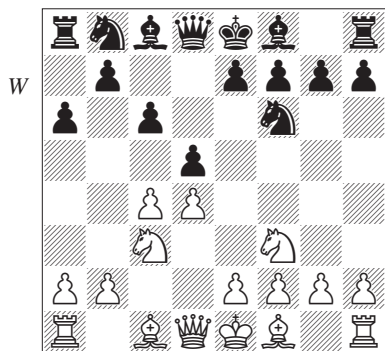


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## 4 The Main Line ...a6 Slav

1 d4            d5  
 2 c4            c6  
 3 ♘f3           ♘f6  
 4 ♘c3           a6 (D)



This little move has several ideas. Most obviously, Black prepares ...b5, which grabs some space and also forces White to act on the queenside, which often stabilizes that part of the board, or else gives Black counterplay. Black also prepares to develop his queen's bishop, since after ...a6 (and possibly ...b5), White's attack on b7 (by ♖b3) has less sting. Note that Black also has the idea of ...♖a7 in reply to ♖b3, so he is not committed to the possibly loosening ...b5. Of course, ...♖a7 looks completely absurd, but then again ♖b3 isn't so useful in itself. The rook often just returns to a8

once its job is done on a7. Also, by waiting for a move, Black makes it easier for him to determine where to put his queen's bishop: if White plays e3, then ...♗g4 is a natural reply, as it now pins the f3-knight. One further point is that Black's idea of ...dxc4 is now slightly more of a threat, although there are only a few lines where he actually carries this out.

Now White has a wide choice:

**A:** 5 ♘e5            110  
**B:** 5 ♖b3            111  
**C:** 5 ♗g5            112  
**D:** 5 a4             115  
**E:** 5 c5             119  
**F:** 5 e3             124

There are even a few other significant moves:

a) 5 cxd5 cxd5 and now:

a1) 6 ♗g5 ♘e4 7 ♗h4 ♘c6 8 e3 ♗f5 = Aseev-Ki.Georgiev, Paris Intel rpd 1995.

a2) 6 g3 e6 7 ♗g2 ♗e7 8 0-0 0-0 9 ♗f4 b5 10 ♘e5 ♗b7 11 ♖c1 ♘bd7 12 ♖b3 ♖c8 gave Black good play in E.Campos-Cummings, Erevan OL 1996.

a3) 6 ♗f4 and now: 6...♘bd7?! – 4 cxd5 cxd5 5 ♘c3 ♘bd7?! 6 ♗f4 a6; 6...♘c6 – 4 cxd5 cxd5 5 ♘c3 ♘c6 6 ♗f4 a6; this is an important transposition.

a4) **6** ♖e5 is not much of an independent option, since after 6...♗c6 (6...♗bd7 – 5 ♗e5 ♗bd7 6 cxd5 cxd5 =; this is a satisfactory line for Black), White probably has nothing better than 7 ♕f4 – 4 cxd5 cxd5 5 ♗c3 ♗c6 6 ♕f4 a6 7 ♗e5.

b) **5** ♖c2 dxc4 (5...g6 6 cxd5 cxd5 7 ♕g5 ± Ivanchuk-P.Nikolić, Monte Carlo Amber rpd 1995) 6 e4 b5 7 ♕e2 gives White some compensation, Ehlvest-Dreev, USSR U-26 Ch (Lvov) 1985; this should be compared with the line 4...dxc4 5 e4 b5 6 ♖c2.

c) **5** h3 b5 (5...dxc4 6 a4 is a main-line Slav with the extra moves h3 and ...a6; 5...e6 challenges White to show why h3 is more useful than ...a6 in a Semi-Slav; then 6 c5 looks most logical, when 6...b6 7 cxb6 ♗bd7 8 g3 ♖xb6 9 ♕g2 c5 10 0-0 ♕d6 11 ♖b1 0-0 12 ♗a4 ♖b5 13 b3 gave White an edge in Knaak-Rogozenko, Bundesliga 1996/7) 6 cxd5 cxd5 7 ♕f4 e6 8 e3 ♕b7 9 ♕d3 ♕e7 10 0-0 0-0 11 a4 b4 12 ♗b1 ♗c6 13 ♗bd2 ♗a5 14 ♖e2 ♖b6 = Zviagintsev-Bologan, New York Open 1997.

d) **5** g3 leads to interesting play that will doubtless be further investigated as the theory of the ...a6 system develops:

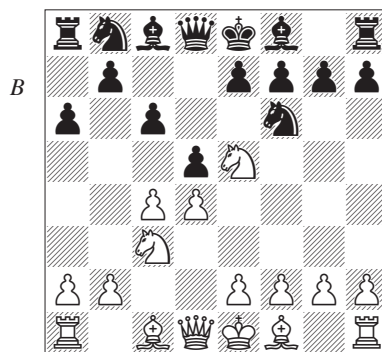
d1) **5...dxc4** 6 a4 (6 ♕g2 b5 7 ♗e5 is a little-investigated position where White has Catalan-style compensation; note the transposition 7...♕b7 8 a4 – 4 g3 dxc4 5 ♕g2 b5 6 a4 ♕b7 7 ♗e5 a6 8 ♗c3) 6...g6 7 ♕g2 ♕g7 8 a5 0-0 9 0-0 ♗d5 10 ♗d2!? (10 ♖a4 ♗xc3 11 bxc3 c5 = Korchnoi; 10 ♗e4 ♕f5 11 ♗fd2 ♕xe4 12 ♗xe4 ♗d7 ∞

Korchnoi-I.Sokolov, Groningen 1996) 10...♕e6 (10...♕xd4 11 ♗xc4 ♗xc3 12 bxc3 ♕xc3 13 ♕h6 {I.Sokolov} gives White dangerous play) 11 ♗ce4 was given by Sokolov as ±, but this is debatable.

d2) **5...b5** 6 c5 g6 7 ♕g2 ♕g7 8 0-0 0-0 9 ♗e5 ♕e6 10 h3 ♖c8 11 g4 (11 ♖h2 ♗e4 12 ♗xe4 dxe4 13 ♕xe4 ♖d8 14 f4 ♕xh3 15 ♖f2 ♕e6 ∞ Goldin-Bologan, New York Open 1993) 11...h5 12 f3 (Korchnoi-Shirov, Groningen 1996) 12...♗fd7 with equality – Shirov.

A)

**5** ♗e5 (D)



This aggressive move doesn't quite hit the target.

**5** ... ♗bd7

Alternatively:

a) **5...dxc4** 6 a4 (6 g3 b5 7 ♕g2 ♕b7 8 0-0 e6 9 a4 transposes to a line of the Catalan; 6 ♗xc4 b5 7 ♗e5 ♕b7 = Ruban-Dreev, Novosibirsk 1995) 6...e6 7 g3 c5 8 ♕e3 ♗bd7 9 ♗xc4 ♗d5 10 ♕g2 (Epishin-Volkov, Russia

Cup (St Petersburg) 1996) 10...♗7b6  
∞ Shipov.

b) **5...b5** 6 cxd5 cxd5 7 ♕f4 (or 7 g3 ♕b7 8 ♕g2 e6 9 0-0 ♕e7 10 ♕f4 ♗c6 11 ♖c1, Lalić-Hodgson, Hastings 1995/6, 11...♖c8 = Lalić) 7...e6 8 e3 ♗bd7 9 ♕d3 ♕b7 10 0-0 ♕e7 11 a4 b4 12 ♗a2 0-0 13 ♗c1 ♗xe5 14 dxe5 ♗d7 15 ♗b3 ♖c8 16 ♗e2 ♗b6 (Gelfand-Shirov, Khalkidhiki 1993) 17 ♖fc1 ± Gelfand.

**6 ♕f4**

Or:

a) **6 cxd5** and here:

a1) **6...cxd5** 7 ♕f4 e6 8 e3 and then: **8...b5** – 5...b5 6 cxd5 cxd5 7 ♕f4 e6 8 e3 ♗bd7 ±; **8...♗xe5** – 4 cxd5 cxd5 5 ♗c3 ♗c6 6 ♕f4 a6 7 ♗e5 e6 8 e3 ♗xe5 =; the latter transposition is the more satisfactory.

a2) **6...♗xe5** 7 dxe5 ♗xd5 = Diz-dar-Schandorff, Moscow OL 1994.

b) **6 g3** e6 7 ♕g2 ♗xe5 8 dxe5 ♗d7 9 cxd5 exd5 10 e4 d4! 11 ♗xd4 ♕c5 = Blatny-Velička, Czech Ch (Zlin) 1997.

c) **6 ♗xd7 ♕xd7 7 ♗b3 dxc4!** (7...e6 is best met by 8 cxd5) and now:

c1) **8 ♗xb7** e5! (Volkov's idea) 9 dxe5 (9 e3 exd4 10 exd4 ♕d6 gives Black both compensation and drawing ideas based on the position of White's queen) 9...♕c5 10 ♗a4 (10 exf6? ♖a7 11 fxg7 ♖g8 12 ♕g5 f6 –+) 10...♗e4 11 ♗xc5 ♗a5+ 12 ♗d1 ♖d8 (or the tempting 12...♗xf2+) 13 ♗xe4 ♕c8+ 14 ♗d6+ ♖xd6+ 15 exd6 ♕xb7 (Atalik) is very good for Black.

c2) **8 ♗xc4** b5 9 ♗d3 e6 10 g3 c5 11 ♕g2 ♖c8 12 dxc5 ♕xc5 1/2-1/2 Atalik-Volkov, Neum ECC 2000.

**6 ... dxc4**  
**7 ♗xc4 b5**  
**8 ♗e5 ♕b7**

Now:

a) **9 e4** e6 10 f3 c5 = Korchnoi-Shirov, Vienna 1996.

b) **9 e3** ♗xe5 10 ♕xe5 ♗d7 11 ♕g3 e6 (= NCO) 12 ♕e2 c5 13 0-0 cxd4 14 ♗xd4 (Evseev-Burmakin, Russia Cup (Tula) 1999; 14 exd4 ♗f6 15 ♕f3 ♗d7 16 d5 ♗xd5 17 ♗xd5 ♕xd5 18 ♕xd5 ♗xd5 19 ♗xd5 exd5 20 ♖fe1+ ♗d7 21 ♖ad1 ♕b4 {Evseev} is equal) 14...♗f6 15 ♗d2 ♕e7 16 ♖fd1 ♗b6 17 ♕c7 ♗d5 = Evseev.

**B)**

**5 ♗b3**

This under-explored move poses some interesting problems.

**5 ... e6**

Or: **5...dxc4** 6 ♗xc4 ♕f5 7 g3 ± Priehoda-Zapolskis, Sala 1993; **5...b5** 6 cxd5 cxd5 7 a4 ±.

**6 ♕g5 (D)**

**6 cxd5** cxd5 7 ♕g5 ♕e7 8 e3 h6 9 ♕xf6 ♕xf6 10 ♕d3 ♗c6 11 0-0 0-0 12 ♖ac1 (Piket-Shirov, Aruba (7) 1995) 12...♕d7 =.

**6 ... dxc4**

This may well give White too much ground. **6...♕e7** is a solid alternative; e.g., 7 e3 0-0 8 ♖c1 (8 ♕e2 dxc4 9 ♕xc4 b5 10 ♕e2 ♗bd7 11 a4 b4 12 ♕xf6 ♗xf6 13 ♗b1 c5 gave Black a good game in Korchnoi-Short, Wijk aan Zee 1997) 8...♗bd7 9 cxd5 exd5 10 ♕d3 is an unusual form of Exchange QGD, where ...a6 isn't the most useful move (and may prove weakening in some lines in view of ♗a4-b6 ideas),