

The Modernized Modern Defense

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The Modernized Modern Defense

Daniel Fernandez

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Key to Symbols

!	a good move	±	White stands slightly better
?	a weak move	∓	Black stands slightly better
!!	an excellent move	±	White has a serious advantage
??	a blunder	∓	Black has a serious advantage
!?	an interesting move	+−	White has a decisive advantage
?!	a dubious move	−+	Black has a decisive advantage
□	only move	→	with an attack
N	novelty	↑	with initiative
↻	lead in development	↔	with counterplay
⊙	zugzwang	Δ	with the idea of
=	equality	▷	better is
∞	unclear position	≤	worse is
∞	with compensation for the sacrificed material	+	check
		#	mate

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Introduction to the Modernized Modern

Playing the Modern Defense with any regularity is a sign that you truly love chess. From the very first move, you are indicating to your opponent (and to the jury deciding on the brilliancy prizes!) that you would like to play an unbalanced position. Then the thrill of the fight courses through your veins and you simply must trust yourself to handle developments better than the other player. For a very long time this truly was the absolute frontier, the Wild West of opening theory: if it went well you looked like a genius, if it goes badly you got mated in 20 moves, and most likely neither of you ever really made the analysis which you so badly needed to remember at the board.

A certain air of reckless abandon, of pure devil-may-care mischief, was needed to play it successfully, and to some extent still is. Something of this passion was conveyed into printed form by Swedish GM Tiger Hillarp Persson when he wrote his *Tiger's Modern*. Even within the Modern, the crème de-la-crème of the opening, when I learned it from his book almost a decade ago was the famous Hippo setup, the epitome of the adventurer's spirit.

While White goes about stationing his pieces aggressively, controls the centre, etc., Black nonchalantly places nearly all his pawns on the third rank and shuffles his pieces behind them! For some reason this appealed to the 15-year-old me: the idea that I could take the game to my opponent in a way that I chose, rather than by preparing endlessly for some subtlety on move 27 of the Poisoned Pawn Najdorf.

Throughout the year 2010 I played the Modern almost exclusively; it filled the gap between my 1...e5 phase and my 1...c6 phase. (The latter remained my main reply to 1.e4 until I began learning the Najdorf in 2018, but I do still enjoy regularly mixing it up with the Modern; there are more than 20 references to my own games in the text.) What might surprise you is that 2010 was the year in which my chess career started progressing by leaps and bounds! I became an IM relying very heavily on it; an example from one of my norm tournaments can be seen in Part I (Lahiri-Fernandez.) I embraced the complexity, the audacity and the novelty wholeheartedly, and it embraced me back.

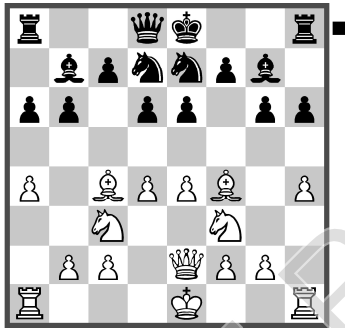
The following game was perhaps one of my most free-spirited ever. As a competitive player it can be hard to get fully into a creative mindset, but you can always try. This is, of course, much easier to do if you're not dependent on the

result to the extent that dinner will be porridge if you lose, salad if you draw and steak if you win.

♔ Bezgodov, Alexei (2485)
 ♚ Fernandez, Daniel (2371)
 ♁ Khanty-Mansiysk 2010

Black's pieces turn out to be quite well placed!

1. ♘f3 g6 2. d4 ♙g7 3. e4 d6 4. ♘c3 a6
 5. h3 ♘d7 6. ♙c4 e6 7. a4 b6 8. ♙g5
 ♘e7 9. h4 h6 10. ♙f4 ♙b7 11. ♚e2



Position after: 11. ♚e2

11... ♚b8!?

Commencing a manoeuvre I had read about in my (at that stage very new) copy of "Tiger's Modern".

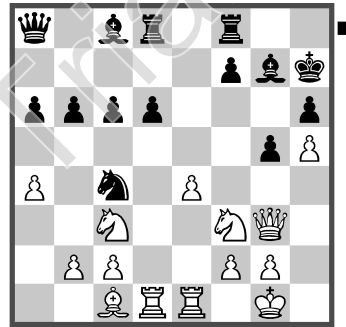
12. ♖d1 ♚a7!? 13. 0-0 ♖d8 14. ♗fe1
 ♚a8 15. ♘h2 0-0

A purist might have played the even more contrived 15... ♙f8 !

16. ♚e3 ♙h7 17. ♚h3 e5!

Opening the game at the right time.

18. ♙e3 exd4 19. ♙xd4 ♘e5 20. ♙b3
 ♘7c6 21. ♙e3 ♘a5 22. ♙d5 ♘ac4 23.
 ♙c1 c6 24. ♙xc4 ♘xc4 25. h5 ♙c8 26.
 ♚g3 g5 27. ♘f3



Position after: 27. ♘f3

27... ♙xc3!?

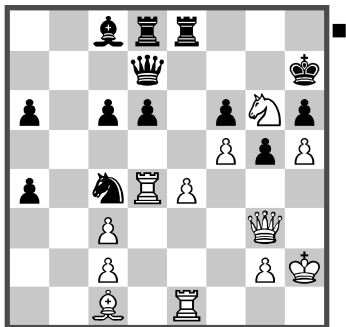
Positionally speaking this is a reasonable idea, but there was no compulsion to give up the bishop.

27... b5!?

28. bxc3 f6 29. ♘h4 ♗fe8 30. f4 b5 31.
 ♘g6 ♚a7+ 32. ♙h2 ♚d7 33. f5?

In mutual time pressure and with the position becoming quite complicated, both sides start making quite big mistakes. Unluckily for our story, the last mistake was made by me.

33... bxa4 34. ♖d4



Position after: 34. ♖d4

34... c5?!

Showing, as Ivan Sokolov would say, "too much talent".

34... ♔f7!♣ would have kept matters under control and Black can always play ...c5 next.

35. ♖xc4 ♔b5 36. e5 ♔xc4 37. e6 ♖b7
38. e7 ♖c8 39. ♖e6

White has very good value for the exchange and in what followed I just fell apart.

39... ♔d5? 40. ♖xf6+ ♔d1 41. ♖xg5
♔xh5+ 42. ♖h4 ♖d5 43. ♗f4 ♖g8 44.
♗xh5 ♖xg3 45. ♖xg3 a3 46. ♖f8 a2
47. ♖xc8 ♖f7 48. ♖xd6 ♖xh5 49.
♖e5
1-0

Life can be ironic sometimes. From a starting point of being fairly contemptuous of opening theory a decade ago, you now find me in the process of selling this, my second opening book; the third one might well feature, of all things, the Poisoned Pawn Najdorf! But this may not be so much due to a change of character as to a change in how chess is played.

Times are changing (as even the Wild West at some point became industrialized) and theory has developed on everything. It has therefore become possible, *inter alia*, to try and write a rigorous opening manual on the Modern. What I mean is not that equality has been found and this should be your exclusive opening choice for all time to come (I would be lying to you if I said that) but rather that there is now a roadmap as to how you should study this opening. About time, given the number of 1.e4 repertoires that have been written and which contain anti-Modern recommendations (usually in the 'Other' or 'Miscellaneous' section towards the back!) that nobody has taken the time to combat rigorously.

Furthermore, there has been a sea change in the ethos of Modern players (and also Pirc players): we no longer wish to get something totally new, or redefine the concept of development in Hippo style, but usually these days we want to get a Sicilian structure! That is to say, a position where Black gets to play ...cxd4 (or have

White play dxc5) and thereby obtains a central majority that will stand him in good stead for the long term. That has now become the intellectual gold standard, a trend that has progressed in tandem with the inclusion of this opening in more players' repertoires and its slow shift in towards the mainstream from the fringes of what is acceptable.

As artisans (for we must never forget our roots) on this moving fringe, it is important to have your bearings. Nowadays (and however much you feel like playing it freehand) if you want to include the Modern in your repertoire you should do some study. You should know, for instance, where White can get a safe plus (in my opinion, just chapter III.2), where White can get a less-safe plus (chapter IV.4), and where there are routes to equality, dynamic or otherwise (essentially the rest of the book!)

For the rare player from the White side who has picked this book up looking for inspiration, this text must have seemed like a really hate-filled polemic right up until that last paragraph. Yes, indeed, I am making some recommendations for White here too. For as objectivity plays a larger and larger part in the evolution of this opening and others, it falls to authors and commentators to try and uncover the truth of the position as honestly as they know how, rather than shamelessly trying to promote one side or the other.

As such, not only am I suggesting some lines and novelties for White, but I'm also severely dialing back some of my other personal biases (such as picking the 'fun' line over safe equality, or giving away the bishop-pair with the manoeuvres ...g4xf3) in order to try and provide as many sustainably playable options as possible. Also, where I consider there to be relatively little choice (Part IV, chapters 3 and 4) I am being honest about that and not trying to create analysis from thin air.

Unfortunately, the nature of the material is such that I cannot possibly cover every move-order; some talented analyst might well prove an advantage for White after 3.c3 or 3.♘c4. What to do? Well, I reiterate the message from my first book: my goal is not to be 100% comprehensive, because these days that's largely impossible. There is a reasonable amount of consensus that the third moves (after 1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♘g7) which deserve the most attention are 3.♗f3, 3.♗c3 and 3.c4; my aim after all three of those moves is to be 99% correct 99% of the time, and never too badly mistaken.

I hope this book proves to be informative as well as ground-breaking; that it reinforces your knowledge while infusing it with passion and some new discoveries; and above all that you have as much fun reading it as I did writing it.

It remains for me to thank those who have been instrumental in the creation of this book as you hold it today: Thinkers Publishing for being (extremely) lenient with deadlines; numerous colleagues and friends for sharing their ideas and input freely (but especially fellow GMs Negi Parimarjan and Justin Tan); and of course my parents, for putting up with so much of my chess mania during the second half of my childhood and beyond.

Daniel Fernandez
Sydney, June 2020

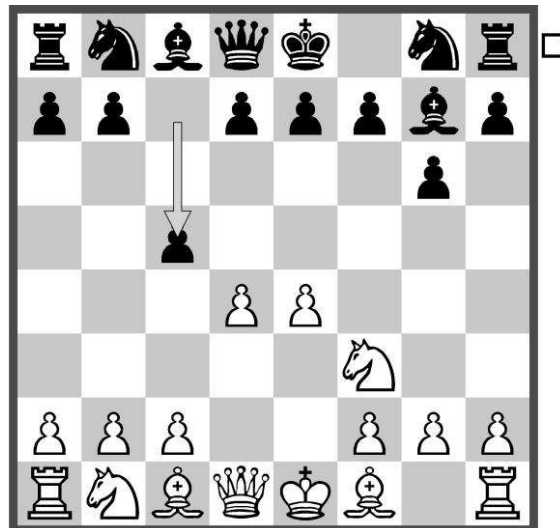
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Systems Chess links for Black

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♖g7

3.♘f3 c5



Chapter Guide

Chapter 5 – Systems Chess links for Black

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Introduction to Chapter 5

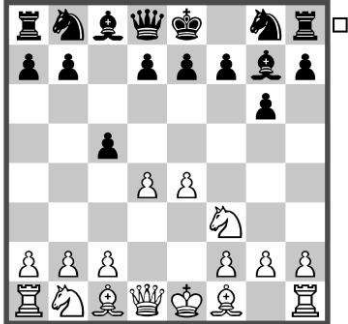
Just as I found time to discuss a line of the Berlin within my Petroff DVD (made for ChessBase in 2018), here too I think there are links to other openings that deserve to be made. Past a certain point in your journey of memorising opening theory, you start to think schematically about structures and borrow ideas from one opening while playing another. Thus, the two lines considered in this chapter are somewhat different from the initial concept of the Modern ('go ...g6 and ...♘g7, then ...d6, and then decide between ...a6, ...c6 or ...♗f6) and you would have to be trying quite hard to find an exact transposition.

In 5.1)-5.3) the line under consideration is the famous 'Sniper', a term coined by English FM Charlie Storey, although the concept dates back at least to Botvinnik's time. This is the purest form in which a Modern player can showcase his 'intellectualism': on some level his basic desire might be just to obtain a favourable Sicilian structure, in particular without risking annoying anti-Sicilians like 3. ♘b5(+) or 4. ♗xd4. So he goes straight for it with 3...c5 right after fianchettoing the king's bishop. Personally, I can see a case for considering the move against 3. ♗f3 (line 5.1) because White has to make a rather specific sequence of 5 moves in order to get an advantage without entering a Benoni setup, and they are not especially obvious. Meanwhile, regrettably, after 3. ♗c3 c5 there is little temptation for White to go for the desired Sicilian structures (4. ♗f3 cxd4 5. ♗xd4 is a very decent Dragon for Black, since he can additionally consider some tricks to do with delaying either ...d6 or ...♗f6). That leaves 4.dxc5 as a way White can go wrong, at least practically (line 5.2) and 4. ♘e3 as the correct answer (5.3.)

In 5.4) and 5.5) I explore a famous endgame, perhaps the earliest example of a queen trade in mainstream opening theory. That arises after 1.e4 d6 (the only time in the book!) 2.d4 ♗f6 3. ♗c3 e5, and now the best move is probably 4. ♗f3 leading to a Philidor Defence, but we will only occupy ourselves with the endgame after 4.dxe5 due to its obvious connection to the endgames of the previous chapter.

5.1) 1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♘f3 c5

1. e4 g6 2. d4 ♗g7 3. ♘f3 c5!?



Position after: 3... c5!?

5... ♙xc5



Position after: 5... ♙xc5

White is probably best advised to take place into a Benoni structure, which I'm not going to discuss here beyond saying that it's a relatively good version for him. One other option seems to get an edge as well:

4. dxc5

A) 4. c3 cxd4 5. cxd4 d5 6. e5 ♘c6=

B) 4. ♘c3 cxd4 5. ♘xd4 and Black can choose to play a Dragon (either Accelerated or not) or something with a slightly more exotic flavour such as 5... a6!?

4... ♙a5+ 5. c3

5. ♗d2 ♙xc5 6. ♘c3 ♘f6 7. h3 d6 8. ♗d3 0-0 9. 0-0 b6= is more or less harmless and Black has the kind of Sicilian-esque game he was after.

6. ♘a3! ♘f6

6... d6 Nothing equalizes, but this move lets White play more simply than the alternative. 7. ♘b5 a6 8. ♗e3 ♙c6 9. ♘a7! ♙c7 10. ♘xc8 ♙xc8 11. ♙b3±

7. ♘b5!

7. ♗e3 ♙c6! 8. e5 ♘d5 9. ♗d4 ♘f4∞

7... b6!?



Position after: 7... b6!?

Now White has to commit somehow.

8... ♖c6 9. e5 ♘e4 10. ♗fd4 ♕b7 11. ♙d3 d5 12. exd6 0-0 13. 0-0 ♗xd6 14. ♗xd6 exd6 15. ♙f4±

8. b4

A) 8. e5 ♗g4 9. ♕d4 ♗xe5 10. ♕xc5 ♗xf3+ 11. gxf3 bxc5 12. ♗c7+ ♔d8 13. ♗xa8 ♙b7 14. ♙e2 ♙xa8± This material imbalance will prove tricky for both sides to handle. I think White's winning chances are considerably reduced by the fragmented structure on the king-side.



Position after: 15. ♙f4±

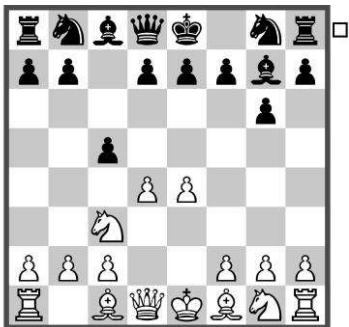
B) 8. ♙d3?! ♙b7 9. ♙e3 ♕c8=

White has a clear lead in development.

5.2) Inferior lines after 1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7 3. ♗c3 c5

1. e4 g6 2. d4 ♙g7 3. ♗c3 c5

4. dxc5?!



Position after: 3... c5

In this line White has to go to great lengths to obtain an advantage.

4... ♙xc3+ 5. bxc3 ♕a5



Position after: 5... ♕a5

This version of the 'Sniper' is about as good as the other one, but has the benefit that few people know the reply.

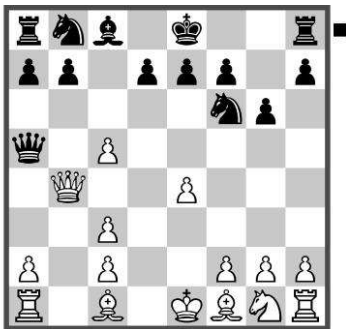
6. ♖d4

This is the accepted antidote, but during my analysis I discovered that some lines were very far from being clear advantages for White.

After the logical 6. ♘e2 Black can generally get play for the pawn, e.g. 6... ♘c6 7. ♙e3 ♘f6 8. f3 b6 9. cxb6 axb6 with the idea of ...d5 next. The c4-square (and sometimes also c5-square) are very handy for Black's knights.

6... ♘f6 7. ♖b4!

7. ♘e2 ♘c6 8. ♖e3 0-0 9. f3 b6 10. cxb6 d5∞



Position after: 7. ♖b4!

7... ♖c7!

Black can regain the pawn, e.g. 7... ♖xb4?! 8. cxb4 ♘c6 9. a3 ♘xe4 10. ♙b2± but this position is miserable.

8. f3!?

White displays an intention to play the optimal setup however long it might take (i. e. the one with ♙e3 and ♖a3.)

8. ♘f3

Position after: 8. ♘f3

The most played move, and natural.

A) 8... ♘c6 9. ♖a4 ♘e5 10. ♖d4 [10. ♙e3 b6↖ frees Black's game immediately] 10... ♘c6 11. ♖e3 b6 12. cxb6 axb6 13. ♙e2 ♙a6∞

B) 8... 0-0 9. ♙d3 ♘a6!?N [9... a5?! 10. ♖c4 b5 11. cxb6± Fressinet, L – Bellon Lopez, J France 2000] 10. ♙xa6 bxa6



Position after: 10... bxa6

Now Black's reorganisation continues as in the following line: 11. 0-0 ♖b8 12. ♖d4 ♖b5 13. e5 ♘h5 14. ♙e3

♞g7 15. ♔d3 ♞e6= with decent play against the tripled pawns.

8... b6!?

Breaking first and managing to keep queens on.

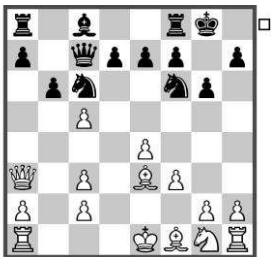
Even if Black complies with White's basic idea, matters aren't completely straightforward. 8... 0-0 9. ♞e3 ♞c6 10. ♔a3 b6!?



Position after: 8... b6!?

9. cxb6

Now I still don't quite believe that Black has equality, but I have discovered some frankly incredible resources in his favour, which I will claim author's prerogative and give in full, rather than just leaving the position with a verdict of 'interesting'.



Position after: 10... b6!?

11. ♞b5! [11. cxb6 ♔b7 12. bxa7 d5∞ is hideously unclear; with White's king still in the centre Black can often even sacrifice the exchange on a7.] 11... ♞e5 [11... ♞b7 Right now White is well enough developed that he can also play an open position with the queens on. 12. ♞e2 bxc5 13. ♔xc5 d6 14. ♔g5!±] 12. ♞e2 bxc5 13. ♔xc5 ♔xc5 14. ♞xc5 d6 15. ♞d4± Obviously Black has some compensation along the b- and c-files, but my impression is that a pawn should basically be a pawn here.

A) 9. ♞e3

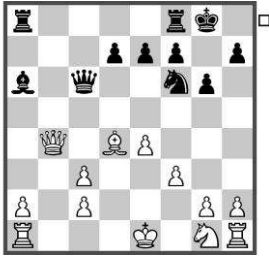
A1) 9... ♞a6!? 10. ♞xa6 ♞xa6 11. 0-0 bxc5 12. ♔xc5 ♔xc5 13. ♞xc5 d6= This position is rather different from the previous note in that Black's play on the open files is further advanced and also harder to stop (since White's queenside rook cannot challenge for the b-file.)

A2) 9... ♞c6 10. ♔a3 bxc5 11. ♔xc5 d6 12. ♔g5 h6! White's queen cannot really feel at home on the kingside, and retreating with 13. ♔g3 opens up play with, for instance, 13... ♞b4!→.

B) Black can answer 9. ♖h6 in various ways, but clever seems to be 9... ♖a6 when White would be well advised to take the transposition to the main line.

9... axb6 10. ♖h6

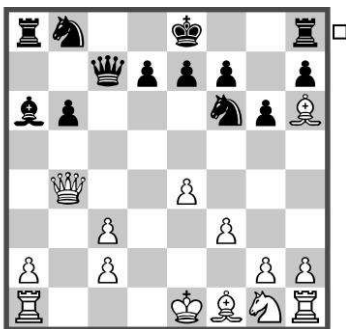
10. ♖e3 ♘a6 11. ♖xa6 ♖xa6 12. ♖xb6 ♗c6 13. ♖d4 0-0!



Position after: 13... 0-0!

White's development is now a big problem, especially in view of the idea 14. ♗xe7 ♘xe4! 15. fxe4 ♖ae8 16. ♗f6 ♖xe4+ 17. ♖d2 ♖xd4+! 18. ♗xd4 ♗xg2+ 19. ♘e2 ♗xe2+ 20. ♖c1 ♖b7 21. ♖g1 ♖e4 22. ♗d2 ♗c4= and Black has enough play for a draw.

10... ♖a6



Position after: 10... ♖a6

11. ♖d3

A) 11. ♖b1 ♖xf1 12. ♖xf1 ♘c6 13. ♗xb6 ♗xb6 14. ♖xb6 ♖xa2=

B) 11. ♖xa6 ♘xa6 12. ♗b2 is the computer suggestion but leads to positions where White effectively can't castle either, and the compensation comes soon after for Black: 12... ♗c5 13. ♘e2 ♖g8 14. ♖f4 d5∞

11... ♘c6 12. ♗a4

Retreating to c1 instead is much the same: 12. ♗a3 ♖g8 13. ♖g5 ♗c8 14. ♖xa6 ♖xa6 15. ♗c1 d5!? 16. ♖xf6 exf6 17. exd5 ♘e5 18. ♘e2 ♗c5= with a position that is still very hard to handle for White.



Position after: 12. ♗a4

12... ♖g8!

A ridiculous move, playing for lines in which both of White's bishops are trapped, in symmetrical ways, on

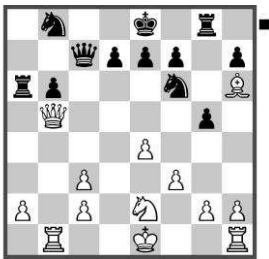
opposite sides of the board! I think this order makes White do the most work.

Black gains nothing by playing 12... ♖c8
 13. ♖b3 ♘e5 14. ♙xa6 ♗xa6 : White can still always play ♙g7xf6 if he so chooses, and there are some lines where the option to play ... ♘h5-g7 would have been useful.

13. ♙g5!

The bishop has done its work on h6 and should return. Now, taking on f6 will always cause Black strategic issues.

A) 13. ♙xa6 loses claim to an advantage: 13... g5 14. ♖b5 [14. ♘h3 g4 15. ♘f2 gxf3 16. gxf3 ♖a7] 14... ♘b8 15. ♘e2 ♗xa6 16. ♗b1



Position after: 16. ♗b1

16... ♘xe4! 17. fxe4 ♗g6 18. ♙xg5 ♗a5 19. ♖d3 ♗axg5

Anything is possible in this position!

B) 13. ♘h3 stops ...g5 but gives Black time to establish a knight on c4 or c5:
 13... ♖c8 14. ♖b3 ♘e5 15. ♙xa6 [15. ♗d1 ♙c4!]=] 15... ♗xa6 16. 0-0 d6

13... ♖c8



Position after: 13... ♖c8

14. ♖b3!

Restricting Black's options.

14. ♙xa6 ♗xa6 15. ♖b3 ♘h5 is like the main line but without Black having ever needed to go ...♘e5. This flexibility may make a difference, e.g. 16. ♘e2 ♘a5 17. ♖b4 f6

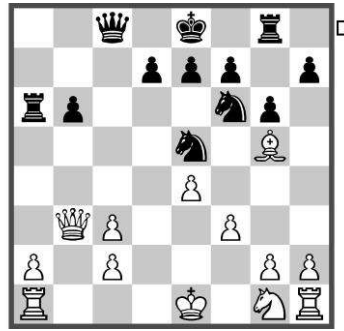
14... ♘e5

14... ♘h5?! The computer really doesn't like this move, but it takes a while to work out the issue. 15. ♘e2 [15. ♖xb6? ♙xd3 16. cxd3 ♘e5 17. ♖d4 f6 18. ♙e3 ♗a6!→] **15... ♘e5**



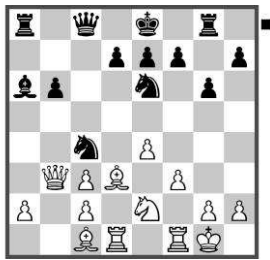
Position after: 15... ♘e5

A) 16. ♖d5 is another possible independent move, but after 16... d6! Black gets the much-needed central solidity. [16... ♘c4 17. ♖b1±] 17. ♖b1 [17. 0-0 ♖c5+ 18. ♖xc5 bxc5] 17... h6! 18. ♙xa6 ♖xa6 19. ♗b5+ ♘d7 20. ♙e3 ♖a5 21. ♗b3 ♗a6 22. ♖b2 g5 23. ♘d4 ♘f4±



Position after: 15... ♖xa6

B) 16. ♖d1! ♘g7 17. ♙f4 ♘c4 18. 0-0 ♘e6 19. ♙c1±



Position after: 19. ♙c1±

While Black has been messing around with his knights, White has managed to achieve a coherent position where his dark-squared bishop controls useful squares and his knight can challenge for the centre.

15. ♙xa6

15. ♖d1 ♙xd3 16. cxd3 ♗a6= seems to secure an equal ending

15... ♖xa6

16. ♙xf6

16. ♘e2 ♘h5! 17. 0-0 ♘g7 18. ♖ad1 ♘e6 19. ♙c1 ♗c4± If we compare this to the version with light-squared bishops still on (note to Black's 14th), Black has significantly more activity here.

16... exf6 17. ♘e2 ♙f8!±

Black should cut his losses and back down here, with a marginally worse but still very dynamic position.

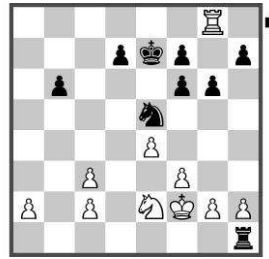
17... ♗c5 This is the consistent move, trying to stop White castling.



Position after: 17... ♗c5

18. ♖d1! Another key move (if a rather natural one.) White uses small features

of the position to navigate his way to a small endgame edge. [18. ♖b4 d5! 19. exd5 ♕e7 20. ♖e4 (notice that we could also have gotten this position from 19. ♖f4 at the end of the note to White's 12th!) 20... ♜ga8↔ gives Black good play.] 18... ♜a3 19. ♜d5 ♜xb3 20. ♜xc5 ♜b1+ 21. ♕f2 ♜xh1 22. ♜c8+ ♕e7 23. ♜xg8±

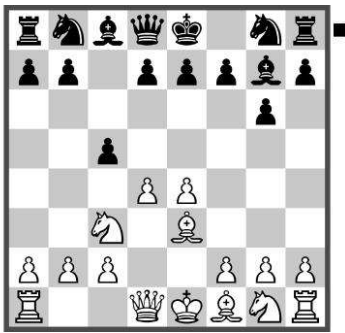


Position after: 23. ♜xg8±

I have analysed this endgame and found White to have a slight advantage.

5.3) 1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♖g7 3. ♘c3 c5 4. ♙e3!

1. e4 g6 2. d4 ♖g7 3. ♘c3 c5 4. ♙e3!



Position after: 4. ♙e3!

This is the less well-known but more reliable antidote.

4... cxd4

A) 4... ♖a5 5. ♘f3 ♘f6 [5... cxd4 6. ♘xd4± is a bad Dragon.] 6. ♖d2 Black has nothing here, because the

positionally desirable 6... ♘g4 runs into 7. ♘d5!±.

B) 4... ♘c6 5. dxc5 ♙xc3+ 6. bxc3 ♖a5 7. ♖d2 is a significantly better version of subchapter 4 from White's perspective.

5. ♙xd4 ♘f6

5... ♙xd4 6. ♖xd4 ♘f6 White can choose various moves here, for instance 7. ♘d5 0-0 8. ♘xf6+± Harikrishna, P – Ehlvest, J chess.com INT 2019

6. e5 ♘h5



Position after: 6... Nf5

7. Nge2!

A) 7. Qd2 d6 8. exd6 Qxd6 leads to a variety of endgames where White has basically nothing, e.g. 9. Qxg7 Qxd2+ 10. Qxd2 Nc6 11. Nd5 Qd7 12. Nf3 Qd6!??

B) If White craves excitement, the pawn sacrifice 7. g4 Nf4 8. Qe3 Qxe5 9. Qd2 is not completely without merit, though of course it is very unnecessary.

7... f5 8. f4

Now White has a major bind. Black will need to play ...d6, but the frustrating

thing about that will be that White is not interested in keeping the pawn and so the recapture ...exd6 will be needed.

8... Nc6 9. Qf2 d6 10. exd6 Nf6



Position after: 10... Nf6

11. g3!

The engine's suggested 11. Nb5 0-0 12. Nc3 a6 13. Nc7 Bb8 quickly degrades into chaos.

11... 0-0 12. Qg2 Bb8 13. Qd2±

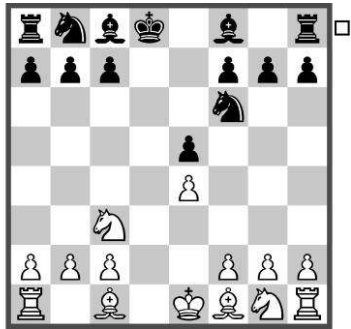
Long castling is coming and there is a limit on how clever Black can be about taking back on d6.

5.4) Minor lines after 1.e4 d6 2.d4 Nf6 3.Nc3 e5 4.dxe5 dxe5 5.Qxd8+ Qxd8

1. e4 d6 2. d4 Nf6 3. Nc3 e5

4. dxe5 dxe5 5. Qxd8+ Qxd8

This is a line I shall be (re?)naming as the Serbian System.

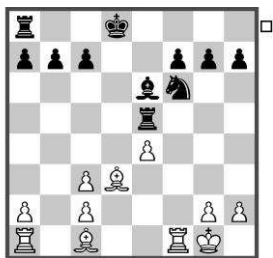


Position after: 5... ♖xd8

6. ♕g5

Here is an interesting attempt to riff on the concept of 6. f4, without allowing Black the possibility of ...♗b4 as below.

A) 6. f4 This is one of the most principled moves. In the examples we shall see over the coming pages, both sides have usually developed enough pieces that the move isn't immediately an issue for Black, but the more general theme of White opening the centre is still relevant to those discussions. 6... ♗b4! 7. ♕d3 [7. ♕d2 exf4 8. 0-0-0 ♗bd7=] 7... ♗bd7 8. ♗f3 ♗e8 9. fxe5 ♗xe5 10. ♗xe5 ♗xe5 11. 0-0 ♕xc3 12. bxc3 ♕e6=



Position after: 12... ♕e6=

Both sides have the obvious strengths and weaknesses in their positions, and these roughly balance each other out.

B) 6. ♗f3 If Black were able to play ...f6, this move would have very little point. We will see versions of this end-game where Black is able to immediately oppose both knights (...f6 and ...c6), then trade dark-squared bishops and play for a win. 6... ♕d6 [6... ♗bd7? 7. ♗g5 ♗e8 8. ♕c4 is embarrassing.] 7. ♕e3 ♗e7 8. h3 ♕e6 9. 0-0 ♗bd7



Position after: 9... ♗bd7

Black can also play in other ways, but this is the most principled, setting up ... ♕c5 ideas. 10. ♗d5+ [10. ♗g5?! ♕c5 11. ♗xe6 ♕xe3+ 12. fxe3 fxe6 ♗ saw one of the more unusual structures arise in Mousseri, D – Khachiyani, M San Diego 2014] 10... ♕xd5 11. exd5 h5= The flexibility of Black's structure, combined with the lack of prospects faced by White's f1-bishop and his nominal majority on the queenside, compensate adequately for the bishop-pair.

6... ♕e6

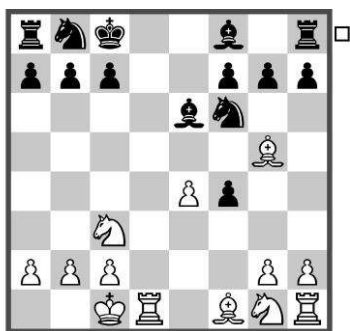


Position after: 6... Qe6

7. 0-0-0+

With the next three moves, White sets up some interesting practical questions that he can pose to his opponent.

7. g3!? is interesting; White is trying not to play with an isolated king's pawn. Instead Black can choose to be the one playing with...doubled, isolated pawns on the f-file. The dynamics of 7... Qc8 8. f4 Qb4 9. Qxf6 gxf6 10. Nf3 work out fine for him, e.g. 10... exf4 11. gxf4 Qg4 12. Qe2 Re8 13. h3 Qh5 14. Nd2 Qxe2 15. Qxe2 f5=

7... Qc8 8. f4 exf4

Position after: 8... exf4

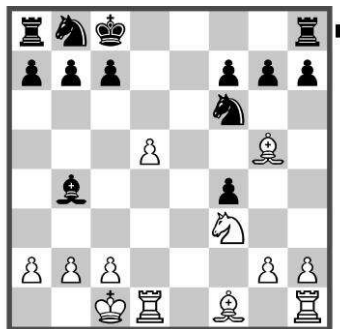
9. Nf3!

A) 9. Nge2 Nbd7 10. Nxf4 Qb4 11. Nxe6 fxe6 12. Qc4 Re8 is one of those odd positions where White is perfectly developed, but Black has just enough co-ordination to stay in the game and begin reminding White of his structural issues.

B) 9. e5 h6 10. Qxf4 Ng4 11. Rf2 Qc5=

9... Qb4! 10. Nf3!

10. Qxf6 gxf6 11. Nd5 Qxd5 12. Rxd5 Nd7 13. Rf5 Qc5 14. Qc4 c6 15. Qxf7 Qe3+ 16. Qb1 Qc7 17. Qe6 Re8! is nothing special, as long as Black isn't afraid of ghosts.

10... Qxd5 11. exd5

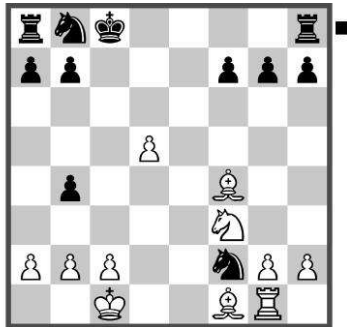
Position after: 11. exd5

11... Ng4!?

The ambitious continuation.

11... ♖d6 12. ♗xf6 gxf6 13. ♖d3 ♘d7
14. ♗f5 ♕d8=

12. ♗xf4 ♘f2 13. ♖d4 c5 14. ♖xb4
cxb4 15. ♖g1



Position after: 15. ♖g1

have much: 16. ♗b5 ♘d7 17. ♘e5
♖xe5 18. ♗xd7+ ♕xd7 19. ♗xe5 f6 20.
♗d4 ♘e4 21. ♖e1 ♖e8=

16. ♗c4 ♘e4?! 17. ♖e1±



Position after: 17. ♖e1±

15... ♖d8?!

15... ♖e8!N The value of the e-file, and
the fact that my exchange plus does not
deserve to survive, should have been
apparent to me. White doesn't really

I later drew a worse ending through
sheer force of willpower in Mihok, O –
Fernandez, D Kecskemet 2015.

**5.5) 1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 e5 4.dxe5 dxe5
5.♖xd8+ ♕xd8 6.♗c4**

1. e4 d6 2. d4 ♘f6 3. ♘c3 e5 4. dxe5
dxe5 5. ♖xd8+ ♕xd8 6. ♗c4!



Position after: 6. ♗c4!