

Taming Wild Chess Openings

How to deal with **the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly** over the chess board

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New In Chess 2015

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Icons



Thumbs up

Recommended for use in any type of competition.



Thumbs down

We do not feel that this opening can be used successfully in serious competition.



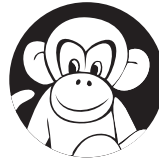
Poison

This opening will seriously damage your position and is considered toxic. Don't play it!



Rabbit

This opening is only good for playing against lower rated competition. It is good for rabbit-bashing and can lead to a quick win, leaving you extra time to rest or prepare for your next game. Or enjoy a pint of your favorite beverage.



Monkey

This opening can be used just for fun ('monkeying around') but it is not recommended for your most important games. After all, chess is a game most people play to enjoy; these openings tend to be offbeat and will lead to original and entertaining situations.



Snake

This opening can bite you if you are not properly prepared, so you should study it. It is not likely to succeed against a well-prepared opponent. But there are traps and landmines that must be avoided.



Bomb

This is used on occasion to mark a move that is a blunder.



Check Mark

This opening is sound enough, but perhaps difficult to play well. Whether you'll want to use it is a matter of taste.

Introduction

What's in this book

This book is designed to help the reader find good solutions to rarely-played openings, openings of dubious worth, and openings which don't involve a lot of theory but are still irritating to play against. The authors have been at this for over 30 years, and have written a number of books covering much of the same material. In addition to dozens of our own books, we have co-authored *The Big Book of Busts* (Hypermodern 1995), *Survive & Beat Annoying Chess Openings* (Cardoza 2003), and *How to Succeed in the Queen Pawn Openings* (Trafford 2006). Each of these deals with irregular and unconventional openings, along with fairly common ones with which inexperienced players are nonetheless unfamiliar. We have updated and expanded our analysis on those openings and added many new ones, emphasizing practical solutions that can be mastered quickly. Our inspiration comes from working with beginning and average players, who tend to have similar problems in openings and ask the same questions about them. The goal is not to provide an abstract survey of opening theory, but to give you the ammunition to punish your opponent for his or her opening inaccuracies (or, if the opening is a sound one, to solve your problems quickly and be ready to go on the offensive). Our emphasis is on typical games and ideas rather than dense analysis, although for certain openings we feel that it is helpful to go into considerable detail.

As chess teachers, we know how frustrating it is for our students to come up against unfamiliar openings and not know where to turn for advice. This is not a book of main lines played by professionals, but it covers a broad range of material from elementary openings to ones seen regularly at tournaments, and includes everything from really silly openings (1.h4, for example, or 1.e4 ♘c6 2.d4 f6 for Black), to inferior but tricky ones (e.g., 1.g4 for White, 1.e4 a6 for Black), to ambitious openings which are rarely used by grandmasters but are playable and dangerous (the Evans and Morra Gambits, for example). As a bonus, players on a club level will hopefully find something of value in our more serious discussion of sound but non-traditional openings such as the Trompowsky Attack (1.d4 ♘f6 2.♗g5) and the Two Knights Tango (1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 ♘c6). Similarly, we've shown ways to play against some slow or passive openings that frustrate our own students, such as the Colle and London Systems or the Veresov Attack. In between these extremes are a huge assortment of gambits, flank pawn adventures, and even piece sacrifices in the opening. No matter how crazy, all these variations have names, and you'll find examples of them in the big databases.

There's an interesting side benefit to studying these openings. Even when we've provided a reasonable answer to some wild variation, it can be fun to try out yourself, perhaps as a surprise weapon that your opponent is unlikely to have encountered before. After all, how many people have even heard of the Mokele

Mbembe (1.e4 ♘f6 2.e5 ♘e4!?), much less played against it? It has won a lot of games for those who know the ideas, as has the Fishing Pole (1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♘g4!?). Black risks a lot with such moves, but White is a tempo ahead in chess and can afford to play strange ‘extra’ moves such as 2.a3 after 1.e4 e5, or 2.h3 after 1.d4 f5.

When you run into most of these openings and don’t know what to do, practical considerations take precedence. If the only way to refute an opening is to play a complex tactical variation, we’ll recommend that (some gambits require sharp replies, for example). But for the great majority of these openings, that won’t be necessary; we’ll provide a simple and safe way to approach the position, requiring little memorization and hopefully leading to a promising game. As explained in the advice section, this involves paying attention to the center and bringing your pieces out quickly, and not plunging into tactical adventures until an advantage is well established.

There’s a lot of fun material in this book and you may be surprised to see how even strong grandmasters have indulged in the craziest variations. Even the supposedly conservative World Champion Magnus Carlsen has played 1.a4 and 1.a3 (several times) as White (in the World Blitz Championships). As Black he played 1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.e5 ♘h5 (the ‘North Sea Defense’) against Adams in a crucial tournament game; and against Kramnik he tried 1.♘f3 b5 2.e4 ♙b7 3.♙xb5 ♙xe4.

To sum up, chess isn’t all main lines and 20 moves of theory; it’s fascinating to see the creative play which can result when one side or both dares to think outside of the box. We hope that you’ll be inspired by these opening adventures and create some of your own!

How the book is organized

We have divided our openings into the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly. The emphasis is on inferior or strange openings, as represented by the Bad and the Ugly; but as a bonus, we’ve added some ‘Good’ ones and placed them at the end.

A ‘Bad’ opening is one that might be fun, but we think should be punishable, especially in tournament play. Some of them are just ridiculous. Nevertheless, students can learn a lot by learning why inferior openings are bad. A paragon of bad openings from Black’s point of view is the Fred (1.e4 f5), while the Ware Opening (1.a4) is a fairly useless way for White to start out. These are usually eccentric and sometimes silly openings, and we’ll provide a solution that gives the reader an advantage. Other bad openings are reasonably challenging, but ultimately lead to a significant disadvantage against best play.

The largest group of openings we discuss (including many truly ‘wild’ ones) fall into the ‘Ugly’ category. They are played in tournaments fairly often and aren’t necessarily objectively bad, but they usually violate some basic opening principles and look wrong to inexperienced players at first sight. By using our recommenda-

tions, you will be able to get good game (and sometimes a nearly winning one) against these openings.

The ‘Good’ openings are sound enough for tournament play, and sometimes very solid; we have found that many beginning and less-experienced students are bothered by them. That’s because either they aren’t familiar with the openings, or they are frustrated trying to come up with a plan against them. Over the years, we’ve tried to find simple solutions for these openings. For example, White might play the Fantasy Variation of the Caro-Kann, the Colle Attack, or the Evans Gambit. These are all quite playable, and we simply try to show you how to neutralize them without needing exotic solutions. An example for Black is the Budapest Gambit, which is sound but unfamiliar to many developing players, so we try to show the way to a small advantage against it. In this section, we’ve always tried to find straightforward solutions to the opening involved, but have not hesitated to present some serious and fairly detailed analysis when we felt it necessary.

For further enlightenment (and a bit of fun), most openings have a graphic representing our subjective opinion of its suitability for use in tournament play. We think that some marginal openings are playable in certain circumstances; for example, you might employ them against lower rated opponents. But some openings are just asking for trouble! The icons and their meanings are listed on page 9; don’t expect them to fit exactly, but they should be of some use.

Some General Advice and Examples

When you are confronted by an unfamiliar opening, you can usually obtain a good game by simply following a few basic opening principles. Of course, if you have studied this book and memorized its entire contents you are less likely to wander into strange territory, but that’s asking a bit much! So here are some handy rules of thumb for sound opening play:

- 1: Place at least one pawn in the center of the board, and if allowed, both center pawns.
- 2: Develop your pieces quickly, especially the ones necessary to prepare for castling.
3. Castle and connect your rooks.
- 4: Place your pieces where they have the most activity, and put at least one of your rooks on an open file.

Let’s look at how two World Champions used these basic ideas when confronted by the same unorthodox opening:

Owen Defense (B00)

Wilhelm Steinitz - Cecil De Vere

Paris 1867

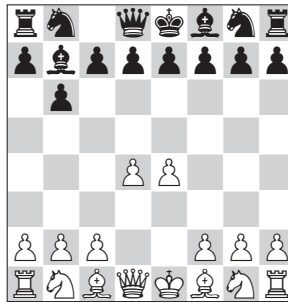
1.e4 b6

The Owen Defense has traditionally been a rare choice in master play, but in recent years two books have been written about it.

2.d4

When your opponent allows you to set up the ideal center, feel free to oblige!

2...♟b7



3.♟d3

White develops, defends the e-pawn, and prepares for castling. 3.♞c3 is another good move.

3...d6

This weakens the light squares slightly and neglects kingside development. 3...e6 is more logical, as played in the next game. Our chapter on the Owen Defense shows other alternatives such as 3...f5.

4.♞e2

Developing. There is nothing wrong with the normal 4.♞f3, but Steinitz (the first World Champion) wants to erect a strong pawn chain g2-f3-e4.

4...♞d7 5.0-0

See our opening goals above; now castling has been achieved.

5...e5 6.c3

This makes sure central control is maintained, because ...exd4 will be met by cxd4.

6...♞gf6 7.f3

At first glance this seems to be some sort of Philidor Defense but for the abnormal position of Black's bishop at b7, whose influence is limited by White's pawns on e4 and f3.



7...h5?

A reckless non-developing move. For one thing, there aren't enough pieces supporting the kingside attack. This is the sort of move a beginner plays.

8.♖e3 h4 9.♘d2

Completing development. Now White's rooks are almost connected.

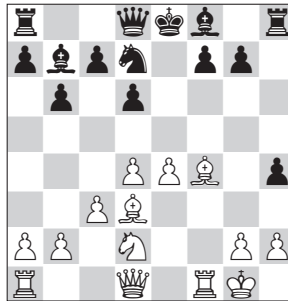
9...♗h5

Black's forces are underdeveloped and uncoordinated. White has prepared an explosive opening of the position.

10.f4!

The attack begins. White's idea is to open the f-file for the rook. His queen is not developed yet because it doesn't yet have a clear destination.

10...exf4 11.♗xf4 ♗xf4 12.♕xf4



12...g5?

Black continues with his plan of attacking with no piece support.

13.♕e3 ♖e7 14.♗b3

The rooks are connected, as prescribed above. Black wants to castle queenside, even if an attack by White along the a-file with a4-a5 would be difficult to defend against. But right now castling is not on anyway, because the pawn at f7 needs the protection of the king. You know you are in trouble when a pawn relies crucially on its monarch! Incidentally, 14.♗g4 was also very strong.

14...d5?

This will allow White to open the e-file for his other rook.

15.♖ae1

Now White has every piece out and is ready to attack. All opening tasks have been completed.

15...0-0-0

Finally Black castles, but to the compromised queenside.

16.exd5!

Black resigns already, because he has no defense against the threats of ♕f4 and d5-d6 followed by ♖xf7. Notice that 16...♖f6 is met by 17.♕xg5.

Owen Defense (B00)

Jose Capablanca - Souza Campos

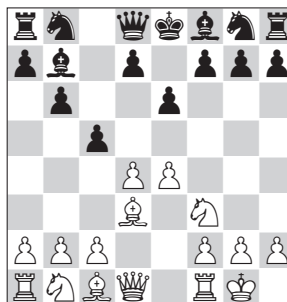
San Paolo 1927

1.e4 b6 2.d4 ♗b7 3.♕d3 e6

We saw 3...d6 in the previous game.

4.♘f3 c5 5.0-0

Capablanca (the third World Champion) plays according to our prescription and castles. He could also support the center by 5.c3.



5...cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♘e7 7.♘c3 ♘g6 8.♕e3 ♕c5 9.♖h5

Every move brings out a new piece. This not only activates White's queen, but connects his rooks.

9...0-0

Black has managed to get some of his pieces out, but he is still behind in

development and will be unable to find effective squares for his rooks and queen. Just as importantly, he lacks space and is limited to defense.



10. ♖ad1!

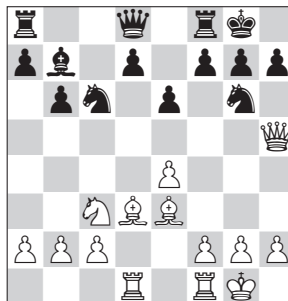
Black's backward pawn at d7 is unlikely to advance soon. White uses this preparatory move to allow the rook to operate on the d-file, keeping in mind the possibility of a rook lift along the third rank.

10... ♕xd4

Black concedes the bishop pair to gain momentum for development, but that is a high price to pay.

11. ♕xd4 ♜c6 12. ♗e3

The attacking player often wants to prevent simplification, and this also gives White the advantage of the bishop pair.



12...e5?

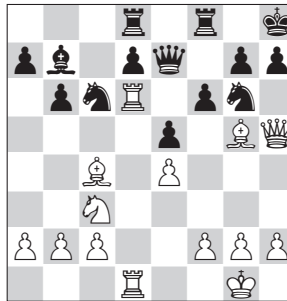
Black is concerned with preventing f4-f5 and grabs control of d4, but the price is too high. He concedes the a2-g8 diagonal and allows White to use the outpost on d5, as well as the d6-square, for his pieces.

13. ♕c4 ♝h8 14. ♜d6!

White immobilizes the weak pawn, and incidentally keeps an eye on both Black knights.

14... ♖e7 15. ♜fd1 ♜ad8 16. ♗g5! f6

Black has to weaken the kingside.



17. ♖xg6!!

This must have come as quite a shock!

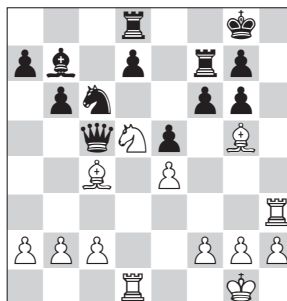
17...hxg6 18. ♖6d3

The weakness of the diagonal sets up mating possibilities, beginning with 19. ♖h3.

18...♗f7

Blocking the bishop's control of g8.

19. ♖d5! ♖c5 20. ♖h3+ ♖g8



21. ♖xf6+!

White forces a very nice checkmate.

21...♖f8

21...gxf6 22. ♖xf6 is followed by mate at h8.

22. ♖h8+ ♖e7 23. ♖e8+ ♖xe8 24. ♖xd7+ ♖f8 25. ♖xf7#

1-0

Cochrane Gambit 2: 5.d4 Main Line (C42)



1.e4 e5 2.d3 f3 3.dxe5 d6
4.dxf7 f7 5.d4



The move around which much of the theory and practice of the Cochrane Gambit has been based. In some ways, it is less flexible than 5.d3, since it gives White less influence on d5. But 5.d4 does challenge Black immediately with the ideas of f2-f4 and e4-e5. Also, ...e6 can often be answered by d4-d5.

1.e4 e5 2.d3 f3 3.dxe5 d6 4.dxf7 f7 5.d4

Now Black has numerous playable moves, most leading to complex play. We'll give just two which lead to advantage and don't require laborious defense.

5...d7

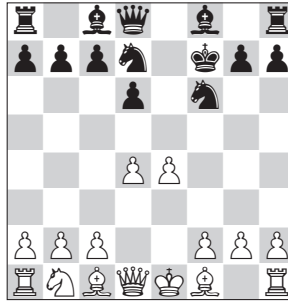
This simply acts to prevent e4-e5 and prepares ...c7-c5, since dxc5 will then have the active answer ...xc5. It is a frustrating variation for White, who will have a hard time working up play.

A) Note that 5...xe4? can be answered by 6.h5+ g6 7.d5+ and 8.xe4;

B) The excellent alternative 5...c5 immediately attacks White's center and forces a resolution of the pawn structure. Here are the main ideas:

B1) 6.c4+ d5! 7.exd5 d6!? (this has been the move so far, but a very easy solution is 7...b5! with the idea 8.xb5?! xd5 9.0-0 b7 10.f3 xd4+. Here 8.e2 is better, but Black still has the advantage after 8...b7 9.dxc5 xc5) 8.0-0 (8.dxc5 a5+ 9.c3 xc5 10.b3 e8+ 11.e3 g8 with advantage) 8...e8 (or 8...cxd4 9.xd4 bd7) 9.dxc5 (9.h3?! cxd4 10.xd4 bd7 11.c3 g8) 9...xc5 10.c3 g8 and Black stands better;

B2) 6.dxc5 is normal, but Black gains a definite advantage after 6...d5! (6...c6!? yields a small edge. For example, 7.c4+ e6 8.xe6+ xe6 9.cxd6 xd6 10.d2 d8 11.0-0 f7) 7.e5 g4 8.c4 (8.b4 c6) 8...xc5! 9.xd5+ (9.xd5+? e8 10.f1 f8—) 9...xd5 10.xd5+ e8.

**6.e5!?**

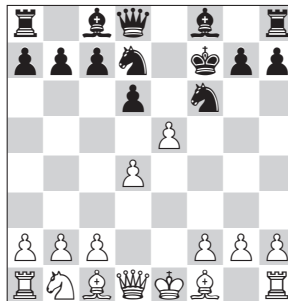
This is the theoretical move (best, according to Chris Baker, author of *A Startling Chess Opening Repertoire*), exploiting the fact that the knight on d7 will be pinned after 6...dxe5 7.dxe5. Other moves are slower:

A) 6.♔d3 c5!? 7.0-0 cxd4 (7...♙e7 and 7...g6 are more solid, and perhaps easier) 8.♙c4+ ♗e8 9.♖xd4 ♖b6 10.♗d1 (Black stands well after 10.♙e3 ♖xd4 11.♙xd4 a6 12.a4 ♘e5 13.♙b3 ♗e7 14.♘c3 ♙e6) 10...♘e5 11.♙b3 ♘xe4! (or 11...♙d7 12.♙e3 ♖c6) 12.♙e3 ♖a5 13.f3 ♘f6 with advantage;

B) 6.♙c4+ is straightforward, but allows an immediate simplifying option if Black chooses: 6...d5 7.♙xd5+! (7.exd5? ♘b6 8.♙b3 ♙b4+ 9.c3 ♜e8+ 10.♙e3 ♙d6) 7...♘xd5 8.♖h5+ g6 9.♖xd5+ ♗g7 and Black can be satisfied with his piece play and two bishops. For example:

B1) 10.♙f4 c6 11.♖b3 (11.♙e5+?? ♘xe5 with the idea 12.♖xe5+ ♗g8 or 12.♖xd8 ♙b4+) 11...♘f6 (or 11...♖b6) 12.♙e5 ♙d6 13.♙xd6 ♖xd6 14.e5 ♖e7 15.0-0 ♘d5 aiming for ...♙e6 or ...♘f4;

B2) 10.0-0 c6 11.♖b3 (11.♖g5 ♖xg5 12.♙xg5 ♘f6) 11...♙e7 (11...♘f6!? 12.e5 ♘d5 13.c4 ♘b6 intending ...♙e6) 12.♘c3 ♖b6 13.♖c4 ♜f8 with advantage.

**6...dxe5 7.dxe5 ♖e7**

Another good line is 7...♙b4+!? 8.c3 ♘xe5, giving the piece back for terrific activity: 9.♖xd8 (9.♖b3+ ♙e6 10.♖xb4 ♘d3+ 11.♙xd3 ♖xd3 12.♖d4 ♖a6! with a clear advantage) 9...♗xd8 10.cxb4 ♘d5 (or 10...♜e8 11.♙e3 ♘eg4) 11.a3 ♜e8! 12.♙e3 ♙f5 13.♘c3 ♘f4!

8.♙c4+ ♗e8 9.f4

9.0-0 ♘xe5 10.♜e1 ♙g4 followed by ...♜d8 is very strong, since 11.f3? ♙xf3! wins.

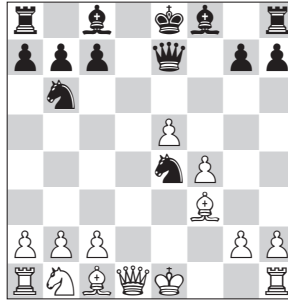
9...♖b6 10.♙e2

10.♙b3? ♙g4 and ...♖d8.

10...♗e4!

We gave 10...♗fd5 in *Big Book of Busts*. It gives Black an advantage, but not as big as the text: 11.c4 (Black also has the better game after 11.0-0 ♙f5 or 11.a3 ♖c5) 11...♗b4 (also good is 11...♖b4+!? 12.♖f1 ♗e7) 12.a3 ♗c6 with an excellent game. White's d4-square is weak, whereas Black is bringing a rook to d8 and retains his material advantage.

11.♙f3



11...♙g4!

A killer move, spotted instantly by the computer. 11...♙f5 12.♖e2 ♗c5 13.♗c3, a line recommended by Chris Baker for White, should also favor Black after 13...♗e6! but that's complex and unnecessary.

12.0-0

12.♙xg4 ♖h4+ 13.g3 ♗xg3 14.hxg3 ♖xh1+ 15.♖e2 ♖g2+ 16.♖e1 ♖xg3+ 17.♖f1 ♙c5 and wins.

12...♖d8 13.♖e2 ♙xf3 14.gxf3

14.♖xf3 ♖b4 wins for Black.

14...♗c5

Or 14...♗d6 with a clear advantage.

15.♗c3 g6 16.♙e3 ♗e6

With the idea ...♙h6 and/or ...♗d5. Even ...♖b4 and ...♙c5 is in the air. Black has a very large advantage and should win.