

**A Complete
Opening Repertoire
for Black**

**Volume 2
The Ragozin
& the Catalan**

Dariusz Swiercz

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**Volume 2
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Key to Symbols

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

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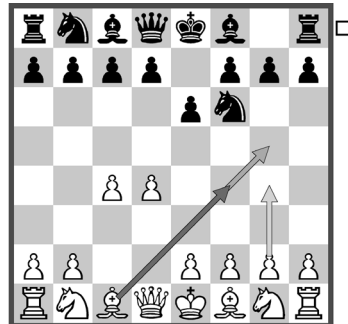
Part I

Early Sidelines in the Queen's Gambit Declined

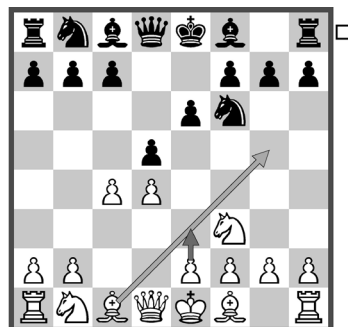


Various Sidelines in the QGD

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 e6



3. ♘f3 d5



Chapter Guide

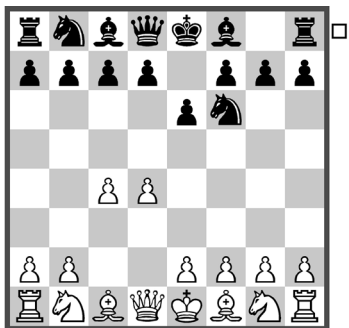
Chapter 1 – Various Sidelines in the QGD

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6

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a) Introduction

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 e6

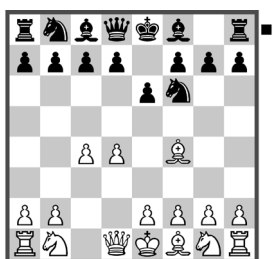


Position after: 2... e6

White has many ways to deviate from standard Ragozin lines and go for something offbeat.

3. ♘f3

A) 3. ♖f4!?



Position after: 3. ♖f4!?

This early bishop move has gained a lot of popularity recently. It is a sort of hybrid of the London and some Nimzo-Indian or QGD, depending on what Black does. The idea is to delay ♘c3 and ♘f3 and avoid standard Nimzo or

Ragozin lines. Black has two main options here: 3... ♖b4 and 3... d5.

A1) 3... d5 is an obvious option here which should equalize, but it leads to some complex positions which could be hard to play for Black. 4. cxd5 ♘xd5 [4... exd5 5. e3 leads to a Carlsbad pawn structure which may not be that easy to play, though of course it should be OK at the end of the day] 5. ♖g3 c5 6. e4 ♘f6 7. ♘d2 White sacrifices a pawn for the initiative and generally gets decent long-term compensation. Of course, Black is fine here after either capture on d4 but generally speaking 3... ♖b4+ seems to be a much simpler solution.

A2) 3... ♖b4+ This would be my recommendation here. 4. ♘d2 [4. ♘c3 -- see Volume 1] 4... c5



Position after: 4... c5

A2.1) 5. e3 This looks rather harmless, but it has been played at GM level so it should be investigated. Black has many options here, but I

would like to recommend the following two. 5... ♖c6 [5... d5!? is more ambitious: 6. dxc5 ♙xd2+ 7. ♗xd2 ♘e4 8. ♗b4 ♘c6 9. ♗a3 e5 10. ♙g3 d4 with a complex game, as in Yoo – Chandra (2022)] 6. ♘gf3 d6 with the idea of ...e5 is the simplest solution.

A2.2) 5. dxc5 ♙xc5 6. e3 0-0 7. ♘gf3 This is one of the main positions in the 3. ♙f4 ♙b4 line. Black needs to choose his way to develop the pieces here. There are of course standard moves like 7...b6, 7...♖c6 or 7...d5, but they seem kind of boring to me and I was happy to find an alternative approach. 7... h6!?N An interesting novelty. This move may seem weird at first, but the idea is very nice: Black controls the g5-square, not allowing ♙g5 in the future, and intending ...d6 and ...e5. Very often ...a5 is part of Black's plans too, given that White may play ♘b3 at some point. White now has many options but I did not find any issues for Black.

B) 3. ♙g5 This resembles the Trompowsky but the c4-pawn does not help White, as it makes it easier for Black to attack White's center. 3... h6 4. ♙h4 c5!? Hitting the center right away, trying to take advantage of White's bishop being misplaced on h4 in such positions. There could always be issues with some ...♙b4 check ideas, or ...♗b6.

C) 3. g4 This is a very entertaining move, played in 2022 by Shakhriyar Mamedyarov. It pretty much banks on Black not being familiar with the lines here. But Black can be better if he just grabs the pawn. 3... ♘xg4 4. e4 f5!



Position after: 4... f5!

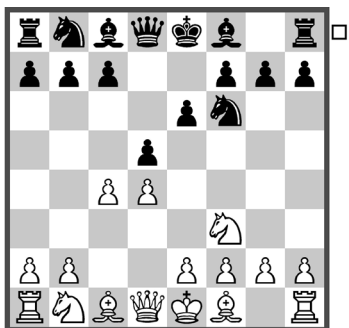
Black should not retreat and instead needs to start fighting for the center and keep the knight active. 5. ♘c3 Here, my recommendation is 5... ♘c6!? following the game Petrosian – Ter Sahakyan (2022).

D) 3. d5 With this move White wants to prevent Black from playing ...d5 himself, but it overextends White's center. Black has many good options here. Probably the simplest is the following: 3... ♙b4+ 4. ♙d2 a5 with the intention of trading the dark-squared bishops one day and making the c5-square an outpost. Additionally, there are ideas of ...b6 and ...♙b7 and applying pressure on the d5-pawn.

E) After 3. e3 d5 it should sooner or later transpose to 3. ♘f3 d5 4. e3.

F) 3. ♘c3 ♙b4 - see Volume 1.

3... d5

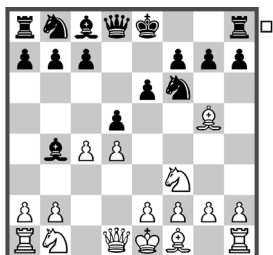


Position after: 3... d5

4. e3

This is not a challenging line for Black. Usually White plays this just to get a game without any major theory.

4. ♘g5 White employs this line to avoid some lines in the Queen's Gambit Declined (like the Semi-Tarrasch) and try to steer the game towards different positions or structures. 4... ♙b4+



Position after: 4... ♙b4+

My recommendation is to go for this Ragozin-themed approach. 5. ♞bd2 The only move that makes sense here, apart from 5. ♞c3 which transposes to the normal Ragozin. 5... dxc4 Black

grabs the c4-pawn, a thematic idea here.

A) 6. a3 ♙xd2+ 7. ♚xd2 0-0 This is a complicated line but White is taking some risk here -- he may not be able to regain the pawn.

B) 6. ♚c2 b5 7. a4 c6 8. g3 White can go for some version of the Catalan. Again, White may not be able to get the pawn back here either. 8... ♙b7 9. ♙g2 ♞bd7 Black often plays ...♚c8 here to stabilize the queenside.

C) 6. e3 is the main move here, but there are many alternatives. 6... b5

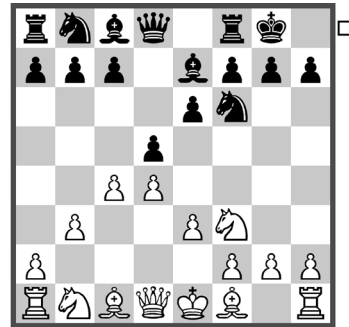


Position after: 6... b5

7. ♙e2 [7. a3 ♙xd2+ 8. ♞xd2 ♙b7 9. b3 is an idea for White, as Black cannot retain the extra pawn here. However, there is 9... c5! which puts White under pressure due to his king being still in the center.] 7... ♙b7 8. 0-0 0-0 9. b3 White gets the pawn back. Unfortunately Black needs to accept that, but still he is doing well after 9... c3! 10. a3 ♙e7 11. ♞b1 c5! 12. ♞xc3 a6 with a comfortable position, similar to the Queen's Gambit Accepted.

4... ♖e7

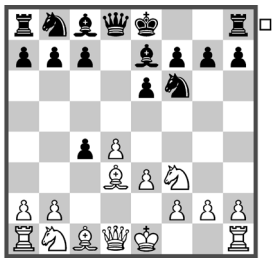
Black has many possible options at this point. I think this is one of the simplest approaches. Black focuses on his development first and only later will he decide whether he will play ...c5 or ...b6 and ...c5.



Position after: 5... 0-0

5. b3

A) After 5. ♗d3 the standard reaction 5... dxc4!



Position after: 5... dxc4!

gives Black an improved version of the Queen's Gambit Accepted (extra tempo!). 6. ♗xc4 a6 7. 0-0 0-0 Next Black will play ...c5 or ...b5.

B) 5. ♘c3 0-0 6. a3 This is another possible setup. White wants to expand on the queenside with b4, c5 etc. A good reaction is 6... ♘bd7 with no problems.

5... 0-0

(see diagram next column)

6. ♗b2

White may try 6. ♗d3 but it is roughly the same as 6. ♗b2. Black anyway plays 6... c5 and transpositions are very likely.

6... c5

I like the idea of putting pressure in the center right away.

7. ♗d3

A) After 7. cxd5 I consider 7... cxd4!? opening the center very quickly, trying to exploit White's king in the center.

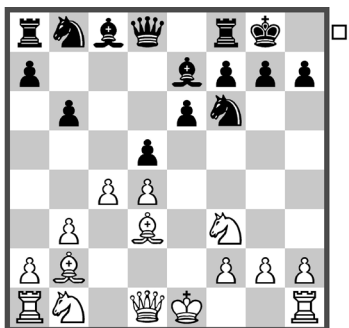
B) After 7. dxc5 the simplest is 7... dxc4!



Position after: 7... dxc4!

following Wesley So's games. The endgame with a symmetrical pawn structure is roughly equal.

7... cxd4 8. exd4 b6



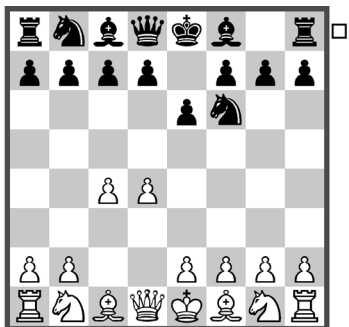
Position after: 8... b6

9. 0-0 ♖b7

Black is happy with this type of position. He plans either ...♘c6 or ...♘bd7, depending on what White does. One of the ideas for Black in the long run is ...♙e8, ...♙g6 and ...♙f8-♙g7. At some point Black will want to go ...dxc4 too and play against White's hanging pawns.

b) 3.--

1. d4 ♖f6 2. c4 e6



Position after: 2... e6

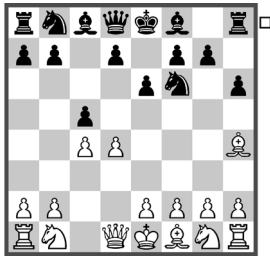
There are various sidelines that people play from time to time in order to avoid mainstream theory or prepare some small idea trying to catch an opponent off-guard.

3. ♙f4

This is a recent trend that has been played a lot in online games by top players. It is some sort of hybrid between the Nimzo, QGD and London.

A) 3. ♙g5 This rare approach is like a Trompowsky with the pawn on c4, which I think is a bit premature. In the Trompowsky, if White plays c4 usually it happens later, especially when Black has already placed a pawn on d5. 3... h6
4. ♙h4 [4. ♙xf6 ♙xf6 this cannot be taken seriously – Black gets the pair of bishops] 4... c5!?

(see analysis diagram next page)



Position after: 4... c5!?



Position after: 9... a6!

Not the only move but I thought that now Black should try to exploit the awkward position of the h4-bishop and White's weakened queenside.

A1) 5. e3 runs into 5... cxd4 and White perhaps should recapture with the queen now, which of course is not ideal. 6. ♙xd4 [if 6. exd4? then 6... ♙b6!♞ causes problems with the b2- and d4-pawns!] 6... ♞c6 7. ♙d3 g5 8. ♞g3 d5♞ Of course, Black has a fantastic position.

A2) 5. ♞f3? is already bad: 5... g5 6. ♞g3 g4!♞ and there are certain problems in the center.

A3) 5. d5 Perhaps White needs to go for a Benoni setup. 5... exd5 6. cxd5 d6 7. ♞c3 ♞e7!?! With the bishop on e7 there are ideas of ...♞xd5. 8. ♞f3 [8. ♞g3 ♞h5 Black gets the pair of bishops with a great position] 8... 0-0 9. e3 Something like this seems reasonable but in fact it is not so good for White. After 9... a6!

(see analysis diagram next column)

White is in trouble: 10. a4 [10. ♞d3 b5♞] 10... ♞xd5! 11. ♙xd5 ♞xh4 12. ♞xh4 ♙xh4 Black has an extra pawn and a clear edge.

B) 3. g4 This is an Incredibly entertaining move which does not really work with accurate play by Black, but it leads to unbalanced positions which can be tricky to play. At the top level, It was first tried in 2022 by Shakhriyar Mamedyarov against Andrey Esipenko and later there were more top games here. 3... ♞xg4!



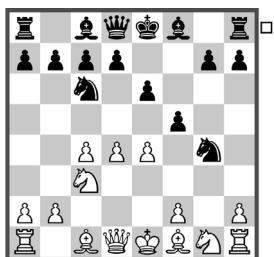
Position after: 3... ♞xg4!

The most principled (and greedy!).

B1) 4. ♞f3?! d5 5. ♙g1 ♞f6 6. ♞c3 c6♞ White's compensation is speculative at best, e.g. 7. ♙d3 [7. ♞f4 dxc4 8. e4 b5♞] 7... b5!?! returning the

pawn to open the queenside and begin playing there. 8. cxb5 cxb5 9. ♖xb5 a6 10. ♗c3 ♗c6

B2) 4. e4 f5! This is the correct move. Apart from defending the knight, Black also begins fight for the center. 5. ♗c3 [5. e5? d6; 5. exf5 exf5 6. ♗c3 ♗b4 7. ♖e2+ ♔f7 8. ♖f3 d6 9. ♗ge2 ♖h4] 5... ♗c6!?



Position after: 5... ♗c6!?

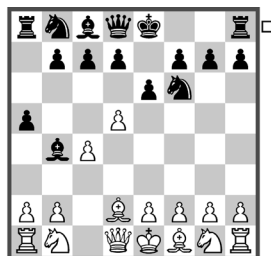
I would recommend this move. It was played in Petrosian – Ter Sahakyan (2022) and Black won that game. [5... ♗b4 is an alternative but the positions after 6. e5 c5 7. a3! are absurdly messy. There is no need to enter them.]

B2.1) 6. ♗f3? was played in the Petrosian game, but here Black is much better. That game continued 6... fxe4! (after ♗f3, the g4-knight is no longer under attack, so Black can take on e4) 7. ♗xe4 ♗b4+ 8. ♗d2 d5+. Black had a healthy extra pawn and a winning position.

B2.2) 6. exf5 Perhaps the best option. 6... ♖h4! Actively defending

the knight and attacking the f2-pawn. 7. ♖d2 ♗b4 8. ♗f3 ♖h5 9. ♖g5 [9. fxe6 0-0!] 9... ♖xg5 10. ♗xg5 0-0 11. h3 ♗f6 Even though the position remains complicated I think that Black has better chances on account of his more active pieces and White's weaknesses.

C) 3. d5?! With this move White wants to prevent Black from playing ...d5 and immediately get some space advantage, but of course it is overextending White's center and leaves White behind in development. Black has many good options here. 3... ♗b4+ 4. ♗d2 a5



Position after: 4... a5

I like this the most. Quite likely there will be a trade of dark-squared bishops, which will leave many dark squares weak in White's camp. 5. ♗c3 [5. a3 ♗xd2+ 6. ♖xd2 0-0 7. ♗c3 d6 with ideas of ...♗a6-c5.] 5... 0-0 6. ♗f3 b6! The plan is to develop the bishop on b7, and keep the idea of ...♗a6 for later. White's center is weak and Black should be better here.

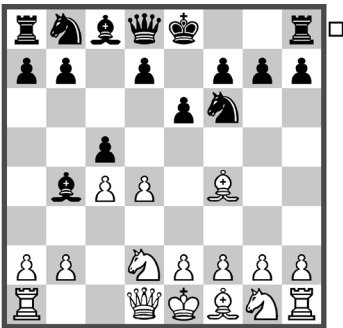
D) After 3. e3 d5 most likely White should play 4. ♗f3, transposing into a

position from the 3... Nf3 d5 4.e3 line. I analyze it there.

3... Bb4+

3... d5 As I said in the introduction, this is another possible move, but I prefer 3... Bb4 . The 3...d5 move should also equalize, but it leads to some complex positions that could be hard to play for Black.

4. Nd2 c5



Position after: 4... c5

5. dxc5

5. e3 This move is not particularly dangerous and Black has many good ways to deal with it. However, it was played recently by Christopher Yoo, who is known for his great opening preparation, so it must be investigated seriously.

A) 5... Nc6 ! This is probably the simplest path to equality, playing in Nimzo style. 6. Ngf3 [6. dxc5? is bad due to 6... Ne4 7. Ngf3 e5!



Position after: 7... e5!

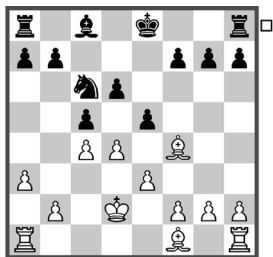
8. Bg3 h5! f7 and White must play h3 or h4 to save the bishop, which allows ... $\text{N} \times \text{g3}$ and White has to recapture with the f-pawn. That, of course, is great for Black.] 6... d6!



Position after: 6... d6!

This is a nice solution to this line. Black simply prepares ... e5 which easily equalizes, since the white bishop is not ideally placed on f4 to meet this Huebner-like idea. 7. a3 $\text{B} \times \text{d2+}$! That forces an equal endgame, as we will see shortly. 8. $\text{B} \times \text{d2}$ [8. $\text{N} \times \text{d2}$ cxd4 f7] 8... Ne4 White has no way to prevent ... $\text{B} \times \text{a5}$, which leads to simplifications. 9. $\text{B} \times \text{c2}$ $\text{B} \times \text{a5+}$ 10. Nd2 $\text{N} \times \text{d2}$ 11. $\text{B} \times \text{d2}$ $\text{B} \times \text{d2+}$ 12. $\text{Q} \times \text{d2}$ e5! The key move. The resulting endgame is just equal:

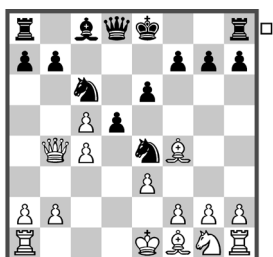
(see analysis diagram next page)



Position after: 12... e5!

13. dxe5 dxe5 14. ♖g3 f6=

B) 5... d5!? is another good option for Black, one that is perhaps more ambitious. 6. dxc5 This is the critical move here. [6. ♘gf3 cxd4 7. ♘xd4 0-0= that is harmless] 6... ♗xd2+! Now we enter a forced sequence leading to a complicated position. 7. ♔xd2 ♘e4 8. ♔b4 ♘c6



Position after: 8... ♘c6

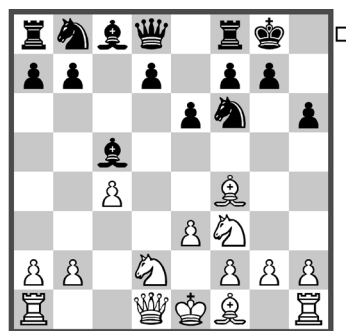
9. ♔a3 [9. ♔a4 dxc4 10. ♘f3 ♘xc5 11. ♔xc4 ♔a5+ 12. ♘d2 e5!↖ This is also good for Black, given that White's king is not that safe in the center and the position has opened up] 9... e5 10. ♗g3 d4 11. 0-0-0 [11. ♘f3?! dxe3 12. fxe3 ♔e7↖ Black is on the brink of being better, Yoo – Chandra (2022)] 11... ♗f5∞ Both sides have their chances in this unclear position, but I like the

fact that Black fully controls the center here. In my opinion, White is the one taking more risk here, despite the engine evaluation being 0.00.

5... ♗xc5 6. e3 0-0 7. ♘gf3

Black has many options here that lead to balanced play. I would like to suggest a rare approach, one that can definitely throw opponents off if they are unfamiliar with it.

7... h6!?N



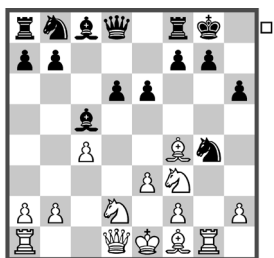
Position after: 7... h6!?N

I would recommend this move. It seems pointless at first glance, but the idea behind it is pretty deep. Black in advance prevents ♗g5 and prepares the ... d6 and ...e5 idea, restricting White's dark-squared bishop. Additionally, very often Black's idea is to play ...a5, anticipating that White will play ♘b3 at some point and then ...a4 will be a possibility for Black.

8. ♗e2

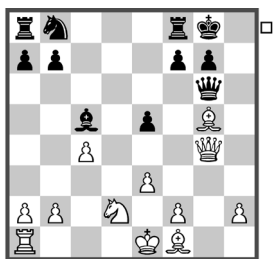
It is logical to complete the development.

A) 8. g4!? is one of the standard ideas in such positions, trying to exploit the hook on h6. 8... ♖xg4 Black can just accept the pawn sacrifice. 9. ♖g1 d6!



Position after: 9... d6!

The point – Black will play ...e5 next. 10. ♖xg4 e5 11. ♗xe5 dxe5 Black wins an exchange but White will have some compensation. 12. ♖xe5 The safer choice for White. [it may be tempting to play 12. ♖xh6 ♖xg4 13. ♗xg4 but Black manages to hold his kingside with 13... ♗f6 14. ♖g5 ♗g6



Position after: 14... ♗g6

with some edge, e.g. 15. ♖g2 ♗c6 16. ♖e4 f5 17. ♖d5+ ♗f7!? 18. ♗g3 ♗b4 19. ♖xf7+ ♗xf7! 12... ♖xg4 13. ♗xg4 ♗g5 14. ♗xg5 hxg5 15. ♖g2 ♗c6 16.

♖c3 White has obvious compensation but it is sufficient only for equality. 16... ♖b4 17. ♖xb4 ♗xb4 18. ♖e2 ♗ab8= The engine evaluates this as 0.00, but from the human point of view I would rather be the exchange up.

B) 8. a3 ♖e7!

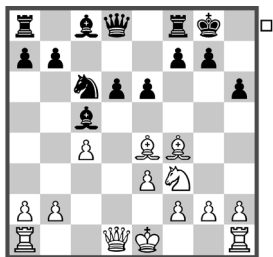


Position after: 8... ♖e7!

Given the potential threat of a tempo-winning b2-b4, Black should retreat the bishop right away and then play ...d6 and ...e5. 9. g4!? Probably the most challenging. Here again, Black needs to grab that pawn and employ the same ideas as after 8.g4. [9. ♖d3 d6 10. 0-0 e5 11. ♖g3 ♖e6 12. b4 ♗bd7] 9... ♗xg4 10. ♗g1 d6! 11. ♗xg4 e5 12. ♗xe5 dxe5 13. ♖xh6 ♖h7 14. ♖xg7 ♖xg4 15. ♗xg4 ♗g8 16. 0-0-0 ♗xg7 17. ♗e4+ ♗g6 18. ♗f3 ♗e8 19. ♗xb7 ♗a6

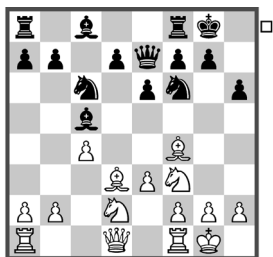
C) 8. ♖d3 Here the bishop could run into some potential attack, say with ...e5-e4 in the future. 8... ♗c6 9. 0-0 [9. ♗e4? is suddenly a serious strategic error. 9... ♗xe4 10. ♖xe4 d6!

(see analysis diagram next page)



Position after: 10... d6!

With...e5 and ...f5 coming next, Black simply takes over! For example: 11. 0-0 e5 12. ♖g3 f5 13. ♔d5+ ♕h8 ♖] 9... ♔e7!



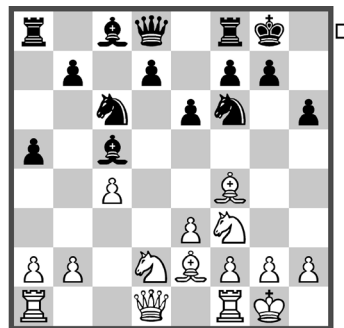
Position after: 9... ♔e7!

Threatening ...e5. 10. ♖g3 d6 11. ♔h4 e5= Black has a good position here, e.g. 12. ♖xf6 [12. ♘e4? g5! ♖] 12... ♔xf6 13. ♘e4 [13. ♖e4 ♔e7 14. a3 f5 15. ♖d5+ ♕h8 16. b4 ♖b6∞] 13... ♔e7 14. ♘xc5 dxc5 15. ♖e4 ♖d7=.

8... ♘c6 9. 0-0 a5!?

Black wants to play ...a4 and then ...d6 and ...e5. And if necessary, the bishop may hide on the a7-square.

(see diagram next column)



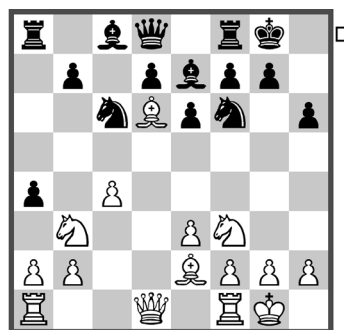
Position after: 9... a5!?

10. ♘b3

A) 10. ♔c2 ♔e7 Now ...e5 is a good idea. And if 11. ♘b3 then 11... e5 12. ♖g3 ♖a7 ♖ is advantageous for Black. Please note that ...h6 was very useful – White could not have played ♖g5!

B) 10. h3 a4 11. ♘b1 d6 12. ♘c3 e5 13. ♖h2 a3 ♖

10... ♖e7 11. ♖d6 a4



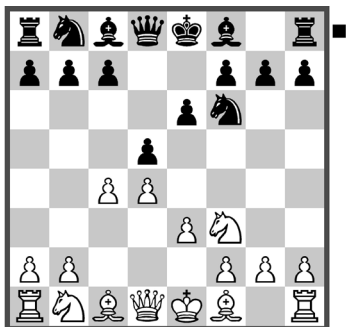
Position after: 11... a4

White is unable to maintain the blockade on d6-square.

12. ♖xe7 ♔xe7 13. ♘bd4 ♖d8=

c) 3. ♘f3 d5 4. e3

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 e6 3. ♘f3 d5 4. e3



Position after: 4. e3

This is one of the lines that White plays if he wants to avoid major theory and just get a game. I will cover here some of the most popular setups for White and how Black should react to them, not necessarily diving into deep lines, but more to discuss this line in terms of ideas and plans.

4... ♙e7

This would be my recommendation. It is the most flexible move here --- first, Black makes sure to castle and only then will he decide whether ...c5 or ...b6 is appropriate. Of course, there is no need to play ...♙b4+ as there is no pin and White can respond with ♙d2.

5. b3

That is one of the standard ways of playing this line. Before the f1-bishop is

developed, White supports the c4-pawn so that in case of ...dxc4 he can recapture with the pawn.

A) After 5. ♙d3 the standard reaction is 5 ...dxc4, when we get a Queen's Gambit Accepted with an extra tempo. 6. ♙xc4 a6 7. 0-0 0-0



Position after: 7... 0-0

A1) 8. ♙d3 c5 9. dxc5 ♘bd7!? I like this a lot. Black tries to recapture the pawn with the knight. [9... ♙xc5= is fine too] 10. c6 [10. b4 a5! ♣] 10... ♘c5!

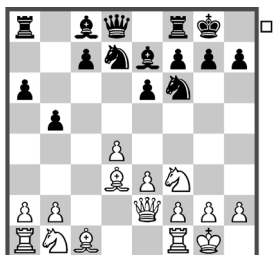


Position after: 10... ♘c5!

11. ♙c2 [11. ♙e2 ♙c7 12. cxb7 ♙xb7 is similar] 11... ♙c7 12. cxb7 ♙xb7 13. ♙e2 ♘ce4 Black has

great compensation thanks to his active pieces.

A2) 8. ♖e2 b5 9. ♘d3 ♘bd7!



Position after: 9... ♘bd7!

Black will play ...c5 soon. 10. ♖d1
[10. a4 bxa4! 11. ♖xa4 c5↗
10... ♘b7 11. b3 c5 12. ♘b2 ♖c7=

B) 5. ♘c3 0-0



Position after: 5... 0-0

B1) 6. ♖c2 b6 Black prepares ...c5, intending to recapture with the pawn. [6... c5!? 7. dxc5 ♘xc5= that is equally good] 7. cxd5 exd5 8. ♘e2 c5 9. 0-0 ♘c6=

B2) 6. cxd5 exd5 These Carlsbad pawn structures with the white bishop on c1 (instead of g5) and with

Black's normal pawn structure (without b6) are completely fine for Black.

B3) 6. a3 The idea of this move is to gain space on the queenside with b4, c5 etc. 6... ♘bd7

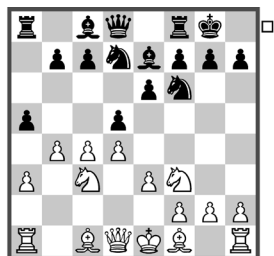
B3.1) 7. c5 White closes the queenside and gains lots of space, but this allows Black to generate play through ...e5. 7... c6 8. b4 ♖c7!? Black does not hide his intentions. 9. ♘b2 e5!



Position after: 9... e5!

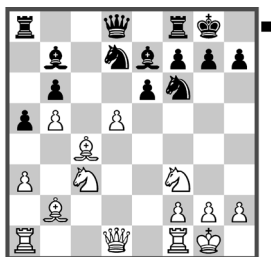
10. dxe5 White should not allow Black to seize central space with ...e4. [10. ♘e2?! e4 11. ♘d2 ♖e8↔] 10... ♘xe5 11. ♘e2 ♘fg4!?!∞ Black has a nice position.

B3.2) 7. b4 a5!



Position after: 7... a5!

8. b5 [8. ♖b1 axb4 9. axb4 This is a positive turn of events for Black, as he has opened the a-file for his rook. White still has the idea of c4-c5 here, so I think the best option for Black is 9... dxc4!? 10. ♙xc4 ♙d6= followed by ...e5.] 8... c5! 9. ♙b2 [9. bxc6?! bxc6 10. c5 e5! is great for Black, as seen in Gajewski – Almasi (2014)] 9... cxd4 10. exd4 dxc4 11. ♙xc4 b6 Black has a good position against the isolated pawn on d4. 12. 0-0 ♙b7 13. d5!?



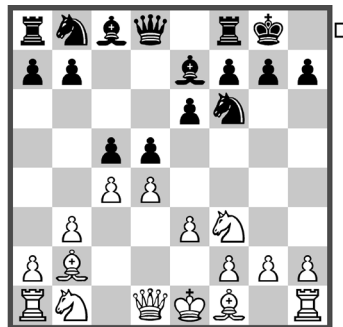
Position after: 13. d5!?

White should sooner or later play d4-d5 and trade the IQP, but Black is still doing well. 13... ♖c8 14. ♙a2 exd5 15. ♘xd5 ♘xd5 16. ♙xd5 ♙xd5 17. ♚xd5 ♘c5= I prefer Black here as White's pawns on the queenside may become weak eventually.

5... 0-0 6. ♙b2

White can play 6. ♙d3 too but after 6... c5 Black employs roughly the same strategy: 7. 0-0 cxd4 8. exd4 b6 9. ♙b2 ♙b7 and we are back in the main line of 6. ♙b2.

6... c5!



Position after: 6... c5!

I like the idea of immediately putting pressure in the center.

7. ♙d3

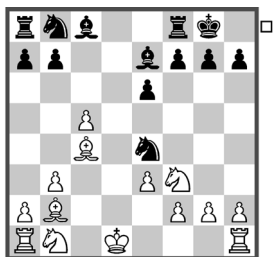
There are also moves like 7. ♘c3 or 7. ♘bd2 but Black reacts pretty much in the same fashion after them, just like after 7. ♙d3. The only real alternatives are 7.dxc5 and 7.cxd5.

A) 7. dxc5 dxc4!

The best reply. This has been played numerous times by Wesley So and he comfortably equalized in his games.

A1) 8. ♚xd8 ♖xd8 This only helps Black complete his development. 9. ♙xc4 ♘e4! 10. ♙e2 [10. ♘bd2 ♘xc5 11. ♙e2 ♘c6 12. ♖hd1 ♙d7= Narayanan – So (2019)] 10... ♘xc5 11. ♘c3 ♘c6 12. ♖hd1 ♙d7= The resulting endgames are roughly equal. No problems at all.

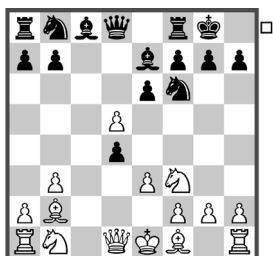
A2) 8. ♖xc4 ♔xd1+ 9. ♔xd1 ♘e4!



Position after: 9... ♘e4!

10. ♔e2 ♘xc5 The endgame is roughly equal. We just need to complete our development in pretty much any reasonable way (say, ...♘c6, ...♙d7, ...♖d8) with a good game. 11. ♘bd2 a6 [11... ♘c6!? is equally good, e.g. 12. ♖ac1 ♖d8 13. ♖hd1 ♙d7=] 12. a4 [12. ♖ac1? is suddenly bad for White. 12... b5! 13. ♙d3 ♘xd3 14. ♔xd3 a5+ Black has won the bishop pair and with such an exposed king White is definitely in trouble, Huzman – Kramnik (2019).] 12... ♘c6 13. ♖hc1 ♖d8 14. ♙a3 b6=

B) 7. cxd5 cxd4!?



Position after: 7... cxd4!?

Opening the center is the best option for Black because that is where the

white king is and Black could try to take advantage of his faster development.

B1) 8. dxe6?! This is risky for White because his king is still in the center. 8... ♙b4+! 9. ♘bd2 ♙xe6 10. exd4



Position after: 10. exd4

Black has a great development advantage, of course, but he needs to play dynamically to take advantage of it. [10. ♘xd4? ♘e4+; 10. ♙xd4?! ♘c6+] 10... ♙xd2+!? This is probably the best move here. It does not give White any time to complete his development. [10... ♘e4!?! is another interesting option, e.g. 11. a3 ♙xd2+ 12. ♘xd2 ♘xd2 13. ♔xd2 ♙d5!♞] 11. ♔xd2 [11. ♘xd2?! ♙d5!♞ with ...♖e8 coming next, this looks very scary for White, especially since he cannot play ♙e2 on account of ...♙xg2] 11... ♘e4 12. ♔e3 ♔a5+ 13. ♔d1 [13. ♘d2? ♖e8!+] 13... ♘f6 14. ♔d2 ♔c7 15. ♙d3 ♘c6 16. ♖e1 ♖ad8 17. ♖c1 ♔d6♞ Black has strong compensation as White's king is in danger and all the light squares are weak.

B2) 8. ♘xd4 ♙b4+!