

**Or Cohen**

# **A Vigorous Chess Opening Repertoire for Black**

**Tackling 1.e4 with 1...e5**

**New In Chess 2013**

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## Introduction

1...e5 is the most reliable continuation against 1.e4. No one can doubt this anymore. In fact, recently 1...e5 has been the reason for many elite players to switch from 1.e4 to 1.d4, 1.♘f3 or even 1.c4.

Although 'mere mortals', i.e., players below 2600 Elo, should not be so influenced by the fluctuating trends of the elite, and should concern themselves more about endgame technique and calculating skills, eventually we all still play the same game and pay the same stiff penalty for our openings misconduct in the form of rating points. The high-level innovations by supreme theoreticians such as Vasily Ivanchuk, Viswanathan Anand and Veselin Topalov eventually get absorbed on the lower levels and also change the landscape in which theoretical battles take place between 1900-2400 rated players. The most significant example is the vast popularity of the line 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♘f3 ♗xe4 5.♗c3 in the Petroff Defence – this variation emerged as the main weapon of enthusiastic club players around the world, who try to follow in the footsteps of Anand and Topalov. There is virtually no 1.e4 opening manual or DVD that does not recommend this aggressive system for White, which is strategically poor but dangerous.

My own 1...e5 repertoire is based on that same, very dependable Petroff Defence: 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6. This opening means a lot to me as a chess player. I find it very natural, harmonic and relatively easy to employ, after many years of practice. I also firmly believe that the Petroff will never be refuted, unlike many lines in the Sicilian or other defences for Black. The beauty in the Petroff is that Black hardly has to make any concessions for his relatively active piece play and the absence of weaknesses in his structure. If you compare this to the Sicilian Dragon, for instance: whereas there, Black has a very clear plan and easy development with no structural weaknesses, he has to pay a very costly price for this privilege. White has a direct path for an assault: push h4-h5 and attack along the h-file. Otherwise, the Dragon would be the perfect opening. If you compare the Petroff to other challenging Sicilian systems, in most of the latter Black is very cramped and passive within the first 20-25 moves. The pawns e6, d6, which characterize the Najdorf and Scheveningen systems, do provide Black with great potential to take over the centre and exploit the fact White is missing an important central pawn, but they are also a real liability during the first 20-25 moves, and make it very hard for mere human players to withstand White's initiative and to master these systems.

On the other hand, contrary to the many prejudices, the Petroff can be mastered with relative ease. The only price Black has to pay is that sometimes the positions are quite simplified, but this does not happen so often as many players claim. Against ambitious white players, a fierce battle can be expected.

However, the first part of this book, which deals with White's alternatives to the Petroff, is by no means less important. I honestly believe that my recommendations

against the Vienna Game and the King's Gambit are unique and very powerful. My recommendation against the Scotch Four Knights is quite extravagant and could be criticized. However, I believe the mainstream solutions for Black in this opening lead to very dry and exhausted positions and my ambition was to challenge 'theory escapists' out of their comfort zone.

Part 2 and 3 of this book are a comprehensive study of the Petroff Defence. My recommendations are based on the games and choices of top GMs such as Vladimir Kramnik, Boris Gelfand, Wang Yue, Jan Smeets (whose preparation and style are worth paying attention to) and Anish Giri. The guideline for choosing the games presented in this book was very meticulous and deliberated. I chose to present as objectively as possible mostly relevant theoretical battles. I don't believe in pretentious books titled 'Winning with the...', especially when they deal with an opening repertoire for Black. It's quite ironic for me to say this, as you will notice that in many of the lines I claim a small or even a clear advantage for Black. However, this has nothing to do with being biased or prejudiced or – a more severe verdict – not objective. Many of White's attempts (especially among club players) are dubious and naive at best, and many of them are simply mistaken and losing. This book has nothing to hide, and I never delude or mislead the reader regarding what I perceive as the true evaluations.

Throughout this book I have made extensive use of Houdini 3.0 pro x64. I think it is only fair to say that a 2400 Fide master is not privileged enough to make his own assessments of the positions of top players, and neither is he in a position to elaborate on their analyses without the usage of this 'chess monster'. However, this hasn't prevented me from trying to be as lucid and instructive as I could hope to be.

The nature of the chess game has significantly changed in the past two decades and this tendency will continue to grow towards 'extreme monstrosity'. Chess is now more concrete and dynamic than ever. As much as I like and appreciate David Bronstein's *Zurich 1953* tournament book, his writing style (with virtually only verbal comments) could not be imitated in our era.

The Petroff Defence is probably the most defamed of all the reliable openings. To many chess fans around the world it epitomizes boring, drawish play. Well, these chess fans simply have to accept the bitter fact that the primary goal of top players is to attain equality with black. Indeed, you can hardly triumph in decent Swiss open tournaments by solely playing the Petroff as Black. I never claim anywhere in this book that black players should stick to one opening against 1.e4. Players rated above 2100-2200, whose games are already published in Megabases, should avoid becoming easy targets for malicious home preparation.

My belief that a combination of some sort of Sicilian as Black along with 1...e5 is the most lethal and dangerous combination: I think that Boris Gelfand is the role model to follow in that sense.

But apart from that, as I have claimed in the above and hope to prove with the analysis in this book, the Petroff is perfectly playable for Black, and not only to

draw. If you learn to work with its structural solidity and active piece play, it will gain you many (full!) points in tournament practice.

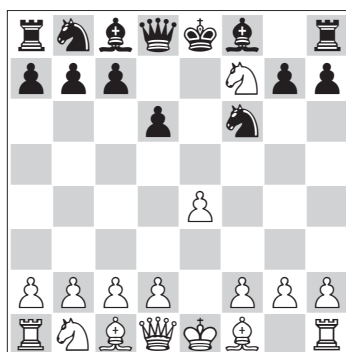
Some words of advice:

In order to derive the greatest benefit from my book, I really recommend you to create PGN/CBH files with the variations you intend to use, out of the games presented in this book. This is a proven method to abstract the relevant knowledge you acquire while studying the games. The reason for this is our human tendency to forget subtleties and concrete variations. You cannot expect to remember every forced variation (unless you have a photographic memory) suggested in this book. You must refine the important lines that you intend to implement into folders with references to the games I examined. If you prefer, you can also wait for the iPad version of this book, which will appear shortly.

## Chapter 9

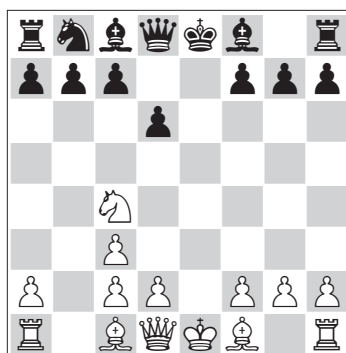
# Cochrane Gambit and Paulsen Variation

1.e4 e5 2.♖f3 ♜f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♗xf7?!!



This sacrifice, which is called the Cochrane Gambit, is objectively dubious. Correct play by Black suffices for at least equality. However, Black can never let go of his guard, because even if the queens are off the board Black will still be three pawns down for the piece, so even materially he isn't winning.

1.e4 e5 2.♖f3 ♜f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♗c4 ♜xe4 5.♗c3 ♜xc3 6.bxc3

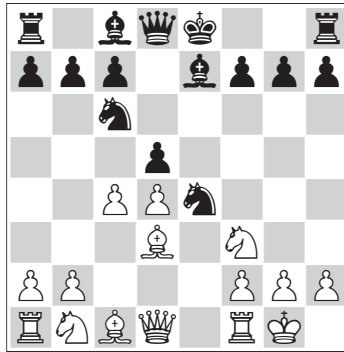


This is the Paulsen Variation, named after the famous theoretician of the 19th century, Louis Paulsen. In Israel it is often called the Beer-Sheva Variation, after a city in the south of the country with a ridiculous amount of good chess players, where this variation is popular. White's concept is to control the centre and get some play along the b-file.

## Chapter 19

### 5.d4, 7...♘e7: 8.c4 without 9.♘e2

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♘f3 ♗xe4 5.d4 d5 6.♙d3 ♗c6 7.0-0 ♙e7  
8.c4



This is White's best shot against the Petroff in the 3.♗xe5 variation. Until the extremely popular 5.♗c3 popped in, 8.c4 had been played almost exclusively at the high levels of competitive chess. I perceive the 8.c4 variation as a 'no messing around' approach to the position. White immediately undermines Black's knight on e4.

After 8.c4, 8...♗b4! is probably the best retort for Black. Black refuses to steer the game into conventional isolani positions. The logic behind this move is that it interrupts the normal flow of development of the white pieces.

Now White can choose between two paths: a tactical and a positional one. White can try to take advantage of the fact that Black has not yet castled and refrain from retreating his light-squared bishop to e2, challenging Black right away. This approach may catch some unsuspecting players unawares, but in the long term, Black repels White's initiative and maintains the balance.

The lines after 9.cxd5 ♗xd3 10.♙xd3 ♙xd5 11.♖e1 ♙f5 are extremely complicated and messy. You should go over Games 70-71 several times in order to comprehend the jumble of tactics, otherwise you will be wiped off the board.

The positional line with 9.♙e2 will be examined in the next chapter, and the entire 8.c4 line will get a general conclusion at the end of Chapter 20.



(C42)

Game 69

Leko, Peter

Gelfand, Boris

Moscow 2008 (8)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♘xe5 d6  
 4.♘f3 ♘xe4 5.d4 d5 6.♙d3 ♘c6  
 7.0-0 ♙e7 8.c4! ♘b4!



8...♘f6 is another very feasible approach, embraced by the most consistent and strongest Petroff expert – Boris Gelfand. This move lies outside the scope of this book, but careful examination of Gelfand's games will enable you to play this variation without significant difficulties.

9.♙e1!?

In the coming three games, all the alternatives to the main line 9.♙e2 will be examined.

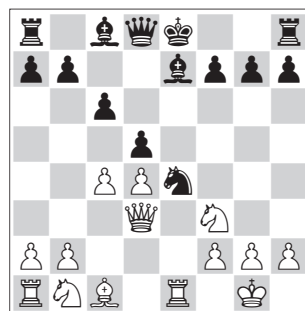
A) 9.♙xe4? is obviously very dubious. White relinquishes his powerful bishop only in order to lose a tempo: 9...dxe4 10.♘e5 ♙f5 11.♙e3 0-0 12.a3 12.♘c3 c5! 13.dxc5 (13.d5 ♙d6 13...♙xd1 14.♙axd1 f6 15.♘d7 (15.a3 ♘c2) 15...♙fd8 16.c6 b6! and White would need to sacrifice a piece because the knight cannot be saved: 17.♘xb6 axb6 18.c7 ♙d6 19.♙xd6 ♙xd6 20.♘b5 ♙e5 21.a3 ♘d3 22.b3 ♘f7 23.♙xb6 ♘e7. 12...♘d3 13.♘c3 c5 14.♘d5 14.♘xd3 cxd4! 15.♘f4 dxc3. 14...cxd4 15.♘xd3 15.♙xd4

♙f6! 16.♘xf6+ ♙xf6 17.♘xd3 ♙xd4 18.♘f4 ♙xc4. 15...exd3 16.♙xd4 ♙d6. The power of the d3-pawn should not be underestimated;

B) Sondergaard-L.B.Hansen, Aarhus 1992, went 9.♘c3!?. This move allows Black to capture White's light-squared bishop without making any concessions. 9...♘xd3 10.♙xd3 ♘xc3 11.bxc3 11.♙xc3 dxc4, not allowing White to employ a dark-square strategy by playing c4-c5 next move. Now this is less strong as White cannot support c5 with b2-b4. 11...♙e6 12.c5 0-0 13.♘e5 f6 14.♘f3 b6 15.♙e1 ♙f7 16.♙a3 ♙e8. The knight is deprived of any good post. White tries to activate it in an artificial way: 17.♘h4? ♙f8 18.♘f5 ♙g6 19.♙f3 ♙d7 20.♘e3 ♙a4! 21.♙b2 c6 22.cxb6 axb6 23.♙g3? ♙b5! Positional collapse. 24.♙c1 ♙d3 0-1. The pawn on c3 and, afterwards, the one on d4 cannot be saved (25.♙b2 ♙d2 and White loses his bishop!).

9...♘xd3 10.♙xd3 c6

10...♘f6 11.c5 0-0 12.♘c3 c6 13.♙f4 and White has some annoying control over the dark squares.



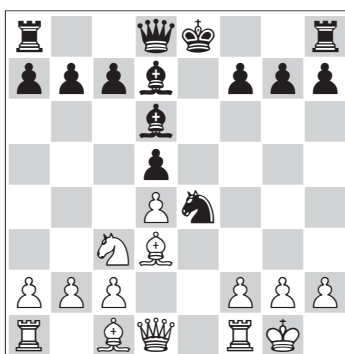
11.cxd5

Surprisingly, 11.♘c3!?. has been tried in practice only once, in a game between two lower-rated players: Pastir-Koval,

## Chapter 27

## 7.0-0 ♖d6: The Deferred 8.♘c3

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.d4 ♗xe4 4.♙d3 d5 5.♗xe5 ♘d7 6.♗xd7 ♙xd7 7.0-0 ♙d6 8.♗c3!?

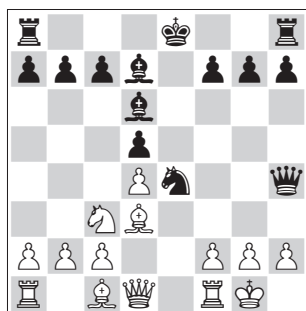


As we have witnessed in some earlier lines, an early ♗c3 is not innocuous but quite dangerous. It is played to achieve a very concrete goal in this line: to open up the diagonal for the d3-bishop and to prepare ♖h5, forcing Black to either lose a pawn or to weaken his pawn structure with ...f7-f5. Unfortunately for White, as there are no knights in the game, Black can deal with this approach and this should not give him sleepless nights.

(C43)  
Kamsky, Gata  
Karpov, Anatoly

Elista ol 1996 (6)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.d4 ♗xe4  
4.♙d3 d5 5.♗xe5 ♘d7 6.♗xd7  
♙xd7 7.0-0 ♙d6 8.♗c3!?



Game 96

Former World Champion Karpov thought about 42 minutes before making this move. Probably he forgot his home preparation.

8...♗xc3 9.bxc3 0-0 is the main choice for Black, as we will see further on.

**9.g3**

9.h3?! allows Black to sacrifice right away: 9...♙xh3 10.gxh3 10.g3?? ♙xg3+-; 10.♗xe4?? ♙h2+ 11.♗xh2 ♙g4+-+. 10...♖xh3 11.f4 ♖g3+ 12.♗h1 ♗f2+ 12...♖h3+=. 13.♙xf2 ♖xf2 14.♖e2+ ♖xe2 15.♙xe2 c6±

**9...♗xc3 10.bxc3**

10.♖e1+ ♖e7= 11.♖xc3 0-0 12.♖b3 ♙c6.

**10...♖g4!?**