



# The Ultimate Tarrasch Defense

by Eric Schiller

Published by Sid Pickard & Son, Dallas

All text copyright 2001 by Eric Schiller.

Portions of the text materials and chess analysis are taken from Complete Defense to Queen Pawn Openings by Eric Schiller, Published by Cardoza Publishing. Additional material is adapted from Play the Tarrasch by Leonid Shamkovich and Eric Schiller, published by Pergamon Press in 1984. Some game annotations have previously appeared in various books and publications by Eric Schiller.

This document is distributed as part of The Ultimate Tarrasch CD-Rom, published by Pickard & Son, Publishers ([www.ChessCentral.com](http://www.ChessCentral.com)).

Additional analysis on the Tarrasch Defense can be found at <http://www.chesscity.com/>.

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Introduction .....                                    | 2  |
| What is the Tarrasch Defense .....                    | 2  |
| Who plays the Tarrasch Defense .....                  | 3  |
| How to study the Tarrasch Defense .....               | 3  |
| Dr. Tarrasch and his Defence .....                    | 4  |
| Overview of the Tarrasch Defense .....                | 7  |
| The Tarrasch Defense: an overview .....               | 7  |
| Basic Concepts.....                                   | 12 |
| Strategic goals of the opening.....                   | 12 |
| The isolated d-pawn.....                              | 12 |
| Heroes of the Tarrasch Defense.....                   | 14 |
| Siegbert Tarrasch .....                               | 14 |
| Svetozar Gligoric .....                               | 14 |
| Boris Spassky.....                                    | 14 |
| Smbat Lputian.....                                    | 15 |
| Slavolub Marjanovic.....                              | 15 |
| John Nunn.....  | 15 |
| Murray Chandler.....                                  | 15 |
| Garry Kasparov.....                                   | 15 |
| Margeir Petursson.....                                | 15 |
| Miguel Illescas Cordoba .....                         | 15 |
| Theory of the Tarrasch Defense.....                   | 16 |
| Classical Tarrasch.....                               | 16 |
| 9.dxc5 Bxc5 .....                                     | 16 |
| 9.dxc5 d4.....  | 16 |
| 9.Bg5.....  | 17 |
| 9.b3 .....  | 18 |
| 9.Bf4 .....   | 19 |
| 9.Be3.....  | 19 |
| Others.....   | 19 |
| Swedish Variation.....                                | 19 |
| Misc. Rubinstein-Schlechter lines .....               | 19 |
| Asymmetrical Tarrasch: Main Lines .....               | 19 |
| Symmetrical Tarrasch & Misc. Asymmetrical lines ..... | 19 |
| Gruenfeld Gambit .....                                | 20 |
| Tarrasch Gambit .....                                 | 20 |
| Marshall Gambit .....                                 | 20 |
| Anglo-Indian.....                                     | 20 |
| Von Hennig Gambit.....                                | 20 |
| Schara Gambit .....                                   | 20 |
| Main Lines with 9.Qd1 Bc5 10.e3 Qe7 11.Be2 .....      | 20 |
| Main Lines with 9.Qd1 Bc5.....                        | 21 |
| White plays 9.Qd1 without 9...Bc5.....                | 21 |
| White plays 9.Qb3 .....                               | 21 |
| White varies at move 8 .....                          | 21 |
| Misc. games .....                                     | 21 |
| White plays 4.dxc5 .....                              | 21 |
| White delays or omits Nc3.....                        | 21 |

## Introduction

### What is the Tarrasch Defense

The Tarrasch Defense is a variation belonging to the Queen's Gambit Declined. The Tarrasch is a flexible formation that can be used to meet just about any move order used by White. It normally is reached by 1.d4 d5; 2.c4 e6; 3.Nc3 c5. We'll look at transpositional paths later on.



Black challenges the center immediately. White now has to constantly consider the consequences of captures in the center. Usually White exchanges the c-pawn for Black's d-pawn.



Later the White d-pawn can be exchanged for the Black c-pawn. This gives Black an isolated d-pawn, which we will discuss in detail later. For now, let's consider the typical pawn structure that arises after an exchange of pawns at d5.

There is a lot of tension in the center. White can capture at c5 or Black can capture at d4, in either case setting up the isolated d-pawn for Black. It is important to note, however, that clarification of the situation does not usually take place in the first few moves. When a central tension is resolved, then it is possible to concentrate on plans which are appropriate to the central situation. While the center remains fluid, it is harder to find the correct plan because the central situation can change quickly. So usually this pawn center stays intact until move 9, when both sides have completed development.

## Who plays the Tarrasch Defense

The Tarrasch Defense is used primarily by advanced players, but this is mostly a result of the tendency for teachers of young chessplayers to avoid openings which involve isolated pawns, on the grounds that they are difficult to defend. Therefore it is only when players graduate to higher levels of competition that they begin to encounter the defense.

Many great players have used the Tarrasch Defense. You will meet some of them in the section on Heroes in the Tarrasch Defense. For now, all that need be said is that World Champions such as Garry Kasparov and Boris Spassky relied on the Tarrasch to get to the top.

The Tarrasch appeals to players with a strong fighting spirit. Tactics can dominate the middlegame, with long combinations involving temporary and permanent sacrifices.

The stronger the endgame skills, the better, since the Tarrasch often leads to endgames which are difficult to win, or even draw (some of the time)! As you play the Tarrasch your understanding of many endgames, especially those with rooks and minor pieces, will broaden and deepen, making you a better overall player.

## How to study the Tarrasch Defense

The Tarrasch Defense is very easy to learn, because there are only a few types of structures that can arise, most of them involving isolated d-pawns or a small chain with pawns at c6 and d6.

Therefore the opening is best studied from the middlegame outward. Start with the sections on typical tactics, just to observe the kinds of resources available to each side.

Then play through each of the illustrative games, ignoring at first most of the discussion of the first 15 moves or so. Observe the flow of the pieces, typical maneuvers, and tactical traps.

The next step is to examine the types of endgames you are likely to encounter. Just play through the longest games, including the ones in the notes to other games, and casually take note of the types of structures that are most frequently seen.

Finally, go back and study the notes to the opening phase of each game. Try to learn where to place your rooks, how the queens operate, and when to capture at d4 or allow capture of your knight at c6.

You will then be ready to go out and use the Tarrasch Defense to defeat your tournament and casual opponents!

## Dr. Tarrasch and his Defence

Siegbert Tarrasch was born in Wroclaw (then Breslau) on 5 March, 1862 and died on 13 February, 1934. His career began during the Classical period of chess, and ended well into the Modern period (We consider the Modern period to have begun when Bronstein was born – 1924). During these years chess openings underwent fundamental changes, beginning with a preference for 1 d4 over 1 e4, and continuing with the development of Hypermodern theories by Nimzowitsch and Alekhine. Tarrasch's main contribution to chess was a result of his work on the IQP (Isolated Queen Pawn) position in the French Defence and Queen's Gambit. Tarrasch believed in the strength of the IQP and adopted very dogmatic positions based on this belief. While contemporary chess does not share his views completely, it certainly credits him with pointing out the cramping influence and attacking power of the IQP.

Tarrasch was 15 years old when he first took up chess seriously, and did not make his debut until 1881 in Berlin, and that was a bit of a disaster. He was not dissuaded, however, and played brilliantly in his next Tournament in Nuremberg, 1883. He reached the master level in 1885, finishing second in Hamburg, and went on to score a series of victories in major international events. For some reason he did not manage to arrange a match for the World Championship until 1908, and he was soundly defeated by Emmanuel Lasker by a score of 10.5—5.5. A rematch in 1916 proved even worse, as he went down to defeat without winning a single game. For the remainder of his career he played in very strong events, usually finishing in the middle of the field.

It is his writing, rather than his playing which makes Tarrasch such an important figure in chess history. His books are classics of the chess literature: *Dreihundert Schachpartie*, *Die Moderne Schachpartie*, and his treatise on the Queen's Gambit. In these and other writings he expounded his chess theories, which were quite different from those of his contemporaries.

Tarrasch introduced the “new” variation of the Queen's Gambit in 1888 in his game against von Bardeleben, though the basic moves had been seen in games fifty years previous. At first all went well, with no one challenging the basic premise of the opening: that an IQP is not necessarily a liability in the middlegame. Soon, however, Karl Schlechter and Akiba Rubinstein worked out a System against the Tarrasch Defence (as it was already being called), involving the fianchetto of the Bf1 at g2. (See Schlechter—Dus Chotimirski). There soon arose a sort of *tabiyah* after 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 c5 4 cxd5 exd5 5 Nf3 Nc6 6 g3 Nf6 7 Bg2 Be7 8 0-0 0-0.

This is the standard position of the Classical Tarrasch, which can be reached by many transpositional paths. Black has solved the main problem of the Queen's Gambit. The light-squared bishop is able to enter the game. On the other hand, Black has accepted an isolated pawn at d5, since White can either play 9 dxc5 or force Black to play an eventual cxd4. Black can defend this pawn with many pieces, but White will be able to set up a blockade on d4 (after dxc5 or cxd4) and then bring pressure to bear along the d-file and h1-a8 diagonal, while his minor pieces harass the Black defenders. Tarrasch held (in *Gegenwartige stand der wichtigsten Eröffnungen*, 1918) that Black's position was fine, but he found few followers at the time. It has always been a “minority” defense, but that “minority” includes many of the best players in the history of the game, appealing to players who prefer their own judgments to those of the theoreticians.

The Tarrasch did not achieve respectability quickly. Cook's *Compendium* (1902) gave the defense just two columns, quoting Pillsbury-Schlechter (Munich 1900) and Schlechter-Tarrasch (Nuremberg 1906). These were not among the most impressive examples of play for Black. In the 1910 edition of Freeborough and Ranken's *Chess Openings* the line was merely mentioned in a footnote, although it must be admitted that the d4 openings were almost completely ignored there anyway, probably because the book was based on early editions of Cook's *Compendium*, which were written during the heyday of 1 e4. Less old-fashioned editors took more note of 3 ...c5. In Blanshard's *Classified Chess Games with Notes*, published by the Glasgow Chess Club in 1911, the opening was carefully considered and the lines given were quite acceptable for Black, but the Schlechter-Rubinstein Variation (6 g3) was not mentioned. Opening theory traveled more slowly in those days.

The leading theoreticians continued to scoff at the defense. Salvioli (1930) dismissed the Variation with a number of smashing wins for White, i.e. Réti—Tarrasch, Pistyan 1922 and other games in which Black mishandled the defense. Efim Bogoljubow, in *Die Moderne Eröffnung 1 d2—d4!* (1928) concurred. His comments are worth considering: “The idea of the opening which is named after Tarrasch is to attack the enemy pawn at d4 (after Black has defended his own pawn with e7—e6) with c7—c5, simultaneously freeing his position. The Tarrasch Defence is not really a defense in the literal sense of the word, but rather a counterattack. Should Black, logically in the role of the defender, be able to take over the attack so early in the game, then the Queen’s Gambit would be no attacking weapon for White and would be absent from the modern opening repertoire ... White can attack the isolated d-pawn after 4 cxd5! exd5 5 Ng1—f3 Nb8—c6 6 g2—g3!, and that the pawn at d5 will remain a point of attack. Black has many difficult problems to solve before he sees his way out of the jam.”

In the 1930s the Tarrasch received aid from an unexpected source. The Swedish team (Stahlberg, Lundin, and Stoltz) at the 1933 Olympiad in Folkestone prepared a new answer to Schlechter’s 6 g3, namely 6 ... c4!? This aggressive move gave a whole new character to the Tarrasch, and for a while it was a mighty tournament weapon. Eventually, however, improved methods of play were found for White, and the opening is no longer considered fully playable. During the war years other openings dominated Black’s repertoire against 1 d4. Nevertheless, Max Euwe had a high opinion of the Tarrasch. He wrote (in *Chess*, 1947:

“Nowadays 4.cxd5 is considered to offer White no clear advantage, so that there is no reason to condemn the Tarrasch. it is obvious from its sporadic adoption that it does not inspire much trust, all the same.” The 7th edition of *Modern Chess Openings* (1946) repeated the usual position that the Rubinstein Variation favored White (“so strong that most masters prefer to avoid the defense altogether”), that the Swedish variation was interesting but unsound, etc.

The view in Eastern Europe was much the same. In the 1957 edition of *Kurs Debitov* Panov wrote that “the fundamental drawback of the Tarrasch Defence remains the weakness of the central pawn d5, which limits the maneuverability of the Black pieces and guarantees White a solid initiative.” Evidently no one paid much attention to Tarrasch’s claim that the opening guaranteed Black’s pieces *greater* mobility! Players, however, are usually capable of making better positional judgments than theoreticians, and soon several Soviet stars took a second look at the Tarrasch. Keres led the way, followed by Aronin, Geller, and Mikenas. The ground was laid for a comeback.

In 1969, Boris Spassky shocked the chess world by using the Tarrasch Defence to win the World championship. He wrote about the reasons behind his choice of openings: “While in the first match 1 occasionally led the game into the paths of the Ujteiky Defence, this time abandoned such deployment of my bishops and took up the classical Tarrasch Defence. Maybe this came as some surprise to the spectators and commentators, and perhaps even Petrosian did not expect it, since he specialized in playing against the isolated pawn. But as for me, I love the defensive style. it is true that the match has demonstrated how demanding and nerve-wracking this opening is, but the defense fulfilled its role admirably in the match.” Here, Spassky talks about defense, where Bogoljubow had stated that the opening was not a defense at all. Clearly, times had changed.

When an opening scores a big success in the international arena, all the contenders scurry to find a refutation. In the 1970s the Tarrasch took a pounding as improvements came pouring in for White. By the end of the decade the opening was being defended by a mere handful of international players: Gligoric, Nunn, Marjanovic, Petursson and Palatnik among them. They contributed many fine defensive improvements for Black, from innovations in well-trodden paths to whole new defensive strategies. The opening received a boost in Sergiu Samarian’s excellent study *The Classical Tarrasch Defence*, Q.G.D. and in his book *Queen’s Gambit Declined* (1974). Despite White’s success, the opening started to make a brief comeback. Paul van der Sterren updated Ewe’s classic book (in Dutch: *De Opening 1B*) and concluded that the Tarrasch was quite respectable.

In *Batsford Chess Openings*, 1982, Kasparov and Keene expressed the opinion that White could count on no more than a minute advantage. Referring to the Schlechter- Rubinstein Variation (6 g3), Jon Tisdall wrote that “Black may fall just short of equality, but his position is both active and extremely playable.” The 1980s saw the Tarrasch rebound from its loss of popularity after Spassky gave it up, and during the 1970s it was not seen with great frequency. A shift began around 1980, when Armenian, Yugoslav, East German and English Grandmasters revived it. There was no current literature on the opening, and that meant that both original and ideas could be used without fear that the opponent would be well prepared.

The first major examination of the Tarrasch in English was my book with Grandmaster Leonid Shamkovich, *Play the Tarrasch*, published by Pergamon Press in 1984. Garry Kasparov had received a copy of the manuscript from me long before it was published, and he started to play it at that time. I take no credit for his adding the

opening to the repertoire. Though we were meeting frequently throughout the period of writing the book (he had collaborated with me on *Batsford Chess Openings* and *Fighting Chess*, and I had translated some of his books) and had great respect for the theoretical ideas of my co-author. In any case, the games below were well known to him from his studies and I think the Tarrasch just fit in well with his style of play at the time. He stuck with the Tarrasch until severe defeats at the hands of Anatoly Karpov led him to the Gruenfeld, which, in some lines, is like a Tarrasch reversed, with Black adopting the fianchetto against White's central bastion at d4.

After some brutal defeats at the hands of Anatoly Karpov, Kasparov left the Tarrasch for the Gruenfeld and King's Indian Defenses, but in the 1990s new followers appeared in the form of Miguel Illescas-Cordoba, Spain's leading native player, and Joel Lautier, the French star. The authoritative opening manuals took a more respectful view of the opening, with BCO 2 (Kasparov, Keene, Schiller), MCO 14 (DeFirmian), and NCO (Nunn) providing no clear path to an advantage for White.

Tarrasch once wrote "The future will decide who has erred in estimating this defense, 1 or the chess world!" We're coming around, Doctor, we're coming around.

# Overview of the Tarrasch Defense

## The Tarrasch Defense: an overview

### 1.d4

The Tarrasch Defense can be reached from just about any opening except for 1.e4. The highly transpositional nature of the opening requires less memorization and places a premium on understanding important strategic concepts and typical tactical devices. Naturally White does not have to play straight into the main lines of the Tarrasch, so we must examine all the other reasonable options.

In this book we will try to adopt the Tarrasch formations wherever we can. Playing ...d5, ...e6 and ...c5 in rapid succession. Against some of White's alternative strategies, this is not always the most efficient plan in terms of achieving equality. However, it is easier to play familiar positions, and to the extent that you sometimes get less in the opening, you receive benefits in the middlegame where your experience provides a great deal of assistance.

All of the lines in this book have been thoroughly tested and White cannot achieve more than a very minimal advantage. There are no openings that can absolutely guarantee an equal position for Black, since the advantage of the first move takes time to overcome. The opening repertoire provided in this book is as good as any alternative system, and has a number of significant advantages.

The most important aspect of the Tarrasch Defense is the isolated d-pawn, which appears in many variations. As you learn how to handle the isolani, you will be able to apply your knowledge in almost every game. Your experience in typical endgames will also provide an edge. The repertoire supplied here maximizes the use of familiar patterns and structures, so you can get up to speed quickly. 1...d5.

The best defenses for Black prevent White from taking control of the center early in the game. 1...d5 prevents 2.e4, and therefore is one of the best moves. It is strongly recommended that you adopt this move order, even though others are available. After 1...e6 White can force you into a French Defense with 2.e4, which is only acceptable to Francophiles. Often 1...Nf6 can reach Tarrasch positions, but usually only when White fails to take advantage of precise move orders that render this strategy risky. In any case, 1...Nf6 invites many alternatives by White, such as the Trompovsky Attack (2.Bg5), which is very popular these days.



2.c4. There are several options for White here. In the analysis sections of the book we will look at the most popular alternatives to 2.c4. For really strange moves you should consult *Unorthodox Chess Openings*, but we will cover everything that is seen in serious games.

2.Nf3 is the most popular alternative, and we devote three games to handling the variations where White refrains from an early c4. The Torre Attack, London System, and Colle System are not particularly ambitious openings for White, and Black can achieve a comfortable game without difficulty.

2.Nc3 is the harmless Veresov Attack. I used to play it but eventually gave it up because there is no way to get an advantage for White. If you play the Caro-Kann, then 2...c6 is a good reply, transposing to the main lines after 3.e4. Similarly, the French is available after 2...e6. In this book we will concentrate on a quite different approach with the gambit line 2...e5 which is very obscure but nevertheless seems to be quite sound.

2.e4 is the Blackmar Diemer Gambit. Black can get a good game by either accepting or declining the offer of a pawn. French and Caro-Kann players will already be used to this approach, as the gambit is played in several forms against those opening. I'll show you a simple and solid reaction.

2...e6 This is the only move to head for Tarrasch territory. Black supports the pawn at d5 and opens a line for the bishop at f8 in support of ...c5, which is the next move in our strategy. 3.Nc3.

White should bring out a knight here, and it doesn't make much of a difference that one is developed first. 3.Nf3 gives White a few additional options later in the game and sidesteps a gambit line for Black, which does not enter into our repertoire. Often this position is reached when the game starts with 1.c4 or 1.Nf3.

3...c5



This is the defining move of the Tarrasch Defense. From here on, both sides must contemplate the effects of pawn exchanges in the center. Black now has a clear plan for development. The knights will come to c6 and f6, the bishop moves from f8 to e7, and kingside castling follows. The role of the bishop at c8 depends on White's plans. Usually White will exchange at d5, opening up a line for the bishop to move to g4, f5 or e6.

4.cxd5. This is the normal reply. White will weaken Black's central pawn formation and spend most of the game trying to win the d-pawn. Don't worry, this plan rarely succeeds without giving Black more than enough counterplay, as we will see in our illustrative games.

4.e3 is the primary alternative. This leads to somewhat dull, symmetrical play in the opening but the game can explode in fireworks later, as you can see in the game Rotlevi–Rubinstein, one of the finest masterpieces. In any case, by locking the bishop at c1 behind the e-pawn, White gives up any hope of building an attack and Black can develop in an atmosphere of peace and quiet.

4...exd5



We now see that Black has a semi-open e-file ready to use once Black manages to castle and bring the rook to e8. 5.Nf3. The only logical move, really.

5.e3 leads to a particularly poor form of the opening for White. Just compare the power of the bishop at c8 to the shut-in at c1!

5.dxc5 is the Tarrasch Gambit, and while it is not completely harmless, Black obtains a superior game with correct play.

5.e4 is the unsound Marshall Gambit. A solid defense is presented in our illustrative game.

5...Nc6. In the Tarrasch, you usually develop your knights in alphabetical order. IF Black plays casually with 5...Nf6, White gets a good game with 6.Bg5!, as I found out to my discomfort against British Grandmaster Tony Miles many years ago.

6.g3.



This is the most logical formation. The bishop will come to g2 and put additional pressure at d5.

6.Bg5 Be7; 7.Bxe7 Nxe7 is nothing special for White, but you should make certain that you are familiar with the theory and ideas as explained in our illustrative game.

6.Bf4 is completely harmless. The bishop does not operate effectively from this square.

6...Nf6. Notice how our opening follows the classical wisdom of developing a few pawns in the center and then bringing out knights before bishops! 7.Bg2. The position of the bishop at g2 gives Black two strategic possibilities. Since the bishop no longer protects the pawn at e2, that can easily become a target. This is especially true in the main lines. In addition, Black can set up a battery of bishop and queen on the c8–h3 diagonal and play ...Bh3 as part of a kingside attack. On the other hand, the bishop not only aims at d5, but can also place annoying pressure at c6 and b7. That is why it is considered a particularly powerful weapon. once in a while, it can even maneuver into a position to attack the Black kingside, as seen in the game [Kasparov–Gavrikov](#). 7...Be7.

Some players try to delay this, so that if White captures at c5, no tempo is lost. That is logical, but impractical, since White need not capture there at all. It is time to get ready to castle, and in any case there really aren't any acceptable alternatives. It is much too early to determine the best square for the bishop at c8, and if you bring it to the wrong square, you would still have to give up a tempo to reposition it later. 8.o–o o–o. Not much to say about castling. It's available and it is good, so just do it!



Here White has a wide range of possibilities. Here is a quick overview.

9.Bg5.



White places pressure at f6, and thereby undermines the support of the weak pawn at d5. This move and the immediate capture at c5 are the most promising continuations for White and one of the two is almost always the choice of a top player. Black can respond with one of three strategies: a central exchange, advance of the c-pawn or passive defense with ...Be6. All three are playable and when you have played the Tarrasch for over a decade, as I have, you may wish to explore all three. Defending the ...Be6 lines requires a lot of endgame skill, so it is not for amateurs. The ...c4 lines are very sharp and to be honest, White should be able to gain an advantage against it. So we will stick with the central exchange ...cxd4, which is the traditional main line and bears the greatest similarity to other lines in our repertoire.

9.dxc5



This is equal in popularity to the Bg5 line, and after Black recaptures at c5. White usually play 10.Bg5. The old line with 9...d4 is making a comeback. I have previously expressed an undeservedly low opinion of it. With care, White can perhaps gain a small advantage, but it may not be enough to provide serious winning chances unless Black makes a mistake.

9.b3



The queenside fianchetto was popular until the mid-1980s, when Garry Kasparov won convincing games as Black during his World Championship ascent. This variation can be a lot of fun for Black, as you can see in my game against Meins.

9.Be3



This is an odd-looking move but the idea is to place as much pressure as possible at c5. Black can get a reasonable game by placing either bishop or knight at g4. The capture at d4 can be played, but by contrast with the 9.Bg5 cxd4; 10.Nxd4 h6; 11.Be3 line, which is the principal variation of the Tarrasch, Black suffers from the lack of "luft" for the king, and back rank mates can become a problem.

9.Bf4



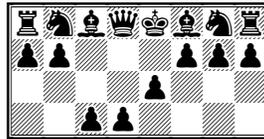
The bishop does not belong here and Black can play an early ...Bd6 if the need arises to defend the dark squares. By developing the bishop from c8 and placing a rook there, typical Tarrasch strategy, Black gets a good game. No other moves need to be taken seriously and require special preparation. Just bring a rook to e8 and c8, after moving the bishop from c8 to some useful square. Moves such as ...Ne4 and ...Qa5 can be played where appropriate. Just head for the normal pawn structures, capturing at d4 when the time is right.

## Basic Concepts

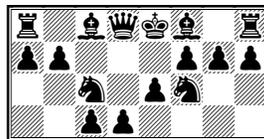
All good chessplayers understand the basic ideas, which underlie good opening play. They are not always easy to articulate, and it must never be forgotten that principles often come into contact, and should never be followed unthinkingly. Consider them as mere guidelines or good advice, and try to follow them as often as you can.

### Strategic goals of the opening

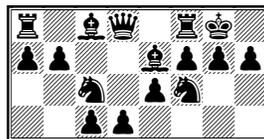
Black's goals in the Tarrasch Defense are very simple. First of all, Black will develop pieces as quickly as possible. First we place three pawns in or near the center at d5, e6 and c5. Let's concentrate on the Black side. We will ignore White's formation, for the moment.



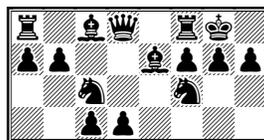
Next, the knights are developed



Then the dark-squared bishop moves to allow castling.



After castling the position of the light-squared bishop can be determined. Usually by this time White has played cxd5 and we have answered with ...exd5.



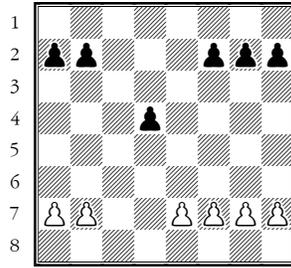
The result is a flexible piece formation which can be used to attack on all three areas of the board. On the queenside the c-file is used either to advance the c-pawn or as a highway for rooks headed to the seventh rank. In the center, d4 is the target. Either Black will advance an isolated d-pawn to d4, or will try to aim pieces at a White pawn on that square, using a knight at c6 and bishop at f6, b6 or a7. In most cases, Black can use the e4-square for a knight, pointing at the vulnerable f2-squares.

On the kingside, many attacking formations are possible. Black can use the dark squared bishop on the b8-h2 diagonal or a7-g1 diagonal. Knights operate from e4 and e5, and the queen usually enters at h4 or f6. Rooks can join the action via ...Rc6 (or 36)-g6 but also commonly attack from the side on the seventh rank.

Black has a flexible position with comfortable development. Therefore it is important to keep the pieces well coordinated throughout the opening and early middlegame. Sometimes this may involve sacrificing a pawn, and as a general rule it is better to give up a pawn than to fall into a passive defense.

### The isolated d-pawn

Much has been written on the most famous "isolani" of all, the isolated d-pawn. Siegbert Tarrasch was convinced that the traditional evaluation of an isolated pawn, that it is a major weakness, was wrong and that the isolated pawn was in fact a strong weapon. Let's first look at the pawn structure by itself.



If the game came down to a king and pawn endgame, Black would be in real trouble. The pawn at d5 is weak, and can easily be blockaded by an enemy king at d4. In fact, the blockade is the best-known strategy for operating against an isolated d-pawn is to blockade it with a piece, usually a knight.

When there is a White piece at d4, the Black pawn cannot advance the pawn from d5 and White can aim other pieces at it. Extreme views have been expressed on the subject of the "isolani". The great Hypermodern strategist Aron Nimzowitsch considered the blockade such a potent weapon against the isolani, rendering it very weak. For Tarrasch, on the other hand, the isolani is a source of dynamic strength, because it cramps the enemy position. In any case, there is no doubt that the isolani has "the lust to expand". It wants to move forward whenever possible. Modern thinking holds that the isolani is neither good nor bad in isolation, but must be judged depending on the surrounding circumstances.

Dynamic players such as Korchnoi and Kasparov have been willing, and even eager, to accept an isolated d-pawn, while for more positional players such as Karpov and Andersson are reluctant to play with an isolani and are more often found battling against it.. In any case, there is hardly a Grandmaster who lacks a strong feeling one way or another!

From our point of view, as Black, the isolani provides us with many tactical and strategic possibilities. In the worst case, it will sit passively at d5 until it is swept off the board by the White army. Even then, however, many of the resulting endgames are merely drawn, and not lost..

# Heroes of the Tarrasch Defense

## Siegbert Tarrasch

Siegbert Tarrasch was born on March 5, 1862 in Breslau (now Wrocław, Poland). A follower of the classical style, Tarrasch had strong beliefs about the role of the center. During his lifetime opening theory underwent several revolutions, including the great Hypermodern movement of the late 1920s, which saw the focus shift from the Closed Game with 1.d4 d5 to the Indian Defenses with 1.d4 Nf6.

Tarrasch believed that the isolated d-pawn was a powerful weapon, and was very dogmatic on this point. Actually, he was dogmatic on just about all chess matters. His ultra-conservative views are still valued as the basis for sound play, although the door has opened to alternative views.

His chess career started very late, at the age of fifteen, and his first tournament was in Berlin in 1881. We are lucky he stuck with the game, as his debut was a disaster. Undaunted, he worked hard on his game and played very well in his next tournament, two years later in Nuremberg, which was to become a frequent chess stop for him.

In 1885 he was awarded the title of Master, helped by a second-place finish in Hamburg. After that victory, his career really took off and he won many major international tournaments. Eventually he established himself as a leading contender for the World Championship.

In 1908 he got his change, but was clobbered by Lasker, 10.5–5.5. His result in the 1916 rematch was even more embarrassing and from then on he only managed middling results.

Though he is remembered for some fine games and tournament results, Tarrasch's real legacy is to be found in the great books and magazine articles he wrote throughout his career. *His Dreihundert Schachpartie*, *Die Moderne Schachpartie*, and his treatise on the Queen's Gambit remain classics of the literature, and new generations of chessplayers are still weaned on his *The Game of Chess*.

[Kurschner vs. Tarrasch, Nuremberg, 1887](#) is a fine game, which is still of importance to the theory of the opening.

## Svetozar Gligoric

The great Yugoslav Grandmaster Svetozar Gligoric, born in Yugoslavia in 1923, was one of the greatest of the post-war players from chess-addicted Yugoslavia. He dominated the country's chess in the 50s and 60s, and remained a vibrant force into the 90s. He was decorated for bravery for acts he performed fighting against the Nazi invaders, and his chess shows this underlying courage. The Tarrasch Defense and the Nimzoindian Defense (which have many similar structural characteristics including frequent isolated d-pawn positions) were his favorites. He won many tournament and brilliancy prizes, and has written extensively on chess. As he grew older he became an International Arbiter and has refereed many very important World Championship events.

[Toran vs. Gligoric, Buenos Aires, 1955](#) is one of his endgame contributions to the library of Tarrasch Defense games:

## Boris Spassky

For a while, Gligoric was one of very few Grandmasters who used the Tarrasch Defense at the highest levels of chess. That changed in 1969, when Boris Spassky used it to successfully challenge Tigran Petrosian for the World Championship. The opening featured prominently in that match, and cause commentators and analysts all over the world to re-evaluate the opening.

Boris Vasilyevich Spassky was born in 1937 in Leningrad, and learned a lot of his chess as a child during the Second World War. He rose to prominence in Russian circles, and afterward received training from Leningrad's finest trainers. He first qualified for the Soviet championship in 1955 and was a participant 11 times. He rose to the top of the Soviet talent pool and after tremendous victories in the 1960s was able to work through the international ranks and qualified for a World Championship bid in 1966, but lost by a point. In 1969 he was better prepared, and armed with new ideas in the Tarrasch he won the title, only to lose it in 1972 to the American phenomenon Bobby Fischer.

Losing the title brought serious consequences for Spassky, who was persecuted by the Soviet regime. Eventually he fled to France, where he still makes his home. The fine French culture cooled his fighting spirit, and his games were more often drawn than not. He nevertheless remains a popular figure, known as The Gentleman of Chess, quite a contrast to the World Champions who preceded and followed him.

[Petrosian vs. Spassky, World Championship, 1969](#) is one of the most famous Tarrasch games of the Spassky era.

### **Smbat Lputian**

The Armenian Grandmaster (born in 1958) rose to prominence in the early and mid-1980s, and played the Tarrasch Defense consistently. [Azmaiparashvili vs. Lputian, Soviet Union, 1980](#) was seen all over the world.

### **Slavolub Marjanovic**

You would think that someone whose first name translates to Slav-lover would choose the Slav Defense, but Marjanovic, born in 1955, inherited the Tarrasch bug from Gligoric and has been addicted to the opening throughout his career. [Natsis- Marjanovic Istanbul, 1980](#) is a fine attacking game.

### **John Nunn**

Dr. John Nunn is one of the greatest chess theoreticians. Born in 1955, he was a true prodigy, entering Oxford at the age of graduating in 1973. He was awarded his doctoral degree in 1978, by which time he had already joined the ranks of England's leading players.

Nunn's writings are among the most detailed analyses available on opening and endgame theory. It is hardly surprising that an endgame specialist would find the Tarrasch Defense appealing, and Nunn's endgame prowess served him well.

Of course, Nunn is also one of the Royal Game's most brilliant tacticians, as he showed in [Vadasz vs. Nunn Budapest, 1978](#).

### **Murray Chandler**

Another major figure on the British Tarrasch scene was Grandmaster Murray Chandler, who was born in New Zealand in 1960, but most of his career has been London-based. He served as a second to many excellent British players and has written many treatises on the opening. [King vs. Chandler Reykjavik, 1984](#)

### **Garry Kasparov**

Garry Kimovich Kasparov was born April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1963 in Baku. He rose quickly to a prominent position in the chess world, and was already a superstar when he made the Soviet Olympiad side in 1980. He won his first Soviet Championship a year later, qualified for the candidates matches in 1982, and defeated Korchnoi, Belyavsky and Smyslov on his way to the first showdown with his "eternal rival" Anatoly Karpov. That match was suspended after six months in 1984/85, during much of which Karpov held a 5-0 advantage but could not bring home the final point.

Kasparov won the rematch later in 1985, and defended his title in 1986, 1987, and 1990 before breaking ranks with the World Chess Federation in 1993, defeating Nigel Short in London for the Professional Chess Association title. He defended that title in 1995 against Viswanathan Anand. Having temporarily exhausted the supply of human challengers, in 1996 he defeated the silicon beast Deep Blue, the product of IBM technology. A rematch is scheduled for May of 1997. He lost his title to Vladimir Kramnik in the fall of 2000, after enjoying a fifteen year reign at the top.

We have already seen a selection of his games in the Illustrative Games chapter. He is another fine game from one of his simultaneous exhibitions against a set of strong masters. [Zueger vs. Kasparov Simultaneous Exhibition, 1987](#)

### **Margeir Petursson**

Icelandic Grandmaster was born in 1960 and has been a leading player in that chess-loving country for many years. His special contribution to the Tarrasch is in the main lines with 9.Bg5 cxd4; 10.Nxd4, where he discovered that 10...Re8 is playable in addition to the normal 10...h6. Here is a sample of his artistry. [Schussler vs. Petursson Gausdal Zonal \(10\), 1985](#)

### **Miguel Illescas Cordoba**

Grandmaster Miguel Illescas Cordoba is the leading native-born player of Spain, a country with over a thousand years of chess tradition. He has been devoted to the Tarrasch throughout his career. [Belavsky vs. Illescas Cordoba Linares, 1990](#)

# Theory of the Tarrasch Defense

The games listed below illustrate the most important theoretical lines in the Tarrasch Defense, and the most reliable defenses to White's other plans.

## Classical Tarrasch

### 9.dxc5 Bxc5

#### 10.Bg5 d4

Lasker-Tarrasch, 1918  
Zagorovsky-Nielsen, 1972  
Andersson-Nunn, 1980  
Ornstein-Raaste, 1981  
Chandler-Engl, 1981  
Schneider-Raaste, 1982  
King-Chandler, 1984  
Andersson-Chandler, 1984  
Maric-Reimer, 1986  
Miles-Klinger, 1986  
Ivanchuk-Marjanovic, 1989  
Molo-Mozzino, 1989  
Mednis-Lputian, 1989  
Bystrov-Timoshenko, 1990  
Lerner-Nenashev, 1991  
Vasilenko-Kudriashov, 1991  
Miles-Lautier, 1992  
Shirov-Illescas, 1993  
Cramling-Ponomarev, 1996  
Tsesarsky-Manor, 1999

#### 10.Bg5 Be6

Analysis – Classical 9.Bg5 Be6 10.Rc1, 2000  
Tal-Keres, 1959  
Smyslov-Vaganian, 1978  
Martin-Kolbe, 1985  
Dobsa-Blaesing, 1986  
DeLaat-Eveelens, 1992  
Samarin-Soltau, 1994

#### 10.Bg5 Others

Olej-Jaworski, 1989

#### 10.a3

Bernstein-Levenfish, 1912  
Szypulski-Zoinierowicz, 1996

#### 10.Na4

Stein-Parma, 1971  
Radulov-Spassov, 1974  
Schussler-Petursson, 1985

### 9.dxc5 d4

Batik-Dyckhoff, 1930  
Demetriescu-Nagy, 1936  
Vidmar-Dyckhoff, 1936  
Fine-Horowitz, 1939  
Muir-Whitfield, 1948  
Rompteau-Engel, 1965  
Ilic-Marjanovic, 1976

Arganian-Schiller, 1983  
Karpov-Ofiesh, 1991

## 9.Bg5

### **9...cxd4 10.Nxd4 h6 11.Be3 Re8 12.Rc1 Bf8**

Petrosian-Spassky, 1969  
Stein-Tarve, 1971  
Zapetal-Nielsen, 1972  
Timman-Gligoric, 1978  
Smith-Carleton, 1992  
Soyer-Poulenard, 1990  
Gurevich-Tal, 1990  
Hawkes-Mintchev, 1990  
Sutkus-Chandler, 1991  
Kationoks-Ivanov, 1991  
Kramnik-Illescas, 1992  
Bowyer-Curnow, 1992  
Flear-Arkell, 1992  
Robatsch-Hübner, 1993  
Karpov-Illescas, 1993  
Kasparov-Illescas, 1994  
Gligoric-Stamenkovic, 1997

### **9...cxd4 10.Nxd4 h6 11.Be3 Re8 12.Rc1 others**

Gligoric-Polugaevsky, 1969  
Spassky-Martin Gonzalez, 1991  
Timman-Chandler, 1983  
Inkiov-Sibarevic, 1983  
Zueger-Kasparov, 1987  
Marin-OPetursson, 1987  
Hjartarson-Illescas, 1988  
Sanchez-Tarrio, 1991  
San Segundo-Lautier, 1993  
Greenfeld-Shmuter, 1996  
Knaak-Chandler, 1996  
Classical Tarrasch-Repertoire 2000

### **9...cxd4 10.Nxd4 h6 11.Be3 Re8 12. others**

Tal-Stean, 1975  
Vadasz-Nunn, 1978  
Belyavsky-Kasparov (2), 1983  
Belyavsky-Kasparov (6), 1983  
Smyslov-Kasparov, 1984  
Karpov-Kasparov, 1984  
Sandstrom-Breutigam, 1985  
Van Wely-Brinck Claussen, 1989  
Stefansson-Johannesson, 1990  
Muco-Ivanovic, 1990  
Skembris-Ivanovic, 1990  
Yakovich-Todorovic, 1990  
Tiulin-Lutovinov, 1991  
Topalov-Martin Gonzalez, 1992  
De Boer-Vladimirov, 1994

### **9...cxd4 10.Nxd4 others**

Petrosian-Spassky, 1969  
Ljubojevic-Marjanovic, 1978  
Antoshin-Palatnik, 1981

Seirawan-Kasparov, 1983  
Jussupow-Petursson, 1983  
Landenbergue-Kindermann, 1983  
Kouatly-Marjanovic, 1987  
Van Osmael-Berecz, 1988  
Mesterton-Ojala, 1990  
Sokolov-Todorovic, 1991  
Matlak-Populsen, 1991  
Farago-Magomedov, 1992  
Christiansen-Piket, 1992  
Gelfand-Illescas, 1993  
Campos Moreno-Segura, 2000

#### **9...c4**

Rubinstein-Perlis, 1909  
Flohr-Maroczy, 1932  
Jussupow-Lputian, 1979  
Kasparov-Hjorth, 1980  
Azmaiparashvili-Lputian, 1980  
Bagirov-Lputian, 1980  
Garcia Gonzales-Braga, 1984  
Granberg-Vodep, 1984  
Blees-Peek, 1986  
Salov-Lputian, 1986  
Chernin-Marjanovic, 1987  
Huzman-Legky, 1987  
Dzhandzhava-Lputian, 1987  
Hansen-Lputian, 1988  
McKay-Peek, 1988  
Petran-Anka, 1989  
LaplaZa-Mozzino, 1990  
Khenkin-Magomedov, 1990  
Dokhoian-Nenashev, 1991  
Summermatter-Balashov, 1991  
Alterman-Zagema, 1994  
Sherbakov-Egin, 1996

#### **9...Be6**

Dus Chotimirsky-Teichmann, 1911  
Kiviaho-Lagland, 1971  
Bielecki-Kahn, 1980  
Barbero-Espig, 1987  
Taylor-Grobe, 1990  
Janniro-Schiller, 1994

#### **9...Bf5**

Najdorf-Yanofsky, 1946

### **9.b3**

Uhlmann-Espig, 1976  
Levitt-Schiller, 1981  
Larsen-Kasparov, 1983  
Berg-Timman, 1986  
Golubenko-Kiik, 1987  
Lagunov-Novik, 1989  
Tisdall-Lalic, 1990  
Boensch-Mende, 1992  
Shutt-Schiller, 1996

Meins-Schiller, 1996  
Tyomkin-Shmuter, 1999

#### **9.Bf4**

Lengyel-Quinones, 1964  
Djuric-Adianto, 1987  
Naumkin-Knikitin, 1991  
Schienmann-Schwagli, 1991  
Kiselev-Jelen, 1992

#### **9.Be3**

Petrosian-Keres, 1956  
Lombardy-Emma, 1958  
Miles-Fernandez, 1980  
Gurevich-Wilder, 1984  
Wickens-O'Duill, 1985  
Larsen-Kasparov, 1987  
Pinto-Schiller, 2000

#### **Others**

Rubinstein-Tarrasch, 1922  
Adams-Schiller, 1989

#### **Swedish Variation**

Heemsoth-Kunz, 1958  
Wikstroem-Kunz, 1961  
Kallinger-Mikenas, 1972  
Foldi-Mikenas, 1972  
Ftacnik-Miralles, 1988  
Barreras-Real Naranjo, 1992  
Tregupov-Moskalenko, 1994  
Becerra-Palao, 1995

#### **Misc. Rubinstein-Schlechter lines**

Forgacs-Tarrasch, 1912  
Marshall-Corzo, 1913  
De Mauro-Jensen, 1991

#### **Asymmetrical Tarrasch: Main Lines**

Harrwitz-Staunton, 1846  
Evans-Larsen, 1957  
Salonen-Ojala, 1974  
Sunye Neto-Kasparov, 1981  
Portisch-Suba, 1986  
Belov-Foisor, 1987  
Rodriguez-Suba, 1987  
Gheorghiu-Wahls, 1987  
Karpov-Illescas, 1987  
Speelman-Larsen, 1987  
DeFirmian-Ravi, 1987  
Tal-Timman, 1988  
Janosi-Peterson, 1989  
Kopriva-Rybak, 1992  
Karpov-Morovic, 1994  
Schiller-Ivanov, 2000

#### **Symmetrical Tarrasch & Misc. Asymmetrical lines**

McDonnell-La Bourdonnais, 1834  
Rubinstein-Kulomzin, 1903  
Rotlewi-Rubinstein, 1907  
Schlechter-Prokes, 1907

Lasker-Janowski, 1910  
Nielsen-Larsen, 1979  
Hass-Andersen, 1982  
Nikolaiczuk-Cramling, 1986  
Dollner-Van Oosterom, 1987  
Kalantaryan-Schiller, 2000  
Stevens-Schiller, 2000

### **Gruenfeld Gambit**

Bareyev-Lobron, 1995

### **Tarrasch Gambit**

Burn-Tarrasch, 1889  
Bernstein-Spielmann, 1906  
Bernstein-Marco, 1906  
Miettinen-Valve, 1967  
Khasin-Nun, 1969  
Smagar-Shkurovich, 1980  
Pyshkin-Weijerstrass, 1989  
Roncan-Mozzino, 1990  
Blok-Lutovinov, 1993  
Bareyev-Lobron, 1995

### **Marshall Gambit**

Marshall-Spielmann, 1908

### **Anglo-Indian**

Maroczy-Tarrasch, 1903  
Kuczynski-Wagner, 1910

### **Von Hennig Gambit**

Benzinger-Von Hennig, 1929  
Foltys-Rohacek, 1941  
Smyslov-Estrin, 1951  
Mitov-Estrin, 1972  
Hein-Schiller, 2000

### **Schara Gambit**

#### **Main Lines with 9.Qd1 Bc5 10.e3 Qe7 11.Be2**

Kluger-Honfi, 1956  
Brilla Banfalvi-Nun, 1968  
Brilla Banfalvi-Berta, 1968  
Nathe-Kornath, 1968  
Polugaevsky-Zaitsev, 1969  
Bouabid-Kerr, 1970  
Vilela-Rodriguez, 1972  
Preinfalk-Berta, 1975  
Beecham-Mcmillan, 1976  
Brilla Banfalvi-Nun, 1968  
Lputian-Danov, 1981  
Nickl-Roach, 1985  
Tozer-Schiller, 1986  
Soppe-Bronstein, 1987  
Borwell-Van Perlo, 1987  
Dijkstra-Morgado, 1989  
Serper-Brandner, 1989  
Taylor-Hartman, 1989  
Destaing-Martine, 1992  
Bronzik-Cech, 1993  
Ford-Schiller, 1994

Farla-Fitzpatrick, 1997

### **Main Lines with 9.Qd1 Bc5**

Prokorovich-Ravinsky, 1958

Mengarini-Radiicic, 1967

Glikshtein-Shkurovich, 1970

Hult-Berkell, 1972

Bruening-Lopez Esnaola, 1973

Kuznetsov-Lerner, 1977

Sidhoum-Kuijf, 1985

Tiemann-Felchtner, 1987

De Mauro-Trapl, 1989

Sargent-Drueke, 1989

Panno-Bertona, 1990

Hovenga-Schiller, 1996

Vigny-Lannaloli, 1997

Izumakawa-Schiller, 1997

### **White plays 9.Qd1 without 9...Bc5**

Alatotzev-IlyinZhenevsky, 1934

Lisitsin-Estrin, 1949

Markovic-Kozomara, 1949

### **White plays 9.Qb3**

Plukkend-Messere, 1969

Hort-Cuartas, 1982

Pieterse-Kuijf, 1987

Oirschot-Schroeder, 1990

### **White varies at move 8**

Pirc-Alekhine, 1931

Geister-Zaitsev, 1960

Narkin-Pol, 1972

Suba-Rodriguez, 1979

Litvinchuk-Randolph, 1984

Strand-Sabel, 1988

Azmaiparashvili-Marjanovic, 1989

Karpov-Hector, 1990

### **Misc. games**

Busch-Ragozin, 1929

Bareyev-Ljubojevic, 1993

### **White plays 4.dxc5**

Marshall-Tarrasch, 1903

Olmeda-Gomez, 2000

### **White delays or omits Nc3**

Forgacs-Tarrasch, 1912

Marshall-Corzo, 1913

Nimzowitsch-Tarrasch, 1914

Spitzbarth-Krempel, 1989