

Contents

Preface	8
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Moscow Variation

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♗c3 e6 5.♙g5 h6 6.♙xf6 ♗xf6

1	7.e4 dxe4 8.♗xe4 ♙b4+	15
2	7.a3	18
3	7.♗b3	24
4	7.♗c2	34
5	7.g3 ♘d7 8.♙g2 dxc4	42
6	7.e3 ♘d7 8.a3	46
7	7.e3 ♘d7 8.♙d3 dxc4 9.♙xc4 ♙d6	54
8	7.e3 ♘d7 8.♙d3 dxc4 9.♙xc4 g6	73
9	7.e3 g6	99

Anti-Moscow Variation

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♗c3 e6 5.♙g5 h6 6.♙h4 dxc4 7.e4 g5
8.♙g3 b5

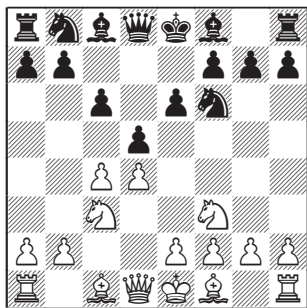
1	9.♗e5	103
2	9.♙e2 ♙b4; 9...b4; 9...♗bd7	112
3	9.♙e2 ♙b7 10.e5	124
4	9.♙e2 ♙b7 10.h4 b4	142
5	9.♙e2 ♙b7 10.h4 g4 11.♗e5 h5.	145
6	9.♙e2 ♙b7 10.h4 g4 11.♗e5 ♙g8; 11...♗bd7	173
7	9.♙e2 ♙b7 10.0-0 ♗bd7 11.♗e5	185

PREFACE

Dear readers,

This book is devoted to one of the key-variations of the Semi-Slav Defence.

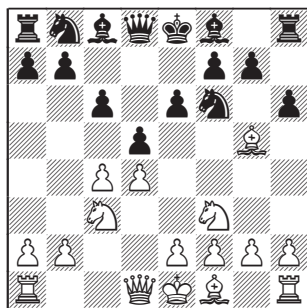
If, after **1.d4 d5**, White wishes to enter the most principled schemes, then if we ignore some second-rate lines (for example like the exchange variation: 2.c4 c6 3.cxd5 cxd5), the game usually continues with **2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 e6**.



Here, White is facing a dilemma. He can play 5.e3, and Black's most fashionable response against it is the Meran variation (5...♘bd7 6.♗d3 dxc4 7.♗xc4 b5), which can be characterized by a sharp tactical fight in the majority of the variations. Its theory goes deep into the middle game and there are novelties found in it in every tournament.

In case White wishes to avoid the Meran variation, but still enter theoretical disputes, he usually chooses **5.♗g5**.

Black can counter this in two ways – the Botvinnik system (5...dxc4) and the variations in it are tremendously complicated with plenty of tactical tricks (All of them however, are so well-analyzed that the top-level chess players are playing it only very rarely lately, because the danger of losing right in the opening stage is too great.), or the **Moscow variation – 5...h6**.



So, Black creates a problem for White to choose between:

- retreating his bishop 6.♗h4, sacrificing a pawn, entering wild irrational positions, in which the price of every mistake is very high and the game may end in all the three possible results;

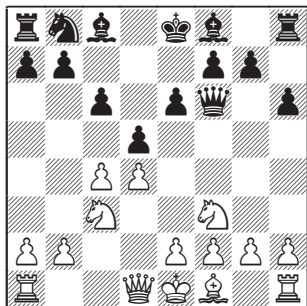
- or to enter positional schemes, choosing the calmer line – 6.♗xf6, obtaining an advantage in space and development. He thus loses his bishop-pair, however. This is a serious positional risk for him, since if he does not play actively and hesitates – then Black's two bishops may prove to be the decisive factor. I have won numerous games with Black following exactly the same script.

From the point of view of history, the Moscow variation, being an alternative to the Botvinnik system, is characterized by the move 5...h6 and the capturing 6.♗xf6, because the retreat 6.♗h4 was considered to be rather dubious. Its theory began to develop however, and this gambit retreat evolved as a method for White to prevent the Moscow variation. Accordingly, it was named the **Anti-Moscow variation**.

So, this book consists of two parts – the Moscow variation and the Anti-Moscow variation.

The Moscow variation

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♙c3 e6 5.♙g5 h6 6.♙xf6 ♗xf6



White acquires an advantage in space and development in the Moscow variation, as well as dominance in the centre. He can try to exploit all this in several different fashions.

Black's main counter strategy is connected with the preparation of the pawn-breaks c6-c5 and e6-e5, in order to open the game and to exploit his two-bishop advantage (His dark-squared bishop has remained without an opponent and may become tremendously dangerous, while the development of the light-squared bishop is one of the most important tasks for Black in this opening.).

One of the main plans for White – the attempt to make an immediate use of his centre and the lead in development with the move 7.e4 is analyzed in Chapter 1.

His alternatives of the type 7.a3, 7.♗b3, 7.♗c2, 7.g3 are dealt with in Chapters 2-5.

Still, his most flexible plan is not to be in a hurry to determine the placement of his queen and to avoid playing early 7.a3, or 7.g3, continuing with his development and preparing the subsequent offensive in the centre with the move 7.e3.

The variations after 7.e3 ♘d7 8.a3, are analyzed in Chapter 6.

After 8.♙d3 dxc4 9.♙xc4 ♙d6, there arise positions of the Classical system (Chapter 7), while following 8.♙d3 dxc4 9.♙xc4 g6!? – the Modern system (Chapter 8).

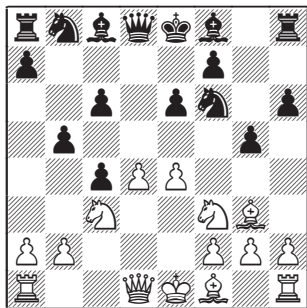
Recently, a variation with an early move 7...g6, after 7.e3 is becoming more and more popular. This new line is analyzed in Chapter 9.

The Anti-Moscow variation

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♗c3 e6 5.♙g5 h6 6.♙h4 dxc4 7.e4

We do not analyze in our book the variations arising after 7.e3. This move is not active enough and after 7...b5, Black remains with an extra pawn in a solid position.

7...g5 8.♙g3 b5



This is the basic position of the Anti-Moscow variation.

White sacrifices his c4-pawn and he allows Black to keep it. In his stead, White obtains a powerful pawn-centre, a space advantage and superior development. His plans are connected with making use of the mobile pawn-centre and exploiting the compromised pawn-structure on his opponent's kingside (impeding his castling short).

Black, having an extra pawn, tries to parry his opponent's tactical threats and to organize counterplay connected with a pawn-offensive on the queenside, but he may sometimes use his far-advanced kingside pawns as well.

Concerning the practical side of the matters, the game may develop in the following fashion:

- White plays immediately 9.♗e5. We analyze this variation in Chapter 1.

- He advances his d-pawn (after the inclusion of the moves 9.♙e2 ♗bd7). We deal with these variations in Chapter 2.

- White pushes his e-pawn (immediately 9.e5, or after the inclusion of the moves 9.♙e2 ♙b7). We analyze these possibilities in Chapter 3.

- He advances his h-pawn with the idea to exploit directly Black's weakened kingside pawn-structure. After 9.♙e2 ♙b7 10.h4 g4 11.♗e5 h5, there arise positions from the Classical system and we analyze

them in Chapter 5. The ways for Black to deviate from the Classical system (11... g8 and 11... bd7) are dealt with separately in Chapter 6. The move 10...b4, which used to be considered as acceptable for him, was refuted, but still, Chapter 4 and the analyses there might be very useful for the players who plan to play the Anti-Moscow variation with White.

Finally, White may refrain from advancing pawns, completing his development first – 9. e2 b7 10.0–0 bd7 11. e5 (or f3-e5 earlier, which transposes to the same situation). I have named this system – “Modern” and it has been dealt with in Chapter 7.

The positions arising in the **Moscow variation** and the **Anti-Moscow variation** are in principle so different that I have decided to arrange the material in the two parts of the book in different fashion too.

The part of the book, which deals with the analysis of the plans and possibilities in the much calmer Moscow variation can be compared to a thorough guide of the series “street by street”.

The positions in the Anti-Moscow variation are much more dynamic and complicated and the task to analyze absolutely all the situations is presently impossible. Still, I have tried to deal with practically all really important variations. The most fashionable positions have been extensively analyzed and I have given some recommendations, which have not been tested in practice yet. The theory of this gambit is developing so quickly all the time that both sides find new ideas every day. It happens very often that just one single move may change dramatically the evaluation of any variation. This process has particularly intensified during the present computer era. After the appearance of more powerful and “smart” computer programs many complicated tactical positions can be evaluated quite precisely and some variations can be simply refuted and forgotten (There is an example of this kind in the book – see a line in Chapter 4.).

The Moscow variation and the Anti-Moscow variation are an integral part of the opening armour of practically all the best chess players in the world (Some of them even play it for both sides...). Among the super-experts who play it with Black, it would be sufficient to name Viswanathan Anand, Vassily Ivanchuk, Boris Gelfand, Levon Aronian, Peter Leko, Peter Svidler, Sergey Karjakin and they all have contributed considerably to the development of its theory. The players who have set the standard of fashion in its development for White are Vladimir Kramnik, Magnus Carlsen, Veselin Topalov, Ruslan Ponomarev,

Alexander Khalifman, Alexander Grischuk, Teimour Radjabov, Shakhriyar Mamedyarov, Konstantin Sakaev etc. Garry Kasparov has contributed immensely to the theory of both systems.

The author of this book has been playing both variations with Black for many years, including at the very top-level and often quite successfully. The results of my analyses (during the preparation for the games and after them), as well as my calculations during the games have laid the foundation of this book.

I hope that it will be useful for the chess players at all levels, even for these who just begin to study the theory of the opening (The book deals thoroughly with the standard plans and ideas for both sides on the basis of general chess principles and common sense). The professional chess players (including I hope these at top-level) will find this book helpful, since there are numerous extensive analyses of the most fashionable lines. I also believe that my numerous theoretical novelties and recommendations will be quite useful for all the readers in their practical games.

I would like to acknowledge and thank my friend and helper for many years – the honourable coach of Russia IM Alexander Filipenko (who is the author of plenty of ideas both in the Moscow variation and the Anti-Moscow variation). His advices and assistance, while I was preparing for tournaments and during the writing of this book, were tremendously valuable. I would also like to thank my close friend and helper Igor Prohorov for his help during the preparation of the contents of this book.

Finally, my sincere thanks and admiration for Sergey Soloviov, since it was his initiative to compile my life-long experience in analyzing these systems and playing them into the writing of this book.

Alexey Dreev
Moscow, February 2010