

**The Réti Opening...**

**...Properly Played**

**Jerzy  
Konikowski  
Uwe  
Bekemann**



**JBV Chess Books**

Jerzy Konikowski  
Uwe Bekemann

# **The Réti Opening – Properly Played**

---

**JBV Chess Books**

## Table of Contents

<b>Explanation of Symbols</b> .....	8
<b>Preface</b> .....	9
<b>How to play the ‘Réti Opening’</b> .....	10
<b>Introduction</b> .....	13
<b>Chapter 1: 1.♠f3 d5 2.g3 c6 (without c2-c4)</b> .....	29
<b>Chapter 2: 1.♠f3 d5 2.b3 (without c2-c4)</b> .....	35
Line 1: 2...♗f6 .....	35
Line 2: 2...c5 .....	37
Line 3: 2...♙g4 .....	45
<b>Chapter 3: 1.♠f3 d5 2.c4 d4</b> .....	51
Line 1: 3.g3 ♗c6 4.♙g2 e5 5.0-0 .....	51
Line 1A: 5...e4 .....	56
Line 1B: 5...♗f6 .....	59
Line 2: 3.e3 .....	64
Line 3: 3.b4 .....	69
Line 4: 3.c5 .....	82
<b>Chapter 4: 1.♠f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3 ♗f6 4.♙g2</b> .....	90
Line 1: 4...dxc4 .....	100
Line 2: 4...d4 .....	105
<b>Chapter 5: 1.♠f3 d5 2.c4 dxc4</b> .....	109
Line 1: 3.e3 .....	109
Line 2: 3.♖a4+ .....	111
Line 3: 3.♗a3 .....	115
Line 4: 3.e4 .....	121
<b>Chapter 6: 1.♠f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.b3</b> .....	134
<b>Chapter 7: 1.♠f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.e3</b> .....	142
<b>Chapter 8: 1.♠f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.g3 ♗f6 4.♙g2 ♗f5 5.b3 e6 6.♙b2 ♗bd7 7.0-0</b> .....	154
Line 1: 7...h6 .....	159
Line 2: 7...♙d6 .....	160

Line 3: 7...♙e7 .....	164
Line 4: 7...♙c5 .....	170
<b>Chapter 9: 1.♟f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♙g2 ♙g4</b> .....	174
Line 1: 5.♘e5 .....	178
Line 2: 5.cxd5 .....	183
Line 3: 5.b3 .....	188
Line 4: 5.♖b3 .....	192
<b>Chapter 10: 1.♟f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♙g2 e6</b> .....	198
Line 1: 5.0-0 .....	204
Line 2: 5.♖c2 .....	207
<b>Chapter 11: 1.♟f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♙g2 g6 5.b3 ♙g7</b> <b>6.♙b2 0-0 7.0-0</b> .....	211
Line 1: 7...♙f5 .....	212
Line 2: 7...♙g4 .....	215
Line 3: 7...♖e8 .....	221
Line 4: 7...♘bd7 .....	227
Line 5: 7...a5 .....	229
Line 6: 7...♖b6 .....	236
Line 7: 7...b5 .....	238
Line 8: 7...♘e4 .....	239
Line 9: 7...dxc4 .....	240
Line 10: 7...e6 .....	241
Line 11: 7...♘a6 .....	242
Line 12: 7...b6 .....	243
<b>Chapter 12: Example games</b> .....	245
Game 1: Rapport – Gutman, Deizisau 2014 .....	245
Game 2: Nimzowitsch – Johner, Bern 1931 .....	245
Game 3: Ivanchuk – Alekseyev, Jermuk 2009 .....	246
Game 4: Kramnik – Meier, Dortmund 2014 .....	250
Game 5: Réti – Rubinstein, Karlsbad 1923 .....	251
Game 6: Tikkanen – Welin, Sweden 2012 .....	253
Game 7: Ftacnik – Ehlvest, Istanbul 2000 .....	254
Game 8: Rapport – Caruana, Berlin 2017 .....	255
Game 9: Schreiner – Frank, Oberwart 2012 .....	257
Game 10: Grigorian – Ahlander, Bremen 2018 .....	258

Game 11: Kramnik – Mista, Doha 2014 .....	260
Game 12: So – Wei Yi, chess.com INT 2018 .....	261
Game 13: Svidler – Kramnik, Moscow 2011 .....	264
Game 14: Huzman – Maryasin, Israel 2002 .....	266
Game 15: Ivanchuk – Charbonneau, Edmonton 2005 .....	267
Game 16: Réti – Havasi, Budapest 1926 .....	268
Game 17: Capablanca – Bogoljubov, Moscow 1925 .....	269
Game 18: Kramer – Fine, New York 1948 .....	273
Game 19: Kögler – Wunderlich, correspondence game 2011 .....	273
Game 20: Fröwis – Kreisl, Linz 2011 .....	274
Game 21: Wojtaszek – Krysztofiak, Poland 2004 .....	275
Game 22: Grigorian – Agasarian, Armenia 2013 .....	276
Game 23: Réti – Lasker, New York 1924 .....	277
Game 24: Capablanca – Lilienthal, Moscow 1936 .....	278
Game 25: Lie – Carlsen, Gjovik 2009 .....	280
Game 26: Elyanov – Karjakin, Kiev 2013 .....	280
Game 27: Carlsen – Nakamura, Moscow 2013 .....	282
Game 28: Malakhov – E. Hansen, Tromsö 2013 .....	283
Game 29: Usmanov – Martynov, Saint Petersburg 2013 .....	284
Game 30: Botvinnik – Stahlberg, Moscow 1956 .....	285
Game 31: Kunin – Hernandez Munoz, Porto 2015 .....	286
<b>Index of Sources</b> .....	288
<b>Index of Names</b> .....	289

## Explanation of Symbols

!	a good move
!!	an excellent move
?	a weak move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
+−	White has a decisive advantage
−+	Black has a decisive advantage
±	White stands better
∓	Black stands better
±̄	White stands slightly better
∓̄	Black stands slightly better
=	equal
∞	unclear; with chances for both sides
∞̄	with compensation for the material deficit
↑	with initiative
→	with attack
↔	with counter play
Δ	with the idea
⊂	better is
x	takes
+	check
#	mate

## Preface

Before we started working on this book, we discussed the needs of our intended target group. We came to the conclusion that it's primarily intended for amateurs looking for an opening that offers the following advantages:

1. It should be easy to learn – based on the fact that the readers can orient themselves on key ideas and general set-up plans – without the need to memorize vast amounts of 'theory'.
2. However, they should still be able to focus on certain continuations and to increase their specific knowledge.
3. The opening should enable them to master the passage from the opening to the middle game with mainly solid positional play – i.e. without the risk of running into sharp tactical surprises.
4. It should offer much room for research and experimentation.

The 'Réti Opening' is quiet and solid and usually leads to the middle game with fairly equal chances for both sides. The arising positions are interesting and require more positional understanding than tactical skills.

In addition to our theoretical explanations, we give many games from tournament practice to show the 'Réti Opening' in action. By studying these games, the reader can not only enrich his knowledge with many typical and subtle motifs and ideas – but also become familiar with what one might call the 'natural development' in the different lines and set-ups. However, we have made sure that the selected games, apart from the required work, are also enjoyable and entertaining.

One final comment on a specific organizational difficulty we had to fight with. Since the various systems and lines covered in this book are sometimes very closely related, many possible transpositions of moves can occur. We have done our best to point out all the different move orders, though we may have missed one or the other.

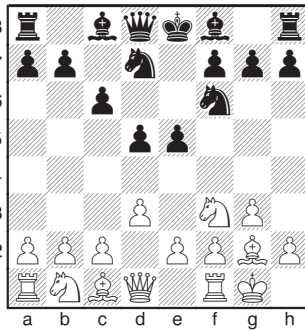
And now, enjoy our book! And may the ideas and plans shown help you to score many great successes!

Jerzy Konikowski – Uwe Bekemann

## How to play the 'Réti Opening'

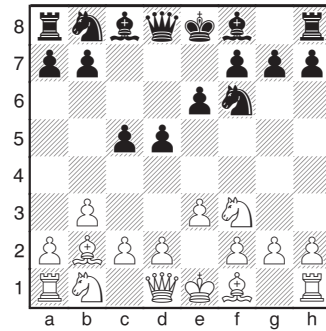
To give you some general guidelines on how to play the 'Réti Opening', let's look at some important typical positions. However, they can only show some of the regularly occurring essential possibilities, as it always depends on the specific circumstances, which approach is the best or the most appropriate.

1<sup>st</sup> example position



Black has built a strong pawn center and White has to keep it under control before he can attack it sooner or later. In the given position, he will do so by applying the lever e2–e4.

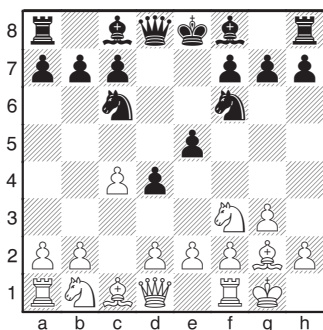
2<sup>nd</sup> example position



Here, Black's strong pawn center looks different, since the c-pawn has advanced *two* squares while the e-pawn has been held back. Furthermore, White has chosen a different fianchetto. The attack on the opposing center will be carried out with c2–c4.

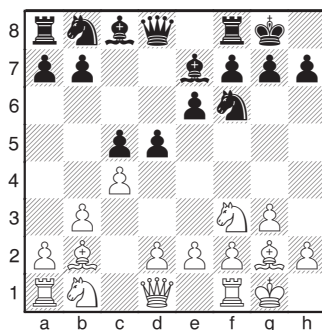


3<sup>rd</sup> example position

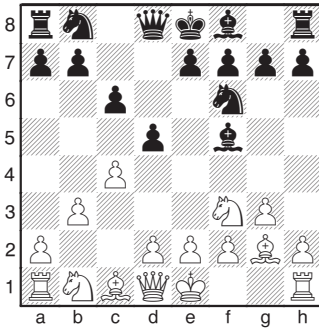


In this position, Black has released the central tension by pushing the d-pawn to d4. After the stabilizing move d2-d3, White will attack the opposing center with the lever e2-e3.

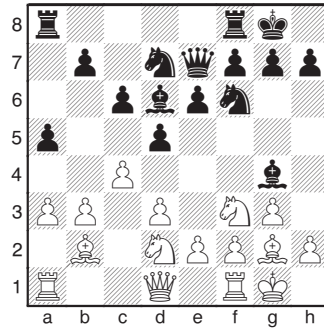
4<sup>th</sup> example position



Here, White has chosen a double fianchetto in order to maximize the central influence of *both* bishops. Furthermore, the attack move c2-c4 has already been executed. Depending on whether Black sooner or later pushes his d-pawn, White chooses the appropriate countermeasures. If Black keeps the d-pawn in place, he will continue his development with d2-d3, ♖b1-d2, e2-e3 etc. – and if it advances to d4, he will either attack it with e2-e3 or become active on the queen side with a2-a3 and b3-b4.

5<sup>th</sup> example position

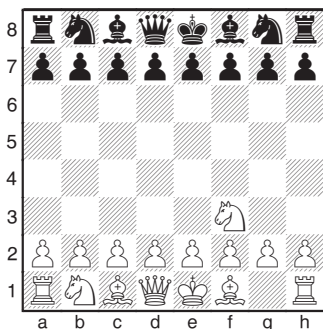
This position is characterized by the fact that Black's queen bishop operates *outside* the pawn chain (alternatively it could also stand on g4). Black will put his e-pawn on e6 for the time being and only later try to push it to e5.

6<sup>th</sup> example position

This position shows an example of which shape the previous one might take. Both sides still have to develop their heavy pieces. Meanwhile, further significant pawn moves are not to be expected in the near future.

## Introduction

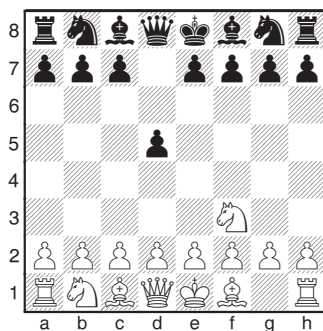
1. ♘f3



This opening was introduced in tournament practice almost one century ago by the extraordinary Hungarian Grandmaster Richard Réti, who was one of the pioneers of the so-called 'Hypermodern School'. One of its revolutionary ideas was a completely different approach to the treatment of the center. Instead of occupying it with pawns (i.e. in the *classic* manner), the bishops were developed to the flanks (by means of a so-called 'fianchetto') in order to build up piece pressure on the center. If White chooses the 'Réti Opening', he allows his opponent to occupy the center with pawns – and then attacks these pawns with the appropriate levers. In many cases the close relationship of the 'Réti Opening' with other openings becomes apparent – for example with the 'King's Indian Defense', the 'English Opening' and many others.

1...d5

This is the most popular reply, although Black has many alternatives given White's restrained approach – like e.g. 1...♘f6, 1...c5 etc. However, they will mostly lead to the main line or to one of the sidelines by transposition of moves.



2.c4

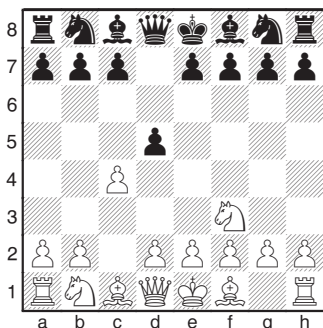
This is the original form of the Réti Opening. White immediately attacks the opposing center pawn. The other options that prepare a fianchetto with either 2.g3 or 2.b3 are examined in separate chapters.

I. 2.g3 (**Chapter 1**)

II. 2.b3 (**Chapter 2**)

However, these two moves can also lead to other lines by transposition of moves. At this early stage of the game it can happen very often, that different move orders lead to the same positions. Of course, if White plays

d2-d4 here or in one of the next moves, this would lead to the Queen's Gambit, which is not a subject of this book.



### 2...c6

This is one of the best defense options, since it reinforces the pawn on d5 without blocking the diagonal c8-h3. However, Black has other moves at his disposal.

I. 2...d4 (Chapter 3)

II. 2...e6 (Chapter 4)

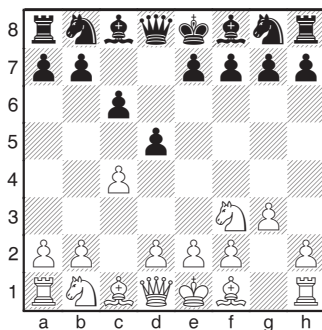
III. 2...dxc4 (Chapter 5)

### 3.g3

White quickly develops his king side without taking care of his pawn on c4. Alternatively, he could do so with the following lines.

I. 3.b3 (Chapter 6)

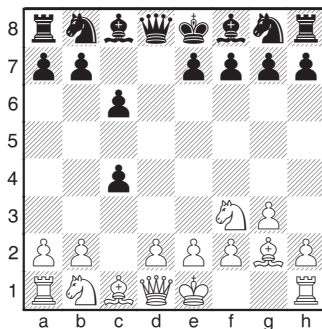
II. 3.e3 (Chapter 7)



3...f6 (continued on page 17)

If Black took the pawn on c4 now, White would have to continue in gambit-style. Since this is of considerable practical relevance, we will take a closer look at it.

3...dxc4 4.gg2



4...f6 leads to the main line (see page 17).

The alternatives are 4...f5, 4...d7 and 4...b5.

A) 4...d7 5.0-0

5.f3! is a noteworthy alternative, which can also be found in similar lines (e.g. Chapter 5 – Line 3).

However, the basic ideas are explained in the following paragraphs.

**A1)** If Black chooses a set-up with the fianchetto of the king bishop, the game can take the following course.

5...g6 6.♘a3 ♘b6 7.♖c2 ♙g7

(Black can try to defend his extra pawn with 7...♗d5!?, but after the example line 8.b3 cxb3 9.axb3 ♙g7 10.e4 ♗h5 11.d4 ♙h3 12.♘c4, White has obtained a very active position.)

8.♘xc4 ♘xc4 9.♗xc4 ♘f6 10.d3

(After 10.b4 a5 11.b5 ♗d5, Black has no problems.)

10...0-0 11.♙d2

(In the game Wen – Shulman, Ningbo 2013, White played 11.♗h4, and Black tried to exploit the opposing queen's absence from the queen side.

11...♗b6 12.♖b1 ♙e6 13.b3 ♗a5 14.a4 ♙g4

Black wants to clarify the situation on the king side.

15.♙d2 ♗h5 16.♗xh5 ♙xh5 17.h3 ♙xf3 18.♙xf3 ♖fd8 19.b4 a6 20.♖fc1 ♘d5 21.h4 h5 22.♙f1 ♖ac8 23.b5

White has an advantage and went on to win. Although there should be the one or other improvement for Black after 11.♗h4, the basic idea deserves more practical tests.)

11...♘d5 12.♖ab1 a5 13.♙c3

To give up the bishop pair is probably not advisable in the given position.

(13.a3! followed by e2-e4 and only then ♙d2-c3 etc. came into consideration.)

13...♘xc3 14.bxc3 a4 15.♗b4 a3 16.♖fc1 ♖a6 17.♘d2 ♗c7 18.♖b3 ♗d6

19.♖c2 ♖d8 20.♗xd6 exd6

In the game Dominguez Perez – Vallejo Pons, Melilla 2011, White should now have played 21.♘b1!? to conquer the pawn on a3, e.g. 21...b5 22.♖xa3. Instead he got under pressure after 21.♘c4 b5 22. ♘xa3 ♙e6 and had to fight for a draw.

**A2)** 5...♘gf6 6.♘a3

(The alternative 6.♗c2! can lead to lines discussed further below.)

6...♘b6 7.♘e5 ♗d4

(Although the approach 7...♙e6! seems a bit artificial, it gives Black good chances to reach an equal position; e.g. 8.♗c2 g6 9.♘axc4 ♘xc4 10.♘xc4 ♙g7 11.d3 0-0=, Maletin – Linchevski, Saint Petersburg 2015.)

8.♘exc4!? ♙e6

Here we even choose this seemingly artificial move as the main line, because we find its effectivity convincing.

(After the alternative 8...♘xc4, the game Vachier–Lagrave – Giri, Beijing 2013, took the following course.

9.♗a4 ♙d7 10.♗xc4 ♗xc4 11.♘xc4 g6 12.b4 ♙g7 13.♙b2 0-0 14.♘a5 ♙c8 15.a4 ♖d8 16.♖fd1 ♘d5 17.♙xg7 ♙xg7 18.b5 cxb5 19.axb5 a6

Now, White could have obtained at least a small advantage with 20.bxa6.)

9.♘a5 ♙d5 10.♘b3

(The greedy 10.♘xb7?? would be a blunder, because after 10...♙xg2 11.♙xg2 ♗d7 12.♘a5 ♗d5+, the knight would be lost.)

10...♗g4 11.f3 ♗b4 12.♘c2

This is a solid choice.

(The push 12.d4!? also leads to interesting prospects. After e.g. 12...♙xb3 13.axb3 e5 14.dxe5 ♖c5+ 15.♔h1 ♗xe5 16.e4, White can proceed with the active plan ♗d1-c2, f3-f4 etc.)

12...♙xb3 13.♗xb4 ♙xd1 14.♖xd1 e5±  
15.♗d3 ♗fd7 16.b3 f6 17.♙b2 ♗c5  
18.♗f2 ♗e6 19.e3 ♙e7 20.f4 exf4  
21.gxf4 ♖d8 22.♙h3 ♗f7 23.♗f1

In the game Ponomariov – Dreyev, Chanty–Mansijsk 2013, White still had the slightly better prospects, not least in view of his bishop pair.

#### B) 4...b5

Black tries to defend his extra pawn, or at least he wants to make it as hard as possible for his opponent to get it back. This approach carries significant risks, as shown in the following lines.

5.0-0

White even has enough time to first bring his king to safety.

5...e6 6.a4

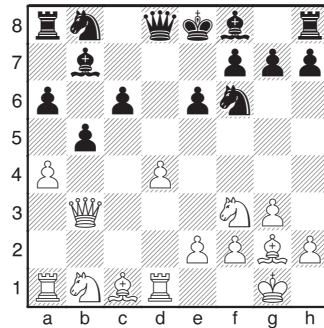
This is the first blow to destabilize Black's pawn structure in this area.

6...♙b7

(After 6...a6 7.axb5 cxb5 8.♗d4! ♖a7 9.♗xb5 ♖d7 10.♗5a3, Black's position is very critical given his weak c-pawn and the undeveloped king side.)  
7.b3!

And this second blow completes the typical method of exposing the weakened opposing queen side.

7...cxb3 8.♗xb3 a6 9.d4 ♗f6 10.♖d1



**B1)** If Black chooses to first bring the king to safety, the game can take the following course.

10...♙e7 11.♗e5 0-0

(After 11...b4, the answer 12.a5!? is interesting – or simply 12. ♙b2 followed by ♗b1-d2-c4♞.)

12.♗a3

(12.axb5 axb5 13.♖xa8 ♙xa8 etc. is unclear and thus less advisable.)

12...b4

(After 12...♗d5 13.♙d2 ♗d7 14.e4 ♗5b6 15.♙a5 ♖c8 16.♗xd7 ♗xd7 17.♖ac1, White's initiative compensates the pawn.)

13.a5 ♖xa5 14.♙d2 ♖c7 15.♙xb4 ♙xb4 16.♗xb4 a5 17.♗a4♞

White has sufficient pressure for the sacrificed pawn.

**B2)** 10...♗bd7 11.♗e5 ♗xe5 12.dxe5 ♗d7 13.♗c3 ♗b8

(After 13...♙e7 14.♗e4 0-0 15.♙a3, White dominates the dark squares.)

14.♗e4 ♗b6

(The pawn on e5 is taboo, as proven in the lines 14...♗xe5 15.♙f4 ♙e7 16.♖ac1+- or 14...♗xe5 15.♙f4 ♗f5 16.♖xd7! ♗xd7 17.♖d1+ ♗e8 18.♗d3

♖d5 19. ♗d6+ ♕xd6 20. ♕xd5 ♕xf4  
21. ♕xe6+-.)

15. ♕a3! ♗c4

(The position after 15... ♕xa3 16. ♖xa3  
♗c4 17. ♖c5! is untenable.)

16. ♕xf8 ♖xf8

(16... ♗xf8 17. ♖b4+ ♔g8 18. ♖e7  
♗xe5 19. ♗d6+-)

17. ♖ac1 ♗xe5 18. ♗d6+ ♔e7 19. ♖b4  
a5 20. ♗f5+

(20. ♗c8+! ♗f6 21. ♖f4+ ♔g6 22. ♗e7+  
♗h5 23. ♖h4# loses even quicker.)

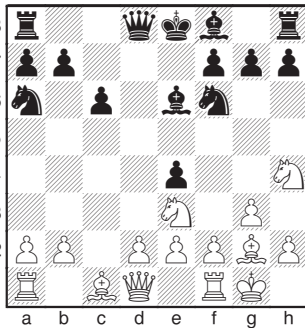
20... ♗f6 21. ♖h4+ g5 22. ♖h6+ ♗g6  
23. ♖g7+ ♗xf5 24. e4+

In the game Mladenov – Chetkov,  
Plovdiv 2008, Black resigned.

**C)** 4... ♕f5 5. ♗a3 e5

(5...b5? is bad because of 6. ♗xb5!  
cxb5 7. ♗h4 with an advantage for  
White.)

6. ♗xc4 e4 7. ♗h4 ♕e6 8. ♗e3 ♗f6  
9.0-0 ♗a6



**C1)** 10.b3 ♖d4 11.♗c2

(11...♖b1 is also playable, and in case  
of 11...0-0-0, White can proceed ac-  
tively on the queen side with a2-a3  
and b3-b4-b5.)

11...♖d7 12.♕b2

We agree with 'Houdini' that the po-  
sition is pretty equal. If Black choos-  
es to castle queen side, a fierce fight  
might follow.

12...0-0-0 13. ♕xf6 gxf6 14. ♕xe4 ♖xd2  
15. e3 ♖xd1 16. ♖fd1 ♖xd1+ 17. ♖xd1  
♗b4 18. ♗xb4 ♕xb4 19. ♗f5

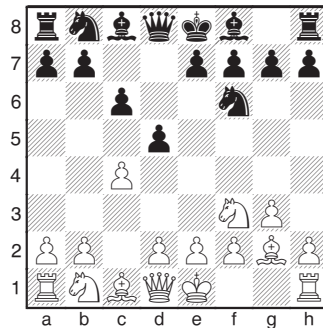
Now White has a slight edge given  
Black's pawn weaknesses on the king  
side.

**C2)** After 10.d3 exd3 11.exd3, the  
game Andriasian – Riazantsev, Dubai  
2014, took the following course.

11...♕e7 12. ♗hf5 0-0 13.d4 ♗c7  
14. ♗xe7+ ♖xe7 15. ♖e1 ♖d7 16.b3  
♖fe8 17. ♕b2 ♕h3 18. ♕f3 h6 19. ♖c2  
♕e6 20. ♕g2 ♖ad8 21. ♖ad1 ♗cd5  
22. ♗c4 ♕f5 23. ♖d2 ♖xe1+ 24. ♖xe1  
♖e8 25. ♗e5

In view of his bishop pair, White had  
a slight edge.

**4. ♕g2**



**4...dxc4**

After the preceding preparations, this  
is now the most consistent continua-  
tion. White has to prove that he has  
sufficient compensation. However,