



BY JOHN HARTMANN

The CHESS **LIFE** Kids Opening Project



AND JJ LANG

THE OPENING PHASE of the game is perhaps the most studied part of chess, and it's also the most misunderstood.

Consider how many books, videos, and online courses are out there, each offering different repertoires to learn, different moves to memorize... and each promising to boost your game to the stratosphere.

There's so much conflicting advice! Some people say you should learn a system like the London or the Colle. Others believe you should play what the top GMs play right away — the Najdorf, perhaps, or the Grünfeld. Still others argue for gambits and tricks, with the idea that quick wins encourage players to keep improving.

So what's the right path? What's the best way to really learn openings?

Beginning this month, we here at *Chess Life Kids* will try to cut through all of the noise and offer a complete attacking repertoire for an improving scholastic player. Using data from *Lichess.org* to pinpoint moves you'll see

over-the-board, we'll give you a complete set of openings with key moves and ideas clearly explained, along with just enough analysis to map out critical positions and variations.

But more than that, we want to try to model how to go about learning openings, because it's not simply about cramming move after move into your memory banks. We want to teach you how to read chess analysis, how to know when to memorize moves and when to focus on understanding, and how to go about building your own opening files, based on what you see here, or perhaps created completely on your own.

With each installment of our repertoire, there will be a complementary video on the US Chess YouTube channel, explaining the main ideas and showing a model game or two. We will put the analysis with a number of model games in a Lichess study for you to work on, and for you Chessable fans out there, we're even making all of this available in a free course on the Chessable website.

That's all beginning in our August issue. In this first installment, we want to explain why we've made certain repertoire choices, and how our ideas about improvement feed into the lines we recommend.

There's an old joke you may have heard: A visitor to New York City is wandering around 57th Street, and stops to ask a passerby with a violin case: "How do I get to Carnegie Hall?" (Carnegie Hall is a famous concert hall in New York.) The answer? "Practice, practice, practice!"

It's always dangerous to explain a joke, but here we'll risk it. The tourist is expecting to get directions, like "Turn here, go there." Instead they get advice. The only way they'll "get there" — the only way they'll perform on-stage — is by practicing.

Chess players have their own version of this joke. "How do I get to 1800? Tactics, tactics, tactics!" If you have chess-playing parents or grandparents, they may have heard a slightly different take on this from FM Ken Smith, who wrote that "until you are at least an [1800 or 1900] player... your

first name is ‘Tactics,’ your middle name is ‘Tactics,’ and your last name is ‘Tactics.’”

While we certainly do not believe that Puzzle Rush alone will lead to improvement, it’s clear that solving tactics on a regular basis is essential for an improving player. We also believe that some openings are better for training us to play tactical, aggressive chess. When we get open positions — those that do not feature locked pawn centers — on the board, we are forced to use patterns we have studied and calculate our way to victory. And even closed, locked positions have a tendency to become open at some point.

Attackers have a greater margin of error than defenders; after all, if your attack fizzles out, you can usually fight on, while if you miss an important defensive move, you’re probably lost. Perhaps more importantly, when you play open, attacking chess, and when you aim for those kinds of positions, you end up in situations where your tactics training can be put to good use. That’s not always true in quieter, “system-based” openings.

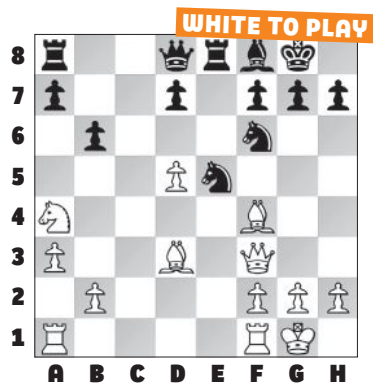
Consider these two examples.

POSITION A

GM Yu Yangyi (2736)

GM Magnus Carlsen (2834)

Qatar Masters (Tiebreak), 12.29.2015



There is no obvious weakness in Black’s position, and while White has something called a “space advantage” thanks to the d5-pawn, it is not clear what the short-term goals or plans are. What would you play?

15. Qd1??

This, or any other retreating move with the queen, loses a piece. The hardest part of this position is even realizing that there is a tactic here, since there was nothing obvious to look for. But, as is often the case, a slow and long-term advantage opens you up to fast and short-term threats from your opponent.

The best move was 15. Bxe5 Rxe5 16. Nc3 re-centralizing White’s pieces.

15. ... Nxd3

Here, Carlsen’s 2736-rated opponent thought for over three minutes. Why didn’t he capture immediately? Because he realized he was losing a piece!

16. Qxd3 Re4, White resigned.

POSITION B

Mikhail Chigorin

Semion Alapin

St. Petersburg, 1883



The only way to save the rook is to

capture Black’s bishop. But does any other move jump out?

10. Bxe4!

If you’ve ever studied the “Greek Gift,” you’ll notice the coordination of White’s pieces against Black’s lonely king. This doesn’t necessarily mean it works, but you probably have already started calculating what Chigorin played after...

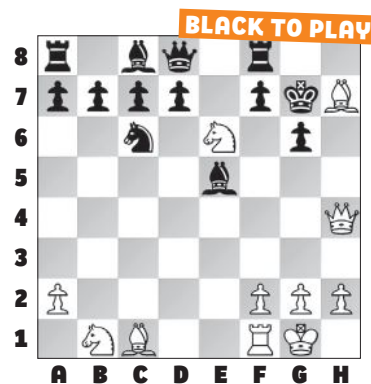
10. ... Bxa1 11. Bxh7+ Kh8

Black loses by force after 11. ... Kxh7 12. Ng5+ Kg8 13. Qh5 Re8? 14. Qxf7+ Kh8 15. Qh5+ Kg8 16. Qh7+ Kf8 17. Qh8+ Ke7 18. Qxg7, mate.

12. Ng5 g6 13. Qg4

Probably the first “hard” move to find, as it is not forcing. But we have opened the h-file, and we now want a long-range piece to stare down Black’s king.

13. ... Bxe5 14. Qh4 Kg7 15. Ne6+



If you could see all of this in your head, you should definitely be playing an attacking repertoire as White. But even if you couldn’t, chances are you had an easier time looking for something like this than you did realizing that White was losing a piece in the previous diagram. This is because, for most chess players, attack comes easier than defense.

15. ... fxe6 16. Qh6+ Kf7 17. Bxg6+

Ke7 18. Qh4+ Rf6 19. Ba3+ d6 20. Qh7+ Kf8 21. Qh8+ Ke7 22. Qg7+ Rf7 23. Qxf7, mate.

The repertoire we will analyze over the coming months is aimed at giving you clear, playable positions where you can put your tactical skills to good use. We also want you to learn something along the way, so isolated queen’s pawn positions (or “IQPs”) will make up a big part of the package.

IQPs can emerge from many different opening systems. You can reach them from the Sicilian, the Caro-Kann, the French, the Queen’s Gambit (Accepted and Declined!), the Nimzo-Indian, and more. IQPs require the “attacker” — the one with the isolated queen’s pawn — to play actively to compensate for the isolated pawn, while the “defender” — the one without the isolani — has to limit

their opponent’s piece play and bear down on their weaknesses.

Learning to play IQPs as both attacker and defender is critical for long-term success in chess. You’ll get plenty of practice with them in this repertoire.

We’ll also work to make sure you understand what you have to memorize, and what you have to simply understand. And this gets to one of the most common misconceptions about opening study.

We have known students who react badly when their opponent plays something “out of book.” After dutifully memorizing their analysis, they get flustered when their opponent does something they’re not “supposed to.” “The book says this and not that,” we’re told, “so why don’t I know how to win?”

There are surprisingly few positions, even in the open games,

where you have to know a string of only-moves by heart. In most cases, knowledge of key ideas and patterns is more important, and if you know them, you may find critical tactical moves on your own, as we saw in Position B above.

We will shy away from “hope chess,” or playing poor moves that try to trick our opponents into blunders. But we will, using data from Lichess, show you how to exploit those all-too-typical mistakes that you will see at the board with both words and analysis.

Most of all, we’ll try to show you that opening study can be fun, especially when limited to what we really need to know. We’ll begin by pushing our e-pawns forward, and sketching our response to Black’s most popular move at the amateur level — 1. ... e5. See you in August! ♠

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The Evans Gambit

BY JOHN HARTMANN

THIS MONTH'S COLUMN is the first installment of a *Chess Life Kids* 1. e4 repertoire. It is based

around open, tactical positions, which I believe are important for improving players to master.

What makes this repertoire different from others you may have seen is the method used to create it. It is based in part on data from the *Lichess.org* database, which lets us see what players at various ratings are likely to play in opening positions. We prepare for the moves we will see most often in scholastic games, along with the typical mistakes.

We begin with the most popular response to 1. e4 — the king's pawn push with 1. ... e5. We'll play 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4, and now 3. ... Bc5 4. b4 — the Evans Gambit.

HISTORY

Developed by William Davies Evans, a sea captain from Wales, the Evans Gambit was first played in 1827 in a game between Evans (White) and Alexander McDonnell (Black). Over time it became

very popular, and most of the top players of the 1800s — including Adolf Anderssen, Paul Morphy, Mikhail Chigorin, Joseph Henry Blackburne, and Wilhelm Steinitz — used it, with some of the most famous games in chess history as a result. Bobby Fischer tried it in his simultaneous exhibition tours, and modern stars like Garry Kasparov and Nigel Short have revived it for today's players.

IDEAS

In contrast to the Giuoco Piano, where we play c2-c3 and d2-d4 to grab the center, we give up the b-pawn to turbo-charge our development. Typical ideas include (a) attacks on the f7-pawn, either with Bc4xf7+ followed by Qd1-d5(+)-xc5, or Qd1-b3 to create a battery with the c4-bishop, (b) attacks on a loose minor piece on a5 via Qd1-a4+, (c) placing our dark-squared bishop on a3 to stop Black from castling, and (d) various attacks on an open or semi-open e-file.

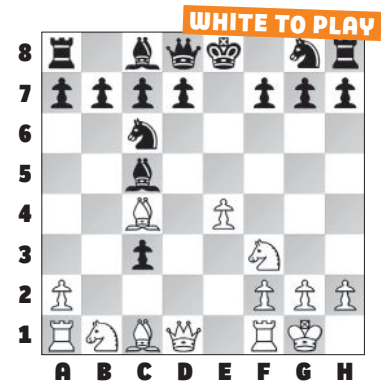
Meanwhile, Black can (a) try to punch back in the center with a

timely ... d7-d5 and (b) look for a moment to play ... b7-b5. Here are some examples for you to ponder.



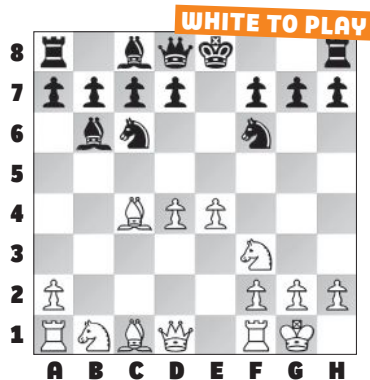
(1) Opening the e-file is a very typical idea in the Evans. Here the a3-bishop also shows its power.

11. e5! Kd8 Other moves: 11. ... Be6 12. Bxe6 Qxe6 13. Qxb7 and White wins at least a piece; 11. ... Na5 12. Qa4+ Nc6 13. exd6 and a rook comes to e1; 11. ... Nxe5? 12. Nxe5! Qxe5 (12. ... Be6 13. Qxb7) 13. Rfe1. **12. exd6 cxd6 13. Bxd6 Qf6 14. Rad1 Bd7 15. Qxb7** and White won shortly. (Kolar – Cerny, Czech U12 Ch, 2022)

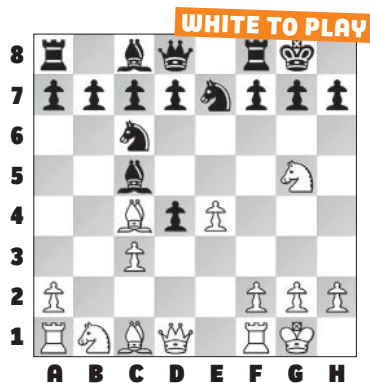


(2) The undefended c5-bishop is a signal that a tactic might exist.

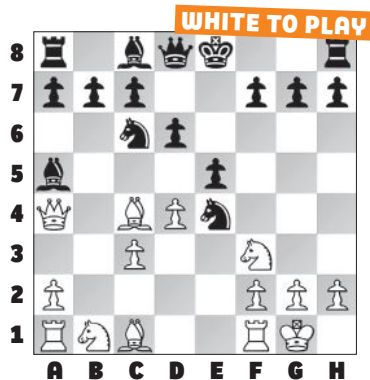
8. Bxf7+! Kxf7 9. Qd5+ Ke8 10. Qh5+ g6? A surprisingly common mistake in this position. Now the h8-rook is vulnerable. The correct 10. ... Kf8 11. Qxc5+ d6 12. Qxc3 is better for White. **11. Qxc5 d6 12. Qxc3 Qf6 13. Bb2** and White dominates the board. (Entner – Bollestad, Fagernes, 2023)



(3) White can use the central pawns to push back Black's pieces as we see here. **9. e5! d5** If 9. ... Ne4 10. d5 Ne7 11. d6 Nc6 12. Qd5!. **10. exf6 dxc4 11. Re1+ Kf8 12. Ba3+ Kg8 13. d5 Na5 14. Be7** with a winning position. (Evans – McDonnell, London 1829)



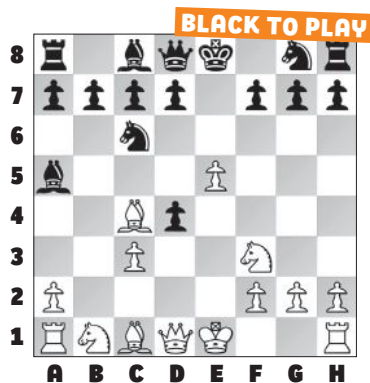
(4) White can still sometimes overwhelm Black's defenses even if she castles. Here White plays the winning **9. Qh5 h6** (forced) **10. Nxf7 Rxf7 11. Bxf7+ Kf8 12. Bb3** and if **12. ... Bd6? 13. Qf7 mate**. (Ali – Bas Mas, Cullera 2005)



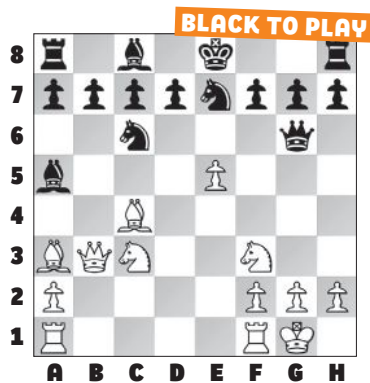
(5) The bishop on a5 can also be a

target, particularly if the c6-knight which defends it can be deflected. Here we see **9. Bd5!** The best move, with the threat of 10. Bxc6 and 11. Qxa5. In Kahn – Bolyski (Budapest, 2020) White played **9. d5? Nxc3?** (9. ... Nc5!) **10. Nxc3 Bxc3 11. dxc6** and later won. Note that trying to solve Black's problems tactically fails. If **9. ... Nxc3 10. Bxc6+! bxc6 11. Nxc3!** Not 11. Qxa5 Ne2+ when Black is hanging on. **11. ... Bxc3 12. Qxc6+** and 13. Qxc3.

Black also has some thematic tactical ideas in the Evans Gambit. (6) The ... d7-d5 break is an important idea in many 1. e4 e5 openings, especially when White pushes e4-e5.



After **7. ... d5! e.p. 8. exd6 Qxd6 9. 0-0 Nge7** Black is ready to castle and finish development. (Marache – Morphy, New York 1857).

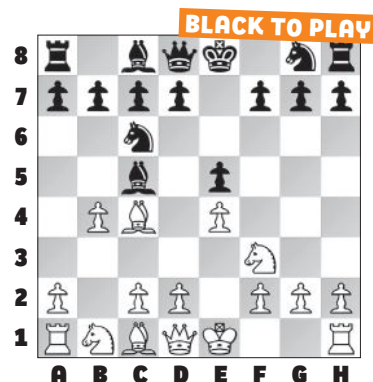


(7) With the bishop on c4 and queen on b3, Black often has a tactical way to develop his queenside pieces: **11. ... b5!** Bobby

Fischer played **11. ... 0-0?!** and lost quickly in Hoffmann – Fischer, New York (blitz) 1963. **12. Nxb5** If **12. Bxb5 Rb8!** using the pin to threaten ... Ba5xc3, while **12. Qxb5?** is a mistake after **12. ... Rb8** and the queen cannot return to defend the c3-knight. **12. ... 0-0!** If **12. ... Rb8?!** first we see why castling is important: **13. Bd3 Qh5** (13. ... Qh6 14. Qa4) **14. Bxe7 Nxe7 15. Nd6+!** **13. Bd3 Qh5** with an equal position.

THEORY

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4 Bc5 4. b4



4. ... Bxb4

Played about 70% of the time according to the Lichess database.

The retreating (a) **4. ... Bb6** is seen about 16% of the time. The bishop is short of squares, so we gain space with 5. a4, threatening a4-a5-a6 and winning the bishop. Now (a1) 5. ... a6 6. c3 (6. d3 allows the complicated 6. ... Nxb4) 6. ... d6 (or 6. ... Nf6 7. d3 d6, transposing) 7. d3 Nf6 (or 7. ... Bg4 8. 0-0, again transposing) 8. 0-0 Bg4 and we reach a pleasant position for White; while (a2) 5. ... a5 6. b5 Nd4 7. Nxd4 Bxd4 8. c3 Bb6 9. d4!? gives White better development and more space; and (a3) 5. ... Nxb4 6. a5! Bc5 7. c3 Nc6 8. 0-0! and we will play d2-d4 next.

Three less common lines: (b) **4. ... Nxb4** 5. c3 Nc6 6. d4 transposes to 5. ... Bc5 line; (c) **4. ... Bd4?! 5. c3**

Bb6 6. a4 when White is a tempo up on the 4. ... Bb6 line, and now if 6. ... a5? (6. ... a6 is slightly better for White) 7. b5 wins at least a pawn; (d) the rare 4. ... d5 should be met with 5. exd5 Nxb4 6.0-0 with a good position.

5. c3

There are three main responses to this move, but let me mention one other move that you might see.

The odd 5. ... Bd6 is played 4% of the time. It blocks the d-pawn and the c8-bishop. White has easy play with 6. d4 Nf6 7. 0-0 and if 7. ... Nxe4? 8. dxe5 Nxe5 9. Re1 winning material on the e-file.

(1) 5. ... Bc5

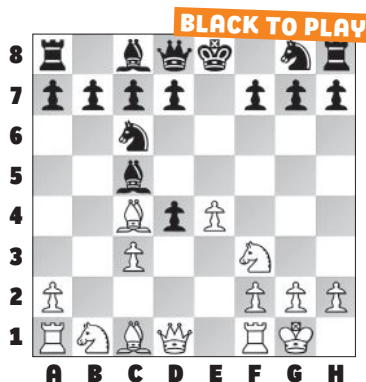
You will see this move most often according to the Lichess statistics in about 43% of the games in this position among club players.

6. d4! exd4

This is almost universally played according to the Lichess database.

Other ideas: (a) 6. ... Bb6 7. Nxe5 Nxe5 8. dxe5 gums up Black's development by guarding the d6- and f6-squares, while (b) 6. ... Bd6? takes the pressure off the d4-pawn, so we have time to continue development with 7. 0-0!.

7. 0-0!



White is better developed and threatens to grab back a pawn

with c3xd4. Here are five Black moves to be aware of.

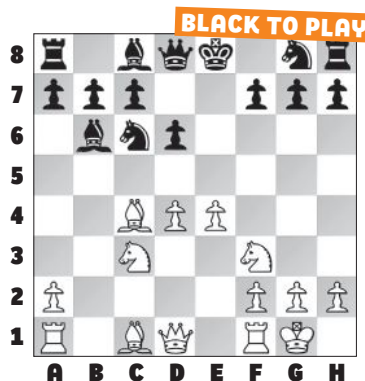
(a) Very common is the mistaken 7. ... dxc3 when White has a simple tactic to gain the advantage: 8. Bxf7+ Kxf7 9. Qd5+ Ke8 10. Qxc5 and White has a huge attack.

(b) If 7. ... Nf6? White grabs the center with 8. cxd4 Bb6 9. e5!.

(c) Similar is 7. ... Nge7?! 8. cxd4 Bb6 9. Ng5 d5 (not 9. ... 0-0?? 10. Qh5) 10. exd5 Nxd5? 11. Nc3! Nxc3?? 12. Bxf7+ Kf8 13. Ba3+ and wins.

(d) The attempted bishop grab 7. ... Na5 is met with 8. cxd4 (or 8. Bd3) when White has a great position after 8. ... Nxc4? 9. dxc5.

(e) Best for Black is 7. ... d6 when we play 8. cxd4 Bb6 9. Nc3, reaching a key Evans position.



Here are four possible continuations: if (e1) 9. ... Bg4 10. Bb5 Bxf3 11. gxf3! and d4-d5 is a tough threat to meet; (e2) 9. ... Nf6? 10. e5! with the initiative; (e3) 9. ... Nge7? allows the winning 10. Ng5 0-0? 11. Qh5; or (e4) 9. ... Na5 10. Bd3 Ne7 when one idea is 11. h3 to limit the c8-bishop.

(2) 5. ... Ba5

This is the second most popular move at 36% of games after 5. c3, pinning the c-pawn to the king. We continue with 6. d4 (a) 6. ... exd4 and now 7. 0-0, getting out of the pin. White is better developed and ready to put her pieces on active squares.

BLACK TO PLAY



(a1) If Black gets greedy with 7. ... dxc3 we play 8. Qb3 (attacking the f7-pawn) 8. ... Qe7 9. Nxc3 and White has the initiative.

(a2) After 7. ... Nf6 8. Ba3 d6 we break open the center with 9. e5! Nxe5 (9. ... dxe5? loses to 10. Qb3 Qd7 11. Re1) 10. Nxe5 dxe5 11. Qb3 with a great position.

(a3) If 7. ... d6 8. Qb3 Qe7 9. e5! again opening lines.

(a4) Here 7. ... d3 is an old move. The pawn isn't trouble, so increase pressure on f7 with 8. Qb3.

(a5) The strongest move is perhaps 7. ... Nge7. White continues 8. Ng5 (or 8. cxd4 d5 exd5 Nxd5 Ba3) and if 8. ... 0-0? (8. ... d5 is better) 9. Qh5! winning.

The key alternative (b) 6. ... d6 is played more at higher levels.

WHITE TO PLAY



White's best is 7. Qb3! attacking the f7-pawn. (Also good is 7. 0-0, getting out of the pin.)

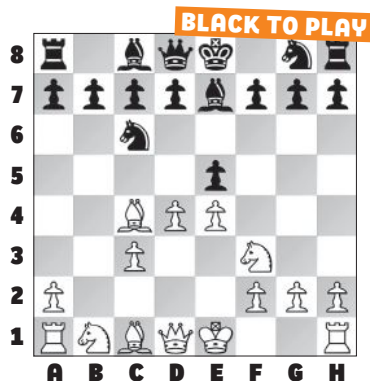
Now Black often plays the incorrect (b1) 7. ... Qe7?! 8. d5 Nd4 (not 8. ... Nb8 9. Qb5+) 9. Nxd4 exd4 10. 0-0.

Instead (b2) the stronger **7. ... Qd7** guards the f7-square, and stops Qb3-a4+ picking up the bishop. A sample line is 8. dxe5 (or 8. 0-0 Bb6 9. Nbd2) 8. ... Bb6 9. Nbd2 Na5 10. Qc2 Nxc4 11. Nxc4 d5 12. exd5 Qxd5 13. Ne3.

Two other lines to be aware of: if (b3) **7. ... Nxd4** (attacking the queen) we play 8. Bxf7+ Kf8 9. Nxd4 exd4 10. 0-0 with initiative; and if (b4) **7. ... Qf6?** we attack the knight with 8. d5 Nd4 9. Nxd4 exd4 10. Qa4+.

(3) 5. ... Be7

This move is less common at the club level, played about 17% of the time. It retreats the bishop and keeps the option of ... Nc6-a5. White follows the plan with **6. d4** and now:



(a) Most often played is **6. ... exd4** which we meet with 7. Qb3! (7. cxd4 is playable) 7. ... Na5 (not 7. ... Nh6 8. Bxh6 gxh6 9. Bxf7+ when White is better) and now the typical idea 8. Bxf7+ Kf8 9. Qa4 Kxf7 (9. ... c6 10. Bb3 leaves White ahead) 10. Qxa5 with an edge.

(b) Top players use **6. ... Na5** which we can meet with: (b1) 7. Be2 exd4 (or 7. ... d6 8. Qa4+ c6 9. dxe5 dxe5 10. Nxe5 Nf6 11. 0-0 with equality) 8. Qxd4!?, with our queen to a good square; (b2) 7. Nxe5 Nxc4 8. Nxc4 d5 9. exd5 Qxd5 10. Ne3 is equal; or (b3) the interesting 7. Bd3!? exd4 8. cxd4 d5!?

(c) We know the ideas after **6. ... d6** 7. Qb3 Na5 (7. ... Be6? 8. d5) 8. Bxf7+ Kf8 9. Qa4.

(d) White is better after the poor **6. ... Nf6?!** 7. dxe5 Ng4 8. Qd5 0-0 9. h3.

ILLUSTRATIVE GAMES

Try analyzing these two games!

Check out our CLK Openings Project website for videos and illustrative games: new.uschess.org/clk-opening-project

EVANS GAMBIT (C51)

GM Garry Kasparov (2805)
GM Viswanathan Anand (2715)
Tal Memorial (4), Riga, 1995

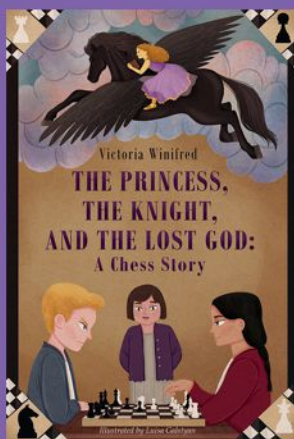
1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4 Bc5 4. b4 Bxb4 5. c3 Be7 6. d4 Na5 7. Be2 exd4 8. Qxd4 Nf6 9. e5 Nc6 10. Qh4 Nd5 11. Qg3 g6 12. 0-0 Nb6 13. c4 d6 14. Rd1 Nd7 15. Bh6 Ncxe5 16. Nxe5 Nxe5 17. Nc3 f6 18. c5 Nf7 19. cxd6 cxd6 20. Qe3 Nnh6 21. Qxh6 Bf8 22. Qe3+ Kf7 23. Nd5 Be6 24. Nf4 Qe7 25. Re1, Black resigned.

EVANS GAMBIT (C52)

bishophop (1909)
Proffessora (1796)
Lichess (blitz), 04.01.2023

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4 Bc5 4. b4 Bxb4 5. c3 Ba5 6. d4 exd4 7. 0-0 Nf6 8. e5 d5 9. exd6 e.p. Qxd6 10. Ba3 Qf4 11. Re1+ Ne4 12. Bd5 f5 13. Nxd4 Qxf2+ 14. Kh1 Nxd4 15. Bxe4 Kf7 16. Bd5+ Be6 17. Bxe6+ Nxe6 18. Qd7+ Kg6 19. Qxe6+ Kh5 20. g4+ Kxg4 21. Rg1+ Kh3 22. Rg3+ Kh4 23. Be7+ g5 24. Qh6 mate. ♠

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-CAREY FAN, CEO, ChessKid.com

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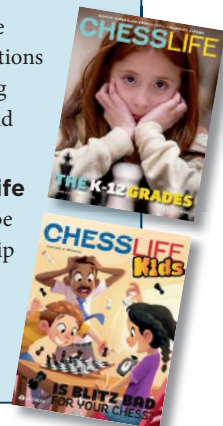
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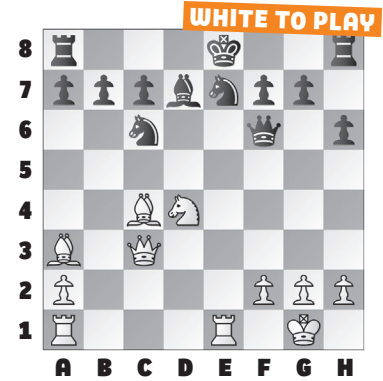
key lines to remember and tactical motifs to look out for. But there's no such thing as too many tactics!

This week's "Tactics Tuesday" focuses on the theme of *attacking the weak king* in the Evans Gambit, whether its on the e8- or g8-square.

In the **example**, White sacrifices their queen with **16. Nxc6!!** because they realized that removing the defender of the pinned e7-knight is more important than the queen.

As a **bonus**, can you find White's

move after **16. ... Qxc3 17. Rxe7+ Kf8 18. Rxf7+ Kg8 19. Ne7+ Kh7?**



EVANS GAMBIT MADNESS

The August issue of *Chess Life Kids* features Editor John Hartmann's complete Evans Gambit repertoire for White. The article gives you

1. WHITE TO PLAY

2. WHITE TO PLAY

3. WHITE TO PLAY

4. WHITE TO PLAY

5. WHITE TO PLAY

6. WHITE TO PLAY

SOLUTIONS

(1) 15. d6! The d5-d6 break attacks f7. Black can't avoid both mate and losing the queen. (Anderssen – Mayet, Berlin, 1865) **(2) 18. Qf7+** We will always look at the f7-square, whether Black's king is castled or not. **18. ... Kh6 19. Bc1+** But did you see this move? It's not easy to spot backwards bishop moves! (Anderssen – Mayet, Berlin, 1865) **(3) 19. Ng5** White is down a full queen, but h7 is so weak! **19. ...**

Qe4 Returning material is the only way to stop mate. (Steinitz – Duffy, London, 1865) **(4) 11. ... Be6 12. d5** is the tactical point to remember against uncastled kings. (Paulsen – Schneider, Leipzig, 1864, analysis) **(5) 12. dxc6 Qxa1??** One of the most important takeaways from studying these games is: do not be greedy. If Black has not castled, we can sac our idle pieces for tempo. **13. Re1+ Be6** Not 13. ... Kf8 14. Qd8 mate. **14. Qd7+** An easy move to miss! **14. ...**

Kf8 15. Rxe6! Black has no answer to threats like Nf3-g5 and c6xb7 followed by Qd7-c8+. (Paulsen – Schneider, Leipzig, 1864) **(6) 13. d5! Bxd5 14. Nxd5 Qxd5 15. Bb5+ Qxb5** Now 15. ... c6 16. Qxd5 wins the queen thanks to the pin. **16. Re1+** Only when the d-file is covered! Black's king is stuck. (Morphy, P. – Morphy, A., New Orleans, 1849) **(Bonus) 20. Bb2!** Black is helpless: White threatens Rf7xg7+ and Bc4-d3+. (Globus – Gross, Riga, 1844)

COORDINATION AND DEFENSE

Continuing our series on tactics in the **Evans Gambit**, this week's puzzles focus on the themes of **deflection**, **removing the guard**, and

interference. Pieces need to work together in order to attack.

The same is true of defense, too! Puzzles five and six require you to find the best defense against White's attack. A master of attack must know what defensive resources their opponent could find.

In our **example**, White wants to use the e-file, but not when Black's king can hide on f8.

After **15. Bxg7 Rg8 16. Rfe1+ Kd8**, White is so close to playing Bg7xf6#.

Can you find Fischer's brilliant winning 17th move?



1. BLACK TO PLAY

2. WHITE TO PLAY

3. WHITE TO PLAY

4. WHITE TO PLAY

5. BLACK TO PLAY

6. BLACK TO PLAY

SOLUTIONS

1) 14. ... Nxc3! A nice removing of the defender with tempo. **15. Nxc3 Bxd4.** (Chigorin – Lasker, St Petersburg, 1895) **2) 22. Rxd7+!** Fischer shows why he is the master of the tempo. **22. ... Qxd7 23. f6+! Nxf6 24. Re1+** deflecting the king off its queen. (Fischer – Celle, Davis, 1964) **3) 18. Bf8! Ne8 19. Bb4!** White missed this nasty double-attack, using the interference of Black's knight to threaten mate

on f8. **19. ... Nd6** This might look like a game-saving resource, but White has **20. Bxe1 Nxf7 21. Nxf7+** regaining the queen! (Koehler – Jasnogrodsky, New York, 1895, analysis) **4) 21. Rxe6 fxe6 22. Nxe6+** This forces the pawn off d7. **22. ... dxe6 23. d7+** (Ward – Wortman, 1915) **5) 9. ... Nh6!** White's 9. Ng5 was not good, because it blocked the white bishop's path to h6. **10. f4** A critical moment. **10. ... exd4!** Not 10. ... exf4? 11. Nxf7! with the

idea that 11. ... Nxf7? 12. Rxf4! wins back the piece. **11. e5 Qe7! 12. e6 fxe6** and the attack died out. (Wolf – Gruenfeld, Vienna, 1920) **6) 16. ... h6!** Puzzle three began after Black's 16. ... Nf6??. **17. Qxf7+ Kh8** holds. **18. Bf8 Qxg5!** White's own bishop is in the way of the queen's path to the back rank. (Koehler – Jasnogrodsky, New York, 1895) **Bonus) 17. Qg3! Black resigned**, as **17. ... Qxg3 18. Bf6** is mate. (Fischer – Fine, New York, 1963)

our favorite openings in real time.

For example, American GM Christopher Yoo is fearsome with the Evans Gambit, and it's interesting to study his opponents' reactions. Here, he gives up two minor pieces for a rook, but shows why it is the exception to the rule!

How would you respond to White's last move, **9. Nxf7**, if you were playing Black here? Check the **solution** below.

All of today's exercises come from

games played by top grandmasters on *Chess.com* in the past five years.



KEEPING UP WITH THE EVANS

With free databases like The Week In Chess (TWIC) updated weekly, we can see if any of our favorite players have done anything interesting in

1. WHITE TO PLAY

2. WHITE TO PLAY

3. WHITE TO PLAY

4. WHITE TO PLAY

5. WHITE TO PLAY

6. WHITE TO PLAY

SOLUTIONS

1) 17. Rxe6 White wins the queen off his world-class opponent. **17. ... fxe6 18. Nd7+** (Yoo – Radjabov, Chess.com, 2023) **2) 12. Nxf7 Kxf7 13. Bh6+!! Kxh6 14. Qxf6+ Kh5 15. Be2** mate (Zhigalko – Batsiashvili, Chess.com, 2021) **3)** Black missed an unusual motif: **11. Bxc5 Qxc5 12. Bxf7+ Kf8** Other moves lose the knight. **13. Bxg8 Rxg8 14. Ng5!** Preparing to deflect Black's king from the rook! **14. ... Qe7 15. Nxf7+**

Ke8 16. Qxg8+ winning. (Golubev – Mucobega, Chess.com, 2018) **4) 26. Ne7! Rf6** Defending the g6-square, but with geometric danger. **27. Nhx f5 g6 28. Be5!** (Yoo – Vokhidov, Chess.com, 2023) **5) 17. Nd5!** Stunning in its simplicity: Black can't castle because of 17. ... 0-0 18. Bxc6 with the e7-bishop hanging. **17. ... Nf5 18. Nf6+! gxf6 19. exf6** wins, as Black's king is trapped. (Jobava – Pajeken, Chess.com, 2021) **6) 24.**

Rf3!! The only winning move. **24. ... Rxa2 25. Rd1 Qa4 26. Rg3+** Only now, with the queen dislodged. **26. ... Kh8 27. Nxf7+** forcing mate (Zhigalko – Lysyj, Chess.com, 2021) **Bonus)** Only **9. ... Qe7!** holds. White has no discoveries, and Black can play ... d7-d5. After **9. ... Rxf7?? 10. Bxf7+ Kxf7 11. e5!**, White was able to quickly push f2-f4-f5 and attack, even after parting with two developed minor pieces. (Yoo – Ambartsumova, Chess.com, 2022)



The Two Knights Defense

BY JOHN HARTMANN

ONE OF THE ideas behind the CLK Openings Project is to give our readers some knowledge of openings that will help them grow in chess strength, and we think improving tactical abilities is important in this process.

With the Evans Gambit, you learned how to gambit a pawn for an attack. The Two Knights is another sharp, aggressive opening, and sometimes you'll sacrifice a knight to get an attack on the king. One thing to keep an eye on is when it's wise to sacrifice on f7, and when it's not. One hint — if your c4-bishop is already under attack, or if Black can safely block the check, it's probably not time to sacrifice.

You'll also work on another key skill — how to patiently defend a position where you have material and your opponent has some initiative.

Everyone wishes they could attack all the time, but unfortunately, that's not possible. In the "main line" of the Two Knights you'll be up a pawn but have to carefully untangle your pieces and make the material count.

Ok, enough talk. Let's look at some moves.

THE TWO KNIGHTS

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4 Nf6 4. Ng5 d5

Black's best move, blocking the bishop's attack on the f7-square and opening the door for Black's pieces to get out.

Here there is just one key alternative for Black, but it's not very good. The Wilkes-Barre or Traxler variation begins with 4. ... Bc5. White should avoid all the complications after 5. Nxf7 by playing 5. Bxf7+! Ke7 6. Bb3 and White is simply better, solidifying the e4-pawn with d2-d3 if needed, and castling.

Note that after 4. ... Nxe4? 5. Bxf7+ Ke7 the king is the center, so we open it with 6. d4!, which also defends the g5-knight. If 6. ... exd4 7. Bd5 and White should win. And after 4. ... Qe7? White also gets a great game with 5. Bxf7+ Kd8 6. Bb3.

5. exd5

This is the key position for our repertoire. Black has two major options and two minor ones.

THE FRIED LIVER

5. ... Nxd5

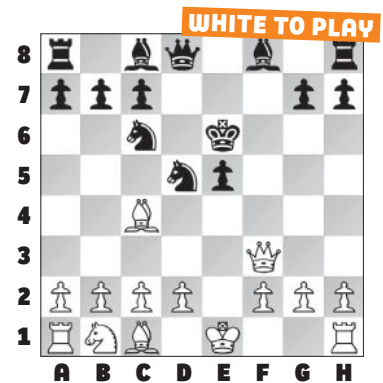
The Fried Liver is played ALL

THE TIME in scholastic games, and surprisingly often at the club level. If you are playing the Two Knights, you MUST know this line. It's also very instructive for learning attacking chess — giving up material for quick development and a king stuck in the center is a recipe for quick wins!

6. Nxf7! Kxf7 7. Qf3+

This move is why the knight sacrifice works. The double attack on the king and pinned knight gives White compensation for the piece.

7. ... Ke6



Here 7. ... Ke8? loses almost on the spot to 8. Bxd5.

8. Nc3!

Piling on the pinned piece.

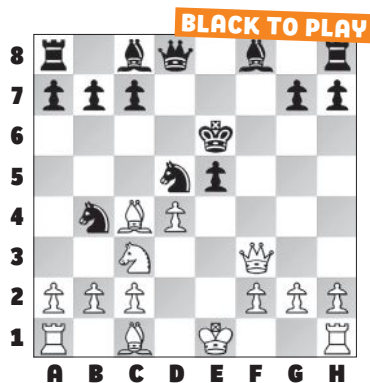
8. ... Ncb4

This is already almost forced.

Now 8. ... Nce7 further ties Black's pieces up. It should be met with 9. d4! opening lines to the king.

If 8. ... Nd4?! 9. Bxd5+ Kd6 10. Qd1! defends the c2-pawn without blocking the d-pawn from advancing. Another idea is 10. Qf7, threatening Nc3-e4 mate, but gives Black chances if she knows what she's doing. See the Lichess study for details!

9. d4!



Time to open lines! We can't be afraid to give up more material when the king is in the center of the board.

Note that in this position 9. 0-0!? is perhaps even stronger. We transpose to the 9. d4 lines after 9. ... c6 10. d4, and it avoids the forced draw seen below after 9. d4 Nxc2+ 10. Kd1 Nxd4.

9. ... Nxc2+

Black decides to grab more material, but there are other options.

After (a) 9. ... c6 10. 0-0 Qf6 (10. ... Nxc2? is met by 11. dxe5 Nxa1? 12. Rd1! pressuring the pinned d5-knight when White is completely winning) 11. Qe2! Bd6? 12. f4!.

White wins back the material

after (b) 9. ... exd4? 10. Nxd5 Nxd5 11. Qe4+ with a great attack.

Black loses after (c) 9. ... Qf6? 10. Bxd5+.

10. Kd1 Nxa1??

Too greedy! White's pieces swarm the king.

Correct is 10. ... Nxd4! 11. Bxd5+ Kd6 12. Qf7 (the complicated 12. Qg3 does not allow the forced draw) and now if Black knows this line, they can force a draw with 12. ... Qe7 13. Ne4+ Kd7 14. Nc5+ Kd6 15. Ne4+.

If 10. ... Ncb4?! White plays 11. Nxd5 Nxd5 12. Re1 and Black is in trouble.

11. Bxd5+ Kd7 12. Qf5+

Checkmate is unstoppable, and soon.

THE MAIN LINE

5. ... Na5

At higher levels this is the move you will most often see — some 56% of the time in games by club-strength players on Lichess.

6. Bb5+

Note that the knight sacrifice doesn't work here because the bishop can be taken. After 6. Nxf7? Kxf7 7. d6+ Nxc4 Black is winning.

6. ... c6

I have always liked Alekhine's 6. ... Bd7, but after 7. Qe2! Bd6 (not 7. ... Nxd5? 8. Qxe5+; if 7. ... Be7 8. Nf3! e4 9. Ne5) 8. 0-0 it's just a game.

7. dxc6 bxc6 8. Qf3!?

(see diagram top of next column)

This is our repertoire choice. It is very tactical in nature, using the pin on the c6-pawn, and entering positions where material is often unbalanced. It's also less common



than other White options like 8. Be2 and 8. Bd3, so your opponent may not have seen it before.

One key idea here is that we have to know when we can, and when we can't, grab the second pawn on c6. In most cases we will retreat the b5-bishop to the d3-square, where it does well on the b1-h7 diagonal, but it — along with a retreating Ng5-e4 after Black's ... h7-h6 — can be a target for Black's central pawns after ... f7-f5 and ... e5-e4.

White has to figure out how to develop the rest of their pieces, and the c1-bishop is a particular problem, sometimes coming to b2 after b2-b3. For their part, Black has to continue to make active moves and cause White problems, or else their initiative wears out and White's extra material begins to matter.

Black has many moves to choose from. Let's look at six of them, in order of frequency played on Lichess.

Here (a) 8. ... Bb7 is played about a third of the time, and threatens to take the b5-bishop, but it takes away support of the ... f7-f5 push. White should play the thematic 9. Bb3, which does very well in the statistics. Now Black often tries 9. ... h6 (if 9. ... c5? 10. Bb5+! and Black is scrambling) 10. Ne4 Nxe4 11. Bxe4 and White is better.

One of Black's best options is (b) 8. ... Be7. As usual, we should play

9. Bd3! (9. Bxc6+?! is too greedy, and after 9. ... Nxc6 10. Qxc6+ Bd7 11. Qf3 0-0 White has to be very careful) 9. ... 0-0 10. Nc3 h6 (10. ... Bg4?! puts the queen on a better square after 11. Qg3) 11. Nge4 Nd5 12. Ng3! and we see one of the ideas of 9. Bd3 — trading a minor piece on f5.

The simple **(c) 8. ... Bd7** isn't very good, and we should play **9. Bd3**.

Another good move for Black is **(d) 8. ... Rb8**, breaking the pin. White has to move the bishop. After **9. Bd3!?** (9. Bxc6+? is a mistake due to 9. ... Nxc6 10. Qxc6+ Nd7!) White disrupts the easy development of their pieces, but gains some attacking chances on Black's kingside along with access to the f5-square.



Three moves are important.

(d1) After 9. ... h6 10. Ne4 Nd5 (10. ... Nxe4 11. Bxe4 and Black has to worry about the c6-pawn) 11. b3! (or 11. 0-0 Be7, when ... f7-f5 is a threat) immediately is interesting, playing to develop the bishop on b2. If 11. ... Nf4 12. Bb2 Nxd3+ 13. cxd3 and the doubled pawns are no problem for White, who has effectively caught up in development.

(d2) If 9. ... Be7 10. Nc3 (10. b3 0-0 11. Bb2 is a possibility here) 10. ... 0-0 11. Bf5! (or 11. 0-0) trading pieces in a cramped position.

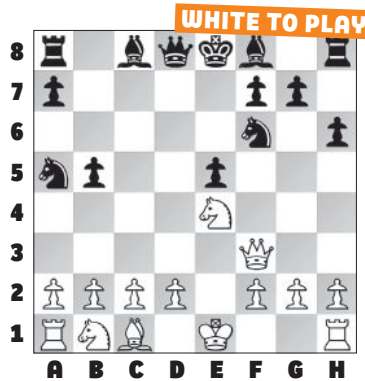
(d3) With 9. ... Bd6 the threat is ... Bc8-g4 followed by ... e5-e4. Now 10. Bf5! is again a possibility,

avoiding the ... Bc8-g4 issues, and White could also try 10. h3!.

The move **(e) 8. ... h6** loses a tempo, because White is happy to move that knight anyway! Still, Black has a powerful idea we need to be aware of. After **9. Ne4** (e1) 9. ... Nxe4 10. Qxe4 White threatens the c6-pawn, but here it's a bit poisoned. After 10. ... Be7 White should castle.

(e2) 9. ... Nd5 is a common move, blocking the diagonal. White might try 10. Ba4!? or 10. Bd3.

(e3) Top-level GM theory recommends 9. ... cxb5, but this is hard for Black to play at amateur levels.



After 10. Nxf6+ gxf6 11. Qxa8 Qd7! 12. Qf3! Bb7! 13. Qxf6 Rg8 14. Qxe5+ Be7 Black has amazing compensation for the material, but at worst White can force a draw with 15. Qb8+ Bd8 16. Qe5+ Be7.

It looks like **(f) 8. ... cxb5!?** is a mistake, but Black gets good compensation for the Exchange. After **9. Qxa8**

(f1) White is happy after 9. ... Bc5? 10. Ne4! Nxe4 11. Qxe4 0-0 12. 0-0.

(f2) Black has compensation after 9. ... Be7 10. 0-0 0-0 11. d4!, but opening lines to develop helps White use the extra material.

(f3) Black's best move is 9. ... Qc7! and after 10. Qf3 Nc6! (10. ... Qxc2? 11. Qc3 is great for White.; 10. ... Bb7? 11. Qe2) White should play 11. c3 stopping ... Nc6-d4.

THE MINOR VARIATIONS

The **Ulvestad variation** begins with **5. ... b5**, and is seen in about 6% of games on Lichess.



It can be a great surprise weapon for Black, as White often plays the mistake 6. Bxb5?, giving Black an easy game after 6. ... Qxd5.

Instead White should play 6. Bf1 retreating the bishop and forcing Black to deal with the attack on the c6-knight. Black can try (a) 6. ... Qxd5?! 7. Nc3, which is now good for White. (b) After 6. ... Nxd5?! 7. Bxb5! is strong now that the queen can't get to d5; if 7. ... Bd7? 8. Nxf7! is great for White. (c) Finally, 6. ... Nd4 is a transposition to 5. ... Nd4, but we will treat it here. White gets a good game after 7. c3 Nxd5 8. cxd4 Qxg5 9. Bxb5+ Bd7? (9. ... Kd8 10. 0-0) 10. Bxd7+ Kxd7 11. 0-0.

Finally, **5. ... Nd4** is the **Fritz variation**. After 6. c3 b5 (6. ... h6?! allows a Fried Liver style attack with 7. Nxf7 Kxf7 8. cxd4, while White is better after 6. ... Nf5 7. Qe2!) 7. Bf1 is a transposition to 5. ... b5.

For more on the Two Knights, including videos about the key variations, "Tactics Tuesday" worksheets, and Lichess studies with replayable analysis, visit the CLK Opening Project website: new.uschess.org/clk-opening-project

TEST YOUR ACTICS

1.

WHITE TO PLAY



2.

WHITE TO PLAY



3.

WHITE TO PLAY



4.

WHITE TO PLAY



5.

WHITE TO PLAY



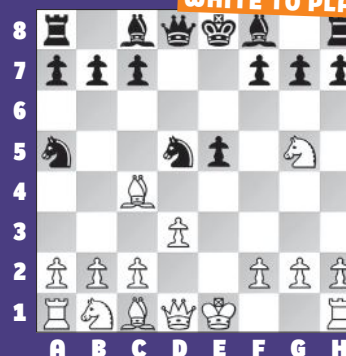
6.

WHITE TO PLAY



7.

WHITE TO PLAY



8.

WHITE TO PLAY



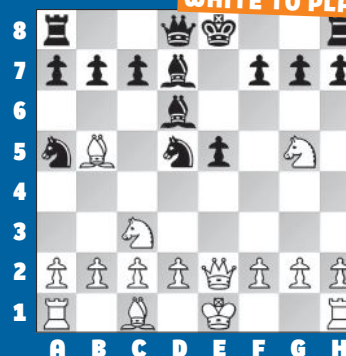
9.

WHITE TO PLAY



10.

WHITE TO PLAY



TO TAKE, OR NOT TO TAKE? THAT IS THE QUESTION.

Once you have seen the Fried Liver Attack, it's tempting to try to use the Ng5xf7 idea in many different types of positions. But you have to be careful and look at the details of your specific position — sometimes it allows the knight sacrifice, and sometimes, it doesn't.

Here are 10 positions from the Two Knights Defense where Ng5xf7 is possible. Can you determine which ones are wise captures, and which ones are mistakes?

ANSWERS ON PAGE 23.

MIND YOUR K'S AND Q'S

This month, we look at the **Two Knights Defense** with **1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4 Nf6 4. Ng5!?**. One testing line continues **4. ... d5 5. exd5 Na5!**

6. Bb5+ c6 7. dxc6 bxc6 8. Qf3!?!?

These lines are very sharp, and the best way to get familiar with them is practicing tactical positions.

This week's exercises feature three variations on this week's example, followed by three games where White neglected development to devastating effect on the back rank.

In the **example**, Black should not fear the queen, and can play **9. ... cxb5! 10. Qxa8 Nc6! 11. Nc3 Bc5!** As

a **bonus**, can you see why **11. ... Be7** is not as good?



1. BLACK TO PLAY

2. WHITE TO PLAY

3. WHITE TO PLAY

4. BLACK TO PLAY

5. BLACK TO PLAY

6. BLACK TO PLAY

SOLUTIONS

1) 11. ... Nc6! 12. Nc3 Bb4! Black can now castle and play ... Bc8-b7 without worry of Nc3xb5. **2) 11. Nxb5** With the queen on d6, the c8-bishop will hang before Black has time to play ... Na5-c6. Worse is **11. Qxa8!?** 0-0 12. Qf3 Bb7, as Black still has a serious attack. **11. ... Qb6 12. Nxd6+ Qxd6 13. Qxa8** when the queen will safely escape. **3) 13. Nge4!!** Is this hard? Very! But it's instructive. Note how, now, White's

queen gets out: **13. ... Nxe4** Or **13. ... 0-0 14. Nxf6+ gxf6 15. Nd5** and Black's queen has no way to save the knight (since ... Qc7-d7 allows Ne4xf6+). **14. Nd5 Qd7 15. Nb6!** The queen escapes. **4) 20. ... Nf4! 21. g3** Both captures fail: **21. Qxf4 Qd1+ 22. Re1 Qxe1** mate; **21. Rxf4 Qd1+ 22. Qe1 Qxe1** mate. **21. ... Bd6! White resigned**, as any queen move gives up control of the e-file, allowing ... Qg4-d1 with mate to follow. (Wayte - Williams, England, 1835) **5) 18. ...**

Bb4+! 19. Kf1 More pressing is **19. Kd1 Re8 20. Qg4 Bxd3**, when Black is winning, too. **19. ... Re8!** An X-Ray of the queen and mate on e1. (Krejci - Kravtsiv, Katowice, 2010) **6) 19. ... Bxd3+** On the spot, **White resigned**, due to **20. cxd3 Qxd3+ 21. Qe2 Qxe2+ 22. Kg1 Qe1** mate. (Lubbe - Geske, Playchess.com, 2011) **Bonus** **11. ... Be7?** **12. Nxb5! Qd7 13. Nxa7! Nxa7 14. d3** when White's queen can come to f3, or, if Black's knight returns to c6, to a4! (analysis)

FRIED LIVER: PINS + CHASES

In the Fried Liver, White is down a piece, but Black's king is pinned. This week's puzzles feature three "king hunts" (1-3) and three puzzles

making use of these pins (4-6).

This week's **example** is a typical "king hunt" position you'll see in the main line of the Fried Liver. Black's last move was 10. ... Kd6, trying to get out of the pin coming on the e-file. Now, White plays **11. Bg5!**, when the "logic" of White's play is becoming clear: if Black breaks your pin, then find a new one. **11. ... h6 12. Bh4 g5 13. Bg3** Another pin! **13. ... Bg7 14. dxe5+ Ke6 15. Ne4 Nf5 16. Rad1** As a **bonus**, what

would you do if Black captured your e-pawn with **16. ... Bxe5?**



1.

WHITE TO PLAY



2.

WHITE TO PLAY



3.

WHITE TO PLAY



4.

WHITE TO PLAY



5.

WHITE TO PLAY



6.

WHITE TO PLAY



SOLUTIONS

1) 25. Qb3+ Ka7 Or 25. ... Kc7
26. Qxb7 mate. **26. Qxb7** mate.
(Zhigalko – Agdestein, Doha (Blitz),
2023) *Note: other exercises are all
analysis positions from this game.*
2) 17. Bxe5+ We always want to
find opportunities to draw the king
further into the center! **17. ... Kxe5**
18. Rfe1+ Kd6 19. Qg3 would be
mate. Instead, 19. Ne4+ is the first
check you might see, but it allows
the king to retreat to safety, e.g.:

19. ... Kc7 20. Qg3+ Nf4! With no
pin, this is a new resource for Black.
3) 14. Na4+ Kb4 Or 14. ... Kxc4
15. Qb3 mate. **15. Qa3+ Ka5 16. Bd2+**
Nc3 Or 16. ... Nb4 17. Qxb4 mate.
17. b4 And that's mate! **4) 16. Re1+**
Kf7 17. Qf3+! Ke8 Alternatively,
17. ... Kg8 18. Bxe7 Bxe7 19. Bxd5+
is nice. **18. Bb5+!** Winning the queen!
5) 18. Qh3+ Kc7 It is counterintuitive
to let the king here, but there's no
way back to the "foxhole" after ...
19. Bf4+ Kb6 20. Re6+ Nc6 21. Bxc6

6) 13. dxe5+ Kd7 The alternatives hang the
bishop: 13. ... Kc7 14. Bxe6; 13. ...
Kc5 14. Bxe6. **14. bxc3!** This is a very
clever move. After **14. ... Bxc4**
15. Rad1+ Bd5 We see the power of
the c3-pawn. **16. c4!** If White had
played 14. Qxc3, there would be
no c3-c4 move here. **Bonus)** After
this move, it's hard to go wrong for
White here. I like **17. Bxe5 Kxe5**
18. Rfe1 using all of our pieces!

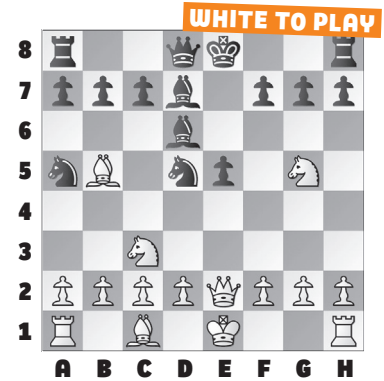
COVERING ALL THE BASES

The downside to playing aggressive openings is our pieces are not always safe. We have to keep an eye out for our own hanging pieces.

In some of these exercises, White is ready to attack. In others, the “obvious” move is refuted.

In our **example**, White must not get greedy by capturing the d5-knight, as White’s own knight hangs on g5. Instead, White rids the possibility of a fork with ... c7-c6 by playing **9. Bxd7+!**. Note that 9. Nxd5 does not win a piece after either 9. ... Qxg5 or 9. ... Bxb5 10. Qxb5+ c6. Now **9. ... Qxd7 10. Nxd5** wins a piece as the queen does not hit the

hanging g5-knight. As a **bonus**, can you refute **9. ... Kxd7?**



1. WHITE TO PLAY

2. WHITE TO PLAY

3. WHITE TO PLAY

4. WHITE TO PLAY

5. WHITE TO PLAY

6. WHITE TO PLAY

SOLUTIONS

1) 8. Bf3! Qxg5 Black wins the piece, but with **9. Bxc6+** White gets it right back... **9. ... Bd7 10. Bxa8** With interest! (Oleg946 – Vahe_Dan, lichess.org, 2023) **2) 10. Qxb7!** We’ve seen capturing the “poison pawn” on b7 get White into trouble before, but not here. **10. ... Ne7** is best. **11. Qb5+ Qd7 12. Qxe5** White’s up three pawns and about to castle. (bluft85 – mohammad-a-sh, lichess.org, 2023) **3) 11. Nxf7!** We should

always be alert for thematic tactics. **11. ... Kxf7 12. Qf3+ Ke6 13. Re1+ Ne5 14. Bf4!** Return of the pins! **14. ... Bf6 15. c3** White is winning. (NicholasElliott – Enjoy_Chess_88, lichess.org, 2023) **4) 14. ... Bc8!** Black uses the open file to win the bishop. (boppintothebeat – Blindbandit99, lichess.org, 2023) **5) 16. ... Qe6!** Black had to stop both the threats of Qg4-d7 and Bc1-g5. Instead, after 16. ... Bc6?? Black stopped mate, but not the

pin. After 17. Bg5, Black resigned. (ohmydomdom – Ahmadraihan15, lichess.org, 2023) **6) 12. Ndf3!** White reveals the threat on the e3-knight while also defending the hanging g5-knight! **12. ... Bf4** and after **13. Bxe3 Nxe3 14. Qd3 Bxg5 15. Nxc5 Qxg5 16. Rxe3+** White is winning. (emiliooo – Sunilkapoor, lichess.org, 2023) **Bonus) 10. Qg4+ Kc6** (or **10. ... Ke8 11. Nxd5** winning) **11. Qa4+** with mate to follow. (A0square – ashu_1992, lichess.org, 2023)



Beat the Scandi!

BY JOHN HARTMANN

IN PREPARING OUR 1. e4 repertoire for improving players, it's important to know what Black might play against our king's pawn push. Using the Lichess database as a reference, what are the most popular responses to 1. e4 from players rated 400-2000 in bullet, blitz, and standard online games?

It won't surprise you to learn that 1. ... e5 is most frequent, followed by 1. ... c5. What is in third place? It's 1. ... d5 — the Scandinavian Defense!

Perhaps due to the cheerful promotion of the opening by chess streamer (and one of the nicest people in chess) IM John Bartholomew, the "Scandi" is seen slightly more often than the French or Caro-Kann. Because it is so popular online, and because our response to the Sicilian (2. c3!) will require two articles, I thought it was a good idea to discuss the Scandinavian first.

Pawn structures often determine strategy. In the Scandinavian, Black will generally play for a "small center" with pawns on c6 and e6, working to keep White's d4-pawn from advancing.



In contrast to the French Defense, Black's light-squared bishop usually gets outside of the pawn chain by landing on f5 or g4, and despite lacking space, Black has a solid position with easy development. They can try various pawn breaks (... b7-b5, ... c6-c5, or ... e6-e5) to free their pieces depending on White's setup.

White often has a space advantage and can develop quickly by attacking the exposed black queen. The c7-square can be a target for a c3-knight to fork the king and rook. White has a lot of freedom in piece placement, and should generally try to keep the space advantage while avoiding excessive piece trades, which tend to help the side with less space.

Let's take a look at some specific variations.

2. ... Nf6

1. e4 d5 2. exd5 Nf6

Now 3. d4 Bg4!? is tricky, so we'll just avoid it with our own tricky...

3. Bb5+!?

With this move we try force Black to put pieces on bad squares and slow down their development.

3. ... Nbd7

If Black plays 3. ... Bd7 we retreat the bishop with 4. Be2! Nxd5 5. d4 and play for development and space, with c2-c4 coming.

After 3. ... c6 we grab a pawn with 4. dxc6 bxc6 5. Be2 and develop normally.

4. d4 a6

The alternative 4. ... Nxd5 5. Nf3 c6 6. Be2 is similar.

5. Be2 Nxd5 6. c4 N5f6 7. Nf3

White has space and easy development.

3. ... Qa5

1. e4 d5 2. exd5 Qxd5 3. Nc3 Qa5

Pinning the knight, but leaving the queen on an unstable square.

4. d4

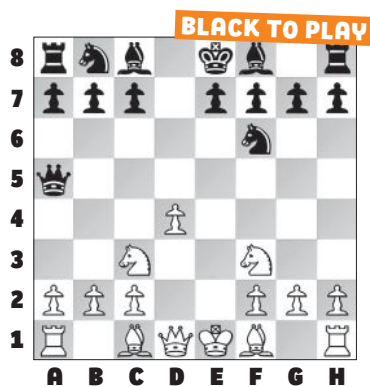
Here the exciting gambit 4. b4!?, popularized by IM Eric Rosen, can also be played, but it's not quite correct. There is analysis in the CLO Lichess study if you are interested, but you might as well just watch Rosen's videos on YouTube and learn from him!

4. ... Nf6

Other moves: (a) 4. ... Nc6 allows the pin with 5. Bb5 Bd7 6. Bd2! and if 6. ... Nf6?? 7. Nd5!. (b) After the ancient 4. ... e5 we continue developing with 5. Nf3 exd4

(5. ... Bb4 6. Bd2) 6. Qxd4 and better development. (c) 4. ... c6 is a way to quickly retreat the queen. It will tend to get to the kinds of lines discussed below.

5. Nf3



5. ... Bf5

This is the most natural square for the bishop. There are alternatives, of course!

(a) The move 5. ... Bg4 is played half the time in this position according to the database, but the bishop doesn't really belong here. One rule of thumb in the Scandinavian is that we should almost always meet this move with 6. h3! when Black does not have a happy choice:

(a1) 6. ... Bh5 7. g4 Bg6 8. Ne5 and the knight can either take on g6, or hop to c4 and attack the queen.

(a2) Not 6. ... Qh5?? 7. hxg4 Qxh1 8. Ne2! and the queen is trapped and soon caught after Ne2-g3!

(a3) After 6. ... Bxf3 7. Qxf3 c6 8. Bd2 and White castles queenside with a good game. The bishops will be powerful in this semi-open position.

(b) You will see 5. ... c6 often in online blitz. We play our usual 6. Bc4 when Black has a number of choices, including 6. ... Bg4 7. h3!. After 6. ... e6 and 6. ... Bf5 we can transpose to our main lines.

(c) Here 5. ... Nc6?! blocks the c7-

pawn and limits the queen. White should play the typical 6. Bd2 with advantage, ready to play Nc3-b5.

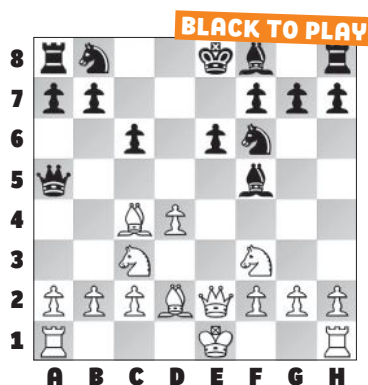
After 5. ... Bf5, White should develop normally with the bishop actively placed on c4.

6. Bc4 e6 7. Bd2 c6

This gives the queen an escape route, and can be played at various moments in the move order.

Instead John Bartholomew prefers the direct 7. ... Bb4, when again I recommend 8. Qe2 (or 8. a3 Bxc3 9. Bxc3 Qb6 10. Qe2) 8. ... 0-0 (8. ... Bxc2? 9. d5!) 9. a3 Nc6 (9. ... Bxc3 10. Bxc3 is similar to lines below) 10. 0-0 Bxc3 11. Bxc3 Qb6 with a complex game.

8. Qe2!



A sharp move, but only one option. White can also try (a) 8. Nd5?! Qd8 9. Nxf6+ Qxf6, which takes some of the tension out of the position. (b) 8. Ne4 reroutes the knight to the kingside after 8. ... Qd8 9. Ng3. (c) 8. 0-0 is tame but decent.

8. ... Bb4

We have reached a key position. White has more space, but Black's pieces are actively placed, and the pawns on c6 and e6 restrain White's advances. White has options to castle kingside or queenside, and can try to win the bishop pair with a2-a3. Expansion

on the kingside with Nf3-e5 followed by g2-g4 and h2-h4 is possible, and White is looking for the d4-d5 break when tactics (and the e-file pin) allow it. For their part, Black will complete development and then look for pawn breaks, and they can choose which side to castle as well.

What else can Black play?

(a) We see one argument for 8. Qe2 if Black gets greedy. After 8. ... Bxc2? 9. d5! leads to a huge attack for White.

(b) After 8. ... Qc7 9. Ne5 Bd6 we see the idea behind Nf3-e5. White plays 10. g4! Bxe5 11. gxf5 and the queen, staying on the e-file, prevents ... e6xf5. Note that this does not work after 9. ... Nbd7, when White should just castle queenside.

(c) Too slow are 8. ... Nbd7?! and 8. ... Be7?!. Both allow 9. d5!, ripping open the center.

9. a3

Trying to win the bishop pair. Here 9. 0-0 can transpose, while 9. 0-0-0 is outside our recommendation but also possible.

9. ... Nbd7

This is most often played according to the Lichess database. The bishop is safe due to the pin on the a3-pawn.

About a quarter of the time Black plays 9. ... Bxc3 10. Bxc3 Qc7 when White can play 11. Ne5 (11. Nh4!?, 11. 0-0, 11. 0-0-0) with the typical ideas of g2-g4, h2-h4, and kingside expansion.

After 9. ... 0-0 White can castle queenside and begin an attack, or play more simply with kingside castling.

10. 0-0

White has a choice as to which side to castle. I prefer kingside,

which gives a quieter game, but leaves White with an advantage. Both this and the sharper **10. 0-0-0** are analyzed in the Lichess study!

3. ... Qd6

1. e4 d5 2. exd5 Qxd5 3. Nc3 Qd6
This has become popular recently. The queen may be safer here than on a5, but because it is less active White can develop easily. We will follow our plan from 3. ... Qa5.

4. d4 Nf6 5. Nf3

Black has a very flexible position with many options.

5. ... a6

This stops Nc3-b5 tricks, and prepares ... b7-b5.

Here (a) **5. ... Bg4** is also met with 6. h3! Bh5 7. g4 Bg6 and now we castle with 8. Bg2! Nc6 9. 0-0.

The main move on the master level is (b) **5. ... c6**. White gets a

good position by attacking the queen with 6. Ne5 Nbd7 7. Nc4 Qc7 8. Qf3 with Bc1-f4 to follow.

(c) Both **5. ... g6** and **5. ... Nc6** allow 6. Nb5 with good activity.

6. Bd3!?

Here 6. g3 makes a lot of sense, followed by Bc1-f4, but we don't usually fianchetto our f1-bishop!

6. ... Bg4

If 6. ... b5 7. a4, while after 6. ... g6 7. Be3 Bg7 8. 0-0 Bg4 (8. ... Nc6 9. Re1!? 0-0 10. Ne4 Nxe4 11. Bxe4) 9. h3 White has a good position.

7. h3

Following our standard plan when the bishop is on g4.

7. ... Bh5

Or 7. ... Bxf3 8. Qxf3 Nc6 9. Be3.

8. 0-0 Nc6 9. Ne4

White is doing well.

3. ... Qd8 / 3. ... Qe6

1. e4 d5 2. exd5 Qxd5 3. Nc3 Qd8
Popular but very passive, allowing White to develop as they please.

Even worse is **3. ... Qe6+** when we are happy to give up a pawn to attack: 4. Be2 Qg6 5. Nf3! Qxg2 6. Rg1 Qh3 7. d4 leaves White with fantastic development.

4. d4 Nf6 5. Nf3 Bg4

Other ideas: 5. ... e6 locks in the light-squared bishop and leaves White better, while 5. ... Nc6 allows 6. Bb5 Bd7 7. 0-0.

6. h3! Bxf3 7. Qxf3 c6 8. Be3

White has a good position. ♠

Visit new.uschess.org/clk-opening-project for our Lichess studies, puzzle sheets, and videos!

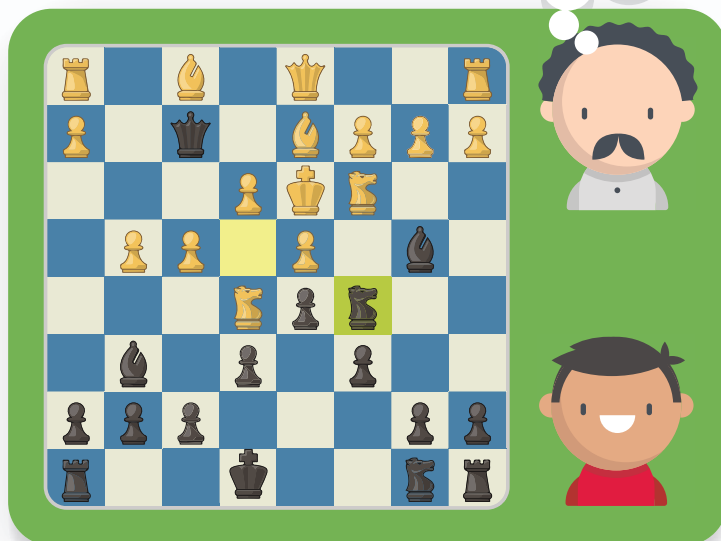


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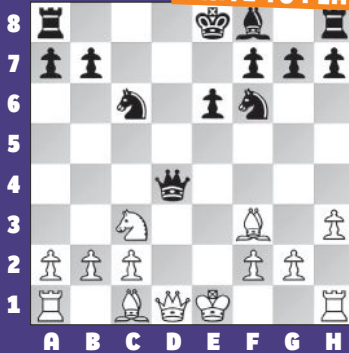
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1.

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2.

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4.

WHITE TO PLAY



5.

WHITE TO PLAY



6.

WHITE TO PLAY



7.

WHITE TO PLAY



8.

WHITE TO PLAY



9.

BLACK TO PLAY



10.

WHITE TO PLAY



THE SCANDINAVIAN DEFENSE.

It's one of the most popular responses to 1. e4 in rapid play and online chess. And we've armed you with some opening ideas and analysis on the previous pages.

With Black's queen out in the open so early in the game, White sometimes has ways to earn a quick victory through tactics, and you will see some of those typical themes in these puzzles. But Black's position is also active, and their creative possibilities should not be overlooked.

Try your hand at these positions, all of which come out of the "Scandi." The answers are on page 23.

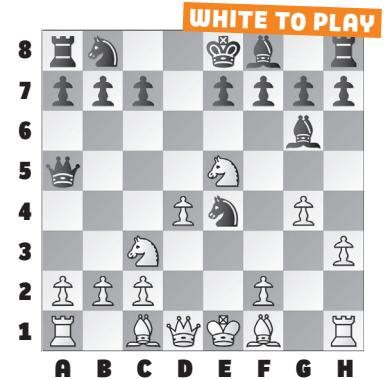
KING SAFETY IN THE SCANDI

This week's Tactics Tuesday begins our exploration of the Scandinavian Defense. By moving the d-pawn on, Black is opened up to tactics on the

a4-e8 diagonal, including well-timed queen and bishop checks when Black's king is uncastled and their army unable to block.

In our **example**, Black has pinned White's knight on c3, but neglected their own development. Play continued **9. Qf3 Nxc3 10. Qxb7 Qd5** Now, White makes use of the weakened a4-d8 diagonal. **11. Bb5+!** with the point that Black's king is now in danger, such that **11. ... Qxb5??** loses instantly to **12. Qc8**

mate. As a **bonus**, how should White continue after **11. ... Kd8?!**



1. WHITE TO PLAY

2. WHITE TO PLAY

3. WHITE TO PLAY

4. WHITE TO PLAY

5. WHITE TO PLAY

6. WHITE TO PLAY

SOLUTIONS

1) 10. d5 Nb4 Anything else is passive: 10. ... Nb8 11. Qb3 Qc8 12. Nd4. **11. Qa4+** winning a knight. (Stepovaia – Stjashkina, Serpukhov, 2008) **2) 15. g4!** Black's d7-knight is pinned, and this breaks the pin on f3. **15. ... Bg6 16. Ne5** There is no stopping White from Bg5xf6 followed by winning the piece on d7. (Lakatos – Hajdu, Barcza, 2015) **3) 15. f3** Not 15. Bb5+ Bd7 16. Bxd7+ Qxd7, hence the deflection. **15. ...**

Qg6 16. Bb5+ forced resignation, as **16. ... Bd7** Or 16. ... Kd8 17. Qxb6+ Kc8 18. Qc7 mate. **17. Bxd7+ Kxd7 18. Rxd5+** starts a fatal attack. (Saric – Kovacevic, Stari Mikanovci, 2009) **4) 13. Nxd5!** A familiar pattern: there are no pieces that can block Bb3-a4. **13. ... cxd5 14. Nc3** The d5-pawn is a goner: after **14. ... e6? 15. Ba4, Black resigned.** (Libersan – Hajjiyev, Montreal, 2010) **5) 12. Bb5+!** Black intended to meet 12. Nxd5 with 12. ... Qxd5. So, White

plays “interference.” **12. ... Kd8** Or 12. ... Ke7 13. Nxd5+ exd5 14. Qxd5 winning. **13. Qxf7** White threatens mate on d7. **13. ... Nc5 14. Nxd5 exd5** Or 14. ... Qxb5 15. Bg5+ winning. **15. Bg5+** And it's over. (De Sa – Gomes, Foz do Iguacu, 2012) **6) 14. dxc7!** Stunning. **14. ... Qxb5 15. Bxb5+ Kf8 16. Rd8+** promotes. (Dimitrov – Dimov, Varna, 2014) **Bonus) 12. Bc6! Qxd4 13. Be3 Qxe5 14. Qxa8** wins. (Magnucka – Kozłowska, Poland, 2014)

BODEN'S MATE IN THE SCANDI

A common theme in the Scandinavian defense is for Black to castle queenside after pushing the c-pawn. This can be enough to

set up a mating pattern you should recognize (see puzzles 1 and 2).

In this **example**, White's king is exposed and White needs to open lines against Black's king urgently. White's only move is **32. Rxc6+** when **32. ... bxc6** loses, but it's subtle. Rb1-b8 would be mate if not for the king's d7-square, so: **33. Qf5+! Rd7 34. Rb8** mate sets up a familiar pattern!

If Black played 32. ... Kd7, then 33. Qf5+ is the fastest mate. After

33. ... Ke8 34. Qe6+ Ne7, as a **bonus**, how does White win in style?



1. WHITE TO PLAY

2. WHITE TO PLAY

3. WHITE TO PLAY

4. WHITE TO PLAY

5. WHITE TO PLAY

6. WHITE TO PLAY

SOLUTIONS

1) 12. Ba6 mate. Black's ... b7-b6 was a mistake even though the light-squared bishop is pinned. (Soleymani – Tendulkar, Tornelo, 2021) **2) 17. Qxc6+** A classic Boden's mate! (Degenhardt – Berkemer, Stauffer, 2005) **3) 14. Nxc6!** The same theme of sacrificing on c6 shows up even when mate is not forced. White will get the bishop on the appropriate h2-b8 diagonal with check. **14. ... bxc6 15. Qa6+**

Kb8 16. Bf4+ e5 17. dxe5 winning. (Hugentobler – Arbinger, Zuerich, 2007) **4) 23. Rxc6+ Qxc6** Black has to part with the queen, as 23. ... bxc6 24. Qa6+ Qb7 25. Rxc6+ Kd7 26. Qxb7+ is game over. **24. Rxc6+ bxc6 25. Qa6+** White should be winning. (Swiatloch – Krasnodebska, Chorzow, 2010) **5) 24. Bd6+** First, White forces Black's king to c8. **24. ... Kc8 25. Qxc6+** Next, we open the b-file. **25. ... bxc6 26. Rb8+** This would be mate if not for the

knight on d7, but... **26. ... Nxb8 27. Rc7** mate. (Leturc – Sellier, Cholet, 2011, variation with h3 and Rag8) **6) 17. Rxc6+** The pawn is pinned, of course! **17. ... Kb8 18. Bf4+ Ka8 19. Rc7!!** The knight is pinned, since Qf3xb7 mates. **19. ... bxa6 20. Rxe7** gives White an edge. (Sorcinelli – Finocchiaro, Torino, 2011) **Bonus) 35. Qxe7+!! Kxe7 36. Rxb7+ Rd7 37. Bd6+ Ke8 38. Rc8+ Qd8 39. Rxd8+ Rxd8 40. Re7** mate. (Hamdouchi – Stefanova, Djerba, 1998)

d4-d5 IN THE SCANDINAVIAN

In the Scandinavian, play begins with **1. e4 d5 2. exd5 Qxd5 3. Nc3** when most popular is **3. ... Qa5**. Now, one main line goes **4. d4 c6 5.**

Bc4 Nf6 6. Qe2 Bf5 7. Bd2 e6 8. Nf3 Nbd7 9. d5! (see **diagram**).

Black's best move is 9. ... cxd5, but this game (Juhasz – Paparizou, Rio Achaea, 2018) illustrates why the d4-d5 break is so powerful against an uncastled king. Play continued **9. ... Nc5 10. Nd4 cxd5 11. Bb5+ Kd8** when White won with the thematic **12. Nxd5!** and Black's queen is trapped on the doomed a5-square.

This week's exercises all have to do with the d4-d5 break and

subsequent opening of the center against Black's uncastled king.



1. WHITE TO PLAY

2. WHITE TO PLAY

3. WHITE TO PLAY

4. WHITE TO PLAY

5. WHITE TO PLAY

6. WHITE TO PLAY

SOLUTIONS

1) 15. d5! Open up! **15. ... cxd5** Or 15. ... c5 16. Rhe1 when White threatens Qe6-e8+ and d5-d6 followed by Nc3-d5. 16. ... Kc8 17. d6 with a crushing attack. **16. Rxd5 Qc7 17. Rhd1** Black can resign. (Saathoff – Artamonov, Bayern, 1998, variation) **2) 17. Rxd7 Rxd7 18. Rd1** is an idea that goes back to a famous Paul Morphy game. (Raahls – Krause, Germany, 2002) **3) 13. Bb5** The d-file is open, so this is a strong way to

coordinate. **13. ... Rd8** A number of moves win, but the idea is to pile on pressure against the pinned knight. **14. Bc3 Qg6** loses, for instance, to **15. Rxd7 Rxd7 16. Bxd7+ Kxd7 17. Ne5+.** (Raahls – Krause, Germany, 2002) **4) 14. Qc4 Qxb2 15. Qxc6+ Ke7** Or 15. ... Kd8 which allows White to capture the rook with check 16. Qxa8+ Kd7 and then save the rook with 17. 0-0. **16. Rc1** Black cannot save the bishop and the rook both. (Haria – Thomas, Glasgow, 2014)

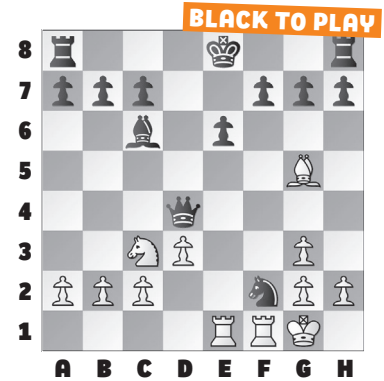
5) 18. Ba5+! Bc7 19. Rxd7+ Or even 19. Rd6!? Qb5 20. Qxf6+ Kc8 21. Qxh8+. **19. ... Qxd7 20. Qxf6+** Instead, your author played 20. Rd1? and managed to lose. **20. ... Kc8 21. Qxh8+** winning. (Lang – Wahl, Las Vegas, 2021) **6) 14. Rhe1 Qd8 15. g4!** For once, the d-pawn push isn't best as 15. d5!? Nc5 means Black can push us back. **15. ... Nf8 16. Qc4 Kd7** And if Black tries to escape, then **17. d5!** works better now. (Saathoff – Artamonov, Bayern, 1998, variation)

Bartholomew (aka Fins) has earned a reputation as a bit of a Scandi Man, not only surviving but often thriving with kingside offensives against over-ambitious opponents who underestimate the opening's dynamic potential and flexibility.

Here are a number of his nicer mates in his favorite opening, as a reminder to always check your king safety even if your opponent plays 1. ... d5 against your king's pawn.

This week's **example** is the

trickiest of the bunch. As a **bonus**, can you find Black's mate?!





The Alapin

BY JOHN HARTMANN

WHAT TO PLAY against the Sicilian is a difficult question for most players.

There are so many variations, and deciding which to choose can give you a real headache!

One of the goals of our *Chess Life Kids* repertoire is to keep things simple. We want to get to positions where we know the ideas as well as, or better than, our opponents, and we want to avoid memory contests. Of course we want to get good positions as well, but the main goal is to get active games where we can play for a win.

This is why we are recommending the Alapin variation (1. e4 c5 2. c3) against the Sicilian. With 2. c3, White tries to build a big center with 3. d4. Because the variation is not forcing, Black has many ways to continue on the second move, but two are played most often: 2. ... d5 and 2. ... Nf6. Both try to stop White from having that big center.

Both of these moves can also lead to isolated queen's pawn (IQP) positions, and that's another focus of our repertoire. IQPs generally reward knowledge of how to play IQPs, and not specific, move-by-

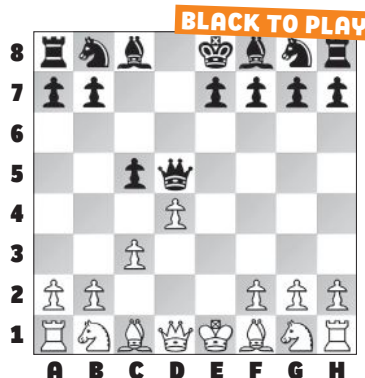
move memorization. The ideas we learn playing IQPs in the Alapin can be applied in many situations, including our recommended lines against the French and Caro-Kann. And Sicilian players may not be as well prepared for the Alapin as they are for the Dragon or Najdorf!

We won't explain all those IQP ideas here, but we will in videos and Lichess studies on the *uschess.org* website. Head to [new.uschess.org/clk-opening-project](https://www.uschess.org/clk-opening-project) for more, including all the old analysis you may have missed!

Let's dig in to the Alapin!

2. ... d5

1. e4 c5 2. c3 d5 3. exd5 Qxd5 4. d4



4. ... e6

Stronger players prefer this move order as it avoids some lines with d4xc5, which can be troubling if Black has not played ... e7-e6, allowing recapture with the bishop. This is true even when White has to recapture with the king after ... Qd5xd1+ and Ke1xd1. With the queens off, the king is safe in the center.

There are many paths forward for Black. Here are the most important ones.

- (a) 4. ... Nf6 5. Nf3 and now (a1) 5. ... Bg4 6. Be2 (6. dxc5!?) 6. ... e6 7. Be3 cxd4 8. cxd4 gives us our standard IQP position.
- (a2) 5. ... Bf5 6. Be2 (6. dxc5!?) 6. ... e6 7. 0-0 is nothing to worry about.

(a3) 5. ... e6 6. Be2 transposes to the main line.

(b) Black can capture on d4 right away with 4. ... cxd4 5. cxd4 Nc6 6. Nf3 (note that this position can also come from 2. ... Nc6) 6. ... Bg4 (6. ... e5 7. Nc3 transposes to **line c** below) and now:

(b1) 7. Be2 has a little trap. If Black “wins a pawn” with 7. ... Bxf3 8. Bxf3 Qxd4? White wins a queen with 9. Bxc6+!. Two better options for Black are 7. ... e6 8. 0-0 Nf6 9. Nc3 and 7. ... Nf6 8. Nc3 Qd8? (stronger is 8. ... Qa5 9. Qb3 Bxf3 10. Bxf3 Nxd4 11. Qxb7 Nxf3+ 12. Qxf3 Rc8 13. 0-0) 9. d5! Bxf3 10. Bxf3 Ne5 11. Bf4 Nxf3+ 12. Qxf3 with a great position for White.

(b2) 7. Nc3 is another path. If Black plays 7. ... Bxf3 8. gxf3! Qxd4 9. Qxd4 Nxd4 10. Nb5 is strong for White. The black knight is more likely to be trapped on a1 than the white knight on a8, as White is ahead in development.

(c) 4. ... Nc6 5. Nf3 and now (c1) Here 5. ... Bf5 is tricky, clearing the way for possible

queenside castling. We continue as normal: 6. Be2 cxd4 7. cxd4 and here 7. ... Bxb1 8. Rxb1 has a trap for Black.

If they grab the pawn with 8. ... Qxa2 9. 0-0 then 9. ... Qxb1?? is actually a mistake due to 10. Qb3! when Be2-d3 is threatened. If 10. ... Qf5 11. d5 the knight has no good squares, and the black king is very unsafe!

After the better 7. ... e6 8. Nc3 Bb4 9. 0-0 we reach a decent IQP for White.

(c2) After 5. ... cxd4 6. cxd4 e5 (6. ... Bg4 transposes to **line b**) 7. Nc3 Bb4 8. Bd2 Bxc3 9. Bxc3 e4 10. Ne5 Nxe5 11. dxe5 White has the two bishops and a tiny edge.

(c3) Black can try to pin with 5. ... Bg4 when we play our usual 6. Be2 (6. dxc5!? tries to take advantage of the f8-bishop being locked in, but this takes us away from our standard IQP positions) 6. ... e6 (6. ... cxd4 transposes to **line b**) 7. 0-0 Nf6 and we head for our standard IQP with 8. Be3 (we can also insert 8. h3 Bh5) 8. ... cxd4 9. cxd4 Be7 10. Nc3 Qd6! with a complicated game.

(d) Black can fianchetto with 4. ... g6 5. Nf3 (with the queen on d5, 5. Na3 is a consideration, heading to b5 and potentially c7. Here the play is equal after 5. ... Bg7 6. Nb5 Na6 7. Be3) 5. ... Bg7 6. Be2 cxd4 7. cxd4 and we have reached an IQP where Black has fianchettoed their bishop. Play might continue 7. ... Nf6 8. Nc3 Qd6 9. 0-0 0-0 10. Qb3!? with reasonable chances for both sides.

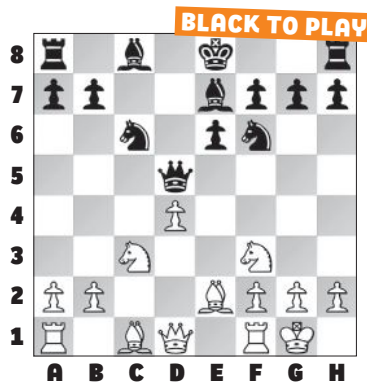
(e) 4. ... e5?! is a bit of a mistake after 5. dxe5 Qxd1+ (if 5. ... Qxe5+ 6. Be2 and White will develop and attack the queen) 6. Kxd1 Nc6 7. Nf3.

5. Nf3 Nf6 6. Be2 Nc6

Here 6. ... Be7 7. 0-0 Nc6 allows

White some more alternatives: (a) 8. Be3 cxd4 9. cxd4 0-0 10. Nc3 is a typical IQP. (b) 8. dxc5!? Bxc5 9. b4 is a bit better for White. (c) 8. c4 changes the structure. White is perhaps a bit better after 8. ... Qd8 9. dxc5 Qxd1 10. Bxd1! Bxc5 11. Nc3.

7. 0-0 cxd4 8. cxd4 Be7 9. Nc3



9. ... Qd6!

While this looks like it invites White to attack the queen, this is the strongest move. It defends the e5-square, and White now struggles a bit for a good plan.

The safer-looking 9. ... Qd8 is played two-thirds of the time, but this move is passive. White can get a good position with 10. Be3 0-0 11. Ne5 White has more space and slightly better pieces. If 11. ... Nxe5?! (alternatives include 11. ... Nb4 12. Bf3 Nbd5 and 11. ... Bd7 12. Rc1) 12. dxe5 Nd5 13. Nxd5 exd5 14. f4 and now Black has the isolated d-pawn.

Note that 9. ... Qa5 lacks a point in this position, as there is no pin on the c3-knight.

10. Nb5

Attacking the queen. We can also play 10. Be3 0-0 with a typical IQP, while 10. a3 may be a useful waiting move, stopping ... Nc6-b4 and looking to expand on the queenside with b2-b4.

10. ... Qd8

You may think the queen moving twice is a waste of time for Black, but it's not. White's idea is Nc3-b5 followed by Bc1-f4, attacking the c7 square, but as Black has ... Nf6-d5, there's never a chance to play Nb5-c7+ forking the king and rook. So the knight will have to move back from b5 to c3 to get back into the game — especially after a useful ... a7-a6 for Black — meaning that both sides lose tempi in this position!

11. Bf4

Another idea is 11. Re1 0-0 12. Ne5 Nd5 (not 12. ... Nxe5?! 13. dxe5 Nd5 14. Bd3 stirring up trouble on the kingside) 13. Bf3 Bd7 14. Bxd5 exd5 15. Nc3 with equality.

11. ... Nd5 12. Bg3 0-0

The position is equal.

2. ... Nf6

1. e4 c5 2. c3 Nf6 3. e5 Nd5 4. d4 cxd4

Black can hold off on capturing on d4 with:

(a) 4. ... e6 5. Nf3 cxd4 6. cxd4 d6 7. Bc4 Be7 8. 0-0 0-0 9. Qe2! (9. Nc3?! allows Black to trade pieces, which is good when you have a cramped position) and White will complete development with a good position due to the extra space. Black has options here:

(a1) 9. ... Nc6 10. Nc3 Nxc3 11. bxc3 dxe5 (11. ... d5? 12. Bd3 with initiative) 12. dxe5 Qa5! (12. ... b6?! 13. Qe4 Bb7 14. Bd3 g6 15. Bh6 with initiative) 13. Bd3 (13. Qe4 Qa4! pins the bishop) 13. ... Rd8 14. Bd2 with complex play.

(a2) 9. ... b6 10. Rd1 (one of the points of Qd1-e2 is to put the rook here) 10. ... Bb7 11. Bxd5 Bxd5 12. Nc3 with a slight advantage for White.

(a3) 9. ... Bd7 10. Nc3 Nxc3 11. bxc3 Bc6 12. exd6 Bxd6 13. Ne5 is fine for White.

(b) Black can also play **4. ... d6** when 5. Nf3 cxd4 6. Bc4 (6. cxd4 Nc6 7. Bc4 Nb6 8. Bb3 dxe5 9. d5 transposes to a well-known pawn sacrifice with lots of theory) 6. ... Nb6 7. Bb3 Nc6 8. exd6 Qxd6 9. 0-0 is our main line.

5. Nf3 Nc6

Of course (a) 5. ... dxc3?? loses a piece to 6. Qxd5, while (b) 5. ... e6 6. cxd4 d6 (6. ... b6 is another possibility) 7. Bc4 transposes to **line a, 4. ... e6**.

6. Bc4 Nb6

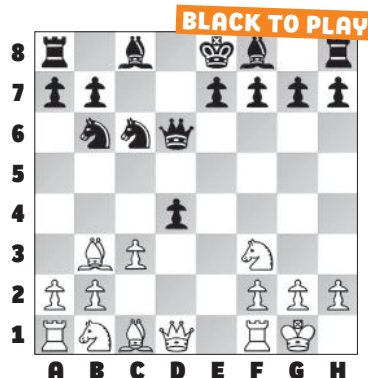
Here 6. ... e6 7. cxd4 is similar to the ... e7-e6 lines, which are relatively good for White. Play can continue 7. ... Nb6 8. Bb3 d6 9. Qe2! defending the e5-pawn and avoiding any queen trades.

7. Bb3 d5

Of course 7. ... d6 8. exd6 transposes to the main line.

Taking the pawn with 7. ... dxc3?! gives White a good game after 8. Nxc3 d6 9. 0-0 and now Black's best bet is to play 9. ... e6 (both 9. ... dxe5? and 9. ... Nxe5? 10. Nxe5! are bad) although White still has a big advantage.

8. exd6 e.p. Qxd6 9. 0-0



9. ... Be6

Almost universal in master games, but at the club / improver level, many moves are played.

(a) 9. ... Bg4 appears in a quarter of club player games on Lichess, but this is a mistake! White gets the advantage with 10. Bxf7+! Kxf7 11. Ng5+ Kg8 12. Qxg4.

(b) 9. ... e6 10. cxd4 is a good IQP.

(c) 9. ... Bf5 10. Nxd4 Nxd4 11. cxd4 e6 12. Nc3 is nice for White. It's not clear what the bishop is doing on f5.

(d) 9. ... g6! ignores the pressure on f7. White can play 10. Ng5 (10. Na3 with the idea of Na3-b5 is also an option) 10. ... e6 11. Ne4 Qd8 12. Re1 with a slight advantage due to the weakened dark squares around the black king.

(e) 9. ... dxc3 10. Nxc3 Qxd1 11. Rxd1 and White's development is compensation for the pawn, with the c7- and f7-squares being targets for tactics. A sample line is 11. ... Bg4 12. Nb5! Rc8 13.

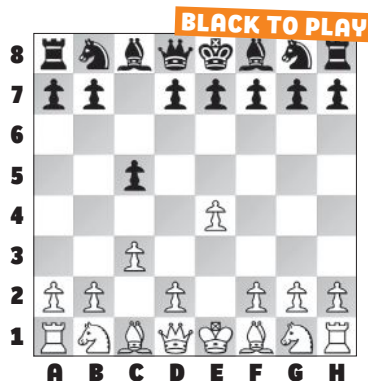
Be3, threatening to play Nb5xa7 followed by Be3xb6.

10. Bxe6 Qxe6 11. Nxd4 Nxd4 12. Qxd4 Rd8

The position is equal, but there are enough imbalances to play for a win.

MOVE TWO ALTERNATIVES

1. e4 c5 2. c3



2. ... Nc6

The Lichess database shows this as one of the most frequently played options. This may be because of transpositions, but it also might be a pre-move in blitz. There are plenty of other options to consider.

(a) 2. ... e5 resembles a king's pawn opening. Our knowledge of the Two Knights will help here. After 3. Nf3 Nc6 4. Bc4:

(a1) 4. ... Be7 5. d4 cxd4 6. cxd4 exd4 7. 0-0

(a2) 4. ... Qc7 and now 5. Ng5 Nd8 (this is why Black played 4. ... Qc7!) 6. 0-0 Be7 7. d3 with the idea of f2-f4 next.

(a3) 4. ... Nf6 5. Ng5 d5 6. exd5 Nxd5 7. Qh5 (7. Nxf7?! should be resisted, as the c3-pawn means that Nb1-c3 is not available to pressure the d5-knight) 7. ... g6 8. Qf3 Qxg5 9. Bxd5 Nd8 10. 0-0 with the initiative.

(b) 2. ... e6 3. d4 d5 (3. ... cxd4 4. cxd4 gives White that big center) 4. exd5 (4. e5 is possible if you play the Advance Variation) 4. ... Qxd5 (4. ... exd5 gives White the option to give Black an IQP) 5. Nf3 we transpose to our 2. ... d5 lines.

(c) 2. ... g6 3. d4 cxd4 4. cxd4 d5 5. e5 Bg7 6. Nc3 f6 7. Nf3 and Black is cramped.

(d) 2. ... d6 3. d4 Nf6 4. Bd3 g6 5. Nf3 Bg7 6. 0-0 Bg4 (if 6. ... 0-0 7. h3! stopping ... Bc8-g4) 7. Nbd2 cxd4 8. cxd4 Nc6 9. h3 Bxf3 10. Nxf3 is slightly better for White.

3. d4 cxd4 4. cxd4 d5

Black is in big trouble after 4. ... g6? 5. d5 Ne5?? 6. f4.

5. exd5

Also playable is 5. e5 Bf5 6. Nc3.

5. ... Qxd5 6. Nf3

And we transpose to 2. ... d5, 4. ... cxd4 lines. ♠

IQP THEMES PT. 1: Nxf7 SAC

Our aggressive Alapin repertoire aims at achieving isolated queen's pawn (IQP) positions. So, this month, we'll look at a different

IQP attacking theme each week. In these positions, **Ne5xf7** is a common idea both for attacking the king directly and for weakening it to win material, as we'll see.

In our **example** Botvinnik - Vidmar (1937), White won with: **20. Nxf7! Rxf7 21. Bxf6 Bxf6 22. Rxd5!** ... Qc6 and **23. Rc5** was decisive, though White still won after 23. Rd6.

The puzzles this week are hard. It's okay if you can't solve all of

these. The goal is to familiarize yourself with the themes and ideas!



1. WHITE TO PLAY

2. WHITE TO PLAY

3. WHITE TO PLAY

4. WHITE TO PLAY

5. WHITE TO PLAY

6. WHITE TO PLAY

SOLUTIONS

1) 19. Qe6 A satisfying forced mate! (Graf - Guliyev, Warsaw, 2005) **2) 17. Nxf7!** The e6-pawn is weak and now the d5-knight will be pinned, too. **17. ... Rxf7** Or **17. ... Kxf7** **18. Qxe6+ Kg6** **19. Bxd5** wins. **18. Qxe6** Any knight moves surrenders the f7-rook, and after **18. ... Bxd4** **19. Bxd5** White has regained the piece, but must have anticipated **19. ... Bxf2+** **20. Kh1 Qf8** Thankfully, there is no time for **20. ... Bxe1?** due to **21.**

Qxf7+ winning. **21. Rf1** and **Ra1-c1** will be decisive. (Rubinstein - Burn, Ostend, 1906) **3) 17. Nxf7! Kxf7** Black played **17. ... Qc7**, and **18. Qxe6 Rf8** **19. Nd6+** won shortly. **18. Qxe6+ Kf8** **19. Ba2!** A key switching of diagonals! (Brostrom - Stenborg, Schweden, 1967) **4) 24. d5** White threatens to capture on f6. **24. ... Ne5** The trickiest move, revealing an attack on White's queen. **25. Qxf6+** induced resignation. White is ahead an Exchange and two pawns

after: **25. ... Qxf6** **26. Bxe5 Qxe5** **27. Rxe5 Bd6** **28. Re2.** (Taimanov - Ostojic, Reykjavik, 1968) **5) 24. Nxf7** is certainly strongest, using the pin on the d5-knight! **24. ... Qxf7** **25. Qxe7** Or **25. Bxd5 Nxd5** **26. Qc8+ Kg7** (or **26. ... Qf8** **27. Re8** wins) **27. Qxa8** wins. **25. ... Nxe7** **26. Rxe7** White is ahead. (Botvinnik - Batuyev, Leningrad, 1930) **6) 15. Nxf7! Kxf7** **16. dxe6+ Kf8** **17. Bd6+ Re7** **18. exd7** **Ba5** Look familiar? See **Puzzle 1!** (Graf - Guliyev, Warsaw, 2005)

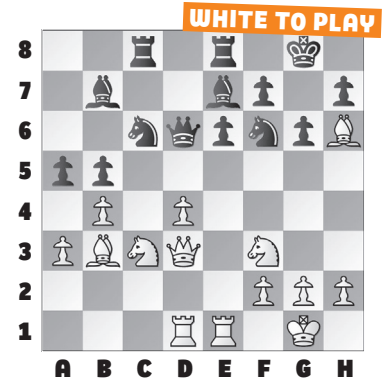
PUSHING d4-d5 WITH AN IQP

This week we continue exploring themes in **Isolated Queen's Pawn (IQP)** positions, when White often pushes d4-d5 to open the center.

In our **example**, this is the perfect time for a d4-d5 break. White's rooks are on half-open files. The light-squared bishop opens up against f7. The weakened dark-squares give White tactical chances, as well: **18. d5! exd5 19. Nxd5 Nxd5 20. Bxd5 Nd8** and White won in Olafsson – Thorhallsson, 1995, with: **21. Qd4 Bf8 22. Rxe8 Ne6 23. Rxf8+!**

In these exercises, you'll try to make d4-d5 work, or jump in after it's been played. These are hard.

The goal is to learn the themes, not solve them all on the first try.



1. WHITE TO PLAY

A B C D E F G H

2. WHITE TO PLAY

A B C D E F G H

3. WHITE TO PLAY

A B C D E F G H

4. WHITE TO PLAY

A B C D E F G H

5. WHITE TO PLAY

A B C D E F G H

6. WHITE TO PLAY

A B C D E F G H

SOLUTIONS

1) White uses the open center to conduct a swift mating attack: **22. Qd7! Ba8 23. Qh3 h5 24. g4!** and **Black resigned.** (Ribli – Wells, Szeged, 1997) **2)** **21. Nxc6!** White likes the e5-knight, but here the trade forces a d4-d5 break. **21. ... Bxc6 22. d5 Ba8** Or **22. ... Nxd5 23. Nxd5 Bxd5 24. Bxd5** wins. **23. Qe5!** White prepares Nc3-e4, using the d5-pawn as interference. **23. ... Kf8 24. Ne4! Ng8 25. Ng5** A new

mating threat, and **Black resigned.** (Suba – Barcelo, Mallorca, 2000) **3)** **25. Ne5** Note that 25. Re5 is also winning: 25. ... Qd1+ 26. Kh2 Qd6 27. g3! unpinning. **25. ... Be8 26. Re3 Qd1+ 27. Kh2 Rd4** when **28. f4!** is an improvement on the game's **28. Rg3+?!** (Gipslis – Borrer, Berlin, 1991) **4)** **23. d5!** White is going to break through on the dark squares. Alternatives: 23. ... exd5 24. Nxf6 wins material; Or 23. ... Nxd5 24. Bxd5 Bxd5 25. Rxd5 exd5 26. Nf6+

wins; Finally, 23. ... Bxd5 24. Bxd5 Nxd5 25. Rxd5 wins. **24. dxe6! f5 25. Rxd8 Rxd8 26. Rd1** winning. (Kamsky – Short, Linares, 1994) **5)** **16. d5! Nxd5** Or 16. ... exd5 17. Nxd5 Nxd5 18. Bxd5 Na5 19. Bxb7! wins material; **17. Bxd5 exd5 18. Nxd5 Bxg5 19. hxg5** winning. (Ribli – Wells, Szeged, 1997) **6)** **20. d5** Theme: lateral mobility! **20. ... exd5 21. Qb4 Qd7 22. Qh4 Kg7 23. Nd4** Now White dominates the kingside. (Browne – Ljubojevic, Tilburg, 1978)

IQP THEMES: THE ROOK LIFT!

The reason White has better attacking chances in Isolated Queen's Pawn (IQP) structures is because of their space advantage.

The rooks dominate half-open central files, and also often enter the game on the flank via impressive rook lifts!

In our **example**, White shows the power of the earlier Ra1-a3 rook lift along with the “lateral mobility” of the open third rank, uncorking the brilliant **23. Qg6!!** when White threatens to take on h7 with mate. After **23. ... Qc2**, the captures lose: **23. ... fxg6** **24. Nxg6+ hxg6** **25. Rh3** mate; or **23. ... hxg6** **24. Rh3** mate.

24. Rh3 and **Black resigned** in Rossolimo – Reissmann, 1967.



1. WHITE TO PLAY

2. WHITE TO PLAY

3. WHITE TO PLAY

4. WHITE TO PLAY

5. WHITE TO PLAY

6. WHITE TO PLAY

SOLUTIONS

1) With the rook already on g3, White has more than enough pieces in the attack to justify a queen sac: **20. Qxf7! Rxf7** **21. Nxf7+ Kh7** **22. Nf6+ Ngxf6** **23. Bd3+** with mate next move. (Karimi – Mager, Germany, 2015) **2)** White missed the winning **23. Rxc6+!** Instead, **23. Qf4?** was played, though White still won. **23. ... Kh8** Or **23. ... hxg6** **24. Qxc6+ Kh8** **25. Qh6+ Kg8** **26. Rg3+ Bg5** **27. Rxc6** mate. **24. Be6! fxe6** **25. Rg7!** and

Rg7xh7+ with **Rd3-h3+** to follow. (Nickoloff – Hebert, Toronto, 1990, analysis) **3)** White is justified in sacrificing a second piece because the threat of **Rd1-d3** guarantees he retains enough attackers. **17. Bxc7 Kxc7** **18. Qg5+ Kh8** **19. Qh6+ Kg8** **20. Ng5 Bd6** **21. Bh7+ Kh8** **22. Bf5+ Kg8** **23. Rd3!** and **Black resigned** shortly. (Ryan – Randazzo Barcelona, 2008) **4)** The changing of the ranks! **27. Re5! Qxh4** **28. Bxc6! fxc6** **29. Rxe6 Rf8** **30. Rxc6+ Kh7** **31. Re6! Rxf3** **32.**

Qxf3 Rg8 **33. Qf7+ Rg7** Or **33. ... Kh8** **34. Re7** wins. **34. Qf5+ Kh8** **35. Re8+ Rg8** **36. Qe5+ Kh7** **37. Re7+** winning. (Giorgadze – Makarichev, Vilnius, 1980) **5)** The strongest of many good rook moves was: **8. Rf3 Re6** **9. gxf7+** and **Black resigned**. (Kuzmin – Smyslov, Sotschi, 1970, fragment) **6)** White won with: **26. Nf6+** Or **26. Qf6** **28. Qh8** mate. **26. ... Bxf6** **27. Qxf6 Kxh7** **28. Rh3+** and **Black resigned**. (Nickoloff – Hebert, Toronto, 1990)

Bd3xh7+ and Nf3-g5+ followed by Qd1-h5. In every exercise today, White can play Bd3xh7+. The **question for each of today's puzzles is** whether White **should** play Bxh7+, and to figure out why it does (or does not work).

In our **example**, White erred with a mistimed Gift: **11. Bxh7+?? Kxh7 12. Ng5+ Kg8 13. Qh5** missing that Black can defend the h7-square with **13. ... Qd3!**, when they are up a piece. Instead, Black played 13.

... Nc2+?? As a **BONUS**, can you find which move wins for White here?



GREEK GIFTS AND TRAGEDIES

When Black does not play sharp against the Alapin, White can often push e4-e5 and play Bf1-d3 to prepare the **Greek Gift** with

1. WHITE TO PLAY

A B C D E F G H

2. WHITE TO PLAY

A B C D E F G H

3. WHITE TO PLAY

A B C D E F G H

4. WHITE TO PLAY

A B C D E F G H

5. WHITE TO PLAY

A B C D E F G H

6. WHITE TO PLAY

A B C D E F G H

SOLUTIONS

1) 11. Bxh7+?? is wrong. The h7-square can be protected by **11. ... Kxh7 12. Ng5+ Kg8 13. Qh5 Bf5!** (ElisabethSchni – atreusvallhalla, *Lichess.org*, 2023) **2) 17. Bxh7+??** is wrong, as the queen can cover h7 after **17. ... Kxh7 18. Ng5+ Kg8 19. Qh5 Qd3!** (uu1422 – RG_13, *Lichess.org*, 2023) **3) 11. Bxh7+!** This works! **11. ... Kxh7 12. Ng5+ Kg8** Although 12. ... Kg6 is more resistant, White's best play is: **13. Qg4 f5 14. exf6! Kxf6**

15. Nce4+! Ke7 and many moves win, including **16. Nh7. 13. Qh5 Re8 14. Qxf7+ Kh8 15. Qh5+ Kg8 16. Qh7+ Kf8 17. Qh8+** (scan-dimalo – AngieTm, *Lichess.org*, 2023) **4) 11. Bxh7+ Kxh7 12. Ng5+ Kg8** While 12. ... Kh6 is tricky, White has **13. f5!** to reintroduce discovered checks! **13. Qh5 Bxg5 14. hxg5 f5** Did you expect this? Luckily, White "closes the coffin" with: **15. g6!** (rnv30z – Neidberg, *Lichess.org*, 2023) **5) 11. Bxh7+? Kxh7 12. Ng5+ Kg6! 13. Qg4?**

Even **13. h4** is too slow, as **13. ... Kf6! 14. Ne4+ Ke7** survives. **13. ... f5 14. Qh4 Rh8!** (kuanysh_zharkinbekov – hessam_wv, *Lichess.org*, 2023) **6) 13. Bxh7+? Kxh7 14. Ng5+ Kg6 15. h4** is dangerous, but Black is up material after **15. Qg4 f5**; or **15. Qe4+ f5 16. Qh4 Rh8!** **15. ... Rh8!** as to meet **16. h5+** with **16. ... Rxh5 17. Qg4 Rxc5!** Winning. (catur1975 – sh_gr, *Lichess.org*, 2023) **BONUS) 14. Ke2!** Not **14. Kf1? Qd3+** as in the game. (Primator – ylukin1973, *Lichess.org*, 2023)



Attack the French!

BY JOHN HARTMANN

MOST FRENCH PLAYERS like positions with long pawn chains and slow, positional chess.

I should know. I'm a French player.

With this month's recommendation, we continue to use our knowledge of isolated queen's pawn positions (IQPs) to get open, attacking games where our tactical skill can shine.

As always, check the CLK Opening Project webpage — new.uschess.org/clk-opening-project — for replayable versions of this analysis in Lichess studies. You will find more detail in key positions there as well!

INITIAL POSITION

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. exd5 exd5 4. c4

This is the starting point for our variation against the French. With 4. c4, we immediately move towards an IQP where ideas matter more than specific move orders.

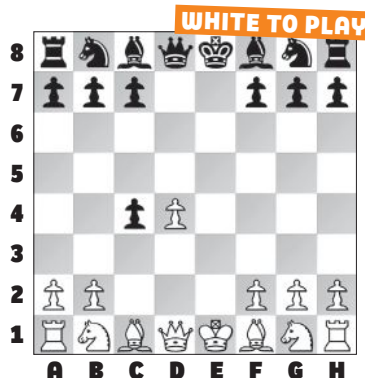
One thing to note: in contrast to many IQP positions from other openings, the e-file is completely open here. Control of open lines and files is always important, but

it's especially important for the person playing with the IQP. Here the open e-file is a signal that White should focus on attacking Black's king, often in conjunction with pressure on the f7-pawn.

In what follows we will look at six different approaches to this position for Black. Because so many moves are playable, they often transpose from one variation to another. But if you know the general plans, you'll know what to do when your "home analysis" runs out.

(1) 4. ... dxc4, 4. ... Nc6

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. exd5 exd5 4. c4 dxc4?!



This is a bit of a mistake. Why?

Part of the hidden battle in the 4. c4 Exchange French is whether White will have to spend time developing the f1-bishop before Black captures on c4. If they do move the bishop, they then have to spend another move (another tempo) taking the black pawn. If they manage to avoid moving the bishop before Black captures the pawn, it's as if they have "saved" a move. So by taking immediately on c4, Black lets White develop the f1-bishop to an attacking square without having to waste any time. Other variations below avoid this problem!

Perhaps a more sophisticated way to try and take the c4-pawn is to play 4. ... Nc6 first, which (after ... d5xc4) would create a two-fold attack on White's d4-pawn. We continue by defending it with 5. Nf3 Bg4 (if 5. ... dxc4 6. Bxc4 and the pawn is safe, while 5. ... Bb4+ 6. Nc3 Nf6 7. Be2 dxc4 8. Bxc4 transposes to line 4 below) 6. Be2, breaking the pin. Here Black can easily fall for a trap. If they try to grab the d-pawn with 6. ... dxc4 7. 0-0 Bxf3 8. Bxf3 Qxd4?? (if 8. ... Nxd4 9. Bxb7 Rb8 10. Qa4+!) White "removes the defender" with 9. Bxc6+ bxc6 10. Qxd4 and wins the queen.

5. Bxc4 Nf6

Other moves: (a) 5. ... Nc6 6. Nf3 Bg4?! looks like it pressures the d4-pawn, but White calmly plays 7. 0-0 and if 7. ... Bxf3? 8. Qxf3 the f7-pawn is under serious pressure. (b) 5. ... Bd6?! shields the d4-pawn from attack. White is better after 6. Nf3 Bg4 7. 0-0.

6. Nf3 Bb4+

Here (a) 6. ... Bg4?? drops material to 7. Bxf7+! Kxf7 8. Ne5+ Kg8 9. Nxc4. (b) 6. ... Bd6 7. 0-0 allows 8. Bg5 when the d6-

bishop would rather be on e7.
(c) 6. ... Be7 7. 0-0 is a tempo up version of line 6.

7. Nc3 0-0 8. 0-0 Bg4 9. Be3 Nc6

This is a position we see in the ... Bf8-b4+ / ... Ng8-f6 lines, but a tempo up for White. In other words, because Black did not force White to spend a tempo moving the f1-bishop before capturing on c4, White got “a free move!” Here we can take advantage of this difference by moving against the g4-bishop:

10. h3

Also fine is 10. a3 Bxc3 11. bxc3 Qd6.

10. ... Bh5 11. g4 Bg6 12. Ne5

With f2-f4-f5 in the air!

(2) HOLD THE PAWN WITH ... c7-c6

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. exd5 exd5 4. c4 c6

Here Black tries to hold onto the d5-pawn, at least for awhile. White is in no hurry to take it, and instead should focus on developing.

5. Nc3 Nf6 6. Nf3 Bb4

We reach a typical IQP after 6. ... Be7 7. Bd3 dxc4 8. Bxc4 0-0 9. 0-0.

7. Bd3 0-0

Here 7. ... Bxc3+ 8. bxc3 gives up the bishop pair and strengthens the White center.

8. 0-0 Bg4

This move is very often played, but the bishop is not well placed on g4 in these lines, as it can be chased with a timely h2-h3. In many cases this involves a sacrifice of the d4-pawn (after ... Bg4xf3 and Qd1xf3).

Now that White has used a tempo to develop the f1-bishop, Black should consider 8. ... dxc4 9.

Bxc4 Bg4, when the d4-pawn needs some assistance. We can play simply or aggressively: 10. Be3 Nbd7 is fairly equal, while after 10. h3!? Bxf3 11. Qxf3 Qxd4 12. Bb3 White’s quick development, aided by attacking the queen with tempo, gives good compensation for the pawn.



9. Bg5

Trying to take advantage of the bishop being on the b4-square. Once again (as above) White can try to sacrifice the d-pawn for development with 9. h3 Bxf3 10. Qxf3 dxc4 11. Bxc4 Qxd4 12. Bb3 with good compensation.

9. ... Nbd7

If 9. ... dxc4 10. Bxc4 Bxf3 11. Qxf3! again gives up the d-pawn. After 11. ... Qxd4 12. Rad1! Qxc4 13. Bxf6 gxf6 14. Rfe1 the rook lift (Re1-e4) will be fatal.

After 9. ... h6 10. Bh4 (we are in no rush to release the pin) 10. ... dxc4 11. Bxc4 the same idea returns: if 11. ... Bxf3 12. Qxf3 Qxd4 13. Bxf6 Qxf6 14. Qxf6 gxf6 15. Ne4 and White has plenty for the pawn.

10. h3 Bh5

After 10. ... Bxf3 11. Qxf3 dxc4 12. Bxc4 Nb6 White can simply play 13. Bxf6 (more complicated is 13. Bd3 Qxd4 14. Bxf6 Qxf6 15. Bxh7+

Kh8 16. Qxf6 gxf6 17. Bf5) 13. ... Qxf6 14. Qxf6 gxf6 15. Bd3.

11. cxd5

Threatening to win a pawn.

11. ... Bxc3 12. bxc3 cxd5 13. c4!? dxc4

After 13. ... Qa5 14. c5! White’s bishops are dangerous.

14. Bxc4 Qc7

Or 14. ... Rc8 15. Bb3.

15. Rc1!

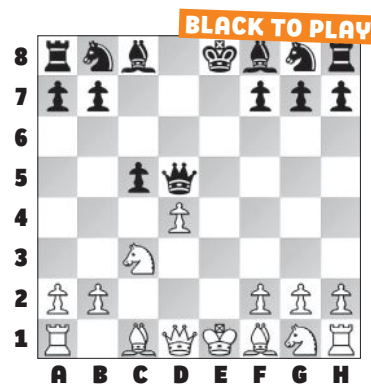
White has a slight advantage.

(3) 4. ... c5

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. exd5 exd5 4. c4 c5?!

Scholastic players often like symmetrical pawn pushes. (“If she did that, why can’t I?!”) Here, however, White can get the advantage by taking the d-pawn.

5. cxd5 Qxd5 6. Nc3



6. ... Qxd4?

This mistake is played 65% of the time per the Lichess database! White gets a big advantage with:

7. Bb5+! Nc6 8. Qe2+ Be7 9. Nf3

White’s development is fast. Nf3-e5 is a possibility, attacking the pinned knight.

Note that 4. ... Nf6 5. Nc3 c5 is

a slightly better version of this push. Take the d-pawn to start.

(4) ... Bf8-b4+ and ... Ng8-f6

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. exd5 exd5 4. c4 Bb4+ 5. Nc3 Nf6

Let me briefly note two other fifth move options for Black:

(a) 5. ... Qe7+ is met by 6. Be2! Bg4 and now we call Black's bluff: 7. h3 Bxc3+ (7. ... Bxe2 8. Ngxe2 dxc4 9. 0-0) 8. bxc3 Bxe2 9. Nxe2 dxc4 10. 0-0 and whether we pick the pawn back up or not, our development is much faster than Black's.

(b) 5. ... dxc4 6. Bxc4 allows White to develop the bishop to a good square in just one move.

6. Nf3

An alternate development play in lines 4-6 is also possible. The idea to develop Bf1-d3 and then Ng1-e2, popularized by IM Josh Waitzkin and GM Maurice Ashley in the 1990s, works to counter the potential ... Bc8-g4 pin by kicking the bishop back with pawns and then attacking it with Ne2-g3/f4. The drawback is that the knight is a bit passive on e2. We won't cover it here, but check out the Lichess study for more on this plan, including sample games!

6. ... 0-0 7. Bd3



This is a tricky move that encourages Black to check on the e-file.

7. ... dxc4

Now 7. ... Re8+ looks good, and is played half the time in the lichess database, but this allows White to try and spring a trap: 8. Be3 Ng4? 9. 0-0!

This pawn sacrifice is very strong, as the f-file will open and the c3-knight is no longer pinned. Play continues 9. ... Nxe3 (note that 9. ... Rxe3 10. fxe3 Nxe3 is met with 11. Bxh7+! Kxh7 12. Qd3+ Nf5 13. Nxd5 with a crushing advantage) 10. fxe3 Bxc3 (10. ... Rxe3? 11. Nxd5) 11. bxc3 dxc4 12. Bxc4 and now 12. ... Rxe3?? loses to 13. Bxf7+ Kxf7 14. Ne5+.

Here 7. ... Bg4 8. 0-0 Nc6 (8. ... dxc4 9. Bxc4 transposes) 9. Be3 dxc4 (9. ... Re8) 10. Bxc4 transposes to the move eight note below.

8. Bxc4 Re8+

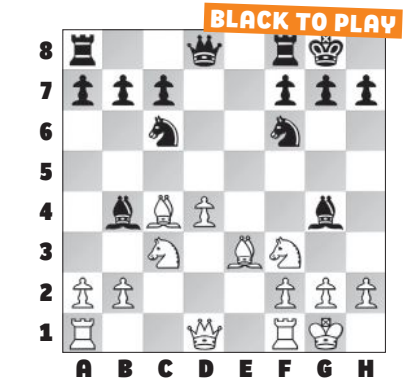
This is played 66% of the time according to the Lichess database.

Another idea is 8. ... Bg4 (or 8. ... Nc6 9. 0-0 Bg4, which transposes to 8. ... Bg4) 9. 0-0 Nc6 (9. ... Nbd7 puts the knight on a less active square, although it may try to influence the d5-square after ... Nd7-b6) 10. Be3 and we have reached a key tabiya, or "theoretical position." Black has many moves here, and you should investigate this position thoroughly before playing it.

(see diagram top of next column)

One key tactical idea here: Black cannot play (a) 10. ... Bxf3? in light of 11. Qxf3 Nxd4 12. Qxb7! with a great position.

Other moves for Black include (b) 10. ... Qd6 centralizing the queen and connecting the rooks, might be best. (c) 10. ... Rb8 guarding the b7-



pawn, which allows black to play ... Bg4xf3 and ... Nc6xd4, while also preparing ... b7-b5. (d) 10. ... Re8 11. Qb3! aiming at the f7-pawn, and (e) 10. ... Qd7

9. Be3 Be6

Trying to trade off the good c4-bishop.

The common 9. ... Ng4? is met by 10. Bxf7+! (10. 0-0 is also good) 10. ... Kxf7 11. Qb3+ Be6 12. Qxb4 and now if 12. ... Nxe3 13. fxe3 Bd5 (13. ... Nc6 14. Qxb7) 14. 0-0 with a great position, while 9. ... Nc6 10. 0-0 is fine for White.

10. Bxe6 Rxe6 11. 0-0 Nc6

If 11. ... c6 12. Qb3! and if 12. ... Bxc3?! 13. Qxb7!

12. Qb3

White is fine here with this move, or 12. Bg5.

(5) ... Bf8-b4+ and ... Ng8-e7

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. exd5 exd5 4. c4 Bb4+ 5. Nc3 Ne7

This move is recommended in a number of books. It avoids problems with a pin, and also allows the knight to jump to the g6- or f5-squares to attack the center. We develop normally.

6. Nf3 0-0

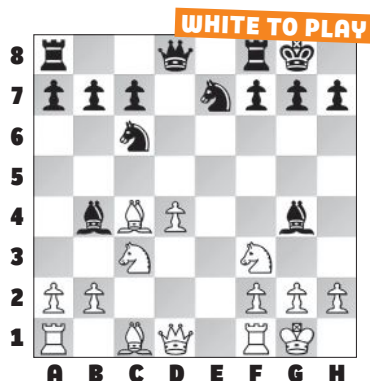
Here 6. ... Bg4 will usually

transpose to our main lines, i.e.,
7. Be2 dxc4 8. Bxc4 0-0.

7. Bd3 dxc4 8. Bxc4 Bg4

Of course 8. ... Nbc6 9. 0-0 Bg4 transposes.

9. 0-0 Nbc6



A key position to study.

10. Be3

Strengthening the d4-pawn and developing a piece.

Perhaps more direct is 10. a3 Ba5 (10. ... Bxc3 11. bxc3 strengthens White's center) 11. Be3 Nf5 and now 12. Qd3 (or 12. Qc2) has a neat idea that gets out of the pin. If 12. ... Bxf3 (12. ... Bb6 13. Qe4! attacking the bishop and the knight; 12. ... Nd6! is best) 13. Qxf5! and the bishop is trapped!

10. ... Nf5

Worse is 10. ... Bxf3 11. Qxf3 Nxd4? 12. Qxb7, when White attacks the loose b4-bishop and threatens to pin the d4-knight to the queen. And if 10. ... Bxc3 11. bxc3 Nd5 White keeps the bishop and the pawn with 12. Bd2!.

The position is tense. The d4-pawn is threatened. How should White respond?

11. a3

Limiting Black's responses. Five moves are all seen fairly frequently in the database.

White can also try the standard idea 11. Qd3 Nd6 (of course not 11. ... Bxf3?? 12. Qxf5; but possible is 11. ... Qd7) 12. Bd5 Bf5 13. Qd1 with dynamic play for both sides.

11. ... Bxc3

Other options include (a) 11. ... Bd6 12. Qd3 Nxe3 13. fxe3, (b) 11. ... Ba5 12. Qd3 Bxf3? 13. Qxf5, (c) 11. ... Be7 12. h3 (or 12. Bd5) 12. ... Bxf3 13. Qxf3 Ncxd4 14. Qxb7, and (d) 11. ... Nxe3?! 12. fxe3 Bd6 13. h3!.

12. bxc3 Nxe3

If 12. ... Re8 White should play 13. Qb1!? attacking the b7-pawn and the f5-knight.

13. fxe3

The half-open f-file gives White some pressure on the f7-pawn, and a small advantage. Play might continue...

13. ... Qe7 14. Qd2 Rae8 15. Rae1

With a good position. White could also try the more aggressive 15. e4!? Qxe4? (15. ... Bxf3 16. gxf3) 16. Ng5.

(6) ... Bf8-e7 and ... Ng8-f6

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. exd5 exd5 4. c4 Nf6 5. Nc3 Be7 6. Nf3 0-0



7. cxd5

White enters the IQP under good

circumstances with this move, and ensures that they won't have to lose a tempo after developing the bishop.

7. ... Nxd5 8. Bd3 Nc6

After 8. ... Nxc3 9. bxc3 White has space and easy development. If 9. ... Bg4 (or 9. ... Re8 10. 0-0 with a slight advantage) 10. Rb1.

Note that 8. ... Bg4 isn't useful here as the d4-pawn is shielded by the d5-knight: 9. 0-0 Nc6 10. h3 Bxf3 11. Qxf3 Ndb4 12. d5 Nxd3 13. Qxd3. (See the note to move 10.)

9. 0-0 Bg4

This is played 46% of the time according to the Lichess database. Now White has a tricky idea.

Other options: (a) 9. ... Bf6 pressures the d4-pawn. We respond with 10. Be4! Be6 11. Re1 and an interesting position. (b) 9. ... Nxc3 10. bxc3 strengthens the White center. (c) After 9. ... Be6 10. a3 is often a useful move in IQPs when (as here) White has time to spend a tempo. It stops knights from hopping to b4, and gives the light-squared bishop a place to retreat.

10. h3 Bh5?

By moving to this square Black allows a tactic.

After the correct 10. ... Bxf3 11. Qxf3 Ndb4 12. d5! (gaining space and attacking the c6-knight) 12. ... Nxd3 13. Qxd3 and White has a small advantage via the extra space.

11. Bxh7+! Kxh7 12. Ng5+ Kg8

Worse is 12. ... Kg6? 13. Qd3+ f5 14. Ne6, while White also gets an advantage after 12. ... Bxg5 13. Qxh5+ Kg8 (13. ... Bh6 14. Nxd5) 14. Bxg5.

13. Qxh5

White is up a pawn with a much safer king. ♠

from our series on the Isolated Queen's Pawn (IQP), including: attacks on h7, rook lifts, and long-range pieces.

In our **example**, from Jepson – Hector, 1999, these themes combine with **17. Ba3**, which is a thematic use of a long diagonal. White continues using his control of open lines from there.

After **17. ... Nd7 18. Bb4 Qd3 19. Rad1 Qf5 20. Bxf8 Nxf8 21. Rd8!**, **Black resigned** as White's pieces

have flown around the open board and landed in mating formation.



EXCHANGE FRENCH TACTICS, PT. 1

This week's puzzles all come from the **French Exchange** variation with 4. c4, as part of our **Openings Project**. Themes should be familiar

1. WHITE TO PLAY

2. WHITE TO PLAY

3. WHITE TO PLAY

4. WHITE TO PLAY

5. WHITE TO PLAY

6. WHITE TO PLAY

SOLUTIONS

1) 17. Qe2 Black tried to blockade White's c3-pawn, but walked into a double attack! **17. ... h6 18. Qxh5 Nb2 19. Bf5 Qd5** If 19. ... Bxf5 20. Nxf5 hxg5, then 21. Ne7 wins the queen. **20. Bxd7** winning. (Baillet – Todory, France, 2016) **2) 30. Re5!** Black cannot both stop mate on h7 and defend the queen. (Arizmendi – Bramman, Benasque, 1999) **3) 11. Nd5!** Black resigned, as Nd5-c7+ is unstoppable. For instance,

even **11. ... Bd6 12. Bxd6 Qxd6** loses to **13. Nf6+** with a discovered attack on the queen. (Graf – Debus, Baunatal, 1999) **4) 15. Rd1** White has been playing for Nb5-d6+, and now has enough pressure along the d-file to execute it. **15. ... Qb6 16. Nd6+ Kf8 17. Qc4** Threatening mate, and continuing to pile on the attack: **17. ... Nh6 18. Ne5** and now a fork on d7, too. Black resigned shortly. (Kufa – Pavelek, Moravia, 2003) **5) 16. Qb4!** There is no way

to defend the a5-knight. Knights on the rim are dim! **16. ... c6 17. Nxf6+ Qxf6 18. Rxe8+ Rxe8 19. Bf1** The knight on a5 is lost. (Volkman – Dzierzenga, Austria, 2013) **6) 20. Re4** An excellent use of the open board. White breaks out of the pin and pressures the loose b4-bishop. **20. ... Qa6** If 20. ... Qc5 21. Nxd5 Qxd5 then 22. Rxb4 wins the bishop. **21. Nxd5 cxd5 22. Rxb4** and **Black resigned** five moves later. (Kantans – Muller, Tornelo, 2020)

EXCHANGE FRENCH TACTICS, PT. 2

This week's puzzles continue our series on the **French Exchange**, this time with a focus on kingside attacks. Enjoy long-range pieces

making the most of White's characteristic attacking chances in the sort of Isolated Queen's Pawn (IQP) positions you can expect with our **Openings Project** repertoire.

In our **example**, White began with the familiar idea of **11. Ba3** which we should be familiar with after **b2xc3** is played! Black got out of the pin with **11. ... Re8**, but after **12. Qe2**, the knight is still pinned to the rook! Play continued **12. ... Kf8** **13. Qe4 Nd7** **14. Ne5 Nf6**.

As a **bonus**, can you find White's brilliant queen sac from here?



1. WHITE TO PLAY

2. WHITE TO PLAY

3. WHITE TO PLAY

4. WHITE TO PLAY

5. WHITE TO PLAY

6. WHITE TO PLAY

SOLUTIONS

1) 20. Nf3 A subtle queen trap, and **Black resigned** shortly, as the material deficit is massive. (Erdos – Gdanski, Warsaw, 2021) **2) 11. Bxf7+ Kxf7 12. Ng5+** A tactical motif when the g4-bishop is unprotected. **12. ... Kg6 13. Qxg4 Qc8** Having regained the piece, White continued the attack with **14. Ne6+ Kf7 15. Qxg7+ Kxe6 16. d5+** and went on to win. (Escudero – Jimenez, Linares, 2010) **3) 11. Ng5 Qf6** If 11. ... h6, then 12.

Nxf7! Rxf7 13. Bxf7+ Kxf7 14. Qb3+ picks up the loose c3-bishop. **12. Qd3** White forks the bishop and a mate on h7, so **Black resigned**. (Matzies – A. Fischer, Frankfurt, 2005) **4) 18. Be5!** White piles on the pressure against the f6-knight, and the queen is crashing through on the h-file shortly. **18. ... Ree8 19. Nxf6+ gxf6 20. Qh7+** winning. (Ramirez – Mariani, Florianopolis, 2023) **5) 16. Qf4 Bxc3 17. Qxf5!** Subtle, but Black resigned upon

realizing that White threatens **Bc4-d3** with an unstoppable mate threat, so there is no time to save the c3-bishop. (Berkes – Stanciu, Arad, 2014) **6) 15. Bxh7+!** Amazing! **15. ... Kh8** Or 15. ... Kf8 16. Nxe6+ wins the queen; Alternatively 15. ... Nxh7 16. Qxh7+ Kf8 17. Qh8 is mate! **16. Nf7** mate. (Miezis – Wiberg, Kollafjord, 2017) **Bonus) 15. Qg6!!** More than one move wins, but this is a nice play on smothered mate. (Chuvilin – Serebrennikov, Barnaul, 2014)