

Someone Opening 1.e3

And Now For Something Completely Different:

1...Nf6!?

(08/06/08 – 05/09/08)



“1.e3 e6! [...] 1...Nf6 is also interesting with 2.Qf3 c6! The idea being to move the queen and then play Kd8, when White’s queen would become embarrassed due to Ne4 and Ng4 threats. 3.Bd3 and 3.Nh3 seem the best ways to try and counter this plan, Black hasn’t demonstrated equal chances in either of these lines...”

Tipau’s Atomic Page by Tim Seymour, 2005

“Here I have played mostly 1...Nf6, but I now believe this to be bad after 2.Qf3, and thus recommend 1...e6.”

Peter-Patzer’s Wild Site by Peter Roberson (Peter-Patzer/Wildkiller), 2005

“1...e6 and 1...Nf6 [...] are virtually the only two moves anyone plays anymore with 1...e6 being highly preferred over the other. 1...Nf6 needs to be analyzed more, but right now, it seems that it confers a slight edge to White. [...] For now, if your opponent plays 1. e3, I recommend responding with 1. ... e6.”

The Atomic Chess Book by Leonard Blackburn (Rekursiv), 2007

“I think it loses”

Sergey Krakov (Siggemann), 2008

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Introduction

For me 1.e3 Nf6 currently possesses a certain mysterious charm. Well-worn paths of theory are frequently soon abandoned; strange and unusual positions are arrived at, which demand original and creative thinking. There is no obvious way for White players to quickly simplify to either a drawn or superior ending where they can hope to squeeze out a win without having a single original thought (a common occurrence after the usual 1...e6 2.Nf3 Qf6 3.c3 and 1...e6 2.Nf3 f6 3.Nd4) yet it has a very dubious air about it. Surely Black can't get away with inviting White's queen to pin down the knight, when Bf1-d3 and/or Ng1-h3 are sure to quickly follow? Well maybe he can, maybe he can't. Not many words have been spent on the idea, the final one certainly not among them, but according to my current analysis there is no clear way for White to punish accurate Black play.

I understand that some people will be surprised at my recommendation and that most will be unfamiliar with the positions after 1...Nf6. For these people I've presented both a history of 1.e3 theory, to show the path from when I started playing atomic up until my adoption of 1...Nf6, and a section on typical themes and ideas. I hope this will help to fill any gaps in the reader's knowledge before tackling the heavier theoretical section.

The arrangement of material in the theoretical section is based on ascending order of importance. How to do this was not really that clear (as after 2.Qf3 c6 the three main moves 3.Nc3, 3.Nh3 and 3.Bd3 appear to be of roughly equal strength) but I eventually decided to tackle the least popular 3.Nc3 first (which actually happens to be White's best scoring move), then 3.Nh3 and finally the most common 3.Bd3. Of course I didn't stick rigidly to this in every sub variation; if I considered an unplayed or unpopular move as the most critical in a position then I've treated it as such. An example being that 2.f3 is (according to Wildchess) the most popular alternative to 2.Qf3 but I consider 2.Nc3 to be the only alternative worth examining in detail. I've also used several colours in the theory section; black with a bold typeface for the main variations and normal black, blue and red for sub variations. The aim was to make variations easier to follow and I hope it succeeds.

A few words about the title: The relatively recent renaming of atomic openings (by Siggemann) refers to 1.e3 as the Rekursiv-Hooby Opening. With respect to both Rekursiv and Hooby (Rekursiv in particular has made significant contributions to 1.e3 theory) I don't like the name and have used Vlasov's original label the Someone Opening. I think that if openings are named after anybody then it should be either the first player to have used them repeatedly, or the player who first turned it into a significant weapon. Both these things had already been achieved before either player learnt atomic (or before I had). As Someone was the first player to repeatedly use 1.e3 I think he has the best claim to the opening.

There's not much more to say except I hope you enjoy analysing and (perhaps) playing 1...Nf6!

Tim Seymour
London, September 2008

History of 1.e3 Theory

While it's obvious that in order to develop a variation it's important to know current theory on it first, it's also important to understand why current theory is current. Memorising fashionable lines from Wildchess or by following a top player's games might win you some rating points but ultimately it tells you nothing about the opening in question. If your opponent deviates from the line you think is best, simply because someone good played it, will you know what to do? Do you know why 1.Nc3 e5 isn't played or 1.Nh3 f6 2.Nc3 Nh6 is considered dubious? Or do you just play 1...e6 and 1...h6 because you've been told they're correct? From looking at older (probably weaker) lines you can understand more about a position and how and why theory has abandoned that particular path and come to where it is (who knows, maybe it was abandoned too quickly and there's something to be discovered – it wouldn't be the first time). As a theoretician I've had a larger effect on current openings than any other individual and I believe there are two main reasons for that. Firstly because I've witnessed most modern lines being developed from their very beginning and secondly because I never accept another player's opinion as fact, regardless of whom they are. I always remember being told, as a relative beginner, that 1.Nc3 was an error because 1...Nf6 2.Nd5 e6 was good for Black - something I immediately accepted as the truth. The player who told me was rated 2000 and, after all, who was I to question him? Fortunately it didn't take me very long to realise 2.Nd5 wasn't forced and I developed 2.e4 into quite a formidable weapon over the years (and 2.f3!? was eventually regarded as a dangerous system as well). As an atomic beginner I was very lucky that the amount of theory was dramatically lower than it is today. I could survive on limited theory, play natural moves and slowly build up my knowledge and experience. By the time of the theory explosion in 2004 I was already a top player and had players of the calibre of TheChessKid and MoltenThinker happy to analyse ideas with me. Like it or not we're now on the other side of the theory explosion and new players can't afford the same luxury of simply playing natural moves and surviving beyond move 10. So what to do? You might ask. I understand a certain amount of memorising is necessary, but it's a lot easier to remember moves when you understand why you're playing them so I urge players not to ignore alternatives to known theory if they can't see a refutation. That's how all the new ideas are found after all and how I build up my opening knowledge. The rest of this section outlines the history of 1.e3 from 2002 until the present (notably most of it discusses the position after 1.e3 e6 2.Nf3 f6 which is also commonly reached via 1.Nf3 f6 2.e3 e6). I hope you'll pay attention to this section and if any reasonable alternatives come to mind (I've only given what I see as the most critical variations) follow it up. There's always a chance you'll be staring in the next chapter of atomic theory, or maybe you'll only be improving your understanding.

1.e3 Theory Pre-2004

Up until 2004 Black's problems against 1.e3 were non-existent. In fact the most common line after 1.e3 was 1...e6 2.Qf3 f5 3.Qxb7 (popularised on ICC by DukeNukem who used it as his main White opening, and I believe was the first player to achieve a 2300+ wild 27 rating; wild 27 is ICC's version of atomic, which doesn't acknowledge checks) which gives Black a choice between forcing an equal ending (3...Qh4 4.g3 Qb4 5.c3 Nf6 6.f3 Qxb2 7.Nh3 h6!? {7...Ng4 =} 8.Ng5 Ne4 9.Nxe4 =), playing with the material imbalance (3...Nf6 4.f3 a6 for example) or the

admittedly more modern idea of mine 3...Nf6 4.f3 Ne4!? with very good play for Black. Sometimes players chose the more ambitious 3.Qh5+!? (notably Relativity; against whom I developed the nice line 3...g6 4.Qg5 Qxg5 5.Nf3 e5!) or to transpose into 1.Nh3 or 1.Nf3 lines with 2.Nh3 f6 or 2.Nf3 f6, neither of which were thought to cause Black problems at the time either (3.Nd4 c6 was considered satisfactory for Black. Most games continued 3.Nc3 instead, when 3...Bb4 4.Nd4 Nc6! is fine for Black).

Effect of the Hook on 1...e6 2.Nf3 f6 3.Nd4 c6:



In 2004 everything changed with the discovery of the, now common, queen manoeuvre Qd1-h5-b5-b6-c7 (known as the Hook; a term coined by Rekursiv, because of the shape made by the queen's path). Unfortunately I was never able to discover who deserves the credit for this crucial idea because after asking several players and having them all claim it as their own I gave up trying to find out! It quickly became clear that Black was having difficulties, the original critical line being 1...e6 2.Nf3 f6 3.Nd4 c6 4.Nb5 cxb5 5.Qh5+ g6 6.Qb5 Nc6 7.Qb6 axb6 8.Bb5 Kf7 9.Bxd7 Rxa2 with a winning ending for White (although the later discovery of pawnitisation showed that White must be more careful than was originally believed. For example 10.d4?! Bb4+ 11.c3 Ne7 eventually led to a draw in Trojanknight(C) – Tipau, FICS 2005 {although even in that position White retains some winning chances}. Black's idea is to, in some order, give away his two pieces for the b and c-pawns, swap rooks and play ...f6-f5 with a draw. The simplest continuation is 10.b4! preventing Black's idea).

Although the position after 1...e6 2.Nf3 f6 was more often reached via 1.Nf3 f6 2.e3 e6 in that case Black had a reasonable alternative in 2...d5, which had already been MoltenThinker's preference for some time. The 1.e3 move order was far more worrying.

The Stopgap 3...Nh6



When it became well known that 1...e6 2.Nf3 f6 3.Nd4 c6 ran straight into the Hook the first reaction for most Black players was 3...Nh6. It had some similarities with the then popular line 1.Nf3 f6 2.Nd4 Nh6 3.e3 c6 (3...e6 would directly transpose) and although I (and I imagine most players) never really trusted the line what else was there to play? Most discussion began after 4.Nb5 Bb4 5.c3 Ng4 6.f4 c6 with 7.Nc7+ and 7.h3 being the obvious continuations. In my opinion the most convincing way for White to play is 7.Nc7+ Kf8 8.h3 Nf2 (8...Nh2 9.Ba6) 9.Qh5 Ne4 10.d4 Ng3 11.Ba6 Nxe4 12.Ne8 g6 13.Bxb7 with a winning position for White, Tipau – Peter-Patzer, ICC 2005.

TheChessKid's 2...Qf6



The first reasonable suggestion to deviate from the above lines was 2...Qf6, first proposed (to my knowledge) by TheChessKid on ICC, who through his use of it quickly ran into 3.c3 (I forget who his opponent was, but it wasn't a top player) and met severe difficulties after the natural 3...Nh6?! 4.Qa4 b5 5.Qd4 followed by Kd1. In my early days on FICS (Spring 2005) I remember analysing pretty much every possible Black 3rd move with Seberg and Maciejg trying to find a playable line, eventually settling on 3...Bc5 after many misadventures. Since then theory has expanded on 3...Bc5 showing that with accurate play White can nullify Black's initiative and Black faces a constant struggle to draw (if he can at all). The main line running 3.c3 Bc5 4.Bc4 (4.d4!?) 4...Nh6 5.Qa4 b5 6.Kd1 (interestingly on ICC 6.Bxe6 Ng4 7.Kd1 bxa4 8.Ng5 is more accurate because following 6.Kd1?! Bxe3! 7.Bxe6 bxa4 8.Re1 without the check rule 8...0-0 is possible, giving Black very good play) 6...bxa4 7.Ng5 Kd8 8.Bxe6 Ng4 9.Nxe7 Nxe2 10.Na3 Bxa3 11.b4! and no good defensive plan has been shown for Black. Nevertheless the lines with 2...Qf6

have remained quite popular over the last few years. Maybe this is because there are many tricky options, which Black players hope White won't be familiar with, or maybe it's because players find the alternative lines even less appealing for Black. After the above line (ending in 11.b4) was worked out playing Black against 1.e3 remained a headache for me for a long time. I lost several games in the 2...Qf6 variation without making my opponents demonstrate any new ideas; in fact because of the problems with 1.e3 together with a couple of other variations and their naturally growing popularity I stopped playing so many rated games. In the meantime I tried to figure out a reasonable defence.

Rare Alternatives to 1...e6



Even during the early days of 2...Qf6 3.c3 Bc5 some players weren't happy with it as Black and began looking for alternatives on the very first move. First under the microscope was 1...d6, which was believed by some (for at least a short time) to be a reasonable alternative to 1...e6. In truth however it can be easily disposed with: 2.Nc3 (2.Qh5 g6 3.Nc3 is also good for White) 2...c6 (2...Bg4? 3.Qf3 +-; 2...Be6? 3.Nb5 Bc4 4.Bd3 +-; 2...e5 has been played a lot by Wbapi(C) but White has many ways to achieve a winning game: 3.Qh5 {3.Nd5; 3.Nb5} 3...g6 4.Qh4 {4.Nb5} and either 4...Qf6 5.Nf3 +- or 4...Qxh4 5.Nb5 +-; 2...Bg4? 3.Qf3 +-) 3.Nd5 cxd5 4.Qh5 g6 5.Qb5+ Nc6 6.Qb6 Qc7 7.Qxb7 +-

The next try was 1...f5, first considered seriously (to my knowledge) in analysis between me, Millzeschess and Calvin not long after I joined FICS (I was surprised that it wasn't mentioned on Vlasov's Atomic Homepage, despite the similar 1.Nf3 e5 2.Ng5 f5 being well known as Vlasov's defence). Since then Calvin has used it at every opportunity and Mrundersun has also employed it reasonably often. Probably White's strongest continuation is 2.Qh5+ g6 3.Qh4 Nf6 4.Bd3 when Black is forced into 4...e5 5.Nc3 (better than the immediate 5.Bxf5, although White is better there also) 5...Bb4 (5...c6 6.Bxf5 and either 6...Qxh4 7.Ne4 or 6...Qf6 7.Nf3 are clearly horrible for Black) 6.Bxf5 Qxh4 7.Nh3 and after White castles Black will be forced into ...Bb4xc3, leaving him a pawn down with White more likely to make use of the f-file by advancing f2-f4-f5 etc. Alternatively White can choose the simple 2.Nf3 when Black has nothing better than 2...e5 3.Ng5 with a variation of the Vlasov defence (1.Nf3 e5? 2.Ng5 f5 3.e3) known to be winning for White.

The Early Days of 1...Nf6



In the mean time 1...Nf6 2.Qf3 c6 (which first appeared soon after 1...e6 2.Nf3 Qf6 3.c3; the similarities between the lines are obvious) was only seen occasionally because both 3.Bd3 and 3.Nh3 were thought to be good enough for a large advantage (as the quote from my 2005 web page on page 1 shows).

Tipau-Siggemann Counterattack 2...Nc6



Around this time (mid 2005) I had started spending a lot more time analysing atomic openings with Siggemann on FICS. Our matches and combined analysis brought forward the theory on many different lines, although admittedly our impact on 1.e3 lines was more limited than in most others (not really surprising as neither of us played the move with any regularity). We did however spend some time looking at 2...Nc6, which was later named the Tipau-Siggemann Counterattack. I'm honestly not really sure whether I earned the right to have my name there, considering I only began analysing it after some key ideas had been worked out by others (I remember being shown 3.Ng5 f5 4.Nxh7 g6! by either Maciejg or Seberg – although whose idea it was originally I couldn't say). My memory of most of these lines is quite hazy, as it hasn't been played much over the last few years (although it might be due for a revival as I've noticed Onubense has been playing it recently). The original refutation ran: 3.Ng5 f5 4.Nxh7 g6! 5.h4 Nb4 6.Bb5 c6 7.c3 Nc2+ (it's possible we originally assumed 7...Nxa2? 8.h5 +-) 8.Kf1 however this doesn't seem so clear as Black has ideas of ...Nc2-e1-f3-d2-xb1. A more clear-cut line for White is 3.Nc3! which was played in a match between TrojanKnight(C) and Sordid(C), then subsequently analysed by me and Siggemann back in 2005: 3...Ne5 (the best try) 4.Ng5 f5 5.Nb5! Ng4 6.f4 Nf2 7.Qf3 Bb4 8.c3 c6 (8...Ne4 9.d4 Nd2 10.Kd1 c6 11.Qg3 +-) 9.Nc7+ Kf8 10.Nxh7 Ne4 11.d4 Nd2 12.Ba6 Nxf3 13.Ne8 g6 14.Nf6 d5 15.Bxb7.

This nice sequence is quite similar to the refutation of 1...e6 2.Nf3 f6 3.Nd4 Nh6, considered above. Now the game Sordid(C) – guest (Tipau), 02/07/08 concluded: 15...Qc8 16.Nd7+ Kg8 17.Nb8 c5 18.h4 cxd4 19.h5 g5 20.h6 Kh7 21.a4 d4 22.b3! Qd8 23.cxb4 dxe3 24.Nd7 e5 25.Bb2 gxf4 26.Rc1 1-0

My ...Kf7 Line



The next instalment in the 1.e3 saga was my discovery of the line: 1...e6 2.Nf3 f6 3.Nd4 c6 4.Nb5 (I believe 4.Nc3 also causes Black difficulties but it's quite rare, due to the popularity of 4.Nb5) 4...cxb5 5.Qh5+ g6 6.Qb5 Nc6 7.Qb6 Kf7!? 8.Qc7 Bb4 (today I believe 8...Nh6 is the only move worth trying here) 9.c3 Qf8. I uncovered this interesting idea shortly before the December 2005 World Championships (with hindsight it would probably have been sensible to have kept it under wraps, along with a few other lines, but naturally I wanted to immediately test it out) and it proved quite a tough nut for White to crack. There are some fascinating variations which were never resolved after 10.cxb4 Qb4 11.Nc3 Nge7 but the refutation was found elsewhere. The critical line, first worked out to its conclusion by Rekursiv, runs 10.Bc4 Bxc3 (in comparison to 10.cxb4 White is a piece down but has gained a tempo, which turns out to be the more important factor) 11.Nc3 Nge7 (11...Nh6 12.Ne4 {12.Qd6 Qxd6 13.Nb5 is not much fun for Black either} 12...Kg8 13.Qd6 Ne7 14.Ng5 fxg5 15.Qxe7 +- White has too much play on the long diagonal and with the f-pawn) 12.Nd5 Nxd5 13.b4! (This was seen as the key move. 13.Qd8 Qxd8 14.b4 Rhc8 15.Bb2 f5 was played in several games, including Rekursiv – Tipau, 2006, and was mistakenly believed to be drawn {due to pawnitisation}. While it's not so important in this particular case, as 13.b4 is clearly simpler, this is quite a common misconception even amongst strong players and a similar situation is discussed in the theory section - see line A after 2.Nc3 Ne4 3.Nxe4 e6 4.Nf3 f6 5.Bd3 Bb4 6.c3 Bxc3?) 13...h5 (Black can't prevent Qd8, or remove his pieces from the long diagonal, making pawnitisation impossible: 13...Rg8 14.Bb2 f5 15.Bg7 is obviously winning for White) 14.Qd8 (Black was hoping for 14.Bb2 Kg8 15.Qd8 Kh7) 14...Qxd8 15.Bb2 with a winning game for White.

Yokke's 3...f5



In early 2007 Yokke began playing the strange looking 1...e6 2.Nf3 f6 3.Nd4 f5. The justification of his idea is that 4.Nb5?! runs into 4...Qh4 5.g3 Qc4 6.Bxc4 Nc6 with very good play for Black, while after 4.Qh5+ g6 5.Qg5 Qxg5 6.Nb5 Nf6 7.f3 a6 8.Nxc7 Bd6 9.g3 Ne4 10.fxe4 f4 Black's has very powerful play along the f-file. For months White tried a variety of deviations from these lines, none of which promise any advantage against accurate Black play (such as 4.Nc3; 4.Nf3; 4.Qh5+ g6 5.Qg5 Qxg5 6.Nf3; 6.Nb5 Nf6 7.Bd3 and others). The critical line first appeared (to my knowledge) in the game Excellion – Siggemann, FICS 06/05/07 (3 0 r): 4.Qh5+ g6 5.Qg5 Qxg5 6.Nb5 Nf6 7.f3 a6 8.Nxc7 Bd6 9.g3 Ne4 10.fxe4 f4 11.Bc4! 0-0 12.0-0 Kh8 13.Bxe6! d5 (13...fxg3 14.Rf7 Rxf7 15.b4 Rf8 16.Bb2+ Kg8 17.Bf6 wins for White) 14.b3 d4 15.Ba3 1-0. Despite analysing many deviations from this line, after 3...f5, nothing has been uncovered which I consider playable for Black.

My Adjustment 3...Bb4 4.c3 f5



After failing to find any respectable improvements on Black's play after 3...f5 in the line above (Black's best is probably 7...Nd5 when he is left a clear pawn down after 8.Nd6+ cxd6) I came upon the idea of playing 3...Bb4 4.c3 (4.Nc3 Nc6! is known to be OK for Black from the move order 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.Nd4 Nc6) 4...f5. The point is that if White plays 5.Qh5+ g6 6.Qg5 Qxg5 7.Nb5, like he would against 3...f5, the long diagonal is blocked and White lacks the b2-b3/b4 and Bc1-b2+ resource in the critical variation. Unfortunately White can switch plans and instead favour 5.Nb5 when after 5...Qh4 6.g3 Qh5 (6...Nf6 7.d3!) 7.f3 Nf6 8.d3! Black is in trouble.

Reassessment of 1...Nf6



My interest in 1...Nf6 was reignited in 2007 (after the failures of 3...f5 and 3...Bb4 described above) when I noticed Onubense had been using it exclusively (although he seems to have since taken up 1...e6 2.Nf3 Nc6 – The Tipau–Siggemann Counterattack considered above). I was quite surprised as it was still my opinion that White was doing well in various lines, but having a lot of respect for Onubense's strength I decided to re-check those particular lines in more detail. I'm not sure how much of what I found Onubense had worked out (or how much I've missed that he found) but my interest was rewarded as it certainly isn't as straight forward as I'd thought for so long. I've been playing 1...Nf6 since early 2008 and have yet to be shown a refutation that meets my satisfaction and have built up a very good score with it (according to my database 16 wins, 2 losses and 4 draws on FICS against an average opponent rating of 2214; a fantastic record for a White opening let alone Black in a problematic defence!). It's quite refreshing to be playing something completely different after years of hitting my head against the wall that is 1...e6 2.Nf3. Long may it continue!

Summing Up and Looking Forward

While 1...e6 remains easily the most popular move (according to Wildchess 84% of games after 1.e3 continue 1...e6 and only 7% 1...Nf6) I hope my above analysis and explanations have convinced you that Black runs into significant problems against critical White play. Black's idea with 1...Nf6 is to answer 2.Qf3 with 2...c6 and follow up by moving out the queen and playing Ke8-d8; the same strategy White was probably hoping to use after 1...e6 2.Nf3 Qf6 3.c3 - if you can't beat them copy them! Of course simply giving some vague ideas behind 1...Nf6 and pointing out holes in the alternatives is not enough (I'm not trying to get 1...Nf6 elected after all). Concrete analysis is required if one wants to prove it's any better than the lines I've already dismissed. The next major section discusses the typical themes and ideas running throughout 1...Nf6 (specifically the critical lines beginning with 2.Qf3 c6) to build up knowledge and understanding, then the theoretical section delves into the serious business of defending 1...Nf6 against all the serious tests that White can throw Black's way.

Typical Themes and Ideas

Dancing Queens

As I've already mentioned Black's idea after 1...Nf6 2.Qf3 c6 is to develop his queen (depending on White's play it could be played to a5, b6 or, more rarely, c7) and then inconvenience White's queen by playing ...Ke8-d8. This is all well and good but what about Black's queen? Won't she get kicked around just as much (if not more)? If Black's queen moves to a5 White can attack it with b4 or simply block and threaten Bb5 or Ba6. If it moves to b6 again Black must reckon with Bb5, Ba6 ideas and Black will always have to guard against Qf3xc6. Finally while on c7 the queen seems safer but it's susceptible to a Nc3-d5 sacrifice, is less active and less effective against White's obvious plans of Ng1-h3-g5 and Bf1-d3-f5/g6/xh7. In all lines the majority of moves either take aim against the opponent's queen or king, or protect your own. This continues until the queens are either swapped or sacrificed (this often occurs quite quickly as the centre becomes crowded and one side or the other is forced to make some sort of simplification for tactical reasons). This can of course result in a large amount of queen moves, with both sides trying to somehow out manoeuvre the other. I like to think of such scenarios as queen dances.

White's Qf3-f5-g5 Manoeuvre

While Black's queen has many different dance steps it needs to know (depending on how White leads) White's follows the same routine time and time again, namely Qf3-f5-g5 in response to Black playing ...Ke8-d8.



This idea occurs in the two most important variations after 3.Nh3: 3...Qa5 (it's easy to see that both 3...Qb6? and 3...Qc7? run into 4.Ng5 Kd8 5.Ne6+) now:

- i) 4.b4 Kd8 5.Qf5!? (5.bxa5 is an obvious alternative) 5...e6 6.Qg5
- ii) 4.Nc3 Kd8 5.Qf5 e6 6.Qg5

With this sequence White obviously prevents ...Nf6-e4 but he also has Qg5-xg7 in mind. For example in both the above lines 6...Ke8?! (unpinning the f6 knight) is strongly met by 7.Qxg7 when White has collected a lot of material for his queen and Black's queen can still be an object for White to attack. In the theory section I instead recommend 6...Qd5 and 6...Bd6 in lines i and ii respectively.

While White's Qf3-f5-g5 manoeuvre is quite common it's actually more likely that the mere possibility of it will force Black to abandon his dream of a rapid ...Ke8-d8 in favour of a slower approach (the most common is playing ...e7-e6, to protect f5, before moving the king). Some examples:

- i) 3.Nc3 Qa5 (again the alternatives 3...Qb6? and 3...Qc7? can be quickly dismissed because 4.Nd5 cxd5 5.Bb5 wins for White in both cases. Other moves are too slow: 3...e6? 4.Nh3; 3...d5? 4.Nh3 Bxh3 5.Bd3 Qb6 6.Bxh7) 4.Ba6!? e6! (4...Kd8?! 5.Qf5 e6 6.Qg5 and Black lacks a good continuation; 6...Ke8 and 6...h6 can be met by 7.Qxg7) and now fascinating complications arise after either 5.b4 or 5.Bxb7, both discussed below under 'Material Imbalances', while 5.Kd1!? is discussed below under 'White's Sidestepping King'.
- ii) 3.Nc3 Qa5 4.b4 Qh5! (4...Kd8?! 5.Qf5 e6 6.Qg5 and unlike the line 3.Nh3 Qa5 4.b4 Kd8 5.Qf5 e6 6.Qg5, discussed above, Black doesn't have the important ...Qd5 move and so is in trouble). This is a rarer solution, which only works for concrete reasons. Black was forced into it because of the threat of Qf3-f5-g5. The main line is now 5.Nd5!? but White has other interesting options too.
- iii) 3.Bd3 Qb6! (3...Qa5? 4.b4 Kd8 5.Qf5 e6 6.Qg5 once again Black doesn't have the important ...Qa5-d5 move and is losing; 3...Qc7? 4.Qf4 Qxf4 5.Bg6 wins a pawn). Now Black is attacking e3 and White is forced into immediate action before Black has played ...Ke8-d8. The critical moves are 5.Bg6 and 5.Bf5.

White's Sidestepping King

Although the idea of Black sidestepping his king with ...Ke8-d8 should be obvious by now, White can occasionally do the same. The most important case occurs after 3.Nc3 Qa5 4.Ba6!? e6 5.Kd1!?



White knows that Black will follow up with ...Ke8-d8 and ...Nf6-g4/e4 and takes precautions, with a very clever idea in mind (5.Bxb7 and 5.b4 are discussed below under 'Material Imbalances'). After 5...Kd8 (5...Bd6 may be a possibility) 6.Qf4 (obviously if the king was still on d1 this would run into ...Nf6-e4) 6...Bd6 7.Qg5 and White has managed to achieve a set-up usually found after a Qf3-f5-g5 manoeuvre. This position is further analysed in the theory section and later in this section under 'Material Imbalances', Pawn Sacrifices.

Black's Misplaced King

When Black plays ...Ke8-d8 he is possibly dreaming of an easy victory with a quick ...Nf6-e4. Alas, this is not often the case. Far more common is a queen exchange (alongside other exchanges) leaving material equal and Black with a misplaced king. The key thing to remember in such a scenario is not to panic. The mass exchanges

reduce the risk of being mated and Black's position often still contains potential for counterplay. A few examples:

- i) 3.Bd3 Qb6 4.Bg6 Kd8 5.Bf5 e6 6.Bxe6 Qxe3 now some might claim White is better here because of Black's misplaced king, but it's not really possible for White to take any advantage of the situation. After 7.Nf3 Bd6 8.Ne5 Bxe5 9.0-0 Re8 10.Re1 Re2 11.Rxe2 d5 Black must be careful how he develops his pieces, but ultimately the position is equal.
- ii) 3.Nc3 Qa5 4.Bd3 e6 5.Bg6 Kd8 6.Bxf7 Rf8 7.b4 Qh5 8.g4 Qh4 9.Kd1 Qxf2 10.Rf1 Rf2 11.Rxf2 d5 (this complicated looking sequence will be discussed below under 'Black Sacks f7'). Black can take some comfort here in that White's king has also been inconvenienced but he still might be a little worried about the open f-file. White will surely win a race to get the rooks there and how can Black block it? The answer is that he doesn't need to! Quite a common idea is to play ...Bd7, ...Be8 and if Rf8 then ...Kc8 is quite safe. If White leaves his rook on the f-file he lacks firepower elsewhere and Black can look to break on the queenside with ...b5 and ...a5. For example the game could realistically continue: 12.Na4 (White is worried about ...d4 and doesn't want to block his bishop in by playing d4 himself) 12...b6 13.Bb2 Nd7 (13...a5 14.Be5) 14.d4 (14.Ke2 Ne5 15.Bxe5 Bd7) 14...Nf8 15.Ke2 Bd7 16.Rf1 Be8 now Black is threatening ...a5 and is completely fine.
- iii) 3.Nh3 Qa5 4.b4 Kd8 5.Qf5 e6 6.Qg5 Qd5 7.Bd3 Bd6 8.Nc3! (8.Qxd5 Ng4 9.f3 Nxb2 10.Bxb7 is the same but without the extra move Nc3 for White) 8...Qf5 9.Qxf5 Bxb2 10.Bxb7 d5. Just like in case ii Black can't hope to win a race for the open file and must instead be prepared to blockade with ...Bc8-d7-e8 (or possibly ...Nb8-d7-f8) before beginning counterplay on the queenside.

Material Imbalances

I have a feeling that players who like simple games without any material imbalances are going to really hate 1.e3 Nf6! Throughout the main lines and sidelines all kinds of weird imbalances occur and I couldn't possibly give advice on all of them; both because it would take forever and because I don't fully understand them all myself.

Some comments about the most common ones:

- i) Queen Sacrifices: In many lines one side gives away their dancing queen for a variety of pieces (sometimes because it's forced, sometimes by choice). We've already seen that with the manoeuvre Qf3-f5-g5 White is hoping to play Qxg7. Another example is 3.Nc3 Qa5 4.Ba6 e6 5.Bxb7!? (White knows Black played 4...e6 in preparation to play ...Ke8-d8, without allowing Qf3-f5-g5, but decides to grab the material anyway) 5...Kd8 6.Nh3 Ng4 7.Kd1 Nxf2 with a mess.



Another queen imbalance results if White deviates from this line with 5.b4 Kd8 6.Bxb7 Ne4 7.Qxe4 Qf5 with another unclear position.



And finally, another interesting queen imbalance results after 3.Nh3 Qa5 4.Nc3 Kd8 5.Qf5 e6 6.Qg5 Bd6 7.Ba6 Ke8 8.f3 b6 9.g3 h6 (Black's run out of other useful moves and forces White into the sacrifice) 10.Qxg7 Qb4 ∞



It's impossible for me to give general advice in such crazy positions, but it's important that you're aware that they're real possibilities and that Black often has no reasonable alternatives to avoid them.

- ii) Pawn Sacrifices: In several lines the pressure Black comes under forces him to sacrifice a pawn. Whether the resulting position guarantees adequate compensation, forces him to grovel for a draw or leaves him simply lost is

often a fine line. In most cases Black is left with the two bishops and at the very least good drawing chances due to pawnitisation (it's important to be very aware of this idea to be successful in many variations). Some example of pawn sacrifices I recommend:

After 3.Nc3 Qa5 4.Ba6 e6 5.Kd1 Kd8 6.Qf4 Bd6 7.Qg5 (this sequence was discussed earlier under 'White's Sidestepping King' and 'White's Qf3-f5-g5 Manoeuvre') 7...Qf5 8.Qxf5 bxa6 9.g3 Bb4.



Here Black's two bishops are very strong. One pins the c3 knight down while the other is immediately coming into the fray via ...Bc8-a6. In fact Black is probably happier not to have an extra b7 pawn in this position!

After 3.Bd3 Qb6 4.Bg6 Kd8 5.Bf5 e6 6.Qxc6 Nc6 7.d4! (this move is discussed below under 'White Sacks c2') 7...Ng4 8.Bxg4 b6!?



Black's idea here is similar to the last example. He wants to make the best use of his two bishops and immediately activates them, threatening 9...Ba6 Δ 10.c4 Bb4. The natural defence is 9.b4 but then Black can keep up his queenside pressure with 9...a5 or 9...Ba6!? 10.c4 Rc8 with initiative for the pawn.

Another way for Black to generate compensation in the above line is with 8...Nb4 9.a3 Na2!



After 10.Nc3 Bb4 Black intends to follow up with the, by now, familiar ...b7-b6 and ...Bc8-a6.

One final example is 3.Nc3 Qa5 4.Nh3 (or 3.Nh3 Qa5 4.Nc3) 4...e6!?



Black prepares ...Ke8-d8 by first preventing Qf3-f5. Usually this idea is weak against Nh3 lines and White can in fact win a pawn now with 5.Ng5 Kd8 6.Nxe6 Bb4 7.Qf5 Qxf5



Admittedly I don't use this line as my main recommendation (I opt for 4...Kd8 instead) and although I wouldn't be surprised if White turns out to be better here I think it's trickier than it first appears. White can't leave his king in the centre for too long, else Black will get compensation by pushing the d-pawn and playing ...Rh8-e8, so it's natural for White to develop the f1 bishop and castle. 8.Bb5 d5 (8...Na6 9.0-0

Bxc3 10.Bxa6 gives Black drawing chances) 9.0-0 g5!? and Black seems to have play with the idea 10...Bh3 11.gxh3 g4.

Black Sacks f7

It's no great revelation that with moves like 3.Nh3 and 3.Bd3 White is hoping to play Ng5 or Bg6 and take on f7, the key is to know when Black can allow it. If Black has already played ...Ke8-d8 then by taking on f7 White is inviting ...Rh8-f8, pinning White's queen against the f-pawn, and as long as Black's queen isn't in trouble this will normally result in a messy queen imbalance position e.g.

3.Bd3 Qb6 4.Bg6 Kd8 5.Bxf7 Rf8 6.Qf7 Rxf7



Now White should probably continue with 7.b4 or 7.b3 with an unclear game.

Another fascinating example is 3.Nc3 Qa5 4.Bd3 e6 5.Bg6 Kd8 6.Bxf7 Rf8



When White has a choice between 7.g4 d5! 8.b4 Qc7 9.Na4 Qg3 10.Kd1 Qxf2 and 7.b4 Qh5 8.g4 Qh4 9.Kd1 Qxf2 which are very similar (and the second can easily transpose after a later Nc3-a4). The second line has already been considered under 'Black's Misplaced King' example ii.

One of the most critical lines in the entire 1...Nf6 opening features an f7 sacrifice, although with much different ideas. After 3.Bd3 Qb6 4.Bf5 e6 5.Qxc6 Nc6 6.Bg6! I recommend 6...Kd8!? when after 7.Bxf7



Black can play 7...Ne5 with compensation. I give detailed analysis on this idea in the theory section.

White Sacks c2

A crucial idea for White in lines after 3.Bd3 Qb6 4.Bg6 Kd8 5.Bf5 e6 6.Qxc6 (White's most popular way of playing against 1...Nf6) is sacrificing c2. In order to generate compensation for his pawn Black needs to play 6...Nc6 with the idea 6...Ne4 7.Bxe4 Ne5/Nb4 winning back material. Unfortunately White doesn't need to worry so much about the ...Nc6-b4 jump because in reality the knight's not actually threatening to capture on c2 (because White's follow up of Ra1-c1 is too strong) and White can simply attack the knight with a2-a3. Therefore White only needs to worry about the ...Nc6-e5 jump and he has two good ways of doing that:

Firstly 7.d4



Now 7...Ng4 8.Bxg4 Nb4 9.a3 Nxc2?? 10.Rc1 Bc5 11.dxc5 Ke8 12.Rc7 Kf8 13.Rxb7 is easily winning for White and so Black is forced to look for compensation for his missing pawn (the position after move 8 has already been discussed under 'Material Imbalances', Pawn Sacrifices).

Secondly 7.f4!?



A completely untested idea when again Black is not advised to capture on c2: 7...Ne4 8.Bxe4 Nb4 9.a3 Nxc2? 10.Rc1 Bc5 11.d4 Ke8 12.dxc5 and White has fantastic pressure. Again Black has to find a way of achieving compensation.

Theory Section

A) 2.Nc3 B) 2.Qf3!

Others:

- 2.f4? d5! and I can't see a good way for White to cover all of the weak light squares.
- 2.f3 with this White makes no real attempt at an opening advantage. Black can play in a number of ways. I prefer 2...d5 but 2...e6 and 2...d6 are also possible. As long as Black is careful about a future Ng1-h3 from White he shouldn't have any immediate problems.
- 2.Bd3 Ng4 (2...Ne4 3.Bxe4 e6 =) 3.f4 g6 (3...e6!?) 4.Bf5 e6 5.Bxg4 =

A) 2.Nc3



This transposes play into 1.Nc3 Nf6 2.e3 which, although it was played by Trojanknight(C), never became popular. It's most likely to be used by players who are looking to avoid a theoretical battle in one of the main lines and are after a more sensible position. That being said, the move still contains a fair amount of punch and shouldn't be taken too lightly by 1...Nf6 players as the following lines can attest.

2...Ne4

This is certainly the most logical move. Others:

- 2...Ng4? 3.f4 c6 4.Nh3 f6 transposes to a position known to be good for White (from 1.Nh3 f6 2.Nc3 Nh6 3.e3 Ng4 4.f4 c6).
- 2...c6 3.Qf3 transposes to 2.Qf3 c6 3.Nc3 which is considered later as line B1.

3.Nxe4 e6

- 3...d6?? 4.Nh3 +-

4.Nf3



○ 4.Qh5 g6 5.Qb5 (5.Nf3 f6 6.Qb5 is also possible as if 5...e5?! Both 6.Qh3 f5 7.Ng5 and 6.Qh4 Qg5 {6...f6 7.Qg4 f5 8.Qg5} 7.Qh6 look good for White. After 5.Nf3 f6 6.Qb5 c6 7.Qxb7 Black must act quickly before White has time to open the b-file: 7...Bd6 8.Ne5 fxe5! gives Black counterplay) 5...c6 6.Qxb7 (6.Nf3 f6 {6...Qf6? 7.Qf5} 7.Qxb7 transposes to 5.Nf3) 6...Qg5!? 7.d3 (7.g3?? Bb4 8.c3 Qf5; 7.Be3 Qf5 8.f4 Bb4 9.c3 Qc2 10.Kf1 Bc5) 7...Qxg2 (or 7...Ba3 8.Nf3 Qxg2 9.bxa3 0-0 =) with equality; alternatively Black could refrain from 6...Qg5 and play with the material imbalance.

○ 4.Qf3 f5 5.Qh5+ (5.Qxb7 Bb4 {5...f4!?!} 6.c3 Ba3 {6...f4} 7.b4 Bb2 {7...f4} 8.Nf3 with a messy game) 5...g6 6.Qg5 Qxg5 7.Nf3 Bg7! 8.d4 g5 with a balanced position.

4...f6

● The absence of the b1 and g8 knights makes 4...Nc6!? an interesting possibility (in the earlier section on the history of 1.e3 theory I considered the line 1.e3 e6 2.Nf3 Nc6 quite risky, due to 3.Nc3, but with this possibility removed White must look elsewhere in his search for an advantage). Critical is 5.Ng5 f5 6.Nxh7 g6! 7.h4 (the move order could be important as 7.c3 gives Black the option of 7...Nd4!? {rather than 7...Nb4 8.Bb5 c6 9.h4 transposing to 7.h4} 8.Bb5 c6 9.h4 Ne2 10.Ba6! now either 10...Nxc1 11.Bxb7 or 10...bxa6 11.Qa4 lead to unexplored messy positions) 7...Nb4 8.Bb5 c6 9.c3 Nc2+ (9...Nxa2? 10.h5 is too strong for White) 10.Kf1



Interestingly this position is known to theory with White having an extra knight on b1 (1.e3 e6 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Ng5 f5 4.Nxh7 g6 5.h4 Nb4 6.Bb5 c6 7.c3 Nc2+ 8.Kf1). You'd naturally assume that White losing a piece would make this a superior version for Black, but in fact White's extra knight on b1 can help Black in certain lines (due to the tactic ...Ne1 g3 Nf3 d4 Nd2+ and ...Nxb1). Black's natural continuation is 10...cxb5

when after 11.d3 (11.g4!?) Black might be able to claim some play if he can somehow defend against White's h-pawn. I must admit I'm not completely happy with this line as Black but the idea of 4...Nc6 is certainly interesting and completely unexplored, so it's quite possible that future developments will occur.

5.Nd4

○ 5.Bd3!? g6 (5...Bb4 6.c3 Bxc3? {6...g6 transposes to 5...g6 6.c3 Bb4} 7.Nd4 f5 8.Qh5+ g6 9.Qg5 Qxg5 10.Nb5 a6 11.Nxc7 Rc8 12.b4 Rc2 13.0-0 Rxa2 this is a standard type of position often mistakenly evaluated as a draw {due to pawnitisation} but the extra pair of rooks give White too much play e.g. 14.Bb2 0-0 15.f4 a5 16.bxa5 h5 17.g4 hxg4 18.h4 d5 19.Kh1 Rd8 20.h5 gxh5 21.Rg1+ Kh7 22.Rg7+ Kh8 {22...Kh6 23.Rh7+ Kg6 24.Rh6+ 1-0} 23.Rg8+ Kh7 24.Rh8+ Kg6 25.Rh6+ 1-0 Of course Black had many other options but White wins similarly in all lines) 6.c3



(6.Ne5? fxe5 7.Qf3 Bb4; 6.b4 Bd6 is an important resource, made possible because Black's pressure on b4 prevents Bd3-b5) Now Black needs to address the threat of Nf3-e5/g5 followed by Qd1-f3. The only way to do this is to move the f8 bishop, but no squares are naturally good. 6...Bb4! seems the best bet (6...Be7? 7.Nd4) and after 7.cxb4 White's advantage is minimal.

5...c6

Now

○ 6.Nb5 cxb5 7.Qh5+ g6 8.Qb5 Nc6 9.Qb6 Kf7 gives Black an improved version over the standard ...Kf7 line (considered in the earlier section on the history of 1.e3 theory under 'My ...Kf7 Line'). The vacant g8 square provides a useful hideout for the Black king and White is without the b1 knight, usually a vital piece in his attacking plans. 10.Qc7 Bb4 11.c3 Qf8 and I prefer Black.

○ 6.Bd3 f5 (6...g6? 7.Nf5) 7.Qh5+ (7.Nf3!? is a much more interesting idea and possibly White's best attempt to get an advantage with 2.Nc3)



(Black can choose between 7...Bb4 8.c3 Bxc3 with an extra pawn against White's active knight and 7...Bd6 8.Ng5 Bxh2 9.g3 when White has very strong play for the sacrificed material) 7...g6 8.Qg5 Qxg5 9.Nf3 Bg7 10.Ne5 Bxe5 gave a balanced position in Siggemannen – Tipau, FICS 03/05/2008 (5 10 u).

Line (A) Conclusion

The lines 5.Bd3!? and 6.Bd3 f5 7.Nf3!? are the most testing continuations against my recommended treatment. The line with 5.Bd3 seems to give White an edge (but nothing too significant) after 5...g6 6.c3 Bb4!, while 6.Bd3 f5 7.Nf3!? is an interesting sacrifice which gives White some good attacking chances and deserves a test. If you aren't happy with one (or both) of these lines as Black then you could give 4...Nc6!? a closer look.

Remember – If you prefer Black can transpose to 2.Qf3 c6 3.Nc3 by playing (after 2.Nc3) 2...c6 when 3.Qf3 is the only testing move.

B) 2.Qf3!

If a refutation of 1...Nf6 is ever found then it will undoubtedly begin with this move.

2...c6



B1) 3.Nc3 B2) 3.Nh3 B3) 3.Bd3

Others:

- 3.d3? gives Black more than one way to get a good game. 3...d5
- 3.Qf5? e6 4.Nf3 was tried once by Rekursiv but 4...d5 gives Black a great position.
- 3.c3 Qc7 is fine for Black.

- 3.Bc4 d5 4.Nh3 dxc4 (4...Qa5 5.b4 Kd8 6.Qf5 e6 7.bxa5 {7.Qg5 Qc7 ∞} 7...Bb4 {7...Ne4? 8.Bxd5 exf5 is good for White; 7...Ng4 8.Kd1 Nxb2 looks very dubious but may be possible} 8.c3 Ng4 9.f4 Bxc3 10.Qc2 Na6 11.Ba3 Nxb2 I would prefer White's chances here, but the position is very messy and unclear) 5.d4 (the most aggressive but Black isn't really in danger. After 5.d3 or 5.0-0 Black can also play 5...Bxb3 and untangle his knight) 5...Bxb3 6.Qf4 and now 6...Na6 7.d5 Qc8 or 6...Qc7 7.Qe5 e6 8.f3 Na6 are interesting and by no means worse for Black.
- 3.b4 Qc7 (3...Qb6? 4.Qf5 e6 5.Nf3 or 5.Ba6 look good for White) 4.Qf4 (4.d3? is good for Black after either 4...Qg3, 4...Qf4 or 4...d5!?!; 4.Qf5 e6 5.Nf3 {5.Ba6? bxa6 6.Nf3 Kinenveu – Rekursiv, FICS 18/08/08 (2 2 r) 6...Bd6! is very good for Black} 5...Bd6 with an unclear game after 6.Bb2 or 6.Bd3) 4...d5!?! (4...Qxf4 is a safer option) 5.Qg5!?! (5.Qd6 Qxd6 6.f3 =) 5...e5 6.Qxg7 ∞
- 3.Na3!?! is an untested move that doesn't seem so bad at all. White will follow with a quick Na3-c4 with obvious threats. Some lines: 3...e6 (not the only good move: 3...Qa5!?! 4.b4 Qd5 {4...Kd8!?! e.g. 5.bxa5 Ne4 6.Qxe4 e5; 4...Qc7} 5.Bd3 e6 ∞; 3...Qc7!?!; 3...d5? 4.Nb5! {4.Nh3 immediately can be met by 4...Bg4! 5.Ng5 Kd7 and White has no clear way to take advantage of Black's temporarily exposed king} 4...cxb5 5.Nh3 Bxb3 6.Qf4 Qd6 7.Bb5+ Kd8 8.Qe5 is winning for White) 4.c3 (4.Nb5 cxb5 5.Bb5 Nc6 6.Nh3 Qa5 7.b4 Kd8 ∞; 4.Nh3? Qa5 5.b4 Qd5 followed by ...Ke8-d8 is good for Black) 4...Qc7 5.Nc4 Qg3 6.Kd1 Kd8 7.Nd6 (7.Ne5!?! d5 8.Ba6 bxa6 9.Qxg3 Ne4 10.d3 Na6 is at least OK for Black) 7...Bxd6 8.Ba6 bxa6 9.Qd5 exd5 10.hxg3 Ne4 (10...h5 is slightly better for Black) 11.d3 Nd2 (again Black can opt for a small advantage with 11...Nxf2) 12.Rxh7 and Black has more than enough compensation for the small material deficit.

B1) 3.Nc3

This has never been as popular for White as 3.Nh3 or 3.Bd3 but it can lead to more complicated play than either and (according to Wildchess) scores significantly better than either in practical play.

3...Qa5



B1.1) 4.Bb5 **B1.2) 4.Bd3** **B1.3) 4.Ba6** **B1.4) 4.b4**

Others:

- 4.Nh3 – see 3.Nh3 Qa5 4.Nc3, line B2.1.

B1.1) 4.Bb5

This gives Black three reasonable lines.

4...d5

I'll take this as the main move as I've analysed it more than the others.

- 4...e6 5.b4 (5.Kd1!? is possible when 5...d5, 5...Bd6 and 5...Kd8 are all interesting possibilities) 5...Kd8 (5...Qxb4!?) 6.Qd1 Ng4 7.f4 Qxb4 resulted in an interesting position in Rekursiv – Tipau, FICS 20/01/08 (5 12 r)

- 4...Kd8 5.Qf5 e6 6.Qg5 Qb4!? (6...Ba3? 7.b4! is bad but 6...Ke8 7.Qxg7 is perhaps possible). After 6...Qb4 the position is unclear and complicated.

5.b4 d4

The most ambitious and complicated move. Others:

- 5...Qd8? 6.Nh3 Bxh3 7.Bd3

- 5...Bg4?! 6.Nh3! (6.Qf5 Bxf5 doesn't give White very much) 6...Bxf3 7.Ng5 Kd8 8.Ne6+ fxe6 9.bxa5 and White has some advantage here.

- 5...Kd8 6.Qf5 Bxf5 7.bxa5 is a playable alternative.

6.Qf5

- 6.Nd5 e6 7.Nc7+ (7.Qf5 transposes to 6.Qf5 e6 7.Nd5) 7...Kd8 8.Qg4 Nxg4 9.Nxa8 (9.a4!? Nd7 is an interesting option) 9...Qxa2 10.Bf1 and Black has the easier play to balance a small material deficit.

6...e6

- 6...Bxf5? 7.Nd5 e6 8.Nc7+ Kd8 9.Nxa8 +-

7.Ba6

- 7.Nd5? is very risky e.g. 7...exf5 8.Nc7+ Kd8 9.Nxa8 Bd6 10.g3 Re8 -+ It's very hard for White to prevent this kind of play.

7...b6

- 7...exf5?! 8.Bxb7 Qh5 9.g4 (not 9.f3? Bd6 10.g3? Bxg3!) 9...Qh4 10.Kd1 d3 11.cxd3 and White is probably better although it remains complicated.

8.Nd5

- 8.Nb5 Qxa6 gives Black enough play.

8...cxd5 and now **9.Bc4 Kd8 10.Ba6 Ke8** is an amusing repetition, but not really forced. The position remains complex.

Line (B1.1) Conclusion

Black has three interesting options on move four (and further options within these lines). With so many decent choices you wouldn't expect 4.Bb5 to be critical and it's not. All Black's moves in these lines are quite natural for the 1...Nf6 variation, so it's not really important to memorise anything either – if only every line was like this!

B1.2) 4.Bd3 e6 5.Bg6

- 5.b4 now 5...Qh5 transposes to 4.b4 Qh5 5.Bd3 e6 (line B1.4), which is OK for Black, but 5...Kd8!? (after 5.b4) also seems playable.

5...Kd8 6.Bxf7 Rf8



7.b4

○ 7.g4 d5! (7...Qb4 8.b3 Qd6 9.Nd5 Qg3 10.Kd1 Qxf2 11.Ne7 Ke8 12.Rf1 Rf2 13.Rxf2 Na6 14.b4 +-) 8.b4 Qc7 9.Na4 Qg3 10.Kd1 Qxf2 11.Rf1 Rf2 12.Rxf2 b6 and Black is OK. If necessary he can defend a rook invasion by ...Bc8-d7-e8 and ...Kd8-c8, meanwhile White must watch for ...a7-a5. See 'A Misplaced King' in the Typical Themes and Ideas section for a closer look at this position.

7...Qh5 8.g4 Qh4 9.Kd1 Qxf2 10.Rf1 Rf2 11.Rxf2 d5



Black is OK (12.Na4 b6 would transpose to 7.g4 above). This position was discussed earlier under 'A Misplaced King' in the Typical Themes and Ideas section.

Line (B1.2) Conclusion

With 4.Bd3 e6 White can force a queenless middlegame with both kings misplaced. While White will most likely be faster to the open file this won't be decisive in this case as Black can easily blockade and aim for queenside counterplay.

B1.3) 4.Ba6 e6



- 4...d5? 5.Bxb7 Kd8 6.b4 Ng4 7.Kd1 +-
- 4...Kd8?! 5.Qf5 (5.Bxb7 isn't clear after 5...Ne4, while 5...e6 transposes to 4...e6 5.Bxb7 Kd8) 5...e6 6.Qg5 (6.b4? Ne4 7.Qxe4 Qh5; 6.Bxb7 Ne4 ∞) 6...h6 (Black has two other unpleasant options: 6...Ke8 looks natural but 7.Qxg7! is too strong as 7...Qf5 8.Nf3 bxa6 9.Ne4 wins for White; 6...Qf5 7.Qxf5 bxa6 leaves White a pawn up) 7.Bxb7 (7.Qxg7 is also good for White) 7...hxg5

5.Kd1!?

- 5.b4 Kd8 6.Qg4 (6.Bxb7 Ne4 7.Qxe4 transposes) 6...Nxc4 7.Bxb7 Qf5 8.f4 (8.Nf3 Bd6 9.Ne4 Bg3 10.Kd1 Bxf2 11.Rf1 Qg4+ 12.Rf3 d5 13.Nd6 d4 ∞; 8.f3 is also possible) 8...Qh5 9.Nf3 Bd6 10.h4 Bxf4 11.g4 Qe5 ∞
- 5.Bxb7 Kd8 6.Nh3 (6.b4 Ne4 7.Qxe4 transposes to 5.b4 Kd8 6.Qg4 Nxc4 7.Bxb7 above; 6.h3 Ne4 is also possible) 6...Ng4 7.Kd1 Nxf2! ∞ (7...Nxe3 is more dangerous for Black).

5...Kd8

- 5...Bd6 could be investigated if there's some problem with 5...Kd8.

6.Qf4 Bd6 7.Qg5 Qf5 8.Qxf5

- 8.Bd3? Bxh2 +-
- 8.d3!? bxa6 9.Ne4 (8.Nf3 Bxh2) 9...Qa5 10.b4 Qa4 11.Ke1 h6 12.Qxg7 (12.Nc5 Bxc5 13.Qxg7 ∞) 12...Bxh2 13.Nc5 d6 14.Nxa4 and White's pressure on the b-file balances the small material deficit.

8...bxa6 9.g3 Bb4 gives Black good play for the pawn with the bishops after a quick ...Bc8-a6. It's likely that White will quickly offer the pawn back with d2-d3 rather than allow the Black bishop into e2 or f1.

Line (B1.3) Conclusion

After 4.Ba6 e6 White has several options. The most interesting are 5.b4 and 5.Bxb7 which result in a material imbalance with Black having a queen against various White pieces. This type of game appeals to some White players so it's important to be happy with them. The other White option is 5.Kd1 resulting in a different type of game, White wins a pawn but Black can generate good compensation.

B1.4) 4.b4 Qh5



- 4...Kd8 is a possibility, but I expect White can achieve some advantage with 5.bxa5 or 5.Qf5!?

5.Nd5

- 5.Nh3 Kd8 (5...Qh4 may be a possibility too) 6.Nd5 cxd5 7.Bb5 Nc6 8.Qd5 d6 9.f3 Bxh3 10.Qf5 e6
- 5.Bb2 e6 6.Nd5 – see 5.Nd5 e6 6.Bb2
- 5.Nb5 e6 6.Nc7+ - see 5.Nd5 e6 6.Nc7+
- 5.Bd3 e6 6.Nd5 – see 5.Nd5 e6 6.Bd3

5...e6



6.Nc7+

- 6.Nh3 Qh4 (6...cxd5? 7.Ng5 Kd8 8.Nxe6 gives White a big advantage) 7.Kd1 Qc4! 8.Bxc4 Kd8 9.Bb2 Bd6 10.Ng5 Ne4 11.d3 Nxf2 12.Rf1 Be5 13.Bd4 b6 14.Nxh7 ∞
- 6.Bb2 cxd5 (6...Qh4? 7.g3 Qxg3 8.Nc7+ Kd8 9.f4!) 7.Bd3 (7.Nh3? Kd8 8.Bxf6 Qg4) 7...Bd6 (Black has other interesting ideas here, such as 7...Qh4 8.g3 Qe4 ∞ or 7...Kd8 8.Qxh5 then 8...Ne4 or 8...Bd6) 8.Be5 Qh4 (8...Kd8 could be as good or even better 9.Bb5 Bxb4! 10.Bc7+ Ke8 and 11.Bxb8?? Qd5 12.d3 Qa5 wins, while 11.Rb1 Na6 seem good) 9.g3 Qd4!? (9...Qe4 is the other possible move 10.Bb5 Bxb4 11.Nh3 {11.Bxb8?? Qd5 0-1} 11...d6 12.Ng5 Kd8 13.Nxf7 g6 14.Bf6+ Ke8 15.Bxh8 Qxe3 16.f4 Nc6 with a probable draw) 10.Qxb7 (10.Nh3? Qxe3 11.Ng5 Kd8 doesn't give White enough) 10...Ng4 11.f4 Nxh2 12.Bxd4 h5 and only Black can have realistic winning ambitions.

- 6.Bd3 cxd5 (6...Qh4? 7.g3 Qe4 8.Nh3 d6 9.Ng5 Kd8 10.Nxf7 Qxe3 11.Ne7 +-)
- 7.Bb2 - see 6.Bb2 cxd5 7.Bd3 above

6...Kd8 7.Nxe6 Qh4 8.g3 Qxg3



9.Bb2

- 9.Nf3 Bd6 doesn't seem as threatening.
- 9.Bh3 f5 10.Bb2 Bd6 occurred in Mrundersun – Tipau, FICS 21/05/08 (5 5 r), now 11.f4 is necessary, when after 11...Re8 Black can unravel with ...Bd6-c7 (or ...Bd6-e7 is allowed) followed up by ...d7-d5; while keeping queenside ideas of ...a7-a5 followed by ...Nb8-a6 after the tension has been removed from b4-a5.

9...Bd6 10.f4 Re8 11.0-0-0 now **11...Be5 12.d4 d5** is an one idea, alternatively Black could try **11...a5** or **11...Bc7**

Line (B1.4) Conclusion

4.b4 seems White's best attempt at an advantage after 3.Nc3. White has various tricky tries on moves 5 or 6 but with careful Black play only the main variation with 5.Nd5 e6 6.Nc7+ can cause problems. Black's position is a little cramped but I think he should be able to unravel and achieve a decent position so long as he's careful.

B2) 3.Nh3 Qa5



B2.1) 4.Nc3 B2.2) 4.b4

- 4.c3?! allows Black to play in the same way as in B2.1 but after 4...Kd8 5.Qf5 e6 6.Qg5 Bd6 the extra option of ...Qa5-d5 is very useful e.g. 7.Ba6 Qd5 8.d3 bxa6 as in Franta – Tipau, FICS 13/02/08 (3 5 r).

B2.1) 4.Nc3



4...Kd8

• 4...e6!? 5.Ng5 Kd8 6.Nxe6 is a possible pawn sacrifice. The e-file could potentially be very helpful for Black although I'm not convinced it's entirely correct. This line was discussed earlier in the Typical Themes and Ideas section under 'Material Imbalances', Pawn Sacrifices.

5.Qf5 e6 6.Qg5 Bd6



• I suspect 6...Ke8 7.Qxg7! is very good for White.

7.Ba6

○ 7.b4? Qf5 8.f4 Qg4 9.Qxg4 Bxb4 +-

○ 7.g3 Ke8 8.f3 (8.b4 Qd5 9.Qxd5 Ng4 10.f3 Nxh2 11.Ne4 d6 12.Ng5 f6 13.Nxh7 =)

8...h6 9.Qxg7 (9.b4 Ne4 10.fxe4 hxg5 11.bxa5 Bxg3) 9...Qd8 ∞

7...Ke8 8.f3

○ 8.Qf5? Bxh2 9.Bxb7 exf5 10.g4 h5 11.g5 Qf5 0-1

8...b6 9.g3 h6 10.Qxg7 Qb4 11.Ng5! hxg5 12.Bb7 Na6 13.b3 Bf4! ∞

Line (B2.1) Conclusion

The main line here (with 7.Ba6 and 8.f3) could prove quite difficult to play in practice, and Black will certainly have to play very carefully, but the queen will always give him counter-chances.

B2.2) 4.b4 Kd8 5.Qf5

○ 5.bxa5? Ng4 6.Kd1 Nxf2 7.Ng5 h6 8.Nxf7 leaves Black a pawn up.

5...e6



6.Qg5!?

○ 6.bxa5 was one line I used to think gave White a safe advantage but after 6...Ne4 7.Qxe4 g5 I'm not so convinced anymore. Objectively White may have some advantage but in practise Black can often makes good use of his b-pawn (after moves like ...Nb8-a6, ...Ra8-b8 and ...b7-b5-b4 etc) and also has very good chances of a kingside attack after White castles - reasonable compensation for the misplaced king and small material loss.

6...Qd5

● 6...Ke8?! was my initial preference when I dabbled with 1...Nf6 a few years ago
Now:

- 7.Qf5 Kd8 repeats
- 7.f3 Ne4 (7...Qc7!?) 8.fxe4 Qf5 9.Qxf5 g5 or 8.d4 Nxc5 (8...Qxc5) 9.bxa5 g5
- 7.Qg6 Kd8 8.Qxc7! (8.bxa5? Ng4 is good for Black; 8.Qg5 repeats)
- 7.Qxc7! is the most off-putting for me. I suspect White is doing very well here, possibly winning.

7.Bd3

○ 7.d4?! is quite a common reaction from people who haven't seen the position before: 7...Bd6! (7...Qxc7! Kinvenveu – Rekursiv, FICS 15/07/08 (2 2 r)) and the tactics seem to work in Black's favour e.g. 8.e4 Qf5! or 8.b5 Qf5!

7...Bd6!



This gives a very complicated looking position but the situation can simplify quickly.

8.Nc3!

The most testing move.

- 8.Qxd5 Ng4 9.f3 Nxc5 10.Bxc7 d5 is OK for Black, Rekursiv – Tipau, FICS 18/05/08 (5 12 r) is a good example of how to play Black here: 11.Nc3 (now Black is

a tempo up from the main line with 8.Nc3. Another model Black game, Ahyum – Tipau1, SchemingMind 01/07/08 went: 11.c4 d4 12.d3 e5 13.e4 f6 14.g4 b6 15.Nd2 a5 16.Bb2 axb4 17.0-0-0 Na6 18.Rh1 Be6 19.Nf1 Nb4 20.a3 Nc2 21.Ba1 b5 22.Nd2 Ne1 23.Rh8+ Bg8 24.c5 Nxd3 and Black went on to convert his extra pawn) 11...d4 12.Na4 b6 13.d3 e5 14.e4 f6 15.Nb2 a5 16.a4 Be6 17.bxa5 Na6 18.Nc4 Bxc4 19.a5?! b5 20.Ba3 b4 21.Kf2 Kc7 22.Bc1? (22.Bxb4, suggested by Rekursiv, should be enough to draw after 22...Rb8 23.Rb1 Rb2 24.Rxb2 c5 25.c4!) 22...Rh8 23.Bh6 gxh6 0-1 Although in this game White's play was far from perfect Black should always be aiming for this type of queenside play, while safeguarding the kingside as White is always faster to the h-file.

- 8.b5 Qf5 9.Qxf5 Bxh2 10.Bxh7 d5 (10...d6), is also OK for Black.
- 8.Rf1!? was played against me by Sordid(C), before it switched to 8.Nc3. 8...Bg3 9.fxg3 Na6!?! (9...Qd6 10.Qxg7! f5 11.Bb2 Qf8 12.Bf6+ Ke8 13.Be7 Qf7 14.Rf3 Qh5 15.Bxf5 Qf5 16.g4 Qf4 17.Bd6 Na6 18.Bb8 1-0 Sordid(C) – guest (Tipau), 18/02/08)

∞

8...Qf5

- 8...Bxb4? 9.Rb1 h6 (9...b5? 10.Nf4 +-) 10.Qxg7 gives White too much play e.g. 10...Qh5 11.f3 b6 12.Bb2 Qh4+ 13.g3 Qb4 14.Bc3 Qf8 15.Bf6+ Ke8 16.Bh7 +- 9.Qxf6 Bxh2 10.Bxh7



10...d5

- 10...d6 is a more solid option if Black doesn't like White's potential play down the d-file later on.

11.Bb2

○ 11.b5!?! d4 12.Nd5 exd5 13.exd4 gave White some very interesting play in Sordid(C) – Guest (Tipau), FICS 29/06/08

Now (after 11.Bb2) Black has different options:

- 11...d4!?
- 11...Bd7 Δ ...Bd7-e8 and ...Nb8-d7
- 11...Nd7 Δ ...f7-f6 and ...Nd7-f8 if White plays his rook to the h-file.
- 11...b5 to prevent a b4-b5 push from White and also to increase the strength of later queenside play based around ...a7-a5.

Black's ideas are not limited to those given above but he shouldn't get too carried away. In addition to the obvious 0-0-0, Rd1-h1-h8 threat White can also play strongly in the centre after 0-0-0, d4, e4, e4xd5, d5. Black should make sure he is ready to meet this plan in a satisfactory way.

Line (B2.2) Conclusion

The old refutation 6.bxa5 is nothing to be too worried about. From experience I believe Black can generate enough play to get a good game. The more ambitious 6.Qg5 is much tougher for Black when 7...Bd6! is an important move. I haven't found a way for White to achieve a definite advantage against this line so far, but 8.Nc3 seems the most accurate way to continue.

B3) 3.Bd3

A very natural move and where most of current theory has built up. In general the lines are more forcing than after 3.Nc3 or 3.Nh3 so it's possible to analyse far deeper into the game (it's been necessary to assess various endings in order to determine whether certain lines are playable).

3...Qb6



Now White must reckon with the attack on e3. Actually this is the only good move, but others have been tried:

- 3...Qc7? 4.Qf4 (4.Bxh7!?) is White's simplest when Black loses a pawn following 4...Qxf4 5.Bg6 or 5.Bf5.
- 3...Qa5? is almost as common on as 3...Qb6 on Wildchess but White is actually winning after 4.b4 Kd8 (4...Qh5 5.Qg4 Qxg4 {5...e6 6.Bg6 Kd8 7.Bxf7 +-} 6.Bf5 e6 7.Bg6 hxg6 8.Nf3 +-; 4...Qd5? 5.Qf5 +-) 5.Qf5 e6 6.Qg5 +-

B3.1) 4.Bg6 B3.2) 4.Bf5

Others:

- 4.Bxh7?! allows Black to obtain strong play after either 4...e6 or 4...d5 followed by ...Ke8-d8 (but not 4...Kd8? 5.Qf5 e6 6.Qg5).
- 4.Qxc6 Ng4 5.f3 Nxh2 6.Bxh7 clearly doesn't give Black any problems.
- 4.Nh3 Kd8 (4...Qxe3?! 5.Ng5 Kd8 6.Nxf7 is better for White) 5.Bf5 (5.Qf5 e6 6.Qg5 Bb4 7.c3 Bxc3) 5...e6 6.Bxe6 Qb4 7.Nc3 Qh4 8.Qg3 (8.Kd1?! Qg4 9.Qxg4 just hands Black a tempo and misplaces the king when compared to 8.Qg3) 8...Qxg3 is OK for Black.
- 4.Qf5!? e6 5.Qc5 (5.Ba6 Qb4 6.c3 Qh4 {6...Qe4 and 6...Qf4 seem OK as well} 7.g3 Qe4 {7...Qf4} 8.Nf3 Nxa6 =; 5.Nf3 Qxe3!; 5.b4!? was played in Wbapi(C) – Rekursiv, FICS 11/07/08 (3 0 r) which continued 5...Qc7 6.Nf3 Qf4 {6...Bd6!?!} 7.Bb2 g6 {7...Bc5!?! 8.bxc5 Na6} 8.Kd1 Qg4 9.Kc1 and now rather than 9...Kd8?! 10.Qg5 Black should have played 9...Bd6 with a complicated position) 5...Bd6 (5...Qxc5 6.Bg6 hxg6 leaves White a pawn up; 5...d6 6.Bg6 hxg6 7.Qg5 Qa5 8.b4 Qxg5 9.h4 again leaves White a clear pawn up) 6.Bg6 (6.Qxc6 Ng4 {6...Nc6? 7.Bg6

wins for White after either 7...Kd8 8.h3! or 7...hxg6 8.Na3} 7.f3 Nxb2 8.Bxb7 Nc6 9.Nc3!? Nb4 10.Nb5 d6 11.Nc7+ {11.Nxa7 Nxa2 and Black should hold the draw quite easily here} 11...Kf8! 12.a3 Nxc2 13.Nxa8 g5 14.Ke2 f5 15.Rh1 b5 with a fortress) 6...Kd8 (6...hxg6 7.Qxc6 {7.h4 Shiroy – Gmonubense, FICS 29/05/07 (3 0 r), 7...Qa5! Δ 8.Qb4 Bh2 is at least fine for Black} 7...Rxb2 gives Black drawing chances due to the opposite coloured bishops) 7.Qxc6 Ng4 8.f4 (8.f3 hxg6 {8...Nxb2 9.Bxb7 gives Black drawing chances} 9.fxg4 Rxb2 is fine for Black) 8...hxg6 (8...Nxb2 9.Bxb7 again gives Black drawing chances) 9.h4 Nf2 gives Black compensation due to his active knight.

B3.1) 4.Bg6 Kd8 5.Bf5

- 5.Qxc6? Ng4 6.f3 hxg6 7.fxg4 Rxb2 leaves Black a piece up
- 5.Bxf7 Rf8 6.Nc3 (6.b3 and 6.b4 are probably more interesting tries) 6...Qxb2 7.Nh3 g5 8.Qf7 Rxf7 9.f4 gives White some play along the f-file and Black must be careful, but after 9...d6 10.fxg5 (10.f5 Kc7 11.0-0 now Black can defend with either 11...Be6 12.f6 Bd5 13.e4 exf6 14.exd5 Nd7 or 11...Nd7 12.f6 exf6 when Black has a safe square on b8) 10...Na6 Black is defending.

5...e6



6.Qxc6

- 6.Bxe6 Qxe3 (6...Qb4!? Δ ...Qb4-h4 might be possible) 7.Nf3 (7.d4? Bd6 8.g3 Re8+ 9.Be3 Bf4 10.Nc3 d5 11.0-0-0 Na6 +- Yokke – Tipau, FICS 20/01/08 (5 5 r)) 7...Bd6 8.Ne5 Bxe5 9.0-0 Re8 10.Re1 Re2 11.Rxe2 d5 is OK for Black e.g. 12.d4 Na6 13.b4 Bh3 (13...Bg4 14.Bf4 Rc8 may be possible) 14.gxh3 Kd7 15.Be3 Re8 16.Nd2 f5 with enough counterplay for the small material deficit (if 17.Nf3 Rxe3 18.Re1 g5! 19.Re7+ Kd8 20.Rxb7?? g4! Black has a winning pawn ending).

6...Nc6!

I much prefer playing this before ...Nf6-e4 (or g4) because if 6...Ne4 7.Bxe4 Nc6 White has extra options with Ng1-f3.

7.d4



An important move, found a long time ago in analysis with Siggemann (and along with 3.Nh3 Qa5 4.b4 Kd8 5.Qf5 e6 6.bxa5 was one of the key lines I used to think gave White significantly better chances). White recognises that by playing ...Nc6-b4-xc2 Black would give him very strong play along the c-file and so is happy to allow it, while at the same time prevents a knight jump to e5. When re-evaluating the variations I found a new wrinkle for Black which seemed to give a playable game (...Bf8-d6 before capturing on c2), however this refutation has since been re-refuted by Rekursiv! Fortunately Black has further options which seem quite reasonable.

- 7.a3 Ne4 8.Bxe4 Ne5;
- 7.c3 Ne4 8.Bxe4 Ne5 and
- 7.b4 Ne4 8.Bxe4 Ne5 all give Black too much play.
- 7.f4!/? (this has never been played but has the same ideas as 7.d4, with comparable advantages in some lines) 7...Ne4 8.Bxe4 Nb4 (8...b6?! is not very effective as White hasn't weakened the light squares with d2-d4) 9.a3 Na2 (9...Nxc2?! 10.Rc1 Bc5 11.d4 Ke8 12.dxc5 with massive pressure for White) 10.Nc3 Bb4 and, with the White knight on c3, ...b6 ideas are effective again. Black has reasonable compensation.

7...Ng4

- 7...Nb4 8.a3 Ng4 9.Bxg4 transposes to 7...Ng4 8.Bxg4 Nb4 9.a3
- It would be nice if Black could continue 7...b6, holding back ...Nf6-g4 yet again to prevent Ng1-f3 ideas, but I'm not sure that White can't just take on e6 now. If you're happy to play Black after 8.Bxe6 Ba6 (8...Nb4 9.a3 Nxc2? {9...Na2} 10.Rc1 Bc5 11.dxc5 Ke8 12.Rc7 Kf8 is horrible) then it might be worth looking at this move in more detail.

8.Bxg4



8...b6!?

- 8...Bd6 9.g3! Rekursiv's important wrinkle in this line (9.f4 seems more natural and aggressive but after 9...Nb4 10.a3 Nxc2 11.Rc1 Ke8 12.d5 Bb8 13.Nf3 g5! {the key move – which doesn't work in the analogous line after 9.g3} the position is very unclear. If Black can survive on the kingside he will slowly unravel his queenside pieces) 9...Nb4 (9...b6!?) 10.a3 Nxc2? (10...Na2 is necessary, when Black has some compensation similar to 8...Nb4 9.a3 Na2. Black players might prefer to play this way and give White a chance to play 9.f4, then switching to the more normal lines in response to 9.g3.) 11.Rc1 Ke8 12.Nf3 Bxg3 (12...f6 13.Ne5 Bxe5 14.Rc7 Kf7 15.Rxb7 Rc8 16.0-0 Rc2 17.Kh1 Rxf2 18.b4 also wins for White) 13.Rc7 Kf8 14.Rxb7 Ke7 15.Ke2 Rc8 16.Rc1 Rc2 17.Rxc2 Kd8 18.b4! (18.a4 a5 19.b4 Kc7 allows Black to block the pawn on the 5th rank instead of the 6th) 18...Kc7 19.b5 a5 20.b6+ +- Having his king free from blocking a pawn is an important plus for White and will allow him to win a tempo later. The situation with the a-pawns is also favourable for White – it would be an achievement for Black to only lose by one tempo from here!
- 8...Nb4 9.a3 Na2 (9...Bd6 10.g3! transposes to 8...Bd6 9.g3 Nb4 10.a3) is a very reasonable alternative to 8...b6.



Rekursiv – Tipau, FICS 27/01/08 (5 12 r) continued: 10.Nc3 (10.Bd2 b6 {10...Nc1 immediately fixing White's c-pawn so that a future ...b7-b6 followed by ...Bc8-a6 is stronger is also possible} 11.Bb4 Ba6!? 12.Be7+ Kc8 13.Nc3 {13.c4?! Nc1} 13...Bf1 looks good for Black) 10...Bb4 11.Nf3 f6 12.0-0 b6 13.Kh1 (13.Nb5!? Be1 14.Rxe1 a5 15.Nd6 Ba6 16.c4!? {16.Nf7+ Ke7 17.Nxh8 Bf1 18.g3 g5 leaves Black with enough play} with compensation for White is an interesting try.) 13...Bxc3 14.Bd2 now rather than 14...Ba6 15.c4 I think 14...d5 is a better try, clamping down the c4 square before playing ...Bc8-a6. Play could continue: 15.b4 Bd7 16.b5 g5 and Black transfers his attention to the kingside with good play. Note that playing on both sides is very typical of this line. Black usually starts by developing his queenside, but can later switch his attention onto White's king with ...g7-g5 (-g4-g3) and ...h7-h5 with a strong attack. I'm sure White can also deviate from the game earlier on but Black's compensation is undeniable.

9.b4

- 9.a3?! allows Black's bishop to infiltrate immediately with 9...Ba6 when if 10.c4 Bb4+ 11.axb4?! Nb4 is good for Black.
- 9.Nf3?! Bd6 10.Ng5 Bxh2 11.Nxh7 Ba6 and Black has fantastic play; note that ...Kd8-e7 followed by ...Ra8-h8 ideas are also in the works now, in addition to the obvious play with the active bishop and knight.

9...a5

To me this seems the most natural move, but Black's play seems to run out of steam.

- 9...Ba6!?



10.b5 (10.c4 may be better, although 10...Rc8 {10...Bxc4!?!} with the idea of ...Ba6xc4 gives Black good play) 10...Nb4 (10...Rc8? 11.a3 is good for White) 11.a3 Na2 12.Nc3 (12.Bd2 Nc1 {12...Rc8!?! Δ 13.bxa6 Nc1 14.Bb4 Nd3+ 0-1} gives Black good play) 12...Nb4! 13.bxa6 Rc8! – I haven't looked all that closely at 9...Ba6 but it does seem yet another promising possibility for Black.

10.Nf3

- 10.a4 axb4 11.Ba3 Nb4 12.Nf3 f6 transposes to the main line.

10...axb4 11.a4 f6

- 11...g5!?! might have been worth a try

12.Ba3 Nb4 13.a5!

- 13.Bxb4 Ba6 (13...g5!?! 14.a5 bxa5 15.Ra7 Rxa7) gives Black compensation.

13...g5 was Rekursiv – Tipau, FICS 26/01/08. White is better here, because of the annoying a-pawn, but Black still has chances as White's king will never be completely safe and the position is a little random. This is one of the great things about 1...Nf6 (especially in some of the critical lines), even if things start to go wrong there are lots of swindling chances – which in fact helped me win this game later! So 1...Nf6 players also have luck on their side.

Line (B3.1) Conclusion

The real starting point of this variation is 7.d4, after which Black has a some good choices. The first good deviation from the main line is 8...Nb4 9.a3 Na2 where I got some nice play in a game against Rekursiv. Another good idea seems to be 9...Ba6!?!; although I would suggest looking a little closer before playing it. In both cases Black gets very good compensation for his lost pawn. The main line with 9...a5 seems to run into difficulties after 13.a5!, so some repair work is required if you wish to venture that way.

B3.2) 4.Bf5 e6 5.Qxc6

- 5.Bxe6 Qxe3 6.Nf3 Bd6! (6...f6 7.0-0 Bc5 8.d4 0-0 9.Re1 Re8 10.Re7 Rxe7 11.dxc5 was good for White in Mrundersun – Tipau, FICS 20/01/08 (5 5 r)) 7.Ng5 (7.Ne5 was played twice against me by Franta, although I got the impression he was simply playing for a draw 7...Bxe5 8.0-0 0-0 9.Re1 Re8 10.Re7 Rxe7 => 7...f6 8.Nxh7 (8.Ne6? Bf4) 8...Bxh2 =

5...Nc6

Again I prefer playing this before ...Nf6-e4 in order to cut out any early Ng1-f3 ideas for White. It can also occasionally confuse White players into playing a move like c2-c3 or b2-b4, which they wouldn't play after 5...Ne4 6.Bxe4 Nc6. However delaying ...Nf6-e4 does have a drawback, demonstrated by White's next.

● 5...Ne4 6.Bxe4 Nc6 7.Nf3 Bd6 8.Ne5 Bxe5 9.Nc3 Nd4 (9...Ne5? 10.Nb5 Nc4 11.0-0 0-0 12.b3 +-) 10.Nd5 Nf3+ 11.gxf3 exd5 with good drawing chances for Black.

6.Bg6!



This is the plus point for White of playing 4.Bf5 rather than 4.Bg6 and the drawback for Black of 5...Nc6 instead of 5...Ne4.

○ 7.d4 isn't as good now that Black can castle: 7...Ng4 8.Bxg4 Bd6 (8...Nb4 9.Nf3 Bd6 10.a3 transposes) 9.Nf3 Bg3 10.hxg3 Nb4 11.a3 Nxc2 12.Rc1 b6 (12...h5 13.Rc7 0-0 14.Rxb7 Rc8 15.b4 didn't give Black enough to win in Rekursiv – Tipau, FICS 14/05/08 (5 12 r)) 13.Rc7 Kf8 14.Rxh7 a5 now Black has good winning chances due to the open c and h-files e.g. 15.g3 Ba6 16.b4 axb4 17.Kd2 f5 (Δ ...Kf8-f7, ...Ra8-h8-h1) 18.Rc1 Ke7 19.Rc7 (19.Rh1? Rc8 20.Rh8 Rc2+ 21.Kd1 Be2+ 22.Ke1 Bf3 0-1; 19.f4? Rh8 20.Rh1 Rc8) 19...Kf7 20.Rc3! (20.Rc1 Rh8 leaves White without a good wasting move 21.Rh1 Rc8 -+) and now that White has defended well against the initial threats Black can slowly advance on the queenside with ...e6-e5 and ...f5-f4, pressurising White into making an error. Black has very good winning chances.

6...Kd8!?

● 6...hxg6 is the most natural move and a reasonable try. After 8.Nf3 f6 (8...f5 9.b4 Ne5 10.Nh4) 9.Na3 Nb4 10.Nb5 Nxa2 11.Nxa7 Rxh2 12.b4 g6 Sordid(C) – Guest (Tipau), FICS 18/02/08 Black drew without any difficulties; although it helps when the opponent has no idea about pawnitisation! Against a strong human player the two bishops would still give Black very good drawing chances, but I haven't analysed the position to a definite conclusion.

7.Bxf7

○ 7.f3 Ne4 (7...Nb4?! 8.a3 will give White good play on the c-file when Black takes on c2) 8.fxe4 (8.Bxe4 Bd6 9.g3 Nb4 10.a3 Nxc2) 8...hxg6 9.h4 Ne5!? (9...Nb4 10.a3 Nxc2 11.Rc1 gives White a lot of play) seems to give Black good play.

7...Ne5 8.Na3!



○ 8.b3 Ng4 9.f4 Nxb2 and I prefer Black here. As the position opens up the extra rook will be very important.

○ 8.Nf3 Nc4 9.0-0 Nxb2 10.Ng5 (10.Ne5 d6 11.Nf7 Ke8 12.Nxb2 is a comparably better version for Black because ...d7-d6 is inserted, so he's gained a tempo) 10...Rf8 11.Nf7+ Rxf7 12.f4 b5 (12...Ke8 13.f5 e5 14.f6 g6 15.f7+ Kf8 is possible. Black will play ...Ra8-b8 next, followed by either ...Rb8-b6-f6 or ...b5-b4-b3. White has no winning chances in either case) 13.f5 Bb7 14.e4 (14.g3 may be a better try) 14...Kc7 15.f6 (15.c4 b4 16.c5 Bc6 -+) 15...gxf6 16.Rf7 Kb6 -+. White can't take advantage of Black's advanced king, or avoid a rook exchange after ...Ra8-f8.

8...Ng4 9.f3

○ 9.f4 Nxb2 10.Nb5 d6 11.Nxa7 e5! (playing 11...h5 in the same style as the main line doesn't work now: 12.b4 h4 13.Bb2 Rh5 14.0-0-0 h3 15.gxh3 Rh2 16.Kb1 Rxd2 17.f5 +-). After 11...e5 Black has ideas of opening the f-file with a rook invasion. 12.b4 Bg4 (12...Rf8? 13.Bb2) 13.Bb2 Rf8 now Black has lots of play on the kingside with ...h7-h5-h4 etc and even ...g7-g5 if White is not careful. 14.a4 (14.d4? exf4; 14.d3? g5!) 14...Kc8 15.a5 Kb8 16.a6 b6 17.a7+ Ka8 18.c4 Bd1 19.c5 dxc5 is a natural continuation but now White has no obvious way to break through and so Black's counterplay can begin. Some sample lines: 20.Rc1 Bc2 21.d3 h5 22.Kf1 (22.Kf2 h4 23.Rh1 Bd1 24.Ke1 Be2) 22...h4 23.Kg1 h3 this sets up a nice pitfall for White (23...g5 24.g3 gxf4 25.gxh4 =) 24.gxh3! (Forced. If 24.g4 h2+ 25.Kh1 Bd1 26.Rxd1 g6 27.g5 exf4 28.Bf6 Rf7! {28...Rc8 29.Bc3 Rf8 30.Bf6 repeats} 29.b5 Rf8 30.e4 Rf7 and now White must block the long diagonal with either 31.d4 or 31.e5 when Black wins with 31...Rc7) 24...Rh8 and White can quite easily hold the draw here e.g. 25.e4 Rh1+ 26.Kg2 Rh2+ 27.Kg1 exf4 28.Bf6 g5 29.Bxg5 now White should advance the e-pawn whenever he's able. Eventually Black will have no choice but to acquiesce to the perpetual.

9...Nxb2 10.Nb5 d6!



● 10...b6? leads to a similar endgame to the main line after: 11.Nxa7 h5 12.b4 h4 13.Bb2 Rh5 (13...e5 14.0-0-0 h3 15.gxh3 Rh2 16.Kb1 Rxd2 17.f4 +- Black must either block the e-pawns, which will allow a winning queen ending later, or unbalance the pawn structures further with ...e5xf4, when White's 4 vs. 2 on the queenside will triumph) 14.0-0-0 h3 15.gxh3 Rh2 16.Kb1 Rxd2 but now White has 17.b5! Δ Bb2-d4-xb6 +-, the only defence to this idea is 17...e5 but then 18.f4 is still winning for White.

11.Nxa7 h5 12.b4 h4 13.Bb2 Rh5!



● 13...e5? leads to a similar ending, but once again the difference is in the details 14.0-0-0 h3 (14...Bh3 15.g3 Bf1 16.gxh4 Bc4 17.Rh1 Bxa2 18.Rh7 Rxh7 +- 19.d4 exd4 20.Kd1 g5 21.Ke1 Δ 21...g4 22.f4) 15.gxh3 Rh2 16.Kb1 Rxd2 17.f4 +- e.g. 17...exf4 18.Bc3 g5 (18...Be6 19.a4 Ba2 20.Ka1 doesn't help) 19.Be1 g4 20.Bg3 d5 21.b5 b6 22.a4 d4 23.exd4 Kd7 24.a5 bxa5 25.b6 Bb7 26.c4 Kc6 27.c5 Kb5 28.c6 Kb4 29.cxb7 and now the White win is obvious 1-0.

14.0-0-0

○ 14.g4 hxg3 15.0-0-0 transposes to the main variation

14...h3 15.gxh3

○ 15.g4?! Rh4 16.Rh1 h2 is very risky for White. To create winning chances he will have to advance his pawns without allowing many exchanges; because if Black can infiltrate with his rook or bishop White will have to sacrifice his rook for the h-pawn to prevent it from queening.

15...Rh2 16.Kb1 Rxd2



Now the opposite coloured bishops seem to be enough to secure Black the draw. If White avoids sacrificing his bishop then Black will follow up with ...g7-g6, so the game could continue: 17.Bxg7 e5 18.Kc1 (18.a4 b6 19.b5 Bb7 is similar, Black has every possible pawn break covered) 18...b6 (18...d5?? 19.c3 followed by e3-e4 is a possible way for Black to go wrong) 19.b5 Bb7 20.a4 Ke7 21.c4 Kd7 22.e4 Ke7 23.Kb1 Kd7 24.Ka1 Ke7 25.a5 bxa5 26.b6 Kd7 27.f4 exf4 28.e5 dxe5 29.c5 Kc6 30.Kb1 Kb5 31.c6 Kb4 with a draw

Line (B3.2) Conclusion

After 4.Bf5 White has to play accurately to cause Black any problems (6.Bg6! being the crucial move). Assuming that White does play optimally Black has several options. If a problem with the main line arises then there are two deviations which appear to give very good drawing chances (5...Ne4 and 6...hxg6), but for now the main variation with 6...Kd8 seems best, when Black can hold for a draw with accurate play.

Overall Conclusion

Naturally against a critical opening like 1.e3 there are several variations where Black is walking a fine line but overall I think that this is a promising variation. Black can often take the initiative if White doesn't play accurately. These hidden pitfalls have already enabled me to notch up a few quick victories against both weaker and stronger players. Of course it shouldn't be that our sole motivation in playing an opening is the hope that our opponent will make a mistake and fall for a trick...but when the opponent starts to think on move three it's certainly nice to know that these possibilities exist!

Although essentially this work is a guide for Black players, I have tried to be as objective as possible. White has ways to make life very difficult in certain lines, and I've pointed out which lines I consider the most challenging and force Black to make many accurate defensive moves.

I don't know of any lines where White can achieve a significant advantage by force. The key lines, which occur in the vast majority of games (at least in my experience), are (after 2.Qf3 c6) 3.Nh3 Qa5 4.b4, 3.Bd3 Qb6 4.Bf5 and 3.Bd3 Qb6 4.Bg6. Potential 1...Nf6 players should be especially clued up on those lines; which also happen to be the most dangerous for Black.

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