

THE RUBINSTEIN ATTACK!

A CHESS OPENING
STRATEGY FOR WHITE

Eric Schiller

The Rubinstein Attack: A Chess Opening Strategy for White

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If you are looking for an effective chess opening strategy to use as White, this book will provide you with everything you need to use the Rubinstein Attack to set up aggressive attacking formations. Building on ideas developed by the great Akiba Rubinstein, this book offers an opening system for White against most Black defensive formations.

The Rubinstein Attack is essentially an opening of ideas rather than memorized variations. Move order is rarely critical, the flow of the game will usually be the same regardless of initial move order. As you play through the games in this book you will see each of White's major strategies put to use against a variety of defensive formations.

As you play through the games in this book, pay close attention to the means White uses to carry out the attack. You'll see the same patterns repeated over and over again, and you can use these strategies to break down your opponent's defenses. The basic theme of each game is indicated in the title in the game header.

The Rubinstein is a highly effective opening against most defenses to 1.d4, but it is not particularly effective against the King's Indian or Gruenfeld formations. To handle those openings, you'll need to play c4 and enter some of the main lines, though you can choose solid formations with a pawn at d3. Against those openings, place your bishop at e2 and castle quickly. These are not the sharpest variations of the King's Indian and Gruenfeld, but they are reliable and your position will not suffer from any weaknesses which can be exploited by your opponent.

Your main weapons in the Rubinstein Attack are a strong bishop at d3, aiming at Black's vulnerable h7-square, and strong knights, one of which usually finds its way to e5. Your other bishop goes to b2, where it can later help in the kingside attack and until then will provide support at d4 and e5. This bishop can become a direct participant in the attack if the pawn at d4 can be gotten out of the way, usually by capturing a Black pawn at c5. Play along the c-file can be organized by playing Rc1 and c4, later capturing Black's pawn at d5, opening up the c-file.

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THE RUBINSTEIN ATTACK

OVERVIEW

The Rubinstein Attack is a basic formation for White, with kingside castling, a bishop at d3, queenside fianchetto and usually knights at f3 and d2. It is known by many names, including: Colle with b3, Modern Colle, Yusupov-Rubinstein Variation, Rubinstein Opening, Zukertort-Yusupov Opening, Zukertort-Rubinstein Opening, etc. Rubinstein was clearly the most significant proponent of the opening, and we honor his contributions by adopting the names Rubinstein Opening and Rubinstein Attack.

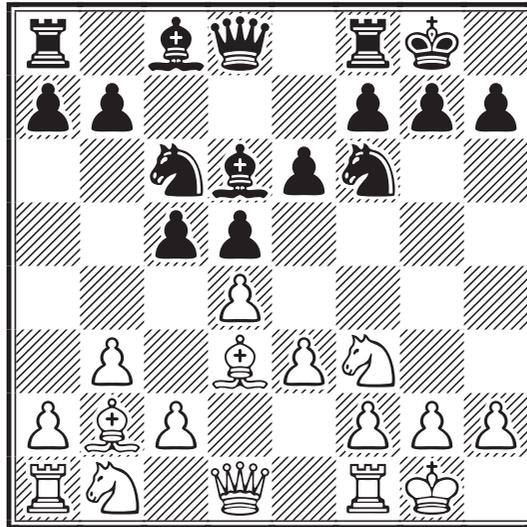
White has several strategies from the basic formation. A stonewall attack with Ne5 and f4 is the most common, but there are alternative strategies involving c2-c4 or e3-e4, which can also be quite useful.

Black, on the other hand, has a big menu of defenses to choose from. Black will, in almost all cases, place a knight at f6, a pawn at e6, and castle on the kingside. It is the position of the other knight, the bishops, and the c-pawn that define Black's formation.

A "Classical" position has the bishop at e7, while a "Bogoljubow" position has the bishop at d6. A queenside fianchetto by Black is a "Tartakower" line. When the knight goes to d7, instead of c6 after the advance of the pawn to c5, then we have a "Modern" line, if Black fianchettoes at b7, or a "QGD" (Queen's Gambit Declined) line otherwise. Black can mix and match these ideas.

Let's take a look at some of the most common defensive formations.

THE RUBINSTEIN ATTACK

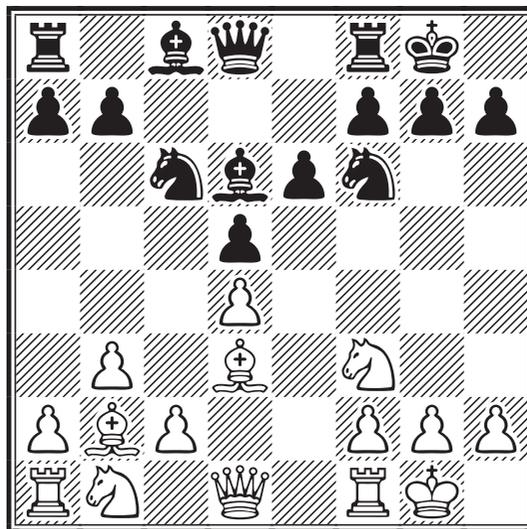


BOGOLJUBOW DEFENSE, CLOSED VARIATION

This is Black's most popular choice. The bishop at d6 can support a fierce battle over control of e5. White usually manages to keep control, and that is a good thing, because if Black ever advances the pawn safely from e6 to e5, there is no chance for White to maintain any sort of advantage.

White will target the kingside, as usual. The knight at f3 will go to e5, and will be supported by a pawn at f4 or knight at f3, or both. Alternatively, White can choose to open a second front on the c-file, advancing the pawn to c4, and place a rook at c1. Then play on either or both wings is possible. Central play, aiming for e4, is yet another option.

If Black does not capture at d4, eventually White can capture at c5 to open up the long diagonal for the bishop at b2.

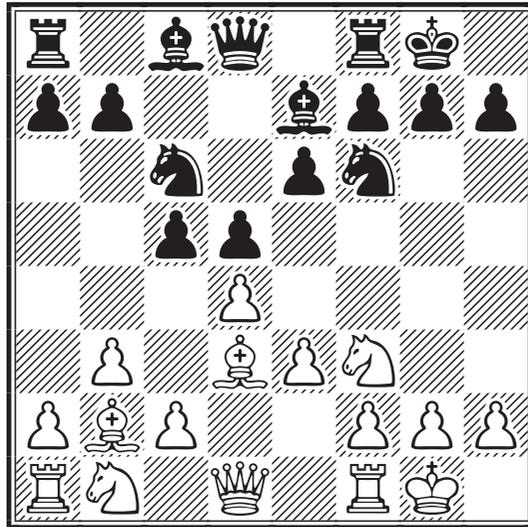


BOGOLJUBOW DEFENSE, OPEN VARIATION

In the “open” lines, Black exchanges the c-pawn for White’s pawn at d4 early in the game. After White recaptures with the pawn at e3, it seems that the bishop at b2 will not be useful. However, there are a variety of ways of “waking up” that bishop, as you’ll see in the games section. In fact, Black often plays ...Qe7 and ...Ba3 to get the bishops off the board. More promising for Black is the potential attack along the c-file, and tricks involving ...Nb4. Overall, however, White’s kingside attack in these lines is promising.

The stonewall attack can be used after Ne5 and f4. Another plan is a combination of Ne5 and Nd2-f3-g5, aiming at both h7 and f7. It isn’t necessary to set up a stonewall to attack. A queen lift Qf3-h3 can be used instead.

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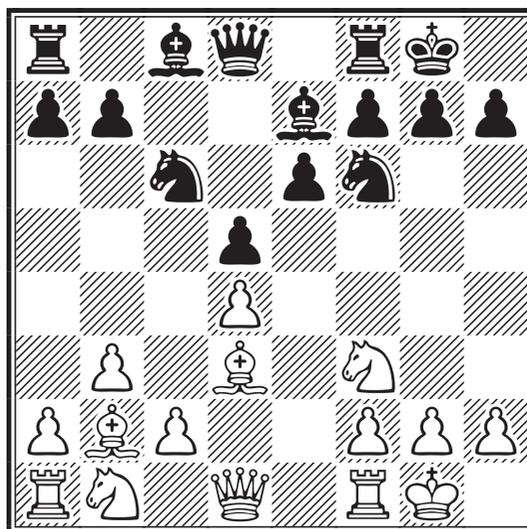


CLASSICAL DEFENSE, CLOSED VARIATION

In the Classical variations, Black's bishop takes up a more passive position at e7. Nevertheless, it is a very solid defense, and Black has the option of capturing White's knight when it gets to e5, because there will not be a fork when White recaptures with the d-pawn.

If Black does employ that strategy, White will have a very strong pawn at e5. This means that Black cannot leave the knight at f6. So, the pawn at h7 will be easier to get at. It also means that the bishop at c8 cannot emerge via the c8-h3 diagonal.

White has all the same options as in the Bogoljubow Variation. Black, on the other hand, cannot adopt the line that is considered Black's best, exchanging the dark-square bishops at a3 with the support of a queen at e7.



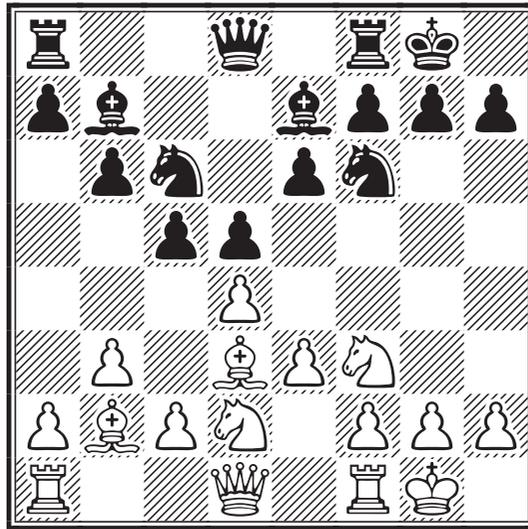
CLASSICAL DEFENSE, OPEN VARIATION

The open variations are a bit less promising in the Classical lines than in the Bogoljubow lines, because the plan of ...Qe7 and ...Bd6 is not available, yet it is often played. It is popular because it eliminates White's option of opening up the long diagonal with dxc5.

In this line, Black usually hurries to put a rook at c8, a queen at c7, or both. Then White must be careful about allowing Black's knight to get to b4, so a3 is often part of White's formula. It is also important to make sure Black's pawn doesn't get to e5 safely.

The usual attacking strategies are all available to White. Getting the d-pawn out of the way is difficult, but it can be achieved in some cases by a combination of Ne5 and c4, sometimes with the knight going to c3 rather than d2. Pressure at d5 can build to the point where capturing at c4 is almost forced.

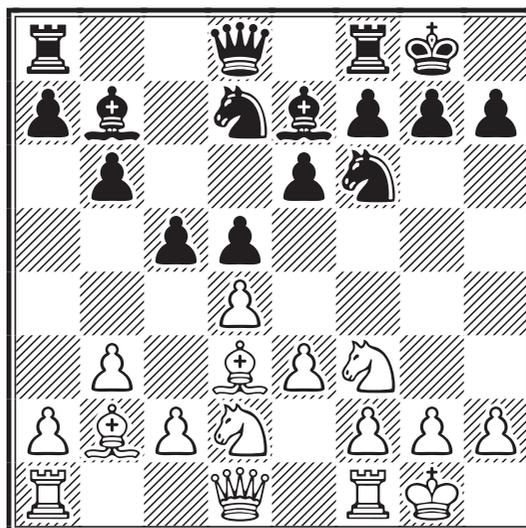
THE RUBINSTEIN ATTACK



CLASSICAL TARTAKOWER VARIATION

The Classical Tartakower is one of the Black's most solid and respectable plans. Both sides attend to development, and neither has any noticeable weaknesses. That doesn't mean the play is boring, however! White usually employs a standard stonewall formation, taking advantage of the fact that Black can't safely plant a knight at e4, while the White knight can travel to e5.

Because it is difficult for Black to create any threats, White sometimes plays Rc1, Bb1 and Qc2, setting up a powerful battery to fire at h7. The closed nature of the position allows White to consider kingside pawn storms, such as marching the g-pawn up the board to drive away the defending knight on f6.



QGD VARIATION

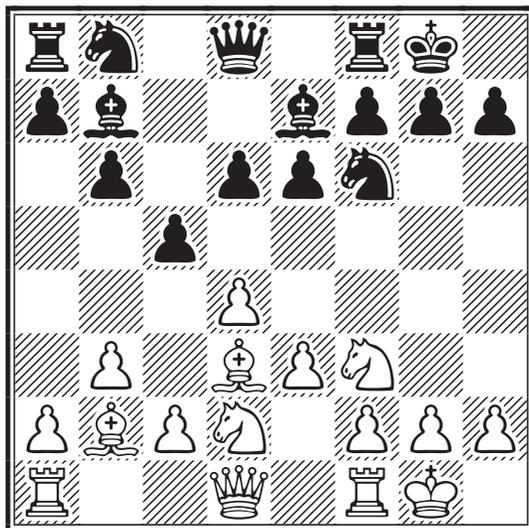
If the knight goes to d7, instead of c6, we have a defense typical of the Queen's Gambit Declined. There are significant differences between the Classical and QGD lines. The bishop at b7 is not blocked by a knight, so has more control over squares on the long diagonal, especially e4.

White must constantly consider the potential impact of Black establishing an outpost at e4. If Black can maintain a knight on that square, it is almost impossible to attack. On the other hand, White may be able to capture the knight with a minor piece, and then take advantage of the superior pawn structure in an endgame.

Opening up the long diagonal by capturing at c5 has to be carefully timed. Black will often recapture with the knight from d7, attacking the bishop at d3, and, importantly, moving into position to occupy e4.

The QGD Variation can transpose to Queen's Indian lines, but Black is not committed to that plan.

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QUEEN'S INDIAN FORMATION

This is an understandably popular variation for Black. The Queen's Indian is an effective setup when there is no pawn blocking the bishop at b7, and the pawn at d6 keeps White from making use of the e5-square.

Keep in mind that the Rubinstein Attack is a battle of formations. Memorizing move sequences is not very important. As you play through the games in this book, concentrate on the attacking techniques rather than specific moves. Learn the ideas and apply them appropriately in your games. Don't expect your opponent to fall for opening traps, they are very rare. Instead, count on your attack to put pressure on your opponent. As soon as the opportunity arises, use one of the typical attacking plans and sacrifices you see in this game collection. Be careful not to overplay your hand, and be aware of various annoyances such as ...Nc6-b4 when your bishop at d3 can't retreat. Keep a firm grip on the position, and don't let Black play ...e5!

WHAT THE AUTHORITIES SAY

In this chapter I survey some of the opinions of those who have written on the Rubinstein Attack either from the perspective of a Black repertoire, or as a neutral “authority”. When preparing an opening, I find it useful to examine literature extolling the merits of the opponent’s position, especially in “repertoire” books and authoritative reference works. I haven’t made any attempt to research all of the hundreds of books offering advice on how to defend against 1.d4, but have chosen representative works, especially the “alphabet soup” of BCO (Batsford Chess Openings), ECO (Encyclopedia of Chess Openings), MCO (Modern Chess Openings), NCO (Nunn’s Chess Openings), SCO (Standard Chess Openings).

1 d4 d5

1...Nf6 2.Nf3 g6 is often recommended, to avoid the Colle and Rubinstein attacks. Indeed, although the basic Rubinstein formation can be used against the Indian games, it is not very effective against the King’s Indian Defense or Gruenfeld Defense, and is not the best way to confront the Queen’s Indian Defense.

2 Nf3 Nf6

2...e6 will have independent significance only if Black is aiming to set up a Dutch Defense.

2...g6 is a relatively rare move order, inviting transposition to the Gruenfeld Defense or the Smyslov Variation of the Queen’s Gambit Accepted.

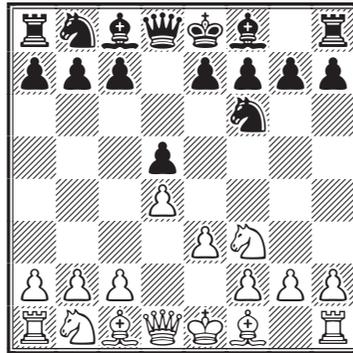
2...c5 will transpose below in most cases.

2...Nc6 invites a transposition to the Chigorin Defense, but White can play 3.e3 and then Bb5, later taking control of e5 and planting a knight there.

3.e3

White can play the first few moves in any order, but the “canonical” order is most likely to lead to the desired positions.

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3 ... e6

3...c5 and now:

4.Bd3 Nc6 5.O-O is a move order not discussed by Kaufman.

4.b3 cxd4 5.exd4 Nc6 6.Bb2 Bg4 7.Be2 Bxf3 8.Bxf3 g6 9.O-O Bg7 10.c4 O-O Kaufman: "The pressure on d4, the extra center pawn, and the problem of how to develop the White knight compensate for the bishop pair."

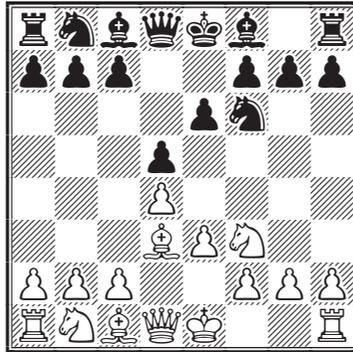
4.Nbd2 cxd4 5.exd4 Nc6 is given by Kaufman but he doesn't consider 6.Bb5!?

3...Bg4 4.c4 e6 5.Qb3!? Bxf3 6.gxf3 Nbd7 7.Nc3 Not mentioned by Drasko & Jovicic. (7.Qxb7 Rb8 8.Qxa7 Bb4+ 9.Nc3 Nb6 Drasko & Jovicic: with compensation) 7...dxc4 8.Qxb7 Nb6 9.Bxc4 Nxc4 10.Qc6+ Qd7 11.Qxa8+ Qd8 12.Qxd8+ Kxd8. Here I claimed that White is clearly better (Hellmann vs. Volk).

3...g6 sets up a good anti-Colle, so White should switch gears with 4.c4 Bg7 5.Nc3, transposing to the Gruenfeld, Reversed Tarrasch [D94].

4 Bd3

WHAT THE AUTHORITIES SAY



4 ... c5

This is the consensus choice, far and away the most popular approach.

4...Bd6 5.O-O O-O 6.b3 c6 7.Bb2 Nbd7 The Semi-Slav Variation, a rare visitor because White owns the e5-square. Therefore sooner or later Black is bound to play ...c5 to get counterplay, losing a valuable tempo. I know of no authority recommending it for Black. White can transpose to the Nbd2/b3 variation of the Semi-Slav, but I think that the stonewall attack is the right way to play.

4...b6 5.O-O Bb7 6.c4 transposes to the Spassky Variation of the Queen's Indian Defense.

5 b3

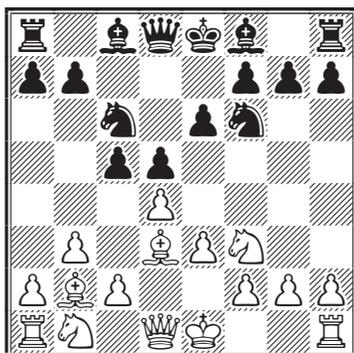
Agaard & Lund: only discuss c3.

5 ... Nc6

5...Qa5+ 6.c3 is considered a little better for White. After castling, the pawn can later advance to c4. Black sometimes places this knight at d7, but that does not seem to have a strong following.

6 Bb2

THE RUBINSTEIN ATTACK

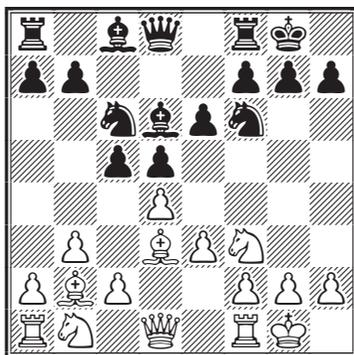


6 ... Bd6

The Bogoljubow Defense. It is generally agreed that the bishop should go to this square. DeFirmian (MCO 14) disagrees.

6...Be7 is the Classical Defense 7.O-O b6 (7...O-O 8.Nbd2 b6 9.c4 (9.Ne5 Bb7 10.f4 Rc8 is equal, according to MCO 14) 9...Bb7 (Classical Tartakower Variation) 10.Rc1 Rc8 11.Qe2 Rc7 12.Rfd1 dxc4 13.bxc4 Qa8 is considered equal in MCO 14 (Olesen vs. Ashley)) 8.Nbd2 Bb7 9.Qe2 O-O SCO 2 (Filatov vs. Mayer)

7 O-O O-O



8 Nbd2

8.a3 is preferred by Kasparov. 8...b6 (8...Qc7 9.c4 (9.Ne5 and according to Kasparov, White retains some initiative.) 9...cxd4 10.exd4 e5 11.dxe5 Nxe5 12.Nxe5 Bxe5 13.Bxe5 Qxe5 14.Nd2 Bg4 15.Re1 Qc7 16.Qc2 dxc4 is evaluated as even in NCO (Kurajica vs. Razuvayev))

WHAT THE AUTHORITIES SAY

9.Ne5 Bb7 10.Nd2 a6! 11.f4 b5 12.dxc5 Bxc5 with an unclear position according to BCO 1 (Dus Chotimirsky vs. Nimzowitsch),

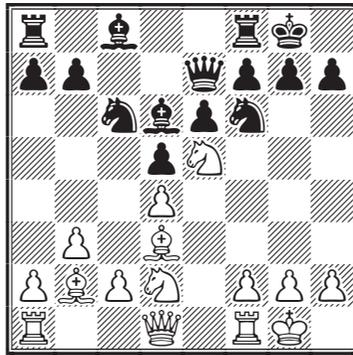
8 ... Qe7

8...b6 followed by ...Bb7 is a Modern Tartakower variation.

9 Ne5 cxd4

9...Rd8 10.a3 Nd7 11.f4 is given in SCO 2: “with a promising attack for White” (Fries Nielsen vs. Hellsten)

10 exd4



10 ... Ba3

11 Bxa3

11.Qc1 Bxb2 12.Qxb2 Bd7 is evaluated by Kasparov as equal. 13.a3 Qd6 14.Rae1 a6 15.f4 Ne7

BCO 2: unclear (Lobron vs. Georgiev) 16.g4 Bb5 17.c4 dxc4 18.bxc4 Bc6 19.Re3 Rad8 20.Rh3 Ng6

ECO 3: unclear (citing same game).

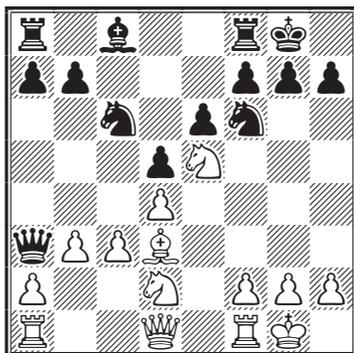
11 ... Qxa3

12 c3!?

Not mentioned by Kasparov. This is, however, the true main line of the Rubinstein opening.

12.Ndf3 Bd7 13.Nxc6 Bxc6 14.Qd2 (14.Qc1! Qb4 15.Qd2 Qb6 16.Ne5—Alekhine.) 14...Rac8 is better for Black, according to NCO (Bogoljubow vs. Capablanca).

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12 ... Nxe5

12...Bd7 13.f4 with attacking chances in MCO 14 (Hoi vs. Danielsen). See also Danner vs. Beim.

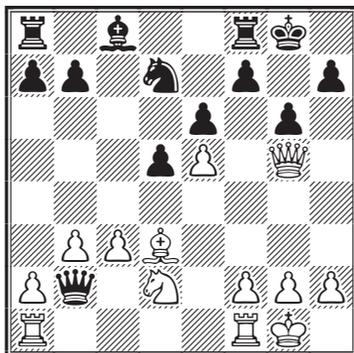
12...Qd6 13.f4 Bd7 See discussion in Danner vs. Beim.

13 dxe5 Nd7

14 Qh5 g6

15 Qg5 Qb2

NCO says the position is unclear (unattributed, but the game is Fuentes vs. Rey Ardid)



Two other Black moves have been recommended:

15...h6 (Jovanic vs. Podlesnik) 16.Qxh6 Chess Assistant: White has a tiny advantage.

15...Qa5 and other queen moves see notes to Danner vs. Beim.

This is just a sampling of the recommendations for Black, but as

WHAT THE AUTHORITIES SAY

you can see, Black rarely achieves full equality, and that is the most Black can hope for in the opening.

Now we turn to the actual games of the Rubinstein Attack. In each game you will see the themes we have discussed, with specific tactical and strategic devices that you can use in your games.

THE RUBINSTEIN ATTACK

CLASSICAL VARIATION BLACKBURNE VS. MINCKWITZ

INTERNATIONAL TOURNAMENT, BERLIN, 1881

CLASSICAL TARTAKOWER [D05]

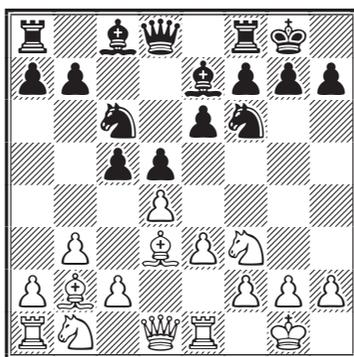
THE FIRST GAME USING THE RUBINSTEIN FORMATION

1	e3	d5
2	Nf3	Nf6
3	b3	e6
4	Bb2	Be7
5	d4	c5
6	Bd3	Nc6
7	O-O	O-O

This is the very first game I've located using the formation that typically arises in Rubinstein's opening. This example maneuvered through a number of different openings before reaching the Rubinstein Attack position.

8 Re1

This move would now be considered a little inconsistent with the general plan that has come to be associated with the opening. Normally, the rook stays in place to emerge only after the knight has moved to e5 and the pawn has advanced to f4.



8 ... b6
9 Nbd2

9.c4 would be a more modern approach.

9 ... Bb7

We have now reached a Tartakower Defense.

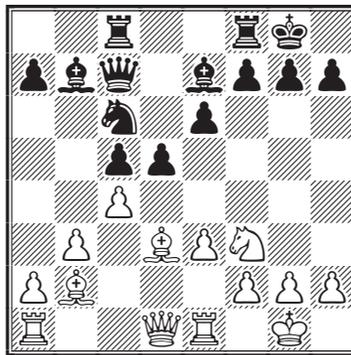
CLASSICAL VARIATION

10 Ne5 Rc8
11 Ndf3

11.a3 Nxe5 12.dxe5 Nd7 13.c4 Qc7 14.cxd5 Bxd5 15.f4 Rfd8 16.Qc2 gave White a small advantage over a century later, in Grabowski vs. Kruszyński, 1987.

11 ... Nd7
12 Nxd7 Qxd7
13 dxc5 bxc5
14 c4 Qc7

White could capture at d5 right away and force Black to accept hanging pawns. There is no need to do this right away, however, and instead White chooses a move which puts a little more pressure on the center and makes Black's queen a bit nervous.



15 Rc1!? dxc4
16 Rxc4 f5
17 Qa1

Black avoids the hanging pawns, but the pawn at c5 is crippled.

This maneuver later became associated with the Reti Opening, but is quite rare in the Rubinstein.

17 ... Bd6
18 Rh4 Qe7
19 Rh5 Nb4
20 Bxg7?!

Flashy, but a bit optimistic.

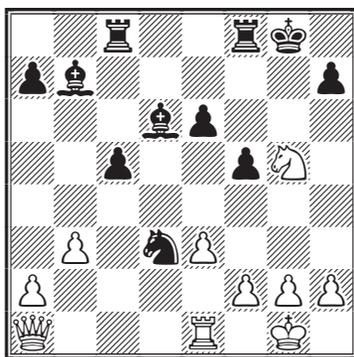
20.Bb1 Bxf3 21.gxf3 g6 should be solid enough, but White could

THE RUBINSTEIN ATTACK

decide to dangle the rook. 22.Kh1!? since 22...gxh5? 23.Rg1+ Kf7
24.Rg7+ Ke8 25.Rxe7+ Kxe7 26.a3 Nc6 27.Bc2 should be a bit better for
White.

20	...	Qxg7
21	Rg5	Qxg5
22	Nxg5	Nxd3

Black has a rook and two bishops for the queen and pawn. White's pieces are passive, and Black's king is not in any danger. Blackburne has overplayed the position.



23	Rd1	Be5
24	Qb1	Nb4?

24...Nb2! 25.Rd2 Rfd8! as the correct plan. White's back rank is weak. 26.Rxb2? (26.Qc1 c4! 27.bxc4 Rd5! is an amazing resource for Black. The pin on the pawn at c4 is excruciating. (27...Rxd2 28.Qxd2 Nxc4 29.Qd7 works out better for White.) 28.f4 Rxc4! The point! This plan wouldn't have worked with the rook still at d8, because then it would be captured with check.) 26...Bxb2 27.Qxb2? Rd1#

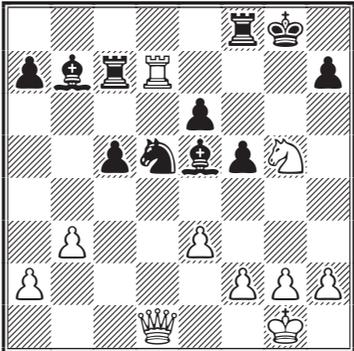
25	Rd7	Rc7!
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25...Bc6 26.Qd1! Bxd7 27.Qxd7 forces 27...Bg7 28.Qxe6+ Kh8
29.Nf7+ Rxf7 30.Qxc8+ Rf8 31.Qxc5 Nxa2 32.Qxa7 Nb4 33.Qa5. White is better, and will eventually get some pawns moving. Black will have to defend the f-pawn and the king with the pieces.

26	Qd1	Nd5!
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Now the rooks come off. You'd think that White isn't going to be able to get any sort of attack going with just a queen and a knight to play with. Not so!

CLASSICAL VARIATION



27 Rxc7 Bxc7
 28 Nxe6 Rf7
 29 Qh5!

29.Nxc7 Rxc7 30.Qh5 Rf7 Black will transfer the knight to e4 via c3. The queen will be no match for the rook, bishop and knight, despite the extra pawns.

29 ... Bb6
 30 e4!?

30.Ng5? Rg7 31.Ne6 Rxc7+! 32.Kxg2 Nf4+ 33.Kf1 Nxe4 30.g4!? might have been stronger, but using the e-pawn doesn't expose White's king to any later tricks on the g-file.

30 ... Nf6

30...fxe4 31.Qg5+ Kh8 32.Qe5+ Nf6 33.g4! h6 34.h4 is also a bit awkward for Black.

30...Nc3 31.exf5 is likewise miserable.

31 Qg5+ Kh8
 32 exf5

White's pieces are perfectly placed! Black chases the queen away.