

The Modernized Grünfeld Defense

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The Modernized Grünfeld Defense

Yaroslav Zherebukh

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Key to Symbols

!	a good move	±	White stands slightly better
?	a weak move	∓	Black stands slightly better
!!	an excellent move	±	White has a serious advantage
??	a blunder	∓	Black has a serious advantage
!?	an interesting move	+—	White has a decisive advantage
?!	a dubious move	—+	Black has a decisive advantage
□	only move	→	with an attack
N	novelty	↑	with initiative
⊙	lead in development	↔	with counterplay
⊙	zugzwang	Δ	with the idea of
=	equality	△	better is
∞	unclear position	≤	worse is
∞	with compensation for the sacrificed material	+	check
		#	mate

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Preface

I have played absolutely everything against 1.d4 from the Slav Defense, Queen's Gambit, Benko Gambit, King's Indian Defense, Nimzo-Indian Defense to the Dutch... you name it. Fortunately, my quest for finding the best opening ended once I discovered the Grünfeld Defense.

I immediately felt drawn to the dynamic positions the opening has to offer. I was also particularly attracted to the possibility of getting good play without resorting to a long passive defense. It's all simple: memorize a few lines and then go fight for the initiative from the very beginning.

I have spent well over 1,000 hours analyzing the Grünfeld throughout the years. It took a bit over 200 hours to review, update and incorporate everything into this book. Therefore, I am very proud to present this work and hope that you will enjoy it!

My motivation for writing this book was twofold:

- 1) To contribute to the opening theory of the Grünfeld Defense.
- 2) To inspire more people to play chess after seeing the beauty of the game through the Grünfeld Defense lenses. I have lost count of all the sacrifices and tactics in the 16 chapters of the book.

This book contains all my analyses, primarily done between January 2016 and January 2020. I have updated everything once again before the book went into print to account for new games and ideas and to reflect the most current state of opening theory as of January 2020.

You will see lots of novelties and exciting ideas that have never been played before. I believe you will find them valuable and playable for many, many years. Remember: once you learn the Grünfeld, you won't need to learn any other opening!

I like to be concise and efficient, so I'll keep this preface short. Just one more thing. I encourage any questions and criticism so please feel free to share your thoughts and feedback by emailing me at yarozchess@gmail.com.

Your feedback truly helps improving the book and the theory of this fabulous opening.

I wish you all good luck on your Grünfeld journey.

Yaro Zherebukh
January 2020, Chicago

Introduction

I hope all of you are hyped up for studying the Grünfeld Defense after reading the preface. So, let's get started!

A brief history

The Grünfeld Defense appeared on the chess scene in the 1920s thanks to the efforts of the Austrian GM Ernst Grünfeld.

Just a few years earlier, Lasker and Capablanca (the second and the third world champions, respectively) had announced to the world that chess is a draw. The only openings that make sense, they said, are the symmetrical ones: The Queen's Gambit (1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6) and the Ruy Lopez (1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5).

Lucky for us, Grünfeld proved them wrong!

How to read this book?

It honestly doesn't matter where you start: it can be chapter 1, 10, or 8 followed by chapters 5, 7 or 9 – it really doesn't matter. Nowadays, White plays everything against the Grünfeld and there is no such thing as a main system anymore. Treat this book like a buffet: eat what you like whenever you like.

For the best results I would recommend reading every chapter.

Don't neglect chapters 14-16. While they don't strictly belong to the Grünfeld domain, they represent a common attempt to punish the Grünfeld players who want to get to the Grünfeld lines even if White starts the game with 1.c4 or 1.♘f3. I used to have a lot of trouble against the Anti-Grünfeld until I really took my time to work on it.

Whenever you see an upcoming diagram you can pause and think about the position on it. For the best learning experience try to either evaluate the position or to guess the move that will be played.

How to memorize the lines and practice the opening?

The memorization part is the trickiest. For those who use ChessBase: create a new database (*Ctrl+X* is the shortcut), then open a new board (*Ctrl+N*) and input all the moves from the chapter you are currently reading. Once complete you can click on *Training* and then keep seeing the moves for White and guessing the moves for Black before you see them played on the board. Eventually, you should be able to memorize the line. Remember though to do just one variation at a time!

If you don't have ChessBase, don't panic, you have options as well. You can use multiple online resources, including chess.com. On chess.com you can go to *Play* → *Live Chess* → *Analysis Board* → *Start* and then input all the moves there. Use the same memorization technique as described in the ChessBase section above. Shoot me an email if you are struggling!

In general, I would not recommend playing a new opening in a tournament game without practicing it first in less important games over the board or online.

You can practice online against other people or even against computers who will play you on demand anytime you like. As a rule of thumb, I want to play at least 10 games online before I can confidently play the opening in a tournament over the board game. The more you practice the better!

Regarding the time control for your practice games: it depends on personal preference. I like doing at least 15 minutes for each.

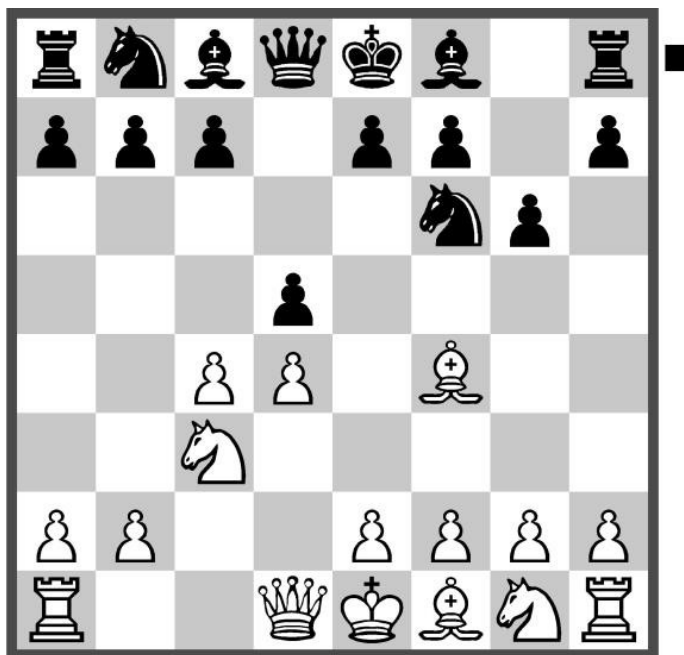
Now, on to the chess part!



4. ♖f4

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 g6

3. ♘c3 d5 4. ♖f4



Chapter Guide

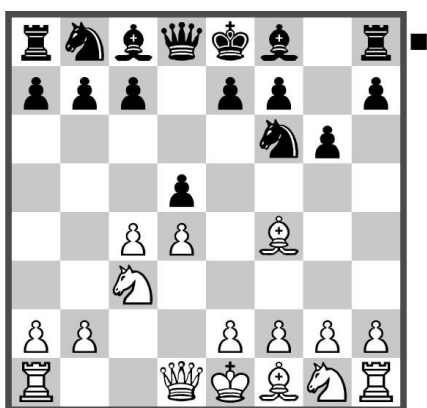
Chapter 8 – 4. f4

1.d4  f6 2.c4 g6 3.  c3 d5 4.  f4  g7

a) 5.--.....	141
b) 5.  f3.....	148
c) 5.e3	152

a) 5.--

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 g6 3. ♘c3 d5 4. ♖f4



Position after: 4. ♖f4

Any beginner's guide to chess will insist on developing your kingside first, castling and only then taking care of the queenside pieces. As players advance in their chess understanding they learn when to break the rules. This system is a good example of when to break the rules.

White takes a lot of precautions against Black's activity on the a1-h8 diagonal by developing the bishop to f4 and the rook to c1 thus trying to tame our dark-squared bishop. Despite White's preparations, our strategy will remain the same: an early ...c5 pawn break followed by active development of the queenside.

4... ♗g7 5. ♖c1

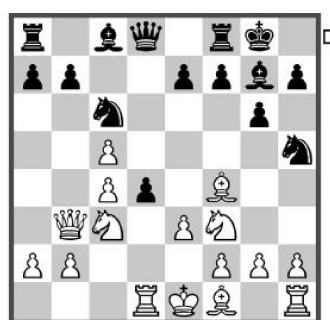
One possibility is to procrastinate even longer with e3.

A) 5. ♔b3 White hopes to force us to give up the center by taking the c4-pawn but we have something better 5... c5.



Position after: 5... c5

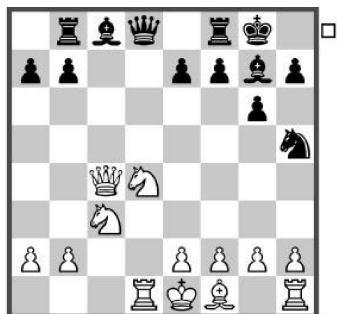
A1) You might be surprised how quickly White gets in trouble after an ordinary-looking 6. dxc5? d4! 7. ♖d1 0-0 8. e3 ♘c6 9. ♘f3 ♘h5!



Position after: 9... ♘h5!

By aggressive attacking White gets no time to continue his development. 10. ♗g5 h6 11. ♗h4 ♗g4 12. ♗e2 ♗xf3 13. ♗xf3 ♔a5 14. ♗xc6 dxc3+

A2) 6. ♘f3 cxd4 7. ♘xd4 ♘h5 A recurring idea in this line. 8. ♗xb8 dxc4 9. ♔xc4 ♖xb8 10. ♖d1 0-0

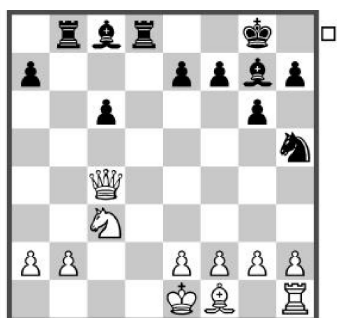


Position after: 10... 0-0

I have to confess it's shocking how the engine didn't even bother a second to remove the queen from the explicitly dangerous rendezvous with the d1-rook. A discovered double attack after 11. ♘c6? No worries, we will just sacrifice the queen!

A2.1) 11. ♘f5 ♔b6↑

A2.2) 11. ♘c6 bxc6! 12. ♖xd8 ♖xd8



Position after: 12... ♖xd8

Nominally, White has a material advantage. However, we are more active and about to restore the material balance by capturing one of White's queenside pawns. 13. ♘d1 ♕e6 14. ♔c1 ♕xa2 15. e3 ♕d5 16. ♕e2 ♘f6 17. 0-0 ♘e4

A2.3) 11. e3 ♔b6 12. ♔b5 ♔xb5 13. ♕xb5 ♖d8 14. 0-0 a6 15. ♕c4 ♘f6 The bishop pair secures Black a slight advantage.

B) 5. ♔a4+



Position after: 5. ♔a4+

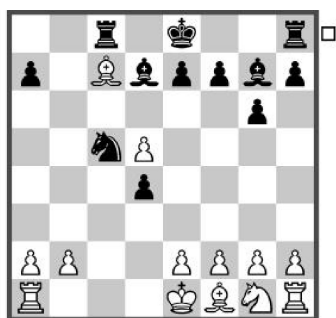
The purpose of this check is always the same: 1) if Black goes ...c7-c6 then the typical pawn break ...c7-c5 is difficult to execute 2) if Black protects the king with ...♕d7 then White retreats with the queen to b3 and the d5-pawn lacks an appropriate level of defense (note the apparent disconnect between the d7-bishop, d8-queen, and d5-pawn). 5... ♕d7 6. ♔b3 c5!



Position after: 6... c5!

As you have seen so far, this moves saves Black all the time.

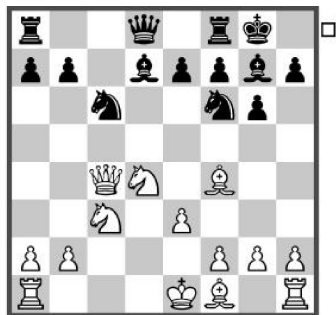
B1) 7. dxc5? As usual, capturing the c5-pawn and allowing ...d5-d4 only brings White disappointment and a nearly lost position. 7... d4 8. ♘d5 ♘a6 9. ♙xb7 ♘xd5 10. cxd5 ♘xc5 11. ♙c7 ♙xc7 12. ♙xc7 ♖c8



Position after: 12... ♖c8

Ironically, Black has a winning position even after the queen trade. 13. ♙f4 ♘e4 14. g3 ♖c2 15. ♙g2 f5→ Black is objectively winning due to his overwhelming activity. In order to castle, White will need to give up the e2 and b2 pawns, giving Black an extra pawn.

B2) 7. ♘f3? Sometimes, simply developing your pieces according to the basic rules of chess is not good enough! 7... dxc4 8. ♙xc4 cxd4 9. ♘xd4 0-0 10. e3 ♘c6



Position after: 10... ♘c6

White has clearly failed to conquer the center and the queen on c4 looks purposeless. Black is significantly better due to the absence of any weaknesses and his superior development. 11. ♖d1 ♘xd4 12. exd4 ♖c8 13. ♙b3 ♙a5 14. ♙xb7 ♙c6 15. ♙a6 ♙f5 16. ♙g3 ♘d5+

B3) 7. ♘xd5 ♘xd5 8. cxd5 cxd4 9. ♙xb7 ♙a5+



Position after: 9... ♙a5+

B3.1) 10. ♙d2? ♙b6 11. ♙xb6 axb6 12. ♘f3 0-0 13. g3 ♘a6 14. ♙g2 ♙b5! 15. a3 ♘c5 16. ♙b4 ♖fc8+ White will not be able to castle without losing the valuable e2-pawn or even the b2-pawn in case Black pushes ...d4-d3. Therefore, Black has a significant advantage.

B3.2) 10. ♙d1? 0-0 11. ♘f3 ♖d8! Mark Dvoretsky, who was a famous Russian chess coach and author, had a chapter in one of his numerous books called Mysterious Rook Moves. I wish this one made it to his famous collection!



Position after: 11... Rxd8!

To this day I have no idea why the rook has to go to d8 and humbly admit the greatness of Leela Chess Zero (the mastermind behind 11... Rxd8!). 12. Qxa8 [12. Qc7 Qa4+ 13. b3 Qxb3+ 14. Qxb3 Qxc7+; 12. Qd2 Qb6 13. Qxb6 axb6 14. g3 Qa4+ 15. Ke1 Qb3 16. d6 Qxd6 17. Qg2 Nc6 18. a3 e5 19. Ng5 f5+ Black has a winning position since White can never castle and Black's domination in the center is undeniable.] 12... Qa4+



Position after: 12... Qa4+

13. Kc1 [13. b3 Qxb3+ 14. axb3 Qxa1+ 15. Ke2 Qc8+ The mate is coming way sooner here than the White Walkers in Game of Thrones. Just 9 moves!] 13... Qc5+ 14. Kd2 Qb4+ 15. Kc1 Qc8+—

B3.3) 10. b4 Qb6



Position after: 10... Qb6

11. Qxb6 [The rook is untouchable: 11. Qxa8? 0-0 12. a3 Na6 13. Qxf8+ Qxf8 14. Rc1 d3 15. exd3 Qb2 16. Rc4 Qxa3+] 11... axb6 12. Nf3 Na6 13. Bb1 0-0 14. Qe5 Qf5 15. Bb2 Qxe5 16. Nxe5 Nc7 17. Nc6 Nxd5

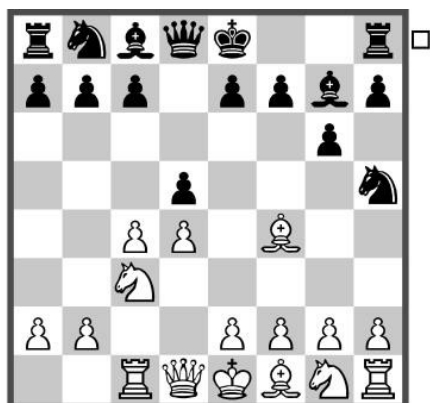


Position after: 17... Nxd5

18. g3! White barely maintains equality. [18. Nxd4 Nc3 19. e3 Qfd8 20. Qe2 Qxa2 21. Bxa2 Nxa2+] 18... Qd7 19. Nxd4 Bxa4 20. Qg2 Nxb4 21. 0-0=

5... Nh5

(see diagram next page)

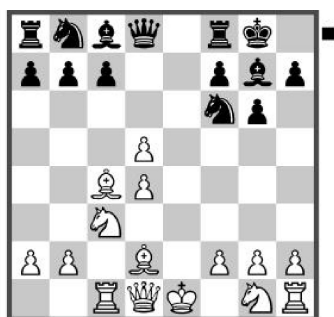


Position after: 5... ♘h5

I hope that after reading this book most of the readers will learn to think creatively and will realize that sometimes the basic positional rules can be tossed out of the window! Instead of castling, Black attacks White immediately.

6. ♖g5

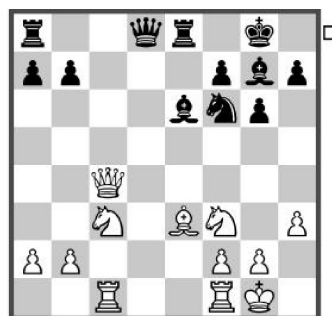
6. ♖d2 e5!? An incredibly creative idea, played by one of the most talented youngsters, GM Vladislav Artemiev. 7. e3 exd4 8. exd4 0-0 9. cxd5 ♘f6 10. ♖c4



Position after: 10. ♖c4

A) Black can even try a pawn sacrifice: 10... c6!? 11. dxc6 ♙xd4 12. ♙e2 ♘xc6 13. ♘f3 ♙d8 14. h3

♘a5 15. 0-0 ♖e8 16. ♖e3 ♘xc4 17. ♙xc4 ♖e6



Position after: 17... ♖e6

As stated previously in the book, a bishop pair in an open type position almost always serves as enough compensation for the sacrificed pawn. 18. ♙a4 ♘d5 19. ♖d4 ♘b6 20. ♙b4 ♖f8 ½-½ (20) Aleksandrov, A (2559) – Artemiev, V (2682) Minsk 2017.

B) 10... ♘bd7 11. ♖b3 ♘b6 12. ♘f3 ♖e8+ 13. ♘e5 ♘bxd5 14. 0-0 ♖e6 15. ♖e1 c6= We have simple play against the isolated pawn. Our next couple of moves could be ... ♙d6 and ... ♖ad8.

6... h6



Position after: 6... h6

7. ♖d2

7. ♖h4? c5!



Position after: 7... c5!

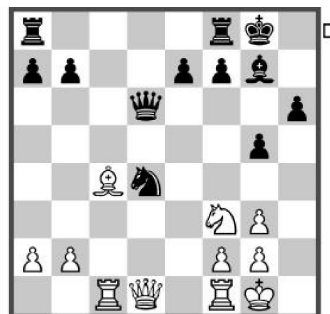
A) 8. ♘xd5 ♗c6 9. e3 cxd4 10. exd4



Position after: 10. exd4

A1) 10... ♖xd4?! it's fascinating how captures usually tend to slow down the pace of attack. 11. ♖xe7 ♖xf2+ 12. ♔xf2 ♘xe7 13. ♔a4+ ♖d7 14. ♔b4 White gained time to breath after 10... ♖d4 and now makes our life difficult by preventing short castling by Black.

A2) 10... ♖e6! 11. ♘f3 0-0 12. ♖e2 ♖xd5 13. cxd5 ♔xd5 14. 0-0 g5 15. ♖c4 ♔d6 16. ♖g3 ♘xg3 17. hxg3 ♘xd4 ♞ We are up a pawn and have every reason to play to win.



Position after: 17... ♘xd4

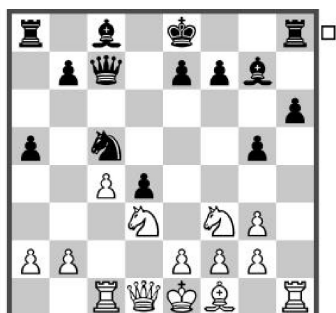
The opposite colored bishop doesn't guarantee White a draw. In fact, the opposite colored bishop usually amplifies the attack whenever the heavy pieces are involved.

B) 8. dxc5 As we have learned from the previous lines in this chapter, taking on c5 and allowing ...d5-d4 is never a good idea for White. This position is no exception. 8... d4.



Position after: 8... d4

9. ♘d5 [9. ♘b1 g5 10. ♖g3 ♘xg3 11. hxg3 ♔a5+ 12. ♔d2 ♔xa2 13. b4 ♔xd2+ 14. ♘xd2 ♘a6 15. ♔b1 ♖f5 16. ♔b2 d3 17. ♔b3 dxe2 18. ♖xe2 ♖c2 19. ♔a3 ♘xb4+] 9... g5 10. ♖g3 ♘xg3 11. hxg3 ♘d7 12. ♘f3 ♘xc5 13. ♘b4 a5 14. ♘d3 ♔c7+ The bishop on f1 is the most miserable bishop I have seen in a while.



Position after: 14... ♖c7-+

Black's superior pawn structure combined with the activity of his bishops means White is doomed to a sub-standard existence and eventual loss of the game.

C) 8. e3 cxd4 9. ♖xd5 [9. exd4 dxc4 10. ♖xc4 0-0 11. ♖ge2 g5 12. ♖g3 ♖xg3 13. hxg3 ♖c6-] 9... ♖c6 10. ♖e2 g5 11. ♖xh5 e6!



Position after: 11... e6!

The knight on d5 causes us way more troubles than the h4-bishop, so it makes sense to take care of it first. 12. ♖g3 exd5 13. ♖f3 dxc4 14. ♖xd4 ♖xd4 15. exd4 0-0 16. 0-0 [16. ♖xc4 ♖e8+ 17. ♖f1 ♖e6 18. ♖c1 ♖xd4-+] 16... ♖e6 17. ♖e5 ♖xe5 18. dxe5 ♖xd1 19. ♖xd1 ♖ad8-

7... e5



Position after: 7... e5

8. e3

White needs to resort to modest play and simply finish his development.

The overly active and ambitious 8. dxe5 leads to a slightly worse position after 8... d4 9. ♖d5 c6 10. ♖b4 ♖xe5 11. ♖f3 ♖g7 12. ♖d3 0-0 13. g3 ♖f6 14. ♖g2 ♖e8 15. 0-0 ♖e4-.

8... exd4 9. exd4 0-0



Position after: 9... 0-0

10. cxd5

Acceptable, although admittedly a lot riskier, is 10. ♖f3 c5 11. ♖e3 [11. dxc5

♖e8+ 12. ♙e2 d4 13. ♘b5 d3→] 11...
 ♙g4 12. ♙e2 cxd4 13. ♘xd4 ♙xe2
 14. ♘cxe2 dxc4 15. 0-0 ♘f6 16. ♖xc4
 ♘d5= Black has comfortable play and
 can easily develop the queenside knight
 and rook in the next couple of moves.

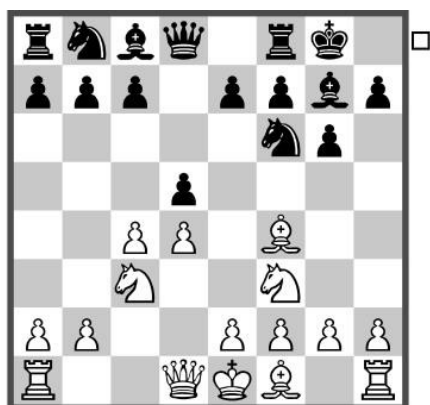
10... ♘d7 11. ♙c4 ♘b6 12. ♙b3 ♘f6
 13. ♘f3 ♖e8+ 14. ♘e5 ♘bxd5 15.
 0-0 ♙e6 16. ♖e1 c6=



Position after: 16... c6=

b) 5. ♘f3

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 g6 3. ♘c3 d5 4. ♙f4
 ♙g7 5. ♘f3 0-0



Position after: 5... 0-0

6. ♖c1

It may seem to be counter-intuitive to develop your queenside before the kingside but here it makes sense. White is fully ready to meet ...c7-c5, so Black needs to come up with a different line of play.

A) 6. e3 c5 7. dxc5 ♔a5 8. ♖c1 dxc4 9. ♙xc4 ♔xc5 transposes to the main line (next subchapter).

B) 6. cxd5? The c7-pawn is not worth putting White's kingside development on hold. Black ruthlessly punishes White for this transgression.