



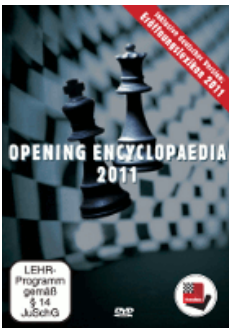
COLUMNISTS

The Openings Explained

Abby Marshall



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The Tarrasch Defense, Swedish Variation [D33]

I have played the Tarrasch Defense for years with good success. It is the Count Dracula of chess openings in that no one has yet been able to put a stake through its heart. I covered the 9.dxc5 variation in my very first column in [October 2009](#). Here, we will look at an offbeat line called the Swedish Variation, also known as the Folkestone Variation.

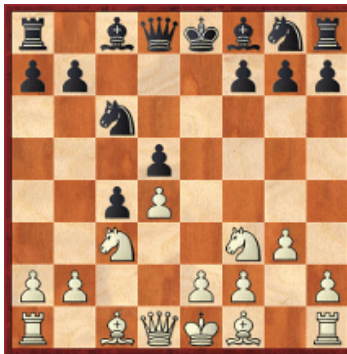
1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 c5

This is the Tarrasch Defense. Black wants to have active pieces and fight for the initiative. In many variations the pawn on d5 ends up isolated, which Black will try to use to advantage.

4.cxd5 exd5 5.Nf3 Nc6 6.g3

This is the main line for White. The bishop naturally wants to go to g2, where it can eye the d5-pawn.

6...c4!?



[FEN "r1bqkbnr/pp3ppp/2n5/3p4/2pP4/2N2NP1/PP2PP1P/R1BQKB1R w KQkq - 0 7"]

The standard way to play with this pawn structure is to wait until the ninth move, but the idea here is a setup with the knight on e7, instead of f6, and the bishop on b4. This move does not seem to be covered in either of Aagaard's book on the Tarrasch, perhaps because of its offbeat nature, but it has been played by many well-known grandmasters.

Usually the Tarrasch is about active pieces and fighting for the center with an isolated d-pawn. Even in the variations with 9...c4, both sides fight for the center and try to achieve pawn breaks such as e4 or b3 for White, and ...c5 for Black after an exchange on c6. The bishop on e7 and the knight on f6 both aim to influence the center. While the bishop on b4 and knight on e7 seem more about queenside play, which gives White a freer hand to play in the center.

6...Nf6 7.Bg2 Be7 8.0-0 0-0 9.Bg5 c4 is one of the main lines, with 9...cxd4 an alternative.

7.Bg2

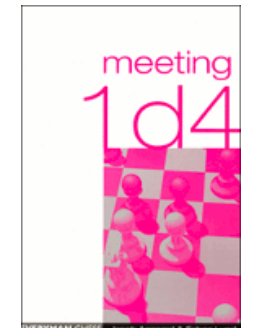
White develops and prepares to castle.

7.e4 White can react right away with this pawn push, but it is premature. 7...

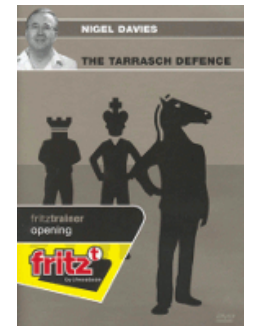
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dxe4 8.Ng5 White wants to be active and aggressive; otherwise all White has is a wrecked pawn structure. Black should react in kind. (8.Nxe4 is inconsistent with White's idea, which was to challenge Black with unclear play. Now White is left with weak light squares and three pawn islands. 8... Qe7 9.Qe2 Bg4 Black makes a threat with every move. 10.Ned2 0-0-0 11. Qxe7 Bxe7 12.h3 Bh5 The pawn cannot be defended on d4, so Black preserves the bishop. 13.Bxc4 Nxd4 14.Nxd4 Rxd4 15.Be2 Bxe2 16.Kxe2 Nf6 17.Nf3 Rb4 Black is a little better.) 8...Qxd4 Black challenges White in turn. White relies on quick development to justify the dissolved center. 9.Bf4 White opens communication between the queen and the rook. 9...Be7 10. Qxd4 Nxd4 11.0-0-0 Ne6 Black is doing well here and is able to get developed while for the moment up a couple of pawns.

7.Bg5 is a natural move. Black should not let this discourage his plan. 7...f6 Gaining a tempo and proceeding as planned. 8.Bf4 Bb4 9.Bg2 Nge7 One of the nice things is that Bg5 is hardly ever a problem, and often it will lose a tempo. 10.0-0 0-0 11.a3 Ba5 Notice that Black does not always capture on c3. The bishop can retreat to a5 to go b6 and attack d4.

7...Bb4

The bishop is a little more active here than on e7 (as in the main lines). From here, the bishop puts pressure on c3, indirect pressure on e1 if a rook ever wants to go there, and can also go ...Ba5/Bb6 to attack d4.

8.0-0

White's big break is going to be e4, so the king will want to be castled.

8...Nge7



[FEN "r1bqk2r/pp2nppp/2n5/3p4/1bpP4/2N2NP1/PP2PPBP/R1BQ1RK1 w kq - 0 9"]

The strong Swedish players Stahlberg, Lundin, and Stoltz developed the Swedish Variation in the Tarrasch, and this was their intended set-up. The knight is not as active here as it is on f6, but there is no Bg5 pin, and the knight lends support to its twin on c6.

9.e4

White has many options here. White must sooner or later choose between this pawn push, hitting Black's center and undermining the support for the c4-pawn, or the pawn push b3 attacking the head of the pawn chain.

9.a3 White can feel out where the black bishop is going. The idea in this variation is to see how Black attacks the queenside. 9...Ba5 10.b4 White again wants to force Black into making some choices. Black generally lets the c4-pawn stand after b4 or b3, since it is a passed pawn. (10.e4 The delay of this move gives Black extra options. 10...0-0 11.exd5 Nxd5 12.Bg5 Nxc3 This is a choice because bxc3 does not attack a bishop on b4, as it would if e4 was played on the ninth move. 13.bxc3 f6 Now the c3-pawn is attacked and Black does not have to worry about discovered attacks coming from the bishop on g2 after Nxd5 Qxd5.) 10...Bb6 11.b5 Na5 The b3-outpost is looking good. 12. Ra2 0-0 13.a4 Re8 14.Ba3 Nb3 Black is at least equal, if not slightly better. The d4-pawn is weak, and if White plays e3 the light squares around f3/e4/d3

become weak.

9.Ne5 is a big alternative that changes the pawn structure before playing e4. While improving the strength of the g2-bishop, this move, and the subsequent exchange, give Black the option of ...c5. 9...0-0 10.Nxc6 bxc6 11.e4 Be6



[FEN "r2q1rk1/p3npp/2p1b3/3p4/1bpPP3/2N3P1/PP3BP/R1BQ1RK1 w - - 0 12"]

Black tries to preserve the pawn structure. 12.Bf4 (12.e5 is interesting, taking the stress off Black's center, but gaining space in the center and kingside. 12...Bf5 Black can follow up with ...Rb8 and ...Qa5.; 12.a3 Bxc3 Retreating is also playable. 13.bxc3 dxe4 14.Bxe4 Bd5 This is a solid set-up for Black. 15.Qc2 f5 16.Bxd5+ Qxd5 17.Qe2 Ng6 18.Re1 Rab8 Black is equal here. White is still not completely developed and Black has open files to compensate for the doubled isolated c-pawns.) 12...Bxc3 This is another example of Black capturing, rather than playing ...Ba5. 13.bxc3 dxe4 14.Bxe4 Bd5 15.f3 Ng6 If Black can play ...Bd5 and ...Ng6, everything should be alright. 16.Qd2 Nxf4 17.Qxf4 Qa5 18.Qd2 f5 This will be followed soon by ...c5.

9.Ne1 This odd-looking move should be taken seriously, since it has been played by several strong players. 9...0-0 10.Nc2 This is the idea: transfer the knight to the queenside and open the diagonal for the g2-bishop. (10.Be3 is a good example of what happens if White is too slow. 10...Ba5!? A nice decision. Without provocation Black plans to retreat to b6 to attack the d-pawn, while anticipating the Nc2 tempo. 11.Nc2 Bf5 12.f3 This lets Black quickly develop an initiative. 12...Qb6 13.Na4 Qb5 14.Ne1 Rad8 15.Bf2 h5 16.b3 cxb3 17.axb3 Rfe8



[FEN "3rr1k1/pp2npp1/2n5/bq1p1b1p/N2P4/1P3PP1/4PBBP/R2QNRK1 w - - 0 18"]

This is the dream: open files for the rooks, bishops on good diagonals, the queen pressuring the queenside, and the knights holding up the center. 18.Rc1 Bg6 19.e3 Nf5 20.Nc2 Nd6 21.Na3 Qd3 22.Nc5 Qxd1 23.Rfxd1 Nb4 24.Bf1 b6 25.Na6 Re7 26.Nxb4 Bxb4 27.Nc2 Bc3 28.Ne1 Rc8 29.Nd3 Bxd3 30. Bxd3 b5 31.e4 dxe4 32.fxe4 Nxe4 33.Bxe4 Rxe4 34.d5 Re7 35.d6 Rd7 36. b4? The critical error that lets the pawns fall. 36...Rc4 37.Bxa7 Bxb4 38.Rb1 Bxd6 0-1, Granda Zuniga, J-Lputian, S/Las Palmas 1989) 10...Ba5 11.Bg5 h6 The pin is simply not effective. If White captures on e7, Black can recapture with the knight on c6. 12.Bd2 Bf5 Black is already just better. White is not prepared for e4, and the N/e3 looks silly precisely because it blocks the e-pawn. Black can even expand on the queenside with a6-b5.

9.Bf4 is a natural continuation if White is interested in the pawn break b3.

9...0-0 10.Rc1 Be6 11.b3 Qa5 Another nice thing about ...Bb4 is that it makes b3 tricky since the knight on c3 needs defending. 12.Bd2 Rfd8 13.a4 a6 14. bxc4 dxc4 15.e3 Rac8 16.Ne4 b6 This stops Nc5. 17.Bxb4 Nxb4 18.Neg5 Bg4 Black has the d3-square to work with and White's decimated queenside. Black is much better.

9...0-0

Black willingly walks into a messy situation for the sake of castling.

9...dxe4 is not good enough. 10.Nxe4 0-0 11.Qc2 White is able to quickly get a rook to the d-file to support the passed pawn.

10.exd5

Delaying this move would only let Black get more pieces out.

10.Nxd5 This move, exchanging more pieces, is the main alternative. 10... Nxd5 11.exd5 Qxd5 12.Be3 White gets developed before exploiting the discovered attack on the black queen. (12.a3 Ba5 We will look at this in the first illustrative game.) 12...Qb5 Black gets out of danger immediately. The position is difficult. I wish Black had more development, but Black is okay here. (12...Bg4 is tempting but fails tactically. 13.Ne5! It runs into this anyway! 13...Qxg2+ 14.Kxg2 Bxd1 15.Nxc6 Black's tattered pawn structure gives White the advantage.; 12...Bf5 This could be a bailout. Safer, although I see few winning chances. 13.Ne5 Be4 14.Nxc6 Qxc6 15.Bxe4 Qxe4 looks drawish.)

10...Nxd5 11.Bg5

This is another test. The exchange on d5 transposes to the previous note on move ten.



[FEN "r1bq1rk1/pp3ppp/2n5/3n2B1/1bpP4/2N2NP1/PP3PBP/R2Q1RK1 b - - 0 11"]

11...f6

My instincts trust this move, since it gains a tempo and gives Black an okay position.

11...Qa5 is the other choice. It is similar to ...f6, but White has more options because there is no threat to the bishop on g5. 12.Nxd5 Qxd5 13.a3 (13.Ne5 Qb5 14.a4 Qa6 15.Nxc6 bxc6 16.d5 We will look at this in the second illustrative game.) 13...Ba5 14.Ne5 Qb5 15.a4 Qa6 16.Nxc6 bxc6 17.Qc2 (17. Bd2 Bxd2 18.Qxd2 Be6 This ended in a draw in Sharavdorj,D-Graf,A/ Singapore 1995. Black is equal here and this position is very similar to what happens after 10...f6.) 17...Be6 18.Rfc1 Rab8 Black probably has enough counterplay to have fighting chances, but the momentum lies with White.

12.Nxd5

The next few moves are natural and forcing.

12...Qxd5 13.Ne5 Qb5 14.a4

This forces the queen from the active b5-square, where it kept an eye on the b2-pawn.

14...Qa6 15.Nxc6 bxc6 16.Bd2

This makes sense, so a rook can go to e1.

16...Bxd2 17.Qxd2 Be6 18.Rfe1 Bd5



[FEN "r4rk1/p5pp/q1p2p2/3b4/P1pP4/6P1/1P1Q1PBP/R3R1K1 w - - 0 19"]

Both sides pawns look weak. The open b and d-files give Black enough counterplay for equality.

Vera Gonzalez Quevedo, Reynaldo (2475) – Arencibia Rodriguez, Walter (2425)

Capablanca Memorial-A Havana, 1990

1.d4 d5 2.e4 e6 3.Nf3 c5 4.cxd5 exd5 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.g3 c4 7.Bg2 Bb4 8.0-0 Nge7 9.e4 0-0 10.Nxd5 Nxd5 11.exd5 Qxd5 12.a3 Ba5



[FEN "r1b2rk1/pp3ppp/2n5/b2q4/2pP4/P4NP1/1P3PBP/R1BQ1RK1 w - - 0 13"]

Here is where we left off. This game is a good example of active play.

13.Ne5

White exploits the discovered attack and the queen has to stick around to defend c6.

13...Qb5

This is an active spot for the queen. ...Qe6 would run into Nxc6 and Qa4. ...Qd6 and Bf4 is uncomfortable. ...Qxd4 is the worst because of Nxc6-Ne7+.

14.b4

This gets White into trouble, despite getting rid of the passed c-pawn. Other moves would be similar to the positions we had in the theory section.

14...cxb3 15.Rb1 Nxe5

Black is better developed and uses that initiative.

16.Rxb3 Qa4 17.dxe5 Bg4 18.f3

18.Qc2 Rac8 19.Qb2 Be2 wins the exchange.

18...Rfd8 19.Rd3



[FEN "r2r2k1/pp3ppp/8/b3P3/q5b1/P2R1PP1/6BP/2BQ1RK1 b - - 0 19"]

19...Qc4!

A strong move. White has only one move.

20.Rd6

20.Rxd8+ Rxd8 and the queen is trapped!

20...Bf5 21.Be3

White finishes development, but it is too late.

21...Bd3

Another good move. Black blocks communication to the rook on d6 and prepares to infiltrate the e-file.

22.Rf2

22.Rxd8+ This just shifts the pain to the d-file. 22...Rxd8 23.Rf2 Bf5 24.Qe2 Qxe2 25.Rxe2 Rd1+ 26.Kf2 Bd3 White cannot move the rook because of mate on f1.

22...Rxd6 23.exd6 Re8

Black is winning now.

24.d7 (24.Bd2 Bb6) 24...Rxe3 25.Qd2



[FEN "6k1/pp1P1ppp/8/b7/2q5/P2brPP1/3Q1RBP/6K1 b - - 0 25"]

A good try since the queen cannot be taken. Black can defend both the rook

and the bishop however.

25...Qc5 26.Bf1 Bxf1 27.d8Q+ Bxd8 28.Qxd8+ Qf8

Black will be up two pawns and have a winning endgame.

29.Qd4 Rxa3 30.Kxf1 h6 31.Re2 Rxf3+ 32.Kg2 Rf6 33.Qd7 Qb4 34.Qc8+ Kh7 35.Re8 Qd2+ 36.Kh3 Rf2 37.Rh8+ Kg6 38.Qg4+ Qg5 0-1

Tukmakov, Vladimir (2565) – Lputian, Smbat (2590)

Tilburg rapid (3), 1994

1.d4 d5 2.Nf3 e6 3.c4 c5 4.cxd5 exd5 5.g3 Nc6 6.Bg2 c4 7.0-0 Bb4 8.Nc3 Nge7 9.e4 0-0 10.exd5 Nxd5 11.Bg5 Qa5 12.Nxd5 Qxd5 13.Ne5 Qb5 14.a4 Qa6 15.Nxc6 bxc6 16.d5



[FEN "r1b2rk1/p4ppp/q1p5/3P2B1/Pbp5/6P1/1P3PBP/R2Q1RK1 b - - 0 16"]

White wants to force things immediately. This is dangerous for Black, since White is better developed.

16...cxd5

Black plays calmly.

17.Qxd5

17.Bxd5 Bb7 18.Bxb7 Qxb7 19.Qg4 Qc8 is equal.

17...Rb8 18.Rfc1 Be6 19.Qe4 Bc5

What I always liked about the Tarrasch is that it leads to open positions and favors the player who likes activity and to attack. Black has proven that White's strategy was not the greatest and now the play is in Black's hands.

20.Rc2 Rb4 21.Bf1



[FEN "5rk1/p4ppp/q3b3/2b3B1/Prp1Q3/6P1/1PR2P1P/R4BK1 b - - 0 21"]

It is difficult to defend the weak queenside pawns. White instead decides to go after the black pawns.

21...Rc8!

Taking on c4 is impossible for White, who would run into a discovered check ...Bxf2+ at the end.

22.Be3 Bxe3 23.Qxe3 Rxa4 24.Rac1 Rb4

White is completely tied down and behind a pawn.

25.Rc3

This threatens Ra3.

25.Qd4 is a little better. Everything is defended for the moment and the queen has more influence here. 25...Qb6!? 26.Qxb6 axb6 Double-rook endings are very drawish, but the bishops make a difference. Black can play Ra8-a2 and poke around with Bf5.

25...Qa2

25...Rxb2 26.Bxc4 Bxc4 27.Rxc4 Obviously, Black has all the chances, but often the threat is stronger than the execution. Black is up a pawn, yet with no bind on White.

26.Qd4

26.Ra3 Qxb2 27.Rxa7 c3 the passed pawn looks really scary.

26...g6

In endgames where you have the edge, you do not have to rush. White cannot do anything. The pressure builds on the weaker side and often they make a mistake.

27.h4 Qxb2 28.h5



[FEN "2r3k1/p4p1p/4b1p1/7P/1rpQ4/2R3P1/1q3P2/2R2BK1 b - - 0 28"]

This is the mistake. Black is better able to take advantage of a weak king and the extra black pawn on the kingside eventually tells.

28.Qxa7 Qd2 29.R3c2 Qd6 and the white king looks uncomfortable, plus the passed c-pawn is hard to handle.

28...gxh5

Black cannot let White play 29.h6.

29.Qf4 Rb5

The checks on the black king are easily stopped.

30.Bxc4 Rf5 31.Qe3 Bxc4 32.Rxc4 Rxc4 33.Rxc4 Qb1+ 34.Kh2 Qb6



[FEN "6k1/p4p1p/1q6/5r1p/2R5/
4Q1P1/5P1K/8 w - - 0 35"]

35.Rd4

35.Qxb6 also loses, because of Black's extra pawn and the holes in the white kingside. 35...axb6 36.Kg2 Kg7 37.Rb4 b5 38.f4 Kf6 39.Kf3 Rc5 40.Rb3 Kf5 White cannot keep Black out.

35...Kg7 36.Kg1 Qf6 37.Qd2 a5 38.Rd6

It was likely time trouble at this point; White makes a tactical error in a lost position.

38...Rxf2 39.Qd5 Rf1+ 40.Kg2 Qf2+ 41.Kh3 Qf5+ 42.Qxf5 Rxf5 43.Ra6 Rb5 44.Kh4 f6 45.Kh3 Kg6 46.Kh4 Rc5 47.Ra7 h6 48.Ra6 Rc4+ 49.Kh3 a4 50.Ra8 Kf5 0-1

In this high-level game, and in the previous game, Black used the open lines and the initiative to great effect.

Lessons Learned

- Black's setup is with pawns on c4 and d5, bishop on b4, and a knight on e7. There is no Bg5 pin, and the two black minor pieces are in ideal places to pressure the center and queenside.
- This variation, being somewhat forcing, does not get too heavily into positional considerations. The main structures that arise are the black pawn on c4 and the white passed pawn on d4, which Black tries to blockade, and Black pawns on c6 and c4, where the ...c5 break is a good thing to think about and the open b-file is ripe to go to.
- This system demands that Black know how to use open files and the initiative. If White plays b3, Black has the queenside files to work on. If White plays e4, the e-file and d-files become open, and Black has to play energetically to use the pawn structure to advantage.

Practitioners

- Gideon Stahlberg was a Swedish grandmaster who held the title of Nordic champion for ten years. He competed with Najdorf, Nimzowitsch, and Euwe among others. He was also a chess author.
- Erik Lundin was a Swedish honorary grandmaster who played in many Olympiads. He also competed with the top players of the world in the mid-twentieth century.
- Gösta Stoltz was a Swedish grandmaster who won a match against the very strong American player Isaac Kashdan in 1930.

Bibliography

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