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## Foreword by Anish Giri

The opening is the only part of the game that one can predict and plan, so it is no wonder that this aspect of the game fascinates many chess players of all levels and ages. Winning the game with the white pieces straight out of the opening by just memorizing a sequence of moves, as tempting as it sounds, only happens in fairy tales (or in some of my games, but I do this for a living, so don't try this at home). More and more players have realized that the way to approach their White repertoire is to find an opening where the plans are simple, yet harmonious, and the main focus of the game shifts onto the middlegame, the phase where the sharper mind prevails. This, however, is easier said than done. The imaginary tree of openings, expanding on a daily basis with more and more theoretically relevant games pouring in, is hard to navigate; the options are limitless and for every move you make with White there are five alternatives you have to be prepared for.

One easy, yet prideful way out of this opening carousel, or madhouse, if you wish, is the Italian Game, or the Giuoco Piano – the so called Quiet Game. The first ten to fifteen moves are clear (as Karsten and Georgios explain in the very first pages of this book), yet even the strongest players have failed to navigate the labyrinths of this crystal-clear opening. Behind the apparent clarity and simplicity there is a layer of move-order subtleties and nuances that you don't necessarily have to know, but that you may eventually stumble upon anyway.

I have little doubt that the variations in this book are neither complete nor faultless and some of the evaluations are to be doubted. Some, checked under the careful microscope of serious hardware and software, can and probably will be proven over-optimistic for White, and in extreme cases may even be blatantly wrong. But the basic principles, the plans and the concepts as well as the model games offered in this book will help many ambitious chess lovers come closer to understanding the subtleties of this quiet yet fascinating opening.

Personally, I have played many successful games with the Italian Game in games with shorter time controls, but also in some longer and more important games. In the recent Candidates Tournament in Moscow I used it to outwit Hikaru Nakamura, and although he later escaped, Pavel Eljanov, the first player I played after the Candidates tournament, didn't. Hopefully there will be many more victories in the Italian Game for me and for the readers of this book, too.

Anish Giri  
June 2016

## Preface

Any 1.e4 player knows the problem that 1...e5 is hard to meet and to beat. The Spanish or Ruy Lopez opening is not easy to learn, as Black has so many options to deal with it. So why not choose the Italian Opening, which also is very old and can lead to similar structures? We admit that 3.♘b5 exerts more direct pressure, but it also gives Black more options. The slow Italian with c2-c3 and d2-d3, with the idea of following up later with d3-d4, preserves White's initiative and is not easy to deal with. Black has several options, but does not really have an easy life, as White can often press on until the endgame. Therefore we have also included typical strategies and endgames, and last but not least tactical exercises.

We recommend a schematic set-up plan in Ruy Lopez style with 0-0, ♘b1-d2-f1-g3(-f5), ♗e1, h2-h3, and d3-d4, and if ...d6-d5 then exd5, but as usual you need to know a few move order details not to be outsmarted. White can of course also use other set-ups, which we mention briefly as well. For example, the modern trend to play a2-a4 early, with one idea being to follow up with ♘b1-a3, is also looked at. Other White move orders and concepts are also briefly described in Chapter 9. We have unified the move orders according to our repertoire suggestions.

We would like to thank Jonas Lampert and Ufuk Tuncer for ideas, suggestions and analytical corrections, Allard Hoogland and Peter Boel of New in Chess for their good cooperation, Anton Schermer, Frank Erwich and Ian Kingston for the excellent layout, and last but not least super-grandmaster Anish Giri for his foreword.

Karsten Müller and Georgios Souleidis,  
Hamburg 2016

## Introduction

As an 1.e4 player I struggled for a long time in my career with what to play against 1...e5. As I am not the most hard-working guy in the world I always refused to study the massive amount of theory in the Ruy Lopez. Instead, I tried nearly every other possibility to encounter 1...e5, including dubious stuff like 2.d4 and a gambit that I'd prefer not to name. At some point I realised that I would have to try the Italian Game.

Previously I thought that this was one of the most boring openings in chess history and that it would not be easy to win with it, but to my surprise I started to win game after game, even against stronger opponents, and without studying too much theory. Actually, this should not come as a shock because the Italian Game is a very natural opening and it is no surprise that it was one of the first openings played in chess history. White develops his pieces in a very natural way and brings the king into safety. And from the beginning he is fighting for the centre. These are the basic rules of nearly every opening and this is what a coach teaches his pupils – or at least what he should teach.

Nowadays the Italian Game is my main weapon against 1...e5 and it will probably be so forever. Karsten asked me several times to write a book, but I always refused until he asked me about this opening. I immediately accepted, because I knew that there are many publications from Black's perspective against 1.e4, but very few from White's viewpoint. Of course there is John Emms' classic from 2010, *Beating 1.e4 e5*, but the theory has developed a lot in the past six years, as more and more top players have included the Italian Game in their repertoire, not to mention top grandmasters like Sergei Tiviakov or Ivan Saric who use or have used this opening as their main weapon.

What used to be the main line – 5.d4 – has changed. The new main line is what we present in this book – the Slow Italian after 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 ♙c5 4.c3 ♗f6 5.d3. In this book we cover everything after the moves 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4. I believe we have found a good way to deal with the amount of theory (not to be underestimated) and the demand to present a playable repertoire for the amateur player, who obviously doesn't have the time to study an opening for hours and hours.

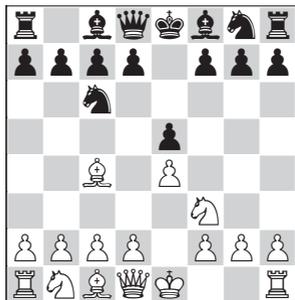
We have, of course, used the latest engine technology to analyse every line in this book, and we hope that we are presenting a super-solid repertoire that can be used for years, and also at a higher level. For me personally it will be my reference book for years to come, and I hope for the readers too.

Georgios Souleidis  
1 September 2016

## Concept of the book

The idea of the Italian Opening is to play with pawns in the centre with c2-c3 and, sooner or later, with d3-d4. In the old days White almost always played d2-d4 in one move very quickly, but modern practice and computer-assisted analysis have shown that this does not lead to an advantage, as it burns the fire of White's initiative too early. For this reason we recommend a slow burning approach with c2-c3 and only d2-d3 first. This started to catch on among grandmasters relatively late in the 1970s, but it has developed a lot since then. It can be compared with a Ruy Lopez with c2-c3 and d2-d3, and a few lines do indeed transpose.

**1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4**



The starting position of this book has been reached. White plans to castle short, to play c2-c3, d2-d3, h2-h3, ♖e1, ♗b1-d2-f1 and then proceed with ♗g3, ♙e3 or d3-d4. This plan is very easy to remember and the following strategies are also very clear.

**3...♙c5**

For sidelines like 3...g6 see Chapter 1.

3...♗f6 4.d3 ♙c5 (for the other main move 4...♙e7 and sidelines see Chapter 3) 5.c3 transposes.

**4.c3**

For the move order 4.0-0, see Chapter 9. Here it is often very important that White does not play h2-h3 when Black has not yet castled.

This move is directed against a quick ...d7-d5.

**4...♗f6**

For sidelines like 4...♖f6, see Chapter 2.

**5.d3!?**

The defining move of the Slow Italian.

5.d4 is the main line in the spirit of the old times, but nowadays it has been overtaken by 5.d3.

**5...d6**

5...d5? is a typical mistake due to 6.exd5 ♗xd5 7.♖b3+-.

5...0-0 6.0-0 (for the move order 6.♗bd2 to meet an early ...d7-d5 with exd5 followed by ♗e4, see Chapter 4.4) 6...d6 transposes (for 6...d5, see Chapter 4.1 and 4.2 and for 6...a6 7.♗bd2 d5, see Chapter 4.3).

5...a6 6.0-0 ♙a7 (6...0-0 7.♗bd2 ♙a7 8.h3 d5 is the same) 7.♗bd2 0-0 8.h3 d5 is another move order which leads to Chapter 4.3 (8...d6 transposes to the main line).

**6.0-0 0-0**

6...♙b6 with the idea ...♗c6-e7-g6: see Chapter 6.2.

6...♙g4 7.♗bd2: see Chapter 5.1.

**7.♗bd2**

This move order is favoured by the specialists Giri and Nisipeanu.

For the modern alternative approach 7.a4!? to follow up with ♖b1-a3-c2, see Chapter 9.4.

### 7...a6

7...♗e7: see Chapter 6.

7...♗a5 is met by 8.♙b5!? (the computer prefers 8.♙xf7+ ♜xf7 9.b4±, but this is more messy than our suggestion) 8...a6 9.♙a4 b5 10.♙c2±;

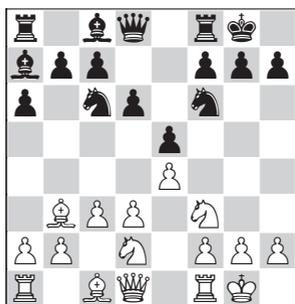
7...♙e6 8.b4: see Chapter 5.4.

7...a5: see Chapter 5.4.3.

### 8.♙b3

The bishop should be preserved against the potential threat ...♗a5.

### 8...♙a7



For 8...♙e6 9.h3 or 9.♞e1, see respectively Chapters 8.1.3.2 and 8.1.3.3. 9.♙c2 is the choice of Anish Giri to preserve the light squared bishop – see Giri-Anand in the Strategy chapter for a repertoire based on meeting ...♙e6 with ♙c2.

### 9.h3!

An important point to remember, as 9.♞e1?! can be met by 9...♗g4 10.♞e2 ♗h8 11.h3 ♗h6 (even the direct 11...f5!? is interesting) 12.♗f1 f5 which plays into Black's hands.

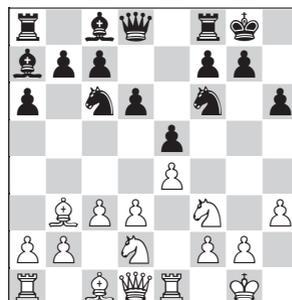
### 9...h6

9...♗e7: see Chapter 6.3.

9...♙e6 10.♞e1: see Chapter 8 (for the interesting alternative 10.♙c2, see Giri-Anand in the Strategy chapter).

After 9...♗h5, 10.♗c4! is very important. See Chapter 7.1.

### 10.♞e1



### 10...♞e8

10...♙e6 11.♗f1: see Chapter 8. 11.♙c2 is another move order.

10...♗h5: see Chapter 7.2.

### 11.♗f1 ♙e6 12.♗g3

12.♙c2 is another move order.

### 12...♞d7

12...d5: see Chapter 8. 12...♙xb3 is usually met by 13.♞xb3 (see Chapter 8), but when Black has played ...h7-h6 then White can also very seriously consider 13.axb3!? (see Chapter 8).

### 13.♙c2 d5

See Chapter 8.

## Move order

Usually you can just play the main schematic set-up plan 0-0, ♞e1, ♗bd2-f1-g3 (for the modern approach with a2-a4 and ♖b1-a3-c2 see Chapter 9) and ♙b3-c2 in any order. Sometimes we have given ways to create more pressure, but that set-up is usually also playable. However, the following points deserve special attention:

1) Before playing ♞f1-e1 you should check that ...♗g4 is not dangerous. Otherwise Black can often follow up with ...f7-f5 quickly. In our main repertoire we play ♞e1 very late.

2) h2-h3 is usually only played after Black has castled. Otherwise Black can aim for ...g7-g5-g4. Furthermore Black can sacrifice on h3 in several lines, especially when his dark-squared bishop controls the a7-g1 diagonal. Watch out for this!

3) Make sure that you can meet ...d7-d5 in the way you want to meet it, or stop it with an early ♖e1. In our recommended move order with ♘bd2 White often has an early ♘e4 or ♖e1 against an early ...d7-d5, but you should study these lines in detail as it is important to use the initiative here directly.

4) We suggest keeping the bishop on b3 for as long as possible and only retreating it at the 13<sup>th</sup> move – see Chapter 8 – but meeting ...♗e6 always with ♗c2 definitely also comes into consideration – see Giri-Anand in the Strategy chapter for a repertoire suggestion with this guideline. If Black

takes on b3 we usually take back with the queen, but if Black has already played ...h7-h6 then axb3 also often comes strongly into consideration.

5) White's bishop usually stays on c4 until Black threatens ...♗a5. Then ♗b3 should be played.

6) The central advance d3-d4 should usually not be played early and only after preparation. Often the queen's knight should already be on g3.

7) ...♗g4 is usually not dangerous and often just helps White.

8) Remember to meet 9...♗h5 with 10.♗c4! as this is an exception to the standard set up – see Chapter 7.1.

One way to gain a first impression of an opening is to choose heroes and to study their games. Here we recommend for example Giri, Nisipeanu, Saric, Delchev, Short, Socko, Tiviakov, Areschenko, Anna Muzychuk and Hou Yifan.

## Chapter 3

# Two Knights without ... ♖c5

In this chapter we will deal with the second main move 3... ♘f6 and all reasonable lines after 4.d3 except 4... ♗c5, which would lead to the main line.

After 4.d3 the main option for Black is 4... ♗e7. We will also examine 4...h6 and the rarely played 4...d6?! and 4...d5?!. After 4...h6 White gets a nice edge with active play in the centre. In the main line we will take an extensive look at the critical line after 5.0-0 0-0 6. ♖e1 d6 and now 7.a4. After White's 7<sup>th</sup> move there are no fewer than seven black moves for us to examine. 7...h6 and 7...a5 are quite interesting, but White gets the more pleasant position. 7... ♖h8 initiates an aggressive plan on the kingside. This move is recommended in some books, but we will show how White gets an edge. 7... ♗e6 is a very solid move with the idea of exchanging the strong bishop on c4. It's difficult to prove any advantage for White, but on the other hand Black has no real counterplay and is playing 'only' for a draw. 7... ♘a5 is the main move nowadays. Black aims at a Spanish-like pawn structure after 8. ♗a2 c5. White has an easy plan at his disposal by pushing the b-pawn or exchanging the bishops on e6 and spoiling the black pawn structure if Black follows up with ... ♗e6.

### 1.e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♗c4 ♘f6

This is the second main move here.

#### 4.d3

The risky 4. ♘g5 is a completely different story and not part of our work.

#### 4... ♗e7

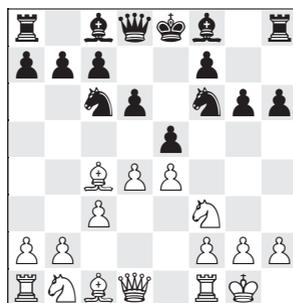
By far the main move besides 4... ♗c5. We will take a deep look at the position arising after White's 7<sup>th</sup> move, but first we analyse some minor black options.

#### A) 4...h6



analysis diagram

Black wants to develop his bishop to g7. This plan isn't as unsound as it may look. White should develop quickly and occupy the centre. **5.0-0 d6 6.c3 g6 7.d4!** 7. ♖e1 is too slow: 7... ♗g7 8.d4 0-0 9.h3 exd4 10.cxd4 d5! 11.exd5 ♘xd5 12. ♘c3 ♗e6=.

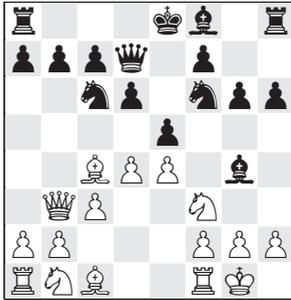


analysis diagram

A1) 7... ♗g7? 8.dxe5 dxe5 9. ♖xd8+ ♘xd8 10. ♘xe5 ♘xe4 11. ♖e1 ♘d6? 11... ♗f5 12.g4! ♗xe5 13.gxf5 gxf5 14.f3 ♖g8+ 15. ♖f1+- 12. ♘xf7+

♙f8 13.♘xh8 ♘xc4 14.♘g6+-  
Womacka-Milchev, Guben 2011;

A2) 7...♙g4? 8.♖b3! ♖d7 8...♘a5  
9.♖a4+ c6 10.♙e2 b5 11.♖c2±.



analysis diagram

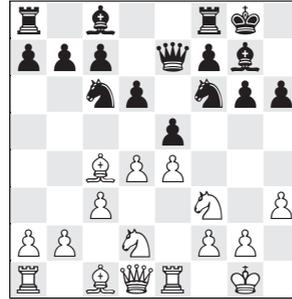
9.♙xf7+! ♖xf7 10.♖xb7 ♙d7 11.d5!  
♘e7 12.♖xa8 ♘xe4 13.♘bd2+-  
Fedorchuk-Bednarek, Warsaw Ech  
2005;

A3) 7...♘d7?! 8.dxe5! ♘dxe5 9.♘xe5  
♘xe5 10.♙b3 ♙g7 11.f4 ♘c6 (Rojo  
Gomez-Candela Perez, Spain tt 2000)  
12.f5!N and Black is in trouble as he  
cannot castle;

A4) There are very few games with  
7...♘xe4. A simple line is 8.dxe5 dxe5  
9.♙d5 ♙f5 10.♖e1 ♘c5 11.♙xc6+  
bxc6 12.♖xd8+ ♖xd8 13.♘xe5 ♙e6  
14.♘xc6±;

A5) 7...exd4 8.cxd4 ♙g7 9.♘c3  
0-0 Black is threatening 10...♘xe4.  
10.d5! ♘e7 10...♘a5 11.♙d3 c5 12.h3  
a6 13.♙f4 b5 14.♖d2 ♙h7 (Haik-  
Arkhipov, Sochi 1985) 15.♖fe1!N ♙b7  
16.♖ad1±. 11.♖e1 11.h3 c6 12.dxc6  
bxc6 (Milliet-Payen, France tt 2004)  
13.♖e1!N d5 14.exd5 cxd5 15.♙d3  
is also a bit better for White. 11...  
a6 (Korneev-Malaniuk, Sochi 2012)  
12.♘d4!N g5 13.f3 c5 14.dxc6 bxc6  
15.♙e3± White has the better pawn  
structure and nicely placed pieces.

A6) 7...♖e7 This is the main move, as  
Black cannot afford to let White open  
up the position. 8.♘bd2 8.♖e1 ♙g7  
9.♘bd2 is the same. 8...♙g7 9.♖e1 0-0  
10.h3



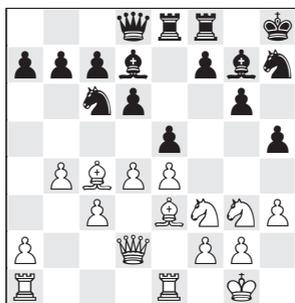
analysis diagram

This is an important position. We will  
give an overview of the most common  
moves and plans.

A61) 10...♘h7 (Black wants to  
exchange a piece via g5, but this  
damages Black's pawn structure) 11.♘f1  
♘g5 (Heberla-Marholev, Plovdiv Ech  
2008) 12.♘g5!N hxg5 13.d5 ♘d8  
14.♙d3 f5 15.♘e3±. Whereas White  
has good prospects on the queenside  
by pushing the pawns, Black's kingside  
approach seems dubious;

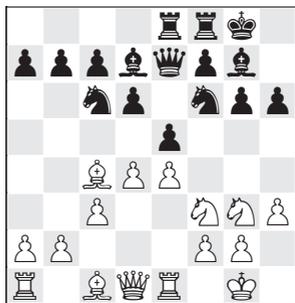
A62) 10...♘h5 11.♘f1 ♙d7 12.♘e3  
♖ae8 (Neelotpal-Adhiban, Chennai  
2008) 13.♘d5!N ♖d8 14.g4 ♘f6  
15.♘xf6+ ♖xf6 16.d5 ♘d8 17.g5 ♖e7  
18.gxh6 ♙f6 19.♙f1±;

A63) 10...♙h8 is slow. White increases  
his control of the centre and enjoys a  
space advantage: 11.♘f1 exd4 11...♙d7  
12.♘g3 ♘h7 13.♙e3 ♖ae8 (13...♘g5  
14.♘g5 hxg5 15.♖d2±) 14.♖d2 h5  
15.b4 ♖d8 (Bologan-Halkias, Plovdiv  
Ech 2008; 15...h4 16.♘e2 exd4 17.cxd4  
♖xe4 18.♙d3 ♖e7 19.b5 ♘b8 20.♘f4  
♖d8 21.a4± is way too passive)



analysis diagram

16.♖ad1!N h4 17.♗e2 exd4 18.cxd4 ♜xe4 19.b5 ♗e7 (19...♗b8 20.♗c3 ♜ee8 21.♙g5 ♗xg5 22.♗xg5 ♙g8 23.♜xe8 ♙xe8 24.♞f4+-) 20.♗c3 ♜xe3 21.♞xe3±. **12.cxd4 ♗xe4** (Narayanan-Ismagambetov, Gurgon 2009) **13.d5!N ♗b4 14.a3 ♗a6 15.♗g3 ♗ac5 16.♞a2 f5 17.b4 ♗d7 18.♞c2 ♗df6 19.♗d4 ♞d8 20.♗xe4 ♗xe4 21.♙b2** with overwhelming compensation for the pawn due to the active pieces and attacking changes against the black king;  
 A64) **10...♙d7 11.♗f1 ♞ae8 12.♗g3**



analysis diagram

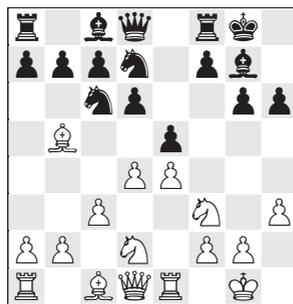
The main line of this complex, but Black has problems as these examples show:

A641) 12...♙h7 13.a3 ♗g8 14.b4 a6 15.♙e3 ♙c8 16.♞d2 ♞f6 17.♙e2 ♞d8 18.♞ad1± Bologan-Bronstein, Oslo 1994;  
 A642) 12...♙h8 13.♙d3 ♗h7 14.d5 ♗d8 15.♞c2 h5 16.♙d2 h4 17.♗f1 f5 18.c4 c5 19.b4 cxb4 20.♙xb4 b6

(Fougerit-Koziak, France tt 2015; 20...♗f7 21.c5±) 21.exf5!N gxf5 22.♗xe5 ♙xe5 23.♞xe5!+-;

A643) 12...♞d8 13.♙d3 (there are more games with 13.♙b3, but it makes a lot of sense to put the bishop immediately on the b1-h7 diagonal in order to prepare further development with ♙e3 and ♞d2) 13...♗h7 14.♙e3 exd4 15.cxd4 ♗g5 16.♗xg5 hxg5 17.♙e2 ♞f6 18.d5 ♗d4 19.♙g4 ♙xg4 20.hxg4 c5?! (20...♞e5 21.♞d2 ♙f6 22.♞ed1 c5 23.dxc6 ♗xc6 24.♞ab1±) 21.♞d2 ♙h6 22.♞ac1 ♞e7 23.b4 b6 24.♞ed1 ♞h8 (24...♞e5 25.♞c4±) 25.f3 ♙g7 26.♙xg5± Amin-Arencibia Rodriguez, Al-Ain 2015.

A65) **10...♞d8 11.♙b5!?** ♗d7 11...exd4 12.cxd4± leaves White with a nice centre but is probably the best option for Black; 11...♞e8 12.♙xc6 bxc6 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.♞a4± with the better pawn structure was the idea of 11.♙b5; 11...♙d7?! costs a pawn after 12.♙xc6 ♙xc6 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.♗xe5 e.g. 14...♙xe4 15.♗xe4 ♞xd1 16.♗xf6+ ♙xf6 17.♞xd1 ♙xe5 18.♙xh6±.



analysis diagram

**12.♗c4 exd4 13.cxd4 a6 14.♙xc6 bxc6 15.♙f4 ♗b6?! 15...c5 16.♞d2 g5 17.♙g3±. 16.♗a5 ♙d7 17.♞c1 g5 18.♙g3 f5** (Armas-Stanciu, Predeal 1988) **19.♗xc6!N ♙xc6 20.♞xc6±**  
 B) **4...d6!?**



analysis diagram

A typical mistake usually made by amateur players. **5.♘g5! d5** This is a well-known position with the additional move d2-d3 for White! **6.exd5 ♘xd5** 6...♘a5 7.0-0 ♘xc4 (7...h6 8.♘f3 e4 9.♞e1 ♙e7 10.♘d4±) 8.dxc4 h6 9.♘f3 e4 10.♞e1 ♙e7 11.♘d4 0-0 12.h3± Movsesian-Vokac, Hustopece rapid 2010; 6...b5 7.♙xb5 (7.dxc6 bxc4 8.dxc4 ♞xd1+ 9.♞xd1±) 7...♞xd5 8.♙xc6+ ♞xc6 9.♞f3 ♙b7 (9...♞xc2?! 10.♘c3 ♙c5? (10...♞b8 11.♞c6+ ♙d7 12.♞xc7 ♞c8 13.♞xe5+ ♙e7 14.0-0 ♞xd3 15.♙f4±) 11.♞c6+ ♘d7 12.♘ge4 ♙d4 13.♞xa8+- Navarro-Kizov, Plovdiv tt 2010) 10.0-0 ♞xf3 11.♘xf3 ♙xf3 12.gxf3±. **7.♘c3!** With the pawn on d2 this move isn't possible, but now it just leads to a big advantage. **7...♙e6 8.♘xe6 fxe6 9.♘e4±** White has the bishop pair and the better pawn structure.

C) **4...d5?!** is dubious as White gets a lead in development after **5.exd5 ♘xd5 6.0-0**. We give some sample lines:

C1) **6...♙e7 7.♞e1 f6 8.h3 ♘b6** 8...0-0 9.♘c3 ♙e6 10.d4 ♙f7 11.♙xd5 ♙xd5 12.dxe5 ♙xf3 13.♞xf3 fxe5 14.♞e4±. **9.♙b3 ♙f5** (Odeev-Buker, Adana 2006) 9...♘a5? 10.♘xe5!+- fxe5 11.♞h5+ ♞d7 12.♞xe5 ♘xb3 13.♙g5 ♞e8 14.♞e6# Conquest-Durao, Thessaloniki 1988. **10.a4!N a5 11.d4 ♘xd4 12.♘xd4 ♞xd4 13.♞f3 ♙d7**

**14.♞xb7 ♜c5 15.♞f3 ♜c6 16.♞g3 ♙e6 17.♙xe6 ♞xe6 18.♞xg7 0-0-0 19.♞g4±;**

C2) **6...♙c5 7.♞e1 0-0 8.♘xe5 ♞h4** 8...♘xe5 9.♞xe5 ♙xf2+ (9...c6 10.♞f3 ♙e6 11.♘d2 ♙b6 12.a3! ♙c7 13.♞e1±) 10.♞xf2 ♞h4+ 11.♞f1 ♞f6+ 12.♞f3 ♞xe5 13.♙xd5 c6 14.♙b3 ♞xh2 15.♙e3± Tischbierek-Donev, Liechtenstein 1995. The two pieces are more worth than a rook and a pawn, and the white king isn't really under attack.



analysis diagram

**9.♘f3! ♞xf2+ 10.♞h1 ♘f6 11.♞e2 ♘g4 12.c3 b5 12...♘a5 13.h3 ♞g3 14.hxg4 ♘xc4 15.dxc4 ♙xg4 16.♞e1!±. 13.♙d5 ♙b7 14.♘bd2!** Black cannot avoid material loss. **14...♞ae8 15.♘e4 ♞xe2 16.♞xe2 ♘f2+ 17.♞xf2! ♙xf2 18.♘xf2+-** Dyakov-Ibar, IECG email 2002;

C3) **6...♙g4 7.h3 ♙h5 8.♞e1 ♙e7** 8...♞d6 9.♘bd2 0-0-0 10.♘e4 ♞g6? (10...♞d7 11.♙b5 ♙xf3 12.♞xf3 f6 13.c3 ♞b8 14.a4 a6 15.♙c4 ♘b6 16.♙b3±; with the bishop pair White's prospects on the queenside are more realistic than Black's on the kingside; 16...♞xd3 is problematic because of 17.♙e3↑ with multiple threats) 11.g4 ♙xg4 12.hxg4 ♞xg4+ (Neelotpal-Lokesh, Bhubaneswar 2014) 13.♘g3!N

h5 14.♘g5 ♖d7 15.♗f3 f6 16.♗xd5  
 ♗xd5 17.♙xd5 ♜xd5 18.♘f3±. **9.g4**  
**♙g6 10.♘xe5 ♘xe5 11.♗xe5 ♘b6**  
**12.♙b3 0-0 13.♘c3 ♘h8 14.♗f3 f5**  
 (Gallagher-Halkias, Budva Ech 2009)  
 14...♘d7 15.♗e2 f5 (Cubas-Santos,  
 Brazil tt 2011) 16.♗xb7!N fxc4 17.hxc4  
 ♙d6 18.♗g2 ♗h4 19.♘b5 ♘e5  
 20.♙d5 ♜ab8 21.♘xd6 cxd6 22.♗g3±;  
 14...♙d6 15.♗e1 f5 16.g5 f4 17.h4 ♘d7  
 18.d4 c5 19.♘e4 ♗a5 20.c3 ♜ae8  
 21.♙d2± Karibaeva-Egorova, Satka jr  
 2005.



analysis diagram

**15.♗xb7!N fxc4 16.hxc4 ♗d4 17.♗e2**  
**♗xc4+ 18.♗g2 ♗h4 19.♙d2 ♙c5**  
**20.♗f1±** Objectively Black does not  
 have enough compensation for the  
 pawn, even if the white king is a bit  
 exposed.

D) 4...♙c5 5.c3 leads to other chapters  
 of this book.

**5.0-0 0-0**

Sometimes Black postpones castling and  
 plays **5...d6** first. The move order can be  
 tricky but it's hard to see any benefit of  
 this approach for Black, as the best he  
 can get seems to be a transposition to  
 the main line. On the other hand White  
 gets additional possibilities.

**6.a4** Of course. We need the square  
 a2 for the bishop immediately now.

**6...0-0** For 6...♘a5 and other tries, take

a look at the game Nevednichy-Halkias,  
 Alba Iulia 2016, in the Strategy chapter.  
 Things don't change much for White  
 since, as we mentioned, he gets only  
 additional options. **7.♗e1** transposes to  
 the main line, but in this move order  
 White doesn't need to place the rook  
 immediately on e1. Instead he can try  
**7.a5!?**, which avoids the main black  
 option 7...♘a5.

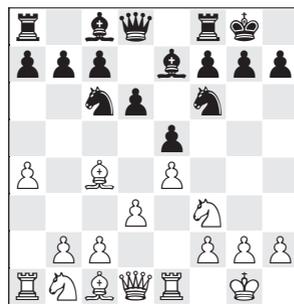
The problem with this line is that White  
 cannot force it. So we included some  
 analysis of this sub-line in the game  
 Howell-Sowray, England tt 2015/16, in  
 the Strategy chapter. This game features  
 the line 6.a4!?

**6.♗e1**

The main move, and our recommen-  
 dation. White prevents the central  
 advance 6...d5.

6.a4!? is a very interesting alternative  
 for White, with the idea of postponing  
 ♗e1 and avoiding the main line 7...♘a5.  
 Please take a closer look at the game  
 Howell-Sowray, England tt 2015/16, in  
 the Strategy chapter.

**6...d6 7.a4**

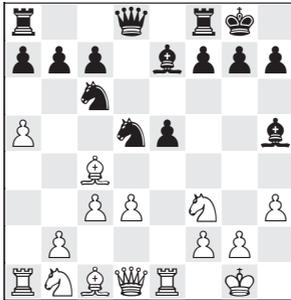


Again the main move and also our  
 recommendation. With this, White  
 gains space and secures a nice spot on a2  
 for his bishop. 7.c3 allows a transposition  
 to the Ruy Lopez after the moves 7...♘a5  
 8.♙b5 a6 9.♙a4 b5 10.♙c2 c5.

## 7...♟a5

A) 7...♠g4 This move could even be considered questionable. If Black places his bishop on the kingside then White's bishop on c4 gains strength. In addition, White wins tempi by attacking the bishop with natural moves. The following lines show that White has the better prospects. 8.h3 ♠h5 8...♠xf3 9.♠xf3 ♟d7 (9...♟d4 10.♠d1 c6 11.c3 ♟e6 12.♠a2±) 10.a5 ♠g5 (Antoniewski-Beliavsky, Austria Bundesliga 2010/11) 11.♠xg5!N ♠xg5 12.c3 ♟e7 13.b4±. 9.c3 and now:

A1) 9...d5 10.exd5 ♟xd5 11.a5!



analysis diagram

A11) 11...♠d6?! 12.♟bd2 ♠ad8 13.♟e4 ♠d7?! 13...♠e6 14.♟fg5 ♠xg5 15.♟xg5 ♠xd1 16.♟xe6 fxe6 17.♠xd1±. 14.♟xe5 ♟xe5 15.♠xh5 ♟xc4 16.dxc4 ♟f6 17.♟xf6+ ♠xf6 18.a6 b6 19.♠f3± Bauer-Petakov, Cannes 2010;

A12) 11...♠b8 12.♟bd2 f6 13.♟f1 ♟h8 14.♟g3 ♠f7 15.♠d2 ♠e8 16.b4 ♠f8 17.♠b3± Zidu-Leisebein, Remote email 2014;

A13) 11...a6 12.♟bd2 12.g4 ♠g6 13.♟xe5 ♟xe5 14.♠xe5 is risky as Black gets counterplay on the kingside. 12...♟h8 12...♠b8 13.♟f1 (13.♟e4± seems even more precise) 13...f6?!

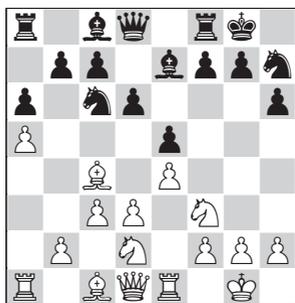
(13...♠d6 14.♟g3 ♠g6 15.♠d2±) 14.♟g3 ♠f7 (Marcelin-Veys, France tt 2015) 15.d4!N exd4 16.♟xd4 ♟e5 17.♟df5! ♟xc4 18.♠g4 g6 19.♟h6+ ♟h8 20.♠xc4±. 13.♟e4 f6 14.♠b3 ♠xf3 15.♠xd5 ♠h5 16.♠e3 ♠b8 17.♠c5 ♠e8 18.♠c4 ♠d6 18...h6 19.d4±. 19.d4± Bologan-Naiditsch, Kallithea tt 2008;

A2) 9...a5!? 10.♟bd2 ♟d7 10...d5? 11.exd5 ♟xd5 12.♠b3 ♟b6 13.♟xe5 ♟xe5 14.♠xe5 ♠g6 15.d4 ♠d6 16.♠e1 ♠e8 17.♠xe8+ ♠xe8 18.♠f1± Gallagher-K.Georgiev, Zurich 2013. 11.♟f1 ♟b6 12.♠b3 ♟h8 13.g4 ♠g6 14.♟g3± Karpatchev-Junker, Frankfurt 2014;

A3) 9...♟h8?! 10.♟bd2 10.a5 first seems more precise. 10...♠d7 11.a5 a6 12.♟f1 ♠ae8 13.♟g3 ♠g6 14.♟h4 ♟g8 15.♟xg6+ fxg6 16.♠e3± Svetushkin-Moiseev, Moscow 2009;

A4) 9...♠d7 10.♟bd2 a6 10...♠ad8 11.a5 a6 (11...♟b8?! 12.♟f1 b5 13.axb6 axb6 (Haslinger-Evengroen, Dieren 2015) 14.♟g3!N ♠g6 15.♟h4±) 12.♟f1 ♠fe8 13.♟g3 ♠g6 14.♠b3 ♟h5 15.♟f5 ♠f8? (15...♠b8 16.♟5h4±) 16.♟5h4 ♟f4 17.♠xf4 exf4 18.♟xg6 hxg6 19.d4 ♠b8 20.e5+- Reefat-Ayyad, Doha 2006. 11.♟f1 ♠g6 12.♟h4 d5 13.♟xg6 hxg6 14.exd5 ♟xd5 15.a5 ♠c5 16.♟g3 ♟f6 17.b4 ♠a7 18.♠g5± Salgado Lopez-Yaremko, Herceg Novi jr 2006.

B) 7...h6 The idea here is that Black wants to exchange pieces via the square g5. This is a somewhat 'lazy' approach that leaves White with a more pleasant position. 8.a5 a6 9.c3 ♟h7 10.♟bd2 We prefer this clear plan over the alternative move 10.♠e3, which is playable as well of course, and indeed is actually played slightly more often.

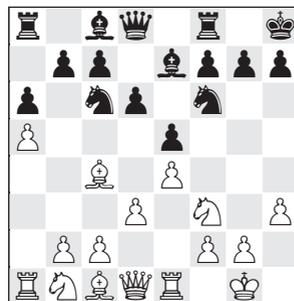


analysis diagram

**10...g5** 10...h8 11.d4 exd4 (11...g5 (Van Weersel-Szczepkowska Horowska, Warsaw 2012) 12.d5!N b8 13.gxg5 xg5 14.d3 f5 15.c4±) 12.cxd4 f5 13.d5 e5 14.xe5 dx5 (Delchev-Bologan, France tt 2006) 15.exf5!N xf5 16.f3 e4 17.d4 b4 18.d2 c5 19.e3±. **11.f1 g4** 11...xf3+ 12.fxf3 g5 (Vajda-Roussel Roozmon, Budapest 2007) 13.xg5!N xg5 14.e3 e6 15.b4±. **12.xg5 xg5** **13.h3** d7 **14.xg5** xg5 **15.e3** e6 **16.g3** f6 **17.e3** h7 **18.f3** d8 **19.b3** xc4 **20.dxc4±** Sulskis-Beinoras, Vilnius 2014;

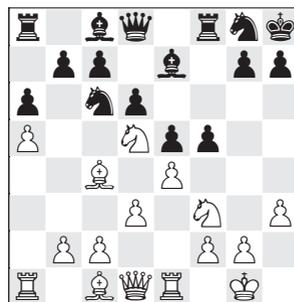
C) **7...h8** This initiates a dangerous plan. Black wants to play ...g8 and ...f7-f5 with counterplay on the king-side. White has to be careful. **8.a5** is an important move as it threatens 9.a6 and takes away the black option to play ...a5 along with ...c7-c5. **8...a6** 8...g8?! seems dubious because of 9.a6 b6 (9...f5 10.axb7 xb7 11.c3 b4 (Bitoon-Handoko, Tagaytay City 2004) 12.e6!±) 10.d5 d7 11.b4± but this has never been played. 9.c3 is a good move against 9...g8 with the idea of following with 10.d5, but Black plays 9...g4! 10.h3 e5 and the pin is extremely annoying. 11.g4? doesn't work because of 11...xg4! 12.hxg4 xg4-+. The threats 13...d4

or 13...f5 are decisive. Therefore, **9.h3!** is a nice waiting move, taking control of the square g4. White is now ready to play 10.c3.



analysis diagram

**9...g8** 9...e6 10.bd2± is a better version for White compared to the lines presented after 7...e6. 7...h8 doesn't make much sense now. But strictly speaking a loss of tempo is not a big deal in such a position. **10.c3** f5 **11.d5**



analysis diagram

This is a very important position that you need to remember. You should look carefully to the following lines. White is better in our opinion, but there is some very concrete play you need to memorize:

C1) **11...fxe4** **12.dxe4** f6 and now:

C11) **13.g5** is tempting but doesn't seem to work: **13...xd5** **14.xh7**

♗f4? 14...♙f4! 15.♙xd5 (Fedorov-Murtazin, Kazan 2014; 15.g3 ♖e8 16.♙xd5 (Sikula-Marzolo, Nancy 2007) 16...♗xh7!N 17.gxf4 ♗d4 18.f5 ♔e6! 19.♙xe6 ♗xe6 20.♔xe6 ♖c6∞) 15...♗b4!N 16.♙d2 d5! 17.♔f1 ♔c5 18.♙e2 ♖h4 19.c3 ♔g4! 20.hxg4 ♗d3 21.♙xd3 ♔xf2+ 22.♙xf2 ♙xf2+ 23.♗h2 ♙h4+=. **15.♗xf8 1-0** Rombaldoni-Timmermans, Hoogeveen 2010;

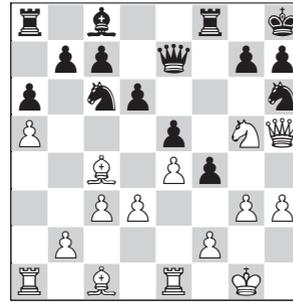
C12) **13.c3** is good, with the idea of slowly pushing the pawns on the queenside: 13...♔e6 14.♔a2 ♔g8 15.b4 ♗xd5 (15...h6 16.♔d2±) 16.exd5 ♗b8 17.♔e3 ♔f7 18.♙d2 ♗d7 19.♗g5 ♔xg5 20.♔xg5 ♖e8 21.♙ac1 ♔g6 22.c4± Eife-Forsti, ICCF email 2012;

C13) **13.♙a3!? ♗xd5?! 13...♔e6±. 14.exd5 ♗b8 15.♔d3 ♗d7 16.c4 ♗c5 17.♔c2 ♔f5** (Howell-Pavlidis, Vung Tau City jr 2008) **18.♔xf5!N ♙xf5 19.♔e3 ♗d7 20.♙b3±**

C2) 11...h6 12.b4 fxe4 13.dxe4 ♔e6 14.♔d2 ♔f7 15.♙a3 ♔h5 16.♔e2 ♔g6 17.♙e3 ♗f6 18.♔c4 ♔h5 (Vocaturo-Espinosa Veloz, Havana 2011) 19.c3!N ♗h7 20.♔e2 ♔f7 21.♙c1±;

C3) **11...♗f6!?** There are only two games that have been played with this move, but the lines that it introduces are very tricky, so you have to be well prepared. **12.♗g5! ♗g8 12...♗xd5? 13.♗xh7!** is the point: 13...♗f6 (13...♗xh7?? 14.♙h5+ ♗g8 15.♔xd5+++–) 14.♗xf6 g6 15.♗d5±; 12...fxe4 13.♗xf6 ♙xf6 14.♗f7+ ♙xf7 15.♔xf7 exd3 16.♙xd3±. **13.♙h5** If your opponent is Magnus Carlsen you can of course choose to repeat moves with 13.♗f3=. **13...♗h6 14.c3 f4 15.♗xe7 ♙xe7** (Bojkov-Radulski, Greece tt 2009) **16.g3!N** This looks very dangerous for White, but in fact it is a

very logical move. You can check the lines for yourself:



analysis diagram

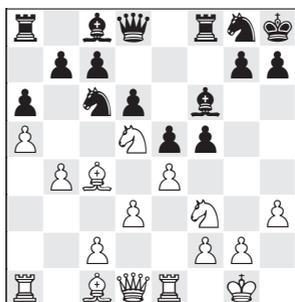
C31) **16...♔d7 17.♔d2 ♙f6 17...♙f6 18.gxf4 exf4 19.d4±. 18.gxf4 18.♗h1 ♔e8** (18...fxg3?! 19.fxg3 ♙f2 20.♙e2 ♙xg3 21.♙g2 ♔e8 22.♗f7+! ♔xf7 23.♔xf7 ♙xd3 24.♔xh6 gxh6 25.♙e1! ♗e7 26.♙e2 ♙g8 27.♔xg8 ♙xg8 28.♙xh6+–) 19.♙h4 fxg3 20.♙xg3 ♙xf2 21.♙xf2 ♙xf2 22.♙f1 ♙xf1+ 23.♙xf1 ♔g6 24.b4∞. **18...exf4 19.d4 ♔e8 20.♙h4 ♗e7 21.♗f3 ♙xh4 22.♗xh4 ♔h5 23.♗g2±;**

C32) **16...♗d8 17.♙h4 17.gxf4 exf4 18.♔d2 ♔e6 19.♗xe6 ♗xe6∞. 17...♙f6 18.gxf4 exf4 19.d4 ♔e6 20.♔f1±;**

C33) **16...♙f6 17.♙h4 ♙g6 17...♔d7 18.gxf4 exf4 19.d4 ♙af8 20.♗h1 ♙f5** (20...♗d8 21.♔d2 ♔e6 22.♗xe6 ♗xe6 23.e5 dxe5 24.dxe5 ♙f7 25.♙xe7 ♙xe7 26.♙ad1±) 21.♙g1 ♙xa5 (21...♗xa5 22.exf5 ♗xc4 23.b3 ♗b6 24.c4±) 22.♔xf4 ♙xa1 23.♙xa1 ♔xh3 24.♙g1±. **18.gxf4 exf4 19.♔xf4 ♗e5 20.♗h1 ♔xh3 21.♙xh3 ♙f8 22.♔e3 ♗xc4 23.dxc4 ♙xg5 24.♔xg5 ♙xg5 25.♙g1 ♙e7 26.f3±**

C4) **11...f4!?** There are only a few games with this move without the inclusion of ...a7-a5/...a7-a6. White gets an advantage with the typical reaction **12.d4!** e.g. **12...♔f6 13.b4 ♗xd4 13...exd4**

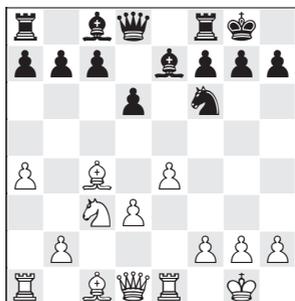
14. ♖xf4±; 13... ♗e6 14.c3±. **14. ♗xd4**  
**exd4 15. ♖xf4 ♗e5 16. ♗xe5** 16. ♗g3  
 also leads to a much better position for  
 White, but it's more complicated. **16...  
 dxe5 17.c3 ♖h4 17... dxc3 18. ♖c2±.**  
**18. ♖a2 ♗e6 19.cxd4 ♖ad8 20. ♖d2**  
**exd4 21.g3 ♖xh3 22. ♖xd4±;**  
 C5) **11... ♗f6 12.b4!**



analysis diagram

**12... fxe4 12... h6 13. ♗b3 ♗d7 14.c3**  
 ♗ge7 15. ♗xf6 ♖xf6 16.exf5 ♗xf5  
 17.d4±; 12... f4 13.d4! ♗e6 14.c3±.  
**13.dxe4 ♗ce7 14. ♖a3 14. ♗xf6 ♗xf6**  
 15. ♗f1 looks even better. White has the  
 bishop pair and can push the queenside  
 pawns, e.g. 15... ♗e6 16.c4 ♖e8 17.b5  
 ♗d7 18. ♗e3 ♗g6 19.bxa6 bxa6 20.c5  
 ♗xc5 21. ♗xc5 dxc5 22. ♖e3 c4 23. ♖c2  
 ♖b5 24. ♖c3 ♗f4 25. ♗d2±. **14... ♗xd5**  
**15.exd5 ♗e7 16. ♗f1 ♖e8 17.c4±**  
 Eliseev-Lastin, Moscow 2012.

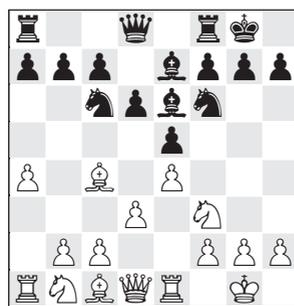
D) **7... ♗d4** gives White better central  
 control: **8. ♗xd4 exd4 9.c3 dxc3 10. ♗xc3**



analysis diagram

**10...c6 10... ♗e6 11. ♖b3 ♖c8 (11... ♗xc4**  
 12.dxc4 b6 (Saric-Zelic, Zadar 2007)  
 13.a5!±) 12.d4 ♗xc4 13. ♖xc4 c6  
 14. ♖d3 ♖e6 (Gelfand-Sutovsky, Russia  
 tt 2006) 15. ♗d2!±. White enjoys a small  
 plus due to his nice centre. **11. ♖b3**  
 ♗d7?! 11... ♗g4!? 12.d4 ♗h4 13.g3 ♖f6  
 14. ♗d1!±; 11...c5 12. ♗f4±. **12.d4 ♖a5**  
**13. ♗d2 13. ♗e3±. 13... ♖h5 14. ♗e2**  
 ♗b6 15. ♗f4 ♖h4 16. ♗d3 g5 (Korneev-  
 Mascaro March, Balaguer 2007) **17.a5!N**  
**gxf4 18.axb6 a6 19. ♗c4±;**

E) **7... ♗e6**



analysis diagram

This is a solid move which leads to  
 quiet positions. Black wants to 'kill'  
 the bishop on c4 but he also loses a  
 lot of potential to get any counterplay.  
 Generally speaking, in many lines  
 White can push the b-pawn and gain  
 some space advantage on the queenside.  
 Taking on e6, to spoil Black's pawn  
 structure, is also an idea in many cases.  
 After that White can manoeuvre more  
 freely. **8. ♗bd2 8. ♗c3** is an interesting  
 alternative with the idea of controlling  
 the square d5. We cover this move in  
 the game Z.Almasi-Harikrishna, Reggio  
 Emilia 2007, in the Strategy chapter.

E1) **8... ♗xc4** doesn't make much  
 sense as White immediately gets  
 his knight to the strong outpost c4:  
**9. ♗xc4± 9.dxc4** is also possible. There  
 is an old game in which Michael Adams

won convincingly against Alexander Onischuk. But Black can improve his play in many ways. **9...♖e8 10.♘f1** (Adams-Onischuk, Tilburg 1997) and here **10...a5N**, with the idea of 11...♘d7, looks perfectly playable for Black;

E2) **8...♘d7 9.a5** This move has rarely been played, but it makes a lot of sense. Otherwise Black could get a better version of the 7...a5 idea, e.g. if White opts for 9.c3. Besides, White increases his space advantage.

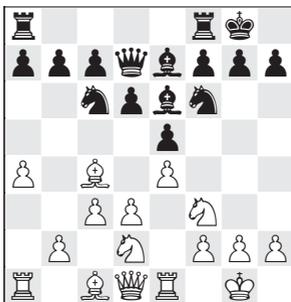
E21) **9...♙f6** (Barua-Nixon, Edinburgh 2003) **10.c3N 10.a6N b6 11.c3±. 10...a6 11.b4±;**

E22) **9...♙g5** (Gershon-Blodstein, Givataim 1997) **10.a6!N b6 11.♙b5 ♙xd2 11...♘d4! 12.♘xd4 exd4 13.c3 c5 14.cxd4 cxd4 15.♘f3 ♙f6 16.♙d2 (16.b4?! ♘e5!) 16...♘c5 17.♙f4 (17.b4 ♘b3=) 17...♙g4 18.h3 ♘e6 19.♙d2 ♙h5 20.g4 ♙g6 21.♖c1 h5 22.♔g2±. 12.♙xd2 ♘e7 13.d4 c6 14.♙f1↑;**

E23) **9...b6 10.a6 ♙xc4 11.♘xc4 ♘d4 12.♘xd4 (12.b4 c6 13.c3 ♘xf3 + 14.♗xf3 b5 15.♘a5 ♗b6±) 12...exd4 13.f4 d5±;**

E24) **9...a6 10.c3 ♙g5** (Domont-Glauser, Zürich 2004) **11.♘g5N 11.b4N ♙xd2 12.♘xd2 ♗e7 13.♗b3 ♙xc4 14.♗xc4±. 11...♗xg5 12.b4 ♙xc4 13.♘xc4 ♗g6 14.f3 f5 15.♙e3±**

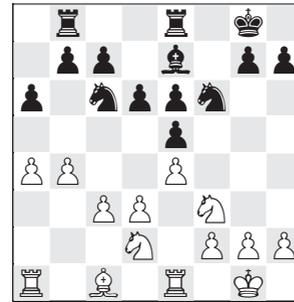
E3) **8...♗d7 9.c3**



analysis diagram

E31) **9...♖fe8 10.♗b3!?** 10.b4 a6 (Delchev-Ivanisevic, Vrsac 2006) 11.♗b3!N ♘d8 (11...d5 12.exd5 ♘xd5 13.♘e4 (13.♘xe5 ♘xe5 14.♖xe5 ♖ad8=) 13...♖ad8 14.h3 f6 15.♙d2±) 12.a5 ♙xc4 13.♘xc4 ♘e6 14.h3 is a bit more pleasant for White due to the space advantage, but Black's position is very solid.

E311) 10...♖ab8 11.♙xe6 ♗xe6 12.♗xe6 fxe6 13.b4 a6.

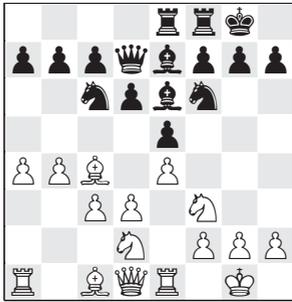


analysis diagram

Here I should not have rushed with 14.b5 in Souleidis-Zelbel, Erfurt 2015, which would have led to an equal position after 14...♘d8!. Instead, 14.♘b3! would have preserved all White's options. He brings his bishop into play and pushes his pawns on the queenside at a later stage. In contrast, Black has no counterplay at all here, e.g. 14...♖f8 15.h3 ♘d7 16.♙e3 ♖a8 17.b5 ♘d8 18.c4±;

E312) 10...d5! (unfortunately this move makes 10.♗b3 less attractive) 11.exd5 ♙xd5 12.♙xd5 ♘xd5 13.♘c4 (after the inferior 13.♘xe5 ♘xe5 14.♖xe5 ♘f4 Black gets a lot of counterplay as White lacks development) 13...♙f6! = as capturing on b7 is very risky.

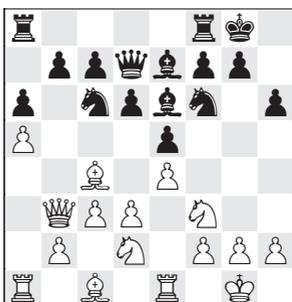
E32) **9...♖ae8** allows the rapid advance of White's b-pawn. With a rook on a8 Black can slow this down with ...a7-a6. **10.b4!**



analysis diagram

**10...h6** (Asgarizadeh-Ghosh, Győr ol jr 2014) 10...♙xc4 11.♘xc4 ♘d8 12.♚b3 ♘e6 (Stopa-Lehman, Concord 2011) 13.♘e3!N c6 14.♘f5±; 10...♙d8 11.a5 ♘e7 12.a6 b5 (Kovalev-Zeberski, Dresden 2008) 13.♙xe6!N ♚xe6 14.♘f1 c6 15.♙e3 ♘c8 16.♘g3 ♙b6 17.d4±; 10...♘d8, a computer suggestion with the idea of ...♘xe6 if White exchanges bishops. 11.h3 c6 12.a5±. **11.♙xe6!N ♚xe6 12.♘f1 a6 13.♘g3±**;

E33) **9...h6 10.a5 10.b4** makes less sense with a rook on a8. Black plays **10...a6** and threatens to play ...d6-d5 or even ...b7-b5: **11.♚b3** 11.♙b3 has been played more often but 11...♙xb3 12.♚xb3 (Hendriks-Haslinger, Hilversum 2009) 12...♚ab8!N looks equal. Here Black has not compromised his pawn structure in comparison with lines where White has exchanged the bishops on e6.



analysis diagram

E331) **11...♚fe8 12.♙xe6 fxe6** 12...♚xe6 13.♚xb7±. **13.♘c4** 13.d4 exd4 14.♘xd4 ♘xd4 15.cxd4 ♙f8 16.♘f3±. **13...♙f8 14.h3 ♚ab8**

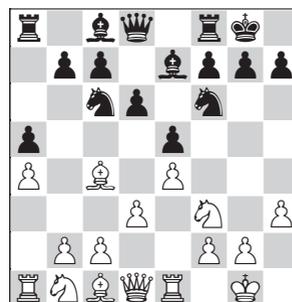
(Rabiega-Machelett, Germany Bundesliga 2001/02) 15.♚a4!N ♚f7 16.b4±;

E332) **11...♘h5?! 12.d4** Look out for this advance, especially if Black has given up control of the square d5. **12...♙xc4 13.♘xc4 ♙f6** (Vogt-Boschetti, Brocco 1990) **14.♚d1!N ♚g4 15.♚a4±** with the idea d4-d5;

E333) **11...♚ab8 12.♘f1 ♚fe8** 12...♙xc4 13.dxc4 is possible, but this structure is a bit more pleasant for White as he has control of the central squares and can put his knight on d5 or f5. **13.♘e3 ♙f8** (Spasov-Kaidanov, Yerevan ol 1996) **14.♙xe6!N fxe6 15.♘c4±** is similar to Rabiega-Machelett.

E34) **9...♚ad8 10.b4! ♚c8** (Delchev-Beliavsky, Plovdiv Ech-tt 2003) 10...♚fe8 11.b5 ♘a5 12.♙xe6 fxe6 (Fedorov-Zelic, Croatia tt 2002) 13.c4!N c6 14.♙b2 ♚c7 15.♘g5 ♙f8 16.♙c3 h6 17.♘gf3±. **11.♙xe6!N ♚xe6 12.♘c4±** and b4-b5.

F) **7...a5** is a rare move, taking control of the square b4. The main idea is to bring the knight from f6 to c5. **8.h3!?** is a good waiting move taking control of the square g4, which is important in many lines.



analysis diagram

F1) **8...♔e6** (Kindermann-Graf, Germany Bundesliga 2012/13) **9.♘a3!N** The square c4 is a very good outpost for the knight. **9...♔xc4 9...♘d7 10.c3 ♘b6 11.♔xe6 fxe6 12.♔e3±; 9...d5 10.exd5 ♔xd5 11.♔xd5 ♖xd5 12.c4 ♗e6 13.d4↑. 10.♘c4 ♘d7 11.c3 ♗e8 11...♘c5?! 12.d4↑. 12.♔d2** The advance b2-b4 is in the air now. **12...♘f8 13.b4 13.♘e3 ♘e6 14.♘d5±. 13...axb4 14.cxb4 ♘e6 15.b5 ♘cd4 16.♘xd4 ♘xd4 17.♔e3 ♘e6 18.♗g4±;**

F2) **8...♘d7 9.c3 ♗h8?!** (9...♘c5 10.d4 exd4 11.cxd4 ♘d7 12.♘c3±; 9...♔f6 10.♔e3 ♘c5 11.♘bd2±) was a strange mix of plans in Luciani-Borsos, Verona 2007. White could have obtained a better position with **10.♔e3N ♘c5** (10...f5?! 11.exf5 ♗xf5 12.♘a3±) **11.♘bd2±**

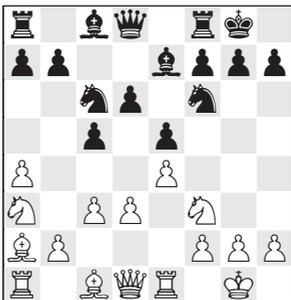
### 8.♔a2 c5

**8...♔e6?!** allows White to gain space on the queenside, e.g. **9.b4 9.♔xe6N fxe6 10.b4 ♘c6 11.c3±** seems even better. **9...♔xa2 10.♗xa2 ♘c6 11.c3±** Godena-Marguerettaz, Padova 2014.

### 9.c3 ♘c6

**9...♔e6** allows a quick b2-b4: **10.♔xe6 fxe6 11.b4 cxb4 12.cxb4 ♘c6 13.b5 ♘d4 14.♘xd4 14.♘bd2±** might be even better. **14...exd4** (Hommeles-Boudre, France tt 2005) **15.♘d2!N e5 16.♘c4 ♗c8 17.♔a3** with a better position due to the pressure on d6 and better pawn structure.

### 10.♘a3



More precise and flexible than **10.♘bd2**, which has been played more often, as it leaves d2 open for the bishop.

### 10...♔e6

**10...h6!?** A logical waiting move. **11.♔d2**  
A) **11...♘h7** (Kurmann-Petschar, Graz 2015) **12.b4!N cxb4 13.cxb4 ♘g5 14.♘xg5 ♔xg5 15.♔c3 a6 16.♔c4±** White has a nice initiative on the queenside;

B) **11...♔e6?!** (this doesn't fit with 10...h6) **12.♔xe6 fxe6 13.b4 b6 14.♘c4 ♗c7 15.♗c1 ♘d7 16.b5 ♘d8 17.d4 ♘f7 18.dxe5 dxe5 19.♗b3±** Demchenko-Grünfeld, Jerusalem Ech 2015;

C) **11...♗e8 12.♘c2?! ♔f8 13.♘e3 ♔e6 14.♔xe6 ♗xe6 15.c4 a5 16.♗f1 ♗e8 17.♘e1 g6 18.f4±** Olofsson-Buseman, corr. 2014;

D) **11...a6** An attempt to play on the queenside.



analysis diagram

**12.h3!N** A nice waiting move which improves the position on the kingside too.

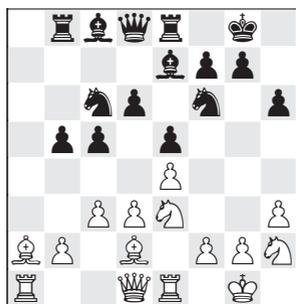
D1) **12.♘c4** is premature and allows Black to put his light-squared bishop uncontested on his dream square e6: **12...♔e6!** and now: **13.h3 13.b4 b5 14.♘e3** (Harikrishna-Yang Kaiqi, China tt 2012) **14...cxb4!N 15.♔xe6 fxe6 16.cxb4 ♗d7=;** the white knights don't really have prospects here. **13...♗e8**

14. ♖b1!? ♕f8 15.b4 b5! 16. ♘e3 ♕xa2 17. ♖xa2 cxb4 18.cxb4 (Udeshi-Panchanathan, New Delhi 2013) 18... bxa4!N and no matter how White reacts, Black will play ...d6-d5 soon and equalise;

D2) 12.b4 doesn't work because of 12...cxb4 13.cxb4 d5! =;

D3) 12...♖b8 13.♘c4 and now:

D31) 13...b5 14.axb5 axb5 15.♘e3 ♖e8 16.♘h2.



analysis diagram

White starts attacking on the kingside. 16...♕e6 17.♕d5! ♖d7 18.♖a6 ♖ec8 19.♖f3 ♖b7 20.♖aa1 ♖a8 21.♘hg4 with a dangerous initiative on the kingside for White. Now Black cannot just trade rooks because this increases the pressure, e.g. 21...♖xa1 22.♖xa1 ♖a8?! 23.♖xa8+ ♖xa8 24.♘f5±;

D32) One could ask why not 13...♕e6 now? There is a slight difference. With the rook on b8 White can now play 14.b4! cxb4 15.cxb4. Let's see some lines:

D321) 15...d5 16.exd5 ♘xd5 17.b5 ♘cb4 18.♕b1!± and Black loses a pawn, as 18...f6?! doesn't work because of 19.d4±;

D322) 15...♘d7 16.b5 ♘d4 17.♘xd4 exd4 18.♕b4±;

D323) 15...b5?! runs into 16.axb5 axb5 17.♘a5!±. With the rook on a8 this idea doesn't work.

### 11. ♕xe6!

It makes sense to damage the black pawn structure. 11.♘c4 has been played more often, but we suppose more of psychological reasons as White fears the opening of the f-file. In our Strategy chapter we summarise some lines in the game Iordachescu-Saric, Halkidiki Ech tt 2011.

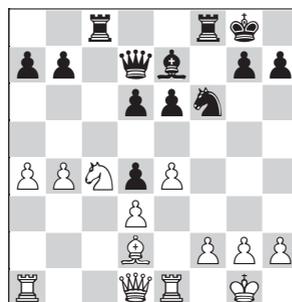
### 11...fxe6 12. ♕d2

The latest try by one of the strongest exponents of the Slow Italian. White plans b4-b5 with a space advantage.

A) 12.b4?! immediately doesn't work because of 12...cxb4 13.cxb4 (Sikula-Borsos, Hungary tt 2005/06) 13...♘xb4!N 14.♖b3 d5 15.♘xe5 ♘c6 16.♘f3 ♕b4=;

B) 12.♘c4 generally leads to the same positions as after 12.♕d2:

B1) 12...♖d7 13.♕d2 ♖ac8 14.b4 cxb4 15.cxb4 ♘d4 15...♘h5? 16.b5 ♘d8 (16...♘b8 17.♕e3 ♘f4 18.♕xa7±) 17.♕e3 ♖a8 (17...b6 18.♘fxe5 dxe5 19.♖xh5 ♖xd3 20.♘xe5 ♖xe4 21.♕xb6+–) 18.♘fxe5 dxe5 19.♖xh5 ♖xd3 20.♘xe5 ♖xe4 21.♕c5 ♖xe1+ 22.♖xe1 ♕xc5 23.♘d3+– Leon Hoyos-Arencibia, Santa Clara 2004. 16.♘xd4 exd4 (M.Muzychuk-Kashlinskaya, Plovdiv Ech W 2014)



analysis diagram

17.b5!N e5 17...d5?! 18.exd5 ♖xd5  
19.♗e5 ♖e8 20.♖g4 ♜f5 21.♗c4  
♔c5 22.♖e4 ♜f6 23.♙g5 ♜f5 24.h4  
h6 25.♙d2 ♜f6 26.♗e5± with the  
idea 27.♗g4. 18.♙b4± with a similar  
position to that in Hommeles-Boudre;

B2) 12...♜c8 Here White has a choice:

B21) 13.♙d2 b6 14.♜b1 and now:

B211) 14...♗h5 15.b4 cxb4 16.cxb4  
♗f4 17.♙xf4 ♜xf4 18.b5 ♗d4 19.♗xd4  
exd4 20.a5!±;

B212) 14...♗d7 15.b4 cxb4 16.cxb4  
♖e8 17.♙c3±;

B213) 14...♜b8?! 15.b4 cxb4 16.cxb4  
♗d7 17.♙c3 b5 17...a5 18.b5 ♗b4  
19.♙xb4 axb4 20.♗e3±. 18.axb5 ♜xb5  
19.♗a3 ♜b7 (Vocaturro-Geenen, Aix-  
les-Bains Ech 2011)



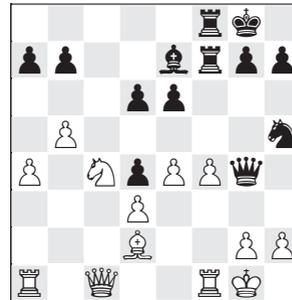
analysis diagram

20.b5!N ♗cb8 21.♗c4±

B22) 13.♜b1 ♗h5 14.b4 cxb4  
15.cxb4 ♗f4 16.b5 ♗a5 17.♗xa5  
♖xa5 (Kapnisis-Petkov, Kavala 2007)  
18.d4!N ♖c7 18...exd4 19.♗xd4 ♗d3  
20.♙d2 ♖c7 21.♗xe6 ♖c2 22.♜e2±.  
19.♙e3±

C) 12...♖e8 13.♙d2 The following  
two correspondence games were played  
with the help of computers. Both are  
very convincing and indicate that White  
is better in this position. They are very  
important games for understanding this  
position.

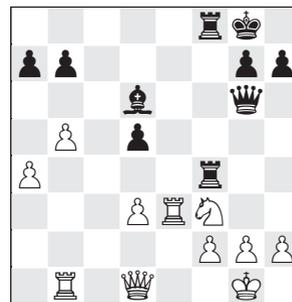
C1) 13...♗h5?! 14.b4 cxb4 15.cxb4  
♖g6 16.b5 ♗d4 17.♗xd4 exd4 18.♜f1  
♜f7 19.f4 ♜af8 20.♖c1! ♖g4



analysis diagram

21.f5! exf5 22.e5! ♖g6 (22...d5? is  
losing due to 23.e6 ♜f6 24.♗e5 ♖e2  
25.♜e1+–) 23.♖e1 ♜d8 24.♙b4 ♙g5  
25.exd6± Rada-Eremin, ICCF email  
2014;

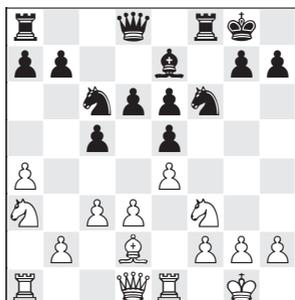
C2) 13...♗d7 14.b4 cxb4 15.cxb4 ♜c8  
16.♙c3 d5 17.exd5 exd5 18.♗cxe5  
♗cxe5 19.♙xe5 ♗xe5 20.♜xe5 ♖f7  
21.♜b1! ♙d6 22.♜e1 ♖g6 23.♜e3 ♜f4  
24.b5 ♜cf8



analysis diagram

25.♜a1! (if White can play such a slow  
move then Black has literally nothing on  
the kingside) 25...♗h8 26.d4 ♖h6 27.g3  
♜e4 28.♜c3 ♖f6 29.♜a2 g6 30.♗g2  
♖f5 31.b6 a6 32.h4 h6 33.♗e5 ♙xe5  
34.dxe5 d4 35.♜c4 ♖xe5 36.♜ac2 ♖d5  
37.f3 ♜e3 38.♜xd4 ♖xf3+ 39.♖xf3

♖exf3 40.♖c7 1-0 Achilles-Penkin,  
ICCF email 2011.



### 12...d5?!

Black sacrifices a pawn but objectively he doesn't get enough compensation. 12...♖e8 13.♘c4 see Rada-Eremin and Achilles-Penkin.

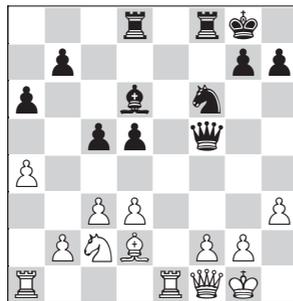
12...♖c8 13.♘c4 see Vocaturu-Geenen.

12...♗d7 13.♘c4 see Leon Hoyos-Arencibia and Muzychuk-Kashlinskaya.

**13.exd5 exd5 14.♗xe5 ♘xe5  
15.♖xe5 ♘d6 16.♖e1 ♗d7 17.h3!  
a6 18.♗c2 ♗f5 19.♗e2**

19.♖e3± might be even better.

**19...♖ae8 20.♗f1 ♘d8**  
Saric-Bosicic, Porec ch-CRO 2016.



### 21.b4!N ♘h5

21...b6 22.a5!±.

### 22.bxc5 ♘xc5 23.♗d4!

23.♘e3 ♗c8! 24.d4 ♘d6 25.♘g5 ♘g3  
26.♖e2 ♖d7 27.♗d1 ♖df7 28.fxg3  
♖f1+ 29.♗xf1 ♖xf1+ 30.♖xf1 ♘xg3  
31.♖ff2 ♘xe2+ 32.♖xe2 ♗xc3 33.♗f2  
is better for White too, but it's not clear  
if it's enough to win the game.

### 23...♘xd4 24.cxd4 ♗f4 25.♖e3±

White has everything under control  
and is a pawn up. His next move will  
be to activate the rook on a1.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have dealt with the main line 3...♗f6 4.d3 ♘e7 and some minor black options after 4.d3. Apart from 4...♘e7, only 4...h6 is of theoretical importance. With concrete play White conquers the centre and enjoys a space advantage. There seems to be no line where Black can equalise. In the main line we took an extensive look at the position after 7.a4!. Black has many options. 7...♗h8 initiates a dangerous plan with the idea of attacking on the kingside, but we offer a convincing path to neutralise Black's idea and even get a promising position. 7...♘e6 is a very solid option for Black, but he lacks counterplay and White always has at least a more pleasant position. 7...♗a5 is the main move, but White has a simple plan by exchanging the bishops on e6 and damaging Black's pawn structure. The examples shown are very convincing from White's perspective. The other main idea is to push the b-pawn in many lines and increase the space advantage.

All in all we are very convinced that the lines presented offer White very good play with almost no risk at all.