

Introduction and the Solid 3...d5

1 d4 Nf6 2 Bg5 Ne4 3 Bf4 (Diagram 1)

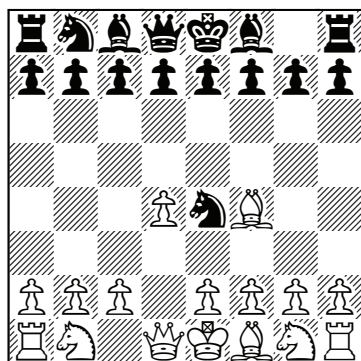


Diagram 1 (B)

The most popular choice

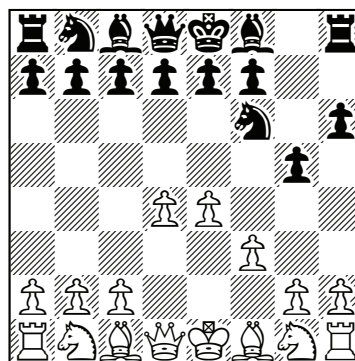


Diagram 2 (B)

Grob-like development

White's invariable choice these days and a move played in 68% of all the games in my database with 2...Ne4. While 3 h4 and 3 Bh4 remain decent surprise weapons and might suit the creative club player, they do have their theoretical drawbacks as we have seen. The retreat to f4 is a more sensible choice, since Black will generally find it much harder to exploit the bishop's position to obtain early counter-play.

3...d5

Black usually chooses either the dynamic, dark-square approach 3...c5 (played in 53% of all games with 3 Bf4), which we'll consider in our next chapter, or the solid text (36%), but his lesser alternatives are by no means unknown at club level:

a) 3...g5?! is an aggressive attempt to exploit the knight's position, but this weakening thrust fails to convince: 4 Bc1! (retreating to a safe square while attacking g5 is best; instead 4 Bg3?! has been worryingly common, but White should not part with his dark-squared bishop so lightly, although doing so with 4 Be5!? f6 5 e3! h5 6 Be2 g4 7 Bg3 is not actually so bad, E.Kovalev-G.Evtushenko, Novosibirsk 2007) 4...h6 (White obtained an edge too after 4...g4 5 Nd2 Nxd2 6 Bxd2 Bg7 7 c3 d6 8 e4 e5 9 dxe5! Bxe5 10 Bc4 Qf6 11 Ne2 Nd7 12 Be3 in M.Vasilev-M.Haas, German League 2005) 5 f3 Nf6 6 e4 (**Diagram 2**) 6...d6 7 Nc3 e5 8 Nge2 Bg7 9 dxe5! dxe5 10 Qxd8+ Kxd8 11 Ng3 Nc6 12 Be3 leaves White with a rather pleasant advantage, G.Kasparov-Y.Dembo, Tel Aviv (simul) 1994.



TIP: Never be afraid to retreat your bishop back to c1 after 3 Bf4. It's often the safest approach when the bishop is attacked early on and is a decent way of defending against an early attack on b2 after ...c5 and ...Qb6, as we'll see in our next chapter.

b) White hasn't scored particularly well after 3...Nc6?!, but the critical line 4 f3! (this isn't actually the only route to the advantage; the simple 4 Nd2 should also promise an edge) 4...e5 5 dxe5 g5 (this aggressive thrust is the point of Black's play) 6 Be3 (once again a good case can be made too for tucking the bishop out of harm's way with 6 Bc1!? Nc5 7 e4, as recommended by De la Villa) 6...Nc5 7 Qd2 Ne6 8 Bf2 Bg7 9 Nc3 (**Diagram 3**) 9...Bxe5 10 e4 looks quite pleasant for White. One Trompowsky expert showed the further way forwards in W.Gerstner-S.Giemska, German League 1989: 10...d6 11 Bc4 Bd7 12 Nge2 Rb8 13 Be3 and with the king-side situation under control, the greater trumps belonged to White.

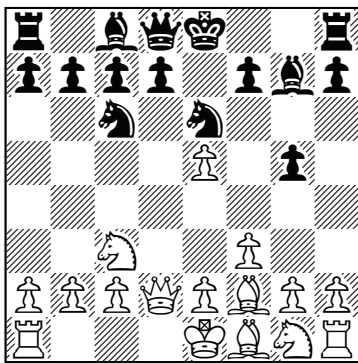


Diagram 3 (B)

Black may well regret ...g5

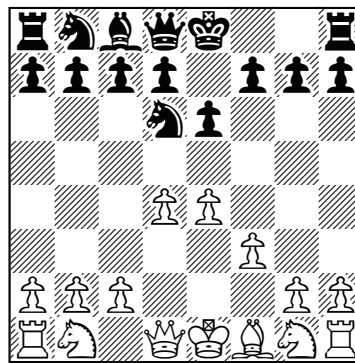


Diagram 4 (B)

White takes over the centre

c) 3...e6 has the point 4 f3 (not essential; with Black committed to ...e6, White might decide that this is a good time for 4 Nd2) 4...Bd6 5 Bxd6 Nxd6, but in practice White has scored pretty well with his strong centre after 6 e4 (**Diagram 4**) 6...f5 (Black often strikes out thus, but perhaps he does better with 6...Nc6!? when 7 Qd2 0-0 8 Nc3 Rb8 9 0-0-0 b5 10 d5 Ne5 11 Qd4 Qf6 was hardly clear in L.Winants-D.Hausrath, Belgian League 2007, and so White might wish to investigate 9 Nh3!?) 7 e5 (a decent case can also be made for retaining the tension with 7 Nc3!?) 7...Nf7 8 f4. Black's problem is that his knight on f7 isn't all that well placed and 8...0-0 (or 8...c5 9 dxc5! Qa5+ 10 Qd2 Qxc5 11 Nc3 g5!? 12 g3 b5 13 Bg2 Nc6 14 Qf2, maintaining control and an edge, M.Karttunen-E.Hintikka, Jyvaskyla 2006) 9 Nc3 d6 10 Nf3 c5 11 dxc5! (a deep and correct decision; White exchanges his e-pawn in return for maintaining a grip) 11...dxe5 12 Qxd8 Rxd8 13 Nxe5 Nxe5 14 fxe5 Nc6 15 Bc4

Starting Out: The Trompowsky Attack

Nxe5 16 Bb3 saw him fail to equalize in M.Karttunen-R.Nevanlinna, Finnish League 2007; not only are there ideas of 17 0-0 and 18 Rfe1, but Nb5-d6 may cause problems.

d) 3...d6!? (**Diagram 5**) is the best of this bunch, especially if Black has some familiarity with either the Pirc or Philidor. Moreover, it's been the sometime defence of Trompowsky practitioner Luke McShane. At this juncture White faces his standard choice:

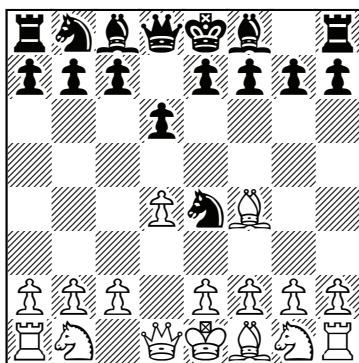


Diagram 5 (W)

Simple, but not so bad

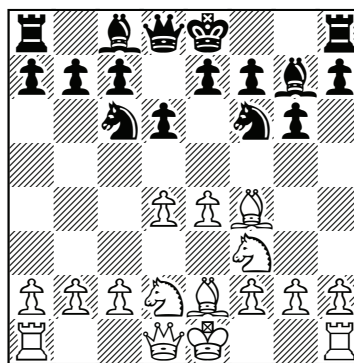


Diagram 6 (W)

Pirc-like play

d1) 4 Nd2 is the more solid approach when the issue is whether 4...Nf6 (4...Bf5 has been preferred by McShane, but 5 Nxe4 Bxe4 6 f3 Bg6 7 e4 e6 8 h4! h6 9 h5 Bh7 10 Qd2 Nd7 11 0-0-0 Be7 12 Kb1 gave White a pleasant spatial plus in M.Adams-A.Kogan, online blitz 2000) 5 e4 g6 6 Ngf3 Bg7 7 Be2 gives White an improved version of the Classical Pirc. I'm not so sure that it does after 7...Nc6 (**Diagram 6**), which may explain why Hodgson has preferred 6 e5!? Nd5 7 Bg3, which is a bit more aggressive and 7...Bg7 8 Ngf3 0-0 9 Bc4 Nb6 10 Bb3 Nc6 11 0-0 was perhaps slightly better for White in J.Hodgson-G.Vescovi, Bermuda 1997.

d2) 4 f3 Nf6 5 e4 leaves White better placed for a Pirc, especially if he is familiar with the aggressive Be3 and Qd2 variations. Black doesn't have to fianchetto, though, and 5...Nbd7! (or 5...e5 6 dxe5 Nh5 7 Be3 dxe5 8 Qxd8+ Kxd8, reaching the type of queenless middlegame in which it is possible for a weaker White to be outplayed, but 9 Nd2! Be6 10 Bc4 Bd6 11 Bxe6 fxe6 12 Nh3! Ke7 13 g3 Nc6 14 c3 a5 15 a4 h6 16 Nf2 Nf6 17 Ke2 Nd7 18 Nd3 saw White retain the upper hand with some model play in J.Rowson-S.Gordon, British Championship, Douglas 2005) 6 Nc3 (the Sämisch-like 6 Be3 e5 7 d5 Be7 8 c4 allows 8...Nh5 9 Nc3 Bg5 10 Bf2 g6 with sufficient counterplay for Black, R.Burnett-A.Ivanov, US Championship, Seattle 2003) 6...e5 7 Be3 Be7 doesn't look like too bad a version of the Philidor for

him. With the aggressive 8 Qd2 (**Diagram 7**) 8...0-0 9 0-0-0 a6 10 g4! b5 11 g5 Ne8?! 12 dxe5 Nxe5 13 f4 White seized the upper hand in V.Laznicka-I.Brener, online blitz 2006, but 8...c6 9 0-0-0 0-0 10 g4 b5 11 g5 Nh5 looks like a more critical response.

We now return to 3...d5 (**Diagram 8**):

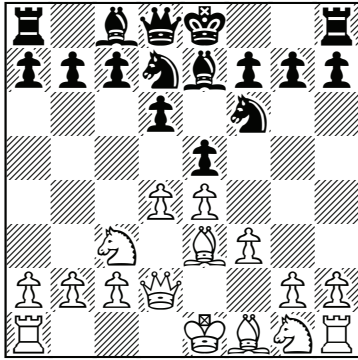


Diagram 7 (B)
Aggression from White

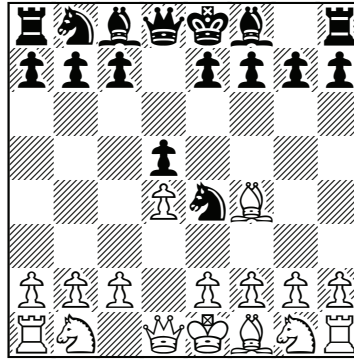


Diagram 8 (W)
Logical play from Black



NOTE: There can't be too much wrong with this classical move, primarily aimed at preventing White from occupying the centre with 4 f3 and 5 e4. Solid 3...d5 might be, but some of the resulting lines are among the most intriguing and complex in the whole of the Trompowsky.

4 Nd2

At this point 4 e3, which we will cover next, just edges out the more daring 4 f3, the subject of the final section of this chapter, in the popularity stakes. Lagging some way behind is the text, which might appeal to a systems-orientated player, but is too solid to really fight for the advantage.

4...c5!? (Diagram 9)

This vigorous move has the support of both Gallagher and Wells, but it has been much less common than both:

a) 4...Nxd2 5 Qxd2 Bf5 6 e3 e6 continues the solid theme and the exchange of a pair of knights should help Black in this London-type position: for example, 7 Bd3 (7 Nf3 might well be met by 7...Bd6, but with 7...Nd7!? 8 c4 dxc4! 9 Bxc4 Nb6 10 Bd3 Nd5! Black showed a good grasp of light-square strategy to equalize in V.Salov-P.Van der Sterren, Biel Interzonal 1993) 7...Bxd3 (or 7...Bg6) 8 Qxd3 c5!?

Starting Out: The Trompowsky Attack

(Diagram 10) 9 Bxb8 (9 dxc5 Na6 10 c6 Qa5+ 11 c3 bxc6 12 Nf3 Nc5 should be okay too for Black) 9...Rxb8 10 Nf3 Bd6 11 dxc5 Qa5+ 12 c3 Qxc5 13 Rd1 and White could find nothing better than to offer a draw in V.Salov-J.Polgar, Wijk aan Zee 1998.

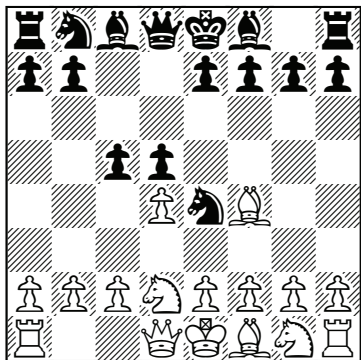


Diagram 9 (W)

Black fights for the initiative

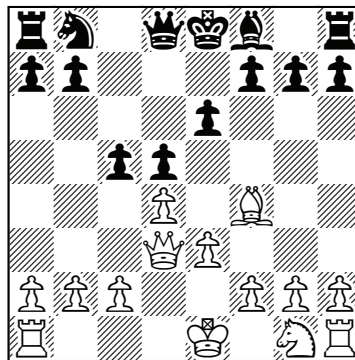


Diagram 10 (W)

Further exchanges beckon

b) 4...Bf5 has often transposed to our last variation after 5 e3 Nxd2 6 Qxd2. White has also tried both 5 Nf3 and 5 Nxe4 Bxe4 6 e3, but neither should trouble an experienced opponent: for example, after the latter 6...e6 7 f3 Bg6 8 h4!? h6 9 h5 Bh7 10 Bd3 Bxd3 11 Qxd3 has been tried in a few games by Miladinovic. This is probably White's best try, at least netting him some useful space, although I doubt that Black has too much to complain about if he continues 11...Bd6 12 Ne2 Nd7!?

5 Nxe4

Not the only try, but Black is fine too after 5 e3 Qb6 6 dxc5 Nxc5 7 Nb3 e6 8 Nf3 Nc6 9 Be2 Be7 10 0-0 0-0 11 c3 Ne4, V.Milov-B.Avrukh, Israeli Team Championship 2000.

5...dxe4 6 dxc5

Davies prefers 6 e3!? Qb6 7 Rb1, but I find it hard to believe that Black's free development is any less important than the dead-point on e4. Admittedly 7...Bf5 8 c3 Nc6 9 Qb3! Qxb3 10 axb3 cxd4 11 exd4 e3?! 12 Ra1 exf2+ 13 Kxf2 e5!? 14 dxe5 Bc5+ 15 Kg3! didn't give Black quite enough for his pawn in A.Walton-R.Palliser, British Championship, Scarborough 2004, but it's not so hard to improve on this sequence, such as with 8...cxd4!? when 9 Qxd4 Nc6 10 Qxb6 axb6 prepares to sideline the bishop with ...e5 and looks about equal after 11 Bc7 Rxa2 12 Bc4 Ra4! 13 b3 Ra8 14 Ne2 e6 15 0-0 Be7 16 Ra1 0-0 17 Bxb6 Ne5.

6...Qa5+

At this point White has tried a couple of moves, but without really coming close to fighting for the advantage:

a) 7 c3 Qxc5 8 Qa4+ (uninspiring, but 8 Bxb8 Rxb8 9 Qa4+?! b5 10 Qxe4 b4 gives Black excellent play for the pawn, as noted by Gallagher, while 8 Qd4?! Qxd4 9 cxd4 Nc6! 10 0-0-0 e5! already left White on the back foot in V.Mikhalevski-Ma.Tseitlin, Beersheba 1996) 8...Qc6 9 Qxc6+ Nxc6 10 e3 e5 11 Bg3 Be6 12 f3 exf3 13 Nxf3 f6 (**Diagram 11**) was rather comfortable for Black in G.Barbero-Y.Pelletier, Swiss League 1998.

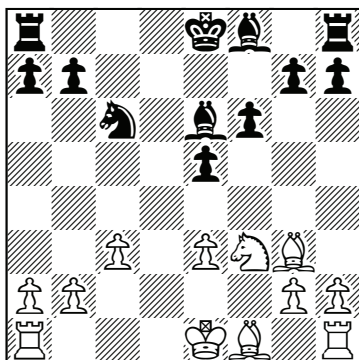


Diagram 11 (W)

Easy equality for Black

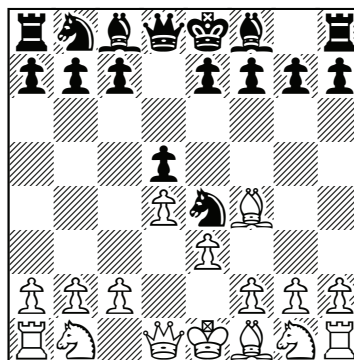


Diagram 12 (B)

White prepares 5 Bd3

b) 7 Qd2 Qxc5 8 Bxb8!? Rxb8 9 0-0-0 was at least a creative try in L.Keely-R.Palliser, Bradford 2008, although here 9...Bf5 looks like a decent alternative to the game's 9...Be6!? 10 e3 g6 11 Qd4 Qxd4 12 Rxd4 a6, sacrificing a pawn for queenside pressure and the initiative.

Conclusion

The critical lines of the 3 Bf4 variation are still to come, but it's useful for White to have an inkling of what to do should Black reject both 3...d5 and 3...c5. Moreover, 3...d6 isn't such a bad approach for a black player keen to avoid theory.

The main subject of this chapter is, of course, 3...d5 when I strongly believe that White should adopt either 4 e3 or 4 f3. There's nothing too wrong with 4 Nd2 when White has made 54% from over 650 games, but I'm at a loss to suggest a good path for him after the surprisingly rare 4...c5 and Black's more solid defences appear fine too.