

Smashing the Spanish!

Stunning the Scotch!

Marek Soszynski



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by Marek Soszynski

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Introduction

If you play 1.e4 e5 as Black and respond to 2.♘f3 with 2...♘c6, then the Spanish (3.♗b5) along with the Scotch (3.d4) will make up over 60% of what you can expect to face. In this book, we introduce you to a couple of unconventional and overlooked lines with which to smash and stun your opponents – if you'll excuse the dramatic phrasing.

Part One covers Bird's Defense (1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘d4), while Part Two explores the Lolli Variation (1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 ♘xd4). Both are rare, and the Lolli is almost unheard of. What better way to surprise your opponents than with openings they have barely studied – or even seen?

Each of the two parts begins with theoretical chapters. These are not exhaustive surveys but focused analyses from Black's perspective. We cover White's key continuations and the best ways to counter them while also highlighting some pitfalls for Black. After the theory we present annotated games that provide a broader, more practical view of Bird's Defense and the Lolli Variation – showing what actually happens in real games rather than just in home preparation or computer analysis.

The amount of material out there on the Spanish and the Scotch – where Bird's Defense and the Lolli Variation are often relegated to mere footnotes – is unmanageably and unreadably vast. After extensive research, I have found much of the existing coverage of the Bird and the Lolli to be outdated, dismissive, and often flawed – when it exists at all. These two lines are long overdue for fresh, independent analysis suited to the mid-2020s – and this book delivers exactly that.

One last thing – please do not share this book with White players. It will only anger and confuse them as the diagrams are from our point of view – Black's.

Marek Soszynski
Birmingham, UK
October 2025

Part One

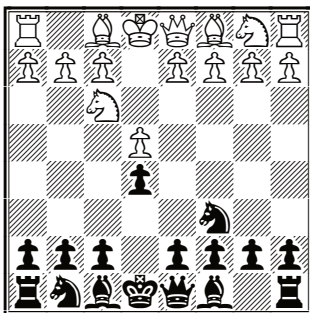
Chapter 1

Bird's Defense

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6

This is the standard way for Black to defend against what was formerly and formally called the “King’s Knight’s Opening.”

Thus we reach the most common opening position (after two moves) in all of chess. While it is true that the Sicilian Defense (1.e4 c5) is more popular than the Open Game (1.e4 e5), Black exercises more choice on the second move in the Sicilian.



3.♙b5

The Ruy Lopez Opening or Spanish Game. 3.♙b5 is more popular than any other white third

move, occurring forty-something percent in large databases. So, no Black player should doubt the importance of having a good defense (or preferably two) against the Spanish Game. In Part One we examine, from Black’s point of view, an unusual choice.

3...♞d4

The defining move of Bird’s Defense, named after the strong but inconsistent English player Henry Bird (1829-1908), who played it “hundreds” of times casually and often in serious games too.

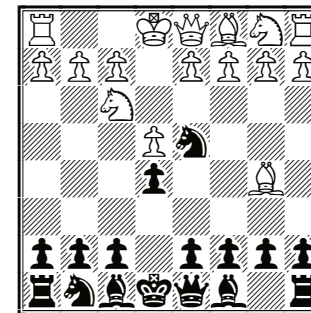
Since then, lots of big names have tried 3...♞d4 over a brief period and/or as a one-off surprise or occasional weapon, but no more than that. We will see examples of this in the annotated games.

Among the strongest recent players to actually rely on it (to some extent) have been the Spanish GM David Larino Nieto (b. 1989) and the Czech IM Jiri Jirka (b. 1983). Before them, the

Ukrainian GM Vladimir Malaniuk (1957-2017) and the Belarusian GM Viktor Kupreichik (1949-2017) were among the more frequent users of Bird’s Defense.

In correspondence chess, a couple of prominent exponents are the Russian CCGM Mikhail Shchebenyuk (b. 1947) and the English master-strength veteran Keith McLaughlin.

However, 3...♞d4 is definitely a minor sideline, only the seventh or eighth most popular response to 3.♙b5. Hardly a study priority for our Ruy Lopez opponents!



Let’s pause to consider Black’s last move. The targeted knight on c6 evaded capture (or later getting pinned) by going to d4, so there will be no Spanish Exchange Variation (3...a6 4.♙xc6). Although evasion means that Black breaks the principle of not moving the same piece twice in the opening, White’s best reaction is in fact to immediately break the same principle himself with 4.♞xd4. Meanwhile, the “Spanish” bishop on b5, finding itself in Black’s half

of the board with little reason to be on b5 anymore, is vulnerable to attack (by black pawns once the d4-knight is eliminated). In short, all of White’s familiarity with the various forms of the classical Ruy Lopez becomes superfluous in the unique situations brought about by Bird’s Defense.

Incidentally, there is such a thing as Bird’s Defense Deferred, which is 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♞d4. However, there’s nothing in particular to recommend the deferral after 5.♞xd4 exd4 6.d3 b5 (the main line) 7.♙b3 ♙b7 8.c3±.

4.♞xd4

(a) If White does not capture the d4-knight, then that knight can capture on f3 (or b5). For example, 4.♙c4 (4.♙a4 can get the same response) 4...♞xf3+ 5.♞xf3 (5.gxf3 ♞f6 6.♞c3 c6±) 5...♞f6 6.♞g3 (6.♞e2 can get the same response) 6...♙c5 7.♞c3 ♞e7=. See game 12, Pisk-Lutz for a continuation.

(b) 4.♞xe5?? is crazy even if White gets two pawns for the bishop, 4...♞xb5 (4...♞e7!?) 5.♞xf7 ♞xf7 6.♞h5+ g6 7.♞xb5 c6-+.

4...exd4

Do not try to be clever. 4...a6?! is outsmarted by 5.♞e6! fxe6 6.♞h5+ g6 7.♞xe5 ♞f6 8.♞xf6 ♞xf6 9.♙d3 d5 10.f3 leaving Black a pawn down.

5.0-0

By far the most common move – whether you are a White player familiar with the Bird or not. It is also the most accurate; otherwise, Black might feel even more encouraged to pry open the e-file with an early ...d7-d5:

(a) 5.♘c4 (wishing for 5...♘c5?? 6.♘xf7+-) can be answered by the instant 5...d5! (extremely rare in this move order) 6.exd5 (6.♘xd5 ♖f6=) 6...♖f6 7.0-0 (7.d3 ♘e7 8.0-0 ♘xd5 game 13, Fargere-Rapport) 7...♗e7 8.♖f3 (8.d3 ♘xd5 is game 13 again; 8.♗e1 ♘xd5 9.♖h5 c6 10.♘xd5 ♖xd5 11.♖xd5 cxd5 12.d3 ♗e6=) 8...0-0 (better than 8...♗g4 9.♖f4 0-0 10.h3 ♗d6 11.♖xd4 Saric-Carlsen, Tromsø 2014, which Black lost) 9.h3 (9.d3 ♗g4 10.♖f4 [10.♖g3 ♗e8=] 10...♗d6 11.♖xd4 c5! 12.♖c3 ♗e2 13.♗e1 ♖g4! 14.g3 ♗e8 15.♗b5 ♖xh2!∞) 9...♖d7!? (9...♗d7=) 10.d3 b5! 11.d6!? ♘xd6 12.♖xa8 c6! threatens to trap the white queen. Note that 5...♖f6 6.0-0 d5, etc., can lead to the same though White might vary by not castling, so 5...d5!? is more certain; it is also better than 5...g6 6.0-0 ♗g7 7.♖f3 ♖e7 8.d3±.

(b) 5.d3 c6 (5...♗b4+ game 18, Galvao-Do Nascimento) 6.♗a4 (6.♗c4 d5 [6...♖f6 game 19, Noa-Alapin, and game 40, Papp-Rudolf; 6...♖e7 game 30, Fick-Spielmann] 7.exd5 cxd5 8.♖e2+!? ♗e7 9.♗b5+ ♖f8 10.0-0 h5!)=) 6...d5!?

7.exd5 ♖a5+ 8.c3 ♖xd5 9.0-0 ♖f6 10.♗e1+ ♗e7 and now White has to avoid 11.♖e2!? ♖e6=.

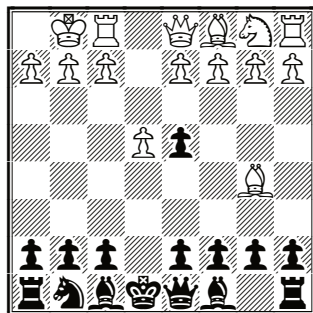
(c) If 5.c3, the white bishop is obliged to resume its starting position after 5...♖g5. Alternatively, 5.c3 c6 6.♗a4 ♖f6∞ as in game 21, Garcia Bugallo-Larino Nieto.

(d) 5.♗a4 c6 (anyway) followed by ...♖g8-f6 is likely to transpose to later chapters.

(e) It is too early for 5.f4!?. Black can reply 5...a6; either that or 5...c6 intending the usual ...d7-d5, as in game 14, Tirrito-Wisniewski.

(f) 5.♖f3 ♖f6=.

(g) 5.e5!? c6 6.♗c4 d5 (6...b5!?) 7.exd6 ♘xd6 8.0-0 ♖c7!? 9.h3 ♖e7=.



We reach a critical juncture. Beyond White's lead in development, the defining feature of the position is Black's d4-pawn, which is on a dark square. This pawn gives Black more space (impeding the creation of a white pawn center and hindering the

b1-knight) but at the same time if it is stuck on d4 (after d2-d3) how will that harmonize with his dark-square bishop? Moreover, as a doubled pawn, it could become more of a weakness later, at least in the endgame. (We explore the pawn structure further in the middle of Chapter 3).

So, what is Black's strategic aim? A gradual queenside pawn storm? Or just forcing through ...d7-d5 with or without ...c7-c6 as preparation? Alternatively, chaos at any cost – or determined defense?

Playing Black, guided by this book, we can reduce this to a choice of where to place our dark-square bishop (and secondarily our g-knight). The f8-bishop is...

(a) Fianchettoed on g6 – Chapter 2.

(b) Placed immediately on c5, in support of the black d4-pawn (with the black knight going to e7) – Chapter 3.

(c) Eventually placed on e7 (after Black plays ...♖g8-f6 first, with 5...c6 first of all) – Chapter 4.

This is a simplification of Black's possibilities but it gives us a framework for further investigation in subsequent chapters. Note that some of the positional and tactical insights from one chapter may also be relevant to another despite their surface differences.

5...♖e7 is the so-called Paulsen Variation named, it seems, on the basis of a single game by German master Wilfried Paulsen (1828–1901). It often leads to an inferior version of the Blackburne Variation, i.e., a kingside fianchetto position for Black in which his knight has been hastily deployed. For 5...♖e7 without a fianchetto, see game 15, Vitiugov-Kovalev.

An early ...h7-h5 has attracted some modern analysts, not to mention Henry Bird himself a long time ago. We do not award the move its own chapter as, frankly, it just seems to waste a precious tempo in the lines that we do cover. See game 11, Baron-Faika for an example.

Finally, and much more interesting, is the advance of the other rook-pawn, i.e., 5.0-0 a5!?. At first glance, this seems like a one-trick pony, wishing for 6.d3?? c6 7.♗c4 b5, quickly trapping the bishop. However, ...a7-a5 often features usefully anyway for Black in Bird's Defense – more frequently than ...h7-h5 – on account of the proximity of White's light-square bishop and the possibility of ...♗a8-a6.

Here are some brief lines. 5.0-0 a5!? 6.♗c4 (6.a4 c6 7.♗c4 transposes; 6.c3 c6!; 6.a3 c6 7.♗c4 ♖f6∞) 6...c6 7.a4 (7.♖h5 ♖e7!; 7.♖f3 ♖f6=) 7...♖f6! 8.e5 (8.♗e1 ♗c5 9.e5 ♖d5 10.d3 0-0 11.♖d2 ♖e3!∞; 8.d3 transposes to game 40, Papp-Rudolf) 8...d5!.