

Unconventional Approaches to Modern Chess

Volume 1

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Volume 1

Alexander Ipatov

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Key to Symbols

!	a good move	±	White stands slightly better
?	a weak move	∓	Black stands slightly better
!!	an excellent move	±	White has a serious advantage
??	a blunder	∓	Black has a serious advantage
!?	an interesting move	+−	White has a decisive advantage
?!	a dubious move	−+	Black has a decisive advantage
□	only move	→	with an attack
N	novelty	↑	with an initiative
⊙	lead in development	↔	with counterplay
⊙	zugzwang	Δ	with the idea of
=	equality	△	better is
∞	unclear position	≤	worse is
∞	with compensation for the sacrificed material	+	check
		#	mate

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To my family

Preface

*“Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority,
it is time to pause and reflect.” Mark Twain*

Thanks to the democratization of knowledge following technological progress, nowadays everyone knows chess openings. It is getting increasingly harder to obtain an opening advantage against a well-prepared opponent, even against a non-professional player who knows his lines well. Some players are stubborn and try to be better prepared than the competition by analyzing deeper (up to move 30 or even further), using stronger engines (e.g. ChessBase Cloud), getting access to correspondence and engine databases or by simply memorizing lines from fashionable openings books. In my opinion, for the most part it all comes to down to pure memorization and, hence, an abundance of deadly drawish positions or repetitions right out of the opening if both players are up to the task. Super-tournaments are notorious for this. Additionally, the game loses its creative aspect and becomes less fun.

I believe that devoting most of the training time to studying mainstream theory is wrong. First, chess is not fun anymore. How many moves does one have to play (memorize) to be finally on his own? Second, opportunity cost – what other chess knowledge could you have acquired in that time? Third, knowledge doesn't stay the same – if you want to be ahead of the curve in opening preparation, you have to be constantly monitoring new games on a daily basis, updating your software and hardware to gain stronger engines, and reading all relevant published literature.

But the competition is doing exactly the same! It reminds me of numerous visits to the old dining hall at my university. There were two tables with food. One table had ingredients to make a burger. The other table had healthier food. Whenever I entered the dining hall for lunch, there was one big line and always to that same table. The latter one with healthy food, you might think? No. People were lining up to get burgers whereas the healthy table had no line at all! Isn't it the same with opening preparation, where there is one clear unhealthy trend? I keep wondering why the majority of players, from total beginners to strong grandmasters, fall into this trap. Learning main lines and staying up to date takes an enormous amount of time, since nearly everyone is doing the very same thing. It is like a rat race, where you always have to run. Couldn't that time be used more wisely by spending it on enhancing one's general chess understanding -- studying classics, endgames, typical pawn structures and plans, and solving tactics?

Do not get me wrong. I do not say that one doesn't have to know openings at all. Of course not. The message that I'm trying to convey is that one needs to be smarter and avoid following the trend of memorizing fashionable lines until move 30 or so. As a chess professional, I know a number of accomplished players whose strength significantly drops once they are out of book and have to start thinking on their own early on. Much the same can be said about amateur players – they play flawlessly when they follow their preparation, but once they are on their own wonders start to happen. This brings me to an important distinction that I want to draw between “in theory” and “in practice”.

What I suggest is to dedicate most of the training time to improving general knowledge as discussed above, and less to studying main lines. As far as openings are concerned, there is a plethora of less studied or even totally neglected lines that can be studied at home and successfully implemented over the board. However, it is important to have several such lines, otherwise it will become easy to prepare against you. The whole point is to be predictably unpredictable. While preparing against you, the majority of players will simply turn on the engine, smile (“Eh, it is +0.7, I am much better here!”) and stop preparing. Some of them will follow the first line for a few more moves and then stop. And this is exactly what we want!

Also, rare lines imply less theory, which subsequently means that one doesn't have to memorize as much as in the mainstream theory. For example, if your opponent plays fast, you can anticipate that he has likely prepared the first or second line shown by the engine. So if you understand that position well enough, you can play some other move not shown by the computer! Your opponent, likely out of book and without deep knowledge of that line, will burn some time on the clock and start making inferior decisions later on. However, sometimes, you might get unlucky – your opponent will play well no matter how hard you try to get him out of theory. This is the risk that I am willing to take in my games. Are you? If so, keep reading.

This book is about the **practical** approach to the game of chess. It shaped me as a player and now I would like to share my philosophy with you. My objective is to combat several generally accepted misconceptions, such as a) only studying opening theory will make you a better player, b) one should always follow the first or second line shown by Komodo or Stockfish, and finally, c) that “in theory” is equivalent to “over the board”. The last fallacy is especially dangerous because it implies that players will keep on making the best moves over the board, and therefore sidelines should never be played as the opponent will always find a way to retain and convert the advantage. That is in theory. In practice, however, many players will

feel like fish out of water once they end up in a position that is objectively better for them but one that they have never analyzed. Overall, based on my experience as a chess professional, I strongly believe that the above-mentioned fallacies do not hold true empirically.

Most of the material in this book is based on my own offbeat opening repertoire from Black's perspective. The book is divided into four parts. Part I covers sidelines in the mainstream openings where I take a major opening and analyze one or several sidelines. This is the most theoretical part of the book, where I share a significant amount of original thoughts and analyses that constitute my opening repertoire. Part II discusses the concept that I refer to as systems. It still involves theory, but less so in comparison to Part I. What I am trying to convey in this part is the "schematic thinking" – where you think in terms of plans and typical ideas. Part III takes one step further in abstraction – it analyzes notable modern games where one player showed ambition early on in the game and it worked out well for him. Part IV covers the so-called "early surprises" where early on in the game a player implemented a move that shocked his opponent. Perhaps the most recent example is my game against Sam Shankland where the audacious 1.d4 Nc6 2.c4 e5! was seen.

All parts cover openings. Therefore, you may see various lines of the same opening being covered in different parts of the book. I did so to contrast different approaches. I'd like to apologize that not every single offbeat opening line is covered in the book – this would be impossible as the number of unconventional lines that you can play is infinite and is limited only by the degree of your creativity and boldness. Therefore, my choice was purely subjective – I selected the games and lines that were in my opening repertoire, that I was familiar with or simply the ones that inspired me. Finally, for some games or opening lines it was difficult to decide in which part they should be covered. Hence, my choice was also subjective.

My message to you is that modern chess can be viewed and played differently. Therefore, I ask you to see this book in terms of the big picture without bogging down in possible small inconsistencies – such as, for example, the arrangement of the different parts.

Thank you for reading this book and let the journey begin!

Alexander Ipatov
November 2018

Part I

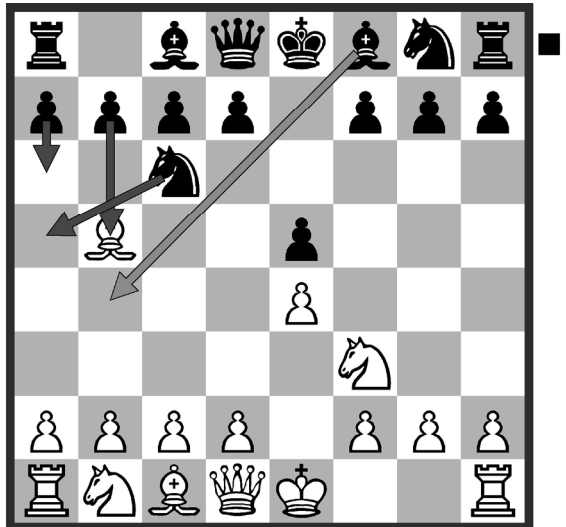
Sidelines In Mainstream Openings

The first part is by far the theoretically heaviest one in the book. It gives a broad introduction to a number of sidelines in various openings that constitute the core of my offbeat opening repertoire with Black.



Early Deviations in the Ruy Lopez

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5



Chapter Guide

Chapter 1 – Early Deviations in the Ruy Lopez

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5

1) 3...♙b4 (Meier – Carlsen 2018) 15

2) 3...a6 4.♙a4 b5 5.♙b3 ♘a5 6.0-0 d6 7.d4

2.1: 6th move alternatives (Vachier Lagrave – Vallejo Pons 2017) 18

2.2: 6.d4 alternative (Mista – Vallejo Pons 2017)..... 21

2.3: 7...exd4 (Wang Hao – Vallejo Pons 2017)..... 25

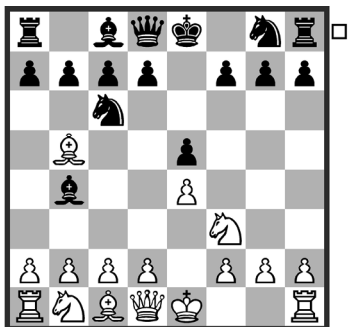
2.4: 7...♘xb3 8.axb3 f6 9.-- (Murey – Agdestein 1986)..... 28

2.5: 7...♘xb3 8.axb3 f6 9.♘c3 ♙b7 10.♚e2 (Beliavsky – Agdestein 1989)..... 35

2.6: 7...♘xb3 8.axb3 f6 9.♘c3 ♙b7 10.♘h4 (Dominguez – Ivanchuk 2016) 41

1) 3... ♖b4 (Meier – Carlsen 2018)

1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♙b5 ♙b4



Position after: 3... ♙b4

At first sight, this seems like a dull move: it doesn't pin, it doesn't check and it doesn't provoke anything. However, this move has an interesting underlying idea if White keeps playing natural moves. Magnus Carlsen has played 3... ♙f8-b4 in three rapid and blitz games against grandmasters and won all of them. The downside of this variation is that White can obtain a pleasant human advantage in a straightforward way.

4. 0-0

I think that White should play 4. c3 ♙a5 and here 5. ♘a3! directly going after the bishop pair. [5. 0-0 transposes into 4. 0-0 ♘ge7 5. c3 ♙a5.]

A) 5... ♘ge7?! 6. ♘c4 0-0 7. ♘xa5 ♘xa5 8. ♘xe5 d5 9. d3 ♙d6 10.

♘f3± Black doesn't have enough compensation.

B) Playing in a gambit style isn't appropriate here: 5... d5? 6. ♙a4 ♙b6 7. ♙xc6+ bxc6 8. ♙xc6+ ♙d7 9. ♙xd5 ♘e7 10. ♙xe5 0-0 11. d4 and Black is down way too much material while the b6-bishop is left out of play.

C) 5... ♙b6 6. ♘c4±



Position after: 6. ♘c4±

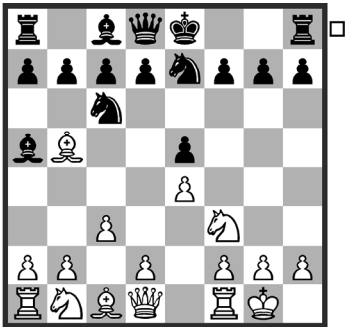
There is little to be said about this position. White is simply better as he can grab Black's bishop pair any time.

4... ♘ge7 **5. c3**

5. d4 is another human reaction, but I think that Black is doing all right after 5... exd4 6. ♘xd4 0-0 7. ♘c3 d6.

5... ♙a5

(see diagram next page)



Position after: 5... ♖a5

6. d4

A) 6. ♘a3 here it is not as convincing as earlier. 6... 0-0 7. ♘c4 d5 8. ♘xa5 ♘xa5 9. ♘xe5 dxe4 10. d4 f6 11. ♘g4

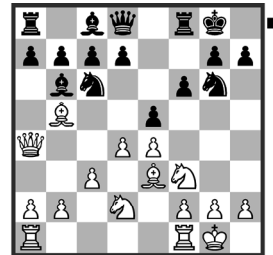


Position after: 11. ♘g4

Balogh, C (2608) – Sedlak, N (2550) Hungary 2011. 11... c5! 12. ♘e3 [White cannot take 12. dxc5? as it loses the g4-knight: 12... ♖xd1 13. ♖xd1 ♘xg4+] 12... a6 13. ♘e2 cxd4 14. ♖xd4 ♖xd4 15. cxd4 ♘e6= Black controls the key d5-square. Jansa, V (2495) – Kholmov, R (2550) Trencianske Teplice 1979.

B) 6. ♖a4! is another way to claim a pleasant edge out of the opening.

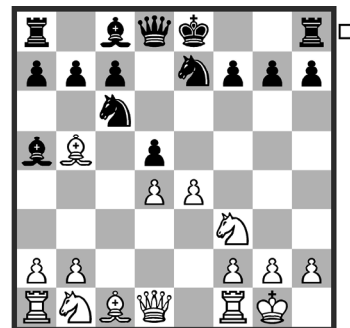
6... ♘b6 7. d4 ♘g6 8. ♘g5! Provoking ...f7-f6, which weakens the a2-g8 diagonal. 8... f6 9. ♘e3 0-0 10. ♘bd2±



Position after: 10. ♘bd2±

Black struggles to finish his queenside development.

6... exd4 7. cxd4 d5! =



Position after: 7... d5! =

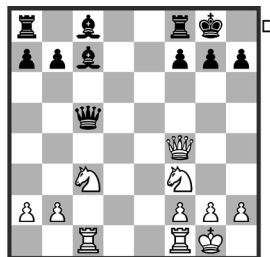
White has played several natural moves in a row, but the position is already equal!

8. ♘xc6+

A) 8. e5 allows Black to counter-attack the White center with ...f7-f6. 8... ♘g4 9. h3



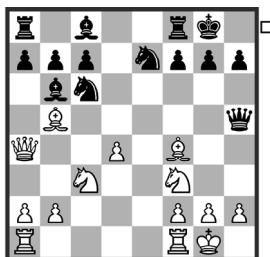
Position after: 9. h3



Position after: 17... Qxc7↑

9... Qxf3!? [9... Qh5 10. Nc3 0-0 11. g4 Qg6 12. Nh4 Qb6 13. Qe3 f6 14. exf6 Bxf6= Karjakin, S (2771) – Carlsen, M (2881) Flor & Fjaere 2014] 10. Qxf3 0-0 11. Qg4 [11. Qd3 f6 12. exf6 Bxf6= White needs to take care of his d4-pawn.] 11... Qc8! 12. Bd1 Qb6= The d4-pawn needs protection.

B) 8. exd5 Qxd5 9. Qa4 0-0 10. Nc3 Qh5 11. Qf4 Qb6



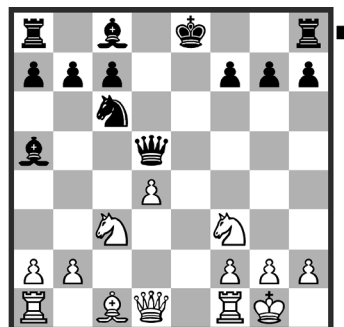
Position after: 11... Qb6

12. Qxc6 Nxc6 13. d5 Ne7 14. d6 Ng6 15. dxc7 Nxf4 16. Qxf4 Qc5 17. Ba1 Qxc7↑

(see analysis diagram next column)

Black has the bishop pair in an open position, Grigoriant, S (2568) – Carlsen, M (2834) chess.com 2018.

8... Nxc6 **9. exd5** Qxd5 **10. Nc3**



Position after: 10. Nc3

10... Qxc3!

That is the secret idea behind 3... Qb4. The bishop was waiting for the b1-knight to step onto the c3-square, planning to eliminate it right away.

11. bxc3 0-0

Black has a beautiful hold on the light squares. Nimzowitsch and Petrosian would be delighted.

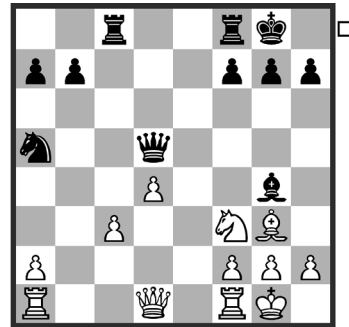
12. Qf4 Qg4!

Not giving White even a chance of grabbing the initiative.

13. ♖xc7 ♜ac8 14. ♙g3 ♞a5

(see diagram on the right)

Meier, G (2647) – Carlsen, M (2834)
chess.com 2018.



Position after: 14... ♞a5



Conclusion

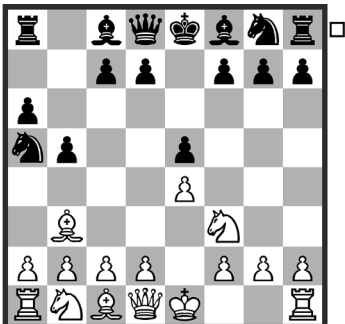
This is perhaps not the best line to play more than once in classical tournaments, but it can become

a decent weapon in rapid and blitz events.

2) 3...a6 4. ♙a4 b5 5. ♙b3 ♞a5 6.0-0 d6 7.d4

2.1: 6th move alternatives

1. e4 e5 2. ♞f3 ♞c6 3. ♙b5 a6 4. ♙a4 b5 5. ♙b3 ♞a5



Position after: 5... ♞a5

An educated chess player, upon seeing this position, will likely claim that this is anti-chess and that exposing readers to lines like this one in the book is a sin. I would very likely agree with such a hypothetical comment. However, I can say the following in my defense: it works in practice and definitely doesn't lose on the spot! I recommended this line to a couple of my titled friends who followed my advice and equalized against 2500-rated opponents in classical tournaments. So what did I tell them? I just said that Black's plan is to grab the bishop pair and survive the

opening stage. That's it. If White doesn't punish us right away, then we will enter the middlegame with the bishop pair in our hands. The rest of the material devoted to this variation is filled with cumbersome and often unnecessary lines just to prove this simple point!

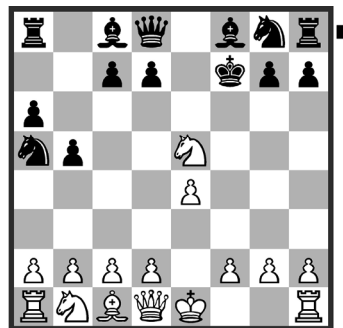
As a side note, I'd like to add that one of the top players of the time, Mark Taimanov, played this line a whole 10 times in the 1950s! I would certainly not recommend playing this line that often in modern times. Intermingle it with other offbeat variations and please do not make it your main weapon. The same can be said about nearly all of the lines covered in the book -- none of them constitutes a bullet-proof opening repertoire. Objectively, there are holes, but -- as I already mentioned in the introduction -- it is one thing to suspect that a certain line is not completely sound and quite another thing to prove that in an over-the-board game.

6. ♖xf7+?!

This sacrifice looks more dangerous than it actually is.

6. ♖xe5?! ♖xb3 7. axb3 ♔e7 8. d4 d6 9. ♖f3 ♔xe4+ Black has the bishop pair and will have no problems finishing his kingside development.

6... ♔xf7 7. ♖xe5+



Position after: 7. ♖xe5+

7... ♔e7!

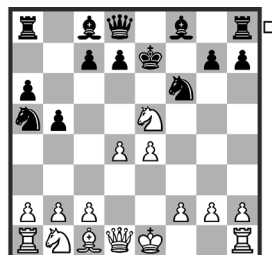
Black is going to solve the "king problem" by playing ...♔d8-e8 followed by ...♔e7-d8 or by simply kicking the white e5-knight with ...d7-d6 and then playing ...♔e7-f7-g8.

8. d4

Black's position is so good that he has even a choice here: to bring the king to the kingside or the queenside. 8. ♖c3 is met by 8... ♔e8! as we have just discussed.

8... d6

8... ♖f6 is equally interesting.

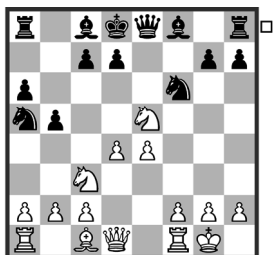


Position after: 8... ♖f6

A) 9. ♖f3?! ♙b7 10. b4? ♘c4 11. ♖e2 ♘xe5 12. dxe5 ♘xe4 13. f3 ♙e8!⚡ followed by either ...♖d8-h4+ or ...♘e4-g5 depending on White's move. Rabar, B – Taimanov, M Belgrade 1956.

B) Trying to punish Black directly doesn't work: 9. ♙g5 ♖e8 10. ♖f3 d6 11. ♖c3? dxe5 12. dxe5 ♙f7→ Paramonov, D (2332) – Orlov, V (2444) St Petersburg 2000.

C) 9. 0-0 ♖e8 10. ♘c3 ♙d8



Position after: 10... ♙d8

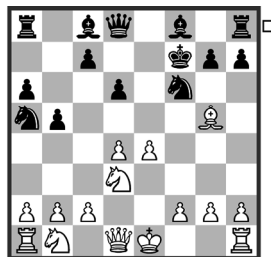
11. ♙e1 [≤ 11. ♘d5 ♙b7 12. ♙g5 ♙c8!⚡ The black king is safe.] 11... ♙b7 12. ♘d3 ♙c8∞ White certainly has compensation but I find playing with Black easier.

9. ♘d3

9. ♙g5+ ♘f6 10. ♘d3 ♙f7

(see analysis diagram next column)

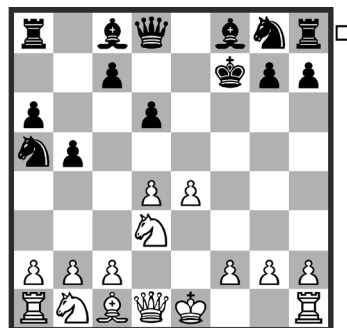
11. 0-0 [11. e5? dxe5 12. dxe5 is refuted by 12... ♖d5! 13. 0-0 ♙b7 14. f3



Position after: 10... ♙f7

♘c4⚡] 11... ♙b7 12. ♘c3 ♙e7 13. e5 dxe5 14. dxe5 ♘d5 15. ♖f3+ ♙g8 16. ♙xe7 [♞ 16. ♘c5!⚡ would have offered White better chances. Black is OK there nevertheless.] 16... ♘xe7 17. ♖g4 ♖f8 18. a4 h5 19. ♖e6+ ♖f7 20. ♖xf7+ ♙xf7 21. axb5 axb5 22. ♘xb5 ♙hc8⚡ Nezhmetdinov, R – Furman, S Gorky 1954.

9... ♙f7



Position after: 9... ♙f7

10. 0-0

10. ♖f3+ ♘f6 11. e5 ♙b7 12. ♖f4 ♙e7 13. exf6 ♙xf6 14. 0-0 ♙f8∞ For just one pawn, Black has the bishop pair, the open f-file and a better development.