The Modernized Bird

A Complete Repertoire for White

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Raven Sturt

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Key to Symbols

!	a good move
?	a weak move
!!	an excellent move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
□	only move
N	novelty
↻	lead in development
⊙	zugzwang
=	equality
∞	unclear position
$\overset{=}{\infty}$	with compensation for the sacrificed material
⩲	White stands slightly better
⩱	Black stands slightly better
±	White has a serious advantage
∓	Black has a serious advantage
+−	White has a decisive advantage
−+	Black has a decisive advantage
→	with an attack
↑	with initiative
⇆	with counterplay
Δ	with the idea of
⌓	better is
≤	worse is
+	check
#	mate

Table of Contents

Introduction

Welcome to the Modernized Bird Opening!

I began studying the Bird in January 2023, and this book marks a summation of 2 years of deep analysis. When I had originally started building the repertoire, I assumed it would take a few months and be a walk in the park. How naïve I was! Bird's Opening turned out to be one of the most complex openings I've ever had to analyze in my life. Having spent an enormous amount of time analyzing and checking over the material, I can confidently say I've given this my very best. It's taken months of sleepless nights and chaotic days, but finally, the book is done.

In this day and age, it seems that 1.d4 and 1.e4 are running out of steam. A stronger generation of computers is showing that almost every single mainstream opening is approaching 0's. As this has happened, opening trends have shifted away from playing for any objective advantage to playing to surprise your opponent and catch him in a situation his skillset is ill-equipped to improvise against. The structures arising in this repertoire fit this criterion perfectly—they don't resemble anything close to king or queen pawn openings. In fact, unless your opponent plays the Dutch Defense as Black, they will likely never have seen any of these structures, motifs, or positional themes before. Your frequent practice of such positions will amass a wealth of experience and know-how inaccessible to opponents who rarely encounter them. This differential in experience should translate to a higher and higher win rate as it grows. Therefore, I would urge readers not to get disappointed with any initial results. Like all openings, you need to ride the learning curve. I have several students who play the Bird. While initially their results are commensurate with other white openings, as they continue to play such structures, they gradually achieve win rates of between 70–80%. I have one student, Ean, who started playing it as a 1500 last year. Currently, he is 1800 and consistently outplaying 2000s in the Bird.

Beyond its surprise value, Bird's Opening has an awful reputation. As we will see throughout this book, this reputation is undeserved, with Bird's Opening offering fantastic fighting chances. However, rather than complain about this reputational travesty, we should embrace it. Your opponents will not take the game seriously until it is far too late.

Bird's Opening is currently in that "Goldilocks zone" of the great arbitrages in life. The majority of chess players have dismissed it, overlooking its inherent value, and this allows for early adopters of the Bird to take advantage of this asymmetry. As of this writing, it is played 0.9% of the time in online databases, and this drops to 0.2% (!) in the master's database of OTB games. For reference, in the OTB database, 1.e4 is played 45% of the time. So, for every 225 OTB games your opponent plays against 1.e4, he plays against the Bird once. While a case could be made that 1.e4 or 1.d4 are stronger, the objective difference between them and the Bird is infinitesimal. The way I see it, people will continue to ignore the Bird for the foreseeable future. Unless this book sells a million copies, the Bird will never be played remotely close to the frequency it deserves. Because of this, it will never be worth your opponent's while to study it, so it will always carry great surprise value.

The book is structured around the Lichess database for players rated between 1200 and 2000—so if you are in this category, the repertoire will synchronize perfectly with the lines your opponents are choosing in your own games. Whenever possible, I have sought out lines to surprise your opponent and give them the toughest time figuring things out.

My goal for this repertoire was to cater it to the club player but also nuance it enough to be played at the highest level. I made Grandmaster in July of 2022. If I were quizzed then on any of the ideas in this book, I would have failed miserably! It is very easy to go through one's entire life playing chess and never seriously studying these structures. I would reckon half of my colleagues (my GM friends) do not know anything about the Bird. I did not want to put my name on something that could not be played at the GM level, and towards that end, I have been playing the Bird exclusively in my games online and in tournament practice. I've gotten mixed results, but at the same time, I have come to be certain that this is playable at all levels, FOR A WIN. Online, I have won against several grandmasters in the top 100 and even a few in the top 20. I didn't play any classical chess in 2024, but I did beat two IMs rated around 2400 with it in 2023. I am planning to return to chess this summer, and I look forward to demolishing the competition with this great opening. My opponents can feel free to look through this book to see what I'm going to play. It won't matter much—whatever position occurs in my classical games, I will have played it tenfold as much as them.

I want to extend my deepest thanks to Thinkers Publishing for being receptive to the idea of this book. I'd also like to thank them for giving me the opportunity to publish my first chess book.

Around the age of 14, I obsessively began reading chess books. I would carry them everywhere I went and focus on them to the detriment of my grades, social life, and everything else. I remember the excitement of poring over Chess Life catalogs to see what new books were out! It is truly special to be on the other side—that is, to be producing the book that will be examined next to a chessboard and a fresh cup of coffee.

Raven Sturt
Tokyo, January 2025

Part I

1...d5

1. f4 d5

Welcome to the largest section of the book. 1...d5 systems are the most common against the Bird and can come about through a series of transpositions. Black can start with ...♘f6, ...d5, or even ...e6 and in each case be heading for the same type of light-square strategy. His setups can be divided into two families: those in which the knight is placed in front of the pawn on c6, and those in which Black delays ...♘c6 in order to get a reversed Queen's Gambit setup with ...c7-c5. The first set of plans are characterized by more aggressive, energetic play while the second are defined by a more positionally-sound strategy. Both require serious care in our study of the plans and ideas.

2. ♘f3 ♘f6

Here we have arguably the most important decision in our entire repertoire. The moves b3, d3, e3, and g3 are all popular, but which one should we go for? Generally, d3 and g3 are played together, meaning if one is played on move 3 the other is played on move 4. On the other hand, while e3 is frequently paired with a queenside fianchetto after b2-b3 and ♗b2 this is not always the case. I initially tried to build the repertoire around the g3/d3 setups but it left too bad a taste in my mouth and I ended up canning the system for e3.

3. e3!
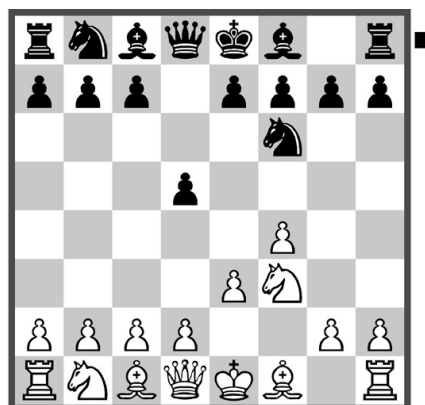
Position after: 3. e3!

Opening up the bishop. Our bishop will probably come to b5 but might also reside calmly on e2. We will aim for a queenside fianchetto with good pressure on the central dark-squares.

3. d3?! was a move I spent a lot of time on prior to deciding on 3.e3. White prepares to play g3, fianchetto his bishop and play a reversed Leningrad Dutch system. Allow me to sum up my reasons for avoiding it. First there can quickly arise some really uncomfortable positions with Black throwing his b-pawn down the board (see below). Second, Black has lots of other critical tries all of which require at least as much precision by White as they do by Black. This isn't ideal since we want our opponents to be the ones to have to find strong hidden moves. Third, when consulting databases on online games, it appeared that most online Bird players play e3 in this position. And I wanted to make a repertoire accessible to that majority. It is worth noting that while e3 is the most popular move in online games, in my database of master games (mostly over the board) g3 and e3 are chosen with roughly the same frequency.

3... e6 4. g3 b5 5. ♗g2 ♗e7∓

These positions are just uncomfortable for White. The b-pawn can always come to b4 to kick out a knight that arrives at c3. And moving the knight to d2 is very risky in Leningrad setups since it blocks the bishop's coverage over the weak e3-square. White's breaks on e4 or c4 won't pack much punch. I really want to stress that I tried very hard to make these positions work, but the positions that arose were all at least slightly preferable for Black, and the ones that were closest to equal were very boring, infinitesimally-worse endgames. I love the Leningrad Dutch and one of my motivations for this course was being able to apply some of the same ideas to the White side. The likelihood your opponent knows this system might be small, but all the same it is very hard for me to recommend a path that would allow this.

3. g3?! might be even more hated by the computer than d3. It aims for the same systems with a kingside fianchetto and pawns on d3 and g3. Black can adopt several promising strategies, one of them being 3... e6 4. ♗g2 b5∓ Again this is not the end of the world, but Black's space-grab is already annoying. This repertoire is intended to be long-lasting and, while I could build a repertoire around such positions with tons of tricks and gimmicks, the sustainability of this approach is dubious.

1

Key Ideas in the Bird

Chapter Guide

Chapter 1 – Key Ideas in the Bird

Introduction

Welcome! This chapter will be discussing when to go for certain positional devices and pawn breaks! The Bird is one of the most complex and rich openings I've seen and as you go through the material you will understand the significance of this chapter! What lies ahead are tendencies I've noticed in figuring out when to do what. Enjoy!

a) To chop or not to chop

Example 1
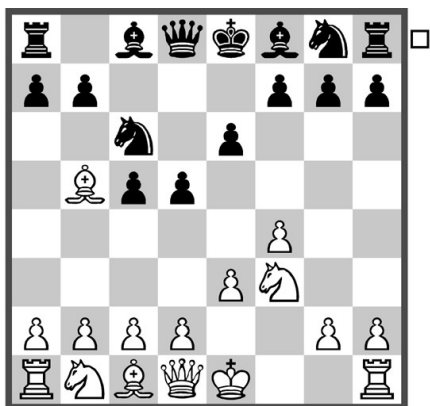
The most important theme in the entire course, the karate chop on c6. Our bishop points at the knight on c6, placing serious pressure on it. We will see the bishop come to b5 in this manner not only in ...d5-systems but also in variations against Black's Sicilian setup with 1...c5. Simply put, in almost every situation available, if Black cannot recapture with a piece, we should smash Black's queenside and ruin the structure. I cannot think of a single time we will not take in these situations. The structure for Black with doubled-pawns on c5 and c6 unequivocally gives us a healthy game.

1. ♗xc6+ bxc6

Black is given an ugly structure with weak, disharmonious pawns on the c-file. The c5-pawn/square will be a permanent target for our pieces. Additionally, Black's c6-pawn is fixed in place making it relatively impossible for Black to use his light-squared bishop effectively on the long diagonal, from b7. It should be mentioned that a6 will likely prove no better for the light-squared bishop as we can always blunt its perspective with d2-d3.

Example 2
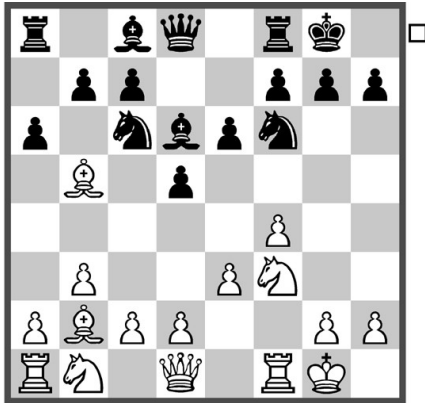
The position is very similar to the previous one, but the conditions of the chop are slightly different. The c-pawn is now on c7. This makes the chop slightly less effective than before, but still good. I should mention there are some rare positions in which this chop is not best even if it doubles the pawns on c7 and c6. While with the Black pawn on c5 we chop to double the pawns nearly 100% of the time, here we do so only 90% of the time, meaning that once in a blue moon we will instead retreat. If this happens, we usually retreat to e2, followed by a quick c2-c4 with tension against the black center.

1. ♗xc6 bxc6

Notice Black's dark-squared bishop isn't nearly as bad as in the last position. This is due to the fact that with the pawn on c7 rather than c5, it still has a clear view of the a3-f8 diagonal. His other bishop, however, continues to be blocked in by his many pawns on light-squares. As usual, it will never find good health on

b7 as the long diagonal is obstructed by pawns on c6 and d5. This structure with doubled-pawns on c7 and c6 appears far less often than ones in which the pawns are doubled on c5 and c6. Each of these situations come with similar plans that only vary slightly.

Example 3
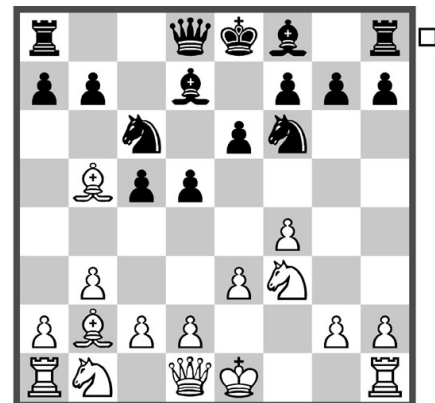
Here we see a more nuanced situation. The bishop on d7 is ready to recapture on c6, keeping Black's structure healthy. In such scenarios we will still prefer chopping to retreating but here there is more of an argument to waiting for Black to spend a move nudging us with ...a7-a6. In this exact position, taken from the French setup chapter, we immediately trade on c6. But it is also fine to wait with 0-0.

1. ♗xc6

1. 0-0 a6 2. ♗e2? Retreating when the pawn is on c5 is just bad. Black has healthy control of the center and with his extra space may be able to begin playing for an advantage shortly. Black's

...a7-a6 is a useful move as it assists his expansion on the queenside with ...b7-b5. So, remember, with the pawn on c5 and the knight on c6, never retreat! We will observe exceptions to this if the knight is developed to d7 (where it is always inferior to the c6). But the c6-chop must always be chosen over the retreat with the pawn on c5.

1... ♗xc6

In these cases, we have not achieved any structural weakening, so what was the justification for ceding the bishop pair in this fashion? Well, we have great control over the e5-square which our knight can immediately exploit.

2. ♘e5!

Renewing the threat to ruin the black structure. Our position resembles a harmonious reversed Queen's Indian setup in which our pawn phalanx and fianchettoed bishop dominate.

Example 4
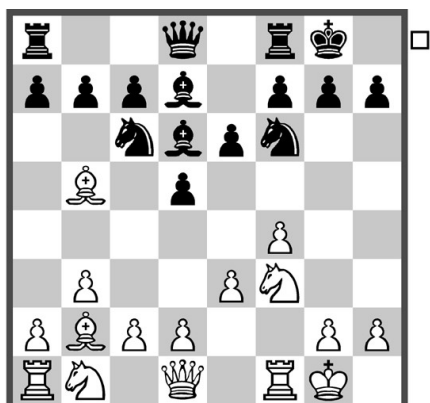
Here we see the fourth type of situation: c6 is defended by the d7-bishop and the pawn is on c7. In these positions the knight on c6 is misplaced as it blocks the c-pawn from its natural advance to c5 to fight for d4. I will not mince my words here – DO NOT CHOP! Black's position is a walking mess with the d7-bishop and c-pawn both screaming at the c6-knight to move out of the way. Pro tip – do not solve your opponent's problems for him, make him move the knight. Normally we would wait for them to play ...a7-a6 before retreating but this is a special position from the 2 knights defence chapter in which we re-route unprompted.

1. ♗e2!

We will play c2-c4 next with an interesting fight. Black is not ready to fight for the center with either ...e6-e5 or ...c7-c5 and we have a healthy practical edge. I want to re-emphasize; this retreat is only executed when Black's pawn is on c7. On c5 his setup would make complete sense and he would have no need to move the knight from c6 to advance the c-pawn.
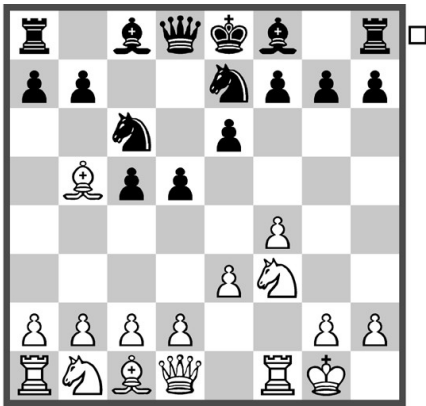
1... ♖e8

Black might try to make sense of his setup by leaving his knight on c6 and simply playing for ...e6-e5.

2. ♘e5!±

Black is left without obvious counter-play!

Example 5

The fifth and rarest type of situation. If the knight is ever defended by another one on e7, DO NOT TRADE. If you were to trade, the e7-benchwarmer would simply replace the c6-knight in perfect harmony. In this situation the knight on e7 is quite unharmonious with the rest of the Black setup and will likely block its own dark-squared bishop. With the knight on e7, the bishop on b5 is useless and so – as throughout this repertoire – when the knight is aimed at e7 we do not even commit the bishop to b5 to arrive in this situation. However, if you do find yourself here, simply leave the bishop on b5 and if it gets harassed retreat to e2 when the position remains balanced. Remember, ♗xc6 gives away a healthy half of the bishop pair and we do not want to do this without getting something tangible in return.

b) Post-chop structures

Example 1: Pawns on c5-c6
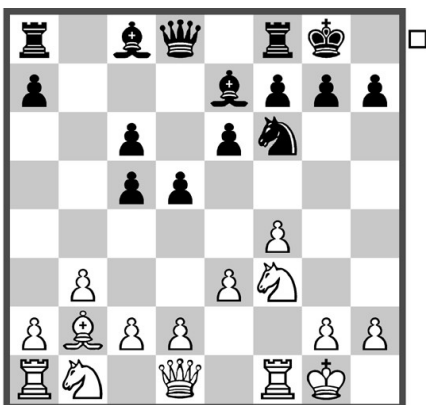
If I had to pick a structure in this course for you to memorize, it would be this one – the post-chop position with pawns on c5 and c6. Black's c5-pawn is fundamentally weak; it can never be defended by a pawn. It resembles the c4-pawn in Nimzo-Indian structures, which is a permanent target for the black pieces. Unlike the Nimzo-Indian, however, our opponent has not achieved an overwhelming center by advancing his e-pawn, since our f4-pawn digs into that square. Black has 3 principal methods of counterplay all involving his pawns and we have 3 measures of prevention to pre-empt each of these attempts. We start with the biggest, ...c5-c4.

Black wants to throw his c-pawn down to c4 for several reasons. It would unblock his bishop; it gets him one step

closer to opening the diagonal for a bishop on b7 with ...c6-c5; and it guarantees some type of trade which will also benefit the light-squared bishop.

9. c4!

Nipping ...c5-c4 in the bud.

9. d3? allows the push 9... c4! Black is often happy to do this even if it means losing a pawn. Here, for instance, he has full compensation for the pawn due to the diagonals being opened. 10. dxc4 ♛b6 In addition to a6-f1, the queen highlights another of the diagonals that have been opened by the pawn sacrifice. 11. ♖e1 ♝a6∞ Black has full compensation. Compare the quality of his bishops and queen to that of the starting position – they are worlds apart.

What is Black's next biggest threat in these structures? It's a tie between two pawn breaks: ...a4 (with ...a7-a5-a4), and ...e5 (after it has been adequately prepared). In both case we will proactively stop such breaks as best we can.

9... a5

The pawn is coming to a4... what to do?

Black can also play for ...e6-e5 with 9... ...♝d6. Make no mistake, if Black achieves this, he will be very close to equality. Luckily, in this position we can clamp down on this idea for good with 10. ♘e5! The pawn is going nowhere.

Instead, I'll waste some moves with White to show what could happen if Black actually achieves ...e6-e5 in this structure. 10. ♔h1? ♘d7 11. ♔g1? ♛c7 12. ♘c3 e5! Several pawns are about to get traded and Black's bishops will flourish in the more opened position. The c8-bishop in particular can breathe a sigh of relief that it will get out along the diagonal to somewhere useful, like f5 or g4, eventually.

10. ♘c3!
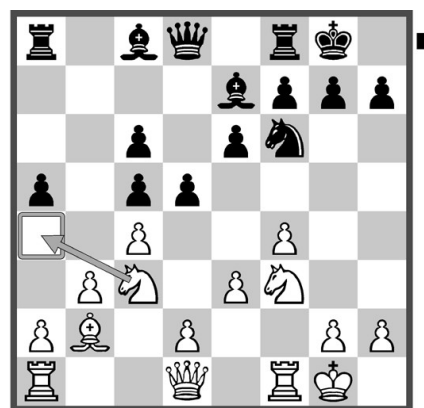
Position after: 10. ♘c3!

Our knight grooves into a4 where it will pressure the c5-weakness and hold back any ...a4 tricks.

10. d3? a4! If Black trades on b3 then we will have a new weakness there. But ...bxa4 would fracture our structure and lead to other weaknesses on the a-file. So, Black has equalized because he's achieved this.

10... ♝d6 11. ♘a4±
And the pawn on a5 is frozen in space. You will get this position countless

times. You can simply pile up on the c5-pawn with moves like ♖c1, ♘f3-e5-d3 and when the time is right cash in on c5. Keep in mind that cxd5 will open up the venomous c8-viper that's been lurking in the dark cellar the whole game, so only exchange on d5 if you're getting more than enough to compensate for this.

Example 2: Pawns on c7-c6 Part I
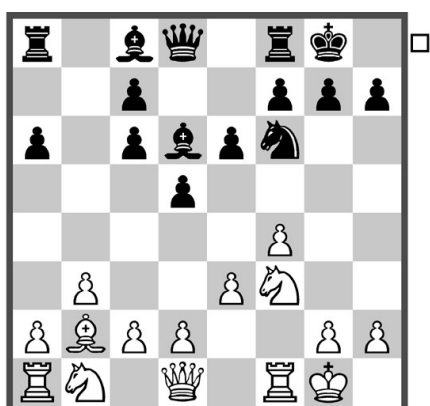
These structures are a bit different than those with pawns on c5 and c6. Firstly, while c5 is a weak square it no longer has a vulnerable pawn placed on it making Black's pawn structure a bit healthier. Without the pawn on c5 we no longer have to make preparations against ...c5-c4. If Black pushes ...c5 to prepare this, we will always be able throw c2-c4 right back at him freezing the pawn on the ugly square and keeping the diagonals relatively closed. In these structures Black has one central idea – to liberate his position with ...e5.

This would open his c8-bishop to the light and also give his rook on f8 a real purpose when it reaches e8. We will watch out for this thrust – if Black gets close to playing it, we will clamp down with the classic knight shimmy.

1. ♘e5!

The black e-pawn is going nowhere! We have a healthy advantage due to our grip on the structure and we should think about aiming our other knight at the c5-weakness. This could be done through the classic transfer ♘b1-c3-a4.

Example 3: Pawns on c7-c6 Part II
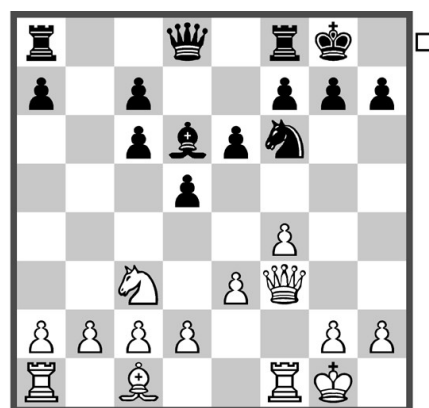
But what do we do when we can't fully control the e5-square with our pieces? Well, we must play instead for d3 and e4! This will create uncomfortable tension against the black pawns. Our dream would be if Black traded on e4, thereby rendering his already ugly doubled pawns isolated and exposed. As long as the d5-pawn stays on the board

it is hard for us to get at the c6-vulnerability, but once it is removed the pressure grows naturally.

1. d3!

1. d4? Clamps down on e5 but is not a good Stonewall! 1... c5! and Black has very nice tension against our center. He looks to trade on d4 and then undermine our second d4-pawn with ...c7-c5. We will discuss the rules of when to go for a Stonewall or not a little further on in the book.

1... e5

Black has achieved the liberating push. Notice how, even without light-squared bishops, this push frees critical space for his d6-bishop and his rook (which will move from f8 to e8).

2. e4!
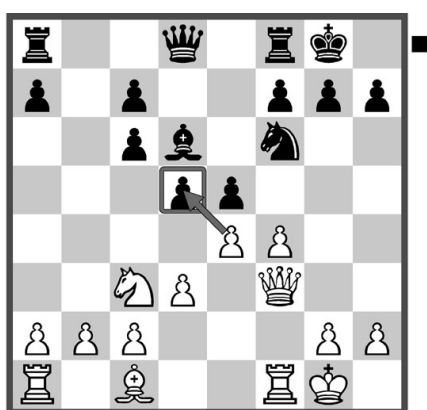
Position after: 2. e4!

The tension on d5 is uncomfortable. If White is given time, he will play f4-f5

with a really nice pawn phalanx pointed at the black kingside.

2... dxe4

2... ♖e8 3. f5! ♗c5+ 4. ♔h1± f4-f5 has been achieved and this guarantees the center and the e-file will be closed for a while. We can throw our g-pawn forward to g4 and g5 and bring the "heavies" over to the kingside for a picturesque denouement. See my game against Leinier Dominguez in the model games for more on this type of position.

3. ♘xe4 ♘xe4 4. ♕xe4

The pawns are traded and White retains a nagging edge. The c-pawns will never not be a weakness. The computer insists things are close to level but we are not playing cold-hearted silicon beasts – instead we are playing humans who hate ugly doubled pawns!

Example 5: Black plays ...e5. Should we react with f5?
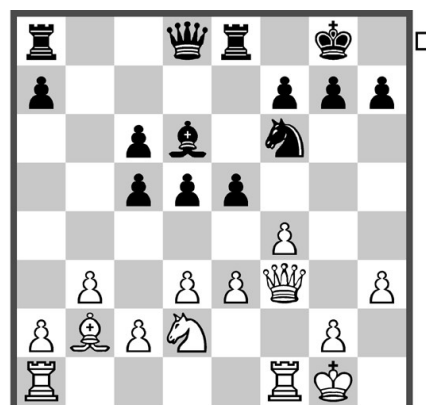
We have reached a complicated situation in which Black has played ...e5. Should we play f4-f5 and attempt to build a healthy phalanx? Simply put, if they can advance ...e5-e4, then the answer is a resounding NO!

12. f5?

All seems fine. We plan to play e4 next move we think to ourselves... Nothing could go wrong it would seem.
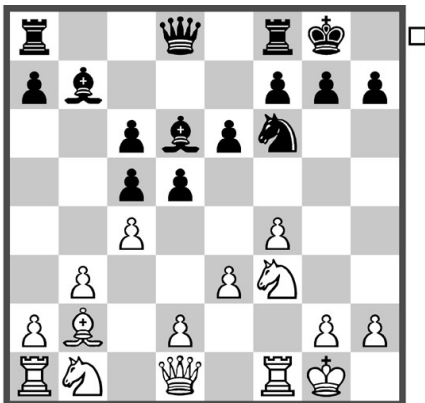
12. ♖ae1!⇆ was better holding the tension on the e-file.

12... e4!∓

Black throws a monkey wrench in our plans and his pieces begin to look better and better. His bishop peeks through e5 at some weak-squares on the kingside and if we ever trade on e4 we will simply be giving his knight or rook a great outpost on that square.
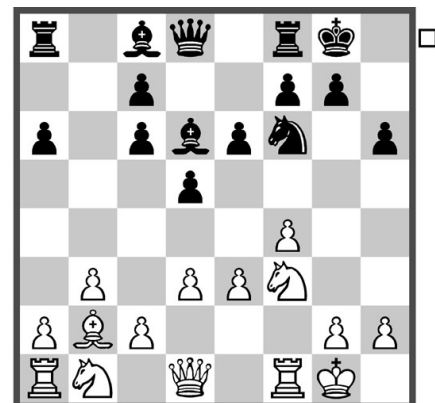
c) The b1-Steed's Steps

Example 1

We come to the difficult question of our b1-knight. While the king's knight will go to f3 with no exceptions (as far as I can tell each of the 1000 or so variations in this book has ♘f3) our queen's knight has a bit more variety. Against the c5/c6 pawn scramble we invariably aim for a4 via c3 to target the c5-weakness.

9. ♘c3!

Example 2

Here we have a situation vs the classic c7/c6 pawn jubilee. Here our knight has flexibility. It can either go to d2 to help advance e3-e4, or it can transfer to a4 via c3 in order to target the weakened c5-square. Both options work. Keep in mind, we do not want to sit our knight indefinitely on c3 if the bishop has been

fianchettoed to b2 as this would block the b2-dragon from sniping the long diagonal!

9. ♘bd2!

9. ♘c3!? is also interesting but it always depends on the weakness of c5. In this exact position the computer does not like this too much as Black's f6-knight is ready to parry our pressure on c5 with ...♘f6-d7.

Example 3
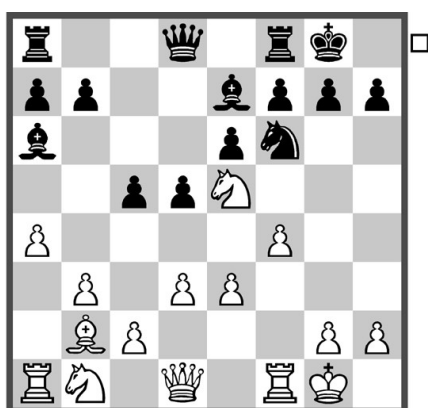
When the chop on c6 has not taken place, it all depends on our c1-bishop. If we've already made preparations to fianchetto it on b2, then the knight will go to d2 to support e3-e4 or further transfer to f3 and then e5. The only exception regarding this as far as I can tell are a few positions in which our king has not yet committed to the kingside (where it remains on e1) and for expediency's sake (since moving to d2 would require us to move the d-pawn) we move the

knight to c3 to quickly castle queenside. Even in those situations, the knight quickly reroutes to g3 via e2. So, there are essentially no positions where the b1-knight stays on c3 indefinitely with the bishop on b2.

12. ♘d2!

Example 4
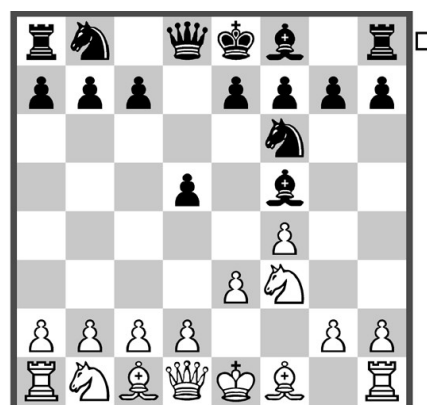
The last thing to mention is when it's clear you are playing for d2-d3 and e3-e4, then the knight is well-placed on c3. Here we see a position from the "Solid ...♗f5" chapter in which our plan is to erect a d3/e4 phalanx against the f5-bishop.

4. ♘c3!

We will play d2-d3 and eventually strive to prepare e3-e4. Our c1-bishop will stay locked beneath the surface for a while and will likely develop to the solid d2.

d) The Stone Wall Question

Example 1
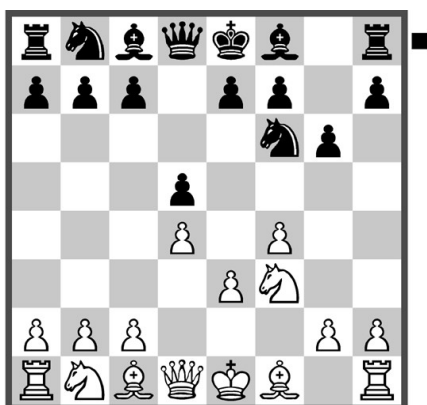
The question of whether to go for a Stonewall (with pawns on d4-e3-f4) is quite tricky and depends on the special circumstances of every position. The structure is inherently risky due to its weaknesses on the light-squares, in particular e4 which has been made an outpost for enemy pieces. In particular, Black can play for an advantage against the structure in two ways: either by weighing down on the e4-weakness with ...♗f5, or by initiating favorable tension with ...c7-c5. It might be confusing why we are talking about Black's ideas when this is a White repertoire, but you will begin to get the point as we move forward. If Black does not have to waste time on either of these ideas, or if for some reason one or both of them is not unavailable, then we should NOT opt for the Stonewall. We will discuss what would make these strong ideas unavailable in the next examples.

1... c5!∓

Black is already better. He will follow with ...♘c6, ...♗g7, ...♗f5 with healthy pressure against our center. The game is not over yet, but already our pieces' prospects are significantly inferior to those of the opponent.
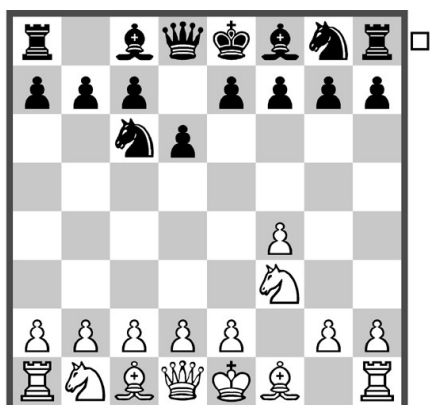
Example 2

Here Black has obstructed his c7-pawn making ...c5 very hard to accomplish. Moreover, he has rushed his queen out to d6 and is aiming at an immediate ...e7-e5 which a Stonewall structure would perfectly clamp down upon. Therefore...

4. d4±

We have a good Stonewall. We will follow with c2-c4 and if possible, expand with c4-c5 to gain more space. Black's pieces on c6 and d6 are looking very silly now that ...e7-e5 is off the table. Moral

of the story: if our opponent's knight is on c6, a Stonewall structure may already be justified since ...c7-c5 is impossible to achieve without Black burning a useless move on the c6-knight.

Example 3

It is always a matter of identifying the factors favorable to the Stonewall. If you spot one, the Stonewall should be ok. If you spot two, drop what you're doing and start laying the bricks. In this example the knight on c6 is again misplaced, and Black has burned a move on ...d6 – this is important since if he doesn't advance it to d5 nothing will be fixing our Stonewall in place and stopping us from advancing e3-e4. So, the knight on c6 is 1 strike and the pawn being on d6 means a free tempo (which is another strike), so it's time to advance!

3. d4!±

A healthy Stonewall. Black is best advised to push ...d6-d5 but of course he will have wasted a lot of time and this doesn't begin to address the knight on c6. I want to emphasize, if your position has 2 of the following criteria, you should probably advance the Stonewall:

- 1) Black's knight is on c6 and his pawn is still on c7.
- 2) Black's c8-bishop is blocked by an obstruction from reaching f5, for instance if a pawn had been pushed to e6.
- 3) If Black's pawn spent two moves getting to d5 or is currently on d6.
- 4) If Black has contorted his position with unusual moves like ...♕d6 or ...f7-f6 to quickly achieve ...e5 in the opening moves.

MEANWHILE if any of the criteria below exist, do NOT advance the Stonewall:
- 1) You have pushed b3. Regardless of whether you have fianchettoed the bishop already or not, this push tends to not work in conjunction with the stonewall. This is partly from it being costly in time and that the bishop on b2 pointing into the white d4-concrete will affect nothing.
- 2)Black's pawn is already on c5. There are no exceptions to this when Black has pawns on d5 and c5. (There is an exception if they've elected for a Sicilian structure with ...d6 and ...♘c6, feel free to check that chapter out for more info.)

e) The c4/...d5 Exception

Example 1
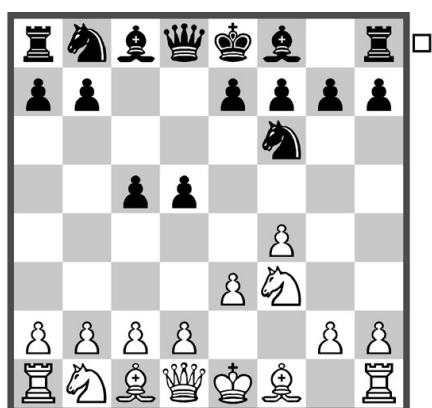
We now arrive at a very confusing aspect of the course. When should we think about breaking early in the game with c2-c4? I am not referring to the aforementioned breaks in the middlegame in which we are holding their doubled c5-pawn back, but instead talking about the few moments we are supposed to break this way on move 4 or 5. This break, if executed incorrectly, can really kill the vibe. When Black has pawns on c5 and d5 for instance, such a break is almost always bad.

4. c4?

Why is it bad? Well essentially, we have a weakness on d3 when we push the c-pawn and although this wouldn't be such an issue if the d-file stays closed, unfortunately we just gave Black a guarantee that he can open that file whenever he wants. He can also advance ...d5-d4 gaining important control over

squares like c3 and e3, which are a key part of our position. It is critical for us to only play for c2-c4 with the d2-e3-f4 phalanx only when we have the time to be able to trade the pawns and still be able to advance d2-d4 without any harassment by Black's c-pawn. This would equate to this break never being played if Black's pawn is on c5. The following example should illustrate this well.

4... ♘c6!

4... d4!∓ Black has a healthy space advantage and the better chances.

5. cxd5 ♘xd5∓

The key question is can we push d2-d4 without it being attacked by a black c5-pawn. The answer is no, and so our idea falls flat. We have a weak d3-square and sooner or later we will have to push the d2-pawn there, leaving us with tender pawns on e3 and d3. Black isn't winning yet, but he is already better, making our flight with the bird short-lived.

Example 2

Here Black's pawn is not on c5 yet, and moreover if we attack the d5-pawn Black's queen would have to waste time recapturing and then retreating, giving us ample time to make the break work.
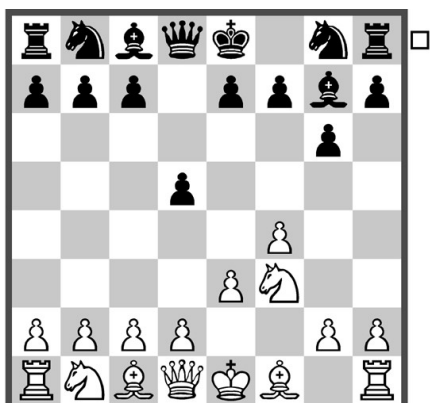
4. c4! c5

Black aims for a good structure this way, and if they have one more move to play ♞f6 they will stand better. But here we can beckon their queen out too soon.

4... ♞f6 5. cxd5 ♞xd5 If Black has time for ...c5 here, he'll be better. Luckily, we can flick in d2-d4 just in time. 6. d4∞ We got d4 in before ...c5 and can aim to play a quick e3-e4. These bonkers positions are analyzed in the "Unusual Birds" chapter.

5. cxd5 ♛xd5 6. ♞c3 ♛d8 7. ♝c4

While we have the same weakness on d3 as always, we have gotten a few free tempi which means we can build a healthy position with d2-d3 and e3-e4.

f) No Nos

Example 1
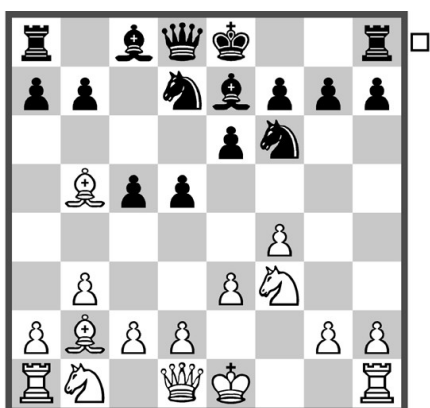
We end the chapter with a few no-nos. These are things that you should almost never do in the Bird. We start with a classic situation. If the knight is on d7, pat the horse on the back and give heartfelt thanks for messing up Black's entire position. The knight is unable to attack d4 as it did not go to the correct c6-square. It also blocks the bishop and the queen, whose development will be worsened due to having an enormous steed in their living room. With that being said.... DO NOT CHOP THE KNIGHT ON D7. It is an awful piece and trading it would not even cramp their structure. So just don't do it. This position is taken from the French setup chapter. Here we cleverly readjust our scopes with...

7. ♝d3!

Our bishops shoot nicely at the kingside. You will see such bishop repositioning throughout the course whenever it's pointed at the d7-knight. The knight is worse on d7 than it would be on b8,

since now it's two steps away from the correct c6 rather than one.

Example 2
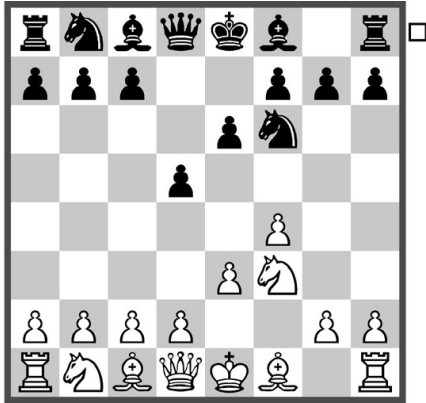
Do not throw the bishop to b5 if one of the following criteria has not been met:
- 1) The black knight has arrived at c6.
- 2) The black pawn has been pushed to c5.

Here neither criterion has been satisfied and so...

4. b3!

We wait until it is met to develop our f1-bishop. By the way there are some set-ups in which our opponent delays both the knight on c6 and the pawn on c7. If that occurs you must keep making useful moves in building the fianchetto, but sooner or later you will have to develop your king's bishop. If b5 still does nothing, then it should probably just go to e2.

4. ♗b5+?! simply gives them a free tempo. 4... c6 While not particularly useful this move does strengthen the Black center so overall our check just helped his position.

Example 3
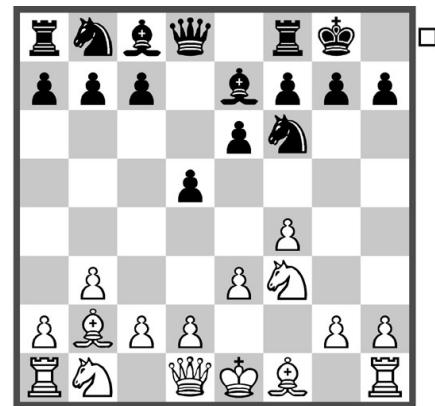
It is recommended to play ♖g1 here. There is no exact no-no tied to this, rather this is just a reminder – the more aggressive and reckless a move is, the more you need to practice it lest you apply it in a slightly different situation. I relish reckless wreckings of the black position but only when they are correct. If you apply one in a slightly incorrect scenario the results could be dire and you could even lose the game. MAKE SURE to have memorized the entire position and not just your side when playing aggressive moves like 6.♖g1 here.
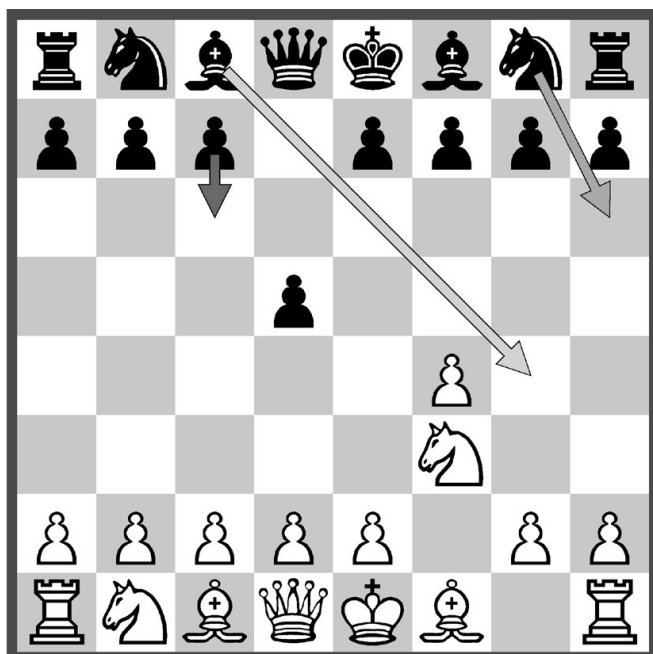
6. ♖g1

White will play g4 with an insane and double-edged game to follow.

2

Unusual Birds

1.f4 d5 2.♘f3

Chapter Guide

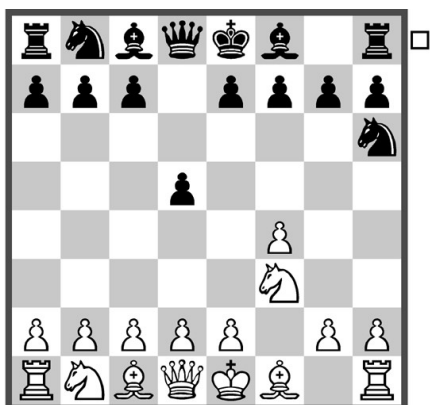## Chapter 2 – Unusual Birds

1.f4 d5 2.♘f3

a) 2...♞h6

1. f4 d5 2. ♘f3

Here we will look at rarer 2nd moves for Black.

2... ♞h6

Position after: 2... ♞h6

This is chosen rarely at lower levels but many strong players have tried this against me (sometimes they do it move 1 and then follow it with 2...d5 to transpose) in over the board blitz games. Black treats our position like White does in the Dutch (which resembles a reverse Bird) and follows the classic plan of installing the knight in front of our f-pawn. Fortunately, we are a tempo up on those positions. We will do our best to get a pawn to e4 when the knight won´t be able to go to f5 and will be left sitting at home on h6.

A) 2... ♗g4 3. e3 will transpose to other chapters that cover ...♗g4 in ...d5 systems.

B) 2... ♗f5 3. e3 will transpose to other ...d5 systems in which ...♗f5 is essayed later on. This is also covered in later chapters.

3. d3
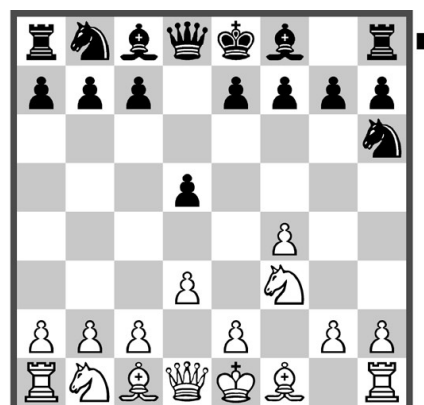
Position after: 3. d3

3... ♗g4

is the most common way to handle the position.

A) 3... g6 Black prepares a kingside fianchetto to complement the knight on f5. Here 3 moves keep equality, while one looks hideous and will certainly get a rise out of your unsuspecting opponent. 4. ♕d2!!