

# Owen's Defence

**Owen's Defence** (also known as the **Queen's Fianchetto Defence**<sup>[1]</sup> or **Greek Defence**<sup>[2]</sup>) is an uncommon chess opening defined by the moves:

## 1. e4 b6

By playing 1...b6, Black prepares to fianchetto the queen's bishop where it will participate in the battle for the centre. The downside of this plan is that White can occupy the centre with pawns and gain a spatial advantage. Moreover, 1...b6 does not prepare kingside castling as 1...g6 does, and it is harder for Black to augment his pressure against the centre with ...f5, which weakens the kingside, than it is to play the corresponding move ...c5 after 1...g6.<sup>[3]</sup> Owen's Defence accordingly has a dubious reputation.<sup>[4][5][6]</sup> The move ...b6 has been played on the first or second move by Grandmasters Jonathan Speelman, Pavel Blatny, Tony Miles, Edvins Kengis, and Normunds Miezis, and International Masters Bricard and Filipovic.<sup>[7]</sup>

Instead of fianchettoing, Black can also play his bishop to the a6–f1 diagonal (the Guatemala Defence).

Owen's Defence is classified as code B00 by the *Encyclopaedia of Chess Openings*.

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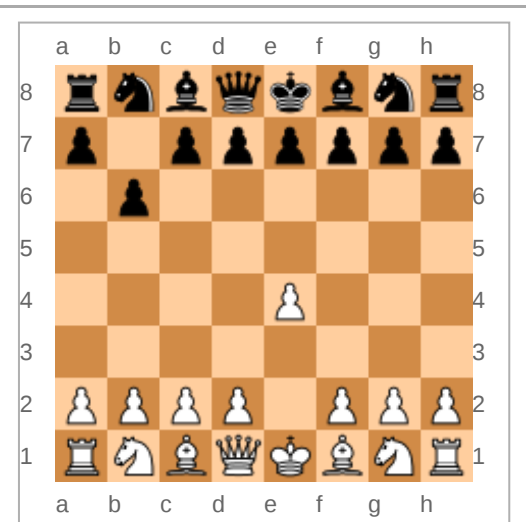
## History

The opening is named after the English vicar and strong 19th-century amateur chess player John Owen, an early exponent.<sup>[1]</sup> Howard Staunton wrote in 1847 that 1.e4 b6, "which the Italians call 'Il Fianchetto di Donna,' although disapproved of by the earlier writers, may be made by the second player without harm, if followed speedily by [...e6] and [...c5]."<sup>[8]</sup>

Using his opening, Owen defeated Paul Morphy in an informal game in London, 1858.<sup>[9]</sup> An additional game in the match featuring this opening, where Owen varied on move 5, was won by Morphy<sup>[10]</sup>

## Theory

### Owen's Defence



<b>Moves</b>	1.e4 b6
<b>ECO</b>	B00
<b>Origin</b>	1619
<b>Named after</b>	Rev. John Owen
<b>Parent</b>	King's Pawn Opening
<b>Synonym(s)</b>	Queen's Fianchetto Defence Greek Defense

The theory of Owen's Defence is less developed than that of other openings. This makes it attractive to some players, since their opponents will often be ill-prepared for it and hence forced to think for themselves.<sup>[3]</sup> GM Christian Bauer observes:<sup>[14]</sup>

To be honest, I don't think Black can equalise as quickly with 1...b6 as he sometimes does in standard openings, and he may suffer against a well-prepared opponent. Then again, the well-prepared opponent is rare for such marginal variations as 1...b6, and in any case, with reasonable play I'm sure White can't get more than a slight advantage from the opening – a risk everyone is running as Black aren't they?

According to MCO-15, after 2.d4 Bb7 White gets the advantage with either:

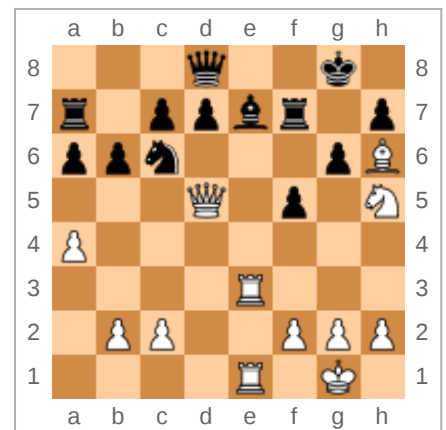
- **3. Bd3 e6 4. Nf3 c5 5. c3 Nf6**(5...cxd4 6.cxd4 Bb4+ 7.Nc3 Nf6 8.Qe2 d5 9.e5 Ne4 10.0-0!? Bxc3 11.bxc3 Nxc3 12.Qe3 Nc6 13.Bb2 Ne4 14.Ba3 and White had a large advantage in Adams–Vanderwaeren, Moscow Olympiad 1994) **6. Nbd2 Nc6 7. a3! d5 8. e5 Nfd7 9. b4 Be7 10. 0-0 0-0 11. Re1**with a clear plus", or
- **3. Nc3 e6 4. Nf3 Bb4 5. Bd3 Nf6 6. Bg5 h6 7. Bxf6 Bxc3+ 8. bxc3 Qxf6 9. 0-0 d6 10. Nd2 e5 11. f4 Qe7 12. Qg4** as in David–Bauer, France 2005.<sup>[12]</sup>

## Illustrative game

Speelman–Basman, British Championship 1984:

**1. e4 e6 2. Nc3 b6 3. d4 Bb7** Transposing to a position more commonly reached by 1.e4 b6 2.d4 Bb7 3.Nc3 e6. **4. Bd3 Nf6 5. Nge2 c5 6. d5! a6** 6...exd5 7.exd5 Nxd5 8.Nxd5 Bxd5 9.Nf4 Bc6 (9...Be6? 10.Be4 wins; 9...Qe7+!?)<sup>[13]</sup> 10.Bc4! "gives White strong pressure".<sup>[14]</sup> **7. a4 exd5 8. exd5 Nxd5 9. Nxd5 Bxd5 10. Nf4 Be6 11. Be4 Ra7 12. 0-0 Be7** Watson and Schiller also give 12...g6 13.a5! as favoring White after 13...bxa5 14.Bd2 or 13...b5 14.Be3 d6 15.b4 Be7 16.Nxe6 fxe6 17.Qg4 Qc8 18.bxc5 dxc5 19.Bh6, intending Rad1, Rfe1, and h4–h5 "with great pressure for just a pawn".<sup>[15]</sup> **13. Ra3 0-0 14. Rg3 f5 15. Bd5 Rf6?** Better is 15...Bxd5!? 16.Qxd5+ Rf7 17.Nh5 with a strong attack.<sup>[13]</sup> **16. Re1 Bxd5 17. Qxd5+ Rf7 18. Nh5 g6 19. Bh6 Nc6 20. Rge3 1-0**<sup>[16]</sup> (see diagram) White threatens 21.Nf6+! Bxf6 (21...Kh8 22.Qxf7) 22.Re8+. On 20...gxh5, 21.Rg3+ wins; 20...Bf8 21.Re8 gxh5 23.Bxf8!; 20...Ra8 21.Rxe7! Nxe7 and now either 22.Rxe7 Qxe7 23.Qxa8+ or 22.Nf6+ Kh8 23.Qxf7 wins.<sup>[13]</sup>

Speelman vs. Basman, 1984



Final position

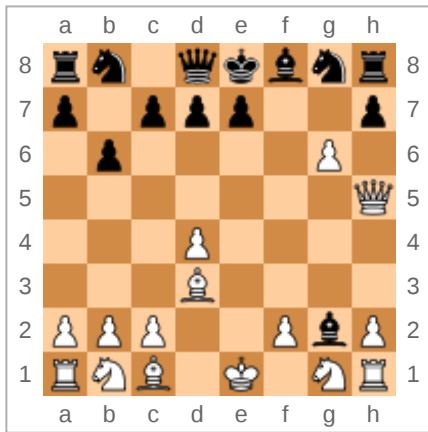
## Matovinsky Gambit

A pitfall for Black in this opening, the **Matovinsky Gambit**,<sup>[17]</sup> dates from a game by the 17th-century Italian chess player and writer Gioachino Greco

Greco–NN, 1619: **1. e4 b6 2. d4 Bb7 3. Bd3 f5?** Bauer calls this move "simply suicidal".<sup>[18]</sup> Black gravely weakens his kingside in an attempt to gain material, but White can win by falling into Black's "trap". Normal is 3...e6 or 3...Nf6.<sup>[19]</sup> Also possible is 3...g6 ("!" – Andrew Martin) heading for a Hippopotamus Defense, when Martin considers 4.f4 f5! (as in Serpik–Blatny, U.S. Open 2003)<sup>[20]</sup> strong for Black.<sup>[21]</sup> **4. exf5! Bxg2 5. Qh5+ g6 6. fxe6**(see diagram)**Nf6?? 7. gxh7+ Nxh5 8. Bg6# 1-0**<sup>[22]</sup>

A better try for Black is 6...Bg7! Staunton wrote in 1847 that White got the advantage with 7.gxh7+ Kf8 8.hxg8=Q+ Kxg8 9.Qg4 Bxh1 10.h4 e6 11.h5.<sup>[8]</sup> Over 120 years later, Black improved on this analysis with both 10...Qf8 ("!" – Soltis) 11.h5 Qf6 12.h6 Rxh6 13.Bxh6 Qxh6 Hendler–Radchenko, Kiev 1970 and 10...Bd5 ("!" – Kapitaniak) 11.h5 Be6 12.Qg2 Rxh5 Schmit–Vitolins, Latvia 1969, winning quickly in both games.<sup>[23][24]</sup> However, White is winning after 7.Qf5! (instead of 7.gxh7+) Nf6 8.Bh6!! Bxh6 (on 8...Kf8, White wins with 9.Bxg7+ Kxg7 10.gxh7 Bxh1 11.Qg6+ Kf8 12.Qh6+ Kf7 transposing to line b below,<sup>[18]</sup> or 9.Qg5 Bxh1 10.gxh7<sup>[25]</sup>) 9.gxh7 and now (a) 9...Kf8 10.Qg6 Bc1 11.Qxg2 Bxb2 12.Ne2 "and Rg1 will prove lethal"<sup>[18]</sup> or (b) 9...Bxh1 10.Qg6+ Kf8 11.Qxh6+ Kf7 12.Nh3 with a winning attack.<sup>[12][18][25]</sup> Den Broeder–Wegener, correspondence 1982, concluded 12...Qf8 13.Bg6+ Ke6 14.Qf4 d5 15.Bf5+ Kf7 16.Ng5+ Ke8 17.Qxc7 1-0.<sup>[26]</sup>

## Greco vs. NN, 1619



Position after 6.fxg6

According to both Soltis and Kapitanik, 7.gxh7+ Kf8 8.Nf3! (which Soltis attributes to F. A. Spinhoven of the Netherlands) is also strong: (a) 8...Bxf3? 9.Qxf3+ Nf6 10.Qxa8; (b) 8...Bxh1 9.Ne5 Bxe5 (9...Qe8 10.Ng6+) 10.dxe5 Bd5 11.hxg8=Q+ Kxg8 12.Qg6+ Kf8 13.Bh6+; (c) 8...Nf6 9.Qg6 Bxh1 10.Bh6 Rxh7 (10...Bxh6 11.Qxh6+ Kf7 12.Ng5+) 11.Ng5 Bxh6 12.Nxh7+ Nxh7 13.Qxh6+; or (d) 8...Nf6 9.Qg6 Bxf3 10.Rg1 Rxh7 11.Qg3!! Be4 12.Bxe4 Nxe4 13.Qf3+ Kg8 14.Qxe4 Nc6 (14...d5 15.Qe6+ Kh8 16.Nc3) 15.Bf4 with an extra pawn for White.<sup>[27][28]</sup> Boris Avrukh also recommends this line, and notes that 13...Nf6 (instead of 13...Kg8) 14.Qxa8 Rxh2 15.Bf4 Rh4 16.Qg2 Rg4 17.Qh2 leaves White "an exchange up with an easily winning position".<sup>[29]</sup> Watson writes that although 7.Qf5! is the "traditional" refutation and does indeed win, "the analysis is complicated", and Spinhoven's 8.Nf3! "is clearer".<sup>[30]</sup>

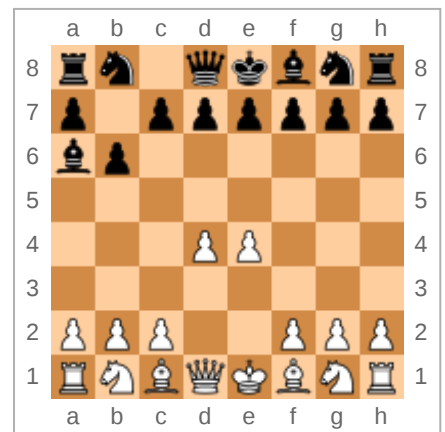
## Guatemala Defense

Instead of fianchettoing, Black can proceed differently by playing his queen's bishop to a6, the **Guatemala Defense**<sup>[31]</sup> so-named because the Guatemala Chess Club used the line in a 1949 correspondence game.<sup>[32]</sup> Andrew Soltis writes that it has "no other discernible benefit than to get out of 'book' as quickly as possible".<sup>[32]</sup> Joel Benjamin and Eric Schiller see some logic in Black's concept to exchange the white bishop as soon as possible, as it often proves troublesome for Black in many openings.<sup>[33]</sup> White gets the advantage with 2.d4 Ba6 3.Bxa6 Nxa6 4.Nf3 Qc8!? 5.0-0 Qb7 6.Re1 e6 7.c4.<sup>[34]</sup>

The Guatemalan bishop deployment can also occur on Black's third move, from various transpositions. For example after 1.e4 b6 2.d4 e6, 1.e4 e6 2.d4 b6, or 1.d4 b6 2.e4 e6, Black can follow up in all cases with 3...Ba6.

## See also

- List of chess openings
- List of chess openings named after people



Guatemala Defence: 1.e4 b6 2.d4 Ba6. Black's occupies the a6–f1 diagonal. Although the Guatemala does not evince high opening ambition, neither does it lose material.

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## External links

- Marcin Maciaga, Flexible System of Defensive Play for Black – 1...b6

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