

Sam Collins

The Tarrasch Defence

move by move

EVERYMAN CHESS

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About the Author

Sam Collins is an International Master with two Grandmaster norms, and a former Irish and Japanese Champion. He has represented Ireland at seven Olympiads, winning an individual gold medal at Bled 2002. He has a wealth of teaching and writing experience, and has produced many books, DVDs and magazine articles on chess.

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Contents

About the Author	3
Bibliography	5
Series Foreword	7
Introduction	9
Structural Introduction	17
1 9 ♗g5 cxd4	26
2 9 ♗g5 c4	82
3 9 ♗g5 ♗e6	98
4 8 dxc5/9 dxc5	110
5 Other 8th/9th move options	155
6 Symmetrical Tarrasch	174
7 Tarrasch sidelines	196
8 Réti set-ups	218
9 In place of an epilogue...	231
Index of Variations	250
Index of Complete Games	254

Series Foreword

Move by Move is a series of opening books which uses a question-and-answer format. One of our main aims of the series is to replicate – as much as possible – lessons between chess teachers and students.

All the way through, readers will be challenged to answer searching questions, to test their skills in chess openings and indeed in other key aspects of the game. It's our firm belief that practising your skills like this is an excellent way to study chess openings, and to study chess in general.

Many thanks go to all those who have been kind enough to offer inspiration, advice and assistance in the creation of *Move by Move*. We're really excited by this series and hope that readers will share our enthusiasm.

John Emms,
Everyman Chess

Introduction

First Thoughts

An excellent potted history of the Tarrasch is set out by one of its exponents in the 1970s, GM John Nunn:

“...the Tarrasch, a defence which has always been considered an uphill struggle for Black, but which becomes fashionable for short periods when some great player attempts to revive and improve it. Spassky used it for a while in the 1960s, and more recently Kasparov adopted it twice in his first match with Karpov. Unfortunately, he lost on both occasions and then largely abandoned it. I played it occasionally in the seventies, but after some poor results I gave it up. My experience indicated that Black’s winning chances were slim since White could usually draw even if he played badly, while strong opponents would generally win! Today [Nunn was writing in 1997 – SC] only a few players are willing to adopt it, Murray Chandler being one of this vanishing breed.”

Dr. Nunn’s comments represent the consensus view and are certainly an accurate representation of the historical development of the Tarrasch before 2000. They throw up a lot of interesting material for discussion.

The Advantage of Playing White

On one analysis, White drawing if he plays badly and generally winning if he is a stronger player, is something which happens in every opening. So what Nunn is describing isn’t so surprising. A look at the statistics from Megabase 2013 (admittedly a rough and ready analysis since I haven’t corrected for rating) bears this out. In the position after 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♖c3, against 3...c5 White scores 54.8% from 8788 games (a lower percentage than he achieves after 3...♖f6 or 3...♗e7). In the position after 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♖f3 (while this signals the Catalan, it is also specifically an anti-Tarrasch move order since White has more options when he hasn’t committed his knight to c3), White scores 60.6% from 6484 games against 3...c5 (which is 0.1% less than he makes against 3...♖f6).

Looking at my own games provided interesting food for thought. I have played the Tarrasch against all kinds of opponents, including some under 2000 and many strong GMs: Korchnoi, Khenkin, Baburin (twice), Pert, Bischoff, San Segundo, Hebden, Burmakin, Socko. From what I can piece together, in 22 games with the line I scored 10 points. From a pure comparison of player’s ratings, my expected score was 11 points. Given that White tends to score approximately 55% in most openings, this result is pretty acceptable. The statistics

are skewed in White's favour by some other factors: first, if one looks at the opening positions I got from those games, the results ought to have been even better (losses to Baburin, Pert, Khenkin and Socko occurred in equal or very playable middlegames); second, in certain games (in particular against Bischoff) I horribly mishandled the opening and genuinely played an awful game.

Accordingly, my own limited experience provides no reason to doubt the efficacy of the Tarrasch.

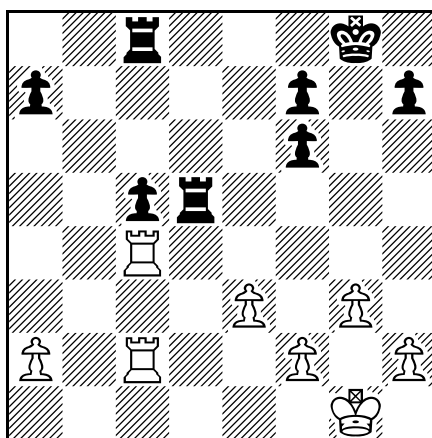
Fashion

Nunn is quite right to point to Kasparov's two losses with the Tarrasch in his first World Championship match against Karpov damaging the opening's popularity in quite a permanent way.

Looking objectively at these two games, in the first (Game 7) Kasparov easily equalized and only lost due to a late blunder. In the second (Game 9), against the best chess technician in history, Kasparov blundered on move 46 and lost in 70 moves. To put it mildly, this was not a result of the opening. If openings were shelved because arising endgames were lost against Karpov in the mid-80s, there wouldn't be a lot of openings played anymore.

It's quite hard to find someone who justifiably dropped the Tarrasch. For instance, Alexander Grischuk was the hero of this opening in the early 2000s (and laid the foundation for many of the modern main lines, in particular through his excellent use of 9 ♟g5 c4!). However, his loss to Gelfand (Russian Team Championship 2004) seems to have been Grischuk's last game with the Tarrasch at a classical time control (admittedly he gave the line a spin at the Amber tournament in 2006, scoring $\frac{1}{2}/\frac{1}{2}$ against Van Wely and Ivanchuk). So did Gelfand show a good antidote against the Tarrasch? Actually, no. The game followed the same first 13 moves as Sargissian-Halkias (covered later in this volume) where, as you will see, 13... ♞xd4! is a clean equalizer.

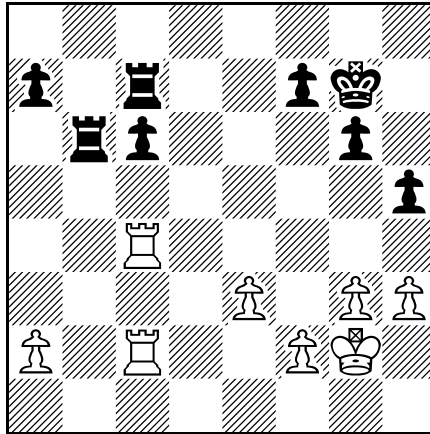
Moreover, let's see the endgame which resulted in Gelfand-Grischuk:



How did Gelfand know how to exploit his advantage here? Well, let's ask him!

"...I was very optimistic about the double-rook ending. In my first encounter with Anatoly Karpov in Linares 1991 I had a similar ending, in which with Black I was defending a better pawn structure (my pawn was on g6, not on f6) and where I was confident that we would soon agree a draw. But the 12th world champion taught me a memorable lesson, allowing me no chances in such a harmless-looking position. My hope of exchanging my a- and c-pawns for the a-pawn proved to be a mere illusion."

Let's have a look at the position Gelfand is referring to:



And the opening in that game was a Grünfeld, which nobody (including Gelfand) ditched as a result of the game.

Moreover, just how bad is this endgame? I've found the following examples of this or similar endgames arising from the Tarrasch (many following the same line as in Gelfand-Grischuk):

V.Borovikov-W.Pereira Neto, Nettetal 2004 (1/2-1/2 in 60)

G.Pitl-E.Lie, Gausdal 2007 (1/2-1/2 in 38)

Wang Hao-S.Iuldachev, Asian Team Championship 2008 (1-0 in 64)

Zhou Jianchao-V.Akopian, Beijing (blitz) 2008 (1/2-1/2 in 66 – as Black is a rook up in the final position I'm not sure about this result!)

Mi.Hoffmann-K.Kiik, European Cup, Ohrid 2009 (1-0 in 39)

A.Matthiesen-Kar.Rasmussen, Aarhus 2010 (1/2-1/2 in 61)

Zhu Chen-E.Kovalevskaya, FIDE Grand Prix, Nalchik 2011 (1/2-1/2 in 44)

I.Kragelj-T.Suc, Trieste 2012 (1/2-1/2 in 34)

So what looks like a forced win in the hands of Karpov or Gelfand starts looking pretty unclear at lower levels (even "normal" GM level). Moreover, this endgame is close to the maximum White can hope for in the 9 ♟g5 c4 line (admittedly, as Gelfand observes, if

White can keep the queens on Black may have some additional problems to solve, as in S.Mamedyarov-V.Akopian, Gibraltar 2012) and ways to avoid it have been found, including 13...♘xd4 in the Gelfand-Grischuk move order and other alternatives, such as Aagaard and Ntirlis' recommendation of an early ...h7-h6, not to mention the ninth move alternatives. So let's not throw our toys out of the pram just yet.

Looking at current representatives, it's true to say that the Tarrasch doesn't have too many regular GM advocates (the patronage by Grischuk, T.L.Petrosian and Akopian appears to have cooled off recently). That said, there are some players who have played it with success over the last few years. Occasional GM practitioners with excellent results include Jacob Aagaard, Milos Perunovic, Ray Robson and Julio Sadorra, while Vlad Jianu, Lucian Miron, Ivan Sokolov, Aaron Summerscale, Robin Swinkels and Branko Tadic have all played it several times with good results. Alexander Berelowitsch, Goran Todorovic and the rapidly-improving Spanish GM David Larino Nieto are probably the most consistent GM practitioners at the moment, with good to excellent results. Ekaterina Kovalevskaya and Natalia Zhukova seem to play it all the time, again with good results. Admittedly, the Tarrasch doesn't have a regular super-GM advocate at the moment and, accordingly, it is unlikely to become as popular as when Spassky and Kasparov were beating everyone with it. But this is rather to our advantage, since playing an opening at the height of fashion tends to lead to one's opponents being better prepared and more experienced in the resulting structures.

Begging the Question: What Happens When You Don't Define Your Terms

– suggested title for popular science book (*London Review of Books*, March 2011)

Let's see what we're talking about:

1 d4

White occupies the centre. Classical theory would suggest that, if it were his turn to move again, 2 e4 would be his choice.

1...d5

Black responds in kind, stopping e2-e4 and gaining a foothold in the centre.

2 c4

White chips away at the black central pawn. While everybody knows that this isn't a real gambit, after 2...dxc4 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 e3 White can be made to work a little to regain the pawn following 4...♙e6!? or Romanov's favourite 4...b5.

2...e6

This is an almost perfect move (holding the centre and accelerating kingside development), with only one drawback: namely that the c8-bishop is blocked inside its pawns. Of course, in the Tarrasch this drawback is quickly resolved when pawns are traded on d5.

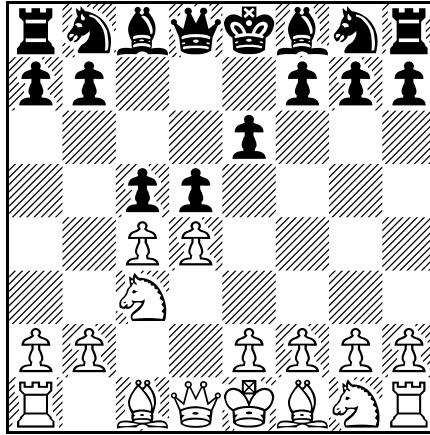
3 ♘c3

The choice between this move and 3 ♘f3 is a matter of taste and the overall repertoire of the White player. 3 ♘c3 is necessary for players who use the Exchange Variation against

the Queen's Gambit Declined. 3 ♖f3, on the other hand, is indicated for Catalan fans.

Regarding the Tarrasch, it is fair to say that 3 ♖f3 is slightly more flexible for White since he gains certain options based on delaying the development of his queen's knight (whereas ♖f3 is going to be a necessary move fairly early in almost every variation). In addition, 3 ♖c3 allows a pretty interesting gambit continuation which we'll see in a few moves.

3...c5



The move which defines the Tarrasch. Black plays the move he wants to play (striking at the white centre, gaining space, preparing a guilt-free development of the knight to c6 etc). The only drawback from a principled viewpoint is that his d-pawn is going to become isolated...

4 cxd5

...hence this is the most principled continuation. White doesn't have to go for this immediately, or at all, and the alternatives will be discussed in plenty of detail later in the book.

4...exd5

Taking the pawn back and keeping a pawn in the middle of the board. Moreover, the c8-bishop is looking at a clear diagonal (which it actually gets to use, as may be compared with, for instance, many lines of the QGD Exchange Variation).

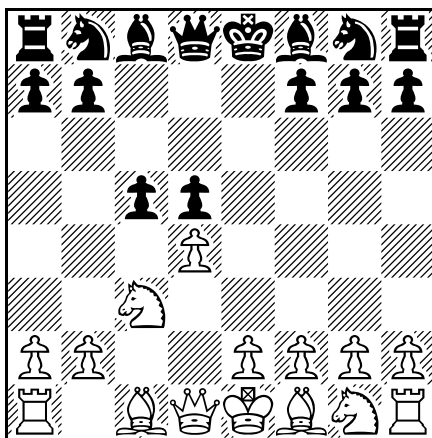
While a lot of chess writers point out that the Stonewall Dutch is one of the very few openings where Black gains a space advantage, this is actually not correct. First, Black doesn't technically have a space advantage in the Stonewall (a white pawn is on the fourth rank, just like the d5- and f5-pawns, and White can play ♖e5, just like Black can play ...♞e4). Second, the best regular example of Black gaining a space advantage is the Tarrasch. If the white d-pawn gets eliminated (through d4xc5 or ...c5xd4), Black will have the only pawn on the fourth rank and, moreover, the only pawn in the centre. In some lines this pawn even makes it to d4 which, while by no means always in Black's favour, certainly

The Tarrasch Defence: Move by Move

marks out even more central space. The lines where the white d-pawn survives are less common, and the most notable is the 9 ♖g5 c4 variation where central space is equal but Black gets a queenside space advantage.

None of the above has any real bearing on the assessment of this position, or of the whole opening. However, what I'm trying to point out is that Black's concept is an aggressive one. In effect, he's trying to play as White, albeit with a few tempi less. If White plays passively, Black will be able to mobilize sufficiently to justify his central space and the commitment inherent in an IQP. Whether Black can justify his concept in the face of accurate white play remains to be seen. But for the moment let's put the pawn in the middle. As Rear Admiral Grace Hopper put it, it's easier to ask forgiveness than it is to get permission.

4...cxd4!? is the gambit I mentioned a few moves ago. Black gets compensation for sure. How much is the question...



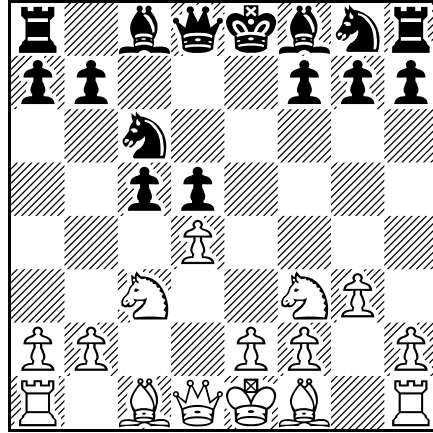
5 ♘f3

No real prizes for this one. Looking at the position I'm not even sure what other sensible moves exist, though I'm sure that hasn't stopped people writing books and articles on them.

5... ♘c6

A rule of thumb I tend to follow in the Tarrasch is that, given the option, I develop this knight before the king's knight. One reason is because the queen's knight doesn't have a better square (as mentioned above, after ...c7-c5 there's no reason not to play ...♘c6), whereas the king's knight, in a small number of cases, might want to come to e7 or to avoid an early pin by ♖g5, as is well illustrated by 6 ♖g5 ♖e7 7 ♖xe7 ♘gx7.

6 g3



An invention of the great Akiba Rubinstein. The fact that his many victories from this position were achieved against players displaying as much resistance as wet tissue paper doesn't change the assessment of this idea as ahead of its time. Today it remains the critical test of the Tarrasch, for the simple reason that the d5-pawn is now in considerable danger of just being taken and Black needs to find a way to avoid this happening without lapsing into passivity.

6...♘f6

Knights before bishops. The Tarrasch is a classical opening and rewards players who put their pieces quickly on good squares. At least this is my theory behind Jacob Aagaard's excellent successes with the line, when many other titled players get caught up in more convoluted development schemes.

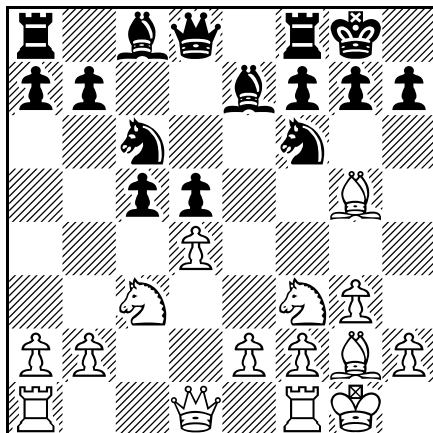
7 ♖g2 ♗e7

The bishops go to their best squares. Obviously d6 isn't a great square since it interferes with the defence of the d5-pawn and doesn't take any sting out of ♗g5.

8 0-0 0-0

It's pretty rare for the kings to go elsewhere in the Tarrasch – maybe in some of the d4xc5 endgame lines, but otherwise there's just too much happening on the c-file for either king to feel safe after long castling.

9 ♗g5



From a principled standpoint, a perfect move. White develops his final minor piece to a good square and creates an immediate threat of some combination of ♟xf6 and d4xc5 . Black has to respond somehow, by either $9\dots\text{cxd4}$ (the classical main line), $9\dots\text{c4}$ (the trendy modern main line) or $9\dots\text{♟e6}$ (the discarded line). Notwithstanding what modern theoreticians may suggest, having analysed these lines I think all three are perfectly playable – which, incidentally, leads to a pretty high analytical overhead for White if he wants to play $9\ \text{♟g5}$, and may explain in part his preference for other systems such as d4xc5 (at move 9 or earlier).

We'll get into specifics in a minute. In the meantime, I wish you best of luck with the Tarrasch!

Finally, I'd like to thank John Emms, Jonathan Tait and Byron Jacobs for their considerable assistance with this book.

Sam Collins
Dublin,
October 2013

Structural Introduction

The main characteristic of an opening is the structures to which it leads, and for no opening is this more true than the Tarrasch. The perceived (and actual) inferiority of Black's structure compared to White's is the only reason for not playing an opening with such great development and, ordinarily, a central space advantage.

In this section I introduce some of the main structures to which the Tarrasch leads. This is not a comprehensive overview. Nor do I deal with the intricacies of each structure – entire books have been devoted to the Isolated Queen's Pawn alone.

For those learning the Tarrasch, there are two great additional resources. First, look up games in other openings which feature the IQP. The ideas are applicable in all IQP positions regardless of the initial sequence. Indeed, in some of the positions in the Symmetrical Tarrasch, after poor play by White we end up in known variations where White has an IQP, with colours reversed.

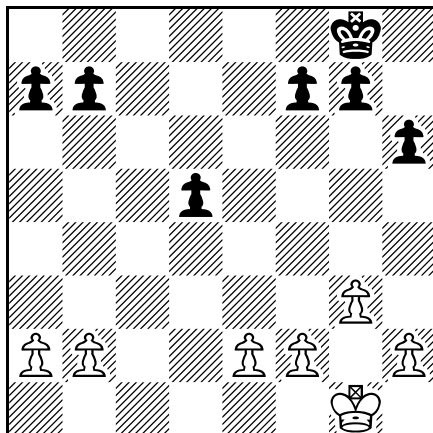
Second, study specialist resources on the IQP and related structures. A real classic in this field is *Winning Pawn Structures* by Alex Baburin, which focuses on the IQP and the related cases of hanging pawns and the isolated pawn couple. In addition, *Winning Chess Middle-games* by Ivan Sokolov is an absolute must for advanced players – while it deals with other pawn structures too, Sokolov's knowledge and handling of IQP positions is exemplary. Indeed, some of his games are featured in this text, with both colours.

Structure No. 1

(see following diagram)

This is the basic Tarrasch structure, most commonly arising from the traditional main line 9 ♗g5 cxd4, as well as some of the 9 dxc5 lines. White has fianchettoed his king's bishop, which puts immediate pressure on the d5-pawn (ordinarily this pawn is securely blocked and cannot advance).

One of the things I realized when researching this book is how even experienced Tarrasch practitioners don't always realize just how vulnerable the d5-pawn is, especially at an early stage. White's c3-knight and g2-bishop already target the IQP, and the pressure can be increased with ♖b3 (or ♖a4) and ♙d1. This, when combined with the fact that the black queen is normally on the d-file (d8 or d7), frequently leads to central shots where White takes on d5.

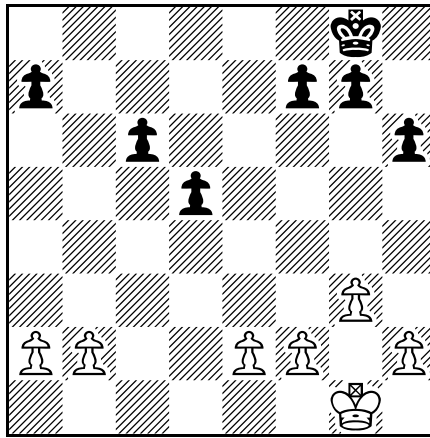


By far the most common way in which Black can (and does) endanger his IQP is with ...♗g4 and, after h2-h3, retreating the bishop to h5. The bishop then seems active, targeting the e2-pawn, and is immune from exchange. My conclusion (after a lot of work) is that, ordinarily, the bishop is just misplaced on h5 in this structure. The pressure on the e2-pawn is of minor significance (White's knight on c3 protects e2 and, if necessary, e2-e3 can be played), but of more significance is that the bishop cannot trade its counterpart on g2 and, importantly, cannot drop back to e6 to protect the pawn. Often a sequence involving g3-g4 and ♜xd5 can clip a pawn, even following a temporary piece sacrifice. Of course, if White plays g3-g4 there may be some compensation in the form of weakened squares around White's king. However, just be sure, when putting the bishop on h5, that you can hold d5, or at least extract sufficient concessions to form valuable compensation. If not – and in the majority of cases, Black doesn't get enough if d5 falls – retreat the bishop to f5 (if available) or e6.

The position is rich and normally the structure is changed into one of those discussed in the next few pages.

If White keeps the structure as it is (and the choice to change the structure is entirely White's, since Black can't force piece trades on c6 or e6), then develop your pieces in the middle and see what happens. The knights will be well placed on c6 and f6 – the f6-knight normally needs to stay put to hold d5, while the c6-knight can sometimes seek activity by ...♞a5-c4 or ...♞b4 followed by ...a7-a5. The light-squared bishop is well placed anywhere on the c3-h8 diagonal and, if a trade of light-squared bishops can be arranged, this is normally in Black's favour. Black's dark-squared bishop has a less clearly defined role in the early stages, and often is simply tucked out of the way after ...♞e8 and ...♗f8. Black's rooks are well placed on any of the c-, d- and e-files – rooks on c8 and e8 seem the most common. The black queen is a difficult piece to handle, and finding a good square for her often signals the solution to Black's opening problems; ...♙d7 followed by ...♗h3 is one common way, and sometimes ...♙b6 is seen instead to put pressure on the queenside.

Structure No. 2

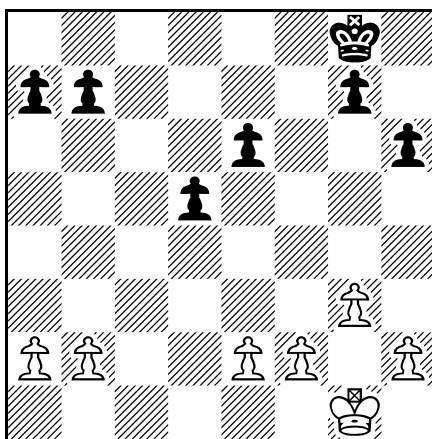


This is the most significant transformation of the basic Tarrasch structure, which occurs when White trades knights on c6. Of course the change brings certain benefits to Black – the d5-pawn is protected and the half-open b-file is available for a major piece.

When White goes into this structure he always has a lot of control over d4 and c5. Accordingly, while Black could, in theory, go into a hanging pawns position with ...c6-c5, in the Tarrasch this happens very rarely.

White's plan is based on blockading the c- and d-pawns and, ultimately, winning one of Black's queenside weaknesses. Note, however, that c6 is more difficult to attack than d5 (for instance, the bishop on g2 doesn't hit the pawn, so White is normally limited to a frontal attack on the half open c-file; in addition, a white knight or bishop frequently occupies the c5-outpost and, while such a piece is well placed, it shields the pawn from attack). Therefore Black has time to try to build up his counterplay and the risk of an early disaster is reduced, although Black needs to take care to avoid falling into passivity. Normal methods include seeking counterplay on the half-open b- and e-files, while exchanging White's light-squared bishop with ...♗h3 is always a good plan, with potential for a kingside attack.

Structure No. 3



This is a structure which commonly arises when Black plays ...♙e6, White plays ♖xe6 and Black recaptures with his f-pawn.

At first glance it seems that White must have a significant advantage here, with two bishops and a superior pawn structure. In fact Black gets major trumps of his own. First, his pawn structure is improved – the d5-pawn is now solidly defended and his rook will be active on the half-open f-file. Black's central control is now extremely strong, with more space and a 2-1 central majority. In addition, the pawns on d5 and e6 have a limiting effect on the white bishop on g2, which is no longer attacking an isolated pawn on d5. This is a similar concept to that in the Stonewall Dutch, where a bishop on g2 is restricted by the opponent's light-squared central pawn chain. Incidentally, this also informs why an ...e6-e5 advance is extremely risky, since the g2-bishop would come powerfully into play.

Note that, by contrast to the previous structure, it is very difficult for White to attack the e6-pawn, which is not on a half-open file.

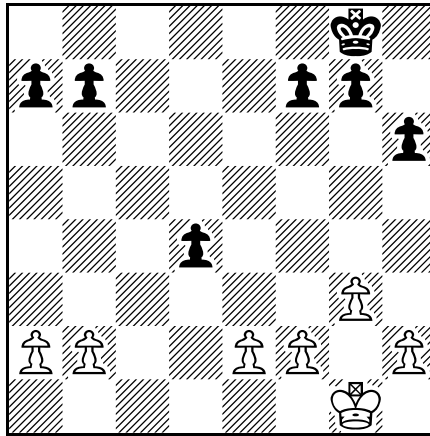
It is very important for the assessment of these structures that White cannot favourably make an e2-e4 break. In order for Black to be okay, White either should not be able to play e2-e4, or Black should be able to meet with e2-e4 with ...d5-d4, keeping the position closed. By contrast, ...d5xe4 would be a strategic disaster, opening lines for the white bishop on g2 and exposing the weak pawn on e6.

I can't be sure, but I suspect that a reluctance to go into this structure is the main reason that many players retreat their bishop to h5 after White plays h2-h3 in the main lines after 9 ♙g5 cxd4. As noted in my discussion above, I really don't like putting the bishop on h5 in most positions, but you can only avoid it if you are happy to let White capture on e6.

This structure was defended with great success by Kasparov in his Candidates matches. He had no problems in game two of his 1983 match with Korchnoi, or game two of his 1984 match with Smyslov, and won a great game in this structure in game twelve against Smyslov.

The following comment of Sokolov, which will arise in the annotated games, is worth noting here: “It is good to note that per definition Black is never worried about 13 ♖xe6 fxe6, since the loss of the bishop pair is fully compensated for by the improvement of his pawn structure”. I agree with this assessment and believe that a key part of handling the Tarrasch well is being ready to go for this structure as Black.

Structure No. 4



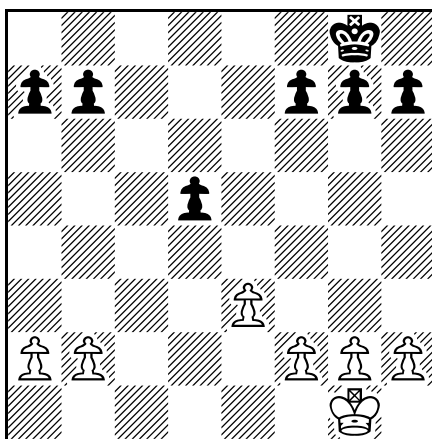
Question: Didn't we look at this already?

Answer: Not really. The structure we examined previously is the main Tarrasch position with a black pawn on d5, as normally arises from the 9 ♖g5 cxd4 variations. In those positions White has far too firm a grip on d4 for Black to be able to play ...d5-d4 himself. The structure currently on the board is characteristic of a number of lines, including most of the major continuations after 9 dxc5. Advancing the pawn to d4 affects the plans for both sides in several profound ways. On d4 the pawn is safer from attack than it was on d5 – for instance, the g2-bishop isn't hitting the pawn. The fact that Black has seized so much central space means that it can be awkward for White to arrange an immediate attack on the pawn. Rather he will rely on other advantages – the g2-bishop's range of activity is extended, hitting the b7-pawn, and a knight on d3 would be perfectly placed.

While the e2-pawn is rarely a real weakness in the 9 ♖g5 cxd4 lines, here it is fixed on e2 (playing e2-e3 will lead, at best, to an exchange of pawns) and its normal defender, the c3-knight, has been driven away from its natural defensive square.

The plans for both sides are markedly different than with a black pawn on d5, so be sure not to play on autopilot.

Structure No. 5

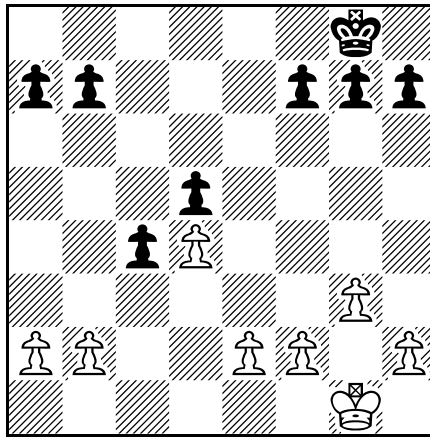


This structure is characteristic of the Symmetrical Tarrasch. The major difference compared to lines we have looked at so far is that White has not gone for the more aggressive option of fianchettoing his king's bishop, but instead puts his bishop either on e2 or on b5 (intending to take a knight on c6).

Black is normally more comfortable in these lines than with a bishop on g2. The d5-pawn is under less immediate pressure and, if White makes a couple of inferior moves, it is quite common to transpose (with reversed colours) into other openings in which White gets a favourable IQP position. The pawn still being on g2 means that Black can consider more direct kingside attacking methods, such as forming a queen and bishop battery on the h2-b8 diagonal. Indeed, the ideal IQP formation – pawn on a6, knights on c6 and f6, bishops on c7 and h3 (after White has been forced to play g2-g3), queen on d6, rooks on d8 and e8 – is established by Black in a number of the examples we'll examine in the chapter on the Symmetrical Tarrasch. If Black gets these moves in, White will be the one who needs to equalize.

One effect of the pawn on e3 is that White's dark-squared bishop can't easily develop to g5, and instead tends to go to b2 (after b2-b3 or a2-a3 and b2-b4). While the bishop is well placed here, it is at risk of being irrelevant if Black succeeds in creating a strong kingside attack. In general White has fewer kingside defenders than in the fianchetto lines, and Black must seek to exploit this.

Structure No. 6



This structure is characteristic of the 9 ♖g5 c4 line as well as the Swedish Variation (featuring an early ...c5-c4, ...♙b4 and ...♞ge7). Black gains additional queenside space and prepares, if allowed, a massive advance with ...b7-b5-b4. In addition, the d5-pawn isn't as weak as it would be if it sat on the end of a half-open d-file.

As against this, playing ...c5-c4 takes all pressure off the white centre. Thus e2-e4 becomes an idea, as does ♞e5 and, if White wishes, ♞xc6. We will also see examples where White seizes more kingside space with f2-f4.

The positions in this structure tend to become quite sharp. White's most reliable method is to seek to destroy the black pawn chain by ♞e5xc6 and b2-b3. Black, for his part after ...b7xc6, tries to arrange counterplay with ...c6-c5. The game is unusual and unbalanced and I think that becoming closely acquainted with this structure significantly enhances a Tarrasch player's level, especially since a number of quieter lines (for instance, after an early e2-e3 by White) can also be met by ...c5-c4.

Isolated Queen's Pawn

One of the benefits of studying IQP positions is that they arise in such diverse contexts. As Ivan Sokolov observes: "Isolated pawn structures are arguably the structures that arise from the most different openings (Tarrasch Defence and Semi-Tarrasch, Queen's Gambit Accepted, Queen's Gambit Declined, Nimzo-Indian Defence, Meran Variation, Ragozin Variation, Petroff Defence, etc) and are therefore very important positions to understand, regardless of the opening preferences a player may have."

There are many examples of players who have managed to exploit transpositions and structural similarities to play a wide range of openings confidently. For instance, a number of GMs are happy to defend an IQP with Black after 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♞d2 c5 4 exd5 exd5, a line developed by Korchnoi and Mikhail Gurevich amongst others. Bartosz Socko also feels comfortable in this line with Black and, in a game against Gawain Jones in the German

The Tarrasch Defence: Move by Move

Bundesliga 2012, he answered 1 e4 c5 2 c3 with 2...e6 3 d4 d5 4 exd5 exd5, obtaining a very similar position and making a comfortable draw.

In the Politiken Cup 2013, I was interested to see Tarrasch enthusiast IM Jonathan Carlstedt obtaining positions similar to his favourite opening in two consecutive rounds. Here he is in round six:

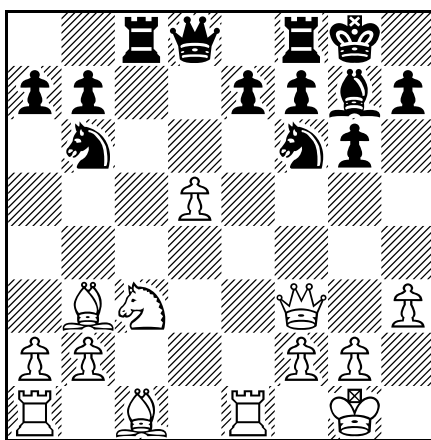
J.Carlstedt-J.Brorsen Helsingor 2013

1 c4 c5 2 e3 ♘f6 3 d4 g6 4 ♘c3 ♙g7 5 ♘f3 0-0 6 ♙e2 d5 7 0-0

Carlstedt has used this set-up in several games as White, scoring heavily. After, for instance, 7...cxd4 8 exd4 ♘c6 we have a Tarrasch with colours reversed and an extra move for White. While I don't believe this line is a serious attempt at an opening advantage, Carlstedt is able to draw on his experience with the Tarrasch and plays such positions well.

The game continued:

7...dxc4 8 ♙xc4 cxd4 9 exd4 ♙g4 10 d5 ♘bd7 11 ♖e1 ♘b6 12 ♙b3 ♖c8 13 h3 ♙xf3 14 ♔xf3



Black hasn't handled the opening in the most principled way and White has a comfortable advantage, going on to win in 39 moves.

In round seven, the following happened:

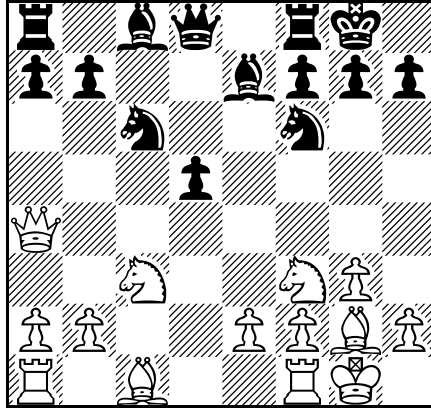
J.Glud-J.Carlstedt Helsingor 2013

1 c4 e5

As we will see, the Tarrasch is sufficiently universal that it can be used against the Eng-

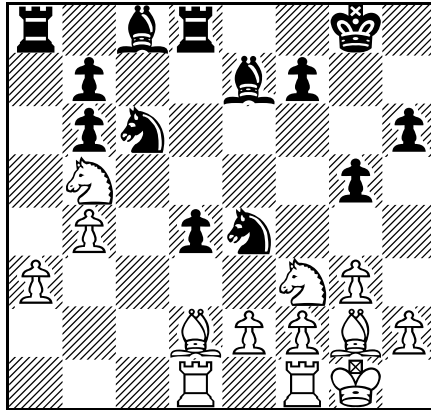
lish: 1...e6 followed by 2...d5 and ...c7-c5. Carlstedt has played this way as Black a number of times, but decides to surprise his opponent (an extremely strong IM from Denmark who made a GM norm in this tournament).

2 g3 ♘f6 3 ♙g2 c6 4 d4 exd4 5 ♚xd4 d5 6 ♞f3 ♙e7 7 0-0 0-0 8 cxd5 cxd5 9 ♞c3 ♞c6 10 ♚a4



It's easy to see the similarities of this position to the d4xc5 lines in the Tarrasch – indeed, 10 ♚d1?! ♙c5?! would be a direct transposition. Carlstedt has a lot of experience in this structure and effortlessly obtains a good game.

10...♚b6 11 ♚b5 ♙c5 12 ♚xb6 axb6 13 ♙f4 h6 14 a3 g5 15 ♙d2 d4 16 ♞b5 ♞e4 17 b4 ♙e7 18 ♞ad1 ♞d8



Black is very comfortable here. He went on to sacrifice a pawn and actually obtained decent winning chances before the game ended in a draw at move 75.

I hope that these examples have demonstrated how universal Tarrasch-type positions are, and how much is to be gained by learning to handle them well.