

opening repertoire

the English

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About the Author

David Cummings is an experienced International Master, who has represented Canada at the Chess Olympiad. He is a regular contributor to the opening theory website ChessPublishing.com, writing a monthly column covering the English and Flank Openings.

Also by the Author:

Symmetrical English

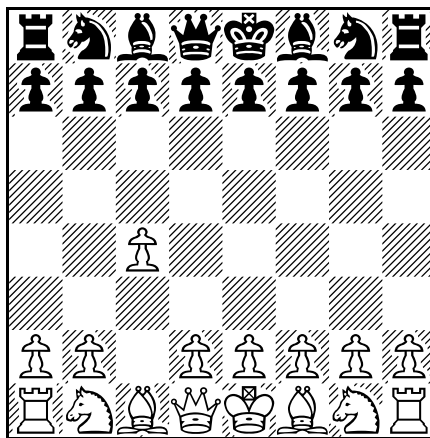
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Introduction

Why Play the English?

The English Opening is characterized by the move 1 c4:



By controlling the d5-square, White fights for the centre, but without allowing the immediate 'head to head' clash that occurs after 1 d4 d5 or 1 e4 e5. In contrast, other 'Flank Openings' give Black an immediate opportunity to occupy the centre, for example after 1 c4 c5 or 1 b3 b5.

The English has always attracted players that like thematic or system-based play, with key pawn structures and thematic ideas recurring time and again. It allows White to play for a win while avoiding the sheer volume of 'move-by-move' theory that comes with openings such as the Grünfeld or Sicilian Najdorf. Playing the English also has a major practical advantage for club and tournament players. Their opponents typically spend most of their time and energy working on their Black repertoire against 1 e4 and 1 d4, often paying much more superficial attention to 1 c4. Finally, as a knowledgeable player of the English, you can use the early move order to steer the game into positions that you like, and ideally positions where your opponent is not comfortable.

My Repertoire Approach

When choosing the key lines for the repertoire, I followed several guiding principles. I looked for lines that allowed White to fight for the centre, and grab space when allowed. I also wanted to be flexible, allowing for transpositions to 1 d4 openings where this made the most sense in a particular line. I tried to present options with a manageable amount of theory, but without compromising on quality. Finally, I searched for lines with well-defined structures and themes where possible, for example, the Maroczy Bind setup in the Symmetrical English with an early ...g7-g6 or ...b7-b6, or systems playing with, or against, the Isolated Queen's Pawn (IQP) in some of the Queen's Gambit style variations. To give you a feel for some of the typical setups that are covered in the book, here is an informal thematic index.

- 1) White plays against Black's doubled f-pawns – Games 1-3.
- 2) White exploits the advantage of the two bishops – Games 6-9, 12, 33-34.
- 3) White has the IQP, goes for active play – Games 26-27, 29.
- 4) White fights against the IQP or hanging pawns – Games 15, 25, 28, 31.
- 5) White employs the Maroczy Bind structure – Games 14, 17-22.
- 6) White plays for a typical kingside attack with the queen on the c2-square, involving ideas such as ♖f3-g5, h2-h4-h5 or g2-g4 etc. – Games 4, 5, 25, 30, 43.
- 7) White employs the h2-h4-h5(-h6) thrust against the ...g7-g6 kingside fianchetto – Games 23, 35, 36, 42.
- 8) White combats the King's Indian structure – Games 38-41.

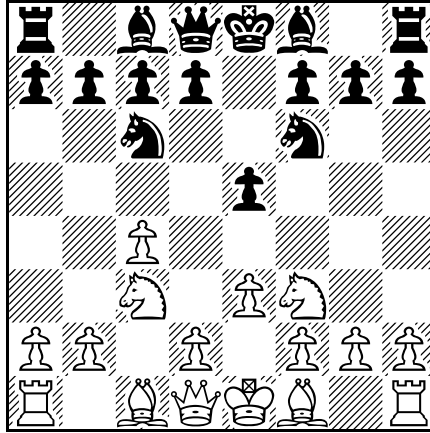
As the above list indicates, certain common ideas and techniques recur, not only within a specific variation or chapter, but across multiple lines. So understanding how to play these typical positions will reap benefits in many practical situations.

Most of the existing English Opening repertoire books offer White systems involving an early g2-g3. Most notably, the seminal works by Tony Kosten and Mihail Marin are based on playing 1 c4 and 2 g3 against any of Black's replies. One key decision I made early on was not to follow in their footsteps. First of all, those books are excellent and I felt I could offer more value by presenting an alternative set of choices. Secondly, the theory after 1 c4 e5 2 g3, which Marin covered in close to 500 pages in 2009, is the very domain that has exploded most dramatically. In the 2016 Moscow Candidates tournament, for example, a full 20% of all the games started 1 c4 e5 with White playing an early g2-g3! Those of us below 2700 level need a different approach!

Overview of the Repertoire

So let's run through an overview of the repertoire and the structure of this book.

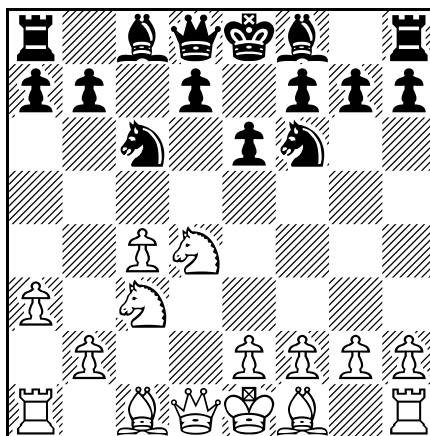
Chapters 1-4 cover 1 c4 e5, where my core recommendation is the line 1 c4 e5 2 ♖c3 ♗f6 3 ♗f3 ♗c6 4 e3:



This is a line that has been played by strong grandmasters for decades, but one where much remains to be explored. Recent games and new ideas support a fresh repertoire in this setup.

Chapters 5-9 cover the Symmetrical English, which 'officially' starts with 1 c4 c5, but which can be reached from other first moves such as 1...♘f6, 1...g6 or 1...e6. Chapter Five is a dedicated move order guide to help you navigate through the options.

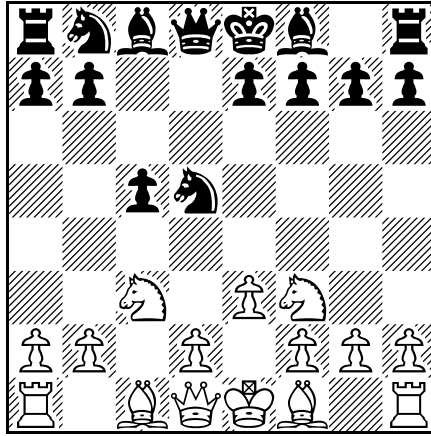
After 1 c4 c5, the repertoire continues with 2 ♖f3. Should Black play a flank move such as 2...b6 or 2...g6, White goes for the Maroczy Bind structure with an early d2-d4 and e2-e4 (see Chapters Seven and Eight). In the case of 2...♖c6, the follow up is 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘d4, with the main line arising after 4...♘f6 5 ♘c3 e6 and now my recommendation is 6 a3, reaching the diagram position below.



This is one of the modern main lines of the Symmetrical English, where White aims for a Maroczy Bind setup without allowing ...♗f8-b4. See Chapter Six for details.

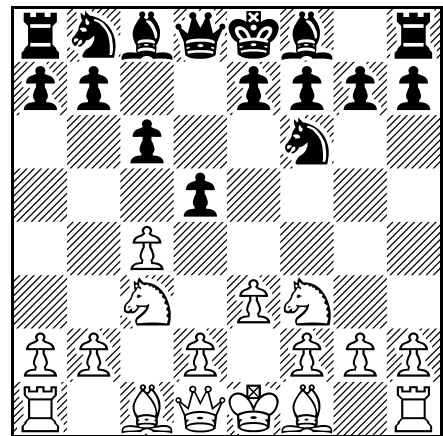
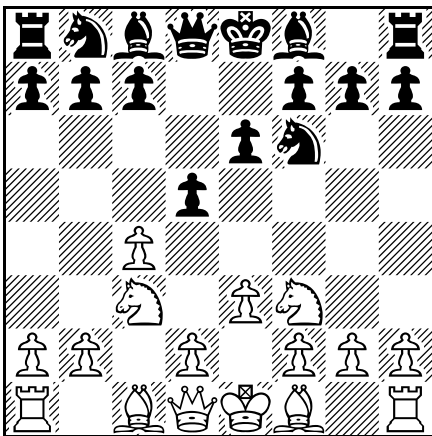
Opening Repertoire: The English

Another key position is reached after 1 c4 c5 2 ♖f3 ♜f6 3 ♗c3 d5 4 cxd5 ♜xd5 and now 5 e3:



Here Black can choose between the ‘Grünfeld-style’ 5...g6 (see Chapter Nine) or play a move such as 5...e6, against which I recommend 6 ♗c4!?. This normally transposes into the line of the Semi-Tarrasch covered in Chapter Eleven. This is an example of where the repertoire moves into a 1 d4 opening, where this is the most consistent and principled choice. I believe this is a better approach than coming up with an artificial way of staying within pure ‘English’ territory at all times. I have also done my best to provide a consistent level of detail for all lines, within the constraints of a single-volume repertoire.

Chapters 10-16 cover all of Black’s first moves other than 1...e5 and 1...c5, taking into account transposition back and forth between these lines and the Symmetrical. The following two diagrams show our typical configuration cropping up against the Queen’s Gambit Declined structure and the Slav setup.



In both systems, if permitted, White will develop with ♖d1-c2, b2-b3, ♘c1-b2, with an eye to a potential attack against Black's castled king supported by a kingside pawn storm. Good examples of this are Game 25 in Chapter Eleven and Game 30 in Chapter Twelve.

Against the King's Indian setup, I again decided to offer a full repertoire based on transposing to a 1 d4 main line, namely the Petrosian System. See Chapter Fifteen for coverage. I believe this is consistent with the style and approach of the rest of the repertoire.

A couple of notes on the structure of the book. I have primarily used the 'complete games' format, supplemented by theoretical articles in the chapter introductions and occasionally in the body of the chapter. In many cases, for ease of use, I have altered the initial move order to fit the repertoire structure, but have noted the actual game move order early in the game notes.

I hope this repertoire brings you many wins and enjoyable games, and expands your chess knowledge!

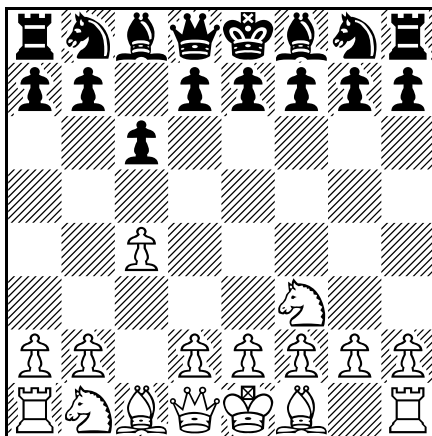
David Cummings,
Toronto,
November 2016

Chapter Twelve

Anti-Slav System

1 c4 c6 2 ♘f3

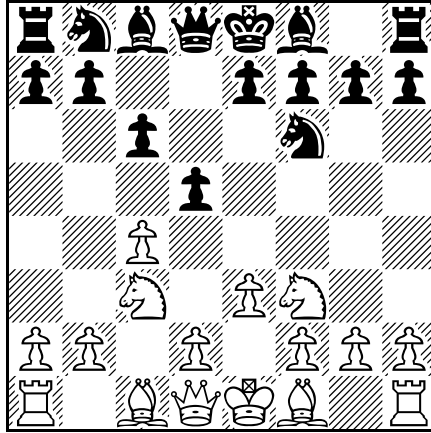
I recommend this move here, in contrast to 1...e6 or 1...♘f6, where 2 ♘c3 is the repertoire choice. If White plays 1 c4 c6 2 ♘c3 d5 3 e3 then Black has the option of 3...e5 occupying the centre and taking the game in a different direction.



2...d5 3 e3

Our anti-Slav system has some similarities to the anti-Queen's Gambit setup covered in the previous chapter.

3...♘f6 4 ♘c3



Black's next move reveals the flavour of Slav system he is looking for.

4...e6

This will likely be the choice of semi-Slav players, since it invites an immediate transposition to the Meran/anti-Meran complex with 5 d4. Instead 4...♘g4, 4...a6 and other 4th moves will often be chosen by players that would play the Classical or Chebanenko Slav against a 1 d4 move order. These are analyzed in Ponomariov-Ivanchuk (Game 32).

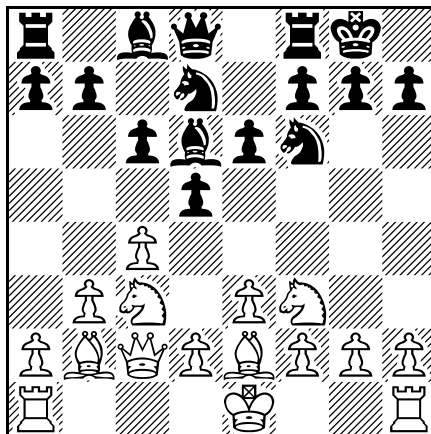
5 b3

White typically develops with b2-b3, ♘c1-b2 and ♖d1-c2 before deciding on the remainder of his development plan.

5...♗bd7 6 ♖c2

One rule of thumb is to answer ...♗b8-d7 with ♖d1-c2, in order to answer 6...e5 with 7 cxd5 cxd5 8 ♗b5.

6...♙d6 7 ♙b2 0-0 8 ♙e2



At this point, White has two potential plans, either to castle short and play an early d2-d4, or to go for an aggressive attack with an early g2-g4. There are many move order nuances around here, which are explained in the notes to Giri-Michiels (Game 30).

8...b6

With this move Black momentarily loosens his grip on the centre, which invites the uncompromising 9 ♖g1 followed by the “bayonet” attack on the kingside.

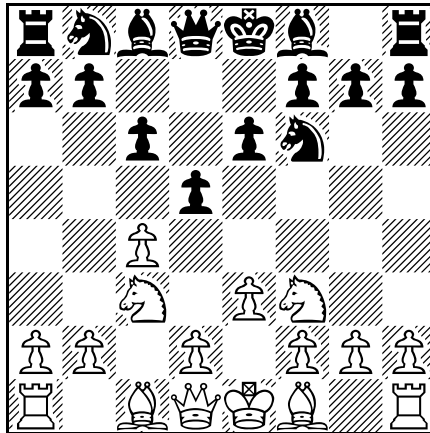
Instead after 8...♖e8 I recommend 9 0-0 b6 10 d4 transposing to an anti-Meran position where Black has already committed to an early ...♗f8-e8, which reduces his flexibility. This is covered in Bosiocic-Caruana (Game 31).

9 ♖g1

We have reached a position which we cover in the next game.

Game 30 A.Giri-B.Michiels French League 2015

1 c4 c6 2 ♘f3 d5 3 e3 ♘f6 4 ♗c3 e6



5 b3

There are a number of move order subtleties in this line, which it is important to understand. For example if White plays 5 ♖c2 ♗d6! 6 b3 0-0 7 ♗b2 e5 and now the typical mechanism 8 cxd5 cxd5 9 ♗b5 can be met by 9...♗c6 posting the b8-knight on its most active square. This is awkward for White when his queen is on the c2-square, since the queen is vulnerable to ...♗c6-b4 jumps. Of course, Black doesn't have this option once he has committed to ...♗b8-d7.

After 10 ♗xd6 ♖xd6 Black is already equal. For example 11 d4 ♗b4 12 ♖d1 ♖c7!? exposes White's lack of development, D.Khismatullin-S.Rublevsky, Berlin (rapid) 2015. So it is

best to delay ♖d1-c2 until Black has played ...♗b8-d7 or until White is ready to deal effectively with this kind of sequence.

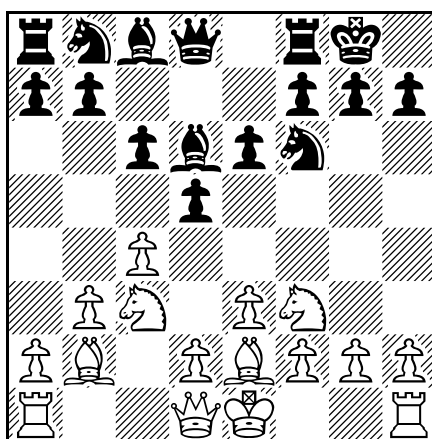
5...♗bd7

5...♗d6 is a cunning move order, aiming to play a quick ...e6-e5 under favourable circumstances. In fact both sides need to consider the possibility of ...e6-e5 on every move. After 6 ♗b2 Black can try:

a) 6...♗bd7 7 ♖c2 transposes to the main game.

b) 6...e5 7 cxd5 cxd5 8 ♗b5 ♗c6 9 ♗xd6+ ♖xd6 10 ♗b5 e4 11 ♗d4 0-0 12 ♗e2 ♗xd4 13 ♗xd4 ♗f5 14 0-0 ♗d7 15 ♖c1 ♗e5 was R.Dautov-K.Mueller, Lippstadt 2000, and here White can improve with 16 f4 exf3 17 ♗xf3 and White is slightly better.

c) 6...0-0 7 ♗e2



and now:

c1) 7...♗bd7 again goes back to the main game after 8 ♖c2.

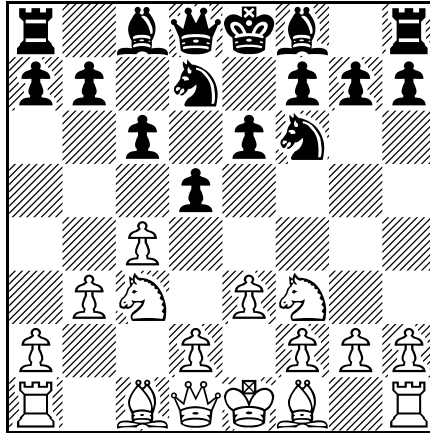
c2) 7...♖e8 8 ♖c2 and finally this move makes sense, since White has played the other developing moves 6 ♗b2 and 7 ♗e2 in preparation.

If now 8...e5 9 cxd5 cxd5 10 ♗b5 ♗c6 11 ♗xd6 ♖xd6 12 d4 ♗b4 13 ♖d2! with a further split:

c21) 13...♗e4 14 ♖d1 exd4 15 ♗xd4 ♖g6 16 0-0 ♗h3 17 ♗f3 ♖ac8 (17...♗g5!? is better, with counterplay) 18 ♗e2 ♗e6 19 ♗f4 ♖g5 20 a3 ♗c6 21 ♖c1 and a draw was agreed here in S.Sagar-S.Shyam, Varna 2013, although White is for choice: he has the two bishops and play against the IQP.

c22) 13...e4 14 ♗e5 ♗d7 15 0-0 f6 (15...♗xe5 now doesn't make sense as after 16 dxe5 ♖g6 is not possible due to 17 ♖xb4 which is why the queen was better placed on d2 on move 13) 16 a3 ♗a6 and now 17 f4!? is a creative attempt to wrest an advantage (17 ♗xd7 ♗xd7 18 ♖fc1 is also pleasant for White) 17...exf3 (17...fxe5 accepting the challenge is not advisable, after 18 dxe5 ♖c6 19 b4 gives White a strong initiative) 18 ♗xf3 ♗f8 19 ♗d3, Wei Yi-M.Kobalia, Moscow 2016, with a more pleasant position for White.

c3) 7...e5 8 cxd5 cxd5 9 ♖b5 e4 10 ♗e5 ♗e8 11 f4 f6 12 ♘g4 ♙xg4 13 ♙xg4 f5 14 ♙e2 ♗c6 15 0-0 ♙c5 16 ♚c1 ♗e7 17 ♚c2 ♙b6 18 ♙a3 ♗b4 19 ♚c3 a5 was played in N.Short-D.Howell, British League 2014, and here 20 ♗e5! would secure White a small advantage. Returning to the position after 5...♗bd7:



6 ♚c2

Following the rule of thumb – play ♚d1-c2 once Black has played ...♗b8-d7.

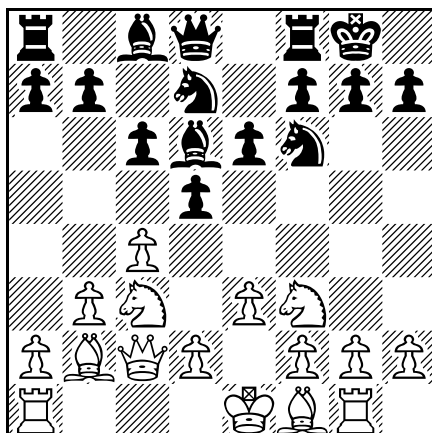
6...♙d6

The queen is needed on the c2-square to control the c-file in the event of 6...e5?! 7 cxd5 cxd5? (of course this is wrong in this particular position, but the same principle applies in other situations) 8 ♗b5 threatening a deadly invasion on the c7-square.

Instead 6...♙e7 will follow similar contours to the main game (and notes), except that Black has fewer active options due to his more modest bishop placement. For example 7 ♙b2 0-0 8 ♙e2 b6 (8...♗e8 9 0-0 and Black would rather have put his bishop on the more active d6-square) 9 ♗g1 ♙b7 10 g4 e5 11 g5 ♗e8 12 h4 ♗d6 13 0-0-0 b5 14 c5!? b4 15 ♗a4 ♗e4 16 ♗xe5 ♗dxc5? 17 ♗xc5 ♗xc5 18 ♗g4 and Black has no answer to the massive threat of 19 ♗f6+, K.Moutousis-S.Naoum, Vrachati 2013.

7 ♙b2 0-0 8 ♙e2

a) 8 ♗g1 is a more aggressive approach. But note that Black can avoid this particular position if he uses the savvy move order with 5...♙d6 that we looked at in the note to Black's 5th move above.



Some sample lines:

a1) 8...e5 9 cxd5 ♖xd5 10 ♖e4 ♙c7 11 g4 ♜e8 12 g5 ♗f8 13 h4 ♙f5 14 h5 ♖e6 15 ♜c1 ♗d4 16 ♙xd4 exd4 17 ♗f6+ ♗xf6 18 ♜xf5 ♖e4?! (18...♗xh5 is unclear) 19 g6 fxg6 20 hxg6 dxe3 21 fxe3 h6? 22 ♜f7+ ♙h8 23 ♜h1 ♙g3+ 24 ♙e2 1-0 was S.Docx-M.Gagunashvili, European Team Championship, Warsaw 2013.

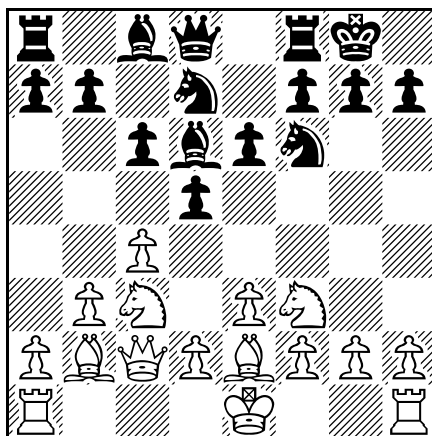
a2) 8...b5!?

and now:
a21) 9 g4?! bxc4 10 bxc4 ♜b8 11 ♜b1 ♗c5 and Black took over the initiative in V.Dobrov-A.Shirov, Jurmala 2015.

a22) 9 cxb5 c5 10 g4 ♙b7 11 g5 ♗h5 12 0-0-0 e5 was played in P.Michalik-S.Matsenko, Prague 2013, and here after the prophylactic 13 ♙b1 can focus on his attack.

b) 8 h3 has also been tried, with similar ideas.

We now return to the position after 8 ♙e2.



Here we have reached a major crossroads.

8...b6

Other tries for Black here are:

a) 8...♖e8 and here I suggest castling short:

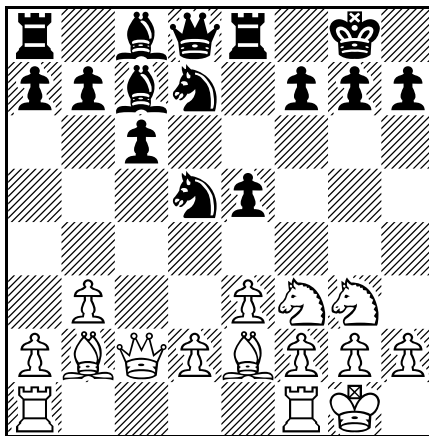
a1) 9 ♖g1?! doesn't work so well here because after 9...e5 10 cxd5 ♘xd5 11 ♗e4 Black has the e5-pawn protected by the rook so can play 11...♗7f6! preventing 12 g4, leaving Black slightly better.

a2) 9 g4?! also has a following, but I think White's compensation is questionable after 9...♗xg4 10 ♖g1 ♗gf6 11 ♗g5 ♗f8 12 0-0-0 e5, V.Zvjaginsev-P.Maletin, Olginka (rapid) 2011.

a3) 9 0-0! e5 (9...b6 is best answered by 10 d4 entering Anti-Meran lines covered in Game 31) 10 cxd5 and now:

a31) 10...cxd5?! 11 ♗b5 ♗b8 12 ♖ac1 d4 13 ♗g5 ♗b6 (or 13...h6? 14 ♗xf7 ♖xf7 15 ♗c4+ ♖f8 16 ♗a3+ ♖e7 17 ♗e6 wins for White) 14 ♗d3 g6 15 ♗c7 ♗xc7 16 ♖xc7 ♖xc7 17 ♖xc7 is nice for White.

a32) 10...♗xd5 11 ♗e4 ♗c7 12 ♗g3 leads to pleasant reversed Sicilian for White.



This is an important position-type to be aware of, that arises when Black recaptures on the d5-square with the f6-knight instead of the c6-pawn. Now after 12...♗f8 13 a3 a5 14 d4 ♗g6 15 ♗d3 exd4 16 ♗xd4, White had an edge in A.Grischuk-V.Kramnik, Wijk aan Zee 2011.

b) 8...dxc4 9 ♗xc4 b5 10 ♗e2 ♗b7 11 ♗g5 a6 12 h4!? c5 13 ♗f3 ♗xf3 14 gxf3 ♗e5 15 f4 ♗xc3 16 ♗xc3 ♖e8, M.Suba-I.Cosma, Bucharest 1996, and now 17 ♗e2! is better for White according to Delchev.

c) 8...a6 9 ♖g1!? (9 d4 is a safe alternative) 9...b5 10 g4 bxc4 11 bxc4 ♖b8 12 g5 ♗e4 13 ♗d4 ♖c7 was unclear in L.Fressinet-W.Spoelman, German League 2011.

d) 8...♖e7 9 0-0 (9 ♖g1 is also available) and now:

d1) 9...b6?! 10 cxd5

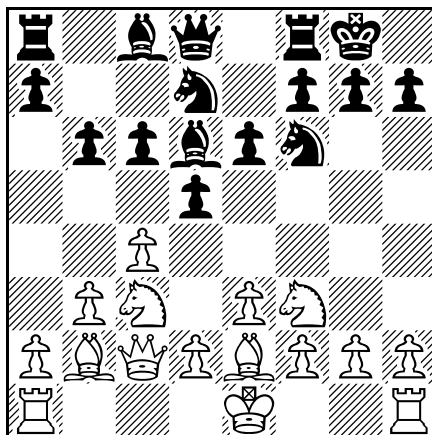
d11) 10...cxd5 11 ♗b5 ♗a6 12 ♗fd4 ♗xb5 13 ♗xb5 ♖fc8 14 ♖d1 a6 15 ♗xd6 ♖xd6 16

a4 is better for White with two bishops against two knights in a flexible pawn structure, P.Schlösser-V.Khachatryan, European Championship, Yerevan 2014.

d12) 10...exd5 11 ♖d4 ♗b7 12 ♘f5 ♜e6 13 ♘xd6 ♜xd6 14 d4 is preferable for White due to his two bishops advantage and Black's passive bishop, A.Grischuk-S.Karjakin, Moscow (blitz) 2010.

d2) 9...e5 10 cxd5 ♘xd5 11 ♗e4 ♗c7 12 ♘g3 g6 13 d4 with a comfortable reversed Sicilian for White, M.Matlakov-M.Schachinger, European Championship, Plovdiv 2012.

Now we go back to the position after 8...b6:



With 8...b6, Black played a quiet developing move on the queenside, rather than challenging White directly in the centre. This is the signal to switch to aggressive mode with:

9 ♖g1!? ♗b7

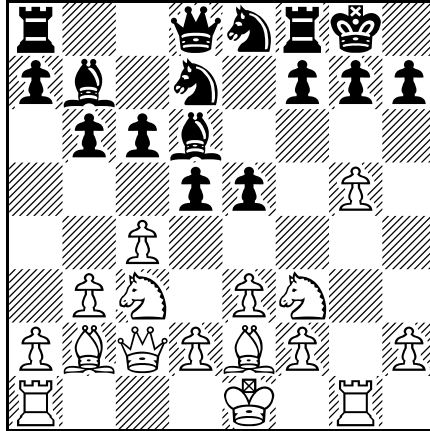
Or 9...♗e5 10 ♘xe5 ♗xe5 11 f4 ♗c7 12 0-0-0 (12 g4! looks even better) 12...b5?! 13 cxb5 c5 14 g4 d4 15 ♗e4 and White is on top, V.Zvjaginsev-A.Dreev, Moscow (blitz) 2001.

10 g4 e5

Black's most natural, and best response.

Instead after 10...c5 11 h4 ♜c8 12 0-0-0 (12 g5! is more straightforward) 12...♗e4 13 ♘xe4 dxe4 14 ♘g5 ♗e5 15 ♗xe5 ♗xe5 16 ♘xe4 White is winning a pawn for nothing, A.Stefanova-M.Sebag, FIDE Grand Prix (women), Ulaanbaatar 2010.

11 g5 ♗e8

**12 h4**

Instead 12 0-0-0 is equally valid. Now 12...♖c7 13 h4 ♗e6 14 ♖b1 ♕e7 was played in B.Socko-K.Ejsmont, Ustron 2006, but here Delchev recommends 15 d4 e4 16 ♗e5 with some edge for White.

12...♖c7

Black has also tried 12...e4 13 ♗d4 ♕e5 14 d3 exd3 15 ♕xd3 g6, V.Papin-S.Ter Sahakyan, Chennai 2013 and now 16 cxd5 cxd5 17 0-0-0 gives White a firm grip on the centre.

13 ♕d3!?

The natural 13 h5 is also a strong move here.

13...g6

13...e4?! 14 ♗xe4! dxe4 15 ♕xe4 with powerful raking bishops.

14 h5

Giri also considered 14 ♗h2 e4 15 ♗g4 exd3 16 ♗xd5 ♕e5 (Black also has 16...♖e8 17 ♖c3 ♕e5 18 ♗xe5 ♗xd5 19 cxd5 ♗xe5 20 f4 ♖xd5 21 fxe5 ♖e6 which is roughly equal) 17 ♕xe5 ♗xe5 18 ♗df6+ ♖h8 19 ♖c3 ♗f3+ 20 ♖f1 ♗xg1 21 ♖xg1 with compensation even for a rook (!), for example 21...♗e6 22 f4 c5 23 ♖f2 and Black's king is still feeling the heat.

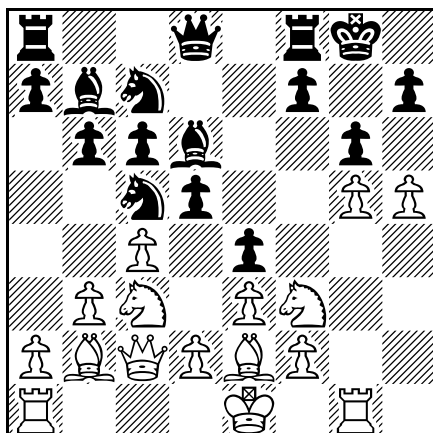
14...♖c5

Instead:

a) 14...♖e8 is answered by the dangerous 15 ♗h2.

b) 14...♖e7 15 ♗h4!? threatens sacrifices on g6.

15 ♕e2 e4



16 ♖xe4!

White had to act, otherwise for example 16 ♖h4 ♗e5 and Black has repelled the worst of the attack, and is fine.

16...♖xe4

16...dxe4 is dealt with by 17 ♖c3 f6 18 hxg6! for example 18...hxg6 19 gxf6 ♖xf6 20 ♖xf6 ♗xf6 21 ♗xf6 exf3 22 ♗xf3 ♕f7 23 ♗c3 with a better endgame for White.

17 d3!

White wins the piece back because Black must prevent White's queen coming to the c3-square with a fatal battery down the long diagonal.

17...♗b4+ 18 ♕f1 ♗c8?

Instead:

a) 18...♖d6 19 a3 and the b4-bishop is trapped.

b) 18...♖xf2! was the best chance. After 19 ♕xf2 ♗e8 Giri gives 20 ♗g2! ♗c5 21 d4 ♗f8 22 ♗h1 with good attacking chances.

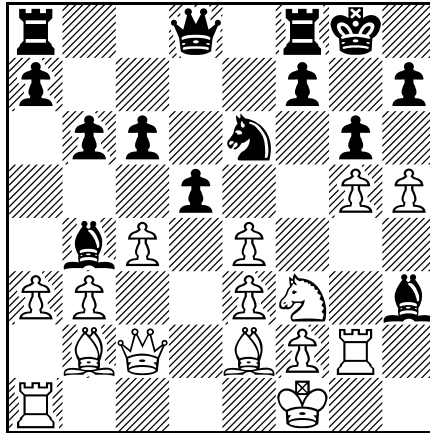
19 dxe4 ♗h3+ 20 ♗g2

White has no qualms in giving up an exchange as Black has no long term answer to White's attack on his king.

20...♖e6

If 20...d4 21 ♗xd4 ♖e6 22 ♗f6 is great for White.

21 a3



21...dxe4

Black has no good square for the b4-bishop, for example:

a) 21...♙e7 22 exd5 cxd5 23 ♖d1 winning the d5-pawn.

b) 21...♙d6 22 exd5 cxd5 23 cxd5 ♖c8 24 ♕d3 ♗xg5 25 hxg6 hxg6 26 ♕d4 f6 27 ♗xg5 ♙e5 28 ♕e4 ♙f5 29 ♕xf5! gxf5 30 ♗e6+ and White wins.

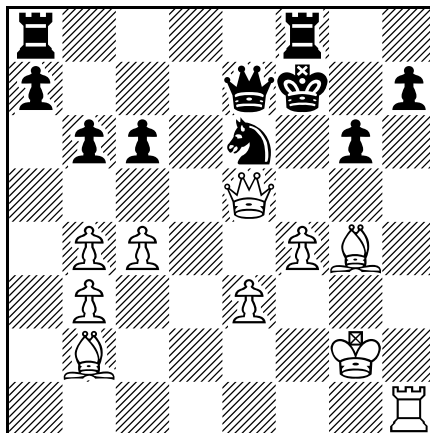
22 ♕xe4 ♙xg2+ 23 ♙xg2 ♗xg5 24 ♕f4!

Aiming for the dark squares.

24...♗xf3 25 axb4 ♗g5

Instead 25...♗h4+ 26 ♙h3 ♗f5 27 ♕xf5! is a nice finish given by Giri.

26 hxg6! fxf6 27 ♕e5 ♙f7 28 f4 ♗e6 29 ♙g4 ♕e7 30 ♖h1



30...♗xf4+

30...h5 can be met with 31 f5 or either capture on h5.

31 exf4 ♕xe5 32 ♙xe5 h5 33 ♙f3

Black's rook and pawn are no match for the two mighty bishops here.

33...♖ad8 34 ♗xc6 ♜d2+ 35 ♗f3 ♜d3+ 36 ♗e4 ♜xb3 37 ♜a1 ♜xb4 38 ♜xa7+ ♗e6 39 ♗d5 mate

Game 31

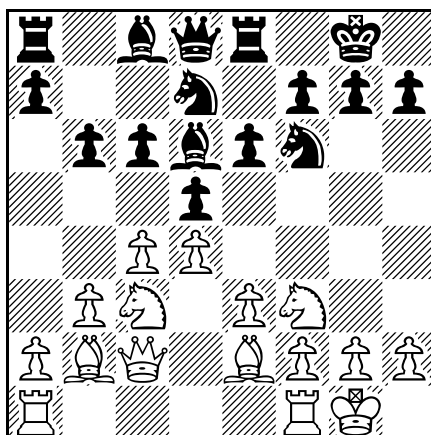
M.Bosicic-F.Caruana

Mitropa Cup, Rogaska Slatina 2009

1 c4

The game move order was 1 ♗f3 d5 2 d4 ♗f6 3 c4 c6 4 ♗c3 e6 5 e3 ♗bd7 6 ♜c2 ♗d6 7 b3 0-0 8 ♗e2 b6 9 0-0 ♗b7 10 ♗b2 ♜e8

1...c6 2 ♗f3 d5 3 e3 ♗f6 4 ♗c3 e6 5 b3 ♗d6 6 ♗b2 0-0 7 ♗e2 ♗bd7 8 ♜c2 ♜e8 9 0-0 b6 10 d4



10...♗b7

Reaching the anti-Meran system in the Semi-Slav. In this game a 17 year old Caruana (already rated 2649!) loses to a lower rated Croatian Grandmaster Bosicic who plays an excellent positional game, illustrating how to tackle the hanging pawns that often arise in this line.

11 ♜fd1

The twist with our repertoire move order is that Black has committed his rook to e8, which restricts his options. Schandorff (in his book on the Semi-Slav) and Ragger (in his chess24.com ebook) follow a guideline that Black should always “copy” the rook placements of his opponent. This is only possible if he has played ...♜e7 before touching his rooks. This does make life more tricky for Black, especially if he is relying on the standard Semi-Slav recipes or memorized theory. In this game we see White taking advantage of this difference.