

Tiger's Modern

By Tiger Hillarp Persson

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Introduction to the Modern Defence

“The reasonable man adapts himself to the world: the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man.”

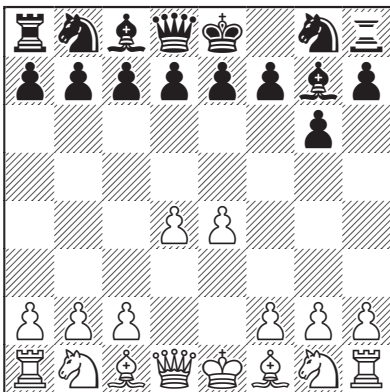
George Bernard Shaw – *Man and Superman*

Ah, looking for Mr Petroff? Sorry, but Petroff has left the building with Mr Lopez. I am the Modern, the Modern Defence. Stop caressing that e-pawn or I will throw you out of this chapter!

I should start with a warning for those of you who have only played classical openings before. The Modern Defence (henceforth referred to as simply the Modern) is something quite different. Even though I have tried to give a few examples of typical positions and structures to strive for, that is far from doing the Modern justice. The Modern is just too complicated and dynamic; what is good in one instance can very well be bad in another. One grandmaster, on hearing I was trying to explain the a6-Modern systems in book form, said: “You will have to explain everything!” and there is some truth to that. Still, I think that is what makes the opening so wonderful.

So, what is the Modern?

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♖g7



This is the basic Modern position. Black's attitude in the Modern is typical of the modern school of thought: Instead of occupying the centre with a pawn or two Black prefers to observe the centre from a distance, develop a few pieces and then strike when White least expects it. The most common continuation here is

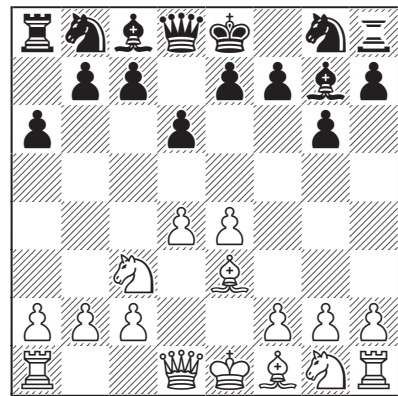
3.♗c3 d6

Now White is faced with a wide choice. To illustrate the system featured in this book, let us say that White plays:

4.♙e3

Now Black can play 4...c6 or enter the Pirc with 4...♘f6, but this book features a different system:

4...a6!



With this move Black plans an expansion on the queenside with b5 followed by ♖b7, ♗d7 and c5, thus cultivating the concept of observing and counterpunching even further than in the other Modern lines (with c6). The only condition for this system to work is that White has played ♗c3 or else b5 will strike thin air and c5 will be easily met by c3.

Why the a6-Modern?

The first great advantage of the Modern with a6 is that it gives White almost zero chances of playing for a draw and therefore it is an excellent choice in situations where playing for a win is essential. In these lines there is no exchange-variation or I-am-a-sucker-for-a-draw-variation, or any other way for White to exchange a bunch of pieces on move ten.

The second (big) advantage of the lines recommended in this book is that they are little known and analysed, so even if your opponent knows that you will play the Modern – with this book as your arsenal – you will probably diverge from “theory” first and therefore the element of surprise will be on your side.

What I have tried to do

Before writing this book I didn't really know a lot of “theory” on the Modern. I just knew some ideas and used the ones best suited for the occasion. However, as I was writing a book I thought it might be wise to look up some of the more accepted theory. What I found came as something of a revelation. Every half an hour I would come across something which made me go “aah!” or “is that so?” or – more often – “I don't believe that!”. I was positively shocked at how many misconceptions exist about this opening! The result is that I often disagree with the opinions of famous players who have annotated a6-Modern games in *Informant*, *ChessBase* and other places. At first I pointed out every such disagreement, but I soon realised that the book would become too polemical and therefore I removed most of these comments. Also I have not pointed out which moves are “theoretical novelties” because there are so many and because the concept of TN's is not very important in this opening.

I have tried to explain the a6-Modern systems in such a way that everyone should be able to understand it, but I have not tried to cover everything about the Modern Defence on these pages. On the contrary this is a very narrow book that deals with only a fraction of the existing

alternatives. Probably some of you will wonder: “But why don't you mention Mr 2650+ against Mr 2600+, somewhere, sometime?” The answer is – if I just have not missed it – that I believe it is not such an important game. I have not tried to write an encyclopaedia on the Modern. This is about the a6-lines and only more where necessary.

Playing these lines is a constant struggle. Occasionally I wake up thinking, “it's crap – I must find something else”, but then, a few mornings later (after some hard work) I wake up thinking “It's alive! It's a miracle!” and so it goes on. Don't let the first of these mornings scare you. If you are not too lazy the other kind of morning is waiting around the corner. As Shaw put it: “...all progress depends on the unreasonable man”.

A very short history of the a6-Modern

There were many strong GMs and other notable players who used set-ups with a6 in the Modern before me. In the sixties there was Ivkov and Ujtelky, in the seventies Suttles and Keene used a6 in the Classical Pirc, but it was not until the eighties that players like Seirawan, Speelman and McNab developed the ideas further. In the nineties Mikhail Gurevich and Azmaiparashvili were the main champions of the a6 systems, but today there are few who play it regularly at a high level. I believe the reason for this has nothing to do with the objective value of the opening, but rather reflects a general tendency towards choosing more solid and less ambitious set-ups with Black.

You will soon notice that this book to a high degree consists of my own games. That is partly because I know these games better than others and partly because they best illustrate the ideas I promote here: how to walk the a6-Modern road. It is not the only road, but it is mine and I am hoping for some company.

The Pirc and the Modern with c6 versus the Modern with a6

There are three main ways to play with g6 against 1.e4. Each of these has its advantages and

disadvantages. One way to compare them is to see how they deal with White's most flexible set-up: 4.♙e3

Modern with a6

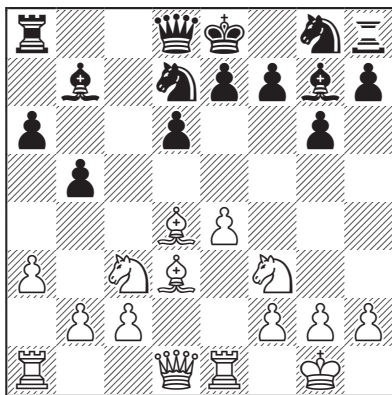
1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♘c3 d6 4.♙e3 a6!

The idea behind this move is similar to 4...a6 in the Sicilian Najdorf. Black intends to expand on the queenside with b5 and attack the e4-pawn with ♗b7, ♘f6 and maybe b5-b4. There is only one problem with that set-up here: White can meet ♘f6 with e4-e5. Therefore Black must weaken White's control of the e5-square before playing ♘f6. This is done by playing ♗b7, ♘d7 and then c5, intending to exchange the c-pawn for White's d-pawn. In this way Black undermines White's d-pawn, gains control of e5, and then the knight can go to f6 without fearing e4-e5. Note that this idea would be absolutely worthless if White's knight was not on c3 already.

5.♘f3 b5 6.a3?!

This wastes an important tempo. As we shall see in later chapters, it is better for White to protect the e-pawn with ♙d3 and then attack b5 with a2-a4.

6...♙b7 7.♙d3 ♘d7 8.0-0 c5 9.♖e1 cxd4 10.♙xd4



Black has achieved an excellent dynamic *Sicilian Dragon structure*. Now both 10...♘gf6 and 10...♙xd4 11.♘xd4 ♘gf6 are excellent for Black, but I chose a more ambitious continuation:

10...e5!?

After 10...♘gf6 11.e5 White is able to open the centre when Black's structural advantage is clearly diminished.

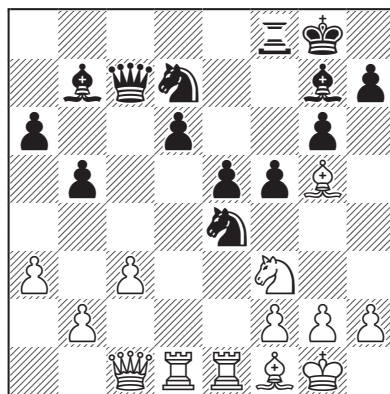
11.♙e3 ♘gf6 12.♗d2 0-0 13.♗ad1 ♖c8

Because I am attacking e4 with both my bishop and knight it is difficult for White to move the d3-bishop and attack my d6-pawn. *It is generally a big advantage to know something about Sicilian structures when playing the Modern with a6!*

14.♙g5 ♗b6 15.♙f1 ♖xc3!

It is also possible to play 15...♗c6, but the text is even stronger.

16.♗xc3 ♘xe4 17.♗e3 ♗c7 18.c3 f5 19.♗c1



And now, instead of playing 19...d5, Black could have played 19...f4 with fantastic compensation for the exchange. This game is a good example of what Black is hoping for and what White should fear. If you would like to learn the finer points of the position after 4...a6 you should look up the Flexible Dragon chapters.

We are following G. Thorhallsson – Hillarp Persson, Icelandic Team Championship 2003.