

The Modernized Slav Defense

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Zaven Andriasian

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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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Introduction

The Slav Defense has been the cornerstone of my repertoire for most of my chess career. I started playing it when I was just 13 years old, and it has remained a trusted weapon ever since accompanying me through countless tournaments, tough battles, and critical games.

It is a solid and deeply reliable opening; one I have used mainly against strong opponents throughout my career. With Black, it gave me stability, clear plans, and confidence—even against players aiming to fight for an advantage. And when my opponents tried to push for more, the Slav always offered good alternatives and counterplay, allowing me to navigate even the sharpest positions with flexibility and purpose.

This opening is more than just a reply to 1.d4; it is a complete system full of dynamic ideas. Whether you are looking for sharp tactical complications or solid positional play, the Slav has something to offer. Over the years, it has proven its value at all levels—from club players to top-level grandmasters.

In this book, I share the ideas, strategies, and personal insights I have gathered from decades of experience with the Slav. My goal is to show not only how to play this opening, but also why it is worth playing—and why it has remained my lifelong companion on the board.

Zaven Andriasian, November 2025



Various 3rd Moves

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.--



Full Chapter: Various 3rd Moves

1. d4 d5 2. c4 c6



Position after: 2... c6

In this section we will examine some sidelines. While they do not fight for an advantage Black must know how to respond.

3. e3

A) 3. b3 A strange move but we need to know how to play against it. 3... ♖f5 4. ♘c3 e5! An interesting way to fight for an advantage. 5. dxe5 [5. e3 e4 6. ♘ge2 ♘f6 7. ♘g3 ♖g6 is a better version of the French.]

B) 3. ♖c2 ♘f6 4. e3 g6 an interesting way to complete development, allowing ... ♖f5 and developing the bishop to g7. 5. ♘f3 [5. ♖d3 Trying to stop ... ♖f5 but other problems arise. 5... ♖g7 6. ♘f3 c5 7. dxc5 dxc4 8. ♖xc4 ♖f5∞ Black has a strong initiative and the pawn on c5 will soon fall.] 5... ♖g7



Position after: 5... ♖g7

B1) 6. ♖d3 encounters problems after ...c5 or ... ♘a6. 6... c5! 7. dxc5 dxc4 8. ♖xc4 ♖f5 9. ♖b3 0-0! 10. ♘d4 ♖c7∞ The c5-pawn will fall leading to equality, but I prefer Black's position.

B2) 6. ♘c3 0-0 7. ♖d3 ♘a6! Black is ready for active play. 8. a3 c5 9. cxd5 cxd4 10. ♘xd4 ♘xd5∞

B3) 6. ♘bd2 0-0 7. a3 Taking control of the b4-square. [7. ♖d3? c5! 8. dxc5 ♘a6 We already know this strong idea.] 7... ♖f5 8. ♖d3 ♖xd3 9. ♖xd3 ♘bd7 10. 0-0 c5∞ Black has solved his opening problems.

B4) 6. ♖e2 0-0 7. 0-0 c5! 8. cxd5 cxd4 9. ♘xd4 ♘xd5∞

C) 3. c5? is simply weak. White moves the same pawn twice in the opening. 3... e5 4. e3 ♘h6 5. b4 ♘d7

D) 3. ♖f4?! dxc4! Now Black takes the pawn creating queenside problems for

White. 4. e3 b5 5. a4 ♖b7 6. ♘c3 a6 7. g3 c5 8. ♘f3 cxd4 9. exd4 b4 10. ♙xc4 e6! 11. ♘a2 ♙d6↗ With the better pawn structure and development.

E) 3. g3 ♘f6 4. ♙g2 ♙f5 5. ♘c3 e6 6. ♘f3 transposes.

F) 3. ♘d2 ♘f6 4. ♘gf3 transposes to 4. ♘bd2.

3... ♘f6 4. ♙d3 e5!



Position after: 4... e5!

A very strong move, starting to fight for an advantage.

5. ♘c3

5. dxe5 dxc4! 6. ♙c2 ♙xd1+ 7. ♙xd1 ♘d5↗ Black has a better position.

5... e4 6. ♙c2 ♙d6 7. f3 0-0!

Finishing development and starting an attack on the white king.

8. fxe4 dxe4 9. ♘ge2 ♘bd7 10. h3 ♘h5!



Position after: 10... ♘h5!

Sacrificing the pawn for a strong attack!

11. ♘xe4 ♙h4+ 12. ♙f1

12. ♙d2 ♙b4+ 13. ♘4c3 b5↗→

12... ♙c7→

Black has a strong attack.



The Exchange Variation

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.cxd5 cxd5



Chapter Guide

Chapter 2 – The Exchange Variation

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.cxd5 cxd5

a) 4. ♖g5	13
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a) 4. ♖g5

1. d4 d5 2. c4 c6 3. cxd5 cxd5 4. ♖g5



Position after: 4. ♖g5

A rare move—not the strongest, but an interesting choice.

4... h6

Soon we will see what happens if Black chooses f6. I suggest you stick with ...h6.

A) 4... ♘c6 5. ♘c3



Position after: 5. ♘c3

A1) 5... ♔b6 It is well known that developing the queen too early in the opening is not ideal. 6. e4! e6 [6... ♔xb2 7. ♘xd5± This looks rather

hopeless.; 6... dxe4? 7. d5 ♔xb2 8. ♔c1+— Development is significant in chess] 7. exd5 exd5 8. ♖b5 ♖e6 9. ♘ge2± Symmetrical positions are usually close to equal, like this one, but they can still be quite unpleasant to play

A2) 5... f6



Position after: 5... f6

I am hesitant to play this move because of the risk of a wild piece sacrifice 6. e4 fxg5 [6... dxe4 7. ♖e3↑ This position is too dangerous to play.] 7. exd5 If Black plays accurately, he should not have any real problems. However, the lines require precise and difficult moves, making it challenging to remember and play correctly 7... ♘b8 8. ♘f3 g6! There is no alternative to this move. 9. ♖b5+ ♔f7! This is the only move. 10. h4 gxh4! 11. ♔xh4 ♖g7 Black now has a choice of moves but I prefer a safer square for the king.



Position after: 11... Kg7

12. Nf3 [12. Qd2 Qd7 13. Qc4 b5∞ I think White has compensation for the piece here, but Black should be fine.] 12... Qd7 13. Qd3 The position looks very dangerous for Black, with all of White's pieces ready for a final attack. However, with precise play, Black can still survive. 13... Qe8 14. Ne2! The knight aims to occupy either f4 or e6. 14... Nf6 15. Nf4 Qd6 16. Nc4 Qd7 17. Ne5 Qd6= I believe repeating the position is best here. It is not easy for White to improve, and Black's development is difficult to complete.

B) 4... Nf6 I do not like giving the opponent the chance to double my pawns 5. Qxf6 gxf6 6. Nc3 Nc6



Position after: 6... Nc6

7. e3±

5. Qh4

5. Qf4 Nc6 6. Nc3 Nf6

A) 7. Nf3 When my opponents play the Exchange Variation, I try to adopt a more aggressive approach to complicate the position. 7... g5 8. Qe5 Qg7 9. e3 0-0∞ This unusual h6–g5 idea allows us to play more aggressively, gain space, and fight for control of the dark squares.

B) 7. e3 Qf5 8. Qb3 Na5 9. Qa4+ Qd7 10. Qc2 e6



Position after: 10... e6

Typical moves in this position, but I believe Black has a slight advantage thanks to the pawn on h6. 11. Nf3 Qc8 12. Qd3 Qb4 The key point now is that without a pawn on h7 we may focus on creating play on the queenside. 13. 0-0 0-0 14. Ne5 Nc6 The knight on e5 is very dangerous and helps White initiate kingside activity so we need to exchange it. 15. Qe2 Qxc3 16. bxc3 Nxe5 17. dxe5 Ne4= This fully equalizes the position.

5... ♔b6



Position after: 5... ♔b6

Generally, we are taught not to develop the queen early but there are exceptions when it is necessary. In this case it is hard to develop the kingside without playing ...e6.

6. ♘c3

This approach is more aggressive

6. ♔d2 It is not easy to defend the pawn on b2. 6... ♙f5 7. ♘c3 e6



Position after: 7... e6

A) 8. f3 Maybe not ideal, but it is the only way to create counterplay. 8... ♙e7 9. ♙xe7 ♘xe7 10. e4



Position after: 10. e4

A1) 10... ♙h7 I played this move during a game but could not recall my exact analysis at the time! The move is fine as I comfortably equalized. I later discovered an interesting idea that allows Black to play for more. 11. ♙b5+ ♘bc6 12. exd5 exd5 13. ♘ge2 ♙d8=

A2) 10... dxe4! Not a natural move, but now White will have problems with development, and the d4-pawn is under heavy pressure. 11. fxe4 ♙g6 12. ♘f3 ♘bc6=

B) 8. e3 ♘c6∞ Black is in a comfortable position as he will complete his development thereby resolving his opening problems.

6... e5

These lines are quite complex; let us examine them move by move.

6... ♔xb2 I do not usually like such moves in the opening, but here is how to play this line. 7. ♘xd5 e6 8. ♙b1 ♔a3 9. ♔c2!



Position after: 9. ♖c2!

9... ♜a5+ ♚ [9... ♘a6 10. e4± And now Black is under attack!] 10. ♜c3 White must exchange queens, but with better development he holds a slight edge. Black needs to play with caution. 10... ♜xc3+ 11. ♘xc3 a6 12. g4 White aims to gain a space advantage. 12... b5 13. ♙g2 ♞a7 14. ♙g3 ♘d7 15. ♞c1∞ The endgame is equal.

7. ♘f3

Black has two main ideas: push the pawn to e4 to close the position or develop with ...♘c6.

7. ♘xd5 ♙b4+ 8. ♘xb4 ♜xb4+ 9. ♜d2 ♜xd2+ 10. ♙xd2 exd4



Position after: 10... exd4

When I first saw this line and the resulting endgame, I thought Black might face some problems because of White's pawn on d4 and the advantage of the bishop pair. 11. ♘f3 [11. e3, does not work because of problems with the bishop on h4. 11... dxe3+ 12. ♙xe3 ♘e7!=] 11... ♘c6 12. e3 the problem is that it is not possible to play without e3, but after that move White cannot save the h4-bishop. 12... dxe3+ 13. fxe3 [13. ♙xe3? g5!



Position after: 13... g5!

14. ♙g3 ♘f6± White faces a serious problem with his king stuck in the center, while Black's attack is mounting.] 13... ♘ge7! 14. ♙c4 ♘f5!∞ The problem lies with the weak pawn on e3, and White's king stuck in the center.

7... ♘c6

7... e4 8. ♘d2 ♙e6 9. e3 This resembles a French Defense structure but White holds a significant advantage thanks to the strong bishop on h4. 9... ♘c6 [9... ♙e7 10. ♙g3!



Position after: 10. Qg3!

The bishop is very strong and must be preserved. 10... ♘f6 11. ♘a4 ♖a5 12. ♜c1± The c-file and the c5-square are firmly controlled by White.] 10. ♕e2 ♕d6 11. ♖b3± With a slight advantage for White.

8. ♘xd5 ♕b4+ 9. ♘d2



Position after: 9. ♘d2

This move leads to sharper lines, requiring more precise calculation.

9. ♘xb4 ♖xb4+ 10. ♖d2 ♖xd2+ 11. ♘xd2 [11. ♔xd2 exd4 transposes to 7. ♘d5.] 11... ♘xd4 12. ♜c1 ♘f5=

9... ♖xd4 10. ♘c7+ ♔f8 11. ♘xa8 ♖xb2 12. ♜c1 g5 13. ♜c2 ♖a3



Position after: 13... ♖a3

White has two challenges in this fantastically messy position. He is a rook up but his a8-knight is completely out of play.

14. ♕g3

14. e4 ♘f6 15. ♕b5 ♕xd2+ 16. ♜xd2 gxf4 17. ♕xc6 bxc6 18. 0-0 ♔g7 19. ♜d8 ♕g4 20. f3 ♖e3+ 21. ♔h1 ♜xd8 22. ♖xd8 h3 23. fxg4 ♘xe4= This computer line is hard to explain but it ends in a perpetual check.

14... ♘f6 15. e3 ♕f5↑

This is a very difficult position for White: although up a rook, he faces a strong pin and intense attack.

b) 4. ♖f4

1. d4 d5 2. c4 c6 3. cxd5 cxd5 4. ♖f4



Position after: 4. ♖f4

4... ♗f6 5. e3 ♘c6 6. ♙b5



Position after: 6. ♙b5

This move order allows flexibility and avoids early commitments, while preparing key strategic ideas.

6. ♙d3 ♙g4! Remember to develop the bishop first, then play ...e6.



Position after: 6... ♙g4!

A) 7. ♙b3 ♗a5 8. ♙a4+ ♙d7 9. ♙c2 ♗c6 10. a3 ♗h5= This typical queen and bishop maneuver is well known, but here Black also attacks the bishop on f4, achieving a comfortable position.

B) 7. f3 ♙h5 8. ♙b3 ♙d7 Now Black must choose a different plan, as the bishop is off the c8–h3 diagonal and the queen on d7 limits the knight while White's f3-pawn controls two key squares 9. ♗c3 e6 10. ♗ge2



Position after: 10. ♗ge2