

Strategic Play with 1 e4

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POPULAR CHESS

About the Author

Milos Pavlovic is a grandmaster and former Yugoslav Champion. He has two medals from the European Senior Championships and has won many European tournaments, including very strong events, such as Biel. He has also been a trainer of many prominent players. He is also a prolific author, having written over 20 books.

Also by the Author:

Opening Repertoire: Strategic Play with 1 d4

Fighting the Ruy Lopez

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Introduction

This book is about positional play when starting 1 e4. Not in a sense of slow or boring but based on a strong positional points, such as rapid development, more space, attacking chances, or even gambit ideas in some cases. I am covering all the major options and openings by Black in normal chess games. It is clear that the Sicilian is the most popular with many games inside. After that come solid reactions such as 1...e5, 1...c6 and 1...e6, followed by other stuff such as the Alekhine, Pirc, and Scandinavian, which are also very popular. Sometimes I present sharper positions and sometimes ones that are less well known or simply less analysed or less published in general. It is very important to realize that learning such positions will greatly help the reader's ability to understand positional aspects of less forcing lines but not necessarily less dangerous lines.

I have separated material into six chapters. The Sicilian, Caro-Kann, French, and 1...e5, each have their own chapters due to their importance. The Sicilian, for instance, has 43 annotated games alone! That's how popular and widespread it is. For other openings I have also presented various move orders for the Philidor Defence and Pirc.

Milos Pavlovic
October 2024

Chapter Two

Four Knights and Vienna Game

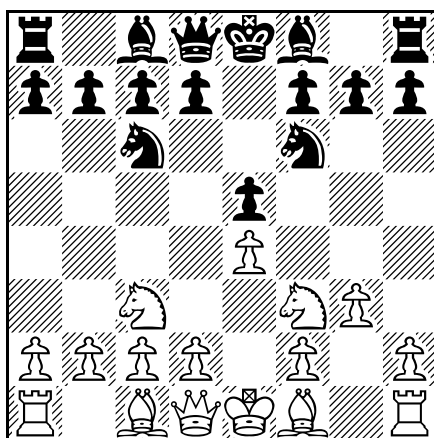
1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3

Here I want to emphasize that we adopt this move order, rather than the Vienna 2 ♘c3, because I strongly believe that 2 ♘f3 is better.

2... ♘c6

We will also examine a Petroff (2... ♘f6) variation where Black responds to 3 ♘c3 with 3... ♗b4 (see Game 63) rather than 3... ♘c6. The Philidor with 2... d6 is covered in Chapter Six (Games 117-119) due to its similarities to Pirc (1... d6) type positions.

3 ♘c3 ♗f6 4 g3



This opening is known as the Glek System, which I think is a very interesting positional

asset for White against the traditional move 1...e5. The idea is to play an improved version of the Vienna, where the knight already being on c6 rules out some ideas for Black, such as ...c7-c6 followed by ...d7-d5. On the other hand, White has also committed a knight to f3, whereas on e2 or at home on g1 White is able to play a quick f2-f4 in some lines. All those pros and cons we will investigate in the main games of this chapter.

We will focus on two major plans for Black: developing the king's bishop to c5, playing a rapid ...d7-d5, or indeed both.

a) 4...d5 5 exd5 ♖xd5 6 ♙g2 (Games 53-59) 6...♗xc3 7 bxc3 is a well-known line in the Vienna Opening. The fact that the knight is already on c6 in a way reduces Black's options, but that doesn't mean Black has problems, far from it. Instead, we will have very interesting positional and sharp chess to see.

b) 4...♙c5 5 ♙g2 d6 6 d3 (Games 44-52) 6...a6 is the alternative main line, where Black develops pieces to logical squares without creating any weaknesses.

Other ideas in this chapter are of importance too, such as 4...♙b4, 4...g6, and 4...♗d4 (Games 60-62).

I want to note here that interesting piece sac 4...♗xe4!? 5 ♗xe4 d5 6 ♗c3 d4, aiming for a strong initiative, will transpose to the 4...d5 line if White simply returns the piece with 7 ♙g2 dxc3 8 bxc3.

Question: Why is the Vienna not so popular today?

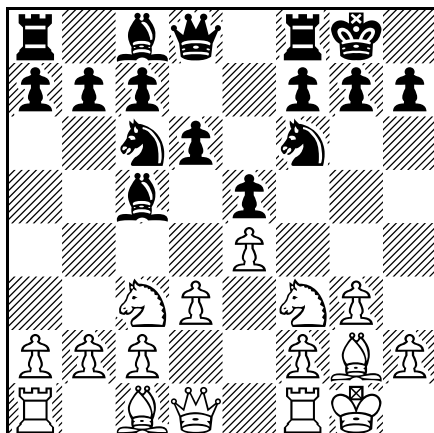
Answer: Many old openings have been forgotten or simply not analysed enough. That doesn't mean an opening is itself bad or doesn't give enough recourse to play for a win. It's just what is trending more. For instance, the Scotch was nearly forgotten until the 1990 Kasparov-Karpov match.

Game 44

M.Chigaev-A.Lenderman

Banter Blitz Cup, Chess24.com 2020

1 e4 e5 2 ♗f3 ♗f6 3 d3 ♗c6 4 g3 ♙c5 5 ♙g2 d6 6 0-0 0-0 7 ♗c3



We come to one of the basic positions that I suggest against 1...e5. It's kind of a combination of the Four Knights and Vienna Game. The system with 4 g3 initiates a universal, positional approach and has the advantage that Black can't really avoid it.

In this particular line White utilizes what I call a triple strategy: eliminating the bishop on c5 with ♖a4, while having in mind both f2-f4 and/or d3-d4. From the other side Black has a solid position, from which he can combat all those plans with his main idea of going ...d6-d5.

7...a6

Securing the bishop on c5. We will examine an attempt by Black to do without this move in Game 50.

8 h3

This is the usual continuation.

8...h6

Securing a place for a bishop on e6 is a standard reaction too.

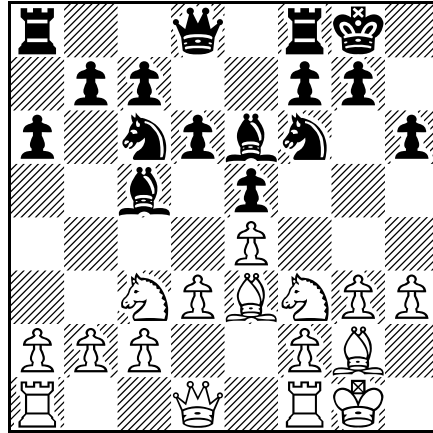
9 ♗e3

One of the main ideas here, preparing d3-d4, and a very solid approach. If Black exchanges bishops White will open the f-file, while gaining an additional pawn to control the centre. An alternative plan with 9 ♔h2 ♗e6 10 ♘d2 is featured in Game 47.

Question: After an exchange on e3 White will have doubled pawns. Is that good?

Answer: It is all about conducting the right plans. That's why I present here how the game may continue in a correct way, so that such aspects can prove to be an asset rather than a liability.

9...♗e6



10 ♖h2

A typical move, safeguarding the king and overprotecting the h3-pawn. White has other options too:

a) 10 d4 exd4 11 ♘xd4 ♗xd4 12 ♙xd4 ♙xd4 13 ♖xd4 c5 14 ♗d2 ♖b6 15 b3 ♗ad8 16 ♗ad1 ♗fe8 was the earlier game M.Chigaev-R.Bakunts, Yerevan 2012, and now 17 g4 looks best; if 17...♗c7 18 a4 b6 (intending to reroute the e6-bishop to b7) then 19 f4! and White is faster with his play.

b) 10 ♗h4 (White is now ready to take on c5 and go f2-f4 at some moment) 10...♙e3 11 fxe3 ♗e7 12 ♖h2 c6 13 d4 ♗g6 14 ♗f5 d5 15 exd5 cxd5 16 dxe5 ♗xe5 17 ♗d4 ♙xf5?! 18 ♗xf5 ♗c6 19 ♖f4 ♗e7? 20 ♗xf6! (this is a key motif in the entire system when the f-file is open) 20...gxf6 21 ♖xh6 and White achieved a winning position, I.Glek-V.Inkirov, Porto San Giorgio 2001.

Question: Can we say that ♗xf6 is a positional threat?

Answer: Yes, because Black's kingside structure will be bad in that case; also Black's pieces will have to remain in passive positions to defend the weak squares around their king.

10...♗d7

We will deal with the more popular 10...♙e3 in the next game, while 9...♙e3 on the previous move is examined in Game 46.

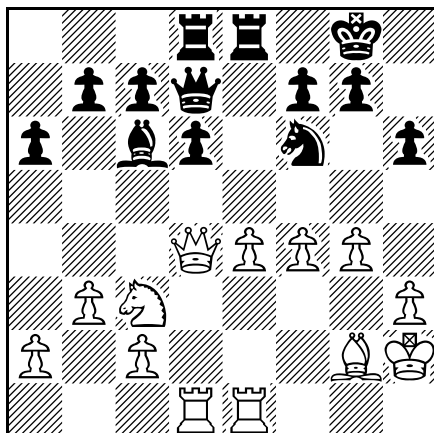
11 d4

The normal plan when Black ignores the d3-d4 idea for too long.

11...exd4 12 ♗xd4 ♙c4 13 ♗e1 ♗fe8

It's logical to place a rook on e8, whereas after 13...♙b4 14 ♗xc6 ♙xc3 15 bxc3 bxc6 16 ♙d4! ♗ab8 17 ♙xf6 gxf6 18 ♗d4 White had the advantage in R.Pfretzschner-M.Liedtke, German Bundesliga 1993.

14 f4 ♗ad8 15 b3 ♙xd4 16 ♙xd4 ♗xd4 17 ♖xd4 ♙b5 18 ♗ad1 ♙c6 19 g4



White has more space and control of the d5-square. Black is solid with no clear weak points but a bit passive because there are no central breaks.

19...♖e7 20 ♗f2 ♘d7 21 h4 ♗f6 22 ♖g3

This is not bad but it's not the most accurate either. Instead, 22 ♘d5 ♙xd5 23 g5! ♗g6 24 ♗xd5 gives White more pressure.

22...g5!

Right on time; the position is still balanced.

23 fxg5 hxg5 24 h5

White has a passed pawn but in return Black has control of the central dark squares.

24...♖e5 25 ♗f1 ♗xc3+ 26 ♙xc3 ♗e5 27 ♗f2 ♘c5 28 ♗df1 ♗f8 29 ♗f5!

It is important to exchange the strong black rook.

29...♘e6 30 ♗xe5 dxe5 31 ♘d5 ♗f4?!

Black didn't play precisely here. After 31...♙g7 32 ♗d1 ♗d8 33 ♙f3 ♗d7 34 ♙f2 a5 35 ♘e3 his position is still okay, though the h5-pawn is a potential asset for White.

32 ♘e7+ ♙g7 33 ♘xc6! bxc6 34 ♗d1

Taking control of the d-file.

34...♗e8 35 ♙f1! ♗e6 36 ♙xa6 ♗f6 37 ♙c4

Winning for White, who is a pawn up with passed pawns on both sides of the board.

37...♘e6 38 ♙xe6 ♗xe6 39 a4 c5 40 a5 ♗a6 41 ♗a1 ♙f6 42 ♙f3 ♙e7 43 ♙e3 ♙d7 44 ♙d3 ♗d6+ 45 ♙c4 ♙c8 46 c3 ♗f6 47 ♙xc5 ♙b7 48 ♗h1 ♗c6+ 49 ♙d5 ♗xc3 50 ♙xe5 ♗xb3 51 h6 1-0

Game 45

I.Smirin-S.Halkias

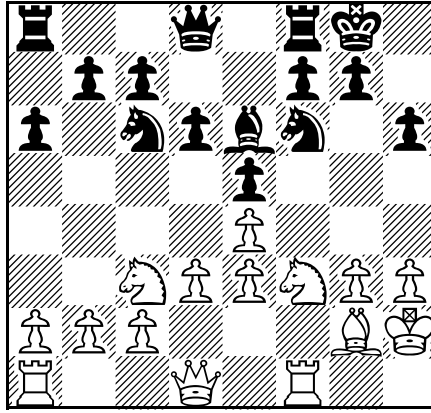
European Team Championship, Plovdiv 2003

1 e4 e5 2 ♗f3 ♗f6 3 ♘c3 ♘c6 4 g3 ♙c5 5 ♙g2 d6 6 d3 a6 7 0-0 0-0 8 h3 h6 9 ♙h2 ♙e6 10

♙e3 ♘xe3

This is the usual reaction.

11 fxe3



An interesting position that somehow both sides were looking to get. Black can now go active with ...d6-d5 as in our main game or else wait a bit.

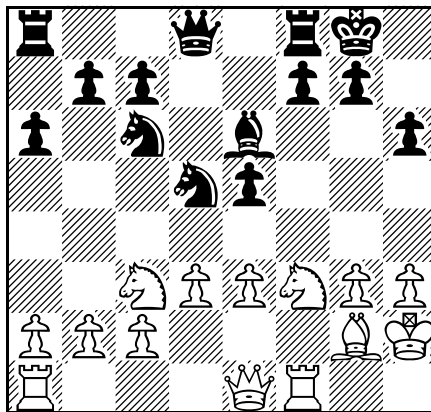
11...d5

Let's look at two more ideas here, after 11...♘e7 12 ♘h4 and then:

a) 12...♘g6 13 ♘f5 c6 14 ♖e1 ♙xf5 15 exf5 ♘e7 16 ♘e4 ♘ed5 17 c4 ♘xe4 18 cxd5 ♘f6 19 dxc6 bxc6 20 ♜c1 and White has some edge, M.Delgado Palomeque-O.Korneev, Navalmaral 2004.

b) 12...♙h7 13 ♜d2 ♘fg8 14 d4 c6 15 ♜ad1 ♜a5 16 d5! cxd5 17 exd5 ♙d7 18 g4 g6 19 ♘e4 ♜xd2 20 ♜xd2 ♙b5 21 ♜c1 ♜fd8 22 c4 ♙e8 23 c5 and White is clearly better, V.Spasov-D.Blagojevic, Yugoslav Cup 2002.

12 exd5 ♘xd5 13 ♖e1



We can see that the e3-pawn covers the central squares nicely.

13...♖d7

Black can also proceed in a slightly different manner:

a) 13...♖b8 14 ♜d1 ♜d6 15 ♘e4 ♜b4 16 c4! ♜xe1 17 ♜fe1 ♘de7 18 ♘c5 ♙c8 19 d4 and White got a preferable endgame due to his play in the centre, R.Slobodjan-U.Garbisu de Goni, Arco 1998.

b) 13...♘de7 14 ♜d1 ♙f5 15 g4 ♙h7 16 ♜g3 ♜d6 17 ♘h4 ♜ad8 18 ♘f5 ♜e6 19 ♙e4 with an edge for White in K.Akshayraj-B.Adhiban, Mangalore 2008, is yet another good example how the game may continue.

14 ♜d1 ♜ad8 15 a3

The problem for Black is how to continue because all the squares are covered, so it's important to play in a patient way.

15...♜fe8

Another option for Black is to trade knights to ease his position, yet 15...♘xc3 16 ♜xc3 f6 17 ♘h4 ♙d5 18 ♜d2 ♘h7 19 ♙xd5 ♜xd5 20 ♜df2 ♜d7 21 ♘f5 g6 22 e4! ♜e6 23 ♘e3 gave White some chances to play for an advantage, E.Vorobiov-K.Sakaev, Novokuznetsk 2008.

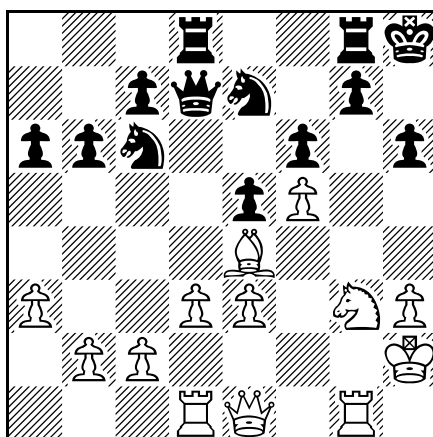
16 ♘e4 b6 17 g4!

This is a good strategy. The outpost on e4 is very strong now, while Black must be careful due to White's c2-c4 ideas and attacking chances.

17...f6 18 ♘h4 ♜f8 19 ♘f5 ♙xf5 20 gxf5

White is better, since Black is not able to generate counterplay anymore.

20...♘h8 21 ♘g3 ♘de7 22 ♜g1 ♜g8 23 ♙e4 1-0



The best plan for Black is to manoeuvre the c6-knight round to d6 to defend the kingside. All the same, White stands better. Unfortunately, the game score stops at this point in the databases and it is unclear what happened, apart from the result.