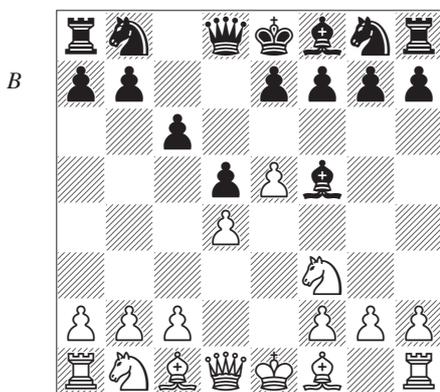


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5 Advance Variation: Short System and Other Modern Treatments

If Chapter 4 gave the impression that the Advance Variation tends to result in a huge tactical scrap, then Game 14 will do little to contradict this notion. This fascinating and hugely creative game is evidence that the seemingly quite unpretentious 4 ♟f3 too can suddenly explode into life when Black elects to react with an early ...c5. Since this thematic freeing move slightly weakens the pawn on d5, White can treat it as an invitation to a general opening of the centre. This is usually achieved by means of the move c4 – although in Game 14 it is, unusually, the pieces alone which create all of the mayhem. There is now undoubtedly a group of 4 ♟f3 devotees who thrive precisely on these sharp positions. However, the original motivation for 4 ♟f3 (D) was altogether more sedate.



It was the insight that White's space advantage may have positive consequences even though the c8-bishop is able to develop outside the pawn-chain which took this, from a move whose existence was grudgingly noted, to main-line status. Indeed, in some of Nigel Short's games when he was developing and

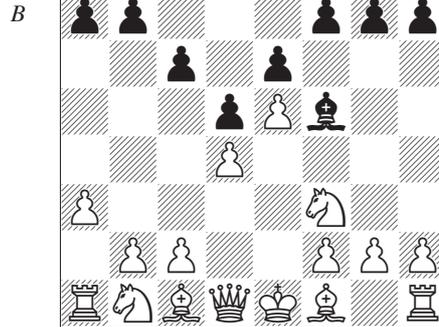
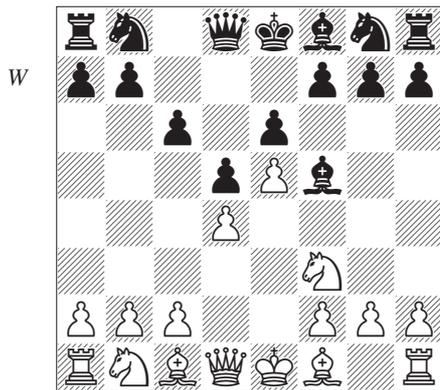
interpreting this line in a very positional way, simply bolstering his centre with c3 as a response to ...c5, the claim was that *this bishop is actually missed on the queenside*. In a sense it is also one more black minor piece competing for a limited set of secure squares on the kingside.

Game 15, and to a degree the remaining games in this chapter, clearly reflect this more positional character. The key skill here is intelligent manoeuvring behind the lines and White's pressing need is to find an effective plan once his opponent has fulfilled the basic task of finding acceptable squares for his minor pieces. A key role in the implicit story running through the chapter is played by the move ...c5 even where it is delayed as here, or where it is never played, as in Games 16 and 17. Whilst Black can dictate a slower pace to the play and force White into less tactical channels by avoiding an early recourse to this pawn-break, part of the motivation for an array of other 4th moves – 4 ♞e3 in particular – which have recently become very fashionable is precisely White's desire to prevent it. This is not the only point of course. In the two final games of the chapter White plays f4, obviously a consequence of the decision to delay ♟f3 and a move which adds a further dimension to the acquisition of space.

As a player who rather relishes a tactical tussle, it is not so easy fully to appreciate the desire to avoid ...c5. However, there is a sense in which White's play in Games 16 and 17 acquires a greater stylistic unity when he can guarantee a contest in a less open type of position. Then again, as Game 17 graphically illustrates, the inclusion of f4 itself brings into play a new pawn-break for Black too as 8...g5!? offers a fresh opportunity to undermine White's impressive edifice.

Game 14
Alexander Motylev – Evgeny Bareev
Russian Ch, Moscow 2005

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 ♗f5 4 ♘f3 e6 (D)



5 ♗e2

This deceptively modest system of development was hardly seen prior to Nigel Short's highly successful deployment of it back in the early 1990s. It seems to have been one of those systems which came up against a fair degree of initial scepticism. Surely such a slow build-up by White could lead to little more than a space advantage comparable with that found in the Advance French, with the disadvantage of allowing a splendid bishop on f5 most decidedly not found there! I believe that much of what will be found in the remainder of this chapter arises from a profound reassessment of the potency of such a spatial plus. Even more modern systems have taken an undeniable inspiration from the 'Short System' and together these now form one of the main arenas of debate at the highest levels. Meanwhile, the current game should remind us that if Black reacts critically in the manner of the French Defence with a quick ...c5 then fireworks will often ensue. Then, not for the first time, we shall see that Black's pride and joy – that sweeping bishop on f5 – can be sorely missed from the queenside.

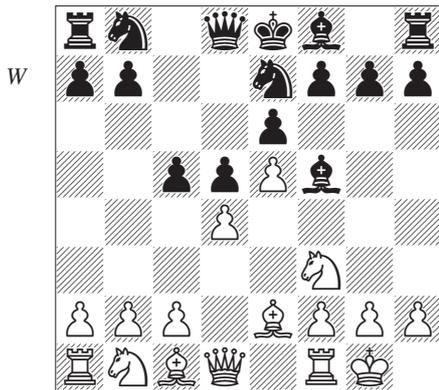
First a mention is owed to another of Short's babies: the paradoxical but ingenious 5 a3!? (D).

There are two significant ideas. In some lines in which White will play an early c4 and Black will capture it, it is hoped that capturing directly with the bishop from f1 instead of e2 will win a tempo. Alternatively, there may be positions in which White can respond to the ...c5 break by capturing and then expanding on the queenside with b4 (and probably c4 too). Black has a choice of systems not dissimilar to those we shall examine in Game 15. However, their respective virtues might change. It seems logical for Black to avoid ...c5 and also to avoid lines in which White claims the bishop-pair with an early ♘h4, since here too he may benefit from being able subsequently to play his bishop to d3 in one go. Hence, 5...♘d7 6 ♘bd2 h6!? looks logical to me, perhaps followed just by ...♘e7-g6 and ...♗e7. For all its creativity, it is hard to believe that 5 a3 can pose a challenge so long as Black is mindful of its specific intentions.

5...c5

Options which keep the play closed will be considered in the next game, but here I would like to look at other attempts which seek to benefit from delaying ...c5 just slightly. The best way to introduce this seems to be with 5...♘e7. The problems encountered by the less appropriate 5...♘d7 6 0-0 c5?! 7 c4! serve to drive home

the lesson that bolstering the d5-square is a good prelude to opening the centre. Hence it is only 5...♞e7 6 0-0 (or 6 c3!? {Karpov}, when 6...c5?! 7 dxc5 is awkward, but 6...♙g6 7 0-0 ♞f5! 8 ♞bd2 c5 is a sensible way to organize Black's troops) 6...c5!? (*D*) which can be regarded as a viable alternative.

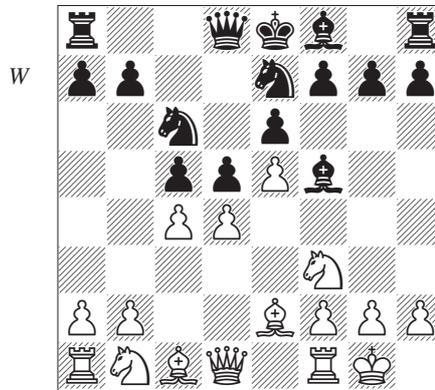


It is worth noting that c3-based systems should normally await the move ...♞bc6, since here, for example, 7 c3 ♞ec6! 8 ♙e3 ♞d7 allows relatively easy development. So, White has two main choices (given that 7 ♙e3 ♞ec6 8 dxc5 transposes to 'a'):

a) 7 dxc5 does not net a pawn for very long in view of 7...♞ec6 8 ♙e3 ♞d7. However, by 9 c4! dxc4 10 ♞a3 White can try to blast the centre open at a moment when Black's control of d5 is not at its greatest. However, after the sensible 10...♙xc5! (avoiding the risky complications which follow 10...c3?! 11 ♖b3!) 11 ♙xc5 ♞xc5 12 ♞xc4 0-0, the black king reaches safety and although d6 is something for White to play with, Black's minor pieces are well placed too. In particular, 13 ♖c1!? ♞d3!? 14 ♖e3 ♖d5! looks comfortable enough.

b) 7 c4!? is the sharpest as usual, when 7...♞bc6 (*D*) is the main line.

It says much for the abnormal complexities which the extreme tension in the centre generates, in conjunction with the question marks that continue to hang over the development of Black's kingside, that the curious-looking 8 ♞a3!? is strongly favoured by recent practice here. Naturally enough, such a move has been

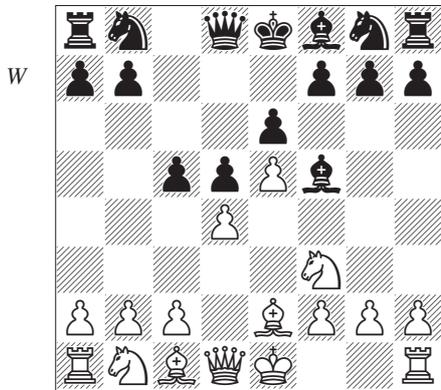


an important weapon in reply to ...dxc4, with the knight heading for d6 via the recapture of the c-pawn (rather as in 'a' above). However, it is interesting indeed that neither 8 dxc5 d4! nor the natural 8 ♞c3 dxc4 9 dxc5 ♞d5! is reckoned to be very special for White. The notable feature of 8 ♞a3 is that Black has no entirely convenient way to release the tension since now 8...cxd4 9 ♞b5! ♞g6 10 ♞bxd4 will enable White to recapture on d4 with a knight, which almost guarantees some initiative. Neither is 8...♞g6 9 cxd5 ♖xd5 10 ♞b5! ♜c8 11 dxc5!? a promising solution. Perhaps there is a reason that practice has almost exclusively seen the rather strange 8...dxc4 and Karpov endorses this too. However, at the very least this strongly vindicates White's 8th move. I am inclined to prefer White a little after 9 ♞xc4 ♞d5 10 ♙g5! ♖d7 (Black is too poorly developed to venture 10...f6 11 exf6 gxf6 12 ♙e3!) since following 11 ♜c1 h6 White should generally be happy to return the bishop to e3, as the d5-knight is pretty fundamental to keeping Black's game together in the centre.

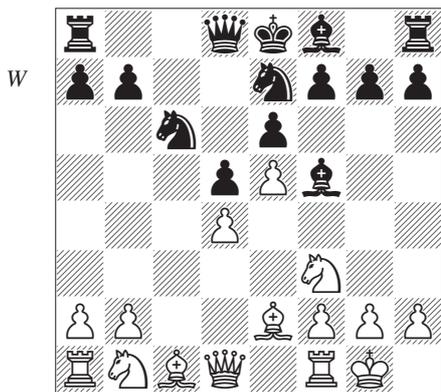
We now return to 5...c5 (*D*):

6 ♙e3!?

The fundamental choice White has to make in this line is between keeping the centre blocked, which presages a slow manoeuvring game, and forcibly opening it up, which promises fiery tactics and early piece clashes. Increasingly, the text-move is recognized as the right way to initiate the latter choice – White is looking to force the issue in the centre and blast it open while Black's development lags.



Not surprisingly, 6 0-0 is still a very respectable but generally quieter alternative. Then 6...♖e7 transposes to the extensive note to Black's 5th move, but the main line is 6...♗c6. Then White can still try 7 ♕e3 with spiritual resemblance to the main game, but here I would like to consider the much more solid 7 c3!?, which has once again dipped a little in popularity, but was fundamental to Nigel Short's aforementioned prowess in the variation. The main line runs 7...cxd4 (it is probably wise to cut out the possibility of dxc5, which is, for example, a good reply to 7...♗b6?!) 8 cxd4 ♗ge7 (D), and now:



a) With 9 a3!?, White has in mind a possible expansion on the queenside with the 'extended fianchetto' and meanwhile keeps his b1-knight flexible – it may be better placed on d2 rather than c3, for example, in response to a ...♕g4 by Black since recapturing with the knight is a

harmonious response to any exchange on f3. 9...♗c8!? (this looks better to me than 9...♕e4 since after 10 ♗bd2 ♗f5 11 b4! capturing on d4 always allows White a substantial initiative as he too will exchange on e4 and open centre files) 10 b4 (White can also choose to exchange his 'bad bishop' with 10 ♕g5, but this gain is somewhat cancelled out by the fact that simplification generally eases the task of the player with less room to manoeuvre) 10...♕e7 11 ♕b2 ♗b6 12 ♗bd2 0-0 13 ♖c1 ♖c8 with a balanced position. Both sides have squares on the queenside (c5 for White and c4/a4 for Black) which they would like to access. However, in response to 14 ♗b3, Michael Adams once played the interesting pawn sacrifice 14...♗c4!? and after 15 ♕xc4 dxc4 16 ♖xc4 ♗d5 17 ♖c3 a5! obtained very decent active play. Hence Shirov's plan of 14 ♕c3 followed by ♗b3 and a4 is probably more prudent. My only slight reservation about Black's position is that this may be one of those cases where the fine bishop on f5 is slightly missed on the queenside. However, with care this should not be a major problem.

b) 9 ♕e3 (9 ♗c3 is also possible although in this case 9...♕g4 followed by ...♗f5 comes into strong consideration) is still perhaps best met by 9...♗c8!? (9...♕g4 10 ♗bd2 ♗f5 11 h3 ♕xf3 12 ♗xf3 followed by ♕d3 looks a bit more comfortable for White) 10 ♗c3!? ♗b6 (if 10...♕e7, 11 ♗a4 ♗b6 12 ♗c5 is interesting because 12...♕xc5?! 13 dxc5 ♗d7 14 ♗d4! is embarrassing for the f5-bishop in view of 14...♗dxe5?! 15 g4!, Short-A.Ledger, British League (4NCL) 2001/2) 11 ♖c1 ♕e7 12 ♗a4 ♗xa4 13 ♗xa4 0-0 and White's extra space is not worthless, but since 14 ♕b5 is met with 14...♗b4! he does not have too much to bite on.

We shall return to 6 ♕e3! (D):

6...cxd4

It is worth mentioning right away that the otherwise natural 6...♗c6?! runs into 7 dxc5! and Black has no easy way to recoup this pawn. Nonetheless, it still looks a little strange to oblige so readily in this opening of the centre, especially as the knight recapturing on d4 will hit f5. But the defender has in mind the quickest possible development by ...♗e7 and ...♗bc6 and if he can accomplish this without