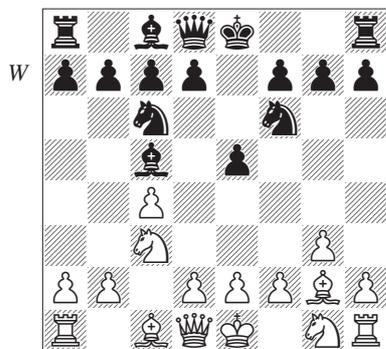


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3 The Three Knights System: 4...♞c5

1 c4 e5 2 g3 ♘f6 3 ♙g2 ♘c6 4 ♘c3
♙c5 (D)



The most active move, aiming at f2.

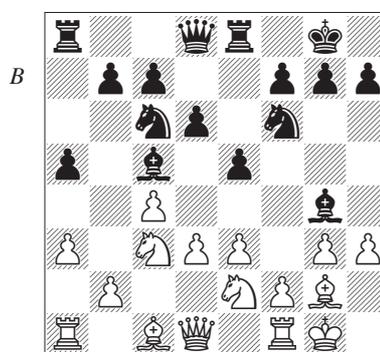
White's Strategy

The expanding centre tactic

The big drawback to lines where Black plays his bishop to c5 is that if White can play e3 and d4, the white centre will expand with gain of time.

The next diagram shows a good reason to tuck the bishop away on a7.

Black decided he would like to play ...♙e6 and ...d5 with a Sicilian-style position, but, unfortunately, after 10...♙e6?, White won a piece by 11



Grivas – Makri

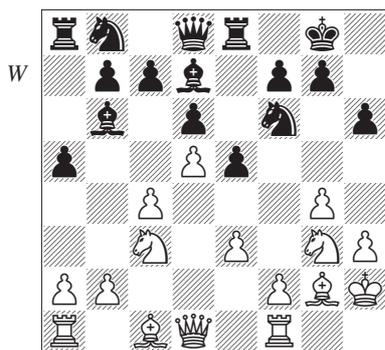
Komotini 1992

d4 exd4 12 exd4 as 12...♙a7 allows 13 d5, forking knight and bishop, so Black chose 12...♘xd4 13 ♘xd4 ♙xc4 14 ♘f5 ♙xf1 15 ♙xf1 but White's two pieces proved more than a match for Black's rook and pawns. Notice that if the black dark-squared bishop had been on a7 originally, then White would have had the strong move 11 ♘d5, when 11...♘xd5? would lose a piece after 12 cxd5, and 11...♙xd5 would concede the bishop-pair.

Kingside attack

Another disadvantage of developing the black king's bishop outside the

pawn-chain is that it can no longer fulfil its defensive duties.



Korchnoi – Szabo

Bucharest 1955

White has just played d4-d5 and ♖g3, gaining control of the e4-square, much as in Chapter 13. He now set about the black kingside:

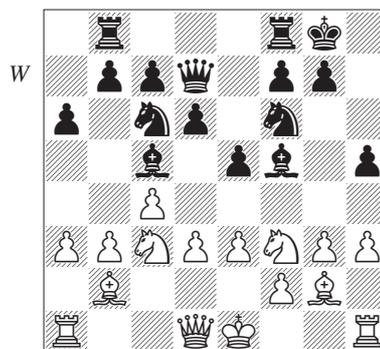
14 f4! exf4 15 exf4 ♖h7 16 g5!

The point is that 16...hxg5 17 fxg5 ♗xg5 18 ♖h5 f6 19 ♗xg5 fxg5 allows 20 ♗e4, winning.

The pivotal d5-square

As in the whole of this book, White's attempt to control d5 is paramount. This line is no exception.

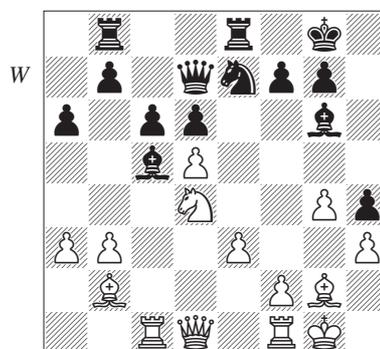
The diagram at the top of the next column shows an instructive type of position. White played **12 ♖d5!** and after the reply **12...♗xd5 13 cxd5 ♗e7**, continued **14 d4!**, exploiting the exposed position of the c5-bishop. Play proceeded **14...exd4 15 ♖xd4 ♗g6** with a structural advantage to



Spraggett – Cuadras

Roses 1992

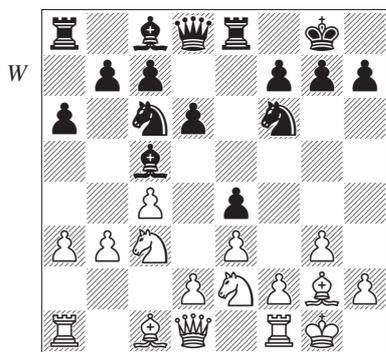
White as he enjoys more space, an extra central pawn and possible pressure along the open c-file against the backward c7-pawn. Following **16 g4 h4 17 ♖c1 ♗fe8 18 0-0 c6?** (D) White won a pawn:



After **19 dxc6 bxc6 20 ♖xc6** Black discovered that he could not continue **20...♖xc6** owing to **21 ♖xc5** – the d-pawn is pinned against the undefended queen.

Black plays ...e4

Sometimes, Black decides to push his e-pawn to e4 before White plays d3, with the hope of establishing a piece on d3.



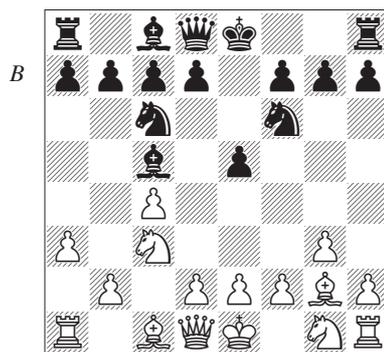
However, this plays into White's hands, for he can reply **10 d4!** (occasionally d3 is more appropriate), and on **10...exd3**, reply **11 ♖f4!** intending to recapture on d3 with the knight. This knight often turns out to be well-placed on the central d3-square.

The Theory of the Three Knights System with 4...♙c5

1 c4 e5 2 g3 ♜f6 3 ♙g2 ♞c6 4 ♞c3 ♙c5 5 a3! (D)

At first sight a strange and somewhat surprising move. In fact, White wishes to play e3 and ♜ge2, blunting the c5-bishop's a7-g1 diagonal, and threatening to smother this piece completely with an eventual d4. However,

there is a problem, for after the immediate 5 e3, Black has the strong possibility 5...d5!? (or 5...0-0 6 ♞ge2 d5!? 7 cxd5 ♞b4 with the same idea), exploiting the weakened d3-square after 6 cxd5 ♞b4, because 7 e4?? allows 7...♞d3+ 8 ♜e2 ♞xf2, and therefore White has no good way to hang on to his d5-pawn, and must allow Black to recapture on d5 with a good game. My examination of games where White allowed this possibility suggest that Black's results are very good, all the more reason to avoid it!



5...a6

This is the most flexible reply, preserving the c5-bishop against the threat of b4, and returning to a standard main line. Obviously ...d5 is no longer possible as cxd5 simply wins a pawn, the c6-knight being unable to move to b4.

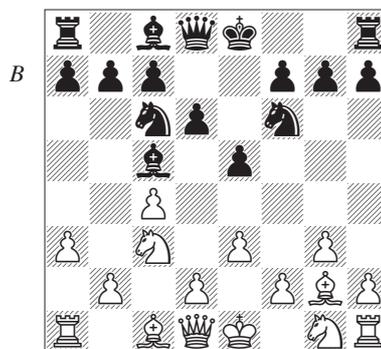
a) Should Black wish to attempt to gain an advantage from White's unusual move-order, he can try 5...♙d4?! (the only real way to attempt to exploit 5 a3), but after 6 ♞d5 0-0 7 ♞f3 (7 e3

and 8 ♞e2 would seem even more sensible) 7... ♗b6 8 d3 h6 9 0-0 d6, Black has only managed to lose moves with his bishop, Spraggett-Hodgson, Winnipeg 1997.

b) 5...a5 is less popular than the text-move, as although Black hereby manages to thwart White's intended b4, it is at the cost of weakening the b5-square. Further, White often refrains from playing b4 anyway, unless it gains some tactical advantage, and prefers b3. 6 e3 0-0 (6...d6 7 ♞ge2 ♙g4 ?! 8 h3 ♙h5 9 d3 0-0 10 g4 ♙g6 11 ♞g3 ♚d7 12 b3 ♞ab8 13 ♙b2 ♙b6 14 ♚e2 ♞e7 15 0-0-0! c6 16 f4 led to a crushing attack for White in Hickl-Schulz, Berlin 1992) 7 ♞ge2 ♞e8 8 0-0 d6 9 d3 ♙f5 (9... ♙g4 ?! 10 h3 ♙e6 ? is a blunder, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter: 11 d4 exd4 12 exd4 ♞xd4 13 ♞xd4 ♙xc4 14 ♞f5 ♙xf1 15 ♙xf1 ♚d7 16 ♚d3 ♞e5 17 g4 ♞b8 18 ♙g5 , with a large plus, Grivas-Miles, Komotini 1992) 10 h3 ♙a7 11 ♙h2 ♚d7 12 e4 ♙g6 13 ♙g5 ♞e7 14 f4 exf4 15 gxf4 ♙h5 16 ♚c2 ♙xe2 17 ♞xe2 ♙h8 18 ♙xf6 gxf6 19 ♚c3 ♞g8 20 ♞g3 led to a wonderful position for White in Spraggett-Polak, Cappelle la Grande 1998.

c) 5...0-0 6 e3 will transpose after 6...a6 to the main line, or line 'b' of this note after 6...a5, but there is the independent possibility 6... ♞e8 7 ♞ge2 ♙f8 although White has everything he could wish for after 8 0-0.

d) 5...d6 6 e3 (D) and now Black can try:



d1) 6...a6 again transposes to the main line.

d2) The 'pseudo-active' 6... ♙g4 is inappropriate here, for Black has no intention of swapping his bishop for the white knight and therefore the bishop just serves as a convenient target for White's kingside expansion: 7 ♞ge2 0-0 8 h3 ♙h5 9 g4 ♙g6 10 d4 (White's pawns expand, pushing back the black pieces) 10...exd4 11 exd4 ♙b6 12 ♙g5 (Black is now unable to break this pin and the threat of an eventual ♞d5 will cause the break-up of the black kingside) 12... ♞e8 13 0-0 and the threats of ♞d5 and f4-f5 give White a clear plus, e.g. 13... ♞a5 ?! 14 c5! dxc5 15 dxc5 ♙xc5 16 b4 ♙d3 17 ♞a2 .

d3) 6... ♙e6 7 b4 ♙b6 8 d3 ♚d7 9 h3 (White wants to preserve his king's bishop from exchange; 9 ♞ge2 ? would allow 9... ♙h3) 9...0-0 10 ♞ge2 ♞d8 11 ♞a4 (demonstrating why Black should prefer a preparatory ...a6 or ...a5; White can simply play ♞d5 or ♞a4 and, with the bishop-pair, can