

The Evans Gambit

Andrew Martin



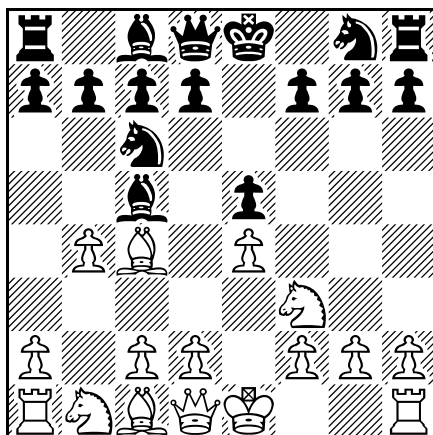
POPULAR CHESS

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Introduction

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 ♙c5 4.b4



Back in the 19th century, the Evans Gambit was described as a “gift from the gods to a languishing chess world”. In our computerized chess world of the modern era, a gift or two such as this would not go amiss. Is the gambit playable in the 21st century? Definitely. At the highest level maybe only as a surprise weapon, but that should not bother the other 99.99% of the chess community.

Why should we play the Evans?

- 1) The gambit can lead to exciting chess.
- 2) To learn the art of attack.
- 3) To execute combinations.
- 4) To win!

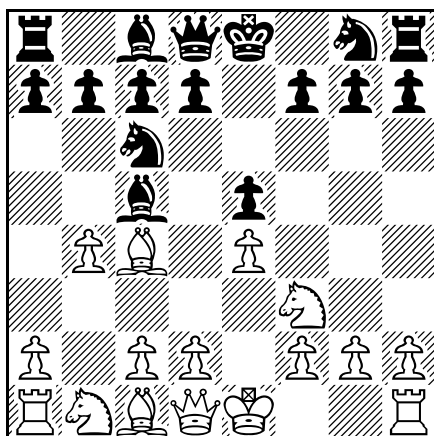
I can't think of a better reason than the final one. I've tried to craft a repertoire book. I've offered good suggestions against all of Black's replies after 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3. This is a massive bonus as there are lots of separate lines. With regards to the Evans, we will stick to a repertoire format and I offer what I think is the current best chance against each of Black's main defences. I hope you enjoy this book and are persuaded to try the Evans Gambit in your own games.

Andrew Martin,
Bramley,
April 2026

Chapter One

An Evans Gambit Showcase

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 ♙c5 4.b4



Let us begin the book with some inspiration and entertainment. This is how I approach a new opening. I want to see the best of what can happen, so that I can feel optimistic. I know that this is not the full story, but there is nothing wrong with getting into a positive frame of mind.

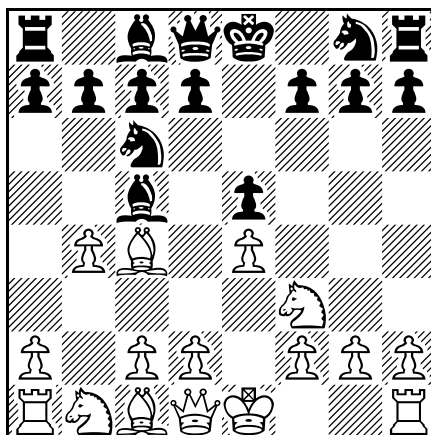
Game 1

William Evans – Alexander McDonnell
London 1829

We begin at the beginning. Captain William Davies Evans was born in 1790 and died in 1872. He was primarily a seafarer, but he was responsible for a number of influential

inventions and was obviously a remarkably intelligent and original man. The Evans Gambit is named after him. Perhaps his most important invention was tri-coloured lighting for naval vessels in order to prevent collisions at night, for which he was handsomely rewarded, not only by the British government, but also by the Tsar of Russia! Once he learned chess, it was only a matter of time before he would demonstrate his individual way of thinking.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 ♙c5 4.b4!



The Evans Gambit offers a pawn sacrifice for which White receives:

- 1) Accelerated development.
- 2) Domination of the centre.
- 3) The chance of an attack against the black king.

I am sure this is the way Evans was thinking and back then, when there was no theory and prior information to go on, McDonnell was suddenly put on the spot.

4...♙xb4 5.c3 ♙c5?!

A provocative choice, which only encourages White to play good moves. Today we know that any of 5...♙a5, 5...♙e7 or even 5...♙d6 are better.

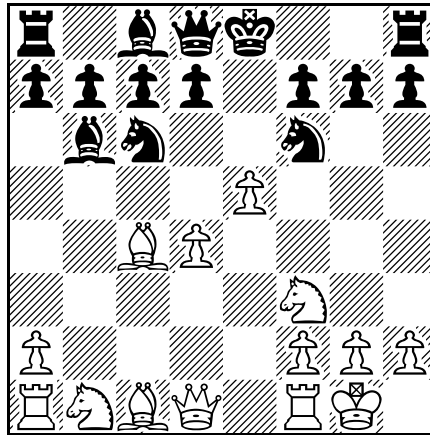
6.O-O

There is no rush to play d4 and allow Black a check on b4 afterwards.

6...♘f6 7.d4 exd4

7...♙d6 was the best try, but perhaps McDonnell was afraid of 8.♘g5 O-O 9.f4, which looks nice for White to me.

8.cxd4 ♙b6 9.e5



If you play the black side of the Evans, don't play it like this!

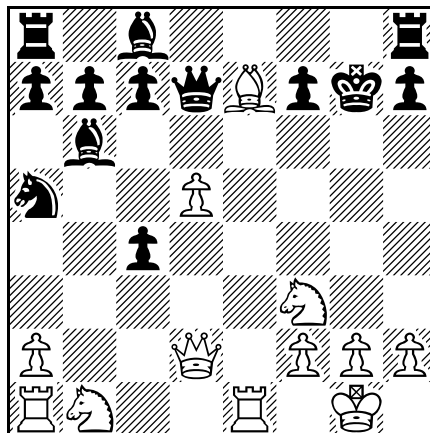
9...d5

9...d5 was a possible alternative, but now I quite like 10...d6 (holding up ...d5; 10.h3 d5 11.exd6 is also very strong) 10...d6 11.h3 Nf6 12.Bg5 Qd7 13.Bb1 and Black is in a mess.

10.exf6 dxc4 11.Bb1+ Qf8

11...Qe6 is answered by 12.fxg7 Bg8 13.d5 and game over.

12.Qa3+ Qg8 13.d5! Na5 14.Qe7 Qd7 15.fxg7 Qxg7 16.Qd2



Black's hand is being forced on every move.

16...Bg4 17.Qc3+ Qg8 18.Qxh8+ Qxh8 19.Qf6+ Qg7 20.Qe8 mate 1-0

Modern players may scoff at this game, but it is clear to me that Evans was a pretty strong player. He decimated one of the best players of the day with his newly-found gambit.

Game 19

Nigel Short – Michael Adams

Sarajevo 2000

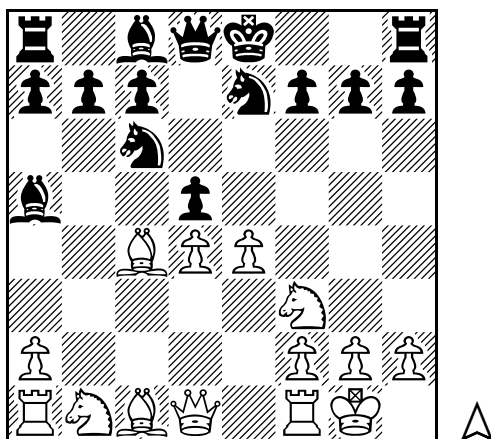
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 ♙c5 4.b4 ♙xb4 5.c3 ♙a5 6.d4 exd4 7.0-0 ♘ge7!

This is a tough nut to crack. Black prepares ...d7-d5 and gets ready to castle. He keeps the king's knight out of the way of the advancing white pawns.

8.♘g5!?

After reviewing the information, I have decided to recommend this direct approach.

As far as I can see, 8.cxd4 d5! is completely reliable for Black.

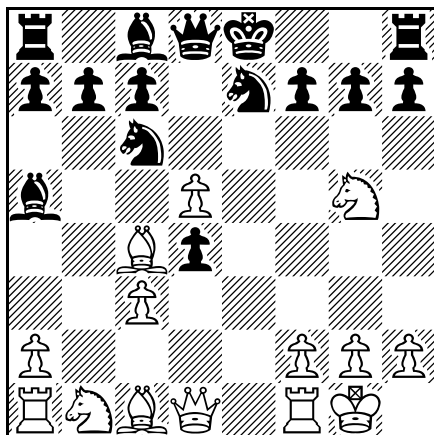


Here 9.exd5 ♘xd5 10.♚b3 (otherwise, 10.♙a3 prevents castling and is probably best, but leads to 10...♙e6 11.♙b5 ♙b4 12.♙xc6+ bxc6 13.♙xb4 ♘xb4 14.♚a4 ♚b8 15.a3 ♘d5 16.♚xc6+ ♚d7 when Black is absolutely fine – I suppose you could play this with White in an emergency; 10.♘g5 has also been tried, without any great effect: 10...♚d6! 11.♘bd2 0-0 12.♘e4 ♚e6 should be stable enough for Black) 10...♙e6! has the point that 11.♚xb7 ♘db4! puts the gambiteer on the back foot: 12.♙xe6 (12.d5!? is a machine suggestion, intending 12...♚b8 13.♚xb8 ♚xb8 14.dxe6 fxe6 15.♘bd2; I suppose if you like playing without your queen, you might go for this mechanical flight of fancy, but, personally, I prefer Black) 12...♚b8 13.♚xb8 ♚xb8 14.♙b3 0-0 15.♚d1 is hardly inspiring for White. The point is surely that the gambiteer is not obtaining any pressure in these variations, which has helped to make 7...♘ge7 a very popular idea in practice.

8...d5!

Black must not castle or he will be trounced: 8...O-O?? 9.♖h5!. Already the prospect of a miniature looms: for example, 9...h6 10.♘xf7 ♜xf7 11.♗xf7+ (11.♙xf7+ ♖h7 12.cxd4 wins too) 11...♖h7 12.cxd4 ♙b6 13.e5! ♙xd4 14.♙d3+ ♖h8 15.♙xh6! ♗g8 16.♗h5 g6 17.♗h4 ♙xe5 18.♘d2! and Black will soon be routed.

9.exd5



9.♙xd5? is tricky, but unsatisfactory at the same time: 9...♘xd5 10.♗b3 ♙e6! 11.♘xe6 fxe6 12.exd5 ♗xd5 works out to quite some advantage for Black.

9...♘e5

More good defence, unlike 9...♘xd5? 10.♘xf7!, which would be White's Evans Gambit tactic of the day. Disaster strikes quickly: 10...♙xf7 11.♗f3+! (11.♗h5+?! is surprisingly not as good after 11...g6 12.♙xd5+ ♙e6 13.♙xe6+ ♖xe6) 11...♗f6 (11...♙e8? fails to 12.♞e1+ ♘ce7 13.♙xd5) 12.♙xd5+ ♖f8 (or 12...♙e6 13.♙xe6+ ♖xe6 14.♞e1+ ♖f7 15.♗d5+! ♖g6 16.♞e6 and wins) 13.♙a3+ ♘e7 14.♞e1, beginning to milk the deadly pin.

10.♙b3!?

When in doubt in the Evans, follow Nigel Short.

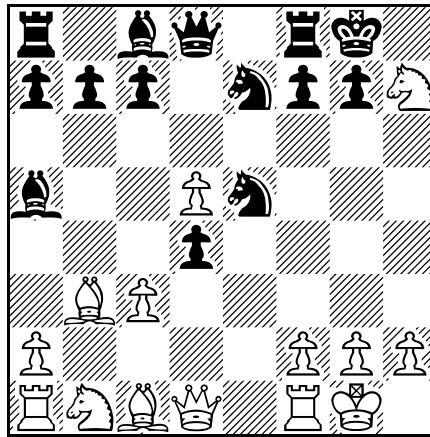
10...O-O!

Sensible, and clearly best. 10...h6?! is inferior, as we'll see in our next game, Lukovnikov-Sychev, as is 10...dxc3?!. True, it does grab the pawn and hinder White's development, but 11.♗e2 f6 12.♘e4 (12.♞d1 ♙g4 13.f3 ♙f5 14.♘e6 is also promising) 12...♘xd5 13.♙a3 c6? (messy complications follow 13...♙g4, which tend towards White: 14.♗b5+ c6 15.♗xb7 ♙c7 16.♘d6+! ♖d7! 17.♙xd5 ♞b8 18.♗xa7 cxd5 19.♘xc3 ♞a8 20.♗c5 ♙xd6 21.♗xd6+ ♖e8 22.♘d5!?, forcing Black to continue to walk something of a tightrope) 14.♘d6+ ♖d7 15.f4 ♘g6 16.♙xd5 ♗b6+ 17.♖h1 cxd5 was D.Bronstein-*Heuristic Alpha*, The Hague 1992, where 18.♞d1! ♗c6 19.♘xc3! ♙xc3 20.♞ac1 would have given White a ferocious attack.

11.♙xh7!?

The best try here.

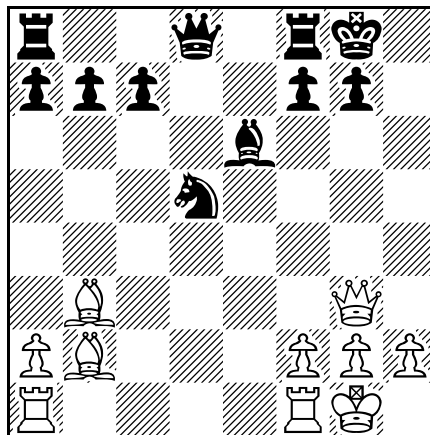
Admittedly the text isn't forced, but 11.cxd4 ♘5g6 12.♖h5 h6 13.♗e4 ♗f5 would seem to slightly favour Black, including after 14.d6!? ♖h4! 15.♖xg6 ♖xe4.



11...♙xh7 12.♖h5+ ♙g8 13.♖xe5 ♗f5!

As usual, Adams reacts logically and calmly.

13...dxc3 surely only helps White: 14.♗xc3 (14.♙a3 ♗g6 15.♖h5?! ♗f4! is a bit awkward) 14...♙xc3? (14...♗f5! 15.♗e4 ♗e8 16.♖f4 ♖h4 would keep Black fully afloat) 15.♖xc3 ♗xd5 16.♖g3! ♙e6 17.♙b2.

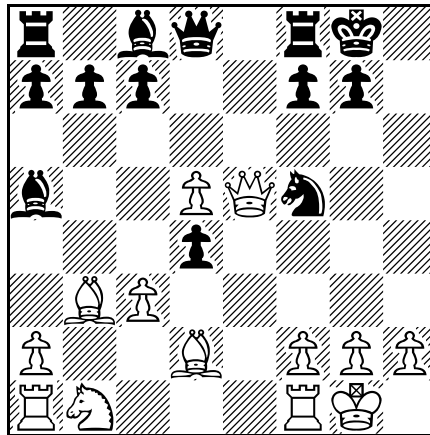


Despite Black's extra pawn, I very much prefer White's attacking chances, as in R.Fischer-R.Carbonell, Houston (simul) 1964, no less: 17...♗f6 (17...f6 18.♙c2! ♖d7 19.♗ad1 ♗f7 20.♙g6 does not look great for Black) 18.♙c2? (Bobby rejects 18.♗ad1, but this was clearly the best move, intending 18...♖e7 19.♗d3! ♙xb3 20.♖xb3 ♖e6 21.♗e3 ♖b6 22.♖h4! and Black is

under heavy fire, since 22...♙xb2? 23.♖h3 ♘h5 24.♙xh5 f6 25.♙h7+ ♔f7 26.♖g3 ♖g8 27.♙h5+ g6 28.♙d5+ ♔g7 29.♙d7+ ♔f8 30.♖h3 wins) 18...♘h5! 19.♙f3 ♙d5 20.♙e4 ♙g5 21.♙xb7 (21.♙c1 ♙b5 22.♙xb7 ♖ab8 23.♙c6 was a good alternative) 21...♖ab8 22.♖ae1 ♙g4 23.♙e5 ♘f6 24.♙xc7?? (with 24.♖c1 White would have continued to enjoy an edge) 24...♖xb7! 0-1, as 25.♙xb7 ♙d5 is the end. So what could have been a classic Evans Gambit attack, especially had he gone 18.♖ad1, ended in frustration for Fischer. From our point of view, this was an instructive encounter, with typical attacking ideas to absorb.

14.♙d2!?

After 14.cxd4 ♖e8 15.♙f4 ♙b4 White has problems with his development.



14...♖e8!?

14...♖e8 is certainly a move, but is it easier here for White to get his pieces out: 15.♙f4 ♙b6 16.♘a3! ♙f6 (otherwise, 16...♙d6 17.♘b5 ♙xf4 18.♙xf4 dxc3 19.♘xc3 appears balanced, as does 16...dxc3 17.♙xc3, although 17...♙d6! 18.♙xd6 ♘xd6 should leave Black pressing, if anyone) 17.♖ac1, with lasting and sufficient play for the pawn.

15.dxc6 bxc6 16.♖e1 ♙c7 17.♙e4 ♙f6

17...♙d6!? 18.g3 would insist on getting ♙f4 in.

18.♙f4 ½-½

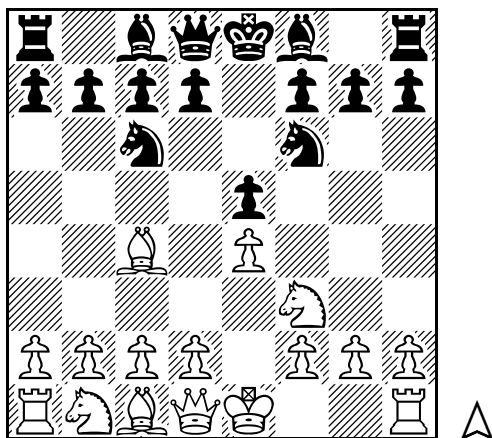
A rather early handshake and there was plenty of play left. For example, Black can snatch a pawn, but cannot keep it for long: 18...♙xf4 19.♙xf4 dxc3 and here White has a few options, including 20.♙e5 ♙xe5 21.♖xe5 ♖d8 22.♘xc3 when a draw does begin to look more likely.

Part Two

The Two Knights Defence

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 ♗f6

If you play 3.♙c4, intending an Evans Gambit, then you will have to face 3...♗f6 at least as often as 3...♙c5.



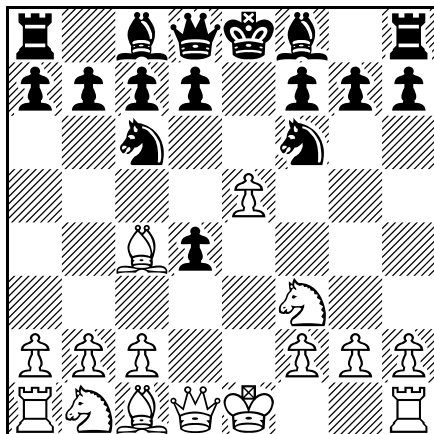
I have pondered what to recommend. 4.♗g5 might be playable, but I don't like giving Black the initiative so early in the game and there is a lot to know. It is too easy for Black to equalize after 4.♗c3, and 4.d3 is what the top guys play and, of course, this is probably the best move, but not all club players are suited to a positional grind in Ruy Lopez style. Which leaves...

4.d4!? exd4

The good news is that this is almost forced, leaving us with less theory to take on board.

5.e5!

As far as I know this is the so-called Modern Variation (White can also castle in place of 5.e5, but once again there is a lot to know after both 5.0-0 ♖xe4 and 5...♗c5). Nobody has staked a claim to the name yet. Among Grandmasters Sveshnikov used the line frequently.

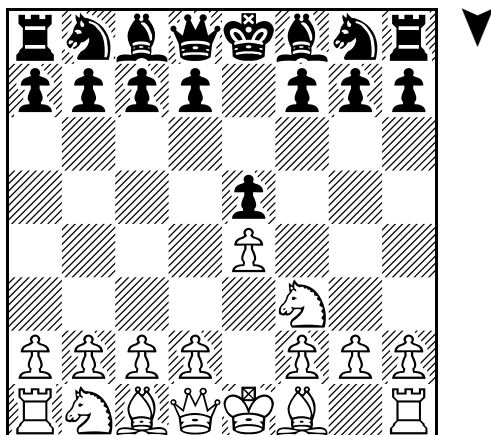


Now Black must decide whether to counter in classical fashion with 5...d5 or advance the knight to e4 or g4.

Part Three

Completing a 2.♘f3 Repertoire

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3



Having covered Black's two main defences in 2...♘c6 3.♗c4 ♗c5 and 3...♘f6, we now come to completing our white repertoire with 2.♘f3. Both the Petroff and Philidor defences deserve respect. Black also has various gambit options we must discuss, on both move two and move three.

Index of Variations

1 e4 e5 2 ♖f3 and now:

A: 2... ♘c6 3 ♙c4 ♙c5

B: 2... ♘c6 3 ♙c4 ♗f6

C: 2... ♗f6 et al

A) 2... ♘c6 3 ♙c4 ♙c5 4 b4 ♙xb4

4... ♙b6 5 a4

5...a5 – 142

5...a6 – 144

4...d5 – 150

4... ♙e7 – 151

5 c3 ♙a5

5... ♙c5 6 0-0 (6 d4 – 107)

6... ♗f6 7 d4 exd4 8 cxd4 ♙b6

9 e5 – 9

9 ♙a3 – 90

6...d6 7 d4 exd4 (7... ♙b6 8 dxe5 – 42; 8 a4 – 45) 8 cxd4 ♙b6 9 ♗c3 (9 h3 – 92) 9... ♗f6

(9... ♙g4 – 99; 9... ♗a5 – 104) 10 e5

10...d5 – 14

10...dxe5 – 102

5... ♙e7 6 d4 ♗a5 (6...exd4 – 128; 6... ♗f6 – 132)

7 ♙e2 – 25

7 ♙d3 – 135

5... ♙d6 6 d4 (6 0-0 – 124) 6... ♗f6 (6... ♖e7 – 121) 7 0-0 0-0 8 ♖e1 h6 (8...b6 – 119) 9 ♗bd2 ♖e8

10 ♖b3 ♖e7 (10... ♖e7 – 116)

11 ♙d3 – 112

11 a4 – 114

6 d4

6 0-0

6...d6 – 16

6... ♖f6 – 37

6...exd4

6...d6 7 ♖b3 (7.0-0 ♙b6 – 42) 7... ♖d7 (7... ♖e7 – 57; 7... ♗h6 – 19; 7... ♗xd4 – 61) 8 dxe5 ♙b6
(8...dxe5 – 54) 9 ♗bd2 (9 ♙b5 – 52) 9... ♗a5 10 ♖c2 ♗xc4 (10... ♗e7 – 50) 11 ♗xc4 d5 12 ♙g5

12...h6 – 29

- 12...♖g4 – 48
 6...b5 – 81
 6...♖e7 – 84
 6...♙b6 – 86
- 7 0-0 ♘ge7**
 7...d3 – 11
 7...dxc3 8 ♖b3
 8...♖e7 – 23, 78
 8...♖f6 – 72
- 8 ♘g5 d5**
 8...♘e5 – 70
- 9 exd5 ♘e5**
 10 ♖xd4 – 35
 10 ♙b3 – 66
- B) 2...♘c6 3 ♙c4 ♘f6 4 d4 exd4 5 e5 d5**
 5...♘g4 6 ♖e2 (6 0-0 – 163) 6...♖e7 7 ♙f4
 7...d6 8 exd6
 8...♖xe2+ – 213
 8...cxd6 – 217
 7...f6 8 exf6
 8...♘xf6 – 207
 8...gxf6 – 211
 5...♘e4 6 0-0 (6 ♖e2 – 166) 6...♘c5 (6...♙e7 – 225; 6...d5 – 228)
 7 ♘g5 – 221
 7 ♘xd4 – 223
- 6 ♙b5 ♘e4 7 ♘xd4 ♙c5**
 7...♙d7 8 ♙xc6 bxc6 9 0-0
 9...♙e7 10 f3 ♘c5 (10...♘g5 – 188)
 11 ♙e3 – 183
 11 f4 – 186
 9...c5 10 ♘b3 c6 11 f3 ♘g5 12 f4 ♘e4
 13 ♘1d2 – 195
 13 ♘c3 – 197
 9...♙c5 – 161
- 8 ♙e3**
 8.0-0 – 232
- 8...♙d7**
 8...0-0 – 170
 8...♙xd4 – 179
- 9 ♙xc6 bxc6 10 0-0**
 10 ♘d2 – 173
- 10...0-0**
 10...♖e7 – 199
- 11 f3 ♘g5 12 f4 ♘e4**
 12...♘e6 – 204

13 ♖d2

13...♗xd2 – 158

13...♞e7 – 202

C) 2...♗f6

2...♗c6 3 ♖c4

3...f5 – 237

3...d6 – 240

2...d6 3 d4

3...♗f6 4 dxe5 ♗xe4 5 ♞d5 ♗c5 (5...f5 – 306) 6 ♖g5 ♞d7 (6...♗e7 – 304) 7 exd6

7...♗xd6 – 300

7...♞xd6 – 302

3...♗d7 4 ♖c4

4...♗e7 – 308

4...h6 – 311

4...c6 – 313

3...exd4 4 ♞xd4 ♗c6 5 ♖b5 ♗d7 (5...♗ge7 – 294) 6 ♖xc6 ♖xc6 (6...bxc6 – 290) 7 ♗c3 ♗f6

8 ♖f4 – 284

8 ♖g5 – 287

2...f5 3 ♗xe5 ♞f6 (3...♗c6 – 332) 4 d4 d6 5 ♗d3 fxe4 6 ♗f4 c6 7 d5

7...♞e5 – 329

7...♗e7 – 331

2...d5 3 ♗xe5 ♗d6 (3...dxe4 – 340) 4 d4 dxe4 5 ♖c4 ♖xe5 6 ♞h5 ♞e7 7 ♞xe5 ♞xe5 8 dxe5 ♗c6

9 ♗c3 ♗xe5 10 ♖b3

10...♖f5 – 338

10...♗d7 – 339

2...♞e7 – 316

3 ♗xe5 d6

3...♗c6 4 ♗xc6 dxc6 5 d3 ♖c5 6 ♖e2

6...h5 – 323

6...♞d4 – 326

3...d5 – 342

4 ♗f3 ♗xe4 5 ♗d3 ♗f6

5...♗c5 – 250

5...d5 6 0-0 (6 ♞e2 – 263) 6...♗e7 (6...♗d6 – 260) 7 ♞e1

7...♗d6 – 255

7...♗f6 – 268

6 h3

6 0-0 – 279

6...♗e7 7 0-0 0-0 8 c3 d5

8...c5 – 246

8...b6 – 276

9 ♖c2

9...♗bd7 – 269

9...♗d6 – 272