

# Control the Catalan

A complete repertoire for Black against the Catalan Opening

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The Catalan is very popular these days, as it leads to interesting play without much risk for White. In this article, I will show you one way to deal with the Catalan. I have used this line myself in many of my own classical games.

**1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 d5 4. g3 dxc4 5. Bg2**

This is the ambitious move, and the one most Catalan players will try. The c4-pawn will be recaptured later, or White can also play for compensation. The alternative 5. Qa4+ will be covered later, as will lines where White plays an early Nb1-c3.

**5. ... c6**



This is the move I suggest, intending to support the c4-pawn with ... b7-b5. Now White has three main replies: 6. Ne5, 6. a4, and 6. 0-0, and we will treat each in turn.

A fourth move, **6. Qc2**, has been played in some games, but it seems a bit illogical to me. Black will still be able to play ... b7-b5. To wit: **6. ... b5 7. 0-0** (after 7. a4 Bb7 8. 0-0 Nbd7 I would surely take Black and the extra pawn!) **7. ... Bb7 8. Rd1 Nbd7 9. b3** (9. Ne5 Nd5 is equal) **9. ... cxb3 10. axb3** and now **10. ... c5!** is a nice way to open things for the b7-bishop. The position is equal.

## 6. Ne5

**1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 d5 4. g3 dxc4 5. Bg2 c6 6. Ne5 Bb4+**

This is an important check, provoking White to make a concession. Don't play 6. ... b5? 7. Nxc6 Qb6 8. Na5! when Black is in trouble!

**7. Bd2**

We see one of the points of Black's play after 7. Nc3 Nd5!, when Black plays to keep the pawn. There are three options for White here.

(a) If 8. Qc2? Nxc3 9. bxc3 Qxd4! and Black makes use of the pins.

(b) After 8. Bd2 b5 (8. ... Nb6!?) 9. 0-0 0-0! 10. a4 a5! Black is fine in this double-edged position. If 11. axb5 we insert 11. ... Bxc3! and then recapture on b5.

(c) The key move is 8. 0-0!?, sacrificing even more material. Play continues 8. ... Nxc3 9. bxc3 Bxc3:



POSITION AFTER 9. ... Bxc3

Now White has a number of options.

(c1) Black is better after 10. Rb1 Qxd4! 11. Qxd4 Bxd4 12. Nxc4 Bc5.

(c2) If 10. Ba3 Qxd4 11. Qxd4 (not 11. Nxc4? Qxc4 12. Qd6 Bf6! and Black is winning) 11. ... Bxd4 12. Nxc4 Bxa1 13. Rxa1 (after 13. Nd6+ Ke7! 14. Rxa1 Kf6 Black can be happy with all the material advantage, but must escape White's immediate threats) 13. ... f6 14. Nd6+

Kd7 15. Rd1 Kc7 16. Nf7 Re8 17. Bd6+ Kb6 Black escapes and is fine.

(c3) Critical is 10. Nxc4!. Here again the path diverges:

(c3a) If Black is up for an adventure, 10. ... Bxa1!? is an option that I have played myself. The engines tell us White is better, but I find the material imbalance interesting. After 11. Ba3 Bb2!:



POSITION AFTER 11. ... Bb2

(c3a1) 12. Bxb2?! b5! leaves Black better.

(c3a2) More challenging is 12. Nxb2!? b5 (forced) 13. Qb3 (alternatives: 13. Bc5?! Bb7; 13. Nd3 a5 14. Bc5 Bb7) 13. ... a5 14. Bc5 Na6! 15. Bxc6+ Bd7 16. Bxa8 Qxa8 17. Nd3 f6! and with ... Ke8-f7 next, Black should be more or less fine.

(c3a3) 12. Nd6+ Kd7 and now:

(c3a3a) 13. Nxf7 Bxa3 14. Nxd8 Rxd8 15. Qd3 Bf8 16. Qxh7 (not 16. e4?! Kc7 17. d5? cxd5 18. exd5 Nc6 with advantage to Black) 16. ... Kc7 17. Qe4! (17. e4? Rxd4) White is better according to engines, if he finds this move. However, I still find the position terribly unclear with practical chances for both sides, and I tested it in Delchev – Thybo (Niksik Mix, 2021), when the game was eventually drawn.

(c3a3b) If instead 13. Bc5!? Qf6! 14. Ne4 (14. Qb3 b6 15. Ne4 Qg6 is equal) 14. ... Qg6 is unclear, despite Black being a

rook up. Next is ... b7-b6.  
 (c3b) The untested 10. ... b5!? is best and safest, leading to positions where Black often gives back their pawn advantage. After 11. Bb2! Bxb2 12. Nxb2 0-0 Black will continue with 13. ... a5 and an equal position.

### 7. ... Be7



This position is one of the reasons that I like this line. Black prepares to sacrifice an Exchange if allowed, leading to dynamic play.

Here 7. ... Qxd4? is premature. White will get too much compensation after 8. Bxb4 Qxe5 9. Na3 b5 10. Bd6 Qxb2 11. 0-0.

### 8. e3

Other moves:

(a) 8. Na3?! Bxa3 9. bxa3 Qxd4 10. Ba5 Qxd1+ 11. Rxd1 b6 12. Nxc6 Nd5! leaves Black ahead.

(b) Against 8. Be3?! (and 8. Bf4) Black can play 8. ... Nd5 and simply take the bishop.

(c) On 8. Bf4 Nd5 9. Nxc4 Nxf4 10. gxf4 0-0 Black is okay after with ... Nb8-d7 next.

(d) I would be happy to face 8. Bc3, as Black gets a lot of compensation after 8. ... b5 9. Nxc6 Nxc6 10. Bxc6+ Bd7 11. Bxa8 Qxa8.



POSITION AFTER 11. ... Qxa8

White has two reasonable moves.

(d1) 12. f3 h5! and now:

(d1a) 13. Qd2 a5! is very unpleasant for White in practical terms. If 14. Bxa5 (14. a3 h4 15. g4 0-0 gives Black the initiative) 14. ... Nd5! 15. e4 b4! 16. exd5 Qxa5 17. dxe6 Bxe6 Black dominates the board.

(d1b) 13. 0-0 transposes to 12. 0-0.

(d1c) 13. h4 Qb8 is slightly better for Black.

(d1d) 13. a3 h4 14. g4 (14. Rg1 a5!) 14. ...

Nxg4 15. Rg1 (15. Bb4 Bf6 16. Qd2 Rh5! is wild and fascinating; you may want to do a bit of work here!) 15. ... Nf6 16. Qd2 (Black grabs the initiative after both 16. Rxc7 Qb8! and 16. d5 Bc5 17. Rxc7 Nxd5 18. Bd4 Ne3! 19. Bxc3 Bxc3 20. Qd6 Qc6) 16. ... Qb8 17. e4 Nh5 with a very interesting position. The black knight is heading for the superb d3-square.

(d2) 12. 0-0 h5! 13. f3 (If 13. d5? exd5! with a good edge, and 13. h4 0-0! is better for Black) 13. ... h4 14. Be1?! (14. g4 b4 15. Bd2 [or 15. Be1 Nd5 with initiative] 15. ... Qd5 is unclear) 14. ... hxg3 15. Bxg3 Nh5! Black's attack is dangerous, with the sneaky threat of ... Nh5xg3 followed by ... e6-e5, sacrificing a pawn to get the queen to c6! For example, 16. Nc3 Nxg3 17. hxg3 e5 with ... Qa8-c6 next.

### 8. ... b5

(see diagram top of next column)

### 9. Nxc6

You will not be surprised to learn that White has plenty of options here.

(a) 9. a4 forces Black to move forward with 9. ... b4 10. Nxc4 (here 10. Nxc6? Nxc6



11. Bxc6+ Bd7 12. Bxa8 Qxa8 is already close to winning for Black) 10. ... Nbd7!? when Black can sacrifice the c6-pawn for compensation. Play continues 11. Bxc6 (11. b3 Ba6!) 11. ... Ba6! when Black gets good compensation in all lines:

(a1) 12. Bxa8?? Qxa8 and Black is winning.

(a2) 12. Bb5 Bb7 13. 0-0 a6 14. Bxd7+ Nxd7 and the strong b7-bishop ensures a good game.

(a3) 12. Qb3 0-0 13. Bb5 Bb7 14. 0-0 is unclear.

(a4) 12. b3 Rc8 13. Bf3 (13. Bb5 Bb7 is unclear) 13. ... 0-0 with a fine game.

(b) Gelfand played 9. b3 in 2019. We continue 9. ... cxb3 10. axb3 Bb7 11. Ba5 Qc8 12. 0-0 (12. Qf3 is a fancy move from Erigaisi; after 12. ... a6!?, with the idea of ... Ra8-a7 and ... c6-c5, Black should be doing okay) 12. ... c5!, giving back the pawn to relieve the pressure. It's equal after 13. Bxb7 Qxb7 14. dxc5 Ne4 with ... Be7-f6 next.



- (c) 9. 0-0 0-0! and now:  
 (c1) 10. b3 cxb3 11. axb3 (after 11. Qxb3 a5! it's more fun to play Black) 11. ... b4! is an important move. After 12. Bxc6 (12. Nxc6?! Nxc6 13. Bxc6 Rb8 leaves Black ahead) 12. ... Nxc6 13. Nxc6 Qd7! 14. Bxb4 (Black grabs the initiative after 14. Nxe7+ Qxe7 15. Ra4 Rb8 16. Qe1 a5! 17. Rxa5 e5!) 14. ... Bxb4 15. Nxb4 Qb5! is an only move. Black has compensation after 16. Ra4 (16. Nd3?! Ba6!; 16. Na2 e5!) 16. ... Bd7.  
 (c2) 10. a4 b4! (this position can also arise from 9. a4 b4 10. 0-0 0-0) 11. Qc2! (11. Nxc4 Ba6!) and now:  
 (c2a) 11. ... a5 is Leela's idea, with play continuing 12. Rd1 (12. Rc1 Ra7 13. Nxc4) 12. ... Bb7 (12. ... Ra7) 13. Nxc4 Nbd7 with equality.  
 (c2b) 11. ... Bb7 12. Rc1 (12. Nxc4 Nbd7) 12. ... Qc7 13. Qxc4 a5 is equal, with ideas of ... c6-c5.

**9. ... Nxc6 10. Bxc6+ Bd7 11. Bxa8 Qxa8**



Black has sacrificed a full Exchange, but has clear compensation in better development, the bishop pair, and the weak light squares.

**12. f3**

Alternatively, White can try 12. 0-0 e5! 13. f3 (13. dxe5? Bh3 14. f3 Ng4! is a tiny bit better for Black) 13. ... e4 14. Nc3 0-0 15. fxe4 Nxe4 16. Nxe4 Qxe4 17. Qf3 (17. Rf4 Qg6 is equal) 17. ... Qc2!



**POSITION AFTER 17. ... Qc2**

Black is fine here, but play is still very sharp indeed! The idea is to keep the queens on

and play against the white king. We proceed: 18. Bc3 (18. Qb7 Bh3! 19. Rf2 Qxb2 is unclear) 18. ... b4 19. Rf2 (19. Rac1 Qa4 and the a2-pawn is loose as well) 19. ... Qd3 20. Be1 (alternatives: 20. Rd1? Qg6 with the idea of ... Bd7-g4!, and 20. Bxb4 Bxb4 21. Qb7 a5! 22. Qxd7 Qxe3 when White has no good reply to ... Bb4-e1) 20. ... Be6 is unclear.

**12. ... e5! 13. dxe5**

Here 13. 0-0 e4 transposes to 12. 0-0.

**13. ... Ng4 14. 0-0 Nxe5 15. Bc3! Nd3!**



White has quite a few tries in this exciting position, and we will look at most of them. Generally speaking, castling is next for Black.

**16. Qe2**

Other options:

- (a) 16. b3? 0-0 is slightly better for Black.
- (b) 16. Bxg7?! is rather greedy. Black will start a huge attack with 16. ... Rg8 17. Bd4 h5 and have the initiative in this unclear position.
- (c) 16. Nd2 0-0 17. Qe2 transposes to 16. Qe2.
- (d) 16. Bd4 0-0 17. a4 bxa4 18. Rxa4 Bxa4 19. Qxa4 Rc8 is equal, as is (e) 16. a4 0-0! 17. axb5 Bc5!.

**16. ... 0-0 17. Bd4!**

The position is unclear after 17. Nd2 Bc5! 18. Nb3 (forced) 18. ... Bd6 19. Nc1 (19. Nd4? b4! damages White's coordination) 19. ... Ne5!.

**17. ... Qc6!**

The d4-bishop is too strong, so Black should exchange it to get at White's weaknesses.

**18. Nd2**

After 18. Nc3 Bf6! 19. Bxf6 Qxf6 Black's strong d3-knight and the weak white king ensures sufficient compensation.

**18. ... Bf6! 19. Bxf6 Qxf6 20. b3**

The position is equal after 20. a4 Qxb2 21. axb5 Ne5!.

**20. ... Qb2**

This double-edged position is equal.

**6. 0-0**

**1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 d5 4. g3 dxc4 5.**

**Bg2 c6 6. 0-0 b5 7. a4**

White can try 7. b3 cxb3 8. Qxb3 (8. axb3 Nbd7 is equal), but after 8. ... a5! 9. Ne5 (9. a4 b4) 9. ... Ra6 Black can keep the pawn for now with a fancy rook move.

**7. ... Bb7 8. Ne5!**

The most critical continuation. After 8. b3 b4! 9. bxc4 c5 10. Bb2 (10. a5 a6 is equal) 10. ... Be7 Black is for choice.

**8. ... a6 9. b3 cxb3 10. Qxb3 Be7!**



Black has faced some problems recently after 10. ... Qxd4 11. Bb2, so I recommend a simpler move.

**11. axb5 axb5 12. Rxa8 Bxa8 13. Qa2**

Attacking the bishop.

**13. ... Bb7 14. Qa7 Qc8! 15. Nc3**

If 15. Nd2 Nfd7! alleviates most of the pressure.

**15. ... 0-0 16. Nxb5 Nd5!**

This cool move solves Black's problems.

**17. Bxd5 exd5!**

Black is fine here.

**6. a4**

**1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 d5 4. g3 dxc4 5.**

**Bg2 c6 6. a4 c5!?**

If you compare this to the position that can happen after 4. ... dxc4 5. Bg2 c5, here White has the extra move a2-a4. But this inclusion gives Black much better access to the b4-square.

It's important not to play 6. ... b5? when White grabs a big advantage with 7. Ne5.

**7. 0-0 Nc6**



### 8. dxc5

Here 8. Na3 is a typical move in the Catalan, but Black is doing fine after 8. ... cxd4 9. Nxc4 Bc5.

Another idea is 8. Ne5!? Nxd4 when 9. e3 (after 9. Nd2 Be7 10. Ndx4 0-0 11. e3 Nc6 Black gives back the pawn with an equal position) is the critical try. After 9. ... Nb3 10. Qxd8+ Kxd8 11. Ra3 Ke7! Black defends the f7-pawn and remains a pawn up, but must play precisely. Black is doing OK after 12. Nxc4 Nxc1 13. Rxc1 g6! 14. Na5 (14. Rb3 Bg7 is equal) 14. ... Bg7 or 14. ... Nd5.

### 8. ... Bxc5

Andreikin is one of the heroes of this line.

### 9. Qxd8+ Kxd8 10. Nbd2

10. Na3 Nd5 transposes.

### 10. ... Nd5! 11. Nxc4

Black is fine after 11. a5 Ke7!.

### 11. ... f6!



Black takes control of the e5-square.

### 12. Ne1!?

With the idea of hitting the black bishop with Ne1-d3. If instead (a) 12. Nfd2 b6! 13. Nb3 Ba6 14. Nxc5 bxc5 Black is completely fine due to the weak b4-square and their active pieces. Also equal is (b) 12. Bd2 Ke7 13. Rfc1 b6.

### 12. ... Nd4

Quite a concrete solution, but it is a good

one! Simpler, while still close to equal, is 12. ... Ndb4!?

### 13. Nd3!

Now 13. Be3 Nxe3 14. fxe3 Nb3 15. Nd3! (15. Rd1+ Ke7 16. Rd3 Nc1 17. Rd1 Nb3 is a fun repetition!) is fairly complicated for both sides. After 15. ... Nxa1 16. Nxc5 Nc2 17. Rd1+ Ke7 18. Bxb7 Rb8! 19. Bxc8 Rhxc8 20. Rd7+ Kf8 21. Na6 Rxc4 22. Nxb8 Rxa4 we end up in an equal endgame.

### 13. ... b6!

The bishop is coming to a6 in many lines.

White has the initiative after 13. ... Nxe2+?! 14. Kh1.

### 14. Ne3

Other options: after (a) 14. Rd1 Ba6 Black is fine in the upcoming complications. (b) 14. a5 Nxe2+ 15. Kh1 Nxc1 16. Rfxc1 Rb8! is equal. (c) 14. Be3 Nxe2+! 15. Kh1 Ba6! is fine for Black.

### 14. ... Ba6

The game remains complex, but Black is not worse here.

## 5. Qa4+

### 1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 d5 4. g3 dxc4 5. Qa4+

This move is sometimes played to avoid the reams of theory we just saw, while regaining the c4-pawn without delay.

### 5. ... Nbd7 6. Bg2

Here 6. Nc3 a6 transposes to 7. Nc3, while 6. Qxc4 a6 (6. ... b6!? with the idea of ... Bc8-b7 is a good way to surprise your opponent) and now (a) 7. Bg2 b5 also transposes, while (b) 7. a4?! b5! 8. Qc6 (8. axb5?? axb5 drops the a1-rook) 8. ... Rb8 gives Black a great game with ... Bc8-b7 coming.

### 6. ... a6 7. Qxc4

White can also try 7. Nc3 Rb8 8. Qxc4 b5 9. Qd3 (9. Qb3 Bb7 with ... c7-c5 next) 9. ... Bb7 10. 0-0 (10. Bf4 Rc8 followed by ... c7-c5) 10. ... c5 with equality.

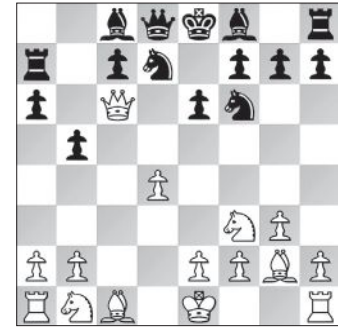
### 7. ... b5 8. Qc6!

After the lesser 8. Qc2 Bb7 Black will soon push ... c7-c5 and is already slightly better.

### 8. ... Ra7!?

(see diagram top of next column)

With ... Bc8-b7 next. Here 8. ... Rb8 is the main move, but after 9. Bf4 a bit of care is required.



### 9. Qc2

Alternatives include:

(a) 9. Be3 Bb4+ and however White blocks the check, Black plays ... Bc8-b7.

(b) 9. Bf4 Bb7 10. Qc2 Bb4+ 11. Nbd2 c5 is equal.

(c) 9. a4 Bb7 10. Qc2 bxa4!? 11. Nc3 c5 is also equal. White can probably try 12. Be3 cxd4 13. Bxd4 Bc5 when Black castles next with a fine game.

(d) 9. 0-0 Bb7 10. Qc2 Be7 transposes to the main line.

### 9. ... Bb7 10. 0-0

If 10. a4 bxa4 and Black continues with ... Bf8-e7, ... 0-0, and ... c7-c5.

### 10. ... Be7 11. a4

Now 11. Nc3 is met with 11. ... c5 (11. ... Qa8!?) 12. dxc5 Bxc5 with equality.

### 11. ... bxa4!?

This move is usually seen as anti-positional, but it works here. Black will continue with ... 0-0, ... Qd8-a8, and then ... c7-c5 at some point. The position is equal.

I think 11. ... b4 is fine as well, although I find 12. Be3 slightly annoying.

### 12. Be3

White finds no advantage with 12. Nc3 0-0 or 12. Qxa4 0-0.

### 12. ... Nd5 13. Bd2 c5

Black will castle next and is totally fine.

## 5. ... c6 6. Nc3

### 1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 d5 4. g3 dxc4 5.

### Bg2 c6 6. Nc3

This position can also arise from the g3 Slav.

### 6. ... b5

Of course 6. ... Nbd7 is also good, but it leads to different kind of play after 7. a4.

### 7. Ne5

After 7. 0-0 Bb7 White's best path is to transpose with 8. Ne5.

**7. ... a6! 8. 0-0**

Grabbing the pawn with (a) 8. Nxc6 is met with 8. ... Qb6! 9. Ne5 (9. Nxb8 Rxb8 10. e4 Bb7 11. 0-0 Bb4 is fine for Black) 9. ... Bb7 10. e4 Bb4! 11. 0-0 0-0! (11. ... Bxc3? 12. bxc3 Bxe4? grabs a poisoned pawn, i.e., 13. Bxe4 Nxe4 14. Qf3 with a winning advantage) when the position is equal but very complicated — for example, 12. a4 (or 12. d5 Nbd7) 12. ... Nbd7 13. Be3 Rfd8.

If (b) 8. a4 Bb7 9. 0-0 Be7 10. axb5 axb5 11. Rxa8 Bxa8 12. Nxb5 cxb5 13. Bxa8 0-0 and now

(b1) 14. Bg2 Bd6!? and here Black can consider taking the e5-knight in some lines:

(b1a) 15. e4?! Bxe5! 16. dxe5 Qxd1 17. Rxd1 Nfd7 with the initiative.

(b1b) 15. Nf3 Nc6 is equal, as is...

(b1c) 15. Bg5?! h6 16. Bxf6 Qxf6.

(b1d) 15. f4 Nd5 is unclear and complicated.

(b2) 14. Bf3 h6!? (14. ... Bd6!?) White has the bishops, but Black has the very nice c4-pawn. Call it equal.

**8. ... Bb7**



**9. b3**

This is clearly the most critical line. White allows the passed pawn on c3 in exchange for squares and development.

The sneaky 9. Qc2 has been tried by Gukesh and Sokolov in recent months. It seems that the best Black can do is to accept the pawn, although it is useful to come armed with a few more moves. If White is well prepared, Black will not find it too easy. I analyze 9. ... Qxd4 10. Bf4 Be7 11. Ne4 (11. Rad1 Qb6 transposes) 11. ... Nd5 12. Rad1 Qb6!

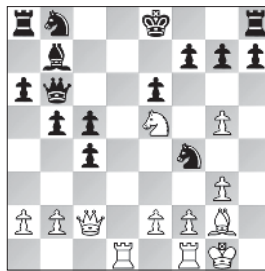
(see diagram top of next column)

Here it is very important to put the queen on b6 and not a7. After 13. h4 c5! (13. ... f6? 14. Ng6! looks very dangerous!) opens the diagonal for the b7-bishop. White must continue with active play, as otherwise he is just two pawns down. Play continues 14. Ng5 Bxg5



**POSITION AFTER 12. ... Qb6**

(eliminating the strong g5-knight) 15. hxg5 (15. Bxg5? f6 wins a piece) 15. ... Nxf4.



**POSITION AFTER 15. ... Nxf4**

Two options now for White:

(a) With 16. gxf4 Bxg2 17. Kxg2 f6! 18. gxf6 (Black is fine after 18. Rh1 fxe5 19. Rxh7 Rxh7 20. Qg6+ Kf8 21. Qxh7 Qb7+ 22. f3 Nc6) 18. ... gxf6 and now there is a fairly forcing line that leads to a draw: 19. Kh2! fxe5! 20. Qe4! Qc6! 21. Qxe5 Rg8 22. Rg1 Rxg1 23. Qh8+ (23. Rxg1 Nd7 24. Rg8+ Ke7 25. Rg7+ Kd8 is also a repetition) 23. ... Ke7 24. Qxh7+ and Sokolov – Motylev (Zagreb, 2023) was soon drawn by repetition.

(b) If instead 16. Bxb7 Qxb7 17. gxf4 0-0 18. Kh2 f6! — it is essential to kick away this strong knight on e5 in many lines. After 19. gxf6 gxf6 20. Rg1+ Kh8 21. Qe4 Ra7 22. Qe3 Qc7 23. Ng4 Nc6 Black should be doing fine in a complicated position.

**9. ... b4 10. Na4**

Here 10. bxc4?! is an interesting piece sacrifice! Black has to accept, gaining a slight edge after 10. ... bxc3 11. Rb1 Ra7! 12. Be3 (or 12. d5 Bd6) 12. ... Bd6 13. d5 c5 as in Li – Ankit, Graz 2014.

If alternatively 10. Ne4 Nxe4 (not 10. ... c3?? 11. Ng5) 11. Bxe4 c3 12. a3 a5 13. axb4 Bxb4! Black captures with the bishop and develops! After 14. Qd3 f5! Black castles next with a fine game.

**10. ... c3 11. Nc4**

The most interesting move.

Other ideas: (a) 11. a3 a5 transposes to the main line, while (b) 11. Qc2 Nbd7 12. Rd1 a5 13. a3 Nxe5 14. dxe5 Nd7 15. Be3 Qc7 and

Black is fine here. One game went 16. Rxd7 Qxd7 17. Nb6 Qc7 18. Nxa8 Bxa8 19. axb4 Bxb4 20. Bd4 c5! and Khalifman – Vallejo Pons (Moscow, 2015) was soon drawn.

**11. ... a5**

This is a very important move for Black, supporting the b4-pawn

**12. a3**

Slightly weaker is 12. Bf4 Nd5 13. Be5 Nd7! (not 13. ... f6? 14. e4 when Black is in a world of hurt!) and now White has three options: (a) 14. e4 N5b6 is equal, while Black is a smidge better after.

(b) 14. Bxg7 Bxg7 15. Nd6+ Ke7 16. Nxb7 Qc7.

(c) If 14. Nd6+ Bxd6 15. Bxd6 N7b6 16. Bc5 Nd7 (or 16. ... Nxa4!?), chasing the bishop!

**12. ... Ba6 13. axb4**

Dubov has tried 13. Bf4 but Black is fine after 13. ... Bb5!.

**13. ... axb4 14. Nc5 Bxc5 15. dxc5 0-0**

**16. Bf4 Nd5 17. Bd6**

Or 17. Qd4 Nd7 18. Bd6 Re8.

**17. ... Nd7! 18. Re1**

Other possibilities:

(a) 18. e4?! Nc7! and

(b) 18. Bxf8?! Qxf8 give the advantage to Black.

(c) 18. Qd4 Re8 is equal.

**18. ... Re8**



The position is still very complicated, but Black is not worse — the queenside pawns can prove very useful. More analysis could be added, but here's a sketch of what might happen.

**19. e4 Bxc4!**

As White has played e2-e4, this is possible.

**20. bxc4 Ne7 21. Qb3 Rxa1 22. Rxa1 Nc8!**

**23. Qxb4 Nxd6 24. cxd6 Qb8**

The position is equal. ♠