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Foreword by Alexey Shirov

We all know chess theory nowadays. Some of us know less, others more. But do we really know the history of chess theory, its development? And, of course, the next question would be – is it important at all? Judging by my personal experience the answer is positive. Many teenagers of today want to know how chess was before they were born.

Our generation (Viorel Bologan is just half a year older than me) have enjoyed all the benefits of ‘technical progress’ in chess. We were still very young and fresh when the use of databases and analysis engines became the most convenient form of working on chess and the experience we had before prevented us from underestimating the human touch, so the work with new technologies could become especially effective. But I think the nostalgic memories of times when everything was done with the desire to discover new things, when the search for the truth in chess was sometimes absorbing, those memories simply can’t be taken away. As well as memories of people who never knew the modern times.

The year 1997 was sad for both Viorel and me. The chess community lost two personalities who had devoted all their life into chess investigation – the Latvian Alvis Vitolinsh and the Moldavian Vyacheslav Chebanenko. I was supposed to write a tribute to my countryman but I haven’t done it yet – who knows when I

will be able to. Therefore it’s important for me to see that Viorel has done so towards his former trainer and spiritual guru. And I should say that the 4...a6 Slav is still only a small part of Chebanenko’s contribution to chess, his other system 1.c4 e5 2.♘c3 ♙b4 3.♘d5 ♙e7!? immediately comes to mind as I played it a few weeks ago against Levon Aronian in Morelia 2008 and achieved a better position! His old ideas in the Rossolimo Variation (1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 g6 4.♙xc6 dxc6 5.d3 etc.) are very important too, practically the whole modern theory of that system is just the continuation of old Moldavian investigations.

I first heard the name of Chebanenko because of the 4...a6 Slav. A Latvian of my age, Kaspars Ramma (he was a fine positional player in his youth but then suddenly stopped competing), successfully employed it in the second half of the eighties and once he annotated his best effort for the Riga magazine *Shakhmaty* or *Sahs*, mentioning the author of the opening, of course, and also referring to Viktor Gavrikov’s article. When I saw those comments I distrusted everybody involved, as I dogmatically thought that a tempo could not be wasted like this. I still needed to meet Chebanenko and become Viorel’s friend to change my opinion!

At the beginning Vyacheslav Chebanenko was like a ghost for me. He never left his

hotel room. During some junior competition I even mistook Boris Itkis for him, because Boris was visible with Moldavian youngsters but he was unknown to me, while Chebanenko's name would always be mentioned when one was preparing against the Moldavian players. I got to know Vyacheslav Andreevich personally in 1988 when he was helping Oratovsky in his match versus Kramnik in Moscow and I attended the meeting of Botvinnik with Jeroen Piket at the same time and venue. Of course, the place I first met Chebanenko was his hotel room and we immediately started analysing the Slav with 4...a6 which I tried to 'refute', but in vain.

Vyacheslav Chebanenko would normally try not to let his knowledge be spread outside the Moldavian chess school, but with me he made an exception, perhaps because I was Viorel's friend. He also introduced me to his girl students and one of them was my girlfriend for a short while. I wouldn't mention this if it were not for the fact that later on in some of my games I employed a move that he had taught the girl (6...♗g4 after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 cxd5

5.♙f4 ♚c6 6.e3), so the Moldavian school definitely had a certain impact on my chess.

So, I should say that Vyacheslav Chebanenko was a nice and a quiet man in daily life and a true workaholic in chess research, and one of the most remarkable trainers of his time. He left this world too early but his systems are still alive. Even though he was not a tactician at all, his chess strategy has passed the test of time and technology.

Finally I should thank Viorel Bologan for a tremendous job of unifying the modern discoveries in the 4...a6 system with its historical background. Now the reader has everything he needs to know – the old strategic ideas and the latest concrete nuances. And the fact that sometimes pieces don't get exchanged before move 20 shows how fascinating and complex the opening is.

Play 4...a6 in the Slav! I used to think it was a loss of tempo but it is not!

Alexey Shirov
Tarragona, 16th of March 2008

Introduction

Containing extracts from the books 'Revolution in the 1970s' by Garry Kasparov and 'School of Chess Excellence 4 – Opening Developments' by Mark Dvoretsky, and the article 'A New System in the Slav Defence' by Viktor Gavrikov

This book is dedicated to Vyacheslav Andreevich Chebanenko, the patriarch of Moldovan chess, and my trainer and teacher.

In working on this book, I was greatly assisted by my long-time friends and colleagues, IM Vladimir Barsky (editor) and GM Victor Komliakov (consultant), to whom I offer my warmest regards and heartfelt gratitude. Without them, I could not even have begun work.

Doctor Chebanenko's Philosopher's Stone

It was all a long time ago. Back in the days when people wrote letters to each other on paper, and a telephone in one's apartment was regarded as a luxury; when a simple IBM electronic calculator took up most of my father's office, and bigger mainframe computers occupied whole floors in the Moldavian Soviet Republic's 'Gosplan' planning institute; back in the days when Fritz was still just a glint in Frederic Friedel's eye, and Mikhail Moiseevich Botvinnik was still struggling with the problem of constructing artificial intelligence.

Back in those days, people, chess players included, used to use their own heads to think.

One used to sit down before a game and decide – OK, if he plays this, I will choose that plan; if he does this, I'll follow that well-known game, and if he does any-

thing else, I'll just work something out over the board. That was all the preparation one did. That is assuming one was a professional, and analysed other people's games, and studied good books – if you were a complete lazybones, then better not to play chess at all!

But we liked to play! It is not only a question of enjoying the process itself, but also, if things go well, there are material rewards – a stipend from the state, foreign travel, dining coupons, lectures, simul...

– OK, you win, said the maestro of Moldavian chess, Vyacheslav Andreevich Chebanenko, stretching himself out on his sofa. – I'll show you something.

It is time to introduce the Doctor, as Vyacheslav Andreevich was called by the older generation of his pupils. Not only did he come up with a miraculous solution to all the problems of the idle chess players of Moldavia, by creating for them a unique opening repertoire, contained within a couple of exercise books. He also managed to interest the whole chess world in his ideas, even such grandiose figures as Tigran Petrosian and Garry Kasparov.

In order to avoid the inaccuracies that are inevitable when re-telling a story, I will let you hear it 'from the horse's mouth' as it were, in the words of the 13th World Champion himself.

Extract from Garry Kasparov's book *Revolution in the 1970s*, pages 324-326:

The Chebanenko Line

When speaking of the founders of the modern opening, one cannot omit the name of the Kishinev master Vyacheslav Chebanenko (1942-1997), a noted theoretician and trainer, who brought on a whole generation of grandmasters and masters – Gavrikov, Iordachescu, Bologan, Komliakov, Rogozenko, V. Nevednichy, Oratovsky and many others. His opening 'bomb' in the Sicilian Defence is well-known, after being used by Petrosian in the first game of his match against Fischer.

Slav with 4...a6

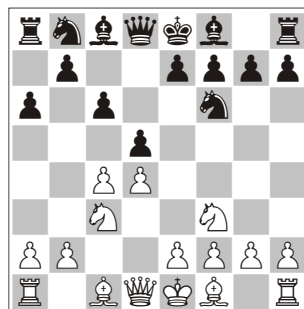
But what is rather more important is that Chebanenko invented and worked out in detail the 4...a6-system in the Slav Defence:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. d2-d4 | d7-d5 |
| 2. c2-c4 | c7-c6 |
| 3.  g1-f3 |  g8-f6 |
| 4.  b1-c3 | |

Or 4.e3 a6.

4. ... a7-a6

And from the mid 1970s, the various Moldovan masters began to use the system in practice.



Today it is one of the main opening systems against 1.d4, but 30 years ago, only a small number of players knew about it and it seemed quite an exotic idea. Chess ideas were still dominated by relatively classical principles, and the apparently pointless loss of a tempo had trouble being accepted.

... It is worth seeing how it changed the evaluation of the Exchange Variation of the Slav Defence.



The author
with the inventor.

1. d2-d4 d7-d5
2. c2-c4 c7-c6
3. ♘g1-f3 ♘g8-f6
4. c4xd5 c6xd5
5. ♘b1-c3 ♘b8-c6
6. ♙c1-f4



For a long time, the main methods of defence were confined to be either 6...e6 or 6...♙f5. But then it turned out that, by analogy with 4.♘c3 a6 5.cxd5 cxd5 6.♙f4 ♘c6, in the diagram position the move

6. ... a7-a6!?

was good, with the idea of 7.e3 ♙g4!, whilst 7.♘e5 can be met by 7...♗b6, and on 7.♙c1 Black equalises with 7...♙f5 8.♘e5 ♙c8.

There is no sense in giving a complete overview of all the possible variations of the Chebanenko System, especially as I only really became acquainted with it quite late on, in the 1990s, when it began to become a bigger and bigger part of the repertoire of top players. Viktor Gavrikov passed the baton to Victor Bologan, Alexey Shirov and other young grandmasters.

I remember being struck by the ease with which Black won in the game Oll-Anand (Biel Interzonal 1993):

5. e2-e3 b7-b5
6. b2-b3 ♙c8-g4
7. h2-h3

In the main line – 7.♙e2 e6 8.0-0 ♘bd7 9.h3 ♙h5 – Black has a solid position, whilst the bishop retreat to f5 is also not bad.

7. ... ♙g4xf3

7...♙h5 8.g4.

8. ♗d1xf3 e7-e6

Chebanenko's pupils preferred 8...e5! 9.dxe5 (9.c5 ♘bd7) 9...♙b4 10.♙d2 ♙xc3 11.♙xc3 ♘e4 12.♙b4 bxc4 13.bxc4 (13.e6 ♙a7; 13.♗g4 c5!) 13...♗b6 14.a3 a5 15.cxd5 cxd5 with good play.

9. ♙c1-d2

9.♙d3!?

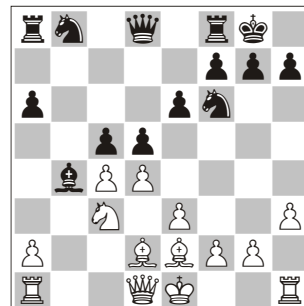
9. ... ♙f8-b4

10. ♗f3-d1?!

The natural 10.♙d3 is better, since White has no objections to either 10...♘bd7 11.0-0 intending a2-a3, and 10...♗a5 11.♙c1 ♙xc3 12.♙xc3 (12.♙xc3!?) 12...♗xa2 13.♗d1 with obvious compensation for the pawn (Sadler-Levitt, Dublin Zonal 1993).

10. ... 0-0
11. ♙f1-e2 b5xc4
12. b3xc4 c6-c5!

An energetic move!



13. d4xc5?

Of course, 13.0-0 cxd4 14.♘xd5! was correct, with equality – Anand.

- | | |
|--------------|---------|
| 13. ... | d5-d4! |
| 14. e3xd4 | ♖d8xd4 |
| 15. ♖d1-c2 | ♜b8-c6 |
| 16. 0-0 | ♖d4-e5! |
| 17. ♖c2-a4?! | ♜a8-d8 |
| 18. ♜d2-e1 | ♜c6-d4! |
| 19. ♖a4xb4 | ♜d4xe2+ |
| 20. ♜c3xe2 | ♖e5xa1 |
| 21. ♜e2-c3 | ♖a1-c1! |

and Black won (0-1).

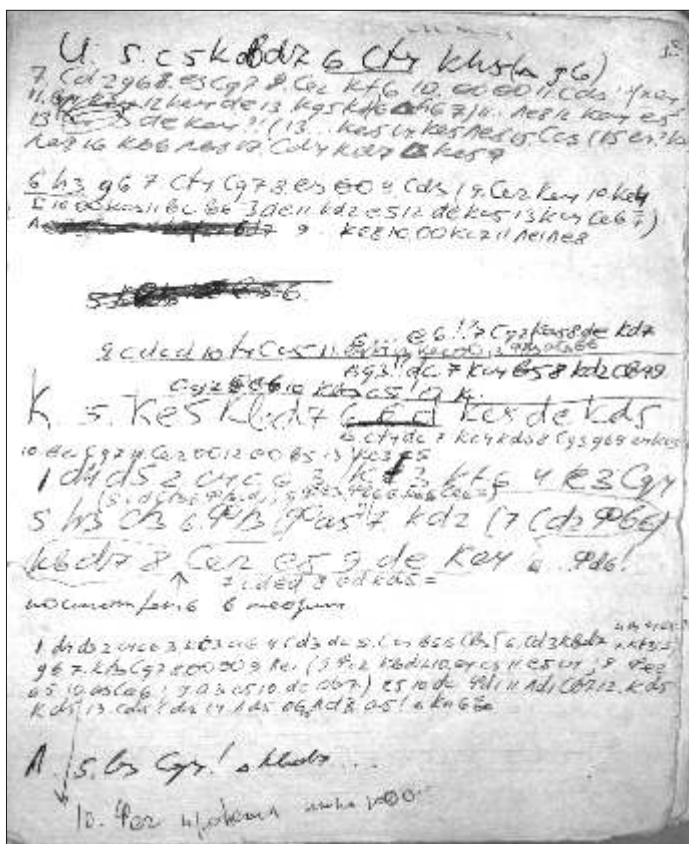
Having looked at the details of the system, I included it in my repertoire, and achieved good results, never experiencing any problems. In the words of Bologan,

‘to date, White has not found any advantage here, and the main lines remain those that were written in our notebooks all those years ago’.

(End of extract)

The title of ‘Doctor’ was given to Vyacheslav Andreevich for his tireless opening experiments, many of which he used even with very young players.

First the idea would be born, then the details would be worked out on his handheld ‘Riga’ magnetic chess set (by using such a set, Chebanenko did not have to get up from the sofa on which he always lay full-length), and then dictated



A page from the author's notebook during his Chebanenko days.

to his pupils, who wrote them down in their exercise-books. And then the pupil, faithfully believing that he had in his hands a super-novelty, would be sent off to his game.

It is only fair to say that the Doctor's opening experiments were usually successful, although that success was not always carried over to the latter part of the game. A typical picture for the Moldavian team in national competitions would go something like this – after the opening, we would have a large advantage, then the position would gradually level out, and in time-trouble, everything would be turned on its head.

One of his 'victims' was his young girl pupil Tanya Derid. She did not have a very good memory, so Vyacheslav Andreevich dreamed up for her the following opening variation: 1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 a6!?. Black gives his opponent the move, without clarifying the situation in the centre, and in answer to the most natural move 4.♘f3, he continues 4...♙g4. It may very well be by analogy with this that the move 4..a6!? in the Slav was found.

* * *

Nikolay Popov recalls (Popov was the first Moldavian IM, and is now a sports commentator on Russian TV):

– Chebanenko was born in Kishinev, but later studied in Leningrad, at the institute of optics and mechanics. However, this did not prove to be his vocation, and he left Leningrad and continued his studies in Odessa, at the institute of maths and physics. After finishing his studies, he spent two years working in the distribution business, in a village somewhere in

Moldavia, and then returned to Kishinev and devoted himself to chess. He worked as a trainer at the chess club and continued his own playing career.

He always had his own approach to chess, his own way of looking at things. This attracted me and I decided to study with him. We spent a lot of time analysing the most varied positions, although I have to say that I always felt a little uncomfortable. I have a very open, dynamic style, whereas he tended to look at the sort of positions that I could not really get on with, and this put me off somewhat.

Maybe I could outplay him in analysis, simply because I was the stronger practical player, but we always had differences of principle in relation to positions. For example, Chebanenko really liked the line 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 and on the next move, regardless of what Black did, taking on c6. Nowadays this is considered a major variation, but I just could not accept that it should be possible to play like this. I remember that we even played a match, where I answered 3.♙b5 with 3...a6 and forced him to take on c6. I do not recall the result of the match, but he got the advantage in the opening. Up to a certain level (let us say against candidate masters) he scored virtually 100% with this opening, because his opponents simply did not how to play against it.

He also spent a great deal of time on another opening, which did not become so popular, but in which he very firmly believed: 1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 c6!?. Here he investigated a whole mass of positions.

Thanks to Chebanenko I played a lot of games, and very successfully at that, with the Black line 1.c4 e5 2.♘c3 ♙b4!?, and



Vyacheslav Andreevich Chebanenko (below, centre): a key figure of Moldavian chess.

if 3.♖d5, then 3...♗e7. And if the knight did not come to d5, then Chebanenko did exactly what he did in the Sicilian, and took immediately on c3, carrying out the same plan that he loved – the battle against doubled pawns.

Petrosian described in detail in 64, the magazine that was around at the time, one of Chebanenko's novelties. After he beat Kortchnoi and qualified for the final Candidates' match against Fischer, he was passed a letter, addressed to the winner of the Kortchnoi-Petrosian match, in which there was analysis of the variation later seen in the first game of the Fischer-Petrosian match. Later, Tigran Vartanovich was very upset that he had wasted such an innovation, by failing at the crucial moment to follow the analysis.

* * *

Grandmaster Victor Komliakov recalls:
– We, his pupils, used to call Vyacheslav Andreevich Chebanenko the Guru, or

Doctor. He had a deep knowledge of chess strategy. He was a great researcher, although it was not only opening ideas that interested him, but chess strategy in general. He had studied Nimzowitsch's theories very deeply and built his own conception. In any opening, the Doctor always strove first and foremost to identify its strategic basis.

At the start of the 1970s, Chebanenko was the trainer of the Moldavian schoolchildren. He never cared about who was in front of him, a schoolboy or a master – he always wanted someone on whom to test his ideas. When you analyse on your own, it is not always possible to retain one's objectivity. At first, he tested his stuff on other Moldavian masters, who also worked as trainers – Nikolay Popov and Boris Itkis (he, in particular, analysed a great deal), and then Chebanenko started to include in the analysis his own pupils – Gavrikov, me, Titov, and others. All of his ideas, Vyacheslav Andreevich first tested on us.

I remember that at a session in 1975, we spent about 10-12 days polishing up the variation, and then wrote it all out in a notebook. Unfortunately, I no longer have the notebook. One of the first to try it was Popov, but he was not very successful. Then there was a lull for about 5 years, before Gavrikov started to use the variation.

In those days, in the main, we played the King's Indian, and only rarely the Slav. Later, when we found some problems with the King's Indian, we returned to the Slav. There are many openings, after all, and one should not spend all one's time on the same one! Chebanenko, for example, spent a lot of time on the Modern Defence with c6-d6, and with white opened 1.e4 more often than 1.d4. He played the Slav with 4...a6 from time to time, in competitions, the games of which have not made it into contemporary databases, such as the Moldavian championships, for example.

Then Gavrikov took up the baton. He played the Chebanenko Variation twice in the 1981 USSR Championship (against Beliavsky and Tukmakov), and made two draws. In December 1983, in the magazine *Shakhmaty v SSSR* he published an article, entitled 'A new system in the Slav Defence'.

At the beginning of the 1990s, Viorel Bologan asked Chebanenko's permission to show the variation to Shirov. Alexey started playing the line very successfully, and being a generous and well-brought up young man, he later went out of his way to express his gratitude to Chebanenko.

It was very important to Chebanenko that he had a suitable opponent (albeit only a candidate master), in order that he could

find his ideas. Chebanenko would come to a training session and say 'Look, I have a new idea', and would set up on the board the critical position, which would usually be the product of a night-time vigil. He would then start to check it, regardless of whether the pupil played this variation or not. Over time, his pupils grew up, and became strong opponents, who had from the beginning developed the art of analysis. In those days, there were no computers, and we all moved the pieces by hand. Chebanenko worked a great deal, and the pieces on his magnetic chess set covered many kilometres moving around the board!

'The Chebanenko Line' (to use Kasparov's apt expression!), as well as the a6-Slav examined in this book, also included 1.c4 e5 2.♘c3 ♙b4 3.♘d5 ♙e7 in the English Opening, and all kinds of King's Indian set-ups, particularly with the knight on d7. To avoid the Four Pawns, Sämisch and Averbakh variations, we often started with 1...d6. Correspondingly, against 1.e4 we were prepared to play the Philidor, reaching it either by 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 e5, or by 3...c6, where Chebanenko handled the pawns in virtuosic style, playing either ...d5, ...c5, or ...e5, depending on circumstances.

As White we all played 1.e4, although Vyacheslav Andreevich occasionally looked at lines after 1.d4; in particular against the Dutch Defence he worked out a system involving a pawn sacrifice with h2-h3 and g2-g4. It is interesting to note that this motif appears nowadays in almost all closed openings.

Needless to say, we did not get mixed up in Open Sicilians, but faithfully employed the Doctor's prescription: against 2...d6 and 2...♘c6 – 3.♙b5, whilst after 2...e6 we had the choice between 3.c4 or 3.d3. Against the French it was only 2.d3, 1...e5 we happily met with the Italian, whilst if we thought the Petroff/Russian Game was likely, we would play the bishop to c4 at move 2.

The main thing that links all the above-mentioned lines is the restrained pawn structure, usually involving d3-c3 as White and d6-c6 as Black. The pieces would then be placed very harmoniously within that pawn structure. The typical plan of preparing either ...b5 or ...d5, and also the overall conception, made the whole system easy to remember and play. The strange thing is that the main variation of Chebanenko's whole life, the Slav with 4...a6, is somewhat outside the general opening conception of the 'Chebanenko Line', because the pawn structure in the centre is determined already at move one. This exception to the general rule allowed Chebanenko to demonstrate his strategic talent. The move ...d5, compared with ...d6, gives Black more room to manoeuvre. It may seem that Black is going to play quite normally, but the originality of the Chebanenko Variation is that it is still in accord with Chebanenko's principal opening credo – preserving the maximum number of options.

So who first played the move 4...a6 in the Slav? In this regard, the article by René Olthof in Yearbook 81 is extremely interesting, in which he refers to the game Reginald Pryce Michell versus Mir Sultan Khan, British Championship 1929.

The first serious opponent, and, therefore, the first person to put the Chebanenko Variation to a serious test, was Nikolay Popov, from whom we have already heard above (incidentally, he also at one time spent a month training me).

Nikolay Popov:

'... And then he developed his variation of the Slav, with 4...a6, a move he was very proud of. Once again, he and I argued over the merits of this line, because the move breaks many of the general rules of opening play. Nowadays this line has become widely-accepted, and even Kasparov devoted a whole chapter to it, in his book *Revolution in the 1970s*.

At a certain level, such as in Moldavian tournaments, this opening scored well. But in 1975, I played two games against Leonid Zaid, and he twice defeated me with the move 5.♙g5. As far as I know, however, nowadays Black is OK in this variation. Also in 1975, I tried the variation against Dorfman, and as early as move 15, he (as White) offered me a draw. I refused and went on to lose. Even so, deep-down, I did not really believe in the Chebanenko System, which to a significant extent was the antithesis of my style.

On the other hand, Victor Gavrikov believed much more in Chebanenko's systems. He lived in a town about 50 km from Kishinev, and every day, he would catch the bus into the capital, to work with Chebanenko. In the early 1980s, Gavrikov had a golden period, first qualifying for the USSR First League, then the Super League, and in one Super League dividing 1-3 places, thereby getting into the Interzonal.'

* * *

It was Victor Gavrikov, the first ‘home-grown’ Moldavian grandmaster, who first gave the Chebanenko Variation its name, and developed its reputation as a serious opening. This was all done in his article in the highly-respected magazine *Shaklmaty v SSSR* in December 1983. It was on the basis of this article that I decided to give a short history of the variation, in this book. I hope readers will find this small historical journey of interest; it can be found at the end of this Introduction.

After the publication of Gavrikov’s article, the variation finally ceased to be purely a Moldavian speciality, and began, at first quietly, and later with greater publicity, to enter the realms of the top of world chess. One of the first practitioners was still a young talent, the 16-year-old Alexey Dreev.

Extract from *School of Chess Excellence 4 – Opening Developments* by Mark Dvoretsky, pages 134-138:

What is Meant by High Class

I hear the speech not of a boy, but of a man.
– Alexander Pushkin

Almost every talented young player can carry out energetic attacks, filled with combinational blows. Such games indicate the player’s talent, but not his maturity or the high class of his play. The truth is that *the class of a player is about all-round versatility, the ability to take independent decisions in the different situations arising during the course of the battle.*

In the chapter ‘How a chess player develops’ I described the preparation of Alexey Dreev, who took the prestigious title of World U-16 Cadet Champion in 1983. The following year in Champigny (France), Alyosha repeated his success and became a double champion. And finally, in the world U-20 championship in Kiljava (Finland), the 15-year old Dreev scored 10/13, to take the silver medal ahead of a host of players several years older than himself (the winner, with 10.5, was Curt Hansen).

Remarkably, Dreev did not lose a single game in any of these three tournaments!

□ **Thorsteins, Karl**

■ **Dreev, Alexey**

World Junior Championship, Kiljava
1984

- | | |
|------------------|----------------|
| 1. d2-d4 | d7-d5 |
| 2. c2-c4 | c7-c6 |
| 3. ♖g1-f3 | ♜g8-f6 |
| 4. ♜b1-c3 | a7-a6!? |

Black chooses a system suggested by the well-known trainer from Kishinev, Vyacheslav Chebanenko. Nowadays it is played regularly by Alexey Shirov, Vladimir Epishin, Julian Hodgson and other well-known grandmasters, but then, it had not yet become fashionable.

When preparing for the world junior championship, Dreev and I decided to widen his opening repertoire, to include several such lesser-known lines. The advantages of this approach are obvious – we would not need to spend so much time studying the new schemes, whilst Dreev’s opponents were unlikely to be well-prepared for them.

Generally speaking, such an approach to one's opening repertoire is questionable, and should not become one's main method, but as a temporary measure when preparing for a specific event, it has its merits.

The first time the system with 4...a6 was tried in the event was the game **Wells – Dreev**. At that moment, both players had 3/3. Their game, although it ended in a quick draw, was quite tense:

5.cxd5 cxd5 6.♟f4 ♘c6 7.♞c1 7.e3!? ♟g4. 7...♘e4! 8.a3!? This move is explained by the variation 8.e3 ♘xc3 9.♞xc3? e5! followed by 10...♟b4. In the game Beliavsky-Tukmakov (USSR Championship, Frunze 1981) White preferred 8.♘e5, but after 8...♘xc3 9.♞xc3 ♟d7 10.♞b3 f6! 11.♘xc6 ♟xc6 12.e3 e6 13.♟d3 ♟e7 14.0-0 ♟f7! Black equalised. 8...♟f5 9.e3 e6 10.♞a4!? f6! 11.♘xe4 ♟xe4 12.♘d2 ♟f5 13.♞xc6!? If 13.♟e2 the game is about even. Instead, the young Englishman strives for complications. 13...bxc6 14.♞xc6+ ♟f7 15.♟xa6 ♟e7?! 16.♟b7 ♞a7 17.0-0 17.♟c7? ♞e8 18.♞b6 ♞d7!. 17...♞a5 18.♘b3 ♞a4 19.♞b6?! The queen exchange leads to a superior ending for White: 19.♞xa4!? ♞xa4 20.♞c1 ♞c4 (20...♞a7 21.♞c7; 20...♟d3 21.♘c5) 21.♞xc4 dxc4 22.♘a5. 19...♟d8 20.♟c7 ♟xc7 21.♞xc7+ ♟g6 22.♞g3+ ♟f7 23.♞c7+ Draw.

Actually, Peter Wells was in slightly too much of a hurry to agree a draw – he could still fight for a win by: 23...♟g6 24.♘c5! ♞a5 25.♞c6! ♞b8 26.b4! (but not immediately 26.♟c8? ♞c7 27.♞e8+ ♟h6) 26...♞xa3 27.♟c8 ♞xb4 28.♟xe6 ♟xe6 29.♞xe6, and White's position remains preferable.

In round 8, Dreev again played the variation, this time against the future bronze medal winner, Karl Thorsteins.

We managed to guess what the opponent would play. It was not hard to imagine that in looking for a weapon against 4...a6, the Icelandic player would rely on the latest *Informant* (it was unlikely that he would be familiar with Gavrikov's recent article in *Shakhmaty v SSSR*, which had served as our main source of information). In *Informant* 36, Tukmakov had annotated a game where he had won as White, and it was this game that Thorsteins decided to follow.

Studying the game **Tukmakov – Bagirov** (USSR 1983), Dreev and I came to the conclusion that Black could achieve satisfactory play. As a result, an interesting opening duel arose in the game against Thorsteins.

5.	♟c1-g5	♘f6-e4
6.	♟g5-f4	♘e4xc3
7.	b2xc3	d5xc4
8.	g2-g3	b7-b5
9.	♟f1-g2	♟c8-b7
10.	♘f3-e5	

This move proves to be the prelude to interesting tactical complications. White goes into them, since otherwise Black will play 10...♘d7 and White's compensation for the pawn is questionable.

10. ... ♜f7-f6!

Black takes up the gauntlet. On 10...♞c8 Tukmakov gives the line 11.♞b1 ♘d7 12.♘xc4! bxc4 13.♞a4 e5 14.dxe5 ♘c5 15.♞xc4, and now it is bad to play 15...♞e6? 16.♞xe6+ fxe6 17.♞xb7.

11. ♘e5xc4!

In the above-mentioned source game, Vladimir Bagirov continued 11...bxc4?! 12.♞b1 e5 13.♞xb7 exf4, and after

14. ♖a4?! ♜c8 15. ♜b6 ♙d6 16. ♜xc4 ♜e7 he managed to beat off the first wave of the attack and obtain a promising position. However, as Tukmakov pointed out, White could play more strongly: 14. ♜b1! ♙e7 (14... ♙d6 15. ♜xg7) 15. ♜e4! ♜d6 16. 0-0 ♜d7 (16... fxg3 17. hxg3 g6 18. ♜fb1 is hardly any better) 17. ♜xc6 ♜xc6 18. ♙xc6 0-0-0 19. ♜fb1 ♙d6 20. ♜a7 with advantage.

Black also has a difficult position after 11...e5?! 12.dxe5 ♜xd1+ 13. ♜xd1 bxc4 14.e6! ♙c8 15. ♜b1.

It turns out that here, just as in the critical position of the game Wells-Dreev, seen earlier, the key to the position is the zwischenzug ...g7-g5!, which improves Black's chances in the subsequent struggle.

11. ... g7-g5!!

12. ♙f4xb8

Many years later, Vishy Anand chose against Dreev 12. ♙e3! bxc4 13. ♜b1 ♜c7 14.h4 with good compensation for the sacrificed piece.

12. ... b5xc4!

Suddenly the white bishop is trapped. How can it sell itself as dearly as possible? Sergey Dolmatov suggested the paradoxical move 13. ♙e5! with the idea of avoiding further exchanges and weakening the enemy king's hiding place on the kingside. For example 13...fxe5 14. ♜b1 ♜c7 15. ♜a4 ♜f7 (or 15... ♜c8 16.dxe5) 16. ♜xc4+ e6 17.d5! exd5 18. ♙xd5+ ♜f6 19.f4!. It is hard to say where White's attacking chances are better, here or in the Anand-Dreev line; only further practical experience can answer this question.

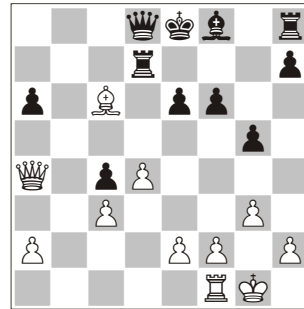
13. ♜a1-b1 ♜a8xb8

14. ♜b1xb7 ♜b8xb7

15. ♙g2xc6+ ♜b7-d7

16. ♜d1-a4 e7-e6

17. 0-0



In his commentary, Tukmakov looked at this variation and continued it as follows: 17... ♜e7 18. ♙xd7 ♜xd7 19. ♜xa6 ♙g7 20. ♜xc4 ♜c8 21. ♜d3. In preparing for this game, we decided that the final position is satisfactory for Black, and we also noticed that he could develop the bishop on a another diagonal: 19... ♜f7!? (instead of 19... ♙g7) 20. ♜b1 ♙e7. However, at the board, Dreev did not blindly follow what we had analysed at home. Instead, he thought further and found the most precise way to develop his pieces.

17. ... ♙f8-d6!

Such decisions show not only good positional understanding, but also the ability to think independently, and belief in one's own ability.

18. ♜a4xa6

White could instead choose 18. ♜b1 ♜e7 19. ♙xd7 ♜xd7 20. ♜xa6 ♜c8 21. ♜b7!? ♜c7 22. ♜xc7 ♜xc7. Now the direct 23.a4? is bad because of 23... ♙b4!! 24.cxb4 c3 25.d5 (25. ♜d3 c2 26. ♜xh7+ ♜d6) 25...exd5 26. ♜d3 c2 27. ♜e3+ ♜d7 28. ♜c1 ♜c4, and the pawn soon promotes. Instead, White

must play 23. ♖b5!. Then it makes sense for Black to harass the enemy king by means of 23...h5! 24.a4 h4 (preparing ...h4-h3 and ...♖b8). If 25. ♔g2, then either the immediate 25...♖b8 26. ♖xc4 ♖b1, or first 25...f5 – in both cases, it is not easy for White to defend.

18. ... ♔e8-f7!

From here, the king can defend the h7 pawn in case of necessity. In the variation 18...♔e7 19. ♕xd7 ♖xd7 20. ♖xc4 ♖b8 (or 20...♖c8) 21. ♖d3 ♔f8 22.c4 the black queen is tied to the pawn instead.

19. ♕c6xd7 ♖d8xd7

20. ♖a6xc4

We have already looked at the position arising after 20. ♖b1 ♖c8 21. ♖b7 ♖c7 22. ♖xc7 ♖xc7, only with the king on e7, where he is slightly better placed. The difference is apparent in the variation 23.a4!? ♕b4?! 24.cxb4 c3 (not 24...♔g7? because of 25.b5 c3 26.b6 ♖c6 27. ♖a7+ ♔g6 28. ♖c7) 25. ♖d3 ♔g7 26. ♖c2 ♖c4 27.b5 (27. ♔f1? ♖xb4 28. ♔e1 ♖b2 29. ♔d1 ♖a1+ 30. ♖c1 ♖xa4+ and 31...♖xd4) 27...♖xd4 28. ♖b3 with a probable draw.

20. ... ♖h8-b8

21. a2-a4

The other possibility was 21. ♖d3 ♔g7 22.c4, as was played nine years later in the game Rashkovsky-Rublevsky (Kurgan 1993). Black will probably win the a2 pawn, but it is hard to say if this will give him realistic winning chances. The white pawn chain h2-g3-f2-e3-d4-c5 restricts the activity of the black bishop.

21. ... ♖d7-c8

22. ♖c4-d3 ♔f7-g7

23. f2-f4?

Here, at last, is a positional error. White is afraid of 23...♖b3 and prepares to defend

the pawn by ♖f3. However, the text move weakens the king's position and gives Black the chance for an attack. He should have played to use the a-pawn: 23. ♖a1 ♖b3 24.a5, or 23.c4 ♖a6 (this is the point of 21...♖c8) 24. ♖d1 ♖xa4 25.c5.

23. ... g5xf4

24. g3xf4

Subsequently, Dreev confidently realised his extra material.

(End of extract)

So it was that the wind got in the sails. After Popov, Gavrikov and Dreev, many other players started playing the a6-Slav: Milorad Knezevic, Vladimir Bagirov, and, of course, Chebanenko's pupils – Victor Komliakov, German Titov, Georgy Orlov, Vasily Sanduliak, Doru Rogozenko... Your humble servant played his first game with the variation in 1989.

Even so, with Megabase showing just 100 games in the variation, the 1980s are more like just the prelude to the full symphony of the 1990s, where we find some 2000 games. Probably the most interesting time for the variation was the turn of the third millennium. The move 4...a6 attracted both question marks and 'dubious' signs. Variations were 'closed' (for instance, the move 5. ♕g5) and new ones opened. Amongst the top 10 players, the first to include the variation in his repertoire was Alexey Shirov. He played fearlessly, with an abundance of risk-taking and passion, and I decided to introduce my friend to Vyacheslav Andreevich, who in turn, via me, showed Shirov many of the subtleties of the variation.

Thanks to Shirov, the Chebanenko Variation began to appear in all of the capitals

of the chess world – Linares, Biel, Tilburg, Monaco. To the honour of both Shirov and Chebanenko himself, the variation achieved a 50% score, 14-14. And this was against the very best players in the world.

Shirov, along with Chebanenko's pupils, like me, Komliakov and Rogozenko, both promoted the name of Chebanenko, and at the same time influenced other, independent schools of players, taking up the 4...a6 line.

One who greatly enriched the theory of the variation was Ivan Sokolov, who not only won many fine games in the line, with some beautiful combinative blows, but also brought to it a dose of aggression. I was not surprised when, after a pause, Ivan returned to the variation and again scored extremely well with it. It is no coincidence that in the test positions, you will find a number of examples from Sokolov's games.

Of the generation of Dreev, Sokolov and Shirov, two others who played the variation are Bareev and Khalifman. But the only ones who made it a permanent feature of their repertoires were all born in the 1970s, and funnily enough, were all called Sergey – Movsesian, Rublevsky and Volkov. Apart from the a6-variation, they have little in common. Movsesian is sharp, temperamental and talented (in 2008, he qualified for the A group at Corus), Rublevsky – strong and confident, Volkov – original and creative, but they all found something they could relate to in the a6-system. Incidentally, Rublevsky (with some help from me!) has also been successful with another of Chebanenko's ideas, namely on the white side of the Sicilian.

In the new millennium, the line started appearing at every level. After its successful use by Kasparov (in games against Kramnik, Ivanchuk and Khalifman), it was taken up by Morozevich, Bacrot and the young Carlsen. At a certain moment, the Moldavian Variation (as it is sometimes also known) also received a helping hand from the Bulgarian school. First it was the highly experienced Kiril Georgiev, and then world champions Antoaneta Stefanova and Veselin Topalov.

As well as Gavrikov's article, a significant role in the popularisation of the variation was played by the New In Chess Yearbook Series. Time after time, it carried articles devoted to the variation. And for every article, the line had another name! It was the 'chameleon', the 'modern a6', the Chebanenko, and simply 'the a6 Slav'. Largely thanks to these articles, people began to start believing in the variation. In preparing this book, I of course consulted not only these articles, but also the only book devoted to the line, Grandmaster Flear's 1983 publication *The ...a6 Slav*. Despite the high quality of all the above material, I nonetheless decided to put pen to paper.

It may appear that everything has already been played and written about the variation. Nothing of the sort! Recently, Kamsky has produced some new ideas, and again White must search for an advantage. Every time one prepares against the a6-system, one experiences a definite feeling of discomfort. I have had problems preparing as White against Malakhov (another major practitioner of the variation), Movsesian and Stefanova.

Nikolay Popov:

– In the mid-1980s, I moved away from Kishinev and Chebanenko acquired some new pupils – Bologan, Rogozenko, Nevednichy, Iordachescu...

By nature, Chebanenko enjoyed excellent health. But chess obsessed him, and he could spend hours on end absorbed in analysis, without even getting up from his sofa. His favourite pose was lying on the sofa, smoking, and constantly analysing some position or other. He smoked a Moldavian brand of cigarette called 'Li-ana', which were extremely strong and rough. The first thing he did after waking up each day was to light up. I remember that I once tried to talk him into taking some exercise:

– You never go anywhere! You should go for walks!

He asked:

– What for?

– Because when you walk, it gets your heart pumping and the blood flowing.

– My heart pumps faster when I have a cigarette. It's just the same!

He died aged just 55, his health wrecked. After he was divorced from his wife, he lived alone, and never looked after himself properly. I remember that he used to buy some sort of strange and disgusting preserve, made from whale meat, which he would eat with eggs! He did not eat like a normal person, with a first course, and a second course, etc. Occasionally, he would visit his mother and eat a decent meal, but generally, his diet left a great deal to be desired. Eggs and preserve – and that was about it.

I was told that he became ill in 1995 and was taken into hospital. They tested his blood pressure and did various other

tests, and it became clear that he was very ill. He was put on a drip. Of course, at that moment, he wasn't able to smoke. Two days later, the doctors repeated their tests, and could not believe their eyes. In 48 hours, his system had completely cleaned itself out! Unfortunately, after this experience, Chebanenko came to believe that any time he wished, he could put his health right in a couple of days. But of course, this was just an illusion, and he died of a heart attack two years later. Our mutual friend Slava Kokhlov told me that he was at home with Chebanenko at the time. The latter stood up, went into the bathroom, then suddenly cried out and that was that. An ambulance was called, but it was already too late...

... on that very day, 1 August 1997, I was supposed to fly from Moscow to Kazan, on business. But for the first time in my life, the flight was cancelled because of a technical problem with the plane, and I had to return home. There I received the sad news from Komliakov. We went to the funeral together. But it was a silent farewell, I had missed the chance to say goodbye to him. Maybe that is why, for a long time afterwards, I used to dream about Vyacheslav Andreevich, and he used to appear to me, alive, talking to me, offering advice, asking how I was...

The following year, thanks to my brother and several Moldavian chess enthusiasts, we managed to organise the first Chebanenko Memorial, which was won brilliantly by Alexander Morozevich, who scored 8.5 out of 9. He went on to win six tournaments in a row, and entered the

world elite. The memorials became an annual event, but quickly deteriorated into a modest tournament, offering only an IM norm. But we believe that the day will come when famous GMs will once again come to Kishinev, to celebrate the memory of the great trainer. He may be gone, but his chess ideas are very much alive, as the book now before you testifies!

Instead of a Guide-Book

The first real guide to the system was grand-master Victor Gavrikov's article 'A New System in the Slav Defence', published in Shakhmaty v SSSR No. 12, 1983. I think the reader will find it interesting to see how the theory of the variation looked a quarter of a century ago. In italics you will find comments by the present author, updating for the present-day state of theory in the Chebanenko System.

In our day, it is difficult to invent a wholly new opening system. Nonetheless, the search goes on, and I would like to acquaint the reader with one such unusual system.

- | | |
|-----------|---------|
| 1. d2-d4 | d7-d5 |
| 2. c2-c4 | c7-c6 |
| 3. ♘g1-f3 | ♘g8-f6 |
| 4. ♘b1-c3 | a7-a6!? |



The inventor of this continuation is the Moldavian master V. Chebanenko. Several of his other ideas have gained general acceptance. I could mention for example his ideas in the Sicilian Defence: 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘b5 d6 6.♗f4 e5 7.♗e3 ♘f6 8.♗g5 ♗e6 9.♘1c3 a6 10.♗xf6 gxf6 11.♘a3 d5!. And in the King's Indian: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.g3 ♗g7 4.♗g2 d6 5.♘c3 0-0 6.♘f3 ♘bd7 7.0-0 e5 8.e4 c6 9.h3 ♖b6 10.♖e1 exd4 11.♘xd4 – 11...♘e8!, which was first seen in the game Artamonov-Chebanenko (1968).

The system under discussion here first began to be worked out in 1972. Later it was subjected to practical tests, initially in Moldavian, and later in All-Union tournaments. A certain amount of material has thus been gathered, which I aim to summarise here.

I

5. c4xd5

One of the main lines, since in the Exchange Variation of the Slav, the move a6 looks like a loss of a tempo.

5. ... c6xd5

6. ♗c1-f4

This position is often reached by a different move-order: 1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.cxd5 cxd5 4.♘c3 ♘f6 5.♗f4 ♘c6 6.e3. A typical example was the game Zhitkus-Chebanenko (VI USSR People's Spartakiad 1975): 6...a6 7.♗d3 ♗g4 8.f3 ♗h5 9.♘ge2 e6 10.0-0 ♗e7 11.♗g3 0-0 (11...♗g6 is also good) 12.♘f4 ♗g6 13.♘xg6 hxg6, and Black had no problems.

6. ... ♘b8-c6

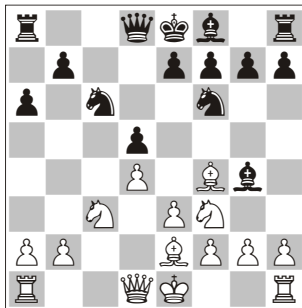
7. e2-e3

Magerramov, against Popov (Beltsi 1979) played 7.♘e5. There followed 7...e6 8.e3

♞xe5 9.dxe5 ♞e4!? 10.♙d3?! ♞xc3 11.bxc3 ♙d7 12.♞c2 ♙c6 with a splendid position for Black.

In the game Beliaevsky-Gavrikov (49th USSR Championship, Frunze 1981) White preferred 7.♞c1, but after 7...♞e4!? 8.♞e5 (or 8.e3 ♞xc3 9.♞xc3? e5!; 9.bxc3 ♙g4) 8...♞xc3 9.♞xc3 ♙d7 10.♞b3 f6! 11.♞xc6 (worse is 11.♞xd7 ♞xd7, threatening ...e7-e5) 11...♙xc6 12.e3 e6 13.♙d3 ♙e7 14.0-0 ♖f7! Black's chances were no worse.

7. ... ♙c8-g4
8. ♙f1-e2



On 8.h3 both 8...♙h5, and 8...♙xf3 are possible. Also seen is 8.♙d3 e6 9.h3 ♙h5 10.g4 ♙g6 11.♙xg6 hxg6 12.♞e5 ♞c8 13.♖f1 ♙e7, and Black did not experience any difficulties (Vladimirov-Gavrikov, Moscow 1981).

Instead of 9.h3, worse is 9.♞b3 because of 9...♙xf3! 10.gxf3 ♞a5 11.♞c2 ♞c8 12.0-0 ♙e7 with the better prospects (Azmaiparashvili-Itkis, Dinamo Championship 1980).

8. ... e7-e6
9. 0-0 ♙f8-e7
10. ♞a1-c1

Nothing is promised by 10.♞e5, after which in the game Platonov-Gavrikov (Beltsi 1977) there followed: 10...♙xe2

11.♞xc6 ♙xd1 12.♞xd8 ♞xd8 13.♞fxd1 ♞c8 14.♞ac1 0-0 with a quick draw.

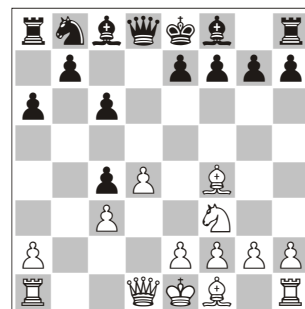
10. ... 0-0
11. a2-a3 ♞a8-c8
12. ♞c3-a4 ♞f6-e4

Black has sufficient counterplay.

The theory of this popular variation grew continually, with both sides looking for improvements on almost every move. I will mention in particular the plan connected with developing White's king's knight to e2: 3.♞c3 ♞f6 4.cxd5 cxd5 5.♙f4 ♞c6 6.e3 a6 7.♙d3 or 7.♞c1 followed by ♞ge2, f2-f3 and later, depending on circumstances, either g2-g4 or e3-e4. Personally, it seems to me that the most unpleasant plan for Black is the set-up 7.♞c1, as tried by Beliaevsky in the above-mentioned game with Gavrikov. Even so, the critical positions remain the same, and the assessment 'Black has sufficient counterplay' has survived the test of time

II

5. ♙c1-g5 ♞f6-e4
6. ♙g5-f4
Nothing better is apparent.
6. ... ♞e4xc3
7. b2xc3 d5xc4



This position was met in the game Zaid-Popov (Daugavpils 1974), where

there followed 8.e4 b5 9.♘e5!? g6 10.♗f3 f6 11.♗g3! with the initiative for White.

The move 9...♙e6, followed by ...f7-f6, deserves attention, where it is hard for White to justify the sacrifice in concrete terms.

In the later game Tukmakov-Bagirov (VIII USSR Spartakiad 1983) White preferred...

8. g2-g3

... but after 8...b5 9.♙g2 ♙b7 10.♘e5 f6! 11.♘xc4?! bxc4 12.♖b1 e5! 13.♖xb7 exf4 did not obtain sufficient compensation for the sacrificed material.

The move 5.♙g5 was at first regarded as a virtual refutation of the Chebanenko System, but nowadays is rarely seen. The main reason is the move shown by Gavrikov in his notes - 9...♙e6, after which it is very difficult for White to show that he has sufficient compensation for the pawn. Also not bad is 9...♗a5, and even the previously rejected move 9...g6 was rehabilitated, with the help of the computer. White in turn has tried to strengthen his play with 6.♙h4, 6.e3 and even 6.h4!?, but without particular success.

III

5. e2-e3

The natural continuation; White aims to develop his kingside pieces quickly.

5. ... b7-b5

6. c4xd5

On 6.c5 a good reply is 6...♙g4, followed by ...♘bd7 and ...e7-e5.

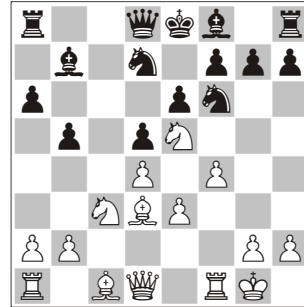
6. ... c6xd5

7. ♘f3-e5

In the event of 7.♙d3, both 7...♙g4 and 7...e6 are possible, leading to positions examined later.

7. ... e7-e6

8. ♙f1-d3 ♘b8-d7
9. f2-f4 ♙c8-b7
10. 0-0



This position was reached in the games Kharitonov-Gavrikov (Moscow 1981) and Tukmakov-Gavrikov (49th USSR Championship, Frunze). The weakening of the e4-square gives Black adequate counterplay. These games continued as follows:

Kharitonov-Gavrikov: 10...♖c8 11.a3 ♙e7 12.f5! ♗c7! 13.♘xd7 ♗xd7 14.♗f3 g6! 15.fxg6 fxg6 16.♙d2 0-0 Black's chances are not worse.

Tukmakov-Gavrikov: 10...♘e4 11.a4!? b4 12.♘xe4 dxe4 13.♙c4 ♙e7 14.a5 0-0 15.♘xd7 ♗xd7 16.♗e2 f5 17.♙d2 ♖fc8 18.♖fc1 ♙d5! with equality.

This line has seen theory develop especially fast, and the developing move 5.e3 is considered one of the principal replies to the Chebanenko System. Both the line mentioned by Gavrikov (6.c5) and one not mentioned by him (6.b3) deserve separate chapters, so considerable is the information available on them. In concluding his short article, Victor Gavrikov summarised things as follows:

I believe that the material presented above gives a good impression of the character

of the new system. Without doubt, subsequent practice will bring improvements for both sides, but one can already conclude that Chebanenko's idea deserves attention.

It certainly does! A quarter of a century later, whole new systems have grown up, which have been developed by the best players and analysts. White has tried all of the following moves: 5.♖c2, 5.♖b3, 5.h3!?, 5.g3, 5.♙f4, 5.a4, 5.♟e5, 5.c5, but in every case, Black has sooner or later found reliable responses. The early knight jump into the centre has caused Black to shed a fair bit of blood, and he has had to rack his brains over how to meet the Catalan-style 5.g3. The battle between 'sword and shield' continues in almost every serious tournament, and the Chebanenko System remains popular with black players who want a solid position with counter-chances. The system still lives and grows, as this book will show.

(End of article)

I should add a word or two about things which are not covered in the book, but which may be of interest to practical players. The real Chebanenko System starts after 4...a6 and does not include lines arising after White's other fourth moves. Thus, lines such as 4.♖c2 and 4.e3 after 3.♟f3, and also 4.e3 after 3.♟c3. A detailed analysis of these lines would require another book, and for the moment, I would just offer the following brief advice:

After 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.e3 Black is best advised to continue 4...♙f5 5.♟c3 e6 6.♟h4 ♙g6 after which he has a very solid position, which does not require deep opening knowledge.

The picture after 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.♖c2 is completely different. Here Black can



bring the white queen into the centre by means of 4...dxc4 5.♖xc4 ♙f5 6.♟c3 e6 with good play for Black.

The other way to avoid the Chebanenko System is by 3.♟c3 ♟f6 4.e3 after which Vladimir Andreevich considered the move 4...a6! as adequate. If White then sticks to his guns and continues 5.♖c2 (5.♟f3 transposes back into lines covered in the book, beginning with 5.e3), then Black does best to answer ...e6 followed by ...c5. The white queen turns out to have gone to c2 rather prematurely. For absolute confidence, I would recommend you to consult a database, collect together the games of the strongest players in this line, and study them, before going into battle.

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