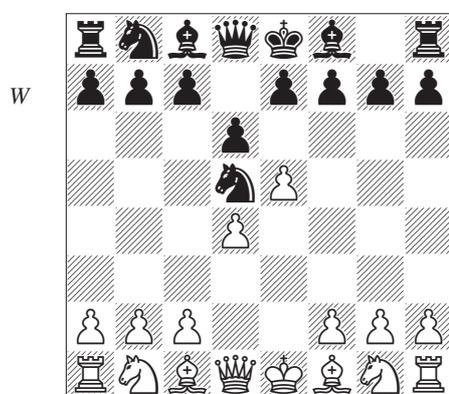


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5 The New Main Line and 4th Move Alternatives

The overwhelming majority of Alekhine Defence games start with the moves 1 e4 ♖f6 2 e5 ♜d5 3 d4 d6 (D).

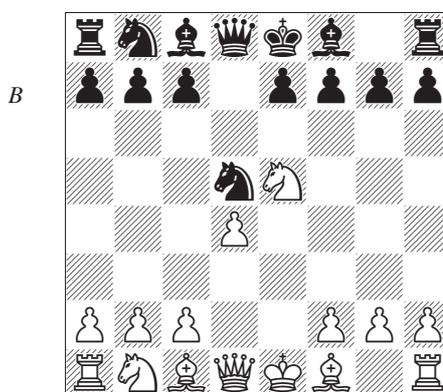


The two most popular moves here are 4 ♖f3 and 4 c4, both of which we have partially covered so far in the book. We shall revisit 4 c4 in the next chapter, in the guise of the Exchange Variation, while in the current chapter we shall complete the coverage of 4 ♖f3 by examining all of Black's alternatives to 4...♗g4, of which the most important is 4...dxe5, in particular with the follow-up 5 ♖xe5 c6. However, these continuations do not exhaust White's 4th-move options and Game 17 (Conquest-Baburin) shall shed light on 4 ♗c4 and other moves by which White seeks to maintain a modest presence in the centre while generating piece play.

But our main focus is the position after 4 ♖f3. As we noted in the previous chapter, the traditional main line 4...♗g4 has in recent years lost a great deal of its popularity, partly as a result of fashion, but mainly because the resulting positions do not seem terribly attractive to modern players, with Black struggling to equalize or create realistic chances of playing for a win.

In Game 18 (Kariakin-Vaganian) we examine 4...g6 (together with less common moves), a line that was highly topical in the 1980s due to its use by Lev Alburt. It still has a following and remains playable, but is not such a hot topic any more.

The remaining three games focus on 4...dxe5, a line originally popularized by Bent Larsen in the 1960s. Black allows White to activate the knight by 5 ♖xe5 (D), planning to offer its exchange by ...♜d7; if White declines in order to keep Black cramped, it will cost him two tempi.



In Game 19 (Oleksienko-Prokopchuk) we begin our coverage of the highly topical line 5...c6, which was hardly known at all before the late 1990s, yet is now played in quite a large proportion of all Alekhine games. We also cover, in the notes to this game, the original Larsen treatment with the provocative 5...♜d7?!, and the move 5...g6, which enjoyed considerable popularity in the 1990s before it was edged out by the more flexible move with the c-pawn. The main game features (after 5...c6) 6 ♗e2, a modest-looking move that has been very popular in the most recent events and that can be followed

up in highly aggressive fashion. The remaining two games deal with other ways for White to develop his king's bishop: Game 20 (Perunović-Ki.Georgiev) features 6 ♖c4, while 6

♗d3 is covered in Game 21 (Topalov-Carlsen), a striking victory for the young Norwegian superstar that will no doubt do much to popularize this variation, and our opening as a whole.

Game 17

Stuart Conquest – Alexander Baburin

Irish Ch, Dublin 2008

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♗d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♗c4

It is hard to find fault with 4 ♗f3; it is the most natural continuation, though of course not the only one. We have already seen 4 c4 as the introduction to the Four Pawns Attack, and another important follow-up to this move will be examined in the next chapter.

4 ♗e2 for the moment prevents the development of its opposing number to g4, but after 4...dxe5 (4...g6 is also perfectly reasonable) White only has 5 dxe5 (when 5...♗f5 is a solid option); generally the claim for the advantage is based on the possibility of recapturing with the knight. One point worth noting is that Black should avoid the line 5...♗c6 6 ♗f3 ♗g4 7 c3 e6?! 8 ♖a4 ♗xf3 9 ♗xf3 ♖d7 10 ♖e4 ♗de7 11 ♗f4 ♗g6 12 ♗d2 0-0-0 13 0-0-0 ♖d3 14 ♖a4, when old analysis by Kupreichik gave the spectacular 14...♗a3 as saving Black. However, it loses to the laconic 15 ♗b1!.

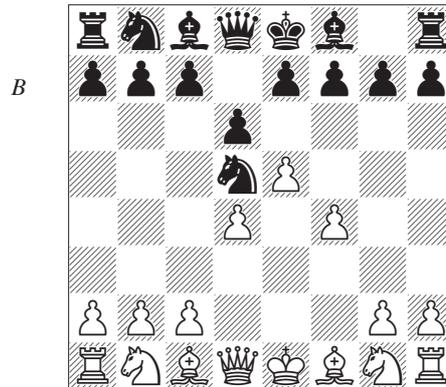
The immediate exchange 4 exd6 has no advantages over the normal Exchange Variation (4 c4 ♗b6 5 exd6), whereas Black gains additional squares for the retreat of the knight: f6, and in the case of 4...cxd6 also c7; moreover, 4...♖xd6 is a completely viable reply.

Therefore, besides the move in the game we shall dwell briefly only on 4 f4 (D).

Now 4...g6 leads, as a rule, to a difficult branch of the Four Pawns Attack, so Black generally chooses one of the two other replies:

a) After 4...♗f5, if White plays 5 c4 then the 5...♗b4 thrust looks rather favourable for Black, so White prefers 5 ♗f3 e6 6 ♗d3 ♗xd3 7 ♖xd3. Despite the exchange of the light-squared bishops (which on general grounds favours Black), White retains a certain initiative, thanks to his advantage in space and freer development.

b) Black's most consistent continuation is 4...dxe5 5 fxe5. White acquires a half-open file



and a pawn-majority in the centre, but his pawn-chain encourages the undermining thrust ...c5.

b1) Out of the continuations employed here, 5...♗c6 looks the least enterprising – a developing move that postpones active counterplay in the centre to a later stage. White can transpose into the Four Pawns Attack, but this would tend to justify Black's last move – and in any case, having avoided the Four Pawns earlier, he is not likely to be tempted now, unless Black allows a favourable version of it. White usually plays 6 ♗f3 or 6 c3, reinforcing the centre and aiming for a small but enduring advantage.

Black's main continuations seek to make a return to Four Pawns territory dubious for White:

b2) 5...♗f5 has the point that in reply to 6 c4 the knight will display more aggression by 6...♗b4, and with good reasons. Heberla-Grabarczyk, Polish Ch, Opole 2007 is typical: 6 ♗f3 e6 7 ♗d3 ♗xd3 8 ♖xd3 c5 9 0-0 ♗e7 (9...h6!?) 10 dxc5 ♗c6 11 ♗h1 ♗xc5 12 ♖e4. If an endgame is reached, the e5-pawn may become a sensitive weakness, but at the moment it creates favourable conditions for a kingside attack by taking away the important f6-square

from Black's defenders. White can also lead an offensive on the other side of the board, where he has a pawn-majority. Black will only acquire counterchances after completing his defence successfully.

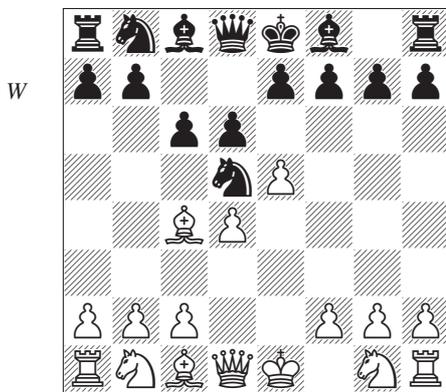
b3) The immediate blow in the centre, 5...c5, is without doubt the most pugnacious continuation. In the line 6 ♖f3 (6 c4? ♜b4!) 6...cxd4 (6...♙g4!?) 7 ♜xd4 ♜c6 8 ♜e4 g6 9 ♙c4 ♜b6 10 ♙b3 ♙f5 the conflict centred on the e5-pawn immediately becomes concrete in nature, and energetic play is demanded of both sides.

The text-move (4 ♙c4) attacks the knight, offering Black two logical replies.

4...♜b6

We shall pass over 4...e6, voluntarily locking in the bishop, as White is spoiled for choice: 5 ♜f3, 5 ♜e2 or 5 ♜g4. The line 4...dxe5 5 dxe5 c6 6 ♜c3 e6 suffers from the same defect, while if 6...♙e6 then the bishop will come under attack after 7 ♜e4 or 7 ♜f3.

Thus the only serious alternative to the text-move is 4...c6 (D).



Black strives to maintain the knight on its centralized post, which for the moment cannot be threatened by the white c-pawn. Let's examine the most significant replies for White:

a) 5 f4 is based on a view that ♙c4 is a more useful move than ...c6. Transplanting Black's plans from the 4 f4 lines considered above entails a loss of time, and the white knight acquires another route with the idea of taking advantage of the weakened d6-square: 5...dxe5 6 fxe5 ♙f5 7 ♜e2 e6 8 0-0 ♙e7 9 ♜g3 ♙g6 10 ♙d3 0-0 11 ♙xg6 fxg6 12 ♜xf8+ ♙xf8 13 c4 ♜b6 14 ♜g4 ♜d7 15 c5 and it is hard to prevent

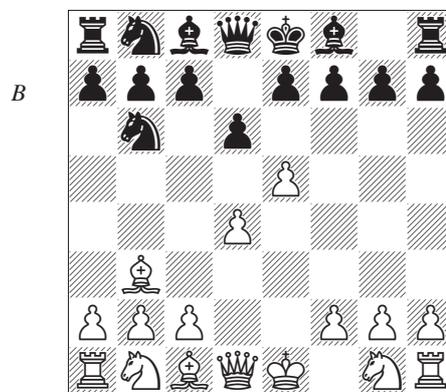
the knight from getting to d6, Glek-Konopka, Austrian Team Ch 2002/3. Lines where Black aims to close the game become more attractive; for instance, 5...♜b6 6 ♙b3 ♙f5 7 ♜e2 d5.

b) 5 ♜f3 restricts the c8-bishop's freedom of development and takes aim at f7. However, the e5-pawn is deprived of its main defender – a knight on f3 – and after 5...dxe5 6 dxe5 ♙e6 followed by ...♜d7 White has to spend time to find another way of supporting it, whereas Black will overcome the slight delay in his development.

c) 5 ♜e2, reinforcing the e5-pawn in advance, invites the enemy bishop to settle for the post on f5. After 5...dxe5 6 dxe5 ♙f5 7 h3 e6 8 ♜f3 ♜d7 9 0-0, Black has a solid, although slightly passive, position.

d) The most natural move, 5 ♜f3, leads after 5...♙g4 6 h3 ♙xf3 7 ♜xf3 dxe5 8 dxe5 e6 to a standard Alekhine position that is considered to be solid enough for Black. We have seen a similar position in Game 13, with the knight instead of the pawn on c6, which is admittedly slightly more pleasant for Black, but he has no reason to avoid the line examined above either.

5 ♙b3 (D)



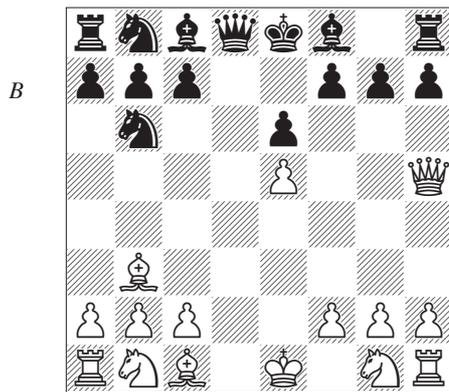
5...♙f5

Black can close the game by 5...d5, which looks quite acceptable by analogy with French Defence lines, but psychologically it is not easy to go for a position that Black can achieve in another variation with an extra tempo (1 e4 ♜f6 2 e5 ♜d5 3 ♙c4 ♜b6 4 ♙b3 d5 5 d4). The continuation 5...♜c6 provokes the old familiar pawn sacrifice 6 e6 fxe6; in this version it leads to a double-edged struggle.

The principal move here is 5...dxe5. Now, it is obvious that White didn't embark on this variation in order to exchange queens, so he has to attack f7, forcing ...e6 and leaving the c8-bishop imprisoned for some time. There are two ways to do it:

a) The less common method is 6 ♖f3 e6 7 dxe5, when Black chooses between 7...♗c6, to be followed by the leap of the queen or the knight to d4, and 7...a5 8 c3 a4, creating yet another possibility of attack on the e5-pawn with the rook-lift to a5. The transfer of the bishop to b5 in order to use the weakened d3-square is also interesting.

b) After 6 ♖h5 e6 7 dxe5 (D) the e5-pawn is protected and the f3-square is available to the knight, which secures White greater freedom in choosing a development plan.

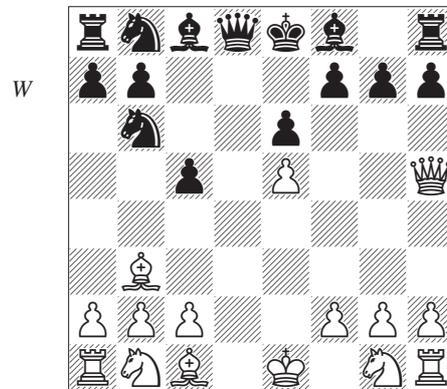


Black again has to decide whether to play 7...♗c6 or to harass the enemy bishop first and seize space with a queenside advance, viz. 7...a5 or 7...c5.

b1) After 7...♗c6 the opening's outcome depends on the success of the counterplay against the e5-pawn, which should not be delayed: 8 ♗f3 ♗d4 9 ♗xd4 (9 ♗bd2, not clinging to the bishop and striving to develop as rapidly as possible, is interesting) 9...♖xd4 10 0-0. If White manages to maintain his stronghold in the centre and avoid excessive simplification, he can retain the advantage. If Black instead opts for routine development, leaving his queen on d8, he will be too cramped once a white rook appears on d1.

b2) 7...a5, besides seizing space, creates a concrete threat. It turns out that after 8 c3?! ♗d3 with the threat of ...a4-a3 White has to offer an exchange of queens, while in the line 8 a3?! a4 9 ♗a2 ♗c6 10 ♗f3 ♗d4 11 ♗xd4 ♖xd4 it is difficult to defend the e5-pawn, which Black plans to attack yet again with the rook from a5. Thus 8 a4 has emerged as the most principled continuation, although it allows the bishop to be exchanged by ...♗a6-c5 or else commits White to sacrificing the a4-pawn (if the bishop retreats to a2). In return, White can hope to develop a dangerous initiative.

b3) Another fighting move is 7...c5 (D).



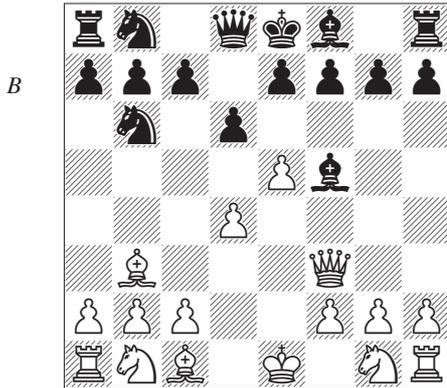
Black again harasses the bishop, while increasing his presence in the centre, but it is not combined with the development of the rook and takes away the c5-square from his own pieces. Here 8 c3 is best, as 8...♗d3 then poses no threat. The following game illustrates a possible course of events: 8...♗c6 9 ♖e2 g5 (sharp, yet typical of positions where the main target of attack is the e5-pawn) 10 ♗c2 ♗d7 11 ♗d2 ♗e7 12 ♗e4 ♗d5 13 ♗h3 h6 14 ♗d6+ ♗xd6 15 exd6 ♖b8 16 f4 with double-edged play, Thorhallsson-Mamedyarov, Reykjavik 2006.

The text-move (5...♗f5) sends the bishop to operate outside the fortress walls. So far all attempts to demonstrate a flaw in this method of play have failed.

6 ♖f3 (D)

Continuing to develop quietly by 6 ♗f3 allows Black after 6...e6 to consider most of his opening problems to be solved. Events take a sharper turn after the typical pawn sacrifice 6 e6. Both captures have been played but 6...♗xe6 7 ♗xe6 fxe6 seems the more logical choice as the

exchange of bishops probably helps Black. White no doubt has some compensation, and it appears sufficient to evaluate the chances as roughly even; e.g., 8 ♖f3 ♗c6 9 0-0 g6 10 ♗g5 ♗d7 11 ♜e1 ♗d8 12 ♗d3 ♕h6 with unclear play, Ji.Nun-Konopka, Zdar nad Sazavou 2008.



The queen move aims to disrupt the harmonious development of the enemy army, and should Black castle kingside, the queen will personally lead the offensive.

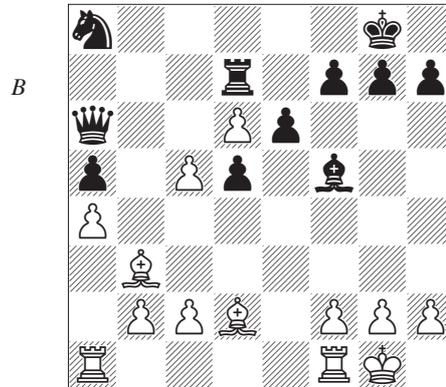
6...♗c8

The pawn sacrifice 6...e6 7 ♗xb7 d5 leads to an interesting and little-studied struggle. The queen is under arrest but its capture is not a simple affair; this process followed a curious course in the game Ristić-Shabalov, Geneva 1992: 8 ♗c3 (8 ♕a4+!?, 8 ♕d2 and 8 ♗e2 are all possible alternatives) 8...♕b4 9 ♗e2 0-0 10 0-0 a5 11 ♗b5 ♗d7 12 a4 ♜c8 13 ♗a7 ♜e8 14 ♗b5 ♗a6 15 ♗a7 ♜xa7 ♗c8 (for the moment Black plays the part of the aggressor and it seems that he is about to complete the encirclement) 17 ♗c3 ♜e7 18 ♗b5 ♗a8 19 ♗d6 ♕xd6 20 exd6 ♜d7 21 ♕d2 c5 22 ♗xa6 ♗xa6 23 dxc5 (D), with an original position.

White has only a rook for the queen, but the a8-knight has no moves, and it is not clear just how strong White's pawns are. Nevertheless, the material advantage should tell in the end.

7 ♗e2

White can radically free himself from the possible worries about the e5-pawn by exchanging on d6, but this frees Black's game just as much. The development of the knight to h3 has its advantages – the access to the g5-square,



and its drawbacks – the d4-pawn is left unprotected.

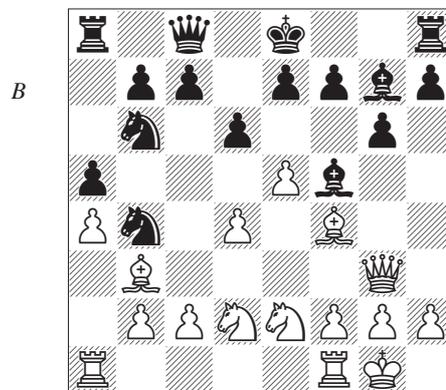
7...♗c6

Attacking the situation in the centre. 7...e6 is more common, when the centre can subsequently be closed with ...d5, while the advance of the c-pawn against the b3-bishop doesn't look bad either; for example, 8 0-0 c5 9 dxc5 dxc5 10 c3 c4 11 ♕d1 ♗c6 with comfortable development.

8 ♗g3

White decides to maintain the bridgehead on e5, in order to prepare under its cover a kingside offensive. The exchange on d6 would create a formation that, with other things equal, is more pleasant for Black, though at the moment the white pieces are more active. It would be interesting to include the preliminary 8 a4, when after 8...a5 the exchange 9 exd6 cxd6 weakens the b5- and b6-squares in Black's camp.

8...g6 9 ♕f4 ♕g7 10 ♗d2 a5 11 a4 ♗b4 12 0-0 (D)



12...0-0

Black has several methods of deploying his forces of roughly similar value. For the time being, White is not afraid of 12...♙xc2?! in view of 13 ♙xc2 ♘xc2 14 ♖ac1 ♗f5 15 ♗f3, when the threat of winning a piece gives Black no time to defend c7.

13 ♗h4?

But this is a mistake that immediately leads to a difficult position. Strategically everything is correct, as White is implementing a standard attacking plan, with ♙h6 and ♘g5 the intended follow-up, taking aim at h7. However, White should have started by moving the knight to f3, since now the e5-pawn's lack of protection presents Black with an unexpected tactical opportunity.

13...♙xc2 14 ♙xc2 ♘xc2 15 ♖ac1 ♘d4!

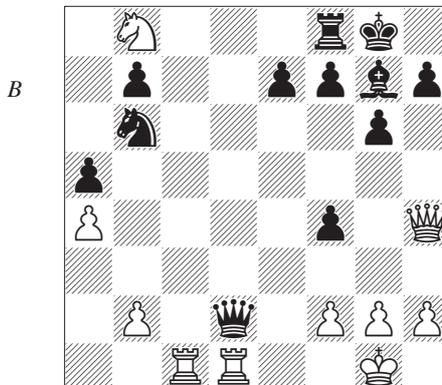
Not only sweeping off the board all White's centre pawns but also putting an end to his hopes for a kingside initiative.

16 ♘d4 dxe5 17 ♘b5 exf4 18 ♘xc7 ♖b8 19 ♘a6 ♗d8

Winning the exchange is mandatory but it fails to restore material parity, to say nothing about the positional balance.

20 ♘xb8 ♗xd2 21 ♖fd1 (D)

21 ♖cd1 is a little more stubborn, when Black all the same should retreat to b4, as unnecessary complications ensue after 21...♗xb2 22 ♗xe7 ♖xb8 23 ♖b1 ♘d5 (23...♗d4 24 ♗c7) 24 ♗d6 ♗e5 25 ♗xe5 ♙xe5 26 ♖b5.

21...♗b4 22 ♘d7 ♘d7 23 ♖xd7 ♙xb2 24 ♖b1 ♗e4 25 ♖bd1 ♙f6 26 ♗g4 ♗xa4?!

It is simpler to keep the pawn by 26...b6, as the a4-pawn cannot be defended anyway.

27 ♖xb7 ♙g7 28 h3 ♖c8 29 ♗d7?!

The exchange of queens eases Black's task, since now even the nebulous threats to his king are not a concern any more.

29...♗xd7 30 ♖bx7 ♖a8 31 ♖d8 ♖a6 32 ♖c8 a4 33 ♖dd8 ♖e6?!

But this is unnecessary. 33...a3 is simpler, with the same endgame that appears in a dozen moves.

34 ♙f1 a3 35 ♖a8 ♙b2 36 ♖d1 ♖c6 37 ♙e2 ♖c7 38 ♖d3 g5 39 ♖d5 h6 40 ♖a6 e6 41 ♖d3 e5 42 f3 ♖c2+ 43 ♖d2 ♖xd2+ 44 ♙xd2 f5

Since one of the white pieces has to guard the passed a3-pawn, two extra pawns easily break through on the kingside.

45 ♙d3 h5 46 ♖a5 ♙f6 47 ♖a6+ ♙e7 48 ♙c2 g4 49 ♖h6 e4 50 ♖xh5 g3 51 ♖xf5 exf3 52 gxf3 ♙f6 0-1

Game 18

Sergei Kariakin – Rafael Vaganian

Pamplona 2004

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♘f3 (D)**4...g6**

The cutting-edge 4...dxe5 is the subject of the next three games; meanwhile we shall survey a variety of minor alternatives:

a) 4...♙f5 is rarely played. The g4-square looks such a natural destination that one might think Black's hand faltered and accidentally dropped the piece on this square. Still, there are a couple of points to this development of the

bishop: besides taking the game off the beaten and well-studied track, the bishop takes aim at the c2-square; for example, 5 c4 ♘b4 confines the white knight to the unprepossessing post on a3. White usually offers an exchange of bishops at once with 5 ♙d3, but there is plenty of scope for creativity; we can also mention 5 c3 and 5 ♘h4.

b) 4...c6 is more popular, and indeed was the prototype for the 4...dxe5 5 ♘xe5 c6 line –