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The Full English Opening

Mastering the Fundamentals

New In Chess 2018

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Foreword

A step back in time...

It was March 1982, and I had just experienced my first true disappointment in chess. I had played a scholastic tournament where I had scored a not overwhelming 3 points in 7 rounds. That, however, was not the disappointment. My brother Bent, who was three years younger, had scored the same amount of points in my group and he had won a prize while I hadn't.

I wouldn't say that this urged me to take immediate action, but nevertheless something had to be done. Therefore, once the summer vacation hit, I decided to study chess. Not any chess, but specifically I resolved to play through all the games I could find that started with 1.c4. The reason for this choice was that one year earlier I had won a copy of the Danish translation of Raymond Keene's book on the 1978 World Championship match, where the World Champion, Anatoly Karpov, had won a very narrow victory against the challenger, Viktor Kortchnoi. Kortchnoi, the underdog, was a fighter. This appealed to me, and he played 1.c4.

In the next two weeks, I skimmed through decades' worth of Danish chess magazines and played over hundreds of games with 1.c4. Not having played any rated game yet, and without any clear understanding of what I was looking at, some ideas and concepts must have stuck in my head. At the very next occasion, in August 1982, I won my very first tournament with 7/7 and brought home a trophy. The key opening, of course, had been 1.c4, in which I had suddenly found new confidence. Later the same year, I played in my first adult tournament, where I scored 3/7 once again but against players with an average of slightly over 1600. Two of the full points were scored with white in the English Opening. Since then, the English Opening has featured prominently in my opening repertoire.

A leap forward – 1998

Having just finished writing my first book, *The Sicilian Accelerated Dragon*, co-authored with Peter Heine Nielsen, I felt the itch to write another book. Graham Burgess, who had commissioned the above book, had moved on to found Gambit Publications with Murray Chandler and John Nunn, and when I reached out to them with some book ideas they were

interested. Eventually we decided that I should write about the English Opening. The result was two books: *The Gambit Guide to the English Opening: 1...e5* (1999) and *The Symmetrical English* (2000). In the first book I employed a novel approach to presenting an opening. In addition to the standard theoretical presentation, it included an introduction to the plans and ideas covered in each chapter. This was well received. In fact, countless times since the publication of that book, people have told me that they loved this particular feature of it, asking me when I was going to write a new edition of the book. The book on the Symmetrical English didn't use the same format – I don't recall exactly why, possibly because Gambit had abandoned the concept. The result was therefore a more traditional opening book with plenty of analysis, some of it rather groundbreaking.

While I'm still immensely happy with the work I did back then, the books are theoretically well past their expiration date from the viewpoint of opening theory.

This is not a book on opening theory

While I think there is need for an update of the general works on the theory of the English Opening, this book is not such an update. While many types of books on the English Opening have been published since mine came out back in 1999-2000, I feel there is a need for a book that dives into the concepts that are fundamental for playing the English Opening well. Therefore, while this book does contain some game references and some theory, they mainly serve to add to the overall understanding of the opening. Also, I should add that not all variations are covered – that has not been my goal. Rather, I have aimed to cover what I felt was most important for the reader to understand the English Opening.

The goal of this book

My aim with this book is not to serve you, dear reader, with a pre-determined, narrow repertoire. I would like you to close this book with the feeling that you actually understand what ideas lie behind the individual variations, why certain moves are being played, and what the players are aiming for. This is where many opening books, including some of my own, tend to cut corners.

Therefore, once you are done studying the chapters in this book, you will have another job ahead of you. You will have to start selecting variations and putting together a repertoire, but armed with the knowledge you have acquired in this book. This should be both interesting and enjoyable because hopefully you will sit down with the feeling that you are in command of the opening rather than the opening controlling

you. So, while you will not have the opening repertoire of Aronian, Carlsen or some of the countless other grandmasters who regularly play the English Opening, you will have the basic knowledge necessary to understand why they favour certain moves and ideas and what their plans and intentions are.

Thank yous

No book is ever created in a complete vacuum. Many people have helped pave the road to the final product. First, a big thank you to Allard Hoogland, who reached out to me and initiated the e-mail exchange that led to this book growing from a thought in my head to a reality. Then the amazing team at New In Chess who, through patience and keen understanding, made this book better than I thought possible.

Furthermore, I should mention the late World Championship Challenger Viktor Kortchnoi for inspiring me to take up this opening, my brother Bent for stimulating me to become better, my parents Anne-Grete and Jørn Erik Hansen, who have supported and encouraged their chess-crazy son, Peter Heine Nielsen for getting me involved in writing about chess instead of just playing it, the boys at Gambit for taking a chance on me writing about this opening, and my better half Stephanie, who has had endless patience when deadlines were creeping uncomfortably close, and who has let me enjoy the freedom to express myself creatively in books.

Carsten Hansen
Bayonne (NJ), May 2018

CHAPTER 14

Asymmetrical lines

1.c4 c5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.♗f3 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5



14.1) 5.g3 ♘c6 6.♗g2 e6 7.0-0 ♗e7

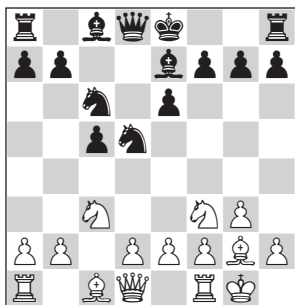
14.2) 5.d4

14.3) 5.e3

14.4) 5.e4

The asymmetrical lines are an interesting mix of straight-laced ‘normal’ lines and crazy ones, where one side gives up the right to castle in order to get a lead in development.

**14.1) 1.c4 c5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.♗f3 d5
4.cxd5 ♗xd5 5.g3 ♘c6 6.♕g2 e6
7.0-0 ♕e7**



This is the starting position of the Keres-Parma Variation. It usually (in this case, nearly always) enters the territory of the Catalan/Semi-Tarrasch. It is far more solid for Black than the normal Tarrasch.

8.d4

The other main line arises after 8.♗xd5 exd5 9.d4 0-0 10.dxc5 ♕xc5 and we have a position that strongly resembles the normal Tarrasch but where a set of knights have been exchanged. You would think that this would favour White, as exchanges of this kind usually help to reduce the dynamic potential in Black's position, but in this line it appears to limit White's opportunities to put pressure on Black's isolated d-pawn. For starters, White cannot play ♕g5 and pin the knight on f6.

Now White has several options:

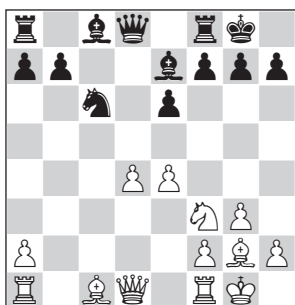
A) My recommendation in my book on the Symmetrical English was 11.♖c2, arguing that this presents Black with the most problems. I still believe this, but

overall Black should be able to equalize: 11...♕b6 12.♞d1 h6 13.b3 ♖f6 14.♕b2 d4 15.♗d2 ♞d8 16.♞ac1 ♕e6 17.♗f4 ♖xf4 18.gxf4 ♞d7 19.♗h4 ♗e7 20.♕a3 (Khismatullin-Khairullin, Khanty-Mansiysk 2014) and here 20...♞ad8 is fine for Black;

B) 11.♕g5 ♖d7 (this is the best move. The old main line is 11...f6, which is considerably more difficult for Black to play, e.g. 12.♕d2 ♕e6 13.a3 ♕b6 14.b4 ♗e5 15.a4 a6 16.♞b1 ♖d7 17.a5 ♕a7 18.b5 ♞ac8 19.♕b4 ♗xf3+ 20.♕xf3 and White has a strong initiative and the better chances, Vitiugov-Zhao Xue, Gibraltar 2014) 12.♖c2 (also 12.♞c1 has been tested, for example: 12...♕b6 13.♕d2 ♖g4 14.e3 ♖h5 15.♗h4 ♕g4 16.♕f3 ♕xf3 17.♖xf3 ♖xf3 18.♗xf3 d4 19.exd4 ♗xd4 20.♗xd4 ♕xd4 and Black has equalized, Aronian-Radjabov, Dubai rapid 2014) 12...♕b6 13.♞ad1 ♖g4 14.♕f4 ♕f5 15.♖a4 ♕e4 16.b4 ♖f5 17.♗h4 ♖f6 18.♕xe4 dxe4 19.♞d6 ♖b2 (Kuzubov-Lenic, Slovenia tt 2017) and here White's best chance for an advantage is 20.♗f5 ♖xe2 (or 20...♖xb4 21.♖xb4 ♗xb4 22.♞d7! ♗xa2 23.♕e5 ♞fd8 24.♞fd1 ♞xd7 25.♞xd7 ♕c5 26.♗xg7 with an ongoing initiative for White) 21.b5 ♗a5 22.♞d2 ♖f3 23.♞e1 ♞fe8 24.♖c2 and White has the somewhat better chances.

8...0-0

In the normal Semi-Tarrasch, Black usually clears up the centre in the following fashion: 8...♗xc3 9.bxc3 0-0 10.e4 cxd4 11.cxd4



But it appears that having the bishop on g2 (compared to e2/d3 in the normal Semi-Tarrasch) is a significant plus for White, who scores very well in this line:

A) 11...♙f6 12.♚b2 ♘d7 13.♞e2 ♘a5 14.♞fd1 ♙a4 15.♞dc1 a6 16.♞e1 ♘c6 17.♞d2 ♞e8 18.♞ab1 ♚b5 19.♙c3 ♞c8 20.♙h3 ♘b8 21.♞e3 and White has the better chances, Cheparinov-Mateo, Dresden 2008;

B) 11...b6 12.d5 exd5 13.exd5 ♘b4 14.♘d4 ♙a6 15.♞e1 ♙f6 16.♙a3 ♙xd4 17.♞xd4 ♘c2 18.♞a4 ♘xa3 19.♞xa3 and White has a clear advantage, Iturrizaga Bonelli-E. Hansen, Dubai blitz 2014.

9.e4

9.♘xd5 transposes to 8.♘xd5 above.

9...♘db4

Withdrawing the knight to b6 is another option, although it allows White to grab the initiative: 9...♘b6, and now:

A) 10.d5 exd5 11.exd5 ♘b4 12.♘e1 ♘c4 (or 12...♙f6 13.a3 ♙xc3 14.axb4 ♙xb4 15.♘c2 a5 16.♘xb4 cxb4 17.♞d4 ♘d7 18.♙f4 with excellent compensation for the sacrificed pawn; White's pieces dominate the board, Ghaem Maghami-Adhiban,

Kolkata 2009) 13.a3 ♘a6 14.♘c2 ♘c7 15.♞e2 ♘d6 16.♙f4 ♞e8 17.♘e3 b6 18.♞fd1 ♙a6 19.♞c2 ♘cb5 20.♘xb5 ♙xb5 21.h4 ♞d7 22.♙h2 ♞ad8 23.a4 ♙a6 24.♙h3 ♞b7 25.♞e1 (Papp-Kannappan, Philadelphia 2016) and White is in charge of the game. Note how all of his pieces are on good active squares;

B) 10.dxc5 ♞xd1 11.♞xd1 ♙xc5 12.e5 ♘c4 13.♘a4 (or 13.♞e1 ♙d7 14.♞e4 ♘b6 15.♙e3 ♙xe3 16.♞e3 ♞fd8 17.b3 ♘b4 18.♘d4 ♙e8 19.♞d1 ♙c6 20.♘xc6 ♞xd1+ 21.♘xd1 bxc6 22.♞e2 ♞d8 23.♘e3 ♞d4 and Black has equalized, Melkumyan-Gruenfeld, Jerusalem 2015) 13...♙e7 14.♙f4 f6 15.♞ac1 ♘4xe5 16.♘xe5 ♘xe5 17.♙xe5 fxe5 18.♘c5 ♙g5 19.♞c2 ♞b8 20.♙h3 ♞d8 21.♞xd8+ ♙xd8 22.♙xe6+ ♙xe6 23.♘xe6 ♙b6 and Black has equalized, Ivanchuk-Xu Jun, Shenyang 2000.

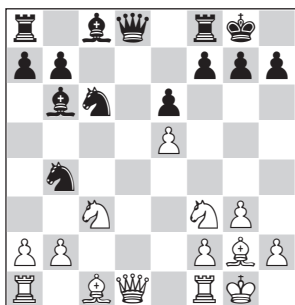
10.dxc5

10.d5!? can also be considered, e.g. 10...exd5 11.exd5 ♘d4 12.♘xd4 cxd4 and now: 13.♘b5 (13.a3 dxc3 14.axb4 cxb2 15.♙xb2 ♞b6 16.♙d4 ♞xb4 17.♞a4 ♞d6 18.♞a1 b5 was seen in Janssen-O.Foisor, Belgium tt 2000/01, and now 19.♞a5 ♙f6 20.♙xf6 gxf6 21.♞b1 leaves White with the somewhat better chances) 13...♘xd5 14.♘xd4 ♙f6 15.♞e1 ♘b4 16.♙e3 ♘d5 17.♙c1 ♘b4 18.♙e3 ♘d5 19.♙c1 ♘b4 ½-½ Van Wely-Ragger, Spain tt 2017; Black has completely equalized.

10...♙xc5 11.e5 ♙b6

The more common continuation is 11...♙e7 12.a3 ♘d3 13.♞e2 ♘xc1

14. ♖axc1 ♕a5 15. ♜fd1 a6 16. ♘d4
 ♘xd4 17. ♜xd4 ♜b8 18. ♜cd1. Here a
 draw was agreed in Ehlvest-Ribli,
 Reggio Emilia 1991, which seems
 a little generous on White's part,
 for instance: 18...b5 19. ♘a2 ♖b6
 (or 19...b4 20. ♖e1 ♜b5 21. ♘xb4
 ♜xe5 22. ♖d2 ♙f6 23. ♘d5 ♖xd2
 24. ♘xf6+ gxf6 25. ♜4xd2 with an
 advantageous endgame for White)
 20. b4 ♙b7 21. ♙xb7 ♜xb7 22. ♘c3
 ♖c7 23. ♖f3 ♜a7 24. ♖e3 with a
 small, but ongoing initiative for
 White in the late middlegame.



Thanks to his pawn on e5, White
 has an advantage in space and
 Black's position is rather cramped;
 a problem that is not easily solved.
 Rather surprisingly, this position
 has only been played twice, both
 times with Anand as Black.

12. ♙g5

I believe that 12.a3 is the more
 challenging move for Black to
 face, e.g. 12...♘d5 13. ♖e2 ♙d7
 14. ♜d1 ♘xc3 15. bxc3 ♖c7 16. a4 ♘e7
 17. ♘g5 ♙c6 18. ♙a3 (White can also
 push with 18. ♙xc6 ♖xc6 19. ♙a3
 ♙c5 20. ♙xc5 ♖xc5 21. ♜ab1 ♜ab8
 22. ♜d7 ♘g6 23. ♘e4 ♖c8 (note
 that 23...♖xe5?? runs into 24. ♜b5,

trapping the queen) 24. ♜d4 ♜d8
 25. ♖d3 ♜xd4 26. cxd4 ♖d7 and
 while White has the better chances,
 Black has a good shot at a successful
 defence) 18...♙xc5 19. ♘xc5 ♙c5
 20. ♖e4?! (White could retain a
 pleasant edge with 20. ♙xc5 ♖xc5
 21. ♖b5 when Black still has a long
 defence ahead of him) 20...♘g6
 21. ♙xc5 ♖xc5 22. ♘f3 b6 23. ♜d7
 ♖xc3 24. ♜ad1 and White has more
 than enough compensation for the
 pawn, but it wasn't sufficient to tip
 the game in White's favour in Giri-
 Anand, St Louis 2016.

12... ♖xd1 13. ♜axd1 h6

A logical move, kicking White's
 bishop away to gain access to the
 d8-square and make a 'luft' for
 the king. However, 13...♘d5!? is
 interesting, e.g. 14. ♘d5 (or 14. ♙d2
 ♜d8 15. a3 h6 16. ♘a4 ♙c7 17. ♜fe1
 a6 and Black is well on his way to
 untangling) 14...exd5 15. ♜xd5 ♙e6
 and Black regains the pawn and,
 with his pieces brought into play,
 the chances are roughly balanced.

14. ♙c1

My computer suggested an
 interesting idea: 14. ♙e3, intending
 14...♙xe3 15. fxe3 ♘e7 16. ♜f2 ♘bd5
 17. ♘xd5 ♘xd5 18. e4 ♘b6 19. ♜fd2
 with some initiative for White, but
 Black may be able to neutralize
 White's pressure with 19...♘c4
 20. ♜d4 b5 21. ♙f1 ♙a6 22. ♙xc4 bxc4
 23. ♜d6 ♙b5 24. ♘f2 ♜ab8 though
 he isn't 100% out of the woods yet.
 I, for one, would rather play White
 in this position than defend it with
 black.

**14... ♖e7 15. ♘d2 ♜bd5 16. ♘c4 ♕d7
17. ♘xd5**

White accepts Black's pawn sacrifice even if it means heavy simplifications. While White can play undisturbed for a win with the game continuation, I think he would have done better to decline the offer and instead add more pressure on Black's position, e.g. by 17.b3 ♕c6 18. ♘e4 ♜fd8 19. ♕a3 when White certainly is in charge. But whether it is actually better than the game continuation is an open question.

**17... ♘xd5 18. ♕xd5 exd5 19. ♜xd5
♕e6 20. ♘xb6 axb6 21. ♜d6 ♜xa2
22. ♜xb6**

White has won a pawn, but thanks to the opposite-coloured bishops there is still a high probability of a draw.

**22... ♕h3 23. ♜e1 ♜a1 24. ♕d2 ♜xe1+
25. ♕xe1 ♜c8 26. ♕c3 ♜d8**

And White continued for a while, but in the end a draw was the outcome, Aronian-Anand, Moscow blitz 2016.

**14.2) 1.c4 c5 2. ♘c3 ♜f6 3. ♘f3 d5
4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.d4**

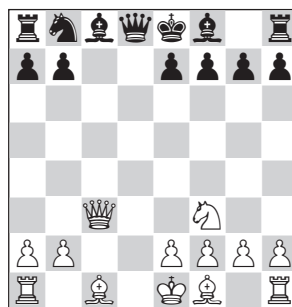


This move looks a little dull because it invites simplifications, but unless you like playing the Grünfeld as Black, it can cause some headaches and even Grünfeld aficionados will not find it easy to equalize in this variation.

5... ♘xc3

A) 5...e6 will take the game to a Semi-Tarrasch with 6.e4 or 6.e3, whereas 6.g3 strictly speaking falls in the same bucket, but it can transpose to the first game in this chapter after 6.g3 ♘c6 (or 6...cxd4 7. ♘xd5 ♜xd5 8. ♜xd4 ♜xd4 9. ♘xd4 ♕c5 10. ♕e3 ♘a6 11. ♜c1 e5 (Bacrot-Wang Yue, Beijing blitz 2014) and now 12. ♘c2 b6 13. ♕g2 ♜b8 14. a3 0-0 15. b4 ♕d6 16. 0-0 is somewhat better for White, albeit not much) 7. ♕g2 ♕e7 8. 0-0 0-0;

B) Another option is 5...cxd4 6. ♜xd4 ♘xc3 (or 6...e6 7.e4 ♘xc3 8. ♜xc3 with transposition to the main line) 7. ♜xc3.



At first glance it may look like White's queen is awkwardly placed and will easily become a target for Black's pieces. The problem, however, is that it is difficult for Black to get his pieces developed

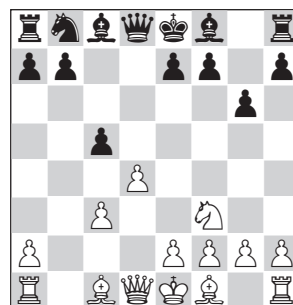
without creating weaknesses. For instance, how is Black supposed to develop his dark-squared bishop? He can't well play ...g7-g6, nor does ...e7-e6 solve the problem, because the pawn on g7 needs to be protected before the bishop can move. Until this problem has been solved, Black will not be able to castle. Meanwhile, White's pieces have a relatively easy time finding good squares.

The bottom line is that this position is considerably easier to play for White than it is for Black, and unless Black knows what he is doing, things can rapidly go downhill: 7...♘c6 (7...♙f5 8.♙e3 ♖c8 9.♗xc8+ ♙xc8 10.g3 may eliminate the queens but White has a lead in development and an ongoing initiative) 8.e4 ♙g4 (after 8...e6 White has to play either 9.♙b5 or 9.a3 to address the threat of ...♙b4: 9.a3 ♙d7 10.♙e2 ♖c8 11.0-0 ♘a5 12.♗d3 ♙e7 13.♙e3 a6 14.♖ac1 ♖xc1 15.♖xc1 with a solid initiative for White, Vi.Zakharov-Lalic, Cappelle-la-Grande 2012) 9.♙b5 ♖c8 10.0-0 a6 11.♙a4 b5 12.♖d1 (12.♙d1!?) 12...♗c7 13.♙b3 e5 14.♙d5 ♘d4 15.♗xc7 ♖xc7 16.♙e3 ♙xf3 17.gxf3 ♙c5 18.f4 and White has the initiative and better chances, P.H.Nielsen-Kempinski, Greece tt 2011.

6.bxc3 g6

Now we enter the Symmetrical English/Grünfeld Indian grey zone. With 7.e4 we will enter the Modern Main Line of the Grünfeld

Exchange Variation. Unless White has nothing better to do with his time, this should not be an option worth considering, at least from our perspective.



7.e3

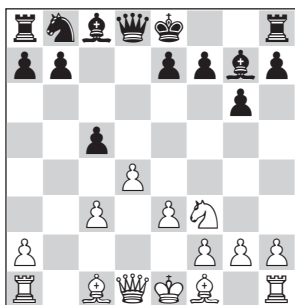
A) 7.♙f4 ♙g7 8.e3 ♗a5 9.♗d2 ♙f5 10.♙e2 ♘c6 11.0-0 cxd4 12.exd4 0-0 13.♖fe1 e5 14.dxe5 ♘xe5 15.♘xe5 ♙xe5 16.♙xe5 ♗xe5 17.♙f3 ♗c7 and Black has equalized, Artemiev-Gelfand, Moscow 2015;

B) 7.♙g5 ♙g7 8.e3 ♗a5 9.♗d2 ♙f5 10.♙e2 ♘c6 11.0-0 0-0 12.♗b2 cxd4 13.cxd4 e5 14.♗b5 ♗xb5 15.♙xb5 exd4 16.♙xc6 bxc6 17.♘xd4 ♙e4 18.♖ac1 ♙xd4 19.exd4 f6 20.♙e3 ♖ab8 ½-½ Ragger-Giri, Germany Bundesliga 2012/13;

C) 7.g3 ♗a5 (the text move keeps the game in the Symmetrical English, whereas 7...♙g7 8.♙g2 ♘c6 9.♙e3 0-0 10.0-0 transposes to the Fianchetto Variation of the Grünfeld, e.g. 10...cxd4 11.♘xd4 ♗c7 12.♘xc6 bxc6 13.♗a4 ♙e6 14.♙f4 ♙e5 15.♙xe5 ♗xe5 16.♙xc6 ♖ac8 17.♙f3 ♖c7 18.♗d4 ♗c5 19.♖fc1 ½-½ Boros-Gopal, Pardubice 2012) 8.♙d2 ♙g7 9.♙g2 0-0 10.0-0 ♗a6 11.♙g5 ♖e8 12.♗d2 ♘c6 13.♙h6 ♙h8

14.d5 (14.e3 is a solid alternative)
 14...♞a5 15.e4 ♕d7 16.e5 ♜c4?!
 (Black should probably have played
 16...♕f5 17.♞fe1 ♜c4 18.♞e2 ♜b6
 when White is better but Black is
 still fighting; now things rapidly
 get unpleasant) 17.♞f4 ♞a4?? (the
 severity of Black's situation is
 demonstrated by the fact that 17...
 f6 18.e6 ♕a4 is probably Black's
 best chance) 18.e6! (now Black's
 position completely collapses) 18...
 fxe6 19.dxe6 ♕xe6 20.♞ae1 ♕f5
 21.♜h4 ♕xc3 22.♜xf5 gxf5 23.♕d5+
 and Black resigned in Mecking-
 Lupulescu, Lodi 2006.

7...♕g7



So why is this position a problem for Black when the Exchange Variation of the Grünfeld is considered a solid option, offering him just about equal chances? With a pawn on e3 instead of e4, White's centre is better supported and less susceptible to pressure from Black's pieces. White can then at a more opportune time push the e-pawn forward. With limited options for Black to put pressure on White's centre, Black's counterplay becomes more difficult to generate. This

doesn't mean Black is in bad shape – that is by no means the case, but Black has to play more patiently and carefully than he is typically accustomed to in the Grünfeld.

8. ♕b5+

Also 8. ♕d3 is a reasonable alternative, e.g. 8...0-0 9.0-0 ♜d7 10.♞b1 ♞c7 11.e4 e5 12.d5 c4 13.♕e2 a6 (Ruck-Vidit, Hungary tt 2017/18) and here 14.a4, intending ♕a3, looks promising for White.

8...♜d7

On 8...♕d7, White has a couple of options:

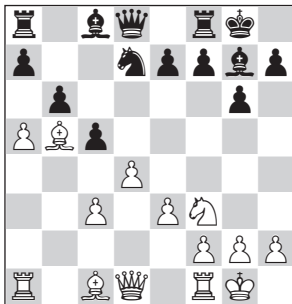
A) 9.a4 0-0 10.0-0 ♞c7 11.♕a3 b6 12.♜d2 ♞d8 13.♜e4 ♕c6 14.♞b1 ♜d7 15.♞d1 ♜f6 16.♜xf6+ ♕xf6 17.♞b3 ♕xb5 18.♞xb5 cxd4 19.cxd4 with a position that is very close to equal, but White has the opportunity to play for more, D.Fridman-Seel, Netherlands tt 2017/18;

B) 9. ♕d3 0-0 10.0-0 ♕c6 11.♞b1 ♞a5 12.♞b3 ♜d7 13.e4! (now White enters a position resembling a regular Grünfeld Indian, but Black's pieces are placed in a way that is very different from most lines in the actual Grünfeld) 13...♞ac8 (13...a6!?) 14.d5 ♕a4 15.♞a3 ♕xc3?! (Black decides the pawn is too good to pass up, but this is where the problems seriously start. Instead, the computer's suggestion 15...c4 16.♕c2 ♜c5 17.♞b4 b5 18.♜d4 is called 'slightly better for White' but Black's position isn't easy to play whereas White can improve his position without too much effort) 16.♕h6 c4?! (Black should have

played 16...♙b4 17.♖b2 ♘c3 18.♖e2 ♘b6, sacrificing the exchange, hoping to stave off White's initiative) 17.♙e2 ♗fe8 18.♗fc1 ♙f6 19.♗xb7 and White has a large advantage, Xu Yinglun-Alekseenko, Moscow 2017.

9.a4 0-0 10.0-0 b6 11.a5

Building the pressure against Black's queenside. The alternative 11.♙a3 requires precision from Black as well, but allows him more time to breathe, for instance: 11...♙b7 12.a5 ♖c7 13.♖e2 ♘f6 14.a6 ♙c6 15.♙xc6 ♖xc6 16.♘e5 ♖c7 17.♖f3 ♗fc8 18.♗ab1 e6 19.♗fc1 ♘e8 20.♘c4 ♙f8 and Black has neutralized White's pressure against the queenside, Bologan-Svidler, Tromsø 2013.

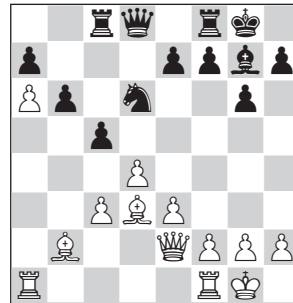


11...♙b7 12.a6!

Closing the queenside may seem like an odd choice, but it wins the bishop pair, which is not a deciding factor in the overall picture but it makes it more difficult for Black to create worthwhile counterplay. In contrast, 12.axb6 is entirely harmless for Black, e.g. 12...axb6 13.♗b1 ♘f6 14.♙d3 ♖c7 15.♗e1 c4 16.♙f1 ♘e4 17.♖c2 f5 18.♘d2 ♘d6 19.♙b2 e5 20.♗a1 b5 and Black has a

comfortable position, Ki.Georgiev-Krasenkow, Leon rapid 2010.

12...♙e4 13.♘g5!? ♘f6 14.♘xe4 ♘xe4 15.♙b2 ♗c8 16.♙d3 ♘d6 17.♖e2



17...c4?!

This is rarely a good idea, but here it's a sign that Black has lost his patience. He wants to grab control over the light squares and then push ...e7-e5. Here, this concept of restraining the white bishop pair is less than fortunate because it releases the pressure against White's centre. Instead, 17...♖c7 18.♗ac1 e6 19.e4 is playable and only marginally better for White.

18.♙c2 f5 19.♙a3

Now e3-e4 looms and Black, thanks to his ...c5-c4 pawn push, has zero counterplay. White takes his time.

19...♖d7 20.f3 e5??

Total panic. Possibly realizing his mistake of a few moves ago and now facing White building a broad centre, Black forces an opening of the position that his pieces cannot support. Instead 20...♗fd8 21.e4 ♘b5 22.♙b2 fxe4 23.fxe4 e5 24.d5 ♘d6 keeps the position closed and keeps Black, at least somewhat, in the game.

21.dxe5 ♖xe5 22.♞ad1 ♜f6 23.♞d5 ♗e6 24.♞fd1 ♜c6

The problem for Black is that he cannot mobilize a defence of the knight on d6 and nor can he move it, e.g. 24...♘f7 25.♙a4 and White crashes through.

25.♗d2 ♘f7 26.♞d8+!?

More accurate was 26.♙a4, bringing the bishop to the party.

26...♘xd8? 27.♗xd8+ ♙g7 28.♞d7+ ♙h6 29.♙f8+ ♙g5 30.h4+

And Black resigned in Korobov-Volokitin, Rivne 2016, before he would get mated.

14.3) 1.c4 c5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.♘f3 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.e3



In this line, as we will see, White has the option to switch into the variation we looked at in the previous game.

5...♘xc3

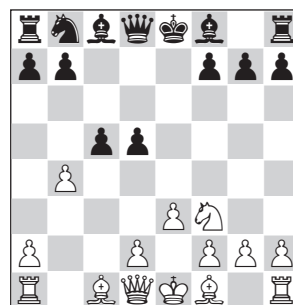
Black can also consider 5...e6, after which 6.d4 will take the game to a Semi-Tarrasch, which we will not discuss at this point. However, there are some additional ideas that we will touch upon now:

A) 6.♙c4 ♘c6 7.0-0 ♙e7 8.♗e2 0-0 9.♞d1 (with 9.d4, play heads

into a Semi-Tarrasch) 9...♘b6 10.♙b5 ♙d7 11.d4 cxd4 12.exd4 ♘b4 13.♙xd7 ♗xd7 14.♘e5 ♗e8 15.a3 ♘4d5 and White has some initiative to counterbalance the isolated pawn, Eljanov-Harikrishna, Wijk aan Zee 2017;

B) 6.♙b5+ ♙d7 7.♙e2 (or 7.♙c4 ♙c6 8.0-0 ♙e7 9.♘e5 0-0 10.d4 cxd4 11.exd4 ♘d7 12.♙xd5 ♙xd5 13.♘xd5 exd5 14.♗b3 ♙f6 (Meier-Liang, St Louis 2017) where White has some initiative but Black should be able to hold the balance) 7...♙c6 8.0-0 ♘d7 9.d4 ♜c8 10.♘b5 ♙xb5 11.♙xb5 a6 12.♙xd7+ ♗xd7 13.♘e5 ♗b5 14.a4 ♗b6 15.e4 ♘f6 16.d5 with a strong initiative and clearly better chances for White, Malakhov-Beliavsky, Croatia tt 2017;

C) 6.♘xd5 exd5 (or 6...♗xd5 7.b3 ♙e7 8.♙c4 ♗f5 9.♙b2 ♘c6 10.0-0 0-0 11.d4 ♞d8 (Rakhmanov-Erdős, Spain tt 2017) and now 12.♙d3 ♗h5 13.♜c1 ♘b4 14.♙b1 promises White some initiative) 7.b4!?



This move, and the idea behind it, is easily one of the coolest gambit ideas in recent history. 7...cxb4 (or 7...c4 8.♙b2 ♙xb4 9.♙xg7 ♜g8 10.♙e5 ♘c6 11.♙g3 ♙f5 12.♙e2

♙e7 13.0-0 h5 14.d3 h4 15.♙f4 d4 with a messy position and chances for both sides, Nepomniachtchi-Harikrishna, Wijk aan Zee 2017) 8.♙b2 ♘d7 (also 8...f6 has been tried, to reduce the range of the bishop on b2, but such a move also weakens dozens of squares: 9.♖c1 ♘c6 10.♙b5 (10.♘d4!?) 10...♙d7 11.♗b3 a6 12.♙d3 ♙e6 13.♘d4 ♘xd4 14.♙xd4 ♖c8 15.0-0 ♙e7 16.♗b1 and White has compensation for the pawn but not more than that, Anton Guijarro-Kasimdzhanov, Riyadh blitz 2017) 9.♖c1 ♘f6?! 10.♙b5+ ♙d7 11.♙xf6 gxf6 12.♘d4 (White can play more precisely with 12.♙xd7+ ♗xd7 13.♘d4 ♙e7 14.♗f3 with massive positional compensation for the pawn) 12...♖c8 13.♙xd7+ ♗xd7 14.♖xc8+ ♗xc8 15.♗a4+ ♘d8 16.0-0 and despite the limited material, Black is in serious trouble: his king is unsafe, White is way ahead in development and Black's pawn structure is a total mess, Kuzubov-Schreiner, Hersonissos 2017.

6.bxc3

This looks like the only natural move, but in recent years the lame-looking 6.dxc3

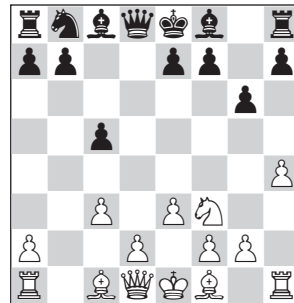


6...♗xd1+ 7.♘xd1 has with very good results been used against black players eager to play a Grünfeld Indian set-up; even World Champion Carlsen jumped on the bandwagon. Black shouldn't have a problem facing this line. The idea is that Black enters a pawn structure where the pawn on c5 is a weakness. It is similar to a line we will look at in a later chapter: 1.c4 ♘f6 2.♘c3 g6 3.♘f3 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.e4 ♘xc3 6.dxc3 ♗xd1+ 7.♘xd1, where Black would never want to play ...c7-c5. A small, but important finesse.

Erdős-Nepomniachtchi, Hersonissos 2017, continued 7...b6 8.♙b5+ ♙d7 9.a4 a6 10.♙xd7+ ♘xd7 11.e4 e6 12.♙f4 f6 13.♘d2 ♙e7 14.♘c4 ♘f7 15.♘c2 e5 16.♖hd1 with a small positional plus White duly converted into a full point,

6...g6 7.h4

Also 7.♙b5+ ♙d7 8.♖b1 ♙g7 9.0-0 0-0 can be played and now with 10.d4 White entered a line that could have been part of the coverage in our previous main game. 10...♗c7 11.♙xd7 ♘xd7 12.e4 ♖fd8 13.♗e2 ♖ac8 14.♙g5 ♘b6 15.♖fc1 h6 16.♙e3 ♗d7 with very near equality, Anton Guijarro-Gelfand, Gibraltar 2017.



7... ♖g7

If Black is concerned about White playing h4-h5, then 7...h6 can be considered, for instance: 8. ♖a3 ♗c7 9. ♗b3 ♖e6 10. ♖c4 ♖xc4 11. ♗xc4 ♘d7 12. 0-0 ♗c8 13. ♗ab1 ♖g7 14. d4 ♗a5 15. ♗b3 with a position that resembles something we would have seen in our previous main game, were it not for White's odd-looking pawn on h4, Yilmaz-Tari, Baku 2016.

8.h5

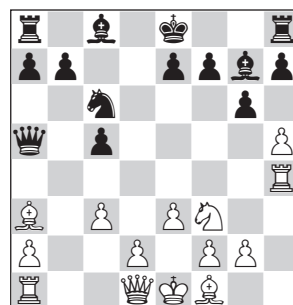
So what's the point behind this pawn advance? For starters, it takes Black out of the book and out of his comfort zone. Black can't just go ahead and castle kingside, because then after hxg6, ♗d1-a4-h4 he is in immediate danger of getting mated. Therefore, Black has to do something until it is safe to castle. White will typically never push the pawn to h6 because this closes the kingside and leaves the pawn somewhat vulnerable.

8... ♘c6 9. ♖a3!?

Another caveman-looking move is 9. ♗b3, intending ♘g5, for instance: 9... ♗c7 (or 9... ♗d7 10. ♘g5 (but 10. ♖a3 b6 11. ♖b5 is probably best) 10... ♗f5 11. h6 ♖e5 12. f4 0-0 13. ♖c4 with a position that doesn't resemble something that would be played between strong players) 10. ♖a3 b6 11. ♘g5 e6 12. d4 ♖b7 13. h6 (or 13. ♗d1!? 0-0-0 with a complicated battle ahead) 13... ♖f8 14. dxc5 ♖xc5 15. ♖xc5 bxc5 16. ♗b1 ♗b8 17. ♘xe6!? fxe6 18. ♗xe6+ ♗e7 19. ♗xc6+ ♖xc6 20. ♗xb8+ ♘d7 21. ♗xh8 ♗e5 22. ♗xh7+ ♘d6 with

a complicated and fascinating endgame, Indjic-Baron, Baku 2016.

9... ♗a5 10. ♗h4!?



This move protects the bishop because 10... ♗xa3 11. ♗a4 ♗b2 12. ♗b1 traps the queen.

10... ♖d7 11. ♗b3

White can also consider 11. ♗a4 ♗c7 12. ♖xc5 ♘e5 13. ♖a3 ♖xa4 14. ♗xa4+ ♘c6 15. ♗b1 with excellent compensation for the exchange.

11... 0-0?!

Black dares White to eat the poisoned pawn, which indeed looks risky. However, the solid 11... ♘d8 is likely best: 12. ♖e2 ♖f6 13. ♗h1 ♗c8 when Black shouldn't be worse.

12. hxg6 hxg6 13. ♗xb7! ♗fd8

14. ♗a6 ♖xc3?!

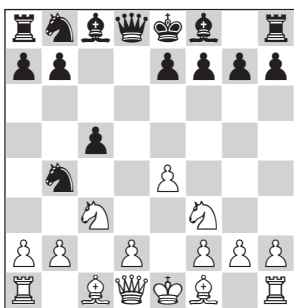
I'm not sure why Black decided to go for this since he isn't actually winning back the sacrificed pawn. Instead, 14... ♖f6 15. ♗xa5 ♘xa5 16. ♗h1 ♗ac8 at least leaves Black with a decent measure of compensation for the pawn.

15. ♗xa5 ♖xa5 16. ♖xc5

And White is a clear pawn up without any relevant compensation for Black, Aronian-Nepomniachtchi, St Louis 2017.

14.4) 1.c4 c5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.♗f3 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.e4 ♘b4

This is one of the crazier lines of the Symmetrical English. A calmer alternative is 5...♘xc3 6.dxc3 (or 6.bxc3, which resembles the lines we have discussed earlier in this chapter, except now the white pawn is on e4 instead of e3, e.g. 6...g6 7.h4 h6 8.♙b5+ ♘d7 9.a4 ♙g7 10.♚e2 ♚c7 11.a5 0-0 12.♙c4 ♘e5 13.♘xe5 ♚xe5 14.0-0 ♚f6 (Siebrecht-Seel, Bonn 2011) and here 15.h5 promises White a good game) 6...♚xd1+ 7.♗xd1 ♘c6 8.♙e3 e6 9.♗c2 b6 10.♙b5 ♙d7 11.a4 a6 12.♙e2 ♙d6 13.♘d2 ♙c7 14.♘c4 a5 15.♙g5 f6 16.♙h4 ♘e5 17.♙g3 ♙c6 18.f3 with a small positional plus like we have seen in similar pawn structures in this chapter, Blomqvist-Kantans, Stockholm 2016.



6.♙c4!?

A more solid and, frankly, boring line where White cannot expect to achieve much is 6.♙b5+ ♘8c6 (or 6...♙d7?! 7.a3 ♘4c6 8.d4 cxd4 9.♘xd4 g6?! 10.♙e3 ♙g7 11.0-0?! 0-0?! (Black is okay after 11...♘xd4 12.♙xd4 ♙xb5 13.♙xg7 ♙xf1 14.♚xd8+ ♗xd8 15.♙xh8 ♙c4)

12.♘b3 ♘a5? 13.♘xa5 ♚xa5?

14.♙xd7 ♙xc3 15.bxc3 and Black resigned when he realized that 15...♚d8 would be met by 16.♚a4, saving the piece, A.Mastrovasilis-Timofeev, Legnica 2013) 7.d4 (7.d3 a6 8.♙xc6+ ♘xc6 9.♙e3 e5 10.♚c1 b6 11.b4 ♘xb4 12.♘xe5 ♙d6 13.a3 ♙xe5 14.axb4 cxb4 15.♘d5 0-0 16.♙xb6 ♚g5 17.0-0 ♙h3 18.♚f3 ♙g4 19.♚e3 ♚xe3 20.fxe3 with a wonderfully unbalanced endgame where both sides have chances, Grischuk-Svidler, Stavanger 2014) 7...cxd4 8.a3 dxc3 9.♚xd8+ (or 9.axb4?! ♚xd1+ 10.♗xd1 cxb2 11.♙xb2 ♙d7 12.♗e2 f6 13.♚hd1 e5 14.♙c3 g5 15.♗e1 0-0-0 and White doesn't have enough for the pawn, Ghaem Maghami-Wagner, Berlin rapid 2015) 9...♗xd8 10.axb4 cxb2 11.♙xb2 ♙d7 12.0-0 f6 13.♙c4 (13. e5 ♘xe5 14.♘xe5 ♙xb5 15.♘f7+ ♗e8 16.♘xh8 ♙xf1 17.♗xf1 e6 18.b5 is difficult to assess, A.Zhigalko-Krasenkow, Warsaw 2015) 13...♘xb4 14.e5 ♚c8 15.♙f7 ♚c2 16.♚fb1 ♘d3 17.♙d4 fxe5 18.♙xa7 e6 19.♚xb7 ♙d6 20.♙e3 ♘c5 21.♚a8+ ♗e7 22.♚xd7+ ½-½ Tal-Timman, Montpellier 1985.

6...♘d3+

Another bizarre move is 6...♙e6, which hasn't been particularly popular because White has had good results against it. However, my computer thinks it is playable, and the Indian grandmaster Gopal has, in fact, tried it out a couple of times: 7.♙e6 ♘d3+ 8.♗f1 fxe6 9.♘g5 ♚b6 10.♚f3 c4?! (this is the

main line, but the better choice is 10...h6 11.♖xe6 ♗xe6 12.♗xd3 ♘c6 13.♗b5 b6 and Black has some compensation for the missing pawn) 11.b3 h6 12.bxc4 ♘e5 13.♗h3 and White was already winning in Elwert-Trapl, Denmark corr 1998.

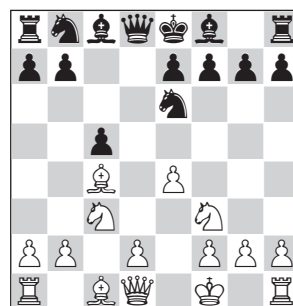
7.♗e2 ♘f4+

When I wrote my book on the Symmetrical English, 7...♘xc1+ was considered inaccurate, but in the light of what's going on in the main line, this may actually prove to be the better option. Black is far behind in development and while White has only given up the right to castle, yet my computer calls this line equal. Needless to say, Black needs to be careful: 8.♖xc1 a6 9.d4 b5!? 10.♙d5 ♖a7 (this seems to run contrary to my statement above, but in three top games with this line, Black has scored a healthy 2.5 points!) 11.dxc5 e6 12.c6 b4 13.♗d4 ♖c7?! (13...♗e7!) 14.♘a4 exd5 15.exd5 ♙e7? (15...♗f6!) 16.♗xg7 ♙f6 17.♗h6 ♖e7+ 18.♗f1 ♗xd5? 19.♗xf6 and White is completely winning, yet Giri couldn't find the way and ended up settling for a disappointing draw, Giri-Harikrishna, Wijk aan Zee 2017.

8.♗f1 ♘e6

Another idea is 8...♘d3 9.♗e2 ♘xc1 10.♖xc1 when White has a solid lead in development, yet here too Black may be okay, e.g. 10...e6 11.h4 ♘c6 (11...a6 12.e5 ♘c6 13.♖h3 b5 14.♙d3 ♙b7 15.♙e4 ♗d7 16.♖g3 g6 17.♗g1 ♙e7 18.♗e3 0-0-0 19.♖g4 ♗b8 was played in Aronian-So, London 2016,

and now 20.a4!? seems to promise White the better chances) 12.e5 ♙d7 13.♖h3 ♗b6 14.♙b5 h6 15.♗g1 a6 16.♙a4 0-0-0 17.♙b3 ♗b8 and Black had comfortably equalized in Erdős-Svidler, Germany Bundesliga 2016/17.



9.b4!?

This variation has been called the 'Drunken Evans Gambit' by Nigel Short. It is White's sharpest attempt at an advantage. In return for his pawn White gets a strong centre and a lead in development, and Black's entire set-up is very passive. Playing Black in this line requires precision and patient defence whereas White basically develops his pieces actively and then starts shaking the tree.

A) 9.h4 ♘d4 10.d3 ♘bc6 11.♘b5 ♙e6 12.♙f4 ♘xb5 13.♙xb5 ♗b6 14.♙a4 ♗a6 15.♖c1 b5 16.♙b3 ♙xb3 17.♗xb3 e6 18.♙e3 ♘a5 (Svidler-Vachier-Lagrave, Tbilisi 2017) and now 19.♗c2 c4 20.a4 ♖c8 21.axb5 ♗xb5 22.♘d4 ♗d7 23.♗c3 would have offered White good chances of an advantage;

B) 9.♘e5 has been tested numerous times – Black appears to

equalize: 9...♗c6 (or 9...♜d6 10.♜a4+ ♕d7 11.♗xd7 ♗xd7 12.♗b5 ♜c6 13.♕d5 ♜b6 14.♕xe6 fxe6 15.d3 a6 16.♗a3 g6 17.♗c4 ♜c7 18.♜a5 ♜xa5 19.♗xa5 0-0-0 20.♖e2 ♕g7 and Black has neutralized White's pressure, Moradiabadi-Anastasian, Abu Dhabi 2007) 10.♗xc6 bxc6 11.♗a4 ♗d4 12.♗xc5 g6 13.♗b3 ♕e6 14.♕xe6 ♗xe6 15.♜c2 ♕g7 16.♜xc6+ ♖f8 17.♜a6 ♗d4 18.♗xd4 ♕xd4, Nakamura-Giri, Wijk aan Zee 2014, and here 19.h4 h5 20.♜e2 gives White good chances; Black has decent compensation but I doubt if it is sufficient for two pawns.

9...cxb4

An interesting alternative is 9...g6 – a counter-gambit of sorts. I analysed this variation thoroughly in my book on the Symmetrical English and as a result the variation took a bit of a hit. 10.bxc5 ♕g7 and now:

A) 11.♕xe6 ♕xe6 12.d4 ♗c6 13.♕e3 ♜a5 (after 13...♕c4+ 14.♖g1 ♜a5 15.♜c1 0-0-0, here 16.♗b1!? was the novelty I offered, which came in handy a couple of years later: 16...♜a6 17.d5 gave White a large advantage in Vallejo Pons-Leko, Linares 2003) 14.♜c1 0-0-0 15.♗e2 f5 16.♗g5 ♕xa2 17.d5 fxe4 with an incredibly sharp position where both sides have chances, Garriga Cazorla-Gopal, Gibraltar 2017;

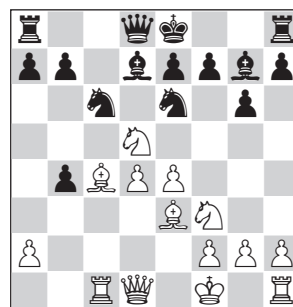
B) 11.♕a3 ♗c6 12.♜b1 0-0 13.♗d5 ♗ed4 14.♗xd4 ♕xd4 15.h4 h5 16.d3 e6 17.♗e3 ♜f6 18.♜d2 ♜d8 19.♕b2 ♜e5 20.♕xd4 ♗xd4 21.♗c2 ♜xc5 22.♗xd4 ♜xd4 23.♜b2 ♜xb2 24.♜xb2 b6 and the chances

are completely even, Jakovenko-Nepomniachtchi, Kazan 2014.

10.♗d5

The old main line is 10.♗e2, preparing d2-d4. Now 10...♗c5 11.♜c2 (11.♗g3?! ♕e6 12.♕xe6 ♜d3+ 13.♖g1 ♗xe6 14.♕b2 ♗c6 15.♜c1 ♜d8 16.h4 h5 17.♖h2 ♗f4 gave Black the upper hand, Giri-Kasimdzhanov, Zug 2013) 11...e6 12.♕b2 ♕d7 13.d4 ♗a4 14.d5 ♗xb2 15.♜xb2 exd5 16.♕xd5 ♗c6 17.♜d1 ♜e7 with a sharp position and mutual chances, Tihonov-Jakubowski, Bialystok 2017.

10...g6 11.d4 ♕g7 12.♕e3 ♗c6 13.♜c1 ♕d7



14.♜d2

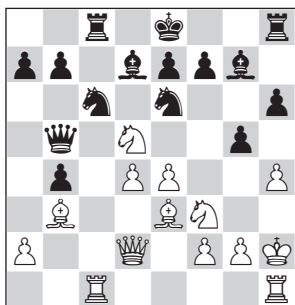
In another fairly recent game, White interjected 14.h4 h5 before developing the queen, and it too worked well for White: 15.♜d2 ♜a5 16.g3 ♜d8?! (16...0-0 17.♖g2 ♜fe8 gives Black better chances of keeping control although White has ample compensation) 17.♖g2 b3?! 18.♜d3 ♜b8 (Black should have played 18...bxa2 although 19.♜a1 ♗b4 20.♗xb4 ♜xb4 21.♜xa2 ♜c8 22.♕d5 is clearly better for White) 19.♕xb3 0-0? was played in Berczes-Xiong, Dallas 2016, and now

20. ♖xc6! bxc6 21. ♗xe7+ ♕h8 22. ♖c1 ♗d8 23. ♖c5 ♜c7 24. ♙f4 is a disaster for Black.

14... ♜a5 15.h4 ♖c8

15...h5 transposes to Berczes-Xiong in the previous note.

16. ♙b3 ♜b5+ 17. ♗g1 h6 18. ♗h2 g5!?



Black is trying to generate some counterplay because otherwise

his position will soon become completely untenable.

19. ♖hd1 ♗f8 20. ♗g1

This is one of the cooler ways of castling by hand. White, by the way, is clearly better.

20... ♖d8

It is difficult to come up with any user-friendly suggestions for Black because it seems that no matter what he tries, he heads straight into a wall of fire. For instance: 20...gxh4 21. ♗xh4 ♗exd4 22. ♖c4 e5 23. ♙xd4 ♗xd4 24. ♖xd4! exd4 25. ♜f4 ♖c6 26. ♗e7! and Black is busted.

21. hxg5 hxg5 22. ♙xg5 ♗xg5

23. ♜xg5 ♙h6 24. ♜h4 ♙g7 25. ♜f4

♙h6 26. ♗g5! ♙xg5 27. ♜xg5 1-0

Aronian-Topalov, London 2015.

Conclusion

It is interesting to see how the theory has developed in these lines over just the last few years. In Variation 14.1, which is a version of the Semi-Tarrasch that resides on English Opening real estate, it seems that Black should be able to equalize fully if properly prepared. That being said, among non-masters, this particular line is a rarity.

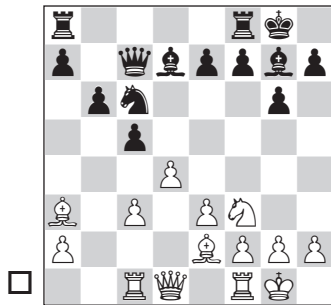
Variation 14.2, 5.d4, ends up looking like a Grünfeld, but here White has a reinforced centre with his pawn on e3 instead of e4, allowing Black much less of the typical counterplay. Theoretically, Black should be okay, but the consistent use by top GMs indicates that White has a decent shot at making more out of this patient set-up than it may first appear.

Variation 14.3 has become a pet line of Aronian, who has infused it with a lot of very creative ideas to challenge the current conventions of opening play; our main line is a great example. It can easily be subject to a lot more investigation in years to come, and it allows for creative play by both sides.

Finally, in 14.4, Black for the biggest part seems to have become more reluctant to defend the main line and has instead adopted the approach that exchanging on c1 is best. While Black is frequently successful in neutralizing White's initiative, it looks quite threatening initially. I suspect that White will be able to find ways to increase the pressure and Black will need to seek alternatives in other set-ups.

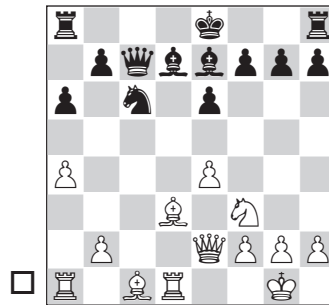
Exercises

Exercise 14.1



Doesn't White simply win a pawn after 13.dxc5 ? Please explain how you think Black can attempt to claim compensation or win it back. (Solution on page 428)

Exercise 14.2



Outline a plan forward for White. (Solution on page 428)