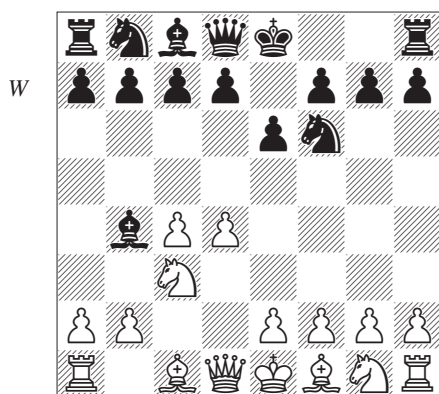


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# 7 Nimzo-Indian Defence

1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♗c3 ♘b4 (D)

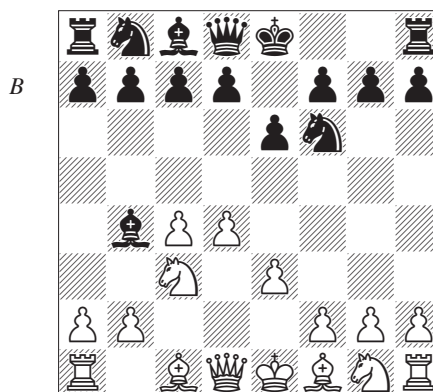


The Nimzo-Indian Defence was for many years a mainstay of nearly every elite player's repertoire. It was said that the reason players used 1 e4 was because after 1 d4 they had to cope with the Nimzo-Indian! The opening is still one of the elite defences versus 1 d4, although now not as feared, and competing in popularity with the Slav, Semi-Slav, Queen's Gambit Declined and (at this moment) the Grünfeld Defence. In our case, we are using 3 ♗c3 because it is consistent with the rest of our repertoire and, in the event that Black plays 3...d5, we have bypassed some troublesome defences which White would allow should he play 3 ♗f3 (an issue I outlined in Chapter 1). Besides, the Nimzo-Indian is one of the greatest strategic openings in all of chess, so it would be a shame to pass it by!

**4 e3 (D)**

This gentle advance of the e-pawn has historically been played more often than any other move against the Nimzo-Indian, and in contemporary chess is played in slightly over a third of the games with 3...♘b4. Nearly every leading player has played 4 e3, some of them regularly.

Despite blocking in the queen's bishop, the move accomplishes a few basic things:



1) White prepares to develop his kingside quickly, and retains flexibility as to the placement of his king's knight on f3 or e2.

2) The e4-square can be challenged by ♗d3, while c3 can be covered by ♗ge2, potentially with a later ♗g3 to control e4 further.

3) The d4-pawn is covered, so the typical Nimzo-Indian attack by ...c5 and ...♗c6 has less forcing effect.

These are modest achievements, and the non-forcing nature of 4 e3 gives Black a great deal of latitude as to how to develop. Still, once White develops and castles, he will be threatening to expand with e4, and thus Black's main moves are directed at setting up so as to prevent or anticipate that advance:

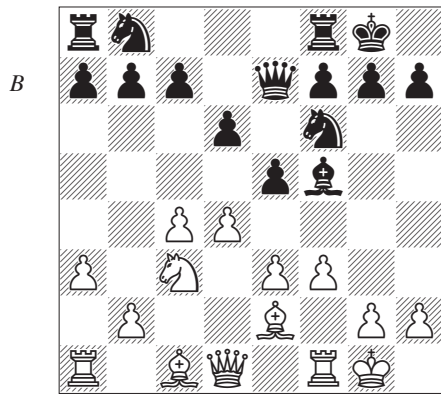
<b>7.1: 4...c5</b>	117
<b>7.2: 4...b6</b>	126
<b>7.3: 4...0-0</b>	139
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I'm not going to deal with illogical or slow 4th moves – after all, Black can play just about anything – but there are a couple of other moves that are important enough to mention:

a) 4...d6 is sound, intending an early ...e5 as he wishes. White has some leeway in setting up:

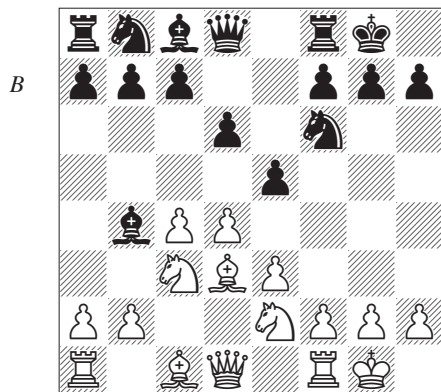
a1) The classic encounter Euwe-Yanofsky, Groningen 1946 continued 5 ♗e2 0-0 6 a3

$\text{♙xc3+}$  7  $\text{♜xc3}$  e5 8  $\text{♙e2}$   $\text{♚e7}$  9 0-0  $\text{♙f5}$  10 f3! (D).



10... $\text{♜c6}$  (White has cleverly discouraged 10...e4?! due to 11 fxe4  $\text{♙xe4}$ ? 12  $\text{♚xf6}$ ! gxf6 13  $\text{♜xe4}$   $\text{♚xe4}$  14  $\text{♙f3}$  and b7 falls) 11  $\text{♜d5}$ !  $\text{♜xd5}$  12 cxd5  $\text{♜b8}$  13 e4  $\text{♙c8}$  14  $\text{♙e3}$  exd4 15  $\text{♚xd4}$ . White has taken over the centre and has the bishop-pair.

a2) 5  $\text{♙d3}$  0-0 6  $\text{♜e2}$  is attractive, and now the only consistent move is 6...e5. A few examples after 7 0-0 (D):



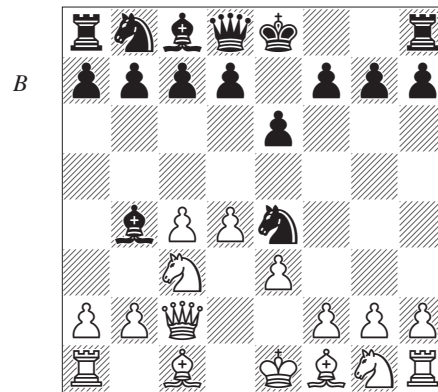
a21) 7... $\text{♚e8}$  8 a3  $\text{♙xc3}$  9  $\text{♜xc3}$   $\text{♜bd7}$  10  $\text{♙c2}$  (10 f3 h6 11 d5  $\text{♜c5}$  12  $\text{♙c2}$  a5 13 e4  $\text{♙d7}$  14  $\text{♙e3}$  gives White an edge due to his space and bishops) 10...h6 11 d5  $\text{♜f8}$  12 f3  $\text{♜g6}$  13 b3  $\text{♙d7}$  14  $\text{♙b2}$  with a solid advantage for White, Chekhov-G.Kuzmin, Leningrad 1991.

a22) 7...c6 8 a3  $\text{♙a5}$  9 b4  $\text{♙c7}$  10  $\text{♚c2}$   $\text{♚e8}$  11  $\text{♙b2}$  (or 11 f3  $\text{♜bd7}$  12 d5  $\text{♙}$ ) 11...exd4 12  $\text{♜xd4}$   $\text{♜bd7}$  13  $\text{♚ad1}$   $\text{♜e5}$  14  $\text{♙e2}$   $\text{♚e7}$  15  $\text{♚d2}$   $\text{♙d7}$  16  $\text{♜f5}$   $\text{♙xf5}$  17  $\text{♚xf5}$   $\text{♚ad8}$  18  $\text{♚fd1}$  with

a slight advantage for White, Likavsky-Vuković, Zalakaros 2001.

a23) 7... $\text{♜c6}$  8 d5  $\text{♜b8}$  9 a3  $\text{♙xc3}$  10  $\text{♜xc3}$  a5 11 e4  $\text{♜e8}$  12  $\text{♙e3}$   $\text{♙}$  Botvinnik-Kholmov, Moscow 1947.

b) 4... $\text{♜e4}$  has been connected with a few recent pawn sacrifices. After 5  $\text{♚c2}$  (D) Black has two plausible options:



b1) 5...f5 6  $\text{♙d3}$  (or 6  $\text{♜e2}$  b6 7 a3  $\text{♙xc3}$  + 8  $\text{♜xc3}$   $\text{♜xc3}$  9  $\text{♚xc3}$   $\text{♙}$ ) 6...0-0!? (6... $\text{♙xc3}$  + 7 bxc3 0-0 8  $\text{♜e2}$  b6 9 0-0  $\text{♙b7}$  10 f3  $\text{♜d6}$  11  $\text{♙a3}$   $\text{♜c6}$  – Rogozenko; then White should play 12 c5 bxc5 13  $\text{♙xc5}$   $\text{♚g5}$  14  $\text{♜f4}$   $\text{♚h6}$  15  $\text{♚ab1}$   $\text{♚ab8}$  16  $\text{♚a4}$  with a distinct advantage) 7  $\text{♜e2}$  (you don't have to give up your good bishop when the alternative is so natural; it turns out that 7  $\text{♙xe4}$  fxe4 8  $\text{♚xe4}$  d5 has quite a bit of analysis attached to it, which may not be worth your time to study) 7...b6 8 0-0  $\text{♙xc3}$  9  $\text{♜xc3}$  (9 bxc3!? is a bit more ambitious and looks promising; e.g., 9... $\text{♙b7}$  10 f3  $\text{♜d6}$  11  $\text{♙a3}$   $\text{♚g5}$  12  $\text{♜f4}$   $\text{♜c6}$  13 c5 bxc5 14  $\text{♙xc5}$   $\text{♙}$ ) 9... $\text{♜xc3}$  10  $\text{♚xc3}$   $\text{♙b7}$  11 b4 d6 12  $\text{♙b2}$  (or 12 c5) with an edge for White because of the bishops – Emms; he nevertheless points out that it's a fairly normal game and you can't expect any quick victories to follow.

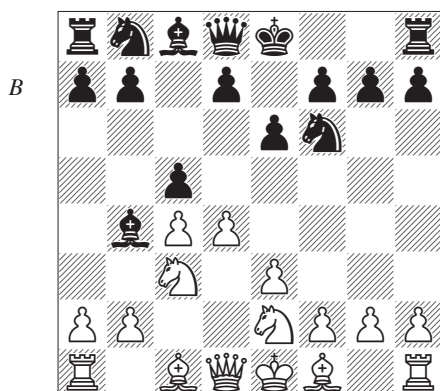
b2) 5... $\text{♜xc3}$  6 bxc3  $\text{♙a5}$  is another relatively new attempt to block the centre with some combination of ...d6, ...c5 and ...e5. A good way for White to set up is 7  $\text{♙d3}$  d6 8  $\text{♜e2}$  followed by central and kingside expansion; for example, 8...h6 9 0-0 and now 9...0-0 10 e4 e5 11 f4  $\text{♜d7}$  12  $\text{♙e3}$   $\text{♜f6}$  13 h3 or 9... $\text{♜d7}$  10 e4 c5 11 f4 with a dangerous pawn-mass.

7.1)

4...c5

This is Black's most aggressive continuation; it strikes at d4, usually with the specific intention of ...cxd4 followed by ...d5, to compromise White's centre. It is in some ways the most important move to study, because White has to know tactical specifics and concrete positional moves, as well as the general contours of a variety of types of position. Although the alternative 4...0-0 is now played more often, especially at the elite levels, the resulting play there is slow and easier to understand.

5 ♖e2 (D)

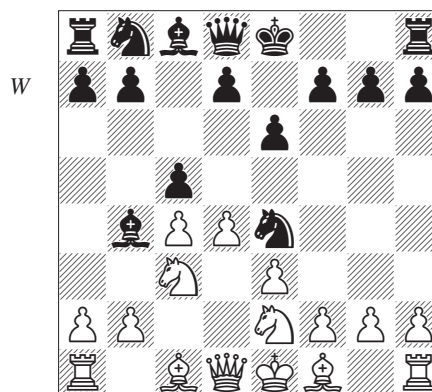


I am recommending playing this way against most defensive set-ups. The knight move develops a kingside piece, prevents Black from doubling White's c-pawns, and prepares a3 to force a favourable resolution of the queenside situation. ♗f4 or ♗g3 may follow, with control over the corresponding central squares. With a knight on e2, it is also possible to play moves like g3 and f3. On the negative side, on e2, the knight blocks the king's bishop and fails to control e5. In the abstract, a knight on f3 is better placed as it covers two central squares and reaches into enemy territory; on the other hand, with a knight on f3, Black can often create doubled c-pawns by capturing on c3, and he can put a piece on e4 without being chased away by f3. These are typical trade-offs in chess, and naturally the consequences are to be found in the particulars of the play.

5...cxd4

a) 5...b6 transposes to Section 7.24 (i.e. 4...b6 5 ♗e2 c5).

b) 5...♗e4 (D) is playable, even though it moves a piece twice and reduces Black's control over d5 and e4. White has two logical replies:



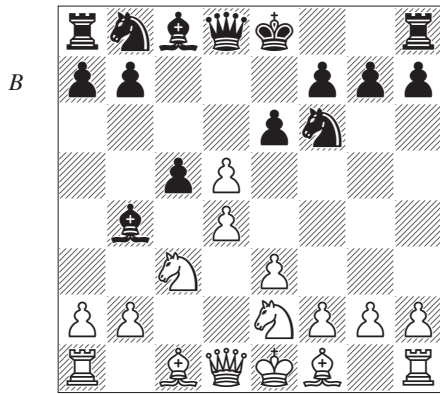
b1) 6 ♗d2 ♗xd2 7 ♗xd2 gains development in return for the bishops. White also has ideas of d5 and a3. Compare this with Section 7.23 (i.e. 4...b6 5 ♗e2 ♗e4). There can follow 7...cxd4 8 exd4 0-0 (8...d5 9 c5 is the main line of Section 7.121) 9 a3 ♗e7 (now 9...♗xc3 10 ♗xc3 d5 11 c5 falls short of transposing to 7.121 since Black isn't in time to play ...a4 – see the note to Black's 11th move in that section) 10 g3! (naturally 10 d5 is also playable) 10...d5 11 cxd5 exd5 12 ♗g2 ♗e6 13 0-0 (13 ♗f4 ♗g5! =) 13...♗c6 14 ♗ad1 ♗g5 (versus ♗f4) 15 ♗d3 with balanced play. Knights are often a touch better than bishops in this structure. One idea is ♗f3 and ♗f4 in order to compel ...♗xf4 and leave White with the better bishop.

b2) If you can't stand ceding the bishop-pair in the opening, 6 ♗c2 plays for a central advantage: 6...cxd4 7 exd4 d5 8 a3 ♗xc3!? (8...♗xc3+ 9 ♗xc3 and now both 9...♗xc3 10 bxc3 and 9...♗c6 10 ♗e3 ♗xc3 11 bxc3 ± give White the bishop-pair and superior structure) and now:

b21) 9 axb4 ♗xe2 10 ♗xe2 ♗c6! (10...dxc4 11 b5! with the idea 11...♗xd4?! 12 ♗e3) 11 ♗c3 dxc4 12 ♗e3 (12 d5!? ♗xd5 13 0-0 0-0 14 ♗e3 results in pressure for a pawn) 12...0-0 13 0-0 ♗e7 14 ♗xc4 ♗d7 15 b5 ±. This isn't much, but White has the bishops and some queenside pressure.

b22) 9  $\text{cxc3}$   $\text{d6}$  and now 10 c5 is perhaps best. Instead, 10  $\text{cxd5!?$   $\text{exd5}$  11  $\text{d3}$   $\text{c6}$  12  $\text{e3}$   $\text{e6}$  13 0-0 leaves White a few moves ahead in a symmetrical position, with a real but limited advantage.

c) 5...d5 is a smart way to get to one of the main lines below by 6 a3  $\text{xc3+}$  7  $\text{cxc3}$   $\text{cxd4}$  8  $\text{exd4}$ , which transposes to 5... $\text{cxd4}$  6  $\text{exd4}$  d5 7 a3  $\text{xc3+}$  8  $\text{cxc3}$  (see 7.122), but bypasses White's option of 7 c5 in 7.121. The only drawback is that White can enter the rather sterile but slightly advantageous lines arising from 6  $\text{cxd5}$  (D), which is therefore important to examine briefly:

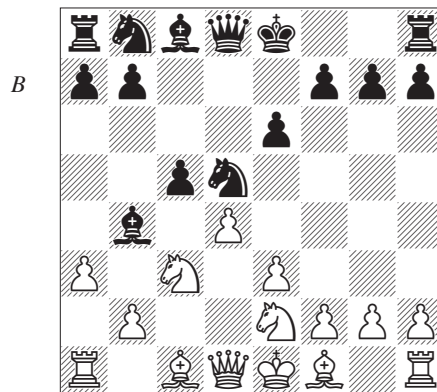


c1) 6... $\text{exd5}$  is sound, but Black lacks positive play after 7 a3  $\text{xc3+}$  8  $\text{cxc3}$   $\text{cxd4}$  9  $\text{exd4}$  0-0 10  $\text{e2}$ ; for example, 10... $\text{c4!?$  11  $\text{cxe4}$   $\text{dxe4}$  12 d5!  $\text{f6}$  13 0-0  $\text{d8}$  14  $\text{e3}$  (14  $\text{b3}$   $\text{d7}$  15  $\text{g3!}$ ) 14... $\text{e5}$  15  $\text{b3}$  with some fancy footwork: 15...b6 (15... $\text{xd5??}$  16  $\text{ad1}$ ; 15... $\text{xd5?}$  16  $\text{f4!}$ ) 16  $\text{fd1}$   $\text{a6}$  17  $\text{d4!}$   $\text{d6}$  (17... $\text{xd5??}$  18  $\text{e3}$ ) 18  $\text{e3}$   $\text{xe2}$  19  $\text{xe2}$  f5 20  $\text{ac1}$   $\pm$  Oll-Novikov, Kuldiga 1987, with the idea 20... $\text{d7}$  21  $\text{c6!}$   $\text{xd5}$  22  $\text{d6!}$   $\text{f7}$  23  $\text{e5}$  with  $\text{f4}$  and/or  $\text{d2}$  next.

c2) 6... $\text{cxd5}$  has been the main move by some margin. There follows 7 a3 (D):

c21) 7... $\text{cxd4!?$  8  $\text{axb4}$  (8  $\text{xd4!?$   $\pm$ ) 8... $\text{dxc3}$  9  $\text{bxc3}$   $\text{c7}$  (9...0-0 10 e4  $\text{f6}$  11  $\text{xd8}$   $\text{xd8}$  12 f3  $\pm$  and  $\text{e3}$ ) 10  $\text{b3!}$  0-0 11 c4  $\text{f6}$  and in G.Kramer-Ulvestad, Baltimore 1948 White extracted an edge from 12  $\text{d4}$  but 12  $\text{f4}$  looks better, or 12  $\text{c3!}$  b6 13  $\text{e2}$   $\text{b7}$  14 0-0  $\pm$ .

c22) 7... $\text{a5}$  8  $\text{dxc5!}$   $\text{xc3+!}$  (8... $\text{cxc3?}$  9  $\text{xd8+}$   $\text{xd8}$  gives White the extra option of 10  $\text{d2!}$   $\pm$ ) 9  $\text{cxc3}$   $\text{cxc3}$  10  $\text{xd8+}$   $\text{xd8}$  11



$\text{bxc3}$   $\text{d7}$  (11... $\text{d7}$  12 e4  $\text{c6}$  13 f3  $\text{d7}$  14  $\text{e3}$   $\pm$ ) 12 c6  $\text{bxc6}$ , and one course is 13 e4  $\text{c7}$  14  $\text{e3}$   $\pm$ . It's not a big advantage, but nobody really wants to play against such bishops.

c23) 7... $\text{xc3+}$  and now:

c231) 8  $\text{bxc3}$  is called ' $\pm$ ' by Babula, perhaps based upon play such as 8... $\text{cxd4}$  9  $\text{cxd4}$  0-0 10  $\text{g3}$   $\text{c6}$  11  $\text{d3}$  with the idea 11...e5 12  $\text{dxe5}$   $\text{xe5}$  13  $\text{hx7+}$   $\text{hx7}$  14  $\text{h5+}$   $\text{g8}$  15  $\text{xe5}$ . 8...0-0 probably improves, when 9  $\text{g3!?$  intending 10 e4 and 11  $\text{g2}$  is interesting.

c232) 8  $\text{cxc3!?$   $\text{cxd4}$  9  $\text{xd4}$  0-0 10  $\text{xd5}$   $\text{exd5}$  11  $\text{f4!?$   $\text{c6}$  12  $\text{d3}$  d4 13 0-0  $\text{dxe3}$  14  $\text{xe3}$   $\text{e8}$  15  $\text{g3}$   $\text{d4}$  16  $\text{g5}$   $\text{f3+}$  17  $\text{xf3}$   $\text{xg5}$  18  $\text{c4}$  with just enough mini-threats to be annoying, although it would be hard to make much out of 18... $\text{f6}$  19  $\text{xf6}$   $\text{gxf6}$ .

c24) 7... $\text{cxc3}$  8  $\text{cxc3}$   $\text{a5}$  (8... $\text{xc3+?!}$  9  $\text{bxc3}$  gives Black no compensation for the bishops; likewise with 8... $\text{cxd4!?$  9  $\text{axb4}$   $\text{dxc3}$  10  $\text{xd8+}$   $\text{xd8}$  11  $\text{bxc3}$   $\pm$ ) 9  $\text{dxc5!?$   $\text{xd1+}$  (9... $\text{xc3+}$  10  $\text{bxc3}$   $\text{a5!?$  isn't problem-free after 11  $\text{e2}$   $\text{d7}$  and now 12 c6 or just 12 0-0  $\text{cxc5}$  13  $\text{d6}$   $\text{d7}$  14 a4!  $\pm$  intending  $\text{a3}$ ) 10  $\text{xd1}$   $\text{xc3}$  11  $\text{bxc3}$   $\text{d7}$  12 c6  $\text{bxc6}$ . This is extremely similar to line 'c22'; e.g., 13  $\text{c2}$   $\text{c5}$  14 a4  $\text{a6}$  15  $\text{xa6}$  (or 15  $\text{a3}$   $\text{xf1}$  16  $\text{hxf1}$   $\text{xa4}$  17  $\text{b4}$   $\pm$ ) 15... $\text{xa6}$  16  $\text{d1}$   $\pm$ .

### 6 $\text{exd4}$ (D)

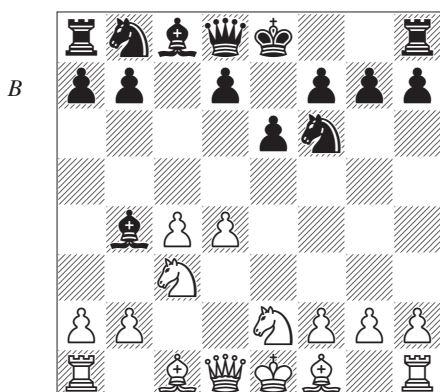
This is the most popular position by far. Now Black has two logical moves:

7.11: 6...0-0 118

7.12: 6...d5 121

## 7.11)

### 6...0-0 7 a3



For something different, there's Scherbakov's 7 c5!?, preparing ♗f4. Black's main replies are 7...d6 and 7...♗e4, both adequate, but neither able to snuff the content from the position.

Now a last parting of the ways:

- 7.111: 7...♗xc3+ 119
- 7.112: 7...♗e7 120

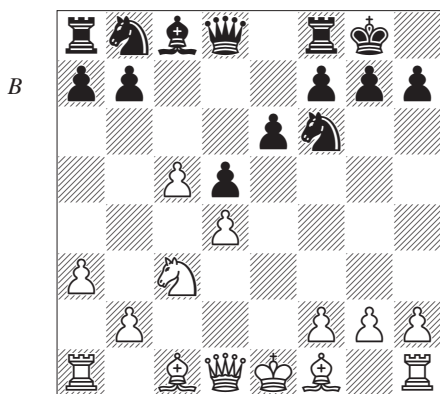
**7.111)**

7...♗xc3+ 8 ♗xc3 d5 9 c5 (D)

This calm move should favour White; it's instructive to see why.

9 cxd5 ♗xd5 (9...exd5 transposes to note 'c1' to Black's 5th move in Section 7.1) 10 ♗d3 ♗c6 11 0-0 b6 12 ♖e1 ♗b7 leads to a typical position with chances for both sides.

Remarkably, the position after 9 ♗d3 dxc4 10 ♗xc4 ♗c6 11 ♗e3 has been played by strong grandmasters, and hasn't done badly, even though White is a full tempo down on the main line of Section 7.122 – all the more reason to respect that line for White!



**9...b6**

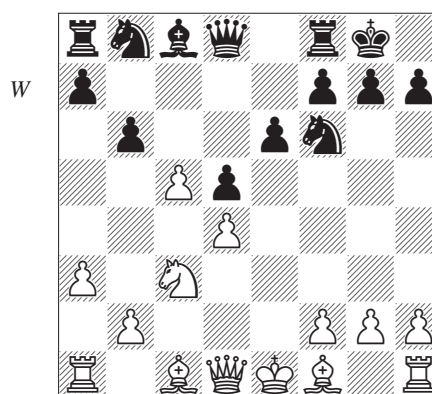
This break and one with ...e5 have to be critical; otherwise White's two bishops and space will give him the better of it:

a) 9...♗e4 10 ♗xe4! (10 ♗d3 ♗xc3 11 bxc3 e5 12 0-0 ♗c6 13 ♗e3 ±) 10...dxe4 11 ♗e3 ♗c6 (11...♗d7 12 b4!? ♗c6 13 ♗e2 ♗d5 14 b5) 12 ♗c4 f5 13 ♖d2 ♖f6 14 g3 ±.

b) 9...♗c6 aims for ...e5. White can play 10 ♗e2 (or 10 ♗f4 ♖e8 11 ♗b5; for example, 11...♗d7 12 0-0 a6 13 ♗e2 ♗e4, Khismatullin-Kravtsov, Voronezh 2007, and now 14 ♗xe4 dxe4 15 f3! is good) 10...e5 11 dxe5! ♗xe5 12 ♗e3 ♗c4 (12...♗c6 13 ♗b5!) 13 ♗g5!? (or 13 ♗d4 ♗xb2 14 ♖c2 ♗c4 15 0-0 dxc3 15 ♖xd8 ♖xd8 16 bxc3 ±) 13...d4 14 ♗xc4 dxc3 15 ♖xd8 ♖xd8 16 bxc3 ±) 14 ♖d4! ♗e6 15 0-0 h6 16 ♗h4 ♗c4 17 f4! ♗a5? (Black should play 17...♗e3!, but White stands better after either 18 ♖xe3 d4 19 ♖g3 dxc3 20 ♖ad1 ♖e7 21 ♖d6! or even 18 f5!? ♗xf5 19 ♖xf5! ♗xf5 20 ♖f1) 18 f5 ♗b3 (18...♗c6 19 ♗xf6! +-) 19 ♖e5! ♗xa1 20 fxe6 fxe6 21 ♖xe6+ ♗h8 22 ♖xa1 +- Sadler-Khalifman, Bundesliga 1999/00.

c) 9...e5!? can and maybe objectively should be met by 10 dxe5, but that gets complicated and an easy way to a small positional advantage is 10 ♗b5!? a6 11 ♗a4 exd4 12 ♖xd4 ♗c6 13 ♗xc6 bxc6 14 0-0 h6 15 ♗f4, again with a modest advantage.

We now return to 9...b6 (D):



**10 b4 bxc5 11 dxc5**

Now:

a) 11...e5?! is natural, but loosening. Khismatullin-Harutjunian, Izhevsk 2011 continued