

The Modernized Petrov's Defense

**A Complete Opening
Repertoire for Black**

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Milos Pavlovic









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Key to Symbols

!	a good move
?	a weak move
!!	an excellent move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
□	only move
N	novelty
⊙	lead in development
⊙	zugzwang
=	equality
∞	unclear position
∞	with compensation for the sacrificed material
±	White stands slightly better
∓	Black stands slightly better
±	White has a serious advantage
∓	Black has a serious advantage
+−	White has a decisive advantage
−+	Black has a decisive advantage
→	with an attack
↑	with initiative
↔	with counterplay
Δ	with the idea of
⊃	better is
≤	worse is
+	check
#	mate

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Introduction

The Petrov Defence (also known as the Petroff or Russian Defense depending on which part of the world you are in) is a fantastic opening. In today's chess, where every line has been extensively developed and analyzed, avoiding many of those openings and systems with the Petrov against 1.e4 is a potentially significant gain for players of the black pieces.

Another important aspect is that it is such an old opening, dating from as far back as the first part of the 19th century. When looking for the earliest possible games I found that some positions that we consider as a tabiya today are of old origin.

To reinforce this point, I will give an example: After 1.e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘f6 3. ♗xe5 d6 4. ♗f3 ♗xe4 5.d4 d5 6. ♙d3 ♙e7 7.0-0 ♖c6 we reach a position which is a starting point of one of Black's main development plans, and to my great surprise it is Paul Morphy who played it! Obviously, due to the efforts of Alexander Petrov, we can surely add Morphy as the main developer of this system.

In my books, I try to present the material in a friendly and readable way but not at the expense of sacrificing quality. This is the philosophy I followed in my Petrov book as well.

Milos Pavlovic, February 2025

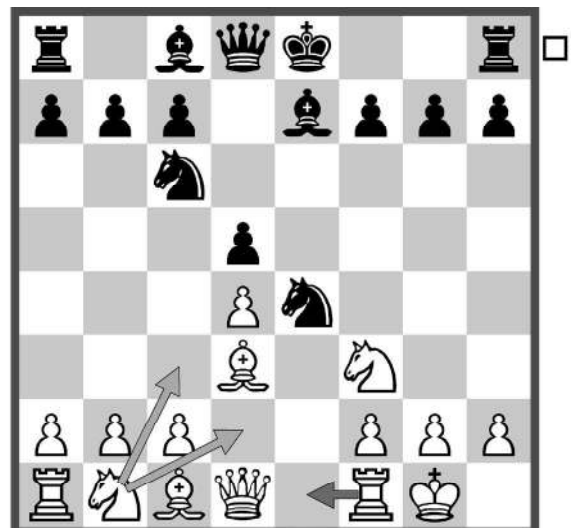
Part I

3. xe5 – Classical Tabiya



Various 8th Move Sidelines

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♘xe5 d6
4.♘f3 ♘xe4 5.d4 d5 6.♙d3
♙e7 7.0-0 ♘c6



Chapter Guide

Chapter 1 – Various 8th Move Sidelines

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♘f3 ♗xe4 5.d4 d5 6.♙d3 ♙e7 7.0-0 ♘c6	
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a) 8. ♘bd2

1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘f6



Position after: 2... ♘f6

The Petrov (sometimes Petroff in English, or Russian Defense as it is called in Eastern Europe, but we will stick with Petrov throughout) is one of the most solid openings against 1.e4. It is really for those who prefer to simplify and, as we say, "dry out" positions so that balanced or equal positions can be reached. It is not as popular as the Ruy Lopez, for instance; the reason for that is that today, even with the black pieces, players are not entirely happy to get simplified positions and only play for a draw. Apart from that, we can see that on a high level – such as the Candidates and World Championship matches – it is often employed.

3. ♘xe5 d6 4. ♘f3 ♘xe4 5. d4 d5 6. ♙d3 ♙e7 7. 0-0 ♘c6

Our starting position in this classical setup in the Petrov. Surprisingly, this

position was seen all the way back in the Paul Morphy and Howard Staunton era. The oldest games connected to a specific player is Morphy in 1858, and Staunton later reached exactly this position! This is fabulous. First, we will examine ideas that at first sight might appear simple to handle, but things are not so easy. Black must be aware of how to handle such continuations.



Position after: 7... ♘c6

8. ♘bd2

White can develop the knight in a slightly different manner – 7. ♘c3 – and we will analyze this move in our next chapter. It has to be said, though, that in both cases the idea is simply faster development – control over the e-file is what White is counting on, while Black is simply looking to exchange pieces to eliminate pressure.

8... ♘xd2 9. ♙xd2 ♙g4 10. c3 0-0 11. h3 ♙h5 12. g3



Position after: 12. g3

A modern idea; the king is coming to g2, and the idea is later to put the queen on c2.

12... ♔d7 13. ♕g2 ♖g6



Position after: 13... ♖g6

14. ♖f4

White has options here:

A) 14. ♕c2 ♖xd3 15. ♕xd3 a6 16. ♖ae1 ♖ae8 17. ♖f4 f6 18. h4 ♖d6 Black achieved equality. ½ – ½ (18) Popovic, D (2494) – Sychev, K (2532) Bajina Basta 2024.

B) 14. ♗e1 ♖d6 15. ♕g4 This is the idea; White is hoping to generate pressure in the endgame. 15... ♕xg4 16. hxg4



Position after: 16. hxg4

16... ♖ae8! [16... ♖fe8 17. ♖xg6 hxg6 18. ♗d3 f6 19. g5 ♕f7 20. ♖h1 White has some pressure here. ½ – ½ (37) Caruana, F (2810) – Dominguez Perez, L (2713) Dortmund 2016] 17. ♖xg6 hxg6 18. ♗d3 ♗d8!?



Position after: 18... ♗d8!?

This is the point – only with the a8-rook on e8 can Black play this manoeuvre. 19. g5 ♗e6 20. ♖h1 f6 21. gxf6 gxf6 22. ♖h2 g5 23. ♖ah1 ♗g7 Black is doing OK.

C) 14. ♖xg6 fxg6 15. ♖f4 [15. ♕c2 ♖ae8 16. ♖f4 ♖f5 17. ♖ae1 ♖ef8 18. ♖e3 g5 19. ♖e5 h6 20. ♕d3 a6 21.

♔e2 As in the Vidit – Abasov game below, Black is doing OK. ½-½ (21) Müller, G (2576) – Vinchev, S (2511) ICCF 2022] 15... h6 16. ♖d3 g5 17. ♙e5 ♜f7 18. ♜ae1 ♜af8 19. ♜e3 a6 20. ♔e2



Position after: 20. ♔e2

20... ♜f5 21. b4 ♜5f7 22. a4 ♞a7 23. g4 ♞c8 24. a5 ♙d6 25. ♜e1 ♔d8 26. ♜f1 ♞e7 27. ♔d3 ♔d7 28. ♙g1 ♞c6 29. ♙g2 ♞e7 This was played in the Candidates and it seems that Black, with a waiting strategy, has managed to balance the game. ½ – ½ (31) Vidit, S (2727) – Abasov, N (2632) Toronto 2024.

14... ♜ae8 15. ♙xg6

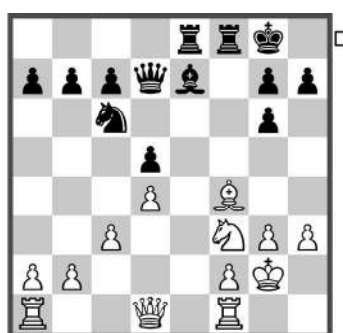
White can still wait: 15. ♜e1 ♙xd3 16. ♔xd3 ♞d8 17. h4 h6 18. ♜e5 c6 19. ♜ae1 ♙f6 20. ♜5e3 ♜xe3



Position after: 20... ♜xe3

21. ♜xe3 ♜e8 22. ♙e5 ♙e7 23. a4 ♙f8 Black is fine here as well. ½ – ½ (23) Duda, J (2733) – Yu Yangyi (2703) Almaty 2024.

15... fxg6



Position after: 15... fxg6

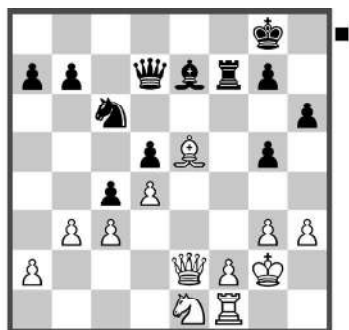
It is essential to react in this way otherwise White has a possible h4-h5 plan, which can create disturbance.

16. ♔d3 ♜f5 17. ♜ae1 ♜ef8 18. ♜e3 g5



Position after: 18... g5

19. ♙e5 h6 20. ♔e2 ♜5f7 21. ♞e1 ♞a5 22. b3 c5 23. ♜f3 ♞c6 24. ♜xf7 ♜xf7 25. ♞d3 c4 26. ♞e1



Position after: 26. Nxe1

26... b5

Black is fine. He used a similar strategy as in a few other games I gave. $\frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{2}$ (26) Volokitin, A (2667) – Gelfand, B (2658) Ajka HUN 2024.

b) 8. Nc3

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nf6 3. Nxe5 d6 4. Nf3 Nxe4 5. d4 d5 6. Bd3 Be7 7. 0-0 Nc6 8. Nc3



Position after: 8. Nc3



Position after: 9... Bg4

10. Rb1

White has a couple of ideas here:

A) 10. Re1 0-0 11. Bf4



Position after: 11. Bf4

This is another important approach that has become popular in recent years: White will eliminate the knight on e4 and prepare the stage for central play in which will try to be faster with his plans along the e-file.

8... Nxc3 9. bxc3 Bg4

A1) 11... ♖d6 12. ♖xd6 ♖xf3 13. ♖xf3 ♖xd6 14. ♖ab1 b6 15. ♖e3 ♖ae8 16. ♖be1 ♖e7 17. ♖h3 h6 18. ♖xe7 ♗xe7 19. ♖e3 ♖e8 White doesn't have the resources to increase the pressure and that is actually the entire point of Black's play in this game. ½-½ (19) Martín Sánchez, C (2443) – Roubaud, D (2555) ICCF 2016.

A2) 11... ♖b8 The idea is ...b5. 12. h3 ♖h5 13. ♖e2 ♖d6 14. ♖e3 f6 15. ♗h4 ♖e8 16. ♖g3 ♖xf4 17. ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 18. ♖xf4 g6 19. ♖e1 ♖f7 20. g3 ♖d6



Position after: 20... ♖d6

21. ♖g4 ♖e8 22. ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 23. ♗f5 ♖d7 24. ♗h6+ ♖g7 25. ♖f4 ♖d6 Black doesn't have serious problems creating a balanced game. ½ – ½ (35) Degerhammar, R (2502) – Matyukhin, S (2509) ICCF 2016.

A3) 11... ♖h5 12. ♖e2 ♖d6 13. ♖xd6 ♖xd6 14. ♖e3 ♖g6 15. ♗h4 ♖xd3 16. cxd3 ♖d7 17. ♖f3 g6 18. g3 ♖ae8 19. ♗g2 ♗e7 20. ♗e3 ♖g7 21. ♖e2 c6 22. ♖ae1 h5 23. ♖f4



Position after: 23. ♖f4

23... ♗g8 24. ♖g2 ♖e6 25. h3 ♖d8 26. g4 ♖h4 Black had equalized and later won the game. 0-1 (83) Ivic, V (2510) – Mamedov, N (2615) Konya TUR 2019.

B) 10. h3 ♖h5 11. ♖b1 ♖b8 12. ♖f5 0-0 13. ♖d3 ♖g6



Position after: 13... ♖g6

14. ♖xg6 [14. ♖f4 ♖d6 15. ♖xg6 hxg6 16. ♖xd6 ♖xd6 17. ♖fe1 b6 18. ♖e3 ♖d7 19. ♖f4 ♖fe8 20. h4 f6!



Position after: 20... f6!

Black has achieved good play. 0-1 (49) Kotronias, V (2518) – Mamedov, N (2602) Nakhchivan AZE 2018] 14... hxg6 15. c4 ♖a5 16. cxd5 ♜xd5 17. ♜e1 ♙d6 18. ♙a3 b5 19. ♙xd6 cxd6



Position after: 19... cxd6

20. ♜e7 This position is popular among correspondence players. Here we have: 20... ♘c6 [20... ♘c4 21. ♜xa7± 1-0 (61) Csjernyik, J (2456) – Jandek, S (2500) ICCF 2013] 21. ♜c7 a5 22. ♜b3 ♜xb3



Position after: 22... ♜xb3

23. cxb3 [23. axb3 ♜fc8 24. ♜d7 ♘b4±; 23. ♜xb3 ♘b4 24. ♜a7 ♜a8 25. ♜xa8 26. ♜b2 ♜c8±] 23... ♜fc8 24. ♜d7 ♘b4 25. ♜b2 [It is overoptimistic for White to try: 25. ♘g5 ♘xa2±] 25... ♜d8 26. ♜xd8+ ♜xd8 27. a3 ♘d5 Overall we can say that Black is able to control the game, in the

sense of reaching equal chances, without many difficulties. ½ – ½ (38) Pasko, P (2541) – Hall, R (2598) ICCF 2017.

10... ♜b8 11. ♜e1 0-0



Position after: 11... 0-0

12. h3

The alternative is the logical idea to place the bishop on f4 immediately...

12. ♙f4 ♙d6 Probably best is to deal with this strong bishop on f4... [12... a6 13. a4 ♙h8 14. ♜e2 ♙d6 15. ♜e3 ♜d7 16. ♙xd6 ♜xd6 17. ♘e5



Position after: 17. ♘e5

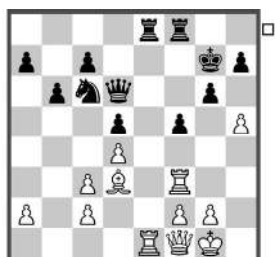
17... ♘xe5 18. dxe5 and White has some initiative. ½ – ½ (34)

Huschenbeth, N (2600) – Laurusas, T (2573) Walbrzych POL 2024] 13. ♖xd6 ♜xd6



Position after: 13... ♜xd6

14. ♜e3 [14. ♖xh7+ ♔xh7 15. ♘g5+ ♔g6 16. ♜xg4 f5→] 14... f5 15. ♜e1 [Another idea might be: 15. ♜f1 ♖xf3 16. ♜xf3 g6 17. h4 b6 18. h5 ♜be8 19. ♜e1 ♔g7



Position after: 19... ♔g7

20. ♜g3 ♜f6 21. f4 ♜xe1 22. ♜xe1 ♜f7 23. ♜f2 ♘d8=] 15... b6 [15... ♘a5 16. ♜e2 ♜bd8 17. h3 ♖xf3 18. ♜xf3 g6 19. ♜e5↑ 1-0 (30) Rogic, D (2552) – Seyb, A (2412) Austria 2015] 16. ♖b5 ♜be8 17. ♜d3 ♖xf3 18. ♜xf3 g6 19. ♜d3 ♔g7=

12... ♖h5 13. ♖f5 ♖g6 14. ♜d3 ♖xf5 15. ♜xf5



Position after: 15. ♜xf5

Now, from two examples, we can see how the game might continue for both sides:

15... ♖d6

15... b5 16. ♖f4 g6 17. ♜d3 a6 18. ♜e2 ♖d6 19. ♜d2 ♖xf4 20. ♜xf4 ♔g7 21. ♜be1 ♜d6 Black had achieved counterplay and later won: 0-1 (48) Quesada Perez, Y (2631) – Dominguez Perez, L (2732) Matanzas 2016.

16. ♖g5 f6 17. ♖d2 ♔h8 18. c4 dxc4 19. ♜e4 ♘e7 20. ♜b5 a6 21. ♜xc4



Position after: 21. ♜xc4

21... b5

This gives Black adequate play. $\frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{2}$
 (42) Perry, D (2503) – Dunlop, G (2536)
 ICCF 2019.

c) 8. ♖e1 ♗g4 9.c4

1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘f6 3. ♗xe5 d6 4. ♘f3
 ♗xe4 5. d4 d5 6. ♙d3 ♙e7 7. 0-0 ♘c6
 8. ♖e1

point that gives Black an easy game.

9... ♘f6



Position after: 8. ♖e1



Position after: 9... ♘f6

Together with 8.c4 (which we will see in later chapters) this is the main idea, creating pressure on a knight on e4.

8... ♗g4

This is an old and, in my opinion, critical reaction; it is essential material for any book on the Petrov.

9. c4

We will also later examine the more popular and probably more critical 9.c3.

9. ♙xe4 dxe4 10. ♖xe4 ♙xf3 11. ♗xf3
 ♘xd4 12. ♗d1 ♘e6= This is the main

10. ♘c3

10. cxd5 ♙xf3 11. ♗xf3 ♗xd5



Position after: 11... ♗xd5

12. ♗xd5 [12. ♗h3 ♗xd4 13. ♘c3
 ♘g4 14. ♖f1 h5 The idea is queenside
 castling; Black is fine. $\frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{2}$ (14) Bellah-
 cene, B (2499) – Debray, C (2367)