

Igor Nemtsev

The Elshad System



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Some Explanations

In this book, the reader will see all kinds of different ratings. How do you differentiate among them? Player ratings on the Chess Planet website are of course much different from ELO ratings. On Chess Planet, my opponents are mostly expert to master in strength, although occasionally you do get grandmasters. For the games played on the Chess.com site, the ratings are completely different. The 2200-2300 level there is at least 2400 USCF. In those games where I haven't given the ratings, it means that either the actual ratings couldn't be determined, or that the games were played in "live" rapid or blitz tournaments. Most of these were played at a time when official ratings for rapid or blitz did not yet exist; therefore, for the game between GM Rinat Jumabayev and Elshad, I wrote just "GM Jumabayev." For cases where the ratings seem low – for example, 2000 on Chess Planet – this means simply that the game was played before the player's rating under their new login rose to match his actual strength.

Most of the games in this book were played at 3-minute blitz online or in "live" blitz; in casual games; or in rapid tournaments. I also present my game with GM Igor Naumkin (Game 65). It was played in a tournament [*the 2014 Aeroflot Open, Round 3 – Tr.*] featuring a classical time control, with International Master norms available. I also played an outstanding game with GM Mikhail Brodsky on Chess Planet. Of course, I cannot say with 100% certainty, that he was the one I was playing against. But still, it was played in a team tournament, with the official logins.

I present a few games without commentary, in *Chess Informant* style – my point being that these were very interesting games and I'm sure that the reader will find it rewarding to go over them on his own. One could consider them supplemental material.

The overall results of my games with this opening are overwhelmingly favorable. Roughly speaking, I've scored about 80%. I especially recommend this book to players who already know the basics of playing chess – let's say, 1800 USCF or higher.

The Elshad System

Naturally, this opening makes a deafening impression – and not just because of its novelty or its unorthodox nature, but also because of how it dares White! Those who absorb the series of important (though not overly complex) principles of play in this opening will, at any rate, have an advantage in any position arising from it, against anyone. Your author is preparing another book on the Elshad – but this time for White! Elshad himself, the system’s author, has been using it for no less than 40 years.

I am not asking you – and especially young players – to play the Elshad System exclusively. But, as a way to broaden your chess horizons, this system is a wonderful thing – especially in blitz and rapid chess!

A Note from the Editor

Like the games themselves, the analysis presented in this book is not primarily intended to ascertain ultimate truth. Rather, it serves two other purposes:

1. To showcase the possibilities that Black enjoys (and the dangers that White faces) in this novel system; and
2. To entertain the reader with spectacular examples of fighting chess.

Don’t be surprised, then, if you find improvements to both the play and the analysis. The classic advice from the opening theoretician to his readers applies tenfold in this case: please don’t take what you read here as gospel truth, but use it only as a starting point for your own investigations!

This is a new opening, whose theory you can contribute to and help to shape. Consider *The Elshad System* a kind of “interactive” book: we invite you to submit improvements to the analysis, as well as any interesting games that you play on either side of the Elshad, for possible inclusion in any new edition of this book. Please e-mail to: ElshadSystem@mongoosepress.com

– JEA

Introduction

In his outstanding book, *Grandmaster Preparation* (Pergamon Press, 1981), Lev Polugaevsky writes:

...I firmly decided to endeavor not to fall into variations prepared by my opponents..., but to spare no time and effort so as to be able myself to set the opponent difficult opening problems as often as possible.

Whether it was this, or something else, that played its part, the role of experimenter became the way for me. And it would be wrong to complain about fate: several times I have managed literally to drag my opponent into forced variations, such that even with maximum ingenuity on his part there has been only one possible outcome. My pregame preparations have enabled me to set my opponent such problems in the opening that he has had no possibility of coping with them at the board. And even if my opponents should say, "It's not worth the trouble. You play hundreds if not thousands of games, and your opening successes can be counted on the fingers of one hand, and besides, they are gained in a strictly limited number of openings," then against them I would merely remind them of an old truth, both in life and in chess: an exceptional moment is worth more than a year serenely lived, or a tournament won. For the reason that, at that moment, the quintessence of creativity, or some part of it very dear to one's heart, can suddenly be concentrated.

The attentive reader will recall that in my childhood I studied the games of Anatoly Karpov. Then there was the after-school chess circle at the Hall of Pioneers, followed by the Physical Culture Institute at Chelyabinsk (Chess Division). I read hundreds of books. Put together, this all gave me a classical chess education. In the periodical press, it was very rare that articles would flash out at me concerning some original setup or such; but on the whole, it was clear to everybody that you had to occupy the center with

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pawns on e4 and d4, develop your pieces, castle, etc. This is how 99% of people play.

1.d4

This book is devoted to a universal system of play for Black against the closed openings – specifically, against the moves 1.d4, 1.c4, and 1.♘f3. You won't see a strictly instructional opening monograph here. This is an adventure book, surveying the unknown. It's as if you'll find yourself in another galaxy, with four suns circling overhead. Your opponents won't have a single classical guidepost to help them. You will be able to beat anyone you want in a given game. A 2000-level player will be able to beat a grandmaster, if said grandmaster is seeing what's happening on the board for the first time. But I'll give the player with the black pieces a reliable compass. Everything in this book will be, to a great extent, subjective – so we won't be looking too hard for a refutation of the Elshad System. In this opening, White will meet a whole Everest of problems to solve.

And so we begin. When the amateur – and 99% of chessplayers are amateurs – considers what opening to choose against a stronger player, very soon he will start feeling dispirited. Think about it: the master plays 1.d4 against you. If you answer with 1...d5, you'll get a Queen's Gambit position, which is mostly static. A fixed pawn structure in the center gives White the chance to spend the next 100 or so moves squeezing you a little. If you're not playing at the same strength as he is, the likelihood of an unpleasant outcome grows because the master will be stronger than you, he knows the theory better, and he has more experience. What to do, then? You can play the King's Indian Defense or the Grünfeld, but everywhere you turn you're going to run into the same problem: you will have a much better-prepared opponent sitting across from you – from both a theoretical *and* a practical standpoint.

It's only in the Elshad System that you'll be able to say with 98% certainty that your opponent knows *nothing*. He will need to “get

Introduction

creative” right from the start. In this book, you’ll see games (even those played at classical time controls) against strong grandmasters, with sad outcomes for them.

1...c6

The system starts, literally, with this move. You may retort that, after 2.e4, we’re in the Caro-Kann Defense. First off, though, we can still play Elshad’s opening; and secondly, we never said we were refuting 1.d4.

2.c4

The point is that White, having opened with 1.d4, has no intention of swerving from his opening strategy. Why did he play 1.d4? Probably because he much prefers that move to 1.e4. People are basically conservative. If you’re all set to play a closed opening, odds are you won’t suddenly opt for a Caro-Kann. There are few who can play sharp, open positions just as well as they can play closed openings. So the chance of 2.c4 is great. Well, that’s all I have to say – White fell for it! He won’t be able to pull his c-pawn back to c3 so that it can support his d4-pawn.

2...d6

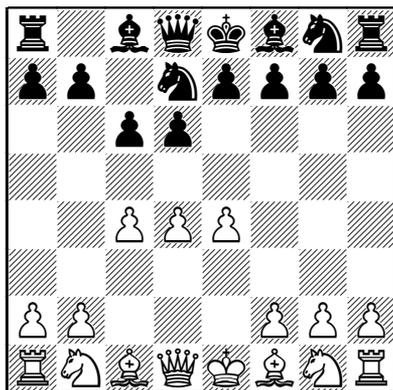
This is the first important fork in the road for the Elshad System, whose author himself prefers to play 2...♖a5. This is a continuation we will also examine very closely in this book.

3.e4

Since Black appears to be simply abandoning the center, of course White will seize it! Sometimes a transposition of moves happens – say, 3.♟c3 or 3.♟f3; but it all works out the same eventually: White is going to grab the space, because it’s “what you do.”

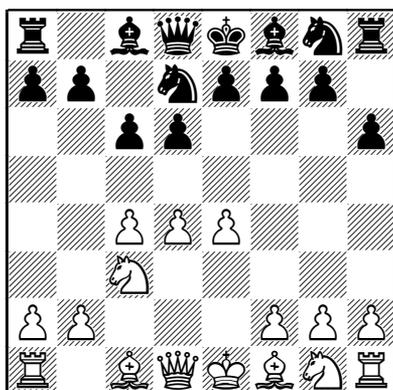
3...♟d7

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In this book we will give an explanation for every one of Black's moves. Every idea, any plan will be subjected to careful analysis. Soon we will reach the *tabiya*, the basic position of the entire opening. And so – where is the knight going? The next part of Black's plan involves the moves ...h7-h6, ...g7-g5, ...♘f8-g7, and ...♘d7-f8. Next, this knight will jump out to e6 so that Black can hit the d4-pawn multiple times, inducing White to advance with d4-d5. At that point, the knight goes back to f8. And, since the e5 square now belongs to us, the horse takes a new route: ...♘f8-g6-e5! If you're playing a blitz game, by this point you'll already have gained at least half a minute on the clock. But even in classical chess, as will be shown later, even grandmasters can fail to solve these problems.

4. ♘c3 h6



Introduction

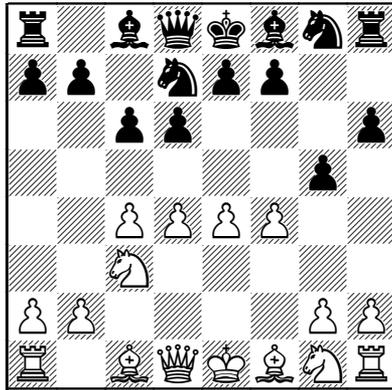
Yet another important fork in the road. White has so many possibilities here!

The most popular lines here start either with 5.f4 or 5.♘f3; these will receive most of our attention. But other moves will not remain shrouded in mystery. Anything that's the least bit dangerous to Black will find illumination in our book.

5.f4

Still, the legitimacy of the creator of this opening is important. This position does not appear on even a single chess database, whereas my own database contains more than a hundred games played by Elshad, by me, or by my students. The system's author himself has been playing this opening since 1975.

5...g5!



This move is the whole point of the system! Igor Kovalenko, a strong grandmaster, had a most interesting thought when he visited me and reviewed some of the materials for this book: “White,” he said, “is simply setting up his game in classical style, and he is unprepared for a concrete, move-by-move game.” The grandmaster went on to compare this situation to a classically trained boxer finding himself in a street fight where there’s no referee, nobody is stopping the fight, and there’s nowhere to run!

The Elshad System

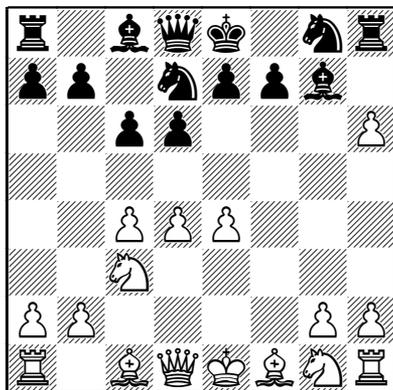
6.fxg5

The first thing White can't understand is: what is Black giving the pawn up for?

6...♙g7

This recalls one of the ideas in the Volga [*or Benko – Tr.*] Gambit, on the opposite wing. Here the gambit ideas are even stronger, since they are typically directed against White's king.

7.gxh6



Consistent, at any rate. And so, on to our games.

Chapter 1

The Main Line: White Plays f2-f4

1. Kretschmer – Nemtsev

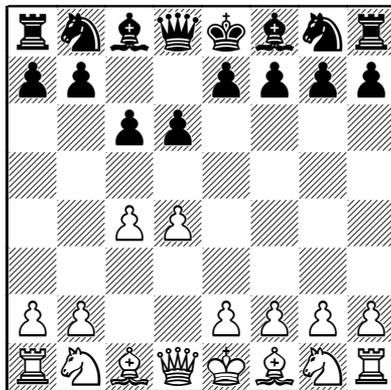
Elshad System

8/27/2014

1.d4 c6

We must start with exactly this move, since once your opponent opens with 1.d4 he is unlikely to follow up with 2.e4, as that would result in a Caro-Kann; whereas with his opening move he's indicated that he wants to play a closed game.

2.c4 d6



This looks provocative, as it does encourage 3.e4; but for now, White is reluctant to play that.

3.♘c3 ♗d7

But now of course we have to go 4.e4 – after all, isn't that what we've been told our whole lives?

Chapter 1

4.e4

But now comes the first problem for White: the d4-pawn is weaker now that it can no longer be protected by pawns (they're standing on e4 and c4). Now Black begins surrounding the d4 square. Still, this intention is not yet obvious, so Black's next move looks like foolishness, or even like he's mocking White's skills. How the first player wants to punish his opponent for this contempt toward the laws of chess!

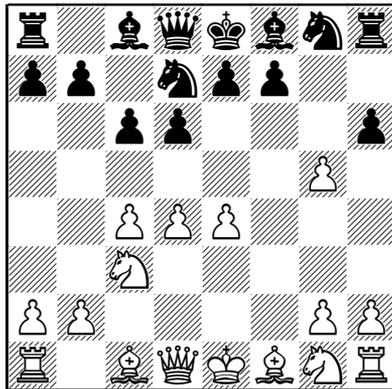
4...h6

What's this?? How dare Black play this way? What nonsense! Instead of developing pieces, instead of occupying the center with pawns?!

5.f4

He really, really wanted to go there. Now Black can't play ...g7-g5. Or can he?

5...g5 6.fxg5

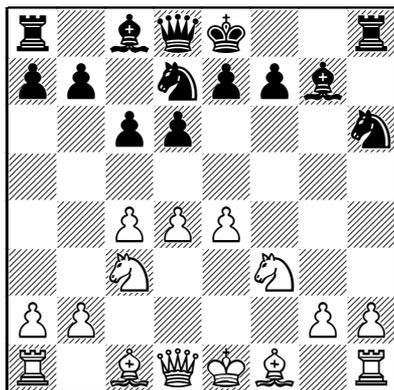


White might still have stepped off the path of doom, while still playing consistently: 6.e5!? ♙g7 7.♘f3 ♘f8 8.exd6 ♚xd6 9.fxg5 hxg5 10.♙xg5 ♘e6 11.♙e3 ♘h6.

The Main Line: White Plays f2-f4

6...♙g7 7.gxh6 ♘xh6 8.♘f3

For the player running into this opening for the first time, it still seems as though his opponent is intoxicated; but Black's next move is bound to look like a slap in the face!!



8...♘f8

Since Black's entire strategy in this opening is based on the dark squares, then obviously Black intends to occupy important dark squares, specifically d4 and e5. Those are the most important squares on the whole board right now. But there are also other good moves, such as 8...c5!? and 8...♘g4!?

9.♙g5

Does White seriously think that Black is going to play ...e7-e5 here, blundering away the queen? Or maybe this is simply developing a piece...

9...♘e6 10.♙e3 ♘g4 11.♙d2

This loses right away, of course, but at any rate Black's advantage is already great enough; while considering what else we know about the system White's chances are by now practically gone. And 11.♙g1 changes nothing.

Chapter 1

11...♖xe3 12.♗xe3 ♖b6 13.♟d1

13.♗d2 ♗xd4 14.♗xd4 ♖xd4 15.♗xd4 ♗xd4 16.0-0-0 ♗e5 17.h3 ♗e6 18.♔b1 0-0-0 leads to a very difficult endgame for White – the bishop pair and weak pawns, especially the one on e4.

13...♗xb2 14.♗e2 ♗h6!

The number of queens lost after this bishop maneuver is beyond counting.

15.♗d3 ♗f4 16.♗d2 ♗xg2+ -+

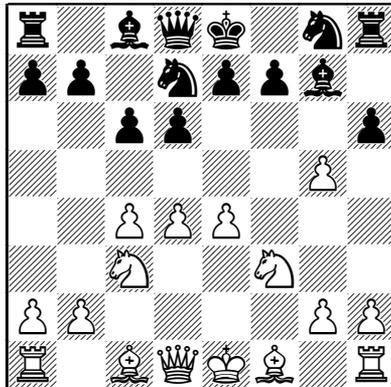
This was an Internet game; immediately after resigning, my opponent wrote me, telling me exactly what he thought of me – and about my parents, all my relatives, how little I knew about the game – and finally, how if we ever met, he would break my arm.

0-1

2. Diplodoc (2507) – Nemtsev_Igor (2741)

02/20/2015

1.d4 c6 2.c4 d6 3.♖c3 ♗d7 4.e4 h6 5.f4 g5 6.fxg5 ♗g7 7.♗f3



The Main Line: White Plays f2-f4

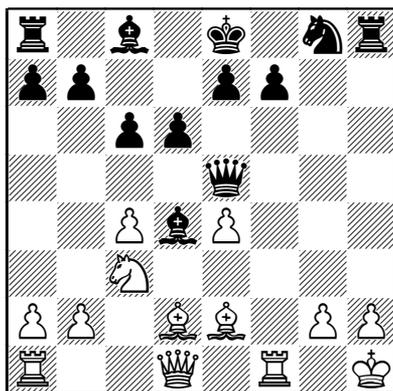
White's not showing himself to be too greedy – yet. Meanwhile, Black is just forging ahead, developing his pieces according to plan. He is aiming at the d4 square.

7...♘f8 8.♙e2 ♘e6

Black would do better to take the pawn with 8...hxg5, transposing into the system's usual lines: 8...hxg5! 9.♙xg5 (9.♘xg5 ♖b6 10.♘f3 ♘e6 11.d5 ♘f8) 9...♘e6 10.♙e3 ♖b6 11.♙b1 (11.d5 ♖xe3) 11...♘h6 12.0-0 ♘g4 13.♗d2 ♘xe3 14.♖xe3 ♘xd4 15.♘xd4 ♙xd4. After the game move, White can play 9.g6 fxg6, with a very confusing position.

9.d5

9.0-0 ♖b6 10.♙e3 hxg5 11.♘xg5 ♘xg5 12.♙xg5 ♙xd4+ 13.♔h1 ♗c5 14.♙d2 ♖e5:



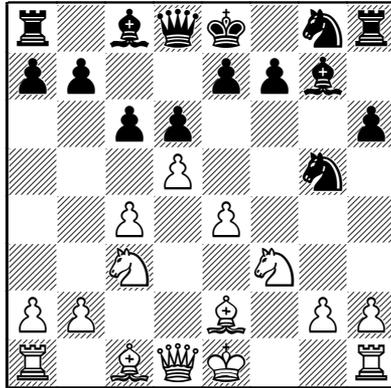
15.♙f4 ♖g7 16.♗d3 e5 17.♙g3 ♘f6 18.♙f2 ♙e6 19.♙xd4 exd4 20.♗xd4 ♙xh2+ 21.♔xh2 ♘g4+ 22.♙xg4 ♖xd4+.

9.0-0 ♖b6 10.♙e3 ♖xb2; 9.gxh6 ♘xh6 10.0-0 ♖b6 11.♙e3 ♘g4 12.♗d2 ♘xe3 13.♖xe3 ♘xd4 14.♘xd4 ♙xd4.

9...♘c5

9...♘xg5!?:

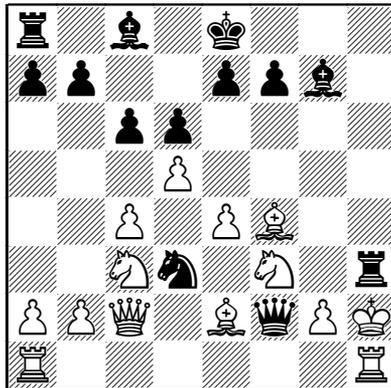
Chapter 1



This move is both stronger and more in the spirit of the position, e.g. 10. ♖xg5 hxg5 11. ♗xg5 ♜b6 12. ♜b3 (12. ♜d2 ♖h6 13. ♗e3 c5 14. h3 ♖g4 15. ♗xg4 ♗xg4 16. 0-0 ♗xh3 17. gxh3 ♞xh3) 12... ♞xh2! 13. ♞xh2 ♜g1+ 14. ♗f1 ♜xh2♯.

10. ♜c2 hxg5 11. ♗xg5 a5

11... ♜b6 12. ♗e3 ♖f6 13. h3 ♖g4 14. ♗f4 ♖f2!! 15. ♗xf2 ♖d3+ 16. ♗g3 ♜f2+ 17. ♗h2 ♞xh3♯.



A rather typical mate in the Elshad System – I have gone through it myself. After the sort of nightmare that White would suffer in a blitz match, your opponent might simply give up chess altogether. Or maybe start playing 1.e4 instead. But getting used

The Main Line: White Plays f2-f4

to playing against this opening during the course of a blitz match is impossible!!

11...♖h6 12.b4 ♗xe4 13.♞xe4 ♕xc3+ 14.♔f2 ♕xa1.

12.0-0 ♗f6 13.a3 a4

This move is not forced. Black can play 13...♞b6 right away, with a powerful attack.

14.♔h1

14.b4 axb3 15.♞d2 ♞b6 16.♕e3 ♗g4 17.♕f4 (17.♕d4 ♕xd4+ 18.♗xd4 ♗xh2; 18...b2 19.♞ab1 ♗b3) 17...♗xe4+.

14...♗g4 15.h3 ♞b6!

Surprise! Turns out the knight wasn't threatened after all. A typical misconception by White in this opening.

16.♞ae1 ♗d7 17.e5 ♗f2+

17...♗dxе5 18.♗xe5 ♗xe5 19.dxc6 bxc6 20.♗xa4 ♞d4 21.♞c3 ♞xc3 22.♗xc3 ♞b8=.

18.♞xf2 ♞xf2

Even though the computer says White has a large advantage here, finding all the right moves over the board is unrealistic – especially if it's a blitz or rapid game. And all the more so when we are playing people and not chess engines.

19.e6 ♗e5 20.♞f1 ♞g3 21.exf7+ ♔f8

Elshad's favorite spot for his king.

22.c5 ♕xh3 23.♕xe7+ ♔xe7 24.cxd6+ ♔d8

White will be mated in not more than four moves.

25.gxh3 ♞xh3+ 26.♗h2 ♞xh2# 0-1