

The Modernized Vienna of the Queen's Gambit Declined

**A Complete Opening
Repertoire for Black
Featuring Del Rio's 5...b5!?**

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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

Table of Contents

Key to Symbols	4
Preface	6
Introduction	7
Possible Move-orders and Transpositions	8

PART I – 5.e4 b5 – Del Rio’s Variation

9

Chapter 1 – Early Deviations	27
Chapter 2 – 9.  e3	45
Chapter 3 – 9.0-0 Minor Lines	69
Chapter 4 – 9.0-0 with 10.  e3	89

PART II – 5.e3 – The Safe Option

133

Chapter 5 – 6.a4	137
Chapter 6 – 6.  xc4 b5 7.  d3	149
Chapter 7 – 6.  xc4 b5 7.  b3	159

PART III – Minor 5th Moves

179

Chapter 8 – 5.  a4+	181
Chapter 9 – 5.  g5	201
Chapter 10 – 5.g3	215

Preface

One of the primary tasks of a chess player is the constant search for new ideas in the opening. This work delves into a variation that, although I cannot claim to have invented (as it had been played before), I was fortunate enough to recognize its potential. The concept of Black playing with a strong/weak pawn on c4 was already known, but forcing that structure almost inevitably was something novel around ten years ago. The complexity of the position that arises after ...Nb6, with just a couple of pawns exchanged and an unusual structure for the standards of 1.d4 d5, initially attracted me the most. The strategic and dynamic richness of these positions has proven to be much greater than it seemed at first glance.

Over time, it was verified that the idea is viable, and today it is quite popular, even at very high levels. In fact, as I write these lines, the variation is being played in the Fedoseev-Gukesh game at Tata Steel 2025, featuring a novelty from this very book! I must thank Fernando for his confidence in this variation (which in the intervening years surpassed my own initial enthusiasm) and his profound analyses. I hope the reader finds in this ...b5 an interesting weapon to unbalance the game. As for me, I have no doubt that I will use it again in the future.

Gabriel Del Rio, Madrid, February 2025

Introduction

I decided to write this book because I believe I have had the unique opportunity to observe the process that transformed the idea of the Spanish Grandmaster Gabriel Del Rio into a widely popular chess variation. However, the primary goal of this work is not to recount a story or to acknowledge the creative efforts of a friend, although those are satisfying perks I allow myself. This is a theoretical book about a chess variation that (it could not be otherwise) I will call the Del Rio Variation.

It is one of the most fascinating openings that can be played today, leading almost immediately to highly dynamic and complex positions. Additionally, it can be set up quite easily. For example, after 1.d4 ♘f6 (1...d5 is another possible move order to reach the same position) 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.♘c3 (from 1.d4 all of White's moves are the most popular). Then 4...dxc4, establishing the Vienna Variation. Here, White can only fight for an advantage with 5.e4. Until a few years ago, the main lines continued with 5...♙b4 6.♙g5 c5, or the dangerous gambit 6.♙c4!? ♘xe4 7.0-0. All of these led to a well-researched ocean of variations where Black had to struggle to maintain equality and generally had few practical chances to win the game.

The scenario changes dramatically with 5...b5!? as Black now sets up a complicated, unbalanced game that is also less studied than the other continuations. This partly explains the excellent results that Black has been achieving in practice. It is no surprise that this move has attracted the interest of today's top players, some of whom have adopted it frequently.

This book is especially focused on Black's perspective and aims to provide you with all the necessary material to successfully employ this variation. You will find theory, exemplary games, deep analyses, conceptual explanations, and many novel ideas that have yet to see the light of day in practice. I have held nothing back in writing this book, and I hope you enjoy it.

Fernando Peralta, February 2025

Possible Move-orders and Transpositions

As stated above, we can reach the position after 4...dxc4 via various move orders. The most likely one will probably arise from 1.d4. Here, after 1...d5 2.c4 e6, White has two main options at their disposal: 3.♘c3 and 3.♘f3. After 3.♘c3 ♘f6, White has the important option of 4.cxd5, forcing the Carlsbad structure. However, this structure isn't to everyone's taste, and many players prefer 4.♘f3 instead, allowing us to play the variation studied in the book.

The move order 1...♘f6 2.c4 e6 can be more subtle. Here, after 3.♘c3, besides 3...d5, White must be well-prepared to face 3...♙b4, the Nimzo-Indian Defense. That's why in this position, they mostly choose to continue with 3.♘f3, and after 3...♘f6, the most frequently played move is 4.♘c3. The major option for White here would be 4.g3, entering the Catalan Opening, which is an option they also have if we start with 1...d5.

For this reason, my opinion is that the move order with 1...♘f6 2.c4 e6 is the one most likely to lead us to play the Vienna Defense.

It's also very interesting to note that knowing this defense makes it much easier for us to build a complete and coherent repertoire with Black. The moves 1...♘f6, 2...e6, and 3...d5 can be played if White starts with either 1.c4 or 1.♘f3. For example, after 1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 d5 4.e3, which is very popular nowadays, the response 4...dxc4 is considered an excellent solution and will most likely transpose into the chapters with 5.e3 in this book.

Part I

5.e4 b5 – Del Rio's Variation

Chronicle of the Birth of the Del Rio Variation

How does a chess opening transition from a player's imagination to being played thousands of times in tournaments around the world? In today's chess landscape, it is often enough for a well-known player to use a novel strategy in a game for it to quickly gain global traction. However, the evolution of this variation was much slower, resembling the spread of a virus – initially emerging as an epidemic localized in Argentina before escalating into a global pandemic. I believe I played a small role in the popularization of what I propose we call the Del Rio Variation, and I hope I can convince you with this brief story. In September 2015, the Spanish Grandmaster Gabriel Del Rio, having just finished a tournament, met me at a coffee shop. He pulled out his pocket chess set and eagerly demonstrated the sequence of moves he had recently created:

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 e6 3. ♘f3 d5 4. ♘c3 dxc4 5. e4 b5



Position after: 5... b5

6. e5 ♘d5 7. ♘xb5 ♘b6



Position after: 7... Nxb6

I must admit that, initially, I was quite skeptical of his idea. It immediately reminded me of another variation with which I had some experience playing as White:

1. d4 d5 2. c4 dxc4 3. Nf3 Nf6 4. Nc3 a6 5. e4 b5 6. e5 Nd5 7. a4 e6 8. axb5 Nxb6



Position after: 8... Nxb6

It seemed to me that his version paled in comparison: the presence of the pawns on b5 and a6 makes it much easier for Black to develop his queenside. We began to move the pieces from the position he proposed. I tried with White to either bring my pieces to an attack on Black's castled position or simply capture the c4-pawn. I always seemed to be close to getting what I wanted but I lost in absolutely every attempt. Gabriel had just played the following game, which you won't find in any database. I reproduce it here with his reluctant permission.

♟ Vishnu Prasanna, V.

♚ Del Rio, Gabriel

♜ 2015

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 e6 3. ♘f3 d5 4. ♘c3 dxc4 5. e4 b5 6. e5 ♘fd7 7. ♘xb5 ♘b6 8. ♙e2 ♘c6 9. 0-0 ♙e7 10. a4!?



Position after: 10. a4!?

10... a6

10... ♘a5!?∞

11. ♘a3 ♘a5 12. ♙d2

There might follow 12... ♘b3 13. ♖b1 ♘xd4 14. ♘xd4 ♙xd4 15. a5 ♘d5 16. ♘xc4=

½-½

A few months later his invention passed a demanding test. Below is one of the earliest games with the variation and, in my opinion, one of the most significant.

♟ Anton Guijarro, David (2635)

♚ Del Rio, Gabriel (2511)

♜ Linares 2015

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 e6 3. ♘f3 d5 4. ♘c3 dxc4 5. e4 b5 6. e5 ♘fd7 7. ♘xb5 ♘b6 8. ♙e2 ♙e7 9. 0-0 ♘c6 10. ♙e3 0-0



Position after: 10... 0-0

11. a3

White controls the b4-square and continues with ♙c2 and ♖ad1. In this way, the white queen targets the kingside and can attack via e4. On the other hand, advancing to a3 weakens the b3-square.

11... ♘a5 12. ♙c2 ♙b7 13. ♖ad1 ♙d7 14. ♘c3 ♙c6



Position after: 14... ♙c6

A difficult but correct decision. Black pressing on the diagonal restricts the action of the white knight. While it may seem anti-positional to block the c7-pawn, the c5-break is typically not a priority in this variation.

15. ♖fe1 ♖fd8 16. ♙f1 h6

16... ♞b3 (as we will see later in the theory section) was a good alternative. If 17. ♙g5 we should respond 17... ♚e8! with a good position.

17. ♙d2

17. ♙d2 with the idea of bringing this knight to e4 was interesting.

17... ♞b3 18. ♙c1 ♚e8 19. ♞e4 ♙a4 20. ♞c3 ♚e8 21. ♞e4



Position after: 21. ♞e4

21... ♙a4

Black also had other options.

21... ♖ab8 22. ♙xc4 ♞xc4 23. ♚xc4 ♙xe4 24. ♖xe4 c5∞

22. ♞c3 ♚e8 23. ♞e4 ♙a4 24. ♞c3

½-½

♙ Krysa, Leandro
♚ Peralta, Fernando
♜ Buenos Aires ARG 2015

At that time, I was preparing to travel to Argentina to participate in the national championship. I was considering some interesting ideas to surprise my opponents and I remembered Gabriel's variation. I then asked Gabriel to explain in more detail what he had analyzed (yes, I was still trying to prove him wrong). In the 12th round, I managed to put the idea into practice.

1. d4 e6 2. ♘f3 d5 3. c4 ♘f6 4. ♘c3 dxc4 5. e4 b5 6. e5 ♘d5 7. ♘xb5 ♘b6 8. ♙e2 ♙e7 9. h4!?



Position after: 9. h4!?

9... ♘c6

The idea of not castling with White in favor of advancing h4 is common in many lines. However, the subsequent exchange of bishops does not benefit them. The d4-pawn will lose one of its natural defenders: the bishop on e3.

10. ♙g5

10. ♖h3!? is an interesting alternative.

10... h6 11. ♙xe7 ♙xe7 12. ♙d2 ♙b7 13. a4 a6 14. ♘a3 ♘xa4 15. ♖h3 0-0



Position after: 15... 0-0

16. ♘c2?

16. ♖xc4 ♖b6 with a good position for Black.

16... ♖xb2 17. ♖b1 ♖d3+ 18. ♙xd3 cxd3 19. ♙xd3 ♖ab8 20. ♖g5 g6!



Position after: 20... g6!

Black has emerged from the opening with a nearly winning position.

21. ♙g3 ♙g7 22. ♖f3 ♙a8 23. ♖d1 ♖b2 24. ♖e3 ♙b4+ 25. ♙f1 ♖b1 26. ♙f4
 ♖xd1+ 27. ♖xd1 ♙b1 28. ♙d2 ♖d8 29. h5 g5 30. ♖g3 ♙f8 31. ♙g1 ♖e7 32.
 ♖xg5 hxg5 33. h6 ♙g6 34. ♖e3 ♙xh6 35. ♖g4 ♙h4 36. ♙b4 a5 37. ♙c5 ♖b8
 38. ♙c2 ♖g6 39. ♖f6 ♖b4 40. ♖h3 ♙xd4 41. ♖d3 ♙e4 42. ♙c5+ ♙xc5 43.
 ♖d8+ ♙g7 44. ♖g8+ ♙h6 45. ♖g4+ ♙h5 46. ♖f6+ ♙h4 47. ♖g7 ♖xe5
 0-1

Gabriel continued to use it from time-to-time against strong rivals, achieving good results.

♙ Pogorelov, Ruslan
 ♙ Del Rio, Gabriel
 ♙ 2016

1. ♖f3 ♖f6 2. c4 e6 3. ♖c3 d5 4. d4 dxc4 5. e4 b5 6. e5 ♖d5 7. ♖xb5 ♖b6 8.
 ♙e2 ♙e7 9. 0-0 0-0 10. ♙e3 ♖c6 11. b3

(see diagram next page)



Position after: 11. b3

White decides to exchange off the annoying c4-pawn, a typical procedure to get the d3-square for his bishop and thus direct it towards Black's castle. The downside is that, after retaking, Black will be in control of the b4-square and achieves good piece coordination.

11... cxb3 12. axb3 ♖b7 13. ♔b1 ♘d5 14. ♙d2 ♘cb4 15. ♖c1 a6 16. ♘a3 ♖c8 17. ♘c4 c5=



Position after: 17... c5=

Finally Black removes the d4-pawn with the thematic ...c5-advance. In the vast majority of openings, this flank attack is executed at an earlier stage. A distinctive feature of this variation is that it prioritizes play before seeking this pawn break.

18. dxc5 ♖xc5 19. ♖d1 ♔b8 20. h4 f6 21. exf6 ♙xf6 22. ♖a5 ♖xa5 23. ♘xa5 ♙a8 24. ♔e4 e5 25. ♔g4 ♙h8 26. ♘c4 e4 27. ♘g5 ♙xg5 28. hxg5 ♘d3 29. ♙xd3 exd3 30. ♖b1 ♔a7 31. ♔h4 ♘e7 32. ♙e3 ♔b7 33. ♔g4 ♘g6 34. f3 ♔b5 35. ♔d4 ♔f5 36. ♘d6 ♔e6 37. ♘c4 ♔f5 38. ♘d6 ♔e6 39. ♘c4 ♔f5

½-½

 Nihal, Sarin (2349)
 Del Rio, Gabriel (2541)
 Port de Pollenca 2016

1. d4 e6 2. c4 f6 3. f3 d5 4. c3 dxc4 5. e4 b5 6. e5 d5 7. xb5 b6 8.
e2 e7 9. 0-0 c6 10. e3 0-0 11. d2



Position after: 11. d2

The c4-pawn is more difficult to capture than it may seem.

11... a6 12. a4 xb5

12... a5! is more complex and leads to a good position for Black.

13. axb5 xd4 14. xc4 xe2+?!

After this Black will have difficulties.

14... f5!∞

15. xe2 d5 16. a5! xe5 17. c6 d6 18. ac1 d5 19. fd1 fe8! 20.
c5 xc5 21. xc5 xc5∞

(see diagram next page)



Position after: 21... ♞xc5

22. g3 ♞e7 23. ♞f3 ♞xc6 24. ♞xc6 ♞b6 25. ♞g2 ♞f8 26. ♞d7 ♞ae8 27. h4 e5
 28. ♞e4 ♞e6 29. h5 ♞d6 30. ♞xd6 cxd6 31. b4 h6 32. f3 ♞e8 33. ♞d5 ♞e6 34.
 ♞a8+ ♞h7 35. ♞e4+ ♞g8 36. ♞a8+ ♞h7 37. ♞e4+ ♞g8 38. ♞a8+
 ½-½

In 2016, the Olympics arrived in Baku. When I met my teammates from the Argentine team (I have been living in Barcelona for a couple of decades), I was surprised to find that everyone had delved into the variation to use it in the tournament. It had caught their attention, and they had even tested it in some local tournaments.

♟ Santiago, Yago de Moura (2427)

♞ Perez Ponsa, Federico (2577)

♜ Buenos Aires 2016

1. d4 ♞f6 2. c4 e6 3. ♞f3 d5 4. ♞c3 dxc4 5. e4 b5 6. e5 ♞d5 7. ♞xb5 ♞b6 8.
 ♞e3 ♞c6 9. ♞e2 ♞b4+!?



Position after: 9... ♞b4+!?

10. ♖c3 0-0 11. 0-0 ♘b7 12. ♔c2 ♙e7

12... ♘e7!? 13. ♘g5 ♘f5 14. g4 ♙e7∞

13. ♔e4 ♙h8 14. ♖fd1

14. ♙d1!?

14... ♖b8 15. ♔g4 ♘b4 16. ♖ac1 ♘4d5 17. ♘d2 ♘xc3 18. ♖xc3 ♘d5 19. ♖cc1 f5 20. exf6 gxf6!?



Position after: 20... gxf6!?

A typical position where Black's pieces are extremely active and therefore compensate for his poor pawn structure.

21. ♘f3

21. ♔xe6 f5∞

21... ♘xe3 22. fxe3 ♖g8 23. ♔h3 ♙e4 24. ♖d2 ♙b4 25. ♖dd1 ♙d6 26. ♔xe6 ♙d5 27. ♔f5 ♖xb2 28. ♙f1 ♔a8 29. ♔xf6+ ♖g7 30. e4 ♙xe4 31. ♘g5 ♙d5 32. ♖e1 ♔f8 33. ♔xf8+ ♙xf8 34. ♖e8 ♖g8 35. ♘e6 ♙h6 36. ♖xg8+ ♔xg8 37. ♙xc4 ♙e3+ 38. ♔f1 ♙xg2+

A good example of the dynamic potential of the black pieces in this variation.

0-1

So, the idea was now popular in Argentina, but it still had no adherents abroad. I think the next game may have played a role in this changing dramatically.

♙ Wang, Yue (2737)
 ♚ Mareco, Sandro (2606)
 🌐 Baku 2016

1. ♘f3 ♘f6 2. c4 e6 3. ♘c3 d5 4. d4 dxc4 5. e4 b5 6. e5 ♘d5 7. ♘xb5 ♘b6 8. ♙e2 ♘c6 9. 0-0 ♙e7 10. ♙e3 0-0 11. ♚c1 ♙a6



Position after: 11... ♙a6

12. ♘c3 ♙b7

Black moves the bishop again to prevent the white knight from reaching e4.

12... ♘b4 was better.

13. ♖d1 ♖b8

Without losing pressure on ♙d4 but neglecting d5.

There were also problems with 13... ♘b4 14. ♘d2!±

14. d5!



Position after: 14. d5!

14... ♞b4!

An excellent pawn sacrifice to fight for the initiative. Although White has an advantage the position is very complex, as will be seen.

A) 14... exd5 15. ♙xb6±

B) 14... ♞xd5 15. ♞xd5 exd5 16. ♙xc4±

15. dxe6 ♔e8 16. exf7+ ♔xf7 17. ♞e1 ♔h8 18. a3 ♞c6 19. ♞f3 ♔g6 20. ♔b1 ♖f5!?

20... ♞xe5±

21. ♞d5 ♞xd5 22. ♖xd5 ♖bf8 23. ♔e4!



Position after: 23. ♔e4!

An excellent centralization.

23... ♞a5 24. ♖ad1 c5 25. h3 ♚b6 26. g4 ♜5f7



Position after: 26... ♜5f7

27. ♞d2?

Finally, a break. White had played a perfect game up to this point.

They should have continued 27. e6! ♜f6 28. ♞g5 g6 [28... ♜g6 29. ♞xh7] 29. ♚e5+–

27... ♙xd5 28. ♚xd5 ♚xb2 29. ♙xc4? ♞xc4 30. ♞xc4 ♚e2! 31. ♜d2 ♚e1+ 32. ♙g2 ♙h4 33. ♚xc5 ♜f3! 34. e6 ♜g3+!!



Position after: 34... ♜g3+!!

35. fxg3 ♚f1+ 36. ♙h2 ♙xg3+ 37. ♙xg3 ♜f3+

Shortly after, the examples multiplied. Players of the caliber of Duda, Caruana, Nepomniachtchi, Nakamura, Firouzja and Maghsoodloo used it in important competitions, demonstrating its validity. It is no longer a marginal line but a variation

against which one should be well-prepared; it has practically replaced the classical move 5... ♖b4.

0-1

I am going to close this brief chronicle as one closes a circle. In 2017, Gabriel once again faced this position on the board, but this time playing as White. His opponent could never have imagined that he was challenging the very person who had created it.

- ♙ Del Rio, Gabriel (2527)
- ♚ Gonzalez Pereira, Asier (2121)
- ♜ Bergara 2017

1. d4 ♘f6 2. ♘f3 d5 3. c4 e6 4. ♘c3 dxc4 5. e4 b5 6. e5 ♗d5 7. ♘xb5 ♗b6 8. ♙e2 ♗c6 9. 0-0 ♙a6?!



Position after: 9... ♙a6?!

10. ♘c3 ♙e7 11. a3 ♙b7 12. ♙e3 ♘a5 13. ♗c2 0-0 14. ♘e4 ♗d5 15. ♘c5 ♙c6 16. ♖ad1 h6 17. ♗fe1 ♖ab8 18. ♙f1

We know this from the game between David Anton and Del Rio himself.

(see diagram next page)



Position after: 18. Qf1

18... ♘b3 19. ♘xb3 cxb3 20. ♔c1 ♖fc8? 21. ♕xh6!

This sacrifice is a recurring idea in this variation.

21... gxf6 22. ♔xh6 ♘d7 23. ♖e3 ♘f8 24. ♕d3 ♕e8 25. ♘e1 ♘g6 26. ♕xg6
fxg6 27. ♖h3
1-0



Early Deviations

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.♘c3

dxc4 5.e4 b5 6.♘xb5



1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 g5 4.♘c3

dxc4 5.e4 b5 6.e5 ♘d5 7.♘xb5

♘b6



Chapter Guide

Chapter 1 – Early Deviations

1.d4 f6 2.c4 e6 3.f3 d5 4.c3 dxc4 5.e4 b5

a) 6.xb5 29

b) 6.e5 d5 7.xb5 b6 8.--..... 33

c) 6.e5 d5 7.xb5 b6 8.a4..... 39