

OPENING IDEA 3: THE KNIGHT AND BISHOP ATTACK

If you play your knight to f3 and your bishop to c4 at the start of the game you'll often have the chance to go for a quick attack on f7 by moving your knight to g5.

Is it a good idea or a bad idea? The answer is that it all depends.

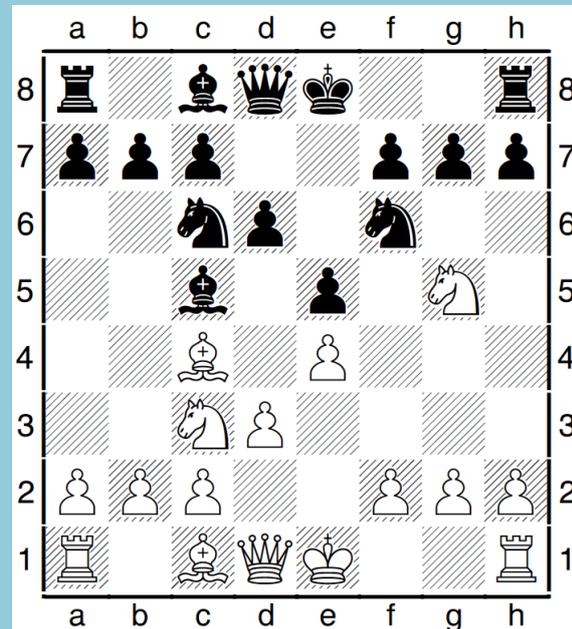
Going back to these moves:

1. e4 e5
2. Nf3 Nc6
3. Bc4 Bc5
4. d3 Nf6
5. Nc3 d6

You'll remember we looked at Bg5 here. You might have asked yourself why we didn't play...

6. Ng5 instead?

Here's the position.



It looks tempting, doesn't it. You're threatening Nxf7 with a FORK which, if your opponent doesn't notice, will win a rook.

But playing for traps like this isn't a good idea. You must always assume that your opponent is going to find the best reply. Here, it's easy for Black to stop White's threat comfortably.

The best move is...

- 6... O-O

You'll remember that this was not a good move after 6. Bg5. But against Ng5 it's the only good move!

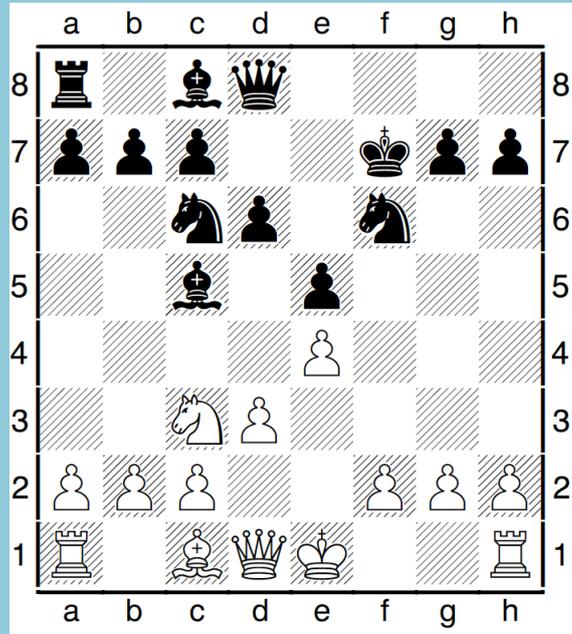
Chess is hard. Even a very slight difference in the position can make a very big difference to the best move.

If you're White you might be tempted to continue with...

7. Bxf7+ Rxf7

8. Nxf7 Kxf7

... reaching this position:



Now you might think this is good for White because Black's king seems to be in trouble. This is not the case, though. In fact, Black has the better position (and scores 77% on my database).

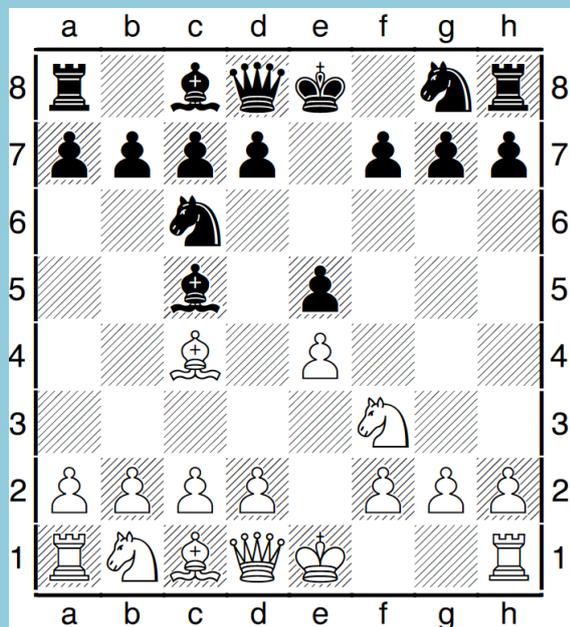
Here's why:

1. Black has a lead in development, with three pieces developed to White's one piece, and the king will have plenty of time to get back to safety.
2. If you count the points it's equal but bishops are actually worth, on average, a bit more than 3 points, so Black's slightly ahead.
3. Rooks are often not so useful in the early part of the game, especially in this position where White has no open files.

So I'd advise you not to play this sort of thing yourself. If you're Black and your opponent plays like this you should be feeling very happy about your position.

Let's look at some more positions where White might think about playing Ng5.

We'll go back to the start.



In this position (after 1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4 Bc5) it's clearly a bad mistake to play...

4. Ng5 Qxg5

Although if you're Black you have to spot that your queen is in line with the white bishop on c1 so

White can play a DISCOVERED ATTACK:

5. d4

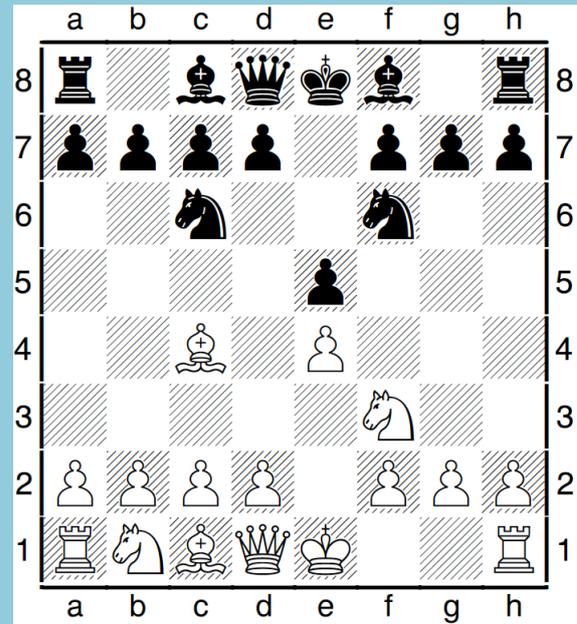
... and instead of taking the pawn play

...

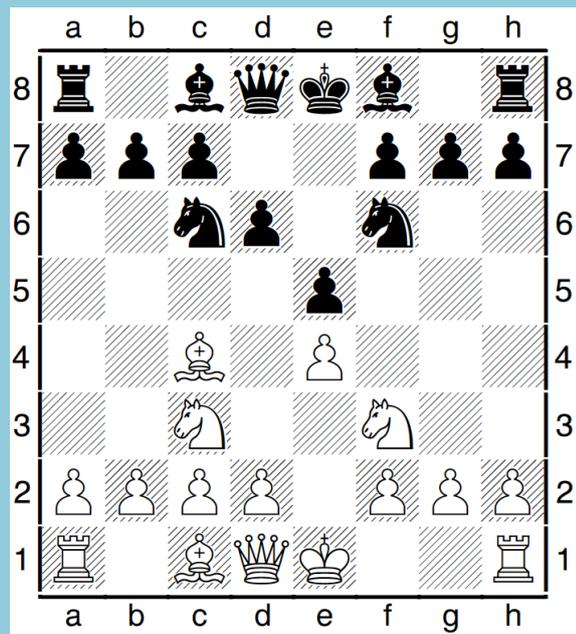
5... Qxg2

... you'll have a winning advantage.

Black can also play 3... Nf6:



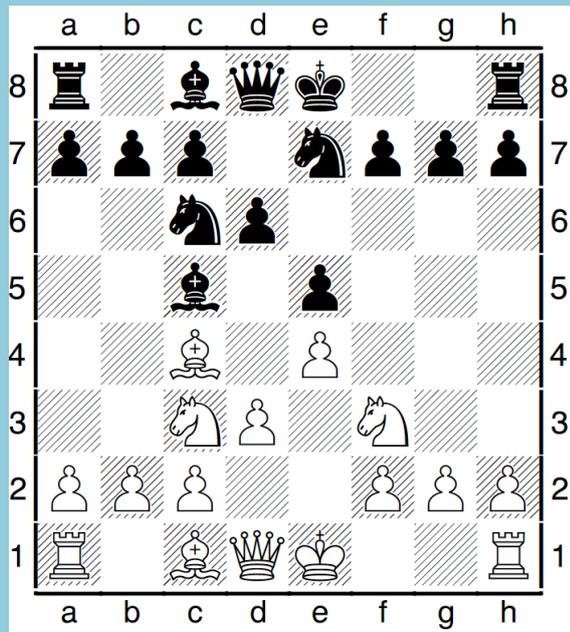
In this position 4. Ng5 is a very interesting move: You can play it if you like, but playing 4. d3, for example, is equally good. It depends which sort of position you want to play.



In this position (after, for example, 1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4 d6 4. Nc3 Nf6)

5. Ng5

Is a very strong move, giving you a big advantage. After either 5... d5 or 5... Be6 White will win a pawn.



This is very similar to what you've seen before. The big difference is that the black knight is on e7, not f6.

In this position ...

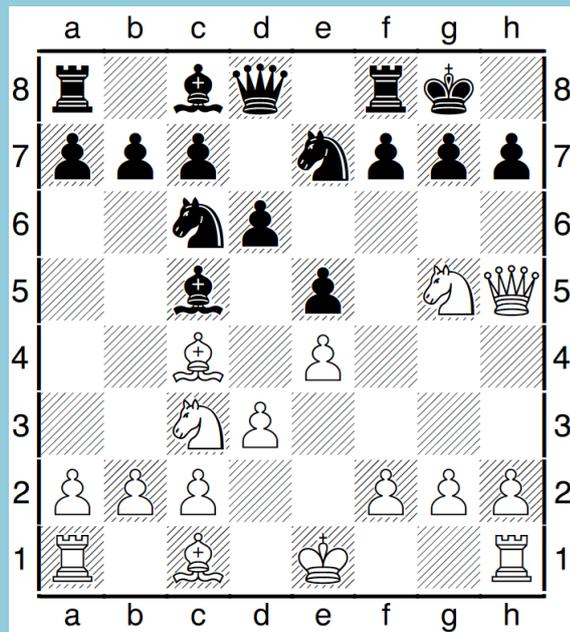
6. Ng5

... is a very strong move. With the knight on f6, as you know, Black's best move is 6... 0-0, but here ...

6... 0-0

... is met by ...

7. Qh5



... when White has a winning advantage.

You have TWO THREATS: Qxh7# and Nxf7. Black has little choice but to play ...

7... h6

8. Nxf7

... when the game might finish with ...

8... Qe8

9. Nxh6+ Kh7

10. Nf7+ Kg8

11. Qh8#

Now you've learnt some important opening ideas it's time at last to learn some real openings.

A few points:

- Chess has been played in its current form for more than 500 years.
- During that time the best players – some of the smartest people in the world – have worked out the best ways to start a game.
- There are thousands of books, not to mention videos, DVDs, websites, which will give you advice on how to start a game.
- I have on my computer a database currently containing more than 6.7 million games going back more than 400 years, some played by the strongest players in the world, some by children like you, and many by players in between. Strong players will buy a database like this along with software to help them use it.
- If you try to make things up yourself you probably won't last very long against someone who's studied the openings.
- Some people think studying openings is about learning moves off by heart. In a few openings this is true but it's mostly about learning and understanding ideas.
- Some people think studying openings is about learning traps. It's not (although you have to learn how to avoid traps): it's learning about how to put your pieces on good squares.
- Some people think you should play the same openings as the world champions. The strongest players in the world play very complicated openings: it's best to start with simpler openings that are easier to understand.
- The best openings have names: some are named after people who played or wrote about them, some after places where they were played, and others have names which describe them in some way.

A few statistics:

In my database:

- 1. e4 is played in 51% of games.
- 1. d4 is played in 32% of games.
- 1. Nf3 is played in 8% of games.
- 1. c4 is played in 7% of games.

This only leaves 2% for the other 16 (count them!) possible first moves for White.

1. e4 is the move whose ideas are easiest to understand so it's, quite rightly, the move usually played by children. So we'll be looking at this move for most of this.

After 1. e4 there's a lot more variety in Black's replies:

- 1... c5 is played in 40% of games.
- 1... e5 is played in 24% of games.
- 1... e6 is played in 13% of games.
- 1... c6 is played in 7% of games.
- 1... d6 is played in 5% of games.
- 1... d5 is played in 4% of games.
- 1... g6 is played in 3% of games.
- 1... Nf6 is played in 2% of games.

And that leaves 2% for the other 12 moves put together.

Although 1... c5 is the most popular move, 1... e5 is usually played in games between children.

Quite rightly so again, because it's the easiest move to understand. 1... c5 is a particularly difficult move to understand, which is why it's popular with stronger players who want a more challenging

game.

For the moment, we'll look at what might happen when the game starts with the moves 1. e4 e5.

After the moves:

1. e4 e5

2. Nf3 Nc6 there are four popular moves for White.

The most popular move is 3. Bb5 (47½% of games from this position).

This called the RUY LOPEZ, the SPANISH OPENING or the SPANISH GAME.

Ruy Lopez was a Spanish priest (he later became a bishop) who lived in the 16th century. In 1561 he wrote a very famous chess book in which he recommended this opening.

This is the opening usually chosen by most strong players. If you understand this opening you'll understand a lot about chess. It's quite hard but worth the effort. We'll look at this opening in more detail very shortly.

The second most popular move is 3. Bc4 (27% of games)

You've already seen this move, which is called the ITALIAN GAME. It was very popular in Italy in the 16th and 17th centuries and is still often played today, especially in junior competitions.

Black usually plays either 3... Bc5, which is the GIUOCO PIANO (this means 'Quiet game' in Italian) or 3... Nf6, the TWO KNIGHTS' DEFENCE (Black defends with both knights). This opening can lead to quiet positions, but there are also ways in which White can play for a quick attack. If you're Black you'll have to know what to do.

The third most popular move is 3. d4 (15% of games)

This is the SCOTCH OPENING or SCOTCH GAME. It was played in a match between Edinburgh and London in 1824. Strong players sometimes use it as a surprise weapon instead of the Ruy Lopez. It scores well in junior chess: if you haven't studied the opening you might well get the next two moves wrong and end up in a bad position.

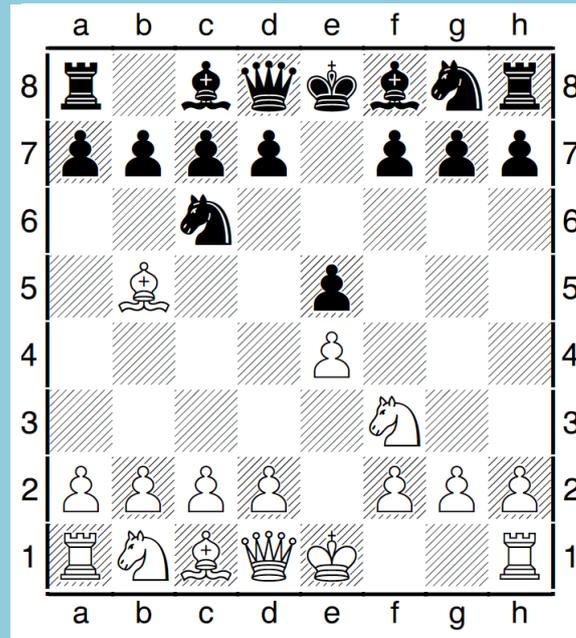
The fourth most popular move is 3. Nc3 (9% of games)

This is called, for obvious reasons, the FOUR KNIGHTS OPENING or FOUR KNIGHTS GAME. It's often played by beginners who have been taught to get their knights out quickly, and is also sometimes used by stronger players to surprise their opponents. Although there's nothing wrong with the move I'd advise you to stop playing it NOW and learn the other openings instead.

These four moves together account for 98½% of games starting with 1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6. So at the moment you don't need to bother about anything else – and there's no reason at all for you to play anything else yourself.

Let's now take a look at the SPANISH OPENING.

1. e4 e5
2. Nf3 Nc6
3. Bb5



Why should you play this move?

1. The big idea of this opening is to put more pressure on the black pawn on e5 by attacking the knight that's defending the pawn. Sometimes you'll be able to win a pawn for free.
2. You're usually going to play your pawn to d4 at some point to try to get rid of the pawn on e5. Sometimes you'll play d4 straight away, sometimes you'll play c3 and then d4 so that you can take back with a pawn and keep two strong pawns in the centre. Which one you choose will depend on how Black develops.
3. You're usually going to castle very quickly in this opening to make your king safe and get your rook into play.
4. Black will probably play Nf6 fairly early on to attack your e-pawn. You have to think about whether and how to defend the pawn. You'll often choose Re1 (which is one reason why you castle quickly) rather than d3 or Nc3.
5. Imagine the e-pawns have disappeared, you have a rook (or a queen) on the e-file and your opponent has a king on e8. If your opponent has a piece in the way you have a PIN: maybe you can attack the pinned piece again with a pawn and win it. If you have a piece in the way, you can play a DISCOVERED CHECK and perhaps win an enemy queen or rook.
6. Watch out for QUEEN FORKS. Queens are very good at doing forks and a lot of games are decided by QUEEN FORKS in the opening. White can often get QUEEN FORKS on d5, h5 or f3 in this opening.

Let's play a few more moves and see what happens. Black's most popular 3rd move is:

3... a6

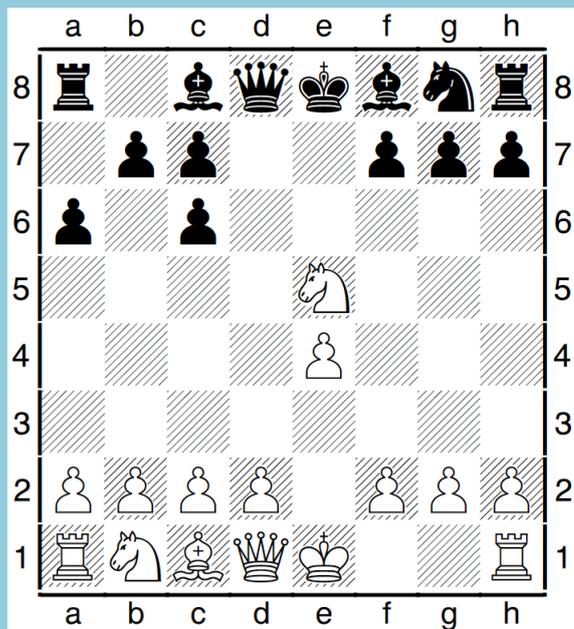
This looks like it loses a pawn, doesn't it? So why does everyone play it? You're about to find out.

4. Bxc6 dxc6

It's best for Black to take this way, opening lines for the queen and bishop.

5. Nxe5

So White's won a pawn, but Black has several ways to win the pawn back.



5... Qd4

This move FORKS the knight on e5 and the pawn on e4. Other possible moves are 5... Qg5, FORKING the knight on e5 and the pawn on g2, and 5... Qe7, SKEWERING the knight on e5 and the pawn on e4.

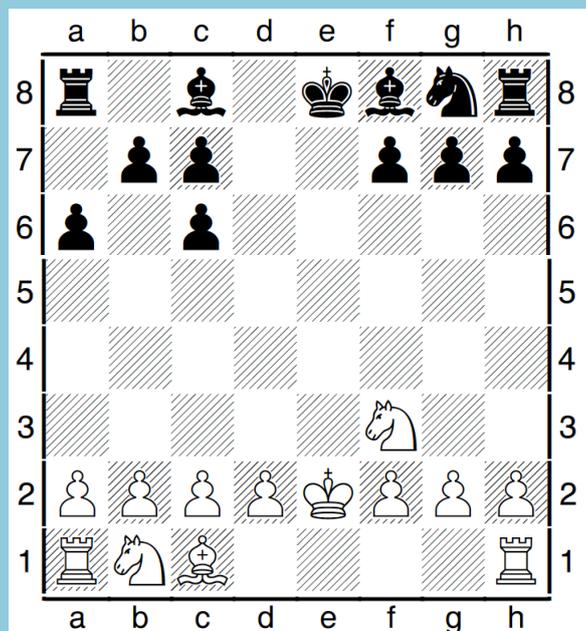
Yes, you've been told not to bring your queen out too soon, but if you can win something without losing too much time then you SHOULD bring your queen out.

White has to do something about the knight and the game might continue:

6. Nf3 Qxe4+

7. Qe2 Qxe2+

8. Kxe2



This position is better for Black. Black has a bishop against a knight and White will have to waste time getting the king back. In fact Black scores 74% from this position in my database. If you play like this with White you're backing a loser.

So let's go back and try something different for White.

5. Nc3, 5. d3 and 5. d4 are all possible, but the most popular move, and the move I'd recommend for you is:

5. 0-0

In the last opening we looked at, it wasn't so good for White to castle quickly, but here it's the best move.

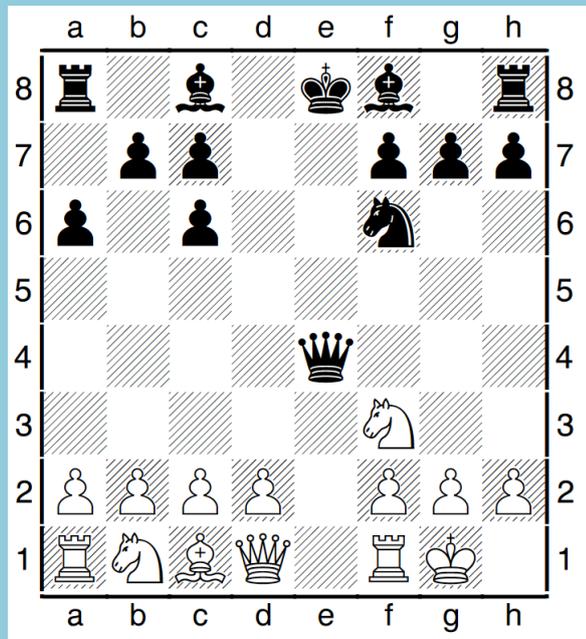
It's Black's move. What could be more natural or obvious than to develop a knight:

5... Nf6

Now it's very different. This time White SHOULD capture on e5.

6. Nxe5

Let's suppose Black tries the same move as last time:
 6... Qd4
 7. Nf3 Qxe4



Stop here and decide what you'd play next for White before reading on.

The correct answer is Re1, PINNING and winning the black queen. Well done if you found that move. So perhaps Black should go back to move six and take the pawn with the knight instead.

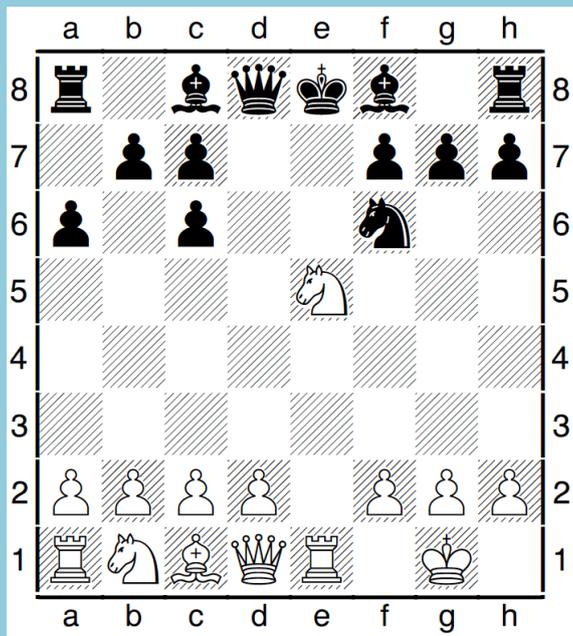
6... Nxe4

Again we're going to put the rook on e1:

7. Re1

THREATENING the knight on e4. If Black defends the knight with 7... Bf5 we're going to play 8. d3, inviting the knight to retreat. But let's suppose the knight moves back at once:

7... Nf6



Again, stop and decide what move you think White should play here before reading on. You might like to find White's second best move as well!

This time there's a white piece between the rook and the enemy king. So if we move the knight anywhere it's DISCOVERED CHECK. The trick is to move the knight to a square where it THREATENS an enemy piece. The second best move is Ng6+, which will win the rook on h8 next move. The best move is Nxc6+ which will win the queen next move. Don't forget that Black is in check from the rook on e1 so the knight is safe from capture. But not Qxf7+ when Black would be able to reply Kxf7.

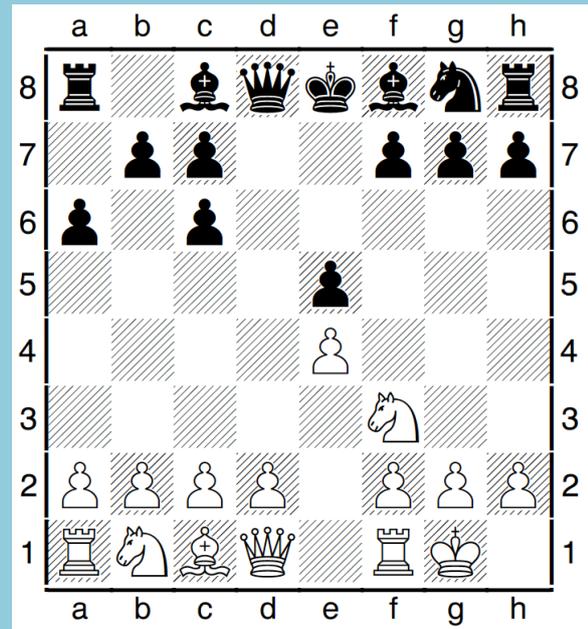
You can see from these examples the advantages of castling early in this opening. Your king is safe from attack while your rook can reach the e-file quickly. When the pawns disappear from the centre of the board uncastled kings are open to all sorts of TACTICS: FORKS, PINS, DISCOVERED CHECKS.

Let's start again with these moves:

1. e4 e5
2. Nf3 Nc6
3. Bb5 a6

By far the most popular move for White here is 4. Ba4, but Bxc6 is also good, and much easier to understand, so it's a good place to start learning this opening.

4. Bxc6 bxc6
5. 0-0



So playing 5... Nf6, while natural, is not good. Black needs to do something about the threatened epawn.

The third and fourth most popular moves are 5... Bd6 and 5... Qd6. The most popular move is 5... f6. In most openings this is a bad move for two reasons. It weakens the king's defences and takes away the knight's best square. But in this position it's a good move. White no longer has a white squared bishop so can't take advantage of the king's weakness while the black knight will come out via e7. Chess is hard.

The move I'd recommend for you, though, is the second most popular move here:

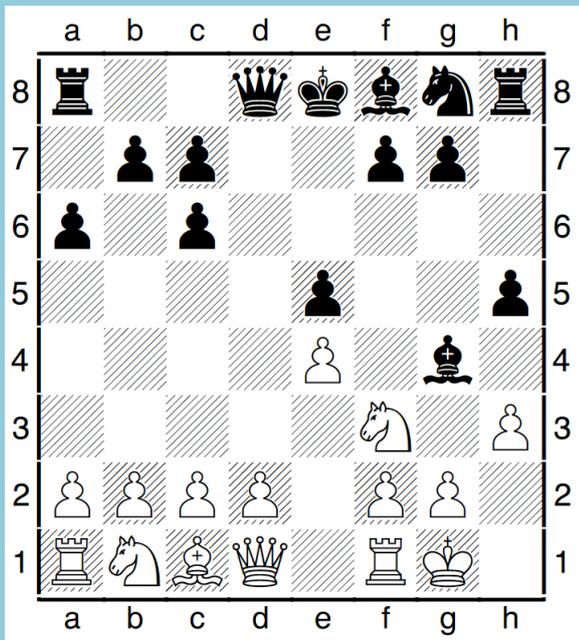
5... Bg4

Black defends by PINNING the white knight. You'd be delighted now if White played Nxe5! The main point of this move, though, is that you can set a nasty trap.

6. h3

A natural move, and probably also the best move, hitting the bishop. Now is your chance to give White a shock. Instead of moving the bishop you play:

6... h5



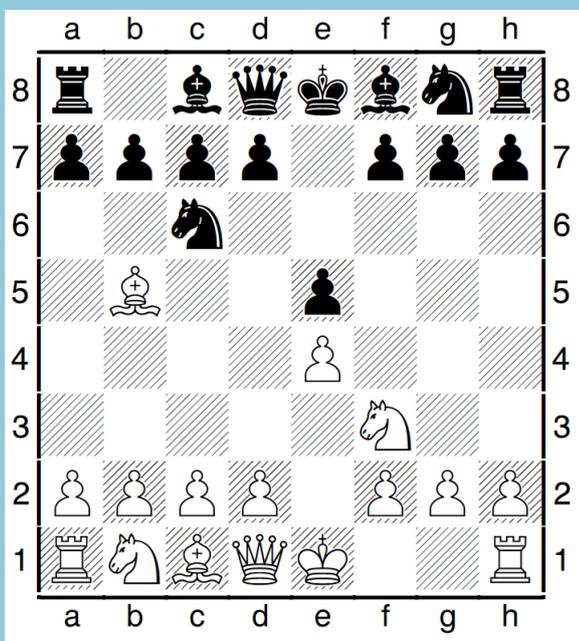
And now if White tries to win a piece you're going to score a quick CHECKMATE:

- 7. hxg4 hxg4
- 8. Nxe5 Qh4
- 9. f4 g3

Checkmate will follow on either h1 or h2.

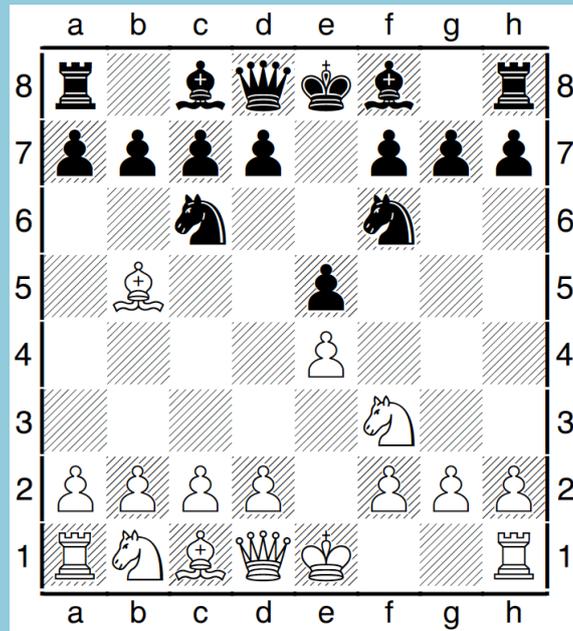
Instead White should ignore the bishop and play 7. d3, when the game goes on. Black should play 7...Qf6 when White can continue developing with either 8. Nbd2 or 8. Be3. Every move both players will have to calculate whether or not White can capture the bishop safely. At some point Black will be forced to trade on f3.

Let's go back to the position after 3. Bb5 (here it is again) and look at some numbers.



3... a6 is played in about 68% of all games here. But other moves are also popular, particularly at your level.90

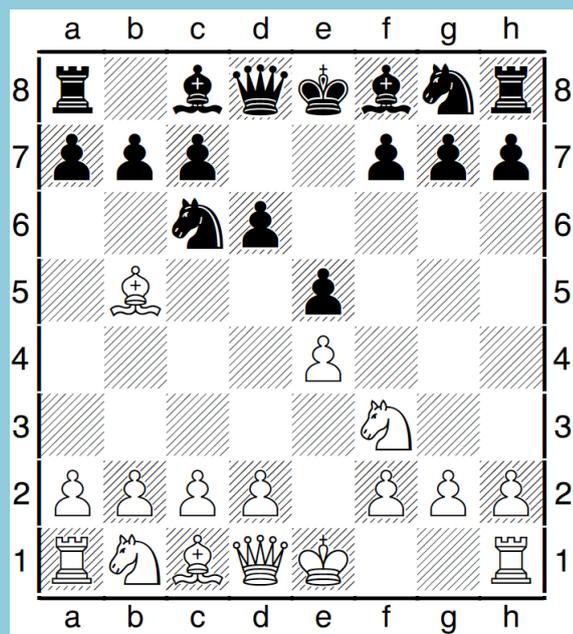
The second most popular move (12% of games) is 3... Nf6, the BERLIN variation. This move is very popular with grandmasters at the moment, and, because it's a natural developing move you'll often meet it yourself.



We could defend the pawn on e4 by Nc3 (now it's a FOUR KNIGHTS GAME) or d3, but instead we're going to play:
4. 0-0

Again, simply castling. If Black plays 4... Nxe4 the most popular move is 5. d4, but you might prefer a simpler alternative: 5. Re1.

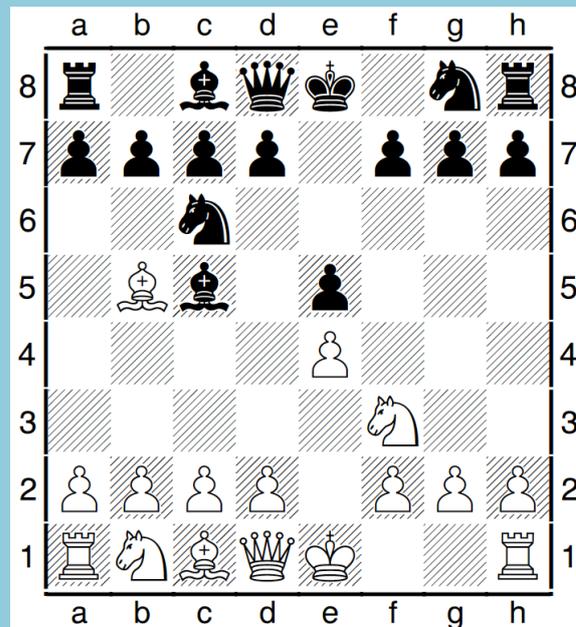
The third most popular move on my database is 3... d6 (5%) – the STEINITZ DEFENCE. This is rarely played by stronger players but often played at lower levels.



Players who don't know the opening sometimes decide they need to defend the pawn again in this way. It's not a bad move, but does block in the bishop on f8. White can take advantage of this by playing the immediate 4. d4.

The next move is 3... f5 (4.6%), a daring GAMBIT (the SCHLIEMANN DEFENCE) which is not much played by beginners so you're unlikely to meet it very often. It's also not played very often by grandmasters, but is quite popular at adult club level, where it scores well for Black. It's something you might want to learn yourself as a surprise weapon. A safe reply for White is to play 4. d3.

The final move we'll look at now is 3... Bc5 (4.5%), another natural developing move often played by beginners.



Again, not a bad move but the bishop might be a target when White plays d4. Again we're going to play 4. 0-0 in reply. We can then choose between two plans. We can either play c3 followed by d4 or we can play the FORK TRICK:

4. 0-0 Nf6
5. Nxe5

And if 5... Nxe5 we'll get the piece back by playing the PAWN FORK 6. d4. You've seen this idea before so you should remember it. If you prefer you could also play 4. c3 or 4. Nxe5 instead of 4. 0-0.

All three moves are fine.