

ALBURT'S CHESS OPENINGS

# Pirc Alert

A Complete Defense Against 1. e4

ALBURT  
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CHERNIN

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By GM Lev Al  
& GM Alex Che



\$34.95

## Games/Chess

Every chess player needs a defense he can trust. *Pirc Alert!* gives you a complete repertoire, everything you need to know to defend against White's most popular way of starting the game—1. e4. International Grandmasters Alburt and Chernin explain both the winning *ideas* as well as the theory and moves of the Pirc Defense, a dynamic system used by the world's chess elite. What's more, the merits of the Modern Defense, a related opening, are considered in every one of White's variations.

Ideal for those who have other demands on their time, the Pirc Defense rewards understanding its ideas over rote memorization.

*Pirc Alert!* is packed with surprise-weapons, never before revealed theoretical novelties—new moves that can win you many games! Nothing is held back. What's more, *Pirc Alert!* gives you the most thorough explanation of an opening's themes and ideas ever published. As a result, your whole approach to openings and opening preparation will leap to a new level. You'll win more games and enjoy chess more as you play and understand it better!

*Pirc Alert!* makes use of time-tested educational techniques to make it easy for you to read and remember. The most important ideas and positions are set off in color. Lesson previews give you the context, and unique "Memory Markers" lock in what you've learned. Nearly 1,000 diagrams often allow you to study without a board.

*Pirc Alert!* is the first volume of a projected three-volume series, *Alburt's Chess Openings*, which will give you all opening knowledge essential to playing this phase of the game like a grandmaster.

*Grandmaster Alex Chernin* is a world-championship candidate and the leading theoretician in the Pirc Defense, playing with and against it at the highest levels of competition for more than two decades. His ideas have brought the Pirc to the forefront of modern chess theory.

*Grandmaster Lev Alburt*, three-time US Champion, former European Champion, and one of the world's most sought-after chess teachers, draws on his extensive experience to help make this book easy to use for players of all levels.

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# **Pirc Alert!**

**A Complete Defense**

**Against 1. e4**

by

GM Lev Alburt and

GM Alex Chernin

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## Note to the Reader

**Y**ou should be able to read a chess book without squinting, without forever flipping pages back and forth to find the relevant diagram, and without trying to keep a 12-move variation in your head.

We've tried to produce *Pirc Alert!: A Complete Defense Against 1. e4* in a way that makes it enjoyable for you to get the most out of the unique instruction it contains. Nearly 1,000 diagrams (including those numbered and unnumbered) certainly make it easier. We've striven throughout to make sure that the moves and the diagrams they relate to are on the same page-spread.

Look for **blue** diagrams and **blue** boxes that call your attention to the most important positions and ideas. This highlighted information will be especially worth revisiting and even committing to memory.

Main lines are clearly set off in **bold** type. Divisions of these main lines are clearly labeled in **blue** type. Diagrams related to main lines are larger than analysis and side-line diagrams, which are clearly labeled "ANALYSIS." The never-before-published surprise moves, "**TN**'s," are also marked in blue. You'll find many such theoretical novelties throughout.

In fact, in producing *Pirc Alert!*, we used many techniques to make following along and learning easier and more fun.

*Pirc Alert!* uses the now universal algebraic system of chess notation. For more on notation, see volume 1 of the *Comprehensive Chess Course*. (See page 448 for ordering information.)

# Table of Contents

## Pirc Alert!

### A Complete Defense Against 1. e4

<b>Part I: About This Book, by GM Lev Alburt</b>	7
◆ Chapter 1: The Authors & the Pirc The Alex files	8
◆ Chapter 2: How to Use This Book Making the most of your time	18
◆ Chapter 3: How to Study an Opening Putting the passion into the Pirc	20
<b>Part II: General Themes and Ideas, by GM Alex Chernin</b>	27
◆ Chapter 4: The Pirc as an Idea More concept than concrete variations	28
◆ Chapter 5: Black Plays ... c7-c5 Counterpunching from the queenside	42
◆ Chapter 6: Black plays ... e7-e5 White responds with dxe5 or d4-d5	66
◆ Chapter 7: The Philidor & Ruy Lopez Pircs White responds to ... e7-e5 by leaving his pawn on d4	74
◆ Chapter 8: The Ruy Lopez & Philidor Pirc as a System More on ... e7-e5, when White leaves his pawn on d4	110
◆ Chapter 9: White Plays e4-e5 Intruder alert!	134
◆ Chapter 10: Black's Queenside Pawn Play The Pirc's right hand	154
◆ Chapter 11: Black's Fianchettoed Bishop The Pirc's left hand	174
◆ Chapter 12: Black's Other Pieces Developing with a plan	186
◆ Chapter 13: The Pirc Versus the Modern Family differences	198
◆ Pirc Player Profiles: Vasja Pirc	208

#### Key to Commonly Used Chess Symbols

#	checkmate	∞	an unclear position
+	check	∞	with compensation
++	double check	=	an equal position
!	good move	±	White is slightly better
!!	outstanding move	∓	Black is slightly better
?	weak move	±	White is much better
??	blunder	∓	Black is much better
!?	interesting move	+ -	White is winning
!?	dubious move	- +	Black is winning

<b>Part III: Theoretical Variations, by Chernin &amp; Alburt</b>	209
<b>Introduction</b>	210
◆ Pirc Player Profiles: Yasser Seirawan & Jon Speelman	212
<b>Section One Introduction: White Strives for e4-e5</b>	213
◆ Chapter 14: The Austrian Attack And Black's "Brenner Pass"	214
◆ Chapter 15: White Plays 4. Bc4 Paper tiger of the Pirc	248
◆ Chapter 16: White Plays 4. Bg5 Real tiger of the Pirc	262
◆ Pirc Player Profiles: Zoltan Ribli & Jan Timman	296
<b>Section Two Introduction: White Concentrates on His Center</b>	297
◆ Chapter 17: The Classical System, I Introduction & 5. Be2	298
◆ Chapter 18: The Classical System, II White plays 4. Nf3 & 5. b3	324
◆ Chapter 19: White Plays 4. g3 The self-centered system	338
◆ Pirc Player Profiles: Tony Miles & Mikhail Gurevich	358
<b>Section Three Introduction: Macho on the Kingside</b>	359
◆ Chapter 20: White Plays 4. Be3 Ready to storm the kingside	360
◆ Chapter 21: White Plays 4. Be2 & 5. h4 The kamikaze h-pawn	394
◆ Pirc Player Profiles: Alexander Beliavsky & Alex Chernin	402
<b>Section Four Introduction: White Plays a "Hybrid" System</b>	403
◆ Chapter 22: White Plays 4. Nf3 & 5. Be3 The Hybrid System	404
◆ Pirc Player Profiles: Mikhail Botvinnik	416
<b>Section Five Introduction: White Avoids 3. Nc3</b>	417
◆ Chapter 23: White Plays 3. Bd3 Early skirmish, early equality	418
◆ Chapter 24: White Plays 3. f3 Saemisch anyone?	434
<b>Conclusion</b>	440
<b>Index of Games</b>	441
<b>Table of Variations</b>	443



**Co-Author: International Grandmaster  
Lev Alburt**

**Place of Birth:** Orenburg, Russia

**Date of Birth:** August 21, 1945

GM Alburt lived for many years in Odessa, a Ukrainian city located on the Black Sea. He won the highly competitive Ukraine championship three times, in 1972-1974. He won the European Cup Championship twice, in 1976 and 1979.

In the days when there were still a Berlin wall and a tight KGB-guard on "Soviet" GMs, Alburt defected while at a tournament in then West Germany.

In 1979, he came to the U.S., making his home in New York City. He won the U.S. Championship an impressive three times in 1984, 1985 and 1990.

Famous for providing aspiring players easy access to master-level ideas, Alburt is the only top-echelon GM to devote his career to teaching non-masters. His seven-volume *Comprehensive Chess Course: from beginner to master* is a long-time best seller.

He provides lessons through-the-mail, over-the-telephone, and face-to-face. Write to GM Lev Alburt at PO Box 534, Gracie Station, New York, NY, 10028, or call him at (212) 794-8706.



*Renowned  
player, teacher  
and writer*

*Mentored by  
world champion &  
pre-eminent teacher  
Mikhail Botvinnik*

◆ Three-time  
US Champion:  
1984, 1985, 1990

◆ Twice US Open  
Champion: 1987,  
1989

◆ Three-time  
Ukraine Champion:  
1972-74

◆ Popular  
*Chess Life*  
Columnist

◆ Sought after  
teacher

◆ Architect  
of best selling  
*Comprehensive  
Chess Course*

# Part I: About This Book

by GM Lev Alburt



# Chapter 1

## The Authors & the Pirc

### The Alex files

This book is intended to be different from the array of other works that give a complete repertoire against 1. e4. Our book will contain every secret the leading GM theoretician and practitioner of the Pirc has compiled over a decade of research. No theoretical novelty (TN) will be withheld from you.

Normally, such information is revealed only to world championship contenders, who hire top-gun theoreticians like Alex Chernin for that purpose. But shared TNs are only one of the book's unusual attributes.

In order to use this book to your maximum benefit, you should first understand what it is designed to do. Part I of our three-part book makes this point clear. This section is short and will more than repay you for the time it takes you to read it.

It helps if you understand who the authors are and what they bring to you that's unique.

I'm a three-time US Champion turned chess instructor. My books, including the *Comprehensive Chess Course: from beginner to master*, are among the best received chess instruction in the US.

The story of my own discovery of Alex Chernin's singular genius for teaching opening ideas in a very short period of time—as well as his talent for finding overlooked theoretical novelties—began a decade ago. This story is a personal experience involving my students and me. The story may seem almost like fiction, but it is true. It may seem at first that it's about me, but it's about Alex and his truly amazing teaching abilities—and how he can in a very short period of time impart both specific and general opening knowledge on a very high level to both masters and non-masters.

#### 1990 US Championship

August of 1990 found me in

Jacksonville, Florida, hoping to win my third US Invitational Championship in seven years. The competition, as well as the format, was brutal. Sixteen of America's toughest GMs—including Joel Benjamin, six-time champ Walter Browne, Larry Christiansen, Nick deFirmian, Max Dlugy, Roman Dzindzichashvili, Boris Gulko and Yasser Seirawan—all nurtured their own hopes.

The tournament was the first-ever knockout championship (structured similarly to a tennis tournament). It was held concurrently with the U.S. Open—a Swiss tournament contested by hundreds of players of all strengths. The US Invitational hopefuls faced each other in matches of two games, each at a time control of 40 moves in two hours, with sudden-death game tiebreakers. Losers were out but could enter the US Open. (I'd won the US Open in 1987 and again in 1989, but this year I hoped *not* to have a chance!) The last two left "standing" in the championship would play a match of four games.

My first match against 1989 co-champion Yasser Seirawan went better than I could have hoped. I won both games, and so I advanced. (Yaz went on to win the US Open; in effect, when the clocks stopped ticking, we had

castled from our 1989 positions.) In the second match, my toughest, I squeaked by Maxim Dlugy only in a tiebreak blitz game. I have to admit that Max had just been elected president of the United States Chess Federation, and the USCF annual convention is always held at the US Open. So the organizational demands on Max were extremely distracting.

I still had to get by deFirmian and then the winner of the Dzindzi-Christiansen match-up. The US Championship is not easy to win!

Enter Alex Chernin, who was doing quite well in the US Open. I knew Alex's reputation as a brilliant opening theoretician and as a top-echelon GM. We'd been good friends for years. Like me, he is originally from Russia.



Three-time US Champion  
Lev Albur

In talking shop at the hotel, he gave me some advice about playing Nick. He said that deFirmian like myself, nearly always plays the same variations. Since Nick had Black the first game, and I played 1. d4, he would undoubtedly play the Modern Benoni and count on my religious response, the g3 system. Alex recommended surprising Nick by putting my light-square bishop on d3.

I was skeptical. I've always stuck to playing the opening variations I thought were best or at least best for me. Really, I was one of the last players who would be comfortable with suddenly trying to learn a new variation at the last minute for a championship contest. It was a waste of time even to consider, I thought. But Alex prevailed on me to give him just fifteen minutes.

Alex's explanations were so concise, his logic and focus so clear, and his ideas so strong that, in spite of myself, I had to admit I was very interested. We wound up spending about two hours on a system I had never in my life played, and I had to admit I felt well prepared! In fact, I achieved a won game without making a single move on my own. Give me such a position against *anyone* and I had better win! I did.

Later, *Chess Informant 51*

even awarded my opening sequence in this game its "Best Theoretical Novelty," which was accompanied by a cash prize. There had been stiff competition—brilliant games by both Kasparov and Karpov, for example.

Alex, now acting as my part-time second, was relentless regarding game two against deFirmian. Why play your predictable Alekhine, he reasoned, wandering into whatever Nick is cooking up? So now I was to ride into battle under the banner of a complex opening, the Pirc, that I'd never played in my life.

We expected Nick to follow his routine of responding to the Pirc with the Austrian Attack. And, as you will shortly see, Chernin had enough ammo to load me for bear in this variation.

After the success of the first game, I was very inclined to listen to Alex. He didn't have to plead for 15 minutes this time. He showed me the ideas and basic moves of the variations we wanted in the Austrian. He thoroughly convinced me of the correctness of his ideas. Then he showed me other White lines—in case Nick would deviate from the usual paths. Importantly, he showed me a move for Black, an interesting sacrificial idea—giving up the Exchange for a pawn—in one of the main lines.

This creative idea is given in Chapter 14 of this book.

Nick played exactly as Alex said he would. I got a good game, but then Nick outplayed me. Here Alex's *idea* came to the rescue. I saw an opportunity to sacrifice the Exchange for a pawn and successfully held White to a draw.

Next came the four-game head-to-head with Christiansen, who had reached the finals without losing a game! Larry was very strong while on the attack, and much more flexible, varying his openings. With some help from Alex, I won a wild first game as Black in my own Alekhine. In the second game, I played my trusty Catalan and won after many ups and downs.

So one more half-point would earn me the championship. We expected Larry this time to start with 1. d4, which I intended to counter with my usual Benko Gambit. Alex had another idea. You need only a draw, he reasoned, so why give away a pawn on move three? Now it took Alex very little time to convince me.

In a few hours, Alex took me through the Slav, showing me what to do in all the main lines. Once again, despite the short time, the brilliance of Chernin's own understanding and his clear, concise, reassuring way of explaining moves and ideas gave

me both knowledge and confidence. Sure enough, Larry played a sideline. Here's how it went:

**CHRISTIANSSEN—ALBURT  
JACKSONVILLE, 1990**

**1. d4 Nf6 2. Nf3 d5 3. c4 c6 4. Nc3 dxc4 5. a4 Bf5**

Here's where Christiansen varied from the mainline. Normal would be 6. e3 or 6. Ne5.

**6. Nh4?!**

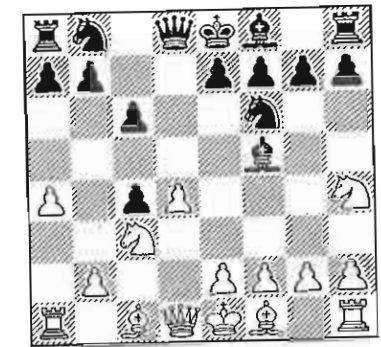


Diagram 1

After 6. Nh4?!

### Learning to fish

Alex and I hadn't discussed this move specifically. Not every move can be anticipated in training, and even if it could, who can remember so much? I was playing an opening that I had never before ventured. So Larry made a practical, professional decision. He wanted to take me out of my "prep," leaving me stranded in uncharted, unfamiliar waters. I didn't, however, feel at all confused or at sea, as I would if Alex had simply crammed my head

with tricky lines. On the contrary, Alex had explained the important ideas of the opening to me so well, that in reaction to Larry's unusual approach, I was actually able to create what is now the approved theoretical prescription for dealing with Larry's sideline!

As the old saying goes, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish, and he can feed himself the rest of his life." After only a brief lesson by Alex, I was fishing—and catching the biggest sharks!

First I thought about retreating my attacked bishop to its home square. White could then return his knight to f3, when I could put my light-square bishop back on f5 again. But then White could make a different, better choice. Why give him that

option? Wouldn't it be better to make him live with his knight-on-the-rim variation? There must be a good reason his sixth move is not a main line for White.

A typical reaction to 6. Nh4 would be 6. ... Bg6, in order after 7. Nxc6 to recapture toward the center and at the same time to open the h-file.

But there's another "candidate move," 6. ... e6!, a move Alex had shown me in a similar position. Yes, it invites a doubled pawn, but look at some of what it accomplishes:

- 6. ... e6! guards the attacked bishop while forwarding development;
- It opens diagonals for Black's queen and dark-square bishop;
- If White captures, doubling the pawns, the Black pawn on f5 supports the e4-outpost for Black's knight, which can also be supported by a rook on e8.

Christiansen did capture the bishop, and on move 8, I played what happened to be a novelty (again based on Alex's ideas). I achieved comfortable equality and eventually won, capturing the title 3-0 in the final.

Later, in a discussion with Garry Kasparov, the world champion made it clear that this game had been brought to his attention.

He wanted to know who told me about the improvement in the 6. ... e6! line, a novelty also discovered by his own analytical team. I couldn't blame him for being curious—after all, an important eighth-move TN doesn't come along everyday! I was amused to honestly tell him that I found the move 6. ... e6! over the board in 10 minutes and its follow-up (8. ... Bb4) in another five minutes—all after "studying" the opening for only a few hours the evening before the game. Of course, after having the pleasure of such a shocking deflation, I told him about Alex Chernin's special skills.

### My students and Alex

Back in New York, where my students ranged from beginners to masters, one of them, a B-player, was an especially busy man, the CEO of a leading national investment firm. He felt that he needed an opening he could understand quickly and play with confidence. Of course, I thought of Alex.

"Can you teach my student a solid system against 1. e4 in one hour?" I asked Alex just before the lesson. "I can do it in thirty minutes," Alex said calmly. I was getting very curious to see how this session would turn out.

Chernin had picked out the Rubinstein French, an unfashionable line that relies on the same

third move, after 1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5, regardless of whether White chooses 3. Nc3 or 3. Nd2. Black plays 3. ... dxe4, and responds to 4. Nxe4 with ... Bd7.

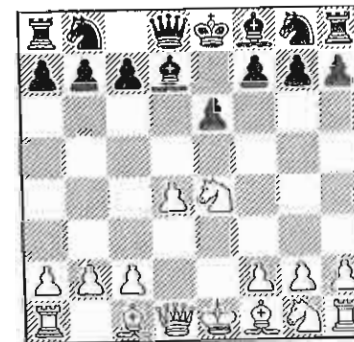


Diagram 2

After 4. ... Bd7

I watched Alex adapt himself perfectly to the needs of this particular student. Alex showed him the ideas and moves of the main line, which led to an equal position.

Then he circled back to demonstrate how players of White typically go wrong, overreaching in the center and leaving their d-pawn vulnerable. He explained how to take advantage of that mistake.

"Time!" I thought to myself as I glanced at my watch. Alex smiled and looked up at the CEO, who had now been transformed into that most focused of humans, the chess player at the moment of enlightenment. My student was delighted to spend another half-hour trying different side varia-



World-Championship Candidate Alex Chernin talks over book plans at the Lawrence house.



tions and asking Alex questions.

Chernin's telephone lesson with my other over-committed student, a C-player and a best-selling writer on nutrition, followed the same sequence of events.

Both players were thrilled with the results of their opening. Each became something of an expert in the line, and found themselves able to battle successfully players (or computers) several hundred rating points above them. Clearly, Alex's magic touch worked on non-masters as well as someone battling for the US Championship.

Then-current theory held that the Rubinstein variation left Black with a disadvantage. What Alex achieved was every chess player's and every chess theoretician's dream—he drastically changed the evaluation of a key opening position from a clear edge for White to approximate equality.

Thus it was not merely that my students' opponents wouldn't find the right moves, although they probably wouldn't. The truth was that the moves and ideas Alex had worked out practically equalized!

### **The Alex files— future theory**

Five years later, in 1995,

Alex came back to New York. My students were eager to see him. Indeed, they were still playing his line in the Rubinstein French. But something had changed.

In fact, new opening books now changed the verdict on the variation, and Alex's line became quite popular with the likes of Anatoly Karpov. Theory had finally caught up with Chernin, at least regarding the Rubinstein. The students were quite impressed that, just as Alex told them five years earlier, his ideas and moves were now given in books as the way to reach approximate equality in this variation! Alex's theoretical ideas are like magic time capsules that contain the truth that will be dug up years in the future.

Top players such as Gelfand, Beliavsky and Lautier know and rely on Alex's genius for seeing into the theoretical future. Beliavsky says it succinctly enough: "Alex's files show theory as it will be in 10 years!"

### **The new series: Alburt's Chess Openings**

After Nikolay Krogius and I completed the seventh and final volume (on endgame play) of the *Comprehensive Chess Course: from beginner to master* (which I co-authored and published), only one part of the game remained to

be explained. Although it wasn't within the scope of the *Course* to tackle opening theory in detail, chess players certainly want and deserve the same kind of help in the opening phase. So I knew it was time to talk to Alex Chernin about "translating" his in-person help into book form. I didn't want to publish the book unless it could attain the same effect as Alex in person:

- It had to be able to convey the overall understanding of an opening in such a way that it made its readers self-supporting "fishermen";

- It had to reveal all the theoretical secrets, those "theoretical time capsules," often five to 10 years ahead of their time;

- It had to do all this with a respect for the other demands on the reader's time.

I needed an author who is:

- A great player;
- A renowned theoretician;
- A highly creative and original chess thinker, who produces many theoretical novelties;

- A teacher who possesses the rare ability to explain openings in terms that are easy to understand, logical, comprehensive, and concise;

- Most of all, a teacher who can explain openings in terms of

**"ALEX'S FILES SHOW  
THEORY AS IT WILL BE  
IN 10 YEARS!"**  
—GM ALEX BELIAVSKY

ideas (ideas are indispensable in chess—with them you can find the best moves on your own);

Naturally, my choice for author was Alex. My own role was to use my teaching experience to help Alex to make the book extremely student-friendly.

### **Could we get the third member of the "A-Team" to sign on?**

*Just the Facts!*, the seventh and final book in the *Comprehensive Chess Course*, is one of the fastest-selling endgame books of all time. It was selected by the Chess Journalists of America as the best book of 2000-2001. *Comprehensive Chess Course* Executive Editor Al Lawrence built into that book a number of features that made the book especially easy to learn from. Al, a former Executive Director of the US Chess Federation, is the author of eight books of his own on a variety of subjects. He is also a former teacher with advanced degrees in curriculum and instruction. He writes on chess with great style and unique perspective. In fact, he was voted 2000-2001 CJA





Executive Editor Al Lawrence

Journalist of the Year.

We certainly wanted to sign up Al for this new series, and to repeat the successful pedagogical techniques so well received in *Just the Facts!*, while adapting them when appropriate to an opening book. Al, who runs two non-chess businesses of his own, comes into chess projects only when he sees that they offer the prospect of providing players with something of great benefit and effectiveness.

I explained the prospective series and its goals to Al and then got Alex and him together. In fact, they spent a three-day weekend at Al and his wife Daphne's house in the country an hour north of New York City. There, between consuming holiday meals and petting the seven resident cats and dogs, they talked about their ideas for the "perfect" opening book and how we might

try to produce it. It didn't take Al long to commit to the work. All three of us took a pact: we committed to using all of our combined talents to produce a uniquely helpful series of books.

### Why the Pirc?

The combination of Alex and the Pirc was a natural to kick off the series. Alex is the Pirc's leading proponent and theoretical spokesman. He understands the defense as a hunter understands his long-time bird-dog. His files are replete with Pirc TNs. Even on its own merit, the Pirc was a very logical choice:

- It's completely sound, having been relied on by some of the best players in the world, including super-solid world champion Mikhail Botvinnik;
- It rewards ideas rather than rote memorization;
- It uses all the ideas so far developed in chess, from classical to modern;
- It's a flexible approach that offers the second player a variety of choices;
- Its theory can be reduced for Black to a relatively small and completely understandable portion.

This last point is very important for nonprofessionals. But no matter who you are, chess makes you practical. There's a lot to learn in chess. A player who

wants to improve can't spend all of his time keeping up on only one phase of the game.

### Who should read this book?

Players of many strengths, from beginning tournament player to super-GM, will profit from this book. Here are some who will benefit most:

- Anyone who already plays the Pirc—this book will be like having the personal opening notebook you always wanted;
  - Anyone who has to play against the Pirc;
  - Anyone who wants to develop a comprehensive and completely modern, competitive defense to 1. e4, without gaps in his understanding;
  - Anyone who wants to acquire a second opening to understand on a very, very high level, perhaps to play against higher-rated opponents;
  - Any player who wants to know what it means to have an opening that is fully developed—completely researched and analyzed—like the theoretical preparation of top professionals;
- Yes, even someone who doesn't play the Pirc or play against it, and doesn't intend on taking it up, may want to study this book for two reasons:

- To take advantage of the fact that learning the Pirc's ideas on a profound level will prove beneficial to a player's understanding of several other openings;

- After studying one opening on this high level, to apply the same winning approach to other openings.

### Three-part structure

Chernin and I quickly agreed on a plan for our new opening series. Volume 1, the book you are reading now, provides a complete repertoire for Black against 1. e4. Volume 2 will do the same thing against 1. d4, 1. c4 and all other White first moves. Volume 3 will provide a complete repertoire for White.

Alex and I have co-authored this first book, which is divided into three parts. It's natural for me to write this first part on my own, explaining my reasons for publishing the work, providing suggestions on how to use this book and how to study an opening, the Pirc in particular.

Here's the general plan and authorship.

Part I: About This Book, by GM Lev Alburt

Part II: General Themes and Ideas, by GM Alex Chernin

Part III: Theoretical Variations, by GM Alex Chernin, assisted by GM Lev Alburt.



## Chapter 2

# How to Use This Book

Making the most of your time

**T**his book is intended to serve you as a practical resource for a very long time. Besides making the book rich in chess knowledge, including the revelation of previously secret theoretical novelties, we wanted to make it easy to learn from—to maximize both your learning and memory retention.

Why do we have Parts 2 & 3, separating the themes and ideas of the Pirc from the theoretical variations? In the Pirc many of the same structures—identical or similar positions—can occur from different move orders. Before you can master a variation in the Pirc, you must know and understand the typical positions, the ideas, and the relative value of the pieces.

You can read and study this book sequentially, as it is laid out—all the ideas first, then the variations. Or you can take the chapters out of order, first studying a chapter or two of ideas, then playing over a variation that you

have reason to be interested in immediately. (Perhaps you are preparing for a tournament or a special game.) Or if you're researching from White's point of view, you may want to go to a chapter on a specific variation. Taking the material out of order shouldn't make any difference in the benefits you derive, as long as you ultimately read the whole book, and as long as you do read each chapter itself in sequence—a must for anyone who plays the Black side of the Pirc. The reasons will become clear as you take a look at the special features we've built in to help you learn and remember.

### Special features and how to use them

- On the left-hand page before each chapter, you'll find a page headed "Some Important Points to Look For." The page contains a very short preview of the chapter to put the upcoming information in context. Then you'll see a series of briefly explained diagrams, touchstones

for the most important ideas you're about to study. Previewing the most important ideas will prepare you to better understand them when you meet them in the context of the chapter—and will increase your ability to remember them.

- Throughout the book, the most important positions are highlighted in **blue**. This format not only calls your special attention to them, but makes the process of reviewing what you've learned much quicker and more effective.

- The most important ideas and guiding principles are set in large type within boxes, what art directors call "call outs," also highlighted in **blue**, with the same effect.

- Importantly, moves and the diagram they relate to are nearly always placed on the same page-spread! Although a painstaking process for the page designer, this layout principle keeps you from having to flip back and forth from moves to diagrams.

- There are many diagrams and they are in the right places, often making it possible to study without a board.

- Main lines are given in bold and clearly separated from analysis.

- It's easy to identify main-line positions. Main-line diagrams are large throughout. All

other positions, whether pure analysis or side-games, are smaller and labeled "analysis."

- Every chapter offers a summary of its main ideas. Carefully reading the summary after studying a chapter while recalling the ideas you've studied will help you remember the key points.

- Every chapter is followed by two pages of "Memory Markers," centrally important positions that challenge you to lock in the concepts you've learned and encourage you to use these ideas in new positions, as you'll want to do in your own games.

- On pages 207, 335 and 355, we've supplied a space for notes and some blank diagrams. Use these pages to keep your book up to date. As you find or play important new games using a variation of the Pirc, write in the participants, the dates, and where it can be found in your library or database. Perhaps there's a key position in the game that you want to remember or analyze. Use the blank diagrams.

We want this book to be a complete reference for a long, long time. We intend to help by updating the book whenever necessary. We want to help to make your chess life as simple and well organized as possible.

## Chapter 3

### How to Study an Opening

Putting the passion into the Pirc

**W**e all know the feeling. We decide to choose a serious opening repertoire. Our idea is first to find a promising game-starting scheme we like and then to learn it and stick with it.

#### White is always equal, but Black is always worse!

After hours or even days, what's our finding? See if this sounds familiar: "When I study White, it's always equal. When I study Black, it's always worse!" Just so you understand that we all hit this wall, regardless of rating, the common complaint is in this instance voiced by none other than World Champion Tigran Petrosian.

#### Lucky in love—or how to put the passion back in your Pirc

It's a lucky player who finds an opening system he loves to rely on, loves to protect from those who would inflict harm on it with their new, villainous ideas.

A player and his favorite opening are really a bit of a romance. Even a tyro in such a relationship can rise on occasion to the role of hero to rescue his maiden in distress. (This romantic analogy would have warned the superego, to use Freud's term, of former US chess great Reuben Fine, who left chess to become a psychoanalyst—and who applied his professional slant to our royal game in his *Psychology of Chess*.)

As a handy example, early in his amateur tournament experience, Executive Editor Al Lawrence found his sweetheart opening, the Scandinavian. (Back then, American players called it the Center Counter.) In the 1960s, the Center Counter (1. e4 d5 2. exd5 Qxd5) was commonly considered a joke, played either by masters who lived before modern principles were understood, or by modern park-players who just as often opened by advancing a rook's pawn.

The CC was a great choice

for Al. There was little theory to learn. His opponents underestimated his choice. Al became a bit of an expert on the Center Counter, enough to spot the holes in popular books, to defeat some players significantly more highly rated than himself, and to draw some international players. He was able to synthesize old, forgotten ideas and even to create a few new wrinkles. And he never played with as much commitment and focus as when his opponent could be seen smirking on the other side of a Center Counter. But these benefits were after-effects, not the selection criteria.

Al never successfully courted a debut as White or as a defense to 1. d4. He dated around, but, when estranged from 1. e4, would wind up a lonely, on-the-board bachelor. His best winning percentage by far, as White or Black, was as second-fiddle against 1. e4.

Of course, in time, this opening from the other side of the tracks won respect. The Center Counter was played even in a world championship match, Kasparov—Anand, 1995. In a dramatic turn-of-fate, there are now serious, admiring books and articles on the opening! Perhaps every chess wallflower will have its day.

Al's experience is just a case

in point. We all know club players who will take on all opponents and all debaters on the topic of their favorite starting moves. How do these lucky-in-love players find their beloved beginnings? Most often, it takes place as it did with Al. He happened to see an old game. For no completely logical reason, the moonlight struck the board. Al was smitten. The fact that the first dates were fun clinched the relationship.

Even on a very top level of play, these same "romantic" factors can play a part. I became known for my reliance on Alekhine's Defense. Despite the prevailing opinion that after 1. e4, the move 1. ... Nf6 is not quite correct, I played "my" Alekhine's consistently at the highest levels, with rewarding results.

It's worth noting that both Al and I elected to take lesser analyzed openings that offered a shortcut—sidestepping much of White's normal preparation.

#### The switching syndrome

Many amateurs spend too much time trying to memorize rote opening moves. That said, none of us wants to reach move 12 with such a steeply up-hill battle that all the strategy and tactics in our head won't get us to the top. Getting caught up in the switching syndrome—jumping

from opening to opening, memorizing and getting discouraged, and never making much use of all the time you've invested—is as impractical as it gets.

Let's take a look at the basic points to consider when choosing an opening repertoire.

### **Set reasonable goals for your opening**

Barring blunders from our opponents, what should we expect from a satisfactory opening?

A. Regardless of its theoretical assessment, we want a position we know how to play.

B. With White, we want a position that is at least equal, and prefer to retain some advantage, although demanding a significant advantage is usually unrealistic.

C. With Black, we want an equal position, or if it is slightly worse for us, we at least want a position we know how to play. For example, a player who emulates Tal may be happy with a material deficit in exchange for an attack—even if, theoretically, it doesn't quite fully compensate him.

### **Realize that openings are schizophrenic**

Don't waste your time with

**THERE JUST ISN'T AN  
OPENING WITH ONLY  
ONE PERSONALITY.**

the fantasy of the "tailor-made" repertoire we sometimes hear about. Some book, some approach, or some personal trainer purports to ken your style and then put together openings that will match your playing persona, bringing out the winning you.

Without question, an experienced, qualified chess teacher can help you to improve much faster and absorb important principles more thoroughly than you could on your own. However, in any major opening, you can't play in a way that will guide you only to tactical terrain while preventing positional games, or vice versa.

Try staying in a "solid" Caro-Kann against someone who wants to pry the game open for an attack. Even Mikhail Botvinnik couldn't do it in 1960. Or try playing the Sicilian for a sharp, attacking game against an expert in White's c3 system, and you'll likely find yourself in a positional struggle. Some variations of the French are passive, while some are downright counterattacks. Some forms of the Ruy Lopez are positional, some are wild and hoary. Some Giuoco Pianos are hardly *pianissimo*.

Your opponent can play the Queen's Gambit like the draw-prone Schlechter or like the checkmate-obsessed Marshall.

Openings are schizophrenic.

So unless you suffer from multiple personalities and have learned to change them on cue, whatever opening you play, you risk getting a position that doesn't match your own attitudes about aggression or passivity.

### **Petrosian's Rule**

Sometimes winning is the only acceptable outcome. Maybe it's the game that clinches the club championship or one that bags a big class prize. In such a situation, should you adopt a wild opening, swinging for the bleachers from move one?

The great Petrosian often acted as patron to the young and talented Russian-Armenian master Karen Gregorian. Once Gregorian returned from an important qualifying tournament and showed Petrosian a last-round game in which the young man had played some very risky opening moves as Black and lost. Petrosian cross-examined him in a characteristically chiding way.

Petrosian: "Why did you play such terrible moves? Even you should understand these are bad."

Gregorian: "I had to win to qualify."

Petrosian: "Make a note. It's much easier to play for a win from an equal position than from a bad position!"

### **How much of your time should you spend on the openings?**

Opening study just doesn't deserve to be so all-consuming, especially for nonprofessionals, for two basic reasons:

1. There are lots of other areas to study in chess that will make a more dramatic difference in your results—just one compelling example is the study of tactics.

2. There have been many grandmasters who became prominent, even world-class players, using an opening system roundly condemned as at least slightly inferior.

As a rule of thumb, you should spend about 25% of the time you have to study chess on the openings.

### **Should you learn a second, "surprise" opening, or can you mow the lawn?**

You don't really have to learn a second opening to surprise your opponents. There are enough choices *within* an opening—and certainly within the Pirc—to allow opportunities to catch your opponent off guard.

Nowadays, even most top players unabashedly specialize in a few openings—normally just enough to cover the opponent's

**WE CAN HOLD OUR FAVORITE OPENINGS TO TOO HIGH  
A STANDARD, OR EVEN BLAME THEM FOR DEFEATS  
THAT TAKE PLACE LONG AFTER  
THE OPENING PHASE.**

main possibilities. A few, like Kasparov, seem encyclopedic in their opening choices, but after all, they have teams of researchers and theoreticians.

Actually, the best thing about knowing a second opening well is *not* that you can use it as a surprise weapon against your opponent, but that you learn the ideas and themes of different types of positions. But once again, from the point of view of real people with jobs to do and lawns to cut, a second opening covering the same ground may steal time from other important areas of your chess development.

**Karpov got an edge  
against a line—  
should you give it up?**

As chess players, the dark side of our fondness for our favorite openings is that we can hold them to too high a standard, or even blame them for defeats that take place long after the opening phase. Ridiculous as it sounds, we often wind up rejecting a possibility because it ends in a loss against a top GM or even a world champion. This is a corollary to the cynical outlook

that an opening is evaluated by the results of a few key games, and these games were won by the stronger player.

Long ago as a young expert, I took up a certain line in the Sicilian. I stuck with the variation as I rose through the ranks. As a master, I contributed to the line's theory, drawing and even defeating famous grandmasters with the variation. So I kept playing it. Later, my own analysis unearthed one line that I worried about, a series of moves that left White with an edge from the opening. But no one seemed to have discovered the true importance of the sequence. It was played against me just once, and I drew easily.

Then in 1971, in the semifinals for the Soviet championship, I played Black against a new, 20-year-old GM named Anatoly Karpov, then already coached by the renowned opening theoretician Semyon Furman. Karpov opened with 1. e4, and I was soon in the familiar territory of my trusty Sicilian. And then suddenly, I was in the line I had hoped I would never see again in a tour-

nament game.

**KARPOV—ALBURT, 1971  
SICILIAN FOUR KNIGHTS**

**1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 e6**



*Diagram 3  
After 5. ... e6*

**6. Ndb5 Bb4 7. a3 Bxc3+ 8. Nxc3 d5 9. exd5 exd5 10. Bd3 d4 11. Ne2 0-0 12. 0-0 Qd5 13. Nf4!**

White drives Black's queen from her dominant central position.



*Diagram 4  
After 13. Nf4!*

**13. ... Qd6 14. Nh5! ±.**

Karpov had played the best moves for White and gotten a small edge. I defended well, but

the game was adjourned with Karpov retaining this edge, not necessarily enough to force a win, but an advantage. Another full, six-hour session saw the game adjourned a second time, this time in a lost position for me. I was disgusted. I felt that everyone would now play the same line against me and I would suffer in this way as long as I played the variation. I gave it up.

I now know that my abandoning the line altogether was a very premature reaction. After all, Karpov went on to dominate top-level chess until Kasparov arrived on the scene. The line Karpov played to get a small edge would not be to everyone's taste, nor within most GMs' ability to maintain and convert to a win. It's true that I went on to a new, fruitful "relationship" with Alekhine's Defense, but perhaps for the wrong reasons.

The next time you are tempted to switch your opening because the latest *Informant* game shows how Kasparov beat NM Rollovervitch in 90 moves in the line—think it over. There isn't a line that wouldn't look bad in such a match-up. And when you lose in the city championship to a smartly played mating attack by the ultimate winner, don't rush to blame the opening. The reason for your loss may lie elsewhere.

### **Why is home cooking better than takeout?**

Dick Katahn, author of the very famous "no-fat" dieting approach, has been a student of mine for many years. Take a page from Katahn, trim the fat from your opening preparation—and learn to cook on your own rather than always ordering from the same restaurant menu as everyone else.

Whatever your playing strength, nothing will improve your opening results more than home preparation—your own work in your own home over your own board. (For the serious who have the opportunity, trainers can be a tremendous advantage, of course.)

You don't have to be a master chef to prepare (chess) *hors d'oeuvres* that are both original and sound. Sometimes what you find may be a tactical trick. Perhaps with best play your find peters out to equality faster than the main line, but an opponent seeing it for the first time will

likely slip into a brutal trap, or he may panic in the face of the unknown and try a kamikaze counterattack.

The chances are extremely high that this book will give you the best opening foundation you've ever had. You'll understand the ideas of the Pirc so well that you're likely to be surprised at the innovations you come up with on your own. And in the process of trying to find better and more interesting moves, you will of course constantly increase your understanding of the Pirc and of chess.

#### **Let the book do the rest**

Under different circumstances, I'd have much more to say about how to study openings, how to look for shortcuts by finding effective sidelines. I would explain the techniques for cutting your job down to size, how to gather and assess material, how to organize and what to memorize. But the fact is that *Pirc Alert!* does all of this for you.

I'm sure you're eager to get started!

## **Part II: General Themes and Ideas**

**by GM Alex Chernin**



**ONE OF THE BEST WAYS TO DISH IT OUT  
IS TO COOK AT HOME!**

**YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A MASTER CHEF  
TO PREPARE (CHESS) HORS D'OEUVRES  
THAT ARE BOTH ORIGINAL AND SOUND.**

## Chapter 4: The Pirc as an Idea

### Some Important Points to Look For

In this chapter, you'll learn the basic pattern of early development, White's seven fourth-move choices, and Black's central counterpunches.



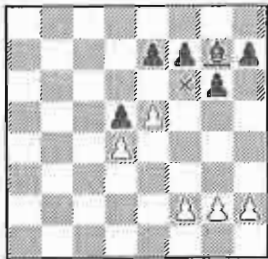
- ◆ The normal Pirc position after 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6.

See Diagram 6.



- ◆ Black has driven White's bishop to g3 but has succeeded only in weakening his own position.

See Diagram 7.



- ◆ Black's bishop is blocked and bad.

See Diagram 10.



- ◆ Here Black can provoke e4-e5 and live to tell about it.

See Diagram 13.

## Chapter 4

### The Pirc as an Idea

More concept than concrete variations

In contrast to other openings that start with 1. e4, such as the Ruy Lopez (1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5) or the Caro-Kann (1. e4 c6 2. d4 d5), the Pirc Defense can be better described by its ideas rather than by mere columns of variations. Indeed, because it has such a strong conceptual identity, the Pirc appeals to a wide range of players who are interested in ideas over sheer memorization.

#### Early development— Pirc vs. classical ideas

In the Pirc, Black fianchettoes his king's bishop by playing ... g7-g6. His standard plan of kingside development includes ... Nf6, ... Bg7, and ... 0-0. The move in the center that characterizes the Pirc is ... d7-d6. This move has not one, but a number of distinct goals:

1. Opens the diagonal for the bishop on c8;
2. Anticipates e4-e5, with its attack on Black's knight on f6;

3. Supports a central counterthrust, either ... e7-e5 or ... c7-c5; (as ... e7-e6 supports ... d7-d5 in the French and ... c7-c6 supports ... d7-d5 in the Caro-Kann);

4. Opens the d7-square for the Black knights.

The moves ... d7-d6 and ... g7-g6 are characteristic of the Pirc Defense. The so-called Gurgendz System, in which the moves ... g7-g6, ... c7-c6 and ... d7-d5 are played, is closer to the Caro-Kann Defense and will not be discussed in this book.

The key Pirc moves ... d7-d6 and ... g7-g6, accompanied by the natural ... Bg7, ... Nf6 and ... 0-0, do more than merely develop. They build a defensive fortress (Diagram 5) for the castled king. The bishop on g7 is a significant rampart in this fortress, protecting the important f6- and h6-squares. Located on the long diagonal of a1-h8, the bishop has some other important duties as well, which we will



examine in Chapter 11: "Black's Fianchettoed Bishop."

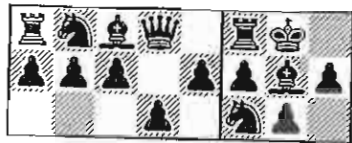


Diagram 5

Black's moves form a defensive fortress

This pattern of development, where Black's men are not placed beyond the sixth rank, allows White both the luxury and the responsibility of relatively great freedom. It's natural that White takes the opportunity to play d2-d4 on the second move, placing another pawn in the center. Having opened files and diagonals for his pieces, White doesn't have any difficulties developing, while Black must free his back row in order to castle. Moreover, the White queen is more mobile than Black's and can be placed either on e2 or d2, giving White the opportunity to castle either queenside or kingside.

Typical play can be illustrated by the following line:

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6

Attacking the e-pawn and thus inviting White's next move.

3. Nc3

Among all the possibilities to protect the e-pawn, this is the strongest and most common.

3. ... g6

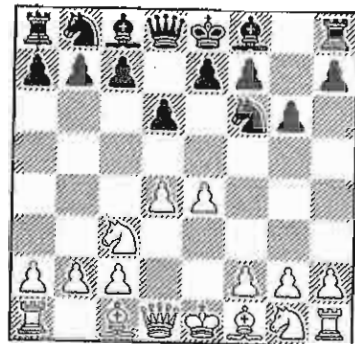


Diagram 6

Main line: after Black's 3. ... g6

This position is basic to all the main systems of the Pirc Defense (although, for completeness, we consider alternatives to 3. Nc3 in Chapters 23 and 24). If we look into any opening manual, we'll see the following lines:

I. 4. f4 (Austrian Attack); II. 4. Nf3 (Classical System); III. 4. Bc4; IV. 4. g3; V. 4. Bg5; VI. 4. f3 (4. Be3); VII. The rest.

As we can see, on his fourth move White can choose from several continuations of approximately equal value. We should try to place them in a logical order.

With that goal in mind, let's examine the ideas behind White's various fourth moves. Why, for instance, isn't the move 4. e5 included in the list? The answer is that after 4. ... dxe5 5. dxe5 Qxd1+ 6. Nxd1 (6. Kxd1 is not to be recommended in view of 6. ... Ng4), the endgame isn't promising for White. Therefore he is not ready yet to play e4-e5 on the

fourth move. However, if we change the position just a little bit by placing White's pawn on f4 or bishop on g5, the e4-e5 advance looks much better.

### e4-e5 as an underlying idea

Why is e4-e5 a threat? We are going to say a lot about the nature and consequences of this move later. For now, we must make some basic observations. When the knight on f6 is attacked by e4-e5, the horseman must retreat to an inferior square. Moreover, Black's dark-squared bishop, destined to occupy g7 after 3. ... g6, is restricted by a pawn on e5. So we mark e4-e5 as a very important resource for White in the Pirc Defense. It is natural that White may try to play e4-e5 as soon as possible. That's why we are going to examine the cluster of moves 4. f4, 4. Bg5 and 4. Bc4. The purpose of each move is the same—to prepare e4-e5.

Still, the rapid e4-e5 advance is not the only possibility for White. The central duo on d4 and e4 can be used as a platform for other actions as well.

At this early point, let's not worry too much about which White fourth move is better. Rather, let's see how each line supports the e4-e5 pawn advance.

#### 4. f4

With 4. f4, White threatens to

to create a powerful center, intending e4-e5, which would be supported by two pawns, f4 and d4. Therefore, White can avoid trading queens after ... d6xe5 by capturing on e5 with his f4-pawn.

#### 4. Bg5

In the 4. Bg5 line, White's dark-square bishop applies pressure along the diagonal h4-d8, enhancing the effect of e4-e5. Besides, if the d-file opens, White can then recapture with the rook on a1. In addition to e4-e5, White may first play f2-f4, again with an eye toward a strong, central dark-square pawn phalanx.

#### 4. Bc4

By playing 4. Bc4, often followed by Qd1-e2, White aims to advance his e-pawn, even to e6, to get tactical advantages.

### Kingside operations

#### 4. f3

The purpose of 4. f3 is to prepare for kingside operations. White can develop threateningly by playing Be3 and Qd2, usually followed by 0-0-0. Then White will play Be3-h6 in order to trade off Black's important g7-bishop, or to drive it back to h8.

At the same time, the center-bolstering f2-f3 excludes the defender's possibility of ... Nf6-g4. Additionally, after f2-f3, the prospect of g2-g4 hangs in the air. When White has castled queenside, the g2-g4 advance can

be key to a pawn storm against the Black king as part of the well-known pattern g2-g4 and h2-h4-h5. Or the g-pawn can be pushed to g5, displacing the knight from its ideal defensive post on f6.

#### 4. Be3

It turns out that first playing 4. Be3, followed by 5. Qd2, is a more precise realization of the attacking idea than is 4. f3. The reason is that attacking White's bishop with 4. ... Ng4 5. Bg5 h6 6. Bh4 g5 7. Bg3 just weakens Black's position.

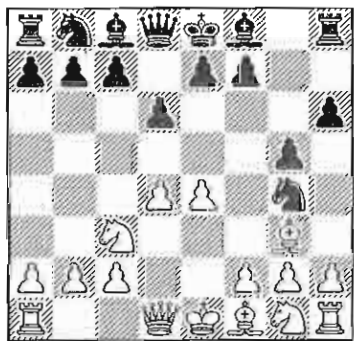


Diagram 7  
After 7. Bg3

Therefore, after 4. Be3 rather than 4. f3, White's pieces are developing faster and he retains the option of playing f2-f4 in one move. That's why 4. Be3 is more popular than 4. f3. In both the 4. f3 and 4. Be3 systems, the center and kingside clearly remain White's turf, while an early e4-e5 advance is not the focus of White's play, as it is after 4. f4,

4. Bg5 and 4. Bc4. But the e4-e5 pawn push isn't completely eliminated from White's plans, even in the 4. f3 and 4. Be3 systems, especially when Black does not play carefully.

#### 4. Be2

Another move aimed at putting pressure on Black's kingside is 4. Be2. Its idea is clear—to support the advance h2-h4-h5. While this plan can't be refuted directly, it allows Black to achieve satisfactory play in a number of ways.

#### Focus on the center

##### 4. Nf3 & 4. g3

The next cluster of systems, in which White also doesn't press for e4-e5, consists of 4. Nf3 (the so-called Classical System) and 4. g3. Here White's main focus is on the center. After 4. Nf3, White usually continues developing with Be2 and 0-0, hoping that his strong center and well-placed forces will guarantee him a better game. Such an approach restricts Black's activity, yet White can't hope for more than a symbolic advantage.

The 4. g3 system, in which White plans to fianchetto his king's bishop and place his king's knight on e2, is also solid. All of White's minor piece placements—Bg2, Be3, Nc3, Ne2—support his pawn center. Black must play precisely in order to

equalize. Still, as in the classical system, Black's position is sound.

#### Thematic groupings of White's fourth moves

Based on the considerations above, we have divided White's choices on move four into three thematic groups:

##### White's Fourth-Move Themes

1. White intends to play an early e4-e5:  
4. f4, 4. Bc4, 4. Bg5.
2. White focuses on operations on the kingside, keeping his center strong  
4. Be3, 4. f3, 4. Be2
3. White maintains his strong center:  
4. Nf3, 4. g3.

The second and third groups have something in common: White is not aiming at a rapid e4-e5, although this threat can certainly crop up later. By the way, even in the first grouping, White isn't committed to playing e4-e5. There are other good plans too.

#### Other White fourth moves

Besides the eight approaches above, there are some others, for

instance 4. Nge2, 4. h3, and 4. Bf4. But these systems have no separate value because in most cases they transpose into main systems. For example, after 4. Nge2, White is ready to continue with g2-g3 or f2-f3. In fact, even main lines can blend into one another. The 4. Be3 and 4. Nf3 move orders can transpose; White's bishop is frequently placed on e3 in the classical system (4. Nf3). On the other hand, even if White has already played 4. Be3 and 5. Qd2, he may "suddenly" change his mind and put his knight instead of his pawn on f3, thus forming a "hybrid" system we're going to evaluate later.

#### Summing up fourth moves

So, on his fourth move, White chooses a *plan* rather than merely a move, and begins to act according to the logic of his plan. For his part, Black usually tries to follow the initial program he has in mind when choosing the Pirc by playing ... Bg7 and ... 0-0. The typical character of play can be illustrated by the following line: 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Nf3 Bg7 5. Be2 0-0. Black has completed the first part of his program. After 6. 0-0 White has done the same.

ON HIS FOURTH MOVE, WHITE CHOOSES A *PLAN*  
RATHER THAN MERELY A MOVE.

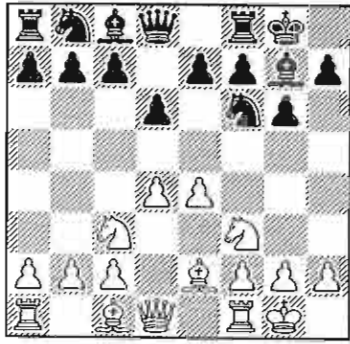


Diagram 8  
After 6. 0-0

Another example: 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Be3 Bg7 5. Qd2 0-0 6. 0-0-0.

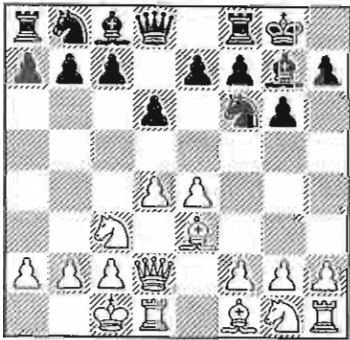


Diagram 9  
After 6. 0-0-0

As we can see, in both cases the basic goals of the opening have been achieved by both sides. (Of course, in the Pirc Defense, there are more complicated scenarios when one side deviates from simple development.)

### Pirc vs. Herr Doktor Tarrasch

Now let's see how Black's

play conforms to the following three classic, general principles of opening strategy, of which the great Siegbert Tarrasch was such an advocate:

1. When possible, place your pawns in the center of the board;
2. Develop pieces quickly and efficiently—avoid making too many pawn moves and moving the same piece twice, unless you have a good reason.
3. Castle early—the king left in the center is vulnerable; moreover, it prevents connecting the rooks and therefore impedes the coordination of forces.

In the Pirc, Black certainly interprets these rules liberally. He doesn't place a pawn in the center. In some lines, Black also flaunts rules two and three as well, making many pawn moves in the opening and even delaying castling, all without harm! We can see the difference in the Pirc's approach by comparing it with other openings dominated by the immediate struggle for the center.

For example, after 1. e4 e5 or 1. e4 c5, Black takes the d4-square under control, discouraging 2. d4, with the follow-up 2. ... exd4 3. Qxd4 Nc6. In both the French (1. e4 e6) and the Caro-Kann (1. e4 c6), Black allows White to enjoy his pawn center for only a half-move. After 2. d4,

Black immediately counterattacks with 2. ... d5. In these openings—as well as in the Alekhine Defense and Center Counter Defense—Black doesn't permit White to maintain the e4/d4 duo.

With ... d7-d6 in the Pirc, Black stops halfway in the center for the time being, postponing an immediate ... e7-e5 or ... c7-c5. Black develops quickly and harmoniously, avoiding an immediate skirmish, allowing White his strong center. Even so, John Watson's statistics show that Black's results in the Pirc Defense are as good as that of the above-mentioned openings. This fact shouldn't be surprising, because Black has prepared well for the future battle. He applies pressure on the center. After all, his very first moves, 1. ... d6 (protecting the e5-square) and 2. ... Nf6 (attacking the e4-pawn), restrain White's central initiative.

But Black has even more in mind. Black's kingside pieces, both his knight on f6 and especially his bishop on g7 (which can strike from a distance), are poised to support operations in the center. And while White has more space to maneuver (four ranks versus Black's three ranks), he can't simultaneously solve two

opening problems—developing his pieces and maintaining his two center pawns abreast on e4 and d4.

### Black's basic strategy

White's center pawns restrain Black's play. There is the dangerous possibility that White will regroup behind these pawns and start a strong central action, most likely beginning with that warhorse thrust e4-e5. Thus Black must act soon before he's overrun.

Black should *not* attempt absolute destruction of White's pawn center—any rash try to dissolve it is unrealistic. Rather, Black's goal is the modern concept of causing changes in the center that favor him. Since a pawn center is most powerful when the two center pawns stand abreast on e4 and d4, sometimes augmented by a colleague on f4, Black's immediate task is to eliminate one of White's two proud center pawns, or at least force one to move. Therefore, Black should push his e- or c-pawn to e5 or c5, attacking White's d-pawn, or Black should play ... d6-d5, attacking the e4-pawn.

### Should Black provoke e5 or d5?

Is it better for Black to concentrate his efforts against e4 or

BLACK DOES NOT PLAN TO DESTROY  
WHITE'S PAWN CENTER, BUT TO  
CHANGE IT IN HIS OWN FAVOR.

against d4? Keeping in mind that the attacked White pawn can be pushed forward, we should analyze the strategic results of d4-d5 in reaction to ... c7-c5 or ... e7-e5, as well as the effects of e4-e5 after ... d6-d5. The results of the two possibilities are quite different.

After ... d6-d5 and e4-e5, White's pawn on e5 not only displaces Black's knight on f6, but also restricts the activity of his bishop on g7. If Black is slow to act against the e-pawn, then later it can be used as a platform for a White attack. A well supported White pawn on e5 blocks Black's fianchettoed bishop, which in fact can be even worse off than the so-called classically "bad" bishop, restricted by its own pawns.

Let's see why by comparing two positions. In the first one, the e5-square is occupied by a strongly supported White pawn, and in the second one, with a Black pawn. In both cases, the Black bishop is limited in its activity, but in the first case its limitations are more severe.

In Diagram 10, we see that

**PROVOKING e4-e5 IS A BIT LIKE SENDING A FORMAL INVITATION TO A THIEF!**

the Black bishop is not able to extend its reach beyond the f6-square.

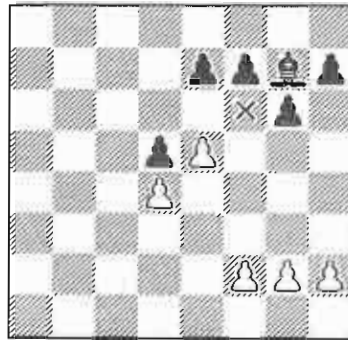


Diagram 10  
Black's bishop is blocked.

Compare Diagram 10 to Diagram 11, below. Now the Black bishop is able to extend its activity through the e5-pawn to d4—where his knight may find an outpost.

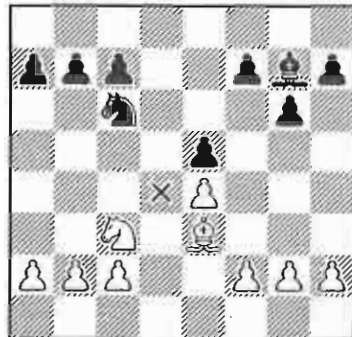


Diagram 11  
Black's bishop is blocked, but still influential.

Summarizing, we come to the conclusion that provoking e4-e5 is a bit like sending a formal invitation to a thief to visit your home! We encourage the wrong outcome. Besides, ... d6-d5 is a

second move with Black's d-pawn, wasting time compared to ... e7-e5 or ... c7-c5.

Indeed, there are many examples of Black's fianchettoed bishop suffering a sad fate after ... d6-d5. Here's one of the most horrible.

ALMASI—RIBLI  
HUNGARY, 1997

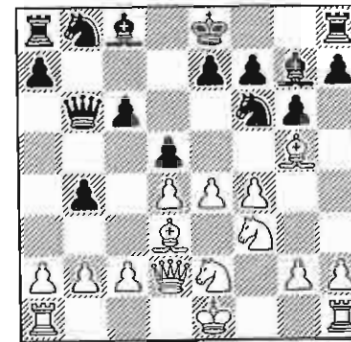


Diagram 12  
White to move

Black has just played 9. ... d6-d5?. The game continued with 10. Bxf6! (by taking the f6-knight, White eliminates the possibility of 10. e5 Ne4) 10. ... exf6?. (This attempt to prevent e4-e5 is not recommended; relatively better is 10. ... Bxf6 11. e5 ± Bg7, and we can see a typical example of a bad bishop on g7, rather than the completely horrible g7-bishop that occurred in this game.) After 11. exd5 cxd5 12. f5!, the bishop on g7 is a prisoner, and Black's position is strategically hopeless.

But the hurly-burly of practi-

cal chess offers many exceptions to general principles. There are times when Black can provoke e4-e5 and live to tell about his prank. But he has to have very specific justifications. For example, here's a theoretical position where Black has his reasons to entice e4-e5.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Nf3 Bg7 5. h3 0-0 6. Be3 c6 7. a4 d5.

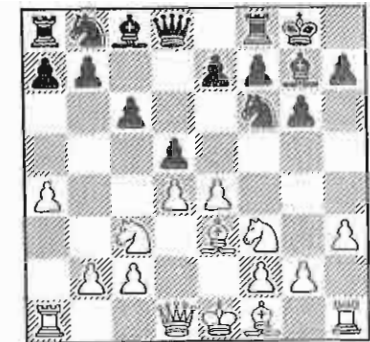


Diagram 13  
White to move

After 8. e5, Black's knight invades with 8. ... Ne4—for example: 9. Nxe4 dxe4 10. Ng5 c5, with an unclear position.

On the next page, let's look at an example of similar play in one of my own games.

**IT'S BEST FOR BLACK TO PLAY ... C7-C5 OR ... E7-E5, INVITING WHITE TO PUSH D4-D5 RATHER THAN E4-E5.**

ZAPATA—CHERNIN  
SAINT JOHN, 1988

1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6 4. Be3 c6 5. Nf3 Bg4 6. a4 Bxf3 7. gxf3 (or 7. Qxf3 Qb6) 7. ... d5!

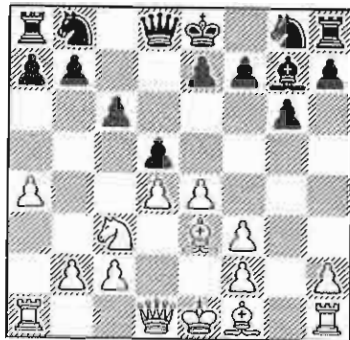


Diagram 14  
After 7. ... d5!

Now after 8. e5, White can't launch a successful kingside attack with f3-f4-f5 because of his weakened pawns.

Another game in which I actually provoked e4-e5 worked out okay for Black too.

TOLNAI—CHERNIN  
AUSTRIA, 1994

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Be3 c6 5. Qd2 b5 6. f3 Nbd7 7. 0-0-0 h4 8. Nce2 a5 9. g4 Nb6 10. Ng3 h5 11. g5 Nfd7 12. h4 d5

The push 12. ... d5, followed by ... e7-e6, allows Black's dark-

**WHITE'S REACTION TO  
BLACK'S COUNTER-  
PUNCH DEFINES THE  
GAME'S CHARACTER.**

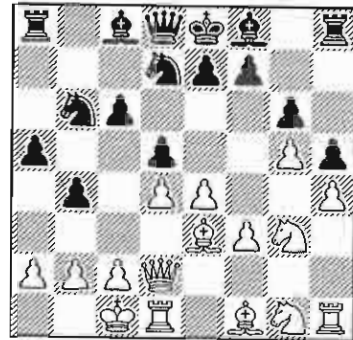


Diagram 15  
After 12. ... d5

square bishop to operate along the a3-f8 diagonal. What's more, ... Nb6 aims at c4. White's pawn on g5 is not well placed here because it makes the idea of pushing the f-pawn (f3-f4-f5) unworkable.

### Exceptions only prove the rule

Despite the occasional exception, all in all, it's clearly best for Black to play ... c7-c5 or ... e7-e5, attacking the d-pawn, inviting White to push d4-d5 rather than e4-e5. When White has played d4-d5 (after ... c7-c5), Black's fianchettoed bishop has more space to operate. When White plays d4-d5 in response to ... e7-e5, the resulting play is similar to Black-friendly positions in the King's Indian. Yes, the g7-bishop is somewhat restricted by the e-pawn, but Black is able to start counterplay with the standard ... f7-f5.

### White's reactions to ... c5 or ... e5

The consequences of ... c7-c5 and ... e7-e5 can change the character of play in the center.

In the following chapters, we will look at both of these possibilities.



### White's Reactions to Black's Counterpunches

1. Capture the pawns with d4xc5 or d4xe5;
2. Push his d-pawn to d5;
3. Push his e-pawn to e5 in response to ... c5;
4. Maintain the tension in the center by keeping his pawn duo on e4 and d4.

### Summary:

*The Pirc is better described by ideas than variations. Although none of Black's early moves go beyond his third rank, their postings begin a flexible strategy while developing Black's pieces to ideal squares and building a defensive fortress for his king.*

*An underlying idea for White is the threat of e4-e5. White's first three moves (e4, d4, Nc3) are nearly universally played, but he has a number of fourth moves that are approximately equal. His choice of fourth moves indicates a plan rather than merely a move.*

*Black's opening moves appear to flaunt the rules of "classical" opening play. His idea is to avoid early skirmishes, to allow White the responsibility of his dual-pawn center—and to undermine it with the modern strategy of forcing changes in that center that are to White's disadvantage.*

*Normally, it is preferable for Black to provoke White's d-pawn, rather than his e-pawn, to advance. When the e-pawn advances to e5, Black's blocked fianchettoed bishop is sometimes even worse than the classically bad bishop that is restricted by its own pawns. So Black's best counter is generally ... c5 or ... e5.*



## The Pirc as an Idea

## Memory Markers!



Diagram 16  
White to move

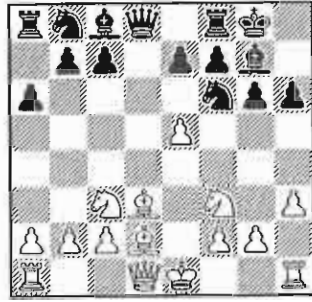


Diagram 17  
Black to move



Diagram 18  
Black to move

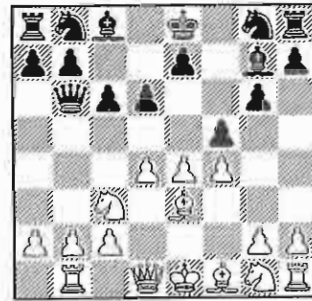


Diagram 19  
White to move

## Be sure to solve the Memory Markers!

At the end of every chapter in Parts II and III, specially selected exercises help you retain the key ideas of that chapter:

1. Use the diagrams on the left-hand page to solve the exercises on your own.
2. Use the right-hand page to check your answers.
3. The page number at the end of an answer shows you where the idea is discussed.

The Pirc as an Idea  
Solutions to Memory  
Markers!

- No. 1 1. Bg5, ready to meet 1. ... h6 with 2. Bh4, and if 2. ... g5, 3. Bg3 ±, due to Black's weakened kingside. (See page 32.)
- No. 2 1. ... Nd5! Worse is 1. ... Nd7 2. e6!.
- No. 3 1. ... Bxf3 2. gxf3 (2. Qxf3 Qb6) 2. ... d5! (See page 38.)
- No. 4 1. e5!. This move, which benefits White strategically, looks impossible tactically. After all, it loses a pawn after 1. ... dxe5 2. fxe5 Bxe5.



Diagram 20  
After 2. ... Bxe5

But, as the Russian proverb goes, if you want something impossible badly enough—do it! After 3. Nf3 Bg7 4. Bc4, White has much more than ample compensation for the pawn.



Diagram 21  
After 4. Bc4

Mikhail Yudovich, co-author of the classic book *The Soviet School of Chess*, was White in this game against the great world champion Mikhail Botvinnik, and neither of them saw 1. e5!.



## Chapter 5: Black Plays ... c7-c5

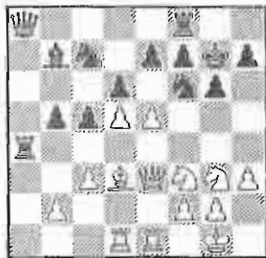
### Some Important Points to Look For

Black has to counterpunch in the center soon after the initial moves. You need to know both ... c7-c5 and ... e7-e5. This chapter explains the key ideas behind ... c7-c5.



- ◆ If White can play e4-e5, Black should try to keep d7 available for the retreat of his f6-knight.

See Diagram 65.



- ◆ With White's knight on f3, Black must keep a close eye on the consequences of White's e4-e5.

See Diagram 46.



- ◆ Black just answered dxc5 with ... Qa5!, threatening both ... Qxc5 and ... Nxe4.

See Diagram 51.



- ◆ Black can play ... b7-b5!, ready to meet Bxb5 with ... Nxe4 and ... Qa5+.

See Diagram 60.

## Chapter 5 Black Plays ... c7-c5

### Counterpunching from the queenside

**B**lack can't put off occupying or challenging White's center forever. The defender has two main, separate ways to stake his claim, ... c7-c5 and ... e7-e5. This and the next three chapters will look at the themes and ideas of these moves.

Can you save time by learning just one of these moves? Sorry, the answer is clearly no. Can we generalize how and when they are played? Yes, we can make a few observations. In general, it is fair to say that when Black can play ... c7-c5 in favorable circumstances, he will have an easy game. But it's also generally true that Black gets to play ... c7-c5 less often than ... e7-e5.

Black can play ... e7-e5 more frequently, but when he does, his opening fight is just beginning.

In this chapter, we'll cover the themes and ideas after Black plays ... c7-c5. We'll organize around White's responses. Our chapter is divided into four parts.

**I.** First we'll look at the ideas after White captures the Black challenger with d4xc5;

**II.** Then we'll examine White's option of pushing past the challenge with d4-d5;

**III.** Next we'll focus on ideas that come up when White keeps his pawn on d4, leaving it up to Black to make the exchange;

**IV.** We'll finish with White trying an immediate e4-e5.

Along the way, we'll provide two special operations for Black useful against dxc5 and d4-d5.

#### **I. Black plays ... c5; White plays d4xc5**

Before going on in this line, it's very valuable to know what Black should normally play to

**BLACK CAN PLAY  
... C7-C5 LESS OFTEN  
THAN ... E7-E5, BUT  
WHEN HE CAN, HE  
USUALLY GETS A  
GOOD GAME.**

prevent a main threat by White—an effective e4-e5.

**White gets to play e5; Black wishes he had read this chapter!**

After the natural reply ... d6xc5, the position will usually be unsatisfactory for Black if White can play e4-e5 and then further strengthen the key e5-pawn. Things may become even worse for Black if White is able to support the e5 pawn with f2-f4. Let's take a look at a quick crush for White using these ideas. Here White plays e4-e5 too early, but his opponent allows him to transpose very favorably into the d4xc5 line.

**BAREEV—NORWOOD  
MARSEILLE, 1990**

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. f4 Bg7 5. Nf3 c5 6. e5?! Ng4??



Diagram 22  
After 6. ... Ng4??

Black should play 6. ... Nfd7!.

**Mutual "Bareevment" over their sixth moves**

In fact, neither GM liked his

sixth move. After the game, Norwood gave his ... Ng4 a double question mark and then commented that Black needs to do "months" of research to be ready to play the line after 6. e5. We have to disagree strongly with his second judgment. In fact, this case is a perfect example of the pre-eminence of concepts over variations in the Pirc.

Knowing the idea that d7 is nearly always the best retreat for Black's knight would have given Norwood a very promising game as early as move six! This would have been a rare opportunity against a super-GM such as Bareev!

Indeed, it's amusing that after making his own sixth move, Bareev, a 1. d4 player, left the board and, once out of sight, complained to me about how he "stupidly" forgot to play the preliminary 6. Bb5+ in this line, convinced that he would now have a very difficult game in unfamiliar territory. Perhaps it was hard for Norwood to accept that Bareev, who had just turned in a stellar performance in Moscow to qualify for the 1990 GMA World Cup, would blunder on move six! Anyway, the game now transposes to a variation of the dxc5 line unfavorable for Black, and the rest shows why a supported pawn on e5 is so dangerous.

7. dxc5 dxc5 8. Qxd8+ Kxd8

With a small transformation of moves, we arrive at the predicted situation.

9. h3 Nh6 10. Be3 b6 11. 0-0-0+ Bd7 12. g4!

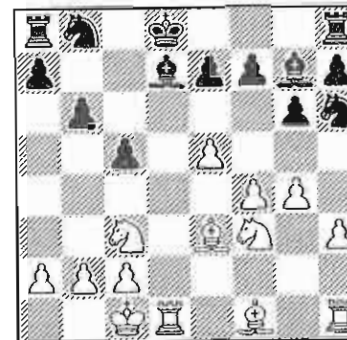


Diagram 23  
After 12. g4!

12. ... Kc8 13. Ng5 f6 14. Rxd7 Kxd7 15. Bb5+ Kc8 16. Ne6 Bf8 17. Nd5

Complete domination!

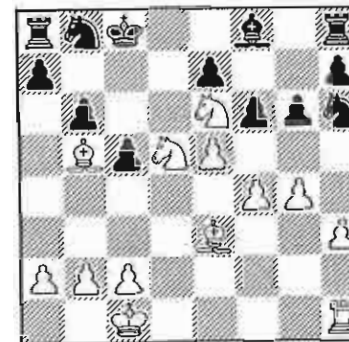


Diagram 24  
After 17. Nd5

17. ... Nf7 18. Ndc7 Nd8 19. Rd1 Nxe6 20. Nxe6 fe5 21. Rd8+ Kb7 22. Bd3, Black resigns.

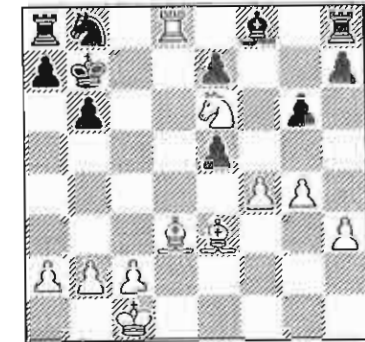


Diagram 25  
After 22. Bd3

Besides the protected enemy outpost on e5, Black surely had other problems in this game. The critical weaknesses of Black's position were:

1. The imprisonment of the g7-bishop;
2. Weak b5- and d5- squares resulting from the c-pawn's advance to c5—it is important to note that the collision would not be total if Black's pawn still stood on c7, so that he could play ... c7-c6 to guard b5 and d5;
3. Poor king position, and the inability to castle.

**Ideal Black play after d4xc5 and ... d6xc5**

After d4xc5 and ... d6xc5 are played, if Black is both able to prevent White's e4-e5 and to preserve his control of the a1-b8 diagonal, the second player may feel very comfortable. In such a position, White's knight on c3 is not very well placed and White can't play c2-c3 to restrict Black's

fianchettoed bishop. But these conditions are rarely met. Here is one example, again featuring Bareev as White entering the Pirc from 1. d4.

**BAREEV—ANAND**  
PARIS, 1992

1. d4 d6 2. e4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Nf3 Bg7 5. Be2 0-0 6. 0-0 c5 7. dxc5 dxc5

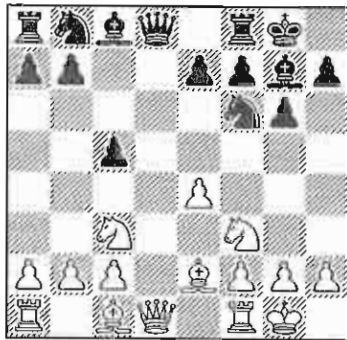


Diagram 26  
After 7. ... dxc5

8. Qxd8 Rxd8 9. Be3 b6 10. Rfd1 Nc6

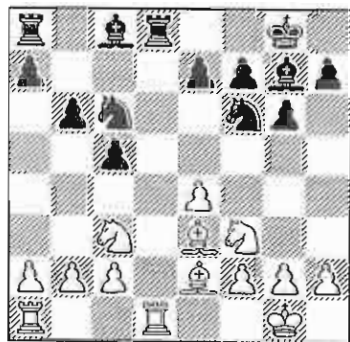


Diagram 27  
After 10. ... Nc6

11. Rxd8+

Black is better after 11. Nd5

Nxd5 12. exd5 Nb4 (Blatny—Ribli, 1995).

11. ... Nxd8 12. Rd1 Bb7 13. Nd2

Or 13. e5 Ng4 14. Bf4 Ne6 15. Bg3 Rd8 16. Rxd8+ Nxd8, with the threat of ... Bxf3.

13. ... Ne6 14. f3 Rd8 15. Kf2 Nd7

Opening the a1-h8 diagonal.

16. Nb3

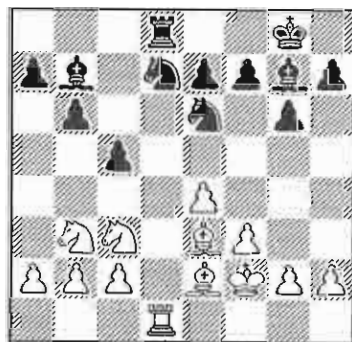


Diagram 28  
After 16. Nb3

16. ... Bxc3! 17. bxc3 Nb8! 18. Rb1 Ba6!, and Black won in 44 moves.



Diagram 29  
After 18. ... Ba6!

### Preparing ... c7-c5 with ... b7-b6

Black sometimes attempts to improve his pawn chain by playing ... b7-b6 before pushing ... c7-c5. One of Black's ideas here is to recapture with his b-pawn after d4xc5. Another idea is to develop his light-square bishop on b7. But going for a double-fianchetto in the Pirc is rarely successful.

After ... c7-c5, Black must keep a constant lookout for White's d4-d5, which is eminently unpleasant, since Black's b7-bishop gets locked in by White's e4/d5 pawn chain. When White's powerful pawn center is mobile, there are usually too many preliminary conditions to be fulfilled by Black for his double-fianchetto to succeed. However, in Diagram 30, we see that if White's play lacks dynamism, Black's risky deployment may work.

**PIKET—AVRUKH**  
ANTWERP, 1998



Diagram 30  
After 10. ... c5

Here 11. d4-d5 is impossible, and after 11. d4xc5, both 11. ... bxc5 and 11. ... Nxc5 are good for Black. After either of these eleventh moves, Black needn't worry about the future of his bishop on g7. On his eleventh move, White can also decide to trade dark-square bishops, but it doesn't turn out well for him: 11. Bh6 cxd4! 12. Nxd4 e5!, and Black has good play, while White's remaining bishop is passive.

Note that after Black recaptures with 11. ... Nxc5, his rook can operate along the c-file. So we can conclude further that recapturing on c5 with a piece after d4xc5 gives Black a favorable Sicilian Dragon structure.

Still, it is difficult to decide where to post Black's knight so that it guards c5. If it's placed on a6—at the edge of the board—it is under attack by White's bishop. If it's developed on d7, the threat of e4-e5 might become quite real because Black's other knight no longer has d7 for retreat. Fortunately, Black has other possibilities to achieve this strategic goal of recapturing on c5 with a piece. We'll see them in the upcoming special section, "Operation Enter the Dragon."

## II. Black plays ... c5; White plays d4-d5

When Black plays ... c7-c5, White isn't forced to capture, of course. He can push past the challenge with d4-d5. This response leads to the following structure:

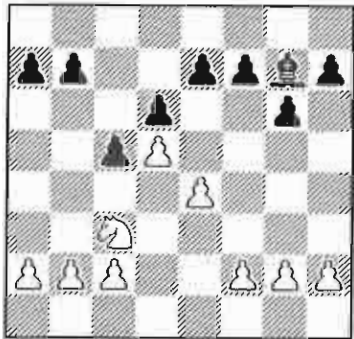


Diagram 31  
Structure after d4-d5

Comparing this structure to the typical King's Indian and Benoni structures, we see a very important difference. White's pawn has not advanced to c4, but remains on c2—a mixed blessing for both players. True, White's center is less firmly supported. On the other hand, he has developed a piece instead of moving a pawn and leaves the c4-square as a potential outpost for his pieces.

### ... b7-b5

From Black's point of view, it would be very useful to get in ... b7-b5 in order to strengthen his influence on the queenside and to weaken the position of White's

knight on c3 by threatening ... b5-b4. However, White initially controls b5 with both his c3-knight and his light-square bishop. The insertion of the moves a2-a4 and ... a7-a6 creates additional difficulties for Black because White's rook on a1 becomes involved, even if indirectly, in the fight for the b5-square. Thus, in order to play ... b7-b5, Black often needs to perform cumbersome maneuvers, such as ... Na6-c7, ... Rb8, ... b7-b6 (preventing a4-a5), ... a7-a6 and—finally—... b7-b5. Only after all those machinations can the pawn take its position on b5.

### ... e7-e6

The other thematic continuation, ... e7-e6, can be used to exploit the relative vulnerability of the d5-square because this square is not supported by the c4-pawn. Under certain circumstances, this central counterattack can be good for Black.

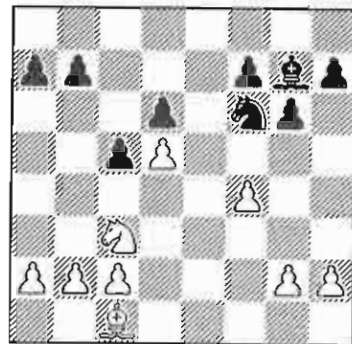


Diagram 32  
After ... e6 and ... exd5

In Diagram 32, we see one possible positive outcome for Black as a result of ... e7-e6 and then ... e6xd5. White didn't have the reply c4xd5 as in the Benoni. Neither did he have Nxd5 because of ... Nxe4. Note that White's dark-square bishop is restricted by his own f4-pawn.

Thus the threat of ... e6xd5 often motivates White to trade on e6 with d5xe6. This leads to one of the following structures.

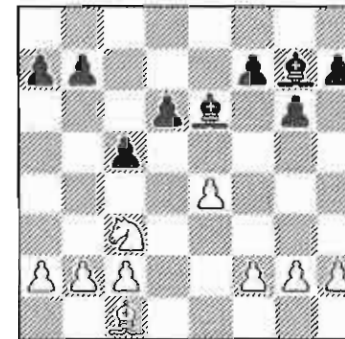


Diagram 33  
After ... Bxe6



Diagram 34  
After ... f7xe6

In Diagram 33, after Black's

... Bxe6, the position is relatively simple. Black has a backward d6-pawn, so he can equalize only after ... d6-d5, which is not so easy to accomplish. But if Black recaptures on e6 with his f-pawn, as in Diagram 34, then ... d6-d5 looks more realistic.

However, even if that's done, his future isn't always bright because White's e4-e5 will restrict the activity of Black's g7-bishop. Moreover, White has real chances to launch an attack against Black's kingside, which is weakened by the absence of the f7-pawn. Let's look at two examples that are near-twins.

### SHIROV—VAN WELY MONACO, 1998

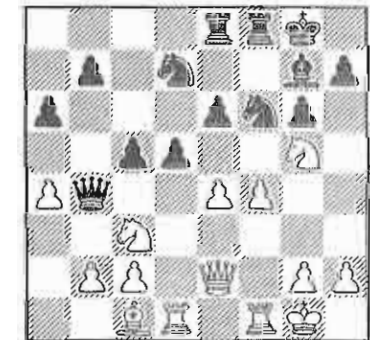


Diagram 35  
Blindfold game

18. e5 Nh5 19. Nb3!

Threatening 20. g2-g4.

19. ... Bh6 20. Ne4! Nxe5

Otherwise, 21. Nd6 and c2-c4.

21. Nd6 Nc6 22. Nxe8 Rxe8

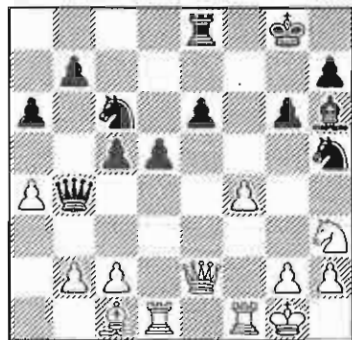


Diagram 36  
After 22... Rxe8

23. c3! Qxa4 24. g4 Ng7 25. g5 Nf5 26. gxf6, Black resigns.

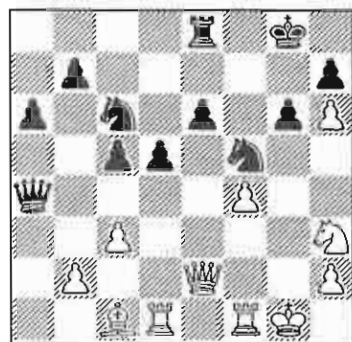


Diagram 37  
Black resigns

Now take a look at a very similar game.



Diagram 38  
White to move

19. c4 d4 20. Ng5 Nb8 21. Ra3 Nc6 22. Rh3 h6 23. Ne4 Rad8

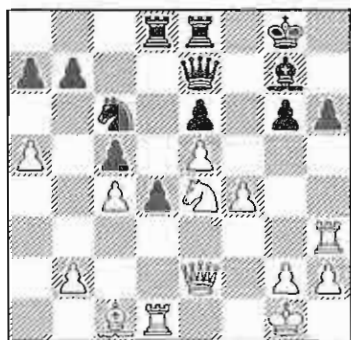


Diagram 39  
After 23... Rad8

Black is ready to sacrifice an Exchange for a pawn if White occupies the d6-square with a knight, yet even this can't save the game.

**BLACK SHOULD CONSIDER SACRIFICING  
AN EXCHANGE FOR A PAWN IF WHITE  
OCCUPIES D6 WITH A KNIGHT.**

24. Rdd3 Qf7 25. Bd2 b6 26. axb6 axb6 27. Nd6 Rxd6 28. exd6 Nb8

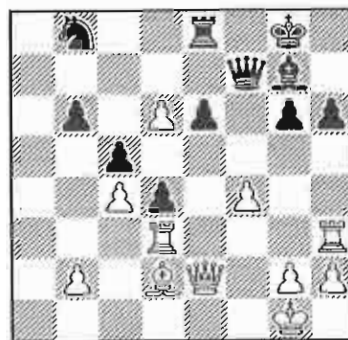


Diagram 40  
After 28... Nb8

29. Ra3 Kh7 30. Qe4 Bf8 31. Rhb3, Black resigns.

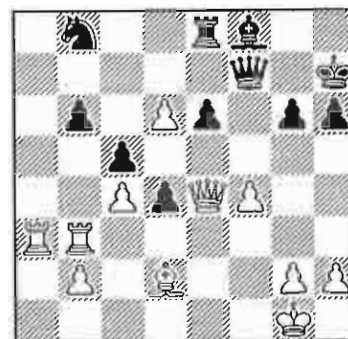


Diagram 41  
Black resigns.

If Black is unable or doesn't want to play ... d6-d5, it is difficult for him to hold his central fortifications in view of his weak e6- and d6-pawns.

FISCHER—DOMNITZ  
NETANYA, 1968



Diagram 42  
White to move

9. dxe6! fxe6 10. Ng5! Nb6 (10... Nf6 11. Bc4) 11. a4! Nc6 12. a5 h6 13. axb6 hxg5 14. Qg4!



Diagram 43  
After 14. Qg4!

14. ... c4

Or 14. ... gxf4 15. Bxf4 e5 16. Qxg6 exf4 17. Bc4+.

15. Bxc4 d5 16. Bd3+-, and White won on move 23.

Keep in mind that in structures with Black's pawns on d6/e6, White also has a possible



**IF BLACK CAN'T OR  
CHOOSES NOT TO PLAY  
... D6-D5, IT'S HARD  
FOR HIM TO HOLD  
THE CENTER IN  
VIEW OF HIS WEAK  
E6- AND D6-PAWNS.**

break with e4-e5. After it's played, Black's e6-pawn is isolated. Alternatively, White can attack the e6-pawn with f2-f4-f5, opening access to the d5-square and Black's kingside. We may conclude that ... e7-e6 is often too risky for Black. But when White isn't ready for such aggressive action in the center and on the kingside, an ... e7-e6 break may be quite an effective weapon in Black's arsenal.

### Turning the board around

Sometimes even at the highest level, a player will get up from his chair and "casually" stroll over to view the game from his opponent's perspective. It helps to adopt for a moment your "enemy's" point of view. So let's view the basic structure after ...c7-c5, d4-d5 from White's vantage point.

The main plan for White is to prepare e4-e5. If this operation is accomplished, it will outweigh Black's wing action.

KARPOV—KORCHNOI  
BAGIO, 1978

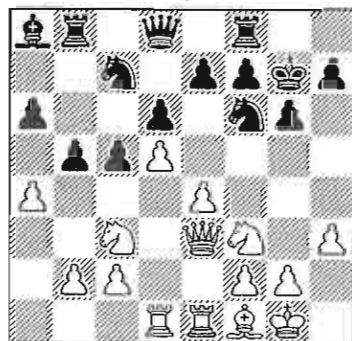


Diagram 44  
White to move

Black has just played ... b6-b5, but White has prepared pretty well for this advance by trading off the dark-square bishops. After a small re-grouping—21. Ne2, 22. Ng3, 24. Bd3—, White breaks in the center with 25. e5!!, launching an attack on the kingside at the same time.

20. axb5 axb5 21. Ne2!

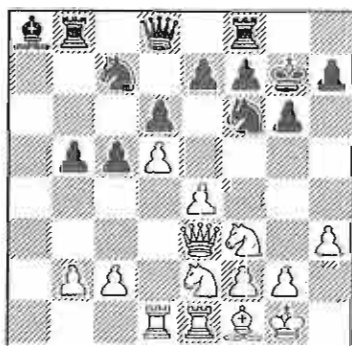


Diagram 45  
After 21. Ne2!

The knight is transferred to the kingside to support the attack; besides, now ... b5-b4 doesn't make sense.

21. ... Bb7 22. Ng3 Ra8 23. c3 Ra4 24. Bd3!

The bishop also aims at the kingside.

24. ... Qa8 25. e5!!

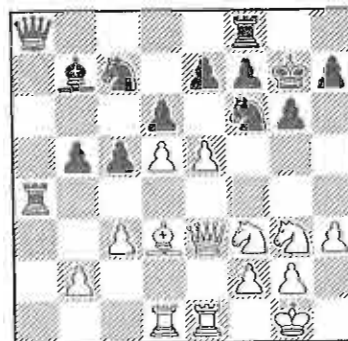


Diagram 46  
After 25. e5!!

25. ... dxe5

Also falling short are 25. ... Nfxd5 26. Nf5+ Kh8 27. Qh6 Rg8 28. Ng5+- and 25. ... Nfe8 26. Nf5+ gxf5 27. Qg5+ Kh8 28. Qxf5+-.

26. Qxe5 Ncx d5 27. Bxb5 Ra7 28. Nh4!± Bc8 29. Be2 Be6 30. e4 Nb4 31. Qxc5 +-

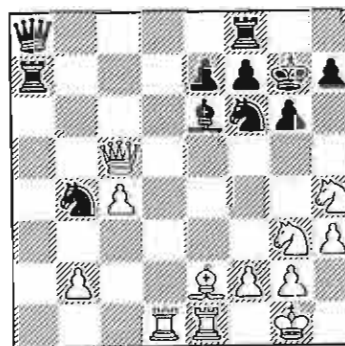


Diagram 47  
After 31. Qxc5

The e4-e5 push is especially effective when White succeeds in placing his king's knight on c4. Meanwhile, this maneuver makes ... e7-e6 senseless, in view of the pressure on the d6-square.

BOTVINNIK—SCHMID  
LEIPZIG, 1960



Diagram 48  
Black to move

10. ... b5

Black is in a hurry to prevent 11. Nb6.

11. e5!! dxe5

If 11. ... bxc4 12. exf6 Bxf6 13. Bh6!, and Black's king is stuck in the center.

12. axb5 axb5 13. Rxa8 Qxa8 14. Nxe5 b4 15. d6! bxc3 16. dxc7 Qc8 17. Bf4

**THE MAIN PLAN FOR  
WHITE IS E4-E5. IF  
SUCCESSFUL, IT WILL  
OUTWEIGH BLACK'S  
WING ACTION.**



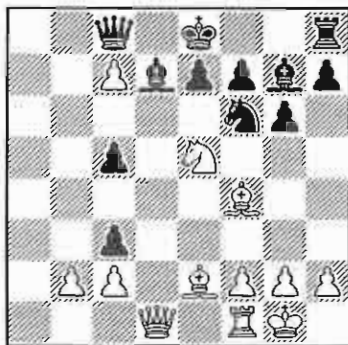


Diagram 49  
After 17. Bf4

The "terrible" c7-pawn decides the matter in White's favor very quickly.

17. ... cxb2 18. Nxd7 Nxd7 19. Bb5 Bd4 20. c3! e5

Or 20. ... Bxc3 21. Qxd7+ Qxd7 22. c8(Q) checkmate.

21. cxd4 exf4 22. Bxd7+ Qxd7 23. Qe2+ Kf8 24. Qe5 Kg8 25. Rb1

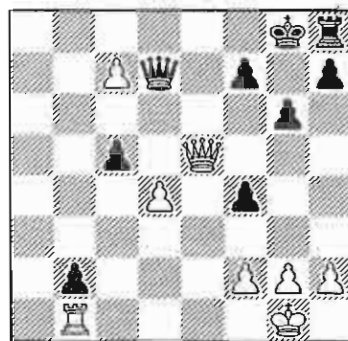


Diagram 50  
After 25. Rb1

And White won. Of course, such a horrible crash, mercifully, doesn't occur often. Yet it demonstrates the dangers Black faces if

his opponent's knight occupies c4.

The shortest and, indeed, the only path for the g1-knight to get to c4 lies through f3 (Ng1-f3-d2-c4). We have learned from the game Karpov—Korchnoi that White's knight also provides good support for the e4-e5 break from f3, one of the stops on the way. For that reason, when White's knight is located on f3, Black should think twice before playing ... c7-c5.

### Two Black operations

Like any army at war, Black in the Pirc can send "operatives" into the field on important missions. The continuation ... c7-c5 allows the Black queen to be developed on a5. When White's king is on e1, this ... Qd8-a5 maneuver becomes the basis for two little tactical operations, which can lead to important strategic consequences.

Let's take a look at these two. In the spirit of the general staff, we'll call them "Operation Enter the Dragon" and "Operation Bravo Pawn."

LIKE ANY ARMY AT  
WAR, BLACK CAN SEND  
"OPERATIVES" INTO  
THE FIELD.

## Operation "Enter the Dragon"

Here we can't help being inspired by the title of the final film of martial arts master Bruce Lee. To counter one of White's obvious responses to ... c7-c5, dxc5, Black's "operative" maneuvers to change the position to a favorable version of the Sicilian Dragon.

Let's look at three theoretical positions showing play after ... c7-c5 d4xc5.



Diagram 53

After 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6  
3. Nc3 g6 4. Bc2 Bg7  
5. h4 c5 6. dxc5 Qa5!

In reply to d4xc5 in all three positions shown at left and above (taken from various lines of the Pirc Defense), Black, instead of ... d6xc5, has played ... Qd8-a5!, threatening ... Nxe4. Usually it's not smart for White to ignore the threat, and on the next move he must protect his e4-pawn by playing 7. Bd3 (Diagram 51), 8. Qd2 (Diagram 52) and 7. Kf1 (Diagram 53). In reply, Black recaptures ... Qxe5, transposing the game into a structure similar to the Sicilian Dragon (Diagram 54).



Diagram 51

After 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6  
3. Nc3 g6 4. f4 Bg7  
5. Nf3 c5 6. dxc5 Qa5!



Diagram 52

After 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6  
3. Nc3 g6 4. Bg5 Bg7  
5. f4 h6 6. Bh4 c5  
7. dxc5 Qa5!



Diagram 54

After ... Qxe5

We've already noted that this structure is favorable for Black. Here Black usually achieves the formation by purely tactical means and without any preliminary preparations, such as ... Nb8-d7 or ... Nb8-a6.

Of course, when White's king is not on e1, Operation Enter the Dragon, ... Qd8-a5xc5, is impossible. In addition, there are other circumstances that prevent this operation, and you need to know these. Let's list them and take a careful look at each.

### Circumstances that prevent the operation

Three conditions inhibit Operation Enter the Dragon:

a) White's bishop stands on e3, making the moves ... c7-c5 and ... Qa5xc5 impossible and the whole operation disadvantageous;

b) A White piece blocks the e1-a5 diagonal, for example a bishop, knight, or queen on d2;

c) White's e4-pawn is defended by a bishop on d3 or a pawn on f3.

Diagram 55 illustrates "a." The idea is that after ... c7-c5, d4xc5 and ... Qd8-a5, White can defend his e4-pawn by playing either Qd1-d2 or Bf1-d3, forcing Black to retake on c5 with a pawn. Therefore, instead of the desirable Dragon structure, Black gets the inferior structure shown in Variation ... c5 (1).

Diagram 56 illustrates "b."

Diagram 57 illustrates "c." Here Operation Enter the Dragon is simply impossible.

In general, the motif of d4xc5, ... Qd8-a5! is the most significant one in the Pirc Defense and is a basis for many theoretical variations. Even if White can gain time by attacking Black's queen on c5 with Be3, Black's queen has ample freedom to maneuver—for instance, she can often return to a5.

## Operation "Bravo Pawn"

White obviously doesn't have to capture when Black plays ... c5; he can push past the pawn with d4-d5. As we'll see, when this happens and when White's king is still on e1, Black can often employ an effective operation, expanding immediately with ... b7-b5. The thematic ... Qd8-a5+ is held in reserve. Let's take a look at two examples.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. f4 Bg7 5. Nf3 c5 6. Bb5+ Bd7 7. Bxd7+ Nfxd7 8. d5

13. Qe2 Nb6!, with an excellent game.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. f4 Nf3 Bg7 5. h3 0-0 6. Be2 c5 7. d5



Diagram 60

7. ... b5! 8. Bxb5 (or 8. Nxb5 Nxe4) 8. ... Nxe4! 9. Nxe4 Qa5+ 10. Nc3 Bxc3+ 11. bxc3 Qxb5, and Black is much better.

If White should be forced to tolerate a Black pawn on b5, it's clear that Black has very efficiently achieved a superior pawn formation.

We've noted the vulnerability of White's center at the very beginning of the game. Both operations we've just studied, Operation Dragon and Operation Bravo Pawn, exploit this central weakness.

8. ... b5! 9. Nxb5 Qa5+ 10. Nc3 Bxc3+ 11. bxc3 Qxc3+ 12. Bd2 Qc4!



Diagram 58

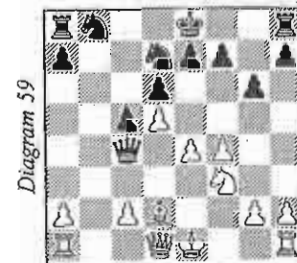


Diagram 59



Diagram 55  
After 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6  
3. Nc3 g6 4. f4 Bg7  
5. Nf3 0-0 6. Be3



Diagram 56  
After 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6  
3. Nc3 g6 4. Bg5 Bg7  
5. Qd2



Diagram 57  
After 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6  
3. Nc3 g6 4. f4 Bg7  
5. Bd3

Diagram 57

**III. Black Plays ... c5:  
White leaves his  
pawn on d4**

If White "ignores" Black's ... c7-c5, Black usually eliminates the object of attack immediately by playing ... c5xd4, achieving the favorable Dragon formation. Exceptions to this rule are very rare.

ASEEV—KHALIFMAN  
VILNIUS, 1997

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. g3 Bg7 5. Bg2 0-0 6. Nge2 Nbd7 7. 0-0 c5 8. h3

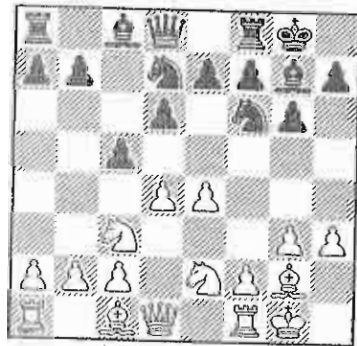


Diagram 61  
Black to move

**8. ... Rb8**

Black is not in a hurry to play ... c5xd4 because White's knight on e2 could then reach a better square on d4. If 9. dxc5, then 9. ... Nxc5. Now 9. d5 looks unsound because White lacks resources to prepare e4-e5, and Black can easily accomplish ... b7-b5. The game continues 9. a4 b6 10. Bg5 a6, with promising

play for Black, who captures on d4 later at an appropriate moment. And after Black captures on d4, we have the now familiar Dragon-like pawn structure, usually favorable for Black.

**Why not just play  
the Sicilian?**

A good question at this point is: If we like this formation so much, why not simply play the Sicilian Dragon? The answer is one of theory's important findings, and can be viewed as an important argument in favor of the Pirc Defense.

Players familiar with the Sicilian Dragon know the main and most effective plan for White in Diagram 62 (after 1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 g6).

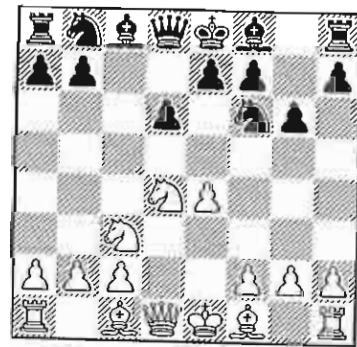


Diagram 62  
After 5. ... g6

That plan is characterized by the moves Be3, f2-f3, Qd2 and 0-0-0, giving us the following important position.

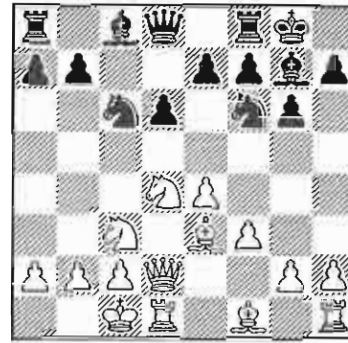


Diagram 63  
After 9. 0-0-0

Black's problems don't stem from any defect in his pawn structure. It's his misfortune that White has a concrete and dangerous plan of attack—h2-h4-h5 (often accompanied by Bh6)—with the clear goal of opening the h-file and delivering checkmate.

Black faces several difficulties in launching his queenside counterattack, even though he mobilizes almost all of his forces, the g7-bishop is powerful, and Black controls the semi-open c-file. Despite these weapons, Black lacks an immediate target for his attack, while White's h-pawn has a ready bull's-eye in the Black g6-pawn, and the possible opening of the h-file is extreme-

ly dangerous for Black's king.

Some believe that White's pawn storm is more effective than anything Black can muster, especially considering the fact that the kings are castled on opposite sides, and pawn attacks often decide in such cases, where "the first with the most" wins. Of course, the play is still sharp and complicated, but how sound is Black's system? This question is nowadays hotly debated, and many Dragoners have succumbed to White's straightforward, almost rote attack. Playing the White side, none other than Bobby Fischer, in his *My 60 Memorable Games*, wrote "I ... had it down to a science: pry open the h-file, sac, sac, mate!"

The character of play is different when both kings are castled on the same side or when White's pawn is located on f4. In these situations, White's attack is not as dangerous, and the positive features of Black's position, such as his good pawn structure, control of the c-file and active g7-bishop, often prevail.

**IF WHITE "IGNORES" BLACK'S ... C7-C5,  
BLACK CAN PLAY ... C5XD4, ACHIEVING  
A FAVORABLE DRAGON FORMATION.**



**Why we prefer  
the "Pirc Dragon" over  
the Sicilian Dragon**

In our Pirc Dragon, Black enjoys the pluses of his position, without risking the ready-made White attacks available in the Sicilian Dragon.

**IV. Black Plays ... c5;  
White pushes his  
pawn to e5**

Finally, right after ... c7-c5 is played, we should consider White's reply e4-e5.

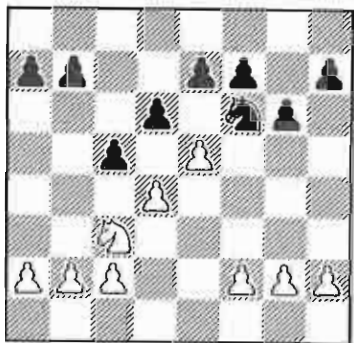


Diagram 64  
Structure after e4-e5

There are some important differences between this position and the previous variations we've looked at with ... c7-c5. First of all, with the pawns in such close contact, White's pawn center can dissolve quickly with ... c5xd4 and ... d6xe5. But, at the moment, the f6-knight is attacked,

and the question is—can White gain something if he succeeds in forcing the Black knight from f6?

It is preferable for Black not to trade pawns on e5 immediately in order to maintain tension and continue threatening all White's central pawns. Besides, the exchange ... d6xe5 d4xe5 leads to the kind of positions, shown in Section One of this chapter, that are usually not good for Black.

So Black's knight prefers to retreat to d7. The resulting pawn-exchanges dissolve White's center. For example, let's return for a moment to the position reached in Bareev—Norwood, after 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. f4 Bg7 5. Nf3 c5 6. e5

**BAREEV—NORWOOD  
MARSEILLE, 1990**



Diagram 65  
After 6. e5

6. ... Nfd7!. White's once proud center disintegrates.

Let's focus on some impor-

tant points regarding the ... Nfd7 retreat. Black may face serious tactical threats if the d7-square is already taken by one of his pieces, either bishop or queen's knight. For instance: 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. f4 Bg7 5. Nf3 c5 6. Bb5+ Bd7. (This was the line Bareev had intended to play against Norwood!)

7. e5

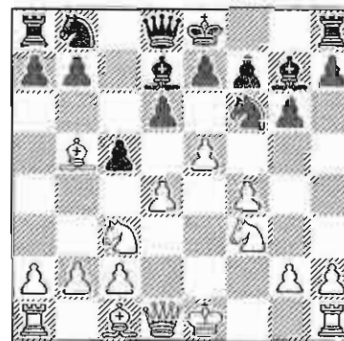


Diagram 66  
After 7. e5

7. ... Ng4

Now this is the best available square, but only because d7 is occupied.

8. e6 fxe6 9. Ng5

With very sharp play. (See Chapter 14: The Austrian Attack.)

**Early ... c7-c5**

Often in this line, Black plays ... c7-c5 quite early when his king is still on e8. After e4-e5 ... Nfd7, e5xd6 (hoping for ... e7xd6, Qe2+, with the idea of preventing Black from castling),

the pawn sacrifice ... 0-0! usually follows, and now Black has a chance to hunt down White's king, which is stuck in the center.

**IVANOVIC—M. GUREVICH  
LUCERNE, 1989**

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. f4 Bg7 5. e5 Nfd7 6. Nf3 c5 7. exd6



Diagram 67  
Black to move

7. ... 0-0! 8. dxc5

Or 8. dxe7 Qxe7+ 9. Be2 cxd4 10. Nxd4 Rd8!, with the idea of Nb6 =.

8. ... Qa5! 9. Be2 Bxc3+ 10. bxc3 Qxc3+ 11. Bd2 Qxc5 12. dxe7 Re8!



Diagram 68  
After 12. ... Re8!

Black prevents White from castling.

13. Rb1 Nc6 14. Rh3 Rxe7 15. Rc3 Qb6 16. Rb3 Qc7 17. 0-0

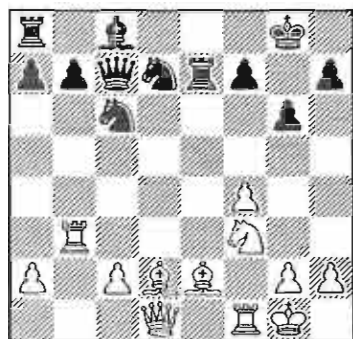


Diagram 69  
After 17. 0-0

Finally, White is able to castle, but in the meantime Black achieves a great deal.

17. ... Nc5 18. Ra3 Bg4

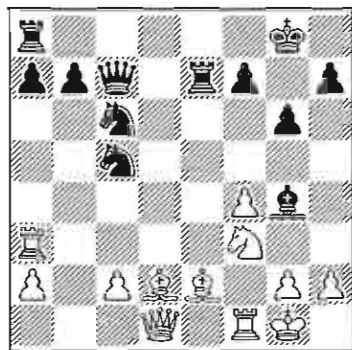


Diagram 70  
After 18. ... Bg4

Black stays on top. Gurevich won on move 34.

While White's e4-e5 should normally be seriously considered in reply to ... c7-c5, this advance doesn't always work well for White.

### Summary:

Soon after his initial moves, Black must challenge White's center, and a Pirc player must know both counters, ... e7-e5 and ... c7-c5. After ... c7-c5 White has a choice of four options: taking the pawn, pushing past the pawn, maintaining his pawn on d4, or playing e4-e5.

The strategic outcome of ... c7-c5; d4xc5 ... d6xc5 is often dubious for Black if White gets to play e4-e5. But if Black can prevent this advance, he can get a satisfactory position. It's even better for Black if he can recapture on c5 with a piece instead of a pawn, achieving a very favorable Sicilian Dragon type of position, without the risk associated with the dangerous pawn storm. When White pushes by Black's ... c7-c5 with d4-d5, Black should try to organize a queenside expansion (... b7-b5) that usually gives him good play. If, in response to ... c7-c5, White leaves his pawn on d4, Black can capture the pawn immediately, getting a safe and favorable Dragon formation. When White reacts to ... c7-c5 with e4-e5, his thrust may be premature. Black's best retreat for the knight on f6 is d7. In general, Black is very well advised to keep d7 open whenever e4-e5 is threatened.



Co-Author: International Grandmaster  
**Alex Chernin**

Place of Birth: Kharkov, Ukraine

Date of Birth: March 6, 1960

After living in Ukraine until 1991, GM Chernin moved to Budapest. A world-championship candidate, he has played both sides of the Pirc at the highest level of competition for more than two decades. He began playing chess in 1971 and quickly showed himself to be a prodigy, coming in second to Kasparov in the

USSR Junior Championship in 1977, and second in the World Junior Championship in 1979.

He won the European Youth Championship in 1980. In 1985, he shared first place in the overall USSR Championship and took fourth place in the Timis Interzonal, qualifying for the world championship candidates' tournament. In that same year, he was a member of the World Championship USSR team. Throughout the last decade, he's won many top-level events.

In addition to his career as a player, Alex has served as trainer and coach to a number of the world's top players: GMs Gelfand, Beliavsky, Lautier, M. Gurevich and others. As a result of this work, important new theory was developed in the Slav, Semislay, Gruenfeld, Benoni, and, of course, the Pirc Defense. Alex often visits the US to consult on openings. He can be reached by Email at [achernin@elender.hu](mailto:achernin@elender.hu) or by telephone at 361-320-2862.



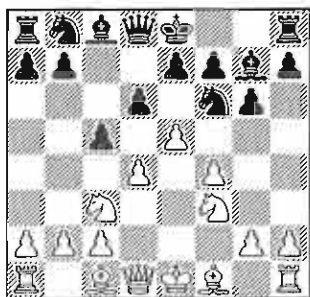
### World championship candidate

#### Leading opening theoretician

- ◆ Trainer & coach of the world's best players
- ◆ 1980 European Youth Champion
- ◆ 1985 Soviet Co-Champion
- ◆ Third place in 1988 World Blitz Championship, beating Karpov in their individual match-up

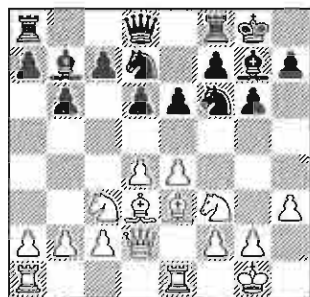
## Black Plays ... c7-c5

## Memory Markers!



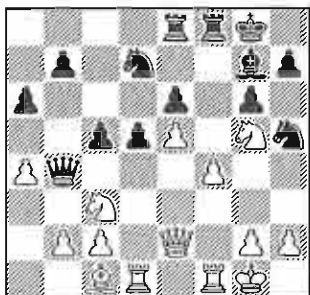
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Diagram 71  
Black to move



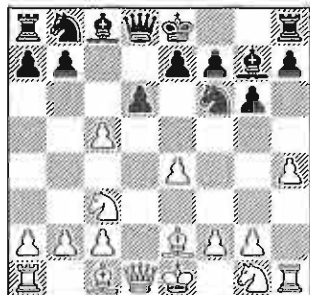
MARKER 2

Diagram 72  
Black to move



MARKER 3

Diagram 73  
White to move



MARKER 4

Diagram 74  
Black to move



MARKER 5

Diagram 75  
Black to move



MARKER 6

Diagram 76  
Black to move

## Black Plays ... c7-c5

## Solutions to Memory Markers!

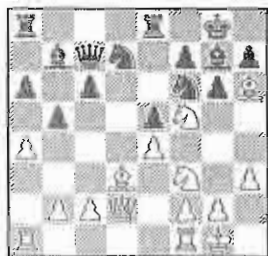
- No. 1* 1. ... Nfd7!, with a good game for Black. White's last move, e4-e5, was a mistake. (See page 60.)
- No. 2* 1. ... e5! gives Black the better game. (See page 47.)
- No. 3* 1. Nh3, threatening to win Black's knight with g2-g4—White is much better. (See page 49.)
- No. 4* 1. ... Qa5!. (See page 55.)
- No. 5* 1. ... Nxe4. (See page 57.)
- No. 6* 1. ... Bd7! (1. ... Nbd7? 2. e5), with a very sharp position. (See page 61.)



## Chapter 6: Black Plays ... e7-e5

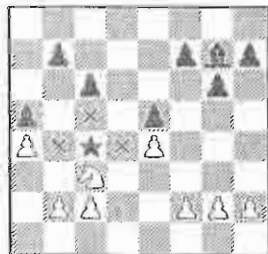
### Some Important Points to Look For

With ... e7-e5, Black offers a challenge to White's center that is less ambitious than ... c7-c5. This chapter explains the ideas in two of the three main White responses.



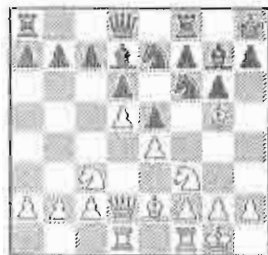
- ◆ White has just played Be3-h6.  
Black plays ... Bh8 and has the better game.

See Diagram 79.



- ◆ It's easy for White to occupy c4 with a piece.  
Black can operate from b4 and sometimes from c5, or even d4.

See Diagram 80.



- ◆ White must prepare f2-f4.  
Black must prepare ... f7-f5.

See Diagram 83.



- ◆ Black has just played ... Nx(B)e4! (on Nxe4, ... Qg6), short-circuiting White's plan to bolster his center with f2-f3.

See Diagram 85.

## Chapter 6

### Black Plays ... e7-e5

White responds with dxe5 or d4-d5

In contrast to the ambitious ... c7-c5, ... e7-e5 is more stolid. Black, after some delay, returns to an option that he had on move one (1. ... e5) and demonstrates his readiness to confront the center. It's no wonder that when Black plays this move, the fight resembles some open games. In this chapter, we will examine White's possible responses in the same order we did in analyzing ... c5.

**I.** First we'll look at the ideas after White captures the Black challenger with d4xe5.

**II.** Then we'll examine White's option of pushing past the challenge with d4-d5.

We'll devote the two next chapters to the ideas that come up when White keeps his pawn on d4, leaving it up to Black to make the exchange.

#### **I. Black Plays ... e5: White captures d4xe5**

After d4xe5, the balance in the center is restored and chances

are often equal. Many of the ideas in the King's Indian Defense are relevant, even though in that opening White's pawn has been advanced to c4.

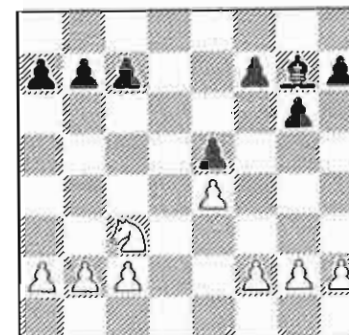


Diagram 77

Structure after ... e7-e5  
and then d4xe5 d6xe5

As in the King's Indian, White's c3-knight can jump to d5, but its position there is tentative in view of ... c7-c6, which forces the cavalry's retreat. But unlike in the King's Indian, here the c4-square may be occupied by other White pieces as well—bishop, knight or even queen. Besides, White can potentially protect the d4-square with c2-c3.

On the other hand, White enjoys less space on the queenside here than in the King's Indian. He can't place his queen on c2 or push his pawn from c4 to c5. Weighing the pros and cons, we find it hard to say which side is better off when the pawn is on c2 rather than c4.

### The struggle for b5

With the pawn on c2, one thing is certain, however. If Black can get his pawn to b5, and it can't be dislodged by a2-a4 (see Diagram 78), Black will have the advantage because White will have lost one of his major pluses—control over c4. Most importantly, Black's domination on the whole queenside would be in the offing.

KOGAN—VAN WELY  
HERAKLIO, 1993

1. d4 Nf6 2. Nc3 g6 3. e4 d6 4. Be3 c6 5. Qd2 b5 6. Bd3 Nbd7 7. Nf3 e5 8. h3 Bb7 9. dxe5 dxe5 10. 0-0 Bg7 11. a4



Diagram 78  
After 11. a4

11. ... a6 12. Ne2 0-0 13. Ng3

### Qc7 14. Bh6? Rfe8 15. Nf5

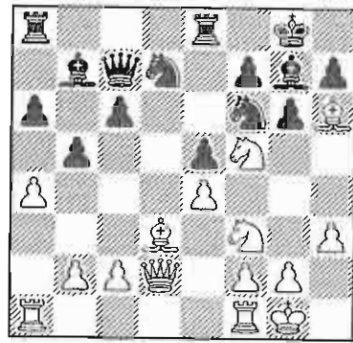


Diagram 79  
After 15. Nf5

15. ... Bb8 ♞, and White's attack brings nothing, while Black is threatening to play 16. ... c6-c5-c4. Black won on move 40.

White usually tries to prevent ... b7-b5 with a2-a4, sometimes with the idea of pushing his a-pawn farther to gain space. Black has a choice—he can contravene White's plan by ... a7 (a6)-a5, or he can allow White's a-pawn to move onto a5, hoping later to place his pawn on b5, although this might be difficult to do.

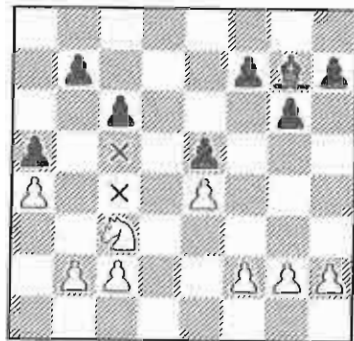


Diagram 80  
Structure after a2-a4 & ... a7 (a6)-a5

In Diagram 80, each side tries to establish fortifications on c4 and c5. It looks like it is easier for White to occupy c4 with a piece (his bishop, for example), while Black can operate from b4, c5, or even d4. In general, it's a tough struggle with equal chances.

### Other themes

Black's own pawn on e5 limits his bishop on g7 to defensive duties only. Black may, however, activate his bishop through f8 and use it to fight for control of the dark squares, including the important c5-square. Sometimes the g7-bishop can support the Black knight's occupation of d4.

Control of the d-file is also important. Often White can dominate here, but usually finds it quite difficult to transform this success into a permanent advantage because there aren't many squares available for invasion. Normally, Black can neutralize White's temporary ownership of the d-file sooner or later. Here is an example from the theory of the classical system.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Nf3 Bg7 5. Be2 0-0 6. 0-0 Bg4 7. Be3 Nc6 8. Qd2 e5 9. dxe5 dxe5 10. Rad1

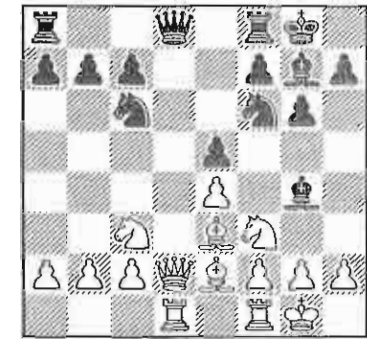


Diagram 81  
After 10. Rad1

### 10. ... Qc8

The most effective way to struggle for the d-file is to leave it for the moment. This move is better than 10. ... Qxd2.

11. Qc1 Rd8 12. Rxd8+ Nxd8 13. Rd1 Ne6 14. h3 Bxf3 15. Bxf3 c6

The position is equal.

### II. Black Plays ... e5; White responds d4-d5

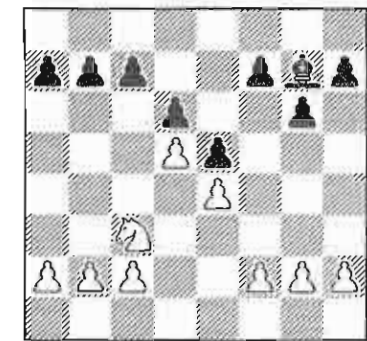


Diagram 82  
Structure after d4-d5

Once again, this structure has a lot in common with the King's Indian. But here the differences are generally not in White's favor. It is quite difficult for White to perform the standard plan against the KID: c4-c5xd6, weakening the d-pawn and beginning operations along the c-file. Here in the Pirc, Black can sometimes even afford to play without his light-square bishop after ... Bc8-g4xf3 (such a luxury is rarely found in the King's Indian). Of course, if the light-square bishop stays alive, things go even more smoothly for Black, as we are going to learn from the following example.

ZIATDINOV—CHERNIN  
PHILADELPHIA, 1998

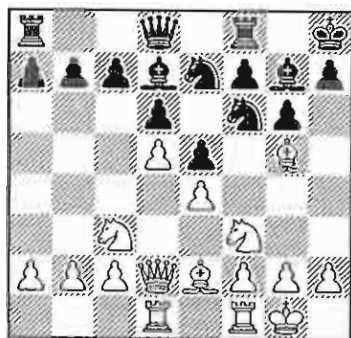


Diagram 83  
White to move

White has the only serious strategic possibility here—f2-f4. Black must prepare ... f7-f5 in response. So both sides begin clearing the way for their f-pawns.

12. Ne1 Nfg8 13. Nd3

The first, small problem—if

13. f4 f6 14. Bh4 exf4, White can't capture on f4 because of ... g6-g5.

13. ... f6 14. Be3 f5 15. exf5 Nxf5!

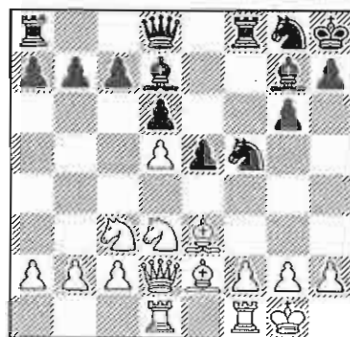


Diagram 84  
After 15. ... Nxf5!

White hoped for 15. ... gxf5 16. f4, making the thematic thrust with comfort. But now after 16. f4 Nxe3, White's dark squares would be weak in an open position.

16. Bg5 Qe8 17. Rde1 (If 17. f4, then ... h6.) 17. ... h6 18. Be3 g5!

Now f2-f4 is impossible.

19. Bf3 Nf6! 20. Be4 (Or 20. Ne4 Nh4! →.) 20. ... Nxe4!

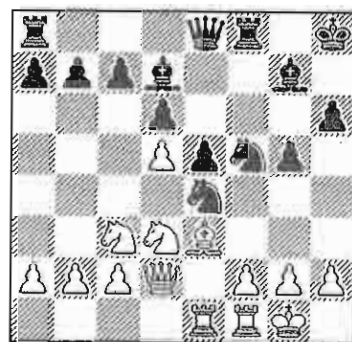


Diagram 85  
After 20. ... Nxe4!

Black short-circuits White's plan to play f2-f3 with the idea of recapturing on e4 with a pawn.

21. Nxe4 Qg6 ♣

The absence of a light-square bishop is very unpleasant for White in this position.

This last, instructive example demonstrates how White can be

restricted by his knight on c3, which blocks the way for his c-pawn. In contrast, the lack of space for Black's fianchettoed bishop is even less a drawback after ... e7-e5 d4-d5 than after ... e7-e5 d4xe5. White's thematic attacking move, f2-f4, if ever achieved, will in fact serve only to give more freedom to Black's g7-bishop.

### Summary:

*Black's other counterpunch in the center, ... e7-e5 is less ambitious than ... c7-c5. After... e7-e5, the game adopts some of the characteristics of the open games.*

*If White responds to ... e7-e5 by capturing d4xe5, chances are approximately equal. Many of the resulting ideas are similar to those in the King's Indian, with the key difference that White's c-pawn remains on c2, blocked by his knight on c3. There are pluses and minuses to this difference, but one important contrast is that in this variation of the Pirc, Black can sometimes maintain his pawn on b5, undermining White's control of c4. After ... e7-e5 d4xe5, White can often take control of the d-file, but only temporarily. Although Black's fianchettoed bishop is restricted by Black's own pawn on e5, the bishop can help support a knight on d4. Sometimes the bishop can be reactivated through f8, fighting for the queenside dark squares, or through h6.*

*When White responds to ... e7-e5 with d4-d5, the structure is again similar to variations of the King's Indian Defense, but it's clearer that the differences make this variation of the Pirc less favorable for White than the King's Indian, since White's standard plan of advancing his c-pawn to weaken Black's queenside is unavailable.*

*Additionally, Black's fianchettoed bishop suffers less restriction in this variation. What's more, if White ever does achieve his thematic f2-f4 break, it only provides more freedom for Black's dark-square diagonal slider.*

Black plays ... e7-e5

**Memory Markers!**

MARKER 1

Diagram 86  
Black to move



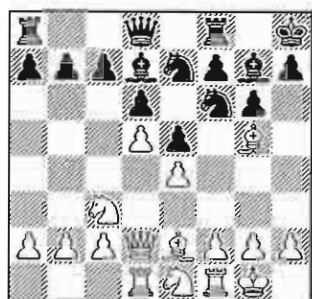
MARKER 2

Diagram 87  
Black to move



MARKER 3

Diagram 88  
Black to move



MARKER 4

Diagram 89  
Black to move



MARKER 5

Diagram 90  
Black to move



MARKER 6

Diagram 91  
White to move

Black plays ... e7-e5

**Solutions to Memory Markers!**

- No. 1 1. ... Nxf5!. (See Diagram 84, page 70.) For 1. ... gxf5, see Marker 6.  
 No. 2 1. ... a6!. (Page 68.)  
 No. 3 1. ... Nxd8!. (See page 69.)  
 No. 4 1. ... Ng8, with the idea of ... f5. (See page 70.)  
 No. 5 1. ... Nh4, with a decisive advantage. (See page 70.)  
 No. 6 1. f4!, with a good game for White. (See page 70.)

## Chapter 7: The Philidor & Ruy Lopez Pircs

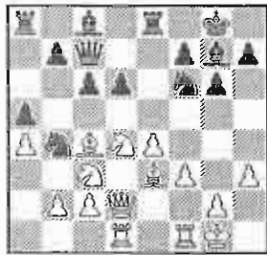
### Some Important Points to Look For

When Black plays ... e7-e5 and White leaves his pawn on d4, Black should play the "Ruy Lopez" Pirc and look for a favorable transposition to the "Philidor" Pirc.



- ◆ By playing 11. ... exd4, Black goes from the Ruy Lopez Pirc into the Philidor Pirc.

See Diagram 110.



- ◆ In this Philidor Pirc position, Black is trying to prepare ... d6-d5.

See Diagram 111.



- ◆ Black pressures the e4-pawn.

See Diagram 117.



- ◆ When in the Ruy Lopez Pirc, be ready to play ... d6-d5. Here it rates an exclamation point.

See Diagram 125.

## Chapter 7

# The Philidor & Ruy Lopez Pircs

White responds to ... e7-e5 by leaving his pawn on d4

**B**lack can determine the character of the game to a great extent by choosing to play ... e7-e5 rather than ... c7-c5. But White gets to make decisions too, of course. Black has made the ... e7-e5 advance, but White can put his d4-pawn on hold.

Sometimes in chess, as in life, "not to decide is to decide." By not moving his d-pawn from d4, White makes an important choice. Some of the ideas in this variation can be very different from the positions we've looked at in the previous chapter—and yet sometimes White can later transpose into lines we've previously considered!

Following White's decision to hold d4, the first question Black must answer is whether or not he should trade pawns with ... e5xd4 immediately. This is similar, of course, to Black's choice in the ... c5 line when White leaves his d-pawn on d4. And as we learned in Chapter 6,

Black needn't fear either d4xe5 or d4-d5. We may conclude that Black should not be in a hurry with ... e5xd4. Nevertheless, let's look at that move to discover some interesting possibilities.

To put it simply, we can distinguish between two basic pawn structures when White, at least for the moment, "decides not to decide." We will call them the Philidor Pirc and the Ruy Lopez Pirc. (Why not? We're already familiar with Dragon Pirc from Chapter 5.)

### The Philidor Pirc

When Black trades pawns on d4, we call the resulting structure the Philidor Pirc.

**WE CAN DISTINGUISH  
BETWEEN TWO BASIC  
STRUCTURES—THE  
PHILIDOR PIRC AND  
THE RUY LOPEZ PIRC.**



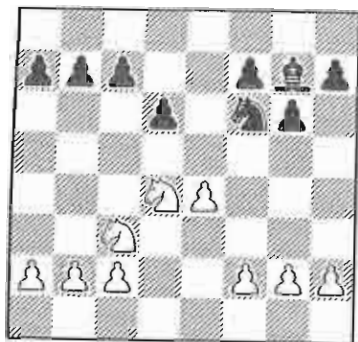


Diagram 92

Structure of the Philidor Pirc

Our name for this line comes from analogy with one of the variations of the Philidor Defense—1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 exd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 g6.

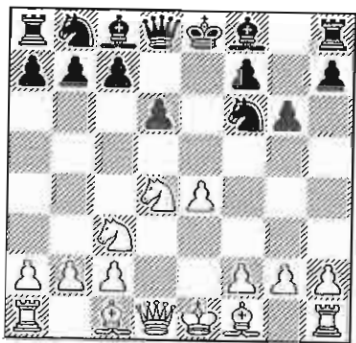


Diagram 93

After 5... g6

Note that this variation uses the kingside fianchetto and was developed into a modern weapon in the 1970s by the Danish GM Bent Larsen.

### The "Ruy Lopez" Pirc

In this structure neither Black nor White does anything immediately to resolve the d4-e5 clash.

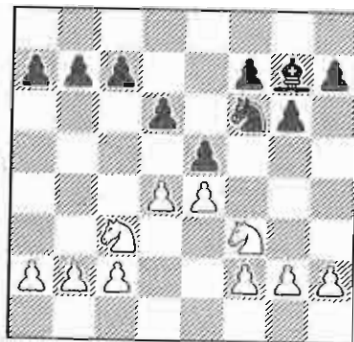


Diagram 94

Structure of the Ruy Lopez Pirc

This strong-point pawn structure (which occurs at the moment Black plays ... e7-e5) again takes its name by analogy, this time from the "real" Ruy Lopez after 1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 b5 5. Bb3 d6 (or even the way Steinitz preferred it—1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 d6). Let's take a preliminary look at this formation.

The following position can help us to see the connection between this variation of our "hypermodern" Pirc and a century of chess experience with the "strongpoint" Ruy Lopez positions.

In the "real" Ruy Lopez, Black usually keeps his pawn on e5 for quite a long time, and if Black trades this pawn with ... e5xd4, he has in mind some concrete ideas. For example, he tries to maintain pressure on the e4-pawn. The Ruy Lopez Pirc is played in much the same way.



Diagram 95

A position in the "real" Ruy Lopez

The position above is from the game Podgaets-Klovans, 1973, reached in the "real" Ruy Lopez move order. To protect e4, White must keep a large number of his forces on alert.

### Don't be Buridan's Ass

Black has to make a choice—whether he should stay in the Ruy Lopez Pirc or transfer play to the Philidor Pirc. Before plunging into variations, we'll give some basic orientations that consider not only opening ideas but middlegame plans as well to help you choose.

After all, we don't want to emulate Buridan's Ass, the poor donkey that, when presented with

two stacks of hay, one on his left and one on his right, couldn't decide which one to eat and starved to death pacing between them!

This chapter is long and sometimes complex because these two new structures are of approximately equal value and fundamentally different from the Dragon Pirc of the ... c7-c5 variations.

### Ideas in the Philidor Pirc

Let's begin with the Philidor Pirc. By playing ... e5xd4, we congratulate ourselves on activating our bishop on g7 and on eliminating the d4-pawn, so our mission is accomplished.

In some ways, Black achieves the same goals as in the Dragon Pirc—his g7-bishop not only protects the position of his castled king but can also take part in action in the center, on the queenside—or in both areas.

Indeed, there are similarities between the two structures. Look at the "normal" Philidor Defense:

**THIS CHAPTER IS LONG AND SOMETIMES COMPLEX—  
THESE TWO NEW STRUCTURES ARE APPROXIMATELY  
EQUAL IN VALUE AND FUNDAMENTALLY  
DIFFERENT FROM THE DRAGON PIRC.**

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 exd4 4. Nxd4 g6 5. Nc3 Bg7 6. Be3 Nf6 7. Qd2! (the slow 7. f3 allows Black to free his game after 7. ... 0-0 8. Qd2 d5! =) 7. ... 0-0 8. 0-0-0

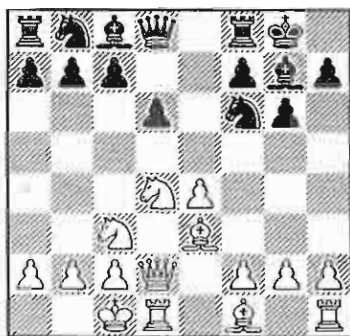


Diagram 96

After 8. 0-0-0 in the "real" Philidor

Now 8. ... d5 is not good in view of 9. exd5 Nxd5 10. Ndb5 c6 11. Nxd5 ±.

In the diagrammed position, White is going to launch an attack on Black's king via f2-f3, h2-h4-h5, Be3-h6, etc. (Such a method is already familiar to us after studying White's attacks against the "real" Dragon.)

All Black's troubles flow from one source. The pawn structure is extremely favorable for White, given opposite-side castling. In contrast to the Sicilian Dragon formation, the Philidor Defense holds even more difficulties for Black because he has no semi-open c-file on which to operate. Recognizing these challenges

helped Alex invent a novelty for White, a way to transform one opening into another—from the Pirc into Philidor.

CHERNIN—ZAICHIK  
LVOV, 1987

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Be3 Bg7 5. Qd2 0-0 6. 0-0-0 Nc6 7. f3 e5 8. Nge2!

An improvement over the normal 8. d5.

8. ... exd4 9. Nxd4

The transformation is accomplished, and now we have a normal Philidor Defense.

9. ... Nxd4 10. Bxd4 Be6 11. Be3!

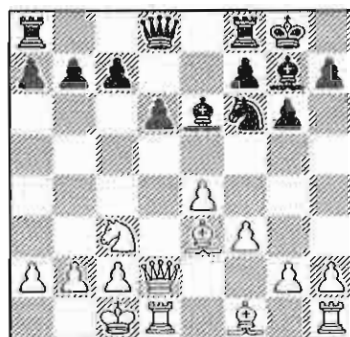


Diagram 97

After 11. Be3!

Here's one more theoretical novelty, this time within the Philidor Defense. White eliminates Black's possibility of counterplay with ... c7-c5 and ... Qa5, allowing himself to concentrate solely on his attack.

11. ... Re8 12. Bg5! Qe7 13. g4 Qf8 14. Kb1 a6 15. h4 h6 16. Bxf6!? Bxf6 17. g5

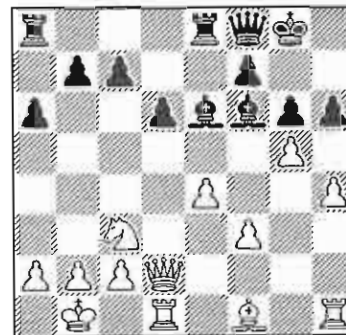


Diagram 98

After 17. g5

17. ... hxg5

If 17. ... Bg7, then 18. h5, opening the kingside files.

18. hxg5 Bg7 19. f4 Bg4 20. Re1 c6 21. Be2 Bxe2 22. Rxe2 f5

White was threatening f4-f5.

23. gxf6 Qxf6 24. Rg1 Rf8 25. Rg4

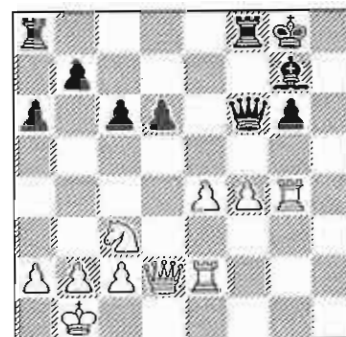


Diagram 99

After 25. Rg4

Now Black can only wait for the final thrust that follows in four moves.

25. ... Rae8 26. Reg2 Re7 27. a3 a5 28. Qd3 Rff7 29. e5!

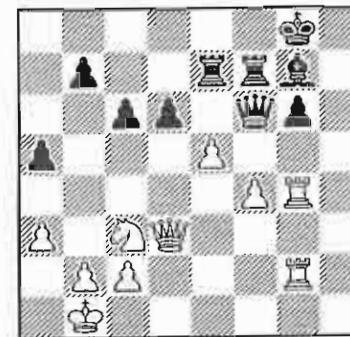


Diagram 100

After 29. e5!

29. ... dxe5 30. Ne4 Qe6 31. Rxc6 Qc8 32. Nd6, Black resigns.

However, an experienced Pirc player on the Black side can minimize the tactical risk in the Philidor structure.

We continue to recommend the Dragon Pirc (... c7-c5) unconditionally. But it's equally important to know the Philidor Pirc because the Dragon is not always available. The Philidor Pirc is critical to the overall theory of the Pirc.

### Advantages of the Dragon Pirc over the Philidor Pirc

Strategically, the Philidor setup is not as attractive as the

THE PHILIDOR PIRC  
IS CRITICAL TO THE  
OVERALL THEORY OF  
THE PIRC.

Dragon structure. In the Dragon, the lines of force from the g7-bishop and c8-rook (and sometimes from the queen on a5) focus on the c3-square.

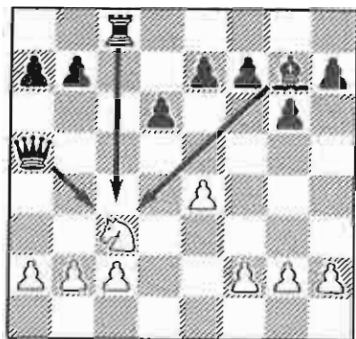


Diagram 101

Structure of the Dragon Pirc

The pressure on White's knight, and therefore on the whole queenside, can be further increased by ... a7-a6, ... b7-b5-b4.

There are also other possibilities—for example, Black's knight may invade c4. Even if White replaces his knight on c3 with a pawn, Black has the same resources for creating counterplay. So we can conclude that Black has a promising and concrete, long-term plan.

### Developing play in the Philidor Pirc

But how can Black develop his play in the Philidor? Should he choose the e4-pawn, located on the semi-open king file, as an object for attack?

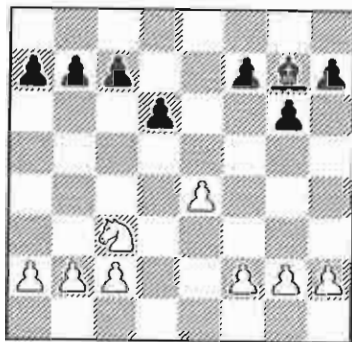


Diagram 102

Structure of the Philidor Pirc

In some cases this approach isn't effective, because the joint forces of several Black pieces can be neutralized by White with f2-f3.

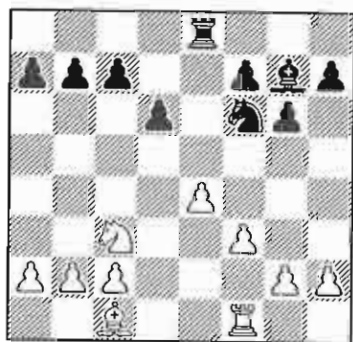


Diagram 103

The f3-pawn makes attack on e4 senseless.

After f2-f3, how can Black continue the siege of e4? The move ... f7-f5 could undermine e4, but it also weakens the position of Black's king and is thus a risky, usually unsound method in the Philidor. Another big question is whether or not Black is able to prepare the freeing move ... d6-d5.

However, in some cases it is impossible for White to protect e4 with f2-f3—for example when White's pawn is already on f4. At other times, the move f2-f3 may have drawbacks. In these cases, the pressure on the e4-pawn may play a significant role. Later, when we begin studying actual methods of play in the Philidor Pirc, we will learn more about organizing pressure on e4.

### The dangers of Black's playing passively in the Philidor Pirc

First of all, we should recall how Aron Nimzovich described White's domination in the pure Philidor structure—where Black's pawn remained on g7. He wrote, explaining the situation in Diagram 104, that sooner or later, White is going to play Nc3-d5, creating such tremendous pressure on the opponent's position that Black will be forced to play ... c7-c6 in order to displace the annoying knight. After its colleague advances, the d6-pawn becomes weak, turning into a target for White's major pieces, free to operate on the semi-open d-file.

We can add that Black's lack of vitally needed space contributes to his being forced eventually to play ... c7-c6 to give himself some *Lebensraum*, some "living space."

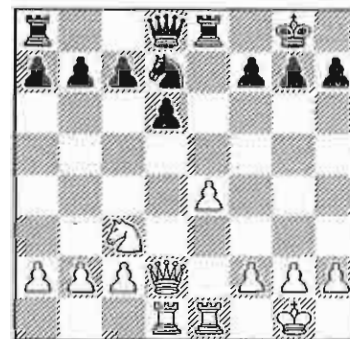


Diagram 104

Instructional position

Does Nimzovich's warning refute our Philidor Pirc? No, because often the Philidor Pirc offers the possibility of trading off all the minor pieces, or at least all the knights. When this happens, there will be nothing left to be placed on the d5-outpost, and the position levels out.

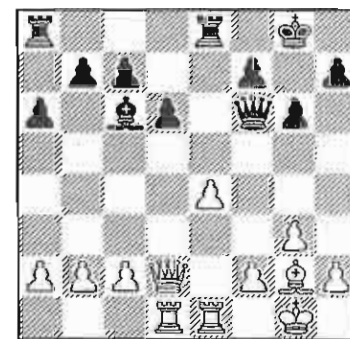


Diagram 105

After the knights are gone, White's space advantage is not a significant factor. The play is equal.

When one side suffers from lack of space, he should normally trade pieces. However, although he may allow the

**BLACK SHOULD BE CAUTIOUS OF WHOLESALE TRADING. HE COULD BE LEFT WITH AN INDEFENSIBLE POSITION.**

exchange of one knight (and the trade-off of dark-square bishops), White usually keeps the other knight. When he does, although the position is similar to the one previously examined, don't be fooled—the game is not equal.

In contrast to the position given by Nimzovich, in which Black's pawn remained on g7, a new factor is added in the Philidor Pirc—the weak dark-square complex on Black's kingside. This vulnerability is clear after Black's dark-square bishop has been traded.



Diagram 106

White's knight allows him to take advantage of Black's kingside weakness.

In Diagram 106, White has a small but constant initiative, due to the knight he keeps on the board. The weakening g7-g6, which was not important in the previous examples, is a serious drawback here.

Since Black can't guarantee that all the minor pieces will come off, he should not automatically initiate wholesale trading, because he could be left with an inferior position.

### Coordinating Black's pieces

Let's contrast the coordination of pieces in the Dragon Pirc with that in the Philidor Pirc.

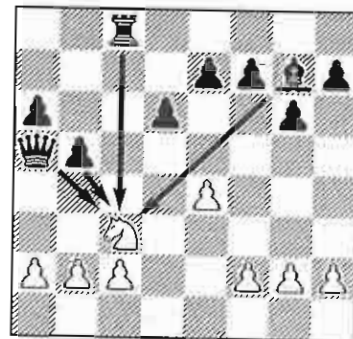


Diagram 107

Black's pieces make a coordinated attack on c3.

**BLACK'S KINGSIDE VULNERABILITY IS CLEAR AFTER HIS DARK-SQUARE BISHOP HAS BEEN TRADED.**

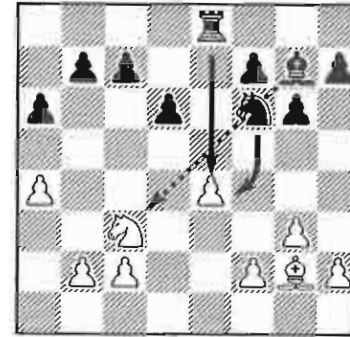


Diagram 108

Black's pieces strike at two different targets.

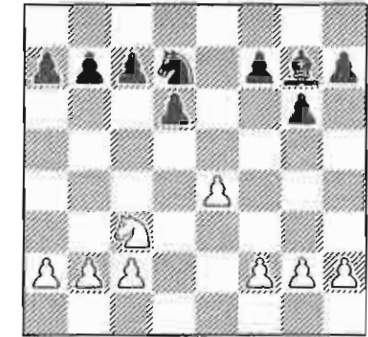


Diagram 109

Playing ... Nd7, Black unblocks his bishop, but reduces the pressure on e4.

In the Dragon Pirc, Black's pieces concentrate on attacking the c3-target. In the Philidor Pirc, the Black rook and knight attack e4, while the bishop on g7 applies pressure to the White knight on c3. Thus two groups of pieces act divergently. Despite the fact that the fianchettoed bishop can create threats to the knight on c3, a key defender of the e4-pawn, Black's plan seems less effective than concentrating all his efforts on *one* focal point.

There are some additional concrete difficulties in the Philidor Pirc. Black's knight on f6 restricts the activity of his bishop on g7, but if Black moves his knight to d7 in order to open the g7-bishop, he reduces the pressure on e4. (See Diagram 109.)



On the other hand, if Black announces his intention to launch ... b7-b5 by playing ... c7-c6 or ... a7-a6, White can usually prevent his opponent's expansion with the "cruel" a2-a4. If White then maintains his knights on c3 and d4 and a pawn on a4, it is not easy for Black to prepare ... b7-b5.

In the Dragon Pirc, Black can develop his queen along the d8-a5 diagonal, but in the Philidor Pirc he has problems activating his Lady. Black also finds it difficult to develop his light-square bishop. We've discussed transforming the Pirc into a favorable Dragon as a great achievement for Black. The virtues of transforming into a Philidor are less clear. We may say that the Dragon Pirc is harder to get, but easier to play. The Philidor is just the opposite—easier to get, harder to play.



## The advantages of the Philidor Pirc

At last—we get to the advantages of the Philidor Pirc!

Despite the unfavorable comparisons we've made to the Dragon Pirc, the Philidor Pirc has some pluses. Its structure is very important to the overall Pirc Defense, so we are going to examine it thoroughly.

We've already seen that the idea of overcoming Black's difficulties by trading minor pieces is usually not realistic. Instead, Black can sometimes organize ... d6-d5. Preparation for ... d6-d5 is not an easy task, however, because White's knight on c3, his pawn on e4 and his major pieces on the d-file all guard against such an advance. Also, even after Black has played ... d6-d5, he must contend not only with the possibility of e4xd5, but with the e4-e5 advance as well.

The pluses and minuses of ... d6-d5 are illustrated by the following game.

POLUGAEVSKY—UHLMANN  
MANILA, 1976

1. Nf3 g6 2. e4 d6 3. d4 Nf6 4. Nc3 Bg7 5. Be2 0-0 6. 0-0 c6 7. a4 a5 8. h3 Qc7 9. Be3 e5 10. Qd2 Na6 11. Rad1



Diagram 110  
After 11. Rad1

11. ... exd4 12. Nxd4 Re8 13. f3 Nb4 14. Bc4

To make it more difficult for Black to play ... d6-d5.

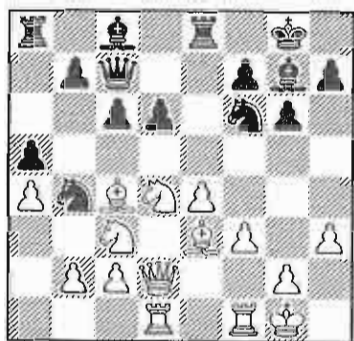


Diagram 111  
After 14. Bc4

14. ... Bd7

Black still wants to advance his d-pawn, but in the meantime he takes control of the b5-square in case it might be necessary to take on d5 with his c-pawn.

15. Bb3 d5

Black succeeds in carrying out his plan, but its outcome is unclear.

16. Qf2!

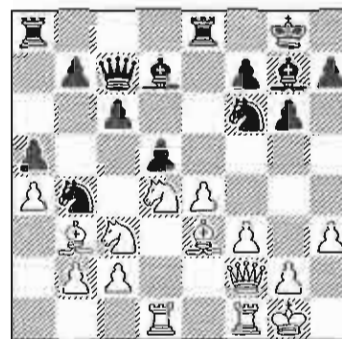


Diagram 112  
After 16. Qf2!

White is maintaining the tension quite resourcefully. 16. exd5 Nfxd5 = would be bland.

16. ... Rac8!

Likewise resourceful, Black makes what Nimzovich termed a "mysterious rook move," transferring his rook to the *potentially* open file, thus making the capture on d5 less appetizing for White. Moreover, the move is useful against White's coming attempt.

17. Nde2! (threatening 18. Bb6)  
17. ... c5! 18. Bxd5 Nxc2 19. Bf4 Qb6 20. e5



Diagram 113  
After 20. e5

Otherwise, the weakness on d5 would have been balanced by a weakness of d4.

20. ... Nxd5 21. Nxd5 Qe6 22. Ndc3 Bc6 23. Rd2 Nd4 24. Nxd4 cxd4 25. Rxd4 Bxe5 26. Bxe5 Qxe5 27. Rfd1 Kg7 28. Ne4 Bxe4, draw.

## Threatening ... d6-d5 can open other options

We've come to the conclusion that the continuation ... d6-d5 in the Philidor Pirc significantly expands Black's arsenal. Yet it's hard to accomplish. Such an idea by itself rarely works as a strategic plan, and so Black must be flexible.

If White tries hard to prevent ... d6-d5—for example, by placing his pawn on f4 in order to meet ... d6-d5 with e4-e5, Black should change his approach and renew his attack on the weakened e4, now deprived of pawn protection.

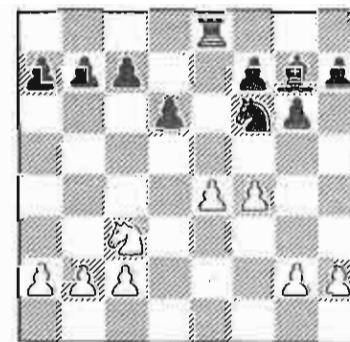


Diagram 114  
Structure showing weakened e4-pawn  
after White's pawn goes to f4



**PRESSURE ON E4 IS A  
KEY IDEA FOR BLACK  
IN THE PHILIDOR PIRC.**

Similar situations may appear in systems characterized by developing the bishop on g2 and the knight on e2. The goal of such a system is to control the d5-outpost from a distance to prevent ... d6-d5.



Diagram 115

Structure after g3 and Bg2

In such a system, the continuation f2-f3 is a positional concession on White's part because it blocks his bishop on g2. So after 4. g3, White should try different methods of protecting the e4-pawn.

Pressure on the e4-pawn is certainly an important idea for Black in the Philidor Pirc, despite the fact that the number of favorable positions—for instance, games in which f2-f3 is

either impossible or unfruitful—is quite limited. Now let's further consider Black's goals and resources, and White's counter-measures.

**Organizing pressure  
on e4 —**

**Black's resources**

In the Philidor Pirc, both Black's rook on e8 and his knight on f6 are active members of an "advanced group" that attacks White's pawn on e4. Black can support these forces by posting his other knight on c5. It's possible that he can even station his light-square bishop on c6 or b7. Additionally, Black can advance his b-pawn (... b7-b5-b4) in order to displace the c3-knight (which protects e4).

**White's counter-measures**

Besides White's knight on c3 and bishop on g2, (in the quite popular 4. g3 system), White's rook on e1 can support the besieged pawn on e4. White can muster further reinforcements after h2-h3, g3-g4 and the maneuver Ne2-g3. White should not miss the opportunity to decrease Black's pressure on e4 by dislocating the attacking pieces or preventing them from occupying their best positions. Therefore, g3-g4-g5 takes aim against Black's knight on f6, and a prophylactic a2-a4 discourages

... b7-b5.

We can see that both sides have many resources available in the fight over the e4-outpost.

**Pressuring e4 —  
Black's strategic goals**

In the Philidor Pirc, Black's two primary objectives are by now obvious.

- To win the e4-pawn;
- To force White to play f2-f3 in a situation where the move is not beneficial for White.

Considering the significant resources at White's disposal, it is clear that these two tasks can be accomplished only if White makes serious mistakes.

There is a more realistic, third goal—

- To tie down the opponent's pieces by forcing them to protect the e4-pawn.

Let's take a mental field trip to a chess classic. In *My System*, Aron Nimzovich revealed important insights about the so-called *overprotection* of key squares. Here's one of his examples.

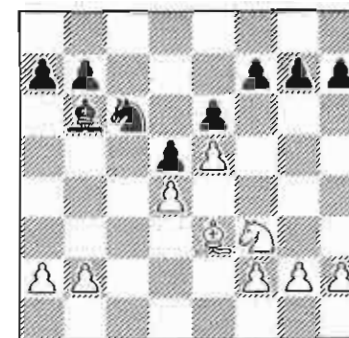


Diagram 116

Black piles on; White is tied down.

The d4-outpost is attacked and defended by an equal number of pieces on both sides, and this situation can be characterized as a total paralysis of the defending pieces. White can't seriously consider moving either his f3-knight or his e3-bishop, because his vitally important d4-pawn would be snatched immediately. So none of the White pieces involved can undertake dynamic actions against Black's position.

In the Philidor Pirc, Black may succeed if he is able to force much of White's army to busy itself defending its pawn on e4, preventing White from playing actively.

**BLACK MAY SUCCEED IF HE CAN TIE DOWN  
WHITE'S FORCES TO THE DEFENSE OF E4.**



Here is one of Black's success stories with this "tie-down" strategy.

WEISSMAN—SHIROV  
MOSCOW, 1991

1. g3 g6 2. Bg2 Bg7 3. d4 Nf6 4. e4 d6 5. Ne2 e5 6. Nbc3 c6

A transposition of moves leads to a theoretical position.

7. h3 b5 8. a3 Bb7 9. Be3 Nbd7 10. f4 exd4 11. Nxd4 0-0 12. 0-0 Re8 13. Re1 a6 14. Nb3 Qc7 15. Bf2 c5 16. Nd2 Re7 17. Rb1 Rae8 ♣

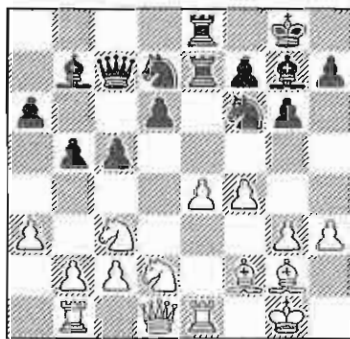


Diagram 117  
After 17. ... Rae8

Black succeeded in fully entangling his opponent by keeping pressure on e4, meanwhile threatening to play ... b5-b4. In order to save his e4-pawn, White must play Nc3-d5, but this move is not satisfactory in view of quite a few factors:

1. The opening of the e-file after ... Nf6xd5 is in Black's favor;
2. After the exchange of

knight, White's pawn on d5 becomes weak;

3. Black's bishop on g7 grows more powerful and effectively supports actions on the queenside.

Nonetheless, playing for such a total "tie-down" can easily backfire. Nimzovich himself makes this phenomenon clear. Adding just one defending White piece, a rook on d3 to Diagram 116, for instance, changes the situation radically, allowing the first player some options with his defensive cadre.



Diagram 118  
White has an extra defender.

Now *all* the White pieces become dynamic, so that any one of the group—the f3-knight, e3-bishop and even d3-rook—are free to move and can take part in active operations. It means that on the very next move, Black must pay attention to the possible moves of all White's pieces—bishop, knight and rook. The strategy of tying down vaporizes.

Of course, if there were one more rook on d1, White would enjoy even greater freedom.

Thus when White strengthens his outpost by adding more defending resources, he *doesn't* tie himself down further. On the contrary, such reinforcements lead to positions where *all* White's pieces have more freedom. We should apply this principle to our play.

Because White has a space advantage in the Philidor Pirc, Black's success depends on the specifics of White's overprotection of e4. Let's explore an example that is counterpoint to Weissman—Shirov.

KARPOV—TIMMAN  
MONTREAL, 1979

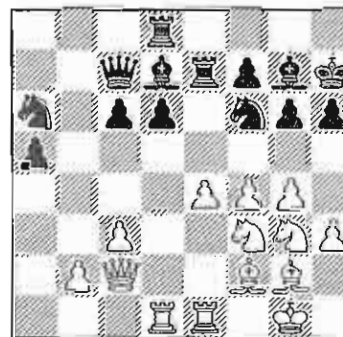


Diagram 119  
After 24. Be3-f2!

With his last move, 24. Bf2, White strengthened the e4-outpost and gained a much better position.

Black has absolutely no counterplay against e4. Theoretically, the e4-pawn can be protected by six(!) defenders: Qc2, Re1 and Re2, Bg2, Ng3, Nd2. Additionally, White's f2-bishop indirectly participates in the defense of e4. White is ready to play Bxc5 if Black puts his knight on c5 to attack e4 again. Black's isolated a5-pawn would make his position even worse. But even if we add a White pawn on a4 and correct Black's *isolani* by adding a pawn on b7 to the diagram, Black's position would still be very difficult.

As we have learned from Nimzovich's rule of overprotection, adding just one new actor to the scene changes this "sword or shield" situation dramatically.

Black's formula for success: the number of attackers against the e4-outpost must be no less than the number of defenders. Ample forces must be involved in battle.

**WHEN WHITE REINFORCES HIS E4-PAWN WITH ADDITIONAL DEFENDERS, HE DOES NOT TIE HIMSELF DOWN FURTHER. ON THE CONTRARY, HE CAN FREE UP ALL OF HIS PIECES.**

**BLACK'S FORMULA FOR SUCCESS: THE NUMBER OF ATTACKERS AGAINST THE E4-OUTPOST MUST BE NO LESS THAN THE NUMBER OF DEFENDERS.**

The difficulty is that it is necessary to predict numerous maneuvers and possibilities that can change the balance in favor of one side.

Let's return once more to Nimzovich's position (Diagram 116), but this time with White pawns on a4 and b4.

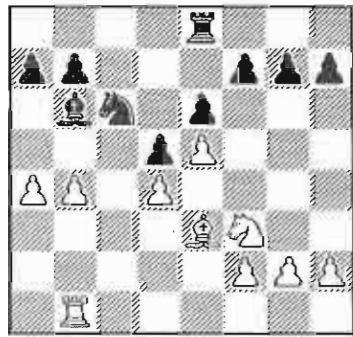


Diagram 120

*White's queenside pawns give him the edge.*

The threats a4-a5 and b4-b5 tilt the balance in favor of White. Similar possibilities should be considered in our Philidor Pirc positions. For instance, advancing g2(g3)-g4-g5 dislocates the f6-knight, and a2-a4 prevents ... b7-b5-b4. It is not difficult to understand that such bold routs as the games Weissman—Shirov and Karpov—Timman were

made possible because one of the players made certain positional mistakes (which we are going to examine later).

When both sides are adequately concerned about the e4-outpost, the following picture can develop.

ASEEV—ZAKHAREVICH  
PETERSBURG, 1995

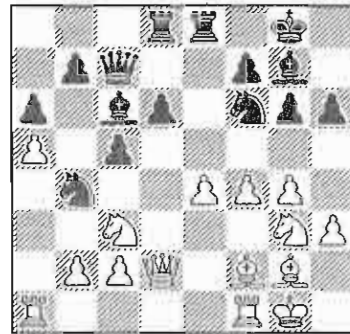


Diagram 121

*After 18. ... Rad8*

Here, Black's achievements are modest. White has three defending pieces versus Black's three attackers. Both sides have reserves—Re1 versus ... Re7 and ... Rde8. White's a5-pawn is weak, so the protecting rook can't stray from a1. (Otherwise, White could dominate the center.) Black's earlier move ... h7-h6, not typical in the Pirc, proves

itself very useful here. Now White's idea of playing g4-g5 to dislocate the Black knight on f6 is less appealing because, after the exchange of pawns (... h6xg5 f4xg5), Black controls e5.

This position was a result of a tough fight over the e4-pawn. Black had to pay close attention to the ramifications of g3-g4, or he would have been outplayed. In fact, g3-g4 is a double hit: White's knight is heading to the vacated g3-square, where the cavalryman can support the e4-pawn, while the g-pawn threatens to dislodge the knight on f6. The effect of g3-g4 and Ng3 is even greater than we might expect—in view of the position of the rook on e1. Here the rook is poised to jump into the fray (after Be3-f2). Thus, the balance between attack and defense remains unstable. There is a threat that the scale could tip suddenly in favor of White.

Let's take a closer look at the move ... h7-h6! in Aseev—Zakharevich. This move is necessary in order to undermine the strategic menace g4-g5. Even such a prophylactic move as ... h7-h5 (to prevent g3-g4) shouldn't be ruled out!

Later, after reviewing the Ruy Lopez structure, we will come back to the games Weissman—Shirov, Karpov—

Timman and Aseev—Zakharevich.

**Black's "slow motion"  
... b5**

Now we can re-examine Black's total resources in the Philidor Pirc in light of Black's strategic goals and possibilities. Even a brief look at Weissman—Shirov reveals how beneficial the occupation of b5 by a pawn is for Black. Yet White is usually alert, and his reaction to ... a7-a6 or ... c7-c6 is natural—a2-a4. As a result of ... e5xd4, Nxd4 and a2-a4, White's pieces are grouped as follows: knight on c3, knight on d4, and a pawn on a4. The group's goal is to prevent the ... b7-b5 advance. Can Black play ... b7-b5 despite these circumstances? Certainly Black can try to do this by playing in "slow motion": ... c7-c6, ... b7-b6, ... a7-a6, ... Bb7, ... b6-b5. It is easier to follow this slow-motion plan before ... e5xd4, staying in a Ruy Lopez structure, when White isn't threatening e4-e5—often with strikes along the h1-a8 diagonal.

As we have seen, Black often plays his c-pawn to c6 and even to c5, gaining vital space on the queenside. In fact, as Nimzovich pointed out, the permanent threat of Nc3-d5 in the Philidor will force Black to move his c-pawn. This certitude should give Black

a philosophic view of weak d6-pawns. Black has to have faith that he will be able to defend his d6-pawn somehow, because advancing the c-pawn brings him hope of counterplay.

### None of Black's resources is a single, silver bullet

We have just examined some possible ideas in playing the Philidor Pirc, such as trading minor pieces, advancing ... d6-d5 to free the position, pressuring e4, and playing ... b7-b5. None of these ideas can alone guarantee equality. Yet knowing these ideas makes it easier to evaluate game positions and to make the right plans.

For example, if we remember that the c8-bishop is often a "bad" piece in the Philidor Pirc, we'll look for the opportunity to trade it off. In Diagram 122, Black has exchanged this bishop and been rewarded with an equal game.

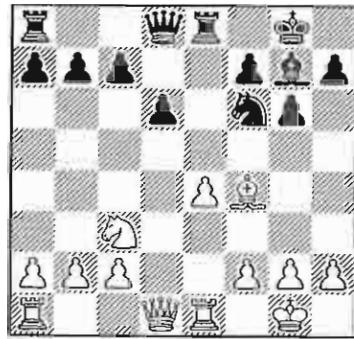


Diagram 122

*Black has an equal position.*

Furthermore, after we examine the Ruy Lopez Pirc, we will realize that from that formation Black sometimes has the possibility of transposing into a good Philidor Pirc with ... e5xd4. Then Black can operate with one of the ideas shown above, or he can combine them.

### The Ruy Lopez Pirc

Now the time has come to examine the Ruy Lopez Pirc (Diagram 123).

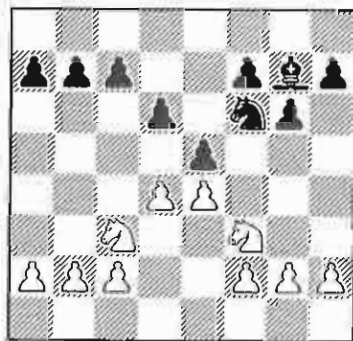


Diagram 123

*Structure of the Ruy Lopez Pirc*

First, we should keep in mind

FROM THE RUY LOPEZ  
PIRC, BLACK CAN  
SOMETIMES TRANSPOSE  
INTO A FAVORABLE  
VERSION OF THE  
PHILIDOR PIRC.

that Black can transpose from the Ruy Lopez Pirc into the Philidor Pirc with ... e5xd4, but he can't go back again. Just a look at the pawn structure of the Ruy Lopez Pirc shows us its main deficiency. In the Ruy Lopez Pirc, as in the Philidor Pirc, Black lacks space. Hence the brave thought: What about playing ... d6-d5 in order to destroy White's main trump, his pawn center, through simplification?

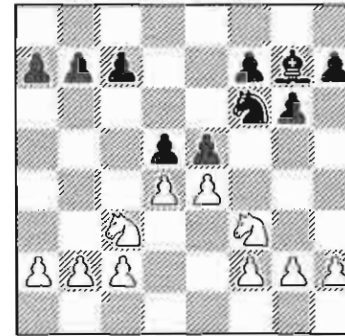


Diagram 124

*Black plays ... d5 in the Ruy Lopez Pirc.*

It is hard to find an argument against the idea of liquidating White's dominant center. Black's fianchettoed bishop is very suitably prepared for such a plan. First, the bishop can reach some important targets, such as the pawns on e5 and d4, as well as the knight on c3. Second, in contrast to some variations of the "real" Ruy Lopez, where Black's bishop usually occupies e7 and blocks Black's own pieces, the fianchettoed bishop, along with

IN THE PHILIDOR  
PIRC, WE SHOULD  
LOOK TO TRADE OFF  
THE C8-BISHOP.

his major pieces on d8 and e8, supports ... d6-d5.

Here is a collection of examples where the ... d6-d5 advance proved successful.

CHANDLER—SPELMAN  
HASTINGS, 1987

1. e4 g6 2. d4 d6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. Be3 a6 5. Qd2 Nd7 6. f3 b5 7. a4 b4 8. Nd1 Rb8 9. c3 bxc3 10. bxc3 Ngf6 11. a5 0-0 12. Bd3 e5 13. Ne2



Diagram 125

*After 13. Ne2*

Better is 13. d5.

13. ... d5! 14. 0-0 c5!

This makes it a full-court press on White's pawn center!

15. Nf2 (no better is 15. dxc5 dxe4 16. fxe4 Qc7 ♣) 15. ... dxe4 16. fxe4 cxd4 17. cxd4 exd4 18. Bxd4 Qc7 ♣



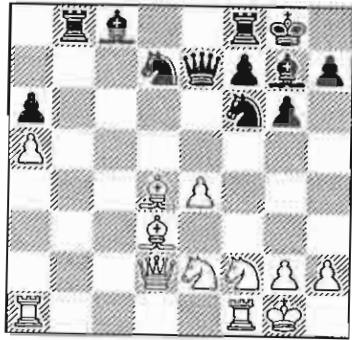


Diagram 126  
After 18... Qe7

COBB—KHALIFMAN  
EUPEN, 1997

1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6 4. g3 Nc6 5. Be3 Nf6 6. h3 e5

Now White should play 7. dxe5! Nxe5 8. Bg2 Nc4 9. Bc1 ±. 7. Nge2

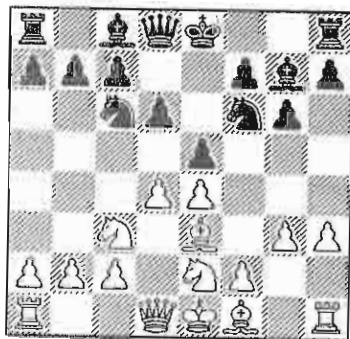


Diagram 127  
After 7. Nge2

7... d5! 8. Bg2

Alternatives are 8. dxe5 Nxe5, threatening 9... Nf3 mate; and 8. exd5 Nxd5 ♣.

8... Nxe4 9. Nxe4 dxe4 10. d5 Na5 11. Bxe4 Nc4 12. Bc1 0-0 13. Bg2 f5 14. 0-0 Nd6 ♣.

CHERNIN—DUNNINGTON  
DUNKIRK, 1994

1. e4 d6 2. d4 g6 3. Nc3 c6 4. a4 Bg7 5. g3 Nf6 6. Bg2 0-0 7. Nge2 e5 8. 0-0 a5 9. h3 Na6 10. Be3

Preventing Black's eleventh move in the game by playing 10. Bg5! h6 11. Be3 is better.

10... Nb4 11. Qd2

This move would gain a tempo if Black's pawn were on h6.

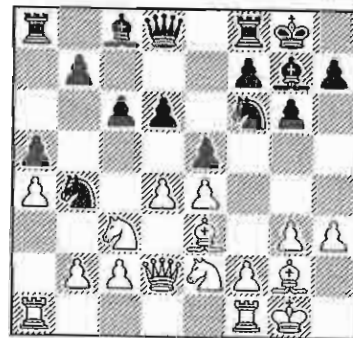


Diagram 128  
After 11. Qd2

11... d5! 12. exd5

White could equalize with 12. dxe5 Nxe4 13. Nxe4 dxe4 =.

12... Nfxd5

Now the e5-pawn is protected.

13. Nxd5 Nxd5 14. Bg5

If 14. dxe5 Bxe5 =, or even 14... Nxe3!? 15. Qxe3 Qe7 16. f4 f6 17. Qb3+ Be6 ♣, with sufficient compensation for a pawn.

14... Bf6 15. Bxf6 Nxf6 16. Rad1 e4!

Better than 16... exd4 =.

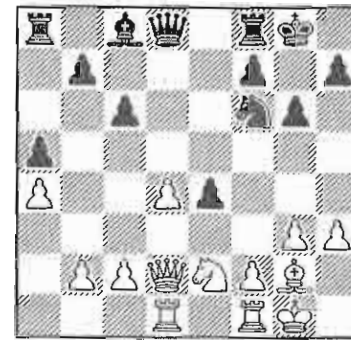


Diagram 129  
After 16... e4!

17. Rfe1 h5! 18. Nc3 Bf5

Black has good play—for instance, 19. Qf4 Nd5.

**Some theory of the Pirc Defense**

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Bd3 e5 4. c3

White's hope in this system is that Black, by playing 4... g6, will stay in the Ruy Lopez for quite a long time. Contrary to White's expectations, Black leaves Ruy territory immediately.

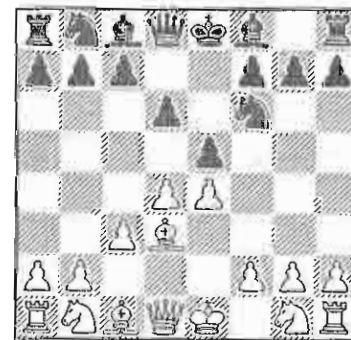


Diagram 130  
After 4... c3—theoretical position

4... d5 5. dxe5 Nxe4 6. Bxe4 dxe4 7. Qa4+

Black's excellent light-square bishop fully compensates him for the loss of castling after 7. Qxd8+.

7... Bd7 8. Qxe4 Bc6 ♣

Later, we'll fully examine the consequences of 4... d5.

Of course, in previous examples, White committed early errors that made Black's counterblow in the center successful.

If White does everything right, it is hard to bet on ... d6-d5. There is a latent vulnerability in Black's plans. After ... d6-d5, the position in the center becomes level, but the overall situation is tense, and it is White's turn to move. Thus White can dictate the action.

Indeed, this situation is similar to the very beginning of a game, where White has the advantage of the first move, guaranteeing him an initiative. It's worse for Black here, however, because the opposing forces are already in contact with each other. White's pawns on e4 and d4 are engaged against Black's pawns e5 and d5. So having the move is even more important. This fact often helps White to refute Black's plan.

**BLACK HAS AN EXCELLENT LIGHT-SQUARE BISHOP.**

BELIAVSKY—AZMAIPARASHVILI  
PORTOROZ, 1997

1. Nf3 g6 2. e4 d6 3. d4 Nf6 4.  
Bd3 Bg7 5. 0-0 0-0 6. Re1 Nc6 7.  
c3 e5 8. h3 Nh5 9. Be3



Diagram 131  
After 9. Be3

9. ... d5

This attempt to solve all of Black's opening problems at once was successful in Magem—Azmaiparashvili, 1997, after: 10. dxe5 Nxe5 11. Nxe5 Bxe5 12. exd5 Qxd5 13. Be2 Nf4 14. Bf3 Qxd1, draw. Analyzing this game, I discovered a strong idea, which GM Beliavsky and I then examined deeply. Azmaiparashvili falls victim to one of our main lines of home analysis.

10. Bg5! f6 11. exd5! fxg5

Or 11. ... Qxd5 12. Nbd2!, with the idea of ... Bc4, exploiting the weakness of the a2-g8 diagonal—the idea of 10. Bg5.

12. dxc6 exd4

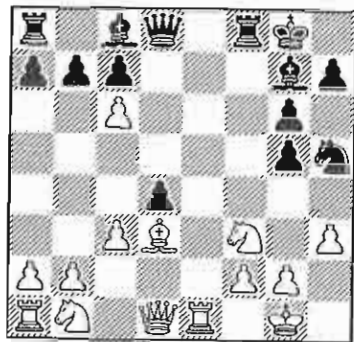


Diagram 132  
After 12. ... exd4

13. Qb3+ Kh8 14. cxb7 Bxb7  
15. Qxb7 dxc3 16. Nxc3 Qxd3  
17. Rad1 Qf5 18. Qxc7! g4

In reply to 18. ... Nf4, 19. Re7 is very strong!

19. hxg4 Qxg4 20. Qd7!

The last move of home preparation stops Black's counterplay on the kingside. Now Black is simply a pawn behind in the endgame.

20. ... Qxd7 21. Rxd7

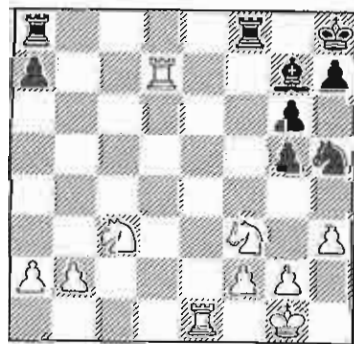


Diagram 133  
After 21. Rxd7

21. ... Rab8 22. Na4 ±, and  
White eventually won.

CHERNIN—MOKRY  
PRAGUE, 1989

1. d4 d6 2. c3 e5 3. e4 Nf6 4. Nd2  
g6 5. Ng3 Nbd7 6. Bd3 Bg7 7.  
0-0 0-0 8. Re1 Re8 9. h3 h6 10.  
Nf1 d5



Diagram 134  
After 10. ... d5

11. Nxe5!

Better than 11. dxe5 dxe4!  
12. exf6 Nxf6 =.

11. ... Nxe4

Or 11. ... Nxe4 12. dxe5 Rxe5  
13. f4 Re8 14. e5 ± Ne4?! 15.  
Bxe4 dxe4 16. Qxd8 Rxd8 17.  
Nd2! ±, with the idea of 18. Nxe4.

12. Bf4!

To force a trade of the g7-  
bishop in case Black takes on e5.

12. ... Nxe5

Or 12. ... Qf6 13. Qf3.

13. Bxe5 Bxe5 14. dxe5 Qg5

If 14. ... Rxe5, 15. f3+-.

15. Bxe4 dxe4 16. Ng3!



Diagram 135  
After 16. Ng3!

The dark squares are weak.  
White's knight will take advantage.

16. ... Rd8

Another way is 16. ... Bf5  
17. Nxe4 Bxe4 18. Rxe4 Rad8  
(18. ... Rxe5 19. f4+-) 19. Rd4 ±.

17. Qa4 Qxe5 18. Rxe4 Qd6 19.  
Rd4 Qe7 20. Rxd8+ Qxd8 21.  
Rd1 Qe7 22. Qd4

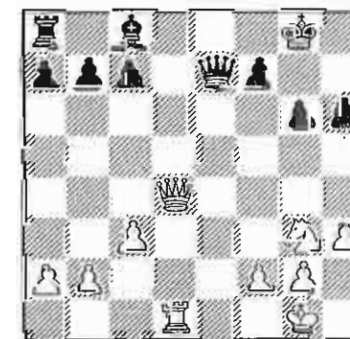


Diagram 136  
After 22. Qd4

Taking the a1-h8 diagonal.

22. ... Be6 23. Ne4 f5 24. Nc5 b6  
25. Nxe6 Qxe6 26. Qf4! Qf7 (26.  
... Qxa2 27. Rd7) 27. Qxh6.

With a decisive advantage.

Clearly, everyone who plays the Pirc Defense must pay close attention to the possibility of playing ... d6-d5 in the Ruy Lopez Pirc structure. If calculation proves that ... d6-d5 is correct, use it! But such opportunities occur rather spontaneously. When ... d6-d5 is really possible, we must consider it a fortunate tactical opportunity.

Now let's explore some more fundamental ideas. The first idea comes from material we have already studied.

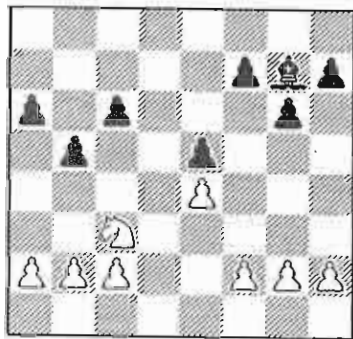


Diagram 137  
Structure favors Black due to his pawn on b5.

Discussing ... e7-e5 in Chapter 6, we learned that in the structure shown in Diagram 137 above, the position of the b-pawn on b5 favors Black.

**STRUCTURES LIKE THESE, WHERE BLACK HAS A PAWN ON B5, FAVOR BLACK.**

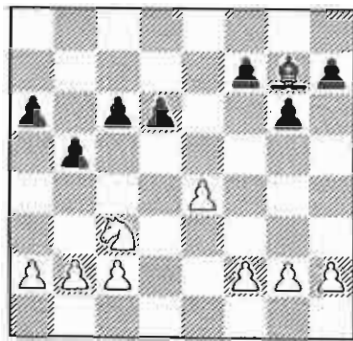


Diagram 138  
The structure of the Philidor Pirc here again favors Black due to the b5-pawn.

Similarly, as we learned from the game Weissman—Shirov, in the Philidor Pirc, Black should try to place his pawn on b5 (Diagram 138). This move threatens ... b5-b4, which undermines the protection of e4 and, in general, widens Black's queenside base.

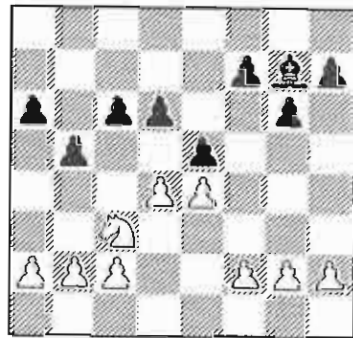


Diagram 139  
This structure is still transitional, but also better for Black.

Therefore, these transitional types of positions (Diagram 139) should also be beneficial for Black.

Indeed, Black should consider the structure in Diagram 139 his cue to transpose into a favorable game. Black is not afraid of d4xe5 because of ... d6xe5, which leads to Diagram 137. Black's recapturing on e5 with a piece (for instance, a d7-knight) leads to the structure in 138. Black is ready to play ... e5xd4 at the appropriate moment, transforming the game to a good Philidor (Diagram 139). It happens quite often that right after ... e5xd4, Black is able to expand on the queenside.

TOLNAI—GHINDA  
STARA ZAGORA, 1990



Diagram 140  
Black to move

13. ... exd4! 14. Bxd4 c5! 15. Bxf6 Nxf6 16. Qxd6 Qxd6 17. Rxd6 Nxe4 ♣

If White's pawn were not on a3, Black would have incorporated ... b5-b4.

The pawn skeleton of this game is basically the same as the structure in Diagram 139. In this

structure, however, there is one important nuance. Black's pawn is on c6—in contrast to the classical (non-Pirc) Ruy Lopez structure, where Black's pawn is on c7. Therefore Black should be more concerned about the advance d4-d5 (see Diagram 141).

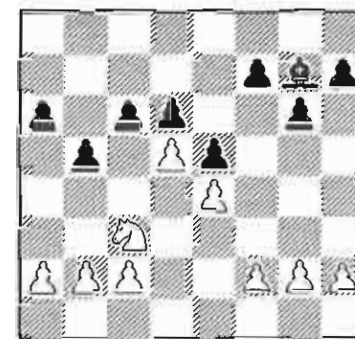


Diagram 141  
The evaluation of a game with this structure depends on other details.

White threatens to play d5xc6, choosing the d6-pawn as his next target, and ... c6-c5 isn't always good for Black positionally, or even possible. Nevertheless, d4-d5 is not usually dangerous for Black unless he's collected other negatives in the position. Even by continuing with d5xc6 and transforming the position into one of the popular Sicilian structures, White doesn't necessarily gain any advantage. Of course, Black's d6-pawn is weak, but the true evaluation of these positions depends on many other nuances.

With Black to move, White must anticipate ... c6xd5.

Because the c3-knight defends e4, the reply Nc3xd5 might not be possible in view of ... Nf6xe4.

Then White would be left with the less convenient e4xd5, which leads to a structure in which Black's kingside is quite solid. Moreover, White may not be able to hold his d5-outpost.

JANIGAVA—M. GUREVICH  
Lvov, 1987

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. g3 Bg7 5. Bg2 0-0 6. Nge2 e5 7. h3 c6 8. Be3 b5 9. 0-0 Bb7!? 10. a3 Nbd7 11. Qd2 Re8 12. Rfe1 a6 13. d5



Diagram 142  
After 13. d5

White's last move aims for dxc6. Black was threatening ... e5xd4 and ... c6-c5, using the idea which was successful in the games Weissman—Shirov and Tolnai—Ghinda.

13. ... cxd5 14. exd5

If White plays 14. Nxd5, Black has ... Nxd5 15. exd5 f5, with good counterplay.

14. ... Nb6 15. b3 Qc7

Again with counterplay.

16. Nc1?!

With the idea of Na2-b4-c6; if 16. g4 Rac8 ≠.

16. ... e4!



Diagram 143  
After 16. ... e4!

17. Bxb6 Qxb6 18. N1a2 Re5  
19. Rad1 Rae8 ≠.

As in the Philidor, White usually plays to prevent ... b7-b5, replying to ... c7-c6 or ... a7-a6 with a2-a4. Even under such circumstances, Black may still attempt ... b7-b5, but it is necessary to prepare the move by lengthy maneuvers—... c7-c6, ... b7-b6, ... a7-a6, ... Bb7 and then ... b6-b5, planning eventually to "jump" into a Philidor. It is very possible that Black can be forced to transform the game into a Philidor earlier, while he is laboriously linking this chain of moves.

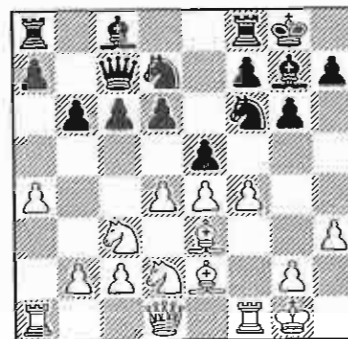


Diagram 144

Theoretical position after 11. f4

White is threatening 12. d4xe5 d6xe5 13. f5 ±.

11. ... exd4 12. Bxd4 Bb7 13. Bf2 a6! 14. Bf3 b5 15. axb5

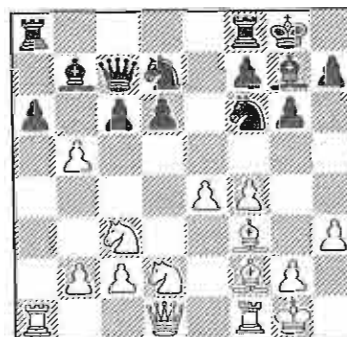


Diagram 145

How should Black recapture?

We suggest that the reader memorize the following idea: 15. ... cxb5! ≠. Black opens a diagonal for his b7-bishop and opens the c-file for his major pieces,

paying no attention to phantom weaknesses on d6 and d5. As we see, a2-a4 here did not do the job for White.

Here is yet another theoretical example of how Black should react to a2-a4.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. g3 Bg7 5. Bg2 0-0 6. Nge2 e5 7. h3 c6 8. a4!



Diagram 146  
After 8. a4!

Still, it is necessary to pay for pleasure, after all. Black now has some new possibilities, such as the knight's journey to b4: 8. ... a5 with the idea ... Nb8-a6-b4, or 8. ... Na6 immediately, planning ... Nb4 (see Chapter 19, 4. g3).

In summary, we can state that in the Ruy Lopez Pirc, Black not

**IN THE RUY LOPEZ PIRC, BLACK NOT ONLY HAS THE PLAN OF ADVANCING HIS PAWN TO B5, BUT HE CAN USE THE THREAT OF THE MOVE TO GAIN OTHER BENEFITS.**



only has the plan of advancing ... b7-b5, but he also can use the very threat of the move to gain other benefits.

### Increasing the pressure on d4

The following logical method is based on material we have examined. We remember that in the Ruy Lopez Pirc neither d4xe5 nor d4-d5 is dangerous for Black. But how does Black press his opponent's position so that White will be forced to decide the destiny of his d4-pawn? The main strategy at Black's disposal is to increase the pressure on d4. Actually, this plan begins with the move ... e7-e5.

In contrast to the Philidor structure, Black, in the Ruy Lopez Pirc, can pressure White's center pawns *without* giving up his e5-outpost. After all, keeping this outpost will maintain the central balance.

Let's examine an important theoretical line.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. g3 Bg7 5. Bg2 0-0 6. Nge2 e5

**IN THE RUY LOPEZ PIRC, BLACK CAN PRESSURE WHITE'S CENTER WITHOUT GIVING UP HIS E5-OUTPOST.**

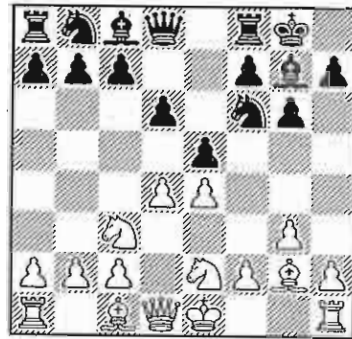


Diagram 147  
After 6... e5

Here White should always play 7. h2-h3! instead of 7. 0-0? because the latter move allows 7... Nc6! (with the threat of 8... e5xd4 9. Nxd4 Nxe4! 10. Nxc6 Nxc3), leading to significant pressure on the d4-outpost. White then has to adjust his plans and play either the tame 8. d4-d5 or the strategically premature 8. d4xe5, leading to equality. The try 8. Be3 is refuted by 8... Ng4!. Now we understand why 7. h2-h3! is necessary to prevent White's initiative from dissolving early in the game!

Let's look at a position in which White hasn't fianchettoed.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Nf3 Bg7 5. Be2 0-0 6. 0-0 Bg4

Applying pressure to d4 by threatening to remove the defender on f3.

7. Be3 Nc6!

Yet another Black piece focuses on d4.

### 8. Qd2 e5

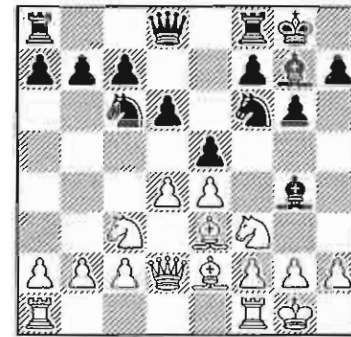


Diagram 148  
After 8... e5

The last point of Black's plan, forcing White to play either 9. d5 or 9. dxe5.

White's position is like a patient ill with a bad appendix—d4. The invalid lies "like a patient etherized upon a table," flanked by two surgeons, the knight on c6 and the pawn on e5, and their hospital chaplain on g4. Behind their backs stands the x-ray technician, the bishop on g7, whose specialty can be clearly felt in the line 9. Rad1? Bxf3 10. Bxf3 exd4 11. Bxd4 Nxe4! 12. Bxe4 Nxd4 ♣.

Here's the "twin" position, illustrating the importance of this "x-ray technician" on g7,

who renders d4-d5 profitless for White.

LENGYEL—M. GUREVICH  
BUDAPEST, 1987

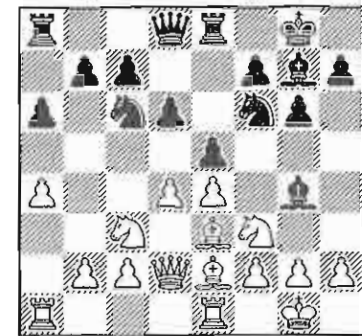


Diagram 149  
White to move

There's a new member of the hospital staff—the rook on e8. Not only is d4 threatened, but e4 may also be in danger after ... e5xd4. This threat creates a crisis in the center, forcing White to play d4xe5 or d4-d5. Meanwhile, the rook on e1 does not neutralize the influence of the e8-rook because the e-file is overloaded with White pieces.

11. d5 (11. dxe5=) 11... Bxf3  
12. Bxf3 (12. dxc6 Nxe4+) 12... Nd4!  
13. Bxd4 (13. Bd1 c6!)  
13... exd4 14. Na2 (14. Qxd4 Nxe4)  
14... Nd7 15. c3 Nc5 16. Qd1 dxc3 17. Nxc3

**PRESSURE ON THE D4- OR E4-PAWN CAN CREATE A CRISIS IN THE CENTER, FORCING WHITE TO PLAY D4XE5 OR D4-D5.**



Diagram 150  
After 17. Nxc3

17. ... Bxc3! 18. bxc3 a5±, fixing the weakness on a4.

Later we'll look more closely at the idea of the somewhat startling 17. ... Bxc3!, giving up Black's pride and joy, his dark-square "Indian" bishop. For now, let's mark the position of the rook on e8, and note that Black uses it to help persuade White to play d4-d5 or d4xe5.

In the Ruy Lopez Pirc, Black's primary technique during the opening stages of the game is to apply systematic pressure on one or both of White's central pawns. Black must keep White busy.

### White's counter-measures in the Ruy Lopez Pirc

Given time, White has quite a few good methods of counter-acting his opponent's plans. Let's take a look at some of the key ideas intended to flummox Black.

### White's h3 & c3

Since ... Bg4 ties down the knight on f3, and ... Ng4 harasses the bishop on e3—and since both White's knight and bishop are key defenders of d4—the prophylactic move h2-h3 is useful. Additionally, the integrity of White's pawn center is even more secure when the c3-knight is replaced by a pawn. Then in reply to ... e5xd4, White has c3xd4.

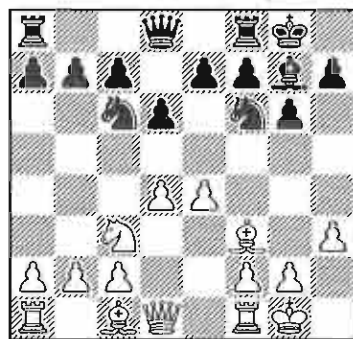


Diagram 151  
After 8. Bxf3 Nc6

Here White has played 7. h3, "putting the question" to Black's bishop on g4, and recaptured on f3 with his bishop. White understands that his opponent is working hard to weaken the d4-outpost (with ... Bg7, ... Nc6, ... Bg4 and ... Bxf3), and that Black will follow up with ... e7-e5. The continuation 9. Be3 e5 means that White gives up his fight to keep a pawn on d4, because he must then play either 10. d5 or 10. dxe5. White doesn't even have a chance to transfer the

game to the Philidor Pirc with 10. Ne2 (with the idea of 10. ... exd4 11. Nxd4), in view of 10. ... d5!.

Therefore, instead of 9. Be3, White plays 9. Ne2! e5 10. c3, preserving the central tension.

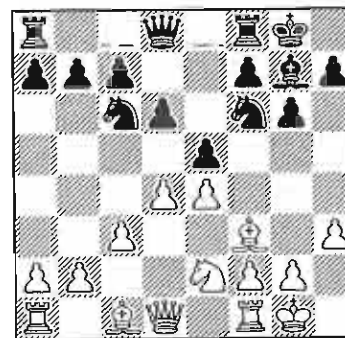


Diagram 152  
After 9. Ne2 and 10. c3

Black must strive hard to displace the d4-pawn. He doesn't now have the radical 10. ... d5 in view of 11. exd5 Nxd5 12. dxe5±. And in case of 10. ... Re8, White switches plans, conceding the fight for d4 but trading it for other significant positional advantages. Thus, after 11. d5 Ne7, White plays 12. c4!. In this King's Indian type of position, White's pawn has reached its Promised Land, c4, where it cements White's grip on the center. The position has "suddenly" become better for White. In particular, Black's rook on e8 is misplaced in this structure, because it's needed on f8 to support the typical ... f7-f5 advance.

Let's return to Diagram 151. White has another line: 9. Nb5 e5 10. c3. White achieves the same goal in the center as he did with 9. Ne2, bolstering his pawn on d4 with its colleague.

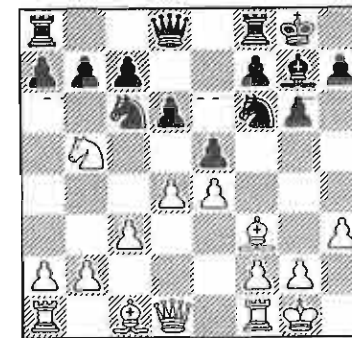


Diagram 153  
After 9. Nb5 and 10. c3

Yet another similar idea is present in the system 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Bd3 e5 4. c3. Here White plays c2-c3 immediately, hoping for the following: 4. ... g6 5. Nf3 Bg7 6. 0-0 0-0 7. h3 Nc6 8. Re1, and the e4-d4 pawn-block is unapproachable. However, an experienced Pirc player can break up such a plan by playing 4. ... d5!. (See Part III, Chapter 23: 3. Bd3.)

Here's an example from a well known game.

**IN THE RUY LOPEZ  
PIRC, BLACK APPLIES  
PRESSURE ON ONE OR  
BOTH OF WHITE'S  
CENTER PAWNS.**

KARPOV—TIMMAN  
MONTREAL, 1979

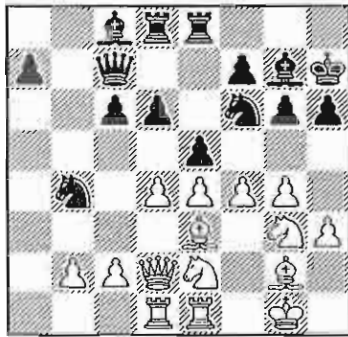


Diagram 154  
After 19. Nc3-e2!

With his last move, 19. Nc3-e2!, White not only attacks the knight on b4, but threatens to play 20. c3, making his center virtually impregnable. Therefore, Black decides to continue with 19. ... exd4 20. Nxd4, transposing the game to a Philidor Pirc. But the change of structure is not good in this particular case, because White's pawn on e4 is more than adequately defended. Strictly speaking, 19. ... e5xd4 is not a voluntary shift to the Philidor by Black, but a capitulation in the center.

### White's f2-f4

As we see from Karpov-Timman, White has yet another way of pressing Black's position in the Ruy Lopez Pirc—f2-f4. This thrust creates yet a new crisis in the center.

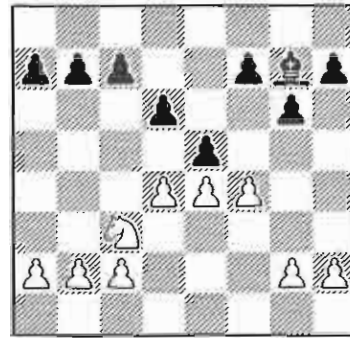


Diagram 155  
Structure after f2-f4

Here White has, besides the threat to the e5-pawn, the idea to connect the previously harmless continuation d4xe5 ... d6xe5 with the pawn advance f4-f5.

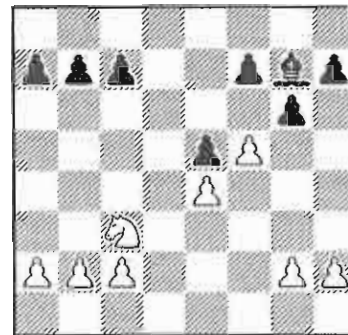


Diagram 156  
Structure after f4-f5

In some circumstances, f4-f5 would not only threaten to shut out the g7-bishop, but would menace the Black king with a pawn storm by g2-g4, h2-h4, g4-g5 and so on. The capture ... g6xf5 creates, after e4xf5, a White strongpoint on e4, which he can occupy with his knight.

### The importance of Black activity

These additional positional opportunities for White, such as replacing the c3-knight with a pawn, or pushing f2-f4, show that in the Ruy Lopez Pirc Black can't take unlimited time to develop his plans. If he isn't active, White will press home an advantage.

Black's primary strategies in the Ruy Lopez Pirc structure are

clear and easy to keep in mind:

#### Black's Strategies in the Ruy Lopez Structure

1. Look for a chance to play ... d6-d5;
2. Try to advance the b-pawn to b5;
3. Pressure d4 (and sometimes e4 as well) to force White to clarify the center with d4-d5 or d4xe5.

#### Summary:

When Black plays ... e7-e5 and White stands pat with his pawn on d4, Black should not be in a hurry to capture the pawn immediately. When Black does take the d4-pawn, he transposes into what we call the Philidor Pirc—similar to the variation of the Philidor Bent Larsen played in which he fianchettoed his dark-square bishop. Before capturing, Black can maintain a strongpoint defense on e5, a structure we call the Ruy Lopez Pirc.

These two structures are of approximately equal value. Both are fundamentally different from the Dragon Pirc that can come about after ... c7-c5. Although we would opt for the Dragon Pirc whenever possible, Black can't always get that variation.

The best approach is to know the ideas of both the Ruy Lopez and Philidor Pirc, and transpose from the Ruy to the Philidor at the most advantageous moment. The transposition is made with the key move ... exd4, so once Black enters the Philidor, he can't go back to the Ruy.

Once in the Philidor Pirc, Black must play actively, and must not start a wholesale exchange of minor pieces, because Black could be left with a bad position where his inferior kingside pawn structure can be exploited by a White knight. In the Philidor, Black should be alert for a good opportunity to trade off his light-square bishop, his problem piece. Additionally, achieving or threatening ... d6-d5 can be an important resource in the Philidor Pirc. Another key idea in this variation is for Black to tie up White's pieces by attacking the pawn on e4, while in the Ruy, its neighbor on d4 is the inviting target. Playing ... b7-b5 is usually good for Black in both the Philidor Pirc and Ruy Lopez Pirc structures.

## The Philidor & Ruy Lopez Pircs

# Memory Markers!



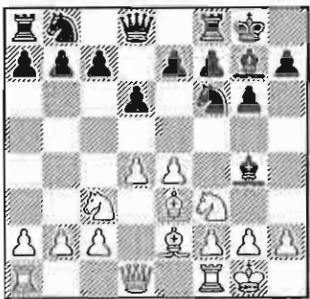
MARKER 1

Diagram 157  
Black to move



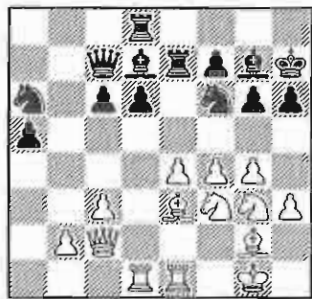
MARKER 2

Diagram 158  
Black to move



MARKER 3

Diagram 159  
Black to move



MARKER 4

Diagram 160  
White to move



MARKER 5

Diagram 161  
White to move



MARKER 6

Diagram 162  
Black to move

## The Philidor & Ruy Lopez Pircs

# Solutions to Memory Markers!

- No. 1 1. ... **exd4!**, followed by queenside expansion and a better game. (See page 99.)
- No. 2 1. ... **cxb5!** (See page 101.)
- No. 3 1. ... **Nc6!**, the move that normally teams with ... Bg4 and ... e7-e5 to pressure d4. (See page 102.)
- No. 4 1. **Bf2!**, strengthening e4. (See page 89.)
- No. 5 1. **Bg5!**, in order to win a tempo after 1. ... h6 2. Be3 Nb4 3. Qd2. (See page 94.)
- No. 6 1. ... **Nc6!**, forcing White to move or exchange the d4-pawn. (See page 102.)



## Chapter 8: The Ruy & Philidor Pirc as a System

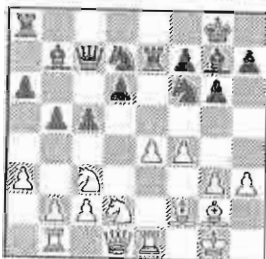
### Some Important Points to Look For

When Black plays ... e7-e5, and White refuses to move his d-pawn, Black must know how to use both the Ruy Lopez and the Philidor Pirc as a system. This chapter shows you how.



- ◆ White failed to play the preventive a2-a4, so Black gains queenside space with 7... b5!

See Diagram 163



- ◆ Black plays 17... Rae8. White's e-pawn is weak, while Black's d6-pawn is not. Black is better.

See Diagram 166.



- ◆ After White's 14. g4!, he is prepared for kingside actions.

See Diagram 175.



- ◆ Black's last move, 13... h6, makes the g4-g5 thrust costly for White.

See Diagram 181.

## Chapter 8

### The Ruy & Philidor Pirc as a System

More on ... e7-e5, when White leaves his pawn on d4

**B**lack must at times rely on ... e7-e5. When he does, and White refuses to capitulate by moving his d4-pawn, the resulting positions are rich, fascinating and instructive. To prevail, Black needs to understand both the Ruy Lopez and Philidor Pirc structures—and he must know how to combine them as a complete defensive system.

#### Black as the watchful opportunist

It's impossible to overemphasize the fact that the Philidor and Ruy Lopez Pirc structures are not preconceived choices but options available in Black's overall plan. Black must ever be a watchful opportunist, responding to White's moves with the better system. Of course, when playing ... e5xd4 and adopting the Philidor structure, Black must understand that he's not only crossed the Rubicon but burned his barges behind him. He can never go home again to the Ruy Lopez Pirc. In both formations,

however, the queenside advance ... b7-b5 is beneficial.

But how *long* to wait before making a final decision on structures and *what* to move while waiting are among Black's most complex decisions in the Pirc. The pressure on Black to commit increases dramatically with time, because his opponent has a space advantage in both the Philidor and Ruy Lopez structures. And it is at times very difficult to tell when Black's position is about to turn bad. Often the line between vital and lifeless is nearly invisible.

With all this background painted in, we can return to some of our introductory examples of Black's successes to understand them better.

The game Weissman-Shirov (Moscow, 1991), from page 88, is a straightforward example to start with.

WEISSMAN—SHIROV  
MOSCOW, 1991

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. g3  
Bg7 5. Bg2 c6 6. Nge2 e5

This position was reached by  
transposition after 1. g3.

7. h3

White plays his prophylactic  
moves in the wrong sequence.  
Here 7. a4 is required.

7. ... b5!



Diagram 163  
After 7. ... b5!

The pluses of this move are  
pretty obvious. Black shouldn't  
worry about losing the right to  
castle—he can look forward to the  
endgame with optimism.

8. a3

An unnecessary move, since  
... b5-b4 was not yet a threat, in  
view of 8. 0-0 b4 9. dxe5 dxe5  
10. Qxd8+ Kxd8 11. Na4, with  
the idea Na4-c5. Here the ending  
favors White.

8. ... Bb7 9. Be3 Nbd7 10. f4  
exd4!

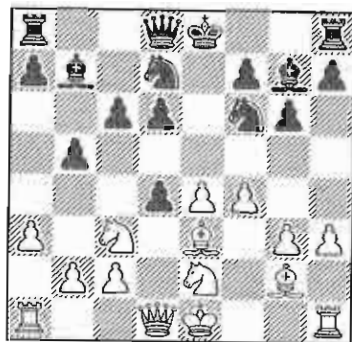


Diagram 164  
After 10. ... exd4!

Excellent judgment. Black  
transposes the game to the  
Philidor Pirc at a time when his  
forces on the queenside are  
already active.

11. Nxd4

Perhaps White should try 11.  
Bxd4!?

11. ... 0-0 12. 0-0 Re8 13. Re1  
a6!

Black plays precisely. He  
shores up b5 to allow the ... c6-  
c5 counterpunch to the center.

14. Nb3

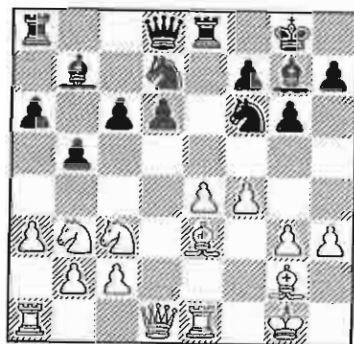


Diagram 165  
After 14. Nb3

Black threatens ... c6-c5. It  
is difficult to find a satisfactory  
plan to defend White's center.

14. ... Qc7 15. Bf2 c5! 16. Nd2

Passive, but after 16. Qd2 c4  
17. Nd4 Nc5, White's knight  
can't go to d2 to protect e4.

16. ... Re7 17. Rb1

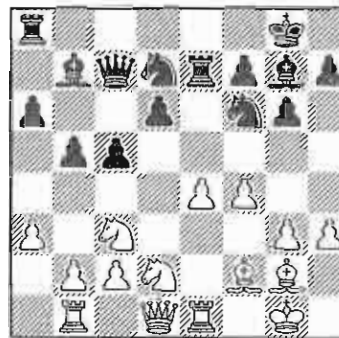


Diagram 166  
After 17. Rb1

White prepares for Nd5,  
should his situation get even  
worse.

17. ... Rae8 18. Kh2

We have already seen and  
evaluated this position on page  
88. The remaining play is clear.  
White will be forced to play Nd5  
under unfavorable circum-  
stances, because after ... Nxd5  
e4xd5, the e-file is open for the  
Black rooks, and the a1-h8 diag-  
onal is open for Black's fianchet-  
toed bishop. As a result, White  
will have too many weaknesses,  
and his game eventually collapses.

18. ... b4 19. Nd5 Nxd5 20. exd5

Rxe1 21. Bxe1 Nb6 22. Nf1 a5  
23. axb4 cxb4 24. c3 Qc5



Diagram 167  
After 24. ... Qc5

25. cxb4 axb4 26. Rc1 Qb5 27.  
Rc2 b3 28. Rd2 Na4 29. Rd3  
Nxb2 30. Rxb3 Nxd1 31. Rxb5  
Ba6 32. Rb1 Rxe1 0-1

White's fatal mistake is clear.  
He simply ignored Black's count-  
er play on the queenside, permit-  
ting ... b7-b5, which could have  
been prevented by a2-a4. As a  
result, White's center was ruined.  
In contrast, Black's play fulfilled  
all the requirements of the Ruy  
Lopez Pirc, including transpos-  
ing into the Philidor with 10. ...  
exd4 at just the right moment.

The following game is much  
more complicated.

IN THE PHILIDOR  
PIRC, THE LINE  
BETWEEN VITAL AND  
LIFELESS CAN BE  
NEARLY INVISIBLE.

**KARPOV—TIMMAN  
MONTREAL, 1979**

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. g3  
Bg7 5. Bg2 0-0 6. Nge2 e5 7. 0-0

White deserves reproach for this one move only, because Black could now play 7. ... Nc6!, equalizing. Then on 8. Be3, Black has 8. ... Ng4; thus White would be forced to play 8. dxe5 dxe5=. So White should instead play 7. h3!

However, in the late 70s, the theory of the 4. g3 variation was in its infancy.

7. ... Na6?!

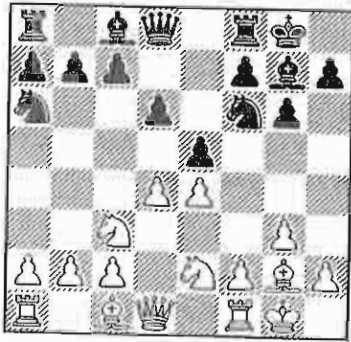


Diagram 168  
After 7. ... Na6?!

Timman used a maneuver that later became one of the most

**YOU SHOULD BE WELL  
AWARE THAT ... NA6 &  
... B7-B5 ARE PIECES OF  
TWO DIFFERENT  
STRATEGIES.**

popular sequences against the 4. g3 variation (Chapter 19). Too bad he combined it with ideas that contradict the requirements of the position! The move 7. ... Na6 may be playable if the knight is ready to continue traveling. Its natural home seems to be c5—after the preliminary exchange on d4. A likely line is: 8. h3 exd4 9. Nxd4 Nc5 10. Re1 Re8.



Diagram 169  
Analysis after 10. ... Re8

Now both Black knights pressure e4, so White should trade this annoying piece: 11. Nb3 Nxb3 12. axb3 Bd7 13. Be3 Qc8 14. Kh2 Bc6 15. Bd4.



Diagram 170  
Analysis after 15. Bd4

White is somewhat better off (Aseev—M. Gurevich, 1983).

Let's refresh our memory

about why White has an edge in these types of positions—his e4-pawn can be securely overprotected (he continues this theme with Qd3). In Aseev—M. Gurevich, Black played accurately, he never let the evaluation of position get worse than  $\pm$ , and finally he secured a draw.

Nevertheless, the developing theory of the Pirc later turned up a more effective base for Black's a6-knight—b4. Of course, a2-a3 must be precluded. Ensnconcing the Black knight on b4 can be achieved by the following sequence: 7. ... c6 8. a4 (to stop ... b7-b5), and only now 8. ... Na6 (or 8. ... a5 and 9. ... Na6), after b4 has been compromised. We'll take a look at all this in the next game.



Diagram 171  
Analysis after 7. ... c6 & 8. ... Na6

It's easy to be glib about this line nowadays, but 20 years ago Timman understandably had no idea that such possibilities existed. Back to Diagram 168 of Karpov—Timman.

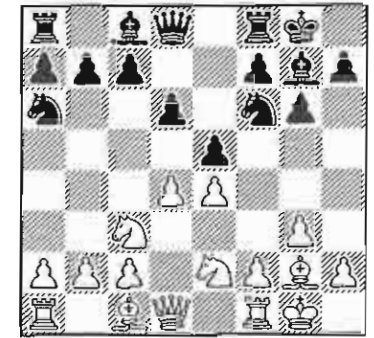


Diagram 172  
After 7. ... Na6?!

8. Re1 c6 9. h3!!

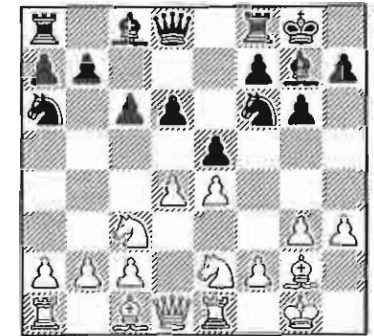


Diagram 173  
After 9. h3!!

Black missed the opportunity to play 7. ... Nc6! (as well as another playable opportunity 7. ... c6, prompting 8. a4). He also missed 8. ... exd4, as in the game Aseev—M. Gurevich. Instead, Timman solved the problem of his development in a different way. He played 8. ... c7-c6, put his queen on c7 and his bishop onto d7, and connected his rooks on d8 and e8. While this structure is built up, Timman held onto the important e5-outpost. By devel-

oping his knight on a6, he kept d7 for his bishop.

Then-World-Champion Karpov had no idea about the complicated plans possible after 9. a4 exd4 10. Nxd4 Nb4. Such ideas surfaced only many years later. But Karpov knew he shouldn't weaken his b4-square.

### **Karpov, connoisseur, knows oysters Rockefeller from crème brûlée**

But why could the world champ ignore the possibility of the often recommended 9. ... b5 advance? Why do we assign two exclamation marks to his 9. h3 move? As a profound strategist, Karpov didn't need reams of theoretical analysis to realize that ... b7-b5 would be incompatible with a Black knight on a6. After all, the main idea of ... b7-b5 is to disturb White's knight on c3. But if White counters by playing a2-a3, what's next for Black? As we saw in Weissman—Shirov, Black's pawn on a6 permits him the logical continuation ... c7-c5—after which a bishop looms on b7 and Black threatens ... b5-b4, undermining e4.

A knight on a6 doesn't protect b5 as an a6-pawn would do, so ... c7-c5 is impossible. The illusory "attack" on the c3-knight via ... b5-b4, a3xb4 Nxb4 brings Black nothing but a bad pawn structure.

You can see that ... Na6 and ... b7-b5 are pieces of two different strategies. From the a6-square, Black's knight should go to b4 or c5, after the game transposes to a Philidor Pirc (as in Aseev—Gurevich). But in that plan, Black shouldn't move the c7-pawn from its initial position. In the current game, Black has already played ... c7-c6. So the b5-pawn needs the support of a pawn on a6, but his knight usurps the square. Some dishes, like oysters Rockefeller and crème brûlée, may be tasty by themselves, but are very unappetizing when presented on the same plate!

### **Desperately seeking counterplay**

So in this game, playing ... b7-b5 presents Black with a problem. And transposing his game to a Philidor structure is also unappealing because, with his knight on a6 and pawn on c6, he has no chance to create standard counterplay. On the other hand, ... d6-d5 is unrealistic. And pushing his queenside pawns doesn't make any sense.

It's true, Black can try to pressure e4, but does he have enough forces available to make this a successful strategy? As an answer to that key question, White is going to overprotect his center convincingly, in what

Nimzovich called the "apotheosis of overprotection."

The second plan for Black is to stay in the Ruy Lopez structure for the long term. Yet this idea isn't promising either. White can undermine Black's strategy by playing f2-f4. The chances of Black's getting in ... d6-d5 are about the same as hitting the lottery without buying a ticket. Black's pawn on b5 achieves nothing good, and Black has long ago missed the opportunity to attack d4 with the idea of forcing his opponent to play either d4-d5 or d4xe5. But Black can't just put himself on hold and wait forever, because his opponent will continue to gain space until he masses a winning breakthrough.

Black's fate is already sealed. An experienced Pirc player can read this position like a death sentence. After crouching in the Ruy Lopez structure, Black will finally have to transpose the game into an unfavorable Philidor Pirc. Moreover, a desperate ... b5-b4 will make things even worse. Meanwhile, Karpov will strengthen his e4/d4 duo and act on the wings, creating in this game an exceptional example of positional play.

**9. ... Re8 10. Bg5**



Diagram 174  
After 10. Bg5

This move provokes ... h7-h6, allowing White to gain a tempo when he plays Qd2.

**10. ... h6 11. Be3 Qc7**

Or 11. ... exd4 12. Bxd4! Nc5 13. e5+-.

**12. Qd2 Kh7 13. Rad1 Bd7 14. g4!**



Diagram 175  
After 14. g4!

**14. ... Rad8 15. Ng3 Bc8 16. f4 b5**

Black is gasping for breath. He desperately needs fresh air.

**17. a3 b4**



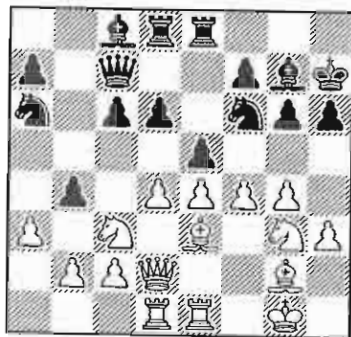


Diagram 176  
After 17. ... b4

Of course, it's hopeless anyway, but 17. ... Nb8 would have been too time-consuming, not to mention that after 18. Qf2, White's control over the g1-a7 diagonal is dangerous.

18. axb4 Nxb4 19. Nce2! (The d4-outpost is again bolstered!) 19. ... exd4 20. Nxd4 a5 21. c3 Na6 22. Qc2! (Now e4 gets attention!) 22. ... Bd7 23. Nf3! Re7 24. Bf2!.

The e4-outpost is again reinforced; each White move is a model.

24. ... Be8 25. Qd3 Qb7

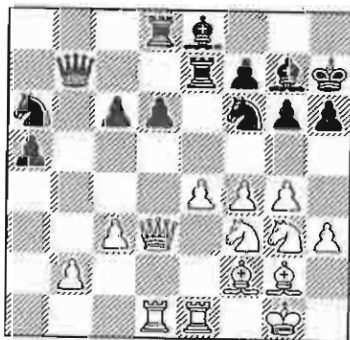


Diagram 177  
After 25. ... Qb7

26. Ra1! Nc7 27. Rxa5 Rdd7 28. b4 Ne6 29. Be3! c5 30. f5 Nd8 31. b5 Kh8 32. Bf2 Qc7 33. Ra4 Qb8 34. c4

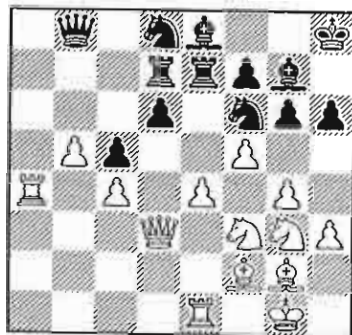


Diagram 178  
After 34. c4

34. ... Ra7 35. Rxa7 Rxa7 36. e5 dxe5 37. Nxe5 Ra2 38. Bxc5, Black resigns.

**Putting it all together**

The following game is a model of logic and understanding—until Black spoils the outcome with an irrational retreat on move 20. Notwithstanding this error, the game bears playing and replaying.

ASEEV—ZAKHAREVICH  
PETERSBURG, 1995

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. g3 Bg7 5. Bg2 0-0 6. Nge2 e5 7. h3 c6 8. a4 Na6

BLACK HAS PROVOKED  
THE WEAKENING OF B4,  
SO HIS KNIGHT MAKES  
A BEE-LINE

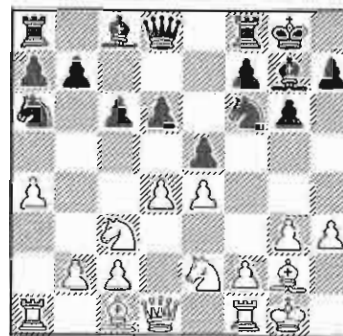


Diagram 179  
After 8. ... Na6

Black has provoked the weakening of b4, so his knight makes a bee-line.

9. 0-0 exd4 10. Nxd4 Nb4

Now ... d6-d5 becomes a possibility.

11. a5!

An attempt to disturb the b4-knight with Ra4. At the same time, 11. a5 guards against ... d6-d5 in view of 11. ... d5 12. exd5 Nfxd5 13. Nxd5 Nxd5 14. a6±.

11. ... Re8 12. f4



Diagram 180  
After 12. f4

White finds a simple enough

solution to ... d6-d5—he is going to meet Black's thrust with e4-e5. However, it's doubtful that White can get an edge after 12. ... d5 13. e5 Nd7 14. Nce2 Nf8, defending e6 and preparing ... f7-f6 (not immediately 14. ... f6 15. e6 Nf8 16. c3 Na6 17. f5!, where White has an attack). By the way, if, instead of 12. f4, White plays 12. Ra4, then 12. ... c5! 13. Ndb5 d5! 14. exd5 Bf5 15. Na3 Bd7. This line, along with other opportunities for both sides, is examined in Chapter 19: 4. g3.

The line Black chooses is also playable. By giving up his plan to play ... d6-d5 and having no chance to play ... b5, Black focuses on the third scheme in the Philidor Pirc, pressuring the e4-pawn. In order to do this, Black is going to play ... c6-c5 and transfer his bishop to c6. The cost of this action is that the d6-pawn and d5-square become weak. On the other hand, White's rook is forced to defend the a5-pawn and White's queen can't stray far from his c2-pawn.

12. ... a6

The first step toward ... c6-c5. Black blocks the a5-pawn.

13. g4

The beginning of a standard plan. White has in mind the maneuver Nd4-e2-g3 and then g4-g5.

13. ... h6



Diagram 181  
After 13. ... h6

This solution is not typical for the Pirc Defense, but it's correct here. Now White would pay a high toll after g4-g5, ... h6xg5, f4xg5, because the e4-pawn becomes isolated and the e5-outpost is in Black's possession.

14. Nde2 c5 15. Be3 Qc7 16. Qd2 Bd7 17. Bf2 Bc6 18. Ng3 Rad8

On the immediate 18. ... Re7, 19. Rfd1 is strong.

19. Rfe1

A critical moment. The balance between attack and defense of e4, which had been even at 3 to 3, now shifts in White's favor.

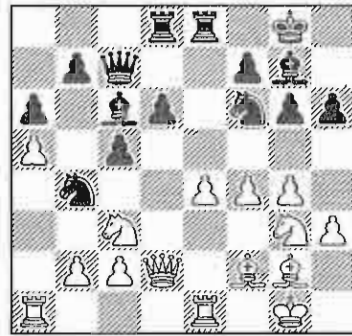


Diagram 182  
After 19. Rfe1

19. ... Rd7!

To restore the balance with 20. ... Rde7. This position is an excellent illustration of Nimzovich's doctrine of overprotecting the important outposts. For a moment, White's pieces become dynamic, and White can continue with the dangerous 20. Na4. If Black decides just to "drift": 20. ... Rde7 21. c3 Bxa4 22. Rxa4 (22. cxb4 Bb5) 22. ... Nc6 23. b4, then White has a significant advantage because his e4-pawn is overprotected. Fortunately, Black has some tactical tricks: 20. ... Qxa5! 21. Nxc5 dxc5 22. Qxd7 Nxd7 23. Rxa5 b6!



Diagram 183  
Analysis after 23. ... b6!

**BLACK MAY PRESSURE e4, BUT DOES HE HAVE ENOUGH FORCES AVAILABLE TO MAKE THIS A SUCCESSFUL STRATEGY?**

After the rook's retreat, Black has a deadly fork, ... Nxc2. Even after the more dangerous 21. c3 Bxa4 22. cxb4 Qb5, White has nothing decisive—for instance, 23. Re3 c4 24. Bf1 (with the idea b2-b3) 24. ... d5!?



Diagram 184  
Analysis after 24. ... d5!?

This outcome is no miracle. Black played according to the requirements of the position and thus did not deserve punishment.

We should note that 19. ... d5, instead of 19. ... Rd7!, is insufficient. For example, even though Black looks prepared, White plays 20. e5 Nd7 21. h4, and his initiative grows in light of the serious threats h4-h5 or g4-g5. Now if Black continues with 21. ... d4, he gives up the important e4-outpost.

**BLACK PLAYED ACCORDING TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE POSITION AND THUS DID NOT DESERVE PUNISHMENT.**



Diagram 185  
Analysis after 21. ... d4

White has a big advantage after 22. Nce4.

Let's go back to the game Aseev—Zakharevich after 19. ... Rd7!.

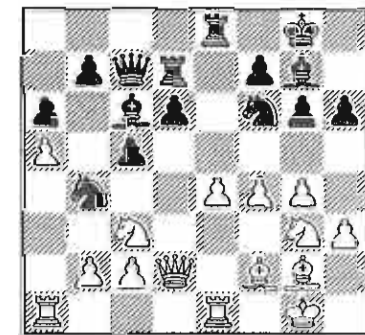


Diagram 186  
After 19. ... Rd7!

After 19. ... Rd7, White, concerned about the menacing 20. ... Rde7, played 20. g5, planning for his knight to invade d5. At this moment, Black illogically pulled back.

20. ... Nh7? 21. Nd5 Nxd5 22. exd5 Rxe1+ 23. Rxe1 Bb5 24. Re8+ Bf8

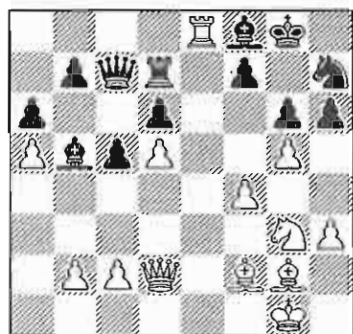


Diagram 187  
After 24. ... Bf8

25. c4!. White won on move 40.

Instead of 20. ... Nh7, Black had the more consistent 20. ... hxg5! 21. fxg5 Nh7.

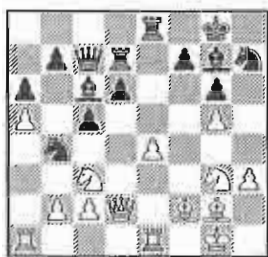


Diagram 188  
Analysis after 21. ... Nh7

ANALYSIS

In this position, White could go for equality with 22. Nd5 Qd8 23. h4 Nxd5 24. exd5.



Diagram 189  
Analysis after 24. exd5

ANALYSIS

24. ... Bb5 25. Rxe8+ Qxe8 26. Re1 Re7=. This line is the most natural outcome of the battle, since both opponents played very well and successfully solved their opening problems.

In the previous game, Black borrowed nearly the whole library of Philidor and Ruy structures. His first stop was 6. ... e5. "Let's go to the video tape."

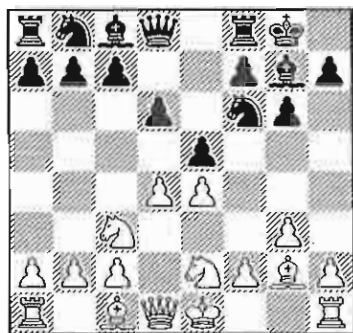


Diagram 190  
After 6. ... e5

Now White plays 7. h3!, ready to meet the threatened 7. ... Nc6! (Black's favorite tool in the Ruy Lopez Pirc) with 8. Be3.

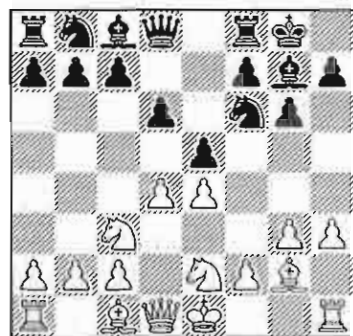


Diagram 191  
After 7. h3!

7. ... c6

Threatens ... b7-b5, and now White discourages it.

8. a4!

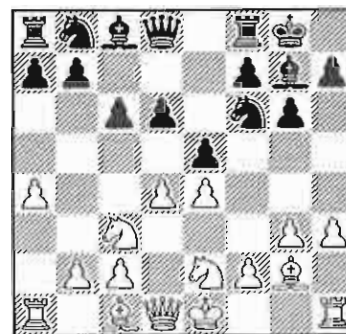


Diagram 192  
After 8. a4!

8. ... Na6 9. 0-0 exd4

Transposing to the Philidor Pirc. Black plans to place his knight on b4 and play ... d6-d5.

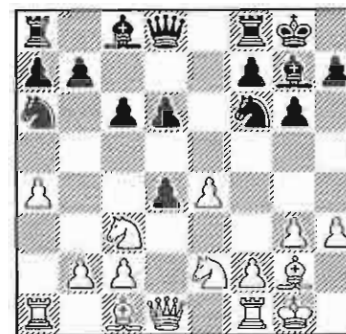


Diagram 193  
After 9. ... exd4

10. Nxd4 Nb4 11. a5

White discourages ... d6-d5.

11. ... Re8 12. f4 a6!

Circumstances have changed,

and Black has adapted his strategy—he prepares to create additional pressure on e4.



Diagram 194  
After 12. ... a6

13. g4! h6!

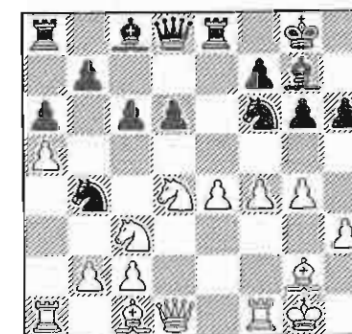


Diagram 195  
After 13. ... h6!

Both sides fight for an edge, trying to disturb the balance of e4 attackers and defenders. White continues with Ng3, Be3-f2 and Re1. Black plays ... Bd7-c6.

14. Nde2 c5 15. Be3 Qc7 16. Qd2 Bd7 17. Bf2 Bc6 18. Ng3 Rad8 19. Rfe1 Rd7!

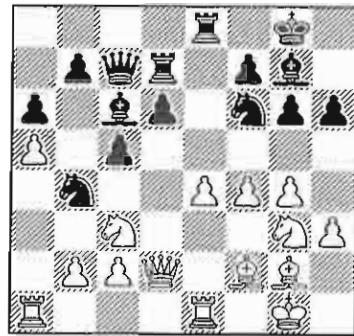


Diagram 196  
After 19... Rd7!

Black mobilizes his last reserves.

20. g5 hxg5

This last is what Black *should* have played.

21. fxg5 Nh7

White drives the knight away.

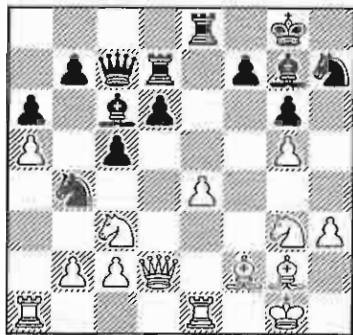


Diagram 197  
After 21... Nh7

**IN ASEEV—ZAKHAREVICH, BLACK METHODICALLY APPLIED THE APPROPRIATE PIRC STRATEGIES, AND CHANGED HIS APPROACH AS DICTATED BY CIRCUMSTANCES.**

22. Nd5 Qd8 23. h4 Nxd5 24. exd5 Bb5

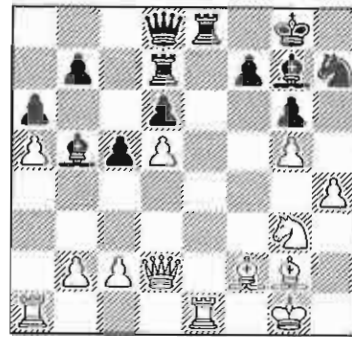


Diagram 198  
After 24... Bb5

The game is level.

Besides instructive moves and maneuvers, this game is valuable for its overall approach—Black methodically applied the Pirc strategies, and he changed an approach only when justified by White's reaction. In contrast to this game, in Karpov—Timman Black simply mixed up two contradictory plans (first ... Na6, then ... c7-c6 and ... b7-b5), with catastrophic results.

### Another incongruous dish

The following game is another strong warning to Black

against mixing incongruous plans.

KARPOV—NUNN  
TILBURG, 1982

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Nf3 Bg7 5. Be2 0-0 6. 0-0 Bg4 7. Be3 Nbd7?!



Diagram 199  
After 7... Nbd7?!

At this moment, Black makes a bad turn. Developing his bishop to ... g4 and trading it is advisable only if Black combines such a plan with an attack on d4 by ... Nc6, and ... e5. Here, why doesn't Black develop his knight to c6?

8. h3 Bxf3 9. Bxf3 e5 10. g3

There is no knight on c6, so Black lacks the resources for creating sufficient pressure on d4. Now White has no problems defending the d4-pawn, so he can maneuver freely.

10. ... c6 11. Bg2!

We saw the same situation in Karpov—Timman. Again, White simply ignores Black's "threat" of ... b7-b5. The reason—after

... b7-b5 is played, transposing the game to a Philidor Pirc doesn't look good because Black's light-square bishop is gone. Remember that the system of counterplay connected with ... b7-b5 requires ... a7-a6, ... c7-c6, ... b7 (b6)-b5, ... Bb7, ... c6-c5.

After that, Black's light-square bishop can make life uneasy for White's e-pawn. It is true that in the Philidor structure, this bishop is not that valuable a piece, but it *is* needed for the ... b7-b5 plan to succeed. Besides, in the Philidor Pirc, it is good for Black to trade his light-square bishop for its White counterpart.

Actually, in the present game, transposition into a Philidor is not beneficial for Black, whether or not ... b7-b5 has been played. Black has no resources for pressing on White's overprotected e-pawn, while d6 will be weak.

How can we evaluate the ... b7-b5 advance if Black is going to play a Ruy Lopez structure, restraining himself from ... e5xd4? Well, in this case the absence of his light-square bishop is unfortunate for him. For instance, White can play d4-d5 with good effect, hitting Black's pawns, when Black needs that bishop to look after them.

11. ... Qa5 12. Qd2 Rfe8 13. Rad1



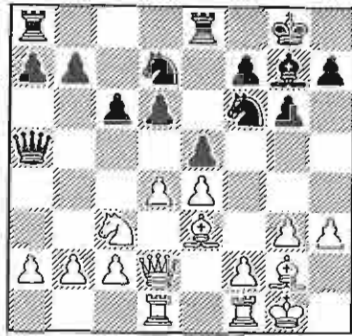


Diagram 200  
After 13. Rad1

Once again, oysters Rockefeller and crème brûlée share the same plate! After ... Bg4 has been served, ... Nc6 should follow.

### 13. ... b5

We can't, however, consider 13. ... b5 a mistake. Black simply had no strategic alternatives. His 7. ... Nbd7?! took him to a bad place.

### 14. a3 Nb6

For a minute, it seems that Black is lucky, and that the ... Nc4 threat forces his opponent to play d4xe5.

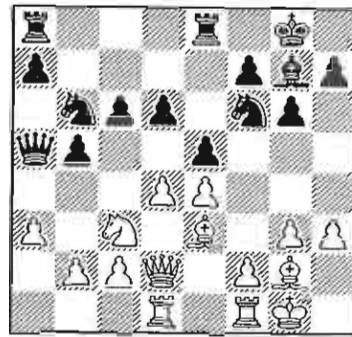


Diagram 201  
After 14. ... Nb6

### 15. b3!

A tiny tactic helps to perform great deeds!

### 15. ... Nfd7

It is not good to take the pawn: 15. ... Qxa3 16. Nxb5 cxb5 17. Ra1 Qb2 18. Rfb1.

### 16. Ra1!

Soon we'll see that the rook fulfills more duties than merely defending the a3-pawn.

### 16. ... Nf8

The knight is heading to e6. Yet Black's position is disharmonious. The grouping of the queen on a5, the knight on b6, and the pawn on b5 is especially ugly.

### 17. d5!

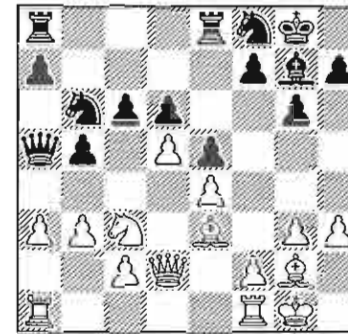


Diagram 202  
After 17. d5!

### 17. ... Rac8

If 17. ... cxd5, then 18. Bxb6 Qxb6 (18. ... axb6 19. b4 and 20. Nxd5) 19. Nxd5±.

### 18. Rfd1 c5 19. Bf1!

Materialization of spirit! The structure now is not the Ruy Lopez Pirc, but the real Ruy Lopez! Now Black is going to have nothing but trouble with his b5-pawn.

### 19. ... c4

If Black continues with 19. ... a6 20. a4 b4 21. Nb5!, it is clear that the a-pawn defends nothing. White threatens Nxd6 or Na7-Nc6, and 21. ... axb5 22. axb5 is clearly bad for Black. So

Black had no real choices here.

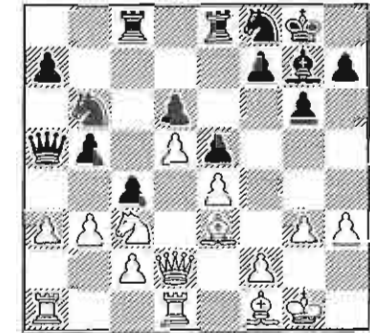


Diagram 203  
After 19. ... c4

### 20. a4! cxb3 21. Nxb5

The ill-fated b5-pawn is gone, which means that the struggle is over. Now Black's queenside cannot be defended.

21. ... Qxd2 22. Rxd2 Rxc2 23. Rxc2 bxc2 24. a5 Nc8 25. Rc1 Nd7 26. Rxc2 Nc5 27. Nxd6 Nxd6 28. Rxc5 Nxe4 29. Rc7 Bf8 30. a6 Rd8 31. Rxa7, Black resigns.

What can we learn from the game we have just analyzed?

Memorizing groups of moves that are united by a common idea will improve your over-the-board play—and results!

ONCE AGAIN, OYSTERS ROCKEFELLER AND  
CRÈME BRÛLÉE SHARE THE SAME PLATE.  
AFTER ... Bg4 HAS BEEN SERVED,  
... Nc6 SHOULD FOLLOW.

MEMORIZING GROUPS OF MOVES THAT ARE  
UNITED BY A COMMON IDEA WILL IMPROVE  
YOUR OVER-THE-BOARD PLAY—AND RESULTS!

### Lessons from Karpov—Nunn

1. Mixing up different plans is a dangerous recipe.
2. The moves ... Bg4, ... Nc6 and ... e7-e5 are compatible because their common goal is attacking the d4-pawn.
3. In contrast, the other group of moves— ... e7-e6, ... b7-b5, ... a7-a6, ... Nbd7, with the idea of transposing the game into the Philidor Pirc—instead target e4; therefore, Black needs to retain his light-square bishop.

### Thinking players can master the Pirc!

The problems we've analyzed here are complicated. After all, look at the status of the "victims." Timman and Nunn belong to the elite group of players who have a profound understanding of the Pirc Defense and who have played many beautiful games in

this opening.

And, admittedly, we've moved back and forth between ideas as we developed the concepts you need to continue your investigation of the Pirc. But don't be discouraged. You've now come to the place where the "learning curve" smooths out a bit.

If you're doubting your own ability to understand the nuances of the Pirc—when to employ the Philidor structure, the Ruy Lopez Pirc, when to switch plans, how to transform pawn structures, and how to put all these together—we assure you, you *can* master the Pirc. The Pirc is an opening that makes demands, but not the demands of memorizing long columns of back-and-forth moves. It demands that you know themes and ideas, and how to apply them. That is why thinking players of all levels love the Pirc.

Our quest will soon become more straightforward. In Part III, the theory of the Pirc Defense is shown systematically and in a strict order. Read it carefully and you won't be left alone at the

**OUR GOAL IS TO PROVIDE READERS WITH AT LEAST ONE THOROUGHLY EXPLAINED, CLEAR OPTION IN EACH THEORETICAL VARIATION OF THE PIRC. ALL LINES ARE DEEPLY ANALYZED, AND WE EMPHASIZE THEORETICAL NOVELTIES.**

board when you need to make an important choice.

### Winnowing the mass of variations

Lev Alburt and I have had to make some choices in our presentation. It's neither possible nor desirable to pack in all the choices that Black and White can make. I've always preferred, whenever possible, strategically clear positions, so, in building your repertoire, we've chosen the lines where plans are familiar and readily understandable. Of course, we've made no sacrifices in quality in our selections.

For instance, we believe that if Black follows in the footsteps of Aseev—Zakharevich, he is walking on very thin ice, even when he does achieve good results. The quality of Black's strategy is not in question, but finding the right moves is very difficult for both players. The consequences of even a minor mistake can be fatal.

Thus at times we offer safer alternatives—for example, 12. ... d5 (page 119).

Throughout this book, we will present you with clear and straightforward recommendations.

For that reason, we recommend not drifting into the Philidor Pirc, but rather staying in the clearer Ruy Lopez, with the understandable and concrete plan of pressuring the d-pawn. When we do recommend switching to a Philidor structure, then pushing ... b7-b5 (or launching some other clear plan) is definitely required. Therefore, when we will reach the "Classical System" in our study, after 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Nf3 Bg7 5. Be2 0-0 6. 0-0, we choose 6. ... Bg4 instead of 6. ... c6. Not because 6. ... Bg4 is actually stronger, but rather because there is a clear concept behind it. This concept takes the form of concrete variations in Chapter 17.

Our book is not intended to be a complete opening compendium. Those who want to study and play the good but "foggy" 6. ... c6 system instead of 6. ... Bg4 should turn to other sources and analyze for them-

**THROUGHOUT THIS BOOK, WE WILL PRESENT YOU WITH CLEAR AND STRAIGHTFORWARD RECOMMENDATIONS.**



selves. As for general ideas, the reader will benefit from studying the material presented in Part II of this book.

Of course, because we emphasize the quality of a given line, the variations we present can sometimes be lengthy and complex. Should we have to make a choice between a sharp yet promising continuation and a quiet yet somewhat passive continuation, we'll pick the former. For example, in Chapter 14, The Austrian Attack (after 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. f4 Bg7 5. Nf3), we offer the 5. ... c5 con-

tinuation, in order to transpose the game into the Dragon Pirc (after 6. dxc5 Qa5 7. Bd3 Qxc5). The "Dragon" is a favorable structure, but in reaching it, we allow White an opportunity to initiate big complications with 6. Bb5+ Bd7 7. e5, a line that is okay for Black but requires a substantial time to study. Of course, it would be easier to present, for example, a system with 5. ... c6 and 6. ... Bg4 that can be illustrated by two or three lines and few explanations. But we would be sacrificing the quality of your play.

#### Summary:

*This was another big chapter, with lots of important ideas. Black's ... e7-e5 advance doesn't guarantee him that the situation in the center will be favorably resolved if his opponent maintains the tension by keeping his e4/d4 pawn duo intact. Neither can full-scale freedom be achieved by maintaining the e5-outpost of the Ruy Lopez Pirc, nor by the pawn exchange ... e5xd4 of the Philidor. Although these two structures can be seen as two independent methods of playing the Pirc, the Ruy Lopez may also be a transitional structure on the way to the Philidor. So we have come to the conclusion that both structures together can make up a system of playing in which Black is a watchful opportunist, transposing from the Ruy Lopez Pirc to the Philidor Pirc when it is advantageous for him to do so. But Black must always keep in mind that he can't go backward from a Philidor to a Ruy Lopez structure.*

*In both the Philidor and Ruy Lopez structures, ... b7-b5 is often beneficial. The ... b7-b5 advance can be played after a preliminary ... a7-e6 or ... a7-a6. This plan may become more complicated if White reacts with an early a2-a4, requiring the "slow motion" sequence ... e7-c6, ... b7-b6, ... Bc8-b7, ... a7-a6 and finally ... b6-b5.*



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## Executive Editor Al Lawrence

**Place of Birth:** Blue Island, Illinois

**Date of Birth:** February 5, 1947

Author and co-author of eight books on a variety of subjects, Al Lawrence edited and designed *Pirc Alert!* with the goal of making it a pleasure to get the most out of the uniquely instructive ideas of GMs Alburtt and Chernin—and to help you and your students win more games!

Lawrence was Executive Director of the U.S. Chess Federation during a decade of innovation and record-breaking growth. A former public school and college teacher with advanced degrees in instructional techniques, he is especially interested in applying modern teaching theory to chess.

He is president of OutExcel! Corporation (Email: OutExcel@aol.com), a marketing and publishing firm. He is also Chief Executive Officer of StarFinder, Inc. (Skyfind@aol.com), which develops and patents products that make it easy for amateur stargazers to enjoy and learn the night sky. StarFinder's "Night Navigator" has been featured internationally in magazines and on television.

Lawrence was selected as "Journalist of the Year" for 2000-2001 by the Chess Journalists of America.



## The Ruy & Philidor Pirc as a System Memory Markers!



MARKER 1

Diagram 204  
White to move



MARKER 2

Diagram 205  
Black to move



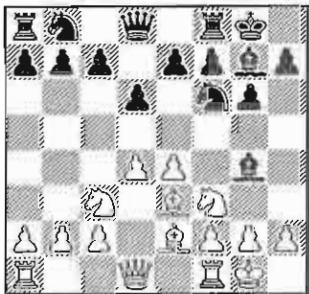
MARKER 3

Diagram 206  
White to move



MARKER 4

Diagram 207  
White to move



MARKER 5

Diagram 208  
Black to move

—REMEMBER—  
BLACK RELIES ON THE  
PHILIDOR AND RUY LOPEZ  
PIRCS AS A COMPLETE  
DEFENSIVE SYSTEM AFTER  
... e7-e5 WHEN WHITE  
LEAVES HIS PAWN ON d4.

## The Ruy & Philidor Pirc as a System Solutions to Memory Markers!

- No. 1* 1. a4!, to stop ... b5. (See page 112.)
- No. 2* 1. ... Nc6! is the best way to equalize. If 2. Be3, then 2. ... Ng4.  
(See page 114.)
- No. 3* 1. h3!. This move secures e3 for White's bishop. White shouldn't worry here about ... b7-b5, as this thrust isn't compatible with Black's choice of a6 for his knight. (See page 115.)
- No. 4* 1. h3!, and White is ready to meet 1. ... Nc6 with 2. Be3.  
(See page 114.)
- No. 5* 1. ... Nc6. Weaker is 1. ... Nbd7, which doesn't pressure the d4-pawn, and thus isn't a good team member with the bishop on g4.  
(See page 125.)



## Chapter 9: White plays e4-e5

### Some Important Points to Look For

Black must always have a watchful eye on White's e4-e5. This chapter shows you the general conditions under which the move is a serious threat and how Black should react.



- ◆ Black can use “tongs” against the point of White's pawn wedge, playing ... f7-f6 to attack e5 at both f6 and d6.

See Diagram 211.



- ◆ Black has weakened his kingside with 7. ... h5. White now breaks in the center with 8. e5.

See Diagram 221.



- ◆ Black has just played 6. ... Nbd7?!, blocking the retreat for his other knight. White plays 7. e5! and gets a small advantage.

See Diagram 239.



- ◆ White plays 10. e5!, sacrificing a pawn to prevent Black from castling—a Mikhail Tal trademark.

See Diagram 240.

## Chapter 9

### White plays e4-e5

#### Intruder alert!

**W**hite's e4-e5 is a potential menace, especially after Black's knight appears on f6. The pawn advance is an essential topic in the Pirc Defense.

So far, we have primarily examined situations in which Black initiates the skirmish in the center, advancing his pawn either to c5 or e5. We assumed that after placing his pawns onto d4 and e4, White continues his development, preparing to castle.

This pattern may not always take place, however. First, there are systems, such as 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. f4 or 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Bg5, in which e4-e5 threatens Black at a very early stage of the game, before he is able to get in either ... c7-c5 or ... e7-e5. Second, there are situations in which Black for some reason postpones his counterblows in the center, so that the possibility of e4-e5 emerges.

These circumstances are the sole subject of Chapter 9.

#### Reasons and results

White can have a number of reasons to push his pawn to e5. And the consequences of the thrust are varied too. We can divide the situations leading to e4-e5 into two main groups.

#### Group A

The e4-e5 advance occurs as a logical outcome of play. It is key to some opening systems, such as 4. f4 and 4. Bg5, but it doesn't necessarily tip the balance of the position. On the other hand, e4-e5 can be a premature action performed by White. In these cases, Black's arsenal is good enough to meet the challenge, especially in the second scenario.

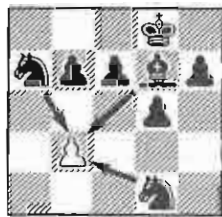
#### Group B

The e4-e5 advance intrudes as a result of mistakes made by Black. For example, such an oversight can occur in systems where Black is busy playing on the queenside and neglects development in the center and kingside. In this case, Black is lucky

if he survives, and even then he may remain under strong pressure for a long time. His bishop on g7 may be blocked out of play after e4-e5. If Black's errors are severe, then the explosive character of e4-e5 might take the form of e5xd6 or e5-e6, after which Black is in serious trouble. He can even be blown out of the game in a few moves.

Whether the push falls into Group A or Group B, the e4-e5 advance is a source of at least temporary crisis in Black's camp, which may or may not be overrun, depending on circumstances. Not only does the g7-bishop become a victim, but its neighbor, the Black king's knight, shares the pain, especially if it still stands on g8, unable to reach f6 after e4-e5 has been played. If the knight is already on f6 when White's e5-pawn attacks, the horseman is forced to leave its normal square, and thus Black's influence over e4 and d5 is diminished. The evaluation of the position may very likely be changed in White's favor. The e4-

**THE ADVANCE E4-E5 IS  
A SOURCE OF AT LEAST  
TEMPORARY CRISIS IN  
BLACK'S CAMP.**



d e f g h

Diagram 209

e5 advance is especially dangerous if it comes before Black has castled.

### Coming to (military) terms with e5

Black's methods for dealing with e4-e5 remind us that chess is a model of military operations.

Consider the d4/e5 duo as a military phalanx that intrudes into Black's position. The e5-pawn is the point of the wedge, while the d4-pawn is its base. If such a wedge is supported by a pawn on f4, then its base is wide, and therefore more difficult to combat.

### Black's four methods of fighting against the e5 advance

Black's reactions to e4-e5 fall into four categories:

#### 1. Attacking the intruder with pieces

After ... d6xe5, d4xe5, Black's bishop stays on g7, and Black retreats—with ... Ng4 or ... Nd7—, creating a double attack on the e5-pawn.

Of course, winning the e5-pawn is Black's big ambition. But even just weakening the e-pawn so that it requires extra protection may give Black a positional advantage. This is also a successful outcome for Black.

Such a radical "cutting" of the wedge can't be used in cases where White's f4-pawn makes the base wide. In this case Black should try the second method.

#### 2. Attacking the intruder with pawns

Black can use "tongs" against the point of the wedge, playing ... f7-f6 to attack e5 with both f6 and d6. (This method is used especially against the d4-e5-f4 pawn trio.)



d e f g h

Diagram 210

After ... f7-f6, the immediate pawn exchange e5xf6 or e5xd6 concedes Black's success. This "tong" method can be used whether the base of the attacking wedge is wide or narrow.

LEKO—GOFSTEIN  
BRNO, 1993

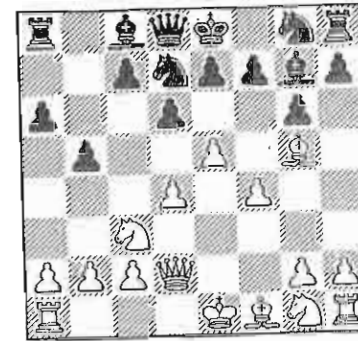


Diagram 211

Black to move

7. ... f6 8. exf6 Ngxf6 9. Bd3 c5!

Methodically eliminating White's center. The f4-pawn is all that will be left—a remnant of the once impressive-looking White center and a source of concern and irritation to White.

10. dxc5 Nxc5 11. Nf3 Bb7  
12. 0-0 b4! 13. Nd1 Qb6 14. Kh1  
0-0 ♣.

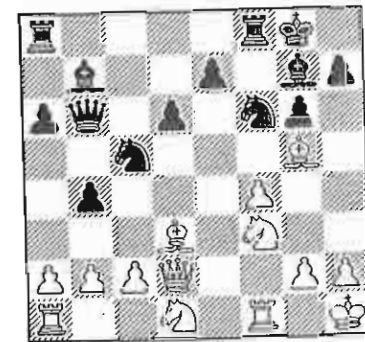


Diagram 212

After 14. ... 0-0

Creating tension on the e5-outpost can also lead to Black's success.

KVEINYS—SPEELMAN  
MOSCOW, 1994

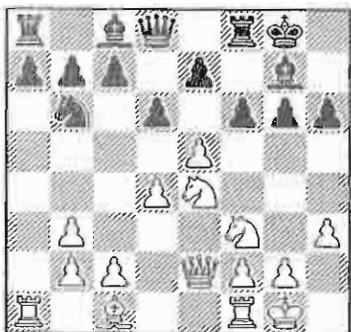


Diagram 213  
After 12. ... f6

In the following play, White tries to maintain his e5-invader, but Black's constant pressure forces it to move.

13. c4 fxe5 14. dxe5 Nd7 15. Bd2 b6 16. e6 Nf6 17. Nxf6+ Rxf6 18. Nd4 Bb7 19. Bc3 a6 20. f4 Qf8 21. Nc2 c5 22. Bxf6 Qxf6 23. Rab1 Rf8 24. b4 Qf5

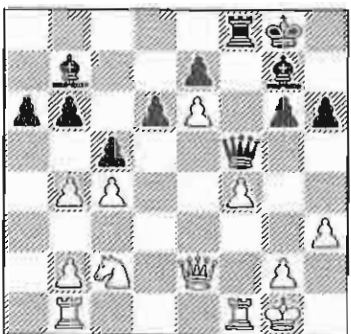


Diagram 214  
After 24. ... Qf5

Black has more than enough compensation for the Exchange due to his very strong bishops.

As we see, in both cases Black succeeded because circumstances were favorable. In the first example, by playing ... f7-f6, Black was able to gain tempos, due to the position of White's g5-bishop. In the second example, the ... f7-f6 move became possible after White's b3-bishop was exchanged (with ... Nc6-a5xb3). Attacking the e5-outpost by ... f7-f6 is actually met quite rarely. In many circumstances ... f7-f6 is risky because it weakens the position of Black's king.

**3. Attacking the base of the wedge—the d4-pawn**

The third method of combating e5 is more universal. Black attacks not the point, but rather the base, the d4-pawn, by playing ... c7-c5. Certainly, after the base is under fire, the next target should be the point of the wedge—e5.

After White has played e4-e5, and the f6-knight retreats, usually to d7, Black has a three-step operation.

A. He plays ... c7-c5.

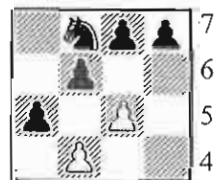


Diagram 215

B. If White can't replace his c3-knight with a pawn, then the exchange ... c5xd4 eliminates the base of the wedge (if there is an f4-pawn, and the base is wide, ... c5xd4 doesn't eliminate but still weakens the base of the wedge).

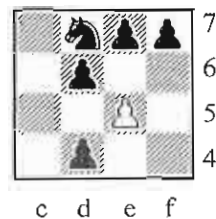


Diagram 216

C. Finally, on the next move Black hits the point of the wedge—the e5-pawn itself—with ... d6xe5.

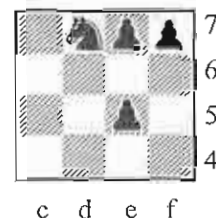


Diagram 217

As a result, White's pawn center may be completely destroyed. Or, if the base is wide, after ... d6xe5, f4xe5, the e5-pawn becomes weak. According to military strategy, this last method of attacking the wings of a wedge is the most reliable. Likewise, in chess we learn to attack the pawn chain at its base.

After ... c7-c5, if White realizes that his pawn center can be eliminated, he can try either d4xc5 or e5xd6 in order to get some concrete benefits. For instance, if Black hasn't castled, then by playing d4xc5 White tries to eliminate the possibility of Black's castling. Black replies with ... d6xe5, completing the demolition of White's pawn center. The consequences should be anticipated, however, because Black pays a toll, losing his right to castle.



Diagram 218  
Theoretical position

8. ... dxe5

Black could also play 8. ... Nxf4, leading to a mind-boggling position we'll analyze in Chapter 16—4. Bg5.

9. Qxd8+ Kxd8 10. 0-0-0+ Bd7 11. fxe5!

Or 11. Nd5 g5!

11. ... Bxe5

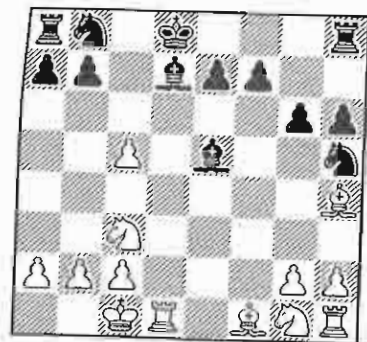


Diagram 219  
After 11... Bxe5

12. Nf3 Bxc3 13. bxc3 ∞

White has compensation, in the form of strong pressure along the e- and d-files, for his damaged pawn structure.

It's likely that White must give up his e-pawn after Black plays ... c7-c5. So White captures e5xd6 to weaken Black's pawn structure. The e5xd6 exchange may have a tactical objective, since after ... e7xd6 Qe2+, Black loses the possibility of castling. Yet there is a good reply to e5xd6. (In Chapter 5, we examined the game Ivanovich—M. Gurevich, in which Black sacrificed a pawn with ... 0-0! The material in the current chapter is related to that of Chapter 5, because ... c7-c5 may be played before or after e4-e5.)

#### 4. Black counterattacks with ... b5-b4

Black may be able to strike an immediate counterblow with ... b5-b4 against White's knight

on c3, ignoring the attack e4-e5 created on Black's f6-knight. Obviously, Black can use this method only if his pawn is located on b5. The success of this entire operation depends on what pieces are "behind" the knights, on d2 and g7. If the White queen is on d2 behind the knight on c3, and Black's bishop is on g7 behind Black's f6-knight, for example, the situation may favor Black. After e4-e5 and ... b5-b4, the captures begin, and White gets to make the first—e5xf6, before Black can play ... b4xc3. The operation deserves consideration only if Black doesn't lose material outright.

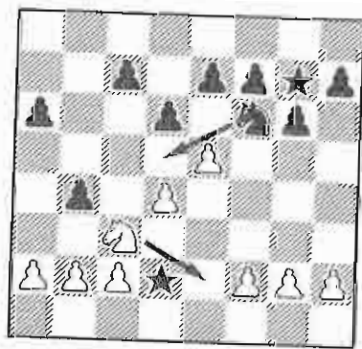


Diagram 220  
Structure of the ... b5-b4 counterattack

However, if calculation confirms that mutual captures on c3 and f6 are not in White's favor and the best choice he has is to retreat his c3-knight, then Black has succeeded in the struggle for the key central outposts e4 and d5. Instead of White's knight, it

will be Black's knight that occupies the d5-outpost, gaining great influence over the play. In such cases, White's own pawn on d4 actually shelters Black's d5-knight from frontal attack. The d5-knight may also be supported by Black's e6-pawn and b7-bishop.

While Black's pawn remains on b4, it is not easy for White to dislocate Black's d5-knight by pushing his c-pawn. Such an outcome is sad for White. By playing e4-e5, White was dreaming of displacing Black's knight on f6 and freeing the important e4-square for his knight, but gets the opposite result.

This fourth method has its limitations. Black's pawn must be placed on b5. The strategic effect of placing Black's knight on d5 after a successful ... b5-b4 counterblow will be studied in detail in the next chapter (see, for example, Golubev—Chernin).

#### e5-e6

So, the most universal weapon for fighting against e4-e5 is the third method, ... c7-c5, played after the knight retreats to d7. However, after Black has played ... Nd7, White may have a menacing pawn sacrifice with e5-e6, a thrust that is part tactical and part positional. After e5-e6 and ... f7xe6, Black's e-pawn is vulnerable. If he picks it off, White rights the pawn balance,

but secures a positional advantage, not to mention opening up Black's king as a potential target. Here is an example.

SHORT—SEIRAWAN  
LUCERNE, 1989

1. e4 d6 2. d4 g6 3. Be3 Bg7 4. Nc3 a6 5. h4 Nf6 6. f3 b5 7. g4 h5?

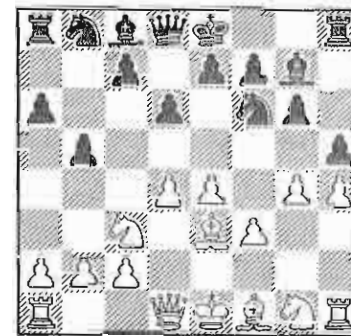


Diagram 221  
After 7... h5?

8. e5 Nfd7 9. gxh5 Rxh5 10. e6! fxe6 11. Bd3

As a result of 7... h5, the g6-outpost is weakened, increasing the strength of White's pawn sacrifice.

11... Nf8

White has more than full compensation for the sacrificed pawn. Now he is able to continue his development, while Black has significant difficulties in bringing his pieces out.

THE UNIVERSAL  
WEAPON IS ... c7-c5.



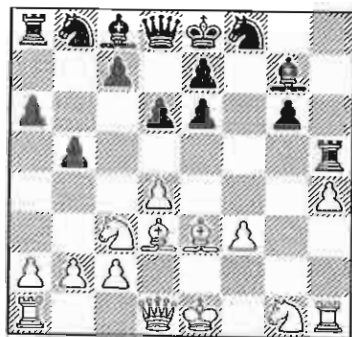


Diagram 222  
After 11... Nf8

12. f4 Rh8 13. Qg4 Bb7 14. Rh3!



Diagram 223  
After 14. Rh3!

Capturing on g6 would only provide Black some relief.

14. ... Bf6 15. 0-0-0 b4 16. Ne4 Bd5 17. Nf3 Nc6

While White busily develops his pieces, Black succeeds in placing his bishop on d5. White has a brilliant shot, however, that exposes Black's achievement as illusory.

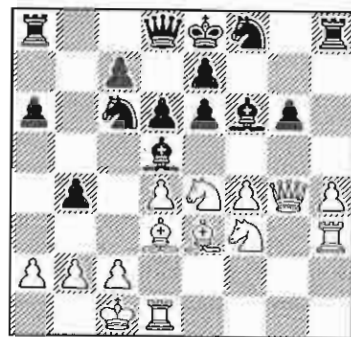


Diagram 224  
After 17... Nc6

18. Ne5!! dxe5 19. fxe5 Bxe5 20. Nc5! Qc8

This move can't protect Black from catastrophe on e6.

21. Bxg6+ Kd8 22. dxe5 Nxe5 23. Nxe6+!

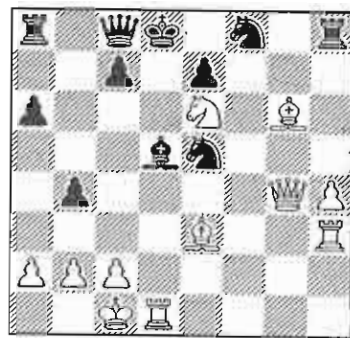


Diagram 225  
After 23. Nxe6+!

White is winning.

23. ... Qxe6 24. Qxe6 Nxe6 25. Rxd5+ Nd7 26. Bf5 Nef8 27. Bg5+-

**WHITE HAS A BRILLIANT SHOT, 18. NE5!!.**

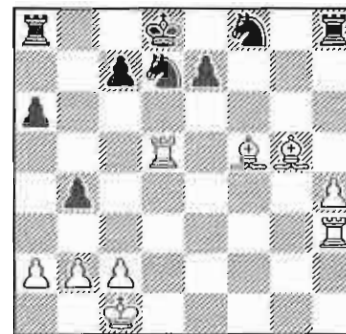


Diagram 226  
After 27. Bg5

White eventually won on move 34. Black was a victim of the hurricane on e6.

In general, the consequences of e5-e6 are unclear. The sacrifice is real, and it is not easy to rout Black's king, which is surrounded by pawns. In the game we just examined, White needed a precise and effective tool like 18. Ne5!!, the only move that guaranteed him victory. If White failed to play 18. Ne5!!, Black may have had some counter-resources like using the d5-outpost.

Recently, a brand-new opening variation was born. The basic nature of this line is a back-and-forth dialectic regarding the merits of the e5-e6 sacrifice. Black lost the game we are about to examine, but analysis shows that the result was not a foregone conclusion. Nearly everything seemed to be uncertain, the play difficult for both sides. It is inter-

esting to note that all the following attempts to follow Anand's idea eventually failed.

ANAND—SVIDLER  
LINARES, 1998

1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6 4. Be3 a6 5. Nf3 b5 6. Bd3 Nd7



Diagram 227  
After 6... Nd7

Despite the fact that the e5-outpost is protected, White can try to break through with the help of a little tactics: 7. e5 dxe5 8. Be4 Rb8 9. dxe5. Black can't take twice on e5 in view of Ba7. Meanwhile, the e5-e6 threat is quite real. However, 7. e5 and then 8. e6 are just the beginning of the conflict.

7. e5 Bb7 8. e6 fxe6 9. Ng5

White gets almost all the benefits from e5-e6: now Black can only dream about castling, and White's g5-knight provokes new weaknesses (h7-h6.)

9. ... Nf8 10. 0-0 Nf6 11. Re1 Qd7 12. Bd2

It is understandable that the

attention of both sides is attracted to e6. Now White is threatening 13. Qe2, so Black finally decides to get rid of the g5-knight.

12. ... h6 13. Nf3

Or 13. Nge4 Nxe4 14. Bxe4 d5 15. Bf3 Bxd4. White sacrifices a second pawn, resulting in an unclear position.

13. ... Rb8!

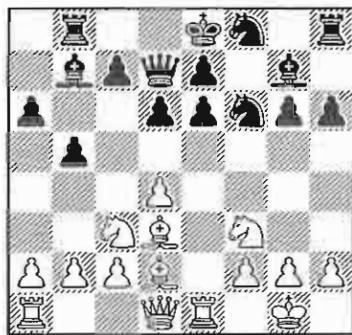


Diagram 228

After 13. ... Rb8!

Fancy move! White's resources to make the position dynamic are limited. His main try is a2-a4. After Black plays ... b5-b4, which is forced, his b-pawn will be under attack. That's why the rook is needed on the b-file.

14. a4 b4 15. Ne4

White could play 15. Na2!?, avoiding simplification.

15. ... Nxe4 16. Bxe4 Bxe4 17. Rxe4 Qc6

Now there will be a new key square in the game as Black's

queen has d5 available. White can't make any progress unless he possesses control over d5.

18. Re3 Qc4!

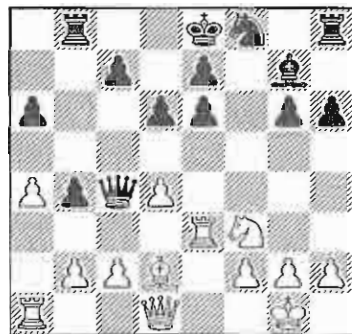


Diagram 229

After 18. ... Qc4!

In reply to 18. ... Qd5, White was planning 19. c3 b3 20. Qe2 and 21. c4, reaching his main goal. Now White must work hard to dislocate Black's queen from c4 without playing b2-b3 because after 19. b3 Qd5, the d5-outpost becomes unapproachable.

19. c3 b3

Black tries to keep the position closed in order to untangle his knot of kingside pieces.

20. Re1 g5

Black has no choice but to make this move, which weakens his position. However, the light-square bishops are gone, so the new compromise is not critical. Now Black's f8-knight has some hope of entering into the fray.

21. Be3 Qd5 22. Qd3 a5 23. Ra3 Kf7 24. Nd2 Ng6

White methodically pursues Black's queen, yet she's able to find new outposts—now it's the f5-square; c2 is a prospect as well.

25. Qe2 Nh4

The purpose of this maneuver is to block White's queen from h5.

26. f3 Ng6 27. c4 Qf5 28. Ne4

White gains nothing if he recovers a pawn, because Black would immediately start operations on the b-file. Now White is threatening 29. g4+.

28. ... Kg8 29. Qd1

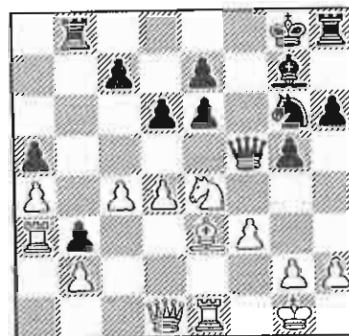


Diagram 230

After 29. Qd1

White is down a pawn and dreams of regaining material and getting a satisfactory position. Now the most logical continuation is 29. ... g4 30. Ng3 Qc2, which would lead to very promising play for Black.



Diagram 231

Analysis after 30. ... Qc2

Black pursues another idea.

29. ... Rb4 30. Rxb3 Rxc4

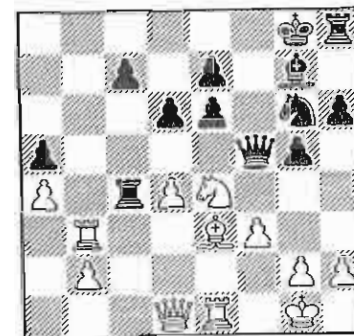


Diagram 232

After 29. ... Rxc4

Black won the c-pawn, but later he made some mistakes in time trouble and eventually lost.

Even if we assume that White would be better if he played 15. Na2, this game is still valuable for its instructive methods of play against the double-edged e5-e6 sacrifice.

**THIS GAME IS AN INSTRUCTIVE EXAMPLE OF HOW TO PLAY AGAINST E5-E6.**

### e4-e5 as punishment

Let's look at some examples from "Group B"—when e4-e5 is punishment for a mistake by Black. We'll start with opening catastrophes and finish with milder illustrations, in which Black gets unpleasant positions due to his passive g7-bishop.

### No exit—d7 is occupied: catastrophe follows

It is difficult to classify all positions in which e4-e5 heralds an outright tactical crisis, because such combinations take so many forms. Certainly, it can be dangerous for Black to occupy the d7-square, which should be reserved for the knight on f6 in case it must retreat. When Black clogs d7, e5-e6 can easily become a decisive blow. Take a look at this miniature:

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. f4 Bg7 5. Nf3 c5 6. Bb5+ Nbd7? 7. e5 Ng4 8. e6 fxe6 9. Ng5, winning.

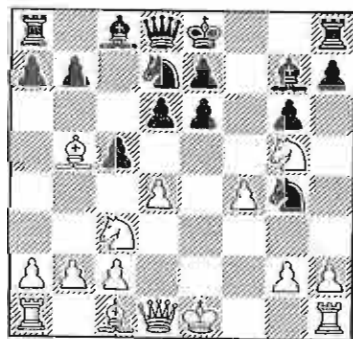


Diagram 233  
After 9. Ng5

Here is another example.



Diagram 234  
White to move

9. e5 dxc5

Or 9. ... b4 10. exf6 bxc3 11. fxf7+.

10. dxe5 Ng4 11. e6 fxe6

Consequences of the e5-e6 break are worse than imagined!

12. Nxb5! Qd8

Or 12. ... Qxd2 13. Nc7(+) +.

13. Nbd4 Nde5 14. Nxe5 Nxe5  
15. Be4, and White is winning.

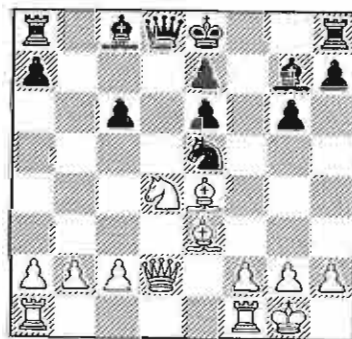


Diagram 235  
After 15. Be4

15. ... 0-0 16. Nxc6 Nxc6 17. Qxd8  
Rxd8 18. Bxc6 Rb8 19. Rad1+-

In the following game, Black lost because he didn't accurately calculate the aftermath of e4-e5.

STANGL—AZMAIPARASHVILI  
TILBURG, 1994

1. d4 d6 2. Nf3 g6 3. e4 Bg7 4. Nc3 Nf6 5. Bf4 c6 6. Qd2 Qa5 7. h3 Nbd7 8. 0-0 b5?! 9. e5

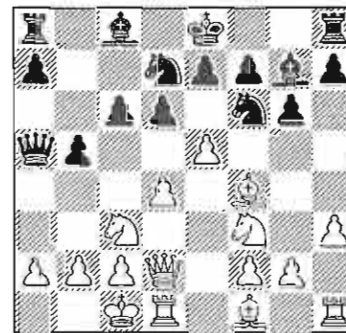


Diagram 236  
After 9. e5

In his preliminary calculations, Black realized that after 9. ... dxe5 10. dxe5 Nh5 11. Bh6, he is lost. Relatively best is 9. ... dxe5 10. dxe5 b4! 11. exf6 bxc3 12. fxf7 cxd2+ 13. Bxd2, with the better ending for White. That's why Black pinned his hopes on 9. ... b4.

9. ... b4?! 10. exf6 bxc3 11. Qxc3!

Black simply overlooked this move. Here the idea of the in-between move f6xf7 is camouflaged. Black is able to save a piece but not the game.

11. ... Qf5 12. fxf7 Qxf4+ 13. Kb1 Rg8 14. Qxc6 Rb8 15. Bb5

Kd8 16. Rd3 Qf5 17. Rc3! Qxb5 18. Qc7+, Black resigns

In view of 18. ... Ke8 19. Qxc8+ Rxc8 20. Rxc8 mate.

These illustrations of the e4-e5 break lead to a catastrophe for Black. Note that in all these cases, Black had occupied his d7 square, eliminating the natural retreat for his knight on f6.

### d7 is available but e6 leads to positional disadvantage for Black

Here's a mosaic of theoretical positions in various Pirc lines where e4-e5 is the best move because it promises an initiative.

TSESHKOVSKI—VADASZ  
MALGRAT, 1978

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. f4 Bg7 5. Nf3 0-0 6. Be3 Na6?!

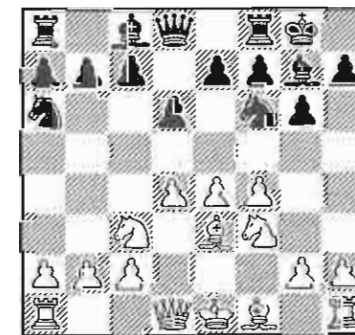


Diagram 237  
After 6. ... Na6?!

7. e5! Ng4?! (7. ... Nd7 8. Qd2) 8. Bg1 c5 9. h3 cxd4 10. Qxd4 Nh6 11. 0-0-0 Qa5 (11. ... Nf5 12. Qf2!±, protecting the g3-square and preparing g2-g4) 12. g4

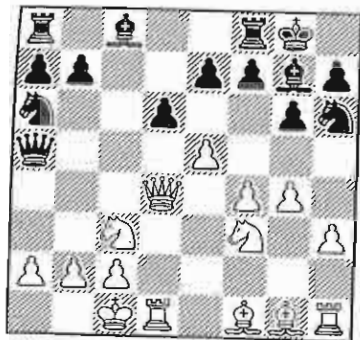


Diagram 238  
After 12. g4

12. ... Bd7 13. Nd5! Qxa2 14. Nxe7+ Kh8 15. Qxd6, and White soon won.

Let's look at a theoretical position.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Nf3 Bg7 5. Be2 0-0 6. 0-0 Nbd7?!

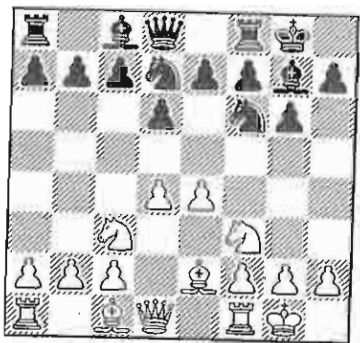


Diagram 239  
Theoretical position

7. e5! Ne8 8. Bf4

Also promising is 8. Bg5.

8. ... c6 9. Qd2 ±

White plans Rad1 and Bh6. If Black continues with 9. ... f6,

then White plays 10. exf6 exf6 11. d5, targeting the weak e6-square.

TAL—HORT  
MOSCOW, 1975

1. e4 d6 2. d4 g6 3. Nf3 Bg7 4. Nc3 Bg4 5. Be3 Nc6 6. Bb5 a6 7. Bxc6+ bxc6 8. h3 Bxf3 9. Qxf3 Qd7

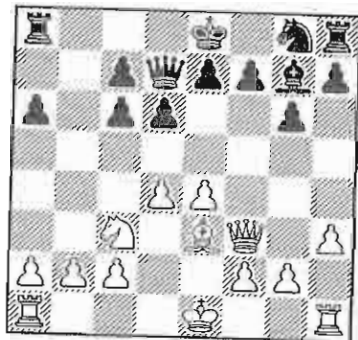


Diagram 240  
After 9. ... Qd7

10. e5! Nh6

In contrast to the game Tseshkovski—Vadasz, Black's knight chooses another path to h6, but that can't change the outcome (10. ... dxe5 11. dxe5 Bxe5 12. 0-0, and White has more than enough compensation for a pawn.)

11. 0-0-0 0-0 12. Rhe1 Kh8 13. Bf4 Rab8 14. g4 Rb4 15. Kb1 a5 16. Bg5

AFTER ALL, E4-E5 IS  
WHITE'S MOST  
NATURAL PLAN.

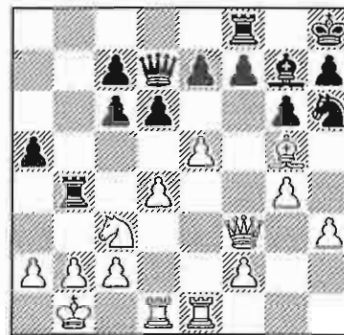


Diagram 241  
After 16. Bg5

16. ... Ng8 17. a3

White has a significant advantage.

Here's some more theoretical analysis.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Nf3 Bg7 5. h3 0-0 6. Be3 a6 7. a4 b6 8. Bc4 Bb7?!

Objectively, 8. ... e6 is better.



Diagram 242  
After 8. ... Bb7?!

9. e5! Ne4

Instead, 9. ... Ne8 ± is too passive, but the consequences of

9. ... Ne4 may be even worse.

10. Nxe4 Bxe4 11. Ng5! Bxg2 12. Rg1 Bb7 13. Qg4 e6 14. h4!

Suggested by Boris Spassky. In Spassky's opinion, White has a crushing attack.

In the last five examples we've examined, Black's ideas were strategically risky, and White got a positional advantage with e4-e5, exploiting Black's dubious play. The punishment was commensurately less severe than it was in the first two examples, where the errors Black made were tactical.

The reader shouldn't be under the impression that the success of e4-e5 always depends on Black making an error. Sometimes, even if Black fully realizes the danger, it may not be possible to prevent e4-e5. After all, e4-e5 is White's most natural plan. The advance flows from the logic of the play. When e4-e5 is unavoidable, Black should think about diminishing its consequences. Otherwise, as in the next example, he could face difficulties even without making obvious errors.

WHEN E4-E5 IS  
UNAVOIDABLE, BLACK  
MUST DIMINISH ITS  
CONSEQUENCES.



MOROZEVICH—  
AZMAIPARASHVILI

NEW YORK, 1998

1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6 4.  
Be3 a6 5. f4 b5 6. Be2 Bb7 7.  
Bf3 Nd7 8. e5

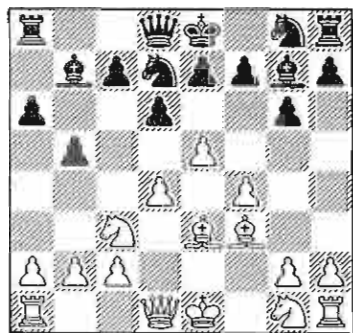


Diagram 243  
After 8. e5

8. ... Qc8 9. Bxb7 Qxb7 10. Qf3  
Rb8 11. 0-0-0 Nh6 12. Bf2 e6  
13. h3 Nf5 14. g4 Ne7 15. Ne4  
d5 16. Nc5 ±

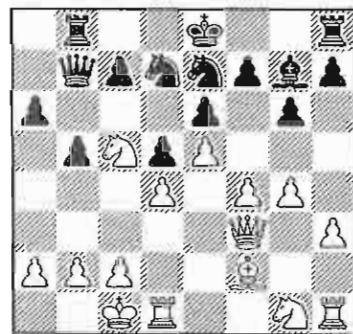


Diagram 244  
After 16. Nc5 ±

Using this system in current tournament practice, Black has faced difficulties similar to those in this game.

### An antidote has been found!

Very recently Ponomariov, playing against Galkin, demonstrated Black's solution to White's system.

In Part III, we'll take a close look at this key game.

In fact, we haven't seen the last of e4-e5 by a long shot, of course. Later, in the theoretical sections, we'll revisit this important move and its consequences many times.

#### Summary:

*The advance e4-e5 can come about as a natural outcome of the continuation selected by White, as the result of a mistake by Black, or as a premature decision by White. However it comes about, e4-e5 penetrates Black's territory, causing at least a temporary crisis in the center. In reaction, Black can respond in four ways. (See below.)*

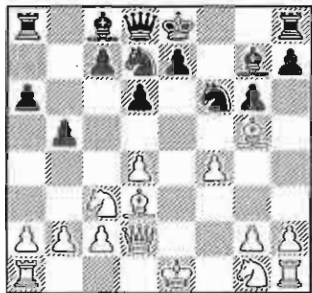
*The most universal choice is number three, in the form of playing ... c5 after the f6-knight retreats to d7.*

*When White is able to play e4-e5 as punishment for a mistake by Black, the opening can be catastrophic for the second player.*

#### Black's Responses to e4-e5

1. Counterattack the intruder on e5 with pieces (after ... d6xe5);
2. Attack the point of the e5-phalanx with ... f7-f6;
3. Counterattack the base of the e5 pawn-wedge—the d4-pawn—with ... c7-c5;
4. Ignore the attack on his own f6-knight and attack the White knight on c3 with ... b5-b4 (this assumes that Black's pawn is already on b5).

## White Plays e4-e5 Memory Markers!



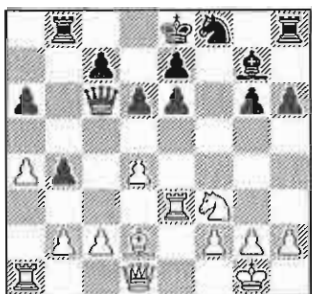
MARKER 1

Diagram 245  
Black to move



MARKER 2

Diagram 246  
White to move



MARKER 3

Diagram 247  
Black to move



MARKER 4

Diagram 248  
White to move



MARKER 5

Diagram 249  
White to move



MARKER 6

Diagram 250  
Black to move

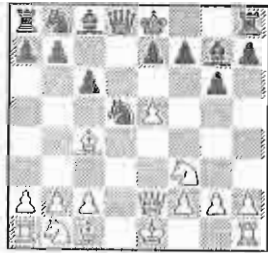
## White Plays e4-e5 Solutions to Memory Markers!

- No. 1* White has just played 9. Bd3. Black plays 9. ... c5!, eliminating White's center. (See page 137.)
- No. 2* 1. e6! fxe6 2. Bd3. As a result of ... h5, the g6-outpost was weakened, increasing the strength of White's pawn sacrifice. (See page 141.)
- No. 3* 1. ... Qc4!, better than 1. ... Qd5 2. c3 b3 3. Qe2 and 4. c4, when Black's queen is driven away from d5. (See page 144.)
- No. 4* 1. dxc5, with an unclear game. (See page 139.)
- No. 5* 1. Qxc3!, to meet 1. ... Qxc3 with 2. fxg7+-. After the somewhat stronger reply 1. ... Qf5, Black saves a piece, but his position remains hopeless. (See page 147.)
- No. 6* 1. ... e6. If Black goes ahead immediately with 1. ... Bb7?!, White has 2. e5!, with a terrific attack. (See page 149.)

## Chapter 10: Black's Queenside Pawn Play

### Some Important Points to Look For

Black's play with his queenside pawns is all-important in the Pirc, and he must be precise. This chapter explains the important ideas.



- ◆ Although this position, stemming from 5. ... c6, looks reliable for Black, it is relatively passive and gets slightly worse results than 5. ... Nc6.

See Diagram 254.



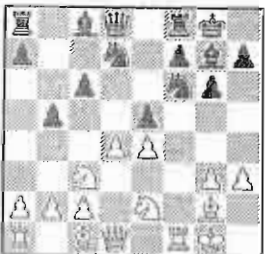
- ◆ White plays a2-a4 to weaken Black's queenside light squares.

See Diagram 265.



- ◆ White has no good opportunities to break through in the center to challenge Black's outpost on d5.

See Diagram 273.



- ◆ Black will meet 11. d5 with 11. ... b4! Black gets a good game.

See Diagram 280.

## Chapter 10

### Black's Queenside Pawn Play

The Pirc's right hand

**W**e have repeatedly seen Black making the queenside pawn moves ... a7-a6, ... b7-b5 and ... c7-c6 in many different lines. These moves are an important, recurring theme in the Pirc. The resulting play is delicate and sometimes even risky, but it often works out splendidly for Black.

#### ... c7-c6

The move ... c7-c6 is not entirely a flank action. It aims at the center, and it is sometimes quite difficult to estimate its consequences precisely. In the box below, let's list the move's principal advantages.

But of course, even excellent ideas have their downsides. By playing ... c7-c6, Black postpones or even cancels the promising idea of playing ... c7-c5. In addition, ... c7-c6 denies

Black's knight an active square.

So whether or not Black should play ... c7-c6 depends on the overall plan Black chooses. If Black wants to play the Ruy Lopez Pirc, planning to create pressure on White's center, then it is better to reserve c6 for the knight. (Recall the game Karpov—Nunn, in which ... c7-c6 turned out to be unsuccessful because it contradicted the requirements of the position.) Also, in positions where the e4-e5 threat is real, it is usually better not to play ... c7-c6, even though the move does guarantee the d5-outpost for the knight.

#### The Principal Advantages of ... c7-c6

1. It paves the way for a follow-up expansion with ... b7-b5 and occasionally even ... d6-d5;
2. It opens the d8-a5 diagonal for Black's queen (it is important that Black's queen can be developed either to c7, b6 or a5);
3. Importantly, it protects the d5-outpost. For example, in the case of a White e4-e5, Black's f6-knight can safely relocate to d5.

Let's take a look at an example.

VASIUKOV—RIBLI  
HOOGOVENS, 1973

1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nf3 d6 4. Bc4 Nf6 5. Qe2



Diagram 251  
After 5. Qe2

The e4-e5 advance is unavoidable. Black should prepare with 5. ... Nc6, not with 5. ... c6.

5. ... Nc6 6. e5 dxe5 7. dxe5 Ng4

Black opens fire on the e5-pawn.



Diagram 252  
After 7. ... Ng4

8. Bb5 Bd7 9. Bf4 0-0 10. Nc3 a6 11. Bc4 b5 12. Bb3 b4 13. Na4 Na5 14. 0-0-0 Qe8 15. h3 Bb5 16. Qd2 Nxf2! ♯



Diagram 253  
After 16. ... Nxf2!

Let's compare the possible outcome when, in the position shown in Diagram 251, Black chooses 5. ... c6 (instead of 5. ... Nc6): 6. e5 dxe5 7. dxe5 Nd5.

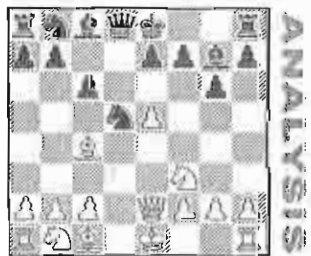


Diagram 254  
After 7. ... Nd5

This position looks reliable, but it is relatively passive and gets slightly worse results than 5. ... Nc6.

In the Austrian Attack, whose theory we'll examine in Chapter 14, I can't recommend ... c7-c6.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. f4 Bg7 5. Nf3

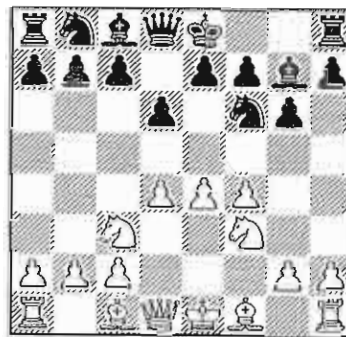


Diagram 255  
Austrian Attack after 5. Nf3

Here 5. ... c7-c6 is inferior to either 5. ... c7-c5 or 5. ... 0-0 because Black gives up his best plans, which begins with ... c7-c5 or ... e7-e5 (after 5. ... 0-0 6. Bd3 Nc6 7. 0-0 e5).

In other types of positions, however, ... c7-c6 has a solid strategic basis and is the best continuation.

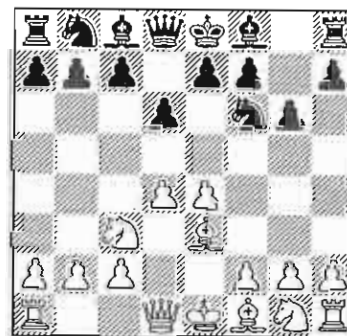


Diagram 256  
After 4. Be3

White's last move, reinforcing c5, makes Operation Enter the Dragon impossible. If 4. ... c5,

then 5. dxc5 Qa5 6. Qd2.



Diagram 257  
After 6. Qd2

Now Black can't play 6. ... Qxc5.

After 4. Be3 in Diagram 256, White often plays to trade dark-square bishops with Bh6. Black may agree to this trade, but he doesn't want to waste a tempo by playing 4. ... Bg7 first. Therefore, the best continuation:

4. ... c6!

Black's idea is to prepare ... b7-b5. If White plays straightforwardly with 5. Qd2 b5 6. f3 Nbd7 7. Bh6?! Bxh6 8. Qxh6 b4 9. Nd1 Qb6, we reach the position diagramed at the top of the next page.

WHEN e4-e5 IS A REAL  
THREAT, IT IS USUALLY  
BETTER FOR BLACK  
NOT TO PLAY  
... c7-c6.



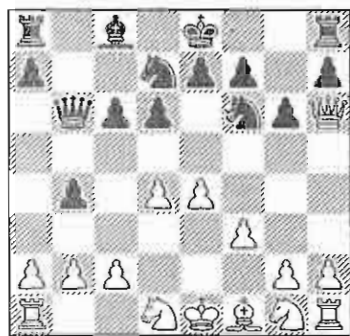


Diagram 258  
After 9... Qb6

Black has excellent play. In this line, the ... c7-c6 move is used to fight for a tempo.

### ... c6 with ... b5

In the Modern, Black is not in a hurry to develop his g8-knight. Instead, Black focuses on developing his forces on the queenside. Usually ... c7-c6 is a necessary part of the plan. It supports ... b7-b5 and frees c7 for his queen, where she, along with other Black pieces—the d7-knight, g7-bishop and the d6-pawn—monitors the e5-outpost. By itself, ... c7-c6 helps Black control the center, but in connection with ... b7-b5, ... c7-c6 is a wing operation as well.

Since the two moves are a bigger commitment than a single pawn push, if Black's wing operation fails, the punishment will be more severe than it would be for a single misstep. Nevertheless, ... b7-b5, performed in one or even in two steps, is a very

important resource for Black in the Pirc Defense. Its purpose is far beyond a local foray, since it guarantees Black freedom as well as key outposts on the queenside.

The Black b-pawn's advance threatens to dislodge one of White's key pieces, the knight on c3 (and, therefore, to undermine the e-pawn, which is protected by the c3-knight), giving Black more chances to succeed in the center. This is a very important strategic purpose of ... b7-b5.

Recall how White's pawn center was ruined in Weissman—Shirov. White allowed Black to play ... b7-b5, although he could have restrained the advance with a2-a4. In that game, we saw that when Black has a pawn on b5 in the Philidor Pirc, he can more successfully perform ... c7-c5 (or ... c6-c5), clearing the way for his light-square bishop to attack the e-pawn from b7.

Quite often, if Black's pawn is still on e7 (or on e6), a preliminary ... b7-b5 intensifies the effect of ... c7-c5. This idea can be brought to life by one of the two schemes available: ... c7-c6, ... b7-b5, ... a7-a6, ... c6-c5, or ... a7-a6, ... b7-b5, ... c7-c5, skipping the intermediate ... c7-c6. When he's done, Black is going to transpose the game into a good

"Dragon" via ... c5xd4. Black isn't worried about either d4xc5 or d4-d5, because his own pawn has already reached b5. His pawn preponderance on the queenside will directly influence the struggle in the center.

BRITTON—NUNN  
LONDON, 1978



Diagram 259  
White to move

12. Bf4 Rad8 13. Qd2 Ne5! 14. Qe3 e6!



Diagram 260  
After 14... c6!

Black has a very strong position on the queenside, and this allows him to play enterprisingly. For instance, moves such as

... Ne5 and ... e7-e6 would not be good under different circumstances, but here they work out just fine.

15. Bxe5 dxe5 16. dxe6 fxe6 17. Nd2 Rd4! 18. f3 Nh5 19. Ne2 Nf4!



Diagram 261  
After 19... Nf4!

Black sacrifices an Exchange to activate his g7-bishop. Moreover, Black's pieces dominate the center and control the key squares on the kingside. The rest of the game is quite understandable: Black demonstrates his superiority!

20. Nxd4 exd4 21. Qf2 Be5 22. a4 Nh5

With the idea of ... Bh2+.

23. g4 Bg3 24. Qe2

Not 24. Qg2 Nf4 25. Qxg3? Ne2+.

24. ... Nf4 25. Qd1 c4

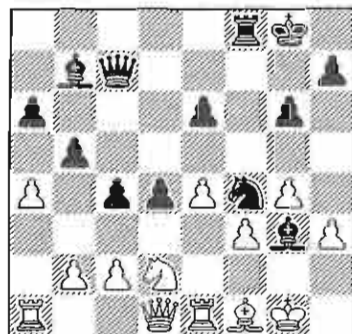


Diagram 262  
After 25. ... c4

26. axb5 axb5 27. Bg2 Bxe1 28. Qxe1 e5 29. Nf1 Qc5 30. Kh2 d3 31. cxd3 Nxd3 32. Qd2 Qd4 33. Rb1 Bxe4! 34. fxex4 Rf2 35. Qg5 Rxe2+ 36. Kxg2 Nf4+, White resigns.

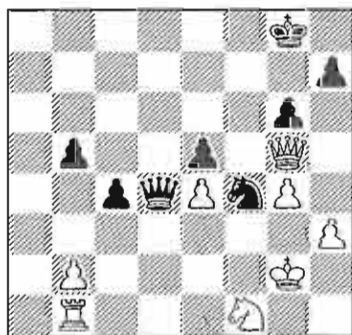


Diagram 263  
After 36. ... Nf4+

### White plays a2-a4

Of course, ... b7-b5 has a lot of potential opposition. Its most natural and obvious enemy is a2-a4. White can play this as a preventative to ... b7-b5 or as a reaction. White's à-la-Larsen (the brilliant Danish World Championship candidate Bent

Larsen was fond of moving his rook's pawn two squares forward) is a challenging move, but not necessarily an antidote to Black's expansion. Black can minimize the effect of a2-a4 if he plays ... b7-b5 after solid preparation. By arranging his pawns on a6, b5, c6, and placing his bishop on b7, Black can simply ignore the threat a4xb5.

Once his pawn is on b5 and White plays a2-a4, Black threatens to push past White's break to b4. Although Black's b-pawn then loses touch with its colleagues, it disturbs White's c3-knight. If White then fails to create sufficient play against b4, and White's c2-c3 break is either impossible to make or not beneficial for White, then the whole operation with a2-a4 is a failure.

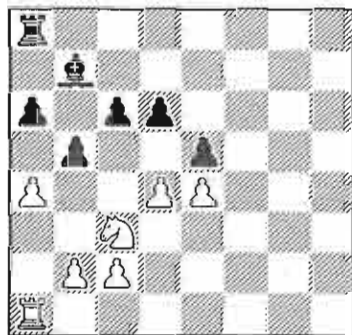


Diagram 264  
Structure when White plays a2-a4  
after Black's ... b6-b5

Still, White's a2-a4 break is a resource that does challenge

Black, and he must be alert. Here is an example of White's a2-a4 as a reaction to a premature ... b7-b5.

NUNN—GELFAND  
MUNICH, 1991



Diagram 265  
White to move

White meets ... b7-b5 with a2-a4, forcing Black to play ... b5-b4, and then to play 11. ... a7-a5 and 12. ... c6-c5 to shore up his advanced pawn. In the process, Black's queenside light squares are seriously compromised.

10. a4 b4 11. Ne2 a5 12. c3 c5  
13. cxb4 cxb4 14. 0-0 0-0 15.  
Rfd1±



**BLACK'S B-PAWN ADVANCE THREATENS TO DISLodge  
WHITE'S C3-KNIGHT, UNDERMINING THE E4-PAWN.**

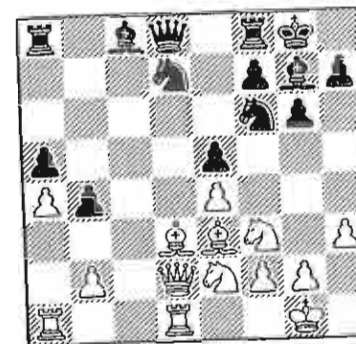


Diagram 266  
After 15. Rfd1

White has excellent prospects for further operations. He succeeded in exploiting the weaknesses in Black's queenside and eventually won.

### White counterattacks in the center

If Black decides to commit to ... b7-b5, he should not only be prepared for the a2-a4 break, but for a counterattack in the center, which after all is the classic antidote to a wing demonstration. Such action in the center is especially likely in situations when ... b7-b5 is played before Black has made other pawn advances, such as ... c7-c5 and ... e7-e5. Black should be alert for two possible breaks in the center, e4-e5 and d4-d5. If ... b7-b5 is played at an inappropriate moment, the punishment can be severe.

MOROZEVICH—CHERNIN  
MOSCOW, 1995

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Be3 c6 5. h3 b5?



Diagram 267  
After 5. ... b5?

6. e5! Nfd7

The capture 6. ... dxe5 is not good—7. dxe5 Qxd1+ 8. Rxd1 Nfd7 9. f4±.

7. exd6 exd6 8. d5! b4 9. Ne4

White has the initiative. But even simpler is 9. Qd4!+, capturing the b4-pawn without giving any compensation to Black.

A one-two combination in the center, 6. e5 and 8. d5, ruined Black's position in short order. By the way, memory is not necessarily the best help in a rapid chess game like this one. Five years earlier, I had made an entry in my notebook that 5. ... b5 is a bad move!

We saw in Chapter 9 how the e4-e5 break worked against ... b7-b5 in the games Chuprov—Pospelov and Stangl—Azmai-

parashvili.

In the same chapter, we examined the immediate counterblow ... b5-b4, aimed against the c3-knight, as one of the methods of fighting against e4-e5. An evaluation of e4-e5 versus ... b5-b4 can be done only with concrete analysis. It matters what is placed on the d2-, b2-, e7- and g7-squares, and, of course, on the c3- and f6-squares.

For instance, in the game Morozevich—Chernin after 6. e5, 6. ... b4 could not help Black in view of 7. exf6 bxc3 8. fxe7 Qxe7 9. bxc3±, and White has an extra pawn. Tactical errors are not allowed here!

Yet if the ... b5-b4 operation is successful, and White's knight on c3 must step aside, Black should be delighted because his own attacked knight on f6 can occupy the lovely d5-outpost.

Now let's look at some illustrations that demonstrate the importance of winning the battle for the e4 and d5 squares.

JONKER—M. GUREVICH  
ZWOLLE, 1996

1. e4 d6 2. d4 g6 3. Be3 Nf6 4. Nc3 c6 5. Qd2 b5 6. Bd3 Nbd7 7. f3 Bb7 8. h4 Nb6 9. e5

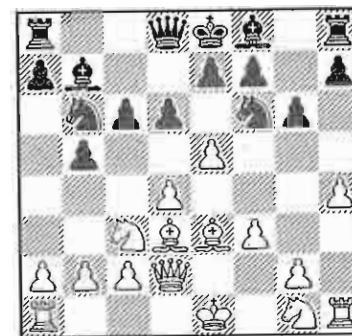


Diagram 268  
After 9. e5

9. ... b4! 10. Nce2 Nfd5 11. h5 Nxe3 12. Qxe3 Nd5 13. Qd2



Diagram 269  
After 13. Qd2

White allowed his opponent to control d5 and to exchange White's important dark-square bishop. Although White creates the unpleasant threat h5xg6, Black, with a brilliant pawn sacrifice, demolishes White's plans.

13. ... g5!! 14. Qxg5

White should return Black's generosity by playing 14. e6 fxe6 15. Qxg5, but in this line Black is also doing well.

14. ... h6! 15. Qd2 dxe5 16. dxe5 e6

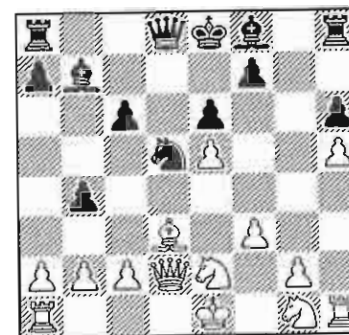


Diagram 270  
After 16. ... e6

Now it's obvious that White can't prevent the Black bishop's jump to c5. Even trading off the d5-knight can't save the game for White. On d5, Black's queen becomes very effective.

17. Nf4 Bc5 18. Nxd5 Qxd5 19. f4 0-0-0 20. Nf3 Rhg8 21. Qe2 Bb6 22. Bc4 Qc5 23. Rh3 Rg4

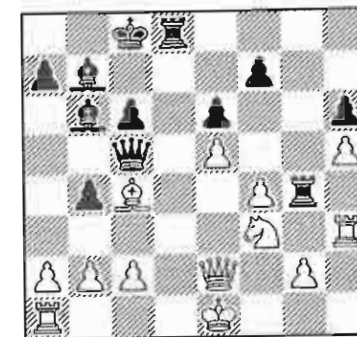


Diagram 271  
After 23. ... Rg4

24. g3 Rdg8 25. 0-0-0 Qe3+

Black has a decisive advantage. He won on move 36.

There is yet another way of conquering the d5-outpost. Black plays ... b5-b4 before White plays e4-e5. If White stubbornly tries to play e4-e5, then the effect might be similar to Jonker—M. Gurevich, above. In order to use the d5-knight most effectively, Black should prevent the opening of the e-file. Keeping this point in mind, let's pay particular attention to Black's tenth move in the following game.

GOLUBEV—CHERNIN  
OPEN (BELGIUM) 1995

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Be3 c6 5. Qd2 Nbd7 6. f3 b5 7. 0-0-0 b4 8. Nce2 a5

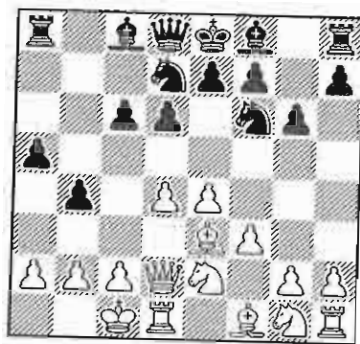


Diagram 272  
After 8... a5

The march of the b-pawn not only reduces the power of a possible e4-e5, but makes things on the queenside uncomfortable for White. Despite this, my opponent decided to push e4-e5 anyway, pinning his hopes on opening the e-file.

9. e5?! Nd5

Not 9. ... dxe5 10. dxe5 Nd5 11. e6!, with unclear complications.

10. exd6 e6!

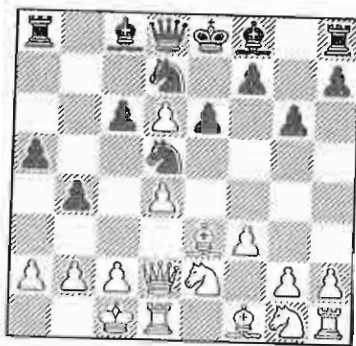


Diagram 273  
After 10... e6!

The situation has changed dramatically, and not in White's favor. White has no good opportunities to break through in the center to challenge Black's outpost on d5. Now Black is in no hurry to exchange on e3 because his d5-knight is more valuable than White's bishop.

11. h4

This weakens g3, and Black's next move emphasizes the weakness.

11. ... N7b6

With the idea of ... Nc4.

12. Ng3

Planning an attack.

12. ... f5!

Preventing 13. Ne4.

13. h5 Qxd6 14. f4 g5!

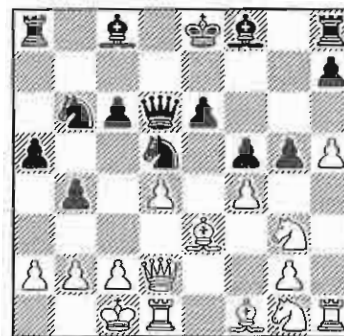


Diagram 274  
After 14... g5!

Suddenly many of White's pieces on dark squares become vulnerable.

15. Nh3 g4 16. Nf2 Bh6 17. Kb1 0-0



Diagram 275  
After 17... 0-0

White now decides to sacrifice material because of the tremendous pressure Black develops. But this doesn't stop

Black's attack.

18. Nxf4 fxf4 19. Ne4 Qe7 20. g3 b3! 21. cxb3 a4 22. bxa4 Nxa4 23. Bc4 Kh8 24. Rcl e5!

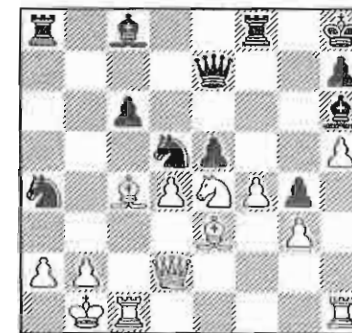


Diagram 276  
After 24... e5!

25. dxe5 Bf5 26. Qd4 Nxe3 27. e6+ Qf6!, White resigns.

I confess I hadn't remembered this game of mine precisely, move-by-move, and had to check my score sheet. But my knight on d5 is a glowing, indelible image in my memory!

The outcome of e4-e5 countered by ... b5-b4 should be evaluated correctly, in advance, both tactically and positionally. In the next game White grabs some material, but the position remains quite satisfactory for Black.

**THE MARCH OF THE B-PAWN NOT ONLY REDUCES THE POWER OF A POSSIBLE E4-E5, BUT MAKES IT UNCOMFORTABLE FOR WHITE TO CASTLE LONG.**

VAN DER WIEL—M. GUREVICH  
AMSTERDAM, 1991

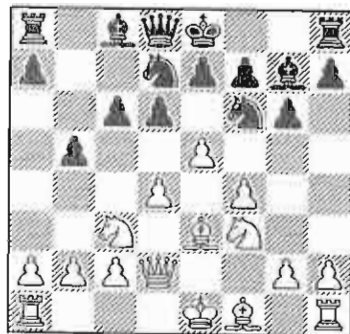


Diagram 277  
After 8... e5

8... b4 9. exf6 bxc3 10. Qxc3  
Nxf6 11. Qxc6+ Bd7 12. Qa6 0-0

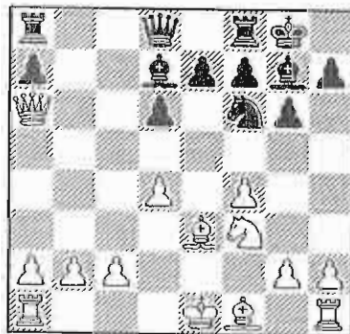


Diagram 278  
After 12... 0-0

Far in advance, Black correctly evaluated this position to be in his favor. White's center is weak because of the ugly position of White's f4-pawn. Furthermore, White is behind in development. His material advantage is not that important.

13. Bd3 Qb8 14. Rb1 Ng4 15.  
Bd2 e5

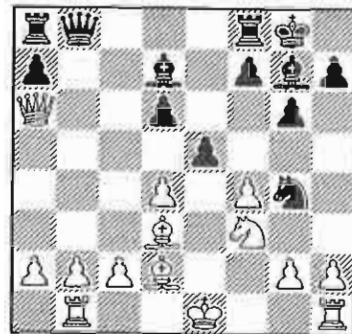


Diagram 279  
After 15... e5

16. 0-0

It's better to give up a pawn than to be under attack after 16. h3 e4!—for example, 17. hxg4 (if 17. Bxe4, then 17... Re8) ... exd3 18. Qxd3 Bxg4, and Black threatens both ... Re8+ and ... Bf5. If White captures on e5 on his 16th move, tactics in the center also favor Black—16. fxe5 dxe5 17. dxe5 Nxe5 18. 0-0 Nxd3, and now if 19. cxd3 Bb5, or if 19. Qxd3, then 19... Bf5 is strong.

16... exd4

Black has a fine position.

**d4-d5**

In response to ... b7-b5, White can instead try advancing his d-pawn. Notice that the ... b5-b4 counterblow often helps Black in this case also. Again, concrete calculations are essential to evaluating who stands better after d5xc6, ... b4xc3 and the follow-up captures.

WESTERVELD—M. GUREVICH  
DUTCH CHAMPIONSHIP, 1995

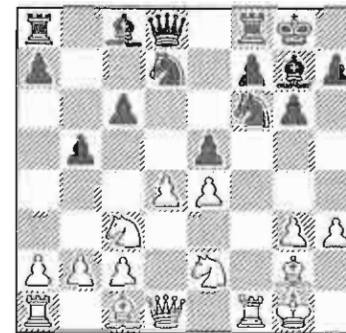


Diagram 280  
White to move

11. d5 b4! 12. Na4

The exchange of blows 12. dxc6 bxc3 13. cxd7 cxb2 14. dxc8(Q) Qb6+, with 15... bxa1(Q) to follow, is not good for White. So White has to react to 11... b4 with 12. Na4, losing control over the d5-outpost. His position becomes worse.

12... cxd5 13. exd5 Re8 14. a3  
a5 15. Be3 e4 16. Nf4 Ba6



Diagram 281  
After 16... Ba6

17. Rf2 Bb5+, with ... Ne5 to follow. Black eventually won.

The d4-d5 advance, whose goal it is to eliminate the c6-pawn (the base of the b5-pawn), is not as powerful as e4-e5, which dislocates the f6-knight. That's why Black may find various methods of refuting White's aggression besides the ... b5-b4 counterblow. The most popular is the simple reply ... c6xd5 (a tempo move that usually doesn't give White time to capture on b5), with ... a7-a6 to follow, and Black protects b5 (see the game Janjgava—M. Gurevich). But in the next example, ... cxd5 doesn't work out.

NIJBOER—SMIRIN  
EUROPEAN TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP  
PULA, 1997



Diagram 282  
Black to move

Now Black shouldn't take on d5: 10... cxd5 11. Bd4! e5 12. Bxb6 ± Nxb6 (12... Qxb6 13. Nxd5 and 14. Bxb5) 13. Bxb5+; Also bad is 10... b4 11. Qd4!. But Black had other resources.

10... Ne5! 11. dxc6 Nbc4 12.  
Bxc4 Nxc4 13. Qd4 Rg8



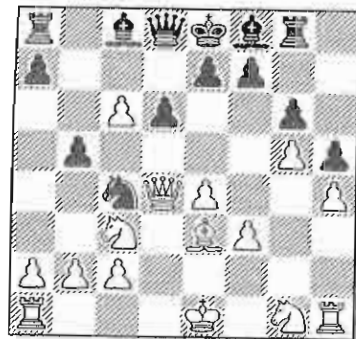


Diagram 283

After 13. ... Rg8

Black is a pawn down but has excellent play.

14. Nxb5?! Qa5+ 15. Nc3 Be6  
16. b4

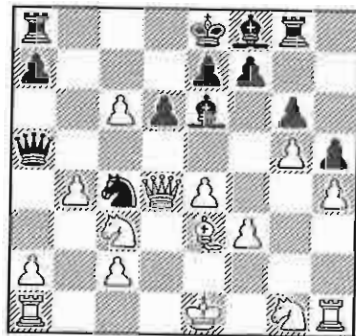


Diagram 284

After 16. b4

16. ... Qa3?

Black could reach a winning position with 16. ... Qxb4 17. Rb1 Qa5 18. Rb5 Bg7 19. Rxa5 Bxd4.

... a7-a6

We have determined already that in various situations ... b5 works perfectly along with ... c5. Recall the chain of Black moves:

... c7-c6, ... b7-b5, ... a7-a6 and ... c6-c5, after which the b5/c5 pawn pair emerges. Why should we have to waste a tempo by playing ... c7-c6 instead of an initial ... a7-a6? Let's take a look at ... a7-a6 and its relative value compared to ... c7-c6.

The move ... c7-c6 takes control of the key d5-square, while ... a7-a6, along with its partner ... b7-b5, is a pure flank action. Therefore, if Black plays ... a7-a6, White may succeed by counterattacking in the center.

Let's recall the sequence of moves that occurred in the game Morozevich—Azmaiparashvili: 1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6 4. Be3 a6 5. f4 b5 6. Be2 Bb7 7. Bf3 Nd7 8. e5

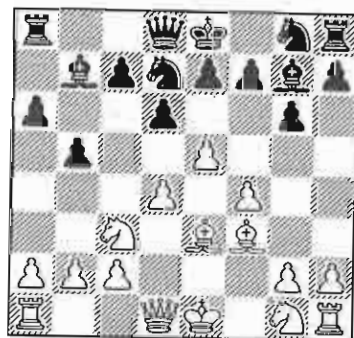


Diagram 285

After 8. e5

White lacks such a possibility in a similar system: 1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6 4. Be3 c6.

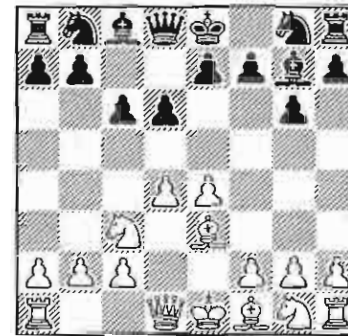


Diagram 286

After 4. ... c6

The game is closed, and Black can control e5 with his d6-pawn, a d7-knight and a g7-bishop. So Black may later risk ... b7-b5. Indeed, the general rule of the effectiveness of a central counterblow as a reaction to a wing operation doesn't necessarily apply here because of the closed character of the position.

If Black stops half way by moving only ... a7-a6 and postponing ... b7-b5 until after he completes his development, then his risk is minimized, but his prospects are minimized also. In any case, White can usually preempt ... b7-b5 with a2-a4. Then Black should be satisfied with the minimally beneficial effect of ... a7-a6, the protection of b5.

### Black's pawn play against White's queenside castling

When White castles long, the value of ... a7-a6 (or ... c7-c6) and ... b7-b5 increases because these moves can be the start of a pawn storm on the enemy king.

LEKO—CHERNIN  
HUNGARIAN CHAMPIONSHIP  
1992

1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6 4. Bg5 Nbd7 5. Qd2 a6 6. 0-0-0 b5  
7. f4 Bb7



Diagram 287

After 7. ... Bb7

8. a3

After 8. e5 Black would play 8. ... f6! 9. Bh4 Nh6, with a good game. (We saw this method in Chapter 9.) Yet perhaps this is the best continuation White has.

8. ... c5 9. d5 Ngf6 10. Qe1 0-0

WHEN WHITE CASTLES LONG, THE VALUE OF ... A7-A6 AND ... B7-B5 INCREASES BECAUSE THESE MOVES CAN BE THE START OF A PAWN STORM AGAINST THE KING.



Diagram 288  
After 10. ... 0-0

### 11. Nf3

The most unpleasant circumstance for White is that e4-e5 is not possible because of ... b5-b4: 11. e5 b4! 12. exf6 exf6 ♣.

### 11. ... Rb8!

Now White can't stop ... b5-b4.

12. Kb1 b4 ♣ 13. axb4 cxb4 14. Na2

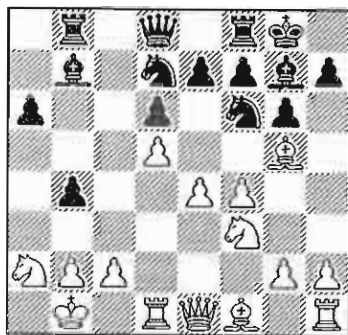


Diagram 289  
After 14. Na2

### 14. ... b3!?

Better is 14. ... a5 ♣.

15. cxb3 Nc5 16. Bxf6 exf6! 17. b4

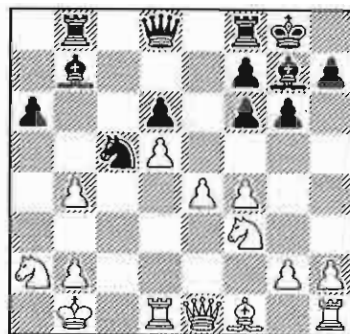


Diagram 290  
After 17. b4

### 17. .... f5!! 18. e5

No better is 18. bxc5 fxe4 19. Qxe4 Bc8!-+.

18. ... Ne4 19. Bc4 dxe5 20. fxe5 Qc7 21. Rc1

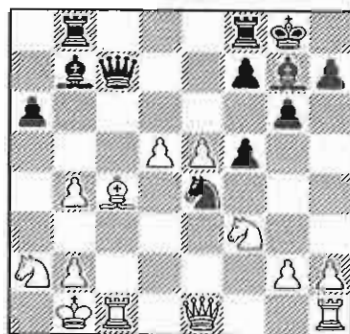


Diagram 291  
After 21. Rc1

21. ... Bxe5 22. Bxa6 Qd6 23. Bxb7 Rxb7 24. Nxe5 Qxe5 25. Qe3

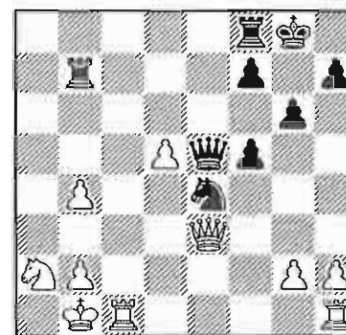


Diagram 292  
After 25. Qe3

### 25. ... Qxd5

Here the simplest way to victory is 25. ... Ra8 26. Rhd1 Qxh2, followed by ... Rba7.

Of course, back on move six, White could react to ... a7-a6 with a2-a4, stopping ... b7-b5, but then he could not comfortably castle queenside.

### Summary:

*Black's queenside pawn play is critical in the Pirc Defense, and he must be accurate. The preparatory move ... c7-c6 supports the center as well as Black's queenside plans. But if he wants to play the Ruy Lopez Pirc, Black should refrain from ... c6 in favor of ... Ne6. Often, if Black's pawn is still on e7 or e6, a preliminary ... b7-b5 makes a coming ... c7-c5 even stronger.*

*The natural enemy of ... b7-b5 is White's a2-a4. When White plays a2-a4 to prevent ... b7-b5, Black can still prepare this advance. When White plays a2-a4 after Black's ... b7-b5, White runs the risk that ... b5-b4 will disorganize his queenside.*

*When White castles long, moves such as ... a6 and ... b5 increase in value because they can be the start of a pawn storm against White's king.*

### Queenside Pawn Moves—a Quick Page Reference

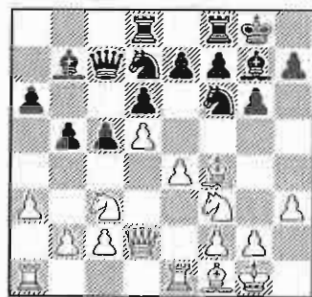
... c6	p. 155	d5	p. 166
... c6/b5	p. 158	... a6	p. 168
a4	p. 160	0-0-0	p. 169
c5	p. 161		

## Black's Queenside Pawn Play Memory Markers!



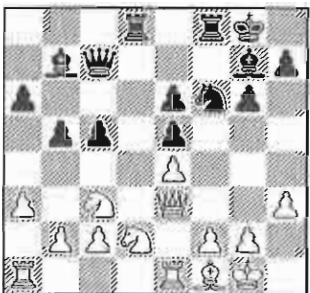
MARKER 1

Diagram 293  
Black to move



MARKER 2

Diagram 294  
Black to move



MARKER 3

Diagram 295  
Black to move



MARKER 4

Diagram 296  
Black to move



MARKER 5

Diagram 297  
Black to move

—REMEMBER—  
THE NATURAL ENEMY OF  
BLACK'S ... B7-B5 IS A2-A4.  
WHEN WHITE  
CASTLES LONG, BLACK'S  
... B7-B5 IS ESPECIALLY  
ATTRACTIVE.

## Black's Queenside Pawn Play Solutions to Memory Markers!

- No. 1 1. ... Nxf2!. (See page 156.)
- No. 2 1. ... Ne5! 2. Qe3 e6!. Black's very strong position on the queenside allows him to play enterprisingly. (See page 159.)
- No. 3 1. ... Rd4 2. f3 Nh5 3. Ne2 Nf4!. Black sacrifices an Exchange to activate his fianchettoed bishop. Moreover, Black's pieces now dominate the center and control the key squares on the kingside. (See page 159.)
- No. 4 1. ... e6, and White has no way to break through to undermine Black's dominating outpost on d5. (See page 164.)
- No. 5 1. ... b4! 2. exf6 exf6 ♣. (See page 170.)

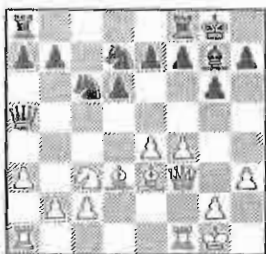
## Chapter 11: Black's Fianchettoed Bishop Some Important Points to Look For

Black's dark-square bishop is a stalwart of both attack and defense. Although Black should generally play to preserve it, the bishop is not a sacred cow.



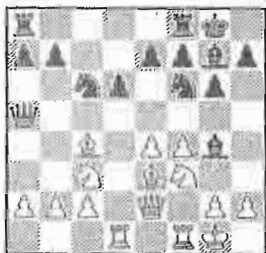
- ◆ At this point, 7. Bb6 is premature and leads to a better game for Black.

See Diagram 304.



- ◆ White needs to take time to play 14. Bd2, protecting his knight.

See Diagram 306.



- ◆ Bobby Fischer put White's once popular system out of business in 1972 with 12. ... Nh5.

See Diagram 312.



- ◆ Black's fianchettoed bishop is "good," but Black's position is bad!

See Diagram 321.

## Chapter 11 Black's Fianchettoed Bishop

The Pirc's left hand

In this chapter and the next, we'll focus on the role that each of Black's pieces plays in the Pirc Defense. It makes perfect sense to start with the cornerstone of Black's system, his dark-square bishop. Due to its importance, the bishop-bulwark of the Pirc deserves a chapter of its own.

Its future is clear—home will be g7. But is this fianchettoed bishop a sacred cow to be preserved at all costs? Or should it be considered "expendable," like its cohorts? What is the real value of this piece, the "business card" of the Pirc?

### The value of the g7-bishop

As we've seen, Black's g7-bishop is a stalwart that can be used either for defense or offense. Clearly, the bishop has a significant value. It is important to realize, however, that the Pirc is not an opening that relies on any one piece. For the purpose of contrast, let's take a look at the

following position, which occurs in the English Opening.

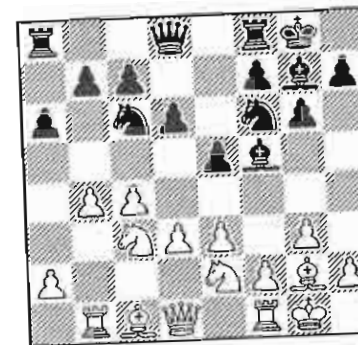


Diagram 298

Unlike White's fianchettoed bishop in the English Opening, the dark-square bishop in the Pirc isn't a sacred cow.

We can see that White's play is based on expanding the influence of his bishop on g2.

### The exchange of dark-square bishops

The importance of Black's fianchettoed bishop is not supreme. In fact, here is a collection of examples in which the exchange of White's dark-square bishop for Black's dark-square bishop (on h6 or elsewhere)

made White's position worse.

**RYTSHAGOV—CHERNIN  
OLYMPIAD, 1996**

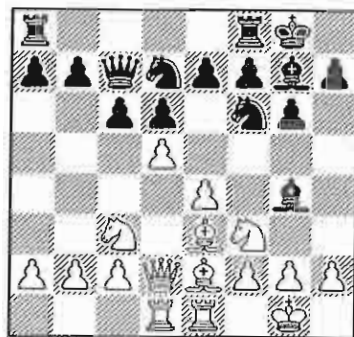


Diagram 299  
White to move

12. Bh6?! Bxf3 13. Bxf3 Bxb6!  
14. Qxb6

Now Black should continue by capturing on d5.

14. ... cxd5 15. exd5 Ne5 16. Be2 Qb6!

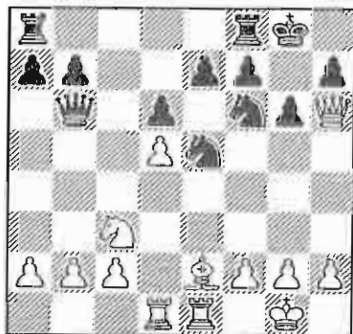


Diagram 300  
After 16. ... Qb6!

Black's last move prevents 17. Rd4 (with the idea of Rh4) and threatens both 17. ... Qxb2 and 17. ... Qxf2+!

Here's another example.

**SUTOVSKY—CHERNIN  
RISHON LE ZION, 1994**

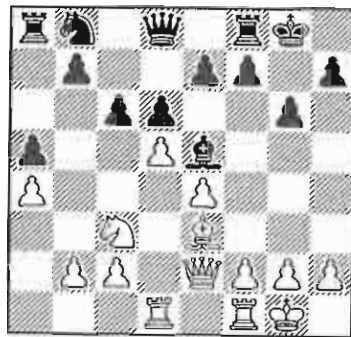


Diagram 301  
White to move

15. Bd4

It is interesting that White has no chance to launch an attack after the dark-square bishops are gone.

15. ... Bxd4 16. Rxd4 Nd7 17. Rd3 Qb6 18. Rh3 Nf6 19. Qd2 h5!

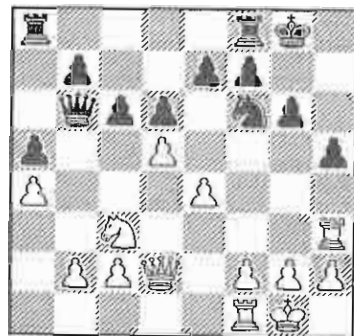


Diagram 302  
After 19. ... h5!

20. Kh1 cxd5 21. exd5 Qxb2 22. Rb1 Qa3 23. g4

Or 23. Rxb7 Ne4!

23. ... Nxc4 ♣.

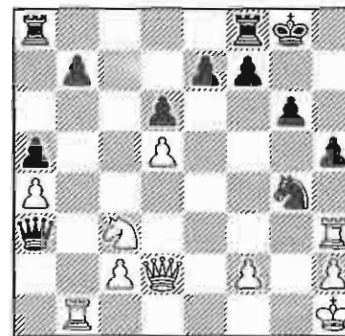


Diagram 303  
After 23. ... Nxc4

Here's a theoretical position where, once again, the exchange of dark-square bishops favors Black.

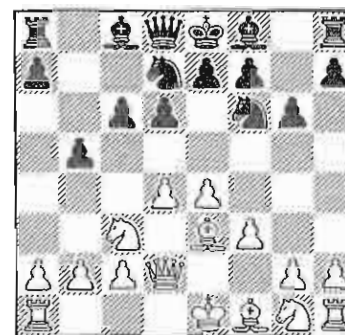


Diagram 304  
White to move

7. Bh6?! b4 8. Na4

Black has easy play even if White chooses the relatively better 8. Nd1 Bxh6 9. Qxh6 Qb6.

8. ... Bxh6 9. Qxh6 Nb6! 10. Nxb6 axb6 ♣

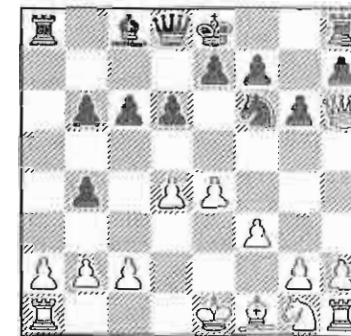
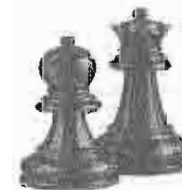


Diagram 305  
After 10. ... axb6

Play could continue 11. e5 Nd5 12. Qg7 Rf8 13. Qxh7 dxc5 14. dxe5 Qc7 15. Qg7 Bf5 ♣

The examples from this collection, which may be expanded easily, show that even with the important g7-bishop gone, it is possible for Black to continue playing on the dark squares successfully.

**Exchanging Black's fianchettoed bishop for White's c3-knight**

On the other hand, it is often hazardous for Black to permit the trade of his g7-bishop for White's c3-knight. Yet, periodically, such a "bishop sacrifice" works.

**AT TIMES, EVEN WITH THE G7-BISHOP GONE, BLACK CAN PLAY SUCCESSFULLY ON THE DARK SQUARES.**



SCHMITTDIEL—CHERNIN  
DORTMUND, 1991

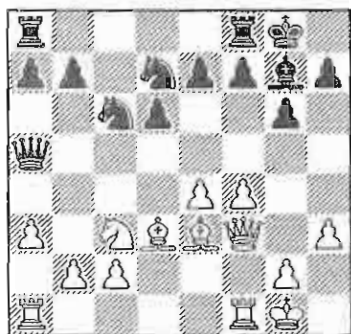


Diagram 306  
White to move

Theory recommends 14. Bd2 here. My opponent didn't want to waste valuable time and chose instead 14. **Rab1**, with the idea of 15. Ne2. I replied with 14. ... **Bxc3!**

It was easy to decide to make this move; otherwise 14. Rab1 would be totally reasonable. White would be a tempo up in a theoretical position.

15. **bxc3 Qxc3** 16. **Bc1**

White sacrificed a pawn with no intention of being "rewarded" with the worse position after 16. Rxb7 Nc5 17. Rc7 Nxd3 18. cxd3 Rfc8. But transferring his bishop to the long diagonal, with the idea of launching a kingside attack, does not work out. Black's flexible pawn chain proves to be resilient.

16. ... **Rac8** 17. **Bb2 Qc5+** 18. **Kh1 Nb6**

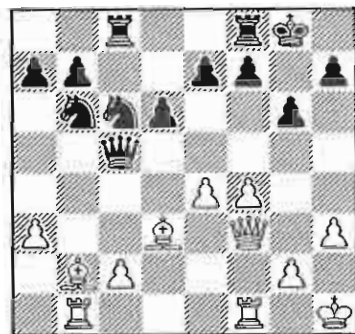


Diagram 307  
After 18. ... Nb6

19. **e5 dxe5** 20. **f5 Nc4** 21. **Bc1 Nd6** 22. **Bh6 e4** 23. **Bxc4 Nd4** 24. **Qg4 Nxc4** 25. **fxg6 hxg6** 26. **Qxe4**

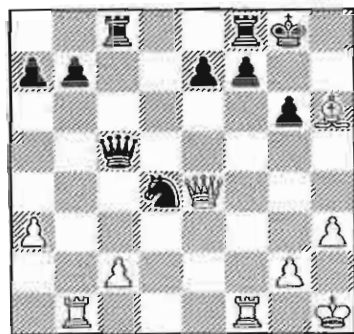


Diagram 308  
After 26. Qxe4

26. ... **Nf5** 27. **Rxf5 Qxf5** 28. **Qxf5 gxf5** 29. **Bxf8 Kxf8**

White has the worse end-game and eventually lost.

Choosing ... Bg7xc3 is irreversible, of course. It's not a move to be made on a whim! Black has to be sure that the resulting positions are good for him. In the following game, even

Alexander Khalifman, an experienced player who has a deep understanding of the Pirc Defense, failed to follow this advice.

KINDERMANN—KHALIFMAN  
HAMBURG, 1991

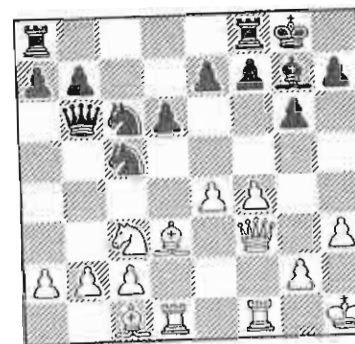


Diagram 309  
Black to move

16. ... **Bxc3?! 17. bxc3 Qa5**

Black damages the opponent's pawn chain and tries to create pressure on it. However, in contrast to the previous example, White's pieces are well placed, so Black eventually fails.

18. **Bc4 Qa4** 19. **Qe2 Na5** 20. **Bd5 e6** 21. **Rd4!**

Black's queen must leave her strong a4-outpost.

21. ... **Qd7** 22. **Bb3 Qe7** 23. **Qf3**

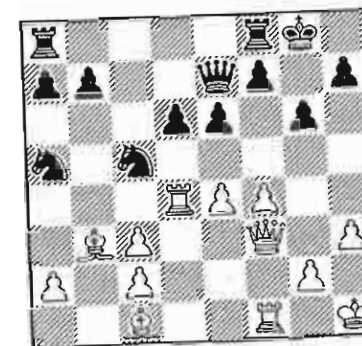


Diagram 310  
After 23. Qf3

23. ... **f5**

Otherwise, White will play f4-f5. The character of play now becomes open, and White benefits because he owns a pair of bishops and applies pressure along the central files. True, Black can trade off the b3-bishop at any moment. But as a result, White's pawn structure will be restored, while White's attack remains strong.

24. **exf5 Rxf5**

Or 24. ... gxf5 25. Re1±, with the idea of Ba3.

25. **Re1 Raf8** 26. **Qd1 Rd8** 27. **Ba3 Naxb3** 28. **cxb3**

CHOOSING ... BG7XC3 IS IRREVERSIBLE.  
IT'S NOT A MOVE TO BE MADE ON A WHIM!



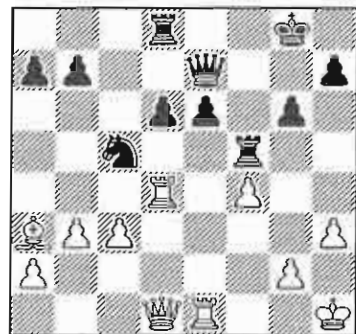


Diagram 311  
After 28. cxb3

28. ... b6 29. c4 a5 30. Qd2 e5  
31. Rd5 e4

Or 31. ... Rxf4? 32. Qxf4.

32. Rd4 Qh4 33. Bxc5 bxc5 34.  
Rdxe4+-, and White won.

In this game, Black's exchange of his bishop for the knight on c3 was too optimistic.

The role of a possible ... Bg7xc3 is further sketched in these various theoretical lines.

SPASSKY—FISCHER  
WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP (17)  
REYKJAVIK, 1972

1. e4 d6 2. d4 g6 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. f4  
Bg7 5. Nf3 c5 6. dxc5 Qa5 7.  
Bd3 Qxc5 8. Qe2 0-0 9. Be3  
Qa5 10. 0-0 Bg4 11. Rad1 Nc6  
12. Bc4



Diagram 312  
After 12. Bc4

This once popular system now becomes obsolete in view of Fischer's play.

12. ... Nh5 13. Bb3

White could try the sharpest line, 13. Rd5 Qc7 14. Rg5.



Diagram 313  
After 14. Rg5

But the shocker ... Bg7xc3 helps Black here too—14. ... Bxf3 15. Rxf3 Nd4 16. Bxd4 Bxd4+ 17. Kh1

IT'S STILL TRUE THAT BLACK SHOULD USUALLY  
TRY TO PRESERVE HIS DARK-SQUARE BISHOP.



Diagram 314  
After 17. Kh1

17. ... Nxf4! 18. Rxf4 Bxc3, with the idea of 19. bxc3 d5 ♣.

Back to the actual game after 13. Bb3.

13. ... Bxc3! 14. bxc3 Qxc3 15. f5



Diagram 315  
After 15. f5

15. ... Nf6

Here 15. ... Na5 16. Bd4 Qc7 (Gligorich—Hort, 1972) is even stronger than Fischer's follow-up.

16. h3 Bxf3 17. Qxf3 Na5

In either Hort's or Fischer's continuation, White's chances to launch an attack are problematic.

Don't get the impression that we can find a successful

... Bg7xc3 only in the Austrian Attack. Here are some examples from other lines of the Pirc Defense.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Nf3 Bg7 5. h3 0-0 6. Be2 c5 7. d5



Diagram 316  
After 7. d5

7. ... b5 8. Bxb5 Nxe4 9. Nxe4 Qa5+ 10. Nc3 Bxc3+ 11. bxc3 Qxb5 12. Bh6 Re8

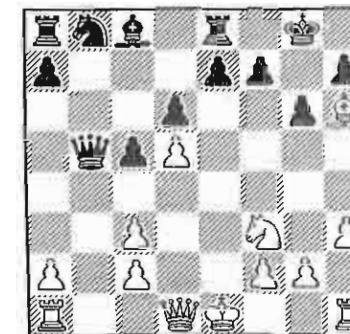


Diagram 317  
After 12. ... Re8

Black has an advantage.



Here's another example.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4.  
Be2 Bg7 5. h4 c5 6. dxc5 Qa5 7.  
Kf1 Qxc5 8. Be3 Qa5 9. h5

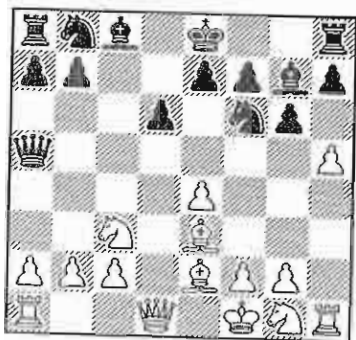


Diagram 318  
After 9. h5

9. ... Nxh5 10. Bxh5 Bxc3! 11.  
bxc3 gxh5 12. Rxh5 Qxc3 13.  
Bd4 Qc4+

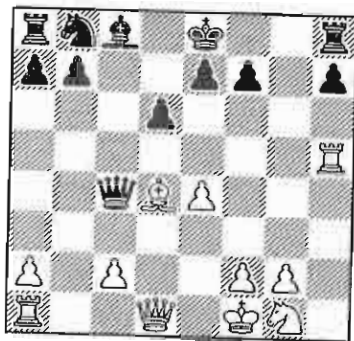


Diagram 319  
After 13. Qc4+

Black has a very good position.

In general, if White's pawn leaves d4, the possibility of ... Bg7xc3 should be considered. But despite the previous examples of Black trading his "prize"

bishop for an advantage, it's still true that Black should usually think not about trading, but about preserving his dark-square bishop.

### Good news, bad news

In some openings, pawn structures take shape quickly. In the Pirc, however, the character of play is initially uncertain. In the French Defense, it's instantly clear that the c8-bishop's role is rather minimal, and that it would be useful to trade it for the opponent's light-square bishop.

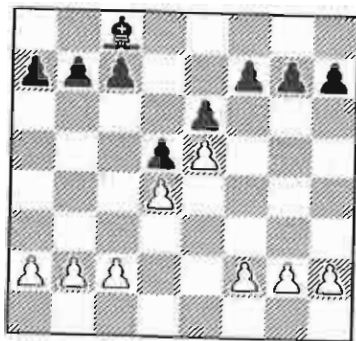


Diagram 320  
Pawn structure in the French Defense

But in the Pirc, the future of the dark-square bishop is unsure for some time.

Although there certainly are positions in which we can recognize that the g7-bishop is "good" (it controls the open h8-a1 diagonal), or "bad," (it's hemmed in by pawns), we shouldn't use this information to jump to a conclusion.

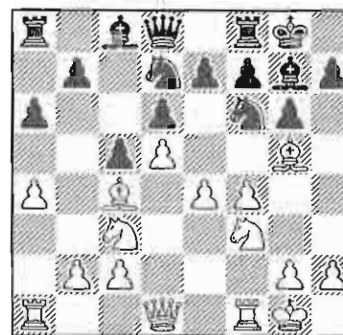


Diagram 321  
Black's g7-bishop is "good,"  
but his position is bad.

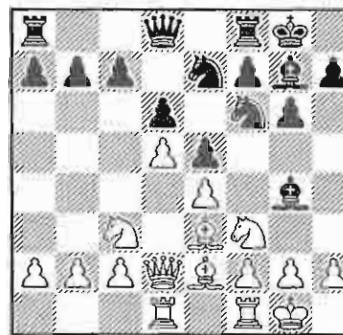


Diagram 322  
Black's g7-bishop is "bad,"  
but his position is good.

In Diagram 321, the g7-bishop is "good," but White has a clear edge. In Diagram 322, despite the fact that his fianchet-

toed bishop is "bad," Black is doing well. He has a promising plan based on advancing ... f7-f5.

Remember that besides its work along the long diagonal, Black's g7-bishop has another, no less crucial, duty—stabilizing Black's castled position. Recall the game Kogan—van Wely.

KOGAN—VAN WELY  
HERAKLIO, 1993



Diagram 323  
Black to move

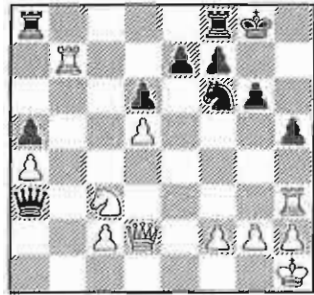
15. ... Bh8

We see why both ... c7-c5 and ... e7-e5 remain Black's two mainstream plans, despite the fact that ... e7-e5 restricts the activity of Black's bishop on g7.

### Summary:

Black's fianchettoed bishop is a stalwart, used in both attack and defense, but it's not a sacred cow. Although Black should generally preserve his bishop, we saw a number of examples where trading off Black's dark-square bishop led to a worse game for White. The pawn structure of the Pirc can take a while to crystallize, and Black should not jump to conclusions about the long-term health of his fianchettoed bishop. Sometimes when his bishop appears "good" Black can have a bad position. Sometimes the bishop can be "bad," yet Black has a good position.

## Black's Fianchettoed Bishop Memory Markers!



MARKER 1

Diagram 324  
Black to move



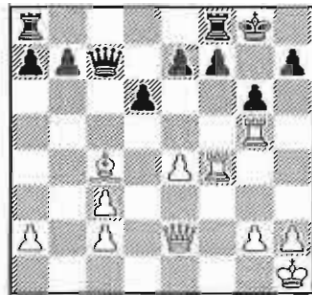
MARKER 2

Diagram 325  
Black to move



MARKER 3

Diagram 326  
White to move



MARKER 4

Diagram 327  
Black to move



MARKER 5

Diagram 328  
Black to move



MARKER 6

Diagram 329  
Bad bishop, bad game?

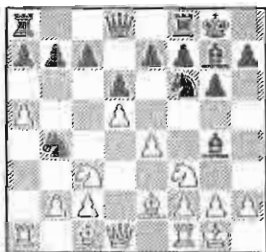
## Black's Fianchettoed Bishop Solutions to Memory Markers!

- No. 1* 1. ... Ne4!. White can't play 2. Nxe4, because Black mates beginning with 2. ... Qa1+. (See page 176.)
- No. 2* 1. ... Nb6! (after 2. Nxb6 axb6, Black is already slightly better). (See page 177.)
- No. 3* 1. Qd2. White has to fight for equality. The ambitious 1. e5 Nd5 2. Qg7 Rf8 3. Qxh7 dxe5 4. dxe5 Qc7 5. Qg7 Bf5 leads to a meaningful edge for Black. (See page 177.)
- No. 4* 1. ... d5!. (See page 181.)
- No. 5* 1. ... Bxc3!, and Black has the better game. (See page 182.)
- No. 6* Bad bishop, good game. (See Diagram 322, page 183.)

## Chapter 12: Black's Other Pieces

### Some Important Points to Look For

Black's pieces are generally cramped, and he must deploy them in a way that jibes with his overall plan.



- ◆ Black plays 9... Bd7!, not only as a tactical point to prevent 10. Ra4, but also as a strategic plan to support ... c6.

See Diagram 333.



- ◆ After 14. Qxh3 Black castles, while 14. gxh3 wrecks White's pawn structure.

See Diagram 334.



- ◆ Here Black should not play ... Qa5, but rather ... b7-b5.

See Diagram 339.



- ◆ It's obvious that Black's king must seek a different retirement home than g8. For now, at least, it can stay in the center until files open against it.

See Diagram 342.

## Chapter 12

### Black's Other Pieces

Developing with a plan

**W**e've discussed the relative importance of Black's dark-square bishop, so now let's look at the role played by the rest of Black's army.

#### Black's light-square bishop

Black's queenside minor pieces experience discomfort due to an initial lack of space. His light-square bishop is a problem piece. Fianchettoing it may be an impossible strategic task for Black. Such deployment would take time, time that Black needs vitally for organizing a more important counterblow in the center.

It looks like Black's very first move, 1... d6, determines the bishop's destiny by opening the c8-h3 diagonal. In most cases, the c8-bishop is developed to g4 with the purpose of pinning White's f3-knight. It is understandable that Black should be ready to give up his light-square bishop, considering the omni-

present threat of h2-h3. Theoretically, White would have two bishops and thus an advantage.

Yet Black usually has something in return for his loss of the bishop pair. It may be easier for him to maneuver, for instance. Black would not be concerned about development of his queen's knight because ... Nb8-d7 no longer blocks his bishop. Besides, c8 can now be reserved for a rook. This last factor is very important in the Dragon structure.

But, of course, the most important reason for giving up the c8-bishop is the weakening of White's hold on d4, a necessary precursor to many of Black's important plans.

Because the Pirc Defense can keep a closed or semi-closed character, it is easier for Black to hold out against his opponent's pair of bishops. However, one shouldn't underestimate the



investment of giving up the bishop pair. Unquestionably, bishops are powerful pieces, and if we give them up, we have to realize the consequences. Let's recall the game Karpov—Nunn with this in mind.

KARPOV—NUNN  
TILBURG, 1982

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Nf3 Bg7 5. Be2 0-0 6. 0-0 Bg4

Preparing to exchange on f3.  
7. Be3



Diagram 330  
After 7. Be3

7. ... Nbd7

The move 7. ... Nc6 is necessary to keep attackers and defenders of d4 in parity. Now Black will be unable to benefit from the weakening of d4 after exchanging on f3, so his bishop will be traded for White's knight without compensation.

8. h3 Bxf3 9. Bxf3 e5 10. g3 c6 11. Bg2 Qa5 12. Qd2 Rfe8 13. Rad1 b5

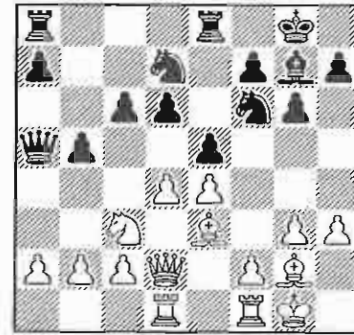


Diagram 331  
After 13. ... b5

It's clear that Black is worse off. In such positions, Black misses his light-square bishop. For instance, here Black would love to place it on b7. Instead, in a couple of moves White will assault the opponent's position by playing d4-d5 with great effect.

14. a3 Nb6 15. b3 Nfd7 16. Ra1 Nf8 17. d5! ±.

From the position in Diagram 330, if Black reacts accurately to 7. Be3 with 7. ... Nc6 8. Qd2 e5 9. d5 Ne7 10. Rad1, we get the following position.



Diagram 332  
After 10. Rad1

It seems that Black is ready to trade light-square bishops, but suddenly he decides to pull back:

10. ... Bd7!

The reason is simple. The g4-bishop has already performed its duties. Its activity caused White to close the center with d4-d5. For the type of play that follows, it is reasonable for Black to keep the light-square bishop alive. Particularly since, as the reader will have an opportunity to see in the theoretical part of this book, the d7-bishop supports ... b7-b5.

MOROVICH—CHERNIN  
BUENOS AIRES, 1992

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Nf3 Bg7 5. Be2 0-0 6. 0-0 Bg4 7. a4 Nc6 8. d5 Nb4 9. a5

Here Black uses the same idea.

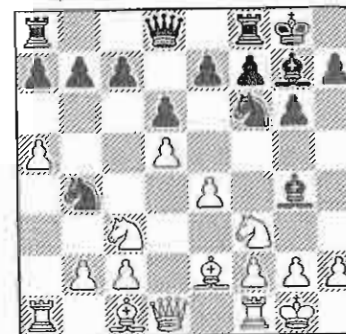


Diagram 333  
After 9. a5

9. ... Bd7!

This is not only a factual point—Black prevents the threat of 10. Ra4—, but also a strategic

plan to support ... c7-c6.

10. a6 bxa6 11. Bxa6 Nxa6 12. Rxa6 c6!

Now if 13. dxc6, then 13. ... Qc8. The advantage of preserving the light-square bishop is clear.

Before giving up your light-square bishop, you should always examine the consequences.

BELIAVSKY—HORR  
MOSCOW, 1975

1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6 4. Be3 c6 5. Qd2 b5 6. f3 Nf6 7. Bh6 Bxh6 8. Qxh6 Qa5 9. Bd3 Nbd7 10. Nh3 b4 11. Ne2 c5 12. dxc5 Nxc5 13. 0-0



Diagram 334  
After 13. 0-0

As a result of White's trading bishops on h6, his queen was able to penetrate the opposing camp, preventing Black from castling kingside.

13. ... Bxh3!

Black solves the problem.

14. Qxh3 0-0

He even gets a better posi-

tion. Naturally, if White stubbornly wants to keep his queen on h6, he must play 14. gxh3, a toll he can't afford.

If Black's light-square bishop stays alive, its activity can be eminently effective in the Philidor Pirc if Black can play the so-called "extended fianchetto" with his b-pawn on b5. Remember that the bishop can be activated by the "Philidor-esque" moves: ... e5xd4, ... c6-c5, with ... b5-b4 to follow, if possible.

ZAPATA—HANSEN  
EREVAN, 1996

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Be3 c6 5. Qd2 b5 6. Bd3 Nbd7 7. Nf3 e5 8. 0-0 Bb7 9. Rfe1 Bg7 10. Bh6 0-0 11. a4

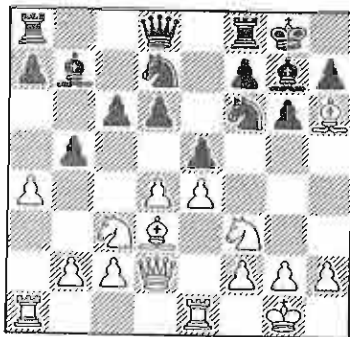


Diagram 335  
After 11. a4

11. ... exd4!

After this move the character of play changes dramatically in favor of the b7-bishop—and in favor of the entire Black position.

12. Nxd4 b4 13. Nd1 c5 14. Bxg7 Kxg7 15. Nf3

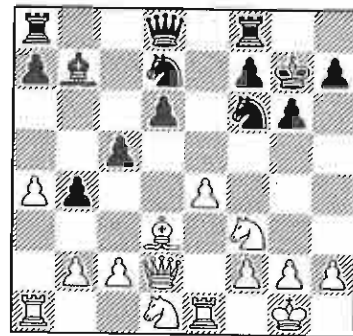


Diagram 336  
After 15. Nf3

In case of 15. Nb5 Ne5, White's b5-knight would be in trouble in view of 16. ... a6. Yet even after the text move White remains worse.

15. ... Re8 16. Qf4 Ne5 17. Nxe5 Rxe5 18. f3 Qe7 19. Qc1 c4! 20. Bxc4 d5 21. Bb3 dxe4

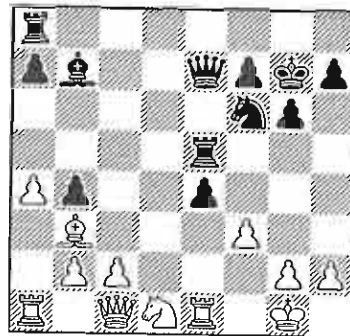


Diagram 337  
After 21. ... dxe4

The attack on e4 has been successful, and as a result Black has a decisive advantage.

### Black's knight on b8

Next door to the bishop on c8, the knight has two main

squares for development—d7 or c6. The choice Black makes depends on the plan he follows. Placing the knight on d7 has its potential drawbacks. Besides positional reasons (insufficient influence on the center, blocking the c8-bishop in some cases), there could be tactical reasons as well (for example, no room for the f6-knight to retreat in case White plays e4-e5).

Not surprisingly, developing the b8-knight to c6 offers its own set of downsides. On c6 the knight blocks the c-pawn, and the threat of d4-d5 should be taken seriously. Of course, each choice offers its advantages. We have already learned quite a bit about them. (See Karpov—Nunn.)

Developing the b8-knight to the third square available, a6, is less frequently chosen. The most logical use of the knight on a6 is supporting a ...c7-c5 advance. In this case, if White continues with d4xc5, Black has ... Na6xc5, transposing the game to a "Dragon." If White reacts to ... c7-c5 by playing d4-d5, then the a6-knight would be transferred to c7 in order to prepare ... b7-b5,

desirable in such structures. This idea is materialized in the following line that is quite popular nowadays.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. f4 Bg7 5. Nf3 0-0 6. Bd3 Na6 7. 0-0 c5 8. d5

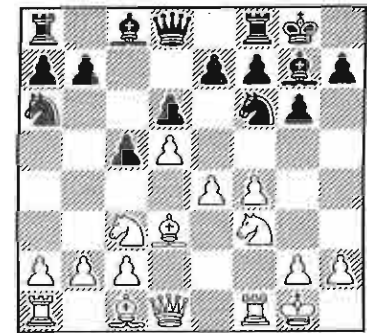


Diagram 338  
After 8. d5

Now Black should decide whether to continue with ... Nc7 right away or to postpone this move for some time.

It is interesting that in this or similar positions, Black is not afraid of Bxa6, when he would hope to get sufficient compensation for his damaged pawns. After all, Black would be immediately ceded the bishop pair and a semi-open b-file for his rook.

Sometimes, after White has

**BEFORE GIVING UP YOUR LIGHT-SQUARE BISHOP, YOU SHOULD ALWAYS EXAMINE THE CONSEQUENCES.**

already played a2-a4, the a6-square becomes a transitional stop for the knight as it heads to b4.

### Black's queen

The prospects of Black's queen should also be taken into account as we evaluate particular opening systems. One of the advantages of the "Dragon" over the Philidor formation is a greater dynamism of Black's most powerful piece. After ... c7-c5, Black's queen has at its disposal the ... d8-a5 diagonal. Of course, the same effect can be achieved by playing ... c7-c6.

After ... c7-c6 Black's queen can occupy c7 in order to control e5. But if Black pushes his c-pawn, he should not be in a hurry to develop his queen to a5, b6 or c7. In closed positions, which are the most common in the Pirc Defense, at least at the beginning of the game, Black's queen is comfortable on d8. There she is able to perform her duties quite well.

In fact, early development of the queen without a very good, specific reason violates general opening principles. Look at this example after 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Be3 c6 5. Qd2

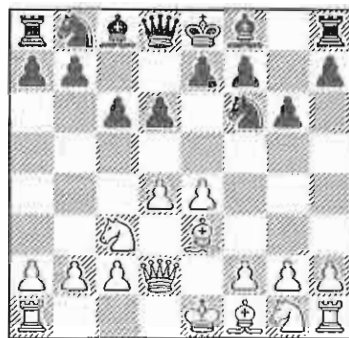


Diagram 339  
After 5. Qd2

Here 5. ... Qa5 is not the best, despite its prominence in tournament praxis. It is better to continue with 5. ... b5, exploiting the benefits of ... c7-c6. (You'll see this in Part III as well.) Black must play ... b7-b5 in any case, so it is proper to do it right away. A similar, but more precarious moment occurs in this line two moves later, after 5. ... b5 6. Bd3 Nbd7 7. Nf3

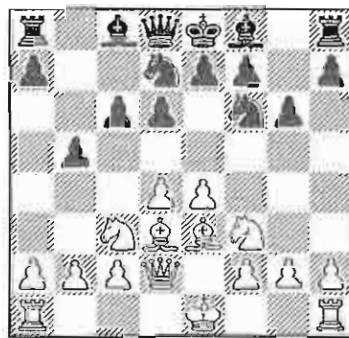


Diagram 340  
After 7. Nf3

Black has two options to fight against the threat of 8. e5—7. ... e5 or 7. ... Qc7. It's better



for Black to avoid moving his queen and continue with the straightforward 7. ... e5. In some variations, after 7. ... Qc7, Black's most powerful piece is misplaced and has to waste time relocating. Here's an example.

7. ... Qc7 8. 0-0 e5 9. a4 b4 10. Ne2 exd4 11. Nxd4 ±

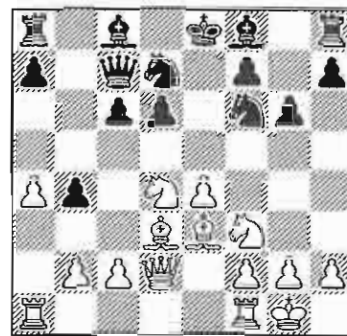


Diagram 341  
After 11. Nxd4

Now following a standard method of play for Black turns out to be bad chiefly because of the position of his queen.

11. ... c5?! 12. Nb5 Qc6 13. Bc4 Bb7 14. Bf4 a6 15. Bd5 Nxd5 16. exd5 Qb6 17. Rfe1+ Kd8 18. Ng5+- (Nunn—McNab, 1992).

### Black's king and rooks

In most cases, from the very first move, the royal residency is intended to be g8. Yet closed

positions in the center allow Black to take his time about castling if this is beneficial. Such a delay can be especially effective if White chooses a developmental plan aimed at an early kingside attack.

Naturally, if Black's monarch feels that the kingside fortress may be unsafe, then his majesty selects a different destination.

#### TOPALOV—BELIAVSKY LINARES, 1995

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Be3 c6 5. f3 Nbd7 6. g4!? b5 7. h4



Diagram 342  
After 7. h4

It is obvious that Black's king must seek a different retirement than g8. For now it can stay in the center until those files open.

7. ... Bb7 8. h5 Rg8 (8. ... Bg7 9. h6 Bf8 10. g5 ±) 9. Qd2 Qc7 10. Nh3 a6 11. 0-0-0 e6

USUALLY, BLACK'S KING BELONGS ON G8. YET A CLOSED CENTER MAY ALLOW BLACK TO TAKE HIS TIME ABOUT CASTLING, TO KEEP WHITE GUESSING.

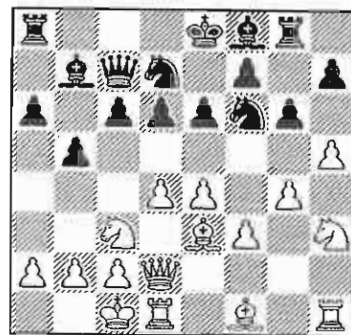


Diagram 343  
After 11. ... e6

Black may castle queenside at any moment, but first he takes care of some pressing business in the center and on the kingside.

12. hxg6 hxg6 13. Ng5 Be7 14. Kb1 Rf8 15. Nh7 Nxh7 16. Rxh7 Nf6 17. Rh2 0-0-0

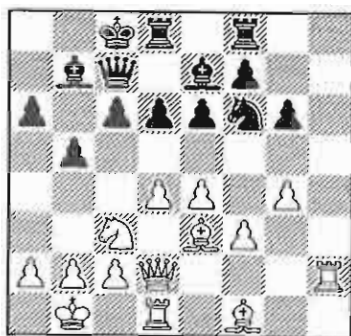


Diagram 344  
After 17. ... 0-0-0

Black has a satisfactory position.

In addition to what we have just examined we can say that postponing castling at Black's discretion is one of the essential elements of opening strategy in

the Pirc Defense. Consider our opponent's point of view. Until the Black king's position has been determined, he simply doesn't know what to choose, central or wing action. The theme of the next chapter flows from this statement.

It is more difficult to say something both meaningful and general about the Black rooks. Naturally, in the Dragon structure, Black places a rook on c8 to influence the semi-open c-file. Likewise, in the Philidor Pirc, he deploys a rook on e8 to exert force along the half-open e-file. It's a little less obvious that Black should also place a rook on e8 in the Ruy Lopez structure. Here it serves two purposes. It increases the possibilities that Black, after a White d4xe5, can recapture with a piece. More important, a rook on e8 strengthens the threat of ... e5xd4, opening fire on the enemy e-pawn.



### Summary:

*Black's queenside pieces are initially cramped. His light-square bishop can be a particular problem. Although sometimes fianchettoed on b7, the bishop normally finds at least a temporary home on g4, pinning White's knight on f3. Black is often happy to exchange his "problem" bishop for the White knight. Because the Pirc results in semi-closed positions, opposing White's bishop pair is not a terrible prospect, and Black gains some freedom in return.*

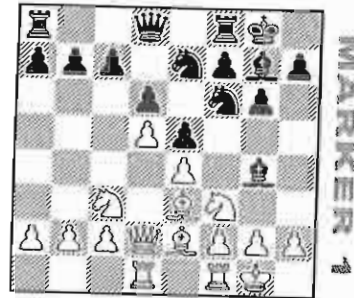
*Depending on the plan of development Black chooses, his queenside knight is normally posted initially on one of two squares—d7 or c6. (The deployment Na6 is used less frequently.) If Black opts for d7, he minimizes his knight's influence on the center and blocks the best retreat square for his other knight, making White's e4-e5 a menace. If Black selects c6, he blocks his c-pawn, and the threat of d4-d5 should be anticipated. Of course, each move has its advantages. It's good to keep in mind that ... Nc6 and ... Bg4 are moves that go together as a team.*

*Black's queen is most dynamic in the Dragon Pirc, where it enjoys influence on the d8-a5 diagonal. In other, more closed positions, the queen often stays on d8 for a time. In fact, "developing" it too hastily can lead to a disadvantage.*

*Black's king usually retires to g8 for the middlegame, of course. Depending on the opening sequence, Black may not be in a hurry to castle. Indeed, castling early may tip Black's hand too soon, letting White choose the most effective piece- and pawn-placements early.*

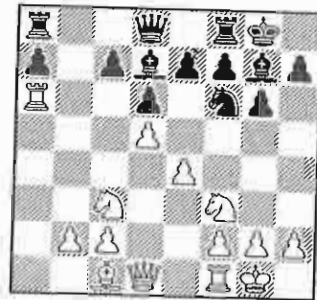
*Black's rooks may take up various posts, depending on the precise variation. In the Dragon structure, Black generally places a rook on c8 on the half-open c-file. Likewise, in the Philidor Pirc, Black places a rook on e8. In the Ruy Lopez structure as well, a black rook is useful on e8.*

## Black's Other Pieces Memory Markers!



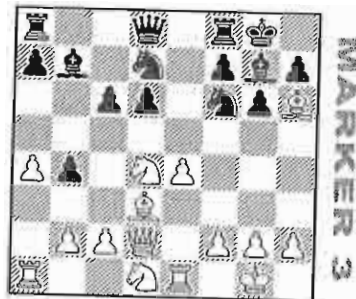
MARKER 1

Diagram 345  
Black to move



MARKER 2

Diagram 346  
Black to move



MARKER 3

Diagram 347  
Black to move



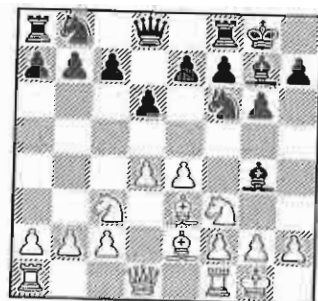
MARKER 4

Diagram 348  
Black to move



MARKER 5

Diagram 349  
Black to move



MARKER 6

Diagram 350  
Black to move

## Black's Other Pieces Solutions to Memory Markers!

- No. 1* 1. ... **Bd7!**. Black's light-square bishop will come in handy. (See Diagram 332.)
- No. 2* 1. ... **c6!**. If 2. dxc6, then 2. ... **Qc8!** (See page 189.)
- No. 3* 1. ... **c5!**, opening fire on the e-pawn. (See page 190.)
- No. 4* 1. ... **e5!**, straightforward and strong, is better than 1. ... **Qc7**, since in some variations, the queen may be misplaced. (See page 192.)
- No. 5* 1. ... **Rg8!**. Not good is 1. ... **Bg7** 2. h6 **Bf8** 3. g5 ±. (See page 193.)
- No. 6* 1. ... **Nc6** is necessary to keep the number of attackers and defenders of d4 in parity. Worse is the less aggressive 1. ... **Nbd7** ±. (See page 188, Diagram 330.)



## Chapter 13: The Pirc Versus the Modern

### Some Important Points to Look For

The Pirc and Modern are members of the same family, but the Modern is hard to recommend as a one-size-fits-all defense. But playing it occasionally has benefits.



- ◆ 1. ... d6 and 2. ... Nf6 characterize the Pirc.

See Diagram 351.



- ◆ In the Modern, Black postpones developing his g8-knight.

See Diagram 352.



- ◆ Black initiates an early skirmish.

See Diagram 353.



- ◆ Black has won the opening battle.

See Diagram 354.

## Chapter 13

### The Pirc Versus the Modern

#### Family differences

At the beginning of the book we described the Pirc Defense as a single opening in which Black makes the moves ... d7-d6, ... g7-g6, ... Nf6 and ... Bg7 in some sequence. Now we learn that the move order implies commitments. In fact, the theory of the Pirc Defense begins right away, and Black must make a serious decision even before he replies to White's very first move.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6



Diagram 351  
An early ... d6 and ... Nf6  
characterize the Pirc.

1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 (or 2. ... d6)

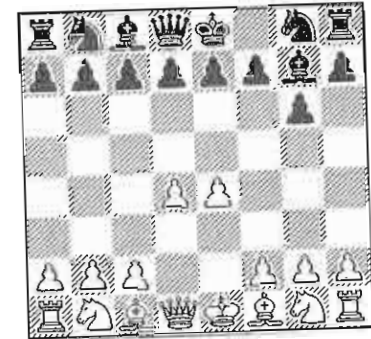


Diagram 352  
In the Modern, Black postpones  
developing his g8-knight.

In order to understand the ideas of these two systems, we will go deeper into a few things that seem obvious. By developing his knight on f6 (1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6), Black attacks White's pawn on e4. White must decide how to protect his pawn. The options are 3. Nc3, 3. Bd3, 3. Nd2 and 3. f3.

Usually White chooses 3. Nc3, and the play is determined for a while. For instance, White can't play c2-c4 in order to estab-

lish unquestioned control of the center. And 3. Nc3 also rules out c2-c3, which strengthens d4.

So are 3. Bd3, 3. Nd2 and 3. f3 more flexible than a 3. Nc3 response? Well, these other moves have shortcomings too. Although 3. Bd3 doesn't block the c-pawn, the price White pays for the early development of his bishop is that many other attractive possibilities are precluded. Besides, Black can begin an immediate attack on White's center with 3. ... e5! 4. c3 d5!

The 3. f3 continuation, which can be considered as an attempt to play the Saemisch variation of the King's Indian Defense after c2-c4, is hardly part of every 1. e4-player's repertoire. Besides switching to the King's Indian, Black can pitch White a changeup—3. ... d5!

Finally, we come to 3. Nd2. Not surprisingly, it too has its limitations. It doesn't forestall the c-pawn, but it certainly blocks the bishop on c1. The moves 3. Bd3, 3. c3 and 3. Nd2 are all theoretical main lines and not bad at all. However, their range is much narrower than 3. Nc3, which

remains the most popular, and the only truly dangerous move:

By now we have determined that 2. ... Nf6 pushes White (with some exceptions) to continue with 3. Nc3, thus blocking the c-pawn. Does it mean that the sequence of moves 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 is preferable over the series 1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7?

Such a statement would be too simplistic. First, 3. Nc3 has more good than bad features. The knight goes to its most natural square, where it exerts maximum influence on the center. In fact, 3. Nc3 is such a natural and strong move that even when Black doesn't encourage it with 2. ... Nf6, White usually plays 3. Nc3 anyway! After 3. Nc3 the other White pieces remain dynamic. White can play either f2-f3 or f2-f4 and develop his c1-bishop to e3 or g5. He can get his other bishop involved via c4 or e2—or even g2 after g2-g3 has been played.

As soon as Black's knight appears on f6, it pressures White's e4-pawn so much that the foot soldier is eager to march forward. But White is not always

**IN FACT, 3. Nc3 IS SUCH A NATURAL AND STRONG MOVE THAT EVEN WHEN BLACK DOESN'T ENCOURAGE IT WITH 2. ... Nf6, WHITE USUALLY PLAYS IT ANYWAY!**

**IN THE MODERN, AN EARLY E5 ISN'T A BOMBSHELL.  
IN THE PIRC, THE ADVANCE CAN BE A REAL SHOT,  
EVEN A WINNING MOVE!**

ready to push the e-pawn immediately. For instance—1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. e5 dxe5 5. dxe5 Qxd1+ isn't good for White. However, in case White plays 4. f4, 4. Bg5, or 4. Bc4 and 5. Qe2, Black must be *en garde* against e4-e5.

In the Modern, an early e4-e5 isn't usually a threat. In the Pirc, an early e5 can be a real menace, even a winning move!

The system 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 requires from Black much more theoretical knowledge than systems in which development of the g8-knight is postponed. But let me say some words on behalf of the Pirc. In the system 1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7, Black has delayed development of the g8-knight, while in the system 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 in some cases he delays the development of the f8-bishop correspondingly.

Therefore, if White is going to trade dark-square bishops via the h6-square (after the moves Be3 and Qd2, or Bg5 and Qd2), Black can save an important tempo by exchanging his bishop on h6. Even in the system 1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7, the most natural

square for the g8-knight is f6. So Black's delaying the development of his g8-knight and, along with it, putting off castling, is a very double-edged strategy.

Another point—in the system 1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7, if White deviates from the Pirc by playing c2-c4, then Black must be ready to play a King's Indian Defense. However, two factors make the position easier for Black than a normal KID.

First, the sequence of moves 1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. c4 varies from the original classical King's Indian 1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 d6 4. e4—in the first system, Black's knight remains on the g8-square. This allows Black to choose one of the so-called "unusual systems," such as 1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. e4 d6 (or 3. ... Nc6) 4. Nc3 Nc6 or 4. ... e5, or 4... Nd7. In these systems, there are no clear theoretical recommendations for White regarding how to achieve an edge, and, in fact, there is much less theory than in the "classical" King's Indian.

Second, there aren't many players in the world who know and play both 1. e4 and 1. d4 games well. (In fact, on the top level only Kasparov and Ivanchuk come to mind.)

If your opponent plays 1. e4, it's most likely his main weapon, and he is not eager to play against the King's Indian Defense.

To explain why there is more theory in the Pirc than in the Modern, let's fall back on another military metaphor for a moment, comparing piece development to conscription—commonly known as the draft. Both Pircs must put units in the field. In the Pirc and the Modern, however, we have two different models of conscription.

In real, bloody wars before the twentieth century, armies were amassed and then the battles began. Likewise, in the Modern, both the White and Black armies perform military conscription before combat begins.

In our century, combat has often ignited suddenly. Extensive military conscription was completed during the fighting. In the Pirc the sequence of events is similar. The fighting begins, then "reinforcements" are drafted and called up.

Let's take a look at initial

moves of the "Austrian Attack":  
**1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. f4 Bg7 5. Nf3 c5**

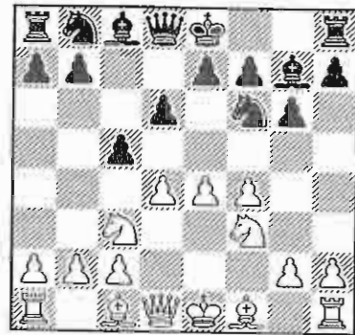


Diagram 353  
 After 5. ... c5

Black begins a skirmish long before drafting a whole army.

**6. Bb5+ Bd7 7. e5**

White accepts the challenge, and the problem of development becomes secondary for quite a few moves.

**7. ... Ng4 8. Bxd7 Qxd7+ 9. d5 dxe5 10. h3 e4 11. Nxe4 Nf6 12. Nxf6+ Bxf6**

The situation has become less tense, and both sides are in a hurry to draft new troops.

**13. 0-0 0-0**

If we consider how many other possibilities the two sides have between moves 5 and 13, it's easy to see that early conflicts require knowing lots of theory.

In contrast to this model, let us examine how slow the action is in the Modern, where Black

concentrates on drafting his entire army before beginning any campaigns.

SINGH—SMYSLOV  
 LONDON, 1989

**1. e4 d6 2. d4 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. Be3 c6 5. Qd2 Nd7 6. Nf3 b5 7. Bd3 Qc7 8. 0-0 Bb7 9. a3 a6 10. Ne2 c5**



Diagram 354  
 After 10. ... c5

The difference between this game and the previous example, where ... c5 was played five moves earlier, is not just a matter of move order. The difference is fundamental. Black is well prepared for the advance in the center. The e4-e5 break won't materialize at all, and Black will soon castle. Clearly, the former World Champion outplayed his opponent.

**11. c3 Ngf6 12. Ng3 Ng4 13. b4 Nxe3 14. Qxe3 c5 15. d5 0-0**

We can describe these first 15 moves in 10 words or less, while for the previous, Pirc example, a healthy section of an

opening manual would hardly be enough.

Because after the first three moves in both the Pirc (1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6) and Modern (1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6), we have a pretty similar picture, then we may guess intelligently that White's arsenal would be similar too. This includes the systems 4. f4, 4. Bc4, 4. Bg5, 4. Be3, and 4. g3. It is understandable that transpositions from the Modern to the Pirc happen very often because the only difference is ... Nf6. But White's attacking systems are somewhat different against the two defenses.

This transpositional possibility may be an element of opening strategy. For instance, consider 1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6. If Black knows that his opponent prefers 4. Bg5, he will follow the Modern, because it is easier for Black to play against 4. Bg5 while his knight remains on g8. After 4. Nf3, the 4. Bg5 danger has disappeared, so Black plays 4. ... Nf6, since this move is the best choice for Black against the Classical System.

Which variation, the Pirc or the Modern, do we recommend? Try both! Players who stick to the Modern exclusively give the opponents a theoretical edge because they know what to expect. White would not need to

be prepared to answer the theoretical questions that arise in great number after 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6. An aggressive opponent prepared for the Modern would be greatly disappointed to see this.

**1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. f4 Bg7 5. Nf3 c5 6. Bb5+ Bd7 7. e5 Ng4 8. e6 fxe6 9. Ng5 Bxb5 10. Nxe6 Bxd4 11. Nxd8 (!?) 11. ... Bf2+, draw by perpetual check.**

In general, the Pirc requires much more knowledge, but promises a straighter road to opening equality. Nevertheless, if you include the Modern in your opening repertoire, you will not only gain a deeper understanding of the entire Pirc Defense, but will have an effective comrade-in-arms to the Pirc. Despite the tough combat that the Pirc sometimes requires, it's a truly reliable weapon in modern chess.

#### Summary:

*The Pirc and Modern defenses are members of the same family. In the Pirc, Black plays an early ... d6 and ... Nf6, intending to fianchetto his dark-square bishop. In the Modern, Black first plays ... g6 and ... Bg7. Of course, this plan allows White more choices in the center—in fact, White may be able to transpose into a King's Indian Defense. But one advantage of the Modern is that an early e4-e5 is hardly a threat. The Pirc requires much more theoretical knowledge than the Modern.*

*The Pirc is a sounder path for Black. Although the Modern allows White too much latitude for us to recommend it as a regular defense, it's good to have a change-up in your repertoire, and by playing it, you will learn even more about the Pirc.*

*This book provides you with a complete repertoire against 1. e4 using the Pirc. It also shows you when using the Modern move order could be a beneficial or practical alternative. But when you do opt for the Modern move order, you should be ready to meet 3. c4 either with the King's Indian Defense, or some "Modern" version of it.*



#### Editorial Consultant: Vadim Kaminsky

**Place of Birth:** Kiev, Ukraine

**Date of Birth:** October 10, 1956

Vadim Kaminsky grew up in Kiev and earned degrees in both graphic arts and computer science before leaving the Soviet Union with his wife Rachel, a Ph.D. in math and physics, as a refugee in 1988. By 1989 Vadim and Rachel had found their way to the US, where they took up residence in Brooklyn.

In the US, Vadim and Rachel wrote and published books to help other immigrants make a successful transition to US citizenship.

Kaminsky's contributions to *Pirc Alert!* were significant. Fluent in both English and Russian, he worked directly with co-author GM Alex Chernin and with editor Al Lawrence to translate Chernin's unique ideas.

In early January of 2000, during the last stages of this work, Vadim died in his sleep. He is survived by Rachel and their son Boris, a computer network specialist.

Vadim Kaminsky was a cultured, talented man whom the authors and editor will miss both as a colleague and as a friend.

#### International Chess Journalist

#### Chess Master

- ◆ Talented graphic artist
- ◆ Translator
- ◆ Computer scientist
- ◆ Publisher



## The Pirc Versus the Modern Memory Markers!

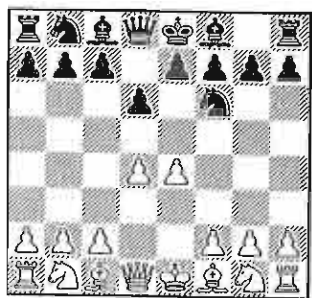


Diagram 355  
White to move

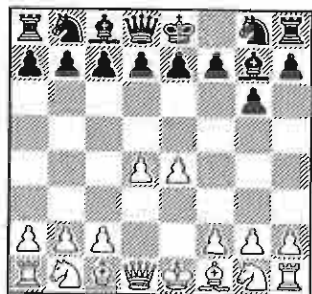


Diagram 356  
White to move

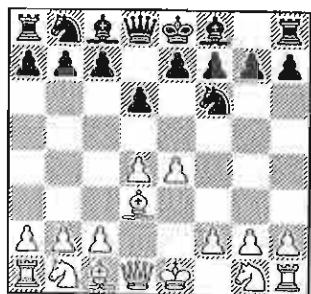


Diagram 357  
Black to move

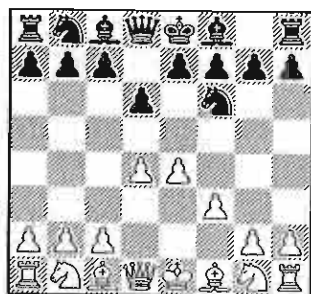
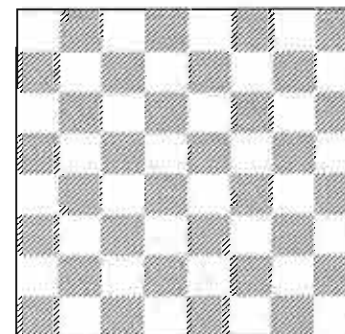
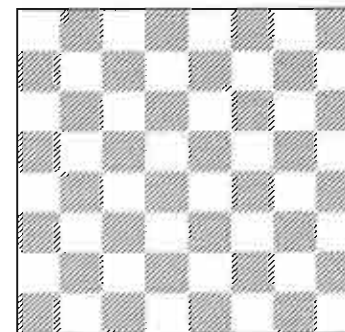
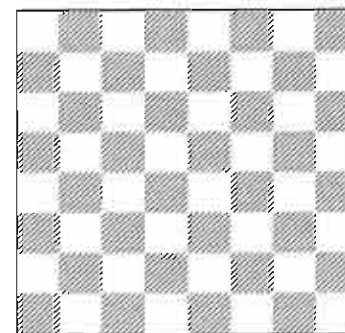


Diagram 358  
Black to move

## The Pirc Versus the Modern Solutions to Memory Markers!

- No. 1 3. Nc3. While other moves are possible, 3. Nc3 is the most common and strongest move.
- No. 2 White has a choice here. He can try to switch to a King's Indian with c2-c4. Most players, however, would prefer 3. Nc3.
- No. 3 Black equalizes with 3. ... e5, and if 4. c3, then 4. ... d5.
- No. 4 Black has a number of good choices, including 3. ... d5, 3. ... c5, and 3. ... g6.

## Your Notes & Positions







**Grandmaster  
Vasja Pirc**

*Born in 1907, Pirc became a grandmaster in 1953, although his heyday as a player was the 1930s. He was champion of Yugoslavia five times in the '30s and '40s. He became an international arbiter in the 1970s. Pirc played his namesake opening and wrote about it regularly, gaining it recognition as a solid system. He died in 1980.*

## **Part III: Theoretical Variations**

**by GM Alex Chernin,  
with the assistance of GM Lev Alburt**

## Part III: Theoretical Variations

### Introduction

The starting gun for the critical variations of the Pirc Defense sounds after Black's third move: 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6.

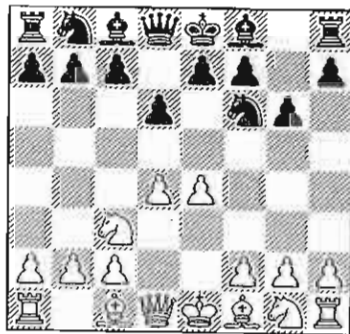


Diagram 359  
After 3. ... g6.

In Part III, all possible continuations for White are divided into five sections.

**Section One** considers 4. f4 (the Austrian Attack), 4. Bc4, and 4. Bg5. These systems are united by White's goal of playing an early e4-e5. Each of these important fourth moves gets a chapter of its own.

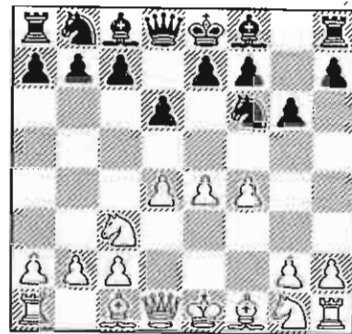


Diagram 360  
After 4. f4: the Austrian Attack

**Section Two** consists of systems in which White plays in and through the center. Here we've grouped 4. Nf3—the so-called classical system—, with its two

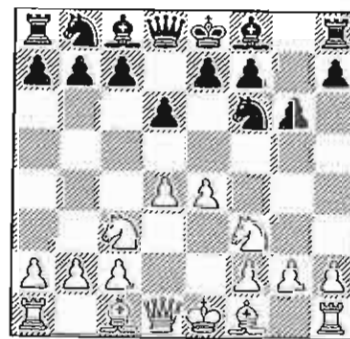


Diagram 361  
After 4. Nf3: the Classical System

sub-variations 4. Nf3/5. Be2 and 4. Nf3/5. h3, as well as 4. g3.

**Section Three** is made up of the continuations in which White's actions focus mainly on the king's flank—4. Be3 (4. f3), followed by Qd2 and, often, 0-0-0; and 4. Be2/5. h4.

**Section Four** is a chapter on the "Hybrid" System—4. Nf3/5. Be3/6. Qd2.

**Section Five** ends Part III with two chapters showing White's attempts to avoid 3. Nc3—1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Bd3 and 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. f3.

Part III of this book presents you with the theory of the Pirc—i.e., the move order 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6, which is the main aim of the book.

Each chapter normally begins with an explanation of the general aims for both sides in the variation, after the spirit of the material in Part II, but then focuses on Black's best lines against the sys-

tem being considered.

But we also examine the Modern move order: 1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 or 2. ... d6.

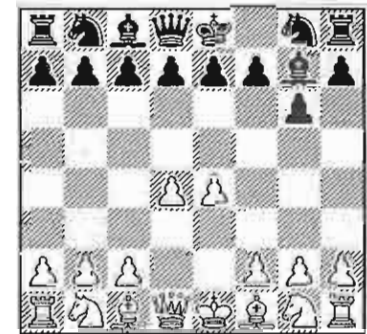


Diagram 362  
The Modern move order

At the end of every chapter, we review the state of theory of White's variation against the Modern and compare Black's chances, practical and theoretical, in the Pirc and Modern.

Although the second (strategic) and the third (theoretical) parts of this book are independent, you'll get the maximum benefit by studying the whole book.

- SECTION ONE:** WHITE PLAYS FOR E4-E5  
**SECTION TWO:** WHITE PLAYS IN AND THROUGH THE CENTER  
**SECTION THREE:** WHITE FOCUSES ON THE KINGSIDE  
**SECTION FOUR:** WHITE PLAYS THE HYBRID SYSTEM  
**SECTION FIVE:** WHITE AVOIDS 3. Nc3

## Pirc Player Profiles

Photo: Nigel Eddis, courtesy, US Chess Federation



### Grandmaster Yasser Seirawan

*A world-championship contender, Seirawan was born in Damascus in 1960. He moved to the US when he was seven years old. He won the World Junior Championship (just ahead of co-author Alex Chernin) in 1979 and the GM title in 1980. The popular GM won a cluster of prestigious tournaments in the 1980s and has been US Champion three times. He is publisher of Inside Chess magazine. With his smooth, positional style, he has advanced both the acceptance and the theory of the Pirc Defense.*

### Grandmaster Jon Speelman

*World Championship Candidate Speelman was born in 1960, won the British Championship for the first of three times in 1978 and earned the GM title in 1980. He has played the Pirc against the world's best players.*



Photo: Jami Anson, courtesy, US Chess Federation

## Section One, Introduction: White strives for e4-e5

In all three systems that we examine in this first section of Part III, White strives for an early e4-e5.

However, all three groups—4. f4, 4. Bc4 and 4. Bg5—do not have equal theoretical value.

**Chapter 14** covers the Austrian Attack, 4. f2-f4, one of the most challenging systems. Recently Black has discovered sufficient defensive resources. In some lines, however, a theoretical debate continues.

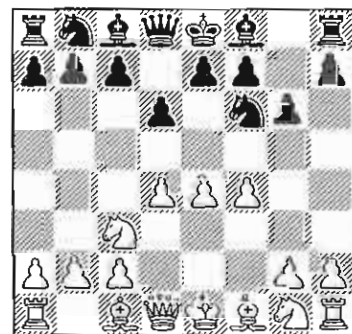


Diagram 363  
Chapter 14: after 4. f4

**Chapter 15** is the 4. Bc4 variation, where White has practically exhausted his try for an advantage. However, the variation is still popular in non-GM events.

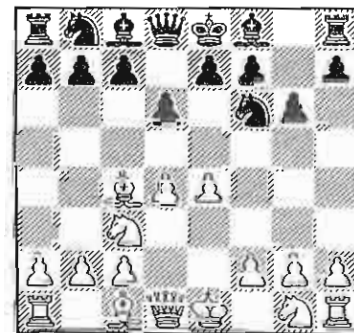


Diagram 364  
Chapter 15: after 4. Bc4

**Chapter 16** examines the system with 4. Bg5. This line is of paramount theoretical interest.

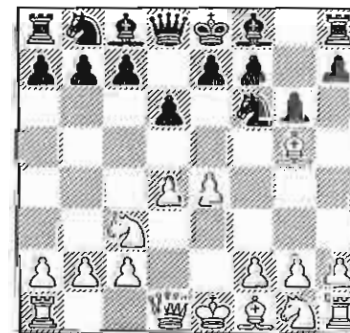


Diagram 365  
Chapter 16: after 4. Bg5

## Chapter 14: The Austrian Attack

### Some Important Points to Look For

The Austrian Attack has long been considered White's most venomous continuation. This chapter provides you with one clear path through the danger, 5. ... c5.



- ◆ 16. ... Na6!! This move, found by Lev Albut, changed the theoretical assessment of a position in the Pirc.

See Diagram 388.



- ◆ A critical moment in the Austrian Attack: 12. ... cxd4! 13. Nxe6 Qc4!!, and Black has a good game.

See Diagram 397.



- ◆ With his last move, 8. ... b5!, Black develops counterplay on the queenside.

See Diagram 429.



- ◆ 17. ... Be5! Black pursues a successful dark-square strategy.

See Diagram 448.

## Chapter 14

# The Austrian Attack

### And Black's "Brenner Pass"

**N**eutralization of the Austrian attack was one of Black's biggest theoretical successes in the Pirc Defense of the 1980s and 1990s. The attack was certainly a mountain of a challenge, but like the famous Brenner Pass through the Austrian Alps, the analysis here can guide us safely over the obstacles.

White begins the Austrian Attack with the moves:

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. f4

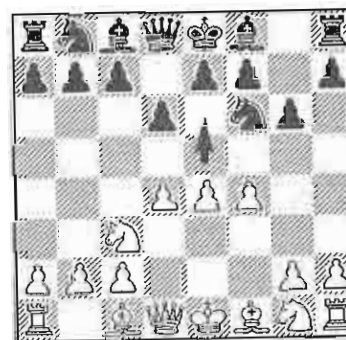


Diagram 366

After 4. f4

White initiates what was at first viewed as the sharpest and

most dangerous line against the Pirc. The appearance of the third White pawn on the fourth rank puts a question to Black: What should he do about the dangerous threat of e4-e5?

### Handling e5

Let's first examine, in general, the possible consequences of this pawn advance. After a future White e4-e5, Black has two possible reactions—to retreat with the knight after exchanging on e5, or to retreat right away, without exchanging the pawns. In the first case (after ... dxe5), White responds by recapturing on e5 with either his f-pawn or his d-pawn. Each recapture is dangerous for Black in its own way.

By recapturing with the d-pawn, White plays for the long-term containment of the bishop on g7. The pawn skeleton shows us much about the resulting possibilities.

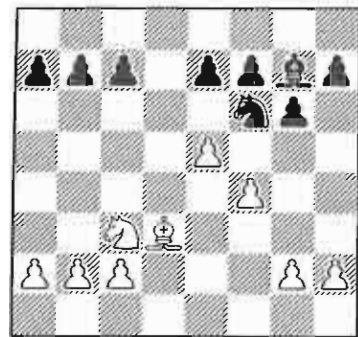


Diagram 367

Pawn skeleton after ... d6xe5 d4xe5

White's dxe5 is especially dangerous for Black after White has played Bd3, because Black doesn't then have the option of immediately exchanging queens.

By playing f4xe5, White maintains the pawn chain d4-e5. If ignored, this pawn chain leads to various kingside attacks, sometimes aided by the presence of the half-opened f-file, against Black.

In such a case, the most desirable reaction is the undermining ... c7-c5. But as we'll see, this counterthrust is difficult to realize with some move orders, for example: 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. f4 Bg7 5. Nf3 0-0 6. Bd3 Nc6 7. e5 dxe5 8. fxe5.

**BLACK'S ATTEMPT TO ATTACK THE CENTER WITH ... F7-F6 USUALLY RUNS AFOUL OF E5XF6. IF BLACK THEN RECAPTURES WITH A PIECE, HE'S SADDLED WITH A BACKWARD E-PAWN. IF HE RETAKES WITH HIS E-PAWN, HE BLOCKS HIS G7-BISHOP.**

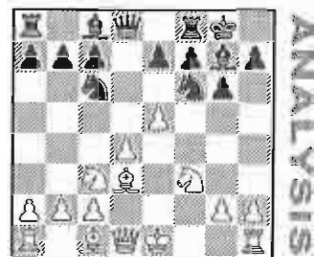


Diagram 368

After 8. fxe5

Here the knight on c6 blocks the c7-pawn.

Black's attempt to attack the center from the other side with ... f7-f6 usually runs afoul of e5xf6. After that simple capture, if Black retakes with a piece on f6, he's saddled with a backward pawn on e7. On the other hand, if Black recaptures with his e-pawn, he blocks the important bishop on g7.

In some cases White can even ignore the challenge of ... f7-f6, for if Black takes the e-pawn, recapturing with a pawn can also be strong for White. White has dangerous tactical possibilities—based on the weaknesses of the a2-g8 diagonal and the g5-square.

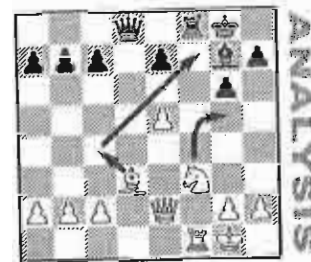


Diagram 369

Structure after ... f6xe5 d4xe5

Playing ... d6xe5 before moving the knight adds one more possible square, d5, to the knight's choice of retreats. This recapture does produce a somewhat more open game but doesn't eliminate the problem of having to fight against the pawn chain of d4/e5 or f4/e5.

### Knight retreats

There are certainly advantages to Black's immediately retreating the knight, without capturing on e5. The d7-square seems best, since from there Black threatens to destroy White's center with ... c7-c5, followed by ... c5xd4 and then ... d6xe5, as in Hector—Agrest, 1996.



Diagram 370

After 6. ... N/d7

The knight on d7 attacks c5

and e5, while his colleague in the Black cavalry can go comfortably to c6.

The big question: Can the plan involving the knight's retreat to d7 survive tactically? After all, the bishop on c8 is temporarily blocked, its control over the square e6 is lost, and in some variations the e5-e6 pawn sacrifice is effective.

Imagine White's bishop getting to c4 before Black can castle. Then the combination Bc4xf7+ and Nf3-g5+-e6 may win at once. Thus the feasibility of ... Nd7 depends on the specifics of the position. There is less tactical risk in the other retreats of the knight (... Ng4, ... Ne8, ... Nh5), but correspondingly less promise.

The move ... Ng4 puts the knight in a precarious position, allowing h2-h3, forcing the jumper to h6. Of course, it would be good if the knight could then move to f5, but usually h2-h3 is followed by g2-g4, after which the knight on h6 is a sorry sight.



Diagram 371  
Black's knight has been restricted to h6.

Another knight retreat is ... Ne8, made of course after



Black castles kingside. Here the knight is safe but passive. Moreover, it divides Black's army in two.

Finally we come to ... Nh5. In contrast to ... Ne8, the knight doesn't hinder other Black pieces, but it doesn't hamper White's either.

All these considerations become important a little later in the game. It's worth noting now that after 4. ... Bg7, White's e4-e5 is not yet a serious threat.



Diagram 372  
After 4. ... Bg7

For example, in the game Hector—Agrist, Black lost the option of castling but nevertheless secured an overwhelming position after 5. e5 Nfd7 6. Nf3 c5 7. dxc5 dxe5 8. fxe5 Nxe5 9. Qxd8+ Kxd8.



Diagram 373  
After 9. ... Kxd8

10. Bd2 Nxf3+ 11. gxf3 Be6 12. 0-0-0 Kc8 13. Bg2 Nc6 14. Rhe1 Rd8 15. Na4 Rd4 16. b3 Rh4 17. h3 Kc7 18. f4 Rd8 19. Be3 Bd4 =.



Diagram 374  
After 19. ... Bd4

So keep the most ambitious retreat, 5. ... Nfd7, in mind, as well as its potential consequences—namely, the collapse of White's center.

Now let's fill in two more moves of the main line.

4. ... Bg7 5. Nf3

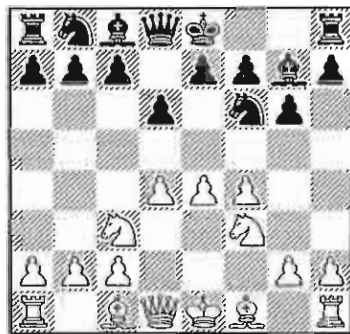


Diagram 375  
After 5. Nf3

The attempt to prevent Operation Enter the Dragon by playing 5. Bd3 isn't good for White. Black can exploit the resulting weakening of White's

d-pawn with 5. ... Nc6 6. Nf3 (6. d5 Nb4 7. Be2 c6) 6. ... Bg4, and now all lines are good for Black: 7. e5 Bxf3, 7. d5 Nd4 or 7. Be3 e5.

With 5. Nf3, White demonstrates his intention to finish his development first with Bd3 and 0-0; or Be3, Qd2 and 0-0-0; and then to push e4-e5 with complete comfort.

So after 5. Nf3, Black must make an important choice—to castle before striking back at the center, or to counterstrike immediately.

Suppose he follows the standard prescription, castling before opening the position, and White replies 6. Bd3. It is difficult for Black to free himself.



Diagram 376  
After 6. Bd3

1) To support ... e7-e5, he needs one more preparatory move—6. ... Nbd7 or 6. ... Nc6. However, 6. ... Nbd7 invites 7. e4-e5, when the knight on f6 has no good retreat square. Or, after 6. ... Nc6, 7. e4-e5 is also very strong because the c7-pawn is

blocked by its own knight, and Black no longer has the possibility of ... Nd7 and ... c7-c5, undermining White's center. So Black must play 7. ... dxe5, which limits his options.

2) After the immediate 6. ... c5 7. dxc5 dxc5, we get a type of position that is unfavorable for Black. Preparing this move with 6. ... Na6 may be Black's best chance—leading to a sharp, unclear game.

Besides 6. Bd3, White has other strong sixth-move possibilities to fight against ... c7-c5, such as the dangerous system starting with 6. Be3, followed by Qd1-d2, and 0-0-0, with the idea of a pawn storm against Black's king.

Additionally, White has the sharp 6. e5. After 6. ... Nfd7 (here, this retreat is clearly the best choice), White can complicate matters with 7. h4, creating a full-court press of difficulties for Black.



Diagram 377  
After 7. h4

While Black has his own

chances in all these complications, we prefer to sidestep these lines by playing 5. ... c5, our main line, instead of 5. ... 0-0.

5. ... c5

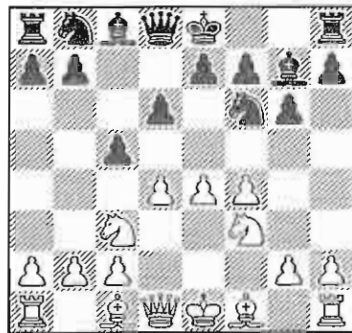


Diagram 378  
After 5. ... c5

The idea: 5. ... c5 6. dxc5 Qa5 (Operation Enter the Dragon) exploits the fact that White has not castled. Not good for White here is 7. cxd6 Nxe4, while after 7. Bd3 (the best), Black plays 7. ... Qxc5 to reach a Sicilian-like position favorable for Black.

White has three logical responses to 5. ... c5: 6. Bb5+, 6. d5, and 6. dxc5. The first is the most ambitious try.

**A 6. Bb5+**

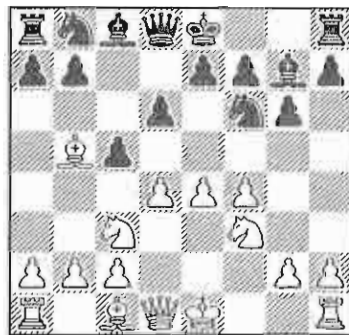


Diagram 379  
After 6. Bb5+

This move was pointless earlier because of ... c7-c6.

**6. ... Bd7**

After this, the only normal response, White can now break through in the center with 7. e5. Or he can close the center, starting with 7. Bxd7+.

Of course, the sharpest is to break open the game with

**A17. e5 Ng4**

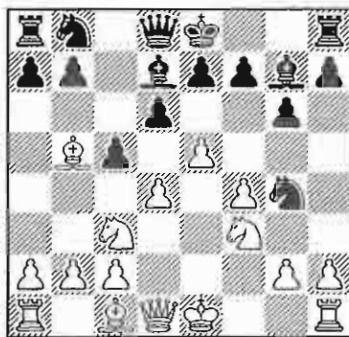


Diagram 380  
After 7. ... Ng4

Here all strategic considera-

tions take a back seat to forced variations. There's no sense generalizing about long-range plans when each move is dictated by life-and-death tactics!

White has three strong continuations: 8. e6, 8. Bxd7+ and 8. h3.

The first creates complications to suit even the most tactically inclined player!

**A1a 8. e6**

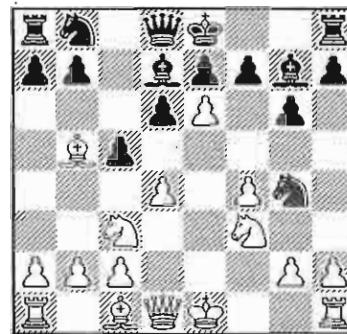


Diagram 381  
After 8. e6

Now Black has two choices, 8. ... Bxb5 and 8. ... fxe6.

**A1a1 8. ... Bxb5**

This is a risky move because it leads to a position in which Black's king is badly placed. But we must analyze this move because it's the last opportunity for Black to avoid the draw that his opponent can force in the main variation.

The following moves are now considered best for both sides.

**9. exf7+ Kd7 10. Nxb5 Qa5+ 11. Nc3 cxd4**

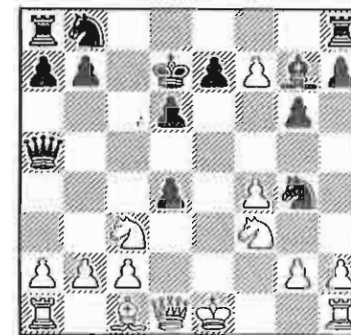


Diagram 382  
After 11. ... cxd4

**12. Nxd4 Bxd4**

Very risky is 12. ... h5 13. Qf3! Nc6 14. Nde2, with an apparent advantage for White.

**13. Qxd4 Nc6 14. Qc4 Qb6 15. Qe2 h5 16. Bd2 Nd4**

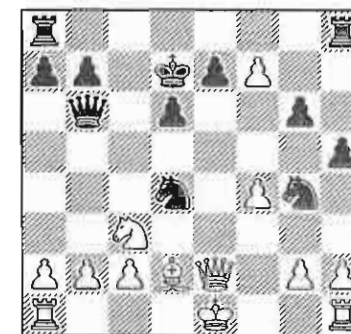


Diagram 383  
After 16. ... Nd4

**17. Qd3 Nf5 18. Ne4 Rac8 19. 0-0-0 Nge3 20. Bxe3 Nxe3 21. c3!**

White is better (Hellers—Ivanchuk, 1984).

**BLACK CAN TAKE  
MATTERS INTO HIS  
OWN HANDS WITH  
OUR RECOMMENDED  
5. ... C5.**

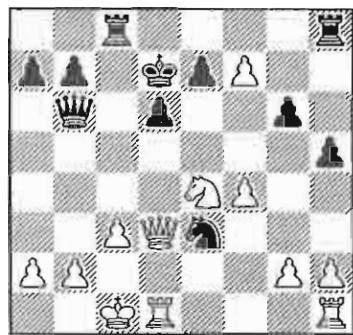


Diagram 384  
After 21. c3

Although improvements are possible in this line, the main plus of the risky 8. ... Bxb5 is that it avoids a draw.

Back to Diagram 381.

**11a28. ... fxe6**

**9. Ng5 Bxb5!**



Diagram 385  
After 9. ... Bxb5!

Black ignores the seemingly mortal threat of Ng5xe6. His justification is the variation 10. Nxe6 Bxd4! 11. Nxd8 Bf2+ 12. Kd2 Be3+, with a draw by perpetual check—an idea of Yasser Seirawan. White has three oppor-

tunities to continue the game: 10. Nxe6, 10. Nxb5, and 10. Qxg4.

The first two have been carefully examined in practice; the third is currently underestimated.

**11a2-1 10. Nxe6**

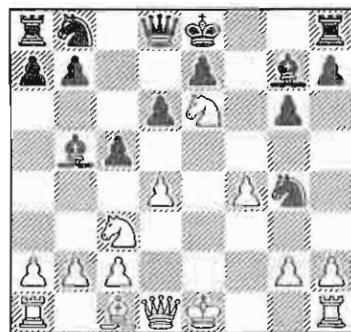


Diagram 386  
After 10. Nxe6

**10. ... Bxd4 11. Nxb5**

Or 11. Qxg4 Bd7, and Black is at least equal; or 11. Nxd4 Bd7=.

**11. ... Qa5+ 12. c3**

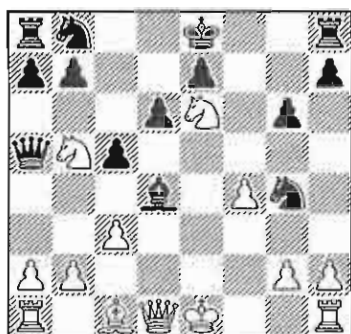


Diagram 387  
After 12. c3

This last move is more promising than the previously played

12. Qd2 Bf2+ 13. Kd1 Ne3+ 14. Ke2 Qxb5+ 15. Kxf2 Ng4+ 16. Kg3.

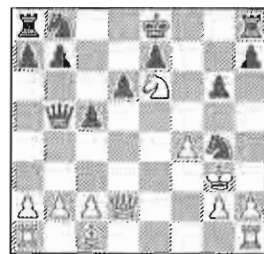


Diagram 388  
After 16. Kg3

GM Lev Alburt, after his US Championship game with GM Nick deFirmian, (which continued 16. ... Qd7 17. Re1 Nh6 18. b3! Nc6 19. Bb2 Nf5+ 20. Kf2 Nfd4 21. Kg1! Nxe6! 22. Bxh8 =, deFirmian—Alburt, 1990), showed Alex the star move 16. ... Na6!!.



Diagram 389  
After 16. ... Na6!!

This move changed the theoretical assessment of the posi-

**LEV ALBURT, AFTER ONLY A FEW LESSONS IN THE PIRC FROM ALEX CHERNIN, FOUND A MOVE THAT CHANGED THE THEORETICAL ASSESSMENT OF A KEY VARIATION!**

tion. The tactical basis is 17. Kxg4 Qd7 18. Re1 Nc7 19. Qc2 Kf7 20. f5 gxf5+ 21. Kxf5 Rag8, followed by ... Rg6-+.

Five years later Alex tested it—on deFirmian himself! The game went 17. Re1 Nh6 (17. ... h5 18. f5!±) 18. b3 Nf5+ 19. Kf2 h5 20. Bb2 (20. Ng7+ Nxc7 21. Qxd6 0-0 -+) 20. ... Rg8 21. Rad1 Kd7 22. c4



Diagram 390  
After 22. c4

Here Alex agreed to a draw—too early. With 22. ... Qc6, he could consolidate. If 23. Qa5 Rae8 24. b4 cxb4 25. c5, then 25. ... Nh4 wins immediately. Otherwise, Black is simply better because of his healthy extra pawn.

Now let's go back to Diagram 387 after 12. c3.

**12. ... Bf2+ 13. Kd2 Be3+ 14. Kc2 Qa4+**



Diagram 391  
After 14. ... Qa4+

**15. Kb1**

Or 15. b3 Qe4+ 16. Kb2, and here not the move recommended in many books, 16. ... Nf2, because of 17. Qc2! Bxc1+ 18. Raxc1 Nd3+ 19. Kb1, but instead 16. ... Qxg2+ 17. Ka3 Kd7— which is in Black's favor.

**15. ... Qe4+ 16. Qc2 Qxc2+ 17. Kxc2 Kd7 18. Nec7 Bxc1 19. Kxc1 a6 20. Nxa8 axb5**

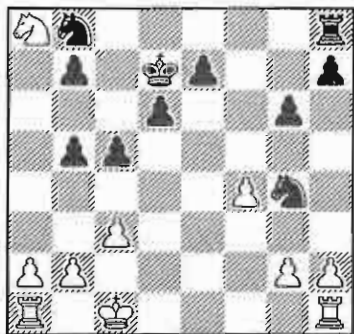


Diagram 392  
After 20. ... axb5

Now, to save his knight, White has to choose between 21. a4 and 21. c4. In the first case, 21. a4 bxa4 22. Rxa4 Kc6 23. Ra7 c4 24. Re1 e5, and Black stands better—the White knight is stuck on a8 (Bauer—Chabanon, 1993).



Diagram 393  
After 24. ... e5

The alternative, 21. c4 bxc4 22. Nb6+ Kc6 23. Nxc4, leads to a material minus for Black, but his mighty centralization assures him a good, fighting game, i.e., 23. ... b5 24. Nd2 Rf8 25. g3 g5 26. fxg5 Rf2, with a strong initiative (Moiseev—Simonenko, 1988).



Diagram 394  
After 26. ... Rf2

ANALYSIS

ANALYSIS

**A1a2-2 10. Nxb5**



Diagram 395  
After 10. Nxb5

**10. ... Qa5+ 11. c3**

After 11. Bd2 Qxb5 12. Nxe6, Black should fearlessly take the pawn: 12. ... Qxb2! 13. Rb1 Qxa2 14. Nxc7+ Kf7 15.0-0, and now 15. ... h5!

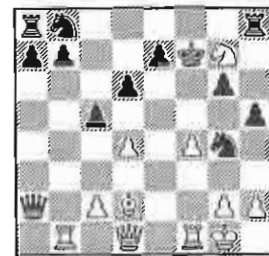


Diagram 396  
After 15. ... h5!

A radical improvement for Black. White cannot create an attack strong enough, and his knight is lost.

**11. ... Qxb5 12. Qxg4**



Diagram 397  
After 12. Qxg4

A critical moment for Black in the whole history of the Austrian attack!

The chief alternative to 12. Qxg4 (12. Nxe6) lost its independent significance after Chernin's game with Dolmatov in Pardubice, 1993. After 12. Nxe6, Chernin played 12. ... Qc4! 13. Qxg4 (others are worse) 13. ... cxd4, transposing to Diagram 398, below.

After 12. Qxg4, the game Khalifman—Popchev, 1989, saw the natural 12. ... Bf6 13. Qxe6 Na6 14. Nf7 Qb6 15. Nxe6, quickly ending in White's favor.

But then researchers for Black found back-to-back star moves.

**12. ... cxd4! 13. Nxe6 Qc4!!**

**DIAGRAM 397 SHOWS A CRITICAL MOMENT IN THE WHOLE HISTORY OF THE AUSTRIAN ATTACK!**

**IT SEEMS THERE IS NO END TO BLACK'S IMPROVEMENTS AND SURPRISES!**

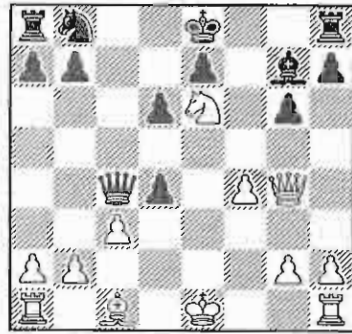


Diagram 398  
After 13. ... Qc4!!

After this beautiful move, discovered by several different grandmasters simultaneously, Black's game again blossoms.

**14. Nxc7+**

Strongest, but White has some lesser attempts. For example, after 14. b3 Qxc3+ 15. Bd2 Qxa1+ 16. Kf2 Qxh1, it is not difficult for Black to repulse the attack. Or 14. Bd2 Bf6 15. b3 Qc8, and Black is okay.

More dangerous is the try 14. f5 Bf6 15. fxg6 Rg8 16. g7, and after careful analysis, we're certain that Black is better off not playing with fire (16. ... Kf7), but continuing with 16. ... Nc6! 17. Nc7+ Kd8.

**AFTER SEVERAL GMS  
FOUND 13. ... Qc4!!,  
BLACK'S GAME  
BLOSSOMED.**



Diagram 399  
After 17. ... Kd8

Now White can likewise play it safe with 18. Ne6+ Ke8 19. Nc7+, draw (Shirov—Khalifman, 1990). Or he can lose his head, and his game, with the likes of 18. Nxa8? Rxc7! 19. Qe4 d5 20. Qf4 Ne5 21. Kd1 Rxc2 22. Qf1 Rxc2! 23. Rg1 Nd3.

**14. ... Kf7**

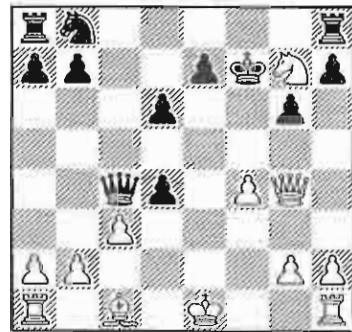


Diagram 400  
After 14. ... Kf7

**15. Nf5**

This move is the best choice, but there are also 15. Nh5? dxc3! 16. Ng3 cxb2 17. Bxb2 Qb4+, and the more serious 15. f5 Kxc7 16. Qh4 Nc6 17. Rf1 (or 17. Bh6+ Kf7!).



Diagram 401  
After 17. Rf1

Here Black has the wonderful Exchange sacrifice 17. ... Rhf8! 18. Bh6+ Kh8 19. Bxf8 Rxf8, which led in Beliavsky—Hodgson, 1993, to a position where the best White could do was to force a draw in the line 20. 0-0-0 gxf5 21. Kc1 b5 22. b3! (inferior is 22. Qh3, actually played in Beliavsky—Hodgson, or 22. cxd4? Nb4) 22. ... Qxc3 23. Rf3 Qc5 24. Rc1 Qd5 25. Rxc6! Qxc6 26. Qxe7 Qe8 27. Qxd6 Qe1+, with a perpetual check.

After the main-line 15. Nf5, current theory recommends 15. ... Qe6+ 16. Ne3 dxe3



Diagram 402  
After 16. ... dxe3

17. Qf3 Nc6 18. 0-0 Rhf8 19.

Bxe3 Kg8 20. b3 a5! 21. Rael a4 22. Bc1 Qf7 23. c4 axb3 24. axb3 Ra2 (Dolmatov—Chernin, 1990)

Theory correctly declared the resulting position "good for Black." That's true, at least at the end of this line, but GM Beliavsky showed Alex that White has a concealed, earlier possibility—17. f5!



Diagram 403  
After 17. f5!

After 17. ... gxf5 18. 0-0, White follows up by capturing on f5 with his rook, plays Qf3, terminates the Black agent on e3, and as a result achieves a position with a permanent initiative. If Black plays 18. ... Nd7, then White has 19. Rxf5+ Nf6 (wishing to transfer the knight in order to unite the rooks).

**THEN BELIAVSKY  
FOUND A  
"CONCEALED"  
RESOURCE FOR  
WHITE!**





Diagram 404  
After 19. ... Nf6

After 20. Qh5+ Kf8 (If 20. ... Kg7, then 21 Qg5+ and 22. Bxe3) 21. Qf3 is strong—if 21. ... e2 22. Be3, intending 23. Re1 and 24. Bd4, with the advantage to White.

But Black can strengthen his last performance by playing the in-between move that continues our main line, from Diagram 400.

15. ... h5!



Diagram 405  
After 15. ... h5!

16. Qg5

Or 16. Nh6+ Rxh6 17. Qg5 Rh8 18. f5 gxf5 19. Qxf5+ Ke8; or 16. Ne3 dxe3 17. Qf3 Nc6 18.

Bxe3 Raf8, with the idea of ... Ke8 and ... g6-g5).

16. ... Qe6+ 17. Ne3 dxe3 18. f5 gxf5 19. 0-0 Nd7 20. Rxf5+ Nf6

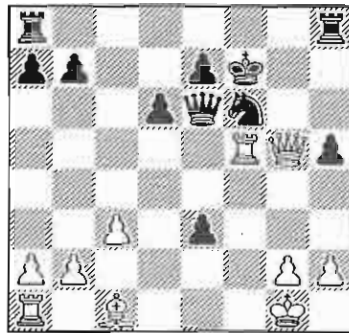


Diagram 406  
After 20. ... Nf6

Here, in view of the absence of a check on h5, everything is less convenient for White than in the earlier version of this idea.

21. Bxe3 Rag8 22. Qf4 Rg4

Black will have good counterplay on the g-file.

**A1a2-3** 10. Qxg4

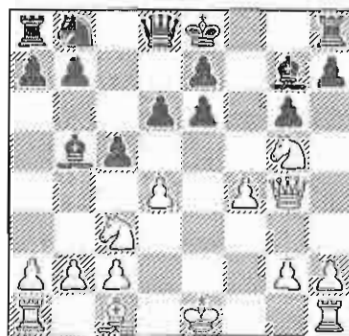


Diagram 407  
After 10. Qxg4

This move, repudiated by

current theory, could actually be the best chance for success for White in the Austrian Attack.

10. ... Bc4

The alternative 10. ... Bd7 runs into 11. Nxh7+-.

11. b3

Here 11. Nxh7 is bad: 11. ... Kd7 12. Qxg6 Qg8 13. Ng5 cxd4, and Black dominates the center.

11. ... Bxd4

The sacrifice of a piece with 11. ... Qa5 12. Bd2 cxd4 13. Nd1 Qf5 14. Qxf5 exf5 15. bxc4 is dubious.

12. Bd2 Bd5 13. Nxd5 exd5 14. 0-0-0

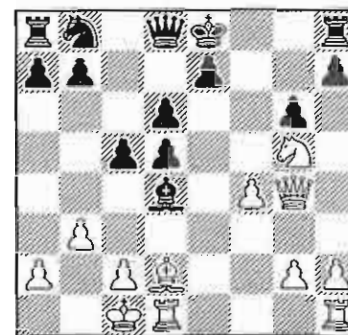


Diagram 408  
After 14. 0-0-0

In a game against Joel Benjamin in 1988, John Nunn, as White, developed strong pressure on the e-file, preliminarily putting his knight on e6: 14. ... Qd7 15. Ne6 Nc6 16. f5 Bf6 17. Rhe1 Nd8 18. Bg5 Bxg5+ 19. Qxg5

Nxe6 20. Rxe6 0-0-0 21. g4 ±

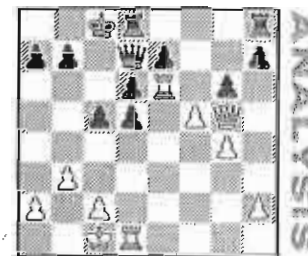


Diagram 409  
After 21. g4

But later everyone agreed that the mistake was 14. ... Qd7; Black has a better move.

14. ... Nc6



Diagram 410  
After 14. ... Nc6

Now after 15. Qe6 Qc8 16. Qf7+ Kd7 17. Qxd5 Qg8 (Nunn—Seirawan, 1989), Black is better.

15. Ne6

Alex remembers how he first analyzed this position deeply, beginning to suspect that it should yield superiority for Black. But how can Black get rid of that newcomer on e6 in order to protect his king?

Gradually Alex understood that with the e6-bone stuck in Black's throat, he has to look for a quick counterattack.

15. ... Qb6!

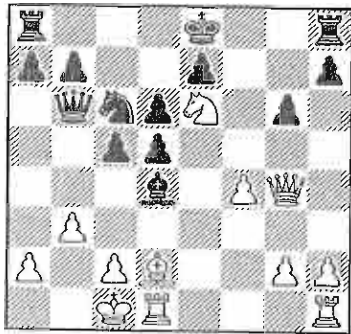


Diagram 411  
After 15. ... Qb6

Here Nunn recommends 15. ... Qc8 16. f5 Bf6 17. fxg6 Rg8 18. g7 Ne5 19. Qh5+ Kd7 20 Qf5 Kc6 21. Bh6, with a very unclear position.

16. f5 Bf6! 17. Rhe1 Ne5 18. Qh3 a5!

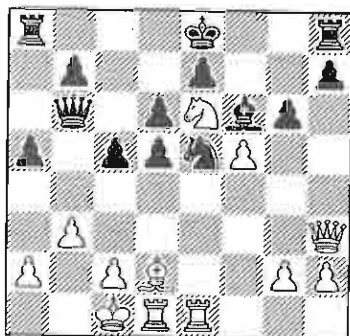


Diagram 412  
After 18. ... a5!

We shouldn't bog down at this point with a full analysis,

although you should analyze this line carefully on your own as a learning exercise. For now, let's look at two illustrative variations showing Black coming out on top.

a) 19. g4 a4 20. g5 axb3 21. cxb3 Rxa2 22. gxf6 Qa7! 23. f7+ Kd7 24. f8(N)+ Rxf8 25. Nxf8+ Kc6 26. Qc3 d4

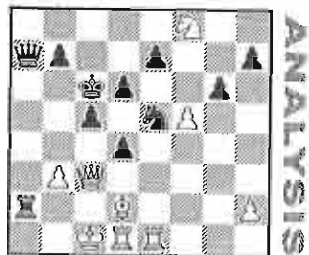


Diagram 413  
After 26. ... d4

b) 19. Bg5 (or 19. Nf4 Qc6) 19. ... Bxg5+ 20. Nng5 a4 21. fxg6 axb3 22. g7 Rg8 23. Qxh7 Rxg7!! 24. Qxg7 bxc2! 25. Qg8+ Kd7 26. Qxa8 Qb1+ 27. Kd2 c1(Q)+! 28. Rxc1 Qd3 mate.



Diagram 414  
After 28. ... Qd3 checkmate

But let's also examine a key line in which White doesn't act so recklessly!

c) 19. a4 c4 20. Be3 Qb4

21. Nc7+ Kf7 22. fxg6+ (22. Nxa8 gives Black an irresistible attack after 22. ... cxb3) 22. ... hxg6 23. Qe6+! Kg7 24. Rf1! cxb3 25. Rxf6! exf6 26. Qe7+ Kg8 27. Qe6+, and a draw is likely.



Diagram 415  
After 27. Qe6+

Let's go back to 14. ... Nc6 15. Ne6 Qb6 (Diagram 411).



Diagram 416  
After 15. ... Qb6

Instead of 16. f5, White can attack the g6-pawn from the other side: 16. h4 a5 17. h5 a4 18. hxg6 axb3 19. g7 bxc2 20. gxh8(Q)+ Bxh8. While many emerging positions in the above lines are super-complicated, and not all analyses can be considered final, we believe that Chernin's method of counterattack (... Qb6, ... a5) is the right way for Black to play.

Such is life after 8. e6 in this variation, and we remind you that all this was caused by Black's persistence in liberating his game with 5. ... c5 to reach a Sicilian-like position.

**A1b** 8. Bxd7+ Qxd7 9. d5 dxe5 10. h3

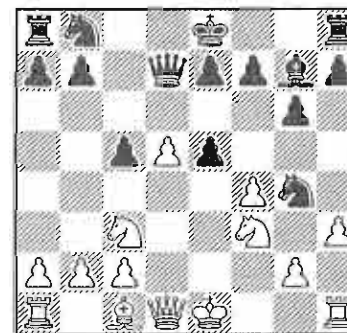


Diagram 417  
After 10. h3

10. ... e4

Black needs the intermediate move 10. ... e4 because 10. ... Nh6 is bad in view of 11. fxe5, with a strong White center.

11. Nxe4

Or 11. hxg4, with equality.

11. ... Nf6 12. Nxf6+! Bxf6

Black has to take with the bishop (unlike in the variation 12. Ne5 Qd8 13. Nxf6 exf6! 14. Nc4 0-0 [with the idea of 14. ... Re8] 15. 0-0 f5, with an unclear position). Otherwise, White enjoys 12. ... exf6 13. Qe2+ Qe7 14. Qxe7+ Kxe7 15. f5!±.

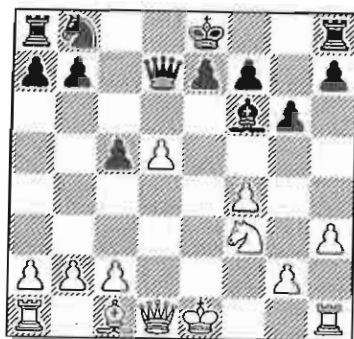


Diagram 418  
After 12... Bxf6

### 13. 0-0 0-0 14. Be3

Other moves are less promising: 14. Ne5 Qd6 or 14. c4 e6 15. Ne5 Qd6 16. Qb3 b6!

If Black wants to play only for equalization here, 14... e6 is simple and reliable after 15. Bxc5 Rd8 16. Bd4 Bxd4+ 17. Qxd4 Qxd5 18. Qxd5 Rxd5 19. Rad1 Nc6 20. Rxd5 exd5 (Dolmatov—Chernin, USSR 1984), with only a slight edge for White.

Our main line is more ambitious.

### 14... Bxb2 15. Rb1

If 15. Ne5 Qc7 16. Rb1, when Black should play 16... Bxe5! 17. dxe5 Nd7.

WE CAN OFFER AN  
ORIGINAL IDEA AFTER  
14. BE3 — ... NA6  
15. NE5 QF5!? **TN**



Diagram 419  
After 17... Nd7

Black fears neither 18. d6 exd6 19. exd6 Qc6, nor 18. e6 fxe6 19. dxe6 Rxf1+ 20. Qxf1 Rf8 (on 20... Ne5, interesting is 21. Bh6) 21. Qb5 Ne5 22. Qxb7 Nf3+! 23. gxf3 Qg3+, with a draw by perpetual check. Neither is he afraid of 18. Bh6 Nxe5 19. Bxf8 Rxf8, when Black's position is unassailable.

### 15... Bg7! 16. Bxc5 Rd8

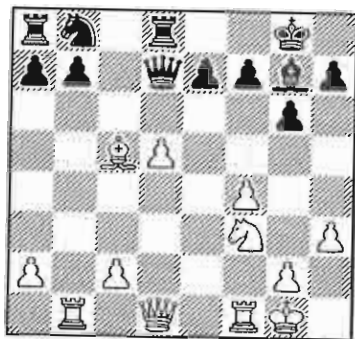


Diagram 420  
After 16... Rd8

### 17. Ne5

The alternative is 17. c4 Qc7 18. Bd4 Qxc4 19. Bxg7 Kxg7 20. Rxb7 Qxd5! 21. Qxd5 Rxd5 22. Rxe7 Nc6 23. Rc7 Nd8 24. Re1 (or 24. Ne5 a5=) ... a5 25. Re8

Rb8! 26. Ng5! h6 27. Rxd8, draw, Acs—Chernin, 1999. The immediate 17. Bd4 Qxd5 also leads to equality.

### 17... Qc7 18. Ba3 Nc6 19. Qf3

More circumspect is 19. Rxb7 Qxb7 20. Nxc6, and Black can play 20... Rd7, with the idea of ... e6, yielding an unclear position. Also possible is 20... e6 21. Nxd8 Rxd8 22. d6 Bb2! 23. Bc5 Qc6 24. Bxa7 Rxd6 25. Qb1 Bf6, when Black has compensation for the pawn. He intends to play ... Kg7, ... Rd2, and ... h7-h5.

### 19... Nd4



Diagram 421  
After 19... Nd4

We are following the game Liss—Chernin, 1999, where Black was a little better after 20. Qe4 Nf5 21. Rb3 Rac8 22. Rc1

Nd6 23. Qe2 Bxe5! 24. Qxe5. Black's idea is 24... Nc4 25. Qxe7 Rd7 26. Qe4 Nxa3 27. Rxa3 Qc5+ 28. Qe3 Qxe3+ 29. Rxe3 Rxd5.

In addition, we can offer an original idea after 14. Be3: 14... Na6 15. Ne5 Qf5!? **TN**, which is an improvement over 15... Qc7 and 15... Qd6.

Now let's examine White's third and final main alternative after 7... Ng4.

### Att 8. h3



Diagram 422  
After 8. h3

Black's "natural" and quite popular reaction here is 8... cxd4. However, we'll go straight to Black's strongest move.

### 8... Bxb5! 9. Nxb5 dxe5!

THE PARADOX IS THAT, WITH 9... Dxe5, BLACK NOT ONLY LEAVES HIS KNIGHT *EN PRISE*, BUT ALSO MAKES A MOVE THAT IS NORMALLY POSITIONALLY UNSOUND.

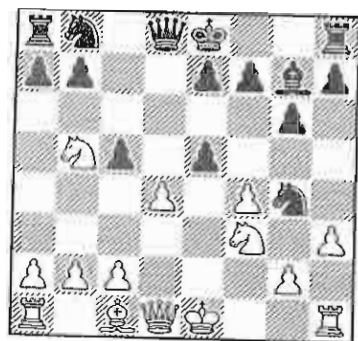


Diagram 423  
After 9... dxe5!

The paradox of the moment is that Black not only leaves his knight *en prise*, but also makes a move that is normally positionally unsound because of the response d4xe5. But here this reply is impossible: 10. dxe5? Qxd1+ 11. Kxd1 Nf2+.

So instead, from the position in Diagram 423, White plays calmly, planning to play d4xe5 later, when it's to his advantage. Black plays to counter this plan.

10. h3g4 Qa5+ 11. Bd2

The overly calm 11. c3 is not good in view of 11. ... e4!. Though the complications are great after 12. Qe2 exf3 13. Nd6+ Kd7 14. Nxb7 Qb6 15. Qxf3 cxd4 16. Qd5+ Kc7 17. Qxf7 (with the idea of an attack) 17. ... Qxb7 18. Qxg7 Qxg2, the line brings nothing to White.

**11. c3 IS NOT GOOD  
IN VIEW OF 11. ... e4!.**

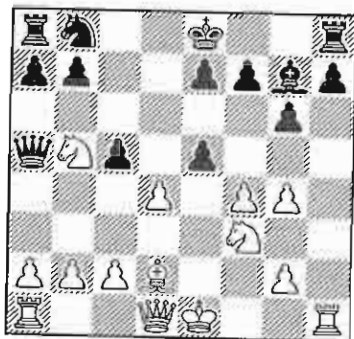


Diagram 424  
After 11. Bd2

11. ... Qxb5 12. dxe5

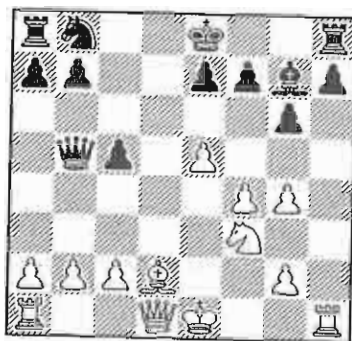


Diagram 425  
After 12. dxe5

12. ... Qxb2!

Instead, 12. ... Nc6 allows White to reach his goal with 13. Bc3 Qc4 14. g3 Rd8 15. Qe2 Qe6 16. g5, with advantage.

This is the most important point: Black takes tactical risks in order to prevent stabilization of the position in White's favor. The risks, however, are not so great. The move 12. ... Qxb2! was suggested by GM John Nunn, and tested by Alex in a

game with Grosar (1995), which continued 13. Rb1 Qxa2 14. Rxb7 Qd5 15. Qb1 0-0 16. Qb3 c4 17. Qb5 Qe4+ 18. Kf2 c3 19. Bxc3 Qxf4.



Diagram 426  
After 19... Qxf4

The position is dynamically equal—Black's extra pawn is balanced by White's active pieces.

The character of the struggle for the Black side in the 8. h3 line reflects the main idea of the move 5. ... c5 (after 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. f4 Bg7 5. Nf3)—to reach a comfortable position, regardless of the complications that he has to overcome to get there. Such an approach, of course, requires thorough preparation.

There is one more possibility to examine in the line 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. f4 Bg7 5. Nf3 c5 6. Bb5+ Bd7.

**BLACK TAKES TACTICAL RISKS TO PREVENT  
STABILIZATION OF THE POSITION IN WHITE'S FAVOR.**

**A2 7. Bxd7+**



Diagram 427  
After 7. Bxd7+

This begins a straightforward idea of White's exchanging on d7 and then closing the center with d4-d5. By doing this, White gets a position reminiscent of the King's Indian—with the light-square bishops gone.

Which Black knight should recapture? Theory alternatively gave preference to 7. ... Nbx7 and 7. ... Nfx7, but eventually favored the latter.

7. ... Nfx7

After 7. ... Nbx7, White should give up trying to break with 8. e5 (because of 8. ... Nh5!) and play 8. d5 instead.

It turns out that it is not easy for Black to liberate the position after 8. ... 0-0 9. Qe2! a6 10. a4



Diagram 428  
After 10. a4

The game Shirov—Chernin, 1996, showed that the pawn sacrifice 10. ... b5 does not equalize. The try 10. ... Qc7, with the idea ... e6, bows to 11. e5.

However, after 7. ... Nfxd7 8. d5, Black can immediately develop counterplay on the queen's flank.

### 8. d5 b5!

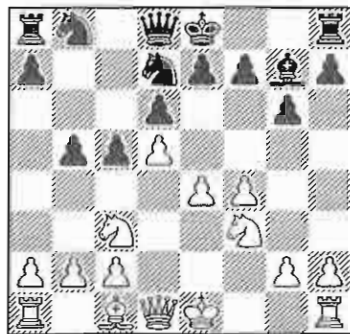


Diagram 429  
After 8. ... b5!

Here White should either castle or play 9. Qe2, because Black can successfully resist the attempt to use the dark squares after 9. Nxb5 Qa5+ 10. Nc3 Bxc3+ 11. bxc3 Qxc3+ 12. Bd2

Qc4 13. Qe2 Nb6!. Black stands well in the endgame and looks to ruin White's center with a maneuver typical of the Benko Gambit: ... Nb8-a6-c7 and ... f7-f5.

After 9. 0-0 b4 10. Ne2, there is no need for Black to castle in a hurry to avoid an attack in the center. He can instead begin to stake out his queenside territory with 10. ... Nb6!. If White follows with 11. f5, Black plays ... N(8)d7, with the idea of ... Qd8-c8-a6 (a maneuver typical of this system).

Another good option for Black is to follow the game Conquest—Jansa, 1989, beginning with 10. ... Nf6 11. Ng3 0-0.



Diagram 430  
After 11. ... 0-0

Here White has 12. f5! (recommended by Jansa; 12. Bd2 was actually played in the game) 12. ... Nbd7 13. h4 (with an attack, according to Jansa). But there is nothing dangerous for Black here after 13. ... Ng4, with the idea of ... Nde5. White's knight on g3 is not in a good

position to aid White's attack. Even if this knight is relocated to f4, via e2, it then restricts White's dark-square bishop on c1.

In Shirov—Beliavsky, 1997, Shirov, who is largely responsible for the rebirth of the White system 7. Bxd7+ and 8. d5, tried to improve the position of this knight. Instead of 9. 0-0, he played 9. Qe2 b4 10. Nd1, intending to send the horseman to f2 and then on to g4 and h6. Beliavsky responded with 10. ... Nb6 11. 0-0 0-0.



Diagram 431  
After 11. ... 0-0

Here Shirov could attack effectively with 12. f5, intending 12. ... gxf5 13. Nh4!. However, instead of 11. ... 0-0, Black could play more precisely—11. ... Qc8!, with the idea ... Qa6.

Now let's return to the point where Black invites all these complications with 5. ... c5.



Diagram 432  
After 5. ... c5

Instead of 6. Bb5+, White can choose the advance 6. d5 or the "normal" 6. dxc5.

To understand why 6. d5 isn't effective, you need to notice the essential difference between it and the variations examined above—the presence of light-square bishops, which is in Black's favor. He quickly gets to play ... e7-e6, and after White's d5xe6 (otherwise, Black plays ... e6xd5, and White's pawn structure, with an awkward, obstructing foot soldier on f4, is unsound), Black follows with ... Bxe6, and then ... d6-d5, solving his opening problems.

But White's other sixth-move option has a bit more to it.

**WHITE'S 6. d5 IS NOT EFFECTIVE BECAUSE THE PRESENCE OF THE LIGHT-SQUARE BISHOPS IS IN BLACK'S FAVOR.**



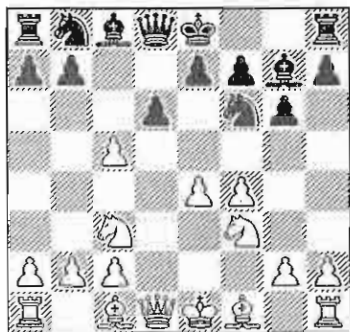
**6. dxc5**

Diagram 433  
After 6. dxc5

The White d-pawn leaves the board.

**6. ... Qa5 7. Bd3**

This is White's best try.

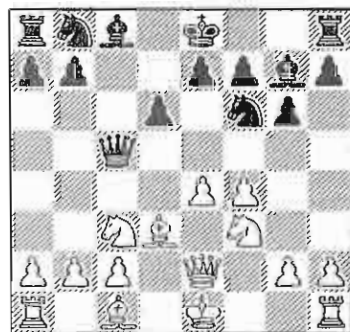
**7. ... Qxc5 8. Qe2**

Diagram 434  
After 8. Qe2

Black has a Sicilian Dragon-like position. White remains with threats on the king's flank, and Black has to decide how to respond. The bulwark of support in Black's position is his fianchettoed bishop on g7. With

no White d-pawn to block it, this bishop is strengthened.

With the pinning move 8. ... Bg4, Black is ready to part with the light-square member of his bishop team, whose possible role in this position is modest. (Except for g4, its only reasonable post is on d7—but d7 should be reserved for the Black king's knight, to unmask the power of his bishop on g7.)

Additionally, Black's bishop-move frees c8 for the rook. What's more, the exchange ... Bxf3 would reduce White's attacking possibilities. Black's 8. ... Bg4 has a lot going for it!

If Black delays this move, White can prevent ... Bg4 with h2-h3. White can even meet the big complications offered by 8. ... 0-0 with 9. Be3 Qa5 10. h3 e5 11. 0-0-0 Nh5 12. f5 Ng3 13. Qe1 Nxf1 14. g4! (Zsofia Polgar—van Wely, 1990).



Diagram 435  
After 14. g4!

Taking this opportunity into account, we see that 8. ... Bg4 is more exact.

**8. ... Bg4 9. Be3 Qa5 10. 0-0 0-0**

Diagram 436  
After 10. ... 0-0

In the main line, White continues with 11. h3. Before we consider this move, we should note that White can try to keep the h3-square for his rook by playing 11. Qe1 Nc6 12. Kh1. And here Black should play 12. ... Bxf3! anyway.



Diagram 437  
After 12. ... Bxf3!

Otherwise, Black must take into consideration White's Nd2, with complications e.g., 12. ... Rfc8 13. Nd2 Bd7 14. Nb3 Qd8.

From Diagram 437, White plays 13. Rxf3. Now 13. ... Rac8 is a rather subtle move in com-

parison with the immediate 13. ... d5 14. e5 d4 15. exf6 Bxf6 16. Ne4 dxe3 17. Nxf6+ exf6 18. Qxa5 Nxa5 19. Rxe3, where White has an effective queenside pawn majority—and for this reason a better endgame.



Diagram 438  
After 19. Rxe3

After 13. ... Rac8! the rook's influence on the c-file will be telling at a critical moment. After 14. a3 (preventing ... Nb4) 14. ... d5 15. e5 d4 16. exf6 Bxf6 17. Ne4 dxe3 18. Nxf6+ exf6 19. Qxa5 Nxa5 20. Rxe3, Black has 20. ... Nc4 ♯, illustrating the idea of 13. ... Rac8!. So in the line above, White must play 19. Rxe3, but then 19. ... Qb6 preserves the queens.

**WITH THE PIN  
8. ... Bg4, BLACK IS  
READY TO PART WITH  
THE LIGHT-SQUARE  
MEMBER OF HIS  
BISHOP TEAM.**



Diagram 439  
After 19. ... Qb6

With queens on the board, Black's position is okay. He maintains control over some key squares on the e-file after ... f6-f5, while White's queenside pawns are difficult to mobilize. After 20. Rb1 f5 21. c3 Nd8, White has nothing better than 22. Qg3. After the incorrect sacrifice 22. Bxf5?, Black played 22. ... gxf5 23. Rg3+ Kh8 24. Qe7 Qh6 (deFirmian—Chernin, 1990).



Diagram 440  
After 24. ... Qh6

And now 25. Rh3 Nc6 led to Black's victory.

You can see why 11. h3 is the favorite move today and our main line.

**11. h3 Bxf3 12. Qxf3 Nc6**

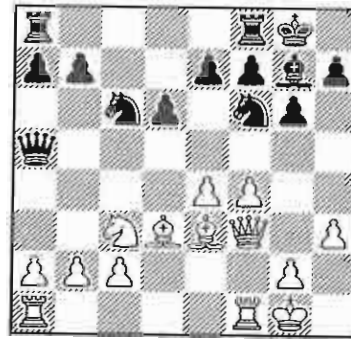


Diagram 441  
After 12. ... Nc6

### 13. a3

An attempt to confuse Black by removing his option to check on b6 is 13. Kh1. The best example for Black is the game Tischbierek—M. Gurevich, 1991: 13. ... Nd7 14. Bd2 Nc5 15. Rad1 Nxd3 16. cxd3 e6



Diagram 442  
After 16. ... e6

17. a3 (17. f5 exf5 18. exf5 Nd4 19. Ne2 Nxf3 20. Bxa5 Nd4) 17. ... f5 18. g4 (18. Ne2 Qb6) Qb6.

There is also an opportunity for Black to win the game at once after 13. Ne2 Nd7 14. c3?? Nde5! -. This blunder is not rare in practice: Hubner, Lubojevich,

and Zapata are among its victims.

**13. ... Nd7 14. Bd2**

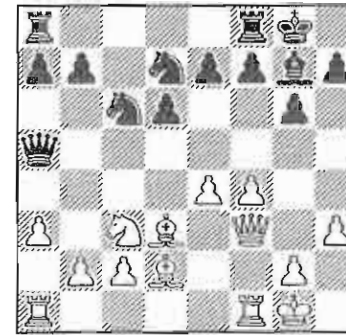


Diagram 443  
After 14. Bd2

White defends c3 for good reason. Schmittiel tried to do without this idea in Schmittiel—Chernin, 1991, analyzed in Part II: 14. Rab1 Bxc3 15. bxc3 Qxc3 16. Bc1 Rac8 17. Bb2 Qc5+ 18. Kh1 Nb6 19. e5 dxe5 20. f5 Nc4 21. Bc1 Nd6 22. Bh6 e4! 23. Bxe4 Nd4.



Diagram 444  
After 23. ... Nd4

Nothing good came out of this for White. Sometimes you need to concede principles to achieve a concrete purpose (in this case the g7-bishop).

From Diagram 443, Black has two lines: 14. ... Qb6+ and 14. ... Qd8!

In Glek—Chernin, 1991, Alex played 14. ... Qb6+ 15. Kh1 Nc5 16. Rab1 Nxd3 17. cxd3 (after 17. Qxd3 17. ... Qa6! is good) 17. ... f5 18. g4 e6! 19. gxf5 exf5 20. Nd5 Qd8! 21. Bc3 Ne7! 22. e5!?, and after 22. ... dxe5 23. Nxe7+ Qxe7 24. Bb4 Qf7 25. Bxf8 Rxf8 26. fxe5 Bxe5 27. Rfel Bf6, Black has full compensation for his sacrificed material.



Diagram 445  
After 27. ... Bf6

During recent years Alex has decided that 14. ... Qd8 is the best.

**14. ... Qd8 (!)**

By not playing for ... Qb6+ and ... Nc5, Black shows that he is not going to exchange on d3. He considers his knights to be an asset! This judgment becomes especially clear when White plays f4-f5. (He has no other strategic opportunity.) Then Black will take e5 under full control with both of his knights.

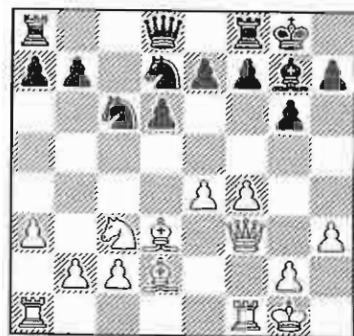


Diagram 446  
After 14... Qd8

Black's life is simplified by the presence of a clear plan: ... e7-e6, ... a7-a6, ... Rc8. White has to decide whether to hurry with f4-f5 or somehow to prepare this threat. In Campora-Chernin, 1991, Campora tried the second plan.

15. Kh1

To prevent any idea of ... Qb6+ and ... Qxb2.

15... e6

Now White can put his light-square bishop on the a2-g8 diagonal or play his queen to g3.

**B1** 16. Bc4

White has f4-f5 in mind.

**BLACK'S LIFE IS  
SIMPLIFIED BY THE  
PRESENCE OF A  
CLEAR PLAN.**

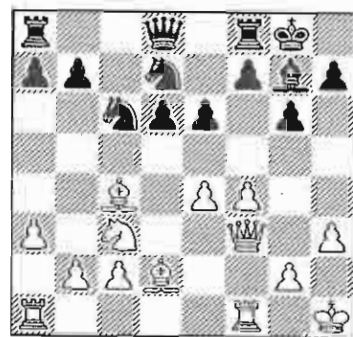


Diagram 447  
After 16... Bc4

Alex unexpectedly changes the character of the struggle.

16... Nd4 17. Qd1 d5! 18. exd5 Nb6 19. Ba2 exd5

Black has excellent prospects. Even without the tactical possibility of 17... d5, prospects for the bishop, which would probably be moved to a2 anyway, are vague. Even in combination with f4-f5, the bishop can't scale Black's barricade on e6, which Black can reinforce several times. And White's rooks cannot exert decisive pressure on the d-file.

Maybe because of that, Chernin's opponent, van der Poel, in their 1994 game, concentrated on pushing f4-f5, but his pawn didn't get farther than the fifth rank. Consequently, Alex enjoyed the fruits of his dark-square strategy in full measure. The game is very instructive.

**B2** 16. Qg3 a6 17. f5 Be5!

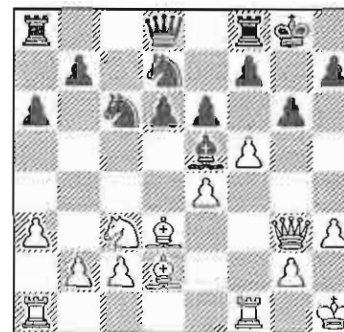


Diagram 448  
After 17... Be5!

18. Bf4 Nf6 19. Bxe5 Nxe5 20. Qh4 Kg7 21. Ne2 h6!

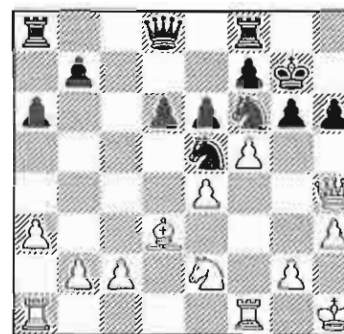


Diagram 449  
After 21... h6!

22. Nd4? exf5! 23. exf5 g5

Black is already winning. The game continued:

24. Qf2 Qc7 25. Rad1 Rae8 26. c3 Re7

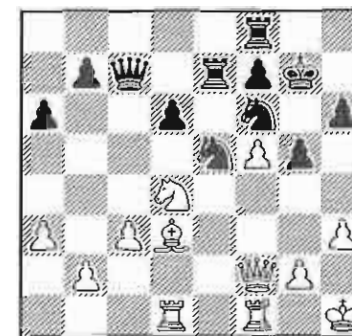


Diagram 450  
After 26... Re7

27. Nf3? Nxf3 28. Qxf3 Rfe8 29. Qf2 Re3 30. Rfe1 Qc5 31. Rxe3 Rxe3 32. Qc2 Qe5 33. Qa4 g4! 34. hxg4 Qg3 35. Qd4 Re5! 36. Rf1 Rd5 37. Rf3 Qh4+ 38. Rh3 Rxd4 39. Rxh4 Rxd3 0-1.

After White voluntarily removed the last barrier on the e-file with 27. Nf3?, Black's invasion was a foregone conclusion. Even if White advances f4-f5 in more favorable circumstances, Black can occupy e5 with his c6-knight. Then his three pieces on g7, e7 (or d8) and d7 protect f6, preventing f5-f6.

### The Modern against the Austrian Attack

Unfortunately, the Modern (opting for ... Bg7 before ... Nf6) doesn't offer much hope for Black in the Austrian attack—for example, after 1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6 4. f4 c6 5. Nf3 Bg4 6. Be3 Qb6 7. Qd2 Bxf3 8. gxf3.

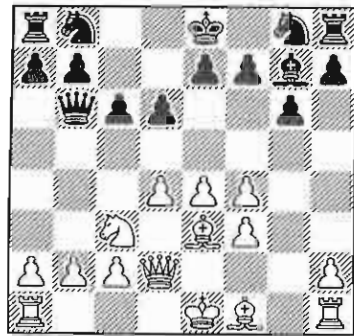


Diagram 451

After 8. gxf3

Even though Black succeeds in doubling White's f-pawns, his position is strategically difficult. White owns a monumental center, and he has the possibility of targeting Black's g6, using the White h- and f-pawns as levers.

Another Modern move order, 1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6 4. f4 Nc6 also doesn't yield equality for Black according to modern theory.

Nevertheless, Black can dive into confusing and relatively uncharted waters with 4. ... a6.

1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6 4. f4 a6 5. Nf3 b5 6. Bd3 Nd7

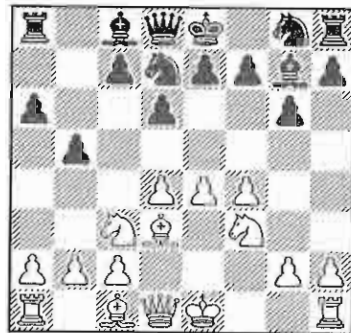


Diagram 452

After 6. ... Nd7

Alex's personal experience in this line has so far been successful.

7. e5 c5 8. exd6 exd6 9. Ne4 Qb6 10. dxc5 dxc5 11. a4 Nh6! 12. axb5 0-0 13. Be2 c4!

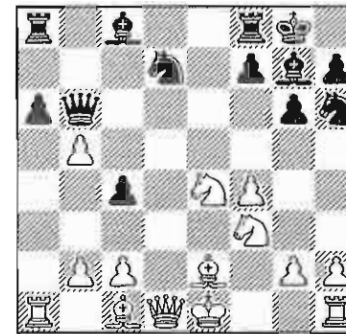


Diagram 453

After 13. ... c4!

14. Ra3 Nf5 15. Bxc4 Bb7 16. Nf2 Rae8+ 17. Be2 Nf6 18. 0-0 Ng4 19. Ne5 Nxe5 20. fxe5

axb5 21. Kh1 b4 22. Rh3 Rxe5 23. Bf3 Ba6

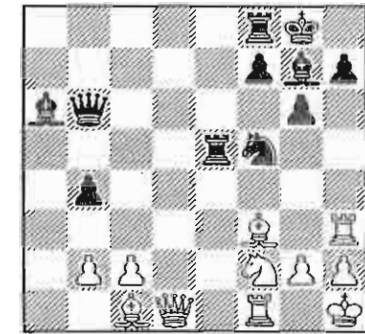


Diagram 454

After 23. ... Ba6

Black has a big advantage (Schlosser—Chernin, 1996).

### Summary:

*There is very little practice in some of the variations of our 5. ... c5 main line against the Austrian Attack. In general, Black should find ways to stir up trouble, keeping the game going at a high level of risk to both sides.*

*Overall, you can be confident in relying on the move 5. ... c5! Black has sharp lines after 6. Bb5+ that lead to good positions. And you've studied plans and ideas for Black after 6. dxc5.*

*This preparation is sufficient for playing at any level, but on occasion it's advantageous to widen your repertoire. For this purpose, you needn't study several systems at once—we have so little time (and sometimes so little memory) for this task in real life.*

*If you adopt one thoroughly studied basic system (such as 5. ... c5 in the Austrian Attack), you'd do well to support it with a lesser known continuation, perhaps even one not 100% correct but relatively rare.*

*That's where the Modern comes in. Against the Austrian Attack, the Modern move order is weaker than the Pirc, although Black can stir up trouble with 4. ... a6. But the best decision objectively would be to go into the Pirc, eg. 1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6 4. f4 Nf6! and, after 5. Nf3, play 5. ... c5.*

**IN THE AUSTRIAN ATTACK, WE CAN BE CONFIDENT IN RELYING ON THE MOVE 5. ... C5!. BLACK HAS SHARP LINES AFTER 6. BB5+ THAT LEAD TO GOOD POSITIONS. AND WE HAVE PLANS AND IDEAS OF HOW TO PLAY THE POSITION AFTER 6. DXC5.**

**THIS PREPARATION IS SUFFICIENT FOR PLAYING AT ANY LEVEL.**



## The Austrian Attack Memory Markers!



MARKER 1

Diagram 455  
Black to move



MARKER 2

Diagram 456  
Black to move



MARKER 3

Diagram 457  
Black to move



MARKER 4

Diagram 458  
White to move



MARKER 5

Diagram 459  
White to move



MARKER 6

Diagram 460  
White to move

## The Austrian Attack Solutions to Memory Markers!

- No. 1 1. ... Bf2+, with perpetual check. (See page 222.)
- No. 2 1. ... Nh4, and Black wins. (See page 223.)
- No. 3 1. ... Qxg2+ 2. Ka3 Kd7, with advantage for Black. (See page 224.)
- No. 4 1. Ne3! dxe3 2. f5!, with the better game. (See page 227.)
- No. 5 1. Rxf6!, with a likely draw. (See page 231.)
- No. 6 1. g4! (The knight can't run away.) White has compensation for the missing material. (See page 238.)



## Chapter 15: White Plays 4. Bc4 Some Important Points to Look For

Although tamed at the GM level, 4. Bc4 is a paper tiger that still stalks amateur events. This chapter shows you how to face it with confidence.



- ◆ 6. ... Nd7! 7. e6 fxe6 8. Qxe6 Nde5  
9. Qd5 e6 turns out well for Black.

See Diagram 465.



- ◆ 9. ... Na5!. Black trades his knight for the bishop so central to White's opening strategy.

See Diagram 469.



- ◆ 5. ... Nc6!. Black sticks with natural development that pressures White's center.

See Diagram 472.



- ◆ 7. ... Nxe4!. Black uses the "fork trick" to eliminate half of White's proud center.

See Diagram 479.

## Chapter 15 White Plays 4. Bc4 Paper tiger of the Pirc

The system beginning with 4. Bc4 is a cat rarely encountered on the highest levels—where 4. f4 and 4. Bg5 dominate—, but often seen on the prowl in amateur and open tournaments, where it takes many victims. We'll learn how the best Pirc players de-claw this would-be predator.

1. c4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Bc4



Diagram 461  
After 4. Bc4

In military terms, the e4/d4 duo can be seen as a ground unit ready to advance. The bishop on c4 can be considered artillery support for White's intended pawn invasion of the e6-square. This beachhead is especially important, because in the Pirc the primary reply for Black to e4-e5 is ... Nf6-d7, attacking the e-pawn. Naturally, the position of the bishop on c4, on the a2-g8 diagonal, discourages the reply ... Nf6-d7 because of the possibility of e5-e6, or tricks such as Bc4xf7.

So it may look like the system with 4. Bc4 has a very solid basis. However, there are good reasons the move isn't a favorite at the top, where it would be naive to plan on winning in the following way:

**IT MAY LOOK LIKE THE SYSTEM HAS A SOLID BASIS. HOWEVER, THERE ARE GOOD REASONS 4. Bc4 ISN'T A FAVORITE AT THE TOP.**

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Bc4 Bg7 5. Nf3 Nbd7??

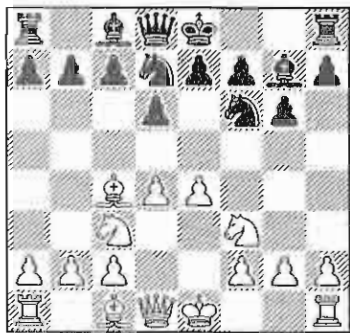


Diagram 462  
After 5... Nbd7??

6. e5 Ng4 7. Bxf7+ Kxf7 8. Ng5+, winning.

But the results of 4. Bc4 needn't be so fearsome. Sticking to military terminology, we could say that White's artillery (the bishop) has advanced too close to the front lines and is subject to attack by less valuable units.

The arsenal of Black's possibilities includes ... d6-d5 (after a preliminary ... c7-c6). It also offers the exchanging combination ... Nf6xe4, followed by ... d6-d5. And the defensive arsenal holds as well the Black knight's maneuvers ... Nb8-c6-a5 and ... Nf6-d7-b6. All these counters show how Black can use the exposed position of the bishop on c4.

### Choosing the right weapons

Black's ultimate success depends on which of these plans

he chooses and at what moment. After 4. ... Bg7, White can try 5. Qe2 or 5. Nf3. At first glance, the most logical reaction is ... c7-c6 and ... d6-d5, blocking the White bishop's diagonal and its influence on e6 and f7. For example, the play may continue 4. ... Bg7 5. Qe2 (the purpose of this move is to avoid the queen trade which is possible after 5. e5 dxe5 6. dxe5) 5. ... c6. At this moment, ... d6-d5 has been prepared, but it's White's turn, and he takes advantage of this: 6. e5 dxe5 7. dxe5. It is obvious that 7. ... Nfd7 8. e6 is bad for Black, but it seems that ... c7-c6 was useful anyway because now Black has a central outpost on d5 for his knight—7. ... Nd5.



Diagram 463  
After 7... Nd5

The knight is centralized and blocks the critical diagonal—thus making White's e5-e6 impossible. But Black's knight on d5 can't counterattack the key e-pawn, which restricts the bishop on g7 and restrains Black's

position in general. Black's game is stable, but somewhat passive.

Even if Black plays ... d6-d5 (4. ... c6 5. Bb3 d5), it is still not clear how Black rids the board of the disruptive e-pawn after 6. e5. White has the possibility of f2-f4 as a follow-up.



Diagram 464  
After 6. e5

Moreover, the bishop on b3 is only temporarily restrained. It can be reactivated by Nc3-e2, c2-c3 and Bb3-c2.

### Black's correct choice, and White's options

Black can avoid this waiting-to-be-attacked posture by focusing his efforts against the d4-pawn, trying to provoke his opponent to advance with d4-d5 instead of e4-e5. If Black succeeds, the position of White's bishop becomes ridiculous. The best method, typical of many lines in the Pirc Defense, is to play ... Nb8-c6 and ... e7-e5.

This goal can be supported

by ... Bc8-g4 if White's knight develops to f3. It's true that White may not play d4-d5, but instead choose d4xe5, when ... d6xe5 leaves White's bishop on c4 on the open diagonal. Nevertheless, after d4xe5 the position is simplified, and the bishop's attack on f7 isn't coordinated with the actions of his other pieces. Also, after Black castles kingside, the critical f7-pawn is defended twice.

Black must meet the challenge in the main line: after 4. ... Bg7 5. Qe2 Nc6, White is ahead in development and ready to start operations in the center with 6. e5.

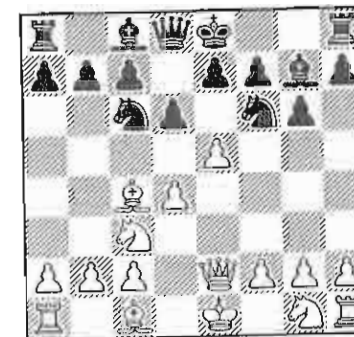


Diagram 465  
After 6. e4-e5

Now ... Nf6-d5 isn't available, and White's impending e5-e6 looks dangerous. (At the same time, 6. ... Nxd4 7. exf6 Nxe2 8. fxg7 leads to a middlegame where three minor White pieces are stronger than Black's queen and two pawns.) In reality, however, after 6. ... Nd7, 7. e6

appears not to be good for White in view of 7. ... fxe6 8. Qxe6 (8. Bxe6 Nxd4) 8. ... Nde5 9. Qd5 e6.

Further, in order to make the e5-outpost a successful stronghold, White must agree to exchange his bishop on c4 in the line 7. Nf3 Nb6 8. Bb3 0-0 9. h3 (otherwise ... Bc8-g4 is too strong) 9. ... Na5. This exchange puts a crimp in White's strategy—for example, it makes the undermining ... f7-f6 move an easier one for Black. Of course, on his 6th move White can decide to forego e4-e5 and continue development, but in this case Black will be the one who advances a pawn to e5. In all cases, it's difficult to call White's opening strategy successful.

Why does White do better in the 4. Bg5 system, where it seems that the dark-square bishop has a less stable position than its colleague in the 4. Bc4 system? In order to dislodge the g5-bishop from the h4-d8 diagonal, Black must significantly weaken his kingside pawns with ... h7-h6, ... g7-g5, and ... Nf6-h5. So it's more difficult to exploit the exposed position of the g5-bishop.

Let's examine 5. Qe2 (Line A) in more detail, and then move to another choice for White's fifth move, 5. Nf3 (Line B).

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Bc4 Bg7

### A 5. Qe2 Nc6!

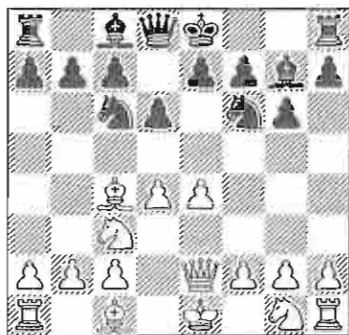


Diagram 466  
After 5. ... Nc6!

Too passive is 5. ... c6. Here is one example: 5. ... c6 6. e5 dxe5 7. dxe5 Nd5 8. Bd2 Be6 9. 0-0-0 Nd7 10. f4 N7b6 11. Bb3 Nxc3 12. Bxc3 Qc8 13. Nf3 Bxb3 14. axb3 Qg4.

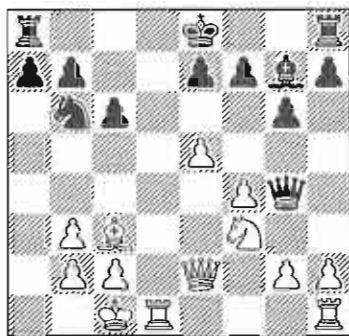


Diagram 467  
After 14. ... Qg4

Black can't avoid castling kingside. When he does, the standard attack h2-h4-h5 looks dangerous. Black's last move is an attempt to construct a barrier against White's kingside pawn attack. Now after 15. g3 0-0,

instead of 16. h3?, which allowed Black counterplay in Kveinis—Chernin, 1992, White could maintain his advantage with 16. Rdg1!, preparing 17. h3. Black should pass on 5. ... c6 and switch to a better plan, 5. ... Nc6.

### 6. e5

In this manner White accomplishes the main goal of his opening strategy. By transposition, 6. Nf3 leads to Line B (5. Nf3).

### 6. ... Nd7

Too risky is 6. ... Nxd4 7. exf6 Nxe2 8. fxg7 Rg8 9. Ngxe2 Rxc7 10. Bh6, when White castles long and follows with the h2-h4 push. While 6. ... Ng4 7. Bb5 0-0 8. Bxc6 bxc6 9. h3 Nh6 may be no worse than 6. ... Nd7, it requires more theoretical research. Our 6. ... Nd7 is simple and strong.

### 7. Nf3

After 7. e6 fxe6 8. Qxe6 Nde5 9. Qd5 e6, Black is much better; or 7. Bxf7+ Kxf7 8. e6+ Ke8! 9. exd7+ Bxd7 10. Nf3 (10. d5 Nd4, followed by ... Bf5.) 10. ... Nxd4 11. Nxd4 Bxd4, and Black has a significant advantage. The text move allows White to keep an e5-outpost in view of

7. ... dxe5? 8. Bxf7+ Kxf7 9. Ng5+ Ke8 10. Qc4 ±.

### 7. ... Nb6!



Diagram 468  
After 7. ... Nb6!

### 8. Bb3

After the alternative 8. Bb5 White must give up his bishop: 8. ... 0-0 9. Bxc6 (9. 0-0 dxe5 10. dxe5 Nd4 11. Nxd4 Qxd4 12. Re1 c6 13. Bd3 Bg4, with even play) 9. ... bxc6 10. 0-0 Bg4 and Black has solved all his opening problems. Compare this variation with 6. ... Ng4 7. Bb5 0-0 8. Bxc6 bxc6 9. h3 Nh6, where the position of Black's knight is worse.

### 8. ... 0-0 9. h3

After 9. 0-0, ... Bg4 is quite unpleasant.

### 9. ... Na5!

**WHITE DOES BETTER IN THE 4. BG5 SYSTEM  
BECAUSE, TO DISPLACE THAT BISHOP, BLACK MUST  
WEAKEN HIS KINGSIDE PAWN STRUCTURE.**

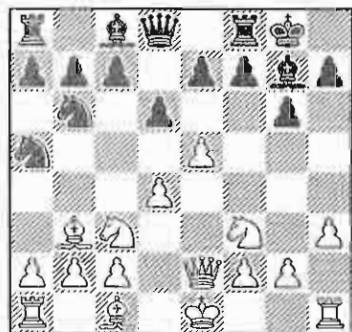


Diagram 469  
After 9... Na5!

The coming exchange of knight for bishop puts a crimp in White's strategy—for example, it makes the undermining ... f7-f6 easier for Black. This leads to a situation where each side has its pluses: White has an e5-outpost while Black has a pair of bishops and prepares the ... f7-f6 break. The game is even.

An alternative is 9... dxe5 10. dxe5 Nd4 11. Nxd4 Qxd4, but after 12. e6, or 12. f4, White is better.

#### 10. 0-0 h6

Black prevents 11. Bg5 h6 12. Bh4.

#### 11. Ne4 Nxb3 12. axb3 f6 13. c4

Now 13. exd6 or 13. exf6 just levels the play. With the text move, White takes the risk of trying to keep the e5-outpost.

**BLACK HAS COMPENSATION FOR THE EXCHANGE.**

#### 13... fxe5 14. dxe5

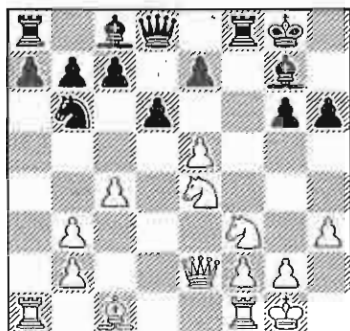


Diagram 470  
After 14. dxe5

#### 14... Nd7

Speelman notes 14... g5!?

#### 15. Bd2 b6

Speelman gives this move a “?!,” but we disagree.

#### 16. e6 Nf6 17. Nxf6+ Rxf6 18. Nd4 Bb7 19. Bc3 a6 20. f4 Qf8 21. Nc2 c5 22. Bxf6 Qxf6 23. Rab1 Rf8

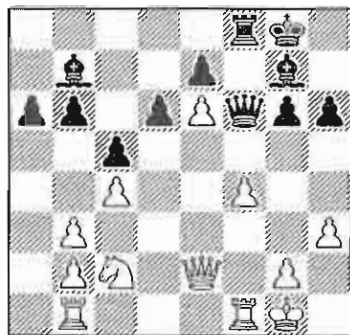


Diagram 471  
After 23... Rf8

Black has more than sufficient compensation for the Exchange (Kveinis—Speelman,

1994). Black won on move 72.

#### 5. Nf3 Nc6!



Diagram 472  
After 5... Nc6!

Black sticks with this natural knight move. Here White has four choices: 6. Qe2 (B1), 6. d5 (B2), 6. h3 (B3) and 6. 0-0 (B4). Let's begin with 6. Qe2 because it's thematically related to the lines we've already examined.

#### B1 6. Qe2 Bg4 7. Be3

If 7. e5 Bxf3 8. gxf3 Nh5 9. e6 0-0 10. exf7+ Kh8, Black is better.

#### 7... e5 8. dxe5



Diagram 473  
After 8. dxe5

The only way to make problems for Black.

#### 8... Nxe5 9. Bb3 0-0 10. 0-0-0 Bh5 11. h3 Nxf3 12. gxf3 Nd7 13. Rhg1 Ne5 14. Rg3

The only move. Now comes an important theoretical novelty that Alex unearthed.

#### 14... c6! TN

A new idea not yet used in GM play.

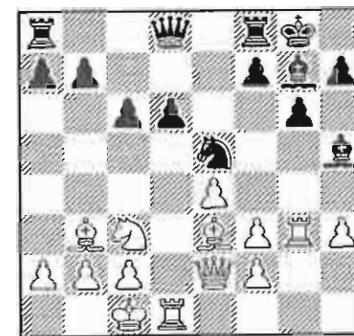


Diagram 474  
After 14... c6!

Black's last move changes the overall evaluation of the line. Previous theory condemned Black to a worse position here. After the older 14... Kh8 15. Nd5 h6 16. Nf4 Qh4 17. Nxf5 Qxf5 18. Qb5!, White has a significant advantage. According to Zelcic, White threatens f3-f4 and Qxb7.

After 14... c6, Black is not afraid of 15. Bg5 because of 15... Bxf3! 16. Qe3 (16. Bxd8 Bxe2 is in Black's favor) 16... Bf6 17. Bxf6 Qxf6, and White has no

compensation for the pawn. If White acts straightforwardly with 15. Rdg1, then after 15. ... b5 16. Bg5 Qb6! (aimed against 17. Qe3) 17. Be7 Rfe8 18. Bxd6 Rad8 19. Rd1 a5, Black has excellent prospects. The pin along the d1-h5 diagonal and powerful center are indisputable pluses. Black is also better after 15. Bc5 Bh6+ 16. Kbl dxc5! 17. Rxd8 Rfxd8, threatening ... Rd2, ... Bf4, and ... b7-b5.

### B2 6. d5

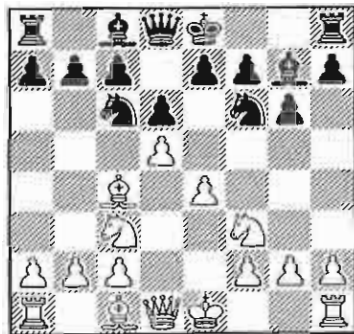


Diagram 475  
After 6. d5

Gaining two tempi, but closing the diagonal for his own "artillery" on c4.

### 6. ... Nb8

Now Black is going to play ... c7-c6.

### 7. h3

It's useful to prevent ... Bg4.

### 7. ... c6 8. Bb3

Anticipating ... b7-b5-b4.

### 8. ... 0-0 9. 0-0

White doesn't want to continue with d5xc6, which could allow Black to reach a good version of the Sicilian Dragon. Black, for his part, should not play ... c6xd5 because after e4xd5 White will get pressure along the e-file. Black has a problem developing his c8-bishop (as a result of 7. h3), but he solves it on the next move.

### 9. ... b6!

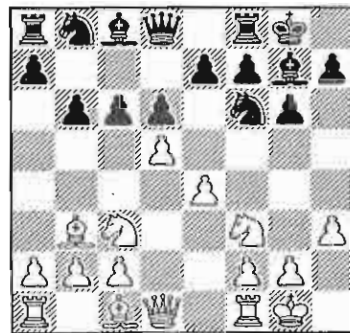


Diagram 476  
After 9. ... b6!

### 10. Bg5 Bb7 11. Re1 Nbd7

With the idea ... Nc5.

### 12. dxc6 Bxc6 13. Nd5

White offers an exchange of knights on d5, but he lacks the resources to attack f6, forcing a trade.

### 13. ... h6 14. Bh4

WHITE LACKS THE  
RESOURCES TO ATTACK  
F6, FORCING A TRADE.

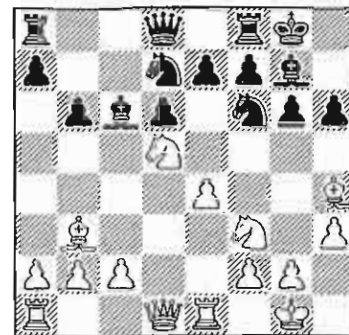


Diagram 477  
After 14. Bh4

### 14. ... e6! 15. Nxf6+ Nxf6

The bishop on b3 is still restricted, while Black is threatening to win the e-pawn with 16. ... g5. White decides to force a draw.

### 16. Nd4 Bb7 17. Nb5 g5 18. Nxd6 Bxe4 19. Nxe4, draw.

In view of 19. ... Nxe4 20. Rxe4 Qxd1+ 21. Rxd1 gxh4. (Rublevsky—Beliavsky, 1997).

### B3 6. b3



Diagram 478  
After 6. b3

### 6. ... 0-0

Now Black intends not only to play ... e7-e5, but also 7. ... Nxe4! and after 8. Nxe4, then ... d7-d5. This idea works perfectly after 7. 0-0.

### B3a 7. 0-0 Nxe4



Diagram 479  
After 7. ... Nxe4

### 8. Bxf7+

If 8. Nxe4, then 8. ... d5 9. Bd3 dxe4 10. Bxe4 Nxd4 is in Black's favor.

### 8. ... Rxf7 9. Nxe4 d5 10. Neg5 Rf8 11. Re1 Qd6

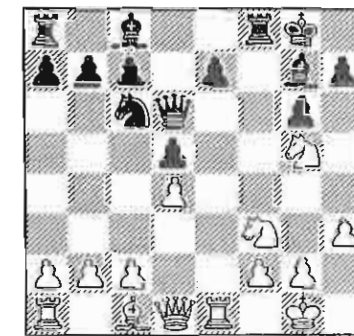


Diagram 480  
After 11. ... Qd6

Black intends to follow up with ... h7-h6. Black has excel-



lent play because White can't take control over e5.

**B3b** 7. Qe2

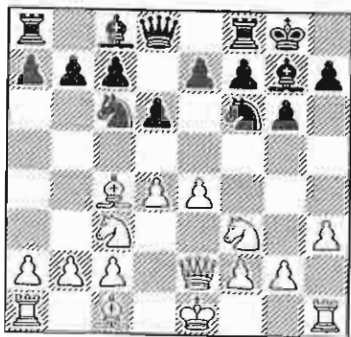


Diagram 481  
After 7. Qe2

White prevents 7. ... Nxe4.  
7. ... Nd7

This is even better than 7. ... e7-e5. Black's maneuvers lead to the exchange of White's light-square bishop.

8. Be3 Nb6 9. Bb3 Na5 10. 0-0 c6

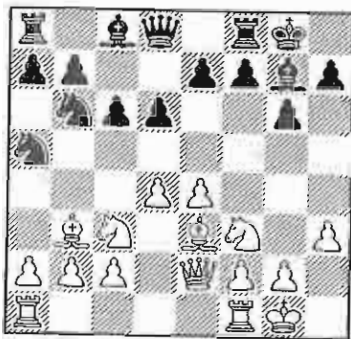


Diagram 482  
After 10. ... c6

Black has successfully solved all his opening's problems. He has an opportunity to eliminate

the bishop on b3 at the appropriate moment, while his next goal is to play ... d6-d5. In such situations, this pawn push is good. For example, let's follow Short—Nunn, 1980.

11. Rf1 d5 12. exd5

The alternative 12. e5 brings White nothing—12. ... f6 13. Bf4 g5 14. Bg3 g4!



Diagram 483  
After 14. ... g4!

Back to the mainline after 12. exd5.

12. ... cxd5 13. Bf4 e6 14. Nd1 Nbc4

Black has a good game.

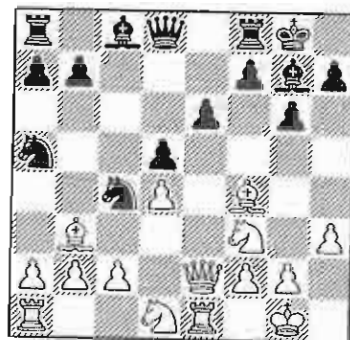


Diagram 484  
After 14. ... Nbc4

Finally, White can try 6. 0-0.

**B4** 6. 0-0 Bg4 7. Be3

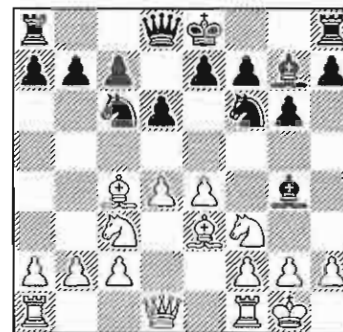


Diagram 485  
After 7. Be3

With White castled kingside, the threat of ... Bg4xf3 is serious.

7. ... 0-0 8. h3 Bxf3 9. Qxf3 e5

Also possible is 9. ... Nd7 with the idea of 10. Ne2?! Nce5! 11. dx5 Nxe5 12. Bxf7+ Rxf7, and Black is better.

10. dx5

If 10. d5, Black plays ... Ne7, preparing ... Nd7 and ... f7-f5.

10. ... Nxe5 11. Qe2



Diagram 486  
After 11. Qe2

Now both 11. ... Nxc4 and even 11. ... Nxe4 12. Nxe4 Nxc4 13. Qxc4 d5 lead to equal play.

### Modern move order against White's 4. Bc4

Against 4. Bc4, Black is better off sticking with the Pirc move order, after which he enjoys a good game.

### Summary:

Black should be happy when White chooses the false bravado of 4. Bc4. Black secures equal play in all the main lines, even without having to know much theory. The big question is one that arises often in the Pirc—what should Black place on c6, a pawn or a knight?

We've seen that placing the knight on c6 is preferable because, in addition to its normal, yeoman duties—supporting ... e7-e5 and pressuring White's d4-square—in some important lines Black's horseman can also take part in hunting down White's bishop.

## White Plays 4. Bc4

## Memory Markers!

## White Plays 4. Bc4

## Solutions to Memory Markers!



MARKER 1

Diagram 487  
Black to move



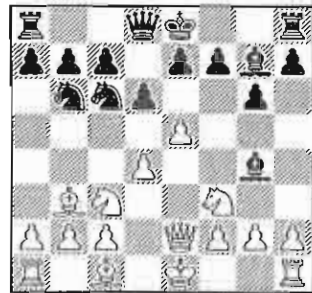
MARKER 2

Diagram 488  
Black to move



MARKER 3

Diagram 489  
White to move



MARKER 4

Diagram 490  
White to move



MARKER 5

Diagram 491  
Black to move



MARKER 6

Diagram 492  
Black to move

- No. 1 1. ... Nd7!  
(See page 251.)
- No. 2 1. ... Nxb3 2. axb3 f6!, attacking e5.  
(See page 254.)
- No. 3 1. e5!, with an advantage. White can reinforce his e-pawn with f2-f4, and eventually activate his light-square bishop via c2.  
(See page 251.)
- No. 4 1. Bxf7+.
- No. 5 1. ... Bh6+ 2. Kbl dxc5! 3. Rxd8 Rfxd8, threatening ... Rd2, ... Bf4 and ... b7-b5. Black stands better. (See Diagram 474, pages 255-256.)
- No. 6 1. ... Qd6!. Black takes e6 and e5 under control. White has big problems with his knight on g5. (See page 257.)

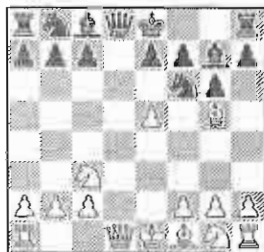
## Chapter 16: White Plays 4. Bg5

### Some Important Points to Look For

Besides the Austrian Attack, 4. Bg5 is White's most serious try for an advantage in Section 1. This bishop move is far more effective than 4. Bc4.



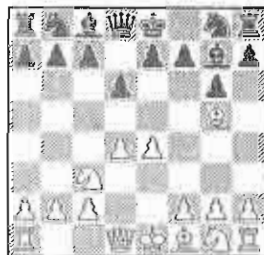
- ◆ After 4. Bg5 the bishop's influence starts to be felt immediately. After the natural 4. ... Bg7, the e4-e5 breakthrough is already a serious threat. See Diagram 493.



- ◆ The early e4-e5 works best against an unprepared opponent who plays the "natural" 6. ... Qxd1+ 7. Rxd1. See Diagram 500.



- ◆ White just played 8. dxe5. Black can recapture 8. ... dxe5, reaching a complicated endgame, or play 8. ... Nxf4 to stir up tactical complications. See Diagram 512.



- ◆ The 4. Bg5 variation is that rare case where the Modern move order may be easier to play than the Pirc. See page 290.

## Chapter 16 White Plays 4. Bg5

### Real tiger of the Pirc

The system with 4. Bg5 is a serious enemy of the Pirc Defense.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Bg5



Diagram 493  
After 4. Bg5

White wants to play e4-e5, just as he does in the 4. Bc4 system. After 4. Bc4, the White bishop is aimed at a well guarded linchpin — the f7-pawn. But 4. Bg5 controls a diagonal (h4-d8) that's densely populated by Black pieces. Even the move Bg5xf6 is a possibility to be reckoned with.

The influence of the g5-bishop on the h4-d8 diagonal starts to be felt by Black very soon. After

the natural 4. ... Bg7, the immediate breakthrough 5. e4-e5 is already a serious threat.

### Why Black's trusty ... c5 doesn't work

After 4. ... Bg7 5. f4, Black's standard counter, 5. ... c5, does not work because of 6. e5!



Diagram 494  
After 6. e5!

Black's knight doesn't have its usual retreat on d7, because of 7. exd6, illustrating the power of the bishop on g5. After 6. ... Ng4, 7. Bb5+ is strong; and 6. ... dxe5 7. dxe5! is also better for White.

And 6. ... cxd4? is a mistake. 7. exf6 exf6 8. Qxd4 Qe7+? (8. ... Nc6 9. Qe3+ Kd7 10. Ne4±) 9. Nce2! Nc6 10. Qc3, and Black

stays a piece down.

### Chasing the bishop

We explained in Chapter 15 the drawback of the 4. Bc4 system—White's bishop, his supporting artillery, is too close to the battlefield and can be easily attacked. Why then, when White plays 4. Bg5, placing a bishop even closer to Black's ground troops, can't the piece be harassed immediately? Black can drive off the newcomer from the h4-d8 diagonal in two volleys — 4. ... h6 5. Bh4 g5 6. Bg3.



Diagram 495  
After 6. Bg3

But achieving this relative success considerably weakens Black's own pawn structure in front of his king. Whether or not Black castles short, White has g5 as a target. He can attack g5 with f2-f4 and especially with h2-h4. So Black's driving away the bishop with ... h7-h6 and ... g7-g5, early or late, is a double-edged saber.

If Bc4 is a White artillery gun, White's bishop on g5 is very effective air support. The firing

of the anti-aircraft guns ... h7-h6 and ... g7-g5 isn't so effective, because they "give away" the position of Black's headquarters.

### The downside of 4. Bg5

The shortcoming of White's development of the bishop on g5 is that his d4 is somewhat weakened by the lack of support—compared to positions when the same bishop is on e3. This lack of support is especially felt when, after f2-f4, the g5-bishop is shut out of the center. However, in an indirect way—pressing on the h4-d8 diagonal —, the bishop does help White to hold the situation in the center, because it hampers ... e7-e5 and ... c7-c5.

White has his own problems with development and has to make some important decisions. Should he first finish construction of the pawn phalanx d4-e4-f4 so that the effect of a coming e4-e5 will be strengthened? Or should he start developing his pieces—and should his plan of development include castling long? In any case, how soon should he play e4-e5, his thematic stab? These are the general strategic questions for both sides in the 4. Bg5 system.

### Sailing to a new world with 4. ... h6

After 4. Bg5, the main continuation 4. ... Bg7 doesn't raise

any special questions—except for one. Perhaps by playing 4. ... h7-h6, without following up with the weakening ... g7-g5, Black could first determine the sphere of influence of White's dark-square bishop. After all, ... h7-h6 for Black is a constructive part of the main lines.



Diagram 496  
After 4. ... h6

The bishop can retreat to h4 or stay on the c1-h6 diagonal. Black is interested in clarifying the long-term position of White's bishop. It is important to consider primarily the continuation 5. Be3, after which chasing the bishop further—with 5. ... Ng4 6. Bc1 (intending f2-f3)—is pointless. Black should be happy after 5. Bh4. You'll see in this chapter that inclusion of the moves ... h7-h6 and Bh4 is usually beneficial for Black.

However, the play after 4. ... h6 5. Be3 a6 (or 5. ... c6) has a

rather unclear character.



Diagram 497  
After 5. Be3 a6!

This position is similar to the system 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Be3, differing only in the position of the pawn on h6. Black has gotten this move for "free," but is it a strength or a weakness?

Well, this extra move can help protect Black's knight on f6 from the assault of the g-pawn. It can also help defend against Bh6 after White's Qd2.

On the other hand, the position of the h-pawn, a bulls-eye for the Qd2-Be3 battery, doesn't permit Black to castle. In general, 4. ... h6 has its own pluses and minuses. We can recommend it for adventurous spirits, those would-be Christopher Columbuses in this sea of possibilities.

### Fianchettoing is the main line

The most popular and most tested move is the fianchetto.

WE CAN RECOMMEND 4. ... h6  
TO CHESSBOARD COLUMBUSES.

4. ... Bg7

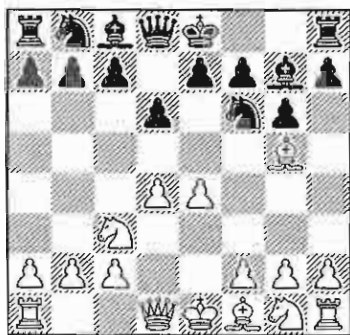


Diagram 498  
After 4. ... Bg7

White has three popular continuations—5. e5 (A), 5. f4 (B), and 5. Qd2 (C). As Black, you have to be ready for all three, but we can tell you that 5. Qd2 is twice as popular as either alternative.

Other moves don't create problems for Black, e.g. 5. Qe2 h6 6. Bh4 c6 7. 0-0-0 Nh5! 8. Qf3 Qc7 9. Kb1 Nd7 10. g4 Nhf6

11. g5 hxg5=, Polugaevsky—Parma, 1969. After 5. Nf3 a6, White's most natural plan is to head for the Hybrid variation with 6. Qd2 0-0 7. Bh6 b5.

A 5. e5

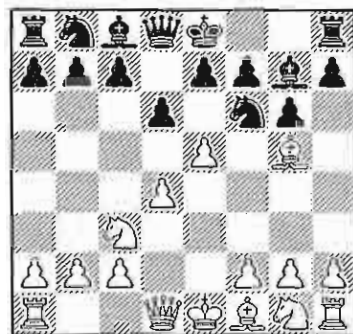


Diagram 499  
After 5. e5

5. ... dxe5

Here 5. ... Nfd7 is not a bad alternative, but 5. ... dxe5 is more forceful.

6. dxe5

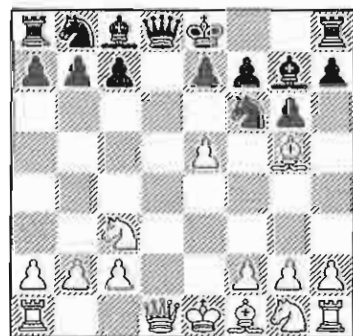


Diagram 500  
After 6. dxe5

The move 5. e5 works best against an unprepared opponent

**THE MOVE 5. e5  
WORKS BEST AGAINST  
AN UNPREPARED  
BLACK OPPONENT WHO  
PLAYS THE "NATURAL"  
6. ... Qxd1+.  
INSTEAD, HE SHOULD  
PLAY THE  
ANTI-INTUITIVE  
6. ... Ng4!**

who plays the "natural" 6. ... Qxd1+ 7. Rxd1. The position is bad for Black—for example, after 7. ... Ng4?



Diagram 501  
After 7. ... Ng4?

White has 8. h3 Nxe5 9. Nd5. However, instead of 6. ... Qxd1+, Black has a much stronger sixth move.

6. ... Ng4!

An anti-intuitive move, since it both voluntarily gives up castling and invites White to bring his rook to the d-file with check! But Black guards c7 and gets good play.

7. Qxd8+ Kxd8

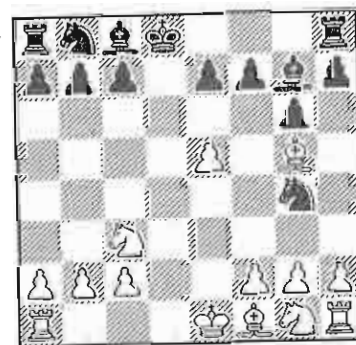


Diagram 502  
After 7. ... Kxd8

8. Rd1+

White has played another move here, 8. Nf3, when after 8. ... Be6! 9. Bh4 Nxe5 10. Ng5 Bd7 11. Bg3 Nbc6 12. Bb5 h6, Black is better.



Diagram 503  
After 12. ... h6

8. ... Bd7 9. e6

Or White can choose 9. Nd5, when 9. ... Nc6 10. f4 h6 11. Bh4 g5! undermines the e-pawn. Haupt—Hort, 1981.

The location of White's bishop on g5 makes 9. f4 disadvantageous because of 9. ... Ne3. Thus White is forced into a double-edged pawn sacrifice that destroys the opponent's pawn skeleton—but revives the bishop on g7.

9. ... fxe6 10. Bc4 Ke8

**WHITE IS FORCED  
INTO A PAWN SACRIFICE  
THAT REVIVES THE  
BISHOP ON G7.**



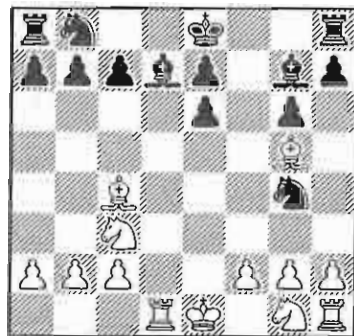


Diagram 504  
After 10. ... Ke8

### 11. Nf3

After 11. Nge2, Black plays 11. ... Ne5, attacking the bishop and threatening quick redeployment of the knight through f7 to d6: 12. Bb3 Na6 13. Ne4 Nf7!



Diagram 505  
After 13. ... Nf7!

14. Bc1 Nd6, with a very good position for Black (Zorman—Picket, 1989).

11. ... Nc6 12. 0-0 Nce5

**AFTER 5. f4, THE "NORMAL" 5. ... 0-0 (OR 5. ... c6) LEAVES WHITE'S MASSIVE CENTER UNTOUCHED FOR A TIME. WE PREFER A MORE DIRECT APPROACH.**

### 13. Nxe5 Nxe5 14. Nb5

After 14. Bb3 Nf7, Black has no problems.



Diagram 506  
After 14. Nb5

### 14. ... Bxb5! TN

This brand-new theoretical novelty is an improvement to the game Magem—Chernin, 1998, which continued 14. ... Kd8 15. Rxd7+ Nxd7 16. Bxe6 Be5 17. f4 Bd6 18. Bh6. Black needn't tempt fate by giving White the opportunity to play 15. Rxd7+.

### 15. Bxb5+ c6

White has nothing. Thus, Black easily repels an early 5. e5 attack.

Now let's see what happens when the threat of e4-e5 is strengthened by a preliminary 5. f4.

### 5. f4



Diagram 507  
After 5. f4

This move also lags behind 5. Qd2 in popularity. It's possible that fashion is unfair, and that many players simply shy away from 5. f4 because of its sharply tactical character.

### 5. ... h6

This move, which intends to separate the bishop on g5 from the pawn on f4, must be considered as a necessary preparation for the counterstrike ... c7-c5. After an immediate 5. ... c5?, White has a very effective 6. e5!. (See Diagram 494.)

The "normal" 5. ... 0-0 (or 5. ... c6, which usually reaches the same position after 6. Qd2 0-0), leaves White's massive center

**IF BLACK WANTS TO STRIKE A BLOW AGAINST THE PAWN ON D4, 6. ... c5 IS HIS LAST REAL OPPORTUNITY.**

untouched for a while. We prefer a more direct approach.

### 6. Bh4 c5



Diagram 508  
After 6. ... c5

Again, after 6. ... c6, Black has reasonable counterchances, although it is not easy to reduce the formidable White center. If Black wants to strike a blow against the pawn on d4, 6. ... c5 is his last real opportunity.

As always, after ... c7-c5, White has a number of possibilities, although 7. d5 isn't strong here, as we pointed out in Chapter 5. Black's best reply is 7. ... Nh5!, attacking the undefended f4-pawn and preparing queen operations—... Qa5 or ... Qb6.

We'll examine 7. dxc5 (B1) and 7. e5 (B2).

**B1** 7. dxc5

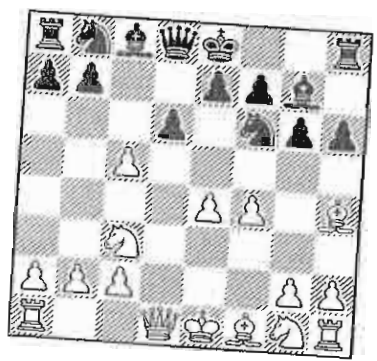


Diagram 509  
After 7. dxc5

7. ... Qa5!

Of course! Black uses the possibility to transpose to the Dragon with the help of this standard operation. 7. ... dxc5 8. Qxd8+ Kxd8 9. e5 is bad for Black.

8. Bd3 Qxc5 9. Qd2

The queenside looks more hospitable for the White king in light of Black's ready-made pawn-storm on the other side of the board.

9. ... Nc6

Black prevents e4-e5 and can look without fear on the prospect of a position in which the opponents have castled on opposite sides. The option 9. ... Nbd7!? also deserves attention.

10. Nge2 0-0 11. 0-0-0

So far, played in Yermolinsky—Gulko, 1996.

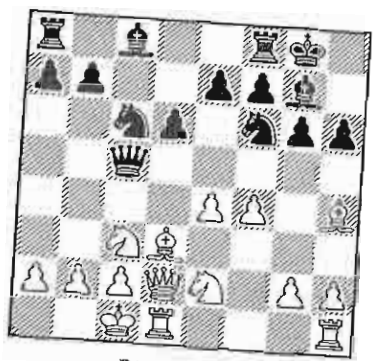


Diagram 510  
After 11. 0-0-0

Here 11. ... Nb4 seems untimely because the exchange ... Nb4xd3 only strengthens White's game after cxd3. Instead, more logical is 11. ... a6 and 12. ... b5 or 11. ... Be6, with double-edged play; both sides seek to organize an attack against the opponent's king. Alternatively, the pawn sacrifice 11. ... b5 **TN** looks very promising.

To sum up, 7. dxc5 (B1) is not dangerous for Black.

**B2** 7. e5



Diagram 511  
After 7. e5

9. Qxd8+ Kxd8 10. 0-0-0+ Bd7

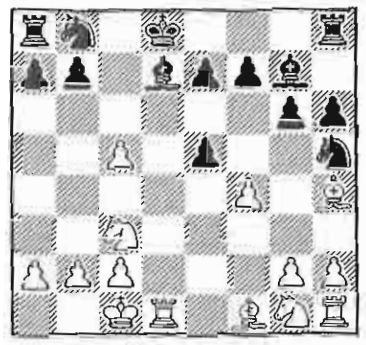


Diagram 513  
After 10. ... Bd7

11. fxe5!

The strongest continuation for White, because 11. Nd5 is refuted by 11. ... g5! 12. Be1 (12. fxg5 hxg5 13. Bxg5? Ng3 14. Bxe7+ Kc8+) 12. ... Nc6.



Diagram 514  
After 12. ... Nc6

Now if 13. Bb5 Rc8 14. fxe5 (14. Bxc6 Rxc6 15. Ba5+ Ke8 16. Nc7+ Rxc7 17. Bxc7 Nxf4+) 14. ... Bxe5, Black has very good play.

11. ... g5! **TN**

This move looks more threatening.

7. ... Nh5

Black attacks an *unguarded* f-pawn— thanks to his 5. ... h6. The usual 7. ... Nfd7 fails to 8. exd6.

8. dxc5

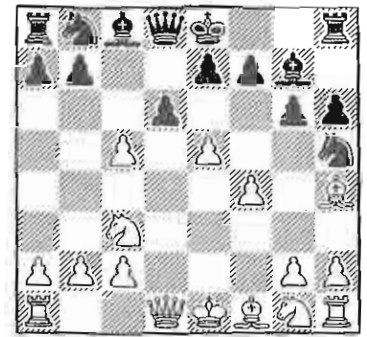


Diagram 512  
After 8. dxc5

Theory formerly gave this variation only a few lines. The possibility certainly deserves more interest, and we will begin to rectify this lack of attention! Black can choose the comparatively quiet continuation 8. ... dxe5 (a) with a complicated endgame, or rush into tactical complications with 8. ... Nxf4 (b).

**B2a** 8. ... dxe5

The loss of castling isn't so dreadful, though it brings some inconveniences to the endgame. The pawn majority in the center is compensation.

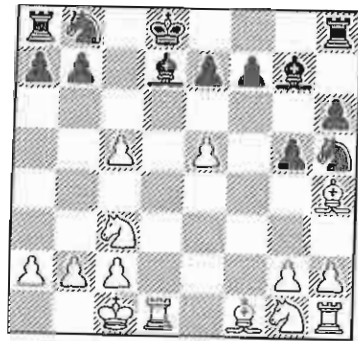


Diagram 515  
After 11... g5!

Another one of Chernin's new ideas. Before Black decides on his piece deployment, it's once again useful for him to know where the bishop will go. If now 12. Bf2 Bxe5 13. Nf3, it's possible to play 13... Bxc3 14. bxc3 Nc6, with an unclear position.



Diagram 516  
After 14... Nc6

12. Be1 Bxe5 13. Nf3 Bg7

8... Nxf4 IS BLACK'S MOST AMBITIOUS CONTINUATION.

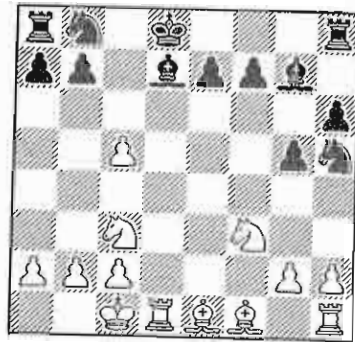


Diagram 517  
After 13... Bg7

Chernin suggested this continuation in 1997, but it was never checked in practice, because the opportunity hasn't arisen very often—White normally chooses 5. Qd2 over 5. f4. We have to consider the position after 13... Bg7 to be unclear.

Let's go to Black's more ambitious eighth-move continuation 8... Nxf4.

**B2b** 8... Nxf4 9. exd6 g5

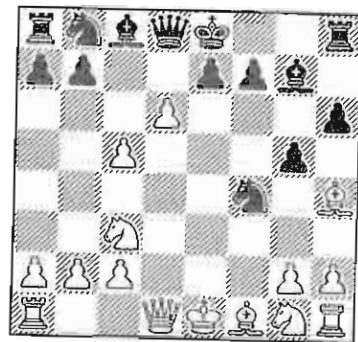


Diagram 518  
After 9... g5

Here the manuals examine only the move 10. Bf2. However,

10. Bg3 may soon become the preferred continuation in practice, raising some new problems for Black. True, 10. Bf2 looks after the pawn on c5 (noteworthy, keeping in mind Black's ... Qa5). On the other hand, after 10. Bg3 White can play Bxf4 at the right moment.

This latter idea is dangerous for Black because the capture of his active knight on f4 also further compromises his pawn structure.

We have to acknowledge that, after 8... Nf4, Black has burned his bridges. It is difficult to imagine a favorable endgame for him. However, he has real chances for an attack.

The next game illustrates the dangers of 10. Bg3 if Black continues with "normal" moves.

10. Bg3 0-0 11. Bxf4 gxf4 12. Qf3 Nc6 13. 0-0-0 e5 14. Nge2



Diagram 519  
After 14. Nge2

White has the better chances, although the position stays double-edged (Hall—Agrist, 1998).

We have to look for the downsides to 10. Bg3 (compared to 10. Bf2), which is the weakness of White's c-pawn. We suggest 10... Bxc3+ 11. bxc3 Nc6 (11... Qa5 12. Qd4!) 12. Ne2 Qa5 13. Qd2 e5.



Diagram 520  
After 13... e5

This position requires testing. Indeed, your own home analysis of this line may yield important ideas!

The attempt to win the c5-pawn without the double-edged 10... Bxc3+ was tried in the game Sadvakasov—Ponomariov, 1999, where 10... Qa5 11. Qd2 Qxc5 led to advantage for White after 12. 0-0-0 0-0 13. dxe7 Qxe7.

AFTER 10. Bg3,  
BLACK SHOULD PLAY  
SHARPLY TO PRESERVE  
A GOOD GAME.

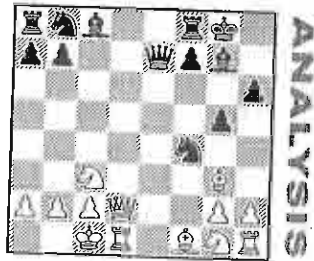


Diagram 521  
After 13. ... Qe7

Here White has 14. Nge2!, and the game continued ... Nxe2+ 15. Bxe2! Bxc3 16. Qxc3! Qxe2 17. Rhe1 Qb5 18. Bd6 Rd8 19. Bxb8, with a winning attack.

Now let's consider the more popular retreat of the bishop.

10. Bf2

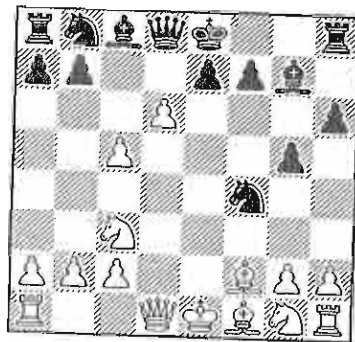


Diagram 522  
After 10. Bf2

10. ... Nc6

This move is used in tandem with ... 0-0 and 10. ... 0-0 is generally considered by theory a mere transposition of moves. However, we've found that after 10. ... 0-0, White has the strong move 11. Bd4! **TN**, e.g.—11. ... Bxd4 12. Qxd4 Nc6 13. Qd2

exd6 14. cxd6 Bg4.

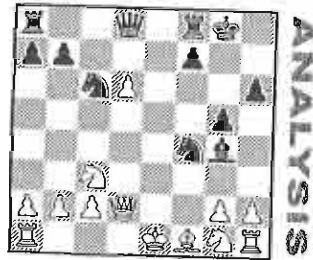


Diagram 523  
After 14. ... Bg4

Now 15. Nge2 and 0-0-0 is dangerous for Black. Playing 10. ... Nc6 first precludes this variation. An important nuance!

11. Qd2

Now or later, White can play g2-g3, driving the Black knight from f4. But from g6 the horse-man is capable of jumping to the equally important square e5. At the same time, the move g2-g3 deprives f3 (the future home of the knight on g1) of support, increasing the effectiveness of Black's ... Qd8-f6 and ... Bc8-g4—for example, 11. g3 Ng6 12. Qd2 0-0 13. 0-0-0 exd6 14. cxd6 Be6! **TN**.

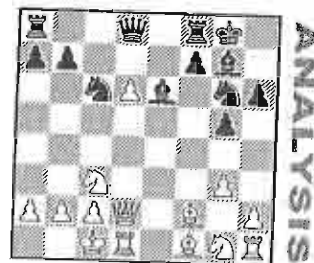


Diagram 524  
After 14. ... Be6

This precise move allows Black to avoid two of White's protective possibilities: 14. ... Qa5 15. a3 and 14. ... Qf6 15. Bc5 b6 16. Ba3. After 14. ... Be6, if White plays 15. a3, Black has 15. ... Qf6. (The maneuver 16. Bc5 b6 is fine for Black because the square a3 is occupied. If made one move earlier, 15. Bc5 would be met by 15. ... b6 16. Ba3 a5, with the idea 17. ... Nb4 and a good game for Black.)

11. ... 0-0 12. 0-0-0 Bg4 13. Nf3 exd6

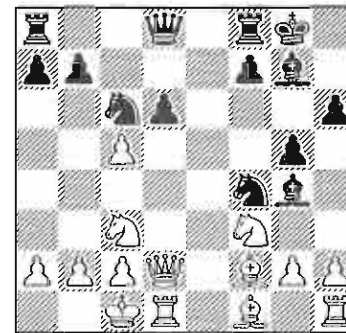


Diagram 525  
After 13. ... exd6

14. cxd6

After 14. Qxd6, the move 14. ... Qa5 follows with great effect. Instead, 14. h4 was tried in the game Voitsekhovskiy—Berelovich, 1992, which continued 14. ... dxc5 15. hxg5 hxg5 16. Qe3. Here, instead of 16. ... Qf6, Black has 16. ... Nd4! **TN**.

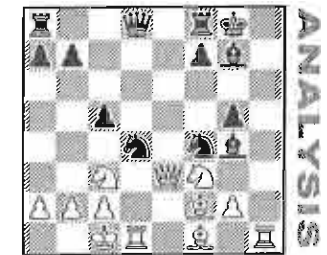


Diagram 526  
After 16. ... Nd4

Black has wonderful prospects—for example, 17. Ne4 Re8 18. c3 Qd5, or 18. Nfxg5 Nb3+, in either case winning.

14. ... Rc8

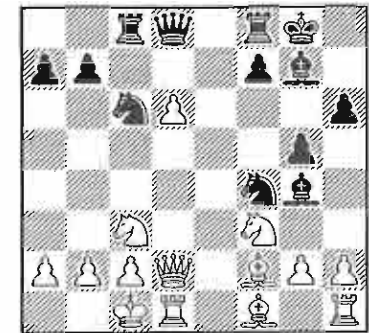


Diagram 527  
After 14. ... Rc8

In the only game ever played in this line, Sorokin—Jansa, 1992, White chose the most aggressive continuation.

**B2br** 15. h4 Qa5!

The right reaction. After 15. ... Nb4?, White played 16. Bd4 Bxf3 17. gxh3 Qxd6 18. hxg5 hg5 19. Qh2 ±.

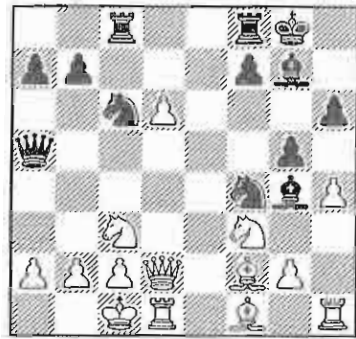


Diagram 528  
After 15... Qa5!

Now Black has a strong counterattack, for example: 16. a3 Nb4 17. Bd4 Rxc3



Diagram 529  
After 17... Rxc3

18. Bxg7 Rxc2+ 19. Qxc2 Nxc2 20. Bxf8 Ne3-+.

Or 16. hxg5 Bxc3 17. bxc3 Qa3+ 18. Kb1 Be6 19. c4 Nb4



Diagram 530  
After 19... Nb4

20. c3 Bf5+ 21. Ka1 Nc2+ 22. Kb1 Nd4+ 23. Ka1 Nb3, mate.

Black again has the better chances in the next branch of the main line.

### B2b2 15. Nb5



Diagram 531  
After 15. Nb5

### 15... Bf5

Also promising is 15... a6 16. Nc7 Qf6 17. c3 Rfd8.

16. d7 Qf6 17. Qc3 Nb4 18. dxc8(Q) Rxc8

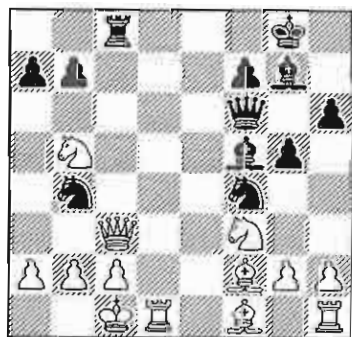


Diagram 532  
After 18... Rxc8

### 19. Qxc8+

If 19. Qxf6, then ... Rxc2+ 20. Kb1 Bxf6 21. Bd4 Re2+ 22. Ka1 Nc2+, winning.

19... Bxc8 20. Bd4 Qf5 21. Rd2 Nxa2+ 22. Kb1 Nb4

And Black clearly stands better.

In Diagram 527, Black can also find sufficient resources in lines other than 15. h4 and 15. Nb5.

B2b3 15. a3 Ne5 16. Nxe5 Bxd1 17. Nxf7 Rxf7 18. Nxd1 Rd7

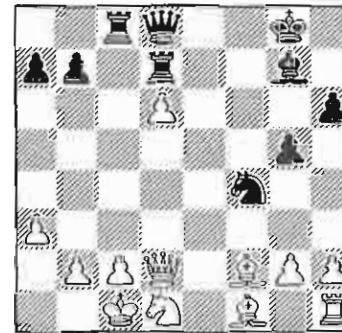


Diagram 533  
After 18... Rd7

B2b4 15. Kb1 Ne5

B2b5 15. Bc4 Nxc2

After this overview of Black's possibilities, you can understand why few White players wish to take on the complications of 5. f4.

Black enjoys himself in Lines A and B. Now it's clearer why White's most popular move

is 5. Qd2.

### G 5. Qd2

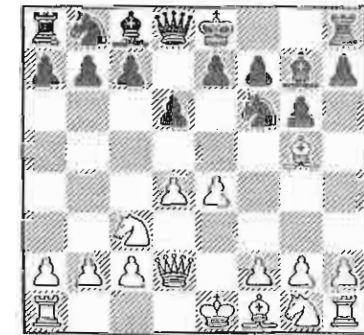


Diagram 534  
After 5. Qd2

We have to note the multi-purpose character of this move. Together with the standard idea of Bh6, White has the possibility of castling either long or short. At the same time, the queen has escaped the potential pin ... Bc8-g4 in case of Nf3. In addition to all these pluses, White retains the possibility of f2-f4, regardless of which side of the board he castles on. Moreover, 5. Qd2 prevents Operation Enter the Dragon — ... c7-c5, dxc5, and ... Qa5.

### Drawbacks of 5. Qd2

With so many good qualities in its favor, it isn't surprising that the continuation 5. Qd2 also has downsides. For instance, it reduces the number of retreat squares for White's bishop along the c1-h6 diagonal. Additionally, it loses control of h5. White made the attack with ... h7-h6



and ... g7-g5 possible, driving the bishop to g3 or e3, where Black can force its exchange with ... Nh5 or ... Ng4. Although his own king's position is weakened, Black gets counterplay.

### The correct move order

To help you understand the subtleties of choosing the right move order, we'll also explain Black's important goals.

Let's take a look at the line 5. Qd2 Nbd7 6. 0-0-0 h6 7. Bh4 g5 8. Bg3 Nh5 9. Nge2 c5.



Diagram 535  
After 9... c5

Black doomed his opponent's dark-square bishop and then cleared the diagonal for his own bishop. His pawn on d6, his knight on d7, and his bishop on g7 protect him from e4-e5.

It's clear that White will try to turn the game to another channel before reaching such a position. And he can do it successfully. That's why Black should start with 5... h6 instead of ... Nbd7. If Black plays 5... Nbd7 6. 0-0-0

h6, White answers 7. Bf4 g5 8. Be3. Although White cannot save his bishop after ... Ng4, White can play 9. h4.



Diagram 536  
After 9. h4

White immediately sets about undermining Black's king-side pawn structure. (This attempt is ineffective after 7. Bh4 g5 8. Bg3 Nh5 9. h4 Nxe3 10. fxe3 in view of White's own busted pawns.) After 9... Nxe3 10. Qxe3 g4, White plays 11. f4!. (Pushing 11. h5 as in J. Polgar—Smirin, 1993, is less logical, as after 11... c5, the bishop on g7 is freed.) The move 11. f4!, in connection with e4-e5, intends to keep the lid on White's bishop. Black takes *en passant*, 11... gxf3.



Diagram 537  
After 11... gxf3 e.p.

Here White plays 12. gxf3!. Exactly so—not 12. Nxf3 c5 13. Rh3 Qa5, with good play for Black (Sutovsky—Agregst, 1997). Black lost only because of later mistakes. Opening the g-file makes Black's bishop on g7, and indeed, Black's whole position, vulnerable. In addition to his king's shattered position, Black can't oppose the threat f3-f4 and e4-e5.

All of the foregoing discussion explains why Black prefers first to play ... h7-h6 to determine the position of White's light-square bishop.

### 5... h6 6. Bf4

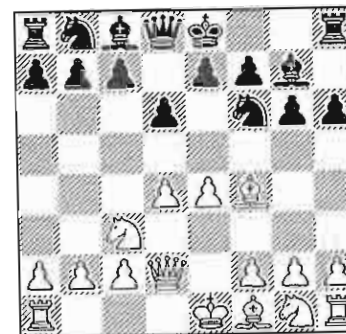


Diagram 538  
After 6. Bf4

This retreat gives White more chances than 6. Bh4. After 6. Bf4, it is best for Black to play 6... g5, because 6... Nbd7 7. 0-0-0 g5 8. Be3 leads to the uncomfortable variation (Diagram 537, followed by 12. gxf3!) we've just discussed. After 6. Bh4, ... g6-g5 isn't urgent; Black

plays 6... Nbd7 with a good game, e.g.—7. f4 c5 8. e5 (If 8. d5, then ... Qb6, Onischuk—Ponomarev, 1998, or 8... Qa5, Shabalov—Smirin, 1977) 8... cxd4 9. Qxd4 g5.

The continuation 6. Be3 stands alone; White keeps the bishop at a cost of some time. The correct method for Black is 6... Ng4 7. Bf4 e5 8. dxe5 Nxe5.



Diagram 539  
After 8... Nxe5

Play could continue 9. 0-0-0 Nbc6 10. Nd5 Be6 11. h3 Rb8! 12. Be3 b5 13. f4 Nc4 14. Bxc4 bxc4, with advantage for Black (Lugovoi—Sakaev, 1995).

### 6... g5 7. Bg3

**BLACK PREFERS FIRST  
TO PLAY 5... h6  
TO DETERMINE THE  
POSITION OF WHITE'S  
DARK-SQUARE BISHOP.**

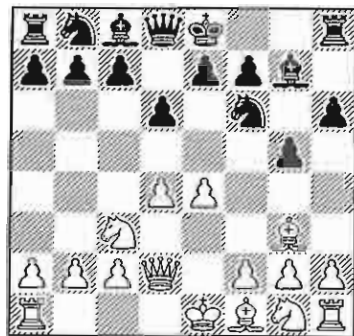


Diagram 540  
After 7. Bg3

As long as Black hasn't committed his queen's knight and has the possibility of ... Nc6, White gains nothing by retreating his bishop to e3. He certainly can't develop play similar to the games Sutovksy—Agrest and J. Polgar—Smirin.

For example, after 7. Be3 Ng4 8. Nge2 Nc6 9. Ng3 Nxe3 10. fxe3 h5!≠ 11. Be2 g4 12. 0-0-0?? Nxd4!, Black's winning. (Romanishin—Kuzmin, 1979).

7. ... Nb5

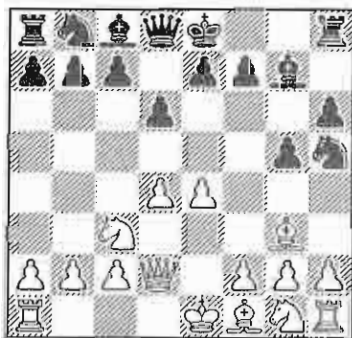


Diagram 541  
After 7. ... Nb5

It is an important moment for both sides. White's development is already oriented toward castling long and pushing h2-h4. Before the move h2-h4, however, White can play Ng1-e2 to avoid getting his kingside pawns crippled by ... Nxc3. Or White can first castle long.

In addition, let's look at White's prospects if he tries to take the opportunity, before playing Nge2, to activate his light-square bishop with 8. Bc4. In response, Black chases this newly developed White bishop with 8. ... Nc6 9. Nge2 Na5! **TN** 10. Bb3 (10. Bd3 c5) 10. ... Nxb3 11. axb3 f5!?, opening the game for his bishops. So much for 8. Bc4.



Diagram 542  
After 11. ... f5!?

Of the two main-line moves, 8. Nge2 and 8. 0-0-0, the first seems more flexible, although 8. 0-0-0 is more frequently played.

#### White hopes for h2-h4

Here we need to pause to discuss some important general ideas. White wants to play h2-h4

as soon as possible. The advance poses Black not only the problem of defending the pawn on g5 (which can be reinforced by ... e7-e6), but also of the possible escape of the White bishop to h2.

Further, this bishop can re-enter the game by Bh2-g1 and f2-f3. Then Black will be left only with his kingside weaknesses, without any compensation. Moreover, the exchange of the bishop, after ... Nh5xg3 and Ne2xg3, can also be dangerous for Black—the knight on g3 eyes h5.

#### Black must pressure d4

To counter White's plan, Black must pressure d4. There are two possibilities: ... Nc6 and ... Nbd7 with ... c7-c5. Both plans can tie down the knight on e2 to the defense of d4, preventing or weakening the effect of Ne2xg3 in answer to ... Nh5xg3. Each of these plans has its own advantages and shortcomings. But ... Nc6 is the best choice. It instantly prevents White from recapturing with a knight in response to ... Nh5xg3 because White's d-pawn then falls.

#### The effect of changes in White's center

If White plays d4-d5 to dislocate Black's knight from c6, he gives the Black bishop on g7 tremendous scope. Besides, the knight won't perish in another

spot. For example, after 8. Nge2 Nc6 9. d5?! Na5! 10. f4 (Or 10. Nd4 c5 11. Nf5 Bxf5 12. exf5 a6=) 10. ... c6 11. Nc1 cxd5 12. exd5 Nxf4 13. Bxf4 gxf4 14. b4? (If 14. Qxf4, Black has 14. ... Qb6, with the better game.)



Diagram 543  
After 14. b4?

14. ... Bd7! 15. bxa5 Rc8 16. Ne2 Qxa5+ (Freedstein).

But if White keeps his center (e4 and d4) intact, it will restrain Black's development. Black has to prepare rather clumsily to castle long by playing ... e6, ... Qe7, and ... Bd7. Meanwhile, White can play f2-f3 to force Black's hand.

For example, after 8. Nge2 Nc6 9. f3 Nxc3 10. hxg3, we have the following position.

**BLACK MUST  
PRESSURE D4.  
THE MOVE ... Nc6 IS  
HIS BEST CHOICE.**



Diagram 544  
After 10. hxg3

White has two main plans to choose from. He can play g3-g4 and, after castling long, regroup with Qd2-e3 to defend d4, and continue with Ne2-g3-h5. Or he can use the pawn on g3 to support f3-f4 and e4-e5. This second idea is the more strategically dangerous one for Black. He must build his defense around the bishop on g7, even if it remains blocked by White's d-pawn for a long time.

### The defensive plan with 8. ... Nd7

Another defensive plan, combining 8. ... Nd7 and ... c7-c5 to remove White's pawn on d4, faces its own dangers. True, the plan increases the scope of his bishop on g7 and weakens the effect of a possible e4-e5, but it opens the game, making White's lead in development menacing. The position of the knight on d7, blocking the bishop still at home on c8, only emphasizes White's lead in development. However, ... Nd7 and ... c5 is the most ambitious plan for Black. And

herein lies the answer to why 8. Nge2 offers White more possibilities than 8. 0-0-0. If, after 8. Nge2, Black insists on bringing his queen's knight to d7 (instead of c6) he faces an immediate pawn push.

8. ... Nd7 9. h4



Diagram 545  
After 9. h4

9. ... e6

Black needs one more move (... c7-c5) to tie his opponent to the defense of d4 (9. ... Nxc3 10. Nxc3 c5 is too slow in view of 11. Nf5). With his next move, White sacrifices a pawn to save his important dark-square bishop. 10. Bh2! gxh4



Diagram 546  
After 10. ... gxh4

And now White can seize the

advantage with the powerful 11. Bg1! **TN**, immediately creating the threat g2-g4, for example: 11. ... Nb6 12. g4 Nf6 13. f3 with the idea Bf2. Instead, White lost in the game Kijk—Agest, 1997, after playing too much by rote: 11. 0-0-0 Nb6 12. Kb1 Bd7 13. Nc1 Nf6 14. Be2 Bc6 15. Qe3 Qe7 16. f3 0-0-0 17. Nb3 Nh5 18. Na5 Qg5 19. Qxg5 hxg5+. Because of the game's result, the idea of an early h2-h4 didn't receive proper theoretical respect.

So, although 8. ... Nd7, preparing ... c7-c5, is Black's most ambitious plan—White can prevent it by playing 8. Nge2 (rather than 8. 0-0-0).

Of course, if Black doesn't like the above possibilities, he still has our recommended move—8. ... Nc6.

### ♠ 8. Nge2 Nc6 9. 0-0-0

We have already discussed the advance 9. d5, while 9. f3 Nxc3 10. hxg3 e6 (or 10. ... Bd7) transposes into main lines.

**ALTHOUGH 8. ... Nd7,  
PREPARING ... c7-c5,  
IS BLACK'S MOST  
AMBITIOUS PLAN—  
WHITE CAN PREVENT  
IT BY PLAYING  
8. NGE2.**

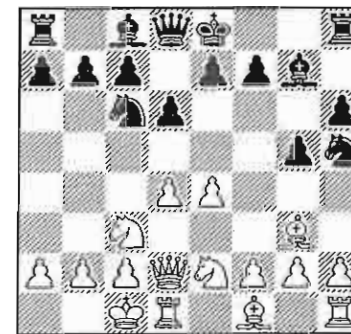


Diagram 547  
After 9. 0-0-0

### 9. ... Bd7 **TN**

Now if White plays 10. Qe3, we arrive, after a transposition of moves, at a position from Leko—Topalov, 1999. After 10. ... e6 11. h4 Qe7 12. Bh2, they reached the following position.



Diagram 548  
After 12. Bh2

White has rescued his bishop, as in the game Kijk—Agest. After f2-f3, White imagines retreating the bishop even farther to g1, where it forms a battery with the queen—directed at the side of the board where Black may likely castle. Then the threat of d4-d5, opening the line of fire, would be very unpleasant.

But instead of 10. ... e6, Black could play 10. ... e5.



Diagram 549  
After 10. ... e5

After 11. dxe5 both captures, 11. ... dxe5 and 11. ... Nxe5, are possible, with mutual chances.

But there is a more popular move than 10. Qe3.

10. f3

White forces the issue.

10. ... Nxc3 11. hxg3 e6



Diagram 550  
After 11. ... e6

Now White has to decide whether to push the g- or the f-pawn.

**C1a** 12. g4 Qe7 13. Qc3

13. ... 0-0-0

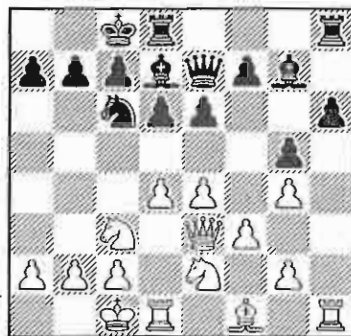


Diagram 551  
After 13. ... 0-0-0

Black's position is very stable. White gets no advantage from action in the center: 14. d5 exd5 15. Nd5 Qe5 16. c3 Kb8=. And if White's knight heads for h5 with 14. Ng3, Black reacts with the maneuver 14. ... Rhg8 15. Nh5 Bh8.

**C1b** 12. f4

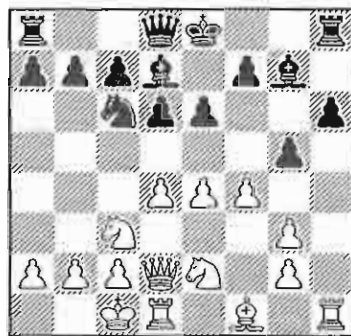


Diagram 552  
After 12. f4

This move demands Black's attention—for example, after 12. ... Qe7 13. d5, the knight is denied e5 as a flight square.

12. ... Qf6!

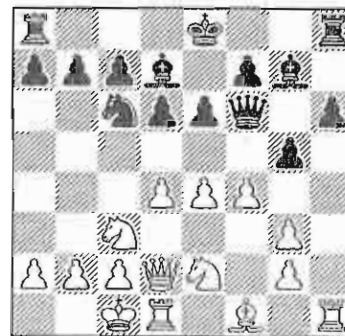


Diagram 553  
After 12. ... Qf6!

A very sharp move. Contrary to the norm in the Pirc defense, Black provokes his opponent to play e4-e5, instead of encouraging d4-d5. For now if 13. d5 exd5, White doesn't have the follow up 14. Nxd5 because of 14. ... Qxb2 checkmate.

13. e5 dxe5 14. fx e5 Qe7 15. Ne4 0-0-0

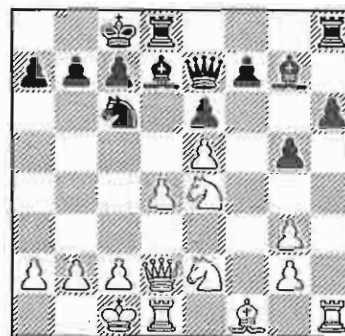


Diagram 554  
After 15. ... 0-0-0

Black has caught up in development and applies some pressure on the d-file, compensating

for White's better pawn structure, which, by the way, isn't as imperious as it may seem. Black has the positional opportunity ... f7-f6, as well as the tactical blows ... Nxe5 or ... Nxd4.

To sum up, 8. Nge2 (C1) requires Black to play creatively and accurately. But if Black does so—and he will, assuming he has a good understanding of the positions and ideas explained here—he'll get equal, fighting chances.

Now let's go back to move seven to look at another possibility for White after 7. ... Nh5.

**C2** 8. 0-0-0

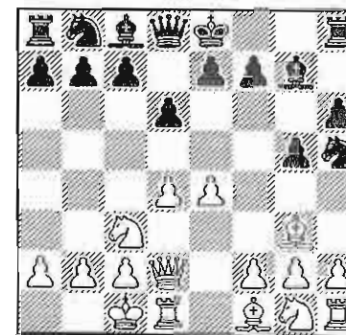


Diagram 555  
After 8. 0-0-0

**C2a** 8 ... Nc6!

Now 9. Nge2 transposes into the previous lines. Black also needs to be prepared for 9. d5 and 9. Bb5. The continuation 9. Qe3 Bd7 10. Nge2 brings us back to the game Leko—Topalov, where as we've noted, Black can improve with 10. ... e5!.

**G2a1 9. d5**

Black must bravely move into enemy territory.

9. ... Nd4!

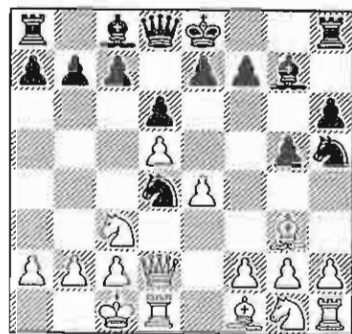


Diagram 556  
After 9. ... Nd4!

In order to attack the interloping knight with c2-c3, White has to get his knight out of the way. This isn't so easy. It didn't succeed even for Anand in his game with Alex.

10. Nb1 c6

Besides pressuring the center, this last move protects b5, providing a flight square for the Black knight, and opens c7 for its further retreat.

11. Na3 Bd7 12. Qe3 Nb5 13. Nc4 Nxd5 14. hxd5 Nc7!

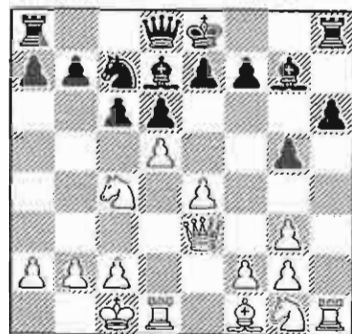


Diagram 557  
After 14. ... Nc7!

15. f4 gxf4 16. gxf4 cxd5 17. exd5 Kf8! ♠ (Anand—Chernin, 1995).

**G2a2 9. Bb5**

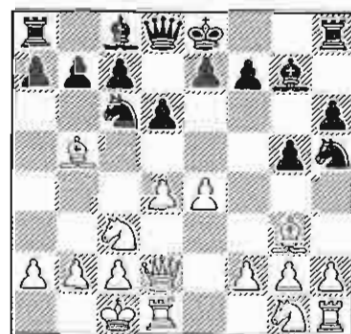


Diagram 558  
After 9. Bb5

This move isn't dangerous.

9. ... Bd7 10. Nge2 e6 11. f3 Nxd5 12. hxd5 Nc7 13. Bxc6 Bxc6 14. g4 Qe7 15. Ng3 Rg8

**AFTER 8. ... Nc6, BOTH 9. Bb5 & 9. d5 LEAD TO GOOD POSITIONS FOR BLACK. AS AN OPTION, BLACK CAN PLAY 8. ... Nd7 AS WELL.**

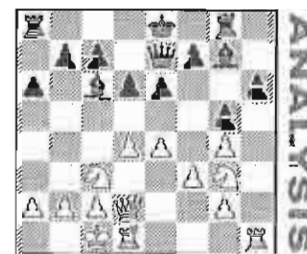


Diagram 559  
After 15. ... Rg8

We've seen this preventative maneuver before. The game leveled after 16. Rhe1 0-0-0= (Tiviakov—Markovski, 1995).

So 9. Bb5 and 9. d5 don't change our opinion that after 8. 0-0-0, the positions resulting from 9. ... Nc6 are quite acceptable for Black. But as a strategic option, let's take a look at developing the knight where it can't be immediately harassed.

**G2b 8. ... Nd7**

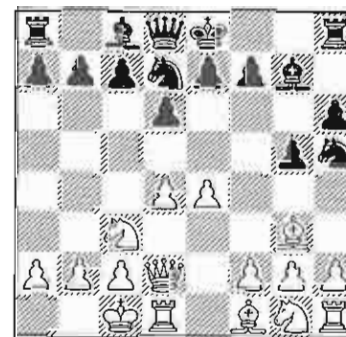


Diagram 560  
After 8. ... Nd7

Now White has four moves: 1) 9. f3, 2) 9. Kb1 3) 9. Nge2, and 4) e5. The first three of these

fail to prevent 9. ... c5, which is once again the main idea for Black after ... Nd7. White's only try to force his own agenda is the fourth possibility, 9. e5. But let's take a look at all four.

**G2b1 9. f3 Nxd5 10. hxd5 c5 11. dxc5 Nxc5 12. Bb5+**

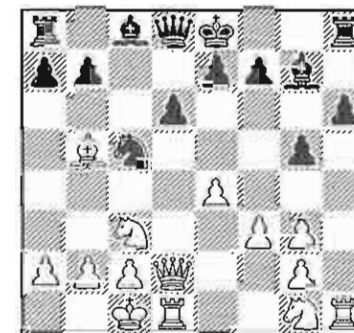


Diagram 561  
After 12. Bb5+

Played to develop quickly. But here Black surprises White.

12. ... Kf8!

White expected 12. ... Bd7 13. Bxd7+ Qxd7 14. Nge2, where White hopes to anchor the knight on f5. After the shocker 12. ... Kf8!, Black stands better. He plays ... a7-a6 with tempo, attacking the misplaced bishop, and will then play ... b7-b5. He'll soon mobilize his entire queenside against the White king, and even have the help of his bishop on g7 (Leko—Chernin, 1997).

ANALYSIS



**G3b2 9. Kb1**

9. ... c5 10. dxc5 Nxc3 11. hxg3 Nxc5 12. f4 Be6 13. Nf3 Qa5 14. Bb5+ Kf8!



Diagram 562  
After 14. ... Kf8!

Black makes the same starring move as in the line above.

15. Nd4 Nxe4 16. Nxe6+ fxe6 17. Nxe4 Qxb5± (Hendriks—Tseitlin, 1997)

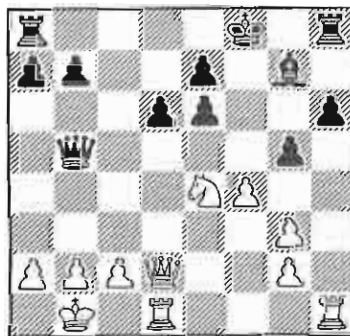


Diagram 563  
After 17. ... Qxb5

Even by pushing his pawn to f4 in one move, White didn't make his game easier.

**G2b3 9. Nge2**

This option is more circumspect. White wants to answer ...c7-c5 and ... cxd4 with Nxd4. Here at least the knight comes out of his corner for the main event.

9. ... c5 10. f3

White could try a waiting move, 10. Kb1. Then the position of White's king allows Black to sacrifice a pawn for the attack: 10. ... b5! **TN**



Diagram 564  
After 10. ... b5!

The more restrained 10. ... a6 (Beliavsky—Chernin, 1997) is also good.

10. ... Nxc3 11. hxg3 a6 12. f4 Qa5

White plays f3-f4, hoping, at last, to force Black to exchange on d4. Nevertheless, Black showed self-restraint, not capturing the pawn for a long time in the game Tiviakov—D. Gurevich, 1999.

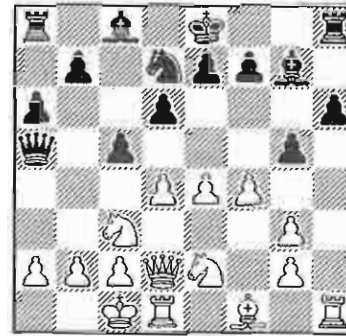
**G2b4 9. e5**

Diagram 565  
After 12. ... Qa5

Black's queen indirectly protects his pawn on g5 because he can play ... cxd4, clearing the rank at the necessary moment. 13. Kb1 g4!? 14. Nd5 Qd8!? 15. Ne3 Nf6 16. Nc3 cxd4 17. Qxd4 Nh5

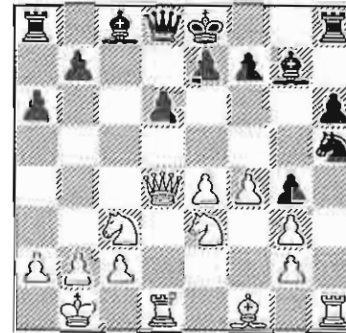


Diagram 566  
After 17. ... Nh5

18. e5 Nxc3 19. Rg1 Be6 20. Ne4 dxe5 21. Qxd8+ Rxd8 22. Rxd8+ Kxd8 23. Nxc3 exf4 24. Nh5 Bd4 25. Nxf4 Bxe3±. Black's actions, especially his 13th and 14th moves, were risky, but this game shows how you can play for a win in the Pirc Defense.

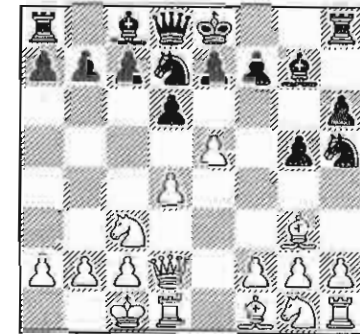


Diagram 567  
After 9. e5

Now accepting the sacrifice gives Black a tough game because, after 9. ... dxe5 10. dxe5 Nxc3 11. hxg3 Bxe5 12. Nf3, White has more than enough compensation for a pawn. But when Black plays 10. ... e6, he gets a difficult position, as in Almasi—Beliavsky, 1997: 11. Be2 Nxc3 12. hxg3 Qe7 13. f4 Nb6.



Diagram 568  
After 13. ... Nb6

Here instead of 14. Nf3 Bd7 15. Nb5 Bxb5 16. Bxb5+ c6 17. Be2 Rd8 18. Qa5 0-0 19. Bd3 Rd5 = 20. Qa7?! Qc5!, White has the strong move 14. a4!, planning to meet 14. ... a5 with 15. Nb5.

Believsky pointed out a better move for Black.

### 9. ... Nb6! **TN**

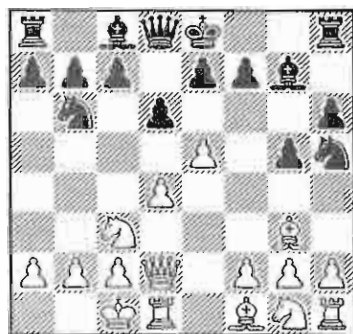


Diagram 569  
After 9. ... Nb6!

This move leads to unclear and unbalanced play in which Black's chances are no worse. (In fact, this sentence can apply to a number of lines in this chapter!)

### The Modern move order against 4. Bg5

In the Pirc, the 4. Bg5 system requires that Black play very accurately. In the Modern, however, after the move order 1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6, Black doesn't yet have his knight on f6. So neither the lunge 4. Bg5 nor the push e4-e5 attacks a piece. Therefore these moves lead to less critical situations for Black, who has tried two methods of play here. He's tried a flank action with 4. ... a6, intending 5. ... b5. And he's tried various attacks on d4, such as playing 4. ... Nc6, 4. ... c5, and 4. ... Nd7

(with the idea ... c7-c5).

The first approach often works out well in practice, but it has a drawback. Without the help of a knight on f6, ... b7-b5-b4 doesn't threaten the pawn e4. And this circumstance gives White more time to arrange his pieces effectively. A recent example of this idea is the game Magem—Tkachiev, 1999.

### 1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6 4. Bg5

Black can react with a queenside expansion.

### A 4. ... a6 5. Nf3 b5 6. Bd3 Bb7 7. a4 b4 8. Ne2 Nd7 9. 0-0 Ngf6 10. Ng3 0-0 11. Re1



Diagram 570  
After 11. Re1

White's chances are preferable.

Sometimes 4. ... a6 connects well with the plan ... Nd7 and ... c7-c5. But in this sequence, it would be more logical to begin with 4. ... Nd7; Black can't man-

age to play ... c7-c5 without this move, while ... a7-a6 may or may not be necessary.

Contrary to the slowly developing flank play, Black's actions against d4 can start immediately with 4. ... Nc6 or 4. ... c5. But although swift, these plans have their shortcomings. After 4. ... Nc6 5. Nge2, Black, in view of the pin on the h4-d8 diagonal, can't play ... e7-e5, which usually justifies the position of knight on c6. In the absence of both ... e7-e5 and ... c7-c5, Black finds it difficult to manage without ... Ng8-f6. So, in the best case, he should count on one of the Pirc positions examined earlier.

If Black immediately tries Operation Enter the Dragon (after 1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6 4. Bg5) with 4. ... c5, then 5. dxc5 Qa5 6. Qd2 Qxc5, although achieving the desired structure for Black, leaves him with a worse position. The immediate invasion of the center by White's knight—7. Nd5—takes advantage of the absence of its counterpart on f6. The d5 outpost brings White not only positional pluses, but also various tactical possibilities. As an illustration, here is the classic example, Keres—Westerinen, 1973.



Diagram 571  
After 7. Nd5

7. ... Be6 8. c4 Nd7 9. Rc1 Ngf6 10. f3 a5 11. Be3 Qc8 12. Ne2 Qb8 13. Nd4 Nc5 14. Nb5 Nxd5 15. cxd5 Bd7



Diagram 572  
After 15. ... Bd7

16. Rxc5! dxc5 17. d6 exd6 18. Nxd6+ Kf8 19. Nxf7 ±, 1-0 on the 30th move. Of course, Black can try 6. ... Bxc3 7. bxc3, but this looks very suspicious.

So logically we come to the conclusion that Black needs to prepare for ... c7-c5 with 4. ... Nd7. In the Pirc, this usually runs up against tough counteraction:



f2-f4 and e4-e5.

In the Modern, however, e4-e5 is not such a crisis. In fact, White's pawn on e5 may invite a "fork"... f7-f6, as in the game Leko—Gofstein, 1993:

**B** 4. ... Nd7 5. Qd2 a6!?

When White develops his queen early, indicating an inclination to castle long, Black is motivated to play ... a7-a6.

6. f4 b5 7. e5 f6!

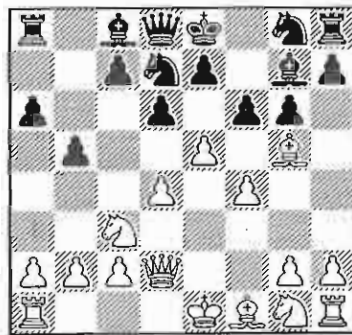


Diagram 573  
After 7. ... f6

Black challenges White's pawn on e5. White's bishop is in an awkward position, forcing the exchange 8. exf6, and after 8. ... Ngxf6 9. Bd3 c5, Black stands better.



Diagram 574  
After 9. ... c5

As we saw, after 5. Qd2, Black can respond 5. ... a6, with a good game. Even more popular is 5. ... c5!. Closing the center achieves no advantage for White: 6. d5 Ngf6 7. f4 a6 8. a4 Qb6! 9. Ra2 h6 10. Bh4 Qb4= (Krnice-Jansa, 1976).

**IN THE MODERN, BLACK DOESN'T YET HAVE HIS KNIGHT ON F6, SO NEITHER THE LUNGE 4. Bg5 NOR THE PUSH E4-E5 ATTACKS A PIECE. THEREFORE, THESE MOVES LEAD TO LESS CRITICAL SITUATIONS FOR BLACK THAN THEY DO IN THE PIRC.**



Diagram 575  
After 10. ... Qb4

White does no better by trying to maintain the tension with 6. Nf3 a6 7. Be2 b5 8. 0-0 Bb7 9. Rad1 cxd4 10. Nxd4 Ngf6, Odeev—Akhundov, 1996.

And, of course, after 5. f4, Black also plays 5. ... c5, and he's comfortable because his knight stands on g8, not on f6. Closing of the center here with 6. d5 is no better for White than in Krnic—Jansa.

A shining example of ener-

getic play for Black is available in Shirov—K. Hansen, 1991: 6. ... Qa5! 7. Qf3 h6 8. Bh4 Bxc3+! 9. bxc3 Ngf6 10. Kd2 b5 11. Nh3 g5!



Diagram 576  
After 11. ... g5!

12. fxc5 Ne5 13. Qe3 Nfg4 14. Qg3 b4 =.

Finally, after the move order:

**1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6 4. Bg5 Nbd7 5. f4 c5 6. Nf3**

Black equalizes with

**6. ... cxd4 7. Nxd4 Ngf6.**

#### Summary:

The 4. Bg5 system leads to very dynamic positions that favor the player armed with the best ideas and understanding. As a Pirc player, you should not fear Bg5, but you should respect it and be prepared.

The 4. Bg5 variation may be that rare occasion where the Modern Defense is much easier to play than the Pirc. If you know in advance that your opponent likes to play 4. Bg5, you may want to consider playing the Modern move order.

## White Plays 4. Bg5

## Memory Markers!



Diagram 577  
Black to move

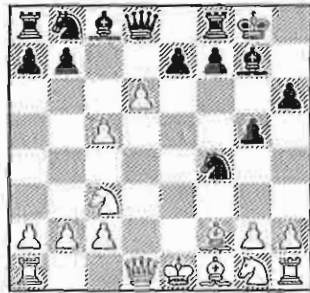


Diagram 578  
White to move

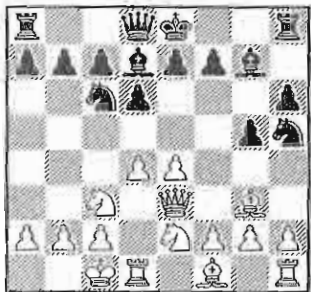


Diagram 579  
Black to move



Diagram 580  
Black to move

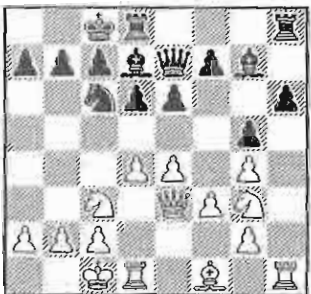


Diagram 581  
Black to move



Diagram 582  
Black to move

## White Plays 4. Bg5 Solutions to Memory Markers!

- No. 1* 1. ... g5!, undermining the e-pawn. (See page 267.)
- No. 2* 1. Bd4! **TN**, with advantage for White, e.g.—1. ... Bxd4  
2. Qxd4 Nc6 3. Qd2 exd6 4. cxd6 Bg4, and now  
5. Nge2 and 0-0-0 is dangerous for Black. (See page 274.)
- No. 3* 1. ... e5!, with a good game. (See page 284.)
- No. 4* 1. ... Nxf3. Black must capture the bishop to get full compensation  
for his weakened kingside.
- No. 5* 1. ... Rhg8, to meet 2. Nh5 with 2. ... Bh8.  
(See page 284.)
- No. 6* 1. ... Bxc3+ 2. bxc3 Nxf3 3. Kd2 b5 4. Nh3 g5! ♯  
(See page 293.)

## Pirc Player Profiles

Photo: courtesy US Chess Federation



### Grandmaster Zoltan Ribli

*Born in 1951, Ribli won the GM title in 1973, the same year that he won his first Hungarian Championship. In 1982 Ribli won the Las Palmas Interzonal, becoming a world-championship candidate. He lost to Smyslov in their semi-final match. You'll find three of Ribli's instructive Pirc games in this book.*

### Grandmaster Jan Timman

*The best Dutch player since World Champion Max Euwe, Timman won the GM title in 1974 and captured the Dutch title many times. A world-championship candidate, Timman played a match for the FIDE title when Nigel Short and Garry Kasparov bolted from the FIDE fold in 1993. Timman lost the match to Anatoly Karpov.*



Photo: Jarril Anson, courtesy US Chess Federation

## Section Two, Introduction: White Concentrates on His Center

**T**his section groups three chapters—Classical continuations where White plays in and through the center, either with 4. Nf3 or 4. g3.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Nf3

**Chapter 17** provides you with a comprehensive introduction to the Classical system, including both of White's main followups, 5. Be2 and 5. h3. In introducing the ideas, it makes the most sense to consider these lines together to avoid confusion and repetition. The chapter goes on to examine thoroughly the theory of 5. Be2.

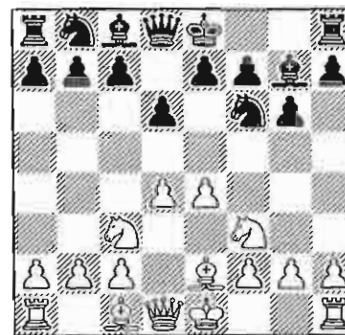


Diagram 583

Chapter 17: after 4. Nf3 and 5. Be2

**Chapter 18** then covers the theory of 5. h3, which intends Be3. Chapters 17 and 18 could logically be one, very long and

complicated chapter, but for the sake of 21st-Century schedules, we've split them.

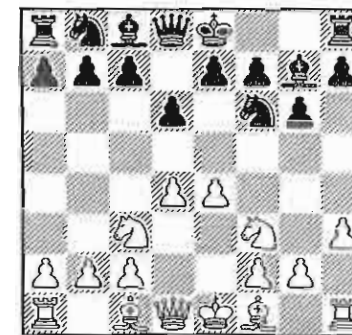


Diagram 584

Chapter 18: after 4. Nf3 and 5. h3

**Chapter 19** presents the theory of another, very different central strategy, in which White plays 4. g3.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. g3



Diagram 585

Chapter 19: after 4. g3



## Chapter 17: The Classical System, I Some Important Points to Look For

In the Classical System, White has two fifth-move choices, 5. Be2 and 5. h3. This chapter introduces the entire system and then focuses on the first branch, 5. Be2.



- ◆ After 4. Nf3, we've reached the starting position of the Classical System.

See Diagram 586.



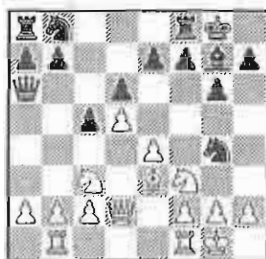
- ◆ Here Black has two good options, one simple and one complicated.

See Diagram 599.



- ◆ Here we prefer 8. ... Nb8! over the more common 8. ... Bxf3.

See Diagram 622.



- ◆ Black's queen often goes to a6 in this system, giving it an unusual but active position.

See Diagram 628.

## Chapter 17 The Classical System, I

### Introduction & 5. Be2

The word "classical" as we use it here doesn't in any sense imply superiority but simply an accordance with the classical chess principles of development. White brings his king's knight to the square revered by the great 19th-century masters, from where it bears on the center. Now e4-e5 is bolstered, while Black's ... e7-e5 is more difficult to make. An early e4-e5 is not part of White's plans, although it may be done opportunistically.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Nf3



Diagram 586  
After 4. Nf3

After this standard Pirc move order, we've reached the starting position of the Classical System.

### Introduction

A general introduction of the Classical System after 4. Nf3 must take into account both 5. Be2 and 5. h3. Then this chapter will continue with the theory of 5. Be2, and Chapter 18 will pick up with 5. h3.

### White's e4-e5

The idea of playing e4-e5 as a "target of opportunity" becomes clearer when we examine the following example: 4. ... Nbd7? 5. e5 dxe5 6. dxe5 Ng4? 7. e6 fxe6? 8. Ng5+-



Diagram 587  
After 8. Ng5

ANALYSIS

Clearly, Black must avoid the catastrophic 4. ... Nbd7. Then, in response to e4-e5, he has the comfortable retreat ... Nf6-d7, which threatens ... c7-c5 and thus causes White some trouble maintaining the d4/e5 pawn duo. Additionally, the possibility of ... d6xe5 hangs in the air.

Let's evaluate the ... d6xe5 continuation. Capturing on e5 with the knight (Nf3xe5) creates an e5-outpost for White, but the entire group of White pieces in the center (knight on c3, pawn on d4, knight on e5) may become vulnerable in the early stage of the game, considering the latent power of the bishop on g7 and the possible ... c7-c5 counterblow.

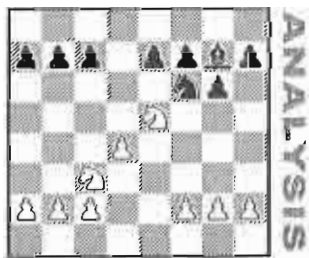


Diagram 588  
Structure after Nxe5

If White instead captures on e5 with his d-pawn (d4xe5), the resulting e-pawn can't be supported by f2-f4 and must be protected by pieces only. That obligation is not easy to live up to.

It is true that, regarding the preparation of e4-e5, White is

less equipped in the Classical System than in the systems in Section I—4. f4, 4. Bg5 and 4. Bc4. On the other hand, with 4. Nf3, White succeeds in preventing his opponent's actions in the center. Black has to be especially cautious with ... c7-c5 when White's knight is on f3, because of the response d4-d5, when the following structure occurs.

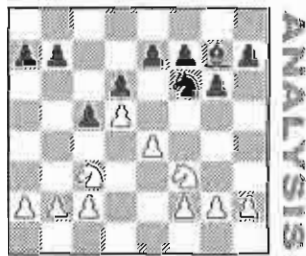


Diagram 589  
Structure after ... c7-c5 d4-d5

Usually, such a structure favors White. His knight on f3 can support e4-e5, or the knight can be relocated to an even more powerful position with Nf3-d2-c4.

### Black's ... e7-e5

Black's other counterblow, ... e7-e5, is likewise restrained by White's 4. Nf3. Nonetheless, Black has no strategic alternative to ... e7-e5. It can be prepared by developing the queenside knight to either d7 (but carefully!) or to c6, when White is not eager to play e4-e5. He usually allows his opponent to put his own pawn on e5. After that, White needs to be

prepared for both the Ruy Lopez and Philidor Pircs.

### 4. ... Bg7

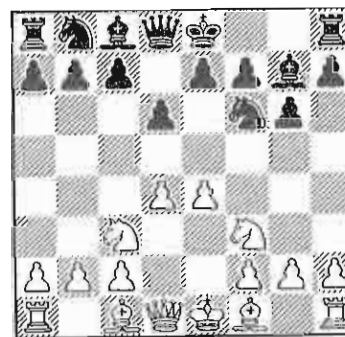


Diagram 590  
After 4. ... Bg7

### White's fifth-move choices

White has several choices. Naturally, 5. Be2 belongs to the Classical System. Additionally, White has 5. Be3 and 5. h3, which are connected. In fact, h3 usually precedes Be3. Transpositions of these moves happen often, with just one exception. After 5. Be3, White may continue with 6. Qd2, omitting h2-h3. The combination of 5. Be3 and 6. Qd2 leads to the so-called Hybrid system that combines the ideas of different lines of the Pirc Defense. This system will be presented separately, in Chapter 22.

The moves 5. Be2 and 5. h3 (with the idea 6. Be3) have a common theme—White's preparation for a coming ... e7-e5. We'll examine these two moves together in this introduction,

after distinguishing an initial difference between them.

Jumping ahead a bit, let's note that in the strictly Classical line 5. Be2, with 6. 0-0, Black's main plan is ... e7-e5—after first playing ... Nc6 and ... Bg4. White's 5. h3 eliminates the prospect of both ... Bg4 and ... Ng4. Therefore, by playing 5. h3, White guarantees himself Be3. In turn, White's bishop, from e3, makes Black's ... c7-c5 difficult to accomplish, because Black now has to be ready not only for d4-d5 but for d4xc5 as well. Black is denied the option of ... Qd8-a5-c5, Operation Enter the Dragon. If Black chooses ... e7-e5, White can play d4xe5, d6xe5, and then develop his bishop to an active post on c4—instead of e2. Besides, if Black plays ... e7-e5 prematurely, he could suffer tactically.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Nf3 Bg7 5. h3 0-0 6. Be3 c6 7. a4 Nbd7 8. a5! e5?! 9. dxe5 dxe5 10. Qd6! Ne8 11. Qb4±



Diagram 591  
After 11. Qb4

It is remarkable that 5. h3, which seemed to be a waste of time, prevents Black from counterpunching with ... c7-c5:

5. ... c5 6. dxc5 Qa5 7. Bb5+! Bd7 8. Bxd7+ Nbx7 9. cxd6! Nxe4 10. 0-0



Diagram 592  
After 10. 0-0

White has an initiative after 10. ... Nxd6 11. Re1, or 10. ... Nxc3 11. bxc3 Bxc3 12. Rb1.

So 5. h3 has many pluses compared to 5. Be2, but what are the minuses? Perhaps Black can find a plan where h2-h3 would be little more than just a lost tempo? Again forecasting an important idea, let's make a few more moves in the 5. Be2 line:

5. Be2 0-0 6. 0-0 b6?! 7. Re1 Bb7

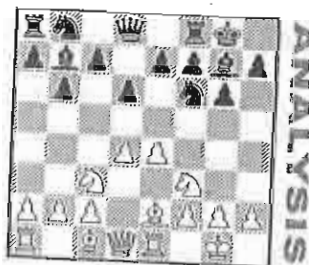


Diagram 593  
After 7. ... Bb7

8. e5! Nd5 (somewhat better is 8. ... dxe5±) 9. Nxd5 Bxd5 10. c4 Bb7 11. e6! f5 12. d5 ±.

It is clear that the idea of accomplishing a double fianchetto fails after 5. Be2. But let's look at Black's attempt after 5. h3:

5. h3 0-0 6. Be3 a6 7. a4 b6 8. Bc4

Or 8. e5 Nfd7, and Black has good play.

8. ... e6 9. 0-0 Bb7

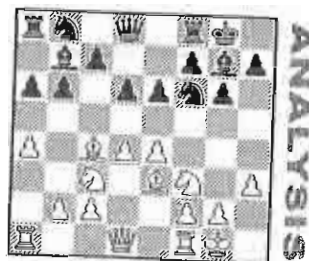


Diagram 594  
After 9. ... Bb7

Black has a pretty good position, and the possibility of e4-e5 doesn't bother him at all.

So we can generalize that developing White's bishop to e3 early overloads the e-file and therefore lessens the effectiveness of e4-e5. Black could take advantage by securing a good version of the double fianchetto. (This formation is rarely met in the Pirc Defense.)

But can't White avoid this downside of 5. h3? Why can't he play 5. h3, simply to eliminate the pin ... Bg4, without 6. Be3 as

a followup?

5. h3 0-0 6. Be2



Diagram 595  
After 6. Be2

It's time for tactics. The ... c7-c5 thrust, which didn't work on the previous move while Black's king was in the center, performs perfectly now.

6. ... c5!

White has a choice of two evils:

If White plays 7. dxc5, then Black has 7. ... Qa5! 8. 0-0 Qxc5, and is playing a good version of the Dragon.

If White pushes 7. d5, Black pushes the Bravo Pawn, 7. ... b5 8. Bxb5 Nxe4! 9. Nxe4 Qa5+ 10. Nc3 Bxc3+ 11. bxc3 Qxb5±.



Diagram 596  
After 11. ... Qxb5

Black can solve the problems presented in the Classical System by staying flexible and not choosing a specific plan of development in advance of seeing White's deployment.

Now let's begin a systematic analysis, starting with a purely classical line.

### Classical System with 5. Be2

5. Be2 0-0 6. 0-0



Diagram 597  
After 6. 0-0

We are not going to examine here the possibility of 6. ... c5 7. d5!, which leads to a complicated, yet slightly favorable position for White that actually belongs to the Benoni.

In the diagramed position, Black should decide where he wants his queen's knight, on c6 or d7. In fact, both plans are of equal value. However, when Black develops his knight to c6 and plays ... e7-e5, his game is strategically clearer, so we will

focus on that plan, although not on moving ... Nc6 immediately.

In Part II, we discussed at length positions in which Black's pawn d6/e5 structure faces White's e4/d4 duo. We found that Black can't immediately force White to play either d4xe5 or d4-d5. The emerging positions are a complex matter to study. However, by placing his knight on c6 Black initiates a crisis on d4. (It's harder for him to achieve this effect with his knight on d7.)

Even after Black decides to post his knight on c6, he must figure out whether he should play ... Nc6 immediately or after a preliminary 6. ... Bg4. There is one circumstance that speaks in favor of 6. ... Bg4. In case Black plays 6. ... Nc6, there can follow 7. d5 Nb8, when White may play the preventative 8. h3!, keeping Black's bishop away from g4. Black must seek some other way to find a home for his bishop, which often becomes an outcast in the Pirc Defense.

Nevertheless, 6. ... Nc6 and especially 6. ... c6 are good con-

tinuations. If Black is content to enter into complex but basically equal positions, he can look into these lines to expand his repertoire. For our main line, however, we choose the bishop move.

6. ... Bg4

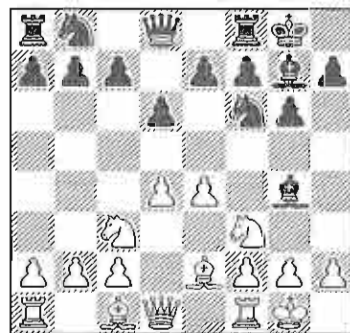


Diagram 598  
After 6. ... Bg4

Now White should decide whether or not to continue with 7. h3, taking advantage of Black's willingness to trade his light-square bishop for a knight. The main goal of this move is to strengthen his center, because after 7. h3 Bxf3 8. Bxf3, the e-pawn gains extra protection. As a result, White's knight can vacate c3 to make room for a bolstering pawn. White's center is then reinforced.

Unfortunately for White, however, the knight on c3 has no good squares to move to. It might go to a second-rate square such as e2 or b5 (from which it would be forced to retreat to a3 after ... a7-a6). This circumstance makes

**ALTHOUGH 6. ... Nc6  
AND ESPECIALLY  
6. ... c6 ARE GOOD,  
WE PREFER 6. ... Bg4.**

7. h3 and 7. Be3 equally good. There is yet another move, 7. a4, which is rarely met. We'll take a closer look at all three.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Nf3 Bg7 5. Be2 0-0 6. 0-0 Bg4

White now generally plays one of the three moves we've discussed: 7. h3, 7. Be3, or 7. a4.

**A 7. h3 Bxf3 8. Bxf3**

Here Black has two good options.



Diagram 599  
After 8. Bxf3

**A1 8. ... e5**

The simplest way.

9. dxe5 dxe5 10. Bg5 c6

But not 10. ... h6? 11. Qxd8 Rxd8 12. Bxf6 Bxf6 13. Nd5±.

11. Qxd8

Or. 11. Qe2=

11. ... Rxd8 12. Rfd1 Na6

With a drawish position.



Diagram 600  
After 12. ... Na6

**A2 8. ... Nc6**

This move leads to more complicated play. White can try developing his dark-square bishop.

**A2a 9. Bg5 h6 10. Be3 e5 11. dxe5 dxe5**

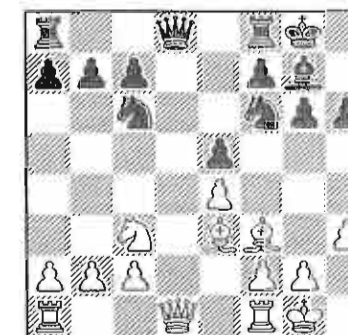


Diagram 601  
After 11. ... dxe5

The game could continue 12. Nb5 a6! 13. Qxd8 Rfxd8 14. Nxc7 Rac8 15. Nd5 Nxd5 16. exd5 Nd4 17. Bxd4 exd4 18. Rac1 h5.



Diagram 602  
After 18. ... h5

Black's idea is to play ... Bh6 at a proper moment. The game is level.

Returning to Diagram 601, following 12. Ne2 (to protect d4), Black can play 12. ... Qe7, when the game is approximately equal.



Diagram 603  
After 12. ... Qe7

White's pair of bishops is not enough to achieve an edge, in view of the lack of coordination between White's minor pieces. Besides, Black has the prospect of trading one of the bishops by playing ... h6-h5, ... Kh7 and ... Bh6, or accomplishing the same goal by using the c5-square.

There is another good idea in Diagram 603. Black may transfer

his f6-knight to d6 by first playing ... Nf6-e8. Or he can transfer his c6-knight to d6 by playing ... b7-b6, ... Nc6-a5-b7-d6.

White doesn't achieve any advantage by playing, after 8. ... Nc6, 9. Be3 (instead of Bg5). Play may continue: 9. ... e5 10. dxe5 dxe5



Diagram 604  
After 10. ... dxe5

11. Ne2 (or 11. Nb5 a6!) 11. ... Qe7, with equality. The positions are basically the same as after 9. Bg5, analyzed earlier.

Returning our consideration to the position after 8. ... Nc6 (page 305), we should note that White has already spent some time playing h2-h3. So it is logical for him to take advantage of the situation immediately by playing (instead of the less effective 9. Bg5 or 9. Be3) 9. Ne2 or 9. Nb5, with the idea of 10. c3 in both cases.

These lines are of equal value, but 9. Ne2 is played more often. Let's consider them in some detail now.

### A2b 9. Ne2 e5 10. c3



Diagram 605  
After 10. c3

White plans to acquiesce to Black's central pressure by playing d4-d5, but then continue with c3-c4 and Ne2-c3, transposing the game into a King's Indian structure. White hopes that it will then be easier to maintain his e4-outpost using the bishop on f3. Additionally, White plans to diminish Black's typical attack of ... g6-g5, ... h7-h5, and ... g5-g4 (after a preliminary ... f7-f5-f4) by controlling the d1-h5 diagonal with his queen and bishop. Since Black lacks a light-square bishop, White's defense is easier.

But an immediate 10. d5 tips White's hand too early. As long as White maintains his pawn on d4, Black hesitates to start typical King's Indian maneuvers such as the f6-knight's retreat and the followup ... f7-f5. Hence White maneuvers, trying to tempt his opponent into a formation that would be unfavorable after d4-d5.

For example, after 10. ... Re8, the threat of 11. ... exd4 and ... Nxe4 is real. But the Black rook has left the f-file, where it should be in a King's Indian-like position. So White has his wish, and plays 11. d5 Ne7 12. c4.



Diagram 606  
After 12. c4

Sooner or later, Black should return his rook to f8, even at the cost of time. From Diagram 605, in Ivanchuk—Timman, 1989, Black tried 10. ... Nd7 11. b3 Nb6 (with the idea 12. Be3 d5=) 12. d5 Ne7 13. c4 f5 14. Nc3 Nd7. Even after Black lost two tempi to provoke d4-d5, White has only a minimal edge.



Diagram 607  
After 14. ... Nd7

So, it is more logical to seek



a better solution for Black. Without d4-d5, White finds it difficult to begin a pawn attack on the queenside, because the formation (Bf3, Ne2) is not suitable for playing against the Ruy Lopez Pirc. With all this in mind, Black has a logical alternative that becomes our main line after 10. ... c3.

10. ... K

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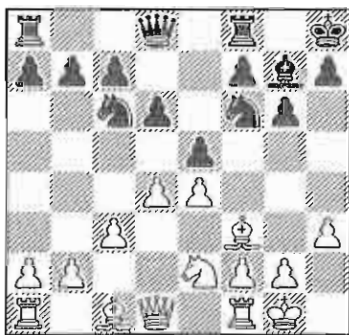


Diagram 608  
After 10. ... K

######

Transferring the Black king from g8 to h8 is quite in the spirit of the King's Indian Defense. As a matter of fact, Black now has ... Ng8, which not only makes way for the ... f7-f5 move, but for ... Bh6 as well. Alternatively, it may be possible to use the g8-square for a major piece.

11. b4

The only move met in practice.

11. ... Qe8

The immediate 11. ... Ng8!?,

discussed above, deserves attention.

12. d5

If 12. Be3, then 12. ... Ng8! (TN) is better than 12. ... Nd7?!, as in Brynell—Agest, 1989.

12. ... Ne7 13. c4

White must play this move in a hurry, in view of 13. Rb1 Nexd5 14. exd5 e4 15. Bg4 h5. But now Black has a different, and good, plan.

13. ... a5 14. bxa5 Rxa5

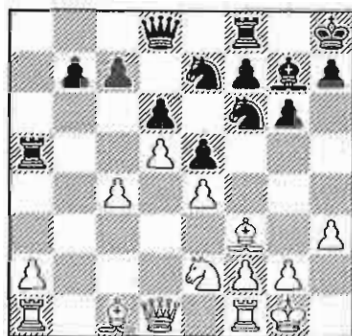


Diagram 609  
After 14. ... Rxa5

It will now be extremely hard for White to play c4-c5.

15. Qb3

We can't recommend 15. ... Qa8?! (Hracek—Chernin, 1993) because the queen's withdrawal from the kingside is not logical. Much better is our main line suggestion.

15. ... b6!

Cementing Black's queen-

side, giving him approximate equality.

A2c 9. Nb5 e5 10. c3



Diagram 610  
After 10. c3

The continuation beginning with 9. Nb5 has its subtleties. After an eventual ... a7-a6, the knight is headed to a3. From there the knight doesn't block the e-file, so in reply to ... Re8, White can simply continue with Re1, keeping his pawn on d4. In general, d4-d5 is not as attractive to White here as it is in the 9. Ne2 line, because White's knight on a3 looks pretty ugly in King's Indian structures. (Recall that in the 9. Ne2 line, the knight heads to its normal c3-square, where it supports the e-pawn in case Black plays ... f7-f5.)

So, by playing 9. Nb5, White expresses his willingness to fight in the Ruy Lopez Pirc structure, maintaining his pawn on d4. He is much less interested in playing d4-d5. Thus Black should find a way to maintain pressure on

White's center in order to force d4-d5 (or d4xe5).

10. ... Qd7! 11. Re1

White still can't choose a different move order. In the case of 11. Be3 a6 12. Na3 Rfe8, he will be practically forced to play d4-d5.

11. ... Rad8



Diagram 611  
After 11. ... Rad8

The move ... a7-a6 can be postponed, yet it remains on the agenda. Black plans ... d6-d5—for example, 12. Be3 a6 13. Na3 d5=. Of course, White may agree to 12. d5 Ne7 13. c4 a6 14. Nc3, but his position is no better than those emerging in the A2b line.

Keep in mind that on his eighth move, Black has a much simpler course beginning with 8. ... e5 (A1). We give 8. ... Nc6 for players who prefer complicated play, or for an occasion that demands it.

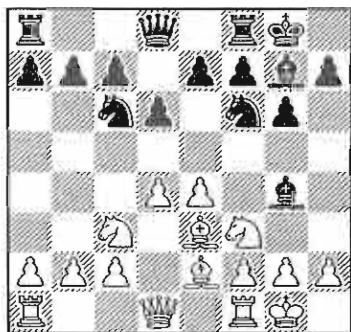
**7. Be3 Nc6**

Diagram 612  
After 7... Nc6

Here White has two main continuations, 8. Qd2 and 8. d5.

Other moves don't cause serious problems for Black. For instance, 8. Nd2 Bxe2 9. Qxe2 e5 10. d5 Nd4 11. Qd3 c6 or 8. Qd3 e5 9. d5 Ne7 10. Nd2 Bc8! (TN), with the idea of ... Nd7 and ... f7-f5.

**8. Qd2**

8... e5

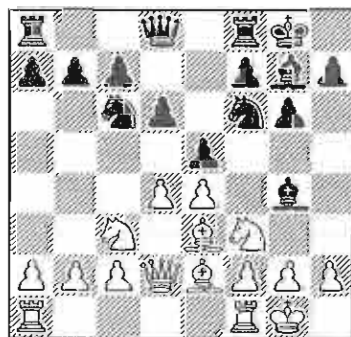


Diagram 613  
After 8... e5

Black plays ... e7-e5 under

favorable conditions. The pressure on the d4-outpost forces White to decide immediately which move to choose—9. dxe5 or 9. d4-d5. It is easy to assume that 9. dxe5 leads to equality.

**9. dxe5 dxe5 10. Rad1 Qc8 11. Qc1 Rd8 12. Rxd8+**

Indeed, many tournament games end in a draw in this variation. The most reliable way for Black is capturing with the knight.

12... Nxd8

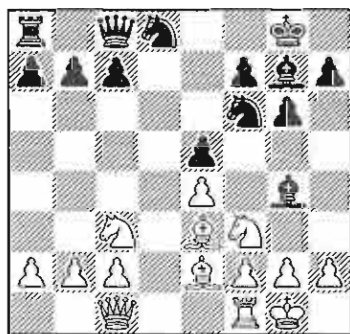


Diagram 614  
After 12... Nxd8

13. Rd1

Or 13. Nxe5 Bxe2 14. Nxe2 Nxe4 =.

13... Ne6 14. h3 Bxf3 15. Bxf3 c6 16. Ne2 Qc7 17. c3 a5 18. Qc2 Bf8

Black intends to follow up with ... Bc5 = (Kaidanov—Wolff, 1990).

**9. d5**

This move intends more beligerence than 9. dxe5. Yet how good can 9. d5 be? Transposition into a King's Indian structure is not beneficial to White, considering both that his knight blocks his c-pawn, and that Black's light-square bishop suddenly emerges in this structure as a valuable piece. Moreover, it's necessary to take into account that Black can take action in the center by playing ... c7-c6.

9... Ne7 10. Rad1

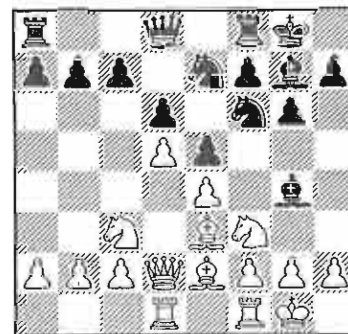


Diagram 615  
After 10. Rad1

White prevents ... c7-c6. He plans to play Ne1 in order to push his f-pawn to f4.

10... Bd7!

Black now wants to avoid the exchange of light-square bishops. He can use this bishop to support actions in the center and queenside (... b7-b5 and ... c7-c6), as well as on the kingside.

Playing in King's Indian

style with 10... Bc8! also deserves attention, leaving d7 as a retreat for the knight on f6—for example, 11. Ne1 Nd7!. Black is ready both to play ... f7-f5 and to meet f2-f4.

11. Ne1

After 11. Bg5 Kh8! 12. Ne1 Nfg8 13. Be3 f5 14. f4 exf4 15. Bxf4 h6, Black has good play. An example where White avoids f2-f4 can be found in Ziatdinov—Chernin, Philadelphia, 1998.

11... b5!

Usually this wing thrust aims to undermine the defense of the e-pawn. Tying White down to the defense of this pawn, Black can play ... c7-c6 in order to destroy the d5-outpost. This would mean that White must exchange on c6. Then the final freeing of Black's position with ... d6-d5 joins the agenda.

Up to now, White hasn't found effective tools against Black's plan. But if instead of 11... b5 Black plays the "natural" 11... Ng4, then White may succeed—for example: 11... Ng4 12. Bxg4 Bxg4 13. f3 Bd7 14. f4 Bg4 15. Rb1 c6 16. fxe5 dxe5

**BLACK NOW WANTS  
TO AVOID THE  
EXCHANGE OF HIS  
LIGHT-SQUARE BISHOP!**



Diagram 616  
After 16... dxe5

17. Bc5! b6 18. Ba3 c5 19. b4!, with the initiative for White. (Nielsen—Chernin, 1992).

12. a3 a5

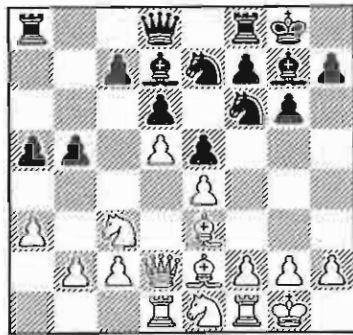


Diagram 617  
After 12... a5

13. Nd3

White may play a2-a3, Nd3 and f2-f3 on moves 12-14 in various orders.

If White attempts to avoid Nd3 to keep his d-file battery unobstructed, the play develops in a different way—for example, 13. b4 axb4 14. axb4 Ra3 (also good is 14... Qb8) 15. Bg5.



Diagram 618  
After 15... Bg5

White acts against ... c7-c6. If 15. f3, then 15... Qb8 16. Nd3 c6 17. dxc6 Bxc6 18. Nc1 Rd8 19. Nb3 d5 = (Thorststeins—Kasparov, 1988, a blitz game).



Diagram 619  
After 19... d5

After 15... Bg5 (from Diagram 618), Black plays 15... Rxc3! 16. Bxf6 (16. Qxc3 Nxe4) 16... Ra3 17. Bxg7 Kxg7 18. f4 f6 19. Nf3 Qb8= (Brunner—Fioramonti, 1992).

Back to the main line, after 13. Nd3.

13... Qb8 14. f3

If 14. b4 axb4 15. axb4 Ra3 16. f3 c6, the game transposes into Thorststeins—Kasparov above.

14... c6

If Black plays 14... Rd8, White has a strong pawn sacrifice: 15. b4 axb4 16. Nxb4! Rxa3 17. Ra1 (Kuczynski—Chernin, 1992). But Black doesn't need more preparation in order to perform a central break.

15. dxc6 Bxc6 16. b4!

The only active choice.

16... d5!

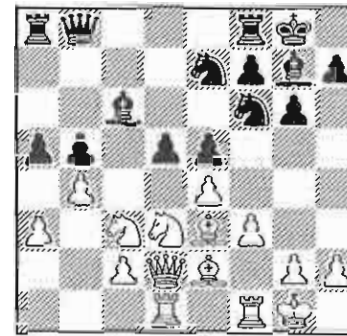


Diagram 620  
After 16... d5!

17. Bc5 Re8 18. bxa5

White must play sharply. If he tries to play it safe, he may give the edge to Black: 18. Nf2 axb4 19. axb4 d4 (Kuczynski—Chernin, 1993).

18... dxe4 19. Nb4 exf3 20. gxf3

Or 20. Bxe7 Qa7+, and Black is winning, or 20. Nxc6 Nxc6 21. Bxb5 Ne4!

20... Bd7 21. a6

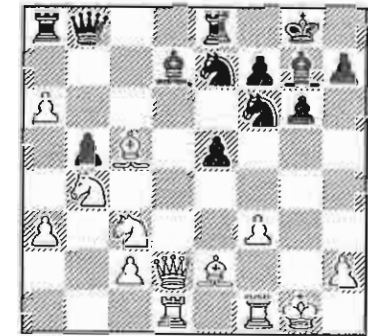


Diagram 621  
After 21... a6

We've followed the game Kaminski—Finkel, 1992.

There are some doubts about whether White will be able to advance his a-pawn farther, considering his numerous weaknesses in the center and on the king-side. Finkel recommends 21... Nf5, with good play for Black. The move 21... Qc8, which was actually played in the game, looks worthy as well. So we can state that in the "genuine" classical line of the Pirc Defense after 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Nf3 Bg7 5. Be2 0-0 6. 0-0 Bg4 7. Be3 Nc6 8. Qd2 e5, White is forced to make an unpleasant practical decision—9. dxe5 is very drawish, while 9. d5 leads to unclear consequences.

IN THE "GENUINE"  
CLASSICAL, WHITE IS  
FORCED TO MAKE AN  
UNPLEASANT DECISION.

**8. d5**

For whatever reason, White chooses this move more and more often. True, Black's fianchetto will have more space, but White's d-pawn applies pressure on Black's position. Besides, with 8. d5 White gains some time.



Diagram 622  
After 8. d5

**8. ... Nb8**

We like this move better than the more common continuation 8. ... Bxf3 9. Bxf3 Ne5, which in Blatny—Chernin, 1993, continued 10. Be2 c6 11. f4 Ned7 12. dxc6 bxc6 13. Rb1 (more common is 13. Qd3) 13. ... Qc7 14. Qd3 Nb6 15. Kh1 Rfd8 16. Bg1 Rab8 17. Rbe1 Nfd7

**WE LIKE 8. ... NB8  
BETTER THAN THE  
MORE COMMON  
8. ... Bxf3.**



Diagram 623  
After 17. ... Nfd7

18. Qh3 Nf8 19. Nd1 Qc8  
20. Qa3 Qb7 21. Qf3 Nbd7 22.  
b3 Ne6 23. Bc4 Nc7 24. Ne3 e6  
25. Be2 Nb5 26. Qh3 Nf6 27. f5,  
and White has an attack.



Diagram 624  
After 27. f5

Alex's play wasn't perfect, but it is clear that in this kind of position White can effectively use the h3-square for his queen or rook.

In our main line, by playing 8. ... Nb8, Black waits until his opponent plays h2-h3 and only then exchanges his bishop. It may seem that the 8. ... Nb8 line is slower than 8. ... Bxf3 9. Bxf3 Ne5 10. Be2, but it is not. The e5-square is not that good for Black's knight. Let's look at one

of the classical examples of Black's play in this variation, Wolff—Ehlvest, 1991: 8. d5 Bxf3 9. Bxf3 Ne5 10. Be2 c6 11. a4



Diagram 625  
After 11. a4

11. ... a5! 12. Re1 Qc7 13. Bd4  
Ned7! 14. Bf1 Rac8 15. Qd2 Ne8



Diagram 626  
After 15. ... Ne8

Black methodically clears up the long diagonal in order to exchange the dark-square bishops: 16. Rad1 Bxd4 17. Qxd4 Nef6 18. Rd2 Rfd8 19. f4 Qb6 20. Qxb6 Nxb6.

Black's endgame is a bit better, but a draw was agreed to on move 45.

From this game (and especially from Black's 13th move) we learn that Black's b8-knight

may feel pretty comfortable on the back row, from where it can be easily transferred not only to d7 but also to a6, with the possibility of ... Na6-b4.

The game Wolff—Ehlvest demonstrates well the strategies for both sides. In fact the strategies in the 8. ... Bxf3 and 8. ... Nb8 lines are often similar.

It would be good for White if he could advance his a-pawn to a5 and maintain it there. Then with both his d- and a-pawns on the fifth rank, White will increase the pressure on the opponent's position. That's why Wolff played 11. a4. It's better for Black to block with 11. ... a5! (as in Wolff—Ehlvest) than with ... Qa5, because the queen is vulnerable—for instance, 11. ... Qa5 12. Ra3 Rfc8 13. Rb3 Rab8 14. Qd4 c5 15. Qd2 a6 16. f3 Ned7 17. Ra3 Ne8 18. Rfa1 Nef6 19. Kh1 Ne8 20. Qd1 Nef6 21. Bd2 ±. (Gavrikov—Mednis, 1987).



Diagram 627  
After 21. Bd2

In general, after a2-a4 and

... a7-a5, White will find it difficult to make progress in the center or kingside without trading off the dark-square bishops, but there are some pluses for Black after the bishops are gone.

To sum up, from the two good moves, 8. ... Bxf3 and 8. ... Nb8, we prefer the latter as more flexible.

White's best attempt to probe for a weak point after 8. ... Nb8 is to retreat his f3-knight. This maneuver, followed by the exchange of light-square bishops, leads to a new kind of position, which we believe favors Black.

There are four possible retreats: 9. Ne1, 9. Nd4, 9. Nd2 and 9. Ng5.

White's 9. Ne1—answering the Black knight's retreat with one of his own—is passive. And 9. Nd4 allows Black effectively to play ... c7-c5.

9. Nd4 Bxe2 10. Qxe2 c5 11. Nf3 Qb6! 12. Rab1 Qa6! 13. Qd2 Ng4 (Chatalbashev—Popchev, 1991).

**SO 8. ... NB8 OFFERS  
MORE PLUSES  
THAN 8. ... BXF3—  
AND NO NEGATIVES.**



Diagram 628  
After 13. ... Ng4

Remember the ... Qd8-b6!-a6! maneuver. Black often transfers his queen to an active position on queenside in this system.

The tries 9. Nd2 and 9. Ng5 are a bit more serious.

1) With 9. Nd2 Bxe2 10. Qxe2, White's idea focuses on playing a2-a4.



Diagram 629  
After 10. Qxe2

If Black plays ... a7-a5 in reply to a2-a4, White's knight then heads for c4, from where it controls b6. For example, 10. ... c6 11. a4 a5 12. Nc4, which leaves Black with a difficult game.

Black must instead adapt to the changing circumstances and continue 10. ... Re8, with the

idea, after 11. ... e6, of forcing White to capture d5xe6, transposing play to the Philidor Pirc after ... Rxe6. In this line of play, an exchange of light-square bishops looks helpful to Black.

2) 9. Ng5 is a move that provokes Black to play ... h7-h6 sooner or later. It's hard to say whether or not White is able to benefit from ... h7-h6. Alex decided not to make this move and instead to use a maneuver which is familiar to us — placing his queen on a6 in order to develop good counterchances on the queenside (Ziatdinov—Chernin, New York, 1998).

9. Ng5 Bxe2 10. Qxe2 c6 11. Rad1 Qa5 12. f4 Qa6 13. Qf3 Nbd7 14. Qh3 (the threat is 15. Nxe7)



Diagram 630  
After 14. Qh3

14. ... h6

Black sees it's the right time to be "provoked"!

15. Nf3 h5! 16. Bd4 c5 17. Bxf6 Nxf6 18. Qh4 b5



Diagram 631  
After 18. ... b5

19. Ne2 (if 19. e5, then ... b4!) 19. ... Qa4 20. Ng3 Qxc2 21. e5 dxe5 22. fxe5 Ng4 ♣.

In this example, Black's counterplay, based on the inspired and dynamic deployment of his queen, has proved to be more effective than White's actions in the center and kingside. Certainly, the character of play in the 9. Ng5 line is a sword that cuts both ways, but Black should not feel in any way inferior.

Recapping, we see that 9. Nd2 and 9. Ng5 don't really test the correctness of 8. ... Nb8. So we can conclude that so far 8. ... Nb8 offers more pluses than 8. ... Bxf3 and no negatives. The f3-knight's jumps aren't at all threatening. Therefore, we should explore White's other choices on move nine.

We need to examine four White moves as our main lines after 8. d5 Nb8: 9. a4 9. Qd2, 9. Re1 and 9. h3.



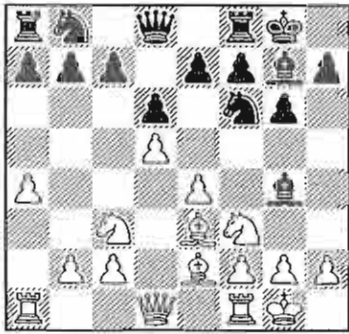
**B2a** 9. a4

Diagram 632  
After 9. a4

Black has two choices here:

**B2a1** 9. ... a5! 10. Nd2

White's knight heads for c4. There is no other way to take advantage of a2-a4/ ... a7-a5.

## 10. ... Bxe2 11. Qxe2 Re8

Not 11. ... c6 12. Nc4

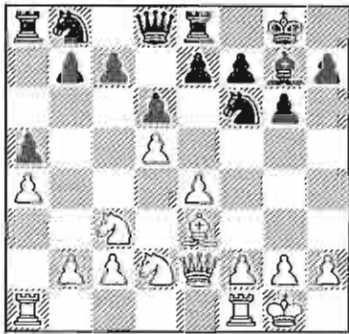


Diagram 633  
After 11. ... Re8

Black has a good game. His idea is to play ... e7-e6 (as we recommended in the 9. Nd2 line) with the moves a2-a4 and ... a7-a5 inserted.

**B2a2** 9. ... Bxf3 10. Bxf3 a5

This is also good for Black. Compared with 8. ... Bxf3 9. Bxf3 Ne5 (which isn't bad in itself), circumstances have been changed in Black's favor. It may now become easier for Black to get counterplay on the queenside (for instance, by a ... Nb8-a6-b4 maneuver).

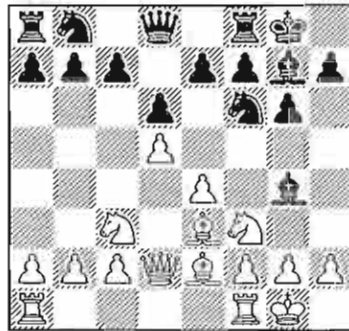
**B2b** 9. Qd2

Diagram 634  
After 9. Qd2

Here the "threat" of Be3-h6 is a fiction because the exchange of bishops is in Black's favor. But what other plan can White try?

## 9. ... c6 10. Rad1 Qa5 11. a3 Rc8

Black has a good game.

## 12. b4 Qc7 13. Bd4 Nbd7 14. Rfe1 a5

In Blatny—Chernin, 1993, White prudently decided to equalize.

## 15. e5

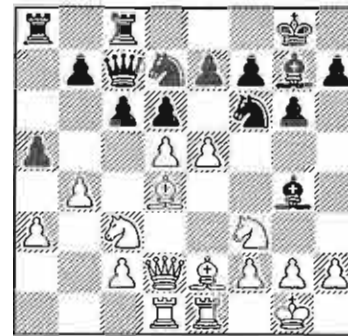


Diagram 635  
After 15. e5

## 15. ... Bxf3

Black had other good options as well. After some skirmishes, White managed to draw.

**B2c** 9. Re1

This continuation has a similar character to a previous one.

## 9. ... c6 10. Qd2 Qc7 11. Rad1 Nbd7



Diagram 636  
After 11. ... Nbd7

## 12. Bh6?

This instructive mistake happened in Rytshagov—Chernin, 1996. (See Part II.)

## 12. ... Bxh6 13. Qxh6 Bxf3 14. Bxf3 a6?!

This leads "only" to equality, while 14. ... cxd5 15. exd5 Ne5 16. Be2 Qb6! is in Black's favor.

**B2d** 9. h3

It's logical to assume that this move is no special threat. After all, we've seen that in the case of 9. a4, Black is doing quite well even after an "unforced" 9. ... Bxf3. Here White squanders a valuable tempo to require Black to make a good move!

## 9. ... Bxf3 10. Bxf3 c6 11. a4 a5

This position is by now an old friend.

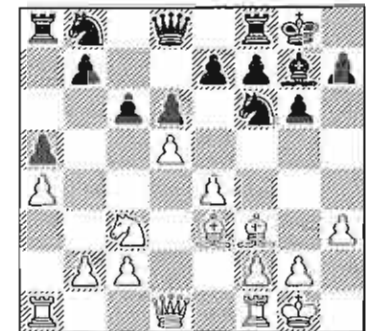


Diagram 637  
After 11. ... a5

Generally, it is nowadays believed that in the Classical System, 8. d5 is not any more promising than 8. Qd2. Black can be confident of his chances and not overly concerned about the dangers. His setup is solid, and it is hard to believe that he can be

forced into an inferior position.

There remains a rare seventh move for White that nevertheless deserves our consideration.

### ♞ 7. a4

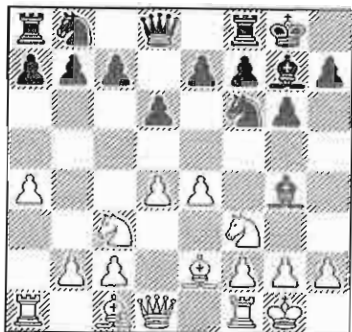


Diagram 638  
After 7. a4

It is obvious that White is going to push his a-pawn farther. Black should not, however, respond with 7. ... a7-a5. Rather, he should allow his opponent to accomplish what he has in mind—and then Black should attack in the center!

### 7. ... Nc6

Now there are two possibilities for White: 8. a5 and 8. d5.

### ♞ 8. a5 e5!

The best. After the dubious 8. ... a6?!, White achieved an edge: 9. d5 Na7 10. h3 Bd7 11. Re1 (Benjamin—Chernin, 1997).

### 9. d5 Ne7 10. a6 b6

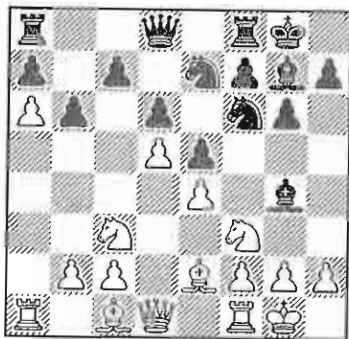


Diagram 639  
After 10. ... b6

In this King's Indian-type structure, the position of White's pawn on a6 doesn't jibe with the strategic demands of the situation. He must try to *open* files on the queenside, not block them! If White plays 11. Ne1, it is better for Black to retreat and preserve his light-square bishop with 11. ... Bc8! **TN**, to meet f2-f4 confidently: 12. f4 exf4 13. Bxf4 Nd7! with the idea of 14. ... Ne5.

Likewise, after the melancholy 11. Bg5 h6 12. Bxf6 Bxf6 13. Ne1, Black should play 13. ... Bd7 14. Bg4 Be8! 15. Nd3 Bg7 16. Nb4 f5 17. Bh3 Bd7 18. f3 h5.

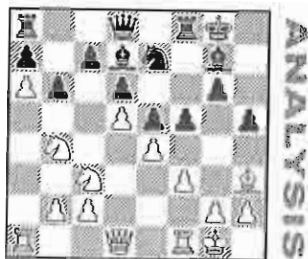


Diagram 640  
After 18. ... h5

Black's idea is to continue with ... Bh6. A player familiar with the ideas of the King's Indian defense would easily recognize that White has lost the opening battle (Benjamin-Gufeld, 1998).

### ♞ 8. d5

Here White's achievements are likewise moderate. Black can react with simple play.

### 8. ... Bxf3 9. Bxf3 Ne5 10. Be2 a5

Black will follow up with ... c7-c6, getting a good game. Even the more ambitious try, 8. ... Nb4 9. a5 Bd7! 10. a6 (10. e5 dxe5 11. Nxe5 Bf5) 10. ... bxa6 11. Bxa6 c6 12. Bc4 Qc7 13. Bb3 Qb7 is fine for Black.

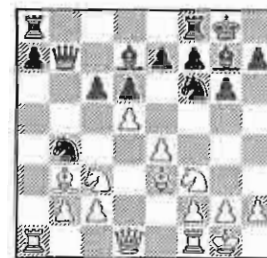


Diagram 641  
After 13. ... Qb7

Here, as in similar variations, Black is able to highlight the minuses of White's a-pawn push.

### Modern move order against 4. Nf3 & 5. Be2

If White plays 4. Nf3, Black can, of course, turn to the Pirc, e.g., after 1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6 4. Nf3, play 4. ... Nf6.

However, Black also has good chances staying in the Modern, with either 4. ... a6 or 4. ... Nbd7.

### Summary

*In the Classical System in general, e4-e5 is not a part of White's plan, but can be played opportunistically. As usual, Black should keep an eye on this possibility and keep d7 open as a retreat square for his knight on f6.*

*After 5. Be2, Black's best bet is to pressure White's d-pawn with ... Bg4, ... Nc6 and then, if given a chance, ... e7-e5. So far, White can't claim more than equality.*

*Black should be alert to structural changes—for example, after White's d4-d5, Black is well advised to preserve his light-square bishop.*

## The Classical System, I Memory Markers!

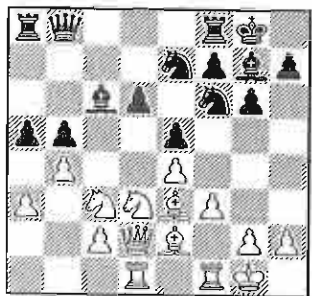


Diagram 642  
Black to move

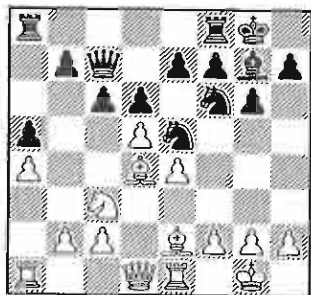


Diagram 643  
Black to move

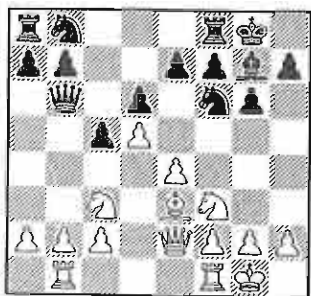


Diagram 644  
Black to move

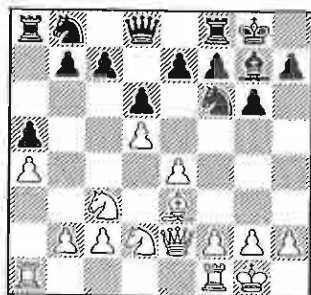


Diagram 645  
Black to move

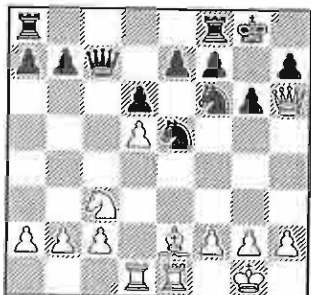


Diagram 646  
Black to move

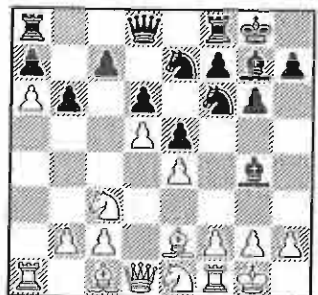


Diagram 647  
Black to move

## The Classical System, I Solutions to Memory Markers!

- No. 1* 1. ... **d5**. Black must play actively to equalize. (See page 313.)
- No. 2* 1. ... **Ned7**. Black is preparing to play ... **Ne8** in order to exchange dark-square bishops. (See page 315.)
- No. 3* 1. ... **Qa6!**, with a good game. (See page 316.)
- No. 4* 1. ... **Re8** (not 1. ... **c6** 2. **Nc4** ±). Black prepares to play ... **e7-e6** and to recapture (after **d5xe6**) with his rook, achieving a favorable Philidor-Pirc position. (See page 318.)
- No. 5* 1. ... **Qb6!** ♣. Black stops **Rd1-d4**, while threatening to strike on **b2** as well as on **f2**—a real hat-trick! (See page 319.)
- No. 6* 1. ... **Bc8**. In this King's-Indian-like position, Black should preserve his light-square bishop to aid in a future pawn-storm (starting with ... **f7-f5**) against White's king. If White tries to preempt this storm with his own **f2-f4**, Black will, after 2. **f4 exf4** 3. **Bxf4**, play 3. ... **Nd7**, aiming for **e5**. (See page 320.)

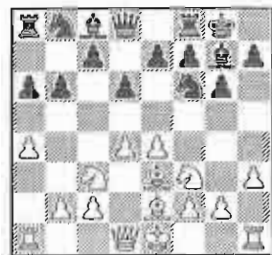
## Chapter 18: The Classical System, II Some Important Points to Look For

This chapter completes coverage of the Classical System, examining 5. h3. Although Black's normal plans turn out to be in White's favor, the second player has other equalizing methods.



- ◆ Now Black must find an alternative to ... Bg4.

See Diagram 648.



- ◆ Black plays 8. ... Bb7, increasing pressure on White's e-pawn.

See Diagram 658.



- ◆ Black is well advised to play the prophylactic 8. ... e6.

See Diagram 663.



- ◆ Tactic alert! (19. ... Rxe3)

See Diagram 670.

## Chapter 18 The Classical System, II

White plays 4. Nf3 & 5. h3

**W**hen White chooses this plan, it puts to rest forever Black's possibility of pinning the knight on f3. He must find an alternative way to play.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Nf3 Bg7 5. h3



Diagram 648  
After 5. h3

Now, of course, Black needs to find an alternative to ... Bc8-g4. After 5. ... 0-0 White can't stay in the genuine Classical System by playing 6. Be2 because of 6. ... c5! 7. dxc5 Qa5 or 7. d5 b5!, and Black equalizes immediately.

That's why after 5. h3 0-0, it is logical for White to continue with 6. Be3, preventing ... c7-c5 and taking advantage of the fact that 5. h3 prevents both ... Bg4 and ... Ng4. Additionally, White is better off because his light-square bishop has not yet been committed—it may be developed to a more promising square than e2.

This possibility would be especially beneficial in case Black chooses the standard plan of ... e7-e5. Then White would think about d4xe5 and placing his bishop on the a2-g8 diagonal.

The following line illustrates this possibility: 5. ... 0-0 6. Be3 c6 7. a4 (aimed against 7. ... b7-b5) 7. ... Nbd7 8. a5 (waiting for ... e7-e5) 8. ... e5 9. dxe5 dxe5 10. Qd6! (this is even stronger than the immediate 10. Bc4 ±) 10. ... Ne8 (no better is 10. ... Re8 11. Bc4) 11. Qa3 Bf6 12. Bc4 Be7 13. Qa2, with advantage to White.



Diagram 649  
After 13. Qa2

We should also point out that 5. ... c5 is too risky now because of the replies 6. e5 or 6. dxc5 Qa5 7. Bb5+ Bd7 8. Bxd7+ Nbx7 9. cxd6 Nxe4 10. 0-0 Nxc3 11. bxc3 Bxc3 12. Rb1.



Diagram 650  
After 12. Rb1

Black's normal plans, ... e7-e5 and ... c7-c5, turn out to be in White's favor. So Black should give up on traditional methods

**BLACK'S  
NORMAL PLANS,  
... E7-E5 AND ... C7-C5,  
TURN OUT TO BE IN  
WHITE'S FAVOR.**

and concentrate pressure not on the d-pawn, but on its neighbor at e4. There are factors in Black's favor—the position of the bishop on e3 causes White difficulties in protecting e4 with his major pieces (a rook on e1 or the queen on e2). What's more, White's development is retarded, since h2-h3 took a tempo. Therefore, Black gains some time for his plans to be accomplished.

Black has two methods of attacking the e4-outpost—with pawns (playing ... d6-d5) or with pieces (developing his bishop on the b7-square). These plans are of approximately equal value.

### Black plays ... d6-d5

Black has several ways to realize the ... d6-d5 break—for instance 6. Be3 a6 7. a4 d5, or 6. Be3 c6 7. a4 d5, or even an immediate 6. Be3 d5. In either case, after White replies with e4-e5, Black's knight occupies e4.

As you learned in Part II of this book, Black should not usually provoke e4-e5 with ... d6-d5. However, the positions that occur after 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Nf3 Bg7 5. h3 0-0 6. Be3 a6 7. a4 d5 8. e5 Ne4 9. Nxe4 dxe4 10. Ng5 c5 are similar to one of the variations of the Caro-Kann: 1. e4 c6 2. d4 d5 3. Nc3 g6 4. Nf3 Bg7 5. h3 Nf6 6. e5 Ne4 7. Nxe4 dxe4 8. Ng5 c5



Diagram 651  
After 8. ... c5

Here the differences between the Caro-Kann and the Pirc favor Black. In the Pirc version, White has played Be3 and pushed his pawn to a4, while Black has castled and played a6. Let's take a look at the following line, illustrating some of the differences between the Pirc and the Caro-Kann in this sequence:

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Nf3 Bg7 5. h3 0-0 6. Be3 a6 7. a4 d5 8. e5

If 8. Bd3, then 8. ... c5 and now, for instance, 9. dxc5 dxe4 10. Nxe4 Nxc4 11. Bxe4 Bxb2=. This motif isn't seen in the Caro-Kann, where b2 is protected by White's stay-at-home bishop, and Bd3 is White's main weapon. For 8. exd5, see Diagram 675.

8. ... Ne4 9. Nxe4

Although it's hard to evaluate the line 9. Bd3 Nxc3 10. bxc3 c5 11. Qd2 Nc6 12. 0-0 c4 13. Be2 f6, the permanent defect of doubled pawns on c2 and c3 gives White little chance to succeed.

9. ... dxe4 10. Ng5 c5



Diagram 652  
10. ... c5

11. dxc5

White lets Black's g7-bishop out of its cage, hoping to hold onto the c5-pawn and thus enjoy a big queenside advantage. If White attempts to hold the center with 11. c3, then Black should reply with 11. ... Qd5!, not trading on d4, to deny White the option of playing Rc1 and Bc4. If White attempts to get rid of the queen with 12. c4, White's center breaks apart after 12. ... Qd8.

11. ... Qc7 12. Qd5

Pushing the e-pawn is too risky positionally: 12. Bc4 Nc6 13. e6 f5 14. 0-0 f4 (Hodgson—McNab, 1998).

12. ... h6

Forcing 13. Nxe4 in order to deny White the option of Qxe4.

13. Nxe4 Be6

Playing in gambit style is also interesting: 13. ... Rd8 14. Qa2 Nc6!?

14. Qd2 Qxe5 15. Nc3 Nd7 16. Be2 Kh7





Diagram 653  
After 16. ... Kh7

It looks like Black gets back the pawn and has few problems. Although the prospects are good for Black, he must be prepared to play some complicated variations. Besides, Black may get a headache trying to figure out when to play ... d6-d5, immediately or after ... a6 or ... c6. Therefore, let us examine our recommended main line, which seems to be simple and faultless—developing the bishop on the b7-square.

5. ... 0-0 6. Be3 a6 7. a4

ANALYSIS

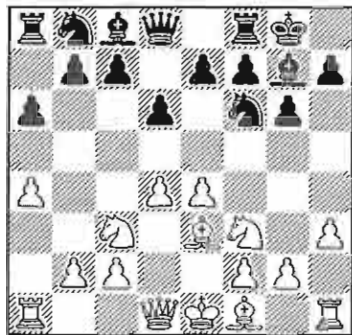


Diagram 654  
After 7. a4

White restrains Black's queenside expansion.

7. ... b6



Diagram 655  
After 7. ... b6

Now White should decide how to develop his bishop—with 8. Be2, 8. Bd3 or 8. Bc4. He has a fourth choice at this point as well, playing 8. e5 before developing further. Let's dispense with this last possibility first, and then consider each of the bishop's moves in turn. We'll see that 8. Bc4 is the most serious try.

**IN OUR RECOMMENDED  
MAIN LINE, BLACK  
DEVELOPS HIS  
BISHOP TO B7.**



**A** 8. e5

White is forcing things. He's not quite ready to make this break.

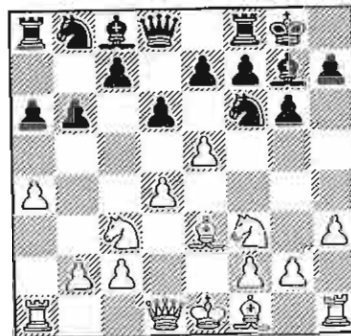


Diagram 656  
After 8. e5

8. ... Nfd7 9. e6

Or 9. exd6=.

9. ... fxe6 10. Ng5 Nf6 11. h4 c5  
12. h5 cxd4 13. Bxd4 gxh5 14.  
Qf3 d5 15. Qe3 Nc6 16. Bxb6

Or 16. Nxe6 Nxd4!

16. ... d4! ♣ (Chandler—Gufeld,  
1988)

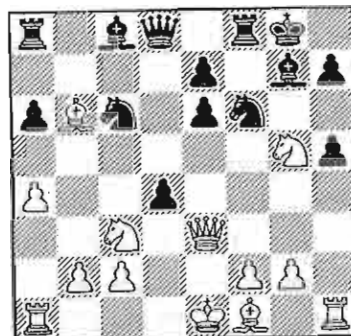


Diagram 657  
After 16. ... d4!

**B** 8. Be2



Diagram 658  
After 8 Be2

8. ... Bb7 9. Nd2

White must continue this way. After 9. d5 c6 10. 0-0 Nbd7  
11. Re1 Rc8 12. Bd4 cxd5 13.  
exd5 Rc7 14. Qd2 Qa8, White's  
pawn on d5 lacks sufficient pro-  
tection.



Diagram 659  
After 14. ... Qa8

After the main-line move 9.  
Nd2, Black can successfully  
fight for d4: 9. ... Nc6 10. 0-0  
(10. d5 Ne5 11. f4 Ned7 12. 0-0  
c6 13. Bf3 cxd5 14. exd5 b5! ♣)  
10. ... e5 11. d5 Nd4 12. Bc4 c6=  
(Pedersen—Miles, 1991).

ANALYSIS

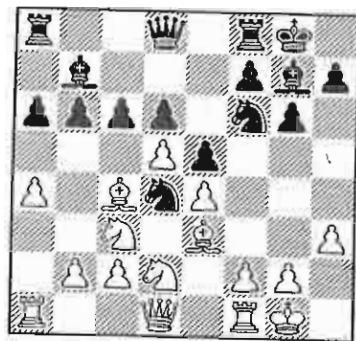


Diagram 660  
After 12. ... c6

**G 8. Bd3**

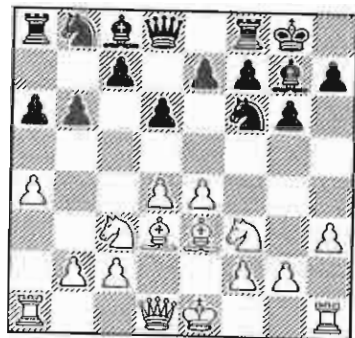


Diagram 661  
After 8. Bd3

White plays to protect the e4-outpost, but his continuation lacks bite, and Black usually equalizes easily. He should play for ... e7-e5, after which the exchange of dark-square bishops with Qd2 and Bh6 (the main idea of the Bd3 line) is not promising for White. Our main line is a good example.

8. ... Bb7 9. 0-0 Nbd7 10. Qd2 e5 11. dxe5 dxe5 12. Bh6 Qe7 =

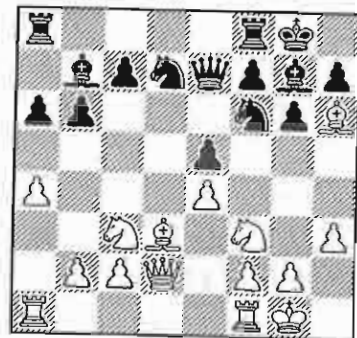


Diagram 662  
After 12. ... Qe7

**D 8. Bc4**

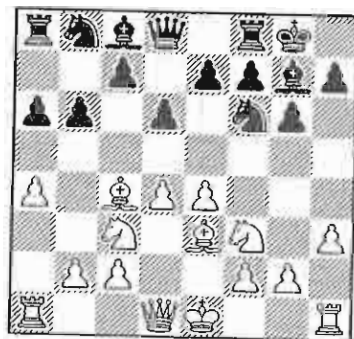


Diagram 663  
After 8. Bc4

**8. ... e6**

Black is well advised to make this prophylactic move against the e4-e5 break, especially in light of the following game: 8. ... Bb7 9. e5 Ne4 10. Nxe4 Bxe4 11. Ng5 Bxg2 12. Rg1 Bc6 13. Qg4, where White has a very strong attack (Spaskey—Seirawan, 1984).



Diagram 664  
After 13. Qg4

**9. 0-0**

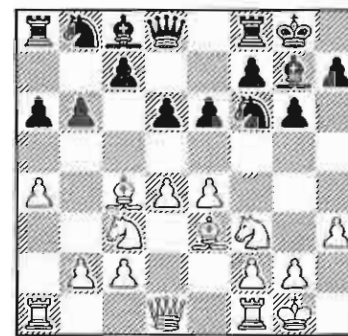


Diagram 665  
After 9. 0-0

**9. ... Bb7**

At first glance, 9. ... d5 may look appealing, gaining a tempo. But after 10. exd5 exd5 11. Bb3 Bb7 12. Ne5, the bishop on b3 pressures the a2-g8 diagonal, and White has the initiative. The exchange 9. ... Nxe4 10. Nxe4 d5 11. Bd3 also favors White.

Now White has two main moves, 10. e5 and 10. d5.

**D1 10. e5 dxe5 11. Nxe5**

If 11. dxe5 Qxd1 12. Raxd1 Nfd7, White has no chance to protect the e5-outpost.

ANALYSIS

11. ... Nc6! 12. Nxc6 Bxc6 13. Qe2 Qc8 14. Rad1 Qb7

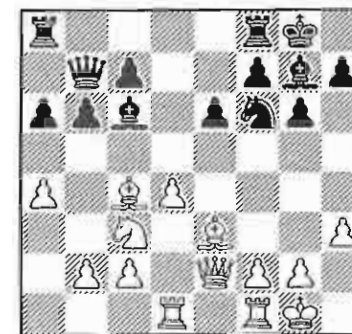


Diagram 666  
After 14. ... Qb7

This position is not a dynamic one for White, and it's fine for Black. His bishops have scope, and his queenside battery of bishop and queen pressures the kingside.

**D2 10. d5**

This move looks more logical than D1, because it has the support of the bishop on c4.



Diagram 667  
After 10. d5

However, this is a very pleasant position for Black from a

practical point of view, allowing him to choose the character of the coming conflict, depending on the circumstances.

If you need a win—for example, against a weaker player—or if you are simply a fighter by nature, then you should choose 10. ... e5, when the game becomes extremely difficult for both sides. Both White and Black have significant minuses in the resulting King's Indian-like position. White's shortcomings are his pawn on h3 and knight on c3, blocking the c2-pawn. Black's position is weakened by ... b7-b6 and the placement of his bishop on b7—now the wrong diagonal.

White's goal is to shatter the opponent's queenside, and he can achieve this in the following way: he plays a4-a5, provoking ... b6-b5, then he moves his knight from c3 in order to play c2-c4. Black should follow the standard King's Indian program, playing ... f7-f5, possibly with the preliminary ... Kh8, ... Ng8, and, if the circumstances permit, ... Bh6. Any advantage White can secure will be relatively small.

Our main line, on the other hand, gives Black a very solid position.

10. ... exd5 11. exd5

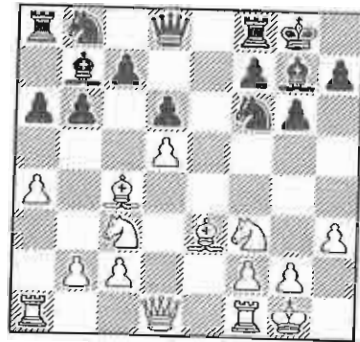


Diagram 668  
After 11. exd5

True, the d-pawn restricts Black's light-square bishop, but because White must protect the d5-outpost with two minor pieces, the situation is a standoff.

11. ... Re8

Black shouldn't allow White's knight to occupy c6: 11. ... Nbd7 12. Nd4 Re8 13. Ba2 Nc5 (it is not too late to continue with 13. ... Ne4) 14. Nc6 Qd7 15. Qf3 (Short—Torre, 1985). Avoiding this positional danger, Black can overcome all of his obstacles.

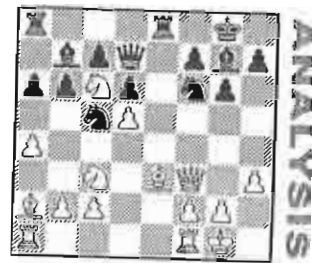


Diagram 669  
After 15. Qf3

Now Black is going to play ... Nf6-e4 as quickly as possible

in order to bring his bishop on g7 to life.

12. Re1 Nbd7

But not 12. ... Ne4 13. Nxe4 Rxe4 14. Bg5, with the initiative.

13. Bd4

White must pay very careful attention to the opponent's plans and react correctly. Hansen—Hansen, 1990 (with a transposition of moves), went 13. Nd4 Ne4 14. Nde2 Qh4 15. Ba2 Ndc5 16. a5 b5 17. Nxe4 Rxe4 18. c3 Rae8 19. Qd2



Diagram 670  
After 19. Qd2

19. ... Rxe3! 20. fxe3 Ne4 21. Qc1 Qf2+ 22. Kh1 Be5 23. c4 Qxe2!, White resigns.

But, after 13. Bd4, all heavy pieces are likely to be exchanged on the e-file, resulting in an even endgame.

13. ... Rxe1+ 14. Qxe1

**THE PAWN ON D5 RESTRICTS BLACK'S LIGHT-SQUARE BISHOP, BUT D5 IS ALSO A LIABILITY FOR WHITE.**



Diagram 671  
After 14. Qxe1

Now Black has a number of good moves.

Playable is 14. ... Nc5—15. b4 Ncd7 16. a5 b5 17. Bb3 Qf8 18. Qd2 Re8 19. Re1 Re7 20. Rxe7 Qxe7 21. Qe1 Qxe1+ 22. Nxe1 Bh6! = (Istratescu—Chernin, 1994.)

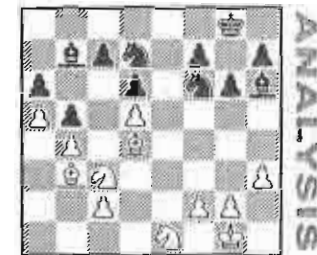


Diagram 672  
After 22. ... Bh6!

Or, from Diagram 671, 14. ... Qf8 15. Qf1 Nc5 16. Rd1 Qe8 17. b3 Qd7 18. Ne1 h6 19. Nd3 Qf5 20. Nb4 a5. (See Diagram 673, next page.)

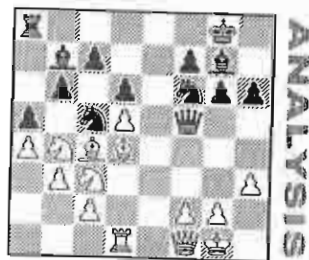


Diagram 673  
After 20. ... a5

Here the b5-square is weak (this was White's goal), but White lacks the room to maneuver effectively, and the position is even. By refusing to restore the balance on the e-file and the exchange of heavy pieces, White gradually gets into trouble.

21. Nd3 Re8 22. Bb5 Re7 23. g4 Qc8 24. Nf4 Qa8 25. Bc4 Qe8 26. Ng2 Nfe4 27. Bxg7 Kxg7 28. Nxe4 Rxe4 29. f3 Re5 30. Qf2 Qe7 31. f4 Re4 ♯, and Black

### Summary:

*White's plan of 4. Nf3 and 5. h3 limits Black's options, and his normal defensive plans rebound in White's favor.*

*Black doesn't have many opportunities to initiate an early skirmish, considering possibilities for White such as 5. h3 0-0 6. Be3 a6 7. a4 d5 8. exd5 (instead of the earlier analyzed 8. e5) 8. ... Nxd5 9. Nxd5 Qxd5, with approximate equality (Godena—Chernin, 1996).*

won on move 46 (Istratescu—Slobodian, 1995).

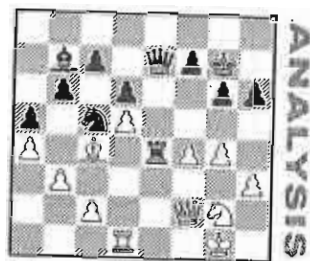


Diagram 674  
After 31. ... Re4

### Modern move order against 4. Nf3

As we have already seen in the previous chapter, after 4. Nf3, Black can, if he wishes, stay in a Modern by playing 4. ... Nbd7 or 4. ... a6.

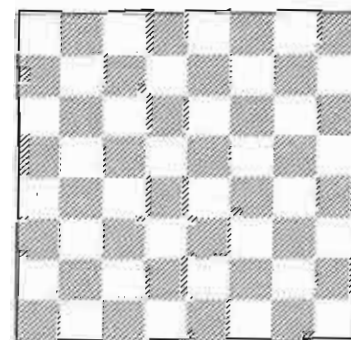
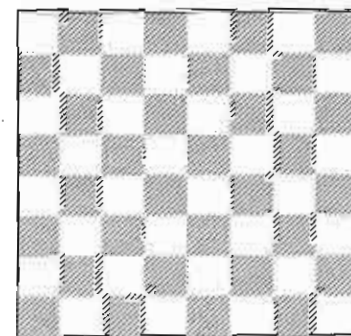
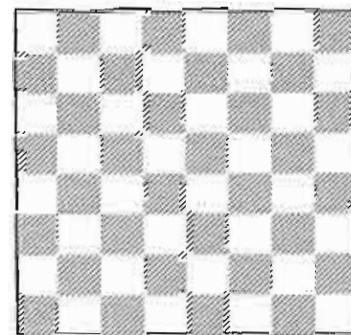
As a matter of fact, Black's play in this chapter is an effective symbiosis of Modern and Pirc ideas.



Diagram 675  
After 9. ... Qxd5

*Of course, this problem exists in virtually all opening variations, and should disturb White much more than Black. Most importantly, Black has sound ways to reach equality.*

## Your Notes & Positions



## The Classical System, II Memory Markers!



Diagram 676  
White to move

MARKER 1



Diagram 677  
Black to move

MARKER 2



Diagram 678  
Black to move

MARKER 3



Diagram 679  
White to move

MARKER 4



Diagram 680  
Black to move

MARKER 5



Diagram 681  
White to move

MARKER 6

## The Classical System, II Solutions to Memory Markers!

- No. 1* 1. a4, preventing ... b7-b5, is the most natural and strongest move. Otherwise, Black equalizes easily. (See page 328.)
- No. 2* 1. ... c6, weakening the d5-pawn and activating his bishop. (See page 329.)
- No. 3* 1. ... Nc6, and if 2. 0-0, ... e5 3. d5 Nd4, with a good game. (See page 329.)
- No. 4* 1. e5 Ne4?! (better is 1. ... Ne8 ±) 2. Nxe4 Bxe4 3. Ng5, with a strong attack. (See page 330.)
- No. 5* 1. ... Qc8, heading to b7. (See page 331.)
- No. 6* 1. Nxe4 Rxe4 2. Bg5, with initiative. (See page 333.)



## Chapter 19: White Plays 4. g3 Some Important Points to Look For

After 4. g3, White stays on his side of the board for a while, quietly developing his pieces. Black can choose any of the three basic structures we've studied in Part II and equalize.



◆ White's 4. g3 conforms to the goal of playing in and through the center.

See Diagram 682.



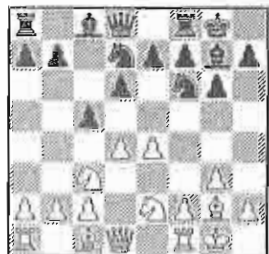
◆ Black enters a good Philidor Pirc by 8. ... exd4.

See Diagram 690.



◆ Before entering the Ruy Lopez Pirc, Black builds up his queenside position.

See Diagram 708.



◆ Black just played 7. ... c5, preparing to enter the Dragon when *he* wishes to.

See Diagram 713.

## Chapter 19 White Plays 4. g3 The self-centered system

If a nonprofessional chess player were to ask Alex to recommend a fairly simple and reliable system to play against the Pirc, GM Chernin would probably advocate 4. g3.

Indeed, White can win in this system if his opponent is not familiar with it, or if Black has been misled by manuals that promise Black an easy life in all variations.

Like 4. Nf3, 4. g3 conforms to the goal of playing in and through the center. White doesn't bolt into enemy territory, but

focuses on development. He prepares quietly for the upcoming action in the center.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. g3

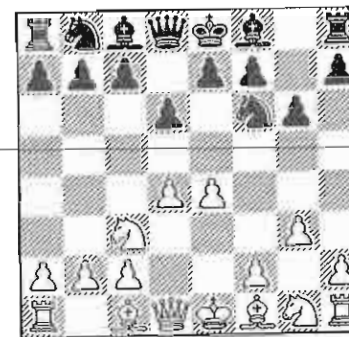


Diagram 682  
After 4. g3

The move 4. g3 not only announces the home for the White king's bishop, but also predicts the future posts of White's other pieces. His king's knight heads to e2, allowing the f-pawn the right-of-way to advance. After a preliminary h2-h3, his queen's bishop heads to e3 where it can't be disturbed by ... Nf6-g4. In the play that follows, the major White pieces are often grouped in the center—the queen stays on d2, the rooks stay on d1 and e1.



Photo: Brian Killigrew

GM Alex Chernin recommends the g3 system to nonprofessionals.

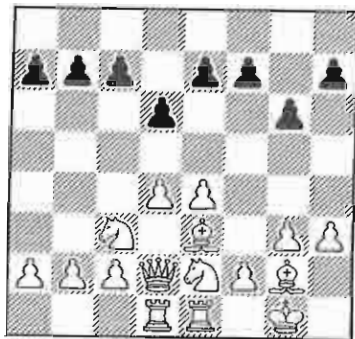


Diagram 683

Normal White piece placement.

### Black's normal counterpunches are hard to make

Such an array of forces, in which the crucial d4- and e4-squares are under control, makes White's center insensitive to the appearance of his opponent's pawns on the fifth rank—the common method of creating counterplay for Black. In fact, if Black plays ... c7-c5 when he isn't yet ready to recapture on c5 with a piece (and thus transform the game into a favorable Sicilian Dragon), White can continue with d4xc5 d6xc5 and play e4-e5 and f2-f4, obtaining the advantage.

The ... d6-d5 advance is dubious not only because White guards against it with Nc3 and Bg2, but also in view of the natural reaction, e4-e5. However, the idea of ... d6-d5 may become feasible when Black has already played ... e7-e5 and ... e5xd4, transforming the game into a

Philidor Pirc. But even in this case, Black finds it difficult to play ... d6-d5 because White can prevent the advance by playing Qd2 and Rd1. Transformation into a "good Philidor" is a hard task because the pawn e4 is defended so well—by Bg2, Nc3, in addition to Re1 and even Ng3 after the preliminary h2-h3 and g3-g4.

What about playing ... e7-e5, not capturing ... exd4 and staying in a Ruy Lopez Pirc? Black then finds it hard to implement his standard plans in this formation. White's h-pawn eliminates the possibility of ... Bg4, and the e-pawn is well defended, so Black's attempt to pressure the center with ... Nc6 and ... Re8 could be insufficient. Black can't force White to play d4-d5 or d4xe5, displacing his d-pawn.

As we've seen, another good plan in both the Ruy Lopez and Philidor Pirc depends on ... b7-b5. Even here, White can make Black's intentions difficult to perform. White can play the preventive a2-a4 as soon as his opponent reveals his plans by playing ... a7-a6 or ... c7-c6.

### A self-centered system

It's almost as if White ignores his opponent in the early part of the game. Going back to our hypothetical conversation with the nonprofessional player

looking for a line against the Pirc, we'd recommend White continue in this way: Play 4. g3, then Bg2, Nge2, h3, 0-0, Be3, Qd2, Rd1, Re1, and then, if the coast is clear, play an immediate f2-f4, or prepare it first with g3-g4 and Ne2-g3. White can meet either ... c7-c6 or ... a7-a6 with a2-a4. In the 4. g3 line, all of White's actions seem natural and intuitive.

This sort of preconceived plan reminds us of the story about the coach who told his player, "I don't know what your opponent will do tomorrow, but you will play the Ruy Lopez."

### The drawbacks of White's piece placement

There is no "White to play and win" system, of course. Many of the prophylactic actions taken by White offer Black some counterplans. In general, White's "safety first" policy commits a lot of his resources to strengthening the fourth rank, thus demonstrating that he is not going to invade beyond the line of demarcation for a while. Let's look at some specifics.

White's knight on e2 (rather

than the normal f3) supports the advance f2-f4, but at some cost. His control over e5 is diminished. Black can take advantage of this fact by playing ... e7-e5 without difficulties. What's more, the position of the knight on e2 has inherent drawbacks. Restricted by Black's e5-pawn, the knight, looking for a change of venue, may go only to c1. If White wishes to transfer the knight to g3, he must prepare the way by making the ambitious g3-g4 move. Or, to improve the position of this knight, White must wait for a long time for his opponent's ... e5xd4. If White forces the issue in the center with d4xe5 ... d6xe5, Black's pawn then remains on e5, guarding the squares that would otherwise look inviting to White's knight.

### Some errors in previous theory

Let's take a look at the generalizations we've made so far in the context of the following example. In the process, we'll note some mistakes that are still being recommended: 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. g3 Bg7 5. Bg2 0-0 6. Nge2 e5 7. h3 Nc6 8. Be3 Re8 9. 0-0 a6 10. a4 exd4 11. Nxd4 Bd7 12. Re1

**"I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOUR OPPONENT WILL PLAY TOMORROW, BUT YOU WILL PLAY THE RUY LOPEZ."**

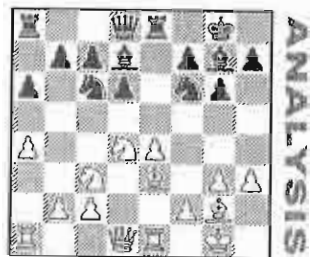


Diagram 684  
After 12. Re1

Here theory recommends two moves—12. ... Na5 or 12. ... Nb4. The common purpose of both is the preparation of ... c7-c5, an advance that supposedly promises active play for Black. However, neither practice nor analysis supports such evaluation!

After 12. ... Na5, White can prove that Black's counterplay against the e-pawn is not sufficient. After 13. Qd3! c5 14. Nde2 Bc6 15. Rad1 Qc7 16. b3, White reaches the following position.



Diagram 685  
After 16. b3

His idea is to play Nf4 or g3-g4!?

A similar picture develops after 12. ... Nb4 13. Qd2 (also

possible is 13. a5!? c5 14. Nb3 Bc6 15. Bf4 Re6 16. Qd2 ±) 13. ... c5 14. Nb3 Bc6 15. Bf4 Nh5 16. Bg5 Bf6 17. Bxf6! ±.



Diagram 686  
After 17. Bxf6!

Many books present only the inferior 17. Bh6 (Klinger—Miles, 1980). After 17. Bxf6, Black's pressure on e4 is insufficient, so his position is strategically weak. We recall from the game Aseev-Zakharevich in Part II that Black's ... c7-c5 in the Philidor Pirc should be planned thoroughly to avoid permanent weaknesses on d6 and d5.

### Three defensive systems

White's idea with 4. g3 is to maintain several strategic options at once, a reasonable goal for this kind of maneuvering approach. But you'll see that this allows Black his own choices. In fact, we're going to provide you three systems by which Black solves his main opening problems using the three Pirc structures we've studied: the Philidor Pirc, the Ruy Lopez Pirc, and the Dragon Pirc.

In his own tournament practice, Alex tried to vary replies against the 4. g3 system. This is a real luxury for Black, since such options are not always available to him in other systems White can choose against the Pirc Defense.

Let's begin with the Philidor Pirc structure, which we analyze in the most detail.

### System I: Philidor Structure

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. g3 Bg7 5. Bg2 0-0 6. Nge2 e5 7. h3

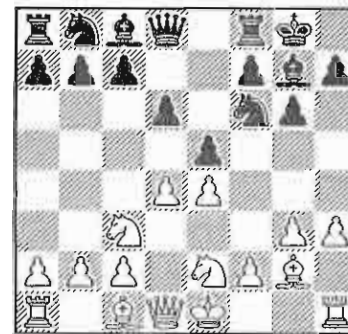


Diagram 687  
After 7. h3

If White forgets theory and hurries with 7. 0-0, Black has a good reply in 7. ... Nc6! 8. dxe5 (8. Be3? Ng4; 8. h3? exd4 9. Nxd4 Nxe4! 10. Nxc6 Nxc3 11. Nxd8 Nxd1, and Black's chances are at least equal, or 8. d5 Ne7, and Black has a good game) 8. ... dxe5 9. Bg5.



Diagram 688  
After 9. Bg5

In this position, Black easily achieves equality: 9. ... Qxd1 10. Raxd1 Nb4, with ... c7-c6 to follow. Now White controls the d-file, but his knights are not placed well. More complicated is 9. ... Be6 10. Nd5 Bxd5 11. exd5 Ne7 12. c4 h6 13. Bd2 Nf5.



Diagram 689  
After 13. ... Nf5

This plan, with the goal of pushing the e-pawn forward, is pretty good for Black, and tournament practice proves it. Here we disagree with John Nunn, who takes White's side because of his two bishops, and recommends 9. ... Qxd1 only. In our opinion, the bishop pair is not a significant factor, considering the closed character of position.

7. ... c6 8. a4

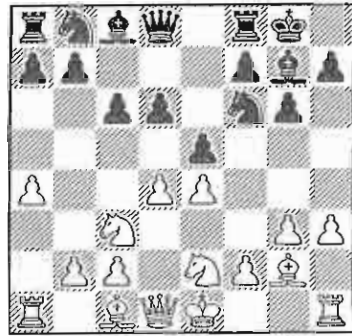


Diagram 690  
After 8. a4

This move is made automatically nowadays, because after 8. 0-0 or 8. Be3, Black plays 8. ... b5 immediately.

#### 8. ... exd4

The simplest sequence of moves on the way to the Philidor Pirc. If Black plays 8. ... Na6, there is the possibility 9. Be3 cxd4 10. Bxd4.

#### 9. Nxd4 Na6 10. 0-0 Nb4

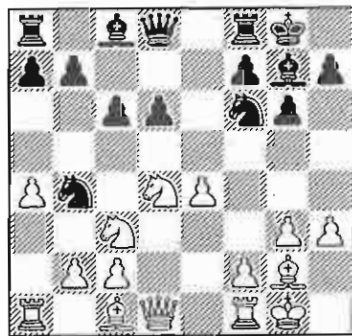


Diagram 691  
After 10. ... Nb4

**BLACK'S KNIGHT ENJOYS THE b4-OUTPOST BECAUSE WHITE HAS BEEN FORCED TO PLAY A4.**

Black's knight on b4 enjoys his outpost because White was forced to play a2-a4. The knight is ready to support the freeing advance ... d6-d5. Besides, the horseman keeps an eye on the c2-pawn, tying down White's queen so that she can't play a major role in attacking the pawn on d6.

So far Black has played to get a favorable variation of the Ruy Lopez or Philidor structures, while White played to prevent such a transposition with moves such as 7. h3 and 8. a4. Now, when it is clear that Black is getting ready to play ... d6-d5, the battle plan is changing. White tries to prevent ... d6-d5 or at least to prepare for it.

#### 11. a5

White tries to push Black's b4-knight back to a6 by playing Ra4, or to force Black to play ... c6-c5. Meanwhile, the idea of a5-a6 is afoot, and Black must remember that White's bishop applies latent pressure on the h1-a8 diagonal—for instance: 11. ... d5 12. exd5 Nfxd5 13. Nxd5 Nxd5 14. a6 ±. Yet Black replies cold-bloodedly.

#### 11. ... Re8!

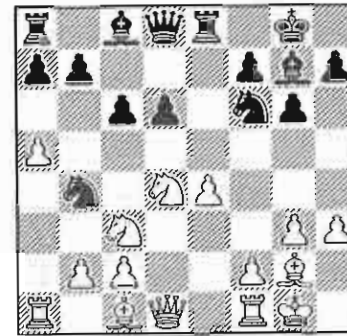


Diagram 692  
After 11. ... Re8

In this position, White has four possibilities: 12. Ra4, 12. Re1, 12. f4, and 12. Kh2.

We are not going to emphasize 12. Nde2, because it presents no special challenge and gives Black a freer hand after 12. ... d5. (In the game Motwani—Ivanchuk, 1990, Black, trying to create complications, played 12. ... Re5.)

#### A 12. Ra4



Diagram 693  
After 12. Ra4

Threatening the knight on b4. But this is not dangerous in light of Black's reply.

#### 12. ... c5! 13. Ndb5

White executes the threat that "prevented" Black's 12. ... c5!

#### 13. ... d5! 14. exd5

Or 14. Nxd5 Nfxd5 15. exd5 Bf5 16. Na3 Bd7.

#### 14. ... Bf5! 16. Na3 Bd7

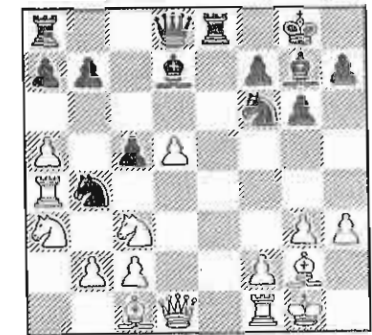


Diagram 694  
After 16. ... Bd7

Black wins material.

#### B 12. Re1

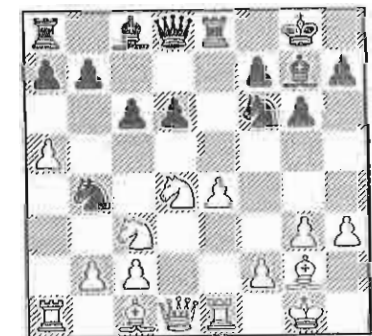


Diagram 695  
After 12. Re1

Of course, all White's moves should be viewed from the viewpoint of a possible ... d6-d5.

#### 12. ... d5

**IN ASEEV—ZAKHAREVICH, BLACK'S POSITION IS OFTEN JUST ONE STEP FROM FALLING APART— BUT IT HOLDS!**

Now we see that White's choice has a downside: if 13. exd5 Rxe1+! 14. Qxe1 c5 and the knight on b4 becomes a hero.

But the main idea of 12. Re1 is to meet 12. ... d5 with 13. e5. Here too Black has a strong move: 13. ... Ne4!. (Or even more ambitious—13. ... Nd7! 14. f4 f6 15. e6 f5, ready to meet 16. exd7? with ... Rxe1+ 17. Qxe1 Bxd4+) 14. Nxe4 dxe4



Diagram 696  
After 14. ... dxe4

Here the annihilation of the central pawns leads to equality: 15. c3 (Or 15. Rxe4 Rxe5 16. Rxe5 Bxe5 17. c3 Bxd4!? 18. cxd4 Be6 19. Ra4=, draw, Gulko—Hort, 1987) 15. ... Nd3 16. Rxe4 Nxc1 17. Qxc1 Rxe5=.

**WHITE'S CHOICE OF  
12. RE1  
HAS A DOWNSIDE.**

**C 12. f4**



Diagram 697  
After 12. f4

White plans to respond to ... d6-d5 with e4-e5, when Black can't play 13. ... Ne4.

**12. ... d5!**

The game Aseev—Zakharovich continued with 12. ... a6, and after 13. g4 h6! 14. Nde2 c5 15. Be3 Qc7 16. Qd2 Bd7 17. Bf2 Bc6 18. Ng3 Rad8 19. Rfe1 Rd7! 20. g5, Black could equalize with 20. ... hxg5 21. fxc5 Nh7 22. Nd5 Qd8 23. h4 Nxd5 24. exd5 Bb5 25. Rxe8 Qxe8 26. Re1 Re7. This method of defense is quite difficult for Black—as we've seen in Part II, Black's position is often just one step from breaking apart. (Still, there is no direct refutation of this line.)

**13. e5 Nd7**

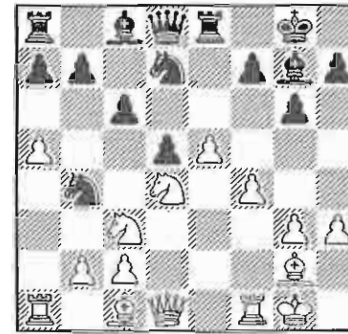


Diagram 698  
After 13. ... Nd7

**14. Nce2!**

Ftacnik suggests this move, with the idea that if Black counters in the center with an immediate 14. ... f6, White continues with 15. e6 Nf8 16. c3 Na6 17. f5!. By offering the e-pawn, White gets a strong attack. That's why we recommend a different 14th move.

**14. ... Nf8! TN**

Now Black is ready to play ... f7-f6. Despite White's powerful kingside pawns, Black has good play. Of course, the combination of ... Nf8 with a follow-up ... f7-f6 may be played against moves other than 14. Nce2. This promis-

ing plan offers Black a simple and clear solution on his 12th move—12. ... d5. Black can thus avoid the razor-sharp risk of 12. ... a6 as played in Aseev—Zakharovich.

**D 12. Kh2!**

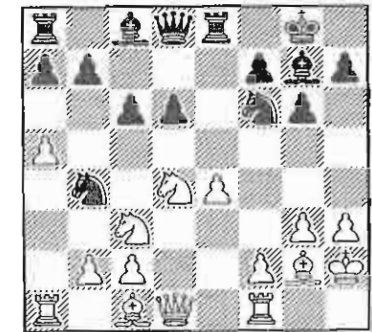


Diagram 699  
After 12. Kh2!

White avoids some of the difficulties that can occur after 12. Re1 (12. Re1 d5 13. exd5 Rxe1+ 14. Qxe1 c5) and 12. f4 (where White's bishop can't attack the d-pawn from the f4-square). In Ivanchuk—Nikolic, 1990, Black played ... d6-d5 anyway: 12. ... d5 13. exd5 Nfxd5 14. Nxd5 Nxd5 15. a6! Qb6. (See Diagram 700, next page.)

**THE STRAIGHTFORWARD 12. ... D5 OFFERS BLACK A SIMPLE AND CLEAR SOLUTION TO HIS PROBLEM, AND AVOIDS THE RAZOR-SHARP RISK OF 12. ... A6.**





Diagram 700  
After 19... Qb6

Black believes that he could hold his game despite the isolated a- and c-pawns that he incurs. The game continued: 16. c3 Rb8 (16... bxa6 16. Nxc6!±) 17. Qa4 Bxd4 18. Bxd5! (now we see the depth of 12. Kh2!. White's whole operation is possible because the pawn on h3 is protected) 18... Be5 19. axb7 Bxh3 20. Bxf7+ Kxf7 21. Kxh3 Rxb7 22. Qc4+ Re6 23. f4 Bf6 24. f5



Diagram 701  
After 24. f5

White won with his kingside attack on move 30. So Black must be accurate after White plays 12. Kh2!.

#### 12... Bd7!

This move, as well as its predecessor, 11... Re8, is not an

indication of Black's unwillingness to play ... d6-d5. It simply keeps other defensive options open as well. White now has three reasonable choices.

#### D1 13. f4 c5



Diagram 702  
After 13... c5

#### 14. Nb3

Or 14. Ndb5 Nxe4 15. Bxe4 Bxb5 16. Nxb5 Rxe4 17. c3 Qe7! with idea 18. cxb4 Re2+ 19. Kg1 Qe4 ±.

#### 14... Bc6 15. Re1 Qc7 16. g4 h6!



Diagram 703  
After 16... h6!

White can't activate his dark-square bishop.

Black's 12... Bd7! confronts White with a dilemma. The move 13. Re1 does not prevent ... d6-d5 (just as 12. Re1 did not): 13... d5 14. e5 (14. exd5 Rxe1+ 15. Qxe1 c5) 14... Ne4 15. Nxe4 dxe4, and White doesn't even have 16. c3 in view of 16... Nd3, while 16. Bd2 is countered by 16... Na6!, which also eliminates the possibility of a5-a6.

As we saw in the 12. Re1 variation, positions in which the e4- and e5-pawns disappear are equal.

#### D2 13. Bf4



Diagram 704  
After 13... Bf4

This alternative doesn't create any problems for Black either.

#### 13... d5 14. exd5

Or 14. Bd6 Bg4! 15. hxg4 Qxd6.

#### 14... Nfxd5 15. Nxd5 Nxd5

Now White's bishop must retreat.

#### 16. Bc1 Rc8

Black continues to play accurately. After the hasty 16... Qf6 17. c3 Rad8 18. Qb3 Bc8 19. a6! b6? 20. Nxc6 Qxc6 21. Rd1 Be6 22. c4 ±, Black's memory is unpleasantly jogged regarding White's prospects on the h1-a8 diagonal.

After 16... Rc8, White must give up something in order to bring his pieces into action, for instance 17. c4 Nb4 or 17. c3 Qc7 18. Qb3 Bxd4 19. cxd4 Be6 (similar to the game Gulko—Hort).



Diagram 705  
After 19... Be6

**BLACK'S 12... Bd7! CONFRONTS  
WHITE WITH A DILEMMA.**

## 13. Nb3



Diagram 706  
After 13. Nb3

In this variation, White's knight heads away from g3, where it would strengthen the e4-outpost.

## 13. ... Be6 14. Ra4

White prevents ... d6-d5, but the position of White's rook on a4 is somewhat awkward.

## 14. ... c5 15. Bf4 Bc4 16. Re1 Re6



Diagram 707  
After 16. ... Re6

Even though Black began with a Philidor Pirc structure, he was soon ready to play ... d6-d5.

As we can see, for instance, in the last example, his opponent had to pay a high toll to prevent it. This position is roughly equal, but strategically unbalanced. White protects his e-pawn well, but his queenside looks a bit like the driver-education practice parking lot. His rook on a4 and knight on b3 are a bit of an embarrassment. What's more, Black's knight on b4 puts continuous pressure on White's position.

### System II: Ruy Lopez Structure

In this reaction to 4. g3, Black decides on a tenacious attempt to play ... b7-b5 (ignoring even a2-a4) in a Ruy Lopez Philidor. This can be done by the following sequence of moves. (Some transpositions of moves are possible along the way.)

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. g3 c6 5. a4 Nbd7 6. Bg2 Bg7 7. Nge2 0-0 8. 0-0 b6

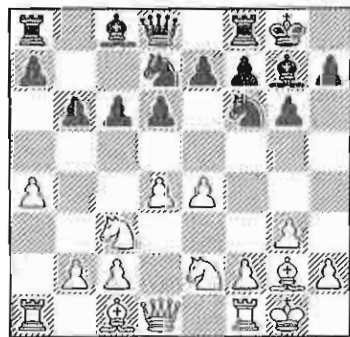


Diagram 708  
After 8. ... b6

9. h3 a6 10. Be3 Bb7

We are already familiar with the series of moves ... c7-c6, ... b7-b6, ... a7-a6, ... Bb7 and then ... b6-b5.

## 11. g4 e5

Of course, in response to an earlier f2-f4 (with the idea e4-e5), Black would play ... e7-e5 immediately.

## 12. Ng3

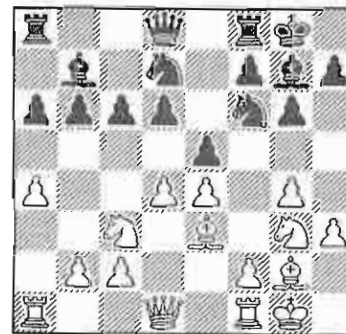


Diagram 709  
After 12. Ng3

After g4-g5, Black can't now reply with ... Nf6-h5.

## 12. ... b5

Also possible is the less ambitious 12. ... h6.

## 13. g5

In order to play d4-d5 successfully, White has to remove Black's knight from its position on f6. But White's subsequent attack against Black's queenside (in some cases, even involving the win of a pawn)—is balanced by his own terminally ill g5-pawn. Because of its feebleness, the entire White kingside is weak.

## 13. ... Ne8 14. d5 cxd5 15. Nxd5 Nc7

Immediately attacking the d5-outpost.

## 16. axb5 axb5

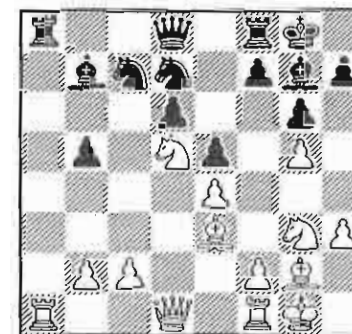


Diagram 710  
After 16. ... axb5

## 17. Qe2

Shirov gives 17. Rxa8 Bxa8 18. Qd3 Ne5 19. Bxc5 dxc5 20. Rd1 (after 20. Nxc7 Qxc7 21. Qxb5 Rb8, White's prospects are limited by the poor positions of his minor pieces, the bishop on g2 and knight on g3, as well as his weak pawn on g5) 20. ... Ne6 21. h4 Qe8, with unclear play, according to Shirov. In our opinion, Black is no worse here.

## 17. ... Nc5 18. Rxa8 Bxa8 19. Rd1 N5e6 20. Nxc7 Qxc7

**WHITE'S QUEENSIDE  
ATTACK IS OFFSET  
BY HIS OWN  
TERMINALLY WEAK  
PAWN ON G5.**



Diagram 711  
After 20... Qxc7

Black sacrifices a pawn, but White's d5-outpost is now eliminated, and Black's knight is heading to f4.

21. Qxb5 Rb8 22. Qa4 Bc6 23. Qa2 Nf4 24. c3 h6 25. h4 hxg5 26. hxg5 Bd7 27. Rd2 Be6 28. Qa6 Bf8

Not only protecting the d-pawn, but threatening to win the g-pawn with ... Bf8-e7.

29. Bxf4 exf4 30. Ne2 Qc5

Black is certainly no worse (Mohr—Chernin, 1997).

Rarely used in tournaments, this defensive plan, involving Black's persistent attempts to play ... b7-b5, seems to provide him good practical chances.

### System III: Dragon Structure

Black can also employ a Dragon structure against White's 4. g3.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. g3 Bg7 5. Bg2 0-0 6. Nge2 Nbd7

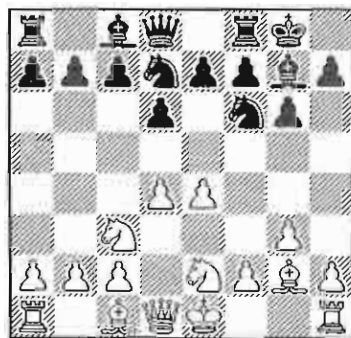


Diagram 712  
After 6... Nbd7

Black needs to do some "construction work" to build a Dragon.

7. 0-0

Playing 7. Be3 is not effective before h2-h3.

7... c5

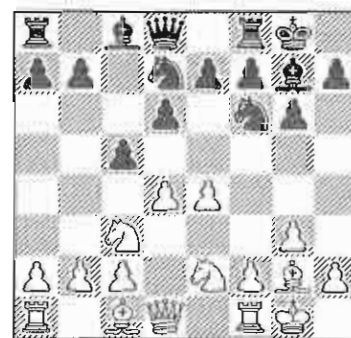


Diagram 713  
After 7... c5

8. h3

White doesn't want to play 8. d5 because afterward, it is easy for Black to accomplish ... b7-b5. Now we have quite a rare situation: Black is not in a hurry to play the Dragon Pirc (!) and may

postpone ... c5xd4. He needs to solve the problem of developing the queenside—and to do so, he must fianchetto his light-square bishop with ... b7-b6 and ... Bb7.

Black will have to move his queenside rook to b8 to prevent it from being attacked on the long diagonal at some moment after e4-e5. After 8... cxd4 9. Nxd4, 9... b6? is bad in view of 10. Nc6. So Black must first play 8... Rb8, planning ... b7-b6 (or, if given a chance, ... b7-b5) on the next move, and only then ... c5xd4. Black reasonably believes that if White has not played 8. d5 or 8. dxc5, he shouldn't fear either of these threats in the future as well.

8... Rb8 9. a4 b6

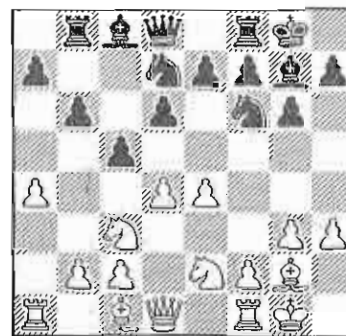


Diagram 714  
After 9... b6

This reply could also be played in answer to 9. Be3. White tried both 10. Bg5 and 10. Be3 here. In both variations, Black transposes the game to the Dragon Pirc immediately or after a few moves.

10. Bg5 a6 11. Qd2 Re8 12. Rfe1 cxd4 13. Nxd4 Bb7

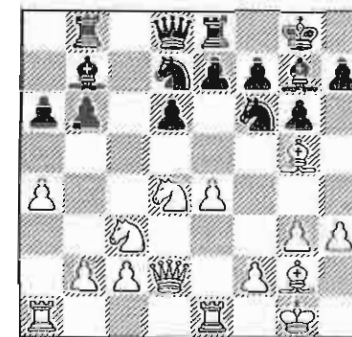


Diagram 715  
After 13... Bb7

In positions of this kind, White's standard plan is Nd5 (with the idea of applying pressure to f6 and forcing Black to play ... Nf6xd5 e4xd5). But the plan doesn't work here because f6 is well protected by Black. One of the remarkable features of this position is Black's ability to play ... e7-e6, despite the weakening of his d-pawn. One of the most instructive games (Aseev—Khalifman, 1997) went:

14. Nd5 e6 15. Nxf6+ Nxf6 16. Ra3 Qd7 17. Bh6 Bh8 18. Qb4 e5 19. Nb3 a5 20. Qc4 Bxe4 21. Bxe4 d5 22. Bxd5 Nxd5 23. Kh2 Rbc8

**WHITE'S STANDARD  
PLAN OF Nd5 DOESN'T  
WORK HERE BECAUSE  
F6 IS WELL PROTECTED  
BY BLACK.**

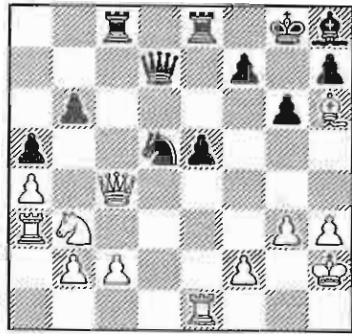


Diagram 716  
After 23... Rbc8

Black has better play.

This elastic variation has been little used in tournament play, but is becoming more and more popular nowadays. The available statistics show Black is doing very well.

### Playing the Modern move order against 4. g3

The Modern will eventually transpose into the Pirc in these lines. There's really no point in Black's delaying ... Nf6 (at least for very long) against 4. g3.

#### Summary

White's 4. g3 strategy conforms to the goal shared by the other systems in Section 2. He intends to play in and through the center.

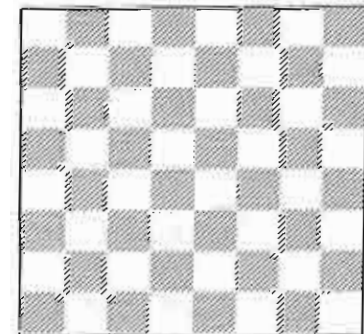
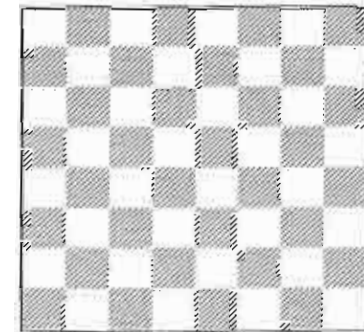
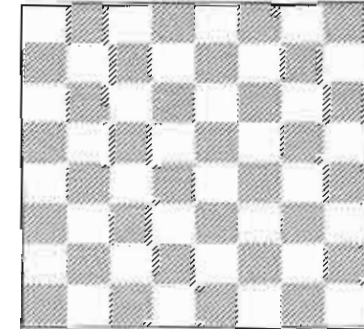
White's fourth move predicts, to a large degree, the future placement of the White pieces.

Although many of Black's normal immediate counter-punches are prevented, he has a choice of any of the three Pirc structures we've examined in Part II—the Philidor, Ruy Lopez, or Dragon Pirc. The Philidor structure has been the most commonly played, but all three seem to give Black a good game.

## Your Notes



## Positions



## White Plays 4. g3

## Memory Markers!



MARKER 1

Diagram 717  
Black to move



MARKER 2

Diagram 718  
Black to move



MARKER 3

Diagram 719  
Black to move



MARKER 4

Diagram 720  
Black to move



MARKER 5

Diagram 721  
Black to move



MARKER 6

Diagram 722  
Black to move

## White Plays 4. g3 Solutions to Memory Markers!

- No. 1* 1. ... **Nc6!**, practically forcing White to take on e5, with an even game. (See page 343.)
- No. 2* 1. ... **b5**, with excellent prospects for Black. (See page 344.)
- No. 3* 1. ... **Bf5** 2. **Na3 Bd7**, winning material. (See page 345.)
- No. 4* 1. ... **Nf8!**, preparing ... f7-f6. (See page 347.)
- No. 5* 1. ... **b5** and the more cautious 1. ... **h6** are equally good. (See page 351.)
- No. 6* 1. ... **e6!**. Black achieves a good game despite the weakening of his d-pawn. (See page 353.)



## Pirc Player Profiles

Photo: Nigel Eddis, courtesy US Chess Federation



### Grandmaster Tony Miles

*Born in England in 1955, Miles is an imaginative and innovative player who aided in the development of the Pirc. He won the World Junior Championship in 1974. In 1976, he became the first modern British player to earn the GM title. He briefly played for the US in the late 1980s.*

### Grandmaster Mikhail Gurevich

*Born in the Soviet Union in 1959, Gurevich was awarded the GM title in 1986. He's a popular figure in the US, having won the World Open and other big events. Gurevich played the Pirc often throughout the 1980's and 1990's, contributing to its theory. You'll find about a dozen of his important games throughout this book.*



Photo: Brian Kilgrew

## Section Three, Introduction: Macho on the Kingside

**A**ttack as soon as the pieces are set up—that's White's motto in this third theoretical section.

**Chapter 20** examines White's most direct try at an early knockout. He plays *Be3*, planning to organize an early pawn-storm against the castled Black king, to open files, to force the exchange of Black's stalwart *g7*-bishop with *Qd2* and *Bh6*, and, as Bobby Fischer put it, to "sac, sac, mate!"

1. *e4 d6* 2. *d4 Nf6* 3. *Nc3 g6* 4. *Be3*

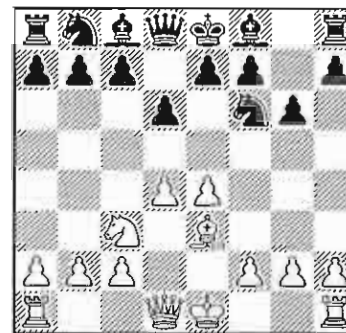


Diagram 723

Chapter 20: after 4. *Be3*

**Chapter 21**, one of our shortest, prepares you for an even more audacious plan for White, playing 4. *Be2* and, without further ado, jamming his *h*-pawn toward confrontation with *g6*.

1. *e4 d6* 2. *d4 Nf6* 3. *Nc3 g6* 4. *Be2 Bg7* 5. *h4*



Diagram 724

Chapter 21: after 4. *Be2* and 5. *h4*

Black should not fear these examples of the action-hero approach to chess, but certainly needs to be prepared.

## Chapter 20: White Plays 4. Be3

### Some Important Points to Look For

After 4. Be3, White has numerous plans to choose from. Black can, however, fight back by delaying his fianchetto and starting queenside actions immediately with 4. ... c6.



- ◆ After 4. ... c6, White has to clarify his intention—at least partially.

See Diagram 727.



- ◆ 10. ... Be7. Black prepares castling while defending the pawn on b4.

See Diagram 732.



- ◆ White has a problem—where to retreat his knight.

See Diagram 754.



- ◆ Before playing ... Bb7 and ... Nf6, Black must drive White's knight away with ... b4.

See Diagram 786.

## Chapter 20

### White Plays 4. Be3

Ready to storm the kingside

In this chapter we deal with one of the most dangerous systems against the Pirc defense. As early as 4. Be3, we can say that White definitely prevents Operation Enter the Dragon—4. ... c5 5. dxc5 Qa5 6. Qd2.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Be3

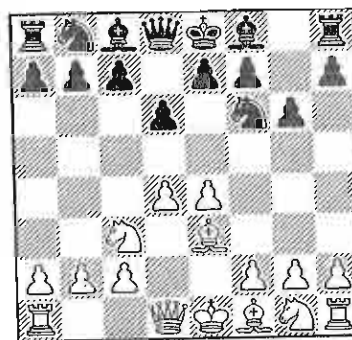


Diagram 725

After 4. Be3

White keeps his opponent in the dark concerning future plans—including, importantly, the future of White's f-pawn. Will it go to f3, strengthening e4 and preparing a pawn storm (g2-g4 and h2-h4) against the Black

king's position?

Or does White want to play f2-f4 to finish building a center phalanx? Perhaps the pawn will stay on f2 during a natural development of White's pieces (for example Nf3 and Qd2, transposing into the Hybrid System, or Nf3 and h3, going into the Classical System). All these plans are available for White after 4. Be3. Black must choose a plan of development that's effective against all of these possibilities.

The seemingly modest move 4. Be3 actually prevents a number of Black's stock plans.

#### Black's bishop chase fails

Decades ago, White played 4. f3 first to secure his bishop's position. Only then did he play 5. Be3. But is 4. ... Ng4 really dangerous for White? If not, he should play the flexible—and thus stronger—4. Be3.

Let's first consider the "raid"

on White's bishop: 4. ... Ng4 5. Bg5 h6 6. Bh4 g5 7. Bg3



Diagram 726

After 7. Bg3

Against 4. Be3, this bishop-chase brings Black nothing but additional weaknesses.

### Black should even defer his fianchetto

Moreover, since White's 4. Be3 lays the groundwork for the exchange of dark-square bishops with Qd2 and Bh6, even a plan as basic as Black's fianchetto is affected. Under these circumstances, Black is well advised to fight the "war of the tempo" by putting off the move ... Bg7. Of course, if White plays Qd2 and Bh6 before Black fianchettoes, then after the exchange ... Bf8xh6 Qd2xh6, White's queen on h6 prevents Black from castling. But as practice shows, when White deploys his queen to the flank too early, his center suffers. So, Black needs to manage for a while without 4. ... Bg7.

### Black's trusty ... Nc6 is ineffective

With 4. Be3, White creates yet another unknown for Black,

since White can castle on either side of the board. Putting it positively, Black is spared making his usual decision about whether to play ... c7-c6 or ... Nc6. After 4. Be3, ... Nc6 is of little use here—Black has no reason to attack d4, since White protects it from the very beginning. In the old days, when 4. Be3 was connected only with the plan f2-f3, Qd2 and 0-0-0 and often began with 4. f3, Black's task was easier and clearer. But over the years, White has built a subtle system to fight back!

### Black can't play ... c5, but can play ... c6

After 4. Be3, Black has no real hope of playing the counterblow ... c7-c5. Rather, the pawn must restrict itself to a more modest post.

Like White's 4. Be3, Black's pawn move has several purposes. On the one hand, it strengthens the center, specifically d5. On the other hand, it prepares ... b7-b5. The move ... b7-b5 is valuable by itself—as usual, it threatens ... b5-b4, undermining the defense of the pawn on e4, and prepares the pawn storm that can be useful in case White castles long.

A new, sharp idea, ... a7-a6, seems somewhat too risky for Black.

4. ... c6

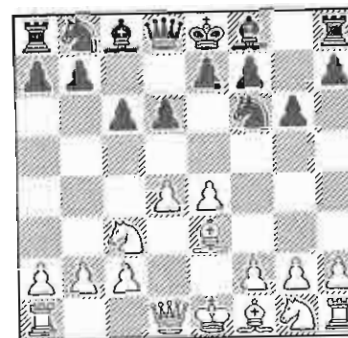


Diagram 727

After 4. ... c6

But at this point, White has to clarify his intentions, at least a bit. His main choices are 5. Qd2, 5. f3, and 5. h3. After 5. a4 (preventing 5. ... b5), Black can reply 5. ... Bg7 (5. ... Qa5, 5. ... Qc7 and 5. ... Nbd7 are also playable). White has already revealed his plans, and Qd2, followed by Bh6, is no longer dangerous. Watch for transpositions into other lines!

The study of the most popular move—5. Qd2—is complicated by the possibilities of transitions to a number of plans.

The move 5. f3 has independent meaning only if White sets his g-pawn in motion as soon as possible.

If White wants to see his f-pawn join the line up on the fourth rank, he must first play h2-h3. (Otherwise after f2-f4, the attack ... Nf6-g4 turns out to be unpleasant.)

Let's take a look at each of White's fifth moves in turn.

### A 5. Qd2

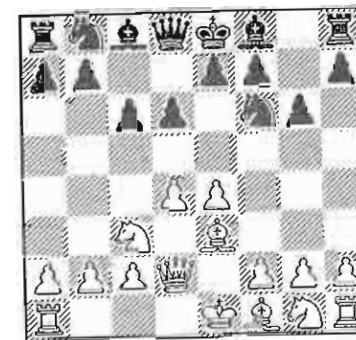


Diagram 728

After 5. Qd2

Black's idea—delaying Bg7 and instead playing 4. ... c6, fighting to be a tempo up after Bh6 and ... Bxh6—is becoming very relevant. He can now continue this strategy.

### 5. ... b5

True, the ultimate consequences of an all-out pawn struggle (i.e., where White plays a2-a4, d4-d5, or e4-e5) are unclear. But 5. ... b5 is perhaps the only active attempt Black has!

Now White has to decide how to defend his e-pawn. He can play 6. Bd3 or 6. f3. Moreover, making this choice finally wedds him to a long-term piece-deployment.

With 6. Bd3, together with Nf3 and 0-0, White concentrates on the center, while with 6. f3, he focuses his sights on the king-side.

### A1 6. Bd3 Nbd7 7. Nf3 e5

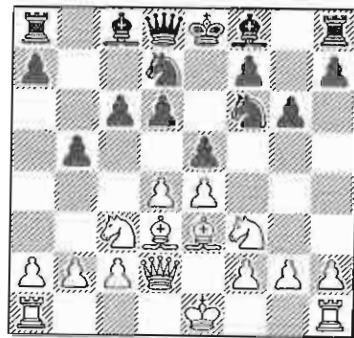


Diagram 729  
After 7... e5

Conceptually, Black's play shouldn't arouse suspicion. If he succeeds in consolidating his position, the advantage of his pawn being on b5 will become evident. At first sight, however, White's lead in development may be disconcerting. The question is—can Black finish mobilizing, all the while keeping the territory his pawns have staked out?

White's logical remedy is the immediate exchange 8. dxe5, combined with activity on both wings—on the kingside (with Nc3-e2-g3, Bh6), and on the queenside (with a2-a4).

Before we begin to examine 8. dxe5, let's determine if White can get something by immediately attacking the pawn on b5 with 8. a4. After 8... b4 9. Ne2 cxd4 10. Nxd4 c5 11. Ne2 Bb7, Black has strong counterplay against White's pawn on e4. (Black's methodology—... b4, ... exd4, ... c5—is a theme from Part II.) So 8. a4 can be ruled out.

What if White puts off the 8. dxe5 capture? Such a plan seems too slow. If White tries 8. 0-0, Black answers with 8... Bb7. White's "natural play"—moves such as Rad1, Rfe1, h3—gives Black time to finish his development. So White usually relies on 8. dxe5, which also eliminates his having repeatedly to calculate the consequences of ... exd4.

### 8. dxe5 dxe5



Diagram 730  
After 8... dxe5

### 9. h3

In 1991 John Nunn discovered that this simple move, preventing ... Ng4, produces an apparent double threat. On the queenside, White brandishes the undermining a2-a4, forcing Black's b-pawn to advance to b4, which could lead to a weakness in Black's queenside. On the kingside, White feints Be3-h6, thus delaying Black from castling short for a long time to come.

Tested for the first time in

the game Nunn—Gelfand, 1991, this idea won for White and determined the fashion in the 4. Be3 system for many years.

What is the right way to react to the move 9. h3? First, Black has to decide which is worse, accepting a weakened queenside or delaying castling. Boris Gelfand played 9... Bg7? because he considered castling promptly the higher priority. In fact, a2-a4 is the main and, actually, the only real threat Black must prevent.

### 9... Bb7!

It turns out that the "threatened" 10. Bh6 inconveniences Black only momentarily: 10... Bxh6 11. Qxh6 Ng8! **TN**, with the idea 12. Qg7 Qf6=.



Diagram 731  
After 12... Qf6

Of course, Black must be prepared for White's attempt to repeat the moves 12. Qe3 Ngf6 13. Qh6, but such a "threat" is, at least normally, hardly a deterrent for Black. But a logical question makes us backtrack a bit. If the idea of a2-a4 is so strong, could

playing 9. a4 instead of 9. h3 be better? Well, after 9. a4 b4 10. Ne2, Black develops his dark-square bishop to a surprising square with 10... Be7!?



Diagram 732  
After 10... Be7

Black's bishop is brought into play and defends the pawn on b4. In fact, Black's bishop deployment is not unique. Have a look at the game Muse—Hickl, 1991, where White, instead of 9. h3 or 9. a4, chose 9. 0-0.



Diagram 733  
After 9... 0-0

Black played 9... Be7!?, and the threat of ... Ng4 (10. Bh6 Ng4 11. Bg7? Rg8 12. Bh6? g5) forced White to play 10. h3.

With Black's bishop on e7, a2-a4 is not so dangerous. Black would play ... b5-b4, where his pawn is now protected.

Muse—Hickl continued 10. ... 0-0 11. a4 b4 12. Na2 a5 13. Nc1 Qc7 14. Nb3 Re8 15. Qe2 Nf8 16. Nfd2 Ne6.



Diagram 734  
After 16. ... Ne6

Although c4 is firmly in White's possession, his opponent's knights have bright prospects for invasion on d4 and f4. The game went on: 17. Nc4 c5 18. Nbd2 Bb7 19. f3 Nh5, with excellent opportunities for Black.

So our main-line continuation 9. h3 seems to be best for White. Among other benefits, it eliminates 9. ... Be7, because 10. Bh6 can no longer be met by ... Ng4.

Back to our main line after 9. ... Bb7.

#### 10. 0-0 Bg7 11. a4 a6

The exchange 12. Bh6 0-0 13. Bxg7 Kxg7 doesn't promise White an advantage. So White maneuvers his knight to g3 and prepares c2-c4.

#### 12. Ne2



Diagram 735  
After 12. Ne2

Black now has two good choices. He can castle at last.

#### 12. ... 0-0 13. Ng3



Diagram 736  
After 13. Ng3

At first glance, White's knight on g3 hasn't any more promise than it had on c3. But on g3, the knight isn't subject to attack by Black's b-pawn and so can reliably defend the e-pawn. Additionally, with the knight out of its way, White's c-pawn has the possibility of moving ahead, separately or in combination with b2-b4. Finally, under certain conditions, White may even play

Ng3-f5.

After 13. ... Qe7 (or 13. ... Qc7 14. Bh6?—14. c4 was better—14. ... Re8 15. Nf5 Bh8!≠, Kogan—Van Wely, 1993), White can fight for advantage with 14. c4 b4 15. c5 a5 (15. ... Nxc5 16. Qxb4+-) 16. Qc2 (Marciano—Leski, 1997).



Diagram 737  
After 16. Qc2

The position assumes the contours of a King's Indian. White has good spots at b3 and c4 for his minor pieces, but the pawn on c5 requires protection. In the game, Black rushed to move his knight from f6 to e6 in order to attack this pawn, but after 16. ... Ne8 17. Rfd1 Nc7 18. Bc4 Kh8 19. Bb3 Ne6 20. Bxe6 Qxe6 21. Rd6±, White locked up control of the d-file. It seems to

us that a better idea is to highlight the weakness on c5 in another way: 16. ... Kh8, ... Ng8 and ... Bh6.

Nevertheless, Black can, if he wants, prevent White from getting his pawn to c5 by a different twelfth move. (See Diagram 735.)

#### 12. ... Qe7!? TN

Kindermann's idea.

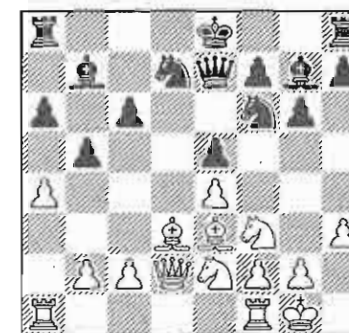


Diagram 738  
After 12. ... Qe7!

If now 13. c4 (13. Ng3 Nc5), Black responds with 13. ... b4 and White doesn't have 14. c5 because of 14. ... Nxc5. Then Black's next move will be ... c6-c5, and White has to forget about any advantage.

**BLACK CAN, IF HE WANTS, PREVENT  
WHITE FROM GETTING HIS  
PAWN TO C5 BY A DIFFERENT  
TWELFTH MOVE.**





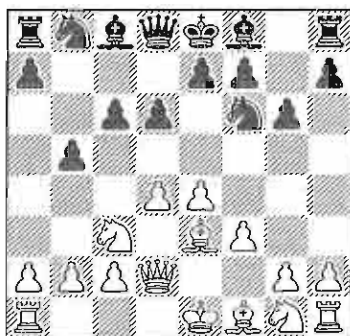
**A2 6. f3**

Diagram 739

After 6. f3

The system 4. Be3 5. Qd2 is associated strongly with this continuation. Like 6. Bd3, 6. f2-f3 shores up e4. But the pawn move brings up a new theme, the pawn storm against Black's king.

In fact, the whole subject of this pawn storm would have been developed into a chapter for Part II of this book—were it not for the fact that its strategy is limited to the variation that combines Be3 and f2-f3.

After f2-f3 and the following g2-g4 and h2-h4, the bulwark of Black's defense in the Pirc—the characteristic kingside formation of the knight on f6, bishop on g7 and pawns on f7, g6, and h7—becomes a target.

White's pawn advance can have a number of ultimate purposes—from pursuing a mating attack to gaining a space advantage. Because the pawn storm's effectiveness isn't restricted to

playing for mate, White can begin the advance without waiting for Black to castle kingside.

The move g2-g4 supports h2-h4-h5. However, g2-g4 creates the independent threat of g4-g5. Attacked in this way, Black's knight on f6 has two squares for retreat—h5 and d7. Both have their own minuses.

The knight can be a liability for Black on h5, especially if White's pawn is still on h2, allowing the threat of the maneuver Ng1-e2-g3. This repositioning forces ... Nh5xg3. (The retreat ... Nh5-g7, allowing h2-h4-h5, is usually even worse.) After h2xg3, White has the semi-open h-file—a positional factor disastrous for Black.

Even the best retreat for Black's knight, d7, has its minuses.

Retiring the knight here leads to an obvious traffic jam on Black's queenside. Black's knight on b8 is especially gridlocked.

Can Black stave off this Hobson's choice between two evils by meeting g2-g4 with h7-h5, and after g4-g5, retreating his f6-knight to h7? Well, it is difficult to imagine how the knight can be re-deployed effectively from there.

So, after g4-g5, retreating the knight to d7 has to be considered a strategic necessity that Black

should foresee and prepare for properly. These are the considerations that Black weighs after 6. f3 to choose his response.

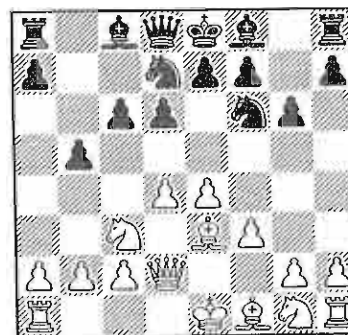
**6. ... Nbd7**

Diagram 740

After 6. ... Nbd7

As in the previous line, Black continues to wage the war for a tempo, keeping his bishop on f8, so that in case of Bh6, he can trade bishops without wasting a move with Bg7. Instead he brings his queen's knight into action.

White has four moves here, 7. g4, 7. 0-0-0, 7. Nh3 and 7. Bh6.

**A2a 7. g4**

White leads with the pawn storm.

**7. ... Nb6**

Best. The knight looks to c4 and frees d7 for the retreat of its colleague on f6.

Once again, White has four moves: 8. g5, 8. h4, 8. b3, and 8. Bd3.

**A2a1 8. g5**

White dislocates Black's knight.

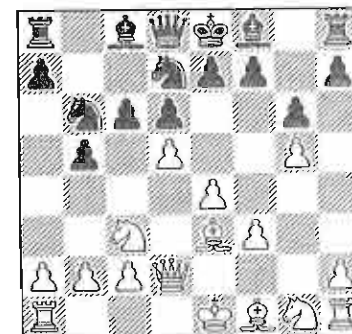
**8. ... Nfd7 9. d5**

Diagram 741

After 9. d5

**9. ... Ne5! TM**

This pawn sacrifice is the only correct choice for Black. Neither 9. ... b4 10. Qd4!, nor 9. ... cxd5 10. Bd4! e5 11. Bxb6 is satisfactory for Black.

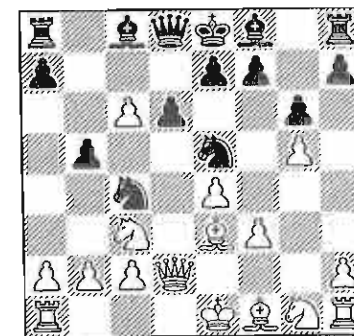
**10. dxc6 Nbc4**

Diagram 742

After 10. ... Nbc4

Now after White moves his queen to a safe square and Black plays ... Nxe3, Black gains obvious compensation for the pawn. Also okay for Black is 11. Bxc4 Nxc4 12. Qd4 Rg8.



Diagram 743  
After 12... Rg8

For example, play could continue 13. Nxb5 Qa5+ 14. Nc3 Be6 followed by 15. ... Bg7 or 13. 0-0-0 Bg7 14. Qd3 Nxb2 15. Kxb2 b4, and Black has the initiative.

#### A2a2 8. h4

White drops the other shoe immediately.

#### 8. ... h5 9. g5 Nfd7 10. d5

This try is repulsed in a similar way to the one we've seen in A2a1.

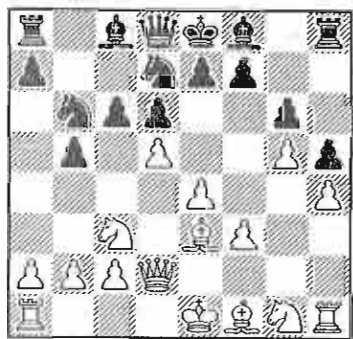


Diagram 744  
After 10... d5

#### 10. ... Ne5! 11. dxc6

Or 11. Bd4 Bg7 12. dxc6 Nbc4 13. c7 Qd7 14. Qc1, with

an unclear position. (Nijboer—Timman, 1997).

#### 11. ... Nbc4 12. Bxc4 Nxc4 13. Qd4 Rg8 14. Nxb5 Qa5+ 15. Nc3 Be6

Black follows up with 16. ... Bg7 and White's position is threatened (Nijboer—Smirin, 1997).

#### A2a3 8. b3

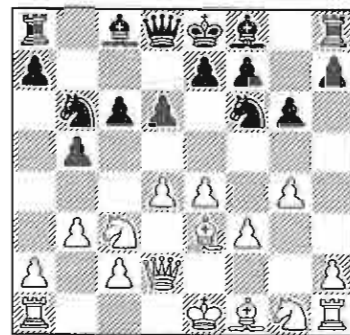


Diagram 745  
After 8... b3

This continuation prevents Black from posting a knight on c4, but White weakens his queenside pawns and eliminates the possibility of castling queenside.

#### 8. ... Qc7

Black is going to prepare ... c6-c5 gradually.

The position allows other approaches too: 8. ... a5 9. g5 Nfd7 10. h4 Bg7 11. h5 Rg8! (it is important for Black to prevent his bishop from being trapped on f8 by h5-h6) 12. Rd1 Qc7 13. Bg2 Bb7 14. f4 b4 15. Nce2 c5 16. c4 a4



Diagram 746  
After 16... a4

Black has sufficient counterplay (Yilmaz—Belotti, 1991).

The game Gazik—Chernin, 1993, is also instructive—8. ... Bb7 9. h4 h5 10. g5 Nfd7 11. f4 Bg7 12. f5 0-0 13. Bh3 (13. Bg2 is more restrained) 13. ... c5! (in case of 13. ... b4 14. Nd1 c5, White regroups with 15. Nf2) 14. fxe6 fxe6 15. Nge2 b4 16. Nd5 Nxd5 17. Be6+ Kh7 18. exd5 Nb6 19. c4 bxc3 e.p. 20. Nxc3.



Diagram 747  
After 20... Nxc3

White's defense is based on maintaining his bishop on e6. That's why 20. ... Bc8! practically resolves the game in Black's favor—21. 0-0-0 Bxe6 22. dxe6 Qc8 23. dxc5 dxc5 24. Rhe1 Rf5 25. Bg1 Qa6—and Black's attack is irresistible.

Alex, months later, tried to follow this once-tested example, but it led him to catastrophe in his game with Braga in 1993: 8. ... Bb7 9. Nge2 h5 (9. ... Qc7!?) 10. g5 Nfd7 11. f4 c5?



Diagram 748  
After 11... c5

Black ought to play 11. ... b4, keeping the White knight off d5. Now White invades the square after 12. dxc5 dxc5 13. Bg2 b4 14. Nd5, and Black's position immediately becomes difficult—14. ... Bg7 15. Rd1 e6 16. Nxb6 axb6 17. c3 bxc3 18. Nxc3 ±.

This game serves both as a case for not over-generalizing (in a previous game, Black did well playing ... c7-c5 prior to ... b5-b4) and as evidence of the complicated problems for both sides in these structures. Let's return to our main-line move, 8. ... Qc7.

**FOLLOWING THIS  
EXAMPLE BY ROUTE  
LED ALEX  
TO CATASTROPHE!**

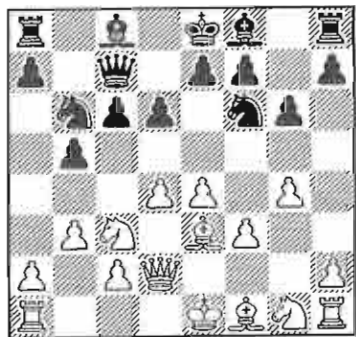


Diagram 749  
After 8. ... Qc7

9. Rd1 Bb7 10. g5 Nfd7 11. d5  
b4 12. dxc6 Bxc6 13. Nb5 Bxb5  
14. Bxb5 Bg7 15. Ne2 0-0 16. 0-0  
a6 17. Bd3 a5 18. f4 Rfc8

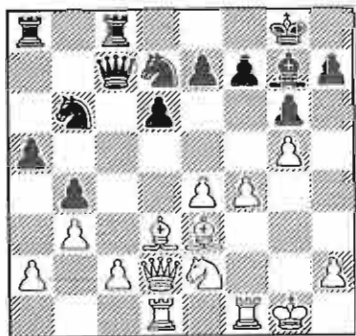


Diagram 750  
After 18. ... Rfc8

Black has achieved a Sicilian-like position with good prospects.

The game Blatny—Chernin, 1996, continued 19. Nd4 Nc5 20. Qf2 Nbd7 21. f5 Ne5 (the knight moves from b6 to e5 in time) 22. Qh4 Qb7 23. f6 Bf8 24. Nf3 Ncxd3 25. cxd3 Rc2 26. d4 Nxf3+ 27. Rxf3 e6 28. Rh3 h6 29. gxh6 Kh7+.

### A2a4 8. Bd3

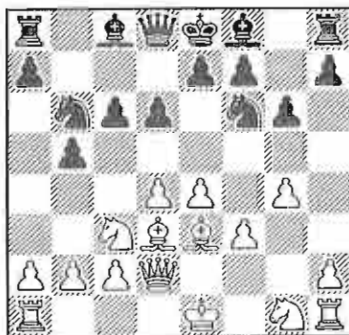


Diagram 751  
After 8. Bd3

### 8. ... Bb7

The move 8. ... Nc4 gives Black the two bishops and an open b-file after 9. Bxc4 bxc4. Nevertheless Black should refuse this opportunity because when his pawn leaves b5, it deprives Black of two of his most important resources— ... c6-c5 and ... b5-b4. Playing 8. ... Bb7, Black continues preparation for ... c6-c5.

### 9. Nge2 h5 10. g5 Nfd7 11. a4



Diagram 752  
After 11. a4

This move doesn't bring White an advantage since it doesn't succeed in preventing Black's actions in the center.

11. ... b4 12. Nd1 a5 13. Nf2 Bg7  
14. Ng3 e5 15. c3 bxc3 16. bxc3  
exd4 17. cxd4 c5 18. Bb5 0-0

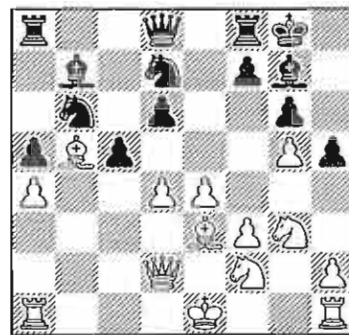


Diagram 753  
After 18. ... 0-0

White's center is unstable (Zuzulkin—Labok, 1990).

### A2b 7. 0-0-0

After this declaration of war, Black secures good chances with any of four moves: 7. ... b4, 7. ... Bb7, 7. ... Qc7, and 7. ... Qa5. We recommend the first, but if one of the other choices strikes you as more interesting or agreeable, you may look into it on your own.

### 7. ... b4

**THE MOVE 7. 0-0-0 IS A DECLARATION OF WAR.  
BLACK SECURES GOOD CHANCES  
WITH ANY OF FOUR MOVES!**

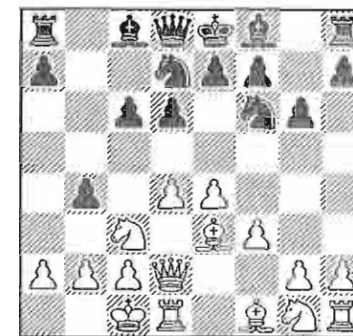


Diagram 754  
After 7. ... b4

White has a problem—where to retreat the knight?

### A2b1 8. Na4

Now Black has a promising pawn sacrifice.

8. ... Qa5 9. b3 Nb6 10. a3 Nxa4  
11. axb4 Qc7 12. bxa4 a5

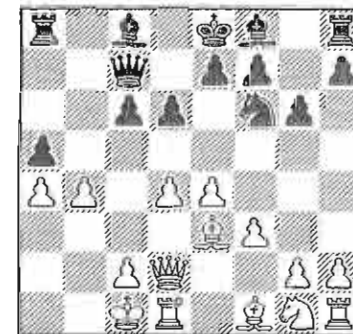


Diagram 755  
After 12. ... a5

The White king's position is too open. Black has a good game—for example, 13. b5 Bd7!.

**A2b2 8. Nb1 a5**



Diagram 756  
After 8. ... a5

These moves lead to a typical situation. The departure of White's knight from c3 removes Black's fear of the breakthrough e4-e5—for example, 9. e5 dxe5 (or 9. ... Nd5 10. exd6 e6) 10. dxe5 Nd5 11. f4 e6, with the idea of play on the queenside with ... a5-a4, now under the cover of the strong knight at d5.

**A2b3 8. Nce2**

A similar picture develops.

**8. ... a5**

And once again, 9. e5 leads to a good game for Black: 9. ... Nd5 10. exd6 e6, with a sharp position in which Black has his share of opportunities (Golubev—Chernin, 1995).

**THE DEPARTURE OF  
WHITE'S KNIGHT FROM  
C3 REMOVES BLACK'S  
FEAR OF E4-E5.**



Diagram 757  
After 10. ... e6

White has another standard plan—9. g4 with the idea of transferring his knight from e2 to g3. This plan leads to a complicated and unclear strategic situation—for example, 9. ... Nb6 (9. ... h6!? deserves attention) 10. Ng3 h5 11. g5 Nfd7 12. h4 d5.

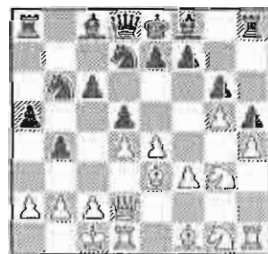


Diagram 758  
After 12. ... d5

Now White played 13. Kb1 (he could sharpen the play with 13. f4 dxe4 14. f5 gxf5 15. Nxf5 Nd5 16. Ng3 N7b6 17. Nxe4 Bf5 18. Ng3 Bg6 19. Bd3 Qd6, when both kings are unsafe in a tactical melee) 13. ... e6 (now if f3-f4, Black has ... d5xe4, winning the fight for d5 and suppressing f4-f5) 14. Bd3 Qc7 15. N1e2 Ba6, and Black has at least equal chances (Tolnai—Chernin, 1994).

**A2c 7. Nh3**

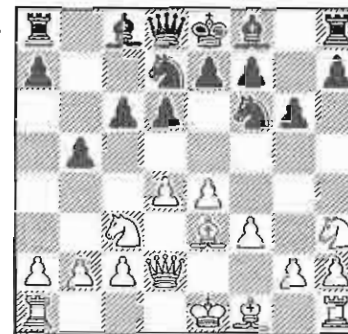


Diagram 759  
After 7. Nh3

The knight is transferred to f2, where it holsters the defense of e4 and can take part in king-side actions with Nf2-g4. But Black can deal with this plan.

**7. ... Bb7 8. Nf2 Bg7 9. Be2 0-0**

Now quiet continuations such as 10. a4 a6 11. 0-0 e5 12. Rfd1 Re8 give both sides equal chances, while the sharper 10. f4 could cause White problems.



Diagram 760  
After 10. f4

Black can continue 10. ... b4 11. Nd1 (11. Na4 c5! 12. dxc5 Bc6! 13. Qxb4 Rb8, with the initiative) 11. ... c5 12. dxc5 Nxc5 13. Bxc5 (13. Qxb4 a5! 14. Qc4

Nxe4) 13. ... dxc5 14. Qxd8 Rfxd8 15. Bf3 e5!.

**A2d 7. Bh6**

Black wins the battle for the tempo. He has delayed Bf8-g7 awaiting just this move.

**7. ... b4**

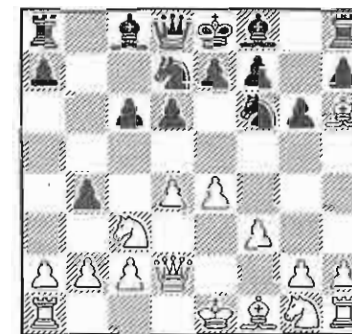


Diagram 761  
After 7. ... b4

**8. Nd1**

If 8. Na4? Bxh6 9. Qxh6 Nb6 10. Nxb6 axb6 11. e5 Nd5 12. Qg7 Rf8 =.

**8. ... Bxh6 9. Qxh6 Qb6**

Now it's best for the White queen to return to the center with 10. Qd2 for defense (10. Nge2 c5). White's whole idea of exchanging bishops results in a waste of his time!

*The tense character of the play in the continuation A2 6. f3 requires from Black the combination of some theoretical knowledge and a good feel for the position. The latter is acquired through study and practice.*

**B 5. f3**

Diagram 762  
After 5. f3

White temporarily abstains from Qd2 in order to get the pawn-storm rolling.

The key difference between A Qd2 and B f2-f3 is seen after 5. f3 b5 6. g4 Nbd7 7. g5 and, since Black hasn't had time to move his queen's knight from d7 to b6, he is forced to play 7. ... Nh5—which is disadvantageous because of Ng1-e2-g3.

As is often the case, Black can oppose this idea with various methods.

He can try to bring some disorder into White's ranks, attacking the pawn on b2 with 5. ... Qb6.

**WHITE TEMPORARILY  
ABSTAINS FROM QD2 IN  
ORDER TO GET THE  
PAWN-STORM ROLLING.**



Diagram 763  
After 5. ... Qb6

Among all White's responses (6. b3, 6. Rb1, 6. Qc1) only 6. Qc1 is positionally motivated, but it has its own drawback, interfering with White's development for some time. But it is also true that the Black queen's location on b6 isn't its best venue, and Black must extricate her. Which side is ultimately better off? Yudasin—Svidler, 1995, continued 6. Qc1 Bg7 7. Nge2 h5!?. (Black simultaneously shuts down two of White's thematic attacks—the pawn-push g2-g4 and the exchange Be3-h6) 8. Nf4 Qc7 9. Qd2.



Diagram 764  
After 9. Qd2

Both queens now re-occupy normal positions. It's obvious that Black successfully prevents

White's kingside pawn-storm. Now Black begins his own thematic attack on the queen's flank with ... b7-b5-b4, and then quickly moves toward the center with ... c6-c5. Soon White has to think about equality.

9. ... Nbd7 10. 0-0-0 b5 11. Kb1 Bb7 12. Qf2 b4 13. Nce2 c5 14. dxc5 dxc5 15. Qg3 0-0-0 16. Nc1 Bh6 ♣



Diagram 765  
After 16. ... Bh6

Although 5. ... Qb6 is an interesting move, and one you may want to examine on your own, we prefer another way.

5. ... b5 6. g4



Diagram 766  
After 6. g4

This early advance of the g-

pawn has its drawbacks, which can at times be highlighted by Black's ... h7-h5. The question for Black is when and especially how to play this move. The consequences of ... h7-h5 by itself can be unfavorable for Black—for example, 6. ... Bg7 7. Qd2 h5 8. g5 Nfd7 9. f4 Nb6 10. Nf3



Diagram 767  
After 10. Nf3

Notice the rising strategic danger for Black. White is going to play f4-f5 and castle short. This plan, in connection with the possibility of Nf3-h4, is very menacing to Black. So the idea of playing ... h7-h5 only after White plays h2-h4, blocking h4 to his knight, suggests itself. Through the process of elimination, we come to the solution—Black must play a prophylactic "waiting" move.

**6. ... h6!**

Now Black needn't worry about Be3-h6. The position requires White to play h2-h4, and Black achieves his aim. Alex's 1999 game with Black against Anand illustrates these ideas perfectly.



## 7. Qd2 Bg7 8. h4 h5

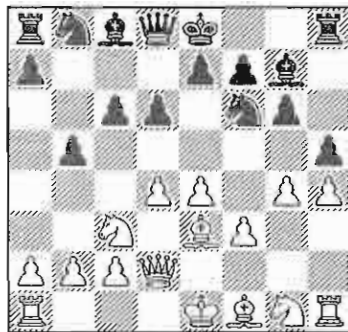


Diagram 768  
After 8. ... h5

Solving the first part of the problem, Black now has to get in ... b5-b4 and ... c6-c5 as soon as possible as counterplay against White's intended f3-f4-f5.

The game continued:

9. g5 Nfd7 10. Nge2 Bb7 11. Ng3 0-0 12. f4 b4 13. Nd1 c5



Diagram 769  
After 13. ... c5

14. d5 Nb6 15. c4 bxc3 e.p. 16. Nxc3 Ba6! 17. Bxa6 Nxa6 18. Qe2 Qc8 19. f5



Diagram 770  
After 19. f5

## 19. ... Nc7

Black obviously needs to play both ... Nd7 and ... Nc7, but he should begin with 19. ... Nd7 ♞, preventing the dangerous possibility 20. f6! exf6 21. Nxf5.

But White continued 20. 0-0 (Black's inaccuracy went unpunished) 20. ... Nd7 21. Nxf5. (After 21. ... Qa6 White's game is unpromising, so White attacks, giving up material) 21. ... gxh5 22. Qxh5 Rb8 23. Rf2 Ne8.

Black takes f6 under control and prepares, just in case, to counter-sacrifice a piece on this square. White tried 24. Raf1.



Diagram 771  
After 24. Raf1

24. ... Ne5? (Black should go on the counterattack with 24. ... Qa6! ♞, with the idea of 25. ... Qd3. This poses White some very difficult problems. With the game move, Black not only loses the chance for this specific counterattack, but loses the game as well) 24. Rg2 Nc4 25. Bc1 Bd4+ 26. Kh1 Ng7 27. Qh6 Rxb2 28. Bxb2 Nxb2 29. Rf3 Bxc3 30. f6 Ne8 31. g6 Nxf6 32. gxh7 ++, winning (32. ... Kxf7 33. Qg6 checkmate).

Despite the outcome, it's clear that the opening battle was resolved in Black's favor.

### Black's play with the kingside pawns

We need now to digress to fill you in on some special ideas about kingside pawn play in the Pirc. On page 376, we saw how Svidler creatively treated the h-pawn (7. ... h5!) in his game with Yudasin. The idea of breaking the initiative of White's g-pawn with the help of ... h7-h6 was derived from Svidler's following two games, perfect examples of Pirc Defense play.

Ivanchuk—Svidler, 1997 went: 1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Be3 d6 4. Qd2 a6 5. f3 Nf6 6. Nc3 Nbd7 7. 0-0-0 b5 8. Kb1 Bb7 9. Nh3 c5 10. dxc5 dxc5 11. g4.

**THE IDEA OF BREAKING THE INITIATIVE OF WHITE'S G-PAWN WITH THE HELP OF ... h7-h6 WAS SVIDLER'S.**



Diagram 772  
After 11. g4

Now Black played 11. ... h6! 12. Nf4 e6 13. h4 Qc7 14. Qh2 Ne5 15. Nd3 Nfd7 16. Bf4 0-0-0 ♞ 17. Be2, draw.

Ioseliani—Svidler, 1997, went:

1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6 4. Be3 a6 5. Qd2 Nd7 6. f3 b5 7. h4 Ngf6 8. g4.



Diagram 773  
After 8. g4

Again, Black has 8. ... h6! 9. Nh3 Nb6 10. 0-0-0 b4 11. Nb1 a5 12. Nf4 Nfd7 13. Bb5 Bb7 14. d5.



Diagram 774  
After 14. d5

Svidler now played the star move 14. ... c5!!, and the game continued 15. dxc6 e.p. Bxc6 16. Qe2 (16. Bxc6 Nc4+, with the threat of mate) 16. ... Rc8, and Black won in 34 moves.

Remember ... h7-h6 in the game Aseev—Zakharevich from Part II? The resounding effect of this previously unnoticed move by the h-pawn is based on the requirements of the position. Like Black, who is fighting for the center with flank movements such as ... b7-b5-b4, White tried to influence the center with the help of g2-g4-g5. The move ... h7-h6 postpones this threat.

Conforming to the conditions framed after 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Be3 c6 5. f3 b5 6. g4, Black plays 6. ... h6! to put the brakes on White's g-pawn advance. And then 6. ... h6! later expands to ... h6-h5. So evolve ideas in modern chess.

Let's finish up our other main lines against 4. Be3 c6.

### ♞ 5. h3

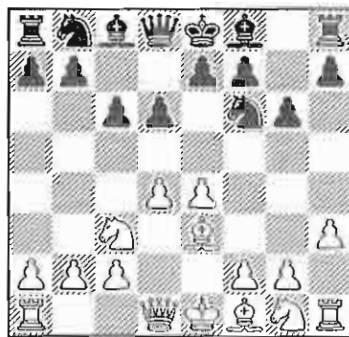


Diagram 775  
After 5. h3

Here White is back to maintaining his center. Black's 4. ... c6 doesn't directly threaten White's center. White makes use of the respite to protect his bishop on e3 and to prepare f2-f4. At the same time, 5. h3 also prevents an immediate ... b7-b5—if 5. ... b5, then 6. e5! Nfd7 7. exd6 exd6 8. d5!. (We've seen this idea before.)

So, 5. h3 doesn't promise Black an easy life. Such is fate in the 4. Be3 system. Nevertheless, there is no reason to panic. Black has to choose between two possible moves: 5. ... Nbd7 or 5. ... Bg7. After 5. ... Bg7, a problem surfaces after simple play—6. f4 0-0 7. Nf3 b5 8. e5 ♣, and Black is one move late with the counterblow ... b5-b4. That's why we recommend 5. ... Nbd7.

5. ... Nbd7

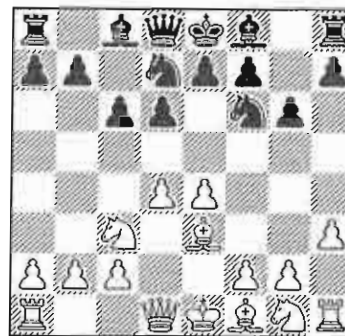


Diagram 776  
After 5. Nbd7

Now the main possibilities for White are the active 6. f4 and the "quiet" 6. Nf3.

### ♞ 6. f4

Now Black has to consider an unusual plan available to his opponent. If at some moment Black plays ... e7-e5, White has the following strategic idea available to him: Qf3, then dxe5 and f4-f5, following up with g2-g4. It can work efficiently enough with Black's bishop on g7, but much less so with Black's dark-square bishop operating on the a3-f8 diagonal. One more reason for Black's waiting to commit this

bishop to g7!

Black has two choices, 6. ... e5 and 6. ... b5! (stopping e4-e5 indirectly).

### ♞ 6... e5

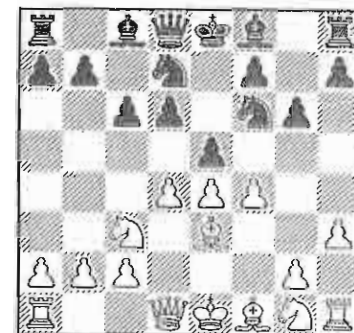


Diagram 777  
After 6. ... e5

This seems a little early for Black to commit to this pattern of play, but the move hasn't been refuted. Black holds e5 from the side with ... Qa5.

For example, play can continue 7. Qf3 Qa5 8. Bd3 Bg7 9. dxe5 dxe5 10. f5 b5 11. g4 b4, with counterplay for Black (Harlov—Labok, 1992).

**SO 5. h3 DOESN'T PROMISE BLACK AN EASY LIFE.  
SUCH IS FATE IN THE SYSTEM  
BEGINNING WITH 4. BE3.  
NEVERTHELESS, THERE IS  
NO REASON TO PANIC.**



## —Recommended Line—

**C1b 6. ... b5!**

We recommend this move.

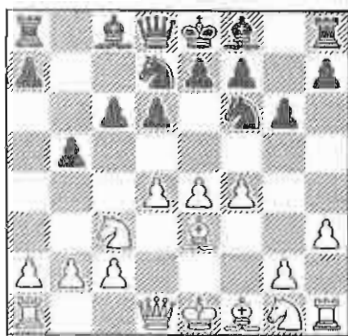


Diagram 778  
After 6. ... b5

Black not only prevents 7. e5, in view of 7. ... b4 8. exf6 (8. Nce2 Nd5) 8. ... bxc3 9. bxc3 Nxf6 ♣, but also fights against White's main idea—7. Qf3: 7. ... b4 8. Nb1 Bb7 9. Nd2 Qc7 10. Bd3 Bg7 11. Ne2 c5 = (Berezuk—Stohl, 1999).

If White plays the calm 7. a3, the inclusion of the moves a2-a3 and ... b7-b5 looks good for Black after the “normal” 7. ... e5. Our recommendation, however, is 7. ... Nb6! (ready to meet 8. e5 with ... Nfd5), and now 8. Nf3 a6 9. Bd3 e6! 10. 0-0 c5 is okay for Black—for example, 11. f5 exf5 12. exf5 c4 13. fxg6 hxg6 14. Be2 Nbd5 15. Bg5 Be7 ♣.

After the solid 7. Bd3, Black can continue 7. ... e5 8. Qf3 Bb7, or 7. ... Bb7 8. e5 b4 9. Ne4 Nd5.

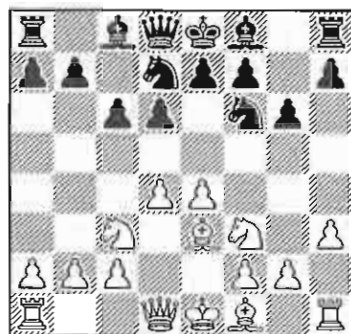
**C2 6. Nf3**

Diagram 779  
After 6. Nf3

This placid choice brings with it a drop of poison.

We remind you that in a variety of Classical Systems we considered a fianchetto on b7 to be the strongest plan for Black. But after ... c7-c6, this idea is hindered, so we need to consider the continuation 6. Nf3 White's attempt to reach an improved version of 5. h3, 6. Be3 in the Classical System.

But Black can cross up White's plan. Once again, he can delay ... Bg7.

**6. ... Qc7 7. a4**

Black defends against e4-e5. White must prevent ... b7-b5.

**7. ... b6**

It's necessary to head off further invasion by White with 8. a5.

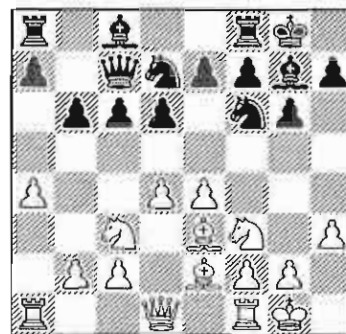
**8. Be2 Bg7 9. 0-0 0-0**

Diagram 780  
After 9. 0-0

**10. Nd2**

Although this is the main move, 10. Qd2 is possible but not very promising, i.e.: 10. ... Bb7 11. Rad1 a6 12. Bf4 e5 13. dxe5 dxe5 14. Bh2 Rad8 ♣.

**10. ... e5 11. dxe5!**

The straightforward 11. f4 exd4 12. Bxd4 Bb7 13. Bf2 a6! **TN** (13. ... Rfe8 Campora—Spragett, 1990) 14. Bf3 b5 15. axb5 cxb5! gives Black one more tempo in comparison with the main line.

**11. ... Nxe5**

If 11. ... dxe5 12. Nc4±.

**12. f4 Ned7**

**BLACK'S ... C7-C6  
HINDERS HIS IDEA  
OF ATTACKING  
WHITE'S E-PAWN  
WITH ... BB7.**



Diagram 781  
After 12. ... Ned7

The pawn on d6 can turn out to be vulnerable because of the possibility of Nd2-c4. But the tactical resource ... d6-d5 helps Black combat this idea. That an immediate 13. Nc4 doesn't bring success is known from the game Short—Ftacnik 1990: 13. Nc4 d5! 14. exd5 Nxd5 15. Nxd5 cxd5 16. Qxd5 Ba6 17. Rae1 Rad8.

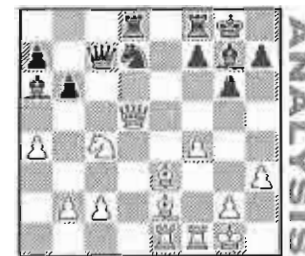


Diagram 782  
After 17. ... Rad8

A postponed attack with Nc4 is parried with tactics: 13. Bf3 Bb7 14. Re1 (14. Nc4 d5 15. exd5 cxd5 16. Nxd5 [or 16. Ne5 Nxe5 17. dxe5 Qxe5 18. Bd4 Qd6=] 16. ... Nxd5 17. Bxd5 Rad8! 18. Bxb7 Ne5!) 14. ... Rac8!



Diagram 783  
After 14. ... Rac8

This preventive move strengthens Black's influence on the c-file, which can be opened at any time (the same idea shows up in the game Polugaevsky—Uhlmann, 1976) 15. Bf2 (15. Nc4 d5! 16. exd5 Nxd5) 15. ... a6! 16. Bg3 Rfe8.



Diagram 784  
After 16. ... Rfe8

Now the final attempts at attack, 17. e5 dxe5 18. fxe5 Nxe5 19. Nc4 Rcd8!; and 17. Nc4 d5, do not succeed. And if Black is permitted, he plays ... b6-b5 with fine play.

It is interesting that the system with 5. h3, despite its logical nature, is less frequently tested. Most popular, 5. Qd2 often yields White good results against unprepared opponents.

As we see, the system 4. Be3 in the Pirc presents a serious challenge for Black, demanding in many cases not only concrete knowledge but also a good feeling for the position.

### The Modern move order against 4. Be3

The Modern move order is typically less crowded with theoretical lines. Nevertheless, before our calendar-odometers rolled over to 2000, we would have had to recommend avoiding the Modern against 4. Be3.

A quick recap of history will give you some important background.

1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6 4. Be3

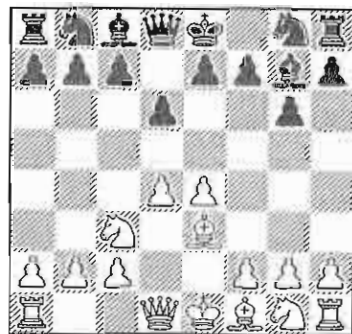


Diagram 785  
After 4. Be3

As always, the location of the Black knight on g8 makes this position distinct from the Pirc. At least temporarily, White's idea of exchanging bishops with Qd2-Bh6 is removed from the agenda. Also, in the absence of an object

of attack on f6, the advance of White's g-pawn (with f2-f3, g2-g4-g5) becomes less compelling.

From Black's perspective, it is more difficult to play ... e7-e5 in the Modern than in the Pirc. That's why at first he acts on the queen's flank, organizing ... b7-b5. With that aim in mind, Black usually continues 4. ... a6 or 4. ... c6. His future plans (after ... b7-b5) often include ... c7(c6)-c5 (after proper preparation), taking the play to the center.

With this last move in mind, 4. ... a6 seems more promising than 4. ... c6, because playing ... c7-c5 directly would save a valuable tempo.

**A** 4. ... a6

Things went well for Black until Morozevich invented the move order

**A1** 5. f4 b5 6. Be2!

Played with the intention of playing e4-e5 quickly and liquidating the Black bishop on b7 with the move Be2-f3. After all, such play in the center is a very logical retort to Black's wing operation.

For a time, Morozevich's plan dealt Black's 4. ... a6 a seri-

ous blow. But as usual, new defensive ideas surfaced.



Diagram 786  
After 6. Be2(!)

Black found that he should not follow the path 6. ... Bb7 7. Bf3 b4 8. e5! Qc8 9. Ne4. Instead, we recommend dislodging White's knight.

**6** ... b4! 7. Nb1

White's knight is driven away from the center. It's true, the drawback of 6. ... b4 is that this pawn is artificially isolated from the support of its colleagues, but this alienation isn't such a big problem here.

**7** ... Bb7 8. Bf3 Nf6

Now after 9. e5, Black has a convenient answer—9. ... Nd5. So it's better for White to reserve the pawn-push for the future.

**9**. Qd3 Nbd7 10. Nd2

**FOR A TIME, MOROZEVICH'S PLAN DEALT  
BLACK'S 4. ... A6 A SERIOUS BLOW.**

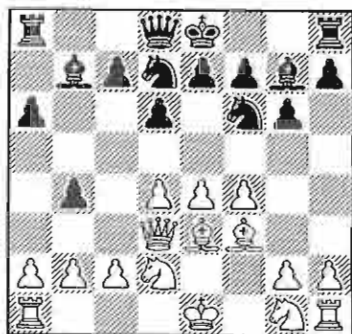


Diagram 787  
After 10. Nd2

Black now has to plan for the liberating ... c7-c5. In the game Marciano—M. Gurevich, 1997, Black tried to ensure the immediate transition to the Dragon structure with 10. ... Qc8 11. Ne2 c5 12. dxc5 Nxc5 13. Bxc5 Qxc5, but after 14. e5! Nd5 15. Nb3 Qb5 16. 0-0-0, he ran into big problems on the h1-a8 diagonal.



Diagram 788  
After 16. 0-0-0

16. ... e6 17. exd6 Qb6 18. f5! gxf5 19. Ned4 0-0-0 20. Nxf5! ±.

**BLACK HAS TO PLAN  
THE LIBERATING ... C5.**



Diagram 789  
After 20. Nf5

Black played better and simpler in Galkin—Ponomarev, 2000.

**10. ... 0-0 11. c4**

White strengthens d4. Also deserving attention is 11. Ne2, when Black answers 11. ... c5.

**11. ... bxc3 e.p. 12. bxc3 c5 13. Ne2**

If 13. d5, then ... a5, planning 14. ... Ba6

**13. ... cxd4 14. cxd4**

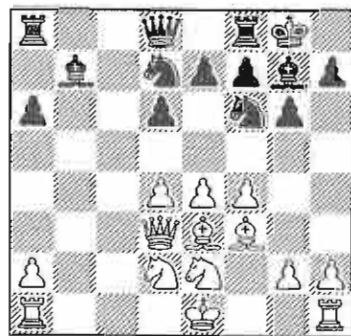


Diagram 790  
After 14. cxd4

Now with 14. ... e5, Ponomarev strikes consecutive hammer-blows at White's center. Now, although desirable for White positionally, 15. fxe5 dxe5

16. d5 (restricting Black's bishop) is not good in view of the tactical response 16. ... Nxd5 17. exd5 e4, winning the rook on a1.) So White continues 15. Rb1 Bc6 16. 0-0 Bb5. The move ... a7-a6 once more shows its usefulness. Black now has an easy position to play: 17. Qc3 Rc8 18. Qb2 Rfe8 19. Rbe1 ♞, and here the opponents made peace.

This game gives Black some answers about how to react to Morozevich's system. Now we have to examine other possibilities White has after 4. ... a6 other than 5. f4 with the idea of Be2.

**A2 5. Qd2**

The most popular move.

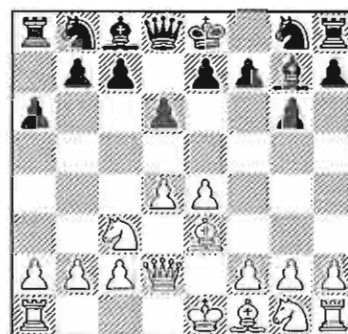


Diagram 791  
After 5. Qd2

Here Black usually chooses 5. ... Nd7 or an immediate 5. ... b5, and these moves are seen to be about equal. However, this seems to us to be a misunderstanding, because after 5. ... b5 6. a4 b4 7. Nd1, the move 7. ... a5 is forced, resulting not only in

the loss of tempo but also in the weakening of the b5-square. We prefer our main line.

**5. ... Nd7!**

Instead of ... b5. Now White has chosen two different moves.

**A2a 6. f3 b5 7. a4 b4 8. Nd1**

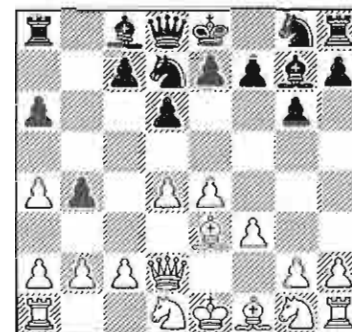


Diagram 792  
After 8. Nd1

Here Black has, instead of 8. ... a5, a far more logical answer.

**8. ... Rb8**

Black maintains the pawn on a6, and importantly, puts the rook on a potentially open file, since here c2-c3 also continues to be the best plan for White. These details improve Black's chances in his struggle against the opponent's center, which remains strong in any case.

**9. c3 bxc3 10. bxc3**

Black has two good moves—10. ... c5 and 10. ... Ngf6, with the idea of ... 0-0 and ... e7-e5.

In the first case, after 10. ... c5 11. a5, we reach Diagram 793.





Diagram 793  
After 11. ... a5

Alex succeeded in winning a good game against Kindermann, using a pawn sacrifice: 11. ... d5! 12. exd5 (after 12. e5 e6, with the idea ... Ne7-c6, and the a-pawn is weak) 12. ... cxd4 13. Bxd4 Ngf6 14. Bc4 Qc7 15. Qe2 0-0 16. Nh3 Bb7 17. Ne3.



Diagram 794  
After 17. Ne3

Alex now got to deliver the blow planned a few moves earlier: 17. ... Nxd5!! 18. Bxd5 Bxd4 19. cxd4 Qc3+ 20. Kf2 Bxd5.

**ONLY AFTER ANALYZING  
THE GAME DID ALEX  
REALIZE 5. ... Nd7 IS  
STRONGER THAN 5. ... e5.**



Diagram 795  
After 20. ... Bxd5

21. Rhc1 (21. Nxd5 Qxd4+ 22. Ne3 Rb2+) 21. ... Qxd4 22. Rd1 Qh4+ 23. Kgl Be6 24. Nf2 Rb5, with a winning position for Black (Kindermann—Chernin, 1996).



Diagram 796  
After 24. ... Rb5

To Alex's regret, it was only after analyzing this game that he understood that the move 5. ... Nd7 is stronger than 5. ... b5, and in the game he and his opponent actually exchanged inexactitudes in the move order 5. ... b5? (5. ... Nd7!) 6. f3? (6. a4!) 6. ... Nd7, reaching by transposition the same position we have just discussed.

White can impede the move ... b7-b5 by playing 5. a4 at once after 4. ... a6. Or he can restrain the b-pawn after 5. Qd2 Nd7

6. a4. In such cases, Black's best reaction is to play ... b7-b6 and ... Bb7. Then he can try ... Ngf6, or even better, ... e7-e6, intending ... Ng8-e7. In general, the move ... e7-e6 is an important preparation for ... c7-c5 in such a structure, as it prevents White's reply d4-d5.

Another plan of White's is the quick offensive push of his h-pawn.

#### A2b 6. h4



Diagram 797  
After 6. h4

#### 6. ... h5

After this "natural" move. White's idea is to transfer his knight through h3 to g5.

#### 7. Nh3

Black, because of his own knight on d7, doesn't even have the option of ... Bxh3, which we would otherwise recommend in this case.

But the good news is that White's knight maneuver isn't that dangerous for Black after

all—for example, after 7. ... b5 8. Ng5 Bb7 9. a4 c6 10. Rd1 Qc7= 11. f4?! Nh6 12. Be2 Nf6 13. Bf3 Nfg4, both sides have knights on the g-file in their opponent's territory.



Diagram 798  
After 13. ... Nfg4

Black has excellent counterplay (Sokolov—Hillarp-Persson, 1997).

Nevertheless, if Black doesn't want to allow White's knight on g5, he can play an equally strong move, 6. ... h6.

Generally, after 4. ... a6, White has many moves—for example, 5. Bd3, 5. g3, 5. h3, and 5. Bc4. Combinations of these moves are also possible. They aren't as important as 5. f4 or 5. Qd2, but deserve Black's respect all the same. When Black runs into such a move, he has to follow the general principles of the Pirc formulated in Part II of this book.

As we know, the theory of the Modern stockpiles relatively few variations. But it does house an alternative to 4. ... a6.

### 4. ... c6



Diagram 799  
After 4. ... c6

This continuation has not been refuted, but is admittedly slightly less ambitious.

As we've observed, after this move ... c6-c5 isn't impossible, but it obviously involves the loss of a tempo.

With 4. ... c7-c6, the character of struggle is determined by the plan White chooses. After the expected ... b7-b5, he can try to undermine Black's b5-pawn with a2-a4 (and then after the answer ... b5-b4, retreat his knight and play c2-c3).

Whether or not White chooses to castle long, he can push his g- and h-pawns. At last, in the spirit of what we have seen so often in the Pirc, White can use "natural" development—Bd3, Nf3 and 0-0, with the idea of playing in and through the center, perhaps with e4-e5, as well as on the kingside with Qd2 and Bh6.

The absence of a Black

knight on f6, reducing the quantity of variations, is a siren tempting stronger chess players who want wins against less experienced opponents. Perhaps the sharpest lines appear after White's attempts to construct the broad center of d4, e4, and f4. Then Black must take very concrete countermeasures. The game Almasi—Chernin, 1998, is an example.

### 5. Qd2 b5 6. Bd3 Nd7 7. f4

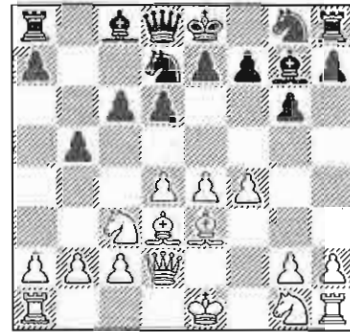


Diagram 800  
After 7. f4

Now the immediate 7. ... e5 isn't very effective because of 8. fxe5 dxe5 9. d5! cxd5 (9. ... b4 10. dxc6 bxc3 11. cxd7+ Bxd7 12. Qxc3) 10. Nxd5, with the initiative. But Black instead has a better move.

### 7. ... Ngf6!

This move gains a tempo because of the positional threat of ... Ng4. White's next move prepares a refuge for his Bishop. **8. Nf3 e5!**



Diagram 801  
After 8. ... e5!

Black prevents e4-e5 literally at the last moment.

### 9. fxe5 dxe5 10. dxe5 Ng4 11. Bg5 Qb6

Although this last move appears sufficient to keep the balance, Black has a stronger move.

### 11. ... Qc7

Both players overlooked that after 12. e6 fxe6 13. h3 (with the idea of 13. ... Nge5 14. Nxe5 Nxe5 15. 0-0, preventing Black from castling short), Black has 13. ... Qg3+. In many cases, Black's queen is better on c7, influencing e5, rather than on b6.

The actual game continued

12. e6 fxe6 13. h3 Nge5 14. Nxe5 Nxe5 15. 0-0-0 0-0 16. Rhf1



Diagram 802  
After 16. Rhf1

16. ... a6 (One more inaccuracy—it is better, as analysis later showed, to play 16. ... Re8!)

In the game, Alex succeeded in holding after 17. Rxf8+ Bxf8 18. Rf1 Bb7 19. Bf4 Bg7 20. Bh6 Bxh6 21. Qxh6 c5 22. Qg5 Qc7 23. Qf6, draw.

This game illustrates the complicated character of play in this system, as well as Black's resources.

Alex himself plays 4. ... c6 less often than 4. ... a6. On the other hand, 4. ... c6 frequently transposes to positions in the Pirc, examined in detail in the first part of this chapter.

### Summary

*After 4. Be3, Black should play 4. ... c6, fighting flexibility with flexibility. White has a wide range of moves, plans and ideas, but in each case, Black has at least one (and sometimes more than one) adequate response.*

*The Modern move order offers Black two good choices after 4. Be3—4. ... c6 and the newly popular 4. ... a6.*

## White Plays 4. Be3

## Memory Markers!



MARKER 1

Diagram 803  
Black to move



MARKER 2

Diagram 804  
Black to move



MARKER 3

Diagram 805  
Black to move



MARKER 4

Diagram 806  
White to move



MARKER 5

Diagram 807  
White to move



MARKER 6

Diagram 808  
White to move

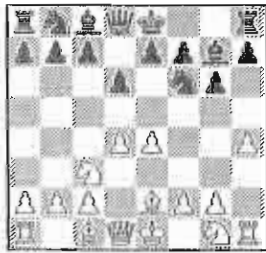
## White Plays 4. Be3

## Solutions to Memory Markers!

- No. 1 1. ... Ng8!, to meet 2. Qg7 with 2. ... Qf6 =. (See page 365.)
- No. 2 1. ... Nd5 2. exd6 e6! (See page 374.)
- No. 3 1. ... dxe4, winning the fight for d5 and suppressing f4-f5. (See page 374.)
- No. 4 1. e5! Nd7 2. exd6 exd6 3. d5! ±. (See page 380.)
- No. 5 1. e5! Qc8 2. Ne4, with advantage. (See page 385.)
- No. 6 1. fxe5 dxe5 2. d5! cxd5 (2. ... b4 3. dxc6 bxc3 4. cxd7+ Bxd7 5. Qxc3) 3. Nxd5, with the initiative. (See page 390.)

## 21: White Plays 4. Be2 & 5. h4 Some Important Points to Look For

This brief chapter covers a system for White whose strategic basis is narrow. He leaves his center to the mercy of "fate" and sends his h-pawn on an early suicide mission.



- ◆ Black's best move here is 5. ... c5!, starting Operation Enter the Dragon.

See Diagram 809.



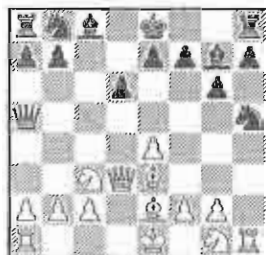
- ◆ With 7. ... e6, Black meets the wing attack with a counter in the center.

See Diagram 812.



- ◆ With 9. ... Nxh5, Black permits destruction of his kingside pawn structure—but he makes his opponent pay the same price on the queenside.

See Diagram 814.



- ◆ Black is ready to meet 10. Bxh5 with 10. ... Bxc3+, he is also ready for the endgame after 10. Qb5+.

See Diagram 817.

## Chapter 21 White Plays 4. Be2 & 5. h4 The kamikaze h-pawn

In this chapter, White's most-appearing 4. Be2 is preparation for an immediate attack with his h-pawn. Black responds, as usual, with 4. ... Bg7. **1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Be2 Bg7 5. h4**

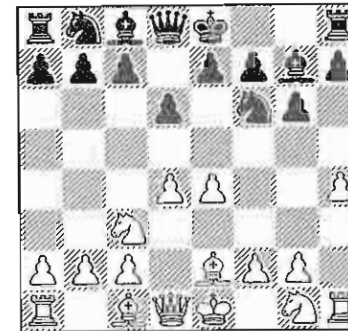


Diagram 809  
After 5. h4

This position belongs to the same group as 4. Be3 with f2-f3, when White targets the Black kingside. But the positional basis of 5. Be2 with h2-h4 is considerably narrower. White leaves the center to the mercy of fate in favor of the possible dividends of the h-pawn's suicide mission. In

the 4. Be3 system, White pays attention to his pawn on e4 and to his opponent's idea of ... c7-c5, d4xc5, ... Qa5. But in the current line, he ignores these matters. That's why Black can begin Operation Enter the Dragon.

5. ... c5 6. dxc5

White can also play 6. d5.



Diagram 810  
After 6. d5

Now Black often continues 6. ... h5, achieving good play. Additionally, it seems to us that Black can ignore the h-pawn's advance in favor of 6. ... 0-0, because White has to deal with the consequences of both ... b7-b5 (Operation Bravo Pawn) and ... e7-e6. In

For example, after 6. ... 0-0 7. h5 b5 8. hxc6, we reach the following position.



Diagram 811

Analysis after 8. hxc6

Black recaptures with 8. ... hxc6 (Black can even consider ignoring the dictum to capture toward the center and play 8. ... fxg6) 9. Bxb5 Qa5 10. Bd2 (10. Qd3 Nxe4) 10. ... Nxe4 11. Nxe4 Qxb5, and White, with his problems in the center and on the queen's flank, can't make effective use of the h-file.

Of course, 7. ... e6 is equally worthy of serious attention. It meets the wing attack with a counter in the center—the classical prescription.

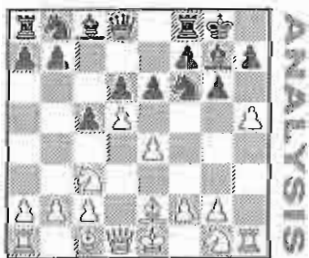


Diagram 812

After 7. ... e6

White's attack develops

slowly, and he has a tough time containing the center.

Indeed, it's likely this weakness of strategy applies to the whole 4. Be2, 5. h4 system. In fact, it's not clear that the main-line 6. dxc5 is any better than 6. d5. Black achieves excellent positions against both moves. The continuation 6. dxc5 is simply more common.

Back to our main line.

### 6. ... Qa5

Nothing remains for White but to defend e4 by 7. Kf1 or 7. Qd3. In both cases, after 7. ... Qxc5, White continues to pin his hopes on the march of the h-pawn.

The first of two possible versions of Operation Enter the Dragon begins.

### A 7. Kf1 Qxc5



Diagram 813

After 7. ... Qxc5

### 8. Be3

White naturally gains a tempo.

### 8. ... Qa5 9. h5



Diagram 814

After 9. h5

### 9. ... Nxb5!

An eye for an eye! Black acquiesces to the destruction of kingside pawn structure, but he makes his opponent pay the same price on the queen's flank. True, Black has to part with his dark-square bishop, but it's one of those times the trade on c3 is to his advantage. (With alternative 9. ... gxh5 Black faces more complicated tasks, though they are solvable.)

### 10. Bxh5 Bxc3! 11. bxc3 gxh5



Diagram 815

After 11. ... gxh5

Now after 12. Rxh5 Black has time to take the pawn on c3—12. ... Qxc3 13. Bd4 Qc4+. If White plays 12. Ne2, Black plays ... Be6 and his pieces start to eye the a6-f1 diagonal with the ideas of ... Bc4 and ... Qa6. Black counters his opponent's dark-square strategy with a light-square strategy. At the same time the Black king can seek shelter on the queenside. Black stands better.

### B 7. Qd3

This continuation doesn't deprive White of castling, and it adds the possibility in some variations of forcing an exchange of queens by checking on Qb5. However, it doesn't promise White any special advantages in comparison with 7. Kf1.

### 7. ... Qxc5



Diagram 816

After 7. ... Qxc5

### 8. Be3 Qa5 9. h5 Nxb5

But not 9. ... Nxe4??, 10. Qb5+, winning.



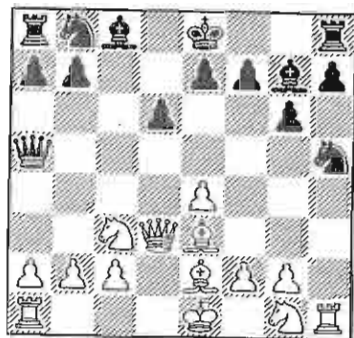


Diagram 817  
After 9... Nxf5

Black follows his idea in the previous line, aiming to spoil White's queenside pawns. Now White has two main choices, 10. Bxh5 and 10. Qb5+.

**B1** 10. Bxh5 Bxc3+ 11. bxc3 gxf5 12. Ne2 Nc6

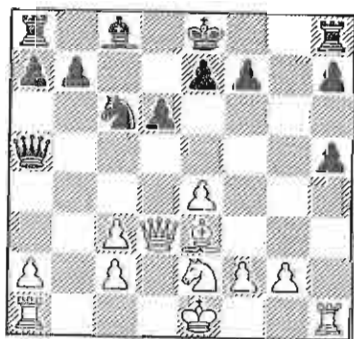


Diagram 818  
After 12... Nc6

If White goes for the h-pawn

**FROM THE MODERN MOVE ORDER, BLACK IS WELL ADVISED TO PLAY 4... Nf6, TRANSPOSING INTO THE PIRC.**

with 13. Nf4 Bg4! 14. f3, he runs into difficulties after 14. ... Ne5+, and now the natural 15. Qd4? fails to 15. ... Bxf3.

In Benjamin—Chernin, 1992, White avoided the destruction of his queenside by playing 10. Qb5+.

**B2** 10. Qb5+ Qxb5 11. Nxb5 Na6 12. Bxh5 gxf5 13. 0-0-0

Somewhat better is 13. Bd4 +.

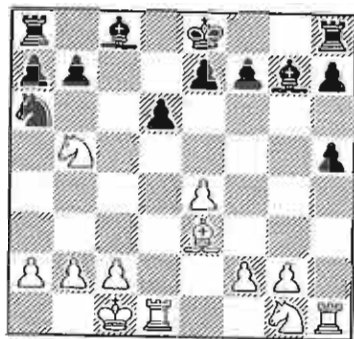


Diagram 819  
After 13. 0-0-0

13. ... f5! 14. exf5 Bxf5

Black's light-square bishop energetically enters the game.

15. Rxd6 Bxc2! 16. Rd2 Bg6 -+.

Black has a spare pawn, two bishops and an attack.

**The Modern against 4. Be2/5. h4**

After the move order 1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6, if White plays 4. Be2, Black is well advised to play 4. ... Nf6, transposing into the Pirc. After all, he gets an easy game if White plays 5. h4.

**Summary.**

While the 4. Be2/5. h4 system is not favorable for White, it is nevertheless not rare in practice. So Black has to remember how to react to it correctly. It doesn't demand any knowledge of long variations. In fact, it's almost as easy to remember as one, two, three:

**Black's Three-step Response to White's**

**4. Be2/5. h4**

1. Enter the Dragon (... c7-c5, d4xc5, ... Qa5).
2. After h4-h5, take this pawn with the knight.
3. After Be2xh5, play ... Bg7xc3.

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## Chapter 21: White Plays 4. Be2 & 5. h4 Memory Markers!



MARKER 1

Diagram 820  
Black to move



MARKER 2

Diagram 821  
Black to move



MARKER 3

Diagram 822  
Black to move



MARKER 4

Diagram 823  
White to move



MARKER 5

Diagram 824  
Black to move



MARKER 6

Diagram 825  
Black to move

## Chapter 21: White Plays 4. Be2 & 5. h4 Solutions to Memory Markers!

- No. 1* 1. ... Qa5 (See page 396.)
- No. 2* 1. ... c4! 2. Bxc4 Nxe4, with dangerous counterplay. (See page 396.)
- No. 3* 1. ... Bxc3, and Black stands better. (See page 397.)
- No. 4* 1. Qb5+, winning. (See page 398.)
- No. 5* 1. ... Bxc2!, with a big advantage. If 2. Rd2, then 2. ... Bg6, with an extra pawn, two bishops and an attack. (See page 399.)
- No. 6* 1. ... Bxf3! (See page 398.)

## Pirc Player Profiles

Photo: courtesy United States Chess Federation



### Grandmaster Alexander Beliavsky

*Born in Ukraine in 1953, he won the World Junior title in 1973 and became a GM in 1975. Beliavsky has been both Soviet Champion and a World-Championship candidate. His ideas for both White and Black in the Pirc have changed theory.*

### Grandmaster Alex Chernin

*Co-author Chernin was born in Ukraine in 1960. He began playing chess at a local club in 1971 and, by 1977, was Ukrainian Junior Champ. In 1985 he tied for first in the Soviet Championship and took top-board prize in the World Team Championship. He is a World Championship candidate and the leading theoretician in the Pirc Defense.*



Photo: Brian Kilgrew

## Section Four, Introduction: White Plays a Hybrid System

**S**ophistication characterizes this approach by White. He synthesizes the central pressure of the Classical System (Chapter 17) with the bishop-and-queen battery against the kingside (Chapter 20), and blends in the h-pawn attack (Chapter 21).

**Chapter 22** stands alone in this section, thoroughly examining a line that previously caused Black serious concern.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Nf3 Bg7 5. Be3

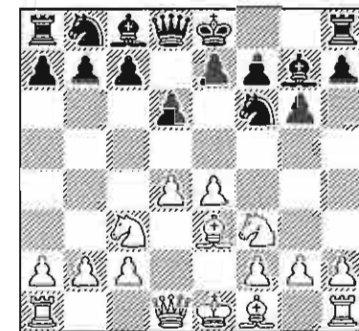


Diagram 826

Chapter 22: after 5. Be3

## Chapter 22: White Plays 4. Nf3 & 5. Be3

### Some Important Points to Look For

After 4. Nf3 Bg7 5. Be3, White is prepared to meet the natural 5. ... 0-0 with 6. Qd2, ready to castle long and play Bh6. While this line seems fine for Black, we prefer the even stronger 5. ... a6.



- ◆ Black can choose between the “normal” 5. ... 0-0 or the subtle 5. ... a6!

See Diagram 827.



- ◆ This “Hybrid” System combines the ideas of the Classical Pirc with those of the 4. Be3 system.

See Diagram 836.



- ◆ After 13. ... Qd6, Black wins a piece back, with a better game.

See Diagram 842.



- ◆ Playing against Svidler’s Modern, Anand sacrificed a pawn with 8. e6.

See Diagram 843.

## Chapter 22

### White Plays 4. Nf3 & 5. Be3

#### The Hybrid System

A few years ago, it became clear that the move order 4. Nf3/5. Be3 needed to be organized as an independent system and considered by itself.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Nf3 Bg7 5. Be3



Diagram 827

After 5. Be3

British chess players proved that if after 5. Be3, White avoids the move h2-h3 in favor of Qd1-d2, with ideas Be3-h6 and 0-0-0, Black has to face a new system. At first White’s idea looked very dangerous for Black and was recommended as the strongest

weapon against the Pirc. Then, as usual, downsides in the system became apparent.

Returning to the move 5. Be3, we should point out that it lies at the crossroads of three variations. After Black’s most popular reply, 5. ... 0-0 (A), White chooses between 6. Be2 and 6. h3 (both part of the Classical System covered in Chapters 17 and 18) and 6. Qd2—a transition to the Hybrid System, our topic in this chapter. We’ll examine the popular and satisfactory 5. ... 0-0 (A) first. Then we will look at 5. ... a6 (B), which we slightly prefer.

AT FIRST WHITE’S  
SYSTEM LOOKED VERY  
DANGEROUS FOR  
BLACK.  
AS USUAL, PIRC  
PLAYERS RIGHTED  
THE BALANCE.

5. ... 0-0 6. Qd2

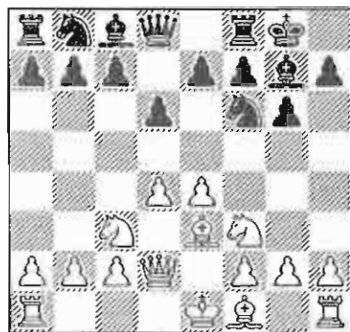


Diagram 828

After 6. Qd2

We've named this system "Hybrid" because it combines ideas of Chapter 20—such as playing Be3, Qd2, Bh6—with the ideas of the Classical Pirc (4. Nf3). The idea of the pawn storm with f3, g4, h4 here, as in Chapter 21, is replaced by a kamikaze attack by the single h-pawn, but this attempt to clear a file to the Black king can be difficult to execute.

The position of the knight on f3, however, can revive the idea e4-e5. If White succeeds later in holding the outpost on e5, it can be used to aid the attack on the king's flank.

Because we write from Black's point of view, it is not the purpose of this book to analyze the numerous examples of how the Hybrid System has succeeded in practice. Instead, we'll show the antidote.

According to the spirit of the position it would be good for Black to meet the idea of Be3-h6 with ... e7-e5. Black's knight can support the pawn from c6. It is clear that this way the threat e4-e5 would be virtually removed.

But if Black plays 6. ... Nc6 at once, White can answer with 7. 0-0-0.



Diagram 829

After 7. 0-0-0

Here 7. ... e5 is not good because of White's queen-and-rook battery. But Black has a clever plan to improve conditions for ... e7-e5. He does this with a flank operation—6. ... a6, with the idea of ... b7-b5. The move ... a7-a6 is an especially good bet when White intends to castle long, because the normal preventative, a2-a4, would produce a poor queenside haven for White's king. Indeed, ... a7-a6 is one of the natural preparatory moves for a pawn assault on White's king after 0-0-0.

But in the short term, ... a6 and ... b5 are directed against the pawn on e4. White, with his pres-

ANALYSIS

ent piece placement, is forced to defend his e-pawn with Bd3. On d3, the bishop disconnects the White's queen-file battery, making it easier for Black to play ... e7-e5.

But before we go further, let's pay attention to the move order Black uses to achieve his aim. He has two possible sequences—5. ... 0-0 6. Qd2 a6 and 5. ... a6 6. Qd2 b5. The difference is seen after 7. Bd3, which White plays in both cases. With the first move order, we reach the following position.

6. ... a6 7. Bd3 b5

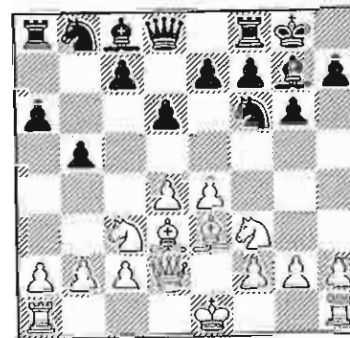


Diagram 830

After 7. ... b5

8. Ne2

White intends to transfer the knight to g3. The game Rowson-Smirin, 1999, is our main line.

Black has also to take into consideration 8. a4 (after which, 8. ... Bb7!? is interesting).

8. ... Nc6 9. d5

The alternative 9. h3!? deserves attention—e.g., 9. ... e5 10. c3.

9. ... Ne5 10. Nxe5 dxe5

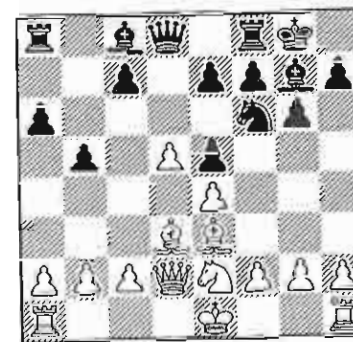


Diagram 831

After 10. ... dxe5

Usually Black abstains from such a transformation, instead preferring, after d4-d5, to retreat the knight to b8. However, here the poor positions of White light-square pieces allow Black to equalize easily with ... e7-e6.

11. 0-0 e6 12. dxe6 Bxe6 13. a4?!

**BLACK'S ... A6 IS A NATURAL PREPARATORY MOVE FOR A PAWN ASSAULT ON WHITE'S KING AFTER 0-0-0. IN THE SHORT TERM, HOWEVER, ... A6 AND ... B5 ARE DIRECTED AGAINST THE E-PAWN.**





Diagram 832  
After 13. a4?!

13. ... c5!

A brilliant move that seizes the initiative—14. Ng3 (14. Bxc5? Nxe4) 14. ... c4 ♣.

This example is instructive because of the uncommon effectiveness of the Black knight's advance to e5 (instead of retreating) after d4-d5.

Although it is somewhat a matter of taste, our preferred move order for Black is 5. Be3 a6.

**ALTHOUGH IT IS SOMEWHAT A MATTER OF TASTE, OUR PREFERRED MOVE ORDER FOR BLACK IS 5. BE3 A6.**

—Recommended Line—

B5. ... a6

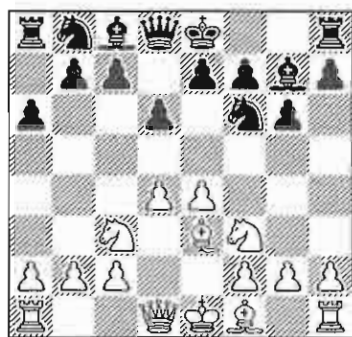


Diagram 833  
After 5. ... a6

The main move here is 6. Qd2, but before examining its consequences, we need to say a few words about other continuations.

The preventive 6. a4 removes the possibility of White's castling long, and it is better for him to transpose to the 5. h3, 6. Be3 variation of the Classical System—Chapter 18.

Ostensibly, 6. Be2?! brings us to the main variation of the Classical System, but in this case the other bishop finds itself on e3 too early. That's why Black can move 6. ... b5, without concern about a possible e4-e5 in the near future. The e-file is overloaded by White pieces, and his rook on e1 wouldn't be able to support the pawn on e5.

For the same reasons, after 6. h3 Black also continues 6. ... b5,

although 6. ... 0-0 with a transposition, after 7. a4, to the 5. h3 (with Be3) system is fine for Black as well.

The last reasonable side line is 6. Bd3, which creates independent possibilities. White is ready for ... b7-b5, so it's better for Black to switch directions with 6. ... Bg4, with the idea of ... Nc6 and ... e7-e5—moves so characteristic of this plan. Play could continue 7. h3 Bxf3 8. Qxf3 Nc6 9. Qd1.



Diagram 834  
After 9. Qd1

This retreat is to a certain extent forced; otherwise, Black has possibilities like 9. 0-0 Nd7 10. Ne2 e5 11. c3!? exd4 12. cxd4? Nde5!. We can see Black's ... a7-a6 is hardly a waste of time!

After White's 9. Qd1, his affairs are more in order. For example, play can continue 9. ... 0-0 10. 0-0 Nd7 11. Be2 e5 12.

**THE PREVENTIVE 6. A4 REMOVES THE POSSIBILITY OF WHITE'S CASTLING LONG.**

dxe5 dxe5, with approximate equality.



Diagram 835  
After 12. ... dxe5

In all these side-line continuations—6. a4, 6. Be2, 6. h3, and 6. Bd3—, White in one way or another concentrates on the center.

6. Qd2



Diagram 836  
After 6. Qd2

White remains alert to actions in the center, but starts to prepare his assault on the king's flank.

6. ... b5 7. Bh6 0-0

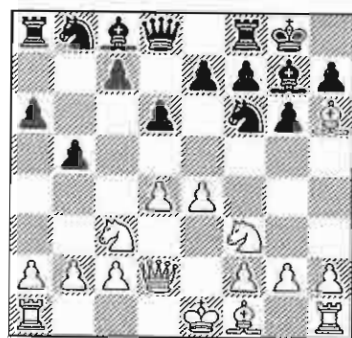


Diagram 837  
After 7... 0-0

Compare this position to Diagram 830 after 7. Bd3 b5. Instead of blocking his queen file, White has accelerated his kingside attack. On the other hand, he has one less piece developed and must play Bd3 soon anyway.

In Diagram 837, both sides have logically fulfilled the first part of their plans. We'll see soon which conception is correct. Now it's of no particular importance whether White exchanges bishops on g7 at once or plays 8. Bd3.

In any case, Black answers with ... Nc6, preparing ... e7-e5. The main question is whether White has the right-of-way on the e-file, the ability to push his pawn to e5 before Black does it first. This question is of paramount importance for White, because he can be successful only if his flank-attack (Bh6 and possibly h2-h4-h5) can be combined with a White pawn anchored on e5.

### 8. Bd3 Nc6

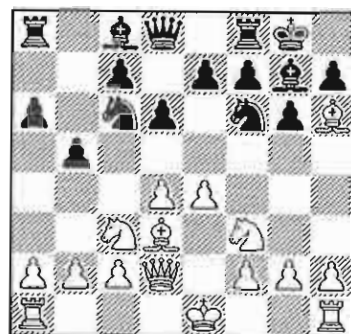


Diagram 838  
After 8... Nc6

### 9. Bxg7

Black is ready to play ... Ng4 after White's e4-e5, so whether this exchange on g7 is made now or on the next move is of no importance.

### 9... Kxg7

A critical moment. Certainly 10. e5 is the most obvious candidate move, but let's first examine briefly the move of another central pawn.

### B1 10. d5

Two Black retreats are fully satisfactory—10... Nb8 and 10... Ne5. We prefer the latter.

### 10... Ne5 11. Nxe5 dxe5 12. a4 b4 13. Nd1

Or 13. Na2 a5 14. c3 e6! 15. cxb4 exd5 16. bxa5 c5!. (This is

better than 16... dxe4 17. Bb5, with an unclear position.)



Diagram 839  
After 16... c5!

17. exd5 Qxd5 18. Nc3 Qxg2 19. 0-0-0 Rxa5 20. h4 h5 21. Rhg1 Qf3 22. Bc2 Ra6! ♯ (Kozakov—Chernin, 2000).

### 13... a5 14. Ne3 e6 15. Rd1 exd5 16. exd5 Bb7

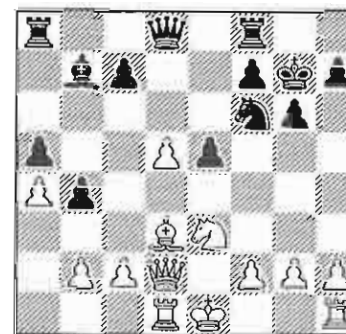


Diagram 840  
After 16... Bb7

### 17. Bc4 Ne4 18. Qe2 Nd6

Black follows up with 19... f5. Just as in the game Rowson—Smirin, the placement of White's bishop on d3 blocks the d-file battery.

And now the main question—what does Black do after

White pushes his king-pawn?

### B2 10. e5



Diagram 841  
After 10... e5

Tactics come to Black's aid.

### 10... dxe5 11. dxe5 Ng4 12. Qf4

If 12. Be4, then 12... Qxd2+ 13. Nxd2 Ngxe5 14. f4 f5 15. Bd5 e6.

### 12... Ncxe5! 13. Ne5 Qd6

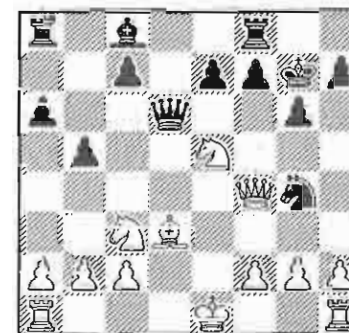


Diagram 842  
After 13... Qd6

Now instead of enjoying his intended attack, White has to deal with more prosaic choices. In Sadler—Ivanchuk, 1998, for example, White accepted the

worse endgame with 14. Nxf6  
hxg6 15. Qxd6 cxd6.

### Hybrid System versus the Modern

Against the Modern, when Black keeps his knight on g8, White's scheme of Nf3, Be3, and Qd2 doesn't threaten Bh6. But White can still play the combination of moves Be3, Nf3 and Bd3.

When he does, it leads to a system fairly new to practice, with results so far quite satisfactory for Black.

The game Anand—Svidler, 1998, for example, went 1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6 4. Be3 a6

5. Nf3 b5 6. Bd3 Nd7 7. e5!?  
Bb7 8. e6!?, with complications  
(see Chapter 9).

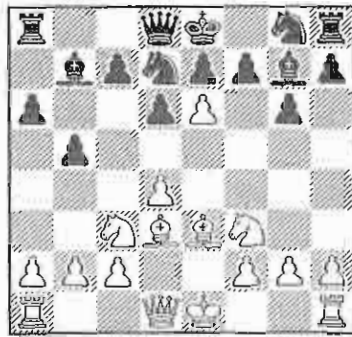


Diagram 843  
After 8. e6!?

So the Hybrid System—4. Nf3, 5. Be3, 6. Qd2—doesn't present a real threat to either the Pirc or the Modern.

### Summary:

*In response to White's Nf3, Be3, and Qd2, Black's ... a6 and ... b5 threaten to undermine White's e-pawn. White is forced to place his bishop on d3 disadvantageously. This move further benefits Black by allowing him to act on the center with ... Nc6 and ... e5. White has to submit to it, because his attempt to play 10. e5 (Sadler—Ivanchuk) allows the tactical refutation (12. ... Nxe5! and 13. ... Qd6).*

*Against the Modern, White can still put together the moves Be3, Nf3 and Bd3, but, although there is little theory as yet on this new attempt, Black appears solid.*

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## White Plays 4. Nf3 & 5. Be3 Memory Markers!



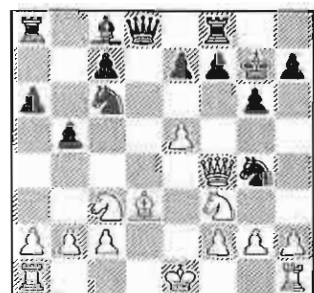
MARKER 1

Diagram 844  
Black to move



MARKER 2

Diagram 845  
Black to move



MARKER 3

Diagram 846  
Black to move



MARKER 4

Diagram 847  
White to move



MARKER 5

Diagram 848  
Black to move



MARKER 6

Diagram 849  
White to move

## White Plays 4. Nf3 & 5. Be3 Solutions to Memory Markers!

- No. 1* 1. ... Nxe4. (See page 408.)
- No. 2* 1. ... Ne4, with the idea of ... Nd6 and ... f7-f5. (See page 411.)
- No. 3* 1. ... Ncxe5 2. Nxe5 Qd6 (if 3. Be4, Nxe5, threatening ... Nd3+), winning a piece back. (See page 411.)
- No. 4* 1. e6!, with compensation for a pawn. (See page 412.)
- No. 5* 1. ... e6, with a good game. (See page 407.)
- No. 6* 1. Nxd4 (not 1. cxd4? Nde5), with approximate equality. (See page 409.)

## Pirc Player Profiles



### Grandmaster Mikhail Botvinnik

Botvinnik (1911-1995) was born in Russia and became the embodiment of success for the Soviet chess program. He became World Champion in 1948, holding that title three times, 1948-1957, 1958-1960, and 1961-1963. In the later stages of his career, he adopted the Pirc, lending great authority to its reputation. He's shown here playing his first game of chess in the US, at a simultaneous in Tom's River, New Jersey.

## Section Five, Introduction: White Avoids 3. Nc3

**B**esides 3. Nc3, there are three reasonable replies to 2. ... Nf6 that protect the e-pawn. One of those, 3. Nd2, blocks the bishop on c1 and the d-file, allowing Black an easy game.

The two remaining choices will be analyzed in the following chapters. These alternatives, 3. Bd3 and 3. f3, refrain from blocking White's c-pawn, allowing a later c3 or c4.

**Chapter 23** examines 3. Bd3, which allows Black a dramatic fourth move that secures an early equality.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Bd3

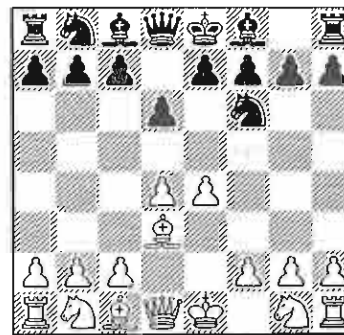


Diagram 850  
Chapter 23: after 3. Bd3

**Chapter 24**, our last chapter, analyzes 3. f3, which leaves Black with a wide range of choices. He needs to prepare only one for this contingency.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. f3

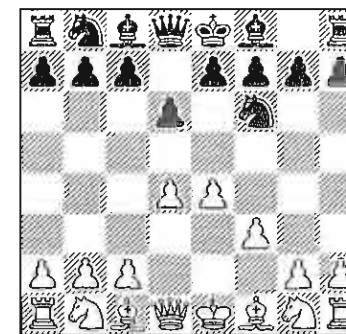


Diagram 851  
Chapter 24: after 3. f3



## Chapter 23: White Plays 3. Bd3 Some Important Points to Look For

With 3. Bd3, White decides to forego Nc3. He'll probably instead play c2-c3, bolstering his center. Black has a two-move sequence that gives him a comfortable equality.



- ◆ With 3. Bd3, White announces he's ready to play without an early Nc3.

See Diagram 852.



- ◆ White has five choices of how to defend against the threat to his bishop.

See Diagram 865.



- ◆ With 8. Bd5, White stops ... d5-d4.

See Diagram 878.



- ◆ With 13. ... Qh4 (**TM**), Black achieves a good game.

See Diagram 890.

## Chapter 23 White Plays 3. Bd3 Early skirmish, early equality

If White wants to avoid Nc3 on the third move, he can develop a different piece to protect the pawn.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Bd3

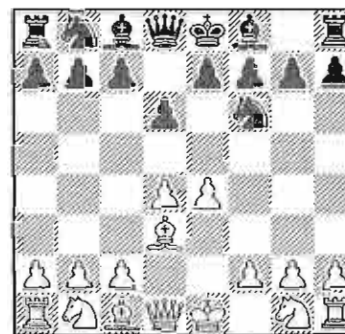


Diagram 852

After 3. Bd3

In playing this way White announces that he can manage without Nc3. Whether voluntarily or under duress, he will probably occupy c3 with a pawn. He's likely to develop his pieces with Nf3, 0-0, Re1, h3 and so on. Of course, in such a position it's difficult for Black to pressure the pawns on e4 and d4. In this structure, Black probably does best to

play ... e7-e5.

A similar type of position is found in the Ruy Lopez. But the Pirc's version offers certain advantages in comparison with the Ruy's—for example, Black avoids weakening his queenside pawns.

What's more, Black has a dramatic remedy that gives him immediate equality.

3. ... e5 4. c3 d5!

Now White's center breaks up.

5. dxe5 Nxe4



Diagram 853

After 5. ... Nxe4

This resulting structure is not

really characteristic of the Pirc defense. For an analogy to it, we have to look at the true Ruy Lopez: 1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5. 0-0 Nxe4 6. d4 b5 7. Bb3 d5 8. dxe5 Be6.



Diagram 854  
After 8. ... Be6

This is the so-called Open Variation of the Ruy Lopez, where the location of the pawn on b5 is a source of trouble for Black. But in the Pirc Defense he doesn't have this problem.

In Diagram 853, notice that Black offers a pawn sacrifice after 6. Bxe4 dxe4 7. Qa4+ Bd7 8. Qxe4 Bc6 9. Qg4 h5 10. Qg3 h4.



Diagram 855  
After 10. ... h4

But even a quick look at the position reassures us that Black has full compensation for the

pawn.

White can also use the capture on e4 to deprive Black of castling, and then to try to win the e-pawn. But after 6. Bxe4 dxe4 7. Qxd8+ Kxd8 8. Bf4 Nd7 9. Ne2 Nc5 10. 0-0 Nd3, Black has a good game once again.



Diagram 856  
After 10. ... Nd3

In Diagram 853, White's actions against Black's forward knight must be combined with a more strategically solid plan. White should develop his knights to d2 and f3—and it doesn't matter too much whether he first plays 6. Nd2 or 6. Nf3. In both cases, Black answers with 6. ... Nc6. However, after 6. Nd2 Nc6, the continuation 7. Ngf3 is forced.



Diagram 857  
After 7. Ngf3

Our main line continues ...

6. Nf3 Nc6

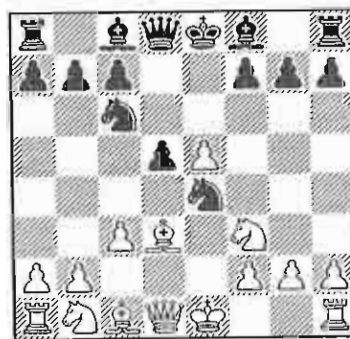


Diagram 858  
After 6. ... Nc6

Besides White's best try, 7. Nbd2 (C), White has other, less dangerous possibilities. Chiefly, these seventh-move attempts butting in line ahead of 7. Nbd2 get the bishop on c1 off the back rank before playing Nbd2, or use the open d-file to pressure d5.

A 7. Qe2

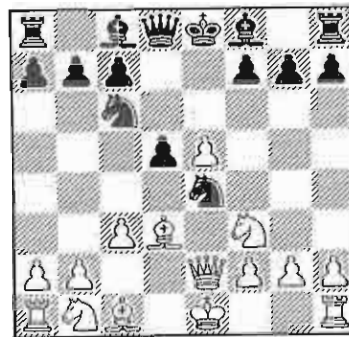


Diagram 859  
After 7. Qe2

7. ... Nc5 8. Bc2 Bg4 9. 0-0

Or 9. Bf4 d4 ♞, as in

Rause—Malanjuk, 1995.

9. ... Qd7 10. Rd1 0-0-0! 11. b4 Ne6 12. Bb3

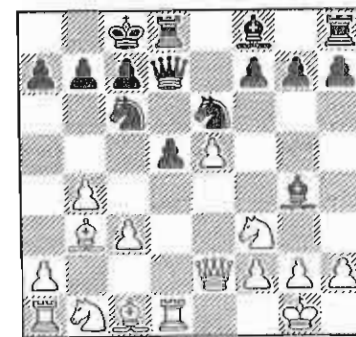


Diagram 860  
After 12. Bb3

White successfully pressures d5, but he has problems with his own outpost on e5.

12. ... Bxf3 13. Qxf3

Or 13. gxf3 Ne7 ♞.

13. ... Nxe5 14. Qe3 Bd6 15. Qxa7 c6



Diagram 861  
After 15. ... c6

Black's powerful position in the center outweighs White's play on the flank. After 16. f3 Black's position is somewhat better, but

he agreed to a draw in Psakhis—Chernin, 1983.

It was Alex's first experience in this system (3. Bd3 e5! 4. c3 d5! 5. dxe5 Nxe4) that made him an ardent supporter of 3. ... e5!.

7. 0-0

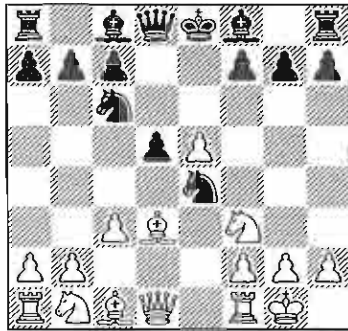


Diagram 862  
After 7. 0-0

7. ... Bg4 8. Bf4 Be7 9. h3 Bh5 10. Be2 0-0 11. Nbd2 Nc5 12. Nb3 Ne6 13. Bg3 f5!

Black practically forces White to trade off his e-pawn—his main trump card in this variation.

14. exf6 e.p. Bxf6 15. Nh2 Bf7

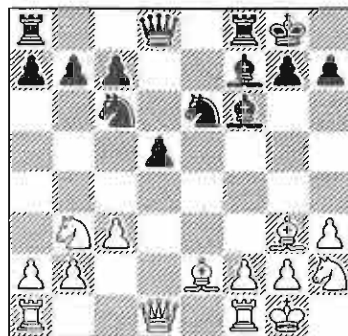


Diagram 863  
After 15. ... Bf7

Ready to protect the d-pawn with pieces.

16. Ng4 Bh4 17. Qd3 Bg6 18. Qd2 Bxg3 19. fxc3 Qd6 20. Bf3 Rad8 21. Rad1

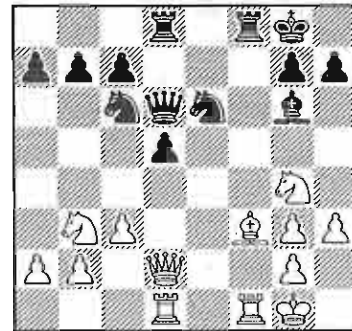


Diagram 864  
After 21. Rad1

21. ... d4! (A. Sokolov—Chernin, 1984), with a good game for Black.

6 7. Nbd2 Nc5!

Note that this position can also be reached by the move order 6. Nd2 Nc6 7. Nf3 Nc5 (see Diagram 857).

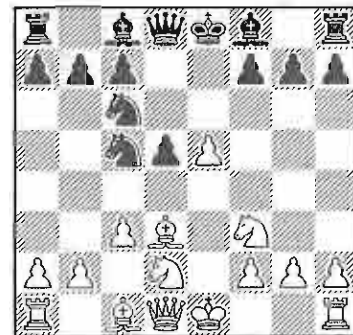


Diagram 865  
After 7. ... Nc5

White now needs to decide

what to do with his bishop, and he has five choices we should consider. First of all, he can leave it where it is, allowing Black to exchange it for his knight.

61 8. Nb3 Nxd3+

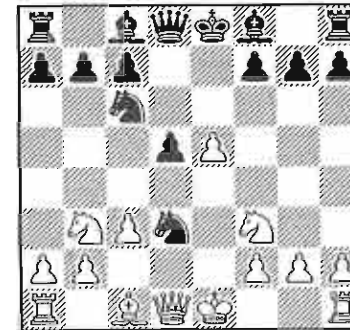


Diagram 866  
After 8. ... Nxd3+

Black can also ignore the "opportunity" to trade this knight for a bishop—8. ... Bg4 9. 0-0 Qd7 10. Re1 0-0-0= (Yusupov—Adams, 1990).

9. Qxd3 Be7 10. 0-0 0-0 11. Nbd4 Nxd4 12. cxd4 b6 13. Rd1 Be6 14. b3 c5

Black has a good game (Landa—Onoprienko, 1994).

**BLACK CAN ALSO  
IGNORE THE  
"OPPORTUNITY"  
TO TRADE THIS KNIGHT  
FOR A BISHOP.**

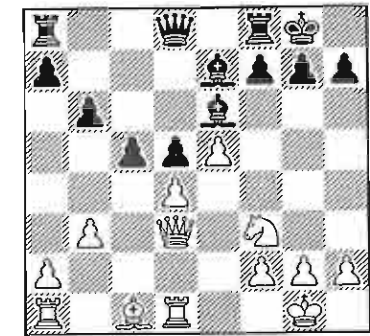


Diagram 867  
After 14. ... c5

Back to Diagram 865 in our main line after 7. ... Nc5—all four retreats of the White bishop, 8. Be2, 8. Bc2, 8. Bb1, and 8. Bb5, deserve attention.

62 8. Be2

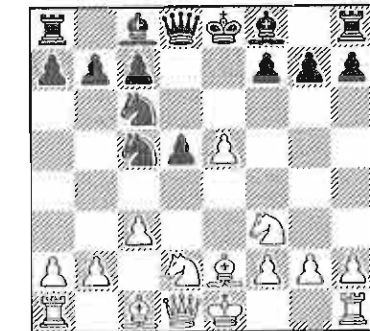


Diagram 868  
After 8. Be2

This is the most harmless move of the four. It gives Black an opportunity to solve his problems instantly.

8. ... d4 9. cxd4 Nxd4 10. Nxd4 Qxd4 11. 0-0 Bf5

In the game Popovich—Chernin, 1999, White didn't find

anything better than to head into an equal endgame.

12. Nf3 Qxd1 13. Rxd1.

**C3** 8. Bc2

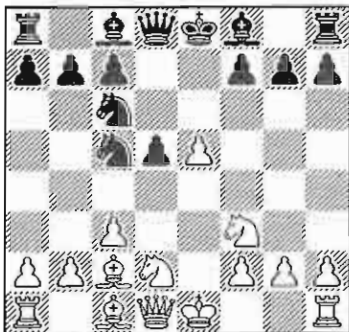


Diagram 869  
After 8. Bc2

8. ... Bg4

Black pins the White knight on f3.

9. 0-0 Be7

Also good is 9. ... d4!?

10. Re1 d4 11. h3 Bh5 12. Ne4 d3

Black could also reach a convenient ending with 12. ... dxc3.



Diagram 870  
After 12. ... d3

13. Nxc5

After 13. Bb1 Nxe4 14. Rxe4, White has a bone—the pawn on d3—stuck in his throat. Now Black simply transfers the game into a better ending.

13. ... dxc2 14. Qxd8+ Rxd8  
15. Nb3

Not 15. Nxb7 Rd1 ≠.

15. ... Rd3 ≠



Diagram 871  
After 15. ... Rd3

Black may also consider 15. ... Bxf3 16. gxf3 g5!?

**AFTER PLAYING  
... d5-d4, BLACK  
USUALLY GETS AN  
EQUAL OR BETTER  
ENDGAME.**

**C4** 8. Bb1

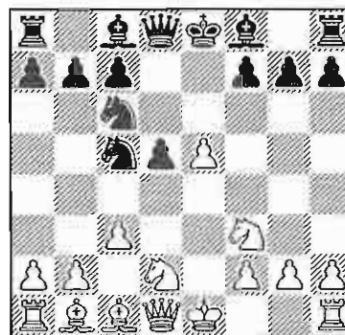


Diagram 872  
After 8. Bb1

This retreat to even more remote ground blunts the effect of ... d5-d4, since the follow-up ... d4-d3 doesn't gain a tempo by attacking the bishop. Still, ... d5-d4 remains a plausible move. Moreover, it's harder for White to bring the bishop back into the game from b1.

8. ... Bg4

Black reacts the same way he did after 8. Bc2. Pinning the knight increases the strength of ... d5-d4. White can break the pin with 9. h3 Bh5 10. g4 Bg6, but he would seriously weaken his king's position.

Recall a major difference between this variation of the Pirc and the real Ruy Lopez: in the Pirc, Black has not distorted his queenside pawns, while in the Ruy, Black has played ... a6 and ... b5. Thus one of the peculiarities of the 3. Bd3 variation is that

Black has the possibility of castling long. So White has to be even more careful than usual about advancing his kingside pawns.

**C4a** 9. 0-0

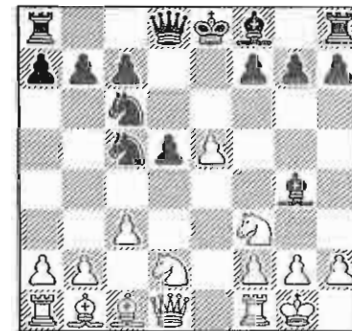


Diagram 873  
After 9. 0-0

9. ... Be7 10. h3 Bh5 11. Re1 d4  
12. Qe2 Qd5 13. a3 dxc3 14. bxc3  
Bg6 15. c4 Qd7 16. Ne4 0-0-0



Diagram 874  
After 16. ... 0-0-0

White achieves nothing. (Smagin—Azmaiparashvili, 1996).

**64b** 9. b4

Diagram 875  
After 9. b4

White avoids the passive nature of 9. 0-0. But his choice is double-edged.

## 9. ... Nd7!

Now White has a serious problem defending his pawn on e5. He tries to solve it by maneuvering with his queen.

## 10. Qa4 Nb6 11. Qc2 g6! 12. b5 Bf5 13. Qb3?!

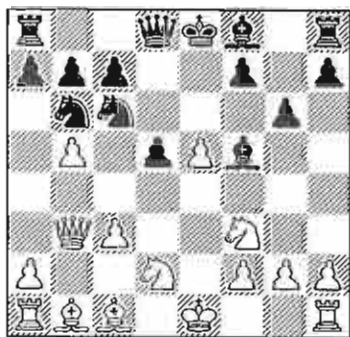


Diagram 876  
After 13. Qb3?!

White should duck for cover with 13. Qd1 Ne7=.

## 13. ... Na5 14. Qd1 Bxb1 15. Rxb1 Bg7 16. Ba3 Nac4 17. Bb4 Nxd2 18. Qxd2 a5

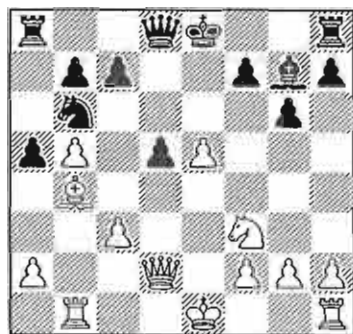


Diagram 877  
After 18. ... a5

## 19. Bc5

Or 19. bxa6 *e.p.* Nc4 20. Qe2 b6, followed by ... c7-c5 ≠

From Diagram 877, the game continued 19. ... Nc4 20. Qf4 b6 21. Bd4 0-0 22. 0-0 a4 ≠ (Rausis—van der Wiel, 1999).

**C5** 8. Bb5

Diagram 878  
After 8. Bb5

White prevents ... d5-d4. He's ready to part with his light-square bishop in order to block-

ade the center.

**C5a** 8. ... Bg4

This move has been rare in GM practice.

**C5a1** 9. h3

White prepares to break the pin.

## 9. ... Bh5 10. g4

Or 10. b4 Ne6 11. Qa4 Qd7, with an unclear position.

## 10. ... Bg6 11. Nd4 Qd7 12. N2f3 a6! 13. e6 Nxe6 14. Ne5 Qd6 15. Bxc6+ bxc6 16. Ndx6 f6

A very unclear position.



Diagram 879  
After 16. ... f6

**C5a2** 9. b4 Ne6 10. Bxc6+ bxc6 11. Qa4 Qd7 =.**C5a3** 9. Nb3 a6 10. Bxc6+ bxc6 11. Nxc5 Bxc5 12. Qa4 Qd7 13. Nd4 0-0

**BLACK'S 8. ... Bg4  
HASN'T PASSED THE  
TRIAL-BY-PUMMELING.**



Diagram 880  
After 13. ... 0-0

## 14. 0-0

Or 14. Qxc6 Bxd4 15. Qxd7 Bxc3+ 16. bxc3 Bxd7=.

## 14. ... Bb6! 15. Qxc6 Bxd4 16. Qxd7 Bxf2+ 17. Rxf2 Bd7 =.

However good these variations look, 8. ... Bg4 hasn't passed the trial-by-pummeling that only GM practice can provide. The continuation 8. ... Bd7 has, on the other hand, proven itself over time.

**C5b** 8. ... Bd7

Black actually baits a trap here. If 9. 0-0 Nxe5! 10. Qe2 Bxb5 11. Qxb5+ Ned7 12. Re1+ Be7 ≠.



Diagram 881  
After 12. ... Be7



## 9. Qe2



Diagram 882  
After 9. Qe2

This move is thus actually forced to avoid 9. ... Nxe5!. Of course, 9. Qe2 develops naturally, so it's not a hardship for White.

## 9. ... a6 10. Bxc6 Bxc6 11. Nd4

White must prevent the threat of ... Bc6-b5. But White is again not unhappy to make the "forced" move, since 11. Nd4 blends in with his plans. It frees his f-pawn for advance.

## 11. ... Bd7 12. 0-0 Ne6!

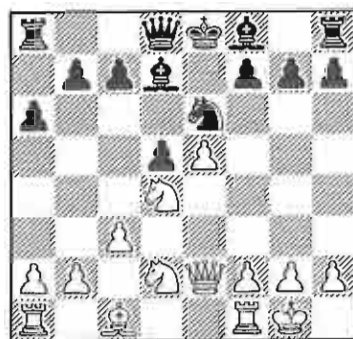


Diagram 883  
After 12. ... Ne6!

Black renews the threat of

skewering White's queen and rook: 13. ... Nxd4 14. cxd4 Bb5. After 13. Nxe6 Bxe6, Black's position is unassailable. Practice has examined two other possibilities for White here.

**C5b1** 13. a4

White takes a moment to prevent the threat on the f1-a6 diagonal, and pins his hopes on advancing his f-pawn.

## 13. ... c5! 14. Nxe6

White doesn't achieve anything with 14. Nf5 because of 14. ... Nf4—for example, 15. Qg4 Ng6, with the threat of 16. ... Qc8 or 15. Qf3 Bxf5 16. Qxf4 Qd7=.



Diagram 884  
After 16. ... Qd7

Back to the main line.

## 14. ... Bxe6 15. f4 Qd7

**WHITE MUST PREVENT  
THE THREAT OF  
... Bc6-b5.**



Diagram 885  
After 15. ... Qd7

Forcing the exchange of knights is a meaningful achievement of Black. Now he goes to work on the light squares.

## 16. Qf2

White should realize the position is equal and not try to force things with 16. c4?!, which goes against the demands of the position—White mistakenly tries to play on the light squares, which are now Black's turf. After 16. ... Bf5! (Black threatens 17. ... dxc4 and 18. ... Bd3), and White's 17. Ra3!, Black should avoid 17. ... d4? (Smirin—Chernin, 1993), closing the center, when White had 18. Ne4, equalizing. Instead, Black should play 17. ... 0-0-0!, renewing the threat of ... dxc4 and ... Bd3. White has no satisfactory answer.



Diagram 886  
After 17. ... 0-0-0

Play could continue: 18. cxd5 Qxd5 19. Nc4 Bd3! 20. Nb6+ Kb8 21. Qe3 (21. Nxd5 Bxe2 22. Re1 Rxd5 23. Rxe2 Rd1+; or 21. Rd1 c4!, winning) 21. ... Qd4=.

## 16. ... Bf5 17. Nf3 Be7 18. Be3 Rc8=

**C5b2** 13. Rd1

Diagram 887  
After 13. Rd1

White's move not only builds pressure on the d-file, but also frees the f1-square to allow transferring a knight.

Reacting in a similar way as in the game Smirin—Chernin, Black got into difficulties with

13. ... c5 14. Nf5 Nf4 15. Qg4 Ng6 (Nunn suggests 15. ... g5) 16. Nf1!



Diagram 888  
After 16. Nf1!

16. ... Be6 17. N1e3 Qd7 18. f4 0-0-0?

A mistake, but Black is out of good options.



Diagram 889  
After 18. ... 0-0-0?

19. Nxd5! Bxd5 20. Rxd5+- (Fedorov—Chekhov, 1998).

Instead, Black should take into account that White's 13. Rd1

has drawbacks in comparison with 13. a4. By moving the rook to d1, White removes the support for his planned f2-f4.

Back to the main line from Diagram 887.

13. ... Qh4! **TN**



Diagram 890  
After 13. ... Qh4!

Black couldn't play this move against 13. a4 because White would have 14. f4! Nxf4 15. Qf3 ±.

Now Black takes the fourth rank under control and prevents the threatened 14. Nf5. In addition, Black prepares for castling long. All in all, a useful move! Black has a good game. Play could continue 14. N2f3 Qh5 or 14. Nf1 0-0-0 15. Nf3 Qe4.

**AFTER THE TN 13. ... Qh4, BLACK TAKES THE FOURTH RANK UNDER CONTROL AND PREVENTS THE THREATENED 14. Nf5. IN ADDITION, HE PREPARES FOR CASTLING LONG. ALL IN ALL, A USEFUL MOVE!**



### The Modern move order against 3. Bd3

Let's take a look at the game Miles—Bologan, 1996: 1. d4 g6 2. e4 Bg7 3. Nf3 d6 4. c3 Nf6 (switching into the Pirc) 5. Bd3 0-0 6. 0-0 Nbd7 7. Re1 e5 8. Nbd2 b6 9. Nf1 Bb7 10. Ng3 Re8 11. d5?!



Diagram 891  
After 11. d5?!

Black's queenside fianchetto helps to pressure e4 and to prepare ... d6-d5. Usually such a method is not suitable in the Ruy Lopez Pirc because of White's d4-d5. But in the present case, Black succeeds in using his queenside pawns to free his play: 11. ... c6 12. c4 Nc5 13. Bf1 (13. Bc2 cxd5 14. cxd5 a5=, as White's bishop on c2 is passive) 13. ... a5 14. b3 b5!



Diagram 892  
After 14. ... b5!

15. Bg5 (15. cxb5 cxd5 16. exd5 Nxd5 17. Bb2 Nf4 ±; 15. dxc6 Bxc6 16. cxb5 Bxe4 17. Nxe4 Nfxe4 ±) 15. ... b4. Black seizes space on the queen's flank and can look forward to good play.

If, after Black's double fianchetto, White exchanges d4xe5, instead of pushing d4-d5, as a rule he achieves nothing. So, the Modern move order, which eventually transfers into the Pirc with ... Nf6, is an acceptable alternative against a plan starting with 3. Bd3. However, the position does not clarify itself as quickly as it does in the Pirc move order, where Black can guarantee himself good play with 3. ... c5 and 4. ... d5!.

#### Summary:

With the order of moves 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Bd3 e5 4. c3 d5! 5. dxe5 Nxe4, Black can both equalize early and secure interesting play.

## White Plays 3. Bd3

## Memory Markers!



MARKER 1

Diagram 893  
Black to move



MARKER 2

Diagram 894  
Black to move



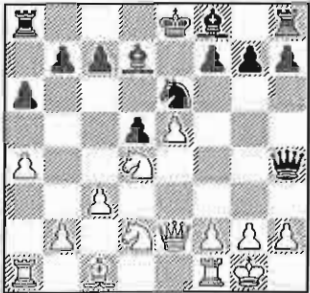
MARKER 3

Diagram 895  
Black to move



MARKER 4

Diagram 896  
Black to move



MARKER 5

Diagram 897  
White to move



MARKER 6

Diagram 898  
Black to move

## White Plays 3. Bd3

## Solutions to Memory Markers!

- No. 1* 1. ... Qd7, with a better game. (See page 420.)
- No. 2* 1. ... d4 ♞. (See page 421.)
- No. 3* 1. ... Bg4. A typical reaction in such positions. Pinning the knight increases the strength of ... d5-d4. (See page 425.)
- No. 4* 1. ... Nxe5, winning a pawn.. (See page 427.)
- No. 5* 1. f4, with advantage—e.g., 1. ... Nxf4 2. Qf3 ±. (See page 430.)
- No. 6* 1. ... 0-0-0!, creating the threat of ... dxc4 and ... Bd3. Not good is 1. ... d4, which allows White to equalize with 2. Ne4, creating an efficient blockade. (See page 429.)

## Chapter 24: White Plays 3. f3

### Some Important Points to Look For

White tries to avoid Pirc theory, but leaves Black with a variety of good choices.



- ◆ Invitation to a Saemisch.  
See Diagram 899.



- ◆ Black is comfortable in this Old Indian position.  
See Diagram 900.



- ◆ After 4. e5, both 4. ... Nfd7 and 4. ... Ng8 are fine for Black.  
See Diagram 901.



- ◆ This line of the French puts White at some risk.  
See Diagram 904.

## Chapter 24

### White Plays 3. f3

Saemisch, anyone?

The continuation 3. f3 isn't as much a theoretical decision as it is a practical one.

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. f3



Diagram 899  
After 3. f3

White's move is an attempt to find a way out of much of the theory of the Pirc.

Of course, if your repertoire as Black includes the King's Indian, the possibility of 3. f3 doesn't challenge you. It simply means that you have to play against the Saemisch variation.

But what choice do you have otherwise? Well, you could learn

the theory of Saemisch for Black. At present it is not White's most threatening weapon in the King's Indian and, besides, study of this one variation is many times less time-consuming than learning a whole opening.

The thirteenth World Champion Garry Kasparov—the indisputable leader of modern opening theory—has given us a lot of examples of how to play against the Saemisch using a number of different continuations. You can study one and hope that your opponent will try to confuse you by choosing 3. f3. You would likely be better prepared for the subsequent positions than your opponent, who, after all, began the game with 1. e4.

Or perhaps one of the systems of the Old Indian in which Black develops his bishop to e7 will suit you. In that case, the continuation 3. ... e5 4. d5 (the exchange of queens is harmless—4. dxe5 dxe5 5. Qxd8+ Kxd8 6. Bc4 Ke8 7. Be3 Nbd7

8. Nd2 Bc5 but 4. Ne2 is playable) 4. ... Be7 5. Be3 is an interesting choice.



Diagram 900  
After 5. Be3

From this position, Black can continue with either 5. ... Nh5 6. c4 Bg5 or 5. ... Nbd7.

In such a structure, when White has closed the center with d4-d5, the bishop often does better on e7 than on g7. On e7 it takes the sting out of a possible Bg5 pin of the Black knight on f6. Additionally, the bishop on e7 can relocate, after ... c7-c6, to b6 or can be exchanged via g5.

Finally, Black can play 3. ... d5!?. Now White can't hope to get an advantage by playing in the spirit of the Scandinavian Defense with 4. exd5 Nxd5 5. c4 Nf6, because the pawn f3 spoils his position. If White plays in gambit style with 4. Nc3 dxe4 5. Bg5 (5. fxe4 e5!), Black has a simple answer in 5. ... h6 6. Bxf6 exf6, with a good game.

Thus, after 3. ... d5, White's most logical move seems to be 4. e5.

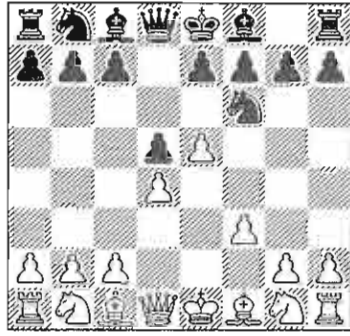


Diagram 901  
After 4. e5

Here Black has 4. ... Nfd7 and 4. ... Ng8. After 4. ... Nfd7, transition to the French defense with 5. f4 is possible. But there is an alternative, albeit questionable, for White: 5. c4 e6 6. cxd5 exd5 7. f4 c5 8. Nf3 Nc6



Diagram 902  
After 8. ... Nc6

9. Nc3 (or 9. Bd3 cxd4 10. 0-0 Nc5 11. a3 Qb6 12. b4 Nxd3 13. Qxd3 g6 14. Kh1 Bf5 (Sjo-

dahl—Hodgson, 1998) 9. ... cxd4 10. Nxd4 Ndx5! (11. fxe5 Qh4+), after which White can't keep his center together.

If White heads toward the French with 5. f4 c5 6. Nf3 Nc6, we reach this position.



Diagram 903  
After 6. ... Nc6

It's up to White to take the last step in the transition to the French Defense with 7. Be3 Qb6 (but Black can deviate: 7. ... cxd4 8. Nxd4 Nxd4 9. Bxd4 Nb8) 8. Nc3 e6 (or 8. ... cxd4 9. Nxd4 e6 10. Qd2 Qxb2—see Diagram 904).

White may prefer the French, since after 7. c4 e6 8. cxd5 exd5, we're back in the 5. c4 variation given above (under Diagram 902), in which White can't maintain his center. And after 7. c3 cxd4 8. cxd4 Nb6 9. Nc3, Black's bishop gets to f5—a joy he's deprived of in the French. That's why theory recognizes 7. Be3 as the best move.

Of course, our book isn't

about the French. Nor is it about the Saemisch variation of the King's Indian. There's plenty of chess literature on these openings already. Nevertheless, let's note that the gambit continuation mentioned above (under Diagram 903) 7. Be3 Qb6 8. Nc3 cxd4 9. Nxd4 e6 10. Qd2 Qxb2, a variation of the French that Black can choose, is judged unclear by theory and puts White at some risk.



Diagram 904  
After 10. ... Qxb2

And, at last, we want to remind you that after 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. f3 d5 4. e5, Black has the move 4. ... Ng8.



Diagram 905  
After 4. ... Ng8



This alternative leads to original variations akin in spirit to the French defense. Black is ready to meet 5. c4, 5. Bd3 or 5. f4. After 5. c4 e6 6. Nc3 dxc4 7. Be3 Nd7 8. Qa4 Ne7 (Van der Sterren—Speelman, 1994)—both Black knights are interested in the d5-square. Or, if 5. Bd3 c5 6. c3 Nc6 7. Ne2 Qb6, and White has to concede to 8. dxc5. Finally, 5. f4 promises little after 5. ... Bf5 6. Bd3 Bxd3 7. Qxd3 e6 8. Nf3 Qd7 9. Be3 Na6 (Ernst—Chernin, 1995).

More promising for White is 5. Be3—at least it hampers ... c7-c5. But after 5. ... Bf5, White has

to take some risks with 6. g4 or simply get a passive game.

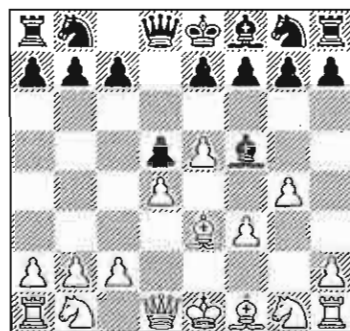


Diagram 906  
After 6. g4

Now Black can play either 6. ... Bg6 or 6. ... Bc8. The game is dynamically imbalanced.

## White Plays 3. f3 Memory Markers!



Diagram 907  
Black to move



Diagram 908  
Black to move



Diagram 909  
Black to move

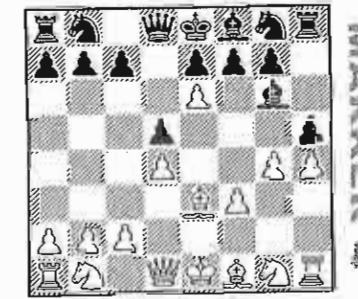


Diagram 910  
Black to move

### Summary:

After 3. f3, Black has a wide range of choices. He needs just a single line for this contingency.

On the other hand, White, in venturing the move, has to be prepared for a wide range of openings—from the King's Indian, to the Old Indian (with the bishop on e7), to the French Defense. It's highly unusual for a real-life opponent to be so widely prepared.

In addition, White has to be ready for independent lines—for example, after 3. f3 d5 4. e5 Ng8. Or 3. f3 c5.

As Black, you should choose one of these lines and be adequately prepared; otherwise, 3. f3 can take you by surprise!

- No. 1 1. ... e5!. (See page 436.)
- No. 2 1. ... Ndx5, to meet 2. fxe5 with 2. ... Qh4+. (See page 436.)
- No. 3 1. ... e6, as 2. Qb5+ Nc6 is okay for Black. (See page 438.)
- No. 4 1. ... hxg4, with sharp play. (See page 438.)

## Conclusion

An opening for all seasons

The Pirc is a defense you can rely on for the rest of your chess career. It's unquestionably sound. It's flexible enough and dynamic enough to offer alternative approaches, depending on your objectives in a particular game. And as you've seen, it always comes up with more than its share of surprises.

In many respects, the Pirc is the embodiment of modern dynamic defense. Those who play it will learn more than an opening; they will learn chess.

You may have read this book, but you haven't *finished* it. Indeed, the book is designed to make periodic review easy. Look for the blue diagrams and "call outs," those blue boxes that draw your attention to the important ideas. Review the "Important Points to Look For," as they predict the basic ideas of each chapter. Take another crack at the "Memory Markers," those learning exercises that both test and lock in the lessons from each chapter. Use the following "Table of Main Lines" for a quick review before a game.

Tote this book along with you in your chess bag. The best

time to look at an opening reference is immediately after a game you've played in that opening. Your interest is at a peak and you're immersed in the context.

Draw from outside sources. Follow the exploits of your favorite Pirc-ateer. Look for games the top grandmasters play on either side of the Pirc. If you like to use computer databases, they will yield you an unending harvest of Pirc master games.

You may want to keep files—diagrams and notes—on tactical and positional themes from your games and the games of others.

We intend to update this book regularly, continuing our no-secret-held-back approach of sharing unplayed theoretical novelties, those blind-sidings of the chessboard.

If you visit the net, be sure to check out Lev Alburt and Al Lawrence's monthly column, "Hoisting the Hippopotamus," on [www.ChessCafe.com](http://www.ChessCafe.com). Besides writing about the interesting and offbeat in chess, you can bet we'll be on "Pirc Alert."

Isn't winning from the "wrong" side of the board great?

## Index of Games

(White is listed first; numbers refer to pages.  
The same game can appear on more than one page.)

- |                                 |                                 |                                  |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Acs—Chernin: 233                | Chandler—Speelman: 93           | Hendriks—Tseitlin: 288           |
| Almasi—Beliavsky: 289           | Chatalbashev—Popchev: 316       | Hodgson—McNab: 327               |
| Almasi—Chernin: 390             | Chernin—Dunnington: 94          | Hracek—Chernin: 308              |
| Almasi—Ribli: 37                | Chernin—Mokry: 97               | Ioseliani—Svidler: 379           |
| Anand—Chernin: 286, 377         | Chernin—Zaichik: 78             | Istratescu—Chernin: 333          |
| Anand—Svidler: 143, 412         | Christiansen—Alburt: 11         | Istratescu—Slobodian: 334        |
| Aseev—M. Gurevich: 114          | Chuprov—Pospelov: 146           | Ivanchuk—Nikolic: 347            |
| Aseev—Khalifman: 58, 353        | Cobb—Khalifman: 94              | Ivanchuk—Svidler: 379            |
| Aseev—Zakharevich: 90, 118, 346 | Conquest—Jansa: 236             | Ivanchuk—Timman: 307             |
| Bareev—Anand: 46                | deFirmian—Alburt: 223           | Ivanovic—Gurevich, M.: 61        |
| Bareev—Norwood: 44, 60          | deFirmian—Chernin: 223, 240     | Janjgava—Gurevich, M.: 100       |
| Bauer—Chabanon: 224             | Dolmatov—Chernin: 225, 227, 232 | Jonker—Gurevich, M.: 162         |
| Beliavsky—Azinaiparashvili: 96  | Ernst—Chernin: 438              | Kaidanov—Wolff: 310              |
| Beliavsky—Chernin: 288          | Fedorov—Cheklov: 430            | Kaminski—Finkel: 313             |
| Beliavsky—Hodgson: 227          | Fischer—Domnitz: 51             | Karpov—Alburt: 25                |
| Beliavsky—Hort: 189             | Galkin—Pouomariou: 386          | Karpov—Korchnoi: 52              |
| Benjamin—Chernin: 320, 398      | Gavrikov—Mednis: 315            | Karpov—Nunn: 125, 188            |
| Benjamin—Gufeld: 321            | Gazik—Chernin: 371              | Karpov—Timman: 89, 106, 114, 124 |
| Berezuk—Stohl: 382              | Glek—Chernin: 241               | Keres—Westerinen: 291            |
| Blatny—Chernin: 314, 318, 372   | Glorigic—Hort: 181              | Khalifman—Popchev: 225           |
| Blatny—Ribli: 46                | Godena—Chernin: 334             | Kijk—Agest: 283                  |
| Botvinnik—Schmid: 53            | Golubev—Chernin: 164, 374       | Kindermann—Chernin: 388          |
| Braga—Chernin: 371              | Grosar—Chernin: 235             | Kindermann—Khalifman: 179        |
| Britton—Nunn: 159               | Gulko—Hort: 346                 | Klinger—Miles: 342               |
| Brunner—Fioramonti: 312         | Hall—Agest: 273                 | Kogan—van Wely: 68, 183, 367     |
| Brynell—Agest: 308              | Harlov—Labok: 381               |                                  |
| Campora—Chernin: 242            | Hartens—Hansen: 333             |                                  |
| Campora—Spragett: 383           | Haubt—Hort: 267                 |                                  |
| Chandler—Gufeld: 329            | Hector—Agest: 217               |                                  |
|                                 | Hellers—Ivanchuk: 221           |                                  |

## Index of Games, Continued

- Kozakov—Chernin: 411  
 Krnic—Jansa: 292  
 Kuczynski—Chernin: 313  
 Kveinis—Chernin: 253  
 Kveinis—Speelman: 138, 254  
 Landa—Onoprienko: 423  
 Leko—Gofstein: 137, 292  
 Leko—Chernin: 169, 287  
 Leko—Topalov: 283  
 Lengyel—Gurevich, M.: 103  
 Liss—Chernin: 233  
 Lugovoi—Sakaev: 279  
 Magem—  
 Azmaiparashvili: 96  
 Magem—Chernin: 268  
 Magem—Tkachiev: 290  
 Marciano—Gurevich, M.: 386  
 Marciano—Leski: 367  
 Miles—Bologan: 431  
 Mohr—Chernin: 352  
 Moiseev—Simonenko: 224  
 Morovic—Chernin: 189  
 Morozevich—  
 Azmaiparashvili: 150  
 Morozevich—  
 Chernin: 162  
 Motwani—Ivanchuk: 345  
 Muse—Hickl: 365  
 Nielsen—Chernin: 312  
 Nijboer—Smirin: 167, 370  
 Nijboer—Timman: 370  
 Nunn—Benjamin: 229  
 Nunn—Gelfand: 161, 365  
 Nunn—McNab: 193  
 Nunn—Seirawan: 229  
 Odeev—Akhundov: 293  
 Onischuk—Ponomarev: 279  
 Pedersen—Miles: 329  
 Piket—Avrukh: 47  
 Podgaets—Klovans: 77  
 Polgar, J.—Smirin: 278  
 Polgar, Z.—  
 van Wely: 238  
 Polugaevsky—Parma: 266  
 Polugaevsky—Uhlmann: 84  
 Popovich—Chernin: 423  
 Psakhis—Chernin: 422  
 Rause—Malanjud: 421  
 Rausis—van der Wiel: 426  
 Romanishin—Kuzmin: 280  
 Rowson—Smirin: 407  
 Rublevsky—Beliavsky: 257  
 Rytshagov—Chernin: 176, 319  
 Sadler—Ivanchuk: 411  
 Sadvakasov—Ponomarev: 273  
 Schlosser—Chernin: 245  
 Schmittziel—Chernin: 178, 241  
 Shabalov—Smirin: 279  
 Shirov—Beliavsky: 237  
 Shirov—Chernin: 236  
 Shirov—Hansen: 293  
 Shirov—Hulak: 50  
 Shirov—Khalifman: 226  
 Shirov—van Wely: 49  
 Short—Ftacnik: 383  
 Short—Nunn: 258  
 Short—Seirawan: 141  
 Short—Torre: 332  
 Singh—Smyslov: 203  
 Sjodahl—Hodgson: 437  
 Smagin—  
 Azmaiparashvili: 425  
 Smirin—Chernin: 429  
 Sokolov—Chernin: 422  
 Sokolov—Hillarp—  
 Persson: 389  
 Sorokin—Jansa: 275  
 Spassky—Fischer: 180  
 Spassky—Seirawan: 330  
 Stangl—Azmaiparashvili: 147  
 Sutovsky—Chernin: 176  
 Sutovsky—Agrest: 279  
 Tal—Hort: 148  
 Thortsteins—Kasparov: 312  
 Tischbierek—  
 Gurevich, M.: 240  
 Tiviakov—Gurevich, D.: 288  
 Tiviakov—Markovski: 287  
 Tolnai—Chernin: 38, 374  
 Tolnai—Ghinda: 99  
 Topalov—Beliavsky: 193  
 Tseshkovski—Vadasz: 147  
 van der Poel—Chernin: 242  
 van der Sterren—  
 Speelman: 438  
 van der Wiel—  
 Gurevich, M.: 166  
 Vasiukov—Ribli: 156  
 Voitsekhovskiy—  
 Berelovich: 275  
 Weissman—Shirov: 88, 111  
 Westerveld—  
 Gurevich, M.: 167  
 Wolff—Ehlvest: 315  
 Yermolinsky—Gulko: 270  
 Yilmaz—Belotti: 371  
 Yudasin—Svidler: 376  
 Yusupov—Adams: 423  
 Zapata—Chernin: 38  
 Zapata—Hansen: 190  
 Ziatdinov—Chernin: 70, 311, 317  
 Zorman—Piket: 268  
 Zuzulkin—Labok: 373

## Table of Main Lines

(Numbers in blue brackets refer to *Informant* classifications.  
 Numbers in *italics* refer to pages where lines begin.)

### 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 g6

#### Austrian (B09) 4. f4 Bg7 5. Nf3 c5 (214)

**A** 6. Bb5+ Bd7 (220)

**A1** 7. e5 Ng4 (220)

**A1a** 8. e6 (221)

**A1a1** 8. ... Bxb5 9. exf7+ Kd7 10. Nxb5 Qa5+ 11. Nc3 cxd4 12. Nxd4 Bxd4 13. Qxd4 Nc6 (221)

**A1a2** 8. ... fxe6 9. Ng5 Bxb5! (222)

**A1a2-1** 10. Nxe6 Bxd4 (222)

**A1a2-2** 10. Nxb5 Qa5+ 11. c3 Qxb5 12. Qxg4 cxd4! 13. Nxe6 Qc4!! 14. Nxc7+ Kf7 15. Nf5 h5! (225)

**A1a2-3** 10. Qxg4 Bc4 (228)

**A1b** 8. Bxd7+ Qxd7 9. d5 dxe5 10. h3 e4 11. Nxe4 Nf6 12. Nxf6+! Bxf6 (231)

**A1c** 8. h3 Bxb5! 9. Nxb5 dxe5! 10. hxg4 Qa5+ 11. Bd2 Qxb5 12. dxe5 Qxb2! (233)

**A2** 7. Bxd7+ Nfxd7 8. d5 b5! (235)

**B** 6. dxc5 Qa5 7. Bd3 Qxc5 8. Qe2 Bg4 9. Be3 Qa5 10. 0-0 0-0 11. h3 Bxf3 12. Qxf3 Nc6 13. a3 Nd7 14. Bd2 Qd8! 15. Kh1 e6 (238)

**B1** 16. Bc4 (242)

**B2** 16. Qg3 (243)

### 4. Bc4 Bg7 (B07) (248)

**A** 5. Qe2 Nc6! 6. e5 Nd7 7. Nf3 Nb6! 8. Bb3 0-0 9. h3 Na5! (252)

**B** 5. Nf3 Nc6! (255)

**B1** 6. Qe2 Bg4 7. Be3 e5 8. dxe5 Nxe5 9. Bb3 0-0 (255)

**B2** 6. d5 Nb8 7. h3 c6 8. Bb3 0-0 9. 0-0 b6! (256)

**B3** 6. h3 0-0 (257)

**B3a** 7. 0-0 Nxe4 8. Bxf7+ Rxf7 9. Nxe4 d5 (257)

**B3b** 7. Qe2 Nd7 8. Be3 Nb6 9. Bb3 Na5 10. 0-0 c6 (258)

**B4** 6. 0-0 Bg4 7. Be3 0-0 8. h3 Bxf3 9. Qxf3 e5 10. dxe5 Nxe5 11. Qe2 (259)

### 4. Bg5 Bg7 (B07) (262)

**A** 5. e5 dxe5 6. dxe5 Ng4! 7. Qxd8+ Kxd8 8. Rd1+ Bd7 9. e6 fxe6 10. Bc4 Ke8 (266)

**B** 5. f4 h6 6. Bh4 c5 (269)

**B1** 7. dxc5 Qa5! 8. Bd3 Qxc5 (270)

**B2** 7. e5 Nh5 8. dxc5 (270)

**B2a** 8. ... dxe5 9. Qxd8+ Kxd8 10. 0-0-0+ Bd7 11. fxe5! g5! 12. Be1 (271)

**B2b** 8. ... Nxf4 9. exd6 g5 10. Bf2 Nc6 11. Qd2 0-0  
12. 0-0-0 Bg4 13. Nf3 exd6 14. cxd6 Rc8 (272)

**B2b1** 15. h4 Qa5! (275)

**B2b2** 15. Nb5 Bf5 (276)

**B2b3** 15. a3 Ne5 16. Nxe5 Bxd1 17. Nxf7 Rxf7  
18. Nxd1 Rd7 (277)

**B2b4** 15. Kb1 Ne5 (277)

**B2b5** 15. Bc4 Nxc2 (277)

**C** 5. Qd2 h6 6. Bf4 g5 7. Bg3 Nb5 (277)

**G1** 8. Nge2 Nc6 9. 0-0-0 Bd7 10. f3 Nxc3 11. hxg3 e6 (283)

**G1a** 12. g4 Qe7 13. Qe3 0-0-0 (284)

**G1b** 12. f4 Qf6! 13. e5 dxe5 14. fxe5 Qe7 (284)

**G2** 8. 0-0-0 (285)

**G2a** 8. ... Nc6! (285)

**G2a1** 9. d5 Nd4! (286)

**G2a2** 9. Bb5 Bd7 10. Nge2 e6 (286)

**G2b** 8. ... Nd7 (287)

**G2b1** 9. f3 Nxc3 10. hxg3 c5 11. dxc5 Nxc5

12. Bb5+ Kf8! (287)

**G2b2** 9. Kb1 c5 10. dxc5 Nxc3 11. hxg3 Nxc5 (288)

**G2b3** 9. Nge2 c5 10. f3 Nxc3 11. hxg3 a6 (288)

**G2b4** 9. e5 Nb6! (289)

**Modern against 4. Bg5 (B06)** 1. e4 d6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6 4. Bg5

**A** 4. ... a6 5. Nf3 b5 6. Bd3 Bb7 (290)

**B** 4. ... Nd7! (292)

**Classical 4. Nf3 (B08) (298)**

**4. ... Bg7 5. Be2 0-0 6. 0-0 Bg4 (301)**

**A** 7. h3 Bxf3 8. Bxf3 (305)

**A1** 8. ... e5 9. dxe5 dxe5 10. Bg5 c6 (305)

**A2** 8. ... Nc6 (305)

**A2a** 9. Bg5 h6 10. Be3 e5 11. dxe5 dxe5 (305)

**A2b** 9. Ne2 e5 10. c3 Kh8! (307)

**A2c** 9. Nb5 e5 10. c3 Qd7! (309)

**B** 7. Be3 Nc6 (310)

**B1** 8. Qd2 e5 (310)

**B1a** 9. dxe5 dxe5 10. Rad1 Qc8 11. Qc1 Rd8 (310)

**B1b** 9. d5 Ne7 10. Rad1 Bd7! 11. Ne1 b5! (311)

**B2** 8. d5 Nb8 (314)

**B2a** 9. a4 (318)

**B2a1** 9. ... a5! 10. Nd2 Bxe2 11. Qxe2 Re8 (318)

**B2a2** 9. ... Bxf3 10. Bxf3 a5 (318)

**B2b** 9. Qd2 c6 10. Rad1 Qa5 11. a3 Rc8 (318)

**B2c** 9. Re1 c6 10. Qd2 Qc7 11. Rad1 Nbd7 (319)

**B2d** 9. h3 Bxf3 10. Bxf3 c6 11. a4 a5 (319)

**C** 7. a4 Nc6 (320)

**C1** 8. a5 e5! 9. d5 Ne7 10. a6 b6 (320)

**C2** 8. d5 Bxf3 9. Bxf3 Ne5 10. Be2 a5 (321)

**Classical 4. Nf3 & 5. h3 (B08) (324)**

**4. ... Bg7 5. h3 0-0 6. Be3 a6 7. a4 b6 (325)**

**A** 8. e5 Nfd7 9. e6 fxe6 10. Ng5 Nf6 11. h4 c5 (329)

**B** 8. Be2 Bb7 9. Nd2 (329)

**C** 8. Bd3 Bb7 9. 0-0 Nbd7 10. Qd2 e5 (330)

**D** 8. Bc4 e6 9. 0-0 Bb7 (330)

**D1** 10. e5 dxe5 11. Nxe5 Nc6! (331)

**D2** 10. d5 exd5 11. exd5 Re8 (331)

**4. g3 Pirc (B07) (338)**

**Phalidor Pirc: (343)**

4. ... Bg7 5. Bg2 0-0 6. Nge2 e5 7. h3 c6

8. a4 exd4 9. Nxd4 Na6 10. 0-0 Nb4 11. a5 Re8!

**A** 12. Ra4 c5! 13. Ndb5 d5! (345)

**B** 12. Re1 d5 (345)

**C** 12. f4 d5 13. e5 Nd7 14. Nce2! Nf8! (346)

**D** 12. Kb2! Bd7! (347)

**D1** 13. f4 c5 14. Nb3 Bc6 15. Re1 Qc7 16. g4 h6! (348)

**D2** 13. Bf4 d5 14. exd5 Nfxd5 15. Nxd5 Nxd5 16. Be1 Re8 (349)

**D3** 13. Nb3 Be6 14. Ra4 c5 (350)

**Ruy Lopez Pirc: (350)**

4. ... c6 5. a4 Nbd7 6. Bg2 Bg7 7. Nge2 0-0 8. 0-0 b6 9. h3 a6

10. Be3 Bb7 11. g4 e5 12. Ng3 b5

**Dragon Pirc: (352)**

4. ... Bg7 5. Bg2 0-0 6. Nge2 Nbd7 7. 0-0 c5 8. h3 Rb8 9. a4 b6

**4. Be3 Pirc (B07) (360)**

**4. ... c6 (361)**

**A** 5. Qd2 b5 (363)

**A1** 6. Bd3 Nbd7 7. Nf3 e5 8. dxe5 dxe5 9. h3 Bb7! (363)

**A2** 6. f3 Nbd7 (368)

**A2a** 7. g4 Nb6 (369)

**A2a1** 8. g5 Nfd7 9. d5 Ne5! 10. dxc6 Nbc4 (369)

**A2a2** 8. h4 h5 9. g5 Nfd7 10. d5 Ne5! 11. dxc6 Nbc4

12. Bxc4 Nxc4 13. Qd4 Rg8 (370)

**A2a3** 8. b3 Qc7 (370)

**A2a4** 8. Bd3 Bb7 (372)

**A2b** 7. 0-0-0 b4 (373)

**A2b1** 8. Na4 Qa5 9. b3 Nb6 (373)

**A2b2** 8. Nbl a5 (374)

**A2b3** 8. Nce2 a5 (374)

**A2c** 7. Nh3 Bb7 8. Nf2 Bg7 (375)

**A2d** 7. Bh6 b4 8. Nd1 Bxb6 9. Qxh6 Qb6 (375)

**B** 5. f3 b5 6. g4 h6! (376)

**C** 5. h3 Nbd7 (380)

**C1** 6. f4 (381)

**C1a** 6. ... e5 (381)

**C1b** 6. ... b5! (382)

**C2** 6. Nf3 Qc7 7. a4 b6 (382)

**Modern against 4. Be3 (B06)** 1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6  
4. Be3 (384)

**A** 4. ... a6 (385)

**A1** 5. f4 b5 6. Be2! b4! 7. Nb1 Bb7 8. Bf3 Nf6 9. Qd3 Nbd7 10. Nd2 (385)

**A2** 5. Qd2 Nd7 (387)

**A2a** 6. f3 b5 7. a4 b4 8. Nd1 Rb8 (387)

**A2b** 6. h4 (389)

**B** 4. ... c6 5. Qd2 b5 6. Bd3 Nd7 7. f4 Ngf6! 8. Nf3 e5! (390)

#### 4. Be2 & 5. h4 Pirc B07 (394)

**4. ... Bg7 5. h4 c5 6. dxc5 Qa5 (395)**

**A** 7. Kf1 Qxc5 8. Be3 Qa5 9. h5 Nxh5! 10. Bxh5 Bxc3! 11. bxc3 gxh5 (396)

**B** 7. Qd3 Qxc5 8. Be3 Qa5 9. h5 Nxh5 (397)

**B1** 10. Bxh5 Bxc3+ 11. bxc3 gxh5 12. Ne2 Nc6 (398)

**B2** 2 10. Qb5+ Qxb5 11. Nxb5 Na6 12. Bxh5 gxh5 (398)

#### 4. Nf3 & 5. Be3 (B08) (404)

**A** 5. ... 0-0 6. Qd2 a6 7. Bb3 b5 8. Ne2 Nc6 9. d5 Ne5 (406)

**B** 5. ... a6 6. Qd2 b5 7. Bh6 0-0 8. Bd3 Nc6 9. Bxg7 Kxg7 (408)

**B1** 10. d5 Ne5 11. Nxe5 dxe5 12. a4 b4 13. Nd1 (410)

**B2** 10. e5 dxe5 11. dxe5 Ng4 12. Qf4 Nxe5! 13. Ne5 Qd6 (411)

#### 3. Bd3 Pirc (B07) (418)

**3. ... e5 4. c3 d5! 5. dxe5 Nxe4 6. Nf3 Nc6 (419)**

**A** 7. Qe2 Nc5 8. Bc2 Bg4 9. 0-0 Qd7 10. Rd1 0-0-0! (421)

**B** 7. 0-0 Bg4 8. Bf4 Be7 9. h3 Bh5 10. Be2 0-0 (422)

**C** 7. Nbd2 Nc5! (422)

**C1** 8. Nb3 Nxd3+ 9. Qxd3 Be7 10. 0-0 0-0 (423)

**C2** 8. Be2 d4 9. cxd4 Nxd4 10. Nxd4 Qxd4 11. 0-0 Bf5 (423)

**C3** 8. Bc2 Bg4 9. 0-0 Be7 10. Re1 d4 11. h3 Bh5 12. Ne4 d3 (424)

**C4** 8. Bb1 Bg4 (425)

**C4a** 9. 0-0 Be7 10. h3 Bh5 11. Re1 d4 (425)

**C4b** 9. b4 Nd7! 10. Qa4 Nb6 11. Qc2 g6! (426)

**C5** 8. Bb5 (426)

**C5a** 8. ... Bg4 (427)

**C5a1** 9. h3 Bh5 10. g4 Bg6 11. Nd4 Qd7 (427)

**C5a2** 9. b4 Ne6 10. Bxc6+ bxc6 11. Qa4 Qd7 (427)

**C5a3** 9. Nb3 a6 10. Bxc6+ bxc6 11. Nxc5 Bxc5 (427)

**C5b** 8. ... Bd7 9. Qe2 a6 10. Bxc6 Bxc6 11. Nd4 Bd7 (427)

**C5b1** 13. a4 c5! (428)

**C5b2** 13. Rd1 Qh4! (429)

#### 3. f3 Pirc (B07) (434)

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