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Squeezing the Sicilian The Alapin Variation

Chess Stars

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A rich merchant combats the Sicilian chaos

Judging by the reviews of our previous book about the Four Knights Game, our concept of an “opening for the pragmatist” has turned out to be quite viable. Subsequently, having dealt in this way with 1...e7-e5, the authors wondered whether it would be possible to deal in the same way with other openings.

It is a well-known fact that the Sicilian Defence has been Black’s most popular response to 1.e4 for nearly seventy years now. Although lately the chess elite seems to have turned its attention to 1...e5, from the 2600+ level downwards the main response is still 1...c5 and as a rule it is this move that creates the most problems for White in preparing for the game. So we wondered whether we could apply the same method here as in our previous book. The basic principles of our approach are:

1. We should like to stay away from sharp modern variations in which the main lines and the evaluations are changing every month. Among other things, this means that the opponent might not know what to do against the lines we have chosen. One of the trends nowadays is for players (even at the level of the solid amateur) to analyse the main lines in great depth and leave the sidelines for later. It is worth noting that this “later” never happens in some cases...

2. We want to avoid complex lines in which the value of every move is very high. Admittedly you cannot play this game successfully without knowing some concrete variations, but we should like to lessen the importance of this factor and to transfer the weight of the struggle to the middlegame.

3. Following on from the previous point, if something goes wrong and your memory lets you down during the game, this will not lead to an immediate catastrophe, as often happens in the sharp main lines. The margin of safety is very high and you should be able to find your way out of the situation just by using general principles. The worst that should happen to you is that you might have to give up the fight for an opening advantage.

4. Our approach does not imply however that White will not be fighting for an advantage in the opening. Yes, we wish to shift the

weight of the struggle to the middlegame, but Black will need to play very precisely in order to enter the middlegame with equal prospects. Naturally Black may equalise (in general Black often equalises in the main lines as well!) but not with indifferent play.

5. We plan to build up our position on a sound positional basis, eschewing any bizarre modern concepts. The centre, development, piece activity and a sound pawn structure – exactly as we were taught in school.

6. Finally, and in particular, we persistently avoid the standard Sicilian pawn structure and the type of fight this leads to. We have in mind the positions with the semi-open c- and d- files, in which any experienced Sicilian player feels like a fish in water. We definitely want to avoid this type of position and prefer to draw our opponent out of his comfort zone.

This more or less concluded our initial approach. Next we needed to select our specific system. Now that our choice has been made you might think that it was the other way round, that the basic principles of our choice were tailored to fit the final result. But believe me, dear reader, this was not entirely true. It took us a long time to make our choice and we investigated numerous possibilities. We kept hitting snags. Some lines were simply not ‘universal’ enough, some involved too much theory to study, while in others the play was just too irrational. But once we had made our decision we felt sure it was the right one. And our choice was – the Alapin Variation with 2.c2-c3!

Judging from the games that have come down to us from those days, Semyon Alapin was not the first to come up with the idea of countering the Sicilian Defence in this way. Nevertheless there is no doubt that he was the first to start playing the system that now bears his name regularly against the strongest players of his day. In fact, at the end of the 19th and the start of the 20th century Alapin was one of the top ten players in the world, according to authoritative modern estimates. His biography is generally quite interesting but it is especially significant that, in addition to his chess achievements, he was also a “merchant of the first guild”. In those days and in those conditions, this fact clearly testified to his having outstanding commercial talent (hence, “an opening for the pragmatist”!) Alapin proved to be an outstanding chess theoretician too and there was even a white opening named after him. Still, if Alapin’s Opening (1.e4 e5 2.♘e2) can be classified these

days as an eccentric rarity, Alapin's line against the Sicilian Defence is something quite different. At the beginning of the last century, in the footsteps of its inventor, some first-class masters such as Nimzowitsch and Tartakower begin to play it and it was possible to write "the system has taken a very worthy place in the theory of the openings", but this turned out to be not quite the case. For quite a long time, although the Alapin system did not completely disappear from practice, it was rarely used in high-level games. It was considered that Black's task in the Alapin was much easier, in comparison with the main lines.

The rebirth of the system happened at the beginning of the 1970s and it was connected with the name of a young and talented master who later became an outstanding and creative grandmaster – Evgeny Sveshnikov. Over time he acquired some followers, but still his contribution to the development of the system has been unique. Sveshnikov has played more than 400 games using the Alapin Variation and for anyone who wishes to counter the Sicilian Defence with the move c2-c3, studying them is invaluable. The order of moves has been refined, some sidelines have been refuted and consigned to oblivion, but the general strategical concept and the evaluation of the arising positions have remained quite valid even today and all of this can be found in Sveshnikov's games. Nowadays the Alapin Variation has quite a respectable reputation, but is still not very popular at the highest levels of the chess hierarchy. However, this can only be good for us.

White's strategic idea is extremely simple. He prepares to advance with d2-d4, to build a solid pawn centre and then dictate the play. He will have to pay for this with the fact that his queen's knight has been deprived of the best square for its development, but it may have other suitable squares (let's not get too far ahead of ourselves, but suffice to say that in many variations this will be, not the d2-square, but a3.). Secondly, it very often happens that after d4 cxd4 cxd4, White's queen's knight gets access anyway to its best square on c3. Naturally, Black will not stay passive and usually tries to organise immediate counterplay in the centre, but White can always find sufficient resources. The modern evaluation of this system is that Black has comfortable enough lines in which he can obtain an acceptable game. We are not claiming to overturn this assessment, or to try to refute this evaluation (Black can equalise, we accept that), but we shall try to prove that not all of his lines are equally good. Whether we have succeeded, let the reader be our judge.

Finally, in conclusion, we should like to apologise for plagiarising a paragraph from our previous book, since it is also extremely relevant here, practically without any changes:

We should also like to mention some other positive aspects of our method and these concern the field of psychology. The first point is if you happen to play against an opponent who is stronger than you (or if he considers himself to be stronger, even without any objective reasons – this happens quite often, by the way). The Four Knights Game has acquired a reputation over the years of “White is just playing for a draw...”. We have in mind something different, but if the opponent is convinced of our intention to play for a draw, this might turn out to be very helpful for us. All this has been tested in practice numerous times. What usually happens is that your opponent thinks: “Draw?” Well, O^o “draw”, and he will usually start to make indifferent moves, assuming that the result of the game has been already settled. However, we then have the possibility of punishing him for his careless attitude. The second possibility is that your opponent may decide that White should be punished for this drawish strategy and he might embark on incorrect complications. This may be very helpful to us as well. Of course, these possibilities cannot be guaranteed, but they happen very often, even at the top level.

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St Petersburg*

Part 1

1.e4 c5 2.c3

In Part 1 of our book we have analysed all of Black's responses to 1.e4 c5 2.c3 apart from 2...d5 and 2...♟f6. Although in contemporary grandmaster practice these possibilities are all played only very rarely, you should not regard them as merely exotic and you should not ignore them in your game preparation. From the historical point of view it is worth mentioning that in the first game which has come down to us, in which the Alapin Variation was played, Black (no less a player than Staunton himself) replied with 2...e6. The player who invented the rather original answer 2...♞a5 was Doctor Tarrasch. Nowadays, if we disregard play at grandmaster level, the variations 2...d5, 2...♟f6 and all the rest are encountered with approximately equal frequency. There is therefore a fairly clear logic to the way we have organised the material.

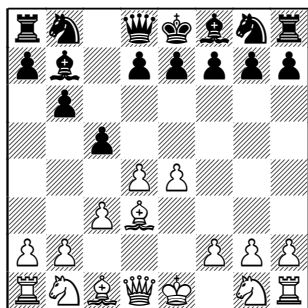
The main drawback of all the continuations covered in Part 1 (we shall touch upon a couple of exceptions) is that they allow White to carry out unopposed his basic strategic idea, namely to

build a powerful pawn-centre with d4+e4. Of course, this in itself cannot provide him with a decisive or even a large advantage. Nevertheless, White's play becomes very clear and comfortable, while Black must come up with something urgently, to avoid landing in a permanently worse position, without any counterplay.

In Chapter 1 we start to cover Black's second move options. It is worth paying special attention to the move 2...♞a5. This brainchild of Doctor Tarrasch has found some outstanding followers nowadays, such as grandmaster Romanishin (it is worth noting though that, during the period of his best results, Romanishin abstained from playing this line against Sveshnikov) and grandmaster Movsesian (lately though it seems that he has become rather disenchanted with this move). However, with all due respect to these great players, the general principles of play in the opening are still valid and the eccentric queen move does not have any particular merits. Admittedly

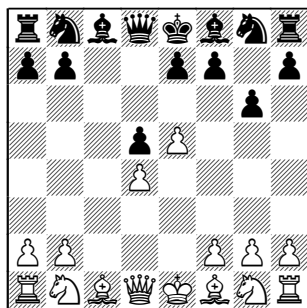
Black has prevented his opponent's plan, but this is only temporary. White can first develop his kingside and then advance d2-d4 quite comfortably. We should also mention the move 2...♘c6. This is not at all bad, but only if, after 3.d4, Black continues with 3...d5, when after 4.exd5 ♖xd5 there is a transposition to variations which we analyse in Part 2 of the book. In all other lines the knight sortie on move two turns out to be untimely.

In Chapter 2 we analyse the variation 2...b6. Now, after 3.d4 ♗b7 4.♗d3,



there is usually a transposition to lines of Owen's Defence (1.e4 b6). This may sound mysterious and even romantic (I suspect that some of our readers are not even aware that such an opening exists), but in practice, if White plays with even minimal accuracy, in order for Black to avoid the worst he will have to transpose to some rather dubious lines of the French Defence.

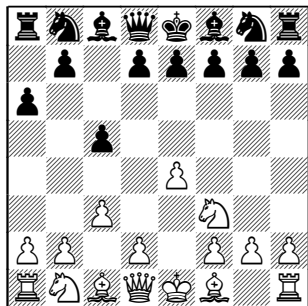
In Chapter 3 we analyse Black's attempt to fianchetto his other bishop immediately with – 2...g6. Here, after 3.d4, if Black wishes to avoid entering a permanently inferior and passive position he needs to play 3...cxd4 (there is also another possibility here, 3...d5 immediately, but then after 4.exd5 ♖xd5 we have a transposition to lines which are analysed in Part 2 of the book) 4. cxd4 d5; then after 5.e5



it turns out that the fact that White has not developed his king's knight yet is definitely in his favour. Black does not have the resource ♗g4 available and White is able to hold on to his powerful centre and maintain a comfortable advantage from the opening.

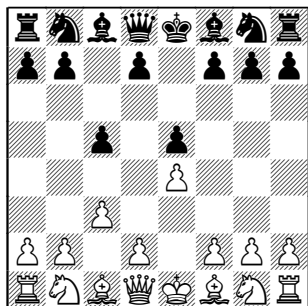
In Chapter 4 we deal with a rather mysterious, generally useful, but rarely played move: 2...a6. We believe that it deserves quite serious attention. The point is that after 3.d4 cxd4 4.cxd4 d5, the move a7-a6 turns out to be quite

useful and we have failed to find any convincing advantage for White. So we have decided that in this situation White should not hurry to advance d2-d4 immediately but should instead play the useful move 3.♘f3.



After this, Black will have to decide what scheme to adopt for his further development and White will occupy the centre under more favourable circumstances.

In Chapter 5 we shall deal with another attempt by Black to prevent his opponent from building a powerful pawn-centre: the move 2...e5.



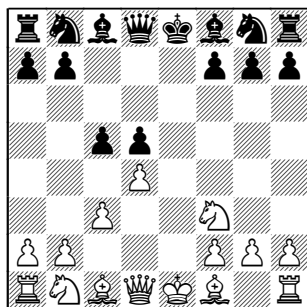
Here too the roots stretch back to the 19th century, but it was introduced into modern tournament practice only at the end of the last millennium by grandmaster Mikhail Krasenkow. However, it is worth noting that in the new millennium Mikhail has admitted that the moves 2...d5 and 2...♘f6 are much more reliable. After 2...e5, it is hardly surprising that the play usually resembles some type of open game. If White develops his pieces patiently, with the idea of exploiting the weakened d5-square later in the middle game, then the type of position that may arise is very similar to schemes in the Closed Ruy Lopez. This might cause some discomfort for players with Black who play nothing but the Sicilian Defence but in fairness White's chances of gaining an advantage this way are slim. We have therefore recommended a line which is quite forcing and requires Black to respond very precisely. Black's chances of equalising are greater than in the positions in the previous chapter, but he will still have problems.

In Chapter 6 we analyse the variations after 2...d6. For many decades this move has ranked as the third most popular response for Black, after the main continuations 2...♘f6 and 2...d5. This is easily understandable. Right from the start of the game Black wishes to enter positions where all three results are possible, avoiding the

main lines, which are much simpler from the strategical point of view. But Black has to pay a price for this, because although the positions arising are really complex, White enjoys more space and a powerful centre and this provides him with the better prospects.

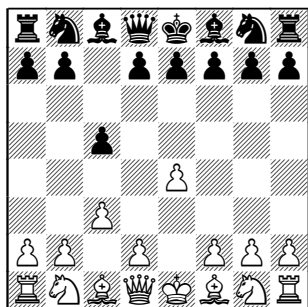
Finally, in Chapter 7, the last in this part of the book, we have analysed the system with 2...e6. This is a very sound move from the point of view of strategy; Black plans to advance d7-d5 and fight for the centre. In our opinion, of all the continuations presented in this part of the book, it is precisely these two moves with Black's king's pawn that offer the best chances of equalising. But there is a difference. If, after 2...e5, as we have already mentioned, the positions arising are typical of the open games, in this chapter the positions reached have a distinctive French flavour. For many devoted Sicilian players, such structural transformations are not only unpleasant but sometimes even unacceptable. For example, after 2...e6 3.d4 d5, White can continue with 4.e5 and the position arising

is not just similar to the French Defence but is in fact one of the key positions of this opening. This is quite a promising option, but we shall abstain from analysing it in this book, on account of the sheer bulk of the material this would involve and its strategic richness. And why embark on such a big main line when instead we can play 4.exd5 exd5 (4...♖xd5 5.♘f3 is covered in the second part of our book) 5.♘f3,



reaching a position which is also similar in character to the French Defence, but one where the game usually comes down to standard positions with an isolated pawn for Black and where White has a small but stable long-term advantage and simple, clear play.

Chapter 1 1.e4 c5 2.c3



In this chapter we will analyse some rarely played moves for Black: **A) 2...♖c7**, **B) 2...♖a5** and **C) 2...♟c6**.

After all these moves he does not influence sufficiently his opponent's centre and White obtains effortlessly an advantage in the opening.

A) 2...♖c7

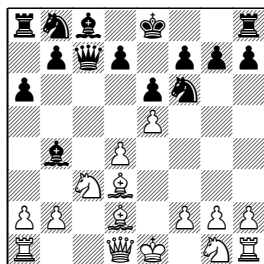
Following this move there usually arise positions from Chapter 4 (2...a6), or Chapter 6 (2...d6). Here, we will deal only with variations which would lead to original positions.

3.d4 e6

About 3...d6 4.h3 – see 2...d6.

About 3...g6 4.♟f3 d6 5.h3 ♘g7 6.♙d3 ♟f6 7.0–0, or 4...♙g7 5.♙d3 d6 6.h3 ♟f6 7.0–0 – see 2...d6.

3...cxd4. As a rule, this exchange in the Alapin system facilitates considerably White's task to maintain an edge, because now, his knight on b1 can be developed on the c3-square, where it would be considerably more active than on d2, or on a3. 4.cxd4 ♟f6 (4...e6 5.♟c3 a6 6.♟f3 – see 2...a6) 5.♟c3 e6 6.♙d3 ♙b4 7.♙d2 a6 (7...♙xc3 8.bxc3±) 8.e5

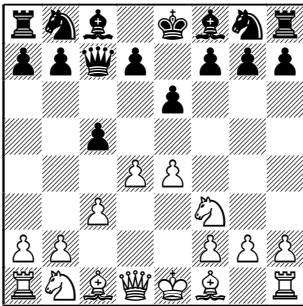


8...♙xc3? Bassani – Barbosa, Brasilia 2012. Black exchanges an important defender of his dark squares and thus worsens his position even more. 9.bxc3 ♟d5 10.

♖g4 0-0 (10...g6 11.c4 ♗e7 12. ♗f3+-) 11.c4 f5 (11...♗e7 12.♗f3 ♗f5 13.♖h3 h6 14.g4 ♗xd4 15. ♗xd4 ♖xe5+ 16.♖e3+-) 12.♖h4 ♗b6 13.♖c1+-

8...♗d5 9.♖g4 0-0 10.♗h6! White is not afraid of the move 10...♗xc3+, because he can counter it with the powerful intermediate move 11.♗f1!, for example: 11...g6 12.bxc3 ♖xc3 13.♗d1 ♗c6 14.♗f3 ♗cb4 15.♗b1 f5 16.exf6 ♖xf6 (16...♗xf6 17.♖g5+-) 17. h4+-

4. ♗f3



4...b6

About 4...a6 5.♗d3 – see 2... a6.

4...d6 5.♗d3 ♗f6 6.0-0, or 5... ♗d7 6.0-0 ♗gf6 7.♖e1 – see 2... d6.

4...♗c6 5.d5 ♗e5 6.dxe6 fxe6, Rapaire – Voarino, France 2007, 7.♗f4 ♗xf3+ (7...♗d6?? 8.♗xe5 ♗xe5 9.♖h5+-) 8.♖xf3 d6 9. ♗d2±

4...♗f6?! 5.e5 ♗d5 6.c4! White continues to chase the enemy knight. 6...♗b6 7.d5 d6 8.♗c3 a6. Here, Black must waste a tempo in order to defend against the threat ♗b5. 9.♗f4 exd5 10.cxd5 ♗g4 11.♖e2! White not only prepares castling queenside, but also creates threats against the enemy king. 11...dxe5, Pekar – Hlavac, Slovakia 2007, 12.♗xe5 ♖e7 13. 0-0-0±

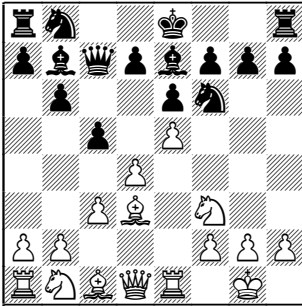
4...cxd4 5.cxd4 ♗f6 (5...a6 6.♗c3 or 5...d6 6.♗c3 a6 7.♗d3 – see 2...a6) 6.♗d3. White is not in a hurry to play ♗c3, since he is reluctant to allow the pin of his knight. 6...♗c6 (6...♗b4+ 7.♗d2 ♗xd2+ 8.♗bxd2± Bernhard – Berger, Austria 2017. White is already perfectly prepared for the pawn-advance e4-e5 and ♗e4-d6.) 7.♗c3 a6 8.0-0 ♗e7, Skok – Zahirovic, Ljubljana 2007, 9.d5! White makes use of his opponent's rather slow play and opens the game in the centre. 9...♗e5 10.♗xe5 ♖xe5 11.♗e3 0-0. Black has managed to evacuate his king away from the centre, but it would come soon under an attack on the kingside. 12.f4 ♖c7 13.e5 ♗xd5 14. ♗xd5 exd5 15.♖h5 g6 16.♖h6 f5 17.exf6 ♗xf6 18.f5+-

5. ♗d3 ♗b7 6.0-0 ♗f6

About 6...d6 7.♖e1 – see 2...b6.

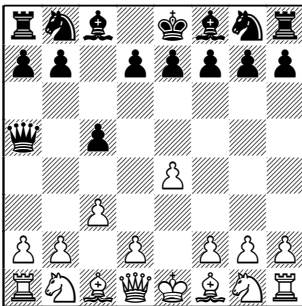
6...♗e7, Magem Badals – Ju.Polgar, Madrid 1994, 7.d5!±

7.♖e1 ♗e7 8.e5



8...♗d5, Korneev – Khamrakov, Seville 2006, 9.dxc5 bxc5 (9...♗xc5 10.a3 a5 11.c4 ♗e7 12.♗c3±) 10.♗a3! White's knight is headed for the d6-outpost. 10...0-0 11.♗b5 ♖d8 12.c4 ♗b4 13.♗b1 a6 14.♗d6 ♗xf3 15.♖xf3 ♗4c6 16.♗h6! This move is energetic and strong. 16...f5 (16...gxh6?? 17.♖e4+-) 17.♖g3. Now, the material losses are unavoidable for Black. 17...g6 18.♗xf8 ♖xf8 19.♗c2 ♗d4 20.♗a4±

B) 2...♖a5



Black is trying to impede the enemy pawn-advance d2-d4, but

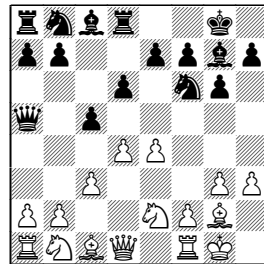
this rather early queen sortie cannot be approved.

3.g3!?

This move is not so popular as 3.♗f3, but it creates serious problems for Black. White's further plan is quite simple. He wishes at first to complete the development of his pieces on the kingside and to castle (♗g2, ♗e2, 0-0) and then to place another pawn in the centre (d2-d4).

3...♗c6

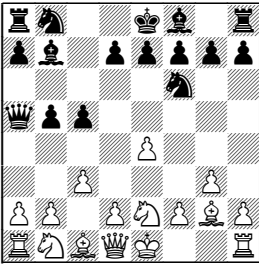
3...d6. Now, Black will be able to develop his knight on f6 without being afraid of e4-e5. 4.♗g2 g6 (about 4...♗c6 5.♗e2 – see 3...♗c6) 5.♗e2 ♗g7 6.0-0 ♗f6 (6...♗c6 7.d4 – see 3...♗c6) 7.d4 0-0 8.h3 ♖d8



9.♗e3. White follows the principles of A.Nimzowitsch and provides additional defence of the strategically important d4-square. (9.a4! White is trying to acquire additional space on the queenside prior to the completion of the development of his pieces. 9...♗c6. Black only facilitates the realisation of his opponent's plans with this move. 10.d5 ♗e5 11.f4 ♗ed7

12.c4±) 9...♞c6, Ibragimov – Shchekachev, St Petersburg 1994, 10.d5 ♞e5 11.b3! Here, before advancing f2-f4, it would be useful for White to prevent the appearance of the enemy knight on the c4-square. 11...b5 12.♞d2 ♖c7 13.f4 ♞ed7 14.g4± White's kingside pawns are ready to advance and to crush the opposition there.

3...b5. Black continues with his flank strategy, which is detrimental to the development of his kingside pieces. 4.♙g2 ♙b7 5.♞e2 (5.d3!? e6 6.♞f3±) 5...♞f6. Black exerts pressure against the enemy pawn on e4 and wishes to force the move d2-d3 (5...f5?! Kopp – Nazarenus, Germany 2012, 6.d3 ♞f6 7.0-0 fxe4 8.♞f4 e5 9.♞h5±).

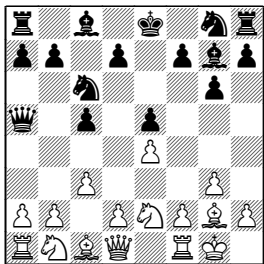


6.d4!? This is an interesting pawn-sacrifice for the initiative. 6...cxd4 (6...♙xe4 7.♙xe4 ♞xe4 8.dxc5 ♞c6 9.b4 ♖a4 10.♖xa4 bxa4. White preserves better prospects thanks to his pawn-majority on the queenside. 11.♞d2 ♞xd2 12.♙xd2 d5 13.cxd6 e5 14.0-0-0! The queenside is the best place for White's king. It will support the advance of his passed pawns from

there. 14...♙xd6 15.♙e3 ♖e7 16.g4!± This is useful prophylactic against Black's pawn-advance f7-f5. Later, White will transfer his knight to the centre of the board (♞g3-e4) and will begin to advance his passed pawns: a2-a3, c3-c4-c5. Black will be faced with a rather difficult defence.) 7.♞xd4 ♙xe4. He wins White's central pawn, but lags horribly in development. 8.♙xe4 ♞xe4 9.♖e2 d5 10.♙f4!? White is not in a hurry to restore the material balance. 10...♞d7 11.f3 ♞ef6 12.♞xb5 e5 13.♙xe5 ♞xe5 14.♖xe5+ ♖d8 15.♞d4± Black's king has been stranded in the centre for long.

It is also possible for White to play calmly here 6.d3 and his plan would be to begin active actions on the queenside after the pawn-advance b2-b4 and thus to utilise his lead in development. 6...d6 7.0-0 ♞bd7, Erenburg – Roiz, Tel Aviv 2002, 8.b4!? cxb4 9.cxb4 ♖xb4 10.♞bc3 ♖a5 11.♖b1 a6 12.a4 b4 13.♞a2. Black will be incapable of holding on to his extra pawn 13...e5 14.♖xb4 ♖c7 15.♙a3±

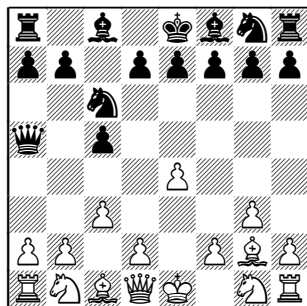
3...g6 4.♙g2 ♙g7 5.♞e2 e5. Black wishes to impede his opponent's pawn-advance d2-d4, even at the price of the weakening of the d5-square. (About 5...♞c6 6.0-0 – see 3...♞c6; after 5...h5, Jiganchine – Berry, Vancouver 2001, the simplest for White would be to play 6.h3±, so that he could counter h5-h4 with g3-g4.) 6.0-0 ♞c6



7. ♖a3 (7.d4!? This is an interesting pawn-sacrifice. White's idea is to eliminate the enemy e5-pawn and to deploy his bishop on the d6-outpost. 7...exd4 8. ♗f4 ♜ge7 9. ♗d6 0-0 10. ♖d2 dxc3 11. ♜xc3± Black will have great problems to complete the development of his queenside pieces, since White's bishop on d6 hampers the movements of Black's pawn on d7.) 7...d6, Can – Chah-rani, Khanty-Mansiysk 2010, 8. d4 (8.b4!? cxb4 9.cxb4 ♜xb4 10. ♜b1 ♗e6 11.d4 ♗xa2 12.♞a1 ♞c8 13.♗b2±) 8...exd4 9.cxd4 cxd4 10. ♜c4 ♞c7 (10...♞c5. Black's queen will soon come under an attack on this square after the move ♗a3. 11.b3 b5 12.♗a3 b4. He covers the diagonal of White's bishop on a3, but now Black will have great problems to oust the enemy knight from the c4-square. 13. ♗b2±; 13.♜f4!?) 11.♗f4 ♜e5 12. ♞xd4!? White obtains more than sufficient material compensation for the queen. 12...♜f3+ 13.♗xf3 ♗xd4 14.♜xd6+ ♜f8 15.♜xd4 ♞b6 16.♞fd1 h5. Here, before developing his knight on g8, Black must take measures against the enemy threat ♗h6+. 17.e5 ♗g4 18.♗e3.

His queen must avoid all the time the attacks of White's pieces. 18... ♞xb2 19.♞db1 ♞c3 20.♗xb7 ♞d8 21.♗g2 ♜g7 22.h3+-

4. ♗g2

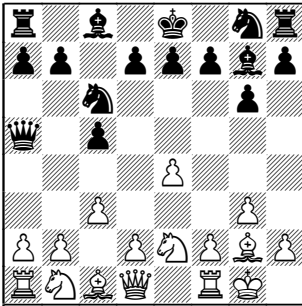


We will analyse now: **B1) 4... g6** and **B2) 4... ♜f6**.

4...d6 5. ♜e2 h5 (After 5...♗g4 6.h3 ♗h5?! Paaske – Rossen, Odense 2011, Black's misplaced bishop would only enhance White's pawn-offensive on the kingside. 7.g4 ♗g6 8.f4±) 6.h3. He wishes to be able to counter h5-h4 with g3-g4. 6...♜h6 7.0-0 h4 8.g4 (White loses a part of his advantage with the move 8.d4 after 8... cxd4 9.cxd4 hxg3 10.fxg3, Selebran – Dubessay, Chalons en Champagne 2015. The shelter of his king would be weakened. 10... ♞h5 11.♜f4 ♞xd1 12.♞xd1 ♗d7±) 8...♜xg4. This knight-sacrifice does not seem to be well prepared, but Black has no other way of organising counterplay anyway. 9. hxg4 ♗xg4 10.f3 ♗d7 11.f4 h3 12. ♗f3 g5 13.fxg5 c4 14.♜a3 ♜e5 15.

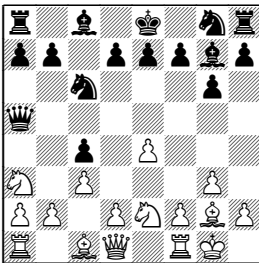
♞xc4!? This is White's most practical decision. He gives back the extra piece, but is happy to have a powerful pawn-centre and good attacking prospects against the enemy king. 15...♞xc4 16.d4 0-0-0 17.♞d3 ♞c7 18.b3 ♞b6 19.a4±

B1) 4...g6 5.♠e2 ♙g7 6.0-0



6...d6

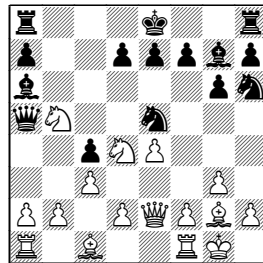
6...c4?! Black prevents d2-d4, but creates a target for his opponent's attack. 7.♠a3



7...b5 8.♠c2 ♞e5 9.a4. White changes the target of his attack from the c4-pawn to the enemy b5-pawn. 9...♞d3. This black knight is beautifully placed here,

but it remains his only active piece in the fight. 10.axb5 ♞xb5 11.♠a3. After the fall of the pawn on b5, White begins again to try to gobble the enemy pawn on c4 as well. 11...♞a5 12.b3! White does not have sufficient forces to increase his pressure against the pawn on c4, so he decides the exchange it in order to undermine the base under the enemy knight on d3. 12...♙a6 13.♠c2 ♞b6 14.bxc4 ♞xc1 (14...♙xc4 15.♙a3±) 15.♞xc1 ♙xc4 16.d3 ♙b3 17.♞b1. Black's active pieces have been exchanged and his other pieces have not been developed yet. In addition, he must lose a tempo to defend against the threat ♞ed4. 17...e5 18.♞c1 a5 19.♞a3 a4 20.♠c1 ♞b8 21.♠a1!± Black is incapable of avoiding the loss of a pawn.

7...♠e5 8.♠d4 ♠h6 9.♞e2 b5. He sacrifices a pawn in order to deploy his bishop on the f1-a6 diagonal as quickly as possible. (9...0-0 10.f4±) 10.♠axb5 ♙a6



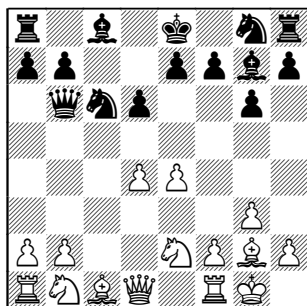
11.b4! With this move White sacrifices the exchange, seizes completely the initiative and is about to settle the issue. 11...cxb3 12.axb3 ♞xa1 13.♠c7+ ♠d8 14.

Chapter 1

♠xa6+- Black's king is stranded in the centre for long and would be an easy prey for White's raging pieces.

7.d4 cxd4 8.cxd4 ♖b6

Black increases his pressure against the d4-square, but now, White can sacrifice his pawn on b2 obtaining an excellent position.



9.♗e3! ♜xb2 10.♠bc3 ♖b4 11.♞b1 ♗a5 12.e5!

White opens the position in the centre in an attempt to exploit his lead in development. He must play energetically, since Black would need only two moves to evacuate his king away from the centre.

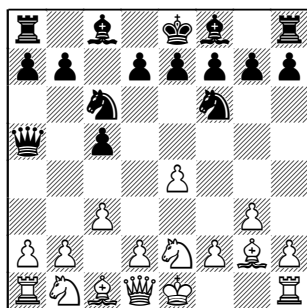
12...♠h6

12...dxe5 13.dxe5± and Black cannot play 13...♠xe5?, because of 14.♞b5+-; 13...♗xe5? 14.♗xc6+ bxc6 15.♗d4+-

13.exd6 exd6 14.♞b5 ♗d8 15.♗g5! It would be useful for White to provoke a move which would weaken the a2-g8 diagonal.

15...f6 16.♗xh6 ♗xh6 17.♞b3! Black fails to castle. 17...♗e7 (17...♗f8 18.♞xb7 ♗xb7 19.♞xb7 ♗c8 20.♞xc6+-) 18.♠d5 ♗xe2 19.♠c7+ ♠d8 20.♠xa8 ♠xd4 21.♞c3! After this move Black's resistance comes to an end. 21...♠xb5 22.♞xf6+ ♗e7 23.♞xh8+ ♗f8 24.a4+-

B2) 4...♠f6 5.♠e2



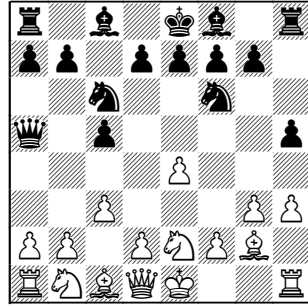
5...h5

5...d6 6.0-0± c4? Van Baar – Romanishin, Vlissingen 2019. Black is trying to impede the enemy pawn-advance d2-d4, but this only worsens his position even more. 7.♠a3 ♠e5 8.f4 ♗c5+ 9.d4! White sacrifices temporarily a pawn and re-establishes his control over the d3-square. 9...cxd3+ 10.♠d4 ♠ed7. Black's knight has been ousted away from the centre. It has become quite evident now that his opening strategy has failed completely. 11.♞xd3 a6 (Following 11...g6, Black cannot play ♗g7 and castle. 12.b4! ♗c7 13.e5! dxe5 14.♠db5 ♗b8 15.

♖c4+–) 12.♗c4 b5. This move weakens horribly Black's queenside, but he has no other way of defending against his opponent's threat b2-b4, followed by e4-e5. 13.♗a5 e5 14.b4 ♖b6 15.♙e3 exd4 16.♙xd4 ♖c7 17.e5+–

5...e6 6.0–0? d5 (6...c4 7.b3 cxb3 8.♖xb3. Black has developed rather badly his pieces and would be incapable of exploiting the relative weakness of his opponent's pawn on a2. 8...♖a6, Larrea – Delgado Ramirez, Montevideo 2011, 9.♗d4 ♗xd4 10.cxd4 d6 11.♗c3 ♖b6 12.♗b1 ♖xb3 13.♗xb3 ♙e7. The trade of the queens has not facilitated Black's defence, because after 14.♙a3 a6 15.e5, White's initiative is still very powerful. 15...dxe5 16.dxe5 ♙xa3 17.♗xa3 ♗d7 18.♗b5 0–0 19.f4± Black cannot cover the dark squares in his camp, since his dark-squared bishop has been exchanged.) 7.exd5 ♗xd5 8.d4 ♙e7 9.c4 ♗f6 10.d5 ♗e5, Hresc – Fernandez Aguado, Finkenstein 1993 (10...exd5 11.cxd5 ♗b4 12.d6 ♙d8, Kuttruf – Wagner, Email 2004, 13.♗d2! White's knight is headed for the c4-square in order to take part in the protection of his passed pawn on d6. 13...0–0 14.♗c4 ♖a6 15.b3±) 11.d6 ♙d8 12.b3 0–0 13.♙b2 ♗e7 14.♗bc3± White's bishop on g2 and his pawn on d6 impede the development of Black's queenside pieces.

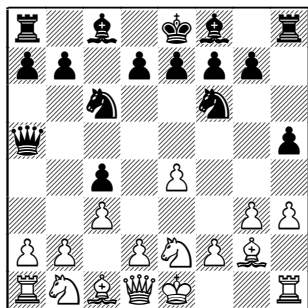
6.h3



6...c4

6...h4. This move does not look good for Black before White has castled kingside, because Black is in fact attacking nothing... 7.g4 ♗e5 8.d3 (Here, it is also possible for White to try the more ambitious line: 8.d4 cxd4 9.f4. He wishes to oust the enemy knights with his pawns as quickly as possible. 9...d3, Kacheishvili – Movsesian, Pula 1997, 10.♗d4 ♗c6 11.♖xd3 ♗xd4 12.♖xd4 d5 13.e5 ♗e4 14.♙xe4 dxe4 15.♙e3± Black will be incapable of preserving his pawn on e4.) 8...♖a6 9.♗f4 (9.c4 ♖d6 10.♗f4 e6 11.♗c3 a6, Ponomariov – Movsesian, Zagan 1997, 12.0–0± Black cannot exploit in any way the vulnerability of the enemy pawn on d3 and the d4-square, while the awkward placement of his queen on d6 and the weakness of his pawn on h4 might create soon great problems for him.) 9...g5 10.d4 cxd4 11.cxd4 gxf4 12.dxe5 ♖a5+ 13.♙d2! White prepares the transfer of his bishop to the long diagonal. 13...♖xe5 14.♙c3 ♖e6 15.0–0 ♙g7 16.♗e1

0–0 17.♖d2 ♕h6 18.♘a3 d6 19. e5± White has more than sufficient compensation for his minimal material deficit.



7.d4

7.0–0!? ♘e5 8.d4 cxd3 9.♘d4 h4 10.g4 g5!? Black is playing very inventively indeed, but White still obtains a considerable advantage with precise moves. 11.b4. He ousts the enemy queen away from the fifth rank. 11...♗b6 12.♙xg5 ♘fxg4!? Black sacrifices a piece and begins a desperate counter attack. (The move 12...a5 would not be any better for him. 13.f4 ♘c6 14.bxa5 ♖xa5 15.♘d2 ♘xd4 16.cxd4 ♗xd4+ 17.♙h1 ♖a6 18. ♘f3 ♗b2 19.♗xd3+-) 13.hxg4 h3 14.♙f3 ♕h6 15.♙h4 ♙f4 16.♙g3 ♙xg3 17.fxg3 d6 18.♘d2± The position is still a bit sharp, but Black's compensation for the sacrificed piece is insufficient.

7...cxd3 8.♗xd3

8.♘f4 d6, Remis Fernandez – Povchanic, ICCF 2008, 9.0–0 e5 10.♘d5±

8...d6 9.f4!?

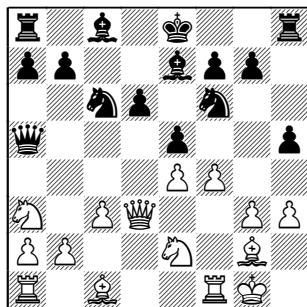
Now, White will not be afraid of the enemy knight-sortie to the e5-square.

9.♘d2 ♘e5 10.♗c2 g6 (10... ♗a6. Black cannot exploit the vulnerability of the d3-square, because White can simply play 11.c4 b5 12.0–0±) 11.f4 (It would be worse for White to try here 11. ♘d4, Kamsky – Movsesian, Moscow 2008, because after 11...♗a6 12.c4, the placement of his knight on d4 would be unstable. 12...♗b6 13.♘4f3 ♘fd7 14.0–0 ♙g7∞) 11... ♘c6 12.♘c4 ♗a6 13.♘e3 ♙g7 14. a4± White will follow this move with b2–b4, in order to continue to cramp the enemy pieces on the queenside.

9...e5

Black wishes to ensure the e5-square for his knight, but weakens in the process his pawn on d6 and the d5-square.

10.♘a3 ♙e7 11.0–0



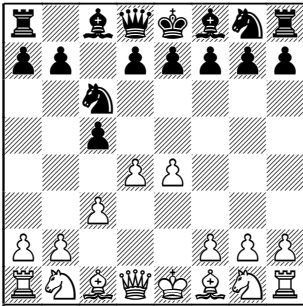
11...h4 12.g4 exf4 13.♙xf4 ♘e5 14.♗b5+ ♗xb5 15.♘xb5.

Black has no compensation for the vulnerability of his pawn on d6 and after **15...0-0 16.♠ad1 ♜d8 17.♞c7 ♝b8 18.♞d4 a6 19.♞f5 ♜xf5 20.exf5±**, White gets rid of his weakness on e4 and also obtains the two-bishop advantage in the process.

C) 2...♞c6

One of the defects of this move is that Black's knight might come under an attack later after d4-d5.

3.d4



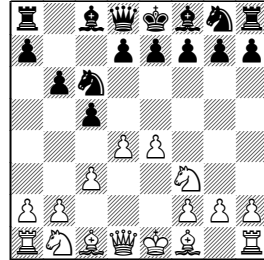
3...cxd4

About **3...d5 4.exd5 ♜xd5 5.♞f3** – see 2...d5.

3...♞f6?! Black continues with his losing strategy. He develops his knights but ignores the control over the central squares. **4.d5 ♞e5 5.f4 ♞g6 6.e5 ♞g8 (6...♞e4 7.f5 ♞xe5 8.♞e2+-) 7.h4 h5 8.♞d3 ♞b6 9.♞f3 d6 10.e6+-** Geidl – Pitic, Germany 2007.

3...b6?! This move does not combine at all with **2...♞c6**. **4.**

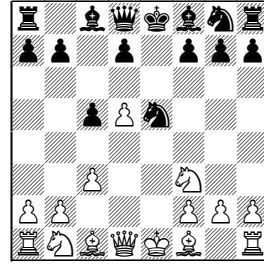
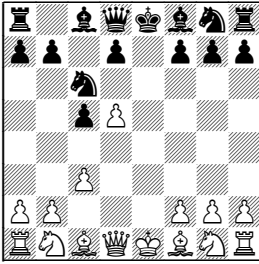
♞f3. Now, before advancing d4-d5, White takes the e5-square under control.



4...cxd4 5.cxd4 ♞b7 (5...e6 6.d5 ♞b4+ 7.♞c3±) 6.d5 ♞b4 7.♞c3± 4...d6 5.d5 (5.♞b5 ♞d7 6.0-0±) 5...♞e5 (5...♞b8 6.e5±; 6.♞b5+!? ♞d7 7.♞e2±) 6.♞xe5. Black wishes to facilitate his defence by exchanging pieces. Still, after **6...dxe5 7.♞h5!?**, it becomes evident that he can hold on to his central pawn only at the price of the loss of his castling rights. **7...♞f6 (7...♞c7 8.♞b5±) 8.♞xe5±** Okhotnik – Zigura, Nancy 2003.

4...e6 5.d5 exd5 (5...♞ce7 6.d6 ♞g6 7.♞a3±) 6.exd5 ♞e7+ (6...♞ce7 7.d6+-; 6...♞a5 7.♞a3 a6 8.♞d3±) 7.♞e2 ♞e5 8.0-0 d6 9.♞xe5 dxe5 10.♞a3+-

3...e6 4.d5. White occupies space with tempo. **4...exd5 (4...♞e5**. On this square Black's knight would come under an attack after **5.f4**, for example: **5...♞g6 6.d6 e5**, Simon – Kaluza, Polanica Zdroj 2009. Without Black's last move White would have protected his pawn on d6 with the move **e4-e5**. **7.♞a3 a6 8.♞f3 exf4 9.h4+-) 5.exd5**



5...dxc7? 6.d6+-

5...♖e7+ This check only enhances the development of White's pieces. 6.♗e2 ♖e5 7.f4 ♘c4 8.♘h3 ♙f6 9.0-0 ♘d6, Rogers – Cohle, ICCF 2012, 10.c4± Black has lost too much time on manoeuvres with his knight and his queen on e7 impedes the development of his bishop on f8.

5...♘b8 6.d6 ♗f6, Avtsynov – Katkov, Voronezh 2013, 7.♘a3. White's knight is headed for the b5-square. 7...♗xd6. Black wins the enemy pawn which cramps his position. Still, this is only a small consolation for him, because after 8.♘b5 ♗e5 9.f4 ♗xf4 10.♗xf4 ♖xf4 11.♘d6+ ♘d8 12.♘e2 ♗f6 13.♘g3+-, he falls considerably back in development and his king, stranded in the centre, would be an excellent target for White's attacking pieces.

5...♘e5 6.♘f3. White wishes to trade his opponent's only developed piece.

(diagram)

6...♘xf3+ 7.♖xf3 ♗f6 (7...d6 8.♗d3±) 8.♗f4 ♗d6 9.♗e3+ ♘e7 10.♗xd6 ♖xd6 11.♘a3± Gergs – Schlickenrieder, Germany 1994.

6...♗d6. On this square Black's

bishop with thwart the development of his queenside pieces, so White should better not be in a hurry to exchange on e5. 7.♘a3!? ♘xf3+ (7...a6? 8.♘xe5 ♗xe5 9.d6+-) 8.♖xf3 ♙f6 9.♘c4± Teixeira – Sversut, corr. 2001.

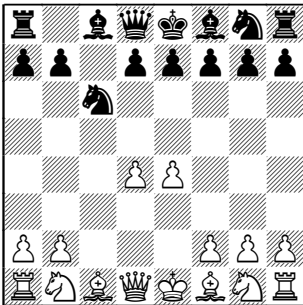
6...♗e7 7.♘xe5 ♗xe5+ 8.♗e2 ♙f6 9.c4 ♗d6, Colina – McLaughlin, ICCF 2013, 10.♘d2. White is transferring his knight to the f3-square in order to castle and to avoid being checkmated. (10.a4!?) This is a very original move. White wishes to bring his rook into the actions along the third rank, but still, that move is a bit weaker than the natural ♘d2. 10...0-0 11.♖a3 b6 12.g3±) 10...0-0 11.♗f3 ♗h5 12.♘g5 ♖e8 13.♙f1 ♗g6 14.♗d3 ♗h5 15.♖xh5 ♘xh5 16.♗xh7±

6...d6 7.♘a3!? ♘xf3+ (7...a6. Black covers the b5-square against the possible penetration of the enemy minor pieces, but falls back in development even more in the process. 8.♘xe5 dxe5 9.♘c4 ♙f6 10.♗g5 b5 11.♘xe5 ♖xd5 12.♖xd5 ♘d5 13.0-0-0 h6 14.♗h4 g5 15.♗g3 ♘f4 16.♖e1±) 8.♖xf3 ♙f6 9.♗d3 ♗e7 10.h3 0-0 11.0-0 a6 12.♗f4 b5 13.♖fe1 ♖e8 14.c4 b4 15.♘c2± White's extra

space provides him with a stable positional advantage.

3...e5. With this move Black wishes to avoid the opening of the position. 4.d5 ♖ce7 (After 4...♖b8, White can try a very promising pawn-sacrifice. 5.d6!? ♖f6 6.♗a3 ♖xd6 7.♖xd6 ♕xd6 8.♗b5 ♖e7 9.♕e3 a6 10.♗xd6 ♖xd6 11.f4 exf4 12.♕xf4+ ♖e7 13.0-0-0±) 5.d6!? If White allows his opponent to play d7-d6, Black would have a cramped but still solid position. 5...♗g6 (5...♗c6 6.♗a3 a6 7.♕e3±) 6.♗a3 a6, Mazza – Mazzetta, Saint Vincent 2006, 7.h4!? h5. Black prevents the further advance of the enemy h-pawn, but weakens the g5-square. 8.♗c4 b5 9.♖d5! With the help of this simple intermediate move White wins the pawn on e5 and Black's position crumbles. 9...♖b8 10.♗xe5 ♖f6 11.♗xg6 ♖xg6 12.♕f4+-

4.cxd4



4...e6

About 4...g6 5.♗c3 ♕g7 6.d5 – see 2...g6.

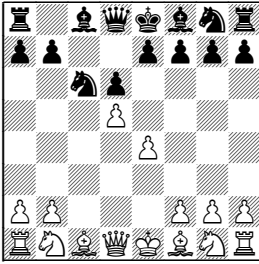
4...d5 5.exd5 ♖xd5 6.♗f3 – see 2...d5.

4...♗f6?! 5.d5 ♗e5 6.f4 ♗g6 (6...♗eg4 7.♗c3±) 7.e5 ♗e4 8.♖d4 f5, Lafuente – Borges, Pan American 1998, (8...♖a5+ 9.b4+-) 9.♗d2 ♗xd2 10.♕xd2+-

Black early queen sorties are detrimental to the development of his pieces 4...♖a5+?! 5.♕d2 ♖b6 6.d5±, or 4...♖b6?! 5.d5 ♗e5 6.♕e3 ♖xb2 7.♕d4 ♖b4+ 8.♗c3 d6 9.f4 ♗d7 10.♖b1 ♖a5 11.♗f3± and only worsen his position even more.

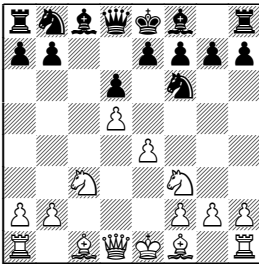
4...e5?! This move leads to the appearance of an isolated pawn in Black's camp. 5.dxe5 ♗xe5 6.♗c3 ♗f6 (6...♕b4 7.♖d4 ♕xc3+ 8.bxc3 f6 9.♕a3 ♗e7 10.♗f3±) 7.f4! It has become clear now that Black has failed to take the e5-square under control. 7...♗c6 (7...♗g6 8.e5 ♗g8 9.♗f3 ♗h6 10.♖c2± ♕e7 11.f5! White continues the chase after the enemy cavalry. 11...♗h4 12.f6! ♗xf3+ 13.gxf3+- Lagergren – Aukstuolis, ICCF 2014) 8.e5 ♗g8 9.♗f3 ♕c5 10.♕c4± White's attack against the f7-square settles immediately the issue. 10...♗ge7 11.♗g5 0-0 12.♖h5 h6 13.♗xf7+- Robertson – Laureles, Email 2013.

4...d6 5.d5!? White wishes to emphasize immediately the defects of Black's second move (about 5.♗f3 – see Chapter 5).



5...dxe5 6.f4. After this move Black is forced to lose another tempo for the retreat of his knight. 6...d7 (or 6...d6 7.dxc3 e6 8.dxe6 fxe6 9.♖b3±; 6...d4 7.dxc3±) 7.dxc3 g6 8.♗d4! White prevents his opponent from the possibility to develop comfortably his bishop on the g7-square. 8...f6 (8...d6 9.e5±) 9.d3 ♔g7, Naerland – Hestad, Sandnes 2006, 10.♙e3±

5...b8 6.d3 d6 (about 6...g6 7.d3 ♔g7 8.d4 d6 9.e2 – see 6...d6) 7.d3



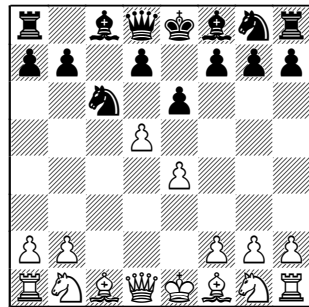
7...d7 8.dxc3

7...g4. Black has less space, so the exchanges of pieces would be in his favour. Still, his last move has a serious defect – his pawn on b7 would remain unprotected. 8.♖b3! ♔c8 (8...dxc3 9.♖xb7 d7 10.gxf3±) 9.e5! White wishes to open the game in the

centre as quickly as possible in order to utilise his lead in development (9.♙b5+ ♔d7 10.0–0±) 9...dxe5 10.dxe5 d7, Okhotnik – Debnar, Slovakia 1997, 11.♙f4±

7...g6 8.d4 ♔g7 9.e2 0–0 10.0–0 d7 11.e3 d5 12.f3. White protects his pawn on e4 and plans to oust the enemy knight away from the c5-square with the move b2-b4. 12...a5. Black parries his opponent's positional threat, but weakens the b5-square in the process. 13.b3 d7 (13...d7 14.c1±) 14.d2 f5. Black is reluctant to defend only passively, but now, the position of his king would be quite unreliable. 15.exf5 gxf5, Borgo – Isonzo, Mantova 1996, 16.♗ae1±

5.d5



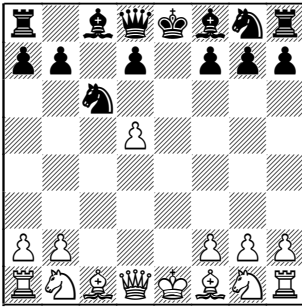
5...exd5

About 5...b4+ 6.d3 exd5 7.exd5 – see 5...exd5.

5...e5 6.f4 ♙b4+! The trade of the bishops facilitates Black's defence but cannot provide him

with complete equality. (Following 6...d6, White can cramp considerably the enemy position with the line: 7.d6 ♖b6 8.e5 f6 9. d3 fxe5 10.d2b5±) 7.♙d2 ♙xd2+ 8.♗xd2 ♗g6 9.d6 ♗f6 10.♗c3± Black has no weaknesses in his position, but still it looks rather cramped.

6.exd5



6...♙b4+

About 6...d5 7.d3 ♙b4 8. d3 – see 6...♙b4.

6...d5? 7.d6+–

6...♗a5+? 7.d3 ♗b4 8.d3 ♗f6 9.♗e2+ ♗d8 10.d6g5+–

6...♗e7+ 7.♙e3 ♗e5 8.d3±

7.d3 ♗e7+

After 7...d5 8.d3 ♗e7, White can try a brave pawn-sacrifice 9. dxe5! (9.♙e2 – see 7...♗e7) 9... ♗xe5+ 10.♙e2 ♙xc3+ 11.bxc3

♗xc3+ 12.♙d2 ♗d4 13.♙f3. Black lags horribly in development, while White's bishops are very powerful. 13...d7 (13...♗e5+ 14. ♙e3 ♗c3+ 15.♗f1! Black has deprived his opponent of his castling rights, but this has not improved his position at all. 15...d7 16.♗c1 ♗a5 17.d6 ♗f5, Sanner – Grego, LSS 2010, 18.♗d3±) 14.0–0 15.♗e1 ♗g6 (15...dxd5? 16. ♗d1±) 16.♙b4!? It would be useful for White to force the enemy rook to occupy a square which is not protected. 16...♗d8 17.♙c3 ♗c4 18.♗c1 ♗f4 19.d6 ♗b8 (19...♗xd6? 20.♙a5+–) 20.♙b2 ♗xd6. Black has already two extra pawns, but after 21.♗c3 ♗f8 22.♗c7 ♗a8 23. ♙d5±, he has practically no useful moves, Buchailot – Panyushkin, ICCF 2017.

8.♙e2 ♗e5 9.♙e3

It is also possible for White to play here 9.d3!? He would not be afraid of the weakening of his kingside pawn structure 9...dxf3+ 10.gxf3, because after 10...♙xc3+ 11.bxc3 d6 12.0–0 ♗c7 13.♗e1 d7 14.♙b5+ ♙d7 15.♙d3 f6 16.f4 ♗f7 17.c4 g6 18.♙b2↑, Black's king would be more endangered than its counterpart.

9...d6 10.d3 0–0 11.0–0 d6 12.h3 ♙d7, Evtushenko – Sheleg, Novosibirsk 2007, 13. ♗e1± White's pieces have a much freer game.