The Modern Nimzo-Indian

Igor Lysyj

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Bibliography

Books

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The Opening Revolution (in Russian), Garry Kasparov, Moscow 2007
The Nimzo-Indian Defence (in Russian), Moscow 1985
The Nimzo-Indian Defence, Michael Roiz, Quality Chess 2017

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Preface

Let's return to the year 2002. In those times the author of these lines was just beginning to grasp chess opening theory. Quality monographs appeared once in a while, the computer engines were a far cry from their current power, while correspondence databases were virtually unknown. That's why my trainer Nikolai Sergeyevich Ogloblin was unable to convince his ward to take upon the Nimzo-Indian Defence. This opening intimidated me with its fundamentality, and the necessary knowledge looked unapproachable. Besides that I had precious card files. Hand-written cards on the Benoni, generously presented to me by my previous tutor Leonid Ivanovich Totskyi.

Twenty years later. Quality books and articles cram the book shelves and internet sites, tons of games of the leading grandmasters and correspondence players add to the picture. Chess truth is just two mouse clicks away. Modern players have run into the problem of information overflow. One of the tasks of contemporary coaches is to help students extract the essence from the enormous flood of knowledge. In opening preparation it is vital to focus the student's attention on the grains of information needed in practice, and discard the husk one could easily deal with over the board.

I wrote this book for the adventurer who wants to start playing the Nimzo but is afraid of drowning in its theory. My creative task is to provide the reader with useful practical advice while sparing him unnecessary learning overhead. I hope that my work will become for you not an opening reference book but a good company.

I'd like to express my sincere gratitude to the technical editor Daria Trapeznikova for the meticulous mutual work on every line of text.
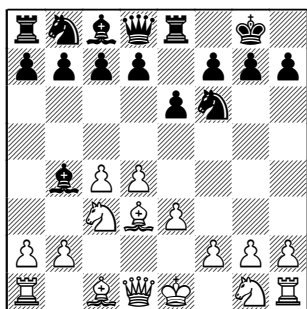
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of White's long-range bishops is only enough for equality.

B) 5.♗d3

I think this continuation is more flexible since the knight can be developed on f3 or e2.

5...♖e8!?

I do not want to say that this rare rook move is better than the usual play in the centre 5...d5 or 5...c5. Its main advantage is that the small amount of accumulated practical material leaves room for creativity and eliminates the need to keep in memory tons of options.

The main idea of the mysterious rook move is to wait for White to define the placement of his knight and, depending on his actions, choose the pawn structure. An additional practical bonus for the reader is the fact that we have already studied the consequences
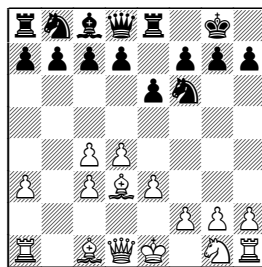
of 6.♘f3 ♗xc3 7.bxc3 d6 in line A).

Thus we have to examine in detail **B1)** 6.♕c2, **B2)** 6.♗d2 and **B3)** 6.♘ge2.

For 6.♘f3 ♗xc3+ 7.bxc3 d6 – see 5.♘f3.

6.a3?! – we already mentioned in the previous chapter that the transition to the Sämisch System after 4.e3 is not a good choice.
6...♗xc3+ 7.bxc3

Exercise:
How should Black continue?

7...e5! – the black pawn is heading for e4.
8.f3, Seiler – Latib, corr. LSS 2017, 8.♘e2? e4 9.♗b1 b6 10.♘g3 ♗a6 11.f3 ♗xc4 12.fxe4 d6 13.♕f3 ♘bd7∓, Schwarz – Babula, Slovakia 2011.
8...e4 9.fxe4 ♘xe4 10.♘f3 d6 11.0-0 ♗f5! – in such a structure the g6-square is optimal for the light-squared bishop since it is important to maintain control over the e4-square. In order to make the move 11...♗f5, it is necessary

to correctly assess the consequences of 12.♘e5! ♘xc3 13.♕f3 ♗xd3 14.♕xf7+ ♔h8 15.♘xd3 ♘d7∓, and soon the black knights will regain control over the e4-square.

6.e4, Krasteva – Ciolacu, Mamaia 2017, 6...e5 7.dxe5

7.d5 ♗xc3+ 8.bxc3 ♘a6⇄.
7...♗xc3+ 8.bxc3 ♖xe5 9.f3 d6 (it is important for black to harmoniously arrange the minor pieces) 10.♘e2
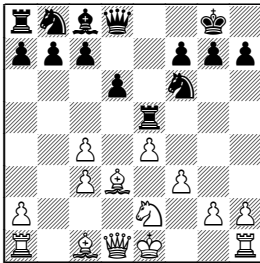
10...♘fd7 – I propose to transfer this knight to c5 so that the rook can retreat to e8 without fearing the pin ♗g5.
11.0-0 ♘c5 12.♗c2 ♖e8 13.♘f4 ♗e6 – in the future the bishop will occupy the f7-square after ...f7-f6.
14.♘d5 ♘bd7=.

6.♕b3 – if White leaves the knight on g1 and makes a developing move with the queen or the c1-bishop, then Black should undermine the centre with the c-pawn.
6...c5 7.♘f3 d6. I think that the queen stands worse on b3 than on c2 due to the plan of ...d6 and ...e5.
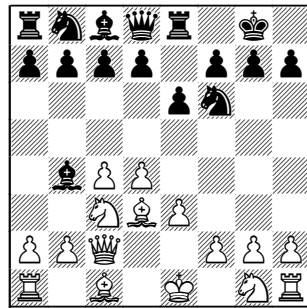8.0-0 e5
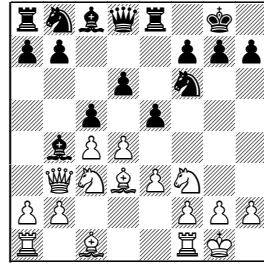
9.dxe5 dxe5 10.♖d1 ♕e7. Black wants to take on c3 and develop the knight on c6.
11.♘e4 ♘xe4 12.♗xe4. In this position the white queen would have come in handy on c2.
12...♘d7=. On the next move the knight will push the bishop out of the centre.

B1) 6.♕c2

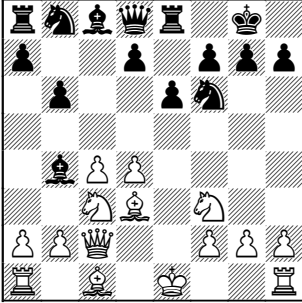**6...c5 7.♘f3** Parnali – Matskevich, lichess.org 2021.

Due to the fact that the c3-knight is already protected by the queen, it is logical to develop the knight on the most active position.
7.♘ge2 d5 8.0-0 cxd4 9.exd4 dxc4 10.♗xc4 ♘bd7=.

Or 7.dxc5 ♘a6=.

7...cxd4 8.exd4 b6

If Black achieves to develop the bishop on b7 and carry out d7-d5, he would get an excellent position. Therefore, White needs to start active actions.

9.♗g5

9.a3 ♗xc3+ 10.♕xc3 ♗b7 11.♗g5 h6 12.♗h4 d5 13.0-0 dxc4 14.♗xc4 ♘c6=.

9...h6 10.♗h7+

After 10.h4?! taking on g5 is not obligatory at all:
10...♗b7 11.0-0-0 ♗xc3 12.bxc3 d6∓.

10.♗h4 ♗b7 11.♘e5 ♗e7 12.0-0 ♘c6 13.♘xc6 ♗xc6=.

10...♔f8

I do not like the the king's retreat into the corner 10...♔h8 because

after 11.h4!? we would have to reckon with the idea of ♘e5.
11...d6? 12.♗e4 d5 13.♘e5±.

11.♗e4 d5

The attack on both bishops forces White to exchange on f6.

12.♗xf6 ♕xf6 13.0-0

It seems that Black is left in the cold – after the capture on e4 the rook on a8 would be defenceless, otherwise the d5-pawn would be hanging.
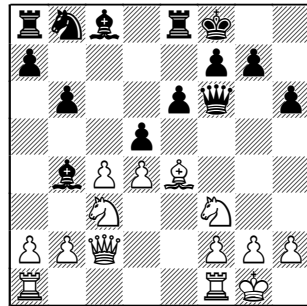
Exercise:
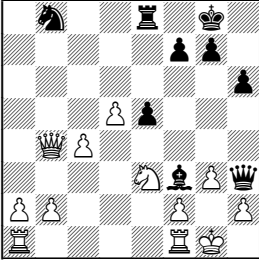*How should Black continue?*

13...dxe4! 14.♕xe4 ♗d7!

In response to the capture of the rook Black takes on f3 and gives a perpetual check.

15.♕xa8

15.♘e5?! ♗c6 16.♘xc6 ♘xc6 17.♕xc6 ♕xd4∓.

15...♝c6 16.♛xa7 ♝xf3 17.gxf3

17.♛xb6? loses beautifully to 17...♛g6 18.♛xb4+ ♚g8 19.g3 ♛g4 20.♞d1!. The knight arrives in time to defend g2.
20...♛h3 21.♞e3 e5 22.d5

Exercise:
How should Black continue?

22...♞d7! – the knight is heading for g4.
23.d6 ♞f6 24.c5 e4!
   It is indispensable to block the white queen from the defence. 24...♞g4? is bad – 25.♛xg4 ♝xg4 26.♞xg4 ♛xg4 27.c6+–.
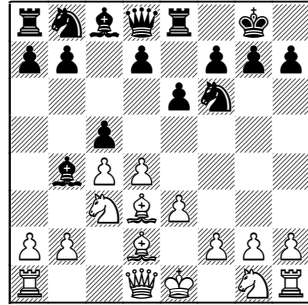25.d7 ♖f8–+.

17...♛xf3 18.♛c7 e5=

The final touch – to deny the path to g3 to White's queen. The perpetual is now inevitable.

B2) 6.♝d2 c5

Black wants to exchange on d4 and carry out d7-d5 as in the variation 4.e3 0-0 5.♝d2 from the

previous chapter. In response White chooses between developing moves with the g1-knight and gaining the bishop pair advantage by 7.a3.

7.a3

7.♞f3 is a harmless continuation that allows Black to carry out d7-d5 comfortably.
7...cxd4 8.exd4
   8.♞xd4 is connected with a small trap – 8...♞c6 9.0-0 Bourque – Olivier, Sherbrooke 2005.
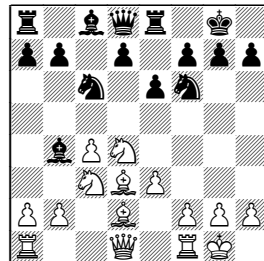
9...♝f8. After the bishop retreat Black can complete the development not only by ...d7-d5 but also by leading out the bishop to b7 (the tempting 9...
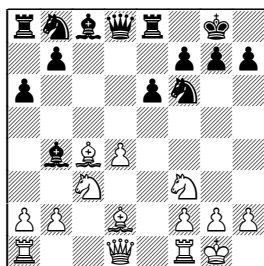
d5? fails to 10.♘xd5+–) 10.♖c1 (10.♘f3 d5 11.cxd5 exd5 12.h3 g6=) 10...♘e5 11.♗e2 b6=.

8...d5 9.0-0

9.c5?! b6 10.a3? (10.cxb6 ♕xb6∓ with the idea of 11...♗a6) 10...♗xc3 11.♗xc3 bxc5 12.dxc5 e5∓.

9...dxc4 10.♗xc4 a6

The modest position of the d2-bishop allows Black to prepare ...b7-b5 without fearing the breakthrough d4-d5:

11.a3

After 11.a4 ♘c6 12.♗g5 h6 13.♗h4 ♗e7= Black will solve all the problems with the already familiar from Chapter 7 method – ...♗d7 and ...♘d5.

11...♗e7 – in this way Black prevents the plan ♗g5 with a further d4-d5.

11...♗f8!? 12.♗g5 b5 13.♗a2 ♗b7 14.d5 exd5 15.♘xd5 ♘bd7=.

12.♖c1

Or 12.♗a2 b5 13.♖e1 ♘c6=.

12...b5 13.♗a2 ♗b7 14.♗g5 ♘bd7=, Dziuba – Gajewski, Warsaw 2020.

7.♘ge2!? – this knight development looks more tricky because after 7...cxd4 8.exd4 d5 White has the idea of 9.c5. Thus I suggest to carry out ...d7-d5 without exchanging on d4:

7...d5

7...cxd4!? 8.exd4 (8.♘xd4 – 7.♘f3) 8...♘c6 leads to unclear play. (The difference between the position of the knight on f3 and e2 can be seen in the following variation: 8...d5 9.c5 b6?! 10.a3 ♗xc3 11.♗xc3 bxc5 12.dxc5±) 9.0-0 d5 10.c5 e5 11.♘b5 (11.a3 ♗xc3 12.♗xc3 e4 13.♗c2 ♘e7⇄) 11...e4 12.♗c2 ♗g4⇄.
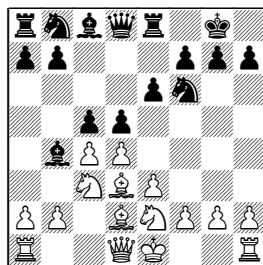
8.a3

After 8.cxd5 exd5 9.a3 ♗xc3 10.♗xc3 c4 11.♗c2 ♘c6 12.0-0 ♗g4⇄ the black bishop is heading for g6.

8...♗xc3 9.♗xc3 cxd4 10.♘xd4

10.♗xd4 ♘c6 11.♗c3 transposes to the main line.

The bishop pair advantage is a significant strategic factor. Black needs to restrict the c3-bishop by placing the pawn on e5.

10...e5 11.♘e2 – White shifts the knight in order to deprive Black of the idea of 11...d4.

11...b6 – the trade of light-squared bishops would be in our favour since White's dark-squared bishop is now biting on a granite. 12.0-0 ♗a6
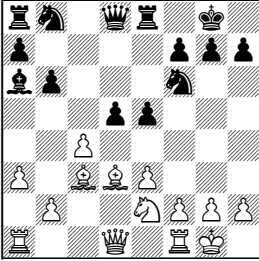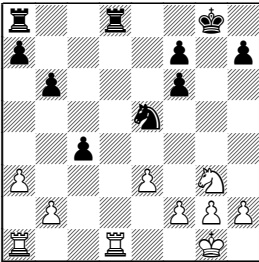

13.♘g3!?

13.cxd5 ♕xd5 14.♗xa6 ♘xa6=. 13...♗xc4 14.♗xc4 dxc4 15.♕xd8 ♖xd8 16.♗xe5 ♘c6 17.♗xf6 gxf6 18.♖fd1 ♘e5=.

Black's knight lands on d3, and this compensates for the spoiled structure on the kingside.

7...♗xc3 8.♗xc3, MacGilla Samhais – Kocher, ICCF 2016.

8...cxd4 9.♗xd4

The appearance of an *isolator* after 9.exd4 d5 suits us since the bishop will be passively located on c3. Therefore, White needs to play 10.c5 ♘c6 11.♘e2 ♘e4! – Black is trying to exchange the knight for the c3-bishop and carry out e6-e5. 12.0-0 ♘xc3 13.♘xc3 ♘xd4 14.♗xh7+ ♔xh7 15.♕xd4 ♗d7 16.♖ad1 ♕f6⇄. Black plans to put the bishop on c6 and set the centre in motion.

9...♘c6 10.♗c3 d5
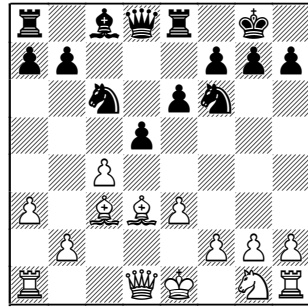
Thanks to the lead in development, Black manages to exchange the f6-knight for the c3-bishop and level the game.

11.♘e2 (11.cxd5 ♘xd5=) **11...dxc4 12.♗xc4 ♘e4 13.0-0 ♘xc3 14.♘xc3 ♕e7=**

Black will play ...♖d8 and transfer the c8-bishop to e8.

B3) 6.♘ge2

The most logical move – White continues the development and is

ready to push back the black bishop.
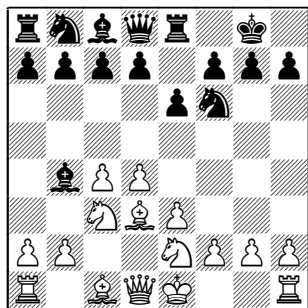
6...d5

With the pawn on d5, the knight would have been more useful on f3. This is the main point of the cunning move 5...♖e8!?.

7.0-0

White can immediately push back the bishop:
7.a3 ♗f8 8.0-0 ♘bd7, but this will only lead to a transposition of moves – see 7.0-0.
The release of tension in the centre 7.cxd5 exd5 8.0-0 ♗f8 brings about a position that arose through a different move order in my **Game 9** A. Smirnov – Lysyj, Cheboksary 2021.

7...♘bd7

With this natural developing move Black sacrifices the d5-pawn. In the event of 7...♗f8, as I played in the above-mentioned game, I

fear 8.♕c2±, Koridze – Dauletova, chess.com 2021. White's idea is to meet 8...b6 by 9.cxd5 exd5 10.e4!.
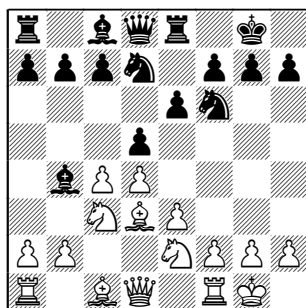
8.cxd5

White can fight for an advantage only by accepting the sacrifice.
8.♕b3 ♗d6 9.cxd5 exd5 transposes to 8.cxd5.

It makes no sense to grab space on the queenside with 8.a3 ♗f8 9.b4 since after 9...a5 10.b5 dxc4 11.♗xc4 Black plays ...c7-c5 anyway:
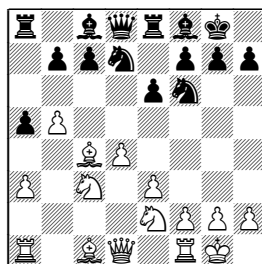
11...c5 12.bxc6
    12.♘a4 cxd4 13.♕xd4 b6=.
12...bxc6=. Black is ready to exchange his light-squared bishop

via a6 and push ...c6-c5, Aleksandrov – Dubov, Moscow 2019.

In contrast to the position after 7...♗f8, 8.♕c2, Perdomo – Mareco, Villa Ballester 2003, is not so unpleasant in view of 8...dxc4! 9.♗xc4 a6 10.♖d1

    10.a4 ♗f8 11.♖d1 c5 12.dxc5 ♕a5=.
10...b5 11.♗d3 ♗b7
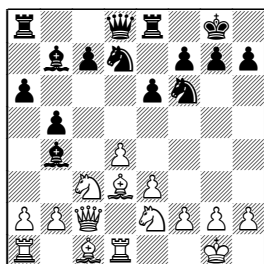
Black's task is to achieve ...c7-c5. 12.a4

    After 12.a3 ♗f8 13.b4 e5! 14.dxe5 ♖xe5⇄ the break ...c7-c5 is on the agenda again.
12...bxa4 13.♘xa4 c5 14.dxc5 ♖c8=.

8.e4 leads to mass elimination after 8...dxe4 9.♘xe4 ♘xe4 10.♗xe4, Del Rio de Angelis – Argandona Riveiro, San Sebastian 2008, 10...e5 11.dxe5 ♘xe5=.

In case of 8.♘g3 we transfer the game into the track of the Slav Defence with 8...c6 and aim for ...e6-e5.
9.e4 e5 10.dxe5 ♘xe5 11.cxd5 ♗xc3 12.bxc3 ♘xd3 13.♕xd3 ♘xe4

14.♘xe4 ♗f5=.

8...exd5 9.♕b3

9.f3!? with the idea of playing e3-e4 is well known.
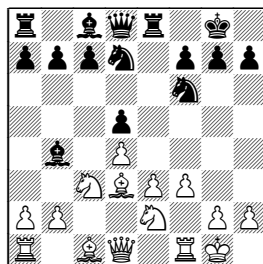
9...♗d6N – before playing ...c7-c5, it is necessary to take the bishop out of the front line in order to deprive White of the opportunity to play a3 after ...c5.

    9...c5? 10.a3 ♗a5 11.dxc5 ♗xc3 12.♘xc3 ♘xc5 13.♗c2±, Ivanchuk – Repka, Sibenik 2016.
10.e4 c5⇄.

9...♗d6 10.♘xd5 ♘xd5 11.♕xd5
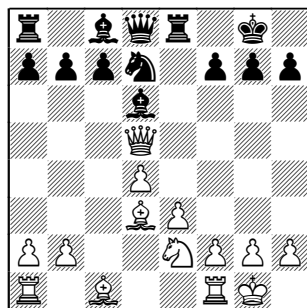
11...♘c5!

Thanks to this tactical resource

(the threat is ...♗xh2+), Black gains the advantage of two bishops as compensation for the sacrificed pawn.
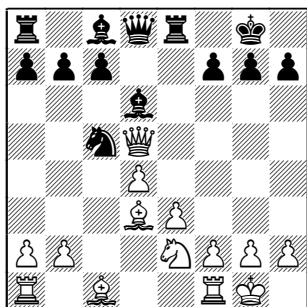
12.♕c4

This occurred in the game Kambrath – Ramirez, Merida 2019.
A principled alternative to the text is the counterblow 12.♗xh7+!? ♔xh7 13.♕h5+ ♔g8 14.dxc5 ♖e5 15.♕f3 ♖f5 – it is useful to drag the white knight on f4 to enable ...♕f6.
16.♘f4
　16.♕e4 ♖e5 17.♕d4 ♖d5=.
16...♖xc5
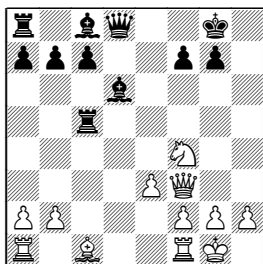
Black wants to lead out his c8-bishop to c6. The powerful bishops compensate for the minimal material shortage. Now a bishop sacrifice leads to a perpetual check – 17.♗d2!? ♗xf4 18.♕xf4 ♕xd2 19.♖ad1 ♕xb2 20.♖d8+ ♔h7 21.♕e4+

　21.♕h4+?! ♔g6 22.♖h8 ♖g5∓.
21...g6 22.♕e8 ♕g7 23.♕e7

　23.♖xc8? ♖xc8 24.♕xc8 b6∓.
23...b6 24.♖f8 ♖e5 25.♕h4+ ♖h5 26.♕e7 ♖e5=.

The attempt to develop the bishop on e3 allows counterplay – 17.e4 ♕f6 18.♗e3 ♖g5⇄, and it is not easy for White to defend against 19...♗g4 19.h3 ♗xh3 20.♕xh3 ♗xf4=.

After 17.♖d1 ♗d7 18.♕xb7?! ♗c6 19.♕a6 ♕f6∞ the white bishop remains on c1, while our pieces are avidly looking at the enemy king.

17.b3 – White needs to include the c1-bishop into play.
17...♖b5! – defending against the threat ♗a3 and preparing the sortie of our light-squared bishop.
18.♗b2 ♕g5 19.h3 ♗d7∞ – our plans include ...♗c6, as well as counterplay on the queenside with ...a7-a5-a4.

12...b5!

Before ♘xd3-♕xd3-c5 it is useful to prepare support for the advance of the pawn to c4.

13.♕c2

13.♕xb5? ♗a6∓.

13...♘xd3 14.♕xd3 c5 15.♕xb5

Taking the second pawn leads to an attack on the white king – 15.♘g3 c4 16.♕e2 ♗b7∞.

15...♖b8 16.♕a4 cxd4 17.♘xd4 ♖b6 18.♗d2 ♖a6!

Before sacrificing on h2, it is necessary to remove White's queen aim at our rook on e8.

19.♕c4

19.♕b5 ♖b6 20.♕a5 ♗xh2+ 21.♔xh2 ♕h4+ 22.♔g1 ♖h6=.
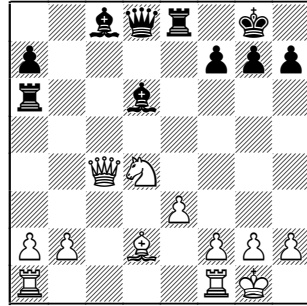
19...♗xh2+ 20.♔xh2 ♖h6+ 21.♔g1 ♕h4 22.f3 ♕h1+ 23.♔f2 ♕h4+=

The white king cannot escape from e2 owing to ...♗a6.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have considered the most natural developing moves for White 5.♘f3 and 5.♗d3. Our task is to wait for the g1-knight to move and only then to define the pawn structure. In response to ♘f3, we are going to double the c-pawns and prepare the advance of the e-pawn. If White develops the knight on e2, then we play d7-d5.
The main advantage of this approach is its versatility.

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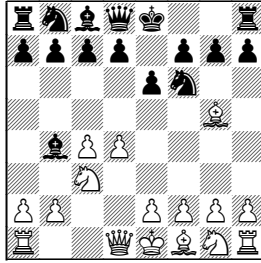
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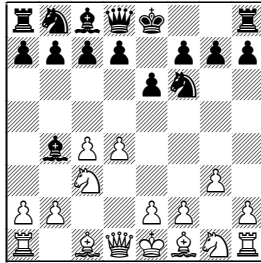
Chapter 5. 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.f3

Chapter 6. 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♘f3
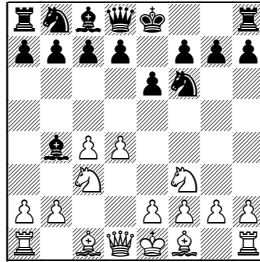
Chapter 7. 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♘f3 0-0 5.♗g5 c5

Chapter 8. 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e3
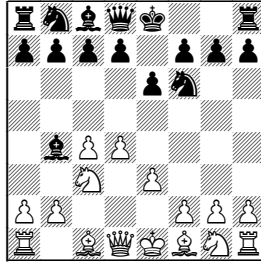
Chapter 9. 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e3 0-0

Chapter 10. 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♕c2
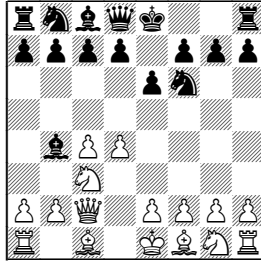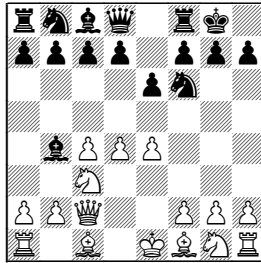

4...0-0 5.♗g5 130
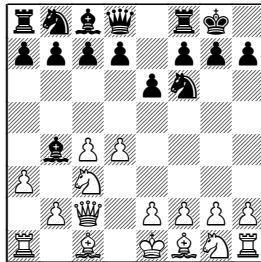   5.♘f3 c5 6.dxc5 ♘a6 7.g3 134
     7.c6 135

Chapter 11. 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♕c2 0-0 5.e4

5...d5 6.e5 ♘e4 7.a3 140
      7.♗d3 144

Chapter 12. 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♕c2 0-0 5.a3

Chapter 13. 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♕c2 0-0 5.a3 ♗xc3+ 6.♕xc3 d5 7.♗g5
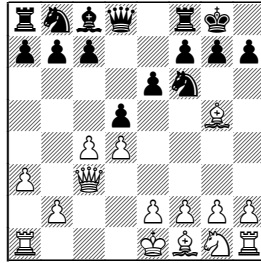
7...h6 8.♗xf6 (8.♗h4?! 165) 8...♕xf6 9.♘f3 (9.cxd5 207) 165