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Keep It Simple: 1.e4

A Solid and Straightforward Chess Opening Repertoire
for White

New In Chess 2018

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Preface

Don't you hate it when you are at a chess tournament, right before the first round, and some local important person is going on about all kinds of things? You are eager to start playing, moving the pieces, getting into a struggle over the board – and someone is stopping you! I have to confess that I feel similarly with book prefaces. Usually I just skip them and dive right into the moves of the chapters I am most interested in, hungry for 'real' information – not some chit-chat.

Therefore this won't be a long preface. The main point of it is to tell you the idea behind the 'Keep It Simple' approach. In fact, 'Keep It Simple' has been my motto in chess and in particular as a chess instructor for a while, so writing and naming a book after it is a very logical thing to do.

So what is this repertoire concept all about? Most opening books nowadays have reached enormous complexity, often spanning several volumes, totaling 1000+ pages. This depth of analysis is useful for very strong players, but not so much for amateur players. I felt it must be possible to 'Keep It Simple' instead, being more practical than scientific in the choices. Against the main-line defences White does not get an advantage anyway – for example the drawing percentage in top level correspondence chess speaks for itself.

My main 'KIS' guidelines are:

- The chosen lines are simple to learn
- It must be possible to find your way if you forget your lines
- Choose lines that may not be most critical, but uncomfortable for the opponent.

Compiling the repertoire according to these guidelines has led to a very classical, sound and reliable repertoire. You will get good endgames frequently, or positions with long-term assets like the pair of bishops. You won't get unsound gambits or tricky lines that can be refuted – all lines are playable up to a very high level; in fact most of the repertoire has been played by top players, at least occasionally or in quicker time controls.

The 'KIS' approach is of course applicable to many openings, so why is this a 1.e4 based White repertoire in particular? The reason is mainly my job as a chess teacher. Over the years I met many students or junior players

that I coached at tournaments – and lots of them play 1.e4, of course. Whenever they asked for general advice or needed a quick preparation session before a game I was less of a help because I've played non-1.e4-openings all my life with white. This book project helped to fix this. While researching for the book I got an excellent general overview on 1.e4 as a whole, trying to find good lines that fitted the 'KIS' approach.

I don't know if you already play 1.e4, or if you try to use this book to add 1.e4 to your opening repertoire. Before this book project I had not played 1.e4 seriously in tournament chess for ages. Since starting with it I have played 1.e4 quite successfully in all time controls. I feel the 'KIS' approach makes it a bit easier to adopt 1.e4, compared to more complex repertoires.

The final important point I need to mention is that 'Keep It Simple: 1.e4' was developed first as an online, interactive book on the platform www.chessable.com. On the website you can learn the moves based on text and videos. This product was released in March 2018. The paper book you are now reading has the same content, only adjusted to fit the format better. Based on the feedback of Chessable users I have added some lines that were played right after the release or that I simply forgot initially – having hundreds of readers before the paper book goes to print is excellent quality assurance!

The only substantial difference between the Chessable version and this paper book release is the add-on of 30 instructional games for this book, illustrating typical middlegames and ideas for the selected lines.

Somehow I still managed to make this intro too long, despite all my good intentions at the beginning!

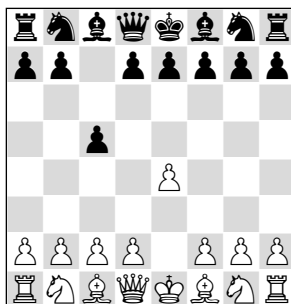
So just one more thing. Always remember: 'Keep It Simple for you, make it difficult for your opponents!'

Christof Sielecki
Dinslaken, Germany
September 2018

PART II

Sicilian Defence: 1.e4 c5

Introduction



The Sicilian Defence is popular on all levels and is Black's most respected reply to 1.e4, on par with the classical 1...e5. The non-symmetrical nature of the position often leads to a tense, complicated game.

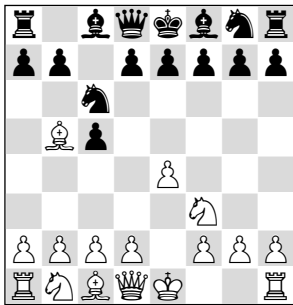
The most principled way to fight the Sicilian is to play the Open Sicilian, basically going 2.♘f3 and 3.d4, almost regardless of Black's second move. The main practical issue with this approach is: Black has a very wide range of subvariations that you need to prepare for and most of them require very precise move-by-move knowledge. One key idea of the 'Keep It Simple' approach is that it should be possible for you to find good moves over the board in case you have forgotten your concrete lines. In the Open Sicilian however there are many lines that are almost

impossible to figure out over the board. It can easily happen that one inaccurate move leads to severe trouble. This is the reason why the Open Sicilian is not featured in this book.

Instead I decided to suggest an anti-Sicilian repertoire, based on ♘b5(+) and a delayed c2-c3 (Alapin), depending on Black's 2nd move choice. One practical advantage of this repertoire is that it starts with 2.♘f3. That means that once you have mastered the lines presented here you can easily, at a later stage, expand your repertoire with an Open Sicilian against a particular black 2nd move, while still not needing to learn all possible Black systems. For example, you may decide at some point to play 3.d4 against 2...e6. That is an Open Sicilian, but Black cannot play lines like the Najdorf, Dragon or

Sveshnikov anymore. Most likely you would get a Taimanov, Kan, or Scheveningen. That's far more manageable than playing the Open Sicilian all the time. This way the suggested repertoire is easily modifiable – you may use all of it, or replace a particular line with something else later if you so desire. Let's have an overview on the presented lines.

Chapter 9: 2.♘f3 ♖c6 3.♙b5

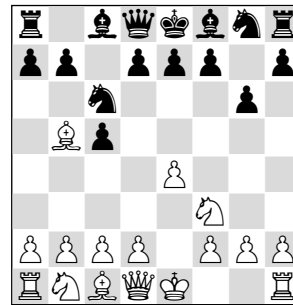


This is the Rossolimo Variation, our choice against 2...♖c6. Nowadays this is not a sideline anymore, but possibly White's main try for an advantage, which avoids entering the Open Sicilian with 3.d4. At the professional level, the main reason for avoiding the Open Sicilian after 2...♖c6 is the Sveshnikov Variation after 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 e5. White struggles to find anything against it, so many Pros have switched to 3.♙b5.

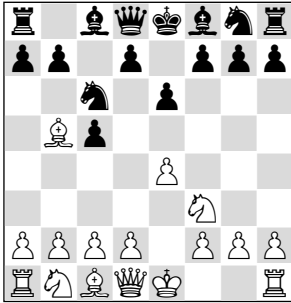
For our purposes the Rossolimo is a very logical choice as it is based on very sound principles, including quick development and good pawn structures. The positions are usually

more strategic in nature, and it is possible to find them over the board in case you have forgotten what you looked at before the game. Black has a plethora of options against the Rossolimo. But don't feel too intimidated, as none of them require extremely detailed knowledge to avoid trouble. You will be OK with common-sense moves and you will frequently get good positions using the ideas presented in this repertoire. In the starting position of the Rossolimo Black has tried many different rare moves. We'll have a look at all these minor options in Chapter 9.

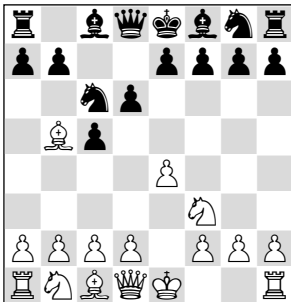
Chapter 10: 2.♘f3 ♖c6 3.♙b5 g6



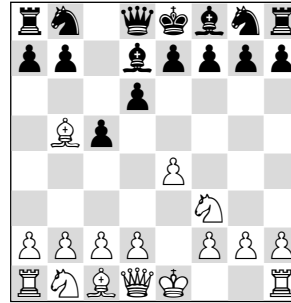
This is the most popular reply, and examined in Chapter 10. Black prepares the fianchetto and tries to increase his control over d4 this way. It also emphasizes kingside development more than the other moves. Note that White will castle on move 4, while Black's king will be in the centre for a while. This is not a big issue yet, as the position is closed, but further delaying it might be a cause for later concerns.

Chapter 11: 2. ♘f3 ♖c6 3. ♗b5 e6

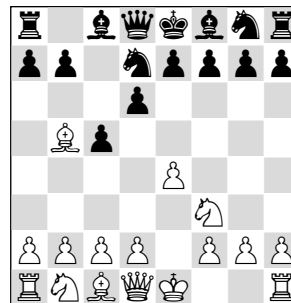
The second most popular move for Black, only surpassed by 3...g6. Black's main idea is to go ...♗ge7, to allow a recapture on c6 with a knight. The other point is to support a later ...d7-d5. This line is discussed in Chapter 11.

Chapter 12: 2. ♘f3 ♖c6 3. ♗b5 d6

Black intends to play ...♗d7 followed by ...a7-a6 to question the bishop. This plan is quite logical, but at the same time rather slow. I think that White has good prospects to get an edge against it. It is important to note that we might also get this position via 2...d6 3 ♗b5+ ♖c6. Please refer to Chapter 12 for this line.

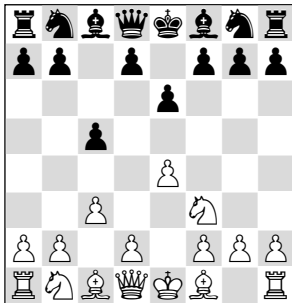
Chapter 13: 2. ♘f3 d6 3. ♗b5+ ♗d7

3. ♗b5+ is called 'Moscow Variation'. I briefly tried to find out why this name is used, but came up empty. This line always had a somewhat lame reputation, but this has changed lately. As White got more and more frustrated with battling the Najdorf, this move gained more popularity and is now used regularly by almost all elite players, including World Champion Magnus Carlsen. 3...♗d7 is the most solid reply for Black as it does not clog up his development that much. We will trade on d7 and later set up a Maroczy Bind in most cases. The Moscow with 3...♗d7 is the subject of Chapter 13.

Chapter 14: 2. ♘f3 d6 3. ♗b5+ ♖d7

This is the usual choice of ambitious players. They avoid the immediate bishop trade, but Black's development is delayed. This variation usually leads to complex middlegames with oftentimes all pieces and pawns on the board. Please see Chapter 14 for this combative line.

Chapter 15: 2.♘f3 e6 3.c3



Going 2...e6 is Black's third most popular move, right after 2...d6 and 2...♘c6. In recent years, the lines connected with it, in particular the Taimanov after 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6, have become very popular. The Taimanov is a good system for


Black, but an additional factor in favour of it is that you can avoid any 3.♙b5 lines with this move order. Our repertoire features ♙b5 against 2...d6 and 2...♘c6, but against 2...e6 we need a different approach. My recommendation is to go 3.c3, in the style of the Alapin Sicilian. Compared to c2-c3 on move 2 Black is committed to an early ...e7-e6. This of course is not a huge issue for Black, but it greatly reduces his choice of lines. This makes it rather easy for White to learn this system. It is examined in Chapter 15.

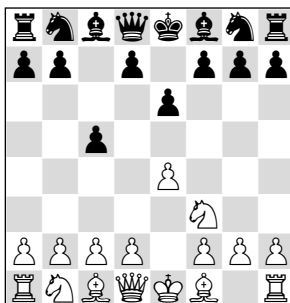
Chapter 16: Rare lines on move 2

After 2.♘f3, Black's most popular moves are 2...♘c6, 2...d6 and 2...e6. Besides these main lines, Black has some rare moves available that we should know good answers to – they can be tricky to handle if you have nothing prepared. Chapter 16 is the 'odds and ends' of the Sicilian and shows how to reply to the offbeat lines.


CHAPTER 15

2. f3 e6 3.c3

1.e4 c5 2.  f3 e6



3.c3

The Delayed Alapin is our line against 3...e6. Other interesting choices here (besides the Open Sicilian, of course) are 3.b3 or 3.g3. These are worth considering if you want to expand the repertoire. I didn't choose them as my main lines because I felt they did not fit into the general concept of this repertoire as well as 3.c3 does. With Black committed to ...e7-e6 he will usually play ...d7-d5 on move 3 or 4. The only other very serious alternative is 3... f6, attacking the pawn and unbalancing the pawn structure, as White needs to advance the e-pawn.

A) 3...b6

This is an independent option that is comfortable for White. Black does not fight for the centre and White develops easily.

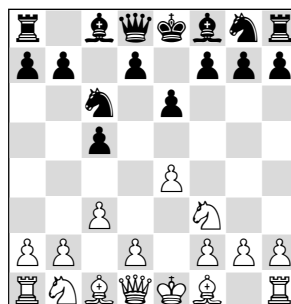
4.d4  b7 5.  d3  f6 6.e5

And this position we examine via a completely different move order, starting with 1...b6, the Owen Defence. I was not sure where to place it (Owen or c3 Sicilian), but at the end decided it probably fits more to the 1...b6 move order – so please see this chapter for more information.

B) 3...a6 4.d4 d5 5.exd5

And it transposes to 3...d5.

C) 3... c6

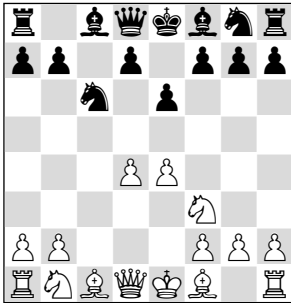


A natural developing move that will very often transpose to lines examined via 3...d5.

4.d4 cxd4

This is the only independent option, and regarded as imprecise, as White should benefit from the trade. The c3-square is now available to White's knight. It is best for Black to play 4...d5 5.exd5 and we will transpose to 3...d5 after either recapture.

5.cxd4



C1) 5...♞f6 6.♞c3

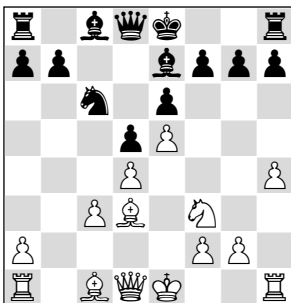
Instead, 6.e5 transposes to 3...♞f6 4.e5 ♞d5 5.d4, which is not part of our repertoire.

Our move avoids this transposition and is objectively stronger as well.

6...d5 7.e5 ♞e4 8.♙d3 ♞xc3

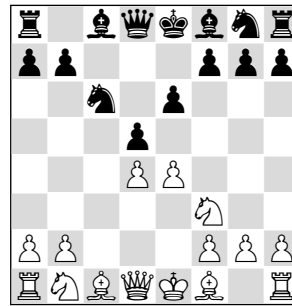
8...♙b4 9.♚c2 is also fine for White.

9.bxc3 ♙e7 10.h4



And White has a promising position on the kingside. Black must avoid castling now; after 10...0-0 the classic sacrifice 11.♙xh7+ wins for White.

C2) 5...d5



6.e5

This is the theoretical argument against Black's move order. We get to an Advance French with an early trade on d4 that benefits White, as he is able to play ♞c3 early on.

However, it needs to be said that it is not a situation where White is clearly better and just needs to learn some moves to prove it. In fact, I am unsure if White has anything better than in a regular French if Black is precise. If you feel uncomfortable in this structure, after 6.e5, you also have the option to simply take on d5, which is playing for a tempo edge in a symmetrical position, or go 6.♞c3, which very likely gets to an IQP after Black takes on e4. I don't want to examine all this in detail as this move order, for Black, is quite rarely seen. If you want to keep it very simple, 6.exd5 is the way to play.

6...♗ge7

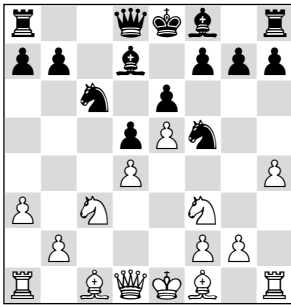
This seems to be best choice for Black, immediately aiming for f5 with the knight.

After 6...♖b6, 7.♗c3 is possible now compared to the French Advance where there are still pawns on c5 and c3: 7...♙d7 8.a3 ♗ge7 9.♗a4 ♖c7 10.♙d3 and White enjoys a nice space advantage.

7.♗c3 ♗f5 8.a3

This is useful in order to have ♗a4 available after a possible ...♖b6. Without a2-a3 Black may respond with ...♖a5+ / ...♙b4+ ideas.

8...♙d7 9.h4



The intended follow up is g2-g4, as now the annoying response ♗h4 is blocked. This position is slightly better for White, but you see that it is not at all that obvious. You have various options at move 6, so there are other position types available if you like to avoid this French Advance structure.

D) 3...d5

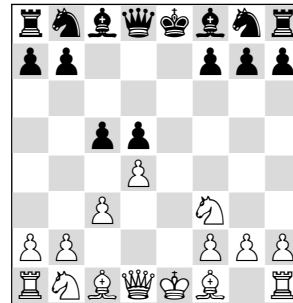
This is the ‘French’ way of playing. I suggest to take on d5, avoiding a possible transposition into a

French Advance Variation after the alternative 4.e5.

4.exd5

Now we will quite often reach an IQP position. After 4...exd5 Black often goes for the IQP, while after 4...♖xd5 we will play with the isolated pawn in many cases.

D1) 4...exd5 5.d4



Now Black has a wide range of moves to check.

D11) 5...♗f6 6.♙b5+

White does not mind trading this bishop against its c8 counterpart, or pinning the knight on c6 if Black avoids the trade. Playing against the IQP by trading minor pieces is a fine approach.

6...♙d7

6...♗c6 we check via the 5...♗c6 6.♙b5 move order (line D14 below).

7.♙xd7+

D111) 7...♖xd7

This is somewhat questionable as now there is no knight on d7 that is able to recapture on c5 comfortably.

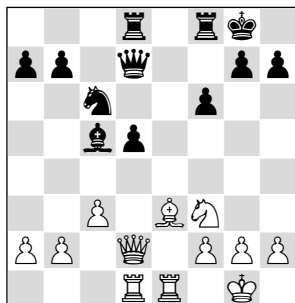
8.0-0 ♗c6 9.♙e1+ ♗e4

9... ♗e7?! 10.dxc5 0-0 11. ♗g5 is very bad for Black already, being a pawn down or allowing ♗xf6, destroying the pawn structure.

10. ♗f4 ♗e7 11. ♖bd2 ♖xd2 12. ♗xd2

White is very comfortable here, being better developed and coordinated.

12... 0-0 13.dxc5 ♗xc5 14. ♖ad1 ♖ad8 15. ♗g5 f6 16. ♗e3

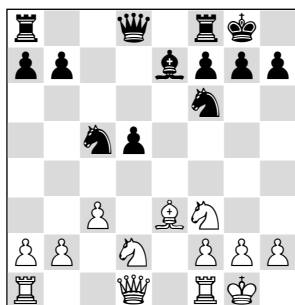


And White managed to get a good anti-IQP game.

D112) 7... ♖bxd7 8.0-0 ♗e7

Black quickly closes the e-file before it is too late.

9.dxc5 ♖xc5 10. ♗e3 0-0 11. ♖bd2



This position is roughly equal, but easy to play for White. You go ♗c2, centralize rooks and maybe go for ♗d4 and ♖d2-f1-e3, to put pressure

on the IQP. Black has got active pieces, of course, so we cannot count on any substantial edge.

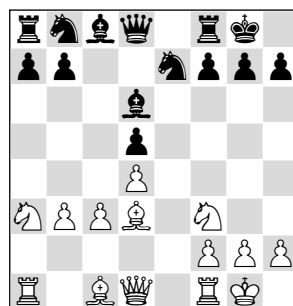
D12) 5...c4

This is not well-timed at this particular moment.

6.b3 cxb3

This is forced. After 6...b5? 7.a4 Black will lose the queenside.

7.axb3 ♗d6 8. ♗d3 ♖e7 9.0-0 0-0 10. ♖a3



White is also better after other moves, but this is a nice move, intending ♖b5 or just ♖a3-c2-e3 to move the pieces to the kingside. White is better in the centre and has nice chances after the natural...

10... ♖bc6 11. ♖h4!?

This controls f5 and prepares f2-f4, to attack.

D13) 5...a6

This move avoids an early ♗b5+ and is often quite useful later on. This position also arises frequently after 2...a6, the O'Kelly Variation.

6. ♗d3

A natural move, but other normal developing moves would be fine as well, for instance 6. ♗e2 or 6. ♗e3.

D131) 6...♞c6 7.0-0 cxd4 8.♞e1+ ♕e7 9.♞xd4 ♞xd4

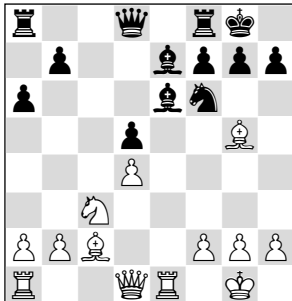
9...♞f6 10.♙e3 0-0 11.h3 leads to a quite typical position. White is very slightly better.

10.cxd4

White has an annoying pull here.

10...♞f6 11.♞c3 0-0 12.♙g5 ♙e6

13.♙c2



Intending ♞d3 and ♙b3 ideas. Black is doomed to passive defence.

D132) 6...c4

The most ambitious move, which is quite in line with the early ...a7-a6.

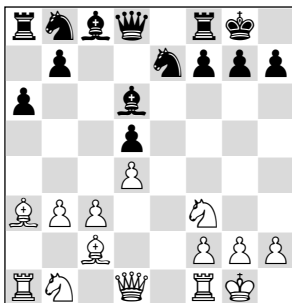
7.♙c2 ♙d6 8.b3

The normal reaction to ...c5-c4.

8...cxb3

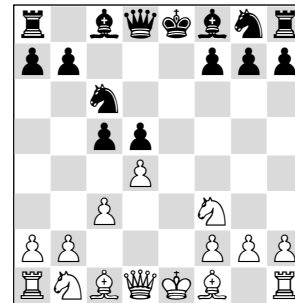
8...b5 9.a4 is fine for White. He opens up the queenside while being better developed.

9.axb3 ♞e7 10.0-0 0-0 11.♙a3



Black is close to being equal now, but we still have the slightly better structure and easy moves like ♞e1 will follow.

D14) 5...♞c6



This is the most popular move, placing the knight on the most logical square, looking at the crucial d4 spot in front of the future isolated queen's pawn (IQP).

6.♙b5 ♙d6

Black needs to get his kingside developed in order to get castled quickly. With ...♙d6 he usually intends quickly to play ...♞ge7 to avoid the issues that we discuss following 6...♞f6.

Let's check 6...♞f6. This is the move that Black ideally wants to play. The knight has its most active post on f6, but it allows a pin by ♙g5 and does not block the e-file, like ...♞ge7 in the main line does: 7.0-0 ♙e7 8.dxc5 ♙xc5 9.♙g5 ♙e6 10.♞bd2 0-0 11.♞b3 ♙b6 12.♞bd4 and White retains a comfortable edge here as the IQP is safely blockaded and the pin on the f6-knight is quite unpleasant for Black to handle.

7.dxc5 ♙xc5 8.0-0 ♞ge7

8... ♖f6 9. ♖g5 we examine via the 6... ♖f6 move order in the paragraph above.

9. ♖bd2 0-0 10. ♖b3

Now we are at the final important point where Black needs to choose where to place the bishop.



D141) 10... ♖d6 11. ♖d3

This retreat is in fact the most active move. It prevents 11... ♖g4 due to 12. ♖xh7+, and prepares the battery with ♖c2/♖d3 to provoke weaknesses.

11...h6

In order to play ... ♖g4 Black avoids ♖xh7+.

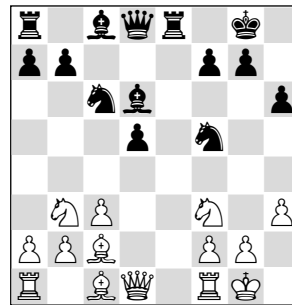
12.h3

No pin please – this is an important move.

12... ♖f5

A good move that prevents 13. ♖e3. Instead with 12... ♖c7 Black can aim to set up a battery himself: 13. ♖e1 ♖d6 14. ♖e3 b6 15. ♖bd4 a6 16. ♖c2 and White is in excellent shape. He is very well coordinated and has no weaknesses, while Black has multiple problems with the pawn structure.

13. ♖c2 ♖e8



14. ♖d3

This is quite inconvenient for Black to meet. White has also tried the more technical move 14. ♖e1. This was featured in sample game 13 between c3 specialist Sergey Tiviakov and GM Ferenc Berkes, played in Plovdiv 2003.

14...g6

It may be better for Black to play 14... ♖f6. The best reply is 15. ♖d2. Grabbing the pawn on d5 does not lose immediately but gives Black strong compensation. We should rather focus on development. Note that 15.g4 ♖h4 leads to absolutely nothing as we only have a harmless check on h7. The battery, here, is a constant worry for Black, but we need to be cautious how we actually execute the ‘threat’, especially if we have to weaken our position like 15.g4 does here.

After 15... ♖e6 16. ♖fe1 g6 17. ♖e2 I prefer White but Black is not in terrible shape either. His pieces are active and the weaknesses are not an immediate problem.

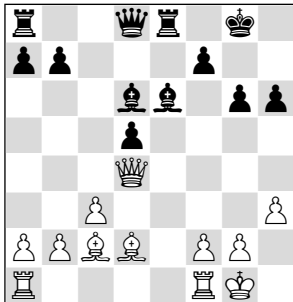
15. ♖d2 ♖e6

15... ♖f6 is better here again, transposing to 14... ♖f6.

16. ♖bd4

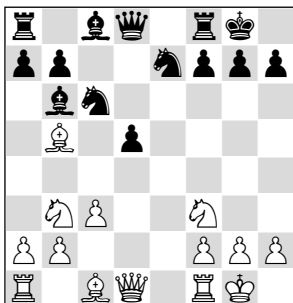
This is strong, inducing multiple trades on d4.

16... ♗cxd4 17. ♘xd4 ♗xd4 18. ♕xd4



An excellent scenario for White. Without knights the position becomes very static and the IQP weakness becomes more pronounced.

D142) 10... ♗b6



This move and 10... ♗d6 are of roughly equal value. 10... ♗b6 looks more principled, though, as it still connects with the d4-square.

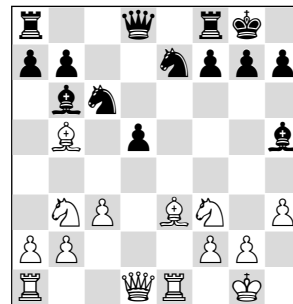
In any case, White would like to trade this bishop – it follows the general rule to trade minor pieces vs the IQP and gets rid of Black's better bishop.

11. ♖e1

To play ♗e3 is a key idea to trade the bishop, which makes 11. ♖e1 a very natural choice.

11... ♗f5

Directed against 12. ♗e3. I think this is better than 11... ♗g4 12.h3 ♗h5 13. ♗e3.



Here, White is comfortable again, being able to trade the bishops on e3 or push Black's bishop back to c7.

12. ♗d3

Against ... ♗f5 set-ups the battery with ♗c2/♕d3 is usually a good idea.

12...h6 13. ♗c2 ♗e6 14. ♕d3 ♖e8

Note that after 14... ♕f6, 15. ♗e3 is an important point. The ♗f5 is basically pinned, so ♗e3 is possible now. (Note that 15.g4 is answered by 15... ♕g6! and White gets nothing out of this weakening pawn push.) 15... ♗xe3 16. ♖xe3 g6 17. ♖e2 is no fun for Black. He is quite passive and has no dynamic chances to compensate for the IQP weakness.

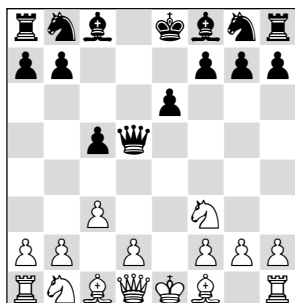
15. ♗d2 ♖c8 16. ♗fd4

This is an idea if Black avoids ...g7-g6.

16... ♗cxd4 17. ♘xd4 ♗xd4 18.cxd4 ♕f6 19. ♗c3

This is slightly better for White due to the bishops, but Black is quite solid, obviously.

D2) 4... ♖xd5



Black avoids the IQP with this move and in fact White could be the one with a (favourable) IQP soon. Most of the time however we play with an early ♖a3, intending to harrass the queen with ♖b5, leading to an open centre without an isolated pawn.

5.d4

D21) 5...cxd4

This is a quite clear concession, giving White the good c3-square for the knight. White will easily get a comfortable IQP position.

6.cxd4

The IQP structure has been discussed a lot in chess literature or media, so I only want to give a quick summary of what is most important. The side with the IQP enjoys fluent piece development and does not have any problem pieces. With many pieces on the board the weakness of the isolated pawn is not that pronounced, as

it is difficult to attack it multiple times. This is not the case after minor pieces are traded, when the rooks and queen may focus on attacking the pawn.

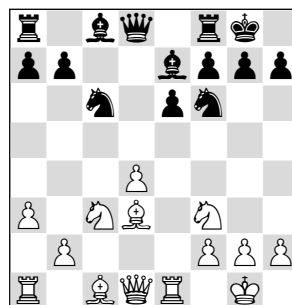
Following this logic, the IQP side should keep minor pieces on, and, if there are no active opportunities for the rooks, allow them to be traded.

The square in front of the pawn is very important as it may serve as an outpost for the opponent. If the IQP side manages to push the pawn forward and break this potential blockade it is often favourable as piece activity persists, while the weakness gets removed. This is just a brief intro to the IQP, please see some classical examples or books on strategy for more information.

6... ♖f6 7. ♖c3 ♖d8

Probably the wisest decision. Other squares offer additional tempo-gaining possibilities for White.

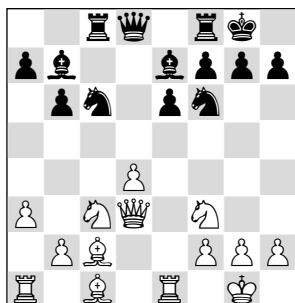
8. ♗d3 ♗e7 9.0-0 0-0 10. ♖e1 ♖c6 11.a3



This is a rather favourable IQP position, but it is useful for your general chess knowledge to study these structures to understand them

better. I will give a typical move sequence to illustrate the dangers for Black, but further study of classical games is very beneficial here.

11...b6 12.♖c2 ♖b7 13.♙d3 ♜c8?



This normal-looking move already puts Black in grave danger.

14.d5! exd5

Instead, 14...♘a5 is the most resilient, but still very bad for Black.

Now it's just over immediately.

15.♙g5 g6 16.♜xe7 ♙xe7 17.♘xd5

And Black loses decisive material.

D22) 5...a6

This is quite rare in this particular position, but the position sometimes arises from 2...a6 3.c3, which is also part of our repertoire.

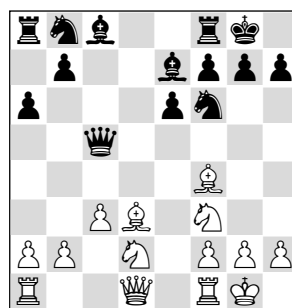
6.♙d3

Other developing moves are also fine, of course.

6...♘f6 7.O-O ♙e7 8.dxc5

This capture is a bit more promising for White here compared to other, similar positions due to the weakness on b6. White should be slightly better with other sensible moves as well.

8...♙xc5 9.♙f4 O-O 10.♘bd2



White is slightly better here. He is well developed and Black still has no great option for his bishop on c8. White's next moves will likely be ♙e2, a2-a4, ♘c4, to increase the pressure on the queenside.

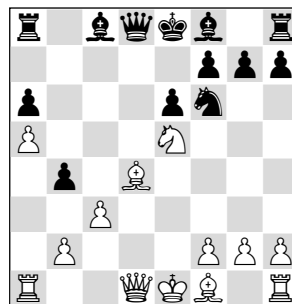
D23) 5...♘c6

This has little independent value as ...♘f6 will be the next move most of the time.

6.♘a3

Now 6...♙d8 7.♘c2 ♘f6 or 6...♘f6 7.♙e3 will transpose to the main line D24 below. The two rare alternatives are bad for Black:

- 1) 6...a6 addresses ♘b5, but the cure is worse than the disease: 7.♘c4 (b6 is a glaring weakness) 7...♙d8 8.♙e3 (White's developmental advantage is reaching alarming proportions) 8...b5 9.♘ce5 ♘xe5 10.♘xe5 cxd4 11.♙xd4 ♘f6 12.a4 b4 13.a5.



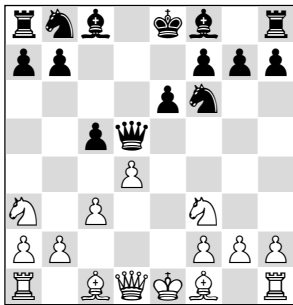
And Black will probably only last for a few more moves, facing ♖a4+ and ♙e2-f3;

2) 6...cxd4 is ill-timed: 7. ♘b5 ♙d6 (the only move already; 7...♗d8 8. ♙f4 and it's 'game over') 8. ♙c4 ♖e4+ 9. ♙e3 ♙b8 10. ♘bxd4 and White is a lot better with excellent mobilization.

D24) 5... ♘f6

This is the main line by a mile. This follows the logic that this knight will be best on f6 with almost 100% certainty, while the optimal position of the other knight is not as obvious and bishop moves make little sense at the moment.

6. ♘a3



D241) 6... ♘c6

With this move Black keeps the queen on d5 as long as possible.

7. ♙e3

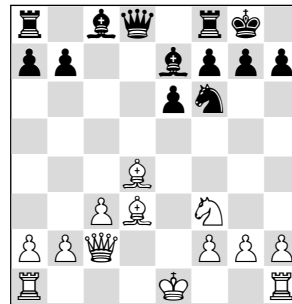
Very natural play, but it is important to note that instead 7. ♘b5 ♖d8 8. dxc5 is less promising than it looks due to 8... ♙xc5 9. ♖xd8 ♗xd8, and this endgame does not lead to much. It is, of course, an option if you like a

quiet game, but I think 7. ♙e3 is objectively more promising.

7...cxd4 8. ♘b5 ♖d8 9. ♘bxd4 ♘d5

9... ♘xd4 is too accommodating.

White retains a good game with simple moves: 10. ♙xd4 ♙e7 11. ♙d3 0-0 12. ♖c2.



White is better both with 0-0 or 0-0-0 next. Choose according to your taste – for a nice example of 0-0-0 see the game So-Akobian, St Louis 2016.

10. ♘xc6 bxc6 11. ♙d2

11. ♙d4 is also interesting, but plans involving ...f7-f6 are a bit murky.

Our move is simple, but also good for a slight pull.

11... ♖b6

Black may also develop the f8-bishop, of course, but this move is the only one that requires a concrete reaction.

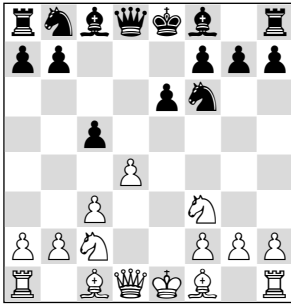
After a move like 11... ♙c5 12. ♙d3 0-0 13. 0-0 White enjoys a nice structural edge.

12. ♙d3!

We happily offer the b2-pawn as we are much better developed.

12... ♖xb2 13. 0-0

With excellent attacking chances for White.

D242) 6...♖d8 7.♘c2

The knight on c2 will recapture on d4 if Black takes this pawn. Here both 7.♘c4 and 7.♙f4 are very decent alternatives if you like to vary your play. I went for 7.♘c2 as the next moves are simple to play and yet still good for a comfortable game. We have the general development plan to go for: ♙d3, 0-0, ♖e2, ♙f4/g5, and then centralize the rooks. This will work pretty much regardless what Black does.

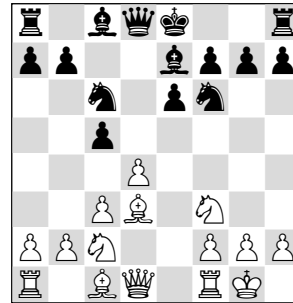
7...♘c6

With 7...♘bd7 Black opts for a set-up with the knight on d7. He could have started this set-up with 7...♙e7 and 8...0-0 as well, of course. Our set-up is the standard one mentioned earlier.

After 8.♙d3 ♙e7 9.0-0 0-0 10.♖e2 b6 11.♙f4 ♙b7 12.♞ad1 White is slightly better. We will play ♞fe1 and ♘e5 next, and see how Black reacts. Our good centralized pieces give us some options, from piece-based kingside play to playing on the queenside with ideas like ♘f3-e5-c4-d6.

8.♙d3 ♙e7

Starting to trade with 8...cxd4 9.♘cxd4 ♘xd4 10.♘xd4 ♙e7 11.0-0 0-0 12.♙f4 gives White the more active pieces and a small advantage. Simple moves, like ♖c2/♙e5, and centralization of the rooks will follow.

9.0-0

Very natural, but White does not always need to commit his king early on. I'd also like to refer you to sample game 14, Godena-Ter Sahakyan, Plovdiv 2013. In this game White delayed castling in a very similar position and managed to reach a promising position.

9...0-0 10.♖e2 b6

This is seen most often, but Black has tried some other moves. I don't think we need to examine them all, as White will go ♙g5 and ♞ad1 anyway and be a bit better.

11.♙g5

As mentioned before, this standard set-up is always possible. Note that 11.dxc5 is also fine, and should be slightly better for White as well.

11...♙b7 12.♞ad1 cxd4 13.♘cxd4 ♘xd4 14.♘xd4 ♖d5

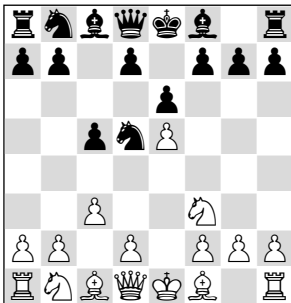
This is Black's most active set-up. **15.f4**

With an interesting game. White has some attacking chances on the kingside, but Black is quite solid. I have selected three sample games for the Delayed Alapin and only after annotating them all I recognized that all three have been played in Plovdiv, Bulgaria – a weird coincidence. Maybe we should rename this line to ‘Plovdiv Variation’?

E) 3... ♘f6

This is best in my opinion. Of course, 3...d5 is very respectable as well but I feel that White has more chances for an edge against this move. After 3... ♘f6 there is no path to a white advantage, according to modern theory.

4.e5 ♘d5



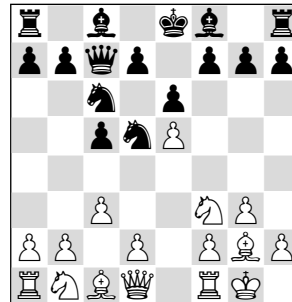
5.g3

White's big main line is 5.d4, of course, but it is rather complicated and Black gets to choose the course of play at important junctions. My choice, 5.g3, is a rather modest move but it is easy to play and learn. If you want to sharpen up your repertoire, 5.d4 is the way to go.

E1) 5... ♘c6

Black quickly tries to put pressure on the e5-pawn.

6. ♖g2 ♜c7 7.0-0!



Offering the e5-pawn for excellent compensation. Black should probably decline, but we need to check the capture, of course.

E11) 7... ♘xe5?!

This is extremely risky, giving White a great initiative.

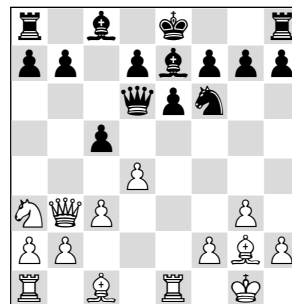
8. ♘xe5 ♜xe5 9. ♖e1 ♜d6 10. ♘a3

Instead, 10.d4 is fine as well. Just open it up as White is so much ahead in development.

10... ♖e7 11. ♜b3 ♘f6

Essentially forced as ♖xd5/♘b5 was in the air.

12.d4



With excellent compensation for the pawn.