

Win with the English!

Playing the English 2nd Edition

By

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Preface to the 2nd Edition

When I wrote *Playing the English* (published in August 2023), my goal was to offer a practical repertoire with 1.c4, built on solid strategic foundations, with clear explanations, and some fresh, surprising ideas. I believed then, and continue to believe, the English Opening to be one of the most underexplored systems in chess: full of subtle imbalances and long-term plans, offering great scope for individual creativity. My goal was to provide a modern, coherent guide to 1.c4, with recommendations designed to last, as opposed to tricks that might be used once and then discarded.

I was genuinely moved by the response from the chess community. Many of you – from club players to titled players – reached out to say you'd learned new ideas from my work, or rediscovered old positions with fresh understanding. Reviewers were generous, and readers were engaged. Sometimes a bit *too* engaged, when they spotted typos or missing lines faster than I did! Your feedback has been invaluable, and I'm deeply grateful to everyone who took the time to read, analyse, or even disagree with my ideas.

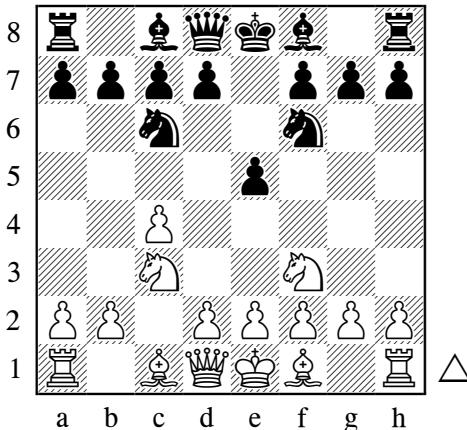
What's changed, and what hasn't changed?

First, let's talk about the elephant in the room. The first edition was missing a chapter. Yes, *an entire chapter*. The analysis was done; but I somehow neglected to send it to my editor, who failed to spot the gap in the repertoire – as did the proofreader. The chapter offered a fresh, quirky and surprisingly effective way to meet the Queen's Indian. The Quality Chess team did the best they could in the circumstances: they edited the missing chapter, along with a collection of other lines that were omitted from the book, and published it as a free, 19-page PDF appendix on their website. Nevertheless, it's a great relief to finally include the Queen's Indian coverage in the official book (you'll find it in Chapter 12), with the other lines from the appendix properly integrated into their respective chapters.

Naturally, this new title includes a lot more updating than the above. Here's a quick summary of the biggest changes you can look forward to:

Four Knights Reversed Sicilian

After **1.c4 e5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.♘f3 ♘c6** I have ditched my old recommendation of 4.g3 in favour of:



4.d3!? The idea is to aim for broadly the same kinds of positions, while making an early ... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ much easier to meet. Chapters 1-3 cover the three main directions:

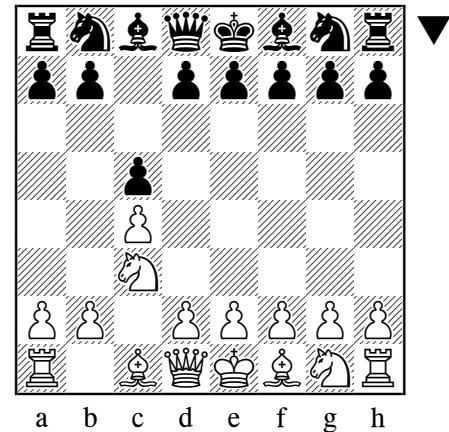
- 4...d5 5.cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 6.g3 converts to a Reversed Dragon. The coverage is similar to the first edition, but my old recommendation of 8.b3 (in a position with the d-pawn still on d2) has been replaced with something fresh and juicy.
- 6... $\mathbb{Q}c5!?$ is Grischuk's system – a distinct branch of the Reversed Dragon. Then 7. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ 0–0 8.0–0 transposes to the first edition, and thereafter you'll find updated recommendations against all three of Black's main pathways.
- 4... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ is the Reversed Rossolimo, when 5. $\mathbb{Q}d2!$ shows the big benefit of our new move order. Black's position is playable of course, but White should have good chances for an opening edge.

The only major drawback of 4.d3!? compared to 4.g3 is that we lose the possibility of breaking with d2-d4 in one move – but that only tended to happen when Black misplayed the opening. As such, I see it as a small price to pay for making our lives so much easier against the Reversed Rossolimo.

Symmetrical English

Much of the **1.c4 c5** coverage remains the same, with **2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$** still the official recommendation to ensure compatibility with other parts of the repertoire. The four chapters stemming from here – titled *Pure Symmetry*, *Impure Symmetry*, *Hedgehog* and *Double Fianchetto* – remain largely unchanged, although some corrections and refinements can be found.

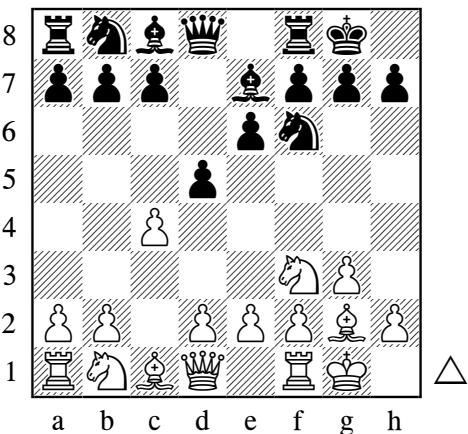
However, I'm proud to present a new chapter showing how **1.c4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}c3!?$** can be a formidable weapon.



As we'll see, there are compelling reasons to have this move in your repertoire. Against certain Black set-ups, we can steer the game in totally different directions compared to the **2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$** lines, posing our opponents difficult problems early in the game. Sometimes, we'll transpose to other chapters covered under the **2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$** move order. There are a few, but not many, lines where Black can steer the game in a direction unique to **2. $\mathbb{Q}c3$** . Further details can be found in Chapter 7.

Catalan Transposition? No Thanks!

Another big change comes in Chapter 16 (Chapter 14 of the first edition), where **1.c4 e6 2.♘f3 d5 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 ♘e7 5.0-0 0-0** is the topic of discussion.



6.b3!? is our new move, replacing **6.d4**. I received a lot of positive feedback regarding the Catalan content, and I liked it a lot myself. Nevertheless, my feeling is that the Reti/Neo-Catalan approach is a more natural and cohesive choice within the framework of our **1.c4** repertoire. **6...d4!** is the critical move, which used to bother me, but now I can show you a fine way to meet it. The alternatives **6...b6** and **6...c5** will also receive the attention they deserve.

Other Changes

In addition to the 'headline changes' above, this book contains a vast number of smaller corrections, new lines, move-order refinements, and clearer explanations. Certain sections are virtually untouched though, examples being the King's Indian and Grünfeld chapters, where I'm happy with my previous suggestions.

When I've reanalysed a variation and noticed new games that were played since the first edition was written, I've mentioned them when they were sufficiently relevant. However, I saw no special value in combing through the entire book and mentioning every case where a novelty from the first book has subsequently been played.

Final Thoughts

While *Win with the English!* has plenty of new content to justify the distinct title, it's still important to me that this new edition retains both the look and the **feel** of the original *Playing the English*. I've kept the same reader-friendly style and structure, introducing each topic with some combination of illustrative games and general guidance, before delving into theoretical details.

If you already have *Playing the English*, you'll surely start by checking out the new material in this book. If you're not familiar with *Playing the English*, take your time with the introduction to each chapter before diving into the theory. The 'big-picture' concepts will help you to navigate and internalize the details more easily.

I've come to think of a chess repertoire in any given opening as something more akin to a living, organic being than a statue carved in stone. Openings evolve, engines surprise us, and players keep inventing. So I'll keep listening, testing, and refining, and I recommend that you do the same. For example, after 1.c4 c5, instead of rigidly thinking of 2.♘f3 as "the repertoire move", I'd suggest studying the 2.♘c3 content in Chapter 7 and being ready to deploy either option according to the opponent.

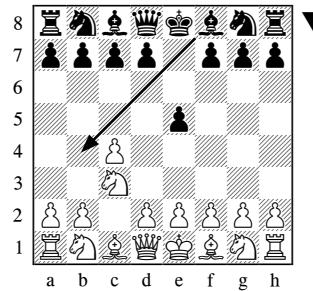
In an era where opening innovations appear (and get documented) even in blitz games, I want to help you play 1.c4 with confidence, clarity, and creativity – without constantly having to reinvent everything. If this book functions the way I intend it to, the primary value of this repertoire won't be in the individual moves, but in the **structures** and **concepts** underpinning them.

I found great joy in revisiting and updating this material, and I hope you'll share some of that enthusiasm as you start delving into the new chapters.

Nikolaos Ntirlis

Maribor, December 2025

Chapter 3



Reversed Rossolimo

Variation Index

1.c4 e5 2.♘c3

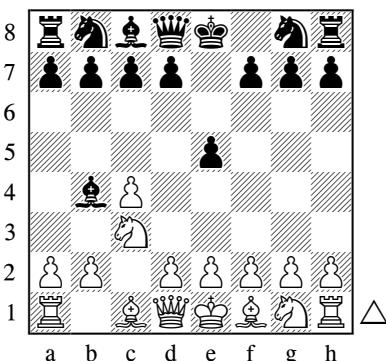
A) 2...♗b4 3.♗d5!	83
A1) 3...♗c5	85
A2) 3...♗e7	87
B) 2...♘f6 3.♗f3 ♘c6 4.d3 ♗b4 5.♗d2! 0-0 6.g3	89
B1) 6...♗xc3	90
B2) 6...♗e8	91
B3) 6...d6	93
B4) 6...d5	95
C) 2...♘c6 3.♗f3 ♗b4	97

Introduction – Black's Ideas

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 is the popular Anti-Sicilian weapon named after Nicolas Rossolimo. (By the way, he and I share not only the same name, but also the same heritage as he has Greek roots, and there is a growing community of chess players in Greece who consider him the first Greek Grandmaster.) These days 3.♗b5 is generally regarded as being every bit as challenging as the traditional Open Sicilian approach with 3.d4. Considering the popularity and theoretical soundness of the Rossolimo, it is only natural that Black should seriously consider the same idea with reversed colours against the English Opening when the knight goes to c3. There are two main ways in which Black can try such a strategy, and we will consider both of them in this chapter.

1.c4 e5 2.♘c3 ♘f6

2...♗b4 is one of the biggest arguments against the 2.♘c3 move order, and with good reason. It has proven to be theoretically sound and has been used many times by Anand (among others) to obtain good positions at the highest level.



3.♗d5 will be our response, avoiding Black's thematic plan of ...♗xc3 followed by ...d6.

2...♘c6 3.♘f3 ♘b4 is another possible version of the same idea. We will cover it at the end

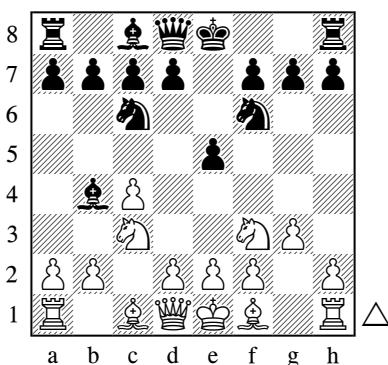
of the chapter, and again 4.♗d5 will be our choice.

3.♘f3 ♘c6 4.d3!?

Our new move order has a great effect on Black's attempts to play a reversed Rossolimo. In fact, a previously huge chunk of theory can be tossed out the window.

What I'm referring to is:

4.g3 ♘b4!?



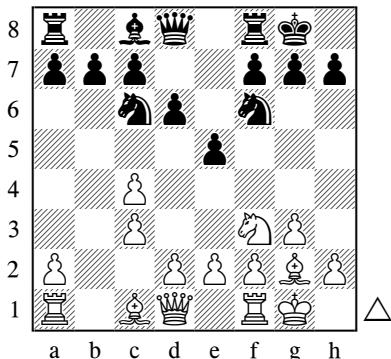
This rich and fascinating system has been tested for decades at the highest level. Black's idea is to take on c3 and double our pawns, then obtain a comfortable game by placing pawns on dark squares. For example:

5.♗g2

5.♗d5! was my recommendation in the first edition, but the position is extremely complicated. A good amount of memorization was needed in order to navigate these tumultuous waters – and even then, Black is ultimately doing okay.

5...♗xc3? 6.bxc3 0–0 7.0–0 d6

Having 'lost' the dark-squared bishop, Black's general plan is to put as many pawns as possible on the dark squares: a century-old strategy which remains both simple and effective today.



8.d3 h6

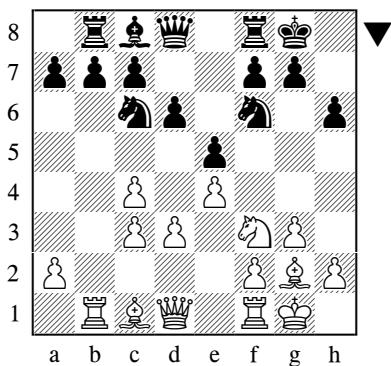
Another pawn moves to a dark square, while preventing a potentially annoying pin.

8...e4!?, 9.♗d4 exd3 10.exd3 ♗xd4 11.cxd4 d5 is another possibility, highlighting White's central inflexible pawns, as seen in, for example, Kramnik – Duda, Dortmund 2018.

9.♗b1 ♗b8 10.e4!?

A typical reaction for White in these lines, taking more space, restricting Black's remaining bishop and planning to play for an attack with ♗h4 and f2-f4.

Lacklustre play could meet with a severe punishment. For instance, 10.♗e1 ♗e6 11.♗c2 ♗d7 12.♗e1 ♗h3 13.♗h1 and now the typical idea is 13...♗h7! planning a brutal attack with ...f5-f4.



10...a6!

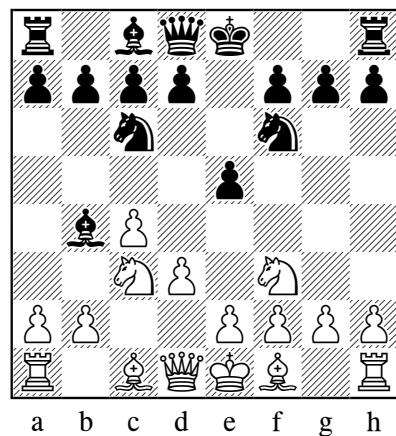
Black prepares to counterattack and create weaknesses.

11.♗d2? b5!

Black had sufficient counterplay in Li Chao – Postny, Tromso 2013. This was only a brief survey, but the general conclusion is obvious: if we allow Black to double our pawns with a timely ...♗xc3, despite getting the bishop-pair advantage, we should be ready to accept that Black will have rich counterplay. That's why I recommend avoiding it whenever the bishop lands on b4.

With our new move order, that goal is easy to accomplish.

4...♗b4

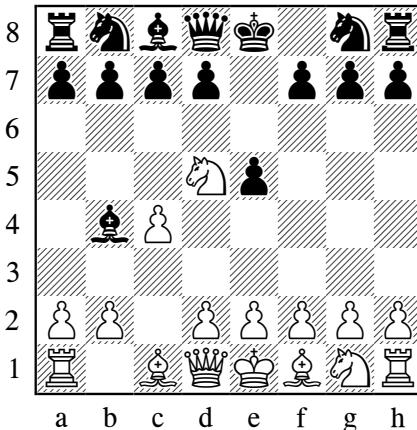


5.♗d2!

And we're ready to take back on c3 with the bishop, meaning that Black's plan of doubling our pawns has been neutralized. The best Black can do is change tack and play a reversed Open Sicilian with ...d7-d5. We'll learn more about that in the theory section. First, let's delve a bit deeper into some of the typical ideas mentioned above.

Gelfand's Approach

1.c4 e5 2.♘c3 ♜b4 3.♘d5!



The first ‘rule’ of this chapter is that when the bishop lands on b4, we will not allow it to take on c3 and double our pawns. We will either use our knight to attack it from d5, or defend our knight with the bishop if our pawn is already on d3.

3...e7

This is Anand's pet line, and I regard it as Black's best bet. Alternatives will of course be examined in the theory section.

4.d4! exd4 5.♘xd4 ♘f6

Anand made this line one of his main anti-English weapons in 2019. Many players tried to find an antidote against it. This is what the great Boris Gelfand came up with:

6. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{W}xe7$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 8. $\mathbb{W}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 9. $e3!?$

Gelfand's idea is simple: he wants to bring the knight to d5, via e2.

9...h6 10.♕xf6 ♜xf6 11.♘e2 d6?!

Surprisingly, this natural move is a mistake.

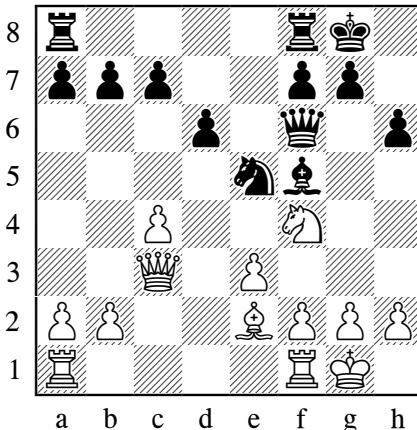
11... $\mathcal{Q}g4!$ is better; see the theoretical section for more details

12.♘f4 0-0 13.♖e2 ♖f5

13... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 14.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}fd8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ gave White a pleasant edge in Vakhidov – Santos Latasa, Internet 2021.

14.0-0

White is better, and for the purposes of opening preparation we could leave it there. However, it is highly instructive to follow the game a bit more.



14... $\mathbb{H}ae8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ 16. $\mathbb{H}ad1$

16. $\mathbb{W}a5$ doesn't win a pawn yet due to 16... $\mathbb{Q}e4$! (16... $\mathbb{Q}d3$! is also possible) 17. $\mathbb{W}xc7$ $\mathbb{W}g5$ with strong counterplay.

16...c6

The strong knight was hard to tolerate, but removing it weakens the d6-pawn.

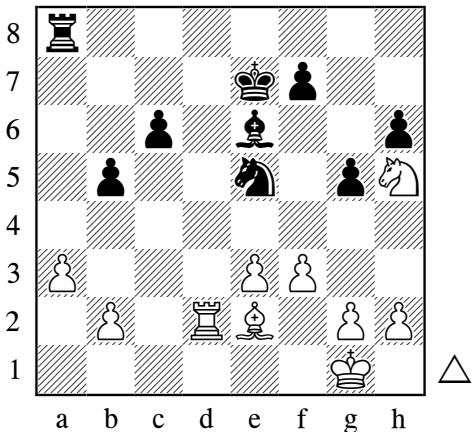
17. $\mathbb{Q}f4 \mathbb{W}c7$ 18. $\mathbb{K}d2 \mathbb{K}d8$ 19. $\mathbb{K}fd1 a6$ 20. $\mathbb{W}a3$

Just like that, White is winning a pawn.

20...b5 21.cxb5 axb5 22.♗xd6 ♜xd6
23.♗xd6 ♜xd6 24.♗xd6 ♜a8 25.a3 ♔f8

25...b4! would have given Black more concrete counterplay.

26.f3 ♔e7 27.♖d2 g5 28.♘h5 ♔e6



I consider this the most instructive position of the game.

29.e4?!

Gelfand pushes his majority a bit sooner than needed, thus allowing counterplay.

A better approach would have been 29.♔f2 followed by patiently improving with g2-g4, h2-h3 and possibly ♔g7.

29...♕a4! 30.♗g3 b4 31.axb4 ♕xb4 32.♗f1 f5!

Black was still somewhat worse of course, but at least he created enough annoying counterplay in order to be able to draw the game eventually in Gelfand – Anand, Amsterdam (blitz) 2019.

Theory Section

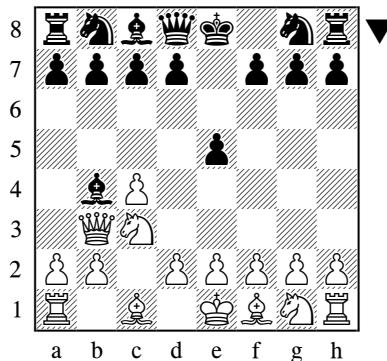
1.c4 e5 2.♗c3

As discussed earlier, there are three versions of the Reversed Rossolimo. We will consider **A) 2...♗b4** followed by the variants starting with **B) 2...♗f6** and **C) 2...♗c6**.

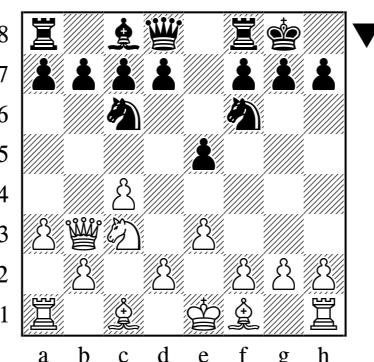
A) 2...♗b4 3.♗d5!

As prescribed earlier.

3.♔b3!? is a decent practical alternative to sidestep a lot of theory.



One thing this line has going for it is that after the most natural 3...♗c6 I think Black needs to know something about the position to equalize. (3...a5 4.a3 and 3...♗a5 4.♗f3 are both decent for Black in this iteration, but we still have some chances for an advantage.) 4.e3 ♗f6 5.♗ge2 0-0 6.a3 ♗xc3! (6...♗a5?! 7.♔c2! and 6...♗e7 7.♗d5 are both good for White.) 7.♗xc3

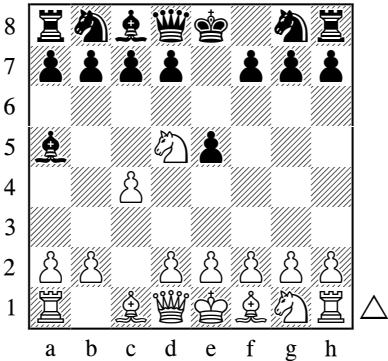


We have the pair of bishops and what generally looks like a good Sicilian. Black can equalize but needs to be accurate, either knowing or understanding that 7...♗e7! is an essential manoeuvre. Then 8.♗e2 c6! is the

last detail Black needs to know, preparing to build up a centre with ...d7-d5 next. Even here, plenty of life remains in the position and White can hope to exploit the bishop pair in the long term. It's a balanced situation but with plenty of chances for the better player to come out on top.

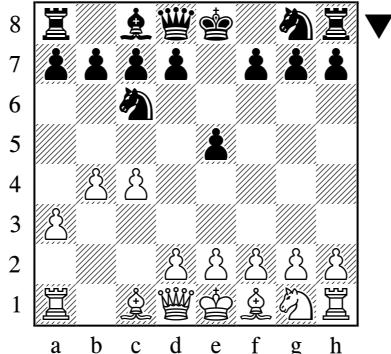
Back to 3.♗d5!, Black's two main options are **A1) 3...♝c5** and **A2) 3...♝e7**. Other options exist, but they are easy to deal with. For example:

3...♝a5?! doesn't actually lose a piece, but that's the end of the good news for Black.



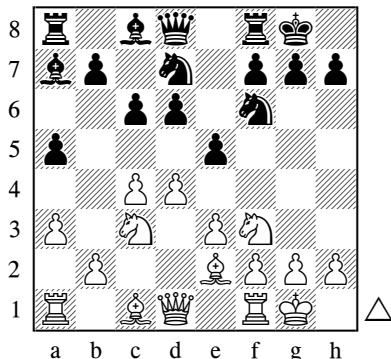
4.b4 ♘b6 (4...c6 5.bxa5 cxd5 6.cxd5 ♘xa5 7.e4 gives us a big advantage due to the bishop pair and extra central pawn.) After the text move, 5.c5 would be the maximalist choice which leads to a clear advantage if followed up correctly, while the simple 5.e3 offers an effortless, comfortable edge.

Both 3...♝a6?! and 3...♝c6 can be met in multiple ways but, for the sake of simplicity, let's grab the bishop and treat them as one line instead of two: 4.♗xb4 ♘xb4 5.a3 ♘c6 6.b4



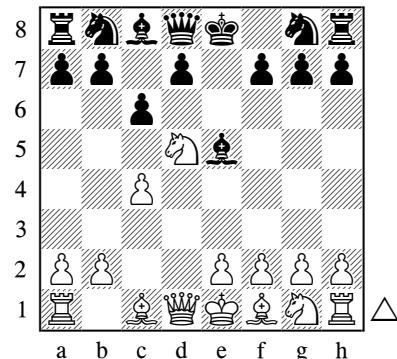
Positionally, White is better, as this looks like some kind of a great Sicilian in which we were gifted the pair of bishops. The game obviously remains complicated as the board is full of pieces and there is a lot of room for creativity by both players, but I think White should already be happy. One high-level encounter continued: 6...d5 7.e3? ♘f6 8.♗b2 Harikrishna insists that he is not afraid of ...d5-d4, and indeed he is right – we should not be. But it's good to note that taking on d5 on whichever ply is a good alternative. 8...d4 9.♗f3 ♘g4?! This is not good, but it is already not easy for Black to keep it together at this point. 10.h3 ♘xf3 and now 11.♘xf3N would have been the simpler recapture in Harikrishna – Vallejo, Palma de Mallorca 2017. On the other hand, after taking with the g-pawn White continued with ♘c2 and long castle and was winning just a few moves later.

3...a5 is not stupid, but 4.♗f3 d6 5.a3 ♘c5 6.e3 gives us an easy edge without having to remember much. For example: 6...c6 7.d4 ♘a7 8.♗c3 ♘d7 9.♗e2 ♘gf6 10.0-0 0-0



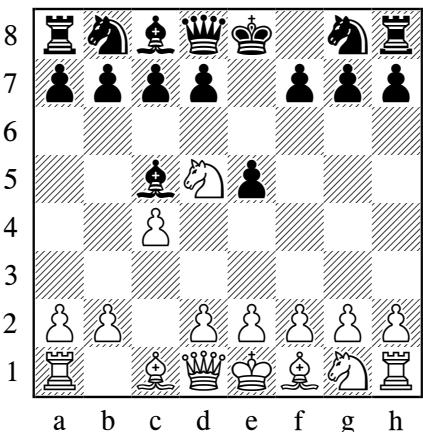
This position is reached almost by force. 11.♗c2! I like this clever little move, developing and stopping ...e5-e4. 11...♝e8 12.d5!N (Pushing the d-pawn is an improvement compared to 12.b4 which has been automatically played in all three games that have reached that juncture. But then Black can play 12...♝b8! 13.b5 e4! 14.♗d2 d5∞ and get a good game, as in Santos – Eljanov, Los Cancajos 2020.) By pushing our pawn on d5, we ensure that Black cannot get both ...e5-e4 and ...d6-d5 in, when ...♝b8 fixes the problematic dark-squared bishop for Black and gives good attacking chances on the kingside. With the pawn firmly fixed on d6, such chances are non-existent. Moreover, our plans might sometimes include taking on d6 and/or playing ♘d1 to exert some pressure on the d6-pawn. After 12...e4 13.♗d2 ♘e7 14.b4 we can already clearly see the importance of choosing the correct structure. We complete development with ♘b2 next, and we have a clear advantage.

3...♝d6 is also not terrible, but it is really easy to get a small edge against: 4.d4! c6 (4...exd4? 5.♗xd4 is awkward because of the threat against the pawn on g7.) 5.dxe5 ♘xe5



6.♗f3! We just keep developing and gaining tempos against the exposed bishop. 6...d6 7.♗f4± We're threatening to take on e5 and d8 followed by ♘d3 with a big advantage. Black can, of course, defend against that, but the bishop pair will almost certainly be lost. Meanwhile, we can continue developing with g2-g3 and ♘g2 followed by castling short if we see nothing better. It's simply a comfortable edge for White, and it is not all that surprising to see two wins in two games in the database, one of them being Smejkal – Hort, Prague 1996.

A1) 3...♝c5



This popular move was recommended by Mihalevski in *Grandmaster Repertoire 19 – Beating Minor Openings*.

4.e3!?

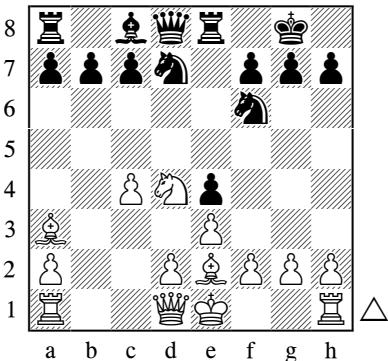
4.♗f3 is a good alternative which has been slightly more popular, but I prefer the text move.

4...♗f6

4...♗e7 5.b4 ♗xd5 converts to the next note.

5.b4 ♗e7

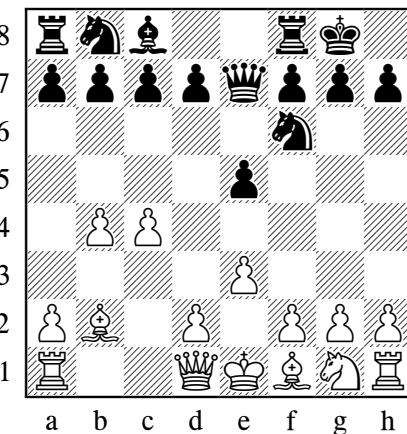
5...♗xd5 6.bxc5 ♗f6 7.♗f3 is somewhat favourable to White, whose dark-squared bishop has a lot of potential. For example: 7...e4 8.♗d4 0–0 9.♗e2 d6 10.♗a3!? dxc5 11.♗xc5 ♜e8 12.♗a3 ♗bd7



13.f4! This is an instructive positional decision, not allowing Black to build up some much-needed activity with ...♗e5 and ...♗g4 next to counter-balance White's bishop pair. 13...exf3 14.♗xf3 ♗f8 (14...♗e5 15.♗xe5 ♜xe5 16.0–0 is amazing for White, with the pair of bishops and the mass of central pawns.) 15.0–0± Black's only positive claim is one about stability. White was obviously the side to be preferred in Martis – Onder, corr. 2021. The plan is simply to play ♗b2 next and then build up an attack on the kingside, likely jumping forward with the f3-knight in one way or another.

6.♗xe7 ♜xe7 7.♗b2

It's useful that we don't have to waste time defending the b4-pawn.

7...0–0**8.♗e2!**

8.♗f3 is the only move mentioned by Mikhalevski. The idea behind the text move is to play ♗g3, followed by ♗e2 and castling. In this way, White will enjoy the bishop-pair advantage, and the c8-bishop will be restricted in its scope. Practical results have been excellent for White in this line.

8...d5!

Paradoxically, Black's best chance against our bishop pair is to open the position.

8...d6 9.♗g3 gives us an easy edge with the plan outlined above.

Another game continued 8...♜e8 9.a3 a5 10.b5 d6 11.♗g3 a4 12.♗e2 c6 13.0–0 and White was better in Mchedlishvili – Godena, Terme Catez 2022.

9.cxd5 ♗xd5 10.a3!

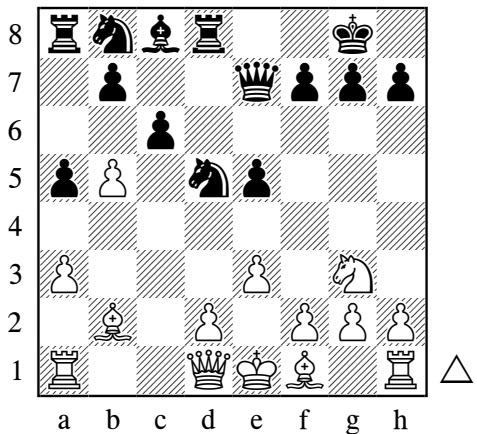
We can afford to take a moment to stabilize the queenside.

10...c6

Another game continued 10...♝f5 11.♗g3 ♗g6 and now 12.♗c4N is the simplest way to keep the upper hand. (The ambitious 12.h4? is

also tempting, and White had decent attacking chances in Moroni – Barp, Chianciano Terme 2021. Engines are not too scared by this, but for a human player the ideas of h4-h5 and $\mathbb{W}g4$ are not so easy to meet.)

11. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ a5 12. b5 $\mathbb{E}d8$



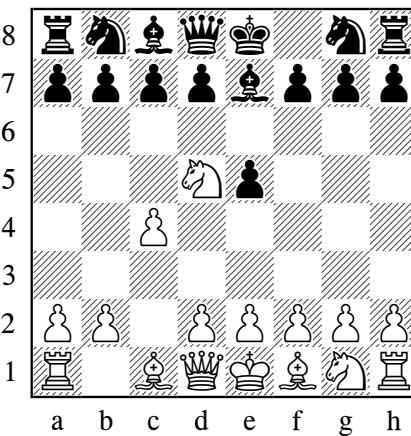
13. $\mathbb{W}h5!?$

Black went on to hold a draw in Elyoseph – Galiano Martinez, corr. 2021, but I think we should be happy to reach such a position with White.

A tempting alternative is 13. $\mathbb{B}c1N$, flexibly developing another piece.

13. $\mathbb{B}e2N$ followed by short castling also looks good enough for a slight edge.

A2) 3... $\mathbb{Q}e7$



I consider this Black's most theoretically challenging option in this line, but we still have ways of fighting for an edge against it.

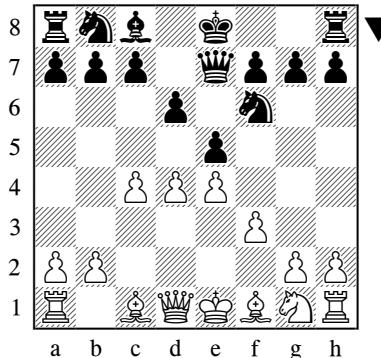
4. d4! exd4

A popular alternative has been:

4... d6

But I believe that in this case we have a simple continuation that leads to an edge for White. Logically enough, that is to occupy the centre with pawns:

5. e4! $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{W}xe7$ 7. f3

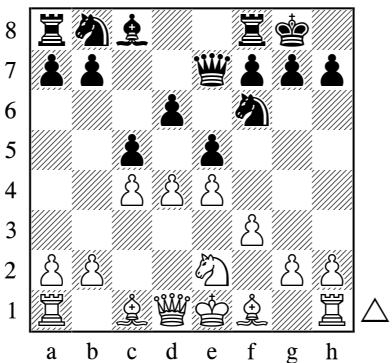


White has a small advantage in space and the pair of bishops, with the pawns being perfectly placed on light squares to complement the unopposed dark-squared bishop.

7...exd4

It looks like this might cede some more territory to White, but Black needs to open the position and look for counterplay as quickly as possible.

After 7...0–0–0 8.♗e2 by taking on d4 Black would allow White to transpose to the main line. But alternatives don't seem particularly impressive. For example: 8...c5? (8...♗h5?! 9.g4 ♘h4† 10.♔d2 was close to positionally winning for White in Srihari – Ter-Sahakyan, Internet (blitz) 2024. 8...♗fd7?! was a better try in Van Kessel – Kollars, Sitges 2022, with Black again preparing ...f7–f5. But retreating the knight ceases control of the d5-square, so 9.♗c3N was correct, with a stable advantage for White.)



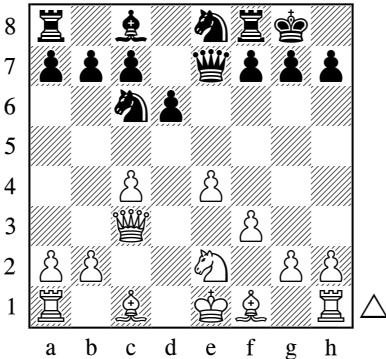
9.d5!N A massive improvement compared to taking on $c5$, which was White's choice in Xiong – Kollars, Internet (rapid) 2024. With the centre locked, White will comfortably prevent ... $f7-f5$ with $g2-g4$ whenever Black threatens it, and this is like a dream version of something that resembles the 4.a3 line of the Nimzo-Indian. In that case, the now healthy $b2$ -pawn is on $c3$, looking doubled, weak and sad. And even then White's position is generally considered to be quite good.

8. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ 0–0 9. $\mathbb{A}e2$ $\mathbb{A}c6$ 10. $\mathbb{W}c3$

On a light square the queen would be vulnerable to a knight jump, and on e3 or d2 it would impede the development of the c1-bishop.

10...e8!

10... $\mathbb{Q}h5$? 11. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ was great for White in Szerlak – Muri, corr. 2020, as Black cannot break on f5 without losing a piece.



11. Qg3!N

Supporting the e4-square just enough to make sure that after ...f7-f5 and ...fxe4 we'll always be able to take back with a piece on e4. 11.♘f4!? is also interesting, as played in Habans – Shirov, Sant Boi de Llobregat 2023. I just slightly prefer the text move.

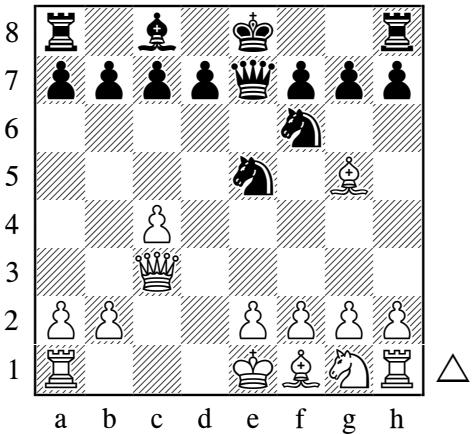
11...f5 12.♗d3 ♜e5

12... Qf6 13.0–0 ensures a small plus for us.

13. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ f4 14. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}h4\ddagger$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d1!$ $\mathbb{W}f2$
16. $\mathbb{Q}g1\pm$

Black has done excellently to annoy us, but we'll soon trade the queens off with either $\mathbb{W}e1$ or $\mathbb{W}d4$ and claim a small but stable edge.

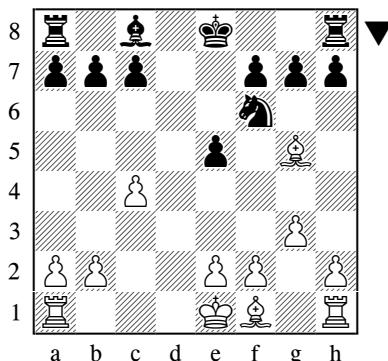
5. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ $\mathfrak{Q}f6$ 6. $\mathfrak{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{W}xe7$ 7. $\mathfrak{Q}g5$ $\mathfrak{Q}c6$
8. $\mathbb{W}c3$ $\mathfrak{Q}e5$



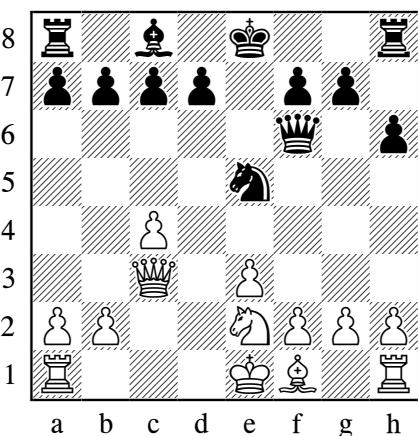
9.e3!?

Gelfand's approach, as we saw in the chapter introduction.

9.♘f3!? d6 10.♘xe5 ♗xe5 (10...dxe5 11.g3 also favours White) 11.♗xe5† dxe5 12.g3 is another simple way to get a small and safe edge, as seen in Nepomniachtchi – Anand, Amsterdam 2019. My engines say that Black's best is the tough-to-find:



12...♘e4!N 13.♗e3 (13.♗c1 b6! followed by ...♗b7 and ...♘d6 seems okay for Black.) 13...♘d6 The knight may go to f5 next, followed by d4. Nevertheless, after 14.b3 our bishop pair must be worth something, and Black still needs to play accurately to prove full equality.

9...h6 10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.♘e2**11...♘g4!**

This is more challenging than 11...d6!? 12.♘f4 0–0 13.♗e2, as seen in the Gelfand – Anand game from the introduction.

12.♗xf6 ♘xf6

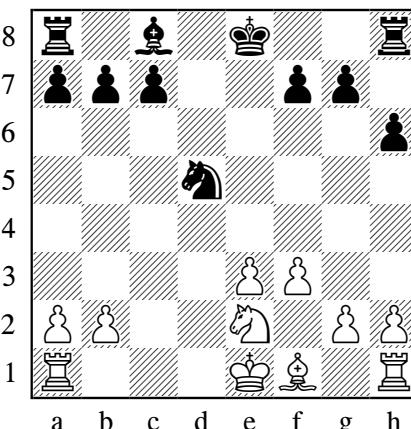
Despite the heavy simplifications, we can still fight for the advantage. The right way to proceed is:

13.f3!

The f3-pawn limits the scope of both of Black's minor pieces. A logical continuation is:

13...d5 14.cxd5 ♘xd5

And now we see another advantage of our 13th move:

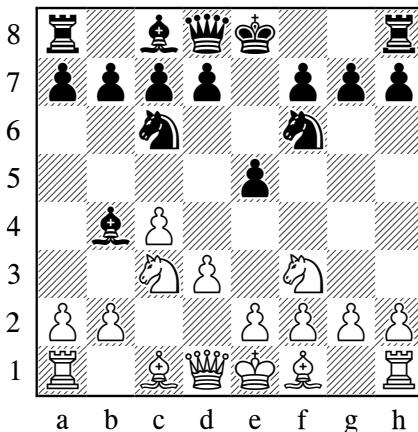
**15.♘f2!**

Our king finds an ideal square, where it stays safe and is also well positioned to support a future advance of the kingside pawns. Instead of rushing with e3–e4, I favour a slow build-up with moves like ♘c1, ♘d4 and g2–g4, with good chances to exert lasting pressure.

B) 2...♘f6

If Black wishes to play this in conjunction with a reversed Rossolimo set-up against our chosen move order, we will reach the following position:

3.♕f3 ♕c6 4.d3?! ♕b4



5.♕d2!

As mentioned in the introduction, this simple unpinning move renders Black's concept far less problematic than it is against the 4.g3 move order.

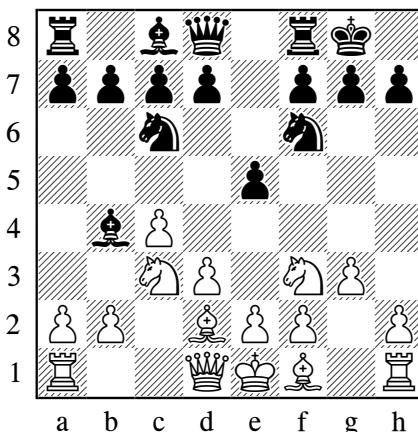
5...0-0

Black could also start with multiple other moves, such as moving the d-pawn once or twice, but there are no plans that do not involve castling short, so we might as well start our analysis with it to avoid confusion.

6.g3

Our usual development scheme.

6.e3?! also makes decent sense in this position.



Now Black needs to make an important decision. We will examine: B1) 6...♕xc3, B2) 6...♖e8, B3) 6...d6 and B4) 6...d5.

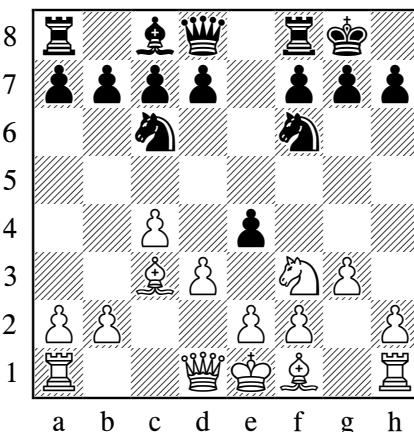
6...♕d4 is rare but not without sense, and has been tried twice by Nakamura in rapid and blitz. I would advocate boldly changing the pawn structure with: 7.♕xd4! exd4 8.♕e4 ♕xd2+ 9.♔xd2! ♕xe4 10.dxe4 c5 11.♕g2 White was slightly better in Czarnota – Petrov, Rome 2023. Our simple plan is to castle and then break with e2-e3, after which the currently impressive black pawn formation will be forced to reveal the assortment of weaknesses left behind on the d-file.

B1) 6...♕xc3

A rare but decent try for Black.

7.♕xc3 e4

7...d5?! 8.♕xe5! requires Black to find hard moves to prove compensation while White's development plan is quite easy to follow. (If you don't like this direction, 8.cxd5 leads to typical Sicilian-style play.)



8.♕h4!

This has only been played in correspondence, but it's clearly stronger than the alternatives and ensures some advantage for White. If the

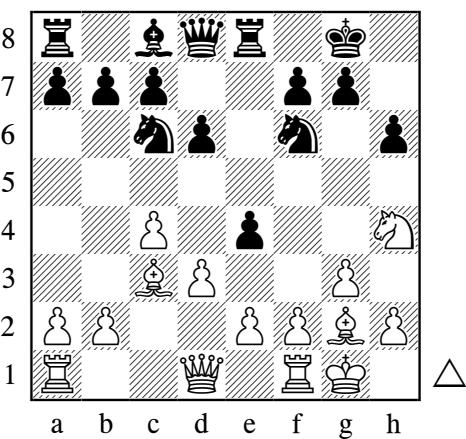
knight doesn't get in trouble on h4, it often turns out to be annoying to deal with, and that's exactly the case here.

8...d6 9.♗g2 ♕e8

9...g5? 10.♕c1 h6 11.dxe4 is winning for White, as the knight escapes through the f5-square.

10.0–0 h6

10...g5?! 11.♕c1 h6 is less of a disaster since e4 isn't hanging, but after 12.b4! with ideas of ♗b2 and ♕c3, it looks like Black would get run over in a practical game.



11.♗h1!

The g2-square can be used to evacuate the knight if needed, and the mighty dark-squared bishop ensured an advantage for White in Borchardt – Nowak, email 2022.

Abridged Variation Index

The Variation Index in the book is seven pages long. Below is an abridged version giving the main variations, with just a few sub-variations.

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