

Jerzy Konikowski
Uwe Bekemann

Openings

The Queen's Gambit

read – understand – play



JBV Chess Books

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Preface

In this book we deal with all the lines that can arise after the initial moves 1.d4 d5 2.c4 – a colorful variety of mostly very different opening systems, some of which are among the most popular in tournament chess.

Nowadays a whole public library could easily be filled with opening literature. But how does this help a player, who – for whatever reason – cannot afford to buy and/or work through dozens of titles? With this book we want to cover his basic need for information. It is part of a small series and deals with the extensive field of the Queen's Gambit.

Our focus is primarily on players of the following categories:

- Beginners, who already have a good command of the rules and know the basics of a proper game, and who now need a basic equipment for an orientation in the world of chess openings.
- Players, who already have some experience, but see a deficit especially in the area of openings, and who want to work it up quickly and without exaggerated effort.
- Hobby players, who want to make themselves familiar with certain openings to a degree that enables them to play interesting and entertaining games.

We attach great importance to the presentation of ideas and plans that are inherent in an opening. Therefore, we occasionally even explain the reason for certain seemingly self evident moves, if we think it necessary. Not only shall the reader be enabled to *play* the right move, but also to understand exactly *why* this is the right move. Only then will he be able to play his openings with sense and understanding, instead of just reproducing the lines learned by heart without understanding them. And this is the only way to avoid the risk of becoming disoriented if the game leaves the usual path.

As in the previous volumes, we have done our best to offer the reader standard ideas that he can refer to again and again in suitable situations. This applies in particular to the various lines of the 'Queen's Gambit Declined'. At the beginning we take a closer look at important standard pawn formations that regularly occur in the examined lines. The introduction serves as an overview of the content of the 18 chapters.

We have done our best to avoid repetition. For example, if we have already explained the meaning of a move in *one* line, we will not repeat the explanation

if the move appears in a similar position. It is therefore advisable to work through the chapters from the beginning and to proceed chronologically in chapters with more than one line.

And finally, one more word about how we have chosen the material. We have basically recorded everything that is considered playable. Within the different lines, we have always looked for promising possibilities to leave the well-trodden paths. Thereby we want to enable the readers to pose problems to their opponents in practice by surprising them with something they are (hopefully) unfamiliar with. Because well-prepared surprises increase the chances of success and increase the fun!

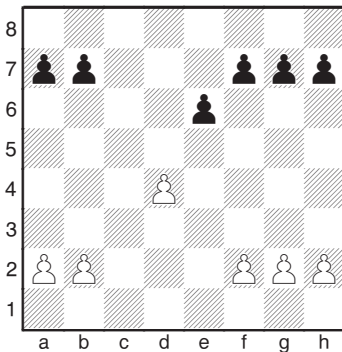
We are confident that, based on what you learn from this book, you will be able to understand the essential basic features of the Queen's Gambit.

We hope you enjoy our book and have fun and success in your games! If we can help you a little to achieve your goals, our work has been worthwhile.

Pawn Structures in the Queen's Gambit

In every chess game, pawn formations are one of the most important elements. They play a central role, as it largely depends on them which strategic-tactical plans can be implemented. At this point, we are going to take a closer look at some general constellations that every player should know when dealing with the Queen's Gambit. Knowledge of this information is assumed for the rest of the book, and only in certain specific cases, we will give additional details.

Isolated pawns



An isolated pawn (or 'isolani' for short) has no pawns on the neighboring files that could protect it. In the Queen's Gambit, an isolani is generally to be found on the d-file, for example a white one on d4 or a black one on d5. It depends on the circumstances whether an isolani is an advantage or a weakness.

The obvious disadvantage is that it can only be protected by pieces. From a static point of view, this basically makes it a weakness, which can have a serious impact especially in the endgame. On the other hand, it leads to a certain space advantage and 'marks' two possible outposts for the own pieces (see below). And in the ideal case, it can advance at a suitable moment and possibly develop great dynamic power.

The different strategies of both sides are derived from this. The owner of the isolani basically tries to keep as much material on the board as possible and attack the opposing king, while the opponent tries to simplify the position and reach an endgame. This results in a complicated fight with mutual possibilities.

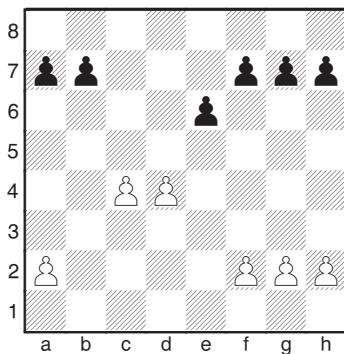
The general conditions regarding its potential weakness or dynamic strength can be defined as follows:

- The neighboring files (c- and e-) are open (not occupied by pawns) or half-open (only occupied by opposing pawns).
- A white isolani controls the important central squares on c5 and e5, while a black one controls those on c4 and e4. This not only leads to a space advantage, but also facilitates the development and improves the mobility of the pieces.
- The square on e5 (or on e4) can be occupied with a piece (ideally

with a knight) to take part in the attack on the king.

- A seemingly passive isolani can break through at a convenient time with d4–d5 (or d5–d4), which can trigger favorable tactical complications in the center. And even the mere *threat* of a breakthrough can cause the opponent to take defensive measures.

Hanging pawns



Two neighboring pawns on half-open files, which are separated from the other own pawns, are called 'hanging pawns'. Similar to an isolani, they can be strong or weak, depending on the positional and tactical circumstances. In the Queen's Gambit, this structure usually occurs on the c- and d-file.

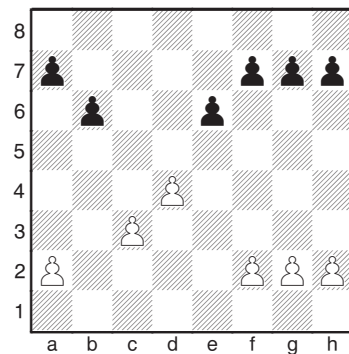
Hanging pawns can be strong, because they control many important squares in the center. However, if one of them is forced to move forward, this leads to a so-called 'hole' that can be exploited and occupied by opposing pieces. Therefore, an advance should

be avoided if it's not absolutely necessary or entails a particular benefit.

The owner of hanging pawns should play actively and try to take advantage of their dynamics, especially for an attack on the king. He should also avoid simplifications.

On the other hand, the right strategy to play *against* hanging pawns is to strive for simplifications. This reduces the opponent's chances of an attack, while the hanging pawns can become weak and can possibly be conquered. An attack from the side can lead to their weakening and possibly cause an isolated or backward pawn.

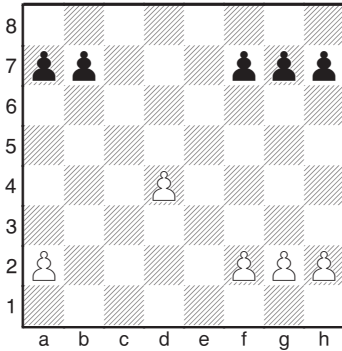
The structure c3–d4 (or c6–d5)



This pawn structure is closely related to that with an isolated pawn or hanging pawns. If the rear pawn on c3 (or c6) cannot advance because the square on c4 (or c5) is blocked by opposing forces, it becomes a backward pawn, in which case the pawn duo loses its mobility and usually becomes weak. Therefore, the owner of

such a structure should strive for active play or try to advance the rear pawn to reach a structure with hanging pawns.

Passed pawns

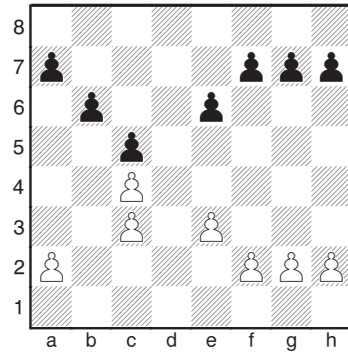


A passed pawn is a pawn whose way to the promotion square is not blocked or controlled by opposing pawns. It is dangerous because of its potential of promotion and it becomes more dangerous the more advanced it is. And once it's one step from the promotion square, it can even become the decisive force.

To stop the pawn the opponent must use pieces, which are then not available for other tasks. However, under certain circumstances they can also conquer and eliminate it.

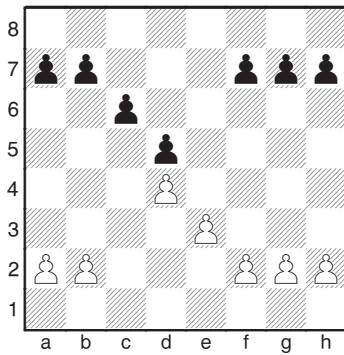
Positions with passed pawns usually are full of dynamic and hidden opportunities. They demand precise play from both sides, because even a small mistake can radically change the result of the fight.

Doubled pawns



Two pawns of the same color that are on the same file are called doubled pawns. Their advantages and disadvantages depend on several factors. Depending on the type of position and its dynamics, such pawns can be strong or weak. In the endgame, however, this formation regularly is a serious weakness. In the opening and the middlegame, doubled pawns in or near the center can have several positive effects. In particular, they can entail the control over important strategic points in that area. Furthermore, every pair of doubled pawns means that the owner has one more half-open file at his disposal than his opponent.

The Karlsbad Structure



This pawn structure is named after the Czech town of Karlovy Vary, which in German is called Karlsbad. It was during a tournament in this town in 1923 that players started to examine this pawn formation, in which Black has a pawn majority on the queen side (a7, b7, c6) compared with the two white pawns on a2 and b2. Nevertheless, White can use his minority to attack the opposing structure on the queen side by playing a2-a4 and b2-b4-b5. And because the attack is carried out by a smaller number of pawns, it's called a minority attack.

If after the push b4-b5 Black reacts with c6xb5, the pawn on d5 becomes an isolani. To avoid this, Black can play b7-b6 at the right moment beforehand and then strive for hanging pawns after the possible moves c6-c5, d4xc5 b6xc5. Under certain circumstances, he can also stop the opposing b-pawn by playing b7-b5 and then try to bring his knight to the strong outpost on c4 via b6. Another option is a counter attack on the king side with f7-f5-f4.

Introduction

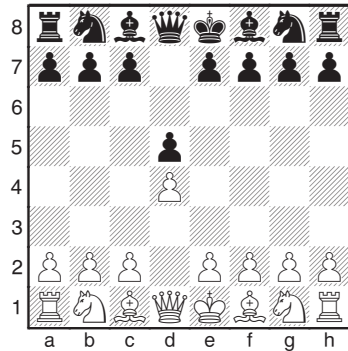
The Queen's Gambit 1.d2-d4 d7-d5 2.c2-c4 is one of the most popular openings. Due to its large number of various lines it's one of the most colorful and demanding openings.

It's basic idea to eliminate the black d-pawn by exchanging it for the white c-pawn, thus paving the way for the push e2-e4 and the erection of a strong pawn center. Even if the c-pawn is unprotected and can thus be conquered, the Queen's Gambit is not a real gambit in the sense that in the opening a pawn is sacrificed. Only if White does not try to recover the pawn, this can lead to a typical gambit.

The Slav Defense with 2...c6 is sometimes seen as a completely separate system. In contrast to most of the other main lines, the black queen bishop is not locked in on c8.

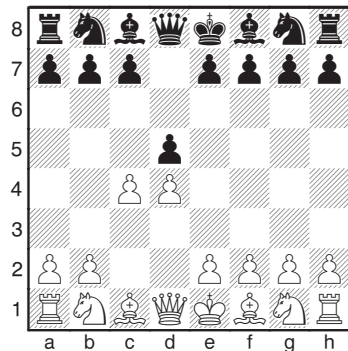
This introduction basically serves two purposes: to provide an overview of all of the lines that make up the Queen's Gambit and to point out how they are connected. Furthermore, it shows the structure of our book – i.e. which continuations can be found in which chapters.

1.d4 d5

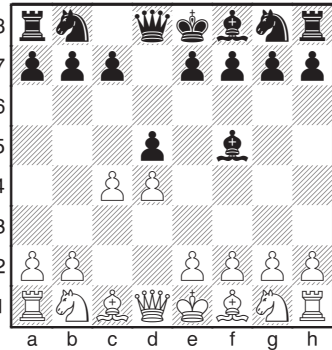
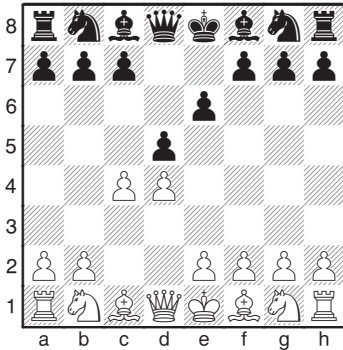


2.c4

In this starting position of the Queen's Gambit, the white c-pawn attacks the black d-pawn, which is considered slightly more valuable due to its more central position.



2...e6



Besides 2...c6, this defense of the attacked central pawn is the most frequently played continuation. Black wants to quickly develop his king side and bring his king to safety by castling.

The alternatives are examined in the following order.

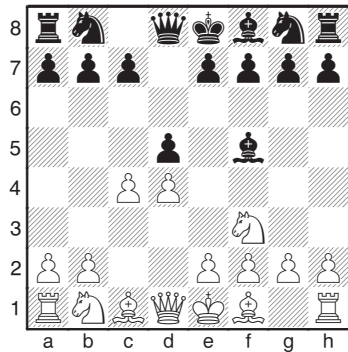
- I. 2...c6 – Slav Defense (**Chapter 1**)
- II. 2...dxc4 – Queen’s Gambit Accepted (**Chapter 2**)
- III. 2...e5 – Albin Counter-Gambit (**Chapter 3**)
- IV. 2...♞c6 – Chigorin Defense (**Chapter 4**)

As the ‘Keres Variation’ and the ‘Symmetrical Defense’ are rarely played, we don’t treat them in separate chapters.

V. The Keres Variation 2...♟f5 (named after GM Paul Keres – 1916-1975) is playable and well suited as a surprise weapon.

A) 3.♞f3

After 3.♞c3, the game can take a similar direction or lead to one of the main lines by transposition of moves; e.g. to the Slav Defense (**Chapter 1**) or the Exchange Variation (**Chapter 8**).



3...e6 4.♞b3 ♞c6 5.♟d2

(– After 5.c5, Black can secure his position on the queen side with 5...♞b8 and then simply continue the development; e.g. 6.♟f4 ♞f6 7.♞c3 a6 8.e3 ♟e7 9.♟e2 0-0 with a solid position.

– And after 5.♞xb7 ♞b4 6.♞a3 ♞b8 7.♞xa7 ♞a8 8.♞b7 ♞b8, White would have to settle for a draw. However, Black could consider to play for more.)

5...♖b8 6.cxd5

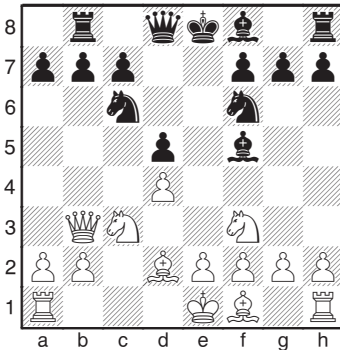
(After 6.♘c3 or 6.e3, Black can simply continue the development of his king side.)

6...exd5

(6...♖xd5 is also playable, although this simplification makes the position rather dull.)

White can now play against the ♗d5 and advance his development. He dictates the events for a while, although Black can make similar progress in defending the pawn.

7.♘c3 ♘f6



8.♗g5

By attacking the ♘f6, White threatens to win the black d-pawn.

8...♗e6

Now the pawn is sufficiently defended again.

9.e3 a6

To avoid the unpleasant pin of the queen knight with ♗f1-b5.

(This could occur after 9...♗e7 10.♗b5, whereupon 10...0-0 11.♗xc6 bxc6 would lead to a slightly uncomfortable position for Black. However, after

12.♖c2 ♖d6 with the intention to carry out the push c6-c5, he still has good equalizing chances.)

10.♗d3 ♗e7 11.0-0 0-0

After mobilizing his troops, Black has good prospects.

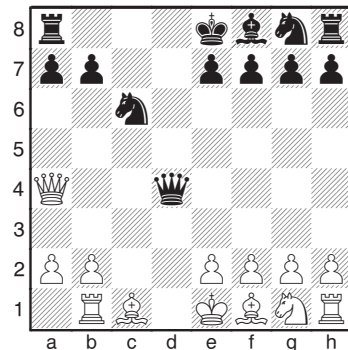
B) 3.cxd5

If Black chooses the Keres Variation, he must also expect this exchange and be familiar with the following maneuver.

B1) The stunning reply 3...♗xb1 is correct, although it seems to contradict the basic opening rule according to which one should not move a piece twice or even exchange a developed piece without good reason. And inexperienced players can make a mistake precisely because they want to abide by this rule.

White can immediately play 4.♖xb1, although it's more common to insert the moves 4.♖a4+ c6 5.dxc6 ♘xc6 first and only then to play 6.♖xb1.

B1a) 6...♖xd4 is the easiest way to obtain fairly equal prospects.



Black's only positional disadvantage

is that he has parted with one of his bishops.

The position after 7.♖xd4 ♘xd4 is completely equal. Both sides will continue their development, as shown in the example line 8.e3 ♘c6 9.♗f3 e6 10.a3 ♘d6 11.b4 ♖e7 12.♙b2 ♗f6 13.♙d3 ♖hd8=.

B1b) With 6...e5, Black can keep the position complicated, but he has to accept an isolated d-pawn, as shown in the example line 7.♙d2 (7.dxe5?? ♙b4+ -+) 7...exd4 8.g3 ♖d5 9.♗f3 ♗f6 10.♙g2 ♙e7 11.0-0 0-0.

White has a freer position and can hope for the active potential of his bishop pair. Black has to nurse his isolani, but with precise play he should obtain good prospects, which is confirmed by practical results.

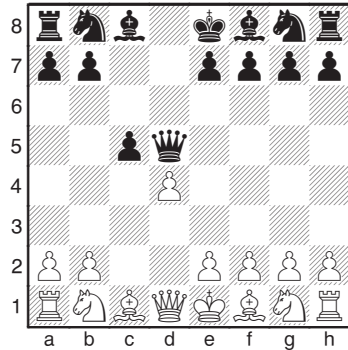
B2) After 3...♖xd5, White could exploit the vulnerable black piece position and obtain a clear opening advantage with 4.♗c3 ♖a5 5.♙d2! or 4...♖d8 5.e4 ♙g6 6.♖b3.

VI. The 'Symmetrical Defense' 2...c5 is another good option to surprise the opponent and obtain good equalizing chances.

3.cxd5

(3.e3 e6 4.♗f3 ♗f6 5.♗c3 ♗c6 leads to a position from the Tarrasch Defense – see **Chapter 7**.)

A) After 3.cxd5, the usual reply is 3...♖xd5.

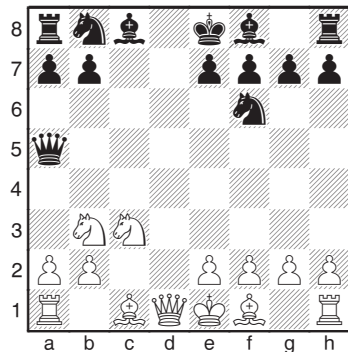


The statistical results confirm that this is the best continuation, provided that Black makes another correct decision in due course.

4.♗f3 cxd4 5.♗c3

Before recovering the pawn, White takes advantage of the pin of the ♗d4 and develops his knight with tempo. This shows the disadvantage that often comes with the early development of the queen. It can become a target and thus involuntarily further the activation of the opposing troops.

5...♖a5 6.♗xd4 ♗f6 7.♗b3



This is the situation, in which Black has to make another right decision. He should continue with 7...♖h5.

(7...♖c7 leads to more comfortable play for White, which is also confirmed by the results from practice. After the possible continuation 8.e4 ♘c6 9.♙e2 e6 10.0-0 a6 11.♙e3, White has made great progress without being disturbed and is now ready to take action; e.g. 11...♙d6 12.f4 12...e5 13.f5 0-0 14.♖c1. His pieces are positioned more effectively and the simple plan to launch an attack with g2-g4 gives him good prospects.)

In order to further activate his troops, White will have to make concessions that will help Black advance his development according to the following pattern.

8.♙f4 e5 9.♙g3 ♙e6 10.e4 ♖xd1+ 11.♖xd1

After swapping queens, the ♙e5 needs protection.

11...♘bd7

This is better than 11...♘c6 12.♙b5 etc. 12.♙b5 a6 13.♙xd7+ ♘xd7

The position is fairly equal; e.g. 14.♘d5 ♙xd5 15.♖xd5 f6 16.♙e2 ♖c8 with equal prospects.

B) The position after 3...♘f6 is slightly more difficult to handle for inexperienced players and requires more preparation.

4.dxc5

(4.♘f3 is also playable, but promises no advantage; e.g. 4...cxd4 5.♖xd4 ♖xd5 6.♘c3 ♖xd4 7.♘xd4 a6=.)

4...♖xd5 5.♖xd5

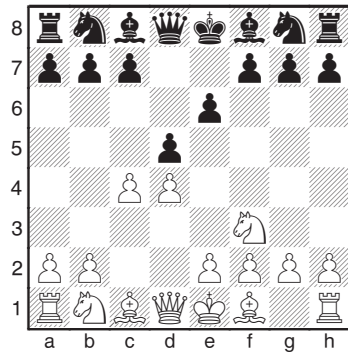
(After 5.♙d2!?, the queens stay on the board; e.g. 5...♖xc5 6.♘c3 ♘c6 7.e3 etc.)

5...♘xd5 6.♙d2 e5 7.♘c3 (7.b4 a5!?) 7...♙e6 8.♖c1 ♘d7 9.e4 ♘xc3 10.♙xc3 ♙xc5=

3.♘c3

White increases the tension in the center by putting pressure on the ♙d5. If possible, he wants to push his e-pawn to e4.

Another option is 3.♘f3 to postpone the decision whether the ♘b1 should be developed to c3 or d2. Depending on the continuation, the game can return to the main lines by transposition of moves or take an independent course.



A) The natural move 3...♘f6 is by far the most popular.

4.♙g5 h6

(4...♙b4+ leads to the Vienna Variation – see **Chapter 5**.)

5.♙h4

(5.♙xf6 leads to the Moscow Variation – see **Chapter 6**.)

5...♙b4+