## Grandmaster Repertoire

## 1.e4 vs <br> Minor Defences

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## Contents

Key to symbols used \＆Bibliography ..... 4
Preface ..... 5
Alekhine
1 Rare Lines ..... 7
2 4．．．g6 ..... 27
3 4．．．． $\mathrm{m}_{\mathrm{a}} \mathrm{g} 4$ ..... 43
4 4．．．dxe5 ..... 63
Scandinavian
5 2．．．$勹 \mathrm{ff} 6$ ..... 96
6 2．．．新 xd 5 ..... 119
7 5．．．思g 4 ..... 144
8 3．．．${ }^{[4 \pi} \mathrm{d}$ d ..... 163
9 5．．．g6 ..... 181
10 5．．．c6 ..... 207
Pirc／Modern
11 Early Deviations ..... 244
12 Pirc with ．．．c6 ..... 270
13 Modern with ．．．c6 ..... 306
14 Pirc with ．．．a6 ..... 320
15 Modern with ．．．a6 ..... 339
16 Main Line with 6．．．思b7 ..... 359
Miscellaneous
17 1．．．0c6 ..... 394
18 1．．．b6 and Others ..... 409
Variation Index ..... 426

## Preface

This book took a long time to finish. Partly, it was due to my ever busier and changing professional life. But even more, it was because of the very nature of the systems covered in this book: the Alekhine, Scandinavian, Pirc/Modern and other miscellaneous replies to 1.e4.

As a young kid, I was always scared of these openings: the Pirc and Modern were endlessly confusing in move orders; the Scandinavian seemed to me to lead to depressingly dull positions; and I never prepared any serious lines against the Alekhine, so I was always a bit afraid of that too. As the years went by and my playing strength increased, fewer and fewer of my opponents played these lines, so I could essentially get away with never preparing anything deep against them. Still, my childhood uneasiness against these defences never quite left me.

When I finally started analysing these systems in earnest for this book, I realized that my uneasiness was not unfounded, as there were just so many interesting possibilities for Black hidden away in all these lines. Nowadays more than ever, with online chess events and faster time controls becoming more prevalent, it is vital to have a well-constructed repertoire against these lines.

In this book, I have endeavoured to address the very features of these defences that made me uneasy against them. If there is a simple path to an advantage, I will generally favour that over a more ambitious but intensely theoretical continuation - it does not feel worth the effort to memorize unnecessarily long lines against inferior continuations which we are never likely to face anyway. At the same time, there are plenty of cases when White simply must take a principled approach in order to prove anything - this is a Grandmaster Repertoire book after all. Still, I have strived to be as practical as possible. When applicable, I have pointed out how certain variations are related to one another, and have shown how you can follow similar plans against different options that Black may try. On a related note, I went to a lot of trouble to take into account the plethora of possible transpositions, especially in and between the Pirc and Modern, and have given my best efforts to make the proposed repertoire 'move-order proof.'

The Alekhine, Scandinavian and Pirc/Modern Defences are generally regarded as less theoretically intense than more popular openings such as $1 \ldots$..e 5 and main-line Sicilians. But paradoxically, my relative lack of practical or theoretical experience in these lines meant that I was pushed to my analytical limits like never before. I would like to thank my many coaches who have helped me see different ways of analysing and understanding such challenges. In particular, I owe my style of chess analysis the most to Vladimir Chuchelov. In this series, I can only hope to match the kind of rigour he demands from his analysis.

Finally, I would like to thank my editor Andrew Greet, who has been a constant throughout this journey, and dealt effectively with both my writing and my procrastination.


## Variation Index

## 1．e4 d5 2．exd5 路xd5 3．0．c3 ${ }^{\text {明 }} \mathrm{d} 6$

$4 . d 4$
A） $4 \ldots . . \mathrm{c} 6 \quad 164$

B） $4 . .\rangle$. 166
B1）5．．．悤g 6．h3 ..... 166
B11）6．．．思xf3 ..... 166
B12）6．．．思h5 ..... 169
B2）5．．．a6 6．g3 息g4 7．h3！ ..... 173
B21）7．．．思xf3 ..... 175
B22）7．．．悤h5 ..... 177

A）note to 8 ．．． 9 ff


B2）note to 6 ．．．思g4


B22）after 14．．．c6


## 1．e4 d5 2．exd5 蹓xd5 3．包c3 蹓d6

It wasn＇t so long ago that this was considered a fringe variation，which was only really played regularly by one world－class GM－Sergey Tiviakov．Times change though，and the text move has since been played regularly by some of the strongest players in the world，including Magnus Carlsen and Fabiano Caruana．Part of the appeal of this variation is that the lines tend to be less forcing，so it is harder to prepare long，forced lines against it，thus making it less risky than a lot of other openings．

## 4．d4

We will start by considering A）4．．．c6，which is sometimes connected with the scheme of leaving the knight on g 8 for a while．We will then move on to the most natural and popular B） $4 \ldots \mathrm{f} 6$ ．

4．．．a65．0f3 宦g4（Black almost always prefers 5．．．$\triangle \mathrm{f} 6$ ，which transposes to variation B2） $6 . \mathrm{h} 3$ 䓌h5 $7 . g 4$ 思g6 8．⿹勹巳 $5 \pm$ gives White a pleasant game．

4．．．g6 is played from time to time，but after 5．©f3 思g76．6．⿷匚 G 5 ！？White can just continue playing in the same way as in the next chapter， and I cannot see anything better for Black than transposing to it by playing ．．．$\subseteq f 6$ at some point．

$$
\text { A) } 4 . . . c 6
$$



## 5．07f3 息g4！

If Black wants to postpone ．．． 9 f 6 ，this seems like the most challenging option．

## 5．．．思f5

This sideline has been played by Tiviakov a few times，but it is not too difficult to handle．
6．0e5 0 d7
6．．．$\triangle \mathrm{f} 6$ leads to variation A of Chapter 10 on page 208.
6．．．e6？is asking for trouble．7．g4 思g6 occurred in Broehl－Forchert，Germany 2013，and now 8．思f4N ${ }^{\circ} \mathrm{m}$ d8 9．h4＋－would have been the easiest way to get a decisive initiative．
7.04


7．．．${ }^{[\mu \mathrm{M} f} \mathrm{f} 6$ ？
This was a surprising choice from Tiviakov， who is usually extremely well prepared．
 gave White an easy edge with the two bishops in Welling－Sant Anna，Douglas 2014.
 Egf6 occurred in Szamoskozi－Schmidt， Budapest 2008，when 11．${ }^{\text {De }} \mathrm{e} 3 \mathrm{~N}$ 思g6 12．h4 $\pm$ seems logical．
8．d5！？
 been excellent for White．
8．．．＇ 5 ？

This was the dubious continuation of Sukandar－Tiviakov，Jakarta 2015．White chose a suboptimal continuation，but still went on to defeat his much higher rated opponent．

 been great for White．


6．h3！
Sacrificing the d4－pawn is clearly the most principled continuation．If something more cautious like 6．思e3 or 6．思e2 is played，then Black will simply play 6 ．．．$\searrow \mathrm{f} 6$ with a better version of a standard variation．

## 6．．．恩xf3

6．．．思h5 7．g4 思g6 8．㽞e5 gives White a clearly improved version of variation B12．

## 7．${ }^{\circ} \mathrm{y} x \mathrm{xf}$ 3 ${ }^{\text {aig }} \mathrm{xd} 4$

7．．． 9 f 6 transposes to variation B11，which will be analysed shortly．

White should be doing excellently from here， but in practice he has often failed to make the most of his chances．He still needs to show some precision，while being aware of the crucial 0 b resource．The most accurate continuation is：


## 8．宽 f 4 ！包 6

Other moves are no better，for instance：
8．．．${ }^{\text {ar b b }}$ 6．0－0 $-0+-$ gives White an overwhelming advantage in development．

8．．．${ }^{\circ} \mathrm{d} \mathrm{d} 8$ 9．0b5！a6 occurred in Ucucu－ Acar，Konya 2019，when 10．思c4！N would have given White a huge initiative．
 －Pultorak，Zalakaros 2017，when White could have won with：

 threats．
 eventual victory for Black in Ivanchuk－ Karpov，Cap d＇Agde 2013，but it was not because of the quality of his opening play．


11．${ }^{2}$ e $4!\mathrm{N}+-$ is the simplest of many possible ways to get a winning advantage．


9．0b5！
As mentioned earlier，this is a vital attacking resource．The next few moves are forced．

9．．．cxb5 10．宽xb5 $\dagger$ 包bd7 11．蹓xb7 管d8


 close to winning for White in Fridman－ S．Kasparov，Porticcio 2018．The text move is a slight improvement，but Black is still in deep trouble．

15．鬼c6 包ef6 16．宽xd8 达xd8 17．日xd7 $\dagger$

White has an extra pawn and the more active pieces，so his winning chances are excellent．

B） $4 . . .2 f 65.0 \mathrm{f}$


In the rest of this chapter we will analyse two important options：B1）5．．．息g4 and B2）5．．．a6．
$5 \ldots \mathrm{~g} 6$ and $5 \ldots \mathrm{c} 6$ will be examined in Chapters 9 and 10 respectively．

## B1）5．．．悤g4 6．h3

Black has the usual choice between B11）6．．．宦xf3 and B12）6．．．宦h5．
B11) 6...思xf3 7.蹯xf3


7．．．c6
7．．． 0 c6？！has been played in a bunch of games but 8 ． $\mathbf{~} \mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{a}} \mathrm{f} 4!\mathrm{N}$ is a powerful reply．The
critical continuation is $8 \ldots \mathrm{Od} 4$（ $8 \ldots$ ．．． $\mathrm{Ma}_{\mathrm{M}} \mathrm{e} 6 \dagger$ 9．思 e 3 is also no fun for Black）9．皆xb7 $0 \times 2 \dagger$
 13．${ }^{[\mu} \times x$ x 7 when Black is the exchange down and has no way to exploit White＇s slightly exposed king．For instance：

起d7 17．［m 1 蹓e3 18．思a6 White still has to remain vigilant with his king in the centre， but he should be able to convert his material advantage with careful play，especially since Black＇s king is also less than safe．

## 8．宽f4 蹓d8

8．．．${ }^{m} \mathrm{~m} x 4$ takes us back to variation A ，where we saw that 9． D b 5 ！is more or less winning for White．

8．．．${ }^{\text {Mig e }} 6 \dagger$ 9．思e2 0 bd7 occurred in Mista－ Proszynski，Ustron 2008，when the most accurate continuation would have been：


10．0－0！N Queenside castling would allow some ．．． C d5 ideas when the vulnerability of the a2－pawn would at least slow down White＇s attack．The text move avoids any such problems，and after something like 10．．． $\mathrm{V}^{\mathrm{b} 6}$
 to complete development without allowing something bad to happen．


9．d5！©xd5
If 9 ．．．cxd5 then simply 10 ． 思xb ！followed by惫 $\mathrm{b} 5 \dagger$ creates major problems for Black＇s king．

## 10．0－0－0 e6 11．0xd5 cxd5

11．．．exd5 was played in Dragomirescu－ Spulber，Mamaia 2019．White has several strong continuations but my favourite is： 12．${ }^{\mu} \mathrm{m} \mathrm{g} 3$ ！ N f6


13．思c4！？The flashy approach is the easiest．

 18．hxg4＋－


Black is unable to catch up in development．



## 15．${ }^{[4]} \mathrm{xd} 5 \mathrm{axb} 5$

 easily．

## 

16．．．f6 allows a forced mate after：17．${ }^{(x x e 6} \dagger$ ！





## 

We are following a game，in which White opted to repeat moves before proceeding with the winning continuation．





White has no immediate mate，but winning Black＇s queen is the next best thing．


29．㟔e7 蹓e8 30． 32．垛 $x b 7$

Black soon had to resign in R．Horvath－ Fauland，Deutschlandsberg 2018.

B12）6．．．宽h5

$7 . g 4$ 宽g6 8．员e5 包bd7
It seems advisable to challenge the strong knight．

The passive 8．．．c6？has been played in a surprisingly high number of games．White has several strong continuations but the rare $9 . f 4!$ seems best．Black is already in severe difficulties，as shown after： $9 \ldots \mathrm{e} 6 \mathrm{~N}$（ $9 . .$. 思e 4
 $13 . c 3$ gave White a huge advantage in Schnegg －Boric，Vienna 2013）


10．${ }^{[3 \mu \mathrm{G}} \mathrm{e}$ e2！？（if you don＇t feel like sacrificing a pawn then 10 ．㤙 $\mathrm{g} 2 \pm$ is an excellent alternative， when Black does not really have a good answer to h4－h5）10．．．䟹xd4（or 10．．．思e7 11．h4＋－and Black will be steamrollered on the kingside） 11．思e3 政d6 11．思g2＋－The game continues，
but White＇s massive advantage in activity should decide the game if he continues to play accurately．

## 9．䠦e2！

This move is virtually untested．Evidently the idea of sacrificing a pawn did not occur to many players，but it gives White superb play．

## 9．．．${ }^{\text {an }} \mathrm{Cl} \mathrm{xd} 4$

Black should accept the challenge，as $9 . . .0-0-0$

 a serious advantage without much effort．

After the text move I found a couple of games where White exchanged on g6．However，it is much better to leave the bishop as a target for the f 4 － f 5 advance．Thus，my improvement is：


## 

10．．．包xd7 11．宽e3 欮f6 $12.0-0-0 \pm$ gives White a tremendous amount of activity．

## $11 . f 4 \mathrm{~h} 6$

11．．．h5 is hardly an improvement，and after 12．f5 悤h7 13．宽d2 0－0－0 14．0－0－0 Black is likely to be murdered on the queenside before he can get his kingside pieces into the game． For instance：14．．．e6 15．© 思g $^{\text {g }}$ d5（ $15 \ldots$ ．．．exf5 16．惫f4 gives White a deadly attack）

 Black is busted．

## 12．f5

White could also start with 12 ． 思g2，but it feels more natural to drive the bishop back before anything else．

## 12．．．家h7



## 13．${ }^{\text {旡 }} \mathbf{g} 2$

This is the most accurate move order，forcing Black to defend b7 in one way or another．

Instead，13．寄d2 e6 14．0－0－0 㚐d6 15．宽g2 allows $15 \ldots 0-0$ ！（rather than $15 . . . c 616 . h 4 \uparrow$ ） 16．悤xb7 咜ab8 17．fxe6 fxe6 18．思g2 思a3！？ when the outcome is uncertain．

## 13．．．0－0－0

This seems like Black＇s best try．
13．．．c6
This feels a little slow，although White still has to play accurately to exploit his dynamic advantage．

## 14．㤙d2 e6 15．0－0－0 恩d6


 White a decisive attack．


16．h4！0－0－0

fxg6 20 ．fxe6 $\pm$ is highly unpleasant for Black． $17 . \mathrm{g} 5$ d 5
 is also good for White．
$18 . \mathrm{g} 6$ 悤 g 8
Black must avoid 18．．．fxg6？19．fxe6＋－when his position collapses．


19．fxe6 fxe6


20． 0 e $4 \pm$
White＇s initiative is definitely worth more than a pawn．


14．宽d2 e6 15．0－0－0 0 d5
 under unpleasant pressure．

15．．．exf5？！
This more is as risky as it looks，and we can refute it with some attractive tactics：


## 16．䰟f4！崽d6


 king is caught．



Tightening the noose．


21．．．घd d 7
21．．．品he8 allows White to execute the threat created by his previous move： $22.0 \mathrm{xa} 7 \dagger$ ！


 Finally，it＇s all over．


16．欮 f ！
 sees Black return the extra pawn and stay in the game．

## 16．．．b6

 the pawn in a much more favourable way than the line above．
 exd5 20．思 $44 \pm$ is also excellent for White．

## 17．蹓d4！

This does not threaten anything immediately， but the queen eyes a range of targets across the board，and White is ready to bring his one inactive piece into play．Black is still a pawn up for now，but he has a hard time coordinating his pieces or doing anything useful．

## 17．．．c6


$17 \ldots$ ．．．${ }^{\text {a }} \mathrm{b} 8$ is more sensible but 18 ．Whe leaves Black stuck for a good move，for instance：

品hg8 20．irime5 思f6


21．fxe6 fxe6 22．呺xe6 ©xc3 23．bxc3士 No fancy mating combination this time，but an extra pawn will do nicely．


## 

18．．．包xc3 19．呺xc3 惫d6 20．fxe6 fxe6 21．${ }^{(1)} x e 6 \pm$ regains the pawn while keeping a big initiative．
 21．思xd5 fxg4 22．hxg4土 is also great for White．

## 18．．．置b7

If Black maintains the tension in this way，
White increases the pressure as follows．

We can afford to spend a tempo on a small improving move．
21．吉b1 蹈c5 gives Black a marginally improved version of the note below．
21．䠦a4！？is a tempting alternative though．

## 21．．．gg8

21．．．${ }^{[i \pi} \mathrm{C} C 5$ is the lesser evil although it leads to a clearly better endgame for White after：


 31．Mxc5 bxc5 32．${ }^{\text {mxg }} 8 \pm$
22．欮 4 4 崽d6
22．．．客c5 23．c4＋－and White will soon break through．


23．思xd6 品xd6 24．${ }^{m} x d 5$ ！exd5 25 ．${ }^{m}$ e7†＋

## 19．蹓a4！宦d6

 of c2－c4．

## 20． 0 e 4 ？

20． 0 e 2 ！？is a promising alternative．

## 20．．．$\frac{\text { in }}{4} \mathrm{C} 7$

Other moves are no better，for instance：
20．．．適b7 and 20．．．思b8 fail to address the main threat：21．c4＋－

 vulnerable．
$20 \ldots$ ．．． W 2 is the computer＇s initial suggestion， but it soon becomes clear that $21 . c 4$ exf5
 25． $0 \mathrm{c} 3 \pm$ reaches a position where White＇s extra piece is worth more than Black＇s three pawns．


## 

 unglued．For instance：24．．．b5 25．\＃xd7 蹓xd7


##  27．思e4！$\pm$

Ironically，after the bishop on h7 was Black＇s problem piece for such a long time， White makes sure to exchange it at the first opportunity！In this way，he gets closer to Black＇s numerous pawn weaknesses，and Black has a difficult road ahead．

## Abridged Variation Index

The Variation Index in the book is 7 pages long．Below is an abridged version giving just the main variations，not the sub－variations．

## Chapter 1


A） $4 . .$. 思 $f 5!? 9$
A） $3 . . .9 \mathrm{xd} 597$
B） $4 . . . c 610$
B） $3 \ldots$ ．．思g 4 4．悤 $\mathrm{b} 5 \dagger$ ！？ 105
C） 4 ．．． 0 b 6 ！？ 11
D） 4 ．．． 0 c 6 ！？ 17
Chapter 6

Chapter 2
1．e4 ©f6 2．e5 ©d5 3．d4 d6 4．0f3 g6
5．宽c4 © 6 6．宽b3
A） $6 \ldots . .928$
B） $6 \ldots$ ．．思 g 730
Chapter 3
1．e4 气f6 $2 . \mathrm{e} 5 \mathrm{D} 53 . \mathrm{d} 4 \mathrm{~d} 64.0 \mathrm{f} 3$ 思g4 5．悤e2

A） $5 . . . c 644$
B） $5 . . . e 646$

## Chapter 4

1．e4 0 f6 $2 . \mathrm{e} 5 \mathrm{~d} 53 . \mathrm{d} 4 \mathrm{~d} 64.9 \mathrm{f} 3$ dxe5

## 5．包xe5

A） $5 \ldots .9 \mathrm{~d} 7$ ？ 64
B） $5 \ldots g 669$
C） $5 \ldots . . c 677$

A） $3 \ldots$ ．． m
B） $3 \ldots . . \frac{14}{4} \mathrm{a} 5123$

## Chapter 7




A） $6 \ldots$ ．．． m 5145
B） $6 \ldots .$. 宽 d 7147

A） 4 ．．．c6 164
B） 4 ．．． 9 ff 166
Chapter 5
1．e4 d5 2．exd5 0 f6 3．d4

## Chapter 8



Chapter 9



A） 7 ．．．a6！？ 183
B） $7 \ldots 0-0191$

## Chapter 10

包 65 ． 0 f 3 c6 6． 05

A） $6 . .$. 思 $f 5208$
B） $6 \ldots$ 思e6！？ 209
C） $6 . . .9 b d 7216$

## Chapter 11

$1 . e 4$

A1）4．．．思g4！？ 245
A2）4．．．觻a5 247
B） $1 \ldots . \mathrm{g} 62 . \mathrm{d} 4249$
B1） 2 ．．． 9 f 250
B2）2．．．d6 252
B3）2．．．思g7 253
Chapter 12



A） $6 . .$. 思g 4275
B） $6 \ldots$ ．． M 觡 5277
C） $6 \ldots 0-0279$
D） $6 \ldots \mathrm{~b} 5288$
Chapter 13


A） $5 \ldots .{ }^{\text {a }} \mathrm{d} 7308$
B） $5 \ldots$ b 5312
$1 . e 4$

## Chapter 18

A） $1 \ldots . . \mathrm{b} 6410$
B） $1 \ldots \mathrm{a} 6$ ？！ 421
C） $1 \ldots \mathrm{~h} 6$ ？！ 424

A） $6 . . .0-0321$

## Chapter 14




B） $6 \ldots$ b 5324

## Chapter 15

1．e4 g6 2．d4 思g7 3．包c3 d6 4．宽e3 a6 5． 0 f 3

A） $5 \ldots . \mathrm{D}_{\mathrm{d}} \mathrm{d} 7$ ！？ 340
B） $5 \ldots \mathrm{~b} 5344$

## Chapter 16

1．e4 g6 2．d4 思g7 3．苗c3 d6 4．思e3 a6


A） $7 . e 5360$
B） $7 . \mathrm{h} 4!365$

## Chapter 17

1．e4（0） 62.0 f3！
A） $2 \ldots . . \mathrm{f}$ ？！ 395
B） $2 \ldots g 6397$
C） $2 \ldots \mathrm{P} 6398$
D） $2 \ldots$ ．．d5 399
E） $2 \ldots \mathrm{~d} 6403$

