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2 8.♙d3 ♙b7 9.a3 22

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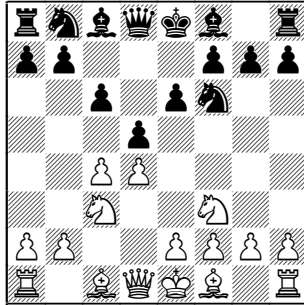
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PREFACE

Dear readers,

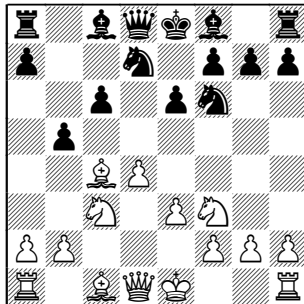
After the moves **1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♗f6 4.♗f3 e6** White has two serious alternatives.



At first, this is the move **5.♕g5**, which may lead to the double-edged positions of the Anti-Moscow Variation (5...h6 6.♕h4 dxc4 7.e4 g5 8.♕g3 b5), or to the Botvinnik variation (5...dxc4 6.e4 b5). The Anti-Moscow Variation (as Black's more fashionable choice) has been analyzed in my previous book (together with the Moscow Variation – 5...h6 6.♕xf6 ♗xf6, in which the developments are much calmer).

Secondly, White may choose the move **5.e3**, in order to steer the game into positional and not so sharp lines, planning to develop initiative in the centre.

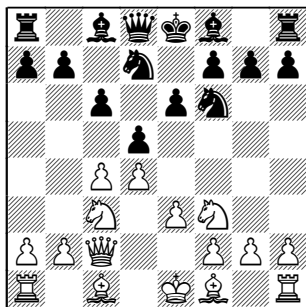
After **5...♗bd7 6.♕d3 dxc4 7.♕xc4 b5**, there arises the position of the **Meran variation** (in short – Meran) and the first part of this book is devoted to it.



As it is well-known, this variation was named like that after a game, played in the year 1924 at a tournament in the Italian town Merano. It was between Akiba Rubinstein and Ernst Gruenfeld. It was Akiba Rubinstein who tried for the first time the move 6...dxc4 (They used to play then moves like 6...♘b4, 6...♙e7, 6...♘d6. They are almost ignored nowadays, more than 86 years later.). The main idea of the variation, introduced by A.Rubinstein, was, in response to White's initiative in the centre, to win a tempo by exchanging on c4 and to follow that with the move b7-b5. Black wishes to organize an offensive on the queenside (for example, to play ♘b7, then a7-a6 and later to accomplish the essential pawn-advance for him c6-c5). As a rule, the positions arising in the Meran variation are very complicated and double-edged. Black has great possibilities to create counterplay and it is practically irrelevant who plays with what colour...

It is understandable that the Meran variation has long history and extensive theory. Naturally, many of its variations are impossible to be evaluated definitely even now, in the computer age. Its theory is permanently developing.

White however, enlarges the theory in another direction as well. He is trying not to let Black enter the Meran variation. The most effective weapon, preventing the Meran, for many years has been the move 6.♙c2.



It has been named the **Anti-Meran variation** (in short anti-Meran) and it has been analyzed thoroughly in the second part of this book. At the same place, we have dealt in short with White's other attempts to avoid entering the Meran variation.

In general, the positions of the anti-Meran are not so sharp as the Meran and the game is more positional. Still, White has the possibility to transfer the game into very complicated and double-edged positions

even in the anti-Meran, for example by countering 6...♗d6 with 7.g4.

Both openings, analyzed in this book, are among the most modern and popular in the contemporary theory and they are being played by many outstanding players like Garry Kasparov, Vladimir Kramnik, Viswanathan Anand, Alexey Shirov, Boris Gelfand, Levon Aronian, Teimur Radjabov and many others.

The author of these lines has a quarter century of experience in both these variations in tournaments and matches, including the World Championships and the Olympiads. I have introduced into the tournament practice numerous new schemes and I have defended them on the board. I collected and wrote about 10 years ago a computer Encyclopaedia of the Meran variation (published by ChessBase). Still, time is running and tournament practice introduces corrections in theory. The development of the computer software and the chess programs helps world's leading players in their home analyses. Naturally, during the time passed, there were considerable re-evaluations of numerous lines and many new ideas and possibilities were found for both sides. Therefore, it has become necessary not only to introduce changes in the already published material, but to write a new book altogether. It is written from the point of view of Black, just like the analyses during the game. This means that we have analyzed White's mains alternatives in all the lines, but the emphasis is on how to play with Black (accordingly, I have shared with you how I would react if I should encounter a certain position in a practical game). Of course, if Black has several, interesting and deserving attention possibilities, we have analyzed them all. Similarly to my previous book, dealing with the Moscow and anti-Moscow variations, I have included in this work many of my own games and original analyses.

I would like to express my acknowledgement to my coach and helper for many years, international master and honorary coach of Russia Alexander Filipenko. Many of his wonderful ideas were tested by me in practice and his advice was always invaluable to me.

I would also like to thank sincerely the editor, international master Sergey Soloviov, for his expert assistance in the preparation of this book.

*Alexey Dreev
Moscow, February 2011*