

**The Modernized Reti,
a Complete Repertoire
for White**

Second extended edition 2018 by Thinkers Publishing
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All sales or enquiries should be directed to Thinkers Publishing, 9850 Landegem, Belgium.

Email: info@thinkerspublishing.com
Website: www.thinkerspublishing.com

Managing Editor: Romain Edouard

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Proofreading: Ian Marks

Graphic Artist: Philippe Tonnard

Cover Design: Iwan Kerkhof

Backcover Picture: Pierre Textoris (CAPECHECS)

Production: BESTinGraphics

ISBN: 9789492510365

D/2018/13730/18

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for White**

Adrien Demuth

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Key to Symbols Used

!	a good move	+–	White has a decisive advantage
?	a weak move	–+	Black has a decisive advantage
!!	an excellent move	→	with an attack
??	a blunder	↑	with an initiative
!?	an interesting move	↔	with counterplay
?!	a dubious move	Δ	with the idea of
□	only move	△	better is
=	equality	≤	worse is
∞	unclear position	N	novelty
±	White stands slightly better	+	check
∓	Black stands slightly better	#	mate
±	White has a serious advantage	∞	with compensation for the sacrificed material
∓	Black has a serious advantage		

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Preface

Contrary to what critical pessimists might say, the Reti opening is an ambitious weapon for White. By avoiding the main theoretical debates, White tries to reach an unbalanced position from an early stage of the game, with many different plans available. This is exactly what I found attractive when I started to play the Reti.

Because, of course, I didn't always play the Reti. At first, I was a pure 1.d4 player, but on numerous occasions, during my preparation, I felt as if I was stuck and caught in a dead end, for instance when I had to investigate very complicated lines such as you encounter in the Slav Defense, and in many others as well. I thought that I was far from getting any advantage in these openings, and even if I could manage, the positions reached were very classical, and my opponents most likely understood them well. That's why I started to play 1.♘f3 from time to time, but at first without knowing much theory. It really came as a breath of fresh air to my games, and I enjoyed it. In 2013, I decided to go one step further and build a complete repertoire for my games with 1.♘f3. I did that with my friend, IM Romain Picard. We were in the same spirit (even if he is a 1.e4 player, we found much common ground with our Reti). Of course, when you leave the center to your opponent, you must be very careful not to end up worse after the opening, but I was satisfied with most of the work we did together.

About one year ago, Romain Edouard offered me the opportunity to write this book. It was a real challenge for me. There was no real book available with a complete repertoire for the Reti. Even more challenging, some recently published books included the Reti in refutable 'side lines' for White, but I have always been confident that I could manage to overturn these opinions and write an interesting book with many new lines and underestimated possibilities.

My first principle was, even if White is playing a rather 'slow' opening and doesn't take full control over the center, that he shouldn't leave Black's hands free by allowing him to play both ...d5 and ...c5 or ...d5 and ...e5 (you won't meet many lines where ...e5 is played by Black). If Black can manage that, I believe he will hardly be worse. That's why I decided to concentrate on the different move orders where White plays 1.♘f3 and 2.c4 against most black moves, putting immediate pressure on d5. It's also why I consider the most critical debate in this book to be the 'Advance Variation', where Black plays 2...d4, because he will try to take some space, following up with 3...c5, heading for a reversed Benoni.

In most of these cases, I have been looking for lines clearly in keeping with the Reti spirit, but I sometimes transposed into some 1.d4 lines when I felt that it was needed or clearly the best choice. So the first point is that I have chosen lines where White plays a kingside fianchetto in most cases (especially when Black starts with 1...d5), and this first fianchetto is often followed by another, if possible. My goal was to reach a middlegame full of subtle resources where White has various ways to react in the center, and his main weapon would be his pair of powerful bishops.

It also seemed important to mention that your opponent might not feel that confident in these kinds of middlegames that he might not be so used to meeting. He might also feel that 'everything is playable against such an opening', but that would be a rather naive and dangerous way of reasoning.

Recently, most of the top grandmasters have included the Reti in their repertoire. It is not necessarily their main weapon, but we can't say that players such as Kramnik, Aronian, Grischuk, and even Carlsen (to name a few), play it 'only rarely', and that is an excellent sign.

Our present book aims at providing you with a complete Reti repertoire for White. The only variations I haven't covered in detail are those few which transpose quickly into other main lines that are not related to the Reti, such as the Maroczy or the King's Indian (although I have offered an alternative). Of course, I have explained these different transpositions and suggested different types of set-up for you to choose from. When I felt it was needed, I analyzed thoroughly, explaining all the main plans in detail.

My aim was to write a book which would be helpful to players of all strengths, from club player to strong grandmaster, who want to start playing the Reti or improve their understanding of it. It has been a difficult though enjoyable task, but I think I have achieved my goal!

I hope you will enjoy reading it, and it would be great if you can score some nice wins and have excellent results with our 'Modernized Reti'!

Adrien Demuth
Barcelona, November 2017

Many thanks to my good friend Pablo Ollier for his help with this second edition.

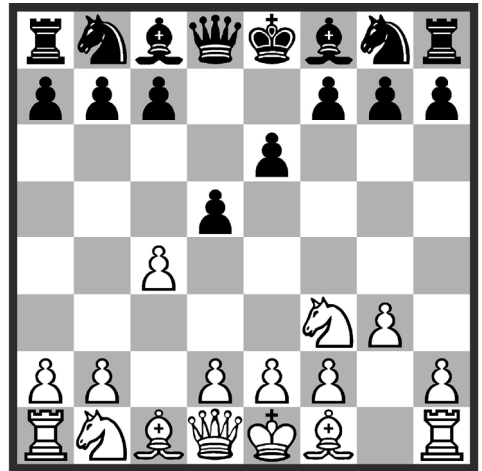
Part I: Neo-Catalan

1.  f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3



Early Deviations

1. ♘f3 d5 2. c4 e6 3. g3



Chapter guide

Chapter 1 – Early Deviations

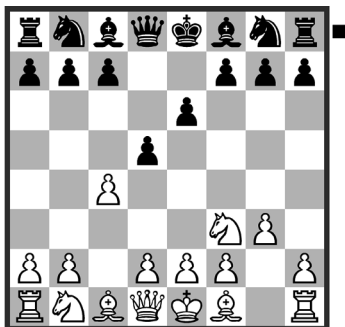
1. ♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3

a) 3...-- 13

b) 3... ♘f6 4. ♗g2 ♘bd7 17

a) 3...--

1. Nf3 d5 2. c4 e6 3. g3



Position after: 3. g3

We are only at the beginning of the theory of the Neo-Catalan, which is the equivalent of the Queen's Gambit Declined set-up for Black, but we aim for a 'Modernized Reti' system for White. Before entering into various variations that we can consider as being the main lines, we will take a look at different set-ups starting from the third or fourth move. Many possibilities have no real independent value, as they will most probably transpose into the main lines, but we can try to be exhaustive about the other ideas. It seems fair to say that most of the lines that are presented in this chapter are rather dubious and we can be quite happy to meet them.

3... Nf6

This is obviously the main move. Let's see other possibilities and possible transpositions to other chapters:

A) 3... g6 This doesn't seem logical. It's even against the principles we all know (don't put all your pawns on the same-colored squares, otherwise it will leave many holes in the position), but at least it prevents us from playing b3 so easily and reaching a Reti set-up with a double fianchetto. 4. Og2 Og7 5. 0-0 Ne7 6. d4 0-0 7. Wc2 ?! This seems to be the best way to defend the center properly. 7... Nbc6 8. Td1 b6



Position after: 8... b6

And here I prefer to follow another path than in the game Yuffa, D (2534) – Motylev, A (2663) Sochi 2016 by playing 9. b3 Ob7 10. Ob2 . I am not sure what Black's intentions could be. 10... Nf5 11. e3! Te8 12. a3 We7 13. Nbd2 and White's play is much easier: 13... Tad8 14. b4±.

B) 3... dxc4 – see chapter 2.

C) 3... d4!? – see chapter 3.

D) 3... c5 – see chapter 4.

E) 3... c6 – see chapter 6.

F) 3... ♘d7 This unusual move can threaten to take on c4 in some lines. Even if we have a few good options, the easiest solution seems to be simply to protect the pawn. 4. b3!? ♘gf6 (4... a5!? 5. ♘c3! It's important to stop the advance of the a-pawn. 5... ♘gf6 6. ♖g2 ♕e7 7. ♕b2±) 5. ♕g2 – see 4... ♘bd7.

4. ♕g2 ♘c6

At first glance, this move may seem weird, but it actually prepares the advance of the d-pawn. Again, many transpositions are possible:

A) 4... dxc4 – chapter 2.

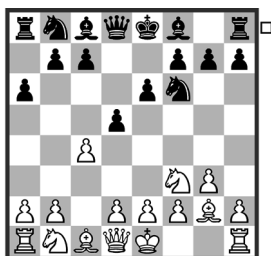
B) 4... d4 – chapter 3.

C) 4... c5 – chapter 4.

D) 4... ♕e7 – chapter 5.

E) 4... ♕d6 5. 0-0 0-0 6. b3 ♘bd7 transposes into the next subchapter.

F) 4... a6

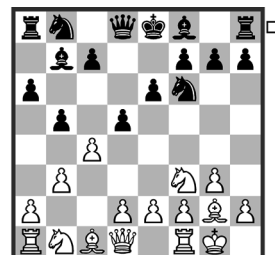


Position after: 4... a6

This reminds us of Romanishin's line, treated in chapter 16. Black is more or less saying, "I am now threatening to take on c4, and you need to do something about it. And I'm fine if you take on d5, as it's not logical to release the tension so early".

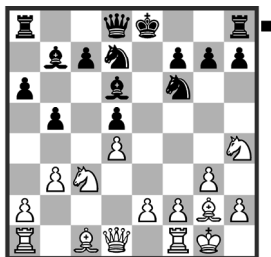
F1) 5. d4 This is of course one of the main possibilities. We can decide to transpose into a real Catalan, where Black doesn't really have a choice because he has already played ...a6. He needs to enter a tricky variation 5... dxc4 6. 0-0 Here you need to know both 6... b5 and 6... ♘c6, but they are not the topic of this book, and you can find all the material about this Catalan in, for example, Avrukh's excellent books.

F2) 5. b3!? This is the move closest to the spirit of the Reti! Play might continue logically with 5... b5 6. 0-0 ♕b7



Position after: 6... ♕b7

And here I prefer to clarify things in the center, and take advantage of the early development of the bishop on b7. 7. cxd5!? exd5 8. d4 ♕d6 9. ♘c3 ♘bd7 10. ♘h4!?±.



Position after: 10. Nc4!±

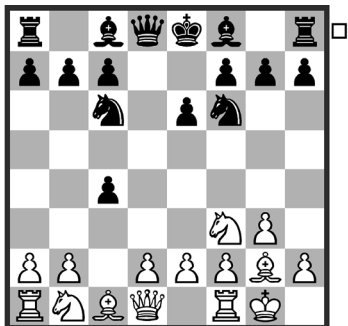
I don't see the point of Black's queenside development (e.g. he can't really play ...c5 any more as it would create a rather weak isolated pawn on d5) and White's chances look preferable.

5. 0-0

A) 5. d4!? dxc4 transposes again into a Catalan.

B) 5. b3?! is not so great; after 5... d4 I will explain in chapter 3 that b2-b3 sometimes doesn't really fit in well against a Benoni set-up. This is the case here, where this pawn should try to reach the fourth rank.

5... dxc4



Position after: 5... dxc4

A) 5... d4 This is simply a transposition into chapter 3 when Black plays with 5... Nc6.

B) 5... Qe7 has no real value because after 6. d4 Black needs to explain what the knight is doing on c6. Black needs to explain that... 6... dxc4 7. Qa4 0-0 8. Qxc4± And we have reached an easy Catalan set-up, where Black clearly lacks counterplay.

6. Qa4

White's real threat is 7. Ne5. What happens if Black tries to keep his extra pawn?

6... Qd5

6... Qd7 7. Qxc4 Na5 8. Qc3!



Position after: 8. Qc3!

This is my recommendation, even if c3 is an unusual spot for the queen. The fact that it's also the computer's move might have something to do with it. The queen keeps an eye on the a5-knight, as well as on the g7 pawn. (≤ 8. Qc2 c5 9. Ne5 Qd6 10. Nxd7 Qxd7 Even if we have gained the bishop pair, this posi-

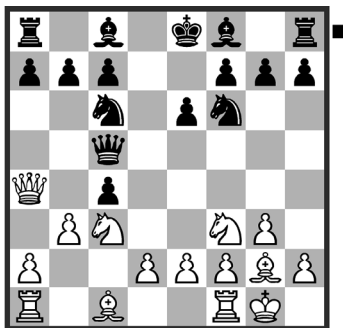
tion looks rather equal and a bit dry.)
 8... c5 9. ♖e5 ♙b5N (9... ♙d6? 10.
 ♗xd7+– This is the difference with 8.
 ♙c2: Black has no good way to take
 back; 9... ♖c8 10. ♗xd7 ♗xd7 11. d4±
 10. ♗a3!



Position after: 10. ♗a3!

A strong sacrifice. 10... ♙xe2 11. ♖e1
 ♙a6 (11... ♙h5 12. ♗ac4! ♗xc4 13.
 ♙xc4 ♙d6 14. ♙xb7 0-0 15. ♙xa8
 ♙xa8 16. b3±) 12. d4! Files needed to
 be opened. 12... cxd4 13. ♙c2± This po-
 sition is pretty sharp, but Black is really
 suffering on the light squares, and he
 won't have time to castle because of
 ♙a4!

7. ♗c3 ♙c5 8. b3!



Position after: 8. b3!

This enables us to develop our pieces
 super swiftly!

8... cxb3

And here I recommend leaving the in-
 teresting game Lushenkov, M (2387) –
 Ivanov, A (2425) Sochi 2007 (1-0) by
 playing the strong...

9. ♗b5!N ♗d5

Black can't solve the problems that eas-
 ily by playing 9... ♙d6?! as White would
 answer 10. ♙a3 (the hidden threat be-
 hind 9. ♗b5) 10... ♙b6 11. ♗xd6+ cxd6
 12. ♙xd6±.

10. e4 ♗b6

10... a6? 11. exd5 ♙xb5 12. ♙xb5 axb5
 13. dxc6+–

11. ♙xb3

Black still needs to defend the c7-pawn.

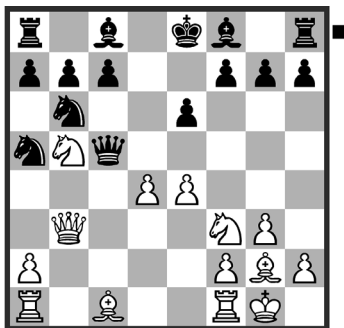
11. ♗xc7+? ♙d8±

11... ♗a5

11... ♙d6? 12. ♙a3!+–

12. d4!

(see diagram next page)



Position after: 12. d4!

This is the point!

12... ♔c6

12... ♘xb3? is of course bad: 13. dxc5 ♘xa1 14. ♘xc7+ ♔d7 15. cxb6+– with too many threats to deal with for Black.

13. d5! ♔c5

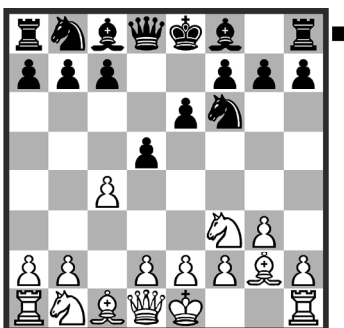
13... ♘xb3 14. dxc6 ♘xa1 15. ♘xc7+ ♔d8 16. ♕f4!±

14. ♕d3±

Black's huge lack of development will prove to be much more important than his extra pawn.

b) 3... ♘f6 4. ♖g2 ♘bd7

1. ♘f3 d5 2. c4 e6 3. g3 ♘f6 4. ♖g2



Position after: 4. ♖g2

4... ♘bd7

It might feel weird to you, but I actually think that this move is a commitment. Black decides too early where his knight should go, as it might be better placed

on c6 in some lines. Also, as ...d4 is no longer a threat, White can simply proceed with...

5. b3 ♖d6

At least the bishop finds a slightly more active square.

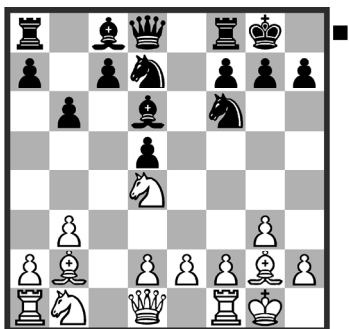
A) 5... ♖e7 6. 0-0 0-0 7. ♖b2 is covered in the fifth chapter.

B) 5... b6 Even when Black tries to be creative, it has no real independent value, as it will eventually transpose into one of the other lines: 6. 0-0 ♖b7 7. ♖b2 ♖e7 8. ♘c3 0-0 9. e3 and we finally transpose into the 6...b6 line of chapter 5.

6. 0-0 0-0 7. ♖b2 b6

A) 7... c6 We can't really say that this is an important theoretical position, but it can be reached through several different move orders, and you can find the theory in chapter 9, the Semi-Slav.

B) 7... ♖e8 8. ♘c3 c6 Black is unable to dispense with this move, which transposes into chapter 9, the Semi-Slav.

8. cxd5 exd5 9. ♘d4!

Position after: 9. ♘d4!

This strong manoeuvre allows White to fight for an advantage.

9... ♖b7

9... ♘c5?! 10. b4 ♘cd7 (10... ♘ce4 11. d3 ♘g5 12. ♘c6!±) 11. ♖b3±

10. ♘f5! ♖e8?!

10... ♖c5 11. d4 ♖e7 12. ♘c3±

11. ♘xd6 cxd6 12. d3±

White may already be technically winning as in 1-0 (41) Martinovic, S (2445) – Paunovic, D (2320) Vrnjacka Banja 1983.

This was really a short chapter, but don't get used to it, it was only our warm-up!

Chapter guide

Chapter 2 – Systems with ...dxc4

1. Nf3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3

a) 3...dxc4 4.--, 4. Ka4+ -- 21

b) 3...dxc4 4. Ka4+ Nbd7 5.--, 5. Bg2 c5 26

c) 3...dxc4 4. Ka4+ Nbd7 5. Bg2 a6 29

d) 3... Nf6 4. Bg2 dxc4 5. Ka4+ -- 33

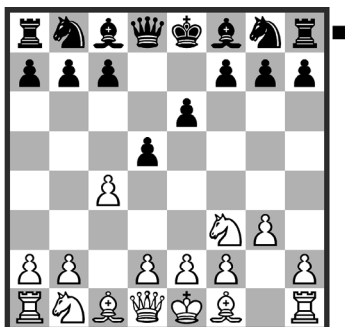
e) 3... Nf6 4. Bg2 dxc4 5. Ka4+ c6 with 9...a6 38

f) 3... Nf6 4. Bg2 dxc4 5. Ka4+ c6 with 9... Rc8 41

g) 3... Nf6 4. Bg2 Re7 5.0-0 dxc4?! 43

a) 3...dxc4 4.--, 4. ♔a4+ --

1. ♘f3 d5 2. c4 e6 3. g3



Position after: 3. g3

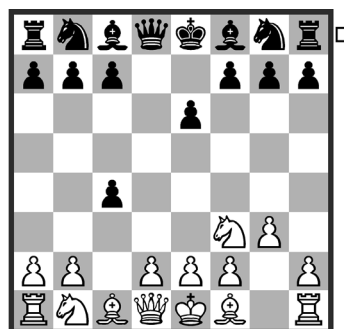
In the first chapter we didn't discuss the most obvious question, the one everyone must have asked himself: it's one thing to sacrifice a pawn, BUT what happens if Black simply decides to take it? How to deal with that? Do we try to recover it at once, or do we stick to quick development and keeping our initiative?

Actually, both approaches are possible, and it merely depends on your personal temperament. Positional players will prefer to restore the material balance as soon as possible, whereas more active and bolder players will prefer the more dangerous paths. My preferred choice? Hmm, it was a tough one, but I went for the positional path (even if I have only tried the bold option myself).

In this chapter, generally speaking, White is going to expose his queen near the center. In exchange, he obtains the

better pawn structure, because he has more pawns on the central files, and his g2-bishop is more active. Black must try to take advantage of the exposed queen by quickly developing his queenside when he could possibly take over the initiative.

3... dxc4!?



Position after: 3... dxc4!?

First of all, we need to know what happens if Black takes as early as on the third move. Why aren't we actually considering 2... dxc4 first? Simply because it's absolutely not the same kind of position than in this present chapter. But don't worry, this is covered in chapter 10, the more 'Queen's Gambit Accepted' types of position. The main difference is that after 2... dxc4, White will most probably take back with his bishop from f1, whereas here, White is already committed to g3, so the bishop will hardly leave his beloved fianchetto position. To take on the third move is a rather concrete and interesting option for

Black. White needs to have an adequate response. I will call it 'The Sveshnikov Variation', as Evgeny and Vladimir Sveshnikov have played it almost twenty times according to the databases, which is impressive for a rare sideline. I do apologise in advance in case this variation already has another name.

4. ♔a4+

As in the main line 4... dxc4, my advice is to take the pawn back straight away. Does White have additional ideas? We will try to find out.

A) 4. ♘a3?!



Position after: 4. ♘a3?!

In this position (in contrast to the main line), this move is not really feasible. Even if I played it once (it transposed to the normal position after 3... ♘f6 4. ♘g2, quite a weird move order), Black has strong options to meet this move.

4... ♙xa3! The strongest, I believe, is to give up the bishop pair in order to damage White's pawn structure. 5. ♔a4+ A logical move if White is not happy about having doubled a-pawns, but Black is

resourceful. (The issue with 5. bxa3 is that Black can keep a healthy extra pawn: 5... b5! 6. ♘g2 ♙b7! Black has already covered the long diagonal, and White's compensation is dubious. 7. ♙b2 ♘f6 8. 0-0 0-0 9. a4 a6 ♞) 5... b5!



Position after: 5... b5!

Easy to miss! Black takes over the initiative. 6. ♔xa3 (6. ♔xb5+?? c6→) 6... ♙b7 7. ♘g2 ♘d7 8. b3 cxb3 9. ♔xb3 ♙b8! ♞ White's play lacks bite, and I prefer Black here.

B) 4. ♘g2 may be an option, but among Black's possibilities, one of them really annoyed me, 4... a6!

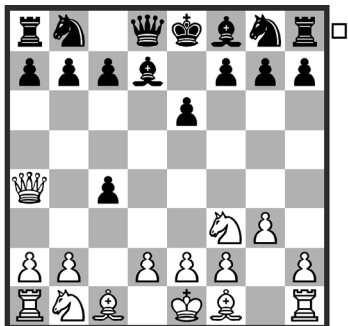


Position after: 4... a6!

And none of the following tries seems attractive to me: 5. ♘c3 (5. 0-0 ♘f6 6. ♘a3 b5 7. ♘e5 ♙a7 8. d3 cxd3 9. ♙e3 c5 ♞ I prefer Black's extra pawn rather

than White's pseudo-initiative with 10. b4; 5. ♘e5 against this move, Black can always respond with 5... ♖d4! 6. f4 ♘d7 7. e3 ♖c5 8. d4 cxd3 9. ♘xd3 ♖a7±; 5. a4?! ♘c6 6. ♘a3 ♘a5 7. ♖c2 ♖d5∞) 5... ♘f6 6. ♘e5 ♖d4!↑

4... ♙d7!?



Position after: 4... ♙d7!?

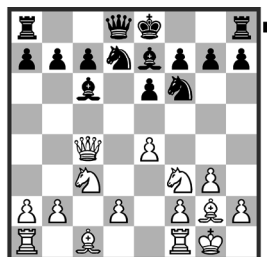
This is actually a smart try. Black tries to get a better version of the main line. How?

4... c6 is possible as well, but it has no independent value. 5. ♖xc4 b5 6. ♖c2 ♙b7 7. ♙g2 ♘d7 8. 0-0 Finally, Black doesn't really have other options than transposing into the main line with 5... c6 by playing 8... ♘gf6.

5. ♖xc4 c5

The classical manoeuvre 5... ♙c6 which reminds us of some Catalan lines for instance, is not particularly strong here. The following correspondence game shows the main difference: as White has not yet played d4, it will be easier to

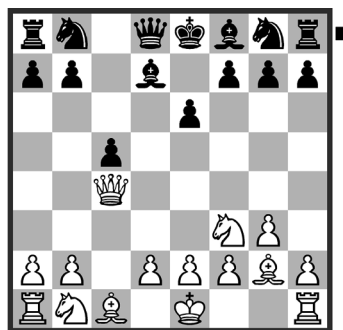
play with e4, and fight against the c6-bishop. 6. ♙g2 ♘f6 7. 0-0 ♘bd7 8. ♘c3 ♙e7 9. e4!



Position after: 9. e4!

9... 0-0 10. ♖d1 a6 11. ♖e2 b5 12. ♘d4 (12. d4!? was straightforward and strong enough to obtain a simple advantage: 12... b4?! 13. d5!±) 12... ♙b7 13. e5! ♙xg2 14. ♖xg2 ♘d5 15. ♘xd5 exd5 16. ♘c6 ♖e8 17. d4± 1-0 (66) Karacsony, E (2340) – Puoli, H (2350) corr Argentina – Romania 2008.

6. ♙g2



Position after: 6. ♙g2

6. ♘e5 doesn't work as well as in the variation with 4... dxc4 and 5... ♙d7 of this current chapter. 6... ♘c6 7. ♘xd7 ♖xd7 8. ♙g2 ♘f6=. What happened?

We are a full tempo down compared to the classical line. Why? Black didn't spend a tempo playing ...♖c8. Thus, I think Black is fine.

6... ♘c6

The Sveshnikov approach. Here I would like to advise you to use a novelty for White (even if it transposes into a few new games).

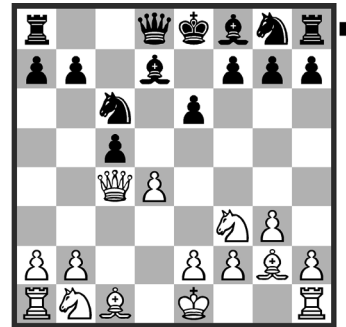
6... ♙c6 This looks to me like the most natural continuation, otherwise the bishop on d7 doesn't make much sense. However, White gets a pleasant position: 7. 0-0 ♘f6



Position after: 7... ♘f6

8. b3! I believe that White can keep an edge with this move. At least he has a simple plan. 8... ♙e7 9. ♙b2 0-0 10. d3 ♘bd7 And here, I want to improve on the game Movsesian, S (2705) – Grachev, B (2672) Sibenik 2012. 11. ♖c2!? N b5 12. e4 a6 13. ♗c1 ♖b6 14. ♖e2! The queen can prove to be better here, that's why I prefer to delay ♘bd2. 14... ♗fd8 15. ♘bd2 ♙b7 16. a4†

7. d4!?



Position after: 7. d4!?

White tries to be smart. OK, but what happens if Black reacts as usual?

The line 7. 0-0 ♘f6 8. d4 b5 9. ♖d3 transposes into a Catalan variation. Sure, you can check, but I don't like it!

7... b5

This seems to be the logical follow-up.

7... cxd4 8. ♘xd4 ♘xd4?! (8... ♗c8 9. 0-0 ♘f6 10. ♘c3 ♙e7 11. ♗d1±) 9. ♖xd4 ♙c6 10. ♙xc6+ bxc6 11. ♙e3±

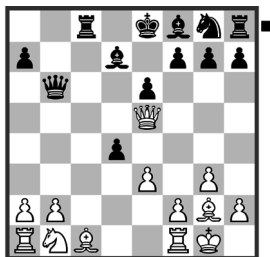
8. ♖xb5!N

We are trying to make a difference.

8... ♘xd4

8... cxd4 may look as the safe option, but things are not so simple: 9. ♘e5! ♘xe5 10. ♖xe5 ♗c8 11. 0-0 ♖b6 12. e3!

(see analysis diagram next page)



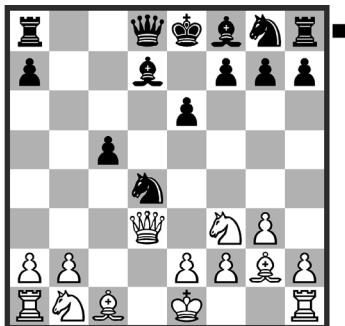
Position after: 12. e3!



Position after: 11. ♔f1!!

Black has a difficult choice: give up a pawn or concede his activity? 12... ♘f6! (12... dxe3?! 13. ♙xe3 ♖a6 14. ♘d2± Black is too far from castling to be fine) 13. ♙xd4 ♙c5 14. ♙h4 0-0 15. ♘c3± Black has some compensation, but he is definitely the one playing for a draw here, and he will need to be very accurate.

9. ♙d3



Position after: 9. ♙d3

9... ♙b5

9... ♙c6 10. ♘bd2 ♘e7 (10... ♘xf3+?! 11. ♙xf3!±) 11. ♔f1!! OK, two exclamation marks may seem too much.

(see analysis diagram next column)

It's not like White is crushing his opponent, but this mind-blowing move makes life difficult for him! (11. 0-0 ♘xf3+ Check, sir! 12. ♘xf3 ♙xd3 13. exd3 ♙d8= was too simple for Black) 11... ♙c8 This semi-waiting move seems to be the most accurate answer. (11... ♘xf3?! 12. ♙xd8+ ♖xd8 13. ♙xf3 ♘d5 14. b3 ♙e7 15. ♙b2± and White keeps the advantage of a better structure. He will try to grab the c-pawn and win the endgame.)

A) 12. e3 ♙b5 13. ♘c4 ♘dc6!↑ (13... ♘xf3 14. ♘d6+ ♙xd6 15. ♙xb5+ ♙c6 16. ♙xc6+ ♘xc6 17. ♙xf3±)

B) 12. ♘xd4! ♙xd4 13. ♙xd4 cxd4 14. ♘b3 e5 15. f4 Even if the position is close to equal, White has ideas to play on and create problems.

10. ♙d2 ♘xe2

10... ♙c8 11. ♘c3 ♙c6 12. 0-0 ♘f6 13. ♙d1 ♘xf3+ 14. ♙xf3 ♙xf3 15. exf3± Black will suffer because of his isolated c-pawn.

11. ♙f1!