

Unconventional Approaches to Modern Chess

Volume 2

Rare Ideas for White

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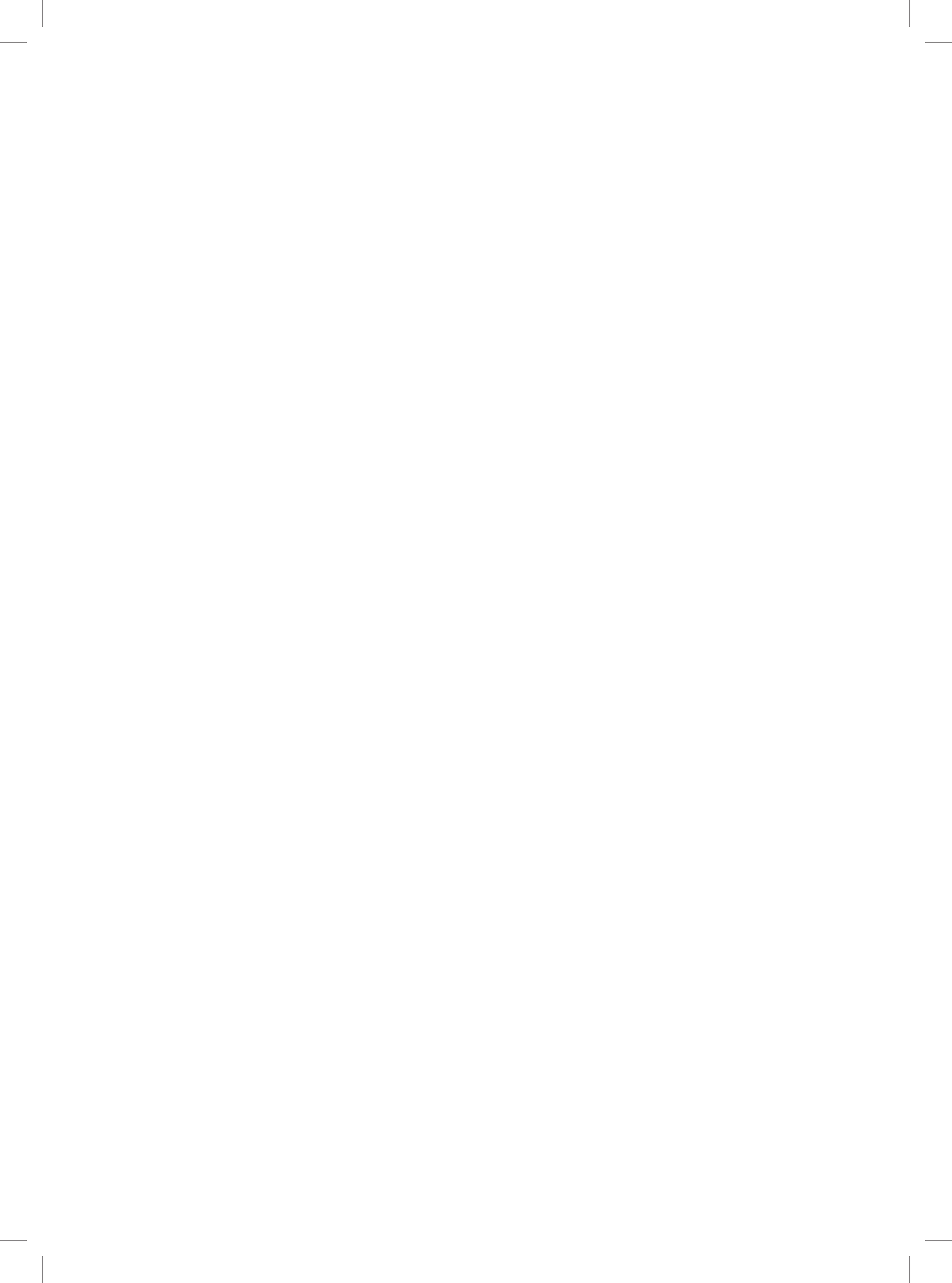
Unconventional Approaches to Modern Chess

Volume 2

Alexander Ipatov

Thinkers Publishing 2020





**To my dear wife Nigarhan,
with gratitude for her love
and support**

Key to Symbols

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

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Foreword

Late one evening in June 2016, after eleven rounds of classical chess in the French ‘Top 12’ league, I decided to venture down to the hotel lobby, hungry for some blitz chess to wash away the stress of what had been a difficult and exhausting competition. The joyous atmosphere that radiates from a chess crowd at the end of a tournament made my quest unchallenging, and I found myself playing until the early hours. Upon sunrise, we decided to call it quits and two of us agreed to catch some breakfast before heading for a well-deserved rest. Little did I know that our breakfast conversation would be the starting point for a lasting friendship and an eye-opening experience for me as a chess player.

A clear trend had emerged from the many games I played against Alex that night; he had consistently outplayed me in the opening stage of our games, and he had done so by using unusual methods. Traditionally, the key to getting the upper hand in the opening is to out-prepare your opponent with lengthy and accurate analysis. The idea is to know *more* than your opponent. That is not Alex’s philosophy, however. Instead, he focuses on the concepts that shape opening positions and the practical aspects of the game. His unique approach leads him to study *different* positions outside of mainstream theory and enables him to surprise his opponents and steer the game into territory that is familiar to him, but unfamiliar to his opponent.

Over the years, I have had the immense pleasure of working closely with Alex on a number of projects and I have been lucky enough to learn from him firsthand. His captaincy of the Saint Louis University chess team has, without a doubt, instilled a philosophy that permeates the team and will continue to do so after his departure. My own chess has greatly benefitted from his guidance and I have employed some of his opening ideas – like the Malakhov system – in my tournament games. Besides the novel opening ideas, Alex’s influence on my chess is equally present in the philosophy that I bring to the game. For this reason, I encourage you, the readers, to use this book not only for its excellent opening suggestions, but also to acquire a depth of understanding of Alex’s unique approach to opening theory.

My collaboration with Alex is not limited to chess – we have been excellent sparring partners in soccer, avid competitors in table tennis, and supportive classmates in computer science courses. In each environment, Alex has constantly displayed his work ethic and desire to excel. This book is no different. Alex draws on his vast trove of opening ideas, meticulous analysis, and years of experience to present a ready-to-use guide for players who seek alternatives to the all-too-common main lines.

GM Francesco Rambaldi
St. Louis, March 2020



Preface

Dear reader,

Thank you for taking the time to read this book. This work is a follow-up to my first book *“Unconventional Approaches to Modern Chess – Rare Ideas for Black”* which was published in February 2019. This time, I am flipping the board and exploring offbeat opening ideas from White’s perspective. The structure of the book has remained basically the same as before, except that I merged Part III (Showing Ambitions) and Part IV (Early Surprises) into one combined chapter Ambitions & Surprises.

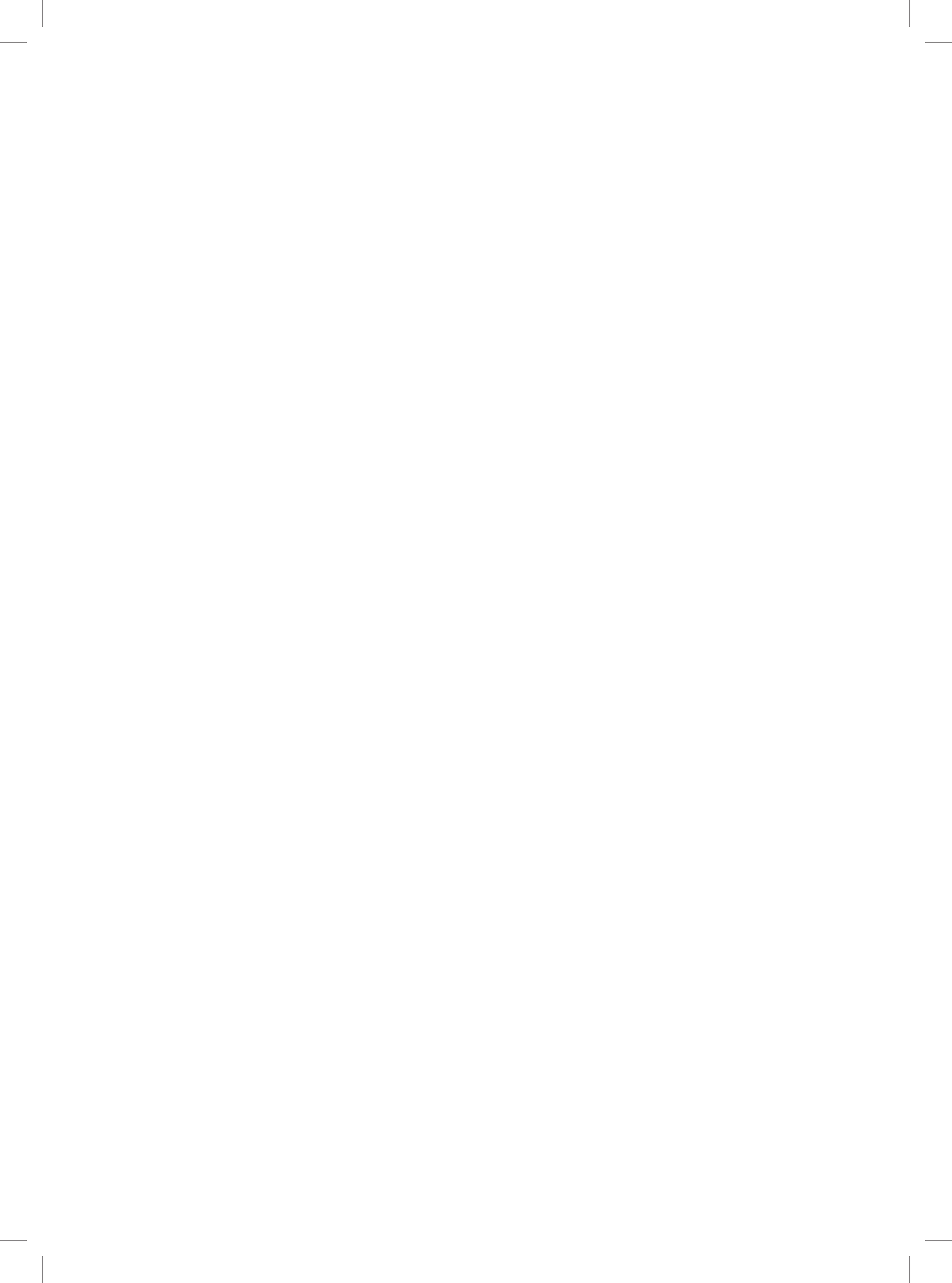
Part I explores sidelines in several mainstream openings. This is the most in-depth chapter of the book in terms of opening analysis. Part II presents two systems that are quite universal in nature and can be used against more than one opening. Part III gives a broad overview of a variety of aggressive lines taken from GM-level games.

As I stated in the previous book, I’m a big believer in the practical approach to chess. In order to win, you don’t need to find the best move in every position. It is neither possible nor necessary. To win a game, it is enough to be just a little bit better than your opponent. To make this happen, especially when facing a strong player, you must force your opponent to solve practical problems. You must get them into a position where the cost of a potential mistake is much higher than usual. If there is no room for your opponent to make a mistake, then they are unlikely to make it. It is your job to give them plenty of opportunity to go wrong. As Mikhail Tal famously put it, *“You must take your opponent into a deep dark forest where $2+2=5$, and the path leading out is only wide enough for one.”*

This book aims to expose you to a variety of opening ideas that can help you to achieve this goal. I hope you find reading it beneficial in your future endeavors at the chess board.

Thank you,

GM Alexander Ipatov
St. Louis, April 2020



Part I

Sidelines In Mainstream Openings

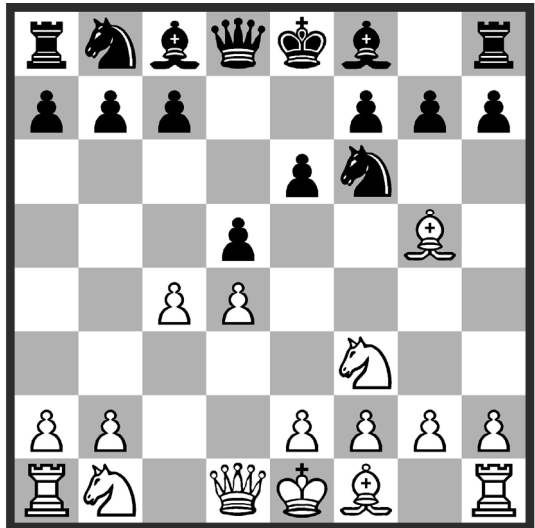
In this part of the book, we will take a look at several interesting sidelines within mainstream openings. All of these lines feature as part of my main White repertoire and I have tested them against grandmaster-level opposition. Don't worry, I haven't sneakily left out any critical lines or novelties for my own personal use – the chapter fully reflects my current knowledge!












Queen's Gambit Declined


1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 e6
3. ♘f3 d5 4. ♙g5



Chapter Guide

Chapter 1 – Queen's Gambit Declined

1.d4 f6 2.c4 e6 3.f3 d5 4.g5 e7 5.e3 0-0 6.c2 h6 7.xf6 xf6 8.h4

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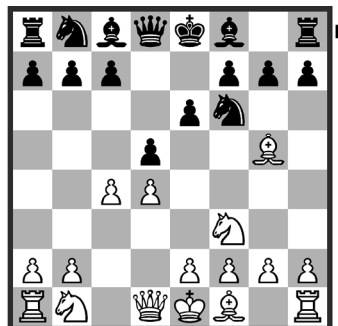
1) Early alternatives

The Queen's Gambit Declined is one of the most fundamental, "unbreakable" openings. It was employed regularly hundreds of years ago by Lasker, Capablanca and Alekhine, and it remains a major tool in the opening repertoire of most top chess players nowadays. Of course, I will not attempt to refute the Queen's Gambit Declined (QGD) or even prove an advantage for White - it is not possible. If you ever see a book claiming to know how to easily beat the QGD, stay away!

Nevertheless, I have one line in my own opening repertoire that may pose practical problems if Black doesn't know the particular nuances. Due to the limited scope of the book, unfortunately, I cannot cover every possible line that Black might respond with. Therefore, for simplicity I will assume that Black will always play ...h7-h6, which is a very common move in the QGD anyway. In other words, standalone systems such as the Tartakower defense will not be dealt with.

1. d4 ♖f6 **2. c4** e6 **3. ♘f3** d5 **4. ♙g5**

This move has been in my repertoire for quite a while. I usually employ it in order to avoid certain openings or attempt to trick my opponent with a move order and get him into unfamiliar positions.



Position after: 4. ♙g5

The b1-knight might sometimes be developed to the d2-square depending on how Black reacts.

4... ♙e7

This is a very likely response by a QGD player.

A) Black may capture the pawn on c4 with 4... dxc4 and then depending on what openings the opponent plays, we can choose between playing 5. ♘c3 and 5. ♙a4+.

B) The idea behind 4. ♙g5 can be seen if Black attempts to play the Ragozin with 4... ♙b4+, as here we may deviate from the main lines and play 5. ♘bd2!? with relatively fresh positions.

C) If Black plays 4... c6 then we have a choice between developing our knight either to d2 or c3. The latter will transpose into of the main lines of the Slav. I

would usually play it if I noticed during my preparation that my opponent is not a Slav player.

D) Finally, Black also has 4... h6 where we would likely transpose into a line of the Slav after 5. ♖xf6 ♜xf6 6. ♘c3 c6.

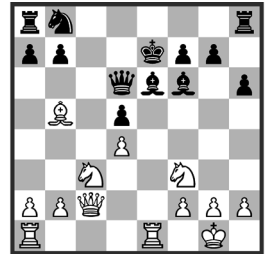
5. e3 0-0

Black may postpone castling and strike in the center immediately: 5... h6 6. ♖xf6 ♖xf6 7. ♜c2 c5 leading to unknown territory. There are only two games in the database here: Nakamura – Adams, 2014 and Ipatov – Akobian, 2018. Although I lost to Varuzhan, it wasn't as a result of the opening outcome. On the contrary, I was better and had more time on the clock as my opponent was out of book very quickly. 8. cxd5 cxd4 9. ♖b5+!



Position after: 9. ♖b5+!

A) In our game, Varuzhan thought for something like 30 – 40 minutes and then played the somewhat unexpected 9... ♗e7N after which I managed to obtain a pleasant edge with 10. exd4 exd5 11. 0-0 ♖e6 12. ♖e1 ♜d6 13. ♘c3±



Position after: 13. ♘c3±

Ipatov, A (2665) – Akobian, V (2640) Saint Louis 2018. The black king is stuck in the center. Even if Black plays ... ♜h8-d8 and ... ♗e7-f8, White will keep annoying him with ♜c2-h7.

B) 9... ♘d7 10. dxe6 ♜a5+ 11. ♜d2 ♜xb5 12. ♘xd4 ♜a6 13. exd7+ ♖xd7 14. ♘c3 0-0 15. ♜d1 Black still has to prove his compensation. White's next moves are ♜d2-e2 and 0-0.

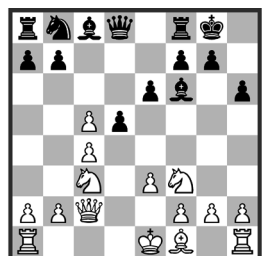
C) 9... ♖d7 10. dxe6!



Position after: 10. dxe6!

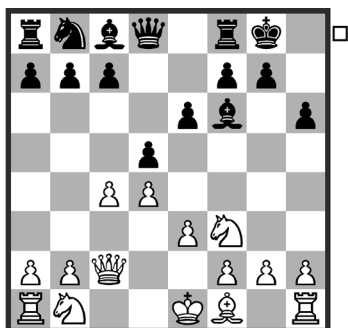
C1) Black cannot accept the piece because of 10... ♖xb5?! 11. exf7+ ♗d7 [11... ♗f8 runs into 12. ♜c5+; whereas 11... ♗xf7 allows 12. ♜b3+] 12. ♜f5+ ♗c6 13. a4 ♖a6 14. b4! and the black king urgently needs help.

C2) 10... ♖a5+ 11. ♘bd2 ♗xb5 [≤ 11... ♙xb5 12. ♖c8+ ♗d8 13. ♗xb7 0-0 14. ♗xb5±] 12. exd7+ ♘xd7 13. ♗e4+ ♔f8 14. ♘xd4 ♗xb2 15. ♖b1 ♗xa2 16. ♗xb7
White got an edge and later won in Nakamura, H (2775) – Adams, M (2745) London 2014.



Position after: 9. dxc5

6. ♖c2 h6 **7.** ♙xf6 ♙xf6



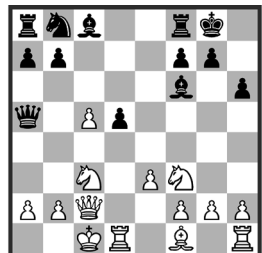
Position after: 7... ♙xf6

8. h4!

This is the correct move order. White postpones the knight's development to c3 until he can be sure that Black will not meet it with ...c7-c5 at once. In other words, White will likely develop his knight to c3 once Black plays ...c7-c6.

I had a couple of successful games with 8. ♘c3 until one of my opponents, Andrew Tang, showed a precise way to equalize with Black at the 2015 World Open: 8... c5 [In case of 8... c6 we transpose into our main line with 9. h4! which we will cover shortly.] 9. dxc5

A) 9... ♖a5 is one option, but I am not too concerned about this continuation as it is still possible to get an interesting game with 10. cxd5 exd5 11. 0-0-0!?

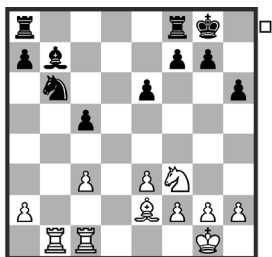


Position after: 11. 0-0-0!?

11... ♙e6 [11... ♙xc3 12. ♗xc3 ♗xa2 13. ♙d3 ♘c6 14. ♔d2↑ with the idea ♖d1-a1. On a side note, White should watch out for Black's ...d5-d4.] 12. ♘xd5 ♖c8 [12... ♙xd5 13. ♖xd5 ♗xa2 14. ♙c4 ♗a1+ 15. ♗b1 ♗a4 16. ♗a2!±] 13. ♔b1! and I couldn't find enough compensation for Black. For example: 13... ♖xc5 [13... ♙xd5 14. ♖xd5 ♘c6 15. ♙c4 ♘b4 16. ♗d2 ♖xc5 17. ♖xc5 ♗xc5 18. ♖c1± Kasparov, G (2710) – Timman, J (2610) London 1984.] 14. b4! ♖xc2 15. ♘xf6+ gxf6 16. bxa5 ♖xf2 17. ♖d8+ ♔g7 18. ♘d4 ♙xa2+ 19.

♔a1 f5 20. ♖d3± Van Wely, L (2585) – Geller, E (2505) Tilburg 1993.

B) Black should instead play 9... dxc4! 10. ♖xc4 ♗a5 [The new move 10... ♘d7!? is also good. 11. c6 bxc6 12. 0-0 ♖b8= Black's bishop pair compensates for the worse pawn structure. Anton Guijarro, D (2650) – Nakamura, H (2785) Caleta 2017.] 11. 0-0 ♖xc3 12. ♗xc3 ♗xc3 13. bxc3 ♘d7 14. c6 bxc6 15. ♖ab1 ♘b6 16. ♖e2 c5 17. ♖fc1 ♖b7=



Position after: 17... ♖b7=

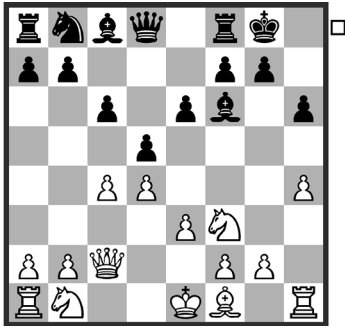
I tried to play like Karpov (he managed to beat Kasparov in this endgame!) but couldn't manage anything against Andrew who improved on Kasparov's play in the opening and played well later on. 18. ♔f1

B1) Garry misplayed the position. 18... ♖d5 19. ♖b5! The rook will be well placed on a5, attacking both the a7- and c5-pawns. 19... ♘d7 [19... ♖xa2?? 20. c4+-] 20. ♖a5 ♖fb8 21. c4 ♖c6 22. ♘e1! Great maneuvering. 22... ♖b4 23. ♖d1 ♖b7 24. f3 ♖d8 25. ♘d3 g5 26. ♖b3 ♔f8 27. ♘xc5 ♘xc5 28. ♖xc5± Karpov, A (2705) – Kasparov, G (2715) Moscow 1984.

B2) 18... ♖fd8! 19. ♖b5 ♖ac8 20. ♔e1 ♖c7= Ipatov, A (2615) – Tang, A (2365) Arlington 2015.

2) 8...c6

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 e6 3. ♘f3 d5 4. ♙g5 ♙e7 5. e3 0-0 6. ♚c2 h6 7. ♙xf6 ♙xf6 8. h4 c6



Position after: 8... c6

9. ♘c3!

Now this move is justified because Black has already committed himself to ...c7-c6.

9... ♘d7

A) If Black switches his mind and plays 9... c5 then we are a tempo ahead compared to before and can continue



Position after: 9... c5

10. g4! cxd4 11. exd4 ♘c6 12. 0-0-0 dxc4? [12... g6!? is likely better but even then, White has great compensation after 13. g5!] 13. g5! ♙xd4 [13... hxg5 ♙xg5+ 15. ♚b1 ♙h6 16. ♙xc4 ♚f6 17. ♘e5! ♘xe5 18. ♘e4 ♚f5 19. dxe5 ♚xe5 20. f4! ♚xf4 21. ♖df1 with a crushing attack.] 14. ♘xd4 ♘xd4 15. ♚e4 e5 16. ♚xe5 ♘c6 17. ♚g3 ♚e7 Ipatov, A – Oleksienko, M Lviv blitz tournament 2013. 18. gxh6 ♚f6 19. hxg7 ♚h6+ 20. ♚b1 ♙f5+ 21. ♚a1 ♖fd8 22. ♙xc4+–

B) 9... g6 is possible and transposes into 8...g6, which will be covered separately.

10. g4 g6?

Black should play 10... e5!

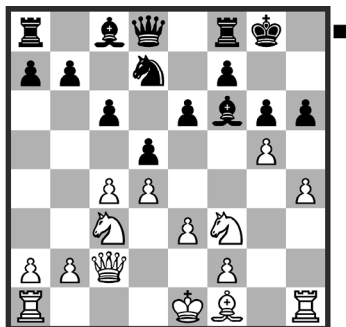


Position after: 10... e5!

11. g5 exd4 12. exd4 [≤ the natural looking 12. gxf6 which backfires as after 12... dxc3 13. fxg7 ♖e8 14. ♚xc3

♘f6! suddenly it is White who has to worry about his king!] 12... ♖e8+ 13. ♙e2 hxg5 14. hxg5 ♙xg5∞ with an extremely complex position where White definitely has compensation. He has a choice between 15.cxd5 and 15.♚h7+, but Black seems to be holding.

11. g5!

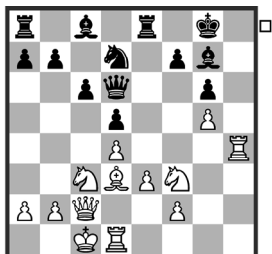


Position after: 11. g5!

Now White has a free-flowing attack.

11... hxg5 12. hxg5 ♙xg5

12... ♙g7 13. 0-0-0 ♚e7 14. cxd5 exd5
15. ♙d3 ♖e8 16. ♖h4 ♚d6

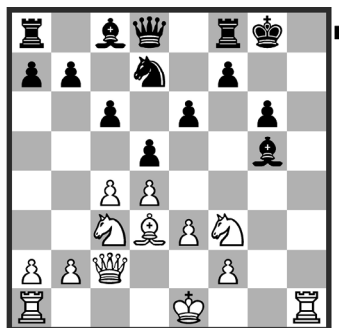


Position after: 16... ♚d6

17. e4! ♘f8 18. ♖dh1 dxe4 19. ♘xe4
♖xe4 20. ♙xe4 and White soon won

in Dubov, D (2536) – Mozharov, M (2474) Moscow 2012.

13. ♙d3



Position after: 13. ♙d3

Black cannot hold the g6-pawn. White threatens ♙d3xg6 and in case of ...♚g8-g7, we can always bring a rook into the attack!

13... ♚g7

13... ♙f6 14. ♙xg6 fxg6 15. ♚xg6+
♙g7 16. ♘g5 ♘f6 17. ♖h7! ♚e7 18.
0-0-0 ♖f7 19. ♖h4+–

14. cxd5 exd5 15. ♖g1 f6 16. ♙xg6+–

White's positional advantage is overwhelming. The rest is easy.

16... ♖h8 17. 0-0-0 ♘f8 18. ♙f5 ♖h5
19. ♘e2 ♙xf5 20. ♚xf5 ♚d7 21.
♚xd7+ ♘xd7 22. ♘f4 ♖h6 23. ♘g5
fxg5 24. ♖xg5+ ♚f6 25. ♖dg1+–

Ipatov, A (2601) – Grover, S (2479)
Kocaeli 2013.