

GAMBIT

An Idiot-Proof Chess Opening Repertoire



Graham
Burgess

*An easy-to-learn repertoire where you can
relax and just play chess!*

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Symbols

+	check
++	double check
#	checkmate
!!	brilliant move
!	good move
!?	interesting move
?!	dubious move
?	bad move
??	blunder
Ch	championship
tt	team event
corr.	correspondence game
(n)	<i>n</i> th match game
(D)	see next diagram

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Publisher's Note

Normally at Gambit we would coordinate the release of the three editions of new books – print, [Chess Studio](#) and Kindle – so that they are within about a month of each other. However, given the unique crisis in which the world finds itself at present, we have decided to release the two electronic versions early. This also provides some reading and study material to all those chess-players who are at present at home and lack any tournaments to watch or compete in. The print edition will be released just as soon as printing and distribution channels allow.

Graham Burgess

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Introduction

I know, you are not an idiot. Clearly: you bought this book! The point is that chess is such a difficult and paradoxical game that it can make us all feel like idiots at times, and it would be nice to have a repertoire that leaves us with a fighting chance when we do have these inevitable slip-ups in the opening.

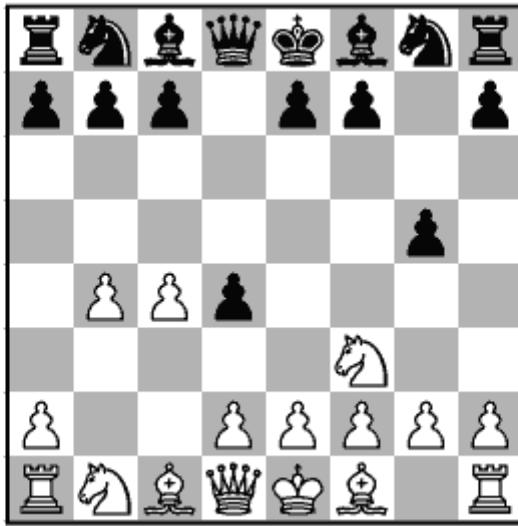
So that's where this book comes in. My aim was to construct a repertoire that avoids excessive simplification as well as overly static or symmetrical structures. We'll also sidestep 'megatheory' and all-or-nothing tactical shootouts where a single slip will lead to instant loss.

I believe it is a high-quality repertoire. If you are conscientious about your work, that's in some sense inevitable in this computer era, where the moment you start putting in dubious moves, the engine starts giving you nasty-looking assessments. It is also an ambitious repertoire: we put our pieces in the centre and are looking for a fight. Perhaps a slow-burning fight, but a fight nevertheless. As you leaf through the book, you will notice plenty of sharp tactical lines. Of course: they exist in any repertoire, and need to be addressed. But generally these most critical lines are ones that we can avoid if we want, and aren't too well known. In the black repertoire in particular, some of the lines that appear most threatening have never actually occurred over the board.

But what is an idiot-proof opening? Let me tell you about a game I once played. I was "really unhappy" about it at the time (that's the G-rated description of my thoughts). I had played an opening I knew well, and the opponent had replied with a couple of insipid moves. So I thought for a while and found a plan that took full advantage of those insipid moves and would give me a great position. Except it didn't. Immediately my pieces were on absurd squares and his insipid moves suddenly had great purpose. So I lost this game, right? Actually, no. As I only realized long afterwards, I had played an *idiot-proof* opening! Even with all the strategic pluses I had granted my opponent, there were no immediate tactics, and he still had to form a plan for how and where to advance and how to transform the structure. Even for a strong player such as my opponent in this game, these are difficult tasks, and there is plenty of scope for getting it wrong. As it was, he allowed me a chance to get back into the game and a few tricky tactics later a draw was agreed.

So how should one 'idiot-proof' a repertoire? For the black openings in this book, I was particularly looking for lines that give White little choice and feature an early pawn exchange that leads to an asymmetrical structure and few exchanges of pieces. I also wanted lines that avoid long-term 'problem pieces', such as a bad bishop inside a pawn-chain. Against 1 e4, the Scandinavian (1...d5 2 exd5 Qxd5) was therefore an obvious choice. Other openings, such as the Caro-Kann, French and even Alekhine can lead to the same structure, but can go in many different directions too. (An idiot-proof repertoire in the Four Pawns Alekhine would have been hilarious...) Against 1 d4, the Slav (1...d5 2 c4 c6) is a natural counterpart, except for lines like the Exchange Variation and Slow Slav. That led to the idea of entering the Slav only after getting in our asymmetrical pawn exchange with 1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4, and then answering 3 Nf3 with 3...c6. This means we need to deal with some QGA lines too (most notably 3 e4 e5), but the trade-off seems a good one.

While the aim is to play soundly and solidly, we also seek tactical opportunities to fight for the advantage. But does it really make sense to recommend lines like 1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 d4 3 b4 g5!? (D) in a book that aims to provide an easy-to-remember repertoire?



White to play

I say definitely yes! It is far easier to play lines where there is a clear-cut objective than ones where you are carefully treading water, subtly anticipating many plans that the opponent might not even play. If the strategy can be summarized in a sentence, then it is easy to remember and study. Here that sentence would be “If White grabs the pawn, Black pushes pawns, gaining space and initiative; if White responds passively, then Black’s extra space on the Kingside proves useful.” And in the accompanying pawn-sac line after 1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 d4 3 g3 Nc6 4 Bg2 e5 5 0-0 e4 6 Ne1 h5!, Black’s strategy can be summed up in one word: “attack!”. The fact that we know both these lines are supported by computer analysis helps us play them with confidence, even if we haven’t committed a big chunk of that analysis to memory. The point is to play energetically and consistently, and this should yield excellent practical chances. Of course, if you are facing a strong opponent who is familiar with these lines (and still chooses to face them, for some reason!), then it will help to know a few more specifics.

Let’s take a walk through the whole repertoire.

Black vs 1 e4: Scandinavian

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Qxd5 3 Nc3

After other moves, most notably 3 Nf3, Black gets counterplay by responding very directly in the centre: 3...Bg4 4 Be2 Nc6; e.g., 5 d4 0-0-0 6 Be3 e5 7 c4 Qa5+ 8 Bd2 Qa6!? and it is very easy for White to get into trouble.

3...Qd6

A line popularized by Tiviakov and taken up as an occasional weapon by Carlsen and other elite players. It is still new enough that you see occasional claims that it is dubious or even refuted, etc. But seriously, can you really believe that this position can be that bad for Black? This should work to our advantage, as an over-confident opponent tends to be careless or unobjective.

4 d4 Nf6 5 Nf3 c6 (D)



White to play

There are other moves here, but this is the main line, and offers the queen both protection and squares. Obviously White can set up in a great many ways, but I'll note that Black will normally put his bishop on f5 or g4 and follow up with ...e6 and further natural development. The option of a fianchetto with ...g6 is useful to have in your back pocket (and may be necessary in some lines), but generally speaking it makes it harder to find a good role for the queen's bishop. Also the manoeuvre ...Nbd7-b6-d5 takes a lot of time, and should only be used when it has a specific purpose, such as gaining time by attacking white pieces.

6 Ne5

The other main line is, surprisingly, 6 h3, when after 6...Bf5 7 Ne5 Nbd7 White needs to explain why h3 is more useful than ...Bf5. He generally does so by hunting the bishop, which leads to interesting play where Black gets his share of the chances.

6...Nbd7 7 Nc4

This is the main line, but the aggressive 7 f4! has got some good press recently. White may even follow up with g4, which resembles some heavy-handed artillery rolling up the board. Black has struggled to meet this idea head-on. My tip is 7...a6!?, on the basis that you don't stop a tank with a roadblock. This useful and flexible little move seeks to lob a grenade into its tracks.

7...Qc7 8 Qf3

8 a4 is a move you may well meet, following its use by (and against) Carlsen. 8...a5?! is a reply Black should avoid because of a specific tactical point, so this is a line where 8...g6 seems right.

8...Nb6 9 Bf4 Qd8

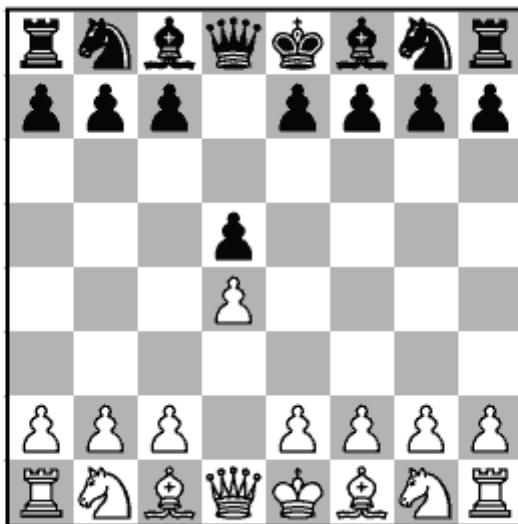
9...Qd7 is the other main option here, but its idea is the wood-chopping ...Qg4 and it also exposes Black to some more dangerous pawn sacrifices. I prefer the more natural retreat to d8, which seems no less sound and leads to a fuller game. One interesting line runs:

10 Be5 Be6 11 Ne3 g6 12 0-0-0

Now the untried 12...Bh6!? makes good use of the organic features of the position and appears very playable for Black.

Black vs 1 d4: QGA/Slav and Queen's Pawn Games

1 d4 d5 (D)



White to play

2 c4

2 Bf4, the Modern London, is the most important of the less common moves. We answer it actively with 2...c5 and a rapid assault on the b2-pawn that White has left unprotected. One key tactical point arises after 3 e3 Nc6 4 c3 Qb6 5 Qb3 c4 6 Qc2: we do not rush in with the common error 6...Bf5? 7 Qxf5! Qxb2 8 Qxd5, but first insert 6...e5! 7 dxе5 before playing 7...Bf5.

2 Nf3 needs to be answered with 2...c6 so that we can stay within our Slav repertoire in the case of 3 c4 dxc4. Note that after 3 e3 Bf5 4 c4 e6 (so we can answer cxd5 asymmetrically with ...exd5) 5 Qb3 we cover b7 by playing 5...Qb6, happy for White to open our a-file by exchanging on b6, but after 6 c5 drop back with 6...Qc7!, keeping the game lively. These are common themes throughout our repertoire. 3 Bf4 is another form of London System, where we'll play 3...Bf5 followed in most cases by ...e6 and ...Bd6.

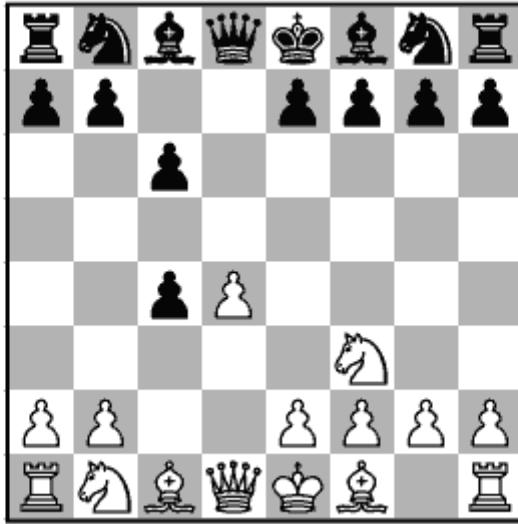
2...dxc4

This is our QGA path to the Slav. Next we will play the freeing ...e5 if White doesn't prevent it directly.

3 Nf3

The most important QGA line in our repertoire is 3 e4 e5. Then 4 Nf3 exd4 5 Bxc4 Nc6 6 0-0 Be6 leads to many interesting possibilities, but the overall assessment is that Black gets plenty of activity to compensate for some weak pawns.

3...c6 (D)



White to play

This brings us to a line of the Slav. We will generally cause White some inconvenience in regaining his pawn on c4, but won't go overboard trying to hold on to it.

4 e3

The main line. Instead 4 e4 obliges us to play 4...b5, when there are some forcing lines we need to know, such as 5 a4 e6 6 axb5 cxb5 7 b3 Nf6! 8 bxc4 Nxe4 9 c5 Bxc5!, but there isn't much memory work involved.

4 a4 is a tricky move-order to meet in a theory-avoiding manner, so I advocate returning to a standard Slav with 4...Nf6 5 Nc3 but then immediately stepping away from the main lines with 5...e6. This leads to a form of modified QGA that has been tested successfully in high-level games.

4...Be6

A strange-looking move, but the centrepiece of our repertoire against 1 d4. Your first thought might be that White must have some way to make the bishop look silly. Well, feel free to scour the lines in Chapter 3, but Black seems to have reasonable resources, even if some of them are yet to see the light of day in practice. One such line is 5 Be2 Nf6 6 0-0 g6 7 Ng5 Bd5 8 f3 h6 9 Nh3 c5!, with points like 10 e4 cxd4 11 exd5?! d3, trapping the bishop unless White goes for 12 Qa4+ Qd7 13 Bd1 b5!, when the black pawns are getting really dangerous. These oddball lines may look like hard work for Black, but think about how tough it will be for White to face them unprepared at the board!

Black vs 1 c4

1 c4

Pretty much the only move that we don't answer with 1...d5! 1...c6 intending ...d5 also doesn't fit in with our repertoire since it allows White to play an Exchange Slav.

1...c5

So the Symmetrical English is our choice. If White doesn't immediately open the centre, then we shall clamp down on the d4 advance by playing ...g6 and ...Bg7, and ...e5 if necessary.

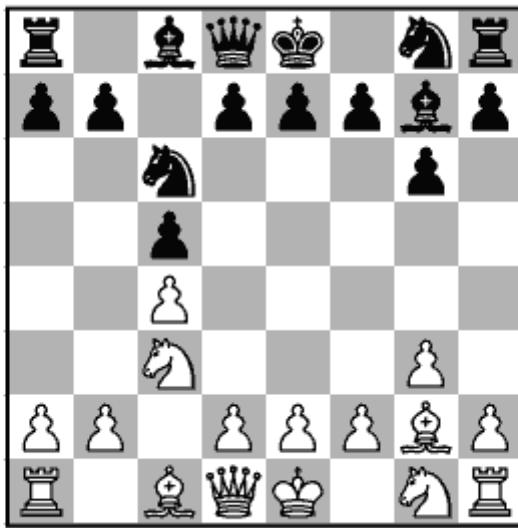
2 Nc3

If White does blast open the centre with 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4, we shall play the tricky move-order 4...Qb6, avoiding most of the heavy theoretical lines of the Symmetrical Four Knights (i.e. 4...Nf6 5 Nc3 e6) and adding some novel twists to the game. One interesting but rare line runs 5 Nb5!? a6 6 Be3 Qa5+ 7 N5c3 Nf6 8 g3 Ng4 9 Bc1 Qc5 10 e3 Nce5 11 Be2 h5 with sharp counterplay.

2...Nc6 3 g3

3 Nf3 allows us to play 3...e5, hindering White's d4 advance. It's an idea that has been well-tested in top-level chess.

3...g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 (D)



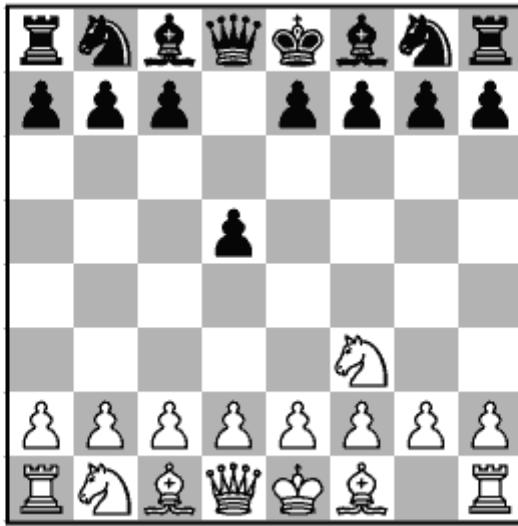
White to play

This is a line that we also play as White. Now:

- **5 a3** is a popular plan, which we meet with 5...b6!?, arguing that White can spend time playing b4 and Rb1 if he wants, but meanwhile we'll be focusing on the centre. An open b-file may prove no more useful for White than it is for Black.
- **5 e4** is a move we avoid as White because 5...a6!? kicks off rapid queenside counterplay that works rather well.
- **5 e3** is a major option, but Black gets abundant chances after 5...e5 6 Nge2 Nge7 7 0-0 d6. One line in particular represents a kind of 'theme encyclopaedia': 8 a3 Be6! (intending ...d5) 9 Nd5 Rb8 (intending ...b5 now that the knight doesn't cover that square) 10 Nec3 a6 11 b4 b5 12 d3 e4!, exploiting the weaknesses that we have forced on the long diagonal. "I love it when a plan comes together!"
- **5 Nf3** e5 sees us using the Botvinnik set-up (a mainstay of our white repertoire) as Black. There is a big complex of variations here, so in Chapter 5 I seek to explain it as far as possible in terms of 'mini-rules', which will also be applicable when we handle similar positions as White.

Black vs 1 Nf3

1 Nf3 d5 (D)



White to play

We offer White a transposition to a queen's pawn opening, but some fancy footwork is needed if he stays within Réti territory.

2 g3

2 e3 appears harmless, but White intends c4, and after our standard theme response of 2...Bg4 3 c4 e6 (actively developing the bishop and intending to meet cxd5 with ...exd5), 4 Qb3!? looks like a problem. However, we have a neat tactical answer: 4...Bxf3! 5 Qxb7 Nd7 6 gxf3 d4! with active counterplay. In particular, 7 exd4?! Ne7! proves better than a similar line of the Torre precisely because Black *hasn't* already put this knight on f6.

2 b3 Bg4 works pretty well for Black since the move b3 rules out a variety of active developments for White.

2 c4 needs to be answered with 2...d4 to avoid being 'move-ordered' out of our repertoire. Fortunately, this line has recently been infused with dynamic and aggressive new ideas for Black – we mentioned two of them earlier in this introduction.

2...Bg4 3 Bg2 c6 4 c4

4 d4 Nd7 5 0-0 e6 6 Nbd2 Ngf6 7 Re1 Be7 8 e4 looks like it will force Black into a passive position after wood-chopping on e4, but there is a far more interesting answer in 8...h6!? 9 e5 Nh7 with kingside counterplay in prospect – and no problem pieces.

4...e6

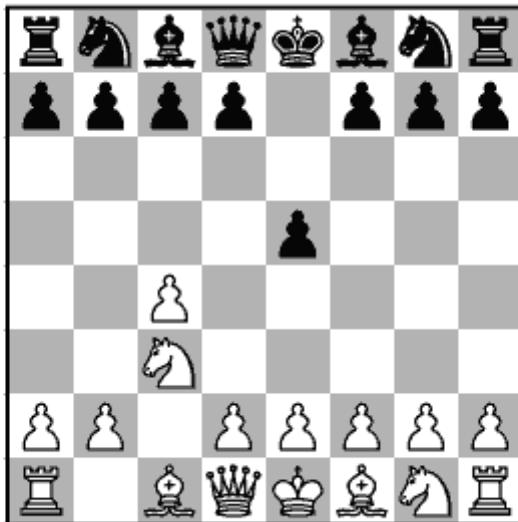
Again we see the themes of 'bishop outside the pawn-chain' and 'answering cxd5 with ...exd5'. We are also in time to answer 5 Qb3 comfortably with 5...Qb6.

White: 1 c4 e5

1 c4

This is certainly the easiest of the 20 possible first moves to play with minimal knowledge. You could almost open 1 c4 with a plan of “develop sensibly and then just play chess” and not do too badly. That’s not what I am recommending of course, but it is a better idea in the English Opening than in a Najdorf, Scotch, Semi-Slav or King’s Indian!

1...e5 2 Nc3 (D)



Black to play

2...Nc6

2...f5 is well answered with 3 d4!, opening the centre and leaving the move ...f5 looking a little pointless and weakening.

2...Bb4 3 Nd5 leads to highly concrete play where White can expect good chances.

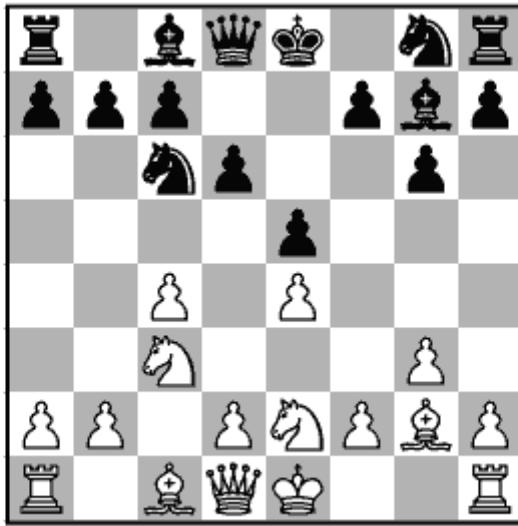
2...Nf6 3 g3 (we dodge 3 Nf3 Nc6 and the very heavy theory – by English Opening standards – of the Four Knights line) and now:

- 3...Bc5 is probably a less effective move here than with the bishop already on g2, as we can respond 4 Nf3 Nc6 before playing 5 Bg2.
- 3...c6 is another line where we avoid an immediate Bg2; instead 4 Nf3 e4 5 Nd4 leads to interesting play where we claim Black’s pawns to be overextended.
- 3...d5 4 cxd5 Nxd5 5 Bg2 Nb6 is a classic Reversed Dragon. We adopt a set-up without an early Nf3, so as to retain ideas of crippling Black’s queenside by meeting ...Nc6 with Bxc6.
- 3...Bb4 is one of Black’s most respected replies to the English. We shall answer with 4 e4, a rather fresh move that enjoys the support of some of the world’s best.

3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7

This is known as the Closed English, as it is the reversed form of the Closed Sicilian (1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 followed by g3).

5 e4 d6 6 Nge2 (D)



Black to play

So, we have achieved the Botvinnik set-up. White is very flexible: he can seek play on the kingside (with f4), in the centre (by the d4 pawn-break) or more obviously on the queenside with a b4 advance. It looks like White has left a nasty hole on the d4-square, but it is not so easy for Black to make good use of it.

Right now two lines need careful handling in particular:

6...f5

The other one is 6...h5, when 7 h4 offers the black pieces good footholds, so my recommendation is the more slippery 7 h3. Then 7...h4 8 g4 f5 (a theme we also see with reversed colours) 9 gxf5 gxf5 10 Rg1! offers kingside play and has the tactical point 10...f4?! 11 d4!. After the more flexible 7...Be6 8 d3 Qd7!? it makes sense to play 9 h4, as Black has made some slow and committal moves.

7 d3 Nf6

A position that can occur from many move-orders, and where White must take Black's possible ...f4 ideas seriously.

8 Nd5

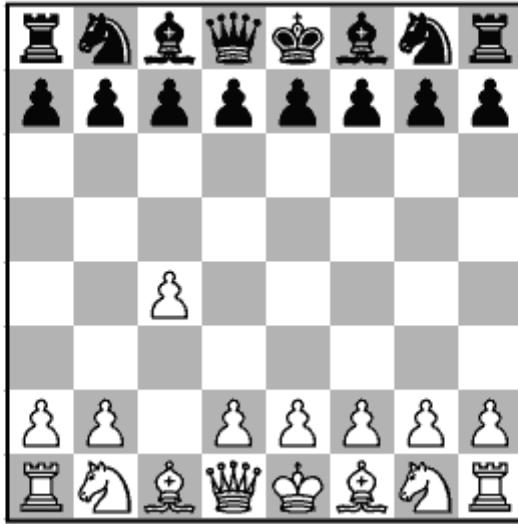
8 h3 f4!? and 8 0-0 0-0 9 Nd5 f4!? are both unclear lines where White has lost the initiative.

8...0-0 9 Bg5

This keeps Black under pressure. In many lines White will exchange pawns on f5 when the time is right, and choose his set-up based on how Black recaptures.

White: 1 c4 vs 1...c5 and other moves

1 c4 (D)



Black to play

Black has a wide choice here.

1...c5

1...b6 clearly beats us to the punch if we wanted to continue with g3 and Bg2. However, we can blunt Black's fianchetto using a Botvinnik set-up: 2 Nc3 Bb7 3 e4 intending g3, Bg2 and Nge2, etc. If Black replies 3...e5!?, then we have the nice idea 4 a3!?, answering the natural 4...a5 with a sudden switch to King's Gambit mode: 5 f4! exf4 6 d4 Qh4+ 7 Kd2 and after 7...Qf2+?! 8 Kd3 Nc6 9 Nb5 we see why White wanted to insert the a-pawn moves!

1...f5 seeks a Dutch Defence. But unlike the true Dutch (1 d4 f5), White is better placed here to fight for the e4-square, and our main plan is to prepare the move e4. 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 g3 e6 4 Bg2 Be7 5 d3 0-0 6 e4 is a critical line, when as far as I can see, 6...Nc6 is the only way for Black to seek a viable game, but this move is very rarely played, and so far never with the correct follow-up.

1...g6 is a King's Indian player's move. We can reply with a Botvinnik set-up, and the play is generally very similar to the Closed English.

1...e6 and 1...c6 both intend to follow up with ...d5, so we shouldn't play an early Nc3 if we wish to avoid transpositions to main-line queen's pawn openings. In both cases we'll reply 2 g3 d5 3 Bg2. If Black takes on c4, then we'll end up in positions that look a little like a Catalan without actually transposing, and otherwise we'll adopt a double fianchetto, in some cases transposing to strategically rich lines of the Réti Opening.

1...Nf6 is a flexible move that demands a flexible response, as Black might still follow up with ...e5 or ...c5, in addition to a variety of other plans including ...e6 and ...d5. 2 g3 fits the bill. Then the main moves are 2...g6, 2...c6 and 2...e6. Strategically they have much in common with these same moves played one move earlier, though many of the details are different.

2 g3 (D)



Black to play

An important move-order point. We suppress any Hedgehog ideas with ...b6, and are generally happy to follow up with Bg2, Nc3 and in many cases e4 followed by Nge2 (i.e. the Botvinnik system). But Black has a great many options with his set-ups and move-orders, and we must be flexible to answer each of them in a challenging way and without our workload mushrooming. To that end, we generally avoid Nc3 until ideas with ...e6 and ...d5 are off the table. That's because Tarrasch and Semi-Tarrasch approaches are easier to answer when we haven't yet played Nc3. There are lines where we put the knight on f3, but that is only in specific instances where Black has already plumped for a line where the Botvinnik set-up makes no real sense.

2...g6

After 2...Nc6 3 Bg2 Nf6 we do after all play 4 Nc3 e6 5 e4. While Black can play 5...d5 here (which he rarely does, in fact), he will not get anything resembling a Tarrasch.

2...Nf6 3 Bg2 d5 4 cxd5 Nxd5 5 Nc3 Nc7 is the odd-looking Rubinstein line, where we'll vigorously disrupt Black's plans for central domination with 6 Nf3 Nc6 7 a3 and now 7...e5 8 b4! or 7...g6 8 h4!?. This looks eccentric, but it has been used to good effect by very serious players in very serious games!

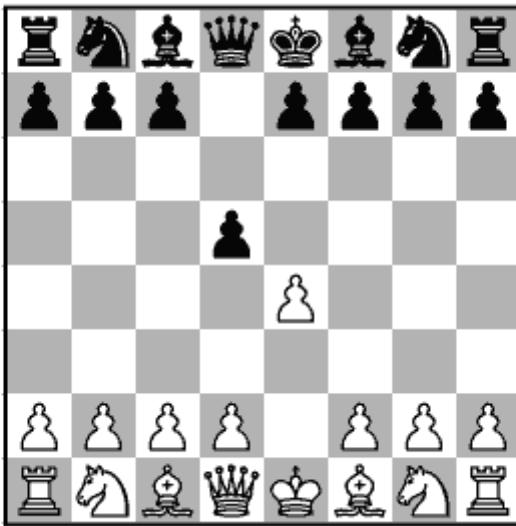
3 Bg2 Bg7 4 Nc3 Nc6

This is the place where our white and black repertoires intersect. I have chosen the amazingly rich lines following 5 d3!? as the setting for the imaginary game of "what if we had to play against ourself?"

Having set the scene, it is now time for a more detailed examination.

1: Scandinavian

1 e4 d5 (*D*)

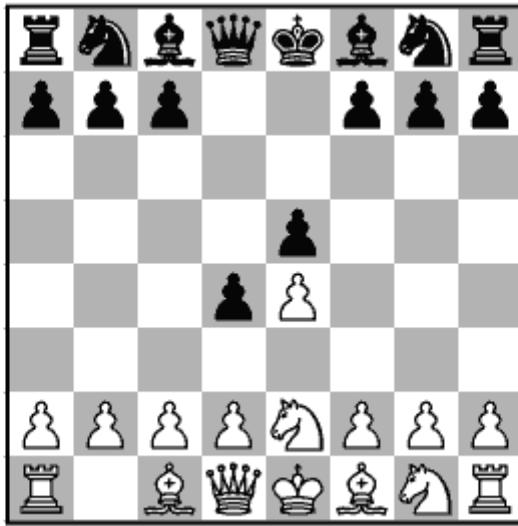


White to play

2 exd5

One of the practical advantages of the Scandinavian is that it is very forcing: there are no ‘closed’, ‘exchange’ or ‘symmetrical’ variations. Other moves at this point are very rare and offer White nothing (at best):

- a) 2 d4?! is the same dubious gambit as 1 d4 d5 2 e4?!, so is covered in Line [A](#) of Chapter 4.
- b) 2 Nf3? is an inferior version of the Budapest. After 2...dxe4 3 Ng5 Bf5 White will struggle to get out of the opening alive since there is no disruptive check on b5 (as there would be if Black had played ...c5).
- c) 2 d3?! dxe4 3 dxe4 Qxd1+ 4 Kxd1 Nc6 and Black is already at least equal; in practice White scores very poorly from this position, though that might be in part because very few good players will ever opt for 2 d3?!. Grind away!
- d) 2 e5?! is a clearly inferior version for White of the Advance Caro-Kann or Advance French. 2...c5 and then:
 - d1) 3 f4?! Nc6 4 Nf3 (4 Bb5 Bd7) 4...Bg4.
 - d2) 3 c3 Bf5 4 d4 e6 5 Nf3 (5 Bb5+ Nd7 6 Ne2 a6) 5...Nd7!? (so the other knight can come to c6) leaves Black very comfortable.
- e) 2 Nc3 can be met by the effort-saving 2...dxe4 3 Nxe4 Qd5!?, when 4 Nc3 Qd6 transposes to Line [C](#). But objectively Black should prefer 2...d4 3 Nce2 e5 (*D*), with a position he can be very happy to have just three moves into the game.



White to play

He has space and easy development while White's sniping around the edges will barely be enough to maintain equality:

e1) 4 d3 removes any Bc4 ideas, and 4...c5 5 f4 Nc6 6 Nf3 Bd6 is very solid.

e2) 4 c3 Nf6!? 5 Ng3 (5 cxd4 Nxe4 6 dxe5?! Nc6! 7 Nf3 Bc5 leaves White in trouble) 5...h5 with the initiative.

e3) 4 f4 exf4 5 Nxf4 Bd6 6 d3 c5 is pleasant for Black.

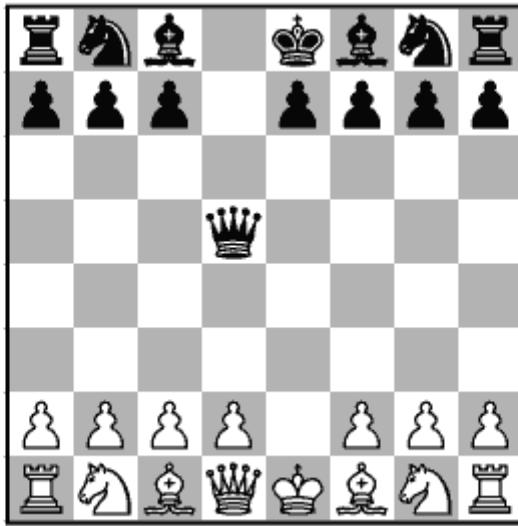
e4) 4 Nf3 f6 5 Ng3 Be6 makes it hard to activate White's pieces.

e5) 4 Ng3 Be6 (preventing Bc4) 5 c3 Nc6 (simple and good) 6 Bb5 Ne7 and then:

e51) 7 Nf3?! a6 8 Ba4 d3! (Demuth-Miroshnichenko, Leros 2009; normal moves are fine here too) 9 Nxe5 b5 10 Nxc6 Nxc6 11 Bb3 h5 and White has real problems.

e52) 7 d3 and almost any reasonable plan can be used by Black, but one good idea is 7...a6 (7...h5!?) 8 Ba4 (Pel-Litwak, Olomouc 2006) 8...dxc3 9 bxc3 Qd6 intending ...0-0-0 with ...h5 as a possible follow-up.

2...Qxd5 (D)



White to play

Now three moves deserve ‘main line’ status, though the third is by far the most common:

A: 3 d4

B: 3 Nf3

C: 3 Nc3

Instead 3 h3 looks feeble, but could be an attempt to reach favourable versions of the main lines (i.e. those after 3 Nc3 or 3 d4). For instance, 3...Bf5 eyes c2, but 4 Nc3! Qe6+?! (4...Qd6 seeks a transposition to Line [C2](#), but 5 Qf3 Qe6+ 6 Nge2 Nc6 7 d3 causes some disruption, albeit for both players) 5 Be2 Qg6 6 d4! is a good pawn sacrifice. So I propose 3...c5 4 Nc3 Qd8 5 Nf3 Nc6, which leads to conventional play (e.g., 6 Bb5 Bd7 7 0-0 e6), while pawn-grabbers can look into 3...Qe6+ 4 Be2 (4 Ne2 b6!?) 4...Qg6 5 d4 Qxg2 6 Bf3 Qg6 7 Nc3 Na6 at their own risk.

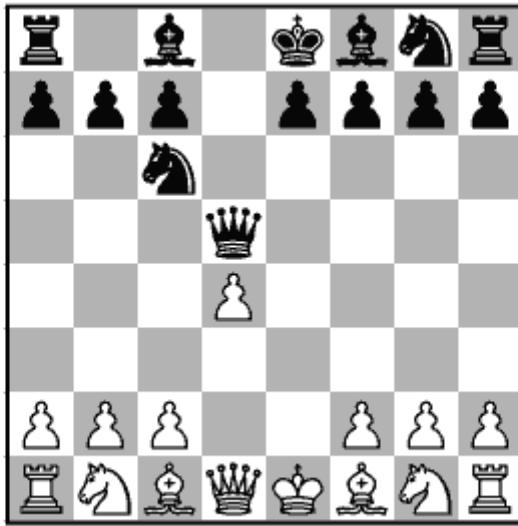
A)

3 d4

This should be met very directly with a counterattack in the centre.

3...Nc6 (D)

3...e5 is tempting, but 4 Nc3 is an annoying reply, as Black will need to defend carefully after 4...Qxd4 (or 4...Bb4 5 Ne2 exd4 6 Qxd4, as in Romero Araya-Tiviakov, Antofagasta 2016) 5 Qxd4 exd4 6 Nb5, with no prospect of any outcome better than sterile equality.



White to play

4 Nf3

Or 4 Be3 e5, and then:

- a) 5 Nf3 Bg4 6 Nc3 Bb4 7 Be2 exd4 is obviously OK for Black: 8 0-0 (only move) 8...Qh5 9 Nxd4 Bd6 (G.Lund-Djurhuus, Norwegian Team Ch 2018/19) 10 h3 Bxe2 11 Ncxe2 Nge7 and White has got nothing out of the opening.
- b) 5 Nc3 Bb4 6 Ne2 (6 Nf3 Qa5!) 6...exd4 (safer than 6...Bg4?! 7 a3! Bxc3+ 8 Nxc3, when 8...Bxd1? 9 Nxd5 0-0-0 10 Rxd1 Rxd5 11 c4 followed by d5 leaves White much better) 7 Nxd4 Bxc3+ 8 bxc3 Nge7 and Black can be happy.

4...Bg4

The main alternative is 4...e5 but after 5 Nc3 (5 dxe5?! Qxd1+ 6 Kxd1 Bg4) 5...Bb4 6 Bd2 Bxc3 7 Bxc3 e4 8 Ne5 (8 Nd2 Nf6 9 Nc4 {9 Bc4?! Qg5} 9...Be6) 8...Nxe5 9 dxe5 Ne7 White has more ways to play for an advantage.

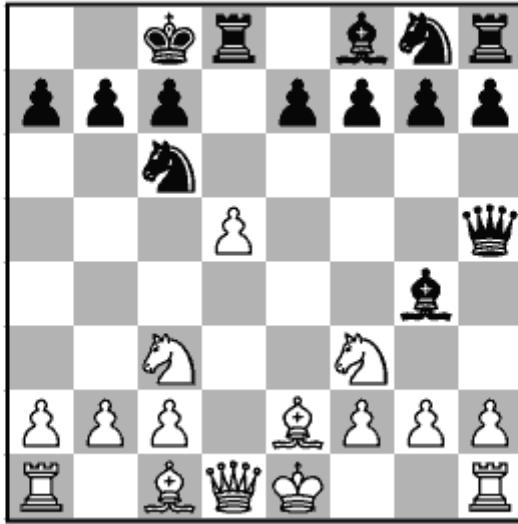
5 Nc3

5 Be2 transposes to Line [B](#).

5...Qh5 6 d5

6 Bb5 is met by 6...e6, as in Grushevsky-Korchnoi, Tashkent 1958.

6...0-0-0 7 Be2 (D)



Black to play

Now an accurate sequence neatly solves Black's problems: 7...e6! (Black should avoid 7...Bxf3?! 8 Bxf3 Qe5+ 9 Be3 e6 10 0-0 Nf6 11 dxc6! Rxd1 12 cxb7+ Kb8 13 Rxd1, as played in a number of correspondence games) 8 Ng5 Bxe2 9 Qxe2 Qxe2+ 10 Kxe2 Ne5 11 dxe6 (11 Bf4 h6; 11 f4 h6) 11...f6! and the e6-pawn will fall before long.

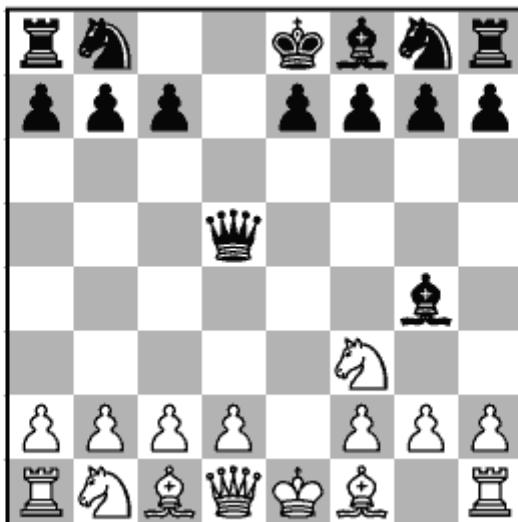
B)

3 Nf3

Black must take this modest-looking move very seriously.

3...Bg4 (D)

After 3...Nf6?! 4 d4 it is hard for Black to equalize, as the time spent playing the move ...Nf6 should have been used instead to attack the centre more directly.



White to play

4 Be2

4 Nc3 Qe6+ 5 Qe2 Nc6!? (5...Qxe2+ 6 Bxe2 Nc6 is also viable) 6 h3 (6 Qxe6 Bxe6 7 Bb5 Bd7 is OK for Black) 6...Qxe2+ (6...Bxf3 7 Qxe6 fxe6 8 gxf3 Nd4 9 Kd1 Nf6 retains more imbalance) 7 Bxe2 Bh5 8 g4 Bg6 9 Bb5 e6 (Degraeve-Chabanon, French Ch, Nantes 1993) offers White little since Black's dynamic play will compensate for the doubled pawns if White exchanges on c6.

4...Nc6 5 d4

Other moves:

a) 5 0-0 0-0-0 and then:

a1) 6 Nc3 Qd7 (6...Qf5!?) 7 h3 (7 b4?! e5!) 7...Bxf3 (7...Bh5 8 b4!?) 8 Bxf3 e5 with interesting but roughly balanced play; e.g., 9 Re1 Nge7 10 d4!? (10 b4 Ng6) 10...Qxd4 11 Qe2 Qb6.

a2) 6 h3 Bh5 (6...h5 is tempting, but the follow-up after 7 c3 intending d4 isn't obvious) and here:

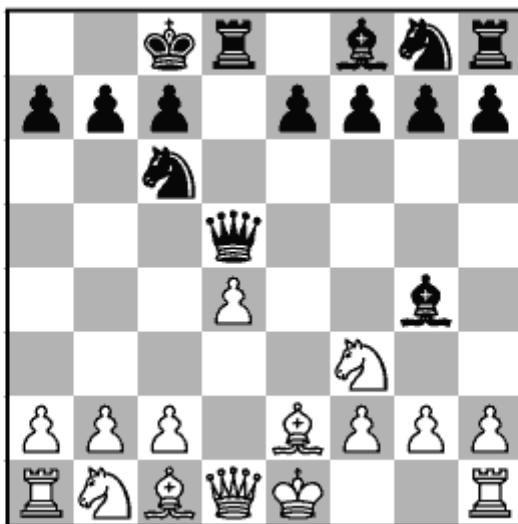
a21) 7 d4 Bxf3 8 Bxf3 Qxd4 costs White a pawn here.

a22) 7 Nc3 Qd7 8 d3 (8 b4 Nf6 9 b5?! Bxf3) 8...Nf6 9 Re1 and here 9...Rg8 (intending ...g5) is an interesting attempt to liven the play, while 9...e6 is safe and equal.

a23) 7 d3 Nf6 8 Be3 and with White's set-up so modest, Black can start to grab space with 8...e5 or even consider 8...Rg8 intending ...g5.

b) 5 h3 Bxf3 (after 5...Bh5?! 6 d4 the pawn is untouchable for tactical reasons – compare the line after 5 0-0 0-0-0 6 h3 – and 6...0-0-0 7 c4 favours White) 6 Bxf3 Qe6+ is a disruptive check. 7 Qe2 Nd4! (Black can also play 7...Qxe2+ 8 Bxe2, but it is not so easy to combat the bishop-pair) 8 Qxe6 Nxf3+ 9 gxf3 fxe6 and both players have weak pawns, with no obvious strategic advantage for either side. However, there is clearly enough imbalance to make the game interesting. For instance, 10 d3 g6 11 Be3 (11 h4 Nh6 12 h5 gxh5 13 Rxh5 Nf5) 11...Nh6 12 Nd2 Nf5 13 Ne4 Bg7 14 c3 a5.

5...0-0-0 (D)



White to play

6 Be3

6 c4 Qf5 (this seems the best square in this case) 7 Be3 (7 Nbd2 e6 and 7 0-0 Nxd4 8 Nxd4 Bxe2 9 Qxe2 Rxd4 10 Be3 Rd7 both leave the game roughly equal) 7...Bxf3! 8 Bxf3 Nxd4! 9 Bxd4 (9 Bg4 is no knockout because of 9...Nc2+ 10 Qxc2 Qxg4) 9...Qe6+ 10 Be2 Nf6!? (this move is untried; the point is that White can't save his bishop in any case, so there is no need as yet to commit to 10...c5 or 10...Qe4) 11 Qa4 (11 0-0 c5 12 Qa4 cxd4 13 Qxa7 Qxe2 14 Qa8+ and White must take the perpetual check; 11 Nc3 c5 12 Nd5 cxd4 13 Qxd4 Kb8 also offers White very little) 11...Rxd4 12 Qxa7 Qb6 and if White does not carefully steer the game towards a draw he could end up worse: 13 Qa8+ (13 Qxb6 cxb6 and ...e6 with no problems for Black) 13...Kd7 14 Qa4+ (or 14 0-0 Qxb2 15 Na3 e5) 14...c6 15 Na3 and now Black has a number of viable options, including 15...Ne4!? 16 0-0 g6 17 Nc2 Rd6 and 15...Kc7! 16 Nc2 Re4 17 b4 e6, with sharp play in both cases.

6...e5 7 c4

Alternatively:

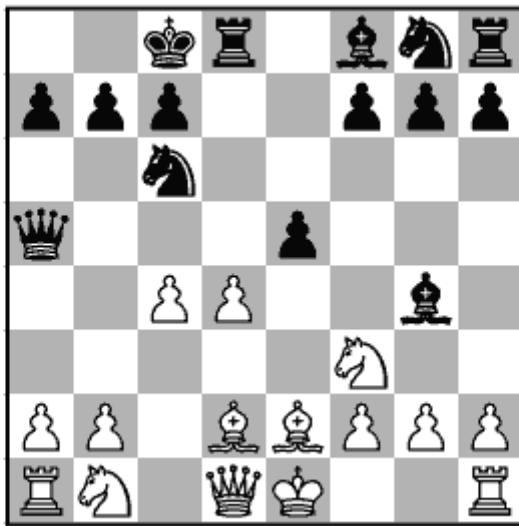
a) 7 dxe5 has several good answers, including 7...Qxd1+ 8 Bxd1 Nxe5.

b) 7 Nc3 Qa5 (7...Bb4 8 0-0 Bxc3 9 bxc3 Nf6 10 c4 Qe4, as in M.Becker-Smerdon, Bundesliga 2014/15, is a sharper option) 8 Nxe5 (other moves are bad) 8...Bxe2 (not 8...Nxe5? 9 Bxg4+) 9 Qxe2 (9 Nxc6? Bxd1 10 Nxa5 Bxc2 gives Black the bishop-pair and a better structure) 9...Nxe5 10 dxe5 Qxe5 is OK for Black; e.g., 11 Qc4 Nf6 12 Rd1 (12 0-0 Bd6 13 g3 Qh5 with kingside counterplay) 12...Rxd1+ 13 Kxd1 Bd6 14 Kc1 (14 Qxf7 Bb4) 14...Qe6 is safe enough.

7...Qa5+

The f5-square is unavailable, but the queen check forces a loss of tempo.

8 Bd2 (*D*)



Black to play

8...Qa6!?

This is an interesting alternative to the standard 8...Bb4.

9 c5

9 d5 Bxf3 10 Bxf3 Nd4 (Külaots-Kovalenko, Iasi 2014) is no problem for Black thanks to his strong centralized knight.

9...Bxf3 10 gxf3 b5

With a chaotic mess that is dangerous for either player if they don't know what they are doing!

a) 11 dxe5?! Bxc5!.

b) 11 d5 Nd4 12 d6! cxd6 13 Nc3 Nxe2 14 Qxe2 dxc5 followed by ...Nf6 is sharp with chances for both sides.

c) 11 Nc3 Nxd4 and now 12 b4! keeps White in the fight; one good idea is then 12...g6 intending ...Bh6.

d) 11 cxb6 Qxb6 12 dxe5 Bb4 (12...Nxe5 13 Nc3 Bc5 14 0-0 Nd3 15 Ne4 Nf6 is playable too) 13 Nc3 Nge7 (13...Bxc3 14 bxc3 Nxe5 15 Qc2 leaves White more solid) and one possibility now is 14 Qa4!? Rxd2! 15 Ba6+ Kd7 16 Kxd2 Bxc3+ 17 bxc3 Qxf2+ 18 Be2 Rd8 with a potent attack. After 19 Rae1 (only move) 19...Nd5 20 Kc2 Qc5 21 Bb5 Nxc3 great care is needed from White.

C)

3 Nc3 Qd6 (D)



White to play

After remaining in the shadows for a long time, this move has emerged in the 21st century as a reliable option and the main line of the whole opening. Perhaps it was neglected because White can 'gain further time' by attacking the queen with his minor pieces. However, this gain of time is normally a mirage since those pieces are usually ones that have already moved and/or arrive on squares where they are not stable and will have to move again. Meanwhile the queen itself generally has plenty of good squares to choose from, so can tailor its choice according to White's set-up.

4 d4

There are several other options, but on the whole they are less flexible, and if White avoids d4 for much longer, he could end up with very odd-looking development:

- a) 4 g3 is such a slow move that Black can safely grab space in the centre by 4...e5 5 Bg2 Nc6, with active deployment to follow.
- b) 4 Nb5 Qb6 5 d4 (5 Nf3 Nf6 transposes to line '[d5](#)' of this note) 5...a6 6 Nc3 (6 Na3 e5!) 6...Nf6 7 Nf3 Bg4 is an untested position that looks OK for Black; e.g., 8 Be2 Nc6!? 9 Na4 Qa5+ 10 c3 e5 11 b4 Qd5 12 dxe5 Bxf3 13 Bxf3 with unbalanced play whether Black exchanges queens or retains them.
- c) 4 Bc4 Nf6 (*D*) and then:



White to play

- c1) 5 d4 transposes to note '[f](#)' to White's 5th move.
- c2) 5 Nf3 transposes to line '[d6](#)' of this note.
- c3) 5 Nge2 leaves g2 exposed after 5...a6 6 d4 (6 d3?! transposes to '[c42](#)') 6...b5! (6...Qc6 is unnecessary greed) 7 Bf4 Qd7, and here:
- c31) 8 Bb3 Bb7 9 Qd3 (9 d5 c5!?, Ardeleanu-Malaniuk, Arad 2006; 9 0-0 Nc6 10 a3 0-0-0 already favours Black) 9...Nc6 (9...Bxg2 10 Rg1 Bb7 is unclear) 10 0-0-0 (10 f3 e6 11 0-0-0?! Nb4 and ...a5, Zhelnin-Gorshkov, Kaluga 2007) 10...Na5 11 Rhe1 e6 intending ...0-0-0 is unpromising for White.
- c32) 8 Bd3 Bb7 9 f3 (intending to repair his coordination with Ne4) 9...e6 10 a4 b4 11 Ne4 and now one good option is 11...Nd5 12 Bg3 Be7, with ...a5 and ...Ba6 a possible idea.
- c4) 5 d3 was recommended by Sam Collins in *A Simple Chess Opening Repertoire for White*, but Black scores well after 5...a6! (*D*):



White to play

c41) 6 Qf3?! Nc6! and White's pieces are looking clumsy, Stentebjerg-Danielsen, Marianske Lazne 2016.

c42) 6 Nge2?! b5 7 Bb3 Bb7 8 0-0 Nbd7 and frankly there is very little to like about White's position.

c43) 6 a4?! (Collins's continuation, but it leaves Black better) 6...Nc6! 7 Nge2 (7 Nf3 Bg4) 7...Bf5 (7...e5 is also good) 8 0-0 e6 9 Ng3 Bg6 10 Nge4 (10 f4? 0-0-0, with ...h5 coming in many lines, is excellent for Black) 10...Qd7!? 11 Nxf6+ gxf6 and the doubled f-pawns give Black a lot of interesting options, such as play on the g-file, an h-pawn advance, or simply good central control.

c44) 6 Bb3 has the sole point that 6...b5?! carelessly invites the annoying 7 Qf3, but Black has a number of good replies, including 6...Nc6 (there's even 6...Be6) 7 Nf3 Bg4 and White may soon regret his failure to control d4.

c45) 6 Nf3 b5 7 Bb3 Bb7 8 0-0 e6 9 Qe2 (intending a4) 9...Nbd7! (9...Be7 10 a4 b4 11 Ne4 gives White more prospects, as 11...Qb6?? loses to 12 a5 Qa7 13 Neg5!) 10 Ne4 (the point is 10 a4 Nc5!) 10...Qb6!? 11 Re1 (11 Neg5?! h6!; 11 a4 c5 12 a5?! Qc6) 11...Nxe4 12 dxe4 Be7 and Black can be happy with his chances.

d) 4 Nf3 Nf6 (*D*) and now:



White to play

d1) 5 d4 transposes to the [main](#) line.

d2) 5 g3 c6 (5...Nc6 6 Bg2 Bg4 establishes a grip on d4, but may lead to unwelcome simplification) 6 Bg2 Bf5 7 0-0 h6 8 d4 transposes to Line [C1](#).

d3) 5 Be2 allows Black many options such as 5...a6!? retaining ...Nc6 ideas, but the simplest repertoire-wise is 5...c6, when 6 d4 transposes to note '[c](#)' to White's 6th move, and 6 0-0 Bf5 7 Nh4 Bg6 8 d4 to line '[c31](#)' of that note.

d4) 5 h3 Bf5 brings White no special benefit. 6 g4 (6 d4 e6 and Black can consider active developments with ...Nc6) 6...Bg6 7 Bg2 e6 (7...Nc6!? 8 d4 0-0-0 9 0-0! is far sharper and riskier) 8 0-0 Nbd7 9 d4 (intending Ne5) 9...c6 leaves Black solid as White will need to play Ne2 if he is to free his c-pawn or generate cheap threats with Bf4.

d5) 5 Nb5 Qb6 6 d4 Bg4 (6...c6 7 Na3 isn't so easy for Black, and 6...a6?! is also well met by 7 Na3 – unlike the position with the knights still on g1 and g8) and here:

d51) 7 Na3 Nbd7 8 Nc4 Qc6 and White can't avoid a structural weakening.

d52) 7 c4 c6 8 Nc3 Bxf3 9 gxf3 g6 is comfortable for Black.

d53) 7 Bf4 Nd5 repels White's aggression: 8 Bg3 e6 9 Bc4 (9 c4?? Bb4+) 9...a6 10 Bxd5 axb5 11 Be4 Nd7 and ...Nf6 with no problems.

d54) 7 a4 a6 (the exciting option; 7...c6 8 a5 Qd8 is a safer approach; e.g., 9 h3 Bh5 10 g4 Bg6 11 Ne5 e6! and finally it is time for the knight to drop back from b5, with 12 Nc3 Bb4 OK for Black) 8 Na3 e5 9 Nc4 (9 dxе5 Ne4 10 Qd4 Bb4+ 11 c3 Nxc3 12 Bd2 Qxd4 13 Nxd4 Nd5 is roughly equal) 9...Qxd4 10 Nxd4 Bxd1 11 Nxe5 Bh5 12 f3 Nbd7 and we have a rather tame position after all.

d6) 5 Bc4 a6 (5...Nc6 6 d4 Bg4 7 d5 Ne5 8 Bb5+ c6 9 dxс6 isn't so easy for Black; after 5...c6 6 0-0 Bg4 7 h3 White benefits from the fact that he has delayed playing d4) 6 d4 (6 d3 transposes to line '[c45](#)' of this note) reaches a line where Black has scored well with 6...b5 (D) followed by ...Bb7:



White to play

d61) 7 Bd3 Bb7 8 0-0 e6 9 Qe2 Be7 10 Re1 Nbd7 and all White can force exchanges: 11 a4 b4 12 Ne4 (Savić-Sedlak, Montenegrin Team Ch, Cetinje 2009) 12...Nxe4 13 Bxe4 Bxe4 14 Qxe4 0-0 15 Bf4 Qb6 with no problems for Black after 16 Ne5 Nxe5 17 Bxe5 Bd6 or 16 c4 bxc3 17 bxc3 Bd6.

d62) 7 Bb3 Bb7 8 Qe2 (8 a4 b4 9 Ne2 e6 10 a5 Be7 is OK for Black) 8...Nc6 9 a3!? (9 0-0 Na5 eliminates the dangerous bishop) 9...e6!? (9...Nxd4 is possible too) 10 d5 (it's either this or a passive move, since 10 0-0?! Nxd4 11 Nxd4 Qxd4 12 Nxb5 Qc5 13 Nc3 Bd6 is nice for Black) 10...Na5! 11 dxe6 Nxb3 12 exf7+ Kxf7 13 cxb3 Re8 14 Be3 h6 with a lot of play for the pawn.

4...Nf6 (D)



White to play

5 Nf3

Again there is quite a range of alternatives, including sensible developing moves that require thoughtful handling but are mostly harmless or transpositional:

- a) 5 g3 c6 (5...Bg4 is best met by 6 Be2 Bxe2 7 Qxe2) is likely to transpose to Line [C1](#) unless White goes for 6 Bf4 Qd8 7 Bg2 Bf5 8 Nge2 e6, when the white pieces are somewhat uncoordinated.
- b) 5 Nge2 has many plausible answers, but an interesting thought is 5...e6 so that 6 g3 (otherwise White has no smooth plan of development; e.g.. 6 Bf4 Qb6 7 Na4?! {7 Qd2 Bd7; 7 a3 Bd7} 7...Qa5+ 8 c3?! Bd7) can be met with the disruptive 6...Qc6 7 d5 (7 Rg1 looks too silly) 7...exd5 8 Bg2 Be6.
- c) 5 Nb5 Qb6 6 c4 (6 Nf3 transposes to note '[d5](#)' to White's 4th move) seeks to create a harmonious pawn-front, but 6...a6!? (6...c6 7 Nc3 e5 {7...Bf5 is the steady path} 8 dxe5 Ng4 9 Qe2 Bc5 10 Ne4 is unclear) 7 Nc3 e5! is a strong gambit response: 8 dxe5 (8 c5 Qa7!?, Okhotnik-Boricsev, Hungarian Team Ch 2018/19) 8...Ng4 9 Nh3 (9 Qe2 Bc5 10 Ne4? Bb4+ 11 Bd2 Nc6) 9...Bc5 10 Ne4 (10 Qe2 Be6) 10...Bb4+ (10...Bf5!?) 11 Nc3 allows Black to repeat with 11...Bc5 or play for more if he wishes.
- d) 5 Bd3 is an odd move, and allows Black to play actively in the centre: 5...Nc6 6 Nge2 (6 Nf3 Bg4; 6 Nb5 Qd8 {intending ...a6} 7 Be3 {7 Bf4?! Nd5 8 Qf3 Ncb4!} 7...a6 8 Nc3 e5 9 Nf3 exd4 10 Nxd4 Ne5 and White's 'numerical' development is good but his quality of development is poor; 6 Be3 e5 7 Nf3 Bg4 is a similar story) 6...e5 7 0-0 Nxd4! (7...exd4?! 8 Nb5 gives White the initiative) 8 Nxd4 Qxd4! and regaining the pawn is the extent of White's ambitions. 9 Nb5 (9 Be3 Qd6; 9 Qf3 Bd6; 9 Re1 Be6 10 Be3 Qd6) 9...Qc5! 10 Be3 (after 10 Re1 a6! 11 b4 Qe7 12 Nd4 Bg4 13 f3, as in Antal-Kovchan, Greek Team Ch, Porto Rio 2015, 13...Be6! is solid) 10...Qe7 11 Nxa7 Bg4 12 Bb5+ Bd7 13 Bxd7+ Qxd7 is one way for that to happen.

e) 5 Be3 c6 (*D*) (there are several other reasonable options here, but 5...Bf5?! 6 Qf3, as in Short-Sulava, European Ch, Ohrid 2001, is worth avoiding) and then:



White to play

e1) 6 Nf3 transposes to note '[a](#)' to White's 6th move below.

e2) 6 Qd2 Bf5 7 0-0-0 (7 Nf3 is also covered [within](#) note 'a' to White's 6th move) 7...e6 8 f3 (8 Nf3 Qc7 9 Nh4 Bg6 10 Nxg6 hxg6 11 Bf4 Bd6 leaves Black solid) 8...h5!? (not the only option, but it stakes out kingside space and denies White an easy kingside development; the queenside will be safe enough for the black king, given that White has also gone queenside) 9 Bd3 (9 Kb1 Nd5) 9...Bxd3 10 Qxd3 Nbd7 and Black can advance on the queenside as well as stabilize the centre with ...Nd5.

e3) 6 Bd3 Bg4 7 f3 Bh5 8 Qd2 Nbd7 9 Nge2 Bg6 10 0-0-0 Bxd3 11 Qxd3 e6 with an interesting middlegame ahead where ...Nd5 will give Black a central foothold and he can seek play against the white king.

f) 5 Bc4 (*D*) is perhaps the trickiest of these fifth-move options.



White to play

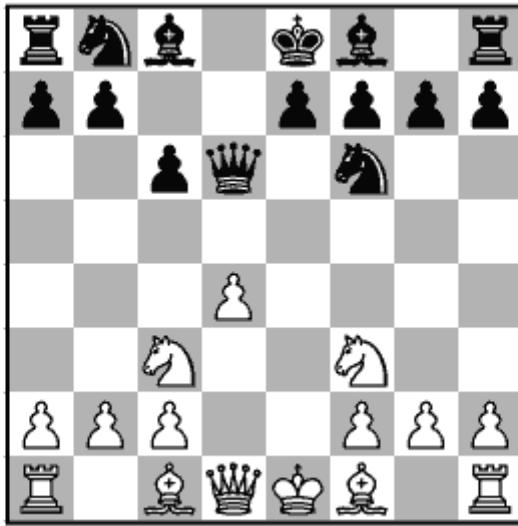
For instance, 5...c6 can be met by 6 Nge2!?, while 5...Nc6 6 Nf3 Bg4 is a sharp line we [avoided](#) in note 'd6' to White's 5th move. 5...Bg4 is sound, but 6 f3 Bf5 7 Nge2 e6 (7...Nc6 8 Bf4 e5 is riskier) 8 Bf4 Qb6 9 a3 can lead to intricate play. 5...a6 is a good choice, especially as it will mostly transpose to lines we have already covered: 6 Bb3 (6 Nge2 transposes to note '[c3](#)' to White's 4th move, and 6 Nf3 to line '[d6](#)' of that note) 6...Nc6! (6...b5?! 7 Qf3 is the main point of White's move-order) and then:

f1) 7 Be3 Bf5 (7...Na5!?) 8 Nf3 e6 9 0-0 Be7 is comfortably equal for Black, who will soon start bishop-hunting if White doesn't take some action.

f2) 7 Nge2 e5 (7...b5!?) with pretty much instant equality: 8 dx5 Qxd1+ 9 Nxd1 Nxe5 or 8 Be3 exd4 9 Nxd4 Bg4 (Parligras-Moldovan, Bucharest 2003), etc.

5...c6 (*D*)

This move is a key ingredient in the ...Qd6 Scandinavian's rise to respectability. In the few earlier experiments with this line Black tended to play 5...a6, which covers b5 while allowing ...Nc6, but this fails to give the queen extra squares and fits in with fewer realistic schemes of development. However, it is to our practical advantage that this line exists, since our opponents will need to spend some of their precious time preparing for it. The same can also be said for the lines 5...Bg4 and 5...g6.



White to play

We have now reached a key crossroads, where there are three main paths for White to choose from:

C1: 6 g3

C2: 6 h3

C3: 6 Ne5

As usual, there are the simple ‘get the pieces out’ moves to consider, each with their own points and perils:

a) 6 Be3 is a useful developing move with little specific purpose other than to wait and see Black’s next move before forming a plan. 6...Bf5 (6...Bg4 7 h3 Bh5 is also popular, and has been used by Tiviakov) 7 Nh4 (7 h3 transposes to note ‘[b](#)’ to White’s 7th move in Line C2; 7 Bd3 shows little ambition, and 7...Bxd3 8 Qxd3 Nbd7 followed by ...e6 is comfortable for Black; 7 Qd2 e6 8 Nh4 Be4!?) 7...Be6 (basically saying that e6 is a good square for the bishop while the knight is silly on h4; 7...Bg6 is playable, especially with an imminent ...Nd5 hitting the e3-bishop) 8 Bd3 g6 9 Nf3 (claiming that Black’s ‘free’ developing move isn’t very harmonious) 9...Bg7 10 0-0 0-0 11 Re1 and now 11...Nd5 12 Nxd5 cxd5 13 Qd2 Nc6 looks easier for Black to handle than 11...Bg4 12 h3 Bxf3 13 Qxf3 (Volosov-Kreindl, corr. 2014) 13...Re8 14 Rad1 Nbd7, though both are surely viable.

b) 6 Bd3 prevents the bishop from going to f5, but makes 6...Bg4 (*D*) a more attractive option.



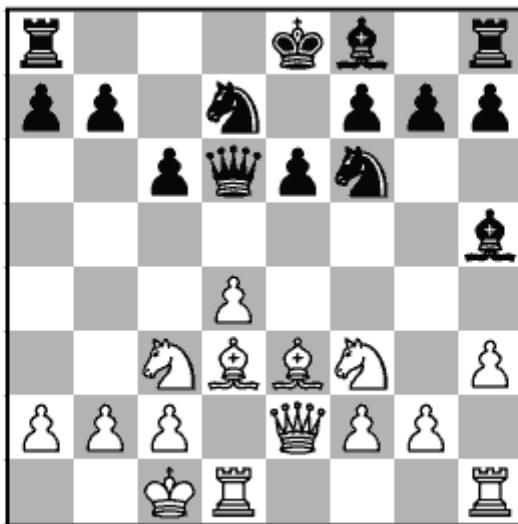
White to play

Now:

b1) 7 Ne4 Nxe4 8 Bxe4 Nd7 followed by ...Nf6 brings Black easy equality, Anand-Carlsen, Kolkata blitz 2019.

b2) 7 h3!? Bxf3 8 Qxf3 Qxd4 (this is the sort of gambit that should be accepted!) 9 Be3 Qd8 10 0-0-0 Nbd7 11 g4 e6 (Grabarczyk-Čičak, Germany tt 2001/2) offers White a fair amount of compensation, but Black's game is very solid.

b3) 7 Be3 Nbd7 8 h3 Bh5 9 Qe2 e6 10 0-0-0 (*D*) (10 g4 Bg6 11 Bxg6 hxg6 12 Ng5 b5 13 Qf3 Be7 is OK for Black as 14 Nxb5? Qb4+ 15 Nc3 Qxb2 16 Qxc6 0-0! is a misadventure for White) is a tricky position where Black can easily get in trouble if he plays a careless move or two. As some of the ideas are thematic, I'll go into some detail here about Black's options, and why some of them fail:



Black to play

b31) 10...0-0-0? loses(!) to 11 g4 Bg6 12 Bxg6 hxg6 13 Ne5! Qe7 14 Nxc6!.

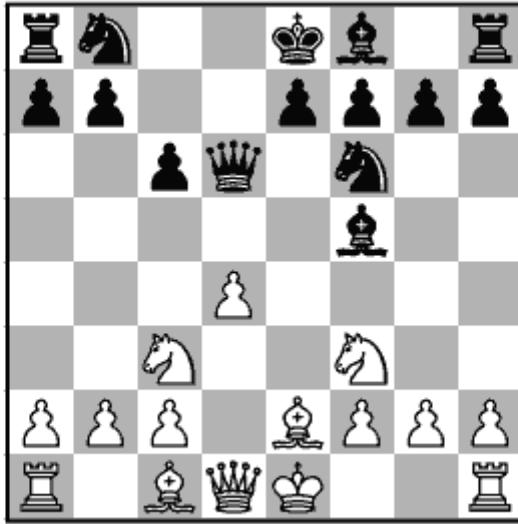
b32) 10...b5 (claiming that creating counterplay is more important right now than moving pieces out) 11 Kb1 (11 Rhe1 Be7; 11 g3 Nd5) 11...b4 12 Ne4 Qc7 and White has trouble keeping control of events; e.g., 13 g4 (13 Nxf6+ Nxf6 14 g4 Bg6 with ...Bd6 to follow – the bishop finds a better square than e7, explaining why it didn't just go there on move 10) 13...Bg6 14 Nfd2 Bxe4 15 Bxe4 (15 Nxe4 Nxe4 16 Bxe4 Nf6 and ...Nd5) 15...Nb6 16 g5 Nxe4 17 Nxe4 a5 should give Black enough play, but this is not an easy line and accuracy is needed.

b33) 10...Qc7 (intending ...Bb4, while also preparing ...0-0-0) 11 Kb1 and the next move is important:

b331) 11...0-0-0?! 12 g4 Bg6 13 Bxg6 hxg6 14 Ne5! is good for White: 14...Nxe5 15 dxe5 Nd5 (15...Rxd1+ 16 Rxd1 Nd5 17 Nxd5 cxd5 {Kuosmanen-Laine, corr. 2010} 18 Bxa7! Rxh3 19 c4!) 16 Nxd5 Rxd5 17 Rxd5 exd5 18 Bxa7 b5 19 Bd4.

b332) 11...Bg6 and while Black may not have quite equalized, White has no direct path forward and Black can play a normal game; e.g., 12 Bxg6 (12 Bc1 {intending Ne5} 12...Bb4; 12 Bg5 Bxd3 13 Rxd3 Bd6) 12...hxg6 13 Ng5 (this looks a little artificial, but the pressure on f7 is irritating) 13...Nd5 (13...a5!?) 14 Nce4 N7f6.

c) 6 Be2 looks like (and is!) the kind of obvious developing move that might be chosen by an opponent who is unfamiliar with this position. That doesn't mean it is a bad move! 6...Bf5 (*D*) (6...Bg4 is more popular, but then the forcing line 7 h3 Bh5 {7...Bxf3 8 Bxf3 is a clear bishop-pair} 8 g4 Bg6 9 h4!? h5 10 Ne5 Nxg4 11 Bxg4 hxg4 12 Qxg4 Nd7 13 Nxg6 Qxg6 14 Qxg6 fxg6 15 Bg5 is not too pleasant) and now:



White to play

c1) 7 0-0 e6 8 Ne5 (8 Nh4 Bg6 transposes to '[c31](#)') 8...Nbd7 9 Bf4 Nxe5 10 Bxe5 is harmless, as 10...Qd8 is safe, in addition to 10...Qb4, which is [covered](#) in 'c22'.

c2) 7 Ne5 Nbd7 and then:

c21) 8 Nc4 Qc7 9 g3 (9 g4?! Be6 10 Ne3 Nb6 and White has only succeeded in weakening his position while Black has d5 under firm control) 9...Rd8!? (intending ...e5 or ...Nc5) prepares to meet 10 Bf4 with 10...Qc8, when Black's well-organized position is ready to take pot-shots at the white pieces and pawns.

c22) 8 Bf4 Nxe5 9 Bxe5 Qb4 (as much a route to a5 as an attempt to grab b2; 9...Qd7 10 Bf3! gives White d5 and Qe2 ideas among others) is OK for Black: 10 g4 Qxb2 11 Na4 Qa3; 10 0-0 e6 (10...Qxb2?

11 Qe1! spells trouble) with ideas like ...Nd7 or ...Rd8, and soon White will have to address ...Qxb2; or 10 Qd2 e6 11 0-0-0 Qa5 (intending ...Bb4) 12 a3 0-0-0 with a balanced game.

c3) 7 Nh4 (rare, but surely the critical move) 7...Bg6 and here:

c31) 8 0-0 e6 9 g3 Qc7 10 Bf3 Nbd7 (Zamengo-Stopa, Spoleto 2016; 10...Bd6 11 Re1 0-0 sidesteps d5 ideas at the price of committing the king) 11 Re1 Be7 (11...Bd6 invites 12 d5!?) 12 Bf4 Qb6 (12...Bd6 is playable too) 13 Nxg6 (13 Na4 Qa5 14 c4 Bh5) 13...hxg6 14 Qd3 0-0 and Black can bring his rooks to the centre files, with a solid position.

c32) 8 g3 e6 9 Bf4 Qd8 10 Nxg6 hxg6 11 Qd3 Qa5!? (intending ...Nd5) 12 a3 (12 0-0-0?! Bb4 13 Rde1?! g5!; after 12 0-0, 12...Qf5 is based on a view that this type of position without queens is fully acceptable for Black, especially with ‘diamond pawns’ after 13 Qxf5 gxf5) 12...Nbd7 13 0-0-0 (note that Black was threatening 13...Nd5 14 Bd2? Nb4 15 Qe4 Nf6) 13...Nb6 and Black has various ideas including ...0-0-0 and ...Bd6, as well as ...Na4, ...g5 and ...Qf5 or plonking a knight on d5.

d) 6 Bc4 invites the pin 6...Bg4 (*D*), which is rather uncomfortable for White:



White to play

d1) 7 Bxf7+?? gets played now and then, but is an outright blunder in view of 7...Kxf7 8 Ne5+ Qxe5+!.

d2) 7 h3 Bxf3 8 Qxf3 Qxd4 leaves White scraping around for unconvincing compensation, Sebag-Karpov, Cap d'Agde rapid 2014.

d3) After 7 0-0 we should steer clear of 7...Bxf3?! 8 Qxf3 Qxd4 9 Nb5!, but 7...e6 is fine for Black since sooner or later White will need to spend time covering the d4-pawn: 8 Re1 (8 Bg5 Nbd7 9 Re1?! Bxf3 10 Qxf3 Qxd4 and now 11 Bxe6 fxe6 12 Rxe6+ Kf7 13 Bxf6 Nxf6 14 Rd1 Qxd1+ 15 Nxd1 Kxe6 gives Black a lot of material for the queen) 8...Nbd7 9 Ne4 Nxe4 10 Rxe4 Nf6 and Black is in no way worse.

d4) 7 Be3 Nbd7 8 h3 Bh5 9 g4 (9 Qe2 e6 10 0-0-0 is probably best met by 10...Be7, as 10...b5 11 g4 Bg6 is the same risky line [mentioned](#) in ‘d41’ just below) 9...Bg6 and now:

d41) 10 Qe2 e6 11 0-0-0 Be7 (as played in a blitz game by Carlsen; 11...b5 is risky, but not necessarily bad, due to 12 d5! – feel free to investigate the lines after 12...cxd5 on your own) and here:

d411) 12 Ne5?! Nxe5 13 dxe5 Qxe5 14 f4 Qc7 15 Rhf1?! (after 15 h4 h5! 16 f5! exf5 17 Bc5 Kf8 White is just about staying afloat) 15...b5! (the only good move) 16 Bb3 b4 17 Na4 0-0 and Black was on top

in Nepomniashchy-Carlsen, Kolkata blitz 2019 since after 18 f5? exf5 19 Bf4 he has 19...Qb7.

d412) 12 Bd3 b5 gives Black counterplay; e.g., 13 g5 Nd5 14 Bxg6 hxg6 15 Ne4 (15 Nxd5 Qxd5 16 Kb1 a5) 15...Qc7 16 h4 b4.

d42) 10 Nh4 e6 11 Nxg6 hxg6 12 Qf3 (Grishchuk-Ivanchuk, Beijing rapid 2011) 12...Nb6 13 Bb3 Nbd5 (13...a5!? is more ambitious; e.g., 14 a4 Nbd5 15 Nxd5 cxd5 intending queenside play) 14 Nxd5 (14 Ne2 a5 15 a3 b5) 14...exd5 and Black claims that White's bishops are not very effective pieces in this structure and that the h-file is more likely to be useful for Black.

C1)

6 g3 (D)



Black to play

This used to be the main alternative to putting the knight on e5. The fianchetto is a logical way to develop, with an eye in the longer term to putting pressure on c6 and b7. On the other hand, White is not getting his pieces quickly to active squares, and Black is well-placed to develop harmoniously and with a little care can make sure his queenside pawns are well looked after. A rare but perhaps more dangerous interpretation of the move is not as a fianchetto at all, but simply a means to get the bishop to f4 before the black queen is truly ready with its exit plan.

6...Bf5 7 Bg2

As mentioned above, 7 Bf4!? seems a more testing idea:

a) 7...Qd8 8 Bd3 (an odd-looking but quite dangerous plan; 8 Bg2 h6 transposes to the [note](#) to White's 8th move, while 8 Qe2!?! e6 9 Nh4 Bg4 10 f3 Bh5 11 0-0-0 Nd5 is playable for Black, Haapamäki-Cumming, corr. 2017) 8...Bxd3 9 Qxd3 e6 10 0-0-0 shows White's idea, which is better than it looks. Then 10...Be7 11 h4 Nbd7 12 Kb1 is uncomfortable for Black, with h5-h6 often coming soon, while 12...Qa5 can be met by 13 Rhg1 or 13 Nd2!?. 10...a5 (intending ...Qb6-a6 in some cases) and 10...Bd6 are other ideas, while after 10...Na6 11 Ne5 (11 a3 Nc7) 11...Nb4 12 Qe2 Bd6 a complex middlegame lies ahead, where White keeps some initiative.

b) 7...Qb4!? (D) is possible too.



White to play

8 Bd3 (8 a3? Qxb2; 8 Bd2 Qxb2; 8 Qd2 Nd5) 8...Bxd3 (8...Qxb2? 9 0-0!) 9 Qxd3 e6 10 0-0-0 Nbd7 11 Kb1 Be7 12 h4 0-0 (this looks risky, but the king has to go somewhere) 13 h5 Nd5 14 Ne4 (14 Bd2 Nxc3+ 15 Bxc3 Qb5 gives Black a grip on the light squares) 14...Nxf4 15 gxf4 Qb5 16 Qe3 (16 Qxb5 cxb5 17 h6 g6 18 d5 exd5 19 Rxd5 Rfd8 and White's weak pawns offer Black compensation) 16...Nf6 17 Ne5 Nxe4 18 Qxe4 Qd5 19 Qe3 gives White Kingside play but Black can defend.

7...h6

It is worth preserving this bishop, both objectively and to keep more practical winning chances.

8 0-0

8 Bf4 Qd8 9 Qe2 e6 10 0-0-0 Nd5 offers White little.

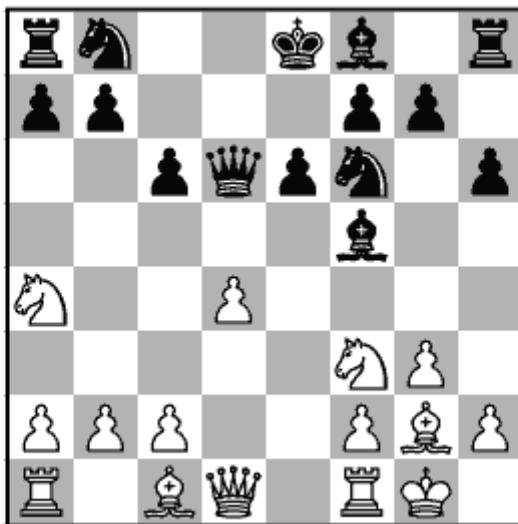
8...e6 (D)

I'll draw your attention to a common snare at the first opportunity: 8...Nbd7? is a bad idea because of 9 Bf4; while this doesn't trap the queen here, it causes chaos in the black position.



After the text-move, we have a position where both sides develop fairly normally and there are few critical lines to navigate. Strategically, White's most interesting plan is to get the c3-knight moving, which obviously means spending time moving the c3-knight. There's a wide choice in how to do this:

- a) 9 a3 is a poisonous move, as it invites a very natural blunder. 9...Be7 (not 9...Nbd7? 10 Bf4; 9...Qc7?! has the point of meeting Bf4 with ...Bd6) 10 Re1 (10 Bf4 Qd8 11 Qe2 0-0 transposes to line 'c' of this note; 10 Na4 0-0 11 c4 Qc7 12 Re1 Nbd7 looking to play in the centre after putting rooks on d8 and e8, or dropping a knight into e4 if White continues to neglect this square) 10...0-0 (10...Nbd7?? 11 Bf4 – sorry to keep mentioning it...) 11 Bf4 Qd8 12 Na4 (12 Qe2 is again line 'c') 12...Nbd7 13 c4 Nb6 disrupts White's build-up; as the player with less space, Black is generally happy to exchange a pair of pieces.
- b) 9 Ne2 Be7 10 c4 0-0 11 a3 (after 11 Nc3, as in Shevchenko-Burmakin, Graz 2020, 11...Qb4 12 Qe2 Nbd7 gives Black counterplay against the c4-pawn) 11...Qc7 (11...Nbd7?? 12 Bf4) 12 Nc3 Nbd7 13 Re1 Rfe8 leaves Black flexible and well coordinated; e.g., 14 h3 Rad8 or 14 Bf4 Bd6.
- c) 9 Qe2 (this can be preparation for a Nd1-e3 manoeuvre) 9...Be7 10 a3 (10 Bf4 Qd8 transposes to line 'd') 10...0-0 (10...Nbd7?? 11 Bf4) 11 Bf4 Qd8 12 Rfe1 (12 Nd1 Be4) 12...Nbd7 13 Nd1 and Black is in time with 13...b5, forestalling c4 and starting active play of his own.
- d) 9 Bf4 Qd8 (in general, forcing the queen back by playing Bf4 doesn't gain a huge amount for White since at some point Black will be able to play ...Nd5, gaining time on the bishop and leading to an exchange of knights that is quite useful for Black) 10 Qe2 (10 Na4 Bd6) 10...Be7 (10...Bd6!?) 11 Rfd1 (11 Na4 Nd5 12 Be5 0-0 13 c4 Nb4 gives Black counterplay, Milde-Iacomi, corr. 2019) 11...0-0 leaves White oddly stuck for a constructive move, and 12 Ne5 Nbd7 13 g4 Bh7 (Cuartas-Valli, Barcelona 2012) is more of an attempt to put a brave face on this than any genuine aggression.
- e) 9 Re1 Be7 (9...Nbd7?! 10 Bf4 Qb4 11 d5! shows the point of Re1 and is an instance where Bf4 is powerful even when the queen is not boxed in) 10 Na4 (10 Bf4 Qd8 11 Na4 Nd5 12 Bd2 Nb4 is mildly annoying for White) 10...0-0 11 Bf4 Qd8 12 c4 Nbd7 13 Nc3 and White has achieved his desired set-up but Black has also completed his development and can halt White's most obvious plans: 13...Re8 (parrying White's idea of 14 d5 as 14...cxd5 15 cxd5 Bc5 16 dxe6 Rxe6 offers White nothing) 14 Qe2 Bb4!?, 15 Rac1 and Black can even become active with 15...g5 16 Be3 e5.
- f) 9 Na4 (D).



Black to play

9...Nbd7 (9...Qd8?! 10 c4; 9...Be7 10 Nc5!?) 10 Bf4 (10 c4 Qb8!? intending ...Bd6, and leaving room for the bishop on c7 in case White hits it with c5; meanwhile the queen supports possible thrusts with ...e5 or ...b5) 10...Qb4 11 c3 Qb5 (Petrigin-Oliynyk, corr. 2018) and ...Qd3 ideas interfere with White's expansion plans. After 12 b4 a5 13 a3 Nd5 Black is clearly not being pushed back in disarray any time soon.

C2)

6 h3 (D)



Black to play

This move looks odd, but White is seeking to gain time by attacking the bishop that is about to appear on f5, and this little move has become one of White's top choices in recent years.

6...Bf5

It is best to acquiesce, since White's plan is not without its drawbacks.

It is tempting to play 6...g6 and seek to show the move h3 to be a waste of time, but this leads to positions similar to lines of the Alekhine where it is very hard to find a good role for the queen's bishop. While it is often useful for Black to retain the *option* of a ...g6 approach for some time, a very specific reason is needed for it to become the right set-up to choose.

7 Ne5

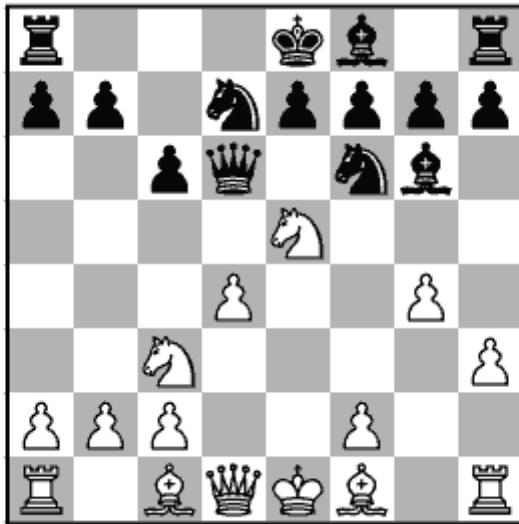
This is the main idea, but there are other moves too, only one of which poses any threat:

- The unambitious 7 Bd3 is, surprisingly, the most popular move here. After 7...Bxd3 8 Qxd3 Nbd7 there are few problems for Black, who can play ...e6, ...Qc7 and ...Bd6 before deciding which side to castle.
- 7 Be3 Nbd7 8 Qd2 e6 9 0-0-0 (9 a3 is the standard cheap trap and evaded most smoothly by 9...Qc7) 9...Qc7 has ...Bb4 in mind, while retaining options of ...Ne4 or ...Nd5.

c) 7 Nh4 Bg6 (7...Be6!?) 8 Nxe6 (or 8 g3 e5!) 8...hxg6 9 g3 e5! blasts open the centre and gives Black a fully viable game.

d) 7 Bc4 takes aim at f7 now that a pin with ...Bg4 is off the table. But after 7...e6 White's play looks rather unfocused. 8 0-0 (after 8 Nh4, 8...Bg6 is solid for Black, while 8...Bxc2 9 Qxc2 Qxd4 is messy but playable) 8...h6 is safe for Black; e.g., 9 Ne5 Nbd7 10 Bf4 Nxe5 11 Bxe5 Qd8 12 Bd3 Bxd3 13 Qxd3 Be7.

e) 7 g4 Bg6 8 Ne5 Nbd7 (*D*) and then:



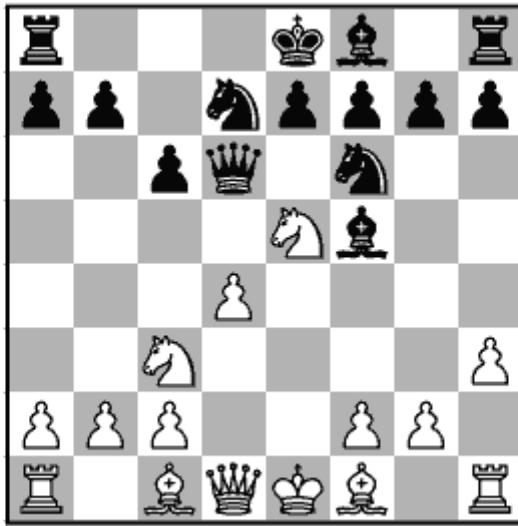
White to play

e1) 9 Bf4 Nxe5 (not 9...Qb4?! 10 Nc4) 10 Bxe5 (Kos-G.Mohr, Slovenian Team Ch 2013) 10...Qb4 (the active black queen demonstrates its 'nuisance value') 11 Qd2 0-0-0 12 0-0-0 e6 and Black is no worse.

e2) 9 Nxe6 hxg6 is similar to a line after 6 Bc4 Bg4 (note '[d42](#)' to White's 6th move in Line C to be precise), but here White seems to have lost a tempo. However, in that line the bishop wasn't too well-placed on c4, so it isn't obvious whom the difference favours. 10 Bg2 (10 Be3?! Nd5) 10...e6 (Fernandez Romero-Villuendas, Spanish Team Ch 2016; 10...e5?! 11 d5 offers White more chances) with a reliable position for Black, who need not be in any hurry to commit his king to one wing or the other just yet.

e3) 9 f4 e6 10 Bg2 (10 h4 Nd5 works tactically because 11 f5? exf5! 12 h5 0-0-0! is not a place White wants to go) 10...Nd5 (the point is that Black can now save his bishop with ...f6; less good is 10...Qc7?! 11 0-0 0-0-0 12 Qe1) gives Black a viable game: 11 Nxe6 (11 Nxd5 cxd5 12 h4 Be4; 11 h4 f6 12 h5 Nxc3 13 bxc3 fxe5 14 hxg6 exf4 with a messy position where Black is OK; 11 Ne4 Bxe4 12 Bxe4 f6) 11...Nxc3 12 bxc3 hxg6 is roughly equal. The black knight will find good squares while the white king lacks secure pawn-cover.

7...Nbd7 (*D*)



White to play

This is like the [main](#) line 6 Ne5 Nbd7, and White needs to explain why he thinks h3 should be a more useful move than ...Bf5.

8 Nc4

Or:

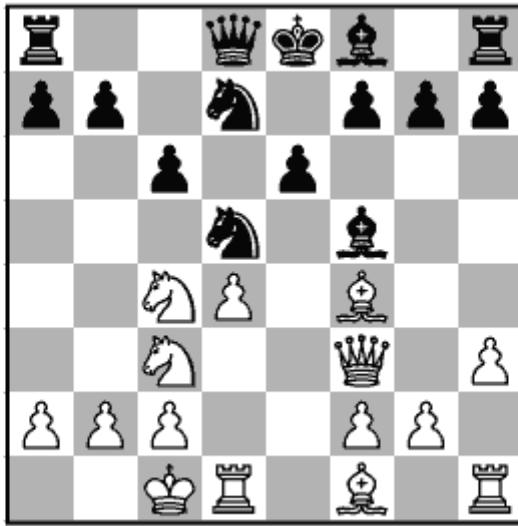
- a) 8 f4 offers Black a number of good options, with 8...Nd5 straightforward and reliable.
- b) 8 Bf4 Nd5 9 Nxd5 Qxd5 and now White has nothing better than 10 Nxd7, which would be completely harmless in the [analogous](#) line (after 6 Ne5 Nbd7 7 Bf4), but here has the point that the natural recapture with the bishop leaves h3 as an extra tempo. That said, Black is fine after either recapture on d7.

8...Qc7 9 Qf3 e6

Rather than 9...Be6 10 Bf4 Qd8 11 0-0-0 g6 12 Ne3 intending d5. And don't even think about playing 9...Bxc2?? 10 Bf4 followed by Qe2, winning.

10 Bf4 Qd8 11 0-0-0 Nd5 (D)

This seems clearly the best option here. The decentralizing 11...Nb6?! has been more popular, but appears to leave White much better after 12 g4 Bg6 13 h4. A common theme throughout the whole 3...Qd6 Scandinavian is that Black should be reluctant to spend time on the manoeuvre ...Nb6-d5 unless it has a very specific and useful purpose.

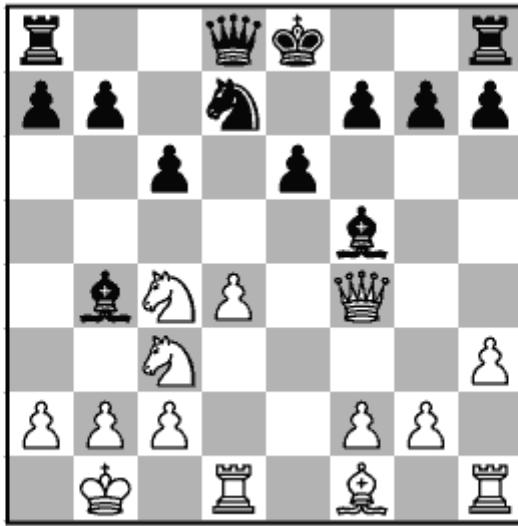


White to play

12 g4

Chasing the bishop was of course White's idea. But one of the alternatives is also interesting:

- a) 12 Nd6+ Bxd6 13 Bxd6 N7b6 is very playable for Black.
- b) 12 Be2 N7f6 (far from the only option here) looks very secure for Black since 13 Nxd5 cxd5 14 Ne5 Qb6 offers him queenside counterplay.
- c) After 12 Kb1 Nxf4 13 Qxf4 Black has a tricky decision:
 - c1) 13...Qb8 is a solid move. Then:
 - c11) 14 Qe3 Qc7 (14...Be7? 15 g4 Bg6 16 f4!) 15 d5 (15 g4 Bg6 16 f4 is now answered with 16...0-0-0) 15...cxd5 16 Nxd5 Qc6 threatens ...b5 and plans ...Bc5.
 - c12) 14 Qf3 Qc7 15 g4 Bg6 16 h4 h5 (16...f6!?) is provocative but hard to trust; 16...h6 17 Bd3 Bxd3 18 Rxd3 Be7 is safe but a little passive) 17 g5 Nb6 18 Ne5 Bf5 19 Bh3 g6 is fairly solid for Black; e.g., 20 Bxf5 (20 a4 Bd6) 20...exf5 21 Rhe1 0-0-0, when 22 d5?! is no good due to 22...Bd6.
 - c2) 13...Bb4!? (D) is worth considering:



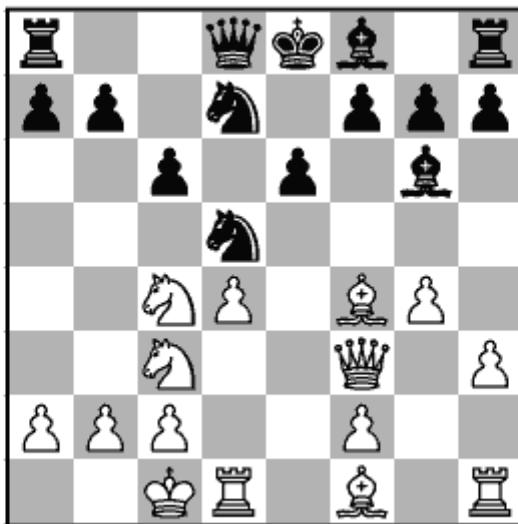
White to play

c21) 14 a3 Bxc3 15 Nd6+ Kf8 16 Nxf5 exf5 17 bxc3 g6 is playable for Black; e.g., 18 g4 Qh4 19 Qd6+ Qe7 20 Qxe7+ Kxe7 21 gxf5 Kf6 22 fxg6 hxg6 with good positional compensation due to White's weak pawns.

c22) 14 Qe3 Bg6!? (keeping all options open while preparing ...b5) 15 g4 Bxc3 16 Qxc3 Qc7 17 Qa3 Nb6 and 18 Nd6+ is repelled by 18...Kd7 since f7 is defended.

c23) 14 d5 looks strong at a glance, but after 14...0-0 White might just be opening the position for Black's pieces. 15 dxc6 bxc6 (Papenfuss-Semmelroth, corr. 2018) 16 g4 (16 Ne5?? Qb8!) 16...Bg6 17 Na4 (17 Ne5 Qb8! 18 Nxg6 hxg6) 17...Qf6 18 Qe3 may keep some advantage, but the game is far from one-sided; e.g., 18...Qe7 19 Bg2 Nc5 20 Nxc5 Bxc5 21 Qe2 Qf6 and Black seems active enough.

12...Bg6 (D)



White to play

13 h4

13 Nd6+?! Bxd6 14 Bxd6 Qg5+ 15 Kb1 Nxc3+ with the point that 16 Qxc3?! Qd5 forks White's pieces.

13...h5!

This is probably best, though 13...Be7, using a potential pin to parry White's expansion, looks viable too:

- a) 14 h5?! Nxf4 15 hxg6 (15 Qxf4?? Bg5) 15...Nxg6 16 Bd3 offers White some compensation.
- b) 14 Nd6+ Bxd6 15 Bxd6 h5 16 g5 N7b6 17 Nxd5 (17 Be5 Nxc3! followed by ...0-0 is safe for Black, with no knights to break open the castled position) 17...Qxd6!? (17...Nxd5 18 Qa3) 18 Nf4 Nd5 19 Nxg6 fxg6 may look ugly for Black, but his pieces are working well; e.g., 20 Bd3 0-0-0 21 Rhe1 Qf4+ 22 Qxf4 Nxf4 with ...Rhf8 to follow, when the knight is powerful on f4.

14 g5 Bb4!?

Black's idea is to meet 15 Nd6+ with 15...Ke7, while 15 Nxd5 cxd5 16 Qb3 (16 Nd6+? Bxd6 17 Bxd6 Be4) 16...Qe7 (16...0-0 17 Qxb4 dxc4 hopes to launch an attack on the white king, but isn't wholly convincing after 18 Bd6) 17 a3 dxc4 18 Qxb4 Qxb4 19 axb4 Nb6 leads to an ending where Black should be OK with some care.

C3)

6 Ne5 Nbd7 (D)



White to play

Now there are three moves, all important enough to deserve 'main line' treatment:

[C31: 7 Bf4](#)

[C32: 7 f4!?](#)

[C33: 7 Nc4](#)

C31)

7 Bf4

This is perhaps the most natural move, but allows exchanges that in principle should help Black.

7...Nd5

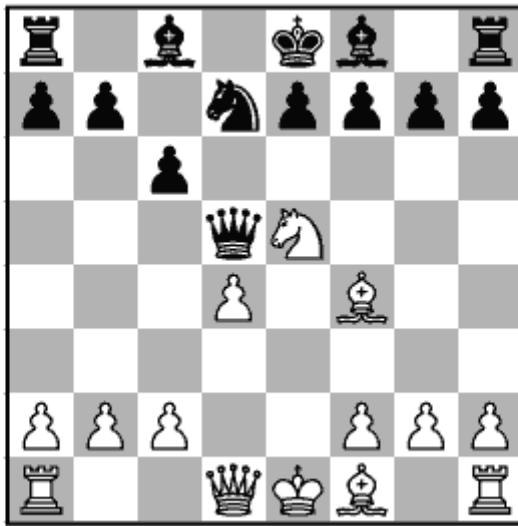
This ambitious move is the right way to exchange knights. 7...Nxe5 is playable, but less fun for Black after either recapture.

8 Nxd5

Or:

- a) You could imagine White bashing out 8 Nxf7?? in a blitz game, but he would regret it after 8...Qe6+.
- b) 8 Nxd7?! Nxf4 is another line White should avoid.
- c) 8 Bg3 Nxc3 9 bxc3 Nxe5 10 Bxe5 Qd5 also offers White very little, Sedlak-Benković, Subotica 2003.

8...Qxd5 (D)



White to play

White's problem after this move is that he can't develop his king's bishop without either losing time or gambiting the g2-pawn.

9 Nf3

Other moves:

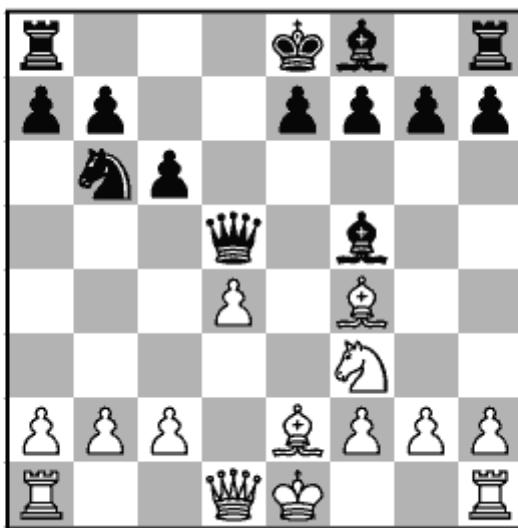
- a) 9 f3 avoids sacrificing the g2-pawn or retreating the knight, but looks very odd. 9...Nxe5 10 dxe5 (10 Bxe5 Bf5 has ...0-0-0 ideas, and after 11 c3 f6 12 Bg3 h5 Black will take over the initiative unless White starts liquidating, Ponkratov-Lysy, Russian Junior Ch, St Petersburg 2007) 10...Qa5+ 11 Qd2 Qxd2+ and Black has no problems after either recapture.

b) 9 Be2 (this popular gambit scores well, but is objectively unclear) 9...Qxg2!? (9...Nxe5 10 Bxe5 Qxg2 is the standard reply, but it gives White more options, some of which lead to a complex forced draw) 10 Bf3 Qh3 11 Qe2 (11 d5?! Qf5! makes use of Black's decision not to exchange knights on e5, as the f4-bishop is loose here; then 12 Nxd7 Bxd7 13 Qd4 Rc8 leaves White struggling to justify his gambit) 11...Qf5 (11...Nxe5?! allows the trick 12 Bxe5 f6 13 Bh5+, but even this turns into a decent way to return the gambit pawn after 13...g6 14 Bxf6 Rg8) 12 Bg3 Nxe5 13 dxe5 and now in *A Startling Chess Opening Repertoire* I gave 13...Qe6 14 h4 g6 15 h5 Bh6 with a highly murky position. It's playable for both sides, and probably roughly balanced, though in practice anything could happen.

9...Nb6

Overwhelmingly preferred in practice; Black covers c4 and has a nasty trap in mind. The untried 9...e5 would certainly shock most opponents and is supported by our silicon friends, but will tend to boil down to a tedious defence for Black. 9...Nf6 10 Be2 Bf5 sets the same trap as the text-move, and has a similar assessment.

10 Be2 Bf5! (D)



White to play

Here is the trap: Black threatens to win a pawn by 11...Qe4, and White must waste time defending against this:

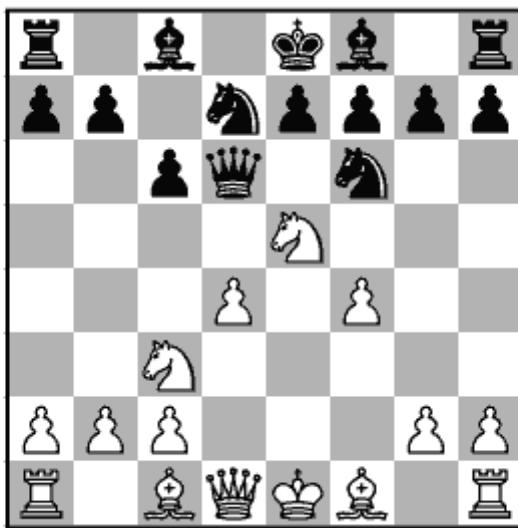
- a) 11 0-0? is an oversight that has been made by some surprisingly strong players, though don't get too excited if you land this one: it isn't an automatic win for Black. 11...Qe4 12 Bc7 Qxc2 13 Bxb6 Qxd1 14 Rfxd1 axb6 15 d5! (otherwise Black consolidates easily) 15...g6 16 dxc6 bxc6 17 Nd4 (17 Rac1?! Bg7 led to victory for Black in Parligras-Tiviakov, Bundesliga 2008/9) 17...Be4 18 Nb5! (18 Nxc6 Bg7) 18...Rc8 19 Rac1 Bg7 20 Rc4 Bxb2 21 Rd2 and White will probably be saved by the opposite bishops.
- b) 11 c3 e6 (11...Qe4 followed by ...Qc2 and an exchange of queens should be safe enough for Black, and with enough scope for a strong player to outplay a much weaker one) 12 0-0 Be7 (12...Qe4 is again possible, Quesada-Ivanchuk, Havana 2012) 13 a4 a5 14 Bc7 Bd8 (Ivanchuk-Tiviakov, Hoogeveen 2009) and White will have just a slight initiative in the middlegame. Since this doesn't offer Black great chances to stir up winning chances, perhaps he should opt for the queen exchange on move 11 or 12.
- c) 11 Bg3 and again Black has the choice between a middlegame or (seeking) an endgame:

c1) 11...e6 12 0-0 Be7 13 a4 a5 14 Ne5 Qd8 15 c3 (15 c4 0-0 intending ...c5) 15...Nd5 16 Bf3 Ra6 (Savanović-Milanović, Serbian Team Ch 2012) with hopes of queenside counterplay, but it's not much to go on.

c2) 11...Qa5+ 12 c3 Qa4 is an irritating prod at White's queenside. 13 b3 (13 Qd2 Qc2 and after the queens come off, we can settle in for a long fight) 13...Qa3 14 Bd3 (14 0-0 e6 15 Nh4 Bg6 16 f4 Be7) 14...Bxd3 15 Qxd3 e6 with a decent game for Black; e.g., 16 Be5 f6 17 Bg3 Nd5 18 0-0 Bd6 19 Rfe1 0-0!, Van Damme-Barclay, corr. 2017.

C32)

7 f4!? (D)



Black to play

This committal move suggests White is a player who likes to go all-out and hates retreating or compromising! I suspect this is an unwise choice for most club-level players as White, since it leads to complex positions where bluffing is no use and detailed preparation is necessary. However, you can expect to face it relatively often since it has received a 'good press', with several recommendations and even claims of being a 'refutation'.

7...a6!?

Despite being virtually untested, this may well be the correct move. One key idea is that in some lines Black would like to play ...c5, gaining central counterplay and undermining the support for the e5-knight. With b5 covered, this move is far more likely to work. Meanwhile, Black keeps options of set-ups with either ...e6 or ...g6, and the fact that he hasn't yet plumped for one or the other makes it harder for White to find moves that are equally useful against both – and that don't fall foul of ...c5. Black also supports possible ideas of a queenside advance with ...b5, but let's not get carried away just yet.

Let's quickly see why other moves are less appealing:

- a) 7...g6 8 Bc4 e6 is not necessarily terrible for Black, but too ugly to recommend with a clear conscience!
- b) 7...e6 invites White to get moving with 8 g4.

c) After 7...Nb6, 8 g4! is an aggressive and absolutely critical test of Black's opening. Objectively it is probably good for White, but very messy indeed. That's for our opponents to worry about, as we shall play something else, which provides a clearer response to a kingside pawn-storm.

Thus we return to 7...a6!? (D):



White to play

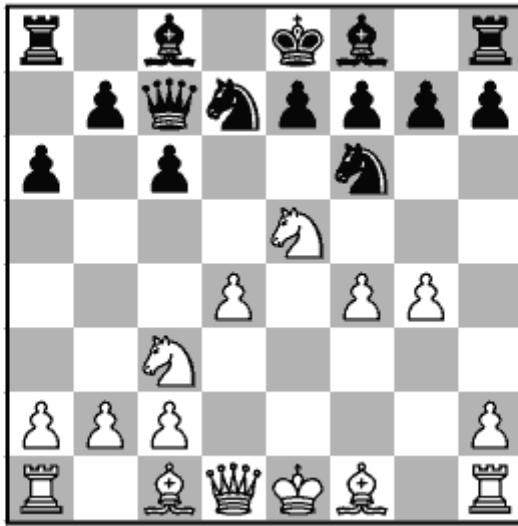
8 g4

Other moves:

- a) 8 Bc4?! forces 8...e6 but this is no great achievement if Black hasn't played ...g6. The bishop will be a target for Black's ...b5 advance and the queenside counterplay will come fast.
- b) 8 Be3 Nb6 (or 8...g6 with ...Nb6 soon to follow) makes sense now that the e3-bishop is a target for a knight landing on d5.
- c) 8 a4 e6 (intending ...c5; 8...g6?! is still well met by 9 Bc4) 9 g3 (9 Be2 Qc7 with ...c5 coming soon, possibly after ...Be7 and ...0-0) 9...Qc7 (9...c5?! proves premature after 10 Be3) 10 Bg2 Be7 11 0-0 0-0 intending ...c5 and meeting 12 Be3 with 12...Nd5.
- d) 8 Be2 (Camps-May, corr. 2013) is probably best met by 8...e6!? now that g4 can't be followed up by Bg2; the move ...a6 is at least somewhat useful:
 - d1) 9 g4 Qc7! (intending ...c5) 10 g5 (10 Bf3 Be7 11 Qe2 Nd5 12 Ne4 f5!?) is a theme that crops up in a number of lines) 10...Nd5 11 Ne4 b5 intending ...c5.
 - d2) 9 Bf3 (hindering ...b5) 9...Be7 (9...c5?! 10 Be3 causes White no inconvenience and reduces Black's options) keeps a number of plans in mind; e.g., 10 Qd3 Qc7 11 Bd2 Nd5 (note the ...Nb4 possibility) 12 0-0-0 (12 a3 0-0) 12...b5.

8...Qc7 (D)

Threatening ...Nxe5. 8...g6 and 8...Nxe5 9 fxe5 Qe6 are other lines for White to worry about.



White to play

9 Rg1

A logical response, but now White will not be able to develop his kingside in any normal way. Other moves (bear in mind that this is all analysis, as this critical line is yet to be tested):

a) 9 h3 e6 (back to the ...c5 plan):

a1) 10 Qe2 Nd5 11 Bd2 (11 Ne4 f5!?) 11...Be7 12 0-0-0 Nxe5 13 dxe5 Nxc3 14 Bxc3 b5 and Black has basically solved his opening problems.

a2) 10 Bg2 (putting the brakes on ...b5 themes) 10...Be7 11 0-0 0-0 with ...Nd5 or ...c5 coming next.

b) 9 Qe2 Nxe5 10 fxe5 Nxg4 11 h3 (11 Rg1 h5 12 h3 Nh6 13 Ne4 Nf5 is also solid for Black; e.g., 14 Qf2 g6 15 Bg5 Ng7, activating the queen's bishop) 11...Nh6 12 Bxh6 gxh6 13 0-0-0 Bf5 offers White compensation, but is OK for Black: 14 h4 e6 15 Bh3 (White can mount a prolonged siege with knight vs bishop, whereas 15 Ne4 Bxe4 16 Qxe4 0-0-0 poses Black little threat) 15...Bxh3 16 Rxh3 Be7 17 Ne4 0-0-0 and there are no obvious ideas for White to break through.

c) 9 g5 Nd5 10 Ne4 (10 Nxd5 cxd5 11 Bd3 Nxe5 12 fxe5 Bh3! makes sure of developing the bishop outside the pawn-chain!; 10 Qf3 Nxc3 11 bxc3?! Nxe5 12 fxe5 Be6 and Black is doing well) 10...Nxe5 11 fxe5 Bf5 (11...f5?! 12 gxf6 exf6 13 c4!) 12 Bg2! (D) (12 Ng3 Bg6 13 h4 h5) is a critical line.



Black to play

Black faces an important and typical practical decision: seek a safe line that also poses the opponent few problems, or take on a far greater risk by playing the most ambitious moves and entering crazy and open-ended complications? In this case, the latter is surely the right path, as no opponent will find the best moves, whereas the safe line allows White easy pressure.

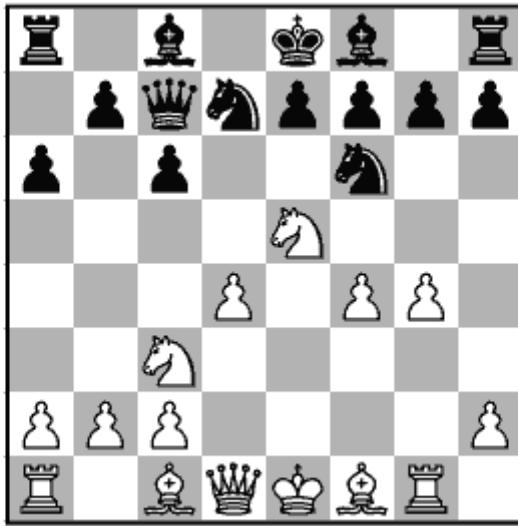
c1) 12...e6 13 0-0 (13 c4 Bxe4) 13...Nb6 14 Qe2 0-0-0 15 c3 Kb8 is the modest approach. Black can seek counterplay with ...h6, but will come under queenside pressure.

c2) 12...0-0-0 13 0-0 e6 14 Qe2 c5 and now to get anything at all out of the opening White needs to play 15 c4!. Then:

c21) 15...Nb4?! doesn't work due to 16 d5 Qxe5 17 Bf4 Qd4+ 18 Kh1!, but even here you probably need to be a computer to find the narrow path to an advantage as White.

c22) With 15...Nb6 Black intends an exchange sacrifice after 16 Nd6+ Rxd6 17 exd6 Bxd6, when 18 dxc5 Bxh2+ 19 Kh1 Nd7 20 b4 Ne5 21 Bb2 h6! whips up threats against the white king. White can thread his way to a better ending by 22 g6! Nxg6 23 c6, but detailed computer analysis suggests that Black can hold after 23...Nf4 24 cxb7+ Kb8 25 Qf3 Nxg2 26 Qxg2 Rd8!. Of course, you will never get that whole line in a practical game! If White is on his own in the position after 14...c5, you will most likely get a good position immediately, or (if he dives into the complications) you'll get some crazy mess where the more resourceful player will come out on top.

We now return to 9 Rg1 (*D*):



Black to play

9...h5(!)

This is Black's most ambitious option and can lead to very sharp play. Two other moves are worth mentioning:

- a) With White having played some odd moves, this is a case where 9...g6 is more attractive than usual, meeting 10 Be3 with 10...Nd5, while 10 Qf3 h5 11 h3 Nxe5 12 fxe5 Nd5 13 Ne4 (13 Nxd5 cxd5 14 Qxd5?! hxg4 15 hxg4 Qxc2) 13...Qb6 14 Qf2 hxg4 15 hxg4 Bh6 16 c4 Bxc1 17 Rxc1 Nc7 18 Rg3 Be6 is unclear and unbalanced.
- b) 9...e6 is a more cautious ('practical') approach, offering up fewer targets; e.g.:
 - b1) 10 Qe2 Nxe5 (not 10...c5? 11 g5) 11 dxe5 Nd5 12 Ne4 (12 Bd2? Qb6! is good here: 13 Rg3 Qxb2 14 Rb1 Qxc2) 12...b5 looks like a reasonable game for Black; e.g., 13 Bd2 Bb7 14 0-0-0 0-0-0.
 - b2) 10 Rg3 b5 and Black develops without making serious concessions.
 - b3) 10 Qf3 and then:
 - b31) 10...c5?! 11 g5! is risky for Black (compare the [next](#) note).
 - b32) 10...Nxe5 11 dxe5 Nd5 12 Bd2 Bb4 (12...Qb6? fails in this case because 13 Rg3 Qxb2 14 Rb1 Qa3 15 Nxd5 Qxf3 16 Nc7+! gives White an overwhelming attack in a queenless middlegame) 13 0-0-0 and here White has no need to play a3.
 - b33) 10...Bb4! 11 Bd2 c5 12 a3 (now 12 0-0-0?! is met by 12...cxd4) 12...Bxc3 13 Bxc3 Nxe5 14 dxe5 Nd5 is playable for Black.

10 g5

After 10 h3 hxg4 11 hxg4 e6 (11...Nd5 12 Ne4 b5 is riskier) the open h-file seems to help Black in comparison with the 9...e6 lines; e.g., 12 Qf3 (12 Bg2 Nd5 13 Ne4 Nxe5 14 fxe5 c5) 12...c5 13 g5?! (this is strong in the position with the h-pawns still on the board; 13 Be3 cxd4 14 Bxd4 Bc5 and Black is getting his pieces out) 13...cxd4 14 gxf6 Nxe5 15 fxe5 dxc3 16 fxg7 Bxg7 17 Rxg7 Qxe5+ 18 Be3 Qxg7 19 0-0-0 Rh4! and while the game remains sharp, it is White who is fighting to stay afloat.

10...Nd5 (D)



White to play

This is clearly a critical line but Black appears to have his fair share of the chances:

a) 11 Nxd5 cxd5 12 Qf3 Qxc2 13 Rg2 (13 Qxd5 Nxe5 14 dxe5 e6; 13 g6 Nxe5 14 fxe5 f5!) 13...Qe4+ boils down to rough equality.

b) 11 g6 Nxe5 12 fxe5 (12 dxe5 Bg4!?) 12...fxg6 13 Bd3 Bf5 14 Rxg6 Nxc3 15 bxc3 Bxg6 16 Bxg6+ Kd8 with a complex middlegame ahead; e.g., 17 Bg5 (17 Be3 e6) 17...Kc8 18 Qd3 Qd7 19 c4 e6 intending ...Be7.

c) 11 Qd3 and now:

c1) After 11...g6!? White must act or be pushed back: 12 Nxg6 fxg6 13 Qxg6+ Kd8 14 Nxd5 (14 Bd2 Nxc3 15 bxc3 e6! 16 c4 a5) 14...cxd5 15 Bd2! a5! 16 Rg3 Nb6 17 Qf7 h4 18 Bb5! Qd6 19 Re3 Bd7 20 a4 Nc4 (a computer line that is most unlikely to occur in practice unless both players have prepared and memorized it!) with a chaotic and messy game; objectively White is the one pressing, but over the board anything could happen.

c2) 11...Nxe5 12 dxe5 (12 fxe5? Nb4 with ...Bf5 coming up) 12...g6 (12...Nxc3 13 Qxc3) 13 Nxd5 cxd5 14 Qxd5 Be6 (14...Qxc2?! 15 Rg2 Qc7 16 Be3 Be6 17 Qe4) 15 Qd4 (15 Qe4 Rc8 16 c3 Bg7 with compensation) 15...Qxc2 16 Bd2 Rd8 17 Qb4 Qc6 18 Bg2 Bd5 19 Rc1 e6! 20 Qa5 Bxg2! 21 Rxc6 Bxc6 and it will be very hard for White to make any real progress.

This has been a messy section, but it is an absolutely critical line. Remember that most opponents will be completely on their own after 7...a6!?.

C33)

7 Nc4

This is the most popular move, and has been extensively tested in high-level games.

7...Qc7 (D)



White to play

8 Qf3

White prepares Bf4. Only one of the alternatives is especially important:

- a) 8 d5 g6 offers White very little, as he merely liquidates his central pawn. Then the dramatic 9 d6 (9 Qd4 Bg7 10 Bf4 Qd8 11 dxc6 bxc6 is fine for Black, Dominguez-Ivanchuk, Wijk aan Zee 2010) 9...exd6 10 Bf4 Ne5 11 Qd4 Nh5 12 Ne4 Nxf4 13 Ncxd6+ Bxd6 14 Nxd6+ Kf8 15 Qxe5 Qe7 liquidates most of the pieces too.
- b) 8 g3 is less effective than some g3 lines we have seen on earlier moves. 8...Nb6 9 Bf4 (9 Ne5 Bf5 10 Bf4 Qc8!?) 9...Qd8 10 Ne5 (10 Qd2 Bf5) 10...Nfd5 and White's pieces are looking disorganized, Groszpeter-Babula, Odorheiu Secuiesc Zonal 1995.
- c) 8 Bd3 b5 9 Ne3 (9 Nd2 e5) 9...e6 and while White has been shifting his knight from f3 to e3, Black has been playing useful moves.
- d) 8 a4!? is relatively rare, but this will probably change following its use by both Carlsen and Caruana. 8...g6 (*D*) (8...a5?! 9 Qf3 is an improved version of the 8 Qf3 main line for White, as after 9...Nb6 10 Bf4 his options are limited by the undefended b6-knight and the weakness of b5, as shown by 10...Qd8 11 Be5 Be6 12 Ne3 g6?!, transposing to a bad line [within](#) note 'b' to White's 12th move below {13 d5!}; let's just mention that 8...Nd5 was played in Caruana-Carlsen, Baku Olympiad 2016) and now:



White to play

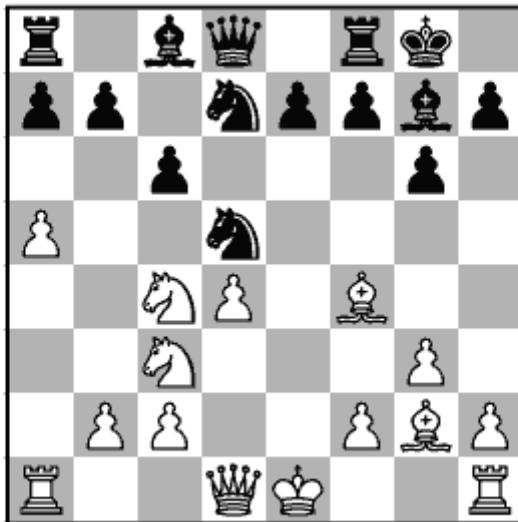
d1) 9 Qf3 Bg7 10 Bf4 Qd8 11 a5 Nf8!? intending ...Ne6, Höxter-Buhlmann, corr. 2014.

d2) 9 g3 Nb6 and then:

d21) 10 Nxb6 axb6 11 Bf4 Qd8 12 Bg2 Bg7 13 0-0 is not a position where Black should have major problems; e.g., 13...Bg4 (13...Be6 14 Re1 Qd7 15 Qe2!?) 14 Qd2 0-0 (14...Qd7?! 15 d5) 15 Rfe1 Qd7 looking to exert pressure on the d- or even a-file, and meeting 16 Qe3 with 16...Nh5!?.

d22) 10 Ne5 a5 (preventing White from reverting to the dangerous a5 lines) 11 Bf4 (or 11 Bg2 Bg7 12 0-0 0-0 13 Re1 Bf5) 11...Qd8 12 Bg2 Bg7 13 0-0 0-0 (Darini-Tiviakov, Mashhad 2010) is a fairly good version of the fianchetto set-up for Black since he has more options than usual for deploying his queen's bishop, while White's queenside lacks fluidity. After 14 Re1 Bf5 Black eyes c2 and intends to put a knight on d5.

d3) 9 a5 is surely the critical line, but is largely unexplored. 9...Bg7 (9...Nd5 may prove premature after 10 g3) 10 g3 0-0 11 Bf4 Qd8 (11...e5?! 12 dx5 Nh5, as in Mihok-G.Szabo, Budapest 2014, is unsound due to 13 Qd4!) 12 Bg2 and now the surprising 12...Nd5!? (D) is the best way to seek a central foothold:



White to play

d31) 13 Bxd5?! cxd5 14 Nxd5 grabs a pawn at the cost of the bishop-pair and king safety. 14...Nf6 15 Nde3 (15 Nxf6+ Bxf6 16 Ne5 Qd5) 15...Bh3 gives Black good compensation.

d32) 13 Nxd5 cxd5 14 Ne3 (14 Bxd5?! Nb6! is the key tactical point – Black regains the pawn with full equality) 14...e6 (not 14...e5? 15 dxe5 g5 16 Qh5!; but 14...Nf6 intending ...Be6 or ...e6 is a safer option, as the immediate 15 c4?! is strongly met by 15...Nh5!) 15 c4 (15 0-0 Nb8 intending ...Nc6) 15...Nf6 (15...e5? 16 dxe5 g5 is entertaining but inadvisable due to 17 Bxg5 Qxg5 18 f4) and White is making a good show of exerting pressure but has vulnerabilities of his own. 16 Qb3 (16 Be5 dxc4; 16 c5 Ne4 {intending ...g5} 17 Nc2 Bd7) 16...Nh5!? 17 Be5 f6 18 cxd5 fxe5 19 dxe6 Qe7 20 d5 Nf6 and the players have contrived to produce a chaotic mess that the computers – surprise, surprise! – analyse down to endgames that should be drawn. In practice, anything could happen.

8...Nb6 (D)

Immediately challenging the knight and freeing the c8-bishop. Other moves are very rare, even though 8...g6 9 Bf4 Qd8 might be playable.



White to play

9 Bf4

After 9 Ne5, 9...Qd6 (9...Be6 is the main alternative) has its logic, hitting the d4-pawn and returning the queen to this influential square while keeping options open with respect to how to deploy his bishops. 10 Be3 (obviously less active than putting the bishop on f4; after 10 Bf4 Black has no choice but to grab the pawn by 10...Qxd4, transposing to note '[b](#)' to White's 10th move) 10...g6 11 Bd3 (11 a4 a5) 11...Bg7 12 0-0 Be6 13 Rfe1 0-0 14 Rad1 Nfd7 and Black has little to worry about.

9...Qd8

Seeking normal development and to keep plenty of pieces on the board. This is more natural than 9...Qd7 (seeking a queen exchange with ...Qg4), when White has some dangerous pawn-sacrifice ideas.

10 Be5

Or:

- a) 10 0-0-0?? is a major option with the queen on d7, but here loses to 10...Bg4 11 Qe3 Nbd5 12 Nxd5 Nxd5 13 Qe4 f5!.
- b) 10 Ne5 fails to defend the d4-pawn. There's no reason to let White get away with this. Even though it looks like White obtains compensation, Black has his full share of the chances in the resulting play: 10...Qxd4 (10...Be6 is the cautious approach, though not necessarily safer) 11 Rd1 (11 Bd3 g6) 11...Qb4 12 Be3 (12 Bd2? Bg4; 12 Be2 g6) 12...Qxb2 (12...Qa5 is playable too) 13 Bd4 Qb4 14 Be2 (14 a3 Qa5 15 Be2 h5!) and now 14...h5! is a critical idea to make this position work for Black. Note that 15 h3? fails to prevent 15...Bg4!.

- c) 10 h3 is another move that is an important possibility with the queen on d7, and where Black has a useful extra option here: 10...Be6 (10...Nxc4 11 Bxc4 Qxd4 12 Bb3 is unsafe for Black) 11 Nxb6 axb6 12 Be5 (G.Ginsburg-S.Kasparov, Bundesliga 2010/11) 12...b5 and Black has events under control. 13 Bxf6 gxf6 14 d5 Bd7 15 Rd1 (15 dxc6 bxc6 16 Rd1 Bg7) 15...Qc7 offers White little, as 16 dxc6?! runs into 16...Qe5+! 17 Be2 Bxc6.

We now return to 10 Be5 (D):



Black to play

10...Be6

This is the most natural developing move. 10...Bg4 11 Qg3 is more awkward for Black due to the loose bishop.

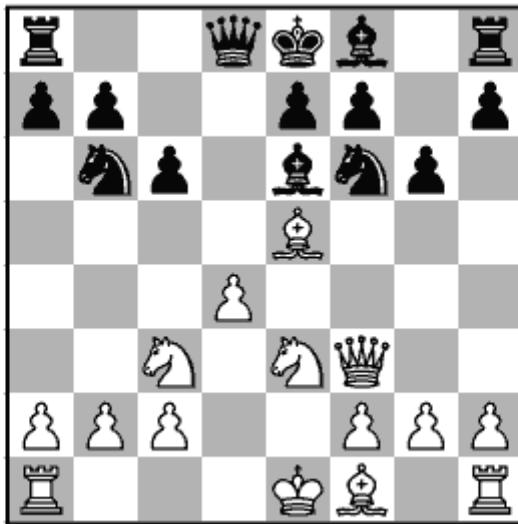
11 Ne3

This is the only critical move.

- a) 11 Na5?! is strongly answered with 11...Nbd7!, the point being 12 Nxb7 Qb6 13 Nc5 Nxe5 14 dxe5 Qxc5 15 exf6 exf6 with bishops, open lines and active play.
- b) 11 Nxb6 Qxb6 awkwardly threatens White's pawns: 12 Be2 (12 0-0-0?? Bg4) 12...Nd7 13 Bf4 (13 0-0-0 Nxe5 14 dxe5 g6 offers White nothing) 13...Qxd4 14 Rd1 Qb6 15 0-0 g6 and White has just about enough play for the pawn; e.g., 16 Be3 Qa5 17 Bd4 Rg8 intending ...Bh6 and ...0-0-0.

11...g6 (D)

This rare move looks like a good idea, continuing with development rather than moving any of the pieces that are already deployed.



White to play

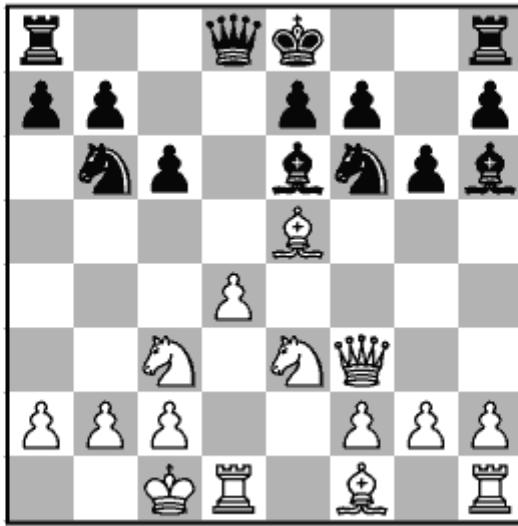
12 0-0-0

Alternatively:

- a) 12 Rd1 Bg7 is very solid for Black.
- b) 12 a4 Bg7 (it is important not to play 12...a5?, which weakens the b5-square: 13 d5! Nbd5 14 Nxd5 Bxd5 15 Nxd5 Qxd5 16 Qxd5 cxd5 17 Bb5+ Kd8 18 0-0-0 Bg7 19 c4 is horrible for Black, as the a5-pawn is weak and the b5-bishop entrenched and powerful, D.Zuniga-Libre, Greenhills 1996) 13 a5 Nbd7 14 a6 (14 Bc4 Bxc4 15 Nxc4 0-0 is OK for Black, with ...b5 and ...Nxe5 both ideas White will have to address) 14...Nxe5 15 dxe5 Nd7 16 axb7 Nxe5 (just in time!) followed by ...Rb8 is OK for Black, Tyleček-A.Lorenzo, corr. 2013.
- c) 12 d5 Nbd5 13 Nxd5 Bxd5 14 Nxd5 Qxd5 15 Qxd5 cxd5 16 Bb5+ Kd8 17 0-0-0 Bg7 offers White little here since Black's queenside is unweakened, Laihonen-Koykka, Finnish Team Ch 2013/14.
- d) Inserting 12 h4 h5 doesn't dramatically alter the situation: 13 d5 (13 0-0-0 is still met by 13...Bh6, and 13 a4 with 13...Bg7) 13...Nbd5 14 Nxd5 (14 0-0-0?! Bh6) 14...Bxd5 15 Nxd5 Qxd5 16 Qxd5 cxd5 17 Bb5+ Kd8 and to get his pawn back, White will need to give up his bishop-pair, when Black should have few problems.

12...Bh6!? (D)

The meek 12...Bg7 (V.Meier-Schnelzer, Germany tt 2010/11) 13 h4 leaves Black under pressure.



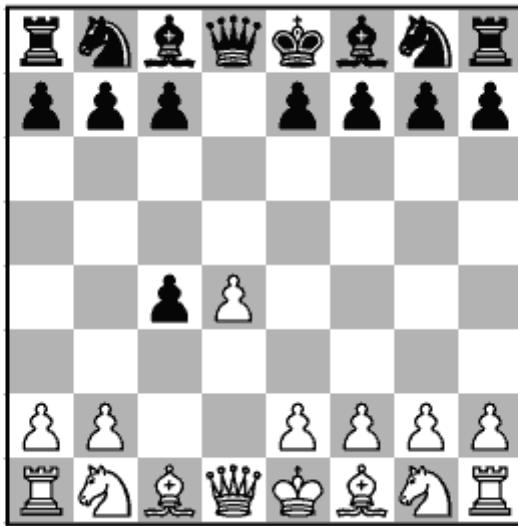
White to play

The text-move threatens ...Bg4, and brings about an untested position that looks playable for Black:

- a) 13 Be2 Bg4 14 Qg3 Bxe2 15 Nxe2 Nh5 followed by ...f6 is at least OK for Black.
- b) 13 h3 Nbd5 14 Nxd5 Qxd5 (14...Bxd5 15 Qe2 keeps more pieces on the board but offers White more chances too) 15 Qxd5 Bxd5 16 c4 Be6 and pushing forward with 17 d5 makes the game interesting but delivers no real advantage: 17...cxd5 (17...Bd7!?) 18 cxd5 Bf5 19 Bb5+ Kd8!? with counterplay.
- c) 13 Kb1 Bxe3 14 Qxe3 (Black need not fear 14 Bxf6 exf6 15 fxe3 f5) 14...Ng4 15 Qg3 Nxe5 16 Qxe5 0-0 (Black can also move his rook and go queenside, for a fuller game) 17 h4 Nd5 18 Ne4 Qb8 19 Qg5 Qf4 with few problems for Black.

2: Queen's Gambit Accepted

1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 (*D*)



White to play

In common with our choice against 1 e4, we make an exchange of pawns that avoids both a blocked centre and a symmetrical pawn-structure. Our next move will be the liberating thrust ...e5 unless White prevents it!

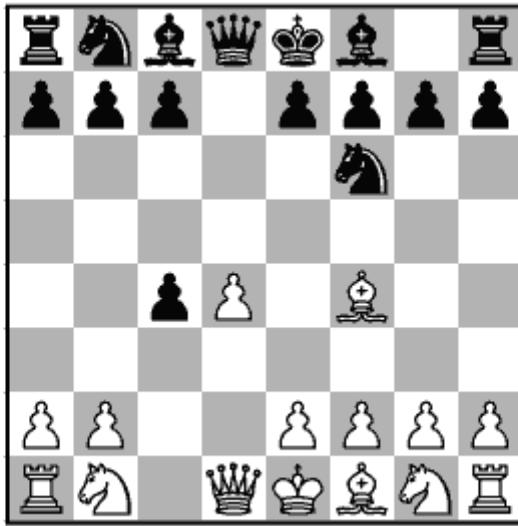
The most common move is now 3 Nf3, when we shall transpose to a Slav line with 3...c6 (see Chapter 3). That leaves two main lines and an array of minor options:

A: 3 e3

B: 3 e4

Just one of the ‘other moves’ is testing, and that is only because it normally transposes to Line A:

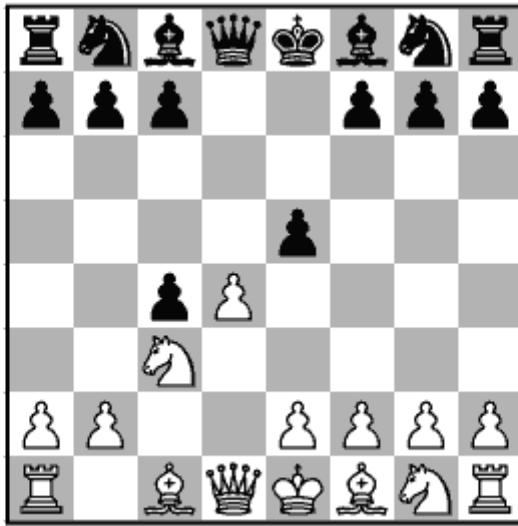
- a) 3 Na3? not only fails to prevent 3...e5!, but makes it a good deal stronger.
- b) 3 g3?! e5 is likewise good for Black.
- c) 3 Qa4+ is a move you normally see cited as a reason why the Queen’s Gambit is not a ‘real’ gambit, even though after 3...Nc6 White can’t regain the pawn immediately. Still, the position after 4 Nf3 is not so simple for Black to handle, and I shall recommend a reply that is more in keeping with our ...e5 theme: 3...Nd7 4 Nf3 (4 Qxc4 e5 and 4 e4 c6 5 Qxc4 e5 are unpromising for White) 4...c6 5 Qxc4 (there’s little choice as Black was threatening ...b5) 5...e5 6 dx5 Nx5 7 Nx5 Qa5+ 8 Nc3 Qxe5 and Black has easy development and no real problems in this little-explored position; e.g., 9 Bf4 Qa5 (intending ...Be6) 10 Qb3 Nf6 (Rook-Janisch, corr. 2017) or 9 g3 Be6 10 Qa4 Bc5 11 Bg2 (Gustafsson-Semrl, Bled 1999) 11...Nf6 with very healthy development.
- d) 3 Bf4?! has several good answers, including 3...Nf6 (*D*).



White to play

Then:

- d1) 4 Nf3 b5 (don't be put off by those examples in beginner's books that show a greedy approach in the QGA failing; it is strong here!) and then:
- d11) 5 Nc3 c6 6 a4 b4 7 Nb1 Ba6! and with ...e6 and ...c5 coming fast, and ...Nd5 and ...c3 ideas in the mix too, Black's counterplay comes before White is serious about regaining the pawn on c4.
- d12) 5 a4 c6 comes to the same thing after 6 Nc3, while 6 axb5 cxb5 7 Nc3 looks like a clever move-order until you see 7...Nd5!, holding on to the booty. Let's also note that 6 e3 e6, with ...Bb4(+) ideas, keeps the queenside pawns united.
- d2) 4 Nc3 c6 5 a4 (5 e4?! b5) 5...Nd5 is good for Black; note that 6 Bd2?! e5! is back to our central theme: 7 dxe5 Nb4 8 Nf3 N8a6 intending ...Nc5 and ...Bf5.
- d3) 4 e3 b5 5 a4 (5 b3?? e5!; 5 Nf3 e6 with ...Bb4+ and ...c6 both on tap to keep the queenside pawns intact) 5...c6 6 Nc3 (6 axb5?! cxb5 7 Qf3 {7 b3?? e5!, Mancini-N.Pert, French Team Ch 2004} 7...Nd5 with a solid extra pawn) 6...Qb6! denies White full compensation for the pawn.
- e) 3 Nc3 is a popular move, but after 3...e5 (*D*) it normally merges with the 3 e3 line. (3...a6 is a good alternative, but we shall stay with our thematic central thrust.)



White to play

Now:

e1) It is instructive just how bad 4 d5? is. This move wastes time and gives Black too many useful squares. 4...Nf6 5 Bg5 (5 e4 b5! is simply good for Black) 5...a6 6 a4 (Vizantiadis-Spassky, Siegen Olympiad 1970) 6...h6 7 Bxf6 Qxf6 gives Black the bishop-pair and good development for free.

e2) 4 Nf3 exd4 5 Qxd4 (5 Nxd4 a6!? covers b5 in preparation for playing ...c5) 5...Qxd4 6 Nxd4 Nf6 (6...a6 is also a good move) 7 Bf4 (7 e4?! transposes to note '[b](#)' to White's 5th move in Line B; 7 Bg5 Bb4 is fully OK for Black) 7...Bb4 8 Bxc7 (8 Nb5 Na6) 8...0-0 9 a3 Nc6!? 10 Nxc6 (10 Nb5 Ba5 leaves Black well placed on the queenside) 10...Bxc3+ 11 bxc3 bxc6 and the black pieces quickly reach good squares.

e3) 4 e3 will normally transpose to 3 e3 lines. 4...exd4 5 exd4 Nf6 6 Bxc4 Bd6 7 Qe2+ (the main independent idea; 7 Nf3 0-0 8 0-0 transposes to Line [A](#), while neither 7 Nge2 nor 7 Bg5 0-0 8 Qf3 brings White any particular benefit) 7...Qe7 and then:

e31) 8 Bg5 0-0 9 Qxe7 (9 0-0-0 h6) 9...Bxe7 10 0-0-0 h6 11 Bf4 Bf5 and the c7-pawn is tactically defended.

e32) 8 Qxe7+ Kxe7 9 Nf3 (Sedlak-Indjić, Serbian Ch, Novi Sad 2018) 9...Re8 10 0-0 Nc6 (intending ...Bg4; 10...Kf8 11 Ng5 Re7 is quieter and also OK) 11 Ng5 (or 11 Re1+ Kf8 12 Rxe8+ Nxe8) 11...Nxd4 and both sides must be careful: 12 Bxf7 (12 Nxf7 Bb4!) 12...Rd8 13 Bc4 Nc2 14 Rb1 (14 Nf7 Bxh2+!? 15 Kxh2 Rd4) 14...Bf5 15 Nf7 Rd7 with a rough balance.

A)

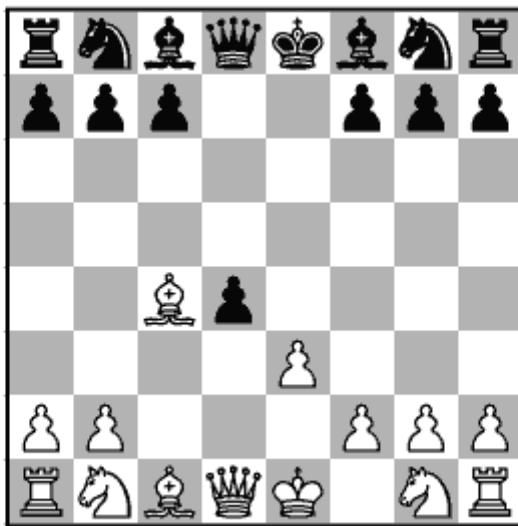
3 e3 e5

3...Be6 is an attempt to transpose to our repertoire line 3 Nf3 c6 4 e3 Be6 (see Line [E](#) of Chapter 3), but offers White some dangerous additional possibilities.

4 Bxc4

4 Nc3 transposes to note '[e3](#)' to White's 3rd move above.

4...exd4 (D)



White to play

5 exd4

We now have a position that can also arise from an Exchange French. This simple recapture is the overwhelming choice, but Black should at least be aware that f7 is exposed and that White can target it in various crude ways:

- a) 5 Qh5? Bb4+ 6 Bd2 Bxd2+ 7 Nxd2 Qe7.
- b) 5 Qb3 Qe7 6 a3 (6 Nf3?! Qb4+) 6...Nc6 and with ...Nf6 and ...Bd7 in the pipeline, White will soon have to deal with ...Na5 ideas.
- c) 5 Nf3!? Bb4+! 6 Bd2 Bxd2+ 7 Qxd2 affords Black several viable options, including 7...Nc6 8 0-0 (8 exd4 Bg4 puts pressure on d4, Čertić-Paunović, Belgrade 1989) 8...Nf6 9 Bb5 (9 exd4 0-0 is safe for Black, Gorovets-Bregadze, Burlingame 2015) 9...dxe3 10 Qxe3+ Qe7 11 Qxe7+ Kxe7 12 Bxc6 bxc6 13 Re1+ Be6, when White gets enough compensation, but that is all.

5...Bd6 6 Nf3

6 Nc3 Nf6 transposes to note '[e3](#)' to White's 3rd move at the start of the chapter, while 6 Qb3 Qe7+ (a position dating back to 1855!) offers White nothing.

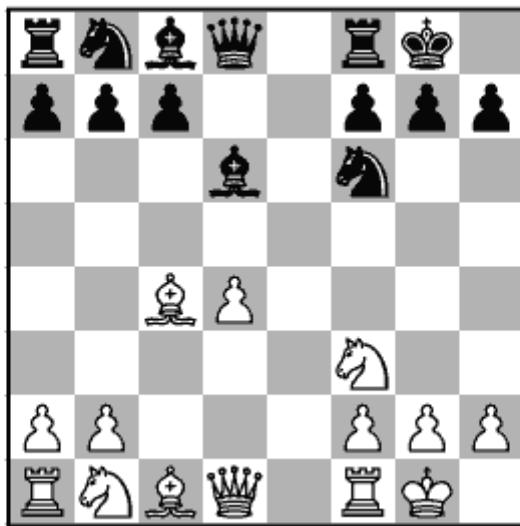
6...Nf6

Black just develops actively and trusts in the solidity of his position to combat any early aggression from White.

7 0-0

7 Qe2+ is intended as an annoying prod, but 7...Qe7 8 Qxe7+ Bxe7 causes Black little inconvenience apart from the sterility of the resulting positions. 9 0-0 (9 Bf4 Bd6 10 Bxd6 cxd6 11 Nc3 0-0 intending ...Bg4 and ...Nc6) 9...0-0 10 Re1 (or 10 Nc3 a6 11 Re1, as in Aronian-Nakamura, Dubai rapid 2014, when 11...Bd6 transposes) 10...Bd6 11 Nc3 a6 12 Bg5 Nbd7 (Li Chao-Alekseenko, Qinhuangdao tt 2018) and it is not clear how White can make real progress.

7...0-0 (*D*)



White to play

8 Nc3

This is a particularly important position as it can also arise from a 3 Nc3 move-order.

Other moves:

a) 8 h3 Nc6 9 Nc3 transposes to the [main](#) line.

b) 8 Re1 Nc6 (8...Bg4?! 9 h3) 9 h3 (9 Nc3 Bg4 gives Black useful pressure on the d4-pawn, as does 9 Bg5 Bg4) 9...h6 (for both sides it is worth spending a move at this point to prevent an annoying pin; ...h6 also makes a possible home on h7 for the bishop) 10 Nc3 transposes to the [main](#) line.

c) 8 Bg5!? (perhaps the most important option unique to the 3 e3 line) 8...Nc6 9 h3 (9 Nc3 transposes to the [note](#) to White's 9th move) invites 9...h6 10 Bh4 g5 11 Bg3, when Black is fully OK if he plays precisely: 11...g4 (11...Ne4 12 Bxd6 Nxd6 is possible too) 12 hxg4 Bxg3 13 fxg3 Bxg4 14 Nc3 Kg7! 15 d5 (Moiseenko-J.Christiansen, European Clubs Cup, Novi Sad 2016) 15...Bxf3! 16 Qxf3 Ne5 17 Qf4 Qd6!; e.g., 18 Nb5 Qb6+ 19 Kh1 Ng6! 20 Qxc7 Qxc7 21 Nxc7 Rac8 22 d6 Ne5 23 Bb3 Ne4 24 Rfe1 Ng4 and with his knights going like clockwork, Black has weathered the storm in a teacup.

8...Nc6

A position also known from the Petroff Defence – opening theory can be a tangled web!

9 h3

Or 9 Bg5 h6 10 Bh4 Bg4 (*D*), and then:



White to play

- a) 11 Qd3 Bxf3 12 gxf3?! (12 Qxf3 g5 13 Bg3 Bxg3 is not essentially different from the line after 11 h3: 14 hxg3 Qxd4, Bukavshin-Shimanov, Kirishi 2010) 12...Kh8 (intending ...g5; not 12...g5? 13 Qg6+) 13 Rad1 Qd7 works out well for Black.
- b) 11 h3 Bxf3 12 Qxf3 g5 (after 12...Nxd4, 13 Qd3!?) is more dangerous than taking back the pawn on b7) 13 Bg3 Bxg3 followed by ...Qxd4 works out OK for Black: 14 Qxg3 (or 14 fxg3 Qxd4+ 15 Kh1 Qxc4 16 Qxf6 Qe6 17 Qf3 f5, Elsness-Agdestein, Norwegian Ch, Moss 2006) 14...Qxd4 15 Bb5 Qb6 (15...Qd6 is OK too) 16 h4 g4 (16...Nh5 17 Qg4 Nf6 18 Qg3 Nh5 repeats) with a roughly balanced fight ahead; e.g., 17 Be2 Nd4 18 Bxg4 Kh8.
- c) 11 Re1 and here Black has a number of viable options, including the untried and rare 11...Be7!? with the point 12 d5 (12 Be2 Re8!) 12...Nxd5; e.g., 13 Bxd5 (13 Nxd5 Bxh4 14 Re4 Bh5 and the best White can do is regain his pawn in a line like 15 Qe2 Kh8 16 Rd1 Bxf3 17 Qxf3 Bf6 18 Ne3 Nd4 19 Qh5 Re8) 13...Bxh4 14 Re4 Bxf3 15 Qxf3 Be7 16 Rd1 Bd6 and Black holds his game together.

9...h6 (D)



White to play

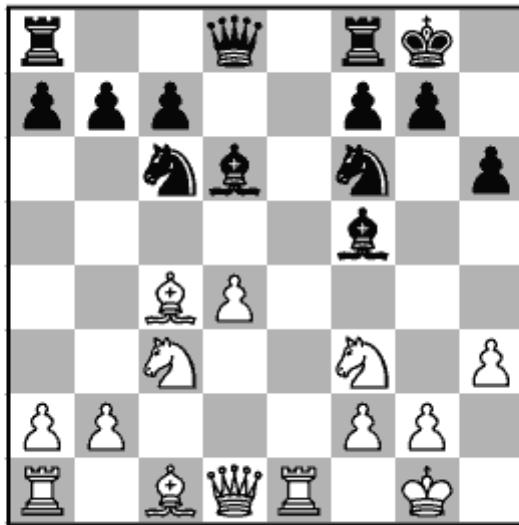
This is a main line played in hundreds of games, but it's not clear why White should be able to claim any advantage. Black is solid and has no weaknesses or problem pieces.

10 Re1

Or:

- a) 10 Qc2 (hoping to show that the c8-bishop has no good outlet) 10...Na5 (10...a6 11 a3 Ne7, intending ...Bf5, is another idea) 11 Bd3 Be6 12 Re1 Re8 (A.Sorokin-Alekseenko, Russian Junior Ch, Kolomna 2014) and Black has no development problems.
- b) 10 Qd3 has similar ideas (to 10 Qc2) but 10...Na5 disrupts White's scheme: 11 Bb5 a6 12 Ba4 c5 13 Bc2 c4, as first played in a de Labourdonnais-McDonnell game in 1834.
- c) 10 a3 Bf5 and now one interesting line is 11 Nh4 (11 Re1 transposes to note '[b](#)' after Black's 10th move) 11...Bh7 12 Be3 Re8 13 Qf3 Qd7 14 Rad1 Rad8, when the little trick 15 Bxh6 runs into 15...Nxd4 16 Rxd4 Bh2+ 17 Kxh2 Qxd4 18 Qg3 Nh5, with 19 Bxf7+ Kxf7 20 Qxc7+ Rd7 (20...Re7 21 Qa5!) 21 Be3! a lucky bailout.

10...Bf5 (D)



White to play

Now:

- a) 11 d5 (White blunts his own bishop to gain d4 for his pieces, but doesn't achieve a great deal) 11...Ne7 12 Be3 (12 Nd4 Bg6 13 Ndb5 a6 14 Nxd6 Qxd6, with ...Nf5 to follow soon, is comfortable for Black, Vaganian-Souleidis, Bundesliga 2003/4) 12...a6 (threatening to win a pawn, please note) 13 Bd4 Ng6 (13...b5? 14 Bxf6) 14 a4 and both 14...Nf4 and 14...Nh7 yield counterplay.
- b) 11 a3 a6 (11...Re8 is very solid, but less interesting) and now:
 - b1) 12 Ne5 Bxe5 13 dxe5 Qxd1 14 Nxd1 Nd7 gives White nothing.
 - b2) The same can be said for 12 g4 Bh7 13 Ne5 Bxe5 14 dxe5 Qxd1 15 Nxd1 Rfe8!.
 - b3) 12 Nh4 Bh7 is completely solid.

b4) After 12 b4 Re8 13 Be3 Qd7 (Daels-Ulybin, Charleroi 2014) Black can start thinking about playing against the IQP. Let's note the funny line 14 Qd2 Bxh3!? 15 Bxh6! Qg4 16 Qg5 Bxg2 17 Qxg7+ Qxg7 18 Bxg7, when the ending should be drawn.

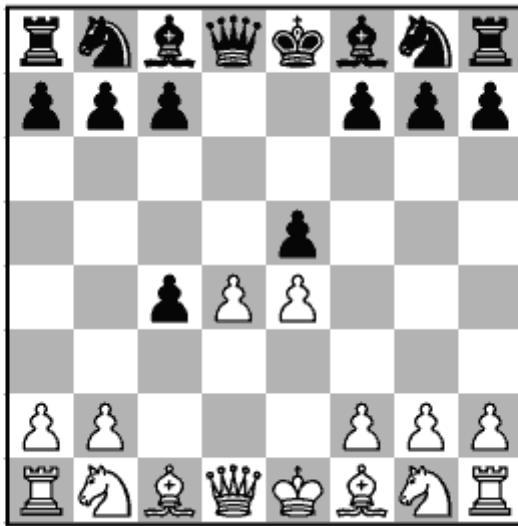
b5) 12 d5 Ne7 13 Be3 (13 Nd4 Bh7 14 Qf3 Ng6 15 Bd3 Re8 with good piece-play for Black) 13...Re8 14 Bd4 Ng6 15 Rxe8+ Nxe8 and Black is no worse.

B)

3 e4

Apart from 3 Nf3, this is by far the main and most critical move.

3...e5 (D)



White to play

This is the most popular of several major lines here. Black attacks the centre by the most direct means, while opening lines for his pieces.

4 Nf3

Other moves are just bad: 4 dx5? Qxd1+ 5 Kxd1 Nc6; 4 d5? Nf6 5 Nc3 b5! is a very poor line for White.

4...exd4 5 Bxc4

This gambit approach is definitely best. After other moves White is struggling even to maintain equality:

a) 5 Nxd4?! Nf6! and now:

a1) 6 Bxc4 Bc5! (not 6...Nxe4?! 7 0-0! Be7 8 Re1 with compensation) is obviously unpleasant for White, meeting 7 Be3 with 7...Ng4.

a2) 6 Nc3 Bc5 7 Be3 Ng4! 8 Ne6 (a nice tactic, but it doesn't really help; 8 Bxc4 0-0 is just dismal for White, especially in view of 9 0-0 Qd6!, rather than taking immediately on e3) 8...Bxe6! (8...Qxd1+ 9

Rxd1 Bxe6 10 Bxc5 Nd7 11 Bd4 c5 12 Bxg7 Rg8 13 h3 is less clear) 9 Qxd8+ (9 Bxc5? Nd7) 9...Kxd8 10 Bxc5 Nd7 11 Rd1 Kc8! 12 Bd4 (after 12 Ba3 the threat of h3 is well parried by 12...Rb8!?) 13 h3?! Nge5 14 f4 b5!) 12...c5 13 Bxg7 Rg8 14 h3 Nxf2 15 Kxf2 Rxg7 leaves White fighting for a draw (Rost-Sukhov, corr. 2003), since 16 Nd5?! is now met by 16...b5.

b) 5 Qxd4?! Qxd4 6 Nxd4 Nf6 7 Nc3 (7 f3 Bc5 8 Be3 Nc6 9 Nc2 Bxe3 10 Nxe3 Be6 is a little awkward for White because of 11 Bxc4 Bxc4 12 Nxc4 Nb4! 13 Nba3 0-0-0, as in V.Gallego-Moreno Ruiz, Madrid Team Ch 2010/11) 7...Bc5 (*D*) and here:

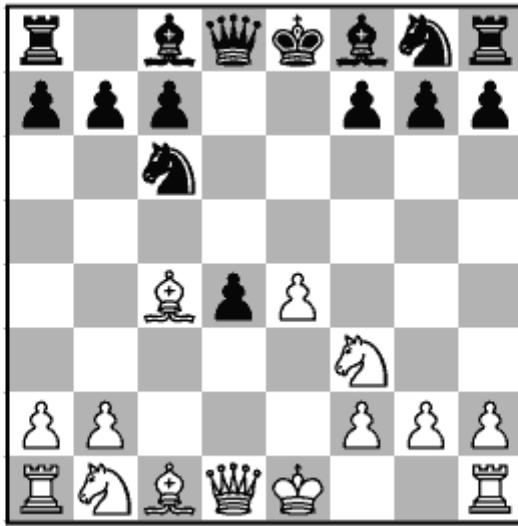


White to play

b1) 8 Ndb5 is the most popular move, but has scored disastrously: 8...Na6 9 Bf4 c6 10 Nd6+ Bxd6 11 Bxd6 Be6 12 e5 (Beliaovsky-Ponomariov, Enghien-les-Bains 1999) and now 12...0-0-0! is a strong novelty. 13 Be7 (even worse is 13 exf6? Rxd6 14 fxg7 Rg8) 13...Ng4 14 Bxd8 Rxd8 15 Rd1 (15 f4 Nb4 is a ‘nightmare’ for White) 15...Rxd1+ 16 Nxd1 Nxe5 with a material advantage for Black, whose queenside pawns are set to roll.

b2) 8 Be3 Ng4 9 Nd5 (9 Bxc4 c6! and White’s bishop problem remains unsolved, Obolentseva-Afanasiev, Moscow 2019) 9...Nxe3 10 fxe3 and now 10...Kd8!? gives White problems since his centralized knights do not fully compensate for his poor structure. 11 Bxc4 (11 0-0-0 Nd7 12 Bxc4 Ne5 transposes) 11...Nc6 12 0-0-0 Ne5 13 Nf4 (V.Ivanov-Kowalczyk, corr. 2017; 13 Bb3 c6!) 13...Ke8 14 Bb3 Bg4 15 Rd2 Bb4 16 Rc2 c6 and White should hold with care, but it will be no fun.

5...Nc6 (*D*)



White to play

Black must play a tricky balancing act between supporting his valuable d4-pawn, and parrying tactical threats against f7.

6 0-0

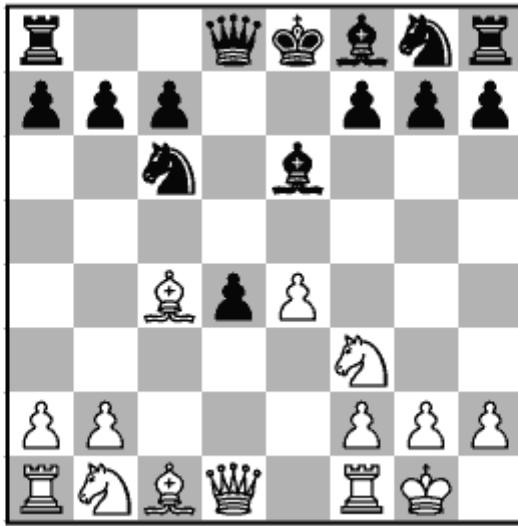
6 Qb3 Bb4+ 7 Nbd2 (this move needs to be taken seriously; 7 Bd2 Bxd2+ 8 Nbxd2 Qf6 is fine for Black since White's pieces are in each other's way) 7...Nh6!? (after 7...Qf6 8 0-0 Nge7 9 e5, as in Dreev-Rublevsky, Poikovsky 2007, it's hard for Black to avoid a draw by perpetual attack on his queen, while White has other options too) 8 Bb5 (Smirnov-Donchenko, European Ch, Plovdiv 2012) 8...a5! and then:

a) 9 a3 Be7 and thanks to the a-pawns' moves, Black gets superb counterplay if White goes straight for c6: 10 Ne5? (10 Nc4 Ng4 11 0-0 0-0 12 Rd1 Be6 13 Bxc6 bxc6 14 h3 Nf6 15 Rxd4 Qb8 16 Qc2 c5 17 Rd1 Qb5 and ...a4) 10...0-0! 11 Nxc6 (11 Bxc6 bxc6 12 Nxc6 Qe8) 11...bxc6 12 Bxc6 Ra6 and White is in deep trouble.

b) 9 0-0 0-0 (now Black has ...Na7 ideas) 10 Bxc6 bxc6 11 Nc4 Qf6 12 Rd1 Ba6 with active play.

6...Be6 (D)

With this move, Black is willing to make structural and material concessions in order to bring his pieces quickly into play. The main alternative is 6...Bc5, but then White can expect dangerous compensation. In any case, be sure to avoid the trap 6...Bg4?? 7 Qb3!.



White to play

After the text-move, we now have three main lines:

B1: 7 Nbd2

B2: 7 Bb5

B3: 7 Bxe6

B1)

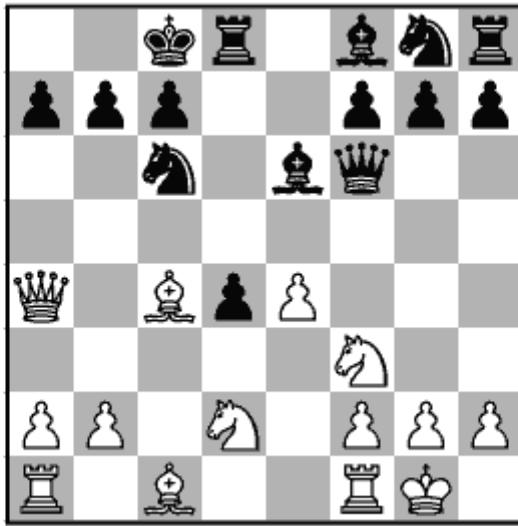
7 Nbd2

This is a rare but interesting option. Given that exchanging on c4 does Black no favours, White retains the option of following up with either Bxe6 or Bb5.

7...Qf6 8 Bb5

Or:

- a) 8 Bd3 is too passive, and after 8...0-0-0 (Belous-Eliseev, Russian Ch, Sochi 2013) Black is already thinking about active play with ...g5.
- b) The untried 8 Qa4!? requires careful handling as it can lead to concrete and forcing play in a variety of lines. 8...0-0-0 (*D*) (this seems best, even though the king is a target here) and then:



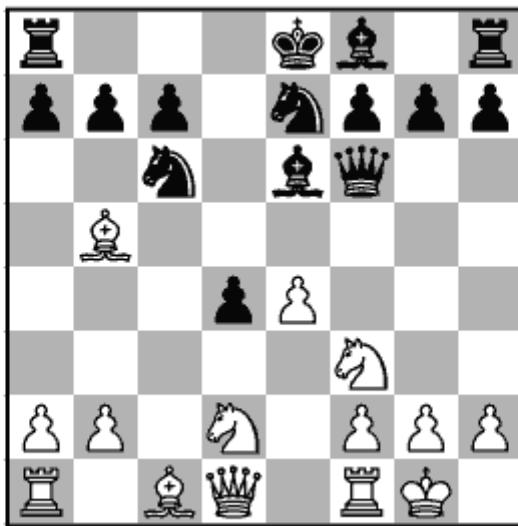
White to play

b1) 9 Rb1 Bb4 (blocking the b4 thrust) 10 a3 Bxd2 11 Bxd2 Bxc4 12 Qxc4 Qe6 and Black is safe.

b2) 9 b4 Bxb4 10 Rb1 Bxd2 11 Ba6!? bxa6 12 Bxd2 Bg4! 13 Bg5 (13 Qxa6+?! Kd7 14 Bg5 Qd6!) 13...Qd6! 14 e5 Qd5 15 Rfc1 should end in perpetual check; e.g., 15...Nge7 16 Bxe7 Nxe7 17 Qxa6+ Kd7 18 Rxc7+ Ke8 19 Rb5 Qe6 20 Rbb7 Qxa6 21 Rxe7+, etc.

b3) 9 Bb5 Nge7 10 Nb3 Bg4! (this counterattack is the only good defence against the threat of Nc5) 11 Bg5 (11 Nc5? loses: 11...Bxf3 12 Ba6 Qg6 13 Bxb7+ Kb8 14 g3 Ne5!) 11...Qg6 12 Nbd2 (12 Nbx4 Nxd4 13 Nxd4 seeks perpetual check, a task that 13...a6!? complicates) and with further accurate play Black defends: 12...f6 13 Bf4 Bxf3 14 Nxf3 Qxe4 15 Bg3 a6! 16 Bc4 Ne5; e.g., 17 Bxe5 fxe5 18 Rac1 Kb8!? (more interesting than 18...Nd5, as played in Kovalenko-Straka, corr. 2016) 19 Ng5 Qc6 20 Qxc6 Nxc6 21 Nf7 Bd6 22 Bxa6 e4 and both sides will have chances in a sharp ending.

8...Ne7 (D)



White to play

9 Nb3

9 Qa4 0-0-0 transposes to note '[b3](#)' to White's 8th move.

9...a6!? 10 Bg5

10 e5 Qg6 11 Bd3 Qh5 (Trembecki-Copar, corr. 2012) 12 Be2 (otherwise the black bishop takes up a good post on d5) 12...d3! 13 Qxd3 Qg6 gives Black a fully reliable game.

10...Qg6 11 Bxc6+

11 Bd3 Bg4 with kingside counterplay; e.g., 12 Bf4 Qf6 13 Bxc7 Bxf3 14 Qxf3 Qxf3 15 gxf3 g5! intending ...Ng6 and ...Bg7.

11...Nxc6 12 Nbd4

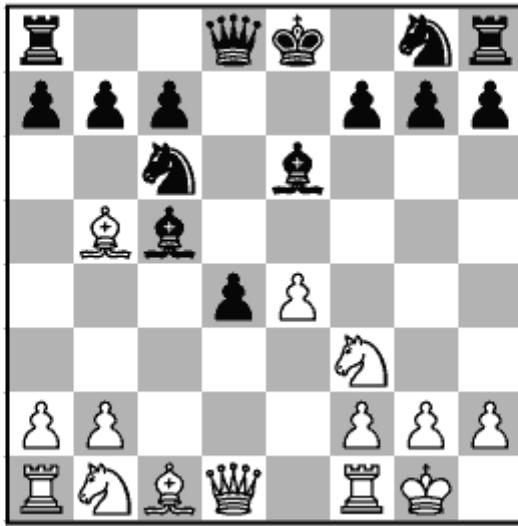
Now 12...h6! 13 Bh4 Bh3 14 Bg3 Rd8 15 Nh4 Qg5 16 Nhf3 Qg6 is a weird (and unforced) repetition, while 12...Bd7 13 Rc1 Bd6 14 Nxc6 Bxc6 15 e5 Be7 and 12...Nxd4 13 Qxd4 f6 14 Bf4 c5 15 Qa4+ Kf7 are reasonable ways to keep the game alive.

B2)

7 Bb5

This is one of the two traditional main lines here. Rather than regain the pawn, White prioritizes keeping the initiative and is often willing to invest further material to keep the black king in his sights.

7...Bc5 (D)



White to play

8 b4

This is White's most ambitious and critical option. Other moves:

- a) 8 Ng5 Qe7 (8...Qd7 is OK too; just avoid the blunder 8...Ne7??) 9 Bxc6+ (9 Nxe6 Qxe6 and 9 b4 Bxb4 are not a problem for Black either) 9...bxc6 10 Qc2! Rb8 gives White barely enough compensation thanks to Black's weak pawns.

b) 8 Nbd2 Qd6!? (rather than 8...Ne7, which has a lot of cumbersome theory) and then:

b1) 9 Nc4 Bxc4 10 Bxc4 0-0-0! is sound for Black; e.g., 11 b4 Bxb4, 11 Ng5 Nh6 12 Bxf7 d3 or 11 e5 Nxe5 12 Nxe5 Qxe5 13 Re1 Qd6 14 Qg4+ Kb8 15 Qxg7 Ne7 16 Bg5 Rhg8 17 Qf6 Nd5.

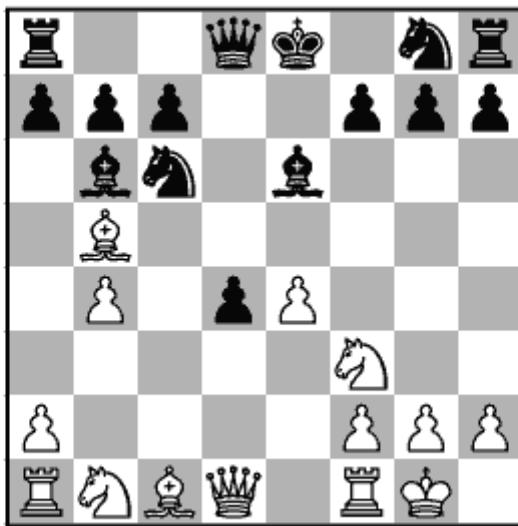
b2) 9 e5 Qd5 10 Ng5 0-0-0 11 Bc4 Qd7 12 Nxe6 fxe6 13 b4 (Kasparov-Anand, Linares 1999) 13...Bxb4! 14 Qb3 Kb8 and Black's position proves robust; e.g., 15 Rb1 (15 Ne4 b6; 15 Bxe6 Qe8 16 Ne4 Qg6) 15...b6 16 Ne4 Nge7 17 Bxe6 Qe8 18 Bf7 Qf8 19 e6 Nd5, and it is an open question whose pieces are more active.

c) 8 Qc2 Bb6 and here:

c1) 9 Bxc6+ bxc6 10 Qxc6+ Bd7 11 Qc4 and if Black wants to avoid an immediate repetition, 11...c5 (this would be too weakening with the pawns on a4 and a5) 12 Ne5 Qe7 is a reasonable choice.

c2) 9 a4 a5 (the right move, grabbing some queenside squares) 10 Bxc6+ bxc6 11 Qxc6+ Bd7 12 Qc4 (12 Qc2 Ne7 and Black has nothing to complain about) 12...Be6 (if Black must avoid a repetition here, then 12...Nf6 is viable: 13 Nxd4 0-0 14 Nc3 Qe7 15 Nf3 Qb4 with acceptable play for the pawn) 13 Qc6+ Bd7 repeats.

8...Bb6 (D)



White to play

9 a4

9 Bb2 Ne7 leaves Black fully developed and weakness-free, Hera-Burns, Helensburgh 2013.

9...a6!

It is best to challenge the bishop right away.

10 Bxc6+ bxc6 11 a5

Or:

a) 11 Bb2 Nf6 comes to the same thing after 12 a5 Ba7.

b) 11 Nbd2!? is a rare alternative mostly used in correspondence games. After 11...Qf6!? 12 Bb2 Ne7 13 Qc2 (13 Rc1 a5 14 Ba3 {Loinjak-Morrow, corr. 2017} 14...axb4 15 Bxb4 c5 16 Bxc5 Bxc5 17 Rxc5 0-0 gives Black enough play; e.g., 18 Qa1 Rfd8 19 Rfc1 Ng6 20 g3 Bg4 21 Rc6 Rd6) 13...Rb8!? 14 Nc4 c5 an interesting struggle lies ahead.

11...Ba7 12 Bb2 Nf6 (D)



White to play

13 Bxd4

13 Nbd2 0-0 14 Qc2 Nh5 15 g3 Qd6 offers Black counterplay, while 13 Nxd4 Qd6 14 Nxe6 Qxe6 is OK for Black, and after 15 Nd2 (R.Jacobs-Ohtake, corr. 2013) he can even consider the aggressive 15...0-0-0.

13...Bxd4

13...Nxe4 14 Bxa7 leads to a more difficult defence for Black, despite his extra pawn.

14 Nxd4

14 Qxd4 Qxd4 15 Nxd4 c5! breaks any bind.

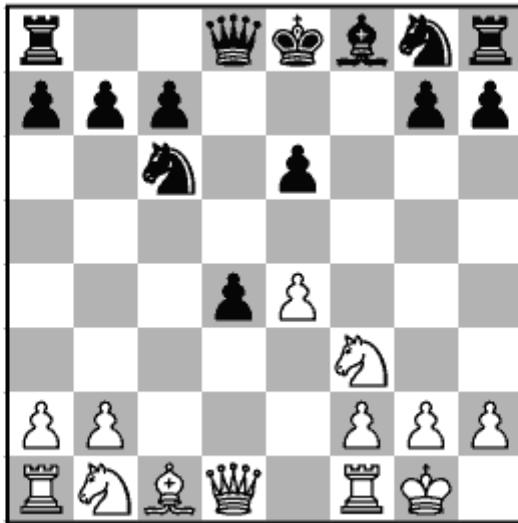
14...Qd6

Now:

- a) 15 Na3 0-0-0!? 16 Nxe6 Qxe6 17 Qe2 (Haugen-D'Adamo, corr. 2010) 17...Kb7! 18 f3 Nd5 works out OK for Black; e.g., 19 Qd2 Ne7 20 Qb2 Rd6.
- b) After 15 Nxe6 Qxe6 16 f3 0-0 17 Na3 (Starke-Moll, corr. 2010) there are various paths to counterplay, including 17...c5 18 bxc5 Rfd8 19 Qc2 Rab8.
- c) 15 Nc3 0-0 16 e5 Qxe5 17 Re1 Qd6 (17...Qg5 18 Nxc6 Rfe8 is more double-edged) 18 Nxe6 fxe6 19 Qxd6 cxd6 20 Rxe6 Rad8 with an interesting endgame that should probably end in a draw.

B3)

7 **Bxe6 fxe6 (D)**



White to play

8 Qb3

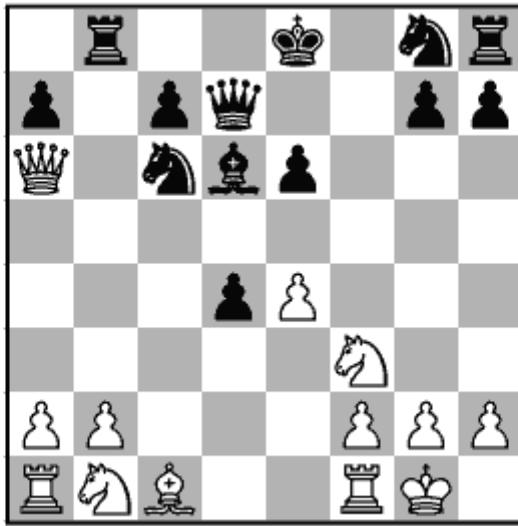
This is by far the most popular move. White regains the pawn but allows Black to catch up in development. Instead:

- a) 8 Ng5 Qd7 9 Qb3 (9 Qh5+?! g6 10 Qh3 0-0-0! 11 Qxe6 h6 is good for Black, Herndl-Ibragimov, Vienna 1996) 9...0-0-0 10 Nxe6 Re8 11 Nxf8 Rxf8 offers White nothing, Boccia-Andeer, corr. 2011.
- b) 8 Nbd2!? may have been unduly neglected. 8...Qd7 9 Nc4 (Taddei-V.David, Nancy 2003) 9...Nf6! 10 Nfe5 Nxe5 11 Nxe5 Qb5 12 Bf4 Bd6 (12...Be7!?) 13 a4 Qb6 14 a5 Qb5 15 Qxd4 Bd6 seems like an odd loss of tempo, but the pressure on e5 and e4 may be worth it; e.g., 16 Bg3 Rd8) 13 a4 Qa6 14 Qxd4 0-0 is playable for Black, but deserves practical testing.

8...Qd7! 9 Qxb7 Rb8 10 Qa6

White has won back his pawn and has a prettier structure, but has lost his development advantage.

10...Bd6 (D)



White to play

Material is now level, and Black has some weak pawns. On the other hand, White is now behind in development and Black has open lines and potential play against the white king. It's a position where it would be natural to conclude "chances for both sides" and "just play chess", but a substantial body of theory has grown up from here, so it makes sense to look a little deeper.

11 Nbd2

Other moves are rare:

- a) 11 Re1?! Nge7 and ...0-0 already thinking of a kingside attack.
- b) 11 e5?! is an unimpressive liquidation: 11...Nxe5 12 Nxe5 (or 12 Nxd4 c5) 12...Bxe5 13 Re1 (13 Qxa7 c6!) 13...Bd6 14 Qxa7 c6 and Black's nice block of central pawns are more potent than White's passed but slow-moving a-pawn.
- c) 11 a3 Nge7 intends ...0-0 and ...Ng6, when the knight can go to f4 or e5.

11...Nf6

Rather than 11...Nge7, when 12 Nb3 is an awkward attack on the d4-pawn.

Now ...Ng4-e5 is a common manoeuvre in many lines, and White must also be careful about Black's potential play on the f-file. Black is generally in no hurry to play ...e5 unless the d4-pawn comes under fire.

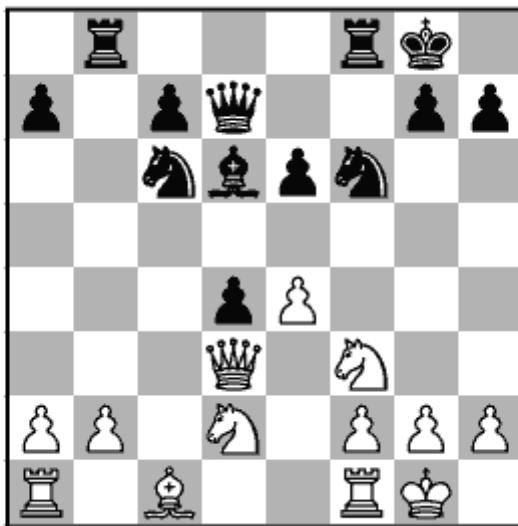
12 b3

This seems the most testing move, as White develops efficiently. Otherwise:

- a) After 12 e5?! both captures are playable; e.g., 12...Nxe5 13 Nxd4 0-0 (Ovseevich-Efimenko, Ukrainian Ch, Ordzhonikidze 2001) and all Black's pieces are very active, with ...Rb4, ...c5 and ...Nfg4 all ideas that could come into play.
- b) 12 Nb3?! 0-0! is a tactical defence of the d4-pawn since 13 Nbd4?! Nxd4 14 Nxd4 Ng4 gives Black strong kingside play.

c) 12 Re1 Ng4 is no problem for Black; note that there are even ideas like 13 h3 Rb6 14 Qe2 d3 15 Qf1 h5 16 Nc4 Bc5 in the air.

d) 12 Qd3 0-0 (*D*) is a position that has been extensively analysed, but really shouldn't be much of a problem for Black:



White to play

d1) 13 Nc4 Ng4 14 h3 Nge5 (this calm move gives better practical winning chances than the dramatic 14...Rxf3, which is playable too) 15 Nfxe5 Nxe5 16 Nxe5 Bxe5 17 f4 (Grosso-Abdala, corr. 2002) 17...Bd6! 18 Qxd4 Rb4! 19 Qxa7 Qb5 and White must thread his way through a minefield.

d2) 13 a3 Ng4 14 h3 (14 b3 Qf7!?) 14...Nge5 15 Nxe5 Nxe5 16 Qxd4 (Nikolić-Anand, Monte Carlo blindfold 1999) 16...Nd3! and suddenly White must think of his own safety.

d3) 13 h3 (preventing ...Ng4, when a knight landing on e5 will hit the white queen) 13...e5 14 Nc4 h6 15 Bd2 Qe6 (K.Berg-Logothetis, European Ch, Dresden 2007) with a complex and little-explored middlegame.

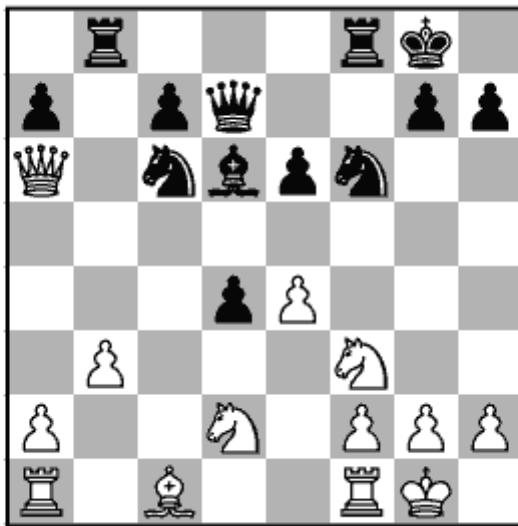
e) 12 a3 0-0 13 b4 (*D*) (13 h3?! Nh5) allows Black a lot of kingside play:



Black to play

- e1) Black should be wary of static structures like 13...e5?! 14 Ne1! Nh5 15 Nc4 and Nd3.
- e2) 13...h6!? is untried but interesting: 14 Bb2 e5 (more acceptable now that White's pieces are less well organized) 15 Qc4+ (15 Ne1 Nh5 and ...Nf4) 15...Kh8 16 Rac1 Rb6.
- e3) 13...Ng4 14 Bb2 (14 h3 Nge5 15 Ne1!? g5!?, Pessoa-Copar, corr. 2017) 14...Nce5 15 Nxe5 Bxe5 16 h3 Nh2!? (the well-tested 16...Rb6 is good, but can lead to a forced repetition) and then:
- e31) 17 Rfe1 Qf7 18 Re2 Rbd8 and Black's major pieces gravitate towards the white king.
- e32) 17 Rfd1 Qf7 18 Nc4 leads to an odd dynamic equilibrium: 18...Qxf2+ 19 Kh1 Rb6! (19...Nf1?? 20 Qxe6+) 20 Qa5 (20 Qxa7 Nf1; 20 Nxb6 Qg3) 20...Bf6! 21 Kxh2 (21 Nxb6 axb6 22 Qb5 Nf3) 21...Rc6 22 Rf1 Qe2 23 e5 Bg5.
- e33) 17 Nc4 Bf4 18 Rfd1 e5 19 Rd3 (defending against ...Nf3+ and a rook-lift) 19...Qf7 and White will have to defend carefully.

12...0-0 (D)



White to play

13 Bb2

13 Ba3!? works well if Black replies by resolving the tension on the queenside, but White isn't threatening anything, so there is time for the manoeuvre 13...Nh5!? 14 g3 (14 Rac1?! Rb6 15 Qa4 Bxa3 16 Qxa3 Nf4) 14...Nf6, when the weakening of White's kingside is worth the time spent. 15 Kg2 e5 16 Rac1 Ne7 offers Black sufficient kingside counterplay, as demonstrated in a number of high-level correspondence games.

13...e5 14 Rfc1

This is the right rook, since 14 Rac1?! Nb4 (Jojua-Arabitze, Georgian Ch, Tbilisi 2019) highlights the loose a2-pawn.

14...Nd8

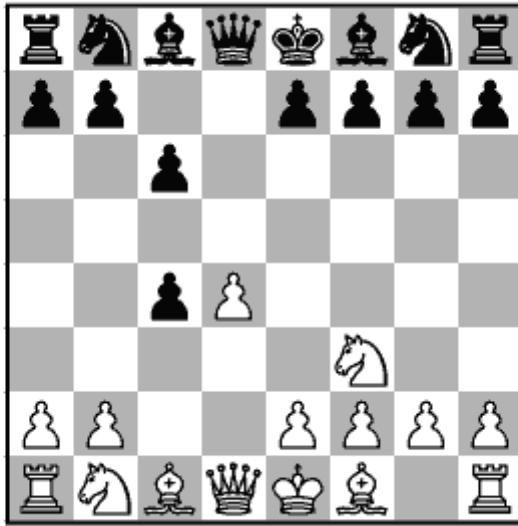
Rerouting the knight to e6 seems most solid, and also has an eye to kingside play. Now:

- a) 15 Nc4 Qe6! (not so mysterious when you realize how exposed the white queen is) 16 Ncxe5 (16 Qxa7 Nf7 poses threats to the white king *and* queen) 16...Nd7 (16...Ng4 17 Nc6 is liable to end in perpetual check: 17...Rxf3 18 gxf3 Qh6 19 Bxd4 Nxh2 20 Nxb8 Qh3, etc.) 17 Nxd7 Bxh2+ 18 Nxh2 Qxa6 19 Nxb8 is unclear.
- b) 15 Bxd4 exd4 16 e5 Ne6 17 exd6 cxd6 18 Qc6 d5 has proven viable for Black in a number of correspondence games.

3: Slav

Naturally we are not going to cover the whole Slav here, but just the lines we need to complete our QGA repertoire from the previous chapter.

1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 Nf3 c6 (D)



White to play

Black switches into a line of the Slav, having ruled out both the Exchange Variation and the ‘Slow Slav’ thanks to his sneaky move-order.

If you recall what I wrote in the Introduction to this book, you are no doubt aware that the most testing move here is 4 e3, and that we are answering it with the unusual-looking 4...Be6. But there are a number of other ideas for White too, some of them highly ambitious and critical. Our main lines are:

A: 4 g3

B: 4 Nc3

C: 4 e4

D: 4 a4

E: 4 e3

And here’s the rubble:

a) 4 Bf4?! is unimpressive, and 4...Nf6 leaves White fighting for equality. 5 e3 (5 a4 b5 transposes to note ‘[d12](#)’ to White’s 3rd move in Chapter 2, while 5 Nc3 b5 is line ‘[d11](#)’ of that same note; 5 g3 g6 is like our [line](#) vs 4 g3, where the move Bf4 makes a very odd impression) 5...b5 6 Be2 (6 a4?! e6 with ...Bb4(+) coming to keep the queenside pawns strong) 6...e6 7 0-0 Be7 8 b3 (8 a4 0-0 9 axb5 cxb5 10 b3 Nd5! with the point 11 bxc4?! Nxf4 12 exf4 b4!) 8...cxb3 (8...Nd5?! 9 bxc4 Nxf4 10 exf4 b4? makes

no sense when the a- and b-pawns are not passed) 9 Qxb3 Nbd7 10 Rc1 Bb7 with an extra pawn, for which White has some compensation.

b) 4 Qc2 (this is like a popular sideline of the Slav, but the fact that Black has already taken on c4 gives him a greedy and good extra option) 4...b5!? (D) (the critical reply; 4...Nf6 transposes to a well-worn line of the Slav) and then:



White to play

b1) 5 a4 Nf6 with a largely untested position where Black appears fine:

b11) 6 e4 e6 transposes to line '[b31](#)'.

b12) 6 axb5 cxb5 7 Nc3 Bd7 looks odd but everything is safely covered; then 8 e4 e6 9 Be2 Nc6! 10 Nxb5?? Nb4 11 Qxc4 Rc8 illustrates an important tactical point.

b13) 6 Nc3 b4! 7 Ne4 Nxe4 8 Qxe4 gives Black a choice between 8...e6 with a full and double-edged struggle, and 8...Qd5, when White must find 9 Qf4! Bf5 10 Ng5! Bg6 11 e4 Qxd4 12 Be3 Qxb2 13 Rd1 in order to scrape a draw.

b14) 6 e3 a6 7 Nbd2 (Andres Gonzalez-Vishnu, San Sebastian 2012; White intends b3) 7...Nd5 8 Be2 (8 b3? c3) 8...g6!? with interesting play (instead, 8...Nb4 9 Qc3 Nd5 repeats).

b2) 5 b3 cxb3 6 axb3 e6 gives White some compensation, but his pieces aren't seizing good squares as quickly as they need to in order for this to be dangerous for Black. 7 Bd2 (as in Dubov-Naer, Moscow blitz Ch 2015) should be met by 7...a5! rather than granting White the a5-square.

b3) 5 e4 e6 and then:

b31) 6 a4 Nf6 has scored unimpressively for White primarily because his e- and d-pawns are too poorly protected for him to make a serious assault on Black's queenside pawns; e.g., 7 axb5? cxb5 8 b3? Bb7 9 e5 Bxf3!, and Black wins.

b32) 6 b3 cxb3 7 axb3 (Miroshnichenko-Tregubov, Moscow 2006) 7...a5!? intending to play ...Na6 (and ...Bb7 if necessary), ...Be7 and ...Nf6 in some order, when Black's access to b4 makes it hard for White to prove compensation.

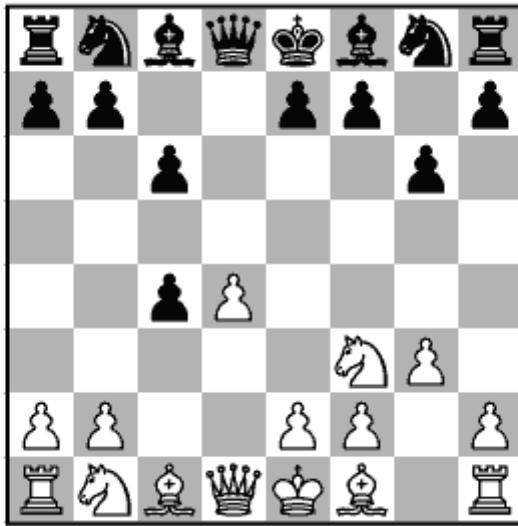
A)

4 g3

Now Black has many options, since he has not played an early ...e6 and has no need to go into Catalan lines.

4...g6!? (D)

This interesting reply lends the game a Grünfeld vibe. The early ...c6 and ...dxc4, and the fact that the knight is not yet on f6, give the play some unusual twists. Instead 4...b5 5 Bg2 makes it hard for Black to dodge Catalan lines; we shall keep the ...b5 idea in reserve though.



White to play

5 Bg2

Or:

- a) 5 a4 Bg7 6 e4 (6 Bg2 transposes to note '[b](#)' to White's 6th move) 6...Nf6 7 Nc3 Bg4 8 Bxc4 Bxf3 9 Qxf3 Qxd4 10 Qe2 e6 offers White some compensation for the pawn.
- b) 5 e4 is untried; then 5...Nf6 6 e5 (6 Nc3 b5) 6...Nd5 7 Bxc4 is a position where White's g3 is pointless and a little weakening, more than making up for ...c6 also looking like largely a waste of time.

5...Bg7 6 0-0

Alternatively:

- a) 6 Na3 b5 (6...Qa5+ 7 Bd2 Qa6 is not absurd either; e.g., 8 Qc1 Nf6 9 Nxc4 0-0 10 0-0 Be6 11 b3 Bd5) 7 Nxb5 (7 Ne5 Qb6) 7...cxb5 8 Nh4 (8 Nd2 Bd7 9 Bxa8 Nc6 is a similar story) 8...Bd7 9 Bxa8 Nc6 10 Bxc6 (10 Bb7 Nxd4 11 0-0 Ne6 with slow-burning pressure as compensation, Boukal-Turgut, World corr. Ch 2013) 10...Bxc6 11 0-0 Qd5 (Caruana-Anand, Zurich 2015) gives Black good compensation, and this type of position is awkward for White over the board.
- b) 6 a4 invites Black to change tack by 6...c5!? 7 d5 Nf6 8 Nc3, now with Benoni themes. The knight's access to b4 and maybe d3 can prove useful. 8...e6 (8...Na6 is possible too) 9 e4 (9 d6 Nc6) 9...exd5 10 e5 Ne4 is OK for Black.

c) 6 Qc2 c5 (6...b5 7 a4 Qb6 is more ambitious) 7 dxc5 Qa5+ 8 Bd2 (8 Nbd2 Nc6!? 9 Qxc4 Be6 with active play) 8...Qxc5 9 Na3 Nc6 10 Qxc4 Qxc4 11 Nxc4 Be6 and Black's development is no worse than White's.

6...Nf6 (D)



White to play

We have transposed to a rare line of the Fianchetto Grünfeld where Black has delayed castling to get in both ...c6 and ...dxc4. It's not a bad idea at all.

7 a4

This is White's best attempt to keep control of events. Instead:

- a) 7 Ne5?! Ng4! is a line White should avoid, as he has nothing better than 8 Nf3.
- b) 7 Na3?! b5! 8 Ne5 (8 b3 c3!?) 8...Nd5 offers White nothing, Ravi Haria-Kryvoruchko, Dubai 2018.
- c) 7 Qc2 b5 8 a4 Bf5 gives Black a grip on the central light squares.

7...Ne4

The standard move, intending ...Nd6 in most cases. 7...Be6 is possible, when 8 Ng5 (Salomon-Volkov, Sitges 2017) 8...Bd5 9 e4 (9 f3 Nfd7!?) 10 e4 f6 is also murky) 9...h6 10 exd5 hxg5 is a theme we see in other of our Slav lines.

8 Qc2

8 Na3 can be met by 8...Nd6 or 8...c3!?, while 8 Nc3 Nd6 9 e4 Bg4 10 Be3 Qc8 is OK for Black.

8...Nd6 9 e4 Na6 10 Na3 Be6!?

This bishop move has been used to good effect in recent practice; e.g.:

- a) 11 Bd2 0-0 12 Bc3 f6!? (Zhekov-Onoprichuk, corr. 2018) restrains the pawn-centre and keeps the pieces flexible.

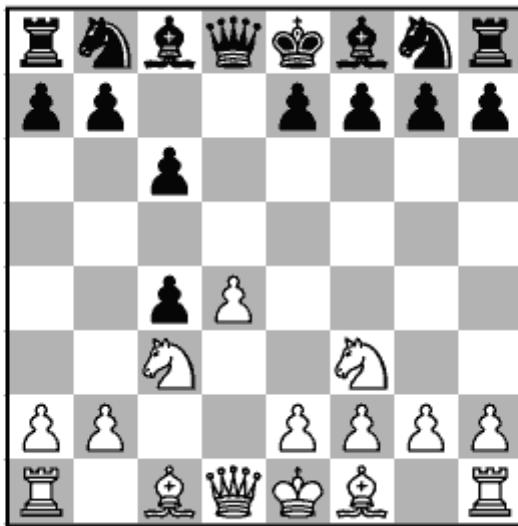
b) 11 Ng5!? Bxd4 12 Nxe6 fxe6 with chances for both sides; e.g., 13 Nxc4 (13 e5 Bxe5 14 Nxc4 Bg7 15 Nxd6+ Qxd6 and Black hangs on) 13...e5 and the extra pawn is ugly, but far from useless.

c) 11 Be3 0-0 (11...Nb4!?) 12 Ng5 Qd7 13 Nxe6 Qxe6 14 e5 Nf5 (Tomashevsky-Dastan, Turkish Team Ch, Konya 2019) and White has had to weaken his own structure to regain the gambit pawn.

d) 11 Qe2 0-0 12 Rd1 Qc8 13 Bg5 Re8 14 e5 Nf5 is a similar story; e.g., 15 Nxc4 Qd7 (Rodshtein-Dvirny, European Clubs Cup, Antalya 2017) and Black will make good use of the d5-square.

B)

4 Nc3 (*D*)



Black to play

A straightforward and ambitious response.

4...b5

This is not just the most consistent move, but also the only decent one that doesn't transpose to some other main line. 4...Be6? is bad when White can still play 5 e4, while 4...e6 is an Abrahams/Noteboom. 4...Nf6 is the Main-Line Slav; then 5 a4 does actually transpose to a line that is part of our repertoire (see Line [D](#)), but it is a less comfortable option than the lines that follow 4...b5, and White has other possibilities on move 5 too.

5 g3

This is similar to a Catalan, except that White's early Nc3 is not a normal or especially convenient part of that opening. Other moves:

- 5 e4 e6 (5...Nf6 transposes to a Slav line that doesn't have a good reputation for White, but he can certainly stir up murky complications if he knows what he is doing) 6 a4 transposes to note '[b](#)' to White's 6th move in Line C.
- 5 e3 has various satisfactory replies (most notably 5...Nf6, when transpositions back to lines covered in this chapter are still very possible), but the simplest from the point of view of our repertoire is 5...Be6,

transposing to Line [E5](#).

c) 5 a4 b4 (*D*) and then:



White to play

c1) 6 Na2 b3!? 7 Nc3 Na6 followed by ...Nb4 is rather awkward for White.

c2) 6 Nb1 Nf6 7 e3 and now 7...Be6 has never been played in this move-order, but transposes to note '[c](#)' to White's 7th move in Line E52.

c3) 6 Ne4 Nf6! 7 Ng3 (7 Nxf6+ exf6 gives Black rapid development, and 8 e4!? can be met by 8...Qe7!, as in a number of correspondence games) 7...Qd5! (clamping down on e4; 7...h5 is an idea we see in note '[d](#)' to White's 8th move in Line E52, but is less good when White can still play Bg5) 8 e3 (8 Qc2?! b3!; 8 Ne5 Ba6! 9 e4 {anything else is too slow} 9...Nxe4 10 Be2 Nxg3!? 11 hxg3 Nd7 12 Bf3 Qe6 13 Bxc6 0-0-0! and Black has returned the pawn while keeping some strategic pluses, Koo-Filin, corr. 2018) 8...h5!? and then:

c31) 9 h4 e6 intending ...Bd6.

c32) 9 Ne5 Ba6 10 Be2 Qe6!, intending ...h4 or ...Nbd7, is surprisingly good for Black, as 11 Nxh5 Nxh5 12 Bxh5 g6 13 Bg4 f5 14 Bf3 Bg7 gives him excellent play.

c33) 9 Qc2 is neatly met by 9...Ba6 10 e4 b3!.

c34) 9 e4 Nxe4 10 Nxe4 Qxe4+ 11 Be2 (Epishin-Ortega, Bolzano 1999) 11...Qd5! (the queen will soon be attacked, and by retreating now keeps all other options open) 12 0-0 (12 Bf4 a5 13 Ne5?! Qe4!?; 12 Be3 g6) 12...Nd7 13 Bf4 a5 14 Ng5 Nf6 15 Bf3 Qd7 16 Rc1 Ba6 17 Re1 and White postures aggressively, but the limit of his ambitions is to win back his two pawns.

We now return to 5 g3 (*D*):



Black to play

5...Bb7

There's a wide choice here; e.g., 5...e6 transposes to a sideline of the Abrahams/Noteboom, while 5...Nf6 is an analogous Semi-Slav – I covered both these lines from White's viewpoint in *A Cunning Chess Opening Repertoire for White*.

Given that our main line becomes sharp and irrational, I should offer a safer alternative line, namely 5...Nd7 6 Bg2 (6 d5? Bb7!; 6 a4 b4 7 Ne4 Ngf6 8 Nxf6+ exf6! – a point behind delaying ...e6) 6...e6, and now:

a) 7 Ne5 Nxe5 8 dxе5 Qxd1+ 9 Kxd1 Bb7 with the point 10 Nxb5 0-0-0+!, when White is lucky to have the bailout 11 Nd6+ Bxd6 12 exd6 with rough equality.

b) 7 0-0 Ngf6 transposes to a relatively common line but one that offers White very little thematic Catalan play and where Black scores well.

c) 7 a4 b4 8 Ne4 Ngf6 9 Nxf6+ gxf6! (necessary to cover e5) is playable for Black, with ...Ba6 coming soon, and ...Rc8 preparing counterplay with ...c5. Still, White can exert pressure, and he has not had to find any difficult or unnatural moves in this line.

6 Bg2 Nf6 7 Ne5 Qc8

Black is in time to set up a robust defence of the long diagonal.

8 0-0 e6 (D)



White to play

Only switching to a sort-of Catalan once some of White's more dynamic early options have been bypassed. I actually considered this position in *A Cunning Chess Opening Repertoire for White* in a different opening and via a very different move-order!

9 b3

More obvious tries like 9 e4 Nbd7 and 9 a4 Nbd7 10 Qc2 a6 prove highly unconvincing for White.

9...c5! 10 d5!

After 10 Bxb7 Qxb7 White already has nothing special: 11 dxc5 (11 bxc4 b4 {Barrientos-Zaragatski, Guatemala City 2020} 12 Rb1 cxd4 13 Nb5 Be7 with unbalanced play) 11...Bxc5 12 bxc4 b4 and Black's pawns and pieces are in harmony.

10...b4!

Black makes use of White's slightly inflexible set-up. Now:

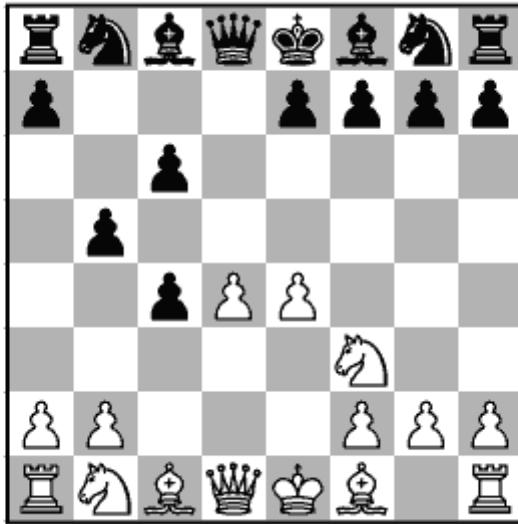
- a) 11 Nxf7?! Kxf7 12 dxe6+ Ke8! is good for Black: 13 Nd5 Bxd5 14 Bxd5 Nxd5 15 Qxd5 Nc6! (15...Qc6?? loses to 16 Qh5+ g6 17 Qe5) 16 Qxc4 Nd4.
- b) 11 Ne4 Nxe4 12 Bxe4 and now 12...Nd7 13 Nxc4 Nf6 pushes White back, with rough equality.
- c) But inflexible does not mean bad, and if White plays like an attacking genius, he can give Black problems: 11 bxc4! bxc3 12 Rb1! exd5 13 Bg5! Nbd7 (13...Be7 14 cxd5 0-0 15 Rxb7! Bd6! is another possible defence, as in Vinchev-Freeman, corr. 2012) 14 Bh3! (absolutely no one would find these moves over the board, of course!) 14...Qc7 15 Nxd7 Nxd7 16 Bf4 Qc6 (16...Bd6 17 Bxd6 Qxd6 18 Rxb7 Nb6 19 cxd5 0-0 is a position Black should probably survive, but it's not much fun) 17 cxd5 Qxd5 18 Bxd7+ Qxd7 19 Qxd7+ Kxd7 20 Rxb7+ Ke6 21 Rc1 g5!? 22 Bxg5 Rg8 23 h4! h6 24 Bf4 Bg7 25 Bc7!? Rge8! and with active play, Black should hold the ending – but again, you'll probably never have to, since no one unprepared will find the amazing sequence of moves needed to bring this about.

C)

4 e4

By grabbing the centre with both hands, White pretty much forces Black to cling onto the gambit pawn by...

4...b5 (D)



White to play

5 a4

Other moves:

- a) 5 Nc3 e6 6 a4 transposes to note 'b' to White's 6th move.
- b) 5 Be2 is too meek a follow-up to White's aggressive advance. After 5...Nf6 6 Qc2 e6 7 0-0 Be7 (Pavliček-Krzyzanowski, corr. 2014) White will be hard-pressed to prove full compensation.
- c) 5 b3 cxb3 6 a4!? (6 Qxb3 Nf6 7 Bd3 e6 is a similar story) 6...b4 7 Nbd2 e6 8 Nxb3 Nf6 9 Bd3 a5 10 0-0 Be7 gives White compensation for the pawn but Black is solid and has his full share of the chances.

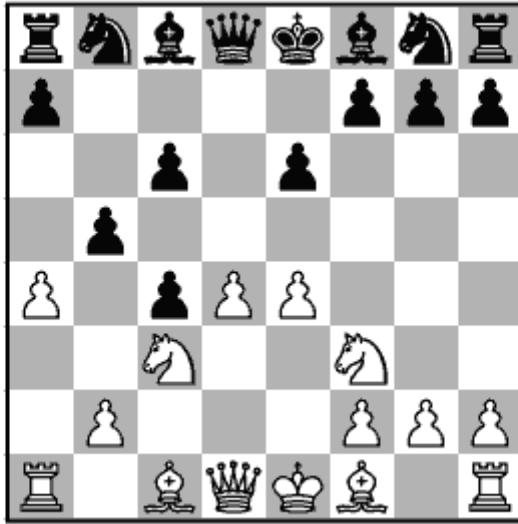
5...e6

Of numerous options, this seems most reliable. 5...Nf6?! 6 axb5! cxb5 7 Nc3! is unpleasant for Black.

6 axb5

Otherwise:

- a) 6 b3?! Bb4+! 7 Bd2 Bxd2+ 8 Qxd2 (8 Nbxd2?? loses(!) to 8...c3 9 Nb1 b4 as that knight is never getting out) 8...cxb3 9 axb5 Nf6! gives Black excellent prospects, Sachdev-Khenkin, Rome 2011.
- b) 6 Nc3 (D).



White to play

6...b4 (6...Bb4 is more common, but transposes to a line of the Abrahams/Noteboom that is more ‘specialist’ territory; 6...a6 7 axb5 cxb5 8 Nxb5 axb5 9 Rxa8 Bb7 10 Ra1 transposes to an exchange sac line that has received some high-level testing) with an array of knight moves that we see in several places in this chapter:

- b1) 7 Na2 is odd with b4 already covered, and 7...Ba6 followed by ...Nf6 is fine for Black.
- b2) 7 Ne2 Ba6 8 Ng3 c5 shows that Black has no need to rush with ...Nf6, as both ...h5 and ...c5 can be useful ideas. Then 9 d5 exd5 10 exd5 Nf6 11 Bg5 Bd6 leaves Black solid.
- b3) 7 Nb1 Ba6 8 Bg5 (8 Nbd2 c3! and 8 Qc2 b3! 9 Qc3 Qb6 10 Bd2 Nf6 are both lines White should avoid) 8...Qa5 9 Qc1 (Kožul-Vitiugov, European Ch, Budva 2009; 9 Nbd2 c3) 9...c3 10 bxc3 Nd7 and White must proceed with caution.

6...cxb5 (D)



White to play

7 b3

This is a critical line. It seems Black can equalize fully, but it means going down a forcing line that leads to a simplified position.

Note that White is right to avoid 7 Nc3?! Bb4, when the exchange on b5 has only helped Black.

7...Nf6! 8 bxc4

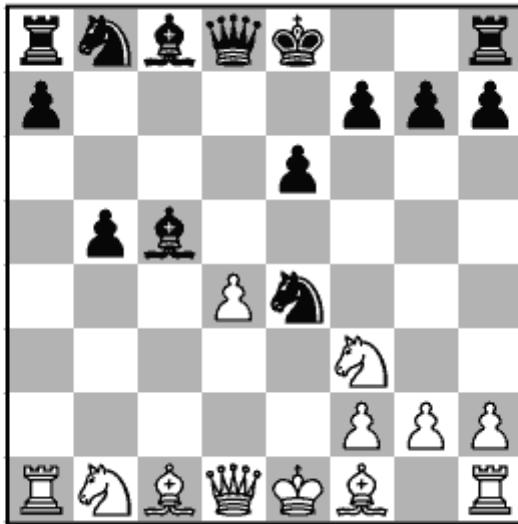
8 Bg5?! h6! 9 Bxf6 Bb4+ 10 Nbd2 Qxf6 11 bxc4 Nc6! leaves Black on top, while he can also be happy with 8 e5 Ne4! 9 bxc4 Bb4+, as in Beliavsky-Kharlov, Ljubljana 2002.

8...Nxe4 9 c5

This is far more critical than 9 cxb5 Bb7 10 Nbd2 Bb4 11 Bd3, when 11...Nxd2 12 Bxd2 Bxd2+ 13 Qxd2 (Ax.Smith-Koch, French Team Ch 2019) 13...0-0! has ideas of ...Bxf3.

9...Bxc5! (D)

Otherwise Black risks being suffocated.



White to play

10 Bxb5+

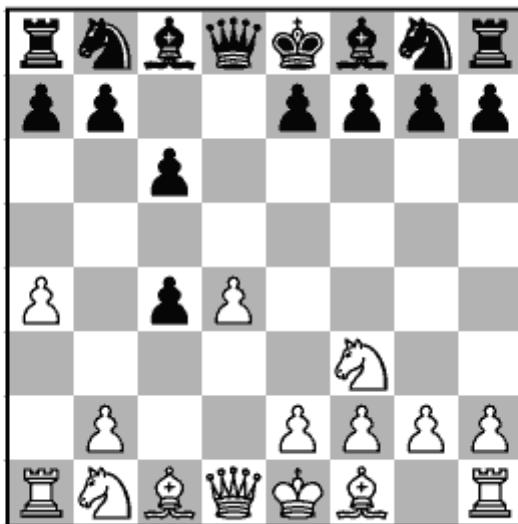
Less precise is 10 dxc5 Qxd1+ 11 Kxd1 Nxf2+ 12 Ke1 Nxh1, when 13 Bxb5+ Bd7 costs White time.

10...Bd7 11 Bxd7+ Qxd7 12 dxc5 Qxd1+ 13 Kxd1 Nxf2+ 14 Ke2 Nxh1

At the end of this forced sequence we have an unbalanced endgame where Black should be OK. 15 Bf4 (or 15 Be3 Nc6 16 Na3 Rb8) 15...0-0 (15...Nc6 16 Bd6 f6 is possible too) 16 Bd6 Rc8 17 Nc3 Nd7 18 Na4 Nf6 (a move used in correspondence games, though 18...Rc6 19 Rxh1 Ra6, as in Malakhatko-Asylguzhin, European Ch, Batumi 2002, should also hold with an accurate follow-up) 19 Rxh1 Ne4 20 Rd1 Rc6 21 Rd4 Nxd6 22 Ne5 Nb5 23 Nxc6 Nxd4+ 24 Nxd4 Kf8 25 Nb5 Ke7 26 c6 a6 27 Nb6 Rf8 28 c7 axb5 29 c8Q Rxc8 30 Nxc8+ and the ending should be drawn. What can you say? Every repertoire is bound to include some drawish lines, and at least this isn't a simple forced repetition, and White has had to demonstrate some elaborate opening knowledge.

D)

4 a4 (D)



Black to play

A major option. It is hard to find a good alternative to a transposition to a Main-Line Slav, although we can immediately deviate from there into a rather respectable sideline that looks more like a QGA than a Slav and which requires good common-sense play rather than a great depth of expertise in Slav theory and strategy.

4...Nf6

The Sveshnikovs advocate the highly questionable 4...Bg4?! – well, theirs *is* a repertoire for blitz.

5 Nc3

5 e3 Be6 transposes to Line [E1](#).

5...e6

This is our main repertoire move, and named after Soultanbéieff. Black intends ...c5, and the play ends up looking like either a QGA or a Vienna QGD, with White having the pure extra move a4. However, this move can help Black, and compared to some QGA lines Black has not played the move ...a6. This leaves the square available to a knight or bishop, and means that b6 is less weak. On the other hand, White has access to b5. While analogies to standard lines are useful, there are many subtleties unique to the Soultanbéieff, and few opponents will be familiar with them.

I'll mention a couple of alternatives:

- 5...e5?! has been played by Morozevich (in a rapid game), but has little going for it beyond its shock value. 6 Nxe5 Bb4 7 e3 Be6 8 Be2 (8 Bd2!?) 8...c5 9 0-0 Nc6 10 Bxc4 Bxc4 11 Nxc4 cxd4 12 exd4 0-0 (Korchnoi-Khassanov, Montreal 2004) basically leaves Black a pawn down.
- But if you really want to surprise an opponent, especially one who you think will go astray in an unfamiliar situation, then 5...Qa5 (D) can be suggested.



White to play

It's *almost* a respectable line, and has been used at IM and even GM level in 'real' games. 6 Bd2 (6 Ne5 Be6 7 e3 Nbd7 8 Nxc4 Bxc4 9 Bxc4 e6 is fairly solid; 6 e3 invites a pin by 6...Bg4 7 Bxc4 e6, when 8 Qb3 Bxf3! 9 Qxb7?! Bxg2 10 Rg1 Bb4 11 Bd2 0-0 works out OK for Black) and now 6...Qf5 7 e3 Be6 has its logic as Black is stopping e4 and making it hard for White to regain the c4-pawn. It has some parallels with the 3...Qd6 Scandinavian, but it is harder to believe that White can't keep a meaningful edge here:

b1) 8 Ne5 Nbd7 9 Nxc4 Qg6 has ideas like 10 g3 Bxc4 11 Bxc4 e5 and 10 Na5 Bf5 11 Nxb7 e5, as in Lobanov-Narkun, corr. 2013.

b2) 8 Be2 Nbd7 9 0-0 h6 (9...g5?! 10 e4) 10 a5 (I.Sokolov-Dizdarević, Sarajevo 2003; 10 Re1 Bd5 might prove playable, but I wouldn't stake my life on it; 10 Be1!? intending Nd2 is also tricky to meet) 10...g5 11 Qa4 and now Hübner felt that after 11...Bg7 it isn't so easy for White to prove a major advantage.

Food for thought, but 5...e6 (*D*), to which we now return, is far more suitable as a regular choice.



White to play

White now has two main lines:

[**D1: 6 e4**](#)

[**D2: 6 e3**](#)

Despite its less aggressive appearance, the latter is more of an enduring threat.

6 Bg5 Bb4 7 e4 (7 e3?! b5 8 Be2 Nbd7 9 0-0 Qb6 is more than OK for Black) transposes to Line [D12](#).

D1)

6 e4 Bb4

This is like the popular Vienna line of the QGD (i.e. 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Nf3 dxc4 5 e4 Bb4), but with the extra moves a4 and ...c6. Now we have:

[**D11: 7 Bxc4?!**](#)

[**D12: 7 Bg5**](#)

[**D13: 7 e5**](#)

D11)

7 Bxc4?!

This pawn sacrifice (which is highly respectable in the Vienna, but less so here) should definitely be accepted, though after...

7...Nxe4 8 0-0 (D)

...the second pawn is best declined.



Black to play

8...Nf6

The rare option 8...Nd6 9 Bd3 Nd7 is worth considering (avoid 9...0-0? 10 Bxh7+ Kxh7 11 Ng5+ Kg6 12 h4!) but 10 Bf4!? offers White good play for the pawn.

The text-move gives Black ample defensive resources (note that in the analogous Vienna line with the pawns on a2 and c7, the main and most dangerous line is 8 Qa4+, so these differences surely favour Black). However, White has scored well in practice, so take a close look at these variations.

9 Qe2

There isn't a clear main line here, maybe because there is no real path forward for White. Three other moves:

- a) 9 Bg5 h6 (it is worth 'putting the question' to the bishop) 10 Bh4 0-0 and Black can curl up with ...Nbd7 and ...Be7 if need be, with counterplay by ...c5 when ready, while a set-up with ...Be7, ...a5 and ...Na6 also looks good.
- b) 9 Ne5 0-0 10 Re1 (or 10 Bg5 Nbd7 11 f4 Be7) 10...Nbd7 and it's hard to see anything that should worry Black too much; e.g., 11 Qf3 Nxe5 12 dx5 Nd5 13 Qg3 Qc7, when 14 Bh6?! falls flat due to 14...f5.
- c) 9 Re1 0-0 10 Bg5 Be7 11 a5 (preventing ...a5 and ...Na6) 11...Nbd7 (11...Na6!?) 12 Qe2 b5 and Black starts to push back, Damljanović-Indjić, Belgrade 2016 (note that the result of this game in Mega Database is surely a data error).

9...0-0 (D)



White to play

10 Rd1

10 Bg5 h6 11 Bh4 a5!? intending ...Be7 and ...Na6.

10...Nd5

Keeping the other pieces flexible until White commits to a plan.

11 Rd3

11 Bd3 a5 12 Ng5 (12 Qe4?! f5; 12 Ne5?! Nd7) 12...Nf6 13 Nf3 and Black can repeat, but playing on with 13...Nbd7 is good (13...Na6?! is riskier because after 14 Ne5 the knight is harder to challenge).

11...Nd7

Now the rook-lift won't get too far:

- a) 12 Ng5 (Schekachev-Rublevsky, Paris 2017) 12...h6!? 13 Rh3? hxg5 14 Qh5 f5! and the king runs away.
- b) 12 Bg5 (Akopian-El Debs, Gibraltar 2012) 12...Qc7 leaves the bishop staring at empty space and 13 Ne5?! f6 leads to exchanges.
- c) 12 Bd2 Bd6 (12...a5!?) 13 Ne5 Qc7 (initiating some critical play, but the forces have to come into contact sooner or later; after 13...N7b6?, as in A.Gupta-C.Balogh, Moscow 2012, 14 Rg3! suddenly gives White dangerous play) and here:
 - c1) 14 Re1 f6! 15 Ng4 (15 Ng6? Rf7! and ...Nf8!) 15...f5! 16 Ne5 (16 Qxe6+?? Kh8 self-traps the queen) 16...Nxe5 17 dx5 Bc5 and Black can start thinking in terms of 'realizing the extra pawn'.
 - c2) 14 f4 f6!? 15 Ng6 hxg6 (15...Rf7? 16 f5!) 16 Qxe6+ Rf7 17 Bxd5 cxd5 18 Nb5 Nf8! 19 Qxd5 Qc2 20 Nxd6 Be6 followed by ...Rd7 is good for Black.

An intricate sequence to be sure, but I have given this mainly as a sample of the kind of defensive resources at Black's disposal, and as a reminder that good defence is more than a matter of just sitting

there and hoping the opponent can't find a way to hurt you. White has numerous ways to arrange his pieces and you will need to respond concretely.

D12)

7 Bg5 (D)



Black to play

7...h6

7...Qa5 8 Bd2 c5 is the main alternative, and riskier.

8 Bxf6

8 Bh4? g5 9 Bg3 Nxe4 is unsound for White, Lapčević-Todorović, Serbian Team Ch, Kragujevac 2016.

8...Qxf6 9 Bxc4 c5

Claiming that White's now extra move a4 is not helpful to him; indeed, it makes the bishop more secure on b4.

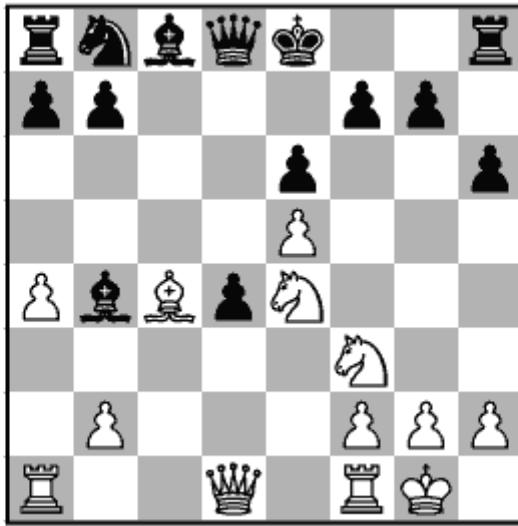
10 e5

10 0-0 cxd4 11 Nb5 (11 e5 Qd8 transposes to the [main](#) line; 11 Nxd4?! 0-0, Pachta-Ragger, Austrian Ch, Leoben 2008) 11...Qe7 offers White little, as the pawn-grab 12 Qxd4 0-0 13 Nxa7 Bd7! (threatening ...Bc5) 14 Nb5 Nc6 15 Qd3 Rfd8 16 Qe2 Na5 (J.Chandler-Cekulis, corr. 2016) leaves Black with good queenside pressure.

10...Qd8 11 0-0

11 d5 shouts 'refutation!', but 11...exd5 12 Bxd5 0-0 13 0-0 Nc6 (Timofeev-Yakovenko, European Ch, Plovdiv 2012) is actually rather comfortable for Black.

11...cxd4 12 Ne4 (D)



Black to play

12...Nc6!

12...0-0 is similar to an Aronian-Caruana Candidates game (pawn on a2) where White got nothing, but in this slightly different position 13 Qc1! makes use of the move a4 because after 13...Qc7 Black lacks ...b5 ideas as an emergency way to exchange queens, so White's attack after 14 Nf6+ Kh8 is more powerful.

13 Qc1

Or:

- a) 13 Qe2 Bd7 14 Rfd1 Qa5 (Sethuraman-Karthikeyan, Kolkata 2014) and White is fighting for equality.
- b) 13 Bb5 Bd7 14 Nxd4 and now 14...0-0 is OK, but since 15 Nf6+ gxf6 16 Qg4+ is a draw, 14...Be7 can be considered if you need to play on.

13...Bd7

Now:

- a) 14 Rd1 Qa5 15 Qf4 0-0-0 is at least OK for Black, and will lead to a good battle, since 16 Qxf7? Nxe5 is wholly appealing for White.
- b) 14 Qf4 has the point that 14...0-0?! 15 Nf6+ Kh8 16 Ng4 gives White a dangerous attack. Instead 14...Qe7 intends ...0-0-0, which is viable because with the bishop unable to be driven away from b4 (as the pawn is on a4), White will not lodge a knight on d6. 15 Rfc1!? (15 Rfd1 0-0-0 16 Nd6+ Bxd6 17 exd6 Qf6 pretty much forces the queens off, Timofeev-Rublevsky, Russian Team Ch, Sochi 2014) 15...0-0-0 16 a5 g5 17 Qg3 Bxa5 gives White reasonable play for the pawn(s), but he has too many pieces too far from the action for it to be called a strong attack. 18 Nxd4 Kb8 19 Nd6 Bb6 20 N4b5 a6 and the game goes on.

D13)

7 e5 (D)



Black to play

Obviously a critical move.

7...Nd5

Black should avoid 7...Ne4?! 8 Qc2 Qa5 9 Qxe4 Bxc3+, when both 10 Kd1 and 10 Nd2 give Black serious problems.

8 Bd2 b5

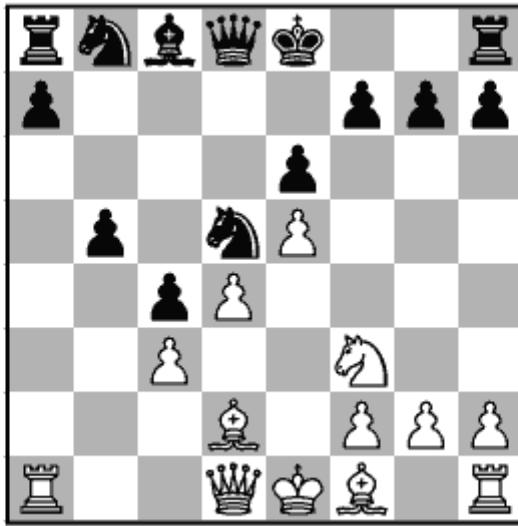
This has been used as Black by some good players recently.

9 axb5

Instead:

- a) 9 Qb1 a6 is OK for Black.
- b) The same can be said for 9 Ne4 Qe7, as in Stoček-Rausis, Czech Team Ch 2008/9.
- c) 9 Ng5 h6 10 Nge4 0-0! 11 axb5 (11 g3, as in Naer-C.Balogh, Czech Team Ch 2017/18, can be met by 11...c5! 12 dxc5 Nd7 13 axb5 Nxe5 with nice centralization, and ...f5 coming soon) 11...cxb5 12 Nxb5 Qh4 and Black has returned the pawn to take over the initiative.
- d) 9 h4 h6 10 Rh3 Nd7 11 Rg3 Nxc3 (11...g6?!, as played in Salem-Caruana, Douglas 2016, is unsafe due to 12 Nxd5! Bxd2+ 13 Qxd2 exd5 14 e6) 12 bxc3 (12 Bxc3 Bxc3+ 13 bxc3 and now 13...0-0 is good) 12...Bf8 looks passive, but if White can't do anything quick, then Black will organize and be a good pawn up.

9...Bxc3 10 bxc3 cxb5 (D)



White to play

A type of position known from other move-orders, though White's chances are reduced here in comparison because he has needed to exchange on b5 to encourage Black to exchange bishop for knight on c3.

11 Ng5

With a sharp and unbalanced position where Black is doing OK. There are several viable approaches, including...

11...Bb7 12 Qh5

A pawn down, White needs to be aggressive.

12...Qe7 13 Be2 Nd7

Avoid 13...b4? 14 Bxc4 bxc3 15 Bc1.

14 Bf3

14 Bg4? has been used by a couple of grandmasters, but after 14...h6! 15 Nxe6 (15 Bxe6 0-0! 16 Bf5 N5f6!) 15...g6 16 Ng7+ Kd8! 17 Qh3 Rh7 the knight is trapped.

14...a5

14...h6 15 Ne4 0-0 16 Nd6 Bc6 17 h4 f6 18 Rh3 fxe5 19 dxe5 Nc5 (Shtyrenkov-Sumets, Alushta 2006) 20 Rg3 is the sort of thing White is hoping for.

15 0-0 Bc6

Getting out of the way of Ne4-d6; there's no rush to play ...h6. Now:

- a) 16 Qh3 b4 17 Ne4?! 0-0 18 Bg5 f6 gets White into some trouble.
- b) After 16 Rfe1 h6 17 Ne4 0-0 18 Bxh6 Black defends with 18...gxh6 19 Qxh6 f6 20 exf6 N7xf6 21 Ng5 Qg7.

c) 16 Be4 N7b6 and after 17 f4 (17 Nxh7? Kd7) 17...g6 18 Qh6 Qf8 19 Qh3 if Black wants to avoid a repetition, there is the risky option 19...Kd8 20 f5! exf5 21 e6 f6 22 Nf7+ Kc7 23 Bf3 Kb7.

D2)

6 e3 (D)



Black to play

This is a more modest move than pushing this pawn two squares, but at least as important. It leads to a modified form of a QGA that has been seen in a number of top-level games.

6...c5 7 Bxc4 Nc6 8 0-0 cxd4

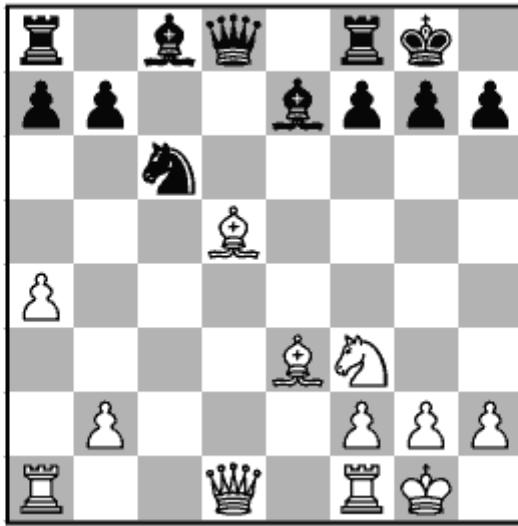
Delaying this exchange much further just gives White useful extra options.

9 exd4 Be7 10 Qe2

Or:

a) 10 Be3 0-0 11 Ne5 and now 11...Bd7 is a typical move for Black in this line. Either the bishop finds a good square on c6 (12 Qf3 Rc8 13 Ba2 {13 Bb3 Be8} 13...Nxe5 14 dxе5 Bc6 15 Qe2 Nd7) or with Nxd7 White squanders several tempi to gain a bishop-pair that merely compensates for his IQP: after 12 Nxd7 Qxd7 to avoid being worse, White needs to liquidate by 13 d5 exd5 14 Nxd5 Rfd8, as in Van Wely-Kempinski, Bundesliga 2018/19.

b) 10 d5 only forces a liquidation to a very dull position, though Black isn't forced to agree a quick draw. As this was recently used in a high-profile victory (albeit hardly down to the opening), a little more detail is called for. 10...exd5 11 Nxd5 Nxd5 12 Bxd5 0-0 (12...Nb4?! 13 Be4! gives Black more problems) 13 Be3 (D) and now two approaches look reliable:



Black to play

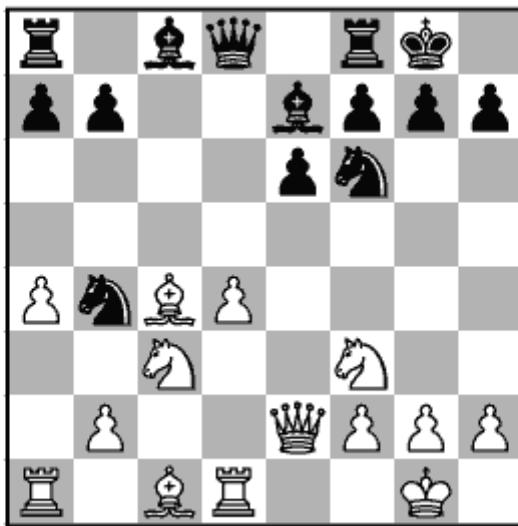
b1) 13...Bf6 14 Qb3 Qe7 15 Rad1 Be6 16 Bxe6 Qxe6 and Black will have few problems after either 17 Qxe6 fxe6 (whose dislocated pawns are truly weaker?) or 17 Qxb7 Rfb8, as in Kantor-Topalov, Gibraltar 2017.

b2) 13...Bf5 14 Qb3 Nb4 15 Rfd1 Qe8 (a little more accurate than 15...Qa5, as in Ju Wenjun-Goriachkina, Women's World Ch (4), Shanghai 2020) 16 Rdc1 (16 Nd4 Nxd5 17 Qxd5 Bg4 offers White little, Mirkowski-Lemutov, corr. 2017) and now a funny idea is 16...Nxd5 17 Qxd5 Bc8, simply bagging the bishop-pair and going solid.

10...0-0 11 Rd1

11 Be3 Nb4 12 Ne5 Bd7 13 Rad1 and now Svidler's move 13...Nbd5! creates a threat against the a4-pawn, with 14 Bc1 (Aronian-Svidler, Moscow Candidates 2016) 14...Nxc3 15 bxc3 Bxa4 16 Rd3 b5 17 Ba2 b4 working out OK for Black.

11...Nb4 (D)



White to play

This is a secure square for the knight thanks to the pawn being on a4.

12 Bg5

Otherwise:

a) 12 Ne5 b6!? 13 Bg5 (13 Qf3 Rb8 14 Qg3 Bb7 15 Bh6 Ne8 and White's forward progress is halted, Bosiočić-Yu Yangyi, Batumi Olympiad 2018) and now 13...Nfd5 is safest, though 13...Bb7 14 Nxf7 Rxf7 15 Bxe6 is just unclear.

b) 12 a5 Bd7 13 Ne5 (13 d5 is a harmless liquidation: 13...exd5 14 Nxd5 Nbxd5 15 Bxd5 Nxd5 16 Rxd5 Qe8) and then:

b1) 13...Bc6!? will tempt many players into 14 Nxc6 bxc6!, a structural change that often leaves Black very comfortable against an IQP, but 14 a6 is more testing.

b2) 13...Rc8 is a safe option, when 14 a6 (14 Bg5 Be8 intending ...Nfd5) 14...bxa6 15 Bxa6 Nxa6 16 Rxa6 Rc7 (Tomashevsky-C.Balogh, Istanbul Olympiad 2012) intending ...Bc8 is rather equal.

12...h6!

Svidler's adoption of this move in a Candidates tournament brought the line to general attention; its later use by Carlsen, albeit just in a rapid game, is also notable.

13 Bxf6

White's best bet is to force the pace. 13 Bh4 Bd7 14 Ne5 Bc6! offers White very little (e.g., 15 a5 Nfd5 16 Bxe7 Qxe7 17 a6 Nb6), while 13 Bd2 Bd7 14 Ne5 Rc8! 15 Bb3 Bc6 16 a5 a6 (Grishchuk-Carlsen, Doha rapid 2016) is comfortable for Black.

13...Bxf6 14 Ne4

After 14 Ne5 Bd7 White has found nothing better than the liquidating 15 d5 exd5 16 Nxd5 Nxd5 17 Rxd5 Bxe5 18 Qxe5 Qe8, when Black has no problems.

14...b6 15 Ne5 (D)



Black to play

15...Bh4!?

Better than 15...Bb7?! 16 Nxf6+ Qxf6 17 Nd7 Qg6 18 d5, as in Bacrot-Kempinski, European Ch, Jerusalem 2015.

16 g3

By provoking this pawn move, Black has ruled out rook-lifts and weakened the white king. 16 Ra3 Bb7 17 Rh3 Nd5 (Blübaum-Svane, Dresden 2017) is solid for Black, as 18 Qg4 Bg5 offers White no way forward.

16...Be7 17 Nc3 Bf6

Keeping e6 guarded for now. 17...Bb7?! 18 a5! has the point 18...bxa5 19 Nxf7 Rxf7 20 Qxe6 Qf8 21 Rxa5.

Now (after 17...Bf6):

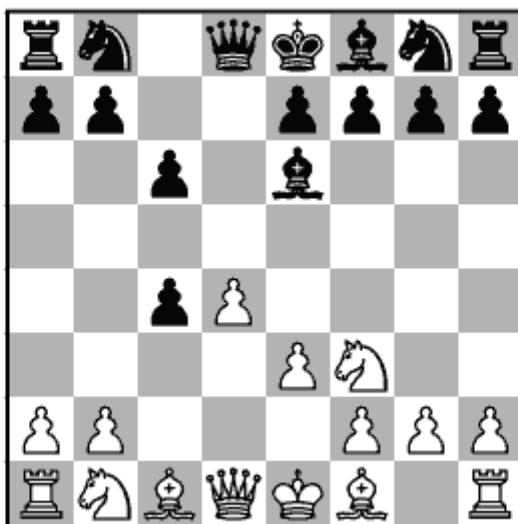
- a) 18 d5 Qc7! (Svidler's accurate move; 18...Bxe5? 19 Qxe5 leaves White on top) 19 d6 (19 Ng4 Bxc3 20 dxe6 Bxb2!; 19 Nxf7 Rxf7 20 dxe6 Re7 21 Ne4 Bxb2 22 Rab1 Bxe6) 19...Qc5! 20 Ng4 Bxc3 21 bxc3 Nc6 22 Rab1 a6! (preventing Rb5), when the critical lines run 23 Bd3 f5 24 Ne3 Bd7 (Schnabel-Schuller, corr. 2017) 25 Bxa6?! f4! and 23 d7 Bb7 24 Bd3 Rfd8 25 Qe4 Kf8!, when Black is fine, Nakamura-Svidler, Moscow Candidates 2016.
- b) 18 a5 bxa5 19 d5 needs to be met differently: 19...Bxe5! (19...Qc7?! 20 d6 Qc5 21 Ng4 Bxc3 22 bxc3 Nc6 23 d7 Bb7 and now White has 24 Rab1!) 20 Qxe5 Qb6 21 Na4 Qb8 22 d6 Rd8 23 Rac1 Nc6 (Kozenko-Malkov, corr. 2016) and Black holds.

E)

4 e3

This modest-looking move is the most testing reply, as it offers Black few targets for counterplay while also demanding a slightly clumsy move to hold on to the c4-pawn.

4...Be6 (D)



White to play

Or is this move really clumsy? If Black can establish a grip on the central light squares or somehow cause White inconvenience, and meanwhile develop his pieces in a coherent manner, his position might end up making a lot of sense. It will all depend on the specifics, and the ingenuity of the players.

The main lines are as follows:

E1: 5 a4

E2: 5 Qc2

E3: 5 Nbd2

E4: 5 Be2

E5: 5 Nc3

Or:

- a) The first major tactical point in favour of Black's idea is that 5 Ng5?? is an outright blunder because of 5...Qa5+. Nevertheless, if you play this line as Black, chances are you'll get a few easy wins thanks to this, as many players, including masters and grandmasters, have missed this queen check. It's only obvious once you've seen it!
- b) 5 e4 is very rare but far from silly. 5...b5! 6 a4 Nf6 7 axb5 (best but untried; White should avoid 7 Ng5?! Bg4 8 f3?! Bd7, as in Yankelevich-Kunun, Luxembourg Team Ch 2016/17) 7...Nxe4 8 bxc6 (8 Qa4 is best met by 8...cxb5 9 Qxb5+ Nd7) 8...Nxc6 9 Nc3 (9 Qa4 Bd7 and 9 Ra4 Rc8 give White little) 9...Nxc3 10 bxc3 g6 11 Qa4 Qd7 with a playable game for Black.
- c) 5 Ne5 is harmless. 5...Nf6 (*D*) and then:



White to play

c1) 6 Bxc4? is a move to hope for, since 6...Bxc4 7 Nxc4 Qd5 picks off a pawn. 8 Qb3 Qxg2! (don't be bluffed into 8...b5? 9 Ne5) 9 Qxb7 Qxh1+ 10 Kd2 (10 Ke2? Qd5!) 10...e6 (10...e5! is strong, but messy) 11 Qc8+ (11 Nc3 Be7) 11...Ke7 12 Qb7+ Nfd7 and with his king safe enough, Black keeps some extra

material. It's worth being familiar with lines like this, since it is very frustrating to land a trap but then squander the opportunity because you don't know how to deal with a tricky reply.

c2) 6 Nxc4 c5 (already Black has a pleasant choice, with 6...g6 also very satisfactory, and akin to a quiet Grünfeld) 7 Ne5 (7 Nc3?! cxd4 8 exd4 Nc6, 7 dxc5?! Qxd1+ 8 Kxd1 Ne4 and 7 Qa4+ Bd7 8 Qb3 cxd4 9 Qxb7? Nc6 are lines White should avoid) 7...cxd4 (7...Nc6?! 8 Bb5) 8 exd4 g6 and simple play gives Black an excellent game.

c3) 6 Be2 g6 7 0-0 Bg7 8 Bxc4 (8 Nxc4 c5 with comfortable equality, Kožul-Z.Varga, Bosnian Team Ch, Jahorina 2003) 8...Bxc4 9 Nxc4 0-0 offers White little due to its slowness; e.g., 10 Nc3 c5?! 11 dxc5 Nbd7 12 c6 Rc8 or 10 b4 Nd5 11 a3 Nd7 12 Bb2 e5!?.

c4) 6 Nc3 b5 7 a4 b4 and then:

c41) 8 Nb1 Nbd7 9 Bxc4 Bxc4 10 Nxc4 c5 also works out well for Black.

c42) 8 Ne2 Nbd7! (returning the pawn to get a great position) 9 Nxc6 Qb6 10 Ne5 and now, e.g., 10...Rc8 11 Nf4 Nxe5 12 dxe5 Nd7 leaves Black very comfortable.

E1)

5 a4

This is the first of the more testing responses we must look at, and will give us a taste of the ingenious ways in which Black can justify his odd-looking set-up.

5...Nf6 (D)



White to play

6 Nc3

6 Na3 is similar to lines we shall see after 5 Nbd2, but here White has spent time preventing ...b5 – a move that is probably unwise for Black in that line. 6...c5 (6...Bd5 7 Bxc4 e6 is solid) 7 Nxc4 (7 Bxc4 Bxc4 8 Nxc4 e6 is safe for Black, Malakhov-Bu Xiangzhi, Ergun tt 2006) 7...cxd4 (riskier is 7...Nc6 8 Nce5 cxd4 9 Bb5 Bd5) 8 Nxd4 (8 exd4 Nc6 is unappealing for White, while sharp tries aren't dangerous

if Black doesn't get greedy: 8 Nce5!? Nbd7 or 8 a5 Nc6) 8...Bd5 is very sound for Black, especially since 9 f3 e6 10 e4? runs into 10...Nxe4! 11 fxe4 Qh4+ 12 Kd2 Qxe4 13 Kc3 Na6!, as in Czerwonski-F.Levin, Guben 2003.

6...g6 7 Ng5

Or:

- a) 7 a5 is a little slow, and 7...Bh6!? a funny response, preventing Ng5 and hindering e4 due to the loose pawns on a5 and d4. 8 Be2 0-0 9 0-0 (9 e4 Bxc1 10 Qxc1 Bg4 with counterplay) 9...c5 should soon lead to a fairly normal-looking position.
- b) 7 e4 Bg7 8 Ng5 (8 Be2 0-0 9 0-0 Na6 10 Be3 Qc8!? 11 Ng5 Rd8 gives Black reasonable counterplay) 8...Qd7! (not 8...Qc8? 9 e5 Nd5 10 Bxc4!, as in I.Sokolov-Eliet, Belgian Team Ch 2009/10) and then:
 - b1) 9 e5 Nd5! 10 Nce4 (10 Bxc4? Nxc3 11 Bxe6 Nxd1 12 Bxd7+ Nxd7 13 Kxd1 is good for Black) 10...Nb4! (Kluger-Szilagyi, Hungarian Ch, Budapest 1958) and Black is doing well since 11 Nc5?! runs into 11...Qxd4!.
 - b2) 9 Be2 Na6 (getting pressure on d4 is a priority) 10 0-0 Rd8 11 Be3 0-0 keeps the centre restrained.

7...Bd5 (D)



White to play

This pair of moves – Ng5 and ...Bd5 – is a common thread in the 4 e3 Be6 line, and how it works out hinges on the specifics of each case.

8 f3

8 e4 h6 is another standard theme, and OK for Black here: 9 exd5 hxg5 10 dxc6 (10 Bxc4 cxd5 11 Bb5+ Nc6 12 Bxg5 Bh6!?) 10...Nxc6 11 Bxg5 (11 d5 Ne5 is a good centralization, especially as 12 Qd4? Nfg4! intending ...Bg7 left White in deep trouble in Estremera-Starostits, Olomouc 2002) 11...Qa5 12 d5 Bg7! is sharp but works out fine for Black.

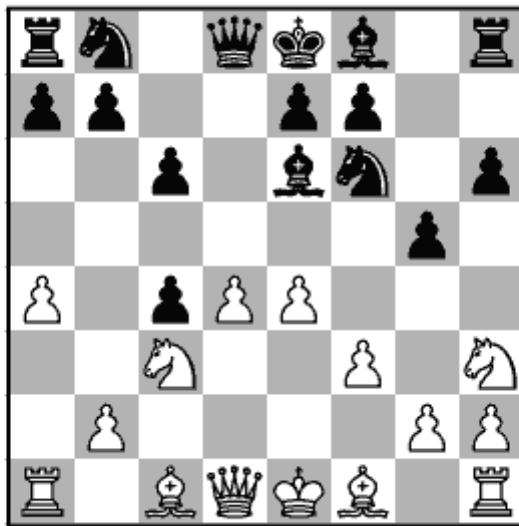
8...h6 9 Nh3 g5

Covering f4 to prevent Nf4 and so prepare ...Be6. 9...c5?! is an idea that works in a similar [position](#) we shall examine in Line E4, but here it leaves Black too exposed in the centre after 10 e4 Be6 11 d5! Bxh3 12 gxh3.

10 e4

10 Be2 Be6 is OK for Black: 11 0-0 c5 or 11 e4 Bxh3 12 gxh3 e5.

10...Be6 (D)



White to play

Now:

- a) 11 Nf2 Bg7 12 a5 Na6 13 Be3 (13 h4 g4! 14 fxg4 {14 f4? g3! 15 Nh3 Bg4 is hopeless for White} 14...h5! grabs good squares) 13...b5 (as played in Yeke-Starostits, Bled Olympiad 2002, and a standard theme in Slav lines with ...Na6 and a5) 14 axb6 axb6 15 h4 Nb4 with chances for both sides; unusually, all four rooks are likely to be exchanged off before any other pieces.
- b) 11 f4!? Bg4! (an important subtlety; after 11...Bxh3?! 12 gxh3 it is hard to get counterplay; e.g., 12...Qa5 13 Bd2 Qb6 14 Bxc4! Qxd4 15 Qb3 e6 16 Qxb7!) 12 Qd2 Bxh3 13 gxh3 Nh5 14 f5 Nf4 with an unclear mess; e.g., 15 Bxc4 (15 Qf2 Nd3+) 15...Bg7 16 e5 (16 f6 exf6!) 16...c5.

E2)

5 Qc2 (D)



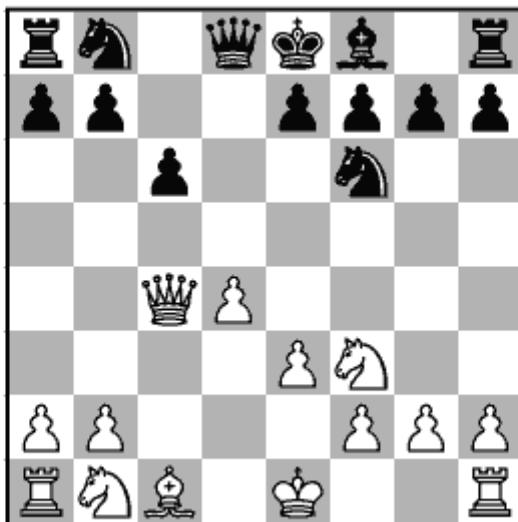
Black to play

This is one of two moves (the other being 5 Nbd2) that quietly seek to regain the pawn and claim an edge in terms of space and mobility, while challenging Black to take on some risk by clinging to the pawn with ...b5. Black's most prudent course in both cases is to let White have the pawn back and show the edge to be extremely slight or non-existent. However, I shall outline both approaches, since for some games/opponents you may need a more fighting option.

5...Nf6

This is the safe option. 5...b5?! is probably not good, but has the point that 6 Ng5?! (recommended by Avrukh) 6...Bc8 (not the only good move) 7 Nxh7 e5 gives Black good play. Also 6 b3 cxb3 7 axb3 Nf6 followed by ...g6 looks playable for Black. 6 a4! is probably best. Then Black avoids early trouble by 6...Nf6 (6...a6 is another option) 7 axb5 (7 Nc3 b4 8 Nb1 b3 9 Qd1 Bd5 gives Black fewer problems if he plays actively) 7...cxb5 8 b3! (8 Nc3 Bd7) 8...Nbd7 (8...cxb3 9 Bxb5+ Nbd7 may not be good, but isn't obviously awful either) 9 bxc4 Bxc4 10 Bxc4 bxc4 (Khurtsidze-Stefanova, Yugoslav Women's Team Ch, Nikšić 1997), followed by ...e6 and castling as soon as possible, but the a-pawn will come under pressure.

6 Bxc4 Bxc4 7 Qxc4 (D)



This should prove very close to equal:

- a) 7...Qa5+ 8 Nc3 Qa6 is safe if unexciting, and has been seen in various games, dating back to Kots-Ebralidze, Moscow 1955.
- b) 7...e6 is also viable, with Black often seeking counterplay with a well-timed advance on the queenside, such as ...b5 if White puts his knight on c3, or ...c5 if he plays more modestly.
- c) 7...Nbd7(!) 8 Nc3 Qc7, intending ...e5, is a reasonable and largely successful attempt to equalize cleanly: 9 e4 e5 10 0-0 (10 dxe5 Nxe5 11 Nxe5 Qxe5 12 Be3 Be7 and if attacked the queen will be happy to drop back to e6, since an isolated pawn on that square will not be a significant weakness) 10...Bd6 11 Bg5 (Stella-Basso, Italian Ch, Salerno 2018) 11...exd4 12 Bxf6 gxf6 13 Qxd4 Ne5 14 Kh1 (14 Nh4 Ng6) 14...b6! intending ...0-0-0 and meeting 15 Rac1 with 15...Bc5.

E3)

5 Nbd2

Black has the same basic choice as in Line [E2](#), but the greedy approach may have more going for it here.

5...Nf6

Again the safe option. 5...b5 is perhaps objectively dubious, but may be worth playing if you think White doesn't know what he's doing! 6 a4! (*D*) is the only troublesome reply.



Then:

- a) 6...Qa5?! (the 'traditional' try) runs into 7 Be2 Nf6 8 0-0 g6 (8...Na6?! 9 Ne5!) 9 Ng5.
- b) 6...a6?! 7 Ng5! (untried but strong; 7 axb5 cxb5 8 b3 c3 9 Ne4 Bd5 10 Nxc3 Bb7 gives Black fewer problems) 7...Bc8 (7...Bd5? 8 e4) 8 axb5 e6 9 Nxc4! Qxg5 10 Nb6 works out well for White, though few

players would go into this if they were unprepared.

c) 6...Nf6 7 axb5 cxb5 8 b3 c3 9 Bxb5+ Bd7 10 Bxd7+ Nbd7 11 Nc4 (11 Nb1!?) 11...e6 and with Black surviving in several correspondence games, the correct assessment isn't simple. 12 Qc2 (12 Ba3 Bxa3; 12 0-0 Bb4 13 Ba3 a5; 12 Qd3 a5 13 Ba3 Bb4 14 Nd6+ Bxd6 15 Bxd6 Qb6 16 Ba3 Rc8 17 0-0 Nxd5) 12...a5 13 Ba3 Bb4 14 Nd6+ Bxd6 15 Bxd6 Nd5 looks like a critical line.

We now return to 5...Nf6 (D):



White to play

6 Nxc4

White leaves the bishop on e6 in the hope that it gums up Black's development but this move also slows White's own deployment.

After 6 Bxc4 Bxc4 7 Nxc4 e6 White can exert pressure but Black is very solid with no bad pieces: 8 0-0 (8 Qb3 Qc7 9 0-0 Nbd7 10 Bd2 Be7 11 Bb4 c5 12 dxc5 {Maletin-Gomez Garrido, Balaguer 2010} 12...0-0 13 c6 Bxb4 works out OK for Black) 8...Be7 (8...Qd5 9 Qb3 is more troublesome) 9 Qc2 0-0 10 e4 and in each of the following lines Black hasn't quite equalized, but should be OK with careful play: 10...c5 (10...Qc7 11 Bg5 h6 12 Bh4 c5 13 Ne3 Rd8, Lipecki-W.Fischer, corr. 2018) 11 dxc5 Na6 (11...Bxc5 12 e5 Nd5 13 Ng5 g6 14 Ne4 Qc7 15 b3 b5) 12 e5 Nd5 13 Nd6 Qc7 14 Ng5 Bxg5 15 Bxg5 Nxc5 16 Rac1 b6 17 Qe2 f6 18 Be3 Nxe3 19 Qxe3 Qe7.

6...Bd5

Hoping to play ...e6 and ...c5. 6...g6 seems a logical response, but 7 Qc2 Bg7 8 e4 0-0 9 Be2 is hard to meet.

7 Bd3 e6 (D)



White to play

8 0-0

8 Qc2 intends e4 but invites 8...Bxf3 9 gxf3 c5.

8...Nbd7

Opting for a light-square strategy. After 8...c5 9 Nce5 Nc6 10 b3 the centre is likely to open up before Black is fully ready.

9 Qe2

9 Nfd2 prepares e4 but is slow enough that 9...c5 is now effective.

9...Be4

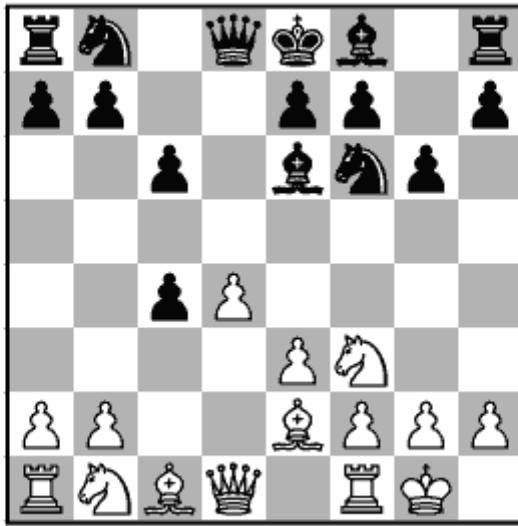
The star bishop physically blocks the central advance, offering Black a solid game. White retains the initiative, but in order to advance in the centre he will need to exchange a number of pieces, which reduces the potency of such an advance.

E4)

5 Be2

Although relatively rare, this is perhaps the most critical test of the whole line. The idea is that once White has castled, Ng5 becomes an idea, and White has not had to commit his queen's knight to bring this about.

5...Nf6 6 0-0 g6 (D)



White to play

7 Ng5

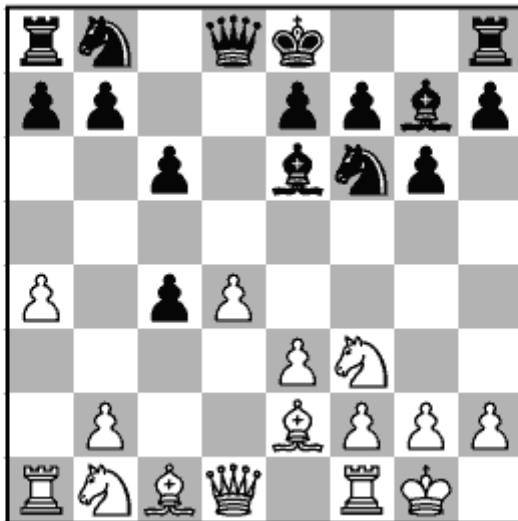
Or:

a) 7 Nc3 Bg7 and then:

a1) 8 Ng5 Bd5 9 Qc2 (9 e4 h6) 9...h6 10 Nh3 b5 (if his bishop is going to get pushed around, Black might as well have a pawn for his trouble!) 11 e4 (11 Nf4 0-0 12 e4 g5!) 11...Be6 12 Nf4 Bc8 13 e5 Bf5! (a vital intermezzo since 13...Nd5? loses to 14 Nxg6!) 14 Qd2 Nd5 with a playable game.

a2) 8 e4 b5 9 Ng5 Bc8 10 a4 (kicking off a sharp and absolutely critical line; 10 e5 Nd5 11 a4 h6 holds) 10...b4 11 Bxc4! (11 Na2?! h6) 11...0-0 (11...bxc3? 12 Bxf7+! Kf8 13 Bb3 gives White a decisive attack) 12 Ne2 h6 13 Nxf7 Rxf7 14 Nf4 Qe8 (14...Nxe4 15 Qc2 is more perilous for Black) 15 Qd3 (Ralls-J.Fernandez, corr. 2012; 15 Nxg6 e6) 15...a5 (15...e5!?) 16 Nxg6 (16 e5 Bf5) 16...Ba6 with an unclear but roughly balanced position.

b) 7 a4 Bg7 (*D*) and here:



White to play

b1) 8 Na3 0-0 9 Nxc4 (9 Ng5 Bd5 10 f3 c5! is an idea we'll see again; the key point is 11 e4? cxd4! 12 exd5 d3) and now 9...c5 (9...Nbd7!? keeps more tension) 10 dxc5 (Agrest-Cousu, Täby 2007) 10...Qxd1 11 Rxd1 Ne4 12 Nd4 Bxc4 13 Bxc4 Rd8 is a fairly clean equalizer.

b2) 8 Nc3 0-0 and then:

b21) 9 a5 c5 (before White has been able to play e4, and so cannot answer with d5) 10 e4 (10 Ng5 Bf5 11 d5 Bd3!) 10...cxd4 11 Nxd4 Bg4! is a nice tactical exchanging manoeuvre.

b22) 9 e4 Na6 10 Ng5 Qc8! with a tense and far from one-sided battle ahead. Black can put pressure on the d4-pawn and prepare a ...b5 advance. White can push forward with his e- and f-pawns, but this is committal and gives Black squares too.

7...Bd5 (D)



White to play

8 f3

8 Nd2 is also critical. White intends both e4 and to take on c4, and a creative response is needed. 8...Bh6!? (this move, fighting against White's plan of making the e4 advance, was suggested by the Sveshnikovs, though they didn't analyse it further; instead 8...Bg7 9 Qc2 h6 10 Ngf3 b5 11 e4 Be6 12 b3 favours White) 9 h4 (after 9 Nh3? b5 White won't be playing e4 any time soon) 9...Bg7 10 Qc2 (10 e4?! h6) 10...h6 and then:

a) 11 Ngf3 b5 12 e4 (12 a4?! 0-0) 12...Be6 13 b3 cxb3 14 Nxb3 0-0 and with his kingside weakened by the 'free' move h4, it will be very hard for White to settle down to a calm exploitation of the weak squares on Black's queenside.

b) 11 Nh3 0-0 (11...c5?! 12 e4; 11...b5!?) 12 e4 Be6 13 Nf4 Qxd4 14 Nxe6 fxe6 15 Bxc4 Na6 and here too the weakening of White's kingside improves Black's chances: 16 Bxa6 (16 Bxe6+?! Kh7 and Black is doing well; 16 e5 Qxe5 17 Qxg6 Nc7 18 Nf3 Qe4) 16...bxa6 17 Re1 Ng4 (or 17...Nd7 18 Nf3 Qc5) 18 Nf3 Qf6 and Black is active enough.

8...h6

8...c5!?

9 Nh3 c5! (D)



White to play

This move is untried, but seems like clearly the right idea.

10 e4

Or: 10 dxc5 e5!; 10 Nc3 cxd4 11 Qxd4 Nc6 12 Qd1 Ne5.

10...cxd4 11 Qxd4

11 exd5?! d3! shows Black's main point, and neatly highlights an unlikely drawback of White's Be2 + 0-0 scheme! After 12 Qa4+ Qd7 13 Bd1 b5! 14 Qa5 Nxd5 15 Nc3 Bg7 the black pawns are strong and the white pieces disorganized.

11...Nc6 12 Qf2

12 Qe3 Be6 13 Nf4 is similar to our main line. Here 13...Bg7!? (not forced!) is higher up the pecking order since the white queen is in more danger: 14 Nxe6 fxe6 15 Rd1 Qc7 16 Bxc4 Rd8! 17 Rxd8+ Qxd8 and the pressure on White's queenside will keep the game in equilibrium.

12...Be6 13 Nf4

Surprisingly, Black now has several viable options:

- One idea is 13...Bd7 14 Bxc4 g5 15 Nd5 e6 16 Ndc3 Ne5.
- Or 13...Nd4 14 Na3 (the key tactical point is 14 Nxe6 Nxe2+! 15 Qxe2 Qb6+) 14...Bg7 15 Nxe6 Nxe2+ 16 Qxe2 Qb6+ 17 Be3 Qxe6.
- There is even the nonchalant 13...Bg7 14 Nxe6 fxe6 15 Bxc4 (15 Rd1 Qb6 16 Bxc4 Qxf2+ 17 Kxf2 Kf7 intending ...Ne8-d6) 15...Qd4 16 Qxd4 (the point is 16 Bxe6?? Nxe4!, when to avoid material loss White will have to go into a terrible endgame by 17 fxe4 Rf8) 16...Nxd4, when Black's active pieces compensate for his weaknesses.

d) 13...Qc8 14 Na3 Bg7 15 Nxe6 (15 Be3 0-0) 15...Qxe6 16 Bxc4 Qe5 17 Be3 0-0 with healthy development and centralization for Black.

E5)

5 Nc3

A straightforward move.

5...b5 (D)

Now that White has played Nc3 (and there is no ...Qa5+ fork), it is best to cling onto the c4-pawn, both because it is now harder for White to recover it, and also since 5...Nf6 6 Ng5 is unlikely to go well for Black.



White to play

There are two important lines here:

[**E51: 6 Be2!?**](#)

[**E52: 6 a4**](#)

Or:

- 6 b3 is an idea to be borne in mind throughout these lines, but here can be met by the disruptive 6...Qa5.
- 6 Ng5 is another standard theme (and has the nasty point 6...Bf5? 7 Nxf7!, with an attack that should prove decisive), but has little impact here since 6...Bd7 intends ...e5 or ...e6, hitting the loose knight, and 7 Qf3 Nf6 8 a4 (8 Nxb5?? is a blunder for a reason you must surely know!) 8...h6 9 Nge4 (I.Balog-Zpevak, Slovakian Team Ch 2015/16) 9...Qa5 is OK for Black; e.g., 10 Bd2 b4 11 Nd1 Qd5 12 Nxf6+ exf6. If you are getting confused in this maze of lines after 4 e3 Be6, my tip is to focus on how Black responds to Ng5 in each line: where does the bishop go, and what key tactic does Black employ? If you

remember this central piece of information for each line, it should be easier to recall the logic of the surrounding moves. To revise this knowledge, you can search this section of the book for 'Ng5' and check that you know the answer.

E51)

6 Be2!? Nf6 7 0-0

This is certainly one of White's better tries to cast doubt on Black's opening. Instead:

- a) 7 b3?! is well met by 7...Qa5!.
- b) 7 Ng5 Bd7 and Black can still curl up into a solid structure with ...e6 (this would be far more weakening if Black had already played ...g6); the bishop isn't so active on d7, but the move is virtually for free since the white knight is poorly placed on g5.

7...g6 (D)



White to play

A committal move since now structures with ...e6 are unappealing, but other moves have more serious drawbacks. Now:

- a) 8 a4 b4 9 Nb1 Bg7 is OK for Black; e.g., 10 Nbd2 0-0 11 Nxc4 Bd5 (or 11...Nbd7 intending ...c5) 12 Nfe5 Qc7 13 f3?! c5.
- b) 8 Ng5 Bd5 9 e4 (9 b3 Bg7 10 bxc4 Bxc4 11 Bxc4 bxc4 12 Qa4 0-0 13 Qxc4 Qa5 and the loose white knight basically costs White a tempo, which Black can use to mobilize) 9...h6 10 exd5 hxg5 (now h-file counterplay will be a constant worry for White) 11 dxc6 b4 12 Nb5 Nxc6 13 Bf3 (13 Qa4 Qd7 14 d5 Nxd5 15 Rd1 Rc8 16 Bxc4 e6 and it looks precarious, but Black survives, Reichelt-Zajšek, corr. 2017) 13...Rc8 14 Re1 (Panitevsky-Lagendijk, corr. 2015; 14 Bxg5 Bg7 with counterplay because ...a6 is a threat) 14...g4 15 Bxg4 e6 16 Bg5 Be7 and Black appears to live.
- c) 8 b3?! is untried but critical. 8...cxb3 (8...Qa5?! 9 Bd2 b4 10 Na4 c3 11 Be1 and a3; 8...Bg7?! 9 bxc4 Bxc4 10 Bxc4 bxc4 11 Qa4 is structurally good for White) 9 Ng5 bxa2 10 Nxe6 fxe6 11 Qb3 gives White

a lot of compensation, though Black should be able to survive, perhaps starting with 11...a5 12 Qxe6 Qd7 13 Qxa2 e6 or 11...Nd5 12 Ne4 Bg7 13 Ng5 Nc7 14 Nxe6 Nxe6 15 Qxe6 Qd7 16 Qxa2 a5.

We have just examined some razor-sharp and critical lines, but you are very unlikely to face them unless your opponent has made an unusually detailed study of this rare line. The fact that computer analysis and correspondence play indicate that Black stays afloat is reassuring, and from a practical viewpoint it helps that White has to do the fancy footwork whereas Black is often just playing forced moves. Stay calm at the board, avoid blunders, and you should be OK.

E52)

6 a4 b4 (D)



White to play

Now four knight moves need to be examined, all leading to different play.

7 Ne4

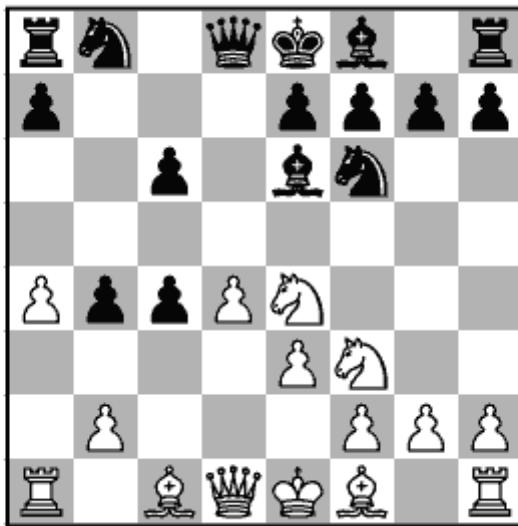
Or:

- a) 7 Na2 a5! is a line where the bishop proves particularly well-placed on e6. 8 Ng5 has several good answers, including 8...Qd6!? intending ...Nd7-b6, with 9 Qe2?! c3! 10 Nxe6 Qxe6 11 bxc3 b3 a nice tactic. But avoid 8...Bd5?! 9 e4 h6 10 exd5 hxg5 11 Bxc4 cxd5 12 Bb5+.
- b) 7 Ne2 Nf6 8 Nf4 (8 Ng3 transposes to note '[d](#)' to White's 8th move; 8 Bd2 a5 9 Rc1 Nbd7 10 Nf4 Bd5 11 Bxc4 e6 12 Nxd5 cxd5 13 Bb5 Bd6 and while White can point to his bishop-pair, the one on d2 is hardly a better piece than either of the black knights) 8...Bd5 9 Ne5 Nbd7 10 Bxc4 Nxe5 11 Bxd5 Nxd5 12 dxе5 (K.I.Georgiev-Z.Varga, Austrian Team Ch 2007/8) 12...e6 and White has little to show for all his knight moves.
- c) 7 Nb1 Nf6 8 Qc2 (8 Ne5 transposes to note '[c41](#)' to White's 5th move in Line E; 8 Nbd2 transposes to the [main](#) line; after 8 Be2 g6!? 9 Nbd2 Bg7 White regains his pawn but Black is developing smoothly with ...c5 coming) and then:

c1) 8...b3 is tempting but unconvincing: 9 Qd1 Bd5 (9...Na6?! 10 Na3 Qa5+? 11 Bd2 Qxa4?? 12 Nxc4; 9...c5 10 Na3 Nc6 11 Bxc4 Bxc4 12 Nxc4 will give Black some play for the pawn he is sacrificing) 10 Nbd2 Qa5 11 Be2 c3 12 bxc3 Qxc3 13 Rb1 with a tricky future ahead of Black.

c2) 8...Nbd7 9 Bxc4 Bxc4 10 Qxc4 e6! (nicely exploiting the bishop on c1 that is loose due to the knight's retreat to b1!) intending ...Rc8 and ...c5 leaves Black solid.

7...Nf6 (D)



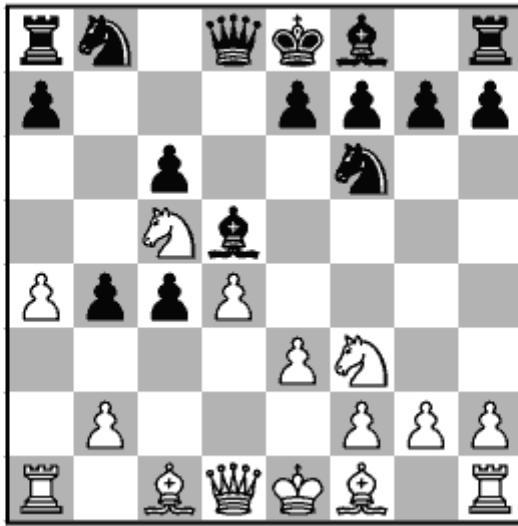
White to play

Again White has a wide selection of knight moves.

8 Ned2

Other moves:

- a) 8 Neg5?! Bd5 9 Ne5 Nbd7! offers White nothing.
- b) 8 Nxf6+ exf6 (Black normally takes away from the centre in this line) solves any development problems for Black. 9 Bd2 (9 Qc2?! b3, Dlugy-Rausis, Liepaja rapid 2006) 9...a5 10 Rc1 (10 Qc2?! b3) 10...c3! 11 bxc3 Na6 (Reinecke-Thalmann, corr. 2006) and it is hard for White to resolve the queenside tension in any way that favours him. 12 e4 Be7 13 Be2 0-0 14 0-0 (14 c4 f5! 15 e5 g5 with sudden kingside counterplay) 14...Qd7 with a tense struggle ahead; e.g., 15 c4 Bg4 16 Be3 c5 seeking a dark-square blockade.
- c) 8 Nc5?! Bd5 (D) is sharp but if Black plays vigorously he is doing well:



White to play

c1) 9 Ne5 e6! 10 f3 (10 Nxc4, as in Beliavsky-Riazantsev, Linares 2003, should be met by 10...Bxc5! 11 dxc5 Nbd7) 10...Bxc5 11 dxc5 Nfd7 12 Qd4 (Zhukova-Stefanova, Groningen 1998) 12...0-0! 13 Nxc4 e5 gives Black superb play.

c2) 9 Qe2 (Maksimenko-Z.Varga, Croatian Team Ch, Pula 1999) 9...e5!! 10 e4 Bxc5 11 exd5 cxd5 12 dxc5 0-0 with excellent play for the piece – note this line carefully, since it would be hard to find at the board.

c3) 9 Bd2 (Andersson-Conquest, Pamplona 2001/2) 9...e5! (9...a5 is fine too) 10 Nxe5 (10 Bxb4 Nbd7) 10...Bxc5 11 dxc5 a5 12 Nxc4 (12 Bxc4 0-0!) 12...Ne4 with great centralization, and obviously a dream outcome for the bishop that looked so unstable on e6 just a few moves earlier.

d) 8 Ng3!? Bd5 (*D*) sidesteps both e4 and Ng5.



White to play

Black also has the active idea of ...h5-h4 in many of the lines that follow; if White responds with h4, then ...e6 and ...Bd6 targets the g3-knight. Now:

d1) 9 Bd2 e6 10 Rc1 h5 11 Bxc4 (11 h4 Bd6 12 Bxc4 Bxg3 13 fxg3 a5) 11...h4 12 Ne2 h3 with counterplay.

d2) 9 Qc2 and now the question is in what order Black should play two pawn-thrusts:

d21) 9...b3 10 Qc3 h5 and then 11 Bxc4 h4 12 Ne2 h3 13 Qxb3 hxg2 14 Rg1 e6 (14...Bxf3 15 Bxf7+ Kd7 16 Be6+ with perpetual check) 15 Bxd5 cxd5 will give Black good play for the pawn, while 11 h4 e6 12 Bxc4 Bd6 has been shown in correspondence games also to grant Black compensation for the b-pawn whether White allows the exchange on g3 or spends time removing his knight.

d22) 9...h5 can come to the same thing, but there are extra possibilities:

d221) 10 h4 doesn't have to transpose, as 10...e6 is actually possible, since 11 e4?! (11 Bxc4 Bd6) 11...b3 12 Qe2?! Na6 13 exd5 cxd5 gives Black too much for the piece.

d222) 10 e4 b3 11 Qd1 h4 12 exd5 cxd5 is unclear too.

We now return to 8 Ned2 (D):



Black to play

8...c3!

The extra pawn cannot be saved, but it can sell its life dearly, sowing disruption in White's queenside.

9 bxc3 bxc3 10 Nb1

10 Nc4 Bd5 11 Ba3 (Butnorius-Kupreichik, European Seniors, Thessaloniki 2010; 11 Qc2?! e6 12 Qxc3 Ne4 gives Black the initiative) 11...e6 12 Bxf8 (or 12 Be2 Be7 13 0-0 0-0 14 Bxe7 Qxe7 15 Qc2 c5) 12...Kxf8 13 Rc1 c5 is roughly equal.

10...Qa5! 11 Qc2 Nd5 12 Ba3

12 Ra3?! runs into 12...Na6! 13 Nxc3 Nab4 14 Qd2 Bf5 15 Rb3 (15 Nxd5 e6!! is a line from my book on the Slav) 15...e6.

12...Nd7?! (D)

12...Na6 13 Bxa6 Qxa6 14 Nxc3 may offer White an edge.



White to play

After the text-move, Black stays well in the game:

- a) 13 Bd3 g6 (13...Bg4 is another possibility) 14 0-0 Bg7 15 Rc1 c5 with counterplay, as 16 Nxc3 is met by 16...Nb4, snagging a bishop.
- b) 13 e4 Nb4 14 Bxb4 Qxb4 (Kukov-Vasilev, Sofia 2006) 15 Nxc3 g6 with a healthy Grünfeld-type position. One neat idea is shown by 16 Rb1 Qa5 17 Bd3 Bg7 18 0-0 0-0 (intending ...Bg4) 19 h3 Nc5!.
- c) 13 Be2 is best answered with the outlandish but effective thrust 13...g5! (13...g6?! 14 0-0 Bg7? {14...Bh6!?} is ineffective here due to 15 Rc1! c5 16 Nxc3, when 16...Nb4? hits no bishop on d3) 14 0-0 (14 Nxe3? Nxe3) 14...g4 15 Ng5 (or 15 Ne1 Rc8! 16 Nd3 Bf5 17 Qb3 e5!?) 15...Nxe3 16 fxe3 Qxg5 with complex play ahead.

4: Queen's Pawn

1 d4 d5 (*D*)



White to play

While the Queen's Gambit (2 c4 or 2 Nf3 followed by c4) is by far the most popular response to 1...d5, there are plenty of other moves here, each with their following. To keep our workload manageable, we need to be careful with our move-orders, as White can play some of these openings in various sequences.

We examine:

[**A: 2 e4?!**](#)

[**B: 2 Nc3**](#)

[**C: 2 e3**](#)

[**D: 2 Bg5**](#)

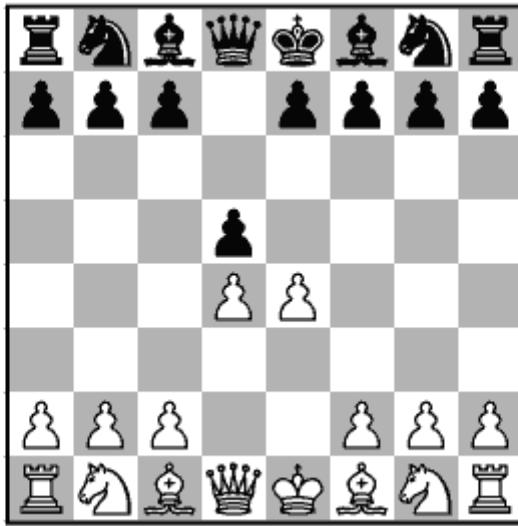
[**E: 2 Bf4**](#)

[**F: 2 Nf3**](#)

A)

Every now and then you'll encounter the Blackmar-Diemer Gambit:

2 e4?! (*D*)



Black to play

Its adherents tend to be true ‘believers’, undeterred by all the sage advice that this is a poor gambit both objectively and as a barrier to improvement. In the interest of simplicity, rather than advocate the most objectively challenging acceptance of the pawn, I shall offer a practical response that gives Black a pleasant game. If your opponent doesn’t relish a fight for a draw from a slightly worse position, he will no doubt find a way to play very unsoundly for a win!

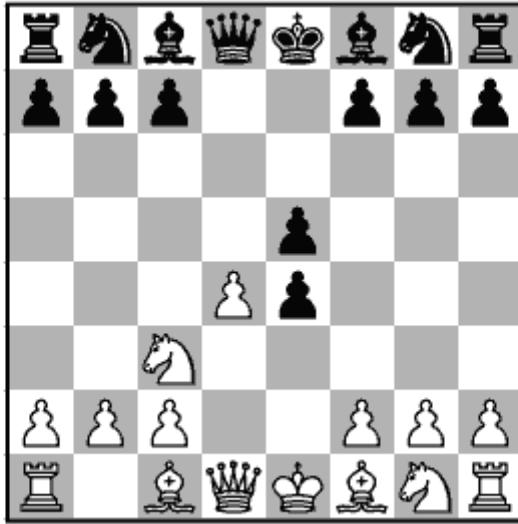
2...dxe4 3 Nc3

Or:

- a) After 3 f3?! our response 3...e5! is even stronger: 4 dxe5 Qxd1+ 5 Kxd1 Nc6 6 fxe4 (6 Bb5 Bd7) 6...Bg4+ followed by ...0-0-0+ and ...Nxe5 with a positionally dominant game.
- b) 3 Bc4 has several good answers, including our thematic 3...e5 since 4 Qh5 Qe7 is completely safe; e.g., 5 dxe5?! (5 Bg5 Nf6 6 Bxf6 Qxf6 7 dxe5 Qf5) 5...Nc6 6 Bf4 g6.

3...e5 (*D*)

A practical choice, avoiding all opening problems. 3...Nf6 4 f3 exf3 is no doubt objectively best, when White can generate some play, but the assessment teeters somewhere around ‘almost enough compensation to scrape a draw’.



White to play

4 Nge2

There isn't any clearly defined main line here, since nothing is particularly appealing for White. This relatively rare knight move is worth noting, as White scores quite well with it, but thanks only to the most obvious reply being dubious. Here are the other moves White tends to try:

- a) 4 Bc4?! Qxd4 5 Qxd4 (in practice White normally plays 5 Qe2?! Bb4 6 Bd2 Nf6 7 0-0-0 Bxc3 8 Bxc3 Qc5, when he should certainly lose) 5...exd4 6 Nxe4 Bf5 7 Ng5 Nh6 and White must pray that he can somehow hold the draw.
- b) 4 Qh5 is more popular than it deserves to be, probably because it fits in with the 'attack at all costs' mindset. 4...Qxd4 (White's scheme is 4...exd4 5 Bc4 Qe7 6 Bg5, though even this is objectively unconvincing) 5 Be3 (5 Nb5? Nf6! with the point 6 Nxc7+ Kd8 7 Qxf7 Bb4+, winning) 5...Qd6! 6 Nxe4 (6 Bc4? Be6!; 6 Rd1? Nf6!) 6...Qb4+ 7 Nd2 Nc6! 8 Bc4 Qe7 intending ...Be6 with a fairly safe extra pawn.
- c) 4 Nxe4 Qxd4 5 Bd3 (5 Qxd4 exd4 6 Bf4 Bf5 7 Bd3 Nc6! tempts White into 8 Bxc7?? Kd7!, winning material) 5...Nc6 6 Nf3 Qd5 7 0-0 and here the rare 7...Bf5 is a good option: 8 Qe2 (8 Nc3 Qd7 and now 9 Nxe5?! Nxe5 10 Qe1 regains the pawn but at a positional cost) 8...Bg6! 9 Bg5 Be7 10 Rad1 0-0-0.
- d) 4 dx5 Qxd1+ 5 Nxd1 (5 Kxd1 Nc6 and in this near-symmetrical position White's misplaced king is far more important than his extra development tempo) 5...Nc6 (Sanhueza-Tristan, Neuquen 2015) gives Black the initiative as he is the first to attack the opponent's stranded e-pawn.

4...f5!? (D)

A rare but attractive option. Not 4...exd4? 5 Qxd4, when White gets his desired activity, but 4...Nc6 5 Be3 f5 6 dx5 Nxe5 7 Qxd8+ Kxd8 8 0-0-0+ Bd7 is another viable approach.



White to play

5 dxe5

5 Be3?! is strongly met by 5...f4!:

- a) 6 Nxf4? exf4 7 Qh5+ g6 8 Qe5+ Qe7 9 Qxh8 fxe3 10 Qxg8 Be6 11 Qh8 exf2+ 12 Kxf2 Nc6 and Black wins – hey, if White can dream, so can we! This is the kind of concrete line that is worth remembering, as it will help you piece the rest together at the board.
- b) 6 Bc1 Nc6 7 dxe5 (7 Nxe4 Bf5) 7...Qxd1+ 8 Kxd1 (8 Nxd1 Nb4) 8...f3! 9 gxf3 exf3 10 Nf4 Bf5 with an attack.
- c) 6 Bd2 Nc6 7 dxe5 (7 d5 Nb4!) 7...e3! 8 fxe3 Qh4+ 9 g3 fxg3 leaves White with ugly pawns.

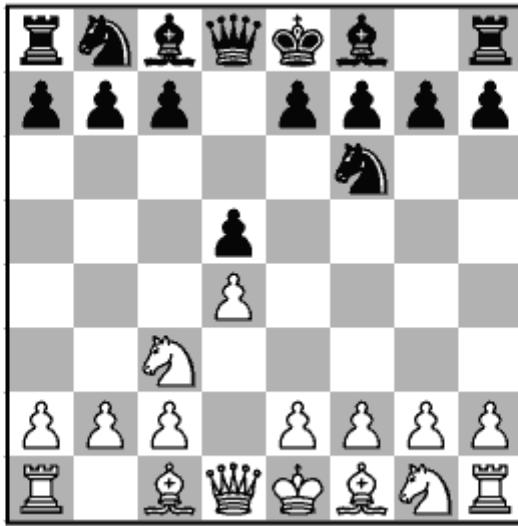
5...Qxd1+ 6 Kxd1 Ne7 7 Nb5 Kd8 8 f4 a6 9 Nbc3 Nbc6

Given that the move ...a6 has some real value, Black is more comfortable in this symmetrical position.

B)

2 Nc3 Nf6 (D)

Black covers e4 since 2...c6 3 e4 allows a transposition to a Caro-Kann.



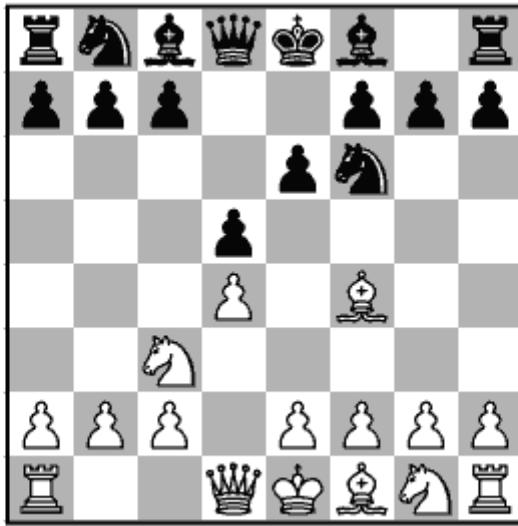
White to play

3 Bg5

This is the Veresov, one of the more traditional queen's pawn games that has fallen well out of fashion. It is like a mirrored Ruy Lopez, where the plan of f3 and e4 is too weakening to be effective, or like a reversed Chigorin QGD with less activity because Black hasn't yet played ...c5. We'll use a straightforward and reliable reply.

There are two other moves you are likely to encounter:

- a) 3 e4?! is White's other attempt to reach Blackmar-Diemer land. Again we opt for a practical choice: 3...Nxe4 4 Nxe4 dxe4 (already it is unclear what might attract White to this position) 5 Bc4 (5 f3?! e5! is highly unappealing for White) 5...Nc6 6 Be3 (6 Ne2 Na5 eliminates White's only dangerous piece; 6 c3 is the most common move, but 6...e5 basically leaves White a pawn down with a bad position since 7 Qb3 Qd7 8 dxe5 Nxe5 9 Bf4 Nd3+ is dismal, Aulaskari-Froeberg, corr. 1998) 6...e5 7 dxe5 (7 d5?! Na5) 7...Qxd1+ (7...Qe7 is good too) 8 Rxd1 Nxe5 9 Bd5 and one good option is 9...Bg4 10 Rd4 (10 Ne2? Bb4+!) 10...Bd6! intending ...0-0-0, when Black will be the one with the excellent piece-play.
- b) 3 Bf4 enjoys some popularity, even at high level, albeit mostly in blitz and rapid. A no-nonsense reply is 3...e6 (*D*) intending ...Bb4 or ...Bd6, and ...c5 ideas once ready.



White to play

If White doesn't make something of his knight's position on c3, it could end up looking clumsy. Now:

b1) 4 Nf3 Bb4 intending ...Ne4 or ...c5.

b2) 4 a3 c5 5 e3 (intending Nb5) 5...a6 and normal play offers White so little that the engines want to go berserk with 6 g4 (as in J.Fries Nielsen-A.Rasmussen, Danish Ch, Svendborg 2015), even though it is not so good.

b3) 4 e3 Bb4 5 Bd3 c5 is already pleasant for Black: 6 dxc5 0-0 intending ...Nbd7.

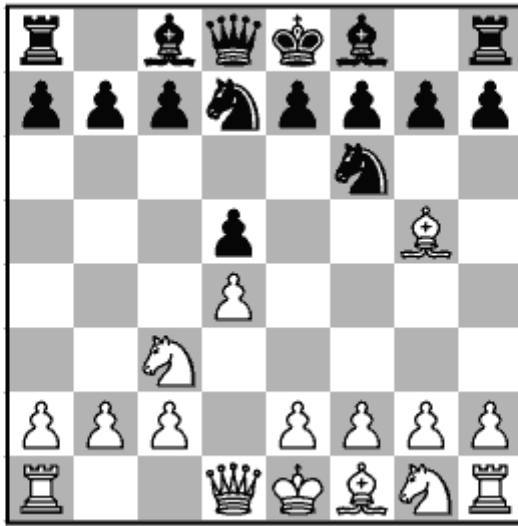
b4) 4 Nb5 (addressing the 'clumsy knight' issue) 4...Na6 5 e3 (5 a3 Be7 intending ...0-0 and ...c5) 5...Be7 (Black normally kicks the knight back with 5...c6 but there is no need for this just yet) 6 Nf3 0-0 and then:

b41) 7 c4?! c5 is a skirmish Black is ready for.

b42) 7 a3 c5! 8 dxc5 (8 c3 Nh5! 9 Be5 f6 10 Bg3 Bd7 makes it clear why h3 is a more useful move than a3) 8...Bd7! 9 b4 Bxb5 10 Bxb5 Nxc5 (Meessen-Rodshtein, European Clubs Cup, Novi Sad 2016) is a neat tactic.

b43) 7 h3 c6 (7...c5 8 c3 and a4 leaves White better organized) 8 Nc3 c5! (Bortnyk-Sarana, Moscow 2015; hitting d4 at a time when White can't play c3) looks fine for Black, with ideas of ...Ne4 or ...Nb4-c6, while an exchange on a6 just opens lines for Black's major pieces.

3...Nbd7 (D)



White to play

With this move, Black covers everything and neutralizes the f3 plan (as we shall see), leaving White with little more than turgid plans of development.

4 f3

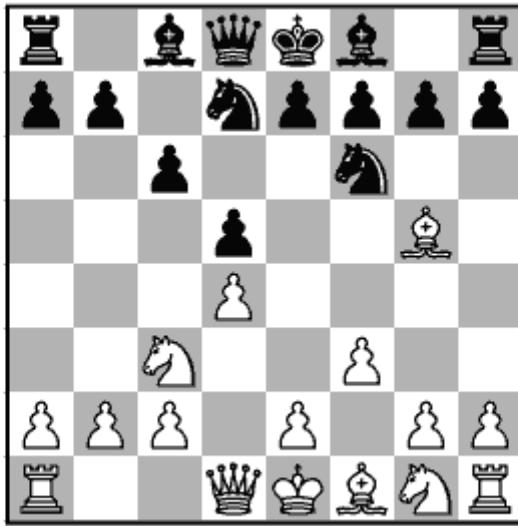
This is the traditional main line and leads to some nicely thematic play – for Black! Other moves fall mostly into the turgid bucket:

- a) 4 f4 e6 (intending ...Bb4) 5 a3 is a bizarre idea, to which 5...c5 6 e3 Qa5 7 Qd2 cxd4 8 exd4 Bb4 is one good answer.
- b) 4 e3 g6 5 Bd3 (5 Qf3?! Bg7! 6 Nxd5?? Nxd5 7 Qxd5 c6 followed by ...Qa5+, picking off the bishop – a beautiful little trap!) 5...Bg7 6 f4 (6 Nge2 0-0 and any attacking attempts by White look frankly rustic, while Black is not short of plans and pawn-breaks) 6...c5 7 Nf3 and now 7...c4 8 Be2 b5 is far from Black's only plan, but does enable him to get rolling on the queenside without delay.
- c) 4 Nf3 g6 5 e3 Bg7 and here:

c1) 6 Bd3 plans an e4 advance, which 6...c5 pre-empts. After 7 0-0 0-0 8 a4 b6 one curious line is 9 a5 (9 Ne5 Nxe5 10 dxe5 Ng4 11 Be2 d4 is fully OK for Black, Vyzhmanavin-Novikov, Jurmala 1983) 9...bxa5 10 Qb1 cxd4 11 exd4 Nb8 intending ...Nc6.

c2) 6 Be2 0-0 7 0-0 (7 Ne5 c6) 7...c6 and the fact that White has tried almost every legal move in this position suggests that he has no natural plans. 8 h3 is met by 8...b5 (Khasangatin-Yandemirov, Kazan 2017), while 8 a4 prevents ...b5 but invites 8...Re8 and ...e5.

4...c6! (D)



White to play

Not just because it is a move we often play in our repertoire; there is a very specific tactical point.

5 e4 dxe4 6 fxe4

6 Qd2 seeks gambit play, but 6...h6 7 Bh4 e6! (Ostojić-Segal, Bucharest tt 1970) 8 fxe4? Nxe4 is a nice answer.

6...e5!

What have we said about ...d5 and ...e5? White's problem is the loose bishop on g5:

a) 7 dxe5 Qa5 is good for Black after 8 Bxf6 (or 8 exf6 Qxg5, Alburt-Tal, USSR Ch, Baku 1972) 8...gxf6 9 e6 (9 exf6? Ba3!) 9...Ne5! (9...fxe6 is good too) 10 exf7+ Kxf7 11 Qh5+ (11 Nf3 Ba3!) 11...Kg7 12 Qh4 Bb4 13 Qg3+ (13 Ne2 Rd8) 13...Kf7 14 0-0-0 Be6 with a very strong attack.

b) 7 Nf3 Qb6 (*D*) and then:



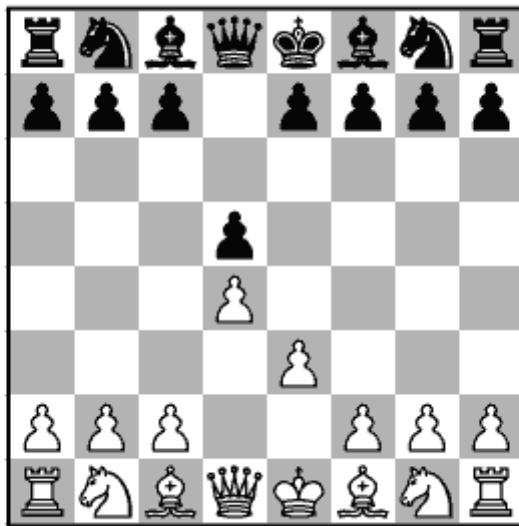
White to play

b1) 8 dxe5 Qxb2 9 Bd2 Ng4 10 Rb1 Qa3 11 e6 fxe6 12 Ng5?! (12 e5 Bc5 13 Ne4 Ne3 with some advantage for Black) 12...Nde5 13 Nb5 Qe7 14 h3 a6! and White is running out of ammo.

b2) 8 Qd2 exd4 9 Nxd4 Bb4 10 Nf5?! (10 0-0-0 0-0 11 Re1 Re8 12 Nf5 Qc5 and Black is the one playing for the advantage, Zaugg-Soares, corr. 2016) 10...Nxe4! (a move worth noting, since in practice Black has missed it four times out of four so far!) 11 Qe2 Nf6 12 Nd6+ (12 Bxf6? Bxf5) 12...Bxd6 13 Bxf6 Qf2+ 14 Qxf2 Nxf2 and Black emerges on top.

C)

2 e3 (D)



Black to play

This looks – and is! – insipid, but to avoid being ‘move-ordered’ we should play...

2...Bf5

2...c6 3 c4 is a Slav where we are too late to take on c4 – not a disaster, but outside our repertoire.

Our plan with the text-move – as in many such lines in this repertoire – is to develop the bishop actively (rather than locking it in with ...e6) while preparing to answer a later cxd5 with ...exd5. This avoids a locked and symmetrical structure like those you get in the Exchange Slav. The plan sometimes requires a little tactical ingenuity, but the reward, if successful, is an unbalanced position with no bad pieces.

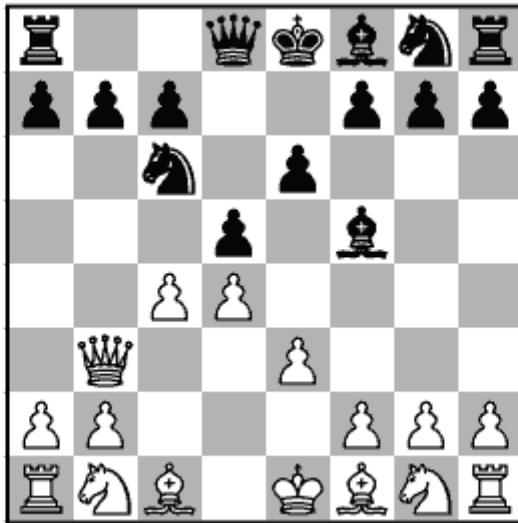
3 c4 e6 4 Qb3

Seeking to take advantage of the bishop’s absence from the queenside. Other moves:

- 4 Nc3 c6 5 Nf3 transposes to Line [F4](#).
- 4 cxd5 exd5 doesn’t help White since it takes ideas of tracking down the f5-bishop with Nf3-h4 off the table.

4...Nc6 (D)

4...b6 is playable too.



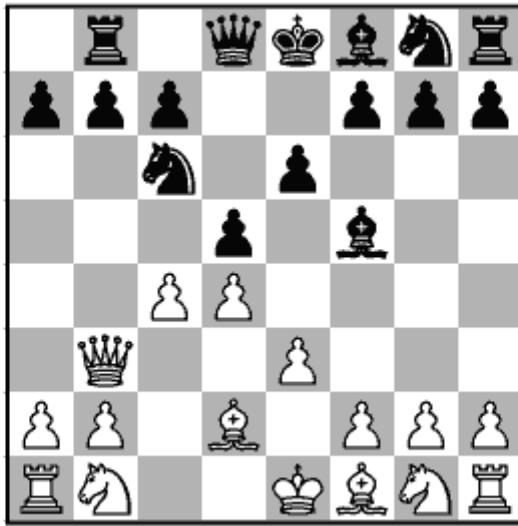
White to play

5 Bd2

Covering b4. Otherwise:

- a) 5 Qxb7? Nb4 leaves the queen in deep trouble: 6 cxd5 (6 Na3 a6!) 6...Rb8 7 Bb5+ Ke7 8 d6+ Kxd6. This is one of those lines it is nice to know works, so a mental note is recommended!
- b) 5 Nc3 Nb4 6 e4 dxe4 7 a3 is best answered with 7...Nc6 8 Nge2 a6 9 Be3 Nf6.
- c) 5 a3!? a6 6 Nf3 Nf6 (6...Na5 7 Qa4+ c6 8 c5 b5 is another idea) 7 Nc3 dxc4 8 Bxc4 Bd6 (8...Na5 9 Qa4+ c6 is playable) 9 Nh4 0-0 10 Nxf5 exf5 11 Be2 Rb8 (now the pawn requires direct defence) occurred in B.Thompson-Mirkowski, corr. 2017, and is a type of situation known from the Slav: the doubled f5-pawn restrains e4, which limits the c1-bishop. With open lines and piece-play, Black is OK.
- d) 5 cxd5 exd5 (5...Qxd5!?) is a very safe option and sets the trap 6 Qxb7?? Nxd4! 6 Bd2 (6 Qxb7?! Nb4 7 Bb5+ Ke7 8 Nc3 a6! followed by ...Rb8 is difficult for White) 6...Rb8 7 Ne2 Nf6 8 Nf4 is a line Black could have avoided by taking with his queen on d5, but 8...h6 9 Be2 (9 Nc3 Nb4 10 Rc1 g5 leads to unclear play) 9...a6 10 Bf3 Ne7 is far from bad for Black.

5...Rb8 (D)



White to play

6 Nf3

After 6 cxd5, 6...Qxd5 is again an option.

6...Nf6

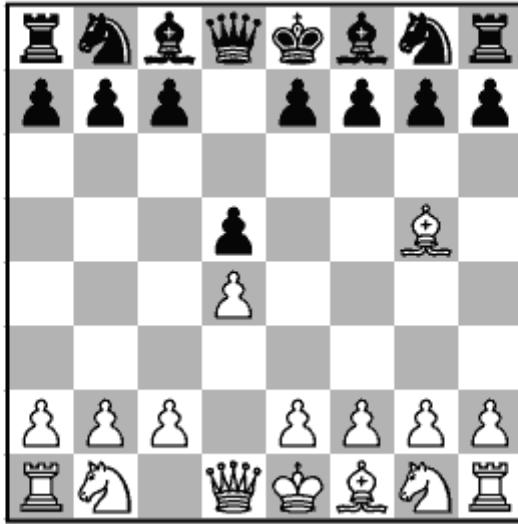
When putting the knight on f6 in this type of position, Black should have a plan in mind for how to deal with an attack on his active bishop. That is very much the case here:

a) 7 Nh4 Be4!? 8 Nc3 (8 f3? falls into a nice trap: 8...Bxb1 9 Rxb1 g5) 8...Bb4 9 cxd5 (9 Nxe4?! is poor because of 9...Nxe4 10 Bxb4 Qxh4 11 g3 Nxg3! 12 fxg3 Qe4 13 Rg1?! Nxb4) 9...Bxd5 and a little pirouette has brought the bishop to a good post.

b) 7 Nc3 h6 (preserving the active bishop) 8 Qa4 (intending Ne5; 8 cxd5 exd5 9 Bb5 Be7 10 Ne5 0-0! politely asks what White's pieces think they are doing) 8...Nd7!? 9 cxd5 Nb6 followed by ...exd5 leaves Black solid.

D)

2 Bg5 (D)



Black to play

An odd-looking move popularized by Hodgson, and taken up by many Trompowsky players. But despite Julian's ingenuity, it remains a stab into empty space.

2...h6 3 Bh4 c6

This cautious-looking move has some interesting points. ...Qb6 will now unpin the e-pawn with gain of time, while the loose bishop on h4 can become surprisingly relevant. This is not Black's only good response to 2 Bg5, but it also ties in with the line 2 Nf3 c6 3 Bg5, which is part of our repertoire too.

Instead 3...c5 4 dxc5 leads to wilder play.

4 e3

Or:

a) 4 Nf3 transposes to Line [E1](#).

b) 4 Nc3 abandons ideas of c4 in favour of piece-play. 4...Qb6 5 Rb1 Bf5 (solid, but 5...e5 6 dxe5 Ne7, as in Bricard-Collas, French Team Ch 2005, is far from silly) 6 e3 (6 f3?! e5! 7 dxe5 {V.Okhotnik-Pataki, Zalakaros 2006} 7...Nd7! gives White problems, since 8 e4 dxe4 9 fxe4 Bxe4! 10 Nxe4?! Qb4+ is a new version of a standard tactic) 6...e6 leaves Black extremely solid, with easy and healthy development.

4...Qb6 (D)



White to play

Black unpins the e-pawn with gain of time, and sets up a concealed tactic against the loose h4-bishop, which immediately comes into play if White defends the b2-pawn.

5 Qc1

Other moves:

- a) 5 Nf3 Qxb2 6 Nbd2 transposes to note 'b' to White's 5th move in Line F1.
- b) After 5 Bd3?!, 5...e5! is even better than grabbing the pawn.
- c) 5 Nd2 Qxb2 6 Bd3 isn't an impressive gambit, as White lacks activity and open lines. 6...Nd7 7 Ngf3 (7 c4?! e5!) 7...e6 (Minasian-Sturua, World Seniors, Bucharest 2019) with ...Be7 and more development coming next.
- d) 5 b3 e5! 6 Nf3 e4 and Black grabs a useful space advantage:
 - d1) 7 Ne5?! Ne7! 8 Be2 Nf5 9 Bg3 (9 Bg4 Nxh4! 10 Bxc8 h5! and suddenly the e5-knight is in grave danger; then 11 g3 Qc7 12 Bh3 f6 13 gxh4 fxe5 is terrible for White) 9...Bd6 and White is struggling to avoid a serious disadvantage.
 - d2) After 7 Nfd2 the flexible move 7...Be6!? has scored well:
 - d21) 8 c4 Nd7 9 Be2 (9 Nc3 Ne7; 9 c5 Qa5 10 a3 g5) 9...Ne7 10 f3 (10 0-0 g5 11 Bg3 Nf5) 10...exf3 11 Bxf3 Nf5 12 Bf2 Nf6 13 0-0 Rd8 14 Nc3 Bb4 and Black's pieces are working well.
 - d22) 8 f3 exf3 9 Nxf3 (9 Qxf3 Be7) 9...c5 and Black develops harmoniously.

5...e5 (D)



White to play

Our motto in the QGA was that if Black can play both ...d5 and ...e5 in the opening without losing material, he should; it applies here too.

6 Nf3

6 dx_e5?? Qb4+ has occurred a couple of times in practice, but let's not name names!

6...e4

This move gets most of the attention, but 6...exd4 is perhaps a simpler solution.

7 Nfd2

7 Ne5? self-traps the knight once Black covers the g6-square.

7...Ne7!?

More ambitious than 7...Be7.

8 f3

8 c4 Nf5 9 Bg3 Be6 (Meduna-Scherbakov, Dečin 1996) and Black can be happy with his prospects.

8...exf3

Now 9 gx_f3?! is unimpressive due to 9...Nf5 10 Bf2 Be7 (Povah-Salomon, Gibraltar 2017), while after 9 Nxf3 g5 (9...Nf5 10 Bf2 Nd7 is viable too) 10 Bf2 Bg7 Black's position looks the easier to play.

E)

2 Bf4 (D)

The Modern London is the most important alternative to 2 c4 and 2 Nf3 – an amazing turnaround given that until a few years ago, it barely got a mention, being generally viewed as an inaccurate way to play

the London System! It is now regarded not only as the correct way to enter the London, but as having a variety of dynamic ideas unique to the 2 Bf4 move-order.



Black to play

2...c5

Immediately targeting the soft spots in White's set-up. It is superficially tempting to be 'consistent' and choose 2...c6, but compared to the lines with 2 Nf3 c6 3 Bf4 that are in our repertoire, White is a tempo faster here with his queenside pressure: 3 e3 Bf5 4 c4 e6 5 Qb3 is a line where White has scored well, since after 5...Qb6 6 c5!, the c7-square is covered and Black has nothing better than the undesirable 6...Qxb3 7 axb3, with strong play on the queenside.

3 e3

This possibility is one of the major points of the 2 Bf4 move-order. By delaying the move Nf3, White keeps his bishop secure from being hunted by ...Nf6-h5 and can use the tempo saved to secure his central bastion and to create queenside pressure.

Other moves are either too quiet or too wild:

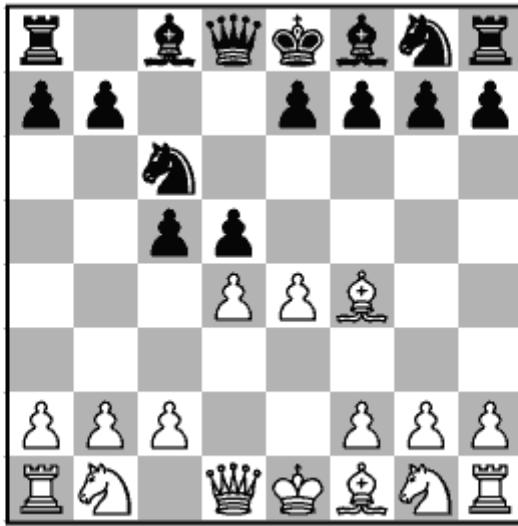
a) 3 c3 is very meek – a reversed Slav where Bf4 is not an unambiguously useful extra move. 3...Nc6 4 Nf3 (4 e3 transposes to Line E2; 4 dxc5? e5 hits the bishop) 4...Nf6 (4...Qb6 is another option) 5 dxc5 (5 e3 transposes to note '[e](#)' to White's 5th move in Line E1; 5 Nbd2?! cxd4 6 cxd4 Nh5 hunts down the bishop) 5...e6 6 b4 a5 7 b5 Ne7 is similar to lines in our Slav repertoire, and could actually transpose (with no extra tempo for White) after Black gains a tempo on the f4-bishop:

a1) 8 Be5 Ng6 9 Bd4 is such a transposition (note '[d](#)' to White's 8th move in Line E52 of Chapter 3), but now we're playing the white side! The conclusion was 'unclear'.

a2) 8 Bd6 Ne4 9 e3 Nxd6 10 cxd6 Ng6 11 c4 Bxd6 and Black can be happy.

b) 3 dxc5 Nc6 4 Nf3 (4 e4 transposes to line '[c1](#)') 4...e6 (4...f6!?) 5 e3 Bxc5 6 c4 Nf6 7 Nc3 0-0 leaves Black a full tempo up on a major line of the QGD, as his bishop took directly on c5 rather than going via e7.

c) A reversed Albin with 3 e4 was once viewed as a useful surprise weapon, but Black should be quite happy to see it. 3...Nc6 ([D](#)) is a good response:



White to play

c1) 4 dxc5 Nf6 5 e5 (5 exd5?! Nxd5 makes the bishop look clumsy on f4) 5...Ne4 (Reddmann-Huschenbeth, Hamburg 2010) is clearly a good outcome of the opening for Black.

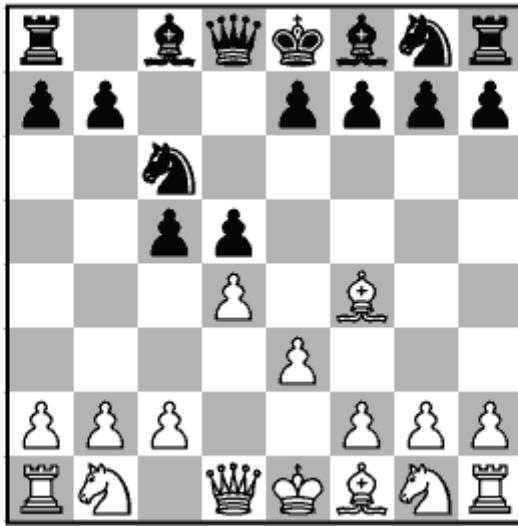
c2) 4 Nc3 cxd4 5 exd5 (5 Nxd5?! e5; after 5 Nb5?! e5 6 exd5 exf4 7 dxc6, as in Ritzen-E.Grünfeld, corr. 1916, 7...Bb4+ 8 c3 Qe7+ 9 Qe2 dxc3 works out well for Black) 5...dxc3 6 dxc6 Qxd1+ 7 Rxd1 bxc6 and only tactics stop White being worse: 8 Bc7 e6 9 Rd8+ Ke7 10 b3 Nf6 11 Ne2 (11 Ba6 Bb7 12 Rxf8 Bxa6 is a funny sequence that gives White nothing) 11...Nd5 12 Ba5 c5! 13 g3 (13 Nxc3?! Nxc3 14 Ba6 Bb7) 13...Bb7 14 Rxa8 Bxa8 15 Bg2 g6 16 Nxc3 Bg7 with an unbalanced but roughly equal ending.

c3) 4 exd5 Qxd5 5 Nc3 Qxd4 and then:

c31) 6 Be3 looks silly but transposes to an Albin line (i.e. 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e5 3 Nc3 exd4 4 Qxd4 Nc6 5 Qxd5 Be6) with no extra tempo. Then a safe option is 6...Bg4 and after whichever liquidation White chooses, Black will be very comfortable.

c32) 6 Nd5 e5 and White must play very precisely just to survive: 7 Nc7+ Kd8 8 Nxa8 exf4 9 Nf3 Qxd1+ 10 Rxd1+ Bd7 11 Bb5 Kc8 12 0-0 (Winants-Michalczak, European Ch, Dresden 2007) 12...Nh6!? 13 Rfe1 f6 14 Nd2 (14 Re4 Nf5) 14...Nf7 15 Nc4 Nfe5 16 Bxc6 Bxc6 17 Nxe5 fxe5 18 Rxe5 and in practice Black's bishops will prove hard to blunt.

3...Nc6 (D)



White to play

Now we have two main lines:

E1: 4 Nf3

E2: 4 c3

4 Nc3?! is angling for Nb5 but looks rather pointless after 4...cxd4 5 exd4 Bf5.

E1)

4 Nf3

White returns to standard London lines.

4...Nf6

As White has left his bishop more exposed to attack, this move is now more tempting. Instead 4...Qb6? (our response to 4 c3) 5 Nc3! shows the benefit of developing rapidly.

5 Nbd2!?

A move that should be taken seriously, as it has been used recently by some good players.

Most other moves are very slow and run into either ...Qb6, ...Nh5 or simple development with ...cxd4 followed by ...Bf5, etc.:

a) 5 Nc3?! cxd4 6 exd4 Bg4 is just good for Black.

b) 5 c4?! Bg4 is a skirmish for which White is ill-prepared: 6 Qb3 Na5! 7 Qa4+ Bd7 8 Qd1 e6.

c) 5 h3 is a traditional and very slow interpretation of the London System, just preserving the bishop. Black can simply develop, but 5...Qb6 6 Nc3 c4 is an interesting way to seek the initiative.

d) 5 Be2 can be answered in various ways, including the simple 5...cxd4 (5...Nh5 and 5...Bg4 are also very playable) 6 exd4 Bf5 7 c3 e6 intending ...Bd6, which even 8 Qb3 does not deter: 8...Bd6 9 Qxb7 (9 Bxd6 Qxd6 and ...0-0 with no problems for Black) 9...Bxf4 10 Qxc6+ Kf8 with excellent compensation; e.g., 11 Na3 g5 or 11 0-0 h5.

e) 5 c3 Nh5!? (D) (5...Qb6 is standard and very much OK) and then:

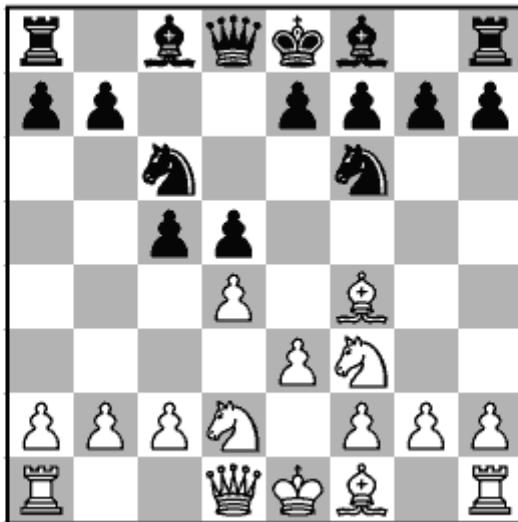


White to play

e1) 6 Be5 f6 7 Bg3 Qb6 8 Qb3 (8 Qd2 Be6!? covers the d-pawn and retains several possible development plans) 8...Nxe3 9 hxg3 e6 10 Bd3 (Windhausen-Williamson, corr. 2017) is equal after any normal move, but there is also 10...c4!? 11 Qxb6 axb6 12 Rxh7 Rxh7 13 Bxh7 Kf7 14 Bc2 b5, when Black's queenside play is worth more than White's extra g-pawn.

e2) 6 dxc5 Nxf4 7 exf4 e6 8 b4 and now 8...g6!? (intending ...Bg7) is one of several interesting ideas; e.g., 9 b5 Na5 10 Qd4 f6 (Chocenka-Loinjak, corr. 2017) intending ...Qc7 or ...Bd7 and ...Rc8.

We now return to 5 Nbd2!? (D):



Black to play

5...cxd4

5...Nh5 6 dxc5 is White's main idea, though not too terrifying.

5...Qb6 6 dxc5 Qxb2 7 Rb1 Qc3! 8 Bb5 should be OK for Black, but is messy; if the 5 Nbd2 line remains topical and becomes heavily analysed, you may want to look further into this option.

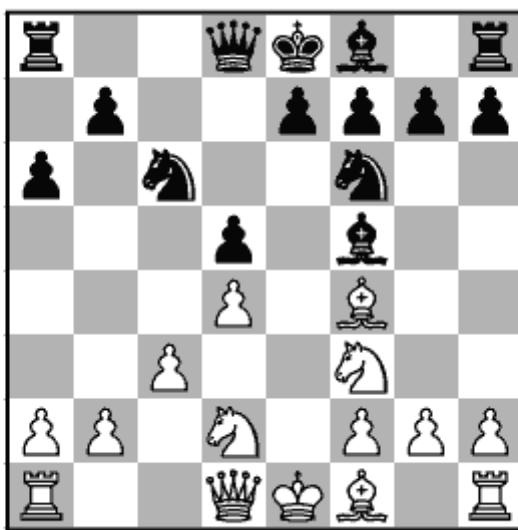
6 exd4 Bf5

This simple approach is by far the most practical.

7 c3

7 Bb5 Rc8! (avoiding 7...Qb6 8 c4 dxc4 9 a4) 8 Ne5 (8 c4 dxc4 is fine for Black) 8...Qb6 (Guichard-Dragičević, Melbourne 2017) with no obvious problems for Black.

7...a6! (D)



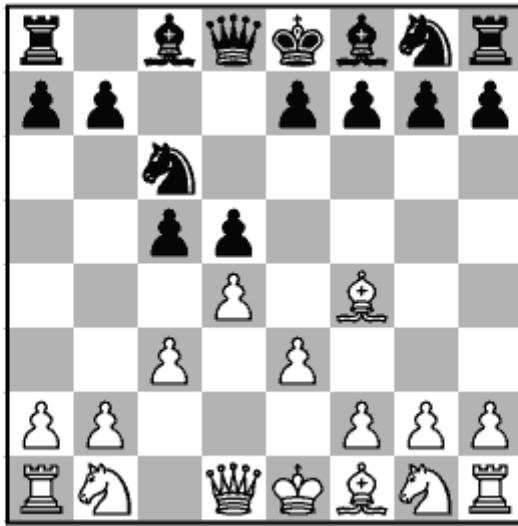
White to play

Preventing Bb5 and parrying Qb3 ideas too. Now:

- 8 Qb3 Na5 (8...b5? 9 a4!) 9 Qd1 e6 and normal development.
- 8 Ne5 Nxe5 (8...h6 is safer) 9 dxe5 Nd7 10 g4 Bg6 11 h4 h5 12 e6 fxe6 13 Nf3 hxg4 14 Bd3 (Naiditsch-Idani, Sharjah 2017) is scary, but 14...Be4 15 Ng5 Nc5 holds things together.
- 8 Nh4 Bg4 9 Qb3 b5 (9...Na5 10 Qc2, as in Kamsky-Riazantsev, Moscow rapid 2019, offers White more play) and a4 will be well met by ...b4! now that the d4-pawn is loose; e.g., 10 h3 Bh5 11 g4 Bg6 12 Nxg6 hxg6 13 a4 b4! 14 cxb4 (14 a5 e6) 14...Nxd4 15 Qc3 Qb6 16 Bxa6 (16 Be5 Nc6 17 Bxf6 and both recaptures lead to interesting play) 16...Nxc4 17 0-0 e5 with a remarkably messy position for such a famously quiet opening. Chances are roughly equal.

E2)

4 c3 (D)



Black to play

This represents the Modern London approach. Black must be on his toes, but does have interesting ways to seek counterplay if he is willing to play very energetically.

4...Qb6

4...f6 is interesting but risky. 4...Bf5 is a solid alternative, meeting 5 Qb3 with 5...Qd7.

5 Qb3

Or:

a) 5 Na3 c4 leaves the knight looking misplaced on a3.

b) 5 Qc2 is very meek, with one good reply being 5...g6 6 Nf3 Bg7 (6...Bf5 7 dxc5! Qxc5 8 Qb3 0-0-0 9 Nbd2 is interesting but not so safe for Black) 7 Nbd2 Bf5 8 Qb3 (8 dxc5?! Qxc5 9 Qb3 now runs into 9...e5, while after 8 Bd3 Bxd3 9 Qxd3 Qxb2 10 Rb1 Qxa2 11 Qb5 Qa6 Black defends comfortably) 8...c4 9 Qa3 (9 Qxb6 axb6 is pleasant for Black, as usual) and now 9...Bf8 is awkward for White, as long as Black meets 10 Ne5 with 10...f6!.

5...c4 6 Qc2 (D)

6 Qxb6?! axb6 offers Black such pleasant play on the a-file (e.g., 7 Na3? e5! 8 Nb5 Ra5) that White should immediately change the structure with 7 e4, though 7...Nf6! 8 e5 (8 exd5 Nxd5 9 Bg3 b5 10 Na3 Rxa3!? 11 bxa3 Nxc3 is very tough for White to defend) 8...Ng8 9 Na3 Bf5 leaves Black with a structural edge.



Black to play

6...e5!

Not 6...Bf5? 7 Qxf5! Qxb2 8 Qxd5, which is complex but very good for White.

7 dxe5

7 Bxe5 Bf5 8 Qc1 (8 Qd2 Nxe5 9 dxe5 Rd8 intending ...f6) 8...Nxe5 9 dxe5 f6 (Khasangatin-Triapishko, Russian Team Ch, Sochi 2018) also offers Black good compensation; e.g., 10 Nf3 fxe5 11 Nxe5 Bc5 12 Be2 Nf6 13 Nd2 0-0 14 Nef3 Rae8 15 0-0 (15 Nd4?! Bd3!) 15...Bxe3 16 fxe3 Qxe3+ 17 Kh1 Ng4 18 Ng1 (18 Nd4 Nf2+ 19 Rxf2 Qxf2) 18...Nxh2!.

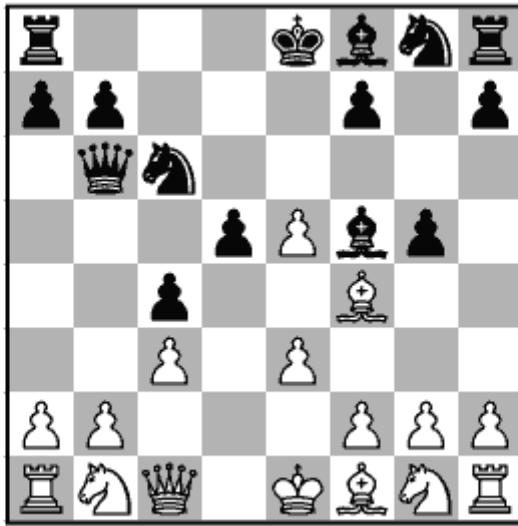
7...Bf5

With the path from f5 to d5 blocked, this is now good.

8 Qc1

White must avoid 8 Qxf5? Qxb2, while 8 Qd2 f6 also offers Black good play; e.g., 9 Nf3 g5 10 Bg3 h5.

8...g5 (D)



White to play

9 Bxg5

9 Bg3 is met by 9...h5, when 10 h4?! g4! (Turzo-Kantor, Budapest 2019) leaves White cramped, while after 10 h3 Black has a number of ways to secure interesting play. For instance, 10...Bg7 11 Nf3 Nh6!? 12 Nbd2 h4 13 Bh2 g4 14 Nxh4 Be6 with good compensation.

9...Nxe5

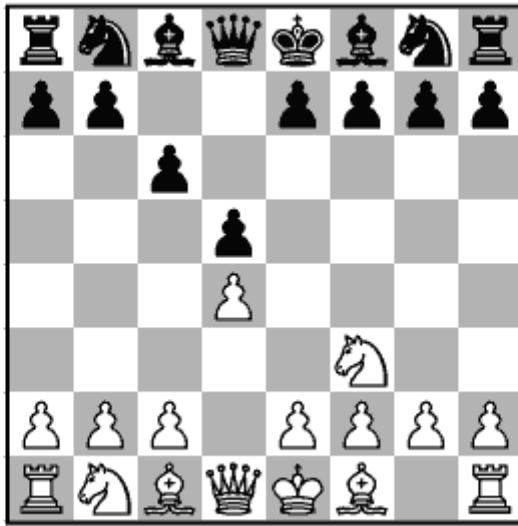
Black has ample play for the pawn: 10 Nd2 (10 Nf3?! Nxf3+ 11 gxf3 f6; 10 Bf4 Nd3+ 11 Bxd3 Bxd3 12 Nf3 Bg7 13 Be5 Qg6) 10...f6 11 Bf4 Ne7 12 b3 (after 12 Bxe5 fxe5 13 Ngf3, as in Boschma-Garscha, corr. 2012, 13...Bg7 seems best) and now there are various ideas, including 12...Rg8, 12...N7g6 13 Bxe5 fxe5 14 bxc4 d4 and 12...0-0-0 13 bxc4 Nd3+ 14 Bxd3 Bxd3 15 c5 Qa6!? with a potent initiative.

F)

2 Nf3

Keeping Black guessing as to whether White really will play a Queen's Gambit.

2...c6 (D)



White to play

This move is necessary to stay within the Slav part of our repertoire if White follows up with 3 c4. It is also not a bad move at all: it allows for ...Qb6, supports the centre (which will come under attack sooner or later) and leaves the king's knight flexible. On the other hand, it removes ideas with a quick ...c5.

Now:

F1: 3 Bg5

F2: 3 g3

F3: 3 Bf4

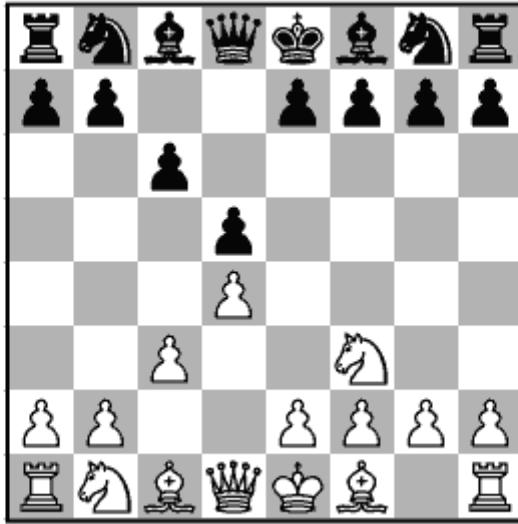
F4: 3 e3

Other moves:

a) 3 c4 dxc4 transposes to Chapter [3](#).

b) 3 Nc3 Nf6 (preventing any transpositions to the Caro-Kann with e4) 4 Bf4 (4 Bg5 Ne4!) is an inflexible form of the London System where the knight on c3 gets in the way of White's plans. Then 4...Qb6 5 Na4 Qa5+ 6 c3 doesn't help Black's prospects, but 4...Nbd7 is a good answer, covering e5 and preparing ...Nh5. 5 e3 (5 g3 h6!? intending ...g5 and ...Bg7) 5...Nh5 6 Bd3 (6 Be5 Nxe5 7 Nxe5 g6 8 Be2 Nf6 with the bishop-pair) 6...Nxf4 7 exf4 g6 and although White has some space, Black should be happy with his chances.

c) 3 c3 (*D*) is very stodgy.



Black to play

3...Bf5 at least avoids total symmetry since after 4 Bf4 e6 Black can delay ...Nf6 for a while, at least until he has secured the f5-bishop's future. Then:

c1) 5 e3 Bd6 6 Bxd6 (6 Qb3 Bxf4 7 Qxb7?? Qc7 8 Qxa8 Bd6 and White will lose material; 6 Ne5?! f6; 6 Bg3 Bxg3 7 hxg3 Nd7) 6...Qxd6 7 Qb3 Nd7 and Black has no problems.

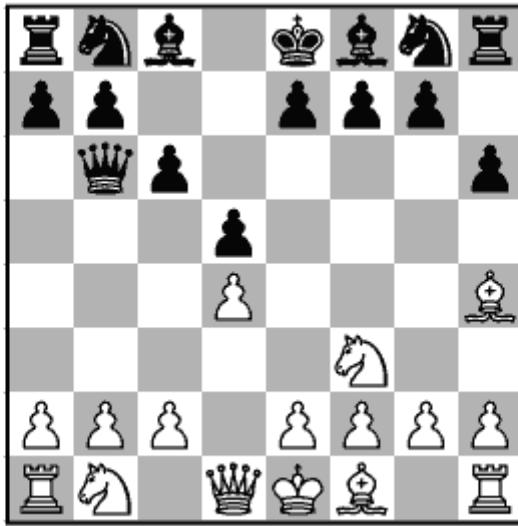
c2) 5 Nbd2 h6 6 Qb3 Qb6 7 e4!? (an attempt to make at least something happen) 7...Bxe4 (7...dxe4 8 Nc4 Qxb3 9 axb3 exf3? 10 Nb6 is the point) 8 Nxe4 dxe4 9 Nd2 Nf6 10 Qc2 Nbd7 11 0-0-0 Be7 12 Nxe4 0-0 with an unbalanced position, though both players had to work to make this happen!

F1)

3 Bg5 h6 4 Bh4

This might be dubbed the Torre-Slav! It's a position that can also arise in our repertoire from the 2 Bg5 move-order.

4...Qb6 (D)



White to play

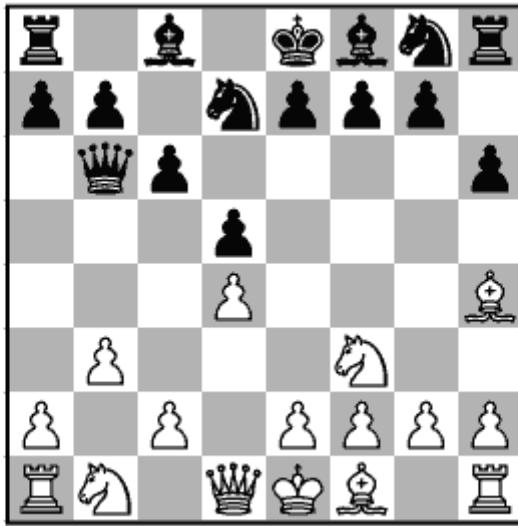
5 b3

This is the most popular move here (unlike in Line D), given that defending the pawn with the queen loses a pawn. However, it weakens the queenside and allows Black several good answers. Instead:

- a) 5 e3 Qxb2 6 Nbd2 transposes to line '[b](#)'.
- b) 5 Nbd2 Qxb2 6 e3 (6 e4 dxe4 7 Nxe4 Nf6! gives Black rapid development) 6...e6! (White doesn't have enough for the pawn here, but in practice Black must be a little careful; 6...Nd7 7 c4 e6 8 a4 is an example of a line where White can get dangerous play) 7 Bd3 (7 Rb1 Qxa2 8 Bd3 Qa5 evacuates the queen with White's 'ammo' depleted; 7 a4 Qc3 with ...c5 coming soon; 7 c4 Qa3 8 Be2 Ne7!? intending ...Nf5) 7...Be7 8 Bg3 Nf6 9 0-0 Qa3 10 e4 0-0 and Black is doing well as he can choose how and when to open lines.
- c) 5 Qc1 looks suspiciously like a blunder of a pawn in view of 5...g5 6 Bg3 g4 7 Ne5 Qxd4, but in fact several GMs have played it deliberately as White on a number of occasions. However, White's compensation isn't too impressive. 8 c4 Bg7 9 e3 Qc5 10 Nd2 Nf6! (after the more common 10...Nd7 11 Nd3 followed by cxd5 White gets real compensation) 11 Nd3 (11 cxd5 Qxc1+ 12 Rxc1 Nxd5 13 e4 Nb6 14 Be2 h5 and Black is a pawn up for not a whole lot, Vasile-Boldysh, corr. 2009; 11 Be2 Ne4 12 Nd3 Qa5 13 b4 Qb6 14 c5 Qd8 is also unconvincing for White, Söderberg-Eastoe, corr. 2014) 11...Qa5 12 cxd5 (12 b4 Qd8 doesn't help White) 12...Ne4! and Black takes over the initiative.

5...Nd7 (D)

Continuing the theme of trying to play ...e5. There is plenty of choice here. 5...Nf6!? has its logic, given that an exchange on f6 will leave White more vulnerable on the light squares now that he has played b3. Also 5...c5!? is yet to be tried, but appears fully playable.



White to play

6 e3

6 c3 discourages ...e5 but is otherwise feeble. 6 Bg3 stops ...e5 but invites 6...Ngf6 and ...Ne4.

6...e5 7 Be2

7 dxe5?! Nxe5 8 Nxe5 Qb4+ is of course Black's idea, while 7 Bg3 e4 8 Ne5 Ne7 intending ...Nf5 is attractive for Black.

7...e4 8 Nfd2 Ne7

8...Be7 is good too.

However, the text-move (8...Ne7) is clearly fine for Black:

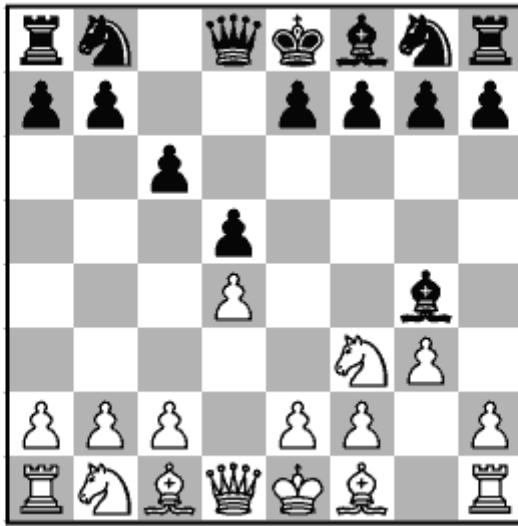
- a) 9 Bg4?! (Tristan-Slipak, Argentine Ch, Saenz Pena 2013) 9...h5! 10 Bxh5 (10 Bh3?? Ng6) 10...c5! is unpleasant for White, with his centre under attack and his bishops tangled up; e.g., 11 c3 cxd4 12 cxd4 Nf5 13 Bg5 Nxd4!, winning.
- b) 9 c4 Nf5 10 Bg3 Nxg3 11 hxg3 Nf6 and there is little to like about White's game.
- c) 9 f3 exf3 10 Bxf3 and any reasonable plan of development leaves Black comfortable.

F2)

3 g3

This is especially important due to transpositions from the Réti.

3...Bg4 (D)



White to play

Both a good move, *and* consistent with our [repertoire](#) vs 1 Nf3.

4 Bg2

The alternative is 4 Ne5 Bf5:

a) 5 c4 e6 (Black wants to be able to meet cxd5 with ...exd5, Qb3 with ...Qb6 and to delay the development of his king's knight for the time being so as to make e5 a less secure square for the white knight) 6 Qb3 Qb6 7 c5 is one instance where the right answer is 7...Qxb3 8 axb3, as 8...f6 9 Nf3 Na6 offers Black good counterplay in all parts of the board.

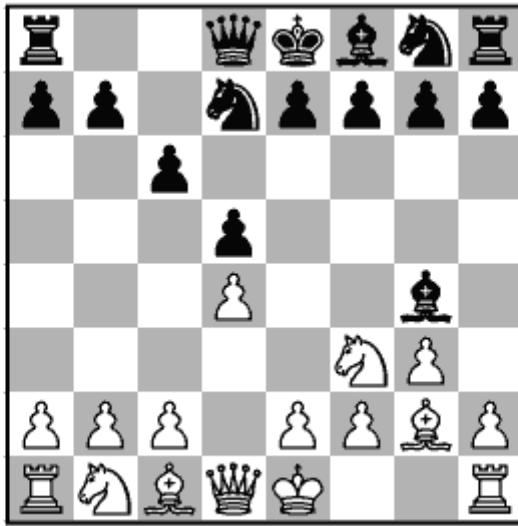
b) 5 Bg2 Nd7 and then:

b1) 6 Nd3 Ngf6 with excellent development.

b2) 6 Nxd7 Qxd7 can hardly be a problem for Black; e.g., 7 Bf4 (7 0-0 Nf6 8 Nd2 e6 intending ...Bd6) 7...h6!? is not just a useful move, but preparation for ...g5 and ...Bg7.

b3) 6 0-0 e6 7 c4 (7 Nd2 Ngf6 8 Ndf3 is dealt with most simply by 8...Nxe5 9 Nxe5 Nd7) 7...Ngf6 and before long White will have to address Black's idea of exchanging on e5. 8 Nc3 (8 Qb3 Qb6 is OK since White isn't ready to follow up with c5) 8...Be7 9 h3 (9 Qb3 Qb6 10 Nxd7 Nxd7 11 e4 dxe4 12 Nxe4 Nf6 is equal) 9...h6! and it is hard for White to make progress in any part of the board; e.g., 10 cxd5 exd5 and now 11 f3 Nxe5 12 dxe5 Nd7 or 11 g4 Bh7 12 f4 Bd6.

4...Nd7 (D)



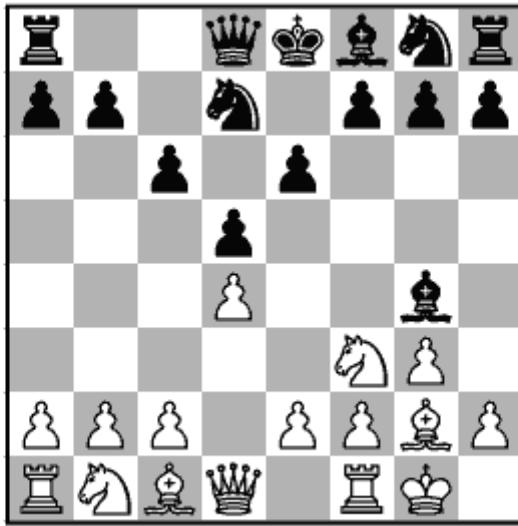
White to play

5 0-0

5 c4 e6 (it is a major part of our plan to recapture with the e-pawn on d5) 6 Qb3 Qb6 and then:

- a) As in most such cases, 7 Qxb6?! axb6 gives Black a nice compact structure (as he will meet cxd5 with ...exd5) and pressure on the a-file.
- b) 7 c5 and here 7...Qa6 (as in Ekeberg-Dvirny, European Clubs Cup, Rhodes 2013) intending ...b6 is an interesting alternative to exchanging queens (which is also completely satisfactory).
- c) 7 Nc3 Ngf6 8 0-0 Be7 and here:
 - c1) 9 Re1 0-0 10 c5?! and now 10...Qxb3! 11 axb3 b6 12 b4 a5 is a very good option: 13 b5 cxb5 14 c6 Bxf3 15 Bxf3 b4 16 Nb5 Nb8, as in Voronin-Sospedra, corr. 2014.
 - c2) 9 Bf4 h6!? 10 c5 Qxb3 11 axb3 g5 12 Be3 Ne4 offers Black kingside counterplay.
 - c3) 9 c5 Qa6 10 Re1 b6 11 cxb6 axb6 12 e4 0-0 makes it hard for White to open lines, which he needs in order to stop Black expanding on the queenside. 13 exd5 Nxd5 (Theodorou-Miton, Greek Team Ch, Achaea 2016; 13...cxd5 invites 14 Nh4!?) 14 Nxd5 cxd5 and Black is no worse.

5...e6 (D)



White to play

6 Nbd2

Or:

a) 6 h3 gives Black the option of 6...Bxf3 7 Bxf3 f5 with a good version of the Stonewall that has scored well in limited but high-quality practice.

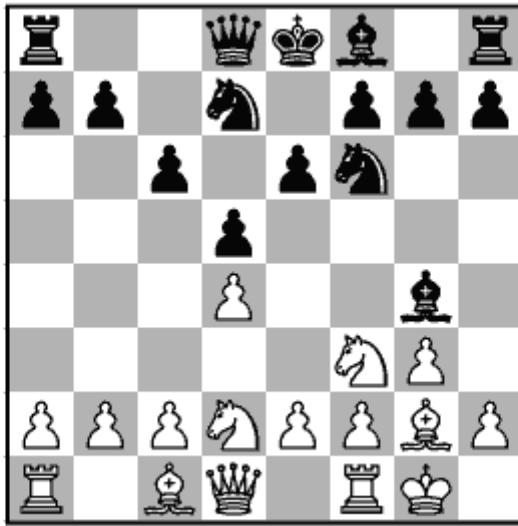
b) 6 c4 Ngf6 and now:

b1) 7 Nc3 is well met by 7...dxc4 – White can't take too many liberties with this pawn!

b2) 7 Qb3 Qb6 8 c5 (8 Nc3 transposes to note '[c](#)' to White's 5th move above) 8...Qa6!? 9 Bf4 b6 10 cxb6 axb6 (Teterev-Zhilgalko, Belarus Ch, Minsk 2014) 11 Rc1 Rc8 12 Nc3 Be7 leaves Black solid.

b3) 7 b3 settles into a Catalan/Réti-type set-up with none of the pressure and with Black ideally developed. He has a wide choice, but should probably play ...h6 fairly soon to ensure his bishop a strong role on the h7-b1 diagonal. Otherwise, just play chess!

6...Ngf6 (D)



White to play

Obliging White to use his rook if he wants to play e4.

7 Re1

7 h3 Bh5 8 Re1 Be7 9 e4 h6!? 10 e5 Nh7 transposes to note 'b' to White's 9th move, while 7 c4 looks inconsistent with the previous move, which was apparently aiming for a central strategy. After 7...Be7 8 Qb3 Qb6 we have a familiar situation but with White's queenside pieces less active.

7...Be7 8 e4

8 c3 seeks to stay flexible, but the e4 advance is really the only game in town.

8...h6!?

This approach is more interesting than exchanging on e4, and also scores better.

9 c3

Otherwise:

a) 9 exd5 cxd5 offers White very little.

b) 9 e5 Nh7 10 h3 Bh5 will transpose unless White tries something like 11 c4 Ng5 12 Qb3, when 12...Nxf3+ 13 Nxf3 Qc7!? 14 cxd5 cxd5 intending ...Nb8-c6 is fully OK for Black.

9...0-0 10 e5

After 10 Qb3 Qc7 11 exd5 cxd5 White fails to prove the black queen is misplaced: 12 Nf1 Bf5 13 Bf4 (Yandemirov-Izoria, St Petersburg 2002) 13...Qc6!? 14 Ne5 Nxe5 15 Bxe5 Ng4 16 Bf4 (threatening Bxd5) 16...Rfd8 with a solid position and good prospects.

10...Nh7 11 h3 Bh5 (D)



White to play

White has so far failed to cast any doubt on Black's odd-looking scheme of kingside counterplay: 12 Nf1 (12 g4 Bg6 13 Qe2 Rc8 intending ...c5) 12...c5 (12...Ng5 13 Bxg5 hxg5 is also fully viable) and then:

- a) 13 Be3 Ng5 14 g4 Nxf3+ and ...Bg6 leaves Black with no bad pieces.
- b) 13 c4 Nb6 14 cxd5 Nxd5 gives the knight a good square, and 15 Ne3 Nb4 16 a3 cxd4 17 axb4 dxe3 18 Bxe3 Bxb4 is no problem for Black either.
- c) 13 g4 Bg6 14 Ng3 Rc8 15 Be3 (15 Bf4, as in Mamedov-Elianov, Khanty-Mansiisk Olympiad 2010, has the idea of meeting 15...cxd4 with 16 Nxd4 but is far less appropriate versus 15...Ng5!) offers Black several good options, including 15...cxd4 16 Bxd4 (16 cxd4 Nb6) 16...Nc5 17 Qd2 (Colas-J.Wang, Saint Louis 2019) 17...Ng5.

F3)

3 Bf4 (D)



The traditional form of the London System. Compared to the 2 Bf4 lines, Black has played the slow ...c6, while White's Nf3 is inflexible and makes it easier for Black to go after the f4-bishop.

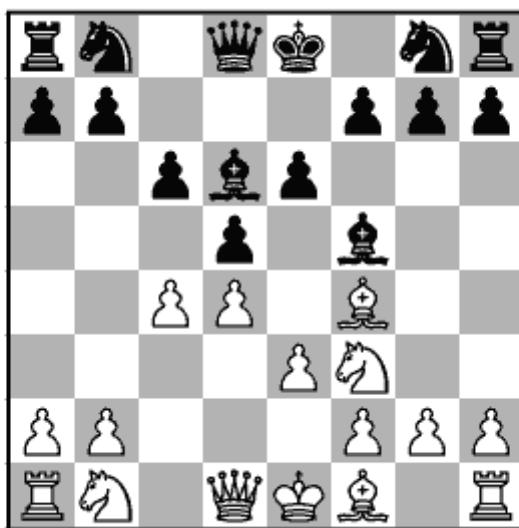
3...Bf5

Black seeks to equalize by the most direct means, namely ...e6 and ...Bd6; by doing so before playing ...Nf6, he denies White a stronghold on e5 and can use the tempo to cover his queenside if need be. I'll briefly outline why other moves are less convincing:

- a) 3...Qb6 4 Qc1 is not necessarily ideal for Black, since on c1 the queen supports the c4 advance, with c5 then an idea, gaining time and space.
- b) 3...Nf6 is tempting, with follow-ups like ...Qb6 and ...Nh5 in mind, but it is hard to make it work in any convincing way after 4 e3 Qb6 (or 4...Nh5 5 Be5) 5 Qc1 Nh5 6 Be5.

4 c4!?

4 e3 allows Black to use our main plan, 4...e6 5 c4 Bd6 (*D*), when there is little reason for White to claim any real advantage.

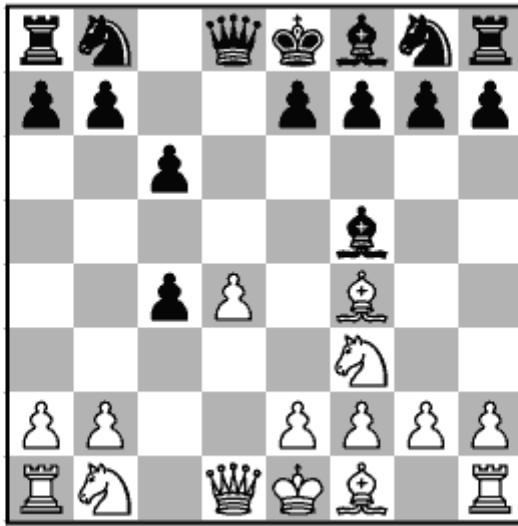


For example, 6 Bxd6 Qxd6 7 Qb3 (7 Nc3 Nd7 8 Nh4 Bg6 gives White nothing much; remember that in almost all cases Black will recapture on d5 with his e-pawn and seek central and kingside play) 7...Nd7 and now White should avoid 8 Qxb7?! Rb8 9 c5 (9 Qxa7? Qb4+) 9...Rxb7 10 cxd6 Rxb2, while after 8 Nc3 Rb8 Black has everything under control.

With the text-move, White reverts to Queen's Gambit mode, which demands a different response:

4...dxc4 (*D*)

4...e6?! is too slow in view of 5 Qb3 Qb6 6 c5, when White retains his powerful bishop and Black has to play 6...Qxb3 7 axb3, with an unpleasant defence ahead.



White to play

5 Nbd2

Or:

- a) 5 Nc3 Nf6 transposes to a minor line of the Slav where Black is OK. 6 Ne5 (6 e3 Nd5) 6...e6 7 Nxc4 (7 f3 Nd5 also hits the loose bishop) 7...Nd5 and White is far from executing the e4 advance, given lines like 8 Bg3 Nd7 9 f3? b5.
- b) 5 e3 b5 6 Be2 offers Black several viable options, including 6...e6 (6...Nf6 7 a4 Nd5 8 axb5 cxb5 9 Nc3! Nxc3 10 bxc3 Nd7 11 Ra6 gives White more play, but is also unclear) 7 0-0 a5 8 a4 Bb4!, ready to give up bishop for knight to keep the queenside pawns united.

5...b5

5...Nf6 is less challenging but also playable.

6 g3

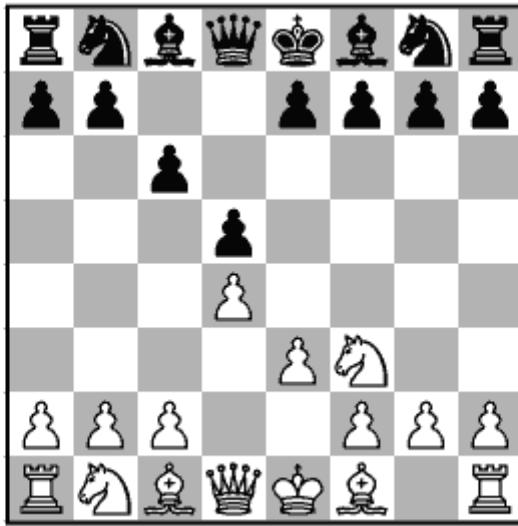
The natural 6 e4 (Barva-Molnar, Hajduboszormeny 1995) is strongly met by 6...Bg6! 7 a4 Nf6 8 axb5 cxb5 9 b3 e5!, which is extremely dangerous for White; e.g., 10 Bg5 (10 dxe5 Nxe4 11 Nxe4 Qxd1+ 12 Rxd1 Bxe4 13 bxc4 Bb4+) 10...exd4 11 e5? (11 bxc4 Bb4) 11...Bc5 12 exf6? 0-0 and the white king will be slaughtered.

6...Nd7 7 Bg2 Rc8

With an interesting fight in prospect. White won't be able to set up true Catalan-type pressure since Black has already removed most of the targets, and also because Black will get a grip on the e4-square unless White plays e4 himself, which will block his own bishop. 8 0-0 Ngf6 9 a4 a6 10 Ne5 (10 e4 Bg4) 10...Nxe5 11 dxe5 and now 11...Nd5 is playable because 12 e4 Nxf4 13 exf5 Nxg2 exploits the bishop being on f4.

F4)

3 e3 (D)



Black to play

This very quiet move hopes for a transposition to a Semi-Slav or a Slow Slav after 3...Nf6 4 c4. We shall avoid both of these using our usual formula: develop the queen's bishop and play ...e6 while leaving the knight on g8 for the time being. This provides extra time to secure the queenside and makes it hard for White to chase down the bishop with Nh4. We shall also avoid any Exchange Slav structures by answering cxd5 with ...exd5.

3...Bf5 4 c4

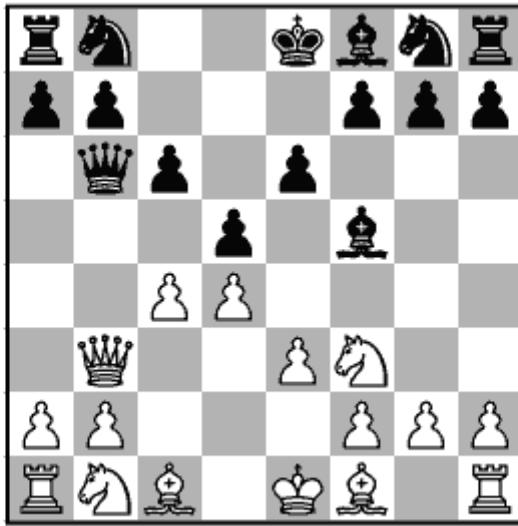
4 Bd3 Bg6 (4...e6 is viable too) and then:

- a) 5 0-0 Nd7 6 c4 (6 Nc3 Ngf6 preventing e4) 6...e6 7 Nc3 transposes to our [main](#) line.
- b) 5 Ne5 Bxd3 6 cxd3 is untried, but normal development will see Black through.

4...e6 5 Nc3

After 5 cxd5 both recaptures are OK, but our idea (and normally the right option when it exists) is 5...exd5, keeping more imbalance.

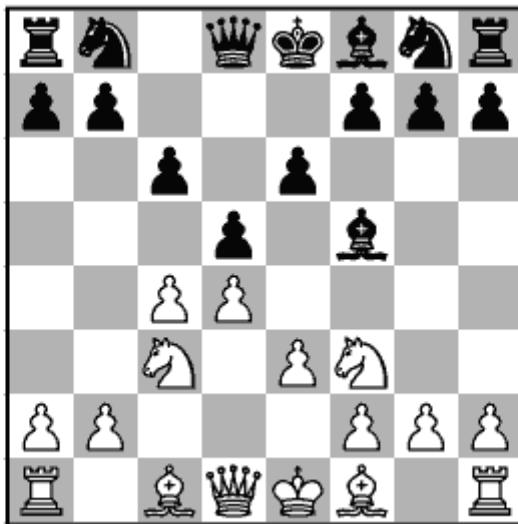
A major and typical alternative is 5 Qb3 Qb6 (*D*).



White to play

This is our standard response to Qb3 across many lines, not fearing an exchange on b6, but generally preferring not to exchange on b3 in response to a c5 advance. 6 Nh4 (6 c5 Qc7! is quite attractive for Black, as White's c5 advance loses central influence and he lacks a follow-up with Bf4; 6 Qxb6 axb6 gives Black a-file pressure and no bad pieces) 6...Be4 7 Nc3 (7 f3?? Bxb1 8 Rxb1 g5 is a snare waiting to be sprung) 7...Nf6 8 c5 (now 8 f3? Qxb3 9 axb3 Bc2 is a trap that *has* claimed a few victims; 8 Nxe4? dxе4! threatens to trap the knight, and 9 g3 Qxb3 10 axb3 Bb4+ 11 Bd2 Bxd2+ 12 Kxd2 c5! whips up strong play against the white king) 8...Qc7 is nothing for Black to fear since in the blocked position knights will be just as good as bishops.

We now return to 5 Nc3 (*D*):



Black to play

5...Nd7

By delaying ...Nf6, Black prevents Nh4 ideas, while he also prepares ...Rb8 as a response to Qb3.

Note that 5...Nf6 drops us straight into a Slow Slav, with masses of tedious theory and more than 16000 games in the databases!

6 Bd3

6 Be2 h6 (preserving the bishop makes sense, as White is playing slowly) 7 0-0 Ngf6 is a very comfortable type of QGD position for Black.

6...Bg6

This keeps a little more tension in the position than exchanging on d3.

7 0-0

7 cxd5 exd5 is as toothless an Exchange QGD as you could ask for.

7 Bxg6 hxg6 (Vajda-Nepomniashchy, European Clubs Cup, Antalya 2017) gives Black a half-open h-file to play with. It's not much, but it's something!

7...Ngf6

Black's chances are as good as White's. Now you just play chess, as they say.

5: Flank Openings (as Black)

In this chapter we focus on the Réti and the English, so the material divides rather naturally:

[**A: 1 Nf3**](#)

[**B: 1 c4**](#)

Of course, in the initial position White has 20 possible moves. Most can be dealt with using common sense, and this is as much a question of general chess knowledge as a repertoire issue, as you'll need to face these oddball moves no matter what your repertoire is against the main openings. But I'll give brief coverage of four of the more important 'other first moves', particularly noting how your responses to them might fit in with lines recommended elsewhere in this book:

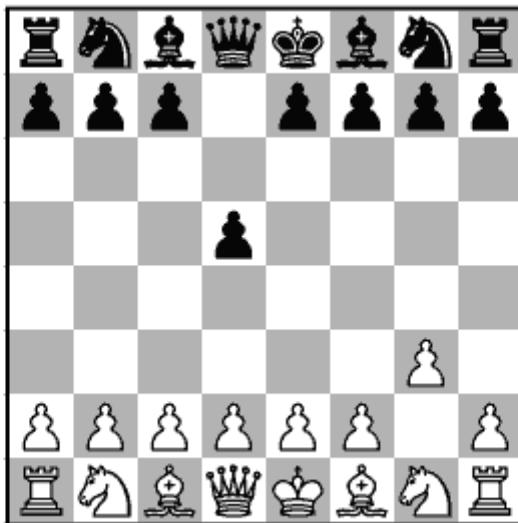
a) 1 Nc3 is a reasonable move, but straightforward to deal with from a repertoire viewpoint. 1...d5 gives White nothing better than a transposition to lines from other chapters:

a1) 2 d4 transposes to Line [B](#) of Chapter 4.

a2) 2 e4 (the most common move here by far) is note '[e](#)' to White's 2nd move at the start of Chapter 1.

a3) 2 Nf3 risks leaving White worse: 2...Nf6 3 d4 (3 d3?! c5 intends ...Nc6 and grabbing a big chunk of the centre, with the ...d4 advance a dark cloud hanging over White) and now 3...c6 transposes to note '[b](#)' to White's 3rd move in Line F of Chapter 4, but Black has other good options, including the natural 3...c5.

b) 1 g3 d5 (*D*) will tend to end up in Réti lines unless White lets Black grab a big chunk of the centre:



b1) 2 Nf3 transposes to Line [A4](#) of the current chapter.

b2) 2 c4 d4 3 Bg2 (3 Nf3 transposes to Line [A32](#); 3 b4?! e5!) 3...e5 and then:

b21) 4 Nf3 is most simply answered with 4...Nc6, again transposing to Line [A32](#), but if you don't like the idea of the opponent getting away with taking liberties, then you can play 4...e4!?

b22) 4 d3 Nc6 5 Nf3 transposes to the [note](#) to White's 5th move in Line A32.

b3) 2 Bg2 e5 (well, ...e5 and ...d5, gotta do it...) and then:

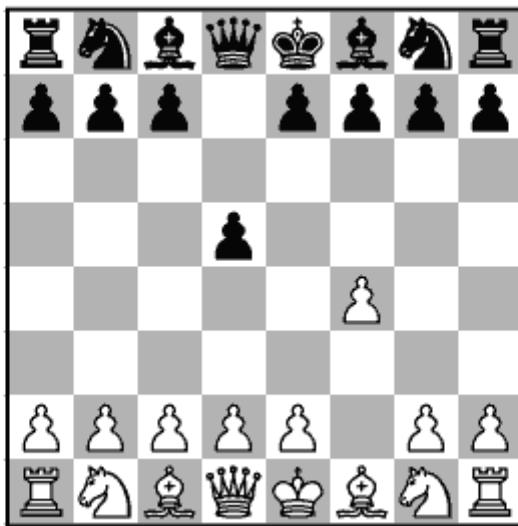
b31) 3 Nf3?! e4 4 Nd4 c5 5 Nb3 c4 6 Nd4 Bc5 7 c3 Nc6 is a reversed Chase line of the Alekhine, where the early fianchetto leaves f2 weak and reduces White's options for counterattacking Black's oversized centre.

b32) 3 d3 is a reversed Modern, where Black has a full range of set-ups to choose from; a modest one where he supports his centre and develops healthily should lead to a very satisfactory outcome:

b321) 3...c6 4 Nf3 Bd6 is an easier form of KIA for Black to handle than we see in Line [A41](#).

b322) If merely 'satisfactory' isn't to your taste, feel free to go for 3...Nc6 4 Nf3 f6, when compared to similar lines of the Pirc, the fact that White's bishop is already on g2 might mean that Black playing ...Be6, ...Qd7 and ...Bh3 will effectively gain a tempo as White will not be able to play Bf1xh3; e.g., 5 a3 Be6 6 b4 Qd7 7 Nbd2 Bh3.

c) 1 f4 d5 (*D*) is obviously a reversed Dutch, but Black can make use of his flexibility to react to White's set-up:



White to play

c1) 2 b3?! Bg4! enters a reverse of a piece-play line against the Dutch where the move b3 really doesn't fit in with any of White's logical set-ups. 3 Bb2 transposes to line '[d2](#)' of this note.

c2) 2 g3?! invites 2...h5!, when 3 Nf3 (3 Bg2 h4 puts a thorn in White's side) 3...h4! 4 Nxh4? Rxh4 5 gxh4 e5 is a line White should want nothing to do with.

c3) 2 d3 Nc6 3 Nf3 Bg4 4 Nbd2 has its logic but promises little, with 4...e6 intending ...Bd6 one good response of several.

c4) 2 e3 g6 3 Nf3 Bg7 and with his knights and c-pawn unmoved, Black will deploy to take full advantage of any drawbacks in White's set-up:

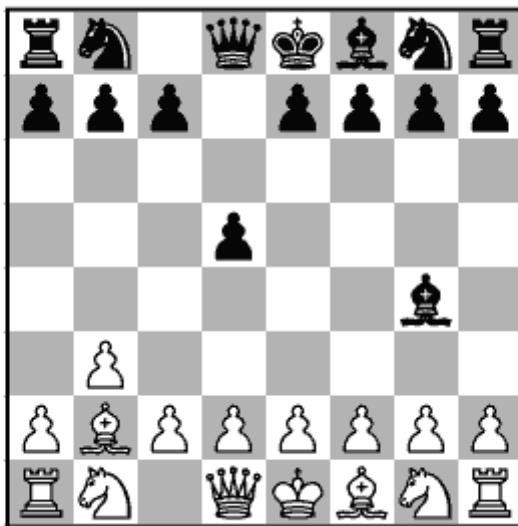
c41) 4 d3 Nc6 intends ...e5.

c42) 4 Be2 c5 (intending ...Nc6 now that Bb5 costs a tempo) 5 0-0 Nc6 6 d3 Nh6 (6...Nf6 grants White his desired reversed Classical Dutch, but White is still probably playing for equality!) 7 e4 (7 c3 0-0 8 Na3 b6 is a similar story; 7 Qe1 0-0 8 c3 with a wide and pleasant choice for Black, including the obvious 8...e5) 7...0-0 and Black has little need to resolve the central tension, and can play moves like ...b6, ...Ba6, ...Qd7, etc.

c43) 4 d4 c5 (4...Nh6 5 c4 flips the script, though still offers White little) 5 c3 Nh6 (a move that works so well against the regular Stonewall Dutch that in that opening, Black normally waits for Nf3 before committing to ...d5) 6 Bd3 Qc7 (no rush to play ...Bf5) 7 0-0 0-0 and Black's next move will be ...Bf5 unless White invites something even better.

c5) 2 Nf3 Bg4 (2...g6 is also a good move) 3 e3 (3 Ne5 Bh5 intending ...f6) 3...Nd7 with a good and flexible position for Black. He can develop normally in several different ways. 4 Be2 e6 5 0-0 (after 5 b3 Black can even get creative with 5...Qf6 6 Nc3 0-0-0 7 Bb2 h5) 5...Bd6 (5...c6!?) retains options of putting the knight on f5 and the bishop on e7) 6 b3 Ngf6 with a solid game.

d) 1 b3 d5 (the classical response 1...e5 2 Bb2 Nc6 3 e3 d5 4 Bb5 Bd6 is reliable too) 2 Bb2 and now 2...Bg4 (*D*) has much in common with ideas we use in other lines.



White to play

It looks like a stab into empty space, but it is empty space that White wants to use right now, and throwing pawns at the bishop will create weaknesses near the king. Those who open 1 b3 tend to be creative types, so you can expect all sorts of responses here.

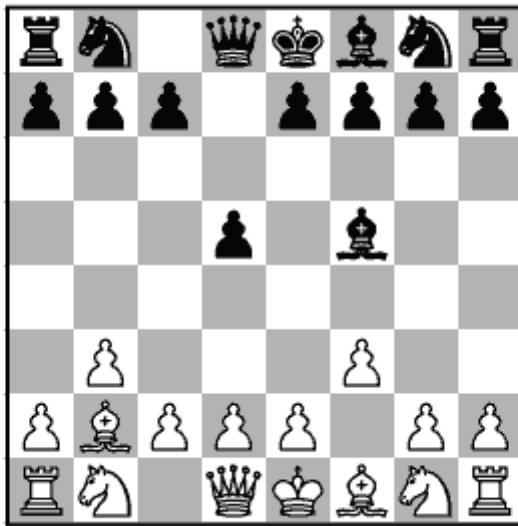
d1) 3 Nf3 transposes to Line [A1](#) of this chapter.

d2) 3 f4?! gives White a really clunky position against almost any reasonable plan of development by Black. 3...Nc6 (or even 3...Qd6 4 g3 Nc6 5 Bg2 0-0-0) 4 Nf3 Bxf3 5 exf3 e6 with ...Nge7, ...Nf5 and ...h5 likely to come soon, and White's development disjointed.

d3) 3 g3 c5 intends ...Nc6, as e3 and Bb5 isn't an issue now. Slow play will allow Black a grip on the centre, and the untested gambit 4 f3 Bf5 5 e4 dxе4 shouldn't overly worry Black, as there is no need to open lines by playing ...exf3 any time soon: 6 Bb5+ (6 Bg2 Nf6 7 Qe2 Nc6 8 fxе4 Bg4) 6...Nc6 (6...Nd7 7 Nc3 Nf6 8 Qe2 exf3 9 Nxе3 gives White enough play for the pawn) 7 Qe2 (after 7 Bxc6+ bxc6 Black

will hang on to the pawn) 7...Bd7 8 Bxc6 Bxc6 9 fxe4 e5 and White has merely regained his pawn. Gambits only tend to be dangerous when there is a strategic cost to declining them.

d4) 3 f3 Bf5 (*D*) and then:



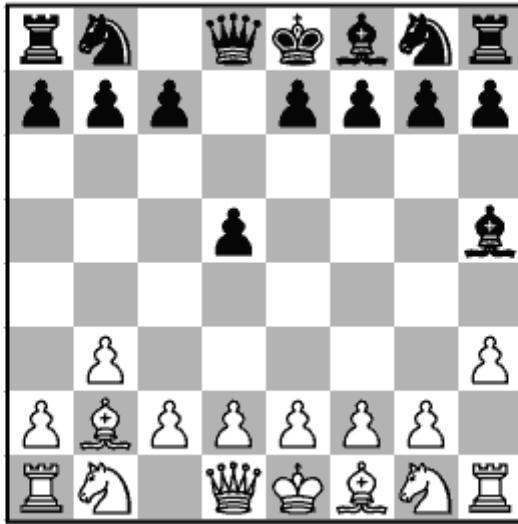
White to play

d41) 4 e4?! Bg6!? (a nice calm response, but 4...dxe4 5 Nc3 Nf6 is unlikely to offer White enough for the pawn) 5 Qe2 (5 exd5 Qxd5 is a very acceptable version of a Scandinavian for Black) 5...a6 and White's attempts to give a pawn away have saddled him with odd-looking non-development.

d42) 4 e3 e6 5 Ne2 c5 6 Ng3 Bg6 7 Bb5+ Nd7 is starting to look like a '960' game, and is very playable for Black.

d43) 4 f4 e6 5 Nf3 c5 6 e3 Nc6 7 Bb5 Ne7 leaves Black flexible and weakness-free.

d5) 3 h3 Bh5 (*D*) and then:



White to play

d51) 4 g4?! Bg6 5 Bg2 h5?! 6 g5 e5?! (a shocking type of thrust that we shall also see in the similar Réti lines) 7 Bxe5 (after 7 c4 Black has a variety of good options, including the queen ‘sacrifice’ 7...Qxg5 8 Nf3 Qxg2 9 Rh2 Qxh2 {even taking the knight is an idea, as White’s pieces are so poorly placed} 10 Nxh2 d4) 7...Nc6 (7...Qxg5 8 Nf3 is White’s little plot, though also far from clear) with excellent play for Black: 8 Bf4 Nd4 9 d3 Ne6.

d52) 4 g3 f6!? (intending ...e5, and giving the bishop a nice retreat on f7) 5 d4 e5!? 6 dxе5 fxе5 7 Bxe5?! Nc6 8 Bb2 Nf6 intending ...Bc5 with superb gambit play.

d53) 4 Nf3 is similar to one of our Réti lines, but there are some extra possibilities:

d531) 4...Bxf3 is viable despite the apparent loss of time. After either recapture it is hard for White to arrange his pawns and minor pieces so that they don’t get in each other’s way; meanwhile Black’s pieces can deploy harmoniously. 5 exf3 would lead to rapid development except for the fact that d4 – the move the queen’s knight and king’s bishop want to see – is most unwelcome for the queen’s bishop. And after 5 gxf3 the move h3 stops Bh3 ideas and makes the kingside a less secure location for the white king.

d532) 4...Nd7 5 g4 (5 e3 Ngf6 transposes to Line [A1](#)) 5...Bg6 6 Bg2 (6 Nh4?! Be4) 6...h5!? (6...c6 is also very satisfactory) 7 Nh4 Bh7 and White’s play has rather missed its target, while Black has good central play.

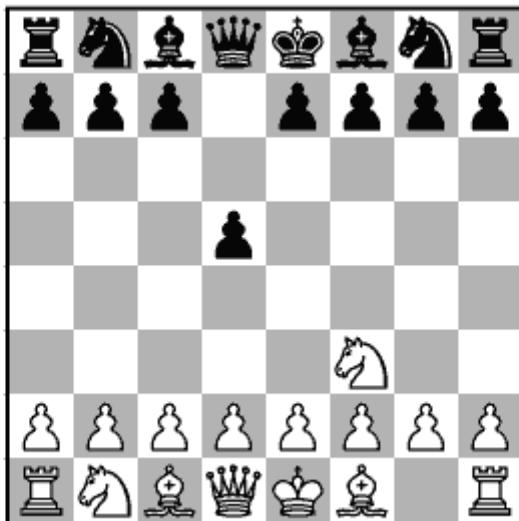
A)

1 Nf3

This move characterizes the Réti Opening, but it is a very transpositional beast, as White can follow up with d4 or c4 (or even e4 if allowed), in addition to systems with fianchettoes of either or both bishops. This puts a strain on even the best-crafted of repertoires, as we would like to avoid having to devise a completely independent set-up against each of White’s myriad options.

1...d5 (D)

This is a good solid move that fits in well with our repertoire vs 1 d4. Note that after 1...c5, angling for a Symmetrical English, 2 e4 drops us into a Sicilian!



White to play

Now it is already time to divide the material into four main lines:

A1: 2 b3

A2: 2 e3

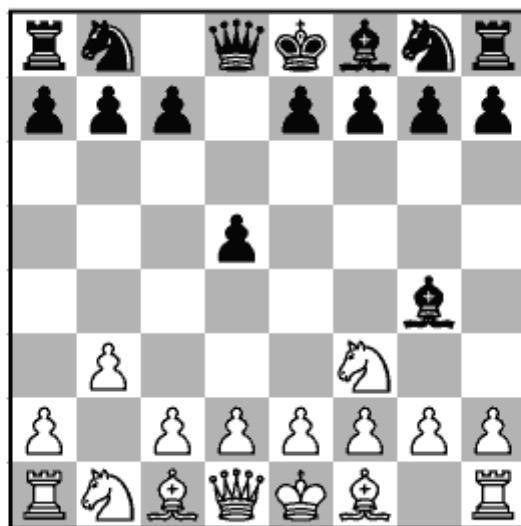
A3: 2 c4

A4: 2 g3

Naturally, 2 d4 takes us to Line **E** of Chapter 4.

A1)

2 b3 Bg4 (D)



White to play

In a reversed Trompowsky, the move b3 isn't tremendously helpful, as it doesn't gel well with either queen activation by c4 or central solidity with d4.

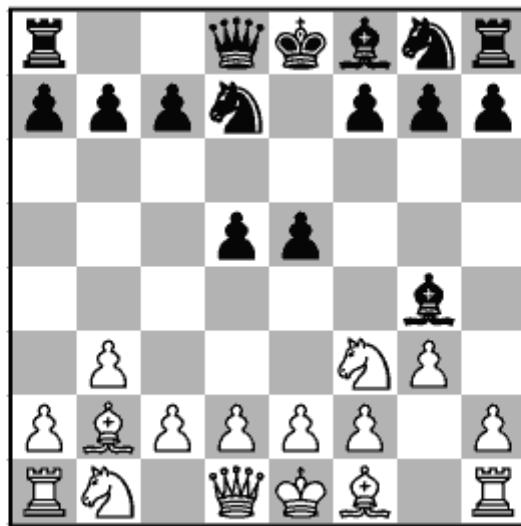
3 Bb2

Or:

- a) 3 e3 Nd7 (3...e5 is a tempting space-grab, but 4 h3 forces Black to surrender the bishop-pair without getting enough in return – arguably!) 4 h3 Bh5 5 Bb2 Ngf6 transposes to the [main](#) line of this section.
- b) 3 Ne5 Bf5 (3...h5 is not totally silly – a reversed h4 Tromp, in which the move b3 isn't ideal) 4 e3 (4 Bb2?! f6 5 Nf3 e5 with a 'diagonal block'; 4 d4 Nd7 is another line where White's development looks uncoordinated) 4...Nd7 (4...f6 5 Bd3! keeps things unclear) 5 Nxd7 (5 d4 doesn't fit well with b3) 5...Qxd7 6 Bb2 with a wide choice for Black, including even 6...h5?!, seeking space and activity on the kingside.

3...Nd7 4 e3

4 g3 e5!? (*D*) (a bold new idea!) and now:



White to play

- a) 5 Bxe5?? loses to 5...Bxf3.
- b) 5 Nxe5?! Nxe5 6 Bxe5 d4 (threatening both ...f6 and ...Qd5 – thanks to the move g3) 7 f3 Qe7 8 Bxd4 Bxf3 9 Rg1 0-0-0 with superb play for the pawn.
- c) 5 Bg2 Bd6 with a solid centre and good development.
- d) 5 h3 is most simply met by 5...Bxf3 6 exf3 (Malakhov-Motylev, Russian Team Ch, Sochi 2018) now that this exchange does more damage to White's structure, but surprisingly 5...Bf5 is feasible too: 6 Bxe5 (6 Nxe5 Nxe5 7 Bxe5 d4 8 Bg2 f6 9 Bf4 g5 10 g4 gxf4 11 gxf5 c6 is unclear) 6...Nxe5 7 Nxe5 Qf6 8 d4 Bd6 9 Nf3 Qe6 gives Black reasonable compensation for the pawn; e.g., 10 Bg2 Nf6 11 e3 (11 Nh4 Be4; 11 Ng5 Qd7; 11 c4 c6) 11...h6, keeping the pressure on.

4...Ngf6 (*D*)



White to play

5 h3

5 c4 e6 and 5 Be2 e6 are likely to transpose.

5...Bh5

Now:

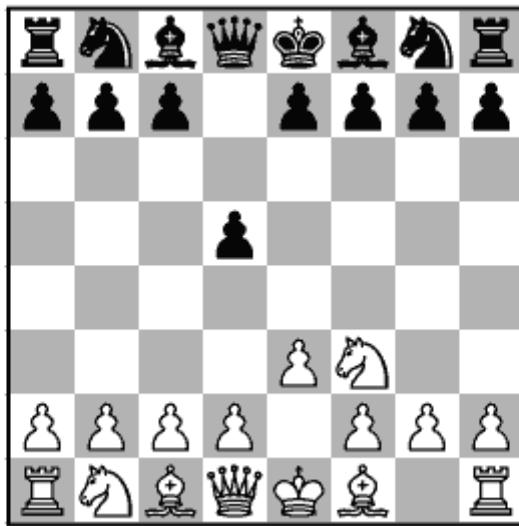
a) 6 c4 is most simply answered with 6...e6.

b) 6 Be2 e6 7 c4 c6 8 0-0 Bd6 gives Black no problems.

c) 6 g4 Bg6 7 g5 (7 Nh4 e5 8 d3 Bc5 and with his pieces developed actively, Black has his full share of the chances) 7...Ne4 8 h4 Bh5 (avoid 8...h6? 9 h5! hxg5 10 hxg6 Rxh1 11 gxf7+ Kxf7 12 d3! – a nice trap!) 9 d3 Nec5!? (9...Nd6 10 Be2 h6 11 Nbd2 e6 12 Rg1 hxg5 13 hxg5 Bg6 14 c4 c6 15 Qc2 gives White the initiative, Artemiev-Yakovenko, Russian Ch, Izhevsk 2019) 10 Be2 h6 11 Nbd2 e6 12 Rg1 hxg5 13 hxg5 Bg6 and the pressure on d3 makes it hard for White to find an active continuation.

A2)

2 e3 (D)



Black to play

Black has many viable replies to this very meek move. However, it makes it tricky for Black to stay within our repertoire, as White can follow up with either c4 or d4. For instance, 2...Nc6 has the point that 3 c4 d4 is part of our repertoire (Line A31), but 3 d4 brings about a quiet anti-Chigorin line where it is hard for Black to prove equality: 3...Bg4 4 c4 (4 Bb5 is also annoying) 4...e5 (4...e6 is safer) 5 Qb3! (5 cxd5 Qxd5 6 Nc3 Bb4 is an improved Chigorin as Black hasn't had to exchange on f3) 5...Bxf3 6 gxf3 (Parligras-Rej, Chalkis 2010) is complex but probably good for White.

Therefore my main recommendation is:

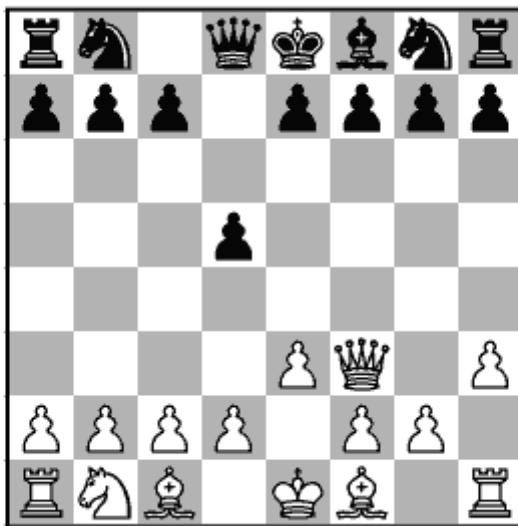
2...Bg4

It's a kind of reversed Torre or Trompowsky. In a number of lines, Black gets counterplay because his knight *isn't* already on f6.

3 c4

This is clearly the critical test. Instead:

- a) 3 b3 transposes to note 'a' to White's 3rd move in Line A1.
- b) 3 d4 e6 4 c4 (4 Bd3 c5! and Black takes over the initiative) 4...c6 is similar to other lines in our repertoire and fairly comfortable for Black; e.g., 5 Qb3 Qb6 6 c5 Qc7! 7 Ne5 Bf5, as in Vass-Khasangatin, Piestany 2005.
- c) 3 h3 is analogous to a popular line against the Torre. 3...Bxf3 (3...Bh5?! 4 c4 e6 5 cxd5 exd5 6 Qb3 and now there is no ...Bc8 defence) 4 Qxf3 (*D*) is little-tested but should prove very solid for Black as long as he avoids the ambitious approaches used by White in the Torre and Tromp.



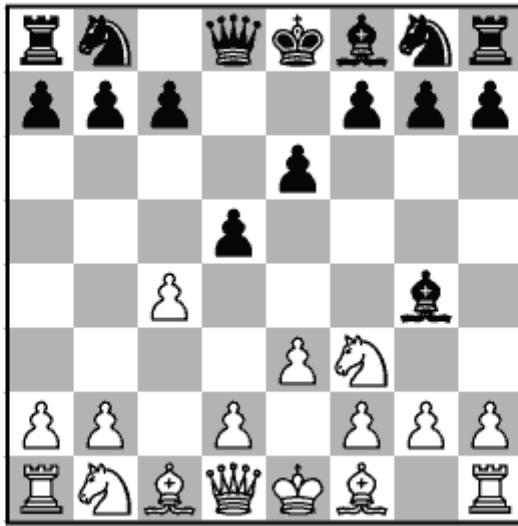
Black to play

If White plays slowly then Black's next four moves can be ...e6, ...c6, ...Bd6 and ...Nf6 in some order. There is probably little to be gained here from trying to take advantage of the knight's flexibility to choose a square other than f6. For instance, 4...Nf6 5 c4 (5 d4 e6 6 Bd3 c5 and Black takes the initiative) 5...e6 6 d4 Bb4+ (6...c5 is viable but risks opening the position for the bishops) and now:

c1) 7 Bd2 Bxd2+ 8 Nxd2 0-0 9 cxd5 exd5 10 Bd3 (Bayer-Nisipeanu, Austrian Team Ch 2016/17)
10...Qe7 leaves Black solid and prepared for either a slow or a sharp battle.

c2) 7 Nc3 c5 8 cxd5 (8 a3 Bxc3+ 9 bxc3 Nc6 looks like a good version of a Nimzo-Indian; 8 dxc5 Qa5 9 Bd2 Ne4 with good counterplay) 8...cxd4 9 Bb5+ Ke7! 10 d6+ Qxd6 11 Qxb7+ Nbd7 12 exd4 Rab8 and Black has everything under control.

3...e6 (*D*)



White to play

Black now appears to hang by a surprisingly durable thread.

4 Qb3!?

Initiating sharp and forcing play. Other moves:

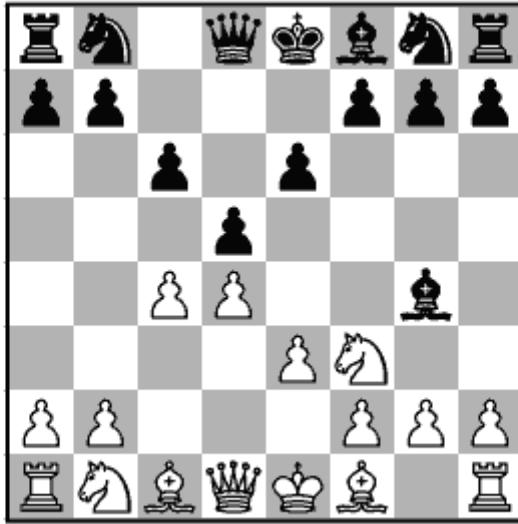
a) 4 b3?! falls into a positional trap familiar from the regular Torre: 4...d4! 5 exd4 Nc6 and Black will regain the pawn, leaving White with a backward d-pawn. 6 Be2 (6 Bb2?! Nxd4 7 Bxd4? Bxf3 8 Qxf3 Qxd4 9 Qxb7? Rd8! 10 Qb5+ c6! 11 Qxc6+ Rd7 12 Qc8+ Ke7 and Black wins – just like in a Torre line analysed by Petrosian!) and now both 6...Bxf3 7 Bxf3 Qxd4 and 6...Qf6!? 7 Bb2 0-0-0 are very acceptable for Black.

b) 4 cxd5 exd5 5 Qb3 (5 h3 allows Black the more comfortable retreat 5...Be6) 5...Bc8!? and while Black has obviously lost two tempi, White has blocked in his bishop with e3, put his queen on an odd square and made a cooperative exchange on d5 that allows all the black pieces free development.

c) 4 d4 and then:

c1) After 4...Nf6 5 Qb3 it is not too easy to find a fully satisfactory active continuation for Black, even if 5...Bxf3 6 Qxb7 Nbd7 7 gxf3 c5 (Tuma-Teske, Pardubice 2009) might intimidate some opponents and is probably objectively tenable after 8 cxd5 Rb8 9 Qxa7 Nxd5 10 Nc3 Nxc3 11 bxc3 cxd4 12 Qxd4! Qa5 13 Be2 Be7.

c2) So 4...c6 (*D*) is my tip.



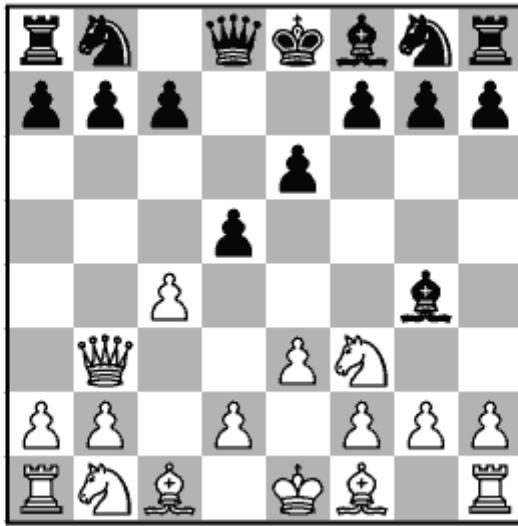
White to play

This *doesn't* transpose to lines in the Queen's Pawn chapter because there the bishop was on f5. However, the overall assessment, that Black is completely OK, remains. He has no bad pieces, can comfortably defend the b7-pawn and will recapture on d5 with his e-pawn, ensuring good piece-play. Now 5 Nbd2 Nd7, 5 Bd3 Nd7 and 5 Nc3 Nd7 all see Black covering e5 to good effect and making it hard for White to hunt down the g4-bishop. Two other moves of note:

c21) 5 Qb3 Qb6 6 Ne5 (6 c5 Qc7 is fully OK for Black) 6...Bf5 and White has achieved little; e.g., 7 g4 Bxb1 8 Rxb1 Nd7 or 7 Nc3 Bd6 8 f4 Nd7.

c22) 5 h3 Bh5 (5...Bf5 is a rare but reasonable option; this is like Line F4 of Chapter 4 but with the white pawn on h3, which may not make much difference to the assessment) 6 Qb3 Qb6 7 Ne5 (all roads seem to lead to Rome here: 7 g4 Bg6 8 Ne5 Be7 9 Nc3 Nd7 10 Nxg6 hxg6 11 Bd2 Ngf6 12 Be2 g5 transposes) 7...Nf6 (7...Bd6!?) 8 Nc3 (or 8 g4 Bg6 9 Nxg6 hxg6 10 Bg2 g5!) 8...Nbd7 9 g4 Bg6 10 Nxg6 hxg6 11 Be2 (11 g5 Ng8!?, Carlsen-Movsesian, Wijk aan Zee 2009) 11...g5 12 Bd2 Be7 13 0-0-0 and now 13...dxc4 14 Qxc4 Nd5 15 Kb1 Nxc3+ 16 Qxc3 Nf6 17 Qc2 Nd5 (Morrow-Neto, corr. 2017) offers Black enough play, while 13...Qxb3 14 axb3 0-0-0 15 f3 Ne8 (Fedoseev-Naer, Moscow 2017), intending ...Nc7 and doubling on the h-file, is also solid.

We now return to 4 Qb3!? (D):



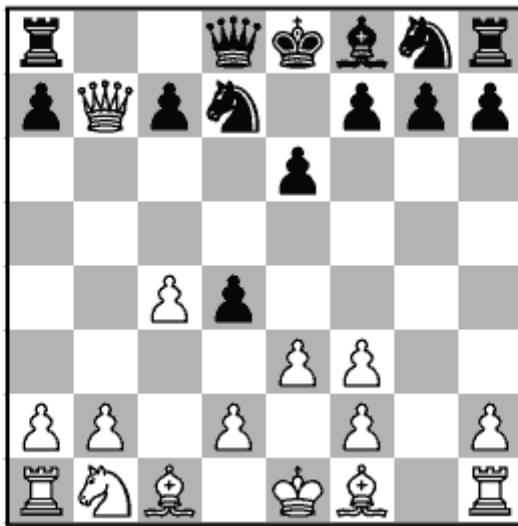
Black to play

4...Bxf3! 5 Qxb7

5 gxf3 d4! transposes after 6 Qxb7 Nd7 or 6 f4 Nd7 7 Qxb7, while 6 exd4? Nc6! 7 d5 Nd4 leaves White in deep trouble.

5...Nd7 6 gxf3 d4! (D)

A new move. 6...Rb8 7 Qxa7 Bc5 8 Qa4 d4 (Mezheritsky-Leshchenko, Kiev 2003) is possible, but I like it less in view of 9 Na3 intending Nc2; also, White can avoid this possibility by using the move-order with 5 gxf3.



White to play

The position after the text-move (6...d4!) is terribly dangerous for White. Even with computer-precise play by him, Black's compensation persists:

- a) 7 exd4?! Ne7! gives the black knights many inroads – in the analogous Torre line (i.e. 1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 e6 3 Bg5 c5 4 e3 Qb6 5 Bxf6 gxf6 6 d5 Qxb2 7 Nbd2 exd5), White's king's knight is already stuck on

the less flexible square f3.

b) 7 Qe4 c5 8 f4 Rb8 followed by ...g6 and/or ...Ne7-f5.

c) 7 b3 Rb8 8 Qe4 c5 9 Bb2 Ngf6 (good now that the queen must go to a poor square) 10 Qc2 (10 Qd3 e5 with a good centre and White's development chaotic) 10...Ne5 11 Bg2 Nc6 with good play for the pawn.

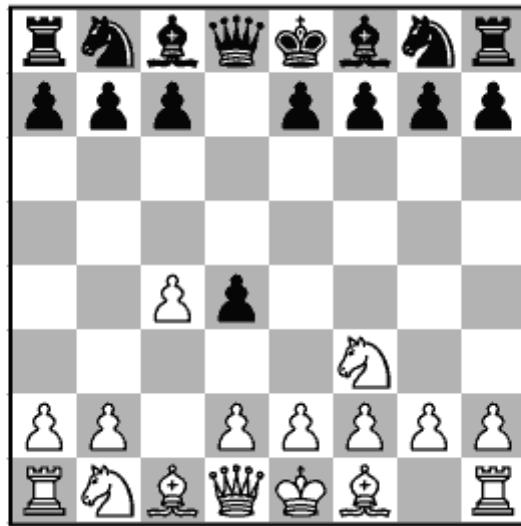
d) 7 f4 Rb8 8 Qg2 g6 intending ...Bg7 and ...Ne7; note again how much worse the knight would be on f6.

A3)

2 c4

One of the traditional main lines of the Réti.

2...d4 (D)



White to play

This space-grabbing response can be enthusiastically recommended for Black, as recent years have seen some remarkably bold and aggressive new ideas. Three moves can now be considered main lines:

[A31: 3 e3](#)

[A32: 3 g3](#)

[A33: 3 b4](#)

Minor options:

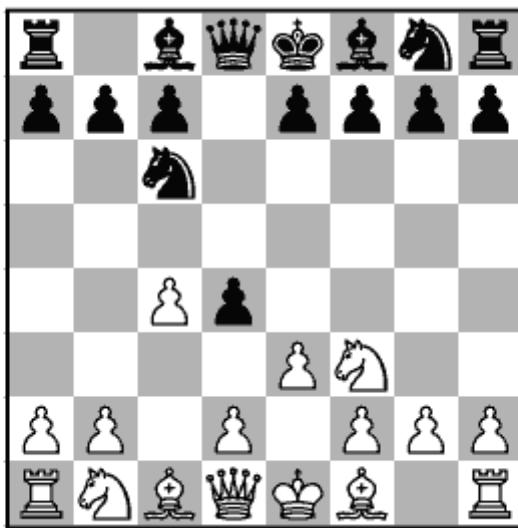
a) 3 c5?! e5! 4 Nxe5 Bxc5 leaves Black more active, Ortmann-Khenkin, Bad Wiessee 2011.

b) 3 e4?! Nc6 is a reversed Semi-Benoni where White's extra move has served to block the plans of both f4 and Be2-g4.

A31)

3 e3 Nc6 (D)

A solid reply: Black goes for piece-play and control of the d4-square. A true reversed Benoni with 3...c5 is also a good idea, but far messier.



White to play

4 exd4

4 b4 holds no terrors for Black as there is the neat reply 4...dxe3 5 fxe3 Nxb4 6 d4 (6 Qa4+ Nc6 7 d4 Bd7!; 6 Nc3 e5! 7 Rb1 e4! 8 Nxe4 Nd3+ 9 Bxd3 Qxd3 10 Nc3 Qxc4) 6...e5!, when 7 Nxe5 Qh4+ (Czarnota-Socko, Polish Team Ch, Katowice 2010) forces a king move.

4...Nxd4 5 Nxd4

5 Nc3 Bg4 6 Be2 Bxf3 7 Bxf3 c6 is comfortable for Black.

5...Qxd4 6 Nc3

6 d3 e5 and 6 Be2 e5 are similar.

6...e5!

6...c6 used to be standard, but Nb5 is of no concern.

7 d3

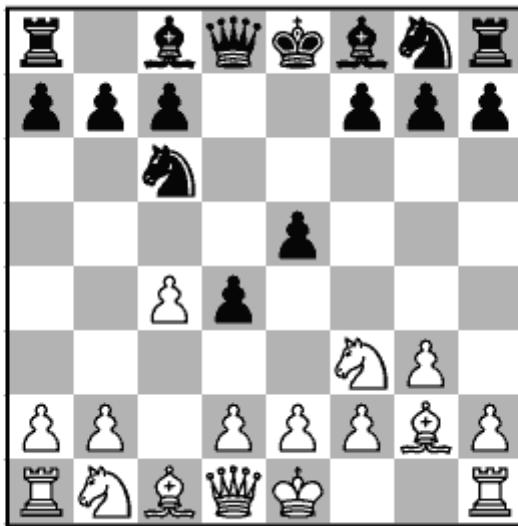
7 Nb5?! Qb6 8 Qh5 Be6! 9 Qxe5 0-0-0 (Rastenis-Taucius, Lithuanian Team Ch, Vilnius 2000) gives Black a lot of compensation, while 7 Nd5?! Bd6 8 d3 Ne7 gets White nowhere, and after 7 Be2 Ne7 8 0-0 Nf5 (Iturriaga-Matlakov, Moscow 2017) it is hard even to kick the queen out of d4.

7...Ne7

This position holds no terrors for Black. Indeed, White can easily end up worse; e.g., 8 Be3 (8 Be2 Be6 9 Qb3 Qb6 is safe for Black, Bukić-Kennaugh, Bled 1994) 8...Qd6! (the most active square; while White can kick the queen, he only misplaces his own pieces in the process) 9 Qf3 (9 Be2 Nf5; 9 Nb5 Qd8) 9...Nc6 10 0-0-0 Qg6 11 Be2 Be6 intending ...0-0-0 with good play for Black.

A32)

3 g3 Nc6 4 Bg2 e5 (D)



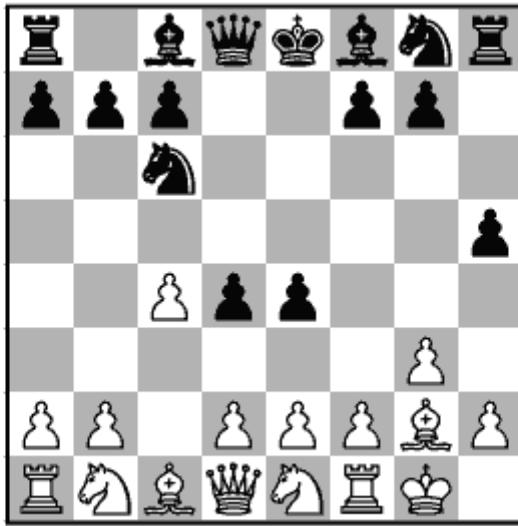
White to play

This looks like it should be rock-solid for White, but Black has interesting play.

5 0-0

5 d3 Bb4+! is a disruptive check familiar from the Schmid Benoni. After both 6 Nbd2 a5 and 6 Bd2 a5 White has a difficult game because the piece lodged on d2 really gunks up his development. In the latter case 7 0-0 (7 a3 Be7 8 0-0 Nf6 9 Bg5 0-0 is just a bad Benoni for White; his score in practice from here is terrible) 7...Nf6 8 Na3 (8 Bxb4 axb4 puts White under positional pressure) 8...0-0 9 Nc2 leaves Black spoilt for choice, with 9...Bxd2 10 Qxd2 Qd6, intending 11 e3 dxе3 12 Nxe3 Rd8 (E.Popov-Mirkowski, corr. 2015), one good option.

5...e4!? 6 Ne1 h5! (D)



White to play

While this looks like a cavalier gambit, it gives Black much stronger play than you might expect.

7 d3

The obvious 7 Bxe4 may even be dubious: 7...Bh3! 8 Qb3 (8 Bg2 Qd7 with a rather obvious plan of attack!; 8 Ng2 is yet to be played, so here is a sample line: 8...Qd7 9 d3 Nf6 10 Bf3 Ng4 11 Nd2 h4 12 Nxh4 Be7 13 Ne4 Nge5! 14 Re1 0-0-0! with a crushing attack) 8...Qc8! (D) and then:



White to play

- a) 9 Qb5 (Hawkins-N.Pert, London Knockout 2015) 9...Nf6! 10 Bxc6+ bxc6 11 Qxc6+ Bd7 12 Qf3 c5! with masses of compensation.
- b) 9 d3 Bxf1 10 Kxf1 Nf6 11 Bg2 h4 still with an attack.
- c) 9 Bg2 h4 is untested, but the main question is not whether Black is OK but if White can survive; e.g., 10 d3 Bxg2! 11 Nxg2 Qd7! (calmly preparing to bring up the reserves) 12 Nxh4 (12 Qxb7? Rb8 13 Qa6 hxg3 14 fxg3 Rb6 adds a rook to the attack) 12...0-0-0 and Black will bombard the kingside with

everything he's got: 13 f4 g5! 14 Nf3 (14 fxg5?! Rxh4! 15 gxh4?! Qg4+ 16 Kh1 Bd6) 14...gxf4 15 Bxf4 Bh6 16 Bxh6 Nxh6 17 Nbd2 Qe7 and White is unlikely to survive.

We now return to 7 d3 (D):



Black to play

7...e3!

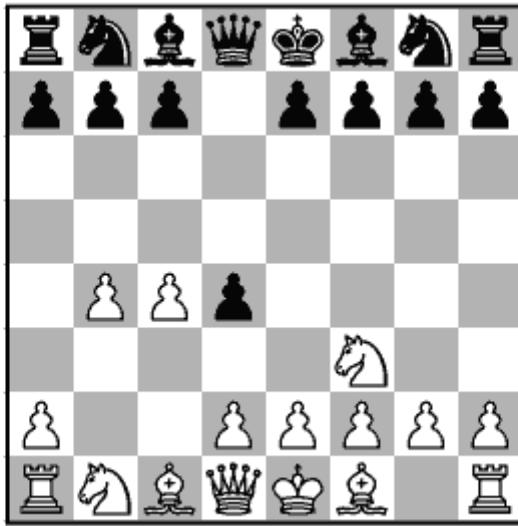
Again Black's plan is simple: all-out attack! 7...h4 8 dxe4 gives White more defensive options.

8 fxe3 h4

While White has managed to draw some correspondence games from here, his task over the board is unpleasant; e.g., 9 gxh4 (9 exd4 Nxd4 10 e3? hxg3 11 hxg3 Nf5 is already desperate for White, Gareev-Morozevich, St Petersburg rapid 2018) 9...Qxh4 10 Bxc6+ (10 Nf3?! Qh5 11 exd4 Nxd4 12 Bf4 Bc5) 10...bxc6 11 Nf3 Qg4+ 12 Kf2 (12 Kh1 c5!) and now it is possible to go all-in with 12...Rhx2+, but the computers tell us this should end in a draw. Instead 12...c5 gives Black very good play for the pawn.

A33)

3 b4 (D)



Black to play

White grabs queenside space, and it looks like Black will be the one fending off his opponent's dynamic flank aggression. However, our repertoire move turns that script on its head:

3...g5!? (D)

A surprising idea that was unknown before 2011. However, I have no qualms about recommending this move: it has been tested in high-level games, scoring very well, and is supported by computer analysis. The idea is to gain space on the kingside. White can win a pawn, but at the cost of allowing Black to advance aggressively in the centre. Otherwise, White will have to spend time dealing with ...g4 ideas, so Black will have a little extra kingside space for free.

To understand the motivation for this thrust, consider 3...g6 4 g3 Bg7 5 Bg2 e5 6 d3 Ne7 7 0-0 0-0 8 Nbd2, a normal line where Black does not have ready-made counterplay whereas White has already gained ground on the queenside.



White to play

4 Bb2

White has a wide choice, but the story tends to be similar in each case:

a) 4 Nxg5?! allows Black his space-gain, but doesn't even win a pawn: 4...e5 5 d3 (5 Nf3?! e4 6 Ng1 Bxb4 is awful for White) 5...Bxb4+ 6 Bd2 Be7 (or 6...Bxd2+ 7 Qxd2 b6 and Black is first to the long diagonal) 7 Nf3 Nc6 8 g3 (Zaragatski-T.Burg, Dutch Team Ch 2017/18) 8...Nf6 9 Bg2 (9 Qc2 h5!? 10 Bg2 Nd7 11 h4 Nc5 12 0-0 Bg4 with an excellent game for Black) 9...e4 10 dxe4 (10 Ng5 Ng4! has the neat point that 11 Nxe4 f5 traps the knight) 10...Nxe4 leaves Black well-centralized and better developed.

b) 4 e3?! e5! (this is even better than 4...dxe3 5 fxe3 Bg7 6 d4 g4 7 Nfd2, as in Maksimović-Milijković, Niš 2016) and now:

b1) 5 Nxe5?! Bg7 6 f4 gxf4 with wild play from which Black emerges on top: 7 Qh5 Nh6 8 exf4 0-0 or 7 exf4 Bxe5 8 Qe2 (8 fxe5?? Qh4+) 8...Nc6 9 b5? d3 10 Qe3 Qd4.

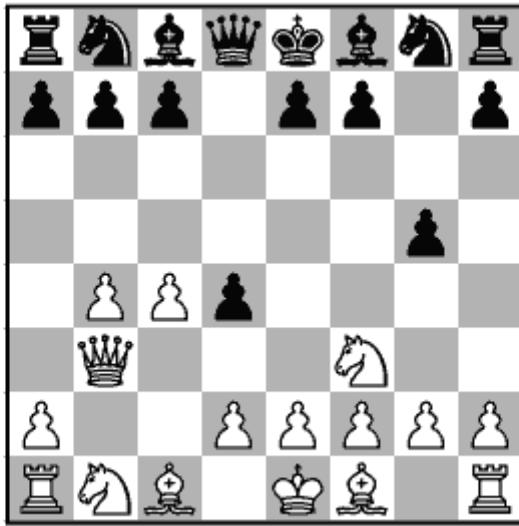
b2) 5 Qe2?! Bg7 6 exd4?! Ne7 7 dxe5 g4 followed by ...Nbc6 is a poster child for “greed doesn’t pay”.

b3) 5 exd4 exd4 6 Qe2+ Ne7! 7 Nxg5 Bg7 8 d3 (8 Qh5?! Ng6 9 d3 Qe7+ 10 Be2 Nd7! has led to a quick victory for Black in a couple of games) 8...0-0 with excellent compensation since White has failed to develop.

c) 4 Qa4+ c6 5 g3 (5 Nxg5 e5 6 d3 Bh6 7 f4 exf4 8 Nf3 a5 and 5 Qb3 e5! 6 Nxe5 Bg7 7 Nd3 a5 leave White short of space and quality development) 5...g4 6 Nh4 e5 7 Bg2 and from a smorgasbord of possibilities, it is possible that greed is best: 7...Be7 (7...Ne7 8 d3 Ng6 9 Nxg6 hxg6 10 Nd2) 8 d3 Bxh4 9 gxh4 Ne7 and ...Nf5.

d) 4 g3 g4 5 Nh4 e5 6 Bg2 with a similar choice to the one in the 4 Qa4+ line; here 6...Be7 7 d3 Bxh4 8 gxh4 Ne7 may again be the best option.

e) 4 Qb3 (*D*) was chosen by Svidler. It threatens Nxd4, please note.



Black to play

4...Bg7 5 Nxg5 e5 6 Qg3 (a critical attempt to cast doubt on Black’s idea, but it rebounds if Black responds precisely; 6 Ne4?! f5 7 Nc5 e4!; 6 Nh3 Nd7 intending ...a5) 6...Ne7! (6...Qe7 was chosen in Gual Pascual-Trepaut Herranz, Barcelona tt 2019, but 7 Ba3 is a troublesome reply) 7 Ne4 (7 Ne6 Bxe6 8 Qxg7 Rg8 9 Qxh7 allows Black more than enough play for the pawn(s) after any healthy and aggressive continuation) 7...Ng6 8 h4 f5 9 h5 (9 Nc5 e4) 9...fxe4 10 hxg6 h5! and Black is doing well.

f) 4 h3 h6 5 g3 (5 Bb2 Bg7) 5...Bg7 6 Bg2 e5 7 d3 Ne7 8 0-0 0-0 9 Nbd2 (*D*) should be compared with the 3...g6 line [mentioned](#) earlier.



Black to play

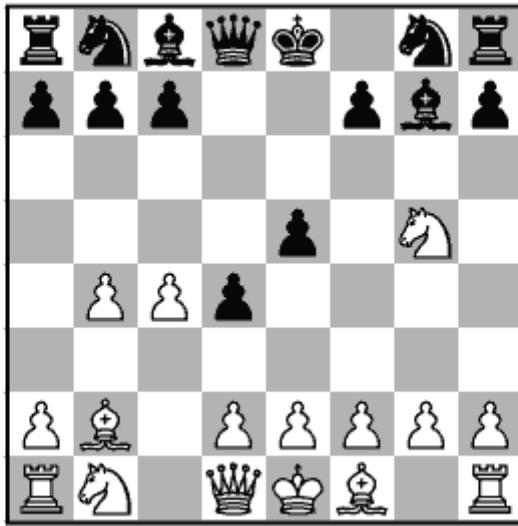
Here the main focus is clearly on Black's menacing kingside activity. 9...Ng6 (Black can even contemplate 9...f5) 10 Nb3 Nc6 11 b5 Nce7 12 a4 Rb8 13 Ba3 b6 14 a5 Be6 (Gordievsky-Swiercz, Columbia 2019) intending ...Qd7 with good prospects. Black's primary goal with 3...g5!? is strategic, after all!

4...Bg7 5 Nxg5

Again White has a wide but unappetizing choice:

- a) 5 h3 e5 is another case where Black has more space than in regular lines.
- b) 5 g3 g4 (or 5...e5 6 d3 g4 7 Nfd2, transposing to line '[c](#)') 6 Nh4 e5 7 d3 Nc6 (or 7...Ne7 intending ...Ng6) 8 b5 Nce7 and the black pieces gather for a kingside assault.
- c) 5 d3 g4 (5...e5 is possible too) 6 Nfd2 e5 7 g3 h5! 8 h4 f5 (no point being shy now; besides, this is strong) 9 Bg2 (in Aguilar-Antipov, Gibraltar 2019, 9 e3?! f4!?) gave Black a dream attacking position after just nine moves – eight of them with pawns!) 9...Ne7 10 0-0 0-0 and here is a sample line showing what can happen if White blithely continues with normal queenside play: 11 a4 Nd7 12 b5 Nf6 13 a5 Rb8 14 Ba3 Rf7 15 Qa4 Ng6 16 Bc5 b6 17 Bb4 e4! 18 dxе4 f4 with a huge attack.

5...e5 (*D*)



White to play

6 Ne4

The ‘main line’, occurring in about a quarter of all 3...g5 games, but Black is doing well here.

6 Nh3 Qd6! hassles White’s pawns while increasing the queen’s boardwide influence.

6...f5 7 Nc5

7 Ng3 Nf6 (Agrest-Morozevich, Berlin rapid 2015) and White is already looking for the emergency button.

7...b6!

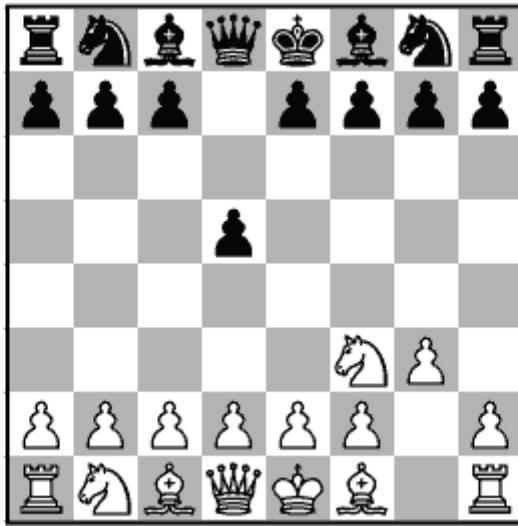
Now:

a) 8 Nd3 Ne7 9 e3 0-0 10 exd4 (10 c5 Nd7!) 10...e4! 11 Nf4 Nbc6 (Kanep-Berzinš, Liepaja Zonal 2018) and Black is far ahead of White in mobilizing his pieces.

b) 8 Qa4+ Kf7! 9 Nd3 Ne7 (Atakhan-Mosadeghpour, Iranian Team Ch, Tehran 2019) gives Black excellent play for the pawn. White should probably try 10 f4 (10 Na3 Ng6 11 c5 e4 12 Nc1 Be6!) 10...e4 11 Ne5+ Bxe5 12 fxe5 c5 13 e3 Nbc6 14 Na3 (14 exd4?! Nxd4!) 14...a6 15 Nb5 and White is just about managing to keep the game unclear.

A4)

2 g3 (D)



Black to play

There are good reasons why this is the most common move. It retains many options regarding the central structure, so Black must remain flexible and bear in mind that White could play d4 and/or c4, or a KIA set-up where he angles for e4.

2...Bg4

This is the best move-order for the purpose of our repertoire. 2...c6 is another option, transposing after 3 Bg2 Bg4, but 3 c4 dxc4 (otherwise we cannot both develop our bishop actively and be ready to meet cxd5 with ...exd5) 4 Bg2 brings in some extra lines to deal with.

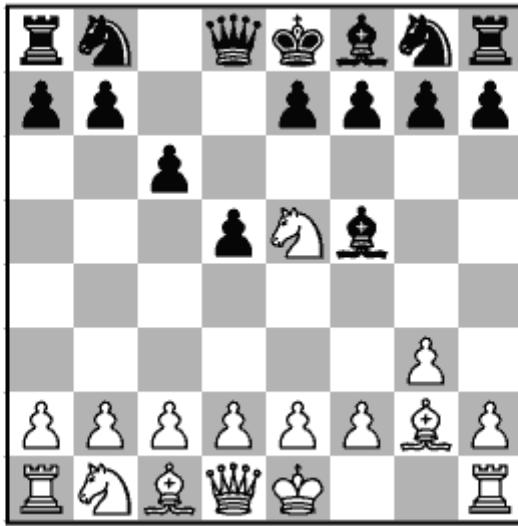
3 Bg2

Or:

a) 3 d4 c6 transposes to Line [F2](#) of Chapter 4.

b) 3 c4 Bxf3 4 exf3 can hardly be good for White if Black just develops normally. 4...Nc6 (4...c6 5 Qb3 Qb6 6 Qxb6 axb6 7 cxd5 cxd5 might be mildly annoying for Black) 5 d4 (5 Qb3? Nd4) 5...e6 gives Black a very playable position where his knights work well.

c) 3 Ne5 Bf5 4 Bg2 c6 (*D*) offers White little since the e5-knight is not firmly anchored and will soon be hit by ...Nd7.



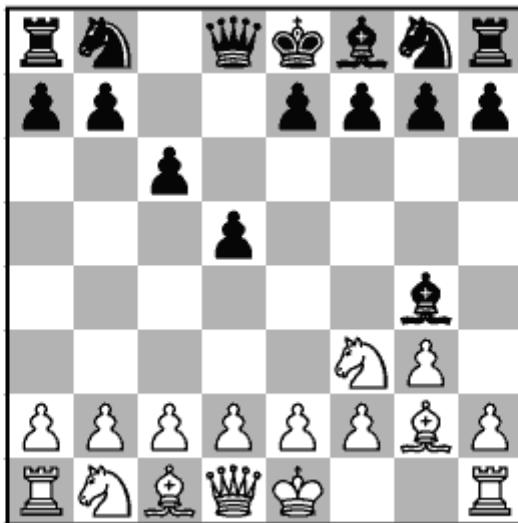
White to play

5 d3 (clearly with ideas of playing e4; 5 d4 transposes to note '[b](#)' to White's 4th move in Line F2 of Chapter 4) and then:

c1) 5...Nd7 6 Nxd7 Qxd7 7 0-0 (7 e4 Bh3 disrupts the harmony of White's position) 7...e5 (7...h5!?) 8 e4 dxе4 9 dxе4 Qxd1 10 Rxd1 Be6 is solid and equal.

c2) 5...Qc7!? 6 d4 (Black is hoping for 6 Bf4?? g5; 6 f4 Nd7 leads to double-edged play) 6...f6 (6...Nd7 7 Nxd7 Qxd7 transposes to note '[b2](#)' to White's 4th move in Line F2 of Chapter 4, as both sides have lost a tempo) 7 Nf3 e5 is more ambitious, but obviously riskier.

3...c6 (D)



White to play

Now we have two main lines, representing different philosophies:

[**A41: 4 0-0**](#)

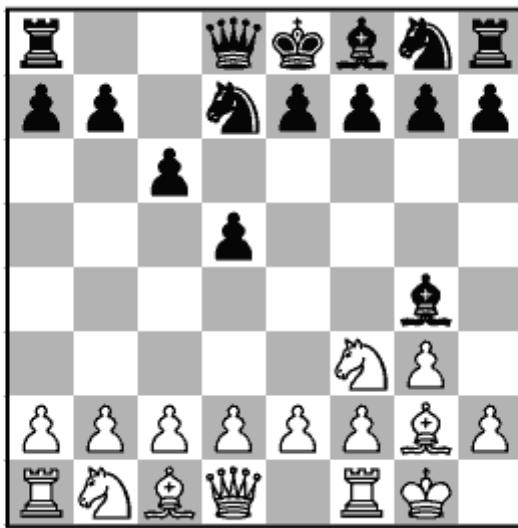
A42: 4 c4

Instead:

- a) 4 d4 transposes to Line [F2](#) of Chapter 4.
- b) 4 d3 Nd7 5 e4 dxe4 6 dxe4 e5 7 h3 (7 0-0 transposes to note ‘[b](#)’ to White’s 6th move in Line A41)
7...Be6 8 Ng5 (8 Nbd2 f6) 8...Bc4 9 Nd2 Ba6 and the bishop retains a lot of influence.

A41)

4 0-0 Nd7 (D)



White to play

5 d3

This looks like a toothless KIA but requires careful handling. Otherwise:

- a) 5 d4 transposes to Line [F2](#) of Chapter 4.
- b) White should avoid 5 c4?! Bxf3 6 Bxf3 Ne5 (Rapport-Baramidze, Austrian Team Ch 2012/13).
- c) 5 h3 invites 5...Bxf3!? 6 Bxf3 Ngf6 and ...e5; this occurred in two Ding Liren-Yu Yangyi games, with Black holding the second one (Danzhou 2017), which must be a good sign.

5...e5 6 Nbd2

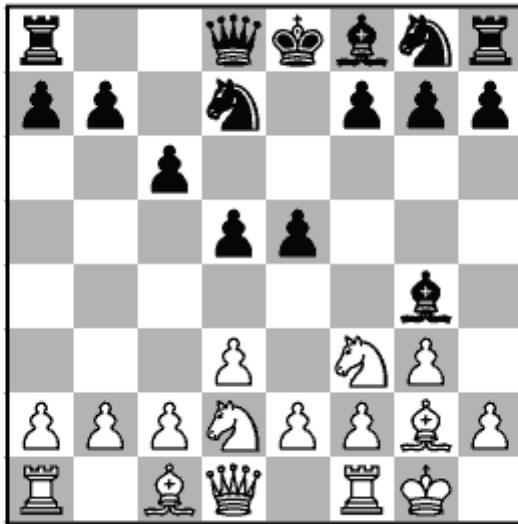
Otherwise:

- a) 6 c4 dxc4 7 dxc4 (7 d4!? is mysteriously untried; then 7...exd4 8 Qxd4 Ngf6 9 Qxc4 Bc5 is surely OK for Black, but much less promising lines for White have received a lot more attention) 7...Be7!? (wanting to see White’s next move before deciding how to arrange the other pieces) 8 Qc2 (8 Nc3 Ngf6 9 h3 Be6

with ...h6 to follow soon, Swayams-Barrish, Seville 2020) 8...Bh5 9 Nc3 Qc7 and Black's plans include the moves ...Ngf6, ...Bg6, ...Nc5, ...a5 and ...Rd8.

b) 6 e4 dxe4 7 dxe4 and now 7...f6!? is a radical solution to the problem of White chasing the bishop with h3, etc. Black can follow up with ...Bc5, ...Ne7 and ...Qc7; e.g., 8 Qe2 (8 h3 Be6 is of course the idea) 8...Bc5 9 Nbd2 (9 a4 a5) 9...Ne7 10 Rd1 Qc7 11 Nc4 0-0 12 Bd2 (threatening b4) 12...b5 (12...a5 is OK too) 13 Ne3 Be6 with interesting play ahead.

We now return to 6 Nbd2 (D):



Black to play

6...Be7

6...Bd6 7 e4 Ne7!? has scored very well in practice but is harder to trust.

7 e4 Ngf6

Black's calm set-up is hard to dent thanks to some tactical points.

8 exd5

Alternatively:

- a) 8 Re1 can be met by 8...0-0 for reasons we are about to see.
- b) After 8 Qe1 the pawn sacrifice is also viable: 8...0-0 (8...Qc7 is simpler) 9 exd5 (it's noteworthy that White chose to decline the pawn in the high-level game Pantsulaia-Vitiugov, European Ch, Gjakova 2016; 9 h3 Bh5! reaches a more common line where 10 Nh4 Re8 leaves Black very solid, as in Onischuk-So, USA Ch rapid playoff, Saint Louis 2017) 9...Nxd5 10 Nxe5 (note that if White had inserted h3 Bh5, this would be a blunder because of 11...Nb4!) 10...Nxe5 11 Qxe5 Qd7! with enough play for the pawn, the one slight disappointment being that 12 Qd4 (12 Ne4 f5 13 Ng5 f4! 14 Bxf4 Rae8 leaves White fighting for his life) 12...Nb4 13 Qc3 Nd5 14 Qd4 is a weird repetition.

8...Nxd5 9 Re1 0-0! 10 h3 Bh5 (D)



White to play

11 g4

11 Nc4 f6 12 d4 b5! ruins White's plan of central domination; note the nice point 13 g4 e4!.

11...Bg6

Now:

a) It turns out that grabbing the pawn with 12 Nxe5?! Nxe5 13 Rxe5 leaves White in some trouble, with Black even having a choice of good options: 13...Nf4 (or 13...f6 14 Re1 f5 with ...Bh4 ideas) 14 Qf3 (14 Nf3?! Nxg2 15 Kxg2 f5) 14...Nxg2 15 Qxg2 f5 with good Marshall-type compensation.

b) So White has nothing better than 12 Nc4 f6, when Black is solid: 13 d4 (13 Nh4 Rf7!?) 13...Qc7! and now:

b1) 14 dxe5 Nxe5 15 Ncxe5 fxe5 16 Nxe5 Bc5!? gives Black enough for the pawn(s), one nice point being 17 Bxd5+ cxd5 18 Qxd5+ (Mulder-Egelstaff, corr. 2017) 18...Kh8 19 Nxg6+? hxg6 20 Be3 Rxf2!!, winning.

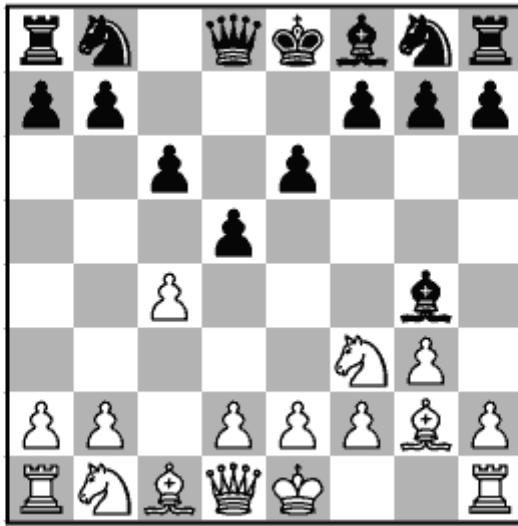
b2) 14 Nh4 Bf7 15 Nf5 Bb4! (15...Rfe8 16 dxe5 fxe5 is a safer and less chaotic option) and the game remains roughly balanced since 16 c3 Nxc3 highlights White's loose pieces: 17 bxc3 Bxc3 18 Ba3 Bxa1.

A42)

4 c4

The traditional Réti approach.

4...e6 (D)



White to play

Accomplishing our desired set-up; if White soon plays d4, then we are likely to reach lines covered in our Queen's Pawn chapter.

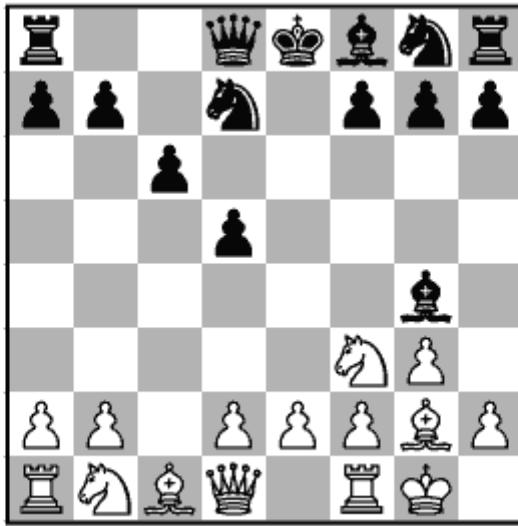
5 0-0

5 Qb3 Qb6 6 0-0 (6 d4 Nd7 transposes to the [note](#) to White's 5th move in Line F2 of Chapter 4; 6 d3 Nd7 7 Be3 dxc4!? 8 Qxc4 Qxb2 9 Bd4 Qb4+ 10 Nbd2 f6! is OK for Black, Romanishin-Marzano, Berlin 2015) 6...Nd7 7 d3 (7 d4 Ngf6 transposes to note '[b2](#)' to White's 6th move in Line F2 of Chapter 4) 7...Ngf6 8 Be3 (8 Nc3 has various answers, including the straightforward 8...Bxf3 9 Bxf3 d4) 8...Bc5 9 Bxc5 (9 d4 Bxf3) 9...Nxc5 10 Qa3 (Artemiev-Bu Xiangzhi, World Team Ch, Astana 2019; Romanishin has tried 10 Qc3 a couple of times, but then 10...d4! is a funny little tactic) 10...Bxf3 11 Bxf3 a5 and Black has no real problems (be sure to avoid 11...dxc4? 12 Nd2!).

5...Nd7 6 b3

Or:

- a) 6 d4 transposes to note '[b](#)' to White's 6th move in Line F2 of Chapter 4.
- b) After 6 cxd5 both captures are feasible, with 6...exd5 (*D*) more unbalancing:

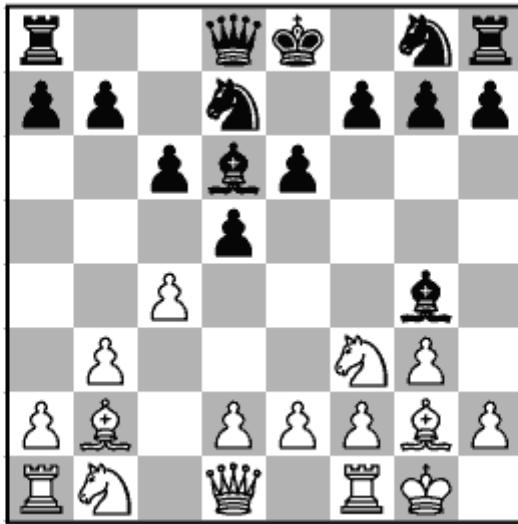


White to play

b1) 7 h3 Bxf3 8 Bxf3 Ngf6 9 d3 Bc5 10 Bg2 0-0 11 e3 (otherwise Black may play ...d4 at a good moment; this move also blunts attacks on g3 with ...Qc7) 11...a5 (grabbing space on the queenside, where White needs to find squares for his pieces) 12 Qc2 (12 b3 a4) 12...Re8 13 Nd2 (Roiz-Landa, Russian Team Ch, Sochi 2006) 13...a4 14 Nf3 (intending Bd2-c3) 14...Bb4 and it is hard for White to unravel without offering Black good squares for his pieces.

b2) 7 d3 Bc5 8 Nc3 Ngf6 9 Qb3 Bb6 10 Na4 0-0 11 Nxb6 axb6 is rather solid for Black; e.g., 12 h3 (12 Qc2 Re8 13 Re1 Bxf3 14 Bxf3 d4 stakes out space in the centre, Amin-Shyam, Abu Dhabi 2014) 12...Bxf3 13 Bxf3 Nc5 14 Qc2 (Malikentzos-Mastrovasilis, Greek Ch, Hydra 2015) 14...h5!? and the black knights will prove effective.

6...Bd6 7 Bb2 (D)



Black to play

7...e5

This move is untried but logical, whereas 7...Ngf6 transposes to a main line of the Réti.

8 cxd5

8 Nc3?! d4! 9 Ne4 Bc7 10 Ba3?! f5 gives Black a lot of space.

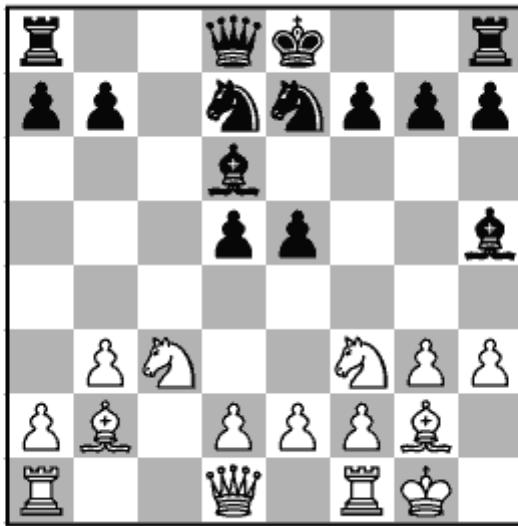
8...cxd5 9 Nc3 Ne7

Making use of the delay in committing this knight. It's now hard to put a real dent in Black's centre.

10 h3

If White had played this move any earlier, the bishop could have dropped back conveniently to e6.

10...Bh5 (D)



White to play

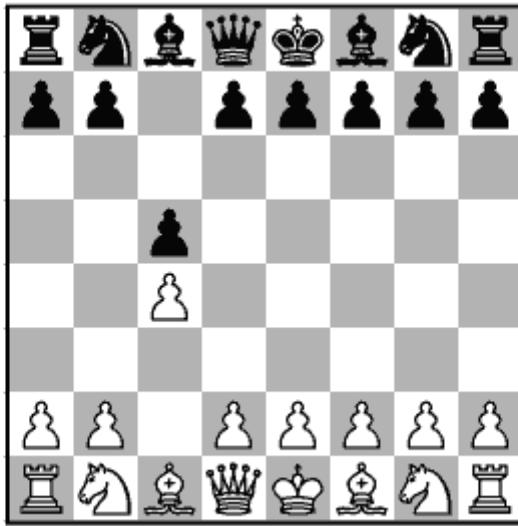
A full battle lies ahead. Some sample lines: 11 Rc1 (11 Nh4 g5!?; 11 g4 Bg6 12 Nh4 h5!?; 11 Nb5 Bb8 12 Ba3 0-0 13 Nd6? Qb6) 11...0-0 (after 11...f6, 12 Nb5 is more awkward to meet) 12 Nh4 (12 Nb5 Bb8 13 Ba3 Re8 now offers White very little) 12...Nf6 (better than 12...Nb6 {intending ...f5} 13 g4 Bg6 14 a4) 13 g4 Bg6 14 Nxg6 (14 g5?! Ne8) 14...hxg6 with an interesting and roughly balanced game; e.g., 15 e3 Rc8 (15...Bb8 covers the d-pawn but is a little passive; 15...g5 16 h4!?) 16 g5 (16 Qe2 g5 radically prevents g5, and plans 17 h4 d4!?) 16...Nh5 17 Nxd5 (17 Bf3 Rc6 18 Bxh5 gxh5 19 Qxh5 Ra6 with a counterattack against White's queenside pawns and a sinister eye directed towards White's loose kingside) 17...Rxc1 18 Nxe7+ Qxe7 19 Qxc1 Qxg5 and the situation remains tense.

B)

1 c4

The defence against this move holds a special place in our repertoire, since we shall be playing against ourselves, as it were.

1...c5 (D)



White to play

Since there is no way to get in ...c6 and ...d5 without giving White the option of an Exchange or Slow Slav, we'll play this straightforward move and grab as much as we can of the centre with ...Nc6 and if necessary ...e5, if White allows us.

Straight away we have a major parting of the ways:

B1: 2 Nf3

B2: 2 Nc3

Or:

- a) 2 e3 e5 is likely to reach one of the lines below where White plays e3 a move or two later. 3 d4 cxd4 4 exd4 exd4 offers White nothing good, while 3 Nc3 Nc6 transposes to the [note](#) to White's 3rd move in Line B2, and 3 Nf3 Nc6 is note '[d](#)' to White's 3rd move in Line B1.
- b) 2 g3 is an important option, but after 2...Nc6 3 Bg2 g6 4 Nf3 (4 Nc3 transposes to Line [B22](#)) 4...Bg7 5 0-0 e5 White can't avoid a transposition for much longer without playing something silly. For instance, 6 d3 Nge7 7 Nc3 transposes to the [note](#) to White's 7th move in Line B2251.

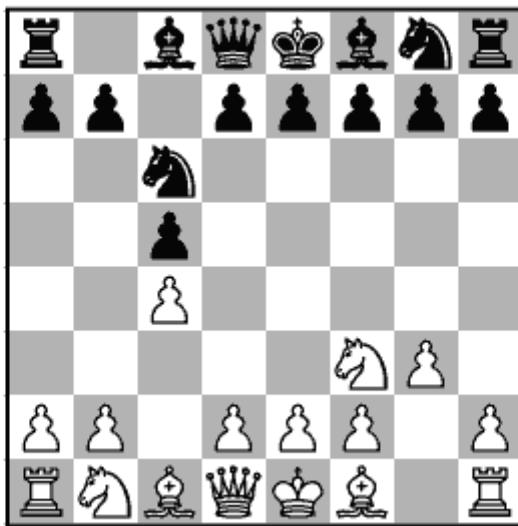
B1)

2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4

This is a way for White to open the centre. If he delays this advance any longer, then we shall play ...e5 to hinder or prevent it:

- a) 3 Nc3 transposes to Line [B21](#).
- b) 3 b3 does little to deter us from 3...e5 4 Bb2 d6 intending ...g6, ...Bg7 and ...Nge7, as 5 e3 g6 6 d4 exd4 (6...cxd4 7 exd4 e4 is interesting too) 7 exd4 Bg7 (Laznička-Goganov, European Ch, Jerusalem 2015) is clearly unappealing for White.

c) 3 g3 (*D*) and then:

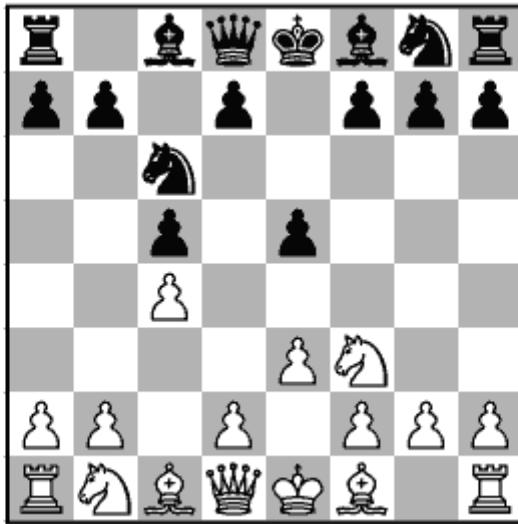


Black to play

c1) 3...g6!? is interesting here, since 4 d4?! cxd4 5 Nxd4 Bg7 is a line that is well-known to be ineffective for White (e.g., 6 Nc2 d6 7 Bg2 Be6), but after normal moves such as 4 Bg2 we will probably end up in our standard lines in any case.

c2) 3...e5 will probably transpose to our main line (i.e. Line [B225](#)): 4 Bg2 (or 4 Nc3 g6 5 Bg2 Bg7) 4...g6 and White is unlikely find a better move than 5 Nc3.

d) 3 e3 clearly intends d4, so in line with our plan we shall answer with 3...e5 (*D*).



White to play

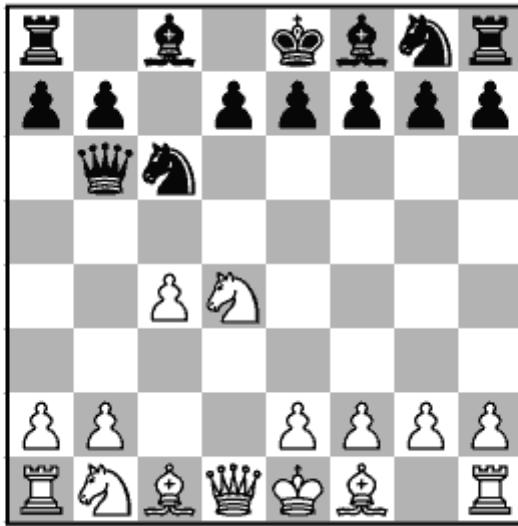
Then:

d1) 4 Nc3 transposes to Line [B21](#).

d2) 4 d4 is much rarer than the same line with Nc3 and ...Nf6 played, presumably because a pawn landing on e5 won't hit the black knight. 4...cxd4 (4...e4 gives White the additional option of 5 d5) 5 exd4 e4 6 Nfd2 (6 d5? exf3 7 dxc6 Bb4+ 8 Nc3 Qe7+ 9 Be3 dxc6 is horrid for White; 6 Ne5 Nge7 7 Nc3 Nf5 is fully OK for Black) 6...f5 (6...Nf6 7 d5 Ne5 8 Be2 Bc5 9 Nc3 is awkward for Black, Fressinet-Grishchuk, Riga rapid 2013) with an unexplored position and an interesting battle ahead; e.g., 7 Nc3 Nf6 8 Nb3 Bb4 9 Be2 d5 10 Bg5 Be6 or 7 d5 Ne5 8 Be2 Nf6 9 0-0 g6 (9...Bd6!?) 10 Nc3 d6.

3...cxd4 4 Nxd4 Qb6 (D)

This move seeks to limit White's options. 4...Nf6 5 Nc3 e6 is the main line, and considered very sound for Black, but White has a great deal of choice, including both sharp and intricate lines, and ones that force simplification.



White to play

We now have two critical lines to consider:

B11: 5 Nb5!?

B12: 5 Nb3

Or:

a) 5 Nc2 is passive and unchallenging. 5...e6 6 Nc3 Nf6 and then:

a1) 7 g3?! d5! 8 cxd5 exd5 9 Nxd5? Nxd5 10 Qxd5 Be6! 11 Qe4 (Beliaovsky-D.Gurevich, USSR 1975) 11...Rd8! gives Black an initiative that should prove decisive. Let's note 12 Bh3 Qa5+! 13 Kf1 Qd5! (one for the tactics textbooks!) 14 Qxd5 Bxh3+ 15 Qg2 Rd1+ 16 Ne1 Rxe1+ 17 Kxe1 Bxg2.

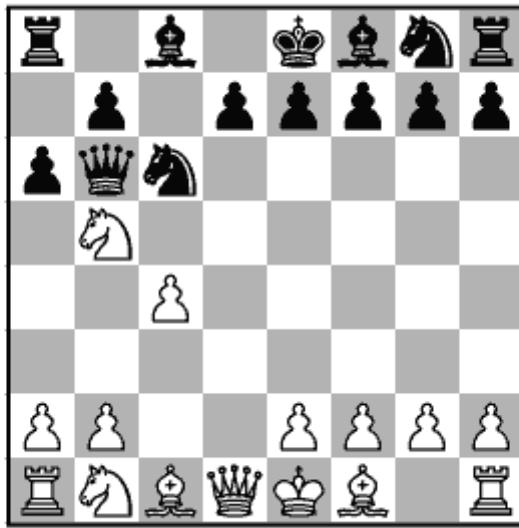
a2) 7 e4 Bc5 (making use of the knight being on c2 instead of b3) 8 Qe2 (8 Qd2 Ng4) 8...0-0 with a good game thanks to Black's grip on d4.

a3) 7 e3 Be7 8 Be2 (8 Bd3 d5) has occurred dozens of times but so far no one has tried 8...d5! 9 cxd5 Nxd5 10 Nxd5 exd5 11 Qxd5 (11 b3?! Bf6) 11...0-0 intending ...Bf6 and ...Be6 with good compensation.

b) 5 e3!? looks unambitious, but keeping the knight on d4 isn't such a bad idea. Black can settle for a normal position with 5...Nf6 and ...e6, but a more provocative idea is 5...g6!? 6 Nc3 Bg7, which does succeed in removing the knight from d4! Then 7 Nd5 Qd8 8 Nb5 Rb8 looks superficially dire for Black, but it's only a check on c7, and after 9 Nbc7+ Kf8 10 Nb5 a6 (Coletto-Belezky, Collado Villalba 2003) 11 Nbc3 e6 or 9 e4 d6 10 Be3 Nf6 we have a complex position with chances for both sides.

B11)

5 Nb5!? a6 (D)



White to play

6 Be3

6 N5c3 e6 7 g3 Bc5 (7...h5!?) 8 e3 (8 Ne4 Nf6! 9 Nxc5 Qxc5 10 Bg2 Qxc4 11 Nc3 d5 gives White some play for the pawn, but maybe not enough) 8...Qc7 9 Bg2 Nf6 10 0-0 0-0 (J.Anderson-Williamson, corr. 2008) and Black plans ...Rd8 and ...d5, with active play.

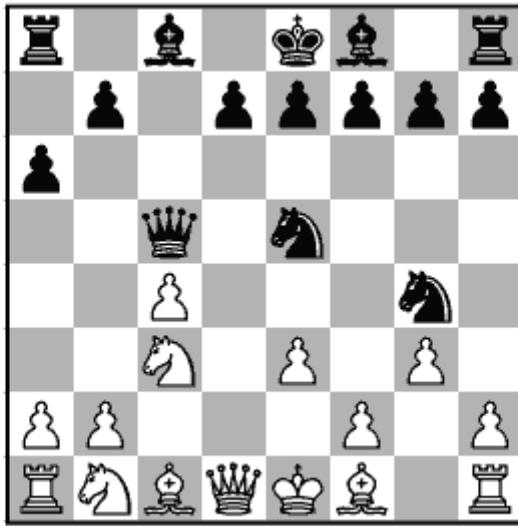
6...Qa5+ 7 N5c3

7 Bd2 Qd8 8 N5c3 e6 intending ...d5.

7...Nf6 8 g3 Ng4 9 Bc1

This is a very rare but critical line. If Black plays ordinary moves, White will have a space advantage, but there is a nice path to counterplay:

9...Qc5 10 e3 Nce5 (D)



White to play

11 Be2

11 b3 Qc6 12 Qd5 Nf6 13 Qxc6 dxc6 is no problem for Black.

11...h5 12 Nd2 e6 13 0-0

13 h3 Nf6 14 f4 Ng6 is double-edged.

13...b5!?

I'd call 13...b6!? 'calmer', except that the idea is 14 h3 Bb7 15 hxg4 hxg4 16 e4 Nd3!, with utter mayhem ahead.

14 cxb5

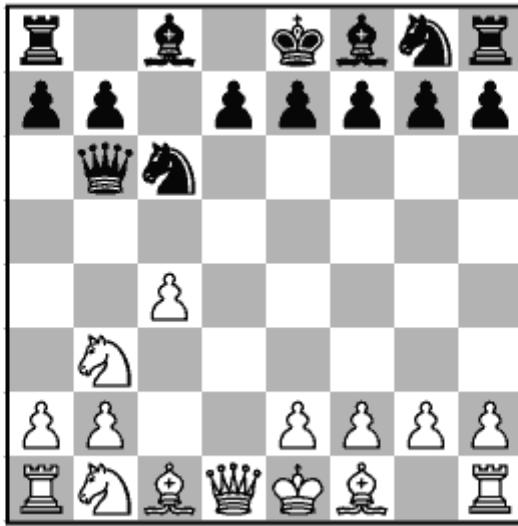
14 h3?! b4! 15 Na4 (15 Nce4 Qc7 16 hxg4 hxg4 17 Bxg4 f5 18 Bh5+ g6) 15...Qc6 16 e4 Bb7 17 hxg4 hxg4 intending ...f5 with serious threats.

14...axb5

Now 15 Bxb5?! h4 is perilous for White, while after 15 Nxb5 Bb7 16 Nb3 Qc6! 17 f3 h4 18 gxh4 Nxh2 19 Kxh2 Be7! 20 Rh1 Nxf3+ 21 Bxf3 Qxb5, with a ...Ra4 rook-lift in the picture, Black has enough play. An insane and long line, I know, but as they say on the Internet, "critical line is critical".

B12)

5 Nb3 (D)



Black to play

With Nb5 lines off the table, Black can breathe a little more freely.

5...e6 6 Nc3

Other moves:

- a) 6 e4 Bb4+ 7 Nc3 Nf6 transposes to note '[b](#)' to White's 7th move below.
- b) 6 g3 Nf6 7 Nc3 transposes to Line [B121](#).
- c) 6 a3 Nf6 (6...f5!?) 7 Nc3 transposes to Line [B122](#).
- d) 6 Be3 Qa6!? 7 c5 (7 N1d2 Be7) 7...b6 8 Nc3 Nf6 with unclear play.

6...Nf6 (D)

The Nimzo-like 6...Bb4 7 g3 offers Black much less interesting prospects.



White to play

Now there are two principal options:

B121: 7 g3

B122: 7 a3!

Instead 7 Bg5 a5!? and 7 Be3 Qb4!? only cause White inconvenience, while two other moves are relatively easy for Black to handle:

a) 7 e3 Be7 8 Be2 0-0 9 0-0 d5 10 cxd5 exd5 is a solid IQP for Black, while grabbing the pawn with 11 Nxd5 Nxd5 12 Qxd5 Be6 13 Qb5 (Panchanathan-R.Wang, Edmonton 2010) 13...Rfd8! makes it tough for White to complete his development without giving the pawn back.

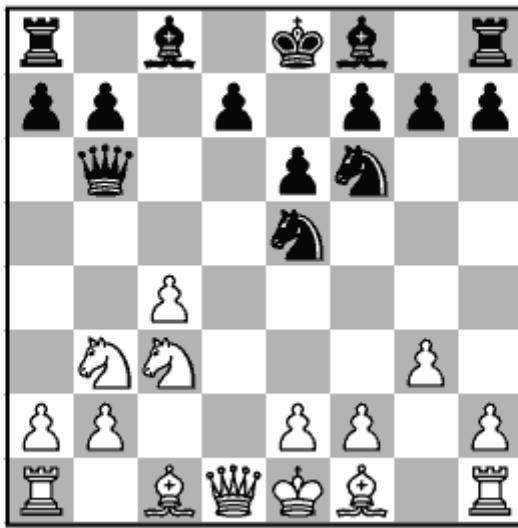
b) 7 e4 Bb4! is more pointed now that there is a target on e4. 8 Bd3 (8 Be3 Qc7 with ...d5 coming before long) 8...Ne5 9 0-0 Qd6 (odd-looking but effective) 10 Bf4 (either retreat by the d3-bishop loses a pawn, albeit for some compensation) 10...Bxc3 11 bxc3 Qxd3 12 Bxe5 Qxd1! 13 Rfxd1 Nxe4 14 Bxg7 Rg8 (Lenic-Z.Varga, Hungarian Team Ch 2018/19) with an unbalanced but roughly equal ending.

B121)

7 g3

This transposes to a main line of the Four Knights English, but one where Black has abundant and well-established counterplay.

7...Ne5! (D)



White to play

8 e4

8 Be3?? Qc6 is a well-known trap that has claimed a few victims.

8...Bb4! 9 Qe2

9 c5 Qc6 10 f3 (10 Bg2 Qb5) 10...b6 11 Bf4 Ng6 12 Bd6 bxc5 13 a3 Bxc3+ 14 bxc3 a5! (threatening ...Nxe4) with good play for Black, Morozovich-Topalov, Zug 2013.

9...d6! 10 Bd2

10 f4 Nc6 (not 10...Bxc3+? 11 bxc3 followed by Ba3) 11 Be3 Bxc3+ 12 bxc3 Qc7 13 Bg2 e5! 14 c5 (14 0-0 b6! 15 fxe5 Nxe5) 14...b6! (a strong ‘novelty’ from Radjabov-Gelfand, London Candidates 2013 – played previously in correspondence chess) gives White significant problems.

10...a5!?

10...0-0 is more standard.

11 f4

11 Nb5 achieves little after 11...0-0.

11...Nc6

Now:

a) 12 Be3 Qd8! 13 Bg2 (or 13 Nd2 e5!, Anton-Ragger, European Ch, Erevan 2014) 13...e5! (another idea proven in correspondence games) 14 0-0 a4 15 Nc1 Ng4 16 Nd3 Nxe3 17 Qxe3 Bxc3 18 bxc3 0-0 with good play for Black.

b) 12 Na4 Bxd2+ (12...Qc7 13 Bg2 e5 is possible too) and then:

b1) 13 Nxd2 Qa7 (Anand-So, Bilbao 2015; 13...Qc7!? is another idea) intending ...Nd4 is pleasant for Black.

b2) 13 Qxd2 Qa7! 14 Bg2 e5 is OK for Black; e.g., 15 f5 0-0, 15 0-0-0 Bg4 16 Rdf1 Be6 or 15 Nc3 0-0 16 Nb5 Qb6 17 Nxd6?! a4 18 c5 Qc7 19 Nc1 b6 20 Nd3 Be6.

B122)

7 a3! (D)



The most challenging move. It transposes to the other Four Knights main line. We have again sidestepped the treatment with Ndb5, reducing our workload, but the Nb3 option is more testing here.

7...d5

This straightforward move is probably best, rather than 7...a5 8 Be3 or 7...Na5 8 Nxa5 Qxa5 9 Bd2.

8 Be3

8 cxd5 Nxd5! (Zakhartsov-Konovalov, Moscow 2017) and thanks to the move a3, White can't even think about grabbing the pawn.

8...d4!?

Giving up a pawn rather than taking on an IQP – an interesting idea. But I'll mention two other options and leave the choice to you:

- a) 8...Qd8 9 cxd5 Nxd5 (or 9...exd5 10 g3 Be6 11 Bg2 Be7 12 0-0 0-0 13 Rc1, Izoria-Almasi, Bled Olympiad 2002) 10 Nxd5 exd5 11 g3 (Ivanchuk-Dobrov, Jurmala 2015) with pressure on the IQP. Both games cited ended in draws.
- b) 8...Qc7 9 cxd5 Nxd5 10 Nxd5 exd5 11 g3 (11 Qxd5?! Be6 12 Qb5 a6; 11 Rc1 Be7) 11...Be7 (11...g6 12 Bd4 Nxd4 13 Qxd4 Rg8 is unconventional but interesting) 12 Bg2 0-0 13 Qxd5 (13 0-0 Bf6 14 Nd4 {Wojtaszek-Tregubov, Tallinn rapid 2016} 14...Bf4 and Black is probably active enough) 13...Be6 14 Qb5 a6 15 Qa4 Rfd8 16 0-0 Qe5 and White can reach a pawn-up ending but with opposite bishops it should probably end in a draw: 17 Bxc6 bxc6 18 Na5 Qxb2 19 Nxc6 Re8 20 Nxe7+ Rxe7.

We now return to 8...d4!? (D):



9 Nxd4

9 Bxd4 Nxd4 10 Nxd4 (Stefansson-A.Zhuravlev, Stockholm 1991) 10...e5! 11 Nb3 (only move) 11...Bf5 intending ...Rd8 with rather obvious compensation for the pawn.

9...Ng4 10 Na4

10 b4 Nxe3 11 fxe3 a5 with positional compensation; e.g., 12 c5 Qc7 13 Rb1 axb4 14 axb4 b6.

10...Nxe3 11 Nxb6

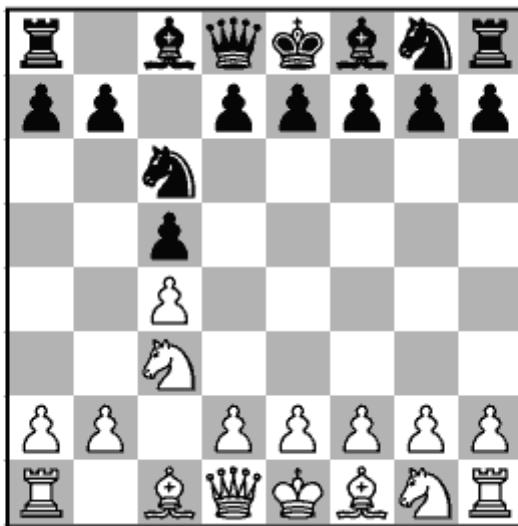
11 fxe3? Qc7 is good for Black.

11...Nxd1 12 Nxa8 Nxb2

Now 13 Nc7+ (13 e3 Kd8) 13...Kd8 14 Ncb5 e5 15 Nf3 (15 Nc2 Be6) 15...a6 16 Ng5 (16 Nc3 Nxc4) 16...axb5 17 cxb5 Nd4 18 Ra2 Na4 19 Nxf7+ Ke8 20 Nxh8 Be6 is heading for an odd material imbalance and an ending that Black should probably survive (objectively) and that will be tough for White to handle in practice.

B2)

2 Nc3 Nc6 (D)



White to play

Now as soon as White is seriously intending d4 we shall play ...e5. Otherwise our next moves will generally be ...g6 and ...Bg7, keeping the king's knight flexible for now.

There are two main lines here:

[**B21: 3 Nf3**](#)

[**B22: 3 g3**](#)

3 e3 can transpose in all sorts of directions, but to keep things under control we should play 3...e5, when the main independent option is the very rare 4 Nge2 (4 Nf3 transposes to Line [B21](#), while 4 g3 g6 5 Bg2 Bg7 is Line [B223](#)) 4...Nf6:

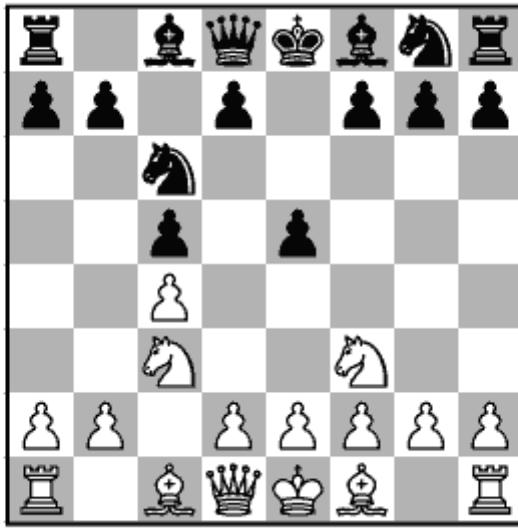
a) 5 g3?! d5! takes over the centre.

b) 5 d4 exd4 6 exd4 d5! is not so easy for White as the knight gets in the way on e2.

c) 5 Nd5 d6 6 Nec3 g6 7 Be2 Bg7 8 0-0 0-0 (Black is waiting for White to play some slow moves before initiating exchanges on d5) 9 Rb1 a6 10 d3 Rb8 11 a3 Nxd5 12 cxd5 (Pino-Daus, corr. 2011; 12 Nxd5 b5 13 b4 Be6) 12...Na7!? 13 b4 Nb5!? with interesting play.

B21)

3 Nf3 e5 (D)



White to play

4 e3

Or:

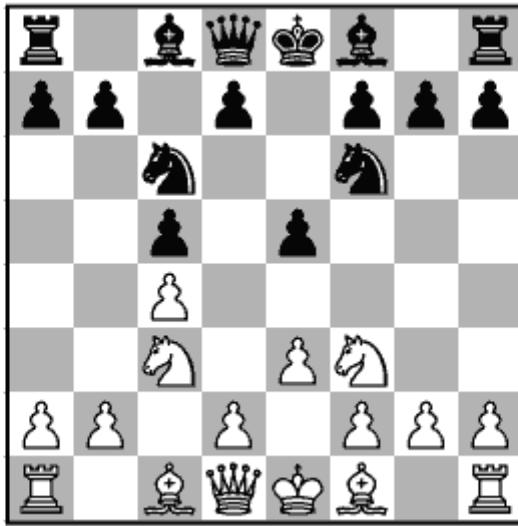
a) 4 g3 g6 5 Bg2 Bg7 transposes to Line [B225](#).

b) 4 a3 is an attempt to be really flexible, but rather neglects the centre. 4...g6 invites 5 b4!?, but 4...Nf6 intending ...d5 is a good reply.

c) 4 e4 is a move you might face, but White will be disappointed if he thinks he is a move ahead in a symmetrical position. After 4...g6 Black will play ...Bg7 and ...Nge7, with excellent prospects as his pieces are more flexible and he has the plan of ...f5. White should try to wrench the game in a different direction with 5 a3 Bg7 6 b4 but after 6...d6 his further plan is unclear.

d) 4 d3 Nge7!? (seeking to profit from White's lack of control of d5; 4...g6 is possible too, with a likely transposition to our main lines, and Line [B2252](#) in particular) 5 g3 (5 Nd5 d6 6 g3 Nxd5 7 cxd5 Nb4 offers White little, as d5 is a 'dead point' that Black can work around) 5...d5 6 cxd5 Nxd5 7 Bg2 (7 Nxd5 Qxd5 8 Bg2 Bg4 and the queen can drop back to d7 when needed, with Black maintaining a spatial plus, Andersson-Sax, Reykjavik 1988) 7...Nxc3 (avoiding 7...Nc7, which transposes to the theory-heavy main-line Rubinstein) 8 bxc3 Be7 with an unbalanced position where Black should have few problems; e.g., 9 0-0 0-0 10 Rb1 Rb8 11 Nd2 Qc7 12 c4 (12 Ne4 f5!? 13 Ng5 Bxg5 14 Bxg5 f4 15 gxf4 h6 16 Bd5+ Kh8 17 e4 Ne7 18 Bxe7 Rxf4) 12...f5 13 Bb2 Bf6, Tobor-Anokhin, corr. 2017.

4...Nf6 (D)



White to play

A line that has been extensively tested in high-level chess. It appears fairly safe for Black, and there are some interesting ideas to explore too.

5 d4

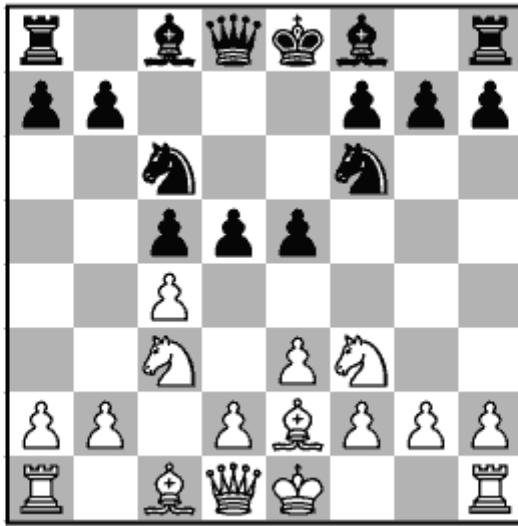
Alternatively:

a) 5 a3 d5 6 cxd5 Nxd5 is a reversed Open Sicilian, but one where Black has achieved the Maroczy structure without having to make any concessions and where White's a3 may prove both slow and to get in the way of Ba3 ideas. Then:

a1) 7 Bb5 Nxc3 and after either capture White would be better off with the pawn on a2: 8 dxc3 (8 bxc3 Bd6) 8...Qxd1+ 9 Kxd1 (Ruck-Almasi, Hungarian Ch, Kazincbarcika 2005) 9...e4! 10 Nd2 (10 Ne5?! a6!) 10...Bf5 and ...0-0-0.

a2) 7 Qc2 Nxc3 has the same logic, as the recapture with the queen is poor too. 8 dxc3 (8 Qxc3 f6 and Black develops with ...Be6, etc.; 8 bxc3 Bd6 9 Bd3 h6 is at least OK for Black) 8...Be6 9 e4 Be7 10 Bb5 Qc7 (Arsović-A.Kovačević, Serbian Team Ch, Mataruška Banja 2007) has the point that 11 Bxc6+ Qxc6!? (11...bxc6 is not bad either) 12 Nxe5 Qa6 gives Black enough play for the pawn; e.g., 13 Qd3 Qxd3 (13...Qa4 14 Qf3 Qa6 offers a repetition, while 13...b5 could be considered) 14 Nxd3 0-0-0 15 Ne5 (15 Nf4 Bb3 16 0-0 a5 and it is an open question whose practical winning chances are better) 15...Rhe8 16 Be3 Bb3.

b) 5 Be2 d5 (*D*) and then:



White to play

b1) 6 cxd5 Nxd5 7 0-0 offers White little whether Black goes for the simple 7...Nxc3 8 dxc3 Qxd1 9 Rxd1 Bf5 (Dubov-Esipenko, Russian Team Ch, Sochi 2017) or 7...Nc7, keeping the game more complex.

b2) 6 d4 e4!? (this gives better chances of an interesting game than the other two main lines, 6...exd4 7 exd4 and 6...cxd4 7 exd4 e4 8 Ne5 dxc4 9 Bxc4) 7 Ne5 dxc4 (7...Bd6 is an alternative) and here:

b21) 8 Bxc4 Nxe5 9 dxe5 Qxd1+ (Black seeks to benefit, compared to the 6...cxd4 line, from leaving the pawns on c5 and e3, as this restricts the c1-bishop) 10 Kxd1 (10 Nxd1 Ng4) 10...Ng4 11 Bb5+ Kd8 12 Nxe4 Bf5 with about equal chances.

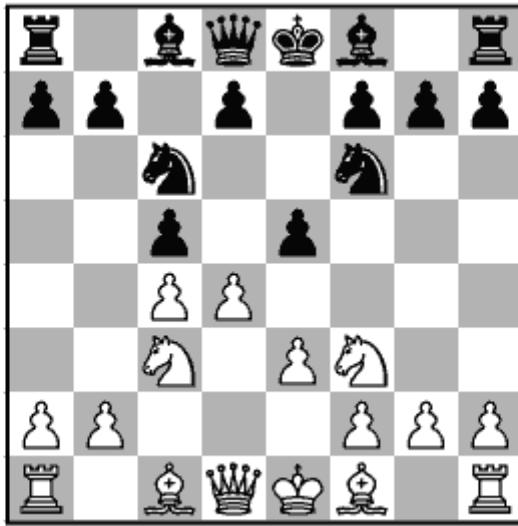
b22) 8 Nxc6 bxc6 9 Bxc4 cxd4 10 Qxd4 Qxd4 11 exd4 Bb4 is roughly equal.

b23) 8 Qa4 cxd4!? and then:

b231) 9 Nxc6 bxc6 10 Nxe4 and now 10...d3 stirs up a little trouble; e.g., 11 Bf3 (11 Nxf6+ gxf6! 12 Bf3 Rb8 is viable for Black) 11...Nd7 12 Qxc6 Rb8 and White should avoid 13 Qxc4?! Bb4+ 14 Bd2 Ne5!, when he is suddenly fighting for his life.

b232) 9 exd4 Be7 10 Nxc6 bxc6 11 d5 (11 Qxc6+ Bd7 12 Qxc4 Rb8 13 0-0 0-0 with reasonable play for the pawn, G.Meier – Vachier-Lagrave, Saint Louis 2012) 11...0-0 12 dxc6 Qc7 (Malakhov-Tregubov, Doha rapid 2016) intending ...Rb8 should be OK for Black.

We now return to 5 d4 (D):



Black to play

5...e4

This leads to sharp play where Black must be accurate, but White has not proved an advantage despite a lot of high-level testing.

The alternative move-order 5...cxd4 6 exd4 e4 has the point that 7 d5? runs into 7...exf3 8 dxc6 Qe7+, but gives Black less appealing options against 7 Ne5.

6 d5

Otherwise:

- a) 6 Ng5 cxd4 7 exd4 Bb4 (intending ...h6) 8 d5 Bxc3+ (8...h6!?) 9 bxc3 Na5 is at least OK for Black; e.g., 10 f3 0-0 11 Be2 d6 0-0 Bf5 13 fxe4 Bg6!
- b) 6 Nd2 cxd4 7 exd4 Bb4! gives Black excellent play: 8 Be2 (8 a3 Bxc3 9 bxc3 d5) 8...0-0 9 0-0 d5 10 cxd5 Nxd4 11 Nxe4 Nxe2+ 12 Qxe2 Nxd5 13 Rd1 Bxc3 14 bxc3 Bf5! (D.Fischer-Lombeck, corr. 2017) and the tactics work out OK for Black.
- c) 6 Ne5 g6 (*D*) (not 6...Qc7? 7 Ng4, but 6...h5!? 7 Be2 {7 Nxc6?! dxc6} 7...Qc7 is interesting) and here:



White to play

c1) 7 Be2 Bg7 8 Nxc6 dxc6 9 dxc5 Qa5! is pleasant for Black; e.g., 10 Qd6?! Be6 11 Bd2 Qa6 (Czebe-Secheres, Satu Mare 2018).

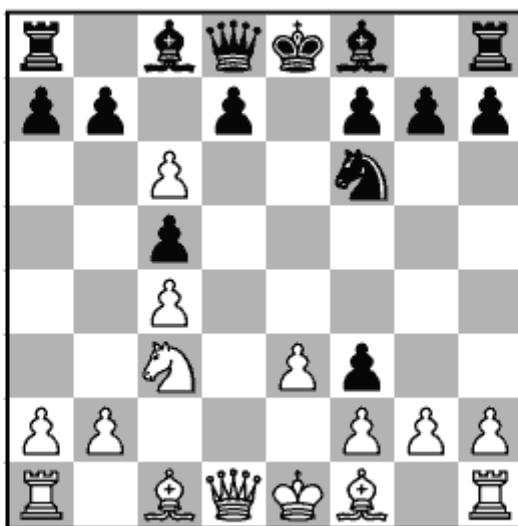
c2) 7 g4 h6 8 Bg2 Bg7 9 h3 (Mamedyarov – Vachier-Lagrange, Biel 2018; 9 h4 Qe7!?) 9...0-0 10 Nxe4 (10 b3?! Re8!; 10 0-0 Qe7 11 b3 d6 12 Nxc6 bxc6 intending ...h5) 10...Nxe4 11 Bxe4 Nxe5 12 dxe5 Bxe5 is OK for Black; then the pawn-grab 13 Bxg6 fxg6 14 Qd5+ Kh7 15 Qxe5 b6 gives Black compensation as his king is the safer of the two.

c3) 7 Rb1 Bg7 (or 7...h5 8 Be2 Bg7 9 Nxc6 dxc6 10 dxc5 Bf5 11 Qxd8+ Rxd8 and Black claims compensation, with ...h4 and ...Nd7-e5 coming) 8 Nxc6 dxc6 9 dxc5 (the point: White waited until the bishop went to g7) 9...0-0 10 Qxd8 Rxd8 and it is very hard for White to cling to the extra pawn without allowing a lot of counterplay. 11 b3 (11 Na4 Bg4 12 Be2 b5!) 11...Nd7 and now:

c31) 12 Na4 Bf8 13 Ba3 (13 b4? a5) 13...Nb6! (a neat tactic) 14 Nc3 f5 intending ...Be6 and ...Nd7.

c32) 12 Nxe4 f5 13 Ng3 Nxc5 14 Bb2 a5 with good queenside pressure.

6...exf3 7 dxc6 (D)



Black to play

Now Black has a fundamental choice.

7...bxc6!?

This objectively risky move provides more scope for outplaying a weaker opponent than 7...dxc6, which carefully seeks dull equality: 8 Qxd8+ Kxd8 9 gxf3 g6 (9...Be7 10 b3 Kc7 11 Bb2 Rd8 12 h4, as in a couple of Aronian – Vachier-Lagrange games, keeps Black on his toes) 10 b3 Bg7 11 Bb2 b6 offers White little to play with, Ioannidis-Halkias, Greek Team Ch, Patras 2019.

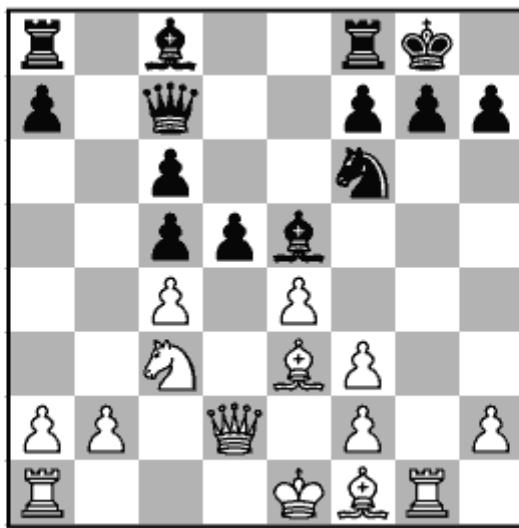
8 e4

8 Qxf3 Bd6 9 g4 (9 e4 0-0 10 Bd3 Be5 11 Bf4 d6 is OK for Black, whose pieces and pawns are in harmony) 9...0-0 10 g5 (10 Bd3 g6! gives the knight the h5-square) 10...Ne8 11 Qg2 (11 h4 Rb8) 11...Be5 12 Bd2 (12 f4?! Bxc3+ 13 bxc3 Nd6) 12...g6 gives Black adequate defensive resources.

8...Qc7 9 gxf3 Bd6 10 Be3 0-0 11 Qd2 Be5 12 Rg1

12 0-0-0 d5.

12...d5 (D)



White to play

13 exd5

After 13 cxd5 cxd5 White should avoid 14 f4?! d4!, as in Svane-Vocaturo, Bundesliga 2017/18.

13...cxd5 14 cxd5 Bf5

14...Rd8 15 0-0-0 Rb8 16 Rg5!.

15 0-0-0 Rfd8 16 f4

Now 16...Bd4?! 17 Bc4 gives Black some problems, but 16...Bd6 leads to a double-edged middlegame as it will be hard for White to hang on to the d5-pawn while securing his king's safety; e.g.:

a) 17 Nb5 Qe7 18 Nxd6 Rxd6 19 Bc4 g6!? 20 Bxc5 Rc8 21 b4 Qe4 22 Bd3 Qxd3 23 Qxd3 Bxd3 24 Rxd3 Ne4 25 Rgd1 a5! offers White no winning chances.

b) 17 Bd3 Bxd3 18 Qxd3 Rab8 (18...Bxf4?! 19 Qf5) 19 Rd2 (19 Qf5 Ne8) 19...g6 and with 20 Nb5 met by 20...c4 (e.g., 21 Qd4 Rxb5 22 Qxf6 c3!? with nice counterplay) Black has events under control.

B22)

3 g3 g6

There's no reason to play ...e5 yet, for two reasons: 1) White isn't ready to play d4; and 2) Blocking the long diagonal makes it easier for White to use ideas with a3 and b4.

4 Bg2 Bg7 (D)



White to play

This is the basic position of the Symmetrical Variation of the Symmetrical English. Our plan as Black is for it not to remain symmetrical for much longer: we shall play ...e5 as soon as White is ready to play d4, and boldly stake a claim for the central squares. Normally the king's knight will go to e7, both to avoid a pin by Bg5 and to maintain the g7-bishop's influence on the long diagonal. However, White has many different moves and approaches in this position, so we should not be robotic in our response. It's not "...e5 against everything"!

Now we have our last major split of the chapter:

[**B221: 5 e4**](#)

[**B222: 5 a3**](#)

[**B223: 5 e3**](#)

[**B224: 5 d3!?**](#)

[**B225: 5 Nf3**](#)

As always, the main line is given last. However, you might want to examine the 5 Nf3 lines first, as I go over a number of typical themes and ‘mini-rules’ in that section, and these will help illuminate some of the ideas employed in the other lines. Note also that 5 d3!? is my [proposal](#) for White in Chapter 8, so these sections could usefully be studied together.

Other moves:

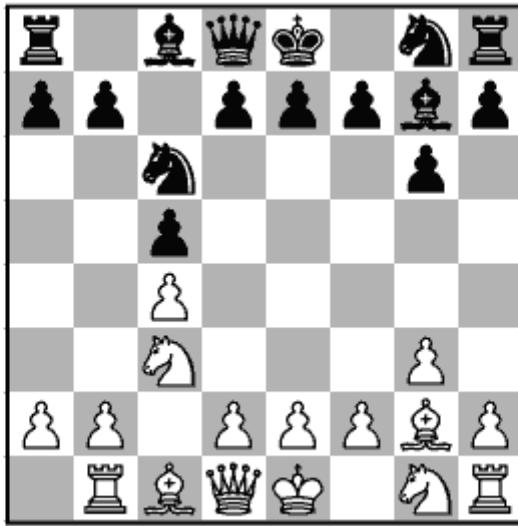
- a) 5 h4 is an advance we see a number of times, and use in some situations in our white repertoire, but looks premature here, as Black has done nothing to invite it. Simply 5...Nf6 halts the pawn and intends play in the centre. Then 6 e4 doesn’t fit well with h4, given that White’s most natural plans will then involve an f4 advance, which will leave the g4-square weak. And after 6 Nh3 e5 (stopping Nf4 makes a good deal of sense) 7 d3 h6 it’s not clear what White’s plan should be.
- b) 5 b3 (*D*) is of course a reasonable choice, and one you might be wondering about if you like Black’s chances in the lines we examine in Line [B222](#) after 5 a3 b6.



Black to play

However, some of White’s better options there are ones where he abandons the plan of b4 and plays in the centre, so it makes sense to do so as Black here. 5...Nf6 (5...e6 6 Ba3!?) d6 7 e3 Nge7 8 Nge2 shows one difference from the reversed line – if the pawn were already on a6, then ...b5 would be good) 6 Bb2 0-0 and now:

- b1) 7 Nf3?! d5! is at least OK for Black – a theme that appears in many forms.
- b2) 7 Nh3?! d5! exploits the loose knight on h3.
- b3) 7 Nd5 e6 8 Nxf6+ Bxf6 9 Bxf6 Qxf6 10 Nh3 is similar to the reversed line: chances for both sides.
- b4) 7 e3 Nb4!? 8 d4 (8 d3?! d5 9 a3 Nc6!, as in Svidler-Gelfand, Amsterdam rapid 2019, is pleasant for Black: 10 Nxd5 Nxd5 11 Bxg7 Nxe3!) 8...d5 9 a3 cxd4 (9...dxc4 10 axb4 cxb4 11 Na4 c3 12 Bc1 e5 is an interesting piece sacrifice) 10 exd4 Na6 (making use of the fact that the pawn is *not* on a6!) appears fully OK for Black: 11 Nxd5 Nxd5 12 Bxd5 Rb8 intending ...b5 with tons of counterplay.
- c) 5 Rb1 (*D*) is a straightforward and traditional choice, intending a queenside space-grab with a3 and b4.



Black to play

However, it lacks the pawn-sacrifice ideas that lie behind 5 a3, and has been eclipsed by the little pawn move. We can also answer it in the same way: 5...b6 (5...e5, a move we avoid after 5 a3 because of the pawn sacrifice with 6 b4, is pretty safe here, meeting 6 a3 with 6...a5 and generally reaching our Botvinnik set-ups) and then:

c1) 6 a3 Bb7 7 b4 transposes to note '[b](#)' to White's 7th move in Line B222.

c2) 6 e3 Ba6!? 7 d3 e6 8 Nge2 Nf6 9 a3 Bb7 10 b4 d6 intending ...Qd7 gives Black a flexible position and a good stance in the centre.

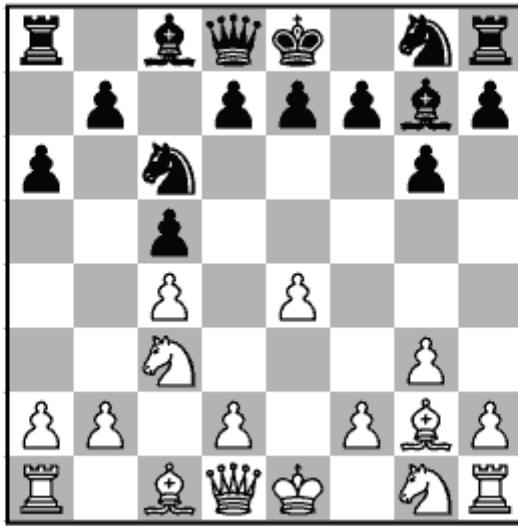
c3) 6 Nf3 Bb7 7 0-0 e6 8 Nb5!? (8 a3 Nge7 9 b4 d6 is solid; 8 e3 Nge7 9 d4 cxd4 10 Nxd4 d5 with the point 11 cxd5?! Nxd4 12 exd4 Nxd5) 8...d5 9 cxd5 exd5 10 d4 a6 11 Na3 Nf6 (avoiding 11...Nxd4?! 12 Nxd4 Bxd4?! 13 b4! – compare the 5 b3 [line](#)!) 12 dxc5 bxc5 with active enough piece-play for this hanging-pawns set-up.

B221)

5 e4

An attempt to reach a Botvinnik set-up, but not the one we use in our white repertoire. Why is that? Because the move has some specific drawbacks in this particular situation, and might almost be considered an inaccuracy.

5...a6!? (D)



White to play

Black plans ...b5 at a much earlier point than normal, and before White is fully ready to deal with it.

6 Nge2

Or:

a) 6 d3 b5! 7 Be3 (an idea we use as Black in the 5 e3 line, but not good here) 7...bxc4 8 dxc4 Rb8! 9 Qd2 (9 Qc2 Qa5 10 Bd2 Nd4) 9...Qa5 10 Rc1 and now the surprising 10...Bxc3! 11 bxc3 (11 Qxc3 Rxb2; 11 Rxc3 Qxa2) 11...Ne5 is very strong, as ...Rb2 is coming next. Compare note '[c](#)' to White's 6th move in Line B223.

b) 6 a4 is not the move White wants to play. If you consider the 'mini-rules' that we develop in Line [B225](#), you'll see that as Black in the Botvinnik set-up we only play ...a5 when White has spent a couple of moves preparing b4 (normally a3 and Rb1) and is about to make this advance. That's because as Black we want to have the option of ...b5 in many lines, so we lose flexibility without getting the opponent to make much of a commitment himself. So the insertion of ...a6 and a4 here is to Black's advantage in a wide variety of possible set-ups. 6...d6 (*D*) and now:



White to play

b1) 7 Nge2 h5!? (Black can also stodge things up with 7...e5, given that White's queenside play is hamstrung by the early a-pawn moves) 8 h3 (8 h4?! Ne5 9 d3 Bg4) and Black can 'do an Aronian' (see note '[a3](#)' to White's 6th move in Line D6 of Chapter 8) by 8...h4 9 g4 f5; e.g., 10 gxf5 (10 Nf4?! fxg4 11 Nxg6 {Hautot-Teske, European Clubs Cup, Kallithea 2002} 11...gxh3 12 Bxh3 Rh7) 10...gxf5 11 d3 fxe4 with a considerable mess, but note that the black king can readily find safety on the queenside.

b2) 7 d3 Nd4 (or 7...e6 8 Nge2 Nge7 – compare the lines after 5 d3) and then:

b21) 8 Nge2 Bg4 is obviously disruptive.

b22) 8 h3 is a very slow move, with several good answers. 8...Bd7 (8...e6 9 Nge2 Ne7 is solid) 9 Nge2 Nxe2 10 Nxe2 Qc8!? (10...b5 11 e5 leads to chaos where Black is the one in more danger) hinders 0-0 while still planning ...b5, and seems very acceptable for Black; e.g.:

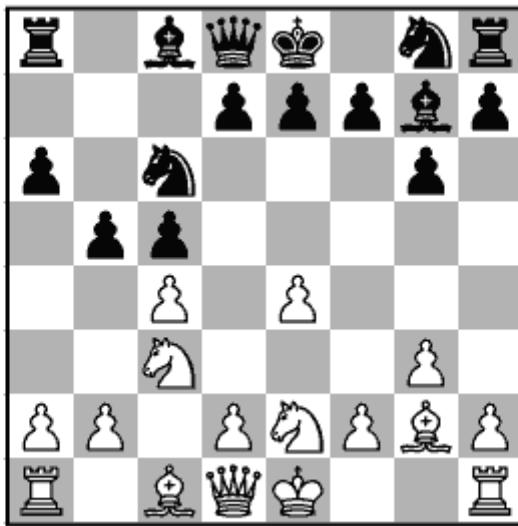
b221) 11 a5 Rb8 and Black can choose when to open the b-file.

b222) 11 Qc2 e6 (intending ...Ne7-c6) 12 Be3 Ne7 13 d4 Nc6 14 Rd1 cxd4 15 Nxd4 Nxd4 16 Bxd4 Bxd4 17 Rxd4 Qc5! is equal.

b223) 11 Nc3 e6 (intending ...Ne7-c6) 12 Be3 Ne7 13 d4 Nc6! ensures White will not dominate the d4-square.

b23) 8 Nce2 Bg4 9 f3 Bd7 intending ...b5 – to make this advance successfully even *after* White has spent time with a4 to rule it out pretty much guarantees Black a good game.

6...b5 (D)



White to play

7 cxb5

7 d3 Rb8 gives Black excellent chances and White very little of his thematic play.

7...axb5 8 Nxb5 Ba6

Now:

- a) 9 Nbc3? Nb4 10 Nf4 (10 a3? Nd3+ 11 Kf1 Bd4; 10 0-0 Bd3 and White must give up an exchange) 10...Bd3 11 Nxd3 (11 Qf3 c4) 11...Nxd3+ 12 Kf1 (12 Ke2 c4) 12...Bd4 is grim for White.
- b) 9 Nec3 and now Black has a number of attractive options, but don't get carried away: White should survive. 9...Bxc3 (9...Qa5 10 a4 Bxc3 11 dxc3 Bxb5 12 axb5 Qxa1 13 bxc6 dxc6 14 0-0, as in Lagopatis-Navara, Greek Team Ch, Achaia 2013, and 9...Qb8 10 a4 Bxc3 11 dxc3 Bxb5 12 Bf4 Qa7 13 axb5 Qxa1 14 bxc6 dxc6 are both double-edged) 10 Nxc3 Bd3 11 Bf1 Nb4 12 Bxd3 Nxd3+ 13 Kf1 (13 Ke2?! c4! 14 b3 Qb6 15 bxc4 Qd4!) 13...f5!? with the initiative; e.g., 14 Qb3 Qc8 15 Qc4 (15 Qb5 c4 16 b3 Nf6) 15...fxe4 16 Nxe4 Qa6 17 Qxa6 Rx a6 with positional pressure (and sneaky ideas like ...Re6).

B222)

5 a3

With this tricky and popular move, which White is hoping to play a pawn sacrifice with b4 in many cases, especially if Black replies with ...e6 or ...e5.

5...b6!? (D)



White to play

A cunning response advocated by Watson, but rather dismissed by Kosten. It lets White play b4, but argues that if all White can then do is exchange pawns on c5, he has basically just lost time. Meanwhile putting the bishop on b7 opens up some tactical themes on the long diagonal.

6 b4

Other moves:

- a) 6 Nf3 Bb7 7 0-0 Nd4 8 e3 Nxf3+ 9 Bxf3 Bxf3 10 Qxf3 Nh6 restrains the d4 advance and leads to interesting play.
- b) 6 d3 Bb7 offers White little; e.g., 7 e4 e6 8 Nge2 Nge7 9 0-0 d6 10 Be3 (intending d4; 10 Rb1 Nd4 11 b4 Qd7 with a good and flexible game, and ...f5 coming soon) 10...Nd4 with no particular problems for Black; e.g., 11 b4 0-0 12 Rb1 Qd7 13 Qd2 f5 14 Bh6 Bxh6 15 Qxh6 Nec6 (Shahinyan-Korobov, Erevan 2015).

c) 6 e3 Bb7 7 Nge2 (*D*) and here:



Black to play

c1) 7...Na5 is the solid approach. 8 Bxb7 Nxb7 (it might seem that Black has wasted time, but White has made a lot of little pawn moves without a great deal to show for them) 9 b4 (9 d4 Rc8!? 10 d5 Nd6, intending ...f5 and with ...b5 ideas in the background, livens the game up somewhat) 9...Nf6 10 Bb2 0-0 11 0-0 d5 12 cxd5 Nxd5 13 Qb3 (King-Motwani, Blackpool Zonal 1990) and now 13...Nxc3 14 Bxc3 Bxc3 leaves Black with no particular problems.

c2) 7...Qc8 seeks counterplay and a more complex game. 8 d3 (or 8 0-0 Ne5 9 d3 Bxg2 10 Kxg2 f5!?) 8...Nd4 9 e4 d6 10 0-0 h5 (10...Nf6 11 b4 is pleasant for White) 11 h3 (11 h4 Nh6) 11...Nf6 and then:

c21) 12 b4 is now answered by 12...Nxe2+ 13 Qxe2 h4, with the point 14 g4? Nxg4.

c22) 12 Nxd4 cxd4 13 Nd5 Nd7 14 Bf4 Ne5 (but not 14...e6?, losing to 15 Bxd6!! exd5 16 exd5) is playable; e.g., 15 a4 h4 16 g4 e6 17 Nb4 0-0 intending ...f5.

c23) 12 Be3 and now 12...h4 13 Nxd4 (13 g4? Nxg4!) 13...cxd4 14 Bxd4 hxg3 15 fxg3 Rxh3 leads to a double-edged struggle.

6...Bb7 (*D*)



White to play

7 bxc5

Otherwise:

a) 7 b5?! Na5 gets White nowhere.

b) 7 Rb1 d6!? (7...Rb8 8 Nf3 Ne5 is another option, as in Koutseva-Salputra, Oxford vs Cambridge 2009) and now:

b1) 8 bxc5?! Bxc3! 9 dxc3 dxc5 is structurally unpleasant for White, and he lacks dynamic compensation: 10 Qa4 Qd7 11 Nf3 Nf6 12 Ne5 Nxe5 13 Qxd7+ Kxd7 14 Bxb7 Rad8 and the knights will dominate the bishops.

b2) 8 b5 Na5 9 Bxb7 Nxb7 10 Bb2 e6 (Wilde-Kabatianski, Germany tt 2010/11) intending ...Ne7 and ...d5 at his leisure, is comfortable for Black.

b3) 8 Nf3 Nd4 9 Nd5 Qd7 with no particular problems for Black.

b4) 8 Bb2 e6 (8...Qd7 is fine too) 9 Nb5 (9 Qa4 Ne7) 9...Bxb2 10 Rxb2 Nge7 and Black has no problems, Dominguez-Caruana, Baku 2014.

c) 7 Bb2?!? Qc8 8 Nf3 (after 8 Qb1?! Nd4 9 Nf3, as in Rotstein-Markholev, Cesenatico 2004, 9...cx b4! is good for Black) 8...cx b4 9 axb4 Nxb4 10 Qb3 Nc6 11 Nd5 Nf6! allows White just about enough compensation.

7...bxc5

This leads to rather equal positions. More ambitious is 7...Bxc3!? 8 dxc3 Nf6.

8 Rb1

Here we have two reliable options:

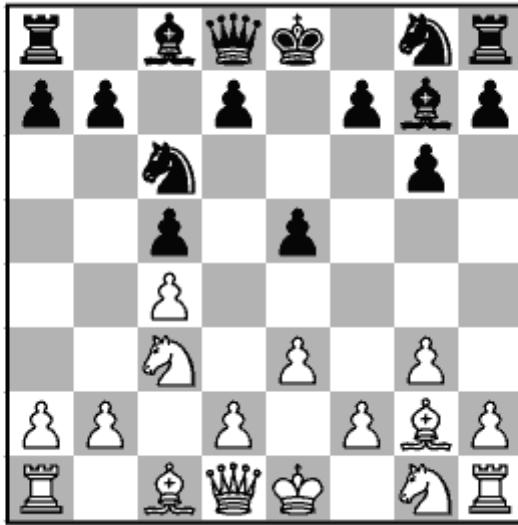
a) 8...Qc8 9 Nf3 Na5 (9...Ne5 10 Nd5! Nxc4? 11 Rxb7!) 10 Qa4 looks awkward, but 10...Bxc3 11 dxc3 Be4 12 Rb2 Nb7 holds things together.

b) 8...Rb8 (solid) 9 Na4 Na5 10 Bxb7 Rxb7 11 Rxb7 Nxb7 is very equal, Keskowski-Ingersol, corr. 2015.

B223)

5 e3 e5 (D)

5...e6 is the main alternative here, but it can lead to some grindingly dull and symmetrical positions.



White to play

6 Nge2

6 a3 might seem like a good idea, given how effective the [line](#) 5 e4 a6!? is for Black. However, White's extra move e3 here has its drawbacks, and 6...d6!? parries White's intended b4 advance by rather clever means:

a) 7 Nge2 Nge7 8 b4 (8 0-0 transposes to note '[c](#)' after Black's 7th move at the end of this section) 8...Be6 9 d3 d5 (9...cxb4 10 axb4 Nxb4 is OK too) 10 cxd5 Nxd5 11 bxc5 Qa5 12 Bd2 Qxc5 and Black has his full share of the chances.

b) 7 Rb1 Nge7 and then:

b1) 8 b4 Be6 9 bxc5 (9 Nd5 transposes to line '[c3](#)') 9...Bxc4 is a line where White extra move hurts him, as 10 Rxb7 0-0 11 cxd6 Qxd6 gives Black nice compensation; e.g., 12 Qa4 Qe6 13 Ne4 (13 Nge2 Rab8 14 Rxb8 Rxb8 15 0-0 f5) 13...Rac8!? 14 Nc5 Qd6.

b2) 8 Nge2 Be6 9 Nd5 (9 d3 d5) 9...b5!? (9...Rb8 10 b4 a6, with ...b5 coming soon, is a safer option) 10 Nxe7 (10 cxb5?! Bxd5 favours Black, Sloth-Adorjan, Gladsaxe 1983) 10...Nxe7 11 cxb5 (11 Bxa8? Qxa8 is terrible for White) 11...d5 may well give Black enough compensation, and would certainly be intimidating to face over the board.

c) 7 b4 and now 7...Be6 (D) is logical but rare. Then:



White to play

c1) 8 d3?! e4!.

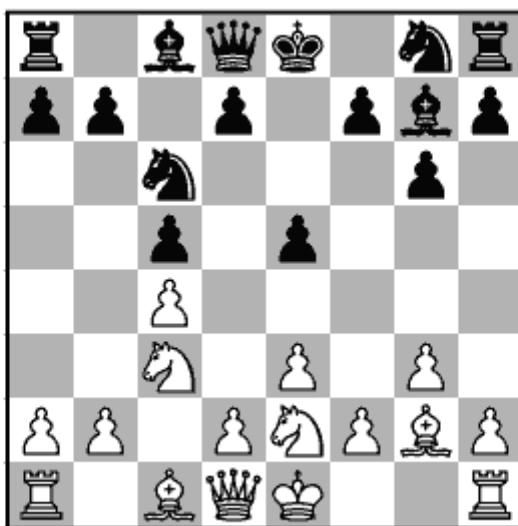
c2) 8 bxc5?! dxc5 9 Rb1 Qd7 is good for Black, as White's d-pawn will remain backward and Black has an excellent grip on the position generally. A specific line that shows the extra move e3 (compared to the analogous [line](#) after 5 e4 a6!? that we saw in Line B221) to be a great disadvantage is 10 Qa4 Rc8! 11 Bxc6? bxc6!, when 12 Ne4? (strong in the reversed case) loses to 12...Qd3 13 Nc3 Nf6 with a decisive grip around the white king's throat.

c3) 8 Nd5 Nge7 9 Rb1 cxb4 10 axb4 b5 (achieving this advance with no preparation is something of a coup, but 10...a5!? is also playable) and now:

c31) 11 Nxe7 Nxe7 12 cxb5 (12 Bxa8?! Qxa8 13 f3 bxc4 is great compensation; e.g., 14 Qa4+ Bd7 15 b5 0-0 16 Qxc4 Bf5 17 d3 Rc8 18 Qb3 e4! 19 fxe4 Bxe4) 12...Rc8 with good play.

c32) 11 d3 Rb8 12 Ne2 transposes to the game Mareco-Felgaer, Buenos Aires 2012, when 12...0-0 left Black comfortably directing events.

We now return to 6 Nge2 (D):



6...Nge7

We now have a rather tangled mass of lines and transpositions, but one of the key points is that it is often important for Black to play ...d6 and ...Be6 rather than castling quickly, and that the moves ...a6 and ...Rb8 may not be needed to start queenside counterplay. 6...d6 is another possible move-order, but gives White the extra option of 7 d4!?

7 0-0

Or:

a) 7 a3 d6 transposes to note '[a](#)' to White's 6th move above.

b) 7 d3 d6 8 a3 Be6 9 b4 transposes to that [same](#) note.

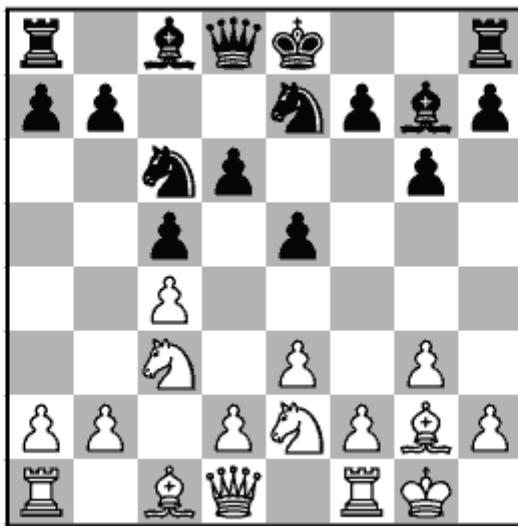
c) 7 b3 d6 8 Bb2 Be6 9 0-0 (9 Nd5 Bxd5 10 cxd5 Nb4 11 0-0 Nbxsd5 12 d4 merely gives White enough play for the pawn) 9...0-0 (9...d5?! is one instance where this advance is premature: 10 cxd5 Nxd5 11 Na4! b6 12 Nf4! is an elegant tactic from Benko-Kapetanović, New York 1987) 10 Nd5 (otherwise Black really will play ...d5) and then:

c1) 10...Rb8 11 d3 (11 Nec3 a6 and ...b5) 11...b5 12 Qd2 a5 gives Black enough queenside activity.

c2) 10...Bxd5 11 cxd5 Nb4 12 e4 (12 d4 is again "enough for the pawn") 12...Nd3 13 Bc3 f5! gives Black counterplay, as the attempt to trap the knight with 14 Qb1 (14 Qc2 fxe4 15 a3?! Qb6! eyeing f2) 14...fxe4 15 a3 runs into 15...Qd7 16 Bxe4 Nf4!.

7...d6 (D)

7...0-0 8 a3 a6?! 9 b4! offers White more chances.



Now (after 7...d6):

a) 8 d4 exd4 9 exd4 cxd4! 10 Nd5 (10 Nb5?! Nf5) 10...Nf5 is not very convincing for White.

b) 8 d3 0-0 9 a3 (9 Rb1 Bg4 10 h3 Be6 11 Nd5 Rb8 intending ...b5 with counterplay, Persson-Wedberg, Stockholm 1978/9) 9...Bg4 (the idea is that after h3 the bishop drops back to e6 and a later ...Qd7 gains a tempo) 10 Rb1 a6 (10...a5 is viable too) 11 b4 cxb4 12 axb4 b5 with chances for both sides.

c) 8 a3 Be6! (planning ...d5 if White simply defends the c4-pawn; 8...0-0 9 b4!?) 9 Nd5 Rb8 (intending ...b5) 10 Nec3 (10 b4 e4) 10...a6 11 b4 b5 (MacFarlane-Palkovi, Oakham 1986) 12 d3 e4! is almost a ‘theme encyclopaedia’. Black can be happy with his prospects.

B224)

5 d3!?

A flexible move, and my recommendation for White in this book. White might still intend to play e4, but retains other plans too.

5...e6 (D)



White to play

This makes sense now that the desperately dull lines where White also plays e3, Nge2 and d4 are off the table, and any quick gambits with a3 and b4 would drop the knight on c3.

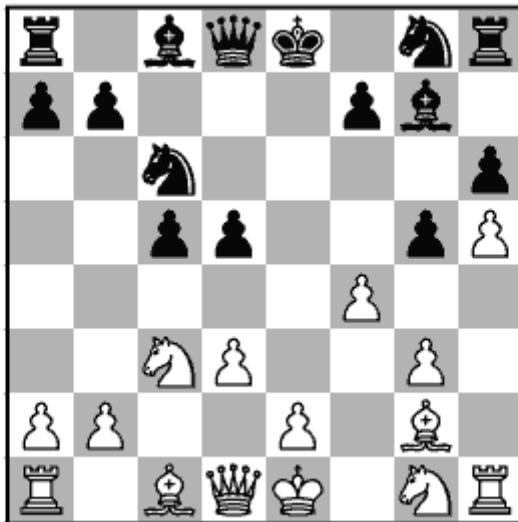
6 e4

Bringing us back into Reverseland. But since I used the word ‘flexible’, you’re no doubt expecting to see a mass of strategically diverse alternatives. This should not disappoint:

a) 6 Bxc6 dxc6 7 f4 is an old Larsen idea, seeking to keep the c8-bishop bottled up, but 7...e5 is a good response.

b) 6 Nf3 is most simply answered with 6...d5, given that White has allowed this move. Black’s centre doesn’t come under any quick pressure; e.g., 7 cxd5 (7 Bf4 d4!? 8 Na4 e5 9 Bd2 Qe7 with a space advantage; 7 0-0 Nge7 8 e4 d4 9 Na4 b6 leaves Black very solid) 7...exd5 8 0-0 (8 Bf4 Nge7 9 Qd2 0-0 10 Rc1 d4 11 Nb5 b6 is safe enough) 8...Nge7 9 e4 (9 Bf4 0-0 10 Rc1 h6!?, Bernadsky-Ulko, St Petersburg 2014) 9...0-0 10 Bf4 dxe4 (10...d4 is OK except that after 11 Nb5 b6 12 Nc7 Rb8 13 Nb5 Black should allow the repetition) 11 dxe4 Qb6 with counterplay.

c) Let's meet 6 h4 with 6...h6!? (if you want a simpler option, then 6...Nf6 is reliable, meeting 7 Nf3 with 7...d5, focusing attention on the centre), inviting Aronian's idea 7 h5 g5 8 f4 because we have the interesting pawn sacrifice 8...d5!? 9 cxd5 exd5 (*D*) ready:



White to play

c1) Declining with 10 Nf3?! d4 11 Ne4 f5! allows Black excellent play.

c2) 10 Nxd5 Nge7 11 Nxe7 (11 Nc3 g4! gives the black pieces good squares) 11...Qxe7 with surprisingly good compensation; e.g., 12 Nf3 g4 (rather than 12...gxf4 13 Bxf4 Bxb2 14 Rb1 Bg7 15 Qc1) 13 Nh4 Bd7 14 Bxc6 (14 Be4 c4) 14...Bxc6 15 Nf5 Qf6 16 e4 0-0-0, when 17 Qxg4 Rxd3 18 Qxg7 (18 Nxg7+? Kb8 gives Black a devastating attack) 18...Qxg7 19 Nxg7 Bxe4 traps the knight, with rough equality. More analysis? OK: 20 Rh4 Rxg3 21 f5 Bc6! 22 f6 Rd8 23 Nf5 Rg1+ 24 Kf2 Rdd1, when 25 Nxf6? Rdf1+! 26 Ke2 Bb5+ 27 Ke3 Rg3+ 28 Ke4 Bc6+ 29 Ke5 Rd3! is winning for Black.

d) 6 Be3 d6 7 Qd2 h6! (*D*) and then:



White to play

d1) 8 f4!? (intending Nf3, with ideas of either d4 or kingside play) 8...Nf6 9 Nf3 0-0 10 h3 Qe7 (10...d5? 11 Bxc5) 11 Bf2 (11 0-0?! d5) 11...d5 12 Ne5 d4 13 Nxc6 bxc6 14 Na4 e5 15 e4 with a tough strategic battle ahead.

d2) 8 Nf3 e5! (preventing d4) and here:

d21) 9 0-0 Nge7 (Granda-Iturriaga, Cochabamba 2013) 10 Ne1 Be6 11 Nc2 Qd7 with play in the centre or on the kingside; I give some further analysis in Chapter 8 (note '[b3](#)' to White's 6th move in Line D6), when we look at this from the white side.

d22) 9 a3 (intending b4) 9...Nge7!? (there's also the solid 9...a5 10 0-0 Nge7, with a modified version of familiar lines) 10 b4 Be6 has the tactical point 11 bxc5 (11 0-0 b6 leaves Black solid) 11...dxc5 12 Bxc5 e4 with counterplay; e.g., 13 dxe4 Qa5 14 Bd4 Rd8 15 e3 (15 Bxg7?! Rxd2 16 Nxd2 Rh7! 17 Bf6 Ng8!) 15...Bxc4.

6...Nge7 (D)



White to play

Now:

a) 7 h4 h6 (note that in our black repertoire, we are generally meeting h4 with ...h6 in this structure where it is viable; for our white repertoire we often need to consider ...h5 too) doesn't gain White a great deal: 8 Be3 (8 f4?! d5! is that old thing about meeting a flank advance with a blow in the centre; 8 h5 g5 9 f4 gxf4 10 Bxf4 {Borsuk-Kovchan, Omelnyk 2018} 10...Ne5!? intending ...N7c6 gives Black a good grip on the centre) 8...Nd4 9 Qd2 (9 f4 d5 10 e5 0-0 intending ...f6) 9...Nec6 10 Nge2 (10 f4 intends h5, which 10...h5 prevents) 10...d6 with chances for both sides, Rakhmanov-Linchevsky, Kaliningrad 2015.

b) 7 Be3 Nd4 and now:

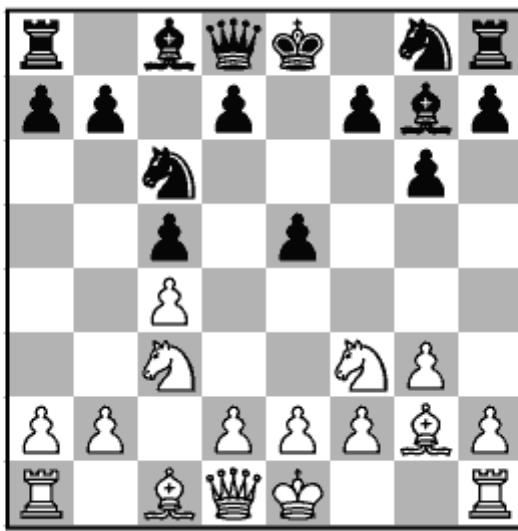
b1) 8 Nge2 Nec6 9 h4 h6 (Aleksandrov-Krasenkov, New York 1997) 10 h5 g5 11 f4 (11 Nb5 d6) 11...gxf4 12 gxf4 d6 13 Qd2 (13 Rg1 Bf6) 13...Qa5 with a messy game where both kings will end up on the queenside.

b2) 8 h4 h6 9 h5 g5 10 f4 gxf4 11 gxf4 d6 12 Qd2 is an important but untested position that is also part of our white repertoire. See note '[a](#)' at the very end of Chapter 8 for additional analysis.

c) 7 Nge2 d6 (flexible) 8 0-0 (8 Rb1 b6 9 a3 Bb7 10 b4 f5 with interesting and unexplored play; 8 Be3 Nd4 9 Qd2 Nec6 10 0-0 0-0 11 Bh6 Bxh6 12 Qxh6 {Miezis-Leko, Dresden Olympiad 2008} 12...f6 gives Black a very fluid structure and no bad pieces; 8 h4 h6 9 f4 e5!? intending ...Bg4) 8...0-0 9 Rb1 b6 10 Bg5 (10 Be3 Nd4) 10...Bb7 11 Qd2 and Black might as well start counterplay with 11...f5!?

B225)

5 Nf3 e5 (D)



White to play

In the lines that follow, there are a great many possible move-orders, so it is helpful to understand the position in terms of mini-rules, which I'll emphasize throughout this section.

Right now there are three moves to consider. They feature a lot of strategies in common, but each have their own subtleties in terms of implementation, in particular with respect to manoeuvring the f3-knight, which would love to sit unchallenged on d5:

B2251: 6 0-0

B2252: 6 d3

B2253: 6 a3

6 Rb1 Nge7 7 a3 a5 (7...d6 8 b4 f5 is another idea, Strelnikov-V.Georgiev, Bansko 2010) 8 0-0 0-0 transposes to Line [B2253](#).

B2251)

6 0-0 Nge7

Now there are two important lines where White adopts the Ne1-c2 manoeuvre.

7 Ne1

7 d3 d6 8 a3 a5 9 Ne1 (*D*) and here we have a mini-rule.

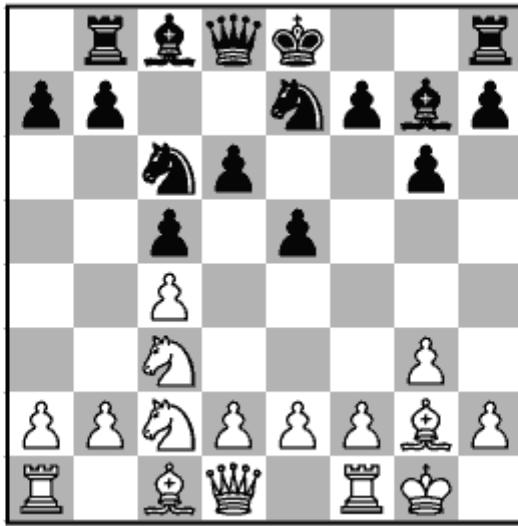


Black to play

White is spending time in order to occupy d5, but is not yet ready to do so. This is Black's signal to get in the ...d5 advance himself: 9...Be6! 10 Nc2 (10 Nd5 Rb8 11 Rb1 0-0 12 Nc2 transposes to the [note](#) to White's 11th move in Line B2253) 10...d5 11 cxd5 Nxd5 12 Ne3 Nb6! (a key move, used by Caruana and Shankland; 12...Nde7 13 Nc4 0-0 14 Bg5 gives White annoying pressure) 13 Bxc6+ (13 Na4 Nxa4 14 Qxa4 Bd7 and 13 Ne4 Qe7 14 Qc2 c4 15 Nxc4 Nxc4 16 dxc4 Nd4 17 Qa4+ b5!, as in Sapundjiev-Pirs, corr. 2009, offer White little) 13...bxc6 and then:

- After 14 Na4 Nxa4 15 Qxa4 0-0 16 Qxc6 Qd4! 17 Nc2 Qg4 (Rohan-Priyadharshan, Berkeley 2018) White must be rather careful to protect his king.
- 14 Ne4 c4! 15 dxc4 (15 Nxc4 Nxc4 16 dxc4 Qd4 and the black bishops will be strong, as demonstrated in some high-level correspondence games) 15...0-0! 16 b3 (or 16 c5 Nd7 17 Qd6 Qc8) 16...a4 17 Qxd8 Rfxd8 18 Ng5 Bc8! 19 b4 Ba6 with enough counterplay: 20 c5 Nc4 21 Ra2 h6 22 Ne4 f5 23 Nc3 Nxe3 (six correspondence games have reached this position, with no wins for White) 24 Bxe3 f4! 25 Bc1 f3, Peschke-Wolmann, corr. 2014.

7...Rb8 8 Nc2 d6 (*D*)



White to play

9 d3

9 Ne3 a6 intends ...b5 (this would have been bad before the knight left c2, as White could have responded strongly with Rb1 and b4!), and 10 a4 is not a move White wants to play, as then 10...Nb4 (Cox-Motylev, European Clubs Cup, Kallithea 2008) ensures White will not dominate the d5-square.

9...Be6 10 a3

10 Rb1 allows 10...d5, while 10 Ne3 a6 11 Ned5 0-0 (intending ...b5) 12 a4 Nb4! (Barcza-Hecht, Varna Olympiad 1962) uses the b4-square to contest d5; if White ends up with a pawn on d5, he will not have achieved much.

10...0-0 11 b4 (D)

11 Ne3 is as usual met by 11...a6.



Black to play

Now (after 11 b4):

- a) Not 11...e4? 12 Nxe4!, as in Dive-R.Smith, Waitakere 2017.
- b) 11...d5!? could be investigated.
- c) 11...b5!? 12 Nxb5 (12 cxb5 Nd4! 13 bxc5? Bb3; 12 bxc5?! bxc4) 12...d5; e.g., 13 Bg5 f6 14 Be3 dxc4 15 dxc4 Qxd1 16 Rfxd1 Bxc4 17 Nd6 Bb3 18 Rdc1 Nd4 19 Nxd4 cxd4 20 Bd2 f5 and the position is full of life.
- d) 11...b6 (the safe choice, intending ...d5) 12 Rb1 (12 Ne3 now allows 12...e4!; 12 b5 Nd4 13 Ne3 f5) 12...d5 breaks open the centre, avoiding any binds; e.g., 13 cxd5 Nxd5 14 Nxd5 Bxd5 15 bxc5 Bxg2 16 Kxg2 Qd5+ 17 e4 Qxc5.

B2252)

6 d3 Nge7 (D)



White to play

7 Nd2

White seeks to benefit from the delay in castling to find another route to d5.

7 0-0 takes us back to the [note](#) to White's 7th move in Line B2251. As I have mentioned, there are many possible move-orders, so it is important to understand the key strategic themes. Any attempt to perform a mere rote memorization of a great many specific sequences will lead to confusion due to the tangled nature of these lines.

Note that 7 Bg5 is met by 7...f6, which is the usual reaction to Bg5 in this line. The blocking of the long diagonal is not a big deal as Black's eventual plans include the ...f5 advance, and the f7-square may prove useful too; the priority is to stop White dominating the d5-square.

7...d6 8 Nf1

This allows us to note a mini-rule: when White spends a lot of time in order to occupy d5, it makes sense for Black not to play ...Be6, and instead to prove a white knight superfluous by playing around the one on d5.

Instead after 8 a3 Rb8 (8...0-0 9 Rb1 a5 is a solid option) 9 Rb1 a6 10 b4 (10 Nf1 b5 and White appears to have mixed two plans) 10...cxb4 11 axb4 b5 Black stabilizes the queenside.

8...a6 (D)



White to play

I'd like to offer a mini-rule on whether to play ...a6, ...a5 or neither, but it probably can't be expressed pithily; just be aware that it is a weighty decision. Now:

- a) 9 Bg5 Rb8 (or 9...f6 10 Bd2 Rb8) 10 a4 (10 Ne3?? f6 shows a point of delaying ...f6!; 10 Nd5 b5! and the check on f6 is no real inconvenience for Black: 11 Nf6+?! Kf8 12 Bxc6 h6!) 10...f6 11 Bd2 0-0 (11...Nb4?! 12 a5) 12 Ne3 f5 13 Ned5 Nxd5 (even 13...f4 isn't absurd) 14 Nxd5 and now 14...a5!? blocks the queenside to focus on the kingside, where Black is well set-up for battle; ...Nb4 can also be a way to challenge the d5-knight.
- b) 9 Ne3 Rb8 10 Ned5 0-0 (10...Nxd5 11 cxd5 Nd4, as in Alekseev-Landa, Tomsk 2006, is sound but less interesting) 11 Bg5 f6 12 Bd2 b5!? (Psakhis-Liss, Tel Aviv 1999) 13 Nxe7+ Nxe7 14 cxb5 axb5 15 Qb3+ Kh8 16 Nxb5 Nf5 17 e3 d5 with counterplay.

B2253)

6 a3 Nge7 (D)

The possibility of Black playing ...d5 is one that White normally prevents one way or another, but it 'keeps White honest' as it were. With that in mind, you'll appreciate why the move-order with 6...d6 gives White more options.



White to play

7 0-0

Or:

a) 7 Rb1 0-0 (7...a5 is viable too, though unnecessary just yet) and here:

a1) 8 0-0 transposes to the [main](#) line of this section.

a2) 8 d3 and now Black can safely continue with normal moves (e.g., 8...a5 9 0-0 transposes to the [note](#) to White's 9th move below) or play 8...d5 9 cxd5 Nxd5 (Semrl-Nefedov, World corr. Ch 2017), when 10 Nxe5 Nxc3 11 Nxc6 Nxd1 12 Nxd8 Rxd8 13 Bg5 Rd6 14 Kxd1 c4 15 Bf4 Rd4 works out OK for Black.

a3) 8 b4 is another case where 8...d5! proves good: 9 cxd5 (9 b5 e4!? 10 Ng5 Ne5 11 cxd5 f5 with good play) 9...Nxd5 10 Nxd5 (10 Nxe5?! Nxc3 11 Nxc6 Nxd1 12 Nxd8 Rxd8 13 Kxd1 c4! with excellent compensation and the threat of ...Bf5) 10...Qxd5 11 d3 cxb4 12 axb4 a5 gives Black the initiative.

b) 7 b4 looks like a great way to seize control of the game until you discover that Black has prepared 7...d5! (D), an excellent blow in the centre that leaves him comfortable:



White to play

b1) 8 b5 has several good answers, including 8...Na5 9 cxd5 e4 10 Ng5 f5.

b2) 8 bxc5 dxc4! is unpromising for White; e.g., 9 Rb1 (9 Qa4 0-0 10 Qxc4 Na5 11 Qh4?! f5!) 9...0-0 10 0-0 Rb8! intending ...Bf5 and meeting 11 Ng5 with 11...b6.

b3) 8 cxd5 Nxd5 and then:

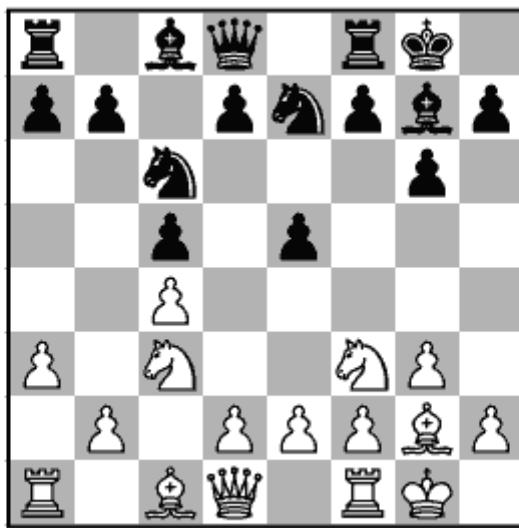
b31) 9 Nxd5?! is considered harmless even though no one has answered 9...e4! 10 Ng5 (10 Nc3 exf3 11 Bxf3 Bh3!) 10...Qxd5 11 Nxe4 Kf8!.

b32) 9 e4 (Cordova-F.Fernandez, Badalona 2016) 9...Nc7!? 10 bxc5 Ne6 with a nice grip on the centre.

b33) 9 Ng5 Nc7! (9...Ndxb4 10 Nxf7 is White's idea) 10 d3 (10 Nge4 c4!) 10...f5!? (10...e4 11 Ngxe4 cxb4 12 axb4 f5 13 Bg5 Bxc3+ 14 Kf1 Qd4 leads to messy play, Gelfand-Grishchuk, Kazan Candidates 2011) 11 Qb3 Qe7 12 bxc5 h6 13 Nf3 Be6 14 Qxb7 Qd7 with compensation as the white queen is in danger.

7...0-0 (D)

7...d6 invites 8 b4.



White to play

8 Rb1

Alternatively:

a) 8 d3 d6 9 Bg5 (9 Rb1 a5 transposes to the [note](#) to White's 9th move) 9...f6 is likely to transpose to 8 Rb1 a5 9 d3 d6 10 Bg5 f6 lines, i.e. note '[c](#)' to White's 9th move or line '[a4](#)' of that note.

b) 8 b4 can be answered in a way that should be familiar by now: 8...d5. Then:

b1) 9 bxc5 dxc4 10 Rb1 transposes to note '[b2](#)' to White's 7th move above.

b2) 9 b5 Na5 10 cxd5 Nxd5 11 Nxd5 Qxd5 12 Ng5 (12 Bb2 is strongly met by 12...e4! since the king defends the bishop) 12...Qb3 with no problems at all for Black.

b3) 9 cxd5 Nxd5 10 Nxd5 e4!? (everyone has played 10...Qxd5 here, which is OK too) 11 Nc3 (after 11 Ne5 Qxd5 12 Nxc6 Qxc6 13 Rb1 c4 Black has little to worry about) 11...exf3 12 Bxf3 Nd4 with excellent compensation; e.g.:

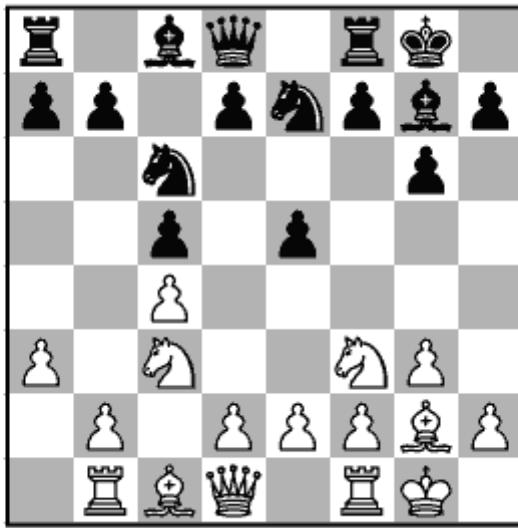
b31) 13 bxc5 Nxf3+ 14 exf3 Re8.

b32) 13 Bd5 Bf5 14 Ra2 (14 e4 Bh3) 14...Qd7.

b33) 13 Be4 cxb4 14 axb4 Re8 15 e3 Nb5 16 Qc2 Bh3 17 Bg2 (17 Re1? Nxc3 18 dxc3 Rxe4) 17...Bxg2 18 Kxg2 Rc8.

b34) 13 Bg2 cxb4 14 axb4 Bg4 15 Rb1 Re8 16 f3 (16 Re1 Qd7) 16...Bf5 17 Ne4 Qb6 18 e3 (18 Kh1 a5 18...Nxf3+ 19 Bxf3 Rxe4!).

We now return to 8 Rb1 (*D*):



Black to play

8...a5

Now that White has spent a further move supporting b4, it is time to prevent it more directly.

8...d5 is possible, but less effective than it is as a reply to b4 (see the notes to White's [7th](#) and [8th](#) moves above). After 9 cxd5 Nxd5 10 Nxd5 Qxd5 11 d3 Black will have to defend very precisely.

9 Ne1

Again we see the Ne1-c2 manoeuvre.

9 d3 is generally linked with the idea of an annoying Bg5 pin. 9...d6 and then:

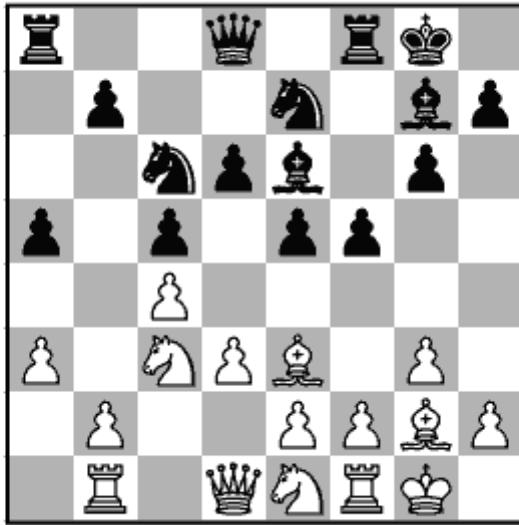
a) 10 Ne1 comes a little too late. With 10...Be6 we get a taste of the ...d5/...b5 mini-rule ([explained](#) in line 'b' below):

a1) 11 Nc2 d5 is Black's idea; then 12 cxd5 Nxd5 13 Ne4 b6 14 Ng5 Bg4 (Siebrecht-Jakubowski, Gausdal 2005) is more than OK for Black.

a2) 11 b4 axb4 12 axb4 Nxb4 (Valdes-Zaibi, Batumi Olympiad 2018) liquidates the a- and b-pawns, with safe equality.

a3) 11 Nd5 Rb8 and ...b5 follows, as 12 a4?! (12 Nc2 transposes to the [note](#) to White's 11th move below) 12...Nb4 (Najdorf-Sanguineti, Buenos Aires 1977) is good for Black.

a4) 11 Bg5 f6 12 Be3 (12 Bd2 transposes to line 'c') 12...f5 (*D*) (12...Qd7 13 Nc2 Bh3 14 b4 gives White more prospects, though should be OK for Black) and here:



White to play

a41) 13 f4 b6 14 fxe5 dxe5 with an odd structure that can't be bad for Black.

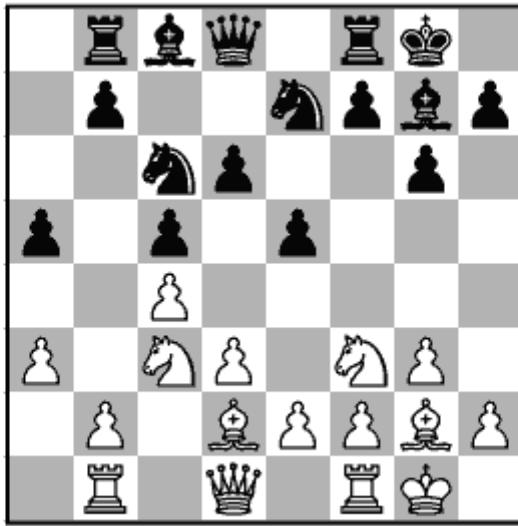
a42) 13 Nc2?! f4 14 Bd2 d5 obviously leaves Black in charge.

a43) 13 Nd5 Bf7 (intending ...Nxd5) 14 Bg5 h6! 15 Nxe7+ Nxe7 16 Bd2 (Berkovich-Cvetković, European Seniors, Plovdiv 2013; 16 Bxe7 Qxe7 17 Nc2 f4!) 16...Qd7! (not 16...d5? 17 cxd5 and Qc1) with ideas of either a kingside push or ...d5 once it is tactically sound.

a44) 13 Qd2 Qd7 14 Nf3?! Kh8 15 Bh6 (15 Ng5?! Bg8) 15...f4!? with chances for both sides.

a45) 13 Bg5 Qd7 14 Qd2 (14 Nc2?! is well met by 14...f4, as in Ludgate-D.James, Dublin Zonal 1993; 14 Bxe7 Nxe7 intending both ...d5 and ...f4) 14...Rf7 (14...d5?! 15 cxd5 Nxd5 16 Na4!; 14...Kh8 15 Nc2 Ng8 is OK) 15 Nc2 (15 Nf3 Raf8) 15...d5 16 Na4 Qd6 17 Ne3 Ra6 with a complex struggle.

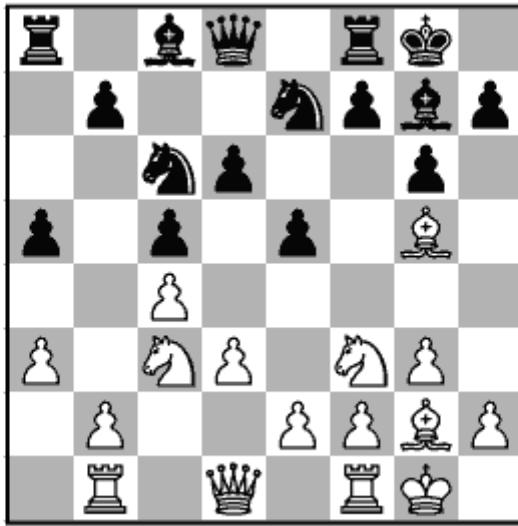
b) 10 Bd2 Rb8 (*D*) may look odd after playing ...a5, given that Black's prospects of getting in the ...b5 advance seem poor.



White to play

But actually it is a standard idea in this line. The move Nd5 is a major part of White's active plans, but this move takes the pressure off b5, and often allows the ...b5 advance after all. So the rook move is clever prophylaxis against one of White's main ideas. 11 Ne1 (11 Nb5 allows 11...d5) 11...Be6 shows a further mini-rule: by preparing ...d5, Black encourages White to play Nd5, which allows the ...b5 advance that he has up his sleeve. Then 12 e4 (hardly the move White was dreaming of but 12 Nd5 walks into 12...b5 and 12 Nc2 is met by 12...d5; both these lines are well-tested and sound for Black) 12...Nd4 leaves Black very comfortable; e.g., 13 b4 b5.

c) 10 Bg5 (*D*) brings in an important theme.



White to play

10...f6 (in most instances this is the right response to Bg5; 10...h6?! 11 Bxe7! scores very well for White, since White will then manage to establish a knight on d5, and the bishop-pair does not make up for this) 11 Bd2 (11 Be3 Be6 12 Ne1 transposes to line '[a4](#)') 11...Be6 12 Ne1 (12 e4 Rb8 13 Nd5 b5 14 b4 leads to a queenside liquidation that leaves White no better) 12...d5 and then:

c1) 13 cxd5 Nxd5 is comfortable for Black:

c11) 14 Qb3?! Nc7! (Svidler-Giri, Moscow 2016; 14...a4 is also OK) 15 Qxb7 (15 Qb6 Nd4) 15...Nd4 leaves the queen in danger.

c12) 14 Nc2 f5 (14...Rf7!?) 15 Ne3 Nxe3 16 Bxe3 (Kazoks-Freydl, corr. 2005) 16...Nd4! and Black is doing well; e.g., 17 Bxb7 Ra7 18 Bg2 Nb3.

c2) 13 Na4!? b6 14 b4 has only occurred in correspondence games. 14...axb4 15 axb4 and now exchanging on b4 is equal, while 15...dxc4 keeps the game a little more unbalanced: 16 bxc5 (16 b5?! Rxa4! 17 Qxa4 Nd4) 16...b5!? (16...bxc5 provides simpler equality) 17 Rxb5 f5 intending ...e4.

We now return to 9 Ne1 (*D*):



Black to play

9...d6 10 Nc2

10 d3 transposes to note '[a](#)' to White's 9th move, while after 10 b3?! our standard themes function like clockwork: 10...Be6 11 Nd5 (11 Nc2 d5, Lombard-Ribli, Skopje Olympiad 1972) 11...Rb8 12 d3 (12 a4 Nb4) 12...b5 (Perelshteyn-Bartholomew, Philadelphia 2008).

10...Be6

Intending ...d5. 10...a4 11 d3 is harder for Black to handle.

11 Ne3

Thanks to his accurate move-order, White has managed to get both knights trained on d5 without having to occupy this square or allow ...b5. However, this has taken time and his queen's bishop is not playing a role yet, and with accurate play Black can get his share of the chances.

11 Nd5 Rb8 intends ...b5, and 12 d3 (12 b4 b5 13 d3 comes to the same thing) 12...b5 13 b4 (13 Nce3?! is a popular move, but 13...f5 a powerful response; 13 Bg5 f6 14 Bd2 bxc4 15 dxc4 a4, as in Zapletal-Sloth, corr. Olympiad 1992-8, offers Black good play, with ...f5 coming and ...Rb3 often a useful idea) 13...bxc4 14 dxc4 axb4 15 axb4 Nd4!? (15...cxb4 is OK too) 16 e3 Nxd5 17 cxd5 Bg4 18 f3 Nxc2 19 Qxc2 Bd7 20 bxc5 Rxb1 21 Qxb1 dxc5 is roughly equal.

11...Rb8 (*D*)



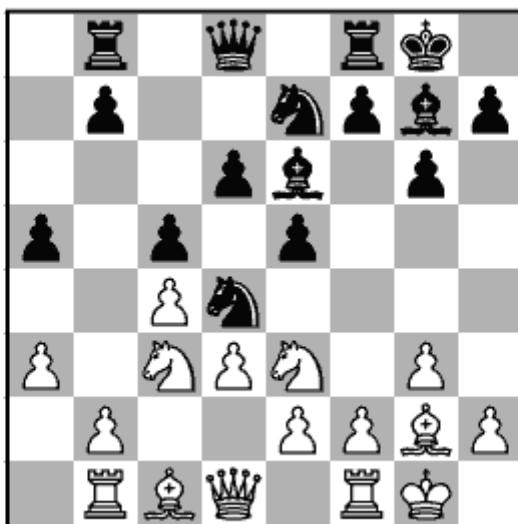
White to play

12 d3

12 Ned5 Bd7 (this looks odd, but the idea is to prepare ...Nxd5; 12...Bg4 is another idea, seeking to gain a tempo on the h3-pawn following 13 h3 Bd7) 13 Nxe7+ (13 b4 is a mere liquidation since after 13...axb4 14 axb4 Nxd5 15 Nxd5 Nxb4 16 Nxb4 cxb4 17 Rxb4 Black safely achieves 17...b5) 13...Qxe7 14 d3 (14 Nd5 Qd8 intending ...b5) 14...Be6 and then:

- a) 15 Nd5 Qd7 (intending ...b5) 16 b4? (16 Nb6 Qd8 17 Nd5 is annoying from a practical viewpoint, though Black clearly has ways to play on if he must) 16...axb4 17 axb4 Bxd5! 18 cxd5 Nxb4 19 Bd2 Na6 20 Rb6 Nc7 intending ...Na8 doesn't give White enough for the pawn.
- b) 15 Bd2 Qd7 (15...f5 16 Nd5 Qd7 17 b4 axb4 18 axb4 b5 is safer) intends ...f5, and 16 Qa4 (Buhmann-Navara, Pula tt 2003) 16...b5!? (not forced!) would be a nasty shock over the board: 17 cxb5 (17 Nxb5?! Nd4 18 Bxa5?? Rxb5 19 cxb5 Bb3) 17...Nd4 18 e3 (18 b3 f5) 18...Bb3 19 Qxa5 Nxb5 with the white queen in danger and intricate play ahead.

12...Nd4 (D)



13 Bd2

Otherwise:

- a) 13 Ned5 Nxd5 14 cxd5 Bg4! (a subtle idea so far mostly used in correspondence games) 15 h3 Bd7 16 a4 b5 17 e3 b4 18 Ne4 Nf5 19 b3 Bc8! 20 Nd2 Ba6 (Karlgren-Blake, corr. 2017) 21 Nc4 and now 21...Bxc4 22 dxc4 Qe7 is very comfortable for Black; e.g., 23 h4 e4. If Black had not inserted 14...Bg4! before dropping the bishop back to d7, White would have been able to play Bh3 a move earlier and seek a war of attrition with good bishop vs bad bishop.
- b) 13 b4 cxb4 14 axb4 b5!? (a different way to play things from usual; 14...axb4 15 Rxb4 Qa5 16 Qa4 Qxa4 17 Rxa4 b5 is also OK) 15 bxa5 Qxa5 (Ter Minasian-Zill, Germany tt 2012/13) 16 Nxb5 Nxb5 17 cxb5 Rxb5 18 Bd2 Qa6 with equal chances.

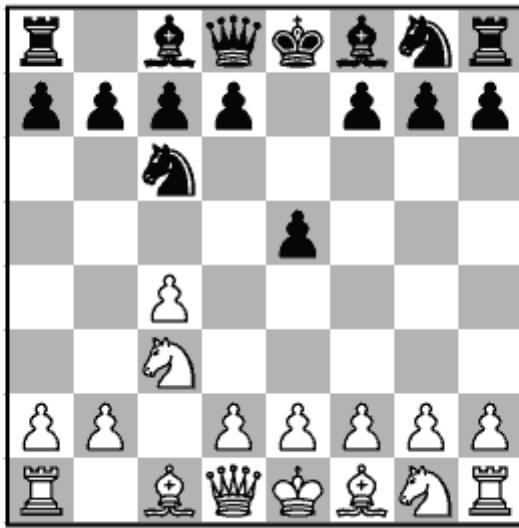
13...b5 14 Nxb5 Nxb5 15 cxb5 Rxb5 16 Nc4 d5 17 a4 Rb7 18 Nxa5 Ra7 19 Qe1 Qd7

White has won a flank pawn at the cost of giving Black a big centre. Two high-level correspondence games (in which White gave the pawn back straight away) have been drawn from here, and Black's practical chances look reasonable.

6: Closed English

With this chapter we begin coverage of our repertoire for White, based on the English Opening.

1 c4 e5 2 Nc3 Nc6 (D)



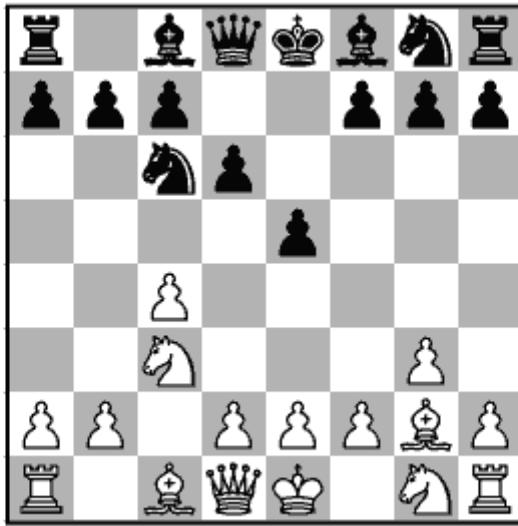
White to play

This is known as the Closed English due to its similarity to the Closed Sicilian, 1 e4 c5 2 Nc3. Some ideas from one opening can prove relevant to the other, but the extra tempo changes matters substantially. In particular, Black can seek to tailor his response to reduce the value of White's extra move, by using his extra 'information' wisely.

3 g3 g6

Having put the knight on c6, by far the most natural and logical course for Black is to increase his control of d4 by fianchettoing. However, that doesn't stop players from trying a wide range of other moves in this position:

- a) 3...h5 is more logical in lines where White has already played Nge2. But 4 Nf3 gives Black no obvious follow-up. After 4...Nd4 even 5 Nxe5 Qe7 6 f4 d6 7 Nd5 is good, while 4...Be7 5 d4 (A.Petrosian-Katalymov, Sochi 1969) is the classic 'play in the centre vs a wing thrust'.
- b) 3...Bb4 would make much more sense with a knight on f6 rather than c6, since after 4 Nd5 the knight will be hard to dislodge from d5. 4...a5 (4...Nf6 5 Bg2 transposes to line '[f](#)', while for 4...Bc5 5 Bg2 Nge7 6 e3 {intending Ne2 and d4} 6...Nxd5 7 cxd5 see line '[f5](#)') 5 Bg2 d6 6 e3 Nce7 7 Ne2 is untested but must be a little better for White.
- c) 3...d6 4 Bg2 (D) can transpose in various directions:



Black to play

c1) 4...g6 5 e4 Bg7 transposes to Line [B](#).

c2) 4...f5 invites a rapid queenside advance: 5 Rb1 (5 d3 Nf6 6 e4 might lead to a Botvinnik, but Black has some extra options) 5...a5 (5...Nf6 6 b4 is similar since 6...a6 7 a4 a5 8 b5 Nb4 9 Ba3 doesn't quite work for Black) 6 a3 Nf6 (6...Be6 7 d3) 7 b4 axb4 8 axb4 and now:

c21) 8...d5 9 Nxd5 Nxd5 10 cxd5 Nxb4 11 Bb2 is good for White since 11...Bd6 12 Bxe5 Nd3+ 13 exd3 Bxe5 14 Nf3 leaves him more active, tripled pawns notwithstanding.

c22) 8...g6 9 b5 Nd4 10 e3 Ne6 11 Nge2 h5 12 h4 with d4 coming soon.

c23) 8...Be7 9 b5 Nd4 10 e3 Ne6 11 Nge2 0-0 12 0-0 Qe8 13 Bb2 and White's central play is more important than Black's kingside demonstration.

c3) 4...Be6 5 Nf3!? (intending d4; White can of course defend the pawn, but this gambit is good) 5...Bxc4 6 d4! is very awkward for Black, as his bishop is in some trouble; e.g., 6...Qd7 (6...exd4 7 Nxd4 Nge7 8 Qa4 Be6 9 Nxe6 fxe6 10 Bh3 Qd7 11 Nb5) 7 0-0! Nf6 8 Bg5 (Santos Ruiz-Laxman, Dubai 2019) with tremendous activity.

d) 3...Bc5 4 Bg2 (*D*) and then:



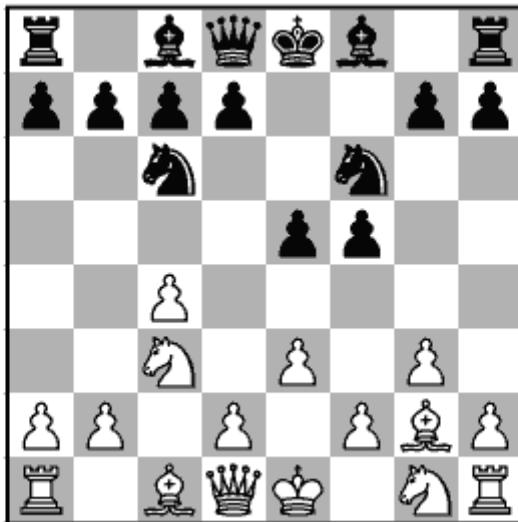
Black to play

d1) 4...Nf6 5 Nf3 transposes to note 'b' to Black's 3rd move in Line B of Chapter 7.

d2) 4...a6 5 Nf3 (threatening Nxe5!) 5...d6 6 0-0 Nge7 (6...Nf6 7 e3 0-0 8 d4 Ba7 9 h3 with a stable spatial plus, Grishchuk-McShane, Moscow 2012) 7 e3 Ba7 8 d4 exd4 (8...Bg4 9 d5) 9 Nxd4 Nxd4 10 exd4 0-0 11 Re1 with a pleasant space advantage.

d3) 4...d6 5 e3 Bf5!? (5...Nf6 6 Nge2 and 5...Nge7 6 Nge2 are both comfortable for White) 6 a3! (please avoid 6 Nge2? Nb4) 6...a5 (6...a6 7 Nge2 intends d4, as 7...Bd3 is rebuffed by 8 b4 Ba7 9 Qb3) 7 d3 (now 7 Nge2 Bd3 is irritating) 7...Qd7 (7...Nge7 8 Nge2 0-0 9 d4) and now White can play rather slowly to force through a powerful d4 advance: 8 h3 (8 Nge2 Bh3 offers Black some activity) 8...Nge7 9 Nge2 0-0 10 b3!? (as in S.Collas-Leconte, French Women's Ch, Saint Quentin 2015) 10...Rae8 11 Ra2 intending Rd2 and Bb2, etc.! There's no rush; what can Black do?

e) 3...f5 4 Bg2 Nf6 5 e3 (D) (preparing d4 – a direct response in the centre makes sense once Black has played ...f5; 5 d3 Bb4 gives White a much harder time proving any advantage) and here:



Black to play

e1) 5...Bb4 invites 6 Nd5.

e2) 5...g6 6 Nge2 Bg7 7 d4 d6 8 b4!? gets things moving quickly on the queenside.

e3) 5...e4 6 d3! Bb4 7 Ne2 leaves Black overextended, and even his best try, 7...d5 8 0-0 dxc4 9 dxe4 (Hambleton-Ivanisević, Biel 2017), gives White a structural plus.

e4) 5...d5 (a critical attempt to justify Black's play tactically) 6 cxd5 Nb4 7 d3! Nbx d5 (7...c6 8 e4! cxd5 9 a3 resolves matters to White's advantage) 8 Nxd5 Nxd5 9 Nf3 favours White; e.g., 9...Bd6 (9...Bb4+ 10 Bd2 Bxd2+ 11 Qxd2 Qd6 {Kramnik-Bartel, Dortmund 2012} and now 12 e4! Ne7 13 d4 nicely breaks open the centre) 10 0-0 Nf6 11 Qb3 (11 e4!? has the point that Black's e5-pawn will be weaker than a white pawn on either d3 or e4) 11...Qe7 (11...c6 12 e4!) 12 Nd2 makes a prod at the b7-pawn while preparing Nc4; Black may be able to hold this, but it is unpleasant for him.

f) 3...Nf6 4 Bg2 Bb4 (although this move has been played in many games, it is much less effective than in lines where Black has not yet played ...Nc6; 4...Bc5 5 Nf3 transposes to note '[b](#)' to Black's 3rd move in Line B of Chapter 7) 5 Nd5 (*D*) and now:



White to play

f1) 5...Nxd5?! 6 cxd5 Ne7 (6...Nd4?? falls into a nasty trap that has claimed many victims: 7 e3! Nf5 8 Qg4 wins a piece) 7 Nf3! is good for White because the only natural way to defend the pawn, 7...d6??, loses a piece.

f2) 5...Ba5?! 6 Qa4! and Black can't avoid the ugly structure resulting from 6...Bb6 7 Nxb6 cxb6 because of 6...a6 7 b4 b5? 8 Qd1!.

f3) 5...Be7 looks like the line 2...Bb4 3 Nd5 Be7 (note '[c](#)' to Black's 3rd move in Line A of Chapter 7) but here Black can't evict the knight with ...c6. White is a little better after 6 d3 (other set-ups are possible too) 6...0-0 7 Nf3 d6 8 0-0 Nxd5 9 cxd5 (Uhlmann-Liebert, Löberitz 1996), as he will have pressure on the c-file.

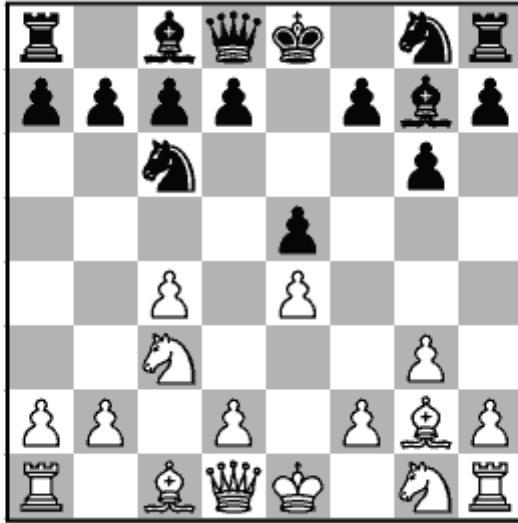
f4) 5...0-0 6 a3 Bc5 7 b4 Bd4 8 Rb1 is not an easy line for Black either: 8...d6 (8...a6 9 Nf3 Ba7 10 d3 {threatening Bg5} 10...Nxd5 11 cxd5 Nd4 12 Nxd4 exd4 13 d6!?) 9 Nf3 Bb6 10 Nxb6 (10 d3?! Nxd5 11 cxd5 Ne7) 10...axb6 11 Bb2 is at least a little better for White.

f5) 5...Bc5 6 e3 and White prepares the d4 advance while Black lacks any tricks with ...d5. 6...Nxd5 (6...d6 7 Ne2) 7 cxd5 Ne7 (7...Nb4?! 8 d4! exd4 9 exd4 Bxd4?? 10 a3) and here:

f51) 8 b4!? Bd6! (8...Bb6?! 9 d6!; 8...Bxb4?! 9 Qg4) 9 Bb2 c6 10 Nf3 f6 (10...Nxd5 11 Nxe5 Nxb4 12 0-0 Qe7 13 Nc4 gives White excellent compensation because of Black's poor development) 11 dxc6 dxc6 12 0-0 Bxb4!? 13 d4 e4 14 Nh4 f5 15 f3 exf3 16 Nxf3 offers White enough play for the pawn.

f52) 8 Ne2 c6 (8...d6 9 d4 exd4 10 Nxd4 with a strategic plus for White) 9 Nc3 0-0 10 0-0 h6 (Boschma-Brobakken, corr. 2009; 10...d6 11 d4) 11 f4!? d6 12 dxc6 bxc6 13 fxe5 dxe5 14 b3 leaves White with a slightly better structure.

4 Bg2 Bg7 5 e4 (D)



Black to play

My main recommendation in the Closed English is the Botvinnik set-up, based on this move. While it looks odd to give Black a square on d4, it is hard to make much use of it for the time being. Meanwhile White grabs space and has a view to kingside play with an f4 advance, or even a central advance following Nge2, d3, Be3 and d4, possibly with Nd5 thrown in along the way. Note how hard it will be for Black ever to play ...d5 or to force open the d-file, so d4 is unlikely to become an outpost in the true sense (i.e. on a half-open file).

Now we have two main lines, though the latter is far more natural and common:

A: 5...Nh6!?

B: 5...d6

While neither side can afford to be too careless with their move-orders, there are many possible ways to reach variations covered in Line B.

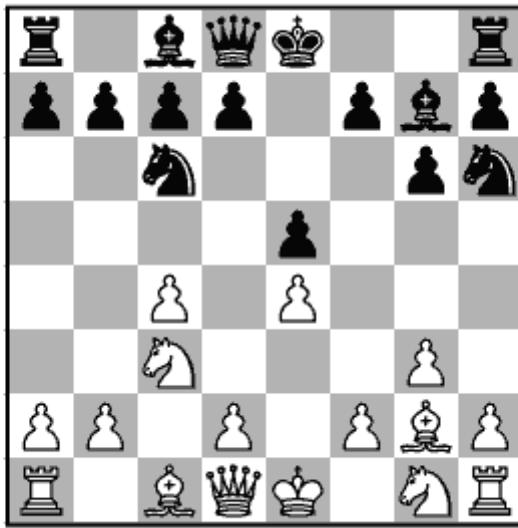
a) For instance, 5...Nge7 6 Nge2 0-0 7 0-0 f5 8 d3 d6 transposes to note '[b](#)' to Black's 8th move in Line B3.

b) 5...h5 looks premature, as this thrust is more logical after White has played Nge2 (we shall see such ideas below). 6 h3 is a good response (to meet ...h4 with g4) here too; e.g., 6...Nge7 (6...d6 7 Nge2 transposes to Line [B1](#); after 6...Nd4 7 Nge2 c5 8 Rb1 White will make good use of the pawn-levers b4 and/or f4) 7 Nge2 Nd4 8 Nxd4 exd4 9 Ne2 and White will be free to expand on the kingside in the middlegame.

c) 5...Nd4 6 Nge2 Ne7 (6...c5 stodges things up but White has the pawn-breaks b4 and f4 to play with; 6...Nxe2 7 Nxe2 and in addition to all White's normal plans, suddenly the idea of d4 has appeared) 7 Nxd4 exd4 8 Ne2 0-0 (8...c5 9 d3 b5 10 Bf4 bxc4 11 dxc4 leaves White's pieces active) 9 d3 c6 (9...d6 10 0-0 transposes to note 'a' to Black's 8th move in Line B3) 10 0-0 d5 11 exd5 cxd5 12 b3! and Black's activity has just gifted White a pleasant structure.

A)

5...Nh6!? (*D*)



White to play

This seems a strange choice in a line where Black can freely play ...f5 and ...Nf6, but there is a point to the move, and it (together with the 5...d6 6 Nge2 Nh6 version of the same idea) is actually one of Black's best responses to the Botvinnik.

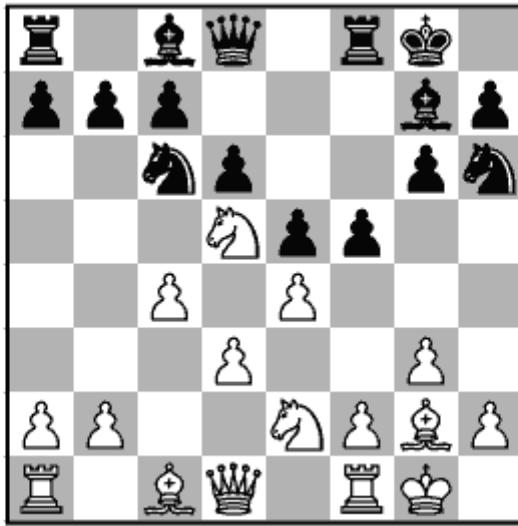
6 Nge2 0-0 7 0-0

7 d3 d6 8 h4 (recommended in Kosten's book; 8 h3 can be answered with 8...f5 9 Be3 Nd4 10 Qd2 Nf7 11 f4 fxe4, while 8 0-0 is of course our [main](#) line) 8...Nd4! 9 Nxd4 (9 f3 c6; 9 h5 g5) 9...exd4 10 Ne2 Ng4 (Flores-An.Rodriguez, Villa Martelli 2014) offers White little.

7...d6

7...f5?! 8 d4?.

8 d3 f5 9 Nd5 (*D*)



Black to play

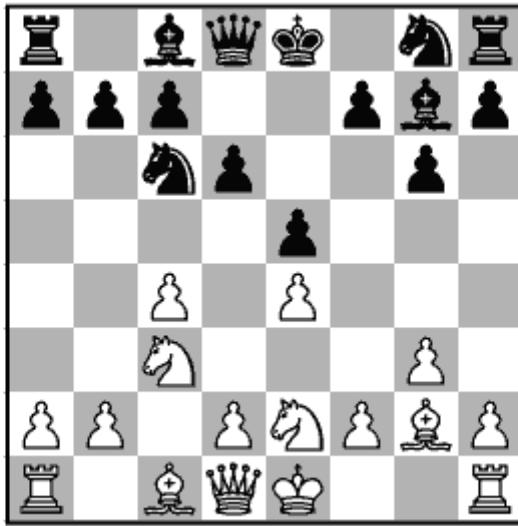
Now Black has tried many moves, although they almost all involve playing ...g5 within a few moves:

- a) 9...g5 is the main idea allowed by putting the knight on h6, but 10 exf5 followed by b4 gives White queenside play and the e4-square, so Black tends to hold the g-pawn back for a move or so.
- b) 9...Be6 10 Rb1 a5 11 b3 g5 12 f4 gxf4 13 gxf4 and White will seek pressure against g7 on the g-file and the long diagonal.
- c) 9...a5 10 Bd2!? (intending Qc1; 10 Rb1 g5 11 exf5 Nxf5 12 a3 a4 is OK for Black since White lacks time to grab the a4-pawn without allowing problems on the kingside) 10...g5 11 exf5 Nxf5 12 Be4 intending Kh1 and f4 as well as queenside play with a b4 advance. There is plenty of play for both sides in this untested position.

B)

5...d6 6 Nge2 (D)

6 d3 has the drawback that a quick d4 advance – a key idea in some lines – will now cost an extra tempo.



Black to play

Now (after 6 Nge2) the path divides in a rather fundamental manner:

B1: 6...h5

B2: 6...f5

B3: 6...Nge7

Other moves:

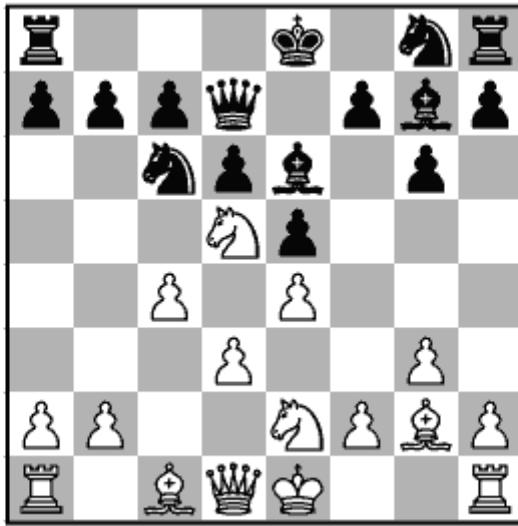
a) 6...Nh6!? 7 d3 0-0 transposes to the [note](#) to White's 7th move in Line A.

b) 6...Nf6 seems odd, blocking the f-pawn. In Line [F1](#) of Chapter 9 we shall see a similar 'King's Indian' line with ...Nf6 where Black has not yet played ...Nc6. That means he has ideas with ...c6 and ...b5, so here he seems to have the worst of both worlds. Given Black's rapid development, White should seek to envelop rather than rip the game open: 7 0-0 0-0 (7...h5 8 d4!) 8 d3 (8 f4?! exf4 9 gxf4 Nh5 10 d4 Qh4 11 Be3 Bh3, as in Webster-Matveeva, Prestwich 1990, works out surprisingly well for Black; e.g., 12 Nd5 Rae8 13 Nec3 Bxg2 14 Kxg2 Na5!) 8...Nh5 9 Rb1!? and then:

b1) 9...a5 10 b3! makes it hard for Black to find a productive move; e.g., 10...f5 (10...Nd4 11 Nxd4 exd4 12 Ne2; 10...Be6 11 h3 Qd7 12 Kh2 Rae8 13 Bb2) 11 exf5 Bxf5 (11...gxf5 12 d4!) 12 h3, as in I.Thompson-D.James, British League (4NCL) 1997/8.

b2) 9...f5 10 exf5 Bxf5 (10...gxf5 11 f4 is a standard theme to halt Black's counterplay) 11 h3 followed by b4 after Black avoids the pawn-fork.

c) 6...Be6 is a traditional move that you'll find in the old theory books. 7 d3 Qd7 8 Nd5 (*D*) and here:



Black to play

c1) 8...Nf6?? is a blunder because of the standard tactic 9 Bh6!.

c2) 8...f5 9 0-0 Nf6 10 Qb3!?.

c3) 8...h5 9 h4 (with d3 already played, responding with h3 is not so good – compare the 6...h5 [line](#)) 9...Nf6 10 Bg5 Nh7 11 Be3 0-0 12 0-0 and with the kingside relatively stable, White will be able to focus on the queenside and centre; e.g., 12...f5 13 exf5 gxf5 (13...Bxf5 14 b4) 14 Qb3! Nd8 (14...f4? 15 Qxb7 fxe3 16 Qxc6) 15 Rad1 f4 16 gxf4 c6 17 fxe5!.

c4) 8...Nce7 9 d4 c6 10 Ne3 f5 (10...Bh3 11 dxe5; 10...exd4 11 Nxd4 Bh3 12 Ndf5!, Maletin-Pasiev, Samara 2011) 11 d5 Bf7 12 Nc3 with a nice grip on the position; e.g., 12...Nf6 13 a4 f4 14 Nc2 g5 15 h4 Bh5 16 Qd3.

B1)

6...h5 7 h3 (D)



Black to play

This seems the best way to handle the h-pawn thrust in this instance.

7...Be6

It is probably best for Black to keep White guessing about whether ...h4 is coming.

The immediate 7...h4 is easier to deal with: 8 g4 f5 (8...Bh6?! was given by Kosten as a reason for White to avoid 7 h3, but nowadays a glance at a computer engine is enough to see that after 9 d4! Bxc1 10 Rxc1 dynamic factors outweigh good vs bad bishops) 9 gxf5 gxf5 10 Rg1! and then:

- a) White's key point is that 10...f4?! is strongly met by 11 d4! (Romanov-Andreikin, Baku 2011); e.g., 11...Nf6 12 dxe5 dxe5 13 Nd5.
- b) 10...Qe7 11 Qb3 (11 Qa4!?) 11...Nd4 (11...Nf6 12 Nd5) 12 Nxd4 exd4 13 Ne2 fxe4 14 d3 opens lines for the white pieces; e.g., 14...Nf6 15 Bg5.
- c) 10...Qf6 11 Qb3 (11 f4!?) 11...f4 12 Nd5 Qf7 13 d4 Nxd4 14 Nxd4 exd4 15 c5! (intending Nxf4) 15...Be5 16 cxd6 cxd6 17 Bf1 focuses attention on the black king.

8 d3 (D)



Black to play

8...Qd7!?

8...h4 9 g4 Qd7 (9...Nf6?! 10 Bg5!; 9...Bh6?! 10 f4) 10 b4!? a6 (10...Nxb4 11 Rb1 c5 12 f4 with good play) 11 Nd5 f5 12 gxf5 gxf5 13 Rb1 intending Rg1 with pressure.

9 h4

Good now that Black has played some slow moves; otherwise Black could throw in ...h4 in a situation where White lacks a convincing reply.

9...f5

Now:

a) 10 Nd5 Nf6 11 b4 0-0 (11...fxe4 12 dxe4 Nd4 is possible too) 12 b5 Nd8 13 exf5 (13 0-0 f4) 13...Bxf5 offers White little.

b) 10 Bg5 Nf6 11 Qd2 0-0 (11...Nh7 12 Be3; 11...fxe4 12 Bxf6 Bxf6 13 Nxe4) 12 exf5 Bxf5 13 0-0 intending Rae1 and the d4 pawn-break will give White control of some central light squares. Black should be OK, but has work to do.

B2)

6...f5 7 d3 Nf6 (D)

This is an important option, especially as it can also arise from various move-orders with an early ...f5.

7...Nh6 is well met by 8 h4 intending h5; e.g., 8...Nf7 9 Be3 Nd4 10 h5 c6 (10...g5 11 h6 and the pawn is untouchable: 11...Nxh6?? 12 Rxh6 Bxh6 13 Nxd4) 11 Qd2 with some advantage for White.



White to play

8 Nd5

Rather than 8 0-0 0-0 9 Nd5 f4!? 10 gxf4 Nh5, when Black gets a lot of counterplay.

8 h3 would be a useful alternative move-order if Black had nothing better than 8...0-0, transposing to a 'Dutch' line (Line [B2](#) in Chapter 9), but there is once again the issue of 8...f4!?, when 9 gxf4 0-0! (intending ...Nh5) leads to unclear play in which Black has a bigger share of the initiative than we'd like.

8...0-0 9 Bg5 Be6

Or:

a) 9...Nd4 10 Nxd4 exd4 is not a great idea even if White responds with ordinary play, but also invites 11 h4!?.

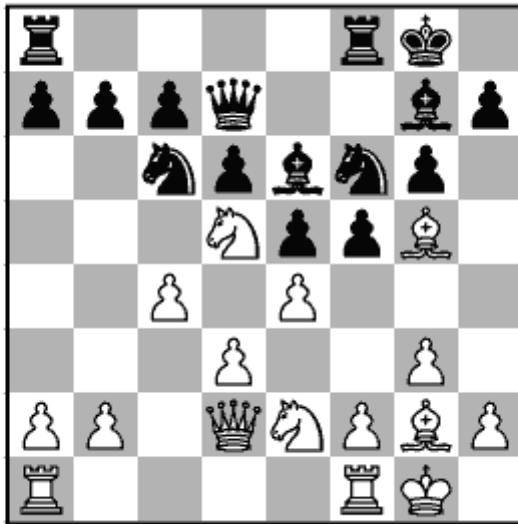
b) 9...Ne7 10 Nxf6+ Bxf6 11 Bxf6 Rxf6 12 d4 focuses attention on the centre, where White is well-placed to fight.

c) 9...f4?! is a tricky pawn sacrifice but looks unsound after the accurate response 10 gxf4 exf4 11 0-0! (11 Nxf4?? Nxd5 12 Bxd8 Nxf4; 11 Bxf4? Bg4! 12 f3 Nxd5 13 cxd5 Nd4!), and then:

c1) 11...h6 12 Bxf4 Nxd5 (12...Bg4? 13 f3 is no good for Black now that after 13...Nxd5? 14 cxd5 Nd4 15 fxg4 the f4-bishop is defended) 13 cxd5 Nd4 14 Nxd4! Rxf4 15 Ne2 with a good extra pawn.

c2) 11...Ne5 12 Nxf6+ Bxf6 13 Bxf4 g5 14 Bg3 g4 15 Kh1 doesn't give Black enough for the pawn.

10 0-0 Qd7 11 Qd2 (D)



Black to play

This line features steady play by both sides.

11...Rae8

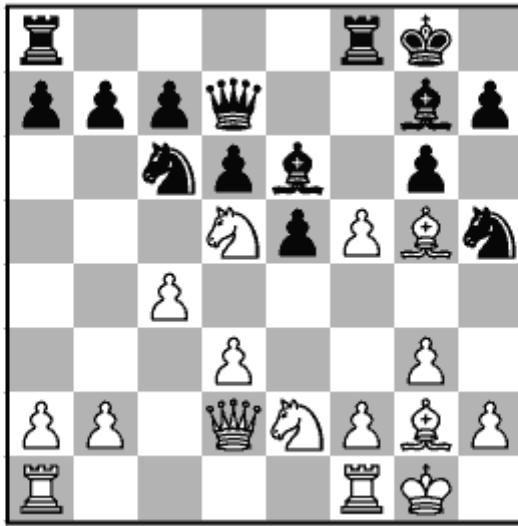
Other moves:

a) 11...Rf7 prepares ...Raf8. Then:

a1) After 12 exf5 Bxf5 13 Nxf6+ Bxf6 14 Bxf6 Rxf6 Black has lost a tempo compared to the [note](#) to White's 12th move below (rook on a8 rather than e8), though this may just mean his path is a little rockier in a line like 15 d4 (or 15 b4 Bh3 16 Bxh3 Qxh3 17 b5 Ne7 18 d4 Qe6) 15...Bh3 16 d5 Bxg2 17 Kxg2 Ne7 18 f4 Raf8 19 fxe5 dxe5 20 Rxf6 Rxf6 21 Nc3 Qg4 22 Qd3 intending Ne4.

a2) 12 b4!? fxe4 (12...Raf8 13 b5 Nd8 14 exf5 Bxf5 15 Nxf6+ Bxf6 16 Bxf6 Rxf6 17 d4 favours White, Stokke-Abbasov, Tromsø 2010) 13 dxe4 Raf8 14 Rac1 intending gradual queenside play.

b) 11...Nh5 seeks to start kingside action with ...f4, but 12 exf5 (D) nips this in the bud.



Black to play

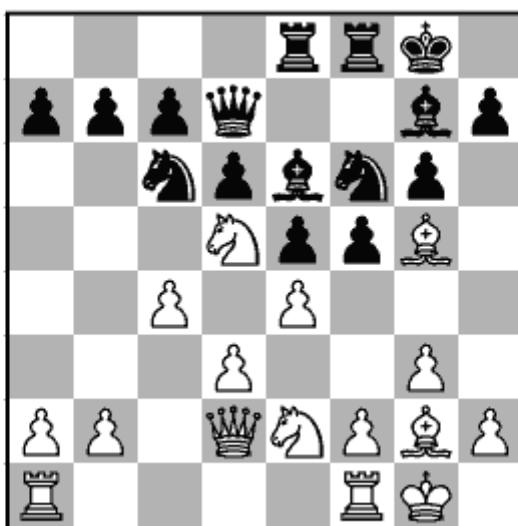
This exchange of pawns on f5 is a common device for White in this structure, not just to parry ...f4 ideas, but to open lines and free squares for his own pieces. Each possible recapture has its specific drawbacks that White will target:

b1) 12...gxf5 13 f4 (the standard reaction) gives White a grip on the centre, with Rae1 coming. The fixed pawn on f5 is no great asset for Black.

b2) 12...Rxf5 13 h3 Rf7 14 g4 and the knight must retreat.

b3) 12...Bxf5 13 b4 is a position where White has scored well; e.g., 13...Rae8 14 b5 Nd8 15 Bxd8 Rxd8 16 Ne3 offers White good play, as 16...Bh3 (16...c6 17 Nxf5 gxf5 18 Qg5 Nf6 19 Rab1 is a difficult defence for Black, Zmokly-Krzyzanowski, corr. 2015) 17 Bxb7! Bxf1 18 Rxf1 (P.Nguyen-Martinović, Zadar 2017) is a strong exchange sacrifice.

We now return to 11...Rae8 (D):



White to play

While it looks like both sides are mechanically bringing their pieces into play, it is important to understand the tactics that lurk just below the surface. For instance, this move prepares 12...Nh5 13 exf5 Rxf5 14 h3 Rf7 15 g4 Nf4!; e.g., 16 Ndx4 exf4 17 Bxf4 h5 18 f3 hxg4 19 fxg4 Bxg4! 20 hxg4 Qxg4 21 Rf2 Nd4.

12 Rae1

12 exf5 Bxf5 13 Nxf6+ Bxf6 14 Bxf6 Rxf6 15 d4 Bh3 16 d5 Bxg2 17 Kxg2 Ne7 18 f4 Nf5 19 Rae1 e4 gives Black counterplay.

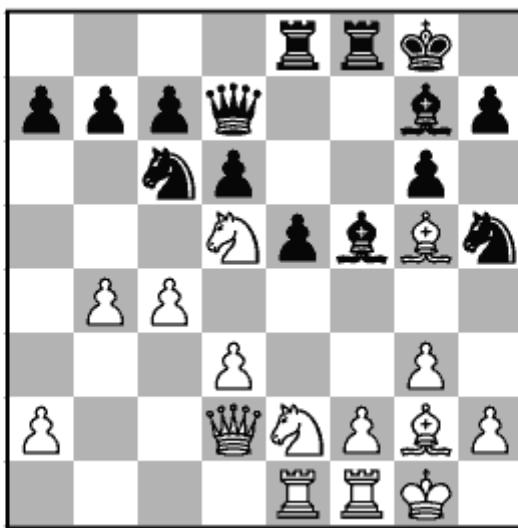
12...Nh5

There's not much choice in fact, since White was threatening to start play in the centre; e.g., 12...Kh8?! 13 exf5 Bxf5 (13...gxf5 14 Nxf6 Bxf6 15 Bxf6+ Rxf6 16 f4) 14 Nxf6 Bxf6 15 Bxf6+ Rxf6 (Serafimov-Lerch, Mulhouse 2006) 16 d4 Bh3 17 d5 Bxg2 18 Kxg2 Ne7 19 f4 Nf5 20 fxe5 Rxe5 21 Nf4 puts Black under pressure. Also 12...f4 13 gxf4 doesn't give Black enough: 13...Nh5 (13...Bh3 14 Bxh3 Qxh3 15 Bxf6 Bxf6 16 Qe3) 14 Kh1! h6 15 f5.

13 exf5 Bxf5

13...Rxf5 14 h3! Rf7 15 g4 and 13...gxf5 14 f4 are easier for White to handle.

14 b4 (D)



Black to play

Now:

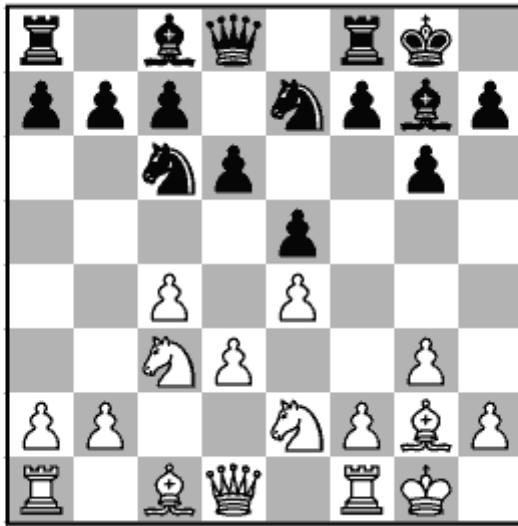
- 14...Bg4 15 f3 (15 b5 Nd8 16 Bxd8 Rxd8 17 Qa5 is interesting too) 15...Be6 16 g4 Nf6 17 Nxf6+ Bxf6 18 Bxf6 Rxf6 19 b5 Nd8 20 h3 intending f4 and play across the board.
- The voluntary retreat 14...Nd8 intends to meet 15 b5 with 15...c6 before White can play Qa5. However, after 15 Be3 White's slow-burning queenside advance seems more potent than whatever distractions Black can muster on the kingside. 15...Rf7 (15...Nf7 16 a4 c6 17 Ndc3) 16 a4 Bh3 (16...c6 17 Ndc3 gives White new targets) 17 b5 (threatening Bxa7) 17...c6 18 Ndc3 Nf6 (18...Bxg2 19 Kxg2 Ne6 20 f3 {parrying the threat of ...Nh4+} 20...a6 21 d4) and the game remains rich in lines like 19 d4 e4 20 d5 c5 21 Bg5 and 19 Bxa7 d5 20 cxd5 Bxg2 21 Kxg2 cxd5 22 d4 e4 23 f3.

B3)

6...Nge7

Black keeps his options open regarding an f-pawn advance, but at the cost of putting the knight on a less active square than f6.

7 d3 0-0 8 0-0 (D)



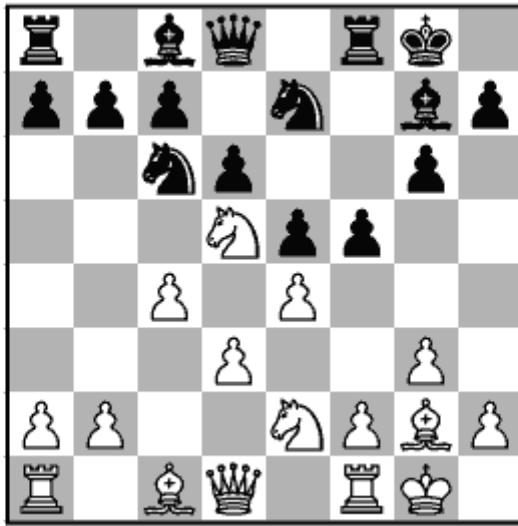
Black to play

8...Be6

Alternatively:

a) 8...Nd4 9 Nxd4 exd4 10 Ne2 offers White good prospects of expanding on either side of the board, with the d4-pawn a ‘dead point’ for Black. 10...a5 11 b3 (White should avoid 11 a3?! a4 as he lacks ways to attack a4) 11...Bd7 (11...c5 is unwise because a static queenside means that White can focus on the kingside, where he has a better stance) 12 Rb1 (12 a4!?) 12...b5!? (12...c5 13 a4!, as in Kögler-Schüler, corr. 2009, is the ‘static queenside’ scenario) 13 f4!? (13 a3 is safer) 13...Rb8 14 f5 (“coming, ready or not!”) 14...gxf5 15 Nf4 fxe4 16 Bxe4 bxc4 17 dxc4 f5 18 Bg2 c5 19 Rb2 with interesting compensation in view of Black’s weaknesses.

b) 8...f5 9 Nd5 (D) and then:



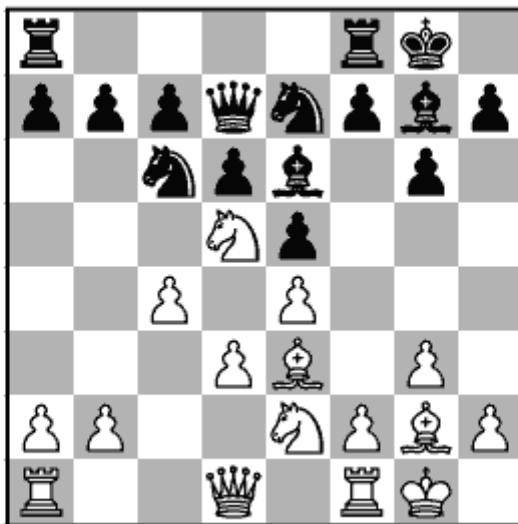
Black to play

b1) 9...Be6 10 Be3 Qd7 transposes to the [main](#) line of this section.

b2) 9...h6 10 Be3 g5?! (10...Kh7 11 Qd2 is a safer path for Black, but it isn't clear then how he is fighting for the centre) 11 f4! (Moreno Ruiz-Ubilava, Collado Villalba 2009) is good for White.

b3) The flexible 9...Rb8!? is rare, but probably Black's best move here. 10 Kh1!? (10 Bg5 f4 11 gxf4 h6 12 Bxe7 Nxe7 13 fxe5 dxe5 and 10 Be3 Nxd5 11 cxd5 f4! 12 gxf4 exf4 13 Bxf4 {13 Nxf4 Nd4} 13...Nd4 offer White little) 10...Kh8 (10...f4?! 11 gxf4) 11 Bg5 (or 11 Be3?! Nxd5 12 exd5 f4 13 gxf4 exf4 14 Nxf4 Nd4 15 Qd2 Qh4 16 Rae1) 11...f4 (11...h6 12 Be3 leaves g6 as a weakness compared to the 11 Be3 line) 12 gxf4 h6 13 Bxe7 Nxe7 14 fxe5 (14 f5!?) 14...dxe5 15 f4 with a game that could go either way, but right now White has an extra pawn and a safer king; e.g., 15...Bg4 16 Bf3 Bxf3+ 17 Rxf3 b5 18 Rb1.

9 Nd5 Qd7 10 Be3 (D)



Black to play

Note that White is preparing the d4 advance, so Black cannot just sit there.

10...f5

10...Nd4 11 Nxd4 exd4 12 Bd2 gives Black a ‘dead point’ on d4. White can play around it on either side of the board and it is not clear where Black’s counterplay will come from. If Black actually wants this type of structure, he should play ...Nd4 at an earlier stage, and then arrange his pieces more appropriately for it.

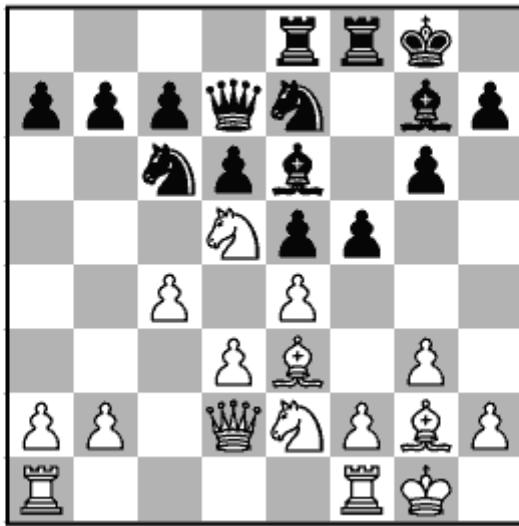
11 Qd2

11 b4!? is an interesting alternative, played as long ago as Lombardy-Malich, Leningrad tt 1960.

11...Rf7

Or:

- a) 11...fxe4?! 12 dxe4 just reduces Black’s possibilities and gives White extra ones, such as c5.
- b) 11...Nd8?! is too decentralizing, as 12 d4 (Serper-Tiviakov, Odessa juniors 1989) shows.
- c) 11...Rae8 (*D*) has, in addition to central themes, ideas like ...Nd8 and ...Nc8 in mind, manoeuvring the knights while preparing to push White back with ...c6.



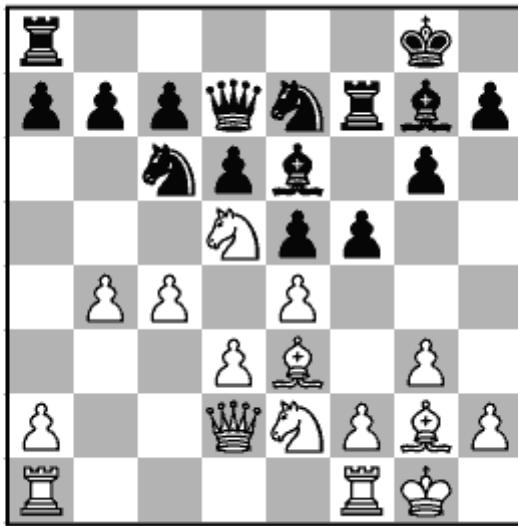
White to play

Then:

- c1) 12 b4 f4! 13 gxf4 Nd4 now has more punch behind it: 14 fxe5 Nf3+!.
- c2) 12 Rac1 has the idea of meeting 12...Nd8 with 13 Qa5!? c6 14 Nc7!? b6 15 Qxa7 Nc8 16 Qb8 Re7 17 Bxb6, but 17...f4 18 Nxe6 Nxe6 19 Bh3 Ref7 gives Black sufficient counterplay.
- c3) 12 Rae1 and now:
 - c31) 12...f4? 13 gxf4 Nd4 14 fxe5 doesn’t give Black enough for the pawn.
 - c32) 12...Nc8 13 b3 Nd8 (as played by both Tal and Korchnoi, believe it or not) 14 d4 is good for White.
 - c33) 12...Nd8 13 b3 (bolstering c4, which could come under attack after ...c6) 13...c5 (otherwise it is hard to restrain White’s pawn-breaks; e.g., 13...c6 14 Nxe7+ Qxe7 15 exf5 gxf5 16 f4) and of a number

of tempting possibilities, 14 Nxe7+ Rxe7 15 exf5 Bxf5 (15...gxf5 16 f4) 16 Bg5 Ree8 (16...Bf6 17 f4!) 17 Bxd8 Rxd8 18 Nc3 heads for good knight vs bad bishop.

12 b4!? (D)



Black to play

There are many moves for White here; this is a direct but rare option.

12...f4

With White making rapid progress, Black needs counterplay.

After 12...fxe4 13 dxe4 Raf8 14 Rac1 (Bilek-Honfi, Hungarian Ch, Budapest 1971) White intends b5 or c5 with fast queenside play, while in the case of 12...Raf8 13 b5 Nd8 (Stryjecki-Helis, Poraj 1997) 14 Nxe7+ Qxe7 15 exf5 Bxf5 (15...gxf5 16 f4) 16 a4 (threatening Bxa7) 16...a6 17 d4 White is making inroads.

13 gxf4 Bh3

13...exf4? is strongly met by 14 Nxf4 Bxa1 (L.Gomez-Movsziszian, La Pobla de Lillet 2013) 15 Nxe6 Qxe6 16 Nxc7, while after 13...Nd4 14 Nxe7+ Qxe7 15 Bxd4 exd4 16 f5! White keeps the extra pawn since the open lines after 16...gxf5 17 exf5 Bxf5 18 Rae1 are a big problem for Black.

14 Nxe7+ Nxe7 15 fxe5 dxe5 16 f3

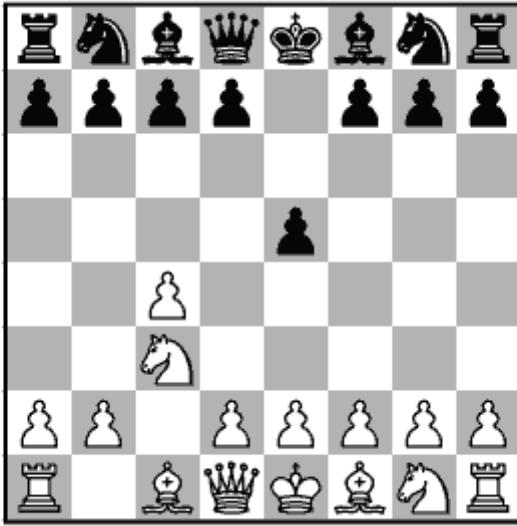
The onus is on Black to prove compensation for the pawn.

7: Other Reversed Sicilians

Here we shall complete our coverage of the 1...e5 lines of the English by examining Black's alternatives to 2...Nc6, the most important of which is the natural development of his king's knight.

1 c4 e5 2 Nc3 (D)

2 g3 is an alternative move-order, but gives White fewer options against 2...c6 (a very respectable move here), 2...f5 and even 2...h5.



Black to play

After 2 Nc3, we have two main lines...

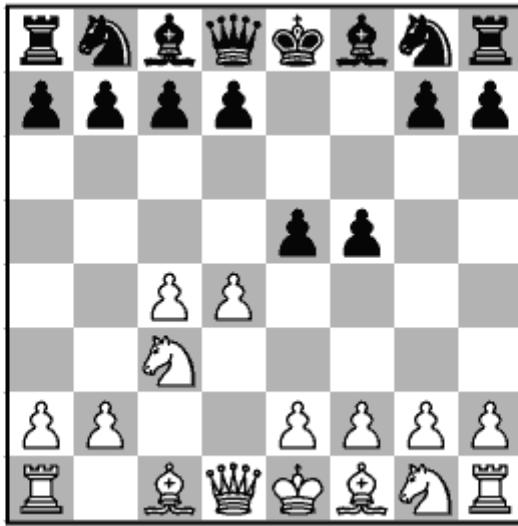
A: 2...Bb4!?

B: 2...Nf6

...and three more minor ones:

a) 2...c6 3 Nf3! (note that 3 d4 is best met by 3...d5, an odd transposition to the Winawer Counter-Gambit in the Slav) immediately rules out any ideas of a quick ...d5. After 3...d6 (3...Qa5 4 Qc2 followed by d4 – and meeting 4...Nf6?! with 5 Qf5! – doesn't alter the basic nature of the position) 4 d4 Nd7 the game proceeds along Old Indian lines, where Black is rather passive and White has a choice of easy-to-play and promising options. 5 g3 Ngf6 6 Bg2 is a logical line that scores well, where White avoids a major commitment in the centre.

b) 2...f5 is a little too brutal, and well answered with 3 d4! (D), when the move ...f5 can end up looking like a simple weakening:



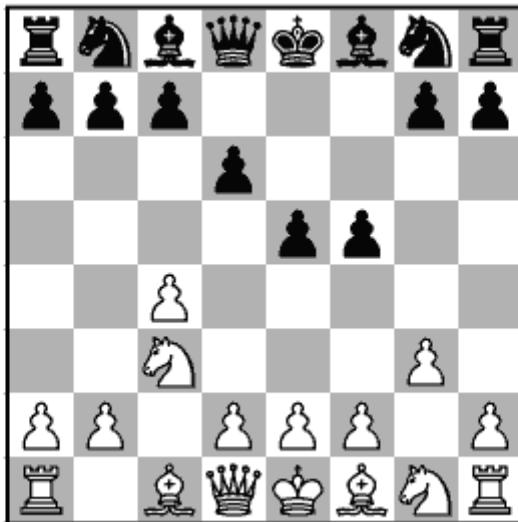
Black to play

b1) 3...e4 4 h4 intending Nh3 is an ideal reversed French/Caro for White.

b2) 3...d6 4 dx5 dx5 5 Qxd8+ Kxd8 6 Bg5+ Be7 (6...Ke8 7 0-0-0) 7 Nf3 gives White a significant initiative in a queenless middlegame.

b3) 3...exd4 4 Qxd4 Nc6 (4...Nf6 5 g3 transposes to the [note](#) to Black's 3rd move in Line B of Chapter 9) 5 Qe3+ (this queen check is a key theme in this line) 5...Qe7 (5...Be7 6 Nd5 and 5...Kf7 6 g3 Nf6 7 Bg2 Bb4 8 Nh3 Re8 9 Qd2 Qe7 10 0-0 rather obviously favour White) and White has tried various active moves here, but the calm 6 g3 looks promising, retaining options of Nb5 and Nc5, while preparing to develop with pressure. 6...Qxe3 (6...Nf6 is again the Chapter 9 [line](#) mentioned above; 6...Nb4 7 Qd2) 7 Bxe3 Bb4 8 Rc1 Nf6 9 Bd2 leaves White more harmonious, with d5 a useful square and c7 a sore spot that won't easily be solved.

c) 2...d6 3 g3 f5 (*D*) (3...Be6 hits the c4-pawn, but White can ignore it with 4 Nf3 intending d4, and after 4...Nd7 5 e4 Black's pieces are looking odd) offers White a pleasant choice:



White to play

c1) 4 Bg2 Nf6 5 d3 Be7 6 b4 (why not expand in this way? Black has no pressure on the long diagonal to discourage it; 6 f4 is interesting too, but messier strategically) 6...0-0 (6...a5 7 b5 and 6...a6 7 a4 fail to slow White down) 7 Rb1 with good queenside prospects.

c2) 4 d4 Be7 (4...exd4 5 Qxd4 is similar to the 2...f5 [line](#) and pleasant for White, and the same can be said for 4...Nf6 5 dxe5 dxe5 6 Qxd8+ Kxd8 7 Bg5) and now 5 Bh3!? is a rare but very interesting idea (used by Giri, Esipenko and others), seeking pressure on the f5-pawn rather than the more obvious fianchetto development:

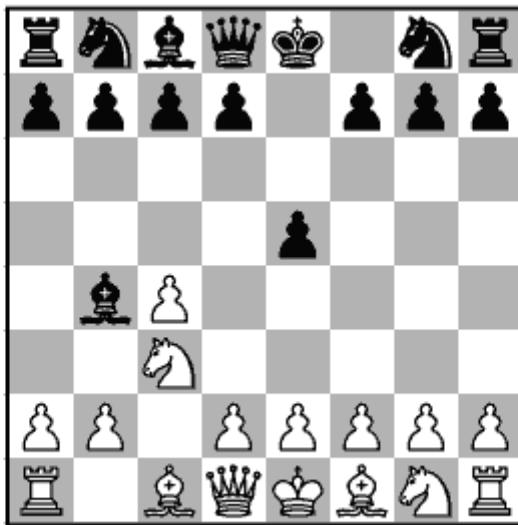
c21) 5...exd4 6 Qxd4 Nc6 invites White to self-trap his queen, but 7 Qd3 (Millstone-Salcedo, corr. 2007) favours White.

c22) 5...Nf6 6 Nf3 Ne4!? 7 dxe5 Nxc3 8 bxc3 dxe5 9 Qxd8+ Bxd8 10 e4! keeps the pressure on.

c23) 5...Na6 6 dxe5 dxe5 7 Qxd8+ Bxd8 8 Nf3 Bf6 (8...e4 9 Nd4 g6 10 f3 with the initiative; 8...Nb4 9 0-0 Nc2 10 Rb1 e4 11 Nh4 favours White, Adhiban-Henderson de la Fuente, Gibraltar 2019) 9 e4 Ne7 10 0-0 Nc5 11 Bg2 will leave Black with a weak pawn, though White's actual advantage will be slight.

A)

2...Bb4!? (D)



White to play

This is a popular move, and a major option that *doesn't* exist in the 2 g3 move-order.

3 Nd5

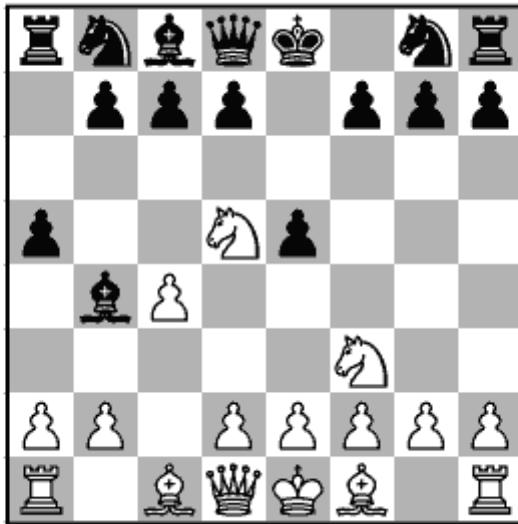
Surely the most logical reply. The good news is that there are many ways to create interesting play. The bad news from a practical and preparation viewpoint is that Black has a lot of choice (there are four major replies on move 3, and further splits on moves 4 and 5), and concrete play is needed against many of these options. There are few common themes in these lines, other than Black's apparent disregard for the bishop-pair.

3...Bc5

While I'm defining this as the main line, two of the alternatives are about equally respectable:

a) 3...Ba5 4 b4 c6 5 bxa5 cxd5 6 cxd5 Qxa5 7 e4 is rather obviously good for White and is rarely chosen by Black nowadays. 7...d6 (7...f5? 8 Qh5+! g6 9 Qh4 fxe4 10 Ne2! Qxd5 11 Nc3 Qd4 12 Ba3 with a huge development advantage; 7...Nf6 8 f3 0-0 9 Kf2!? intending Ne2 and d4, Tukmakov-Raetsky, Lausanne 2005) 8 a4!? Nf6 (8...f5 9 Ba3) 9 Qc2 (Siefring-Motta, USA corr. Ch 2014) followed by Ba3 leaves Black's position creaking.

b) 3...a5 4 Nf3 (D) and then:



Black to play

b1) 4...e4 5 Nd4 and here:

b11) 5...Nf6?! 6 Qc2 (Van Wely-Hector, Malmö 2013) picks off the e4-pawn.

b12) 5...c6 6 Nxb4 axb4 7 d3 d5 (Esen-Naer, European Ch, Jerusalem 2015) 8 dxe4 dxc4!? (8...dxe4 9 Bf4) 9 Bf4 Ne7 10 e3 b5 11 b3 c3 12 Be2 is messy but favours White.

b13) 5...Ne7 6 Qc2 0-0 7 Qxe4 (Golubka-Hector, Växjö 2017) 7...Re8 is Black's best try, but his compensation after 8 Qc2 (8 Qh4 Ra6!) 8...Na6 9 a3 Nxd5 10 cxd5 Bf8 11 Nf3 b5 is unconvincing.

b2) 4...d6 5 a3 Bc5 6 d4! exd4 7 Nxd4 Ne7 (7...Nc6?? loses to 8 Nb5 but somehow this must be hard to see since two high-rated players have blundered into it; 7...c6 8 Nc3 with the freer game for White; e.g., 8...Ne7 9 Bf4 d5 10 e3, Aronyak-Laxman, Abu Dhabi 2018) 8 Bg5 f6 9 Bf4 with an edge for White due to Black's weaknesses.

c) 3...Be7 4 d4 d6 (4...exd4 5 Qxd4 Nf6 6 Nxe7 Qxe7 7 Bg5 Nc6 8 Qc3 offers White some advantage; e.g., 8...Ne5 9 Nf3 d6 10 Nxe5 Qxe5 11 Qxe5+ dxe5 12 g3, Nepomniashchy-Anand, Amsterdam rapid 2019) 5 e4 (D) and now:



Black to play

c1) 5...c6 6 Nxe7 Qxe7 (6...Nxe7 7 Ne2) 7 Ne2 and here:

c11) 7...f5?! 8 dx5 Qxe5?! 9 Bf4!! (9 exf5, as in Kasparov-Shirov, Novgorod 1994, is good too) with an overwhelming initiative: 9...Qxb2 (9...Qxe4 10 Qb3 and 0-0-0) 10 Rb1 Qxa2 11 Nc3 Qa5 12 Qd4 Nf6 13 Bxd6 Nxe4 14 Bb4!.

c12) 7...Nf6 8 Nc3 0-0 9 Be2 gives White a space advantage; e.g., 9...exd4 10 Qxd4 c5 11 Qd3 Nc6 12 0-0 Nb4 13 Qb1 Re8 14 f3.

c2) 5...Nf6 6 Nxe7 Qxe7 7 f3 and then:

c21) 7...Nh5 8 Ne2! (Čičak-Hector, Swedish Team Ch 2011/12) offers Black no good dynamic options: 8...f5?! (8...exd4 9 Qxd4 Nc6 10 Qe3 Ne5 11 b3) 9 exf5 Bxf5?! 10 g4! e4 11 gxf5 exf3 12 Kd2!! fxe2 13 Bxe2 Nf6 14 Bf3 and White wins – a lovely trap!

c22) 7...exd4 8 Qxd4 Nc6 9 Qc3 (intending Ne2) 9...Nh5 (Williams-R.Pert, Witley 1999) 10 g4! (10 Ne2?! f5!) 10...Nf6 (10...Qh4+ 11 Kd1 Nf6 12 Nh3! leaves the black queen in trouble) 11 Ne2 with a firm grip on the position.

We now return to 3...Bc5 (D):



White to play

4 e3

4 Nf3 c6 5 Nc3 shows Black's idea: he has got the move ...Bc5 basically for free, not that this necessarily offers him an easy game.

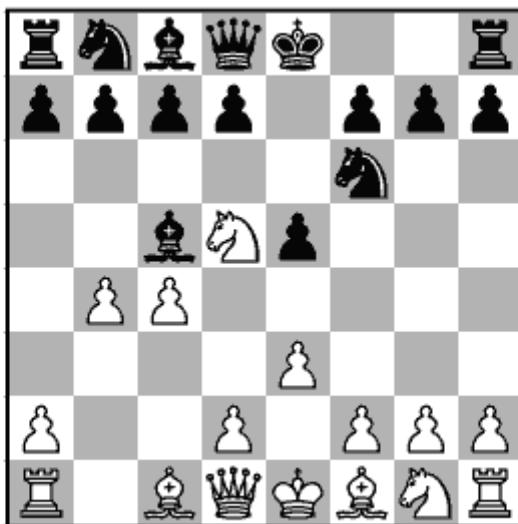
4...Nf6

Or:

a) 4...Ne7 5 b4 Nxd5 transposes to note 'c' at the end of this section.

b) 4...c6 5 d4 exd4 (5...cxd5?! 6 dxc5 Qa5+ 7 Bd2 Qxc5 8 Qg4! gives White a strong initiative: 8...g6 9 Rc1 d6 10 Qh4 {Donchenko-Moradiabadi, Sitges 2019} 10...Nc6 11 b4!) 6 exd4 Be7 7 Nxe7 Nxe7 8 Bd3 with a spatial plus: 8...d5 9 c5 Bf5 10 Ne2 0-0 11 0-0 Nd7 12 Be3 with a tricky defence ahead for Black.

5 b4 (D)



Black to play

Now:

a) 5...Bd6 6 Bb2 Nxd5 7 cxd5 c6 8 Qg4 and Black fails to unravel as planned.

b) 5...Be7 6 Nxe7 Qxe7 7 Bb2 and then:

b1) 7...0-0 8 Ne2 d5 (Bezemer-Timman, Belgian Team Ch 2018/19) 9 Ng3! enables the white pieces to find effective roles, and grabbing the pawn with 9...dxc4 (9...d4 10 a3 a5 11 Be2) 10 Bxc4 Qxb4 11 Qc1 Re8 12 Rb1 Qd6 13 0-0 gives White nice compensation, with f4 coming soon.

b2) 7...d6 8 Ne2 a5 9 b5 (9 a3 is possible too) 9...Nbd7 (Ingebretsen-Baklan, Sitges 2019) 10 Nc3 b6 11 Be2 Bb7 12 0-0 offers White pleasant long-term prospects. 12...0-0-0 13 d4 sharpens the game but the black king is the one in more real danger.

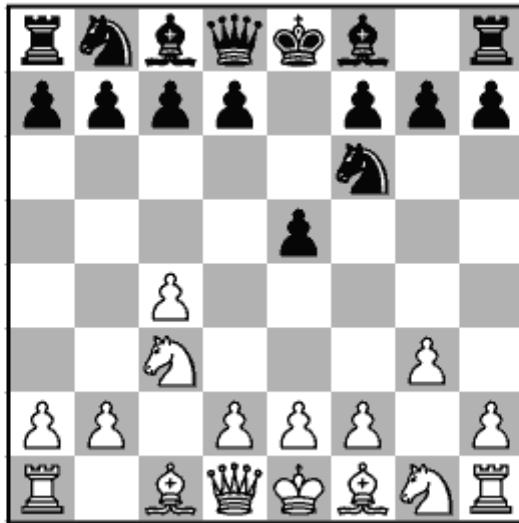
c) 5...Nxd5 6 bxc5 Nf6 7 Bb2 Qe7 8 Nf3 Nc6 9 d4! exd4 10 Nxd4 Nxd4 (10...Qxc5 11 Nb5 with good play for the pawn, Inarkiev-J.Christiansen, St Petersburg rapid 2018) 11 Qxd4 and the bishops outweigh the weakened pawns: 11...b6 12 Qe5 Qxe5 (12...bxc5?! 13 Qxc7) 13 Bxe5 Kd8 14 Bd4 (Zubov-Erdos, Romanian Team Ch, Mamaia 2019) with an endgame edge.

B)

2...Nf6 3 g3 (D)

This fianchetto is our repertoire move. White seeks a grip on d5 and keeps his options open regarding his centre pawns and where to put his king's knight.

3 Nf3 Nc6 is the other main line, which has a very substantial body of theory.



Black to play

After 3 g3, the path divides into lines that differ greatly from a strategic perspective:

B1: 3...c6

B2: 3...Bb4

B3: 3...d5

Two other options deserve mention:

a) 3...h6 looks like a random stab until you appreciate that this is a common and useful move in lines like 3 Nf3 Nc6 4 g3 Bb4 5 Bg2 0-0 6 0-0 e4 7 Ne1 Bxc3 8 dxc3 h6, and by playing it at this stage, Black is seeking to get White to commit to a set-up where it will be relevant. As we shall see in the line 3 g3 Bb4 4 e4, it can actually be in Black's interest for White to have completed the fianchetto. So White should choose his reply thoughtfully:

a1) 4 a3 is a witty reply.

a2) 4 Bg2 Bb4 5 e4 is like the line 3...Bb4 4 e4 d6 5 Bg2 (note '[d3](#)' to Black's 4th move in Line B2) but with ...h6 instead of ...d6; this helps White, but Black isn't doing too badly.

a3) 4 Nf3 (untried, surprisingly) 4...e4 (4...Nc6 5 Bg2 Bb4 6 Nd5 and ...h6 looks rather pointless) 5 Nd4 Bb4 6 Nd5!? Nxd5 7 cxd5 0-0 8 Bg2 Re8 9 0-0 intending d3 with interesting play ahead.

b) 3...Bc5 (*D*) targets f2 so requires careful handling.



White to play

4 Nf3 (avoiding the line 4 Bg2 c6 5 Nf3 e4 followed by ...d5) 4...Nc6 (4...e4?! 5 Ng5 and now the dramatic 5...Bxf2+ 6 Kxf2 Ng4+ 7 Kg1 Qxg5 8 Nxe4 Qg6 9 Bg2 is simply good for White; 4...d6 5 d4 exd4 6 Nxd4 offers White a space advantage and Black insufficient counterplay) 5 Bg2 d6 6 0-0 0-0 7 e3 intending d4 gives White some advantage; e.g.:

b1) 7...Bb6 8 d4 (Dominguez-Zhigalko, European Clubs Cup, Bilbao 2014) 8...exd4 9 exd4 Bg4 10 h3 Bxf3 11 Bxf3 Nxd4 (11...Qc8 12 Be3! Qxh3? 13 Nd5!; 11...Bxd4 12 Bxc6 Bxc3 13 Bg2! Ba5 14 Bxb7) 12 Bxb7 with the superior structure.

b2) 7...Bg4 8 h3 Bh5 9 g4 Bg6 10 d4 Bb6 11 c5!? (11 dx5 dx5 12 b4 is also pleasant for White, Fressinet-Karpov, Cap d'Agde rapid 2015) 11...exd4 (11...Ba5 12 cxd6 cxd6 13 Nh4) 12 Nxd4! dxc5

(12...Nxd4? 13 cxb6; 12...Bxc5 13 Nxc6 bxc6 14 f4!) 13 Nxc6 bxc6 14 Bxc6 leaves White with better pawns.

B1)

3...c6 (*D*)



White to play

A traditional main line named after Keres. It is kind of a reversed c3 Sicilian, though it normally leads to play of a very different nature.

4 Nf3

Instead 4 Bg2 d5! boils down to a sound pawn sacrifice, while 4 d4 exd4 5 Qxd4 d5 offers Black active piece-play.

4...e4

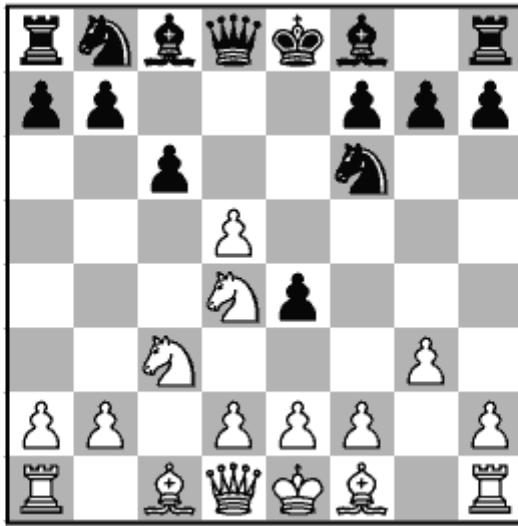
4...d5 5 cxd5 e4 6 Nd4 transposes to note '[b](#)' to Black's 5th move, while the passive 4...d6 is not in line with the Keres strategy: 5 Bg2 Be7 6 0-0 0-0 7 Qc2, with d4 to follow when White is good and ready, offers a pleasant space advantage in an Old Indian position.

5 Nd4 Qb6!

Or:

a) 5...Bc5 6 Nb3 Bb4 7 a3!? (7 Bg2 d5 8 cxd5 cxd5 9 d3 transposes to one of the traditional main lines, which we'll avoid) 7...Bxc3 8 dxc3 d5 9 Bg5 is pleasant for White.

b) 5...d5 6 cxd5 (*D*) and then:



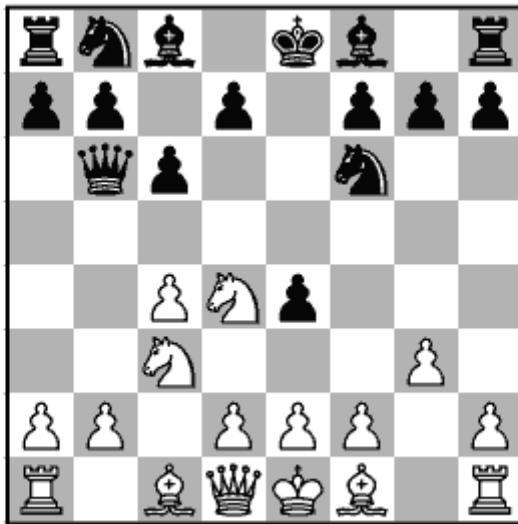
White to play

b1) 6...cxd5 7 d3 Bc5 (7...Qb6 8 dxe4 Bc5 9 e3 dxe4 {Benko-Tringov, Varna Olympiad 1962} 10 Na4! sticks a fork in Black's active development) 8 dxe4!? (8 Nb3 Bb4 9 Bg2 is the same old main line as mentioned under 5...Bc5) 8...dxe4 9 Be3 0-0 (9...Ng4?! looks good until you see 10 Ne6!) 10 Bg2 Ng4 (10...Qe7 11 0-0 Rd8 12 Qa4) 11 Nxe4 Nxe3 12 fxe3 and with White's centralized knights, the extra pawn is of some use.

b2) 6...Bc5 7 Nb3 Bb6 8 d3 (8 Bg2 cxd5 9 d3 Ng4 gives Black his intended play against f2) 8...cxd5 9 dxe4 Nxe4 10 Nxe4 dxe4 11 Qxd8+ (Taimanov-Gawlikowski, Lodz tt 1955) offers White at least some advantage, and at any rate is cheerless for Black.

b3) 6...Qb6 7 Nb3 a5 (7...cxd5 8 Bg2 Nc6 9 d3! exd3 10 Bg5 gets active while Black is undeveloped) 8 d3 a4 9 Nd2 exd3 (9...cxd5 10 dxe4 dxe4 11 Bg2 e3 12 fxe3 and Black has donated a pawn for unclear returns since 12...Qxe3? 13 Nde4 Qb6 14 Nxf6+ Qxf6 15 Rf1 leaves him hopelessly behind) 10 Nc4! Qc5 11 exd3 cxd5 12 d4 Qc7 13 Bf4 favours White.

We now return to 5...Qb6! (D):



White to play

6 Nb3 a5

This is Black's best move-order. Instead 6...d5 7 cxd5 transposes to note '[b3](#)' to Black's 5th move above.

7 d3

7 Na4!? Qb4 (7...Qa7!? 8 c5 and 7...Qd8 8 Bg2 d5 9 cxd5 cxd5 10 Nd4 are far from clear too) 8 Nd4 d5 (8...b5? 9 Nc2!, Forintos-Barczay, Budapest Ch 1964) 9 Nc2 (9 b3 dxc4 10 Bb2 Nbd7 11 a3 Qd6 12 bxc4 Nc5 13 Bg2 Nxa4 14 Qxa4 Be7 is probably OK for Black) 9...Qxc4 10 Nb6 Qa6 11 Nxa8 is a messy exchange sacrifice.

7...a4 8 Nd2

8 Be3 Qd8! 9 Nc5 Ng4 10 Bd4 e3 is unclear at best.

8...exd3 (D)



White to play

9 Bg2!

White should avoid 9 exd3? Bc5!, as in Nakamura-Topalov, Wijk aan Zee 2012.

9...d5

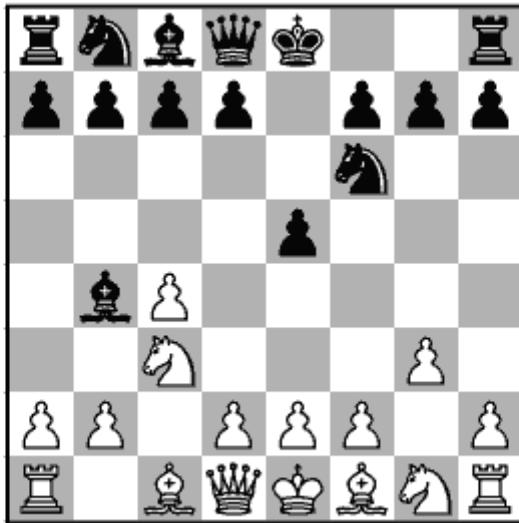
9...dxe2? 10 Qxe2+ Be7 11 0-0 and Re1 catches the black king in the centre.

Now (after 9...d5) White has a choice:

- 10 cxd5 cxd5 11 0-0 (a more interesting try than 11 exd3 Bg4 12 Nf3 d4 13 Ne2 Bb4+ 14 Bd2 Nc6, Navara-Huschenbeth, Czech Team Ch 2019/20) 11...Bg4 12 h3 dxe2 13 Nxe2 with compensation.
- 10 exd3 Bg4 (Mazé-Edouard, French Ch, Pau 2012; 10...Bc5?! 11 0-0) 11 Qc2 Na6 12 a3 is mildly awkward for Black; e.g., 12...dxc4 13 Nxa4 Qa5 14 Qxc4 Nc7! 15 Nc3 and Black must still prove his compensation.

B2)

3...Bb4 (D)



White to play

A respected line and perhaps the most challenging option at Black's disposal. Now 4 Bg2 is the old/standard move, and we should take a look to see why we might want to avoid it. 4...0-0 (4...d6?? is a remarkably common blunder due to 5 Qa4+, but 4...c6 and the surprising 4...h6 are both respectable options) and now:

- a) 5 Nf3 Re8 6 0-0 e4 7 Nd4 Nc6 8 Nc2 Bxc3 9 dxc3 h6 is a main line where White has always struggled to gain much traction.
- b) 5 e4 Bxc3 6 bxc3 c6 7 Ne2 d5 is an example of how Black benefits from not having played an early ...Nc6. After 8 cxd5 cxd5 9 exd5 Nxd5 10 d4 exd4 11 Qxd4 Be6 12 0-0 White will struggle to do much with his bishop-pair.

So...

4 e4!? (D)



Black to play

...is the latest fashion, popularized by Carlsen and adopted by some other top-class players. White seeks to transpose to positions normally reached via 4 Bg2 0-0 5 e4 while avoiding some problematic lines. There are also variations where the bishop doesn't go to g2 at all.

4...Bxc3

This might seem like a cooperative exchange, but the move has been used successfully by Anand and Caruana, so let's not jump to any hasty conclusions! A few of the alternatives also contend for main-line status in this new and unsettled variation:

a) 4...c6 5 Bg2 0-0 (5...Bxc3 seems odd after playing ...c6 since 6 dxc3 leaves the d-pawn backward: 6...d6 7 Qe2 0-0 8 Nf3 intending 0-0 and Rd1) 6 Nge2 d6 (6...d5?! 7 cxd5 cxd5 8 exd5 Bf5 9 d4 Nbd7 doesn't give Black enough for the pawn; 6...Re8 7 0-0 Na6 8 a3 Bf8 9 d4 exd4 10 Nxd4 Nc5 11 Re1 d6 12 h3 with a pleasant advantage for White, Polugaevsky-Harandi, Manila Interzonal 1976) 7 0-0 a6 8 a3 Bc5 9 d4 Ba7 10 h3 b5 11 cxb5 axb5 12 Be3 is unbalanced but it's easy to like White's chances of getting something moving on the kingside.

b) 4...Nc6 (giving up ...c6 ideas also seems cooperative) 5 Bg2 0-0 (*D*) (5...Bxc3?! 6 bxc3 is good for White now that Black can't reply with a quick ...c6 and ...d5) and then:



White to play

b1) 6 Nge2 d6 offers White little: 7 h3 (7 0-0 Bg4 8 h3 Bxe2 9 Nxe2 Bc5 or 7 a3 Bc5 8 b4 Bb6 9 Na4?! Nd4! 10 Nxb6?! Bg4!) 7...a6 (7...Bc5 8 0-0 a6 may transpose but gives White the extra option of 9 a3) 8 0-0 b5 9 d3 Bc5 10 Kh2 bxc4 (or 10...Rb8) 11 dxc4 Nd4, as in Hambleton-Hakobyan, Saint Louis 2019.

b2) It may well be worth spending a tempo with 6 a3!? to encourage 6...Bxc3 (6...Bc5 7 b4 Bd4 8 Nge2) 7 bxc3, when White can play a normal game and seek to make use of his bishops and centre pawns, though Black has his fair share of counterchances; e.g., 7...d6 (7...Na5 8 d3 c6 9 Nf3 d5 10 cxd5 cxd5 11 exd5 followed by c4 and 0-0) 8 d3 Ne8 (Tregubov-Berkes, Zurich 2017; 8...h6 9 Ne2, 8...Be6 9 Nh3?! h6 10 f4 and 8...Nd7 9 Nf3 Nc5 10 Nh4 also offer White interesting play) 9 Ne2 f5 10 exf5 Bxf5 11 Rb1 Rb8 12 h3 intending g4.

c) 4...0-0 5 Nge2 b5!? (D) (5...Nc6 6 Bg2 transposes to line '[b1](#)' above, while 5...c6 6 Bg2 is line '[a](#)'; 5...d6 6 Bg2 will mostly transpose to other lines in this note).



White to play

6 cxb5 (6 Nxb5 Bb7 7 f3 d5! 8 cxd5 c6 9 Qb3 a5 10 a3 cxd5 11 axb4 dxe4 is a chaotic mess that is probably best avoided) 6...a6 has so far only been tested in games where there was a big rating gap

between the players. 7 b6 (7 d4!? Nxe4 8 Bg2 Bb7 9 0-0 Nxc3 10 bxc3 Bxg2 11 Kxg2 Be7 is unclear) 7...cxb6 (7...c5 8 Bg2 d6 9 0-0 Nbd7 10 d3 Nxb6 11 h3 offers White an edge based on his prospects of kingside expansion and firm grip on d5) 8 Bg2 Nc6 and here:

c1) 9 0-0 Bc5 and Black controls d4.

c2) 9 a3 Bxc3! (9...Bc5?! 10 b4) 10 dxc3 (10 Nxc3 d5!) 10...Na5! is much less good for White than you might think at a glance.

c3) 9 d4 d5 10 0-0 dxe4 11 Nxe4 Bg4 just about holds together tactically for Black, though no one would find the defence over the board: 12 h3 Bxe2 13 Qxe2 Nxd4 14 Nxf6+ Qxf6 15 Qc4 Bc5 16 b4 e4!; e.g., 17 bxc5 b5 18 Qb4 Ne2+ 19 Kh2 Qxa1 20 Bb2 Qxa2 21 Qd2 Qc4 22 Re1 Nxg3 23 Qg5 Nh5 24 Qxh5 f5 and the game is level but not drawish.

d) 4...d6!? (D) might be the best ‘new’ reply (it would be a blunder after 4 Bg2).



White to play

d1) 5 Nge2 Bg4 6 Bg2 transposes to line '[d33](#)'.

d2) 5 d3 Bg4 doesn't appear to offer White anything special; e.g., 6 Be2 (6 Qc2 Nc6 7 Be3 Bc5) 6...Bd7 (rather than 6...Bxe2 7 Nxe2 or 6...Be6 7 f4) leaves White looking disorganized.

d3) 5 Bg2 Bg4!? is so far untried, but critical:

d31) 6 f3?! Be6.

d32) 6 Nf3 Bxc3 7 dxc3 Nxe4 8 h3 might give White enough compensation after 8...Bc8 9 Nxe5 Nxg3 10 fxg3 dxe5 11 Qh5 0-0 12 0-0 or 8...Bh5 9 Be3.

d33) 6 Nge2 Nc6 (a position reached from other move-orders) 7 a3!? (7 f3?! Be6 8 d3 Bc5; 7 h3 Bxe2 8 Nxe2 Bc5 and Black's grip on d4 is hard to shake, Ivanisević-Donchenko, Barcelona 2019) 7...Bc5 8 f3 Be6 9 b4 Bb6 10 Nd5 h5! (otherwise it is hard for Black to get counterplay) with a tough position to assess. 11 Nxb6 (11 h4 also leads to rich and roughly balanced play) 11...axb6 12 b5 Na5 13 d3 h4 14 Bg5 and now one plausible line is 14...hxg3 15 hxg3 Rxh1+ 16 Bxh1 c6 17 Nc3 d5 18 exd5 cxd5 19 cxd5 Bxd5 20 Qe2.

5 dxc3 (D)

Seeking rapid development and a firm grip on d5. 5 bxc3 0-0 6 Bg2 transposes to an older line where White has had problems against 6...c6 intending ...d5.



Black to play

5...d6

5...Nxe4?! is reminiscent of that old line in the Exchange Lopez that is trotted out in every elementary book: 6 Qg4 (6 Qd5!? is also good) 6...Nf6 7 Qxg7 Rg8 8 Qh6 (Berkes-Timman, Paks 2010) is not a disaster for Black, but White can be happy.

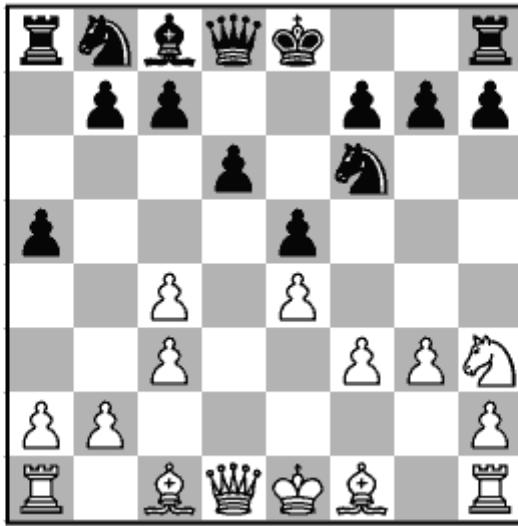
6 f3

The bishop would be inactive on g2 and leave c4 unprotected, so White instead plans a set-up with Nh3-f2, Bd3 and Qe2, which keeps the centre under control and maintains options of play in all sectors of the board.

6...a5

6...Be6 7 Nh3 h6 8 Nf2 Nfd7 9 f4!? (Gareev-Vokhidov, St Petersburg 2019 – it's as good a time as any to push forward, given that Black is clearly preparing ...f5; White can also respond more calmly with 9 Qe2 intending Nd1-e3 among other ideas) 9...exf4 (anything else is too meek) 10 gxf4 Qe7! 11 Qe2 g6 (11...f5 12 Rg1 fxe4 13 Bg2 Bf5 14 Nxe4 Nc6 15 Ng3 with a complex but roughly level ending) 12 Bg2 Nc6 13 Be3 0-0-0 14 0-0-0 leads to a double-edged struggle.

7 Nh3 (D)



Black to play

7...a4

Or:

- a) 7...0-0 8 Nf2 Be6 9 Bd3 Nbd7 10 Qe2 c6 (10...Nc5 11 Bc2 a4 transposes to the [main](#) line of this section) 11 0-0 Re8 (So-Mamedyarov, Bucharest 2019; 11...d5 12 cxd5 cxd5 13 exd5 Nxd5 14 Bd2 feels risky for Black as he has opened lines for White's bishops, but objectively is probably viable) 12 Be3 intends Rad1 while Black must be wary of the f4 advance.
- b) 7...Na6 8 Nf2 Nc5 (directed against Bd3) 9 Be3 (White needs something more assertive than 9 Be2 Qe7 10 Qc2 0-0 11 Nd1 Be6 12 Ne3 c6 13 0-0 d5, as played in Svidler-Tomashevsky, Bundesliga 2018/19) 9...Qe7 (parrying the threat of Bxc5; after 9...Be6 10 Qc2 a4 {Gukesh-Barseghyan, Cannes 2020} 11 Be2 followed by 0-0, Black will have to watch out for both f4 and b4 ideas) 10 a4 Be6 (after 10...b6, 11 Bg2 is most appropriate since White will need e4 well covered before an eventual f4 advance) 11 Be2 0-0 12 0-0 and while White is not going to push forward any time soon, he has interesting prospects of a kingside advance at some point, while Black's c5-knight is not wholly stable with White able to play b4 at a time of his choosing.

8 Nf2 Be6

8...Nbd7 9 Be3 Nc5 offers White a choice between 10 Bxc5 dxc5 11 Qxd8+ Kxd8 12 Nd3 Nd7 13 0-0-0 Ke7 14 Bh3 (Van Wely-T.Nguyen, Novy Bor 2019), when Black is under some pressure, and 10 b4 axb3 11 axb3 Be6 with a more fluid situation.

9 Bd3 Nbd7 10 Qe2 (D)



Black to play

10...Nc5

10...c6? is poorly timed due to 11 f4!, when White is well on top, even though Black went on to survive in Carlsen-Anand, Karlsruhe/Baden-Baden 2019.

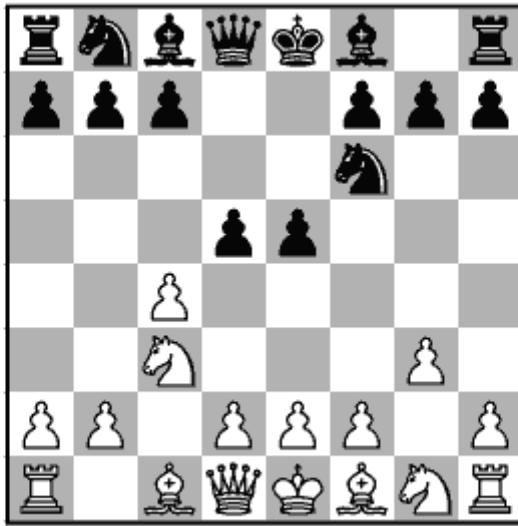
11 Bc2 0-0

This position will probably be explored soon:

- a) 12 f4?! rolls the dice and after 12...exf4 13 gxf4 Re8! (13...d5?! 14 f5) 14 Be3 Bc8! 15 Bxc5 dxc5 16 e5 g6! it is still easy for Black to go wrong, but objectively White is risking at least as much.
- b) 12 0-0 Nfd7 13 Nd1?! f5 pre-empts Ne3.
- c) 12 Be3 Nfd7 13 0-0 (13 f4? Nb6) with interesting play ahead; e.g., 13...Qe7 (13...f5 14 exf5 Bxf5 15 Bxf5 Rxf5 16 Bxc5 Nxc5 17 Ne4 offers White light-square play, although the position is getting a little sterile) 14 b4 axb3 15 axb3 b5 16 f4 f6 (16...exf4 17 gxf4 f6 18 cxb5 Nxb3 19 Rxa8 Rxa8 20 e5!?) 17 f5 Bf7 18 cxb5 Nxb3 19 Bxb3 Bxb3 20 Ra6!?.

B3)

3...d5 (D)



White to play

This is a popular line known for obvious reasons as the Reversed Dragon. It gives Black a solid game as long as he arranges his pieces carefully and isn't overly ambitious – many anti-Dragon plans will not work a tempo down!

4 cxd5 Nxd5

A reversed Morra with 4...c6?! is very rare. 5 dxc6 Nxc6 6 Bg2 is unlikely to give Black enough compensation (...g6 is a decent defence against the regular Morra, and this is a whole extra tempo), while 5 Nf3 e4 6 Nd4 is a good practical choice, reaching the Keres System with Black committed to the arguably inaccurate early ...d5 (i.e. note '[b](#)' to Black's 5th move in Line B1).

5 Bg2 (D)



Black to play

Now we divide into two sections, but the latter is by far the more important:

B31: 5...Nxc3

B32: 5...Nb6

Other moves have more serious drawbacks:

- a) 5...c6?! allows White a rather easy central advantage after 6 Nf3 Bd6 7 0-0 0-0 8 d4.
- b) 5...Ne7?! 6 Nf3 Nbc6 slows Black's development to the extent that 7 b4! is a good response. 7...a6 (7...Nd5 8 Nxe5 Nxc3 9 Nxc6 doesn't work very well for Black) 8 0-0 g6 9 a4 Bg7 10 Ba3 (Milos-Curi, Turin Olympiad 2006) keeps Black under pressure.
- c) 5...Be6?! is a popular but misguided attempt to keep the knight in the centre. 6 Nf3 Nc6 (6...f6?! 7 d4 will get ugly for Black fast) and with 7 0-0 (*D*) White calmly prepares to strike.



Black to play

One free move is not enough for Black to solve his problems:

- c1) 7...Bb4 8 Ng5! Qxg5 9 Nxd5 Bd6 10 d4 Qh5 11 dxе5 Bxe5 12 Qa4 is good for White, who has the little tactic 12...0-0 13 Bf3! Qf5 14 Qxc6 bxc6 15 Ne7+ in mind.
- c2) 7...Qd7 8 Ng5 Nxc3 9 bxc3 Bd5 (9...Bf5 10 d4 f6 11 Nf3 0-0-0 12 e4!) 10 Bh3! Qd8 11 d3 intending e4.
- c3) 7...Be7 8 d4! exd4 (8...Nxc3 9 bxc3 e4 10 Ne1 f5 11 f3 exf3 12 Bxf3 0-0 13 Ng2 {a pleasing manoeuvre} leaves White better) 9 Nb5 (9 Nxd4 also provides an edge, thanks to the bishop on e6) 9...d3 (9...0-0 10 Nbxd4 and 9...Qd7 10 Nbxd4 offer White a simple plus) 10 Nfd4! Nxd4 11 Nxd4 dxе2 12 Qxe2 (Contin-Barakat, Moscow Olympiad 1994) 12...Qd7 13 Nxe6 Qxe6 14 Qd1! c6 15 Re1 Qd7 16 Qe2 catches the king in the centre, with great compensation for White.
- c4) 7...Nb6 8 d4! shows how careful Black needs to be with his development in these positions (with ...Be7 instead of ...Be6, he would be fine here, a specific line to compare being 5...Nb6 6 Nf3 Nc6 7 0-0 Be7 8 d4 exd4 9 Nb5 0-0 10 Bf4 Nd5). After 8...exd4 9 Nb5 (*D*) there's no good answer for Black.



Black to play

Note that many of the lines would be hard to find over the board, so some study is recommended here:

c41) 9...Bc5 10 Qc2! Bc4 11 Bf4 Bxb5 12 Qxc5 Qd5 (12...Bxe2 13 Rfe1 d3 14 Ne5!) 13 Qa3! and with king and queen unsafe, Black should bail out by 13...Nc4 14 Qb3 Nb6 (Lorparizangeneh-Li Bo, Johor Bahru 2018) 15 Nxd4! Qxb3 16 Bxc6+ Bxc6 17 axb3, when White retains strong pressure.

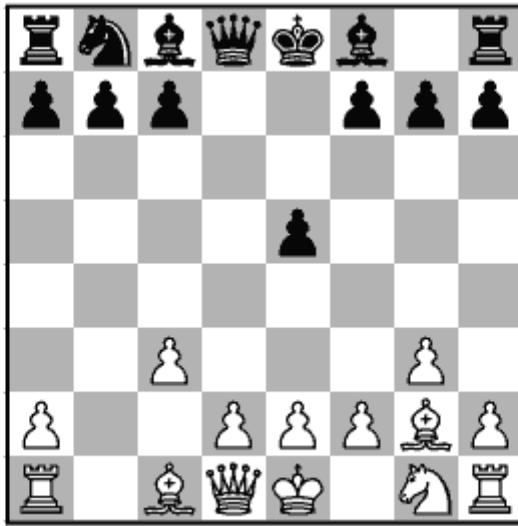
c42) 9...d3 10 Ng5!! Bc4 11 exd3 Bxb5 12 Qb3 (Khlebovich-Polosin, St Petersburg 2019) is a nice tactic.

c43) 9...Bd5 10 Bf4 Rc8 (10...Bd6 11 Bxd6 cxd6 12 Nfxd4) 11 Nbxd4 with a simple advantage.

c44) 9...Qd7 10 Nbxd4 and White will gain the bishop-pair, a better structure, or an attack: 10...0-0-0 (10...Nxd4 11 Qxd4 with a simple plus) 11 Be3 Bc5 (11...Nc4 12 Nxc6 Nxe3 13 Nxa7+ Kb8 14 fxe3 Qxd1 and the desperado 15 Nc6+ breaks Black's resistance) 12 Nxc6 Qxc6 13 Qc1 Bxe3 14 Qxe3 (Macurek-Ghisi, corr. 2016) with a ready-made attack on the queenside.

B31)

5...Nxc3 6 bxc3 (D)



Black to play

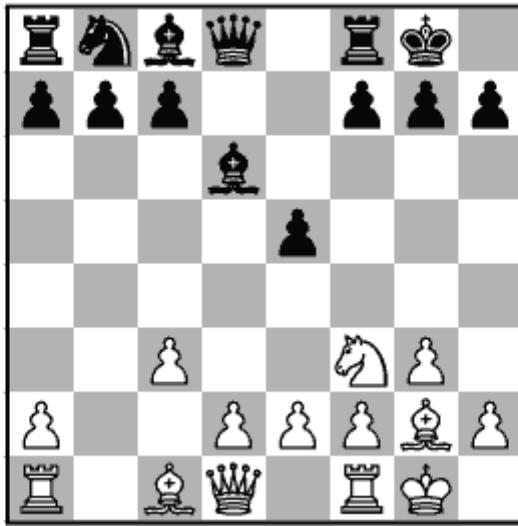
This gives White a superior structure, but Black should achieve a playable game by developing actively.

6...Bd6

Or:

- a) 6...Bc5 is most simply met by 7 Nf3 Nc6, transposing to line '[c](#)'. Instead 7 Qa4+!? sets the little trap 7...Bd7?? 8 Qc4, but is far from clear after 7...Qd7 8 Qc4 Bb6! 9 Ba3 Nc6 intending ...Qe6 or ...Qg4.
- b) 6...c5 looks clumsy, but if White doesn't respond actively, Black will establish a grip on the centre. 7 Qa4+!? Bd7 (7...Qd7 8 Qxd7+ Nxd7 9 d3 gives White enduring pressure as Black's pieces are in each other's way; 7...Nd7 8 Nf3 Bd6 9 0-0 0-0 and now slow play gives White a pleasant game, while 10 d4!? logically breaks things open) 8 Qb3 grabs a pawn. Black has some compensation after 8...Nc6 9 Qxb7 (9 Bd5 Qf6 10 Nf3 is possible too) 9...Rb8 10 Qa6 Qc7 11 Qd3 Be7 12 Rb1 0-0 but it's not clear if it is fully sufficient.
- c) 6...Nc6 7 Nf3 Bc5 (7...Bd6 8 0-0 0-0 transposes to the [main](#) line of this section; 7...e4 8 Ng1 leaves Black overextended: 8...f5 9 Nh3, Adorjan-Timman, Reggio Emilia 1984/5) 8 Bb2!? 0-0 9 d4 exd4 10 cxd4 Bb4+ (otherwise White has gained time for nothing) 11 Kf1 Be6 12 h4 offers White good prospects across the whole board.

7 Nf3 0-0 8 0-0 (D)



Black to play

8...Nc6

8...c6 9 d4 Nd7 10 a4!? has little that should appeal to Black.

9 d4

Now:

a) 9...exd4 10 cxd4 leaves White in charge of the centre.

b) 9...Re8 10 Rb1 makes it tricky for Black to unravel his queenside and after 10...h6 11 Re1 White is ready for central play.

c) 9...Rb8 modestly shores up the queenside, so focusing on the centre and kingside by 10 Qc2 Qf6 11 Ng5 Bf5 12 e4 Bg6 13 d5 makes sense.

d) 9...Qe7 10 Qc2 (untried but logical; 10 a4!? and 10 Rb1!? are both worth considering too) 10...h6 (ruling out Ng5) 11 e4 Re8 12 Rb1 and a tough fight lies ahead, but White is directing events.

B32)

5...Nb6 6 d3 Be7 7 Be3 0-0 8 Rc1 (D)



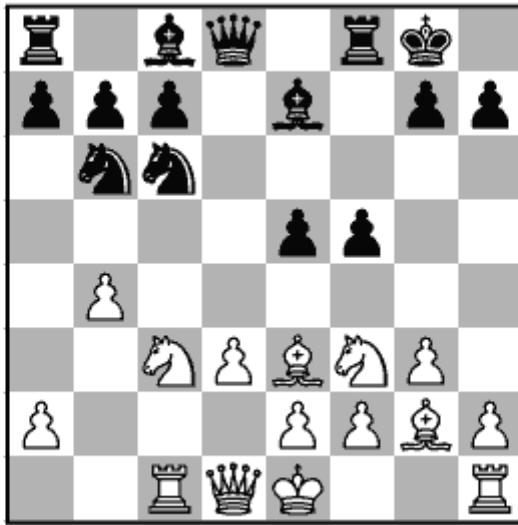
Black to play

This move, originally an idea used by Danish players in the 1970s and 1980s, has become popular in recent years. By delaying Nf3, White keeps the option of meeting ...Nc6 with Bxc6. In the resulting positions, Black's broken pawns are likely to prove more relevant than the vacated fianchetto on White's kingside since the white knights move quickly to influential squares. White can't delay Nf3 for ever, so over the next few moves, we may see a sort of waiting game where both sides seek the most useful moves they can without shutting the door on Nf3 or ...Nc6 respectively.

8...Re8

This has been the choice of most supergrandmasters who have faced 8 Rc1, but two alternatives are of fundamental importance:

- a) 8...f5 allows White to insert 9 Nf3 Nc6 at a point when he has an unusual follow-up at his disposal: 10 b4!? (D).



Black to play

Then:

a1) 10...e4?! 11 Qb3+ followed by dxe4.

a2) 10...Bxb4 11 Qb3+ Qd5 (11...Kh8? 12 Nxe5) 12 Qxb4 Nxb4 13 Nxd5 (B.Jacobsen-Bromann, Tåstrup 1998) 13...N4xd5! 14 Nxe5 Nxe3 15 fxe3 and White's more active minor pieces leave him for choice.

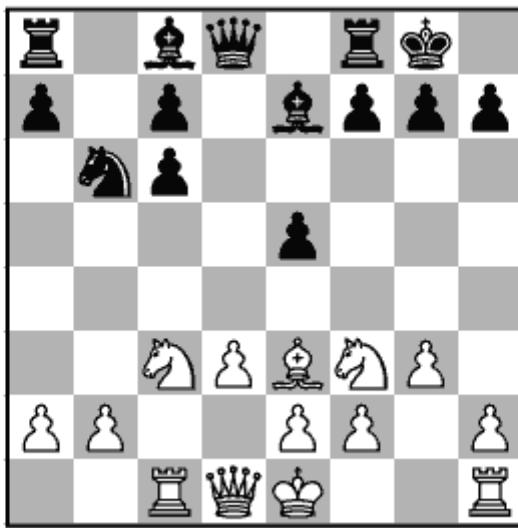
a3) 10...f4 11 Bc5 Kh8 (threatening ...Nxb4) 12 Bxe7 (12 Qb3 a5!) 12...Qxe7 13 b5 Nd4 14 a4 and White retains a slight initiative.

a4) 10...a6 and now:

a41) 11 a4 Be6 12 0-0 (12 b5?! axb5 13 axb5 Nd4 14 Nxe5 Bb4 15 0-0 Ra3 shows the reason why Black wanted to insert the a-pawn moves) 12...f4 13 Bc5 Bxc5 14 bxc5 Nd5 15 Qb3 Kh8 16 Nxe5 Nxe5 17 Bxd5 Bh3 (Oliynyk-S.Novikov, corr. 2017) gives Black enough play.

a42) 11 0-0 Be6 12 Bc5 (12 a3 transposes to one of the main lines of the Reversed Dragon) has been exclusively used in correspondence chess, where Black has largely survived, but he has some non-standard problems to solve; e.g., 12...Kh8 13 d4 (13 Qd2 Bxc5 14 bxc5 Nd5) 13...e4 14 Bxb6 exf3 15 Bxf3 cxb6 16 d5 Bg8! (to keep lines open for the rooks) 17 dxc6 bxc6 18 a3 with queenside pressure.

b) 8...Nc6 allows White's main idea, so is rather critical: if White has nothing here, then his whole plan looks harmless. 9 Bxc6!? bxc6 10 Nf3 (*D*) and now:



Black to play

b1) 10...Bh3 11 Nxe5 (Csom-Zaichik, Coimbatore 1987) 11...Qe8 12 Rg1 doesn't give Black enough for the pawn.

b2) 10...f6 11 Qc2 (11 d4!?) 11...Bh3 (11...Nd5, as in Bachmann-Romanishin, Douglas 2016, can be met by 12 Nd1 Bd7 13 Bc5) 12 a3 and it will be hard work for Black to get enough activity to make up for his weak pawns. After 12...Bg2 13 Rg1 Bxf3 14 exf3 Black's broken pawns are more easily attacked than White's.

b3) 10...Nd5 11 Qa4 is not so easy for Black: 11...Nxe3 12 fxe3 Bd6 13 Qxc6 Rb8 14 Nd1 or 11...Rb8 12 Nxe5 Bf6 13 Nc4 Bh3 14 Rg1 Qd7 15 Qc2.

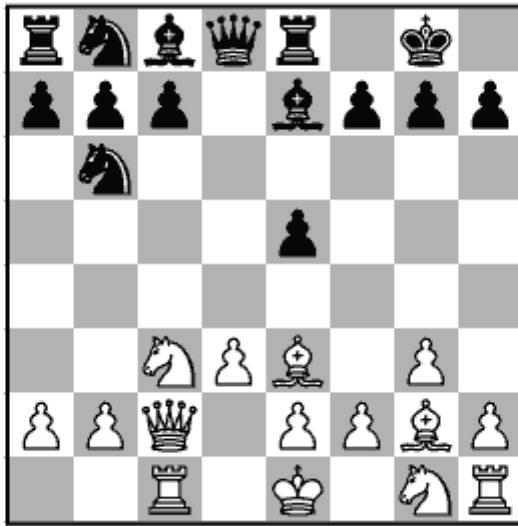
b4) 10...Bd6 11 Ne4 Nd5 and here:

b41) 12 Rxc6 Rb8 (12...Bh3 13 a3) 13 Bc5 Ne7 14 Bxd6 cxd6 15 Rxd6 Qa5+ 16 Qd2 leads to roughly equal chances after both 16...Qxd2+ and 16...Qxa2.

b42) 12 Qc2!? Nxe3 13 fxe3 Bd7 14 Kf2 (not a bad square for the king!) 14...Rb8 with chances for both sides. Right now the white knights have an easier time finding good squares than the black bishops.

9 Qc2 (D)

9 a3 is another move with similar aims, and mostly an alternative move-order.



Black to play

9...Bf8

Other moves:

a) 9...c6 seems inadvisable as the knight needs this square. 10 Nf3 Bf8 (10...Nd5 is time-consuming, and after 11 Nxd5, 11...cxd5? fails due to the weak back rank after 12 Nxe5 Bb4+ 13 Kf1) 11 d4 (11 0-0 Bf5) 11...exd4 12 Bxd4 offers White a risk-free space advantage.

b) 9...Nc6 invites 10 Bxc6 bxc6 11 Nf3; e.g., 11...Nd5 (11...Bd6 12 Ne4) 12 0-0! (rather than trying to grab pawns) and it is not so easy for Black to get his pieces working in harmony with his rickety pawn-structure. If Black wants to allow Bxc6 and the doubled pawns, it is probably best to do so on move 8 and then deploy his pieces more actively.

c) 9...a5 10 a3 and then:

c1) 10...Nc6 11 Bxc6 bxc6 12 Nf3 Nd5 and now 13 Ne4 or 13 Nd1!?, which is good with both ...Bb4+ and ...Nb4 ruled out.

c2) 10...h6 is a slow move that would be rare in a regular Reversed Dragon, so this is a good moment to revert to more standard development with 11 Nf3 Nc6 12 0-0 Be6 (D).



White to play

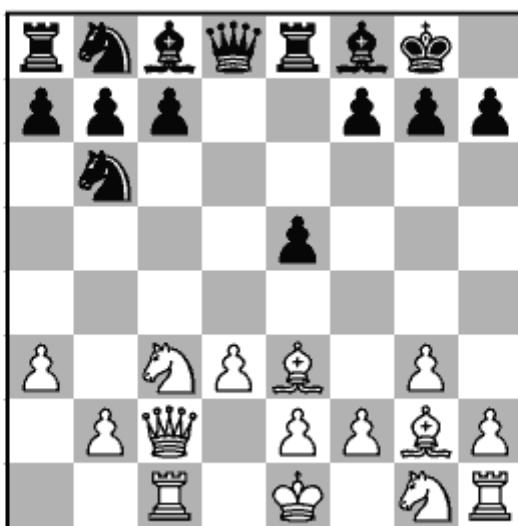
This may not be much better for White than normal lines, but it is a rich position and not so hard for White to play using common sense, and Black won't be able to trot out any memorized theory. A sample line out of many possibilities: 13 Bxb6 (13 Na4 Nd4) 13...cxb6 14 e3 Rc8 15 Qb1 Bf5 16 Rfd1 Qd7 17 Nd2 Qxd3 18 Qxd3 Bxd3 19 Nd5 and now:

c21) 19...Rcd8 20 Nc4 Bxc4 21 Rxc4 Bc5 (21...b5? 22 Rxc6!) allows White a grip on the position that is hard to shake and certainly enough to win the pawn back (b4 is coming at some point) and pose Black a few problems.

c22) 19...b5 20 Ne4 Be2! (20...Bxe4 21 Bxe4 Bf8 22 Nb6 Rcd8 23 Rd7 is uncomfortable for Black) 21 Rd2 Bg4 22 h3 Be6 23 Nxe7+ and despite the extra pawn it will be hard for Black to hold his queenside together.

10 a3 (D)

White can abandon the waiting game and go for 10 Nf3 Nc6 11 Ne4, also with a fresh position.



Black to play

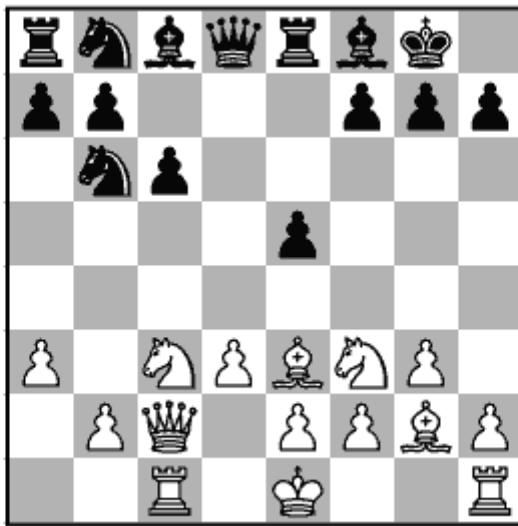
10...c6

This seems more acceptable than it did on the [previous](#) move, given that White has made a ‘slow’ move of his own.

Alternatively:

- a) 10...Nc6 11 Bxc6 bxc6 12 Nf3 is little-explored but seems at least as promising for White as other such positions we have examined; e.g., 12...Bh3 (12...Nd5 13 Nd1) 13 Rg1 (threatening g4) 13...Bg4 14 Ne4.
- b) 10...a5 11 Nf3 (11 Ne4 Nc6 12 Nc5 Nd5 doesn’t achieve a great deal for White) 11...Nc6 12 0-0 Bg4 (12...Nd4?! allows a more successful version of a tactic that we see in other guises: 13 Bxd4 exd4 14 Nxd4 Qxd4 15 Nb5 will boil down to R+2P vs B+N, since 15...Qg4?! 16 Nxc7 Rxe2? 17 Qb3 hits the loose knight on b6) 13 Na4 with nice queenside play.
- c) 10...h6 11 Nf3 (figuring that a3 is more useful than ...h6) 11...Nc6 (11...c6 transposes to note ‘[b](#)’ to Black’s 11th move) 12 Ne4 (after 12 0-0, as played in Giri-Kramnik, Hoogeveen 2011, 12...Nd4! kicks off tactics that lead to a material balance that is hard to assess: 13 Bxd4 exd4 14 Nxd4 Qxd4 15 Nb5 Qg4 16 Bf3 Qg6 17 Nxc7 Bh3 18 Nxa8 Nxa8 19 Rfd1) and here:
 - c1) 12...Bg4 13 0-0 Qd7 14 Rfe1 Rad8 15 b4 with queenside pressure.
 - c2) 12...Be6 13 0-0 a5 14 Nc5 Bxc5 15 Bxc5 a4 16 Nd2 Nd5 17 Ne4 (Mercadal-de la Rosa, corr. 2018) looks pleasant for White but any objective advantage is small.
 - c3) 12...a5 13 0-0 a4 14 Rfe1 Be6 15 Nfd2 (Ivanchuk-Khairullin, Jurmala rapid 2012) and White’s access to c5 gives him a slight initiative, though Black has plenty of defensive resources.

11 Nf3 (D)



Black to play

11...Bf5

Instead:

- a) 11...Na6 12 0-0 and b4 offers White good prospects.

b) 11...h6 12 0-0 Bf5 transposes to the [next](#) note (and 12...Bg4 13 h3 Bf5 is similar).

12 0-0 N8d7

12...h6 covers g5 and gives the bishop a square on h7 in case it is needed. 13 Rfd1 (13 b4!?) 13...N8d7 14 Bd2 (intending e4, with another typical Sicilian structure in reverse) 14...Qf6 15 Nh4 (15 Ne4 Qe6 16 Bb4!?) 15...Bg4 16 h3 Be6 17 Ne4 Qd8 18 b4 f5 (Mackintosh-Waller, corr. 2018) 19 Nc5 Nxc5 20 bxc5 Nd7 21 Rb1 with interesting play.

13 Bg5!?

The bishop now serves little purpose on e3, so it might as well relocate while provoking weaknesses.

13 b4 a5 14 Rb1 axb4 (14...Nc4!? 15 Bc1 Nd6 16 e4) 15 axb4 Nd5 16 Bg5 f6 (after 16...Be7?! 17 Bxe7 Qxe7 18 b5 White is making progress, Bachmann-Brodsky, New York 2017) 17 Bd2 Be6 and the game remains roughly balanced.

13...f6 14 Bd2

14 e4 Be6 15 Be3 (Ohtake-Casabona, corr. 2016) is another idea.

14...a5

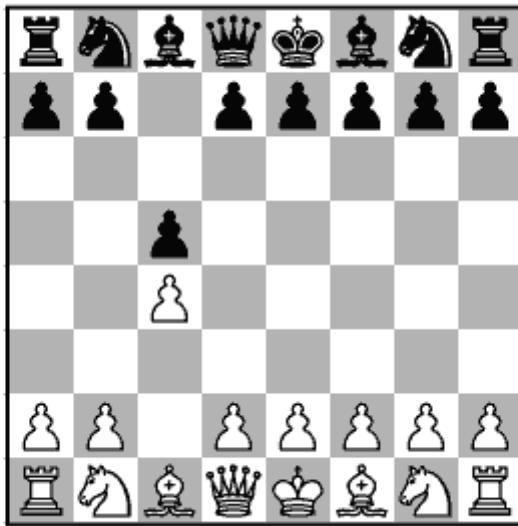
14...Nc5 15 b4 Ne6 16 Ne4 Nd5 also leads to a rich battle.

15 b4

A complex middlegame lies ahead. White has ideas of using the b5 pawn-lever to attack Black's queenside structure, as well as playing in the centre with e4 followed by preparing the d4 advance. A sample line: 15...axb4 16 axb4 Be6 17 Rb1 Nd5 18 b5 Nb4 19 Qb2 c5 20 Be3 Qc7 21 Rbc1 Na2 22 Ra1 Nxc3 23 Qxc3 Nb6 24 Nd2 heading for a good post on c4.

8: Symmetrical English (as White)

1 c4 c5 (D)



White to play

This copycat reply shares the same benefits as White's first move, and is of course also our choice in our repertoire as Black. It doesn't yet tell us much about Black's intentions. It's possible he's intending to copy White's moves for as long as possible, or he might want to break the symmetry in the next couple of moves. Does he want a quiet game or a sharp one? Perhaps he intends a set-up with ...e6 and ...d5, a Hedgehog or a fianchetto on the other wing with ...g6. And he could be angling for a quick ...e5 to rule out White's central break with d4.

The Symmetrical English has a huge and diverse body of theory, partly because many of the variations within it are basically queen's pawn openings or Réti lines that feature c4 and ...c5 and that aren't classified more conveniently within some other major opening.

Given Black's breadth of choice, we'll need to be careful with our move-order to avoid being forced into lines we'd prefer not to face. With that in mind, my recommendation is...

2 g3

The first order of business is to establish control of d5.

2 Nc3 makes it harder to answer lines with a quick ...e6 and ...d5 without transposing to openings that lie outside our repertoire. In most cases this knight will be going to c3 within a few moves though.

After 2 Nf3 it is easier for Black to reach Hedgehog set-ups or to play lines with a quick ...d5, both of which we'll be clamping down on as far as possible. As we aren't looking to play a quick d4 ourselves, putting the knight on f3 has little benefit to us, especially as in some main lines we'll be placing it on e2 or at least leaving it on g1 for some time to allow the bishop to enjoy a better view on the long diagonal.

After 2 g3, we divide our coverage into the following main lines, though the move-orders are rather fluid:

A: 2...Nc6

[B: 2...Nf6](#)

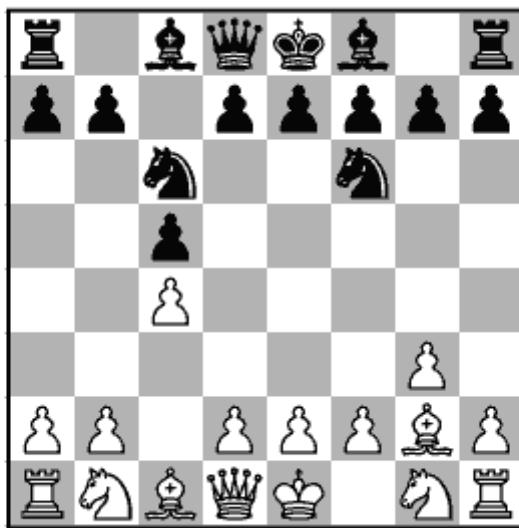
[C: 2...e6](#)

[D: 2...g6](#)

A)

2...Nc6 3 Bg2 Nf6 (D)

3...g6 4 Nc3 Bg7 transposes to Line [D](#).



White to play

Black deploys his knights in very classical fashion and is clearly looking for action in the centre. Before proceeding further, let's note that there is no way to stop Black playing ...e6 and ...d5, seeking Tarrasch or Semi-Tarrasch positions, and there are several move-orders by which he can do so. These are both theory-heavy openings with some high-level supporters. If you are happy to take on the main lines of both openings, then you have a lot more choice as an English Opening player. But note that the Semi-Tarrasch is looking very solid, and Tarrasch players may have memorized a lot of published analysis. In this repertoire we allow both openings only in forms where our queen's knight is still at home on b1, as this gives us some excellent extra options that are both far lower-maintenance in terms of theory, and probably objectively more promising.

4 Nc3

4 Nf3 is less appropriate from a repertoire viewpoint, as Black is not yet committed to ...e6 and can play 4...d5 (or 4...g6), when play can go in a great many directions, requiring extensive additional preparation without much guarantee of interesting chances.

4...e6 (D)

Or:

a) 4...g6 5 d3 Bg7 transposes to Line [D5](#).

b) 4...d6 5 d3 g6 6 e4 Bg7 is also Line [D5](#).

c) 4...e5 doesn't fit well with ...Nf6, as in the Botvinnik set-up the knight belongs on e7; there are numerous good answers, including 5 d3 Be7 6 e3 d6 7 Nge2 Be6 8 Nd5.



White to play

After the text-move (4...e6) we have an interesting way to avoid regular Tarrasch set-ups altogether:

5 e4

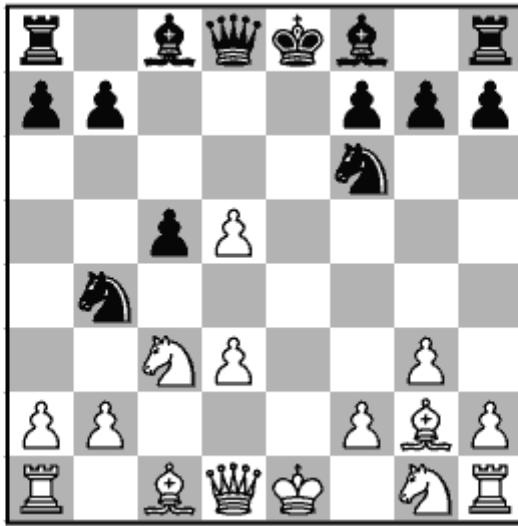
5 Nf3 d5 6 cxd5 will lead to Semi-Tarrasch or Tarrasch lines we're hoping to avoid after 6...Nxd5 or 6...exd5 7 d4, when Dubov's 7...cxd4 8 Nxd4 Bc5 is the latest fashion.

5...d5

More often than not, Black doesn't play this move, but it is the only challenging and consistent option. After other moves, White plays 6 Nge2 and either adopts a Botvinnik set-up as in our main lines (see in particular Lines [D5](#) and [D6](#), though ...e6 andNf6 is an odd combination) or else grabs a space advantage by playing d4, if allowed. Note that after 5...g6 6 Nge2 Bg7, 7 d4 cxd4 8 Nxd4 is very much playable because 8...Nxe4 9 Nxe4 Nxd4 10 Bg5 Qb6 11 c5 gives White a strong attack.

6 exd5 exd5 7 cxd5 Nb4 8 d3 (D)

Please avoid 8 Nf3?! Nd3+ 9 Kf1 Be7 10 Qa4+ Bd7.



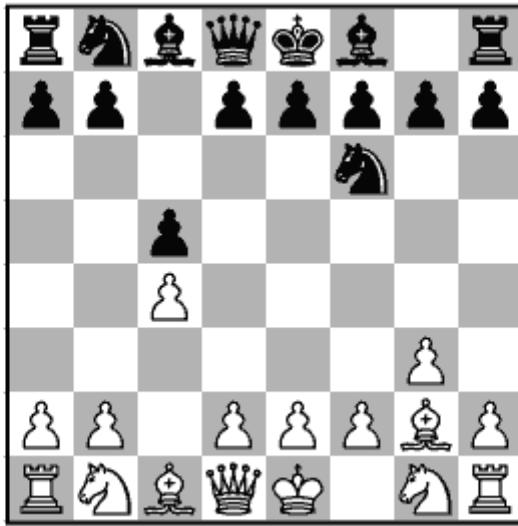
Black to play

Now (after 8 d3):

- a) 8...Bf5?! ("going for the throat" according to Atalik, but it misses the target) 9 Be4! and then:
 - a1) 9...Qe7 10 Nge2! (the only good move, but untried!) 10...Qd7 (a sad necessity, in view of 10...Nxe4? 11 dxe4 Bxe4 12 d6 and 10...Bxe4? 11 dxe4 Nxe4 12 Qa4+) 11 Nf4 is unlikely to end well for Black; e.g., 11...Bd6 12 a3 Bxf4 13 axb4!.
 - a2) 9...Qd7 10 Nf3! Bg4 11 0-0 Bd6 12 a3! Na6 (12...Nxe4? 13 dxe4 Nc2 14 Qxc2 Bxf3 15 Qd3!) 13 Bg5 (less effective is 13 Re1?! 0-0!, as in Van Osmael-Häusler, corr. 2002; e.g., 14 Bg5 Ne8) 13...0-0-0 (13...0-0?! 14 Bxf6 gxf6 15 h3! Bxh3 16 Nh4; 13...Nxe4 14 Re1!) 14 Re1 and there is a fight ahead, but White's attacking chances are at least as good as those of Black, who is still a pawn behind.
- b) 8...Nfxd5 9 Nxd5 Nxd5 10 Qa4+ (10 Ne2 Be7 11 0-0 0-0 transposes to line 'c') 10...Bd7 11 Qe4+ Be6 12 Nh3 Be7 13 Nf4 Nxf4 14 Bxf4 0-0 15 0-0 (Havranek-Kolesar, Stare Mesto 2006) and Black will need to defend carefully.
- c) 8...Be7 keeps the game fairly level. 9 Nge2 0-0 10 0-0 Nbxd5 (10...Nfxd5 11 d4!?) 11 Nxd5 (11 Nf4 Nxc3 12 bxc3 Rb8 could lead to an interesting and roughly balanced fight) 11...Nxd5 (Lovkov-Safarli, St Petersburg 2010) 12 Qb3!? Nb6 (12...Nb4 13 Nf4) 13 Nf4 maintains pressure on Black, who should probably play 13...g5, though no unprepared opponent is likely to do so!

B)

2...Nf6 3 Bg2 (D)



Black to play

There are now two main ‘central play’ options for Black:

B1: 3...e6

B2: 3...d5

Or:

a) 3...Nc6 transposes to Line [A](#).

b) 3...g6 will transpose to ‘Symmetrical Symmetrical’ lines, but with the knight already committed to f6: 4 Nc3 Bg7 5 d3 0-0 (5...Nc6 is also Line [D5](#)) 6 e4 d6 7 Nge2 Nc6 transposes to Line [D5](#).

B1)

3...e6 4 Nf3 (D)

This move is more acceptable for our repertoire here than it was after 3...Nc6, as the fact that Black has played ...e6 limits his possibilities.



Black to play

4...d5

Or 4...Nc6 5 0-0 (5 Nc3 d5 leads to main lines of the Semi-Tarrasch or Tarrasch), and now:

- a) After 5...d5 6 cxd5, 6...exd5 transposes to Line [C](#), and 6...Nxd5 to the [note](#) to Black's 6th move below.
- b) 5...Be7 seeks to reduce White's options by delaying ...d5, but after 6 d4 cxd4 (6...d5 7 cxd5 will transpose to the variations mentioned in line 'a') 7 Nxd4 it's hard for Black to get counterplay having developed so modestly; e.g.:
 - b1) 7...Qb6 8 Nb5 0-0 (8...d5 9 Be3) 9 N1c3 d5 10 Be3 Qa5 11 cxd5 and following 11...exd5 12 a3 or 11...Nxd5 12 Nxd5 exd5 13 Qb3 Black gets an IQP but little of the activity that needs to accompany it.
 - b2) 7...0-0 8 Nc3 d5 9 Bf4!? is somewhat awkward for Black, as 9...Qb6 is well answered by 10 Be3!; e.g., 10...Qxb2 11 cxd5 exd5 12 Nxd5 Nxd5 13 Bxd5 Bh3, when 14 Rb1! Qa3 15 Rxb7! Nxd4 16 Qxd4 Bxf1 17 Kxf1 proved a good exchange sacrifice in Z.Rahman-Konguvel, Kolkata 1998.

5 cxd5 Nxd5

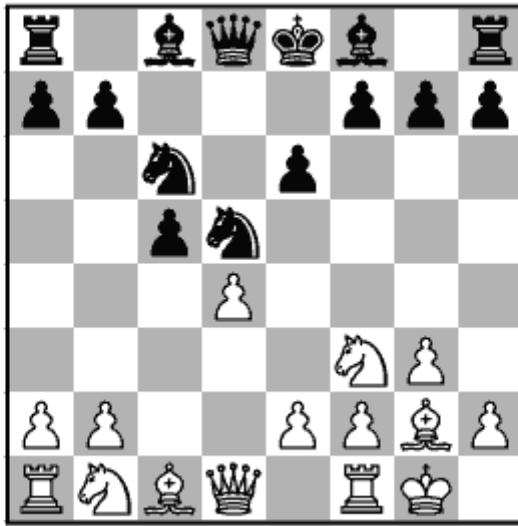
5...exd5 6 d4 Nc6 7 0-0 transposes to Line [C](#).

6 0-0

White intends d4. This isn't quite a Semi-Tarrasch since White has not yet played Nc3, and can therefore drive the knight from d5 without allowing an exchange of knights on c3.

6...Be7

6...Nc6 7 d4 (*D*) and then:



Black to play

- a) 7...Nb6 8 Ne5!? (8 dxc5 is good too) 8...Nxe5 (8...Nxd4?? 9 e3 is the neat tactical point behind White's previous move; 8...Bd7 offers White the bishop-pair or a better structure) 9 dxe5 Qc7 10 Nc3 Bd7 (10...Qxe5?? loses to 11 Bf4 and Nb5) 11 Ne4 Bc6 12 Nd6+ Bxd6 13 exd6 Qd7 14 e4 0-0 15 Be3 (Vasovski-Bouaziz, Cannes 1997) favours White.
- b) 7...cxsd4 8 Nxd4 Bd7 9 Nc3 (good now that opening the long diagonal will produce real pressure) 9...Nxc3 10 bxc3 and after both 10...Rc8 11 Rb1 (Leitão-Giusti, São Bernardo tt 1998) and 10...Be7 11 Rb1 Black is defending pawns while White is completing his mobilization.
- c) 7...Be7 8 dxc5 Bxc5 (8...0-0 9 e4 Nf6 10 Qc2 Qa5 {10...e5 11 h3 intending Be3} 11 e5 Nd5 12 Ng5!) 9 Qc2 Qe7 (9...Qb6 10 a3) 10 a3 and White develops harmoniously and with gain of time.

7 d4 (D)



Black to play

7...cxsd4

Or:

- a) 7...Nc6 transposes to note 'c' to Black's 6th move.
- b) 7...0-0 8 e4 Nb6 9 Nc3 cxd4 (9...Nc6 10 d5 exd5 11 exd5 Nb4 12 Ne1 is good for White since Black lacks real counterplay; e.g., 12...Bf6 13 a3! Bxc3 14 axb4 Bxb4 15 Nc2 sidelines the black bishop and leaves the d-pawn a monster: 15...Qf6 16 Nxb4 cxb4 17 Be3) 10 Nxd4 Bf6 11 Ndb5 Nc6 (Fine-Kashdan, USA Ch, New York 1938) and now 12 Qh5! cleverly provokes a weakness: 12...g6 (12...a6 13 Rd1 Bd7 14 Nd6) 13 Qe2 a6 14 Rd1 Bd7 15 Na3 Nd4 (15...Bxc3?! 16 bxc3 leaves Black's kingside too weak because of the move ...g6) 16 Qe1 e5 17 Be3 with the better chances for White.

8 Nxd4 0-0 9 Qb3

White intends Rd1 with pressure that will endure even if Black exchanges off some pieces:

- a) 9...Na6 10 Rd1 Nc5 11 Qf3! (threatening e4) 11...Qb6 12 Nc3 (Rubinas-Mamonovas, corr. 2009) and Black will have to make a concession.
- b) 9...Qb6 10 Bxd5 exd5 11 Qxb6 axb6 12 Nc3 is obviously unpleasant for Black.
- c) 9...Nc6 10 Nxc6 bxc6 11 e4 Nf6 (Rashkovsky-Krogius, Sochi 1977) and now White has numerous ways to keep an edge, including 12 Nc3 e5 13 Rd1.

B2)

3...d5 4 cxd5 Nxd5 5 Nc3 (D)



Black to play

5...Nc7

The Rubinstein System. At first sight it looks odd, but it is the undisputed main line here, and has been a respected line for a very long time, as you might deduce from the name. Before investigating it, two alternatives need to be mentioned:

a) 5...e6?! basically blunders a pawn, but has an odd history. This move has been made by a number of grandmasters, and has frequently gone unpunished. It only became well-known after its use by Kramnik(!) in a critical Candidates loss against Gelfand. After 6 Nxd5 exd5 7 Qb3! Nc6 Black can try to claim compensation but it is unconvincing after the precise sequence 8 Qxd5 (not 8 Bxd5? Nd4) 8...Bd6 (Kramnik tried 8...Qxd5 9 Bxd5 Nb4 10 Be4 f5 11 Bb1 but lost in the end) 9 Nf3 0-0 10 0-0 Be6 11 Qd3! (rather than 11 Qe4?! Re8 12 Qa4 Bd5, which gives Black compensation).

b) 5...Nxc3 6 bxc3 (*D*) is a pleasant structure for White, who has ready-made pressure on the long diagonal and the b-file:



Black to play

b1) 6...e5 transposes to a 1...e5 line: note '[b](#)' to Black's 6th move in Line B31 of Chapter 7.

b2) 6...g6?! 7 Rb1 (7 h4!?) and then:

b21) 7...Bg7? attempts to set a trap, but there is a hole in it: 8 Bxb7!? ("everyone knows" you take with the rook in these situations, but the bishop works here too!) 8...Bxb7 9 Rxb7 Qd5 10 Qa4+! Nd7 (10...Kf8? 11 Qxa7!) 11 Rc7!.

b22) 7...Nc6 8 Qa4 Qc7 9 Qb5 leaves Black in a mess.

b23) 7...Qc7 8 Nh3!? (L.Popov-Milev, Bulgarian Ch, Sofia 1960) heading for f4 and d5 before deciding how to handle the centre – a d4 advance is likely.

b3) 6...Nc6 and here the direct 7 Bxc6+ bxc6 8 Qa4 may have been underestimated:

b31) 8...Qb6 9 Ba3 e5 10 Nf3 Qb5 11 Qe4! f6 12 c4 Qa6 13 0-0! is good for White; e.g., 13...Bd6 14 Qd3!.

b32) 8...Qd5 9 e4 (9 Nf3 c4 is not so clear) 9...Qe6 (9...Qd6 10 Ba3) 10 Ne2 Bd7 11 Ba3 and White is creating pressure on Black's pawns before Black has mobilized.

So let's return to 5...Nc7 (*D*) and the Rubinstein System.



White to play

I would call it a subtle and sophisticated line, but that goes against the fact that it was the first defence against the English I learnt as a kid! Basically Black wants to grab space with ...e5, and if White replies with routine development, he'll succeed. Disruption is called for.

6 Nf3 Nc6 7 a3!?

An important little move to counter Black's principal idea.

7...g6

The fianchetto is Black's other main plan in the Rubinstein if the straightforward ...e5 is unappealing, which it is here, as 7...e5 8 b4! has scored well for White:

a) 8...cxb4 9 axb4 and then:

a1) 9...b5 10 Bb2 Bxb4 11 Rc1! and the threats against b5, e5 and c6 will bear fruit; e.g., 11...0-0 12 Na2 e4 13 Nh4! Be6 14 Nxb4 Nxb4 15 Bxe4.

a2) 9...Bxb4 10 Nxe5 Bxc3? 11 Nxc6 Qf6 12 dxc3 bxc6 13 Qd4 is pretty much lost for Black.

a3) 9...a6 10 0-0 Be6 (probably best, but yet to be tested in any master-level games; 10...Bd7 11 Na4! Bxb4 12 Nb6 Rb8 13 Bb2 f6?! 14 d4 rips through the centre, while 10...Be7 11 b5 axb5 12 Rxa8 Nxa8 13 Nxb5 leaves White more active and with more targets, Wang Yue-Wang Rui, Chinese Team Ch 2013) 11 Qa4!? Bd7 (11...Qd7 12 Rd1 intending d4, H.Koch-Nichols, corr. 2014) 12 Qb3 Be7 13 b5 axb5 14 Rxa8 Qxa8 15 Nxb5 Nxb5 16 Qxb5 Qa6 17 Qb1 and White can still claim a slight structural edge.

b) 8...f6 9 Rb1 (*D*) (9 bxc5 Bxc5 and 9 b5 Nd4 only help Black mobilize) and now:



Black to play

b1) 9...Be7 10 bxc5 Bxc5 is a clear tempo-gain for White, who enjoys an obvious initiative after 11 Qc2 0-0 12 0-0 with ideas of breaking open lines by e3 and d4, among other piece-play plans.

b2) 9...Rb8 10 b5 Nd4 (it is clear whose rook move is more useful) 11 Nh4! intends e3, which comes anyway after 11...g5: 12 e3 gxh4 13 Qh5+ Ke7 14 exd4 Qxd4 15 f4.

b3) 9...cxb4 10 axb4 a6 (10...Bxb4 11 Nxe5! is a key tactical point) 11 0-0 Be7 12 b5 axb5 13 Nxb5 (G.Meier-Timofeev, Havana 2009) is good for White.

8 h4 (D)

This looks wild, but it has been chosen by some very serious players! Instead a queenside-only approach with 8 Na4 b6 9 b4 proves ineffective after 9...Bg7.

Incidentally, I once had a game that started 1 a3 g6 2 h4, but the rooks' pawn moves are a good deal more pointed here, given the six moves that preceded them!



Black to play

8...h6

Black asks whom the h-pawn moves favour, but White is ready with an answer. Other moves:

a) 8...Bg7?! 9 h5 “puts a thorn in Black’s side that is hard to negotiate: if he doesn’t castle, then h6 followed by Ne4 is a problem, while castling has obvious drawbacks.” Shortly after I wrote those words in early 2020, a supergrandmaster took on Black’s position. After 9...Bf5 (addressing the Ne4 issue) 10 d3 Qd7, Black survived following 11 Be3 Nd4 12 Rc1 0-0 13 hxg6 (perhaps premature; 13 h6!? and 13 b4 are worth a look) 13...hxg6 14 b4 Nxf3+ 15 Bxf3 cxb4 16 axb4 Nb5 in Svane – Vachier-Lagrange, Bundesliga 2019/20, though the position remains tricky for him. 11 Qa4!? poses interesting questions; e.g., 11...Bg4 12 Ne4 or 11...Rd8 12 hxg6!? hxg6 13 Rxh8+ Bxh8 14 Qh4 Bf6 15 Bg5 Qe6 16 Kf1, though there are a wealth of possibilities here.

b) 8...h5 invites 9 Ne4 b6 10 Neg5, opening up all sorts of tactics, including 10...f6 (10...Bb7 11 Ne5!) 11 b4! (11 Qa4 Qd7 12 Qe4 is safer) 11...fxg5 12 Bb2 Rg8 (12...Nd4?? 13 Bxd4! cxd4 14 Ne5) 13 Nxg5 Qd7 14 0-0 with a difficult defence ahead for Black.

c) 8...Bg4 9 d3 (pawn-grabbers may wish to look into 9 Qb3) 9...Bg7 10 Nh2!? (10 Be3 Nd4 gave Black fewer problems in Ding Liren-Vidit, Tbilisi 2017) 10...Bf5 (10...Bd7 11 h5 gxh5 12 Nf1 looks odd but gives Black real issues on the kingside) 11 Be3 Nd4 12 h5 gxh5 (12...0-0 13 h6 Bh8 14 0-0, with Rc1 generally to follow, is also a little uncomfortable for Black) 13 Nf1 with interesting play since c5 and b7 are targets in addition to those on the kingside.

9 d3 Bg7 10 Be3 (D)



Black to play

10...Ne6

Or:

- a) 10...b6?! would be a good and solid move except that it lets White show a way in which the insertion of h4 and ...h6 helps him: 11 h5 g5 12 Nxg5.
- b) 10...Nd4 11 Ne4! (11 Na4?! b6 offers White less, Pavlović-Milanović, Serbian Ch, Dimitrovgrad 2003) favours White since 11...b6 12 Nxd4 cxd4 13 Bf4 e5 (13...Ne6? 14 Nd6+) 14 Bd2 f5 15 Qa4+ b5 16 Qc2 fxe4 17 Ba5 works out well.

11 Rc1

Intending 12 Na4 b6 13 b4.

11...Bd7 12 0-0 Rc8

12...b6 (Beim-Van Wely, Bundesliga 1999/00) 13 b4! cxb4 14 axb4 Nxb4 15 d4 offers White good play, while 12...0-0 13 Ne4 b6 14 b4 cxb4 15 d4 gives Black some rather concrete problems.

13 b4

13 Na2 seems too decentralizing, despite its positive outcome in Adhiban-Kariakin, Wijk aan Zee 2018.

13...cxb4 14 axb4 Nxb4 15 Qb3 (D)

15 d4 also offers compensation.



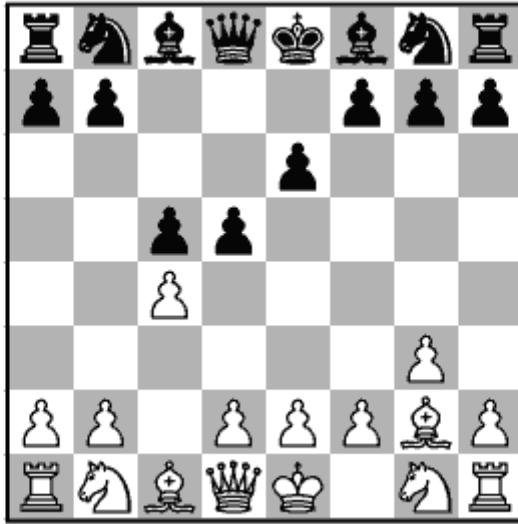
Black to play

Now (after 15 Qb3):

- a) 15...a5 16 d4 Bc6 (16...0-0 17 Ne5 intends f4 or Rfd1; 16...b5 17 Rfd1 Rc4 18 Ne5 Bxe5 19 dxe5 Qc8 20 Qa3 keeps Black under pressure) 17 Rfd1 Bxf3 18 exf3 (with Bh3 ideas) 18...Nxd4?! (18...0-0 19 Bh3) 19 Qa4+ Kf8 (19...b5?! 20 Nxb5) 20 f4! and the d-file pin causes problems.
- b) 15...Nc6 16 Qxb7 (16 Nd5 Nc7 17 Nxc7+ Rxc7 18 Bf4 e5 19 Qb2 0-0 leads to a liquidation) and then:
 - b1) 16...Qa5 17 Qb3 Rb8 18 Qc4 Rc8 19 Nd5! Ncd4 20 Qxc8+ Bxc8 21 Nxd4 Bd7 (21...Nxd4 22 Rxc8+ Kd7 23 Rc7+) 22 Nxe6 Bxe6 23 Nc7+ Kf8 24 Nxe6+ fxe6 25 Bf3 is unpleasant for Black.
 - b2) 16...a5 17 Qb3 0-0 18 Qa3 and White retains some pressure.

C)

2...e6 3 Bg2 d5 (D)



White to play

Black is clearly seeking some form of Tarrasch. We can acquiesce, but there is no need to allow the theory-heavy main lines.

4 cxd5

The move-order 4 Nf3 mostly gives Black extra possibilities, including 4...d4 with a fairly solid reversed Benoni.

4...exd5 5 Nf3 Nc6

5...d4?! 6 0-0 and e3 breaks open lines.

6 0-0 Nf6 7 d4 (D)

There's no getting around a Tarrasch transposition, but we have sidestepped a lot of early deviations, and the fact that White hasn't played Nc3 gives us extra options. While one should not place too much weight on statistics, the fact that White scores well over 60% from this position is encouraging.



Black to play

7...Be7

The most natural, but several other standard Tarrasch options need to be examined:

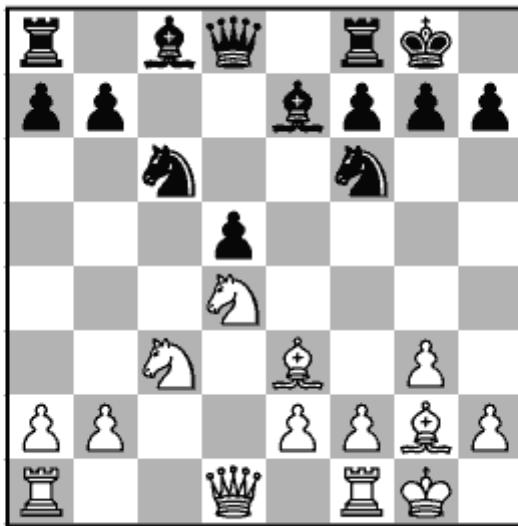
a) 7...Bg4?! 8 Be3 Qb6 (8...cx4 9 Nxd4 Be7 10 Nc3 0-0 transposes to line '[b31](#)'); 8...c4 9 b3 cxb3 10 Qxb3 Qb6 11 Ne5 temporarily sacrifices the e2-pawn for a lot of pressure on Black's queenside) 9 Nc3! Bxf3 (9...Qxb2 10 Rc1 with a big initiative) 10 Bxf3 cxd4 11 Na4 and Black's ploy has clearly failed.

b) 7...cx4 8 Nxd4 and then:

b1) 8...Bc5?! is *not* like the topical Dubov line, as 9 Nxc6 bxc6 10 Qc2 immediately forces Black to start defending weaknesses: 10...Qb6 (10...Qe7? 11 Be3!) 11 Nc3 Be7 12 e4 (Filip-Borkowski, Polanica Zdroj 1979) and Black's strategy is in ruins.

b2) 8...Qb6 9 Nb3 Be7 (9...d4 doesn't hit a knight as it would in a regular Tarrasch, and 10 Na3 Be6 11 Qd3 offers White a very pleasant game) 10 Be3 followed by Nc3 establishes both control of d4 and pressure on d5.

b3) 8...Be7 9 Nc3 0-0 10 Be3 (*D*) is an improved version of a regular Tarrasch for White.



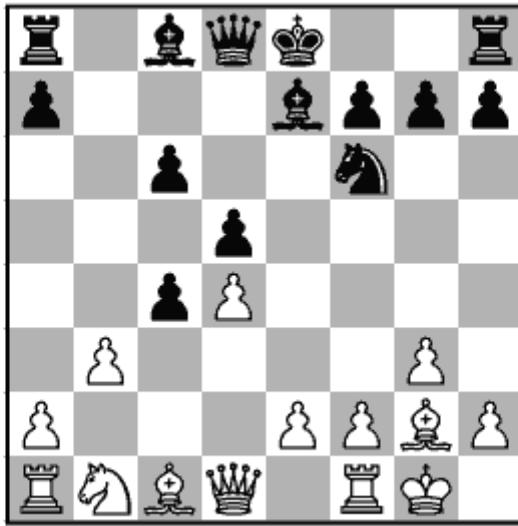
Black to play

Since Black exchanged on d4 voluntarily, White did not have to play Bg5 to encourage this, so White has played Be3 directly instead of Bg5-e3 with Black getting the useful extra move ...h6. There are many lines where White benefits from the difference, such as:

b31) 10...Bg4 11 Qa4 Qd7 with a number of good options, including snagging a pawn by 12 Bxd5 due to the loose bishop on g4.

b32) 10...Re8 11 Qa4 Bd7 12 Rad1 Nb4 13 Qb3 a5 14 Rd2 (14 a4 is also better for White than the analogous line; e.g., 14...Rc8 15 Bg5 or 14...Bc5 15 Bg5) 14...a4 15 Qd1 a3 16 Qb1 Bf8 (thus far as in a famous Beliavsky-Kasparov game with the pawn on h6) 17 Bg5 and the renewed pressure on d5 sinks Black's counterplay.

c) 7...c4 is another idea that works better for Black when White already has a knight on c3. 8 Ne5 Be7 (8...Bd6 9 Nxc6 bxc6 10 b3 cxb3 11 axb3 is similar) 9 Nxc6 bxc6 10 b3 (*D*).



Black to play

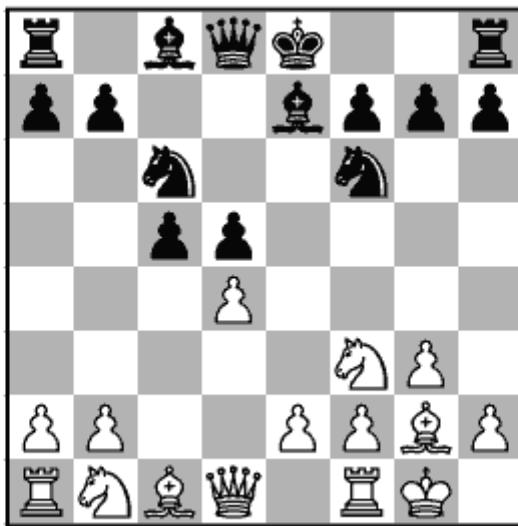
10...cxb3 (10...Ba6 11 bxc4 Bxc4 12 Na3 Ba6 13 Qa4) 11 axb3 is difficult for Black, whose weaknesses are more easily attacked than White's. 11...Bf5 (11...0-0 12 Qc2) 12 Ba3 Bxa3 13 Rxa3 Qe7 (Hoge-Beveridge, corr. 2018) 14 Ra5 (the right square as the attack on d5 is useful in some lines) 14...0-0 15 Nd2 Rfb8 16 e3 and the (open) question is whether Black can defend his weaknesses, but there is no question that it is an unpleasant task in practice; e.g.:

c1) 16...Ne4 17 Nxe4 Bxe4 18 Bxe4 Qxe4 19 Qc1 Rb6 (19...Rxb3? 20 Qxc6) 20 Qc5.

c2) 16...Bd3 17 Re1 Rb6 18 Qc1 Qb7 19 Qc3 Bf5 20 Rc1.

c3) 16...h5 17 h4 a6 18 Qa1 Rb6 (18...Bd3 19 Rc1) 19 Qc3.

We now return to 7...Be7 (D):



White to play

8 dxc5

This move is my recommendation. White clarifies the centre, reducing the number of structures he has to deal with. If you want an alternative, then 8 Be3 was analysed in my book *A Cunning Chess Opening Repertoire for White*. It also scores very well.

8...Bxc5 9 a3

Intending b4 and Bb2. This line performs excellently in practice.

9...Ne4

The whole point of the Tarrasch is active piece-play, so this should be the first place to look. Other moves:

- a) 9...Be7 10 Nc3 (10 b4 Ne4 intending ...Bf6 gives Black more play) 10...0-0 11 b4 transposes to line '[c2](#)'.
- b) 9...a6 10 b4 Ba7 11 Nc3 d4 (11...0-0 12 Bg5) 12 Na4 0-0 13 Bb2 (intending Nc5, stranding the d4-pawn) 13...Ne4 14 Rc1 Bg4 15 h3 Bh5 16 Nc5 (Romanov-Berzinš, Riga 2012) with a big advantage.
- c) 9...0-0 10 b4 (*D*) and then:



Black to play

c1) 10...Bd6 11 Bb2 and it's hard to find a continuation that isn't depressing for Black; e.g., 11...Re8 (11...Qe7 12 Nc3 Be6 13 Nb5 with an iron grip on d4) 12 Nc3 Be6 13 Ng5 a5 14 Qb1!? h6 (14...axb4?? 15 Nxd5! is one of White's basic *tactical* themes!; 14...Be5 15 Rd1 with a ton of pressure) 15 Nxe6 fxe6 16 b5 Ne5 17 e4! shows one of White's basic *strategic* themes.

c2) 10...Be7 11 Nc3 Be6 12 Bb2 can be considered a target position for White, and dates back to games by Rubinstein. 12...Rc8 (12...Ne4 13 b5 Na5 14 Nxe4 dxe4 15 Nd4 with an excellent game for White, who should meet 15...Nc4 with 16 Nxe6) 13 Qd3 puts Black under considerable pressure.

c3) 10...Bb6 11 Nc3 Re8 (sometimes Black plays 11...h6 to prevent Bg5, but we're not planning that in any case) 12 Bb2 with another position where Black is struggling to find enough activity. White's ideas include Qd3 and doubling against the IQP, and Na4 to remove the active bishop:

c31) 12...Bg4 13 Na4 Ne4 (13...Bc7 14 Nc5 b6 15 Nd3 with a strong strategic grip, Khairullin-Gabrelian, Khanty-Mansiisk 2012) 14 Nxb6 axb6 15 Qd3 is cheerless for Black.

c32) 12...a6 13 e3 (13 Qd3 Bg4 14 Rad1 d4 15 Na4 Ba7 shows Black's idea, but even this is tough for him) 13...Bf5 (13...d4 14 exd4 Nxd4 15 Na4 is very difficult for Black, who has liquidated his weakness but opened lines for White) 14 Ne2 and pressure on the d5-pawn with Nf4 is an alternative to the standard blockading strategy.

10 Nfd2 (D)



Black to play

Now:

- a) 10...Nf6 11 Nb3 Bb6 (11...Be7 12 Nc3) 12 Nc3 0-0 (12...d4 13 Na4) 13 Bg5 and the IQP is under pressure.
- b) 10...Bf5 11 Nxe4 Bxe4 12 Bxe4 dxe4 13 Qc2 Qe7 14 Nc3 is good for White because 14...e3 15 Bxe3 Bxe3 runs into 16 Nd5 (Stefanova-Kovalevskaya, Moscow rapid 2019) 16...Nd4 (16...Bxf2+? 17 Rxf2 is hopeless for Black) 17 Qc4 Qe4 18 Nxe3 b5 19 Qd3 with an extra pawn (19...Nf3+?! 20 Kh1!).
- c) It is not surprising that 10...0-0, simply giving the pawn away, has found no fans among human players, even if some computers consider it Black's best try. 11 Nxe4 dxe4 12 Qxd8 Rxd8 13 Bxe4 Bd4 (13...Bg4 14 e3 Ne5 15 Bxb7 Rab8 16 Bg2 Nd3 17 Nc3 Nxb2 18 Bxb2 Rxb2 19 Na4 leaves a miserable defensive task ahead of Black) 14 Kg2! (14 Nc3 Bg4 is not so clear) and Black will not be getting his pawn back any time soon.
- d) 10...f5 11 Nc3 Be6 12 Nb3 Bb6 and Black has remained active at the cost of additional weaknesses. 13 Na4 d4 14 Qc2 (14 Nd2 is safer but 14...Nxd2 15 Bxd2 0-0 intending ...Bd5 may bring Black closer to equality, Ju Wenjun-Zhukova, Women's World Ch, Khanty-Mansiisk 2012) 14...Qe7 (14...0-0 15 Nbc5 eats into Black's activity) 15 Nd2 Bd5 (15...d3 is scary but after 16 Qd1! Black lacks a convincing follow-up) 16 b4 0-0 17 Bb2 Rac8 18 Nxb6 axb6 19 Qd3 Rfd8 20 Rac1 leaves Black fighting to find an ending where he has drawing chances.

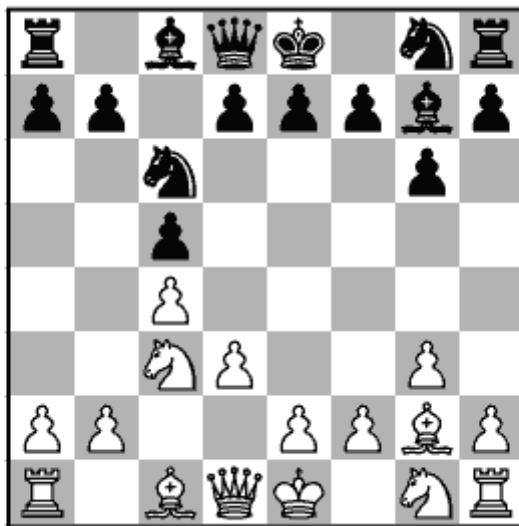
D)

2...g6

With this move, Black is happy in turn to take control of the d4-square.

3 Bg2 Bg7 4 Nc3 Nc6 5 d3!? (D)

Our main plan as White is to go into a Botvinnik set-up by playing e4. But as we [saw](#) in our repertoire as Black vs the English, the immediate 5 e4 has some good answers, so with this flexible move we keep a number of additional options open.



White to play

Black has a lot of choice here, with the last four the most important:

[**D1: 5...b6**](#)

[**D2: 5...e5**](#)

[**D3: 5...a6**](#)

[**D4: 5...d6**](#)

[**D5: 5...Nf6**](#)

[**D6: 5...e6**](#)

D1)

5...b6

We use this move in our repertoire as Black in [reply](#) to 5 a3, but d3 is more useful than a3 if White is not going for the b4 advance.

6 e4

This makes a good deal of sense, since a b7-bishop will be biting on granite and counterplay with ...a6 and ...b5 (standard vs the Botvinnik set-up) will cost a tempo.

6...Bb7

This line is often reached by transposition (e.g., from 1...b6 [lines](#)). Instead 6...e6 is nicely answered by 7 Nb5!? with the point 7...d6?? 8 e5!.

7 Nge2 (D)



Black to play

7...e6

Or:

- a) 7...d6 8 Be3 Qd7 (8...Nd4 9 0-0 h5 10 Bg5 Ne6 11 f4!?) 9 0-0 (9 d4 is premature because 9...e5! gives Black the d4-square for his knight) 9...Nd4 (9...h5 10 h4 Nh6 11 f3) 10 a4! intending a5.
- b) 7...Nf6 8 0-0 0-0 (8...d6 9 h3 0-0 10 Be3 intending further useful moves like Qd2 and Kh2 before deciding whether to play for f4, d4 {bear in mind the ...e5 counter-idea} or b4) 9 h3 Ne8 10 Be3 (intending d4) 10...Nd4 (10...Nd6 11 f4) 11 f4 Nc7 12 g4 with kingside play.

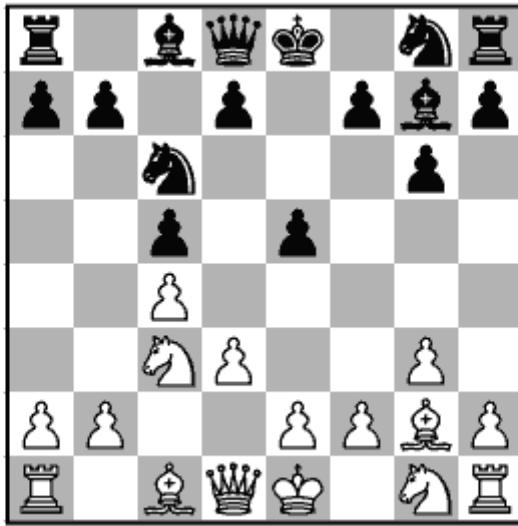
8 0-0

Now:

- a) After 8...Nge7 9 Be3 White intends d4 and can answer 9...Nd4?! powerfully with 10 Bxd4 cxd4 11 Nb5.
- b) 8...d6 9 Be3 Nf6 (9...Nd4?! 10 Qa4+! Qd7 11 Bxd4 cxd4 12 Nb5 {Cekro-Sadkowsky, Belgian Team Ch 2013/14} 12...Bc6 13 e5!) 10 h3 0-0 11 Qd2 (11 d4 e5!) 11...Ne8 (11...d5 12 exd5 exd5 13 Nxd5 Nxd5 14 Bxd5 Qd7 15 Bh6! with some advantage since 15...Qxh3 16 Bxg7 Kxg7 17 d4 leaves White nicely centralized) 12 Bh6 with a modest initiative for White, who remains flexible with three possible pawn-breaks to consider: b4, d4 or f4-f5 (if allowed).

D2)

5...e5 (D)



White to play

This seems premature when White can still seek rapid queenside play.

6 a3

If you want a completely unconventional reply, then 6 f4!? is worth a look.

6...Nge7 7 Rb1 a5

7...0-0 allows 8 b4 without further ado, but 8...d6 still leaves Black fairly solid. White can proceed with 9 e3 (preparing b5; the immediate 9 b5 Nd4 10 e3 Ne6 11 Nge2 f5 12 Nd5 Nc7 is not so clear) 9...a6 (9...f5 10 Nge2 gives White a nice flexible position, Movsziszian-Barbero, Catalonian Team Ch 2019; 9...Be6 10 b5 Na5 11 e4 {preventing ...d5} 11...f5 and now the precise 12 Bg5 h6 13 exf5! followed by Bxe7 offers White a grip on d5 and the centre in general) 10 bxc5 dxc5 11 Nge2 with play against c5 and good squares for the white knights; e.g., 11...Rb8 12 0-0 Bf5 13 Ne4 b6 14 N2c3 Be6 15 Qc2 h6 16 Na4 Qc7 (Hempel-Soszynski, corr. 2015) 17 Rb2!? and it is not easy for Black to defend his weaknesses, but the position is rather delicate.

8 Bg5

8 e3 0-0 9 Nge2 d6 transposes to a line that is rather solid for Black.

8...f6

8...h6?! 9 Bxe7 is in general a favourable exchange for White in this structure since with two knights vs one he will win the battle for d5. Even without the extra tempo, 8...0-0 is still well met by 9 Bxe7; e.g., 9...Nxe7 10 e3 f5 11 Nge2 d6 12 Qd2 gearing up for b4 while keeping a hold on d5.

9 Bd2 (*D*)



Black to play

White intends e3 and Nge2, and here the move ...f6 proves inconvenient for Black.

9...d6 10 e3

Now:

- a) 10...Bf5 11 Qc2 0-0 12 Nge2 Rb8 13 0-0 Kh8 14 Nd5 (14 f4!?) 14...b5 15 Nxe7 Nxe7 16 cxb5 Rxb5 17 Nc3 Rb8 18 Nd5 and the a5-pawn is a significant weakness.
- b) 10...Be6 11 Nge2 d5 (11...0-0 12 Nd5) 12 Qb3! dxc4 13 dxc4 0-0 14 Nd5 and White has achieved the prime strategic goal of a firm grip on the d5-square.

D3)

5...a6

This is a rare choice with many plausible answers. I shall examine a fresh and topical one:

6 Qd2!? (D)

White intends b3 and Bb2 (compare 5...d6 6 Qd2 in Line [D4](#)), which makes particular sense since it fortifies the c4-pawn in case Black follows through with ...Rb8 and ...b5. Instead 6 Be3 is answered comfortably with 6...d6.



Black to play

6...Qa5!?

Maybe the most testing response, as it directly prevents White's idea. Otherwise:

- a) 6...Rb8 7 b3 Qa5 8 Bb2 Nh6 (Hartston-Speelman, British Ch, Morecambe 1975) 9 h4!?.
b) 6...Nf6 7 b3 0-0 8 Bb2 e6 (8...Rb8, as in Rakhmanov-Abasov, Spanish Team Ch, Linares 2019, can be met by 9 Nd5! with the point 9...Nxd5?! 10 Bxg7! Kxg7 11 cxd5) 9 Bxc6 (9 Na4!?) makes more sense than usual here since it will be especially hard to activate the c8-bishop. 9...bxc6 (9...dxc6 10 Nf3 and the white knights will find good squares) 10 Nh3 (10 f4 e5! 11 fxe5 Ng4; 10 Na4 d6 11 f4 Bh6) 10...e5 11 f3 with a complex game where White is on firmer ground positionally; e.g., 11...d6 12 Nf2 Nh5 13 0-0-0 and a fierce battle lies ahead.

7 h4 h6

Or:

- a) 7...b5?! 8 h5! b4 9 Ne4.
b) 7...Nf6 8 Nd5 Qxd2+ 9 Bxd2 Nxd5 10 cxd5 Ne5 11 h5 intending Bc3 keeps Black under pressure.

8 Nd5 Qd8

8...Qxd2+ 9 Bxd2 Rb8 10 Bc3 Bxc3+ 11 bxc3 gives White queenside pressure.

9 h5 g5 10 f4

White "does an Aronian"! (Compare note '[a3](#)' to White's 6th move in Line D6.) Now 10...gxf4 11 Qxf4 guarantees a sharp and unbalanced game; e.g., 11...d6 12 Nf3 Rb8 13 Bd2 Nf6 (13...Bxb2 14 Rb1 Bg7 15 0-0) 14 Nxf6+ Bxf6 15 Rb1 (15 Bc3 e5 offers White less) 15...b5 16 0-0 with a complex struggle after 16...b4 (preventing Bc3) 17 a3 a5 18 axb4 axb4 19 Be3, preparing d4, or 16...bxc4 17 dxc4 Qd7 18 Bc3 Bxc3 19 bxc3 Rxb1 20 Rxb1.

D4)

5...d6

Black waits for White to break the symmetry somehow.

6 Qd2 (D)

An odd-looking move, but it intends b3 and Bb2, neutralizing Black's g7-bishop.



Black to play

6...e6

Other moves:

a) 6...Qa5 (preventing White's plan but misplacing the queen) 7 Rb1! (intending a3 and b4) 7...Nf6 8 Nf3 0-0 9 0-0; e.g., 9...a6 10 a3 b5 11 b4! cxb4 12 axb4 Qb6 (12...Nxb4? 13 Nd5) 13 Qa2 intending Be3.

b) 6...Qd7 keeps copying White, but after 7 b3 b6 8 Bb2 Bb7 9 Nd5 the symmetry is broken:

b1) For education's sake, let's follow the copying line all the way: 9...Nd4?! 10 e3 e6 11 Nf4 Nf5? 12 g4! g5? 13 gxf5 gxf4 14 Bxb7 Bxb2 15 Qxb2 Qxb7 16 Qxh8 Qxh1 17 Qxg8+.

b2) 9...Bxb2 10 Qxb2 e5 11 f4 (Carlsen-Yakovenko, Moscow blitz 2019) gives White a powerful initiative.

b3) 9...e5 10 h4!? and then:

b31) 10...h5?! 11 Bh3 (11 Nh3!?) 11...Qd8 (11...f5 12 Nf3) 12 e4 (Ivanisević-Baron, Moscow rapid 2019) intending f4.

b32) 10...f5 11 h5 0-0-0 12 h6 causes some discomfort.

b33) 10...Nf6 11 Nxf6+ (the dramatic 11 Qh6?! proves ineffective after 11...0-0!; 11 h5 Nxh5 12 g4 Nf6 13 Qh6 Nh5 14 Qd2 is a nutty way for the game to end in a repetition; 11 e4 0-0 leads nowhere clear) 11...Bxf6 12 h5 (12 e3!?) 12...g5 13 e3 with a full-scale battle ahead.

c) 6...Nf6 and now the untried 7 e3!? 0-0 8 Nge2 (*D*) implements a double fianchetto in a way that leads to an interesting battle in the centre.



Black to play

8...e6 9 b3 d5 10 0-0 (not rushing to put the bishop on b2 while Black retains a realistic option of ...d4), and here:

c1) 10...d4?! feels like a misadventure for Black, even if the assessment is not completely clear-cut after 11 Na4! dxе3 (11...Nd7?! 12 Ba3) 12 fxe3 Ne4 13 Bxe4 Bxa1, when with 14 Nec3?!, rather than grabbing a pawn right away, White ensures that Black's fianchetto will remain vacated.

c2) 10...b6 11 Bb2 Bb7 12 Rfd1 Re8 (12...d4?! 13 exd4 cxd4 14 Nxd4!) 13 cxd5 exd5 14 Rac1 intending d4, and White will target the black d-pawn.

d) 6...e5 (*D*) asks how the queen on d2 fits in with White's fight for d5 in a Botvinnik structure.



White to play

But it's just as important what White *hasn't* played. With his knight still on g1, he will not have to make all those cumbersome manoeuvres that we saw in our lines as Black after 5 Nf3 e5 (Line [B225](#) of Chapter 5). Also in the lines with e3 and Nge2, you may recall the probing pin with ...Bg4 being fruitful (compare the final [note](#) in Line B223 of Chapter 5), but here the queen has already sidestepped. 7 b3 (7 e3!? is a possible move-order too, but as there's no real alternative to putting the bishop on b2, it is logical to do that first) 7...Nge7 8 Bb2 Be6 (intending ...d5; 8...Rb8 9 e3 a6 10 Nd5 b5 causes White little inconvenience, as after 11 Ne2 he is happy to recapture with the d-pawn on c4 and can start kingside play with f4, among other plans) 9 Nd5 (9 h4!? is an idea, seeing how Black responds before deciding how to continue; after 9...h5 he can play 10 Nf3, when Ng5 ideas will induce ...f6) 9...0-0 (9...Qd7 10 h4) 10 e3 Qd7 11 h4 (11 Ne2?! Bh3 solves Black's bishop problem, Aronian-Carlsen, Kolkata blitz 2019) 11...h5 (11...h6 invites 12 Ne2 intending 13 h5 g5 14 f4) 12 Ne2 Rab8 13 Nec3 with a delicate situation where both sides are loath to do anything too committal:

- d1) 13...a6 has the drawback that after 14 0-0 the intended 14...Bh3?! runs into 15 Nb6 Qe6 16 Ne4.
- d2) 13...f5 14 f4 is not what Black wants with his bishop still on e6.
- d3) 13...b6 14 Rb1 (14 0-0 allows 14...Bh3) 14...a6 15 a3 (after 15 0-0 Bh3 16 f4 Bxg2 17 Kxg2 f5 18 e4 the centre will open in a way that is acceptable for Black) 15...b5 16 0-0 Bh3 17 Ne4 and we see that White has calved out some footholds for his knights.

7 b3 Nge7 8 Bb2 0-0 (D)



White to play

Now a quiet plan with e3 and Nge2 won't achieve much, but Black's set-up invites...

9 h4 h6

Or: 9...d5?! 10 h5; 9...h5 10 Ne4.

10 0-0-0

Intending 11 h5 g5 12 f4. Otherwise:

- a) 10 h5 g5 11 f4 g4! 12 e4 d5 shows why evacuating the king first makes sense.

b) 10 Nf3 b6 11 0-0 Bb7 12 e3 may not offer White a whole lot, but is at least OK; e.g., 12...e5 (12...d5, as in Pančevski-M.Löffler, Burgdorf 2020, should be met by 13 cxd5 exd5 14 Ne2 with good play in the centre) 13 h5 g5 14 d4 exd4 15 exd4 Nxd4 16 Nxd4 Bxg2 17 Kxg2 cxd4 (17...Bxd4 18 Rae1 with compensation) 18 Nb5 d5 19 Bxd4 dxc4 20 bxc4 Nf5 21 Rad1 Nxd4 22 Nxd4 with enough play due to the weakness of Black's kingside.

10...d5 11 e3

and anything could happen in a chaotic middlegame where White will break open lines on the kingside.

D5)

5...Nf6

The most natural move on the board. However, it invites...

6 e4 (D)



Black to play

...as there is no real drawback to this move now. In our repertoire as Black, we met 5 Nf3 with 5...e5, and the extra tempo here is clearly useful. Throughout this section, bear in mind the mini-rules we discussed in the 5 Nf3 e5 [line](#), together with the various standard strategic themes.

6...d6

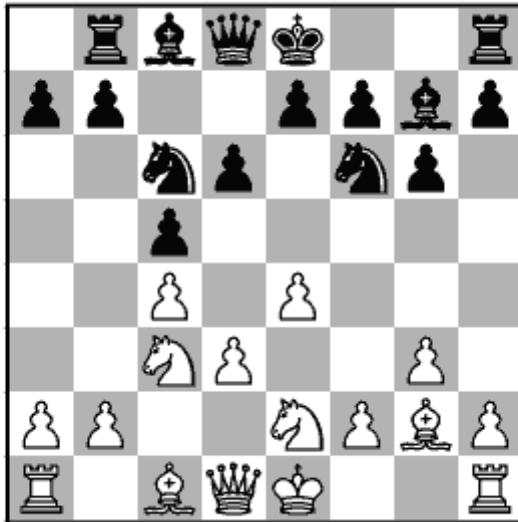
There's little to gain from delaying this move for long. After 6...0-0 7 Nge2 Ne8 (7...a6 8 0-0 Rb8 9 a4 d6 10 h3 transposes to the [main](#) line of this section) 8 Be3 Nd4 9 0-0 Nc7 10 Rb1 a5, 11 Na4!? is a funny way to exploit Black's omission of ...d6.

7 Nge2 0-0

There is an argument for Black delaying castling here, and that in reply White should also hold off from castling. However, it is not so cut and dried that it should be considered a 'mini-rule':

a) 7...Nd7 8 Be3 (8 0-0 Nf8 9 Rb1 Ne6 is Black's idea) 8...a6 (8...Nf8?! is an idea we saw with reversed colours, but here it is too slow: 9 d4!) 9 0-0 (always check before ploughing forward in the centre: here 9 d4? is bad because of 9...cxd4 10 Nxd4 Nde5) 9...0-0 10 a4 Nd4 11 Rb1 Rb8 12 b4 b6 13 Qd2 Bb7 14 Bg5 and White maintains a slight initiative.

b) 7...Rb8 (*D*) and now:



White to play

b1) 8 0-0 a6 9 a4 Bg4 (the last chance to play this as 9...0-0 10 h3 is again the [main](#) line below) 10 f3 (10 h3 Bxe2 gives Black a lot of dark-square control) 10...Bd7 and now:

b11) 11 Be3 0-0 transposes to note '[b2](#)' to White's 9th move, which isn't a line I am recommending, but it is certainly playable.

b12) 11 h3 0-0 12 f4 Ne8 13 Kh2 (13 Be3 Nd4 is solid for Black) 13...Nc7 14 a5 b5 15 axb6 Rxb6 16 Ra3 is an interesting middlegame where you can 'just play chess'. Note that the c5-pawn can become a target allowing for a sudden e5 thrust by White.

b2) 8 h3 has its logic by analogy with our main line, and may transpose, but the ...Nd7 response has more logic now, with the f8-square still available, and with White having spent time ruling out ...Ng4 themes in any case. There are many possible lines here, most of them little-explored in practice. 8...a6 (the immediate 8...Nd7 can come to the same thing, but gives White extra options in how to advance his queenside pawns, including a3 and b4) 9 a4 Nd7 (9...0-0 10 0-0 transposes to our [main](#) line) 10 Be3 (White should probably avoid the wild 10 0-0 Nf8 11 f4 Ne6 12 f5 Ned4) 10...Nd4 11 Rb1 0-0 12 0-0 and now 12...b6 transposes to note '[b](#)' to Black's 9th move, while 12...Nxe2+ 13 Qxe2 Ne5 14 f4 Nc6 15 Kh2 leads to a tense middlegame where White has slow-burning and menacing kingside play.

8 0-0 (*D*)



Black to play

8...a6

8...Ne8 (another knight manoeuvre we saw with reversed colours) 9 Be3 (intending d4) 9...Nd4 10 Rb1 (intending b4 – remember our mini-rules?; 10 Qd2 Nc7 11 Bh6 is another approach) 10...a5 (10...Nc7 11 b4 b6 12 f4!?) and White can choose between kingside play with 11 f4 and contesting d4 by 11 a4!? intending Nb5, another idea you may recall from the 5 Nf3 e5 lines.

9 h3

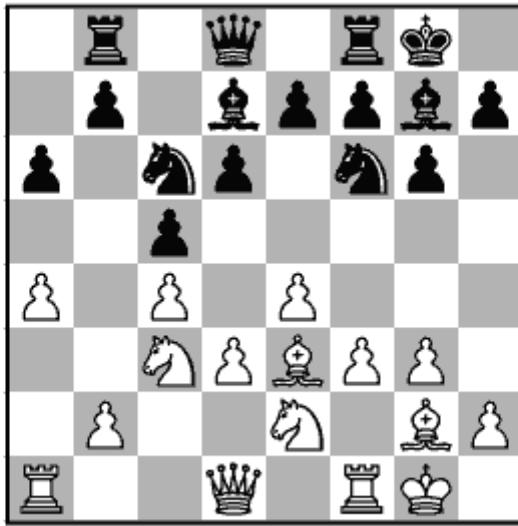
My main recommendation, as it allows White to direct events rather than them getting out of his control. A couple of lines to illuminate this point:

a) 9 Rb1 is premature in view of 9...Bg4!, when 10 h3 Bxe2 11 Nxe2 b5 12 e5 Nxe5 13 f4 Ned7 14 Bxa8 Qxa8 (Fauland-C.Horvath, Austrian Team Ch 1994/5) is the kind of exchange grab that is generally a bad idea in practice, even if it is objectively unclear.

b) 9 a4 seems to allow Black more counterplay if he plays an accurate sequence:

b1) 9...Ne8 is not active enough, as shown by the standard theme 10 Be3! (intending d4) 10...Nd4 (10...Nc7?! 11 d4) 11 Rb1 intending b4.

b2) 9...Bg4! 10 f3 (10 h3 Bxe2 11 Nxe2 Rb8 offers White little) 10...Bd7 11 Be3 (as usual, to add d4 ideas to the mix, which is useful even if it isn't an immediate threat) 11...Rb8 (*D*) and then:



White to play

b21) 12 d4 cxd4 13 Nxd4, as in Zhou Jianchao-Ding Liren, Danzhou 2013, is nicely answered with 13...Na5! 14 b3 e5 15 Nde2 b5.

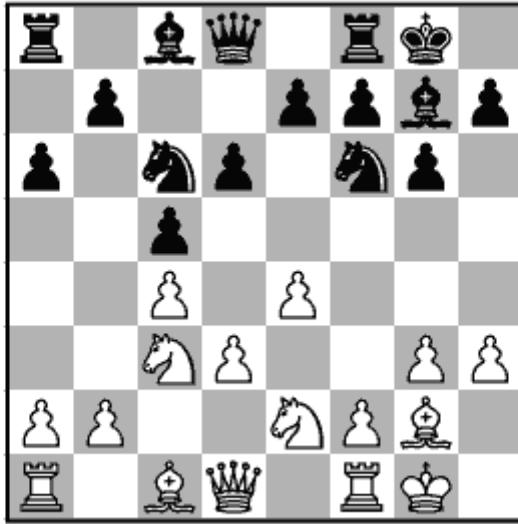
b22) 12 Rb1 Ne8 (intending ...Nc7; 12...e5 13 Qd2 lets White get back in control of events) 13 d4 (a move to which White aspires, but Black is ready with his response) 13...cxd4 (Anand played 13...b6?! in a blitz game, but I suspect he was getting his lines mixed up – see the [similar](#) variation after 9 h3) 14 Nxd4 Nxd4 15 Bxd4 b5 and Black has no problems. I have gone into some detail here, as it is important to understand why some lines work and others don't, especially in a structure that we are playing with both colours.

b23) 12 Kh1 is an interesting option:

b231) 12...Na5 forces through ...b5, but leaves Black's pieces a little tangled after 13 Rb1 b5 14 axb5 axb5 15 cxb5 Bxb5 16 b4 cxb4 17 Nxb5 Rxb5 18 Qa4. Then 18...Qd7?!! (Short-Bromberger, Munich rapid 2016) 19 Bh3 is awkward for Black, who should prefer 18...Rb8, though after 19 Ra1 Nb7 20 d4 White has space and the bishops.

b232) 12...e5 is more solid. “½-½ Al.Perez-Kural, corr. 2019” tells us little, but may be a fair assessment. After 13 Rb1 Black can choose between 13...Nd4 14 Bd2 (to allow Nxd4 ideas) 14...b5 15 axb5 axb5 16 Nxd4 cxd4 17 Nxb5 Bxb5 18 cxb5 Rxb5 19 f4 Qd7, when White's bishop-pair and passed b-pawn are as yet no great assets, and 13...Nb4 14 Qd2 b5 15 axb5 axb5, when 16 b3 digs in for a kingside battle, while 16 Nxb5 Bxb5 17 cxb5 Rxb5 18 f4 leads to a more open fight.

We now return to 9 h3 (*D*):



Black to play

9...Rb8

Alternatively:

- a) 9...Ne8 10 Be3 Nd4 11 Rb1 Nc7 12 b4 b5 13 Kh2 maintaining the tension for now.
- b) 9...Nd7 10 a4 Rb8 11 Rb1 (11 f4 is another approach) 11...b6 (11...Nd4 lets White forego Be3; e.g., 12 b4 b5 13 axb5 Nxe2+ 14 Nxe2 axb5 15 bxc5 bxc4 16 Rxb8 Nxb8 17 cxd6 Qxd6 18 d4!? with a nice pawn-centre) 12 Be3 Nd4 13 b4 (13 f4 Bb7 14 f5?! is rash due to 14...e6) 13...Bb7 14 f4 e6 15 Kh2 f5 16 Qd2 (Quesada-Albornoz, Cuban Ch, Santa Clara 2019) with a full-blooded fight ahead.

10 a4

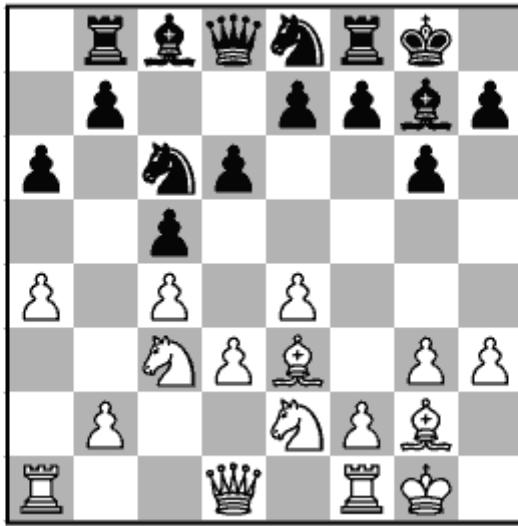
Generally it makes sense to wait until Black has played both ...a6 and ...Rb8 before responding with a4.

10...Ne8

Or:

- a) 10...Nd7 transposes to note '[b](#)' to Black's 9th move.
- b) 10...Bd7 11 Be3 Ne8 12 Rb1 (Black's idea is 12 d4 Qc8 13 dxc5 Bxh3) 12...Nc7 13 d4 cxd4 14 Nxd4 Nxd4 15 Bxd4 b5 16 Bxg7 Kxg7 17 Qd4+ Kg8 18 b4 bxa4 19 Rfd1 (Kozlowski-W.Evans, corr. 2011) and Black will have to defend carefully.

11 Be3 (D)



Black to play

11...Nd4

11...Nc7 12 d4 b6 (12...cxd4 13 Nxd4 gives White a pleasant spatial plus; e.g., 13...Ne6 14 Nde2!) 13 d5 (13 f4!?) 13...Ne5 14 b3 b5 15 f4 Nd7 and now 16 a5 (16 Rb1 bxc4 17 bxc4 Nb6 18 Qc2 is interesting too, meeting 18...Nxc4 with 19 Bxc5, as in Szerlak-La Valle, corr. 2017) 16...b4 17 Na4 Bxa1 18 Qxa1 (Marin-Pavlović, World Seniors, Bucharest 2019) is a fairly promising exchange sacrifice.

12 Rb1

Intending b4.

12...Nc7

Now:

- a) 13 a5 Nc6 looks like a boo-boo by White, but he gets enough compensation after 14 b4! Nxb4 (14...cxb4 15 Nd5) 15 d4 Ne6! 16 d5 Nd4 17 Nxd4 cxd4 18 Bxd4 Bxd4 19 Qxd4 Qxa5 20 Rfd1.
- b) 13 b4 b5 (13...Nce6?! 14 f4!) 14 axb5 axb5 15 bxc5 dxc5 16 cxb5 Qd6! and Black should be able to defend but it is tricky; e.g., 17 e5 (17 Nd5 Nxd5 18 exd5 Rxb5) 17...Bxe5 18 Nxd4 (or 18 Ne4 Qb6, Canizares-Canamas, corr. 2016) 18...cxd4 19 Ne4 Qd7 (19...Qb6 20 Bg5) 20 Bh6.

D6)

5...e6

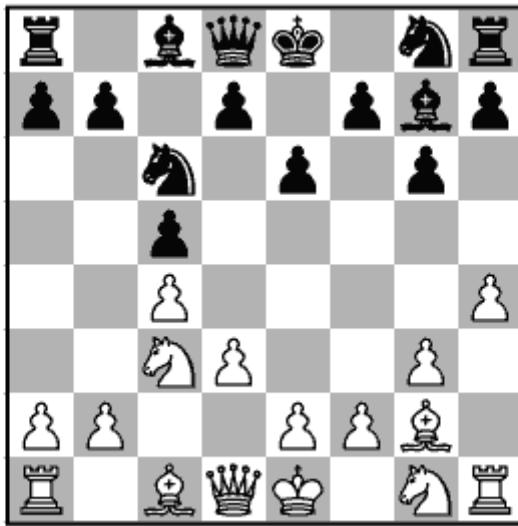
Our move in this position as Black, so this line occupies a very special place in our repertoire: it is what we would get if we played against ourselves! Or to put it less melodramatically, if we faced someone else who was following this repertoire.

6 e4

This is already a little more favourable than it was a move earlier, since the move ...e6 doesn't fit in so well with ideas of a quick ...a6 and ...b5, and rules out any lines with ...Bg4. As this is the main

crossroads of our repertoire, I shall also briefly cover two other moves:

a) 6 h4 (*D*) and then:



Black to play

a1) 6...h5?! 7 Bg5 is annoying for Black since ...f6 will always leave his kingside weak.

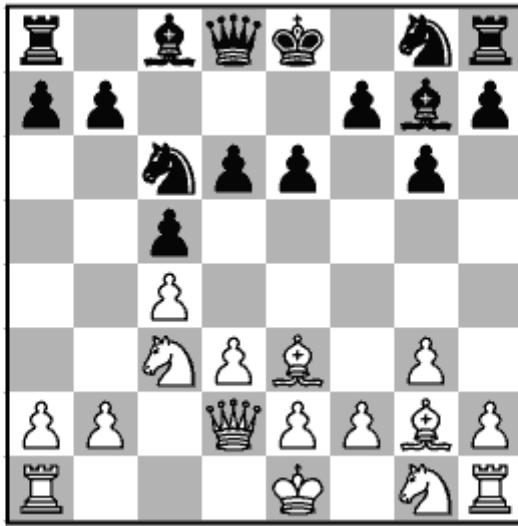
a2) 6...Nf6 parries the h5 advance, but White can argue that this move doesn't fit with ...e6, which prepared ...Nge7. 7 Nf3 and here:

a21) 7...0-0 8 h5!? Nxh5 9 Bg5 is more powerful than you'd think: 9...Bxc3+ (9...Nf6?! 10 Qd2; 9...f6?! 10 Be3 and Bxc5 after Black saves his knight; 9...Qc7 10 Qd2 {threatening g4} 10...f5 11 Nb5 Qb8 12 Bh6 Rf7 13 Bxg7 Rxg7 14 Ng5 with serious kingside and central play) 10 bxc3 f6 11 Bc1 intending Qd2 with compensation.

a22) 7...d5 8 Bg5 h6 (8...d4?! 9 Ne4; 8...dxc4?! 9 dxc4) 9 Bxf6 Bxf6 10 Nd2 d4 (10...0-0 11 cxd5 exd5 12 Nxd5 Bxb2 13 Rb1 Bg7 14 Nf4 is also unbalanced) 11 Bxc6+ bxc6 12 Nce4 Be7 13 f4 with an interesting strategic battle.

a3) After 6...h6!?, 7 h5 g5 8 f4 has been used by Aronian to create a little chaos. Then the pawn sacrifice 8...d5!? (8...d6 9 Bxc6+ bxc6 10 Nf3, Aronian-Le Quang, Bucharest blitz 2019) 9 cxd5 exd5 10 Nxd5 Nge7 11 Nxe7 Qxe7 was my recommendation for Black. In the line that followed (see note '[c2](#)' to White's 6th move in Line B224 of Chapter 5), White does not need to get into trouble and Black must find some accurate moves.

b) 6 Be3 gains time on the loose c5-pawn. 6...d6 (6...Nd4 7 h4!?; 6...b6 7 Bf4 e5 8 Bd2 with ideas of h4 or a3 and b4) 7 Qd2 (*D*) and now:



Black to play

b1) 7...Nge7 8 Bh6 0-0 9 h4 Bxh6 (9...f6 10 Bxg7 Kxg7 11 h5 g5 12 h6+ Kh8 13 f4 g4 14 e4 with a nice grip on the centre) 10 Qxh6 f6 (10...Nf5 11 Qd2 h5 12 e3) 11 g4 d5 12 Nf3 with good kingside play.

b2) 7...Nd4 8 Rb1 intends b4, and answering ...a5 spoils Black's queenside counterplay with ...b5. Hunting the bishop with 8...Nf5 9 Bg5 f6 10 Bf4 e5 (10...g5 11 e4) 11 e4 is not in Black's favour.

b3) 7...h6! 8 Nf3 e5! (8...Nge7 9 d4! d5 10 cxd5 exd5 11 Rd1! favours White) 9 0-0 Nge7 (Granda-Iturriaga, Cochabamba 2013) 10 Ne1 Be6 11 Nc2 Qd7 12 Nd5 (intending b4) 12...Nf5 (Black is mostly playing this so he can castle, and not to play ...Nxe3, since you will recall that the exchange of the dark-squared bishop for Black's king's knight is one that *White* generally wants in this structure) 13 b4 cxb4 14 Ncxb4 0-0 15 a4 e4 16 Bxe4 Nxe3 17 Nxe3 f5 18 Bg2 f4 19 Ned5 Bxa1 20 Rxa1 g5 with a sharp and unclear middlegame ahead.

Let's return to 6 e4. Now we have two move-orders to examine:

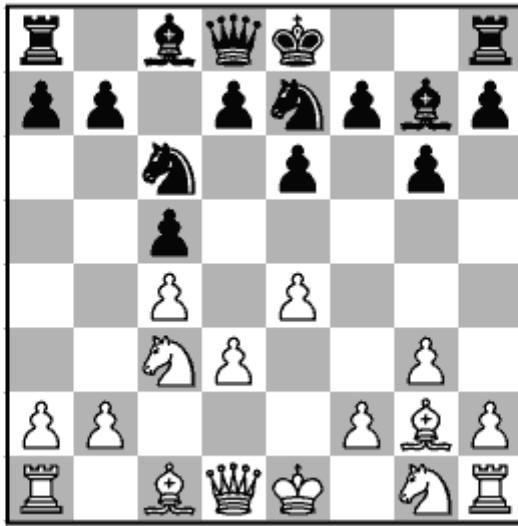
D61: 6...Nge7

D62: 6...d6

D61)

6...Nge7 (D)

This can simply merge into 6...d6 lines or result in a significantly different game.



White to play

7 h4

7 Be3 can lead to exciting play: 7...Nd4 (7...d6 transposes to Line [D62](#)) 8 h4 h5 (for 8...h6, see the [next](#) note) 9 Nge2 0-0 (9...d6 transposes to note '[b](#)' to Black's 8th move in Line D62) 10 Qd2 Nec6 11 g4!? d5! initiates great complications where Black survives.

7...h5

7...h6 is the other basic option; this choice between ...h6 and ...h5 is one that Black faces at many junctures. 8 Be3 (Black's counterplay flows more smoothly after 8 h5 g5 9 f4 gxf4 10 Bxf4 Ne5; e.g., 11 Nf3 N7c6 12 Qd2 a6 13 0-0-0 b5) 8...Nd4 (8...d6 transposes to Line [D62](#)) 9 h5 g5 10 f4 gxf4 11 gxf4 (*D*) (planning Qd2 and 0-0-0, and obviously hoping to storm in via the porous black kingside) and now:



Black to play

a) 11...d6 transposes to note '[a](#)' after Black's 8th move at the end of the chapter.

b) For 11...Rg8 12 Qd2 d6, see line '[a1](#)' of that note.

c) 11...Nec6?! 12 e5!.

d) 11...d5 is calmly met by 12 Qd2 since an open d-file doesn't necessarily benefit Black.

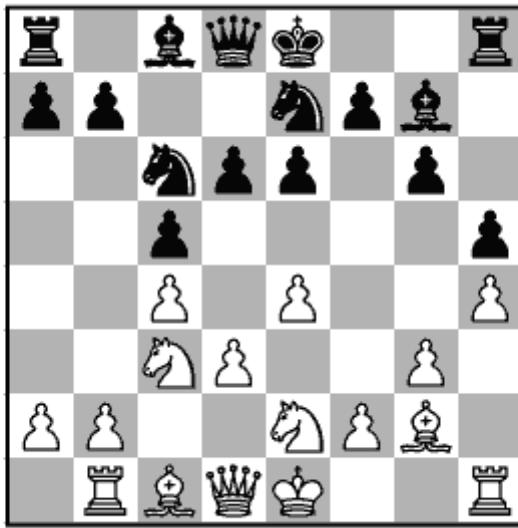
e) 11...Qa5 seeks to prevent White from developing smoothly, but White can play 12 Qd2!? regardless:

e1) 12...Nec6?! 13 e5! highlights the d6-square.

e2) 12...Nb3?! 13 axb3 Qxa1+ 14 Kf2 Qa5 15 e5 Nf5 16 Be4 Nxe3 and after either recapture on e3 Black faces an appallingly difficult defensive task in practice, even if the computers insist he should hold.

e3) 12...d6 can transpose to note '[a2](#)' at the end of the chapter via 13 0-0-0 Bd7 14 Nf3 Nec6, but White has another option in 13 Bxd4!? cxd4 (13...Bxd4?! 14 Nb5) 14 Nb5, giving Black some headaches with his d-pawns.

8 Nge2 d6 9 Rb1 (D)



Black to play

This is similar to lines we play as Black with a tempo less in this repertoire. In those lines, it seemed best to focus on central and queenside play. Here, with the h-pawns moved, the Bg5 theme carries some additional weight, though on the other hand a black knight will be more secure on e5.

9...0-0

9...a6 10 Bg5 Rb8 11 a3 b5 12 cxb5 axb5 13 b4 cxb4 14 axb4 Nd4?! (14...Ne5 15 Ra1) 15 Nxd4 Bxd4 (de Eccher-Tratar, Arco 2008) 16 Ne2 followed by d4 is good for White.

10 a3 a6

Otherwise:

a) 10...a5?! 11 0-0 (seeing Black's next move before selecting a way forward) 11...Rb8 (11...Bd7 12 Nb5!) 12 Bg5.

b) 10...Ne5 11 Bg5 gives White some pressure and a choice of plans. 11...a6 12 0-0 Qc7 13 Qd2 and then:

b1) 13...N7c6 14 f4!? Ng4 15 f5 exf5 (few players would choose 15...Nce5 16 f6 Bh8 17 Bh3 b5 even if it is rather unclear) 16 Nd5 Qb8 17 Nef4 with good kingside play.

b2) 13...Rb8 14 b4 b6 15 b5 and Black will need to allow White some open lines on the queenside (e.g., 15...axb5 16 Nxb5 Qd7 17 Bh6!), since the kingside-only fight after 15...a5?! 16 Bh6 will be unpleasant for him with White able to funnel his pieces into the attack, notably with Nd1-e3.

11 Bg5 Qc7 12 Qd2 Nd4

Now:

a) 13 g4!? hxg4 14 h5 is a change of pace that will no doubt shock Black, but is objectively unclear: 14...Nec6 (14...f6 15 Be3) 15 Bh6 Qe7 16 Bxg7 Kxg7 17 hxg6 fxg6 18 Qh6+ Kf7 19 Qh7+ Ke8 20 Qxg6+.

b) 13 b4 Nec6 14 0-0 Bd7 15 Rfc1 and there is everything to play for in the middlegame; e.g., 15...Nxe2+ 16 Qxe2 b6 17 Be3 (intending f4) 17...Ne5 18 Bh3 Bc6 19 f4 Nd7.

D62)

6...d6 7 Be3

7 h4 is premature when Black can still reply 7...Nf6. Instead 7 Nge2 Nge7 8 0-0 0-0 is a standard line.

7...Nge7 (D)



White to play

8 h4

This active approach will no doubt receive more attention since its use by Aronian against Carlsen, albeit in a blitz game.

8 Qd2 Nd4 and 8 Nge2 Nd4 are both more standard lines that have proven solid for Black in practice.

8...h6

Or:

a) 8...Nd4 9 h5 is generally an uncomfortable situation for Black, since he has little say in how the h-file tension is resolved.

b) It would be interesting to know what Aronian has in mind after 8...h5. One idea is 9 Nge2 Nd4 (Gabuzyan-Siugirov, Erevan tt 2015) 10 Bg5!? (10 Rb1 Nec6 11 a3 a5 12 Nb5 is a more standard option, but it probably brings no advantage), claiming that the knight has occupied d4 prematurely given that ...Nec6 is not available. Then 10...Qb6 (10...Qc7?! walks into 11 Nxd4 cxd4 12 Nb5 Qb8 13 Qa4) 11 0-0 Nec6 (11...Qxb2?? 12 Nxd4! Bxd4 13 Nb5 Qxa1 14 Qa4) 12 Nxd4 Nxd4 13 Rb1 leaves the black queen slightly misplaced.

We return to 8...h6 (D):



White to play

Now there are two interesting options:

a) 9 h5 g5 10 f4 gxf4 11 gxf4 Nd4 (an important position also for the 6...Nge7 move-order) 12 Qd2 intending 0-0-0. Here are some sample lines:

a1) 12...Rg8 13 0-0-0 Bd7 14 Kb1 and White will soon break with f5 unless Black plays ...f5 himself; a complex struggle lies ahead.

a2) 12...Nec6 13 0-0-0 Qa5 14 Nf3 Bd7 15 Kb1 0-0-0 16 Rhg1 Rhg8 17 f5 (17 Bh1 keeps the tension a little longer) 17...Nxf3 18 Bxf3 Bxc3 19 bxc3 Ne5 20 Be2 exf5 21 Bxh6 fxe4 22 dxe4 Ba4 23 Rdf1 and the h-pawn must be carefully handled.

b) 9 f4, intending h5, was Aronian's choice. 9...h5 10 Nf3 Nd4 11 0-0 and then:

b1) 11...Rb8 12 Bxd4!? cxd4 13 Qa4+ followed by Nb5.

b2) 11...0-0 12 Ng5!? with interesting kingside chances.

b3) 11...Nec6 12 Rb1 (12 Ng5!?) 12...0-0 (Aronian-Carlsen, Saint Louis blitz 2019 featured 12...b6?!, when 13 f5! would have been strong) 13 Ng5 is similar.

9: English: Other 1st Moves

1 c4

Of Black's 20 legal moves here, we have so far looked at two. Here we shall examine eight more, with 1...Nf6 the most important. From the others, 1...g6, 1...e6 and 1...c6 are of particular interest, especially as all three can also occur on move 2, following 1...Nf6. Throughout all these lines, we need to be careful with our move-order, or else we might find ourselves manoeuvred into lines that are outside our repertoire. While that might not be a disaster, few people relish the idea of learning several different systems against the same opening or set-up, and we certainly don't want to play substandard lines just for move-order reasons.

Our main lines are:

[**A: 1...b6**](#)

[**B: 1...f5**](#)

[**C: 1...g6**](#)

[**D: 1...c6**](#)

[**E: 1...e6**](#)

[**F: 1...Nf6**](#)

Or:

a) 1...d6 2 Nc3 e5 transposes to note '[C](#)' to Black's 2nd move in Chapter 7.

b) 1...g5?! used to be considered semi-respectable as a response to the English, but there is a big problem with it. White answers with the direct 2 d4 Bg7 3 Bxg5 c5 4 Nf3! ([D](#)), when Black has an unpleasant game.



Black to play

4...Qb6?! 5 Nc3! is already desperate for Black (5...Qxb2 6 Nb5 or 5...cxd4 6 Nd5), while after 4...cxd4 5 Nxd4 Qb6 6 Nb5! the c4-pawn proves very useful, and otherwise it is hard for Black to regain material without making a terrible exchange-grab on a1: 6...a6 (6...Bxb2 7 N1c3) 7 Be3 Qa5+ 8 N5c3.

A)

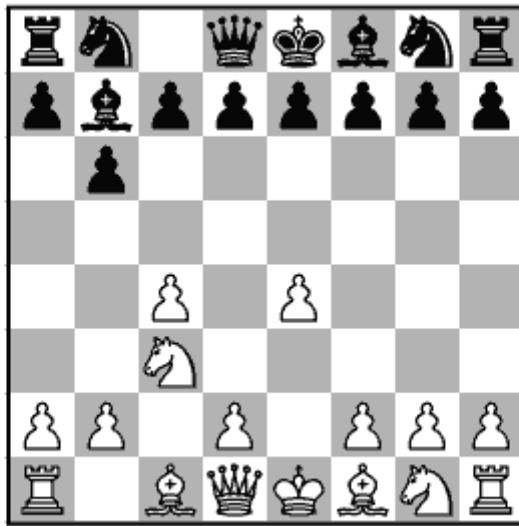
1...b6

This is known as the English Defence. Black makes sure of fianchettoing his queen's bishop before White can rule it out with g3 and Bg2. The price for this is allowing White to set up a big centre by 2 d4 e6 3 e4, but then Black gets a lot of counterplay and the lines become messy. Fortunately we can adopt a more 'English' set-up that is similar to those we use elsewhere in this repertoire and that also poses Black some problems:

2 Nc3 Bb7

2...e6 3 e4 and 2...c5 3 e4 will both tend to transpose.

3 e4 (D)



Black to play

3...e5?

An attempt to punish White's omission of d4. Other moves lead to more normal play:

a) 3...c5 4 g3 and then:

a1) 4...g6 5 Bg2 (5 Nge2 Bg7 6 d4 is another good option) 5...Bg7 6 Nge2 Nc6 7 d3 transposes to Line [D1](#) of Chapter 8.

a2) 4...e6 5 Bg2 Nc6 (5...Nf6 6 Nge2 with d4 to follow will give Black a very dubious form of Hedgehog) 6 Nge2 Nd4 (Piorun-Rozentalis, Polish Team Ch, Warsaw 2012) 7 Nxd4 cxd4 8 Ne2 Nf6 9 d3 e5 10 f4 d6 and White has time for 11 Ng1 intending Nf3 with pressure on e5.

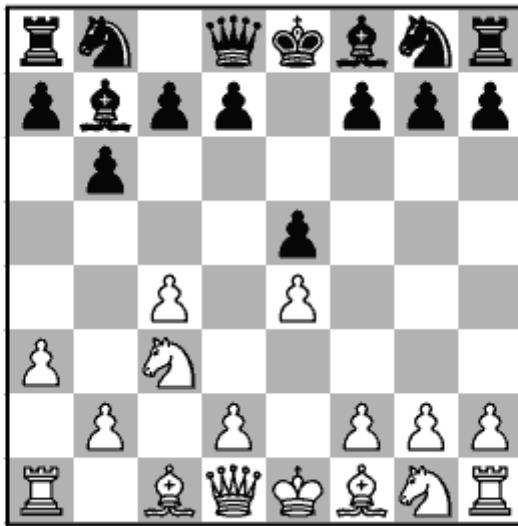
b) 3...e6 continues to invite White to expand in the centre. We'll continue to decline unless Black pushes it too far. 4 Nge2 Nf6 5 d3 (5 f3!?) and now:

b1) 5...d5 (OK, now we have to grab some space!) 6 cxd5 exd5 7 e5 Nfd7 (after 7...d4 8 Qa4+ Qd7, as in Marjanović-G.Szabo, Arad 2017, 9 Nxd4! is the right way to take the pawn) 8 d4 c5 9 f4 Nc6 10 Be3 with a solid plus.

b2) 5...c5 6 g3 d5 7 exd5 exd5 8 Bg2 Qd7 9 Nf4 dxc4 (9...d4?! 10 Ncd5) 10 Bxb7 Qxb7 11 0-0! Nc6 (11...cxd3? 12 Re1+ Be7 13 Nfd5! Nxd5 14 Qf3 with overpowering threats – take a look at this line, which occurred in Mogranzini-Bentivegna, Porto San Giorgio 2011, as it isn't an obvious sequence by any means) 12 dxc4 Be7 13 b3 (Gramstad-A.Savage, corr. 2013) leaves White a shade better.

4 a3!? (D)

A flexible and useful move. One reason for the little pawn move is shown by 4 Nge2 Nf6 5 d3 Bc5! 6 a3?? Ng4, while the immediate 4 f4?! exf4 5 d4?! is no good due to 5...Qh4+ 6 Kd2 Qf2+ 7 Kd3 Nc6 – we shall see why this is relevant shortly!



Black to play

4...a5

Probably not best, but it allows White to demonstrate his main idea. Otherwise:

- a) 4...Bc5 5 b4 Bd4 6 Nge2 favours White.
- b) 4...Nf6 5 d3 Nc6 (5...Bc5 6 b4 Bd4 7 Nge2) 6 Nge2 Bc5?! 7 b4 is similar.
- c) 4...Nc6 5 Nf3 (rather than a more modest deployment, as Black's ideas include ...Bc5 and ...f5) 5...Nf6 (5...f5 6 d3; 5...Bc5 6 b4) 6 g3 a5 7 Bg2 Bc5 8 0-0 0-0 9 d3 d6 10 Rb1 (B.Jacobson-Brodsky, New York 2019) and White will soon expand in one part of the board or another.

But why isn't the text-move (4...a5) an ideal response? It's because the a-pawns' moves mean that a King's Gambit approach is strong:

5 f4!

The modest 5 d3 Bc5 6 g3 gives Black fewer problems.

5...exf4 6 d4 Qh4+ 7 Kd2

The point is that the king is now safe after 7...Qf2+?! 8 Kd3! since there are no knight checks on b4 (and 8...Nc6 is met by 9 Nb5 intending Nh3), so White is solidly better thanks to his pawn-centre; e.g., 7...Nf6 8 Nf3 Qg4 9 d5! or 7...f5 8 e5 g5 9 Kc2!.

B)

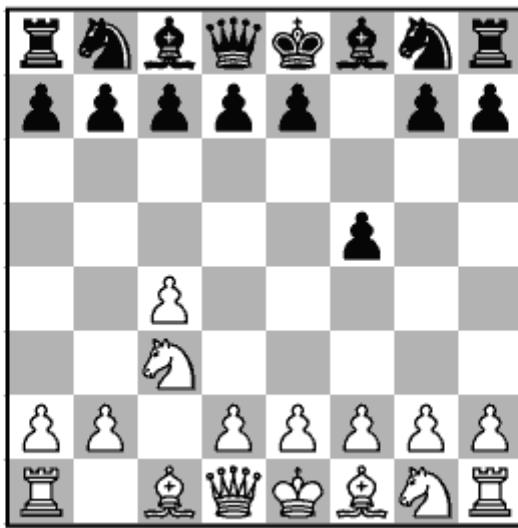
1...f5

Bear in mind that Black can also play some form of Dutch with ...f5 a move or two later, after starting with 1...e6, 1...d6, 1...g6, or even after playing ...c6, ...d5 and ...e6 in some order. Fortunately, a set-up with g3, Bg2, Nc3, d3 and e4 is a good option in virtually all cases.

One of the main features of the regular Dutch (1 d4 f5) is Black's control over the e4-square, but the English move-order makes it easier for White to contest this key square. Black can (and perhaps should) play ...e5 fairly soon, but this will generally lead to positions from our repertoire in the Closed English.

2 Nc3 (D)

I recommend this move-order, as 2 g3 e5 takes us outside our repertoire, albeit only slightly.



Black to play

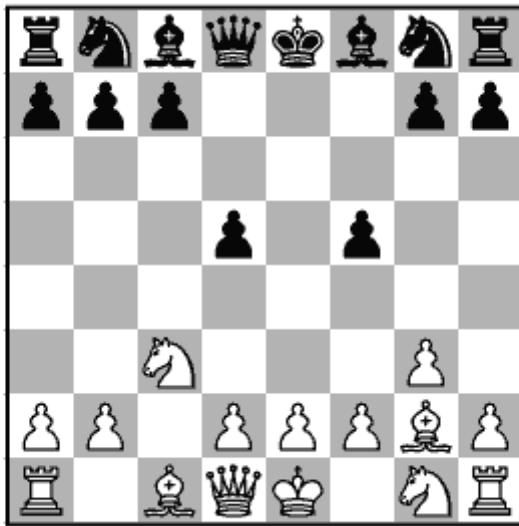
2...Nf6

It makes a lot of sense to play this before committing any of the pawns. Other moves are either transpositional or somewhat risky:

- 2...e5 transposes to note '[b](#)' to Black's 2nd move in Chapter 7.
- 2...d6 3 g3 e5 is note '[c](#)' to Black's 2nd move in Chapter 7.
- 2...b6?! (there's a limit to how much Black can muck around rather than control the centre!) 3 e4 fxe4 4 Nxe4 leaves Black very exposed.

d) 2...g6?! 3 g3 (3 h4!? gives Black problems more directly) 3...Bg7 4 Bg2 will soon transpose to one of our other lines: 4...e5 5 d3 Nf6 6 e4, etc.

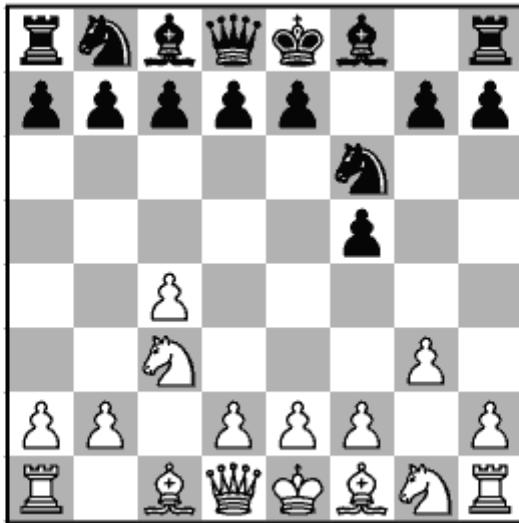
e) 2...e6 3 g3 d5 (3...c6 4 e4 again punishes ‘mucking around’) 4 cxd5 exd5 5 Bg2 (*D*).



Black to play

Black has loosened his position, so White will play a set-up with d3, seeking a good time to break with e4, though this may not actually be necessary. 5...Nf6 (5...c6 6 d3 Bd6 invites 7 e4) 6 d3 Be7 (6...d4 7 Qa4+ c6 8 Nb1 leaves Black overextended; 6...c6 7 Nf3 Bd6 8 0-0 0-0 and now it is time for 9 e4!) 7 Nf3 0-0 8 0-0 c6 9 Qc2 Kh8 (after 9...a5 quiet play is good, while 10 e4 yields some advantage too) 10 a3 a5 (10...c5 11 d4 c4 12 b3) 11 e3 Na6 12 Bd2 intending Ne2 and Bc3. Black has to tip-toe around the e4 break, which is like playing with one hand tied behind his back.

3 g3 (*D*)



Black to play

Now we have two main lines, analogous to the Classical and Leningrad variations of the Dutch:

B1: 3...e6

B2: 3...g6

Instead 3...e5 seems logical, but is well met by 4 d4 exd4 (4...e4 5 Nh3 is an ugly structure for Black when White hasn't had to waste any time in bringing it about) 5 Qxd4 Nc6 6 Qe3+ (the standard check, as you may recall from the line 1 c4 e5 2 Nc3 f5 3 d4) 6...Qe7 (6...Kf7 7 Bg2 Bb4 8 Nh3 Re8 9 Qd2 Qe7 10 0-0 favours White; 6...Be7 7 Bg2 0-0 8 Nh3 and Black's sensitive light squares won't be easily solved, Gelfand-Shirov, Tilburg 1996) 7 Bg2 Qxe3 8 Bxe3 Bb4 9 Bd2 (intending Rc1, when White will be solid and able to settle down to exploiting Black's sore spots) 9...Ne5 10 a3 Bd6 (10...Bxc3?! 11 Bxc3 d6 {11...Nxc4?! 12 Rc1!} 12 c5) 11 Nb5!? Nxc4 12 Rc1 c6 13 Rxc4 cxb5 14 Rc2 with better structure and development.

B1)

3...e6 4 Bg2 (D)



Black to play

4...Be7

This will mostly be the choice of Classical Dutch players, as it gives up ideas of reaching a Modern Stonewall, which demands the bishop go to d6. Otherwise:

- a) 4...d5 5 cxd5 exd5 transposes to note 'e' to Black's 2nd move above.
- b) 4...c6 (hoping for a Modern Stonewall with ...d5 and ...Bd6) 5 e4!? fxe4 6 Nxe4 is little-explored, but pleasant for White; e.g., 6...Nxe4 (6...d5?! 7 Nxf6+ Qxf6 8 d4 Bb4+ 9 Bd2 0-0 10 Nf3 with an obvious structural advantage, Jurcsak-Lorinczy, Senta 2006) 7 Bxe4 Qf6 and now 8 Bg2!? has a surprisingly effective 19th-century type of idea behind it: 8...e5 (otherwise White will establish a firm grip on the e5-square) 9 f4 exf4 10 Nf3 fxg3? (10...Bc5 11 d4 Bb4+ 12 Kf2 0-0 13 Bxf4 is good for White) 11 0-0! gxh2+ 12 Kh1 with a decisive initiative. That's right, Black is dead lost, as you'll appreciate if you stare at his position for a while.

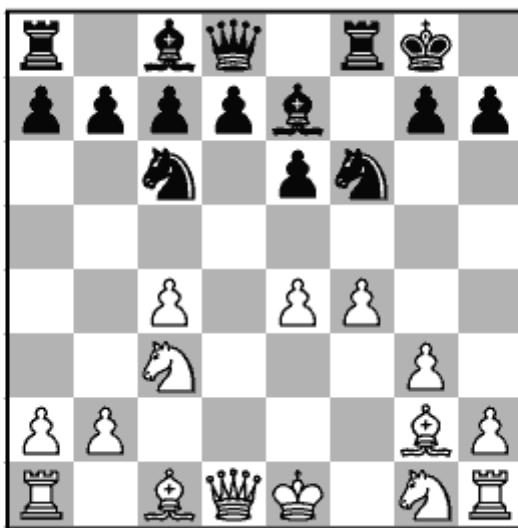
c) 4...Bb4 5 Qb3 seeks to gain the bishop-pair with the minimum of fuss while keeping the centre pawns flexible. 5...a5 6 Nf3 0-0 7 0-0 Nc6 (7...Kh8 8 d4 with an improved Classical Dutch for White, Doroshkевич-Nei, Vilnius 1966) 8 Na4!?

After the text-move (4...Be7) White has a wide choice, but let's take a look at a line that has much in common with our approach in other English lines:

5 d3 0-0 6 e4 Nc6!?

Very rarely played but probably best, or even simply necessary.

In *Play the Classical Dutch*, Williams claimed White's 6th move was dubious on the basis of 6...fxe4(?)! 7 dxе4 Nc6, but he didn't discuss Rossetto's old idea 8 f4 (D).

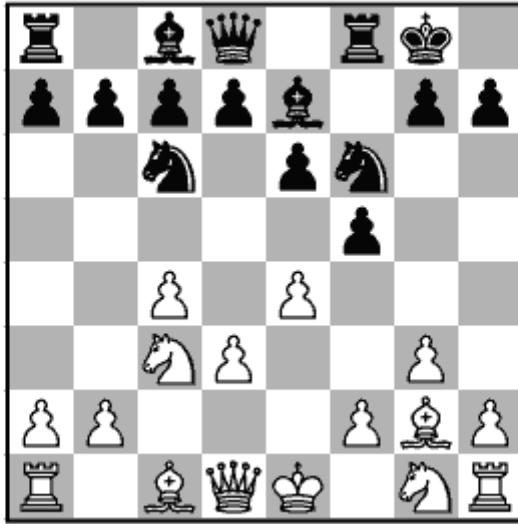


Black to play

White simply plans to steamroller Black in the centre, so he must react. But after 8...e5 (8...Bc5? 9 e5; 8...d6?! 9 Nf3 is good for White) 9 Nf3 (9 f5, as in Rossetto-Guimard, La Plata 1944, is far from absurd, but probably unclear; e.g., 9...b6 10 g4 Ba6 11 g5 Ne8 12 h4) 9...exf4 (9...Kh8?! allows 10 Nxe5, while 9...d6?! 10 f5 begins a kingside roll-up) 10 gxf4 (10 Bxf4 is less critical, but not harmless either; e.g., 10...d6 11 0-0 Bg4 12 h3) an acceptable continuation for Black is not obvious:

- a) 10...Ng4?! 11 h3 Bh4+ 12 Ke2 (Snape-S.Williams, Hastings 2005/6) is much better for White.
- b) 10...Qe8 11 0-0 intending e5 or Nd5.
- c) 10...d6 11 0-0 is not easy for Black as his pieces lack scope and White can consider f5 in the near future.
- d) 10...Bc5?! (the most interesting, but if it somehow hangs, it is by a very fine thread) 11 e5 d6 (11...Qe8?? 12 Kf1!) 12 exf6 Qxf6 13 Ng5! Bf5 (13...h6 14 Nge4 Qh4+ 15 Kf1) 14 Kf1 and it's not clear if Black really has enough for the piece; e.g., 14...Rae8 15 Nce4 Qg6 (15...Qd4 16 Qxd4 Bxd4 17 Nf2 Nb4 18 Bd5+ Kh8 19 Be4) 16 Nxc5 dxc5 17 Bd5+ Kh8 18 Rg1 Qd6 19 Rg3.

We now return to 6...Nc6!? (D):



White to play

7 exf5

Other moves seem less effective: 7 f4 Bc5!; 7 Nf3 fxe4 8 dxe4 Bc5; 7 Nge2 fxe4 8 dxe4 Ng4.

7...d5

Even though this move is untried, it is basically forced. 7...exf5? is positionally vile.

8 d4

Now:

a) 8...e5 9 Nf3! exd4 (9...e4 10 Ne5) 10 Nxd4 Bc5 11 Ne6 Bxe6 12 fxe6 somewhat favours White, as violent attempts against f2 have little impact.

b) 8...dxc4 9 Nf3 Nd5 (9...exf5 10 Qe2 Nxd4 11 Qxc4+ Ne6 12 0-0 with good play for the pawn) 10 Qe2 Rxf5 (10...Ndb4 11 0-0 Nxd4 12 Nxd4 Qxd4 13 Nb5 Qc5 14 a4 intending Be3 with good play) 11 Qxc4 Nb6 12 Qb3 (12 Qd3 e5) 12...Nxd4 13 Nxd4 Qxd4 14 0-0 with pleasant, but far from overwhelming, compensation for the pawn.

B2)

3...g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 (D)



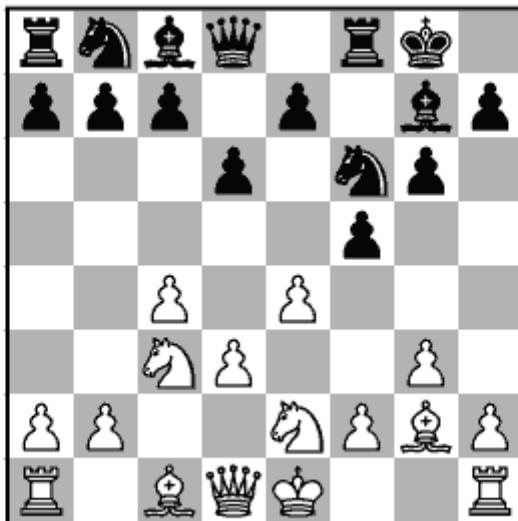
Black to play

This normally leads to positions similar to ones we see in the 1...g6 lines and the Closed English, as there is little point Black avoiding ...e5 indefinitely.

5...0-0

5...d6 6 e4 e5 (6...Nc6 7 Nge2 e5 transposes to Line [B2](#) of Chapter 6) 7 exf5 (7 Nge2 Nc6 is the same line as just mentioned) 7...gxf5 (7...Bxf5?! 8 Bxb7 Nbd7 transposes to note '[d](#)' to Black's 5th move in Line C1, and doesn't give Black enough for the pawn, though White must avoid 9 Bxa8? Qxa8) 8 Bg5?! leaves Black exposed on the kingside with the white bishop hard to repel. Then 8...0-0 9 Nge2 transposes to line '[b](#)' of the next note.

6 e4 d6 7 Nge2 (*D*)



Black to play

7...Nc6

Other moves:

a) 7...fxe4 8 dxe4 c5 9 0-0 Nc6 10 b3 (Rukavina-Gavrikov, Croatian Team Ch, Medulin 1997) and it will be hard in the long term for Black to solve his structural problems.

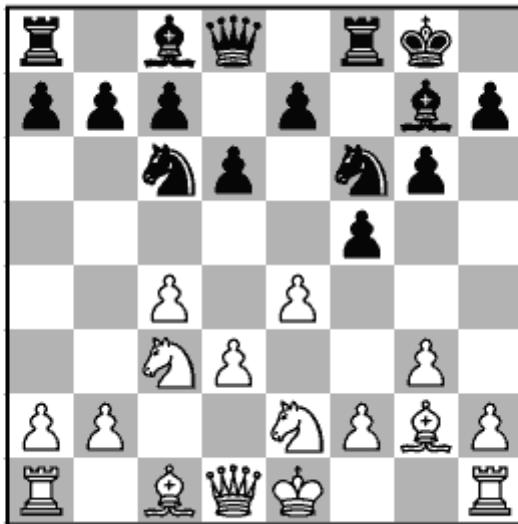
b) 7...e5 8 exf5! (delaying the decision with 8 0-0 gives Black extra options, including 8...f4!? 9 gxf4 Nh5 10 f5 Nc6) 8...gxf5 (8...Bxf5?! 9 Bxb7 Nbd7 10 0-0!) 9 Bg5 is far from easy for Black. White has piece-play options, as well as several ways to handle the structure: central play with d4, fixing the f5-pawn by playing f4, or queenside expansion with b4. 9...Qe8 (9...h6 10 Bh4) 10 0-0 Qg6 11 Qd2 and now 11...Nc6 12 f4, 11...c6 12 b4 (intending b5) and 11...Na6 12 d4 see White putting his pawn-breaks into action.

c) 7...c6 8 0-0 and then:

c1) 8...fxe4 9 dxe4 Ng4 10 b3 leaves Black structurally worse, and 10...Qb6 11 Bf4 (R.Hall-Pegg, corr. 2014) 11...e5?! (or 11...a5 12 Qe1 a4 13 h3) offers no tactical solution due to 12 Na4.

c2) 8...Na6 9 h3 e5 10 exf5 and White chooses his pawn-break depending on how Black recaptures: 10...Bxf5 11 d4 or 10...gxf5 11 f4.

We now return to 7...Nc6 (D):



White to play

8 h3!?

A rare but interesting move. 8 0-0 e5 is a position we avoid in the Closed English section due to the unclear line 9 Nd5 f4!? 10 gxf4 Nh5.

8...e5 9 exf5

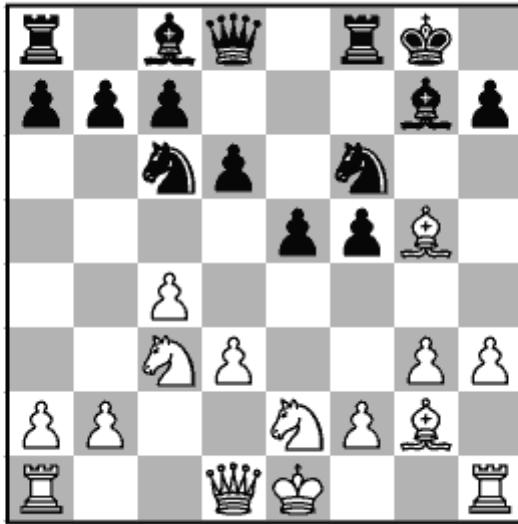
Avoiding 9 Be3 f4!? and 9 Bg5 f4?.

9...gxf5

9...Bxf5 10 0-0!? (transposing to a more common variation) 10...Qd7 (10...Nb4 11 d4!) 11 Kh2 Nb4 (attempting to cause disruption since 11...Rae8 12 Be3 leaves White in charge of events, Barbosa-Coppola, Foz do Iguaçu 2018) 12 Be3! (this untried idea looks most promising; 12 d4? exd4 13 Nxd4 Bd3) 12...Bxd3 (12...Nxd3? 13 g4 Nxb2 14 Qb3 and 12...Rae8?! 13 a3 Nxd3?! 14 g4 demonstrate

White's key tactical point) 13 a3 Bxe2 14 Qxe2 Nc6 15 Rad1 with good positional compensation due to the pressure on the long diagonal and d-file, Black's exposed king and White's bishop-pair.

10 Bg5 (D)



Black to play

A rich but little-tested position. Now:

- a) 10...Ne7 11 Qd2 c6 12 0-0-0 Be6 (12...Rb8 invites the central break 13 d4) 13 Kb1 Qd7 14 g4.
- b) 10...Qe8 11 Qd2 Qg6 12 0-0-0 Be6 and then:
 - b1) 13 g4 is not effective yet: 13...f4 14 Bxf6 Qxf6 15 Bd5 Bxd5 16 Nxd5 Qf7 17 h4 (17 Kb1 b5) 17...Nd8 intending ...c6.
 - b2) 13 f4 Rae8 14 g4 exf4? Qxf4? Qxg5 16 h4 Qxg4 17 Bh3 Bh6! is a tactical point explaining one way in which Kb1 is useful.
 - b3) 13 Kb1 and again White will tailor his pawn-breaks to Black's set-up: 13...Kh8 (13...Rae8 14 g4 f4 15 Bxf6 Qxf6 16 Bd5 seeks good knight vs bad bishop; 13...Rab8 14 f4 e4 15 g4! exd3 16 Ng3! breaks open the kingside) 14 h4!? (intending h5) 14...h6 15 Nd5! Bxd5 16 cxd5 Ne7 17 Rc1 Rac8 18 f4! Nxd5 19 h5 with the initiative. Not the simplest of lines, but a good sample of the kind of kingside play White can seek.
- c) 10...Be6 11 Qd2 Qd7 and now 12 0-0-0 adds g4 ideas to White's kingside toolbox; e.g., 12...Rae8 13 g4!? fxg4?! 14 hxg4 Nxg4?! 15 Be4 Bf5 16 Bd5+ Be6 17 Rdg1 Nxg2 18 Ne4 Nxh1 19 Nf6+ Rxf6 20 Bxf6 Re7 21 Bxe6+ Qxe6 22 Qh6 and Black is lost despite having played a sequence of very obvious-looking moves.

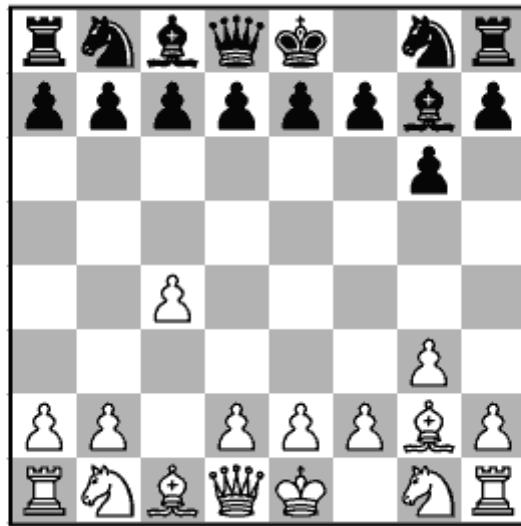
C)

1...g6

Often used by King's Indian players, rather than the more obvious move-order with ...Nf6 first, as it offers more flexibility against some of White's set-ups. With White already committed to c4, there is

clearly no danger of Black being forced into some line of the Pirc, as there is if he meets 1 Nf3 with 1...g6.

2 g3 Bg7 3 Bg2 (D)



Black to play

With two main options:

C1: 3...e5

C2: 3...d6

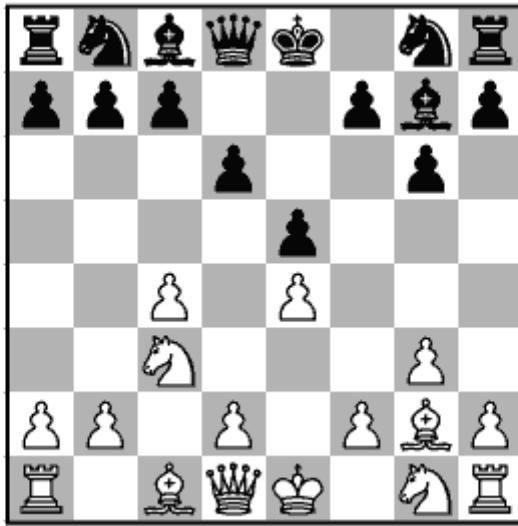
3...Nf6 transposes to Line [F1](#), while 3...c5 is Line [D](#) of Chapter 8. For 3...c6 4 Nc3 Nf6 5 e4 0-0, see note '[c](#)' to Black's 5th move in Line F1.

C1)

3...e5

For the time being, slamming the door on any King's Indian transpositions.

4 Nc3 d6 5 e4 (D)



Black to play

5...Ne7

Or:

- a) 5...Nc6 transposes to Line [B](#) of Chapter 6.
- b) 5...Nf6 6 Nge2 0-0 transposes to Line [F1](#).
- c) 5...h5 6 h3 Nc6 (6...h4 7 g4) 7 Nge2 transposes to Line [B1](#) of Chapter 6.
- d) 5...f5?! 6 exf5 Bxf5 (6...gxf5 7 d4!) 7 Bxb7 Nd7 8 d3 (not 8 Bxa8? Qxa8) denies Black full compensation; e.g., 8...Ngf6 9 Nf3 Rb8 10 Be4 Nxe4 11 dxe4 Be6 12 Ng5!? Bxc4 13 b3 Bg8 14 Be3 and White has regained the initiative.

6 Nge2 0-0

6...Nbc6 transposes to Line [B3](#) of Chapter 6.

7 0-0

Don't be tempted, as White has been in way too many games, by 7 d4?! exd4 8 Nxd4 Nbc6 9 Be3 Ne5!.

7...c5 (D)

One of Black's more reasonable attempts to play a 'symmetrical Botvinnik'. We can at least seek to unbalance the play and avoid dull wood-chopping, but proving any particular advantage is tough.

Note that Black should avoid 7...f5?! 8 d4!.



White to play

8 d3

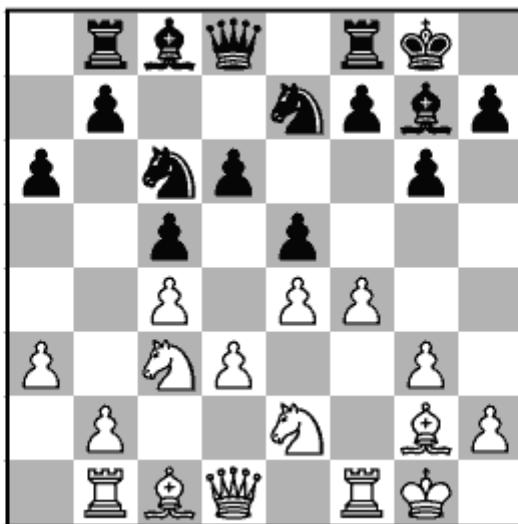
8 a3 Nbc6 9 Rb1 is another option.

8...Nbc6 9 f4 Rb8

A cunning move, as White lacks a good way to resolve the tension. Otherwise:

- a) The symmetrical 9...f5 allows White to keep some initiative with 10 fxe5 Nxe5 (or 10...dxe5 11 Be3) 11 Bg5.
- b) 9...exf4 10 Bxf4 Bg4 11 h3 Bxe2 12 Qxe2 Nd4 13 Qd2 is promising for White.
- c) 9...Be6 10 Nd5 Qd7 (T.Johansson-Mossong, British League (4NCL) 2011/12) looks risky but the game is objectively unclear after 11 fxe5 Nxe5 12 Nf6+ Bxf6 13 Rxf6 N7c6 or 11 f5 gxf5 12 Nec3 Kh8 13 Qh5 f4 14 gxf4 Bg4 15 Qg5 f5 16 h3 h6 17 Qh4 Ng6 18 Qe1 Bh5 19 Ne2.

10 Rb1 a6 11 a3 (D)



Black to play

White can play the symmetry game too! Now 11...b5?! (the obvious move that will tend to be played without much thought) 12 f5! reveals the clever point and gives Black serious problems. 11...exf4 12 gxf4 b5?! 13 f5 is similar. But if Black sees the danger, a complex game will result:

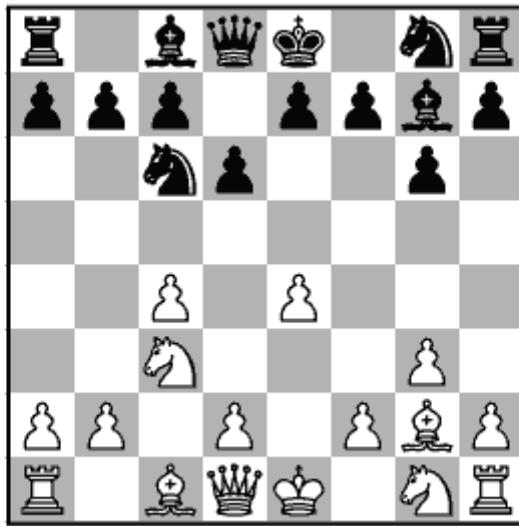
- a) 11...Bg4 12 h3 Bxe2 13 Nxe2 exf4 14 gxf4 Nd4 (14...b5 15 f5 is not so clear any more, but offers White the initiative at least) 15 b4 and there is plenty of life in the position.
- b) 11...Be6 (Baumhus-Blasek, Moscow 1990) 12 Nd5 and now 12...b5 13 fxe5 Bxe5 14 Bg5 bxc4 15 dxc4 Rxb2 16 Rxb2 Bxb2 17 Nef4 is roughly balanced, and the same can be said for 12...exf4 13 gxf4 f5 14 b4 cxb4 15 axb4 b5 16 Bb2.

C2)

3...d6 4 Nc3 Nc6!?

A move-order popular with King's Indian players but rarely covered in books on the English.

5 e4 (D)



Black to play

5...Nd4!?

This move deserves a good deal more attention than it has received. Alternatively:

- a) 5...e5 transposes to Line [B](#) of Chapter 6.
- b) 5...h5 6 h3 h4 (6...e5 7 Nge2 transposes to Line [B1](#) of Chapter 6) 7 g4 f5 (7...e5 allows White to transpose to the [note](#) to Black's 7th move in Line B1 of Chapter 6 with 8 Nge2 and he has other good moves here too) 8 d3 fxg4 (8...Qd7 9 g5 and 8...e5 9 gxf5 gxf5 10 Nf3 f4 {Geider-Sperhake, corr. 2014} 11 Rg1 both offer White good play) 9 hxg4 e5 10 g5 restricts Black's pieces and cuts off the h-pawn.

6 d3

6 Nge2 Bg4 (6...c5 lets White get his queenside play going with 7 Rb1 Bg4 8 b4) 7 0-0 (7 d3 and 7 h3 are possible too) 7...h5! (this offers more counterplay than 7...Nf3+ 8 Bxf3! Bxf3 9 d4 and Qd3) 8 f3 (avoid lines like 8 h3 Nf3+ 9 Bxf3? Bxf3 10 d4 Qd7 11 Kh2 f5!, when the white king finds itself in a cage) 8...Be6 (8...Bd7 9 h3) 9 d3 h4 10 Be3 c5 11 Rb1 with sharp and unbalanced play.

6...c5

6...e5 7 Nge2 Bg4 8 h3 achieves little for Black here, with White uncastled.

7 Nge2 Bg4

Now White should avoid 8 0-0?! Nf3+ 9 Kh1 h5! (another nasty cage), and try 8 Rb1; e.g., 8...Qa5 (8...h5 9 h3 and 8...Nf6 9 h3 Bxe2 10 Nxe2 Nd7 11 0-0 a5 12 a3 fail to inconvenience White) 9 0-0 Bxe2 (9...Qxc3 10 Nxc3 Bxd1 11 Rxd1 is just a queen exchange – and a bishop-pair) 10 Nxe2 Qxa2 11 Be3 with good compensation.

D)

1...c6

Clearly a Slav player's move. We can sidestep as long as we are careful with our move-order.

2 g3 d5 3 Bg2 (D)

3 Nf3 is a move-order option that avoids the 3 Bg2 e5 line, but allows other things, such as 3...e6 and 3...dxc4, which require additional preparation.



Black to play

3...e5

An attempt to punish White's omission of Nf3. Other moves:

- a) 3...e6 transposes to Line [E2](#).
- b) 3...Nf6 transposes to Line [F22](#).

c) 3...d4?! 4 Nf3 and Black will lose time supporting d4.

d) 3...dxc4 4 Na3 and White should regain the pawn with little inconvenience. After 4...e5 (4...Be6 5 Qc2) 5 Nxc4 f6 6 b3 White will soon be looking to crack open the centre with d4.

e) 3...g6 4 Qa4!? (threatening cxd5; other moves lead to more conventional Symmetrical Grünfeld play) 4...dxc4 (4...d4 5 d3 Bg7 6 Nf3 with ideas of b4 and Bb2) 5 Qxc4 Bg7 6 Nf3 e5 (other moves leave White comfortably placed) 7 0-0 Ne7 8 d3 0-0 9 Nc3 with an unbalanced position where White has scored well in practice.

4 cxd5 cxd5 5 d4

5 Qb3?! looks tempting but 5...Nf6 6 Nc3 Nc6! transposes to a gambit line of the Keres (the same one we [avoided](#) in Line B1 of Chapter 7) that is very sound for Black.

5...e4

5...Bb4+ 6 Bd2.

6 Nh3

As in Larsen-Sax, London 1980. This is viable for Black, but a type of position that is easier for White to play, as he just attacks Black's centre and chooses the moment to break lines open with f3.

E)

1...e6 2 g3 d5

This straightforward move-order (1...e6 and 2...d5) is often used by those who are happy to play the black side of a QGD or Catalan. The fact that we have avoided Nc3 gives us some good extra options.

3 Bg2 (D)



Black to play

We can pick out three main lines:

[E1: 3...d4](#)

[E2: 3...c6](#)

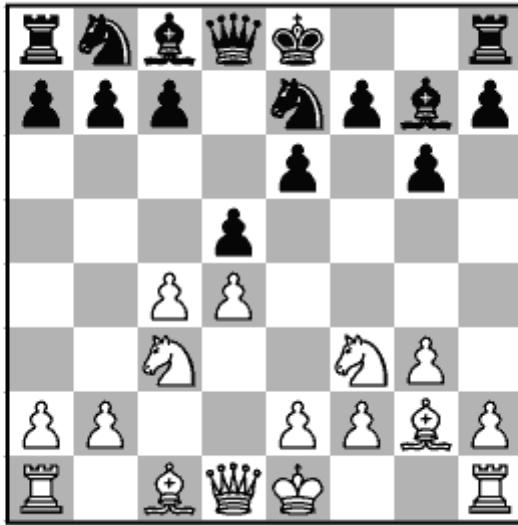
[E3: 3...dxc4](#)

Other moves:

a) 3...c5 transposes to Line [C](#) of Chapter 8.

b) 3...Nf6 transposes to Line [F3](#).

c) 3...g6 oddly combines QGD and Grünfeld, planning to put the knights on e7 and c6. 4 d4 Bg7 5 Nc3 Ne7 6 Nf3 (*D*) and then:



Black to play

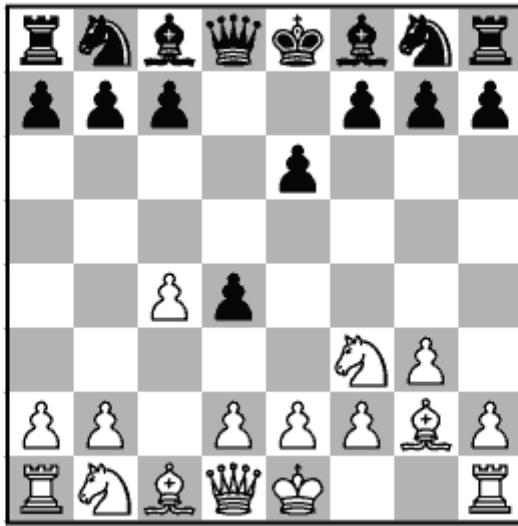
c1) Giving up the centre with 6...dxc4 7 Qa4+ Nbc6 8 0-0 0-0 9 Rd1 and Qxc4 was not Black's plan.

c2) 6...0-0 (Black will strongpoint d5 and only take on c4 if it causes true inconvenience) and now 7 h4!? is logical, given the location of the knight on e7. 7...dxc4 (7...h5 8 Bg5; 7...h6 8 h5! g5 9 Nxg5 hxg5 10 Bxg5 with a very strong attack) 8 h5 Nbc6 (8...Nf5 9 Bg5; 8...c5 9 hxg6! hxg6 10 Bh6 cxd4 11 Ne4) 9 hxg6 fxg6 (9...hxg6?! 10 Bh6) 10 Bg5 (Heimann-Young, Saint Louis 2017) is pleasant for White due to Black's damaged structure.

c3) 6...Nbc6 may be a more accurate move-order, but 7 0-0 0-0 8 e3 (overprotecting d4) keeps control as Black lacks the ...c5 break: 8...dxc4 (8...Na5 9 cxd5) 9 Qa4 e5 (9...Nd5 10 Qxc4 Nb6 11 Qe2 also with good central prospects) 10 Nxe5! Nxe5 11 dxe5 and Black doesn't get time to organize his forces: 11...Bxe5 (otherwise f4) 12 Rd1 Qe8 13 Qxc4 c6 (after 13...Be6 14 Qc5 Bd6, as in Debasish-Stefanova, Dubai 2016, 15 Qg5 is an annoying prod) 14 e4 with a mobile kingside majority.

E1)

3...d4 4 Nf3 (*D*)



Black to play

This gives White an improved version of the Réti line 1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 d4, though this fact does not guarantee any big advantage.

4...Nc6

Or:

- a) 4...Nf6 5 e3 should transpose, as Black certainly doesn't want to exchange on e3.
- b) 4...c5 5 e3 Nc6 6 exd4 cxd4 7 d3 gives White a tempo-up Benoni – and two tempi if Black plays ...e5.

5 0-0

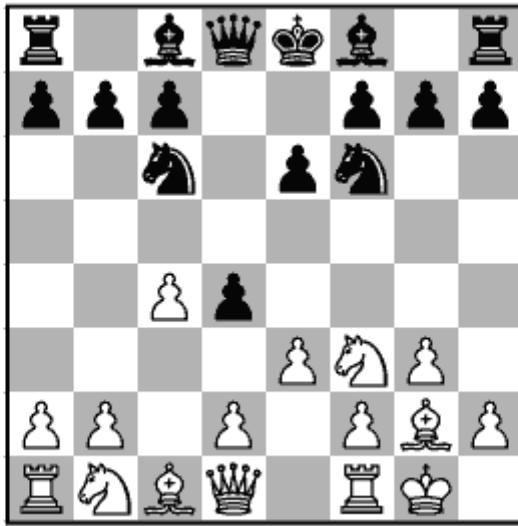
White intends e3.

5...Nf6

5...Bc5 6 d3 (6 e3 Nge7 7 Nxd4!? Nxd4 8 b4 Bxb4 9 exd4 is just unclear as long as Black doesn't fall into the trap 9...Qxd4?? 10 Qa4+ c6 11 Qxb4 Qxa1 12 Nc3, when the queen is snared) 6...Nf6 7 Nbd2 a5 8 Nb3 Be7 (8...Ba7?!, as in Carlstedt-S.Ernst, Groningen 2010, is strongly met by 9 Bd2!) 9 e3 dxe3 (9...e5 10 exd4 exd4 and now 11 a4?! looks odd but halts and fixes the a5-pawn, allowing White to focus on his own play) 10 Bxe3 Ng4 11 Bc5 offers White plenty of central control and breaks any blockade on d4.

6 e3 (D)

6 d3! should transpose: 6...Bc5 is the [previous](#) note, while 6...Be7 7 e3 is line 'b' of the next note. Black does best to avoid 6...e5?! 7 b4!.



Black to play

6...e5!?

Otherwise:

- a) 6...Bc5?! is now met by 7 b4! (Caruana-Hammer, Stavanger 2015).
- b) After 6...Be7 7 d3 0-0 8 a3!? a5 9 exd4 Nxd4 10 Nc3 Black's queenside will come under pressure.

7 d3

Black's point was 7 exd4 e4! 8 Ng5 Nxd4, when he will get good compensation for the pawn.

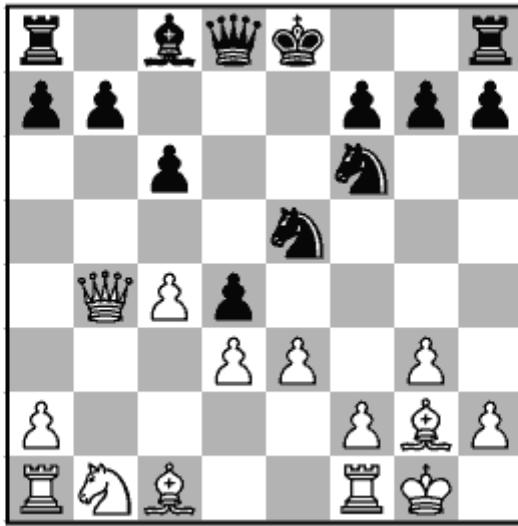
7...Bc5

7...Be7 8 exd4 exd4 9 Re1 0-0 10 Na3 (Vishnu-Ziatdinov, Nagpur 2012) favours White.

8 b4!?

A more exciting option than 8 a3 a5 9 Re1 0-0 10 exd4 Bxd4 11 Nc3 and 8 exd4 Bxd4 9 Nxd4 Nxd4 10 Re1 0-0 11 h3 (not 11 Rxe5? Bg4), which both lead to stable positions.

8...Bxb4 9 Nxe5 Nxe5 10 Qa4+ c6 11 Qxb4 (D)



Black to play

11...Nxd3

11...a5 12 Qb3 dxe3 13 Bxe3 Qxd3 14 Bf4 with compensation.

12 Qd2 Nxc1 13 exd4

With an unbalanced struggle if Black lets White take on c1, but the tactical fun and games are not over: 13...Nxa2 (13...Qxd4?? 14 Re1+) 14 Re1+ Be6 15 d5 0-0 16 dxe6 Qxd2 17 Nxd2 Nb4 with a very sharp ending: 18 e7 Rfe8 19 Reb1 a5 20 Nb3 b6 21 Nd4. The computers insist it is a draw, but in practice someone would surely stumble.

E2)

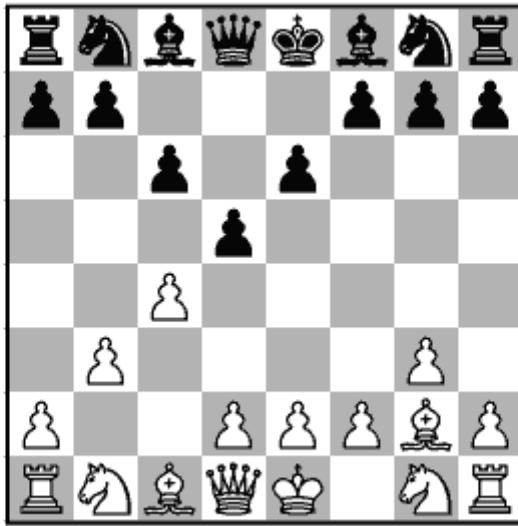
3...c6

This might be the choice of a Wedge/Triangle QGD player, or even a Stonewall Dutch enthusiast. It can equally well arise from a 1...c6 move-order.

Now 4 Nf3 and 4 Qc2!? are both normal moves that allow Black a lot of choice. After the latter we would have 4...d4, 4...f5, 4...c5 and 4...Nf6 to address; that's a lot to deal with, and in some cases we would need to revert to mainstream queen's pawn openings to get much traction.

But there is a challenging 'pure flank opening' alternative:

4 b3!? (D)



Black to play

The ultimate assessment of this interesting line may hinge on an untried exchange sacrifice.

4...dxc4

Alternatively:

- a) 4...e5 5 Bb2 f6 is better than it looks, but White has good play after 6 e3 Be6 7 cxd5 cxd5 8 Nc3 Nc6 9 Nge2 with d4 coming soon.
- b) 4...a5 5 Nf3 (also possible is 5 Nc3!? d4 6 Na4 e5 7 e3) and then:
 - b1) 5...Nf6 6 Nc3 hinders ...a4, and 6...d4 7 Na4 b5 8 Nb2 Bb7 (after 8...a4?! 9 bxa4 bxa4, as in Krnić-Tregubov, Amsterdam 2001, 10 Rb1! is very strong) 9 0-0 looks a little ragged for Black.
 - b2) 5...a4 6 0-0 axb3 7 Qxb3 Nf6 (N.Petrov-Novković, Swiss Team Ch 2018) 8 a4 with a queenside initiative; d4 and/or Ba3 may follow.
 - c) 4...Nf6 5 Bb2 and here:
 - c1) 5...Nbd7 6 Nf3 transposes to note '[c](#)' to Black's 4th move in Line F3.
 - c2) 5...a5 6 Qc2 a4 7 Nf3 a3 8 Bc3 b5 (Black must try to keep White off balance) 9 0-0 b4 10 Bxf6 gxf6 11 d4 Nd7 with interesting play after 12 Nbd2 (intending e4) 12...f5 13 Ne1 or 12 e4 dxc4 13 bxc4 c5 14 d5.

5 bxc4 Qd4 (D)

Not forced, but otherwise White continues Bb2 with excellent play.



White to play

6 Nf3!?

6 Nc3 Qxc4 has been tested in numerous games and is probably just unclear.

6...Qxa1

6...Qxc4 7 0-0 Nf6 8 d4 with good play for the pawn, as White may advance rapidly in the centre.

7 Nc3 Ba3

Giving up a piece to free the queen. Black has greater problems after 7...Bb4?! 8 Qc2, 7...Nf6?! 8 0-0 Ne4 9 Qb3 Nxc3 10 dxc3 a5 11 Bf4 or 7...Na6?! 8 0-0 Nb4 9 Qa4! Nxa2 10 Ne5!. Almost any line where Black gives up the queen for two rooks will be hopeless for him since the white queen will run rampage through the undefended dark squares.

8 Bxa3 Qxd1+ 9 Kxd1

White has compensation for the exchange; e.g., 9...f6 10 Ne4 Nh6 (10...Ne7 11 h4 h5 12 Nd6+ Kd7 13 e4 intending e5) 11 Nd6+ Kd7 (11...Kd8 12 Bh3 claws back a pawn without losing the initiative or the bishop-pair; note that 12...g5 is met by 13 Kc2!) 12 e4 (intending e5) 12...a5 (12...b6 13 e5 c5 14 Nxc8 Rxc8 15 exf6 gxf6 16 Ne5+ regains the exchange with some advantage) 13 e5 Kc7 14 Re1 Na6 15 exf6 gxf6 16 Ne4. Once White wins back a pawn, material is close to even, factoring in the bishop-pair and rook-pair, and given his greater mobility, he can view the future with confidence.

E3)

3...dxc4 4 Qa4+ (D)

This can easily transpose to a Catalan, but doesn't have to. 4 Na3 Bxa3 5 bxa3 is an interesting option, but probably no better than 'unclear'.



Black to play

4...Nd7

4...c6 5 Qxc4 and the fact that White has not yet developed either knight gives him more ways to oppose Black's queenside advances; e.g., 5...Nf6 (5...b5 6 Qc2 Bb7 7 a4 a6 8 Nh3!? maintains the pressure on the long diagonal and makes it hard for Black to find counterplay, Kasimdzhanov-Riazantsev, European Clubs Cup, Eilat 2012) 6 d4 b5 7 Qd3 Bb7 8 a4 Be7!? (8...a6 9 Nh3!? Nbd7 10 0-0 Be7 {Burke-Ostrovskiy, New York 2018} 11 Be3 keeps a clamp on Black's active ideas; 8...bxa4 9 Nc3 Bb4 10 Nh3!? should be a familiar idea by now) 9 axb5 a6 is an interesting way to get some activity, but probably doesn't give Black quite enough for the pawn after 10 bxc6 Nxc6 11 Bxc6+ Bxc6 12 Nf3 (Jacome-Pineda, corr. 2018).

5 Qxc4

This will mostly transpose to lines we cover via 1...Nf6 2 g3 e6 later on.

5...c5

5...Ngf6 6 Nf3 transposes to Line [F31](#).

6 Nf3 (D)

6 d3 is a less explored option that has scored well in practice.



Black to play

6...a6

Or:

- a) The normal move is 6...N_gf6, transposing to Line [F31](#).
- b) 6...b6 seeks to use tactics to develop, but after the forcing line 7 N_d4 N_e5 8 N_c6 N_xc4 9 N_xd8 R_b8 10 N_c6 B_b7 11 0-0 Ra8 (Loew-Wells, Nuremberg 2006), White can keep the initiative with 12 b3 N_d6 13 d4.

7 Q_b3 N_e7

7...N_gf6 8 0-0 transposes to the [note](#) to Black's 7th move in Line F31.

8 0-0 N_c6 9 R_d1

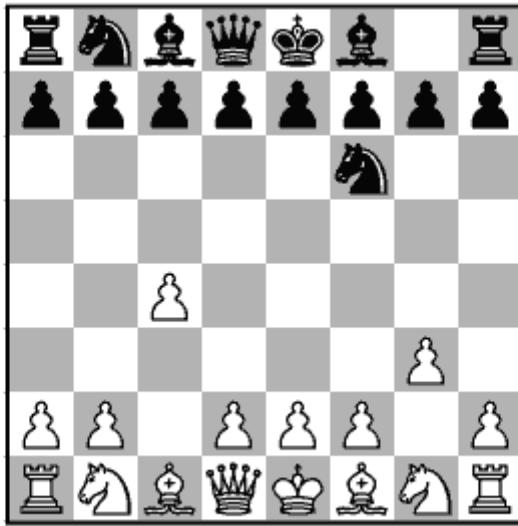
White intends d4, which gives Black plenty to think about. 9...e5 10 e3! (intending d4) 10...e4 11 N_e1 N_f6 12 N_c3 B_e6 13 Q_a4 leaves Black overextended, with 13...B_g4 14 B_xe4! B_xd1 15 B_xc6+ b_xc6 16 Q_xc6+ Nd7 17 N_xd1 a good exchange sacrifice.

F)

1...N_f6

Actually, this is Black's most popular response to the English Opening, though it often transposes back to the main lines of the previous three chapters, or to different openings entirely.

2 g3 (D)



Black to play

This is the most flexible move, given that we plan a fianchetto in all cases, and putting the knight on c3 at this point would limit our options in lines where Black plays ...e6 (or ...c6) followed by ...d5. Black in turn now has a choice almost as wide as he had on move 1, though some of these transpose to earlier chapters, or are analogous to his options from one move ago.

Our main lines are:

F1: 2...g6

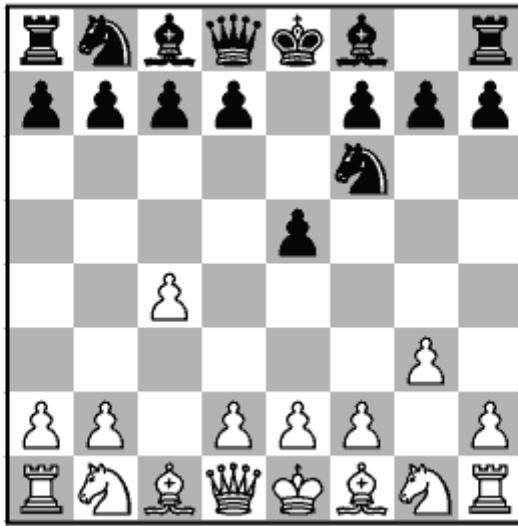
F2: 2...c6

F3: 2...e6

Other moves:

a) 2...c5 transposes to Line [B](#) of Chapter 8.

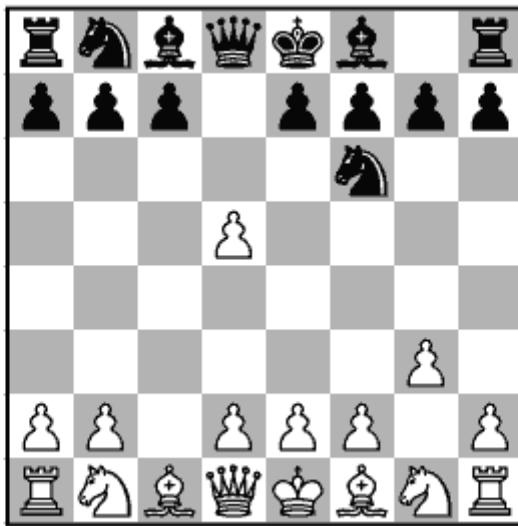
b) 2...e5 (*D*) brings in some move-order issues that are worth highlighting.



White to play

The simplest reply from a repertoire viewpoint is 3 Nc3, transposing to Line B of Chapter 7. The completely obvious 3 Bg2 is a popular move, as it often leads to the same positions and sidesteps the troublesome 3...Bb4 [line](#). However, if you play this, you need to prepare an additional line against both the recently popular 3...Bc5 (as in Line B of Chapter 7 we avoid this precise position by delaying Bg2) and the Keres System, 3...c6 (a move with a number of supporters among the world elite), since 4 Nc3 walks into the strong pawn sacrifice 4...d5!. One option is 4 d4, as recommended by Kosten, while 4 Nf3 e4 5 Nd4 (on which I give a crash course in Line [F21](#) via yet another tricky move-order) is far from clear after 5...Qb6 (as used by Caruana) or 5...d5, preferred by Anand.

c) 2...d5 3 cxd5 (*D*) and then:



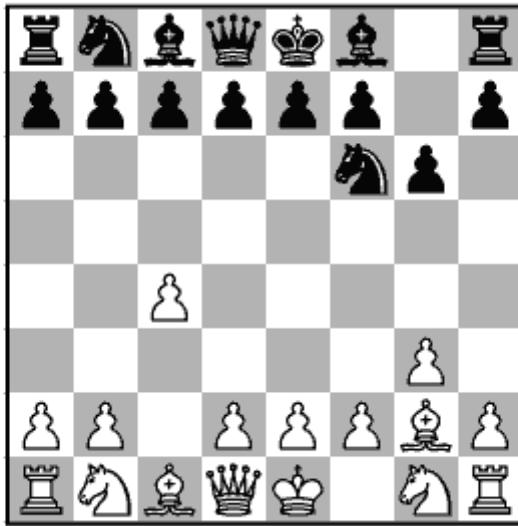
Black to play

c1) 3...Qxd5 4 Nf3 scores poorly for Black as there is no strategic justification for the time he will lose with his queen or for giving White a central majority. 4...e5 5 Nc3 Qa5 6 Bg2 Nc6 7 d3 with a pleasant plus: 7...Nd4 (7...e4 8 Ng5!; 7...Be7 8 a3 Nd4 9 Bd2) 8 Nd2!? (Looshnikov-Nasybullina, Satka Ch 2012) 8...Bb4 9 Nc4 Bxc3+ 10 Kf1! and bxc3.

c2) 3...Nxd5 4 Bg2 g6 (clearly seeking some sort of Grünfeld; instead 4...c5 transposes to Line [B2](#) of Chapter 8, while 4...e5 5 Nc3 is Line [B3](#) of Chapter 7) 5 Qb3!? (an interesting nuance, taking advantage of the fact that a knight exchange on c3 is not possible; 5 Nc3 is the standard move, when both 5...Nxc3 6 bxc3 and 5...Nb6 have been tested in thousands of games) 5...c6 (5...Nb6 invites the annoying 6 Qc3) 6 Nc3 denies Black any of the standard set-ups. 6...Nb6 (6...e6?! is too passive and weakening, while 6...Nxc3?! 7 Qxc3 f6 is ugly) 7 Nf3 (7 h4!?) 7...Bg7 8 0-0 Be6 (8...e5 9 Qa3!?; 8...0-0 9 d4 is similar) 9 Qc2 Na6 (Papin-Mosadeghpour, Rasht Khazar 2015) 10 d4 Nb4 11 Qb1 and Black's temporary piece activity will not hold back White's centre pawns.

F1)

2...g6 3 Bg2 (D)



Black to play

3...Bg7

Or:

- a) For 3...c5 see note '[b](#)' to Black's 3rd move in Line B of Chapter 8.
- b) 3...d5 4 cxd5 Nxd5 transposes to note '[c2](#)' to Black's 2nd move in Line F.
- c) 3...c6 (looking for a Symmetrical Grünfeld) 4 b3 (4 e4!?) 4...d5 5 Bb2 Bg7 6 Nf3 transposes to Line [F223](#).

4 Nc3 0-0

Offering White a Fianchetto King's Indian.

5 e4

We shall politely decline for now, but if Black plays too passively we will be happy to grab a big centre.

Now a lot of moves will transpose to lines considered elsewhere, notably within the Closed English, and our coverage here focuses on variations unique to this move-order, generally with Black avoiding an

early ...Nc6.

5...d6

Other moves:

- a) 5...c5 6 Nge2 Nc6 7 d3 transposes to the [note](#) to Black's 6th move in Line D5 of Chapter 8.
- b) 5...e5 6 Nge2 Nc6 7 0-0 d6 is covered in note 'b' to Black's 6th move in Line B of Chapter 6.
- c) 5...c6 6 Nge2 d5 (6...e5 7 0-0 d6 transposes to note 'c' to Black's 7th move below) 7 cxd5 cxd5 (Ribli-Nunn, Reykjavik 1988) 8 e5 followed by d4 with a spatial plus.

6 Nge2 e5

For 6...c5 7 d3 Nc6, see Line [D5](#) of Chapter 8.

7 0-0 (D)



Black to play

7...Be6

Hindering a King's Indian transposition, but will the bishop be good here?

Otherwise:

- a) 7...Nc6 transposes to note 'b' to Black's 6th move in Line B of Chapter 6.
- b) 7...c5 is a poor attempt at a symmetrical Botvinnik, as White plays f4 far more easily than Black ...f5.
- c) 7...c6 invites 8 d4, transposing to a favourable form of King's Indian, while 8 f4?! b5! is a tactical idea to note. But there is nothing wrong with 8 h3, when White still has the option of following up with d4 or staying in English territory:
 - c1) 8...Nbd7 9 d3 and it's not so easy to find a useful and flexible move for Black; e.g., 9...Nh5 10 b4 f5 11 exf5 gxf5 12 Rb1 (12 b5 f4!) accelerates White's queenside play. After 12...f4 13 Bf3 it is hard to find an active continuation for Black, as in many lines White has a good reorganization with Kh2 and if necessary Ng1.

c2) 8...a6 9 d3 (9 d4!?) 9...b5 10 f4 (Gashimov-Fluvia, Barcelona 2007) gives White the initiative.

8 d3 (D)



Black to play

8...Qd7

8...c6 9 h3 and now:

- a) 9...d5?! 10 exd5 cxd5 11 d4! with a fight in the centre for which Black is ill-prepared.
- b) 9...b5 10 cxb5 cxb5 is based on a fork on b5 and h3, but after 11 a3 Black has done little to help his position and White retains the idea of an f4 pawn-break when he is good and ready.
- c) 9...Qd7 10 Kh2 (intending f4) is good for White. Black normally tries 10...d5?!, even though 11 exd5 cxd5 12 d4! leaves White much better; e.g., 12...e4 13 cxd5 Bxd5 14 Nxd5 Qxd5 15 Nc3 Qf5 (Benko-Panno, Moscow Olympiad 1956) 16 f3!.

9 Bg5!?

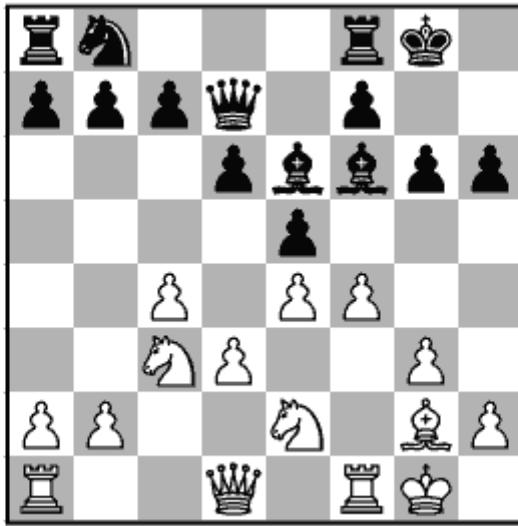
One of a number of promising ideas for White.

9...h6

Instead:

- a) 9...Nc6 10 Nd5 Nh5 11 Qd2 f5 transposes to note 'b' to Black's 11th move in Line B2 of Chapter 6.
- b) 9...Nh5 10 b4 grabs space while Black isn't ready for ...f5 since the b7-pawn is still loose.

10 Bxf6 Bxf6 11 f4 (D)



Black to play

11...exf4

11...Nc6?? 12 f5! gxf5 13 exf5 Bxf5 14 g4! costs Black a piece, while 11...Bg4 invites 12 Nd5 (Schneider Zinner-Albadri, Vienna 2011).

12 gxf4 Nc6

Now:

- a) 13 f5 gxf5 and now 14 exf5? Bxf5 is no good for White, though 14 Nd5 Bg5 15 Ng3 offers interesting play.
- b) 13 Qd2 (threatening f5) 13...Bg4 14 Nd5 Bg7 15 Ng3 is uncomfortable for Black.

F2)

2...c6 3 Bg2 (D)



Black to play

Now:

F21: 3...e5

F22: 3...d5

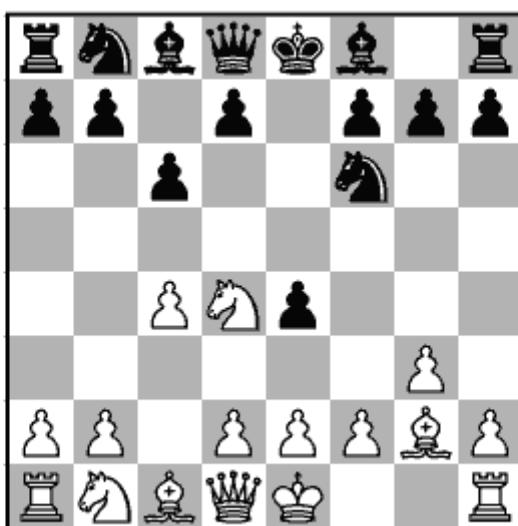
F21)

3...e5

Rare via this move-order, but it does circumvent our regular reply to the Keres System. I propose...

4 Nf3 e4 5 Nd4 (D)

...though the coverage will be brief, as you probably won't face this very often.



5...Qb6

5...d5 6 d3 Bc5 (6...Qb6 7 dxe4 Bc5 8 e3 dxe4 9 Nc3 with pressure on e4, Shankland-Piorun, Matanzas 2017) 7 Nb3 and then:

- a) 7...Bb4+ 8 Bd2 a5!? (8...Bxd2+ 9 Qxd2 dxc4 10 dxc4 leaves Black's e-pawn vulnerable, Wang Hao-Sengupta, Khanty-Mansiisk 2017) 9 cxd5 exd3 10 Bxb4 axb4 (Kostanjšek-Hartl, corr. 2019) 11 0-0 Nxd5 12 Qxd3 with a slight edge for White.
- b) 7...Bb6 8 cxd5 Qxd5 (8...exd3 9 Nc3) 9 0-0 Qf5 (Ding Liren-Anand, Lindores Abbey rapid 2019) 10 a4!? exd3 11 a5 Bc7 12 e4 with a plus for White.

6 e3 d5

6...Bc5 7 d3 exd3 (7...Bxd4 8 exd4 Qxd4 9 dxe4 Qxc4 10 b3 Qb4+ 11 Bd2 with good compensation) 8 Qxd3 offers White good development and central influence.

7 0-0 Bc5

7...Bg4 8 Qc2 Bc5 9 f3!?.

8 d3

Now:

- a) 8...exd3 9 cxd5 (Izoria-Smirnov, Internet rapid 2018) and it is hard for Black to catch up in development without taking on weaknesses.
- b) 8...Bxd4?! 9 exd4 Qxd4 10 cxd5 Qxd3 (10...cxd5?! 11 dxe4 Qxd1 12 Rxd1 dxe4 13 Nc3) 11 Qxd3 exd3 12 Re1+ with a nice initiative for pawn(s) that Black will not be able to hold on to in any case.
- c) After 8...Bg4 9 Ne2 Black will need to give ground in the centre or concede the bishop-pair.

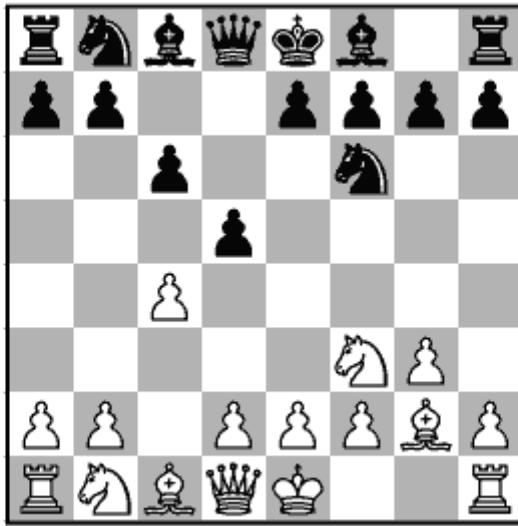
F22)

3...d5

This suggests that Black is a Slav player, or perhaps is seeking a Symmetrical Grünfeld.

4 Nf3 (D)

With this move we land in heavy-duty Réti theory, but it is probably the best 'flank opening' option. 4 Qc2?! e5 is unappealing for White, as is 4 b3?! e5.



Black to play

We have three standard Réti lines plus a Grünfeld interloper:

[**F221**](#): 4...Bg4

[**F222**](#): 4...Bf5

[**F223**](#): 4...g6

[**F224**](#): 4...dxc4

4...e6 is an odd choice as it blocks the bishop in, and transposes to note '[C](#)' to Black's 4th move in Line F3.

F221)

4...Bg4

While similar to some very reliable lines against the Réti (indeed, we use ...Bg4 in our response as Black to this opening), here it invites a strong reply:

5 Ne5!

Black already faces a key decision.

5...Be6

There are two other noteworthy bishop retreats:

a) 5...Bh5?! 6 cxd5 (*D*) and then:



Black to play

a1) 6...cxd5 7 Qa4+! Nbd7 (7...Nc6 8 g4!) 8 Nc3 (not 8 g4? Qc7) 8...e6 9 g4 Bg6 10 h4 has occurred in many games and gives Black a very difficult position:

a11) 10...a6 11 Nxd7! Qxd7 12 Qxd7+ Kxd7 13 h5 Bc2 (Matamoros-Itkis, Philadelphia 2011) 14 g5! Ne4 15 Bxe4 Bxe4 (15...dxe4 16 b3) 16 f3 Bc2 (back to prison!) 17 d3 d4 18 Ne4 intending either to trap the c2-bishop or to play Bf4-e5, and there's no good way to avoid both.

a12) 10...Bc2 11 Nxf7!? (a nice blow, but don't get too excited; White is merely 'better') 11...Bxa4 12 Nxd8 Rxd8 13 Nxa4 Nxg4 14 Bh3 (Blomqvist-Assabaeva, European Ch, Minsk 2017) 14...h5 15 f3 Nge5 16 d4 Nc6 17 Bg5 and there is suffering ahead for Black.

a2) 6...Nxd5 7 Qb3! Qb6 (7...Nb6?! 8 Bf3! Bg6 9 a4; 7...Qc7 8 d4 helps White; 7...Nd7 8 Bxd5 Nxe5 9 Bg2 with a nice plus for White; e.g., 9...Rb8 10 Nc3 e6 11 d3 intending Bf4 or Be3) 8 Bxd5 (this wins a pawn, but there is a good and calm alternative in 8 Qc4 e6 9 Qh4) 8...cxd5 9 Qxd5 e6 10 Qe4 and Black's compensation is unconvincing.

b) 5...Bf5 6 cxd5 cxd5 (D).



White to play

7 0-0 (a good choice, keeping White's options open; 7 Nc3 Nc6 and 7 Qb3 Nc6! promise less) 7...Nbd7 (7...e6 8 d3 Nbd7 9 Nxd7 Qxd7 10 Qb3 intending Nc3 and e4 or Bf4; 7...Nc6 8 Nxc6 bxc6 9 d3 with e4 ideas; e.g., 9...e5 10 e4! dxe4?! 11 Qc2) and here:

b1) 8 Qa4 a6 9 d3 b5 10 Qf4 Nxe5 (10...e6 11 e4!) 11 Qxe5 e6 12 e4 dxe4 13 dxe4 Bg6 14 Nc3 is an interesting sequence, but Black looks OK.

b2) 8 d4 e6 9 Qb3 Qb6 (9...Nxe5 10 dxe5 Nd7 {Louček-Hrbolka, Czech Team Ch 2006/7} 11 e4! dxe4 12 Be3 and it is hard to evacuate the black king safely) 10 Nc3 Be7 (10...Qxb3 11 axb3 threatening Nb5) 11 Nxd7 Kxd7 (11...Nxd7 12 e4 with the initiative) 12 Qa4+ Qc6 13 Qd1 with the safer king.

6 cxd5

6 Qb3 Qc8!? is a fairly convenient set-up for Black.

6...Bxd5 (D)



White to play

This is Black's idea; after other captures the bishop makes little sense on e6.

7 Nf3

The ultra-quiet 7 0-0 Bxg2 8 Kxg2 might keep an edge due to the centre pawns.

7...e5

Or:

a) 7...g6 8 Nc3 Bg7 9 0-0 0-0 10 d3 (Flores-Cori, Buenos Aires 2015) intending e4.

b) 7...c5 8 Nc3 Bc6 9 0-0 e6 (9...g6?! 10 Qb3! Qb6 {10...Bg7? 11 Ne5!} 11 d4!, Pigusov-Engqvist, Stockholm 1992) with a number of tempting options for White, including 10 Qc2 intending both e4 and Rd1 preparing d4.

8 0-0

The most flexible. Now:

- a) 8...Nbd7 (Carlsen's choice in a blitz game) 9 Nc3 Bxf3 10 Bxf3 (Ponkratov-Romanov, Croatian Team Ch, Mali Lošinj 2017) intending Rb1 and b4, etc.
- b) 8...Bd6 9 d4 e4 10 Nh4 intending Nc3, Nf5, maybe Bg5, and f3 when necessary.
- c) 8...e4 9 Ne1 (not 9 Nh4?! Be6!) intending Nc3 followed by either Nc2, d3 or d4 according to circumstances.

F222)

4...Bf5

A very solid move whose only obvious drawback is leaving b7 undefended.

5 Qb3 (D)

Any delay gives Black the option of ...e6 and a later ...exd5.



Black to play

5...Qb6

Other moves:

- a) 5...Qc8 6 d3!? e6 and for some reason the natural and good 7 Nh4 is yet to be tried here.
- b) 5...Qc7 6 cxd5 cxd5 7 Nc3 e6 8 d3 (Turner-Gormally, British League (4NCL) 2015/16) and with Bf4, Rc1 and Nb5 on the horizon and an e4 thrust in the background, White is gaining some traction.

6 d3 e6

Alternatively:

a) 6...Qxb3 7 axb3 Na6 (Timman-Karpov, Murmansk 2016) 8 Nc3 and Black's queenside quickly comes under pressure: 8...Nb4 (8...e6 9 Be3) 9 0-0 e6 10 Ra4 a6 11 Bd2 Be7 12 Nd4 Bg6 13 Nd1 c5 14 Bxb4 cxb4 15 Ne3.

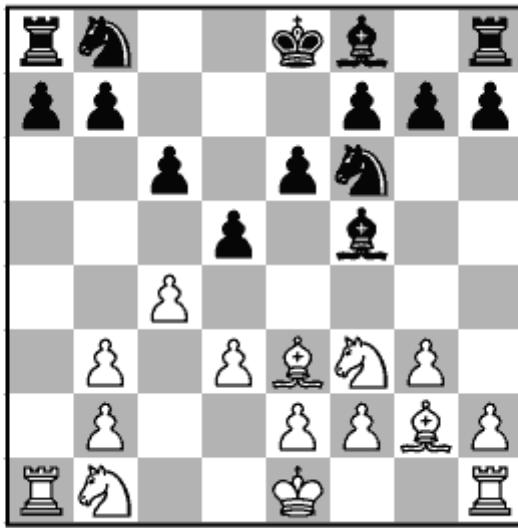
b) 6...Nbd7 7 Nh4! (not yet played, but it seems the most accurate move-order; 7 Be3 Qxb3 8 axb3 e5 with the point that 9 Nh4 can be met by 9...Be6) 7...Bg6 8 Be3 Qxb3 9 axb3 and White can gain the bishop-pair at will and enjoys queenside pressure:

b1) 9...a6 10 Nxg6 hxg6 11 Na3 intending Nc2 and b4 and a bind on the queenside.

b2) 9...e6 10 Nxg6 Bb4+ 11 Nc3 hxg6 12 0-0 a5 13 h3.

b3) 9...e5 10 0-0 a5 (10...Bh5 11 d4) 11 cxd5 Nxd5 12 Bxd5 cxd5 13 d4 exd4 14 Bxd4 Nc5 15 Nd2 with an edge for White.

7 Be3 Qxb3 8 axb3 (D)



Black to play

8...a6

8...a5?! 9 Bd2.

9 Nh4 Bg6 10 h3

Preventing ...Ng4 while also dealing with any long-term counterplay on the h-file following the exchange on g6.

10...Nbd7 11 Bd4!?

This move looks like a useful new idea. Now:

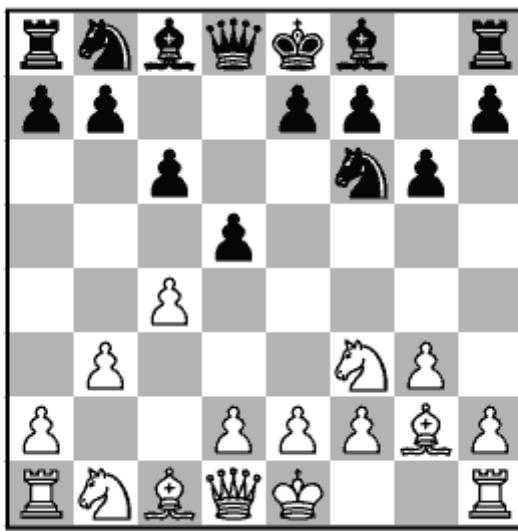
a) 11...Nc5?! 12 Nd2 is the reason why the bishop manoeuvred via d4 rather than d2.

b) 11...e5 12 Bc3 d4 13 Bd2 Nc5 14 Ra3 intending b4 and White has got things moving on the queenside.

c) 11...Be7 12 Bc3 0-0 (12...e5 13 b4 0-0 14 Nxg6 hxg6 15 0-0 intending Na3 and a significant queenside initiative) 13 Nxg6 hxg6 14 0-0 and with White flexible and able to play in the centre and queenside, Black must perform a difficult balancing act, especially as any opening of the position will tend to favour White's bishops.

F223)

4...g6 5 b3 (D)



Black to play

This move enables White to avoid standard Fianchetto Grünfelds, though he can still choose favourable transpositions into them.

5...Bg7

5...d4 6 Bb2 c5 7 e3 (7 b4 is a tempo-up version of a reversed line of the Benko, so not a bad option) 7...Nc6 8 exd4 cxd4 9 b4 and White is already sniping at Black's centre. After 9...Bg4 10 0-0 Bg7 11 h3 Bxf3 12 Qxf3 White can be happy.

6 Bb2 0-0 7 0-0

This would be a standard Fianchetto Grünfeld position if White had played d4 instead of Bb2. The difference favours White, as he retains options of d3, and it is harder for Black to generate counterplay here. Meanwhile if Black plays a slow move like 7...Re8, then 8 d4 comes with greater force.

7...Bg4

Otherwise:

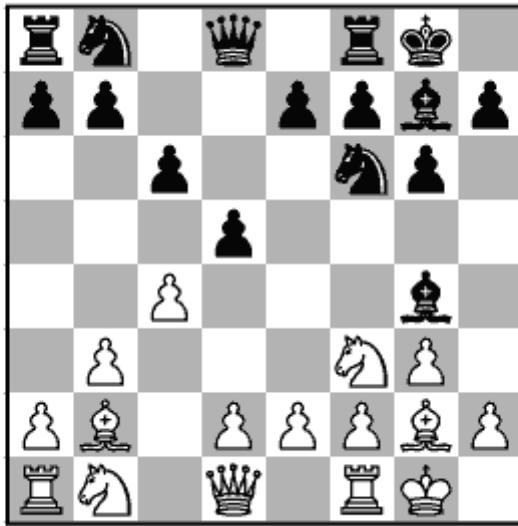
- a) 7...a5 8 Nc3 Ne4 9 Na4! Bxb2 10 Nxb2 (Prusikin-Caruana, Swiss Team Ch 2011) leaves White more flexible and better developed.
- b) 7...Nbd7 8 d4 (8 a4!?, introduced by Grishchuk in 2020, cuts out any ...b5 nonsense, intends further queenside activity, and appears to have no major drawbacks; e.g., 8...Re8 9 d4 b6 10 a5) 8...b5 (8...Ne4 9 Nbd2 Ndf6 10 Ne5 with good central play for White, Spoelman-Donchenko, Bundesliga

2019/20; 8...Re8 9 Nbd2 a5 10 Rc1 and White can play a queenside advance or prepare central play with e4) 9 Ne5 and then:

b1) 9...Bb7 10 Nd2 Nxe5 (10...bxc4 11 bxc4 c5 12 Rb1) 11 dxe5 Nd7 12 cxd5! cxd5 (12...Nxe5? 13 Bxe5! Bxe5 14 dxc6 Bxa1 15 cxb7) 13 Nf3 leaves Black passive.

b2) 9...Qb6 10 c5 Qc7 11 Nd3 a5 12 Nd2 is untested, but White's central and kingside prospects look good.

We now return to 7...Bg4 (*D*):



White to play

8 d3

This leads to less standard positions than 8 d4, though it is also a good move.

8...Nbd7

8...Bxf3 9 exf3!? and f4 will keep e5 under control while the e-file will prove useful.

9 Nbd2

Now:

a) 9...a5 10 Qc2 (flexible) 10...Re8 (10...e5 11 h3 Bxf3 12 Nxf3 d4 13 Rae1 intending e3) 11 h3 Bxf3 12 Nxf3 e5 (12...e6 invites 13 e4, as in Radjabov-Ivanchuk, Dubai rapid 2002) 13 e3 (rather than 13 cxd5 cxd5, exposing the queen) and White will determine the structure to his liking.

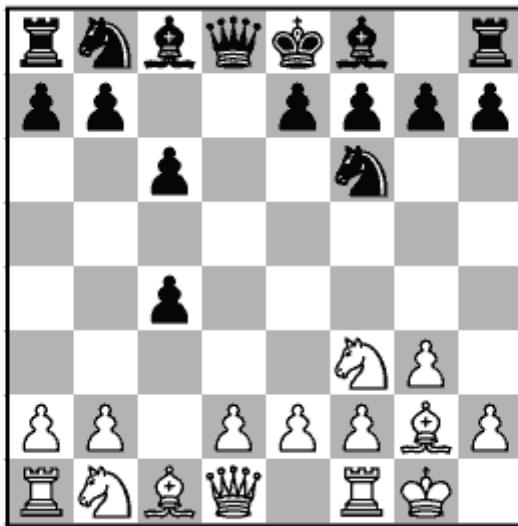
b) 9...Re8 10 cxd5 cxd5 (10...Nxd5 11 Qc2 e5 12 a3 is a kind of reversed Sicilian where White has good central influence and plans) 11 h3 Bxf3 12 Nxf3 e5 13 Rc1 (Polugaevsky-Taimanov, USSR Ch, Leningrad 1974) favours White. Note that after 13...Qa5, White has an interesting response in 14 Rc2!?, intending the classic Qa1 manoeuvre, and meeting 14...Qxa2 with 15 Nxe5 Nxe5 16 Bxe5 Qxb3 17 Bxf6 (17 Bd4!?) 17...Bxf6 18 Qb1, when White's central pawns will be a powerful force.

4...dxc4

Obviously a critical test of White's opening scheme.

5 0-0 (D)

Waiting to see Black's next move before deciding how to target the c4-pawn. 5 Na3 b5 and 5 Qc2 b5 are harder for White to deal with.



Black to play

5...Nbd7

The most popular. Black covers the c4-pawn at the cost of slightly slow development rather than weakening the queenside.

There are a great many other options:

- a) First we should see what White has planned after 5...b5. It's the surprising 6 d3! (this pawn sacrifice offers White very good compensation; obviously it only makes sense once Black has played ...b5) 6...cxsd3 7 Ne5 Qc7 (7...dxe2? 8 Qxe2! gives White way too much activity; 7...Bb7 8 a4 b4 {T.L.Petrosian-Anand, Berlin rapid 2015} 9 a5!?) 8 Nxd3 e5 9 Qc2; e.g., 9...Bd6 10 Bg5 0-0 11 Nc3 a6 12 Bxf6 gxf6 13 f4 Nd7 14 Ne4.
- b) 5...Qd5 6 Nc3 Qa5 (6...Qh5 misplaces the queen so 7 b3! cxb3 8 Qxb3 gives White superb compensation) 7 b3 cxb3 8 Qxb3 offers White more than enough space, development and open lines for the pawn. 8...e6 (8...e5?! invites pure aggression: 9 Ng5 Qc7 {Lizak-Sandhofner, Oberwart 2011} 10 f4! exf4 11 d4) 9 d4 Be7 10 e4 0-0 (Nikolac-Loncar, Croatian Team Ch, Šibenik 2007) 11 Qc2 Nbd7 12 Bd2 Qd8 13 e5 Nd5 14 Ne4 (intending Neg5 and h4, etc.) 14...c5 15 dxc5 Qc7 16 Rfe1 Nxc5 17 Rac1 b6 18 Nfg5 g6 19 h4!?.
- c) 5...e6 6 a4 and with Na3 and Qc2 coming, White seeks to regain the pawn without making concessions and so retaining good central prospects. For example, 6...Qd5 7 Na3 e5 (7...Nbd7 8 Ne1 Qc5 9 d4! cxd3 10 Nxd3) 8 Ng5! Qd4 9 d3 or 6...Na6 7 Na3 Bxa3 8 bxa3!? (keeping control of b4) 8...Qa5 9 Qc2.
- d) 5...Bf5 6 Na3 (D) and then:



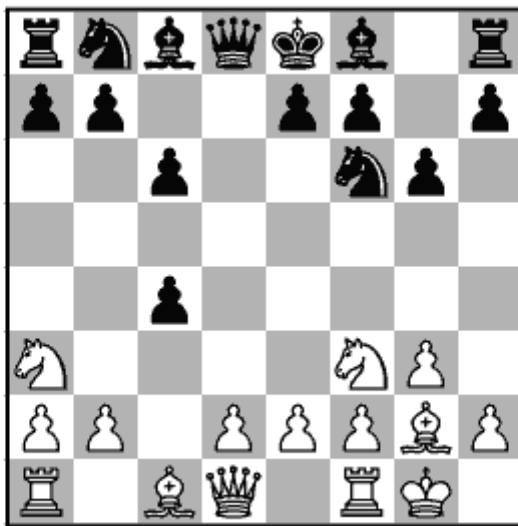
Black to play

d1) 6...Qd5?! 7 Ng5! leaves Black nothing better than a miserable retreat since 7...Qc5?! (7...Qd4?! 8 d3! cxd3?! 9 Qb3 dxe2 10 Re1 and Black shouldn't survive long) 8 d4! cxd3 9 Qb3 dxe2 (Iskusnykh-Arslanov, Khanty-Mansiisk 2012) 10 Qxf7+ Kd8 11 Re1 is a decisive attack.

d2) 6...b5 7 b3! (Black is squelching d3 ideas, but White still has this more standard line-opening lever) 7...cxb3 8 Qxb3 with excellent compensation; e.g., 8...e6 (8...Qd5? 9 d3 is far worse for Black than it looks; e.g., 9...Qxb3 10 axb3 Be6 11 Nd4 Bd5 12 e4 Be6 13 f4 is already resignable; 8...a6 9 Ne5 Be6 10 Qc2 Bd7 11 Nb1! intending a4) 9 d3! (preventing ...Be4) 9...a6 (9...Bc5 10 Bb2 0-0 11 Rac1 Qb6 12 Ne5) 10 Bb2 Be7 11 Nc2! (Rawlings-Gerard, corr. 2011) with ideas including Ncd4, a4 and Ne5.

d3) 6...e5 7 Nxc4 e4 8 Nfe5 Nbd7 (Movsesian-Tregubov, Russian Team Ch, Sochi 2013) 9 d3 and it will be hard for Black to catch up in development.

e) 5...g6 6 Na3! (*D*) and here:



Black to play

e1) 6...Bg7 7 Nxc4 gives White pleasant prospects since the otherwise slow move ...c6 has extracted no concessions from White in regaining his pawn.

e2) 6...Qd5 7 Qc2 Be6 (7...Bf5 8 Qc3! Bg7 9 Nxc4 and 7...b5 8 b3! cxb3 9 axb3 Bg7 10 Bb2 leave White on top) 8 Qc3!? Bg7 9 Nd4! is good for White since 9...Ne4? loses to 10 Nxe6 Nxc3 11 Nxg7+ (Delchev-Kostić, Valjevo tt 2011) 11...Kd8 12 dxc3! Qe5 13 Bh6. Take a close look, since this line could prove hard to find at the board.

e3) 6...b5 7 Ne5! a6 (the best try; 7...Qc7?! 8 d4! {Pigusov-Nenashev, Pavlodar 1987} 8...cxd3? pretty much loses to the far from obvious 9 Bf4! g5 10 Nxb5! Qb6 11 Qb3 Be6 12 Be3!; 7...Nd5 8 d3! cxd3 9 Qxd3 with great play for the pawn; e.g., 9...Be6 10 Rd1 Bg7 11 e4 Bxe5 12 Bh6! a6 13 Nc2! intending exd5) 8 Nxc6 Nxc6 9 Bxc6+ Bd7 10 Bxa8 Qxa8 11 f3 doesn't give Black enough for the exchange.

f) 5...Be6 6 Na3 (*D*) and now:



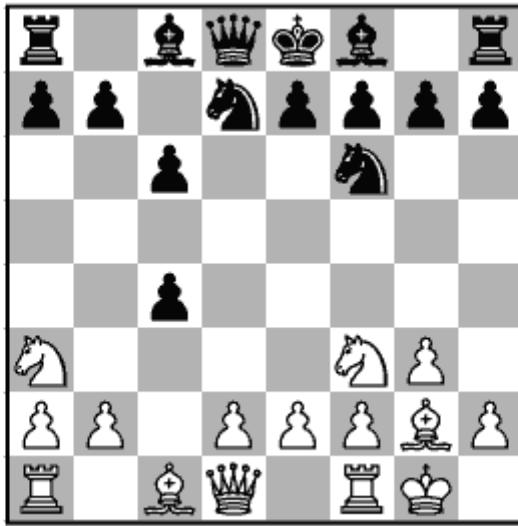
Black to play

f1) 6...Qd5?! 7 h4! brings in Ng5 ideas.

f2) 6...b5 (for some reason this obvious move is largely untried) 7 b3 (7 d3 cxd3 8 Ne5 runs into 8...Bd5) 7...cxb3 8 Ng5 Bf5 (8...Bd5 9 e4) 9 Qxb3 e6 10 Bb2 a6 11 Nc2 threatening Nd4 and with e4 ideas, such as 11...h6 12 e4 Bg4 (12...Bg6 13 Nxe6!) 13 e5.

f3) 6...Bd5 7 Qc2 b5 8 b3 cxb3 9 axb3 with good compensation; e.g., 9...g6 10 Bb2 Bg7 11 Rfe1 0-0 12 e4 Be6 13 Nd4 Qd7 (13...Bc8 14 e5 Nd5 15 Nxc6 Nxc6 16 Qxc6, C.Martin-Figlio, corr. 2018; 13...Ng4 14 Nxe6 fxe6 15 Bxg7 Kxg7 16 Qc3+ e5 17 h3!) 14 Nxe6 Qxe6 15 d4.

6 Na3 (*D*)



Black to play

6...Nb6

6...b5 7 d3! (don't forget this idea!) 7...cxd3 8 Nd4.

7 Qc2 Be6

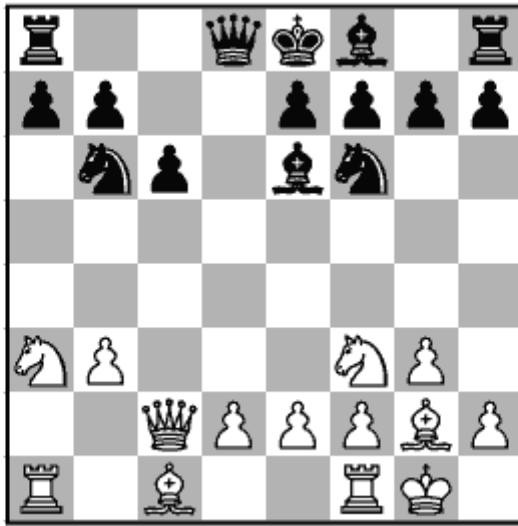
7...Qd5 8 b3! cxb3 (8...Be6 9 bxc4 Nxc4 10 d3!) 9 axb3 Be6?! 10 Nc4! Nxc4 11 bxc4 Qxc4 12 Qb1 Qb5 13 Bb2 (Fridman-S.Ernst, Dutch Team Ch 2011/12) with massive compensation for the two pawns.

8 b3!?

Probably the best try for an unbalanced game. Instead:

- a) 8 Ne5 h5! has been well-tested in correspondence games and seems roughly level.
- b) 8 Ng5 Bg4 (8...Bd5?? 9 e4; 8...Qc8 9 b3 cxb3 10 axb3 and Nc4 with good play; 8...Qd7 9 e4 g6 10 b3 cxb3 11 axb3 Bg7 12 Bb2 0-0 13 Nc4 with mobile central pawns, C.Martin-Macayo, corr. 2018) 9 Nxc4 Bxe2 10 Ne5 Bh5 11 Re1 is horribly dangerous for Black, though with computer-precise defence he should survive: 11...h6! 12 Ne4 (12 Ngxf7 Bxf7 13 b4 a6 14 a4 g5 15 Rb1 Bg7) 12...e6; e.g., 13 b4!? Bxb4 (13...a6? loses to 14 Nxc6 bxc6 15 Nxf6+ gxf6 16 Qxc6+) 14 Nc5 (14 Rb1 Be7) 14...Qd4! 15 Nb3 Qd8 repeating.

8...cxb3 9 axb3 (D)



Black to play

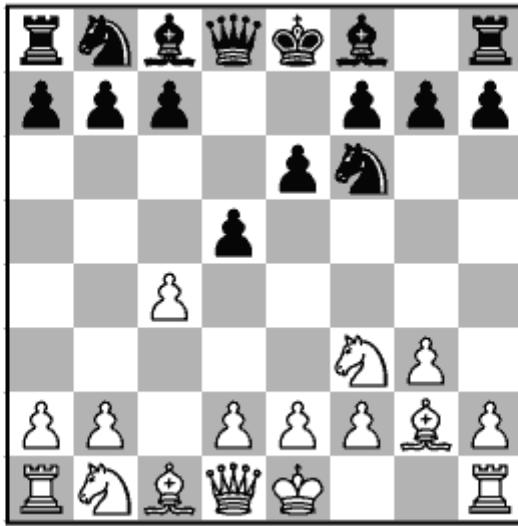
Even though Black's queenside is not weakened by ...b5, White can set up pressure against b7 and c6, as well as creating a big pawn-centre. Now:

- a) 9...Qd5?! 10 b4 Qb3 11 Qxb3 Bxb3 12 b5 (Timman-S.Ernst, Wijk aan Zee 2012) with a nice initiative.
- b) After 9...g6 here are two options:
 - b1) 10 e4!? Bg7 11 d4 0-0 12 Nc4 is one approach, retaining Ne3 ideas.
 - b2) 10 Nc4 Bg7 11 Na5 Qc7 12 Bb2 0-0 (12...Bd5, as in Elianov-Riazantsev, Russian Team Ch, Sochi 2013, can be met by 13 b4 a6 14 Be5 Qc8 15 Rfe1 intending e4) 13 e4 Ne8 (13...Bg4 14 Ne5 Be2 15 Rfc1 Bb5 16 d4) 14 d4 with a fight ahead in which White's practical chances must be fairly good.

F3)

2...e6 3 Bg2 d5 4 Nf3 (D)

Apart from 4 d4, with a transposition to the megatheory of the Catalan, it is hard to find a viable alternative to this move.



Black to play

Now the path divides as follows:

F31: 4...dxc4

F32: 4...Be7

Or:

a) 4...c5 transposes to Line [B1](#) of Chapter 8.

b) 4...d4 5 e3 will transpose to Line [E1](#).

c) 4...c6 5 b3 Nbd7 (5...Be7 6 Bb2 0-0 7 0-0 transposes to the [note](#) to Black's 6th move in Line F32, while for 5...a5 6 Nc3 see note '[b1](#)' to Black's 4th move in Line E2; 5...b5 seems premature before White has played Bb2, and 6 d4 is a good reply) 6 Bb2 (6 0-0 allows 6...e5, though 7 d4 e4 8 Nh4 is an interesting and untested reply) and White can expect to create pressure in a slow game unless Black tries 6...b5!? (6...Bd6 is a fairly popular move, but 7 d4 is a good form of Catalan for White, who is clamping down on ...e5 and Black's counterplay in general, and whose own play flows naturally), when White has a choice:

c1) 7 0-0 bxc4 8 bxc4 Rb8 (8...Be7 9 d3) 9 Qc2 Be7 (9...Qb6 10 Bxf6! Nxf6 11 Nc3) 10 d3, when White keeps ideas of an e4 advance.

c2) 7 Qc2 bxc4 (7...Be7 8 0-0 0-0 transposes to the [note](#) to Black's 6th move in Line F32) 8 bxc4 and White keeps his centre pawns flexible: one idea is d4 and c5, but he can also play d3 with e4 ideas.

F31)

4...dxc4 (D)



White to play

This looks similar to an Open Catalan, and transpositions are obviously possible. While we should be open to the idea of playing a later d4 when favourable, there are plenty of lines where it is useful to hold this pawn back.

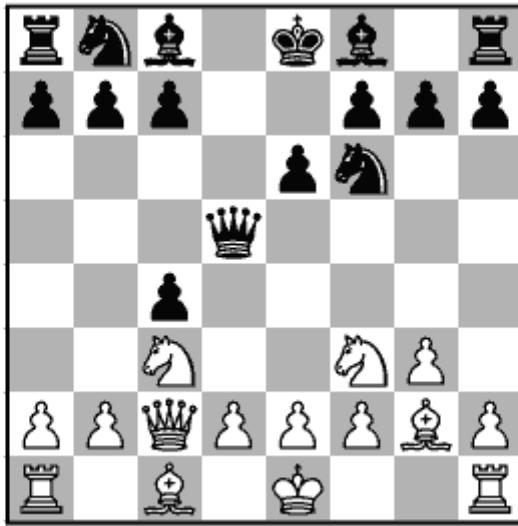
5 Qc2!?

This is my main recommendation. White will recover the pawn and then create a pawn-centre and/or queenside pressure depending on how Black sets up. The positions are not hard to handle using ‘common-sense’ chess. Other lines that you may wish to investigate include 5 0-0 a6 and 5 Na3 Bxa3 6 bxa3 b5 (6...0-0 is more sober) 7 Ne5 Nd5 (7...Qd4 8 Rb1) 8 d3 Qf6 9 Bf4, which is interesting but messy.

5...Nbd7

Other moves:

- a) 5...Be7 6 Na3 0-0 (taking the knight would now involve a loss of tempo) 7 Nxc4 c5 (7...b5 8 Na5) 8 b3 Nc6 9 Bb2 Nd5 (Reinderman-Potkin, Wijk aan Zee 2012) and now 10 h4 demonstrates the flexibility of White’s set-up. 10...Bf6?! 11 Ng5 g6 12 Ne4 leaves Black in some danger.
- b) 5...b5 6 a4 b4 (6...c6?! 7 axb5 cxb5 8 Nd4!, B.Savchenko-Frolanov, St Petersburg tt 2009) 7 Ne5 Nd5 8 Nxc4 with interesting play ahead.
- c) 5...c6 6 a4 (intending Na3 and Nxc4; 6 Qxc4 b5 is a better-known line) 6...Na6 (Kjartansson-Peralta, La Massana 2013) 7 Na3 Nb4 8 Qxc4 Be7 9 0-0 0-0 10 d3 and Black must still solve his development issues.
- d) 5...Qd5!? 6 Nc3 (*D*) and then:



Black to play

d1) 6...Qc5 7 b3 cxb3 8 axb3 with compensation as White will gain time on the black queen.

d2) 6...Qa5 7 Nd1!? (Ager-Wertjanz, Austrian Ch, Zwettl 2012) and White simply intends to regain the pawn (by Ne3xc4 or Qxc4) and claim a development advantage. 7...b5 8 Nd4 c6 (8...Nd5 9 Ne3 Bb7 10 Nxd5 Bxd5 11 Bxd5 exd5 12 Qf5!) 9 a4!? a6 10 Nxc6 Qb6 11 axb5 Bb7 12 0-0 axb5 13 Rxa8 Bxa8 14 Nxb8 Bxg2 15 Kxg2 Qxb8 16 d3 with an edge in mobilization.

e) 5...a6 6 Ne5 (*D*) and then:



Black to play

e1) 6...Nbd7?! 7 Nxc4 c5 (Hulak-Timoshenko, European Ch, Ohrid 2001) 8 d3! makes it hard for Black to untangle his queenside.

e2) 6...Nd5 7 0-0 (7 Qxc4 b5 is Black's idea) 7...Be7 (7...b5 8 d3! cxd3 9 Nxd3 and Nc3 gives White excellent play for the pawn, Mareco-Abdusattorov, Moscow 2018) 8 Qxc4 with nice pressure since 8...b5 9 Qg4! 0-0 10 d4 is now rather harmonious for White.

e3) 6...c5 7 0-0 and here:

e31) 7...Ra7 8 Rd1 (8 a4 is simpler and safer, though 8...b6 9 Na3 Bb7 brings Black very close to equality) intending to break lines open with a d3 pawn sacrifice; e.g., 8...Be7 (8...Nbd7 9 d4!? {Salgado-Pelletier, French Team Ch, Haguenau 2013} and 8...Qc7 9 d3! cxd3 10 Nxd3 Nbd7 11 b4 both offer White interesting play) 9 d3 cxd3 10 Rxd3 (10 Nxd3 b6 11 Bf4 Bd7 12 Ne5 offers compensation) 10...Qc7 11 Bf4 kicks off a forcing line: 11...Nh5 12 Nxf7 Nxf4 13 Nxh8 Nxd3 14 Qxd3 g6 15 Nxg6 Bf6 with sharp play; e.g., 16 a4 hxg6 17 Qxg6+ Qf7 18 Qc2 and White's pieces will quickly move to good squares. Black will probably have to return at least a pawn, with an exciting endgame ahead.

e32) 7...Be7 8 d3 (8 a4, as played in Li Chao-Lenić, Gibraltar 2016, is again the safe move) 8...cxd3 9 Nxd3 and White either wins back the pawn or gets nice compensation: 9...0-0 (9...Nbd7 10 a4 Ra7 11 a5 b5 12 axb6 Qxb6 13 Na3 Bb7 14 Nc4 with good play) 10 Be3 Nbd7 11 Nxc5 Nd5 12 Bd4 Nxc5 13 Bxc5 and White remains a little more active.

We now return to 5...Nbd7 (*D*):



White to play

6 Qxc4

Transposing to a rather popular position, but not one that is very hard for White to handle. Instead:

- 6 a4 intends to regain the pawn with Na3xc4 and exert pressure. 6...Nc5 seems like the critical response, when 7 Na3 (7 Qxc4 Qd5!) 7...Nb3 8 Rb1 Qd5 9 0-0 Bd7 10 Nxc4 Bxa4 11 Ra1 Bb5 12 Qxb3 Qxc4 (12...Bxc4?! 13 Qc3) 13 Qxc4 Bxc4 14 d3 gives White play for the pawn but is too messy and intricate to be my main recommendation.
- Also after 6 0-0 Nb6! (6...a6 7 a4 is what White wants: 7...Nc5 8 Qxc4 Qd5 9 Qh4 works much better now that the c1-bishop is defended) it is hard to find anything truly attractive for White. 7 Rd1!? brings in ideas of opening the d-file, but Black's resources look adequate: 7...Bd6 8 b3 (8 a4 a5 9 Na3 e5) 8...cxb3 (8...Bd7!?) 9 axb3 Nbd5! (Lecroq-Churkin, corr. 2017; 9...0-0 invites 10 e4 and d4) and while White has play for the pawn, Black's grip on b4 will be a thorn in White's side.

6...c5

6...a6 7 Qc2 c5 8 Nc3 Qc7 9 0-0 (Giri-Kariakin, Riga 2019) with options a4 or d4.

7 0-0 b6

7...a6 8 Qb3 Rb8 9 d4! (Tabatabaei-Vignesh, Abu Dhabi 2019) intending Bf4.

8 Nc3 Bb7 9 e4!?

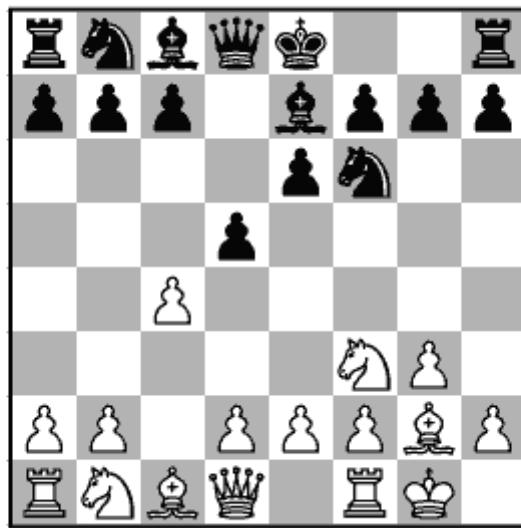
This leads to lively play, and at any rate isn't just an ordinary Catalan-type position. The queen will generally drop back to e2 and White will seek play on the kingside and in the centre.

F32)

4...Be7

Black again invites a Catalan transposition.

5 0-0 (D)



Black to play

5...0-0

5...d4 is somewhat premature, as 6 b4!? (or 6 e3 Nc6, transposing to note '[b](#)' to Black's 6th move in Line E1) is going to be a better form of reversed Benoni than most we examine in the lines below. After 6...0-0, the untried 7 b5 grabs queenside influence.

6 b3

We have again reached a major line of the Réti. The lines split for one last time in this book:

[F321](#): 6...b6

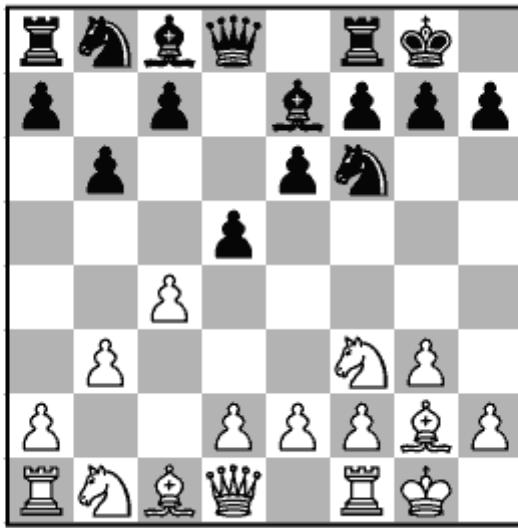
[F322](#): 6...c5

[F323](#): 6...d4

6...c6 is rather passive unless it is linked with a quick ...b5 (compare with the 4...c6 [line](#)). 7 Bb2 (7 d4 is good too) 7...b5 (against quieter development White can either play a pleasant Catalan with d4, or else adopt a set-up with d3, angling for d4; e.g., 7...Nbd7 8 Qc2 {a useful move in both d3 and d4 cases} 8...Re8 and now 9 d4 seems particularly appropriate) 8 Qc2! Nbd7 (8...Bb7 9 c5!) 9 d3 Bb7 (9...Qb6 10 Nbd2) 10 e4 (Pantsulaia-Bruzon, Tromsø Olympiad 2014) with good central play.

F321)

6...b6 (D)



White to play

A logical and highly respected option here, though it does broadcast the fact that Black isn't going for ...b5 or ...d4 options.

7 Bb2 Bb7

7...Ba6 8 Nc3 c6 (8...dxc4?! 9 Ne5) and now 9 d3 blunts the a6-bishop – an option that doesn't exist in similar lines of the Catalan.

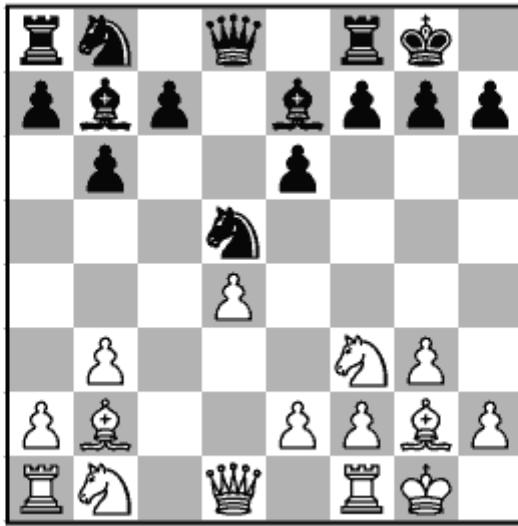
8 cxd5

Otherwise Black might play 8...dxc4 9 bxc4 c5.

8...Nxd5

8...exd5 9 e3!? avoids blocking the b2-bishop's long diagonal for now, giving White extra possibilities for piece-play against the kingside. If Black replies 9...c5, then 10 d4 makes a lot of sense, since the central tension makes the long-range influence of the fianchettoed bishops much more real.

9 d4 (D)



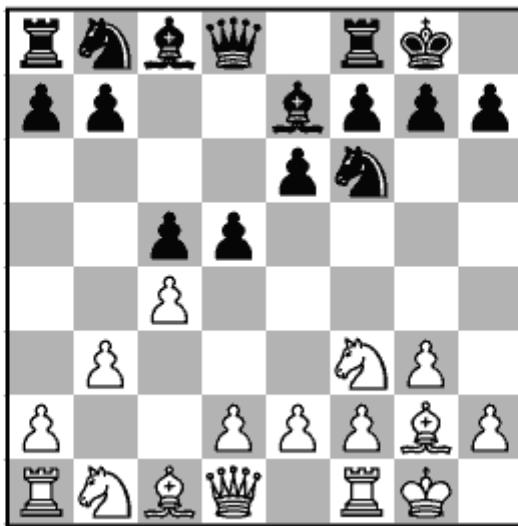
Black to play

Now:

- a) 9...Nd7 10 Re1! (an accurate move, keeping some advantage) 10...c5 11 e4 N5f6 12 Nc3 cxd4 13 Nxd4 Bc5 (13...Ne5 14 Qe2! is tricky for Black, So-Onischuk, USA Ch, Saint Louis 2017) 14 Re2! (this nice second-rank rook manoeuvre deserves a mental note) 14...Ne5 (14...Qb8 15 Rd2 a6 16 Qe2 and Black has not equalized, Grishchuk-Aronian, London 2015) 15 Na4 (Rozum-Lysy, European Ch, Skopje 2019) and Black needs to concede the bishop-pair.
- b) 9...c5 10 Re1!? (preferable to 10 e4 Nf6 11 e5 Nd5 and 10 dxc5 Bxc5 11 Nbd2 Qe7) 10...Nc6 (10...cxd4 11 Nxd4 Nc6 and now 12 Nxc6 Bxc6 13 e4 keeps a slight initiative) 11 dxc5 Bxc5 12 a3 a5 13 Nbd2 leaves White's pieces a little more harmonious.

F322)

6...c5 (D)



White to play

This suggests that Black is interested in playing ...d4, but wants White to invite it first.

7 cxd5

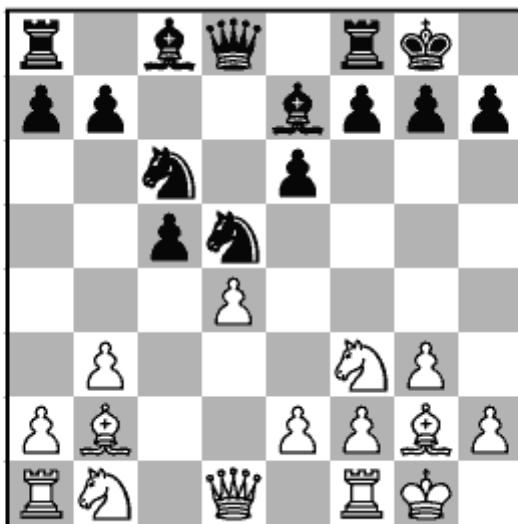
Or:

a) 7 e3 Nc6 and Black waits for Bb2 before playing ...d4.

b) If you just want an unbalanced game, then 7 Bb2 d4 is worth considering, but it is an objectively unpromising Benoni after 8 e3 (8 b4 is merely ‘counterplay’ since White has lost time) 8...Nc6 9 exd4 cxd4 10 Re1.

7...exd5

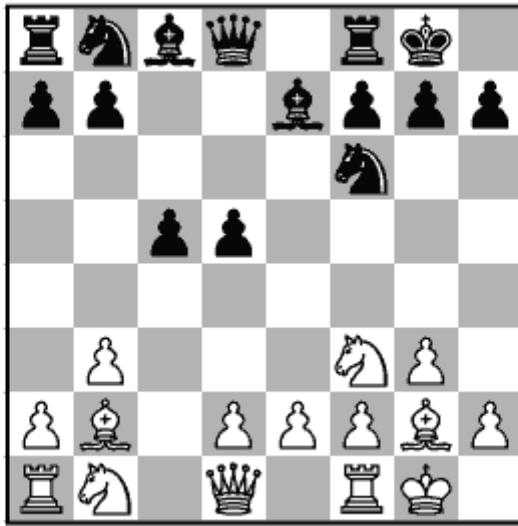
7...Nxd5 8 Bb2 Nc6 (8...b6 9 d4 Bb7 transposes to note ‘[b](#)’ after White’s 9th move in Line F321; 8...Bf6 9 d4! Nc6?! 10 e4 Ndb4 11 a3 Na6 12 e5 Be7 13 Nbd2! cxd4 {Erashchenkov-A.David, Mumbai 2020} 14 Rc1 with excellent play) 9 d4 (*D*) and we have a sort-of Semi-Tarrasch where White benefits from not yet having played Nc3.



Black to play

The game looks quiet, but White’s fianchettoed bishops exert a lot of pressure and careless play will land Black in trouble. 9...cxd4 10 Nxd4 Nxd4 (10...Bd7 11 Na3!?) 11 Qxd4 (the mate threat disrupts Black’s coordination) 11...Bf6 (after 11...Nf6?! 12 Rd1 it is not clear how Black will get his queen’s bishop out) 12 Qd2 Bd7 (12...Nf4!? does not completely solve Black’s problems because 13 gxf4 Qxd2 14 Nxd2 Bxb2 15 Rab1 Bf6 16 Ne4 Be7 17 Rfd1, as in Liu Yan-Zou Chen, Tianjin 2020, makes it hard for him to finish development) 13 Na3 Bc6 14 Nc4 and White’s pieces remain more active; e.g., 14...Bxb2 (or 14...Qc7 15 e4 Bxb2 16 Qxb2 Ne7 17 Rfc1 with b4 ideas) 15 Qxb2 Nb4 (15...Nb6 16 Bxc6 Nxc4 17 Qc3! with bishop vs knight or a better structure, Melkumyan-Lenić, Austrian Team Ch 2015/16) 16 Rfd1 Qe7 17 Ne5 with a slight edge.

8 Bb2 (*D*)



Black to play

8...Nc6

After 8...d4 the untried 9 Na3 looks like a good idea.

9 d4

We have transposed to a sideline of the Tarrasch where White has pleasant chances.

9...Ne4

9...Bg4 10 dxc5 Bxc5 11 Nc3 has scored well for White in practice.

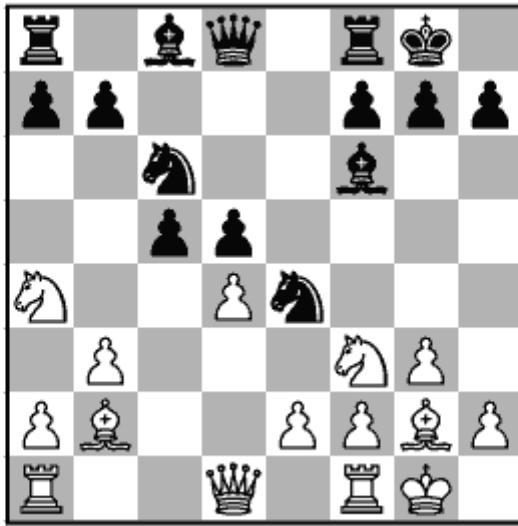
10 Nc3

With 10 dxc5 Bxc5 (10...Bf6 11 Qc1!) 11 Nc3 Nxc3 12 Bxc3 White adopts the motto “the pawn has a choice between being weak on d5 or weak on d4”, but 12...d4 13 Bb2 Bg4 is probably OK for Black due to his piece activity, which is of course a central theme of the Tarrasch.

10...Bf6

10...Bf5 11 Rc1 Nxc3 12 Bxc3 b6 13 dxc5 bxc5 14 Ne1 attacks the centre.

11 Na4 (D)



Black to play

Now:

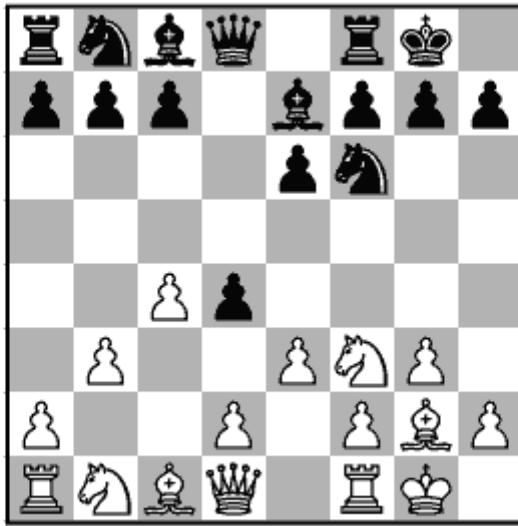
- a) 11...b5? 12 Nxc5! Nxc5 13 Rc1 is a key tactical point, and has occurred in a great many games, even at grandmaster level.
- b) 11...b6 12 dxc5 Bxb2 (12...b5? 13 Bxf6 Qxf6 14 Qxd5!, Uhlmann-Kl.Müller, East German Ch, Görlitz 1972) 13 Nxb2 bxc5 14 Na4 with pressure on the hanging pawns.
- c) 11...Re8 12 Rc1 changes little, as 12...b6 13 dxc5 Bxb2 14 Nxb2 Nb4 (14...bxc5 15 Na4 Ba6 16 Re1! c4 17 bxc4 Bxc4 18 Nd2 Nxd2 19 Qxd2 Rc8 20 Nc3 slightly favours White, Moriarty-Gromotka, corr. 2018) 15 a3 Na2 16 Rc2 Ba6? 17 Na4 b5 (D.Gurevich-Christiansen, USA Ch, Seattle 2003) 18 Nb2! b4 19 Qa1! just gets Black in trouble.
- d) 11...cx d4 12 Nxd4 Bd7 (12...Bxd4 13 Bxd4 Bf5 14 e3 is similar) 13 Rc1 Qe7 14 Nxc6 (14 Nb5 Nb4!?) 14...Bxc6 15 Bd4 (Serper-Nenashev, Tashkent 1992) with a typical Tarrasch situation: Black must play carefully or else the IQP will become a problem.

F323)

6...d4

This thrust is more attractive now that White has played the slow move b3, but not so much as it would be if he had also played Bb2, a particularly ineffective move in many Benoni structures.

7 e3 (D)



Black to play

7...c5

7...Nc6 seeks to keep d4 as an outpost for the black pieces, but 8 exd4 Nxd4 9 Bb2 is not so easy for Black:

- a) 9...Nxf3+ 10 Qxf3 Rb8 11 Qe2! (11 d4 b5! is Black's idea) 11...b6 (Botvinnik-Ståhlberg, Amsterdam Olympiad 1954) 12 d4 with an edge for White.
- b) 9...c5 already looks wrong because an exchange of a pair of knights is in general helpful for the Benoni player, whose structural 'capacity' is limited. 10 d3 (planning to exchange on d4 and then attack the pawn with the other knight) 10...Qb6 (10...Nc6 11 d4; 10...Re8 11 Na3; 10...Bd6 11 Nbd2 e5 12 b4!?) 11 Nxd4 cxd4 12 Na3 and holding White back is unlikely to prove much fun for Black.
- c) After 9...Bc5 10 Ne5!, avoiding exchanges, it turns out that the pseudo-outpost on e5 is more influential than the real one on d4. White plans Re1 and Nc3; e.g., 10...Qd6 11 Re1 Rd8 12 Nc3 (Gareev-Wang Qibiao, Philadelphia 2019; intending Na4) 12...Ba3 (after 12...c6, one exciting idea is 13 Na4!? Ba3 14 c5 Bxc5 15 Nxc5 Qxc5 16 Rc1 Qa5 17 Rc4 Nf5 18 Qa1! suddenly with a very dangerous attack) 13 Bxa3 Qxa3 14 Ne2 and with the blockading knight gone, White will enjoy excellent prospects; e.g., 14...Qd6 15 Nxd4 Qxd4 16 Qf3 Rb8 17 g4! h6 18 h4.

8 Ne5!? (D)

This very new idea has breathed fresh life into this whole line. At any rate, it poses unusual problems for Black and adds many new strategic themes to a position that had looked a little like a monorail.

The old line, 8 exd4 cxd4 9 Re1 Nc6, is a comfortable reversed Benoni for White, but it is still hard work to create any initiative.



Black to play

8...Qc7

Alternatively:

- a) 8...Qd6?! gives White the extra option, besides 9 f4 (as in Moroni-Lodici, Italian Ch, Padua 2019), of 9 exd4?! Qxd4 10 Re1 leaves the queen exposed to Ba3) 10 Qe2 Nfd7 (10...Qxa1? 11 Nc3 and Ba3 traps the queen) 11 Nd3 followed by Bb2 with a development advantage.
- b) 8...Bd6?! 9 exd4 cxd4 10 f4 Nfd7 Nxd7 12 d3 e5?! (but otherwise d4 comes under pressure) 13 f5 (13 Ba3!?) 13...Rb8 14 Nd2 b6 15 Ne4 Be7 (Zaragatski-Cuenca, Guatemala City 2020) 16 b4 with a Benoni player's dream position.
- c) 8...Ne8?! 9 Na3 f6 10 Nd3 with good play.
- d) 8...Nfd7 9 exd4 cxd4 10 Nxd7 Nxd7 11 d3 and in a Benoni with a pair of knights exchanged, White has more chances to generate long-term pressure; e.g., 11...e5 12 Ba3 Re8 13 Bxe7 Qxe7 14 Nd2 Nc5 15 Ne4 Nxe4 16 Bxe4 (Dizdarević-Kojić, Bosnian Team Ch, Jahorina 2018; intending f4) 16...g6 17 Re1 (avoiding 17 f4?! Bh3) intending Qd2 with good prospects on both wings.
- e) 8...Nbd7 9 exd4 cxd4 10 Nxd7 Qxd7 11 d3 is similar.

9 f4!? (D)

The key follow-up: White seeks control over e5 and has the long-term idea of leaving the d4-pawn stranded. 9 exd4 cxd4 10 Re1 (10 f4 is not good when the white king is more exposed along the a7-g1 diagonal) 10...Nc6 (Gordon-Deac, Gibraltar 2020) offers White little.



Black to play

9...Nfd7

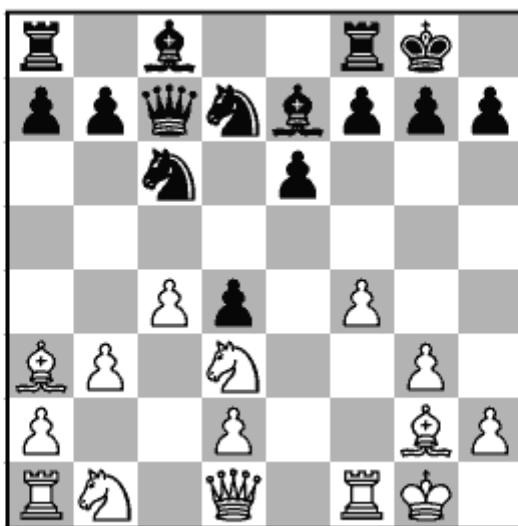
Or 9...Nbd7 10 Nd3 e5, and then:

- a) 11 Na3 a6 (11...e4?! 12 Nf2) 12 Nc2 Bd6! 13 Bb2 (Malikentzos-Koutoukidis, Greek Ch, Thessaloniki 2019) with an interesting fight ahead.
- b) 11 Bb2 Bd6 (11...exf4?!, as in Mons-Urkedal, Internet rapid 2020, is well met by 12 Nxf4!) 12 g4!? is more aggressive, and riskier; e.g., 12...exf4 (12...h6 13 g5 hxg5 14 fxg5 e4 15 Nf4) 13 exd4.

10 exd4

10 Nd3 Nc6 11 Na3 a6 (after 11...e5?! 12 Bb2 Black cannot maintain his pawn-centre, Anton-Svane, Bundesliga 2019/20) 12 Bb2 (12 Qf3?!) 12...b6 13 exd4 cxd4 14 b4 (14 Nb5 axb5 15 cxb5 Bb7) 14...Bb7 15 Nc2 with complex play.

10...cxd4 11 Nd3 Nc6 12 Ba3 (D)



12...Qd8

12...Bd6 offers White a number of tempting options, including 13 Qc1 (intending 14 Bxd6 Qxd6 15 c5) 13...b6 14 c5 bxc5 15 Nxc5 Nxc5 16 Bxc5 Bb7 17 Na3 with a queenside initiative.

13 Bxe7

13 Qc1 e5 should come to the same thing.

13...Qxe7 14 Qc1

Simplification will benefit White, as it helps him exert positional pressure and reduces the value of Black's central majority.

14...e5

14...a5 15 Na3 heading for b5.

15 Re1

15 Qa3 Qe6! (15...Qxa3? 16 Nxa3 is pretty much hopeless for Black) leads to messy play after 16 Qb2 Qg6 17 Nxe5 Ndxe5 18 fxe5 Rd8! or 16 b4 e4 17 b5 Ne7.

15...Nb4 16 Nxb4 Qxb4 17 fxe5 Nc5 18 Bf1

White intends Na3 with the better practical chances, although Black is scraping together play for the pawn.

Index of Variations

Chapter Guide

As Black:

1 e4 d5 – Chapter [1](#)

1 d4 d5:

a) 2 c4 (other moves – Chapter [4](#)) 2...dxc4 3 Nf3 (other moves – Chapter [2](#)) 3...c6 – Chapter [3](#)

b) 2 Nf3 c6 3 c4 (other moves – Chapter [4](#)) 3...dxc4 – Chapter [3](#)

1 Nf3 d5 – Chapter [5](#)

1 c4 c5 – Chapter [5](#)

Other moves – Chapter [5](#)

As White:

1 c4:

a) 1...e5 2 Nc3:

a1) 2...Nc6 3 g3 – Chapter [6](#)

a2) 2...Nf6 and other moves – Chapter [7](#)

b) 1...c5 2 g3 – Chapter [8](#)

c) Other 1st Moves by Black – Chapter [9](#)

Chapter Detail

[1: Scandinavian](#)

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 [Qxd5](#)

A: 3 d4

B: 3 Nf3

C: 3 Nc3 Qd6 4 d4 Nf6 5 Nf3 c6

C1: 6 g3

C2: 6 h3

C3: 6 Ne5 Nbd7

C31: 7 Bf4

C32: 7 f4!?

C33: 7 Nc4

2: Queen's Gambit Accepted

1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4

A: 3 e3

B: 3 e4 e5 4 Nf3 exd4 5 Bxc4 Nc6 6 0-0 Be6

B1: 7 Nbd2

B2: 7 Bb5

B3: 7 Bxe6

3: Slav

1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 Nf3 c6

A: 4 g3

B: 4 Nc3

C: 4 e4

D: 4 a4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e6

D1: 6 e4 Bb4

D11: 7 Bxc4?!

D12: 7 Bg5

D13: 7 e5

D2: 6 e3

E: 4 e3 Be6

E1: 5 a4

E2: 5 Qc2

E3: 5 Nbd2

E4: 5 Be2

E5: 5 Nc3 b5

E51: 6 Be2!?

E52: 6 a4

4: Queen's Pawn

1 d4 d5

A: 2 e4?!

B: 2 Nc3

C: 2 e3

D: 2 Bg5

E: 2 Bf4 c5 3 e3 Nc6

E1: 4 Nf3

E2: 4 c3

E: 2 Nf3 c6

F1: 3 Bg5

F2: 3 g3

F3: 3 Bf4

F4: 3 e3

5: Flank Openings (as Black)

A: 1 Nf3 d5

A1: 2 b3

A2: 2 e3

A3: 2 c4 d4

A31: 3 e3

A32: 3 g3

A33: 3 b4

A4: 2 g3 Bg4 3 Bg2 c6

A41: 4 0-0

A42: 4 c4

B: 1 c4 c5

B1: 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Qb6

B11: 5 Nb5!?

B12: 5 Nb3 e6 6 Nc3 Nf6

B121: 7 g3

B122: 7 a3!

B2: 2 Nc3 Nc6

B21: 3 Nf3

B22: 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7

B221: 5 e4

B222: 5 a3

B223: 5 e3

[B224](#): 5 d3!?

[B225](#): 5 Nf3 [e5](#)

[B2251](#): 6 0-0

[B2252](#): 6 d3

[B2253](#): 6 a3

[6](#): Closed English

1 c4 e5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 [5 e4](#)

[A](#): 5...Nh6!?

[B](#): 5...d6 [6 Nge2](#)

[B1](#): 6...h5

[B2](#): 6...f5

[B3](#): 6...Nge7

[7](#): Other Reversed Sicilians

1 c4 e5 [2 Nc3](#)

[A](#): 2...Bb4!?

[B](#): 2...Nf6 [3 g3](#)

[B1](#): 3...c6

[B2](#): 3...Bb4

[B3](#): 3...d5 4 cxd5 Nxd5 [5 Bg2](#)

[B31](#): 5...Nxc3

[B32](#): 5...Nb6

[8](#): Symmetrical English (as White)

1 c4 c5 [2 g3](#)

[A](#): 2...Nc6

[B](#): 2...Nf6 [3 Bg2](#)

[B1](#): 3...e6

[B2](#): 3...d5

[C](#): 2...e6

[D](#): 2...g6 3 Bg2 Bg7 4 Nc3 Nc6 [5 d3!?](#)

[D1](#): 5...b6

[D2](#): 5...e5

[D3](#): 5...a6

[D4](#): 5...d6

D5: 5...Nf6

D6: 5...e6 6 e4

D61: 6...Nge7

D62: 6...d6

9: English: Other 1st Moves

1 c4

A: 1...b6

B: 1...f5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 g3

B1: 3...e6

B2: 3...g6

C: 1...g6 2 g3 Bg7 3 Bg2

C1: 3...e5

C2: 3...d6

D: 1...c6

E: 1...e6 2 g3 d5 3 Bg2

E1: 3...d4

E2: 3...c6

E3: 3...dxc4

F: 1...Nf6 2 g3

F1: 2...g6

F2: 2...c6 3 Bg2

F21: 3...e5

F22: 3...d5 4 Nf3

F221: 4...Bg4

F222: 4...Bf5

F223: 4...g6

F224: 4...dxc4

F3: 2...e6 3 Bg2 d5 4 Nf3

F31: 4...dxc4

F32: 4...Be7 5 0-0 0-0 6 b3

F321: 6...b6

F322: 6...c5

F323: 6...d4

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