

# **The Modernized Philidor Defense**

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# **The Modernized Philidor Defense**

**Sergio Trigo Urquijo**

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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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*Video Series*, Chess24

## Programs/Engines

- ChessBase 14*  
*Houdini 4*  
*Leela Chess Zero*  
*Stockfish 12*



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# Preface

But Inigo, how can this be good for Black? It was the first thing I asked my good friend and FIDE Master Inigo Martin Alvarez after he taught me the queen exchange line (1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♗c3 e5 4.dxe5 dxe5 5.♔xd8+ ♕xd8) of the Philidor Defense. I confess I couldn't believe it. He also insisted that against 6.♕c4, the best response was 6...♕e6, allowing pawns to be doubled! I could not get over my astonishment – a variation in which Black quickly surrendered the possibility of castling *and* voluntarily doubled (and isolated) pawns in the center!

I naively thought that the best way to prove to my friend how wrong he was, was to play against him in that position and to beat him – but I couldn't. There was no way to break that pawn structure. So, as the popular saying goes: "If you can't beat your enemy, join him!"

Since the time when he taught me this defense, at an under-12 Spanish Championship, I have not stopped playing it. It has always been part of my opening repertoire, even becoming my main weapon for much of my life, with great results.

But it is one thing to play it and quite another to write a book about it. Me writing a book? Even though the idea has been in my head for quite some years, I have to say that I didn't think I would be able to do it until Grandmaster Romain Edouard offered me the opportunity – I couldn't refuse it, although it would be quite a challenge for me.

I had the advantage that there were not many specific books on the market about this defense which, on the one hand, made my task easier; on the other hand, this placed a considerable responsibility upon me to write a book that could become the main authoritative reference on the Philidor Defense.

The biggest challenge has been to fight against the engines that, at first glance, don't credit this defense with the value it deserves. This is because the engines significantly value the space that White usually has against the Philidor, but there is one aspect that neither Leela Zero nor Stockfish nor any of the other engines take into account – and that is the counterattack!

The aim of this book is to provide the reader not only with a complete repertoire for the Philidor Defense, but especially a repertoire that begins from the very first

move – because White has mechanisms at their disposal to avoid entering into the vast labyrinth that they often perceive when meeting this opening. Why do I say labyrinth? Because Black can come up with different move orders that make White dizzy – and the curious thing is that almost all of these ways are acceptable and have good statistics in practical chess. For example, Black may decide to play with ...c6 and ...a5, with ...c6 and ...b6, with ...c6 and ...♔c7, or with ...a6 and ...b6 (which I recommend) etc. In short, I think Black has several schemes, and each one is not very difficult to learn because they have many lines in common.

My goal, as I mentioned before, is to write a book that will become the main reference on this defense and one that will be of help to all types of players, from club players to Grandmasters. For this reason, it was my wish (and I hope I have succeeded) to create a very elaborate repertoire with the firm intention that any player will be able to face an opponent of a higher level, without fear and with clear ideas.

I have tried to include new moves and new ideas against practically all of White's weapons and I have aimed to be as exhaustive as possible, so that I can accompany the explanation of the ideas with concrete moves, to make them easier for the reader to understand.

Clearly 1...d6 and the Philidor Defense in particular, is far from being the refutation of 1.e4 but I have always tried to look for options for Black that are active in order to equalize or to achieve very real counterplay.

Furthermore, the advantage of studying this book and playing this defense with Black is that the chances of White finding new ideas are much lower than in other main openings – such as some very critical lines of the Sicilian, for example, where we constantly see new moves and schemes that quickly land Black in trouble.

Having said all this, I encourage you to discover (if you haven't already done so) this great defense. I hope you enjoy the book and that it will be very useful for your games and hopefully, you will gain many points with the Philidor.

Sergio Trigo Urquijo  
Portugalete, January 2021

# Introduction

"Pawns are the soul of chess." We have all heard this phrase more than once in our chess life and we owe it to the great French player François-André Danican, so-called Philidor, considered one of the best chess players of the 18th century.

It's not surprising that with this way of thinking, he revolutionized chess, which until then was almost all about direct attacks on the king. With this, he also changed the way of understanding and playing openings, in which he introduced a new concept for the time – that the pawns should be ahead of the pieces.

Bearing this in mind, the defense he created can be much better understood, in which all these rules are fulfilled and the importance of the pawn structure is maximal.

At first, his idea was to play this opening in the order of 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 d6 and it was some time before it was discovered that the move 3.d4 was the best response, and the one that gave Black the most trouble. Attempts were made to make 3...♘f6 and 3...♘d7 work but it was concluded, after much praxis, that Black could not equalize. However, the concept was clear and the defense did not fall into disuse.

From then onwards, this defense had been varying its move orders until it was finally realized that the best way to play would be 1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 e5.

The popularity of this opening has changed over the years but it has always lived in the background, behind the more mainstream openings such as the Spanish, the Sicilian or the French, among others.

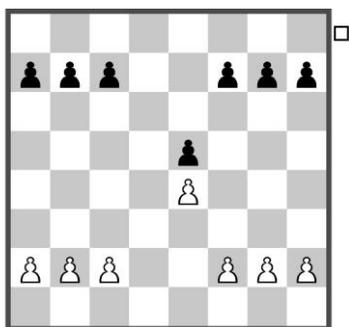
However, with the quick development of the field of theory that we have had (and have nowadays) thanks to engines, the main openings have become filled with an amount of theory that is virtually impossible to remember. This means that more and more people are deciding to research and play other openings which are often easier to understand, and the amount of lines required to study is much less. In addition, on many occasions, these lines are the ones that really surprise our opponents.

Although the Philidor Defense may still be considered a secondary opening, many Grandmasters use it with some regularity. My initial idea was to name them but

there are so many that it is impossible. To give a little list, this defense has been used by, among many others, Magnus Carlsen, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, Fabiano Caruana, Vassily Ivanchuk, Alexander Grischuk, Teimour Radjabov and Pavel Eljanov. They are just a small example among the ocean of Grandmasters who have played it.

To understand better, as I said before, and beyond knowing the specific moves, I think it is essential to recognize the pawn structures that are going to be formed. For this reason, I am going to show you here some standard structures that we are going to see throughout the different chapters:

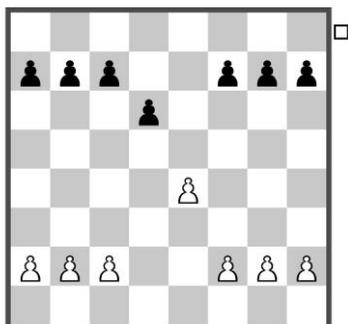
### Symmetrical structure



This structure is created when White exchanges their d4-pawn for Black's e5-pawn. Generally speaking, and from my experience, this structure usually takes place with all the pieces on the board and with both kings castled short. Normally, White has a knight on c3 and Black has a knight on d7 – the black knight stands a little better thanks to the possibility of installing it on c5, from where it attacks the e4-pawn and can even go, if necessary, to e6, then transferring to d4 or f4. Conversely, the white knight on c3 can only jump to d5 but Black can easily control that via c6. With this in mind I would say that, notwithstanding the obvious equality granted by this symmetrical structure, we have potential.

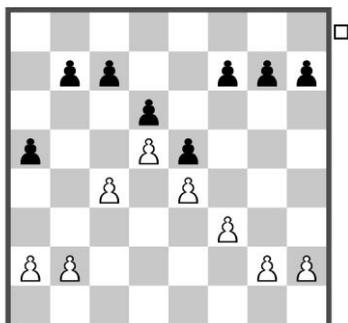
### Structure after taking on d4

This structure (*see diagram next page*) takes place when Black exchanges the e5-pawn for White's d4-pawn.



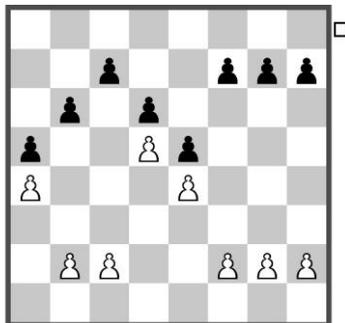
Usually, this is somewhat more comfortable for White to play as long as they can put a piece (generally a knight) on d5. Why? Because the only way to expel that piece would be with ...c6, which would weaken, slightly, the pawn on d6. However, not everything looks negative for us. In return for this compromise, Black can exert strong pressure upon the e4-pawn, usually with a rook from e8 and with a knight from c5. Besides, having to play ...c6 is not a weakness about which we need to be too overly-concerned, when there are many pieces on the board, together with the dark-squared bishop on f8. In addition, Black can often open up the center with ...c6 and ...d5 or by taking on e4 with a piece, and then ...d5.

### Sämisch structure



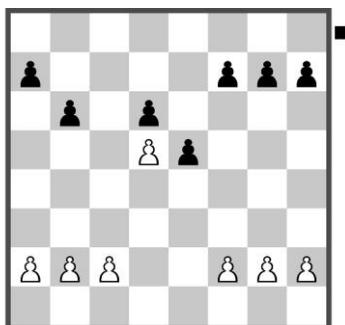
This is a structure that is rather typical of the Sämisch Variation of the King's Indian Defense. I have this opening in my repertoire against 1.d4 – I am very used to playing this structure and I find it comfortable for us as Black. Usually Black places a knight on c5 and, once we do that, the plan is to attack on the kingside by expanding with ...f5. White will try instead to attack on the queenside by advancing the pawns b3-a3-b4.

### Closed center



This is a very similar structure to the previous one but with a very important difference: the white pawn is on a4. This means that the plan discussed earlier for White no longer exists and it doesn't look easy for them to open up the queenside by c3-b4. For this reason, taking advantage of the fact that the pawn is on c2, White's plan is usually to place their minor pieces on their weak squares (a bishop on c6 and a knight on b5) and to try to attack Black's weakest pawn, which is c7. As Black, we will follow the same idea that we have discussed with the previous structure: we are going to create counterplay on the kingside.

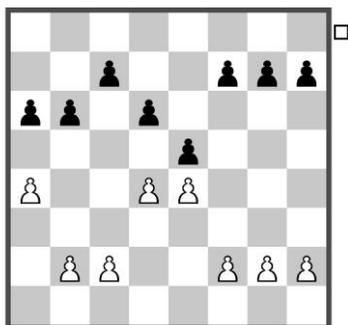
### Sicilian structure



This is the typical structure of one of the fashionable lines arising from the Sveshnikov Variation of the Sicilian Defense: appearing after the moves 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 e5 6.♗db5 d6 7.♗d5 ♗xd5 8.exd5. In that variation, I believe that the structure makes sense for White because the white pawn on d5 gives them more space and both sides have three minor pieces. However, in the

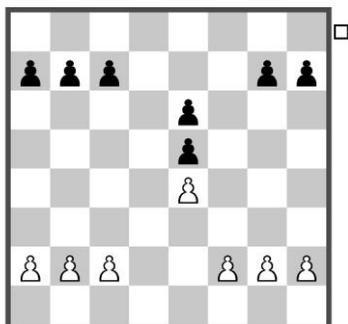
Philidor, this structure favors Black instead, because it usually occurs after the exchange of one or two minor pieces which makes life easier for us. Besides, Black's plan is very simple: expand on the kingside by ...f5 and this usually gives rise to excellent positions.

### Standard structure



Here, we have the structure that will be repeated most often in the book: the structure that is created by the Hanham Variation of the Philidor. Personally, I like the order ...a6 and ...b6 without touching the c7-pawn. This serves to develop the bishop to b7, quickly attacking the e4-pawn. Then, depending on how White plays, we'll play ...c6 or take on d4. If White decides to close with d5, then this forms the structure that has already been seen above.

### Doubled and isolated pawns



I dare say that this is the most characteristic structure of the Philidor Defense that we will see in the book. I don't remember any other opening where this structure

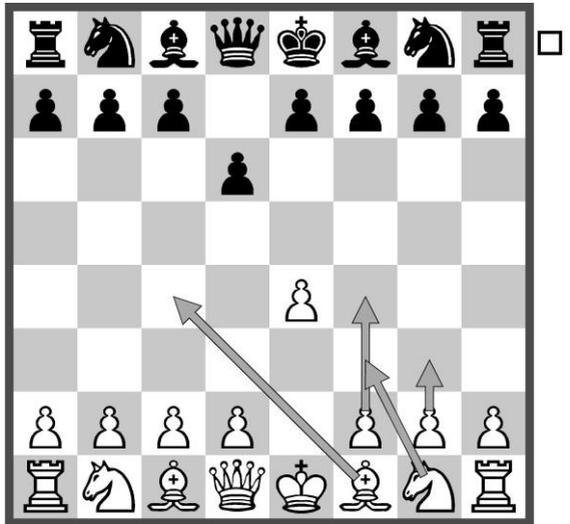
is reached. Perhaps a version may be seen in the Exchange Variation of the French Defense, but the pawns there would be doubled and isolated on the d-file instead.

As I explained in the preface, it was thanks to this structure and how much it surprised me that I was introduced to the world of this opening. At first glance, they look terrible but they have a great virtue in that they control all the central squares. This is very important because: if we look at the position from which this is derived (after 1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 e5 4.dxe5 dxe5 5.♙xd8+ ♔xd8 6.♙c4 ♙e6 7.♙xe6 fxe6), we can see that except for the light-squared bishops, the rest of the minor pieces are on the board, especially the knights. This means that our e5- and e6-pawns control the white pieces very well and it is not easy for them to find strong squares. Our opponent's plan is to improve their knights by looking for squares from which to attack the pawn on e5, since e6 is not targetable. Those squares are usually d3 and c4. Therefore, the most frequently repeated maneuvers will be f3-♘h3-♘f2-♘d3 and ♘b1-♘d2-♘c4. Even if White manages to place their knights in the ideal way, the e5-pawn will be very well-defended, usually with a bishop on d6 and a knight on d7 or c6. But not everything in life is going to be about defending with Black. This structure gives us considerable counterplay on the queenside which we will expand by ...a6, ...b5 and ...c5. Although the main aim is to play on this side, it is also possible equally to create counterplay on the kingside. This can be contemplated because there is only one open file (the d-file) for the rooks but White won't be able to exploit it. For this reason, Black's rooks will be free, from the last rank, to launch their pawns forwards on both sides.



# Rare 2nd Moves

1.e4 d6



# Chapter Guide

## Chapter 1 – Rare 2nd Moves

1.e4 d6

a) 2.g3 ..... 19

b) 2.♘f3 ..... 24

c) 2.♙c4 ..... 28

d) 2.f4 ..... 32

## a) 2.g3

### 1. e4 d6

Although 2. d4 is White's main second move by far, it is clear that White has other alternatives and we must be well-prepared against all of them, if we don't want to be surprised.



Position after: 5... e5

### 2. g3



Position after: 2. g3

This is the least common alternative and I have never had to face it in practice.

### 2... d5!

reacting in the center is the best way to take advantage of the weaknesses created on the diagonal.

### 3. exd5

3. ♖g2 dxе4 seems the easiest way to play. 4. ♘c3 ♘f6 5. ♘xe4 e5 gaining space and control of the center.

6. d3 ♘xe4 7. ♙xe4 ♙d6= with equality. Black's position seems more comfortable to play thanks to the easy development of their pieces.

### 3... ♙xd5



Position after: 3... ♙xd5

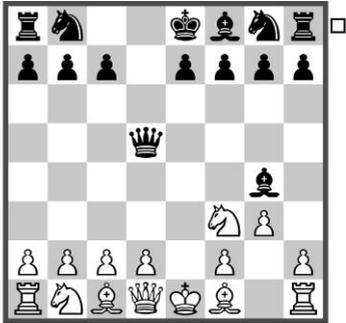
already puts the opponent in trouble.

### 4. ♘f3

If White were to play 4. ♙f3, it would be a good idea for Black not to exchange queens and to play 4... ♙c5 instead. The reason is that the white queen on f3 is badly placed because it

hinders the development of her own pieces.

4... ♖g4



Position after: 4... ♖g4

5. ♕e2

5. ♕e2 This is how it was played in the game Rolletschek, H – Humer, W Linz 1993. We can take advantage by removing any possibility of castling for White. 5... ♖e6+!N 6. ♔f1 [6. ♖e2 doesn't solve the problem for White because of 6... ♖xe2+ 7. ♔xe2 ♖c6 8. c3 e5= and our position is very pleasant. We can continue with long castling] 6... ♖a6+ From this square, White cannot gain development time by attacking the queen.



Position after: 6... ♖a6+

A) 7. ♔g1 Unlike with 7.d3, here, White seeks to play d4. 7... ♖f6 8. h3 [8. d4?! Now is not a good time to make this move because we can attack it quickly. 8... ♖c6 9. c3 e5!♣] 8... ♕h5 9. d4 [9. g4 ♕g6 10. ♖e5 ♕e4! 11. ♕xe4 ♖xe4=] 9... e6



Position after: 9... e6

10. g4 [10. ♖bd2 ♖bd7 11. ♔h2 ♕e7= and now our idea is ...c5] 10... ♕g6 11. ♖e5 ♖c6 12. ♖xg6 hxg6 13. c3 e5= and we have a comfortable position.

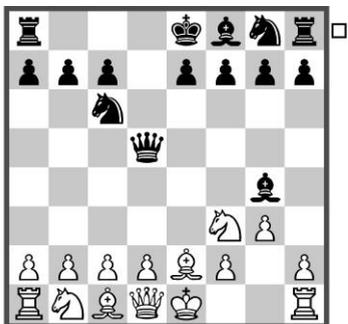
B) 7. d3 ♖c6 8. h3 ♕h5 9. ♖c3 0-0-0 This seems to be the best way forward. The idea is to attack on the kingside. 10. g4 ♕g6 11. ♕e3 e5 12. ♖h4 ♖ge7= I find the position more pleasant to play for us as Black. The idea is to improve the situation of the



Position after: 12... ♖ge7=

knights, placing one on d4 and the other on c6.

5... ♖c6



Position after: 5... ♖c6

6. h3

6. ♖c3 White can decide to play without h3 but it doesn't seem suitable. 6... ♔d7 7. d4 e6

A) 8. ♖e5 to exchange some pieces but we are well-prepared for this. 8... ♙xe2 9. ♔xe2



Position after: 9. ♔xe2

9... ♖xe5 [9... ♖xd4?! I don't think it's worth winning this pawn because White obtains ample counterplay. 10. ♔d3 ♔d6 11. ♙f4 f6 12. ♖f3 ♔c6

13. ♖xd4 ♔xh1+ 14. ♔e2 ♔xa1 15. ♔b5+ and the white pieces have very good compensation for the exchange] 10. dxe5 ♙b4 11. ♙d2 ♙xc3 12. ♙xc3 0-0-0=



Position after: 12... 0-0-0=

Although there is equality, the position is more comfortable to play for us (as Black) because the pawn structure favors our knight. Why? Because the white pawns are located on the same colored squares as their bishop.

B) 8. h3 ♙xf3 There is no need to exchange but it's for a specific reason. [8... ♙f5!?] 9. ♙xf3 0-0-0!



Position after: 9... 0-0-0!

forcing White to play d5 and resulting in a few piece exchanges. 10. d5 exd5 11. ♔xd5 ♔xd5 12. ♙xd5 ♖d4 13. ♙e4 ♖f6



Position after: 13... Nf6



Position after: 12... Nge7

So far everything appears forced and Black's position looks very healthy.  
 14. Qd3 Nd7 15. Qe3 Nc5 16. 0-0-0  
 Nxd3+ 17. Rxd3 Nf5=

### 6... Qh5



Position after: 6... Qh5

### 7. Nc3

7. g4 Unlike 7. Nc3, White's idea is to keep the option of playing c4. 7... Qg6  
 8. d4 e6 9. c4 as played in the game Munoz Pantoja, M – Narciso Dublan, M Barbera 2020. 9... Qd6! In the aforementioned game, Black retreated to d7. 10. Nc3 0-0-0 11. Qe3 h5 12. g5 Nge7

13. c5 White is forced to play in this way to continue with the attack. [13. Qa4 is a very natural move but meets the strong reply 13... Qb4! We can see the idea behind 9... Qd6. 14. Qxb4 Nxb4 15. 0-0-0 Nf5=] 13... Qd7 Black has gained control of the d5-square for their knight. 14. Qa4 Nd5 15. 0-0-0 Qe7 breaking through the kingside with ...f6.



Position after: 15... Qe7

16. Rhg1 [16. Qb5 f6 17. Rhg1 Qe8= with the idea of playing ...a6, with a good position for Black] 16... a6=

### 7... Qd7 8. d4 e6 9. Qf4

as tried in Munoz Pantoja, M – Mateus, A Badalona 2019.

## 9... 0-0-0N



Position after: 9... 0-0-0N

It's best to put a lot of pressure on the center.

## 10. ♘b5

10. ♘e5 to exchange pieces but we are well-prepared. 10... ♗xe5 11. ♙xe5 ♙xe2 12. ♖xe2 ♘e7 13. 0-0-0 ♘d5= and Black doesn't have any problems.



Position after: 13... ♘d5=

## 10... ♙xf3!

Black gives up the pair of bishops, but profits by taking White's central pawn.

## 11. ♙xf3 ♘xd4



Position after: 11... ♘xd4

## 12. ♘xd4

12. a4 is a possible move but Black has a good answer. 12... e5! 13. ♘xd4 ♖xd4 14. ♖xd4 exd4= and we have nothing to fear. Now, we can transfer the knight from g8 to c6 via e7.

12... ♖xd4 13. ♖e2 ♘f6 14. 0-0 ♙d6 15. ♗fd1 ♖a4 16. ♙e3 ♙e7=



Position after: 16... ♙e7=

Even though White has compensation thanks to their pair of bishops, Black has an extra pawn and nothing to fear in this position. Now, the plan is simply to exchange rooks.

## b) 2. ♘f3

1. e4 d6 2. ♘f3



Position after: 2. ♘f3

2... ♘f6 3. d3

If White decides to play 3. ♘c3, we will transpose to the lines that are analyzed in the next chapter.

3. c3 taking advantage of the fact that we cannot capture the e-pawn due to a check on a4. 3... e5 4. d3 ♘e7 5. ♘e2 c5 6. 0-0 ♘c6 transposing to 4. ♘e2.

3... e5



Position after: 3... e5

4. g3

4. ♘e2 c5 to have more control over the center. 5. 0-0 ♘c6 6. c3 ♘e7 Here, White has two reasonable options:



Position after: 6... ♘e7

A) 7. d4 exd4 8. cxd4 as played in the correspondence game Marcotulli, G – Borelli, C IECG email 2002. 8... d5!N



Position after: 8... d5!N

dynamiting the center. 9. exd5 [9. e5 ♘e4=] 9... ♘xd5 10. dxc5 0-0 11. ♘c4 ♘e6= and once we recoup the pawn, we won't have any problems.

B) 7. ♖e1 0-0 8. ♘bd2 [8. ♘f1 ♖e8 9. ♘bd2 ♘f8 10. a3 d5= as in the game Onischuk, A – Zhu, C Beijing

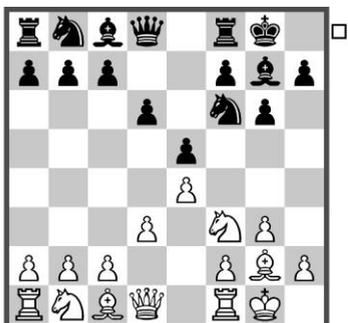
1998] 8... d5 9. exd5 ♖xd5 10. ♕f1 ♜c7 11. ♘c4 ♕f6= as tried in the game Sulskis, S – Shulman, Y Vilnius 1997.



Position after: 11... ♕f6=

Black has everything under control and thanks to the space advantage, this position is easier to play with the black pieces.

4... g6 5. ♕g2 ♕g7 6. 0-0 0-0



Position after: 6... 0-0

As we can see, it's a totally symmetrical position.

7. ♘bd2

7. c3 c5 8. ♜e1 ♘c6 9. a3 [9. a4 gaining space on the queenside. 9... h6 10.

♘a3 ♜e8 11. ♘c4 ♕e6= as in Bagheri, M – Maghsoodloo, P Arak 2016. Black is ready to play ...d5] 9... h6 10. b4 a6



Position after: 10... a6

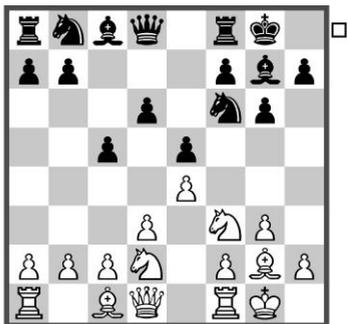
The c6-knight is very well-placed, so it is better to prevent b5. 11. ♘bd2 ♕e6 12. ♘b3 [12. ♕b2 ♘d7 13. ♘c4 b5! 14. ♘e3 ♘b6=] 12... c4! 13. dxc4 ♕xc4 14. ♘fd2 ♕e6 and we are prepared to break with ...d5, so White decides to play 15. c4 as played in the game Sutovsky, E – Dominguez Perez, L Saint Vincent 2002. Here, we have a very strong riposte. 15... a5!!N



Position after: 15... a5!!N

16. b5 a4! 17. bxc6 bxc6= and the position is favorable for us due to the superior pawn structure.

7... c5

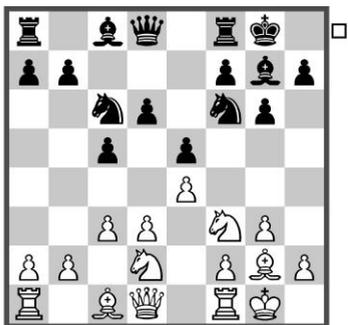


Position after: 7... c5

**8. c3**

A) 8. a4  $\text{Nc6}$  9.  $\text{Nc4}$  h6 10.  $\text{Ne3}$  [10. b3  $\text{Qe6}$  11.  $\text{Qb2}$   $\text{Wc7=}$  with equality in Bosiocic, M – Tiviakov, S Trieste 2008] 10...  $\text{Qe6}$  11.  $\text{Nd2}$   $\text{Wd7=}$  and Black has no concerns as we can see in the game Weindl, A – Bogdanovski, V Cannes 1990.

B) 8.  $\text{Nc4}$  b5 9.  $\text{Ne3}$   $\text{Nc6=}$  as in Harikrishnan, A – Glimbrant, T Barcelona 2019.

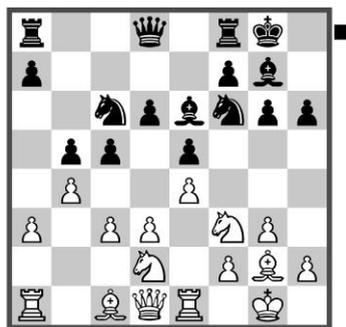
**8...  $\text{Nc6}$** Position after: 8...  $\text{Nc6}$ **9.  $\text{Re1}$** 

A) 9. a3 b5 10. b4  $\text{Rb8=}$  occurred in Amin, B – Socko, B Khanty-Mansiysk 2010. Black's plan is to move the knight from f6 to b6 via d7.

B) 9. a4 h6 10.  $\text{Nc4}$   $\text{Qe6}$

Position after: 10...  $\text{Qe6}$ 

11.  $\text{Nfd2}$  [11.  $\text{Qe2}$   $\text{Wc7}$  12.  $\text{Nfd2}$   $\text{Rad8}$  13. a5 d5 $\bar{f}$  was played in Amin, B – Robson, R Antalya 2013. Black's position seems easier to play thanks to his space advantage] 11... d5 12. exd5  $\text{Qxd5}$  as in the game Van der Wiel, J – Sosonko, G Amsterdam 1995.

**9... h6 10. a3  $\text{Qe6}$  11. b4 b5!**

Position after: 11... b5!

gaining space on the queenside and preventing White's b5.

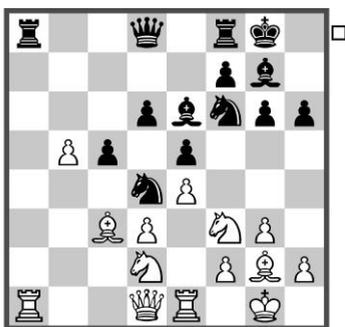
12. ♖b2 a5

putting considerable pressure on this side.

13. a4 axb4 14. axb5 bxc3 15. ♖xc3

Here, we have reached the game Amin, B – Debashis, D Doha 2016.

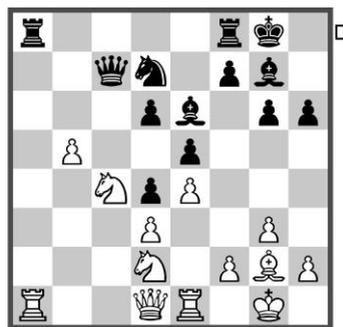
15... ♞d4!N



Position after: 15... ♞d4!N

Black has a strong domain in the center and we will be able to progress through the queenside.

16. ♖xd4 cxd4 17. ♞c4 ♚c7 18. ♞fd2 ♞d7=

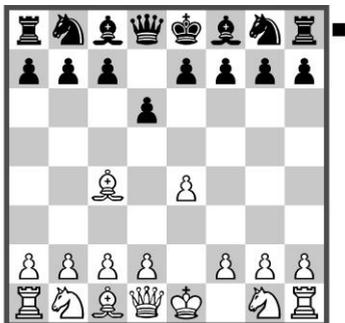


Position after: 18... ♞d7=

and the position seems equal. Our plan now is to move ...♜fb8 and then ...♞c5.

## c) 2. ♖c4

1. e4 d6 2. ♖c4



Position after: 2. ♖c4

The idea is to continue with d3.

2... ♗f6 3. d3

A) 3. ♗c3 e5 4. f4?! The remaining options will transpose to the lines analyzed in the next chapter. 4... ♗xe4!



Position after: 4... ♗xe4!

An important move. 5. ♗xe4 d5 6. ♗f3 [6. ♖e2? dxc4 7. fxе5 ♗c6 8. ♗f3 ♖e6 9. ♗eg5 ♖d5] and we have a clear advantage as was shown in the game Kupreichik, V – Galdunts, S Graz

2001] 6... dxc4 7. ♗xe5 ♖h4+ 8. g3 ♖e7 9. 0-0 ♗c6] and Black has an advantage due to the pair of bishops.



Position after: 9... ♗c6

B) 3. ♖e2 A reasonable choice with White. 3... e6 with the threat of ...♗xe4 followed by ...d5. 4. ♖b3 [4. d3 ♖e7 5. ♗f3 0-0 6. 0-0 c5 and we are ready to react in the center. 7. c3 d5 8. ♖b3 b5=] 4... c5



Position after: 4... c5

Here, our opponent has two interesting choices:

B1) 5. f4 ♖e7 6. ♗f3 0-0 7. d3 [7. e5 ♗d5 8. d3 ♗c6=] 7... ♗c6 8. c3 b5 9. 0-0 a5 10. a4 b4=

**B2)** 5.  $\text{Nf3}$   $\text{O-O}$  6.  $\text{O-O}$  [6.  $\text{d4 cxd4}$  7.  $\text{Nxd4}$   $\text{Nc6}$  8.  $\text{c3}$   $\text{O-O}$  9.  $\text{O-O}$   $\text{Nc7=}$ ] 6...  $\text{O-O}$  7.  $\text{c3}$   $\text{b6}$



Position after: 7... b6

Black's idea is to develop the bishop to a6. Now, White has three options:

**B2.1)** 8.  $\text{Nbd1}$   $\text{Oa6}$  9.  $\text{d3}$   $\text{Nc6}$  10.  $\text{Nbd2}$   $\text{Nc7}$  11.  $\text{Nf1}$   $\text{Nad8}$  12.  $\text{Ng3}$   $\text{Ne5=}$  with equality as essayed in Weill, R – Dourerassou, J Lille 2015.

**B2.2)** 8.  $\text{Ne1}$   $\text{Oa6}$  9.  $\text{d3}$   $\text{Nc6}$



Position after: 9... Nc6

Black prepares to transfer the knight from f6 to e5. 10.  $\text{O-f4}$  [10.  $\text{Nbd2}$   $\text{Nd7}$  11.  $\text{O-c2}$   $\text{Nde5}$  12.  $\text{Nxe5}$   $\text{dxe5=}$  as in the game Duarte, L – Fier, A San Luis 2006] 10...  $\text{Nd7}$  [10...  $\text{Nh5!?$ ] 11.  $\text{Na3}$   $\text{Nde5=}$  as

was played in Baklan, V – Fish, G Yalta 1996.

**B2.3)** 8.  $\text{d3}$   $\text{Oa6}$  9.  $\text{Nbd2}$   $\text{Nc6}$  10.  $\text{O-c2}$   $\text{Nc7}$  11.  $\text{a3}$   $\text{Nd7}$  12.  $\text{Ne1}$   
This position was reached in McShane, L – Karjakin, S Hastings 2002. 12...  $\text{d5!N}$  gaining more space in the center.



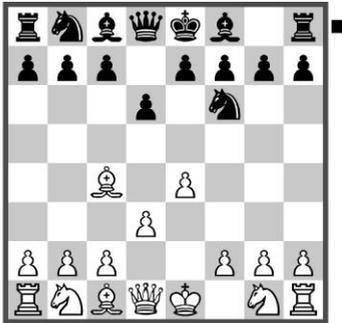
Position after: 12... d5!N

13.  $\text{e5}$  [13.  $\text{Nf1}$  Black is ready to capture. 13...  $\text{dxe4}$  14.  $\text{Nxe4}$   $\text{Nf6}$  15.  $\text{Nh4}$   $\text{Nad8}$  16.  $\text{O-f4}$   $\text{Nd7=}$ ] 13...  $\text{f6!}$  14.  $\text{exf6}$   $\text{Nxf6}$  Black has significant counterplay along the f-file and their pieces are more active than the opponent's. 15.  $\text{Nf1}$   $\text{Naf8}$  16.  $\text{O-g5}$   $\text{Nxf3!}$  17.  $\text{Oxe7}$   $\text{Nxe7}$  18.  $\text{gxf3}$   $\text{e5}$  and we have a clear advantage. Now, our plan is to play ... $\text{Ng6}$  and ... $\text{Nf4}$ .



Position after: 18... e5

Back to 3.d3.



Position after: 3. d3

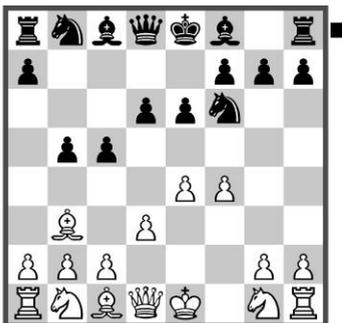
**3... e6 4. ♖b3**

4. ♘f3 d5 5. exd5 exd5 6. ♙b3 ♙e7 7. 0-0 0-0=

**4... c5 5. f4**

We are following the game Fernandez Romero, E – De Dios Ortega, J Seville 2016. Here, Black has a strong move.

**5... b5!N**



Position after: 5... b5!N

so as to continue with ...c4.

**6. ♘f3**

**A)** 6. ♙e2 ♙e7 7. ♘f3 0-0 8. e5 ♘d5 9. 0-0 dxe5 10. ♘xe5 ♙b7= Black has no problems.

**B)** 6. c3 c4! 7. dxc4 [7. ♙c2 ♙b7 8. ♙e2 cxd3 9. ♙xd3 a6 10. ♘f3 ♘bd7] 7... bxc4 8. ♙c2 ♘bd7 9. ♘f3 ♙e7 10. ♙e2 0-0= with a pleasant position for us as Black.

**6... ♙b7**



Position after: 6... ♙b7

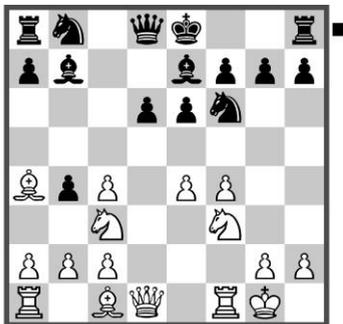
**7. 0-0**

7. e5 ♘fd7 8. exd6 ♙xd6 9. ♘c3 a6 10. a4 b4 11. ♘e4 ♙e7=

**7... ♙e7 8. ♘c3**

8. ♙e2 c4 9. dxc4 bxc4 10. ♙xc4 ♘xe4=

8... c4! 9. dxc4 b4 10. ♖a4+



Position after: 10. ♖a4+

10... ♖c6

It is also possible to play 10... ♘bd7!?

11. e5 to exchange a few pieces but we are well-prepared. 11... bxc3 12. exf6 ♖xf6 13. ♔xd6 cxb2 14. ♖xb2 ♖xb2



Position after: 14... ♖xb2

15. ♔ab1 [15. ♔ad1 ♔b6+ 16. ♔xb6 axb6 17. ♖xd7+ ♔e7=] 15... ♔b6+ 16. ♔xb6 axb6 17. ♖xd7+ ♔e7= and the

endgame seems to be heading for a draw. 18. ♔xb2 ♖xf3 19. ♔xf3 ♔c6=



Position after: 19... ♔c6=

11. e5

11. ♖xc6+ ♘xc6 12. ♘b5 ♘xe4=

11... bxc3 12. ♖xc6+ ♘xc6 13. exf6 ♖xf6 14. b3 0-0 15. ♖a3 ♖e7=



Position after: 15... ♖e7=

reaching a balanced position. Now, a possible idea would be to play ... ♔a5.

## d) 2.f4

### 1. e4 d6 2. f4



Position after: 2. f4

An alternative against which we must be well-prepared.

### 2... e5

I firmly believe that for us, the best option is to enter into the King's Gambit.

### 3. ♘f3

3. ♘c4 exf4 is best. 4. d4 4. ♘f3 transposes to the main line. 4... ♙h4+ 5. ♔f1 ♘c6 6. ♘f3 ♘g4 7. ♘b5 seems to be the best choice for White.



Position after: 7. ♘b5

7... ♙h5 8. ♘c3 f5! kicking the center.  
9. ♙d3 0-0-0 10. ♘xc6 bxc6 11. ♘xf4  
fxe4 12. ♙xe4 ♘e7 13. ♖e1 g5 14.  
♘xg5 ♘h6



Position after: 14... ♘h6

as was played in the game between the engines Stockfish and Lc0 on chess.com 2020.

### 3... exf4



Position after: 3... exf4

### 4. ♘c4

If White had chosen 4. ♘c3, after 4...g5, it would transpose to the lines analyzed in the next chapter.

4. d4 is an interesting move. 4... g5  
Here, our opponent has three options:



Position after: 4... g5

**A)** 5. ♖c4? is a poor choice, as we can gain an advantage. 5... g4! 6. 0-0 gxf3 7. ♔xf3 ♔f6 Although it may seem that White has compensation, it's not really enough. 8. e5 The best option, opening up the center to try to reach our king. 8... dxe5 9. dxe5 ♔b6+ 10. ♔h1 ♖e7!



Position after: 10... ♖e7!

Our plan is to work on developing the pieces. 11. ♖xf4 ♖e6 12. ♖xe6 ♔xe6 13. ♔xb7 ♔c6! 14. ♔b3 ♖d7 15. ♖g3 ♔e6 16. ♔f3 ♖b8 17. ♖c3 ♖g7+ and after castling short, we have a clear advantage.

**B)** 5. h4 is the usual idea in the King's Gambit but now it doesn't work for

White. 5... g4 6. ♖g1 [6. ♖g5? f6! 7. ♖xf4 fxe5 8. hxe5 ♖g7+] 6... ♔f6 7. ♖c3 ♖e7 8. ♖ge2 ♖h6



Position after: 8... ♖h6

Black has everything defended so White doesn't appear to have enough compensation for the sacrificed pawn. 9. ♔d2 [9. g3 fxe3 10. ♖xe3 ♖xc1 11. ♖xc1 ♖bc6+ with a decisive advantage as was seen in Khader, S – Aleksandrov, A Dubai 2010] 9... ♖bc6 10. ♖b5 ♔d8



Position after: 10... ♔d8

Here, White has two reasonable moves but Black is very well-prepared against both.

**B1)** 11. e5 ♔f5! 12. exd6 ♖d5 13. ♖xc7 as tried in the correspondence game Naftalin, S – Bangiev, A corr. 1990. 13... ♖e8!N brings in



Position after: 13... ♖e8!N

another piece. 14. ♘xe8 ♘cb4 15. ♘c7 [15. d7 f3→] 15... f3→

**B2)** 11. d5 The best option for White, as was played in Gallagher, J – Flear, G Lenk 1992. 11... a6!N 12. ♘bc3 [12. ♘xc7 ♙xc7 13. dxc6 ♙e5 14. ♘xf4 ♙xe4+↗] 12... ♘e5 13. ♘xf4 g3 leaving the g4-square free to be occupied by a piece. 14. ♙e3 ♘7g6



Position after: 14... ♘7g6

We can see how the white pieces are thoroughly pinned. 15. ♘ce2 ♘xf4 16. ♘xf4 ♘g6 17. ♘h5! ♙xe3 18. ♘xf6 ♙d4 19. ♘h5 ♙f2+ 20. ♙d1 f5↗

(see analysis diagram next column)



Position after: 20... f5↗

and the position is more comfortable for us to play as Black.

**C)** 5. g3 The best move for our opponent. 5... ♙g7 6. ♘c3 ♘c6



Position after: 6... ♘c6

7. d5 [7. ♙b5? g4 8. ♘h4 f3 9. ♙e3 a6 10. ♙xc6+ bxc6 11. ♙d3 ♘e7 12. 0-0-0 0-0↗] 7... ♘e5 8. gxf4 gxf4 9. ♙xf4 ♙g4 10. ♙b5+ ♙f8 11. ♙e2



Position after: 11. ♙e2

We have reached the game Zvjaginsev, V – Smirnov, P Novokuznetsk 2008. Now, we have an excellent move. 11... ♖xf3+! 12. ♙xf3 ♚f6 13. ♙xd6+ cxd6 14. ♙xg4. This position was seen in the correspondence game Nepustil, F – Kuta, J ICCF email 2014. 14... ♚h4+N 15. ♔d2 ♘e7



Position after: 15... ♘e7

It should be noted that Black has great control over the dark squares. Now, one possibility is to install the knight on e5. 16. ♔c1 [16. ♖f1 ♙h6+ 17. ♔d3 ♘g6] 16... h5 17. ♙d7 ♖d8 18. ♙b5 ♙xc3 19. bxc3 ♚xe4

#### 4... h6



Position after: 4... h6

#### 5. d4

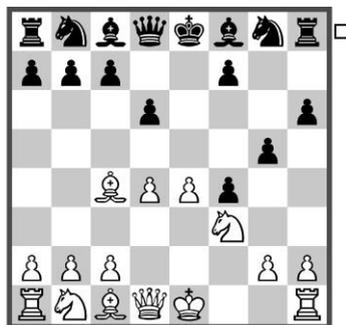
5. 0-0 g5 6. ♘c3 ♙g7 7. d4 ♘c6 8. ♘d5 ♘ge7 It seems that Black has no difficulties in developing their pieces and the plan is to castle long. 9. c3 ♘xd5 10. ♙xd5 ♘e7 11. ♙b3 ♙g4 12. g3



Position after: 12. g3

as was seen in the correspondence game Firsching, G – Weber Widmer, D Remote email 2013. 12... ♚d7N 13. gxf4 0-0-0

#### 5... g5



Position after: 5... g5

#### 6. 0-0

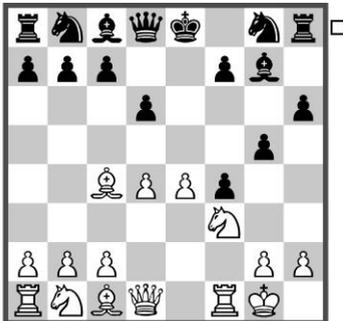
6. g3 ♘g7 7. gxf4 g4 8. ♖g1 ♟c6 9. ♙e3 as in Todorovic, G – Husari, S Budapest 2001. 9... ♚f8! An excellent king move. 10. ♟c3 gxf3 11. ♗xf3 ♟xd4 12. ♗f2 ♟c6



Position after: 12... ♟c6

It doesn't appear that White has enough compensation for the piece. 13. 0-0-0 ♙xc3 14. bxc3 ♗f6

6... ♙g7



Position after: 6... ♙g7

7. c3

7. g3 ♟c6 8. gxf4 8.c3 transposes to the main line. 8... ♙h3 9. ♖f2 g4 10. d5 ♟a5 11. ♙b5+ c6+ as occurred in Johnson, C – Berry, J Oklahoma 2008.

7... ♟c6



Position after: 7... ♟c6

8. h4

A) 8. ♗a4 ♙d7 9. ♗b3 ♟a5! Black can afford to get caught on f7. 10. ♙xf7+ ♚f8 11. ♗a3 ♚xf7 12. ♗xa5 ♚g6

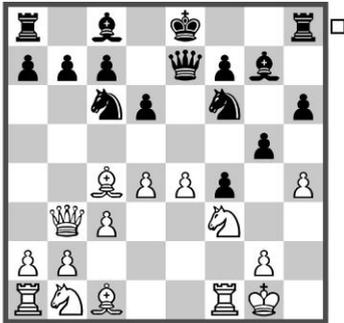


Position after: 12... ♚g6

with a clear advantage for Black as demonstrated in the game Van Hoorn, G – Warmerdam, M Assen 2018.

B) 8. g3 ♙h3 9. ♖f2 ♗d7 10. gxf4 ♟f6!+ as essayed in Rasulov, V – Raetsky, A Abu Dhabi 2014. Black's plan is to improve the king's position by castling long.

8... ♖e7 9. ♚b3 ♘f6!



Position after: 9... ♘f6!

11... ♘h5!N



Position after: 11... ♘h5!N

10. hxg5

10. e5 dxe5 11. hxg5 hxg5 12. ♘xg5 ♘d5 [12... ♙h6!? is also a good option. 13. ♘xf7 ♖h7→] 13. ♘xf7 [13. ♙xd5 ♚xg5 14. ♙xf7+ ♚f8→] 13... ♚xf7 14. ♙xd5 ♚h5 15. ♘d2 ♚h1+ 16. ♙f2 ♚h4+ 17. ♙g1

12. ♘xf7

12. ♙xf7+ ♚d8→

12... ♘xd4! 13. ♚d1 ♖h7!

An important move. Once the rook is not under attack, it's time to play ...♘g3.



Position after: 17. ♙g1

17... ♘xd4! 18. cxd4 e4!→

10... hxg5 11. ♘xg5

14. ♙xf4 ♘xf4 15. ♖xf4 ♘e6→



Position after: 15... ♘e6→

and we reach the game Langer, W – Ackermann, D Germany 1989. Here, we have a very strong response.

with a decisive advantage. The knight on f7 will be trapped after ...♙f6.



## **Conclusion to Chapter 1**

White has several alternatives to 2.d4 with their second move. Those analyzed in this chapter are the least common. In facing all of these, Black seems to have mechanisms to at least equalize and in many cases, to obtain a clear and comfortable advantage.

The most dangerous amongst these alternatives for Black to face is perhaps 2.f4, but I firmly believe that it is best to play 2...e5, entering the King's Gambit because I believe that Black obtains good positions there.