

# Preface

This is an ideal book for the active club player who wants to understand what's going on in the opening of a chess game. I believe *Chess Opening Essentials* is:

- *Comprehensive*: it covers all main variations likely to arise
- *Easy-to-use*: important moves and key positions are highlighted in colour
- *Long-lasting*: it doesn't outdate quickly because it is about the basics, not the latest fashions
- *Complete*: it explains the plans and counterplans for both White and Black
- *Down-to-earth*: simple, verbal introductions (no database-dump full of dead trees)
- *Convenient*: every opening is illustrated with a number of instructive games.

The authors quite lucidly explain the plans behind the various openings, as well as many subtle similarities and differences between them. This way, without giving endless variations, they manage to get across the essence of every opening. Also, the often colourful history of variations is elaborated upon in an entertaining way.

Although *Chess Opening Essentials* is about understanding the ideas behind the openings, and not about following the latest fashions in top-level chess, we could not do without a limited amount of updating. This volume of the originally Italian series *Capire le Aperture* (published in 2005) has been brought up to date with new developments and games until the beginning of 2009.

The colours in this book we believe to be a great help for the reader to navigate more quickly, and to distinguish between, for instance, main lines and others. **Coloured text** highlights important moves, and also key initial positions and positions arising after important sequences. **Bold type**, be it in black or in **colour**, indicates main lines, which are also classified and sub-classified. Lines given in *italics* are unsound lines that should be avoided.

But this is not all. There are also numerous graphic features highlighting moves, plans, and strong or weak points. We believe that all this makes for a highly pleasant and accessible presentation, and hope that you, our readers, will agree.

I am convinced that by studying this book, beginners, casual players as well as club players can improve their game and enjoy a deeper understanding of the game of chess in its entirety. For even stronger players it can be a tool to test and review their opening repertoire.

Peter Boel  
Editor

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However, often these non-committal evaluations are the only appropriate comment, and they correspond not only to the complexity of the position in question, but also to the highly complex nature of chess in general.

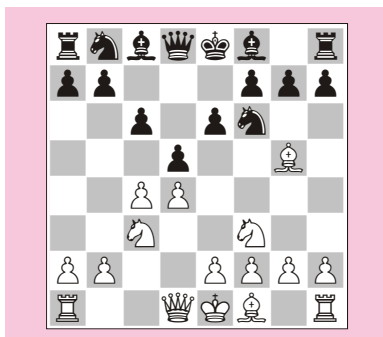
diagram position was seen for decades, but everybody played the natural  $5... \text{♞b8-d7}$  or  $5... \text{♜f8-e7}$ .

The contribution of the great Soviet champion was to appreciate the power of

**5. ... d5xc4!**

### Anti-Meran 5. ♜g5

- |           |        |
|-----------|--------|
| 1. d2-d4  | d7-d5  |
| 2. c2-c4  | e7-e6  |
| 3. ♞b1-c3 | ♞g8-f6 |
| 4. ♞g1-f3 | c7-c6  |
| 5. ♜c1-g5 |        |



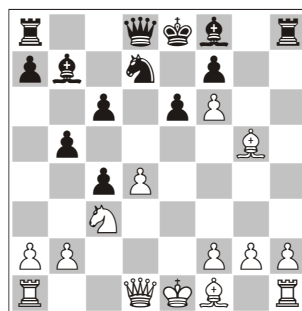
A mountain of theory has been created with the study of this move in recent years. It is played with great frequency at all levels, and it produces positions that are among the most interesting and complicated in all opening theory. In particular with  $5... \text{dxc4}$  the scale and depth of analysis is such that we can do no more than make an introductory examination here.

At this point, we must make a brief digression to discuss the variation's nomenclature. Recently it has become widespread to use the term **Botvinnik System** for all the positions that arise after  $5. \text{♜g5}$ . This is historically unjustified. The Botvinnik System is a gambit that is played by Black – not White! The



In fact, this move had been played before by **Stahlberg**, **Grünfeld** and **Euwe**. However, it was only **Botvinnik**, in several games played in the 1940's and '50's, who made clear the continuation's potential for Black.

- |            |        |
|------------|--------|
| 6. e2-e4   | b7-b5  |
| 7. e4-e5   | h7-h6  |
| 8. ♜g5-h4  | g7-g5  |
| 9. ♞f3xg5! | h6xg5! |
| 10. ♜h4xg5 | ♞b8-d7 |
| 11. e5xf6  | ♜c8-b7 |



If we now do a pawn count, it is White who is a pawn up; therefore...  $5. \text{♜g5}$  does not sacrifice a pawn – it wins one!

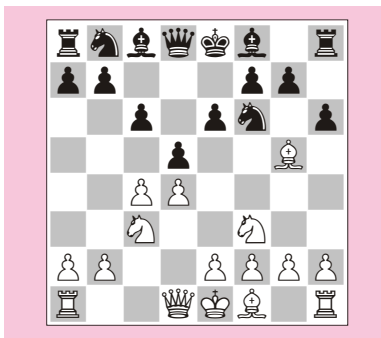
The move  $5.e2-e3$ , which usually leads to the **Meran** after  $5...c6$   $6.d3$   $dxc4$ , has always been the most popular choice, and therefore it is logical that the move  $5.c1-g5$  was usually labelled the **Anti-Meran**: the name which seems to be the most accurate.

After  $5.c1-g5$  Black can choose from two independent variations; ignoring  $5...c6$ , which after  $6.e3$   $a5$  transposes to the **Cambridge Springs Defence**, which we will look at later; and  $5...e7$ , which leads to a line of the **Orthodox Defence** in which Black has prematurely played  $...c7-c6$ . Now White can achieve a good position with  $6.e3$   $0-0$   $7.c2!$   $b7$   $8.d1$ .

We will now discuss the two independent lines available to Black:  $5...h7-h6$  and  $5...d5xc4$ .

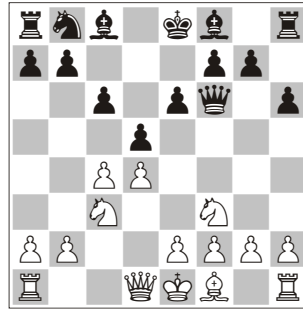
### Moscow Variation $5...h6$

- |            |         |
|------------|---------|
| 1. $d2-d4$ | $d7-d5$ |
| 2. $c2-c4$ | $e7-e6$ |
| 3. $b1-c3$ | $g8-f6$ |
| 4. $g1-f3$ | $c7-c6$ |
| 5. $c1-g5$ | $h7-h6$ |



And now we have the critical question of what to do with the bishop: retreat it to h4 and sacrifice a pawn, or take on f6 and be left with only one bishop?

### A) 6. $g5xf6$ $d8xf6$



Black has the two bishops. In compensation, White has a slight space advantage and a small lead in development.

### 7. $e2-e3$

The most natural. An interesting substitute is to play  $7.g3$  in **Catalan** fashion, but Black equalises with  $7...c6$   $8.g2$   $dxc4$   $9.0-0$   $e5$ .

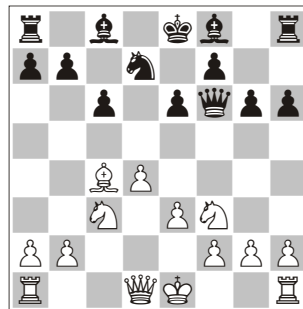
It may be worth considering  $7.b3$ , with the idea of advancing  $e2-e4$  without having to worry about  $...b4+$ .

### 7. ... $b8-d7$

### 8. $f1-d3$ $d5xc4$

It is also possible to play  $8...g6$  or  $8...d8$ . However, with the two bishops it is probably wiser to open up the position.

### 9. $d3xc4$ $g7-g6$



Better than  $9...d6$ , when the bishop would be subject to  $e4-e5$ .

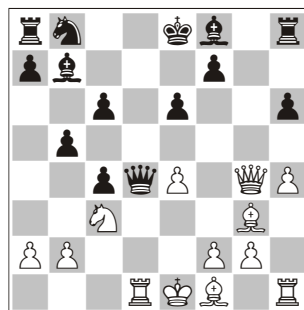
10. 0-0 ♖f8-g7

11. ♗d1-c2

11.e4 e5 gives Black a satisfactory game.

11. ... 0-0

Is White better or has Black equalised? The answer probably lies somewhere between the two!



### B) 6. ♗g5-h4

Until a few years ago this was considered to be a gambit of dubious merit; nowadays, it is increasingly popular and well respected. Comment enough is that it was played a good 5 times (4 draws and 1 black victory) in the 2007 World Championship tournament in Mexico City. Any line played at this level is soon in the public eye. The associated theory continues to grow with each new top-level tournament, in which the line almost inevitably appears. The theory for 6.♗h4 is still evolving and it will be well some time before it is fully examined.

6. ... d5xc4!

7. e2-e4 g7-g5

7...b5 8.e5 transposes to the **Botvinnik Variation**.

8. ♗h4-g3 b7-b5

Here we see a real pawn sacrifice: White puts his faith in his nice centre and the effectiveness of pawn breaks on d5 and h4.

9. ♗f1-e2

The number one choice. However, the immediate 9.♗e5 is a very interesting second choice: 9...♗b7 (9...h5!? 10.h4 g4 11.♗e2 ♗b7 transposes to the 10.h4 line in the following note) 10.h4 g4 11.♗xg4! ♗xg4 12.♗xg4 ♗xd4 13.♖d1.

With uncertain compensation for the pawn.



9. ... ♗c8-b7

9...b4 is too risky: 10.♗a4 ♗xe4

11.♗e5! ♗f6 12.♗c5! is too risky.

10. 0-0!

At the time of writing, this move has clearly overtaken the old main line 10.h4, which has lost a lot of its appeal, but the line 10...g4 11.♗e5 h5 12.0-0 ♗bd7 13.♗c2 ♗xe5 14.♗xe5 ♗g7 15.♖ad1 is yet to be fully explored.

10. ... ♗b8-d7

11. ♗f3-e5!

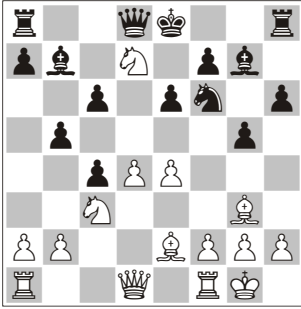
Clearing the way for the f2 pawn and increasing control of the g4- and h5-squares.

11. ... ♗f8-g7

The ambitious 11...h5 is also a popular choice: after 12.♗xd7 ♗xd7 13.♗e5 ♗h6 14.♗c1, we have a critical position;

it is not easy to say which of Black's possible replies is best: 14...♖g6, 14...♘g4, 14...♙h7 or 14...c5.

### 12. ♘e5xd7



From a positional point of view, the most appropriate move. However, recently some top players have experimented with the extraordinary 12.♘xf7!?: after 12...♙xf7 13.e5 ♘d5 14.♘e4 ♙e7 15.♘d6 ♖b6 16.♙g4, at first glance it would seem that White has not obtained enough compensation for the piece, but in fact he has.

### 12. ... ♙f6xd7

If the queen recaptures, White continues with e5 and ♘e4, with a good initiative.

### 13. ♙g3-d6

Stopping Black from castling.

### 13. ... a7-a6

In preparation for a future ...c6-c5.



### 14. ♖f1-e1!

In anticipation of the e-file opening. It is difficult to say to what extent White's initiative compensates for the pawn.

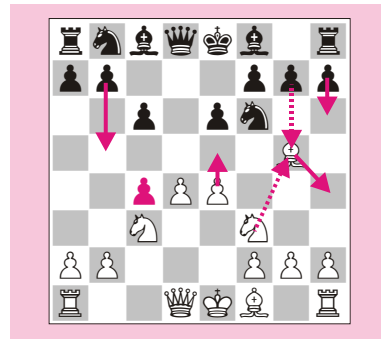
## Botvinnik System 5...dxc4

- |           |        |
|-----------|--------|
| 1. d2-d4  | d7-d5  |
| 2. c2-c4  | e7-e6  |
| 3. ♘b1-c3 | ♘g8-f6 |
| 4. ♘g1-f3 | c7-c6  |
| 5. ♙c1-g5 | d5xc4  |

Black shows his intention of supporting the pawn with ...b5. Now White's most logical move is

### 6. e2-e4

which attacks c4 and threatens e4-e5.



### 6. ... b7-b5

### 7. e4-e5

7.a4!? is an interesting alternative that has little theory attached to it. After 7...♖b6 or 7...♙b7 the positions are too complex to be evaluated easily.

### 7. ... h7-h6

### 8. ♙g5-h4 g7-g5

### 9. ♘f3xg5

This pseudo-piece sacrifice is the strongest move. Now and then the gambit 9.exf6 pops up: 9...gxh4 10.♘e5 (threatening 11.♘xf7) 10...♖xf6 11.a4 (11.g3!?) 11...c5! 12.♘g4!? ♖e7 13.dxc5 ♙b7, with an unclear game.