Fundamental Chess Openings

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GAMBIT

First published in English language in the UK by Gambit Publications Ltd 2009
Based on *De wereld van de schaakopeningen*, published in three volumes in Dutch language by Tirion Uitgevers BV

ISBN-13: 978-1-906454-13-5
ISBN-10: 1-906454-13-2

DISTRIBUTION:
Worldwide (except USA): Central Books Ltd, 99 Wallis Rd, London E9 5LN, England.
Tel +44 (0)20 8986 4854 Fax +44 (0)20 8533 5821. E-mail: orders@Centralbooks.com

Gambit Publications Ltd, 99 Wallis Rd, London E9 5LN, England.
E-mail: info@gambitbooks.com
Website (regularly updated): www.gambitbooks.com

Edited by Graham Burgess
Typeset by Petra Nunn
Cover image by Wolff Morrow
Printed in Great Britain by The Cromwell Press Group, Trowbridge, Wilts.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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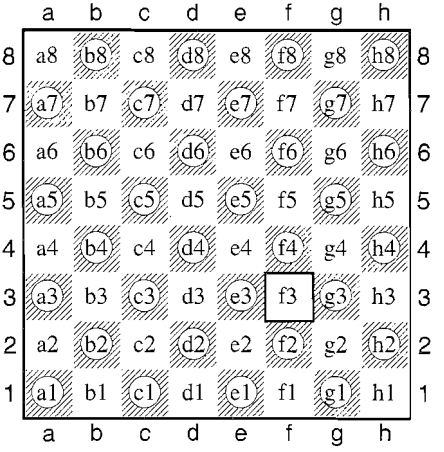
Symbols and Notation

x	capture
+	check
++	double check
#	checkmate
!!	brilliant move
!	good move
!?	interesting move
?!	dubious move
?	bad move
??	blunder
0-0	castles kingside
0-0-0	castles queenside
D)	see next diagram

♔	king
♕	queen
♖	rook
♗	bishop
♘	knight

Algebraic Notation



Moves are shown by giving the piece symbol followed by the destination square. For instance, if a knight moves to the square marked in the diagram, this is written as ♘f3 in algebraic notation. If two pieces of the same type can move to the same square, more information is given. For instance, if there are knights on g1 and e5, then the one on e5 moving to f3 is written as ♘ef3.

For pawn moves, only the arrival square is given (for example, e4 means that a pawn moves to the e4-square). For pawn captures, the file the pawn is leaving is also given. Thus exf4 means that a pawn on the e-file makes a capture that brings it to the f4-square.

Introduction

In the colossal body of chess literature, no aspect of the game has been treated as extensively as th openings. In varying degrees of expertise, clarity and depth, thousands of books discuss ever imaginable and unimaginable opening the game of chess has to offer. This is a process that wil never stop. As long as a particular opening is being played, its variations will be worked out deepe and deeper and assessments will be modified on the basis of these new experiences. As long a chess is alive, its opening theory will also be alive and new books will be needed to document all o this new life.

This book intends to introduce the reader to this strange but fascinating world, the world of open ing theory. There will be no long sequences of moves, no complicated analysis and no real attempt t keep up with the very latest developments. Instead I shall attempt to clarify the background, the gene sis and the development of all major openings and try to show how they are much more intercon nected and based on the same ideas and insights than many people think. This approach makes thi book a very different one from the usual opening manuals. It could perhaps be said to precede them. I it has the effect on the reader that it whets his appetite for these 'usual' opening books, or at leas makes him understand them a little bit better, this book will have fulfilled its purpose.

What is Opening Theory?

Everyone who devotes even the tiniest amount of thought to his first move not only makes a star with that particular game but also with the development of opening theory. From that moment on every new game will confront him with the starting position again and therefore with his earlie thoughts on it. Also he will sooner or later find out that millions of other players have pondered ex actly the same problems and, whether he wants to or not, he will to some extent start comparing hi own ideas about how to start a game with theirs.

This means that opening theory arises quite naturally with the start of a game. No one can avoi it. It ends, equally naturally, with the end of a game. If we pursue our thinking about the openin position logically and systematically, while accepting only the highest possible degree of certainty as a satisfactory result, we cannot end our investigation unless we are sure we have reached either winning or a drawn position. Seen in this light, thinking about the starting position involves a thor ough examination of the middlegame and endgame as well.

It could be said then, that opening theory does not really exist, at least not as something separat from other aspects of the game. Ultimately, opening theory comprises *all* theory.

However, since the human brain and even the computer is still not capable of completely seein through (and thereby destroying) chess as a whole, in practice opening theory does not end with a empty board but in positions where there is a certain consensus about how they should be assessed for instance 'chances are equal' or 'White (or Black) has the advantage'.

Sometimes a question can be answered with total confidence. In the position after 1 e4 there i some room for discussion on how good or bad 1...g5 is (though not much), but if White continues d4 here, there can be no question on the value of 2...f6 because 3 ♕h5# is then mate. End of game end of theory.

But in most cases an assessment is merely a temporary stop. The moment somebody starts ques tioning it, the argument continues. Until the next temporary stop is reached.

And so, ever since the beginnings of chess, every single chess-player has contributed something to that gigantic construction called opening theory. This brings us to the next question.

How Much Theory Should a Player Know?

The most severe answer to this has to be 'everything', the softest 'as much as you like' and the profoundest 'nothing'. All three are correct.

Knowledge of opening theory is a double-edged sword. The player who knows a lot will undoubtedly profit by his knowledge, but he may also live in constant fear of meeting an opponent who knows even more. Everyone who has studied opening theory in depth will have learned that, no matter how well you do your work, there is always the possibility of having overlooked something or of not having looked deep enough. Trying to keep abreast of the latest developments, reading everything, keeping a close watch on the Internet, makes you very knowledgeable but also acutely aware of the possibility of missing something. In short, he who lives by the sword shall die by the sword.

It is therefore of the utmost importance for a chess-player to find his own personal balance between knowing too much and knowing too little. The purpose of studying opening theory should not be accumulating any set amount of knowledge, but being content with whatever knowledge one has. For someone with a natural flair for study, it may be perfect to work on openings all the time. For someone who is much less scientifically minded, even the slightest attempt to study openings may well be superfluous and even detrimental to his game.

But there is another aspect of studying opening theory to be mentioned. Anyone with even the slightest intellectual bent of mind (and which chess-player isn't?) may find getting to know a little bit about opening theory very interesting. Even without any ambition to improve your results and independent of your level of play, you may simply find the study of openings very enjoyable. You may also discover that this has absolutely nothing to do with memorizing variations or the need to occupy yourself with chess more than you want to.

This sheer fun is in my view an essential element of studying opening theory. It is my hope that this book will make some of this pleasure visible and perceptible. The book contains an overview of all major openings, how they have evolved through the years and how they are looked upon today, early in the 21st century. I shall be just sketching the outlines and will be very concise, but perhaps this is precisely the way to convey the fascination that opening theory has always had for me. Opening theory has been an almost inexhaustible source of pleasure for me throughout my active chess years. I sincerely hope it may be the same for you.

The First Move

The two most important opening moves by far are **1 e4** and **1 d4**. By playing either of these classical moves, White uses his right to open the game to occupy as large a portion of the centre as possible. He also opens lines and diagonals for his queen and one of his bishops and creates a possible square of development for one of his knights.

Slightly more modest, yet still very respectable, are **1 c4** and **1 ♘f3**. With these moves, White does not immediately occupy any of the centre squares (e4, d4, e5 and d5) but he controls them, which is strategically just as important. He does this from the side or, in military terms, on the flank. That is why these two opening moves are called Flank Openings.

It is mainly on these four moves that the grand structure of opening theory has been erected. Bordering on that structure (in the grounds so to speak) are the modest cottages of **1 g3**, **1 b3**, **1 f4** and **1 ♘c3**, while with other moves we gradually get bogged down in the marshlands surrounding the estate, lands which have hardly been made inhabitable and perhaps had better remain so.

We shall start our investigation with 1 d4.

1 d4

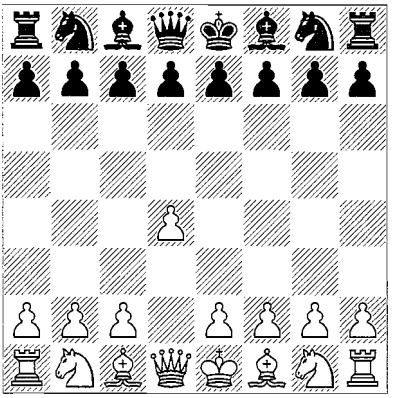
Speaking in very general terms, one might say this is the more strategically orientated of White's two main opening moves. If, on your classical opening move, the equally classical symmetrical reply is what you expect, then you know that after 1 e4 e5 you will immediately be able to attack an undefended pawn with 2 ♘f3 (or the much more radical 2 f4). White then has an obvious object of attack which makes the situation relatively clear and straightforward.

After 1 d4 d5 things are very different because Black's pawn on d5 is securely defended. Yet on closer inspection it turns out that White is able to attack Black's central stronghold, mainly because of the possibility of 2 c4. This attack has a different feel and is slower than White's plans in the equivalent position after 1 e4 e5. It is based on a long-term positional plan and therefore more of a strategic nature. That is why 1 d4 did not really flourish until the rise of positional play in the late 19th century. Until then 1 e4 was by far the most popular move.

This means that practically from the start, theory of the 1 d4 openings has been developed by players whose general outlook on chess was similar to ours today. That is why almost all of these openings are still very much alive, which can hardly be said of the 1 e4 complex. Especially in the 1 e4 e5, section quite a lot of the old theory has by now been shelved permanently.

1 d4 *(D)*

B



Black's most classical reply has already been mentioned: **1...d5**. Until about 1920, this was by far the most highly regarded and in some periods practically the only 'approved' move. The crucial position arises if White then plays **2 c4**, the **Queen's Gambit**. Black's principal defences to this set-up have grown into three major, independent openings: the **Queen's Gambit Declined** (**2...e6**), the **Slav Defence** (**2...c6**) and the **Queen's Gambit Accepted** (**2...dxc4**). These openings will be the subject of the first three chapters of this book. In the fourth I shall give an overview of Black's less popular replies to 2 c4 and of White's alternatives to 2 c4.

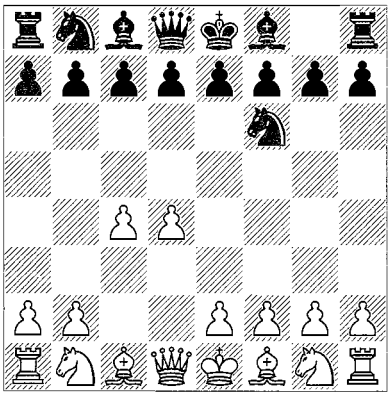
Around 1920 the classical move 1...d5 began to be seriously challenged by the rise of an alternative: **1...♘f6**. Hesitant at first, suffering much scorn and sarcasm, then quickly gathering momentum and eventually quite triumphantly, this move has risen to the top of the bill.

Traditional theory had stated that 1...♘f6, although it does have the merit of controlling e4 and thus preventing 2 e4, had little more to offer against the logical **2 c4** *(D)* than a hasty retreat to the safe ground of the Queen's Gambit with 2...e6 followed by 3...d5 and therefore had little independent significance.

In due course it became clear, however, that Black does not have just one, but several important possibilities. In fact, the position after 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 turned out a real goldmine of new openings. Most of these rose to prominence shortly after World War II and 1...♘f6 has been Black's most popular defence to 1 d4 ever since.

To begin with, it was discovered that Black has **2...e6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4**, the **Nimzo-Indian Defence**. Then it turned out that Black has two alternatives to 3...d5 if White plays **3 ♘f3** instead

B



of 3 ♘c3, namely **3...b6**, the **Queen's Indian Defence**, and **3...♗b4+**, the **Bogoljubow Defence** or **Bogo-Indian**. All three have developed into very reliable openings, which are unlikely ever to disappear again.

Even more spectacular was the gradual acceptance of **2...g6**. No fewer than two new openings were introduced here, both equally important today and equally forceful: after **3 ♘c3** the move **3...♗g7** produces the **King's Indian Defence**, while **3...d5** is the **Grünfeld Defence**.

Finally, Black also has the possibility of **2...c5**, which is called the **Benoni**. This opening contains a surprisingly large number of subvariations, all offering Black an interesting game.

All of these openings will get a chapter of their own. We shall then consider some minor alternatives on Black's second move and we shall see what happens if White refrains from playing 2 c4.

Apart from 1...d5 and 1...♘f6, Black has several other replies, of which **1...f5**, the **Dutch Defence**, is the most important, at least in a historical sense. In the 19th century, this opening was considered the only reasonable alternative to the classical 1...d5. It was ranked far above 1...♘f6 until that move became popular around 1920. The rise of the Indian openings pushed the Dutch Defence into the background, but there it has held a respectable position ever since.

1...d5, 1...♘f6 and 1...f5 are moves that prevent the opponent from taking up the ideal central pawn-formation by playing 2 e4, which is what White would undoubtedly do if Black were to push his clock without making a move. And yet, the term 'ideal central pawn-formation' is perhaps a misleading one. It is not only a matter of *how* White (or Black) places his pawns in the centre, it is equally important (and perhaps even more so) what he can *do* with those centre pawns in any given situation. A broad pawn-centre can be strong, but it can also be vulnerable. It is strong if it cramps the enemy position or if it forms a base for an attack. It is vulnerable if it is *being* attacked, and it is weak when it crumbles as a result of that attack.

It is a perfectly legitimate opening strategy for Black to let White build up a central pawn-formation to his liking. If he does so without a plan and the necessary determination to fight back at the first opportunity, however, opening theory will regard this as a betrayal of its principles and turn its back on the offender. But if he acts with a plan and with determination, the result may be a fascinating opening struggle. In that case Black allows his opponent to form a broad pawn-centre only with the firm intention to annihilate it.

The major representatives of this category of openings are **1...e6**, **1...d6** and **1...g6**. A respectable body of theory has been developed around all three of these moves, especially in the last three decades, but to put this into perspective (for, after all, this is still only a fraction of the theory attached to the 'big' 1 d4 openings) I have condensed this into a single chapter.

Queen's Gambit Declined

1 d4 d5
2 c4 e6

The Queen's Gambit Declined is one of the oldest 1 d4 openings and has a long history. As long ago as the 19th century, when 1 e4 was still by far the most popular move, 1...d5 2 c4 e6 was the accepted reply to the far less respected 1 d4. With the rise of positional chess, attention shifted heavily to 1 d4 and the Queen's Gambit Declined automatically became the most important of all openings. In the 1927 match for the World Championship between Alekhine and Capablanca, for instance, the Queen's Gambit Declined was played in 32 of the 34 games (and 1 e4 only once). No doubt as a reaction to this one-sidedness, a much broader range of openings was developed after this, but the Queen's Gambit Declined has always remained important, simply because it is regarded as an intrinsically sound and trustworthy way of playing.

Black prepares to recapture on d5 with his e-pawn if necessary, while at the same time opening a diagonal for the king's bishop. He thus holds his ground in the centre and sets up a very natural plan of development for his pieces.

White now has two plausible moves, **3 ♘c3** and **3 ♘f3**. The main significance of 3 ♘f3 lies in preparing the **Catalan Opening**, which arises after 3...♘f6 4 g3 and will be dealt with at the end of this chapter.

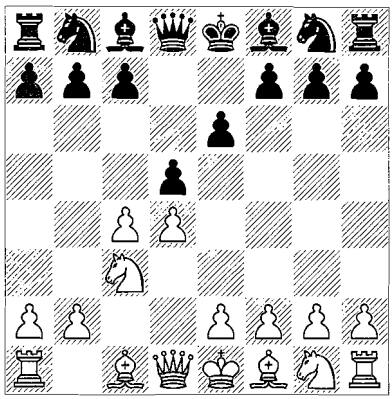
3 ♘c3 *(D)*

This is the most usual move, which brings us to our first major parting of the ways:

With **3...c5** Black claims an equal share of the centre at once. This is called the **Tarrasch Defence**.

He can also play **3...c6**. This move is based on a very clever idea and is much more aggressive than it looks. This is the **Noteboom** (or **Abrahams**) **Variation**.

B



Then we have the simple developing moves **3...♘f6** and **3...♗e7**. It is with either of these that the Queen's Gambit Declined proper is reached.

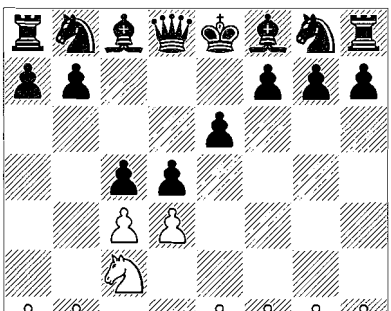
Finally, the move **3...♗b4** has been played on and off, especially in the 1990s. This is an attempt to combine two different openings, the Queen's Gambit Declined and the Nimzo-Indian Defence. Black keeps all options open to go either way depending on White's reply, a strategy that may well unsettle an opponent with a narrow opening repertoire. Theory has not yet managed to get a firm grip on this line, but one of White's best options seems to be 4 a3. By forcing his opponent's hand, White attempts to turn the situation around and use whatever Black plays (after 4...♗xc3+ 5 bxc3) to achieve a favourable variation of the Nimzo-Indian.

Tarrasch Defence

3 ... c5 *(D)*

This was regarded as the only correct move by Siegbert Tarrasch (1862-1934), one of the world's best players in his day and an extremely influential theoretician. His basic assertion was that White cannot very well take on d5 because

W



that would give Black "the advantage of an isolated d-pawn after 4 cxd5 exd5". Tarrasch valued open lines and freedom of movement for his pieces so highly that he considered it irresponsible for White to play like this and judged 4 e3 to be the best move, whereupon it was of course Black's turn to avoid making the same mistake by taking on d4. His view of the situation was that both players should wait for a favourable opportunity to break the tension in the centre.

Since then, the evaluation of the isolated queen's pawn has changed considerably. Pawns may become weak, especially when they are isolated. The judging of these positions could be said to have become a very personal affair and it is only natural that some famous grandmasters have often and successfully used the Tarrasch Defence (for example, Spassky and Kasparov) while others have never even tried it.

4 cxd5

4 e3 is hardly ever played nowadays, yet some positions resulting from this move are still relevant because they may also arise from very different openings. The position after 4...♘f6 5 ♘f3 ♘c6, for instance, is often reached via the Symmetrical English; e.g., 1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 ♘c3 ♘c6 4 e3 e6 5 d4 d5. White then usually takes on d5 anyway but the subtle waiting move 6 a3 is popular as well, when Black often adopts the same strategy by playing 6...a6. In this position White has another useful waiting move in 7 b3 (in the best tradition of Tarrasch!) though this is also a good moment for releasing the tension and developing the queenside with 7 dxc5 ♗xc5 8 b4 and 9 ♗b2.

4 ... exd5

This recapture seems natural, yet Black ha the option of trying to grab the initiative by sac rificing a pawn: **4...cxd4**. This is called th **Schara-Hennig Gambit** and its main line run 5 ♕xd4 ♘c6 (I suspect being able to play thi beautiful move is all the justification that quit a number of Schara-Hennig fans need) 6 ♕d exd5 7 ♕xd5 ♗d7 8 ♘f3 ♘f6 9 ♕d1 ♗c5 10 e ♕e7 11 ♗e2 0-0-0 12 0-0 g5. There is a shar middlegame ahead which offers rather mor scope for short-term tactical calculations tha for considerations of a positional nature.

5 ♘f3 ♘c6 *(D)*

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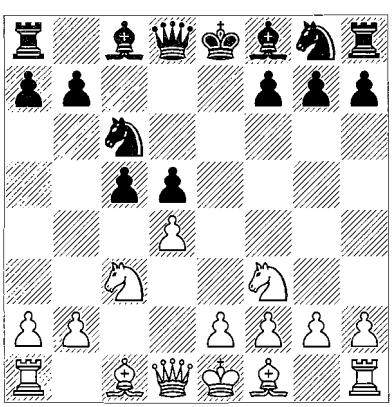


6 g3

Decades of practical experience have turne this into the main line of the Tarrasch Defence The alternative **6 e3** ♘f6 is not unimportant, bu it is usually reached via other openings. White' standard continuations are 7 ♗e2 and 7 ♗b5 These variations are not as sharp or as deepl worked out as the ones arising from 6 g3.

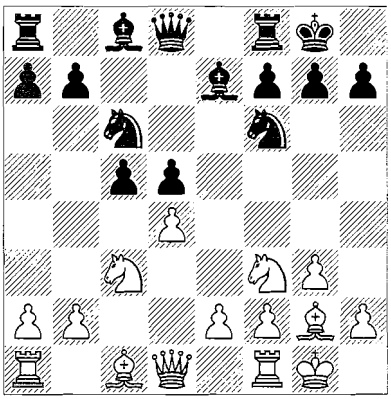
6 ... ♘f6

The provocative move **6...c4**, which give the game a totally different face, is an importan and interesting alternative. This is called th **Swedish Variation**. Black takes a somewha intimidating step forward on the queenside an tries to cramp his opponent's position. Whit has two standard strategies at his disposal t try to break up Black's pawn-formation: b3 an – even more forceful – a well-timed e4 and pla

is likely to revolve around either of these. After 7 ♗g2 ♗b4 8 0-0 ♘ge7 the thrust 9 e4 is already possible for White regains his pawn after 9...♗xc3 10 bxc3 dxe4 11 ♘d2.

7 ♗g2 ♗e7
8 0-0 0-0 *(D)*

W



This is the most important starting position of the Tarrasch Defence. No other opening offers Black such free and easy development for his pieces. One might easily be led to believe that it was actually Black who started the game! In fact White's only chance lies in putting pressure on Black's d-pawn, but although this is White's *only* option it is also a very dangerous one, especially in the hands of a skilled positional player, so it would be wrong to assume that everything is going Black's way in this position. Whether one prefers White or Black is – at least to a certain extent – a matter of taste.

A large number of moves have grown into major variations here. **9 ♗e3**, **9 ♗f4**, **9 b3** and even the at first sight rather unimpressive **9 a3** are not bad, yet the outstanding main lines are **9 dxc5** ♗xc5 10 ♗g5 and **9 ♗g5**. After the latter move, Black has a choice of 9...♗e6, 9...c4 and 9...cxd4 10 ♘xd4 h6. Some of these lines have been analysed deep into the endgame, but this should not be as alarming as it sounds since play is of a very logical nature here which makes the variations fairly easy to understand.

Noteboom (or Abrahams) Variation

3 ... c6 *(D)*

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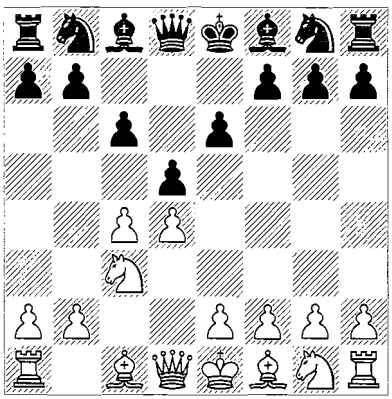

This innocent-looking little move is in fact the first step into one of the most exciting variations the world of chess openings has to offer.

4 ♘f3

By playing this natural move, flexible and aimed at a development of his pieces, White allows the Noteboom Variation, which is also known as the Abrahams Variation.

There are three major alternatives, the most popular one being **4 e3**. This normally leads to the Meran Variation of the Semi-Slav Defence (page 33) after 4...♘f6 5 ♘f3, but Black may also choose to go for a relatively favourable version of the Stonewall Variation of the Dutch Defence (page 175) by playing ...f5.

4 cxd5 is an attempt to reach the Exchange Variation (page 22), but White's options are limited here as compared to the 'regular' ways to reach this line. After 4...exd5 the move 5 ♗g5 is not possible while 5 ♗f4 allows 5...♗d6, giving Black a much easier game than in the Exchange Variation proper.

4 e4 is very interesting. This is a totally logical move, which has one disadvantage only, i.e. 4...dxe4 5 ♘xe4 ♗b4+. Now the retreat 6 ♘c3 offers little hope of an advantage because it gives Black the opportunity for a counter-thrust in the centre: 6...c5. The critical move is 6 ♗d2, sacrificing one or even two pawns after 6...♕xd4 7 ♗xb4 ♕xe4+ 8 ♗e2 (or 8 ♘e2). White has a sound lead in development, but Black's position has no real weaknesses. After some years of great popularity during the 1990s, White seems to have lost interest in this gambit.

4 ... dxc4 *(D)*

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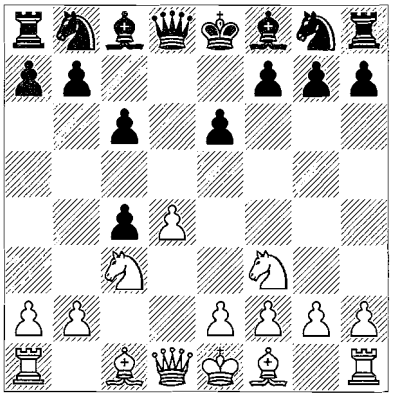

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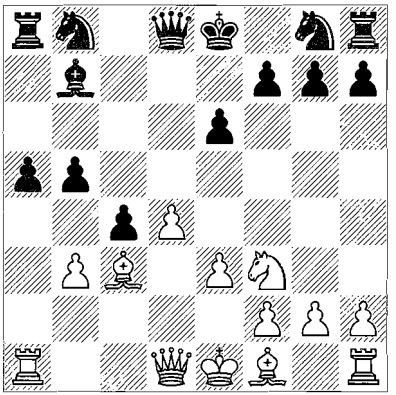

Taking on c4 is a major theme in many variations of the Queen's Gambit, its consequences being subtly different in almost every case.

5 e3

What makes this particular line so surprisingly uncontrollable is that this seemingly modest and reticent reply to Black's capture on c4, is in reality the starting point of the truly mind-boggling complications of the Noteboom Main Line. The seemingly more aggressive **5 e4** is less forcing (Black replies 5...b5 6 a4 ♗b4) and considerably less popular, as is **5 ♗g5**, though both these moves may well be worth some deeper investigation. **5 a4** has no independent significance after 5...♗b4 6 e3 (or 6 e4) 6...b5.

5 ... b5
6 a4 ♗b4
7 ♗d2

White manages to win back the pawn because he still has the break b3 up his sleeve, but the real point of the Noteboom is that Black has a particularly venomous answer to this.

7 ... ♗b7

7...a5, based on exactly the same idea, has also been played. Theory has not quite decided yet what the most accurate move is, but they usually lead to the same position, shown in the next diagram.

8 axb5 ♗xc3
9 ♗xc3 cxb5
10 b3 a5 *(D)*

This is the point and the reason why the Noteboom Variation has deserved its prominent place in chess theory. After 11 bxc4 b4 12 ♗b2 ♘f6 it turns out that Black has managed to drop two connected passed pawns on the queenside behind the enemy lines, so to speak. These may well intimidate a *pessimistically* inclined player of the white pieces to a disastrous degree, yet the *optimistically* inclined will look at his mass of central pawns and judge the position quite differently. Whoever wants to play this line (with either colour) will need a good deal of theoretical knowledge or a lot of self-confidence and preferably both.

3...♘f6 / 3...♗e7

3 ... ♘f6 *(D)*

This simple and natural developing move already constituted the main line of the Queen's Gambit Declined as far back as the 19th century and this situation has never really changed. A subtle modern variation on it is **3...♗e7**. This move is intended to limit the opponent's options. If White continues 4 ♘f3 then Black will simply play 4...♘f6 and return to the main lines. By preventing ♗g5, if only for one move, Black hopes to take the sting out of the Exchange Variation. It is precisely here, however, that the critical test for 3...♗e7 lies, for White can return the favour by playing 4 cxd5 exd5 5 ♗f4. Because Black has already put his bishop on e7, the natural reply 5...♗d6 is now slightly less attractive (though it is still not bad and actually played quite often) which means that Black is also limited in his choices. He will want to develop his queen's bishop to f5 but first 5...c6 6 e3 ♗f5 7 g4 and secondly 5...♘f6 6 e3 ♗f5 7 ♕b3 need to be properly evaluated.

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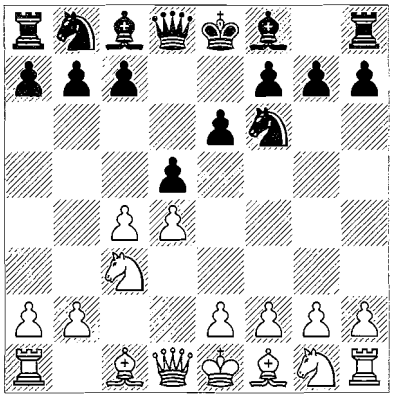

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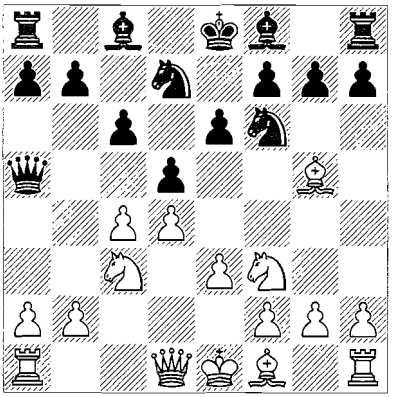

These lines are pretty sharp, but the amount of theory involved is moderate compared to the 'regular' Exchange Variation.

Three main lines have developed from this position. The oldest and most straightforward one is **4 ♗g5**, then there is the flexible **4 ♘f3** and finally we have **4 cxd5**, the **Exchange Variation**.

3...♘f6 4 ♗g5

4 ♗g5

Many different variations have evolved from this position, especially in the first decades of the 20th century, when the Queen's Gambit Declined reigned supreme in the world of chess openings. Most of these lines have now been practically forgotten.

Black has, for instance, the possibility **4...c5** 5 cxd5 cxd4, called the **Dutch Gambit** (or the **Dutch-Peruvian Gambit**, due to the Peruvian player Canal's alternative idea 5...♕b6). This was still moderately popular as late as the 1950s, but has now been reduced to a footnote.

Then there is the older still **Cambridge Springs Variation**, which is less risky and fairly popular to this day. It can be reached either by playing **4...♘bd7** 5 e3 c6 6 ♘f3 ♕a5 *(D)* or by **4...c6** 5 e3 ♘bd7 6 ♘f3 ♕a5. Black unpins his king's knight and prepares the aggressive moves ...♗b4 and ...♘e4, both of which should not be underestimated.

White's most cautious reply is **7 ♘d2**, whereupon Black has two options: 7...dxc4 more or less forces the exchange 8 ♗xf6 ♘xf6 after which many players, satisfied with this achievement, will be happy to withdraw their queen (9 ♘xc4 ♕c7), and 7...♗b4 8 ♕c2 0-0 9 ♗e2 and now either 9...c5 or 9...e5, continuing the attack.

A sharper reply is **7 cxd5** ♘xd5 (with the black queen on a5, 7...exd5 would produce an inferior version of the Exchange Variation) 8 ♕d2. White is prepared to sacrifice the pawn that will be lost after 8...♗b4 9 ♖c1 ♘7b6 (followed by 10...♘a4) in order to take over the initiative. This approach is perhaps the most feared nowadays although its consequences are far from clear. Black also has 8...♘7b6, immediately bringing the second knight into the assault on c3, when White also tends to sacrifice a pawn, by 9 ♗d3 ♘xc3 10 bxc3 ♘d5 11 0-0.

In practice many players avoid the Cambridge Springs by transposing to the Exchange Variation with cxd5 on move 5 or 6.

All other variations at Black's disposal start with...

4 ... ♗e7

Just like 3...♘f6, this is a solid and natural move. Black is not in a hurry to try to take over the initiative, and simply develops his pieces instead.

5 e3 0-0
6 ♘f3 *(D)*

This is the starting point for all variations which are based on 4...♗e7. In the course of well over a century the following can be said to have evolved as the main lines: **6...♘bd7**, **6...h6 7 ♗h4 ♘e4**, **6...h6 7 ♗h4 b6** and **6...h6 7 ♗xf6**.

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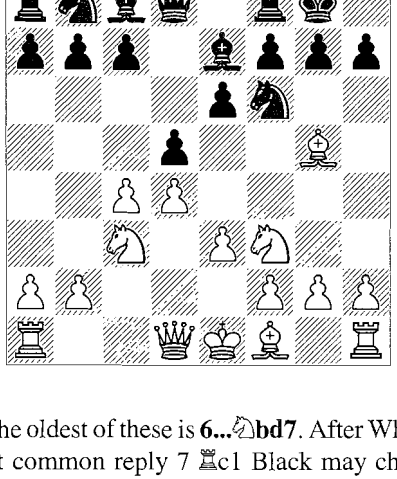

The oldest of these is **6...♘bd7**. After White's most common reply 7 ♖c1 Black may choose 7...c6 8 ♗d3 dxc4 9 ♗xc4 ♘d5, the **Capablanca Variation**. Here we touch upon some of the bedrock theory of the Queen's Gambit Declined. It has remained virtually unchanged since the 1920s yet it is still alive and very interesting. The point is that after the plausible 10 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 11 0-0 ♘xc3 12 ♖xc3 Black continues 12...e5, when he has reached a very acceptable position without any weaknesses. White has tried just about everything to hold on to at least a minimum of initiative. One option is the forcing 13 dxe5 ♘xe5 14 ♘xe5 ♕xe5 15 f4, which has been worked out very deeply. Theory's present favourite, however, seems to be 13 ♕c2 exd4 14 exd4.

Very closely related to the Capablanca Variation is **6...h6 7 ♗h4 ♘e4**, the **Lasker Variation**. Here too Black aims at a fairly uncomplicated middlegame by exchanging some minor pieces. In some cases the similarities with Capablanca's idea are astonishing; for instance, after 8 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 9 ♖c1 c6 10 ♗d3 ♘xc3 11 ♖xc3 dxc4 12 ♗xc4 ♘d7 13 0-0 e5 the only difference from the line given above is that Black's pawn is on h6 instead of h7. A good alternative plan is 13...b6. Perhaps the most principled approach is to play 9 cxd5 (instead of 9 ♖c1), forcing the exchange on c3. After 9...♘xc3 10 bxc3 exd5 White has a very sound strategy in 11 ♕b3 followed by c4 gaining a nice central pawn-majority. Black's reasons for allowing this are the open lines, which allow him an easy and active development of his pieces.

Both these variations are old and respectable *and* still quite fashionable, but the real main line of the Queen's Gambit Declined is now **6...h6 7 ♗h4 b6** *(D)*, the **Tartakower Variation**.

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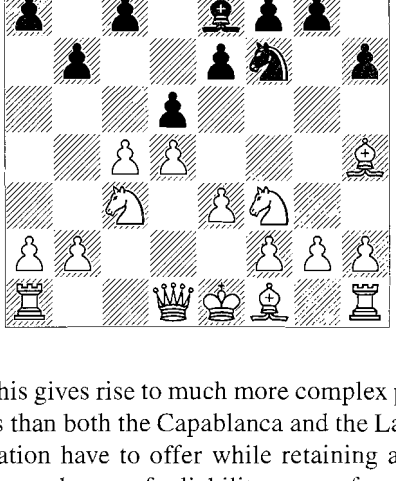

This gives rise to much more complex positions than both the Capablanca and the Lasker Variation have to offer while retaining about the same degree of reliability, a very fortunate combination of characteristics which makes the Tartakower very attractive indeed. In fact there is hardly a world-class player nowadays who has never played it.

White has tried a great number of ideas to gain at least a minimal opening advantage, often extremely subtle and sometimes involving a clever move-order to execute a standard plan in a new form.

Basically White has three different plans at his disposal. The first is to leave Black in peace and to concentrate instead on developing as actively as possible. This attitude may result in a variation like **8 ♗d3** ♗b7 9 0-0 ♘bd7 10 ♕e2 c5 11 ♖fd1. The tension in the centre may be resolved at any moment, but how? This strategy is intrinsically sound but it does require some accuracy and good positional skills in order to be really effective.

The second plan is to do precisely the opposite: White fixes the central pawn-formation immediately by playing **8 cxd5**. This was the main line of the Tartakower until about 1970, but when it became increasingly clear that 8...♘xd5 9 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 10 ♘xd5 exd5 is entirely playable

for Black, mainly because of the discovery that after 11 ♖c1 the somewhat surprising 11...♗e6 is much stronger than 11...♗b7, its popularity dwindled. 11...♗e6 leaves Black free to use the open b-file after 12 ♗e2 c5 13 dxc5 bxc5 14 0-0 ♘d7 for his rooks. Chances are considered equal here.

The third plan (and the most popular one nowadays), is actually a refinement of the second. White waits for 8...♗b7 to be played (this can be done in numerous ways, the most common ones being **8 ♗d3**, **8 ♗e2**, **8 ♖c1** and **8 ♕b3**), he then exchanges bishop for knight on f6 and only *then* does he take on d5. In this type of middlegame it is much more difficult for Black to free his position by means of ...c5 and if he does not achieve this pawn-break he runs the risk of ending up in a slightly passive, if still fairly solid position. Naturally by giving up the bishop-pair White does take a certain amount of long-term positional risk, so this strategy, popular though it is, does require a steady hand.

The reader may have noticed that both the Lasker and the Tartakower Variation are given here as starting with **6...h6**. This is played simply because in many of the resulting positions ...h6 turns out to be a useful move for Black. Inevitably the attempt to 'punish' Black for this insertion by not retreating the bishop and going for **7 ♗xf6** instead has also been investigated. Very similar to the above-mentioned third plan against the Tartakower, White gives up the bishop-pair in order to make it more difficult for Black to get ...c5 in. At the same time a ...b6 set-up (for instance 7...♗xf6 8 ♖c1 b6) is discouraged because White will then normally be just a tempo ahead of a regular Tartakower.

This means that Black will have to think of other methods of tackling the opening problems. Four main lines have been developed, all based on White's choice of move after **7...♗xf6** *(D)*.

These lines are very subtle and need a good deal of positional understanding, but basically they all fit into the simple schedule: White chooses a move to make ...c5 as unattractive as possible, then Black reacts in such a way as to demonstrate that White has made the wrong choice.

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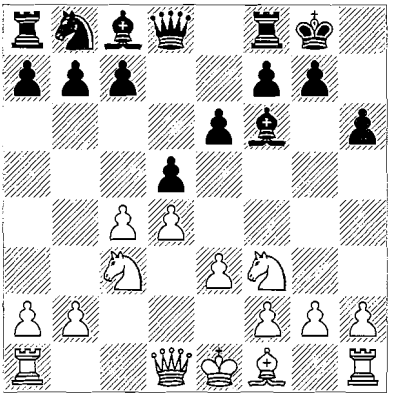

After **8 ♖c1**, an enormously popular move around 1985, 8...c6 9 ♗d3 ♘d7 10 0-0 dxc4 11 ♗xc4 e5 is the main line.

On **8 ♕c2**, intended to make castling queenside possible, Black turns out to be able to play the much longed-for 8...c5 anyway, mainly because of the fearless pawn sacrifice 9 dxc5 ♘c6!.

Subtly different from this, **8 ♕d2**, also with a view to castling queenside, is met by 8...dxc4 9 ♗xc4 ♘d7 with 10...c5 to follow.

Perhaps White's most forceful move (though not necessarily the strongest!) is **8 ♕b3**, attacking Black's pawn on d5. In that case Black will have to look for a specific way to take advantage of the exposed position of the white queen: 8...c6 9 ♖d1 ♘d7 10 ♗d3 and now 10...♕b6, 10...a5 and 10...♖b8 (intending 11...b5) have all been played.

3...♘f6 4 ♘f3

4 ♘f3 *(D)*

This position very often occurs via 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 ("A Nimzo-Indian – 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 – perhaps?") 3 ♘f3 ("No thank you, but I wouldn't mind a Queen's Indian – 3...b6 – or a Bogo – 3...♗b4+.") 3...d5 ("Well, now that you have put your knight on f3 I think I prefer a Queen's Gambit Declined.") 4 ♘c3.

Because 4 ♘f3 applies less direct pressure on Black's central position than 4 ♗g5, Black now has a very large choice. The main lines are **4...♗e7**, **4...♘bd7**, **4...c5**, **4...♗b4** and **4...dxc4**. **4...c6** is also important but this is one of several

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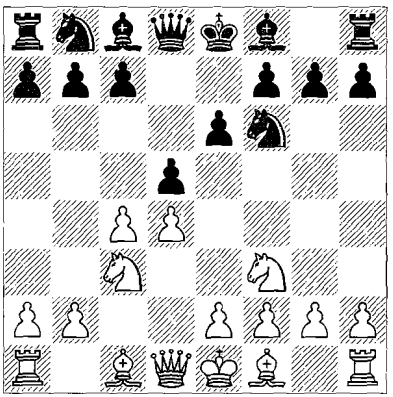

move-orders to reach the Semi-Slav, and will be dealt with in the next chapter.

3...♘f6 4 ♘f3 ♗e7

4 ... ♗e7

Black's most classical move. Now **5 ♗g5** will take us back to the 4 ♗g5 lines, but White has an important alternative which rose to great prominence in the 1990s.

5 ♗f4 *(D)*

On the face of it, this move is less aggressive than 5 ♗g5, but it has the great advantage of not overly encouraging standard simplifying manoeuvres like ...♘e4.

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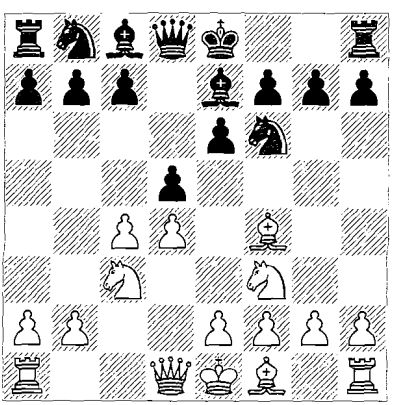

5 ... 0-0

6 e3

Now the 'normal' moves **6...♘bd7**, **6...c6** and **6...b6** have never really caught on. Most of the resulting middlegame positions are regarded as just that little bit less attractive (from Black's point of view) than with a white bishop on g5. On the other hand Black now has a move that is simply bad with a bishop on g5, but is entirely feasible after 5 ♗f4.

6 ... c5

Thus it is only natural that this has become the main line. With White's bishop on f4 instead of g5, Black's d5-pawn is safe.

7 dxc5 ♗xc5 *(D)*

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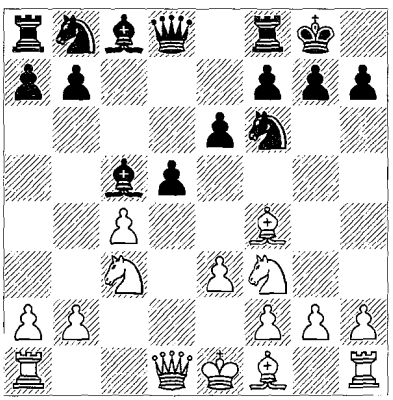
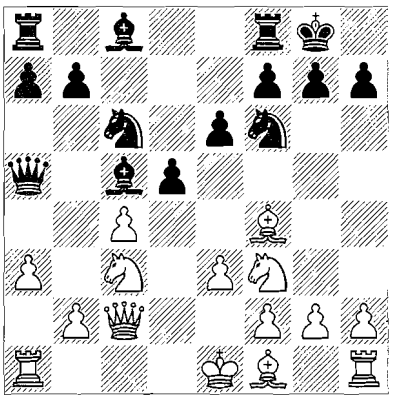


White now has a choice of two fundamentally different plans. The first is to keep the position simple by exchanging on d5. The main line runs **8 cxd5** ♘xd5 9 ♘xd5 exd5 and now both 10 a3 and 10 ♗d3 have been played. 10 a3 stops Black from playing 10...♗b4+. After something like 10...♘c6 11 ♗d3 ♗b6 12 0-0 ♗g4 Black has developed his pieces satisfactorily, but White may still hope to besiege the isolated d-pawn. 10 ♗d3 ♗b4+ pursues the same strategy more fanatically, ignoring the somewhat precarious position of the white king and hoping to take advantage of the now rather loosely placed bishop on b4.

The other and far more popular plan is not to worry about a possible ...dxc4, play **8 a3** or **8 ♕c2**, develop the queenside and increase the pressure on d5 later on. A critical position arises after 8 a3 ♘c6 9 ♕c2 ♕a5 *(D)*.

Black's last move threatens ...♘e4 and forces White to react.

The oldest line in this position goes **10 ♖d1** ♗e7 11 ♘d2 allowing but also forcing Black (in view of the threat of 12 ♘b3) to lash out in

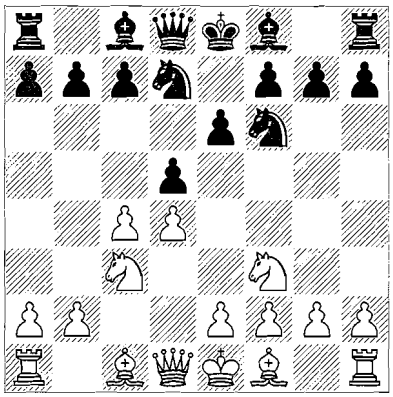


the centre with 11...e5 12 ♗g5 d4. This variation was thoroughly examined and considered acceptable for both sides.

Then, in 1988, **10 0-0-0** was introduced and this became extremely popular almost overnight. After 10...♗e7 both the ferocious attacking moves 11 g4 and 11 h4 *and* the more subtle 11 ♘d2 and 11 ♔b1 all turned out to be very dangerous for Black. It took a few years, but by now Black has managed to work out good defensive lines against all four of these moves and the Queen's Gambit Declined is back from the Intensive Care Unit, but it was mighty close!

3...♘f6 4 ♘f3 ♘bd7

4 ... ♘bd7 *(D)*



This move has not yet established itself sufficiently to get a name, but it is a sound and flexible option which can be played with several ideas in mind.

To begin with, it may be used as an anti-5 ♗f4 weapon since on **5 ♗f4** Black now has the excellent reply 5...dxc4. The white bishop finds itself somewhat awkwardly placed after both 6 e4 ♗b4 and 6 e3 ♘d5, so this is usually avoided.

Against **5 ♗g5** Black has a choice between transposing to the 4 ♗g5 main lines by playing 5...♗e7 or 5...h6 6 ♗h4 ♗e7 (although he has of course committed himself to a ...♘bd7 line), the Ragozin Variation by 5...♗b4 (see page 21) or the Cambridge Springs by 5...c6 6 e3 ♕a5 (see page 15).

The critical test for 4...♘bd7 is **5 cxd5** exd5 6 ♗f4. Again, as in the variation 3...♗e7 (see page 14), because there is a drawback to the natural reply ...♗d6 (in this case of course 6...♗d6 7 ♗xd6 cxd6 would be awkward) White is hoping to achieve a favourable version of the Exchange Variation.

The whole of the 4...♘bd7 line, although it has been known for quite some time, has somehow managed to stay clear of the theoretical steamrollers. This makes it an interesting choice for those who know their way about in the Queen's Gambit and can hope to lure their opponents into unknown territory.

3...♘f6 4 ♘f3 c5

4 ... c5

This is called the **Semi-Tarrasch Variation**, and it indeed bears a close superficial relationship with the line 3...c5. However, the name is at odds with the fact that Tarrasch was attracted to *his* opening, the Tarrasch Defence, by the point that Black is going to play ...exd5 if White ever takes on d5, while in the variation that we are discussing here, Black's aim is to *avoid* an isolated queen's pawn. Hardly a strategy that Tarrasch would have approved of, let alone given his name to! But of course chess opening nomenclature *is* not always logical and this is really a nice illustration of the fact.

However, the strategic idea behind the move 4...c5 is perfectly logical and that is what counts. Black attacks the white central formation in a very straightforward way.

5 cxd5 ♘xd5 *(D)*

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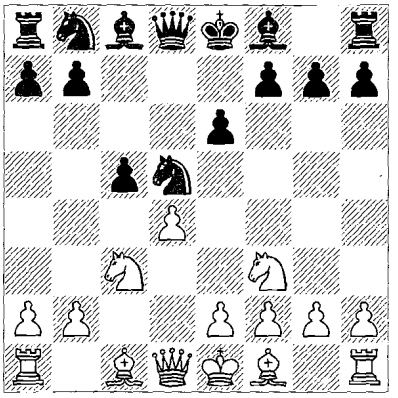

This is the idea. The whole variation has actually more in common with a Grünfeld Defence than with the Tarrasch. Black challenges his opponent to occupy the centre by playing **6 e4**. Such an aggressive attitude is not to everyone's taste, however, and the rather more reserved options **6 e3** and **6 g3** have also grown into proper variations.

After **6 e4** ♘xc3 7 bxc3 cxd4 8 cxd4 ♗b4+ 9 ♗d2 ♗xd2+ 10 ♕xd2 0-0 Black has developed very nicely and it is not clear how strong White's central position really is. The main line goes 11 ♗c4 ♘c6 12 0-0 b6 followed by 13...♗b7. The position seems to be asking for a d5 breakthrough, but its consequences are far from clear. A good variation for players with strong nerves!

Though outwardly less aggressive, **6 e3** also offers White some attacking prospects, but of a different nature. In fact he is inviting Black to play 6...cxd4, when 7 exd4 *(D)* now gives *White* an isolated queen's pawn with all the (latent) attacking chances on the kingside that go with it.

Theory recognizes two main lines here. One is easy development: **7...♗e7** 8 ♗d3 (or 8 ♗c4) 8...♘c6 9 0-0 0-0 10 ♖e1 and now, for instance, 10...♗f6. The other is more aggressive and rather tricky: **7...♗b4**. Now after the natural 8 ♕c2 ♘c6, White may fall into a 'trap' by 9 ♗d3 ♗a5 (threatening 10...♘db4) 10 a3 ♘xc3 11 bxc3 ♘xd4! losing a pawn, but then Black may find that this is actually rather unclear for after 12 ♘xd4 ♕xd4 13 0-0 White has a considerable lead in development which several players

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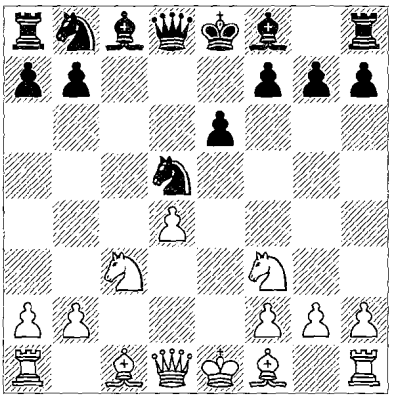

consider sufficient compensation for the material deficit. Nevertheless most people avoid this by developing their king's bishop in a slightly less active way, namely 9 ♗e2, avoiding the knight fork on b4. Also 8 ♗d2 (instead of 8 ♕c2) is often played.

The solid option is **6 g3** *(D)*.

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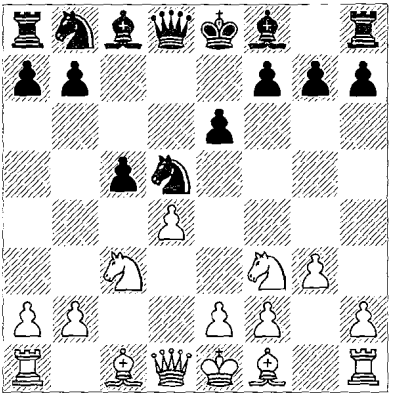

White follows a completely different strategy here. Instead of trying to establish some sort of central dominance, he aims for a symmetrical position with a tiny lead in development and some pressure against b7. After **6...cxd4**, for instance, 7 ♘xd5! ♕xd5 8 ♕xd4 ♕xd4 9 ♘xd4 is considered to be very slightly better for White. Theory at any rate prefers **6...♘c6** 7 ♗g2 and now 7...cxd4 (7...♗e7 8 0-0 brings us to a position discussed via the Keres-Parma Variation of the English Opening on page 210) whereupon 8 ♘xd4 (8 ♘xd5? ♕xd5 would now simply lose a pawn) 8...♘xc3 9 bxc3 ♘xd4 10