishop and prevents ...♗g4.

8...0-0 9.♗e2 ♕b6



10.a3

This is the idea I wanted to show. It is useful to know this tactical defence of the b2-pawn. The pawn is now poisoned, and at the same time, we prepare ideas like b2-b4 and ♘a4 with tempo. White is comfortably better.

10...♕xb2?? 11.♘a4

The queen is trapped, and White wins.

A2) 3...♘f6

Black tries to transpose into a regular Grünfeld, for example, after 4.♘c3 ♗g7, but there is a problem with this particular move order.

4.cxd5 ♘xd5

Black may also play 4...♗g7.



A clever idea, hoping for 5.♘c3 ♘xd5 with a direct Grünfeld transposition, but 5.♕a4+ is the problem and is important to remember! Now, White is much better in all lines.

We keep the pawn in lines like 5...♗d7 6.♕b3 or 5...♘bd7 6.♘c3. White's moves are all easy to play. After 5...c6 6.dxc6, Black does not have compensation for the pawn either. Finally, Black may play 5...♔f8, but after that, normal development suffices to be clearly better. Black's position is a mess with the king on f8.

5.e4 ♘b6 6.h3

This is the second important move to remember! It is very useful to prevent 6... ♗g4.

6... ♗g7 7. ♘c3 0-0 8. ♗e3

White has an excellent control of the central squares in this position. One problem for Black is that the typical Grünfeld move ...c7-c5 is safely prevented.

8... ♘c6 9. ♕d2 f5



This is the only approach worth looking at, as it at least poses a concrete question that needs a correct reply.

10.e5

This is by far the best move, keeping a substantial advantage. This way, we make both black bishops look bad. One simple but very dangerous idea is to push h3-h4-h5 next.

A3) 3...dxc4 4.e4

We will get the pawn back easily and enjoy the excellent centre.

4... ♗g7 5. ♗xc4 ♘f6 6. ♘c3 0-0

Note that Black never was able to play ... ♗g4, due to ♗xf7+ tactics.

7.e5

There is nothing wrong about 7.0-0, but this idea is worth noting.

7... ♘e8



8.h4

With a strong attack for White.

B) 2... ♗g7

Here, 2...d5 is badly timed and we can take advantage of it. After 3.c4, White is better, as discussed in line A above.

3.g3



B1) 3...d5 4. ♗g2

In the majority of cases, Black plays ... ♘f6 soon – for instance now – and we transpose into one of the Grünfeld chapters. There are some rarer ideas worth checking out briefly.

B11) 4...c6



5.0-0 ♘d7

This is a rather obscure move order by Black, but there are some points to it. Usually, Black plays the natural 5... ♘f6 here, after which 6.b3 leads to the main line.

6. ♘bd2

Whenever Black has played ...c7-c6 already, the push c2-c4 needs to be carefully considered. Here, 6.c4 dxc4 leads to rather unclear play that I don't like to cover, given that the position is so rare. Usually in those early ...c7-c6 lines, we prepare c2-c4 with b2-b3 first. In this particular case, however, Black has the annoying 6.b3 e5! available. This leaves the knight move to prepare c2-c4.

6... ♘gf6 7.c4 0-0 8.b3

We have reached a fairly standard position for these lines, and it will very likely transpose to a line covered via the main line move order, for example, after the very sensible next moves.

8... ♘e4 9. ♗b2

And we have indeed transposed to a position usually reached via 1.d4 ♘f6 2. ♘f3 g6 3.g3 d5 4. ♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 c6 7.b3 ♘bd7 8. ♗b2 ♘e4 9. ♘bd2.

B12) 4...e6



A rare move, but it is not that bad. Black intends to play the knight to e7, keeping the bishop's diagonal open.

5.0-0 ♘e7 6.c4 ♘bc6

Black tries to put some piece pressure on White's centre. It is not easy to play ...c7-c5 anyway, given how the pieces are positioned. Black may also play 6...0-0 first, after which 7.♕c2 ♘bc6 8.e3 leads to the same position.

7.e3

The d-pawn needs some support. This looks passive at first, locking in the bishop with the pawn. A closer look, however, reveals that the bishop had no bright future on g5 or f4 anyway. It is better placed on b2 or in some cases a3.

7...0-0 8.♕c2 b6 9.♖d1 ♗b7



10.b3

White has a slight advantage in this position. Black has less space and no clear pawn break to change that. We still have useful moves, such as ♗a3, ♘bd2 or ♘c3 and ♖ac1. Let's check a direct way for Black to free his position.

10...♘b4 11.♕e2 c5 12.♗b2 dxc4 13.bxc4 cxd4 14.exd4 ♘f5 15.d5

White had a strong initiative with this textbook central pawn break in Giri-Kasimdzhanov, Rosmalen rapid 2014. Obviously, you could analyse this position further, but this is an extremely rare line.

B13) 4...♘h6

Another rare line, but it has a sensible idea. Black intends to place the knight on f5, putting some pressure on d4 in case White plays c2-c4.

5.0-0 ♘f5



6.c3

One of the very rare cases where I advocate playing c2-c3 in our repertoire. The more standard-looking 6.c4 is answered by 6...dxc4, and I don't see a convincing continuation for White. With c2-c3, White prepares to play e2-e4, a logical plan after Black has neglected control of this square.

6...0-0 7. ♘bd2 ♘d6 8. ♖e1

I actually had this position on the board once – with black! I wanted to surprise my lower-rated opponent with the ... ♘h6 set-up, but already regretted my choice here. I'll show some lines that I considered and what I played in the end.

8...b6

The move I played, but it also leads to a comfortable game for White.

The move 8...f5 stops e2-e4, but still leaves an odd impression. We will play just like we do against the Stonewall Dutch. Here's a sample line: 9. ♘e5 e6 10. ♘df3 ♘d7



11. ♗f4. White is better in this position. Note that the set-up with ...g7-g6 may invite h-pawn pushes in some lines. This is rarely an option in the standard Stonewall, where the pawn is on g7.

I considered 8...♗f5, but it does not stop e2-e4 for long: 9.♘h4 ♗e6 10.e4 dxe4 11.♘xe4 ♘xe4 12.♗xe4 c6 13.♘g2. This is an interesting move, intending ♘f4 to play against the bishop on e6. White is slightly better here at least, because Black is not able to play ...e7-e5 or ...c6-c5 easily.

9.e4 dxe4 10.♘xe4 ♘xe4

At this moment, you wonder why you played ...♘g8-h6-f5-d6 in the first place.

11.♖xe4 ♗b7 12.♖e1 ♘d7 13.♗g5 ♘f6



14.♕e2

My opponent, Etienne Bauduin, played 14.♘e5 here, which also gave White a comfortable advantage. It's a tough call, but 14.♕e2 seems even stronger. It keeps more pieces on the board and probably exerts more pressure. We play ♖ad1 next and still may play ♘e5 later to exploit the weak c6-square.

B2) 3...d6 4.♗g2



Now, Black will often just play 4...♘f6 to transpose back into King's Indian main lines starting with 1...♘f6.

An independent option for Black is to play 4...e5 immediately or prepare the move with 4...♘d7.

B21) 4...e5

This is dubious, due to the trades on e5 and d8.

5.dxe5 dxe5 6.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 7.♘c3

Black has various systems based on a quick ...d7-d6 and ...e7-e5 available, allowing a trade on e5 and the queen exchange. One well-known, similar line is 1.d4 g6 2.c4 ♗g7 3.e4 d6 4.♘c3 e5 5.dxe5 dxe5 6.♕xd8+ ♔xd8. This has a reasonable reputation for Black. Another line goes 1.d4 d6 2.c4 e5 3.dxe5 dxe5 4.♕xd8+ ♔xd8, which is regarded as fine for Black. Now, why is 4...e5 here regarded as dubious? The reason is that White has not committed any pawns on c4 and/or e4, which means these squares are open to white pieces, in particular knights. With pawns on c4 and e4, the light-squared bishop looks a bit suspect, which is not the case in our given position

7...c6 8.0-0 f6



9.♘e1

White has more than one good line available, but I like this idea. White prepares a quick f2-f4, applying pressure on the e5-pawn. Note that ♘d3 will increase this pressure, and ♘e4 is an important option as well. White enjoys a sizeable advantage.

B22) 4...♘d7



Black prepares to play ...e7-e5 on the next move, avoiding the drawbacks of the immediate 4...e5.

5.0-0 e5 6.dxe5

The trade gains in strength if White does not have pawns on c4 and/or e4. Here, we keep a nice edge.

6...dxe5

The move 6...♘xe5 is very uncommon, but useful to check to understand one idea: 7.♘xe5 ♗xe5 8.♘c3 (of course, 8.c4 or 8.e4 is fine as well) 8...♘e7 9.e4 ♗g7 10.♗g5. This is a strong move, having ♘d5 and ♕d2 in mind. White is in good shape, because Black no counterplay and suffers from lack of space in the centre. After trading the bishop on g7, we have chances to attack with f2-f4.



7. ♘c3

This is very important! Don't play c2-c4 after the trade, but rather route a knight to this important square.

7... ♘gf6

This is better than putting the knight on e7, but I still prefer White in this line.

7... ♘e7



8. ♕d3. This is a very strong move! It is recommended by the engines, and was played in 2018 by the accomplished theoretician and author GM Mikhalevski. 8...0-0 9. ♖d1 (this is the point of ♕d3. White is piling up on the knight on d7, intending ♗h3! at the right moment. Black is already in some danger) 9... ♘c6 (addressing the ♗h3 idea by covering the queen, but White is better nevertheless) 10. ♗g5 ♕e8 11. ♕e3. We are threatening 12. ♘d5. Black does not have a good antidote to this idea, and we are comfortably better.

8. ♘d2

The mentioned set-up – the knight is well-placed on c4.

8...0-0 9.a4

The immediate 9. ♘c4 runs into 9... ♘b6.

9... ♖e8 10.a5

We have some useful pressure on the queenside. The immediate threat is a5-a6. Note how important it is to not have no pawns on c4/e4.

10...a6 11. ♘c4 ♕e7



12.b3

With the idea of playing 13.♗a3. Note that instead 12.e4, planning 13.♘d5, was strong as well.

B3) 3...c5



This is an interesting approach from Black's perspective. Now, some natural moves don't promise anything at all – in particular, 4.c4 cxd4 5.♘xd4 ♘c6 is very satisfactory for Black as White does not want to take or retreat. The same issue arises after 4.♗g2 cxd4 5.♘xd4 ♘c6, but here, 6.♘xc6 is a bit less of a concession. Some players go 4.c3 here, but this is not much in line with the rest of the repertoire.

Ultimately, I discovered that the dxc5 option of Chapter 20 is also fine against this move order!

4.dxc5

B31) 4...♕a5+ 5.♘fd2 ♕xc5

5...♘f6 6.♘c3 would already transpose to the more standard move order 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3 c5 4.dxc5 ♕a5+ 5.♘fd2 ♗g7 6.♘c3.

6.♗g2 d6



One rare way to not transpose to the lines starting with 1...♘f6. We have a creative solution against this move:

7.♘e4

It looks a bit unusual to jump to the centre, but hang on.

7...♕b6 8.♘bc3

The knights are actually quite a nuisance for Black. The natural development with ...♘f6 is impossible, but if you don't play ...♘f6 now, what do you play?

8...♘c6

As mentioned, 8...♘f6 9.♘xf6+ ♗xf6 10.♘d5 is a disaster for Black.

9.♘d5 ♕d8 10.c4



White retains annoying pressure, as Black still has no natural way to develop the kingside.

B32) 4...♘a6



I don't think this is very likely to happen, but we need to check it.

Compared to the line 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3 c5 4.dxc5 ♘a6, the main difference is that 5.♗e3 is impossible now, so Black will get the pawn back.

5.♗g2

There is no way to hang on to the pawn, but this is not necessary at all. As we will see, White retains a slight pull with simple moves.

5...♘xc5 6.0-0 ♘f6 7.c4 0-0 8.♘c3

The knight is actually not that useful on c5. One drawback is that d4 is readily available for White's knight.

8...d6

We should also have a brief look at 8...b6.



After 9.♘d4 ♗b7 10.♗xb7 ♘xb7 11.e4 ♖c8 12.b3, we have reached a comfortable Maroczy Bind structure. A typical set-up with f2-f3/♗e3/♖c1/♕d2 gives Black very little to play for. Ultimately, ♘d5 will be annoying for Black, as the knight is hard to expel with ...e7-e6, and taking it gives White even more space with a pawn on d5.

9.♘d4 ♗d7 10.b3 ♖c8 11.♗b2

White has reached a comfortable position with good control. As usual, placing a knight on d5 is a standard plan. I'll show one line to illustrate this idea:

11...a6 12.♕d2 ♕c7 13.♖ac1 ♕b8 14.♘d5 ♘xd5 15.cxd5



And White is at least slightly better. The d5-pawn establishes a space advantage and secures the knight on d4. In similar positions, I have often played in the centre with e2-e4 and f2-f4, after due preparation, of course.

Conclusion

The move 1...g6 will often transpose to other chapters after a later ...♘f6. The independent lines are comfortable for White, as demonstrated above. It is important to know line B3, angling for a transposition to Chapter 20.

PART III

Black's flexible set-ups:

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3



One of the most popular replies to 1.d4 is the sequence 1...♘f6 2.c4 e6, still keeping many options open for Black. One cornerstone of this particular approach is the Nimzo-Indian after 3.♘c3 ♗b4, which is often combined with openings like the Queen's Indian after 3.♘f3 b6 or the Bogo-Indian 3...♗b4+. If Black intends to play these openings, he will usually answer 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 with 2...e6. After our unsurprising reply 3.g3, Black has some options. Queen's Indian players will usually play 3...b6, while you also encounter 3...c5 and 3...b5, which stop the pawn push to c4 in its tracks. I have coined this part of the book 'flexible set-ups', because Black usually is rather flexible in his central pawn formations. This in particular applies to the d-pawn, which is often not played at all or its position is only determined at a later stage.

Move orders are quite straightforward in this part of the book. We complete castling first and then play c2-c4 next if allowed, so rather often 1.d4/2.♘f3/3.g3/4.♗g2/5.0-0 will be the first moves. As we saw in Parts I and II, an early ...c7-c5 needs our attention. We have delayed the move c2-c4, so advancing the d-pawn is not an option. Against ...c7-c5 on move 3, we will allow the capture on d4, while against combinations of ...b7-b6/...♗b7 and then ...c7-c5, taking on c5 is my suggestion.

This part of the book also includes the reply 1...e6, which is mostly a transpositional tool to other chapters in the book, but there are some points related to an early ...c7-c5 that are worth discussing.



This chapter is about black set-ups based on an early ...b7-b6, usually preceded by playing ...♘f6 and/or ...e7-e6 first. These set-ups are associated with the Queen's Indian, which has the traditional move order 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 b6. Our repertoire approach of fianchettoing first and only later playing c2-c4 if desired, has some interesting points against Queen's Indian set-ups.

One key difference is that Black's absolute main line in the proper Queen's Indian is not on anymore. 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 b6 4.g3 ♗a6 is the principled line for Black, and in our move order, there is no pawn on c4 to attack! Let's have a look at this sequence to illustrate: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 b6 4.♗g2 – compared to the main line Queen's Indian with the early move c2-c4, we have played ♗g2 instead of c2-c4.

Black, therefore, needs to play differently, and usually goes for the more passive ...♗b7 lines. After 4..♗b7, I suggest playing 5.0-0, according to our general concept of delaying c2-c4, which severely cuts Black's options. This move order has a small drawback, which will be discussed in detail later.

Speaking of move orders: Black may also play ...b7-b6 on the very first move, or combine ...b7-b6 with ...g7-g6, going for a double fianchetto. These systems are covered in this chapter as well.

Chapter 23: 3...b6 4.♗g2 ♗b7 5.0-0 ♗e7 6. c4 0-0 7.♘c3



Chapter 23 covers the main line of the Queen's Indian. We have completed our standard set-up and played c2-c4 and ♘c3 to play d4-d5 next, playing against the bishop on b7. Black usually addresses this idea by playing ...d7-d5 or the more flexible knight jump ...♘e4. The first option is long-known to be comfortable for White, while the latter has a deservedly solid reputation. Still, I think we are able to retain a slight advantage and pose some interesting new problems. Key ideas in these lines were provided by LeelaZero and involve a surprising early use of the h-pawn.

Chapter 24: 3...b5



This is not the most commonly seen line, but it is a sensible choice for Black. With the early ...b7-b5, the pawn push to c4 is stopped for the moment. With best play, Black has good chances to equalize, but of course we are going to check if Black knows the ins and outs of his set-up. He won't get it on the board all that often, so his knowledge might be sketchy. To be perfectly honest: I have played this line with Black, only knowing that you play 3...b5 and maybe ...c7-c5 later, but I would not have been ready to fight the suggestions in this book properly over the board.

Please check Chapter 24 for analysis of the extended fianchetto.

Chapter 25: 3...c5



In this chapter, we examine a set-up for Black that involves playing ...c7-c5 after a preparatory ...e7-e6

After 3...c5, advancing the d-pawn does not work at all and capturing makes little sense as well, as Black easily recaptures on c5. For comparison, the main reason that 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3 c5 4.dxc5 (Chapter 20) is interesting is that Black needs to spend time to recover the pawn. So that leaves the option of just letting Black take on d4.

We employ a similar approach in the line 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 c5 4.♗g2

(Chapters 4-6), and there are some transpositions into that line if Black decides to play a later ...d7-d5. If Black avoids ...d7-d5, the more common scenario, the positions may even become similar to a symmetrical English Opening or Hedgehog set-up. In general, these lines are not bad for Black, but they require precise play. If Black's knowledge is only superficial, it may cost him dearly.

Please read Chapter 25 for more information.

Chapter 26: 3...c5 4.♗g2 cxd4 5.♘xd4 ♘c6 6.0-0 ♕b6...



... and 6...♗c5



Chapter 26 explores the main continuations in the 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 c5 variation that involve an early pressure on the d4-knight with the moves 6...♕b6 or 6...♗c5. These lines lead to interesting play and are fine for Black if he knows what he is doing. As usual, we won't make it easy for him, and many natural-looking lines are not satisfactory for Black at all. Please see Chapter 26 for analysis of these critical lines.

Chapter 27: 1.d4 e6



The move 1...e6 has very little independent value and will transpose to other chapters of the book most of the time. Chapter 27 mostly deals with the specific line 1.d4 e6 2.♘f3 c5, which I cover a bit more extensively than perhaps strictly necessary. I think these lines are fascinating to study and helpful to understand g3-type positions better.

CHAPTER 22

Queen's Indian – Introduction and sidelines: 2...b6 and 3...b6

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 A) 2...e6 3.g3 b6 / B) 2...b6



A) 2...e6 3.g3 b6 4.♗g2 ♗b7 5.0-0



This is the usual choice in our repertoire approach. With only very few exceptions, we complete kingside castling first and only then play c2-c4 on move 6. I am sticking to this approach, but there is an argument to playing 5.c4 here. Going 5.c4 has one main advantage: after 5.c4, the reply 5...c5 can be answered with 6.d5, which is complicated, but good for White. After our move 5.0-0, the reply 5...c5 is entirely different, because we don't have 6.d5 now and need to play a more modest set-up. So why do I recommend 5.0-0 then? There are multiple reasons:

1) It is more in line with our general approach;

2) 5.c4 c5 6.d5 is complicated and not easily learned; and

3) The most important one: after 5.c4, Black may also play 5...♗b4+, which is a lot to learn in addition. A tough call! Let's have a look how it continues from here.

A1) 5...c5

This is the argument against the move order with 5.0-0. As mentioned in the notes to 5.0-0, this move gains in strength compared to 5.c4 c5, when 6.d5 is possible.

6.dxc5

This move has been played multiple times by German chess legend Robert Hübner, who quite often employs our repertoire approach of 1.d4/2.♘f3/3.g3. It leads to positions that are certainly close to equality for Black, but still interesting to play for White. Now, the two recaptures are about equally popular.

A11) 6...bxc5



This is Black's more ambitious choice, as it will lead to a position type without many exchanges.

7.c4

The next moves are very natural for both sides and almost always played.

7...♗e7 8.♘c3 0-0 9.♗f4 d6



Just like after 6...♗xc5, there is a similar line from the main line Queen's Indian with an early ...♗a6: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 b6 4.g3 ♗a6 5.♕a4 ♗b7 6.♗g2 c5 7.dxc5 bxc5 8.0-0 ♗e7 9.♘c3 0-0 10.♗f4. We are one tempo down on this line, lacking the move ♕a4. This is not a big deal at all, as going ♕b3 is a common idea anyway, and this way we will actually transpose into the ♕a4 Queen's Indian. The general assessment of the dxc5 bxc5 structure is that Black has good equalizing chances. I agree, but the positions still tick important boxes for me: they are solid and sound against good opponents and offer chances to outplay weaker ones.

10.♕b3 ♕c8

1) 10...♕b6 11.♕xb6 axb6 12.♖fd1 (we will pile up on the d-pawn first and then consider the next steps) 12...♖d8 13.♖d2 ♘c6 14.♖ad1 ♘e8 15.b3. It is going to be a slow game with subtle manoeuvres. I'll show some more moves of the most recent GM game from here: 15...h6 16.g4 ♖d7 17.♘b5 ♖ad8 18.♗g3 ♗a8 19.h4, and White had good pressure in Sargissian-Arencibia Rodriguez, Sharjah blitz 2018. Black's set-up is very solid, but not very active;

2) 10...♗c6 (this looks a bit odd and unharmonious) 11.♖ad1 a6 12.♖fe1 ♕c7 13.e4. Black faces the threat of e4-e5 and is worse.

11.♖fd1 ♖d8 12.♖d2

Again, we will pile up on the d-file.

12...♘c6 13.♖ad1 ♘e8 14.♗g5

This is an important idea worth knowing! It looks counter-intuitive to trade the passive bishop on e7, but Black actually should think twice about taking on g5.

14...f6

Taking on g5 looks good for Black, but instead is very good for White: 14...♗xg5 15.♘xg5. The e7-bishop looks like a passive piece, but it is one of the cases of 'bad bishops protect good pawns', as GM Mihai Suba famously said about similar situations. Without the bishop, d6 is a lot more vulnerable to ♘b5 and/or ♘e4 ideas: 15...♖b8 16.♕c2 g6 17.♘ge4, and Black clearly regrets the trade now and suffers on the dark squares.

15.♗e3 ♖b8 16.♕a4

Black's position is solid, but still rather passive. I'd rather be White here, even though Black's set-up is certainly hard to crack.

A12) 6...♗xc5 7.c4 0-0 8.♘c3



One incentive to choose 6.dxc5 is this position type. I feel it is a basically risk-free way for White to play and still ask some questions that Black needs to answer correctly. It is interesting to compare this position to the following line: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 b6 4.g3 ♗a6 5.♕a4 ♗b7 6.♗g2 c5 7.dxc5 ♗xc5 8.0-0 0-0 9.♘c3. Compared to this line, we are down a tempo, the ♕a4 move. This, however, is not harmful at all, but rather the opposite. Let's have a look at some possible continuations.

8...d5

This is the most direct attempt to equalize.

1) 8...♘c6. In this position type, the knight is usually not perfectly placed on c6. It blocks his own bishop and has no particular active role. 9.b3 (I believe White is also a bit better after other moves, such as 9.♗g5 or 9.a3. I always like to play b2-b3, because it lends protection to c4. The c-file is half-open, so that will matter. Here, we see a case where the queen is better on d1 than on a4. You wouldn't play b2-b3 with the queen on a4, trapping itself) 9...♖c8 10.♗b2 ♗e7 (Black is setting up a Hedgehog with the knight on c6, which is not ideal. Still I don't see anything better for him, the knight on c6 is just a bit misplaced) 11.♖c1 d6 12.♕d2.



White is a bit better in this position. We exert some pressure on d6, and may increase it with ideas like ♗a3 or ♘f3-g5-e4. As mentioned, Black's Hedgehog formation is not ideal, but still rather solid;

2) 8...♘e4. This idea is frequently seen in the Queen's Indian, most notably in the main line with 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 b6 4.♗g2 ♗b7 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.c4 0-0 7.♘c3 ♘e4. In the given position, it is a bad idea, because Black's loss of time is more of a problem in this more open position: 9.♕c2 ♘xc3 10.♕xc3 d5 11.♖d1, and White is quickly able to put some pressure on the d-file, with a comfortable advantage;

3) 8...♗e7 is a very usual move with the queen on a4, as ...♘b8-a6-c5 comes with a tempo. Here, it is less pointed, as there is no tempo gain, and the queen will have a better spot than a4 anyway. 9.♗f4 ♘a6 10.♖c1 ♘c5 11.♗d6 ♗xd6 12.♕xd6 ♘ce4 13.♘xe4 ♘xe4 14.♕d4, and White had useful pressure in the game Sargissian-Navara, Huaian blitz 2016. A fun side note: this game took a curious move order to our position – 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♘f3 b6 5.♗d2 ♗b7 6.g3 c5 7.dxc5 ♗xc5 8.♗g2 0-0 9.0-0 ♗e7 10.♗f4 ♘a6 11.♖c1 ♘c5 12.♗d6 ♗xd6 13.♕xd6 ♘ce4 14.♘xe4 ♘xe4 15.♕d4. A nice transposition!

9.cxd5

This plays for a small, completely risk-free advantage. You may also play 9.♘e5, which sets more concrete problems. After this move, Black's best bet is the not so obvious 9...♘e4, after which I found nothing great for White. Still, this is not a bad option if you don't want to simplify as in the main recommendation. Note that simplification does not mean it is harmless: in *Megabase 2019*, White scored 12 wins/4 draws/ZERO losses with 9.cxd5 !

9...♘xd5 10.♘xd5



10...♗xd5

An alternative is taking with the queen with 10...♕xd5, which is the less popular of the recaptures. White has a small, but nagging edge in a symmetrical position now. I'll show one sample line: 11.♗f4 ♘d7 12.♘e1 ♕xd1 13.♖xd1 ♗xg2 14.♔xg2 ♘f6 15.♘d3 ♗e7 16.♖c1 ♖fc8 17.♖fd1 ♔f8 18.♔f3. White has an annoying pull here. Black has a problem with the c6-square, and White is more active in general. It is also easier for White to expand on the kingside, with moves like g3-g4 and e2-e4 coming to grab more space.

11.♘g5

This interesting move is a novelty.

11...h6

11...♗xg2



12.♕c2 (this is the key point of ♘g5) 12...g6 13.♔xg2 ♕d5+ 14.f3. White will have useful tempi with ♘e4, ♗h6 and ♖d1, with an advantage.

12.♘e4 ♗e7 13.♗f4

Again, White is a little bit better, due to his more active pieces and the c6-weakness. We have the option of playing ♕a4 and centralizing the rooks next.

A2) 5...♗e7 6.c4



Now, the flexible 6...0-0 is the main move by a mile, but there are some sidelines. The move 6...d5 has no independent value, as 7.cxd5 exd5 8.♘c3 0-0 9.♘e5 transposes to 6...0-0 7.♘c3 d5 8.cxd5 exd5 9.♘e5. For the main line 6...0-0 7.♘c3, please refer to Chapter 23 for details.

6...c5

This is a bad move, but you need to know why. I am surprised that White didn't exploit Black's mistake in more than half of the games in my database.

1) 6...d6 is a passive move that we can exploit:



7.d5 (this is an opportunity that you should not miss. White gets a nice advantage in space with this move) 7...exd5 (Black may also play 7...e5, which after the natural moves 8.♘c3 0-0 9.e4 leads to a position we examine via 6.c4 0-0 7.♘c3 d6 8.d5 e5 9.e4) 8.♘h4 (heading for f5 and setting up the pin on the long diagonal. Black has no good way to keep his pawn) 8...c6 9.♘f5 0-0 10.cxd5 cxd5 11.♘c3. We will win the d5-pawn back with some advantage. Black's pawn formation is permanently damaged;

2) 6...c6 is quite reasonable actually. Black stops any d4-d5 ideas and intends to

play ...d7-d5 himself next. Compared to the immediate 6...d5, he will be able to answer cxd5 with the symmetrical ...cxd5, avoiding the hanging pawns. You probably have already noticed that ...d7-d5 next looks a lot like a different opening: the Closed line of the Catalan! You may play 7.♘c3 here. After 7...d5, you have the choice between 8.♘e5 or 8.♘d2. In particular, 8.♘d2 looks quite good for White. However I recommend the economical 7.♕c2, because Black has nothing better than going for a Closed Catalan now. After 7...d5 8.♘bd2 0-0 9.e4, we have reached Chapter 8.

7.d5

Of course! If you are able to play this move, you should do so.

7...exd5



8.♘h4

This is the point that is probably unknown to many players on the white side. We exploit the pin on the long diagonal and direct the knight towards the juicy f5-square. It is important to note the difference to 6...0-0 7.d5 exd5 8.♘h4, when Black's only good move is 8...c6 to keep the extra pawn.

8...0-0 9.cxd5 d6 10.♘f5 ♖e8 11.♘xe7+

A Modern Benoni without a dark-squared bishop is a bleak prospect for Black. Getting the bishop pair in a non-symmetrical pawn structure is not bad either, so just take it.

11...♕xe7 12.♘c3

In the long run, White will play for e2-e4 and f2-f4, and prepare a central breakthrough. Black has no active ideas, so we might as well prepare this idea carefully.

A3) 5...d5 6.c4

You may also reach this position via 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 b6 5.0-0 ♗b7 6.c4.

6...dxc4

This is a rare line, but it is quite playable for Black. We can only count on a small advantage if Black plays well. Usually, Black plays moves such as 6...♘bd7 or 6...♗e7, after which 7.cxd5 exd5 8.♘c3 0-0 9.♘e5 is a favourable line covered via 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 b6 4.♗g2 ♗b7 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.c4 0-0 7.♘c3 d5 8.cxd5 exd5 9.♘e5 (see Chapter 23).

7.♕a4+ ♘bd7



8.♘e5

The other interesting move that I like is 8.♗g5, but the knight move is more straightforward.

8...♗xg2 9.♔xg2

Now, Black needs to worry about the c6-square.

9...c5

The best move, but only played in a small percentage of the games.

1) 9...a6 (hoping for ...b6-b5, but we have a strong reply:) 10.♕c6 (very strong! We block the c-pawn first and only then take on c4) 10...♗e7 (10...b5 is too greedy.

Then 11.a4 is very strong. Black is falling apart on the queenside now) 11.♘xc4. We have a comfortable position here, pressing on the queenside and the c-file later;

2) 9...♗d6 is the most popular move, but again we keep a nice edge on the queenside: 10.♘xc4 0-0 11.♕c6 ♕e7 12.♘c3, and Black again does not manage to free himself from the bind on the queenside.

10.dxc5 ♗xc5 11.♖d1



It is understandable that Black is scared about this position and therefore avoids 9...c5. A closer look shows that White only has a small advantage.

11...♕c7 12.♘xd7 ♘xd7 13.♘c3 ♕b7+ 14.f3 a6

Black needs to break the pin on the knight.

15.♕xc4 0-0 16.♘e4

With a small advantage for White. We are quicker on the open files.

B) 2...b6



Most players aiming for a Queen's Indian play 2...e6 first, and only after 3.c4 (or our 3.g3) opt for 3...b6. What is the difference in playing 2...b6 ? Well, Black might want to fianchetto both bishops, skipping the move ...e7-e6 for the moment. As far

as I can see, this 2...b6 move order does not have a substantial drawback for Black. It is not a big deal from our perspective, as we are able to play our standard set-up of fianchettoing on the kingside first.

3.g3

The move that is in accordance with our repertoire approach. I'd like to mention that 3.♗g5 also seems very reasonable to me. With ♗g5, you go for a Torre set-up (the proper Torre goes 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.♗g5), with Black already committed to ...b7-b6, which is not ideal. This is a good alternative if you like to vary your play.

3...♗b7 4.♗g2

Now, 4...e6 would transpose to line A above or the next chapter, but Black has tried other approaches, usually based on ...g7-g6 set-ups.

B1) 4...g6

Black goes for a double fianchetto. This is quite an interesting line for Black that has gained some momentum in recent years, usually starting with different move orders. One example: our main line position may arise from 1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 b6 3.g3 ♗b7 4.♗g2 g6 5.0-0 ♗g7 6.d4 0-0 7.♘c3.

5.0-0

It is interesting to note that this position may also occur via 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3 b6 4.♗g2 ♗b7 5.0-0.

5...♗g7

Black may also play 5...c5 here, which after 6.dxc5 bxc5 7.♖e1, transposes to a position covered via 4...c5.

6.c4



Black now castles almost all of the time, but we also need to check two alternatives (see B12 and B13):

B11) 6...0-0 7.♘c3

This is our usual approach in the Queen's Indian, going for this natural developing move after we have completed our standard set-up of kingside castling and d2-d4

and c2-c4. I'd like to mention that 7.d5 also looks promising to me, but having a simple recipe against an offbeat line makes sense to me. After 7.d5 ♘e4!?, it gets too murky for my taste. This is the kind of line you can specifically prepare for if you know your opponent is going to play it. As a general approach, it is not economical, given that you'll face this line so rarely.

7...♘e4

1) 7...d6. Remarkably, this strategic mistake is encountered quite frequently.



8.d5 (making the b7-bishop look silly) 8...♘bd7 9.♘d4, and White is just better with his extra space and the bad b7-bishop. After some preparatory moves, we can play for further expansion with the pawns in the centre and possibly with b2-b4 as well;

2) 7...d5. Black mixes at least two to three different openings with this move. In any case, we have a simple, but promising reply: 8.cxd5 ♘xd5 9.♘xd5 ♗xd5 10.♕c2. We have easy moves such as ♗f4 and rooks to c1 and d1 coming. Black is stuck with a weak c-pawn.

8.♘xe4 ♗xe4 9.♗e3

Our approach is to trade the g7-bishop with ♕d2 and ♗h6, and then expand slowly on the queenside and in the centre, if possible. Black's position is solid, but we'll have more options to improve our position.

9...c5

An alternative may be 9...d6 10.♕d2 ♘d7 11.♗h6 ♘f6 12.♗xg7 ♔xg7 13.b3. This is very similar to 9...c5. Black will often play this move anyway now and transpose.

10.♕d2 d6 11.♗h6 ♘d7 12.♗xg7 ♔xg7 13.b3



This is protecting the pawn as a prophylactic measure, anticipating ...♖c8 or ...♕c7 by Black. We also need to keep in mind that d4-d5 is an interesting idea. After the immediate 13.d5, Black has 13...b5, but we have moves that make the idea d4-d5 more powerful. I'll show one line to illustrate:

13...♘f6 14.♖ac1 ♕c7 15.d5

This version of the d4-d5 push is more dangerous for Black, as we have anticipated counterplay with ...b7-b5.

15...b5 16.♗h3

This is a key move for White. We are now threatening 17.♘h4, which shows that a centralized bishop can be badly placed.

16...♗xf3 17.exf3 bxc4 18.bxc4

Here White has the easier game. We can target the e7-pawn and sometimes g3-g4-g5 helps to develop an initiative. Note how b2-b3 and ♖ac1 helped in preparation of d4-d5. The rook on c1 is useful in anticipation of a later ...♖a8-b8-b4 play and also allows ♖c1-c3-e3.

B12) 6...e6

This is rare at this particular point, actually, but the resulting positions may also occur via other move orders, such as 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 b6 4.♗g2 ♗b7 5.0-0 g6 6.c4 ♗g7.

7.♘c3 ♘e4

7...0-0.



If Black allows us to play d4-d5, we should do so: 8.d5 exd5 9.cxd5 ♖e8 10.♘d4 (an important move! Black was threatening to play 10...♘e4, with desirable trades for Black. With 10.♘d4, we control the e4-square) 10...♘a6 11.♘db5, and White has some advantage here. I'd like to point out one idea worth knowing. If you play 11.♗f4 instead, Black may answer 11...♘h5, and after 12.♗e3, go for an exchange sacrifice with 12...♖xe3!?. This sacrifice is an idea you should be aware of. Black gets good play on the dark squares, control over squares such as e5, and the bishop pair. This is often enough in a practical game. With 11.♘db5, we intend to play ♗f4 later, as in the following line: 11...♘c5 12.♗f4 d6 13.b4, with a substantial advantage. Black has problems, in particular with the badly placed b7-bishop and the c-file pressure on the backward pawn.

8.♘xe4

In the double fianchetto lines, I recommend taking the knight on e4. The following play is simple to conduct and comfortable for White.

8...♗xe4 9.♗g5



The general idea for White is to play a later ♕d2 and ♗h6, trading off Black's good bishop. In the resulting positions, White has an easier job to play for space and is

therefore slightly better.

9...♕c8

Another possible line is 9...f6 10.♗e3 0-0 11.♕d2 ♘c6 12.♖fd1 (please avoid 12.♗h6 ♗xh6 13.♕xh6 ♗xf3 14.♗xf3 ♘xd4, and Black is better!) 12...♘e7



13.♗h6. White has at least a small advantage. We have more options here to play on the queenside and in the centre. One later idea to take note of is to move the g2-bishop away to f1 or h3, and only then play ♘d2 and e2-e4, expanding while avoiding further trades.

10.♕d2 h6 11.♗e3 d6 12.♖ac1

Black can't castle kingside easily, as the h6-pawn is under attack. White is slightly better here, with long-term prospects on the queenside. One idea is to play for a b2-b4 and c4-c5 break.

B13) 6...c5



7.d5

The move 7.♘c3 all of a sudden transposes into a symmetrical English, often reached via a move order such as 1.c4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♘c3 b6 4.g3 ♗b7 5.♗g2 g6 6.0-0 0-0 7.d4. Advancing the pawn is stronger and leads to an advantage.

7...b5

The point of Black's play. The type of Benoni after 7...0-0 8.♘c3 d6 9.e4 is very good for White. A set-up with ...b7-b6 and ...♗b7 makes little sense for Black and does not oppose White's plan of long-term central expansion.

8.d6

I like this move a lot. Black wanted to get a Benko-type game and now this idea is not possible. White is better, due to Black's central weaknesses.

8...bxc4 9.♘a3 0-0 10.♘xc4

And White is better. The d6-pawn is very annoying for Black.

B2) 4...c5



These early ...c7-c5 moves are played with the intention of making use of White's move order. We have not played c2-c4, and therefore we can't answer ...c7-c5 with the advance d4-d5, as Black was very quick in controlling this square.

5.dxc5

I advise playing in the same fashion after 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 b6 4.♗g2 ♗b7 5.0-0 c5 6.dxc5. We might transpose into this line if Black plays ...e7-e6 next.

5...bxc5 6.0-0 g6

By far the most popular move in this position, even though 6...e6 is a fine alternative to transpose into more regular Queen's Indian structures. After 6...e6, we

play 7.c4 to transpose to 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 b6 4.♗g2 ♗b7 5.0-0 c5 6.dxc5 bxc5 7.c4 (A11 above). That being said, it makes sense from Black's perspective to play ...g7-g6, though, considering his move order of delaying ...e7-e6 from the start.



7.♖e1

This move is very rare, but also very strong! White intends to play e2-e4 next, even though this square is covered twice.

7...♗g7

Black may also play 7...d5. Of course, this is already strategically dubious, but we are able to play very powerfully now.



8.e4 (pawn breakthroughs on protected squares are often very strong, and this no exception). 8...♘xe4 9.c4. The following line is long, but rather forced: 9...♗g7 10.cxd5 ♗xd5 11.♘g5 ♘f6 12.♘c3 ♗xg2 13.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 14.♔xg2 ♖f8 15.♗e3. White is clearly better. We will get the c5-pawn and keep a huge initiative against Black's vulnerable king and weak pawns.

8.e4



8...0-0

Black can't take on e4 and thus needs to allow e4-e5.

1) 8...♘xe4 9.♘g5 (a terrible pin on the long diagonal) 9...f5 10.♘d2 0-0 11.♘dxe4 fxe4 12.♘xe4. Black's position is even worse than it looks at first sight. There are the immediate ideas of 13.♘f6+ and 13.♘xc5, but also h2-h4-h5. There is no adequate reply to all of them;

2) 8...♗xe4 9.♖xe4 ♘xe4 10.♕d5, with a large advantage for White.

9.e5 ♘e8

Passive, but the only stable square.

10.h4



White has a very pleasant position. The e5-pawn is a nuisance for Black, and the quick h4-h5 starts a dangerous initiative on the kingside.

Conclusion

The Queen's Indian has a solid reputation for Black. With our move order of a delayed c2-c4, we prevent some good lines for Black (...♗a6 set-ups), but allow the early ...c7-c5 (line A). Black is fine in this line, but I am happy with this trade-off. I think that the positions in line A are still interesting to play and sound against

strong opposition. The double fianchetto lines (line B) are still rather unexplored, but not bad for Black. We can only count on a small plus against this set-up if Black plays well. A general idea that you need to play attention to is the push d4-d5 to blunt the b7-bishop, as showcased in some diagrams in this chapter.

CHAPTER 23

Queen's Indian – Main line:

3...b6 4.♗g2 ♗b7 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.c4 0-0 7.♘c3

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 b6 4.♗g2 ♗b7 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.c4 0-0



7.♘c3

This is the tried and tested main line, but White has some interesting options to choose from at this point. The main alternatives are the sophisticated 7.♖e1 and the Polugaevsky/Kasparov/AlphaZero gambit move 7.d5. We have seen the d4-d5 idea before, for instance, after 6.c4 d6 7.d5. Here, 7.d5 exd5 8.♘h4 c6 9.cxd5 ♘xd5 is possible for Black and leads to complex play in which White has good attacking chances at the cost of a pawn. You should definitely study the AlphaZero games in this line, as they are among the best chess games ever played! I looked at these lines and I felt that they don't quite fit into this repertoire, due to complexity that is not quite necessary at this point. In some cases, you NEED to play a sharper move to pose problems, but here classical play is possible, and poisonous enough.

Back to our move: we develop the knight to its most natural square and fight for control over e4 and d5. Black now needs to worry about the advance d4-d5, which would make the b7-bishop look a bit sad. The two main moves address exactly this idea.

A) 7...♘e4



This move has the best reputation. It does not physically stop d4-d5, like 7...d5 does, but makes it unattractive. After 8.d5 ♘xc3, we get a weak doubled pawn and after 8.♘xe4 ♗xe4 9.d5, this advance is not very effective, as the bishop is actively placed on e4.

8.♕c2

Nowadays, 8.♗d2 is more popular, but there is nothing wrong with this move. I believe that some new ideas, mostly suggested by LeelaZero, may set Black unexpected problems.

8...♘xc3

This is more or less forced, but still you'll meet the other moves quite regularly. 8...f5.



It is a rather common scenario to see Queen's Indian structures with a later ...f7-f5, leading to a Dutch-style game. In this particular case, however, it does not work well. 9.♘e5 is the move to remember. Black does not have enough control over e4 and is in trouble:

1) 9...♘d6 10.♗xb7 ♘xb7 11.e4 (a huge strategic accomplishment, occupying the centre without any concessions) 11...♘d6 12.exf5 ♘xf5 13.♕e4, with a significant advantage for White;

2) 9...d5. Black is declaring strategic bankruptcy with this move, weakening his position beyond repair. 10.cxd5 exd5 11.♗f4 (directly taking aim at c7). Let's look at a possible line that shows White's general plan: 11...♗f6 12.♖ad1 c6 13.♘xe4 fxe4 14.f3. Black is not able to defend against this central breakthrough, for instance, after the following moves: 14...exf3 15.♘xf3 ♘d7 16.e4 dxe4 17.♘e5, and Black is falling apart after the coming ♗xe4.

9.♕xc3

Black now mostly chooses between set-ups with ...c7-c5 or ...f7-f5. In my mind, a ...c5-based set-up is sounder, but ...f7-f5 still enjoys substantial popularity.

A1) 9...c5



This is the best set-up in my opinion. Black stakes some claim in the centre, and in many cases prepares a later knight development to c6. There is a range of pawn structures that may arise from here. Black can keep the tension in the centre or take on d4, sometimes leading to a Hedgehog set-up. Let's have a look at some lines and discuss details once they are on the board.

10.♖d1

I like this move the most, putting the rook opposite the queen immediately. Now, 10...d6, keeping the tension, seems best.

A11) 10...d6 11.b3

Here, 11.♕d3 is not as effective as against 10...♗f6 (see A12), because Black has the option of answering dxc5 with ...dxc5.

11...♗f6 12.♗b2

This is a natural sequence of moves after Black has chosen 9...c5. It is no surprise that it occurred in dozens of games. I will explore some continuations from here, pointing out interesting ideas for White.

A111) 12...♕e7



This is by far the most popular move for Black at this point.

13.h4

Again, this fresh idea. It gains in strength after Black has played ...♕e7, because after a future ♘f3-h2-g4, the f6-bishop has no retreat squares.

13...♘c6

This looks very natural and is quite likely to happen in a practical game. An alternative may be 13...cxd4 14.♘xd4 ♗xg2 15.♔xg2 ♕b7+ (this is not that great for Black, but you need to be alert next move) 16.♕f3 ♕xf3+ 17.exf3. Please don't play 17.♔xf3 e5!, and after a knight move, ...e5-e4+ is painful. After the correct 17.exf3, we are just better, based on the weak d-pawn and Black's undeveloped knight on b8.

14.e3



We keep the tension and prepare ♘f3-h2-g4 this way.

14...♖ad8

1) 14...cxd4 15.exd4 d5 16.cxd5 exd5 17.♘h2 is quite comparable to the line starting with 14...♖ad8. White has annoying ideas of ♘g4 and ♘h2-f1-e3, and enjoys a nice initiative;

2) 14...e5 is a critical move, but I think White has interesting play here as well: 15.♕d2 e4 (Black has to push the pawn basically. Against something slow, we have a comfortable choice of playing d4-d5 or taking on c5/e5 to open the d-file, depending on Black's choice) 16.♘g5 ♗xg5 17.hxg5. Now, Black has a hard task. What to play now? White is threatening both 18.d5 (intending ♕c3) and 18.dxc5. 17...♘d8 is by far the best according to the engines – not exactly easy to find. Still, White has a pull here: 18.dxc5 dxc5 19.a4 ♕xg5 (not the only move, but the one that seems most critical) 20.a5. White has very good compensation here, and you could certainly explore more, but you need to cut the analysis at some point. I think that it is clear that this whole line is tricky for Black to handle.



15.♘h2 h5

A drastic measure, but the alternative shows that allowing ♘g4 is not fun either: 15...cxd4 16.exd4 d5 17.cxd5 exd5 18.♘g4, and Black is in trouble. We have ♕f3

ideas, and the knight will often be excellently placed on e3, eyeing the d5-pawn and the f5-square.

16.♕d2 ♖fe8

Black may also play 16...cxd4 17.exd4 d5 18.cxd5 exd5 19.♕f4. We have seen this structure before. White is better, mostly due to the ♘h2-f1-e3 idea.

17.d5 ♗xb2 18.♕xb2 exd5 19.♗xd5



White is slightly better here, given that there are weaknesses on d5 and d6. The knight on h2 looks bad at the moment, but it can quickly improve to f3 and possibly g5 soon. Please note that ...h7-h5 is a serious weakening of Black's kingside, which makes an idea such as ♘h2-f3-g5 much more attractive.

A112) 12...♕c7



13.h4

Do you see a pattern here? Again, this new and still unexplored move is an interesting twist. We need to look at some moves to see the benefits of this idea.

13...♘d7

Black is keeping the long diagonal open and gets the knight closer to the kingside.

The move ...♘f8 looks like a good way to cover h7 without weakening the king, but this is a rather passive approach.

The move 13...♘c6 looks more obvious than 13...♘d7, but it seems less reliable: 14.e3 ♖ad8



15.♘h2 (the second point of h2-h4. The knight eyes the g4-square, and at the same time, the diagonal for the bishop on g2 is opened) 15...h5 16.♕d2, and now d4-d5 is an idea. This position is very interesting and tough to play for Black. LeelaZero likes White here, and I agree. One idea that I'd like to show is the following: 16...cxd4 17.exd4. After the trade, ♘h2-f1-e3 is a way to improve the knight. Playing the early h2-h4 sets Black fresh problems.

14.♕c2

This is a bit better here than 14.♕d3, because it keeps the bishop on b2 protected.

14...h6

Black prevents ♘g5 completely. If 14...♖fd8 (going for ...♘f8, but White retains good pressure) 15.♘g5 ♘f8 16.♗xb7 ♕xb7 17.♘e4, with annoying pressure for White.

15.♖d2

White also has 15.e4 here, grabbing more space. I suggest doubling on the d-file, anticipating a following ...cxd4. Black has answered our h2-h4 idea precisely with ...♘d7 and ...h7-h6, and has a solid position. I'd still rather be White, but Black is not in bad shape either.

A113) 12...♘c6

This move order is imprecise and leads to a nagging advantage for White.

13.♕d2

Stepping out of the long diagonal and threatening to push the d-pawn to d5.

13...♕e7 14.d5 exd5 15.♗xf6 ♕xf6



16.♕xd5

And White enjoys a permanent edge, based on the weaknesses on the d-file.

A114) 12...♘d7 13.♕c2 ♕c7 14.h4

And we have transposed to 12...♕c7 13.h4 ♘d7 14.♕c2.

A12) 10...♗f6

This move is less reliable than 10...d6. Our reply will highlight the drawback of the text move immediately.



11.♕d3

As mentioned in some other similar lines, this needs to be checked whenever the b7-bishop is unprotected. We are threatening 12.♘g5 now.

A121) 11...♘c6

Black needs to do something about the unprotected b7-bishop.

12.dxc5 bxc5



13.h4

Surprisingly, the move 13.♕xd7 is not that clear after 13...♕b6. We will see that playing h2-h4 is an intriguing idea in this line. It leads to interesting play here, getting ♘g5 back on the map.

13...h6

Black should probably stop ♘g5.

13...♕b6 14.♘g5 ♗xg5 15.hxg5, and all of sudden we have ideas on the kingside. Moves like ♗e4 and ♔g2 quickly make good use of the h-file.

14.♗f4 ♕b6

Black may also play 14...d5 15.cxd5 exd5 16.♕xd5 (we are accepting the challenge) 16...♕xd5 17.♖xd5 ♘d4 (Black's point, but the resulting position is much easier for White to play) 18.♘xd4 ♗xd5 19.♗xd5 ♖ad8



20.♘e6 (the great point!) 20...fxe6 21.♗xe6+ ♔h8 22.♖c1, and White has good play for the lost exchange.

15.g4

I suggest this enterprising move, but you may also play something slower, such as 15.♗d6 ♖fe8 16.a3. After the more aggressive 15.g4, White has good play on the kingside, getting in g4-g5 next.



A122) 11...d5

The other move to take care of the unstable bishop on b7.

12.cxd5 exd5 13.dxc5 bxc5



14.h4

Again this idea! The AI engines love to use the h-pawn, and I have to agree that it is an under-appreciated weapon that should be used more often. We are planning ♘g5, of course.

14...h6 15.g4

The great point! g4-g5 is a serious threat, and taking on h4 is good for White.

15...♗xh4 16.♕b5 ♗a6 17.♕xc5 ♗xe2 18.♖xd5



Black is under heavy pressure and will have a hard job defending this position. The recurring theme of h2-h4 is very remarkable.

A13) 10...cxd4

Black goes for a position similar to the Hedgehog.

11.♘xd4 ♗xg2 12.♔xg2 ♕c8



Black needs to prepare ...♘c6 and leaves the d-file.

13.b3

White is somewhat better here, due to the pawn structure. The black d-pawn is a weakness and there is little that Black can do about it. There are some possible continuations here, but it mostly looks similar to the following line.

13...♘c6 14.♗b2 ♘xd4 15.♕xd4 ♗f6 16.♕d2 ♗xb2 17.♕xb2 ♕c6+ 18.♔g1 d6 19.♖d4

And we are piling up on the d-pawn, with some advantage.

A2) 9...f5



10. ♖d1

White should start with this move, threatening d4-d5 at the right moment. This would make the b7-bishop passive.

10... ♗f6 11.b4



Black has stopped d4-d5 for the moment, but we are already set to grab the initiative on the queenside. I prefer White here, but Black's compact position is quite resilient. I'll show some lines that showcase typical play:

A21) 11...a5 12.b5 d6 13. ♕e3

Getting out of the diagonal with a gain of tempo.

13... ♕e7 14. ♗a3 ♘d7 15. ♖ac1

We are playing for c4-c5, opening up the position.

15... ♖ad8 16. ♘e5

A nice tactical shot, leading to an advantage for White.

16...♗xg2 17.♔xg2 ♗xe5 18.dxe5 ♘c5 19.exd6 cxd6 20.♖d2

And White is clearly better, targeting the weaknesses on d6 and e6.

A22) 11...c5 12.bxc5 bxc5 13.♗a3 ♘a6 14.♖ab1 ♗e4



15.♖b5

White has made considerable progress on the queenside and is better.

A23) 11...d6

Black needs to develop the knight, but ...d7-d6 weakens the e6-square. We need to watch out for tactics based on this fact.

12.♗b2 ♕e7

12...♘d7 looks normal, but now the e6-pawn weakness is very relevant!: 13.♘g5 ♗xg5 (after 13...♗xg2 14.♘xe6 ♕e7 15.♘xf8 we win decisive material) 14.♗xb7 ♖b8 15.♗c6. Black is busted on the light squares after he had to give up his essential b7-bishop.

13.c5

Always keep this idea in mind. We open up the position while Black is still underdeveloped.

13...bxc5 14.bxc5 dxc5



15. ♗a3

And White is a lot better again.

A3) 9...d6



Black intends to be flexible, but we have an interesting reply that immediately forces a decision:

10. ♕d3

You always have to check this move, or ♕c2, looking at h7. The bishop on b7 is unprotected, and therefore 11. ♘g5 is a serious threat.

10...f5

So Black had to play ...f7-f5 after all.

11. ♕e3

Why not misplace the black queen first?

11...♕c8



12.b4

And we reach a position very similar to 9...f5. I think White is better in the ...f7-f5 positions in general. We have more space, and Black's knight on b8 is still at home and is not easily activated.

B) 7...d5



This line is more or less extinct at the professional level nowadays. White has worked out how to reach an advantage. It is still very important to have some knowledge of the lines from White's point of view. The main reason is its popularity at the club level and the frequent transpositions from other openings, as we will see.

8.cxd5

B1) 8...exd5



This is the most frequently-played move. It's an important line, as it may occur from various move orders, in particular from Catalan starting sequences with an early ...b7-b6, e.g. 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 ♗e7 5.0-0 0-0 6.c4 b6 7.cxd5 exd5 8.♘c3.

9.♘e5

I strongly recommend this move, even though White also scores well with others. The main reason why I recommend it: Black now only has ONE move that limits the damage to manageable proportions. If Black does not find it, he will be much worse quickly. Note that I used the verb 'find'. This is an important consideration when playing against questionable lines. If your opponent knew that the line he is playing is bad, he would probably avoid it altogether. So often people play into bad lines, simply because they don't know any theory at all, and therefore need to find all the moves over the board. It doesn't often happen that someone plays a rotten line and then knows all the ins and outs.

Back to our line. The only move that is somewhat OK for Black is 9...♘a6. We should still look at all of the logical moves. Knowing some more about them will result in many nice wins.

B11) 9...♘a6



This is the only move that makes Black's set-up at least playable. White is still better, but it's a game.

10. ♗f4

We employ the standard set-up that we have seen in many lines against this pawn formation. This set-up includes ♗f4, ♕a4 and rooks to c1 and d1.

10...c5 11. ♕a4

Black now has tried some moves, but White keeps a pull everywhere:

11... ♕c8

The queen heads to the e6-square. This is actually a rather frequently-seen spot for the queen in hanging pawns positions.

1) 11... ♕e8 12. ♕xe8 ♖fxe8



13. ♖fd1. We have strong pressure against Black's centre, in particular the d5-pawn. Ideas like ♘b5 may also come in handy;

2) 11... ♘c7 12.dxc5 ♗xc5 13. ♗g5 looks horrible for Black. I don't see how he will keep the d5-pawn, given that ♘e5-d3-f4 and ♘c6 are both extremely annoying to meet.

Or if Black takes with the pawn, 12...bxc5 13. ♘c4 (a very important motif I needed to show! This knight move is very strong! 14. ♘a5 is a terrible threat now) 13...a5

14.♖ad1, and Black's centre is falling apart;

3) 11...cxd4 is a concession. The resulting IQP position is not very attractive for Black, because his piece placement is rather passive: 12.♕xd4 ♘c5 13.♖fd1. White has some advantage here. Still, this seems like one of the better options for Black, compared to some rather dreadful accidents.

12.♖ac1 ♕e6 13.♖fd1

And we have completed the standard set-up. I'd like to look at two sample lines from here:

13...♖fd8

Black may play the generally useful move 13...h6, and sometimes is able to play ...g7-g5 in tactical lines, based on the slightly unstable knight on e5: 14.e4 (going for the throat already). White has the better chances in the complications now: 14...dxe4 15.d5 ♕f5 (15...♘xd5 fails to a long tactical line: 16.♘xd5 ♗xd5 17.♖xd5 ♕xd5 18.♗xe4, with a clear advantage for White after the dust settles) 16.d6 ♗d8 17.♘c6, and White's breakthrough with the d-pawn is tough to defend for Black.



14.♘b5

White is slightly better in this position. We exert some pressure on Black's centre and have the easier game. One idea that I'd like to point out is to play a2-a3 and b2-b4 after capturing on c5. The pawn move b2-b4 intends to make the c-pawn move, thus freeing up the d4-square or isolating the d5-square.

This whole line with 7.♘c3 d5 is better for White, but the hanging pawns positions are still complicated. It is useful to study some complete games to understand this pawn structure better. It is going to appear in your games, so be prepared.

B12) 9...♘bd7



This bad move is in fact the most popular one!

10.♕a4

A very strong reply that you need to remember. We are now threatening the simple sequence 11.♘xd7 ♕xd7 12.♕xd7 ♘xd7 13.♘xd5, winning the d5-pawn. How is Black going to stop this idea? In fact, Black has no satisfactory solution anymore!

10...♘xe5

This doesn't save Black, but he was out of good options anyway. 10...♘b8 is very, very sad... but the alternatives don't convince either. Now, the standard build-up with ♗f4 and ♖c1 is the way to go: 11.♗f4 a6 12.♖ac1 b5 13.♕b3 c6



14.e4. After ...c7-c6, this pawn break is easier to play and even more effective. White has a huge advantage.

11.dxe5 ♘e8 12.♘xd5

No need to be subtle about it.

12...♗xd5 13.♖d1 c6 14.e4 ♘c7 15.exd5 cxd5



16. ♗e3

The d5-pawn will drop soon, and that's not the only problem for Black, of course.

B13) 9...c6

Against ...c7-c6 set-ups, you should always consider playing e2-e4, putting pressure on d5.

10.e4 dxe4 11. ♘xe4 ♘d5

Black is not able to maintain a blockade on d5.

12. ♘c3

We should fight for control over d5 immediately. Black is in trouble again.

12... ♗f6 13. ♕h5

One of many good moves. Black is under serious pressure and has a hard time to even develop fully.

B14) 9... ♖e8

This move looks rather normal, but has one drawback. It weakens the f7-spot, and we have a way to use this defect.

10. ♕b3 c6



11.e4

This is how to make use of the early ...♖e8. Again, we have strong pressure on the d5-pawn.

11...♘a6 12.♖d1 ♘c7

Black hurries to c7 to lend additional support to the d5-pawn.

13.a4

White increases the pressure with a4-a5 to come. Black's position after allowing e2-e4 is very passive.

B15) 9...♘e4

I guess that this knight hop prepares to play ...f7-f6.

10.♘xe4 dxe4 11.♕c2

The most direct way to play. e4 is hanging, and Black needs to attend to that.

11...f5

Taking on d4 is a mistake: 11...♕xd4 12.♕xc7, with a double attack on both bishops! White wins.

12.♖d1 ♔h8



13.♗f4

Black's strategy has created many weaknesses, such as c7 and the light squares. White is well-positioned to take advantage of them.

B16) 9...c5



Black goes for the 'hanging pawns', but this is more like going for 'dropping pawns'. This central formation is very weak and most likely destined to fall apart.

10.dxc5 bxc5

Or if Black takes with the bishop: 10...♗xc5 11.♗g5 ♗e7



12.♘d3. This is a useful regrouping to remember. The knight has a good post on f4, attacking d5 once more. This pawn will drop.

11.♕b3

And Black has no way to defend b7 and the centre. He loses the d5-pawn at least.

B2) 8...♘xd5 9.♘xd5

White has some promising moves, but this simple approach leads to a nice advantage.

B21) 9...♗xd5 10.♕c2

White is clearing the d1-square for the rook and prepares e2-e4 at the same time. It

turns out that Black's position is already unpleasant after 9...♗xd5, even more so than after 9...exd5.

10...♘d7

10...c5 11.dxc5 ♗xc5 12.♘g5 (an additional point of 10.♕c2) 12...g6 13.♘e4 ♗e7 14.♗h6 ♖e8 15.♖fd1, and Black is in huge trouble already. White's pressure is tough to withstand.

11.e4 ♗b7 12.♖d1

White has a central pawn advantage and Black has little to show for it.

12...♘f6 13.♘e5 ♕e8



14.♗e3

Black has a backward c-pawn, which is a useful target for White. One key problem is that playing ...c7-c5 is not easy, and even if Black manages to play this freeing move, it is not clear that it helps. White usually has d4-d5 in reply, to create a very strong passed pawn.

B22) 9...exd5



10. ♗f4

You just need to remember the natural set-up of ♗f4, ♕a4 and rooks to c1 and d1 to be better. I'll show one line to display some ideas:

10...♘d7 11.♖c1 c5 12.♕a4 ♖e8 13.♖fd1

This is good set-up against the hanging pawn structure. We have some pressure against the pawns.

13...♗f6 14.♗e3 a6 15.dxc5 ♘xc5

Black may also take with the pawn: 15...bxc5



16.♘e1. This is a useful regrouping. White's knight will be well-placed on d3 and perhaps later on f4, increasing the pressure against the black central pawns.

16.♕a3

Black's isolated pawn is a permanent weakness that we can play against.

C) 7...c5



A completely wrong approach. Now, White gets a very favourable Benoni structure.

8.d5 exd5 9.cxd5 d6 10.e4

Both black bishops are misplaced in this pawn structure. Let's have a look at a possible further course of action:

10... ♘bd7 11. ♖e1 ♖e8 12.a4 a6 13. ♘d2

White directs the knight to c4 and later tries to break through in the centre with e4-e5. Black has very limited counterplay.

D) 7... ♘a6



One of the better offbeat lines in the Queen's Indian, frequently played by GM Sergei Tiviakov. White has tried quite a wide range of lines, but found nothing brilliant against the 'knight on the rim'. Fortunately, we still have a simple option that gives a little something.

8. ♘e5

At first, I thought this move can't be great. If you have more space, you should not trade pieces – one of the rules of thumb that usually apply. This however is an exception. After the trade on g2, we will gain even more space, so it makes a lot of sense. I'd like to mention that 8.d5 is answered by 8... ♗b4!, which is reasonable

for Black and tricky for White to play.

8... ♗xg2

After 8...d5 9.cxd5 exd5 10.♗f4, we have transposed to the line 7.♘c3 d5 8.cxd5 exd5 9.♘e5 ♘a6 10.♗f4 (B11 above).

9.♔xg2 ♕c8

Black needs to prepare ...d7-d6 first. After the bishop trade, the light squares (c6) are weak.

10.e4 ♕b7



11.f3

White has gained a lot of space in the centre and enjoys some advantage. Black's position is solid, but also passive.

E) 7...d6



This is a strategic mistake, but still rather frequently seen at the club level.

8.d5

If you can advance the pawn to d5 and shut the b7-bishop in... do it!

8...e5 9.e4

The position now has some features of the Old Indian, but with a misplaced b7-bishop and little counterplay for Black. It is good to know White's best set-up, so I'll show some more moves:

9... ♘bd7 10. ♘e1 ♘e8 11. ♘d3

The knight is best on d3. It supports queenside play, but also f2-f4 at an opportune moment.

11... ♗g5



12.f4

This is one of those moments. Black is denied the desirable bishop trade.

Conclusion

The most popular line in this chapter is 7... ♘e4, and deservedly so. Black has a solid position in this line, but the new ideas presented pose some fresh problems. The other important move is 7...d5. It is still frequently played at the club level, and the resulting positions may also arise from other move orders, in particular via the starting moves of the Catalan. White gets a comfortable advantage against 7...d5, in particular if Black continues with less than perfect play. Black's other options on move 7 give White too much space and some advantage with little effort.

CHAPTER 24

The extended fianchetto 3...b5

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 b5



Black plays ...b7-b5 only after White has committed to g2-g3. Note that playing ...b7-b5 on move one or two is best answered without the fianchetto. These rare lines are examined in Chapter 35.

4.♗g2

I recommend playing our standard moves first and only then deciding what to do. I also explored 4.♗g5 here, which is an interesting alternative. White delays ♗g2 to retain the chance to play e2-e3 at some point, gaining a tempo on b5. This sounds really sophisticated, and in fact it is sophisticated! This is also the reason why I decided to go for a simpler approach – still, 4.♗g5 is interesting to check at a later stage.

4...♗b7

Very natural, but instead 4...d5 is also possible, and a common way to reach the line 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 b5, which is covered in Chapter 10.

5.0-0

Black now has a choice between three different paths:

1) He can play ...d7-d5, again transposing to Chapter 10;

2) There is 5...c5 (line A), prioritizing queenside play;

3) Black often chooses 5...♗e7 (line B), preparing castling first.

A) 5...c5



Black immediately expands on the queenside. I think this approach is better for Black compared to the slower 5...♗e7.

6.♗g5

Again this move, acknowledging that this bishop has no bright future and a quick queenside development is useful. Now I believe Black's best is to take on d4; it is also the most popular move. I need to mention that 6.♘a3 is also fine and is a worthy alternative. I mostly opted for 6.♗g5 because it is the same move as after 5...♗e7 and therefore easier to learn.

A1) 6...cxd4



7.♗xf6

Most people play 7.♘xd4, but I view the black queen as misplaced on f6. The resulting position is not much for White, but I think we have a small pull. Let's have a look.

7...♕xf6 8.♘xd4 ♗xg2 9.♔xg2 a6 10.c3

Our pawn structure is solid as a rock, while after a2-a4, Black is regretting the ...b7-b5 pawn push a little bit. I am happy with White's chances here.

10...♗c5 11.♕d3 0-0 12.♘d2 d5

An alternative is 12...♗xd4 13.cxd4 ♘c6 14.♘f3 ♕d8 15.♖fc1.



This is a bit easier for White to play. Note that we may combine queenside play with h2-h4 ideas, intending ♘g5.

13.b4

This is an interesting idea, setting a subtle trap.

13...♗b6

This is what Black should play, avoiding the trap. 13...♗xd4 is tempting, but Black should probably just retreat. 14.cxd4 ♘c6 (a double attack! Have we blundered a pawn?) 15.♘f3 ♘xb4 16.♕c3 a5 17.♖fc1.



White has some serious compensation here. 17.♖fc1 stopped ...♖c8 and renewed the idea to play a2-a3: 17...♕d8 (Black covers the a5-pawn) 18.♕b3 (again threatening 19.a3) 18...♖b8 19.♖c5 ♕d7 20.♘e5 ♕b7 21.♖ac1 ♖fc8 22.a4 bxa4 23.♕xa4. We will win back the pawn and have some serious pressure. This is a very deep line, but it was necessary to drill that deep to prove the compensation.

14.a4 bxa4 15.♖xa4



Black is close to equal here.

A2) 6...♗e7 7.dxc5 ♗xc5 8.♕d3

And we transpose to the line 5...♗e7 6.♗g5 c5 7.dxc5 ♗xc5 8.♕d3.

A3) 6...h6

We are ready to take on f6 anyway, so this feels a bit misguided.

7.♗xf6 ♕xf6 8.c3

Supporting d4. Next is a2-a4, playing against the weak queenside.

8...♕d8 9.a4 bxa4 10.♕xa4



White has a slight advantage, as Black has little to show for his weaknesses on the queenside.

A4) 6...♘a6



This has been played in quite a number of games, but White has a powerful reply.

7.e4

This is very dangerous for Black.

7...h6

After 7...♗xe4 8.♘c3 ♗b7 9.d5, White has a huge attack. The main idea is to go ♘e5 next, almost no matter what Black plays: 9...b4 10.♘e5 (threatening the brutal 11.dxe6, and 11.♘xf7!) 10...bxc3 11.dxe6 ♗xg2 12.exd7+ ♔e7 13.♖e1.



Yes, you can get a quick mating attack with 1.d4, 2.♘f3 and 3.g3.

8.♗xf6 ♕xf6 9.♘e5

And again, Black needs to be very cautious. There are already some serious dangers lurking.

9...d6

After 9...cxd4 10.♘xd7, Black is in huge trouble as well.



10.♘c6

Ouch! Black probably didn't expect that move. White has a great attack.

A5) 6...d5



Black plays in the style of the early ...d7-d5/...b7-b5 set-ups. Now, I see some interesting options.

7.a4

I also examined 7.♗xf6, which is a good alternative. After this move, Black needs to play 7...gxf6, as 7...♕xf6 8.e4! is too dangerous. After 7...gxf6, you can play the usual procedure 8.a4 b4 9.c4 again, and claim that ...gxf6 sticks out a bit in this structure. Still, I'd like to recommend 7.a4, as this is simpler to handle I think.

7...b4 8.c4

And we have transposed to the line 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 b5 5.0-0 ♗b7

6.a4 b4 7.c4 c5 (Chapter 10), which I believe to be slightly better for White. There is just one issue: it is technically not the same position, as Black has the en passant here! I think this is better for White as well, which makes this line more straightforward than 7.♗xf6 in my opinion.

8...bxc3 9.♘xc3

The bishop usually belongs to f4 in such positions, but even this version with ♗g5 seems good for White.

9...♘bd7 10.♕b3 ♗a6 11.♘b5

White has a nice initiative with ♖fc1 coming next.

B) 5...♗e7



Black prepares castling first and only later decides on the queenside set-up. I think White has good chances for a slight edge here.

6.♗g5

This move has more than one motivation. Firstly, the bishop does not have a great post anyway and is not unhappy about simply trading itself. More importantly, White has a specific set-up in mind that starts with ♗g5. We will often play ♕d3 (tempo on b5) and ♘bd2 next, and we prefer to develop the bishop first, rather than have it blocked by the knight. There is also a tactical idea that I will show on the next move. Now, 6...0-0 is very logical, and the overwhelming main line.

B1) 6...0-0

Very natural play, and principled after 5...♗e7.

7.♕d3 a6



8.♘bd2

We already had the tactic 8.♗xf6 ♗xf6 9.♘g5, but after 9....♗xg5 10.♗xb7 ♖a7 11.♗g2 d5 we have not accomplished much. It is better to develop first and ask Black for a piece of information: what next?

8...d5

Black stops the ♗xf6/♘g5 idea completely. This is solid, but not very active, of course. Now, I am unsure what's best, as I like more than one move.

After the slow move 8...d6, the ♗xf6 ideas gain in strength: 9.a4 b4 10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.♘g5 ♗xg5 12.♗xb7 ♖a7 13.♗g2 d5 (certainly not the only move, but I think White has a slight pull anyway) 14.e4 c6 15.a5. Black's queenside is rather weak, and we have multiple targets there.

9.♗xf6

I also like the flexible 9.c3 or the pawn lever 9.a4. The capture on f6 changes the course of the game quite drastically.

9...♗xf6



10.b4

Black is now stuck with a bad bishop on b7. Both sides have weak squares on c5 and c4, which are good knight outposts. White must be somewhat better due to the b7-bishop, but as mentioned, we have some interesting options on move 9 if you dislike this approach.

B2) 6...c5

If Black intends a quick ...c7-c5, he should play that on move 5, instead of 5... ♗e7.

7.dxc5 ♗xc5



8.♕d3

This is a useful tempo move, using the unprotected b5-pawn.

8...a6 9.c4

White is opening up the queenside, intending to exploit the weakened squares in the black camp.

White has a slight advantage at least.

B3) 6...d6 7.♕d3

Again this move.

7...a6 8.a4 b4 9.c3 bxc3 10.bxc3 ♘bd7

Of course, 10...0-0 looks natural, but Black always needs to think twice about castling. With 7.♕d3, White has prepared a typical shot: 11.♗xf6 ♗xf6



12.♘g5 ♗xg5 13.♗xb7, and White is better. Black lacks the light-squared bishop, which was a key defender on the queenside.

11.♘bd2

White is slightly better here as well. We have better chances on the b-file and have more options to play c3-c4 or e2-e4.

B4) 6...d5



7.♕d3

White also has 7.a4 b4 8.c4, similar to the lines discussed via the 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 b5 move order. Here, we have the bishop on g5 already, which is a drawback. You usually need ♗f4 in these lines. 7.♕d3 is a good option as well.

7...a6 8.a4 b4 9.c4

We know this idea, of course. Here, there is a twist due to the queen on d3.

9...bxc3 10.♕xc3

This is the idea. White now plans to play for control of c5 and pressure on the c-file.

10...a5 11.♘bd2 ♘bd7 12.♘e5

And White is better again.

Conclusion

The extended fianchetto is a sound line for Black. He still needs to play with some precision, as the analysis in this chapter shows. Some rather standard-looking lines (see A4) actually lead to some trouble for Black. Black's best line seems to be the early ...c7-c5 (line A), but we are still able to ask some questions in a low-risk position.

CHAPTER 25

3...c5 – Introduction and sidelines

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 c5



This is a flexible move for Black. It is not yet clear what the intention is. He might play ...cxd4 soon, but he might also play ...d7-d5 in the next moves, even transposing to different chapters, such as the ones on the Reversed Grünfeld. In fact, most strong players go that route – we will see that most of the lines examined in this chapter don't lead to a fully satisfactory game for Black.

4.♗g2

Black has tried many moves at this point. Most of them later transpose to 4...cxd4, so I decided to regard 4...cxd4 as the main line, even though many games use different moves that later transpose. This applies for lines such as 4...♘c6 5.0-0 cxd4 or 4...a6 5.0-0 cxd4 or the more obscure 4...♗e7. After 5.0-0, Black may delay the capture on d4 with 5...0-0, but after 6.c4, he is facing the threat of the d-pawn advance and will finally take on d4. He could also play 6...d5, after which 7.cxd5 leads us to Tarrasch territory. It sounds complicated, but it actually isn't. We just play our usual moves all of the time: put pawns on d4 and c4 and castle kingside.

A) 4...♘c6

This is the most frequently-played move for Black, and certainly natural enough.

5.0-0

After 5.0-0, we will almost always transpose elsewhere; there are only very few independent possibilities.

5...♕b6

This is an independent line that we need to examine. Other moves will transpose, for example, 5...cxd4 6.♘xd4 leads to our chapter's main line. Black may also play 5...d5, after which 6.c4 leads to a Reversed Grünfeld (Chapter 6).



6.dxc5

This might look a bit counter-intuitive. It seems that we are speeding up Black's development, but a closer look reveals that the set-up with ...♕b6 and ...♗c5 is rather vulnerable.

6...♗xc5 7.c4

White's idea is to play ♘c3 next, threatening ♘a4. This is already quite a serious idea, so Black needs to react to it immediately.

7...♘e4

This seems to be the relatively best move.

1) 7...♕a6 (stopping ♘c3 for the moment, as the c4-pawn is attacked) 8.b3 d5 (otherwise, White manages ♘c3, and then Black's set-up looks even more silly) 9.cxd5 ♘xd5 10.♗b2. This position is quite similar to the Semi-Tarrasch line 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 c5 4.♗g2 ♘c6 5.0-0 e6 6.c4 ♗e7 7.cxd5 ♘xd5, which is covered in Chapter 6. This line is dubious for Black, as the black pieces will be pushed back from their central posts. The same applies here, as illustrated by the following sample line: 10...0-0 11.♕c2 ♗e7 12.a3 ♗d7 13.e4 ♘b6 14.♘c3. White enjoys a significant space advantage. The idea of playing ♖e1 and ♗f1 is an additional cause of concern for Black;

2) 7...d5 8.cxd5 exd5



9.♘c3. White now attacks the d5-pawn and threatens ♘a4, netting the bishop pair and excellent play on the weak dark squares. White is clearly better.

8.e3 0-0 9.♘bd2

I actually think White is better with many moves here, but directly addressing the intruder on e4 seems logical to me.

9...♘xd2

9...d5 10.cxd5 exd5 11.♘xe4 dxe4 12.♘g5, and White wins the e4-pawn.

10.♘xd2 d5



Otherwise, there is the danger that Black will never manage this move at all. Amongst others, ♘d2-e4-c3 is an idea for White next, stopping the d-pawn.

11.♕h5

This is the unconventional engine suggestion at this point. It is most important not to be greedy and snatch the pawn on d5. After 11.cxd5 exd5 12.♗xd5 ♗h3, Black has at least enough compensation for the pawn. The queen sortie to h5 has more than one idea, but a useful one to remember is the following one:

11...d4 12.♘b3

Black has nothing better now than 12...e5.

12...e5 13.♘xc5 ♕xc5 14.b3

And White has a clear advantage. Note that after exd4 next, Black is unable to recapture with the pawn, and does not even get a passed pawn in return for the strong white bishop pair.

B) 4...♕a5+



Check! Black is arguing that neither ♘bd2 nor c2-c3 are very useful moves for White and does not mind provoking them. Often, he has a queen placement on c7 in mind, and indeed a knight on d2 is a lot less threatening in such a scenario.

5.c3

The obvious alternative 5.♘bd2 is not bad either. I need to emphasize that I am not very keen on playing a passive-looking c2-c3 in d-pawn openings unless I have a very good specific reason to do so. Here, you need to address the check, and it turns out that the pawn placement on c3 often is just temporary.

5...cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♘c6

1) 6...d5 7.0-0 ♗e7



8.c4. As usual, a pawn on d5 should be attacked with c2/3-c4 eventually. Now this

structure looks very much like a Catalan: 8...dxc4 9.♕c2, and White gets the pawn back with a slight advantage, due to the Catalan bishop;

2) 6...♗e7 7.0-0 0-0 8.c4. White corrects the pawn placement on c3, intending ♘c3 next. Compared to the line 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 c5 4.♗g2 cxd4 5.♘xd4 ♗e7 6.0-0 0-0 7.c4, Black has the extra move ...♕a5 now, but it is not obvious that it helps him. In the games I found in the database, Black played with ...a7-a6 and ...♕c7, basically transposing to the mentioned line – and this line is just favourable for White;

3) 6...a6 7.0-0 ♕c7 looks like a reasonable idea for Black, stopping the c3-c4 move: 8.b3. White insists on playing c3-c4, intending the following point: 8...d5 9.c4, and we have transposed to the following line: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 c5 4.♗g2 cxd4 5.♘xd4 a6 6.0-0 ♕c7 7.b3 d5 8.c4.

7.0-0 ♗e7 8.c4

This is most in line with our repertoire approach. However, I'd like to mention that 8.e4 is not bad either. Ideas like ♘b1-d2-c4 are tempting, and the queen has a good square on e2 as well.

8...0-0

8...♕c5 9.♘b5 saves the c-pawn by tactical means.

9.b3

Instead, 9.♘c3 ♕c5 is less convincing.

9...d5 10.♗b2 ♖d8 11.cxd5 ♘xd5 12.♘xc6 bxc6



13.♕c1

And here I'd still rather be White, as I am valuing structure quite highly. Black has good piece activity though and should be objectively fine.

C) 4...cxd4 5.♘xd4

You may also play 5.0-0 first here. There is no benefit of this move order though, so simply recapturing on d4 is fine. Now, the most popular move amongst higher-rated players is actually 5...d5, which after 6.0-0 transposes into a Reversed Grünfeld (Chapter 4). I agree that this could be Black's best bet here, as most independent lines don't convince.

c1) 5...♘c6



6.0-0

Now, Black has a choice between different approaches. He may play 6...♕b6 or 6...♗c5, playing against the knight on d4. These lines both are reasonable for Black, but still give us good chances for a small advantage. Those two options are covered in Chapter 26.

Black may also choose a somewhat inferior Hedgehog set-up with moves like ...a7-a6 and ...♗e7, or angle for a transposition to a Reversed Grünfeld or Tarrasch with a quick ...d7-d5. These transpositions are welcome, as in the Reversed Grünfeld, delaying ...♘c6 is regarded as more critical. Here, 6...d5 7.c4 would be a direct transposition to the mentioned Chapter 5.

6...♗e7

Black is not yet committing to a central formation with this move, but it seems that most of time he is heading for a Hedgehog-style formation with this move. This is also possible with 6...a6 first, of course. In any case, we will play with ♘c3 and b2-b3 if Black continues to play small moves.

7.c4 0-0

7...a6 and 8...0-0 is of course also possible and leads to the same position on move 9.



8. ♘c3

Now, Black needs to commit in some way regarding the pawn structure.

8...a6

Black intends to play a Hedgehog formation with this move. He would like to play ...d7-d6 or ...b7-b6, but to do this he needs to cover the knight on c6 first by ...♕c7. This is prepared by 8...a6. Instead, Black may also transpose out of this chapter or play an ill-advised queen sortie.

1) 8...d5 is played quite often, actually, but Black is certainly not aware that it leads to a bad line for him.



9.cxd5 exd5 10.♗e3, and we have transposed to a Tarrasch! This is covered via the move order 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 c5 3.c4 e6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.g3 ♘c6 6.♗g2 ♘f6 7.0-0 cxd4 8.♘xd4 ♗e7 9.♘c3 0-0 10.♗e3. Please see Chapter 3 for more coverage;

2) 8...♕b6. There are lines with early ...♕b6 motifs, like 1.c4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♘c3 ♘c6 4.d4 cxd4 5.♘xd4 e6 6.g3 ♕b6. This is a solid line for Black, getting quick counterplay. Here, White is better organized; it is particularly useful to have played 0-0 already, while Black's ...♗e7 and ...0-0 don't help with counterplay: 9.♘db5 (without castling for both sides and ♗g2/...♗e7 being played, Black has ...♘e5 ideas, often followed by ...♘g4, getting concrete play. This is not possible here)

9...a6 (9...♘e5 10.♘a4 ♕d8 11.♗f4 with a terrible position for Black) 10.♗e3 ♕a5 11.♘d6, with an excellent position.

Let's return to the independent option of 8...a6.



9.b3

I'd like to mention that 9.♗f4 is very strong as well in this particular position. I still suggest playing 9.b3, because it is of similar quality and Black may choose move orders like 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 c5 4.♗g2 cxd4 5.♘xd4 a6 6.0-0 ♕c7, when 7.b3 is the suggested repertoire move, with a likely transposition to the lines examined here.

9...♕c7 10.♗b2



Now, we have a split between the two logical pawn moves for Black. He may also play 10...♘xd4 11.♕xd4 d6 12.♖ac1 ♗d7 13.♖fd1, which transposes to C12 below.

C11) 10...b6 11.♖c1

We are lining up for ♘d5! next. Black has a hard time to defend here already.

11...♗b7

This runs right into the standard idea that we had prepared. There is an alternative for Black that does not convince either. After 11...♗c5 12.♘xc6 dxc6 13.♘a4, Black

is in deep trouble as well: 13...♗e7 (13...♖d8 14.♕c2 ♗e7 15.c5 b5 16.♘b6 ♖b8 17.♕c3, and White has an overwhelming position. Black will never get any active role for the c8-bishop) 14.♕d4 ♖b8 15.♖fd1 c5



16.♕f4, and White is winning already, as the black queenside will fall apart.

Let's return to the position after 11...♗b7.



12.♘d5

It's always very pleasant to play this move – you'll get it on the board eventually!

12...♕d8

After 12...exd5 13.cxd5, we will get the knight back with excellent play, and there is only one move now that we should check briefly: 13...♗c5 14.♘f5 (this is even stronger than taking on c6) 14...♘e8 15.dxc6 dxc6 16.♖c4, with a winning attack for White. The rook lift plus ♕c2/♗e4 ideas is too much for the black king to survive.

13.♘xe7+ ♕xe7 14.♕d2

Black's structure is very weak, in particular b6 and d6 lack protection by the bishop. Let's check a sample line.

14...♖fd8 15.♖fd1 ♖ac8



16.♕e3

And you see that b6 is an easy target. 16.♕e3 also threatens 17.♘f5!, an idea that is easily overlooked.

C12) 10...d6 11.♖c1

We are preparing ♘d5 again.

11...♘xd4

The alternatives are worse. Let's have a look.

1) 11...♘e5 (Black is stepping out of the ♘d5 tactics and plans to develop with ...♗d7 next) 12.e3 (a useful move, preparing ♕e2 and supporting the knight on d4. In the long run, we might go for a kingside attack with f2-f4 and g3-g4). Let's follow a grandmaster game from this position: 12...♗d7 13.♕e2 ♖fe8 14.h3 ♗f8 15.g4 h6 16.f4 ♘g6



17.g5, and White already had a winning attack in Granda Zuniga-Bezold, Germany Bundesliga 2016/17;

2) 11...♗d7



12.♘d5 (a common idea, leading to a sizable advantage for White) 12...exd5 (12...♕d8 13.♘xe7+ ♕xe7 14.♗a3 (one of many good lines after 12...♕d8. Black is suffering with the target on d6 and no counterplay whatsoever) 14...♖fd8 15.♘c2 ♗e8 16.♕d2, with a huge advantage for White) 13.cxd5 ♘xd5 14.♗xd5, and White is a lot better with easy targets to attack, such as the d6-pawn in the long run.

12.♕xd4 ♗d7

This simplifying operation seems to be relatively best for Black.

13.♖fd1 ♖fd8 14.a4

A useful move, combining multiple ideas. We prepare to play ♗a3, and at the same time make it harder for Black to play ...b7-b5 in the long run.

14...♖ac8 15.♗a3 ♗e8



16.h3

White is slightly better here, but Black's position is quite resilient. In some games, White continued with ♖d3 and ♖cd1, putting more pressure on the d6-pawn.

C2) 5...a6



Black usually aims for a Hedgehog position with this move, including a later ...♕c7, ...♗e7, ...0-0 and ...d7-d6. There are many possible move orders; for example, 5...♗e7 first is possible as well. Black also needs to decide whether he develops the b8-knight to c6 or tries for a ♘bd7 set-up. In many games, Black actually starts with 5...♘c6 and only later plays moves like ...♗e7, ...a7-a6 and ...♕c7. I decided to cover the non-♘c6 set-ups via the 5...a6 move order and the ...♘c6-based ones via 5...♘c6. This means that if Black starts with 5...a6 and later plays ...♘c6, we will transpose to 5...♘c6 lines.

6.0-0

Now, Black will play the moves ...♗e7, ...0-0 and ...♕c7 in some order, while we play c2-c4/b2-b3 and ♗b2, leading to the same position on move 9. There is just one particular move order to be aware of – it requires a direct response.

c21) 6...♕c7

This looks like the most sophisticated move order to reach a Hedgehog. Black stops c2-c4 for the moment, a difference to 6...♗e7.

7.b3 d5



This is the special line that I referred to on move 6. Black continues to play against

c2-c4. Of course, Black may also play 7...♗e7 and after 8.c4 0-0 9.♗b2, stick to a Hedgehog type play.

8.c4

This is very important to remember. White gets a very dangerous initiative with this pawn sacrifice.

8...dxc4 9.♗b2

This extremely natural move was a novelty at the time of writing, and was suggested by the engines.

9...cxb3

This is no fun for Black, but trying to catch on with development does not help much either. 9...♗e7 10.♘d2 c3 11.♖c1 is an important point. Black is in terrible shape here, not even having an extra pawn for his worries.

10.♕xb3



Black is struggling here. White is opening up the position, in particular exposing the weakened queenside. Here, I concluded my original analysis, but just one day before it was published on Chessable, the game Ding Liren-Caruana was played at Norway Chess in Stavanger. Caruana went for 10...♘c6, but after 11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.♗xf6 gxf6 13.♕c3 ♗d7 14.♕xf6, did not manage to defend this bad position.

c22) 6...♗e7 7.c4 0-0

7...♕c7 8.b3 0-0 9.♗b2 leads to the same position.



8.b3

White most often plays 8.♘c3, but 8...♕c7 attacks c4 and requires either an ugly response like 8.♕d3 or some sharp play sacrificing the pawn.

After 8.b3 first, White is going to be slightly better without any particular knowledge of concrete lines required.

8...♕c7

Black has delayed ...♘c6 for a while already and it is probably not very likely to happen anymore, as ...♘bd7 seems to be Black's preferred set-up. Still, Black could play ...♘c6 on one of the following moves, which leads to positions that I have examined via the 5...♘c6 move order.

9.♗b2 d6 10.♘c3 ♘bd7

We also should check 10...♗d7 11.♖c1. Black obviously wanted to play 11...♘c6 next, but...



12.♘d5. The standard tactic of this line hits! In fact, this is a transposition to 5...♘c6 again! The full sequence of moves is 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 c5 4.♗g2 cxd4 5.♘xd4 ♘c6 6.0-0 ♗e7 7.c4 0-0 8.♘c3 a6 9.b3 ♕c7 10.♗b2 d6 11.♖c1 ♗d7 12.♘d5. There are countless possible move orders, but remembering our standard set-up with b2-b3, ♗b2 and ♖c1 is all you need to do.

11.♖c1

What next? Black can't play ...b7-b6, and rook moves like ...♖b8 or ...♖d8 don't help to develop the bishop on c8.

11...♖b8

It is funny to note that 11...♘e5 12.e3 is analysed via the 5...♘c6 move order. The move order in question is 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 c5 4.♗g2 cxd4 5.♘xd4 ♘c6 6.0-0 ♗e7 7.c4 0-0 8.♘c3 a6 9.b3 ♕c7 10.♗b2 d6 11.♖c1 ♘e5 12.e3.

12.e3

Against a slow move like 11...♖b8, I recommend playing 12.e3 and aiming for a set-up with a later ♕e2, f2-f4 and possibly even g3-g4 to storm the kingside. Black's position is very passive.

Conclusion

The sidelines of the ...e7-e6/...c7-c5 set-up are comfortable for White to play. Black-'s attempts to play a Hedgehog position often backfire quite badly, in particular with a knight placed on c6. You will also frequently transpose out of this chapter after a quick ...d7-d5 by Black, either to a Reversed Grünfeld (Chapter 4) or an inferior version of the Tarrasch (Chapter 3).

CHAPTER 26

3...c5 – Main lines: 4.♗g2 cxd4 5.♘xd4 ♘c6 6.0-0 ♕b6 and 6...♗c5

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 c5 4.♗g2 cxd4 5.♘xd4 ♘c6 6.0-0



Now, Black has a choice between different approaches. The only fully sound lines are 6...♕b6 and 6...♗c5, which are covered in this chapter. Black's inferior options on move 6 and prior are examined in Chapter 25.

A) 6...♕b6

Black puts pressure on our knight, forcing it to retreat to b3. This is not ideal, but we will see that the queen on b6 is not ideally placed either.

7.♘b3

Now, Black has a fundamental choice between playing for central control with 7...d5 or playing more in a Hedgehog style with 7...♗e7.

A1) 7...♗e7



8.c4

This is more in line with our usual set-ups than 8.e4, which also looks promising.

8...o-o 9.♘c3 ♕b4

This must be the critical move. After 9...d6 10.♗e3, the black queen needs to retreat, as the 'active' move seems too risky: 10...♕b4 11.♖c1.

Now, taking on c4 is unattractive, which makes the whole queen operation a bit pointless. After 11...♕xc4 12.♘d5 ♕a4 13.♘xe7+ ♘xe7 14.♕xd6 ♘f5 15.♘c5 ♕b5 16.♕d2, White is better, due to his much more active pieces.



10.e4

This is a novelty, much to my surprise. All games continued with 10.♘d2 instead. Sacrificing the c-pawn sets far more problems for Black. I will explore this line a bit deeper, even though you probably won't get this on the board frequently. I mostly want to convey an impression of the nature of these pawn sacrifices.

Moves like 10.♘d2 are passive and should be avoided – sometimes, you need to sacrifice a pawn to play principled chess.

10...♕xc4 11.♖e1

Now there are multiple ideas for White, most importantly e4-e5 and playing against

the queen with moves like ♗e3/♗f4, ♖c1 and ♗f1.

11...♕b4

After 11...d6 12.♗f1 ♕b4 13.♘b5, White is winning already. The threat is 14.♗d2, followed by 15.♘c7. This attacks not only the rook, but also has ♗b5 in store, trapping the queen!

12.e5 ♘e8 13.a4

White has more than one dangerous option here, but 13.a4 seems to be the most powerful. The idea is to play ♘b5, preventing the retreat to b6. An additional idea is to push the a-pawn even further to a5 and a6 in some cases.

13...♕b6

Black makes sure that the queen has some squares.

13...f6 is a logical move, but it ignores the ♘b5 idea.



14.♘b5 (15.♖e4 is the threat!) 14...fxe5 15.♖e4 ♘d4 16.♘3xd4 exd4 17.♘xd4, and White has excellent compensation for the pawn. I'll continue this line to illustrate the play: 17...♘f6 18.♗d2 ♕c5 19.♖c1 ♕h5 20.♕xh5 ♘xh5 21.♘b5. This line is not forced, but it shows the dangers Black is facing. The final position here is close to winning for White already – Black won't be able to develop in a normal way anymore.

14.♗f4

White secures the e5-pawn and prevents the black d-pawn from moving.

14...f6

After 14...♕d8 15.♖c1, we are just calmly improving our position. Black has a hard time freeing himself. Let's check how we answer the most principled move: 15...d5 16.exd6 ♗xd6 17.♗xc6 (this has a concrete idea, otherwise there would be no reason to give up the great bishop) 17...bxc6 18.♘e4 ♗c7 19.♕xd8 ♗xd8



20.♘d4. We win back the pawn and still keep a strong initiative.

15.exf6 ♘xf6 16.♘b5 ♘e8 17.♖c1 a6 18.♘c3

White has excellent play here. You need to cut off the analysis at some point, so I'll stop here. It's lots of fun to analyse positions like that, so you should continue on your own. It will help your overall play, not just your opening knowledge.

A2) 7...d5



This is one of the few instances where a later ...d7-d5 does not transpose to Part I of this book. After 7...d5, we need to play somewhat differently than usual, because it is not possible to play the desirable c2-c4 break.

8.♘c3

We need to attack the d5-pawn, so it's going to be e2-e4 instead of c2-c4. The problem with 8.c4 is the following line: 8...dxc4 9.♗e3 ♕c7 10.♘3d2 ♘g4 11.♘xc4 ♘xe3 12.♘xe3. Here, we lack the dark-squared bishop to generate some play. Black

has no problem even with playing a move like ...a7-a6, stopping ♘b5. This kind of move would be impossible with the bishop still on the board. Fortunately, 8.♘c3 and later e2-e4 is a good alternative way to play.

A21) 8...♗b4



This move does not stop e2-e4.

9.e4

A211) 9...d4 10.e5

It is important to remember this move. It is a lot stronger than moving the knight.

10...♘xe5

Here, 10...dxc3 is even worse than 10...♘xe5: 11.exf6 gxf6 12.bxc3 ♗xc3



13.♖b1. White has a great position here. The engines already claim it's a clear win – not too surprising if you look at ideas like ♗a3 and ♕f3. Black lacks development and coordination.

11.♘a4 ♕d8 12.♕e2

The simple 12.♕xd4 is also better for White, but I think 12.♕e2 sets more problems.

12...♘c6 13.♖d1 0-0 14.♗xc6

White goes for a concrete solution, but you have good alternatives, in particular 14.c3. I like the capture though, as the next moves are forced and the resulting position seems far easier for White to play, in my opinion.

14...bxc6 15.♖xd4 ♕e7 16.♗g5 e5 17.♗xf6 gxf6 18.♖h4 ♗f5

The only move, as Black needs to cover h7.

19.a3 ♗d6 20.♘a5

An interesting position. White has good play against the weak queen-side, and the black bishop on d6 is very passive. Black's king is also not entirely safe in the long run.

A212) 9...♗xc3 10.exd5



The important intermediate move.

10...♘xd5 11.bxc3 0-0

Black needs to castle before this becomes permanently impossible, due to ♗a3.

Let's have a look at the greedy move 11...♘xc3: 12.♕g4. Taking on c3 is, frankly speaking, insane! Now Black is already out of sensible moves.

12.c4 ♘de7



13.c5

White's pawn structure is not ideal, but our bishops are excellent. Let's check two possible lines:

1) 13...♕d8 14.♕e2 e5 15.♗b2 f6 16.♖ad1 ♕c7 17.f4, and again White obtained a strong initiative out of the opening;

2) 13...♕a6 14.♗b2 e5 15.♖e1 f6 16.f4 (very strong! Black is under serious pressure, as the capture on f4 is not possible) 16...exf4 17.♕d6 ♘g6



18.a4!. A remarkable line! Now, ♗f1 is a terrible threat that Black has no defence against.

A22) 8...♗e7

Compared to 8...♗b4 above, this move allows answering 9.e4 with ...d5-d4 under better circumstances.

9.e4 d4

Another possibility is trading on e4: 9...dxe4 10.♘xe4 ♘xe4 11.♗xe4. White is slightly better in these positions. Our pieces are more active, and long-term there are chances based on the majority on the queenside. Let's have a look at a logical

sequence from here: 11...0-0 12.♕e2 ♖d8 13.♗e3 ♕c7



14.♖ad1. Now, 14...b6 looks very risky after 15.♖xd8+ ♗xd8 16.♖d1, so Black probably should play modestly with ...♗d7 and ...♗e8. He is solid, but White certainly has a pull.

10.♘e2

Compared to 8...♗b4 9.e4 d4 10.e5!, here the pawn push 10.e5 is bad, due to 10...dxc3 11.exf6 ♗xf6.

10...e5 11.c3 a5

This is the best move, but it is very rarely played. Most of the time, Black takes on c3 and is at least slightly worse. 11...dxc3 12.♗e3:

1) 12...c2 (relatively best) 13.♕xc2 ♘b4 14.♕c1 ♕a6 15.♘c3 (White is better here. If the black knight needs to retreat to c6, ♘d5 will be very annoying to meet. Therefore, Black needs to resort to direct, tactical play) 15...♗e6 16.a3 ♘d3 17.♕c2 0-0 18.♖fd1 ♖fd8 19.h3 (Black now faces the idea of ♗f1) 19...♕c4 20.♘d2 ♕c7 21.♘db1 ♘c5



22.♘d5. White now gets a dangerous passed pawn, enjoying a comfortable advantage;

2) 12...♕a6 13.♘xc3 0-0 14.♘d5 (White is a lot better here. Black now needs to

take the knight, but the resulting complications are not working out too well for him) 14...♘xd5 15.exd5 ♖d8 16.♘c5 ♕a5



17.♖c1. I'll stop here, concluding that Black is in trouble. As usual, feel free to continue to analyse positions like this. You probably won't get them on the board exactly like this, but you will improve your abilities in the typical middlegames.

12.cxd4 a4 13.dxe5 ♘g4



Quite an enterprising concept by Black. I am not surprised that 11...a5 is rarely met, as Black usually has not prepared to play into these lines, and coming up with this idea over the board requires strong imagination. Black gets good compensation for the pawn now.

14.♘d2 ♘cxe5 15.♘f3

This seems better to me than 15.♘f4, which has been played in this position. After 15.♘f4 ♘xf2, it's messy and not too comfortable for White to play.

15...♘xf3+ 16.♗xf3 ♗c5

Black needs to use his active pieces now. Against something slow, we have

♘e2-f4-d5.

17.♕e1 ♘e5

Otherwise, ♘e2-f4-d5 will be annoying for Black.

18.♗g2 ♗e6

The move 18...♘d3 looks attractive, but fails: 19.♕c3 ♘xf2 20.♕xg7, with a large advantage for White.



19.♘f4

With this move White sacrifices the exchange, but retains good play on the light squares and enjoys a fantastic knight on d5. This is probably objectively equal, but interesting to play. You may also explore the alternative with 19.♕c3 f6 20.♘f4. We keep the extra pawn in this line, but Black has some pressure for the material deficit. I'd rather give up the exchange for bishop and pawn and have a position that is easy to play, but there is some 'taste' factor involved.

19...♗c4 20.♘d5 ♕d6 21.♗f4 ♗xf1 22.♕xf1 0-0 23.♕e2



When to stop a line in a book? I am doing this here, claiming that this position is about equal. Note the important idea of ♗h3, in particular after Black has played ...f7-f6, which is very likely to happen. With the strong knight on d5 and the bishop

on h3, the rooks are not active at all, which is a key element in any exchange sacrifice.

B) 6...♗c5 7.♘b3 ♗e7

This is a clever operation. Black has pushed our knight to b3, reducing the pressure on c6. This is a useful preparation for a quick ...b7-b6 set-up.

7...♗b6 8.c4 d5 has no independent value.



After 9.♘c3, we transpose to a favourable line of the Reversed Grünfeld. The move order in Chapter 5 is 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 c5 4.♗g2 cxd4 5.0-0 ♘c6 6.♘xd4 e6 7.c4 ♗c5 8.♘b3 ♗b6 9.♘c3.

8.c4 0-0

1) 8...b6 (Black opts for quick play against the c4-pawn, even delaying castling) 9.♘c3 ♗a6 (we cover 9...0-0 10.♗f4 via the more common move order 8...0-0 9.♘c3 b6 10.♗f4)



10.♘d4 (this is the best way to handle the threat to the c4-pawn. Covering it with 10.♘d2 is too passive) 10...♘xd4 (Black has to take on d4, as there is no other good choice; the move 10...♖c8 fails directly to 11.♘xc6 dxc6 12.♕a4, and the black queenside is falling apart) 11.♕xd4 ♖c8 12.b3 (now, this convenient cover of the c4-pawn is possible) 12...0-0 13.♗b2, and White has the better chances in this

line. The bishop on a6 is a bit awkward, and the pawn breaks ...b6-b5 or ...d7-d5 are hard to realize. We have some pressure on the d-file and may expand in the centre after due preparation;

2) 8...d5 9.♘c3. After 9.♘c3, we again transpose to a good line of the Reversed Grünfeld. The move order in Chapter 5 is 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 c5 4.♗g2 cxd4 5.0-0 ♘c6 6.♘xd4 e6 7.c4 ♗c5 8.♘b3 ♗e7 9.♘c3.

9.♘c3

After 9.♘c3, Black may play with 9...b6 or 9...d6, hinting at the future post of the c-bishop.

B1) 9...b6 10.♗f4

The dark square on d6 is weakened, and therefore ♗f4 and ♘b5 looks attractive.

B11) 10...♗b7

The stronger players mostly went for this move.

11.♖c1 d6 12.♘b5 ♘e8



13.♕d2

We have followed a blitz game Aronian-Carlsen, Paris 2016. White has a slight advantage here. We can apply some pressure on d6, but this is not enough to obtain anything too serious. In the long run, we need to involve some pawns, for example, for a b2-b4/c4-c5 break or for kingside play with e2-e4 and f2-f4. These plans all require careful preparation, but you usually have this time – Black is mostly staying flexible and awaits White's ideas.

B12) 10...♗a6

This move looks more active than ...♗b7, but there are concrete problems with it.

11. ♘b5

Now, there is no fully convincing reply for Black. 12. ♘c7 and 12. ♘d6 are annoying threats.

11...d5

The active defence, compared to 11... ♖c8. Black sacrifices an exchange, but it does not seem to be fully sufficient. After 11... ♖c8 12. ♘d6 ♖c7 13. ♖c1, Black is under pressure. His pieces are not coordinated well and his position is purely defensive.

12. ♘c7 ♗xc4 13. ♘xa8 ♕xa8



14. ♖c1

Black has a pawn for the exchange, but I don't believe it should be enough compensation. One key idea for White is to play ♘d4 to get the offside knight into play. This needs ♖e1 first, to protect e2. If White manages to trade or activate the knight, his advantage will be more pronounced.

B2) 9...d6



10. ♗f4

White has more than one good set-up here. Even 10. ♘d4 is not bad at all. White is

a 'tempo down' with this move, but it is not felt all that much. Still, I suggest playing 10.♗f4, as it allows me to show the opening moves of an excellent game played by former World Champion Anatoly Karpov.

10...♘h5

This is the most popular move for Black, trying to get rid of the pressure on d6 as quickly as possible.

11.e3

Creative play by Karpov, inviting the capture on f4.

11...♘xf4 12.exf4

Now, the doubled f-pawn is more of an asset than a liability. White often can use the idea f4-f5, trying to fight for the light squares. If Black needs to move the e6-pawn, the d5-square is a huge outpost.

12...♗d7 13.♕d2 ♕b8 14.♖fe1

Now, the f4-f5 idea gets into the picture.

14...g6 15.h4 a6 16.h5 b5 17.hxg6 hxg6 18.♘c5 dxc5 19.♕xd7 ♖c8



20.♖xe6

And White won with a great attack on the light squares in Karpov-Topalov, Linares 1994.

Conclusion

After 6...♕b6 (line A), the play is a bit different to other parts of the book, as it is not advisable to play c2-c4. We need to resort to e2-e4 to break in the centre. Interestingly enough, the best line for Black is not widely known and leads to complicated play with chances for both sides. More popular options for Black are easier to handle for us and usually net a small advantage. Line B, starting with 6...♗c5,

often leads to Hedgehog-style positions that are solid for Black, but also a bit passive for him.

CHAPTER 27

Move orders with 1...e6: 1.d4 e6

1.d4 e6



In this chapter, we are examining the move order 1.d4 e6. This is a flexible move for Black that would be far more popular if somehow 2.e4 would be an illegal move. Transposing to the French Defence is not bad, but of course we are sticking to a 1.d4-themed approach.

2.♘f3

Now, there are a number of possible transpositions and one line that we will cover in this chapter.

2...♘f6 3.g3 – leads to other chapters in Part III or Part I if Black plays a quick ...d7-d5;

2...f5 3.g3 – leads to the Dutch;

2...d5 3.g3 – leads to Part I;

2...b6 3.g3 – this is will lead to a Queens' Indian or a Dutch in case of a quick ...f7-f5;

2...b5 3.e4 – this is examined via 1.d4 b5 in the 'Odds and ends' chapter;

And finally, the line that we need to examine in more detail.

2...c5



This move order is quite rare, but interesting for Black to play. I have employed it myself in some games. The main reason why it is not more popular is that Black needs to be ready to play a French (1.d4 e6 2.e4 is possible) and a Sicilian (3.e4 now is not a bad move!). This is a rather steep requirement that few players are willing to go for. Therefore, you won't meet it too often. Anyway, it is not a problem for our repertoire concept and will almost always transpose to lines examined in this chapter via 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 c5, or to a chapter with ...d7-d5/...c7-c5-based set-ups, such as the Reversed Grünfeld or Tarrasch.

3.g3 cxd4

1) 3...d5 4.♗g2 leads to a Reversed Grünfeld, but may also develop into a Tarrasch Defence;

2) 3...b6.



Black intends to transpose into a Queen's Indian position type, usually reached via the move order 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 b6, where a later ...c7-c5 is frequently seen. I recommend being practical about that and just transpose into the Queen's Indian. You may try to punish Black's move order, but it is such a rare occurrence that investing study time into it seems excessive.

4.♗g2 (here, 4.e4 is an attempt at refuting Black's move order. It leads to

positions very much reminiscent of the Open Sicilian, but in a rather good version for White. Still, this is very far away from our usual play, so it didn't feel right to go there in the context of this repertoire) 4...♗b7 5.dxc5. This accepts the transposition to the Queen's Indian. Here, the engines suggest the brutal move 5.e4(!) instead, offering the central pawn for excellent compensation, for instance, after 5...♗xe4 6.♘c3 ♗b7 7.d5. This line or the one mentioned on the previous move is the way to go if you want to play in the most principled way;

3) 3...♘c6 is played quite frequently, but usually just transposes to other lines, because ...♘f6 is such a natural move and this will transpose into the more common main move order of this set-up, as examined in Chapter 25.

4.♗g2 and now, 4...♘f6 will already transpose to the mentioned Chapter 25. Black may take first on d4 and play 5...♘f6, but a transposition is basically unavoidable after natural moves;

4) 3...b5



4.♗g2. Similarly to 3...b6, I recommend just playing conservative moves against Black's extravagant move order. Now, we will most likely transpose to a different chapter, like Chapter 24 or Chapter 10. 4...♗b7 5.0-0 ♘f6 6.♗g5, with a transposition to Chapter 24 (this position is usually reached via 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 b5 4.♗g2 ♗b7 5.0-0 c5 6.♗g5);

5) 3...♕a5+ looks a bit odd, but this check is a decent move. Again, we will probably transpose to a different line. 4.c3 cxd4 5.♘xd4 ♘f6 6.♗g2 is by far the most common sequence after 3...♕a5+, and this position is examined via 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 c5 4.♗g2 ♕a5+ 5.c3 cxd4 6.♘xd4 in Chapter 25.



4.♘xd4

In this particular move order, we need to immediately recapture on d4. If we play 4.♗g2 first, the move 4...♕a5+! is irritating. After the queen check, we would need to sacrifice a pawn with 5.c3, but this is not fully trustworthy. A comparable situation arises after 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 c5 3.g3 cxd4 4.♗g2 ♕a5+!. It's no big deal that we have to recapture immediately, but it is useful to have seen these move order nuances. Now, after 4.♘xd4, most of the time the game transposes to Chapter 25, because ...♘f6 is a very natural move.

The only interesting independent line is a quick attack on the d4-knight that we need to check more closely.

4...♕b6

This is the mentioned line that avoids the transposition. More often than not, Black instead plays 4...♘f6 to transpose directly to Chapter 25 or 4...♘c6 and ...♘f6 on the next move. We just play ♗g2 and 0-0 to transpose.

Black may also play 4...d5 5.♗g2. Now, 5...♘f6 would transpose to the Reversed Grünfeld (Chaper 4) and it is the most common move. Let's look at one independent try: 5...e5 6.♘b3 ♗e6 (this is not precise, and Black should play 6...♘f6 instead to transpose) 7.c4 ♘f6



8.♗g5, and the pressure on d5 becomes unbearable. Now, Black's only chance is the following sacrifice: 8...d4 9.♗xb7 ♘bd7 10.♗xa8 ♕xa8 11.f3. This is important. We don't need to castle into the attack, but can stay in the centre for a moment. We will organize with ♘1d2 and ♘b3-c1-d3 next. White is better due to the extra material, but some care is required.



5.♗g2 ♗c5

This idea of putting pressure on the d4-knight is unique to the 1...e6 move order. Let's compare. After 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 c5 4.♗g2 cxd4 5.♘xd4 ♗c5 6.0-0, the move 6...♕b6 makes no sense at all, as White has the simple reply 7.♘b3. I am analysing this line a bit deeper than it perhaps deserves. It is rather obscure, but the ensuing lines are very instructive and show the dynamic potential in these positions. If you feel these sharp lines are a bit 'too much', I'll point to simpler solutions along the way.

6.e3



B1) 6...♘c6 7.0-0

Here, White may also play the conservative 7.♘b3, which after 7...♗e7 8.0-0 ♘f6 9.c4 will probably lead to a Hedgehog structure with a slightly misplaced knight on

c6. White is slightly better in this line. However, the pawn sacrifice move 7.0-0 seems to be stronger to me. Black's whole concept looks a bit silly if you don't take the pawn now or on one of the next moves – and taking the pawn gives White very good compensation.

B11) 7... ♘f6

Black should probably decline the pawn sacrifice at this particular moment.

8.c4



White continues to ignore the threat to d4 and tries to build his ideal set-up with c2-c4 and ♘c3, threatening ♘a4. I need to mention that this position after 8.c4 is actually well-known, contrary to our move order leading to it. It is mostly reached via a move sequence outside of our repertoire such as 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 c5 4.g3 cxd4 5.♘xd4 ♘c6 6.♗g2 ♕b6 7.e3 ♗c5 8.0-0.

B111) 8... ♘xd4

Black should take the pawn now, as after 8...0-0 9.♘c3, he won't be able to even get a pawn, making the whole ...♕b6/...♗c5 operation looking pointless.

9.exd4 ♗xd4 10.♘c3 e5

This seems like the only testing move.

10...0-0 11.♘a4 ♕d6 12.♗f4 e5 13.♗e3. This is forced after 10...0-0. White now threatens c4-c5, winning the pawn back with a great position. I don't see a good way out for Black.

11.♘b5 ♗c5

An alternative for Black is 11...0-0 12.♘xd4 exd4



13.a4 (this is the engine improvement on 13.b3, which is less convincing due to 13...d5! 14.cxd5 ♗g4, giving Black good play) 13...d5 14.cxd5 ♗g4 15.a5 ♕c5 16.♕d2, and White has the advantage here. Important ideas to note are ♖a4 and b2-b4.

12.b4

In for a penny, in for a pound! This second pawn sacrifice gives White a very dangerous attack.

12...♗xb4 13.♗e3 ♗c5 14.a4

This is strong move that needs to be remembered. The key line from here is the following:

14...♗xe3 15.♘d6+ ♔e7 16.♘f5+ ♔f8 17.fxe3

And White converted his menacing attacking position to a win in the game Iturrizaga Bonelli-Ruck, Tegernsee 2017.

B112) 8...0-0



9.♘c3

Taking the pawn now is too dangerous, so Black needs to retreat.

9...♗e7

1) 9...♘xd4 10.♘a4 ♕b4 11.exd4, with an awful position for Black;

2) 9...♗xd4 10.exd4 ♕xd4 11.♕xd4 ♘xd4 12.♗f4, and Black is in huge trouble. The bishop on c8 is in danger of being boxed in forever. The only playable move seems to be to return the pawn: 12...d5 13.♗e5 ♘c6 14.♗xf6 gxf6 15.cxd5. White gets the pawn back with a huge advantage. Black's structure is destroyed.

10.b3

White is comfortably better here, with ♗b2 and ♖c1 to come. It is not clear how Black is organizing his position to develop the c8-bishop.

B12) 7...♘xd4



A principled but very daring decision.

8.exd4 ♗xd4 9.♘c3

Black has a hard time defending this position.

9...♘e7

After 9...♗xc3 10.bxc3, the coming ♗a3 will be devastating. Black's king is stuck in the centre and White's bishops are amazing.

10.♘a4 ♕d6



11. ♖e1

White is now threatening 12. ♗f4, with excellent compensation for the pawn. The immediate 11. ♗f4 is not bad either.

B2) 6...d5



This move was played in a very high-level encounter: Aronian-Carlsen, London Chess Classic 2017.

7.0-0

Aronian tried the inventive 7. ♕g4, but after the equally original reply 7... ♗f8!?, it was not clear what 7. ♕g4 has accomplished after a coming ... ♘f6. I suggest simply castling.

7... ♘f6 8.c4

I also like 8. ♘c3 here, but attacking d5 with c2-c4 is always a tempting option.

8...dxc4

Probably the critical move. How do we get the pawn back?

9.♘d2 ♕a6



Black can't allow ♘xc4 to happen so easily.

10.b4

Well, we don't get the pawn back, but rather we offer a second one! You may also play 10.♕c2 for a quieter game, but the move 10.b4 is too interesting to ignore.

B21) 10...cxb3 11.♘2xb3

The even more 'generous' 11.♗b2 is also interesting.

11...♗e7 12.a4

White has excellent compensation for the pawn. Black needs to defend in a passive position against the active white pieces.

B22) 10...♗xb4 11.♖b1 ♗xd2 12.♘b5

Zwischenzug!

12...0-0



13.♕xd2

White has great compensation in this position. 14.♘c7 is the immediate threat,

and ♗a3 is coming as well.

B23) 10...♗xd4 11.exd4 c3

Otherwise, White plays a2-a4 and b4-b5 with a great position.

12.♘b1 ♘c6 13.♘xc3

White has a very dangerous initiative. Black can't take the pawn on b4 now.

13...♘xb4 14.♕b3 ♕b6 15.♖b1 ♘bd5 16.♕a3 ♕a6



17.♘b5

And White has a decisive attack.

Conclusion

This chapter mostly consists of the line 1.d4 e6 2.♘f3 c5. I examined this in more detail, because I think the resulting play, often involving pawn sacrifices, is very instructive to study for general chess purposes, not only opening study. I suspect that you will not get this line on the board frequently, and so my advice is to study the rough outline of this chapter first, and at a later stage look into the details to gain a better understanding of the dynamics of these positions.

PART IV

Black's sharp and offbeat defences

Introduction and overview

This part of the book deals with Black's non-symmetrical and most confrontational openings. The two main branches in this part are the Benoni systems, which are analysed in Chapters 28-30. These chapters are somewhat special in this book, as we are not able to play in the usual manner with a quick kingside fianchetto. The other large portion in this part is the Dutch Defence. Against the Dutch, the kingside fianchetto set-up is the absolute main line, so White's play will feel very familiar to us.

Chapter 28: 1.d4 c5 and 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5



Chapters 28-30 are about set-ups involving an early ...c7-c5 that is played even before White has committed to the kingside fianchetto. This scenario arises after the moves 1.d4 c5 and 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5. Black plays ...c7-c5 before he has committed any other pawn, like ...e7-e6 or ...g7-g6 first and only then ...c7-c5.

Against this very early ...c7-c5, we should advance the d-pawn and enter the typical Benoni structure. These lines are either just better for White in case of 1.d4 c5 2.d5, or at least difficult to handle for Black after 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5 3.d5. There is also not much else available besides d4-d5. In particular, there is no decent line that

shares some similarities with the other repertoire choices.

I'd like to note that these lines are rare cases in this repertoire, and don't involve a kingside fianchetto. In a Benoni structure, one of Black's main ideas is to play ...b7-b5, and the bishop is much better placed on its starting diagonal to fight against this.

The Benoni systems are split into three chapters. The two most important lines, 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5 3.d5 b5 and 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5 3.d5 g6, are discussed in the two subsequent chapters, while Chapter 28 covers lines starting with 1.d4 c5 and 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5 3.d5 e6.

Chapter 29: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5 3.d5 b5



Playing in Benko Gambit style. This is Black's most principled reply. White 'failed' to play c2-c4, and therefore ...b7-b5 can be played without sacrificing a pawn. Still, this move does not speed up development and is rather risky, as we will see. In Chapter 29, I present a new idea for White, namely the surprisingly dangerous move 4.c3. This move has never been analysed before in a publication (as far as I know), and will pose difficult problems that your opponents need to solve over the board.

Chapter 30: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5 3.d5 g6



In this chapter, we examine the Schmid Benoni, named after the German grandmaster and chief arbiter of the Spassky-Fischer match, Lothar Schmid. Black plays a quick ...g7-g6 after the Benoni structure has been set up. I have chosen the move order 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5 3.d5 g6 to cover it, but it also arises via 1.d4 c5. For example, 2.d5 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.e4 d6 5.♘f3 ♗g7 is a way to enter this chapter. The Schmid Benoni has a reasonably solid, but passive reputation. The analysis in Chapter 30 shows that White maintains a comfortable advantage with relatively simple means.

Chapter 31: 1.d4 f5



The Dutch Defence is one of Black's more daring choices. Black quickly establishes a non-symmetrical pawn structure, characterized by the early move ...f7-f5, most of the time played right on move 1. The Dutch Defence will always lead to complicated play and is often employed by ambitious players going for a win. This ambitious approach is quite risky though, as ...f7-f5 weakens the king significantly, and even on the very first move! I think that White has good prospects against the Dutch Defence, but be ready for a tough fight.

There are some move order tricks for Black, based on starting with other moves,

such as 1...e6, 1...d6 or even 1...d5, and only later playing ...f7-f5. These move order subtleties are not very relevant for our repertoire, as we will fight the Dutch with our standard kingside fianchetto set-up. This g3-based approach is the traditional main line against the Dutch anyway, so our set-up fits perfectly. This universal appeal is particularly important if Black employs the move order tricks mentioned.

Let's have a look at the pure Dutch move order 1.d4 f5. Here, White has a wide choice of moves besides 2.g3 or 2.♘f3/3.g3. I have played 2.♘c3, for instance, trying for a quick e2-e4 push. Now, 2.♘c3 (or some other non-g3 set-up) might be a good line, but what about 1.d4 e6 2.♘f3 f5 ? Or 1.d4 d6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3 f5 ? Black can easily delay the ...f7-f5 move and only enter the Dutch after we have committed to the kingside fianchetto. Therefore, it makes little sense to learn a 1.d4 f5 specific line. Better rely on the g2-g3-systems anyway, as 1.d4/2.♘f3/3.g3/4.♗g2/5.0-0 is a top choice against all Dutch lines.

So we know what to play... what does Black do in the meantime? In fact, the Dutch Defence has three main branches that are quite different in nature.

The first main line for Black is the Classical Dutch. In the Classical Dutch, Black chooses a set-up involving ...e7-e6 and ...♗e7, combined with ...d7-d6. Black often plays for ...e7-e5 later on, based on moves like ...♘c6 or ...♘e4/...♗f6 plans. Our set-up against the Classical will be very similar to the one against the Leningrad. We play against the ...e7-e5 push and prepare to play e2-e4 in the long run. The Classical Dutch and less popular Dutch sidelines are featured in Chapter 31. The other two main branches are the Stonewall (Chapter 32) and the Leningrad (Chapter 33).

Chapter 32: 1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 d5



The Stonewall is based on combining ...f7-f5 with the moves ...e7-e6 and ...d7-d5. Black sets up a wall in the centre, clamping down on the e4-square. At the same time, he weakens e5 quite significantly, a strategic downside that we will try to exploit. Against the Stonewall, I suggest a set-up involving a quick regrouping of the knights, focusing on the hole on e5. The Stonewall is a tough nut to crack, but Chapter 32 shows that White is more comfortably placed, due to his better and more flexible structure.

Chapter 33: 1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6



The most popular Dutch line, the Leningrad, features a kingside fianchetto. Black's dream objective in this line is to achieve a scenario where he manages to play a later ...d7-d6 and ...e7-e5, taking over the initiative in the centre and on the kingside. The Leningrad has some resemblance to the King's Indian, and in fact we will combat the Leningrad similarly with an early b2-b3 and ♗b2, playing against the ...e7-e5 plan. Our long-term goal is to achieve the e2-e4 break in the centre, exposing Black's weaknesses in the centre and on the e-file. The Leningrad leads to combative play and is examined in Chapter 33.

Chapter 34: 1.d4 d6



In this chapter, we will discuss two options for Black that start with 1...d6. The first one is the Wade Defence: 1.d4 d6 2.♘f3 ♗g4. Black's main idea is to take on f3 and create a doubled f-pawn for White. The second option is the Old Indian, based on a quick ...e7-e5 without fianchettoing the king's bishop. Against the Old Indian set-up, we are able to employ our standard approach of completing kingside castling and continuing with c2-c4.

Chapter 35: 1.d4



Every opening book has its 'Odds and ends' chapter – here it is!

We'll have a look at some rare lines that Black may play, including the incorrect Englund Gambit 1...e5 and premature ...b7-b5 lines like 1.d4 b5 and 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 b5.

CHAPTER 28

Benoni sidelines:

1.d4 c5 and 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5

1.d4 c5/1...♘f6 2.♘f3 c5



This chapter covers two move orders. The first one is the earliest possible Benoni invitation with 1.d4 c5 (line A). After 2.d5, White enjoys more space and at least a comfortable advantage. Black more frequently chooses to play 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5, after which we again have to advance the d-pawn to fight for an advantage. After the pawn push 3.d5, the most popular lines for Black are covered in Chapters 29 (3...b5) and 30 (3...g6). This chapter covers a third option, 3...e6, which is discussed in line B below.

A) 1.d4 c5



2.d5

Advancing the pawn is the objectively best reply against 1...c5. We should get some advantage with relatively simple means. I need to mention that it is not possible to just react in a schematic way according to our usual set-up. If we play 2.♘f3 cxd4

3.♘xd4, Black will play ...d7-d5 and ...e7-e5 quickly, kicking our knight around without any concessions. In the line 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 c5 4.♗g2 cxd4 5.0-0, we delay the recapture on d4 and wait for ...♘c6. This is not possible here, as 2.♘f3 cxd4 3.g3 e5! is a clear refutation. So just go 2.d5 and be happy that Black chose to give us space for free.

Now we need to check some options for Black. 2...f5 is very dubious and can be met by direct, aggressive play. On the other hand, 2...e5 is solid for Black, but strategically dubious – we get an excellent space advantage. Finally, 2...e6 and 2...♘f6 will mostly transpose elsewhere, but have points worth mentioning.

A1) 2...f5



The Clarendon Court Defence. The best thing about it is the fancy-sounding name – if you know how to reply. It can turn out to be tricky if you don't know what to do.

3.e4

This or 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e4 is basically the refutation of Black's opening concept.

3...fxe4 4.♘c3 ♘f6 5.♘ge2

5.♘h3 is also excellent for White.

5...g6 6.♘g3



And we can stop here already. White is getting the pawn back at will, and a quick h2-h4-h5 is extremely dangerous for Black. Note that Black has many weaknesses, in particular after the inevitable ...d7-d6, the e6-square and the e-file will be problematic.

A2) 2...e5

The so-called Old Benoni or Czech Benoni. Black intends to close the centre and then play with the pawn advances ...b7-b5 and/or ...f7-f5. The main problem for Black is that these will never happen under favourable circumstances if White plays well. One important nuance is that White has not played a pawn to c4, a square that will prove very useful for a knight. One key idea for Black in this structure is to trade his bad bishop with an early ... ♗f8-e7-g5, but we have a good antidote to this approach.

3.e4 d6 4.♘c3



Now, Black mostly chooses between immediately trying to trade the e7-bishop (A21) or castling first (A22).

A21) 4... ♗e7 5.♘f3 a6 6.a4

Whenever Black plays ...a7-a6, you respond with a2-a4. Black's ...b7-b5 play needs

to be stopped.

6... ♗g4



7.b3

I only learned of this idea while researching for this book. I like it a lot, as it is directly aimed at stopping/defanging Black's main idea of trading with ...♗e7-g5. Whenever you can play against or even stop your opponent's main idea, it is often the best thing to do. They might not know any other idea than the main one!

7... ♘d7 8.h3 ♗xf3 9.♕xf3 ♗g5 10.♗b2

The point of b2-b3, just not agreeing to the trade and asking the g5-bishop what it is doing on the exposed g5-square, all on its own. In fact, the bishop can easily become a target.

10... ♘e7 11.h4 ♗h6



12.♗d3

12.g4 f6 is also better for White, but somewhat hasty. Black has zero counterplay in this position, and we can slowly build up. A nice idea is to regroup the knight with ♘c3-d1-e3, looking at key squares such as c4, f5 and g4.

A21) 4...♘f6

Black sometimes castles first and only then tries to prepare ...♗f8-e7-g5, combined with ...f7-f5 ideas.

5.♘f3 ♗e7



6.♘d2

Heading towards c4. I need to emphasize that White has many ways to be better, and this is not the only approach that gives White an edge.

6...0-0 7.♗d3

I prefer this square to e2. The bishop covers e4 and is more relevant in case of a later ...f7-f5 push.

7...♘e8 8.0-0 ♗g5 9.a4

There is nothing wrong with the immediate 9.♘c4 either, but I like the idea of making some useful moves and seeing how Black decides on his further plans.

9...♘d7 10.b3

We might play ♗b2 soon, connected with a long-term plan to play f2-f4 later on after due preparation (♘e2, ♔h1, g2-g3, f2-f4, for example).

10...g6



This is part of Black's set-up, intending ...♘g7 and ...f7-f5, but it is a move that weakens the dark squares. Therefore, we now are happy to trade the g5-bishop.

11.♘c4 ♗xc1 12.♕xc1

Now f2-f4 is a serious idea, in particular after Black has played ...f7-f5.

12...f5 13.f4

With an excellent position for White. We are much better prepared for the battle in the centre and Black's kingside is weakened.

A3) 2...e6 3.♘c3

I recommend playing this first instead of 3.e4, so that you are able to recapture on d5 with the knight. Of course, 3.e4 exd5 4.exd5 is fine for White, but ♘xd5 is a common theme in our repertoire against similar lines, for instance, 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5 3.d5 e6 4.♘c3 exd5 5.♘xd5 (B in this chapter). Now, we will very likely transpose to line B, as a natural sequence like 3...d6 4.e4 ♘f6 5.♘f3 shows.

A4) 2...♘f6 3.♘c3

Of course, 3.♘f3 would simply transpose to 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5 3.d5, but going 3.♘c3 first gives Black the opportunity to go wrong in a particular line that is played surprisingly often.

3...e6

This is the line I was talking about. Against other moves like 3...g6, 3...d6 or 3...e5, we just transpose to lines covered elsewhere after the standard moves 4.e4 and 5.♘f3 next. One common example is 3...d6 4.e4 g6 5.♘f3 ♗g7 6.♗c4, and we have transposed to Chapter 30.

4.e4 exd5

This is huge mistake, but still frequently-played. Black should play 4...d6, which transposes to a line covered via 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5 3.d5 e6 4.♘c3 d6 (B in this chapter).



5.e5!

Surprisingly, many players have routinely recaptured on d5 instead. After 5.e5, Black is basically lost already.

5...♘g8

1) 5...d4 6.exf6 dxc3 7.♕e2+, and White wins a piece;

2) 5...♕e7 6.♕e2 ♘e4 7.♘xd5 ♕xe5 8.c4, and it's over: White threatens both ♗f4 and f2-f3, winning.

6.♕xd5

With a fantastic position for White.

B) 1...♘f6 2.♘f3 c5



3.d5

Just like after 1.d4 c5, there is no decent alternative to this push that would fit into our repertoire concept. The only other ambitious move is 3.c4, but that would lead us far away from our usual lines. It happens to be that 3.d5 is the best move here, so we should go for it. Black has some options after 3.d5. The most popular and important ones are 3...b5 and 3...g6, which are covered in the subsequent Chapters 29 and 30. Black may also play 3...d6, but this has little independent value after

4.♘c3, as Black needs to commit now to a pawn formation with 4...g6 (Chapter 30), 4...e5 (see line A above in this chapter) or 4...e6, which leads to a line covered in this chapter below, starting with 3...e6.

3...e6



Black is trying to play into a Modern Benoni after 4.c4 exd5 5.cxd5, but we are not complying.

4.♘c3

I have always liked this line for White. We will maintain a small advantage, and Black won't have many active possibilities. This makes the line especially effective against Benoni players, who are usually aiming for confrontational play.

With 3...e6, Black has signalled the intention to take on d5, and 4...exd5 is indeed the most common move in this position. We will examine this in B2 below, but we also need to check the aggressive pawn sacrifice 4...b5 (B1) and attempts to delay the capture on d5 (B3).

B1) 4...b5



This is sometimes played by fans of the Blumenfeld Gambit (1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5

3.d5 e6 4.c4 b5). Here, the situation is somewhat different and the pawn sacrifice seems incorrect.

5.dxe6 fxe6 6.♘xb5 d5

Another possible line is 6...♕a5+ 7.♘c3 d5 8.♗d2 ♕b6



9.e4. This type of move is important to remember in this line. Black has weakened his central structure and lacks the f-pawn. We should not play passively, but rather open up the game and try to attack Black.

7.♘c3

The engines also suggest 7.e4 ♘xe4 8.c4, but this move is simple and good. We are preparing e2-e4 on the next move.

7...♘c6



8.e4 d4 9.♘b5

Black's position is hard to defend here. Taking on e4 now is very risky.

9...♘xe4 10.♗d3 ♘f6 11.♗f4

With an excellent game for White. Black wanted to take over the initiative with 4...b5, but now he's on the defensive. Remember the idea to break with e2-e4 in the centre, as it is a strong reply to the pawn sacrifice 4...b5.

B2) 4...exd5 5.♘xd5 ♘xd5

An alternative for Black may be 5...d6 6.e4. Instead, 6.♗g5 is also promising, but we have already covered the position after 6.e4 via 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5 3.d5 e6 4.♘c3 d6 5.♘c3 exd5 6.♘xd5. I'd like to keep the general approach consistent. Our aim is to keep d5 controlled by a piece, supported by the pawn on e4.

6.♕xd5

In this position, Black has some desirable moves such as ...d7-d6, ...♗e7, ...0-0 and ...♘c6. He may play these in many orders, which makes an initial study of this line without any guidance quite challenging. Things are not that complicated actually, once you realize that White just plays the same set-up almost every time, involving e2-e4 and ♗c4 next. We will try to keep control over the d5-square with a piece, keeping a structural advantage.

There are two notable exceptions. If Black plays the imprecise move 6...d6 (B21) now, we can immediately punish him by playing 7.♘g5. The second exception is the move order 6...♘c6 7.e4 ♗e7 (B22), which allows White to play for a direct attack on the king.

B21) 6...d6



This move order is imprecise and can be exploited with a forced line.

7.♘g5

7.e4 would transpose to a line that we have in our repertoire as well, but the knight jump is directly heading for a refutation of Black's move order.

7...♕e7

This artificial-looking move is well motivated. The other queen moves have a tactical flaw: 7...♕c7 (instead, 7...♕d7 would have the same consequences)



8.♘xh7. Snatching a pawn based on the check on e4. The engines evaluate 8.♗f4 even higher, but taking the pawn is enough: 8...♖xh7 9.♕e4+. A good job by the knight and queen.

8.♗f4

Now, White just intends to pile up on the d6-pawn. Moves like ♘e4 and 0-0-0 are on the cards.

8...♗e6

What else?

9.♘xe6 fxe6 10.♕b3

White is much better here. We will castle queenside and maintain annoying pressure on Black's weakened central structure.

B22) 6...♘c6 7.e4



7...♗e7

Here, Black should probably rather play 7...d6, but after 8.♗c4 ♗e6 9.♕d3, White keeps a small advantage, maintaining control over the d5-square and having d6 as a useful target. Black has one direct equalizing try that must be checked: 9...♘b4 10.♕e2 ♗xc4 11.♕xc4 d5 12.exd5 ♕xd5 13.♕e2+ ♕e6 14.♕xe6+ fxe6 15.♔d1, and

White keeps a nagging edge. The e6-pawn is weak, as are the squares in front of it (e4 and e5). Both squares will be useful posts for white pieces.

8.♗c4 0-0 9.♕h5

There is nothing wrong with a slower approach like 9.0-0, but this queen position on h5 is menacing for Black.

I think that the defence is not easy at all to conduct, even though White's idea is rather crude: go for h2-h4 and ♘g5!.

9...d6



10.h4

We are setting up ♘g5, a threat that is not at all easy to defend against.

10...♕e8

This is the only move to properly defend against ♘g5: 10...h6 11.♗xh6 gxh6 12.♕g6+ ♔h8 13.♕xh6+ ♔g8 14.♘g5, and mate is unavoidable!

11.♗d2

Queenside castling is the obvious idea. The immediate 11.♘g5 fails, due to 11...♗xg5 12.hxg5 ♕xe4+. Now, Black is under heavy pressure. The engines don't see a great solution for Black and suggest the following line:

11...♘d4 12.♘xd4 cxd4



13.0-0-0

And White is better. We don't need to give mate to win here, as the pawn structure is also very favourable for us.

B23) 6...♗e7 7.e4

Keeping the game in line with the standard set-up. In this particular move order, 7.♗f4 is also good for White, intending to castle queenside quickly.

7...0-0 8.♗c4 d6



9.0-0

Here, 9.♕h5 is not as promising as it is with the knight on c6. Black would have ...♘b8-d7-f6 available to defend the kingside here. Therefore, I suggest playing for a long-term pull and castling kingside instead.

9...♘d7 10.♕d3

We should preserve the bishop and step out of the ...♘b6 fork.

10...♘b6 11.♗b3 ♗g4 12.c3

White has a slight advantage here. Black is not able to get rid of the weaknesses d6 and d5 so easily. Playing the bishop to f4 and placing a rook on d1 is an obvious

follow-up. If Black threatens to fork us with ...c5-c4, we should consider ♘d2, for example in the following line:

12...♖c8 13.♘d2 ♗e6



14.♘c4

And again, we have managed to prevent ...d6-d5, keeping the long-term pluses.

B3) 4...d6

Black delays the capture on d5.

5.e4

Now, the most important thing to remember is that in case of 5...exd5 or 5...a6 6.a4 exd5, we still recapture with the knight, as e4 is a poisoned pawn. The most likely scenario is actually that Black takes on d5 after all, after which ♕xd5 leads us to the lines discussed under B2 above.

Before we check these scenarios, we should briefly discuss 5...♗e7 as well, which is punished by concrete play.

B31) 5...♗e7

After this move, White achieves a permanent advantage by direct means.

6.♗b5+ ♗d7

6...♘bd7 does not work at all: 7.dxe6 fxe6 8.♘g5, and Black is lost, being unable to defend e6.

7.dxe6

This starts a forced sequence that leads to an edge for White.

7...fxe6



8.e5 dxe5 9.♘xe5 ♗xb5 10.♕xd8+ ♗xd8 11.♘xb5

This was forced after 6.♗b5+. White is better forever, due to the damaged black pawn formation.

B32) 5...exd5 6.♘xd5

Now, Black usually takes on d5, which will transpose to the earlier capture on d5 via 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5 3.d5 e6 4.♘c3 exd5 5.♘xd5 ♘xd5 6.♕xd5.

6...♘xe4

As mentioned, this pawn is poisoned. Black may also play 6...♗e7, after which 7.♗c4 leads to a position that we examine under B33 below with the additional moves ...a7-a6 and a2-a4.

7.♕e2 f5



8.♘g5

And White is crashing through on the e-file.

B33) 5...a6

An interesting move order twist, stopping annoying checks on b5.

6.a4

As usual, just play a2-a4 against ...a7-a6.

6...♗e7

Of course, the natural 6...exd5 7.♘xd5 ♘xd5 8.♕xd5 is also possible and leads to a familiar position type, but here the additional moves ...a7-a6 and a2-a4 have been inserted. The play is very similar, so I'll stop here – just go with ♗c4 next and claim a slight advantage.

7.♗c4

This should lead to the standard position type with ♘xd5 after the following sequence.

7...exd5 8.♘xd5

Now, e4 is poisoned and can't be taken by Black.

8...♘xe4 9.0-0

Now, ♖e1 is a huge threat.

9...0-0

Black may also play 9...♘f6 10.♘g5 0-0



11.♕d3, and White has a decisive attack, for example, after the following moves: 11...g6 12.♖e1 ♘xd5 13.♕xd5 ♕e8 14.♗f4. Black can't prevent ♗xd6 and is lost.

10.♖e1 ♗f5 11.♗d3

And White wins a piece.

Conclusion

White is better in all the lines covered in this chapter. They are still encountered from time to time at the club level, so studying them will net you many excellent positions out of the opening. The relatively best line for Black is to play 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5 3.d5 e6, but this is also comfortable for White and not the type of position

a Benoni player intends to get.

CHAPTER 29

Anti-Benko: 1.d4 ♘f6 2. ♘f3 c5 3.d5 b5

1.d4 ♘f6 2. ♘f3 c5 3.d5 b5



4.c3

Here, 4. ♗g5 is the overwhelming main line. The move 4.c3 is actually very rare, and *Megabase 2019* only has 9 games with it, compared to more than 2000 with 4. ♗g5. I started to look at 4.c3 after realizing that engines like the move, and it has been recently played by players like Ferenc Berkes and Nikola Sedlak, two creative opening researchers.

So, what's the idea behind 4.c3 ? It's not the most obvious move. The idea becomes a little clearer if we look at the move sequence 4.e4 ♘xe4 5. ♗xb5 ♕a5+, which loses a piece for White. With 4.c3, White actually enables this idea, for instance, after 4.c3 g6 5.e4 ♘xe4 6. ♗xb5. As we will see, this trade of e-pawn vs b-pawn is very good for White most of the time. This is not the only benefit of 4.c3. The move is useful to prepare a2-a4, as ...b5-b4 is not as easily playable with a pawn on c3.

On a very general note, it is important to see that in the main line of 4. ♗g5, quite often White plays c2-c3 at a later stage, for example, after something like 4. ♗g5 ♕b6 5. ♗xf6 ♕xf6 6.c3,



the pawn is useful to blunt a queen or more often a bishop on the long diagonal. I need to emphasize that 4.c3 is a basically unknown idea at this point, and Black players are very unlikely to have any preparation against it. The coming play is more concrete and tactical than usual in our repertoire, but we still have an easier task than our opponents, who will be on their own from move 4.

A) 4...♕b6



This move was played by Boris Gelfand against Jovanka Houska in the Isle of Man tournament in 2018. Two notable points: firstly, Houska is the author of some excellent books and an opening expert. Secondly, Gelfand is the highest rated player who faced the 4.c3 idea, and therefore his response is certainly worth studying. He took more than 16 minutes for the move, showing that he had to work hard over the board.

5.♘bd2

I suggest this improvement on the mentioned game. Houska played 5.a4 b4 6.c4, which is not in the spirit of this line in my opinion. White should keep c4 open for

the knights. The move 5.♘bd2 is very tricky for Black to handle and it would have been interesting to see how Gelfand would have reacted.

A1) 5...e6

This seems to be the best. Black needs to do something quickly.

6.e4 exd5



7.e5

Again, White is getting a dangerous initiative.

7...♘e4

I doubt that a human would play the move 7...♘g8, but the reply is instructive: 8.a4 bxa4 9.c4 (very nice play, fighting for the central square e4) 9...d4 10.♗d3. White has excellent play here. We castle and play ♖e1 and ♘e4 next. How is Black developing his pieces?

8.a4

Again, fighting for the c4-square.

8...♘xd2

An alternative for Black may be 8...b4: 9.♘xe4 dxe4 10.♘g5 (here, we see a point of provoking ...b5-b4. Without the moves a2-a4 and ...b5-b4, Black now would be able to play ...♗b7. Here, this is impossible because of ♗c4!) 10...♗e7 (after 10...♗b7 11.♗c4, White wins) 11.♘xe4, and we have regained the pawn with a nice central advantage.

9.♕xd2

Now d5 and b5 are attacked, making sure that we win the pawn back with a good position. We are much better developed, and the e-pawn is establishing a useful space advantage.

9...♗b7



10.axb5

White is better here. Note that ♕f4 is a good way to make use of the odd queen position on d2.

A2) 5...♘xd5



This must be a critical move: did we just blunder the d-pawn?

6.a4

A very strong reply. We are fighting for control of the c4-square, and trying to play ♘c4 with a tempo on the black queen. Black has a difficult choice now.

6...b4

I think that this is the most likely move to happen. It is impossible to look at all possible alternatives, but White has good chances everywhere, as far as I and the engines can see.

An alternative is 6...♘c7. Black retreats prophylactically, anticipating e2-e4 by

White. I will show one possible line that illustrates White's set-up: 7.axb5 ♕xb5 8.e4 ♕b7 9.♗c4 e6 10.0-0 ♗e7



11.e5. White has excellent compensation for the pawn. Moves like ♖e1, ♘e4 are natural follow-ups. Black will have a hard time defending on the kingside.



7.♘c4 ♕c6 8.♘ce5 ♕d6

Or another queen move: 8...♕b7 9.e4 ♘f6



10.♘g5. Ouch! This is not as winning as it looks at first sight, though: 10...h6 11.♘gxf7 ♕xe4+ 12.♗e2 (we are not just attacking h8, but also plan to just castle and play ♗f3) 12...♗a6 13.♘xh8 ♕xe5 14.cxb4 ♗xe2 15.♕xe2 ♕xe2+ 16.♔xe2 cxb4 17.♘g6, and we have kept the extra material and should win in the long run.



9.e4 ♘f6 10.♗d3

White has very good compensation for the pawn. Black's defence is very tough to master.

I will check two moves to show some ideas:

1) 10...♗b7 11.♘c4 ♕c7 12.e5 d5 and now:



13.♘d6+ (a nice counter-punch!) 13...exd6 14.exf6, with a great attack for White after the coming 0-0 and ♖e1;

2) 10...♘c6 11.♘xc6 ♕xc6 12.cxb4 cxb4 13.♗f4 (White's development advantage reaches decisive proportions. ♖c1 is coming next) 13...♘xe4 (this does not work at all) 14.♘d4 ♕d5 15.♘b5, and this is far too much to handle for Black.

A3) 5...g6

I'd like to show how bad such a normal-looking move is. The following line is not completely forced, but shows some typical ideas.

6.e4 d6



7.a4

Mixing ...♕b6 and ...g7-g6 did not turn out well.

7...b4 8.♗b5+ ♗d7 9.♘c4 ♕b7 10.e5

Now Black is struggling not to lose immediately. A quick way to end it goes like this: 10...♘xd5 11.♘a5. A good job by the knight!

B) 4...g6



This looks very natural, but it seems to be advantageous for White.

5.e4

The direct idea of 4.c3: if Black leaves b5 unprotected, we will play e2-e4 next. White is threatening e4-e5 and the b5-pawn, so:

5...♘xe4 6.♗xb5



Black will have problems on the e-file. A reasonable continuation is:

6...♗g7 7.0-0 0-0 8.♖e1 ♘f6

Black may also play 8...♘d6, but after 9.♗f1 ♗a6 (otherwise, White may play c3-c4 and lock out the c8-bishop) 10.♗g5, White has an excellent game here. The pressure on e7 and Black's awkward piece placement is obvious.

9.c4 d6



10. ♘c3

This position was reached in the game Sedlak-Milanovic, Serbia tt 2018. White has useful pressure on the e-file, and Black lacks clear counterplay.

C) 4...a6

This move has not been tried yet, but seeing the other lines, it makes some sense to check it. At least White now can't play e2-e4 straight away, because b5 is covered.

5. ♗g5



White argues that, compared to 4. ♗g5, the insertion of ...a7-a6 and c2-c3 should be more useful for him. The lines I checked support this view. We will look at the most popular options against 4. ♗g5.

c1) 5...♕b6

When I analysed the 1.d4 ♘f6 2. ♘f3 c5 3.d5 b5 line for my Benko-based repertoire, I came to the conclusion that Black should play 4...♕b6 in reply to the main 4. ♗g5. Inserting c2-c3 and ...a7-a6, however, makes ...♕b6 less attractive for Black.

6.a4



6...bxa4

This looks ugly, but the alternative 6...b4 does not convince either: 7.a5 (a useful tempo. This move isolates the b4-pawn and allows ♕a4 in some lines) 7...♕d6 8.♗xf6 ♕xf6 9.e4. Black is in trouble here, as the following sample line illustrates: 9...d6 10.♕a4+ ♗d7



11.♕b3, and the black queenside is falling apart.

7.♖xa4

I also looked at 7.♘bd2, which is very dangerous as well.

7...♕xb2



8.e4

White has a great position for just a pawn. We will develop with ♗e2 and 0-0. The b1-knight will have a good position on c4. I think that this is terribly difficult to handle for Black, even though the traditional engines don't see it as that bad. LeelaZero likes White, though!

C2) 5...d6 6.a4

Here, we see a difference to the line without ...a7-a6 and c2-c3 inserted.

6...b4 7.cxb4 cxb4 8.♗xf6 exf6



9.a5

This position is strategically very dubious for Black. There are multiple possible outposts like b6 and c6 for White and the b4-pawn is just weak.

c3) 5...♘e4



This is dubious after 4.♗g5, and the insertion of ...a7-a6 and c2-c3 does not change this general assessment. There is one line I'd like to show to point out a difference.

6.♗h4 ♗b7

Without the moves ...a7-a6 and c2-c3 played, White has the strong move 4.♗g5 ♘e4 5.♗h4 ♗b7 6. a4!, which basically refutes the line. Here, 7.a4 is also OK, but there is a better move available.

7.♕d3

Just trying to kick the knight away, to follow up with e2-e4 next.

7...f5

Otherwise we will play e2-e4. 7...♘f6 8.e4 gives White a good game, being just much better in the centre.



8.♘bd2

Again, it's time to compare to 4.♗g5 ♘e4 5.♗h4 ♗b7 6.♕d3 (6.a4! is stronger) f5 7.♘bd2. In this line, 7...♘a6! or 7...c4 8.♕d4 ♘a6! saves the day for Black.

8...c4 9.♕d4

Now, Black has nothing better than

9...♘xd2 10.♕xd2



White is better here. Black has weaknesses like the odd-looking f5-pawn and bad development.

D) 4...e6



5.e4

If Black fails to cover b5 on move 4, we will play e2-e4 next, attacking the pawn.

5... ♘xe4

1) 5... ♕b6 6. ♘bd2, with a transposition to the line 4... ♕b6 5. ♘bd2 e6 6.e4. White has promising alternatives in 6.a4 and the simple 6.dxe6, but the transposition is enough to know;

2) 5...exd5.



This loses to an often overlooked idea: 6.e5. This is much better than automatically recapturing. White is already winning now, as both d5 and b5 will fall.

6.♗xb5

I think this position is promising for White. After the coming capture on e6, Black's centre will be rather weak than strong, and there are potential issues on the king-side as well. We need to check a concrete line to illustrate this point.

6...♗e7 7.0-0 ♗b7 8.dxe6 fxe6 9.♗d3 0-0 10.♕e2 ♘f6 11.♘a3

This is a good square for the knight. It makes moves like ...♕c7/...♕b6 unattractive and has the prospect of going to c4 later. We will continue with ♗f4/♗g5 and ♖ad1, putting pressure on Black's d7- and e6-pawns.

E) 4...♗b7 5.e4



As usual, we are going to push e2-e4 if Black does not cover b5 on move 4.

5...♘xe4 6.♗xb5 e6 7.dxe6 fxe6 8.♕e2

And we will very likely transpose to the line 4.c3 e6 5.e4.

8...♗e7 9.0-0 0-0



10. ♗d3

And we have transposed to line D above.

Conclusion

When I started the research for this book, I was not aware that 4.c3 is an option at all. It was fascinating to see how dangerous this new idea is for Black. He will very likely not have prepared anything against the move, as it is not covered yet in any publication. Even after some analysis, I don't see a reliable way for Black to equalize.

CHAPTER 30

Schmid Benoni: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5 3.d5 g6

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5 3.d5 g6



4.♘c3 ♗g7

Of course, Black may also play 4...d6 first and ...♗g7 on the next move.

5.e4

Now, Black has a fundamental choice between the sharper, but dubious move 5...0-0 and the more solid, but passive 5...d6.

A) 5...0-0

This move order is played to avoid the line 5...d6 6.♗b5+, but it has a serious flaw.



6.e5!

We have to accept this invitation. White is better now, but it is quite sharp. It is important to understand Black's idea. Against 5...d6, our set-up starts with 6.♗c4. Now 6.♗c4 gets hit by 6...b5!, a tactic that is justified by the point 7.♗xb5 ♘xe4!, with good play for Black. Here, we have a case of needing to pick up the gauntlet.

A1) 6...♘g4 7.♘g5

A very nice shot. Black needs to be very precise to avoid a quick loss.

7...d6

1) 7...♘h6 leads to an attack that Black should not survive: 8.h4 f6 (8...♗xe5 9.h5 ♗g7



10.♘xh7 (no need for preparation anymore. Black is busted on move 10) 10...♔xh7 11.hxg6+ fxg6 12.♗xh6 ♗xh6 13.♕d2, and we get into 'Mate in x' territory) 9.♘ge4. 9.♘f3 is strong as well. I don't see a defence for Black against both moves. One sample line runs 9...♘f7 10.h5 ♘xe5 11.hxg6 hxg6 12.f4 ♘f7 13.♕g4, and White wins quickly;

2) 7...♘xe5



8.f4, and the knight is trapped in the middle of the board.

8.e6 ♘xf2

The only chance for Black to at least stir up some trouble. 8...f5 9.h3 ♘f6 10.h4 is a devastating attack, with the pawn wedge d5/e6 killing off the whole black queenside army.

9.♔xf2

You may also play 9.exf7+ ♖xf7 10.♘xf7 ♘xd1 11.♘xd8 ♘xc3 12.♗c4, leading to an advantage as well.

9...fxe6+ 10.♘f3

And Black does not have enough compensation.

A2) 6...♘e8

This is less of a challenge than 6....♘g4. White gets a strong attack with simple means.



7.h4 d6

7...h5 does not help at all to slow down White: 8.♗d3 (the engine already claims a white win with 8.g4, but this simple move leaves Black short of an answer) 8...d6 9.e6. The point of placing the bishop on d3. Black is falling apart on the kingside.

8.h5 ♗g4

Black may also play 8...dxe5 9.hxg6 hxg6 (or taking with the f-pawn: 9...fxg6



10.♘g5 and White not only has a strong attack, but also an excellent outpost on e4 now. Black has a hard time defending this position) 10.♗h6. White's attack is too strong, with a quick ♕d2 and 0-0-0 coming.

9.hxg6 fxg6 10.♗e2

This is a very strong move! We are threatening to play 11.♘g5, thus forcing Black to take on f3.

10...♗xf3 11.♗xf3 ♗xe5



12. ♘e4

The point of 10.♗e2. Now, Black lacks the light-squared bishop badly, with ♘g5 and ♗g4 coming soon. White has a very strong attack that the engines already evaluate as winning.

B) 5...d6



6. ♗c4

I'll explain why this is a good move after both sides have castled.

6...0-0 7.0-0

Let's discuss why putting the bishop on c4 is useful. Isn't this square usually the target square for the f3-knight? Yes, this is absolutely true, but there are other relevant points. A very concrete point is that, compared to the more standard 6.♗e2 0-0 7.0-0 line, now 7...e6 is questionable. In other set-ups based on 7...♘a6 or 7...a6, the bishop also proves to be useful on c4, supporting d5 in preparation of the pawn push to e5. We should check some concrete lines to illustrate ideas.

B1) 7...♗g4



This move is quite frequently seen in the Modern Benoni (imagine the current position without the pawns on c2 and e7). Black correctly sees little active ideas for the c8-bishop and does not mind trading it. However, contrary to the Modern Benoni Black has fewer possibilities for counterplay. There is no play on the half-open e-file, for instance. I don't think Black can equalize with 7...♗g4, but this was my relatively best line for Black when I analysed from their point of view.

8.h3 ♗xf3 9.♕xf3 ♘bd7 10.♕d1

We have pocketed the bishop pair, but it was rather time-consuming. However, the issue for Black is that he has no clear play. He has a space disadvantage and should try to free himself, but it is not easy to do. Playing ...e7-e6 seems unrealistic, and ...b7-b5 is not easy to get in either.

10...♘e8

Black is aiming for ...b7-b5.

11.a4 ♘c7 12.♖e1 b6

Black usually starts with ...b7-b6 first, because after 12...a6 13.a5, pushing the b-pawn leads to some weaknesses. 13...b5 14.axb6 ♘xb6



15.♗e2, and the a-pawn remains a liability. A good plan for White is to play the bishop to f4 or e3, followed by ♕d2. The bishop trade via h6 would be useful, as the g7-bishop is certainly Black's best piece.

13.♗g5 a6



14.♕d2

With a fine position for White. Black might manage to play ...♖b8 and ...b6-b5, but then we are already on the open a-file. We also have the aggressive idea of playing with f2-f4 later.

B2) 7...♘a6



This set-up is a main line with the bishop on e2. In fact, the bishop is later relocated to c4 anyway in this line, so we might save a full tempo.

8.♖e1 ♘c7 9.♗f4

We'd like to push e4-e5 long term, so this centralization looks very harmonious.

9...a6 10.a4 b6 11.h3 ♗b7



12.♕d3

I like White's position a lot. We are perfectly centralized, and Black has few active possibilities. Black always needs to watch out for e4-e5 breakthroughs, and ♕e3/♗h6 is a useful option as well. For a model illustration of White's chances, you should study the final game of the Karpov-Kortchnoi match in 1978. In this game, Karpov had played ♗e2-c4, reaching the position basically a tempo down. When I started to study 6.♗c4, I immediately thought of that game. It highlighted that the bishop can prove to be very useful on c4.

B3) 7...a6



8.a4

After any ...a7-a6 in the Benoni, just play a2-a4 and stop ...b7-b5. Now I will stop this line, as Black will probably play 8...♘bd7 or 8...♗g4, which leads to position types reached via those moves on move 7. The insertion of ...a7-a6 and a2-a4 might happen at any time in the Benoni set-ups.

B4) 7...e6

This move is possible and quite good with the bishop on e2 instead of c4. Here it is dubious, as we will see.

8.dxe6

The engines also love 8.♗f4 or 8.♗g5, and I agree that these moves are good. However, they lead to positions where some experience in closed King's Indian structures is very useful. I feel that it is simpler to just capture on e6 and be better with a concrete line.

8...♗xe6

Taking with the pawn is not a good option: 8...fxe6



9.e5. Black's structure is shattered now, with the e6-pawn being particularly weak.

9.♗xe6 fxe6 10.♗f4

Here 10.e5 is less convincing, as 10...dxe5 11.♘xe5 ♘d5! shows a crucial difference to the position with bishops stills being on c4 and c8.

10...♘e8

1) 10...♘xe4 11.♘xe4 ♖xf4



12.♘fg5. The central pawns are weak and a useful target. Note that this move is stronger than the immediate 12.♕xd6, as we basically win a tempo compared to that line. The tactics now work nicely for White. One sample line: 12...♕e7 13.♕xd6 ♕xd6 14.♘xd6 ♗xb2 15.♖ab1 ♗e5 16.g3 ♖b4 17.♘xb7, and White will win a pawn;

2) 10...d5



11.♗g5 is a very important move to remember! Now, Black can't handle the pressure on the centre anymore. The best line for him is the following: 11...♕d7 12.exd5 ♘xd5 13.♘e4, and White enjoys a long-term strategic advantage, due to the multiple weaknesses in Black's camp.

11.♗g3

White has some useful pressure on the d6-pawn, with moves like ♕d3 and ♖ad1 to follow.

B5) 7...♘bd7 8.♖e1

This is a universally useful move. Very long-term, pushing e4-e5 is part of White's arsenal.

8...♘g4

Black tries to trade a knight to get more space for the pieces.

9.♗f1

With ...♘e5, Black will attack the bishop anyway, so we might as well move it away prophylactically.

9...♘ge5 10.♘xe5 ♘xe5



11.h3

I wanted to highlight this idea. Now the knight looks fine on e5, but what is Black's next idea? You can't play ...♗d7, due to f2-f4, because h2-h3 took away the crucial g4-square for the knight. White has may useful moves, like a2-a4 and ♗g5/♕d2 for example. Sometimes, Black plays with ...f7-f5 in a structure like this, but it weakens e7 and the e6-square enormously.

Conclusion

The Schmid Benoni is solid, but also rather passive for Black. The slow lines in B above don't require much move-by-move knowledge, but line A is rather provocative and should be punished with swift attacking play. It pays off to learn these lines, as the reward will often be a completely winning position out of the opening.

CHAPTER 31

Dutch Defence – Classical and rare lines: 1.d4 f5

1.d4 f5



As mentioned, Black may also start with moves like 1...d6, 1...g6, or 1...e6 and play ...f7-f5 on the next moves to transpose into the Dutch. It does not bother us at all, as our standard moves fit into the anti-Dutch repertoire perfectly.

2.♘f3

No surprise, we play 2.♘f3 almost all of the time. I'd like to point out that 2.g3 would also be perfectly viable to reach the lines that we are going to examine. It would avoid a line allowed by 2.♘f3, namely 2...♘f6 3.g3 b6, but this is good for White anyway. The usual argument in favour of 2.g3 over 2.♘f3 is the flexibility regarding the g1-knight. It might be well-placed on h3 in some lines, for example, this is a decent option against the Stonewall. Now, this is all nice and good, but we need to keep in mind that Black may start with 1...e6/1...g6/1...d6/1...d5 and later go the Dutch route. In those cases, we are committed to ♘f3 anyway, so it makes little sense to study 2.g3 here and make your move orders more complicated for relatively little benefit.

2...♘f6

The knight definitely belongs on f6 in the Dutch, emphasizing control over the e4-square and developing the kingside – keep in mind that 1...f5 was not exactly a developing move! Other moves than 2...♘f6 usually just delay the move slightly, ultimately transposing back into lines examined via 2...♘f6.

3.g3

A) 3...e6 4.♗g2 ♗e7

Black develops the bishop first, still not committing if he is going for a Classical Dutch or a Stonewall.

5.0-0 0-0

Here, 5...d5 transposes to the Stonewall, covered via 1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 d5 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.c4.

6.c4



6...d6

Black goes for the Classical Dutch. As the name suggests, it is one of the older lines in the Dutch opening. The Classical Dutch does not enjoy a good reputation, but it is not so simple to play against it. The world's leading expert on the Classical Dutch, Ginger GM Simon Williams, has used it to defeat top players, including World Championship challenger Boris Gelfand! In the Classical Dutch, Black is not yet committing to a certain set-up, but is somewhat flexible. One idea for Black is to play a quick ...♘e4, usually followed by ...♗f6, ...d7-d6 and going for ...e6-e5. Another idea is to play with ...♕d8-e8-h5, getting the queen closer to the white king.

My take on this opening is: the only idea that concerns me is Black playing for ...e6-e5. If we manage to prevent this plan or defuse it, we will be better. This sounds like we are on the defence, but this is not the case. We are dealing with an opening in which White will be much better if 'nothing bad' happens – we have the automatic plans such as going for e2-e4 or expanding on the queenside in the long run. Instead of 6...d6, Black may also transpose into the Stonewall in various ways, such as 6...d5 or 6...c6 7.♘bd2 d5. Against the Stonewall, we play ♘bd2 and ♘e5, as analysed in Chapter 32.

With 6...♘e4, Black plans to play ...♗f6 next, aiming at a later ...d7-d6 and ...e6-e5. It won't happen after our reply 7.♘bd2: 7...♗f6 (here, Black should probably play 7...d5 to transpose to a Stonewall) 8.♘xe4 (this leads to a favourable pawn structure immediately) 8...fxe4 9.♘e5 d5 10.♘g4 ♗e7 11.♗f4, and White is clearly better. We control e5, and Black has no compensation for the weaknesses. We should aim for a well-timed f2-f3 break to open the position.

7.b3

I recommend this flexible move. I like the queenside fianchetto against lines that strive for ...e6-e5 in general, such as the King's Indian and the Dutch Leningrad, for example. In the coming lines, one very important decision will be the placement of

White's b1-knight. In the anti-...e6-e5 set-ups, we often place the knight on d2, leaving the diagonal open to keep more control over e5. We will see this knight placement against the Classical as well, but there are also lines where ♘c3 is the better choice. I will explain the different scenarios and the reasoning behind the knight placement in the coming lines.

A1) 7...♕e8



8.♗b2

A11) 8...♕h5

You will meet this queen manoeuvre frequently in the Classical Dutch. In this particular position, you have more than one good move, but I'd like to show one common antidote that will also work in other, similar situations.

9.e3

This is a useful move. Sometimes we have ♘b1-c3-e2, planning ♘f4.

9...♘bd7 10.♘c3 g5

It looks crazy, but I found some games with this move. This is not how chess works!

11.♘d2 ♕h6 12.b4



It will take a long time until Black has anything close to a threat, while we tear down the queenside. Note that in a very similar position, with Black having played ...a7-a5 instead of ...♘bd7, we are able to play 12.e4. Here, 12.e4 is less convincing, due to 12...f4, when 13.e5 is not possible.

A12) 8...a5



9.♘c3

Why go to c3 now? The set-up with ♘bd2 makes a lot of sense after the early ...♘e4, but here ♘c3 is stronger. I checked 9.♘bd2, but I disliked 9...♘c6, intending ...♗d8 and ...e6-e5. These lines seem to be better for White, but it is murky. After 9.♘c3, the idea of playing for ...e6-e5 with ...♘c6 is prevented, due to 10.d5!.

A121) 9...♘a6 10.a3

This move threatens b3-b4!, which is possible due to the unprotected rook on a8.

10...♗d7

Black stops b3-b4 by covering the rook.

11. ♘e1

Regrouping the knight and gaining a tempo on b7.

11...c6 12. ♘d3



We have a nice position here, with a useful advantage in space. Playing e2-e4 is still on the agenda, but sometimes b3-b4 is also a fine idea. The knight is just very versatile on d3.

A122) 9...♕h5 10.e3

The typical antidote to ...♕h5. We stabilize the centre and allow ideas like ♘c3-e2-f4 or ♘d2 with a tempo.

10... ♘a6

Black may also play 10...g5:



11. ♘d2 (a strong reply to Black's crude attack) 11...♕h6 12.e4. The centre counts for something, White is clearly better here. One key point is that Black's desired reply 12...f4 does not work well: 13.e5.



Black knight needs to retreat now, giving White a large advantage in central control.

11.♘d2 ♕h6 12.♕e2

White is better here, having much better chances of playing in the centre or on the queenside.

A123) 9...♘c6 10.d5

With a clear advantage for White, similarly to 8...♘c6 9.d5.

A13) 8...♘c6

Just a mistake, as it allows the following pawn structure change.

9.d5 ♘d8 10.dxe6 ♘xe6 11.e3



White has a clear advantage here. Black has weaknesses and no compensation to show for it. Our idea is to exploit the d5-square with ♘b1-c3-d5 later.

A14) 8...♘e4 9.♘bd2

The moves ...♕e8 and ...♘e4 don't work well together. With ♘bd2 and ♘e1 later, we are successfully fighting the intruder on e4.

A2) 7...♘e4



A common plan for Black, going for ...♗f6 next.

8.♗b2 ♗f6

Sometimes, Black delays ...♗f6 with a move like 8...♘d7. The standard idea against ...♘e4 is to go ♘bd2 and ♘e1 – let's have a look: 9.♘bd2 ♘df6 10.♘e1 ♕e8 11.♘d3 (the knight is excellent on d3. It looks at e5 and f4 and thus makes any ...♕h5 jumps unattractive) 11...♗d7 12.f3 ♘xd2 13.♕xd2, with a clear advantage for White, who has the central expan-sion with e2-e4 on the agenda soon.

9.♘bd2 ♘c6



10.♘e1

Now, Black has to either play ...d7-d5 or give up the post on e4.

10...♘xd2

1) 10...d5 11.e3. We have transposed to a Stonewall now, with Black having lost a tempo with ...d6-d5. This line is favourable for White even without the tempo loss, so we can't complain;

2) The idea 10...♘c5 was recom-mended in Simon Williams' *Killer Dutch* book, but White is just a lot better after it: 11.e3 a5 12.f4.



And White has a huge centre and the much better game.

11.♕xd2

This is a very comfortable position for White. The main problem for Black is that ...e6-e5 is basically impossible now.

11...e5

Black still played the move in 7 games in my database... and lost all of them!

12.♗d5+

Pushing the king in the corner before the long trading sequence. Along the next moves, Black has some alternatives, but they are all even worse.

12...♔h8 13.♗xc6 bxc6 14.dxe5 dxe5 15.♕xd8 ♖xd8 16.♘d3 ♖e8 17.f4 e4 18.♗xf6 exd3 19.♗e5 dxe2 20.♖fe1



White is close to winning in this endgame. Black's pawn structure is very weak, and the e5-bishop is dominating the board.

A3) 7...a5



Inserting this move is quite popular. Black sometimes gets the option of playing an irritating ...a5-a4 and gaining a bit of ground on the queenside.

8. ♗b2

Now, Black's best move seems to be 8...♕e8, but after 9.♘c3, we transpose to the line 7...♕e8 8.♗b2 a5 9.♘c3.

8...♘e4

This is a rare line, but there is one important point. If we play 9.♘bd2 now, Black has the irritating 9...a4, intending to answer 10.b4 with ...a4-a3.

1) 8...♘a6. To be perfectly honest, I never understood what the appeal of this ...a7-a5/...♘a6 set-up is. In any case, I recommend investing a tempo with a2-a3 to take away the b4-square and make sure that there is always b3-b4 against ...a5-a4: 9.a3 ♗d7 10.♘bd2 ♖b8 11.♕c2.



And we are ready to play e2-e4 soon. There is also the idea ♗c3 and b3-b4, playing against the knight on a6. It is interesting to compare this set-up to the one we play against the Leningrad: it is completely identical;

2) 8...a4 9.b4. If we are able to comfortably reply b3-b4 to ...a5-a4, it is not a problem at all. The a-pawn is rather weak now than anything else.

9. ♘fd2

If in doubt, check what Magnus is playing! This was played by the World Champion in a simul and it is a good move. You have a good alternative in 9.a3, which after 9...♗f6 10.♘bd2 ♘c6 11.♘e1 leads to the line 7...♘e4 8.♗b2 ♗f6 9.♘bd2 ♘c6 10.♘e1, with the a-pawn moves added. This insertion favours Black – see the long endgame line after 7...♘e4 – but White is still better. In comparison though, 9.♘fd2 looks even stronger.

9...d5

9...♘xd2 10.♘xd2 is how the mentioned Carlsen simul game went. White is much better with all the pluses: development, centre, no weaknesses.

10.♘xe4 fxe4 11.♘c3



And we are going to open up the position next with f2-f3, using the much better development.

B) 3...d6

This move has little independent value and will usually transpose to a Leningrad or Classical Dutch.

4.♗g2 c6

The only move to stay on an independent path. After the most common 4...g6, we transpose into a Leningrad, while after 4...e6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.c4, a switch to the Classical Dutch is also possible.

5.0-0 ♕c7



Black is preparing a quick ...e7-e5, but this idea falls short.

6.♘c3

I faced this obscure line in an important game once and played this move. Checking it again now, I see no reason to switch to a different recommendation. We are just going for a quick e2-e4, not wasting any time on more pawn moves.

6...e5

Consistent, but terrible for Black. An alternative is 6...g6 7.♖e1 and we manage e2-e4 next – or Black needs to play the completely inconsistent move ...d6-d5. Black is already in terrible shape.

By the way: the 22-year-old version of me played the overaggressive 7.e4 in the mentioned game and only won after some entertaining adventures. I can't resist quoting the game: 1.♘f3 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 d6 4.d4 c6 5.0-0 ♕c7 6.♘c3 g6 7.e4 fxe4 8.♘g5 d5 9.f3 exf3 10.♕xf3 ♗g7 11.♗f4 ♕b6 12.♖ae1 ♕xd4+ 13.♗e3 ♕c4 14.♗f4 0-0 15.♔h1 ♗g4 16.♕f2 e5 17.♗xe5 ♘e4 18.♘cxe4 ♖xf2 19.♘xf2 ♗e2 20.♗xg7 ♔xg7 21.b3 ♕xc2 22.♘g4 ♗xg4 23.♖f7+ ♔h6 24.h4, and Black resigned in Sielecki-Schätzle, Germany 1997. That was fun, but 7.♖e1 is the better move.

7.dxe5 dxe5



8.e4

We are opening the position while Black is clearly behind in development and has many weak-nesses already. White is clearly better.

8...fxe4

8...♗d6 9.♗h3 (not very obvious, but very strong!) 9...fxe4 10.♗xc8 exf3 11.♗xb7, and Black is falling apart quickly.

9.♘g5



White is clearly better after regaining the pawn, enjoying the great e4-square.

C) 3...b6

Black is going for a mix of the Dutch and the Queen's Indian. This set-up has a dubious reputation.

4.♗g2 ♗b7 5.0-0 e6

5...g6 is better than playing with 5...e6 (which nevertheless is far more popular): 6.c4 ♗g7 7.♘c3 (we basically handle this in the same way as the line 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 b6 3.g3 ♗b7 4.♗g2 g6) 7...0-0 (or the alternative 7...♘e4 8.♘xe4 ♗xe4



9.♗e3. We are going for ♕d2 and ♗h6 to trade Black's best piece. We have looked at a similar position with Black having played ...0-0 instead of ...f7-f5, which is certainly the more beneficial move) 8.♗f4. 8.d5 is also fine, but I like this simple move as well. The idea is to play ♕d2 and ♗h6, trading off the important g7-bishop.

6.c4 ♗e7



7.d5

If you can play d4-d5 in a Queen's Indian style structure, you should almost always do so. The bishop on b7 is severely restricted now.

7...0-0

7...exd5



8.♘d4 (attacking the f5-pawn, which provokes a weakening move) 8...g6 9.cxd5 (even simpler than 9.♘c3. Black's position is a mess now) 9...♗xd5 10.♗xd5 ♘xd5 11.♘xf5, and White already has a winning advantage.

8.♘e5

I suggest this rare, but tricky move. The most popular move 8.♘d4 is not bad either, but 8...c5 is not entirely clear to me.

8...♕c8

8...d6 is not a good idea!



9.♘f7 (you should play 8.♘e5, just to get this on the board once!) 9...♕c8 10.♘g5, and the weak e6-square is eyed by the busy knight.

9.♘c3

White keeps the d5-pawn, which secures a useful space advantage and blunts the bishop on b7.

9...d6 10.♘f3

This simple retreat is strong. We are aiming at the weak e6-square with ♘g5 or ♘d4 soon.

Conclusion

The Dutch Defence is regarded as a risky opening, so it's no surprise that most sidelines are dodgy. The best option for Black in this chapter is the Classical Dutch, but White gets good play with the recommended set-up involving a quick queenside fianchetto. This set-up is also used against the Leningrad as discussed in Chapter 33. On a general note, I'd like to mention that you will gain a strategic advantage against the Dutch very often, but Black usually has chances based on his space on the kingside. So be alert: the Dutch might not be objectively great, but make sure to defend accurately against desperate counterattacks.

CHAPTER 32

Dutch Defence – Stonewall:

1.d4 f5 2. ♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4. ♗g2 d5

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 d5



Black sets up the Stonewall, characterized by the pawn formation of pawns on d5 and f5. The idea of the Stonewall is to set up a solid wall of pawns in the centre and then select further action based on White's set-up. Black may go for kingside play, based on ...♘e4 and later ...g7-g5, or elect to play more solidly with ...b7-b6 and ...♗b7, later going for ...c7-c5. Our recipe against the Stonewall is to use the defect of Black's position, namely the weak e5-square. This weakness is best exploited by knights, and therefore we need to arrange the knights accordingly. The best set-up for the knights is to place them on f3 and d3, and it is exactly this set-up that we are playing for as soon as possible. After we have managed this first step, we will adjust our plans based on what Black is doing. We will discuss some more strategic ideas later while looking at the specific lines.

5.0-0

In the Stonewall, Black needs to choose between two bishop set-ups. He may develop his bishop to e7 or to d6. Nowadays, the ...♗d6 lines are regarded as the main line, but Black has tried some offbeat ideas with ...♗e7 lately that we should examine. It is important to note that our set-up with ♘f3 and ♘d3 is desirable regardless of the bishop's placement on d6 or e7. The decision about developing the bishop is usually made now with either 5...♗d6 or 5...♗e7, but Black may also start with 5...c6 and delay it for a move. We will play c2-c4 and ♘bd2 anyway and transpose once the bishop on f8 decides on its square.

A) 5...♗d6



6.c4 c6

6...0-0 (Black sometimes delays ...c7-c6, but it makes no big difference for our set-up and usually transposes quickly) 7.♘bd2 ♘c6. A rare line, instead of just transposing with 7...c6. We have looked at this ...♘c6 move with the black bishop being on e7, which at least allowed ...♘e4 and ...♗f6. Here, it makes less sense in my opinion. In any case, we play in just the same way as we do against the ...♗e7 version of this idea: 8.a3 a5 9.b3 ♘e4 10.♗b2 ♗d7 11.♖c1 ♗e8 12.♘e1.



We are heading for the ideal set-up with ♘d3, preparing the central expansion with f2-f3 and e2-e4.

7.♘bd2

This knight is headed to f3, while the f3-knight should switch to d3. You may also start this operation with 7.♘e5 first, as it will transpose in almost all cases.

A1) 7...0-0 8.♘e5



A11) 8...b6

Black may also play 8...♘bd7, after which 9.♘d3 transposes to the move order 7...♘bd7 8.♘e1 0-0 9.♘d3. Instead of 9.♘d3, the move 9.♘df3 is also fine for White.

9.♘df3

A111) 9...♗b7 10.♗g5

A similar idea as after ...♕e7.

10...♕e8

Unpinning immediately.

11.♖c1 ♘e4 12.♗f4

With the queen on e8, the move ...g7-g5 is not possible.

12...♘a6 13.cxd5 exd5 14.♘d3



And we reach this familiar position type again, with Black playing ...c6-c5 soon. We have the much easier game, because our position is free of weaknesses.

A112) 9...♘e4

Black prevents a possible pin after, for example, 9...♕e7 10.♗g5, and prepares

...g7-g5 against ♗f4.



10.h4

We make sure that f4 is our square and the bishop will be stable there.

10... ♗b7 11. ♗f4 ♘d7 12. ♖c1

We have looked at this position type multiple times. I think that White is better, simply because Black has a lot of weaknesses that are tough to handle in the long run. The f-pawn can't go back – ever!

12...c5

Against this move we have a strong reply, showing an additional point of h2-h4.

13. ♘g5 ♘xg5

This is the only move and it leads to a long, forced line that is good for White.

14. ♗xg5 ♕e8 15. ♘xd7 ♕xd7 16.cxd5 ♗xd5 17.dxc5 ♗xc5 18. ♗xd5 exd5 19. ♕b3



Black is suffering with multiple weaknesses to attend. He can't play ...f5-f7, which would help.

A12) 8... ♕e7

Black remains flexible with the queenside set-up and does not commit to ... ♘bd7 just yet.

9. ♘df3

There is nothing particularly wrong with 9. ♘d3 here, but after ...♕e7, we might get in ♗g5, which is an annoying pin.

9...b6

Black can play 9... ♘e4 to stop ♗g5, and now 10.h4 is suggested by LeelaZero, unsurprisingly. The AI engines love h-pawn moves. The move secures the dark squares f4 and g5, which is an important accomplishment. 10...b6 (after 10... ♘d7 11. ♗f4 ♘df6 12.c5 ♗c7 13.b4



we have a very simple plan on the queenside; what does Black have?) 11. ♗f4 ♗b7 12. ♕a4. We are putting pressure on the c6-pawn and the whole queenside. Black will go for a hanging pawn formation with ...c6-c5 soon to free himself. I'll show one possible line that makes sense to me and illustrates an idea for White: 12...c5 13. ♖fd1 ♘a6 14. ♖ac1 ♖fc8 15.cxd5 exd5 16. ♘d3.



This is the idea I was referring to. We trade the dark-squared bishop, which is favourable for us.

10. ♗g5

I like this idea a lot, even more than the standard placement on f4. It is a new move

at this point, so we need to check some possible lines and can't rely on game samples.

10...♗b7 11.♖c1 ♘bd7

The pawn structure change with 11...c5 is almost unavoidable in the long run for Black. Usually, he will only play it after the b8-knight is developed, so this is an early moment to do it: 12.cxd5 exd5 13.e3. I think that this structure is favourable for White in any case, as Black's position just has too many weaknesses in the long run. I'd like to show two remarkable lines that help us to understand key motifs related to the ♗g5-pin:

1) 13...♘a6 14.h4.



You guessed right if you thought 'AI idea!'. LeelaZero's idea is twofold: one point is ♗h3, followed by ♗f4 and ♘g5. The other one is to just push h4-h5-h6, for a super dangerous pawn near the black king. As said, you are also in a good spot without remembering such an interesting idea, but to me this is an outstanding concept;

2) Another possible line is 13...♘bd7 14.♘xd7 ♕xd7 15.♗xf6 ♖xf6 16.♘e5 (forced after 13...♘bd7, and just excellent for White) 16...♗xe5 17.dxe5 ♖ff8



18.b4 (very powerful play, weakening the hanging pawns) 18...cxb4 19.♕d4. White will win back either b4 or d5, with a large advantage.



12.b4

White is also better with the more pedestrian 12.cxd5, but who wants to walk if you can run with such a cool move available?

12...♖fc8

Taking on b4 is impossible: 12...♗xb4 13.cxd5 cxd5 14.♖c7, and White is winning decisive material. The key line is the following: 14...♗c8 15.♘c6 ♕d6 16.♗f4 e5 17.dxe5 ♕xc7 18.♘xb4, and one of the knights will be lost, due to the double threat of exf6 and e6. But a slow move looks bleak as well.

13.c5

White has a huge initiative on the queenside and is certainly much better.

A2) 7...♘bd7

Black adds additional cover to e5, thus stopping ♘e5. This is an additional option that Black gets due to 7.♘bd2 instead of 7.♘e5. However, I don't mind allowing this 'extra option'. We will see that White has good chances.

8.♘e1



The other road to d3.

8...0-0 9.♘d3

We will look at some possible lines for Black now. Our play is rather similar in all cases: we will play ♘f3 and ♗f4, and quite often we will take on d5 after ...b7-b6 has been played.

Let's have a look at concrete moves.

A21) 9...♕e7 10.♕c2 b6

Black has played the knight to d7 early on, which basically only leaves this development option for the c8-bishop.

11.♘f3 ♗b7 12.♗f4 ♗xf4 13.♘xf4 ♘e4 14.♖ac1 ♖ac8 15.cxd5 exd5



16.h4

This move secures f4 for the knight. White is at least slightly better here. We have play against c6 and no weaknesses in our camp. Black will very likely play... c6-c5 at some point, entering a hanging pawns formation. This will become complicated, but keep in mind that Black has a lot of long-term weaknesses already since he has played ...f7-f5.

A22) 9...b6



After ...b7-b6, the trade on d5 becomes a lot more interesting, as we open the position to play against the weakened c-pawn. The trade on d5 usually leads nowhere if Black still has the pawn-chain b7/c6/d5.

10.cxd5 exd5

10...cxd5 gives a position type that is very one-sided for White: 11.♘f3 a5 12.♗f4 ♕e7 13.♖c1 ♗b7 14.♗xd6 ♕xd6 15.♕d2.



A typical sequence after the sym-metrical recapture. White always has play on the dark squares, and Black's weakened kingside often becomes a long-term problem. This is also the reason why I would avoid a queen trade in such a position.

11.♘f3 ♗b7 12.♗f4 ♕e7 13.♗xd6 ♕xd6 14.♘fe5

This position would already look better for White with the black pawn on f7 instead of f5. We have easy targets, like c6, and Black has no counterplay that I can see.

A23) 9...♘e4 10.♕c2

We need to cover c4 before ♘f3 is possible.

10...♕f6 11.♘f3 g5

Blacks plays ...g7-g5 just before ♗f4 was possible. We would still like to play ♘fe5, so the next move makes perfect sense – but it involves a pawn sacrifice.

12.b3 g4

This is more than risky, but obviously critical. If Black plays something slow, we'll play ♗b2 and ♘fe5 next.

13.♘fe5 ♘xe5 14.dxe5 ♗xe5 15.♘xe5 ♕xe5 16.♗b2



White's compensation for the pawn is simply fantastic. Black will never get a safe king again, given that the long diagonal is ruled by our bishop.

B) 5...♗e7



Black goes for a ...♗e7 set-up. This way of playing the Stonewall is considered to be more passive than ...♗d6, but there are some recent ideas that are actually quite interesting for Black. These are based on avoiding the move ...c7-c6 and placing the knight on c6, building up some pressure on d4 with ...♘e4 and ...♗f6. There is one version of this line that we need to be particularly aware of.

Let's have a look.

6.c4

After 6.c4, I decided to examine the ...c7-c6-based set-ups via the immediate 6...c6, while the more offbeat set-ups are analysed via 6...0-0. Then there is a third option: Black's immediate knight jump 6...♘e4. This line is rather unknown yet, but very dangerous if you are not aware of the underlying ideas.

B1) 6...0-0 7.♘bd2

Here Black's most common move is 7...c6, transposing to a more standard Stonewall. We need to briefly check set-ups that avoid this move.

B11) 7...♘c6 8.a3

Black has stopped ♘e5, so we need to take care about developing the c1-bishop now.

8...a5

We wanted to play b2-b4, of course. Black can't allow that to happen.

9.b3 ♘e4 10.♗b2

How do we get our ideal knight set-up now? Black has made ♘e5 look unattractive, so we need a different approach. The way to do it is to play e2-e3 and then ♘f3-e1-d3.

10...♗d7 11.♖c1

This is useful, because Black sometimes has tricks based on ...a5-a4, after which we would like to reply with b3-b4. In this case, c4 might be hanging, so additional protection of the c-pawn is a good prophylactic measure.

11...♗e8 12.♘e1 ♗f6 13.e3 ♗f7 14.♘d3



We have managed the key regrouping. We definitely would like to play f2-f3 at some point, evicting the e4-knight. I like to play this slowly by going ♘d2-f3-e5 and ♕e2 first, and then think about f2-f3 and e3-e4. An important point about the Stonewall is that Black does not have all that many active ideas, but it is hard to do nothing in chess. Quite often, Black will do something that does not help him, for example, playing ...g7-g5, which just weakens his position.

B12) 7... ♘e4



This signals Black's intention to play for a ...♗f6- and, most of the time, ...♘c6-based set-up. Contrary to 7...♘c6, this move order does not stop us from playing 8.♘e5.

8.♘e5

Now, Black does not manage to play ...♘c6, and the play will look more like a standard Stonewall, because Black will play ...c7-c6 sooner or later.

8...♘d7 9.♘df3

Now, we manage to connect both knights to the e5-square.

9...c6 10.♕c2 ♘xe5

Black trades on e5. Against other moves, retreating to d3 will transpose to a line that we have examined via an early ...c7-c6 move order. An example for this scenario is 10...♘df6 11.♘d3, which is covered via 1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 d5 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.c4 c6 7.♘bd2 0-0 8.♘e5 ♘bd7 9.♘d3 ♘e4 10.♕c2 ♘df6 11.♘d3.

11.♘xe5

It is difficult to analyse such a closed position move-by-move, as both side have many moves that could be played in a specific position, and the move order is not very critical.

11...♗d7

A common regrouping, trying to get the bishop to h5. A good set-up for White is the preparation of e2-e4 with moves like b2-b3, ♗b2, ♖ad1, going for f2-f3 and e2-e4 later.

12.b3 ♗e8 13.♗b2 ♖c8 14.♖ad1



And f2-f3 and e2-e4 is the next stage. We might play this slowly, as Black has little active play. There is nothing wrong with moves like e2-e3 first or playing c4-c5 to grab space on the queenside. The central breakthrough is hard to prevent by Black anyway.

B2) 6...♘e4



This line is a specialty of the Hungarian GM Richard Rapport. Rapport and his wife Jovana have played it numerous times with excellent results. So, what's the idea of the early knight jump? Black is delaying castling for a reason! Have a look at the following line: 7.b3 ♘c6 8.♗b2, and now 8...h5!. This is in fact very dangerous for White, as shown in some games.

7.♘e5

This is my recommendation against the Rapport line. This move fits into our general plans (♘f3-e5-d3 and ♘b1-d2–f3) and discourages ...♘c6 and ...h7-h5 ideas by Black. This is basically all you need to know in my opinion. It's just good to know that the early ...♘e4 needs some caution. Let's continue this 7.♘e5 line for a bit.

7...♘d7

Keeping in line with avoiding castling.

8.♗f4 g5

This is in the spirit of Black's play, but certainly risky.

8...0-0 9.♘d2 looks like a rather standard position again, similar to the main line 1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 d5 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.c4 0-0. The move ♗f4 is played early, but fits into the e5-square-based play.

9.♗e3 0-0 10.♕c2



White is better here, looking to play for e2-e4 in the long run. We will develop the b1-knight, play f2-f3 and prepare the central pawn push.

B3) 6...c6 7. ♘bd2 0-0

7... ♘bd7 stops ♘e5, but has a draw-back: 8. ♘g5 ♘f8 9. ♘df3. Black's position is rather unharmonious, while our knights are very annoying to play against.

8. ♘e5



Heading straight for the regrouping of the knights.

B31) 8... ♘bd7 9. ♘d3

9. ♘df3 is not bad either, but both black knights have e4 as their targets. Keeping both on the board makes life a bit more difficult for Black.

9... ♘e4 10. ♕c2

We need to cover c4 before ♘f3 is possible.

10... ♗f6

1) After 10... ♘df6 11. ♘f3 ♗d7 12. ♘fe5, Black has issues with the knights. Note that after c4-c5 and f2-f3, Black's knight would have no square to go to. 12... ♗e8

13.c5 ♘d7 14.♘xd7 ♗xd7 15.♗f4.



The bishop is heading to e5. Long-term, we are of course playing for f2-f3 and e2-e4, after due preparation;

2) 10...♘xd2 11.♗xd2 ♘f6 12.♗f4, and we have excellent control over e5 and good plans to choose from. I also like the simple queenside play here with c4-c5, b2-b4-b5 etc.

11.♘f3

Mission accomplished.

11...dxc4

This is rarely a good idea in the Stonewall, but here Black wins a pawn. We have good compensation, but we need to check this, of course.

1) 11...♕e8 12.♗f4 g5 13.♗c7 ♕e7 14.♘fe5.



Black's play looks risky to me. We have control over e5, and I don't see how ...g7-g5 helped to fight the long-term plan to go for f2-f3 and e2-e4;

2) 11...g5 (Black prevents ♗f4 or ♘f4, but weakens the position quite a bit) 12.♘fe5 ♘d6 13.b3. We have ♗a3 next. This looks bad for Black.

12.♕xc4 ♘b6 13.♕b3

White has tried to hang on to the pawn with 13.♕b4, but I am happily sacrificing

for this much compensation.

13...♗xd4 14.♘xd4 ♕xd4 15.♗e3 ♕d8 16.♖fd1 ♘d5 17.♗d4



We will go for f2-f3 and e2-e4 next, with great compensation. Black's dark-square weaknesses are a heavy burden for him.

B32) 8...♗d7

One of the classic Dutch ideas. Black tries to improve the bishop via e8 and h5.

9.♘df3 ♗e8 10.♕c2

Here and one move earlier, White also had ♕b3 for more concrete play, but I want to focus on some more general ideas, like completing the knight regrouping.

10...♘e4 11.♘d3



We have managed our intended set-up. Now what? I like to play with b2-b3, ♗b2, ♖ad1 and go for ♘fe5 and f2-f3 later. Let's have a look at a sensible sequence.

11...♘d7 12.b3 g5

Black refuses to sit and wait. Often, these ambitious ideas backfire, though.

13.♗b2 ♗h5 14.♘fe5 ♘xe5 15.♘xe5



White still plays for f2-f3 and e2-e4, but note that we don't need to rush this. Preparing this slowly is often the best approach, as Black is not threatening all that much.

Conclusion

The Stonewall is one of the openings that has a fitting name. This set-up is indeed tough to crack, but it also has the drawbacks associated with a wall of stone: it is not flexible at all, and once you establish a weak spot, it might crumble quickly. The main revelation of this chapter is the strength of the knight set-up on d3 and f3. If you forget concrete lines, try to regroup the knights to these key squares.

CHAPTER 33

Dutch Defence – Leningrad:

1.d4 f5 2. ♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6



1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6

The Leningrad involves the move ...g7-g6, and sometimes Black plays this right away. Let's examine 2...g6.



This position may also arise after 1.d4 g6 2.♘f3 f5.

With 3.g3 we stick to our normal set-up. White in fact has a line to try to punish Black's move order. The caveman-style move 3.h4 is dangerous for Black, but I couldn't find a simple path to a clear advantage. After 3.h4, the critical line is 3...♘f6 4.h5 ♘xh5 5.♖xh5 gxh5 6.e4, after which 6...♗g7 7.♘h4 seems to be best. This 3.h4 line could be interesting to analyse if you expect this exotic move order to happen in a game that you prepare for. If you face the 1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 g6 move order in a random game, just play 3.g3. Black may have specifically prepared for 3.h4, knowing the crazy lines better than you do.

3...♗g7 4.♗g2. Now, Black almost always just plays 4...♘f6, transposing to the main-line Leningrad. I'd like to show one alternative set-up that Black sometimes plays.

4...d6. Here, 4...♘f6 is the most common move and a transposition to the main line starting with 2...♘f6.

5.0-0 ♘h6. A bit odd, but the knight will support the ...e7-e5 push from f7.

6.c4. In the proper Leningrad with the knight on f6 instead of h6, I suggest playing b2-b3 first, and only later going for c2-c4. Here, the immediate c2-c4 and ♘c3 is very logical – we manage to play e2-e4 very quickly now, realizing a main strategic goal against the Dutch.

6...0-0 7.♘c3 c6



8.e4. White is better here. The problems on the e-file will be more significant than the counterplay Black may obtain on the f-file.

3.g3 g6

The combination of ...f7-f5 and ...g7-g6 is called the Leningrad Dutch. It is the most respectable Dutch line nowadays and it leads to strategically complicated play. In a perfect world, Black would achieve ...d7-d6 and ...e7-e5 for a strong pawn duo in the centre. This is a scenario we are able to avoid by employing a double fianchetto, which is quite similar to our approach to the King's Indian.

Let's see what happens:

4.♗g2 ♗g7

Of course, Black may also play 4...d6 here or 5...d6 on the next move. It will ultimately just transpose to the starting position of the Leningrad main line after 1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0 6.b3 d6 7.♗b2.

5.0-0 0-0



6.b3

The queenside fianchetto is directed against Black's ...e7-e5 idea. We will see that it is difficult for Black to play this move under acceptable circumstances. Most of the time Black plays 6...d6 now, but there are some offbeat ideas that delay or omit ...d7-d6 completely.

6...d6

1) 6...d5 (the Leningrad Stonewall) 7.c4 c6 8.♘c3 (I prefer that to 8.♘bd2. This knight ultimately wants to be on d3, and ♘c3-e2-f4-d3 is a fine route) 8...♘e4 9.♗b2 (this position may also arise via the move order 6.b3 ♘e4 7.♗b2 d5 8.c4 c6 9.♘c3) 9...♗e6 10.♕c2 ♘d7 11.e3.



We will go for the mentioned knight tour next, unless Black starts some concrete play. We are well equipped for any confrontation, though. We are well-developed

and centralized;

2) 6...c5 7.e3 (a solid choice. We're going for a set-up with ♗b2 and c2-c4) 7...♘e4 8.♗b2 (this position is also sometimes reached via 6...♘e4 7.♗b2 c5 8.e3) 8...♘c6 (Black exerts some pressure on White's centre, but it's not enough to force any concessions) 9.c4 e6 10.♕e2.



I don't quite believe in Black's set-up. We are going for ♖d1 and ♘c3 next, enjoying a central advantage.

7.♗b2



Examining this theoretical complex involves one particular challenge: the flexibility of Black's move orders. In general, I'd like to divide Black's approaches into two groups: he may try for a quick ...e7-e5 after all, with moves like ...♘e4/...♘c6, often in combination with ...♕e8. The second approach is to stay flexible with moves like ...c7-c6/...♕e8/....a7-a5/...♘a6/...h7-h6, that may be played in any possible order. Now, against the quick counterplay ideas, we need to act with specific replies, for instance, we should fight ...♘e4 immediately with ♘bd2 and ♘e1 (quite similar to the lines in the Classical Dutch). If Black chooses one of the slower approaches, almost regardless of move order, we are aiming for a set-up with

c2-c4, ♘bd2, ♕c2 and ultimately e2-e4, realizing the strategic goal against the Dutch. Black has a huge range of move orders in the slower set-ups, but don't worry too much. Going for the mentioned set-up will work fine and only needs the odd moment of fine-tuning, depending on what move order Black chooses. The slow set-ups almost always involve ...c7-c6, which is played on move 7 or quickly afterwards. I decided to examine all the slow lines involving ...c7-c6 under the 7...c6 move order, which means that after moves like 7...♘a6, 7...♕e8 or 7...a5, it will frequently transpose to 7...c6 after Black plays this move later.

A) 7...c6



The move ...c7-c6 is the most popular choice here. Black is aiming for a flexible set-up, often involving moves like ...a7-a5/...♘a6 and ...♕e8.

8.c4

A1) 8...♘a6

Black stays with the slow set-up. The knight on a6 makes an odd impression, but it's tough to suggest a better option for it. Often, it gets repositioned via c7 or supports queenside play with ...b7-b5. In any case, we can aim for our desired set-up against this aproach. Note that after ...♘a6, Black is ready to play ...♘b4 in response to a future ♕c2. This is no problem at all, as after a queen move, we are

ready to kick the knight back with a2-a3.

9.♘bd2

A11) 9...♕e8 10.♕c2 h6

The most popular move here for Black. To be perfectly honest, it seems dubious to me. Black is trying for ambitious play on the kingside while we are ready to play e2-e4.

11.♗c3

It is worth spending a tempo on covering the b4-square before we engage in central action with the e2-e4 push. This improvement on the traditional 11.a3 was suggested by Boris Avrukh in his *GM Repertoire* book series. We will see the reasoning behind it in some moves.

11...g5 12.e4



12...fxe4

Black wants to play 12...f4, but it does not work: 13.e5. Now the knight has no reasonable square to go, and White is a lot better. Note that 13.gxf4 is a serious mistake, due to the textbook reply 13...♘h5!, and Black gets the knight to the dream square f4.

13.♘xe4 ♘xe4

After 13...♕g6 14.♘xf6+ ♕xf6 15.♖ae1, White is better, intending to double on the e-file: 15...♗f5 16.♕d2 ♖f7 17.♖e3.



White is much better here, piling up on the e-file. In this position, we see one benefit of ♗c3 compared to a2-a3. White is also threatening d4-d5 here, because the bishop is protected.

14.♕xe4 ♗f5 15.♕e3 ♕d7



16.d5

Avrukh's 16.♖ae1 is also better for White, but I think this is the case with more than one continuation here. I think 16.d5 makes a lot of sense.

16...e5

Black must avoid the trade of the bishop for the sake of king security.

17.dxc6 bxc6 18.♖ad1 ♖ae8 19.♘e1

White has a very good position here. We have good pressure against the pawns on c6 and d6, and the knight on a6 is offside.

A12) 9...e5

We need to check this principled move, of course.

10.dxe5 ♘d7

10...♘g4 is less of a challenge, compared to 10...♘d7: 11.♕c2 ♘xe5 (11...dxe5 is dubious. The following sequence is forced: 12.h3 e4 (otherwise, we just win e5) 13.♗xg7 ♔xg7 14.hxg4 exf3 15.exf3 fxg4 16.♖ae1, and White is better here, being better developed and having the much safer king position) 12.♖ad1.



And White must be slightly better, thanks to the weak d-pawn.



Black wants to take with the d-pawn, so he avoids 10...♘g4. Now, we need to be more cunning to fight the ...e7-e5 idea.

11.♗a3

A motif that we use more than once against the ...e7-e5 push. Now, Black more or less must take with the knight on e5.

A121) 11...♘xe5



12. ♖b1

This is the simple solution to Black's idea of taking on f3 and winning the exchange. The less pedestrian one is to play 12.b4, and simply ignore the threat. As mentioned in the remarks to 11...c5 (A122), the exchange sacrifice is always worth considering. Here, it is definitely playable, and endorsed by the engines. It's a matter of taste to some extent – if you feel more adventurous, play 12.b4.

12...c5

Otherwise, we'd go b3-b4-b5.

13. ♖e1

We prepare ♘d2-f1-e3 this way. 12. ♖b1 leads to a slow game with a slight advantage for White. The sharper 12.b4 tries to punish Black harder, but involves more risk, obviously.

A122) 11...c5

This has been tried, but it seems incorrect to me.

12.e6 ♘b6 13. ♖c1

Quite often, you don't really need to save the rook in such a situation, because the g7-bishop is such a strong piece. The bishop is not only active, but also a key defender of the king. That being said, White is also better here without any sacrifices.

13... ♗xe6



14.h4

You may also play the more standard 14.♘e1, but I like this idea. ♘g5 is an irritating move.

14...h6

An alternative is 14...♕c7 15.♘g5 ♗d7 (Black played ...♕c7 to prepare this move. ♘g5 not only attacks e6, but also the b7-pawn) 16.♘h3, and we get the knight to the good f4-square, looking at d5. This is the same idea that could have been started with 14.♘e1, but h2-h4 gives additional ideas (the obvious h4-h5, for example).

15.♘e1



After having provoked ...h7-h6, we are happily heading towards d3 and possibly f4 next. After ♘d3, covering f4, we also have the idea of playing e2-e4.

A13) 9...♖b8 10.♕c2 b5



Against Black's ...b7-b5 plans, a set-up with a2-a3 and b3-b4 is the best antidote.

11.a3 ♗d7 12.b4 ♘c7 13.♖ac1

The idea is to take on b5 while Black is unable to recapture with the c-pawn. If Black has to take with a piece, the plan ♘d2-c4-a5 becomes very annoying.

13...♖c8 14.e3



If Black keeps the tension with semi-waiting moves from here, we can consider the idea of playing ♕d3 and doubling on the c-file, increasing the pressure. These ...b7-b5 positions in the Leningrad are complex, but easier to play for White in my opinion.

A2) 8...♕c7 9.♘bd2 ♖e8



Black is lining up for ...e7-e5 next. This is a rare case where we need to deviate from the usual ♕c2 set-up.

10.♖e1

We know Black is going to play ...e7-e5 and will manage the pawn duo on e5 and f5. This is a scary prospect and needs to be addressed. If you can't prevent it altogether, the best reaction is usually to play e2-e4 as a counterpunch. Here, I'd rather prepare that with the rook than with the queen.

10...e5 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.e4 fxe4

The alternative 12...f4 13.c5 is much better for White, with ♘c4 coming.

13.♘g5



We will establish a strong knight on e4, with a nice advantage.

A3) 8...a5 9.♘bd2 ♘a6 10.♕c2 ♕c7

Black is aiming for ...e7-e5, supported by ...♖e8 on the next move. This line strikes me as more logical than many others that Black has tried.

11.a3

This is a necessary move to prepare e2-e4. After the immediate 11.e4, we get hit by 11...♘b4 12.♕b1 fxe4 13.♘xe4 ♘xe4 14.♕xe4 ♗f5, which is very annoying.

11...♖e8 12.e4 fxe4 13.♘xe4 ♘xe4

An alternative for Black is 13...♗f5 14.♘xf6+ exf6 (this makes use of the rook placement on e8 and is more logical than taking with the bishop) 15.♕d2.



This position seems reasonable for Black if he plays for ideas such as ...♗e4 and ...d6-d5. It is an interesting position to play for both sides. My main hope as White would be to exploit the small weaknesses that Black has created, like e6 and f6. These weaknesses are around the king, which makes them more practically relevant.

14.♕xe4 ♗f5 15.♕e3 e5 16.dxe5 dxe5 17.♘g5



White has the better structure in this position, but Black's pieces are active. This is probably about equal, but also in some way a matter of taste.

I'd rather be White, having the much safer king and healthier structure, while other players might not value these factors so highly.

A4) 8...♕e8 9.♘bd2 ♘a6 10.♕c2

This is just another way to the main line of this chapter and covered via the move order 8...♘a6 9.♘bd2 ♕e8 10.♕c2. Black may play ...♘a6 first or ...♕e8 first, and it makes no difference for our set-up.

A5) 8...e5 9.dxe5 ♘g4



Yet another version of this idea.

10.♕c1

This more or less forces Black to take on e5 with the knight.

10...♘xe5

Black can also take with the pawn: 10...dxe5 11.h3 e4 (otherwise, e5 is dropping) 12.♗xg7 ♔xg7 13.hxg4 exf3 14.exf3 fxg4 15.♘d2. This long line is completely forced after 10...dxe5 11.h3. Now White is better. We are much better developed, and the black king is wide open.

11.♘c3



And we have a frequently-seen central pawn structure with the d-pawn traded for the e-pawn. Black is suffering with the weak d-pawn and no clear active prospects to compensate for it.

B) 7...♘e4



A clear signal that Black is not going for a slow approach. He wants to play for a quick ...e7-e5 push.

8. ♘bd2

We should immediately take action and fight the knight on e4.

8... ♘c6

Black may also play 8... ♘xd2 9. ♕xd2 ♘c6



10. ♘e1. There are other strong moves available, but this move transposes to 8... ♘c6 9. ♘e1 ♘xd2 10. ♕xd2. This line is fine for White, so there is no need to learn anything additional.

9. ♘e1

This is the same approach as used against the Classical Dutch with an early ... ♘e4.

B1) 9... ♘g5

This is the most popular and best move.

10.f4 ♘f7 11. ♘c4 e6 12.e3 ♗d7 13. ♘d3



A good set-up for White. We are watching over the e5-square and will slowly prepare to play e3-e4.

B2) 9...♘xd2 10.♕xd2



Now, it is actually quite difficult for Black to manage the desired ...e7-e5 push.

10...♕e8

This is better than the immediate 10...e5, but still not a satisfactory solution for Black. White gains a clear advantage against 10...e5:



11.♗d5+ ♔h8 12.♗xc6 (Black's pawn structure gets completely destroyed. It is worth giving up the strong bishop for this accomplishment) 12...bxc6 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.♖d1 ♕e7 15.♕a5.



Black has too many weaknesses in this position.

11.f4

This is not the most obvious move, but it is a strong one and worth remembering. It is directed against ...e7-e5, of course.

11...e5 12.♗d5+ ♔h8 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.♘d3

Here we see the point of 11.f4. White builds up huge pressure in the centre, forcing the following line.

14...exf4 15.♗xg7+ ♔xg7 16.♖xf4



This position is better for White. We are able to open up the position while being better developed, and Black's king is not perfectly safe either.

B3) 9...d5 10.♘df3

Black has changed the structure to a Stonewall. With ♘df3, we are on the way to the standard ♘f3/♘d3 set-up against this pawn formation. White has the typical strategic defect of the Stonewall, the e5-square, to exploit.

c) 7...♕e8



A frequently-seen move in the Dutch. In this particular case, Black's intentions are not yet clear. He might play for ...e7-e5 or switch the queen to h5 after ...h7-h6 and ...g6-g5 next. Black may also play ...c7-c6 soon, going for a slowish set-up that we cover via 7...c6.

8.c4

The set-up we aim for involves c2-c4 and ♘bd2. Which one to play first? My move order recommendation is to first play c2-c4, then go ♘bd2. There are pluses and minuses for both approaches, but I like to go c2-c4 first. One reason is the line 7.♘bd2 ♘c6, when pushing d4-d5 is not possible. Now or on the next moves, it is

always possible for Black to play ...c7-c6, which will lead to lines covered via 7...c6.

C1) 8...h6

A small move with a big plan: ...g6-g5, and ...♕h5 for an attack on the white king.

9.♘bd2 g5 10.♕c2

I also like 10.e3 here, anticipating ...♕h5. This idea we also employ against a similar queen sortie in the Classical Dutch. However, the standard move 10.♕c2 is fine here, so I see no particular reason to complicate things further by recommending something else.

10...♕h5 11.e3



This is directed against ...f5-f4 ideas, now allowing the answer exf4.

11...♘a6 12.a3 c6 13.b4

This queenside expansion is useful and directed against the offside knight on a6. Black still has no real play on the kingside, as ...f5-f4 does not lead to much.

13...♘c7 14.a4

White is better here, due to the advantage on the queenside.

C2) 8...♘a6



Black is staying flexible with this move.

9. ♘bd2

Here, you can make a case for 9.♕c2 actually. After our move 9.♘bd2, Black's best seems to be ...c7-c5, as we will see. If you want to avoid this line, 9.♕c2 does this job quite well. Black of course still may play ...c7-c5, but being able to develop the knight to c3 makes a difference.

I am still going for 9.♘bd2 for a couple of reasons. The first one is to be consistent with other move orders, which makes it easier to remember. The second one is that 9.♕c2 stops ...e7-e5, but this is a move that I'd like to see against 9.♘bd2 !

So the 9.♘bd2 move order trades a bit of quality for simplicity and trick value, which is useful in particular against club level opponents.

9...c5

This seems to be Black's best try here.

1) 9...e5 is possible, but fine for White: 10.dxe5 ♘g4



11.♗a3. Remember this motif, as it will happen more than once in our anti-Leningrad repertoire. Again, it is most important to avoid the pawn duo on e5 and f5, creating the d-pawn vs e-pawn structure again: 11...♘xe5 12.♘xe5 ♕xe5 13.♖b1, and White has a comfortable advantage, as usual in these pawn structures;

2) 9...♖b8 10.♕c2 b5 (an interesting counterplay attempt on the b-file. Against these ideas (there is also ...c7-c6 and later ...b7-b5), it is important to remember the set-up with a2-a3 and b3-b4. It keeps the c-pawn backwards and limits Black's play on the queenside) 11.a3 c6 12.b4.



White is better here. We are looking at very similar structures via the 7...c6 move order, so please have a look there for more information.

10.a3

This is a recent idea against the 9...c5 line. White is preparing a later b3-b4. It is important to avoid 10.d5, as ...b7-b5 gives Black good play.

C21) 10...cxd4 11.♘xd4

This position has not yet been tested in games. I'll show some ideas to illustrate possible lines of play.

11...♘c5

1) 11...e5 12.♘b5 ♕e7 13.♘b1. The knight is certainly better on c3 than on d2. White looks a bit better to me;

2) 11...♘c7 12.a4 (this prepares ♘b5) 12...♕d8



13.♘b1, and again this move, aiming for ♘c3 to improve this piece.

12.♘b5 ♘e6 13.b4

This looks good for White, with ♘b5-c3-d5 to come soon.

c22) 10...♗d7



11.b4

You may also prepare this with 11.♖b1, but playing aggressively against ambitious players often pays off ('fight fire with fire').

11...cxb4

11...cxd4 12.♘xd4 was good for White in Ruck-Dionisi, Pontevedra 2018.

12.axb4 ♘xb4 13.♗c3

White gains good compensation on the open files. Let's have a look a sample line:

13...♘a6 14.♕b1

It is useful to provoke 14...♖b8, as we will see.

14...♖b8 15.♖a5



The idea is to play ♕a1 and ♖b1 next. White may also play d4-d5 and ♗d4 later, attacking the a7-pawn. This is one reason why 14.♕b1 was a useful move.

c23) 10...♖b8 11.b4 cxd4

An alternative for Black may be to take the pawn on b4: 11...cxb4 12.axb4 ♘xb4 13.♕b3 (even stronger than 13.♖xa7) 13...♘c6 14.d5 ♘d8 15.♖xa7.



With a great game for White. Note that Black is not able to free himself with 15...b5 now. After 16.♘d4, the c6-square is terribly exposed now.

12.♘xd4

This is similar to the line 10.a3 cxd4.

C3) 8...e5



Wait, wasn't our set-up designed to prevent this move? Well, you can't prevent it entirely, but you can prevent the pawn duo on e5 and f5, which is the most important point.

9.dxe5 ♘g4 10.♕d5+

There is a tactical reason for inserting the check, just hang on.

10...♔h8 11.♕d2 ♘xe5

The move 11...dxe5 does not work now! 12.h3 ♘h6



13.♗xe5 (ouch!) 13...♗xe5 14.♘xe5 ♕xe5 15.♕xh6, and White wins! We needed the black king on h8, so that the f8-rook is now hanging.

12.♘c3



This is excellent for White. The easiest way to assess this position is to compare it to lines of the King's Indian double fianchetto that have the same pawn structure, but with a pawn on f7. White is already much better in those lines, and having the pawn on f5 does not help. For the King's Indian line, please check: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.g3 ♗g7 4.♗g2 0-0 5.0-0 d6 6.b3 e5 7.dxe5 ♘g4 8.♗b2, after which Black often captures on e5 with the knight.

c4) 8...♘c6

Going for ...e7-e5, so we need to act quickly.

9.d5 ♘d8 10.♘c3

This is important! The knight is much better here than on d2, because we need to connect it with d5, anticipating Black's ...e7-e5 push.

10...e5

Black sometimes delays this, but we have many good moves to play in the meantime, such as ♕c2 and e2-e3, for example.

11.dxe6 ♘xe6 12.♕c2



Our idea is to play ♖ad1 and ♘d5. As usual in the positions with an d-pawn traded for an e-pawn, the move ♘d5 plays a key role. The knight is very strong on d5, but ...c7-c6 is too weakening, and taking the knight opens the c-file to good effect for White.

D) 7...a5

Black has more than one idea with this move. He might advance the pawn further to a4, trying to generate some play on the a-file. The second idea is to gain some ground on the queenside to prepare ...♘a6. In some lines, we are going for a2-a3 and b3-b4 later, an idea that is slowed down by ...a7-a5.

8.c4 a4

This is an independent option for Black.

Otherwise, he usually plays 8...c6 or 8...♘a6 9.♘bd2 c6, which we cover via the 7...c6 move order.

9.b4 c6 10.a3



I am not convinced by the a-pawn advance to a4. Here, the pawn is a liability, and I don't see much compensation for this issue. Note that ♘c3 instead of our usual ♘bd2 comes into consideration here, of course.

E) 7...e5

Black is playing the move that we tried to prevent. But don't worry, it is fine for White.

8.dxe5 ♘fd7

Black may also play 8... ♘g4



9.♕c1 (not the only move to gain an advantage, but the one closest to other lines that we have in the repertoire. Now, Black needs to take on e5 with the knight) 9... ♘xe5 (after 9...dxe5 10.h3, White is much better, as in similar situations) 10.c4, and we have reached this favourable structure once again. The queen is not ideal on c1, but ♘c3, ♖d1 and ♕c2 next are easy moves to play.

9.♘c3

This is a bit uncommon, but it is strong. Black wants to take on e5 with the pawn, and we need to be ready to play e2-e4 against it. If we go 9.♕c1 here, Black has ...dxe5, with decent play.

9...dxe5 10.e4



This is very good for White. Black is too much behind in development, and his pawn duo is more weak than anything else.

Conclusion

The Dutch Leningrad is an ambitious choice by Black and leads to dynamic play. Our set-up against the Leningrad enjoys an excellent theoretical reputation and is similar to other schemes in the book. The most important point to remember is the difference between Black's slow set-ups with ...c7-c6 and the more direct ones, for instance with ...♘e4 or ...♘c6. Against the latter, you need to know concrete lines, while against the former, you will be fine with just knowing the overall set-up with b2-b3/c2-c4/♗b2/♘bd2 and ♕c2.

CHAPTER 34

Old Indian and Wade Defence: 1.d4 d6

1.d4 d6



The move 1...d6 is rather flexible and may still lead to a range of set-ups and openings.

Black has many ways to transpose to other chapters, as a quick...f7-f5 would lead to a Dutch Defence or ...g7-g6 would transpose to a King's Indian set-up. We play 2.♘f3, 3.g3 and 4.♗g2 next anyway and see what Black chooses.

In this chapter, we will discuss two independent options for Black. The first one is the Wade Defence: 1.d4 d6 2.♘f3 ♗g4. Black's main idea is to take on f3 and create a doubled f-pawn for White. The second option is the Old Indian, based on a quick ...e7-e5 without fianchettoing the king's bishop. The typical moves ...♘bd7, ...e7-e5, ...c7-c6 and ...♗e7 may be played in various orders. It is not a big deal for us, as we play the same standard moves every time. For the Old Indian, I decided to choose the move order 1.d4 d6 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 ♘bd7 4.♗g2 e5 5.0-0 as the main path and will point out some other orders along the way. As mentioned, we just play our standard set-up and don't need to worry too much.

2.♘f3

Our usual move, but I'd like to mention two alternative ideas. The first one is to play 2.e4, transposing into an 1.e4-style position. I discussed this approach a bit in Chapter 20 on 1.d4 g6. The second option only occurred to me days before I finished the writing of the book. It is an interesting idea to play 2.g3. This move fits well in our repertoire and will often transpose after 3.♘f3 next, for example after 2...♘f6 3.♘f3 or 2...g6 3.♘f3. So, what's the difference if it transposes usually? There are two: Black is not able to play the Wade Defence (A below) and create the doubled pawn. The second one is the move 2...e5, after which White's best is going for the trades with 3.dxe5 dxe5 4.♕xd8+ ♔xd8. After 5.♘c3 and a quick f2-f4, opening up the position with the better development, White is slightly better.

All in all, 2.g3 looks like an excellent 'KIS' option, as you save the effort of learning

the Wade Defence. I considered making 2.g3 my main suggestion, but decided against it, because the positions in the Wade Defence are interesting to study and I did not want to discard this analysis. Another point is that 2.g3 e5 only requires knowing the small line with the queen trade and the plan with f2-f4, so you have two options to choose from.

A) 2...♗g4



This is the Wade Defence. It's a sideline, but it is not bad and quite regularly pops up as a surprise weapon by strong players in rapid and blitz games. It is a flexible defence, not yet determining the central pawn formation. Black may just play ...♘bd7 and ...e7-e5 for an Old Indian formation or play ...e7-e6 and ...d6-d5, going for a light-squared set-up. We should be aware that Black may also play 2...♘f6 3.g3 ♗g4, which is a related line. This fact, and of course the overall repertoire concept, suggests we play with g2-g3, but we need to be aware of the capture on f3. Black's early ...♗g4 gives him the opportunity to take on f3, doubling our pawns. This doubled pawn in itself is not a problem, but there is one important detail to be aware of. After Black captures on f3, it is desirable for him to build up a light-squared pawn formation with ...d6-d5, often supported with ...e7-e6 and ...c7-c6. This formation is a tough nut to crack if we play too routinely.

3.g3

Now, Black has the fundamental choice between taking on f3 or allowing White to play ♗g2 next, giving up on this idea completely.

3...♗xf3

The usual choice. If Black waits with 3...♘d7 or 3...♘f6, we will play 4.♗g2 and transpose to lines covered with the move order 1.d4 d6 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 ♗g4 4.♗g2.

4.exf3

Understanding the pawn formations is key in this line. Black has doubled our pawns and now needs to choose a set-up of his pawns. There are two main approaches. The first one is easy to handle for us: Black plays a set-up with a kingside

fianchetto. Against this set-up, we obtain the better chances with a timely advance d4-d5, as we will see. The more challenging idea in my opinion is Black playing for a light-squared pawn set-up with ...d6-d5, often supported by ...e7-e6 and/or ...c7-c6. Placing all the pawns on light squares complements nicely with Black's bishop and makes a solid impression. The key against the light-squared strategy is early action. We need to immediately tackle this idea to pose problems, so looking at the concrete lines is important. Let's check the details.

4...d5

1) 4...g6 5.c4 ♗g7 6.♘c3 ♘f6 (an alternative for Black may be 6...e6: 7.d5 (I know it sounds like a broken record: prevent ...d6-d5 by advancing yourself, if possible) 7...exd5 8.cxd5 ♘e7 9.♗h3, and White has an excellent position. After getting d4-d5 in, both bishops are strong in this open position)



7.d5 (yes, again this move! Stop ...d6-d5 by playing the pawn there yourself) 7...0-0 8.♗g2 c6 9.0-0 ♘bd7 10.f4.



And White has good chances with the bishop pair and useful targets, such as the e7-pawn and basically the whole black queenside;

2) 4...e6 5.c4 c6 (Black should play 5...d5 here, transposing to the 4...d5 main line) 6.d5. We should always advance d4-d5, if possible. This leads to a favourable opening of the position;

3) 4...c6 5.c4 ♘f6 (Black should play 5...d5 here, transposing to the 4...d5 main line) 6.d5. Again, taking this opportunity. Play will now likely transpose to the 4...g6-based set-ups that are comfortable for us.

5.c4

I think this direct play is necessary to pose problems. Many players opted for 5.♗g2 and a slow build-up, but got nowhere. It is interesting to note that this position is very similar to the following line: 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♗g4?! 3.c4 (3.♘e5 is even stronger) 3...♗xf3 4.exf3. Compared to this line, we have the extra move g2-g3, which proves to be quite useful. Black's best response to 5.c4 is to set up the pawn triangle with e6 and c6. I will show some lines about why deviating is inadvisable.



5...c6

1) 5...e6 6.♘c3 (now, Black should complete the triangle with 6...c6 to transpose

back to the main line. Other options don't impress) 6...♘f6 (the line 6...♘c6 7.cxd5 exd5 8.♗b5 is better for White. The pressure on c6 and the c-file is very annoying) 7.♕b3 (Black has no reasonable move now) 7...♘c6 (the most interesting try) 8.cxd5 ♘xd5 9.♕xb7 ♘xd4 10.♗b5+ ♘xb5 11.♕c6+ ♔e7 12.♕xb5.



White is much better, due to the insecure black king. This sequence is amazingly similar to the Caro-Kann line 1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.cxd5 exd5 4.c4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♘f3 ♗g4 7.cxd5 ♘xd5 8.♕b3 ♗xf3 9.gxf3 e6 10.♕xb7 ♘xd4 11.♗b5+ ♘xb5 12.♕c6+ ♔e7 13.♕xb5. Our version is more favourable, of course – it's good to have a g-pawn;

2) 5...♘c6 6.♘c3 e6 7.cxd5 is a different move order to reach line 1 above.

6.♘c3 e6 7.♕b3 ♕b6

The natural and best move.

7...♕d7 is not a very natural move, but seeing the best reply is instructive: 8.♗f4, a very concrete move! White has ideas like 9.cxd5 cxd5 10.♗xb8 ♖xb8 11.♗b5. This limits Black's options:

1) The normal-looking move 8...♘f6 is a huge mistake: 9.cxd5

1.1) 9...exd5



10.♗h3. Ouch! One line to see why g3 is useful! 10...♕e7+ 11.♔f1, and ♖e1 is a deadly threat;

1.2) 9...♘xd5 10.♘xd5 exd5 11.♗h3, and again this shot leads to a clear advantage.

2) 8...dxc4 (Black more or less has to take) 9.♗xc4 (White's lead in development is impressive) 9...♘f6 10.0-0 ♗e7 11.♘e4, with the idea of playing ♘c5 soon. White has a sizeable advantage.



8.♕c2

I like this move best. The more standard 8.c5 is fine for Black after 8...♕xb3 9.axb3 g6!, with counterplay against the d4-pawn. This line is just equal for White, but not a bad alternative if you are after a quiet game. After 8.♕c2, I think White is better, but it is not the most usual position for our repertoire.

8...dxc4

1) 8...♕xd4 9.♗e3 ♕e5 10.0-0-0.



Black's play was too greedy. White has a strong initiative for the pawn;

2) 8...♘e7 9.♗e3. Against a slow move like 8...♘e7, I recommend castling queenside as well, keeping the option of advancing the pawns on the kingside. This comes in handy against ...g7-g6 in particular, when h2-h4-h5 is the obvious answer.

9.♗xc4 ♘f6

9...♕xd4 10.♘e4 ♘f6 (10...♗b4+ is very good for White: 11.♔e2 and the next moves like ♖d1 all come with tempo) 11.♗e3 ♕d8 12.0-0.



After ♖ad1 next and f3-f4-f5 to come, White again has a strong attack.

10.♗e3 ♕d8 11.0-0-0



After ♔b1 next, we can start to gain space on the kingside. White has some initiative in this position.

B) 2...♘f6

Black may also start the Old Indian set-up with 2...♘d7, after which I suggest just playing 3.g3. This is not the absolute best move, to be honest. If you want to punish Black to the utmost for his bad move order, you should play 3.e4 e5 4.♗c4, as covered in *Keep it Simple: 1.e4*. I still recommend playing 3.g3 for practical reasons, as learning this whole branch of the Philidor seems a bit much for such a rare line. For an 1.e4 player, this is more important, as 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 ♘d7 is still

frequently played, in particular at club level. So my take is: play 3.g3. If you absolutely know beforehand that you will face this odd move order, learning 3.e4 is an option. After 3.g3, we will transpose to the lines examined here, for example after 3...♘gf6 4.♗g2 e5.

3.g3



3...♘bd7

Black may also start with 3...c6 and then continue 4...♘bd7 and ...e7-e5. We just complete kingside castling in any case.

3...♗g4 4.♗g2 (Black combines ...♗g4 with an Old Indian pawn formation. This line is comfortable for White, because most of the time we gain the bishop pair for some advantage) 4...c6 (Black may also delay the move ...c7-c6 and develop the kingside first. It will usually lead to the same positions. After 4...♘bd7 5.0-0 e5 6.c4 ♗e7 7.♘c3 0-0, we will play 8.h3, and after 8...♗h5 9.♘h4 c6 10.♘f5, transpose to our chosen move order) 5.0-0 ♘bd7 6.c4 e5 7.♘c3 ♗e7 8.h3:

1) 8...♗xf3



9.exf3 (this is even better than 9.♗xf3, as we get to open the position more quickly) 9...0-0 10.f4 exd4 11.♕xd4, and White has a fantastic position here. We are better

simply centralizing and increasing the pressure on d6. Note that at a later stage, moving the kingside pawn mass is an option as well (f4-f5, g3-g4-g5);

2) 8...♗h5 9.♘h4.



Off to f5, netting the bishop pair.

9...0-0 10.♘f5 ♗g6 11.♘xe7+ ♕xe7 12.e4. White has a nice space advantage and the bishop pair on top. The g6-bishop is also offside and not doing all that much.

After 12...♖fe8 13.d5 cxd5 14.cxd5 ♘c5 15.f3



I had a large advantage in Sielecki-Chlechowitz, Germany tt 2005/06. Black had no play whatsoever and was later ground down on the queenside and c-file.

4.♗g2 e5

Again, Black may also start with 4...c6 and then play 5...e5.

5.0-0



Black now most of the time plays for the set-up with ...♗e7/...0-0 and ...c7-c6. The only other significant idea for Black is the ambitious advance ...e5-e4, which leads to interesting play. Black may advance immediately or prepare this with 5...c6 first, which is more common.

B1) 5...♗e7 6.c4 0-0 7.♘c3 c6 8.e4



I looked at various set-ups against the Old Indian and eventually came to the conclusion that the main line is in fact the simplest to play. White is gaining space and has a further set-up with h2-h3 and ♗e3 in mind, completing development. If Black tries to play the common plan with ...a7-a6 and ...b7-b5, we are going to stop that in its tracks with a2-a4 most of the time. It's not so easy to analyse this opening move-by-move, because Black has so many possible move orders. He may play ...♖e8 and ...♗f8, play ...♕c7 and ...a7-a6, etc. I'll examine some plausible move orders to illustrate how it will most likely continue.

8...a6

This is the most popular move, and probably the most precise one for Black. After the early ...a7-a6, White should respond with a2-a4, stopping any ...b7-b5 plans. If Black manages ...b7-b5 unhindered, he gains some useful space on the queenside and a spot for the bishop on b7.

8...♖e8. Black may delay ...a7-a6 for a bit with moves like this and ...♗f8 to follow. But if he waits for too long, we might be in a position to even allow ...b7-b5 and still be better. Let's have a look at this scenario: 9.h3 ♗f8 (here, 9...a6 10.a4 a5 11.♗e3 was a way to transpose back into the early ...a7-a6 line) 10.♗e3 a6



11.d5 (of course we might just transpose to 8...a6 again by playing 11.a4, but here we are well organized to meet the ...b7-b5 plan already) 11...cxd5 12.cxd5 b5 13.♘d2 (this is the reason why we can allow the ...b7-b5 plan. We are just in time to get this harmonious set-up. Now, White is better on the queenside with simple means) 13...♘b6



14.a4 bxa4 (after 14...b4 15.a5, Black is basically lost. The b4-pawn is terminally weak and will drop. 15...bxc3 16.♗xb6 is the idea of 15.a5 – we win a pawn immediately) 15.♘xa4. We are opening up the queenside and have many weaknesses to attack. White has a distinct advantage.

9.a4 a5

This highlights a drawback of a2-a4. Black is freezing the queenside structure and secures control over some dark squares, in particular b4 and later c5, after the d-pawn is moved or captured. These weaknesses are a drawback in White's camp, but the most important fact in this position is that Black has few active prospects, while White is able to play for expansion. Let's have a closer look:

10.h3 ♖e8 11.♗e3



11...exd4

Black usually captures to get the c5-square for the knight.

With 11...♗f8, Black is keeping the tension. Now, you can do the same or play 12.d5:

1) After 12.d5 White has more space and is better. The issue with the move is the very closed nature of the position after 12...c5. White certainly has more chances to generate play with f2-f4 later, but it is going to be a long struggle with lots of patience needed;

2) 12.♕c2 ♕c7 13.b3 g6 14.♖ad1 ♗g7 15.♖fe1.



Black is running out of useful waiting moves and probably will take on d4 now, again transposing to the position type examined after the earlier capture.

12.♘xd4 ♘c5 13.♕c2

A good spot for the queen, covering e4 and connecting the rooks.

13...♗f8 14.♖ad1 ♕b6 15.b3 ♗d7 16.f4



This is the typical position you will frequently get in the Old Indian. White has the better chances, with his space advantage and chances on the kingside. Black has the nice c5-square, and there are weaknesses on b4 and b3 – but there is more going on than just that. The problem for Black is that there is little action that he can undertake. In particular, there is no way for Black to ever initiate changes in the pawn structure – only White is calling the shots.

B2) 5...e4 6.♘fd2 d5 7.c4

We definitely need to attack Black's centre.

7...c6 8.♘c3



I have covered this position via the more common move order 5...c6 6.c4 e4 7.♘fd2 d5 8.♘c3, which is examined in line B3 below.

B3) 5...c6 6.c4



Now, Black may play the ambitious advance or play more conservatively with 6... ♗e7, which we cover via the more common 5... ♗e7 move order.

6...e4

An ambitious line for Black that leads to interesting play.

6...g6 is a very rare move order, but we need to be alert not to be tricked into a King's Indian Fianchetto main line that is not part of our repertoire: 7. ♘c3 ♗g7.



Now after 8.e4 0-0, we are in a main line King's Indian Fianchetto system. This is not bad for White, of course, but also not part of our repertoire. 8.dxe5 (I also looked at 8.d5, which is also promising) 8...dxe5 9. ♕d6 ♗f8 10. ♕d2 (Black can't easily coordinate now) 10... ♗g7 11. ♖d1 ♕e7 12.b3 0-0 13.a4, and we have some pressure with ♗a3 to come. There is ♘f3-g5-e4 as well.



7. ♘fd2

The next moves are quite forced. We attack Black's centre, and he has little choice in how to defend.

7...d5 8. ♘c3 ♗e7 9.cxd5 cxd5



10.f3

The key move to remember. We absolutely have to attack the e4-pawn to bring our bishop and rook to life. After something lame like 10. ♘b3, Black is fine, and perhaps even better. He's got more space after all.

10...exf3 11. ♘xf3 0-0 12. ♘h4

I like this move, immediately exploiting the newly-gained activity for the pieces.

12... ♘b6 13. ♘f5 ♗xf5 14. ♖xf5 ♕d7 15. ♕d3



We have followed the game Lisitsin-Shamkovich, Leningrad 1955. White is slightly better here, but the position remains interesting. We should keep the pressure up on the d5-pawn. Ideas like ♗g5 and a2-a4-a5 come to mind.

B4) 5...g6



Move order trickery! But we have a good reply to transpose into a line we have covered in Part II of this book:

6.dxe5 dxe5 7.♘c3 ♗g7 8.♘d2



This is a good line for White and is covered in Chapter 20 via 1.d4 g6.

Conclusion

The Old Indian is better for White, but it leads to a game with all the pieces on the board. You need to be patient to build up your position and exploit any untimely activities by Black. The Wade Defence leads to more unbalanced play, but it also favours White. Note that 2.g3 is an interesting move order twist to avoid the Wade if you desire to do so.

CHAPTER 35

Odds and ends – 1.d4 others

1.d4



Every opening book has its 'Odds and ends' chapter – here it is! We'll have a look at some rare lines that Black may play.

A) 1...e5

The Englund Gambit. It's incorrect, but it is useful to know some points.

2.dxe5 ♘c6

Or 2...d6 3.♘f3 ♘c6 4.♗g5 (playing ♘f3 and ♗g5 first is a bit better than taking on d6 immediately) 4...♕d7 5.exd6 ♗xd6 6.♘c3. Black does not have enough play for a central pawn and is clearly worse.



3.♘f3 ♕e7

This is played most of the time, aiming for a particular trap: 3...f6



4.e4 (this is useful to know. We should develop and play ♗c4, and not grab pawns) 4...fxe5 5.♗c4, and White is clearly better. Black has huge problems to coordinate and can't ever castle kingside.

4.♗f4

We are happy to cover the pawn and play along with the first moves of the mentioned trap.

4...♕b4+ 5.♗d2 ♕xb2



6.♘c3

This is the important move to know and the death nail of the Englund Gambit. The mentioned trap is 6.♗c3 ♗b4 7.♕d2



7...♗xc3 8.♕xc3 ♕c1 – checkmate!

6...♗b4 7.♖b1 ♕a3 8.♖b3

Here, 8.♘d5 is also very good for White, but a bit more complicated.

8...♕a5 9.a3 ♗xc3 10.♗xc3 ♕c5 11.e3



White has a huge advantage. We will develop quickly with ♗d3 and 0-0, and it's not clear how Black should organize his position.

B) 1...♘c6



The Alekhine's Defence of the d-pawn openings. It doesn't have a widely-accepted name, as far as I know.

2.♘f3

You can make a case for 2.d5, as it is probably the best move in a scientific sense. The issue with this approach is: you need to study some lines (Boris Avrukh has 8 pages on it in his recent book) that you'll get once every five years. I am cutting this down to a minimum by allowing possible transpositions to lines that are good for us anyway. Now after 2.♘f3, Black's best is 2...d5, transposing into Chapter 1 on the Anti-Chigorin. We'll check two worse alternatives.

2...d6

2...e6 is odd, but I found hundreds of games with this position in *Megabase 2019*: 3.e4 (this is too good to not play. If you feel very bad about entering a great French position, 3.g3 will get you back into something more '1.d4-like'. For instance, after 3...d5 4.♗g2 ♘f6 5.0-0, you'd transpose into Chapter 7) 3...d5 4.e5.



We transpose into a French Defence with a misplaced knight on c6. Black needs the c-pawn for counterplay against the centre, and this idea is now out of the picture. Again, if you have never played 1.e4 in your life and want to avoid such a scenario, read the note on move 3.

3.d5

There are other moves, of course. White is also better after 3.c4 or 3.e4, but this is the simplest. You may also play 3.g3, but after 3...e5, I did not find an easy path to a clear advantage. After 3.d5, White must be better with simple means.



3... ♘e5 4. ♘xe5 dxe5 5.e4 ♘f6 6. ♗b5+ ♗d7 7. ♕e2 a6 8. ♗c4



That's all you need to know (perhaps even more than that...). White prevents Black from easily playing ...e7-e6 and is better.

C) 1...b5



This is sometimes called the Polish Defence. It is a dubious opening and one of the cases where we should ignore our usual g2-g3 set-ups. Black is just giving us free rein in the centre, so let's play classical chess and build a big pawn centre.

2.e4 ♗b7

Black may also play 2...a6. This is sometimes reached via 1.e4 a6 2.d4 b5, which was also the move order in the famous game that Karpov lost with white against Tony Miles. Still, this is not a good opening, and we will be better with normal development: 3.♘f3 ♗b7 4.♗d3 e6 5.0-0 c5 6.c3 ♘f6



7.♖e1. You have some leeway here about the specific set-up. The only thing to remember is to answer ...c7-c5 with c2-c3, keeping the full centre. Typical ideas from here are a2-a4 to attack the black queenside and the knight tour ♘b1-d2-f1-g3.



3. ♗d3

This is simpler than 3. ♗xb5, which is not that convincing anyway.

With white, I once faced 1. ♘f3 b5 2.e4 ♗b7 3. ♗xb5 and later experienced some unexpected difficulties.

3... ♘f6 4. ♘d2 c5 5.c3 e6

Now we reach a similar set-up to the one after 1.d4 b5 2.e4 a6 with...



6. ♘gf3

White is better here by playing normal developing moves.

D) 1... ♘f6 2. ♘f3 b5



As discussed in Chapter 23, it is much more reliable for Black to play ...b7-b5 only if White has committed already to a g2-g3 set-up. According to that logic, 2...b5 is a dubious move, and in fact it is!

3. ♗g5

I've mentioned in the chapter on the Queen's Indian that 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 b6 3.♗g5 is a good line for White, although not significantly better than our usual 3.g3 recipe. Here it is a different matter. White is happy to develop this bishop and play e2-e3 quickly, gaining a useful tempo on the exposed b5-pawn. We have an easy game against the weakened black queenside. This approach to a line like 2...b5 is very practical. You will face it very rarely, so a simple way to attain a comfortable game is very welcome.

3... ♗b7

1) 3...♘e4 4.♗h4. It is obvious that Black will have a hard time playing ...e7-e6 now. We just play e2-e3 next and are better;

2) 3...e6 4.e4 looks really bad already. b5 is hanging and e4-e5 is a threat as well.

4. ♘bd2



4...a6

Slow, but 4...e6 wasn't great either: 5.e4. Again, we favourably managed to play e2-e4.

5.a4

We have a nice choice of good lines. Here, 5.e3 was fine as well.

5...b4 6.♗xf6 exf6



7.e4

White is better here, planning ♗c4 and 0-0 next.

E) 1...c6

This has little independent value for our repertoire. We will just play the usual moves and it will transpose.

2.♘f3



Now most likely is 2...d5, with a transposition to one of the ...♗f5 or ...♗g4 chapters later. Black may also play some combination of ...d7-d6, ...♘d7 and ...e7-e5 next, which leads to the Old Indian. In any case, we just play our usual moves of 3.g3 and 4.♗g2 and await Black's further pawn moves to transpose into a chapter of our repertoire.

F) 1...b6



2.♘f3

I recommend playing our standard move here. However, the reason why 1...b6 is not a regular guest at the top level is 2.e4!, which is better for White. I had already covered 1.e4 b6 in *KIS 1.e4*, and there was no need to change anything in these lines. So I could have basically 'copy-pasted' all the lines. I initially intended to do this, but then realized that the lines are very far away from the usual set-ups in a 1.d4-repertoire and would require some effort to learn. So, just play 2.♘f3 and 3.g3 next. This will transpose elsewhere in the book, most likely to a Queen's Indian (Chapters 20 and 21) after 2...♗b7 3.g3 ♘f6 or sometimes a Dutch (Chapter 30) after 2...♗b7 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 f5.

Conclusion

The 'Odds and ends' chapter is obviously a mixed bag. White is better in all the lines that don't transpose elsewhere in the book.

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Bibliography

Compiling a complete repertoire for White from move one is a tough task. You definitely should compare your ideas and assessments with the books that have already been published before. However, with such a wide range of Black options, it is basically impossible to check all books that are on the market. I had some books available in my own library, and of course I used them to improve this repertoire. However, I did not call my friend who owns a chess mail order business to order every single book ever published for Black against 1.d4, trying to find flaws with my lines. The chosen lines are fundamentally sound and chosen to provide good practical weapons – it is called 'Keep It Simple' for a reason.

Here is the list of resources used to write the book. In fact, I looked at some more books in my own library, but in some cases the lines that I suggest are completely new or have been ignored so far in books. Examples are the Slav-style Chapters 13 and 14, where the ideas presented for White are not covered at all in books by Avrukh or Kornev.

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Author's biography

IM Christof Sielecki is a professional chess teacher and content creator from Germany. As a player he has competed in the top leagues of Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium. The best result was winning the Dutch team championship in 2012 with the team of Voerendaal. In Germany he has led his home town club of Dinslaken on the first board, promoting from the 7th divison to the 2nd division. His best results in tournaments were winning the Latschach Open 2013 and sharing first place in San Sebastian 2018, ahead of many GMs.



He is a very active content creator. This includes a Black repertoire book on the Nimzo- and Bogo-Indian in 2015, *Keep It Simple: 1.e4* in 2018 and many online publications for various platforms like Chessable.com, Chess24.com and The Internet Chess Club. He is also providing live chess commentary online and on site, most recently at the Berlin Candidates tournament.