

Larry Kaufman

Kaufman's New Repertoire for Black and White

A Complete, Sound and User-friendly Chess Opening Repertoire

New In Chess 2019

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General introduction

In 2013 I wrote *The Kaufman Repertoire for Black and White*. The Black half of this book is an update of the Black half of that one, mostly updated in 2018 with some further updates in 2019, with the addition of the Marshall Attack being the biggest change. The White half however is completely new; it had to be, because in KRBW I recommended 1.d4, whereas here I recommend 1.e4. Many of the games, and most of the analysis, for the White book are from 2019.

The main theme of the book, especially the White portion, is that you can obtain good positions, meaning slightly favorable ones as White and only slightly worse ones as Black, without having to play the most complex, theory-heavy lines in most cases. I was pleasantly surprised to see how little White gives up by avoiding the most critical lines. Apparently the elite GMs agree with me as they have been playing many of my White sidelines against each other in 2019. White can usually maintain a plus even in these sidelines well into the endgame. It won't be enough to win many correspondence games when your opponent is using an engine, but for over-the-board play, you will generally emerge from the opening as White with good winning chances if you are the stronger player, and with black should at least obtain positions where you won't just be fighting a one-sided battle for a draw. Although this is a repertoire book, I have made a much greater effort than in my previous books to give alternatives for the chosen side, especially in the White book, as I really don't want the book to become obsolete just because one or two variations prove to be dead draws or otherwise dubious. The price for this is less coverage of rare moves by the opposing side. Usually inferior moves by Black can be rather easily refuted with any modern engine. I can't cover everything!

Although I am the oldest active GM in the U.S. and no longer play near GM level, I do have some real advantages for writing a book like this. Computer chess is having a revolution now, based on Monte-Carlo Tree Search and Neural Networks, inspired by the success of AlphaZero. This is not a book on computers, so you'll have to look elsewhere for more information about these terms, but suffice it to say that I am very much involved with these developments as a partner in KomodoChess, which has a very strong Monte-Carlo version already, and so I know what engines to use, what hardware to buy, and how to use them effectively. In March of 2019 I purchased a computer with a very powerful GPU (RTX 2080

for the tech-minded) and 8 very fast CPU cores. My method for working on this book is to run each position on the latest Lc0 (which is a neural network designed to roughly replicate Alpha Zero, rather successfully I would say) on my GPU and 2 CPU cores while running Komodo 13 MCTS on the other 6 CPU cores. These two engines complement each other quite well. Lc0 is in general stronger due to the extremely powerful GPU (which has almost 3000 cores!!). But it has no chess knowledge except what it taught itself by playing games, whereas Komodo MCTS has ten years of refinement of its chess knowledge behind it. Also Lc0 is relatively weaker in the endgame, and rather blind to perpetual checks in many positions. Note that both of these engines can be used in 'MultiPV' mode to display the top 5 (or more) moves without any loss of quality, which is not at all true of normal (non Monte-Carlo) engines, nor do the two engines have to share resources.

The result is a quality of analysis that vastly exceeds what most people will get using normal engines on normal pcs with shared resources and MultiPV displays. Aside from using these two engines, I also keep an eye on analysis done by others using Stockfish, Houdini, and normal Komodo, as well as database statistics using two databases. One is the Hiarcs Powerbook (mostly engine vs engine games I believe), and the other is a combination of the ChessBase MegaBase and a database of correspondence games. Of course I also consult books and magazines (especially *New In Chess Yearbook*), but due to the amazing developments mentioned above I consider anything older than 2018 to be unreliable so looking at older books was not a priority. One book I did consult on several lines for White was *Keep It Simple* by Christof Sielecki, both because it is new enough (2018) and because we chose some of the same lines, since simplicity was also one of my goals in this book. But I wanted my book to be suitable even for grandmasters, so in general my choices are not as simple as his; I'm really trying to prove an edge for White, not just interesting lines with surprise value. Although the variations chosen are aimed at reasonably strong players, my explanations are at a more elementary level, so even if some of the lines are a bit difficult, I hope that less advanced players will learn how to evaluate positions from my comments.

My role in choosing which moves to give is primarily as a referee. When the two engines (plus other analysis and database stats when applicable) agree, I will very rarely argue. These engines play somewhere in the 3400 to 3600 Elo range, and only in special circumstances would I ignore them. But when they disagree, which is pretty often, I have to decide which one is right, and here my chess understanding and knowledge of chess engines both play a role. The default assumption is that Lc0 is right, but

if Komodo MCTS strongly prefers a move that is only slightly below the best according to Lc0, or if Lc0 seems to be blind to some feature of the position or to a perpetual check, I'll probably go with Komodo's choice. I also consider whether the move is easy or difficult to understand; it is common that Komodo will pick the same move that I would pick, while Lc0 prefers one that just doesn't seem as good. Lc0 may be correct, but if I can't figure out why, probably the reader will also have difficulty, so I do consider this factor.

I generally quote the evaluation shown by Komodo (example: $+0.26$ – between brackets) because until recently the Lc0 evaluations $+0.27$ were unrealistic, and I try to put into words the factors that justify the assessment shown. I tend to use symbols showing advantages a bit more aggressively than is customary, because if both engines show around $+0.15$ (for example), the position is almost surely favorable for White, if only slightly, and calling it equal just seems wrong.

The book is full of novelties, which I mark with an N, although it often happens that someone plays one of these moves shortly after I wrote up the game, so don't be surprised if you see games with my 'novelty'. When I refer to material advantages, I use the scale that I have promoted (see the chapter called 'Material values', namely pawn = 1, knight or bishop = $3\frac{1}{2}$ (with a slight preference for the bishop in general), rook = $5\frac{1}{4}$, queen = 10, and the bishop pair earns a half point bonus. Checkmate may be the nominal object of the game, but nowadays it seems as if the rules have been changed to say that being the sole possessor of the bishop pair wins! It's an exaggeration, but if you don't believe that winning the bishop pair for nothing is generally a serious advantage, a lot of the White book won't make much sense. All modern computers and top GMs accept this.

Writing this book has made me feel like a time traveler. It is full of the latest games and novelties, many in 2019, and features some games by players born in the 21st century. Yet I also have ties to the distant past. My first chess teacher, Harold Phillips, was Greater New York champion in 1895, and played twice against the first World Champion, Wilhelm Steinitz, in 1894!! I met Edward Lasker, whose most famous game was played in 1912, and had some instruction from Norman Whitaker, a top player around 1920. I played against Sam Reshevsky and Al Horowitz in the U.S. Championship, and won a ten game rapid match from Arnold Denker, three of the four top American players during World War II. My first big success was winning the American Open championship in 1966, but I didn't earn the Grandmaster title until I won the World Senior Championship in 2008. I was part of the team that created MacHack, the first chess computer to earn a rating in human tournaments, in 1967,

and 52 years later I'm still working on chess computers and playing in tournaments! In short, I have had a very long chess career!

I would like to thank Daniel Clancy for the correspondence database, Hiarc for their database, Mark Lefler and the late Don Dailey for their roles in KomodoChess, the late Steve Brandwein for teaching me a lot about chess so long ago, Christopher Gallardo for encouraging me to write this book, and New In Chess for publishing it.

Big changes are happening in the chess world, in an effort to combat excessive draws and to minimize the role of preparation for specific games. One top event introduced 'Armageddon' playoff games after every draw, and FIDE is organizing a serious World Championship of 'Chess960' aka 'Fischerandom' with most of the elite players. I don't know where these changes will take us, but I hope to be involved in these new developments. Despite my age, I'm receptive to new ideas.

Larry Kaufman
Bethesda, USA,
October 2019

WHITE INTRODUCTION

1.e4: safe lines for a modest edge

Way back in 1940, U.S. Master Weaver Adams published a book called *White to play and win*, in which he tried to prove a win for White starting with 1.e4. Unfortunately he totally failed, since he resorted to dubious gambits that were often just winning for Black.

I don't believe that White has a forced win in chess, but I do believe that if he starts with 1.e4 and makes no mistakes, he can retain at least the preferable position without allowing an obvious draw for 30 to 40 moves or so, beyond the point to which openings can generally be analyzed. He should normally get positions where it is fairly easy to explain why White is better, even if in many cases a grandmaster can expect to hold the draw against a similar opponent. Black should at least be the one who has to be careful to get the draw. There are a great many lines in this White book where White's advantage is the bishop pair, so I'm tempted to call the White book 'White to play and win the bishop pair', but of course that wouldn't be accurate.

When I was learning chess back in the 1960s we didn't have chess computers to tell us what moves were good in the opening; the first rated chess computer was MacHack in 1967, of which I was a team member, and it was only rated in the low 1500s. What we did have then was Bobby Fischer. Whatever he played or said about the opening was treated with the same awe that we now reserve for the opinions of top players who use 3500 rated engines to prepare. Fischer's views on the opening were pretty clear; Black had multiple ways to equalize against 1.d4 but only one way, the Najdorf Sicilian, to equalize against 1.e4. He almost always opened 1.e4 except for his use (to avoid prep) of 1.c4 in his title match with Boris Spassky in 1972.

Like other Fischer disciples (notably including the late six time U.S. Champion Walter Browne), I also played 1.e4 in the 60s (I learned a lot of my White openings by simply watching all 70+ games of Fischer's 1964 simul in Washington D.C., there being no databases or internet back then) but eventually turned to 1.d4 due primarily to the success and popularity of the Najdorf. It seemed impossible to get any edge against the Najdorf, which was the most popular defense among strong players. Garry Kasparov was also mostly a Najdorf exponent, and also turned away from 1.e4 for much of his career although he may have had other reasons as well.

Due to the influence of Fischer and Kasparov, I have pretty much held the lifelong view that 1.e4 is the best opening move if we know that Black will not play the Najdorf, but that without such knowledge, 1.d4 is better. In my first opening book in 2003 I went for 1.e4 for White based on avoiding the Najdorf by the 3.♗b5 check. Unfortunately, right after my final deadline GM Ivanchuk introduced a surprising new move for Black (a seemingly unplayable 11...d5!!) in the main line of 3.♗b5 check that gave Black total equality rather easily. With the Najdorf still very difficult to crack, I returned to 1.d4 in my second opening book; the Black portion of this book is an update from that one. But this time I again reverted to 1.e4 for the White book, because it seems that White can avoid Ivanchuk's brilliant move in more than one way, still retaining the better chances. This 3.♗b5 check line has become quite popular among elite GMs, and it seems to give White rather clearly the better chances in all lines, although there is no denying that Black's chances to draw are higher than in sharper Sicilian lines. It seems that I got it right in my first book, only the details were wrong! White usually aims for the Maroczy Bind with the bishop check, something that he cannot reach with 3.d4 in most Sicilian variations. Of course there are other Sicilians besides 2...d6, but 3.♗b5 has remained in good standing against 2...♟c6, and both 3.c3 and 3.c4 are decent ways to aim for a slight edge vs. 2...e6.

In order to give White a second option, I decided to include 2.♟c3, intending to meet 2...d6 with 3.d4 cxd4 4.♖xd4 ♟c6 5.♖d2!?, which has recently caught fire in elite play. Of course I include answers to the other second moves for Black here.

The big concern for 1.e4 players in recent years has been the Berlin Defense to the Spanish, which I recommended for Black in my first book. The line I gave in that book for White (4.0-0 ♟xe4 5.♖e1) is definitely more pleasant for White than for Black, though somewhat drawish, and remains my recommendation, varying only on move 9. Against the Morphy Defense (3...a6) I changed my recommendation from the Exchange Variation (which looks just too equal) to the 6.d3 line, playing d2-d3 only after 5...♗e7. This has become popular with the elite, even appearing in the World Championship Karjakin vs. Carlsen, primarily as a way to avoid the Marshall Attack, although as I show there is a real possibility of play transposing to an Anti-Marshall line usually arising from the normal 6.♖e1. This time, I decided to offer the Italian (3.♗c4) as an alternative to the Spanish. Many elite GMs are choosing the Italian, perhaps on the grounds that if White has to settle for an early d2-d3 in the Spanish, why should it be better than the Italian? Well, it's not really that simple, but it seems to me that White can count on at least a small

plus without giving Black a draw too easily in the Italian (as well as in the d2-d3 Spanish). I give both quiet (d2-d3) and sharp (4.c3 ♖f6 5.d4) options for White.

The Petroff (Russian) Defense (1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗f6) is quite important and was the main choice of World Number 2 Caruana until 2019, when he seems to have moved on. Perhaps the lines I give here are the reason, although I don't know this. It seems that White can get a small edge in the former main line by simply offering a swap of knights by 8.♗bd2. Black can avoid that line by playing more symmetrically, but even this doesn't give him problem-free life. I also give an alternative with 5.♖e2, which tended to be used only as a drawing line, but now seems to be a valid way to play for a small advantage. I also cover in this chapter the Philidor Defense (2...d6 or 1...d6 with an early ...e7-e5) which was somewhat popular a few years ago but seems to be fading now, as well as the two Black gambits on move 2, Latvian and Elephant.

The Caro-Kann is one of the best replies to 1.e4, and not easy to refute. The traditional main lines where White meets 4...♙f5 with 5.♗g3 seem to be very close to equal, and the fashionable 3.e5 often leads to positions where White has more space but few winning prospects. I decided to make the Two Knights Variation my main line, based partly on a single recent game that seems to overturn the theory of the 3...♗f6 defense. I also give a rare line recommended in an SOS article in *New in Chess*, meeting 4...♙f5 by 5.♖f3, which usually results in White's winning the bishop pair at some cost in time. Since the position is open, the bishop pair should be worth something, and it is hard to find full equality for Black. For a third option, I give the Exchange Variation, which seems to have been improved by the move 6.h3. Black either has to play ...g7-g6 and ...♙f5, not a good combination of moves, or else settle for a rather inactive light-squared bishop.

Against the French I stuck with the Tarrasch Variation (3.♗d2), as in my first book. One reason for this is that there is a fairly important transposition possible between the Sicilian with 2...e6 3.c3 d5 4.exd5 exd5 and the Tarrasch French, as explained in the notes to the Sicilian game with that opening. More generally, the Tarrasch is more in line with the theme of this White book, which is to aim for small but clear advantages rather than the possibly larger but less clear advantages of sharp main lines such as 3.♗c3 in the French. 3...c5 against the Tarrasch is considered the main line, and I think that with 4.♗gf3 (rather than 4.exd5), as also given in my first book, Black doesn't get total equality. Other third move options for Black are playable and analyzed here, but White usually keeps a normal plus.

Black has several other reasonable first moves against 1.e4 besides the 'big four', which I analyze in the Other First Moves chapter. All of them give White a larger advantage than he gets against the 'big four', but you have to know what you are doing! Alekhine's Defense is met by an accelerated Exchange Variation, the Nimzowitsch Defense by offering transposition to the Spanish/Italian, the Scandinavian with 2...♖d5 by the usual 3.♗c3, the Modern by an early ♗e3, and the Pirc by a surprising early ♗f4 which has only recently come to my attention.

So how much of an edge can you get as White with my repertoire? Here are the Elo advantages for White after my preferred response to the main lines (per Hiarcs db):

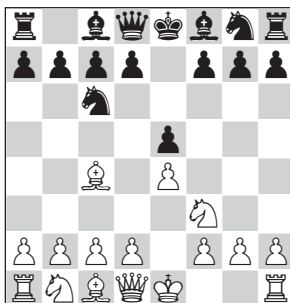
- Caro-Kann Two Knights +40;
- French Tarrasch +45;
- Sicilian 2...♗c6 3.♗b5 +37;
- Sicilian 2...d6 3.♗b5+ +40;
- Petroff main line +37;
- Italian +30;
- Spanish Berlin 5.♖e1 with ♗f1 +42;
- Spanish 6.d3 +26.

So to sum up, if Black plays the defenses given in the Black book White is held to a 26 to 30 Elo plus, otherwise he gets at least 37 Elo in every line! Lc0 evaluations of these lines are reasonably consistent with these statistics. White isn't giving up much by playing these lines, which in general require much less memorization than the traditional main lines.

CHAPTER 5

Italian Game

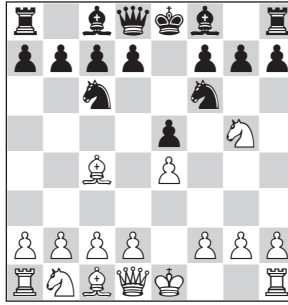
The Italian (1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4) is the most popular opening among novice players, but until quite recently it was a rather rare choice in elite-level games.



However, due to Marshall/Berlin phobia, it has become a serious alternative to the Spanish recently, with former World Champion Anand being perhaps the leading practitioner of the Italian; his recent games play a big role in this chapter.

There are basically two main ways to play the Italian, at least against the main reply 3...♙c5. I exclude the lines where all four knights come out to their natural squares early as they are a bit drawish, and Evans' Gambit (4.b4) which both Fischer and Kasparov liked on occasion but which doesn't look so good with modern computer analysis. Note that after 3...♙c5, common sense says that not only is White better because it is his turn, but his advantage should at least be more than just that because the knight on f3 blocks a pawn that has much less need to move than the one Black has blocked with his ♘c6, since the c7-pawn hems in the queen. Whether White's edge is more or less than in the Spanish is not at all clear. So I give both.

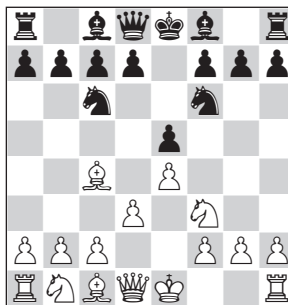
First we consider lines where White is ambitious and doesn't settle for meeting ...♘f6 by d2-d3. If Black plays the Two Knights Defense, 3...♘f6, one way to get an exciting game is the ancient and crude 4.♘g5.



After the nearly forced **4...d5** (the Traxler Counter-Gambit **4...c5** isn't a blunder but is now considered dubious) **5.exd5** **Qa5** (**5...xd5** is also considered dubious) **6.b5+ c6** **7.dxc6 bxc6** **8.f3** is an old line that I played well over fifty years ago which virtually forces Black to gambit a second pawn, which we refuse. Analysis indicates that White retains slightly better chances though the resultant endgames should be drawn. See Game 5.1.

After **3...c5** **4.c3** **f6** **5.d4 exd4** **6.e5** is a sharp line analyzed recently in *New In Chess Yearbook* with the conclusion that Black can equalize in one or two lines with very accurate play. I found some improvements for White that at least seem to keep the slightly better chances, though it's quite close to equal in a couple of lines. See Game 5.2, which includes in the notes a very recent game in which Anand adopted this idea at the highest level and did obtain some advantage.

Next we come to meeting **3...f6** by the safe but unexciting **4.d3**.

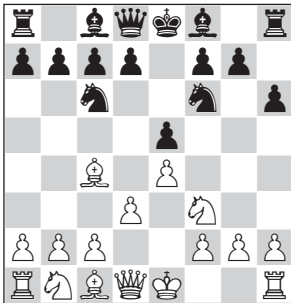


First we'll look at **4...h6**, intending **...d7-d6** (without fear of **g5**) and either **...g7-g6** or the recently popular **...g7-g5**. White seems to keep a normal edge in this line by avoiding **d2-d4** when the reply **...g5-g4** would win a pawn. See Game 5.3. If Black just plays **4...e7** we get play somewhat

73% expected score for White is way too high...

Game 5.3 Italian Game – Giuoco Piano
Sergey Karjakin 2782
Shakhriyar Mamedyarov 2808
 Paris rapid 2018 (5)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 ♗f6 4.d3 h6



This was formerly played with the idea to follow up with ...g7-g6 (before or after ...d7-d6) without allowing ♗g5. But lately it has been played with the idea of ...g7-g5 (especially after White plays c2-c3), planning ...♙g7 and ...♗c6-e7-g6. It doesn't fully equalize, but it does seem like a rather good choice for Black when a draw just won't do.

5.0-0 d6

Black waits to see one more White move before choosing between ...g7-g6 and ...g7-g5.

6.c3 g5

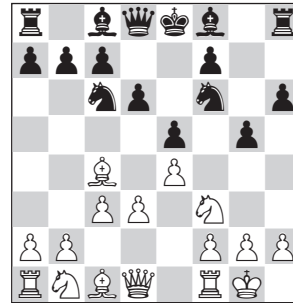
Logical now since the natural 7.d4 (striking in the center to answer a flank attack) means gambiting a pawn. But White need not hurry. 6...g6 7.d4 ♖e7 was the standard way to play the line until recently,

but it doesn't equalize: 8.♞e1 ♙g7 9.♗bd2 0-0 10.h3 ♙d7 11.♗f1 ♞ae8 12.♗g3 ♞d8 13.♙b3± (+0.68).



analysis diagram

Black has no compensation for his space disadvantage, but at least his position is solid. But the computers have taught us that other things being equal, space matters.



7.a4!

White preserves the bishop on a strong diagonal and gains space.

7...♙g7 8.♞e1 0-0 9.h3

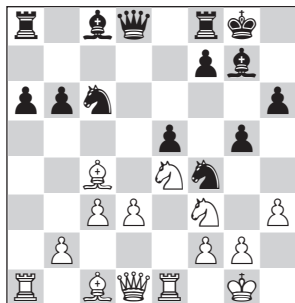
Note that White only does this after Black castles, since otherwise the reply ...g5-g4 might be a bit dangerous for White.

9...d5?!

9...♗e7 10.♗bd2 ♗g6 11.♗f1 c6 12.♗g3± (+0.22). The position is almost symmetrical, but White's

dark-squared bishop is superior to the black one, and he has a lead in development.

10.exd5 ♖xd5 **11.** ♖bd2 **a6** **12.** ♗e4
♜f4 **13.a5** **b5** **14.axb6** **cxb6**



15.b4?!

15. ♗e3! ♗a5 (15... ♖b8 16.d4 exd4 17.cxd4± (+0.80)). The threats of 18. ♗xa6 and 18. ♗xf4 followed by d4-d5 are hard to meet) 16. ♗a2± ♜xd3? 17. ♜fxg5! hxg5 18. ♖h5+–.

15... ♗e7?

15... ♖a7 16. ♗e3 ♖h8 17.b5 axb5 18. ♗xb5 ♖xa1 19. ♖xa1 ♖c7 20. ♖a3± (+0.25). White has the better pawn structure and invasion plans on d6.

16.d4

16.b5! a5 17. ♗a3± (+0.85).

16... ♖c7 **17. ♗xf4** **gxf4** **18. ♖e2**

18. ♗b3±.

18...exd4 **19.cxd4** ♜f5 **20. ♖ac1**

♖d8 **21. ♖d2** ♜xd4 **22. ♖xf4** ♜xf3+

23. ♖xf3 ♗b7

23... ♖a7 24. ♖cd1±.

24. ♖f5

24. ♖cd1±.

24... ♗xe4 **25. ♖xe4** **a5** **26.bxa5** **bxax5**

27. ♖e3 ♖c8 **28. ♖f5** ♖c7? **29. ♖g3+–**

♖d6 **30. ♖h2** ♖d8 **31. ♖cc3** ♖f8

32. ♖h7 ♖e5 **33. ♖ce3** ♖a1 **34. ♖g4**

♗e5+ **35.g3** ♗g7 **36. ♖f4** ♖d1

37. ♖e4 ♗f6 **38.h4** **h5** **39. ♖a8+** ♖d8
40. ♖f3 ♖d6 **41. ♖xh5** ♖d2 **42. ♗xf7**
♖xf7 **43. ♖h6+** **1-0**

Game 5.4 Italian Game – Giuoco Piano

Surya Ganguly 2633

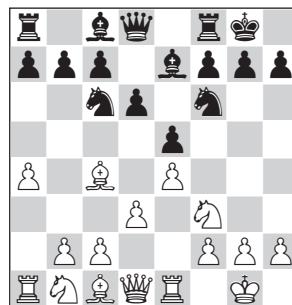
Murtas Kazhgaleev 2587

Astana 2019 (6)

1.e4 **e5** **2. ♜f3** ♜c6 **3. ♗c4** ♜f6 **4.d3**
♗e7 **5.0-0** **0-0** **6. ♖e1**

This is pretty much automatic, to rule out ...d7-d5 while playing a very useful move.

6...d6 **7.a4**



This has become the preferred way to meet Black's threat of ...♗a5.

7... ♖h8

Black plans ...♗g8 and ...f7-f5, but it doesn't equalize.

A) 7... ♗e6 8. ♗xe6 (this trade in similar positions used to be considered bad, but now it's generally believed that the damage to Black's pawn structure and king shelter exceeds the benefit of the half-open f-file, at least when White can achieve c2-c3 and b2-b4) 8... fxe6 9.c3 ♖d7 10.b4 a6 11. ♗bd2 h6 12. ♜f1± (+0.33). White's better bishop and queenside initiative give him the edge;

B) 7...♘a5 8.♙a2 c5 9.♘a3 ♘c6
 10.c3 ♙e6 11.♙xe6 fxe6 12.♙d2 a6
 13.h3 ♖e8 14.b4 cxb4 15.cxb4 h6
 16.♘c4 b5 17.axb5 axb5 18.♗xa8
 ♖xa8 19.♘a5 ♗c8 20.♖b3 ♘d8
 21.♙e3± (+0.24). White has better
 pieces and better pawns.
8.a5 a6 9.♘c3 ♘g8 10.♘d5 f5
11.h3 fxe4 12.dxe4 ♘f6 13.c3 ♘xd5
14.exd5 ♘b8 15.♘d2
 15.♙d3 ♖e8 16.c4 ♘d7 17.b4 ♘f6
 18.♘g5± (+0.78). White has more
 space and will probably win the
 bishop pair on e6.
15...♘d7 16.♘e4± (+0.38)
 White has more space.
16...♘f6?! 17.♘xf6± ♙xf6 18.♙d3
g6 19.♙h6 ♗f7 20.♖d2 ♙f5 21.♙e2
♖e7 22.c4 ♗g8 23.♗a3 ♙h4
24.♙e3 ♙c8 25.♗f1 ♗g8 26.b4±
h6? 27.♙xh6+- ♙xf2+ 28.♙h1 ♗g8
29.♙g5 ♖f8 30.♗f3 ♗xf3 31.♙xf3
♙d4 32.♙e2 ♙f5 33.g4 ♙e4+
34.♙h2 ♖e8 35.♙f6+ ♙h7 36.♖g5
♖f8 37.♙e7 ♙e3 38.♖xe3 1-0

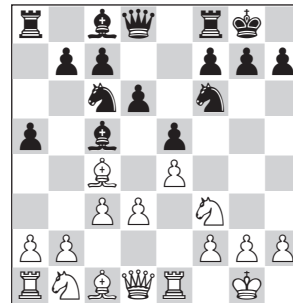
Game 5.5 Italian Game – Giuoco Piano
Anish Giri 2790
Pavel Eljanov 2765
 Stavanger 2016 (1)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 ♙c5 4.c3
 I prefer the move-order 4.0-0 ♘f6
 5.d3 0-0 6.♗e1 d6 7.c3 or 5...d6 6.c3
 0-0 7.♗e1 to cut out 6...d5 as in the
 game.
 4.0-0 ♘f6 5.d3 0-0 (5...d6 6.c3 was
 the move-order in Vachier-Lagrave-
 Ding Liren, Zagreb 2019, see below)
 6.♗e1 (6.h3 is also a good move as

explained in the next game notes,
 but it doesn't go with the quick
 ♙g5 plan of this game) 6...♘g4 (6...
 d6 7.c3 transposes to the game)
 7.♗e2 ♘d4 8.♘xd4 ♙xd4 9.h3 ♘f6
 10.♘d2 d6 11.a4 c6 12.a5 a6 13.♘f3
 ♙a7 14.♙e3 ♙xe3 15.♗xe3 ♗e8 16.d4
 exd4 17.♖xd4 ♙e6 18.♙f1 (+0.15),
 Lc0 +0.34. White has more space
 and pressure on d6.

4...♘f6 5.d3 0-0 6.0-0 d6
 6...d5 7.exd5 ♘xd5 8.a4 a6 9.♗e1
 ♙g4 10.♘bd2 ♘b6 11.h3 ♙h5
 12.♙a2 ♖xd3 13.a5 ♙xf3 14.♘xf3
 ♖xd1 15.♗xd1 ♘c8 16.b4 (+0.04),
 Lc0 +0.34. White is down half a
 pawn, but has space, the d-file,
 and a great diagonal for the light-
 squared bishop. Certainly White
 has full compensation, but whether
 he has an actual advantage is not
 clear.

7.♗e1 a5



This spoils White's queenside play
 but makes the pin more attractive
 as Black will lack queenside play
 himself.

8.♙g5
 8.h3 can be considered the main
 line, which I'm trying to avoid by

Defenses of the Superstars

In KRBW I recommended meeting 1.e4 with 1...e5, aiming for the Breyer Defense to the Spanish Opening, and meeting 1.d4 with the Grünfeld Defense. In the present volume I have kept those choices, except that I now give the Marshall Attack as my preferred defense to 1.e4, keeping the Breyer as a reserve or for those who just don't like to gambit pawns or those who won't play a defense that allows forced draws. The Breyer was Magnus Carlsen's favorite shortly before KRBW was published, but after that both he and frequent World number 2 Aronian usually aimed for the Marshall Attack (until Carlsen took up the Sveshnikov Sicilian in 2018). The Breyer keeps all the pieces on the board, concedes very little to White (just a slight central advantage of pawns on d4 and e4 vs d6 and e5), and is in good shape theoretically, but it cannot be denied that even though it may be the best defense on move 9, White still has the better chances. The database statistics show that White's results are quite a bit better than Black's in all lines after 9.h3, even the Breyer, but are much less convincing against the Marshall. Regardless of whether White allows the Marshall or avoids it on move 8, his statistical edge is well below par after 7...0-0. I also added a chapter on the Møller Defense, which seems to be ideal except in one line. Against earlier deviations in the Spanish and against non-Spanish lines, I have mostly stuck to KRBW lines, with many theory updates of course. The other satisfactory option for Black, as given in my first book, is the Berlin, but playing for a slightly worse but drawn endgame is not to everyone's liking.

Against 1.d4, I stayed with the Grünfeld, a favorite of two of the world's top five players, Caruana and Vachier-Lagrave. I considered the Semi-Slav, but there are some problems in the 5.♙g5 lines and also a big problem of reaching the Semi-Slav without allowing unpleasant options like the Catalan or the Slav Exchange. The QGD is the safest choice, but like the Breyer it leaves White with at least somewhat the better chances in general. The Grünfeld is in good shape, and it seems that finding an advantage against it is an extremely challenging task, although Carlsen has been quite successful as White playing the Exchange Variation with ♙e3.

I was pleasantly surprised to learn while working on KRBW that the English Opening, 1.c4, is not much of a problem for the Grünfeld player, contrary to my opinion years earlier. I show how the move 1...g6! either transposes to the Grünfeld or leads to near-equality in all cases.

As for 1.♟f3, we can play the Grünfeld anyway, covered in the Anti-Grünfeld chapter, but in this volume my recommendation is to play the Symmetrical English with 3...d5, which avoids committing to ...g7-g6 prematurely. Black has to walk a narrow path to reach near-equality, but he does achieve the goal with the given lines. Most of the elite Grünfeld players now meet 1.♟f3 this way. In the Réti chapter I give some alternatives for Black. So my overall conclusion is that the Grünfeld does not have major move-order problems.

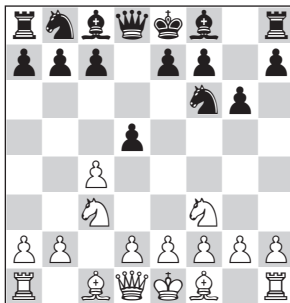
Many players are reluctant to meet 1.e4 with 1...e5 because there are so many ways White can vary before we get to play our own line (in this case the Marshall, on move 8 of the Spanish). This is true, but almost all of them are inferior. In fact I would say that only the Italian, the Anti-Marshall 8.a4, and the Spanish with 6.d3 lead to positions (with best play) where White is clearly for choice, and just marginally so. Quite a few of the white options that I actually face in tournaments fail even to equalize the game. When people try to take me out of book early, I am usually quite content! In this book I don't take the attitude that Black is always happy with a draw; once White makes one or two second-rate moves I start to look for a black advantage.

In updating this Black portion of the book, I made substantial use of Lc0 running on my powerful 2080 GPU, together with Komodo 13 MCTS; quoted evals such as (+0.26) are Komodo unless otherwise stated +0.27. Lc0 tends to love space, and so most mainline openings tend to show rather significant white advantages since White can almost always achieve at least a space advantage if all else fails. This made the task of showing near-equality for Black much more difficult with this update, and the reader will note that in some cases I had to recommend something other than what was the main line in the first edition. Although Lc0 is certainly too optimistic for White in general, I cannot deny that it has convinced me that White's advantage after 1.e4, 1.d4, or 1.♟f3 is larger than I had previously believed; we just have to accept that no matter what we play as Black, 'White is slightly better' is an outcome we cannot avoid if White knows everything. Grandmaster Adorjan has made a career out of writing Black is OK books, in which he generally argues that with the right choices of defenses Black should have roughly equal chances. I have to disagree with him on this, although he is correct in the sense that Black need not lose just because he moves second. But I think that you will find that if you know the lines in this book well enough, most opponents you face won't get any noticeable edge with white, and even when they do you should still generally be able to hold the draw with careful play or even to aim for a win if you are the stronger player that day.

CHAPTER 12

Anti-Grünfeld and Symmetrical English

The name Anti-Grünfeld is applied to the use of the opening move 1.♘f3 to aim for the usual Queen's Gambit lines without allowing the Grünfeld Defense. White plays 1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 and if 3...♙g7, 4.e4 d6 5.d4 is the King's Indian. So a Grünfeld player will likely play 3...d5,



after which 4.d4 would be a Grünfeld. However White can try other fourth moves instead, hoping to benefit by saving the tempo d2-d4 or in some lines by recapturing on c3 with the d-pawn instead of the b-pawn. Actually this was the hardest chapter of the book for me to write, because I believed that White had more than one path to a non-trivial advantage in the Anti-Grünfeld. However, when I really got into the analysis deeply, I found satisfactory lines for Black in each case, and my present opinion is that with best play the Anti-Grünfeld confers no larger advantage on White than he can obtain against the normal Grünfeld, which is to say very little. In several lines though, it seems that Black has hardly any choice if he wishes to stay close to equality, so you had best study this chapter rather thoroughly, unless you want to play altogether differently against 1.♘f3 – see the Réti chapter.

In Game 12.1 we look at 4.♚a4+ ♙d7 5.♚b3 dxc4 6.♚xc4 a6! 7.d4 (and other 7th moves for White). Now if 7...♙g7 8.e4 0-0 we would transpose to the Hungarian Variation of the Russian System against the Grünfeld (which I recommend in that chapter for Black), but with the difference that Black's bishop is on d7 rather than c8. This seems to be in White's favor, as he no longer can play ...♙b7 (after ...b7-b5), and also because he needs d7 as a retreat square for his knight in case of e4-e5. So we don't play this way. Instead we play 7...b5 8.♚b3 c5 (the novelty 8...♙g7 9.e4 ♘c6!? is also discussed and doesn't seem bad) 9.dxc5 ♙g7 10.e4 ♙c6 and Black doesn't seem to have any theoretical problems.

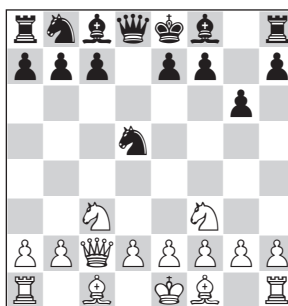
The next four games feature the exchange $4.cxd5 \text{ } \text{♞}xd5$.



In Game 12.2 White provokes an endgame by $5.e4 \text{ } \text{♞}xc3$ $6.dxc3 \text{ } \text{♚}xd1+$ $7.\text{♞}xd1$. The novice might say that White has lost the right to castle for nothing, but with queens and a pair of knights off the board the white king will be quite happy on c2 or (after $\text{♞}c4$) on e2. Black's equalizing strategy is to play $\dots f7-f6$ and $\dots e7-e5$, together with $\dots \text{♞}d7$, so as to meet the natural $\text{♞}e3$ by $\dots \text{♞}c5$, exchanging off White's better bishop. It seems that this works fine, as Black has a nice plus score in grandmaster play from here in the current century.

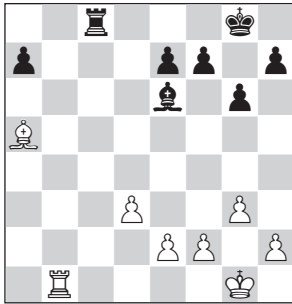
Next we look at two queen moves, $5.\text{♚}b3$ and $5.\text{♚}c2$. The first can transpose into a Grünfeld line which I recommend for White after $5.\dots \text{♞}b6$ $6.d4 \text{ } \text{♞}g7$ $7.e4$ 0-0 (recommended by Delchev) $8.\text{♞}e3 \text{ } \text{♞}g4$ $9.\text{♞}d1$, so I don't recommend playing this way. Instead we play $7.\dots \text{♞}g4!$. Other seventh white moves can be met by $7.\dots \text{♞}e6$, hitting the queen.

The move $5.\text{♚}c2$ was unveiled by Topalov in his 2011 Candidates' match with Kamsky.



Topalov got an advantage and should have won the game but didn't. For a while I considered this novelty to be the refutation of $3\dots d5$ in the anti-Grünfeld, but as shown in my notes to Game 12.3 I no longer consider $5.\text{♚}c2$ to be any problem for Black, if he reacts in the sharp manner shown, namely $5.\dots \text{♞}c6$ $6.d4 \text{ } \text{♞}db4$ $7.\text{♚}a4 \text{ } \text{♞}d7$ $8.\text{♚}d1 \text{ } e5!$.

material and bishops of opposite color it's almost sure to be a draw.



24.f3 ♖d5 25.♔f2 ♙c6 26.g4 f6
27.h4 ♗f7 28.♙d2 h5 29.g5 f5
30.♞a1 ♞a8 31.♞a5 a6 32.♞c5 ♞c8
33.♙b4 ♙d7 34.♞e5 e6 35.e4 ♞b8
36.♙c3 ♞b5 37.exf5 ♞xe5 38.fxd5+
♗xg6 39.♙xe5 a5

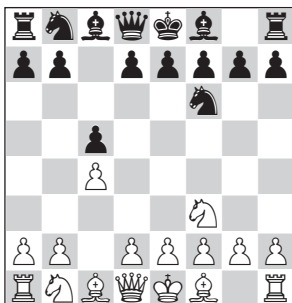
Draw agreed. Black doesn't even need the a-pawn to draw here.

Game 12.6 English Opening –
Symmetrical Variation

Levon Aronian 2799
Ian Nepomniachtchi 2751

St Louis rapid 2017 (2)

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 c5



This has become the main choice of Grünfeld aficionados. Black avoids committing to ...g7-g6 prematurely.

3.♘c3 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5



5.e3

5.d4 ♘xc3 6.bxc3 g6 7.e3 (7.e4 ♙g7 transposes to the Grünfeld; 7.♙f4 ♙g7 8.e3 ♗a5 9.♗d2 0-0 10.♞b1 b6 11.♙d3 ♘c6 12.0-0 ♙a6= (0.00).

This bishop trade should make White's space advantage negligible) 7...♙g7 8.♙b5+ ♙d7 9.♙d3 0-0 10.0-0 ♘c6 11.♞b1 ♗c7 12.h3 ♞fd8= (+0.05). A typical Grünfeld position, but White is less developed than he should be.

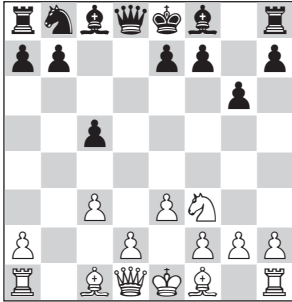
5...♘xc3

5...e6 is normal and usually leads to the Semi-Tarrasch, but the rare line 6.♘d5 exd5 7.b4! is pretty strong and annoying here, so I recommend the Grünfeld-like text move instead, which is the usual choice of GMs who play the Grünfeld.

6.bxc3

6.dxc3 looks odd, forfeiting castling, but if the white pawn were on e4 here White would be better, with a safe square for the king on c2 and more active bishops. Since e3-e4 cannot be stopped the dxc3 capture is a serious move even here. I think Black does best to avoid the endgame by 6...♗c7. Then 7.e4 e6

8.♙e3 ♘e7 9.♗d2 0-0 10.♖f3 ♜d8
 11.♖g3 aims to open the h-file if
 Black trades queens, so he replies
 11...♙d6. 12.f4 ♙f8!N 13.♙e2 b6
 14.0-0 ♙a6! 15.♖f3 ♙xe2 16.♖xe2
 ♗c5 (+0.11). White has just a small
 space edge.
6...g6



7.h4!

This seems to be the only way to
 pose problems for Black.

A) 7.d4 ♙g7 8.♙b5+! (this avoids
 a later ...♙b7; 8.♙d3 0-0 9.0-0 ♖c7
 10.♖e2 b6= is a typical Grünfeld
 position with a pleasant game for
 Black (0.00)) 8...♙d7 9.♙d3 0-0
 10.0-0 ♖c7 11.♜b1 b6 12.e4 ♗c6
 13.♙e3 ♙g4 14.♙e2 ♜ad8 15.♞c1
 ♖b8 16.d5 ♗e5 17.♙g5 ♙xf3
 18.♙xf3 f6 19.♙f4 f5 20.g3 ♗xf3+
 21.♖xf3 ♙e5 22.♙h6 ♜f7 23.exf5
 ♜xf5 24.♖e4 ♖d6 25.c4 b5 26.♙e3
 bxc4 27.♖xc4 ♖xd5 28.♖xc5
 ♖xc5 29.♜xc5 ♙d4 30.♙xd4 ♜xd4
 31.♞c8+ ♜f8 32.♞c7 ♜a4 33.♜a1 e6=
 (+0.03). This is a drawn ending,
 White's edge is only cosmetic;

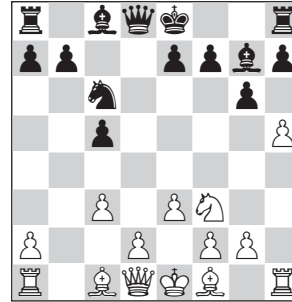
B) 7.♙b5+ ♙d7 8.♙e2 ♙g7 9.0-0
 0-0 10.d4 ♖a5 11.♖b3 ♙c6 12.♙d2
 ♗d7 13.c4 ♖a6 14.♙c3 ♜ab8 15.♞ac1
 ♜fd8= (0.00). Another typical

Grünfeld-style position where Black
 has few problems.

7...♙g7

7...h6 has scored well enough for
 Black but Komodo considers it an
 unnecessary concession, and the
 elite GMs seem to agree.

8.h5 ♗c6



9.♙e2

A) 9.♖b3 b6!N 10.♙b5 ♖c7=
 (0.00). Black need not fear to castle
 kingside;

B) 9.♜b1 b6 10.d4 0-0 11.♖c2 cxd4
 12.cxd4 ♖d6 13.♙d2 ♙f5 14.♙d3
 ♙xd3 15.♖xd3 ♜fd8= (0.00). The
 bishop exchange has eased Black's
 game. I'd rather play Black in this
 equal position.

9...b6

9...e5! 10.e4 ♖d6 11.♜b1 0-0=,
 Black's active queen and space fully
 offset the slight white pressure on
 the black king (0.00).

10.♙f1 ♖d6?!

10...♙b7! 11.♖a4 ♖d7 12.d4 ♗e5
 13.♙b5 ♙c6 14.♙xc6 ♗xc6 15.g3 h6
 16.♙g2 g5= (0.00).

11.d4± 0-0 12.♙a3 ♙f5 13.♙g1

13.hxg6 hxg6 14.♗g5±.

**13...♜fd8 14.♖a4 ♖f6 15.hxg6 hxg6
 16.♜f1?! ♜ac8 17.♙b2 ♗a5 18.♙a1**