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Cast of Characters



Zort from Zugzwang: A teenaged computer from planet Zugzwang. His favorite hobbies are chess, facebook and googling. Zort uses his amazing computer board sight to show what's really going on in complicated variations and key positions.



The chess professor answers kids' questions with wit and wisdom, giving you important winning tips!



The Dinosaurs

'The Dinosaurs' stand for players in the first great chess tournaments, from the 1850's to the 1890's. Like Tyrannosaurus Rex they were crude and deadly, always playing for the kill and producing many sharp battles.



Power Chess Kids

Chess kids of the world ask typical kids' questions about winning opening strategy.

Introduction

Having been a chess coach for over four decades, I have taught hundreds of kids, from beginners to strong tournament players, how to sharpen their chess skills. One important area that children are very interested in is how to begin the game. Masters have a grasp of key ideas at this stage, which makes it almost easy to find strong moves. Without this knowledge, kids flounder and make whatever move comes to mind, with no clear purpose.

Opening books for adults stress memorizing opening variations. These are sequences of moves that have been tested in master games. Unfortunately, most kids' opening books copy this approach. Memorizing is important for advanced tournament play, but not useful or necessary for kids who are just starting out. Instead, the first step should be learning the goals and priorities of opening play, and how each piece can best be used to meet these goals. Kids who absorb these guiding ideas, will learn how to get a strong opening position without having to name or memorize specific variations. In this book, chess-loving children will be introduced to the names and basic ideas of many important chess openings, but for a different reason: to illustrate the basic principles of strong opening play. First, you will learn how to find a strong move for each piece in many different opening situations, and how to get your pieces and pawns working together as an effective team. Only then will we take a closer look at some opening variations, so that kids who want to study further can begin to learn more about using these ideas to understand the goals of specific openings.

What Is the Chess Opening?

Most activities have a beginning, a middle, and an end. In chess it's not so simple! The opening does mark the start of a chess game, but it means much more. Sometimes it's useful to think of chess as a battle between two opposing armies. In fact, the chessmen represent typical combatants during the Middle Ages (the years 400-1500 AD), when the modern rules of the game were established. Using this metaphor, the opening is the phase in which you prepare your army for battle. When both sides are fully prepared, the next stage is the middlegame, when plans of attack are devised, to achieve an advantage of position or 'material' (having more men), with the ultimate goal of checkmating the enemy king. The endgame is a phase in which many pieces have been traded, so the king is in less danger of checkmate. Then the battle often includes trying to promote a pawn into a queen, and use the extra queen for a checkmating attack.

Here's something unique about chess – while the opening starts the game, sometimes it's also the end! In this case we say that one side never made it out of the opening. A player may fail to prepare his forces, or make a terrible mistake and

get checkmated right away! Although there are three possible phases of a chess game, many battles never get beyond the opening stage. A good opening gives you much better chances to win the game, so learning the basics of strong opening play is extremely important.

What's the Goal of the Opening Phase?

This is a great question, because most kids have only a vague idea what they're aiming for at the start of a game. They make one move here and another there, and may tell you they have a new 'plan' each turn. Unfortunately, the plan often has nothing to do with good opening play.

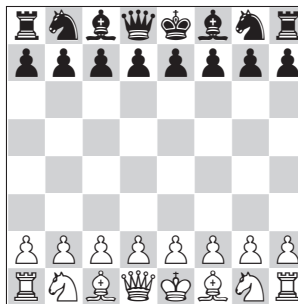
The main goal of the opening can be boiled down to one sentence:

Get your pieces into action quickly and effectively!

Sounds easy, right? But anyone who has played a few games knows that good chess ideas are more complicated than they seem. It takes practice and study to learn how to consistently get your pieces into action quickly and effectively. There are three things to master: what it means exactly to get pieces into action and how to do it quickly, and what makes a move effective. 'Effective' is a big word that means 'able to do things'. Often kids move a piece out quickly, but to a square that isn't very effective.

Development

Chess players use three main words to describe the process of getting the pieces into the action: **Development**, **Mobilization**, and **Activation**. These three words mean basically the same thing. If you look at the starting position of a chess game, your pieces have very little **mobility** (options for moving around), which gives them no chance for positive action.



Only pawns, and knights, with their unique ability to jump over pieces, have any options for action at the start! To activate the bishops, queen and rooks, some pawn moves are necessary. We will pay a lot of attention to which pawn moves work best. This also has a lot to do with where the opponent places his or her pawns and pieces.

Here we come to another very important goal of the book. Chess players start out by trying to find good ideas, but kids have a hard time learning to also pay attention to their opponents' ideas and goals. An important part of good opening play is learning to notice the strengths and weaknesses of your opponent's moves. By studying many different types of opening positions, this book teaches you how to change your plan to meet the needs of the situation. Unfortunately, you can't play the same moves every time and expect success. So we will pay lots of attention to learning when a certain way of developing or moving a piece is effective, and when you need to adjust and find a different, better plan.

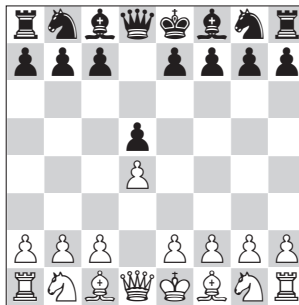
The following pages teach everything you need to know about winning opening play. We study the best ways to develop each piece, and the best strategies for utilizing pawn play to support quick and powerful development.

First, we need to go over the **Values of the Pieces**, and the **Quick Count**. These are crucial tools for calculating complicated piece trades to see who comes out ahead. You can skim this section if you've already read my books *Power Chess For Kids*, Volumes 1 & 2, but if not, this knowledge is a must for good opening play.

Central Pawn Duo Opening #1: The Queen's Gambit

The most direct way for White to achieve a central pawn duo is the Queen's Gambit Opening, 1.d4 d5 2.c4!. This dynamic opening gives White's pieces active posts with little risk. The bishops get great diagonals with three quick pawn moves; the knights occupy their natural squares; and the major pieces get a half-open file and central space. In short, White gets all the advantages of a Quick and Easy scheme, but his aggressive pawn play gives him two added advantages – more central space, and enhanced queenside attacking chances.

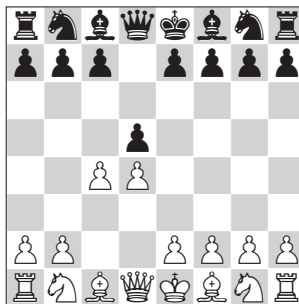
1.d4 d5



1...d5

The most solid move. Against 1...♘f6 we recommend the Torre Attack from the previous section.

2.c4!



2.c4! – The Queen's Gambit

The reason why 1.d4 is so popular: White gets a central pawn duo with no real risk. A pawn duo means two pawns side by side on the same rank (the 4th rank, or row, in this case).

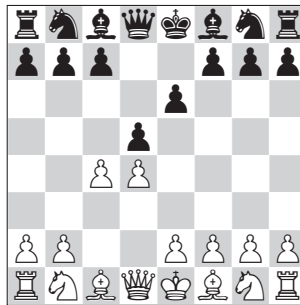


What's so great about a central pawn duo, anyway?



I thought you'd never ask! The first great book about pawns was *Pawn Power in Chess*, by the Austrian master Hans Kmoch. Kmoch showed that the duo is the strongest attacking formation for a pair of pawns; working together, they control four light and dark squares ahead of them! (in this case, the c-pawn attacks d5 and b5, while the d-pawn controls c5 and e5). Duos are also *flexible* – either pawn can advance and be protected by the other. Central Pawn Duos control valuable **central space**, giving your pieces more freedom to operate effectively.

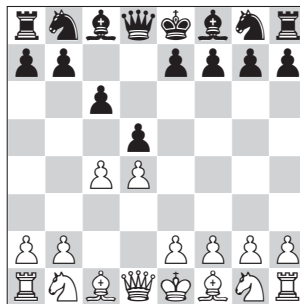
2...e6



2...e6 – a strongpoint defense

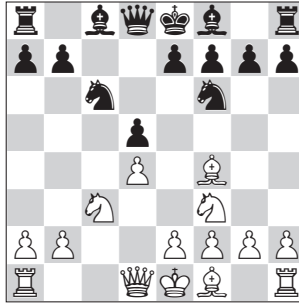
Black adopts a 'strongpoint defense' with this move, called the *Orthodox Defense*. In Chapter 5, we learned why Black can't keep the pawn after 2...dxc4. 2...e6 keeps firm control of the central bulwark d5, unlike the common kid's mistake 2...♘f6?! 3.cxd5! ♘xd5 4.e4 (or 4.♘f3 first), when White gets a strong central duo with gain of time.

The tricky *Slav Defense* 2...c6 requires special attention.



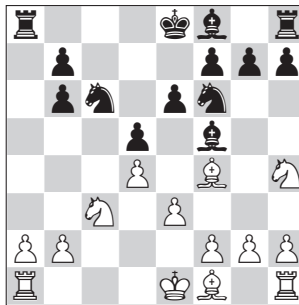
2...c6 – the Slav Defense

Now we recommend switching to a Quick and Easy approach which is very comfortable for White and avoids complications: 3.cxd5 cxd5 4.♘c3 ♘f6 5.♘f3 ♘c6 6.♙f4.



Slav Defense, Exchange Variation after 6. Qf4

Black can play copycat, but White's extra move gives him a leg up: 6... Qf5 7.e3 e6 8. Qb3!? Qb6 (a typical trap is 8... Qd7? 9. Qe5! Qxe5? 10.dxe5 Qe4 11. Qb5 winning the queen!) 9. Qxb6 axb6 10. Qh4! (going for the two bishop advantage):

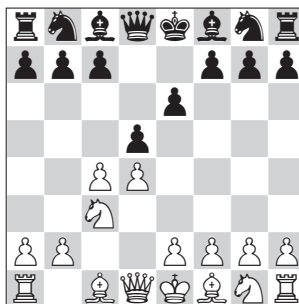


10. Qh4!? – copy this!



Now 10... Qh5? 11. Qc7 is bad; otherwise, Zort prefers White after 10... Qe4 11. Qc1 Qb4 12.a3, or 10... Qb4?! 11. Qb5+! Qd8 12. Qxf5 exf5 (12... Qc2+ 13. Qd2 Qxa1 14. Qg3 and 15. Qxa1 next) 13. Qe2.

Returning to the Orthodox Defense: **1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3. Qc3.**



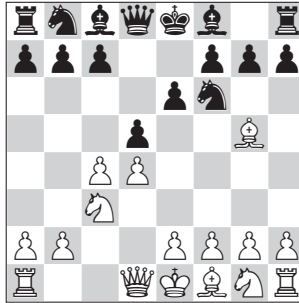
3. Qc3

White's central duo gives the knight's ideal move extra punch, pressuring Black's d5 strongpoint. Black still can't win the pawn on c4: 3...dxc4?! 4.e4! and 5.♙xc4 (4...b5? 5.♘xb5).

3...♘f6

Natural development, 'overprotecting' d5.

4.♙g5!



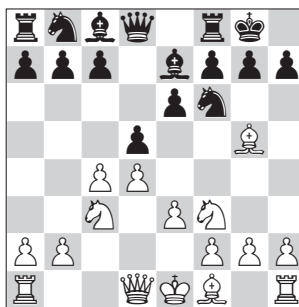
4.♙g5! – purposeful bishop development

This great pin works well in Queen's Pawn Games. In two more moves (e2-e3 and ♙d3), both bishops get splendid diagonals. White already threatens 5.cxd5 exd5 6.♙xf6, forcing Black's pawns to fragment with 6...gxf6, since 6...♙xf6 7.♘xd5 wins a pawn.

4...♙e7!

The usual, soundest response to ♙g5 – Black frees the knight from the pin by shielding his queen on the g5-d8 diagonal. Breaking the pin at once fortifies the d5 strongpoint.

5.♘f3 0-0 6.e3



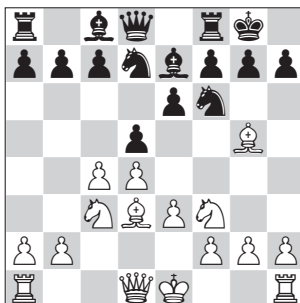
6.e3

6...♘bd7

Slow but steady. Another common idea is 6...h6, chasing White's bishop. As in the Torre, White usually answers 7.♙h4!. In Chapter 3 we discussed the risks of 7...g5?!, exposing Black's king after 8.♙g3.

This modest development is typical of strongpoint defenses. Black's firm grip on d5 protects him from early attacks, at the cost of less freedom to develop aggressively. 6...♘c6?! looks natural, but doesn't fit Black's plans. He needs the c-pawn unblocked, to play ...c7-c6, bolstering the strongpoint.

7.♙d3!

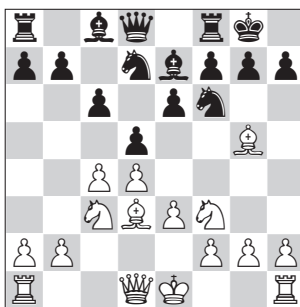


7.♙d3 – another fine diagonal

The most active development, pointing at the black king on the long diagonal b1-h7. If 7...dxc4 8.♙xc4, the bishop switches to another good post. Equally good are 7.♖c2 or 7.cxd5.

7...c6

Black reinforces the strongpoint and keeps his options open.

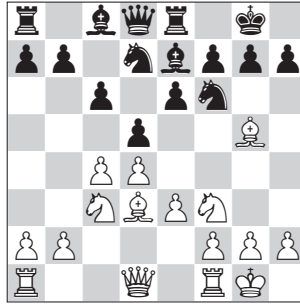


7...c6

This position illustrates the battle of a **Central Pawn Duo** vs. a **Strongpoint Defense**.

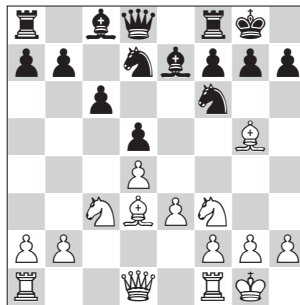
White has freer development and more central space. Black's compact formation is a tough nut to crack, but he has problems to solve in order to equalize. Playing 2...e6 to establish the d5 strongpoint left his queen's bishop shut in, unlike White's counterpart on g5. Having less central space, Black is somewhat cramped. Because his strongpoint holds off White's attack, Black has good chances to resolve these issues.

8.0-0 ♖e8?!



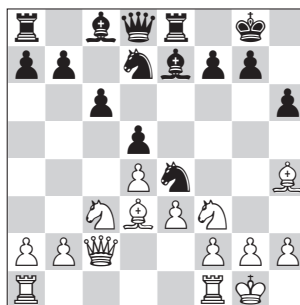
8...Re8?!

This is a minor mix-up for Black. Why did he get confused? Because if White had played the common 8.cxd5 exd5! 9.0-0 first we get this position:



8.cxd5 exd5! 9.0-0 – analysis

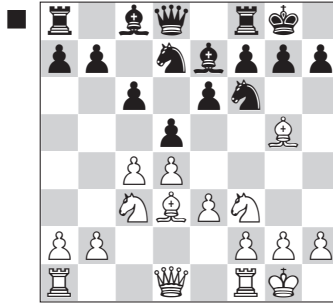
In this position 9...Re8! is a wonderful move, because it prepares a **freeing combination** on the half-open e-file: 10.♖c2 h6 11.♗h4 ♘e4!.



11.♗h4 ♘e4! – an excellent freeing idea

Now on 12.♗xe7 ♖xe7 the ♘e4 is defended (3 defenders vs. 3 attackers). Black has eased his cramp and is ready to develop the queen's bishop after ...♗df6 (or ...♗f8).

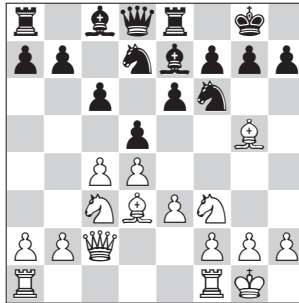
So let's return to move 8 and see how Black could better play for equality:



What should Black play?

Since his ♖e8 makes less sense here without the half-open e-file, Black should try one of two ideas: either 8...dxc4 9.♙xc4 ♘d5! (as he actually played one move later), forcing piece exchanges to ease his cramp, or 8...h6 9.♙h4 b6!?, to fianchetto and develop his problem ♗c8. Black's plan is then to finish untangling with ...♙b7, ...♖c8, and possibly ...c6-c5, with a complicated position.

9. ♙c2



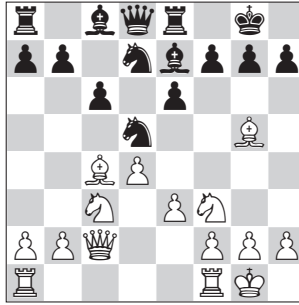
9. ♙c2

This position was reached between two club players, Svendsen and Neudel, at a tournament in Queenstown in 2009. White controls more space and has optimally developed men; the game continuation shows the potential of White's central and queenside attack once the major pieces get effectively involved.

9...dxc4

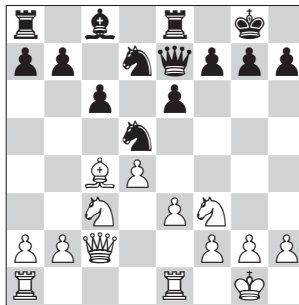
Black decides he is developed enough to release the strongpoint, in order to force some trades to create more room for his pieces. His wasted last move made life more difficult, but Zort will show that he still had plenty of resources!

10. ♙xc4 ♘d5



10...Nxd5 – a typical freeing move

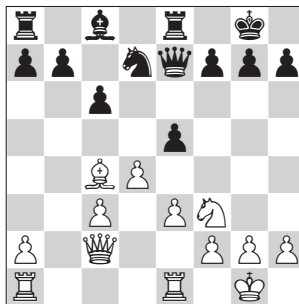
11. Qxe7 Rxe7 12. Rfe1



12. Rfe1 – sneaky rook play!

A crafty rook move by White! He foresees Black's plan to counterattack in the center, and prepares for central battle by placing his rook opposite Black's queen.

12...Nxc3 13. bxc3 e5

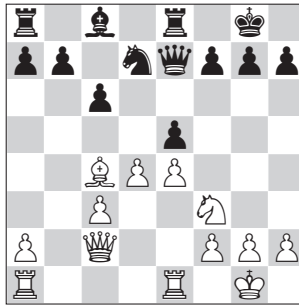


13...e5 – a bid for freedom

Black tries to break his cocoon by fighting back in the center and opening a line for the c8-bishop. He wants to expand on the kingside with 14...e4!

14.e4!

White says ‘no way, José!’ to Black’s ...e5-e4 idea. By making a new central duo, he keeps his space advantage and reveals the hidden idea behind 12.♖fe1!.



14.e4! – ‘no way, José!’

14...exd4?

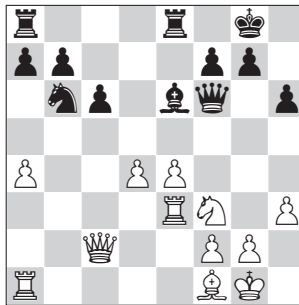
Black has fought hard for freedom and should not give up his new strongpoint on e5!

Zort recommends 14...b5! 15.♗b3 ♘b7 with roughly equal chances. White’s powerful center now denies Black any good prospects.

15.cxd4 h6 16.h3 ♘b6 17.♗f1!

Tucking the bishop safely on f1 is strong here. White avoids a trade on c4, to prove that Black’s ♘b6 is misplaced. He also sees powerful rook play ahead, and doesn’t want to block the b-, d- or e-files with his bishop.

17...♖f6 (threatening 18...♗xh3 19.gxh3 ♖xf3) **18.♖e3 ♗e6 19.a4!**



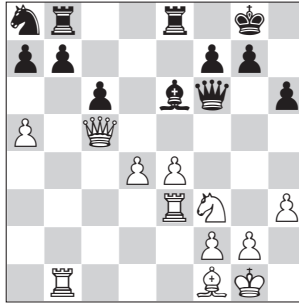
19.a4!

Black has finally developed his bishop, but now White gets a powerful queen-side attack to go with his commanding center. He plans to win the c6-pawn after pushing a5-a6, to remove the b7-pawn, which defends c6.

19...♖ac8

Defending c6. If 19..a5 20.♖b1!, and Black’s knight is stuck shielding the b7-pawn from capture.

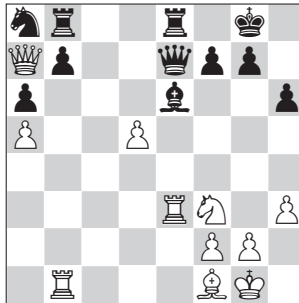
20.♖b1! ♖b8 21.a5 ♗a8 22.♖c5



22. ♖c5 attacks Black's weak queenside pawns

22...a6 23. ♖a7 ♖d8

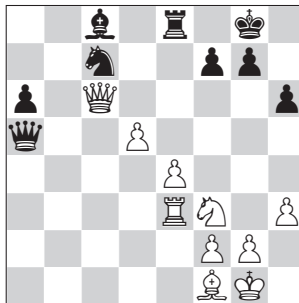
If instead 23... ♖e7 24.d5! cxd5 25.exd5



25.exd5 – analysis

White wins the bishop, since it's pinned by the ♖e3.

24. ♖xb7 ♖xb7 25. ♖xb7 ♖xa5 26. ♖xc6 ♖c7 27.d5 ♖c8



27... ♖c8

Black resigned without waiting for White's move, because he saw 28.d6!, deflecting the knight from defending the ♖e8, whereby White wins the knight for free.