

Your Variations

Trends & Opinions

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HOT! = a trendy line or an important discovery

SOS = an early deviation

GAMBIT = a pawn sacrifice in the opening

Opening Highlights



Wesley So

Flexibility and deep understanding characterize Wesley So's opening play. Without seeming to prepare every line to the death, the American star finds subtle solutions to the slightest opening problems. A case in point is his **direct remedy to Black's structural issues in the Open Catalan**. So's 14...c5 led to a masterpiece against the talented Jeffery Xiong, significantly contributing to the former Filipino's US title. It's analysed by So himself in Vilela's Survey on page 136.

Daniel Fridman

Every grandmaster wants to avoid Berlin Walls and Petroffs as White. There is one probate way to do this: **play the Bishop's Opening with 2. ♗c4!** At least, that is what three of Daniel Fridman's formidable opponents considered at the European Championship in Minsk. As a result, Vladimir Fedoseev, Alexander Motylev and Igor Kovalenko scored only a miserable half point, and Fridman came fourth. Read the Latvo-German grandmaster's success story on page 91.

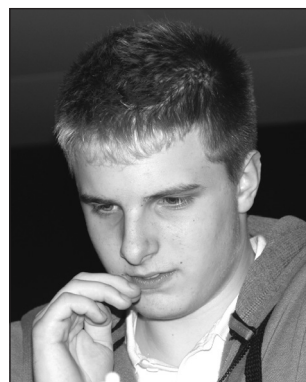


Boris Gelfand

When Najdorf fan Boris Gelfand played **the dubious-looking thrust 8...d5 in the Accelerated Dragon** against Anish Giri as well as Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, watchers wondered whether something had been put in the Israeli top GM's meals in Moscow. However, moves condemned by experts are only bad until the next improvement. Read Carsten Hansen's Survey on page 41 and find out how Gelfand got the idea to play 8...d5, and how good it really is.

Richard Rapport

If a grandmaster game features an early ...h7-h5 by Black, there's a good chance that Richard Rapport is involved. Against Pentala Harikrishna in Wijk aan Zee, the Hungarian used this move to **put the question to the Short Variation against the Caro-Kann**. The idea was known, but no-one is able to spot its dynamic possibilities like Rapport. One move later he already came up with a devastating trick! Read Krzysztof Panczyk's and Jacek Ilczuk's thoughts on this sharp line on page 71.





Levon Aronian

A Levon Aronian in good form is an exceptionally subtle opening player. With white, the Armenian seems to have a special relationship with the square c2. See in Viacheslav Ikonnikov's Survey on page 221 how **the modest-looking 6. ♖c2 in the Réti caused Arkadij Naiditsch problems** at the Grenke Classic, and see also Bologan's Opening Bulletin (page 24) for Aronian's 10. ♙c2! in his sensational win over Magnus Carlsen at Stavanger.

Benjamin Bok

The young Dutchman also performed excellently at Minsk with an unbeaten 7½ out of 11 against strong opposition and qualification for the World Cup. After three initial wins a series of 2700+ players didn't even get close to giving Bok any headaches. In the last round, the 22-year-old **used a 6. ♙e3 Najdorf to squeeze Denis Khismatullin to death** with the new concept of 11. ♖h4!. Bok wrote a Survey on the line which you can read on page 36.



David Cummings

Our new author has written two tomes on the English Opening and provides regular updates on ChessPublishing.com. As there is a lot to write on 1.c4 these days, David Cummings' expertise is very welcome. The Canadian IM devotes a Survey to **Evgeny Tomashevsky's tricky move 6. ♙c4 in the Symmetrical English with 3...d5**. This intricate line is currently popular with top grandmasters – see Cummings' explanations starting on page 211.

Robert Hungaski

The American GM, who is active as a player as well as a trainer, specializes in 1.e4 e5 openings from the black side. Hungaski's first contribution to the Yearbook is a Survey on **a baffling new idea for White in the Italian Game**. Instead of moving his queen's knight via f1 to g3 as happened in countless games, white players like Carlsen, Anand, Kramnik, Caruana and Nepomniachtchi use a new route by playing a2-a4 and putting the beast on a3. Read all about this new vogue on page 83.



Closed or Open?

by Victor Bologan



Victor Bologan, a top grandmaster and writer of several best-selling chess books, scans the most recent top events for new tendencies in opening play.

The tournament in Stavanger once again assembled an exceptionally strong lineup. The fact that the World Champion Carlsen scored -1 says a great deal. But we are interested in which openings are currently in fashion, which lines are topical, where White has problems and how to solve them.

From this point of view in Norway there was a clash of two conceptions – closed and open. To the first we will assign all first moves apart from e2-e4. And to the second, strictly e2-e4.

+5 against +1 (and that advantage was gained in a Sicilian) is a result that, on the face, demonstrates the obvious superiority of the solid closed approach! It was a combination of Aronian's brilliant form and native talent, together with a divining of the opening trends, that brought the Armenian grandmaster a brilliant and unequivocal victory in the tournament. We are talking about wins over the first two in the world rating list. First the World Champion Magnus Carlsen was defeated.

Levon Aronian Magnus Carlsen

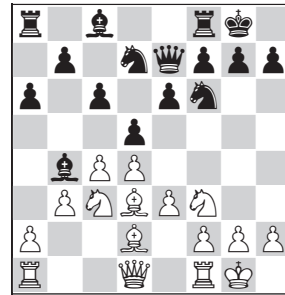
Stavanger 2017 (4)

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 e6 5.e3 a6

It would be interesting to know why after 1.e4 Magnus does not permit himself such liberties, but strictly plays for equality by 1...e5 ?

6.b3 ♙b4 7.♙d2 ♘bd7 8.♙d3 0-0 9.0-0 ♖e7

In the last World Rapidplay Championship Carlsen played 9...♙d6 10.♖c1 h6 11.♗c2 ♖e8 12.h3 ♗e7 13.c5 ♙c7 14.e4 e5 15.♗fe1 ♗d8 16.exd5 cxd5 17.dxe5 ♘xe5 18.♘xe5 ♖xe5 19.♖xe5 ♙xe5 (Flores-Carlsen, Doha 2016) 20.♖e1 ♙c7 21.♘e2 ♙d7 22.♘d4±.



10. ♙c2!

A novelty. The move does not look like anything special, but if it is capable of embarrassing the World Champion himself, it deserves an exclamation mark. Before this White tried 10.♖e1 a5 11.♘e2 b6 12.♘g3 ♙b7 13.♗c1 ♖ac8 14.♙xb4 axb4 15.a4 c5± Matlakov-Andreikin, Sochi ch-RUS rapid 2016, and 10.♗c2 e5 11.♘xe5 ♘xe5 12.dxe5 ♗xe5 13.♘xd5

♞xd5 14.cxd5 ♕xd2 15.♖xd2 ♖xd5=
Kempinski-Markowski, Czechia tt
2016/17.

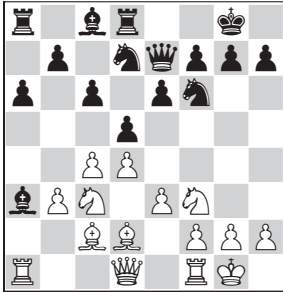
10...♖d8 11.a3!

It begins.

11...♕xa3

11...♕d6 12.e4 dxe4 13.♞xe4 ♞xe4

14.♕xe4.



12.♖xa3!

The exchange sacrifice theme was very topical in Stavanger, and had it not been for the format restriction of this article I would have happily investigated it.

12...♖xa3 13.c5!

Closing the door! White is the exchange and a pawn down, but it is Black who has problems, the main one being the position of his queen.

13...b6 14.b4

14.♞b1 ♖a2 (14...♖b2 15.♕c3 ♖a2
16.♞bd2 a5 17.♖c1+-) 15.♖c1 bxc5
16.♞c3 ♖a5 17.♞xd5 ♖b5 18.♞c7 ♖b8
19.♞xa8 ♖xa8 20.♕a5 ♖e8 21.dxc5 ♞xc5
22.♕xh7+ ♞xh7 23.♖xc5±

14...♞e4

14...♖b2 15.♞a4 ♖a2 16.♞c3 ♖b2

15.♞xe4 dxe4 16.♕xe4 ♖b8

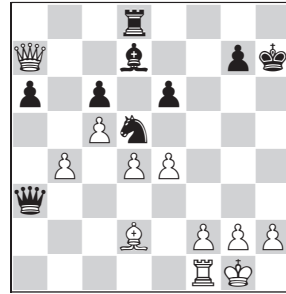
And now the thematic

**17.♕xh7+! ♞xh7 18.♞g5+ ♞g8 19.♖h5
♞f6 20.♖xf7+ ♞h8 21.♖c7!**

Otherwise White has problems.

21...♕d7 22.♞f7+ ♞h7 23.♞xd8 ♖c8

24.♖xb6 ♞d5 25.♖a7 ♖xd8 26.e4



White has very strong compensation for the sacrificed piece, but the win is still a long way off.

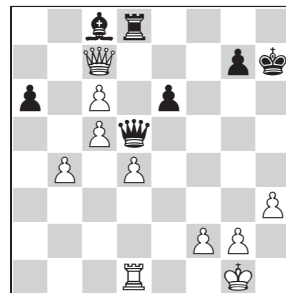
26...♖d3

The knight should have been preserved:
26...♞f6! 27.♕g5 ♖xb4 28.e5 ♞g6! 29.h4
♖xd4 30.♖b6 ♕c8! (cleverly linking the
major pieces) 31.exf6 gxf6 32.♕e3 ♖d5
33.f3 e5 34.♖e1 ♕f5 35.♖xa6 e4 36.fxe4
♕xe4 with good chances of a draw, but
this is all fine when you have ample time
at home and with a good computer to
hand.

27.exd5 ♖xd2 28.♖c7 ♖g5 29.dxc6

Here the engine much prefers 29.d6
♖f6 30.h3 ♖h4 31.♖d1± followed by the
switching of the rook to the kingside.

29...♕c8 30.h3 ♖d5 31.♖d1



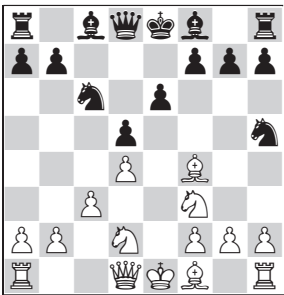
31...e5??

One can understand Magnus's desire to finally free his bishop on c8, but he should have been patient for a little longer and activated his rook: 31...♖f8
32.♖d6 ♖b3! 33.♖f1 (33.♖xf8 ♖xd1+
34.♞h2 ♖xd4 35.♖xc8 ♖f4+ =) 33...♞g8

Fighting the London

by Vidit Gujrathi

- | | | |
|----|------|------|
| 1. | d4 | ♘f6 |
| 2. | ♗f3 | e6 |
| 3. | ♙f4 | d5 |
| 4. | e3 | c5 |
| 5. | c3 | ♞c6 |
| 6. | ♞bd2 | cxd4 |
| 7. | exd4 | ♞h5 |



In today's computer world, there is a trend to play lines that are not very heavily analysed. The London System is currently the most popular of these. Many top players often play it, e.g. Kamsky, but when Carlsen started playing the system, it suddenly gained momentum.

I feel the London System is a very correct opening in itself. White develops his pieces to their natural squares and has no weaknesses in his position. Our current topic of discussion, the position after 7...♞h5, has been gaining popularity these days. It is a way for Black to unbalance things and has been quite successful in practice, so I decided to take a closer look at it.

The point of this move is to free the square d6 for Black's bishop. If Black manages to play ...♙d6 and ...0-0, he seems to have no problems.

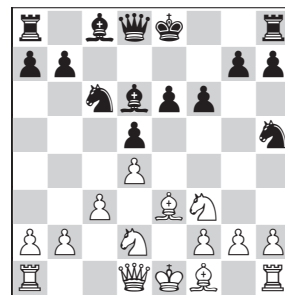
There are three main ways for White to react:

Harmless

I am surprised to see lot of players opting for 8.♙g3. White gives up his bishop, allowing Black to obtain the bishop pair. He does get the open h-file in return, but he can hardly make use of it. Ju Wenjun, who has faced this three times, continued with set-ups like ...♙e7 or ...g7-g6 and ♙e7. Although these are also completely fine, I feel that with the most natural set-up, including the immediate ...g7-g6/...♙g7, Black can get a good game.

Provoking and retreating

In order to 'punish' Black, white players have gone for 8.♙g5 in order to provoke 8...f6 and then return the bishop to e3. Although this takes the f6-square away from the h5-knight, it also gives Black some added flexibility. For example, after ...♙d6, ...0-0- and ...♞e8 he can play for ideas like ...g7-g5 and ...e6-e5. The main move after 9.♙e3 ♙d6

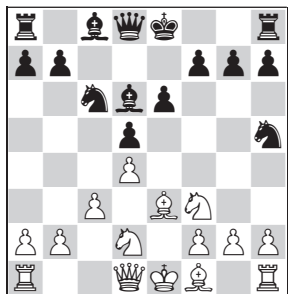


is 10.g3. The idea is to develop the king's bishop to d3 or g2 and prevent the black

knight from coming to f4. After some analysis I came to the conclusion that both ♖d3 and ♗g2 hardly pose Black any problems. In some games Black even took over the initiative. However, Karjakin played 10. ♖b5 in two recent games, scoring convincing wins over Grischuk and Nakamura. The simple idea is to develop the bishop without allowing the annoying ...♗f4 manoeuvre. In both the above-mentioned games, Black played inaccurately and ended up worse. I think that with a clever move order, Black should get a completely fine game. With the novelty 13...♗e8 in the position from the game Karjakin-Nakamura, Black will retain a more flexible game.

The immediate retreat

In quite a number of games, White played 8. ♗e3 immediately. Although this doesn't give Black the added flexibility with the f6/e6-pawn structure, it does allow him to withdraw the knight to f6 after 8... ♗d6.



If Black manages this, he will have a very easy game. White needs to act quickly if he wants to prove an opening advantage. He has two options at his disposal:

A) The popular 9. ♗e5

After 9. ♗e5 g6 White has many options, the most testing one being 10.g4!?. Black needs to be quite accurate in this line, but if he is, he will be completely fine.



Ju Wenjun

The pawn sacrifice 10.g4 ♗g7 11.h4! is very critical, but since this was played in the game Kamsky-Nakamura, it has lost its surprise value. Nakamura very convincingly showed how Black should react in this line.

B) The new 9.g3

This was played in the recent game Grischuk-Nakamura at the Paris GCT. In this game, Nakamura played inaccurately and was worse throughout. But because it was a rapid game, Grischuk later managed to blunder away all his advantage and even lost. My suggestion is the normal-looking move 10... ♗f6N instead of 10... f5. Unlike in the lines with ...f7-f6, Black doesn't need to keep the knight hanging on h5 here. I feel that after 10... ♗f6 White has no trace of an advantage.

Conclusion

In my analyses so far I haven't been able to find any advantage for White. In practice, too, Black has obtained good results. In the few lines in which White won some games, Black can easily improve; see for example Karjakin-Nakamura in the Game Section. I believe this line is going to get even more popular, and now the ball is definitely in White's court!