



## COLUMNISTS

## The Openings Explained

Abby Marshall



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## The Openings Explained

### Alekhine's Defense, Four Pawns Attack [B03]

I chose Alekhine's Defense as the opening for this month. Specifically, I will be looking at what happens when White responds with the Four Pawns Attack. This choice may seem odd for a number of reasons:

1. The Alekhine is a tough opening to recommend to beginning and intermediate players.
2. The Four Pawns Attack is complicated and full of long variations that do not lend themselves to a column about basic ideas and concepts.
3. I have no experience on either side.

However, I made this choice because the Four Pawns Attack is highly interesting for both players. It is a sharp line that will likely score wins against ill-prepared opponents. It also teaches tactics, as well as positional ideas, and is fun to explore. I will be looking at it from Black's perspective, but will also mention mistakes Black can make, which is useful for white players.

#### 1.e4 Nf6

This is unconventional move develops a piece gives Black a threat on the first move. It fits the spirit of the opening as well. Black gives up the center and allows White more space with the idea that White will overextend and Black will have enough piece play and a solid position to be able to counterattack. The Alekhine also offers a chance to play with different pawn structures than the usual static 1.e4 e5.

#### 2.e5

This is the most popular and challenging answer. White gets the pawn out of harm's way and gains space and a tempo on the black knight.

#### 2...Nd5

The knight goes to the center while having b6 as a good square to go to if attacked.

#### 3.d4

Easy chess: White advances a center pawn and supports the head of the pawn chain.

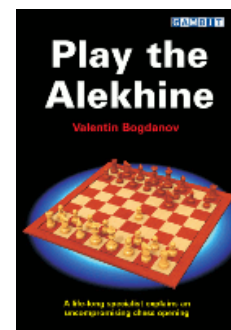
3.c4 Nb6 4.c5 is the Chase variation. The White pawns are uglier than usual. The idea is to take away Black's retreat square of b6 and develop quickly, but Black can defend.

#### 3...d6

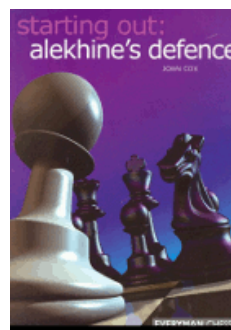
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[FEN "rnbqkb1r/ppp1pppp/3p4/3nP3/3P4/8/PPP2PPP/RNBQKBNR w KQkq - 0 4"]

This is essential. Black nudges the cramping e5-pawn and remains flexible. It is unclear where Black's pieces will go: the f8-bishop may develop after ...e6 or ...g6; the knight may go to c6 after a ...c5 push; the bishop may go to f5 or g4.

#### 4.c4

White grabs more space immediately.

4.f4 White normally plays this next move after the knight has been kicked from the center. This is the choice of strong players A. Vitolinsh and Viktor Kupreichik. 4...dxe5 As in the main line, Black exchanges pawns on e5. This eases some of the spacial pressure on Black and opens up White's position. 5. fxe5 This is the logical recapture. White's king is more exposed, but White has two pawns in the center and has the open f-file. 5...c5 Black immediately attacks White's center and gains more space. Pawns thrusts such as this are common in systems that don't stake out space with the center pawns. 6. Nf3 (6. c4 White can't transpose to the main lines. 6...Nb4 7. a3 N4c6 Black can do this little knight dance after the c-pawn has been pushed. Now White is facing serious pressure in the center.; 6.c3 cxd4 7.cxd4 e6 White retains two pawns in the center, but the black knight is here to stay.) 6...cxd4 Black breaks up the White center. 7. Qxd4 Nc6 8. Bb5 Bf5 Black gets all the pieces out. 9. Nc3 e6 10. Qa4?! Ndb4



[FEN "r2qkb1r/pp3ppp/2n1p3/1B2Pb2/Qn6/2N2N2/PPP3PP/R1B1K2R w KQkq - 0 11"]

Black wins a pawn. 11. Bxc6+ bxc6 12. Be3 Bxc2! This move and Black's next move keep the initiative. Taking on c2 with the knight would leave c6 hanging. 13. b3 Qd3→ White can't castle and Black easily develops more pieces into the attack.

4.Nf3 is the Modern variation and the main choice of grandmasters. Black has many choices. 4...dxe5 5.Nxe5 c6 is an interesting line to explore.

#### 4...Nb6

Black retreats and prepares to attack the advancing pawns.

#### 5.f4



[FEN "rnbqkb1r/ppp1pppp/1n1p4/4P3/2PP1P2/8/PP4PP/RNBQKBNR b KQkq f3 0 5"]

This is the creatively named Four Pawns Attack. White wants to cramp the Black position, open the f-file, and provide extra support for the e-pawn. It certainly looks frightening, but not only for Black. Both players need to know what they're doing.

5.exd6 is the Exchange variation. 5...exd6 leads to quieter play; while 5...cxd6 is more tactical and unbalanced.

### 5...dxe5

Black opens up the d-file and the f8-bishop if ...e6 is played later. I look at 5...g6 in the first game.

### 6.fxe5

Trading queens with 5.dxe5 would be an insult to White's choice of opening.

### 6...Nc6

This is the move on the way to the main line where Black has been experiencing problems. I offer 5...g6 and 6...c5 as alternatives, but the main line is quite exciting with chances for Black.

6...c5!? is a crazy line played by Lubomir Ljubojevic and Alex Shabalov, two very noted tacticians. I look at this in the second game.

### 7.Be3

7.Nf3 is another way to defend the d-pawn, but this is worse. 7...Bg4 8.e6 White sets a trap. 8...fxe6 Black's e-pawns are isolated and doubled, but Black has good center control and can develop with ...g6.(8...Bxe6 9.d5).

### 7...Bf5



[FEN "r2qkb1r/ppp1pppp/1nn5/4Pb2/2PP4/4B3/PP4PP/RN1QKBNR w KQkq - 0 8"]

Black gets the bishop out before playing ...e6.

### 8.Nc3

8.Nf3 Nb4 9.Na3 e6 is not what White wants.

### 8...e6

The moves for Black aren't hard to remember. Just get the pieces out.

### 9.Nf3

9.Be2 Note that this avoids the 9...Bg4 system. 9...Be7 10.Nf3 0-0 11.0-0 f6 transposes to 10.Be2 in the main line.

### 9...Be7

This is the main line; however, I do not recommend it because White can get an advantage if he does not charge ahead.

9...Bg4 This system is interesting and more playable than 9...Be7. 10.Be2 Bxf3 (10...Qd7!? This is a recent idea. 11.0-0 Rd8 Black chooses to not castle queenside because the king protects the f7-square. It is bizarre reasoning to have the king protecting anything in the middlegame, but it is a try. 12.Ng5 (12.c5 needs to be examined.) 12...Nxc4



[FEN "3rkb1r/pppq1ppp/2n1p3/4P1N1/2nP2b1/2N1B3/PP2B1PP/R2Q1RK1 w k - 0 13"]

Multiple things are attacked. White can either safeguard the e3-bishop or counterattack on f7. 13.Bf2! This cuts off the f1-rook; however, the bishop will return to e3 once Black's pieces have been kicked back. (13.Rxf7 Nxe3 14.Rxd7 Nxd1 15.Rxd8+ Nxd8 16.Bxg4 Ne3 Black is okay here. 17.Bh3 (17. Bxe6 h6) 17...c5) 13...Bxe2 14.Qxe2 Be7 (14...Nb6 15.Be3 Nxd4 16.Bxd4 Qxd4+ 17.Kh1 Rd7 18.Rad1 Qc4 19.Qf3 White has scary compensation for the two pawns.) 15.Nxf7 Kxf7 16.Qxc4 Rhe8 Black gets safe but this looks like no fun.) 11.gxf3 Qd7 This position reminds me of the Chigorin's Defense against the Queen's Gambit. White has the center, more space, and the two bishops, while Black is aiming to chip away at the white pawns. In this position, the Black knights may even be better than the bishops since the position is semi-closed. (11...Qh4+ is the main move. 12.Bf2 Qf4 13.c5 Nd7 (13...Nd5 14.Nxd5 exd5 15.Qd2 Qxd2+ 16.Kxd2 The two bishops give White a slight pull. 16...g6 17.Be3) 14.Qc1 Qxc1+ 15.Rxc1 0-0-0 16.Ne4 Ndb8!



[FEN "1nkr1b1r/ppp2ppp/2n1p3/2P1P3/3PN3/5P2/PP2BB1P/2R1K2R w K - 0 17"]

Black puts together a plan for the knights. The c6-knight will go to e7/f5 or d5, and the b8-knight will take its place on c6. 17.Ng5 Rd7 18.Bb5 h6 19.Ne4

g6 20.0-0 Bg7 21.f4 h5 22.Rc4 Bh6 23.Be3 a6 24.Ba4 Rdd8 25.b4 Na7 Black has less space, but with the knights this is not a problem. 26.Bb3 Nbc6 27.a4 Kb8 28.Kg2 Ne7 29.Kf3 Nd5 Black is solid and eventually won this position in Byrne-Albert 1984.

## 10.d5

10.Be2 is a tamer system than the critical 10.d5. 10...0-0 11.0-0 f6 Black should always be looking at these pawn breaks. 12.exf6 Bxf6 13.Qd2 Qe7 14.Rad1 Rad8 15.Qc1 (15.Kh1 h6 Black has several ideas here and the position is equal.) 15...e5! This shot frees the Black position. 16.d5 Nd4 17.Bxd4 (17.Nxd4 exd4 18.Bxd4 Bg5 19.Qa1 c5 20.Bf2 Bc2 21.Rde1 Rxf2 22.Rxf2 Be3 Black has enough pressure for the pawn.) 17...exd4 18.Nxd4 Bc8 In an open position with two bishops, Black has enough play for the pawn.

## 10...exd5

10...Nb4!? It feels a little weird that I am giving so many choices for Black; normally, this would be the case if I were writing this for the white player. I just think that Black has a lot of interesting play and it helps to have options and to get more familiar with the positions. 11.Nd4 (11.Rc1 In this line, the usual rhythm of cause and effect seems to be absent. Black charges forward and doesn't directly respond to White. 11...exd5 12.a3 c5 The knight stays put. 13.axb4 d4 14.Bxd4 cxd4 15.Nxd4 Qb8 Black leaves the bishop en prise. 16.Nxf5 Qxe5+ 17.Be2 Qxf5 18.c5 Nd7 19.Nd5 Bd8 20.Rc3 0-0 White is a little bit better, but what's a +/- evaluation between the ranks of the non-titled players?) 11...Bg6 12.a3 Na6 13.dxe6 0-0 14.exf7+ (14.Be2 Declining the pawn may be best. 14...c5 15.Nf3 fxe6 unclear) 14...Bxf7 15.Qg4 Bc5 16.e6 Bg6 Black has open files, play against the white king, and can try to pick off the vulnerable e6-pawn sooner or later. White is up a pawn, but I would take Black here.

## 11.cxd5 Nb4



[FEN "r2qk2r/ppp1bppp/1n6/3PPb2/1n6/2N1BN2/PP4PP/R2QKB1R w KQkq - 0 12"]

This is the best place for the knight.

## 12.Nd4

12.Bxb6 The idea is to eliminate pressure on d5, but this comes at the cost of parting with the dark-squared bishop in an opening position. 12...axb6 13.Nd4 Bg6 (13...Bd7 14.a3) 14.Bb5+ c6 15.dxc6 0-0 16.cxb7 Rb8 White wishes for a dark-squared bishop.

## 12...Bd7 13.Qf3

13.e6 This is a position that gets me excited about chess. Maybe it is because I like tactical positions where no one is really sure what's going on. Analyzing positions like this will make you a stronger player and help you enjoy the richness of chess. 13...fxe6 14.dxe6 Bc6 Both sides are in a precarious situation. 15.Qg4 (15.Nxc6 Qxd1+ 16.Rxd1 Nc2+ 17.Kd2 Nxe3 18.Kxe3 bxc6 This is drawish. Black's queenside pawns do not impress, but either does the White e6-pawn. It is also features opposite-colored bishops, though they are not always drawish when other pieces are on the board. Except in this



case.; 15.Qh5+ is not dangerous. 15...g6 16.Qh6 Bh4+ 17.g3 Bf6 Where are White's threats?) 15...Bh4+ Black will be crushed by sitting around. 16.g3 White gives up the rook for time. Moving the king away would be ridiculous in a position like this. 16...Bxh1 17.0-0-0 (17.Bb5+ This is a noble effort to get all the pieces out. Unfortunately, Black has a good trick. 17...c6 18.0-0-0 19.gxh4 h5! Black prepares to take on b5. (19...cxb5 20.Nf5 Qf6 21.Bd4 +-) 20.Qg3 cxb5 21.Nf5 Rxf5 22.Rxd8+ Rxd8 Black has way too much material for the queen.) 17...0-0 (17...Bf6 18.Nf5 White wins.) 18.gxh4 Qf6 Black gets the pieces out and defends the king. 19.Bb5 (19.Bg5 Qxf1 20.Rxf1 Rxf1+ 21.Nd1 Nd3+ 22.Kc2 Ne1+ is a draw.; 19.Be2 Bd5 Simply protect the bishop.) 19...c5 20.Bg5 (20.Rxh1 White can bail out. 20...cxd4 21.Bxd4 Qf4+ 22.Qxf4 Rxf4 23.Bxb6 axb6 24.e7 Nc6 25.Nd5 Re4 26.Rg1 unclear Everything is simplified. White's play balances the exchange.) 20...Qe5 21.e7 cxd4 Black is up a lot of stuff and can afford to give some of it back. 22.exf8Q + Rxf8 23.Rxh1 h6 24.Bd2? (24.Bxh6 dxc3 25.Qxb4 cxb2+ 26.Kb1 Qf5+ 27. Kxb2 Qf6+ 28.Kb1 Qxh6 This position is about equal. I would prefer Black because of the king cover.) 24...dxc3 25.Bc4+ Nxc4 26.Qxc4+ Kh8 27.bxc3 Nc6 28.Rf1 Rd8 =/+



[FEN "3r3k/pp4p1/2n4p/4q3/2Q4P/2P5/P2B3P/2K2R2 w - - 0 29"]

Black stands better because of the safer king and superior pawn structure.

### 13...c5

Black has to act quickly because of the e6 threat.

### 14.dxc6 bxc6

This is what is usually played. I looked at the other two choices and neither seem exciting for Black.

14...Bxc6 15.Nxc6 Nxc6 16.Qe4 White has two bishops and more space.

14...Nxc6 brings a piece back and keeps Black's pawn structure intact. I'm not sure how much I believe in it, but I like it better than 14...bxc6. 15.e6 This needs immediate attention. 15...fxe6 16.0-0-0 Qc8 (16...Nxd4 17.Bxd4 Bf6 18.Bxf6 Qxf6 19.Qxb7 0-0 20.Rxd7 Rfb8 21.Qc6 Nxd7 22.Qxd7 Rb6 White must be better.) 17.Bd3 Nb4 18.Qh5+ (18.Be4 Nxa2+; 18.Bb1 N6d5) 18...Kf8 19.Kb1 (19.Rhf1+ Bf6) 19...Kg8 What a messy position. At least Black retains chances, although of course White has them as well. What I really dislike is the rook on h8.

### 15.Be2!

I think what's going on here is that White is the one who has consolidated and has pressure on the black position, so White doesn't need to press right away.

15.e6?! This is a really cool short game that illustrates the hidden resources for Black. 15...fxe6 16.0-0-0 N6d5 17.a3 Nxc3 18.Nxe6 Nca2+!! 19.Kb1 Bxe6 20.Rxd8+ Rxd8 21.axb4 Nxb4 22.Be2 Rf8 23.Qh5+ g6 24.Qe5 Bf5+ 25. Ka1 Rd5 26.Qb8+ Kf7 0-1, Pegoraro-Henderson, Ischia 1996. If 27.Qxa7 Nc2 + 28.Ka2 Nxe3 29.Qxe3 Ra5+ 30.Kb3 Rb8+.

### 15...0-0 16.0-0 N4d5 17.Bf2 Qc7 18.Bg3 Nxc3 19.bxc3



[FEN "r4rk1/p1qbbppp/1np5/4P3/3N4/2P2QB1/P3B1PP/R4RK1 b - - 0 19"]

### 19...Qc8

Black is under a lot of pressure here, and it is hard to say what went wrong. I do not recommend the main line for Black; I presented it simply for clarity since I analyzed this line the most. It is a shame for Alekhine players, but thankfully there are many alternatives, such as 9...Bg4 or even 10...Nb4.

In the next two games, we will look at 5...g6 and 6...c5!? It is amazing that there is so much richness in an opening that most players do not take the time to study.

In the first game, Black deviates from the main line from the very start.

### Brener - Pushkin

USSR, 26.07.1988

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4 g6!?



[FEN "rnbqkb1r/ppp1pp1p/1n1p2p1/4P3/2PP1P2/8/PP4PP/RNBQKBNR w KQkq - 0 6"]

This is uncommon, but considered playable for Black.

5...g5!? is a very interesting move that has had great practical results. It remains pretty untested if Black players are curious to play it. It basically takes pawn breaks to the extreme.

### 6.Nc3

6.Nf3 White wants to play Nbd2 to safeguard the c4-pawn. 6...dxe5 7.fxe5 Bg4 None of this has been tested in practice. Black will fianchetto the dark-squared bishop, castle, and chip at the white pawns with ...f6/...c5.

### 6...Bg7 7.Be3

White develops along normal lines.

### 7...0-0?!

This move order is incorrect and allows a dangerous continuation.

7...Be6!? is correct. 8.Qb3 (8.c5 Nd5 Black is fine here. If Black castles first, then there is no d5-square after 8.c5.; 8.Nf3 0-0 transposes to the game.; 8.d5 Bf5 9.Be2 0-0 10.Nf3 e6 The four pawns on e5, d5, e6, and d6 look strange. Something will give in the white center and Black is okay.) 8...a5!



[FEN "r1qk2r/1pp1ppbp/1n1pb1p1/p3P3/2PP1P2/1QN1B3/PP4PP/R3KBNR w KQkq a6 0 9"]

Black has a plan for the b8-knight. 9.a4?! This weakens the b4-square. 9...Na6 10.Rd1 Nb4 11.Nf3 d5! Watch for strikes in the center such as ...e5/...d5. 12.cxd5 (12.c5?! Nc4!) 12...N4xd5! 13.Nxd5 Bxd5 14.Qc2 Bxf3 Knights are more important than bishops here. The e3-bishop is buried and Black has the light squares, which means outposts for knights. 15.gxf3 Nd5 16.Bc1 e6 Black is better.

### 8.Nf3

8.c5! N6d7 (8...dxc5 9.dxc5 Qxd1+ 10.Rxd1 N6d7 11.Nd5 is clearly terrible for Black.) 9.h4!? is scary for Black. White has all this space and wants to steamroller Black. In my opinion, this is best avoided by playing 7...Be6.

### 8...Be6!

This move was a novelty by IM Sergeev played against Ivanchuk. It would have been better a move earlier, but better late than never.

### 9.Qb3

This is the critical move.

9.Nd2 is the other choice. 9...dxe5 10.fxe5 c5! is another example of a strong pawn push from the flank. 11.d5 (11.dxc5 N6d7 is also good for Black.) 11...Bf5 12.Bf4 e6! Ivanchuk-Sergeev, USSR, 1984. White's center will fall apart. 13.d6 Nc6 14.Nf3 Nd7 15.Qe2 Bg4 This is a pretty typical maneuvering success by Black: White advances too far and Black picks off the pawns.

9.d5? One of the advantages of ...Be6 is that tempting pawn pushes don't work well. 9...Bg4 10.exd6 (forced) 10...exd6.

99.b3 White protects the c-pawn in the most obvious way, but it fails tactically. 9...c5! 10.dxc5 N6d7 Avoiding the queen trade. 11.cxd6 exd6 12.Qxd6 Nxe5!



[FEN "r1q1rk1/pp3pbp/3Qb1p1/4n3/2P2P2/"]



The c3-knight is going to drop off the board.

### 9...a5!

This is an idea worth remembering. As before, it gains space and prepares a knight jump to a6/b4.

### 10.Ng5

White is definitely testing Black.

10.Ne4!? If a white knight can get to e4, it usually means Black did something wrong. Here Black has plenty of activity to make up for the well-placed knight. 10...d5 11.Neg5?! dxc4 12.Nxe6 cxb3 13.Nxd8 Rxd8 14.axb3 Nc6 This is second time Black gives up the two bishops and has control over the light squares. Black is favored in this endgame.

### 10...a4! 11.Nxe6

11.Qb5?! This is just not good at all. 11...Bd7 12.Qb4 Nc6 13.Qa3 f6! White's queen is out of place and the center is falling to pieces.

### 11...axb3 12.Nxd8 Rxd8 13.a3 Nc6



[FEN "r2r2k1/1pp1ppbp/1nnp2p1/4P3/2PP1P2/PpN1B3/1P4PP/R3KB1R w KQ - 0 14"]

Quite suddenly the position has transitioned into an endgame. I think the knights are going to beat the bishops while the pawns clutter the board. Black's bishop will become active after a ...f6 push.

### 14.0-0-0?!

White's king and rook are not really where they want to be.

14.Rc1 is better, after 14...dxe5 15.dxe5 Nd4 16.Bd3 Nc2+ 17.Bxc2 (17.Ke2 fails tactically: 17...Rxd3! 18.Kxd3 Rd8+ 19.Ke2 Nxe3 20.Kxe3 Nxc4+ 21.Ke4 Nxb2 Black has two pawns the the exchange, and it is a little early in the endgame for the king to be in the center.) 17...Nxc4! 18.Ke2!? bxc2 19.Rxc2 Black has a slight edge. ...f6 is coming and Black has active pieces.

### 14...Na5!

Black is better now.

### 15.c5

White is forced to advance the threatened pawn.

### 15...dxc5 16.dxc5 Rxd1+ 17.Nxd1

17.Kxd1 is even worse: 17...Nbc4 18.Bc1 Rd8+ 19.Ke1 f6!.

### 17...Nbc4

All of Black's next moves force the play. Notice Black's lead in development. It is almost as though castling undeveloped White's king.

**18.Bd4 Rd8 19.Bc3 Rd5 20.Bb4 g5!**

This is a nice move. Keep attacking the pawn chain in the Alekhine.

**21.fxg5**

21.g3 The usual solution, but it doesn't work here. 21...gxf4 22.gxf4 Bh6 23. Rg1+ Kf8 24.Rg4 Rd4 and Black wins.

**21...Rxe5 22.Bxc4 Nxc4 23.Re1**



[FEN "6k1/1pp1ppbp/8/2P1r1P1/1Bn5/Pp6/1P4PP/2KNR3 b - - 0 23"]

White finally gets developed, but Black is too active.

**23...e6 24.h4**

24.Rxe5 Bxe5 25.g3 Bd4 It is instructive to see how Black continues to carry the initiative. White is close to paralysis.

**24...Rd5!**

Black would prefer to keep rooks on, since his rook is stronger than White's.

**25.Re4**

25.Nc3 It is too late to activate. 25...Rd2 26.Re2 Rxe2 27.Nxe2 Bxb2+.

**25...Ne5 26.Nf2**

White gets all of the pieces off the back rank, but Black is ideally placed and cleans up.

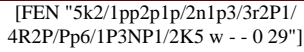
**26...Bf8!**

Winning the c5-pawn.

**27.c6**

White cannot stop the loss of the pawn.

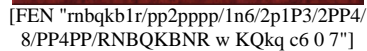
**27...Nxc6 28.Bxf8 Kxf8**



29.Rc4 Rd4 30.Rc3 Rxh4 31.Rxb3 Na5 32.Rd3 Rh2 33.Rg3 Kg7 34.Ne4 Kg6 35.b4 Nc6 36.Nc5 Nd4 37.Rg4 e5! 38.Re4 Rxd2 39.Rxe5 Rxd5 40. Rxd5+ Kxd5 41.Nxb7 Kg4 0-1

The next game is short and sweet. Black wins because White didn't really know what to do in the opening, which is a good precursor to losing a miniature as white.

**1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4 dxe5 6.fxe5 c5!?**



**7.d5**

7.Nf3 Bg4 and Black won't complain.

7.Be3 cxd4 is not how White planned it, trust me.

7...e6

The d-pawn gets no relief.

7...g6 Fianchettoing the bishop is also possible here. The only thing is that the lines get obscure and confusing. 8.Bf4 Bg7 9.Nc3 (9.h3!? White wants to

avoid a ...Bg4 pin. 9...0-0 10.Nf3 e6 11.Nc3 f6 I think Black is fine.) 9...0-0 10.Qd2 (10.Bd3 The bishop has no home here. 10...e6 11.d6 When this happens, the base of the pain chain should be where Black focuses; in this case, the e5-pawn. 11...Nc6 12.Nf3 Nd7 Exactly. 13.Qe2 Nd4 14.Nxd4 cxd4 15.Nb5 Qa5+ 16.Bd2 Qb6 17.b4 Nxe5 White played a couple weird moves and let Black just win the pawn, but Black has pressure regardless.) 10...e6 11.0-0-0 White adopts an aggressive set-up. 11...exd5 12.cxd5 Re8 Black opens lines to pressure the white pawns. 13.Re1 Na6 14.Nf3 Nb4 15.Bg5 Qc7



[FEN "r1b1r1k1/ppq2pbp/1n4p1/2pPP1B1/1n6/2N2N2/PP1Q2PP/2K1RB1R w - - 0 16"]

This is a crazy line within a crazy line. 16.d6 Qc6 17.Bh6 Bh8 I saw on ChessPublishing that this is a suggestion of my old coach, national master Mark Morse. The idea is, of course, to preserve the bishop. 18.h4 Bf5 I'm not really sure what's going on here, except that this looks like a typical position I might play. I don't know if that is a good thing or not.

### 8.Nc3

8.d6 fails tactically: 8...Qh4+ 9.g3 Qe4+ 10.Qe2 Qxh1 11.Nf3 Black is totally winning, but I have to show a long line to prove it, since the queen has to go. 11...Nc6! 12.Nbd2 Nd7! 13.Kf2 Ndx5! 14.Nxe5 Qxh2+ 15.Bg2 Nd4 16.Qd1 Bxd6 17.Nf1 White has done it! But it doesn't matter that the queen is lost. 17...Qxg2+ 18.Kxg2 Bxe5 Black is winning with a rook, a piece, and three pawns for the queen and a bunch of undeveloped pieces.

### 8...exd5 9.cxd5 c4



[FEN "rnbqkb1r/pp3ppp/1n6/3PP3/2p5/2N5/PP4PP/R1BQKBNR w KQkq - 0 10"]

This is the best move. Black's f8-bishop is free to move. This is a critical position for this line.

### 10.a3

10.Bf4 Bb4 11.Bxc4? Nxc4 12.Qa4+ Nc6 13.dxc6 Nxb2— Black is just winning. 14.cxb7+ Nxa4 15.bxa8Q Bxc3+.

10.Qd4 White's goal is simple: grab the c-pawn. 10...Nc6 11.Qe4 Nb4 12.a3 (12.d6 g6 White is in trouble.) 12...N4xd5 13.Nxd5 Qxd5 14.Qxd5 Nxd5 15.Bxc4 Nc7 16.Be3 Be6 Sleepy equality.

10.d6 has been played very rarely, yet is a scary looking move. What to do?

10...Be6 11.Nf3 (11.Nb5 Nd5 12.Nf3 Qa5+) 11...Nc6 12.Nb5 (12.Be2 Nd7) 12...Rc8 13.Bg5 (13.Nc7+ Rxc7 14.dxc7 Qxc7 Black gives up the exchange. In return, White's center has disappeared. Black is better.) 13...Qd7 14.a4 h6 15.Be3 Nd5 16.Bf2 a6 17.Nbd4 (17.Bxc4 axb5 18.Bxd5 Nxe5 19.Nxe5 Qxd6 Black gets the piece back.) 17...Nxd4 18.Qxd4 Nb4 19.Qd2 Nc6 ...g5 is coming to gain space and develop the f8-bishop.

10.Nf3 is the main line. Black sacrifices a pawn, but with good compensation and a fine position. 10...Bb4 11.Bxc4 (11.Bg5 Bxc3+ 12.bxc3 Qxd5 13.Qxd5 Nxd5 14.0-0-0 Ne7 15.Bxe7 Kxe7 16.Bxc4 Bg4=) 11...Bxc3+ 12.bxc3 Nxc4 13.Qa4+ Nd7 14.Qxc4 Nb6 15.Qb5+ Qd7 16.Qxd7+ Bxd7 17.d6 Rc8 18.Bd2 Bb5 19.Nd4 Bd3 White's pawns are extended and White can't castle. ½- ½, Shulman-Baburin 2001.

10.Bxc4 Qh4+.

### 10...Bc5

What White did in the game is not recommended. Now White can't castle and Black has a clear plan of attack.

### 11.Nf3 0-0 12.Be2 Bf5!



[FEN "rn1q1rk1/pp3ppp/1n6/2bPPb2/2p5/P1N2N2/1P2B1PP/R1BQK2R w KQ - 0 13"]

White seems to have developed safely, but keeping the king in the center is terrible, so White has to castle queenside, which is very dangerous.

### 13.Bg5 Qd7 14.Qd2 h6 15.Bf4 Na6 16.0-0-0 Rac8

Black is all developed and ready for action. White has played all normal looking moves, so maybe his danger radar was not on yet.

### 17.h3 Na4!

Black's idea is simple: attack the king.

### 18.Nd4?

This is tactically flawed.

18.Rhf1 Bxa3! 19.bxa3 N6c5 20.Bxc4 Nb3+ 21.Bxb3 Rxc3+.

### 18...Bxd4 19.Qxd4 N6c5 20.Bxc4

White looks consolidated somewhat.

20.Qxc4 Nd3+.

### 20...Qb5!!

This is such a cool move. I remember reading once that it is important to save positions such as this in a notebook full of similar gems. It makes you feel good about chess.



## 21.Rd2

21.Nxb5 Nb3#; 21.Bxb5 Nb3#; 21.b4 Nb3+ 22.Bxb3 Rxc3+—+ winning.

## 21...Nxc3 0-1

22.Qxc3 (22.bxc3 Qb1#) 22...Nb3+ 23.Bxb3 Qxb3—+.

This kind of game makes this line look inviting. Of course, White played poorly, but Shabalov made it look so easy. The critical lines need to be investigated more closely.

### Lessons Learned

- The first one is that the mainline for Black (9...Be7) is under a cloud. I personally am excited about 6...c5!?, while 5...g6 is a solid choice. Maybe 10...Nb4 is the most dubious, while 9...Bg4 is okay. I would encourage black players to do their own analysis and explore the possibilities. Many lines are untested.
- The variations may be a bit daunting. Whenever I'm looking at a line with a lot of theory, I try to bring it back to basics: If I reached this position over-the-board for the first time, what would I think about? Break down the analysis into bits; don't just chug variation after variation. I also like printing out the critical positions and playing them out on a board.
- As for the actual chess, specifics are important, but so are ideas in some positions. Black is aiming to break up the white pawns with ...f6 and ...c5 pawn breaks and gain space. It is a combative opening full of creativity.

### Further Reading

- [\*Starting Out: Alekhine's Defense\*](#) by John Cox. This is a great book full of ideas for both White and Black. It is from 2004, and so considered a grandfather in terms of opening books, so the main line is outdated, but everything else looks pretty fresh.
- Chesspublishing.com is a wonderful site that I highly recommend. In fact, I used it as a reference for this column.

### Practitioners

- Bobby Fischer. Many players know of the funny story from the 1965 Havana tournament. Fischer was playing by phone and thought that his opponent had played 1.d4. Fischer replied 1...Nf6 and was shocked when White played 2.e5. Luckily Fischer didn't blow his cool when he learned that the first move was 1.e4, and he used Alekhine's to good effect throughout his career.
- Vladimir Bagirov. The strong grandmaster is a champion of the defense.
- Edvins Kengis. He is a strong Latvian grandmaster.

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