

The Tricky Tromp

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POPULAR CHESS

About the Author

Richard Palliser is an International Master and the editor of *CHESS Magazine*. In 2006 he became Joint British Rapidplay Champion and in 2019 finished third in the British Championship. He has established a reputation as a skilled chess writer and written many works for Everyman, including the bestselling *The Complete Chess Workout*.

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Introduction

Welcome to the exciting world of the Trompowsky! 1 d4 ♖f6 2 ♗g5 has long been one of my favourite openings and while it's slightly slowed down the final stages of this project, it's great to report that at the time of writing the opening remains popular with several strong grandmasters as a rapid and blitz weapon, not least Dmitry Andreikin and Vladislav Artemiev. Other GMs with more over-the-board possibilities are still using it in their repertoire from time to time, and the Trompowsky remains an excellent regular choice for the dynamic and/or aggressively-minded player at lower levels, while it can even be handled fairly positionally.

This repertoire for White might best be described as both dynamic and aggressive. It should be noted too that some important options are not covered: 2...♗e4 3 ♗f4, 2...e6 3 e4, and the 2...d5 lines where White is quick to exchange on f6. Those were well covered by Cyrus Lakdawala in an earlier Everyman Chess work, *The Trompowsky Attack: Move by Move*, and you may well already have some or even all of them in your repertoire. Instead, we have a number of fun lines to enjoy, ones which can pack a certain punch and may also carry plenty of surprise value.

I've long been aware that Julian Hodgson's old favourite, 2...♗e4 3 h4!?, has at times been rather underestimated by theory, possibly in part because the great Trompowskyte gave it up and switched to 3 ♗f4 during the 1990s. Back in 2021, I was delighted to be asked to sketch out a white repertoire with 3 h4 for Simon Williams to use on his *Killer Tromp* production for Ginger GM. I've now significantly revised and expanded that earlier coverage, adding too some secondary lines along the way, not least 3...c5 4 dxc5, which may be preferred to 4 d5 by those who dislike Benoni-style centres or who just want to open the position to the maximum.

While I didn't have a huge amount of new material to add to the old main line, 2...♗e4 3 ♗f4, I was pleasantly surprised to discover that instead 3 ♗h4 is in better health than has often been considered, so as an alternative to 3 h4 we examine it in Chapter Four. For the 3 h4 fan, meeting 2...c5 with 3 d5 makes a lot of sense, as if 3...♗e4 4 h4, but against 2...c5 I've also covered 3 ♗xf6 gxf6 4 d5 and then the dangerous gambit that is 4...♚b6 5 ♗d2!?

More positional opponents who prefer to meet the Trompowsky with 2...e6 may well nowadays be ready for 3 e4, but may find the 3 ♗d2 lines of Chapter Seven trickier to meet, not least if they join the many black players who have slightly carelessly allowed 3...h6 4 ♗h4 c5 5 e4!, which is another promising gambit line. Black can play more solidly, but then

White can often obtain a souped-up version of the Torre Attack.

In recent years I've lost a bit of confidence in 2...d5 3 ♘xf6, due to both the solid 3...exf6 and some new dynamic ideas for Black, not least 3...gxf6 4 c4 e5!?. Of course, 3 e3 c5 4 ♘xf6 gxf6 5 dxc5 has been all the rage at the top level, but such a positional and topical approach is slightly out of keeping with the other lines in this book. As such, I've also taken a good look at meeting 2...d5 too with 3 ♗d2, another line which carries definite practical sting and is usually far from dull.

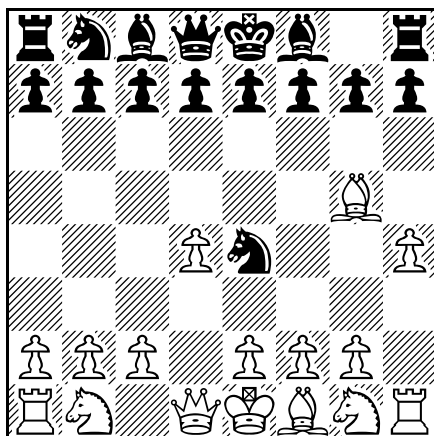
Whether you adopt some or all of the variations covered here, I hope you'll find your Trompowsky repertoire refreshed, or even have an exciting new weapon with which to go to war against 1 d4 ♗f6. Above everything, do enjoy your Trompowsky study and games!

Richard Palliser
York, October 2024

Chapter One

2... ♞e4 3 h4 c5

1 d4 ♞f6 2 ♟g5 ♞e4 3 h4



3 h4 is the aggressive way that Julian Hodgson initially largely wanted to tackle Black's traditional main line against the Trompowsky, 2... ♞e4. White doesn't waste time retreating the bishop and clamours for early pressure down the h-file after a ... ♞xg5; hxg5 exchange.

The advance may seem a little whacky, possibly due to the name some call it by, the Raptor variation, and it's long been seen, like 3 ♟h4, as a slightly shady cousin of the main line, 3 ♟f4. However, I've been slowly charmed over the years by the early involvement of Harry the h-pawn, ever since recognising that it was slowly attracting the eye of various grandmasters as a surprise weapon whilst writing the d-Pawn Specials column for the ChessPublishing website. By the summer of 2021 I was happy enough to map out a

relatively light repertoire for White with 3 h4 for the Ginger GM production, *Killer Tromp*, and still have full faith in the advance, hence the somewhat more detailed coverage which now follows.

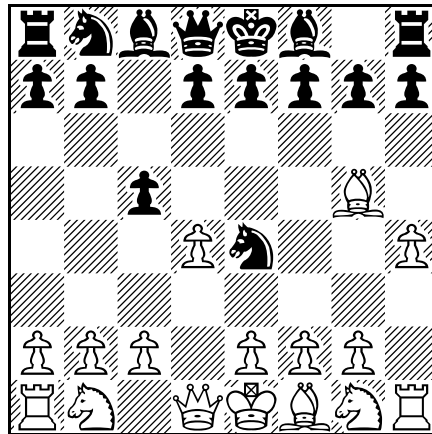
It should be noted that d-pawn systems expert (i.e. 1 d4 without 2 c4) Eric Prié once remarked that 3 h4!? is: “The move that in their heart of hearts, every Tromp fan would love to play, if only they could summon up the courage”. Reading this and the next two chapters, I hope that you will be able to find that courage.

With 3 h4!? White scores 53% from just over 2,550 games on the latest, vast 2024 edition of ChessBase’s famous *Mega Database*, the same percentage occurring from searching for games with 3 h4 from all the 2023 editions of Chess.com’s famous Tuesday Titled Tuesday Blitz tournaments. That’s a respectable statistic, one which suggests that 3 h4 fully deserves to be taken seriously as an alternative to 3 ♗f4, if also one which masks the fact that lower-rated Trompovsky players have claimed an impressive number of somewhat higher-rated black scalps with the advance.

The regular over-the-board forays made with 3 h4 by Hodgson and the Serbian Grandmaster Igor Miladinovic have long shown that one can rely upon the advance as more than a surprise weapon. In more recent times, Daniel Dardha, Alex Fier, Kacper Piorun and especially Richard Rapport have also regularly shown that there’s much more to 3 h4 than may initially meet the eye.

In this opening chapter we’ll look at Black’s most popular response, 3...c5, countering on the dark squares and in the centre, just as he so often does after 3 ♗f4.

3...c5



Chapter Two will examine Black’s main alternative, the solid 3...d5, before we round up his remaining options against 3 h4 in Chapter Three. After 3...c5 White has:

A: 4 d5

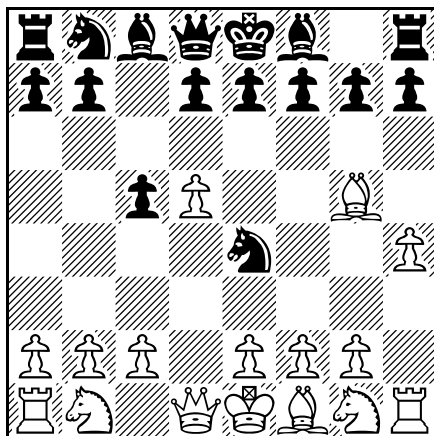
B: 4 dxc5

Opening Repertoire: The Tricky Tromp

Your author has always liked to seize space with 4 d5, but it should be said that the structurally more complex and flexible capture on c5 has been the preference of some big 3 h4 experts, not least Rapport and Dardha.

Line A

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♙g5 ♘e4 3 h4 c5 4 d5



Seizing space so must be a critical test.

4...♚b6

Black's main move, counter-attacking against b2, the point weakened by the early Trompowsky bishop move. This is played slightly more than twice as much as the alternatives, but as such is, of course, by no means forced:

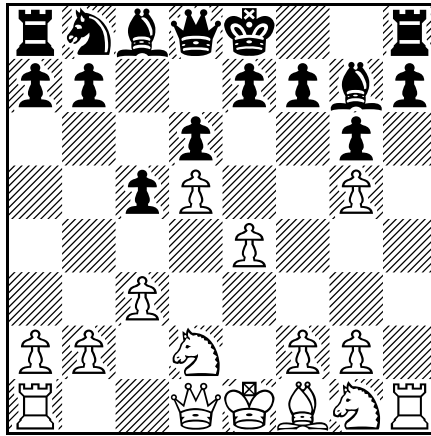
a) With 4...♘g5 5 hxg5 Black's play is in danger of being rather compliant, or at least White already threatens 6 g6!, and if 6...fxg6 7 ♚d3 or even 7 e3 followed by 8 ♙d3, taking aim at g6 and also introducing the concept of ♗xh7. A wise opponent would here obstruct the further advance of what is now the front g-pawn:

a1) 5...♚b6 transposes to our main line after 6 ♘d2, although White might also consider 6 ♚c1!?, which may well establish a pleasant edge after e2-e4, c2-c3, ♘d2-c4 and a2-a4 in some order, exploiting the slightly misplaced black queen.

a2) The 5...e5?! of P.Maghsoodloo-P.Tregubov, Titled Tuesday Blitz 2020, can be met in various ways, including 6 g6!? fxg6 7 d6!, which looks like a pretty dangerous pawn sacrifice to gum up Black's development. Black can snatch a second pawn, but after 7...♚b6 8 ♘c3 ♚xd6?! 9 ♚xd6 ♙xd6 10 ♘b5 must give up the exchange in view of the bishop-trapping 10...♙e7? 11 0-0-0, and even 8...♙xd6 9 e3 followed by ♘d5 or even ♘f3-g5 should leave White with superb lasting compensation.

a3) 5...g6! 6 e4 (keeping c3 free for the c-pawn, since 6 ♘c3 d6 7 a4 ♙g7 8 ♚d2 ♚b6 was a little awkward for White to meet in J.Hodgson-M.Adams, Wijk aan Zee 1993) 6...♙g7 (once again, 6...♚b6?! can be met by either 7 ♘d2 or 7 ♚c1 ♙g7 8 c3! followed by rushing

the knight from b1 to c4, perhaps with a2-a4, ♖a3 and ♖c4) 7 c3! (restricting the gaze of the unopposed bishop on g7) 7...d6 8 ♖d2 is an instructive line.



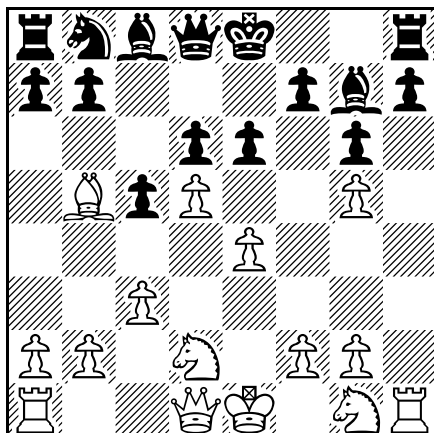
We've reached a position where White would like to annex further space with f2-f4 and Black should probably react on the kingside (line 'a36') to avoid the risk of suffocation:

a31) 8...♖d7?! 9 f4 h6!? (following the better-late-than-never principle; instead, the 9...♗c7 10 ♖gf3 b6?! of M.Condie-J.Henderson, Scottish Championship 1995, might be met by 11 a4 a6 12 ♕d3 followed by ♗e2 when Black can scarcely move, leaving White free to consider increasing the kingside pressure after ♖h4, while the 9...b5!? 10 ♕xb5! ♖b8 11 a4 a6 of M.Cook-A.Tzermadianos, Kavala 1995, could have been met by either 12 ♕xd7+ ♕xd7 13 ♖c4 or 12 ♕c6!? ♖xb2 13 ♗f3! followed by ♖e2, ♖c4 and ideally e4-e5) 10 ♖gf3 (preparing to recapture with the knight on g5 after an exchange of rooks) 10...a6 11 a4! (it generally makes good sense to make Black fight to free his position a little with ...b5) 11...hxg5 12 ♖hx8+ ♕hx8 13 ♖xg5 left White with a pretty pleasant edge in M.Szpar-N.Spyropoulos, Titled Tuesday Blitz 2021. Already ♗g4-h4 is a dangerous-looking possibility, as would be 13...♖f6?! 14 ♖c4! and then a4-a5 or 14...b6? 15 e5! with a huge initiative in view of 15...dxe5 16 fxe5 ♖xd5 17 ♗f3 followed by 0-0-0.

a32) 8...♖a6 9 a4 (a standard policy, fighting for control of b5 and a queenside clamp) 9...♖c7 10 ♖c4 b6?! 11 f4! (full steam ahead with Black electing to do little more than shuffle) 11...♖b8 12 ♖f3 a6 13 ♕e2 was clearly better for White in L.Hauge-T.Hansen, Norwegian Rapid Championship, Drammen 2018, in part because he could meet any ...b5 with either ♖a5 or simply ♖e3.

a33) 8...a6 9 a4 ♖d7 was tried in S.Williams-V.Pranav, Titled Tuesday Blitz 2022, where White might have continued to fight for control of key squares in the far part of the board with 10 f4! followed by ♖gf3, likely with a pleasant edge.

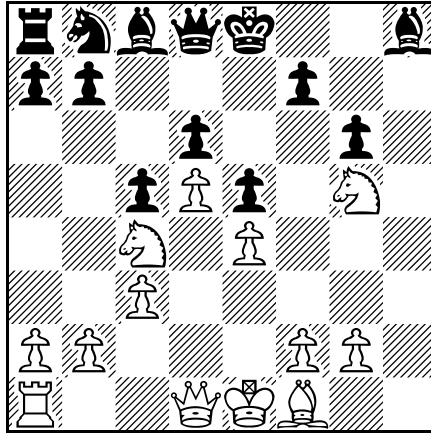
a34) 8...e6 might secure some much-needed counterplay, but for a check which isn't so easy to meet: 9 ♕b5+!



Here 9...♙f8 (9...♙d7 10 ♙xd7+ ♚xd7 11 dxe6! breaks up Black's structure and while 11...♚xe6 does rule out ♖c4 for now, White must have a pleasant edge after 12 ♖h3!?, directing the knight towards d5, with ♚b3 another useful possibility) 10 dxe6! (opening up the position to begin to target Black's potentially fragile central structure and king position) 10...♙xe6 (10...fxe6? 11 ♚f3+ ♙e7 12 0-0-0 followed by ♖c4 looks pretty scary for Black, who must keep the rook on h8) 11 ♖g3 followed by ♚e2 left White slightly for choice in S.Commercon-P.Zelbel, German Blitz Championship, Magdeburg 2021, and, again, 11 f4!? was likely even stronger: for example, 11...d5 12 ♚e2 ♖c6 13 exd5 ♙xd5 14 0-0-0 with the initiative and central pressure more than compensating for a pawn after 14...♙xa2 15 ♖gf3! and ♙c4.

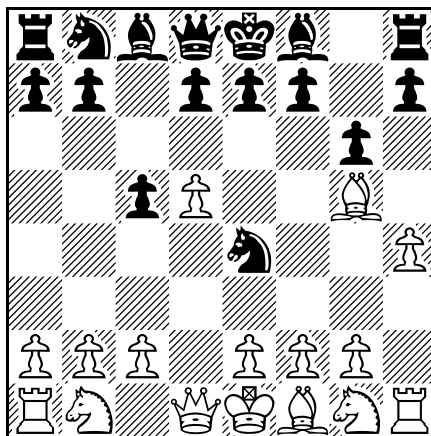
a35) 8...e5!? 9 dxe6! (consistently striving for the initiative and to open the position) 9...♙xe6! (9...fxe6? might have been a bit embarrassing for Black in A.Biggs-D.Gormally, Coulsdon 2002, had White found 10 ♖c4, and if 10...d5 11 exd5 exd5 12 ♚e2+! with a big advantage after, for instance, 12...♙f8 13 ♚f3+ ♙g8 14 0-0-0) 10 ♖c4 ♙xc4 11 ♙xc4 (continuing to angle to swap g5 for d6) 11...♚e7 12 ♚g4 leaves White with the more active bishop and surely an edge, with 0-0-0 on the way.

a36) 8...h6! 9 ♖gf3! (calmly supporting g5, since 9 f4?! hxg5 10 ♚xh8+ ♙xh8 11 fxg5 ♖d7 leaves Black with a firm grip on e5, and 9 gxh6 ♚xh6 10 ♚xh6 ♙xh6 11 ♖gf3 ♖d7 was also rather too comfortable for him in M.Lokander-A.Kovalev, Stockholm 2015) 9...hxg5!? (a less common choice than 9...♖d7, but then White can go 10 a4 a6 11 ♖c4 with a small but pleasant edge, and if 11...♚b8 12 ♙e2 b5?! 13 axb5 axb5 14 ♖a5, heading for c6, or 10 ♙b5!? a6 11 ♙xd7+ ♙xd7 12 ♚e2, swapping a second bishop for a knight to ask questions of the black king; after 12...♚c7 13 ♚e3! h5 14 0-0 b5?! 15 ♖h4! c4 16 f4 White was beginning to roll and clearly for choice in A.Biggs-R.Gwaze, Oxford 2003) 10 ♚xh8+ ♙xh8 11 ♖xg5 (White can now even consider ideas of ♚f3, as well as of f2-f4 and ♖c4) 11...e5 (E.Gorisnic-F.Pierrot, Buenos Aires 2023) 12 ♖c4!? begins a sequence of dangerous sacrifices, one which forces Black to defend carefully.



The critical line runs 12...b5! (12...♖xg5?! 13 ♖xd6+ ♔d7 14 ♖xf7 reveals White's main idea; Black can defend the bishop without allowing ♖g4+, but after 14...♖h4 15 ♖b3! looks even stronger than my old idea of 15 d6, with a virulent initiative and superb compensation) 13 ♖f3 ♕f6 (the only real way to defend against mate in view of 13...♖f6? 14 ♖xd6+! ♖xd6 15 ♖xf7+ ♔d8 16 ♖e6+ ♕xe6 17 dxe6 then ♔d1 and 13...f6? 14 ♖xe5! dxe5 15 ♕xb5+ ♔e7 16 0-0-0 followed by d5-d6+ or ♖e6, with a monstrous initiative) 14 ♖e6!? (14 ♖h7 ♕g7 15 ♖g5 ♕f6 repeats moves) 14...♕xe6!? (14...fxe6 15 ♖xd6+ ♔e7 16 ♖xb5 again leaves White with a dangerous attack for a piece, with d5-d6+ and 0-0-0 coming) 15 ♖xd6+ ♔e7 16 ♖xb5 (threatening the bishop, as well as d5-d6+ and ♖c7) 16...a6! 17 dxe6 axb5 18 ♕xb5 fxe6 19 ♔d1 ♖b6 20 a4, which sees White's compensation persist. With two good pawns for the piece, the engines consider there's enough for a piece. In practice, you might prefer to take White with ♖g4 followed by ♔e2 and ♔h1 a definite plan.

b) 4...g6 clearly has similarities with line 'a' and can even transpose.

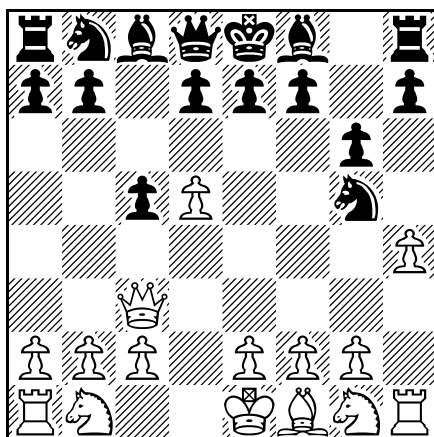


Opening Repertoire: The Tricky Tromp

Here White has a choice and that's without mentioning the untested GChess idea of 5 ♙c1! ?, angling for a rapid h4-h5:

b1) After 5 $\text{♜d2 ♜xg5 6 hxg5 ♙g7}$ (Black can also begin with 6...d6 when 7 e4 prepares to transpose after 7... ♙g7 8 c3 , with 7...e5!?) an independent alternative, one which quickly leads to rather unbalanced and unclear play after 8 dxe6 $\text{♙xe6 9 f4 ♜c6 10 ♜gf3 ♙g7 11 c3 7 c3 d6 8 e4!}$ we've transposed back into the key tabiya of variation 'a3'. Here 7...b5!?) is another independent option which this move order allows and after 8 e4 b4! Black's dark-square counterplay is fairly advanced. On that side, 9 ♚c2 bxc3 10 bxc3 retained sufficient control in A.Ostrovskiy-M.Dziuba, Titled Tuesday Blitz 2020, where after 10...d6 White might have gone 11 f4! $\text{♜d7 12 ♜gf3 ♚a5 13 ♚c1 ♜b6 14 ♜f2!}$?, which I assessed as unclear on the *Killer Tromp*. Two and a half years later that view hasn't changed. Tests really are required! Do note too that White would quite like to go c3-c4 then ♙d3 , and can hide the king on g3 if need be.

b2) 5 ♚d3! ? was an old Hodgson favourite looking to force the pace. The critical line runs 5... ♜xg5 (sensibly bagging the bishop; this isn't forced, but 5... $\text{♚a5+ 6 ♜d2 ♜xg5 7 hxg5 ♙g7 8 c3 d6 9 e4 ♚c7?! 10 f4 ♜d7 11 a4!}$ left White in full control in J.Hodgson-M.Quinn, London 1992, and here even the superior 9... $\text{♜d7 10 a4 ♚b8 11 ♜c4 ♚c7 12 f4! a6! 13 a5 b5 14 axb6 ♜xb6 15 ♚c2}$ of J.Hodgson-J.Emms, British Championship, Plymouth 1992, feels practically uncomfortable for Black due to White's extra space and potential attacking chances on the kingside, if objectively just very unclear; instead, 5... $\text{♙g7?! 6 ♚xe4! ♙xb2 7 d6}$ supplies dangerous play for the exchange, with c2-c3 and h4-h5 high on the agenda, as well as just removing e7) 6 ♚c3! ? (the four-time British Champion liked this intermezzo, although it should be said that 6 hxg5 ♙g7 7 c3 is far from ridiculous, as in A.Granovskiy-S.Savitskiy, Moscow 2011, where 7...d6 8 e4 0-0?! 9 ♜d2 ♚e8 10 ♚g3 left Black coming under pressure down the h-file).

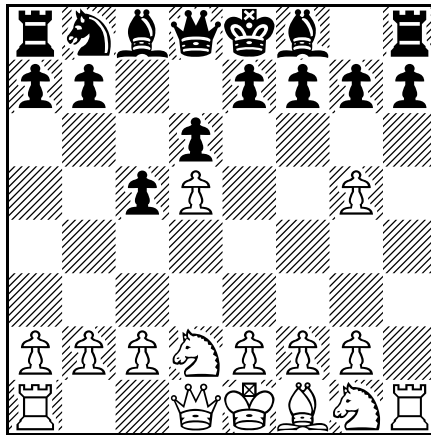


An important continuation is 6...f6!?) (Black's most uncompromising choice, if by no means his only option, with 6... $\text{♚g8 7 hxg5 ♙g7 8 ♚a3}$, as in J.Hodgson-I.Smirin, Munich

1993, looking no more than rather unclear after 8...♖h8!? 9 ♘d2 ♖b6 10 c3 d6 11 e4 h6! 12 ♘gf3 ♘d7, as Black can no longer castle kingside and the white queen is somewhat out of play, and 6...♖e4?! 7 ♖xh8 ♖a5+ 8 c3 ♖b6 9 b3, as in J.Bellon Lopez-S.Castillo Gallego, Seville 1994, doesn't seem to give Black quite enough for the exchange even after 9...c4!? 10 ♖d4) 7 hxg5 ♙g7 (John Nunn no less preferred 7...d6 8 gxf6 exf6 in J.Hodgson-J.Nunn, German Bundesliga 1999, where 9 ♖g3!? ♖b6 10 ♘d2! ♖xb2 11 ♖b1 followed by e2-e4 and f2-f4 in some order leaves White with heavy pressure and easily enough compensation for a pawn or two) 8 ♘d2 d6, as in J.Hodgson-E.Gufeld, London (rapid) 1995. There White exchanged on f6 and 9 ♘h3!? might have been more testing, heading for f4 and e6, while even allowing White to consider recapturing with 9...♙xh3 10 gxh3!?, intending h3-h4-h5.

c) 4...d6 is another sensible-looking move that leaves White with a by now familiar choice:

c1) 5 ♘d2 ♘xg5 (5...♖a5?! 6 c3 only serves to misplace the black queen and after the 6...♘xg5 7 hxg5 e5 of A.Alvarado Diaz-M.Ramos Santana, Las Palmas 2016, White has a few tempting options, including 8 e3 g6 9 f4!? when Black may yet land up becoming quite cramped, especially if White can get in ♖f3, g2-g4 and f4-f5) 6 hxg5.



Here 6...g6 7 e4 ♙g7 8 c3 would bring us back to a familiar position (see variation 'a3', above). Black might though prefer to move the e-pawn and 6...e6!? (there's also 6...e5 when 7 g6!? fxc6 8 e3 supplied definite compensation in E.Ozenir-M.Warmerdam, Belgrade 2021; White wants to go ♖f3-g3 and ♙d3, will meet 8...♙f5? with 9 g4, and in the game 8...♖e7 9 ♖e4 ♙f5 10 ♘g3 e4 11 ♘1e2 ♘d7 12 ♖f4 continued to wreak havoc with the knights, White going on to overcome a 200-point rating disadvantage) 7 dxe6 (7 g6!? fxc6 has only ever been followed up by c2-c4, which feels committal and weakening; if you want to make the pawn sacrifice work here too, 8 ♘h3!? e5! 9 e3 ♘d7 10 ♙d3 followed by ♖f3 could be the critical line) 7...♙xe6 8 ♘h3! is yet another unclear position in need of tests.