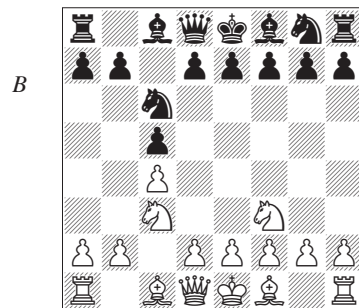


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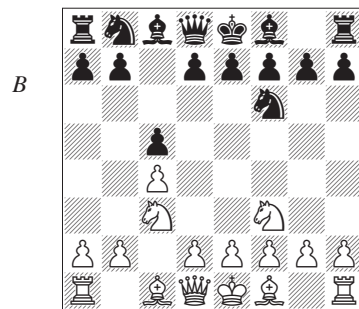
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6 The Three Knights

1 c4 c5 2 ♖f3 ♘c6 3 ♘c3 (D)



1 c4 c5 2 ♖f3 ♘f6 3 ♘c3 (D)



This chapter covers some of the lines which have been developed the most in the last ten years. Several of the lines offer both players plenty of chances to play for a win and that has led to these lines becoming popular amongst grandmasters, which, again,

has led to a massive increase in the amount of theory.

Quick Summary

The lines covered in this chapter have very much been in focus over the last decade and I cannot see any reason for this trend to change, so it will pay off to study these lines carefully.

In Line A (1 c4 c5 2 ♖f3 ♘c6 3 ♘c3) we consider four possibilities for Black.

After 3...e5 (Line A1) 4 e3 ♘f6 5 d4, the most critical line is 5...cxd4 6 exd4 e4 7 ♘g5, which has been played as White by GMs such as Gelfand. The lines are quite complicated, but if this line doesn't appeal to Black he may consider 5...e4.

Line A2 (3...e6) can be quite annoying for White as after 4 e4, 4...e5 makes the pawn-structure very rigid and it is quite difficult for White to obtain any useful edge from the opening. Alternatively, Black can opt for the wild 4...g5!?, which will definitely raise a few eyebrows.

The odd-looking 3...♘d4 (Line A3) is probably Black's best attempt to find a safe path to equality. Although White can meet it in various ways, I feel that he may have to settle for playing for a win from a fairly level position after the opening. The offbeat 4

g3 offers interesting play, but whether it will continue to score well in the future is somewhat doubtful.

Line A4 (3...g6) has for many years been considered better for White and I don't see any reason for this to change; the knight on c6 doesn't work well against the white set-up.

In Line B (1 c4 c5 2 ♖f3 ♗f6 3 ♗c3), 3...b6 gives White a choice between 4 e3 (B1) and 4 e4 (B2). White is doing very well in Line B11 (4...♗b7), but Line B12 (4...e6) is fairly safe for Black. Of the Hedgehog-like positions that can be found under B2, 4...♗c6 (B23) is probably Black's best option, although both 4...d6 (B21) and 4...♗b7 (B22) offer both sides plenty of play, though White will often be the one in the driving seat in these lines.

The Theory of the Three Knights

1 c4 c5 2 ♖f3

Now:

A: 2...♗c6	111
B: 2...♗f6	127

A)

2...♗c6 3 ♗c3

Now:

A1: 3...e5	111
A2: 3...e6	116
A3: 3...♗d4	117
A4: 3...g6	121

3...♗f6 often transposes elsewhere:

a) 4 e3 and now 4...g6?! is Line A41, while 4...d5?! 5 cxd5 ♗xd5

transposes to note 'b' to Black's 5th move in Line B of Chapter 7. 4...e5 transposes to Line A1.

b) 4 d4 cxd4 5 ♗xd4 transposes to note 'c2' to Black's 4th move in Chapter 10, and from there most likely to Chapter 11.

c) 4 g3 d5 (4...e6 is Chapter 5, while 4...g6 5 ♗g2 ♗g7 is Chapter 3) and now:

c1) 5 cxd5 ♗xd5 6 ♗g2 and now: 6...♗f6 is note 'a' to Black's 5th move in Line A of Chapter 7; 6...g6 7 0-0 ♗g7 is Line A of Chapter 3; 6...e6 is the note to Black's 5th move in Chapter 5; 6...♗c7 is Line B of Chapter 4.

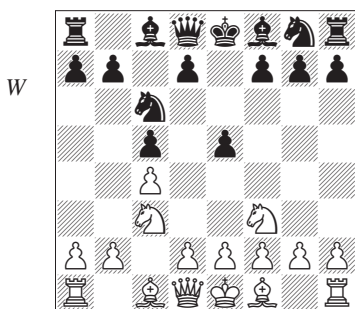
c2) 5 d4!? cxd4 (5...dxc4?! 6 d5 is obviously good for White; 5...♗g4 is well met by 6 ♗e5; 5...e6 6 cxd5 and now 6...exd5 is a Tarrasch QGD, while 6...♗xd5 7 ♗g2 is the note to Black's 5th move in Chapter 5) 6 ♗xd4 dxc4 7 ♗xc6 ♗xd1+ 8 ♗xd1 bxc6 9 ♗g2 ♗d5 10 ♗e3 e6 (10...♗a6 11 ♗xd5 tends to leave White a little better) 11 ♗xc4 ♗a6 12 ♗a5!? (12 b3 ♗b4+ 13 ♗d2 ♗e7 14 ♗c1 ♗hc8! is OK for Black, Gelfand-Timman, Malmö 1999) 12...♗c5 (Ribli suggests 12...♗d7!? 13 ♗d2 ♗b8) 13 ♗d2 0-0 14 ♗c1 ♗d4 15 b4! gave White an advantage in Kramnik-Timman, Wijk aan Zee 1999.

A1)

3...e5 (D)

This line lived a life in semi-obscure until the early 1990s, but nowadays it is regularly played by strong GMs and even Kasparov has given it his seal of approval.

4 e3



Two other moves are also seen quite frequently:

a) 4 d3 g6 5 ♖g5 f6 6 ♖d2 ♖g7 7 g3 ♗ge7 8 ♖g2 should be compared with Line C of Chapter 2.

b) 4 g3 is actually the most popular move in this position, but play then often transposes elsewhere:

b1) 4...g6 5 ♖g2 ♖g7 transposes to Line C of Chapter 2. This is normally what Black is aiming for in playing 3...e5, and what White seeks to avoid by playing 4 e3.

b2) 4...♗f6 (this move is not very popular in this move-order, but this position arises quite often via 1 c4 c5 2 ♗c3 ♗c6 3 ♗f3 ♗f6 4 g3 e5) 5 ♖g2 d6 (5...g6 is similar to Line C of Chapter 2, but here the knight is on f6, which prevents the standard ...f5 and leaves White better, e.g. 6 a3 d6 7 ♖b1 a5 {7...♖g7 8 b4 also gives White a slight advantage} 8 0-0 ♖g7 9 d3 0-0 10 ♖d2 h6 11 ♗e1 ♖e6 12 ♗d5 is slightly better for White, Taimanov-Ioseliani, Roquebrune (Ladies vs Veterans) 1998) 6 d3 ♖e7 7 ♖g5 0-0 8 0-0 ♖e6 9 a3 h6 10 ♖xf6 ♖xf6 11 ♗e1 g6 12 ♗c2 ♖g7 13 ♖b1 f5 14 b4 ♖d7 15 ♗e3 e4 16 ♗ed5 and White is

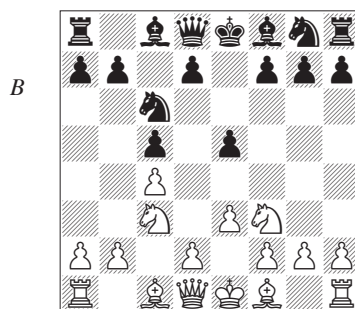
firmly in control, Kramnik-Chandler, Bundesliga 1993/4.

b3) 4...f5 5 d3 and here:

b31) 5...d6 6 ♖g2 g6 7 0-0 ♖g7 8 ♗e1 ♗ge7 9 ♗c2 0-0 and now 10 ♗e3 h6 11 ♗ed5 ♗xd5 12 ♗xd5 ♗e7 13 ♖b1 a5 14 a3 ♖e6 15 ♗xe7+ ♖xe7 16 b4 is better for White (Sher-Sokolin, New York 1999), but 10 ♖g5, intending to exchange on e7 and only then play ♗c2-e3-d5, is even better.

b32) 5...♗f6 6 ♖g2 ♖e7 7 0-0 0-0 8 a3 ♖e8 9 e3 ♖d8 10 b4 d6 11 ♖b1 ♗h8 12 ♗e1 ♖b8 13 f4 exf4 14 gxf4 ♖e6 15 ♖d2 ♖f7 16 ♗f3 ± Rogoff-Meštrović, Lone Pine 1978.

We now return to 4 e3 (D):



4...♗f6

This is better than the alternatives:

a) 4...d6 5 d4 exd4 6 exd4 ♖g4 7 ♖e2!? ♖xf3 8 ♖xf3 ♗xd4 9 ♖e3 ♗xf3+ 10 ♖xf3 ♖d7 11 0-0-0 ♖c6 12 ♗d5 with more than sufficient compensation for the pawn, Helmers-Sigurjonsson, Reykjavik 1981.

b) 4...f5 5 d4 (5 ♖e2 e4 6 ♗g1 ♗f6 7 d3 d5 8 cxd5 ♗xd5 9 ♗xd5 ♖xd5 10 dxe4 ♖xd1+ 11 ♖xd1 fxe4 12 ♗e2, Illescas-Krasenkow, Madrid 1998, and

now 12...♖b4! 13 ♗g3 b6 14 ♗xe4 ♘b7 gives Black counterplay according to Krasenkow) and here:

b1) 5...cxd4 6 exd4 e4 7 ♗e5 (7 ♗d2 ♗f6 8 ♗b3 d5? {8...d6!? is better} 9 ♗g5 dxc4 10 ♘xc4 h6 11 ♗xf6 ♖xf6 12 0-0 ♘d7 13 f3 ♘d6 14 fxe4 ♖h4 15 e5 ♘xe5 16 g3! 1-0 Gausel-Rantanen, Gausdal 1994) 7...♗f6 8 ♘e2 ♘b4 9 0-0 0-0 10 c5 d5 11 ♘f4 ♘a5 12 ♖c1 ♘e6 13 ♖a4 with a better game for White, Kharitonov-Iliushin, Novgorod 1999.

b2) 5...e4 6 d5 (or 6 ♗d2 d6 7 ♗b3 ♗f6 8 ♘e2 ♘e7 9 0-0 0-0 10 f3 exf3 11 ♘xf3 ♘d7 12 ♘d2 ♖b8 13 ♗d5 with the better prospects for White, Gormally-Burnett, Coulsdon 1999) and then:

b21) 6...exf3?! 7 dxc6 bxc6 (7...fxg2 8 cxd7+ ♖xd7 9 ♘xg2 ♖xd1+ 10 ♗xd1 ♗f6 11 b3 {11 ♗d5!?!} 11...f4! 12 ♗d5 ± Marin-Ardeleanu, Romanian Ch 1999) 8 ♖xf3 g6 9 e4 ♖e7 (Engelmann-Miezis, Bonn 1998) 10 ♘e2 ♗h6 11 0-0 gives White the better game.

b22) 6...♗b8 7 ♗d2 ♗f6 8 h3 h5 9 f3 ♘d6 10 f4 ♘e7 11 d6!? ♘xd6 12 ♗dx4 ♗xe4 13 ♗xe4 ♘xf4 14 exf4 fxe4 15 ♖d5 ♖h4+ 16 ♗d1 ♖e7 17 ♘d3! ♗a6 18 ♖e1 and White regains the pawn with slightly better chances, Gritsak-Krasenkow, Polish Cht 1998.

5 d4 (D)

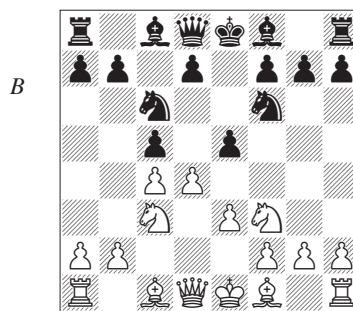
White has some good alternatives:

a) 5 b3 g6 6 ♘b2 ♘g7 ♘e2 0-0 8 d3 d5 9 cxd5 ♗xd5 10 ♖c1 ♘e6 11 0-0 (11 ♗xd5 ♖xd5 12 0-0 ♖fd8 =) 11...b6 12 ♖c2 ♖c8 13 ♖b1 (13 ♗xd5 ♘xd5 14 ♖fd1 =) 13...f5 with fairly

balanced chances, Ibragimov-Tregubov, Russian Ch 1994.

b) 5 a3!? ♘e7 (5...d6 6 ♘e2 g6 7 d4 exd4 8 exd4 ♘g7 9 ♘f4 0-0 10 0-0 ♘f5 11 d5 ♗e7 = Kramnik-Kamsky, New York PCA Ct (4) 1994) 6 ♖c2 0-0 7 b3 ♖e8 8 ♘b2 ♘f8 9 ♗d5 g6 10 ♗xf6+ ♖xf6 11 ♘d3 d6 12 h4 h6 13 0-0-0 ♖b8 14 ♘e4 ♘d7 with chances for both sides, Wells-Lautier, Austrian Cht 1998/9.

c) 5 ♘e2 ♘e7 6 d4 exd4 7 exd4 d5 8 ♘e3!? cxd4 9 ♗xd4 ♗xd4 (9...0-0 10 ♗xc6 bxc6 11 cxd5 ♗xd5 12 ♗xd5 cxd5 13 0-0 ♘f5 14 ♖d2 gives White a small plus, Malakhov-Fogarasi, Balatonbereny 1995) 10 ♖xd4 dxc4 11 ♖xd8+ ♘xd8 12 ♘xc4 0-0 13 0-0 ♘d7 14 ♖fd1 ♘c6 15 ♗b5 ♘b6 16 ♘xb6 axb6 17 f3 ♖fd8 with an equal position, Ivanchuk-Anand, Manila OL 1992.



5...cxd4

This is by far the most popular move, but Black has a few other ideas available:

a) 5...exd4 6 exd4 d5 7 ♘g5 ♘e7 8 dxc5 d4 9 ♘xf6 ♘xf6 10 ♗d5 0-0 (Portisch-Radulov, Indonesia 1983)