

**A Complete
Opening Repertoire
for Black**

**Nimzo-Indian
Volume 1**

First edition 2021 by Thinkers Publishing
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**A Complete
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**Nimzo-Indian
Volume 1**

Dariusz Świercz

Thinkers Publishing 2021



Key to Symbols

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

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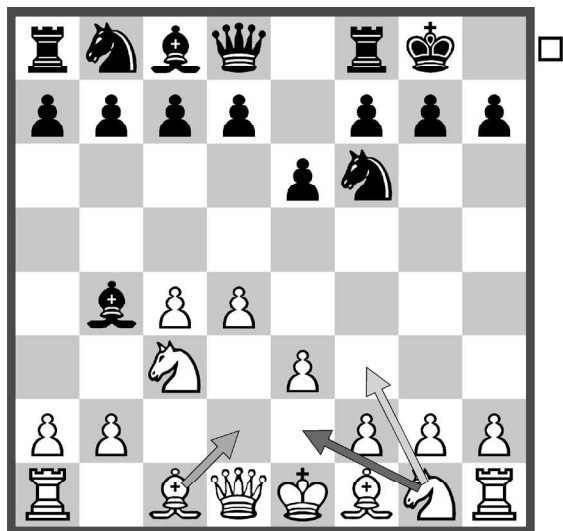
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Preface



4.e3 0-0 without 5.♙d3

1.d4 ♞f6 2.c4 e6
3.♞c3 ♞b4 4.e3 0-0



Chapter Guide

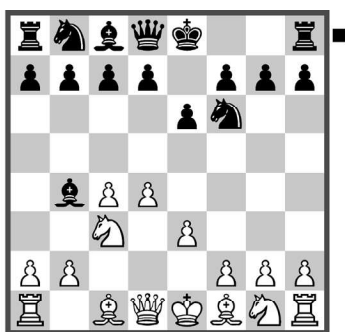
Chapter 9 – 4.e3 0-0 without 5.♖d3

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗c3 ♘b4 4.e3 0-0 5.♗ge2 d5 6.a3 ♘e7

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a) Introduction

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 e6 3. ♘c3 ♙b4 4. e3



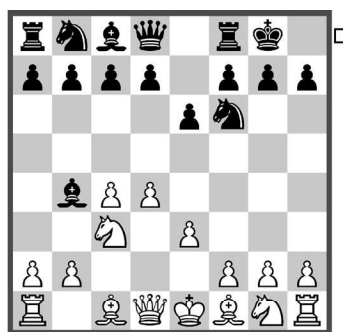
Position after: 4. e3

The Rubinstein System (or Variation) is one of the most popular responses to the Nimzo-Indian. According to my database, there have been more than 55,000 games played with this so far. This line is named after Akiba Rubinstein, the best Polish chess player in the 1900's, who is well-known for his positional style and stunning endgame skills. One of the main ideas for White is to play ♘e2 in order to have the possibility of recapturing ♘xc3, in the event of ...♙xc3. However, ♘e2 is not the only idea for White here and it is also good to develop the knight to the f3-square. This line is very flexible and White has many possible plans.

The Rubinstein System has been used by many World Champions, including Mikhail Botvinnik and recently Magnus Carlsen. From Black's perspective, there is a myriad of various systems and set-

ups available. In this book, I have tried to limit myself to lines that I would certainly recommend playing. I think that my recommendations offer sound strategic grounds for the battle in the mid-game.

4... 0-0



Position after: 4... 0-0

The most flexible response. Black keeps the options of ...d5, ...c5 and other plans too, depending on what White does.

5. ♙d3

This is the most popular line. It will be discussed in the next chapter.

In this chapter, we will discuss the other possibilities on move 5.

A) 5. ♙d2 This line has recently become very popular. White makes sure that the pawn structure will not be ruined. Here, I recommend playing 5... c5

6. a3 ♖xc3 7. ♖xc3 ♗e4. According to my analysis that I present in this book, Black comfortably equalizes.

B) 5. ♗ge2 This is the Reshevsky Variation, named after Samuel Reshevsky, who frequently employed this line in his games throughout his career and contributed significantly to the development of its theory. One of the experts on this line is Mikhail Gurevich, with whom I had the pleasure to train for many years and who, besides improving my chess, has also shown me many ideas in this opening. Recently, Baadur Jobava has employed this line quite successfully too. White's idea is to have the possibility of recapturing ♗xc3 in the event of ...♖xc3 in the future. After White plays a3, Black's bishop should then generally retreat. White very often seeks to break through in the center with e4, while Black tries to control it. There are many possible paths for Black in this line. Personally, I prefer the most classical approach: 5... d5 6. a3.

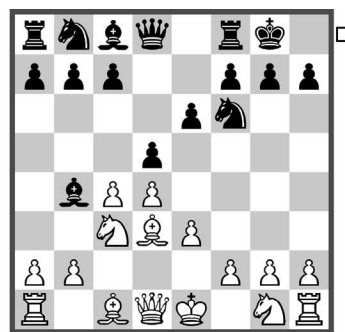


Position after: 6. a3

6... ♗e7 [It is worth noting that 6... ♗d6 has grown in popularity in recent years too. However, I prefer the text

move.] 7. cxd5 [The alternatives 7. ♗f4 and 7. ♗g3 are rather harmless.] 7... exd5 I believe that Black should equalize here without much trouble.

5... d5



Position after: 5... d5

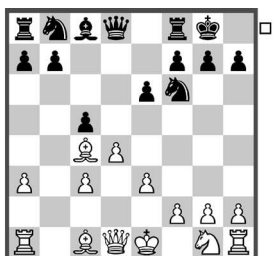
6. ♗f3

Again, this is the most common move here, but Nimzo-Indian theory has recently developed in other directions too.

A) After 6. ♗ge2, I recommend 6... dxc4 7. ♖xc4 c5 8. 0-0 cxd4 9. exd4 ♗c6 where the white knight on the e2-square is not optimally placed (it would have been better placed on the f3-square). In 2013, I employed this line successfully against Ivan Sokolov.

B) 6. a3 This move immediately challenges the bishop and essentially wins the pair of bishops (a retreat with ...♗e7 is possible, but it does not make much sense as Black would lose a tempo). This line has become quite popular

lately too, as Magnus Carlsen has played it a few times, as have many other Grandmasters. Personally, I don't find it too dangerous for Black because the arising positions seem to be quite easy to play as Black. Black should play 6... ♘xc3+ 7. bxc3 dxc4 8. ♘xc4 c5 and immediately challenge the center and queenside.



Position after: 8... c5

Typically, Black's plan is either ...b6 with ...♘b7 or ...♗c6 with ...e5, depending on what White does. White has two possible ways of developing the knight: 9. ♗f3 and 9. ♗e2. Both lead to interesting positions in which I believe that Black is totally fine.

C) 6. cxd5 exd5 7. ♗ge2



Position after: 7. ♗ge2

This line is similar to 5. ♗e2, but Black does not have to retreat the bishop to the e7-square. Instead, Black can keep the bishop more actively on the d6-square. Modern theory suggests 7... ♗e8 8. 0-0 [8. ♘d2 ♘d6 9. ♗c1 a6 most likely leads to the same position] 8... ♘d6 9. ♘d2 a6 10. ♗c1 ♗bd7 and I also recommend this approach. My analysis shows that Black has a good position.

6... dxc4!

In order to keep things simple, I recommend playing this move first.

The small issue is that if Black starts with 6... c5, White has the additional option of 7. cxd5 exd5 8. dxc5 which leads to a position in which Black has an isolated pawn. Even though I believe that there should not be any significant danger to Black, starting with 6...dxc4 eliminates this possibility, leaving White less room to look for ideas.

7. ♘xc4 c5 8. 0-0



Position after: 8. 0-0

This is one of the very popular positions in the Rubinstein System. Black has many possible set-ups. Most likely, all of them are playable, but I can only pick one – since writing a book on such a robust opening as the Nimzo-Indian requires diving into specific lines instead of analyzing everything, as otherwise the book will end up being massive!



Position after: 9... ♖a5

8... ♞c6 9. a3 ♙a5

This is the line I suggest playing. It is named the Larsen Variation. Black's main idea is to wait for dxc5 and only then play ...♙xc3, ruining White's pawn structure. Recently, this line has become quite popular.

For example, in 2020, Leinier Dominguez used it against Fabiano Caruana and he was getting good positions.

I will analyze each of those variations in subsequent pages.

b) 5. ♙d2

1. d4 ♞f6 2. c4 e6 3. ♞c3 ♙b4 4. e3 0-0 5. ♙d2

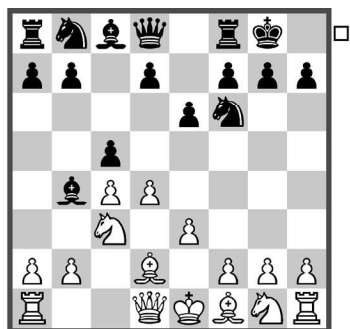


Position after: 5. ♙d2

This line has recently experienced a huge rise in popularity. One of the experts on this line with White is the German Grandmaster Matthias Bluebaum, who employed this system many times, including against me. In general, White wants to recapture ♙xc3 in case Black's ...♙xc3 happens. White also keeps some flexibility in developing the king-side minor pieces. Black has a big choice now and White can choose their own set-up accordingly.

5... c5

5... d5 6. ♘f3 is the main theoretical discussion. I will not cover this line in this book, but will do so in Volume 2 instead, which will be dedicated to the Ragozin Variation. From the Ragozin move order (1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♙b4 4.♘c3 ♙b4 5.e3 0-0 6.♙d2), there are no deviations possible.



Position after: 5... c5

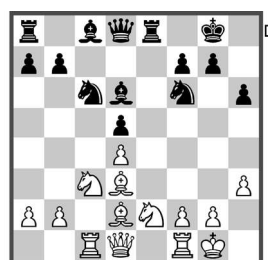
I like this line for Black. I think it should comfortably equalize for Black. I play it myself!

6. a3

The most popular approach recently. White wants to win the pair of bishops immediately. Alternatives are not dangerous at all.

A) 6. dxc5 ♙xc5 7. ♘f3 d5= is simply okay for Black. A regular central development gives Black a comfortable position.

B) 6. ♙d3 is not dangerous either. In the game Gareyev – Lenderman (2019), Black comfortably equalized after 6... cxd4 7. exd4 d5 8. cxd5 exd5 9. ♘ge2 ♘c6 10. 0-0 ♙d6 11. h3 h6 12. ♖c1 ♗e8=.



Position after: 12... ♗e8=

C) 6. ♘f3 transposes to the position discussed in 4.♙d2.

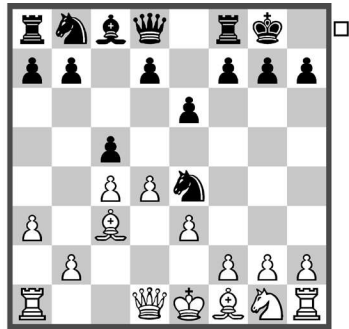
D) 6. d5 leads to a good version of a Benoni structure for Black. 6... exd5



Position after: 6... exd5

7. ♘xd5 [7. cxd5 d6 8. ♙d3 ♘bd7 9. ♘ge2 ♘e5=] 7... ♘xd5 8. cxd5 ♙xd2+ 9. ♗xd2 d6=

6... ♙xc3 7. ♙xc3 ♘e4



Position after: 7... Nxe4

8. Nxe2

This is the recent trend and perhaps the best try to look for an advantage.

A) 8. Qc2 Nxc3 9. Qxc3 is even less dangerous than 8. Rxc1. 9... cxd4! 10. exd4 [10. Qxd4 Nc6 11. Qd2 b6 12. Nf3 Qf6!]=] 10... b6 followed by ... Qb7, ... Nd6, ... Rc8. Black is totally fine. Black can also consider playing ...d5.



Position after: 10... b6

A1) 11. Qd3 d5!? [11... Qb7=] 12. c5 bxc5 13. dxc5 a5∞

A2) 11. Nf3 Qb7 12. Qe2 Nc6 13. 0-0 Rc8=

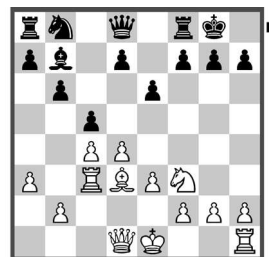
B) 8. Rxc1 is another popular move here, but it is not dangerous.



Position after: 8. Rxc1

Black is okay in many ways. 8... b6!? This is a somewhat ambitious set-up for Black. Having equalized already, I see no reason not to try to begin fighting for an edge! [Playing 8... d6 is simplest though. Black is simply fine. 9. Qd3 Nxc3 10. Rxc3 Nd7 11. Nf3 b6 12. 0-0 Qe7=]

B1) 9. Qd3 Nxc3 10. Rxc3 Qb7 11. Nf3 [11. d5?! exd5 12. cxd5 Qg5!]=]



Position after: 11. Nf3

Here, Black can play either some normal, developing moves like ... d6 with ... Nd7 etc. with an equal position, or go for something more aggressive such as 11... f5!? 12. 0-0 Qxf3!? 13. Qxf3 Nc6 14. d5 Ne5= with a balanced position which has the poten-

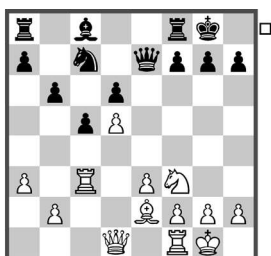
tial to transform into a complicated fight.

B2) 9. d5 ♞xc3 10. ♜xc3 ♞a6!?



Position after: 10... ♞a6!?

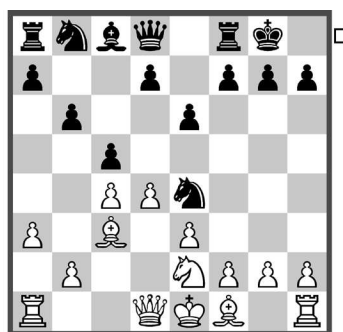
I suggest this idea here. Black brings the knight to the c7-square. 11. ♙e2 [11. ♞f3 ♞c7 12. e4 d6 13. ♙e2 f5!?! Black puts some pressure on White.] 11... ♞c7 12. ♞f3 exd5 13. cxd5 d6 14. 0-0 ♚e7=



Position after: 14... ♚e7=

The position is around equal, which should be easier to play as Black. It is a great version of a Benoni structure as many pieces are already traded (so having less space is not an issue for Black).

8... b6!



Position after: 8... b6!

9. d5

The main move. 9. dxc5N is interesting too, even though it looks pretty harmless and there have been no games so far here. 9... bxc5



Position after: 9... bxc5

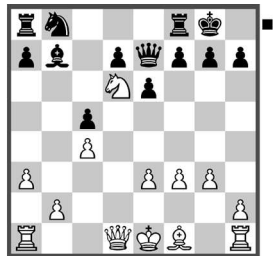
10. f3 [10. b4 ♞xc3 11. ♞xc3 ♚e7=] 10... ♞xc3 11. ♞xc3 White's idea here is to try to exploit the d6-square or at least put some pressure on the d-file. 11... ♚h4+! It makes sense to weaken White's kingside. 12. g3 ♚e7

Here, White is at a crossroads. White can either go for regular development and admit that Black has comfortably equalized or go for the very ambitious 13. ♞e4. Let's discuss both options.



Position after: 12... ♖e7

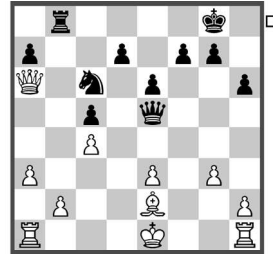
13. ♘e4? seems to be quite logical. There is no ...d5 or ...d6, and on the next move, White will play ♙d6. However, it is surprisingly bad for White! Black simply takes over with very powerful play with 13... ♙b7! [White should play simply with ♘c3 13. ♙g2 ♙b7 14. 0-0 ♗d8= with equality] 14. ♘d6 [14. ♙d6 ♙xd6 15. ♘xd6 ♙xf3→].



Position after: 14. ♘d6

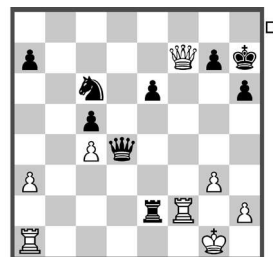
14... ♙xf3! Black needs to eliminate the d6-knight, but by doing so, Black sacrifices a rook. Tactically, though, it all works great for Black! 15. ♙xf3 ♙xd6 16. ♙xa8 ♘c6 17. ♙b7 ♗b8 18. ♙a6 ♙e5! An important move. Due to the very exposed king, White is in big trouble. 19. ♙e2 A logical response. White wants to castle. However, even this does not help. Black has an ingenious

move now that surprisingly wins: 19... h6!!→.



Position after: 19... h6!!→

Black needs to make sure that the black king does not run into any back rank issues. Suddenly, White has no good response: the b2- and e3-pawns are falling and with them White's position, as can be seen in the following example. 20. 0-0 [20. ♙a4 ♗xb2 21. ♙d1 ♙c3+ 22. ♙f1 ♗d2 23. ♙e1 ♙f6+ 24. ♙g2 ♙b2 25. ♙f1 ♗xe2 26. ♙xe2 ♙xa1+ 27. ♙g2 ♙xa3→] 20... ♙xe3+ 21. ♗f2 ♗xb2 22. ♙c8+ ♙h7 23. ♙xd7 ♗xe2 24. ♙xf7 ♙d4!! The only winning move.

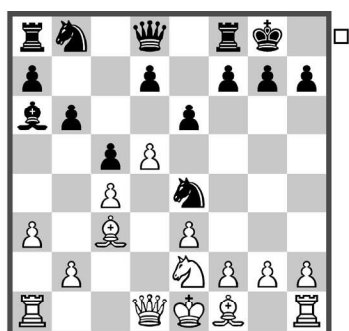


Position after: 24... ♙d4!!

25. ♗af1 ♘e5 26. ♙xa7 ♘d3 27. ♙f7 ♗e5!! 28. ♙f3 ♘xf2 29. ♗xf2 ♙xc4→ Black should win this.

9... ♘a6!?

9... ♘b7 This is the main move. There have been some games here lately and it's also a possibility. However, I have decided to focus deeply on 9... ♘a6, especially since I have played it myself.



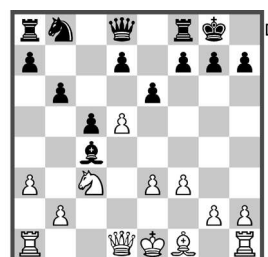
Position after: 9... ♘a6!?

I like this move. Black puts pressure immediately on the c4-pawn. Initially, I thought that the normal 9... ♘b7 should be played here, but then I discovered the game Yuffa – Aronian (2019).

10. ♗d3!?

This move came as a surprise to me during my games against Matthias Bluebaum. At the time, it was a novelty, and for some reason I looked at ♗d3 plans after 10.b3 b5, but not the immediate 10. ♗d3.

A) The key tactical idea that Black hopes for is revealed after 10. f3, which is met by 10... ♘xc3 11. ♘xc3 ♘xc4!.



Position after: 11... ♘xc4!

A nice tactical trick. Black wins a pawn after 12. ♘xc4 ♗h4+ 13. g3 ♗xc4. White still has to prove compensation here, which does not look like an obvious and easy task to me. Therefore, here I would carefully assign a =/+ evaluation. However, I admit that White should still have some counter-chances.

B) 10. b3 b5! Renewing the pressure on the c4-pawn.



Position after: 10... b5!

B1) 11. f3? runs into the same trick: 11... ♘xc3 12. ♘xc3 bxc4 13. bxc4 ♘xc4! 14. ♘xc4 ♗h4+ 15. g3 ♗xc4.

Here, though, it is an even better version of the 10.f3 line as White's queenside is weakened, which gives Black time to complete development and hold the extra pawn.



Position after: 15... ♖xc4

B2) 11. ♖c2!? is a decent alternative, but it does not offer anything special either. 11... exd5 12. cxd5 ♗xc3 13. ♗xc3 [The alternative 13. ♖xc3 does not pose any threats: 13... d6 14. ♗g3 ♗d7 15. ♕e2 ♗f6 with a playable position, for example after



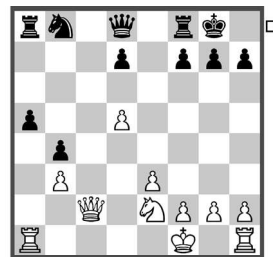
Position after: 15... ♗f6

16. ♖d1 ♖e8 17. 0-0 ♗b6 18. b4 ♕c8 19. bxc5 dxc5 20. ♖c1 c4 21. ♗fd1 ♕d7∞.]
13... b4!



Position after: 13... b4!

A very concrete path to solve the problems with the b5-pawn. 14. axb4 [14. ♕xa6 ♗xa6 15. axb4 ♗xb4 16. ♖d2 d6=] 14... ♕xf1 15. ♗xf1 cxb4 16. ♗e2 a5



Position after: 16... a5

Both sides have their own chances here, but Black's play on the queen-side seems to be easier. The plan of ...♗a6, ...♖b6, ...Ra(f)c8 and ...♗c5 is very straightforward.

B3) 11. ♖d3 This move was played in Yuffa – Aronian (2019).

B3.1) I believe that 11... exd5?! is inaccurate due to 12. cxb5! [12. ♖xd5!?, as in the game, looks good too, though] 12... ♕b7 13. ♕b2± where White manages to keep the pair of bishops.

B3.2) 11... ♗xc3!N I think that this is an improvement over Aronian's move. 12. ♗xc3 bxc4 13. bxc4 exd5

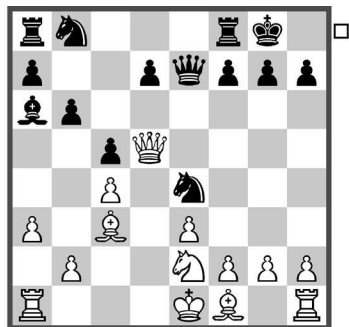
This forced sequence solves all the opening issues. Black is fine, as the following lines show:



Position after: 13... exd5

14. ♘xd5 [14. ♙xd5 ♙a5 15. ♙d2 ♘c6=] 14... ♘c6 15. ♙e2 ♙a5+ 16. ♙c3 ♖ab8 17. 0-0 ♙xc3 18. ♘xc3 ♘a5=

10... exd5 11. ♙xd5 ♙e7!



Position after: 11... ♙e7!

I reacted correctly though.

12. ♖c1!?

I think that this move is the best try for White. White prepares ♘g3 or ♘f4.

A) White cannot take the rook as after 12. ♙xa8 ♘c6, the queen is trapped.

13. ♙xf8+ ♙xf8→

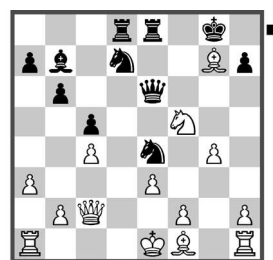
B) 12. ♙d3 The queen on the d5-square was vulnerable, so it makes

sense to retreat it and prepare the maneuver ♘f4-♘d5. However, White is simply not in time to pull this off. 12... d5! A powerful pawn sacrifice. 13. ♙xd5 ♘d7 14. ♙d3 ♙b7 15. ♘g3 ♖ad8↑



Position after: 15... ♖ad8↑

Black has a very strong initiative. 16. ♙xg7!? This perhaps holds, but going for such a move while having all the pieces undeveloped is not an easy decision over the board. [16. ♙c2 g6] 16... ♖fe8! 17. ♙c2 f5! Black goes for the all-out attack. White is under huge pressure. 18. ♘xf5! ♙e6 19. g4

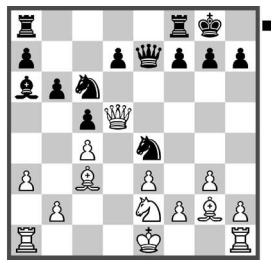


Position after: 19. g4

White possibly holds, but Black has a wide range of possibilities which offer a strong initiative. 19... ♘e5!↑

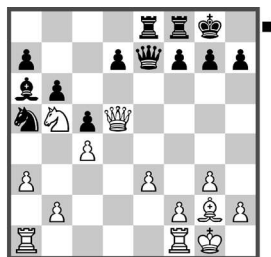
[19... ♘g5!↑?; 19... ♘df6!↑?]

C) 12. g3 was played by Matthias Bluebaum against me. It is not really dangerous for Black. 12... ♖c6 13. ♙g2



Position after: 13. ♙g2

C1) In the first game, I played the unnecessary 13... ♜ae8?! and after 14. 0-0, I was in trouble. Still not realizing that I was worse, I continued with an ambitious idea with 14... ♘xc3 15. ♘xc3 ♘a5, but here, 16. ♘b5! shattered my hopes to win the c4-pawn.



Position after: 16. ♘b5!

Here, I made a further mistake and played 16... ♙b7? [16... ♙f6± was more tenacious] 17. ♙d3 ♙xg2 18. ♙xg2 ♙e4+ 19. ♙xe4 ♜xe4 and after 20. ♘d6!+ I was strategically lost, in Bluebaum – Swiercz (2020).

C2) 13... ♘xc3! After the first loss, I tried to improve my game and I figu-

red that ... ♜ae8 was a waste of time. 14. ♘xc3 ♘a5!



Position after: 14... ♘a5!

Now, there are certain issues with the c4-pawn.

C2.1) ♙f5 is a better move. 15... ♙xc4!? Black can sacrifice an exchange here with sufficient compensation due to the control over the light squares [15... ♜ad8!? is also okay]. 16. ♙xa8 ♜xa8 17. 0-0 ♜d8∞

C2.2) 15. ♙d1? is seemingly a logical move, hitting the a8-rook and trying to play b3 on the next move. But Black can ignore the exchange and go for 15... ♙xc4! which gives Black a huge edge.



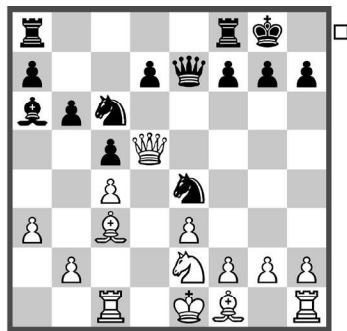
Position after: 15... ♙xc4!

16. ♘d5? A sort of panic, I guess. [Instead, 16. ♔xa8 ♖xa8 17. ♕f3 was necessary, but after 17... ♖e8 18. 0-0-0 b5 ♗ Black is better anyway. It is simply a worse version of 15. ♕f5.] 16... ♕e5! Now Black wins with 17. b4 ♘b3 18. ♖b1 ♘d4 19. ♘f4 ♗ae8→ Bluebaum – Swiercz (2020).



Position after: 14... ♕e6

12... ♘c6



Position after: 12... ♘c6

13. ♘g3

White should quickly deal with Black's active pieces and try to complete their development of the kingside.

Playing 13. ♘f4 ♗ae8 (with the threat of ... ♘xf2) 14. ♕d3 ♔b7↑ with the idea of ... ♘e5 looks good for Black.

13... ♘xc3 14. ♖xc3 ♕e6

One of many moves which give Black a good game.

15. ♔e2

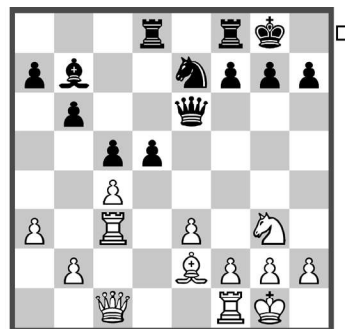
15. ♕d2 ♖ad8=

15... ♘e7!? 16. ♕d2

16. ♕xe6 dxe6=

16... ♖ad8 17. ♕c1 ♔b7 18. 0-0 d5=

18... f5= is slightly more ambitious and also possible.

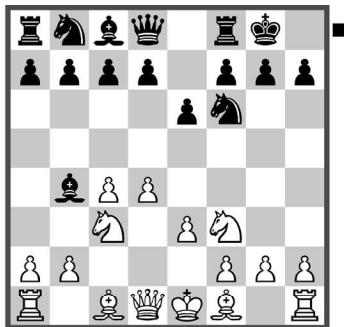


Position after: 18... d5=

Black comfortably equalizes.

c) 5. ♘f3

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 e6 3. ♘c3 ♙b4 4. e3
0-0 5. ♘f3



Position after: 5. ♘f3

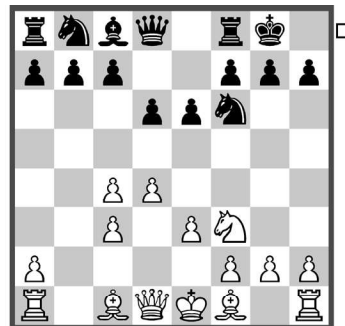
This move order in the Rubinstein System has not been recently played too often among top Grandmasters, as 5. ♙d2 and 5. ♙d3 are the most frequent choices. My understanding is that playing 5. ♙d2 has the idea of preventing ... ♙xc3, and 5. ♙d3 keeps the option of playing ♘e2 in the future. In both cases, 5... ♙xc3 is rather comfortable for White. However, with the white knight already developed to f3, White generally has less options. Taking into account those considerations, instead of going for main lines (like 5... d5, 5...c5 or 5...b6, which are all okay too) I would suggest an alternative, very new and fresh approach here.

5... ♙xc3+!?

I like this idea for Black. I first noticed it in the game Ivanchuk – Ding (2020).

However, this type of idea against plans with ♘f3 was known to me earlier in different positions.

6. bxc3 d6



Position after: 6... d6

Black wants to play against White's structure and generally try to keep the position closed so as to diminish the strength of the white bishops.

7. ♙d3

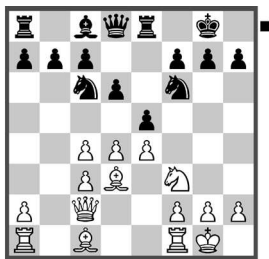
This is the most logical. White should definitely develop their pieces and try to build a strong center. There are alternatives but they are less logical.

A) 7. ♘d2 makes little sense. There is no reason to move the knight unnecessarily a second time. Black can simply play 7... e5= with a good game.

B) 7. ♙e2 looks passive. 7... ♖e8 I would probably go for the typical ...e5

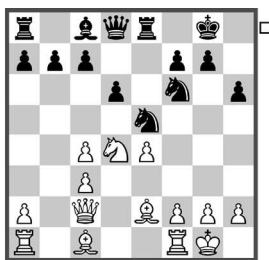
plan. [7... c5!? is also possible. 8. ♖c2 ♗c6 9. e4 e5=] 8. 0-0 ♗c6 9. ♗d2 e5 10. f3 b6=

C) White can prepare e4 by playing 7. ♖c2 too, but the queen here is not so well-placed. The following line pretty well demonstrates this. 7... ♖e8 8. e4 e5 9. ♙d3 [9. d5?! is rarely a good option for White. 9... ♗a6=] 9... ♗a6=] 9... ♗c6 10. 0-0 [10. d5?! ♗e7=]



Position after: 10. 0-0

10... exd4! The point. Now, White has to recapture with the knight. 11. ♗xd4 [11. cxd4? is bad due to 11... ♗b4! 12. ♖b1 ♗xd3 13. ♖xd3 ♗xe4= with a healthy extra pawn for Black] 11... ♗e5 [11... ♗d7!?] 12. ♙e2 h6=



Position after: 12... h6=

Black has a comfortable position due to the better pawn structure, as shown in

the following example. 13. f3 [13. f4 ♗ed7 14. ♙f3 ♗c5 15. ♖e1 ♙g4=] 13... c5 14. ♗b5 a6 15. ♗a3 ♙d7=

7... e5!



Position after: 7... e5!

Black immediately challenges the center. It involves a pawn sacrifice but Black obtains great compensation for it.

8. e4

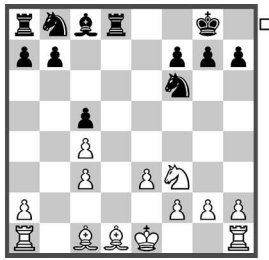
This was played by Ivanchuk. The critical alternative is 8. dx e5 dx e5 9. ♗xe5 where White wins a pawn.



Position after: 9. ♗xe5

Here, Black has two good plans. Both are interesting, but they lead to different types of positions.

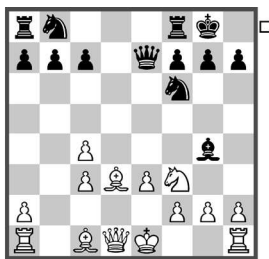
A) 9... ♖d6 This is the simplest solution. Black simply enters the endgame after 10. ♘f3 ♜d8 11. ♙c2 ♚xd1+ 12. ♙xd1 c5! and it appears that White is not able to hold the c4-pawn.



Position after: 12... c5!

Black regains the material and the endgame is equal. 13. ♘e5 ♙e6 14. f3 ♘fd7 15. ♘d3 ♘c6 16. e4 ♘ce5 17. ♘f4 ♙xc4=

B) 9... ♚e7!? is a more ambitious alternative, which is fully playable too. Black wants to create an attack against the white king. 10. ♘f3 ♙g4

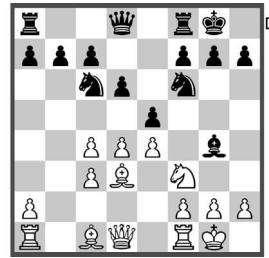


Position after: 10... ♙g4

11. 0-0 [11. ♚c2 ♙xf3 12. gxf3 ♘bd7] 11... ♘bd7 12. ♚c2 ♙xf3 13. gxf3 ♚e6=

8... exd4!

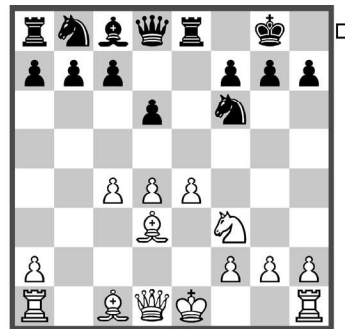
As the white king is still in the center, Black wants to open the center and put pressure on the e-file. This path is the most principled. 8... ♘c6!? is the alternative. It leads to a more positional battle where it is yet to be seen whether the pair of bishops is stronger than the black knights. 9. 0-0 ♙g4



Position after: 9... ♙g4

10. ♙b2!? [10. ♙e3 ♜e8 11. h3 ♙h5 12. ♜e1 h6] 10... ♜e8 11. ♜e1 h6 12. h3 ♙h5 13. ♜e3 ♘h7 14. ♚c2 ♙xf3 15. ♜xf3 ♘e7= A complex positional fight ensues.

9. cxd4 ♜e8



Position after: 9... ♜e8

As it appears, due to the pin on the e-file, White cannot hold the e4-pawn.

10. 0-0!

White should give up the e4-pawn and look for some dynamic play that could compensate for the missing pawn.

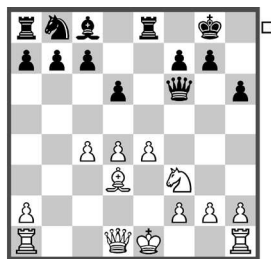
A) An attempt to defend the e4-pawn twice does not save it. 10. ♖c2 ♗xe4! 11. ♙xe4 ♙f5



Position after: 11... ♙f5

Black regains the piece with a better position, for example: 12. ♗e5 ♙xe4 13. ♖xe4 dxe5 14. dxe5 ♗c6 15. ♙b2 ♖d6! 16. 0-0 ♖g6.

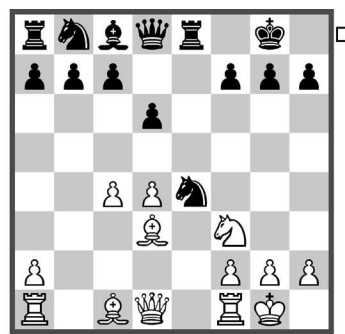
B) 10. ♙g5?! White has the idea of 10... h6 11. ♙xf6 ♖xf6 which actually saves the e4-pawn but at the cost of giving away the pair of bishops and weakening all the dark squares.



Position after: 11... ♖xf6

Black is simply better here. 12. 0-0 [12. h3 ♗c6 13. ♙b1 ♙e6 14. 0-0 ♙xc4] 12... ♙g4 13. ♙e2 ♗c6 14. d5 ♙xf3 15. ♙xf3 ♗d4.

10... ♗xe4



Position after: 10... ♗xe4

11. ♖e1

White can also try 11. ♖c2!? ♗f6 12. ♙g5. Black needs to be somewhat careful here, as the pin is annoying and White has a big advantage in piece development. Black should play 12... h6 13. ♙h4 ♙g4! with a good game.



Position after: 13... ♙g4!

Black needs to quickly bring their pieces from the queenside into the game. 14. ♖ae1 [14. ♗d2 is too passive to cause