

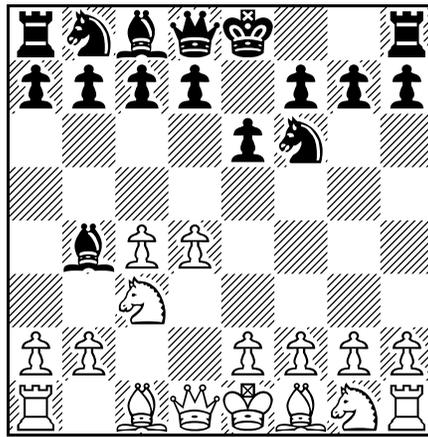
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Introduction

What is the Nimzo-Indian?

The Nimzo-Indian Defence arises after the opening moves **1 d4** ♖f6 **2 c4 e6** 3 ♗c3 ♙b4.



The Nimzo-Indian was the creation of Aron Nimzowitsch, who was one of the World's strongest players in the 1920s, as well as a hugely influential writer. He was also the leader of the Hypermodern School of chess. The hypermodern approach to chess openings advocated long-range control of the centre with pieces as opposed to classical occupation with pawns which previously had been thought to be compulsory.

The Nimzo-Indian bears all the hallmarks of a hypermodern opening. After **1 d4** White would ideally like to follow up with e2-e4. Black prevents this move, not with the classical 1...d5 but with a piece: **1...♖f6!** After **2 c4 e6** 3 ♗c3 White is again ready to play e2-e4. Black could still occupy the centre with 3...d5 but instead uses another piece to prevent White's advance: **3...♙b4!**

The Nimzo-Indian doesn't always stick to hypermodern principles though; in some main lines Black does quickly occupy the centre with pawns. Another feature to mention straightaway is Black's rapid development. In the diagram position Black is already prepared to castle if he needs to, whereas it will take White at least three more moves before he can castle kingside.

The Attraction of the Nimzo-Indian

I've been playing the Nimzo-Indian for over 30 years, starting as a junior all the way up to grandmaster level. I swapped around with other openings but always remained loyal to the Nimzo.

I'm sure one of the reasons I'm still attracted to the Nimzo-Indian is that I'm always learning something new about it, even after all these years. I discovered quite a few new things during the writing of this book. The Nimzo-Indian is such a flexible opening with so many different possibilities and so many ways to play it. New ideas are always cropping up too, not just novelties in existing lines but whole new variations.

Even so, probably the greatest attraction of the Nimzo-Indian is its reliability. The Nimzo-Indian is undoubtedly a sound opening and has no chance of being refuted anytime soon. Yet it also offers players enough imbalances in the position to be able to outplay opponents – the two most typical ones being superior pawn structure versus bishop pair and centre (see Chapter 1-2), and lead in development versus bishop pair (see Chapter 5). I feel it's these two qualities – soundness and imbalance – which have attracted virtually all the World's leading players to the Nimzo-Indian at one time or another.

What this book covers

I've always thought that one of the most difficult periods of a game is when our opening knowledge runs out, when we are "out of book" – when we have to think for ourselves! This happens in 99% of the games we play, and I've tried to address the situation in this book by focussing on the following:

1. Typical situations in opening and middlegame positions (and very occasionally thematic endings).
2. Typical plans for both sides and how players react to these.
3. Typical and thematic tactical opportunities for both sides.
4. The principles and guidelines of each variation covered.
5. The key questions we should be asking ourselves during study and in game situations.

I've also presented the opening theory for each variation covered, and highlighted move-order issues and possible transpositions into other lines in the book.

In general I've chosen to cover well known lines, but I've also favoured lines which I feel teach us a great deal about the basic principles of the Nimzo-Indian, for example fighting against the doubled c-pawns or exploiting a lead in development when White avoids the doubled pawns.

Being a Nimzo-Indian player for such a long time, I can't help but have a certain bias to the Black side of this opening, and this book *is* aimed more at those who play (or want to play) the Nimzo-Indian as Black. I've covered a sufficient number of lines so that those playing Black can choose at least one option against every main line White can play. I do feel, though, that the general study of Nimzo-Indian positions, as well as the opening theory, will also be of value to those who prefer playing the White side.

There is a huge number of players whose ideas have contributed immensely to the de-

velopment of the Nimzo-Indian, and some of these players are featured in this book. Their creative efforts over the board make the task of studying and writing about the Nimzo-Indian much easier, and for this they deserve a huge amount of appreciation. If I had to name just a very few high-profile players, I would mention Anatoly Karpov, Vladimir Kramnik, Michael Adams, Peter Leko, Pavel Eljanov and current World Champion Vishy Anand, all of whose games are well worth following to obtain a better feel for the Nimzo and to check for new ideas. On the White side I should mention Garry Kasparov, Magnus Carlsen, Kramnik (again) and Alexander Morozevich.

The Move by Move Series

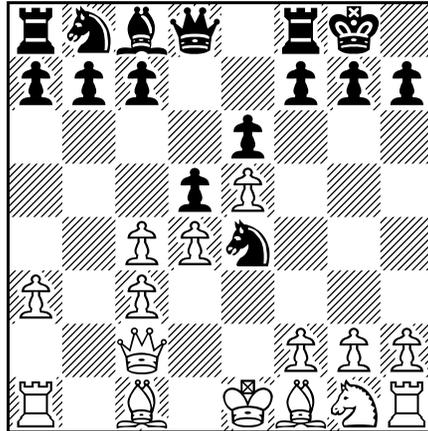
The *Move by Move* series tries to replicate – as much as possible – lessons between chess teachers and students, and encourages the practising of skills just as much as the assimilation of knowledge. Throughout this book you will come across questions which could be asked by students or teachers, and you will also be invited to try exercises of varying degrees of difficulty. To get the most out of the games, please pause at questions before moving on, and spend some time on each exercise before checking the answer. I've highlighted some of the more difficult exercises and also included a few hints in places.

Finally, many thanks go to all those who have been kind enough to offer inspiration, advice and assistance in the creation and development of *Move by Move*. Special thanks go to Darren Reed.

John Emms
Kent
September 2011

Game 27
H.Cardon-J.Gustafsson
Netherlands League 2007

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♙b4 4 ♚c2 0-0 5 e4 d5 6 e5 ♘e4 7 a3 ♙xc3+ 8 bxc3



Exercise: Suggest a good move for Black.

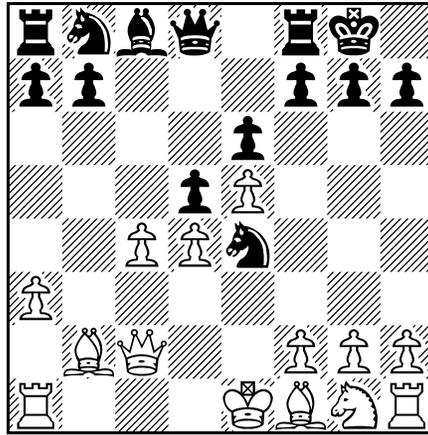
With 7 a3 White is able – temporarily at least – to maintain his pawn centre. The cost is having to make another non-developing move. 7 a3 leads to extremely sharp lines, with both sides needing to prepare and calculate well.

Answer: 8...c5!

There's still a need for Black to react quickly and this pawn break remains a strong idea even though White's d4-pawn now has some protection. After an exchange of pawns the new d4-pawn will be vulnerable to attack and Black will also gain the possibility of an awkward queen check on a5.

9 ♙d3

9 ♙b2 has also been played a few times. The main continuation from here runs 9...cxd4 10 cxd4,

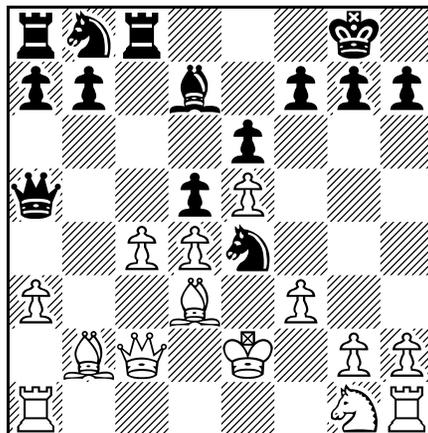


and now 10...♗d7.

Question: Why doesn't Black play 10...♖a5+ instead, forcing the king to an ugly square? This looks really tempting.

Answer: I have to admit that this whole line is quite difficult to explain, because often the most natural-looking move turns out to be a mistake. 10...♖a5+ does look very tempting because White's king is forced to move in front of his bishop (11 ♔d1? ♗d7!), but appearances are deceptive and following 11 ♖e2! Black is faced with a real problem over what to do about f2-f3 and h2-h4 trapping the knight.

Let's see how Black deals with this same problem after 10...♗d7: 11 ♗d3 (11 f3? ♖h4+) 11...♖a5+ 12 ♖e2 ♖c8 13 f3.



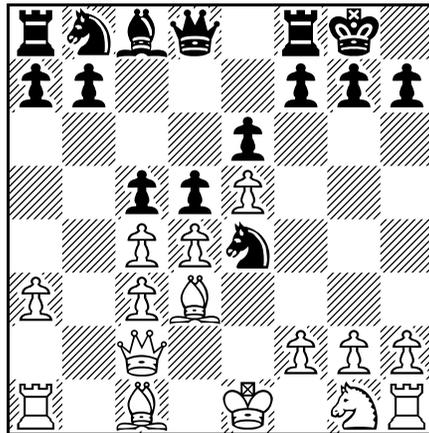
Exercise: Try to find a way to meet the threat to Black's knight.

The Nimzo-Indian: Move by Move

Answer: Black plays 13...f5!. Other moves are possible (e.g. 13 ...♟a4) but the point to note is that ...f5 is often a good answer to f3 when White's bishop is on d3, because if White takes the knight Black regains the piece by recapturing and trapping the bishop. Instead White has played 14 exf6 ♖xf6 but this position is fine for Black.

I've faced the move 11 ♖e2!? (instead of 11 ♟d3), intending to block the check on a5 with ♖c3, against Andrew Whiteley in a London League match. The game continued 11...♖c6 12 ♜d1! f6!? (I couldn't work out all the variations, but 12...f6 just felt right) 13 ♖c3 ♜a5 14 f3 fxe5!? 15 cxd5! (against 15 dxe5 Black can play 15...♖c5! intending 16 cxd5 ♖xe5) 15...exd4 16 fxe4! (after 16 dxc6 dxc3 17 ♟a1 ♟xc6 18 fxe4 there's the very strong 18...♜b6! combining ideas of ... ♟a4 and ...♜e3+) 16...exd5! 17 exd5? (during the game 17 ♜b3! was the move I thought was best, and indeed this is the case: 17...dxc3 18 ♟xc3 ♜b6 19 ♜xb6 axb6 20 ♜xd5 ♟e6 21 ♜g5 g6 looks roughly equal) 17...♜ae8+ 18 ♟e2 (A.Whiteley-J.Emms, London League 2008) and here the computer shows me the win I annoyingly missed: 18...♜xe2+! 19 ♟xe2 ♟g4+ 20 ♟e1 ♜e8+! 21 ♟f2 ♜c5! (the crucial move – I didn't see this idea) 22 ♟g3 (22 dxc6 d3+!) 22...♜e3+ 23 ♟xg4 ♖e5+ 24 ♟f4 g5+ and it's mate in a few moves.

Let's return to Cardon's choice, the less risky 9 ♟d3 – relative speaking of course!



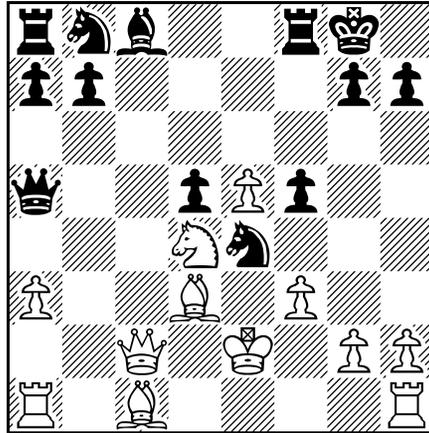
9...cxd4!

Black's route to counterplay involves an early ...♜a5. The only issue is whether or not he chooses to exchange on d4 first. Both are entirely playable.

The main line after 9...♜a5! runs 10 ♖e2 (if 10 ♟xe4 dxe4 11 ♟d2 then 11...♜a6! begins to exploit White's missing light-squared bishop) 10...cxd4 (the only consistent continuation) 11 cxd5! (old theory had run 11 0-0 dxc3 12 ♟e3 ♖c6 13 cxd5 exd5 14 f3 ♖d2 15 ♟xh7+ ♟h8 16 ♟xd2 cxd2 with a clear plus for Black, N.Kelecevic-B.Abramovic, Yugoslavia 1984; 11 cxd5 brought the variation back to life) 11...exd5 12 f3 ♖xc3! 13 ♖xd4 (13 ♟xh7+ is better for Black after 13...♟h8 14 ♖xd4 ♖e4+! 15 ♟f1 ♟xh7 16 fxe4 ♟g8 or 14 ♟d3 ♖c6 15 0-0 ♖xe5 16 ♖xd4 ♟d7; while 13 0-0!? is an interesting gambit, albeit probably not quite sound after 13...♖c6 14 f4 ♜a4) 13...♖e4+! 14 ♟e2.

In this position we can use our knowledge from the previous exercise to help us with

Black's best move: 14...f5!

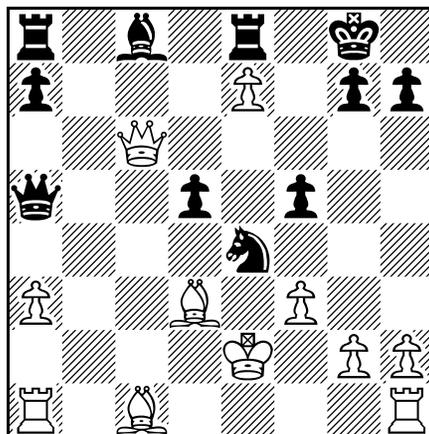


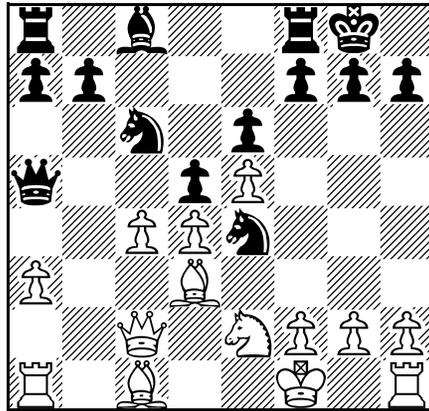
I first became aware of this strong move when Chris Ward showed it to me (he and Timothy Woodward had found it while analysing this variation). After that there was a high-profile encounter with 14...f5 and the theory was supplemented by some published analysis by Kasparov and Leko. They concluded that best play led to a draw, and nothing since has altered this assessment. Here's a summary of what Black really needs to know:

a) 15 fxe4? fxe4 16 ♖b5 ♗g4+ 17 ♕e3 ♜d8! (threatening ...♜g5 mate) 18 h4 ♜b6! (now it's ...♜h6) 19 e6 ♜d6! (and now, with the h-pawn moved, it's ...♜g3!) 20 ♘e2 d4+. Here 21 ♘d2 d3 is terminal while 21 ♘xd4 allows mate in one with 21...♜f4.

b) 15 ♗e3 ♘c6! 16 ♘xc6 bxc6 17 ♜hc1 ♜b8 18 ♕f1 (18 ♕d1 ♜d8 was good for Black in F.Vallejo Pons-P.Leko, Morelia/Linares 2006) 18...f4! 19 ♗xe4 fxe3 20 ♗xh7+ ♕h8 21 ♗d3 with an edge for Black according to Leko.

c) 15 e6! is best, preventing ...♗d7 and introducing tactics involving e6-e7: 15...♘c6! 16 ♘xc6 bxc6 17 e7 ♜e8 18 ♜xc6





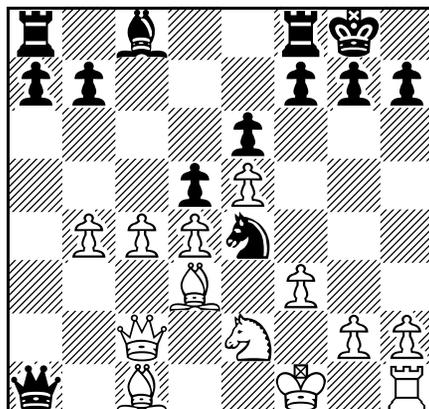
Exercise: Try to work out what's going on after 12...♗b4.

In *Dangerous Weapons: The Nimzo-Indian* I suggested the speculative pawn sacrifice 12 ♗b2!? ♗d2+ 13 ♖e2 but there has been no takers so far. I gave 13...♗xc4 14 ♗c3! (14 ♗xh7+ ♖h8 15 ♗d3 ♗b6! 16 ♗xc4 ♗xd4+! is good for Black) 14...♗b6 15 ♗f3! h6 16 ♗hc1! ♗d7 17 ♖f1 ♗ac8 18 ♖g1. Black is solid enough with a strong knight on c4, but White does have some compensation in view of the plan ♗e2, ♗b1 and ♗d3.

12...f6!

Logically trying to open the f-file in order to get at White's uncastled king.

Answer: 12...♗b4!? to get rid of White's light-squared bishop is clearly a tempting idea, and 13 ♗b1 ♗xd3 14 ♗xd3 f6! would leave Black with a considerable advantage. However, in this line it appears that we should always expect the unexpected. The exchange sacrifice with 13 axb4! ♗xa1 is much stronger, especially as after 14 f3 Black faces the usual problem of a trapped knight.



The Nimzo-Indian: Move by Move

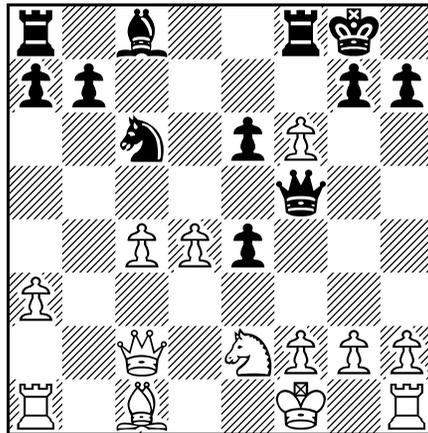
Again the solution is 14...f5! (14...♘g5? loses to 15 h4) and here theory runs 15 ♖b1 ♗a4! 16 ♙e1! (preventing the mate threat on d1 and preparing fxe4) 16...a5! 17 fxe4 fxe4 18 ♙c2 ♗xb4+ 19 ♖xb4 axb4. This imbalanced endgame position was reached in V.Ivanchuk-D.Navara, Antalya 2004, which continued 20 cxd5 exd5 21 ♙b3 ♙e6 22 ♖f1 ♖xf1+ 23 ♙xf1 and the game was eventually drawn, although here all three results remain possible.

Let's return to the game and the position after Gustafsson's 12...f6:

13 ♙xe4

After 13 exf6 ♘xf6! Black has solved the problem of his knight, while White still has to find a good home for his king. This was demonstrated in G.Pataki-P.Horvath, Budapest 2004: 14 ♙e3 ♙d7 15 ♗d2?! when 15...♘g4! 16 f3 e5! would have left White in a dire situation. In H.Bellmann-J.Alvarez Sabor, correspondence 2007, White improved considerably with 14 ♖b1! dxc4 15 ♖xc4 ♙h8 16 f3 ♗d8 17 ♙g5 e5 18 d5 ♘e7 19 ♙xf6 ♖xf6 20 ♙f2 ♘xd5 21 ♖hd1 ♖d6 22 ♙c2 ♙e6 23 ♗e4 ♙g8 24 ♖xe5 ♖e6 25 ♗d4 ♖xe2+ 26 ♙xe2 ♗c7 27 ♙e4 ♘c3+ and here a draw was agreed.

13...dxe4 14 exf6 ♗f5!

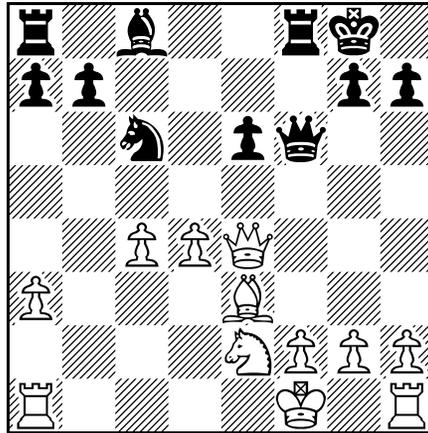


There's nothing really wrong with the obvious recapture 14...♖xf6, but Gustafsson's choice may be stronger. Black's pieces become better coordinated: the queen is well placed on f6 while the rook is less vulnerable on f8.

15 ♙e3 ♗xf6

Finally the position has settled and the stage is set for an intriguing struggle. White's plan is to sort out his king (normally with h2-h3 followed by ♙g1-h2, but h2-h4 and ♖h3 is another, more aggressive possibility) before exploiting Black's pawn weaknesses. Meanwhile, Black will engineer counterplay with either ...e6-e5 or ...b7-b6 and ...♙a6 laying siege on White's c4-pawn. Or White could just take the pawn:

16 ♗xe4



Exercise: Find a good reply for Black.

Let's take a look at a couple of alternatives where White aims to consolidate before capturing:

a) 16 ♖d1 is well met by 16...b6!, planning either ...♙b7 or ...♙a6 to hit c4. T.Woodward-P.Wells, British League 2005, continued 17 ♔g1 (or 17 ♜xe4 ♙b7 with good compensation) 17...♙a6! 18 h4! ♘a5 19 ♜xe4 ♘xc4 20 ♘f4 ♞ae8 21 ♞h3 ♘xe3 and a draw was agreed. It's possible Black could play on here with 22 fxe3 e5, though White should be okay after 23 ♜d5+ ♔h8 24 dxe5 ♞xe5 25 ♜d6.

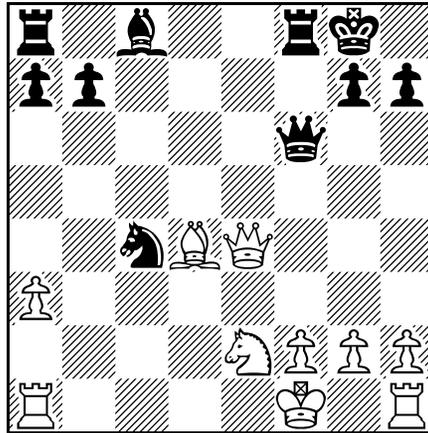
b) In *Dangerous Weapons: The Nimzo-Indian I* suggested 16 h3!? to play ♔g1-h2 as quickly as possible. Amongst other lines, I gave 16...e5 17 d5 ♘d4 18 ♜c3 ♘f5 19 ♔g1 b6 20 ♘g3! ♘xg3 21 fxg3 ♙a6 22 c5 followed by ♔h2 with an unclear position. I don't have much to add to that, except to say that 16...b6 looks reasonable here too, and that either 16 ♖d1 or 16 h3 looks better than Cardon's choice in the game.

Answer: 16...e5!

This was the move 16 ♖d1 was designed to prevent (16 ♖d1 e5 17 d5!). In this position, though, 16...e5 allows Black to fully mobilize his army and also force open the position – 17 d5?? loses instantly to the tactic 17...♙f5! 18 ♜f3 e4!. In view of this, Black has more than enough play for the pawn.

17 dxe5 ♘xe5! 18 ♙d4 ♘xc4!

Another tactic. It's very possible that Gustafsson didn't have to work this out over the board, since both 16...e5 and 18...♘xc4 had been previously pointed out (by Golod).



19 ♖xf6 ♜d2+ 20 ♔g1 ♞xe4 21 ♙d4 b6

Black's greater piece activity certainly counts for something in this ending, although I suspect with accurate defence the odds are still in favour of a draw and this is the final result of the game. The remaining moves were:

22 ♞g3 ♜d8 23 ♙e3 ♞c3 24 h3 ♜d1 25 ♙c1 ♙a6 26 f3 ♜ac8 27 ♞e4 ♙b7 28 ♙g5 ♜d5 29 ♙f4 ♞c3 30 ♞xc3 ♜xc3 31 ♙h2 g5 32 ♜hc1 ♜xc1 33 ♙xc1 ♜d1 34 ♙g3 ♙f7 35 h4 gxh4+ 36 ♙xh4 ♙e6 37 ♙g3 ♙d5 38 ♙b2 ♜xa1 39 ♙xa1 a5 40 ♙f6 b5 41 ♙c3 b4 42 axb4 axb4 43 ♙xb4 ♙e6 44 ♙f4 ♙f7 45 ♙g5 ♙d5 46 ♙c3 ♙a2 47 f4 ♙b3 48 g4 ♙d1 49 f5 ♙g8 50 ♙f4 ♙f7 51 g5 ♙c2 52 ♙e5 ♙b1 53 ♙b4 ½-½

Key Notes

1. A principle Black should remember in the 4...0-0 5 a3 ♙xc3+ 6 ♜xc3 d5 line is "initiative at all costs". This attitude forms the basis of Black's choices in many of the games of this chapter.

2. After 4...0-0 5 a3 ♙xc3+ 6 ♜xc3 d5 White has the two bishops, Black a lead in development. In an open position, a lead in development often trumps the advantage of the two bishops. For this reason Black aims to open up the position as quickly as possible, for example after 7 ♞f3 dxc4!, 7 ♙g5 c5! or 7 ♙g5 dxc4! (see Games 21-24).

3. Black should definitely be prepared to offer pawn sacrifices in return for activity in some lines (see Games 21-23).

4. White can avoid complications by playing 7 e3 but only at a cost of blocking in his dark-squared bishop. In this case Black should just accept this concession by White rather than trying to blow 7 e3 off the board (see Game 25).

5. The 5 e4 line (Games 26-27) is extremely sharp and has become quite theoretical in the past 10 years. There are no shortcuts for either player here – you need to do your homework to play this line successfully.