

Streamers and the king's pawn, Part I

Kraai and Rozman on 1. e4 e5

BY IM JOHN WATSON



HESS HAS MOVED ONLINE to such an extent that we now have millions of players and fans who have seldom or

never played in a club, much less attended a tournament in the real world. There are millions of players on sites such as *Chess.com* and *LiChess*, of course, but much of the excitement is being generated by various chess bloggers, who entertain and/or instruct (in wildly varying proportions).

Arguably the most popular of these is IM Levy Rozman, a.k.a. "GothamChess," who appears on Twitch and YouTube; on the latter, he has over three million followers and has recorded over 1,300 videos. Rozman and other internet personalities have said a lot about opening theory, but little of it has been published in systematic and digestible form. In March, Chessable released a 1. e4 repertoire "MoveTrainer" product by Rozman, and a few weeks later another 1. e4 repertoire MoveTrainer was released, this time by GM Jesse Kraai of the popular ChessDojo website. I was curious how these products would fit into the world of electronic chess publications, many of which I have reviewed in this column.

Many years ago, I produced one of the earliest full-length 1. e4 online repertoires for the Internet Chess Club, and I learned how difficult it is to select efficient and practical lines with 1. e4. Traditional mainline theory is too extensive and complex to do justice to in this format, but sidelines tend to have been neutralized over years of practice.

I thought it would be interesting to see what these leading figures in the online chess world would offer, as compared to established active players such as super-GM Anish Giri, who also has a 1. e4 repertoire on Chessable. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that there are no fewer than 16 such 1. e4 courses on Chessable alone! I've either studied or glanced at all of these (many are available for free in an abridged form called "Short and Sweet"), and realized that it's unrealistic to be comprehensive, so I'm going to limit myself to analysis from both Rozman's and Kraai's courses and try to point to some of their strengths and limitations.

The most difficult task for these authors is to offer the reader a manageable system versus **1. e4 e5**. Levy Rozman opts for pure dynamism. After **2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4**, Black will usually play 3. ... Nf6 or 3. ... Bc5. When I taught a lot of young students, I found that teachers often have their students Rozman's **3. ... Nf6 4. d4 exd4 5. e5**.



He does an extremely thorough job of analyzing the main line **5. ... d5 6. Bb5 Ne4 7. Nxd4**, including recent ideas and much original analysis. At this point, he gives a very long overview of 7. ... Bd7 8. Bxc6 bxc6 9. 0-0, when I think Black can hold the balance with perfect play, but White has a wonderfully rich position with many tactical and positional themes.

Rozman also analyzes the gambit line **7. ... Bc5 8. Be3 0-0** (both 8. ... Bxd4 and 8. ... Bd7 are playable, but this is more forcing) **9. Nxc6 bxc6 10. Bxc5 Nxc5 11. Bxc6 Rb8 12. Qxd5 Qe7 13. 0-0 Rxb2** (13. ... Ba6 14. Rc1 Rfd8 is also fine for Black) **14. Nc3 Rd8 15. Qf3** and here he shows with analysis that **15. ... Ne6!** "is the equalizer."

Rozman freely admits that with perfect play, many lines in his repertoire give no advantage. I've found a number of equalizing improvements for Black, but that is no problem for a repertoire unless there are forced lines leading to drawn or ultra-drawn positions. You can see why Rozman is such a popular online presenter: he analyzes these lines rapidly, peppering the moves with lively commentary and a lot of humor. There are loads of pretty tactics which would serve a student well even if he or she ultimately didn't want to play these lines.

This is all fun stuff, but over the years, when I found myself trying to help students form an effective repertoire with 5. e5, I kept running into doubts about the sidelines. Two were particularly irritating. First, Black can play **5. ... Ne4**, when Rozman continues **6. Qe2** (by far the most popular move; he mentions 6. Bd5 Nc5 7. c3 dxc3 8. Nxc3, but even the immediate 8. ... Nb4 with the idea 9. Bc4 d5! looks good) **6. ... Nc5 7. c3 d3 8. Qe3 Be7** (after his 8. ... Ne6 9. Bxd3, I think 9. ... d6! 10. exd6 Bxd6 11. 0-0 0-0 is equal, as is 9. ... Bc5 10. Qe2 d6 11. exd6 Qxd6 with best play) **9. b4 Ne6 10. 0-0 d6** (Rozman says Black shouldn't play 10. ... d5 11. Bxd3 0-0 12. Nbd2, but 12. ... d4 13. cxd4 Nxb4 14. Bb1 Nd5 15. Qe4 g6 is at least equal) **11. exd6 Bxd6** (11. ... cxd6 has also been tried by very strong players and looks fine) **12. Nbd2 0-0**.



This is playable for both sides but doesn't strike me as much fun for White. Perhaps best is **13. g3** (13. Qxd3 Nf4!) **13. ... Re8** **14. Qxd3 Ng5** (or 14...Ne5 with equality) **15. Nxf5!** (15. h4 is equal) **15. ... Qxg5** **16. Ne4 Qh5!** with the idea **17 Nxd6 Ne5!** **18 Bxf7+ Qxf7!**.

That sort of thing is pretty easy for Black to prepare, and in the main line **3. Bc4 Nf6** **4. d4 exd4** **5. e5 d5** **6. Bb5**, the move **6. ... Nd7** (instead of 6. ... Ne4) is the type of move you'll run into once you're on record as playing this variation and opponents want to prepare solutions that don't lead to 20+ moves of critical theory. To his credit, Rozman talks at some length about it. Play continues **7. 0-0 Be7** **8. Bxc6 bxc6** **9. Nxd4 Nb8**.



Unfortunately, he has an extremely dismissive attitude towards this move, although Black, with two bishops and a mobile center, has enjoyed a small performance rating advantage here. The position has been played dozens of times over the past year, including by the likes of Aronian, Yu, and Cheparinov as Black.

Rozman gives **10. Nc3 0-0** **11. Qf3**. Here he mentions **11. ... a5!** (which scores extremely well, with the idea ... Ra8-a6 and ... c6-c5) saying it's the "only move" and would only be played by 2700 players, so he's not worried about it! In any case, he recommends **12. Rd1 Ra6** (I like **12. ... Qd7!** **13. h3 Ra6**) **13. Nf5 Bxf5** (or **13. ... Qd7!** **14. Nxe7+ Qxe7** **15. Re1 Nd7**) **14. Qxf5**, when either **14. ... Qc8** or **14. ... Qd7** are equal.

But I also like Black's center after the direct **11. ... Qd7** intending ... Qd7-g4, when Rozman gives **12. h3 Rd8**, but **12. ... Re8** prevents White's main idea of e5-e6, for example, **13. Re1 Bf8** **14. Bf4 Na6** **15. Nb3 Nc5** **16. Nxc5 Bxc5** as in Jones – Demchenko, *Playchess.com*, 2020.

Upon concluding this look at 6. ... Nd7, he breezily states that "after 6. Bb5, Black has to play 6. ... Ne4" and also says "it's kind of a miracle that Black can play 6. ... Nd7 and not be losing," which strikes me as either positional blindness or wishful thinking.

Still, these positions are playable for White and the whole section will be instructive for the player starting out with the Two Knights. Again, Rozman's presentation is deeply prepared, fast-paced, and humorous.

Rozman's repertoire suggestion versus **3. ... Bc5** is still more radical: **4. c3 Nf6** **5. d4 exd4** **6. cxd4 Bb4+** **7. Nbd2!**?. This is more respectable than you might think and even been played by a couple of super-GMs, although largely in blitz and rapid. Although I haven't the space to go into the complicated lines, I think it's fair to say that Black has many ways to maintain a balance. Already **7. ... d5** is satisfactory, and after **7. ... Nxe4** **8. d5**, Black can choose between **8. ... Nxd2**, **8. ... Bxd2+**, and **8. ... Ne7**, which are all fine.

On the plus side, as far as I can tell, White is never worse with accurate play and again, there are loads of beautiful and instructive tactics for the student. The main disadvantage is that if your opponent knows that you play this line, it's not hard to prepare a forcing line that results in something that may seem a little too simplified for the attacking player's choice. Perhaps this could be a surprise weapon to mix with more conventional alternatives.

GM Jesse Kraai is one of three founders of the chess hub/website ChessDojo, which features training, lessons, and podcasts. He has been contributing excellent online material for many years. For this repertoire, Kraai emphasizes that he's not using supercomputer analysis, but trying to use positions in which intuition and positional reasoning can be most effective. His commentary is easy-paced and considered, with a lot of instruction and general advice, a sharp contrast to Rozman's fast-paced and heavily analytic approach.

His **1. e4 e5** solution is the Bishop's Opening **2. Bc4**, in many cases transposing into the Vienna Game. Several move orders can lead to the position after **2. ... Nc6** **3. Nc3 Nf6** **4. d3 Bc5** **5. f4 0-0** **6. Nf3** (6. f5 allows 6. ... d5!). Then Kraai has a lot of fun with the mind-boggling tactics following **6. ... Ng4** **7. Ng5!** with an exciting and apparently sound attack.

Not surprisingly, Black can deviate from this in various ways, e.g., **6. ... Qe7** or **6. ... exf4**, when both sides have plenty of play. And **4. ... Na5** **5. Qf3 Nxc4** **6. dxc4** has been well-tested over the years — Black stands absolutely fine, but there is always an interesting imbalance, which is as good as you can ask for in a repertoire. Kraai gives similarly fun lines in the order **2. Bc4 Nf6** **3. Nc3 Bc5** **4. d3 d6** **5. f4**, and now the wild **5. ... Ng4** **6. f5!**, intending **6. ... Nf2** **7. Qh5**.

A more troubling issue arises from this move order, however. Here **2. Bc4 Nf6** **3. Nc3** (transposing to the Vienna order **2. Nc3 Nf6** **3. Bc4**) and allows the famous Frankenstein-Dracula Variation move order **3. ... Nxe4** **4. Qh5**. After **4. ... Nd6** **5. Bb3**, there's an important fork in the road.



He gives the main line as **5. ... Be7** (the most common move on a GM level, considered safely equal) **6. Qxe5 0-0** **7. Nf3 Nc6** **8. Qf4**, concluding "Black can try many different moves here, but the dynamic is simple: Black has to do something about their d6-knight, and while that circus horse is prancing about we will castle and use our lead in development to build an attack." But is there really an "attack?" If nothing else, Black can eliminate White's best attacking piece with **8. ... Na5** **9. 0-0 Nxb3** **10. axb3 Re8** **11. d3 b6** **12. Bd2 Bb7**.

That's not very inspiring for White, but at least it's a game with some play left. More worrisome is the question mark he assigns to **5. ... Nc6** "?", saying "many strong GMs have made this mistake." The long-established moves **6. Nb5** **g6** **7. Qf3 f5** **8. Qd5 Qe7** **9. Nxc7+ Kd8** **10. Nxa8 b6** have been played in over 1,000 of my database games (and countless unpublished ones), as well as analyzed in many books and articles, but Kraai strangely opines that "Black clearly fell for a trick" and "obviously didn't want this position."



He continues **11. Ne2 Bb7** **12. Qd3 Bxa8** **13. 0-0** and approves of White's position.

Well, I like the little-used 11. Ne2 and 12. Qd3 idea, and let's give Kraai credit for spotting this unusual approach which bypasses a lot of theory. Nevertheless, Black has the bishops, a mobile center, and good practical attacking chances as compensation for the Exchange. In fact, of the 22 games in my database arriving at this position, mostly correspondence games where there is heavy use of strong engines, the score is even, and Black even has a small edge in performance rating.

It turns out that another Chessable product by John Chernoff is devoted solely to the Frankenstein-Dracula. He goes into tremendous depth in many positions of this type and demonstrates just how thoroughly and concretely prepared both sides have to be, and how easy it is for White to get overrun if he doesn't know exact theory. If you look at Chernoff's analysis closely, you'll see that Black will be on the verge of equality even against best White play. Furthermore, Kraai doesn't address 8. ... Qf6, when Chernoff's analysis shows White's best line leading to near equality (and in fact that analysis can be improved upon, so that White ends up with no advantage at all).

Fortunately, Kraai has the good sense to offer an alternative order (the only one in the course!) with 2. Bc4 Nf6 3. d3, a more practical setup that I recommended in my own 1. e4 repertoire course years ago. This tends to transpose into other lines unless Black plays 3. ... c6, when 4. Nf3 d5 5. Bb3 Bd6 goes back to the 19th-century.

Perhaps because it's an alternate line, Kraai's analysis isn't as deep as elsewhere. After 6. Nc3, for example, he dismisses 6. ... d4 with a "?!" and says it "shows a

poor understanding of chess." In fact, it's a well-established and solid defense. The brief line he gives as good for White, 7. Ne2 0-0 8. 0-0 c5 9. Ng3 Nc6 10. Nh4 g6 11. h3 is ok, but should be fine for Black after 11. ... Na5 eliminating the powerful bishop.

In the main line 6. Nc3 dxe4 7. Ng5 0-0, he prefers 8. Nxe4 Nxe4 9. dxe4! (I think 9. Nxe4 is objectively better for the repertoire, preserving long-term prospects) 9. ... h6 10. Nxf7 Rxf7 11. Bxf7+ Kxf7 12. Qh5+ Ke7 (other moves lose, so I grant that the attack has practical value) 13. Be3 (White can take a draw with 13. Qh4+ Ke8 14. Qh5+) 13. ... Nd7 (13. ... Qe8 leads to a similar position where White should probably find a drawing sequence before Black completes his development) 14. Be3. He stops here and says the material is "technically equal" (an odd comment — normally White would need two extra pawns, not one), and that he prefers White, who at least has practical attacking chances. I think you'll find that White has to play accurately to bail out with a draw, but that's okay, and White can deviate on move nine anyway. Overall, 3. d3 is an important and practical suggestion, and a developing player will benefit from Kraai's extensive positional advice.

Other related Chessable repertoires are relevant here. IM Yuriy Krykun uses the Vienna 2. Nc3 and meets 2. ... Nf6 3. Bc4 Nxe4 4. Qh5 Nd6 with the immediate 5. Qxe5+ Qe7 6. Qxe7+ Bxe7 7. Be2; this leads to a lot of interesting endgame analysis at the cost of restricted prospects. IM Alexandru Banzea also uses the Vienna 2. Nc3, but answers 2. ... Nf6 with 3. f4 d5 4. fxe5 Nxe4 5. Qf3. That is playable and worth an occasional try, but it's a bit depressing that there's hardly

any natural order of moves in which Black isn't fully equal.

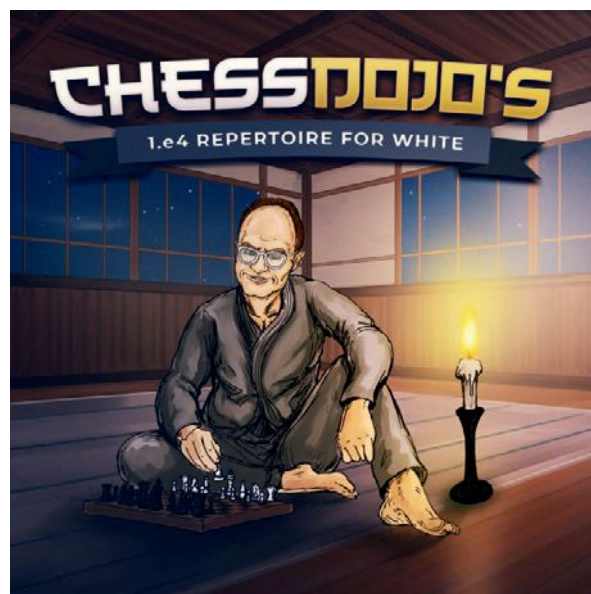
The repertoires above are all designed to avoid the most popular professional variations such as the Ruy Lopez main lines or the Italian positional lines with d2-d3. Other Chessable authors are somewhat more conventional in their choices, although still not entering the thousands of pages of main-line Ruy Lopez theory. GM Anish Giri gives the Italian with 3. Bc4 Nf6 (or 3. ... Bc5 4. c3 Nf6 5. d3) 4. d3, which is a terribly popular choice among today's leading GMs. GM Wesley So chooses 3. Bc4 Nf6 (or 3. ... Bc5 4. c3 Nf6 5. d4 exd4 6. e5) 4. Ng5. IM Christof Sielecki and others give the Ruy Lopez 3. Bb5 with an early d2-d3 (e.g., 3. ... a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5. d3), and of course many authors meet 3. Bb5 Nf6 with 4. d3 to avoid the Berlin.

In next month's column, we will investigate how Rozman and Kraai deal with the Sicilian. ♠

Kraai, Jesse. ChessDojo's 1. e4 Repertoire for White. 24,167 words, 250 variations. 9:02 paid video, 1:07 free video. Available from Chessable.com.

Rozman, Levy. The GothamChess 1. e4 Repertoire. 175,812 words. 1085 trainable variations. 17:12 paid video, 2:03 free video. Available from Chessable.com.

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Streamers on the King's Pawn, Part II

Kraai and Rozman on 1. e4 c5

BY IM JOHN WATSON



LAST MONTH WE LOOKED AT some Chessable repertoires with 1. e4 by Levy Rozman and Jesse Kraai, in particular

their solutions to 1. e4 e5. We saw that, due to their open and often forcing nature, it was a real challenge to find double e-pawn lines that were both interesting and not excessively theoretical. Tackling the Sicilian Defense, 1 e4 c5, is not easy either, but White does have the choice of entering positions that are both less thoroughly worked out and provide playable options throughout. Since the theory of the Open Sicilian, **1. e4 c5 2. Nf3** and **3. d4**, is absurdly extensive and difficult, many anti-Sicilian repertoires use an all-purpose move like **2. c3** (the Alapin), or **2. Nf3** with a positional intent, for example, **2. ... Nc6 3. Bb5** (the Rossolimo, which appears in seven Chessable repertoires), **2. ... d6 3. Bb5+** (or 3. d4 cxd4 4. Qxd4), or **2. ... e6 3. c3** (or 3. b3 or 3. g3). Over the decades, we've regularly seen such repertoires recommended in books and articles.

Refreshingly, both Rozman and Kraai choose **2. Nc3**, following unique variations which have been only rarely played until the past few years. These lines have the advantage of flexibility, although in return White cannot expect more than equality versus natural play.

Let's start with **2. ... d6**, a move many Najdorf and Dragon players will play so that after 3. Nf3 Nf6 4. d4 cxd4 5. Nxd4, they will be in familiar territory. Rozman meets 2. ... d6 with **3. d4 cxd4 4. Qxd4 Nc6 5. Qd2**.



This is a system made popular by Magnus Carlsen. It is currently fashionable, but still relatively fresh and full of possibilities.

5. ... g6

The fianchetto is played more than twice as often as 5. ... Nf6, when after 6. b3 e6 7. Bb2, the move 7. ... Be7 is normal, leading to double-edged play after 8. 0-0-0 0-0 9. f4.

Here Rozman shows some deep analysis after 9. ... a6 10. g4!? Nxg4 11. Nf3 intending Rh1-g1 with a pretty attack. If I were preparing this line, I'd look at 9. ... Qa5 10. Kb1 Rd8, intending ... d6-d5. And going back, an obvious try is 7. ... d5 8. exd5 exd5 9. 0-0-0 Be6 with unbalanced but dynamically equal isolated queen's pawn play.

6. b3 Bh6

Because of Carlsen's use of this system, a great number of games have been played with it in just the past two years. Here the natural 6. ... Bg7 7. Bb2 Nf6 8. 0-0-0 0-0 9. f3 has scored very well for White, whose king

is surprisingly safe. Against slow moves, the pawn advances g2-g4 and h2-h4-h5 are dangerous. Rozman is in his element in such lines, showing many fancy tactical nuances.

7. f4 Nf6

Here 7. ... e5 8. Nb5! Bxf4 9. Qxd6 works out nicely for White, and 7. ... f5 8. Bb2 Nf6 9. Bd3 is an important line which Rozman covers in great detail.

8. Bb2 e5

The alternative 8. ... 0-0 hasn't been as successful, but even if 9. 0-0-0 a5! 10. a4 Nb4 11. Kb1 Qb6 12. Nf3 Bg4 has scored well for White, Black's queenside pressure looks real to me, and Rozman's main line (just one of numerous possibilities) leads to a draw by perpetual check. Plenty to think about.

9. g3 0-0 10. 0-0-0 Re8

Rozman covers many typical mistakes that Black plays in these positions. Things get tactical at this point no matter what Black plays, e.g., 10. ... exf4 11. gxf4 Nh5 12. Nd5 or 10. ... Nd4 11. Nge2 Bg4 12. Nxd4! Bxd1 13. Qxd1 exd4 14. Qxd4 with great play for the Exchange.

11. Kb1 Nd4!? 12. Nge2 Bg4 13. Nxd4!?

Another try is 13. Bg2, hoping for 13. ... Rc8? 14. Nxd4! Bxd1 15. Rxd1 exd4 16. Qxd4 Bg7 17. Nb5! Nh5 18. Qxa7! with a winning game.

13. ... exd4

Also unclear is 13. ... Bxd1 14. Nxd1 exd4

15. Qxd4.

14. Qxd4 Bg7 15. Rc1!? Nxe4 16. Qxg7+!

Kxg7 17. Nxe4+ Kf8 18. Nf6 h5 19. Nh7+

A very courageous player might try 19. Nxc4!? hxg4 20. h3 Re3 21. hxg4 Ke7 22. g5 with some dangerous threats.

19. ... Kg8 20. Nf6+

With a draw by repetition.

Kraai has a more flexible approach, using

2. Nc3 d6 3. f4.



The general idea is Ng1-f3, Bf1-b5, and d2-d3, exchanging off the light-squared bishop and putting the central pawns on light squares. This can lead to a positional struggle, but Kraai likes to attack when possible, as in the line **3. ... Nf6 4. Nf3 g6 5. Bb5+ Bd7 6. Bxd7+ Qxd7** (he says that 6. ... Nbx7 is weaker than 6. ... Qxd7, but after his main continuation **7. d3 Bg7 8. 0-0 0-0 9. Qe1**, the move **9. ... e6** has done well and should be fine) **7. d3 Bg7 8. 0-0 Nc6 9. Qe1 0-0 10. Qh4 Nd4** and now the speculative **11. f5!? Nxc2 12. Rb1 Nb4** (these are not the only moves, of course) **13. Bh6 Nxd3 14. Ng5**. While this terribly complicated position is unclear after **14. ... Nh5**, White certainly has attacking chances.

It's hard to find an original yet effective solution to **2. ... e6**. The traditional **3. g3 d5** and **3. f4 d5 4. Nf3 dxe4** are well worked out and not particularly inspiring, so it's not surprising that both authors look for something a bit more exciting. Rozman recommends **3. d4 cxd4 4. Qxd4**, a rather new idea he calls the "Tari Sicilian." White loses a whole tempo after **4. ... Nc6 5. Qd3**, but intends to castle queenside and attack later.

One main line goes:

5. ... Nf6 6. Bf4 d5

Other moves seem okay here: (a) **6. ... Bb4 7. Nge2 0-0 8. 0-0-0 Qa5!**, or here **7. ... e5 8. Bg5 h6 9. Bh4 g5 10. Bg3 d5** with equality. Another idea is (b) **6. ... Bc5 7. 0-0-0 0-0 8. Bd6 Bxd6 9. Qxd6 a6 10. Nf3 b5 11. e5 b4!**



There is plenty of play in such positions.

7. 0-0-0

Another path is **7. exd5 Nb4** (**7. ... Nxd5 8. Nxd5 exd5 9. 0-0-0 Be6 10. Kb1 Bd6** is equal) **8. Qe2 Nbx5 9. 0-0-0 Qa5** with equality.

7. ... d4 8. Nb5 e5 9. Bxe5! Nxe5 10. Qg3 Nfd7 11. Nf3! a6! 12. Nxe5 axb5 13. Bxb5 Rxa2 14. c4 Ra5

Or **14. ... Qf6**, e.g., **15. Nxd7 Bxd7 16. Qb8+ Ke7 17. Bxd7 Kxd7 18. Qxb7+ Kd8** with another equal position.

15. Rxd4 Rxb5 16. cxb5 Qc7+! 17. Kb1 Nxe5

Rozman gives **17. ... Bd6 18. Rc1 Qxc1+ 19. Kxc1 Bxe5 20. Qe3 Bxd4 21. Qxd4** and stops here. Black's position is okay, e.g., **21. ... 0-0 22. f4 Re8 23. b3 Nf6 24. e5 Nd7 25. Kb2 Nf8 26. Qd3 g6**.

18. Rc1 Qb8 19. Rxc8+ Qxc8 20. Qxe5+ Be7 21. Qxg7 Rf8

And again the play is level after **22. f3**, while other draws are possible, including **22. Rd5!? Qc4!? 23. Qe5 Qf1+ 24. Ka2 Qc4+**.

Against **2. ... e6**, Kraai suggests **3. Nf3**, usually switching to an Open Sicilian next, e.g., **3. ... Nc6 4. d4** (**4. Bb5** might go well with the rest of the repertoire) **4. ... cxd4 5. Nxd4**.



He does a good job of providing solid lines for White with ample explanations of strategy, one exciting line going **5. ... a6 6. Nxc6 bxc6** (**6. ... dxc6 7. Qxd8+ Kxd8 8. Bf4**) **7. Bd3 d5 8. 0-0 Qc7 9. Re1 Bb7 10. Qf3 Bd6 11. e5! Bxe5** (**11. ... Bf8!?**) **12. Qh5 Bd6 13. Rxe6+** with attack. Here **13. ... Kf8** is not so bad, but White has the practical attacking chances.

Of course the Open Sicilian is theory-heavy, and Kraai sometimes neglects to give enough guidance. In the Four Knights Variation **5. ... Nf6**, for example, he gives **6. Nxc6 bxc6 7. e5 Nd5 8. Ne4**, says there's a lot of theory and "it can get really intense," but he thinks it's just "a nice position for White." Considering that there have been many articles and books recommending the Four Knights for Black, along with thousands of games (including plenty with super-GMs playing Black), Kraai really should have added considerable analysis here and

shown a way for White to play in these highly tactical lines.

Incidentally, against **2. ... a6**, Rozman suggests **3. d4** again, with similar ideas to **2. ... e6 3. d4**. This time **3. ... cxd4 4. Qxd4 Nc6** is answered by **5. Qe3**, hoping in some cases for **Bc1-d2, 0-0-0, Nc3-d5** and **Bd2-c3**. Kraai recommends **2. ... a6 3. g3 b5 4. Bg2 Bb7 5. d3**, when one pretty line goes **5. ... e6 6. f4 d5** (6. ... *Nf6* is fine) **7. f5! d4! 8. fxe6 dxc3 9. exf7+ Kxf7 10. Nf3**, saying that “Black is either lost or close to lost.” This is fun stuff.

The two repertoires overlap in what is arguably the most natural variation: **2. Nc3 Nc6**, when both authors recommend **3. Bb5**. Then White intends to play as in a Rossolimo Sicilian with the extra option of **f2-f4**, e.g., **3. ... g6 4. Bxc6 dxc6** (4. ... *bx*c6 **5. d3 Bg7 6. f4**) **5. d3 Bg7** and **6. f4** (Kraai) or **6. Be3 b6 7. Qd2** (Rozman). The main line is **3. ... Nd4 4. Nf3**.



4. ... Nxb5

The authors take somewhat different approaches against the alternatives, a good indication that this system offers flexible play. For example, **4. ... a6 5. Bd3 g6 6. 0-0** (Rozman gives **6. Nxd4 cxd4 7. Ne2** as a second option, when **7. ... d5** should be considered) **6. ... Bg7 7. Re1** can go in several directions. Kraai analyzes **7. ... e6** (7. ... *d6* is safer) **8. Rb1 Ne7 9. b4! cxb4 10. Nxd4 Bxd4 11. Rxb4 Bg7** (11. ... *Nc6?* 12 *Rxd4!*) **12. e5 Nc6 13. Rbe4** with a rich middlegame ahead.

Another logical defense here is **6. ... e6**, which is a position you can get to via **4. ... e6 5. 0-0 a6 6. Bd3 Nc6**:



Kraai gives **7. Be2 Qc7 8. d4**, which is a main line Taimanov by transposition after **9. ... Nf6**. And Carlsen chose the simpler **7. b3** in a game against Praggnanandhaa.

True to his tactical leanings, Rozman suggests **7. Nd5!?**. The knight leap has actually been played quite a bit, and Black has several valid responses, including the bizarre-looking **7...g5!?** (7. ... *exd5* 8. *exd5*

Nb4 9. Re1+ Ne7 10. d6 Nxd3 11. cxd3 favors White) **8. Nxd5** (8. *Ne3 h5* is double-edged) **8. ... exd5! 9. Qh5 Qe7 10. exd5 Nf6!** (10. ... *Nb4 11. d6 Qf6 12. b4!*) **11. Qd1 Ne5**, which is very messy. Rozman gives **12. f4!?** **Nxd3 13. cxd3 Qd6 14. Re1+ Be7 15. b3**, when I think **15. ... Nxd5 16. Bb2 Rg8** is fine, but you can see there are all kinds of options in this variation.

5. Nxb5 d6

Black has tried many moves here, from **5. ... a6** to **5. ... g6** and even **5. ... d5!?**. Generally White has scored well.

6. d4 Nf6 7. Nc3

Rozman prefers **7. Qd3 a6 8. Nc3 cxd4 9. Nxd4** with one rather complex line going **9. ... e5** — he analyses the alternatives deeply — **10. Nf5 Bxf5 11. exf5**.

7. ... cxd4 8. Qxd4 e5

If **8. ... g6 9. e5 dxe5 10. Qxd8+ Kxd8 11. Nxe5 Ke8 12. Be3** with chances for both sides.

9. Qd3 h6

Avoiding **9. ... Be7 10. Bg5 0-0 11. Bxf6 Bxf6 12. 0-0 Be6 13. Nd5**.

10. Nd2 Be6 11. Nc4 Rc8 12. Ne3 Qc7

Indirectly hitting the **c2**-pawn. Kraai gives **13. 0-0 Be7 14. Rd1 0-0 15. Bd2** and thinks that White stands better. Perhaps not, but it's at any rate a complex and interesting middlegame.

Overall, I think both authors do a good job with the Sicilian. A limitation of their **1. e4 e5** coverage (analyzed in last month's column) is that, however creative and exciting, the lines they recommend were often forcing and thus vulnerable to deep preparation by Black. In the case of **1. e4 c5 2. Nc3**, Rozman and Kraai have given the reader variations which are flexible enough to be used for some time, even if a particular line proves awkward or inferior, because White has so many ways to vary and make a game of it.

Next month I'll look at some other defenses to **1. e4** and discuss the merits and limitations of this format. ♣

Kraai, Jesse. ChessDojo's 1. e4 Repertoire for White. 24,167 words, 250 variations. 9:02 paid video, 1:07 free video. Available from Chessable.com.

Rozman, Levy. The GothamChess 1. e4 Repertoire. 175,812 words. 1085 trainable variations. 17:12 paid video, 2:03 free video. Available from Chessable.com.



Streamers on the King's Pawn, Part III

Wrapping up with Kraai and Rozman

BY IM JOHN WATSON



IN THIS COLUMN I CONCLUDE my review of the 1. e4 repertoires on Chessable by IM Levy Rozman (Gotham Chess

on the web) and GM Jesse Kraai (of Chess Dojo) by looking at their solutions to defenses other than 1. ... e5 and 1. ... c5. It's not possible to give a lot of detail here for reasons of space, but I'll show a few typical variations and then make some general comments on these repertoire courses.

Against the Scandinavian Defense, **1. e4 d5**, both Rozman and Kraai opt for main lines:

2. exd5 Qxd5

Here they show ways to get some advantage after 2. ... Nf6 3. d4 Nxd5, while Rozman also covers 3. ... Bg4.

3. Nc3 Qd6

The move 3. ... Qd8 is sound and gets considerable analysis from both.

The old main line is 3. ... Qa5 4. d4 Nf6 5. Nf3, when Kraai meets 5. ... c6 with 6. Bd2 Bf5 7. Bc4 and Rozman gives the most attention to 5. ... Bf5, continuing with the frequently-played variation 6. Ne5 c6 7. Bc4 e6 8. g4 Bg6 9. h4 Nbd7 10. Nxd7 Nxd7 11. h5 Be4 12. 0-0 Bd5 13. Nxd5 cxd5 14. Bd3 Bd6 15. a4 Qc7 16. Qf3. This is roughly equal; arguably White has more long-term chances due to the bishop pair. You will have to do some independent study in this line.

4. d4 Nf6 5. Nf3

Now both authors cover 5. ... a6 well, but only Rozman analyses the solid move:

5. ... c6

His main line continues:

6. Ne5 Nbd7 7. Nc4 Qc7 8. a4 Nb6!?

The alternatives 8. ... g6 and 8. ... Nd5 have been played with better results.

9. Ne5 a5 10. Bf4 Qd8 11. Be2 g6 12. 0-0 Bg7 13. Qd2 0-0 14. Rad1

This is the kind of classical development that serves well for a repertoire. White's space advantage ensures comfortable play.

Against the Alekhine Defense, **1. e4 Nf6**, Rozman chooses the Four Pawns Attack **2. e5 Nd5 3. d4 d6 4. c4 Nb6 5. f4 dxe5**. Although this is a strong line, well-analyzed, and very much in line with his tactical proclivities, it may not be appropriate for everyone, since it requires an awful lot of memorization.

The average player might prefer Kraai's **2. e5 Nd5 3. d4 d6 4. Nf3**, the traditional main line. Still, like Rozman, Kraai sometimes assumes a high level of skill and/or knowledge from his reader. Take, for example, **4. ... g6 5. Bc4 Nb6 6. Bb3 Bg7 7. Ng5 e6 8. Qf3**.



8. ... 0-0

Kraai shows only this defense, but 8. ... Qe7 has been by far the main move over the years, and the most successful one (even recently), so he

should have analyzed it. In particular, there have been hundreds of hard-fought battles after 9. Ne4 dxe5 10. Bg5 (the rarer 10. dxe5 may well be better) 10. ... Qb4+ 11. c3 Qa5, a position that rewards deep preparation.

9. Qh3 h6 10. Nf3

Kraai stops here and says, "It's a very terrible situation for Black and there is no counterplay. You will get this position." Fair enough, but in that case, one shouldn't go in blind. In practice, for example, even masters have failed to find the best moves after **10. ... dxe5**, when many ideas have been tried, but what is likely the best sequence, **11. dxe5 c5 12. Bxh6! c4**, is a piece sacrifice that only works out due to **13. Be3! cxb3 14. Ng5** and although it's still messy, the attack should succeed.

For the Caro-Kann, **1. e4 c6 2. d4 d5**, Rozman and Kraai make choices that are ambitious but not too theory-laden. Rozman uses **3. f3**, the Fantasy Variation, which has gained acceptance among masters after years as an "irregular" line. He backs it up with plenty of analysis, sufficient to get White to a fully playable game with chances for both sides.

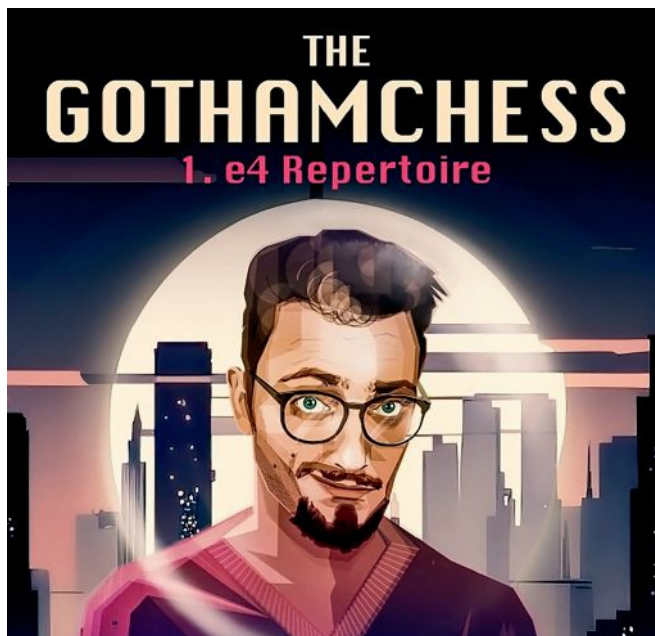
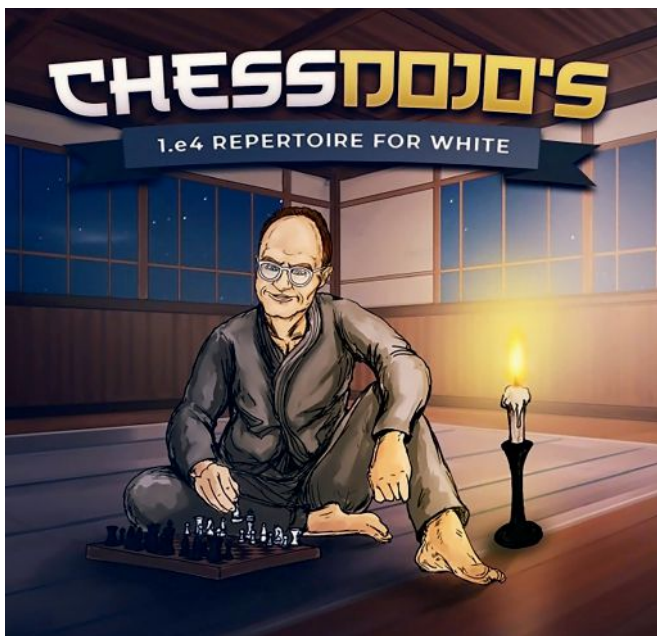
Kraai recommends **3. e5 Bf5 4. h4**, which became very popular about a decade ago and is currently hotly contested:

(see diagram top of next column)

Let's take a look at his sharp main line:

4. ... h5

Kraai directs his attention to this and 4. ... h6, which is met by 5. g4! and is the subject of thousands of games. After 4. ... Qb6, he suggests 5. g4 Bd7 6. c4 and says merely, "White



is clearly much better.” That is probably true on the super-grandmaster or silicon level, but White lags in development and I wonder how practical it is to play such a position without deeper analysis and a lot of examples.

5. Bg5

Kraai’s favorite. Much more popular are 5. c4 and 5. Bd3. It’s always nice to have options if your main line doesn’t work out.

5. ... Qb6 6. Bd3!

A fun gambit. This is practically the only move White ever tries.

6. ... Qxd4

Here 6. ... Bxd3 7. Qxd3 is often played, when the thematic 7. ... Qa6 8. Qh3 e6 is complex, e.g., 9. Nc3 Nh6 10. Nge2 Nf5.

7. Nf3 Qg4

Black shouldn’t even consider trying to defend the position after 7. ... Qxb2 8. Bxf5 Qxa1 9. e6!

8. Bxf5 Qxf5 9. 0-0

Kraai says that this is well-tested on his

ChessDojo site. White is intending to go for broke after 9. ... f6 10. c4 fxg5 11. cxd5 cxd5 12. Nc3! with a strong attack for the piece, which Kraai analyses in detail.

On the other hand, I notice that in several recent games Black has done well with 9. ... Nd7, a natural developing move Kraai doesn’t mention. Then 10. c4 is again critical, e.g., 10. ... e6 11. Nc3 Be7 or 11. ... dxc4 12. Re1 Ne7 13. Ne4 Nd5. These positions are messy and unclear.

In the French Defense, **1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5**, Kraai explains that 3. Nd2 and 3. Nc3 give Black too many options, so he opts for **3. e5**, as does Rozman. In fact, nine of the 1. e4 repertoire authors in Chessable make the same choice, although they take varied approaches.

After **3. ... c5 4. c3 Nc6 5. Nf3**, for example, Giri, who has the luxury of extra videos with which to do detailed analysis, picks well-established main lines with 5. ... Bd7 6. Be2 and 5. ... Qb6 6. a3. But most of the others who choose 3. e5, including Rozman and Kraai, recommend one or another of the fashionable and aggressive 6. Bd3 gambit variations. Here are a few examples:

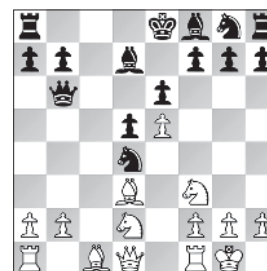
5. ... Qb6

After 5. ... Bd7, the authors go in different directions:

- a) Kraai suggests 6. dxc5 Bxc5 7. b4 Bb6 8. b5 Na5 9. Bd3, which is unbalanced, e.g., 9. ... Ne7 (or 9. ... Qc7, one double-edged line going 10. 0-0 Nc4 11. a4 Nxe5 12. Bf4 Nxf3+ 13. Qxf3 Qd8 14. Qg3 Nf6! 15. Qxg7 Rg8 16. Qh6 Ng4 17. Qxh7 Nf6 18. Qh4 Rg4, which is ultimately

equal) 10. 0-0 Rc8 (one of several setups) 11. a4 Ng6 12. g3 (12. Ba3 Nf4) 12. ... Qe7 13 Ba3 Bc5 with equality.

- b) Rozman turns to the gambit idea 6. Bd3 cxd4 7. cxd4 (7. 0-0 dxc3 8. Nxc3 Nge7 is another version of the gambit beginning with 5. ... Qb6 6 Bd3 cxd4 7 0-0; this has been contested quite a bit, but I think Black’s chances are better without having used a tempo and exposed the queen with ... Qd8-b6) 7. ... Qb6 8. 0-0 Nxd4 (the Milner-Barry Gambit) 9. Nbd2.



POSITION AFTER 9. Nbd2

Rozman calls 9. Nbd2 the “Smerdon Gambit.” He gives massive analysis; a couple of the simpler playable lines for Black are 9. ... Nxf3+ 10. Nxf3 Bb5 11. Be3 Qa6 12. Bxb5+ Qxb5 13. Rc1 Qd7 with equality, and 9. ... Bc5 10. Nxd4 (10. b4 Nxf3+ 11. Nxf3 Qxb4 12. Rb1 Qa4 13. Qxa4 Bxa4 14. Rxb7 Ne7) 10. ... Bxd4 11. Qh5 Ne7 (11. ... Bb5 is also satisfactory) 12. Nf3 Ng6 13. Bd2 Rc8. As you might guess, these positions are wide-open for creative play.

6. Bd3 cxd4 7. 0-0

Introducing the fashionable “Hector Gam-

BY WGM TATEV ABRAHAMYAN



(continued from page 17)

bit.” The traditional 7. cxd4 Bd7 8. 0-0 Nxd4 is the Milner-Barry Gambit given above.

7. ... Bd7 8. Re1 Nge7 9. h4

This move, discouraging ... Ne7-g6, has become the main line and is recommended by both authors. There is a great deal of theory after 9. Nbd2 Ng6 and I see untrodden paths like 9. ... dxc3 10. bxc3 Qc7!? 11. Nb3 Nc8 with the idea ... Nc8-b6.



9. ... h6

Both sides have useful slow moves, including 9. ... Rc8.

After 9. ... a6, Rozman gives (a) 10. Nbd2 dxc3 11. bxc3 Ng6 12. Nb3 Qc7 13. Qe2 f6 14. exf6 gxf6 15. c4 0-0-0 16. cxd5 exd5 17. Be3, although this is only equal after 17. ... Nf4 (or 17. ... Rg8) 18. Bxf4 Qxf4 19. Bxa6 Rg8, when 20. Bxb7+ Kxb7 21. Qb5+ Kc7 22. Nbd4 Rxc2+ leads to a draw. The other main move (b) 10. h5 might even be met by 10. ... g6!, e.g., 11. Nbd2 gxh5 12. Nb3 dxc3 13. bxc3 Ng6 14. Rb1 Qc7 15. Nbd4 h4 16. Nxc6 Bxc6 17. Nd4 Bd7 with equality or 17. ... Rg8.

10. h5 Rc8

Another of Rozman’s main lines here is 10. ... a6 11. a3 Rc8 12. b4 dxc3 13. Nxc3 Nxb4 14. Na4 Bxa4 15. Qxa4+ Nbc6 16. Rb1, and here instead of 16. ... Qa5?!, Black can try the solid 16. ... Qc7! 17. Bd2 Qd7.

11. Nbd2

The alternative 11. Na3 a6 12. Nc2 dxc3 13. bxc3 Na5 14. Be3 Qc7 15. Rb1 looks great after 15. ... b5? 16. a4! (Rozman), but Black can get satisfactory play with 15. ... Ba4! 16. Nfd4 Nc4, or even the greedy 16. ... Qxc3 17. Qe2 Bxc2.

11. ... dxc3 12. bxc3 Na5 13. Rb1 Qc7 14. Ba3 Qxc3 15. Nb3 Nxb3 16. Rxb3 Qa5

We have reached a position that has arisen several times: Rozman gives 17. Qb1 (17. Qa1 Nc6 18. Bxf8 Rxf8! 19. Rxb7 Nb4 20. Qd4 Nxd3 21. Qxd3 Rc3 22. Qb1 Ke7 is equal) 17. ... Rc3 18. Rxc3 Qxc3 19. Qxb7 Qxd3 20. Rc1 Nc6 21. Rxc6 Bxa3 22. Rc8+ Bxc8 23. Qxc8+ Ke7 24. Qc7+ Ke8 with equality.

These solutions to moves other than 1. ... e5 and 1. ... c5 generally fulfill their purpose well without being too demanding. In a few instances both authors can’t resist committing to entertaining but forcing lines that aren’t very flexible. In those cases, if Black is well-prepared, it’s difficult for White to create difficulties without risk. Perhaps that problem is simply in the nature of the modern game, and still more of an issue with 1. e4.

These two Chessable courses are advertised as “recommended for intermediate and advanced players.” That seems right, since they are too advanced for beginners and not always well suited for the professional player. I think that players in the 2000-2400 range could find much of the analysis useful, however, with the proviso that they will only want to use selected lines and have alternatives so as not to become an easy target.

Chessable products can be purchased with or without the full-length video. If you buy the MoveTrainer course with the free video, which is much shorter than the full-length version, you still get all the moves in the repertoire with exercises and sample games, but only a very limited amount of direct guidance and explanation from the instructor.

This saves money, and it’s all you might need if your main purpose is to see what moves are recommended. For these two courses, however, the full-length videos have a great deal to offer. Seeing all of these complex lines played out on the screen makes them easier to understand and learn.

Both presenters take a great deal of time explaining weaker alternatives and Rozman emphasizes which parts need to be memorized, with useful recaps. His pace can be rather frenetic, because he wants to leave no stone unturned.

By contrast, Kraai presents the concrete continuations more slowly and in somewhat less detail, but also discusses the reasoning behind the moves as they’re presented, with an emphasis on pawn structure. He is more concerned with giving the reader a grasp upon the position than covering all the bases. Both courses can teach the developing player a great deal, while providing some serious weapons for practical use. ♣

Kraai, Jesse. ChessDojo’s 1. e4 Repertoire for White. 24,167 words, 250 variations. 9:02 paid video, 1:07 free video. Available from Chessable.com.

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Having forced the king away from the pawn, White still needs a way to give the king cover from the active black rook. The way to do this is by “building a bridge.”

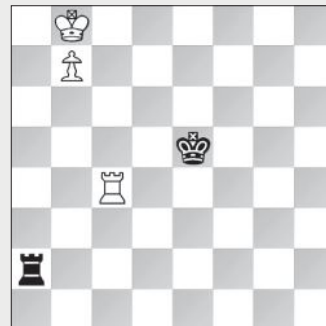
2. Rd4

Here the rook can serve as a shield from checks.

Trying to win straightforwardly with 2. Kc7 fails as the rook can check the king indefinitely, i.e., 2. ... Rc2+ 3. Kb6 Rb2+ 4. Kc6 Rc2+ 5. Kb5 Rb2+ and the king cannot separate from the pawn. (Note that the black rook is more than three squares / ranks from the white king!) If this happens in your game, don’t worry: you can always go back to b8 and restart the winning method!

2. ... Ra1

If Black attacks the rook with 2. ... Ke5 White can play 3. Rc4 and grab control of the c-file.



POSITION AFTER 3. Rc4

The winning method now is 3. ... Kd5 4. Rc1 Rf2 5. Ra1! taking control of the a-file. The king will go to a8 and the pawn will promote.

3. Kc7 Rc1+ 4. Kb6 Rb1+ 5. Kc6 Rc1+
Or 5. ... Ke5 6. Rd5+ Ke4 7. Rb5.

6. Kb5 Rb1+ 7. Rb4

The bridge is built, and the rook blocks the checks. Promotion cannot be stopped.

One benefit to knowing these theoretical positions is that it assists with your decision making, as you will begin to recognize which positions to avoid and which to strive for.

We’ll continue with more rook and pawn versus rook positions next month. In the meantime, practice what you have learned! ♣