

Christof Sielecki

Keep It Simple for Black

**A Solid and Straightforward Chess Opening
Repertoire for Black**

New In Chess 2022

Contents

Preface	6	
Part I	The Caro-Kann 1.e4 c6..... 11	
Chapter 1	Advance Variation	14
Chapter 2	Classical Variation.....	54
Chapter 3	Two Knights Variation	78
Chapter 4	Exchange Variation	95
Chapter 5	Panov Variation.....	110
Chapter 6	Sidelines	137
Part II	The symmetrical 1.d4 d5.....157	
Chapter 7	Queen's Gambit: Carlsbad Variation	160
Chapter 8	Carlsbad theory.....	171
Chapter 9	Queen's Gambit: early ♗g5/♗f4.....	204
Chapter 10	Queen's Gambit: the tricky 4...a6.....	229
Chapter 11	Queen's Gambit: the Catalan	261
Chapter 12	Queen's Gambit: sidelines	295
Chapter 13	London System	309
Chapter 14	Sidelines after 1.d4 d5.....	330
Part III	Defence against 1.c4/1.♗f3/other first moves. 357	
Chapter 15	English with g2-g3.....	359
Chapter 16	English without g2-g3	389
Chapter 17	The flexible 1.♗f3	407
Chapter 18	Other first moves	421
Index of names	441	
Explanation of symbols.....	442	
Biography.....	443	

Preface

Welcome to *Keep it Simple for Black* !

This opening book provides a complete repertoire for the black pieces against all White's opening moves. It includes suggestions against White's main moves 1.e4 and 1.d4, but that's not all. I also cover all the minor opening moves that you may meet. You only need this single book to be confident with the black pieces.

This book is the third one bearing the 'Keep It Simple' title. It all began in 2018 when *Keep It Simple 1.e4* was released; *Keep It Simple 1.d4* followed one year later. Now you are about to dive into *Keep It Simple for Black*.

I aim to become a better author with each new piece of content and give you a great learning experience. Compared to the earlier KIS courses and books, this one has fewer lines but more explanations and guidance. In many cases, I streamlined the content and made learning more accessible. This does not mean it is in any way 'light-weight' or cuts corners. I call it 'lean and mean', focusing on the essential information. I am going as deep as necessary for the main lines and critical challenges to show that Black is in good shape. For chapters like the Caro-Kann Advance or the Catalan, the coverage gets to a level of detail that will make your preparation excellent and competitive on the master level.

Let's talk about the 'Keep It Simple' philosophy. Here is a list of essential points to consider:

- The chosen lines are simple to learn or the most practical available. I want to follow simple recipes, if possible. In some cases, I suggest more ambitious lines or moves that pose more problems for our opponent. Some of the lines are sharp and tactical. In particular, with Black, the spirit of the game is often determined by our opponent's choices. Simple does not mean 'boring'!
- It must be possible to find your way even if you forgot your lines. The book provides guidelines and rules of thumb to understand the concepts better. This makes it easier to find your way, even if you have forgotten your move-by-move preparation.

- All chosen opening lines are fully sound and playable for a wide range of players. I know that players up to the GM level use KIS 1.e4 and KIS 1.d4, as all the lines are well-founded on sound principles and not 'refutable', even by very strong opponents that prepare for the game. The same approach applies to *KIS for Black*.

I suggest mainstream openings that can be played on all levels: from your local town championships to online speed chess to classical time control games against titled opponents. How do these apply to a repertoire for Black, and what else to consider? You must know that you deal with a list of repertoire segments:

1. Defence against 1.e4
2. Defence against 1.d4
3. Defence against 1.♘f3/1.c4 and against rare moves (less critical)

So how to cut down the workload and make it as simple as possible without sacrificing quality? Here are my repertoire choices:

1. The Caro-Kann 1.e4 c6

The Caro-Kann is an ideal choice in many ways. Black plays ...c7-c6 and ...d7-d5, fighting to control the light squares in the centre. The most compelling feature of the Caro-Kann is: it leads to non-symmetrical, exciting positions, but does not require much study of concrete, tactical lines. White does not have many aggressive continuations or tricky gambits they may throw at us. This is a considerable advantage compared to 1.e4 e5, for example. White has dozens of tricky lines that you should know, from the King's Gambit to Italian sidelines to whatnot.

The Caro-Kann has the charm of being no-nonsense but still preserving fighting chances. This quality has led to a revival of the Caro-Kann on all levels. If teenage superstar Alireza Firouzja wants to win with Black, he often chooses the Caro-Kann. Within the realms of this opening, Black retains some flexibility.

I have selected reliable and interesting lines that keep our workload low to keep it simple. We'll fight the Two Knights Variation 2.♘c3 d5 3.♘f3 with 3...dxe4 4.♗xe4 ♘f6, using the same approach as in the Classical after 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♗xe4 ♘f6, both lines that your opponents might be less familiar with.

Against the Advance Variation 2.d4 d5 3.e5 I suggest 3...c5, which is simpler to learn than 3...♙f5 and will often catch your opponents

wrong-footed. At a later stage, you can easily modify parts of the repertoire. Black has plenty of choices against White's systems.

2: The symmetrical 1.d4 d5, intending 2.c4 e6 (QGD)

My recommendation against 1.d4 is the classical reply 1...d5. We immediately place a pawn in the centre and stop White from building a full pawn centre with e4. When you consider playing 1...d5, you need first to decide how to answer White's main option 2.c4, the Queen's Gambit. I suggest playing 2...e6, the 'Queen's Gambit Declined' (QGD).

Let me explain why I think this concept fits well within the 'Keep it Simple' framework. Playing 1...d5, based on the QGD, is considered one of the best replies to 1.d4 and is regularly played by the best players in the world. Black fights for the centre and after 1...d5 2.c4 e6 prepares kingside castling. We develop the kingside quickly and play on the queenside in most cases.

Playing interesting sidelines with surprise value is possible, based on a solid foundation.

The lines 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 a6!? or 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♙g5 dxc4 are examples of this approach. Modifying and developing the repertoire is possible, as there are reliable alternatives everywhere.

3. Defence against 1.c4/1.♘f3 based on QGD – other first moves

If you master the QGD, you have a ready-made foundation to answer 1.c4 and 1.♘f3, White's third and fourth most popular starting moves. Against 1.c4, we'll play 1...e6 and 2...d5, which will often transpose to the QGD, for example after 1.c4 e6 2.♘c3 d5 3.d4. We only need to learn lines that avoid such a transposition, which is manageable. It requires less effort than studying 1.c4 e5, for example. A similar story is 1.♘f3 d5. We don't mind that White can play a quick d2-d4 to transpose to 1.d4 d5 territory. If they decide to play without d2-d4, we only have a small workload to learn these options.

What to do against rare first moves? While this point is less important, it's still useful to consider how to answer White's rare options. Some are easily dealt with, but some (1.b3 and 1.g3 in particular) need attention regarding correct move order. White might still transpose back into 1.♘f3 or 1.c4 territory and we want to avoid getting move-ordered.

Some words about these parts of the repertoire in context. The defences against 1.d4/1.c4/1.♟f3 fit well with the Caro-Kann, but can still be used independently. Similar to the Caro-Kann, Black employs a 'light-square strategy', placing the centre pawns on this colour complex. This frequently leads to similar themes and structures. Good examples are Isolated Queen Pawn (IQP) positions or the 'Carlsbad Structure', which arises after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.cxd5 exd5 and 1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5. We play both sides of this interesting pawn formation in our repertoire.

Despite these structural overlaps, you can only use parts of the repertoire. If you only look for a weapon against 1.d4, you can employ the suggested lines without learning the entire Caro-Kann in addition. It's also possible to only adopt the Caro-Kann and ignore the rest of the book, or use parts of the QGD concept. This is a huge practical advantage, compared to a repertoire approach based on 1.d4 e6, for example. In this case, you'd always need to learn the full French Defence to employ the suggestion against 1.d4. In *KIS for Black*, you are more flexible.

Let's talk about the book structure for a moment. The book has three parts and 18 dedicated chapters in total. Part I and 6 chapters cover the Caro-Kann, Part II and 8 chapters are about the QGD and other 1.d4 lines, Part III and 4 chapters cover other first moves, mostly 1.c4 and 1.Nf3.

As mentioned above, you may only learn parts of the book, so I don't know what part you want to start with and explore first. Within the parts, the chapters are usually sorted by relevance. I'll provide some more information at the introductions for each part.

I hope you will enjoy learning and playing this repertoire. It has served the students on Chessable well and is a cornerstone of my games with Black.

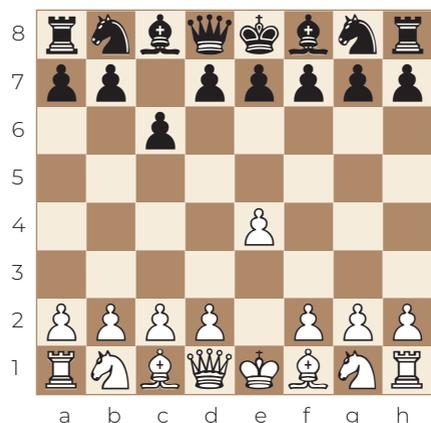
Good Luck with *Keep It Simple for Black*!

Christof Sielecki
Dinslaken, Germany
October 2022

PART I

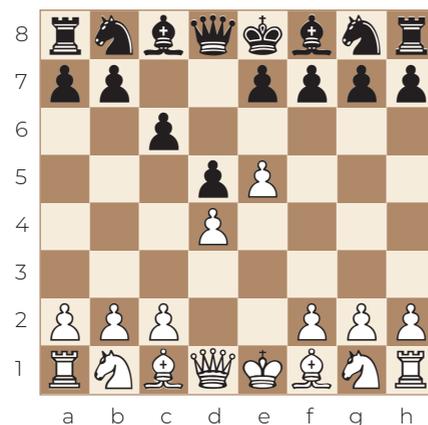
The Caro-Kann 1.e4 c6

Introduction and overview 1.e4 c6



In the first part of the book, we'll examine the Caro-Kann, our weapon against White's most popular move, 1.e4. I have organised the material into six chapters sorted roughly by how theoretically important and popular the variation is.

Chapter 1: Advance Variation 2.d4 d5 3.e5

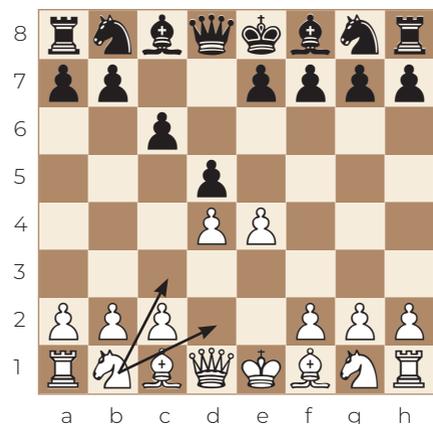


Nowadays, the Advance Variation is commonly regarded as the most challenging option that Black can encounter. It is played in about 25% of the games, depending on the level of the players (a bit more on the master level). It is popular on all levels, but the percentage increases when higher-level players meet.

I suggest the combative reply 3...c5, which is sound and works particularly well against less booked-up opponents.

Chapter 2: Classical Variation

2.d4 d5 3.♘c3/3.♘d2

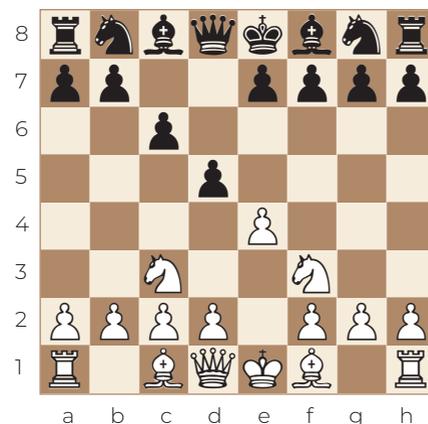


The Classical Variation is White's traditional main line against the Caro-Kann before the Advance got into the limelight. The Classical is still a popular line on all levels and is played in about 25% of games. I suggest the reply 3...dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♘f6, which has gained a following over the recent years. Some crucial improvements have elevated this line from a backwater of theory to the main option for Black.

The following four chapters cover other major options for White. Each chapter represents roughly 10-15% of the total Caro-Kann games.

Chapter 3: Two Knights Variation

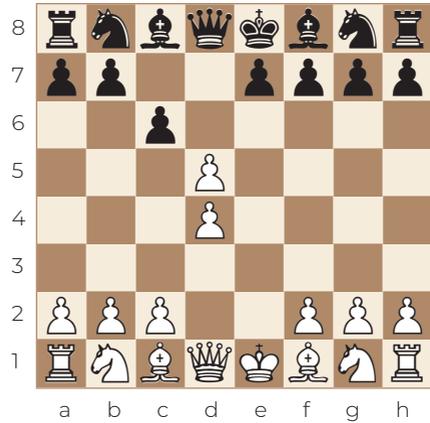
2.♘c3 d5 3.♘f3



The Two Knights, unsurprisingly, features two early knight moves by White. Our choice of the Classical Variation makes our life easy here. We answer with 3...dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♘f6, playing in a similar style. Often, the game will even transpose into the Classical later.

Chapter 4: Exchange Variation

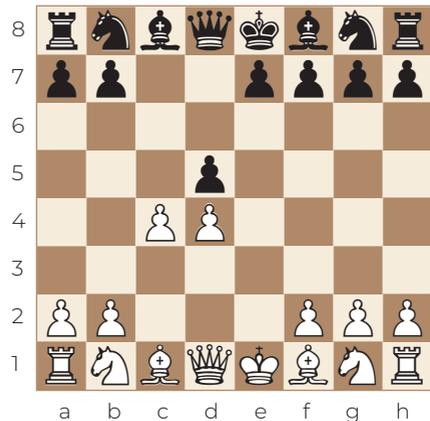
2.d4 d5 3.exd5



White clarifies the central structure early on. They can easily develop their pieces to active positions, but this applies to Black's forces, too. The Exchange features the same pawn structure as the Carlsbad Variation of the Queen's Gambit Declined (Chapter 7), with roles reversed.

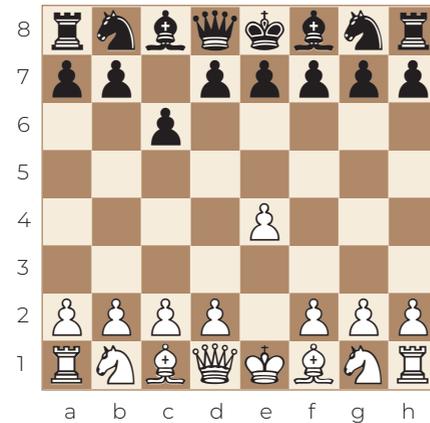
Chapter 5: Panov Variation

2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4



In this chapter, we examine the Panov Variation and the related line 2.c4. The Panov leads to the most open positions in the Caro-Kann and often features an Isolated Queen's Pawn on the white side. These structural imbalances lead to interesting games and winning chances for both sides.

Chapter 6: Sidelines

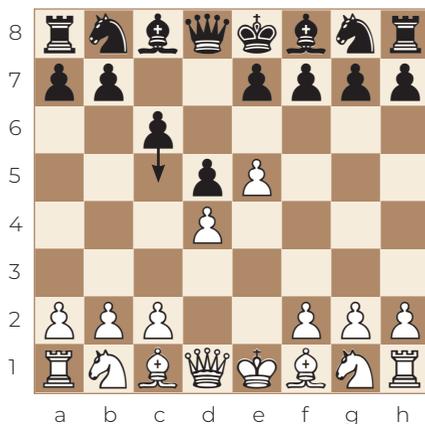


This chapter features the Odds & Ends of the Caro-Kann. We'll check various lines, the most important being the Fantasy Variation 2.d4 d5 3.f3, and systems involving the early move d2-d3. These are rarely met, but they are reasonable options for White and worth studying.

CHAPTER 1

Advance Variation

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5



White advances the e-pawn, the starting point of the 'Advance Variation'. Nowadays, this line is considered to be the main battleground of the Caro-Kann. Top players most often go for the Advance and their preference influences players on all levels.

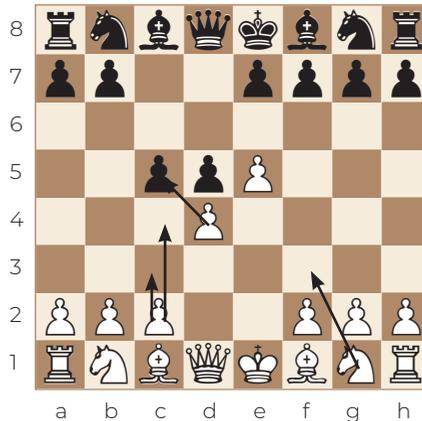
You'll meet 3.e5 frequently in your games, no matter what level you compete on. However, I'd like to point out one essential factor: while the Advance Variation might be regarded as the most testing for Black by pros, it is a line that is difficult to play for BOTH sides. To challenge Black, White needs to know concrete theoretical lines. The ideas that pose problems for Black are not something that people would find over the board, but something they would have studied at home. If White plays 'natural moves', Black will often have no problems and be better out of the opening.

What happens if White is well prepared? Well, these lines can become very sharp. Of all the chapters in the whole course, the current one is the most tactically complex. Depending on your level of opposition, you might never get a 'Main Line' of this chapter on the board.

This disclaimer is important to me, as you might look at this chapter, the first one of the course, and get discouraged by the complexities of some variations. They ARE difficult but unlikely

to happen if you feel overwhelmed by them. If you think your opponents are so strong that you might face these lines (master level and above), you'll appreciate that I include all you need to know to battle those people. Alright, let's see what we play against the Advance!

3...c5



My recommendation is 3...c5, the Arkell-Khenkin Variation. It's named after two GMs that played and analyzed it a lot, Keith Arkell and Igor Khenkin. After 3.e5, Black has two possible good options. Black's most popular move is 3...♘f5, while 3...c5 is considered a sound alternative. It was a tough choice to make, but I think I have some excellent arguments in favour of 3...c5.

First of all, the move is strategically well-founded. Black wants to attack White's central pawn and does so right away. It might look odd that we move the c-pawn again, but its life story doesn't matter all that much if the move works fine.

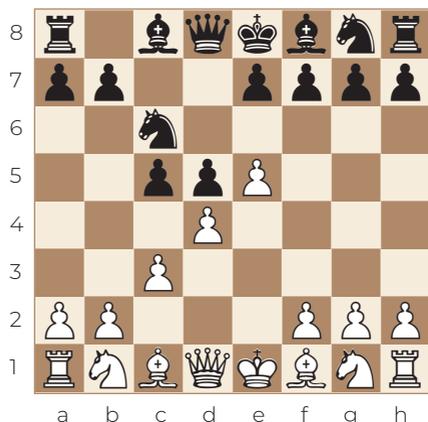
In lines that start with 3...♘f5, Black usually plays ...c6-c5 a bit later, for example after 4.♘f3 e6 5.♘e2 c5. We start with the pawn break right on the third move. In the notes to 3.e5, I mentioned that White needs to know some sophisticated lines and concepts to set problems.

The first crucial moment for White comes right after 3...c5. A logical move for White is 4.c3, but after this move, Black has no problems and often will even gain better chances if White is not careful. The move 4.c3 will happen a lot in our games if you face players below master level. This is a huge upside of 3...c5, of course. In a large portion of games, Black will win the opening battle early on. The more critical moves are 4.♘f3 and, in particular, 4.dxc5.

A) 4.c3

This is White's most popular move below master level. We can be happy to face it, as Black gets a good position without any particular effort.

4...♟c6



A natural development move, increasing the pressure on d4. Now White's most popular move is 5.♟f3, but I'll check some alternatives to give you a better picture about the arising positions. We want to pose as many problems as possible, exploiting White's meek fourth move.

Besides the trainable moves 5.♟f3, 5.♞e3 and 5.f4 White has even more options. I'd like to briefly mention 5.♞e2!?, which is rare, but not bad. We should play the natural 5...♞f5 6.♟f3 e6, which leads to equal chances. A different story is 5.♞b5, when I suggest 5...♞a5!?, immediately trying to exploit the unstable bishop position. After 6.♞xc6+

bxc6 7.dxc5 ♞xc5 8.♟f3 e6 Black is fine due to the long-term asset of the bishop pair.

A1) 5.♞e3

This looks better than 5.♟f3, as it avoids the immediate pin.

5...♟h6

This looks like a good reply. There is nothing wrong with 5...cxd4 6.cxd4 ♞f5, but 5...♟h6 tries to exploit the early bishop move with ...♟f5 or ...♟g4 ideas.

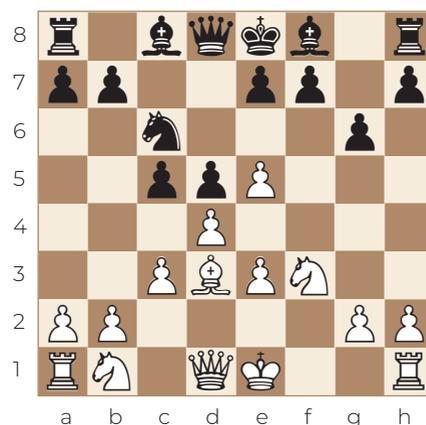
6.♟f3

We don't mind 6.♞xh6?! gxh6, as White moves the bishop twice to capture our knight. We'll play ...♞b6 next, putting pressure on d4 and b2.

6...♟f5

The idea of ...♟h6.

7.♞d3 ♟xe3 8.fxe3 ♟g6!



We have a good spot on h6 for the bishop, putting pressure on e3. Combined with ...♞b6, ...0-0 and a later ...f7-f6, our play on the dark squares looks attractive.

White can't win a pawn with 9.dxc5, as 9...♙g7 quickly picks up e5 in return.

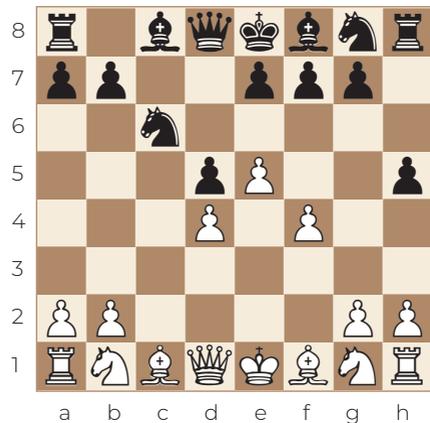
A2) 5.f4

White's central structure is imposing, but the pawn on d4 will become a prime target for our pieces. Playing f2-f4 does not help support d4 in any way.

5...cxd4

We should take first. After 5...♙f5?! 6.dxc5 it's not clear how to recover the pawn.

6.cxd4 h5



There is nothing wrong with 6...♙f5, either. The move 6...h5 is trickier, though. We want to wait for ♘f3 and play ...♙g4 in reply, leaving f5 as a potential outpost for our g-knight.

7.♘f3

Alternatively, White could try 7.♘c3 ♙g4 or 7.♙e3 ♘h6, which also look better for Black.

7...♙g4

Mission accomplished.

8.♙e2 e6 9.♙e3 ♘h6

Or 9...♘ge7, which is just as good. White is struggling here, as they need to defend the weak d-pawn against our attacks. Next, we have ...♘f5, placing the knight on a dream square.

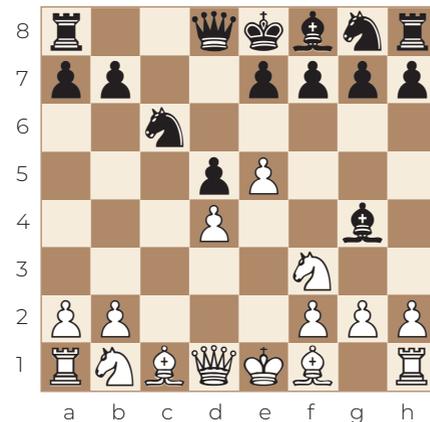
A3) 5.♘f3

White plays this move most of the time, allowing a pin.

5...cxd4

It is best to capture on d4 first, and only then play ...♙g4. After the immediate 5...♙g4?! White has 6.dxc5, which is annoying to meet.

6.cxd4 ♙g4



Setting up an annoying pin and again increasing the pressure on d4. Our target is the d-pawn, which can become very weak.

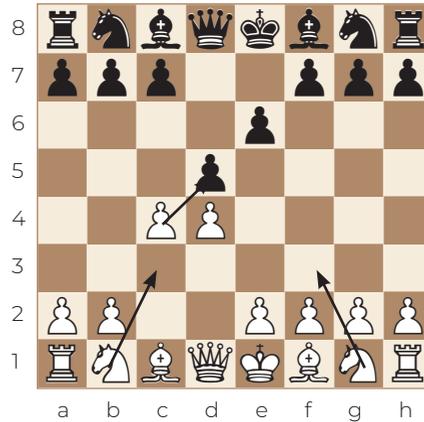
7.♙e2

This is played most of the time. Against other moves, like 7.♙e3, for instance, our strategy would be the same as against 7.♙e2 – go for the d-pawn with ...♘g8-e7-f5.

CHAPTER 8

Carlsbad theory

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6



White may choose to capture on d5 at various moments. In our repertoire framework, there are four possible moments.

- A. 1. d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.cxd5 exd5
- B. 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5
- C. 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5
- D. 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 a6 5.cxd5 exd5

Let's examine the differences and how to evaluate each version. I'd like to start with D, as this type of Carlsbad has some specific points due to the early ...a7-a6 move that we have played. This line is not covered in the current chapter but in the dedicated chapter on 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 a6.

What about the other three versions? Well, the only version considered to be challenging for Black is C, while A and B are considered to be less critical.

Let's work out why this is the case. I suggest looking at C first and then comparing. After 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5 we reach the Carlsbad structure. After the exchange on d5, a major issue in the QGD for Black has improved dramatically. Our c8-bishop is not staring at the e6-pawn but now enjoys an open diagonal c8-g4.

We are happy about this change, but now the question is: where to develop the bishop? Placing it on f5 looks very natural and active,

connecting it with the square e4, a potential outpost for Black. So let's play ...♟f5, right? The issue is: after White's best move, 5.♙g5, we can't play 5...♟f5? because of 6.♙xf6. After 6...♞xf6 7.♘xd5 we've lost the d-pawn, while 6...gxf6 results in an unacceptable pawn structure.

Alright, let's prepare ...♟f5 then. After 5.♙g5, we could play 5...c6, protecting d5 reliably. Now White's most common reply is 6.e3, preparing ♟d3 next. Can we play 6...♟f5 now? Well, it's possible, but White has the strong reply 7.♞f3!, when 7...♙g6 8.♙xf6 ♞xf6 9.♞xf6 gxf6 leads to an endgame that is more comfortable for White to play. It turns out that after White's most precise move order, we don't get ...♟f5 in under favourable circumstances. We will see that this is not the end of the world, but preventing ...♟f5 is an achievement for White.

Now let's compare to the other move-orders that are less precise. Let's have a look at move-order B. After 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5 White usually continues 5.♘c3, when 5...c6! is the most precise move. We anticipate the pinning move 6.♙g5, when 6...h6 7.♙h4 ♟f5! is possible without a problem.

In move order A White exchanges very early on, right on move three. The key difference to the other move-orders is that Black has not played ♘f6 yet, so it's impossible for White to pin the knight with ♙g5. After 1.d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3.cxd5 exd5 White usually opts for 4.♘c3, when 4...c6! is precise. We cover the d5-pawn and prepare the move ...♙d6. White can't develop their bishop with a ♙g5 pin – what else to do? After 5.♙f4, we have the simple reply 5...♙d6.

If White plays 5.♘f3, we manage 5...♟f5. The move 5.♞c2 stops ...♟f5, but after 5...♙d6! White can't develop their c1-bishop at all.

I think I've gotten my point across. Move-orders A and B give Black some additional options, usually regarding an early ...♟f5 or hindering White's desired development. Whenever different move-orders are possible, it is easy to get confused. Therefore I'd like to give you some rules of thumb for this chapter:

1. We need the move ...c7-c6 to support the d5-pawn and construct the reliable pawn chain b7/c6/d5. Rule of thumb: After White exchanges on d5, our next move should be ...c7-c6 right away. Examples are 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.cxd5 exd5 4.♘c3 c6, 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♘c3 c6 or the most common 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♙g5 c6. Starting with ...c7-c6 is not the ONLY way, but it works all the time and is never wrong. If White

has already committed to ♖f4, playing ...c7-c6 is less urgent. No pin increases the pressure on d5.

2. The move ...♙f5 works well if White has already committed to ♗f3 and we have ...c7-c6 played. The latter should almost always be the case (Rule 1). Examples are 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.cxd5 exd5 4.♗c3 c6 5.♗f3 ♙f5 or 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♗f3 ♗f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗c3 c6 6.♙g5 h6 7.♙h4 ♙f5 (inserting ...h7-h6 is a small finesse explained later). A point to remember is that playing ...♙f5 before ♗f3 is on the board is either imprecise (1.d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3.♗c3 ♗f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♙g5 c6 6.e3 ♙f5 7.♖f3!, see above) or no particular achievement (1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.cxd5 exd5 4.♗c3 c6 5.♙f4 ♙f5 allows 6.f3, which is interesting for White).

3. White usually aims for a bishop development to g5 but sometimes elects to play ♙f4 instead. Against all cases of an early ♙f4, I advise playing ...♙d6, challenging the bishop and offering a trade. White's bishop is well-placed on f4, and exchanging it is a good option and always works.

4. If White pins our f6-knight, we should attack the bishop with ...h7-h6, gaining a useful tempo. This happens in the main line 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♗c3 ♗f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♙g5 c6 (Rule 1) 6.e3 h6 or 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♗f3 ♗f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗c3 c6 (Rule 1) 6.♙g5 h6.

A) 3.cxd5

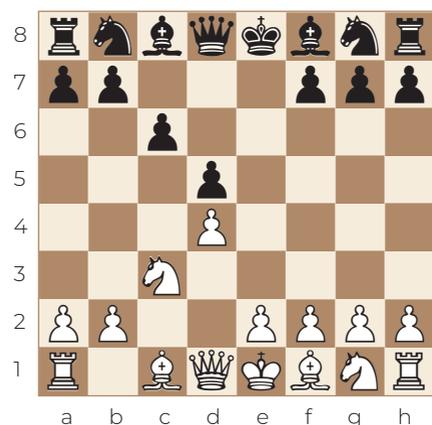
As already stated in the chapter intro: this early exchange is slightly less precise than White's main move-order 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.cxd5. Let's have a closer look at why this is the case.

3...exd5 4.♘c3

White usually starts with this move, as the knight is best on c3, putting pressure on the centre. They can play 4.♘f3 instead, but after 4...c6 (Rule 1) 5.♘c3 will usually follow, transposing to 4.♘c3 c6 5.♘f3, which we will examine shortly.

Another rare option is 4.♙f4 when 4...c6 (Rule 1) and ...♙d6 (Rule 3) work well. This leads to positions that we will examine via 4.♘c3 c6 5.♙f4 ♙d6.

4...c6



As per Rule 1. We play ...c7-c6 right after the trade to support d5. Now we will examine three moves for White.

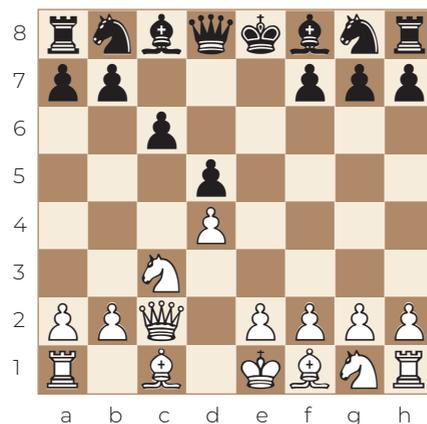
After 5.♘f3, we can apply Rule 2 and develop our bishop to f5.

With 5.♖c2, White can stop this idea in its tracks, but 5...♙d6! is a good reply.

Finally, there is 5.♙f4, which we answer with 5...♙d6, applying Rule 3.

A1) 5.♖c2

A clever idea: White stops ...♙f5, but the move has a drawback. It is slow and neglects the development of the queen's bishop.



5...♙d6!

I like this move a lot for conceptual reasons. Black has other options, like 5...g6 to insist on ...♙f5, but simply preventing White from developing the c1-bishop is tempting. It's fun to compare this line to 1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.♙d3, which follows the same principle.

6.♘f3

White prepares ♙g5 with this logical move. It's tough to suggest anything else, really.

6...h6

‘No ♖g5 for you!’ We plan ...♗f6 next, followed by ...♙d6, ...0-0 and ...♖e8 – very natural play. White can’t play ♙f4, and I don’t see any active option besides 7.e4, which we will check now.

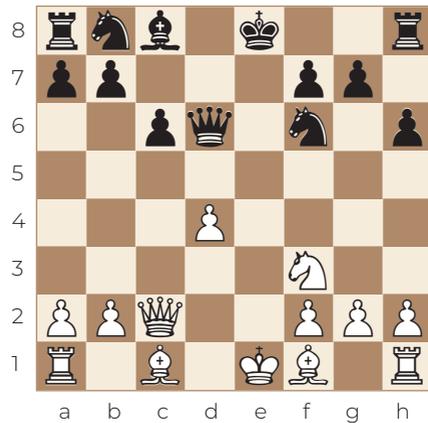
7.e4

The active choice. A sequence like 7.e3 ♗f6 8.♙d3 0-0 9.0-0 ♖e8 is a much better version of this chapter’s main line. White’s c1-bishop is not a happy camper!

7...dxe4 8.♗xe4 ♗f6

Speeding up our development. In this position, we don’t mind giving up the bishop pair, as White’s knight is a strong piece on e4, too.

9.♗xd6+ ♖xd6



We have equal chances in this position. White has an Isolated Queen’s Pawn, which is a handy long-term target. We enjoy good control of d5, too. White, on the other hand, has the bishop pair and easy development, which makes the game about even.

A2) 5.♗f3

Our Rule 2 applies here, so here we go!

5...♙f5

Black is also fine with other moves. One case is 5...♗f6, which would transpose to a variation of the current chapter that arises after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♗f3 ♗f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗c3 c6. Still, if we get the opportunity to develop the bishop to f5 without any problems, we should go for it.

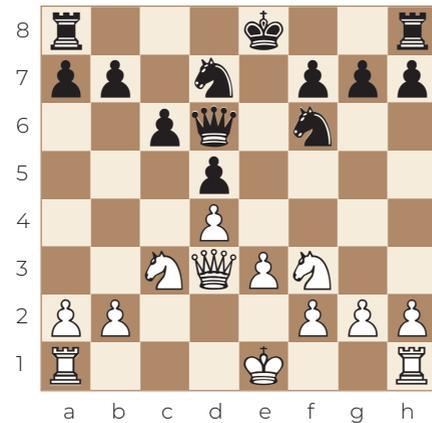
6.♙f4 ♙d6

Rule 3 in play.

7.♙xd6 ♖xd6

Again Black has easily obtained equal chances.

8.e3 ♗f6 9.♙d3 ♙xd3 10.♖xd3 ♗bd7



If you have studied the chapter intro, you have seen the famous game Bobotsov vs Petrosian, Lugano Olympiad 1968. Petrosian outplayed his opponent in exemplary fashion, demonstrating the knight’s strength on d6 later on.

The structure and material distribution on the board is identical to the mentioned game. If you have not studied it yet, I suggest doing it right away. It helps to understand the strategy much better.

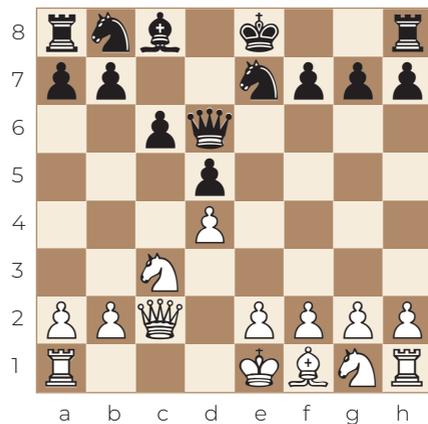
A3) 5. ♖f4 ♗d6 6. ♗xd6

Or 6. ♗g3 ♗f5, when we have successfully developed the bishop.

6... ♜xd6 7. ♞c2

White stops ... ♗f5 for the moment. After 7.e3 ♗f5, we again have accomplished the comfortable development of the bishop.

7... ♘e7!



A nice move, again preparing ... ♗f5.

8.e3 ♗f5

Here we go again. We managed to get the bishop out quickly and have accomplished an important opening goal in this line.

B) 3. ♘f3 ♗f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5. ♘c3

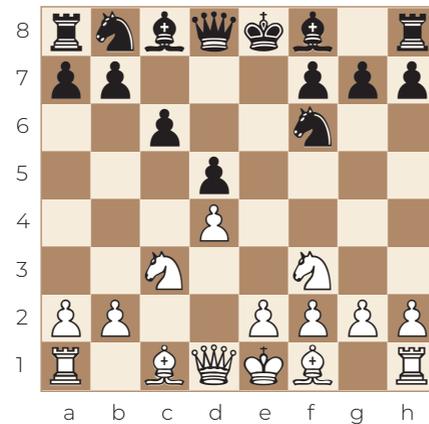
The knight's natural place is c3, so White usually starts with this move.

Of course, developing the c1-bishop first is possible. After 5. ♗f4, we play 5... ♗d6, as usual. We cover this scenario in the line 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3. ♗c3 ♗f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5. ♗f4 ♗d6.

More common is 5. ♗g5, when I suggest playing 5...c6 (Rule 1). Now 6. ♗c3 transposes to 5. ♗c3 c6 6. ♗g5. White could try 6. ♞c2, which follows a similar idea as 5. ♗c3 c6 6. ♞c2 does. In both cases, I recommend 6...g6!, preparing ...f7-f5.

The move 5. ♗g5 only has transpositional value, at best. Stockfish actually points out 5. ♗g5 h6!? as an interesting independent idea, but I don't think it's worth having something special prepared against this rare move-order.

5...c6



As per Rule 1: play ...c7-c6 first.

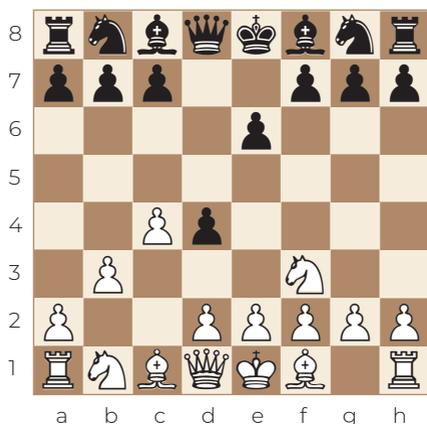
Black is fine after 8...d4, as we have established an early space advantage and have chances to play against the e-pawn in the long run.

The move ...d5-d4 also clears the square d5 for a piece. In particular the knight would have an excellent post right in the centre.

B) 3.b3

White covers the c-pawn and prepares the fianchetto of the c1-bishop. Against this move, I recommend advancing the d-pawn and gaining central space:

3...d4!



I like this pawn advance for several reasons:

1. In general, gaining central space is desirable.
2. It is easier to learn than the alternatives. We instantly clarify the pawn structure in the centre and have a fairly clear plan afterwards.

3. There is 1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 d4, which is not part of our repertoire. It is not bad at all, but fairly complicated for Black after 3.b4. Here, the moves ...e7-e6 and b2-b3 are added, which prevents this option for White. In general, the move b2-b3 turns out to be rather pointless after the advance.

4. A practical point: if you play online games and/or face lower-rated opposition, a common reply will be 4.♙b2?!, which is just a conceptual mistake and immediately gives Black an advantage. The bishop is misplaced on b2, only staring at a well-protected pawn.

Before we examine some moves, a word about the move-order 1.c4 e6 2.♘f3 d5 3.g3 ♘f6 4.b3 d4!. This is a very similar case, but not the same, as we are committed to ...♘f6 already. Black has a good game in these lines, too.

Now, after 1.c4 e6 2.♘f3 d5 3.b3 d4, we need to examine 4.g3, 4.e3 and the already mentioned ill-advised 4.♙b2.

B1) 4.e3

This direct play against our pawn might be White's best option.

4...♘c6

I always suggest playing the ...d5-d4 structures without ...c7-c5, but instead develop the knight quickly (compare to 4.g3 ♘c6)

5.exd4

White should take before we manage ...e6-e5, like after 5.♙b2?! e5, which transposes to a line we cover via 4.♙b2?! ♞c6 5.e3 e5.

5...♞xd4 6.♙b2

Both sides fight for control of the d4-square. We have a good way to lend support to d4: playing ...♙c5 and ...♞g8-e7-c6 next.

6...♙c5 7.♞a3

White could try 7.b4!?, but a simple and good reply is 7...♞xf3+ 8.♞xf3 ♙d4, keeping control and a good position.

7...♞e7 8.♞c2 ♞ec6

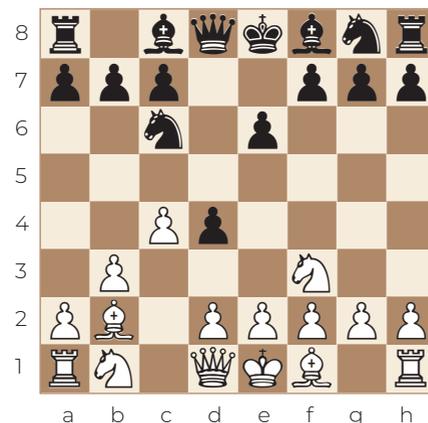


We maintain our grip on d4 and have a good position. Stockfish now suggests 9.♞fxd4 ♞xd4 10.b4!? for White, when 10...♞xc2+ 11.♞xc2 ♙d4 is a good continuation. I'd rather be Black here, having the better pawn structure. White still has long-term worries about the weaknesses on the d-file, d4 and d3.

B2) 4.♙b2?!

I am very tempted even to call this a mistake and give it a '?'. The bishop is misplaced on b2, staring at a well-protected pawn.

4...♞c6



I suggest playing the ...d5-d4 structures with ...♞c6, avoiding the move ...c7-c5. I discuss the reasoning behind this choice more in the notes to 4.g3 ♞c6.

B21) 5.e3 e5

It's important to avoid 5...♙c5? 6.b4!, when White manages to exchange their b-pawn for our d-pawn.

After 5...e5, our advanced pawn is safely protected.

6.exd4 exd4 7.d3 ♙c5

Black has other good options (my Stockfish likes the funky 7...a5 8.♙e2 g5!?, for example), but I like this development. The bishop safely covers c5 and is developed before the king's knight, for reasons that will become clear on the next move.

8. ♖e2 ♜ge7

I wanted to show this interesting idea. White's misplaced bishop on b2 neglects control of f4, so playing ...♜g8-e7-g6 makes a lot of sense.

B2) 5.g3

The following notes will be rather brief, as we reach the same structures as after 4.g3, but with a misplaced white bishop on b2.

5...e5

Having a massive space advantage with Black after five moves – nice!

6.d3 ♖b4+

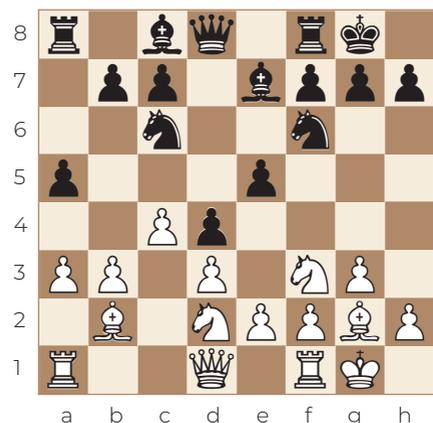
We play in similar fashion after 4.g3 ♜c6 5. ♖g2 e5 6.d3 ♖b4+.

It is also possible to play 6...♜f6 first, and after 7. ♖g2 give the check.

7. ♜bd2 a5

The typical follow-up, stopping White's queenside expansion (a2-a3, b2-b4).

8.a3 ♖e7 9. ♖g2 ♜f6 10.0-0 0-0



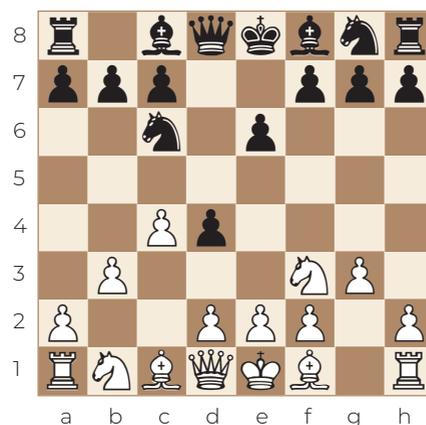
Black has a comfortable advantage in this position. We have much more space and the long-term plan to break through in the centre with ...e5-e4.

A good set-up for us is: ...♖f5, ...♜f6-d7-c5, ...♚e8, trying to play ...e5-e4. White can't do much in the meantime, as there is no meaningful pawn break to change the structure.

B3) 4.g3

White often combines 1.c4 with a kingside fianchetto, trying to initiate play on the long diagonal. Here the central pawn advantage matters more, though.

4...♜c6



In this repertoire, I like to avoid Reversed Modern Benoni or Reversed Benko Gambit structure, as they are tricky to play for Black, in particular, if you don't have experience on the White side against these openings. If you are an 1.e4 player, you might

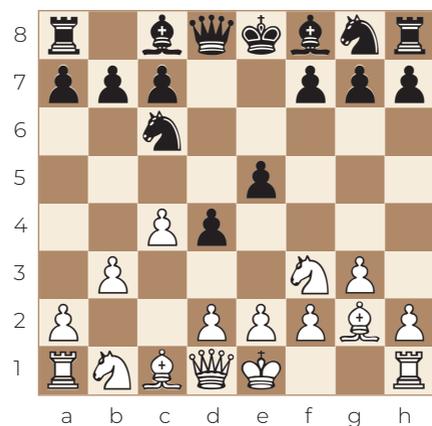
have zero games fighting the Benko, for example.

Therefore I opted for 4...♗c6 here, avoiding lines like 4...c5 5.e3 ♗c6 6.exd4 cxd4, reaching a Reversed Modern Benoni (1.d4 ♗f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 e6 4.♗c3 exd5 5.cxd5 d6 6.e4 g6).

The characteristics of the 'Modern Benoni', compared to the 'Benoni' (1.d4 c5 2.d5 ♗f6 3.♗c3 d6 4.e4 g6), is the trade of the e-pawn vs the c-pawn. This trade sharpens the game and leads to more tactical possibilities, favouring the side with more experience.

Instead, I advise playing without ...c7-c5 and reaching a Benoni structure that is easier to handle. With the c- and e-pawns still on the board, White is less likely to manage a queenside expansion with a2-a3 and b3-b4, to mention a key point.

5. ♗g2 e5



Now the move ...e5-e4 is a serious threat. White should

prevent it with 6.d3, as 6.0-0 e4 7.♗e1 h5! leads to a strong attack.

B31) 6.0-0?

White ignores ...e5-e4, which is asking for trouble.

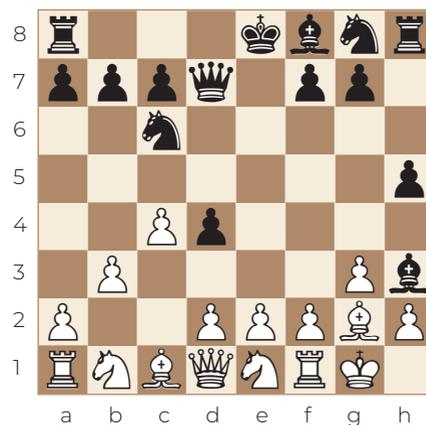
6...e4 7.♗e1 h5!

Yes, we can even sacrifice the e-pawn and throw the kitchen sink at White!

8. ♗xe4 ♗h3

We'll get a great attack with simple means: playing ...♗d7, ...0-0-0 and ...h5-h4 is not exactly rocket science.

9. ♗g2



It seems that 9.♗g2 is even worse. Let's look at a possible sample line. After 9...♗d7 10.b4 (desperation) 10...♗f6 (no need to take the pawn, better to attack!) 11.♗f3 h4 12.♗xh4 g5 13.♗g2 ♗e5 Black has a winning attack.

9...♗d7

White is in deep trouble here. I want to show one attacking idea

that you should know in this scenario:

10. ♖f3?

White can't stop ...h5-h4 this way. There are better defences for White, but our play is much simpler anyway: hack away for checkmate.

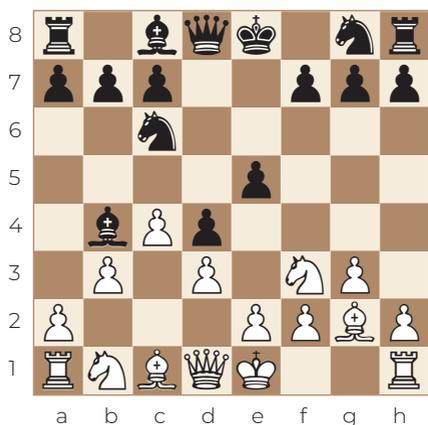
10...h4!

It works anyway.

11. ♖xh4 ♜xh4 12.gxh4 ♔g4

And it's mate next move.

B32) 6.d3 ♖b4+



Here 6...♖f6 would likely transpose to a different line of the current chapter. We play 1.c4 e6 2.♖f3 d5 3.g3 ♖f6 4.b3 d4 5.♖g2 ♖c6 6.0-0 e5, which leads to a similar pawn structure. Due to the different move-orders in this version, we don't manage to give the check on b4.

Here the distracting check is possible and should be played. Both replies, 7.♖bd2 and 7.♖d2, have their drawbacks. Let's have a look.

B321) 7. ♖d2 a5!

An important move. We support the bishop on b4 and make a generally useful move, as it helps to stop White's possible queenside expansion with a2-a3 and b3-b4. Now, with the bishop sitting on d2, White can't develop with ♖b1-a3-c2, which would otherwise be an option to support these pawn pushes.

8.a3

Or 8.0-0 ♖f6 9.a3 ♖e7!, which leads to the same thing.



8... ♖e7!

Trading on d2 would only help White to organise. They have less space and welcome trades. We go to e7, as we anticipate that a future ...♖f6 will be answered with ♖g5. We unpin before even pinned, so to say.

9.0-0 ♖f6

Black's general strategy now is based on playing for a central breakthrough with ...e5-e4, while at the same time preventing White's play on the queenside.

10. ♖g5

The bishop is misplaced on d2, due to our earlier check, and decides it's best to leave the board by trading on f6.

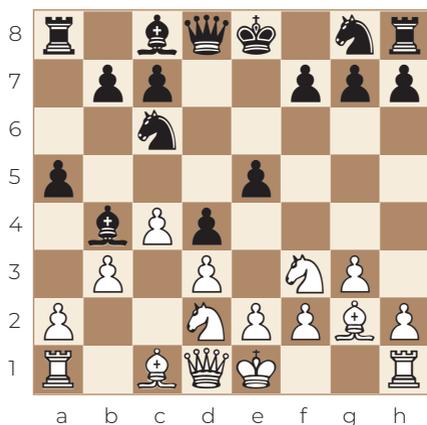
10...h6

Give me the bishop, please.

11. ♖xf6 ♖xf6 12. ♘bd2 ♖e7!

A good positional move, prophylaxis against the queenside play. White has a hard time ever playing b2-b4 now, while we enjoy our central space and may prepare ...e5-e4 in the long run, maybe even supported by ...f7-f5.

B322) 7. ♘bd2 a5!



We play the same move after 7. ♖d2, too. Otherwise, a2-a3+b3-b4 is on the agenda... we'd better prevent this idea.

8.a3 ♖c5

A bit more active than the more usual 8... ♖e7, which is fine, too.

9.0-0 ♘f6 10. ♖b1 ♖d6

The reason why ... ♖c5 is more active than ... ♖e7. We stop b3-

b4, asking White about other plans that they have. Note that 10...0-0 11.b4 axb4 12.axb4 ♖xb4 13. ♘xe5 should be avoided. The queen move lends additional cover to e5 and prevents this idea.

They can play ♘f3-e1-c2, but this still would not threaten b3-b4. In the meantime, we have ...0-0, ...♖e8 and ... ♖f5 to centralize and prepare ...e5-e4.

C) 3.g3

If White does not want to fianchetto the bishop, 3.e3 is the main alternative to avoid a direct QGD transposition. This possibility is examined in the dedicated chapter on 1.c4 e6 that focuses on set-ups without g2-g3.

3... ♘f6



I suggest playing this first. It is consistent with our approach against 1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3. ♖g2 when 3... ♘f6 is the most precise move to reach our preferred lines.