

**Beat the Ruy Lopez
with the Steinitz
Deferred**

**A Complete Repertoire
with Full Coverage of
the Exchange Variation**

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Luis Rodi

Thinkers Publishing 2026



Key to Symbols

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

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Introduction

The Ruy Lopez – or Spanish – is one of the oldest openings in modern chess. It appears in the Göttingen Manuscript at the end of the 15th century and is discussed by Lucena in his work. In the mid-16th century, it was analysed in depth by the Spaniard, Ruy Lopez de Segura, author of one of the fundamental treatises of that period, *Libro de la invención liberal y arte del juego de ajedrez* (Book on the Liberal Invention and Art of the Game of Chess, 1561), which also mentions lines from this opening.

However, the positional concept behind the bishop move to b5 was relegated at that time by more direct development ideas, such as the Italian Opening or the King's Gambit, which extended their dominance until the Romantic Chess era, well into the 19th century, with the addition of a more recent discovery in the world of openings: the Evans Gambit.

Towards the end of that century, a new theoretical revolution in the history of chess took place, led by the ideas of the first official world champion, Wilhelm Steinitz. Solid, positional openings such as the Queen's Gambit and the Ruy Lopez gained ground and became the preferred opening options, acquiring an extensive theoretical body.

Black has various ideas for dealing with the opening, but for a long time Morphy's favourite, 3...a6, dominated the scene, with 3...♘f6 as the second option. The rook-pawn move often offered improved versions of schemes that were riskier without that move, as in the case of the immediate 3...d6, the traditional Steinitz Defence, which theory considers inferior due to the central break 4.d4. This move practically forces Black, sooner or later, to exchange on d4 and give up space in the centre. Although there are many theoretical examples where Black can live with this structure, the general consensus is that the rapid advance of the d-pawn is less effective if the move with the queen's rook pawn is interposed beforehand.

The position arising from 3...a6 4.♙a4 d6 appears first, according to my databases, in the game Lange-Schultz, Düsseldorf 1863, in the preliminaries of the German Championship. Even in that century, Black's strategy was used by masters such as Louis Paulsen – who used it to defeat none other than Adolph Anderssen in 1871 – Simon Alapin, Joseph Blackburne, David Janowski, Richard Teichmann, Jacques Mieses, Jackson Showalter and, of course, Wilhelm Steinitz himself.

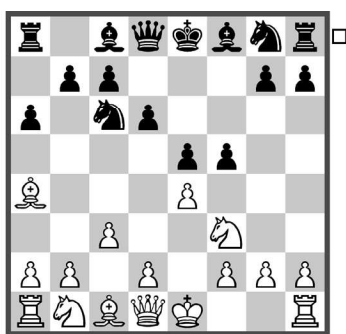
In the first half of the 20th century, it was considered an active way to counter White's scheme, with variations such as the *Siesta*, promoted by world champion José Capablanca. Other practitioners of the system included world champions such as Alexander Alekhine, Boris Spassky, Vassily Smyslov and uncrowned champions such as Akiba Rubinstein, Paul Keres, Vassili Ivanchuk and Nigel Short.

After a slight decline, perhaps due to the emergence of new schemes such as the so-called Berlin Wall in the line beginning with 3...♘f6, it seems to have resurfaced thanks to modern masters such as Shakhriyar Mamedyarov, Fabiano Caruana, Alireza Firouzja, Hikaru Nakamura, Vladislav Artemiev, Kirill Alekseenko and Anton Demchenko.

Theory considers that the most critical continuations for the first player are 5.c3 and 5.0-0.

In this repertoire book, we cannot consider every single possibility for Black, but for these two moves I have selected two different approaches, which we can call 'dynamic repertoire' and 'solid alternative', respectively, and which occupy the first three sections of this book, which are also the most demanding from a theoretical point of view.

The most aggressive schemes for Black are discussed in the first two sections of this work. The first section is devoted to the famous *Siesta Variation*, named after a sanatorium in Budapest, Hungary, where an important tournament took place in 1928 – namely the line arising from 5.c3 f5



Position after: 5... f5

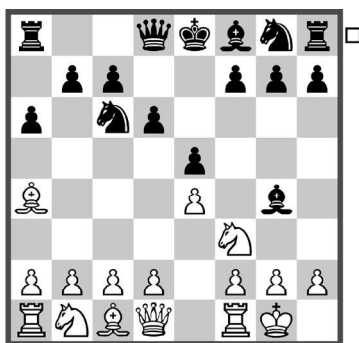
It was played by José Capablanca in one of his first tournaments after losing the world title and has gained popularity ever since. The position itself had been known since the late 19th century.

The possibility of gaining an initiative on the kingside by advancing the f-pawn and hypothetically opening up that file made this line very popular and the subject of numerous theoretical studies.

Black's position is not without risk, and some of White's ideas, such as 6.exf5 ♗xf5 7.d4 e4 8.d5 and 7.0-0 ♗d3 8.♖e1 ♗e7 9.♝b3 proved dangerous and are, in my opinion, most critical against the second player's idea.

Even so, the variation has stood the test of time and the scrutiny of the most modern engines, so we can conclude that it leads to positions of dynamic equilibrium in which Black can expect a struggle that leaves open the possibility of three outcomes.

The second active possibility for Black meets the other critical move, 5. 0-0, with 5...♗g4.



Position after: 5... ♗g4

An idea that appeared in the 1930s, but was popularized by grandmaster Valeri Yandemirov, after whom we name the entire section for his contributions to our main line with 6.h3 h5.

The variations that arise from the exchange on c6 followed by the advance of the d-pawn to the third or fourth rank generally lead to middlegames without queens with doubled white pawns on the f-file, where Black's chances are not inferior and in some cases may even be preferable.

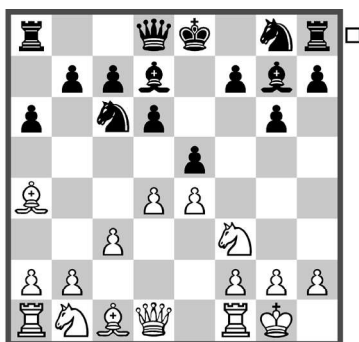
An interesting possibility, unusual in practice but very dangerous, and to which I have devoted an entire chapter, is 7.c4.

In the more theoretical and sharp lines of this variation, born from the critical idea

7.d4, Black is forced to give up a piece to sustain his position. For a time, in the position arising from 7...b5 8.♘b3 ♘d4 9.hxg4, an idea popularized by Yandemirov, 9... ♘xb3 10.axb3 hxg4 11.♘g5 ♔d7, was considered the best option for Black, but in my opinion, despite the complications it produces, the balance inevitably tips in favour of the first player. On the other hand, a previously-rejected line has been gaining ground and the endorsement of the most modern engines, so 9...hxg4 is my recommendation, with the idea 10.♘g5 ♘h6 leading to great complications and original positions, with extraordinary resources for both sides.

The solid alternative is represented by the move 5...♙d7 (as a response to both 5.c3 and 5.0-0).

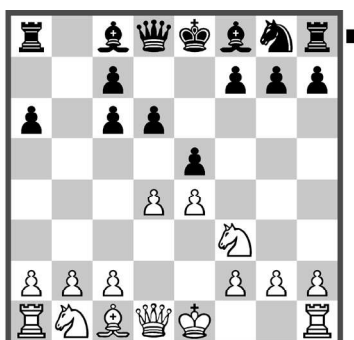
The first two chapters of the third section are devoted to independent, albeit less common, possibilities, with 5.c3 ♙d7 (without a quick 0-0) and 5.0-0 ♙d7 (without a quick c3), while the rest of the section contains chapters where, in one order or another, White reaches the following position – for example, using the move order 5.0-0 ♙d7 6.c3 g6 7.d4 ♙g7 – the Classical variation:



Position after: 7... ♙g7

White has experimented with various plans here, ranging from closing the centre with d5, fixing the central structure by exchanging on e5, or maintaining the tension with moves such as 8.h3, 8.♙e3 or the main line with 8.♖e1. Against the latter, and given its historical value, I devote a chapter to the reply 8...♘ge7, but the next one analyses my main recommendation, 8...♘f6, which is also the current preference in practice, having expanded its theory in the current century.

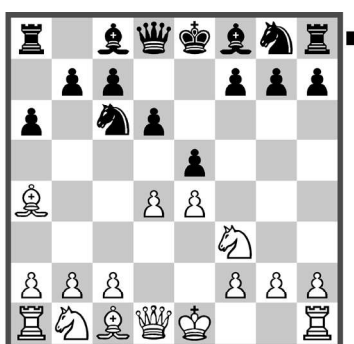
Black's fourth move has also inspired White to play a delayed form of the exchange variation, given that Black must recapture with his d-pawn here. This system is studied in the fourth section, with the critical position arising from the moves 5.♙xc6+ bxc6 6.d4.



Position after: 6. d4

Here, the main theoretical lines for Black arise from the moves 6...exd4 and 6...f6, but I have also added a chapter on an idea by Wolf, 6...♘f6, which is gaining ground in practice and can arise from other orders. The lines with capture on d4 are divided according to the white piece that recaptures; those that include the move 6...f6 are considered the most solid. Black generally chooses between two popular plans, one with the immediate fianchetto of the kingside bishop, the other with the move ...♗e7, where the dark-squared bishop delays its exit. The black knight often goes to g6.

Chapter 5 is devoted to one of the most dangerous ideas (if Black is opposed to making quick draws): the move 5.d4.



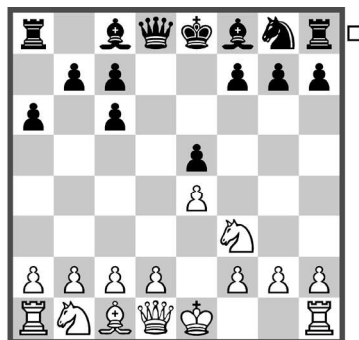
Position after: 5. d4

This gives White the chance to fall into the trap known as Noah's Ark after 5...b5 6.♗b3 ♘xd4 7.♘xd4 cxd4 8.♙xd4? c5, but also the chance to make a quick draw in case of 8.c3 dxc3 9.♙xd4 c5 10.♙d5= Meanwhile, the good news for fans of aggressive play is that Black does not need to enter this line, being able to deviate with 8...d3. The section also presents chapters on White's options such as 8.a4, or

8. ♖d5, which is the most common in practice.

On the fifth move, White has several ideas that fall under what we might call secondary lines. The most important of these is 5.c4, an idea first used by Alapin, which can be seen in the sixth chapter, along with other moves that are less common in practice (and generally not critical) such as 5. ♘c3, 5.d3, or 5.h3.

This book would not be complete without mentioning White's main deviation (not counting the possible ones at move 3, such as the Italian or the Scotch), consisting of the historic Exchange Variation, which arises from 4. ♖xc6 dxc6.



Position after: 4... dxc6

Chapter 7 shows how to play against classic ideas such as 5.d4 or 5. ♘c3, and also against the main line, 5.O-O, created by Barendregt and popularized by Fischer, who achieved excellent results with it. My recommendation against this order is 5... ♗g4, as it has points in common with the Yandemirov variation, with which players defending the black cause will be in familiar territory. However, I also wanted to devote a chapter to an idea that has gained great prestige at master level and has the non-human endorsement of the engines: 5... ♕f6!?

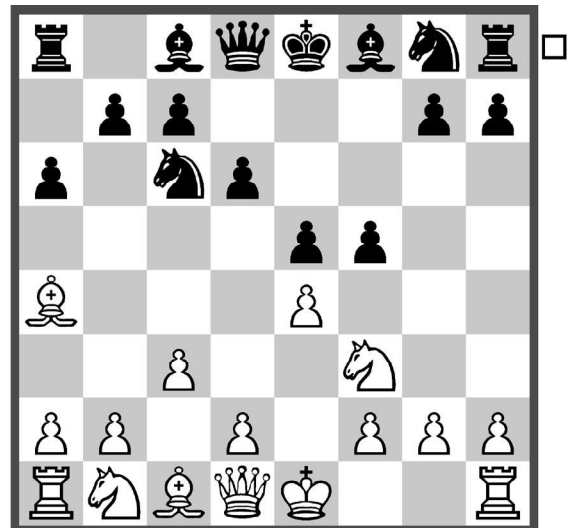
I wish you a good read!

Luis Rodi, February 2026.



Siesta Variation

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6
4.♙a4 d6 5.c3 f5



Chapter Guide

Chapter 1: Siesta Variation

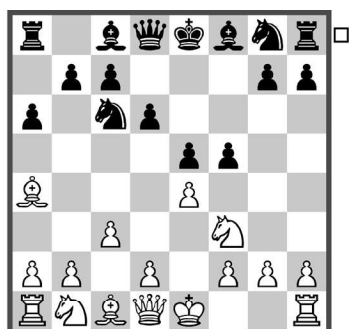
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 a6 4.♙a4 d6 5.c3 f5

a) 6.d4	16
b) 6.d3 ♘f6 7.--.....	20
c) 6.d3 ♘f6 7.♘bd2.....	24
d) 6.exf5 ♙xf5 7.d4 e4 8.d5.....	28
e) 6.exf5 ♙xf5 7.d4 e4 8.♘g5	34
f) 6.exf5 ♙xf5 7.0-0 ♙d3 8.♚b3	38
g) 6.exf5 ♙xf5 7.0-0 ♙d3 8.♞e1 ♙e7 9.--	41
h) 6.exf5 ♙xf5 7.0-0 ♙d3 8.♞e1 ♙e7 9.♙c2	48
i) 6.exf5 ♙xf5 7.0-0 ♙d3 8.♞e1 ♙e7 9.♚b3 --	54
j) 6.exf5 ♙xf5 7.0-0 ♙d3 8.♞e1 ♙e7 9.♚b3 ♞b8.....	60
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a) 6.d4

1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♙b5 a6 4. ♙a4 6. d4
d6 5. c3 f5



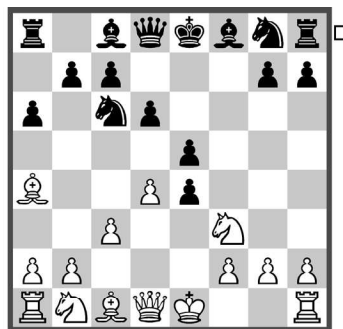
Position after: 5... f5

We begin our excursion into the world of the Steinitz Defence with one of the most critical ideas for White, answered by the bold Siesta variation. The solid option here is 5... ♙d7, planning to follow with ...g6, ... ♙g7. The black line that begins with the more aggressive 5...f5 owes its name to the Siesta sanatorium in Budapest, where José Raúl Capablanca introduced it into master practice in 1928, during his game against Endre Steiner.

The Cuban world champion, however, was not the first to use the idea, an honour that belongs to the German chess player Theodor von Scheve in 1892. Capablanca himself, playing with the white pieces, had faced the line in 1909 during his match with Frank Marshall.

The main line 6.exf5 is analysed from the fourth sub-chapter onwards. The text move is aggressive, but theory does not recommend it.

6... fxe4!



Position after: 6... fxe4!

Black should not fear complications in this variation, especially since they end up being favourable to their cause.

7. ♘xe5!

Possibly the best move. In practice, more common is:

A) 7. ♘g5?! But in this case, Black gains a clear advantage with 7... exd4 8. ♘xe4 [8. ♙xd4 ♘f6!



Position after: 8... Nf6!

(with the threat of ...b5) 9. Nxe4 Qe7 10. O-O Qxe4 11. Qxe4+ Nxe4 12. Re1 Qf5 13. f3 [Rodkin-Estrin, Moscow 1962] 13... Qd7 14. fxe4 Qe8 15. Nd2 Qg6

A1) 8... Nf6 This was played in some of the early games in this line, such as E. Steiner-Kmoch, Budapest 1928, Reti-Capablanca, Berlin 1928, and also more recently by Grandmaster Adhiban, but it is an inaccuracy that allows White to balance the game.

A2) 8... Qf5! The most accurate, played first by Suetin. 9. Qxd4 [9. Qf3 Qxe4 10. Qxe4+ Qe7 11. Qxe7+ Qxe7 12. cxd4 b5 13. Qd1 Nxd4] Peyrer-Kilgus, Vienna 2021] 9... b5



Position after: 9... b5

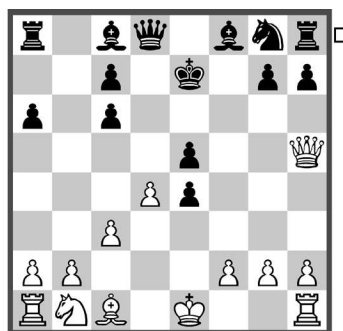
[9... Qe7!? Ciric-Suetin, Sarajevo 1965] 10. Qe3 Qe7 11. Qc2 g6! with ideas such as ...d5 or ...Qh6.

B) Of lesser value is 7. d5 b5 8. Qc2 exf3 9. dxc6 (Lisi-Pompili, Viterbo 2009) 9... Qf6 10. gxf3 Qe6

7... dxe5 8. Qh5+

8. Qxc6+ bxc6 9. Qh5+ can transpose, but Black gains an extra option in 9... Qd7 10. Qf5+ Qe7 where White only has the line with check on g5, losing the one with the bishop.

8... Qe7 9. Qxc6 bxc6



Position after: 9... bxc6

This position first appeared in Stoltz-Sultan Khan, Hastings 1931. Now White must decide which piece to use to check on g5.

10. Qg5+

This move seems to be correct, and it is also the preferred one in practice.

10. ♖g5+ (Kveinys-Juroszek, Augustow 1989) 10... ♜f6 11. dxe5



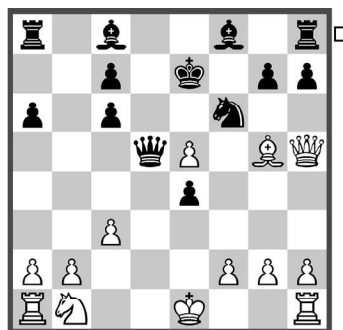
Position after: 11. dxe5

A) In *Yearbook 119*, grandmaster Adrien Demuth indicates 11... ♔f7 12. exf6 ♖xf6 13. ♖h5+ [The position had a recent practical experiment with 13. 0-0 ♜d6∞ Aakanksha-Warti-ovaara, Munich 2025] 13... g6 14. ♖e2 ♜d6=

B) 11... ♖d3!?N 12. ♜d2 [12. exf6+ gxf6 13. ♖c5+ ♔d8 14. ♖e3 a5+] 12... a5 13. exf6+ gxf6 14. ♖c5+ ♔d8 15. ♖xc6 ♜a6 16. ♖c4 ♜b7 17. ♖xd3+ exd3 18. 0-0 a4∞ Black's compensation may only be enough for equality with best play on both sides, but the pair of bishops, the open lines, and the passed pawn on d3 may give them the best practical chances.

10... ♜f6 11. dxe5 ♖d5!

A move already used in the opening game of the line, mentioned in the comments on move 9. White has to make a unique move here!



Position after: 11... ♖d5!

12. ♜h4!

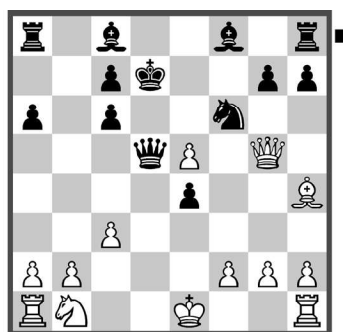
A) 12. f4 exf3 13. 0-0 ♔e6→ Lovkov-Matlakov, Peterhof 2007.

B) 12. ♜d2 ♖xe5→ Dikov-Yumashev, Russia 2012.

12... ♔d7

Demuth's recommendation. Once again, White must make an 'only' move.

13. ♖g5!



Position after: 13. ♖g5!

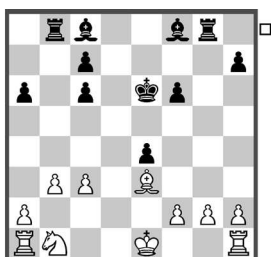
13. ♖f5+ ♔e8 14. ♖g5 ♜g4→

13... h6!?N

A new idea, which requires a further series of unique moves. The options are:

A) A) 13... ♖b8 is Demuth's recommendation, where 14. exf6 [14. b3 e3 15. fxe3 ♕e6] 14... ♕xg5 15. ♖xg5 gxf6 16. ♖xf6 ♖g8 17. ♘d2 is approximately equal.

B) B) 13... ♔e6 is the only move that has been tried in practice: 14. exf6 ♕xg5 15. ♖xg5 gxf6 16. ♖e3 ♖b8 17. b3 ♖g8

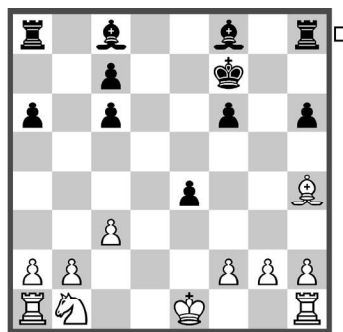


Position after: 17... ♖g8

18. g3 (Laboranti-Perdomo, Buenos Aires 2002) Now the most accurate is 18... ♖f7 19. ♘d2 ♖f5=

14. ♕f5+ ♔e8 15. ♕g6+ ♕f7 16. ♕xf7+ ♔xf7 17. exf6 gxf6

After a series of forced moves, White has options here.



Position after: 17... gxf6

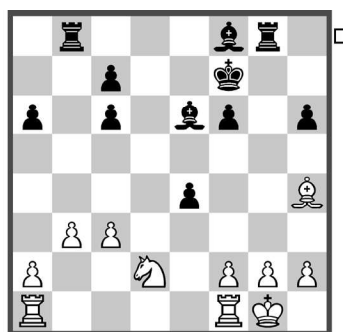
18. ♘d2

18. ♖g3 h5! 19. ♖xc7 ♖h6 20. ♘d2 ♖g8 offers interesting compensation to the second side. An example is 21. g3 ♖h3 22. 0-0-0 ♖ae8

18... ♖g8 19. 0-0

A) 19. ♘xe4? ♖g4+

B) 19. ♖g3 h5∞

19... ♖b8 20. b3 ♖e6

Position after: 20... ♖e6

With equality: the pair of bishops is Black's compensation for White's better pawn structure. A possible continuation:

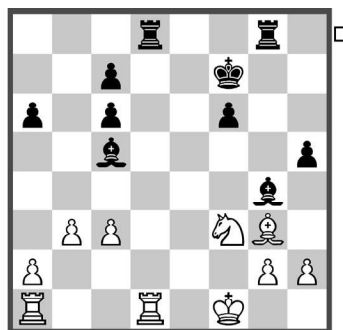
21. ♖g3

21. ♘xe4 ♗g4+–

21... ♖d8 22. ♗fd1

22. ♘xe4 f5 23. ♖h4 ♖d3 24. ♘f6 ♗g6+

22... ♖g4 23. f3 ♖c5+ 24. ♔f1 exf3 25. ♘xf3 h5



Position after: 25... h5

26. ♖xd8

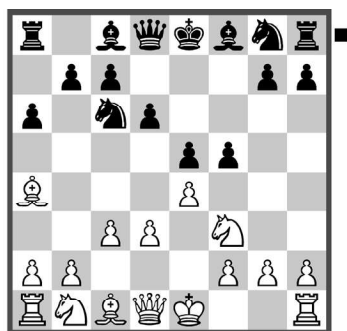
26. ♖xc7 ♖xf3 27. ♖xd8 ♖xg2+–

26... ♖xd8 27. ♖xc7 ♖d3=

Black recovers the pawn and retains the better practical chances thanks to their pair of bishops.

b) 6.d3 ♘f6 7.--

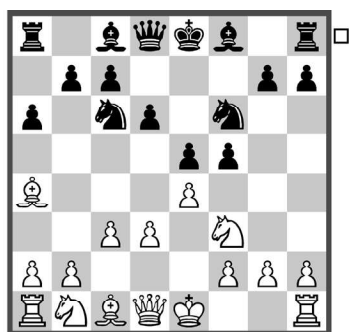
1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♖b5 a6 4. ♖a4 d6 5. c3 f5 6. d3



Position after: 6. d3

The most positional line of the Siesta variation, known since the Walbrodt-von Scheve game, Germany 1892. Although not considered dangerous for the second player, it is a reasonable scheme for White if they seek a quieter game than in the main lines. Furthermore, defenders of Black's scheme can expect this move from opponents who are unfamiliar with the main line and are taken by surprise by the Siesta.

6... ♘f6



Position after: 6... Nf6

7. 0-0

This is considered by Demuth to be White's most accurate continuation. After:

A) 7. ♖e2 ♗e7

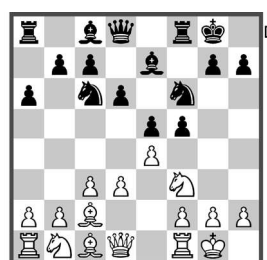
Position after: 7... ♗e7

8. ♘bd2 [8. 0-0 0-0 9. ♗b3+ ♕h8 10. ♘g5 ♖e8 11. ♘e6 ♗xe6 12. ♗xe6 f4 13. ♘d2 g5 Maslikova-Sturv, Slovakia 2006; 8. ♗b3 ♘a5 9. ♗c2 0-0 10. ♘bd2 [Barriga-Marujo, Santiago 2023] 10... ♘h5 8... 0-0 9. ♗b3+ ♕h8 10. ♘g5 d5 11. exd5 ♘xd5 12. ♘df3 (Juhász-Mareckova, Meissen 2013) 12... ♖d6

B) 7. ♗g5

Position after: 7. ♗g5

7... ♗e7 [7... h6 is also good, for example: 8. ♗xf6 ♖xf6 9. ♘bd2 g5 10. exf5 ♗xf5 11. ♘e4 In Tamarozi-Rodi, Niteroi 2022, Black could continue with 11... ♖g7 12. ♗xc6+ bxc6 13. ♖a4 ♗d7 14. ♖a5 d5 15. ♘c5 ♗d6 8. ♗b3 [8. ♘bd2 0-0 9. ♗xf6 ♗xf6 10. ♖e2 ♕h8 11. h3 ♘e7 12. ♗b3 c6 13. 0-0-0 ♘g6 Kjartarsson-Grettarson, Reykjavik 2002] 8... ♘a5 9. ♗c2 0-0 10. exf5 ♗xf5 11. ♘bd2 In Milstein-Krug, Germany 2008, Black could have gained a clear advantage with 11... ♘d5

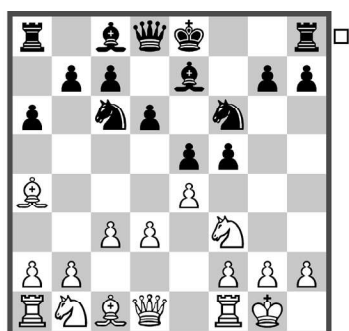
C) 7. ♗c2 ♗e7 8. 0-0 0-0

Position after: 8... 0-0

is already somewhat better for the second side, but after 9. ♖e1 f4 10. d4 ♖e8 11. dxe5 dxe5 12. ♘bd2 ♖h5 White is clearly in trouble, as in Dinu-Sai, internet blitz 2023.

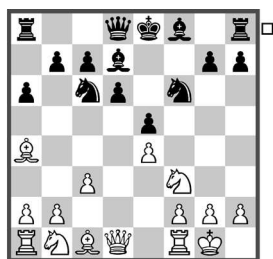
D) 7. ♖b3 ♜e7!? [Or the immediate 7... f4!?] 8. ♘bd2 In Merenciano-De Carvalho, Ceyreste 2025, Black could fight for the initiative with the thematic 8... f4↑

7... ♜e7!



Position after: 7... ♜e7!

7... fxe4 8. dxe4 ♜d7

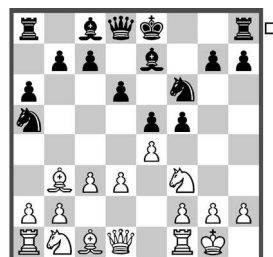


Position after: 8... ♜d7

This is Demuth's recommendation, with the idea of ...♜e7 and ...0-0-0, but as we will see later, Black generally does not exchange early on e4 in order to be able to play ...f4 9. ♖b3 ♜e7 10. ♜e1 [Massoni-Demuth, Calvi 2012] 10... ♘a5!?!↗

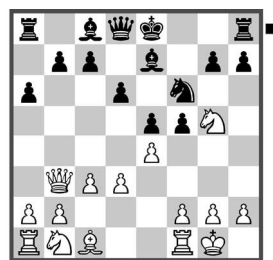
8. ♜e1

A) 8. ♖b3 prevents castling for the moment, but after 8... ♘a5



Position after: 8... ♘a5

A1) 9. ♘g5 ♘xb3 10. ♜xb3



Position after: 10. ♜xb3

10... ♜f8 [10... ♜d7!? 11. ♜f7+ ♜d8↗ is also possible; note the line 12. ♜xg7 ♜g8 13. ♜h6 f4→] 11. exf5 ♜xf5 12. ♜xb7 h6 13. ♘e4 d5 14. ♜c6+ ♜f7 15. ♘xf6 gxf6↗ offers good compensation to Black, as in Wahedi-Derichs, Germany 2010

A2) 9. ♖a4+!? b5 10. ♖c2 White's efforts to show an advantage were unsuccessful: 10... fxe4 11. dxe4 0-0=

B) 8. ♘bd2 transposes to the mainline.

C) 8. exf5 ♜xf5 9. d4



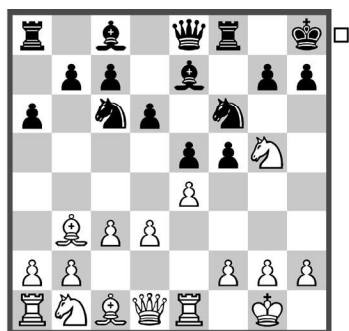
Position after: 9. d4

9... e4 [Probably preferable is 9... 0-0!?
 10. ♖xc6 bxc6 11. dxe5 dxe5 12. ♔xd8
 ♜axd8 13. ♘xe5 ♙d6] 10. d5 exf3 11.
 dxc6 [11. ♔xf3? ♙e4→ Aarav-Gerbelli,
 internet blitz 2023] 11... b5 12. ♙b3
 fxg2 13. ♜e1 d5 14. ♔e2 ♘e4

8... 0-0 9. ♙b3+?!

9. ♘bd2 transposing to the mainline is
 the best idea here for White.

9... ♔h8 10. ♘g5 ♔e8!



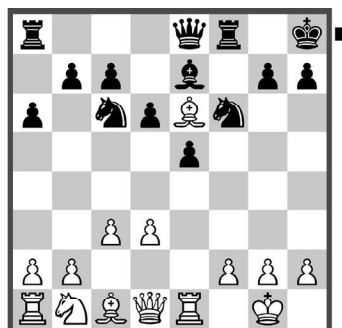
Position after: 10... ♔e8!

and Black has the advantage, for exam-
 ple:

11. exf5

11. ♘e6 ♙xe6 12. ♙xe6 f4

11... ♙xf5 12. ♘e6 ♙xe6 13. ♙xe6



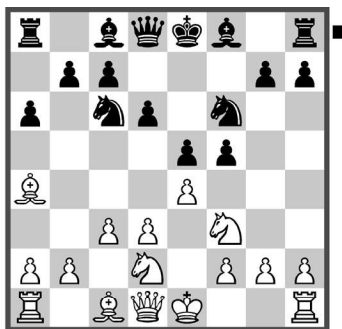
Position after: 13. ♙xe6

13... ♔g6

While the pair of bishops is a valuable
 asset, in this position White obtained it
 at the cost of poor development. On the
 other hand, the activity of Black's pieces
 already threatens to regain that asset
 through the idea ...♘e4.

c) 6.d3 ♘f6 7. ♘bd2

1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♙b5 a6 4. ♙a4 d6 5. c3 f5 6. d3 ♘f6 7. ♘bd2

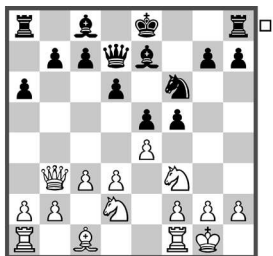


Position after: 7. ♘bd2

The most commonly used idea in practice, and possibly the most critical.

7... ♙e7 8. 0-0

The attempt to prevent Black's castling with 8. ♙b3 does not work: 8... ♘a5 9. 0-0 [9. ♙c2 fxe4 10. dxe4 0-0=; 9. ♘g5 ♘xb3 10. ♙xb3 d5 11. exd5 ♘xd5 12. ♘gf3 ♙f6 ♞ Gasparyan-Sai, internet blitz 2023] 9... ♘xb3 10. ♙xb3 ♙d7



Position after: 10... ♙d7

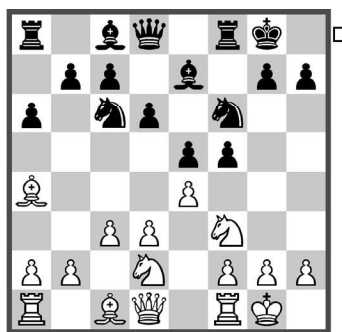
11. d4 [11. ♘g5 ♙f8 ♞ The second player loses the right to castle short, but this is not a problem in this particular position, where ideas such as ...h6 or ...♙b5 appear on the horizon.] 11... exd4 12. exf5 ♙xf5 13. ♙e1 ♙b5



Position after: 13... ♙b5

14. ♙a3!? [14. ♙xb5+?! axb5 15. ♘xd4 ♙d7 ♞ Sidhant-Sunilduth Lyna, New Delhi 2017] 14... h6 15. ♘xd4 ♙d5=

8... 0-0



Position after: 8... 0-0

9. ♙e1

The most common continuation. The option:

A) 9. ♖b3+ ♔h8 10. ♘g5



Position after: 10. ♘g5

The statistics show good results for White, but this is a mirage; Black has two ways of gaining an advantage: 10... d5 [0 10... ♔e8 11. ♘e6 ♘xe6 12. ♘xe6 f4 13. b4 ♘d8 14. ♘b3 [Janko-Sturc, Slovakia 1994] 14... g5] 11. exd5 [11. ♔f3 fxe4 12. dxe4 ♘xe4 13. ♘f7+ ♔xf7 14. ♔xf7 ♘f6 The queen is in trouble and White is lost. An example: 15. ♘f3 ♔d6 16. ♘g5 and now in Leon Cazares-Gibbs, Birmingham 2017, Black won with 16... h6 17. ♔g6 hxg5+] 11... ♘xd5 12. ♘df3 In Munguntuul-Dudarev, internet rapid 2021, Black could have claimed an advantage had they continued with 12... h6 13. ♘h3 ♘f6

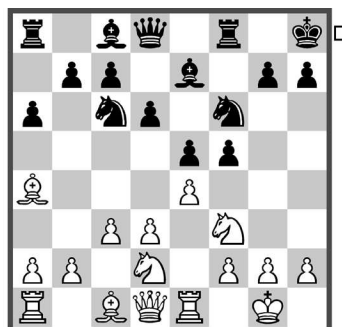
B) A recent White catastrophe occurred after the move 9. ♔e2 where 9... ♔h8



Position after: 9... ♔h8

[9... ♘h5!?] 10. h3 ♘h5 11. ♔e1 ♘f4 12. ♔f1 ♔e8 13. d4 fxe4 14. ♔xe4 ♔g6+ was already decisive in Bostrom-Hector, Norrköping 2022.

9... ♔h8



Position after: 9... ♔h8

A preventive idea that is the most common continuation. Black also has the alternative:

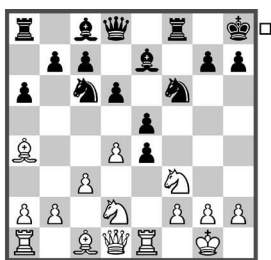
9... fxe4 where after 10. dxe4 ♔e8 [10... ♘d7!? is another reasonable idea here] 11. ♘f1 ♘h5 Black equalizes, as in Penta-Curdo, USA 2004.

10. exf5!?

This move has no precedent in practice, but it may be the most accurate. The options are:

A) 10. ♘f1 This is the most common idea, but Black gains the initiative on the kingside by continuing with 10... f4! 11. d4 We follow the game Simonovic-Markovic, Yugoslavia, 1956, where 11... ♘d7!? enables the advance ...g5. An illustrative line is 12. d5 ♘cb8 13. b4 g5 14. ♘3d2 ♖e8 15. c4 ♗g6

B) 10. d4 fxe4



Position after: 10... fxe4

11. ♘xe4 [11. dxe5 exf3 12. exf6 Now, in Lechtynsky-Gonsior, Czechoslovakia 1971, the correct recapture would have been 12... ♖xf6 with the idea 13. ♘xf3 ♙g4] 11... ♘xe4 12. ♖xe4 d5 In Gehringer-Zeller, Reutlingen 2013, White now had to play 13. ♖xe5 ♘xe5 14. ♘xe5 where Black's advantage is minimal. 14... ♙d6

C) 10. ♙c2 f4!



Position after: 10... f4!

11. d4 [11. h3 [Hsu-Azarya, Al Ain 2025] 11... ♖e8 11... ♖e8 12. dxe5 [12. ♘c4 [Murzin-Navarrete, internet blitz 2022] 12... ♘d7 planning to continue with ...g5] 12... ♘xe5 [12... dxe5 13. ♙a4 ♘d7 14. ♙xc6 bxc6 15. ♘c4 ♙f6] 13. ♘d4 ♙g4 14. f3 ♙d7

10... ♙xf5 11. ♘f1



Position after: 11. ♘f1

11... ♘d7!?

11... ♖d7!? is a reasonable option here.

12. h3 ♙g6 13. ♘g3

Another possibility is:

13. ♖b3 ♜c5 14. ♖c2 ♔d7= The position offers chances to both sides: Black may have a spatial advantage, but White's position is very solid and difficult to break. Even so, I would prefer to play the position from the second side.

13... d5!?

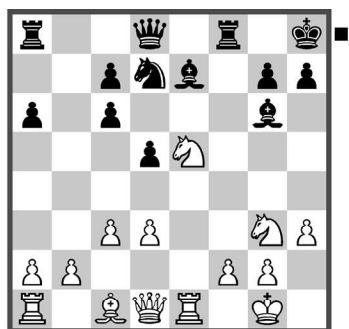


Position after: 13... d5!?

This is the most challenging option, and the most solid.

13... ♜f6= is also possible.

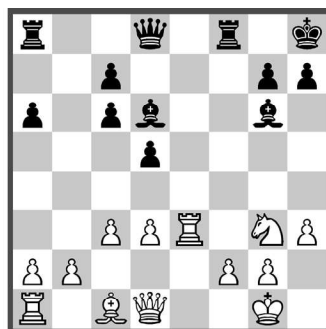
14. ♖xc6 bxc6 15. ♜xe5



Position after: 15. ♜xe5

Obviously critical. Otherwise, Black defends the pawn and his position becomes preferable.

15... ♜xe5 16. ♖xe5 ♜d6 17. ♖e3



Position after: 17. ♖e3

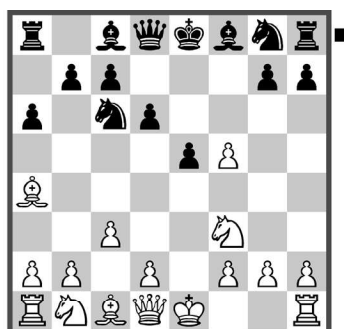
17... c5=

Black has adequate compensation for the pawn sacrifice. Their pieces are more active and they have a reasonable number of open lines to play through. They also have more space in the centre and the pair of bishops.

Logically, the idea of sacrifice still has to pass the practical test, but my impression is that the second player has a clear dynamic balance.

d) 6.exf5 ♖xf5 7.d4 e4 8.d5

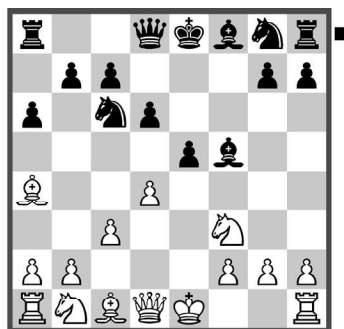
1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♙b5 a6 4. ♙a4 d6 5. c3 f5 6. exf5



Position after: 6. exf5

The main continuation in practice, the preference of engines, and the one that creates the most practical problems for Black.

6... ♖xf5 7. d4



Position after: 7. d4

This is a serious alternative to the main lines with 7. 0-0, and was used by well-known grandmasters such as Kasparov, Grischuk and Svidler, among others.

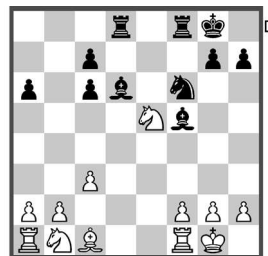
White occasionally uses other moves, but they are not dangerous for the second player. For example, the continuation:

7. d3 Third in practical preference, this leads to a game similar to that of the lines in the previous chapter (to which it can obviously transposed). 7... ♘f6 [7... ♙e7 8. 0-0 ♘f6 transposes] 8. 0-0 ♙e7 9. d4!?



Position after: 9. d4!?

This move has not yet been used in practice, but it may be the only idea that keeps the balance for White. [9. ♖e1 0-0] 9... 0-0 10. ♙xc6 bxc6 11. dxe5 dxe5 12. ♖xd8 ♖axd8 13. ♘xe5 ♙d6



Position after: 13... ♙d6