

# Cyrus Lakdawala

1...b6

**move by move**



**EVERYMAN CHESS**

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[www.everymancross.com](http://www.everymancross.com)

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# About the Author

## Cyrus Lakdawala

is an International Master, a former National Open and American Open Champion, and a six-time State Champion. He has been teaching chess for over 30 years, and coaches some of the top junior players in the U.S.

### Also by the Author:

*Play the London System*

*A Ferocious Opening Repertoire*

*The Slav: Move by Move*

*I ... d6: Move by Move*

*The Caro-Kann: Move by Move*

*The Four Knights: Move by Move*

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*The Scandinavian: Move by Move*

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*Korchnoi: Move by Move*

*The Alekhine Defence: Move by Move*

*The Trompowsky Attack: Move by Move*

*Carlsen: Move by Move*

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# Series Foreword

## *Move by Move*

is a series of opening books which uses a question-and-answer format. One of our main aims of the series is to replicate - as much as possible - lessons between chess teachers and students.

All the way through, readers will be challenged to answer searching questions and to complete exercises, to test their skills in chess openings and indeed in other key aspects of the game. It's our firm belief that practising your skills like this is an excellent way to study chess openings, and to study chess in general. Many thanks go to all those who have been kind enough to offer inspiration, advice and assistance in the creation of *Move by Move*. We're really excited by this series and hope that readers will share our enthusiasm.

John Emms  
Everyman Chess

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# Introduction

*“You never understood that it ain’t no good, you shouldn’t let other people get your kicks for you.”* - Bob Dylan

Was Bob Dylan talking about chess players in the lyrics to *Like a Rolling Stone*? I gape in disbelief when I see non-professional level players online vehemently arguing some ultra-fine point of some sub, sub-variation of a line which is truly understood by about a dozen or so people in the world, and which in all likelihood, they may get once over the board in an entire lifetime - if they are lucky.

What most theory-obsessed players fail to understand is that problem solving and planning ability are infinitely more valuable than knowledge of some novelty on the 17th move of a topical line. Yet, I would say most of my students spend 90% of their study time in the openings alone, when they could get so much more from the study of Capablanca’s or Lasker’s (or any great player) games.

Sometimes when we learn a new opening, we harbour the false belief that we understand the line, simply because we memorized key variations of it. Without true understanding, our grasp remains merely intellectual and therefore superficial. The proof: we reach the end of our analysis and soon after, our position degrades from equal to busted in the space of a dozen moves.

The study of complex lines in some opening books makes preparation for the college SAT exams look like pre-school. As children, we played the opening phase with fresh eyes, as if for the first time. Later, as adults, we bang out our first 20 moves in under a minute in some fashionable line of the Ruy Lopez, Najdorf or King’s Indian. When we open with 1 ... b6, we seek a return to those childhood eyes of wonder. Some openings have been rendered so homogenous and faceless through overuse, that we tend to see right through them, shutting off our mind until move 21 or later. Habit takes the place of thinking. It kind of reminds us of the robotic letters we wrote when we were seven years old (those dreaded Ernest Hemingway-like ‘thank you’ notes our mothers forced us to write):

“Dear Grandma,

Thanks for the baseball glove for my birthday. I hope you are well. Mom is well. Dad is well. I am well, as well.

Love, Cy”

But don’t for a moment believe that 1 ... b6 is a study-free zone. Many who take up our opening equate 1 ... b6 with a concert pianist giving up the piano and taking up the banjo. We chess players study the past as intensely and as obsessively as historians, since theory, like history, and the law, is based upon precedent. When we take up 1 ... b6, we partially avoid precedent since the opening’s unpopularity virtually negates the theoretical past - virtually, but not completely. It’s easy to incorrectly assume that an opening as flexible as 1 ... b6, which creates an idiosyncratic tear in theory’s veil, is less an opening and more simply a platform for undomesticated creativity and self-expression.

The Owen’s and its queen’s pawn counterpart, the English Defence, may be a realm of imagination more than mathematical precision, yet there are still many cut-throat lines which we must play with great exactitude, or we risk the humiliation of a quick and memorable loss. Our brains (well, at least mine) have limited abilities to absorb the scale and scope of the positions which arise after 1 ... b6. Still, we must know and understand the critical lines as best we can.

Scholarship means different things at different times. The Roman physician and scholar, Serenus

Sammonicus, was reputed to recite the magical incantation “Abracadabra!” to ward off sickness and evil spirits. Strangely enough, in the modern era, my doctors tend to discard spells and rely entirely on pharmaceuticals, surgery and lengthy admonitions.

1 ... b6, from the very first move, seeks to distort by disobeying classical boundaries, making no attempt to occupy the centre with pawns. 1 ... b6 isn't merely opening fast food, consumed for convenience, rather than long-term health benefits. You will discover that play in some of the lines feels like we are love-struck garden snakes attempting to kiss a Cobra. I don't expect this book to gain a mass following (in all probability I will likely drop dead of a massive heart attack brought on by sudden shock if the mailman brings to my door a royalty check from a 1 ... b6 book), since we who play it are misfits in the theoretical world, and our quirky opening will likely never be granted entry into the much desired ‘acceptable’ theoretical opening canon. In choosing our opening, we embrace the normality of that which is in essence aberrant.

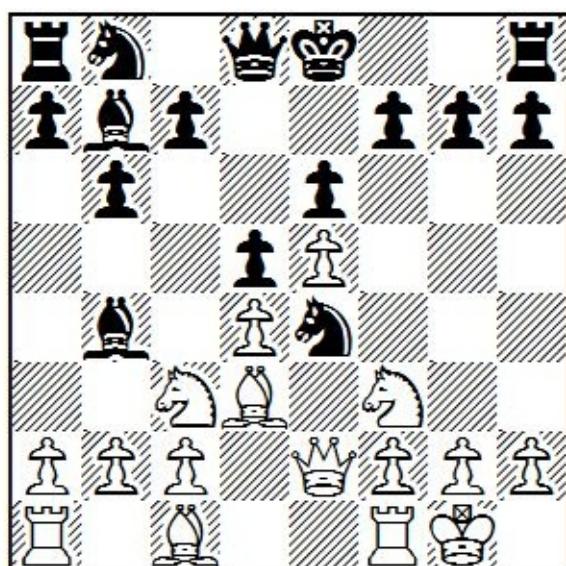
## 1 ... b6, the ‘Joke’ Opening?

In a recent analysis session at my house with IMs John Watson and Keaton Kiewra, John declared: “Keaton, Cyrus uses a lot of humour in his books, and the funniest joke in this one is 1 ... b6!”. And then he proceeded to rudely laugh, at your humble writer's expense. John was joking, having completed several 1 ... b6 videos for the Internet Chess Club. Most chess players, however, don't consider John's declaration a joke and believe 1 ... b6 to be a second rate, or outright unsound opening. We can use this false assumption to our benefit and weaponize it against our amused, overconfident opponents.

All writers, like songbirds, love to sing, but even more importantly be heard by an appreciative audience. As I mentioned, I don't expect this book to be a big seller, since many chess players assume that the Owen's is unsound. In fact, I know of at least one uninformed and tragically misguided chess writer who bashed the Owen's. Wait. I formally retract my statement about the writer being “uninformed and tragically misguided”, since I just realized that it was me who was the 1 ... b6-bashing culprit in *A Ferocious Opening Repertoire*. So now you see why 1 ... b6 has such a bad reputation? Even people who write books on the opening (i.e. your now deeply repentant writer) still trash it.

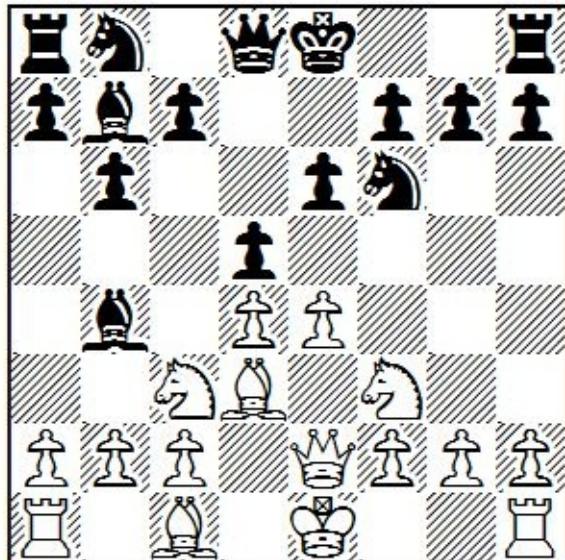
Here are some of our battle grounds reached from 1 ... b6:

### Nc3 Lines



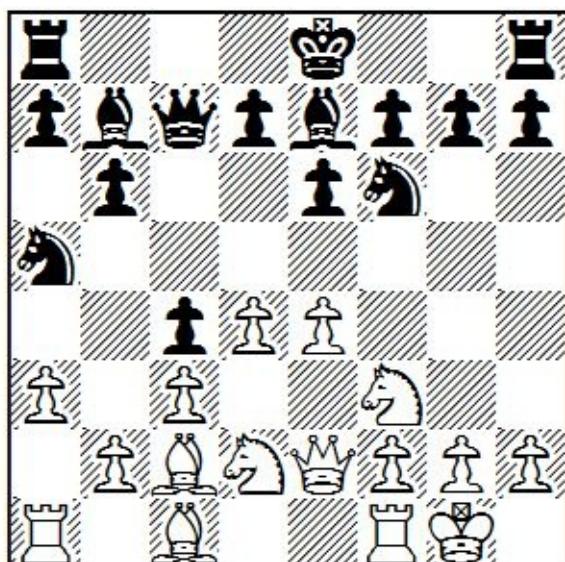
As all attacking addicts understand, an opening gambit is nothing more than a gateway drug to future

sacrifices (our version of heroin). This position arose in Pavlovic-Minasian, Moscow 2008. White just ignored Black's 'threat' to win a pawn on c3 and simply castled. In the chapter, I attempt to show you how to grab the pawn and survive the coming ordeal. In this position we require Petrosian's or Carlsen's leech-like ability to hang on, where others would collapse under the defensive strain. I assure you that our position is sound. We can place faith on the fact that such tempting environments tend to over-stimulate a natural attacker's imagination.

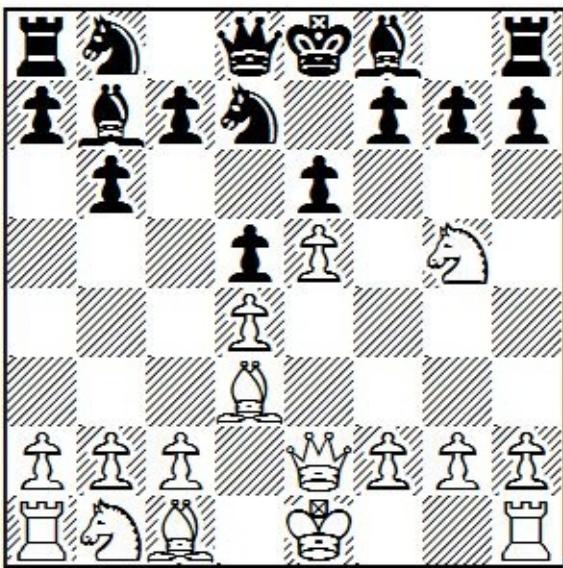


This is our key position from the first chapter. I believe Black gets dynamic equality, no matter how White plays it.

The next two diagrams are from Chapter Two, where White develops his knight to d2 to back up the pawn centre with c3.



This is Tony Miles' treatment. Analysis of the position has convinced me that Black's resources are fully adequate.



Our second position is a cause for concern for our side, and may be our single greatest threat in the entire Owen's. White threatens Nxe6, followed by Qh5+. We can respond in three ways:

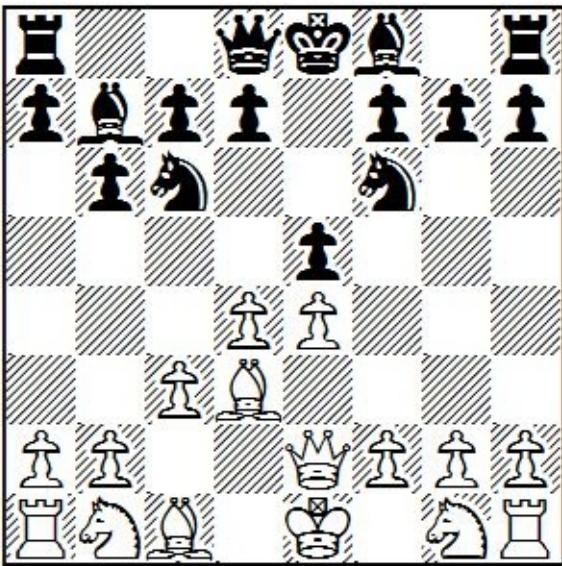
- a) 7 ... g6;
- b) 7 ... Be7;
- c) IM Filipovic's pawn sacrifice 7 ... Qe7.

We must be prepared, having studied and comp'ed the diagrammed position, or else we may be going home early that evening!

### **Blatny's 'Ruy Lopez'**

*"Hybridization, of course, represents a deliberate violation of the isolation of the gene pools on a virtual island."* - Richard Dawkins

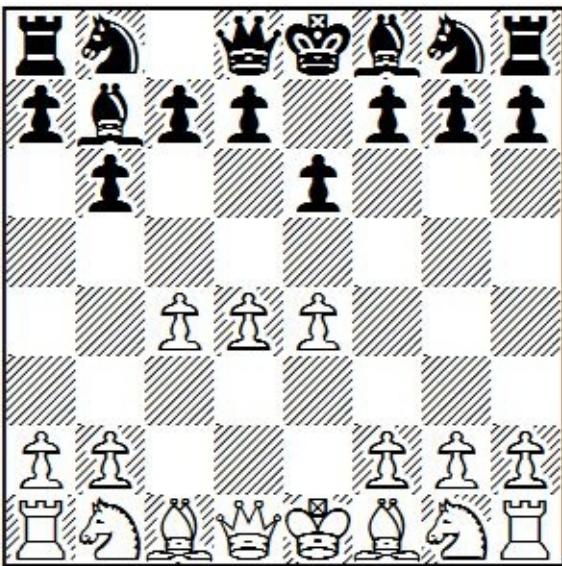
1 ... b6 is subject to a vast degree of stylistic interpretation, and that which was once an Owen's Defence may quickly morph into some indefinable genetic mutation. When our opponents are led into an unfamiliar opening set-up, it's as if we force them to visit another planet, with its inexplicable laws and customs. The following position is Blatny's (my friend GM Pavel Blatny is a creature of unorthodox habits, who is occasionally impelled to excess by the force of his imagination) seminal insight: he shifts the position to something resembling a Ruy Lopez. The meme replicates into a strange new pattern.



This is an example of humanity meddling with the forces of nature. Everyone is familiar with the warning themes of *Frankenstein* and *Jurassic Park*. We may have tricked White into a strange, hybrid Ruy Lopez.

### The English Defence

If natural selection kills off the weaker genes of the species, then how on earth did Chihuahuas emerge from their ancestor, the wolf? The answer, of course, is that it wasn't natural selection. Human meddling was the selective agent. In the diagrammed position we get yet another example of 1 ... b6 hypermodern meddling. In the latter queen's pawn section of the book, this may be our critical position:



We allow our opponents to blatantly express territorial greed, rather than just allow them to skirt metaphorical corners with merely hints of it. Study of the line once again has convinced me that Black has excellent chances of breaking up White's imposing centre, or overextending it.

### The Glorious Saga of Venkat

Advertising is “the science of persuading people to buy what they do not want,” wrote Upton Sinclair, in *The Jungle*. Here is this book’s advertisement for 1 ... b6: I began coaching Venkat three years ago, when

he was 14 years old, and rated around 1850. In the course of a single year, he rocketed to 2150. Then, inexplicably, he froze in stasis for a full two years, his rating unable to budge even a millimetre from the mid to high Expert level. At the time, he played fashionable theoretical opening lines. Soon, the San Diego Masters adjusted and caught on to Venkat's weakness, either outfoxing him in the opening, or forcing him into dull positions (poison to Venkat), where Venkat's strength dropped to the approximate level of a kindergartener who isn't sure how the pieces move.

In desperation, mingled with a fit of pique, I had him trash all his white openings and open with 1 b3 (I was writing my Nimzo-Larsen book at the time and was therefore guaranteed the sale of at least one book). The miracle occurred. Venkat almost immediately began beating masters and his rating rocketed past 2200. Then we began work on 1 ... b6 and his rating continued to sail. At this writing, it stands a shade below the 2300 mark. I actually proposed to Everyman that I write this book, mainly because I studied 1 ... b6 with Venkat. In an unsolicited testimonial, Venkat describes 1 ... b6 (and also 1 b3) as "magic." If you are like Venkat, who revels in murky, non-theoretical tactical positions, then 1 ... b6 is right for you.

## Our Founding Father

According to the Chessmetrics rankings, the Reverend John Owen, the founding father of our opening, was ranked fifth in the world in 1862. Here we see him give the number one ranked player, the great Paul Morphy, a painful lesson on overextension:

*Game 1*

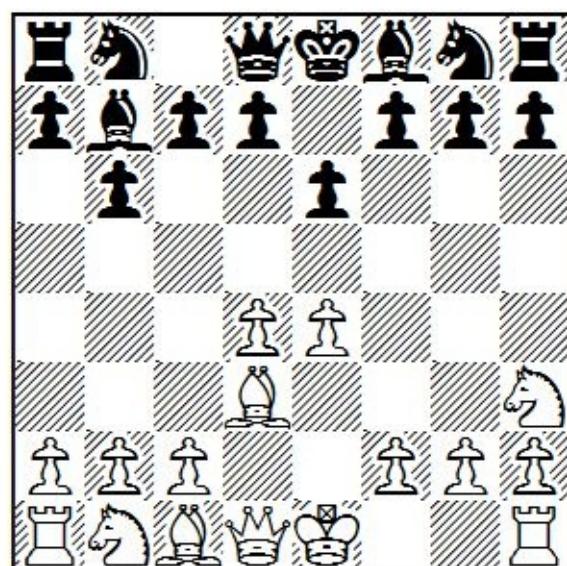
**P.Morphy-J.Owen**

2nd matchgame, London 1858

**1 e4 b6**

Hypermodern players at their core are nature's outcasts. As we note, our opening has been played for a long time. John Owen along with Louis Paulsen and Howard Staunton were the first great hypermoderns, whose play may have inspired Nimzowitsch and Réti to create the hypermodern school in the early decades of the 20th century.

**2 d4 Bb7 3 Bd3 e6 4 Nh3!?**



**Question:** It feels to me like Morphy isn't exactly according his opponent and the Owen's Defence due respect. What is his idea?

**Answer:** Believe it or not, Morphy's last move was theory at the time the game was played. I agree with you though, Morphy - no hypermodern - probably considered the Owen's Defence a heretical affront, since it failed to stake out a pawn centre for Black. Morphy undoubtedly played his last move to allow for a future 0-0, f4 and possibly Ng5 attacking plan.

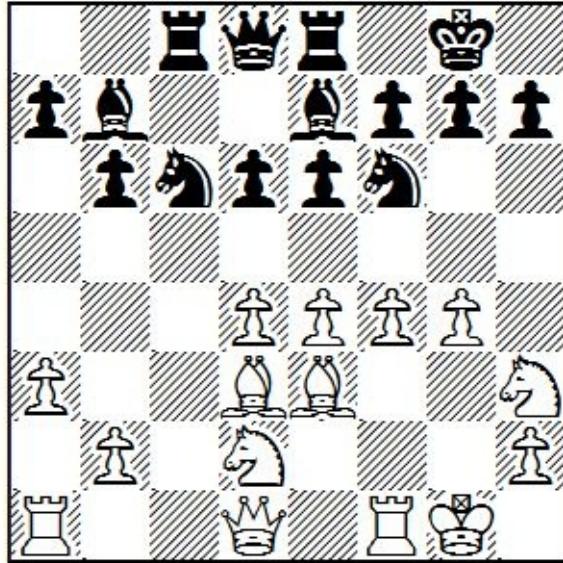
**4 ... c5**

Similar play occurs after 4 ... Nf6 5 f3 c5 6 c3 Nc6 7 Be3 and then:

a) 7 ... cxd4 8 cxd4 was J.Zukertort-H.Bird, Paris 1878. Here Black can consider 8 ... e5!? 9 d5 Nd4 when he is ensured of strong dark-square play if White takes the knight with his dark-squared bishop.

b) 7 ... d5 8 e5 Nd7 9 0-0 Be7 10 Nd2 cxd4 11 cxd4 Nb4 12 Be2 Rc8 13 Bf2 was L.Paulsen-G.Neumann, Berlin 1864. Play enters French-like channels after 13 ... a6 14 a3 Nc6 and now if 15 b4 b5 intending ... Nb6, ... Nc4 and ... a5, with queenside counterplay to offset White's kingside build-up.

c) 7 ... Be7 8 0-0 0-0 9 a3 Rc8 10 Nd2 cxd4 11 cxd4 d6 12 f4!? Re8 13 g4!?.



**Question:** Hmm. Do you sense that White may be another Owen's disrespector?

**Answer:** The thought did cross my mind. After 13 ... g6 14 g5 Nh5 15 f5 (logical, in an illogical way; White is intent to either force mate or overextend in horrible fashion) 15 ... exf5 16 exf5 Bf8 17 fxg6 hxg6 18 Qf3 Qd7 19 Ne4 Bg7 (according to *Houdini*, White is horribly overextended here and losing, no matter how he continues) 20 Bb5? Rxe4! 21 Qxe4 Qxh3 White's position crumbled, H.Suradiradja-M.Chandler, Wellington 1978.

**5 c3**

Morphy backs up his holy pawn centre with pawns.

**5 ... cxd4!**

This looks premature, since it allows White a future Nc3. But if we play it out a couple of moves further, we see Black's intent. He picks up White's valuable light-squared bishop for this knight.

**6 cxd4 Nc6!**

So Owen plays the very first Alekhine's Defence, except on the other side of the board.

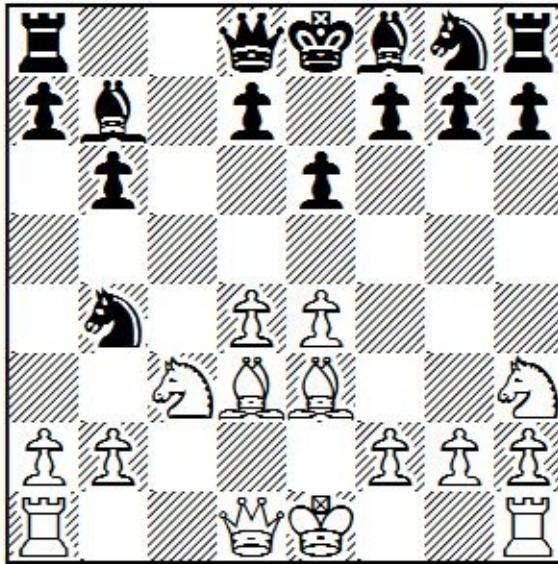
**7 Be3**

7 d5 Ne5 merely loses time for White.

## 7 ... Nb4!

This clever idea is seen in Chapter 5 on the English Defence. Black attacks White's light-squared bishop, who must remain where it stands to secure e4. Owen's move is much stronger than 7 ... Bb4+?! 8 Nc3 Nf6 9 0-0 Bxc3 10 bxc3 Na5?! 11 e5 Nd5 12 Qg4. White enjoys multiple strategic trumps, like the bishop-pair, dark-square control, extra space and kingside attacking chances, G.Mackenzie-H.Bird, Paris 1878.

8 Nc3



8 ... Nxd3+

Now Black rules the light squares for the remainder of the game.

**Question:** Are you saying that Black's bishop-pair and light-square control outweigh White's strong pawn centre and development lead?

**Answer:** Maybe it's stylistic, but it feels that way to me. I would take Black since I don't see an obvious way for White to immediately open the game to exploit his development lead.

9 Qxd3 Bb4

Black can play for pure light-square strategy with 9 ... f5!? 10 f3 (10 exf5 Bxg2 11 Bg5 Be7 12 Rg1 Bxh3 13 Qxh3 Bxg5 14 Qh5+ Kf8 15 Rxg5 g6 16 fxg6 hxg6 17 Qxg6 Qf6 18 0-0-0 Qxg6 19 Rxg6 Rxh2 looks okay for Black) 10 ... fxe4 11 fxe4 Qh4+ 12 Nf2 Nf6 13 0-0 Bb4 14 e5 Ng4 15 Nxg4 Qxg4 (threatening mate on g2) 16 Rf2 Bxc3 17 bxc3 Qe4! 18 Qd2 Ba6! with dynamic equality at a minimum, since Black's domination of the light squares looks more potent than White's control of dark. Of course your annotator had the knowledge advantage over Owen by having studied Nimzowitsch's theories when I was a kid.

10 0-0 Bxc3!?

Introducing a new factor: opposite-coloured bishops.

11 bxc3 Nf6 12 e5

Forward. Morphy's honour demanded it. But seizing space isn't for free, since it enhances Black's power on the light squares, a theme we see recurring over and over throughout the book. Of course nobody in 1858 would play the more circumspect 12 f3 which is the move your cautious writer would play.

**12 ... Nd5 13 c4**

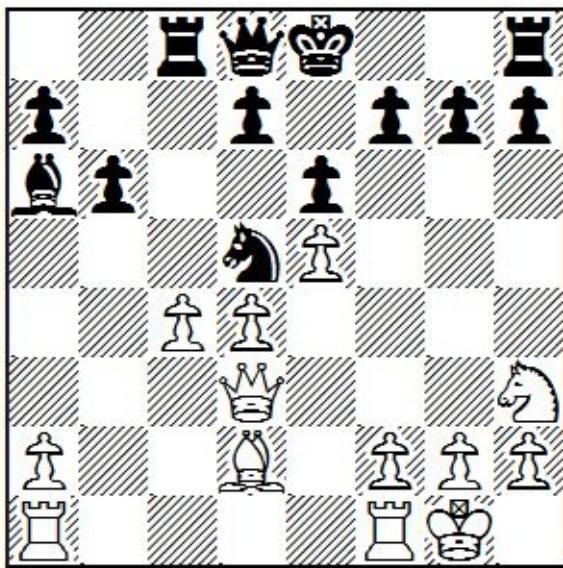
13 Bg5 only helps Black after 13 ... f6 14 Bd2 (14 exf6!? is dangerous since Black opens the g-file for his major pieces with 14 ... gxf6) 14 ... 0-0.

**13 ... Ba6??**

Pinning c4, but the move smacks of the artificial. Black should just play 13 ... Nxe3 14 fxe3 0-0 which looks just fine for him.

**14 Bd2 Rc8?!**

Correct is 14 ... Ne7.



**Exercise (combination alert):** Black's last move overlooked a tactic. White to play and secure an advantage:

**15 Rac1?!**

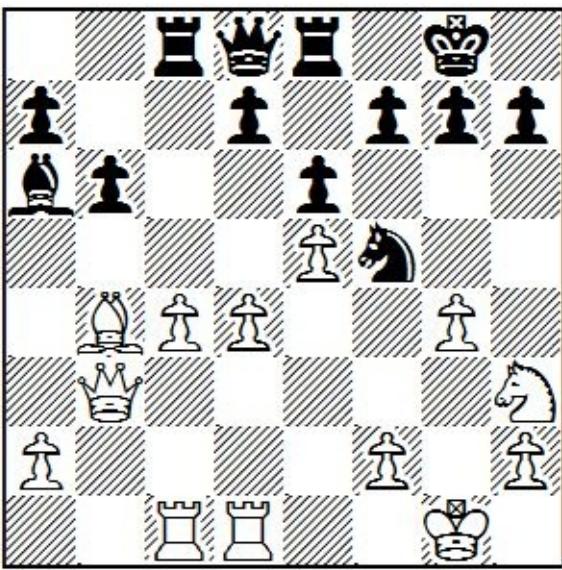
The normally hyper-alert Morphy almost never missed a combination and had the ability to see around corners. Here he uncharacteristically does so. This allows Black to escape.

**Answer:** Instead, Black is in trouble after 15 Qg3!. Double attack. White simultaneously threatens g7 and d5. Black has no choice but to enter 15 ... Bxc4 (15 ... g6?? 16 cxd5 Bxf1 17 Bg5 Qc7 18 Qa3! d6 19 Rxfl is completely hopeless) 16 Qxg7 Rf8 17 Bh6 Qe7 18 Rfc1 f5 19 Qxf8+ Qxf8 20 Bxf8 Kxf8. Black's light-square domination doesn't fully make up for the fact that he remains down an exchange in an ending.

**15 ... 0-0 16 Qb3 Ne7 17 Bb4**

17 Qa4 Bb7 18 Qxa7 Qc7 19 Qa3 Nf5 20 Bb4 Rfd8 21 Rfd1 d6 22 exd6 Nxd6 23 Bxd6 Rxd6 24 Qe3 Rc6 25 c5 bxc5 26 dxc5 h6 when c5 falls and Black stands at least even.

**17 ... Re8 18 Rfd1 Nf5 19 g4?!**



My mother's advice: only spend that which you can afford. The nature of genius is that it thinks unfathomable thoughts, which are clear only to itself. We have knowledge of 'then' and 'now', but we can only guess at 'tomorrow'. In this case White's attacking wishes are constrained by a thousand self-inflicted difficulties. The g-pawn is the person who buys lottery tickets he can't afford, yet soars with optimistic hopes for success, even when the statistical analysis says otherwise.

As we all know from those faces of saints, the Virgin Mary, Buddha, Krishna, Muhammad and Jesus embedded into the surface of grilled cheese sandwiches, the human brain tends to project patterns from that which is essentially random patternlessness. In this instance, Morphy imputes 'attack' from a move which only weakens. Why is it that so often the delivery of checkmate is just a fanciful land, whose reality is of our own imagination's making?

**Question:** Isn't this terribly loosening?

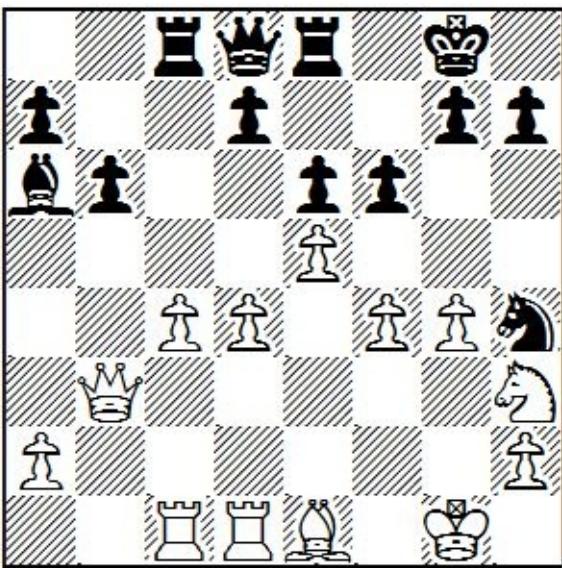
**Answer:** My top priority is to build a time machine and send myself back to around 1850, where I would be a world championship contender, rather than the present day IM in 2014, where even small children beat me. To answer your question, yes, the move creates a dreadful loosening of the light squares around White's king, and I think an average club player today comprehends this instantly. In Morphy's chivalric Golden Age, such honour-driven 'attacking' pawn stabs were the order of the day.

The trouble is all lines work in Black's favour, even the defensive ones. For example:

a) 19 Nf4 Qg5 20 g3 h5 21 Rd3 h4 22 Bd2 hxg3 23 hxg3 Qg4 24 Be1 d5! 25 exd6 Nxd6 26 Rdc3 Red8 27 Qa4 Bb7 28 d5 Ne4 29 Re3 Ng5. Now if 30 Qxa7? Bxd5 gives Black a winning attack.

b) Relatively best is 19 f3! Rc6 20 c5 Be2 21 Rd2 Qh4! 22 Qc3! (22 Rxe2?? Nxd4 and the problem is 23 Rc4 Nxe2+ 24 Kf1 Qh5 25 Qe3 bxc5 26 Rxc5 Rxc5, and if 27 Bxc5 Qg6 28 Qxe2 Qb1+ 29 Kf2 Rc8 30 Be3 Rc2 31 Bd2 Qb2 32 Ke1 Qa1+ 33 Kf2 Qxa2 when White's bishop is too tangled to save itself) 22 ... Bb5 23 Nf2 Ne7 24 Qb2 Nd5 25 Ne4 Rb8 when White still hangs in there.

**19 ... Nh4 20 f4 f6 21 Be1!**



Wow. A defensive move. Unheard of in 1858.

### **21 ... fxe5**

21 ... f5! 22 g5 Ng6 23 Qa4 Bb7 24 d5 (the greedy 24 Qxa7?? is punished by 24 ... Bf3 when Black threatens both the d1-rook and ... Ra8, trapping White's queen; after 25 Qa4 Ra8 26 Qb3 Bxd1 27 Rxd1 Qc7 White's position is way too loose for any real chance for salvation) 24 ... Qc7 25 Bf2 exd5 26 c5 Re6 27 Be3 bxc5 28 Rxc5 Rc6 with a clear advantage to Black, who has an extra pawn and attacking chances.

### **22 dxe5 Qe7?!**

Transferring the bishop to the h1-a8 diagonal with 22 ... Bb7! may have been more accurate.

### **23 Ng5!**

Threatening the h4-knight and preparing to transfer the g5-knight to d6, via e4.

### **23 ... h6!**

Owen, unlike most of the other top rivals of his day, was a savvy defensive player - a necessary skill to survive 1 ... b6. Instead, after 23 ... Ng6 24 Bb4 Qd8 25 Qh3 h6 26 Ne4 Nxf4 (Black can't survive 26 ... Rxc4?? 27 Nf6+! gxf6 28 Rxc4 Bxc4 29 Qxh6 Nxe5 30 fxe5, and if 30 ... fxe5 31 Qg6+ Kh8 32 Bd6 forces mate) 27 Qe3 Ng6 28 Nd6 Rc7 29 Nxe8 Qxe8 30 Rd4 when it is Black who struggles down an exchange.

### **24 Ne4!**

Threatening to pick up the exchange. Morphy hopes to offset and dilute the black bishop's authority on the h1-a8 diagonal by planting a knight on d6. Not 24 Bxh4?! hxg5 and if 25 Bxg5? Qc5+ 26 Kg2 Bxc4 when the opposite-coloured bishops give Black a powerful attack.

### **24 ... Bb7!**

Enterprising. Owen offers an exchange to rid himself of White's powerful knight. After 24 ... Rf8 25 Bg3 Bb7 26 Qe3 Rc7 27 Rc2 everything is covered and White's space gives him the edge.

### **25 Qd3**

Alternatively:

a) 25 Nd6?! Nf3+ 26 Kf1 Nxh2+ 27 Kf2 Rf8! 28 Nxb7 Rxf4+ 29 Kg2 Nxg4 30 Bg3 Rfxc4! 31 Rxc4 Rxc4 32 Nd6 (the c4-rook can't be touched due to the fork on e3) 32 ... Rc5. Four pawns and White's insecure king ensure that Black remains better, despite White's extra piece.

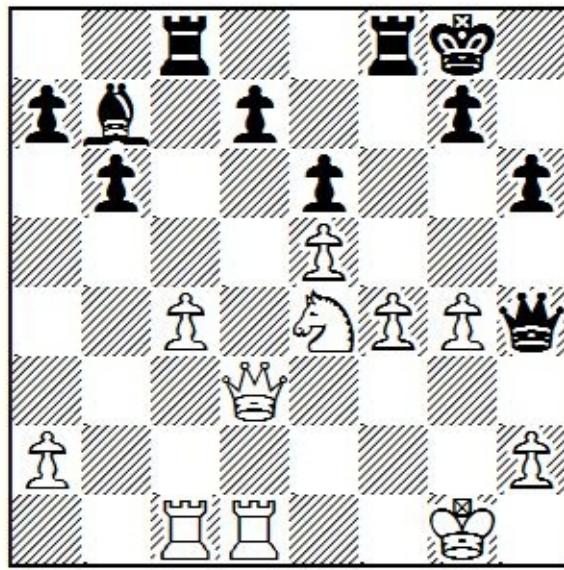
b) 25 Bxh4 Qxh4 26 Nd6 Rf8! 27 Qg3! (27 Nxb7 Rxf4 28 h3 Rcf8 29 Rf1 Rxg4+! 30 hxg4 Qxg4+ 31 Kh2 Qe2+ is drawn by perpetual check) 27 ... Qxg3+ 28 hxg3 Rb8 29 Kf2 Bc6 30 Ke3 g6 and I would

take White if given a choice, since his knight is at least equal to the bishop, and he controls more space.

**25 ... Rf8**

Pressuring f4.

**26 Bxh4 Qxh4**



After much bereavement, anguish, exhaustion of resources, and the shedding of blood, White's attack has yet to produce the hoped-for yield. All outward indicators point to Morphy's position being on the verge of collapse:

1. g4 hangs.
2. As does f4.
3. White faces the wrath of Black's light-squared bishop down the h1-a8 diagonal.

**Exercise (combination alert):** Yet if you find Morphy's next move, it is White who stands slightly better. What would you play here?

**Answer:** Interference/annihilation of king's cover.

**27 Nf6+!**

"It seems we have a mutual enemy. Perhaps we may profit from our association," the knight tells his queen. The two thugs grin in mutual understanding at the black king's discomfort. The knight, uttering contempt to gravity itself, leaps about in a manner which appears to violate the laws of physics. Intimidation is often the precursor of outright extortion. When we get away with what was initially a high-risk plan, we must admit to a kind of acquisitive thrill a criminal feels in the successful perpetration of a crime.

**27 ... Rxf6!**

Black's still solid position is the house on Halloween with all the lights turned off. The implication: no candy for you! No choice, since 27 ... gxf6?? is crushed by 28 Qg6+ Kh8 (is it just me, or do you also see that Black's haggard king bears a striking resemblance to Keith Richards, after a particularly gruelling night of partying?) 29 Rxd7 Qxg4+ 30 Qxg4 Rg8 31 Qxg8+ Rxg8+ 32 Kf2 and Black can resign, down an exchange.

**28 exf6 Qxg4+ 29 Qg3**

By forcing queens off the board, Morphy reduces Black's attacking clutter and debris.

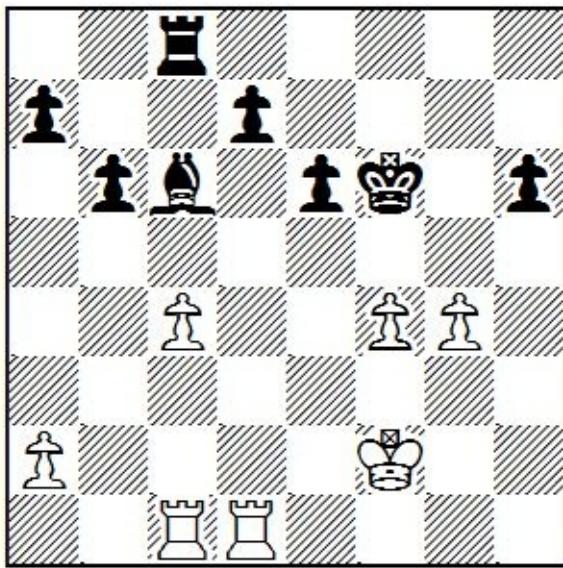
**29 ... Qxg3+ 30 hxg3 Bc6**

The d7 base must be secured.

**31 fxg7 Kxg7**

In the aftermath, White is up an exchange for a pawn. However, Black has decent chances since White is burdened with a loose structure.

**32 Kf2 Kf6 33 g4**



**Exercise (planning):** Owen found a powerful defensive plan. What would you play here as Black?

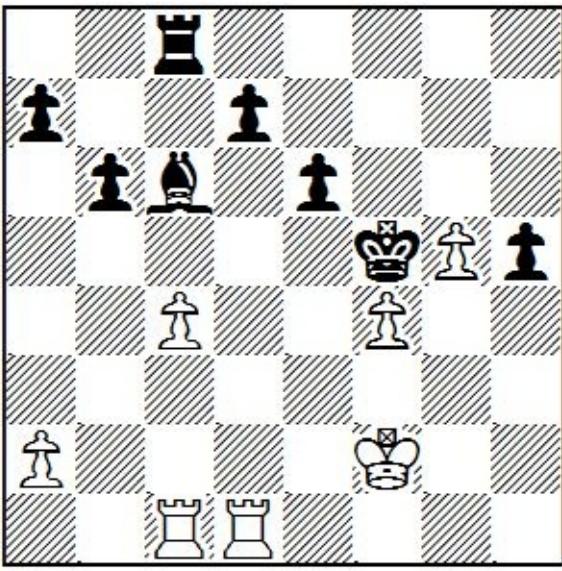
**Answer: 33 ... h5!!**

Owen continues to inflict light-square erosions with ominous deliberation. After this move all of Black's apprehensions are removed. A brilliant strategic decision for the time. We must remember that Nimzowitsch wasn't even an embryo at the time and his theories of weakness of colour complexes were a void in the chess world. This temporary pawn sacrifice creates deep fissions in White's light squares. Today, I think the majority of club players would spot 33 ... h5, which I would downgrade to just one exclamation, because we all read Nimzowitsch.

**34 g5+!?**

When we are nauseous, we are unable to eat the food in front of us, no matter how appealing it may be for others. The position is clearly no more than a lukewarm peace accord, to be broken by one party or the other, on the flimsiest of pretexts. Morphy goes for the full point. White creates a passed pawn, at the cost of giving Black a dangerous passer as well. 34 gxh5 appears headed for a draw after 34 ... Rh8 35 Rc3 Rxh5 36 Kg3 Rh7 37 Ra3 d5 38 Rc1 dxc4 39 Rxc4 Rg7+ 40 Kf2 Bd5 41 Rc8 Rg2+ 42 Ke1 Kf5 43 Rxa7 Kxf4 when Black stands no worse and the logical end result is probably a draw.

**34 ... Kf5**



**35 Ke3?**

**Question:** Why would you give Morphy's last move a question mark, when it followed the principle: centralize your king in an ending?

**Answer:** This is why chess is an infuriatingly difficult game. In this case, following principle is incorrect since White's king must help halt Black's passed h-pawn with the counterintuitive 35 Kg3! e5 36 fxe5 Kxg5 37 Rd6 Bb5 38 Rd4 Rc5 39 Rd5 h4+ 40 Kh2 Rxd5 41 cxd5 Kf5 42 e6 dxe6 43 dxe6 Kxe6 44 Rc7 a6 45 Rb7 Kd5 46 Rxb6 Kc5 47 Rf6 Kb4 48 Rf3 Bc4 49 a3+ Ka4 50 Kh3 Bb3 51 Rf6 Bc4 52 Rxa6+ Bxa6 53 Kxh4 Kxa3, and it's a draw.

**35 ... h4**

Now the passed h-pawn is a force to be reckoned with.

**36 Rd2 h3 37 Rh2?**

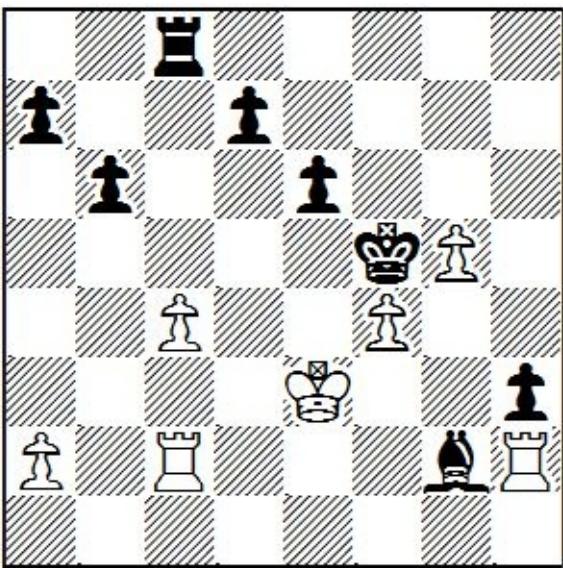
In the frenzy of a long game (Morphy and his contemporaries didn't always play with clocks; I remember reading that Morphy began to shed literal tears of frustration when Paulsen refused to move for over an hour, and when Morphy finally overcame his well-mannered aristocratic upbringing and asked Paulsen to move, Paulsen replied: "Oh! Is it my move?") fatigue makes our disjointed thoughts and impulses flow in a welter of multiple directions, any and all of which may mean our defeat. How are we to know that West draws, while Southeast loses on the spot?

The text entombs the rook. White's last hope lay in a second-rank defence, with the inhuman computer miracle defence 37 Re1!! Rh8 38 Ree2! Kg4 39 Rf2 Kg3 40 Kd4 d6! (40 ... h2?? 41 Rxh2, and if 41 ... Rxh2?? 42 Rxh2 Kxh2 43 g6 leaves Black embarrassed by the fact that his bishop is unable to halt the promotion of the g-pawn) 41 Ke3 Bg2! 42 Rd3! Rc8 (42 ... h2 43 Ke2+ Kg4 44 Rxg2+ Kf5 45 Rd1 h1Q 46 Rxh1 Rxh1 47 g6 Rh8 48 g7 Rg8 49 Ke3 Kf6 50 Rd2 Ke7 51 Rg2 Kf7 52 Rd2 and the game is drawn by repetition) 43 Rdd2 Rxc4 44 g6 Rc8 45 f5 exf5 46 Rxf5 Re8+ 47 Kd4 Re4+ 48 Kc3 Rg4 49 Rd3+ Kh2 50 Rxd6 Be4 51 Rf7 Bxg6 52 Rxa7 b5 53 Rg7 b4+ 54 Kd2 Rg2+ 55 Ke3 Bb1 56 Rb7 Rxa2 57 Rxd2+! Rxd2 58 Kxd2 Kg2 59 Rxb4 Bf5 60 Rh4 h2 61 Rxh2+ Kxh2, with a draw.

**37 ... Bg2**

"I am the intermediary between laity and Divinity," declares the bishop, self-importantly.

**38 Rc2**



**Exercise (combination alert):** Black to play and win.

**Answer: 38 ... d5!**

Pin. Black wins another pawn and wins the ensuing rook and pawn ending.

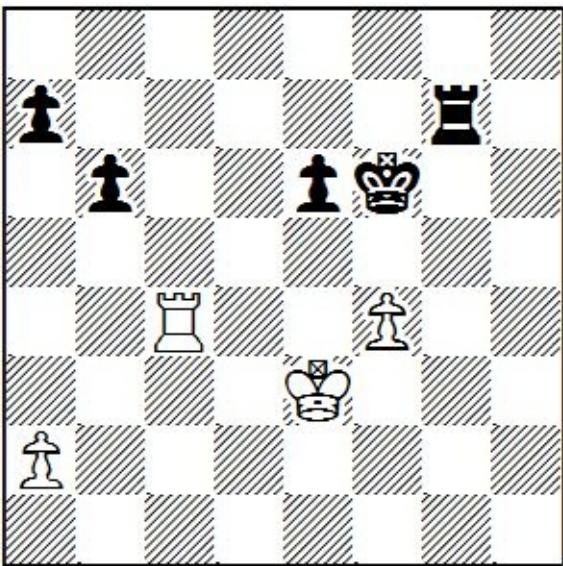
**39 g6**

Desperation. 39 Rxg2 hxg2 40 Rxg2 Rxc4 41 g6 Rc8 42 g7 Rg8 43 Kf3 Kf6 wins.

**39 ... dxc4**

And most certainly not 39 ... Rxc4?? 40 Rxc4 dxc4 41 g7 when the g-pawn promotes.

**40 g7 Rg8 41 Rxg2 hxg2 42 Rxg2 Kf6 43 Rc2 Rxg7 44 Rxc4**



**Exercise (planning):** Come up with a concrete winning plan for Black:

**Answer:** Step 1: Activate the rook, swinging it over to a3, where it attacks a2 and defends Black's only weakness on a7.

**44 ... Rg3+! 45 Ke4 Ra3!**

Step 2: Attack a2, which follows the endgame principle: *tie your opponent's rook down to a pawn weakness if possible.*

## 46 Rc2

Step 3: Push White's king back and pick off either f4 or a2, with the help of Black's king, who is now allowed entry to f5.

## 46 ... Ra4+! 0-1

Black picks off a second pawn after 47 Ke3 Kf5 48 Rc7 Rxa2. "I believe wholeheartedly in the concept of 'sharing', where each party gives freely, without holding back," declares the rook, as he seizes his 100% 'share' of the loot.

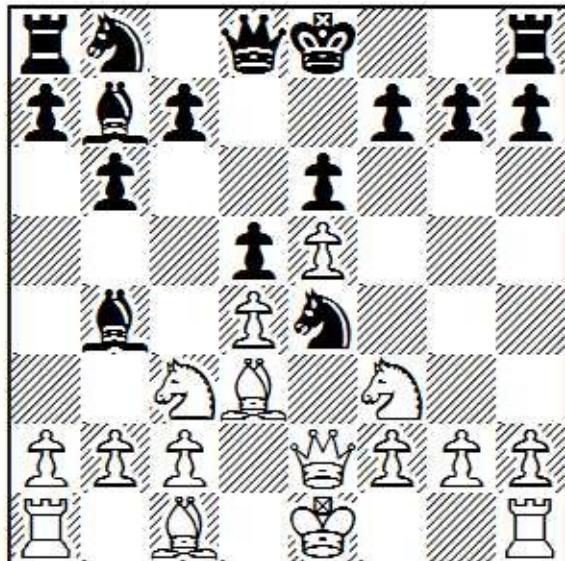
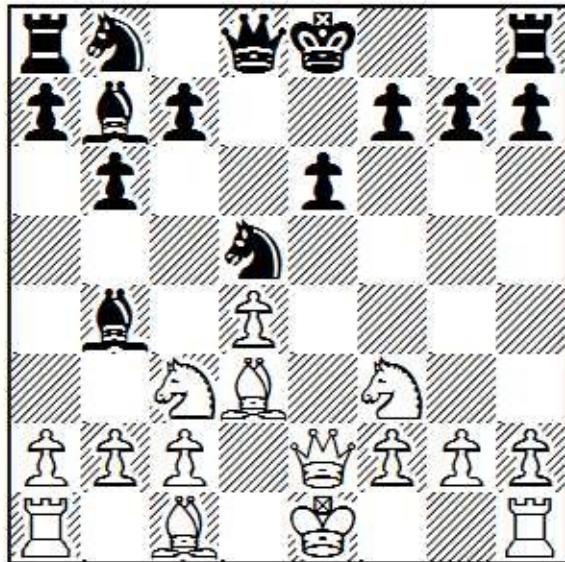
**Summary:** The Owen's Defence has a poor theoretical reputation, but is this based in fact? Having studied the line in this book, I think it is a fully viable defence.

Many thanks to my editors at Everyman for the final edit. Thanks also to Nancy, Associate Regional VP in charge of commas and semicolons. May our opponents raise their eyebrows at least a quarter inch in polite yet confused inquiry at the sight of our first move, 1 ... b6!.

Cyrus Lakdawala,  
San Diego, November 2014

# Chapter One

## Owen's Defence: Lines Involving Nc3



In this chapter, we examine Owen's Defence with White developing the b1-knight to c3, which from my observations on the club and internet level is White's most common set-up. Usually these opponents are the kind who play Nc3 versus the French Defence and feel comfortable, even when we manage to inflict doubled c-pawns on c2 and c3. In my research for this chapter, I stumbled upon a shadowy truth: I don't believe White manages to pull off even a slight edge in any variation in the chapter, as long as we remain aware of the hidden criteria which fit the position's unique defensive needs.

The above three diagrammed positions are critical to this chapter; in each case we 1 ... b6ers seem to be holding our own. The appearance of all three is in the nature of a suspicious calm before the real storm. In the top position we are compensated for White's centre and attacking chances by the structural

damage on c3. In the middle position, White either protects c3, accepting a sour French Defence-style position, or they castle, sacrificing c3 for initiative and attack, based on the equation: time=money. Their philosophy: momentum is a powerful energy, where success tends to breed success. Confidently accept the offer. Our resources are more than adequate. White often experiences difficulties policing both wings on his vast frontiers.

In the third position, White can play Nd2, reacting to our ... e5 with f4!?, which turns the game into a strange King's Gambit, where our side should achieve dynamic equality. The line between opportunity gained or missed fades quickly. So don't wing it in this chapter (or any other chapter in the book), and be thoroughly familiar with our set-ups and themes and you will abandon all misgivings about our opening's alleged 'unsound' nature.

## *Game 2*

**L.Yudasin-P.Blatny**

New York (rapid) 2004

### **1 e4 b6 2 d4 Bb7 3 Nc3**

This is very common, especially at the club level but it may not be White's best option. White refuses to play move order games and simply posts his b1-knight to its most central square. We also look at 3 Bd3, perhaps White's most accurate move, in this chapter.

**Question:** Why would White seek to delay the c3-posting?

**Answer:** Two reasons:

1. In a sense, an early Nc3 plays into Black's hands, since it allows the pin, ... Bb4, which allows our side to apply pressure on White's centre.
2. If White posts a knight early on c3, he is unable to meet ... c5 with c3, backing up a big pawn centre.

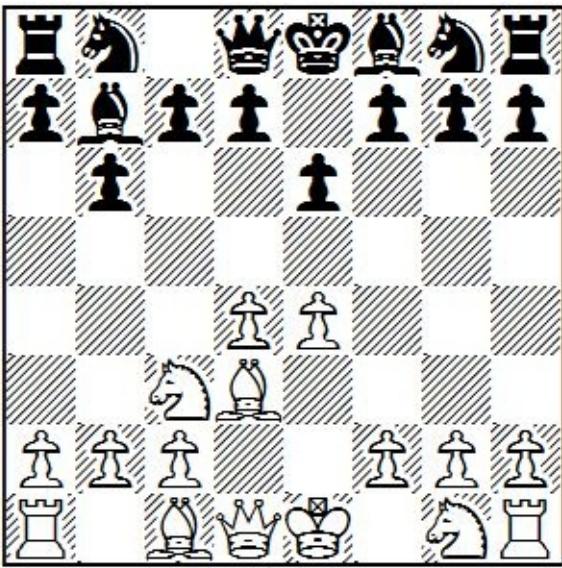
**Question:** So what? White allows ... Bb4 in the Winawer French, and nobody frowns upon that.

**Answer:** The difference between the Owen's ... Bb4 and the Winawer is that Black's central pawns are unfixed and therefore offer our side a variety of set-ups, which is not the case for Black in the Winawer. I think this factor allows Black to equalize against an early Nc3.

**3 ... e6**

Preparing ... Bb4.

**4 Bd3**



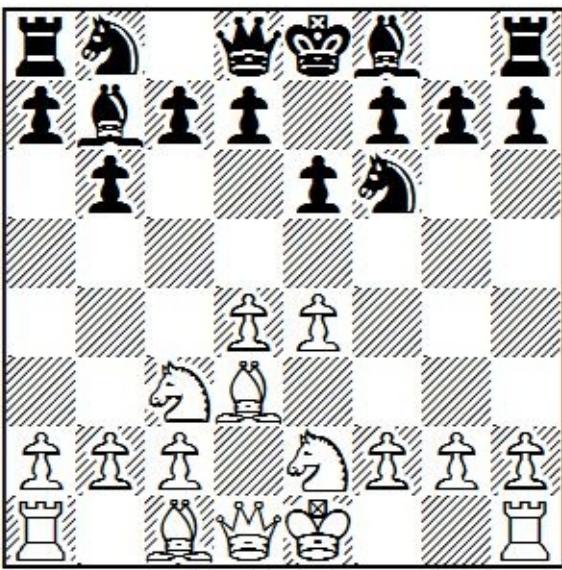
4 Nf3 usually transposes to positions from this chapter. We look at 4 a3 in Chapter Four, where we switch over to the Hippopotamus double fianchetto formation, where White essentially tossed in the useless a3.

**4 ... Nf6**

**Question:** Can Black toss in ... f5 here?

**Answer:** ... f5 tends to be disastrous for Black, if White hasn't yet played c4. For example, 4 ... f5 5 exf5! Bxg2 6 Qh5+ g6 (6 ... Ke7?? hangs a piece when simplest is 7 Qg5+) 7 fxg6 (threat: g7+) 7 ... Bg7 (7 ... Nf6?? 8 g7+ Nxh5 9 gxh8Q and if 9 ... Bxh1 10 Qxh7 is curtains for Black, whose h5-knight hangs, and he faces a Bg6 mating threat to boot) 8 gxh7+ Kf8 9 Nf3! (even stronger than both 9 Be4 Nf6 10 Qg6 Bxh1 11 Bxh1 Nc6 12 Bxc6 dxc6 13 Nf3 when White has a dangerous attack, and 9 hxg8Q+?; believe it or not, Black is okay after this hasty attempt to regain some material, and after 9 ... Kxg8 10 Qg4 Bxh1 11 Bg5 Qf8 I don't think White stands any better) 9 ... Nf6 10 Qh4 Bxh1 (or 10 ... Bxf3 11 Rg1 when Rxg7 is a devastating threat and after 11 ... Bh5 12 Ne4 Rxh7 13 Rxg7! Rxg7 14 Nxf6 Rg1+ 15 Kd2 Bf7 16 Kc3! White has a crushing attack) 11 Ne5 Nc6 12 Bg5 1-0, M.Yeo-A.Mundal, Dresden 2013. If Black continues with 12 ... Nb4 13 Bg6 there is no good defence to the coming Ng4.

**5 Nge2**



I have had this move played on me several times in internet blitz games. 5 Nf3 Bb4 reaches the position of the remainder of the games in this chapter.

**Question:** Why would White deliberately post his knight to a less central square, when he has access to f3?

**Answer:** White posts on e2 with the following reasons:

1. On e2, White's knight backs up the c3-knight to have the option of recapturing with the knight, in case Black ever thinks about ... Bb4 and ... Bxc3+.
2. White keeps the path clear for his f-pawn, with options of the aggressive f4, or f3, which backs up the e4-square.

**Question:** This sounds great for White. Why isn't this move more popular than posting the knight to f3?

**Answer:** Please see Blatny's sixth move for the answer!

**5 ... c5**

Black's logical response. 5 ... Bb4?! makes no sense here since White's entire construct is designed against the move. After 6 a3! Be7 Black essentially gave White the useful free move a3 and stands worse, A.Kosteniuk-C.Herbrechtsmeier, Biel 2004, while 6 ... Bxc3+ 7 Nxc3 just hands White the bishop pair without an iota of compensation.

**6 0-0**

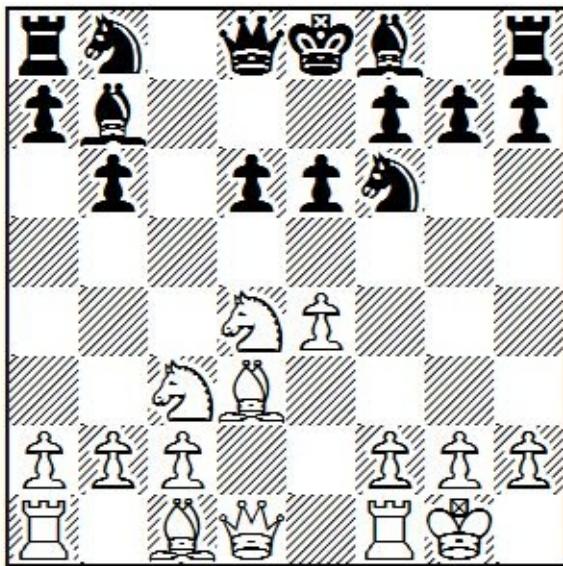
6 d5 is a dangerous gambit (which actually should be given an exclam), analysed by Andrew Greet, which I think Black is better off declining with 6 ... Na6 (6 ... exd5 7 exd5 Nxd5 8 Nxd5 Bxd5 9 0-0 Nc6 10 Nf4 Be6 11 Re1 was I.Smikovski-V.Osipov, Omsk 2001; Paul Morphy's games warn us of the folly of such pawn grabs, where White leads massively in development and a dangerous attack looms over the black king's head) 7 Bc4, as in A.Petrosian-J.Degraeve, Saint Affrique 2014. After 7 ... exd5 (Black can also try 7 ... Bd6 8 Bg5 Nc7 9 f4 h6 10 Bxf6 gxf6 11 0-0 Qe7 12 a4 Rg8 13 Ng3 0-0-0 when White's space means more than Black's dark squares) 8 Nxd5 Nxd5 9 Bxd5 Bxd5 (every swap helps Black) 10 Qxd5 Nb4 11 Qd1 Qf6 12 c3 Nc6 13 Bf4 0-0-0 14 0-0 Qe6 15 Qc2 Be7 when ... d5 is coming and Black looks okay to me.

**6 ... Qc8!?**

Perhaps Blatny viewed Nimzowitsch as a past incarnation of himself. Threat: ... c4, smothering White's bishop. Blatny's ambitious move attempts to exploit White's knight posting on e2.

Black has two other playable options:

a) 6 ... cxd4 7 Nxd4 d6 sees Black take the game into Scheveningen Sicilian-like channels.



**Question:** But isn't this a somewhat passive version?

After all, Black wastes a tempo if he ever plays for ... a6 and ... b5.

**Answer:** True enough, but White's set-up has less flexibility than a normal Scheveningen, since the bishop is posted on d3, rather than on e2, so it may just be a trade-off. One word of caution though: I would avoid this version if you have no Open Sicilian experience with one of the following lines as Black: Scheveningen, Najdorf, Kan or Taimanov. After 8 f4 a6 9 g4!? (this may be dangerous for both sides but still possibly inadvisable, since Black has yet to commit his king and isn't forced to castle kingside into the teeth of White's pawn storm; much calmer is 9 Be3 intending Qf3) 9 ... Nfd7 (getting out of the way of the coming g5) 10 Be3 Be7 11 g5 Nc6 12 Nxc6 Bxc6 13 Qg4 b5 14 Rf2 g6 15 Ra1 h6 16 Bd4 h5 17 Qg3 Rg8 18 h4 Qc7 19 b4!? (once again, 19 a3 is the calmer choice; White's last move, although aggressive, also weakens his queenside and c4) 19 ... Qb7 20 f5!? (thematic but obviously risky, at the same time) 20 ... gxf5 21 exf5 e5 22 Be3? (22 f6! is correct: 22 ... Nxf6! 23 Bxe5 dxe5 24 Rxf6 Bxf6 25 Rxf6 e4 26 Be2 Qa7+ 27 Kf1 Rg6 with a complete mess, which *Houdini* rates at dead even) 22 ... d5 (principle: *counter in the centre when assaulted on the wing*; Black threatens ... d4, as well as ... Bxb4) 23 Bd2 Bxb4 White found himself in deep trouble and lost quickly, T.Studnicka-V.Laznicka, Pardubice 2005.

b) 6 ... Nc6!? 7 d5 Ne5 (Black picks up the bishop-pair, in exchange for White's extra space and development lead) 8 f4 (or 8 Ng3 Nxd3 9 Qxd3 Bd6!? 10 f4 c4! when 11 Qe2 is met with 11 ... h5! and 11 Qxc4 Ng4 12 h3 Bc5+ 13 Kh1 Nf2+ 14 Kh2 Qh4 15 Nce2 Ng4+ 16 Kh1 Nf2+ is a draw) 8 ... Nxd3 9 Qxd3 was G.Li-A.Kvon, Tashkent 2010. Now 9 ... c4! 10 Qxc4 Bc5+ 11 Kh1 Ng4 12 h3 Qh4 results in a probable draw by perpetual check on f2 and g4.

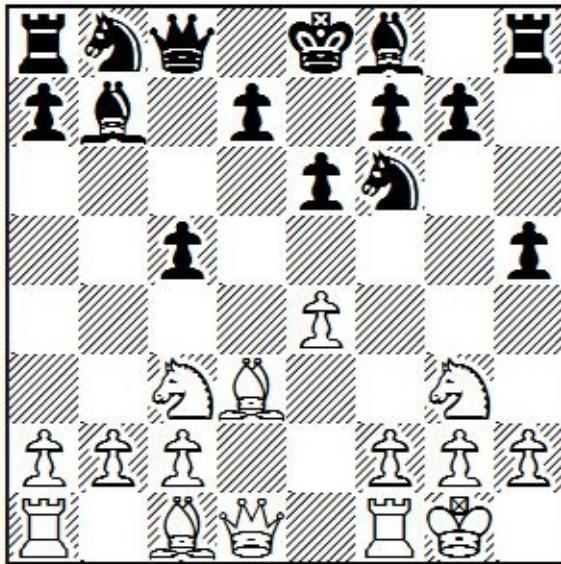
**7 dxc5!?**

*Houdini* likes 7 e5!?. Yudasin hands Black greater central pawn influence, counting on his development lead.

**7 ... bxc5!?**

Ambitious. GM Glenn Flear writes: “Still threatening ... c4 winning a piece. Note that Black now has a central pawn majority which makes it harder for White to find any pawn breaks in that zone.” 7 ... Bxc5 is also playable, with an Open Sicilian-like position.

**8 Ng3 h5!?**



My friend, GM Pavel Blatny, has an almost inbred loathing of orthodox positions, and strives mightily to weird it up.

**Question:** Isn't Black asking for it, violating the principle:  
*don't fall behind in development in an open position?*

**Answer:** Flear answers your question: “Very manly and obviously not flinching at the prospect of having his king stuck in the centre again”. Black's ... h5 idea, also common to the Kan Sicilian, is to gain a tempo and weaken White's king with the coming ... h4 and ... h3, or, play a future ... Ng4, which can be hard to meet if White tosses in f4. However, 8 ... d6 is probably what I would play.

**9 h4!?**

A move based on the philosophy: to kill an opponent's idea in its infancy is a lot easier than trying to overcome it in its maturity. To be unyielding in our beliefs is only of benefit if your belief isn't misguided, as it appears to be in White's case. I'm not sure if White's last move was a defensive move, or a subliminal gesture of intent to launch future aggression against Black's king. In any case, the move looks like an overcorrection which plays into Black's hands by weakening the kingside. He may have been better off with 9 e5! (principle: *meet a wing attack with a central counter*) 9 ... Nd5 10 Nxd5 Bxd5 11 c4 Bb7 12 Re1 h4 13 Ne4 Nc6 14 Ng5!, taking advantage of the fact that Black doesn't have access to ... h6. White may hold a tiny edge.

**9 ... Nc6 10 Re1**

Perhaps angling for Nd5 tricks. 10 Bf4 prevents Black's coming move.

**10 ... Bd6!?**

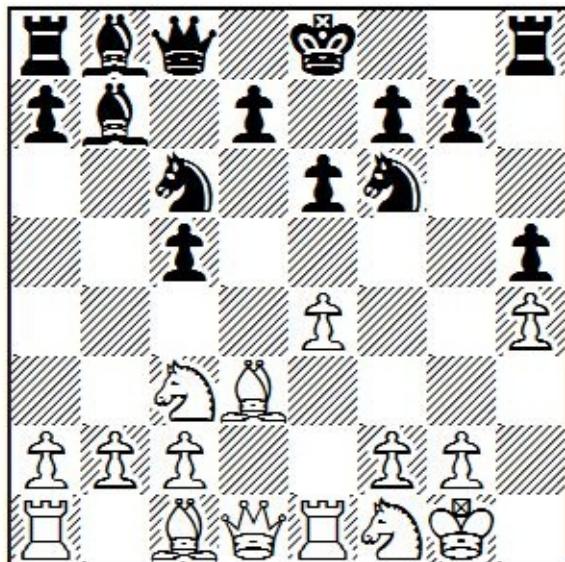
An attempt to seize the central dark squares, but with a hasty move order. 10 ... Qb8! is the safer and more accurate way to implement this idea.

**11 Nf1**

After 11 Nb5! Bb8 12 Be2 Bxg3 13 fxg3 Nxe4 14 Bf4 0-0 15 Bd3! (or 15 Bxh5 Ne7 16 c4 a6 17 Nd6

Nxd6 18 Bxd6 Re8 19 Qd2 Nf5 20 Rad1 Qc6 21 Bf3 Qxd6 22 Qxd6 Nxd6 23 Rxd6 Bxf3 24 gxf3 Reb8 25 b3 Rb7 when Black is okay) 15 ... d5 16 Bxe4 dxe4 17 Nd6 Qc7 18 Qxh5 e5 19 Bxe5 Nxe5 20 Qxe5 Rfe8 21 Qf4 Re6 22 Nxb7 Qxb7 23 b3 Rae8 White stands a little better, but won't have an easy time of it converting his extra pawn, since Black remains very active and his passed e-pawn cramps White.

**11 ... Bb8**



"Out of harm's way, but still pointing in the right direction," writes Flear.

**12 b3 Ne7**

Heading for g6. Blatny methodically masses on the kingside for his coming assault.

**13 Bg5 Ng6**

Bringing the h4-pawn into the equation.

**14 Qd2 Nh7! 15 Na4?!**

Handing Black the defender of White's dark squares is not a great idea. Yudasin should settle for 15 Be3 Nxh4!? (15 ... Nf6 16 Bg5 Nh7 is drawn by repetition) 16 Na4 d6 17 Qc3 Nf6 18 Bg5 Ng6 19 Bxf6 gxf6 20 Qxf6 Bc7 21 Ne3 Kf8 when Black looks slightly better, due to his influence on the dark squares.

**15 ... Be5 16 Rad1 Nxe5 17 Qxg5 d6**

Black controls the dark squares and holds the advantage.

**18 Bb5+?!**

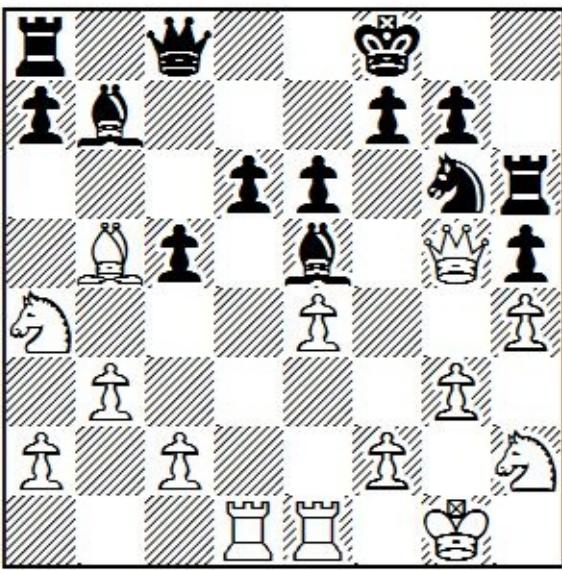
A waste of time since it forces Black to make a move he desires. The admittedly unappetizing 18 g3 looks more accurate.

**18 ... Kf8 19 g3 Rh6!**

Sometimes the least promising candidate turns out to be the most successful for the job. Blatny activates his sleeping rook and sets up a trap, which Yudasin misses.

**20 Nh2?**

20 c3! avoided Blatny's coming trick.



**Exercise (combination alert):** White doesn't sense the danger and his last move is not in accord with his position's needs. What did he miss?

**Answer:** A queen trap!

**20 ... Nf4!!**

When fantasy and reality collide, the former tends to take it on the chin - but not this time. With this shot, threatening both ... Nh3+ and also ... Rg6, Blatny reveals a deeply hidden vulnerability in White's position.

**21 gxf4**

No choice.

**21 ... Bf6!**

White's virtuous queen gapes open mouthed, too shocked for words by the bishop's lewd proposal. This clever zwischenzug is perhaps what Yudasin overlooked. White's queen isn't running away and Blatny hangs on to his dark-squared bishop. Yudasin may have expected the immediate 21 ... Rg6?? 22 Qxg6 fxg6 23 fxe5 dxe5 24 Nf3 when White's two minor pieces and rook are overwhelmingly superior to Black's puny queen.

**22 Qg3 Rg6 23 Qxg6 fxg6 24 Rxd6 Qc7**

"White has enough wood for the queen, but his position is a collection of tactical weaknesses" writes Flear.

**25 e5**

25 Rd7?? Qa5 wins material due to the double attack on e1 and b5.

**25 ... Be7 26 Rdd1**

Once again, 26 Rd7?? wasn't possible due to 26 ... Qa5.

**26 ... Rd8 27 Bc4 Bxh4**

The white king's existence is utterly dependent upon the loose aggregate of defenders. Now he watches helplessly, as their numbers steadily reduce over the next few moves.

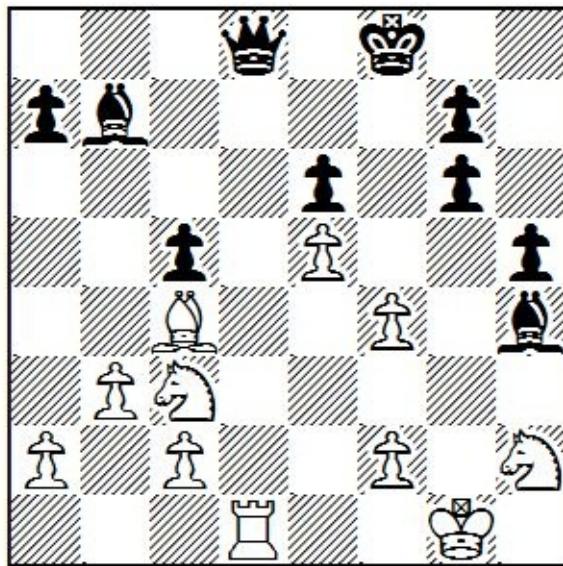
**28 Nc3**

28 Bxe6?? hangs a piece to 28 ... Qc6 with a dual threat to mate and on the e6-bishop.

**28 ... Qa5 29 Rxd8+ Qxd8 30 Rd1**

30 Ne4 is met by 30 ... Bxe4 31 Rxe4 Qd1+ 32 Kg2 Qxc2 33 Re2 Qf5 with a completely winning

position.



**Exercise (combination alert):** White just blundered in a losing position. What did he miss?

**Answer: 30 ... Bxf2+!**

Annihilation of the white king's cover.

**31 Kxf2**

“Oh, dear God, please, please protect me from another lengthy homily,” prays White’s king, as he sees the smiling bishop enter the room and wave to him. Ridding himself of the dark-squared pest brings little solace to White, who continues to multitask simultaneous crises.

**31 ... Qh4+**

The queen, desiring White’s king, continues to ache from want. Clearly enamoured, she seeks to turn the platonic relationship into something more. Not only is White about to lose a load of material, but even worse, it all falls with checks.

**32 Ke3 Qg3+ 33 Kd2 Qxf4+ 34 Kd3 Qd4+ 35 Ke2 Qxe5+**

The prideful queen believes she shames all other females in the world through the radiance of her beauty - and the worst part of it is she is correct in her assumption. Blatny picks off pawns, one by one.

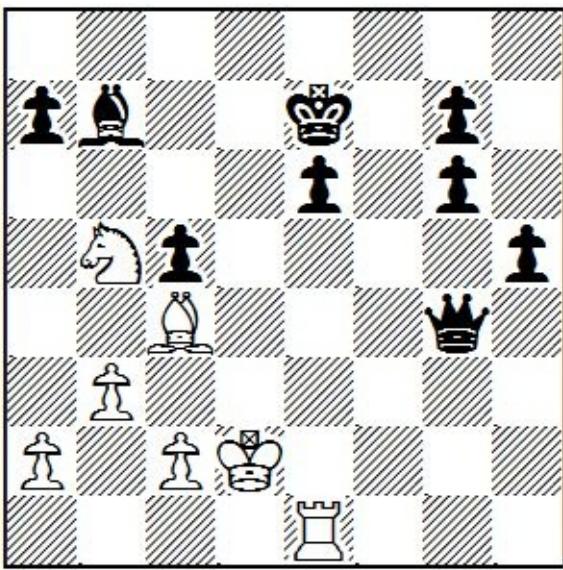
**36 Kd3**

The king weaves with the self-preserving instincts of a hunted animal.

**36 ... Qxh2 37 Rf1+ Ke7 38 Re1 Qd6+ 39 Ke2**

The king appears vaguely nauseated by the prospect of his sister’s upcoming visit and extended stay.

**39 ... Qd4 40 Nb5 Qg4+ 41 Kd2**



Threat: Rxe6+.

**41 ... h4!**

Didn't you hear me? I suppose a cured person has no need for a doctor.

**42 Rxe6+**

The rook continues to clear his throat to attract the black king's attention, but without success.

**42 ... Qxe6 43 Bxe6**

This bishop experiences an uncomfortable notion that God just tested him and found him completely unworthy.

**43 ... Kxe6 0-1**

Black's kingside passers easily win the day.

**Summary:** Be ready for 5 Nge2. We have Blatny's 6 ... Qc8!?, as well as reasonable options in 6 ... cxd4, heading for a Scheveningen-style position, and 6 ... Nc6!?, going after the bishop-pair.

### *Game 3*

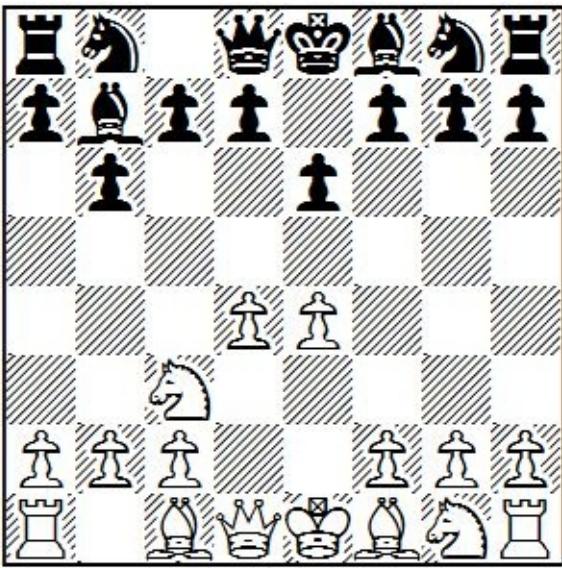
**G.Lorscheid-A.Czebe**

Budapest 1999

**1 d4 b6 2 e4**

2 c4 lines will be covered in the latter half of the book.

**2 ... Bb7 3 Nc3 e6**



#### **4 Nf3**

A common set-up.

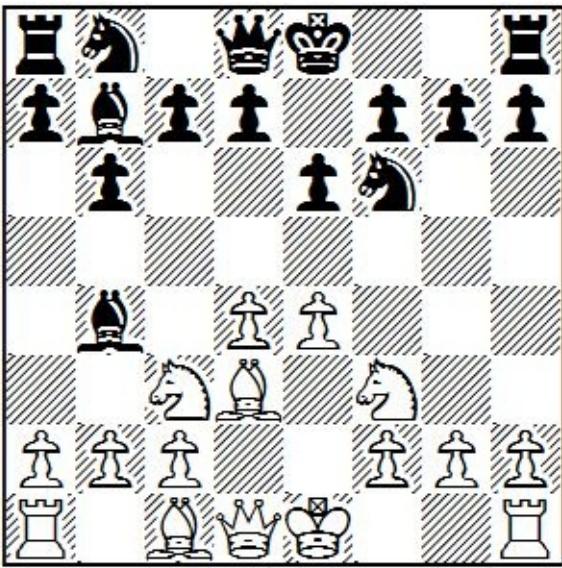
**Question:** Since defence of e4 seems to be the source of White's difficulties, then why not bolster it with 4 f3?

**Answer:** This seemingly logical idea isn't so logical after 4 ... d5! 5 Be3 (White's problem: if he plays 5 e5?!, he lands in a rotten white French-style position with 5 ... c5 after which he is unable to adequately support d4; also, note that f3 is an utter waste in this position) 5 ... Bb4 6 Bd3?! (White overestimates his ability to adequately cover e4; correct is 6 Bb5+ c6 7 Bd3 c5 8 exd5 exd5 9 Nge2 Nc6 when Black stands no worse) 6 ... dxe4! 7 fxe4, R.Singh-P.Blatny, Dos Hermanas 2004. Now Black has the simple 7 ... Nf6! with advantage. For example, 8 Qf3 Bxc3+ 9 bxc3 Nxe4! picks off a key pawn, without compensation, since ... Qh4+ is in the air. If 10 Qg4 Black responds with 10 ... Nf6! and g7 can't be touched.

**Question:** What if White sets up in Austrian Attack fashion with 4 f4?

**Answer:** Tossing in f4 weakens e4 further. Black responds with 4 ... Bb4 5 Bd3 f5!. Always be on the lookout for a propitious moment for this move. Following 6 Qe2 fxe4 7 Bxe4 Bxe4 8 Qxe4 (White just swapped away his good bishop and will lose even more time with his queen) 8 ... Nc6 9 Bd2 Nf6 10 Qd3 0-0 11 Nf3 Bxc3 12 bxc3 (12 Bxc3 d5! is at least even, and probably better for Black, who can play on White's bad bishop) 12 ... d5! (the weakness of e6 is overridden by White's chronically weakened central light squares) 13 0-0 Na5!? (13 ... Ne4 was safer) 14 Ng5! Qd7 15 f5? (White overestimates his attacking chances; correct was 15 Rae1 Rfe8! 16 Qh3 Nc4 17 Bc1 Nd6, and now if 18 Rxe6 Rxe6 19 Qxe6+ Qxe6 20 Nxe6 Re8 21 Re1 c6 22 Kf1 h6 when White stands worse in the ending, despite his extra pawn) 15 ... exf5 16 Rxf5 Nc4 17 Raf1 Nxd2! (swapping one advantage for another) 18 Qxd2 h6 (White's knight is sent offside) 19 Nh3 Ne4 20 Rxf8+ Rxf8 21 Rxf8+ Kxf8 22 Qd3 Qc6 c3 falls and White is busted, V.Iyer-C.Lakdawala, San Diego (rapid) 2014. So my first 1 ... b6! game since the 1980's ended in success and also had the effect of converting Venkat (please turn to the introduction to learn more) into a 1 ... b6 zealot.

#### **4 ... Bb4 5 Bd3 Nf6**



## 6 e5

I seem to get this a lot in internet blitz.

**Question:** What is normal here?

**Answer:** For the remainder of the chapter we cover lines ‘a’ and ‘b’, which are White’s main choices.

a) 6 Qe2 which we examine in the next few games.

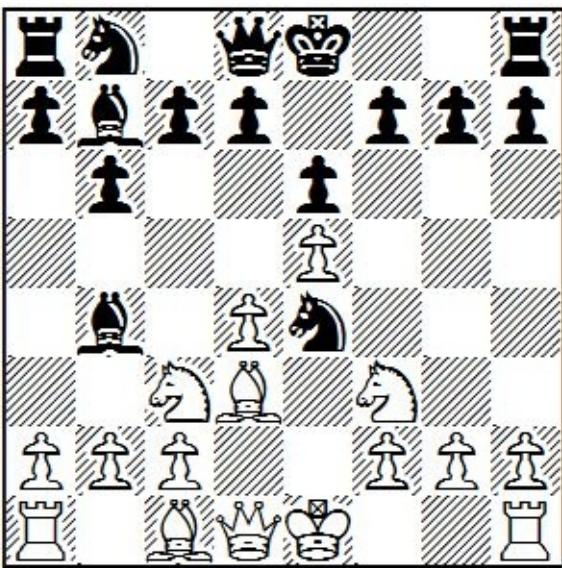
b) 6 Bg5 is covered in the final two games of this chapter.

c) 6 Nd2 is played as a surprise weapon on occasion when we have:

c1) 6 ... d5 (this move seems to be the choice of the GMs) 7 e5 Ne4! (there is no reason to play to d7) 8 Qg4 Kf8! (the position begins to resemble a McCutcheon French) 9 h4 was Z.Mestrovic-B.Filipovic, Zadar 2001 (Black gets light-square compensation for the pawn after 9 Bxe4 dxe4 10 Ncxe4 Bxd2+ 11 Nxd2 Qd5 12 Nf3 Qc4). At this point Black can try 9 ... Nxc3 10 a3 Ba5 (this is more the initial scaffolding, rather than the actual construct of Black’s plan) 11 b4 c5! 12 bxa5 c4 13 Bf1 Nc6 14 axb6 axb6 with a funky looking McCutcheon-like position, where Black’s chances feel no worse than White’s.

c2) 6 ... c5 (a vigorous central counter to White’s passive last move) 7 dxc5 was R.Buss-M.Scherer, German League 2005 (7 Nb5 is met with 7 ... c4! 8 Bxc4 Nxe4). At this point *Houdini* suggests 7 ... Nc6!? 8 cxb6 Bxc3 9 bxc3 axb6 with structural compensation for Black’s pawn sacrifice.

**6 ... Ne4**



## 7 0-0!

This sacrifice is in essence a promissory note to an old debt, stemming back to his last move. White thematically offers a pawn for a development lead and attacking chances, yet I feel that White gets a slightly inferior version of the sacrifice than in lines we look at later in the chapter where Black already tossed in ... d5.

Alternatives are rather milquetoast for White:

a) 7 Bxe4 Bxe4 8 Qe2 Bb7 (Black can also try the more radical 8 ... Bxc3+!? 9 bxc3 Bg6 10 Ba3 Qc8 intending ... Qa6) 9 Bd2 0-0 10 0-0, A.Householder-C.Lakdawala, Internet (blitz) 2014. Best here may be 10 ... Bxc3! 11 bxc3 (11 Bxc3 Ba6 12 Qe4 Nc6 13 Rfe1 Bc4 14 Nd2 Bd5 15 Qd3 f6 with an edge to Black, whose soon-to-be opened f-file and light-square control should give White some cause for concern for his king's safety) 11 ... Nc6 12 Qd3 (intending Ng5) 12 ... f6 when I prefer Black's chances, due to his superior structure and also I feel that Black's light-squared bishop contains more dynamic potential than White's remaining bishop.

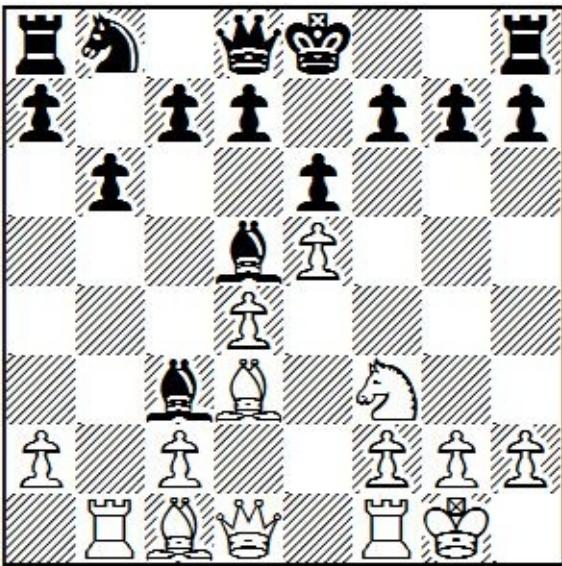
b) 7 Bd2 Nxd2 8 Qxd2 (8 Nxd2 Qg5 looks good for Black) 8 ... Bxf3 9 gxf3 Qh4 10 Be4 Nc6 11 a3 Be7 12 0-0-0?? (correct was 12 f4 with equal chances) 12 ... Bg5, winning White's queen, I.Somogyi-C.Lakdawala, Internet (blitz) 2014.

## 7 ... Nxc3 8 bxc3 Bxc3

We don't care which form of currency White chooses for payment of the debt, as long as there is payment. Black refuses to allow fear to cloud judgement. When we grab such pawns at the cost of development, we are seized by the mingled emotions of terror and hope, similar to the penniless immigrant family on its first view of the big-city skyline of its newly adopted country.

Also playable is the super-cautious 8 ... Be7. This meek retreat runs counter to the robust lunacy we normally see from Speelman, who loves complications and risk-taking. I prefer White's side after 9 Nd2 d6 10 Qg4 g6, V.Akopian-J.Speelman, Elista Olympiad 1998. White's attacking chances outweigh Black's structural benefits after 11 Nf3.

## 9 Rb1 Bd5!



“This can be considered an attempt to play for more” (than a draw), writes Bauer. The difference between this line and the ones we later look at where Black already tossed in ... d5: Black’s light-squared bishop plays a role, covering against White’s intended Rb3 and also menacing a2.

Black can also play 9 ... Nc6 10 Rb3!? Bxd4 (this line is worked out to a forced draw; if Black is ambitious, we can try 10 ... Bb4!? 11 Be4 Be7 12 c4 Na5 13 Bxb7 Nxb7 when White’s centre and development lead offer attacking chances for the pawn, but I wouldn’t mind taking on Black’s burden if compensated financially in the form of one pawn) 11 Nxd4 Nxd4 12 Qg4 Nxb3 13 Qxg7 Nxc1! 14 Qxh8+ Ke7 15 Qf6+ when the formation cycles in an endless loop, with perpetual check, C.Joecks-M.Weyrich, German League 1994.

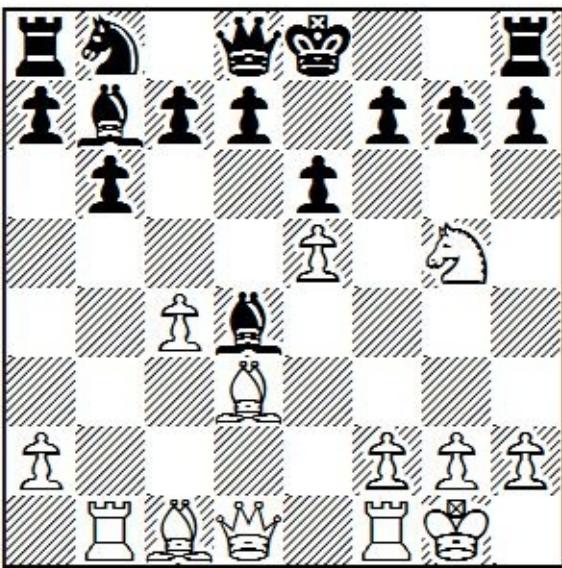
### **10 Ng5**

White lunges, opening possibilities of Qh5 and Qg4, as well. Instead, 10 Bg5 Qc8 11 Nd2?! (the beginning of a fishy adventure; after 11 Bd2 Bxd2 12 Nxd2 0-0 13 c4 Bb7 14 Qg4 f5 15 exf6 Rxf6 White may have enough compensation for the pawn) 11 ... Bxd4 12 Rb5!? c6 13 Rb4 Bxe5?! (13 ... c5! is a winning position for Black) 14 Re1 Qc7 15 Qh5 g6 16 Qh4 c5 17 Rf4 f5? (White doesn’t have enough compensation after the simple 17 ... Nc6) 18 Bxf5! 0-0? (*Houdini* still prefers Black after 18 ... exf5 19 Bf6 0-0 20 Bxe5 Qd8 21 Qh6 Qe7) 19 Bxg6 hxg6 20 Rxf8+ Kxf8 21 Qh7? (21 Bf6! Bxf6 22 Qxf6+ Ke8 23 Re3 Qd6 24 Rh3 Qf8 25 Rh8 Qxh8 26 Qxh8+ and White is winning) 21 ... Bg7 22 c4 Bb7 23 Qxg6 was F.Handke-C.Lakdawala, Internet (blitz) 2014. After all these crazy adventures, *Houdini* says it’s a probable draw after 23 ... Qd6 24 h4 Nc6 25 Ne4 Qe5 26 Re3 Nd4 27 Nf6 Qf5 28 Nxd7+ Kg8 29 Nf6+.

### **10 ... Bxd4**

Even more accurate is 10 ... Nc6! 11 Qg4 Qe7 12 Bb2 Bxb2 13 Rxb2 Nxd4!. Overloaded defender. White lacks compensation for the sacrificed pawns.

### **11 c4 Bb7**



## 12 Nxh7?

Shaken fists and angry yells begin to subside in White's camp, mainly since he begins to run low on attackers, the current level which comes to a grand total of one. And everyone knows, a mob requires more than a single member to form a quorum. While a mechanistic understanding of such a move is easy to discern (White desires an immediate material return on his past investment), the psychological motivation remains a mystery, since the move quite obviously loses the initiative - the lifeblood of compensation. This is a path incompatible with White's survival. Now events begin to tangle and run crosswise for White, since it allows Black to open lines against White's king.

White should try 12 Qg4 c5! (12 ... Bxe5? is met with the trick 13 Nxf7! Kxf7 14 Qh5+ Kg8 15 Qxe5 Na6 when even here, I prefer Black; you know your position is good when you fall into the opponent's trap, and still may stand better) 13 Bb2 Bxb2 14 Rxb2 h5 15 Qf4 f5!. A business person sells for profit, while the thought of giving away wares for nothing tends to leave a tense knot in the stomach. Even here, I don't believe in White's full compensation for two pawns.

## 12 ... Rxh7!

In some positions we are better off if we stop thinking and simply take action. Our notions at the board hit a wall when they collide with a contradiction which we are unable to explain away. In this case it quickly emerges that White's last move was an error.

## 13 Bxh7 Qh4 14 Qd3?

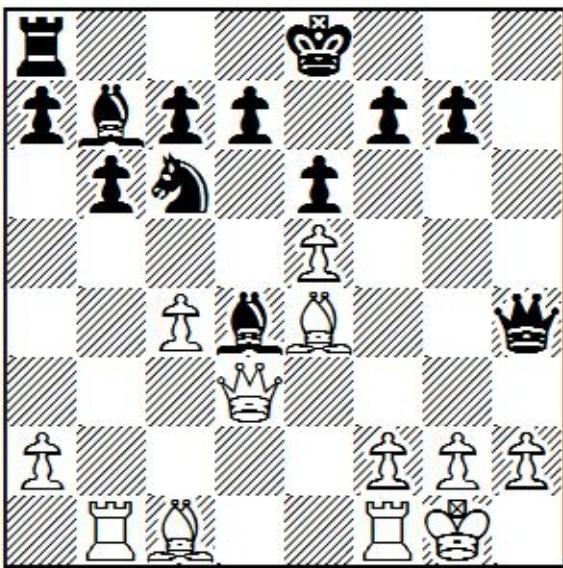
White's queen, for all her finery, fails to outshine her resplendent sister. However, even after 14 Bc2 Bxe5 15 f4 Bd6 16 Rb3 Nc6 17 Rh3 Bc5+ 18 Be3 (18 Kh1?? is met with the nasty shot 18 ... Qxh3! 19 gxh3 Nd4+ 20 Kg1 Ne2 checkmate; oh, if only such lines became reality in our games over the board, rather than in the notes) 18 ... Bxe3+ 19 Rxe3 Qe7 Black stands better with two pawns for the exchange, the superior pawn structure and a safe king, once he castles long.

## 14 ... Nc6

Not bad, but even stronger was 14 ... Qg4! 15 Qg3 Qxg3 16 hxg3 g6 (White's h7-bishop is doomed) 17 Re1 Nc6 18 Bf4 0-0-0 and there is no defence to the coming ... Rh8.

## 15 Be4

15 Qe4 Qh5 16 Rb3 g6 17 Rh3 Qf5 18 Qxf5 exf5 19 Re1 0-0-0 20 Bg5 Re8 21 Bf6 d6 is also busted for White.



**Exercise (combination alert):** Find one simple trick and White's position falls apart:

**Answer:** Discovered attack.

**15 ... Nxe5! 0-1**

The knight arrives with a letter of introduction, which he hands to White's queen. 16 Qxd4 Qxe4 17 Qxe4 Bxe4 18 Rb3 Nxc4 and three healthy pawns for the exchange is too much, rendering further resistance futile.

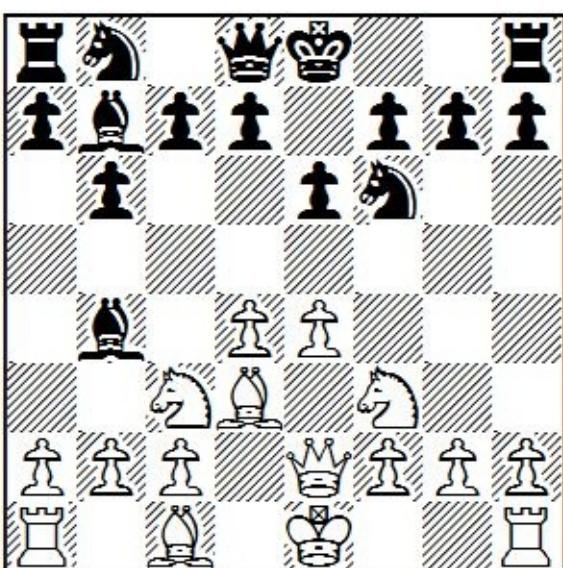
**Summary:** After 7 0-0!? I feel that White gets a slightly inferior version of the sacrifice than in lines we examine later in the chapter where Black already tossed in ... d5.

*Game 4*

**Z.Severiukhina-D.Andreikin**

Belgorod 2008

**1 e4 b6 2 d4 Bb7 3 Nc3 e6 4 Nf3 Bb4 5 Bd3 Nf6 6 Qe2**



White, unlike in the last game, continues to fight over the disputed e4-square.

### 6 ... d5!

In my opinion this move gives Black dynamic equality, no matter how White plays it. We won't be covering 6 ... c5. White can play several ways here, the most attractive of which may be 7 dxc5 bxc5 8 e5 Nd5 9 Bd2 Nxc3 (9 ... f5 is met with 10 Nb5 with advantage to White, due to the extra space and control over d6; now 10 ... Nf4? 11 Nd6+ Ke7 12 c3! Nxe2 13 Bg5+ favours White) 10 bxc3 Ba5 11 0-0, T.Upton-C.Wians, Luxembourg 2000. I like White's potential for kingside attack and also the open d- and b-files for his rooks. White's doubled, isolated pawns may be a concern if Black manages to swap down into an ending, but this prospect seems abstract and far away, when compared to White's present benefits.

### 7 exd5

Others:

a) Later in the chapter we examine 7 e5.

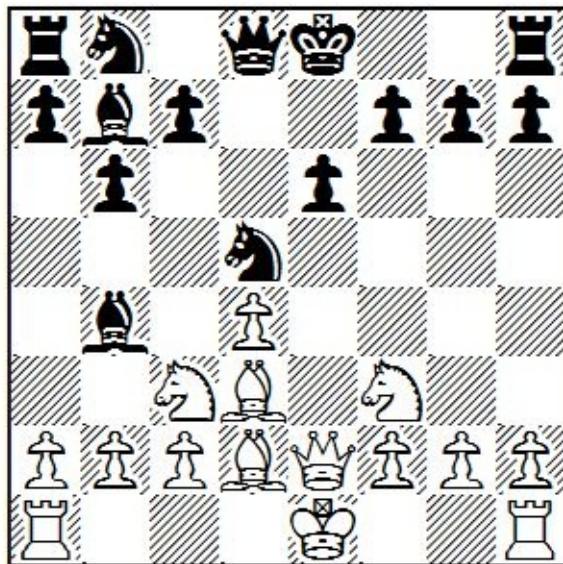
b) Black seizes an edge after 7 Bg5?! dxe4 8 Bxe4 Bxe4 9 Bxf6 Qd5! 10 Be5 (Black also looks better after 10 Bxg7 Rg8 11 Be5 Rxg2 12 Nh4 Bxc3+ 13 bxc3 Rg8) 10 ... Bxf3 11 Qxf3 Qxf3 12 gxf3 Nc6 13 Bxg7 Rg8 14 Be5, J.Abbet-B.Filipovic, Martigny 2008. White is in deep trouble in the ending after the forcing variation 14 ... Nxe5 15 dxe5 Rg5! 16 f4 Rf5 17 0-0-0 Bxc3 18 bxc3 Rxf4 19 Rhg1 Ke7 where his ragged pawns will be an eternal source of concern.

c) With 7 Nd2?! White overprotects e4, at the cost of weakening d4. Black stands better after 7 ... Nc6! 8 exd5, as in L.Kostitsina-D.Valeev, Izhevsk 2011 (8 e5 can be met with 8 ... Nxd4! 9 Qe3 Nf5!, intending 10 Bxf5?? d4! 11 Qh3 exf5 12 0-0 Ng4 with a winning position for Black). Black should continue with 8 ... Nxd5 9 Nxd5 Nxd4! 10 Qe5 Qxd5 11 Qxd5 Bxd2+ 12 Bxd2 Bxd5 when White lacks compensation for the missing pawn.

### 7 ... Nxd5

Black logically piles up on c3, preparing damage on that square. A couple of games later we examine 7 ... Qxd5.

### 8 Bd2



### 8 ... Nxc3

Black inflicts structural damage.

**Question:** This move loses a tempo. Why not chop c3 with our bishop?

**Answer:** I think Black is better off handing White a tempo, rather than dark-square control and the bishop-pair - which matters in such an open position - after 8 ... Bxc3 9 bxc3 Qd6 10 Ne5 (blocking out ... Nf4 ideas for now) 10 ... Nd7 11 f4 N7f6 12 0-0 0-0 when I prefer White, due to the bishop-pair and greater central influence, V.Jedner-H.Müller, Bochum 1999.

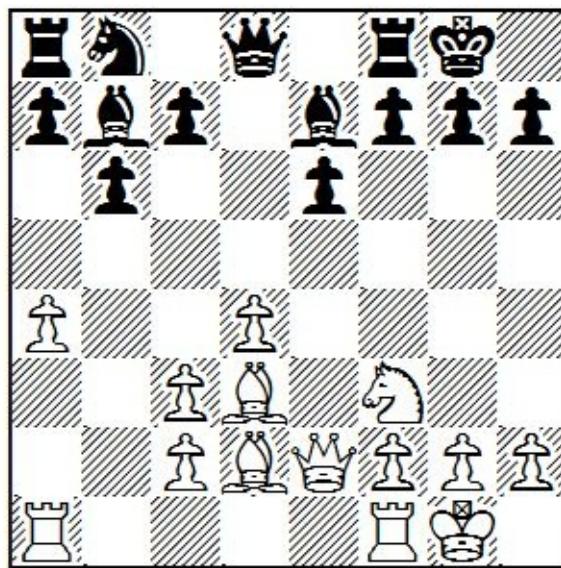
It doesn't make sense to me to not inflict damage on c3 if given a chance, although admittedly after 8 ... Nd7 (I have a feeling Tony just made a weird move for weirdness sake; amazingly, *Houdini* says it's perfectly playable - if a bit dull) 9 Nxd5 Bxd2+ 10 Nxd2 Bxd5 11 0-0 0-0 12 c4 Bb7 13 Be4 Bxe4 14 Nxe4 Nf6 15 Rad1 Nxe4 16 Qxe4 Qd6 White's extra space doesn't lead anywhere and the game is even, I.Rogers-A.Miles, Auckland 1992.

### 9 bxc3 Be7

**Question:** Why not play to d6?

**Answer:** Black wants to cover g5 against both Bg5 and Ng5 lunges. However, your suggestion looks completely playable. For example, 9 ... Bd6 10 0-0 Nd7 11 a4 0-0 12 a5 c5 13 Rfb1, Ruofan Li-Hoang Thanh Trang, Beijing (rapid) 2008. Black looks okay, despite the absence of kingside defenders after 13 ... Qc7 14 h3 h6.

### 10 0-0 0-0 11 a4



**Question:** Why is White focusing on the queenside, when his minor pieces all aim kingside?

**Answer:** White's a-pawn is isolated and therefore a potential endgame weakness. White decides to play it safe and liquidate one of her weaknesses, and asks her GM opponent how he plans to make progress. Next game we look at the more aggressively inclined 11 Ne5.

### 11 ... Nd7

**Question:** Why not thwart White's intent with 11 ... a5?

**Answer:** Your suggestion is playable, yet not without cost:

1. The move hands White's pieces access to b5, since Black will be disinclined to weaken with ... c6.

2. If Black ever plays the thematic central counter ... c5, this automatically weakens b5 and the b6-pawn.

## 12 Rfe1

I would toss in the immediate 12 a5.

## 12 ... c5 13 Be4?!

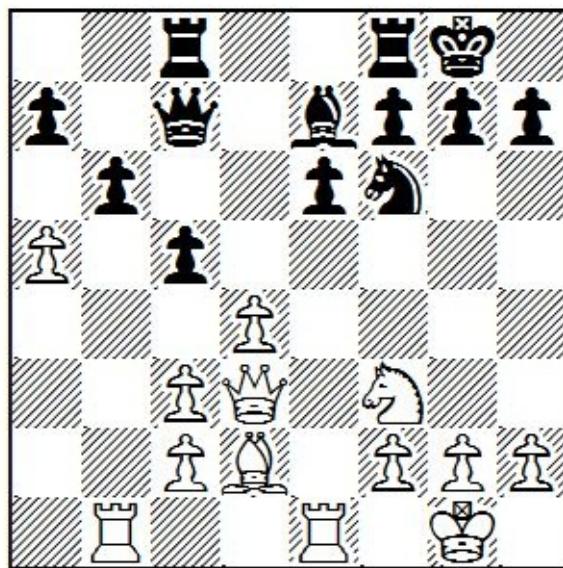
The bishop believes himself to be his b7-colleague's successor. What he doesn't know is that it will be an awfully short succession. White has nothing marketable to offer with this move and there is no ground for compromise or concession. Swapping down against a higher-rated opponent is by no means an insurance policy to the draw. In fact, if the swapping side wastes time or makes a concession on the swap, his position deteriorates. This move weakens White's light squares more than the damage to Black's. Once again 13 a5 looks correct and approximately equal.

## 13 ... Bxe4 14 Qxe4 Rc8 15 Qd3 Nf6 16 Rab1 Qc7

Strategic threat: ... cxd4, when White is unable to recapture with the c3-pawn, since c2 hangs.

## 17 a5?!

I would hunker down with 17 Rb2 and hope to defend the weakened queenside.



**Exercise (planning):** The trajectories of both sides' plans continue to intersect on many planes. Two distinct visions clash for supremacy on the queenside. The grafting together of a pair of mismatched ideas is unlikely to produce a sound end product. White's last move is in line with her earlier 13 Be4?!. She planned to first weaken Black's queenside light squares and then later with a5, raid them. It feels as if White is mounting a queenside attack, but this simply isn't the case. How should Black respond?

**Answer:** Just take it! White will regret not playing this move sooner. Now she must waste time in an attempt to regain her lost pawn.

## 17 ... bxa5!

Black puts to good use the time gained, since White must labour to regain her pawn. White's entry to the seventh rank proves meaningless.

## 18 Qa6 cxd4 19 Rb7?!

'Natural' implies something which isn't fabricated. Yet natural doesn't always equate to beneficial.

This natural move leads to the eventual loss of a pawn. White had to try to hold an inferior position after 19 cxd4 Bb4 20 Bxb4 axb4 21 Rxb4 Qxc2 22 Rb7 Nd5 23 Rxa7 Nf4. Black's queen represents a presence on the kingside; even though she isn't there, her influence remains. Ideas of transferring Black's queen to the kingside via f5 or g6 are in the air, d5 is under Black's control, and d4 is also a source of concern for White. Still, White may be able to hold this position.

**19 ... Qd6 20 Qxa5**

20 Qxa5?? dxc3 21 Bxc3 Rxc3 22 Rxe7 Rxc2 leaves White down two pawns for zero compensation. The problem is 23 Ng5 is met with 23 ... Qf4 when White's knight is forced into an ignominious retreat.

**20 ... dxc3 21 Bxc3 Nd5 22 Be5 Qc6**

Double attack on b7 and c2.

**23 Rb2**

23 Qxa5?? hangs material after 23 ... Bc5. Black's outraged queen unconsciously clenches and unclenches her hands, perhaps imagining them around the presumptuous cleric's throat. If 24 Nd4 Bxd4 25 Bxd4 Ra8 gets the job done.

**23 ... f6**

Black begins to take over the centre and advance his kingside pawn majority.

**24 Bd4 e5! 25 Bxa7**

25 Be3 Rfd8! and White is still unable to capture a7. For example, 26 Qxa7?? Bb4, and if 27 Rf1 Ra8 traps White's wayward queen, whose lips form into an irritated pinch.

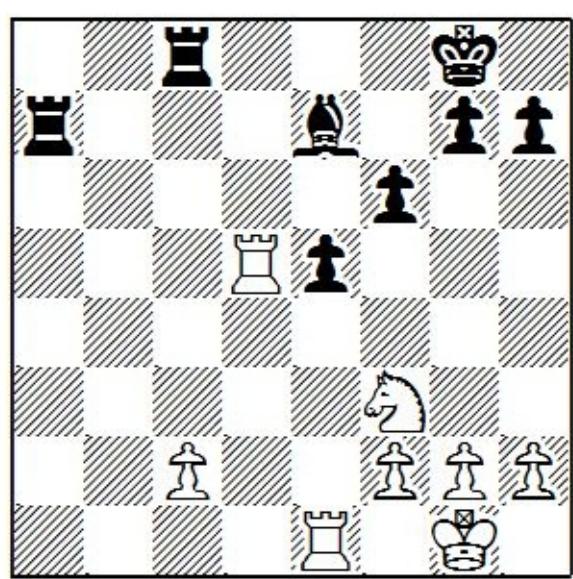
**25 ... Ra8**

White must contort to evade this pin.

**26 Qb5**

Forced.

**26 ... Qxb5 27 Rxb5 Rxa7 28 Rxd5 Rc8**



Now c2 is a goner.

**29 Nh4?**

The knight walks away from his king's defence with the dejected air of an exile, forced to bid goodbye to his beloved native country. White crosses a point of no return and this attempt to get active when she should be in full Maginot Line-mode is misguided. Andreikin soon chastises his opponent for harbouring incorrect presumptions about the alleged lack of potency in his attack. White had to try something like 29 c4 Rxc4 30 Red1, preparing to challenge the second rank at some stage.

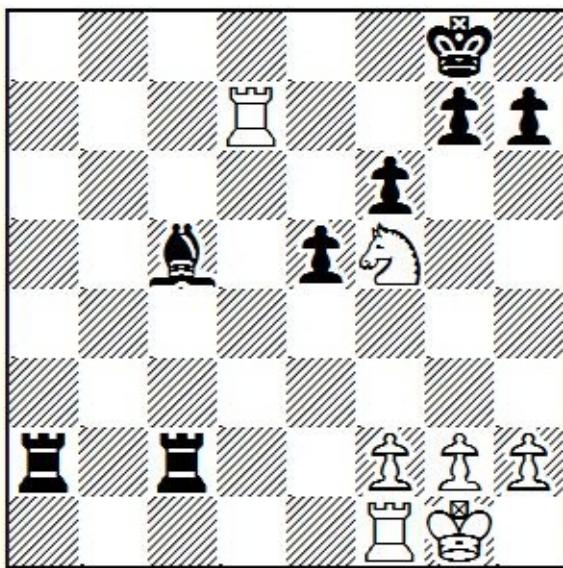
**29 ... Rxc2 30 Nf5**

Forcing Black's bishop to go exactly where it desires to go.

**30 ... Bc5**

The bishop scatters seeds of malevolence along the g1-a7 diagonal.

**31 Rf1 Raa2 32 Rd7**



**Exercise (combination alert):** White's position feels like a rock tossed into a muddy hole, slowly, inevitably sinking. Black attackers exchange significant, conspiratorial glances. Meanwhile, White just attacked g7. What should we do about it?

**Answer:** Ignore it and force mate!

**32 ... Rxf2! 0-1**

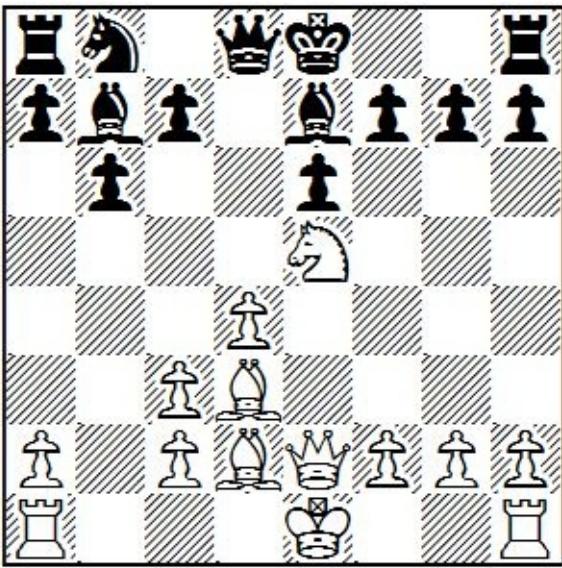
I hate it when fantasy bumps into that much hated limitation called reality. If 33 Rxg7+ Kf8 34 Rxf2 Ra1 mate. The king's interview with Black's rook is at an end, and plainly, it didn't go well.

**Summary:** In my opinion, Black completely equalizes after 7 ... Nxd5. Our structural benefits easily counterbalance White's central control and attacking chances.

*Game 5*

**J.Curdo-A.Ivanov**  
Marlborough 2006

**1 e4 b6 2 Nc3 Bb7 3 d4 e6 4 Bd3 Nf6 5 Qe2 Bb4 6 Nf3 d5 7 exd5 Nxd5 8 Bd2 Nxc3 9 bxc3 Be7 10 Ne5**



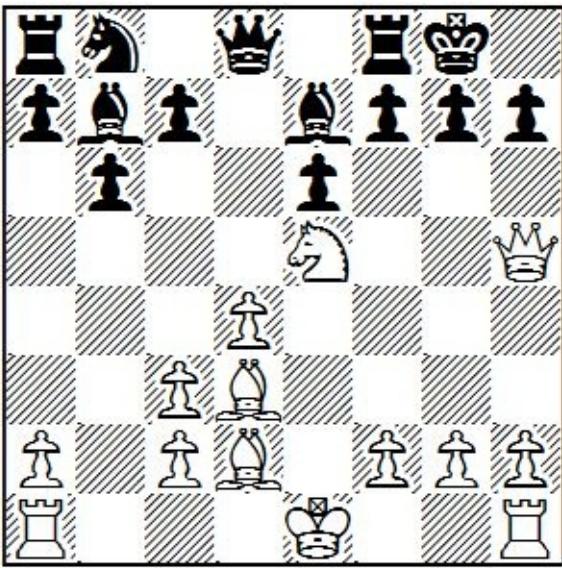
On the chess board, we all display our quirky likes and dislikes. White is obviously a natural attacker. Black must play carefully after this move.

**Question:** What is the idea behind it?

**Answer:** White realizes there is no threat on g2, so he adds an attacker to e5 and clears a path for his queen into h5.

10 h4 is another hostile gesture. White intends to lift the h-rook to the third rank, via h3. After 10 ... Nd7 11 Kf1 (or 11 Rh3 when Kovalev suggests the so far untested 11 ... Bd6 to halt Rg3; White can continue 12 Kf1 0-0 13 Ne5 c5 14 Rg3 f5 15 Bh6 Bxe5 16 dxe5 Rf7 17 Bg5 Qc7 18 Bf4 Qd8 19 Bg5 Qe8, but Black's king looks safe and his control over the light squares compensates for White's bishop-pair) 11 ... c5 12 Rh3 Qc7 13 Ng5 Nf6 14 Re1 Rd8! (Ivanov stalls castling, waiting to see just how White sets up, since 14 ... 0-0?? walks into the teeth of White's idea after 15 Rg3; now if 15 ... Rad8 16 Nxh7! and if 16 ... Nxh7 17 Bxh7+ Kxh7 18 Qh5+ Kg8 19 Rxg7+! Kxg7 20 Bh6+ Kh8 21 Bf4+ wins) 15 Rg3 Rd7 16 Nxf7!? Kxf7 17 Qxe6+ Kf8 18 Bc4 Bd5 19 Bxd5 Rxd5 20 Rge3 Bd8 21 g4 Qd7 Black repelled the onslaught and has the better chances, W.Paschall-A.Ivanov, USA 2000.

**10 ... 0-0 11 Qh5**



The Oz-like queen inspires fear and awe, merely through reputation, rather than her actual power.

**Question:** Hasn't White whipped up an attack here?

**Answer:** Not yet. This is a case of mid-grade wine, sold in an expensive-looking bottle. I think Black has two good responses.

**11 ... f5**

**Question:** Isn't this move strategically disastrous for Black, who just handed White control over e5, and created a backward and weak point on e6?

**Answer:** It is admittedly a strategic concession, but Black also gains from the move in two ways:

1. His king becomes significantly safer.

2. He avoids perpetual check, as shown in the coming note:

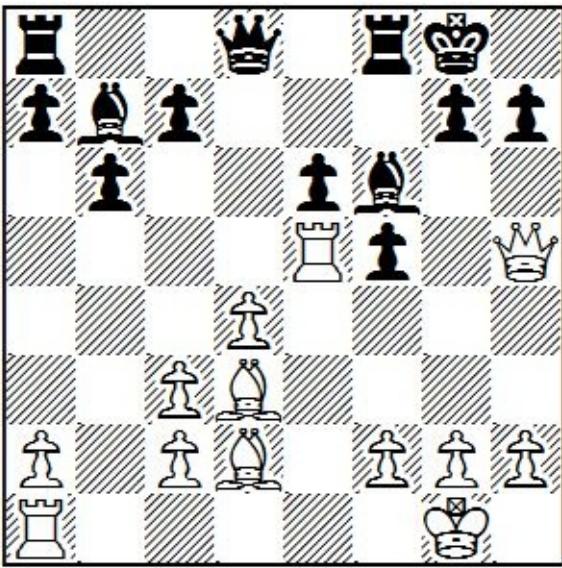
11 ... g6 is perfectly playable. The trouble is Black is a GM and didn't want to allow a draw after 12 Nxg6 (White can also go for it after 12 Qh6 Nd7 13 h4 Bf6 14 Ng4 Bg7 15 Qf4 f5! 16 Nh6+ Kh8, and now if 17 h5 g5! 18 Qxg5 Rf6! when the knight is trapped; White doesn't have enough for the piece after 19 Nxf5 exf5, since f5 is taboo, as 20 Bxf5?? hangs more material to 20 ... Bh6 21 Qg4 Qe7+ 22 Kd1 Rg8) 12 ... f6 13 Bxg6 hxg6 14 Qxg6+ with perpetual check. Of course too 11 ... h6?? is a death wish after the obvious 12 Bxh6 when Black can resign.

**12 0-0 Nd7 13 Rfe1 Nxe5**

This move is possibly too obliging. I prefer 13 ... Nf6 14 Qh3 c5 15 Rad1 Qc7 with a perfectly playable position, since his potential pressure on the queenside and centre easily offsets his e6 weakness. Now if White tries 16 Nf3?! intending Ng5, Black counterattacks with 16 ... c4 17 Bf1 Ne4 with an excellent position, since White's structural woes are not going away soon.

**14 Rxe5 Bf6**

14 ... Bd5 15 c4 Bc6 16 c3 Bd7 looks approximately balanced.



**Exercise (calculation):** Can White get away with 15 Rxе6? Work out the consequences.

### 15 Re2??!

The machinery is unable to run smoothly, unless all components function with precision.

**Answer:** Black's last move was an error and White's last move allowed Ivanov to get away with the crime. Both sides rejected taking e6, due to Black's next move, which double attacks White's rook and also the mate threat on g2. However, White has an amazing defence: 15 Rxе6!! Qd5 (what now? It looks like White has been swindled, but appearances deceive) 16 Qh3!. The cloak of invisibility is removed, and White's queen reveals her true intent. This is an incredibly difficult move to foresee. Black can't touch the 'free' rook. If 16 ... Qxe6?? 17 Bxf5 Qd6 18 Qxh7+ 19 Re1!. Principle: *when engaged in a mating attack, don't chase the opponent's king*. Instead, cut off avenues of escape. White generates deadly threats on g6 and also h5, which leaves Black helpless. For example, 19 ... Rg8 20 Qg6+ Kf8 21 Be6 Qe7 22 Qh7 wins Black's queen.

### 15 ... Qd5

Now Black looks just fine.

### 16 Qh3 c5!?

Black can also first cover e6 against Rxе6 tricks with 16 ... Rae8.

### 17 dxc5

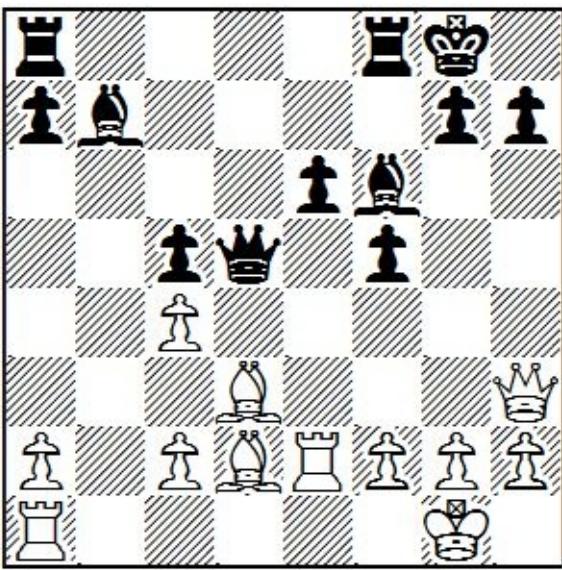
17 Rxе6 isn't as strong as last time, since it is met with 17 ... Bxd4! after which Black looks good.

### 17 ... bxc5

Threat: ... c4.

### 18 c4

18 Rxе6? is met with the clever zwischenzug 18 ... Bg5! which wins material. White is unable to play 19 Re2?? since he hangs a piece after 19 ... Bxd2 20 Rxd2 c4.



### **18 ... Qxg2+!?**

The narcissistic queen will suffer no divided attention from those around her. Her dazzling arrival on g2 ensures the limelight she so desperately craves. *Houdini* claims the move is devoid of angry recoil and the game remains dead even here. 18 ... Qc6 19 Rae1 Rae8 may also be equal, although stylistically I favour Black due to his superior queenside structure.

### **19 Qxg2 Bxg2 20 Rb1 Bf3 21 Rxe6**

White regained his lost pawn.

### **21 ... Rad8**

21 ... g6 is safer.

### **22 Ba5**

When emotion creeps into our decision-making process, it ceases to be a decision and comes closer to raw instinct. The text is tempting, but probably inaccurate. Now d8 and f5 hang, but Ivanov worked out the consequences accurately. With hindsight, 22 Be3 may be more accurate.

### **22 ... Rd4! 23 Bc7**

23 Bxf5?! is met by 23 ... Bg4! 24 Bxg4 Rxg4+ 25 Kf1 Rxc4 with advantage to Black, who threatens both the c2-pawn, and also ... Ra4.

### **23 ... Rg4+ 24 Kf1**

White's king is still okay here, but the momentum clearly shifted to Black's side.

### **24 ... Bd4 25 Rb8!**

If rooks come off the board, Black's a-pawn is in danger.

### **25 ... Rg2**

The rook continues to fight his way in, going after f2.

### **26 Rxf8+ Kxf8 27 Bxf5??**

If left untreated and unremoved, a tumour tends to grow. Everyone knows that success is based on preparation. Very few realize that luck also needs to be added to the list.

White may hold the draw with 27 c3! Kf7 28 Bxf5 Bxf2 29 Bh3 Bh4! 30 Re5 Rg5 31 Be6+ Ke7 32 Re3 Bg2+ 33 Ke2 Bc6 34 Bh3+ Kf7. The logical result is probably a draw. White stands no worse, despite his doubled c-pawns, since Black's queenside pawns are slightly vulnerable to attack.

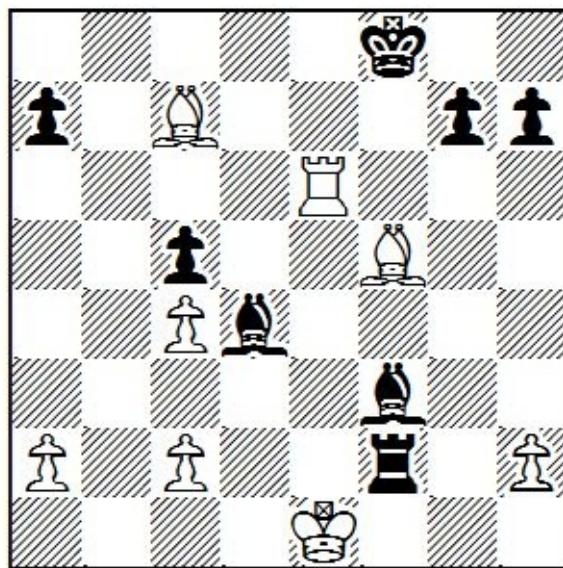
### **27 ... Rxf2+**

A goblin sneaks into paradise when the gatekeeper isn't looking. A monster of chimerical proportions soon arises, and it doesn't take Sherlock Holmes to deduce that White's king carries a heavy burden on

his conscience.

## 28 Ke1

Not 28 Kg1?? Rg2+ 29 Kf1 Rg1 mate.



**Exercise (combination alert):** Black to play and force the win.

**Answer:** Mating attack. White has no reasonable recourse to the threat ... Rg1+, followed by ... Rd1 mate.

## 28 ... Rg2! 29 Bd6+

If we plot the mutual attacks as two curves, we note that White's is starkly more angled:

a) 29 Bh3 Rg1+ 30 Bf1 Bg2 wins.

b) 29 c3 Bxc3+ 30 Kf1 Bd4 (renewing the mating threat on g1) 31 Ke1 Rxg2 is hopeless for White, who is down two pawns, while his king remains in mortal danger. Black can simply start pushing his a-pawn down the board, and White's rook and bishops are unable to generate sufficient counterplay against Black's king.

## 29 ... Kf7 30 Re7+ Kf6

A town's prominent citizen takes offence when berated by those below his social standing. Black still threatens the ... Rg1+ and ... Rd1 mate idea, as well as White's f5-bishop.

## 31 c3

31 Bd3 Rg1+ 32 Bf1 Bg2 is the same old problem.

## 31 ... Bxc3+ 0-1

**Summary:** After 11 Qh5, 11 ... g6 allows a draw, while 11 ... f5 gives Black dynamic equality.

### Game 6

**E.Bareev-C.Bauer**

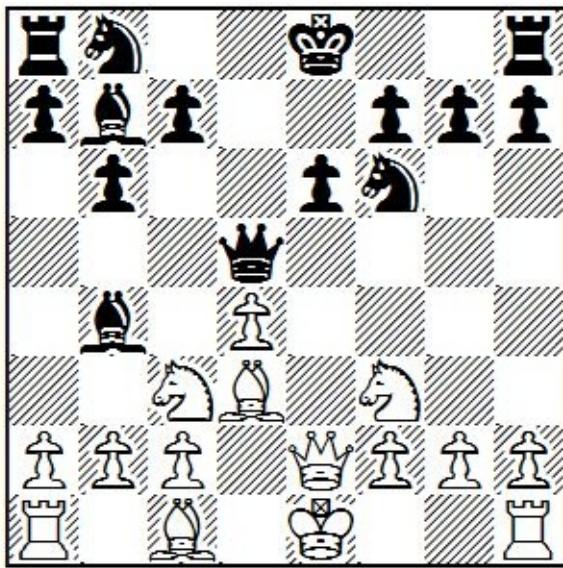
Enghien-les-Bains 2001

## 1 d4 b6

Preparation is the magic elixir which dispels uncertainty. Christian Bauer is one of the world's leading authorities on 1 ... b6 and wrote a book on it for Everyman. Yes, contrary to popular belief, 1 ... b6 can be played against a 2700 and achieve a close to winning position right out of the opening.

**2 e4 Bb7 3 Nc3 e6 4 Nf3 Bb4 5 Bd3 Nf6 6 Qe2 d5 7 exd5 Qxd5**

We must take this move seriously, since GM Christian Bauer is one of the highest-rated advocates of our opening. Black decides to play it in Scandinavian style, bringing out the queen early.



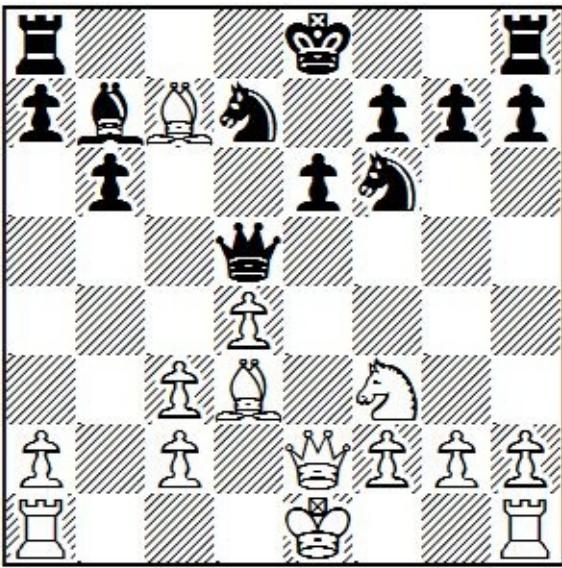
**Question:** Won't Black's queen be vulnerable?

**Answer:** I think actually less so than in a real Scandinavian, since we plan to chop on c3.

**Question:** At the cost of the bishop-pair?

**Answer:** Nothing of value is without some cost. In this case Black's queen is an active participant in the middlegame and I feel like the cost of handing over the bishop-pair for the privilege isn't too steep.

Black can also toss in an early 7 ... Bxc3+ to eliminate white options like Bd2 and later Bxc3. This may be Black's most accurate continuation, since it eliminates white options like Bd2 and Bxc3, sparing the pawn structure queenside damage: 8 bxc3 Qxd5 9 Bf4 Nbd7 ("Oh, please, oh please ..." thinks Black) 10 Bxc7??.



**Exercise (combination alert):** White's last move loses instantly. What would you play as Black?

**Answer:** Double attack. Both c7 and c3 hang, and White can't afford the loss of either. 10 ... Qc6!, E.Handoko-E.Torre, Kuala Lumpur 2005.

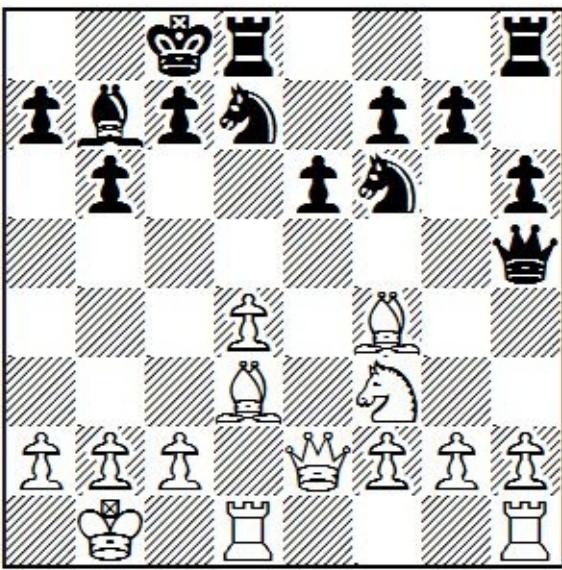
**8 0-0**

**Question:** Why can't White spare structural damage with 8 Bd2?

**Answer:** This is possible, and may actually be White's best option. After 8 ... Bxc3 9 Bxc3 (9 bxc3 simply transposes to the main game) it may appear as if Black's control over the light squares easily nullifies White's rather unimpressive bishop-pair, yet when I examined the position deeper, it felt like White produced an edge. For example, 9 ... Qh5 10 0-0-0 Nbd7 11 Kb1 0-0-0 and now:

a) 12 Ba6 (this eliminates White's own bishop-pair) 12 ... Bxa6 13 Qxa6+ Kb8 14 Rhe1 Qd5 15 Rd3 Ne4 16 Re2 Nd6 17 b3 Rhg8 18 Ne5 f6 was S.Katsogridakis-A.Ipatov, Rethymnon 2011. White has nothing useful to do after 19 Nf3 g5 and I actually prefer Black.

b) Perhaps White should risk 12 Bd2. Here I would avoid chopping on f3 and play something like 12 ... h6 13 Bf4. It feels to me like White has an edge.



**Question:** Can Black chop the f3-knight?

**Answer:** I think it's too risky. Handing White both bishops is no small matter in a semi-open position, even if Black inflicts some structural damage. If 13 ... Bxf3?! 14 gxf3 Kb8 15 Rhg1 Nd5 16 Bg3 g5 17 Ba6 I would be very nervous if I had Black, whose queenside light squares are ripe for mischief from White's part.

**8 ... Bxc3 9 bxc3 0-0**

Instead, after 9 ... Nbd7 10 Re1 Qh5?! 11 a4 Bxf3 12 gxf3 0-0 13 Kh1 Rfe8 White has the bishop-pair, while Black enjoys the superior structure. Chances look balanced, A.Sherzer-P.Oliveira, Philadelphia 1993.

**10 Bf4**

When I got here I faced 10 Re1 Nbd7 11 c4 Qh5 (also possible is 11 ... Qd6, discouraging Bf4, and if 12 c3 c5 13 Be3 e5!, since it is in Black's best interest to resolve central tension and fix the structure in a more rigid fashion; following 14 Nh4 cxd4 15 cxd4 g6 16 dxe5 Nxe5 17 Bf4 Qxd3 18 Qxe5 Nd7 19 Qg5 f6 20 Qg4 Nc5 21 Re3 Qd7 22 Qxd7 Nxd7 Black looks slightly better in the ending, due to his superior structure, M.Chovanec-J.Braun, correspondence 2002) 12 Ne5 Qxe2 13 Rxe2 c5 14 Nxd7 Nxd7 15 c3 Rac8 16 a4 a5?! (*Houdini* disapproves and suggests 16 ... Rfd8! 17 Bg5 f6 18 Bf4 cxd4 19 cxd4 e5 20 dxe5 Nxe5 when Black looks better) 17 d5 Rfe8 (possible is 17 ... exd5 18 Re7 Rfd8 19 Bf5 Re8! which plays on White's weak back rank, and if 20 Re3 Red8 21 Re7 Re8 with a draw by repetition of moves) 18 dxe6 Rxe6 19 Rxe6 fxe6 20 Bf4 Bc6 21 Bd6 Kf7 22 f4 Nf6 23 Bc2?! Be4?! (now the game peters out to a draw; 23 ... Ng4! 24 Bd1 Rd8! 25 Bc7 Rd2 26 Bxg4 Rxg2+ 27 Kf1 Rxg4 28 Rb1 g5 29 fxg5 Rxc4 leaves White the one fighting for the draw) 24 Bxe4 Nxe4 25 Be5 g6 (25 ... Nd2?! is met by 26 Rd1 Nxc4 27 Rd7+ Kf8 28 Bxg7+ Ke8 29 Rb7 Rd8 with equal chances according to *Houdini*) 26 Rd1 Ke7 27 Kf1 Rc6 28 Ke2 Nf6 29 Bxf6+ Kxf6 30 Kf3 e5 and a draw was agreed here, B.Baker-C.Lakdawala, San Diego (rapid) 2014.

**10 ... Rc8**

10 ... Qh5 is still very playable: 11 Ne5 Qxe2 12 Bxe2 Rc8 is a balanced ending.

**11 Rfe1**

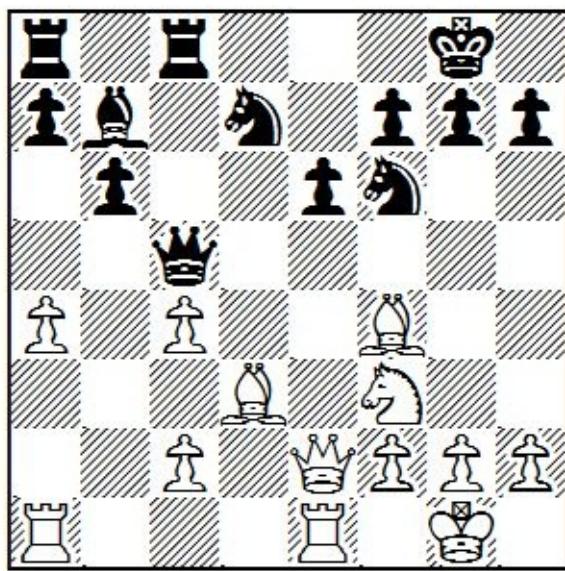
Bauer doesn't like this move and suggests 11 c4 Qh5 12 Ne5 Qxe2 13 Bxe2 c5 14 c3, but this looks like quite a comfortable ending for Black, who is easily structurally compensated for the loss of bishop-

pair.

**11 ... c5**

Once again, 11 ... Qh5 is to be considered.

**12 dxc5 Qxc5 13 c4 Nbd7 14 a4**



Black's superior structure, potential for greater central influence and control over c5 easily compensate White's bishop-pair in the open position.

**14 ... Re8**

Intending ... e5. Instead, 14 ... a5!? is tricky. It fixes a4 as a perpetual target, but also b6, as well as the b5-square. It's difficult to see at this point if the move favours or hurts Black.

**15 a5**

To make his lie convincing, the a-pawn realizes it requires an action of physical commitment.

**15 ... e5**

15 ... bxa5 16 Bd2 regains the pawn instantly.

**16 Be3 Qc7 17 Bf5??**

Positional players tend to harbour a strong distaste for hypotheticals, so it's surprising that Bareev offered a sacrifice for essentially only fishing chances. Only a fragile thread separates this risky idea from a suicide mission. This is a real pawn sacrifice, but it looks only semi-sound. White should address the problem immediately with 17 axb6 axb6 18 Rxa8 Rxa8 19 Bf5 which is the safer route, although I prefer Black after 19 ... g6 20 Bh3 h5.

**17 ... bxa5!**

Advantage Black. Bauer accepts the gift with thanks.

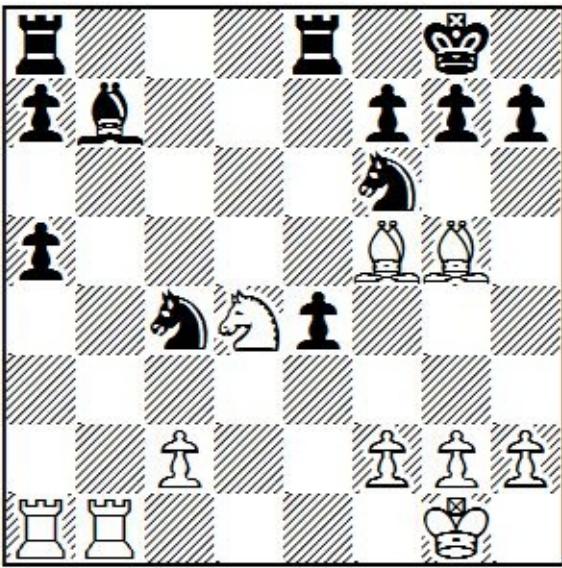
**18 Bd2 e4??**

This weakens the dark squares and offers White some compensation for the lost pawn. Stronger is 18 ... a4!, and if 19 Rxa4 Nb6 20 Rb4 g6 21 Bh3 Ba6! the c4-pawn is done for. After 22 Qd1 Bxc4 23 Qa1 Nfd5 24 Rbb1 f6 Black's active, centralized pieces, domination of the light squares, and his extra pawn easily override White's control over the dark squares and bishop-pair.

**19 Nd4 Nb6 20 Bg5 Qxc4**

The queen is a woman, who throughout her life, was never able to resist a single temptation.

**21 Qxc4 Nxc4 22 Reb1**



**Question:** Isn't Black just completely winning, up two pawns?

**Answer:** GM Tisdall writes: "It seems a bit unfair that Black should have such a hard time showing any clear advantage at all with two extra pawns, but the famous bishop-pair and White's active pieces create a very complex situation."

**Question:** Do you buy this assessment?

**Answer:** Not completely. Conquest of the dark squares seems to be the critical organizing principle of White's justification. I would still take Black any day, with two extra pawns in an ending. Still, Tisdall has a point and to my mind White generates almost (but not complete) compensation for the pawn.

**22 ... Bd5**

Also possible is 22 ... Rad8! 23 Rxb7 Rxd4 24 Rxa7 Nd5 25 Bd7 Rf8 with a clear advantage for Black, whose rook and knights centralize powerfully, challenging White's bishops, while retaining one extra pawn.

**23 Rb5 Rad8 24 Rc5 h6 25 Bh4**

Bareev seeks to retain his bishops, refusing the offer to swap on f6.

**25 ... e3?!**

Emboldened by initial success, Bauer pushes the risk up a notch. So far, we can't accurately describe Black's consolidation attempts as being well orchestrated. Believe it or not, this ambitious move may be the precursor to Black's coming problems. It creates a passer, but also artificially isolates Black's e-pawn, therefore weakening it. More cautious was 25 ... Kf8. Even then, I'm not certain he can make progress, but at least there is very little chance of him actually losing the game.

**26 f3!**

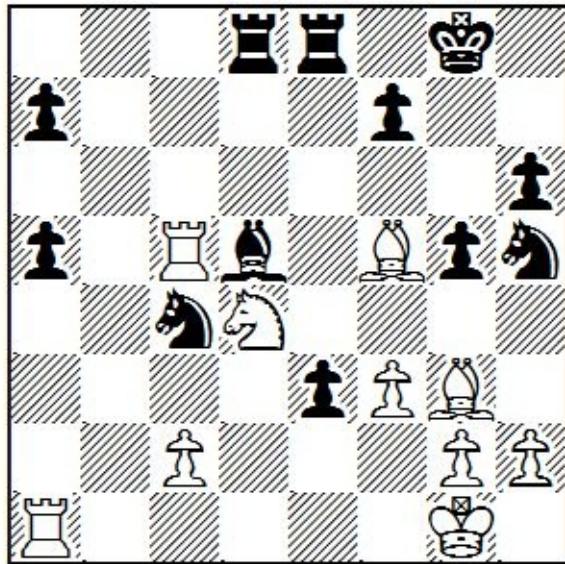
Bareev dreams of surrounding the e-pawn someday.

**26 ... g5?!**

Black remains intransigent, digging in deeper to risk. After this move Black's edge may have vanished. Black should reassess his previous assumptions and take a more cautious route with something like 26 ... Kf8.

**27 Bg3 Nh5?**

This knight chafes at this menial job of office clerk and dreams of doing big things in the world. The fair result should be a draw after a line like 27 ... a6 28 Bc7 Ra8 29 Bd3 Nb2 30 Be2 a4 31 c4 Be6 32 Ra2 a3 33 Nxe6 (33 Rxa3 also looks drawn after 33 ... Bxc4 34 Bxc4 Nxc4 35 Rxc4 e2 36 Ba5 e1Q+ 37 Bxe1 Rxe1+ 38 Kf2 Rb1 39 Nf5) 33 ... Rxe6 34 Rxa3 Rc8 35 Bb6 Rb8 36 Ba7 Na4! 37 Rxg5+ hxg5 38 Bxb8 Rb6 (double attack, threatening the bishop as well as vulgarities along the back rank) 39 g3 Rxb8 40 Rxa4 Rb1+ 41 Kg2 Rb2 42 Kf1 Rb1+ with a draw by repetition of moves.



**Exercise (combination alert):** I have no idea if Black's last move was a blunder

or an overly ambitious sacrifice, but it feels to me a curious fusion of mathematics and prayer. In any case, Black's last move dismantles all his previous labours in the work of a hasty moment. White forces the win of material. How?

**Answer:** Overloaded defender.

**28 Bc7!**

The bishop's monastic concentration on the long diagonal begins to pay off, although some would say that he wasted his life in prayer, to avert an apocalypse, which he now initiates. When someone wounds our pride, it causes us pain; when someone drains our bank balance, our agony grows a hundred-fold. The d8-rook, wishing to be any place but here, begins to whistle Dixie. It can't move, and Black's bishop on d5 requires his defensive services.

**28 ... Nf4**

The only silver lining of a present time crisis is that it doesn't allow us time to brood on the injustices of the past.

**29 Bxd8 Rxd8 30 c3**

White should remove Black's rook with 30 Rc8! Rxc8 31 Bxc8 (White threatens Ba6, Bxc4 and Rxa5) 31 ... Nb6 32 Ba6 a4 33 Bb5 when a4 falls and Black is busted.

**30 ... Ne6**

Even here Black may hold the game with 30 ... Kg7! 31 Rc7 Kf6 32 Rxa7 (or 32 Be4 Bxe4 33 fxe4 Nd2 and I don't think Black should lose) 32 ... Be6 33 Ra6 e2 34 Kf2 Rxd4! 35 cxd4 Kxf5 36 g3 Nd3+ 37 Kxe2 Nb4 when Black's three minor pieces should easily hold the game against White's pair of rooks.

**31 Bxe6?!**

The wrong piece. Stronger is 31 Nxe6! fxe6 32 Bd3 with a winning position for White.

**31 ... fxe6 32 Kf1?!**

White's best winning shot is 32 Nc6! Bxc6 33 Rxc4 Be8 34 Re4 Kf7 35 Rxe3 a4.

**32 ... Rb8!**

Threatening to infiltrate with ... Rb2 next. Bauer continues to distract, making White's conversion as difficult as threading a needle while under physical attack.

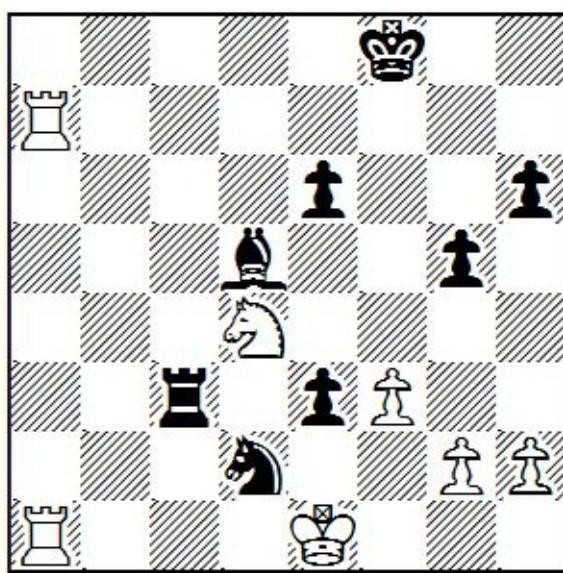
**33 Rb5 Nd2+?**

Black doesn't even stand worse anymore after 33 ... Rc8!.

**34 Ke1 Rc8 35 Rbxa5 Rxc3 36 Rxa7**

Now Black is doomed.

**36 ... Kf8**



**Exercise (planning):** The weak procession of would-be black attackers does little to intimidate White's well protected king. We arrive at a point where intent intersects with volition. Find White's clearest path to the win.

**Answer:** Simplification. Once Black's rook is removed from the board, Black's harmony is tipped in disarray and the remnants of counterplay disappear.

**37 R7a3! Rxa3 1-0**

After 38 Rxa3 Nc4 39 Ra7 Nd6 40 Ke2 Nc4 41 Nc2 the weakness of e3 draws White's attention, as if to a siren's wail. However, if instead 37 ... Rc4 38 Nxe6+! Bxe6 39 Rxe3 and White regains the sac'ed piece with a technical win.

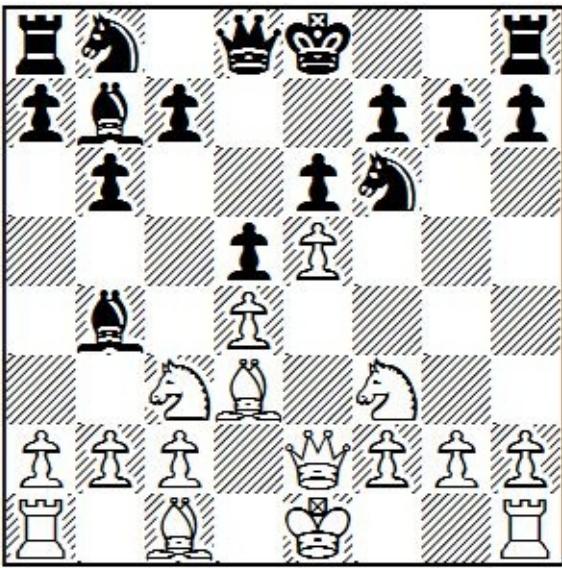
**Summary:** 7 ... Qxd5 (or first, perhaps more accurately, 7 ... Bxc3+ and 8 ... Qxd5) seems to offer Black fully dynamic chances. We are compensated for the loss of the bishop-pair through control over the light squares and the slightly superior structure.

*Game 7*

**L.Kubacsny-Hoang Thanh Trang**

Hungarian League 2007

**1 e4 b6 2 d4 Bb7 3 Nc3 e6 4 Nf3 Bb4 5 Bd3 Nf6 6 Qe2 d5 7 e5**



I'm tempted to give this move a '?!' mark.

**Question:** Why? It looks like White simply enters a French-style position.

**Answer:** This is White's major alternative to swapping on d5, where we arrive in French-like positions, but I believe a good one for our side, mainly due to the c3 pin. When White is unable to maintain a 50% score, I become suspicious of the line's validity.

**7 ... Ne4!**

White scores a sorry 43.2% after this move, which extracts a concession from White, no matter what the response. There is absolutely no necessity to back down with 7 ... Nfd7?! 8 0-0 c5. Black's database score from here, after three games: 0%, which I'm guessing is lower than average.

**8 Bd2**

A concession, after which Black gets an excellent French, having pocketed White's powerful dark-squared bishop.

**Question:** What other option does White have?

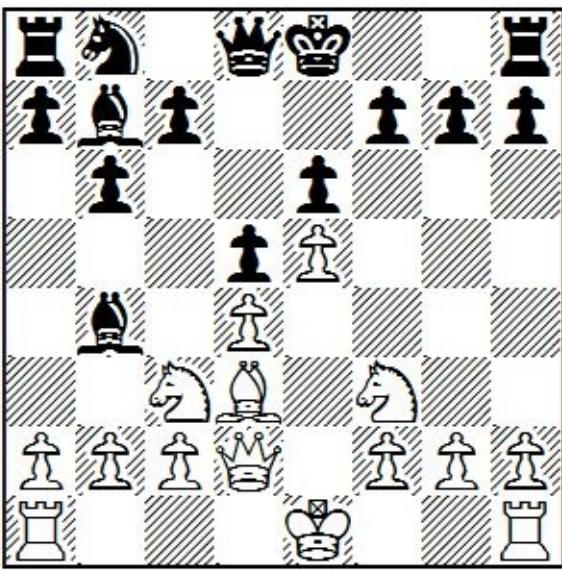
**Answer:** He can castle, sacrificing c3, which is the more dynamic option, that we look at next. But if we know what we are doing, it still looks favourable for Black.

Instead, 8 Bxe4?? (the bishop decides to break with tradition and actually does kill the messenger) 8 ... dxe4 9 Ng5 Qxd4 10 Bd2 e3! 11 Qxe3 Qxe3+ 12 Bxe3 Bxg2 13 Rg1 Bxc3+ 14 bxc3 Bd5 leaves Black up a pawn in the ending, with a vastly superior structure to boot.

**8 ... Nxd2**

Thanks!

**9 Qxd2**



**9 ... Be7**

In my opinion, Black's best move.

**Question:** Why an unforced retreat?

**Answer:** It is in Black's best interest to hang on to the keeper of the dark squares. Black's main move here is 9 ... c5 10 a3 Ba5!? (10 ... Bxc3 11 Qxc3 is safer for Black, but why hand over our good bishop?) 11 b4! cxb4 12 Nb5 b3 (Black's safest and probably best move) 13 c3 0-0 was G.Wagner-M.Werner, German League 1988. The game looks dynamically equal after 14 0-0 f6 15 Rab1 Nd7 16 Rxb3.

**10 Ne2**

Dual purpose:

1. White prepares for the coming ... c5 and is ready to answer with c3, maintaining his central space advantage.
2. White transfers the somewhat useless c3-knight to better grazing grounds on the kingside.

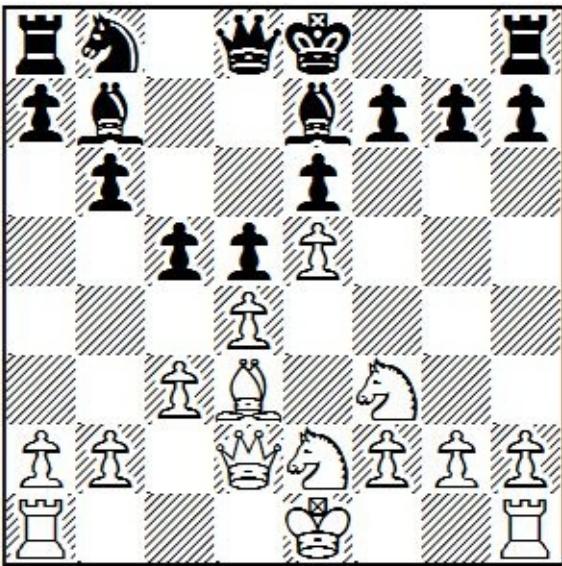
**10 ... c5**

At last, our thematic central French break.

**Question:** What if I'm not a French player?

**Answer:** Today, very few opening systems are purely exclusionary. Most are derivative observations from other lines. 1 ... b6 tends to require the blended skills of the French, Modern Defence, Nimzo-Indian, Queen's Indian, Dutch and sometimes even the Ruy Lopez and King's Gambit. Don't worry if you lack experience in any of the listed lines. These are specific positions and you don't need to learn the entire French, merely targeted segments of the opening structure. There is no subject too complex for our minds under the light of familiarization. In this day of databases, anyone can familiarize him or herself with the key themes of a particular structure very quickly.

**11 c3**



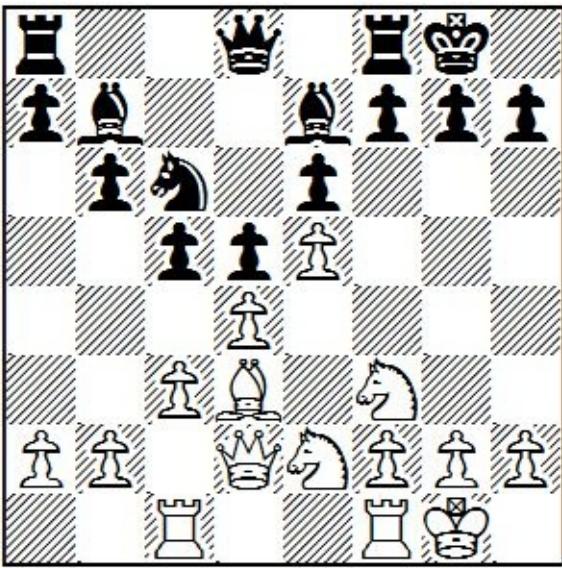
### 11 ... Nc6!?

It may be more logical for Black to take time out to swap away White's powerful attacking bishop with 11 ... Ba6!. An example: 12 0-0 (12 Bc2 is playable, but then Black's formally bad light-squared bishop looks pretty strong down the f1-a6 diagonal) 12 ... Bxd3 13 Qxd3 Nc6 14 Rfe1 Qd7 15 Rad1 (White's rooks are all ready for a coming central break with c4, but I would toss in 15 b3 to prevent Black's next move) 15 ... c4! (now White's rooks look rather aimless on e1 and d1) 16 Qc2 b5 17 b3!? (proactive but it violates the principle: *avoid confrontation on your opponent's strong wing*) 17 ... 0-0 18 bxc4 bxc4 19 Rb1 h6 20 Nd2 a6! (idea: ... Na7 and ... Nb5) 21 g3 Na7 22 f4?! (22 a4 looks correct, keeping Black's knight out of b5) 22 ... Nb5 (threatening a cheapo on a3; I already prefer Black's position) 23 Qa4? Qc6! (cheapo alert: Black threatens ... Nxd4!) 24 Qa5 (the jumpy white queen starts violently at the slightest sound - and with good reason; there is a fine line between infiltrating and getting trapped) 24 ... Rfb8 (even stronger is 24 ... Na3! 25 Rb2 Rab8 26 Rxb8 Rxb8) 25 a4 Na7 26 Rxb8+ Rxb8 27 Rb1 Rxb1+ 28 Nxb1 Qb7 29 Nd2 Nc6 when White's trapped queen pays dearly for her previous presumption, H.Waller-T.Polak, Stockerau 2003.

### 12 0-0 0-0

Black is confident he will survive any kingside assault, especially with White's missing dark-squared bishop. This means he can play moves like ... g6 later on, without fear of Bh6.

### 13 Rac1



A new move. There is nothing more scary than pitting your wits against an opponent who just confidently banged down a theoretical novelty, the idea of which is known to him or her, but not you. This is not one of those times! White's move may be a novelty, but not such a scary one for our side.

13 a3 doesn't exactly put fear of damnation into our hearts either. White intends b4, to induce resolution of queenside pawn tension, but after 13 ... c4 14 Bc2 b5 15 Ne1 (clearing the path for f4, but this is awfully slow, when compared to Black's coming queenside avalanche) 15 ... a5 (anyone who experiences an insect or rodent infestation in her home, understands the power of proliferation, which once gaining momentum, is a difficult force to arrest) 16 f4 f5! (*principle: counter in the centre when attacked on the wing*) 17 exf6 Bxf6 18 Nf3, as in P.Gollewsky-C.Jahn, Bad Blankenburg 1990, chances are dynamically balanced after 18 ... Qd6.

### **13 ... Rc8 14 Rfd1 Qd7 15 h4**

White hopes to get something going on the kingside.

### **15 ... cxd4**

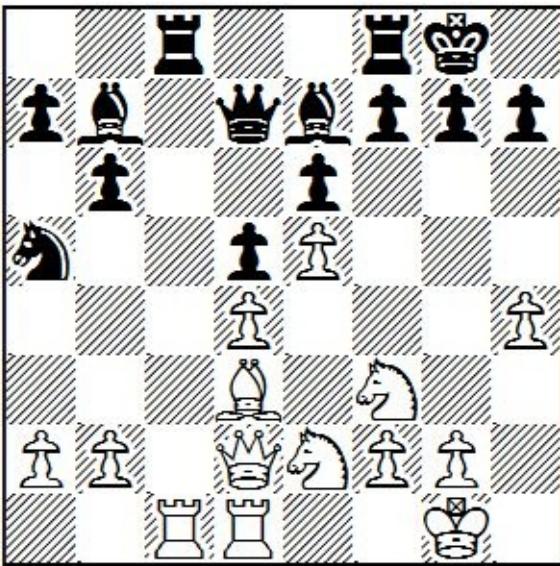
*Principle: counter in the centre when assaulted on the wing.*

### **16 cxd4**

White should perhaps speculate with 16 Nxd4 Nxd4 17 Nxd4! offering h4 to open lines. Gigantic endeavours tend to suffer from one flaw: they tend to move at a slow pace - but not this time. The extenuating fact being, if White doesn't do something radical, he gets slowly ground down, so it's hunt or be hunted. Is there such a thing as an addiction which is free of negative consequences? In order to attack, White must pay up. Maybe this radically aggressive therapy is likely to help White in the healing process.

Following 17 ... Bxh4 (this greedy capture is by no means obligatory, but I would grab and hope to survive the coming assault down the h-file) 18 g3 Bd8! (intending to pressure e5, via c7; also, the move allows Black's queen lateral defensive access to the kingside) 19 Kg2 h6 (an unpopular king requires many guards) 20 Rh1 (what was once a dim apparition now comes into clarity as a significant threat to Black's kingside interests; White has full compensation for the pawn and chances look balanced) 20 ... f6 *Houdini* says chances are balanced, while I display a French player's bias by picking Black's side.

### **16 ... Na5!**



White's dilemma: he doesn't want to allow Black's knight access to c4, but if he plays b3 to prevent it, he weakens his dark squares and sets himself up for ... Ba3, which may wrest control over the c-file.

**17 Rxc8 Rxc8 18 b3 Nc6**

The knight completed its job in extracting concessions and heads for a better square.

19 Bb1

Intending Qd3, but as mentioned earlier, Black can now afford to toss in ... g6, which is almost unthinkable when White's dark-squared bishop remains on the board.

19 ... Ba6

Oh, what inner joy a French Defence player experiences when his or her formally ‘bad’ bishop achieves the status of a respectable member of society through the power of redemption.

20 Ng3

Also possible is to invest a tempo with 20 Qc2 g6 21 Qd2. At least then White can play for h5, chipping away at Black's defensive barrier around his king.

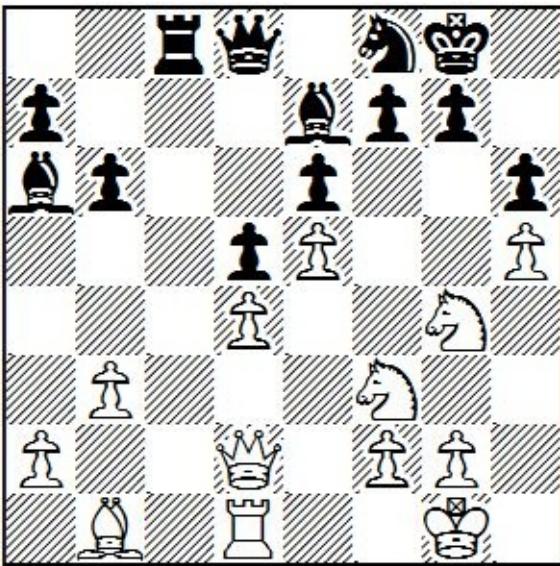
20 ... Qd8 21 h5 Nb8!

Preventing Qc2 and thinking about swinging the knight over to f8.

22 Nf1

Preparing to transfer the knight over to g4.

22 ... Nd7 23 N1h2 h6 24 Ng4 Nf8



25 Bd3

It isn't easy to deliberately lose face, when in the back of our minds we itch to make a show of strength. White, deciding to recalibrate, veers sharply from his previous attacking leit-motif and decides to try and fortify it out. Is this backing down or is this just ruthless pragmatism? I don't know. In any case, *Houdini* doesn't think this move is an error.

**Question:** Can White get away with a knight sacrifice on h6?

**Answer:** It's completely unsound after 25 Nxh6+?? gxh6 26 Qxh6 Be2, and if 27 Rc1 (27 Re1?? Bxf3 28 gxf3 Bg5 traps White's queen) 27 ... Bxf3 28 gxf3 f5 29 exf6 Rxc1+ 30 Qxc1 Bxf6 when White lacks any compensation for the sacrificed piece.

25 ... Bxd3 26 Qxd3 Qc7

Seizing control over the all-important c-file.

27 g3

I would not allow a queen swap and would go into full retreat mode with 27 Ne1 (covering c2) 27 ... Bb4 28 Ne3.

27 ... Qc2 28 a4?!

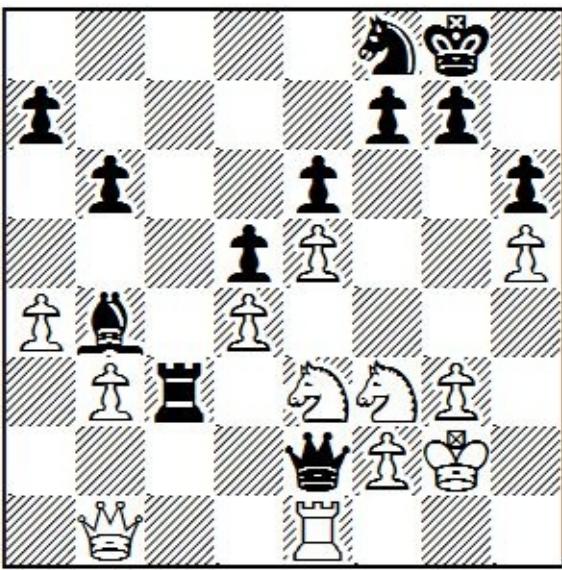
This weakens the queenside. I would take my chances with 28 Qxc2 based on the thought: the infiltration of one piece is an invasion without an army. After 28 ... Rxc2 29 Rd2 Rc1+ 30 Kg2 White may be able to hold this inferior ending - or not. All I know is I would much rather have Black's side. A dynamic equilibrium is very different from its static counterpart. In a dynamic equilibrium, opposing forces somehow still manage to cancel each other out. In this case, it feels like only Black can make progress, so I take with great scepticism *Houdini*'s even evaluation.

**28 ... Bb4 29 Ne3 Qb2 30 Qb1 Qe2!?**

Black is no longer satisfied with the better ending after 30 ... Qxb1 31 Rxb1 Nd7.

**31 Kg2 Rc3 32 Re1?**

Necessary was 32 Rd2 Qa6.



**Exercise (combination alert):** White's last move overlooked a trick. Do you see Black's combination?

**Answer:** Overloaded piece/discovered attack.

**32 ... Rxb3!**

This move is made possible by the fact that it uncovers Black's bishop on the e1-rook.

**33 Qxb3 Bxe1 34 Qc2**

White tries his luck in a pawn-down ending, rather than grovel further with 34 Nd1.

**34 ... Qxc2 35 Nxc2 Ba5 36 Kf1 Nd7 37 Ke2 Kf8**

Both parties centralize their kings, now that queens are removed from the board.

**38 Kd3 Ke7 39 Ng1**

Preparing to gain kingside space with f4.

**39 ... f6 40 f4 f5!?**

I would have tried to open the kingside with 40 ... fxe5 41 fxe5.

**41 Nf3 Nb8 42 Ne3**

Intending g4 next.

**42 ... Nc6 43 g4 fxg4 44 Nxg4 Kf7 45 Ne3 Ne7**

Just in time, before White generates counterplay with f5. Black decides that White's territorial transgressions deserve reprisal.

**46 Ke2 a6!**

Reminding White that Black owns a queenside pawn majority.

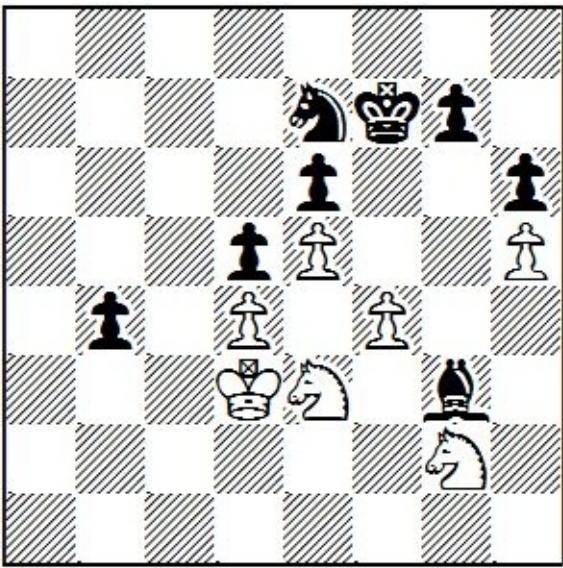
**47 Nh4 Bc3**

Even stronger is 47 ... Nc6!. A counterintuitive move, since it abandons control over f5. After 48 Kd3 Be1! 49 Nf3 (or 49 Ng6 Nb4+ 50 Ke2 Bc3 and d4 falls) 49 ... Bf2 50 f5 Bxe3 51 fxe6+ Kxe6 52 Kxe3 Ne7 53 Kd3 Nf5 there is no remedy for the coming ... Ng3.

**48 Nc2 b5**

A passer emerges. Also strong was 48 ... g6! 49 hxg6+ Nxg6 50 Ng2 h5 and Black will soon get a second passer with ... b5.

**49 axb5 axb5 50 Kd3 b4 51 Ne3 Be1 52 Nhg2 Bf2 53 Ng4 Bg3 54 N4e3**



**Exercise (planning):** Life soon begins to speed up for White's defenders. How does Black make progress?

**Answer:** Create a second passed pawn.

**54 ... g6! 55 hxg6+ Kxg6 56 Nf1 Bf2 57 Nd2 Nf5 58 Nb3 h5**

White is completely tied down to defence of d4, while his g2-knight is a less-than-able blockader of Black's h-pawn.

**59 Ke2**

White's king views the bishop the way a British royal views Oliver Cromwell.

**59 ... Nxd4+ 60 Nxd4 Bxd4**

White's pawns experience emotions similar to Christians in the arena, while Coliseum employees bring in the famished lions. Now Black picks up a third passer.

**61 Nh4+ Kf7 62 Nf3 Bc5 63 Ng5+ Ke7 0-1**

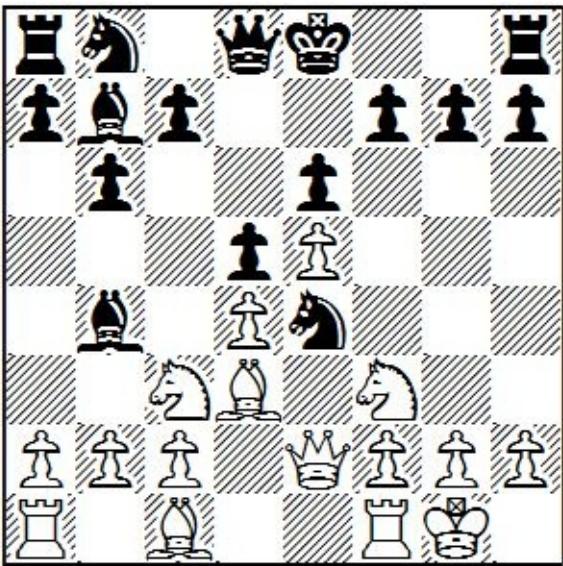
**Summary:** 7 e5 in conjunction with 8 Bd2 gets us into a favourable French style position. Don't be afraid to enter the structure, even if you lack French Defence experience.

*Game 8*

**M.Pavlovic-A.Minasian**

Moscow 2008

**1 d4 b6 2 e4 Bb7 3 Nc3 e6 4 Nf3 Bb4 5 Bd3 Nf6 6 Qe2 d5 7 e5 Ne4 8 0-0!**



**Question:** I assume from your annotation that you believe White's sacrifice is sound?

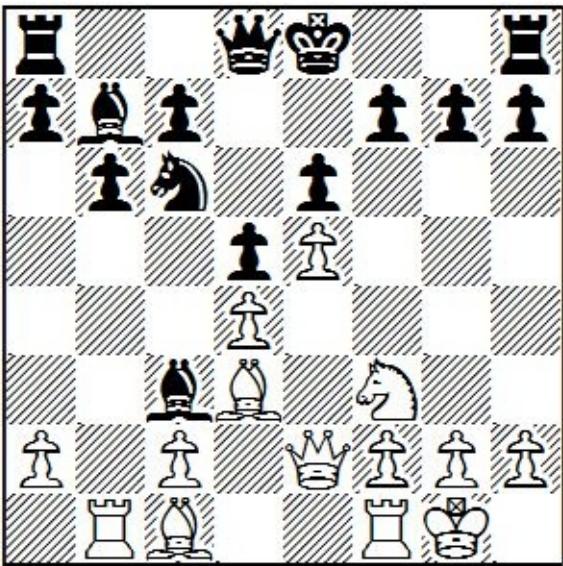
**Answer:** Opening custom dictates such bold action, since all other choices appear lame. If White is going to enter this line, this pawn sacrifice is the only real playable version, unless White wants a milquetoast French-style position like last game, where he or she fights for equality and is unlikely to attain it.

**8 ... Nxc3**

**Question:** Since Black's dark-squared bishop ends up in an awkward situation in the game's continuation, why not chop on c3 with the bishop and then gain a tempo with the knight?

**Answer:** I don't like the idea of handing White all those dark squares, and the corresponding attacking chances which come with the package. For example, 8 ... Bxc3 9 bxc3 Nxc3 10 Qe3 Ne4 (*Houdini* suggests 10 ... h6 11 a4 Nc6 12 Ba3 with balanced chances) 11 Ba3 Nc6 12 c4! Ne7 13 cxd5 exd5 14 Bb5+ c6 15 Bd3 when Black soon loses his extra pawn and struggles from this point on, S.Gligoric-M.Markovic, Herceg Novi 2000.

**9 bxc3 Bxc3 10 Rb1 Ne6**



Applying pressure to d4.

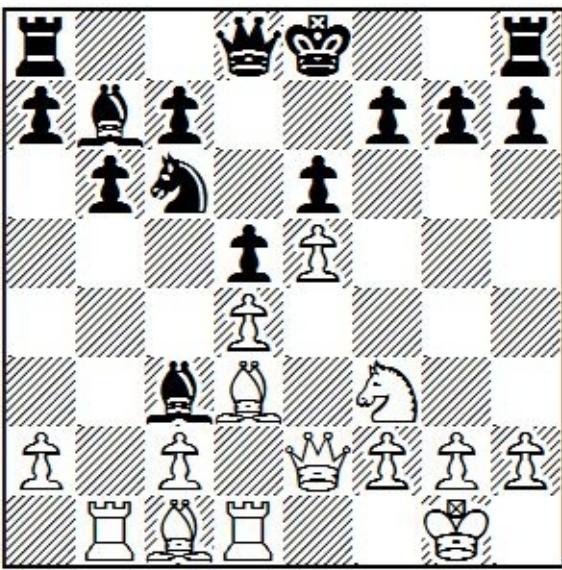
**11 Rd1!?**

A new move. We must feel genuine in the positions we reach after the opening. In this instance, White feels this position is conducive to divergent stylistic interpretation in the most aggressive possible manner.

Others:

a) With 11 Qe3 we note a convergence between the theoretical and the practical, with the latter taking precedence. White refuses to allow Black tricks on d4, while preparing to transfer the queen to greener feeding grounds on the kingside: 11 ... Bb4 (or 11 ... a5 intending to meet Ba3 with ... Bb4; after 12 Qf4 Nb4 13 Qg3 it looks to me like White gets sufficient attacking chances for his extra pawn) 12 Qf4 Qd7 13 Qg5 Bf8! (refusing to weaken the dark squares) 14 Bd2 was A.Gronn-B.Ostenstad, Norway 1992. I don't see fully sufficient compensation for the pawn after 14 ... h6 15 Qg4 a5 (intending ... Ba6) 16 c3 Ba6 17 Bxa6 Rxa6.

b) 11 Be3 Nb4 (logically going after White's important light-squared bishop) 12 Bb5+ c6 13 a3?! (13 Ba4 Qd7 threatens ... Ba6 and after 14 Bf4 Na6! 15 Qe3 Bb4 16 c3 Be7 *Houdini* claims compensation for White, but I play such French positions all the time as Black when I'm not up a pawn, so this one feels like Christmas day for Black's side) 13 ... cxb5 14 axb4 Qd7 15 Rb3 Rc8 16 Bd2 (16 Qd3 doesn't help since Black responds with 16 ... Qc6 intending ... Qc4) 16 ... Bxd2 17 Qxd2 Rc4 18 Ra1 a6 Black's extra pawn means more than his potentially bad bishop, T.Radjabov-V.Ivanchuk, Eilat 2012.



**11 ... Qd7**

**Question:** Can Black pick off a pawn with 11 ... Bxd4?

**Answer:** You must visualize the line a bit further. Black is in deep trouble after 12 Nxd4 Nxd4 13 Qg4! with a double attack on d4 and g7, and if 13 ... c5 14 Qxg7.

**Question:** Fair enough, but what about 11 ... Nxd4?

**Answer:** White whips up attacking chances after 12 Nxd4 Bxd4 13 Bb5+ c6 14 Bxc6+ Bxc6 15 Rxd4, and if 15 ... 0-0 16 Rg4 Kh8 17 Rb3! when White's attack looms dangerously over Black's under-protected, nervous king.

**12 Ba3!?**

I'm not so sure about this move, though. Chances look dynamically balanced after 12 Qe3 0-0-0 13 Bb5 Ba5 14 c3 a6 15 Ba4 f6, although stylistically, I prefer Black.

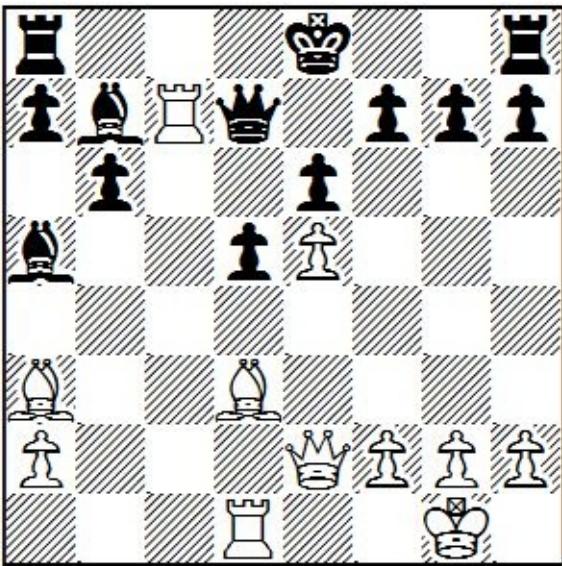
**12 ... Nxd4!**

Now the timing is right. The ramifications of the chain of events to come remain hidden for many moves. Black is under pressure after 12 ... a5?! 13 Bb5 h6 14 Rb3 Bb4 15 Bxb4 axb4 16 c3! 0-0 17 cxb4 Qd8 18 Rc1. White regained the sacrificed pawn with advantage.

**13 Nxd4 Bxd4 14 c3!?**

The strong willed never break from their core principles. White continues his assault with monomaniacal purpose, refusing to play it safer with 14 Bb5 c6 15 Bxc6 Bxf2+ 16 Qxf2 Qxc6 17 Qh4 (threatening mate on the move) 17 ... Qd7 18 Rb3 h6 19 Rg3 Rh7. White has obvious compensation, but I don't see any way to puncture Black, whose position I still prefer (although I have a bad feeling I am in a minority for this view).

**14 ... Bxc3 15 Rbc1 Ba5 16 Rxc7!?**



White operates on a you-break-it-you-buy-it philosophy and the game abruptly left-turns into a bewildering detour from normal. This shocker was White's intent. He picks up Black's queen, at steep cost.

### **16 ... Qxc7 17 Rc1**

Black's queen begins to feel her cheeks warm into the bloom of a full blush. The point: Bb5+ is a deadly threat.

### **17 ... Qxc1+!**

If you confront a loose, aggressive dog on the street, the worst possible thing you can do is to emit fear, since dogs smell the chemicals for terror, secreted by our glands during such states. This in turn, emboldens the dog and makes it more likely it will attack. So Black boldly confronts the aggressor, attaining ample compensation for the queen. Instead:

a) 17 ... Bc3 18 Bd6 Qd7 19 Rxc3 Rc8 20 Bb5 Rxc3 21 Bxd7+ Kxd7 22 h4 and White looks slightly better off here than the version he got in the game, since Black's king looks less secure in the middle.

b) 17 ... Qb8?? walks into a forced mate after 18 Bb5+ Kd8 19 Qh5. Black has no defence to the infiltration threats on f7 and g5.

### **18 Bxc1**

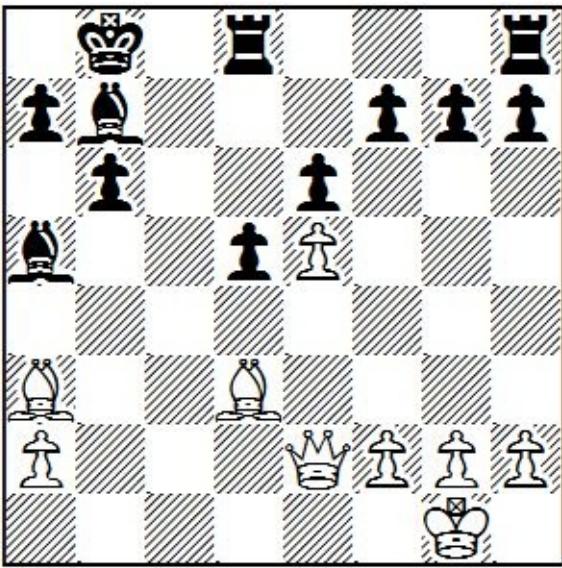
White gave Black two rooks and two pawns - an awful lot for the queen - and his gains seem to be offset with unequal and opposite losses. Black's difficulty lies in a lack of coordination with his pieces and potential to drop kingside pawns.

### **18 ... 0-0-0**

Black's king tucks himself away safely on a8.

### **19 Ba3 Kb8**

Just in time, before White gets the chance for Bd6. Black's king may have reached relative safety, but it's no easy job to unravel the remainder of his army.



**20 Qf3 Rd7 21 Bd6+?!**

Correct was 21 Bb5! d4! 22 Qg4 Rdd8 23 Bd6+ Ka8 24 Qxd4 a6 25 Bf1 h5 when Black stands only a shade better.

**21 ... Ka8 22 Bb5 Rc8!**

Let's admit it. We all love threatening tasteless, lowbrow back-rank cheapos.

**23 h3**

After 23 h4 Bc6 24 Ba6 Rg8 25 Qg3 g6 Black hangs on to everything and retains his advantage.

**23 ... Bc6 24 Ba6**

This constant harassment must have gotten on Minasian's nerves by now.

**24 ... Rcd8**

"Leave me alone!"

**25 Qd3**

Threatening h7.

**25 ... g6**

This move resonates for some time to come. Black's position is a patchwork of dark-square weakness, the renovation and reconstruction of which comes slowly, yet inevitably.

**26 Qc2 Bb7 27 Bb5 Rc8**

Minasian has an answer and his d7-rook once again escapes his tormentors.

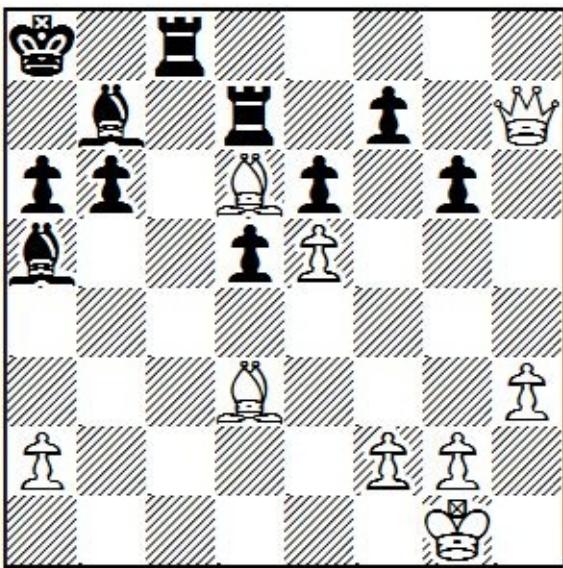
**28 Qa4 Rdd8 29 Qh4**

White incessantly generates threats, which are annoying more than dangerous to Black.

**29 ... a6 30 Bd3 Rd7!**

Not 30 ... h5? 31 Qe7! when f7 falls.

**31 Qxh7**



**31 ... b5!**

At long last, Black activates his queenside pawn majority and prepares to bring his anti-social dark-squared bishop back into the fold. Alternatively, 31 ... d4 32 Bxg6? fxg6! 33 Qxd7 d3 (Black threatens to promote, with the help of his pieces) 34 Bb4 (the only move; not 34 Qa4?? d2 35 Kh2 b5 36 Qb3 Rc1 and Black promotes) 34 ... Bxb4 35 Qxd3 Bc5 threatening ... Rf8 when Black's bishop-pair and rook outweigh White's lone queen and pawns.

**32 Qh4**

Following 32 Bxg6 Rxd6 33 exd6 fxg6 34 Qxg6 d4 the d4 passer looms and White is unable to save himself.

**32 ... Bc7!**

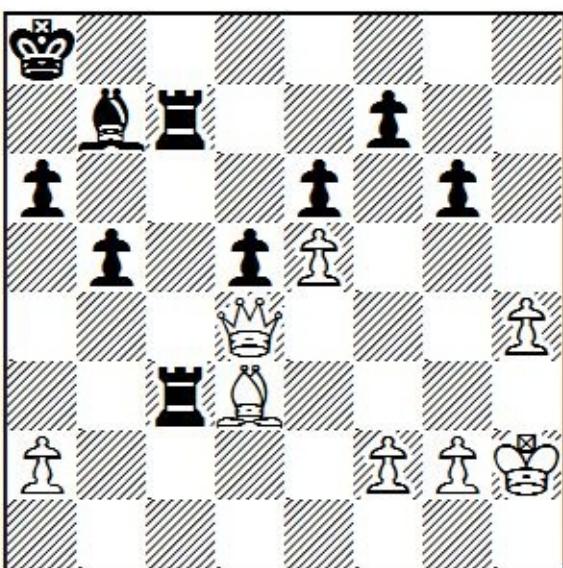
Eliminating White's most meddlesome piece. Black's bishop, who remains cloistered in exile on a5, divorced from all sense of community, is now granted a full pardon and allowed to return.

**33 Bxc7 Rdxс7 34 Qf4 Rc1+ 35 Kh2 R8c7 36 h4!**

Now g4 followed by h5 is in the air, when White generates a dangerous passer down the h-file.

**36 ... R1c3 37 Qd4**

After 37 Bf1 Ra3 38 Qd2 Ra4 39 g3 d4 White won't be able to save himself.



**Exercise (planning/critical decision):** Black is at a crossroads, with a choice of plans: a) Play 37 ... Ra3, going after a2. b) Play 37 ... Rc4, and if 38 Bxc4 dxc4, with a passed c-pawn. Black banks on the principle: *a queen is a poor blockader*. Isolate the correct line and rule out the false path.

### **37 ... R3c4?**

Black writes in the sand on the beach. His idea is clever, yet without lasting benefit. A reinforced hunch still isn't proof. Sometimes we demand and answer when only a fictional one exists within the line. In this case Black attempts to connect dots which don't exist. This plan (which I probably would also pick over the board) is incorrect, when examined deeper. Now White is able to deliver perpetual check.

**Answer:** Plan 'a'. White is unable to hold things together after 37 ... Ra3! 38 Bb1 Rc4!, breaking the d4 blockade and winning a pawn: 39 Qb2 Rxh4+ 40 Kg1 b4 41 Bc2 Rc3 when White is busted, with ... a5 and ... d4 coming.

### **38 Qb6?**

This lets Black out of his obligations. White holds the game after 38 Bxc4! bxc4 (38 ... dxc4 39 Qc3 b4 looks crushing, but White has resources: 40 Qxb4 c3 41 Qf4 c2 42 Qc1 Be4 43 f3 Bd3 44 Kg3 Rb7 45 Qg5! Rb1 46 Qd8+ Kb7 47 Qd7+ Kb6 48 Qd6+ Ka5 49 Qa3+ is perpetual check) 39 Qc3 (it appears as if the queen's power dims and goes into eclipse, but this just isn't so) 39 ... d4 40 Qxd4 c3 41 Qd8+ Rc8 42 Qg5 c2 43 Qc1 Bd5 44 g4! Bxa2 45 h5 gxh5 46 gxh5 a5 47 h6 Bb3 48 h7 Kb7 49 Qa3! Bd5 50 f3! c1Q 51 Qxc1 Rxc1 52 h8Q Rc2+ 53 Kg3 Rc3 54 Qe8 Rxf3+ 55 Kg4 Ka6 56 Qc8+ Kb5 57 Qb8+ Kc4 58 Qa7 Kb4 59 Qb8+ Ka3 60 Qb5 a4 61 Qc5+ Kb3 62 Qb5+ with perpetual check.

### **38 ... Rc8 39 g3**

39 Bxc4 bxc4 40 Qb1 d4 is curtains for White, who is unable to halt the passers.

### **39 ... Ra4 40 Kh3**

40 Bb1 Rc1 and White drops a2 all the same.

### **40 ... Rxa2**

Black's three passers are decisive.

### **41 Kg4 Rc6 42 Qd8+ Ka7 43 Qf8 Rxf2 44 Bxg6 fxg6?**

Unnecessary. Black wins easily after 44 ... Rc4+ 45 Kg5 Rf3.

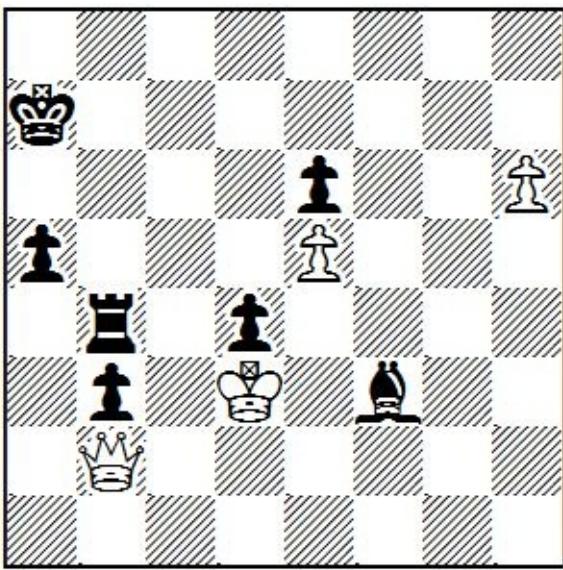
### **45 Qxf2+ Rb6**

The b-pawn is ready to roar down the board.

### **46 Kf4?**

The king approaches the queenside, chewing his lower lip. This move doesn't make sense. White should strive to pick off g6, after which he earns passers. White would hold the game after 46 Kg5! b4 47 Kxg6 b3 48 Qb2 d4 49 h5 d3 50 h6 d2 51 Qxd2 b2 52 h7 Be4+ 53 Kf6 Bxh7 54 Qd7+ Rb7 55 Qd4+ Ka8 56 Qd8+ Rb8 57 Qd6 Kb7 58 Qd7+ Kb6 59 Qd6+ with perpetual check.

### **46 ... b4 47 Ke3 b3 48 Qb2 a5! 49 g4 Rb4 50 h5 gxh5 51 gxh5 d4+ 52 Kd3 Bf3 53 h6**



**Exercise (combination alert):** How does Black halt White's passed h-pawn?

**Answer:** Transfer the bishop to the b1-h7 diagonal, via c2.

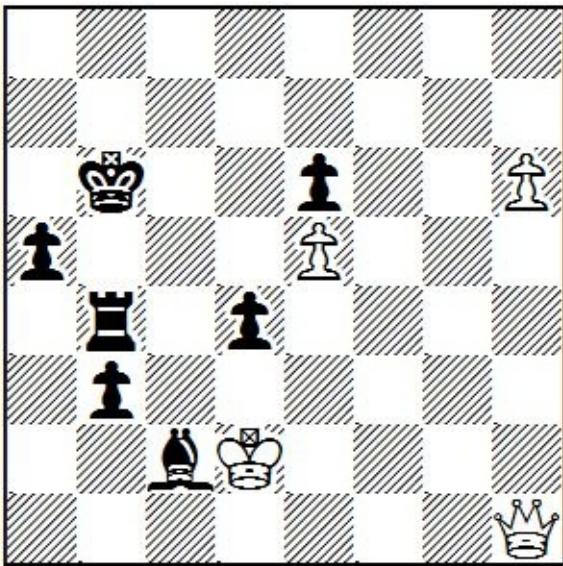
**53 ... Bd1! 54 Kd2 Bc2**

White's entire army is paralysed.

**55 Qa1**

White queen and king, both married to other people, emerge together from the broom closet, sweaty and with shifty expressions, twinged with guilt. If 55 Ke1 Kb6 56 Kd2 a4 57 Ke2 Kb5 58 Kd2 Bf5 59 Kd1 a3 60 Qxa3 b2 and Black promotes.

**55 ... Kb6 56 Qh1**



**Exercise (combination alert):** Find Black's most efficient win:

**Answer:** Overloaded piece. Sacrifice this bishop to promote.

**56 ... b2! 57 Kxc2 0-1**

57 ... b1Q+ 58 Qxb1 d3+! (this overload shot is decisive; most certainly not 58 ... Rxb1?? 59 Kxb1 when it is White who promotes first) 59 Kc1 d2+ 60 Kc2 Rxb1 is game over.

**Summary:** White's pawn sacrifice with 8 0-0! is sound. However, if given a choice, I still prefer Black, since an extra pawn is worth a little sweat.

### Game 9

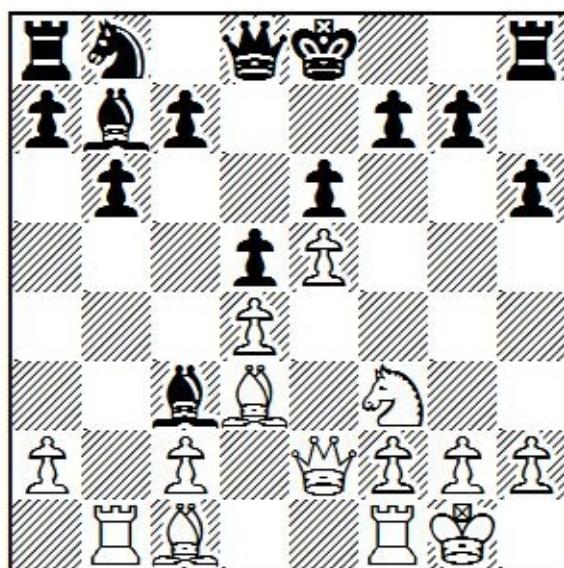
R.Atotubo-E.Torre

Manila 2007

**1 e4 b6 2 d4 Bb7 3 Bd3 Nf6 4 Nc3 e6 5 Nf3 Bb4 6 Qe2 d5 7 e5 Ne4 8 0-0 Nxc3 9 bxc3 Bxc3**

"We thank thee for the meal we are about to receive," intones the bishop, as he recites grace.

**10 Rb1 h6**



Another logical move.

**Question:** What is Black's point?

**Answer:** It eliminates all annoying Ng5 and Bg5 lunges and possibly prepares a future ... g5, if Black later castles queenside.

**Question:** But isn't it a luxury? After all, it's a non-developing move, in a position where Black already seriously lags behind.

**Answer:** Principle: *in closed positions, quality development overrides numeric development.* Black gets away with the crime, as long as White is unable to blast open the game too early.

**11 Rb3**

Sending Black's bishop into a temporary exile, while also preparing a possible rook-lift to the kingside if matters clear along the third rank.

After 11 Qe3 (threat: Bb5+, followed by Qxc3) 11 ... Ba5 12 Qf4 Ba6 (preparing to eliminate one of White's best potential attackers) White has:

a) 13 Rd1 Bxd3 14 Rxd3 Nc6 15 Qg4 g6 (also playable is the funky 15 ... Rh7!? intending to castle long) 16 c3 when chances appear to be dynamically balanced, D.Popovic-B.Nadj Kragujevac

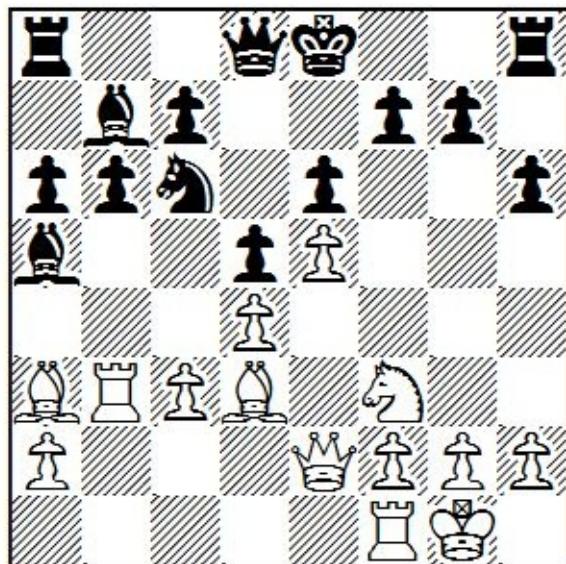
2009.

b) 13 Qg4 Kf8. Don't be alarmed. This is a common idea in French Defence lines (which this position strongly resembles), especially in the McCutcheon. After 14 Rb3 Bxd3 15 Rxd3 Nc6 16 c3 Kg8 17 Nh4 Ne7 18 Rg3 g6 19 Ba3 Rh7 *Houdini* favours Black, as do I, while most attackers may feel comfortable with White's pawn down side.

**11 ... Ba5 12 Ba3**

Preventing kingside castling, which Black never intended in the first place.

**12 ... Nc6 13 c3 a6!?**



**Question:** Why waste a tempo to prevent Bb5?

**Answer:** That isn't Black's intention. Black seeks to bring his dark-squared bishop back into the fold, with a coming ... b5, ... Bb6, ... Na5, ... Rc8 and ... c5.

**14 Ne1 b5 15 Nc2**

I would try and provoke a crisis on the kingside with 15 Qg4 g6 16 Bxg6!? fxg6 17 Qxe6+ Ne7 18 Qf6 Rf8 19 Qg7 Rf7 20 Qxh6 Qd7 21 Nf3 0-0-0 22 Ng5 Nf5 23 Qh3 Rg7 24 g4 Ne7 25 e6 Qe8 26 Bc5 with a complete mess. White has compensation for the piece, while stylistically I prefer Black's side.

**15 ... Bb6!**

Clearing a5 for his knight.

**16 f4 g6**

White's f5 must be prevented.

**17 Qg4**

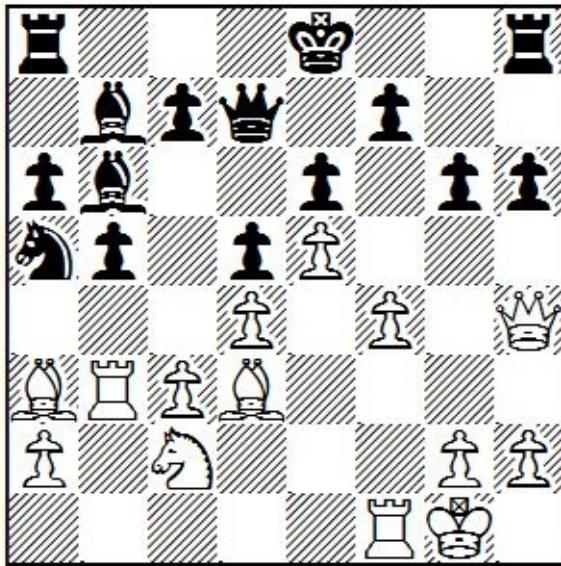
**Question:** Can White go for it by sac'ing with 17 f5 gxf5 18 Bxf5 exf5 19 e6?

**Answer:** *Houdini* isn't impressed by the sacrifice. For example, 19 ... Qf6 20 exf7+ Kxf7 21 Qd3 (21 Ne3 is met with 21 ... Rae8 22 Qh5+ Qg6 23 Rxf5+ Kg7 when Black is winning) 21 ... Kg7 22 Rxf5 Qg6 23 Qf1 Rae8 24 Rf3 Qe6 25 Rg3+ Kh7 26 Re3 Qd7 27 Rf3 (or 27 Qd3+ Re4 28 Rxe4 dxе4 29 Qxe4+ Kg7 30 Ne3 Re8 and Black repels the attack) 27 ... Nd8 28 Ne3 Rhg8 when White's attack stalls and he lacks compensation for the piece.

**17 ... Qd7 18 Qh4**

Preventing queenside castling for now.

18 ... Na5



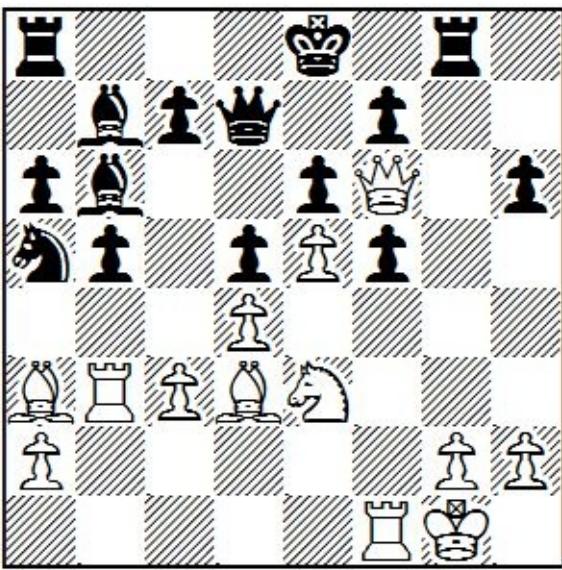
**Exercise (critical decision):** Is it time for the nuclear option of 19 f5? Or should White play a calmer move like 19 Rbb1 and build the attack in slower fashion?

**19 f5?**

**Answer:** White mistakenly nudges his idea forward to its logical extreme, the line-opening intent distilled into its most elemental form. He falsely imputes an attack in dependence on appearances, rather than the mathematical reality on the board. This attempt to resuscitate steals whatever counterplay White had stashed away, and qualifies as an overpress. White undoubtedly feared his position would degenerate if he failed to take decisive action.

Correct was the calm 19 Rbb1! Nc4 20 Bxc4! (20 Bc1?! is met with 20 ... Ba5 21 Qg3 c5 22 dxc5 Qe7; I prefer Black's side in what is essentially an exceedingly complex position) 20 ... dxc4 21 Ne3 c5 22 Ng4 Qc7 (I like White's chances in the opposite-coloured bishops position after 22 ... Bd8 23 Nf6+ Bxf6 24 Qxf6, although 24 ... 0-0 25 Bxc5 Rfe8 26 Qh4 Kh7 27 Rbe1 Rac8 28 Re3 Qd5 29 Rf2 Qd8 30 Qg4 h5 holds the balance) 23 Bxc5 Bxc5 24 dxc5 Qxc5+ 25 Kh1 Rd8 26 Rbd1 Rd3! 27 Rxd3 cxd3 28 Nf6+ Kd8 (only moves can still be good ones) 29 Ne4+ Qe7 30 Qe1 Bxe4 31 Qxe4 Kc7 32 Qxd3 Rd8 33 Qe3 Kc6 when Black owns the d-file and may stand slightly better, but his exposed king should allow White to draw after 34 Qe4+ Kb6 35 a4 Qc5 36 axb5 axb5 37 Qf3 Rd2 38 Ra1 (38 Qa8? is met with 38 ... Qc6! when White is in deep trouble) 38 ... Qd5 39 Qe3+ Kc6 40 Qg1! Qe4 41 Ra6+ Kd7 42 Qa7+ Ke8 43 Qb8+ Rd8 44 Qxb5+ Kf8 45 Ra1 Qxf4 46 Qb4+ Qxb4 47 cxb4 Rb8 48 Rb1 Rb5 49 h4 Ke7 50 Kh2 Rxe5 51 b5 Rd5 52 b6 Rd8 53 b7 Rb8 54 g4 Kd6 55 Kg3 Kc6 56 Rc1+ Kxb7 57 Rf1 Rf8 58 Rf6! Kc7 59 h5 Kd6 60 hxg6 Ke7 61 g7 Rg8 62 Rxh6 Rxg7 63 Kf4 when White should hold the draw. Of course this line is entirely comp-generated and a human would experience far greater difficulty in holding White's shaky position.

**19 ... gxf5 20 Qf6 Rg8 21 Ne3**



It appears as if the kingside transforms into a cornucopia of the black king's enemies. White contemplates a sacrifice on f5.

#### **21 ... Nc4**

The human move, after which the knight leaps about acrobatically, unlike his sedentary e3 counterpart. The human move, rejecting the out-of-play b3 offer and boldly challenging White to sacrifice his knight on f5. The comps, of course, vote for the greedy yet effective 21 ... Nxb3! 22 axb3 Qd8 23 Qxh6 Qg5 24 Qh3 c5! 25 dxc5 Bc7. White is about to lose the initiative and is busted.

#### **22 Bxc4**

White finds himself severely constrained, without viable options. This move loses the initiative, as does everything else:

a) The sacrifice 22 Nxf5? reminds us of the old joke about a man who searches for something under a lamp in his house. His wife asks: "Did you lose your wallet?" He replies: "Yes. I lost it at the office but I'm searching for it here because they turned off all the lights in my office building." This is tempting, but a wrecked car can't be fixed with a new paint job. White's powerful attack, like a mirage, appears to be solid and real, yet doesn't exist when examined under the backdrop of computer analysis. After 22 ... exf5 23 Bxf5 Qd8 24 Qxh6 Qg5 25 Qh3 Qe3+ the queens come off the board and White can resign.

b) 22 Qxh6 Nxa3 23 Rxa3 Qe7 24 Rb3 Qg5 25 Qxg5 Rxg5 when Black is up a pawn and about to take over the initiative with ... c5.

#### **22 ... dxc4 23 Rb2 h5!**

A confident move, retaining his h-pawn before contemplating ... Qd8 and ... Qg5. Black's move is stronger than the immediate 23 ... Qd8 24 Qxh6 Qg5 25 Qxg5 Rxg5 26 g3 Kd7 27 Ng2 Rh8. Black is up a pawn, with the initiative. In the game, Black essentially got this position with his h-pawn still on the board.

#### **24 Rbf2**

24 Qh4 Qd8 25 Qxh5 walks into 25 ... Bxd4! 26 cxd4 Qxd4 27 Re1 Qc3 28 Rbe2 (or 28 Nc2 Rxg2+ 29 Kf1 Qd2 30 Re2 Qf4+ 31 Ke1 Qc1 mate) 28 ... Qxa3 29 Nxf5 exf5 30 e6 Qc5+ 31 Kh1 0-0-0 32 exf7 Rgf8 when White can resign.

#### **24 ... Qd8 25 Qh6 Qg5**

Queens come off the board and White's would-be initiative begins and ends simultaneously.

#### **26 Qxg5**

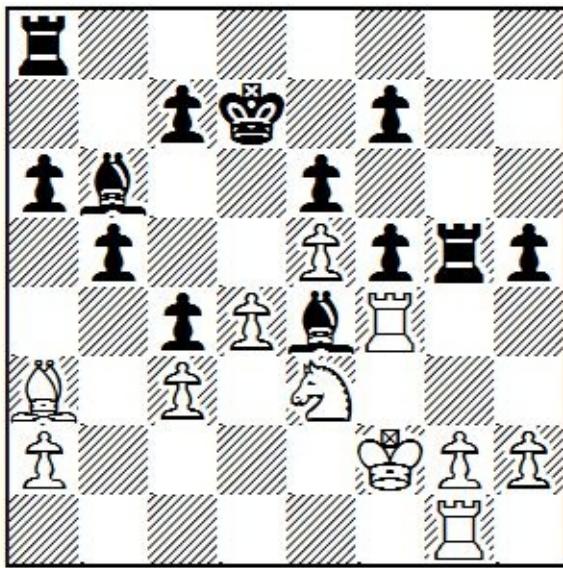
An exhalation of hot air hisses though the white queen's teeth, as she is forced to submit to her bossy

sister's wishes.

**26 ... Rxg5**

The ending is resignable for White, down two pawns, with nothing to show for it.

**27 Rf4 Kd7 28 Kf2 Be4 29 Rg1**



**Exercise (planning):** Before each game, we brace ourselves to endure three trials:

mental, physical and emotional. A collapse in even a single category may turn a potential triumph into a dismal failure. We have all been here, achieving a completely winning position, only to drift and allow our opponents to later escape, or worse, swindle us of the full point. Black's forces work in harmony, each cluster labouring contributions to various sectors of the board. Come up with a clear conversion idea for Black. Your key decision: to which sector of the board should we allocate resources?

**Answer:** Play for a ... b4 breakthrough. This idea is psychologically difficult for Black, since the open g-file pulls our eye over to the kingside.

**29 ... a5!**

Now ... b4! is in the air.

**30 Rd1 Bd3**

Discouraging d5 and bolstering c4, in preparation for ... b4.

**31 Rd2 Rb8!**

Intending ... Ba7 and ... Rb8.

**32 Rb2 Ba7 33 g3 Be4!**

"Good fortune descends upon those with virtue," pontificates the bishop. Interference. Now when ... b4 arrives, White's d4-pawn hangs. Also powerful was the immediate 33 ... b4! 34 cxb4 c3 35 Rb3 axb4 36 Bxb4 c2 37 Ba3 Rxb3 38 axb3 Be4! and d4 falls.

**34 Bc5**

This is the equivalent of resignation. 34 Rd2 b4 35 Bb2 Bd3 36 Ke1 Kc6 37 Rd1 Rd8 38 a3 b3 is just slow death for White. Black simply prepares ... c5, after which White's game collapses.

**34 ... Bxc5 35 dxc5 Rb7!**

Torre alertly avoids the careless 35 ... Kc6? 36 Nxc4. Black is still winning, but why hand over the c4-pawn when he doesn't need to?

**36 h3 Kc6 37 Rd2 Kxc5 38 Rd7 b4 39 Rd4**

Also futile is 39 Rxf7 bxc3 40 Re7 Rb2+ 41 Kf1 Rxg3.

**39 ... h4!?** **0-1**

There were many other ways to win, but 40 gxh4 Rh5 41 Rxc4+ Kb5 42 cxb4 axb4 43 Kg3 Ra7 44 Rf2 Ra3 does win.

**Summary:** Black gets away with 10 ... h6, since White is unable to punish by opening the game rapidly.

### Game 10

**B.Larsen-J.Timman**

Tilburg 1980

#### 1 Nf3

We can also reach our 1 e4 lines through various move orders. Normally, we arrive in our position via 1 e4 b6 2 d4 Bd7 3 Bd3 Nf6 4 Nc3 e6 5 Bg5 Bb4 6 Nf3 h6 7 Bxf6 Qxf6.

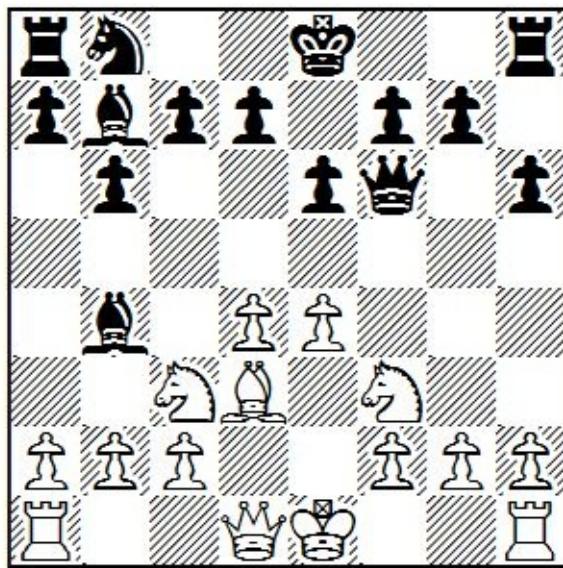
**1 ... Nf6 2 d4 b6 3 Bg5 e6 4 e4 h6**

Forcing White to hand over the bishop-pair.

**5 Bxf6 Qxf6 6 Bd3 Bb7 7 Nc3**

More aggressive than 7 Nbd2 which has the benefit of preserving White's structure by backing up d4 with c3.

**7 ... Bb4**



By transposition, we arrive in our final critical position of the chapter.

**Question:** White gave away the bishop-pair for the centre. Was it worth it?

**Answer:** It's a fair swap, but I don't believe White achieved any edge from it. We plan to return the bishop-pair on c3, inflicting some damage on White's structure in return.

**8 0-0**

8 a3?! wastes a tempo, since we planned to chop on c3 anyway. After 8 ... Bxc3+ 9 bxc3 Black is simply a tempo ahead of the game's continuation.

**Question:** Can White preserve the integrity of structure with 8 Qd2?

**Answer:** Black can disrupt White's structure another way with 8 ... c5 9 a3 cxd4 10 axb4 dxc3 11 bxc3 0-0 12 0-0 with at least even chances for Black in J.Fries Nielsen-B.Brinck Claussen, Copenhagen 1992. Black can continue with something like 12 ... d6 13 Nd4 a6 14 f4 Nd7 with a decent Sicilian-style position. White's normal Sicilian attacking chances have been reduced here through the swap of two pairs of minor pieces.

### 8 ... Bxc3

We rush to inflict damage. The immediate swap on c4 feels more accurate than allowing White 8 ... 0-0 9 Ne2 when a coming c3 gains time on Black's b4-bishop and White's e2-knight is allowed to transfer over to the kingside in the hope of generating a future attack.

### 9 bxc3 d6

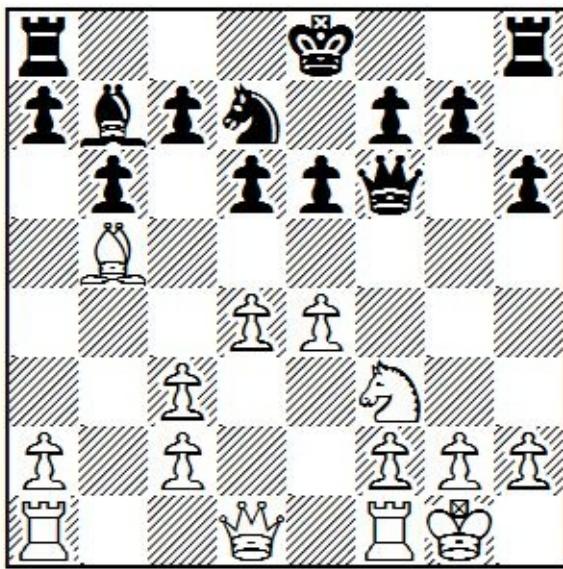
Black logically begins to switch his pawns over to dark, the opposite colour of his remaining bishop.

### 10 Bb5+!?

Larsen's modus operandi was to contaminate theory early in the game with a disorienting move. In this case the bishop is the precocious child who tries too hard to act adult, so that he comes across as artificial. Next game we examine White's main option 10 Nd2 intending f4.

### 10 ... Nd7!

Although 10 ... c6 is playable, there is no reason to loosen the structure and weaken the influence of the b7-bishop. Still, the move is very playable. Watch how quickly White got into trouble in this version: 11 Ba4 0-0 12 e5!? dxe5 13 Nxe5 b5 14 Bb3 c5 (threat: ... c4) 15 a4 c4 16 Ba2 a6 17 Rb1 Qg5 18 g3 f6 19 Nxc4?? (19 f4 Qf5 20 Bxc4 fxe5 21 fxe5 Qg6 22 Rxf8+ Kxf8 23 Bd3 Qg5 24 Qe2 Nd7 25 axb5 axb5 26 Bxb5 Qe7 leads to a messy and probably dynamically even position) 19 ... Qd5! 20 f3 bxc4 21 Qe2, J.Sanchez Martin-M.Marrero Martin, Tenerife 2003. White has insufficient compensation after 21 ... Rc8! 22 Rb4 Qd7.



### 11 Qd3

**Question:** Doesn't White get attacking chances - or if failing that, at least gain time - after 11 Bxd7+ Kxd7?

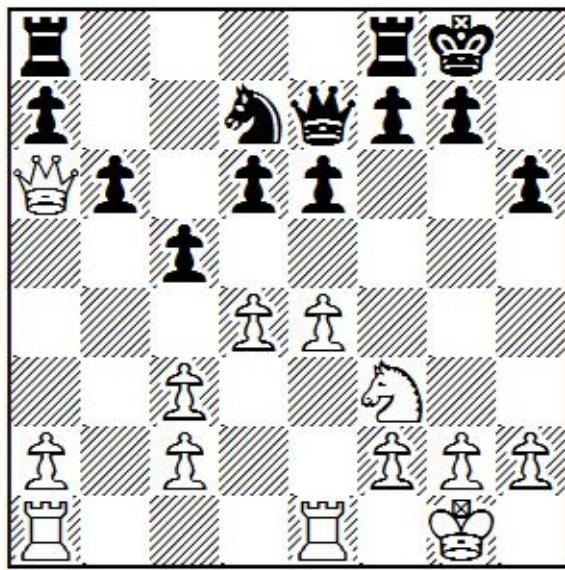
**Answer:** Black's king isn't so easy to reach. For example, 12 Qe2 Rae8 (intending ... e5 and ... Kc8) 13 a4 a5 14 c4 (White plans the disruptive c5 next) 14 ... g5! and if White follows through with his

intention with 15 c5!? g4 16 Nd2 Qxd4 17 cxb6 cxb6 18 c3 Qc5 19 Qxg4, he regains the lost pawn, but at the high cost of handing Black the open g-file. After 19 ... Rhg8 20 Qe2 Ke7 I prefer Black, who owns the open g-file, has the superior structure, and his king feels relatively safe.

### 11 ... Qe7 12 Ba6

Larsen, who realizes he may later get stuck with an inferior minor piece when Black achieves ... e5, decides to swap it away early, hoping to somehow exploit the queenside light squares in the wake of the exchange.

### 12 ... Bxa6 13 Qxa6 0-0 14 Rfe1 c5



Black's superior structure compensates for White's control over the centre and slight control over the queenside light squares.

**Question:** Isn't Black's plan normally to achieve ... e5?

**Answer:** In such structures, Black can free his game, conditionally upon achieving either a ... c5 or ... e5 break.

### 15 a4

Larsen applies a minority attack of sorts, with a5 to follow.

### 15 ... Rfc8!?

Perhaps Timman should ensure the opening of the c-file with 15 ... cxd4! 16 cxd4 Rfc8 17 Rec1 Rc7 18 a5 Rac8 19 c3 bxa5 20 Qxa5 Nb6 21 Nd2 e5. I prefer Black who applies some pressure down the c-file and owns an outside passed a-pawn - a clear asset should queens come off the board.

### 16 d5 Re8

After 16 ... exd5 17 exd5 Qf6 18 Qb5 Rd8 19 c4 Qf5 20 Re2 Re8 21 Rae1 Rxe2 22 Rxe2 Nf6 23 Qc6 Rc8 24 Qxd6 Qg4 25 Re7 Rf8! 26 Rxa7 Qxc4 27 Qxb6 Qxc2 28 h3 and Black, if he chooses, can take a draw here with 28 ... Qc1+ (28 ... Ne4 29 Kh2 Qxf2 30 Qc7 is also possible) 29 Kh2 Qf4+ 30 Kg1 Qc1+.

### 17 Re3 Nf6

Black may already stand a shade better due to his beneficial structure.

### 18 Qd3

Alternatively:

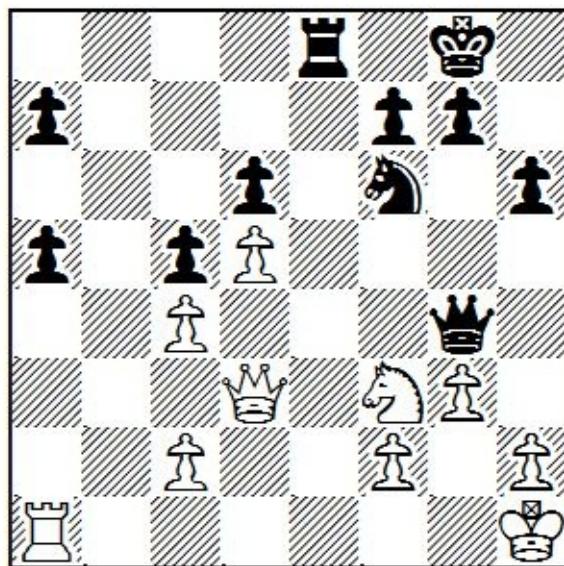
a) 18 c4 exd5 19 exd5 Qd7 20 Rae1 Qf5 21 Rxe8+ Rxe8 22 Rxe8+ Nxe8 23 Qb5 Nf6 24 Qb3 g5 when White finds himself somewhat tied down in the ending to his weak queenside pawns.

b) 18 a5 exd5 19 exd5 Qc7 20 c4 bxa5 21 Qxa5 Qxa5 22 Rxa5 Rxe3 23 fxe3 Ng4 24 Nd2 Re8 25 e4 Nf6 26 Rxa7 Nxe4 and White remains slightly worse in the ending.

**18 ... exd5 19 exd5 Qd7 20 Rxe8+ Rxe8 21 c4 Nh5**

Intending to drum up threats with ... Nf4 and ... Qg4.

**22 g3 Qg4 23 Kh1 Nf6 24 a5 bxa5!?**



Timman gambles that his newly passed a-pawn will be a source of strength, rather than a weakness.

**25 Rxa5**

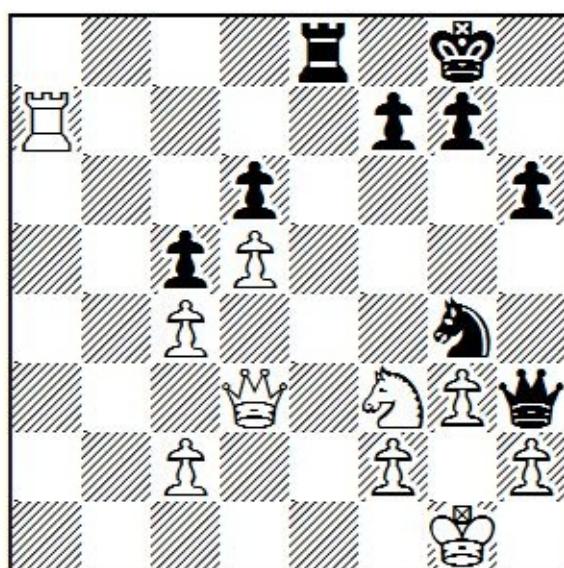
Houdini rates this position at dead even, while stylistically I prefer Black, due to his structure.

**25 ... Qh3**

Now ... Ng4 is in the air.

**26 Kg1**

Certainly not the naive 26 Rxa7?? Ng4 27 Kg1.



**Exercise (combination alert):** The combination's program has been loaded and now merely requires the activation signal. Black to play and force mate in three moves:

**Answer:** Deflection: 27 ... Re1+! 28 Nxel Qxh2+ 29 Kf1 Qxf2 mate

26 ... Rb8

Still playing on White's loose back rank.

27 Rb5 Ra8

Principle: *place your rooks behind passed pawns*

**28 Ra5 Rb8 29 Rb5 Ra8**

Perhaps a tacit draw offer.

30 Qb3!?

No thanks. I just finished a book on Bent Larsen, whose will to win occasionally bordered on psychosis. I would have taken the draw here. White looks like he is in greater danger of loss than Black if the game continues, since in essence Black is up a pawn on the queenside, due to White's crippledawns.

**30 ... Qg4 31 Ra5 Nd7**

The positional route. Timman intends to transfer to b6, tying White down to defence of c4. After 31 ...  
 32 Nd2 Nf6 White can't get carried away with 33 Qb7?? Rf8! 34 Rxa7?? since Black arrives first  
 with 34 ... Qe2 35 Nf1 Ng4 36 Ra1 Qxf2+ 37 Kh1 Re8 when there is no reasonable defence to the coming  
 Re2.

32 Kg2 Nb6

Putting White on the defensive by counterattacking c4

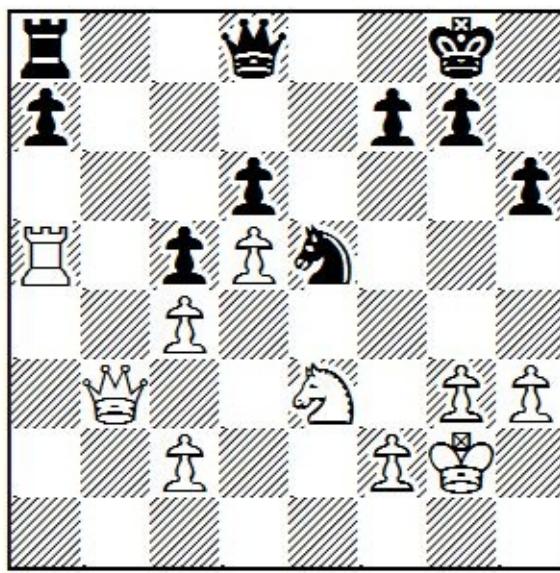
**33 Nd2 Qe2 34 Qd3 Qe1 35 Ra6**

Both sides strive to stake the other to their respective weak points

**35 ... Qe7 36 Nf1 Qb7**

At last, the irritating a6 blockade is broken.

**37 Ra5 Nd7 38 Ne3 Ne5 39 Qb3 Qc8 40 h3 Qd8??**



This idea stands unsteadily on a weak foundation of actual evidence. Timman makes a serious judgement on the dreaded 40th move, the final one to reach time control. Instead, 40 ... h5 looks about even.

41 Ra6

Now Black must worry about d6, as well as a7 and Qb7 infiltrations.

41 ... Rb8 42 Qa3 Qf6!

Timman wisely refuses to allow himself to get trapped into babysitting duties on his a-pawn, and

sacrifices it to generate compensating threats on White's king. It's almost as if an impregnable divider has been constructed between kingside and queenside, with each side doing his own thing on his respective wing.

### 43 f4!

Larsen senses Black's desire to build on the kingside as a potential menace and engages in swift countermeasures. Certainly not the hasty 43 Rxa7?? Qf3+ 44 Kh2 (44 Kg1 is met with the crushing 44 ... Rb1+ 45 Nf1 Qe2) 44 ... Qxf2+ 45 Ng2 Rb1, which forces mate.

### 43 ... Ng6 44 Rxa7 Re8

White's extra pawn isn't all that important and Black remains active, ready and willing to do mischief on White's semi-exposed king. I believe the mercantile-minded *Houdini* misassessed, placing White up a full 0.93 here, when in my estimation, White's edge is only slight at best.

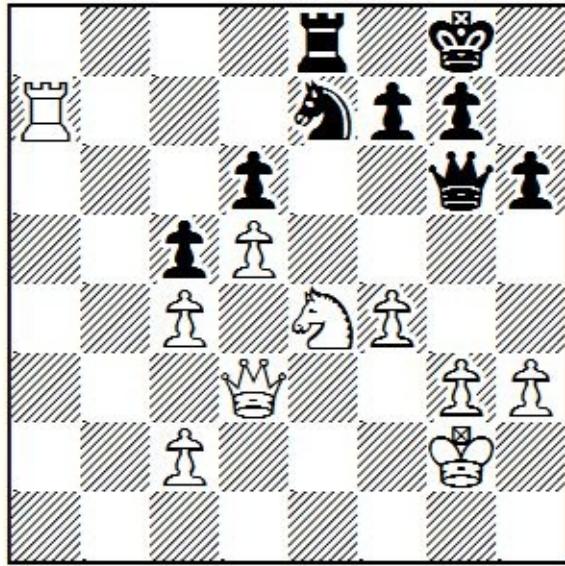
### 45 Ng4 Qd4 46 Qd3 Ne7?

A mistake. Black still looks okay to me after 46 ... Qb2, after which the results of Black's experiment are inconclusive and chances remain close to balanced.

### 47 Nf2??

Black is in deep trouble after 47 Rd7!. This intermediary step is necessary to the process. Following 47 ... h5 48 Nf2 Nc8 49 Qxd4 cxd4 50 Rc7 Kf8 51 Rc6 Ke7 52 Ne4 Kd7 53 Kf3 f5 54 Ng5 Re3+ 55 Kf2 Rc3 56 Ne6 Ne7 57 Rc7+ Ke8 58 Nxg7+ Kd8 59 Ne6+ Ke8 60 Nxd4 Nxd5 61 Rb7 Ne7 62 Nb5 Rxc2+ 63 Ke3 I don't think Black will hold the ending.

### 47 ... Qf6 48 Ne4 Qg6



### 49 Nf2?

White's position is an odd blend of eagerness and foreboding. After this move, Black's threats gain momentum:

a) 49 Rd7 is met with 49 ... Nxd5! 50 cxd5 Qxe4+ 51 Qxe4 Rxe4 with a likely draw, although Black is the one struggling: 52 Rd8+ Kh7 53 Rxd6 g6 54 Rc6 Rc4 55 Kf3 Kg7 56 g4 Rxc2 57 Ke4 f6! 58 Rc7+ Kf8 59 Kd3 Rc1 and progress won't be easy for White.

b) 49 g4! Nf5 (49 ... f5? is met by 50 Ng3 with a winning position) 50 Kf2 Ne3 51 Kxe3! (safer than 51 f5!? Nxg4+ 52 hxg4 Qxg4 53 Ng3 Qf4+ 54 Qf3 Qxc4 when the comps like White, but in real life, Black gets clear practical chances) 51 ... f5 52 gxf5 Qg3+ 53 Kd2 Qxf4+ 54 Qe3 Rxe4 55 Qxf4 Rxf4 56 Rd7 Rxc4 57 Rxd6 Kf7 58 c3 Rh4 59 Rc6 Ke7 60 Kd3 c4+ 61 Ke3 h5 62 Re6+! Kd7 63 f6 Rxh3+ 64 Kd4 Rh4+ 65 Kc5 gxf6 66 Rxf6 Rg4 67 Rh6 wins.

**49 ... Nf5!**

Threat: ... Re3.

**50 g4?**

White's need for defence works with cross purposes with his ambition to win. Larsen, as was his occasional custom, strays too far in his attempts to take home the full point, overpressing. One is reminded of the chain smoking X-ray technician, who also moonlights as an asbestos factory worker, who asks his doctor: "I have cancer? How could this have happened, Doc?" Larsen covers against the ... Re3 threat, only to underestimate Black's threats on the other side.

White may yet be able to save himself after 50 Nd1! (I do admit that it is excruciating when pride is forced to bow to reason's insistence) 50 ... Re4! 51 g4 (51 Qxe4?? hangs the queen to 51 ... Nh4+) 51 ... Rxf4 52 Kh2 Nd4 53 Qxg6 fxg6 54 Ra2 when Black has all the winning chances but White may yet hold the game.

**50 ... Nh4+!**

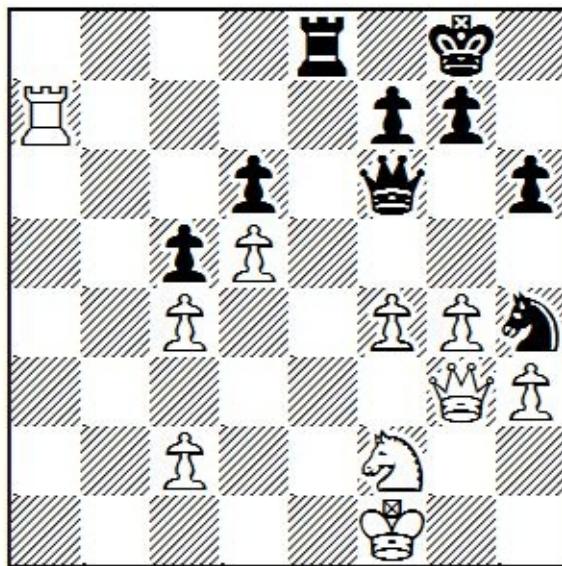
For deception to succeed, it must first be made enticing by wrapping it in festive packaging. Suddenly, Black has a winning attack and his knight is in no danger whatsoever.

**51 Kf1**

"Judge not, least ye be judged," says the king, with a weak smile to his interrogator. Larsen must have intended 51 Kg3?? and then realized Black had 51 ... Re3+! (attraction; knight fork) 52 Qxe3 Nf5+ when White's queen laughs hysterically, since crying is the only other option, and she prefers the former.

Instead, it's mate after 51 Kh2 Qf6! 52 Kg3 (or 52 Qg3 g5! 53 Ra3 Re2 54 Kg1 Qb2 and the defensive wall collapses) 52 ... g5! 53 Qd2 Re2! (deflection) 54 Qc1 Qc3+ 55 Nd3 Rg2.

**51 ... Qf6 52 Qg3**



**Exercise (planning):** Black stands on the precipice of success or failure.  
Unlock a key idea and Black's attack grows completely out of control:

**Answer:** Puncture the dark squares around White's king.

**52 ... g5!**

Old, nearly forgotten anger, isn't so hard to call back. The cumulative process is at an end and it's time to strike. Black's forces seep through on the porous dark squares. Cling as White may, there is no way out. Also strong is 52 ... Ng6! 53 f5 (or 53 Nd3 Qc3 54 Qf2 Qxc4 and White's position is a

shambles) 53 ... Nh4 54 Nd3 g5 55 Qf2 Qc3 56 f6 Qxc4 57 Re7 Ra8 58 Qe1 Qxd5 59 Qe4 Qxe4 60 Rxe4 Kh7 when White is unable to save himself in the ending.

### 53 fxg5

53 f5 Qb2 54 Qd3 Qc1+ 55 Qd1 Qf4 56 Ra3 Qh2 and the mate threat on g2 is decisive. White's king narrows his eyes, sensing his sister's duplicity.

### 53 ... hxg5 54 c3 Nf3!

Black yanks a single thread from an intricately woven tapestry. Threat: ... Re1+, followed by ... Rg1 mate.

### 55 Ra1 Re3! 0-1

The threat is ... Nd2+, and if 56 Qg2 Qxc3 57 Rd1 Qe1+ 58 Rxe1 Rxe1 mate. The rook feigns shock at the white king's sudden death, which comes across to those who know him well as a badly acted parody of innocence.

**Summary:** After an early Bg5 and Bxf6, White's central control is compensated by our superior structure after a future ... Bxc3.

## Game 11

B.Spassky-A.Miles

Niksic 1983

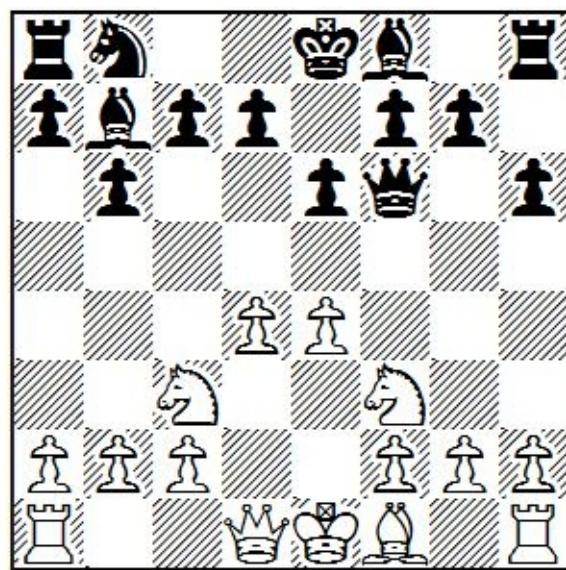
### 1 d4 Nf6

Once again, our move order may run: 1 ... b6 2 e4 Bb7 3 Bd3 Nf6 4 Nc3 e6 5 Nf3 Bb4 6 Bg5 h6 7 Bxf6 Qxf6.

### 2 Nf3 b6 3 Nc3!? Bb7 4 Bg5 e6 5 e4 h6 6 Bxf6

A necessary concession, otherwise e4 falls.

### 6 ... Qxf6



Yes. We can get here from many strange move orders.

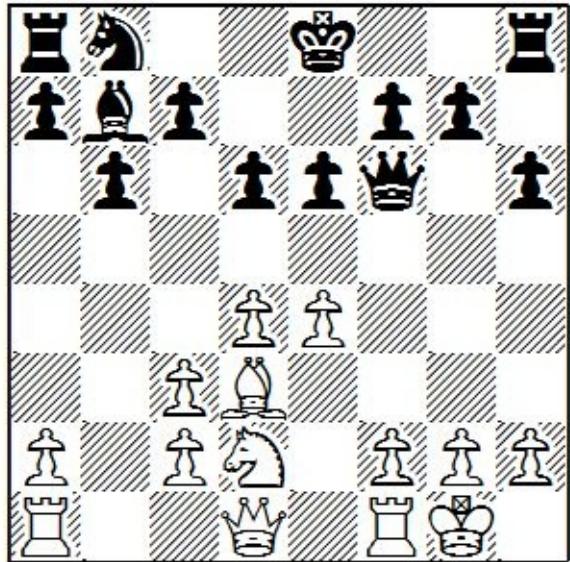
### 7 Bd3

**Question:** What if White prevents our coming ... Bb4 with 7 a3?

**Answer:** The move costs White time, and on the plus side, we get to hang on to our bishop-pair and

dark-square control. Black can play any number of ways. The following looks logical: 7 ... Nc6!? 8 Qd2 (8 d5!? merely weakens White's fast eroding dark squares after 8 ... Ne5 9 Nxe5 Qxe5 10 Qd2 Bd6! 11 0-0-0 Qg5 12 g3 Qxd2+ 13 Rxd2 Be5; I prefer Black's game, due to his control over the dark squares) 8 ... g6 9 e5!? Qg7 10 Bd3 d6 11 Qe2 d5!? (turning the game into a rather decent French Defence-like position; 11 ... 0-0-0, retaining fluidity, also looks fine for Black) 12 Ba6 0-0-0 13 0-0-0 Be7 14 h3, L.Fressinet-F.Moracchini, Paris 1996. Black's chances appear at least even. He can slowly prepare for ... c5, starting with ... Kb8.

**7 ... Bb4 8 0-0 Bxc3 9 bxc3 d6 10 Nd2**



White's main move and considered best by both Christian Bauer and John Watson.

**Question:** Why retreat an already developed piece?

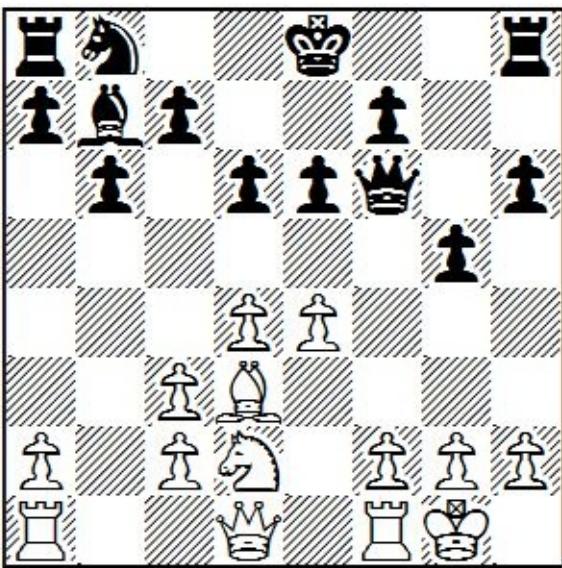
**Answer:** White makes way for the coming f4.

**Question:** But after ... e5, doesn't Black have two pieces covering f4 to White's single piece?

**Answer:** Correct, yet White intends to sacrifice, playing the position similar to the King's Gambit. And I remind you that Spassky took down Fischer on the White side of a King's Gambit, so he clearly doesn't harbour reservations about the sacrifice.

**10 ... e5**

Also possible is 10 ... g5!? which actually looks quite logical to me, since White is less encouraged to pry open the f-file if Black, in exchange, gets an open g-file for his own possible attack.

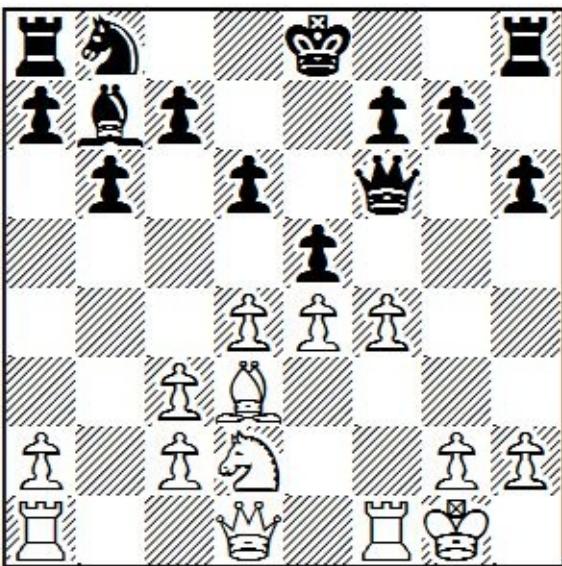


After 11 Qe2 e5 (this pretty much clamps down on White's f4 dreams) 12 Qe3 Nd7 13 Bb5 0-0-0 14 a4 a5 15 Rab1 Rhe8 16 Rfe1 Qg6 17 Qd3 Kb8 Black doesn't stand worse in this sharp position, K.Nikolaidis-A.Minasian, Panormo 1998.

**Question:** Why can't White play 11 f4 anyway?

**Answer:** White can play the move, but seems to get an inferior version when compared to what Spassky got in the game continuation. For example, 11 ... gxf4 12 e5 dx5 13 Be4 Bxe4 14 Nxe4 Qg7 15 Qf3 (threat: Nf6+, followed by Qxa8). Black can now play the calm 15 ... Nd7 meeting 16 Nf6+?! with 16 ... Ke7 17 Nxd7 Kxd7 18 Rae1 f6! 19 dx5 fxe5. *Houdini* actually prefers Black here. If 20 Rd1+? Ke7 21 Qc6 Rhd8! 22 Qxc7+ Kf6 is a winning position for Black.

**11 f4!**



The nature of a pawn storm is for the individual personality to be subsumed into the hive mind. Spassky goes for a kind of King's Gambit versus 1 ... b6. Any other move allows Black ... g5!, clamping down on White's thematic break.

**11 ... exf4**

**Question:** Doesn't White's d4-pawn also hang?

**Answer:** I think it's too risky for Black after 11 ... exd4?! since he doesn't even win a pawn with it. White tosses in 12 e5! dxe5 13 fxe5 Qg5 14 Nf3 Qe3+ 15 Kh1 0-0 (the greedy 15 ... dxc3?? is punished by 16 e6! fxe6 17 Bg6+ Ke7 18 Nh4! threatening Nf5+, followed by Re1, with a winning attack for White, and here 16 ... 0-0 17 exf7+ Kh8 18 Nh4 is crushing too) 16 cxd4 Nd7 17 Nh4 Qg5 18 Qe1 Rae8 19 Qf2 Bd5, V.Tkachiev-A.Minasian, Cannes 1995. Black is in deep trouble after 20 Rae1! f6 21 Qf5! Qxf5 22 Bxf5 with all sorts of tricks involving d7, g6 and exf6.

### 12 g3

Now that he sac'ed it, White wants it back! Also possible is 12 Qf3 g5, as in A.Cabrera-S.Pons Sastre, Palma de Mallorca 2002. I like Black's chances after 13 g3 Nd7 14 gxf4 0-0-0 15 f5 h5.

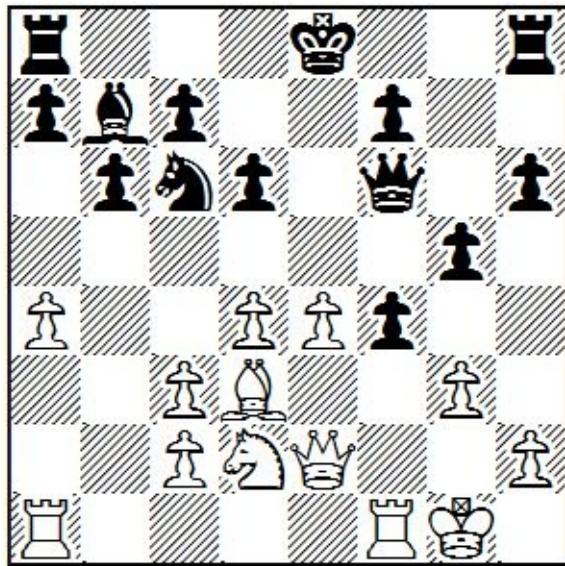
### 12 ... g5 13 a4

Spassky is more interested in attacking, rather than regaining his pawn with 13 gxf4, which also exposes White's king, if he gets ambitious and retains queens on the board. After 13 ... gxf4 14 Qg4 Nd7 15 Rxf4 Qg6 16 Qg3 Rg8 (neither side seems to want to swap queens) 17 Kf2 0-0-0 18 Rg1, M.Simonet Pons-J.Mellado Trivino, Andorra 2001, chances appear balanced after 18 ... Rdf8.

### 13 ... Nc6

Clamping down on White's a5 intent.

### 14 Qe2



### 14 ... 0-0-0

Theory ends here. With this natural move, Miles removes his king from the fluid centre. Also interesting is 14 ... Ne7!? intending to transfer over to g6: 15 a5 Ng6 16 h4!? (I'm not so certain who is undermining whom; White seems to forget that his own king resides on the kingside as well) 16 ... Rg8 (I like this better than 16 ... gxh4!? 17 gxf4 Rg8 18 Kh2! when White's king remains safe enough and *Houdini* rates chances at even) 17 h5 Ne7 18 Ba6 Bc6 19 d5 Bd7 20 axb6 axb6 21 Bb5 Ra5 22 Bxd7+ Kxd7 23 Rxa5 bxa5 24 Qb5+ Kd8, T.Taylor-T.Rooms, correspondence 2011. I prefer Black's chances due to the better structure after 25 Qxa5 Nc8, although *Houdini* rates at dead even here.

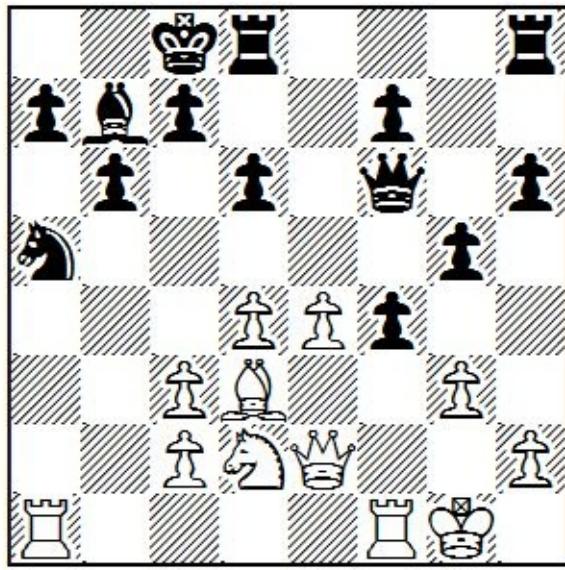
### 15 a5!?

Anyway! Spassky is willing to pay for the privilege of attacking - apparently on either side of the board. A shadow of discontent spreads through White's position and one senses the tell-tale sign of a

nation just itching to declare a war on its not-so-peaceful neighbour, without even the pretence of a false justification.

### 15 ... Nxa5!?

To acknowledge an opponent's strength is a wise policy. We don't all play every position equally. For example, my strength jumps at least 100 points in quiet, controlled strategic positions; on the other hand, I play open, initiative-oriented positions like a frightened 5-year-old, separated from her parents at the mall. In this instance, both Spassky and Miles are in their respective elements, of attack and defence. So Miles risks a tentative excursion into a shrouded and dangerous zone by accepting the challenge and rejecting the safer route 15 ... Kb8 16 axb6 cxb6, which is the route I would take. I prefer Black, whose king looks the slightly safer of the two.



### 16 Ba6

"I am the bringer of light and the dispeller of darkness," intones the bishop to his audience, who mainly roll their eyes, rub their temples, and suppress yawns. Black's position is more solid than outer appearances indicate.

**Question:** How does White's attack fare if he goes for the nuclear option 16 Rxa5?

**Answer:** It's isn't all that easy to discern if this is a suicide mission, cunningly wrapped up in the attractive packaging of an attack. If we examine to a closer degree, we see that it is just that. The exchange sacrifice doesn't appear to be sound after 16 ... bxa5 17 Ba6 d5!. This move allows Black's queen to offer lateral assistance to her king. Following 18 Bxb7+ Kxb7 19 Ra1 Qc6 20 Rxa5 Ka8 21 Nb3 dxe4 22 Rc5 Qg6 23 Rxc7 f3 24 Qc4 (24 Qb5 is met simply with 24 ... Qb6 25 Qc4 e3) 24 ... e3 25 Qa4 Qb6 26 Re7 e2 27 Kf2 Rc8 28 c4 Rc7 the potency of White's assault sputters and goes inert.

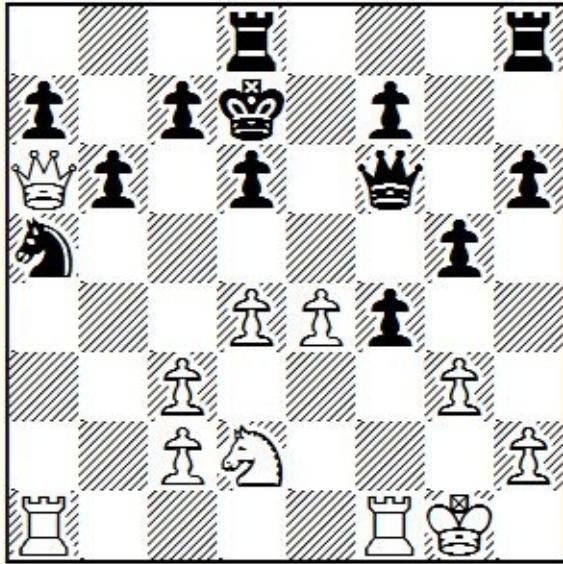
### 16 ... Bxa6!?

Ambitious. Miles isn't interested in a draw after 16 ... Qe6 17 Nb3 Nxb3 18 Bxb7+ Kxb7 19 d5 Qe5 20 Qa6+ Kb8 21 cxb3 Qxc3 22 Qxa7+ Kc8 23 Rac1 Qe3+ 24 Kh1 Qxe4+ 25 Kg1 Qe3+ with perpetual check.

### 17 Qxa6+

Intruder alert! What was once merely an abstraction, now bleeds into Black's reality. Black's queen, when next to her radiant a6 sister, is weighted down with an overwhelming sense of her own unworthiness - and rightfully so.

**17 ... Kd7**



The king stands centre stage, basking in the limelight.

**18 Nc4?!**

Truth can't be vetoed so easily. Spassky, overrating his chances, removes a key defender, but this line favours Black. In positions like this, individual stylistic preference is superseded by the need for the most mathematically precise move. Correct is the line-opening 18 e5! which leads to a probable draw after 18 ... Qg6 19 exd6 Qxd6 20 Ne4 Qc6 21 Rxa5! Qxe4 22 Qb5+ Qc6 23 Qf5+ Qe6 24 Qb5+ Ke7 (24 ... Qc6 25 Qf5+ is drawn) 25 Rxa7 Rc8 when I don't think Black stands worse.

**18 ... Nxc4 19 Qb5+!**

Driving away a defender of c7.

**19 ... Ke7 20 Qxc4**

Now a7 and c7 hang simultaneously.

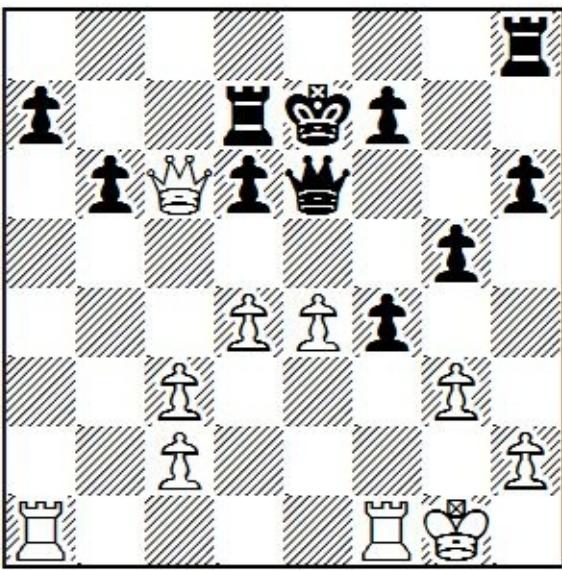
**20 ... Qe6?!**

Black takes over the initiative after 20 ... Rhe8! 21 gxf4 gxf4 22 Kh1 Kf8 23 Rxa7 Rxe4 24 Rxc7 f3 25 Rc8 Re3 26 Rxd8+ Qxd8 when the presence of the f3-pawn endangers White's king and ties his defenders down.

**21 Qxc7+?!**

Now the attack's flow of inspiration begins to wane. The queen, who is consumed with an unquenchable urge to punch her brother in the nose, temporarily allows her emotions to get the better of her good judgement. Now Miles gets to hang on to his a-pawn. Correct was 21 d5 Qh3 22 Rxa7 Rd7 23 Rxc7 Rg8 with equal chances.

**21 ... Rd7 22 Qc6**



**Exercise (critical decision/planning):** Find a key idea and Black seizes the advantage. How?

## 22 ... h5?!

The jumble we arrive in didn't arise from coherence. When we think we can't get hold of the real thing, we tend to make do with a cheap imitation. After missing a favourable line and then examining the game at home, we get that awful feeling of having been induced to part with a thing of value, in exchange for some worthless trinket. Why hand over f4?

**Answer:** Discourage White from capturing on f4 by placing a rook on the g-file: 22 ... Rg8! and White remains down a pawn, perhaps even with the less safe king. If he attempts to regain his previous investment with 23 gxf4? he lands into even greater difficulties after 23 ... Qg4+ 24 Kh1 gxf4 25 Rf2 Qh3 26 Raf1 f3! (threat: ... Rg2) 27 Qd5 Rg5! (not 27 ... Rg2? when White saves himself with the shocking 28 Qxf7+! Kxf7 29 Rxf3+) 28 e5 dx5 29 Qxf3 Qxf3+ 30 Rxf3 Kf8, which leaves White struggling, down material in the ending.

## 23 gxf4!

Why not? Black's failure to place a rook on g8 allows Spassky to regain his long-ago sac'ed pawn.

## 23 ... gxf4 24 Rxf4 Rg8+ 25 Kh1 Rg4

25 ... Qh3 is met with 26 Rf2 when White covers everything.

## 26 Raf1 Rxf4 27 Rxf4 h4 28 Qb5

The itinerant queen hops from here to there, seemingly in it for the journey alone, not caring about the destination's end. Spassky plays for the win, planning to transfer his queen over to g5. Instead, 28 Rxh4 Qf6 29 Rg4 Qf3+ 30 Rg2 Qf1+ 31 Rg1 Qf3+ is perpetual check.

## 28 ... h3

With this move, Miles hopes to generate future back-rank troubles for White.

## 29 Qg5+ Ke8 30 Qg8+ Ke7 31 Qg5+ Ke8 32 Rh4

No draw. White generates a mate threat on h8.

## 32 ... Re7!

There is no win for White after this simple move.

## 33 Qb5+

33 Qg8+ Kd7 34 Qb8 Qg6 35 Qxa7+ Ke6 36 Qa2+ Kf6 37 e5+ Kg5! (37 ... Kg7?? 38 Qa8! not only

covers the g2 mating threat, but also threatens his own on h8) 38 Rxh3 Qe4+ 39 Kg1 Qe1+ 40 Kg2 Qe2+ 41 Kg1 will be perpetual check.

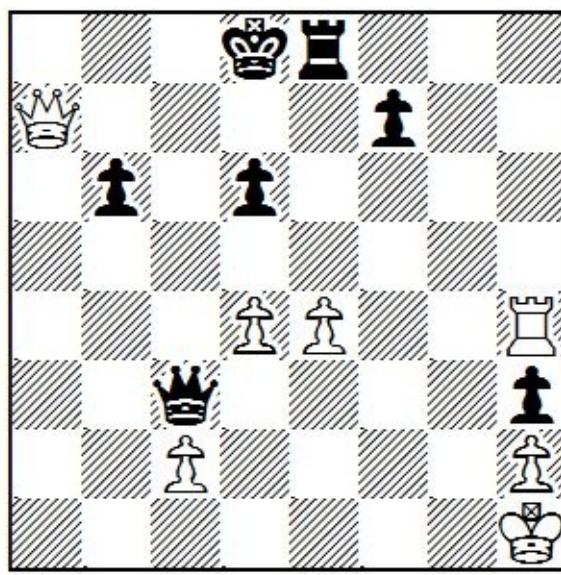
**33 ... Kd8**

My inclination would be for 33 ... Kf8.

**34 Qc6 Re8**

Covering his back rank. The position remains in stasis, with neither side able to make progress.

**35 Qa8+ Qc8! 36 Qxa7 Qxc3**



“You have presumed upon my kind nature once too often,” says Black’s queen, menacingly, to her nervous h1 brother, who never once in his entire life, thought of her as “kind”. She isn’t a person who stands silently while others apply tactful means. So she blurts out the truth: she is out to get him! Black’s last move, threatening mate on the move, brings reality home to White: his own king needs tending. Black’s threats grow serious and Spassky decides to deliver perpetual check. In situations of opposing, mutual attacks, there are three potential scenarios:

1. The attacks arrive at simultaneous speeds, with equal, dynamic chances.
2. The attacks arrive sequentially, where one party arrives faster.
3. Both attacks peter out.

This position appears to be a case of number three on the list.

**37 Qxb6+ Kd7**

Some mysteries solve themselves without need of a detective. Miles decides to take the draw, rather than risk his fortunes in the line 37 ... Ke7!? 38 Qb7+ Kf6 39 Rf4+ Kg5 40 Rf5+ Kg4 41 Rf1 Qxd4 42 e5 d5 43 Qd7+ Kh4 44 Qf5 Qe4+ 45 Qxe4+ dxe4 46 Rf4+ Kg5 47 Rxe4 Rd8 48 Kg1 Rd2 49 Re3 Rg2+ 50 Kh1 Kh4 which is also drawn.

**38 Qb7+**

Black’s crafty king seems to have been Spassky’s white whale this game, always one step ahead.

**38 ... Kd8 39 Qb8+ ½-½**

**Summary:** One attribute (of course, some may perceive it a hindrance) of our opening is that we arrive in positions which resemble other openings. In this instance, we reach King’s Gambit style positions, where Black’s chances feel no worse than White’s.

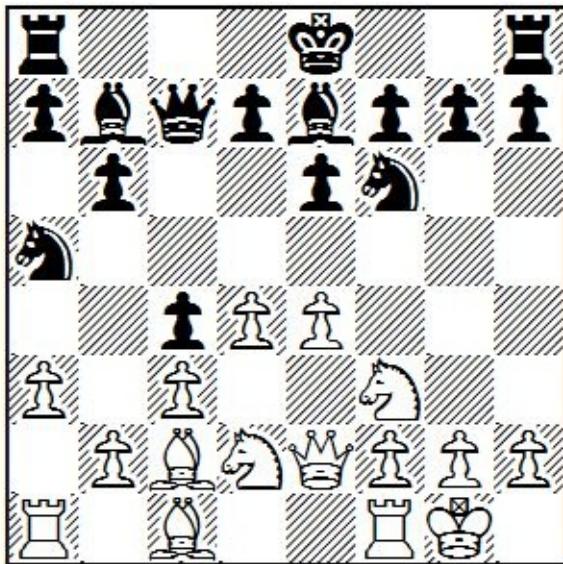
# Chapter Two

## Owen's Defence: Nd2 Lines

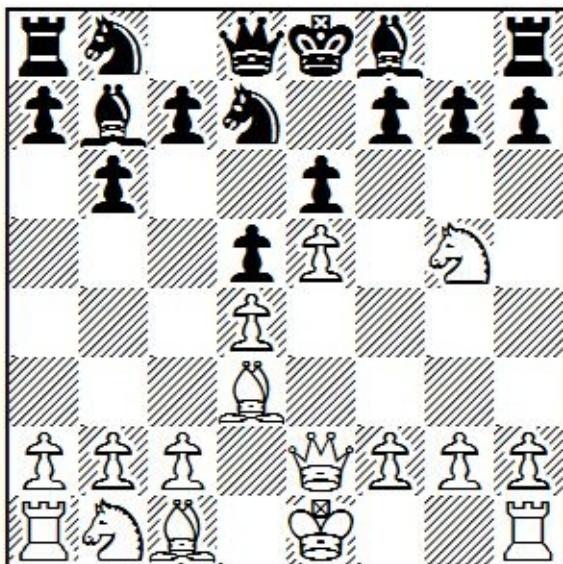
White hopes for two benefits with the d2 posting of his knight in the Owen's:

1. White opens options of backing up the d4-pawn with c3, which enables a pawn recapture if Black plays ... c5 and ... cxd4.
2. White avoids the potential doubling of c-pawns, to which he or she is vulnerable in the Nc3 lines, if Black plays either ... Bb4 and ... Bxc3, or ... Ne4 and ... Nxc3.

Below are two critical positions of the chapter. In the first, the Miles variation, I think White has a difficult time proving even a tiny '+=' edge.



When we fail to do our homework and botch the defence, our position becomes the artist's reject painting, where the artistic intention went horribly wrong. We need to remember some tabiya positions like a favourite childhood song. The one in the lower diagram is of some concern.



To view this as an Owen's Defence or a French Defence is basically a trick of perspective. Our king's life was idyllically perfect until the white knight's uninvited entry to g5. Qh5, Nxe6, and in some cases Nxf7 are in the air and Black must navigate very carefully to survive. Our defensive choices are ... g6, ... Be7 and ... Qe7. Study the final game of the chapter very carefully, since our survival depends upon it.

### Game 12

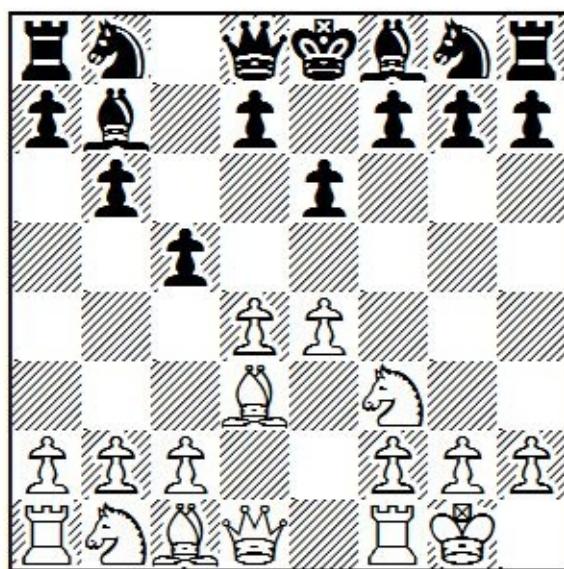
**H.Westerinen-B.Larsen**

Geneva 1977

**1 e4 b6 2 d4 Bb7 3 Bd3 e6 4 Nf3 c5**

At some point, we must either challenge White's central dominance, or at least chip away at it from the wings.

**5 0-0**



White doesn't bother backing up his pawn centre with c3 and borrows an interpretation from the Open Sicilian. He also has:

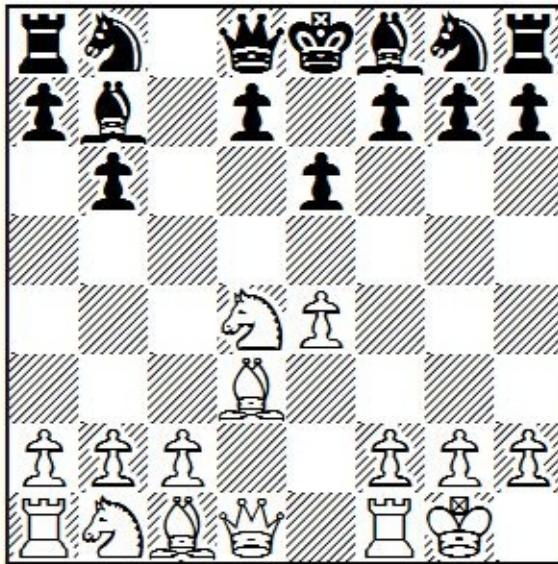
a) 5 Nc3 cxd4 6 Nxd4 Nc6 7 Nf3!? (this retreat to f3 is also seen in some Kan lines) 7 ... Nge7! (Miles maps out his future domination of the central dark squares, planning ... Ng4, which controls both f4 and e5) 8 0-0 Ng6 9 Re1 (perhaps contemplating Nd5 tricks) 9 ... Bc5 10 Bg5 Qb8! (Black's control over e5 and f4 increases) 11 a3 0-0 12 h4?! (better to play something calmer, like 12 Qd2) 12 ... Nce5! 13 Nxe5 (13 h5?? is met with 13 ... Ng4 14 Re2 N6e5 15 Rd2 f5! with a winning attack) 13 ... Qxe5 14 Qg4 h5! 15 Qh3 (not 15 Qxh5?? f6! 16 Qxg6 fxg5 when f2 comes under heavy assault: 17 Nd1 gxh4 18 Ne3 Qf4 19 Re2 Rf6 20 Qh5 Rh6 21 Qf3 Qxf3 22 gxf3 Rf8 23 Ng4 Rg6 24 Kg2 h3+ and the f3 base collapses after 25 Kg3 Bd6+) 15 ... Bd4! 16 Bf1 Rac8 17 Bd2 Qf6! (double attacking f2 and h4) 18 Qf3 Qxh4 19 g3 Ne5 20 Qg2 Qf6 (threatening a fork on f3) 21 Be2 Ng4 22 Bxg4 hxg4 23 e5? (a blunder in a lost position) 23 ... Bxg2 24 exf6 Bf3 25 fxg7 Kxg7 and ... Rh8 is coming. It is ironic that White suffered the entire game on the dark squares, only to lose on the light squares at the very end, E.Karayanni-A.Miles, Komotini 1992. This game is a model of how to play our side in such Owen's Open Sicilian situations.

b) For the remainder of the chapter we mainly look at positions stemming from 5 c3.

**5 ... cxd4**

Not much choice, since 5 ... Nf6 6 Nc3 pretty much forces 6 ... cxd4 and then our positioning of our knight on f6 is slightly inferior to the one Larsen got on e7.

**6 Nxd4**



So we reach an Open Sicilian-like position, from an Owen's move order.

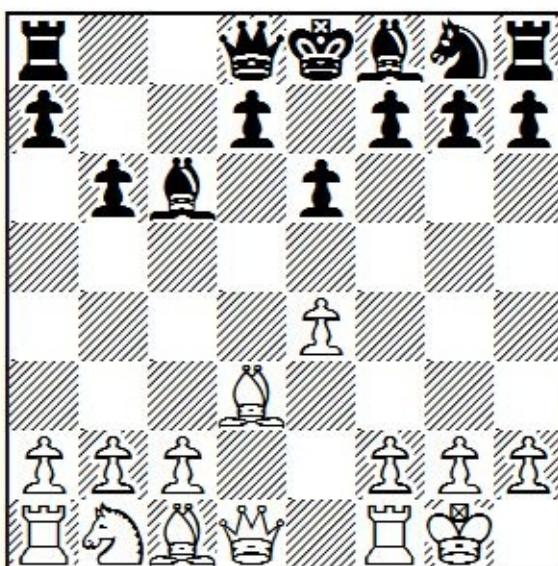
**Question:** What if I have no experience in the Sicilian?

**Answer:** Your option is to play it in French Defence fashion, which we examine closely in the latter half of the chapter. And if you lack experience with either opening? No worries. Repetition and study illumine even the most difficult of chess mysteries. In the era of databases, we can blast through 50 games in a day, just to leave an imprint upon our mind. Miraculously, if you do this, you find that you begin to play the ‘natural’ moves of an opening you never played before, within just weeks of study.

**6 ... Nc6 7 Nxc6**

7 Be3 is met with 7 ... Ne5 picking up the bishop-pair: 8 Nc3 Nf6 (we must remain flexible over f6 and e7 development schemes for this knight) 9 h3 Be7 10 f4 Nxd3 11 cxd3 0-0 with dynamic equality for Black.

**7 ... Bxc6**



**8 Nc3**

**Question:** Did you misfile this game? The chapter is called: “Owen’s Defence: Nd2 lines”.

**Answer:** I was just testing you to see if you were alert! Yes, this game is the single anomaly in the chapter, where in this case White plays it in Open Sicilian fashion, with his knight on c3. But even in this instance, White held back playing Nc3 for eight full moves.

**Question:** How do we set up if White goes Maroczy style with 8 c4?

**Answer:** Exactly as in the game, with ... Bc5 and ... Ne7. For example, 8 ... Bc5 9 Nc3 Ne7 10 a3 0-0 11 Bc2 Ng6 12 b4 (this move comes with a cost, since Black gets a target to chip away at on b4) 12 ... Be7 13 f4 a5 14 Rb1 axb4 15 axb4 Qc7 16 Qh5? (White should play something like 16 Be3 to prevent Black’s coming idea) 16 ... Bb7! 17 c5 (White is already in desperation mode, since 17 Bd3?? is met with the winning computer shot 17 ... Qd6!, threatening d3 and also ... Qd4+) 17 ... bxc5 18 b5 c4 (threatening to enter a pawn up ending with ... Qc5+ next) 19 e5 f6! 20 Ne4 (20 Bxg6 hxg6 21 Qxg6 fxe5 is completely hopeless for White) 20 ... fxe5 21 Be3, I.Margulis-A.Miles, Los Angeles 1991. White resigned without waiting for 21 ... Ra2 22 Qd1 Nxg4.

**8 ... Bc5!**

The best spot for the bishop.

**Question:** Doesn’t Black’s bishop normally post on e7 in virtually all Open Sicilians except the Dragon?

**Answer:** All but the Kan and Taimanov, where sometimes Black posts with ... Bc5 and ... Nge7, exactly as Larsen does this game.

**9 Qe2 Ne7!**

Continuing in Kan/Taimanov Sicilian style, with the knight posting on g6.

**10 Be3!?**

The trouble is this is White’s good bishop, but Westerinen resented the rude stare from c5.

**10 ... 0-0 11 Rad1**

After 11 Bxc5 bxc5 the opening of the b-file only benefits Black, due to enhanced central control.

**11 ... Qc7**

There is no reason to give up central squares with a line like 11 ... Bxe3 12 Qxe3 e5?! (12 ... a6 13 f4 Qc7 gives Black a reasonably secure Sicilian position). This is an example of following a principle and still being wrong. Black places his central pawns on the opposite colour of his remaining bishop, but in doing so, gives White control over d5, and with 13 Bc4 White stands slightly better.

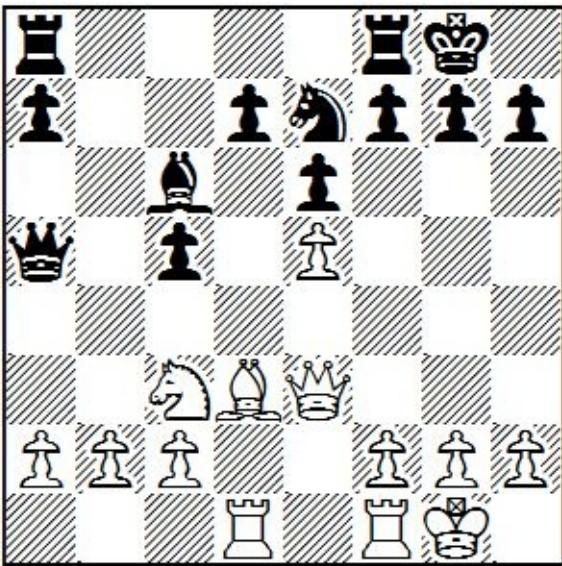
**12 Bxc5!?**

Westerinen pursues an ambitious agenda, handing Black superior central control in the process. If 12 f4 d5! (threatening ... d4) 13 exd5 Bxe3+ 14 Qxe3 Nxd5 15 Nxd5 Bxd5 with full dynamic equality.

**12 ... bxc5 13 Qe3 Qa5**

Larsen wants to keep his d-pawn safely anchored on d7 and avoids 13 ... d6.

**14 e5**



**Question:** Doesn't this move give away control, at least temporarily, over d5?

**Answer:** It's an equitable bargain. White gives up squares to get squares, like e4.

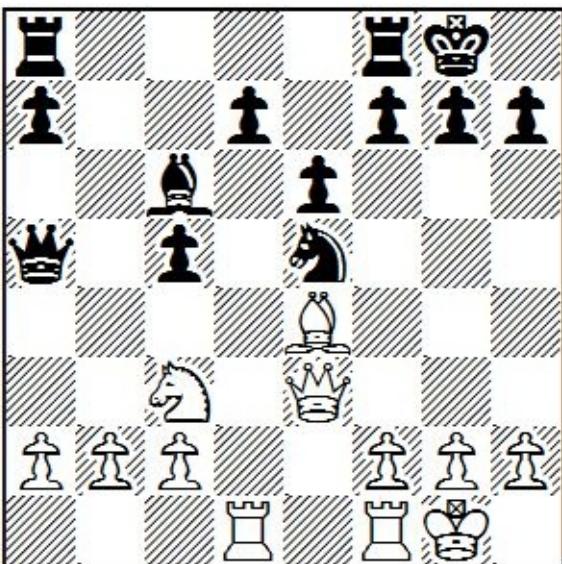
**14 ... Ng6**

I would consider removing a white attacker with 14 ... Nd5 15 Nxd5 exd5.

**15 Be4!?**

Also possible is 15 Bxg6 fxg6!. Capturing away from the centre activates Black's rook on the f-file and keeps his king safer. After 16 b3 Rf5 (16 ... g5, discouraging f4, is also a consideration) 17 Ne2 Raf8 18 f3, as in B.Ahlbaeck-T.Perman, correspondence 1978, Black holds an edge after 18 ... c4! 19 Nd4 Rxe5 20 Nxc6 dxc6 21 Qd4 cxb3 22 axb3 Rd5 23 Qe4 Qc5+ 24 Kh1 Qd6 with an extra pawn, although conversion won't be so easy with so many isolanis.

**15 ... Nxe5!?**



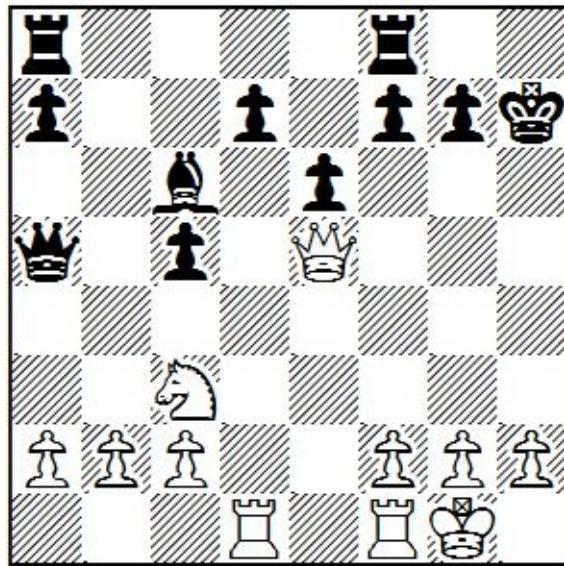
Allowing White to take on h7. Brain researchers tell us there exists a constant battle for supremacy between our frontal lobe, the rational side, and the thalamus, the receptor which gauges risk and its accompanying rewards or pain. It is in the nature of certain players to crave a flirt with death. Some of us

are paralysed by our fears, while others are energized by them with an adrenaline rush. This kind of decision is different from a long calculation, which requires perfection. It is closer to an intuitive leap, which merely hopes for it. The first part of the game has been small talk, with the parties merely exchanging pleasantries. Now the real argument begins.

### 16 Bxh7+?

White struggles to hold his own in the line 16 Bxc6 Nxc6 17 Rxd7 Rfd8 18 Rb7 Rab8 19 Rxb8 Rxb8 20 b3 Nd4! 21 Ne4 (21 Qd3?? is met with 21 ... Qxc3!) 21 ... Qxa2 22 Nxc5 Nxc2 23 Qc3 Nb4 24 Ra1 Qe2 25 Nd7 Nd5 26 Qc4 Qxc4 27 bxc4 Rd8 28 cxd5 (not 28 Rxa7?? Nb6! and White hangs a piece, due to his weak back rank) 28 ... Rxd7 29 dxe6 fxe6 when White should probably hold the draw, but it's never a guarantee when a pawn down.

### 16 ... Kxh7 17 Qxe5



**Question:** It feels to me as if Larsen exposed his lonely king to attack, merely to gain central pawn dominance and a bishop versus a knight. Why embrace a limitation like this? Is my assessment correct?

**Answer:** If I optimistically run two chess computer programs simultaneously, my computer, believing itself God Almighty, demands more memory, or it threatens to send smoke billowing through its circuit boards. This is a position where human intuition may surpass the comps. I think it is a sound decision on Larsen's part, with multiple hidden defensive resources at his disposal. White's coming attack isn't nearly as strong as appearances suggest. But this may come from a stylistic bias from my side. There is a sense of incommensurability when judging White's attack versus Black's counter chances. The answer may simply depend on who you ask, and the position may well still be dynamically even.

### 17 ... Qb4!

The queen attempts to inject herself into the conversation, attacking b2 in the process.

### 18 Rd3!

Tactically covering b2.

### 18 ... f5!

Principle: *meet a wing attack with a central counter*. This move contains three benefits:

1. It cuts off White's queen (or at least slows her down) from squares like h5.
2. It allows lateral defence of g7 for Black's rook.

3. If given a chance, Black wants to do a little attacking himself, with ... Rf6, followed by a lift to g6 or h6.

Note too that b2 is poison: 18 ... Qxb2?? allows 19 Rh3+ Kg8 20 Nd5!, which wins Black's queen, since if 20 ... Qxe5 21 Ne7 mate.

### **19 Rb1!?**

A questionable decision. Westerinen refuses to weaken his queenside, at the high cost of requiring his rook for babysitting duties, which is a little like an ivy league university hiring a Nobel laureate professor, and then putting her to work washing dishes in the college cafeteria. More natural is 19 b3, which appears to me to be the logical progression of the path White chose: 19 ... Rf6 20 Rfd1 Rg6 21 Rh3+ Kg8 22 f3 and I slightly favour White, who can continue with Ne2 and Nf4.

### **19 ... Rac8 20 a3 Qb8 21 Qxc5??**

Patience is the most important quality to cultivate for those who plan to lay in wait for an enemy. A misjudgement, after which White's king is in more danger than Black's. Necessary was 21 Rd6 f4! (threat: ... Rf5) 22 Qh5+ Kg8 23 Qd1 Rf5 24 f3 when White stands only slightly worse.

### **21 ... Bxg2**

Discovered attack. The fawning priest continually praises the white king's infinite attributes to win favour in court, all the while secretly harbouring ambitions of power against him.

### **22 Qe7 Bc6 23 Re1**

Westerinen may have originally planned 23 Rh3+, but then realized that the line favours Black at the end of the variation: 23 ... Kg8 24 Qh4 Rf6 25 Qh7+ Kf7 26 Qh5+ Ke7 27 Qg5 Rg8. Black's king is perfectly safe, while the white king's worries are just beginning.

### **23 ... Qf4**

Even more promising is 23 ... Rf6 24 Rg3 Rg6 25 Qh4+ Rh6 26 Qg5 Rg8 27 b4 Ba8!, intending ... Qb7 next.

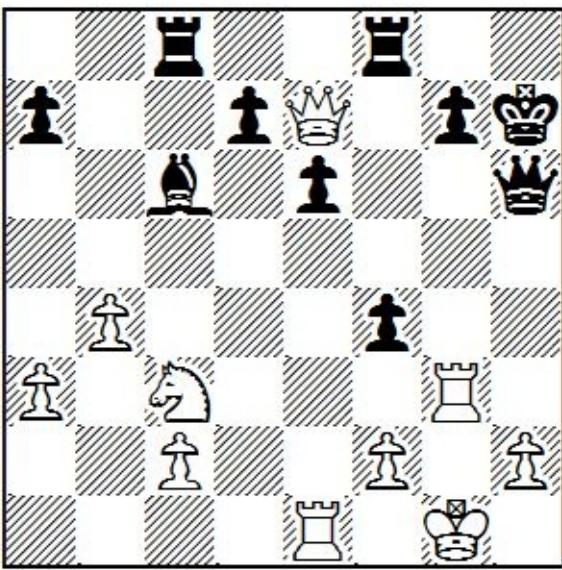
### **24 Rg3**

The rook slides closer, like an ambitious baseball player who cherishes hopes of stealing third base.

### **24 ... Qh6 25 b4?**

Friction from incessant threats, coupled with time tend to slowly erode defensive resistance, but not this time. In critical situations like this one, a close approximation to the correct plan isn't going to cut it. Westerinen plans to undermine d7 by chasing away its defender with b5 next, but his move also drastically weakens c3 and c2, offering Black avenues into White's position via the c-file. The instability factor overrides White's initiative/attack. Such constant harassment strategies are the neighbourhood kids, who as a prank, ring your doorbell and then run away - annoying, but no real harm inflicted. White should voluntarily enter a slightly worse ending after 25 f4 Rce8 26 Qg5.

### **25 ... f4!**



When faced with a direct frontal assault, your defensive line must not break. Larsen continues to erode the defensive barrier to White's king, the way my terrier Kahless gnaws on his favourite dog toy. Black's last move is multipurpose:

1. White's g3-rook is suddenly floating about.
2. This in turn destabilizes both the c3-knight and c2-pawn.
3. Black opens the possibility of rook lifts to f5 for his own attacking ambitions.

### **26 Rg4**

White's Rh4 threat is easily thwarted.

### **26 ... Rf6**

Now ... Rg6 is coming and as it turns out, Black is the one who is truly attacking.

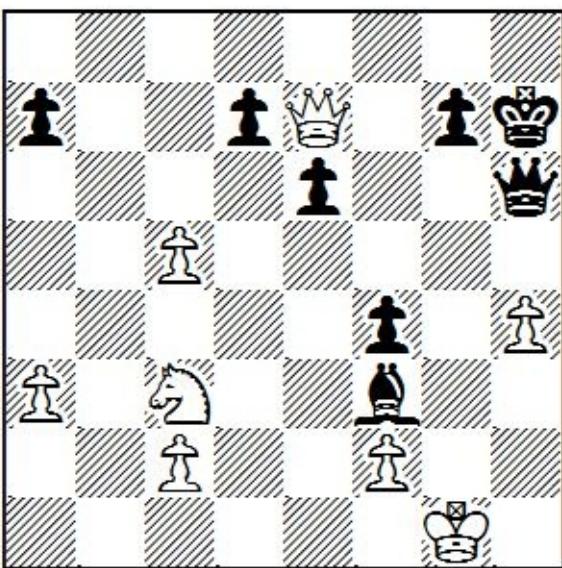
### **27 Re5 Rg6 28 Rxg6 Qxg6+ 29 Rg5 Qh6**

Threat: ... Re8! overloading White's queen.

### **30 h4 Bf3!**

Uncovering on c3 and c2, while defensively covering h5. White's king soon finds himself friendless and stripped of protection.

### **31 Rc5 Rxc5 32 bxc5**



**Exercise (combination alert):** One glance at White's king and we note eyes glazing over and shoulders slumping. Black to play and win:

**Answer:** Double attack. White can't survive infiltration to c2.

**32 ... Qg6+ 33 Qg5 Qxc2 0-1**

The queen shakes with silent laughter at the white king's distress. White is unable to simultaneously deal with the threats of ... Qxc3, and ... Qc1+ leading to ... Qh1 mate. I considered annotating this game for the Defence and Counterattack chapter of my book *Larsen: Move by Move*, but then decided to abduct it for this book instead.

**Summary:** When White insists on an Open Sicilian set-up, remember to switch to Kan/Taimanov mode with ... Bc5! and ... Ne7, rather than the traditional ... Nf6, ... d6, and ... Be7 formations of most Sicilians.

### Game 13

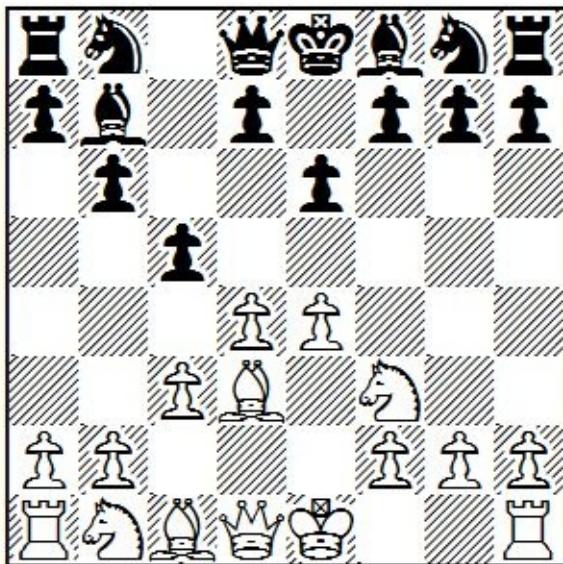
**D.Rosandic-B.Filipovic**

Zadar 2001

**1 e4 b6**

Compare the position of the game with this one from the c3-Sicilian: 1 ... c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nf3 e6 6 cxd4 b6 7 Nc3 Nxc3 8 bxc3 Qc7 9 Bd2 Bb7 10 Bd3 d6 11 0-0 Nd7 12 Re1 dxe5 13 Nxe5 Nxe5 14 Rxe5 Bd6 15 Rh5 g6 16 Rh3 0-0 17 Qg4 f5 18 Qe2 Rae8. Black's superior structure and potential for the central ... e5 break easily make up for White's kingside attacking chances, E.Sevillano-C.Lakdawala, San Diego (rapid) 2005.

**2 d4 Bb7 3 Bd3 e6 4 Nf3 c5 5 c3**



Backing up the centre is far more common than White playing it in Sicilian fashion, as we saw last game.

**5 ... Nf6 6 Qe2**

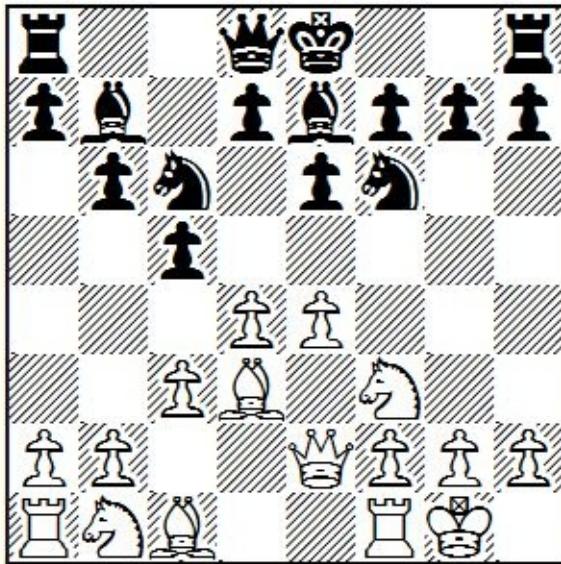
6 e5 Nd5 7 0-0 cxd4 8 cxd4 is a position we can reach via the c3-Sicilian, which is considered satisfactory for Black. Instead, 8 Nxd4!? Nc6 9 Nxc6 Bxc6 10 Nd2 Qc7 11 Nf3 was V.Chernov-M.Scherer, Baden 2013. Black achieves a nice looking c3-Sicilian position after 11 ... Bc5 12 Qe2 f5.

## 6 ... Be7

A necessary precaution before playing ... Nc6. Later in the chapter we look at French Defence-style play with 6 ... d5 7 e5, while the careless 6 ... Nc6? is met by 7 d5! with a clear advantage for White.

## 7 0-0 Nc6

Now ... cxd4; cxd4 Nb4 is in the air.



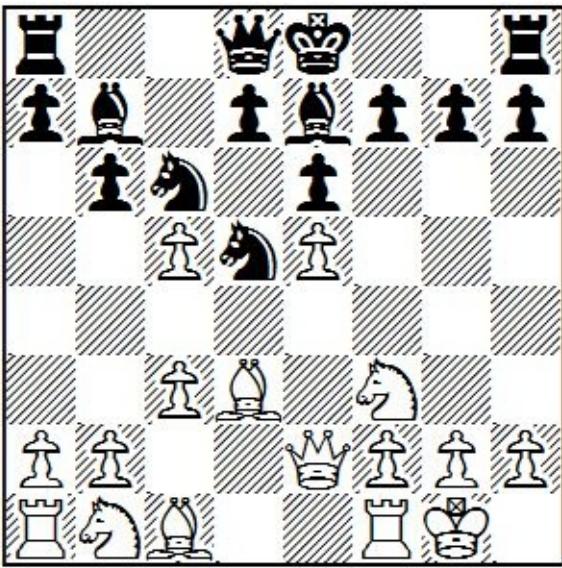
## 8 e5!?

This leads to positions similar to the c3-Sicilian. Next, we examine White's main move 8 a3.

**Question:** Why not just continue to develop with 8 Nbd2?

**Answer:** This is played, but not considered White's best course. Black responds with 8 ... cxd4 9 cxd4 (9 Nxd4 leads to a passive Open Sicilian for White, where c3 doesn't fit) 9 ... Nb4 10 Bb5 (10 Bc4 can be met with 10 ... d5 11 Bb5+ Bc6 12 Bxc6+ Nxc6 13 e5 Nd7 when Black achieved a favourable French Defence position, with the removal of White's powerful light-squared bishop) 10 ... a6 11 Ba4 b5 12 Bb3 Rc8 (if Black doesn't want a draw, he or she can play 12 ... d5 13 e5 Nd7 14 Rd1, C.Michna-T.Honscha, German League 1999; as a French player I would be comfortable as Black here, after 14 ... Rc8 15 Nf1 0-0 16 Ng3 Qb6) 13 a3 Nc2! (strangely enough, Black's knight is alive and well in its 'trapped' position on c2) 14 Rb1 Qb6 15 Qd3 Qc6 16 Ne5 Qc7 17 Nef3 (17 f3?? is met with the trick 17 ... Nxd4!) 17 ... Qc6, which repeats the position and draws.

## 8 ... Nd5 9 dxc5!



This line isn't played very often, yet I feel that it is dangerous for our side. White refuses to wait for Black to toss in ... cxd4l cxd4, after which the Black's knight gets to sit on d5.

**Question:** What is the problem for Black? Isn't this just another version of a c3-Sicilian set-up?

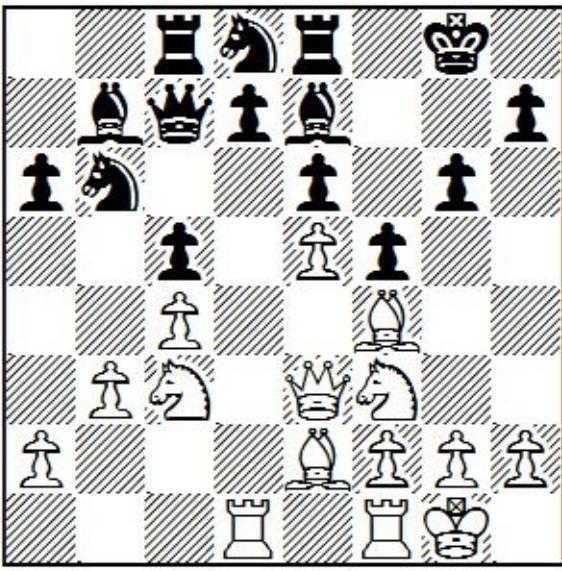
**Answer:** It is but a slightly favourable one for White, since Black didn't have time to toss in ... cxd4; cxd4. This means that White gets to bounce the d5 intruder with a future c4, which isn't usually the case in a normal c3-Sicilian. So the two lines appear undifferentiable, yet if we look closely, we notice this subtle yet important difference.

**Question:** If we don't like Black's side in such c3-Sicilian positions, do we have an option?

**Answer:** Yes. We can play in French Defence-style with an early ... d5 (which is how I prefer to play Black). We look at these positions in the latter part of this chapter.

**9 ... Bxc5!?**

Also possible is 9 ... bxc5 10 c4 Nb6 11 Nc3 0-0 12 Qe4 g6 13 Bh6 f5! (principle: *counter in the centre when assaulted on the wing*) 14 Qe3 (or 14 Qf4 Re8 15 Rad1 a6 16 h4 when White's attempted wing attack can be met with the central counter 16 ... d6! 17 h5 Nxe5 18 Nxe5 dxe5 19 Qxe5 Bf6 20 Qg3 Qb8 21 Bf4 e5 22 Bg5 Bxg5 23 Qxg5 Qd8 24 Qh6 Qf6 and Black successfully defended against White's attempted onslaught) 14 ... Re8 15 Rad1 a6 16 Bf4 Rc8 17 Be2 Qc7 18 b3 Nd8!, opening the b7-bishop's diagonal and preparing to transfer the knight over to defensive duties on f7.



**Question:** It feels to me like Black is on the defensive and can't possibly win. Is my assessment correct?

**Answer:** I do prefer White due to the extra space, but if you defend alertly here, you absolutely can win. Don't underestimate our counterattacking power. For example, 19 a4?! (White begins to overestimate his position and risks overextension) 19 ... Rb8 20 g3?! (unnecessarily weakening the h1-a8 diagonal) 20 ... Nf7 21 h4 Nc8! (clearing the b-file and possibly planning to transfer the knight to c6) 22 Rd3 Ba8 23 Rfd1 Qc6! (23 ... Rxb3!? is interesting; after 24 Nb5 axb5 25 Rxb3 bxc4 26 Bxc4 Nb6 27 Rxb6 Qxb6 28 Rxd7 Qc6 29 Rd3 Rd8 I like Black's position) 24 Nb1 (Black stands better after 24 Rxd7 Rxb3) 24 ... d6! (Black counters strongly in the centre, seizing the initiative) 25 Nbd2 dxe5 26 Bxe5 Ncd6 27 Ba1 Bf8 and White resigned here since the coming ... e5 will be decisive, K.Herzog-J.Pietrzak, correspondence 2009. For example, 28 Nf1 e5 29 Rd5 f4! 30 gxf4 (30 Qxc5 Rxb3 31 N1d2 Qxc5 32 Rxc5 Ra3 is also lost for White, since 33 Bxe5 is met with 33 ... Nf5 34 Ra5 fxe3 35 fxe3 Re3, winning material) 30 ... exf4 31 Qd3 Qc8 32 N1h2 Bxd5 33 cxd5 Bg7 is completely hopeless for White.

### 10 b4!?

White surges on a wave of aggression. He can also take a more strategic route with 10 Be4, as in T.Matosec-A.Diermair, Graz 2005. After 10 ... 0-0 11 c4 (Black looks slightly better if White goes crazy with 11 Bxh7+!? Kxh7 12 Ng5+ Kg6 13 h4 Nxe5 14 h5+ Kf6 15 Ne4+ Ke7 16 Nxc5 bxc5 17 Qxe5 Rh8, and if 18 Qxg7?? Rg8! 19 Bg5+ Kd6 20 Bxd8 Rxg7 21 Bh4 Ne3! 22 Bg3+ Ke7 23 h6 Rg6 24 fxe3 Rxg3 25 Rf2 Rag8 26 h7 Rxg2+ 27 Rxg2 Rxg2+ 28 Kf1 Rh2 when White is busted in the ending) 11 ... f5! 12 Bxd5 exd5 13 cxd5 Nb4 (threatening both the d5-pawn and also ... Ba6) 14 Nc3! Ba6 15 Nb5 Nxd5 16 Rd1 Nc7 17 a4 Ne6 *Houdini* prefers White, while I would be comfortable with Black's side, whose pieces look very active.

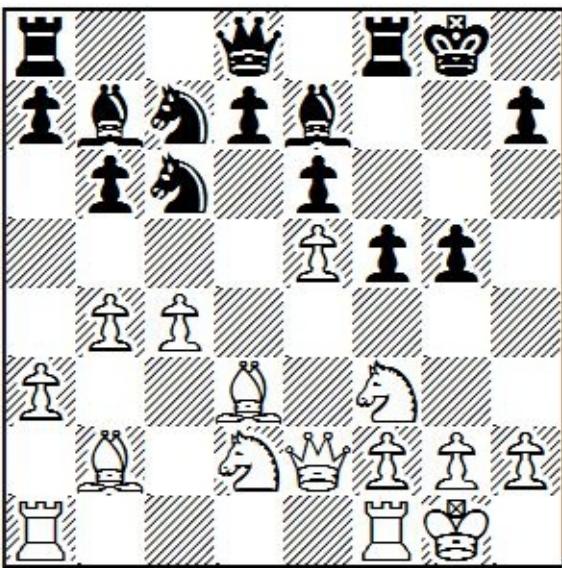
### 10 ... Be7 11 a3!

Intending c4, gaining yet more space.

### 11 ... f5!?

Black can also try to open the centre with 11 ... f6!? 12 c4 Nc7 13 Bb2 0-0 14 Qc2 h6 with a playable game.

### 12 c4 Nc7 13 Bb2 0-0 14 Nbd2 g5!?



The Reverend John Owen, our opening's founding father, may have been a man of peace in his professional life. Over the board though, he and his followers tend to embrace the dark side. Black's last move is one which no computer is willing to compute, but we humans sometimes know better. Filipovic goes directly after White's king in Dutch/Queen's Indian fashion, which we examine later in the book. His move hopes to improve upon the 14 ... Qe8 15 Rfd1 g5!? 16 Nb3 of S.Gligoric-B.Filipovic, Podgorica 1996. Here, Black can try 16 ... g4 17 Ne1 Bg5 18 b5 Ne7 19 Bc2 Rd8 20 a4 Qh5 21 a5 Ng6 with attacking prospects, despite *Houdini*'s frown of disapproval for Black's position.

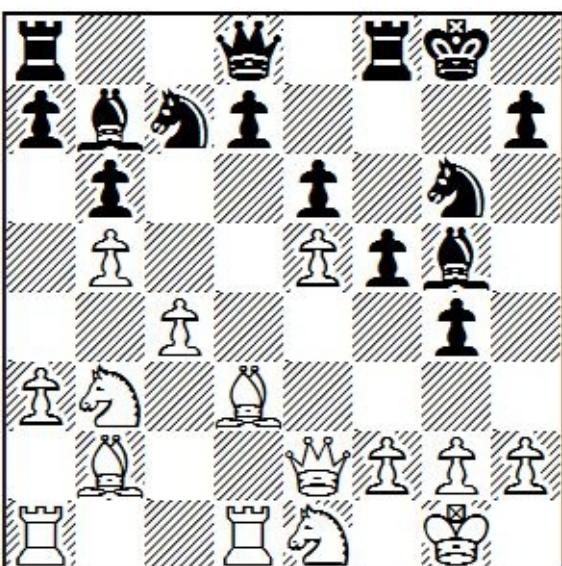
### **15 Rfd1 g4 16 Ne1 Bg5 17 b5**

Black isn't getting pushed around if he *wants* to transfer his knight to the kingside, for his own attacking purposes. GM Jon Tisdall suggests the quieter 17 Nb3.

### **17 ... Ne7**

The human move. *Houdini*, lacking faith in Black's kingside chances, prefers the defensive 17 ... Na5!?.

### **18 Nb3 Ng6**



Tisdall notes that Filipovic got a far superior version than in his game against Gligoric in the above note.

## **19 g3**

This keeps Black's knight out of f4 and h4.

**Question:** Doesn't this move drastically weaken the light squares around White's king.

**Answer:** I do admit it is a vomit-inducing move, but still feel it's a necessary evil. Tisdall suggests the passive 19 Bc2!? (placid acquiescence is a dangerous trait to display while on defence) 19 ... Nf4 20 Qf1 followed by doubling rooks on the d-file. I already prefer Black's position since d7 is easy to protect and Black can build for a kingside sacrifice on g2 or h3.

## **19 ... h5**

Intending to chip away at the defensive barrier by prying open the h-file.

## **20 a4**

White's queenside assault is coming but just doesn't look as potent as Black's on the other side. Houdini stubbornly continues to give White an edge, while your human writer would flip the assessment to '==', an edge for Black.

## **20 ... h4 21 a5 Rb8**

Covering b6 and, more importantly, ensuring that Black's bishop remains on the h1--8 diagonal by covering against a6 tricks.

## **22 Bc2 Rf7**

Dual purpose, covering d7, while planning to lift to the h-file, via h7.

## **23 axb6 axb6**

Tisdall comments: "A very interesting position - a black rook on h7 will defend his main weakness and prepare action on the h-file. White has some annoying obstacles to overcome, since pushing c5 to break through on the queenside will cede the d5-square for a happy black piece."

## **24 Rd6?**

Clearly, the rook's version of the truth fails to align with reality. From time to time we all make superficial moves like this one, which wastes a tempo, allowing Black's misplaced c7-knight to the kingside with a free move. When our clocks run low or we grow fatigued, we fall victim to short-term thinking, the way politicians tend to favour the economy and corporate interests (and therefore their re-election victory) over the planet's degrading environment. 24 Ra7 looks correct. Even then, I still don't like White's position after 24 ... Rh7.

## **24 ... Ne8**

"When will you learn that obstinacy is more painful than obedience?" the knight asks White's confused rook.

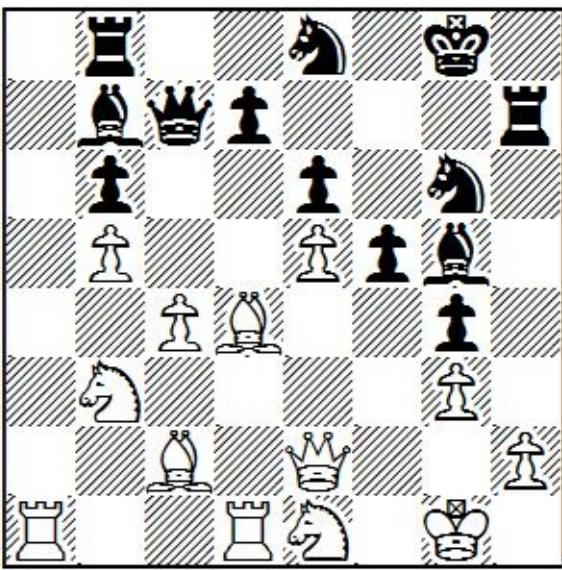
## **25 Rd4 hxg3 26 fxg3**

Defensive Principle: *recapture away from the centre if you believe your king is in danger.* Not 26 hxg3?? after which White's kingside grows sick with toxic light squares, as if injected with radium: 26 ... Rh7 27 Ng2 Bf3 28 Qe1 Qc7 29 Nd2 Bxg2 30 Kxg2 Qb7+ when White can resign.

## **26 ... Qc7!**

The attack on e5 proves awkward for White.

## **27 Rdd1 Rh7 28 Bd4**



**Exercise (planning/combination alert):** Black has a choice of two promising attacking continuations. Find one of them:

**Answer:** Sacrifice either piece on f4.

**28 ... Nf4!**

Black finally breaches a barrier which White took such great pains to erect. This is one of those solutions which feels simultaneously elementary and uncrackable. Also deadly is 28 ... Bf4! 29 gxf4 (otherwise e5 falls without compensation) 29 ... g3! (even stronger than 29 ... Nxf4) 30 Nf3 gxh2+ 31 Kf2 Nxf4 32 Qe3 Nh3+ 33 Kg2 Qxc4 34 Rac1 Nf4+! 35 Qxf4 Qe2+ 36 Kg3 Ng7! threatening ... Nh5+, forcing mate.

**29 gxf4**

The parasite is removed, only to be replaced by another.

**29 ... Bxf4 30 Nd2**

The route of appeasement fails after 30 c5 Rxh2 31 Qxh2 Bxh2+ 32 Kxh2 Bd5 33 cxb6 Qd8 34 Ng2 f4! 35 Nc5 f3 and wins.

**30 ... g3?**

There are two reasons for failure in a chess game, one through lack of skill, and the other self-imposed:

1. We don't know the correct path.

2. We know the correct path, yet deliberately get cute and decide not to take it.

Black's last move is an example of the latter.

Sometimes the simplest path is also the best one. 30 ... Rxh2 is crushing after 31 Qxh2 Bxh2+ 32 Kxh2 d5! (the ruling oligarchy seizes absolute control; Black's last move allows his queen swift entry to the kingside) 33 Kg3 dxc4 34 Ra4 Qh7 35 Nxc4 Qh3+ 36 Kf2 Qh2+ 37 Kf1 g3 38 Rd2 and now follows the pretty shot 38 ... Rd8!! (threat: ... Rxd4!) 39 Bg1 (or 39 Rxh2 gxh2 when White is unable to halt Black's pawn promotion) 39 ... Rxd2 40 Bxh2 gxh2 when Black gets a brand new queen.

**31 Ndf3?**

White may even stand better after 31 h4! Rxh4 32 Ndf3 when 32 ... Rh2? is met with the simple 33 Ng2 with clear superiority for White, whose king suddenly looks a lot safer than it did a few moves ago.

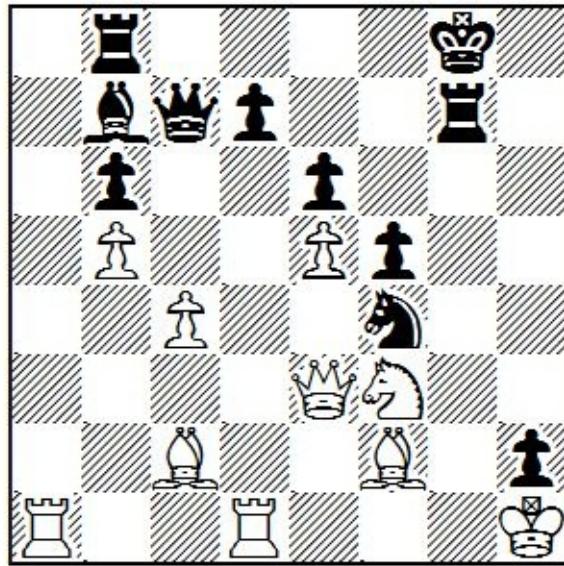
**31 ... gxh2+ 32 Kh1 Ng7 33 Ng2 Nh5**

Finally, the long ignored knight has his say. Black's last move not only defends f4, but also threatens an ugly cheapo on g3.

**34 Bf2 Rg7 35 Nxf4**

35 Ra3 is met with 35 ... Bxe5! 36 Be1 Bg3 37 Bb4 Bf4 38 Be1 Qc5! with dual tricks on a3 and g1.

**35 ... Nxf4 36 Qe3**



**Exercise (combination alert):** Once again Black has a choice of two winning moves, one flashy and the other simple, yet just as brutal. What would you play here?

**Answer: 36 ... Qxe5!**

A pretty overload/queen sacrifice (which isn't really a sacrifice at all), which no human can resist. However, *Houdini* prefers 36 ... Qxc4! 37 Bb3 (or 37 Bb1 Nh3 when there is no reasonable defence to the coming ... Qg4) 37 ... Qe4 and wins.

**37 Ra3**

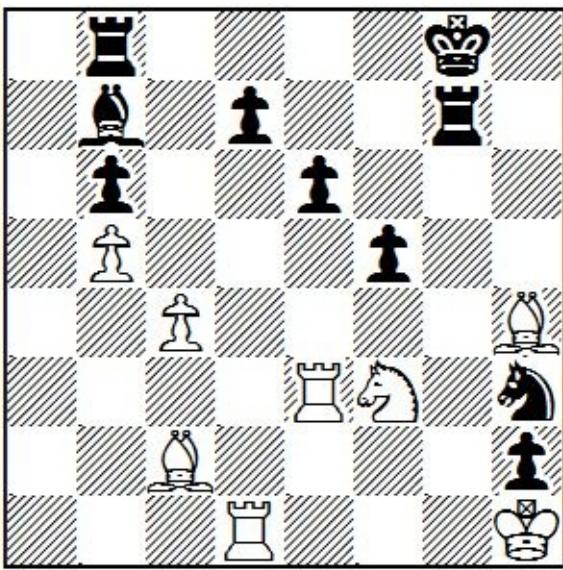
Avoiding 37 Qxe5?? Bxf3+ 38 Kxh2 Rg2+ 39 Kh1 Rxf2+ 40 Kg1 Nh3 mate. The knight pays his final respects to White's dead king, yet finds it difficult, since he had no respect for the king when he was alive.

**37 ... Qxe3! 38 Rxе3 Nh3?**

A serious error, which may allow White to escape. Instead, 38 ... Rg2! 39 Rf1 Ra8 (threatening to infiltrate to a2) 40 Bb1 Ra1! 41 Bh4 (41 Rb3 Rxb1! 42 Rfxb1 Rxf2 43 R1b2 Ne2! is crushing) 41 ... Rg1+! (removal of a key defender/pin) 42 Rxg1+ hxg1Q+ 43 Kxg1 Rxb1+ wins.

**39 Bh4?**

This is not the time to twiddle fingers. White missed a big opportunity with 39 Rf1! Rc8 40 Rc3 Nxf2+ (the deputation of black attackers reluctantly begins to withdraw from its original intent, which is to deliver checkmate to White's king) 41 Rxf2 Kf7 42 Rd2 d5 43 Ra3 dxc4 44 Rd7+ Kf6 45 Rxg7 Kxg7 46 Ra7 Rc7 47 Kxh2 Kf6 48 Kg3 when he continues to struggle, but drawing chances remain.



**Exercise (combination alert):** Multiple omens warn of White's impending doom:

1. Black's lofty b7-bishop looks down on his unfortunate white brethren, as if from a mountain top.
  2. White's king is caught in the corner with a twilight zone-like eternal, misery-drenched present, with no before and no after.
- Black has a crushing move in the position. What would you play here?

**Answer:** Pin.

**39 ... Ng1!**

Do you remember when this knight languished on c7? Coexistence on a single square is an impossibility, since two separate pieces cannot simultaneously occupy the same square. In this case, there is only room for one on f3, and that one is not White's knight.

**40 Rf1 Nxf3**

40 ... Rg4! is more accurate, since in this version, White's bishop is unable to retreat to f2.

**41 Rxf3 Rg4 42 Bf6 Kf7 43 Be5 d6! 44 Bb2**

44 Bxd6 Rh8 45 Bxh2 Rgh4 also ends the game.

**44 ... Rbg8 0-1**

45 Kxh2 is met with 45 ... Rh4+ 46 Rh3 Rg2 + 47 Kh1 Rg3+ 48 Kh2 Rxh3 mate. "A ferocious demonstration of the trumps of the black position, and a game worth studying for 1 ... b6-ers," writes Tisdall.

**Summary:** Be careful of the 8 e5 and 9 dxc5! line. It isn't played very often by White, but I consider it one of our greatest threats of the chapter. Play tends to follow c3-Sicilian channels. If you don't care for Black's position, remember you have the option of playing it in French Defence fashion, which we examine later in the chapter.

**Game 14**

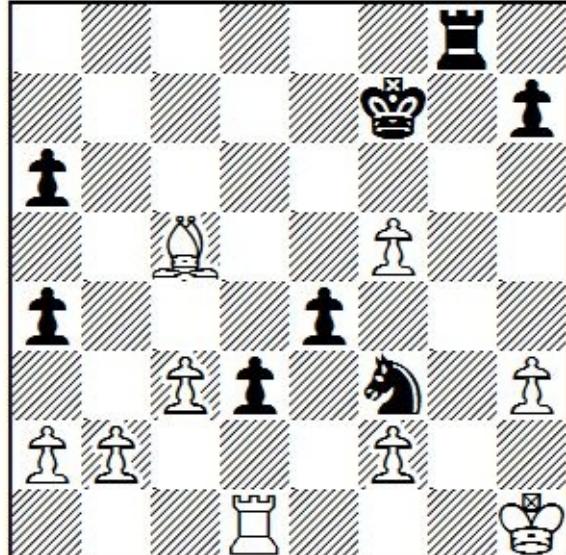
**Z.Susak-B.Filipovic**

Kastela 2002

**1 e4 b6**

Compare our 1 ... b6 game with this Ruy Lopez classic: 1 ... e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0

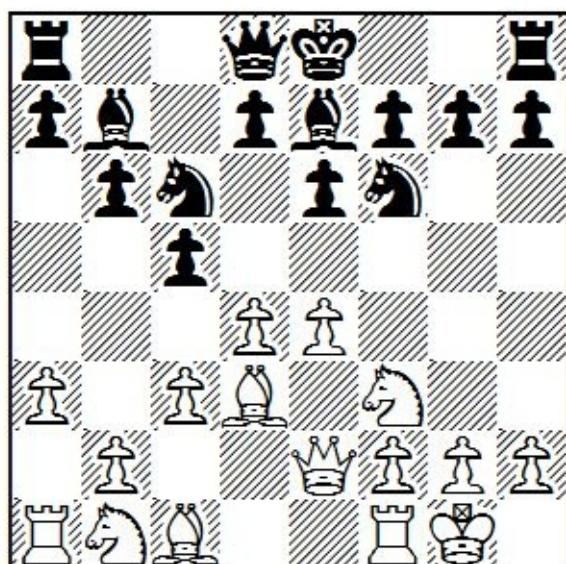
Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 c3 d6 9 h3 Na5 10 Bc2 c5 11 d4 Nd7 12 dxc5 dxc5 13 Nbd2 f6 14 Nh4 Nb6  
 15 Nf5 Rf7 16 Nxe7+ Rxe7 17 Qf3 Be6 18 Nf1 Rd7 19 Ne3 c4 (this structure is similar to the one we get  
 in our featured game, except even better since in that one, White weakened b3 with an early a3) 20 Nf5  
 Na4! (wonderful judgement; the weakness of White's light squares and d3 mean more than Black's broken  
 pawns) 21 Bxa4 bxa4 22 Be3 Rd3 23 Qg4 Qd7 24 Bc5 Rc8 25 Be7?! (25 Ba3 minimizes White's  
 problems) 25 ... Bxf5 26 Qxf5 Nc6 27 Bc5 Nd8 28 Qxd7 Rxd7 29 Rad1 Rd3 30 Ba3 Nc6 31 Rxd3 cxd3  
 32 Rd1 Rd8 33 Kf1 g6! 34 g4 f5! 35 gxf5 gxf5 36 exf5?! (Fischer had to settle for 36 Ke1!) 36 ... e4 37  
 Ke1? (37 b3 was forced) 37 ... Ne5 (Black's knight is the dominant minor piece) 38 Bc5 Nf3+ 39 Kf1  
 Kf7 (threat: ... Rg8 and ... Rg1 mate) 40 Kg2 Rg8+ 41 Kh1.



**Exercise (combination alert):** Black to play and win:

**Answer:** Removal of the guard/pawn promotion. After 41 ... Rg1+! 42 Rxg1 Nxg1 (threat: ... d2) 43 Be3 Nf3 44 Kg2 d2 45 Bxd2 Nxd2 Fischer fought on but resistance at this stage was futile, R.Fischer-B.Ivkov, Havana 1965.

**2 d4 Bb7 3 Bd3 e6 4 Nf3 c5 5 c3 Nf6 6 Qe2 Be7 7 0-0 Nc6 8 a3**



This is by far White's most common move here, but I'm not convinced it's as dangerous as 8 e5 which we looked at last game.

**Question:** What is White's reasoning behind 8 a3?

**Answer:** Two reasons:

1. White eliminates all ... cxd4; cxd4 Nb4 tricks.
2. White may later choose to expand on the queenside with b4.

**8 ... Na5**

GM Tony Miles's speciality, now championed by IM Branko Filipovic.

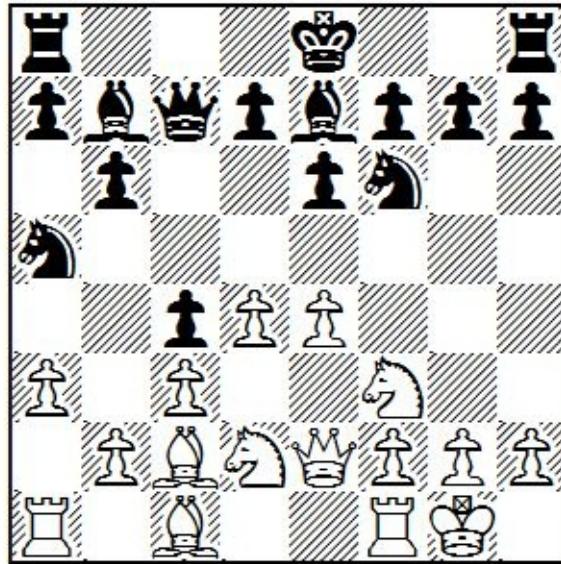
**Question:** This looks ridiculous. Won't Black lose time when White plays Nbd2 and then b4, essentially picking up two free tempi?

**Answer:** Ah! White doesn't get the opportunity to play b4. Stay tuned. We have access to a little tactic coming up which prevents this idea from emerging to the realm of reality. We won't be covering 8 ... d5 9 e5 Nd7 10 b4, as in I.Saric-E.Bacrot, Bastia (rapid) 2013. I'm not crazy about Black's position if White achieves b4, and consider this an inferior French position.

**9 Bc2**

The normal move order is 9 Nbd2 c4!. Black's point: this deflection trick nullifies White's b4 intention.

**9 ... c4 10 Nbd2 Qc7**



Our starting position of the Miles variation, the fruition of Nimzowitsch's hypermodern theories.

**Question:** Doesn't White, who controls the centre, stand better?

**Answer:** On first impression it does appear that White stands better. If we examine the position deeper and demand specifics, I think White has a very difficult time proving even an edge here. We must ask the fundamental question: what is White's plan? As we shall see in the coming games, Black seems to have available an adequate response in every version.

**11 Re1**

White's main move.

**Question:** What does White have in mind?

**Answer:** That is the trouble: White doesn't yet have a plan and makes what he believes is a useful temporizing move. Some of White's concerns:

1. 11 e5 hands Black control over d5.
2. If White plays 11 d5, Black simply responds with 11 ... e5, with a decent Ruy Lopez-style position.
3. If White moves his d2-knight, this leaves open possibilities of ... Nb3, picking up the bishop-pair.
4. The freeing move b4 is highly unlikely to work out well for White, who weakens both c3 and c4 after Black captures b3 en passant.

In the coming three games we also look at 11 Ne5, 11 d5 and 11 e5.

**11 ... 0-0**

Now what? White doesn't seem to have a useful move.

**12 Ne5?!**

Attacking c4 yet White remains planless. Perhaps most logical is 12 Rb1!, intending to unravel the queenside with Nf1, without loss of the bishop-pair to a coming ... Nb3: 12 ... Nh5?!? (Filipovic decides to go off on an adventure; something like 12 ... Rae8 looks safer) 13 Ne5 (13 g3 weakens the light squares, but may still be playable) 13 ... Nf4 14 Qg4 f6!?? 15 Qxf4 (15 Nxd7?! is met with 15 ... Rf7! 16 b4 cxb3 17 Nxb3 Nxg2 18 Qxg2 Qxc3 19 Re2 Ba6 20 e5 Bxe2 21 Qxa8+ Bf8 22 Nxf8 Rxf8 23 Qe4 Qe1+ 24 Kg2 Bf1+ when White must take a draw, since 25 Kg3?? loses to 25 ... Qc3+ 26 Be3 f5 27 Qf3 Qxc2) 15 ... Bd6 16 Ndf3 fxe5 17 Qh4 Nc6 with an odd position in D.Pikula-B.Filipovic, Novi Sad 2000. *Houdini* slightly favours White, while I wouldn't mind taking on Black here.

**12 ... b5**

I would go for the more flexible 12 ... Rac8.

**13 h3**

13 f4 seems more logical in Ne5 lines where White's rook remained on f1.

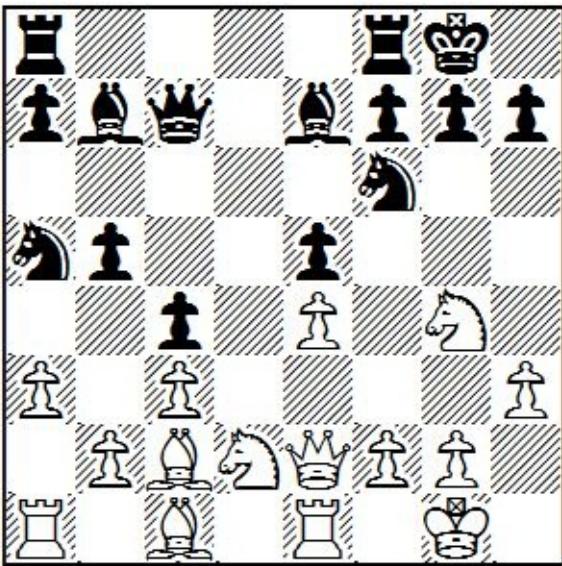
**13 ... d6 14 Ng4 e5**

Black wants his fair share of the centre.

**15 dxe5?!**

White fights for equality after this exchange. She should retain pawn tension with 15 Nxf6+ Bxf6 16 Nf3 a6 17 Be3 Rfe8 18 d5 with a Closed Ruy Lopez-like position, where I slightly prefer White, since his central space looks more meaningful than Black's queenside territorial advantage.

**15 ... dxe5**



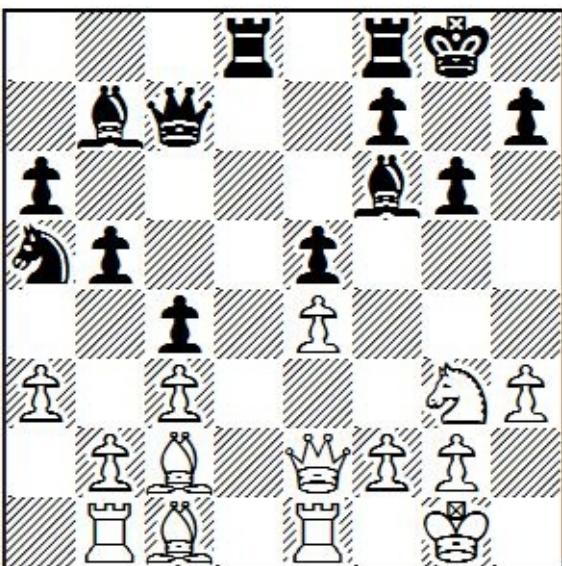
## 16 Nxf6+!?

After this move White's hoped-for kingside play droops like a sweat-soaked sock. He agrees to a huge waste of time with this swap, having moved his knight four times, to swap off for a piece which moved only once.

**Question:** Why not 16 Ne3 intending Nf5?

**Answer:** That may be better, since in this version, White avoided playing Nf3, Ne5, Ng4 and Nxf6, wasting loads of time without getting an iota in return. Black still gets a good Lopez-style position after 16 ... Rfd8 (16 ... g6 is also possible) 17 Nf5 Bf8 18 Nfl Nd7 19 Qg4 Kh8 20 N1g3 Nc5. Black stands slightly better since the b3 and d3 holes remain a deep concern for White, whose attackers are loosed upon the kingside, yet without unified intent, behaving like puppies off-leash. From this point it remains difficult for White to generate anything further on the kingside.

**16 ... Bxf6 17 Rb1 a6 18 Nf1 Rad8 19 Ng3 g6**



Black achieved an excellent Ruy Lopez-style position, since b3, d3 and White's light squares in general remain weak, and he lacks kingside attacking compensation on the kingside. White's position is

worse than it looks, mainly because he lacks a constructive plan.

## 20 Bh6

Optimists tend to dream with their eyes wide open. The coming exchange of bishops only helps Black.

## 20 ... Bg7 21 Bxg7??

If a doctor can't cure an ailment, then the next best option is to attempt to reduce the severity of the patient's pain. Following a preconceived checklist of steps doesn't always lead us to the place we imagined. This is the natural follow-up to his last move but it looks misguided, because White agrees to swap off his good bishop in exchange for non-existent kingside attacking chances. Now blame for White's coming deterioration can be assigned to his no-account remaining bishop. Better was 21 Bg5, retaining her good bishop.

## 21 ... Kxg7

Raw comp numbers don't always state a position's truth with accuracy. *Houdini* misassesses this as equal, when in reality, Black stands better. This exchange may have slightly weakened Black's king, but it also ensured White of a slightly bad bishop, due to her e4-pawn being fixed on the same colour as her remaining bishop.

## 22 Rbd1 Bc8

Played as e6 is the best post for the bishop.

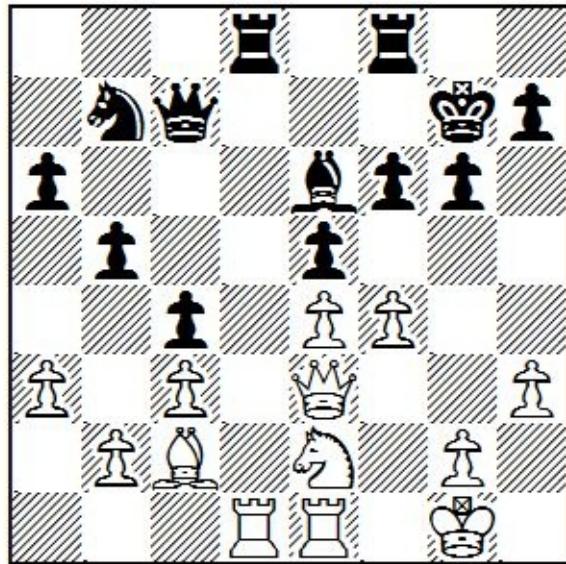
## 23 Qe3 f6 24 Ne2

After 24 h4 Bg4 25 f3 Be6 26 h5 Nb7 27 Kf2 White will never get a chance to attack down the h-file, since Black removes the queens with 27 ... Qc5, with the better ending.

## 24 ... Be6 25 f4!?

Natural, but possibly not best. White continues to pour resources into an essentially doomed cause of kingside counterplay. In this case she weakens e4 in the name of activity. But it's hard to criticize her, because the unpleasant option is to simply wait, while Black improves his position on the queenside.

## 25 ... Nb7



Multipurpose. Black's options:

1. The knight can be transferred to c5, where it overlooks a4, b3, d3 and e4.
2. The knight can be transferred to f7, after which he may consider ... exf4 and ... Ne5.
3. Black keeps open options of ... Qc5, with a superior ending.

## 26 Kh1 Qc5

Either forcing the favourable ending or seizing dark squares.

## **27 Qg3**

Alternatively, 27 Qxc5 Nxc5 28 f5 (28 fxe5 fxe5 29 Kg1 Bc8 30 Ng3 Rxd1 31 Rxd1 Bb7 also looks difficult to hold for White) 28 ... Bc8 29 Ng3 gxf5 30 exf5 Kh6! 31 h4 Bb7 and the ending will be very difficult for White to hold.

## **27 ... Rxd1!**

Black dramatically reduces White's kingside attacking chances by swapping off rooks.

## **28 Rxd1 Rd8 29 Rxd8 Nxd8 30 Ng1 Nf7 31 Kh2**

White has nothing better than to await events.

## **31 ... Bc8**

Perhaps intending to pile on to e4 with ... Bb7, and ... Nd6.

## **32 fxe5**

Otherwise:

a) 32 Nf3 exf4 33 Qxf4 Qf2 34 Qd2 Qa7 35 Qf4 Qe7 would be similar to the game continuation.

b) 32 f5 Nd6 33 fxg6 hxg6 34 h4 Qc6 35 h5 g5 and the trouble is ... Bb7 is coming, endangering e4. Also, h5 may later fall.

## **32 ... Nxe5**

The knight, who previously only worked in the chorus, gets promoted to lead singer.

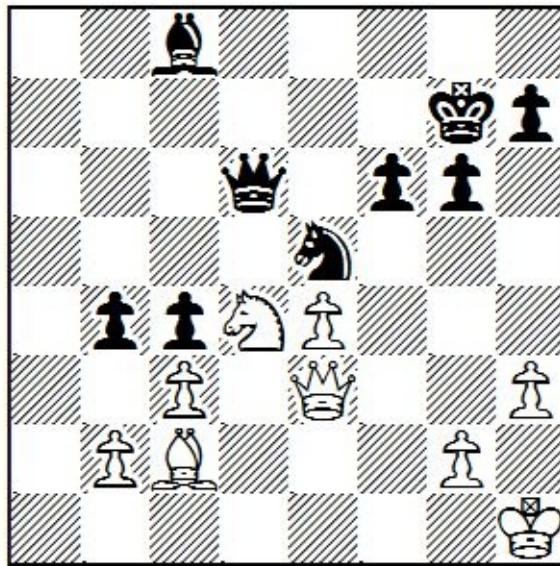
## **33 Ne2 a5!**

Now ... b4 is coming and White has a hard time defending her queenside pawns.

## **34 Nd4 b4 35 axb4 axb4 36 Qe3 Qd6**

Threatening a few discovery cheapos on f3 and g4.

## **37 Kh1**



**Exercise (planning):** Black's eventual win is probable, but not yet at the level of an airtight certainty. Come up with a clear path to make progress for Black:

**Answer:** Step 1: Fix b2 as a stationary target.

## **37 ... b3! 38 Bd1 Qa6**

Step 2: Transfer the queen to a1.

## **39 Qd2 Qa1 40 Kh2 Qb1!**

Step 3: Create a secondary target of e4. Now an unremitting stream of irritating threats pour forth from

Black's side.

**Question:** Why didn't Black play 40 ... Nd3?

**Answer:** A defensive trap. 41 Bxb3! allows White to escape her difficulties.

**41 Nb5**

The battlefield doctor understands she lacks the resources to save all her patients, and so prioritizes by need and save ability by forming a triage, where soldiers too grievously wounded are abandoned. The e4-pawn falls into this unfortunate category. White decides to let e4 go, since any measure to salvage involves an expense too costly to allocate. If 41 Bf3 h5 42 Kg3 Nd3 is hopeless for White, since b2 falls.

**41 ... Qd3!**

Disallowing White's queen entry into his position. The e-pawn isn't running away and Black's last move may be even stronger than 41 ... Qxe4 42 Nd6 Qc6 43 Qd4.

**42 Qe1**

Having met the black queen, the white queen's feeling of agitation deepens steadily.

**42 ... Bb7 43 Qg1**

Take one look at White's not-so-pretty queen, and we realize that not a single member of the judging committee of a beauty contest would even consider voting for her. 43 Nd4 Qxe4 44 Qg3 Qd3 is also hopeless for White.

**43 ... Qxe4**

The queen is callous to the fact that unnumbered multitudes of her subjects (i.e. White's entire army, who she fails to recognize as autonomous, and therefore still under her domain) suffer at her hands.

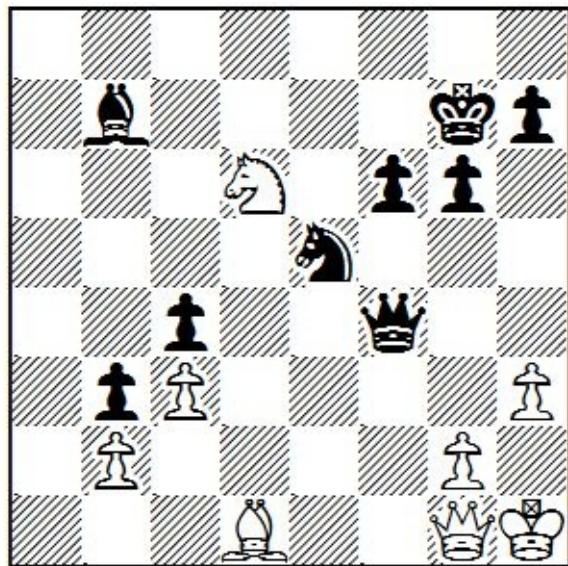
**44 Nd6?**

A blunder in a hopeless position.

**44 ... Qf4+**

The queen's light-hearted demeanour doesn't fool anyone.

**45 Kh1**



**Exercise (combination alert):** White's squalid position eclipses her worst fears. Black to play and win.

**Answer:** Double attack. ... Nf2+ and ... Qxd6 are simultaneously threatened, and Black's hanging bishop isn't really hanging.

**45 ... Nd3!**

White king and queen, wrapped in love's embrace, fail to notice the enemy knight's approach until it's too late.

**46 Ne8+ Kf8 0-1**

White is unable to play 47 Qb6 which is met with 47 ... Qf1+ 48 Qg1 Bxg2+ 49 Kh2 Qxg1+ 50 Kxg1 Kxe8 51 Kxg2 Nxb2 and game over. The dual threats remain.

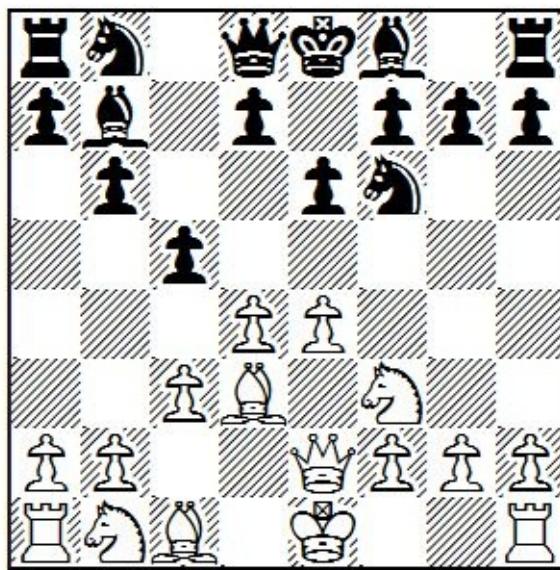
**Summary:** White can be lured into Closed Ruy Lopez-like positions from the Miles variation.

*Game 15*

**J.Dorfman-A.Miles**

Tilburg 1992

**1 d4 e6 2 e4 b6 3 Nf3 Bb7 4 Bd3 c5 5 c3 Nf6 6 Qe2**



**6 ... Be7**

**Question:** Why not 6 ... Nc6 first?

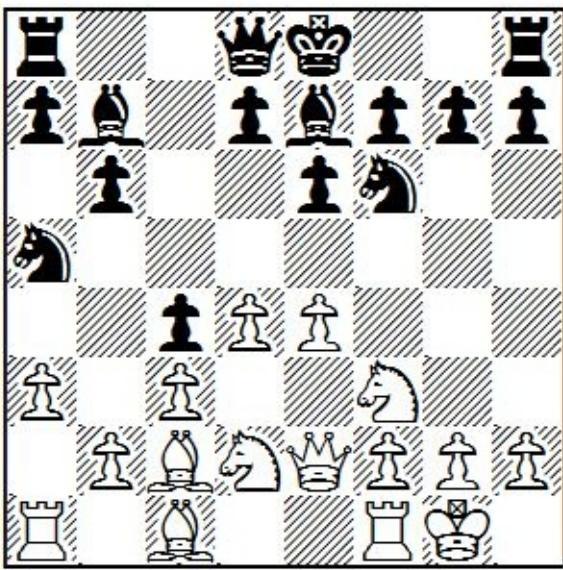
**Answer:** A mistake! I mentioned this point in an earlier game, but it's well worth repeating (since I keep forgetting as well). When I just started the book, still unfamiliar with the theory (I hadn't played 1 ... b6 since the early 1980's), and playing an IM, I banged out 6 ... Nc6?, forgetting to toss in ... Be7. Then came 7 d5! Ne7 8 c4 d6 with a nauseating position for Black, M.Hiramm-C.Lakdawala, Internet (blitz) 2014.

**7 0-0 Nc6 8 a3 Na5 9 Nbd2 c4!**

Our clever bypass point is introduced.

**10 Bc2**

10 Nxc4 Nxc4 11 Bxc4 Bxe4 isn't such a bad deal for Black, who traded a wing pawn for a more valuable central one. Black equalized, G.Sosonko-G.Welling, Dutch League 1994.



**10 ... Qc7**

Black's most flexible response.

**Question:** Isn't Black's move pretty much the same as playing 10 ... Rc8?

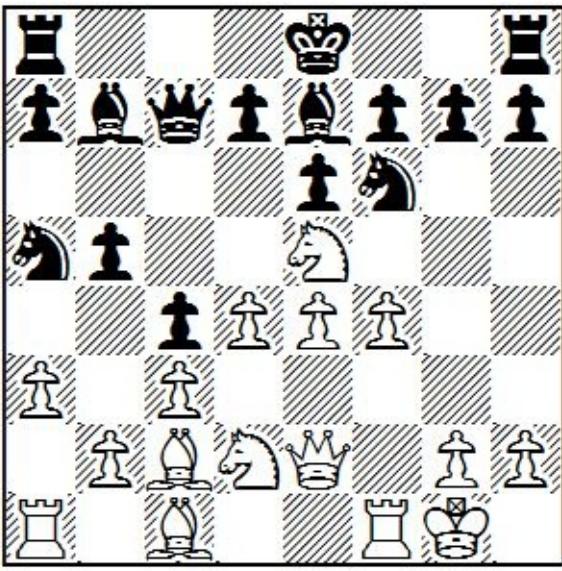
**Answer:** 10 ... Qc7 is more accurate, since after 10 ... Rc8 White can respond with the untried pawn sacrifice 11 d5! when d6 is in the air. Now if Black's queen were on c7, replacing ... Rc8, Black has the easy answer 11 ... e5!. Here, however, 11 ... exd5 12 e5! Nh5 (12 ... Ne4 13 Nxe4 dxe4 14 Bxe4 Bxe4 15 Qxe4 Nb3 16 Rb1 0-0 17 Rd1 also looks unpleasant for Black, who suffers down the d-file) 13 Nd4 g6 14 f4 is advantage White. I don't care much for Black's jumbled position and the extra pawn fails to compensate.

**11 Ne5**

**Question:** I realize that White gains a move attacking c4, but is Black bothered with this, since after covering c4, ... d6 regains the tempo?

**Answer:** An attack on c4 isn't White's main purpose behind the last move. Instead, it is to free the pathway for f4 and a kingside attack.

**11 ... b5 12 f4**



White hopes his broad pawn centre may later convert to an attack on Black's king.

**12 ... 0-0**

**Question:** How about tossing in 12 ... d5 when the presence of the e5-knight prevents White from bypassing with his e-pawn?

**Answer:** Inadvisable. White's forces come alive after 13 exd5 Bxd5 14 f5 0-0 15 fxe6, and if Black seeks to spare structural damage with 15 ... Bxe6?! 16 Ne4 Nd5 17 Bg5! Bd6 (17 ... f6?? 18 Nxf6+! Nxf6 19 Bxf6 Bxf6 20 Qe4 g6 21 Rxf6! overloads the f8-rook and wins, while after 18 ... gxf6 19 Bxh7+ Kxh7 20 Qh5+ Kg8 21 Bh6 Bd6 22 Rf3! there is no good defence to the coming Rg3+) 18 Nxd6 Qxd6 19 Qh5 f5 20 Rf3 White generated an unstoppable kingside attack.

**13 Ng4**

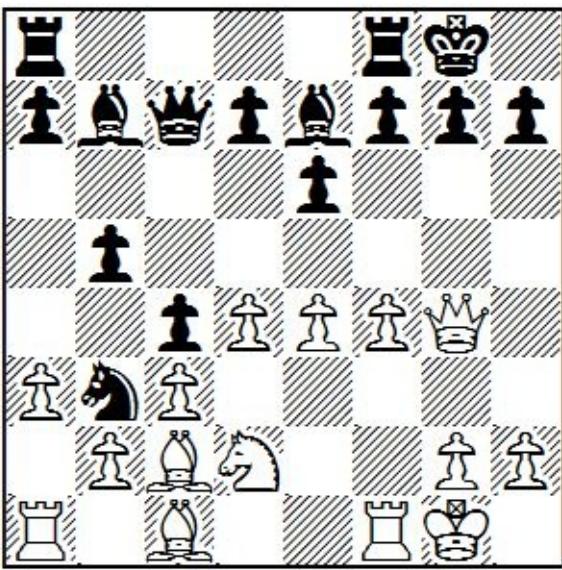
**Question:** Why the unforced knight retreat?

**Answer:** White seeks to clear the path for e5 and f5, with kingside attacking chances. Other options:

a) 13 Nef3 Nh5?!? (Filipovic seems to have a fondness for this knight move; Black must avoid the greedy 13 ... Qxf4?? 14 e5, and if 14 ... Nd5 15 Nxc4 the discovered attack wins) 14 g3 g6 15 e5 (15 f5?! exf5 16 exf5 Rae8 leaves White in trouble, with an exposed queen and king) 15 ... f5! (Black enhances his influence on the light squares and equalizes) 16 exf5?!? (now Black stands better) 16 ... Bxf6 17 Be4 (challenging the diagonal fails to solve White's strategic issues on the light squares) 17 ... Bg7 18 Bxb7 Qxb7 (Black dominates the light squares, which is our theme for this chapter) 19 Ne4 Nb3 20 Rb1 Qd5 21 Ned2 Nf6 22 Nxb3 cxb3 23 Nd2 a5 24 a4?! bxa4 25 Ra1 a3! 26 Rxa3 a4 27 Qc4 Rfe8 (clearing the way for ... Bf8) 28 Qb4?? Bf8 and wins, M.Gomboc-B.Filipovic, Ljubljana 2000.

b) 13 f5 exf5 14 Rxf5 d6 15 Nef3 (15 Ng4?! loses material to 15 ... Nxg4 16 Qxg4 Bc8 when White lacks full compensation for the exchange) 15 ... a6 16 e5 dxe5 17 Nxe5 Rae8 18 Qf2 Bc8 19 Rf4 Be6 when Black's king is solid and he controls both d5, which offers him balanced chances, L.Goldgewicht-J.Chabanon, Cannes 1995.

**13 ... Nxg4 14 Qxg4 Nb3!**



Always keep an eye out for this trick.

### **15 Bxb3!?**

The nuclear option. White bakes his intent and allows it to harden. He is willing to hand over his light squares to pursue his kingside attacking agenda. To an aggressive player like Dorfman, Miles's last move represents a breach of good taste, and he isn't likely to allow it to pass with silent tact.

**Question:** Why did White hand over control of the light squares when he can simply play 15 Nxb3 cxb3 16 Bd3 and then continue to attack kingside?

**Answer:** Then Black has yet another trick which drains White's kingside prospects of vitality: 16 ... Bxe4! 17 Bxe4 f5 (the double attack regains the sacrificed piece) 18 Qe2 fxe4 19 Qxe4 Bd6 20 Bd2 Rac8 when Black dominates the light squares and stands better. He can eventually try to break with ... a5 and ... b4, or just play ... a5 and ... a4, after which White must be on the lookout for ... Bxa3 promotion tricks in endings. White is unable to transfer his pawns off the dark squares, since 21 d5?! is met with 21 ... Qb7.

### **15 ... cxb3 16 f5**

The righteous cause of attack is plainly one which is dear to Dorfman's heart. Threat: f6. Otherwise Black plays ... f5 himself.

### **16 ... exf5!**

Principle: *meet a wing attack with a central counter*. I don't believe Black generates enough compensation for a pawn after 16 ... Kh8?! 17 Nxb3.

### **17 exf5**

Once again threatening f6. 17 Rxf5 d5!, intending ... Bc8, gives Black sufficient play.

### **17 ... Bd6!**

The God-squad convenes on d6 and b7, taking aim at White's king.

### **18 Ne4?**

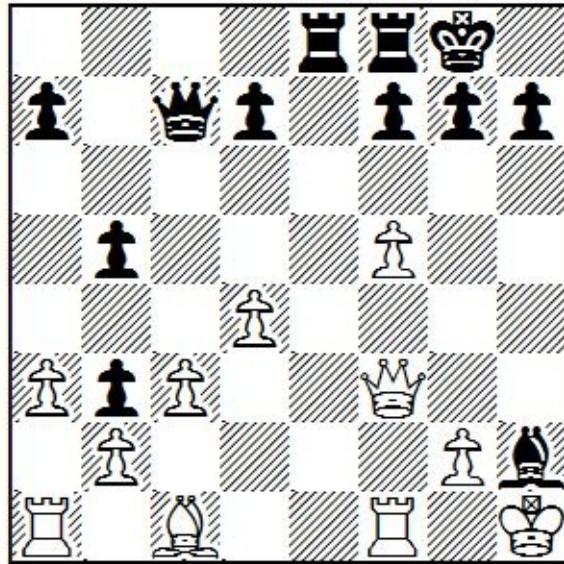
I always find the candour of an openly hostile opponent quite refreshing. This is the revealing gesture, the poker game's tell, which gives away White's unsound intent. This appears to be a solution in search of a problem since White fails to earn enough attacking chances for the pawn:

a) 18 f6? g6! (the hasty 18 ... Bxh2+?? loses to 19 Kh1 g6 20 Qh4 Bg3 21 Qh6) 19 Ne4 Bxh2+ 20 Kh1 Rfe8 21 Qg5 Bd6! 22 Nxd6 Qxd6 23 Bf4 Qd5! 24 Qxd5 Bxd5 and Black has winning chances with his extra pawn, despite the opposite-coloured bishops.

b) 18 Nxb3 (this prosaic move may be White's best option) 18 ... Bxh2+ 19 Kh1 Qg3 20 Qxg3 Bxg3 21 Bf4 Bxf4 22 Rxf4 d6 23 a4 a6 24 Nd2 Rfe8 25 Kg1 when White stands only a microbe worse in the ending, due to Black's powerful bishop, but he should hold the game.

c) However, 18 h3 is too slow: 18 ... Rfe8 19 f6 Bh2+ 20 Kh1 Qg3! (if queens are removed from the board, Black's rook infiltrates e2) 21 Nf3 Qxg4 22 hxg4 Bd6! 23 fxg7 Re2 24 a4 b4. We note serious dysfunction in White's paralysed ecosystem and he won't be able to save himself.

**18 ... Bxe4 19 Qxe4 Bxh2+ 20 Kh1 Rae8 21 Qf3**



**Exercise (planning/combination alert/critical decision):** Black would love to force queens off with 21 ... Qg3. The problem with the line is White may play 22 Qh5, trapping our h2-bishop. Do we have a tactical way out, or should we reject the variation?

**Answer:** A hidden tactic allows the combination to work.

**21 ... Qg3!**

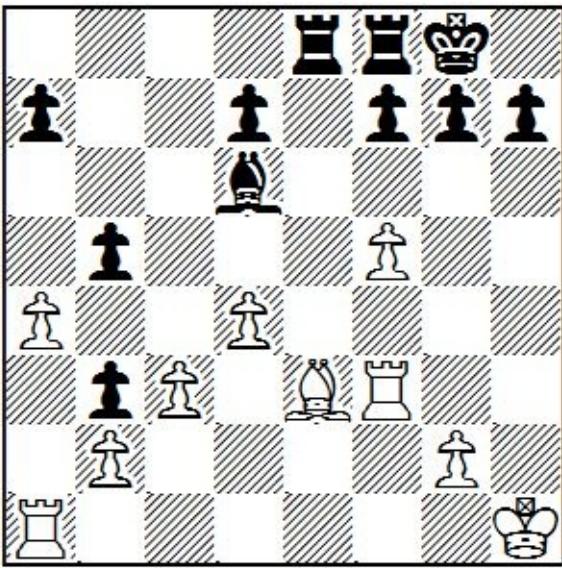
Everyone gets nervous when they notice the queen's brow corrugated in wrathful crinkles.

**22 a4**

The intended 22 Qh5?? fails to 22 ... Re4!, which covers against Qxh2 or Bf4. White has no good recourse to the coming ... Rh4. If 23 Qh3 Rh4 24 Qxg3 Bxg3+ 25 Kg1 Re8 26 Bd2 Re2 27 Be1 Bh2+ 28 Kh1 Rf4! 29 Rxf4 Bxf4 30 Rb1 Rc2! (threats: ... Bc1 or ... Rc1) 31 c4 bxc4 32 Bc3 f6 and White can resign.

**22 ... Qxf3 23 Rxf3 Bd6 24 Be3**

Neither does White save himself with the horribly passive 24 Bd2 Re2 25 Rd3 bxa4 26 Rxa4 Rfe8 27 Kg1 Bb8 28 Rb4 h5!, and if 29 Rxb3 h4! when the threat ... Bg3! forces White to sacrifice the exchange on b8.



**Exercise (combination alert):** The late GM Tony Miles and I used to analyse openings together online. My strategic understanding was approximately on par with his, but I discovered to my endless chagrin that he ran rings around me tactically. In this position, Tony found a deeply embedded tactical idea which turned a favourable ending into a winning one. This one is not so easy, so take your time. How would you proceed with Black?

**Answer:** Overloaded defender/weak back rank.

**24 ... g5!!**

This is no empty gesture. Black's idea, which solves the position's cryptic mystery, sows massive discord and eliminates the harmony from White's position. Threat: ... g4. Miles realizes that his rook must infiltrate e2, after which White is unable to save the game.

Also winning was to first toss in 24 ... bxa4! 25 Rxa4 and only then 25 ... g5!!, once again threatening ... g4: 26 g4 h5! 27 d5 hxg4 28 Rxg4 f6 29 Bxa7 Re2 30 Rf2 Rc2! with a winning bind in the ending. If 31 Rgg2? Ra8! 32 Bd4 Ra1+ 33 Rg1 Rxf2 34 Bxf2 Rxg1+ 35 Kxg1 Ba3! wins. Remember, such ... Ba3 or ... Bxa3 promotion tricks, which are an endgame bonus of our line. I give you a written guarantee that you will someday catch an opponent or two with it.

**25 g4**

Every variation I tried fails for White:

a) 25 Bxg5 bxa4! 26 Bh6 Re2 27 Bxf8 Kxf8 28 Rb1 a3 29 bxa3 b2 30 f6 Rc2 (threat: ... Rc1+) 31 Kg1 Bxa3 32 c4 Rc1+ 33 Rf1 Rxc4 b2 ties White down and I don't believe he saves himself.

b) 25 fxg6 fxg6 26 Rh3 (or 26 Rxf8+ Bxf8 27 Bf4 Re2 28 axb5 Rxb2 29 Bc1 Rc2 30 Rb1 Rxc3 31 Bb2 Rc2 and White is unable to save himself; if 32 Ba1 Ba3! wins) 26 ... bxa4 27 c4 (a4 is immune due to back-rank difficulties) 27 ... a5! 28 c5 Bc7 29 Kg1 (29 Rxa4?? Rf1+ 30 Bg1 Ree1 ends the game) 29 ... g5! 30 Bd2 Re2 31 Bc3 Rff2 32 Rxa4 Rxg2+ 33 Kh1 Rgf2 34 Ra1 a4! (playing on White's weak back rank) 35 d5 a3! 36 bxa3 b2 37 Rb1 Rc2 wins a piece, since ... Rc1+ is threatened, as well as White's bishop.

**25 ... Re4**

Small, seemingly insignificant threats tend to magnify in power by virtue of repetition. Even stronger was 25 ... h5!! (Black's g-pawn cannot be muzzled so easily) 26 Bxg5 (26 gxh5 g4 27 Rg1 Kh7 28 Rxg4

bxa4 29 Rg1 a3 30 bxa3 Re4 31 Rh3 Rfe8 32 Bc1 Re1 also wins) 26 ... Re2 27 axb5 Rxb2 (the passed b3-pawn is a monster) 28 Rh3 f6 29 Bh6 Re8 30 gxh5 Ra2 31 Rb1 b2 32 Rf3 Re2 33 c4 Ra1 34 Rff1 Rxb1 35 Rxb1 Bg3! and the threat of ... Re1+ forces White's immediate resignation.

## 26 axb5 Rfe8!

White's bishop is peremptorily dismissed. One feels Miles' irreversible intent, whose momentum increases with each move. The loss of g5 is irrelevant. All that matters is for Black's rooks to infiltrate the seventh rank and pick off b2.

## 27 Bxg5 Re2 28 Kg1

Alternatively:

a) 28 Rb1 Rh2+ 29 Kg1 Re4 30 Bc1 Rxg4+ 31 Kf1 Bf4! 32 Rxf4 Rxf4+ 33 Bxf4 Rh1+ 34 Ke2 Rxb1 35 Kd2 Rxb2+ 36 Kc1 (the powerless king realizes that his crown will soon be taken from him and replaced with a straw hat) 36 ... Rc2+ 37 Kb1 h5 and White can resign.

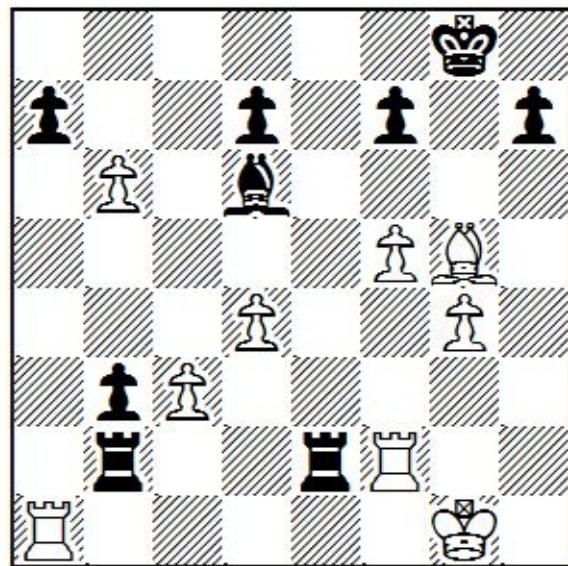
b) 28 Bc1 Rc2 29 Rf1 Ree2 (threatening mate in two moves) 30 Bf4 Bxf4 31 Rxf4 Rh2+ 32 Kg1 Rcg2+ 33 Kf1 Rxb2 34 Kg1 Rbg2+ 35 Kf1 Ra2 when Black either promotes or mates.

## 28 ... Rxb2

Now b2 is the branch torn from the tree which once sustained it. Black pursues promotion threats based on his newly passed pawn.

## 29 Rf2 Ree2 30 b6!?

Absence of style or subtlety is a trademark for desperate ideas. A dire sense of urgency presses itself upon Dorfman, who may be staggered, but isn't yet beaten.



**Exercise (combination alert/critical decision):** White just offered us a full rook on f2. Should we accept with 30 ... Rxf2, or pause to avert White's queening threats with 30 ... axb6? Be careful. Only one of the variations works.

**Answer:** Take the rook, since White is unable to promote due to a tactical trick.

## 30 ... Rxf2!

The 'cautious' route 30 ... axb6?? walks into White's trap. We get mated after 31 Ra8+ Kg7 (31 ... Bf8 32 Bh6 also forces mate) 32 f6+ Kg6 33 Rg8 mate.

## 31 bxa7 Rg2+ 32 Kf1 Rbf2+ 33 Ke1 Rg1+! 0-1

An arrow grazes the white king's skull and imbeds itself in a tree behind him. Black's clever point.

White doesn't get to promote after all: 34 Kxf2 Rxal and the a7 hopeful isn't going anywhere.

**Summary:** Black seems to have ample counterattacking resources after 11 Ne5. Also, keep a sharp lookout for ... Nb3! tricks, as Miles pulled off in this game.

### Game 16

**A.Blees-A.J.Miles**

Komotini 1992

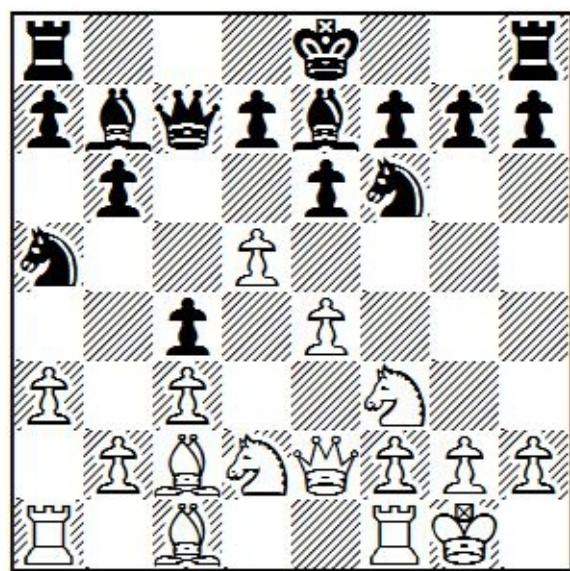
**1 d4 e6 2 Nf3 b6 3 e4**

Never forget that queen pawn openings may easily transfer to a king's pawn version in the Owen's.

**3 ... Bb7 4 Bd3 c5 5 c3 Nf6 6 Qe2 Be7 7 0-0 Nc6 8 a3 Na5 9 Nbd2 c4!**

Our now familiar bypass trick.

**10 Bc2 Qc7 11 d5**



There is one fundamental problem with White's pawn offer: Black need not accept it.

**11 ... e5!**

Thanks but no thanks. Miles wisely declines the pawn offer, instead steering the position into Closed Lopez-style.

**Question:** How would play proceed after 11 ... exd5?

**Answer:** White responds with 12 e5! Ne4 (12 ... Nh5? 13 Nd4 g6 and now White has 14 Nb5! Qb8 15 Nd6+ Bxd6 16 exd6+ Kf8 17 Nf3! Qxd6 18 Bh6+ Ng7 19 Rfe1 when his raging initiative and dark-square domination is worth far more than Black's two worthless extra pawns) 13 Nxe4 dxe4 14 Bxe4 Bxe4 15 Qxe4 Qc6 16 Qf4 Nb3 17 Rb1 0-0 18 Be3 d5 19 Nd4 Nxd4 20 Bxd4 and I prefer White, mainly since Black's queenside majority is blockaded.

**12 g3**

A new move.

**Question:** What is White's intent?

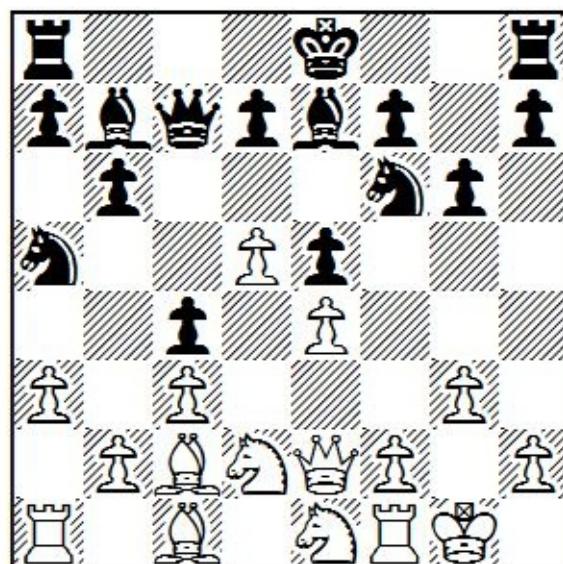
**Answer:** Eventually, White seeks to play Ne1, Ng2 and Ne3, and then possibly follow with an f4

break. Instead, 12 Re1 Bc5 13 Nh4 g6 14 Nf1 h6 15 Be3 (this swaps away White's good bishop, which isn't such a bad plan, since Black's technically 'bad' bishop radiated strength from c5) 15 ... Bxe3 16 Nxe3 d6 17 Rf1 Nd7 (preparing to meet f4 with ... exf4 and ... Ne5) 18 Ba4! (White prepares to eliminate his own problem piece) 18 ... 0-0-0 19 Bxd7+ Rxd7 20 g3 Nb3 (the offside knight will be posted on the active c5-square) 21 Rae1 b5 22 Ng4 saw the players agreed to a draw in this balanced position, R.Ibrahimov-S.Domogaev, Suvorov 2012.

**12 ... g6**

Black also wants to keep a white knight out of f5 and perhaps dreams of achieving the break himself one day.

**13 Ne1**



**13 ... 0-0-0!?**

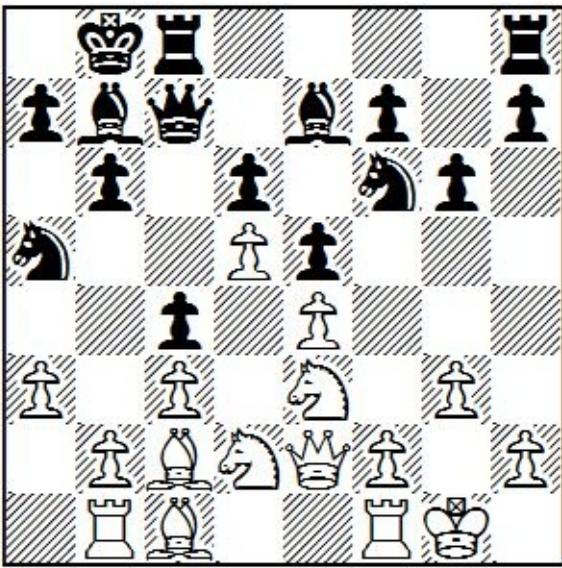
**Question:** This seems unnatural. Why wouldn't Black castle kingside?

**Answer:** Miles realized that his king may be safer on the queenside, since if White attempts to open lines with b4, the en passant capture ... cxb3 leaves White with serious structural weaknesses on the queenside. Also, the move is ambitious. Miles may go after White's king himself with an eventual ... f5. After 13 ... d6 14 Ng2 0-0 15 Ne3 Rac8 16 f4!? exf4 17 Rxf4 (17 gxf4!? Rfe8 18 f5 also looks dangerous for Black) 17 ... Nd7 18 Nf3 *Houdini* assesses at even, in a Lopez-like middlegame.

**14 Ng2 Kb8 15 Rb1**

If 15 Ne3 Rc8 16 f4 exf4 17 Rxf4 Rhf8 18 Qf2 Qc5 19 Bd1 Ne8 20 Nf3 f6 when *Houdini* prefers Black, as do I, with enhanced central dark-square control.

**15 ... d6 16 Ne3 Rc8**



Miles wisely refuses to play ... b5, which allows his opponent fodder to open with a4.

### **17 Qf3!?**

Our styles induce us to play some moves, not because we want to, but because we can't help ourselves. This overly safe move is the kind of move I might have chosen as well. White's coming plan appears to be a case of false economy.

**Question:** What is White's plan behind this strange move?

**Answer:** White's plan is Bd1 and Be2, which looks slow. Perhaps it was time to take a chance and go for the attacking/weakening 17 b4! cxb3 18 Nxb3 Nxb3 19 Rxb3 Nd7 20 a4 Nc5 21 Rb2 a5 22 Bd2 Ba6 23 c4 Ka7 24 Rfb1 Rb8 25 Nd1. White looks slightly better, due to his extra space.

### **17 ... Rhf8!**

Miles shoots for ... f5, while White, so far unwilling to commit to the weakening b4, remains counterplayless.

### **18 Bd1**

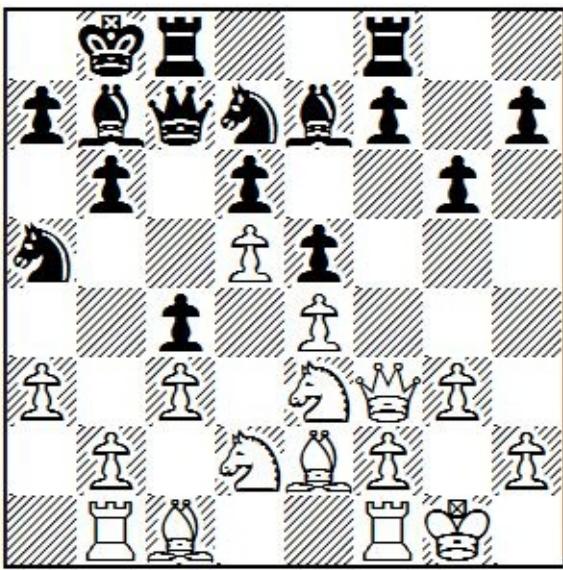
Continuing with the slow Be2 plan, hoping to force Black into the weakening concession ... b5. Once again, I would go with the more radical 18 b4! cxb3 19 Nxb3 Nxb3 20 Rxb3 Ba6 21 Rd1 Nd7 with a sharp game with balanced chances.

### **18 ... Nd7**

Now ... f5 is coming.

### **19 Be2**

The fruition of White's idea. The bishop emerges from his meditative trance and hopes to fight back on c4. It's too late for 19 b4?! cxb3 20 Nxb3 Nxb3 21 Rxb3 Bg5! 22 Bc2 Bxe3 23 Bxe3 f5! 24 exf5 Nf6! when White's centre dissolves and Black gains a ferocious initiative along the light squares.



**Exercise (planning/critical decision):** Our c- pawn is under attack.

Our options: we can protect it with either 19 ... b5, or 19 ... Ba6. Or we can just let the pawn go and begin the counterattack with the immediate 19 ... f5. Only one of the moves is correct. Which one should Black play?

**Answer:** Counterattack; c4 is irrelevant.

**19 ... f5!**

We infer the presence of wind by the rustling of leaves. Protecting c4 leads to harsh consequences for Black. For example:

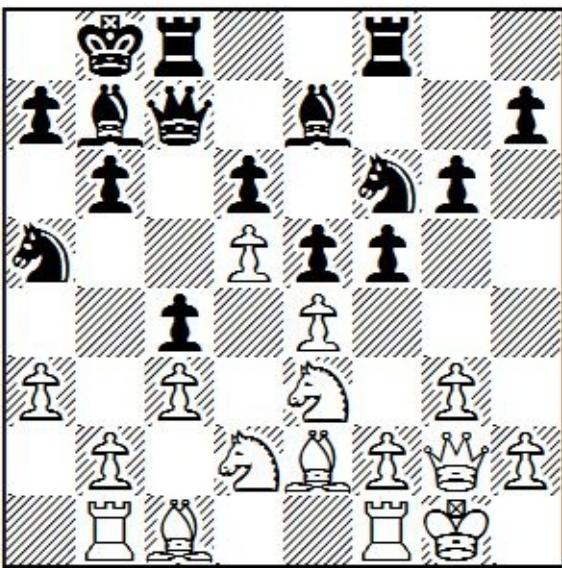
a) 19 ... b5? 20 b4! cxb3 21 Nxb3 Nxb3 22 Rxb3 a6 23 c4 when White's attack rolls, and Black hasn't even started his on the other wing.

b) 19 ... Ba6?? hangs a piece to 20 b4 Nb7 (or 20 ... cxb3 21 Bxa6) 21 b5.

**20 Qg2??**

Stagnation inevitably follows when we lack direction. This meek move - which is akin to taking the time to pick daisies, when being chased by a bear - loses the initiative and White's position degenerates into a tale of fallen grandeur. He had to take his chances with 20 exf5! Bg5 21 Ndxc4 Nxc4 22 Nxc4 Bxc1 23 Rfxc1 gxf5 24 Nd2 e4 25 Qf4 Bxd5. Black regains the sac'ed pawn with at least even chances.

**20 ... Nf6!**



Undermining d5, after which Black's buried b7-bishop threatens to turn into a tyrant on the long diagonal.

### **21 exf5?**

That which was once a gentle breeze, now turns into a hurricane. The fact that White weakens his light squares, presages a future disaster on that colour. This move dooms the all-important d5-pawn. Alternatives:

a) 21 f3?? fails to 21 ... Qc5!. Amazingly, White has no reasonable way to protect the e3-knight, since ... f4 is a secondary threat: 22 Kh1 (22 Qf2? fxe4 23 Nexc4 Qxf2+ 24 Rxf2 Nxc4 25 Nxc4 exf3 wins) 22 ... Qxe3 23 Nb3 Qxe2 24 Qxe2 Nxb3. Three minor pieces is too much for a lone queen, and White is busted.

b) 21 Rd1 appears to be White's best try, although Black can continue to press on the kingside with 21 ... h5, with advantage.

### **21 ... gxf5 22 b4**

Desperation, as after 22 Nxf5 Nxd5 23 Bf3 Nf4! 24 gxf4 Rxf5 25 Bxb7 Nxb7 White's king is hopelessly exposed. For example, 26 Ne4 exf4 27 Qh3 Rcf8 28 Kh1 d5 29 Nd2 f3 when White is down a pawn and can barely move. 30 Qxh7?? opens the h-file and is met with 30 ... Qe5 threatening ... Rh8.

22 Ndxc4?? hangs a piece to 22 ... Nxc4 23 Bxc4 (or 23 Nxc4 Bxd5 24 Qh3 Bxc4) 23 ... f4 overloading the e3 defender.

### **22 ... cxb3 23 c4**

It appears as if White secured d5, but Miles proves this just isn't so.

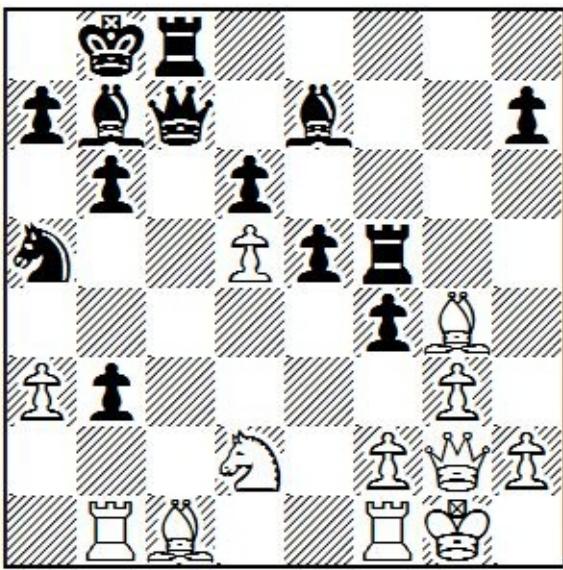
### **23 ... f4 24 Nf5**

24 Nd1 is met with the undermining 24 ... b5! after which White's game collapses.

### **24 ... Nxd5!**

Discovered attack. The knight, with deep scorn, snaps off the hated d5-pawn, whose long ascendant star now begins to plummet.

### **25 cxd5 Rxf5 26 Bg4**



All underdogs want to wear the glass slipper for as long as possible. ‘Winning’ the exchange, yet the threat proves to be transient.

**Question:** Did Miles fall for White’s trap?

**Answer:** No. It was a deliberate exchange sacrifice. As it turns out, White’s light-squared bishop is worth more than either of Black’s rooks.

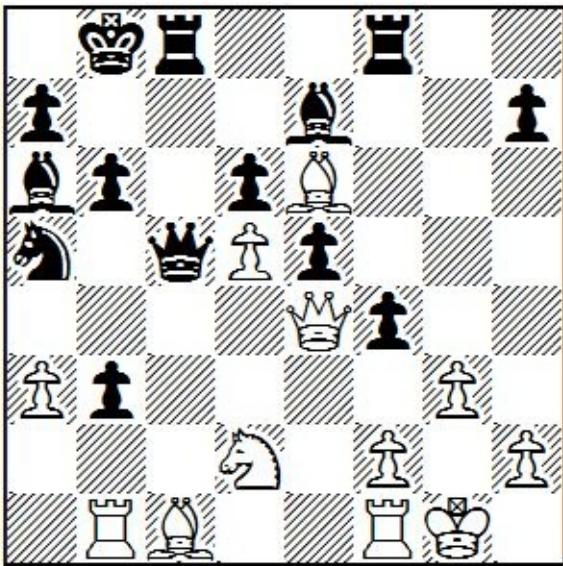
**26 ... Rff8 27 Qe4**

If White accepts, he gets pummelled on the light squares after 27 Bxc8 Rxc8 28 Qf3 Qc2 29 Rb2 Qc5 (the critical d5 point falls, unleashing the long suppressed b7-bishop’s latent power) 30 Nxb3 Nxb3 31 Qxb3 Bxd5 32 Qd1 Bb7 33 a4 Bh4!! 34 Rb5 Qc6 35 f3 fxg3 with a winning position.

**27 ... Qc5!**

The d5-pawb is all that counts. This move confirms the White’s gravest apprehension: Miles didn’t hang the exchange. He sac’ed it for domination of the light squares.

**28 Be6 Ba6!**



The bishop drinks deeply of the pain-dispelling elixir and tastes freedom. If the bishop can’t get his

way on the h1-a8 diagonal, he finds another pathway via the f1-a6 diagonal.

### 29 Bxc8

29 Re1?? fxg3 30 hxg3 Qxf2+ 31 Kh1 and Black has a million ways to win, the easiest of which looks like 31 ... Rf6 32 Nxb3 Rxc1! (elimination of a key defender, and opening the path to a rook check on h6) 33 Rexc1 Rh6+ forcing mate.

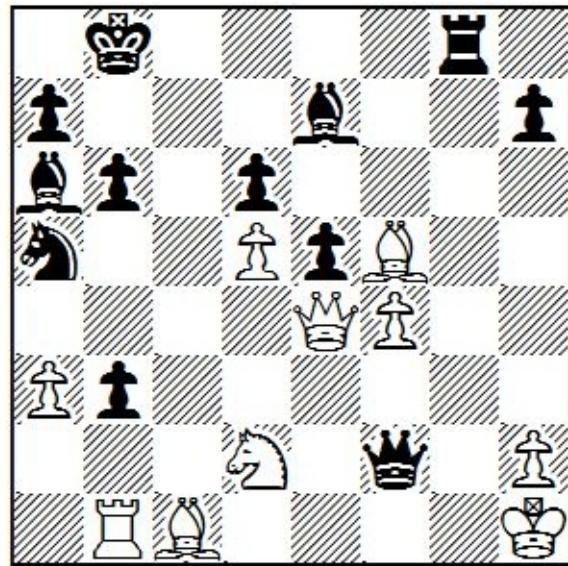
### 29 ... Bxf1 30 Bf5

Attempting to interfere with the f8-rook's access to f2. Instead, 30 Nxfl Rxc8 31 gxf4 Qc2 32 Qxc2 bxc2 33 Rb4 exf4 leaves White two pawns down and paralysed by Black's c2 passer in the ending.

### 30 ... Ba6 31 gxf4

31 Kg2 is met with 31 ... Bc8!, removing the blockader: 32 Bxc8 fxg3! 33 fxg3 b2! 34 Rxb2 Rf2+ 35 Kh3 Qxc8+ 36 g4 (36 Qg4 is met with 36 ... Rxh2+) 36 ... Qc3+ wins.

### 31 ... Rg8+ 32 Kh1 Qxf2



Black threatens two separate mates on g1 and White's king can scarcely turn around without colliding with a black attacker.

### 33 Rb2!?

Hey, I just said "Black threatens two separate mates on g1"! White, obviously in time pressure, allows both mates, but there was no saving move:

- a) 33 Nf3 Qg2 mate.
- b) 33 Bb2 Qxd2 wins.

### 33 ... Bd3!? 0-1

The ostentation of wasteful excess is a privilege reserved for the ultra-wealthy and the powerful. The arrogant bishop airily waves his hand, as if to dismiss White's startled queen. Tony, refusing to allow facts to get in the way of his fun, spurns the pedestrian 33 ... Rg1 mate and 33 ... Qg1 mate.

**Question:** Did Miles miss the mates as well?

**Answer:** No, this is simply an example of Tony's warped sense of humour. The problem is Black still forces mate in two moves.

**Summary:** Meet 11 d5 with the bypassing 11 ... e5! and we reach a decent Ruy-Lopez style position.

**S.Lalic-A.Miles**

Kuala Lumpur 1992

**1 e4 e6 2 d4 b6**

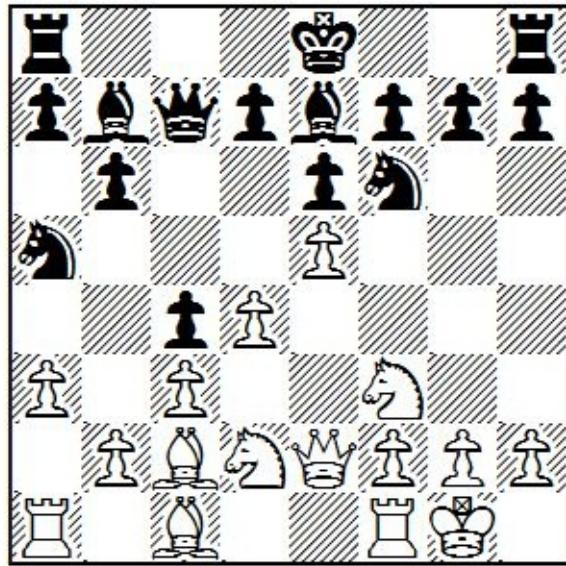
**Question:** Isn't this book titled *1 ... b6: Move by Move?*

**Answer:** Well, it isn't my fault. The nit-picky folk at Everyman refused to let me name the book *1 ... b6, and also 2 ... b6: Move By Move*. 1 ... b6, like no other opening, seems to contain a baffling number of transpositions. In this instance Miles plays the 'Pretend French' move order, only to switch to ... b6 on the second move.

**3 Bd3**

We examine 3 c4, the English Defence, in the latter part of the book.

**3 ... Bb7 4 Nf3 c5 5 c3 Nf6 6 Qe2 Be7 7 0-0 Nc6 8 a3 Na5 9 Nbd2 c4! 10 Bc2 Qc7 11 e5!?**



A player tends to be either calm or excitable, as our genes dictate. White agrees to a huge concession - abandonment of d5 to secure e4 and also stake out kingside space.

**11 ... Nd5 12 Ne4**

**Question:** How does this position compare to a normal c3-Sicilian?

**Answer:** I think our side gets a very nice version, especially because Black has yet to commit his king to either wing of the board.

**Question:** Are you seriously suggesting queenside castling for Black?

**Answer:** Please see Black's next move!

**12 ... 0-0-0!?**

A new move and to my mind, eminently logical, since White's entire set-up is geared for a kingside assault on our now non-existent king in the region. Also strong is 12 ... f5:

a) 13 exf6?! was M.Pucovski-B.Loehnhardt, Milan 2008. Now Black should recapture with his g-pawn, opening the file. After 13 ... gxf6 14 Bh6 0-0-0 I prefer Black's attacking chances, with the open g-

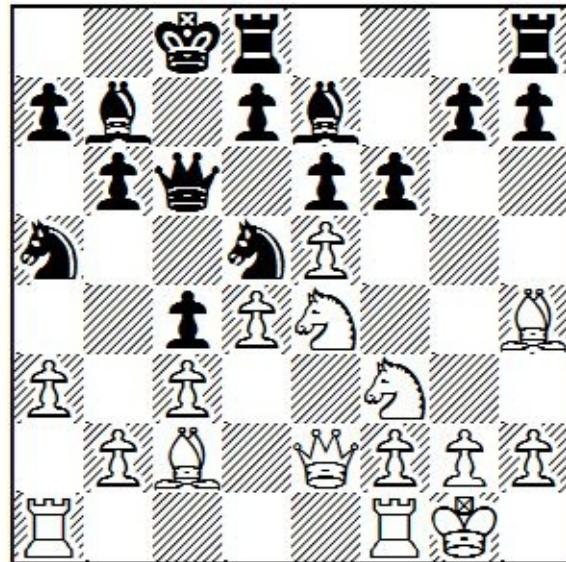
file, control over f4 and mobile f-pawn.

b) 13 Nd6+!? (White is willing to give up a pawn to clear e5 and seize control over the dark squares) 13 ... Bxd6 14 exd6 Qxd6 15 Ne5 0-0!. We must be flexible about where to castle. In this case, Black's king looks safer on the kingside, B.Sakulski-C.Varas Gonzalez, Padron 2012. If White tries to regain the lost pawn on c3, there follows 16 Nxc4 Qc6! (threatening a deadly discovery with ... Nxc3! and also attacking c4) 17 Ne3 (or 17 Nxa5? Nxc3! 18 Nxc6 Nxe2+ 19 Kh1 Bxc6 20 Rd1 Rac8 21 Bb3 f4 22 f3 Rc7 23 Ba2 Bd5! 24 Bxd5 exd5 25 Bd2 Rc2 26 Rab1 Rfc8 with a crushing bind in the ending) 17 ... Nxe3 18 fxe3 Nc4 (transferring to d6, where the knight helps out in the taming of White's e4 ambitions) 19 Rf4 Nd6 with advantage to Black, who holds a grip on the central light squares.

### 13 Bg5

White would love to swap away Black's dark-squared bishop and then land a knight on d6, but of course, Black isn't about to allow it.

### 13 ... f6 14 Bh4 Qc6



The queen tilts her head to the side, an unconscious trait she displays when she plots an enemy's demise. She hopes to leapfrog over to mate on g2 one day. Also logical is 14 ... Rhg8 when White must remain on guard for ... g5 tricks.

### 15 Bg3 Rdg8 16 h4!?

Suppressing ... g5, yet does it? When the move arrives, White may later be sorry she tossed in this move.

### 16 ... f5 17 Nd6+

This may appear to be a leap of faith (or is it desire, outrunning performance?), which has little hope of a soft landing. It is in reality a pawn sacrifice, since White isn't geared to eternally back up d6. Still, she had little choice, since Black takes over the initiative and attack after the passive 17 Neg5?! Rf8 18 Nh3 h6 19 h5 Rhg8, intending ... g5.

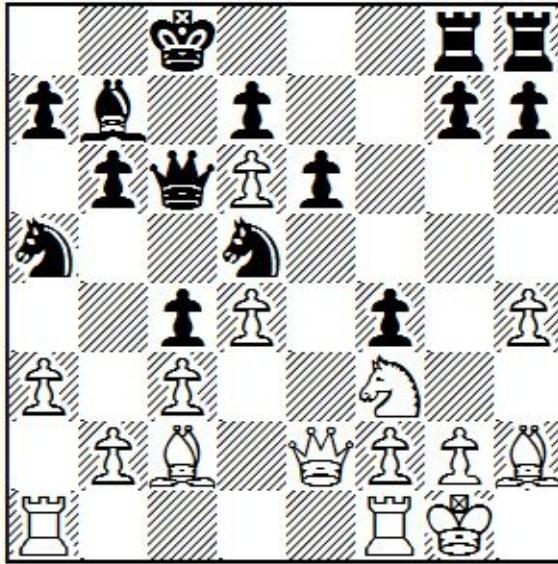
### 17 ... Bxd6 18 exd6

It becomes clear that this game comes down to a battle between White's dark squares and Black's light squares.

### 18 ... f4

Now d6 is a goner. I play the London System as White sometimes and I always feel a sense of affront when Black's side rudely snuffs out my beloved dark-squared bishop's influence on the h2-b8 diagonal like this. White's new problem is that d6 comes under dire threat.

**19 Bh2**



**19 ... Rf8?!**

Wow. What a purist.

**Question:** Why didn't Black pick off d6?

**Answer:** This is more of a stumble rather than a debilitating mistake. Somehow Miles gets it into his head that his king remains safer if he leaves d6 be. I certainly would have grabbed it. Let's look: 19 ... Qxd6! (being a child of the non-comp era, what the advent of computers taught me is: material matters) 20 Ne5 (threat: Nf7, with a queen/rook fork; maybe this is why Miles rejected taking d6) 20 ... g5! (Black ignores it) 21 Nxc4?? Qc6 22 Nxa5 Nxc3 23 Qc4 Ne2+! 24 Kh1 bxa5 25 Bb3 Qxc4 26 Bxc4 gxh4! 27 d5 Bxd5 28 Bxd5 exd5 29 Rfd1 d4 30 Rd2 Re8 and White will lose the ending. Every single Black pawn is isolated, but he has three extra.

**20 Qe5 Rf6**

Black can also consider 20 ... g6, intending an eventual ... h6 and ... g5 break.

**21 Be4 Qb5**

Black may well grab b2 if given a chance.

**22 Rab1 h6!**

Tony sets up a devious trap.

**23 Bc2**

Making air for her queen. 23 h5?? is strategically valuable, but misses a tiny little issue: 23 ... Nc6! and White's queen is suddenly trapped in mid-board.

**23 ... Qc6?!**

Black misses an excellent opportunity to activate kingside potential with 23 ... g5! which looks thematic. White is unable to play 24 hxg5? hxg5 25 Qxg5 Rfh6 26 Rfe1 Nxc3! 27 bxc3, as now the crushing overloaded defender/weak back-rank shot 27 ... Rxh2! ends the game.

**24 Be4 Qa4 25 Qh5?!**

Lalic bravely plays for the win, although I'm almost certain Tony was bluffing about taking a repetition draw.

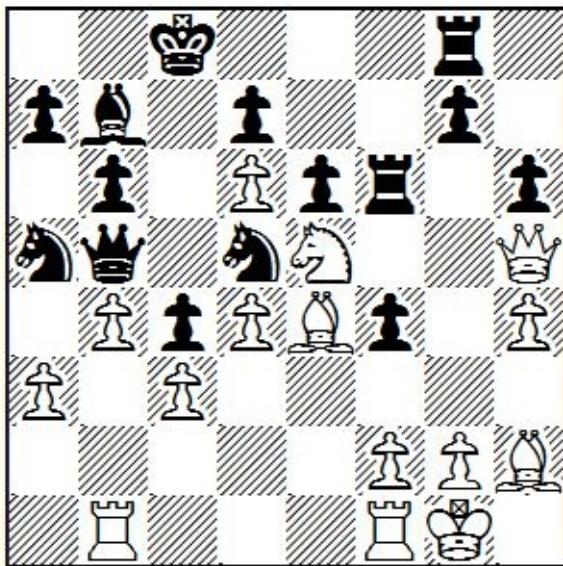
**25 ... Rg8?!**

Black should probably just repeat moves with 25 ... Qc6 26 Qe5 Qb5.

**26 Ne5**

White stands better, with powerfully centralized pieces.

**26 ... Qb5 27 b4!**



An alert shot.

**27 ... Ne6**

27 ... cxb3?? loses on the spot to 28 c4! Nxc4 29 Rfc1, snagging a piece.

**28 a4!**

Opening queenside lines, since Black is forced to accept.

**28 ... Qxa4 29 Qf3??**

The wrong follow-up. White increases her advantage with 29 Bxd5! exd5 30 b5! Nxe5 31 dxe5 Re6 (31 ... Rff8? 32 e6 dxe6 33 Qe2 Rf6 34 Bxf4! is a winning attack for White, whose monster dark-squared bishop towers over Black's) 32 Qf7 Rd8 33 Bxf4 d4 34 cxd4 Kb8 35 Qf5 c3 36 Be3 Rc8 37 Rfc1 Bd5 when I prefer White's extra pawn over Black's passed c-pawn.

**29 ... Qb5**

The queen displays rubber agility in eluding her pursuers.

**30 Ra1 Rd8??**

Black should jump on the chance to toss in 30 ... g5! after which he stands no worse.

**31 Nxc6 Qxc6 32 Rxa7 Qxd6**

Once again, 32 ... g5! looks correct.

**33 Rfa1**

33 b5! hems in Black's king.

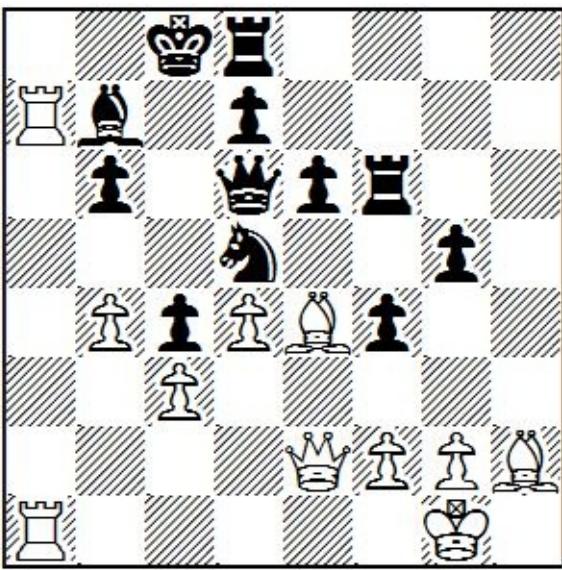
**33 ... g5**

33 ... b5! should be tossed in first.

**34 hxg5**

Once again 34 b5! looks good for White.

**34 ... hxg5 35 Qe2**



**35 ... b5**

Black should offer a pawn to seize the h-file with 35 ... Rh6! 36 Ra8+! (36 Qxc4+?? Qc6 37 Qxc6+ dxc6 leave White helpless to deal with the coming ... Rdh8) 36 ... Kc7 37 Qxc4+ Qc6 38 Qxc6+ dxc6 39 Rxd8 Kxd8 40 c4 Nf6 41 Bf3 Kc7. *Houdini* says even, while I slightly favour Black, due to White's miserable h2-bishop.

**36 Qh5!**

White seizes the h-file before Black does.

**36 ... Rdf8 37 Qxg5 Bc6 38 Qe5?!**

We sense this move made with an air of reluctance. This doesn't look right. White enters damage-control mode when there is no cause for it. She should keep the queens on with 38 f3.

**38 ... Qb8?!**

My feeling is that both sides misassessed their respective chances here. In reality I think White has a slight edge, yet both players seem to believe it is Black who stands better. They seem to be paraphrasing, rather than remaining faithful to their original intent. Miles continues with the mistaken thought: in some positions there is no need to force the issue; better to just sit back and allow nature to take its course. Stronger is 38 ... Qxe5! 39 dxe5 R6f7 40 Bxd5 Bxd5 41 f3 when Black looks slightly better in the ending, since White must watch out for tricks on e5, g2 and f3.

**39 R1a3**

*Houdini* wants to retrace with 39 Qh5!.

**39 ... R6f7 40 Bf3?!**

It almost feels as if any breach of the treaty of stasis represents a personal insult to either side. Once again, correct was 40 Qh5.

**40 ... Qxe5!**

The sands finally shift. At long last, Miles finally wakes up to the fact that he stands better in the coming ending.

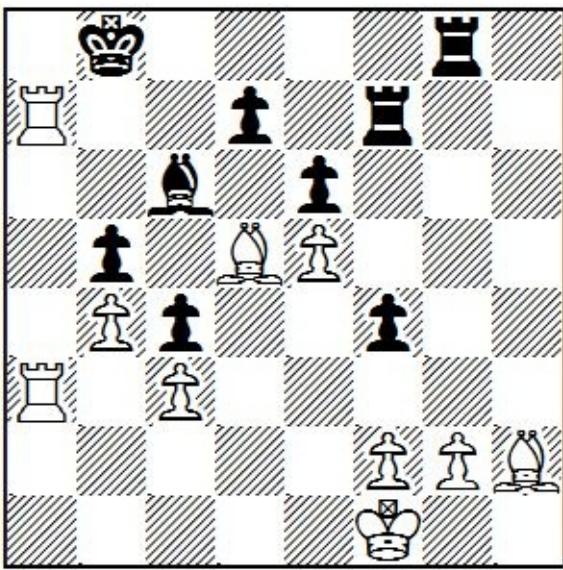
**41 dxe5 Kb8**

Why not go after e5 with 41 ... Rf5?

**42 Kf1 Rg8**

Allowing White an opposite-coloured bishop ending. Black can also try 42 ... Ne7?!. Principle: *when your opponent has the bishop-pair, remove one of them if possible from the board*.

**43 Bxd5?!**



The presence of opposite-coloured bishops doesn't necessarily ensure a draw for the defending side. In this instance, it seems to actually inflame Black's endgame initiative, and White's troubles accumulate, seemingly without end.

**43 ... Bxd5 44 f3**

Intending to weave the bishop back into the game, via g1.

**44 ... Rh8**

44 ... Bc6! 45 Ra1 Rg5 picks off e5, which I have a feeling Miles didn't want to take, since it also increases the scope of White's bishop.

**45 Bg1 Rh1!**

It isn't going to be so easy for White to bring her bishop into the fold after all.

**46 R7a5 Bc6 47 Ra1 Rf5 48 Re1 Rg5!**

Threat: ... Bxf3.

**49 Kf2 Rhh5!**

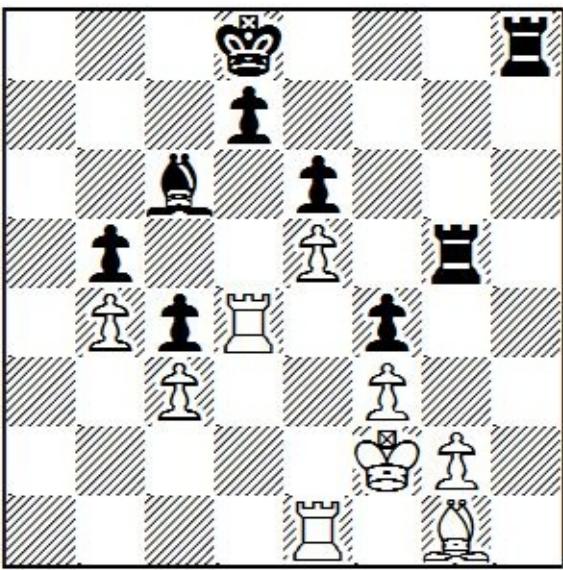
Winning e5.

**50 Kf1 Kc8!?**

Hey, I said "winning e5"! Miles views e5 as a rapidly depreciating junk bond and prefers to hang on to his pressure, rather than bag a pawn. I think Black's best chances is to take what is given with 50 ... Rxe5! 51 Rxe5 Rxe5 52 Ra2 Kc7 53 Bd4 Rh5 54 Re2 Rf5. Black can play for a slow central advance with an eventual ... d6, ... e5 and look for ... e4 breaks later on.

**51 Ra2 Rh1 52 Kf2 Kd8 53 Rd2 Rh8 54 Rd4??**

54 Kf1 Ke8 55 Rd4 Rf5 56 Rd2 Rh1 leaves White only a shade worse and she should be able to draw with accurate defence.



**Exercise (combination alert):** Chess isn't always about being brilliant. Sometimes the key factor is: who can stay alert the longest? In this instance, White's last move is one of those cart-before-the-horse mis-transpositions which overlooks something. What did she miss?

**Answer:** g2 winks an enticing invitation.

**54 ... Rhg8! 55 g4**

Likewise, 55 Kf1 Bxf3! 56 Rxf4 Bxg2+ 57 Ke2 (or 57 Kf2?? Bb7! and there is no good defence to the coming ... Rg2+, followed by ... Rxg1) 57 ... Rxe5+ 58 Kd2 Rh5 is winning for Black.

**55 ... fxg3+ 56 Kg2**

The startled king jerks erect from his bed, woken by the pounding of axes on his door.

**56 ... Rf5 0-1**

Black's attack and material gains function with undiminished efficiency, despite the reduced material on the board. After 57 Re3 Rgf8 f3 and possibly c3 falls.

**Summary:** Our side gets a decent version of a c3-Sicilian after 11 e5. Also, let's follow Miles's example and abandon our prejudice of castling long in this line.

### Game 18

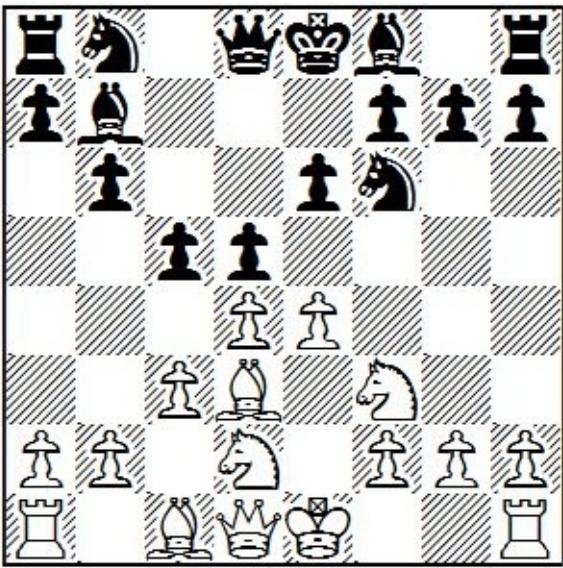
**R.Shankar-V.Akopian**

Kolkata 2000

**1 e4 b6 2 d4 Bb7 3 Bd3 Nf6 4 Nd2**

4 Qe2 may be White's most accurate move order, since it cuts down on our options the most.

**4 ... e6 5 Ngf3 c5 6 c3 d5**



We enter part two of the chapter, where the positions shift radically from the earlier games.

**Question:** What kind of positions do we get?

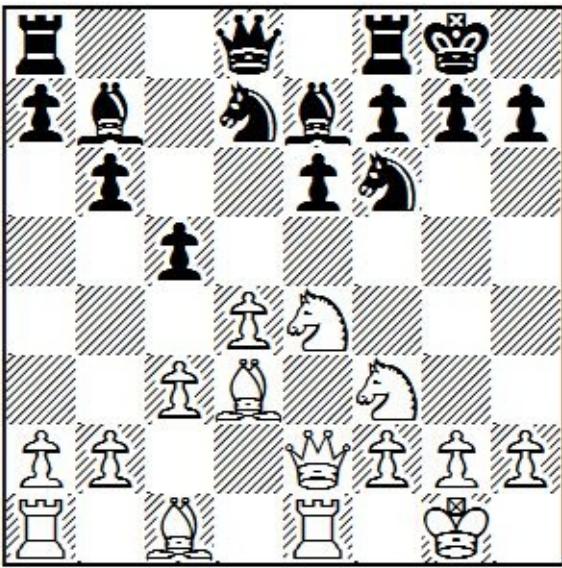
**Answer:** We get positions akin to French Defence, yet not a real French, which can have a disorienting effect on our opponents, who may not sense the differences.

**7 e5**

**Question:** What happens if White either maintains central tension or exchanges on d5?

**Answer:** In both cases, Black should equalize. Let's take a look:

a) 7 Qe2 Be7 (7 ... dxe4?! appears premature, since it violates the principle: *don't open the position when lagging in development*: 8 Nxe4 Nxe4 9 Bxe4 Bxe4 10 Qxe4 Nd7 11 Bg5 Be7 12 Bxe7 Kxe7 13 0-0-0 is somewhat uncomfortable for Black, whose king dangles nervously in the centre, E.Bлом-D.Stothard, correspondence 2002) 8 0-0 0-0 was R.Hiltunen-P.Schuster, correspondence 2006. Now if White insists on avoiding e5, then we equalize by entering a Rubinstein French set-up after 9 Re1 dxe4! 10 Nxe4 Nbd7.



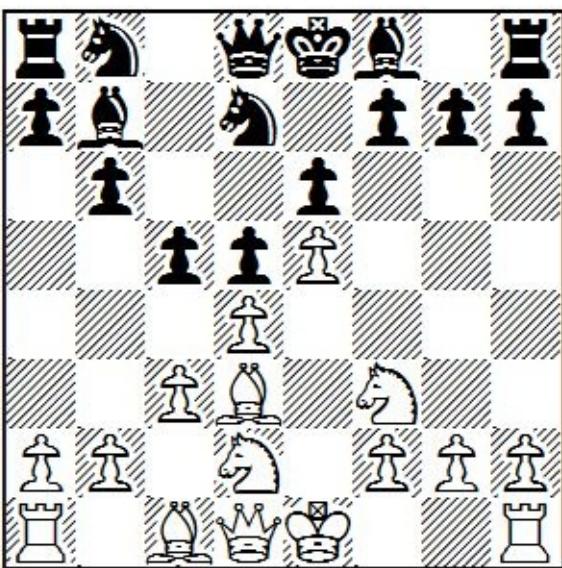
Any long-time Caro-Kann ... Nd7 player can tell you Black achieved equality, since he or she achieved ... c5 in one go, rather than two.

**Question:** Fair enough, but if we look at it from a Rubinstein French perspective, Black plays ... c5 in one shot. So what is the difference?

**Answer:** This is equal from a Rubinstein French perspective as well, since White landed in a far more passive version than the real Rubinstein, as he wasn't able to achieve one of the more dangerous 0-0-0, or Ne5 lines, which challenge Black far more than this version.

b) With 7 exd5 White insists on a c3-Sicilian set-up, which is fine with us, since we equalize after 7 ... Qxd5 8 0-0 cxd4 9 cxd4 (9 Bc4 Qd6 10 Nxd4 a6 11 Qe2 Nc6 is also fine for Black, since 12 Nf5 is easily met with 12 ... Qe5) 9 ... Be7 10 Re1 0-0 and Black reached a pleasant looking c3-Sicilian position, where White doesn't get a tempo on our queen with Nc3, P.Peuraniemi-J.Kalsi, Finnishh League 2005.

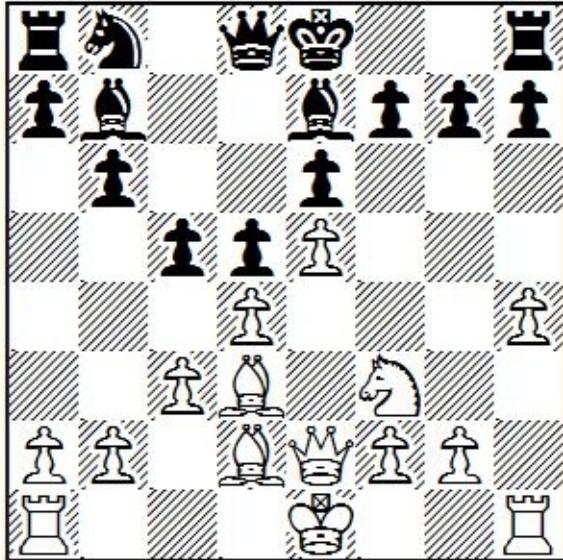
7 ... Nfd7



Black's main move.

**Question:** Why not play the knight to the more active e4-square instead?

**Answer:** 7 ... Ne4 is also possible. Black seeks to swap, which relieves his cramped situation, but at a cost of time, since he plays ... Nf6, ... Ne4 and ... Nxd2, taking three moves to swap away for a piece which only moved once. After 8 Qe2 Nxd2 9 Bxd2 Be7 10 h4! Black may grow nervous about castling kingside.

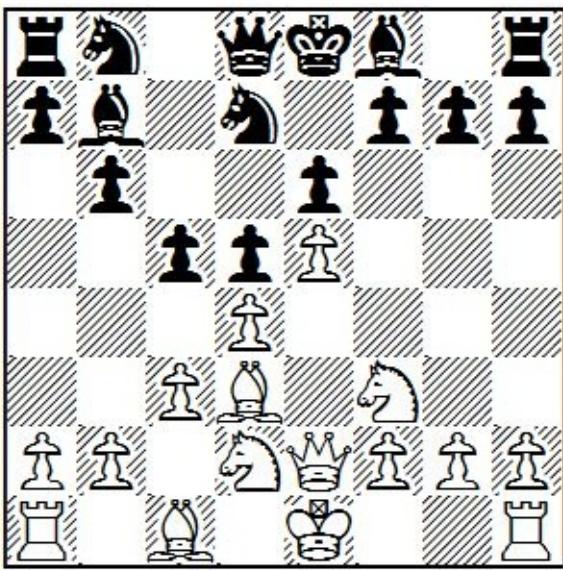


**Question:** Can Black get away with 10 ... 0-0?

**Answer:** *Houdini* assessment after Black's last move: '+19.62' - two queens down for Black! Be aware of the stock, Greek Gift sacrifice on h7: 11 Bxh7+ Kxh7 12 Ng5+ Kg6 (12 ... Kh6 13 Nxe6+ Kg6 14 Qg4+ forces mate too) 13 Qd3+ f5 14 exf6+ Kxf6 15 h5 with mate in two moves.

Instead, after 10 ... h6 11 h5 Nc6 12 Rh3 Rc8 (I would be more inclined to play something like 12 ... c4 13 Bc2 b5 14 Rg3 Bf8 15 Kf1 a5 when Black's position looks playable to my French Defence eyes) 13 Rg3 Kf8 Black can also think about sliding his bishop back to f8. This looks like a favourable French from White's perspective, though, since he gets to attack on the kingside for free, without too much cost on the other side of the board, H.Ganaus-J.Horvath, Vienna 2012.

**8 Qe2**



Discouraging both ... Ba6 and ... f6 ideas.

**Question:** When do we play for ... f6 in such set-ups?

**Answer:** Very rarely since Black's light-squared bishop isn't covering e6.

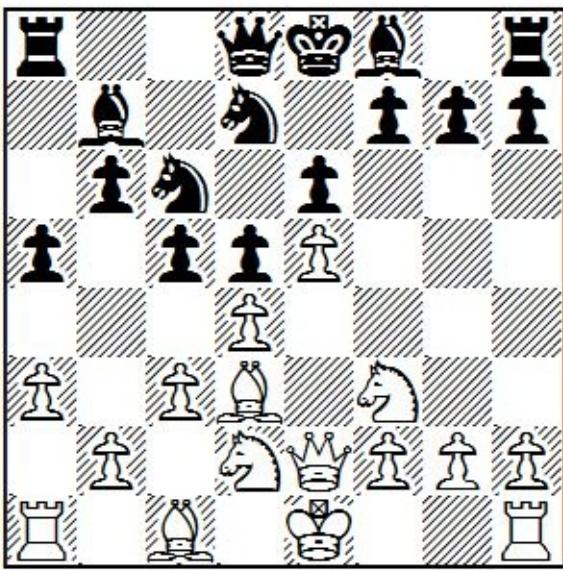
**8 ... Nc6**

Now White must be on the lookout for ... cxd4; cxd4 Nb4 tricks, going after his valuable light-squared bishop.

**9 a3**

White's main line, eliminating all future ... cxd4 and ... Nb4 tricks, but at the high cost of weakening queenside squares, like c4 and b3, which are later often the source of Black's counterplay.

**9 ... a5**



**Question:** What is the point of tossing in ... a5?

**Answer:** Multipurpose:

1. Black opens the option of playing ... Qc8 and ... Ba6, removing White's powerful light-squared bishop.
2. White is prevented from playing b4 himself.
3. Black can also later switch to a pure queenside pawn storm plan of ... c4, followed by ... b4 and ... b4.

### **10 Nf1**

This knight tends to be in the way, so White transfers it to the kingside. After 10 h4 Qc8 11 h5 h6 12 Kf1 Ba6 13 Kg1 Bxd3 14 Qxd3 Qa6 15 Qe3 a4 16 Rh3 cxd4 17 cxd4 Rc8 18 Nf1 Na5 we can safely postulate that the weakened light squares on the queenside are sure to be a source of future anxiety for White. White's kingside play feels half the speed of Black's on the queenside, and correspondingly less efficient.

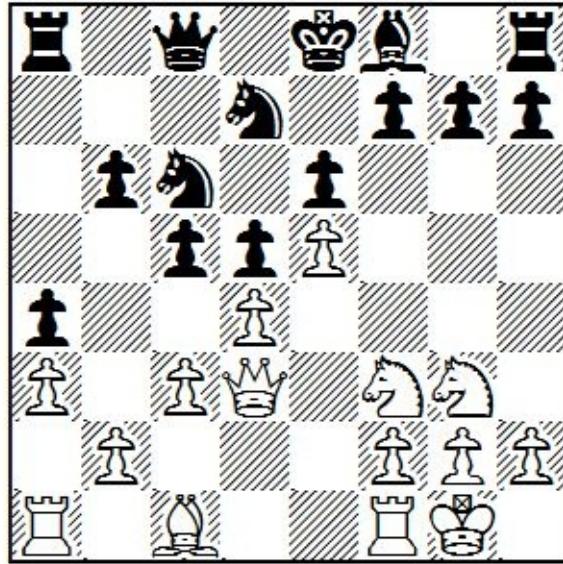
### **10 ... Qc8**

Black prepares the ... Ba6 plan, which takes a bite out of White's kingside attacking force.

### **11 Ng3 Ba6**

The French player's dream of ridding him or herself of the bad bishop, while sticking White with a bad bishop.

### **12 0-0 Bxd3 13 Qxd3 a4!**



Fixing potential light-square targets on the queenside.

### **14 Ng5?!**

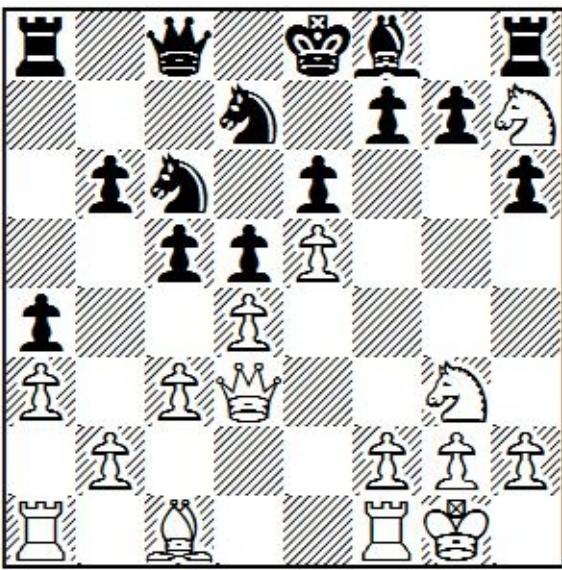
White goes off on an adventure in what may be the commencement of a potentially shady-looking plan.

**Question:** White is miles ahead in development. How does Black respond if he plays 14 c4!? based on the principle: create confrontation and open the game when leading in development?

**Answer:** In theory this move should be correct. However, this case is an exception, and 14 c4 is a mistake, due to the pinning 14 ... Qa6! 15 Be3 Qxc4 when White has no compensation for the lost pawn and the remainder of his centre is under assault as well.

The position remains in tense balance after 14 Nh5 Qa6 15 Qe3 h6 16 Re1 Na5 17 Rb1 Qb5 18 Bd2 Nb3 19 h4 g6!? 20 Nf6+ Nxf6 21 exf6 Bd6 22 Rbd1 0-0-0! when Black's king is safer on the queenside.

### **14 ... h6 15 Nh7??**



This appears to be a violation of the position's tolerance levels. This knight promises the moon and fails to deliver. 15 Nh3 is safer and sounder.

### **15 ... cxd4!?**

Black's most ambitious try. A safety-first guy like me would probably opt for 15 ... Qa6! forcing queens off the board, with the more pleasant ending after 16 Qxa6 Rxa6 17 Nxf8 Kxf8 18 Be3 Na5 when Black dominates the queenside dark squares.

### **16 cxd4 Be7**

Black has a clever idea in 16 ... Bc5! 17 dxc5 Nxc5 and if 18 Qb1? (correct is 18 Qb5 Rxh7 19 Bd2 Qc7 20 Bb4 with some compensation for the sacrificed pawn) 18 ... Nb3 19 Ra2 Ncd4 when Black threatens ... Qc2, with a winning position.

### **17 Nh5! Qa6!**

White's chances look better at the end of the line 17 ... g6 18 N7f6+ Nxf6 19 Nxf6+ Bxf6 20 exf6 Na5 21 Bf4 Qc4 22 Qe3 Nb3 23 Rad1 Rc8 24 Rd3! when Qe5 is in the air.

### **18 Nxg7+ Kd8 19 Qf3!**

Not 19 Qb1?? Nxd4 20 Be3 Nb3, and if 21 Ra2 Nxe5 White's knights are hopelessly out of position. If 22 Bxh6 Qc4 ends the argument, since Black transfers his queen to the kingside and picks off at least one piece.

### **19 ... Nxd4 20 Qxf7 Nxe5 21 Nxe6+ Kd7**

Both parties have a huge stake in the central melee.

### **22 Nef8+?**

Knights wobble and veer like improperly constructed kites in the wind. The right check, but the wrong knight. 22 Nhf8+! Rhxf8 23 Nxf8+ Kc6 24 Qh5 leaves White in a superior version of the game's continuation. *Houdini* assesses here at the dreaded 'I'm-not-sure' verdict of '0.00'.

### **22 ... Kc6!!**

We sense a premeditated cunning, more than an accident of geometry, and fortunes continue to fluctuate wildly. Now you know the truth: such completely irrational positions are well within our 1 ... b6 curriculum. White must have counted on 22 ... Kd6? 23 Bf4! Ne2+ 24 Kh1 Nxf4 25 Qxf4 Raxf8 26 Nxf8 Rxf8 27 Qxh6+ when he stands no worse, and may well hold an edge due to Black's exposed king.

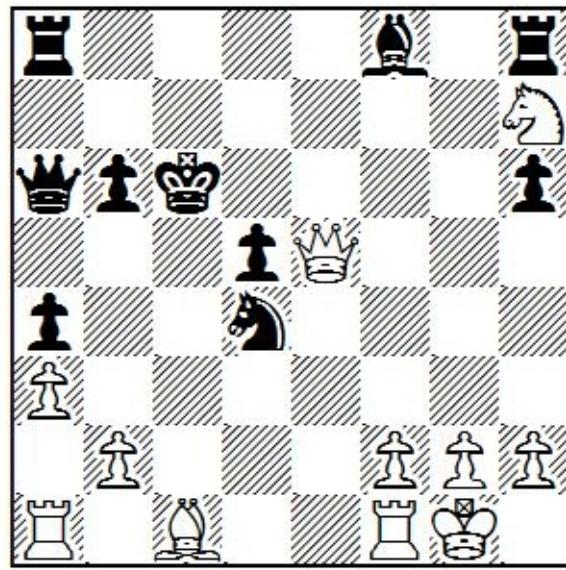
### **23 Qg7**

Black's clever point is that 23 Qxe7?? walks into a forced mate after 23 ... Ne2+ 24 Kh1 Ng3+! 25 hxg3 Qxf1+ 26 Kh2 Ng4+ 27 Kh3 Nxf2+ 28 Kh4 Qh1 mate. "My inner nature is saturated with the flow of

the divine," proclaims Black's queen, who thinks highly of herself.

**23 ... Bxf8 24 Qxe5**

If 24 Nxf8 Ndf3+ 25 gxf3 Raxf8 26 Qxe5 Rhg8+ 27 Qg3 Rxg3+ 28 fxg3 when Black has excellent chances of converting his advantage.



**Exercise (combination alert):** Black to play and win material.

**Answer:** Step 1: Drive White's king away from protection of the f1-rook.

**24 ... Ne2+! 25 Kh1**

Step 2: Clearance/discovered attack.

**25 ... Ng3+! 26 hxg3**

Step 3: Grab white rook and knight - both with check!

**26 ... Qxf1+ 27 Kh2 Rxh7**

It appears as if there are not too many degrees of separation between White's desperate counterattack and the grasping of straws, yet appearances deceive. White, now down a full rook, plays on since he still retains hope of perpetual check against Black's exposed king.

**28 Qe6+ Kb7!**

Akopian alertly sidesteps 28 ... Bd6? which allows White to draw with 29 Bf4 Qxa1 30 Qxd6+ Kb7 31 Qxd5+ Ka7 32 Qe4! (double attack) 32 ... Rah8 33 Qxa4+ Kb7 34 Qe4+ with perpetual check.

**29 Qxd5+ Ka7**

No perpetual check.

**30 Be3!**

A clever trap.

**30 ... Qa6!**

30 ... Qxa1? allows White to deliver perpetual check with 31 Qa5+ Kb8 32 Qxb6+ Kc8 (32 ... Rb7?? 33 Qd8 mate is a tad embarrassing to Black's red-faced king, who senses unthwartable malice directed at him from his ambitious sister) 33 Qc6+.

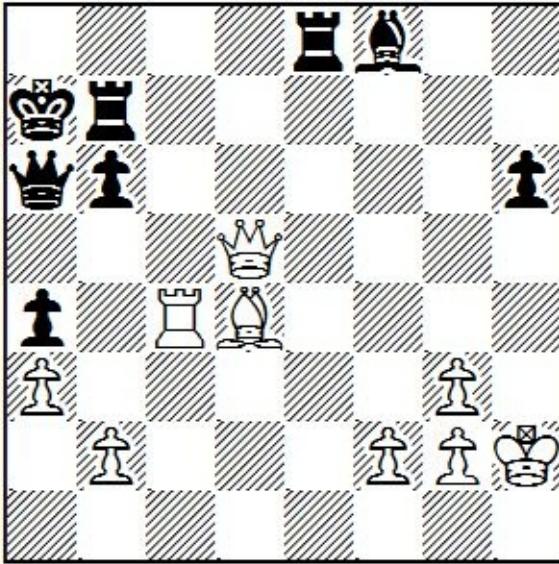
**31 Rc1**

Perhaps intending Rc6.

**31 ... Re8**

Black slowly begins the unravelling process.

**32 Bd4 Rb7 33 Rc4??**



Correct was 33 Rc6!, after which conversion for Black will not be an easy job. Amazingly, *Houdini* puts White behind by only '-0.64' here, less than a pawn.

**33 ... Bc5??**

Black missed an excellent consolidation opportunity with 33 ... Rd8! 34 Qe4 Qb5 35 Be5 Bd6 36 Rxa4+ Kb8.

**34 Bxc5 bxc5 35 Rxc5**

Threatening a cheapo on a5.

**35 ... Qb6 36 Rc6??!**

Correct was 36 Qc4.

**36 ... Rd8! 37 Qe6 Qb5**

Black threatens to remove queens from the board with 38 ... Qh5+.

**38 Qe3+**

The queen continues to test Black's king with her many coquetties.

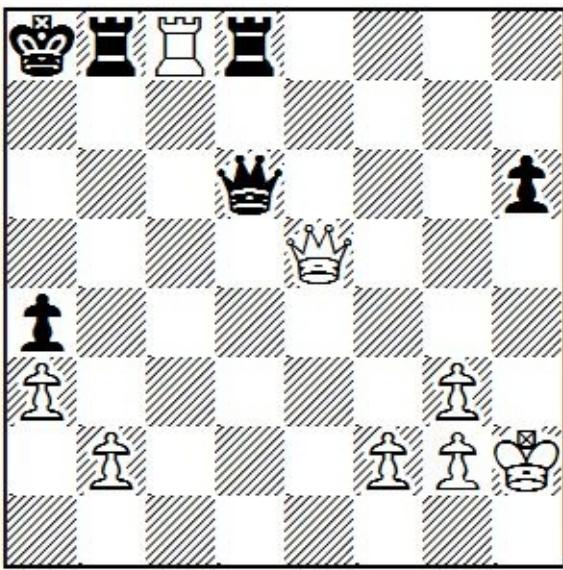
**38 ... Ka8**

By now it becomes clear to everyone in court that their king is bereft of his sanity. Correct was the self-pinning 38 ... Rb6! 39 Rc5 Qd7.

**39 Rc5 Qb6 40 Qe5 Qd6??**

Are we not all prone to lapses in discipline from time to time? The normally vigilant patrol of black defenders begins to slacken, as Akopian dismisses the growing signs of deterioration with an unbelieving attitude, despite mounting evidence of its existence. This blunder on the final move of time control actually loses. The worst part of time pressure is that your ideas begin to distort in proportion, meaning that important matters begin to grow trivial, while unimportant things become life and death concerns. 40 ... Ra7 kept Black's winning chances alive.

**41 Rc8+! Rb8**



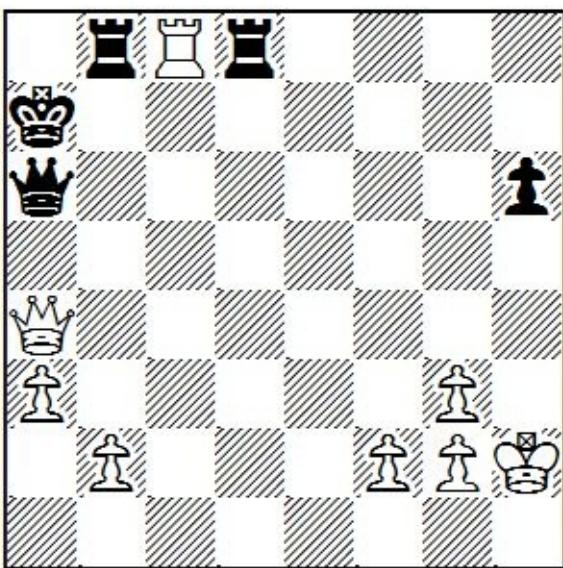
**Exercise (combination alert):** White is down a rook yet can force the win of Black's queen. We must piece together the disconnected fragments of data into a cohesive whole. Work out the sequence.

**42 Qe4+??**

The wrong check.

**Answer:** White wins after 42 Qa5+! Kb7 43 Rc5! (threatening Qb4+) 43 ... Ra8 44 Qb4+ Qb6 45 Rb5. "As I have suffered in the past at your hands, so shall your agony be tenfold from mine," the bitter rook addresses White's queen. Black can resign, since in the coming position, White's queen and three pawns easily beat Black's pair of rooks.

**42 ... Ka7 43 Qxa4+ Qa6**



**Exercise (planning):** This is a time to place aside conjecture and stick to the data. If you hit upon the correct plan, White can still draw. How?

#### 44 Rc7+?

**Answer:** White may still be able to fortress a draw with 44 Rxb8!! Qxa4 45 Rxd8 Qc2 46 f4 Qxb2 47 Rd6 Qg7 48 a4 Kb7 49 a5 Kc7 50 Rb6. *Houdini* failed to make progress in multiple tries from this position. One example: 50 ... h5 51 Rb5 Qg4 52 a6 h4 53 gxh4 Qxh4+ 54 Kg1 Qxf4 55 a7 Qd4+ 56 Kh2 Qxa7 57 Rb3! Qd4 58 Rf3 with a known fortress position for the rook. Black's king can never cross White's third rank. What a tantalizing might-have-been variation.

#### 44 ... Rb7

Now Black has winning chances again.

#### 45 Qf4 Qd6 46 Qa4+ Qa6 47 Qf4 Qd6 48 Qa4+ Kb8 49 Rc6 Qe5 50 Rxh6

And that is the last of the stock. Black's plan of keeping his king safe from perpetual check is driven to its extreme conclusion. White just picked up the fifth pawn for his rook, yet it isn't enough to hold the game, since they are scattered.

#### 50 ... Rh8!

This eliminates White's mating threats.

#### 51 Qf4 Rxh6+ 52 Qxh6 Qxb2 53 Qf4+ Ka7 54 Qf5

After 54 Qa4+ Kb6 Black's king escapes the checks.

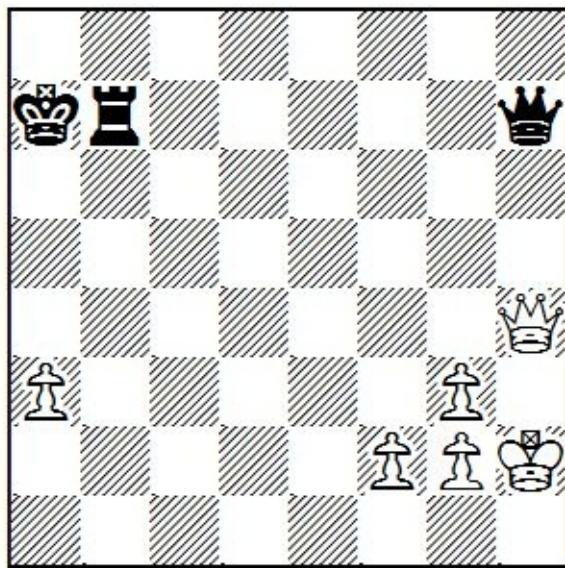
#### 54 ... Qb5

54 ... Qxa3 is also possible, but perhaps Akopian wanted the pawn on the board, since maybe later his king can escape perpetual check attempts on a2.

#### 55 Qe4 Qh5+ 56 Kg1 Qd1+ 57 Kh2 Qd7 58 Qe3+ Ka8 59 Qf3 Qf7 60 Qc6 Kb8 61 Qd6+ Qc7 62 Qf8+ Ka7 63 Qf6

Black mates after 63 f3 Qh7+ 64 Kg1 Qb1+ 65 Kf2 Qb2+ 66 Ke3 Qe5+ 67 Kd3 Rd7+.

#### 63 ... Qh7+ 64 Qh4



**Exercise (critical decision):** At last, Black can force queens off the board. But it isn't clear what the assessment should be.

Should he take the queens off, or keep them on the board?

**Answer:** Black's rook beats White's four extra pawns and he should take queens off the board.

#### 64 ... Rd7! 65 f3 Kb7 66 Kh3

The most difficult part of the decision is to see that Black wins after 66 Qxh7 Rxh7+ 67 Kg1 Kc6 68

g4 Kd6 69 Kf2 Ra7 70 Kg3 Rxa3 71 Kh4 Ra2 72 g3 Ke6 73 f4 Rh2+ 74 Kg5 Rh3 75 Kg6 Rxg3 76 f5+ Ke7 77 Kg5 Rf3 78 Kg6 Rf2 79 g5 Rf1 80 f6+ Kf8 81 Kh6 Kf7 (the pawns are halted) 82 Kh5 (the king finds himself chained to an oar and forced to row) 82 ... Rg1 83 Kh4 (or 83 Kh6 Rh1 mate) 83 ... Kg6.

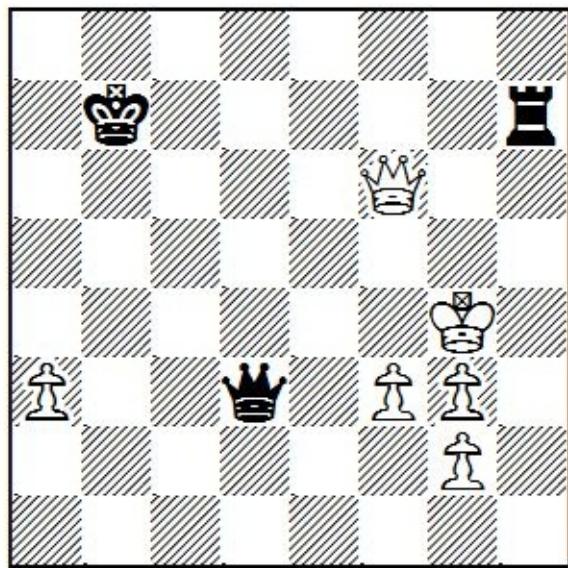
**66 ... Qb1!**

Black correctly changes his mind and goes after White's king, as ... Rh7 is the threat. His move is even more accurate than 66 ... Kc6 which also wins the rook versus pawns ending after 67 g4 Qxh4+ 68 Kxh4 Kd5, with a similar finish to the above note.

**67 Qg5 Rh7+ 68 Kg4 Qd3!**

Cutting off checks on b5 and d5.

**69 Qf6**



**Exercise (combination alert):** Black to play and win White's queen:

**Answer: 69 ... Qd7+!**

This sequence forces White into an unwanted king/queen pin, no matter how he plays.

**70 Kg5**

Or 70 Kf4 Rf7 when the white queen's pendulous, pink lips begin to quiver with the strange mixture of self-pity and impotent rage.

**70 ... Qd5+! 0-1**

71 Kg4 (71 Qf5 Rh5+ deflects White's king from protection of f5) 71 ... Qh5+ 72 Kf4 Rf7 wins.

**Summary:** The positions we get after we induce e5 in the opening are similar to the French Defence.

*Game 19*

**S.Alonso Castillo-S.Satyapragyan**

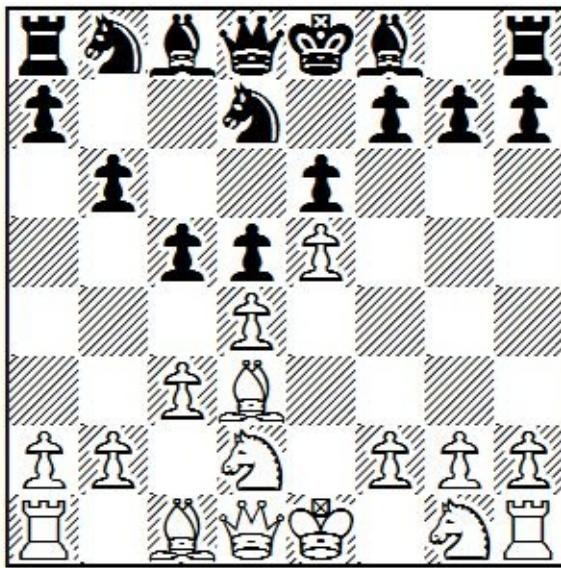
Badalona 2009

**1 e4 c5**

**Question:** Must I ask why we cover a Sicilian?

**Answer:** Believe it or not, we can also get our position directly from a Tarrasch French Defence, this

way: 1 ... e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 Bd3 c5 6 c3 b6.



Now I claim that our Owen's Defence move order is potentially superior to either the Sicilian or the French move orders.

**Question:** On what basis?

**Answer:** In this position, which arose from the French, White's best move according to theory is 7 Ne2! after which the knight intends to post on f4, which is a serious concern for Black's king. In our Owen's version, White's g1-knight has already been posted on f3, an inferior square to e2.

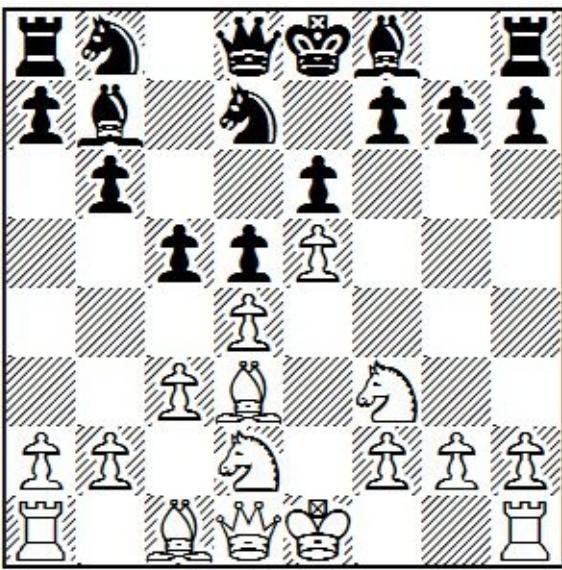
Here is an example of the f4 posting: 7 ... Ba6 8 Bxa6 Nxa6 9 a3 Rc8 10 Nf4 cxd4 11 cxd4 Qc7 12 0-0 Qc2 13 Qg4 h5 14 Qh3 Nc7 15 Nf3 Be7 16 Be3 Qe4 (Black can't survive 16 ... Qxb2?: for example, 17 Rfc1 g6 18 Qg3 h4 19 Qg4 Qb5 20 Rc3 Nf8 21 Rac1 Qd7 22 Ng5 Bd8 23 Nfh3 Rh5 24 Bd2 Nh7 25 Nf3 Rb8 26 Nf4 Rf5 27 Rc6 and Black is busted) 17 Rac1 Kd8 18 Qg3 g6 19 h4 Qf5 20 Nh3 Qg4 21 Qh2 Ne8, D.Howell-I.Nepomniachtchi, Warsaw (blitz) 2011. Black is losing after 22 Nfg5 Qf5 23 f3! Nb8 24 g3!. The trouble is White threatens the deadly Qe2 followed by g4.

Our Owen's move order runs 1 ... b6 2 d4 Bb7 3 Bd3 Nf6 4 Nd2 e6 5 Ngf3 c5 6 c3 d5 7 e5 Nfd7. One thing to note. Even though we got the Tarrasch French position with White's knight on f3, our potential ... Ba6 comes with a tempo loss over the French version, since we already moved it to b7.

**Question:** So are you saying we should avoid ... Ba6?

**Answer:** Correct. I do admit that the disparity between study and play over the board is at times a teeth-gnashing difference. Not 100% of the time, but at least in some cases, as in this game, it may actually be better for Black to avoid ... Ba6 and play a pure queenside pawn storm plan with ... c4, ... b5 and ... a5 (you can also play it in various move orders, like ... c4, ... a5, ... b5, and ... b4, as in this game).

**2 c3 b6 3 d4 Bb7 4 Bd3 Nf6 5 Nd2 e6 6 Ngf3 d5 7 e5 Nfd7**



Presto, changeo! Here we are. So we reach the French position, with both sides making concessions: White having played the g1-knight to f3, rather than to e2, and Black playing an early ... Bb7, which makes ... Ba6 a tempo loss over the French version.

### **8 Qe2**

This doesn't really prevent ... Ba6, since Black can simply toss in ... a5. White can proceed without worry of ... Ba6 by castling here as well. 8 0-0 and then:

a) 8 ... Ba6 9 Bxa6 Nxa6 is a tempo-down French for Black, but with White's knight posted on the inferior f3-square, rather than on e2. Play may proceed: 10 Ne1 (clearing the way for f4, or Qg4, or even Nd3 and Nf4; if White chooses the latter plan, he gives his extra tempo back) 10 ... Be7 11 f4 (also possible is the pure piece-play plan with 11 Qg4 0-0 12 Nd3) 11 ... 0-0!? (11 ... g6, thinking about castling long, is also playable) 12 Ndf3 (or 12 f5 exf5 13 Rxf5 Nc7 when Black's knight posts to e6, with a decent position) 12 ... b5 13 Nc2 b4 14 Qe2 Qb6 15 Be3 bxc3 16 bxc3 Rab8 17 g4!?, F.Caruana-A.Ivanov, Washington DC 2006. As a French player, I like Black's queenside chances after 17 ... Qa5 18 f5 Nc7 19 Bd2 Rb2 20 Ne3 Rfb8. Of course, I reserve the right to change my mind if I end up getting mated 17 moves later.

b) Next game we look at 8 ... cxd4 9 cxd4 Ba6.

### **8 ... Nc6**

Black decides against the ... Ba6 plan, since it involves a tempo loss when compared to the French Defence.

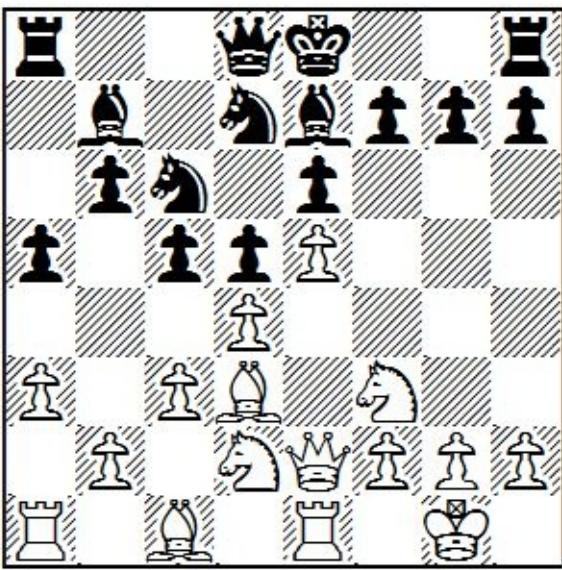
### **9 a3**

Protecting against ... Nb4 tricks, but at the cost of weakening the queenside light squares, and also thinking about seizing queenside territory with b4 next. Instead, 9 0-0 Be7 (also possible is 9 ... cxd4 10 cxd4 Nb4 11 Bb5 a6 12 Ba4 b5 13 Bb3 Qb6) 10 Rd1 cxd4 11 cxd4 Nb4 12 Bb1 Rc8 (with the strategic threat of ... Nc2) 13 Nf1 Ba6 14 Qd2 was D.Sermek-A.Minasian, Cannes 1996. Black gets a decent looking Tarrasch French-like position after 14 ... 0-0 15 a3 Nc6 16 b4 f6 17 exf6 Nxf6 18 Ng3 Bd6 19 Re1 Qd7 20 Bb2 Bc4 (now ... a5 is in the air) 21 Ne5 Bxe5 22 dxe5 Ng4 23 Qc2 g6 24 f3 Nh6 25 Qd2 Qg7. I would be fine playing Black's position here, since all his pieces are active, he owns a passed d-pawn and I don't see a clear way for White to exploit his unopposed dark-squared bishop.

### **9 ... a5**

Halting b4.

### **10 0-0 Be7 11 Re1**



White plans Nf1 and Ng3, with attacking chances on the kingside. However, Black hasn't agreed to place his king on that wing yet, which keeps White guessing his final address.

**11 ... c4!**

The queenside pawn storm plan begins.

**12 Bc2 b5 13 Nf1 Nb6**

Such a heavy-duty, blocked manoeuvring game, like gorgonzola cheese, is an acquired taste. Black seizes control over a4 and clears a path for ... Kd7, should this become necessary later on.

**14 N3d2!?**

This looks a bit clumsy. White clears the way for f4 and Qg4. He should probably opt for a pure piece play plan with 14 Qe3 b4 15 Qf4, intending h4 and Ng3.

**14 ... b4**

I would consider 14 ... h5 to keep White's queen from g4.

**15 axb4!?**

A violation of the principle: *avoid creating confrontation on your opponent's strong wing*. The opening of the a-file can only benefit Black. White was better off playing 15 Qg4 when Black can try the radical 15 ... Kf8!?.

**15 ... axb4 16 Rxa8 Qxa8 17 f4**

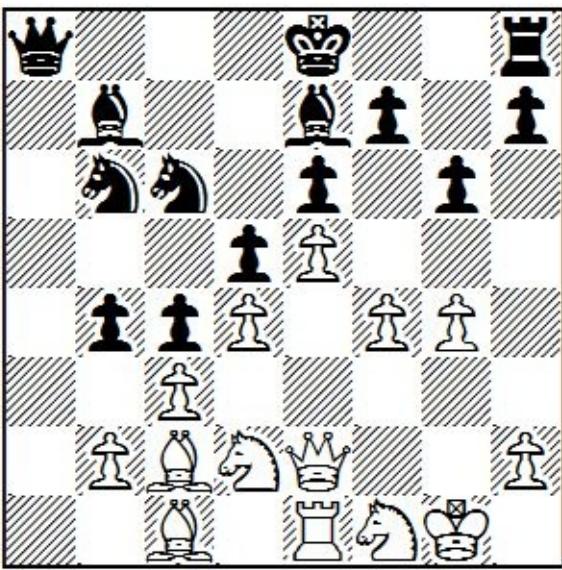
After 17 Ng3 Qa1 18 Nh5 g6 19 Nf6+ Bxf6 20 exf6 bxc3 21 bxc3 Qxc3 22 Nf3 0-0! I like Black's chances, despite the punctured kingside dark squares.

**17 ... g6**

Perhaps an unnecessary precaution. Stronger is the immediate 17 ... Qa1! 18 Qe3 b3 19 Bb1 Na4 20 Qf2 g6 21 Ne3 and now Black can sacrifice with 21 ... Nxc3! 22 bxc3 Qxc3 23 Ndxc4 (if d4 falls, White is busted) 23 ... dxc4 24 Bb2 Qb4 25 Rc1 Na5 26 Bc3 Qb5 27 Bxa5 Qxa5 28 Nxc4 Qb4 with a strategically won game for Black, who has bishop-pair and a deeply passed b-pawn.

**18 g4!?**

Subtlety tends to make a quick exit when desperation enters the room. Such a move is clearly the offspring of raw ambition, mingled with desperation. White intends f5, but as events prove, his attack is slower than Black's queenside model. White essentially ignores his queenside issues and pursues attack, based on the philosophy: the price an artist must sometimes pay is to be deprived of life's material side.



**Exercise (planning):** Come up with a clear plan to break through on the queenside.

**Answer:** Step 1: Indirectly pressure c3.

**18 ... Qa1!**

“You would be well advised to place a high degree of credence to my threats,” warns Black’s queen, in a dangerous tone.

**19 Qf3 b3!**

Step 2: Fix b2 as a stationary target.

**20 Bb1**

The bishop’s b1 tenement can’t accurately be described as an abode of luxury. “Imprisonment, starvation, light depravation, torture - all such coercions are but inconveniences to me,” boasts White’s defiant bishop, who soon takes all his words back for the promise of mercy.

**20 ... Na4**

Step 3: Add a second attacker on b2.

**21 f5**

Complete desperation. The velvet stillness isn’t exactly torn asunder by this move, since we all saw it coming. If White goes passive, indirectly protecting b2, his game also collapses after 21 Re2 h5 22 h3 hxg4 23 hxg4 Bc8 24 Qe3 Na5 25 f5 gxf5 26 gxf5 Nxb2 and White’s own attack arrives too slowly.

**21 ... Nxb2 22 Bxb2 Qxb2 23 Qh3**

Looking for tricks on g6.

**23 ... Kd7**

Even stronger is 23 ... Nxd4! 24 cxd4 (or 24 fxe6 fxe6 25 Bxg6 hxg6! 26 Qxh8 Qf2 29 Qb8 Bc6 and White can resign) 24 ... Qxd4+ 25 Kh1 c3!, and if 26 Nxb3 Qf2 27 Qg3 d4+ 28 Be4 Bxe4+ (deflecting White’s rook from f1) 29 Rxe4 Qxf1+ wins.

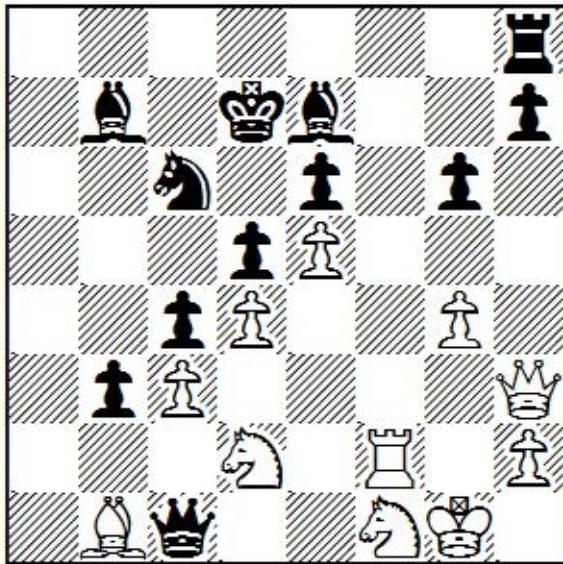
**24 Re2**

Or 24 fxe6+ fxe6 25 Bxg6 hxg6! 26 Qxh8 Qxc3 with no chance of survival for White.

**24 ... Qc1**

Likewise, after 24 ... gxf5 25 gxf5 Nxd4! 26 cxd4 Rg8+ 27 Kh1 (White’s king wanders with a mind which is elsewhere) 27 ... Qxd4 (threatening mate on g1) 28 Nf3 Qg4 29 Qxg4 Rxg4 ... d4 is coming and Black’s passers easily win.

**25 fxg6 fxg6 26 Rf2**



**Exercise (planning):** The position is similar to one of those strangely constructed novels which start at the end, the story working its way to the beginning. White's forces are utterly spent, devoid of all faculties. Design a queenside breakthrough plan for Black.

**Answer:** Step 1: Push to b2, just one away from the promotion square.

**26 ... b2!**

Black plans ... Ra8 and either ... Ra1, or ... Rc3.

**27 Kg2**

Step 2: Transfer the rook to either a1 or c3, after which White's queenside blockade collapses.

**27 ... Ra8!**

The rook vibrates poisonous intent. Attempting to formulate a plan when clocks run low is sometimes akin to attempting to find a specific snowflake during a blizzard. In this case, Black is perfectly on track.

**28 Qf3**

28 Qxh7 Qxc3 wins.

**28 ... Ra1**

Also tempting is to take out c3 with 28 ... Ra3!.

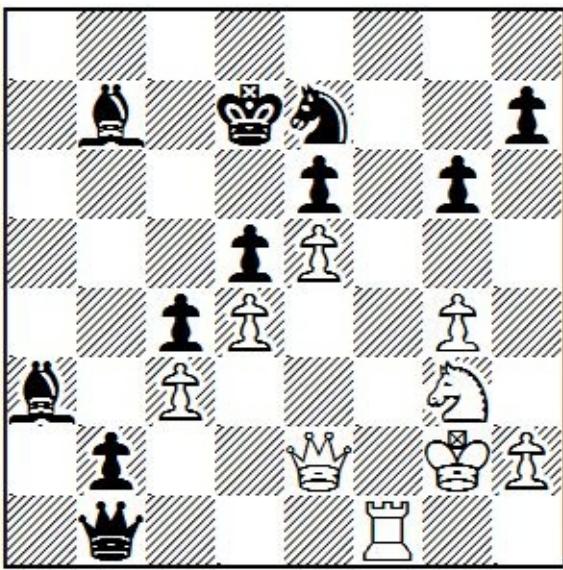
**29 Ng3 Rxb1 30 Nxb1 Qxb1**

The queen is now open to be approached by the deserving.

**31 Qe2 Ba3 32 Rf7+ Ne7**

Note how unbelievably safe Black's king remained throughout the game. We arrive at the grim reckoning and White's counterplayless position wilts like an elderly flower.

**33 Rf1**



**Exercise (combination alert):** How does Black force promotion or heavy loss of material from White?

**Answer:** Interference.

**33 ... Qc1! 0-1**

White is about to drop a full rook.

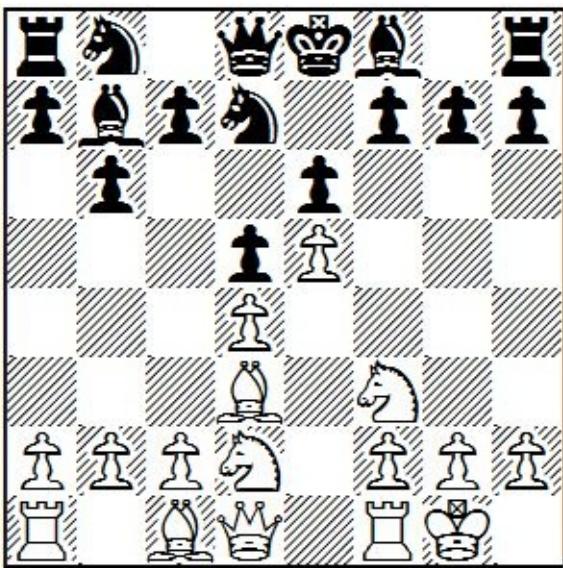
**Summary:** We don't have to play for the ... Ba6 plan every time. This game makes a solid case for the ... c4, ... b5, ... a5, and ... b4 queenside pawn storm plan.

### Game 20

**Y.Schwartz-P.Blatny**

Connecticut 2000

**1 e4 b6 2 d4 Bb7 3 Bd3 Nf6 4 Nd2 e6 5 Ngf3 d5 6 e5 Nfd7 7 0-0**



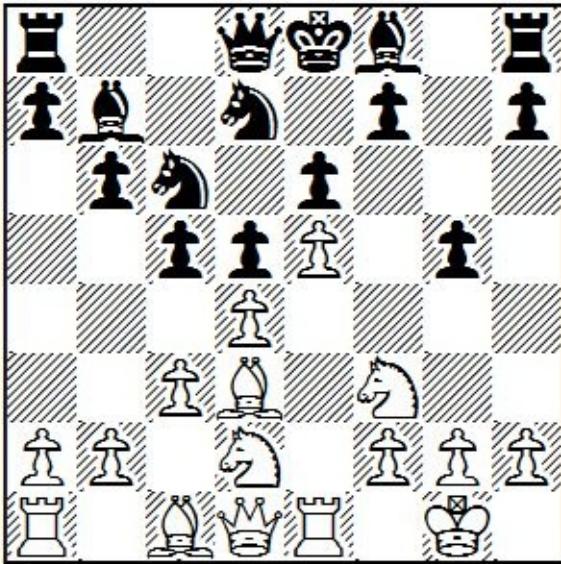
White refuses to play games to stop ... Ba6 with Qe2.

**Question:** Why allow Black ... Ba6?

**Answer:** We discussed this a bit last game, but it's worth repeating: White doesn't mind ... Ba6 since Black will be down a tempo over a normal French Tarrasch, since in that one, Black doesn't waste a tempo on ... Bb7.

**7 ... c5 8 c3 cxd4**

Black clarifies the centre before playing ... Ba6 to knock out c4 ideas from White. Also possible is to just avoid ... Ba6, like the last game, and play 8 ... Nc6 9 Re1 g5!?. Of course this is pretty risky. This is thematic in some French lines, but not as much here.



**Question:** Why not?

**Answer:** For two reasons, the first concrete; the second intuitive:

1. It's unlikely Black can engineer the ... f6 break, since e6 is weakened by Black's queenside fianchetto.

2. Intuitively, as a French player, it feels difficult for Black to feed his clumsy would-be attackers over to the kingside.

After 10 h3 (I also prefer White if he leaves the kingside pawns alone for a while with 10 Nf1 Be7 11 Be3 h5 12 a3 c4 13 Bc2 g4 14 N3d2 Qc7 15 f4 0-0-0 16 f5) 10 ... h5 11 Nf1 (A.Zatonskih-H.Nakamura, Saint Louis 2011) 11 ... Rg8 12 Be3 g4 13 hxg4 hxg4 14 N3h2 Qh4 I slightly prefer White since his king appears rather well protected, while Black may later pay for his kingside weakening.

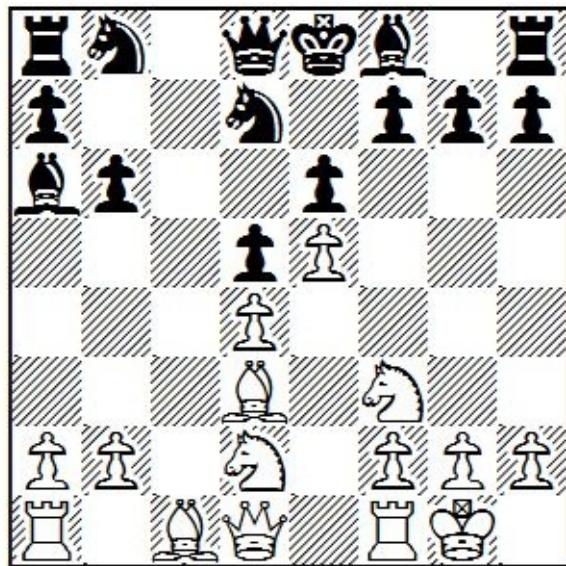
**9 cxd4**

**Question:** Can White get away with sacrificing the e5-pawn for open lines and the initiative with 9 Nxd4?

**Answer:** *Houdini* claims your plan is playable. It works it out to a repetition draw in the line 9 ... Nxe5 10 Bb5+ Nbd7 11 Qh5 Ng6 12 f4 a6 13 f5 axb5 14 fxg6 fxg6 15 Qe2 Bc5! 16 N2b3 (Black stands better after 16 Qxe6+ Qe7 17 Qh3 Nf6 18 N2b3 0-0) 16 ... e5 17 Nxc5 bxc5 18 Ne6 Qb6 19 Qg4 c4+ 20 Kh1 Ra6 21 Nxg7+ Kd8 22 Rf7 Qc6 23 Bg5+ Kc8 24 Rf6 Qc7 25 Rxa6 Bxa6 26 Qe6 Qb6 27 Qe7 h6 28

Bh4 Qc5 29 Qe6 Qb6 30 Qe7 with a draw. Of course, with humans playing, any result would be possible after your pawn sacrifice.

**9 ... Ba6**



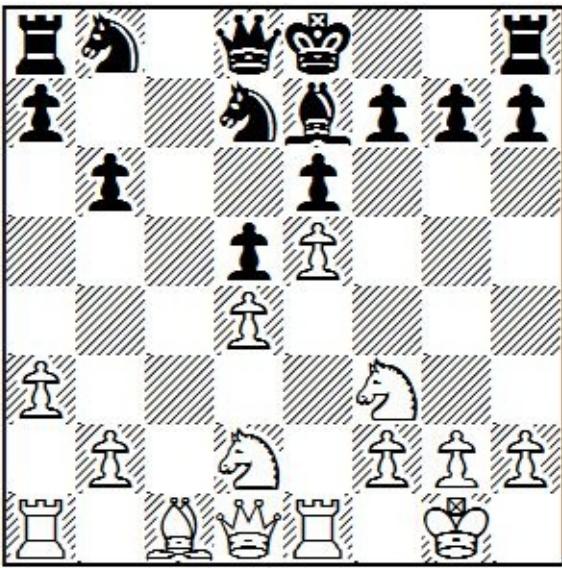
**Question:** Why is Black willing to play a French Defence a move down?

**Answer:** As mentioned last game, it is because White's g1-knight usually posts to the superior e2-square in French, while in the Owen's, White is up a move, but not a move he wants!

**10 Bxa6 Nxa6 11 a3**

Cutting out all ... Nb4 ideas, but also weakening the queenside light squares. White can also play for the weakened queenside light squares with 11 Qa4, as in I.Tofan-A.Yavic, Kusadasi 2004. At this stage Black should play 11 ... Qc8, which looks better than sliding the knight back to c7: 12 Nb1!? (intending to seize the c-file as quickly as possible for his rooks) 12 ... Nb4 13 Nc3 Qb7 14 Bd2 a6 15 Ne2 Nc6 16 Rfc1 b5 17 Qc2 Rc8 18 Qd3 Nb6 19 b3 Ba3 20 Rc2 Be7 21 a3 h6. This slightly favours White, although I would be okay with Black's position, since he managed to swap away the light-squared bishops, which weakens White's kingside attack to some degree.

**11 ... Be7 12 Re1 Nab8**



The knight is best posted on c6.

**Question:** Black first wasted a tempo over a normal French with ... Bb7 and ... Ba6, and then plays ... Nxa6 and ... Nb8, wasting two further tempi. How can he get away with such blatant violations?

**Answer:** The main reason Black can indulge in the open violation of such opening edicts is that the position remains closed, which greatly negates White's development lead, since it becomes difficult to create confrontation.

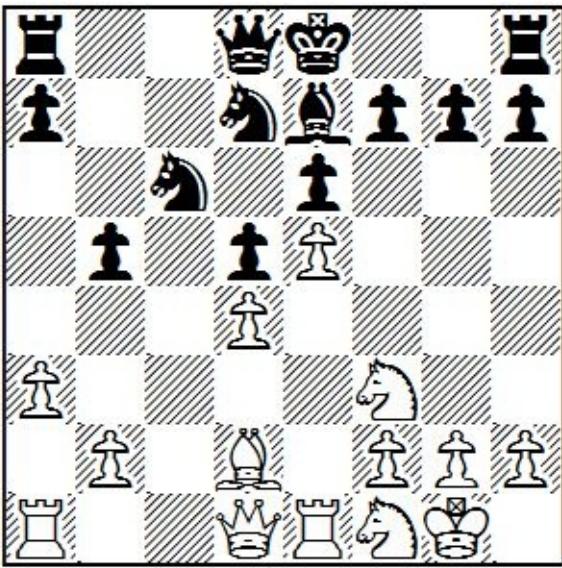
### 13 Nf1

Preparing the usual transfer to g3 and the kingside, where the knight may later fish about, in search of weakness.

### 13 ... Nc6 14 Bd2

14 Qd3! a6 15 Bd2 b5 looks like a slightly more accurate move order for White, since his queen is better placed on d3, and also Black was forced to expend a tempo on ... a6, which Blatny sidestepped in the game.

### 14 ... b5!



More time loss. This multi-purpose move follows two lines of thought:

1. Principle: *place your pawns on the opposite colour of your remaining bishop.*
2. Space is at a premium in the confined quarters of Black's camp, so he clears b6 for his once worthless d7-knight.

**15 Rc1 Qb6**

**Question:** Didn't you just say that b6 was reserved for the knight?

**Answer:** All in good time. Black attacks d4, and can later slide the queen to b7, allowing for ... Nb6.

**16 Kh1**

Setting up a little cheapo, since now Black is unable to take on d4.

**16 ... a5**

Most certainly not 16 ... Nxd4?? 17 Be3, which wins a piece now that Black lacks ... Nxf3 *check*.

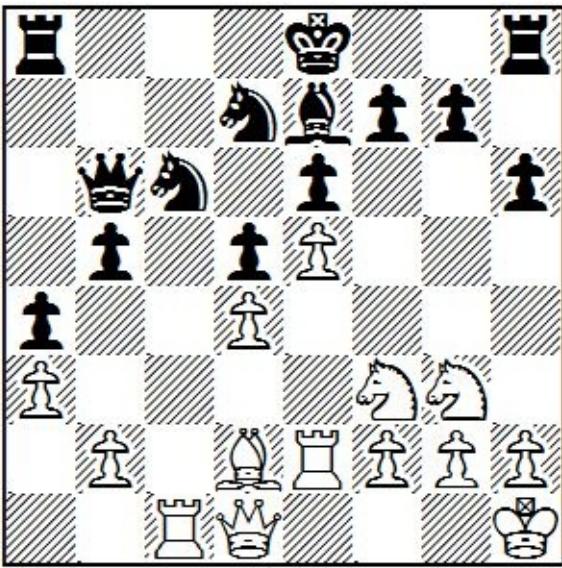
**17 Ng3 h6**

A useful precaution, cutting out both Bg5 and Ng5 annoyances, yet the move overlooks a tactical nuance/computer shot. The immediate 17 ... 0-0 is more accurate.

**18 Re2**

I leave Black's and White's last move without a '?!', since it seems a tad unfair to punish both players with a dubious mark when the great likelihood exists that we too would have overlooked White's comp idea 18 Nf5!! and Black must play 18 ... Bf8! since 18 ... exf5 19 e6 fxe6?! (Black should just offer the piece back and be satisfied with 19 ... 0-0 20 exd7 with advantage to White) 20 Rxe6 Rc8 21 Qc2 Ndb8 22 Qxf5 leads to a winning attack for White. After 18 ... Bf8 19 Ne3 Rd8 20 Qe2 Ndb8 21 Qd3 it's an edge to White, who gets a superior version of the game's set-up.

**18 ... a4**



Now a black knight sits pretty if it reaches c4.

**19 Be1!?**

White creates a new problem to alleviate an old one.

**Question:** Why back the bishop to e1, rather than the most natural square e3?

**Answer:** White fears ... Na5 and ... Nc4, and intends to chop when it reaches a5. White's problem is a black knight can also reach c4, via b6, which Blatny manages to accomplish later on in the game. I agree that the move is unnatural and would opt for a set-up which allows for kingside counter-chances, with your suggestion 19 Be3!, allowing Black's knight to c4. After 19 ... Na5 20 Nh5 if Black takes the plunge and castles, White gets counterplay with 20 ... 0-0 21 Rec2 Nc4 22 Ne1 (intending Qg4) 22 ... Kh7 23 Nd3 with approximately level chances. At least in this version, White worries Black's king, unlike in the game's continuation.

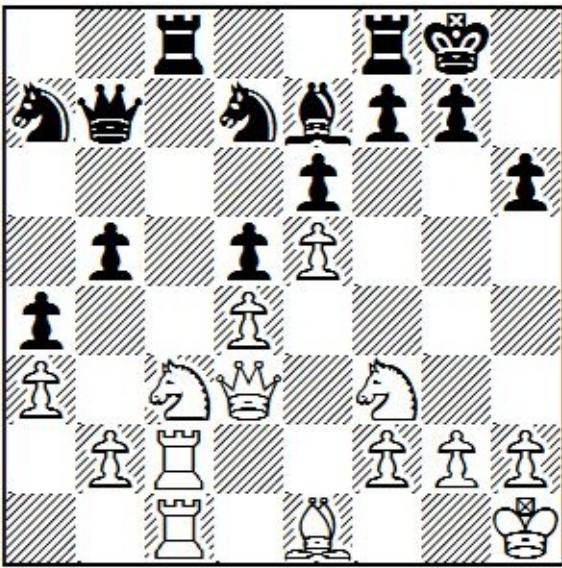
**19 ... Rc8 20 Rec2 0-0**

Blatny feels safer castling now that White's bishop isn't aiming at h6.

**21 Ne2**

After 21 Nh5 Qb7 (intending ... Nb6 and ... Nc4) 22 Qd3 b4 23 Bd2 bxa3 24 bxa3 Ncb8 25 Rc3 Rxc3 26 Qxc3 Qb5 *Houdini* rates the position at even, while I prefer Black, whose queenside chances look superior to White's on the kingside.

**21 ... Qb7 22 Nc3 Na7 23 Qd3**



**Exercise (planning/combination alert):** So far White's supple evasions continue to frustrate Black's attempts to keep a black knight from c4. How can Black force through his ... Nb6 and ... Nc4 intent?

**Answer:** Pin.

**23 ... Nb6!**

Anyway. A happy solution materializes, to a not-so insoluble problem. Blatny uses a minor tactical device to achieve ... Nb6 and ... Nc4.

**24 Na2**

Watching over b4. This knight's attitude is similar to my terrier Kahless, keeping tireless vigil over a rodent's hole in the backyard. 24 Nxb5?? is met with the deadly pin 24 ... Qa6! and clearly, White's plan sprung a leak. It's always a tad embarrassing when our faith fails to reconcile with the actual facts.

**24 ... Nc4**

At last. The knight relaxes on his hammock, which swings lazily in the breeze.

**25 Bc3 Nc6!**

Seizing control over b4 and worrying White further with potential ... b4 breakthroughs.

**26 Nd2**

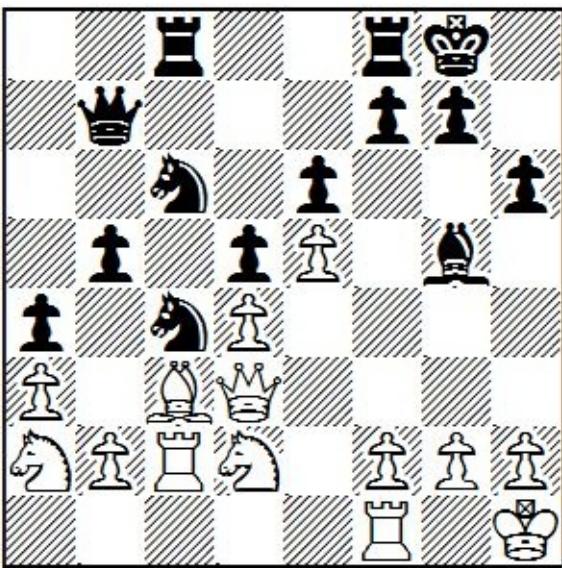
The nucleus of the battle grows further concentrated on the queenside. Another possible defensive formation runs 26 Qd1 Qb6 27 g3 Rc7 28 Kg2 Rfc8 29 Qe1. I don't believe White's queenside blockade will last forever, but if instead 29 h4?! (White's dilemma: he dare not launch a counterattack from a position of weakness, but then again, he dare not do nothing) 29 ... b4! 30 axb4 Nxb4 31 Bxb4 Bxb4 32 Nxb4 Qxb4 White remains tied down and under pressure on the queenside.

**26 ... Bg5!**

The bishop views the queenside proceedings with the grim air of a mean-spirited critic on the opening night of a play. Blatny sets up a trap.

**27 Rf1?**

Correct was 27 Re1.



**Exercise (combination alert):** This is one of those positions where blunders slink behind, waiting patiently for alertness to abate. White's last move walked into a trap. This is not the time for a vague, intuitive strategy. The sequence must be calculated with comp-like precision. What did Blatny find?

**Answer:** Removal of a key defender/clearance/discovered attack.

**27 ... Bxd2! 28 Bxd2 N6xe5!**

Now the bulwark of White's defence performs an ungainly belly flop. White's queen is rudely awakened, aroused from a dreamless slumber. Her only desire is to be at peace with all humanity, who just won't leave her be.

**29 dxe5**

White decides to give up an exchange for fishing chances. 29 Qg3 Nxd2 30 Rxd2 Nc4 leaves White down a pawn, with the inferior position to boot.

**29 ... Nxe5**

The point: White's queen is unable to retain coverage of the now hanging c2-rook.

**30 Qg3**

The queen is characterized as a woman of unflinching loyalty - mainly to her own self-interests.

**30 ... Rxc2**

Oh, the ecstasy of receiving, without having paid a penny. Prosperity pours forth, until Black's cup runneth over.

**31 Bc3**

Now only isolated and ineffective patches of resistance remain. Also totally hopeless is 31 Bxh6 f6 32 Bc1 Rfc8.

**31 ... Rxc3!**

Blatny decides it's time to expunge the remainder of White's resistance, preferring to return some (but not all) of his extra material to seize the initiative. He decides that his extra exchange is an object briefly lent, and now must be returned. The comps prefer the greedier 31 ... f6.

**32 Nxc3 Nc4 0-1**

Black is up two clean pawns for zero compensation.

**Summary:** Black can actually get away with playing a French Tarrasch position a full move down,

since in the Owen's version White's king's knight is posted to the inferior f3-square, rather than on e2.

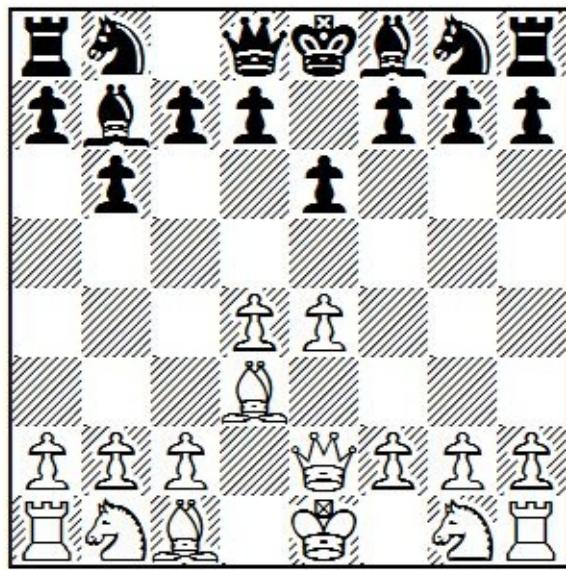
### Game 21

**T.Reiss-K.Chernyshov**

Eger 2005

**1 d4 e6 2 e4 b6 3 Bd3 Bb7 4 Nf3**

4 Qe2! is probably White's most dangerous move order.



**Question:** Why?

**Answer:** Because it limits our options, preventing our side from playing 5 ... c5?! and forces us into narrow, French-like corridors. 4 ... Nf6 is correct and transposes to our game's position after 5 Nf3 d5 6 e5.

**Question:** I still don't get it. Why can't Black play 4 ... c5?

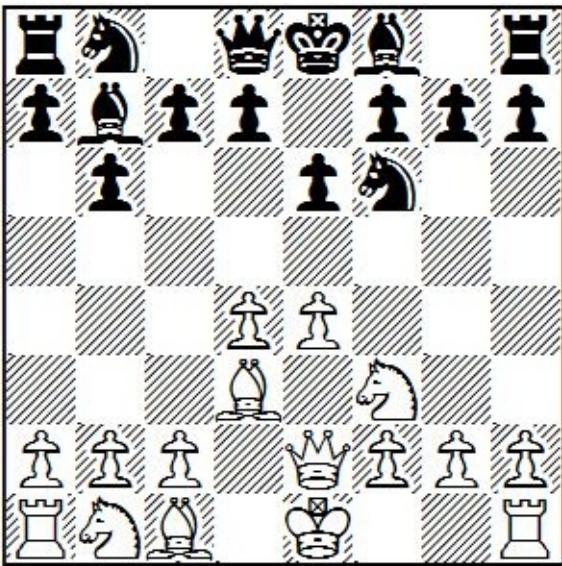
**Answer:** It is met with the bypassing trick 5 d5! when White will follow with c4, with an excellent Benoni or King's Indian formation, since Black's b7-bishop hits a wall on d5: 5 ... exd5 6 exd5+ (White scores a whopping 82.1% from this point) 6 ... Qe7 7 c4 Qxe2+ 8 Nxe2 Na6 9 Nbc3 Nc7 10 0-0 Nf6 11 Ng3 0-0-0 12 Bg5 Nce8 13 Rfe1 and Black remains tangled up and low on space in an unpleasant ending, J.Gomez Esteban-C.Varas Gonzalez, Amorebieta 2006.

**4 ... Nf6!?**

An adventurous move order, inviting the Alekhine's Defence-like response 5 e5. Normal is 4 ... c5 5 c3 Nf6.

**5 Qe2**

White can also take up the challenge with the Alekhine-like 5 e5 Nd5 6 a3 c5 7 dxc5 bxc5 8 0-0 f5 9 exf6!? (White gives up the pawn centre to open the position to enhance his development lead) 9 ... Nxf6 10 Ng5 g6 11 Re1, R.Antoniewski-P.Vavra, Czech League 2005. The position remains sharp and unbalanced after 11 ... Bg7.



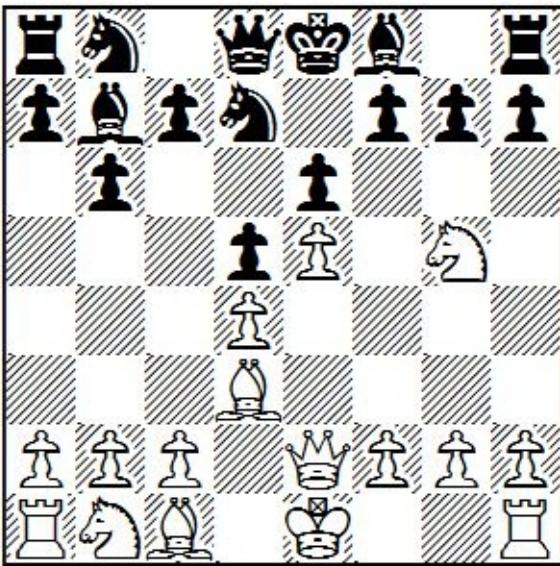
**5 ... d5**

**Question:** How about 5 ... c5 here?

**Answer:** This is the same strategic trap we discussed earlier. White isn't obliged to respond with 6 c3, and can instead cross our plans with 6 d5!, after which we have a choice between entry to a wretched King's Indian, or a sorrowful Benoni formation, since in both, our fianchettoed light-squared bishop faces a wall on d5, with a clear advantage to White: 6 ... exd5 (sorrowful it is) 7 exd5+ Qe7 8 c4 b5 9 b3 Qxe2+ 10 Kxe2 b4 11 Re1 d6 12 Kf1+ Be7 13 Bf4 Kd8, C.Bauer-A.Minasian, New York 2000. Black is busted after 14 Ng5! Rf8 15 Nd2 h6 (or 15 ... Bc8 16 Rxe7! Kxe7 17 Re1+ Kd7 18 Bf5+ Kc7 19 Bxc8 Kxc8 20 Bxd6 Re8 21 Rxe8+ Nxe8 22 Bxc5 f6 23 Nxh7 a5 24 Ke2 when White has way too many pawns for the exchange) 16 Rxe7! Kxe7 17 Re1+ Kd7 18 Bf5+ Kc7 19 Nde4! Nxe4 20 Nxe4 and Black's game collapses since 20 ... Rd8? is met with 21 Nxd6!.

If you want to try and enter the Miles variation, you can also try the strange move order 5 ... Be7!? intending ... c5 next. However, I don't trust it, since White isn't obliged to enter the Miles line since he hasn't yet played c3. The most vigorous continuation may be 6 e5! Nd5 7 a3 c5 8 c4 Nc7 9 dxc5 bxc5 10 Nc3, as in S.Milosevic,-T.Djuricic, Serbia 2008. White stands better after 10 ... 0-0 11 0-0 f5 12 exf6 gxf6!? 13 Bf4 Nc6 14 Be4 Rf7 15 Rfd1 with pressure on d6 and d7.

**6 e5 Nfd7 7 Ng5!**



Threat: Nxe6! followed by Qh5+. The most radical, and in my opinion, strongest, of White's options. I consider this to be Black's most critical position of the chapter. If we survive this one, the others will feel like a garden party. White scores well over average from this position, so we need to know it well. If you don't like what you get, then you can always play Blatny's 'Ruy Lopez' from the next chapter, or switch to a Hippopotamus formation, which we look at in Chapter Four.

**Question:** What is the purpose of White's last move?

**Answer:** IM John Watson answers in *Mastering the Chess Openings, Volume 4*: “White not only brings the queen to the kingside to creates threats, but he frees his f-pawn to advance.”

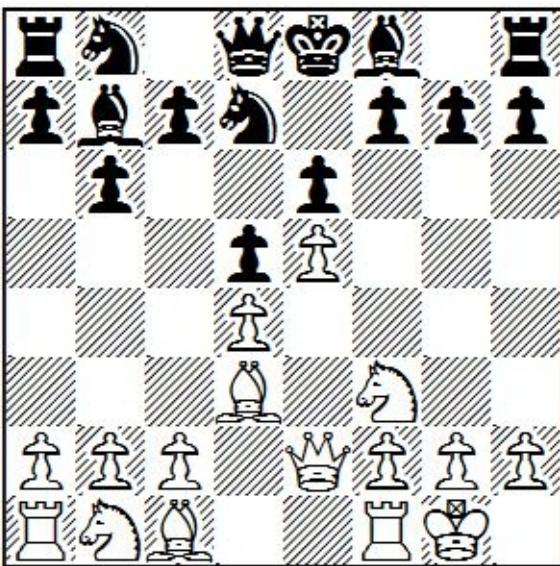
Plenty of other moves have been seen too:

a) 7 Nbd2 c5 8 c3 Nc6 9 a3 leads to a position we already examined earlier in the chapter.

b) 7 Bg5 (the idea is to swap away Black's good dark-squared bishop) 7 ... Qc8!? (however, we refuse to cooperate, with this enterprising try; Black can also play the safer 7 ... Be7 8 Bxe7 Qxe7 9 0-0 c5 10 c3 0-0 11 a3 a5, intending ... Ba6 at some point, J.Fages-V.Bubnov, correspondence 2009) 8 0-0 c5 (8 ... Ba6?! is met by 9 c4! dxc4 10 Bxc4 with advantage to White, since she has e4 for her knight, potential pressure down the c-file and d5 may soon be in the air as well, S.Milliet-B.Filipovic, Basel 2010) 9 c3 Ba6 10 c4 (now this move comes at a loss of tempo for White, since his earlier c3 becomes redundant) 10 ... dxc4 11 Bxc4 Bxc4 12 Qxc4 was O.Zambrana-J.Cueto Chajtur, Collado Villalba 2006. Now Black should play 12 ... Nc6 13 d5!? (principle: *open the position and create confrontation when leading in development*) 13 ... Ndxe5 14 Nxe5 Nxe5 15 Qe4 f6 16 Nc3 Qb7 17 f4 exd5 18 Nxd5 0-0-0 with a playable position.

c) 7 h4 c5 8 c3 Nc6 9 Bg5 Be7 (I would be more inclined to play 9 ... Qc7 intending ... h6 next) 10 Na3 a6 11 Rc1 b5 12 0-0 h6 13 Bxe7 Qxe7 14 h5 0-0 and Black looks okay, despite his bad bishop, since his queenside counterplay gained momentum. A.Motylev-K.Chernyshov, Moscow 2010.

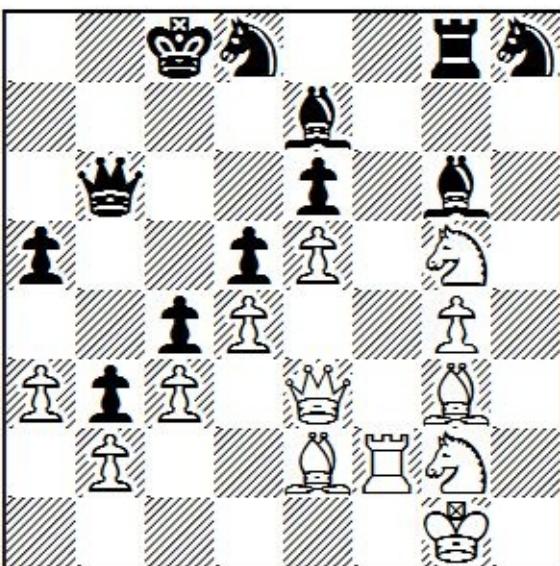
d) 7 0-0.



I think this sensible move, although White's most common choice, fails to challenge Black, whose king is infinitely safer than in the 7 Ng5 line played in the game:

d1) 7 ... Be7 8 c4! dxc4 9 Bxc4 a6 10 Nc3 b5 11 Bd3 Nb6 12 Be4 Bc6 13 Rd1 0-0 14 Qc2 was A.Khalifman-C.Bauer, Internet 2004. Black should play 14 ... Bxe4 15 Qxe4 N8d7 16 Qg4 Kh8 17 b3 b4 18 Ne4 Nd5 with a slightly inferior yet still playable position, since control over d5 partially makes up for White's rather dangerous kingside build-up.

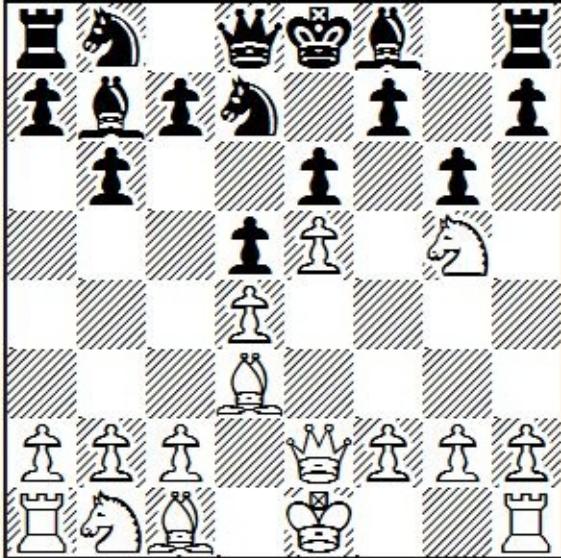
d2) 7 ... c5 is more accurate and after 8 c3 Be7 9 Be3 Nc6 10 a3 c4 11 Bc2 b5 12 Ne1 we see the issues of posting the knight on f3. White must waste time to remove it to play f4. Black already looks like he entered a nice looking French: 12 ... Qc7 13 f4 g6 14 Nf3 0-0-0 15 Bf2 h6 16 Nbd2 Rdg8 17 g4 a5 18 Bg3 Qb6 19 f5 b4 20 fxe6 fxe6 21 Rab1 b3 22 Bd1 g5 23 Qe3 Nf8 24 Ne1 Nd8 25 Be2 Ng6 26 Ng2 Bc6 27 Rf2 Rf8 28 Nf3 Be8 29 Rbf1 Rhg8 30 h3 Nh8 31 h4 Bg6 32 hxg5 hxg5 33 Nxg5 Rxf2 34 Rxf2? (White's best chance is 34 Kxf2! which still allows Black's combination, but in a less painful version for White; I can't give you any more of the variation, or else I give away the answer to the combination alert).



**Exercise (combination alert):** How can Black regain material equality with a clear strategic advantage?

**Answer:** Pawn promotion: 34 ... Bxa3! 35 Qc1 (35 bxa3 b2 36 Rf1 b1Q 37 Rxb1 Qxb1+ 38 Be1 Nh7 leaves White busted) 35 ... Be7 36 Bh4 a4 (Black isn't quite done with his middlegame pawn promotion theme; ... a3 is coming and there is little White can do about it) 37 Bd1 a3 38 bxa3 Qa7 39 Nh3 Qxa3 40 Qd2 Bxh4 41 Nxh4 Be4 and Black is up a full exchange, with attacking chances against White's exposed king and with a deadly b3-pass, O.Kurmann-B.Filipovic, Basel 2006.

7 ... g6



Multipurpose:

1. Black cuts out Nxh7.
2. Black eliminates Qh5.

7 ... g6 is a useful move if White later tries to play for an f4-f5 pawn break. But of course, the move comes at a cost: Black's dark squares are weakened. If you don't like Black's position in this version, we have 7th-move options:

a) 7 ... Be7 8 Qg4 (8 Nxh7? is met by 8 ... g6! 9 Nf6+ Nxf6 10 exf6 Bxf6 11 c3 c5 with a clear advantage to Black) 8 ... h5 9 Qg3 Nf8! (this cuts out sacrifices on e6 and f7) 10 0-0 Ba6 11 Bxa6 Nxa6 12 c3 c5 13 Rd1 c4 14 Re1 Rc8 15 h4 Nh7 16 Nf3 Rg8 17 Bg5 Nxg5 18 Nxg5 Nb8 19 Nd2 Nc6 20 b3 Na5 21 Re3 Bxg5 22 hxg5 g6 saw Akopian manage to seal the position and hold a draw, *Deep Junior-V.Akopian*, Dortmund 2000.

b) Filipovic's enterprising choice is 7 ... Qe7!?. Black offers his h-pawn: 8 Nxh7 c5 9 Nxf8 (or 9 Bg5 f6 10 Bf4 Nc6 11 exf6 gxf6 12 dxc5 e5 13 Nxf8 Kxf8 14 Bg3 Nd4 15 Qd2 Nxc5 when Black's initiative, centre and open kingside lines offer full compensation for the pawn) 9 ... Kxf8 10 dxc5 (after 10 c3?! cxd4 11 cxd4 Qb4+ 12 Nd2 Nc6 13 a3 Qa4! 14 Bb5 Qxd4 15 Nf3 Qg4 Black regains his sac'ed pawn with advantage) 10 ... Nxc5 11 Nd2 Nxd3+ 12 cxd3 Nc6 13 Nf3 Qb4+ 14 Qd2 was M.Stojanovic-B.Filipovic, Basel 2011. According to *Houdini*, Black gets full compensation for the pawn after 14 ... Rh5! 15 d4 Ba6 with loads of light-square play.

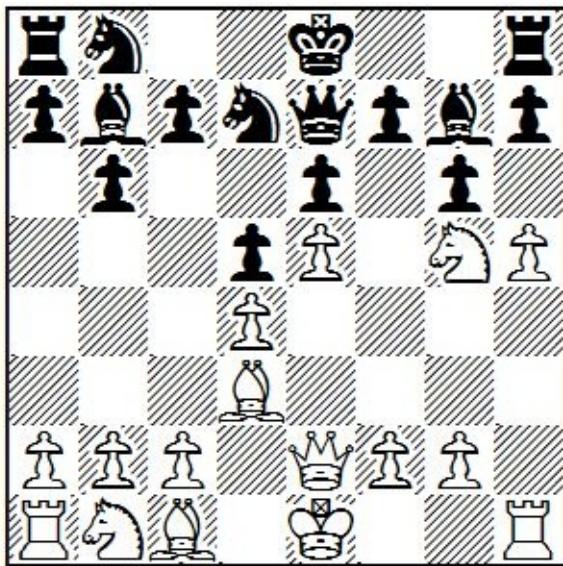
c) 7 ... c5?? misses the entire point of White's last move: 8 Nxe6!. My database contains two games from this position (no wonder everyone thinks 1 ... b6 is unsound). If Black accepts with 8 ... fxe6 then 9 Qh5+ Ke7 10 Bg5+ Nf6 11 exf6+ gxf6 12 Bxf6+! Kxf6 13 Qh4+ wins the queen.

**8 h4 Qe7**

The queen's limited powers remind us of a little girl playing at being a grownup. *Houdini* suggests 8 ... Nc6 9 c3 h6 10 Nf3 Rg8 11 h5 g5, assessing the position as slightly in White's favour. I played on and

took Black from this point: 12 Nh2 Qe7 13 Ng4 f5!? 14 exf6 Nxf6 15 Bg6+ Kd7 16 0-0 Nxg4 17 Qxg4 Ba6 18 Re1 Rxg6! 19 hxg6 Qf6 20 f4 Qxg6 21 fxg5 Be7. I prefer Black, who for the exchange, gets a pawn, and light-square domination. *Houdini* by this stage tones down its optimism for White's side and assesses at nearly even.

**9 h5 Bg7**



**10 Rh3**

Thinking about shifting the rook to f3. White can also try an asphyxiation strategy with 10 h6 Bf8 11 Be3 (11 Rh3 Nc6 12 c3 0-0-0 13 Rf3 Bxh6 14 Rxf7 Qe8 15 Rf3 Qe7 16 Rg3 Bg7 looks slightly better for White as well) 11 ... c5 12 c3 Nc6 13 Nf3 (Bg5 is in the air) 13 ... Qd8 14 Bg5 Be7 (Black has little choice but to swap away the good bishop) 15 Bxe7 Qxe7 16 Nbd2 (if 16 a3 0-0! when Black's king is surprisingly safe; after 17 Nbd2 f6 18 exf6 Qxf6 19 Bb5 a6 20 Bxc6 Bxc6 21 a4 Rfe8 22 Ne5 Nxe5 23 Qxe5 Qxe5+ 24 dx5 Rf8 Black stands no worse and I actually favour his chances in the ending) 16 ... cxd4 17 cxd4 Qb4! (double attack on b2 and d4) 18 Qe3 Qxb2 19 0-0 Qa3 (or 19 ... 0-0 20 a3 Rac8 21 Rfb1 Qc3 22 Rc1 Qa5 23 Nb3 Qa4 24 Bc2 Qa6 25 Bd3 Qa4 with a draw by repetition of moves) 20 Ng5 Qe7, but I don't believe in White's full compensation for the pawn since Black looks solid and can castle kingside next.

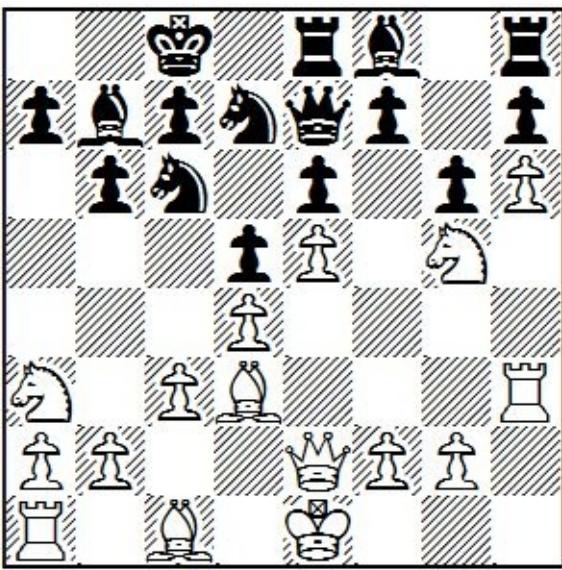
**10 ... Nc6 11 c3 0-0-0 12 h6! Bf8 13 Na3**

White's most accurate move may be 13 b4!, snuffing out ... c5 and ... Na5 counterplay, and after which Black's earlier apprehensions find themselves revived. Black must also watch out for a sudden b5, followed by Ba3, and also simply Rf3:

a) 13 ... f6 14 exf6 Nxf6 15 b5 when Black's game looks difficult.

b) 13 Rf3 Bxh6 14 Rxf7 Qe8 15 Rf3 Qe7 16 Rg3 Bg7 transposes to an earlier note we discussed, where White holds a slight edge.

**13 ... Re8!**



Preparing ... f6. Black's last move is a good one, at odds with its meek outer appearance.

#### **14 Bd2**

White can prepare for the coming ... f6 with 14 Kf1, intending Re1: 14 ... Nd8 (in order to enable the much needed breathing room with an ... f6 break) 15 Qf3 f6 16 exf6 Qxf6 17 Qxf6 Nxf6 18 Bf4 Be7 19 Nb5 Nh5 20 Bd2 Bxg5 21 Bxg5 Rhf8 22 Nxa7+ Kb8 23 Nb5 e5 24 dxe5 Nf7 25 Bd2 Nxe5 26 Be2 Nf6 27 Kg1 Ne4 28 Be3 Bc8 29 Rh1 Bg4! 30 Bf1 Bd7 31 Nd4 Ng4 and Black's initiative easily makes up for his missing pawn.

#### **14 ... f6! 15 exf6 Nxf6**

Black plans ... e5 next, freeing his game. Unexpectedly, the past for Black is wiped clean, as if his formally troubled position never existed in the first place.

#### **16 f4**

This stops e5 at the cost of weakening his light squares.

#### **16 ... Nd8 17 0-0-0 Nf7!**

Challenging both g5 and h6, based on the principle: *the cramped side should seek swaps*.

#### **18 Nxf7?!**

I would have left things alone with 18 Kb1 h6, which isn't really hanging, since 18 ... Nxh6? is met by 19 Rdh1 with clear advantage to White.

#### **18 ... Qxf7**

*Houdini* claims Black stands no worse, and in fact, my French instincts tell me Black's position may even stand better.

#### **19 Nc2 Bd6 20 Rf1 Rhf8 21 g3 Ne4!**

Black, for so long bullied on the dark squares, now begins to assert himself on the opposite colour.

#### **22 Ne1**

22 Qg2 was more accurate, anticipating Black's next move.

#### **22 ... Qd7!**

With the sneaky threat of ... e5!, uncovering on the loose h3-rook.

#### **23 Rfh1?!**

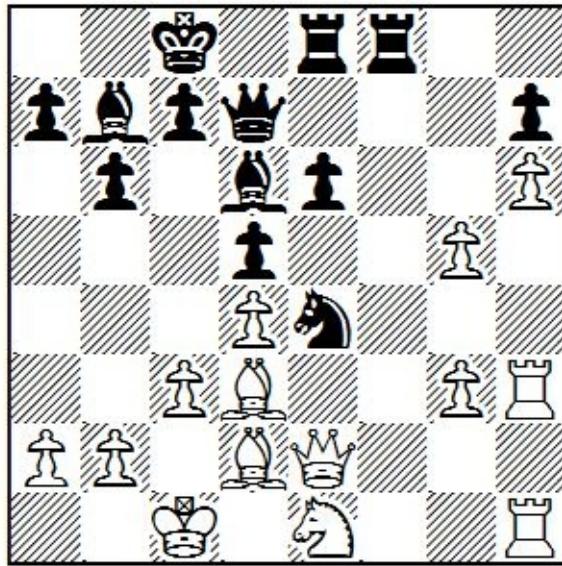
Now White's would-be bind sags in dismay. The unpleasant 23 g4 was necessary: 23 ... Qa4 24 Kb1 e5! 25 fxe5 Rxfl 26 Bxe4 Ba6 27 Bd3 Bxd3+ 28 Rxd3 Rff8 and I don't believe in White's full compensation for the exchange. This line still looks better than what White got in the game.

#### **23 ... g5!**

Black suddenly takes over the initiative, and Chernyshov's inflamed sense of adventure cannot be contained in any way.

## 24 fxg5

White deems his weak points g3 and f2 too weak to warrant rescue or salvage operations, so he offers Black both.



**Exercise (critical decision):** Our choices here are 25 ... Nxe5, which wins the exchange, as does 25 ... Nf2. Or we can play for pure initiative with 25 ... e5. What do we want? Money or glory?

**Answer:** Glory wins out. There is no intoxicant more giddying than to be presented with an unexpected initiative after a dreary period of prolonged defence.

## 24 ... e5!

Black desires the initiative, the way a mosquito craves blood.

We get swindled in the money version after 24 ... Nxe5? 25 Rxe5 Bxe5 26 g6! hxg6 27 Bxg6 Rd8 28 Bg5. Now if we don't want to lose the exchange back, with an inferior position, we can try 28 ... Bf4+ 29 Bxf4 Rxf4, but then White's h-pawn turns into a monster after 30 Qe5 Qd6 31 Nd3 Rff8 32 h7 leaving Black paralysed.

b) Likewise, after 24 ... Nf2 White regains his investment with 25 g6 Nxh3 26 g7! Nf2 27 gxf8Q Rxf8 28 Rf1 Nxd3+ (28 ... Bxg3?! 29 Bc2 Qe7 30 Rg1! is unpleasant for Black) 29 Nxd3 Rxf1+ 30 Qxf1.

## 25 Bxe4

White's best chance, which also gives away control over the light squares.

## 25 ... dxe4 26 dxe5

White fails to get enough compensation after 26 d5 Bxd5 27 g6 e3 28 Bxe3 Bxh1 29 Rxh1 hxg6.

## 26 ... Bxe5 27 Be3 Qa4

Black's queen raids the weakened light squares with sinister deliberation. This move comes as an unwelcome distraction for White, who now fights a war on two fronts.

## 28 Kb1 Rd8

White must watch out for ... Rd1+.

## 29 Nc2

29 Qc2 Rd1+ 30 Bc1 Qd7 31 g6 e3 32 g7 Rd8 33 Ng2 Rxc1+! 34 Kxc1 Qd2+ 35 Qxd2 exd2+ 36 Kc2

Be4+ 37 Kd1 Bxg2 is a winning position for Black.

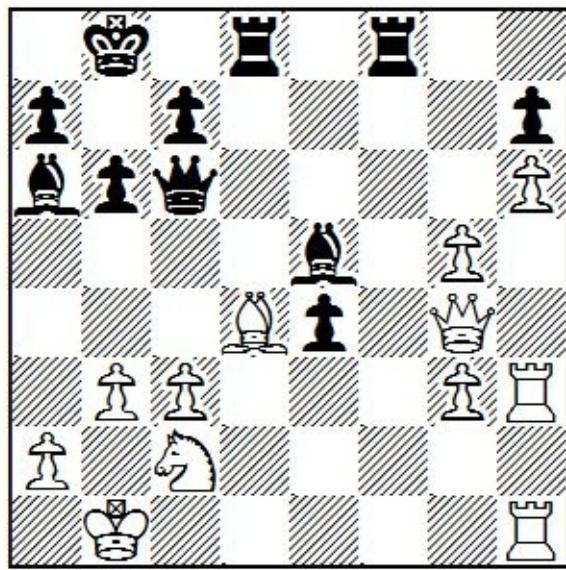
**29 ... Ba6!**

Black's once rotten light-squared bishop enters the attack.

**30 Qg4+ Kb8 31 b3?!**

Now White's king's position is irreparably harmed, all pretence of military discipline is set aside, and it's every defender for himself. It is unlikely, though, he would have saved himself even after the more accurate 31 R3h2 Bc4! 32 Na3 Bd3+ 33 Nc2 Rf3.

**31 ... Qc6 32 Bd4**



**Exercise (planning):** The dim hallways of White's castle fill with indistinct,

malevolent forms. White's last move is an attempt to force order on that which is inherently chaotic.

His ragtag army is in no shape to defend or counterattack, predicated upon you finding the correct plan. How should Black continue the attack?

**Answer:** Elimination of a key defender. *Houdini* announces a forced mate in 14 moves.

**32 ... Rxd4!**

After a few playful stabs, Black begins to attack in earnest.

**33 cxd4 Bd3! 34 R3h2**

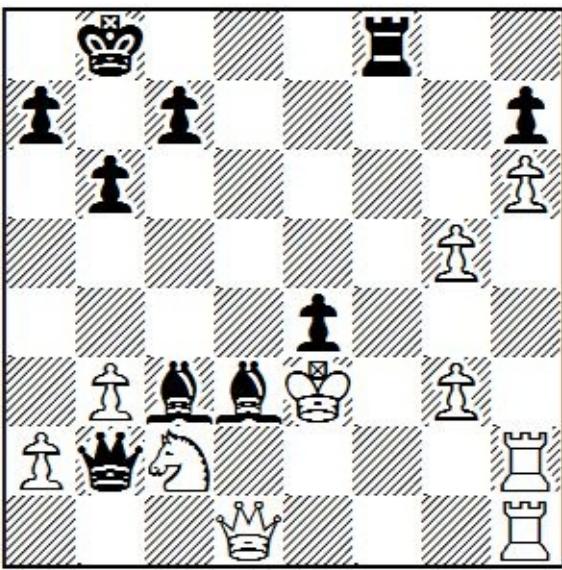
If 34 dxe5 Qxc2+ 35 Ka1 Qc3 mate.

**34 ... Bxd4**

Black's queen is about to slide into c3, after which nothing will save White's king.

**35 Qd1 Qc3 36 Kc1 e3**

Threatening mate on the move. Promising too is 36 ... Qb2+ 37 Kd2 Bc3+ 38 Ke3.



**Exercise (combination alert):** White's king begins to resemble the guy who kidnapped Liam Neeson's daughter in the movie *Taken* (and also *Taken 2*, which is pretty much the same movie), and then got himself blended into chutney by the enraged Mr. Neeson. Black to play and force mate:

**Answer:** Deflection: 38 ... Qc1+! (the mad queen believes herself wise beyond comprehension, a knower of all things, past present and future; strangely enough, it turns out she was right in her outrageous assumption) 39 Qxc1 (or 39 Rd2 Qxd2+ 40 Qxd2 Rf3 mate) 39 ... Rf3 mate.

### 37 g6

I said “Threatening mate on the ... ” Oh, never mind. Handing over a queen is the equivalent of mate.

### 37 ... Qb2 mate (0-1)

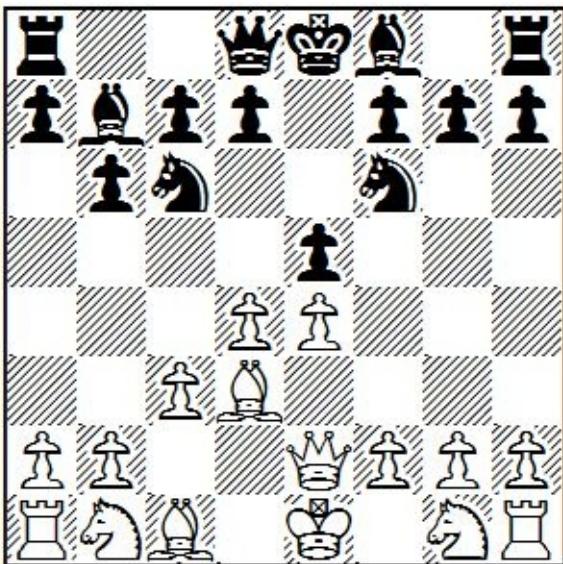
“Howdy! Welcome! Welcome neighbour to my country!” declares White’s nervous king to Black’s unwanted and uninvited queen, with a decidedly drooping smile.

**Summary:** The position after 7 Ng5 is an acquired taste and a tough sell for our side, and one really must love the joys and miseries of the French Defence to brave it. If you dislike what we get, then switch to the offerings of the next two chapters, which avoid it. To my mind we can still dare to enter the forbidden spheres after 7 Ng5, but I warn you: it isn’t going to be easy to negotiate the perilous passage out of the opening and arrive with a full skin. So let’s be thoroughly familiar with the defensive ideas. Also, remember to be careful if White plays an early Qe2, not to toss in a mistimed ... c5?!, which can be met with d5!, when White arrives in either a favourable Benoni or King’s Indian-style formation.

# Chapter Three

## Blatny's 'Ruy Lopez'

1 e4 b6 2 d4 Bb7 3 Bd3 Nf6 4 Qe2 Nc6 5 c3 e5

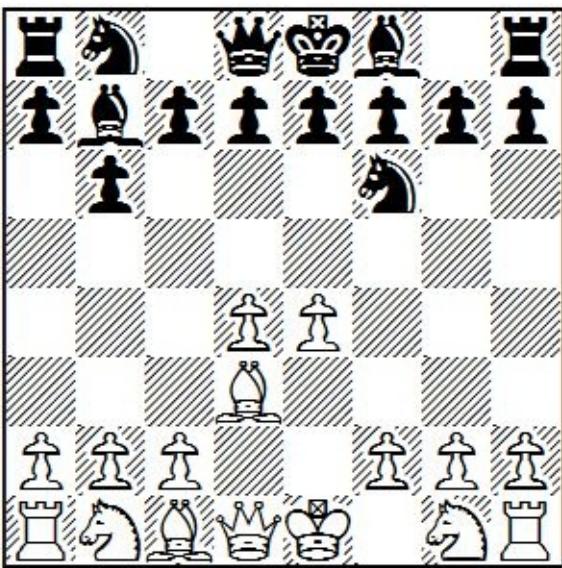


Well, at least sort of a Ruy Lopez hybrid. If we are honest with ourselves, we would admit that it is in chess creativity where our joy lies, not in the victory, as we all suppose. This is a case of contrasting stylistic interpretations. GM Pavel Blatny - a master of 1 ... b6 intrigue, always on constant alert to manipulate any situation to his liking - found an interesting way to dodge the scarier Chapter Two lines by guiding White into funky Lopez-like positions, by bringing out both knights early, then challenging White's central dominance with ... e5. By doing so, we most certainly thwart White's plans of the French-like positions from Chapter Two, and tell him: "Your wants and needs are irrelevant to my decision-making." If you have the Ruy Lopez, King's Indian or Old Indian in your theoretical background, then you may want to give Blatny's idea a try.

*Game 22*

**A.Shabalov-P.Blatny**  
New York (rapid) 2004

1 e4 b6 2 d4 Bb7 3 Bd3 Nf6!?



In this chapter we forego 3 ... e6. This is the entry way move order into Blatny's 'Ruy Lopez'.

#### **4 Qe2**

- a) 4 Nc3 e6 transposes to Chapter One.
- b) 4 Nd2 Nc6!? (4 ... e6 transposes to Chapter Two, but in this version we avoid the critical early Qe2 line, which I believe benefits us) and then:

b1) 5 c3 e5 6 d5 Nb8 (better than 6 ... Ne7 as Black's knight is vulnerable on g6, its eventual destination, after a timely g3 and h4) 7 Ngf3 d6 8 0-0 Be7 9 b4 0-0 10 Re1 c6 11 c4 a5 12 bxa5 Rxa5 13 Nb3 Ra8 14 a4 Nfd7 15 Bd2 Na6 and Black's control over c5 compensates for White's extra space, E.Sedina-B.Filipovic, Swiss League 2007.

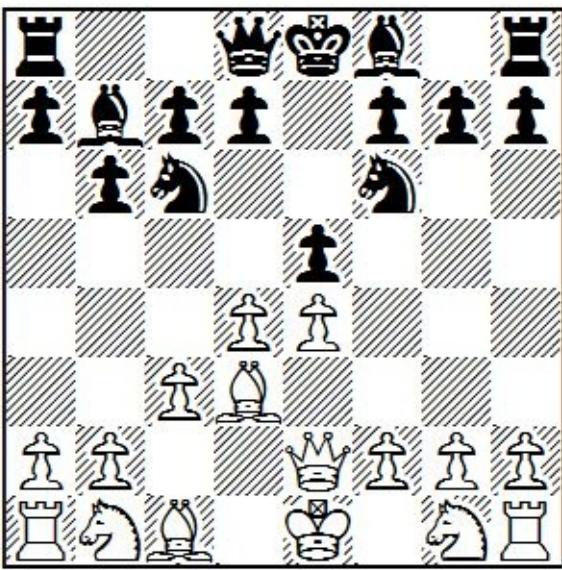
b2) 5 d5 Ne5 picks off the bishop-pair, since 6 Be2?! is too slow and Black gets the better game after 6 ... e6.

b3) 5 Ngf3 Nb4 6 Bc4! (White finds a tactical way to avoid the loss of the bishop-pair) 6 ... d5! (6 ... Nxe4?! 7 Nxe4 Bxe4 8 Bxf7+ Kxf7 9 Ng5+ Kg8 10 Nxe4 is in White's favour, since it will take Black a long time to untangle his kingside) 7 exd5 Nbxsd5 8 0-0 e6 9 Bb3 was J.Antoli Royo-C.Cossar, Biella 2013. Black looks okay after 9 ... Bd6!, reserving e7 for the d5-knight.

#### **4 ... Nc6**

"Dynamic stuff. A combination of the Owen's and the Knight's Tango! Blatny has been playing this recently against strong opposition so must have faith in this eccentric development," writes Glenn Flear. 4 ... e6 5 Nf3 d5 6 e5 Nfd7 7 Ng5 enters the line which stressed us out so much in Chapter Two.

#### **5 c3 e5**



We reach our starting position of Blatny's 'Ruy Lopez'. Black ceases hypermodernity and returns to classical play, laying claim to some of the pawn centre for himself.

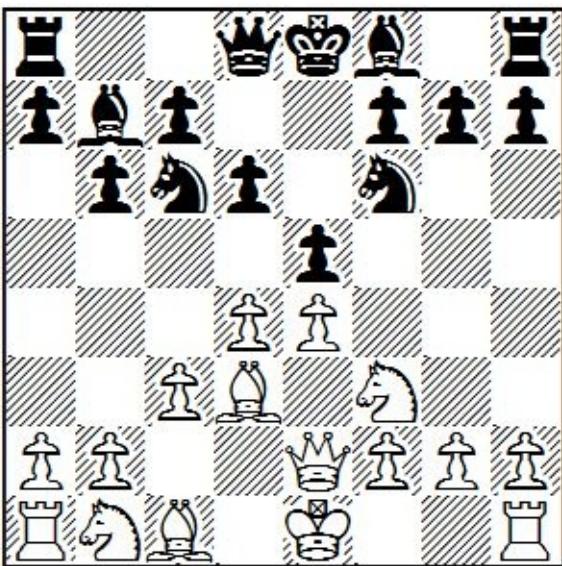
### **6 Nf3**

We examine White's main alternative 6 d5 in the latter part of the chapter.

**Question:** Can White make a gambit of it with 6 f4?

**Answer:** White won both games from the database after this gambit. *Houdini*, however, isn't impressed, and likes Black after 6 ... exd4 7 e5 Nd5 8 Be4. Now in M.Zelic-J.Milosavljevic, Stobrec 2007, Black missed the trick 8 ... dxc3!, after which he looks more than fine: 9 Bxd5 Nd4 10 Qe4 Bxd5 11 Qxd5 Nc2+ 12 Ke2 Nxa1 13 Nf3 Be7 14 Qe4 cxb2 15 Bxb2 0-0 16 Rd1 (or 16 Bxa1?! d5 when Black's two pawns and rook, plus development lead, plus rolling centre outweigh White's two knights) 16 ... Qe8 17 Bxa1 Rd8 18 Nc3 c6 19 Kf1 d5 20 Qc2 Qd7 where I prefer Black's rook and two central pawns over White's pair of knights after 21 f5 f6 22 e6 Qb7 23 Ne2 c5.

### **6 ... d6**



**Question:** I assume White will take space with an eventual d5. Is there a ‘best’ moment to play the move?

**Answer:** GM Flear answers: “There is no consensus as to when it’s most appropriate.”

7 0-0

7 d5 is also reasonable here and after 7 ... Nb8 White has:

a) 8 c4 g6 and we get a slightly offbeat King’s Indian Defence-style position:

1. White took two moves to achieve c4.

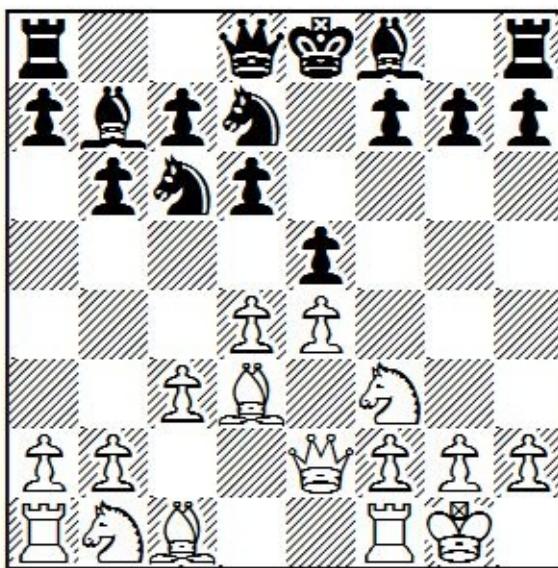
2. White’s queen may not be all that well placed on e2.

3. Black’s b7-bishop hits a wall on d5, and requires future re-posting back to c8.

Following 9 Nc3 Bg7 10 0-0 0-0 11 Bg5 (11 a3 a5 12 Bd2 Nbd7 13 b4 Nh5 14 g3 and White looks slightly better, with his normal queenside space, while Black may have a harder time achieving the ... f5 break) 11 ... h6 12 Bxf6!? (I wouldn’t have played this way; this idea to hand Black the bishop-pair is based on the theory that Black needs his knights to generate serious kingside play) 12 ... Bxf6 13 b4 Nd7 14 Nd2 Bg5 15 Nb3 c6! 16 a4 c5 17 bxc5 bxc5 18 Rfb1 a6 19 Qc2 Rb8 20 Nd2 Qc7 21 Nf3 Be7 22 Rb3 Ba8 23 Rab1 Rxb3 24 Rxb3 Rb8 25 Rxb8+ Qxb8 I already prefer Black, who can play on the dark squares on both wings, D.Vigorito-A.Ivanov, Boxborough 2005.

b) 8 a4 c6 9 dxc6 Nxc6 10 Bg5 Be7 11 Bxf6 (White ruthlessly chops away defenders of d5, and the position begins to take on the feel of a Philidor’s Defence, or a Sicilian Pelikan) 11 ... Bxf6 12 0-0 0-0 13 Rd1 Ne7 14 Ba6 (a swap of light-squared bishops leaves Black with a bad remaining bishop) 14 ... Bc6 15 c4! (clamping down on Black’s intended ... d5 break) 15 ... Ng6 16 g3 Be7 17 Nc3 f5! (Black hopes to generate play down the f-file) 18 Nd5 was T.L.Petrosian-A.Minasian, Yerevan 2011. Black looks like he gets sufficient kingside play after 18 ... f4.

7 ... Nd7



**Question:** What is the idea behind this unforced retreat?

**Answer:** Blatny borrows an idea of Paul Keres, in his line of the Closed Lopez, where Black plays ... Nd7, ... Be7 and ... Bf6 to induce resolution of the centre. Likewise, after 7 ... Be7 8 a3 (after 8 d5 Nb8 9 a4 c6 10 c4 Na6 11 Nc3 0-0 12 b3 Nc5 13 Bc2 a5, L.Kritz-V.Kunin, Griesheim 2003, Black gets a decent-looking Old Indian-style position, since White was induced into creating a hole on b4) 8 ... 0-0 9

b4 Nd7 10 Be3 Bf6 11 Nbd2 Ne7 Black can eventually go for ... g6, ... Bg7 and can think about ... f5 at an appropriate moment. Here 12 dxe5 Nxe5 13 Nxe5 Bxe5 14 Rac1 was M.Popchev-P.Blatny, Brno 2005. Black can try 14 ... Ng6 15 f4 Bf6 intending ... Re8 next, with a decent position.

### 8 a4

White gains useful queenside space. Other possibilities:

a) 8 Na3 Be7 9 Be3 Bf6 10 Rfd1 0-0 11 Rac1 Kh8 12 Bb1 Rg8 13 b4 g5!? (I like this idea to generate kingside counterplay) 14 b5 Ne7 15 dxe5 Nxe5 16 Nc4 N7g6 17 Nfxe5 Bxe5 18 Nxe5 Nxe5 19 a4 Qe7 20 Bd4 f6 21 Ba2 Rg6 22 Bd5 Bxd5 23 exd5 g4 24 Qe3 Re8 when I prefer Black, who can build up for a kingside attack, while I don't see a plan for White other than awaiting events, V.Epishin-P.Blatny, Bastia (rapid) 2003.

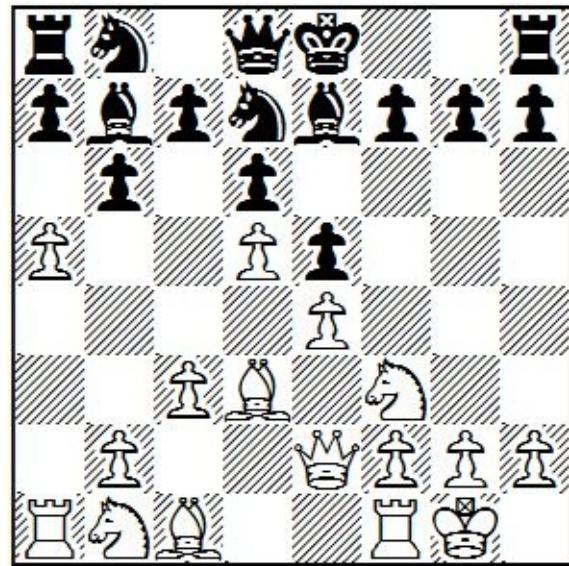
b) Next game we look at 8 Ba6.

### 8 ... Be7

Blatny's move looks like an improvement over 8 ... a5?! 9 d5 Ne7 10 Bb5! h6 11 Nbd2 Ng6 12 b4! Be7 13 bxa5 Rxa5 14 Nc4 Ra7 15 Be3 0-0 16 a5 Nc5 17 Bxc5! Nf4 18 Qc2 bxc5 19 a6 Ba8 (unfortunately forced, since 19 ... Bc8? is met with 20 Na5!) 20 Na5 with a paralysing bind on the queenside light squares, G.Kamsky-P.Blatny, New York (rapid) 2004. This game is annotated in *A Ferocious Opening Repertoire*.

Instead, Flear suggests 8 ... a6!? in order to meet a future a5 with ... b5.

### 9 d5 Ncb8 10 a5



### 10 ... bxa5!

For now, the queenside represents a vast no man's land, with neither side claiming full territorial rights. Blatny refuses to allow a6 to hang over his head forever and decides to resolve pawn tension.

### 11 Be3!?

Maybe Shabalov intuited that he would regain the pawn with advantage. As it turns out, White must labour to regain his not-so-temporarily sacrificed pawn. Perhaps he was better off playing 11 Rxa5, which is met with the tempo-gaining 11 ... c6 12 dxc6 Nxc6 13 Ra1. The position resembles a Philidor, with maybe just a slight edge for White.

### 11 ... c6 12 c4!?

Now Black gets a nice looking Old Indian-style position. White should play 12 dxc6 Nxc6 13 Rd1 0-0 14 Na3 Rb8 15 Bc4 Nf6 16 Qc2 Qc8 17 Nd2 Ba8, with about even chances.

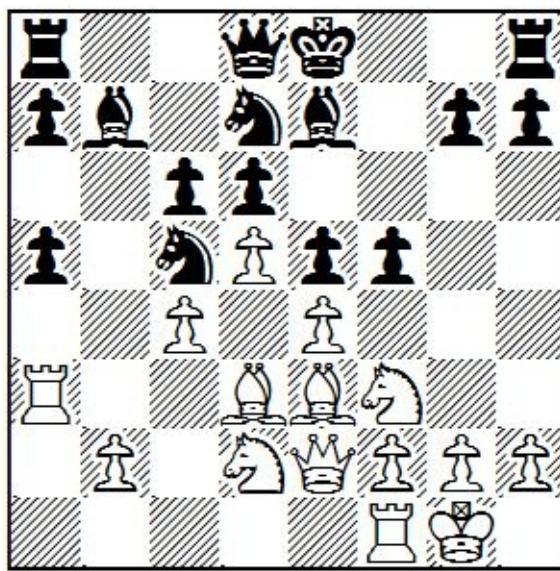
### 12 ... Na6 13 Nbd2

Intending Nb3 and Nxa5.

**13 ... Nac5**

Oh, no you don't!

**14 Ra3 f5!**



Blatny offers a pawn to dismantle White's imposing centre.

**15 exf5 0-0 16 Ne4!?**

Shabalov refuses to settle for 16 dxc6 Bxc6 17 Bc2 Rb8 (Black generates play down the b-file) 18 Nb3 Nxb3 19 Rxb3 a4 20 Rxb8 Qxb8 21 Rb1 Qb7 22 b3 axb3 23 Rxb3 Qc7 24 Ra3 a5 25 Ng5 Bxg5 26 Bxg5 a4, which looks dynamically balanced.

**16 ... Nxe4!?**

The correct move order 16 ... cxd5! 17 cxd5 Nxe4 18 Bxe4 Nf6 transposes to the game.

**17 Bxe4 cxd5 18 cxd5!?**

Shabalov misses an opportunity to seize control over the position. White should weaken his opponent on the light squares with 18 Bxd5+! Bxd5 19 cxd5 Rxf5 20 Rfa1. White stands better since Black is in danger of losing both a-pawns.

**18 ... Nf6 19 Bb1**

19 Ng5 Nxe4 20 Ne6 Qe8 21 Qg4 Qf7 22 Qxe4 Qxf5 looks fine for Black.

**19 ... Nxd5 20 Rd1 Kh8 21 Bd2**

Target: a5.

**21 ... Bf6 22 Rb3!?**

Ambition tends to scoff at boundaries. Shabalov, disregarding a5, as if extraneous waste kitchen scrap meant for the trash bag, balances on the threshold of a decision, not completely in and not quite out either. As it turns out, this was no inconsequential decision. I think he should go into salvage mode and clip it while he can with 22 Bxa5 Nf4 23 Qe3 Qd7 24 Bc3 Qb5 with an edge to Black, who controls the centre and also thinks about ... Ne2+, followed by ... Nxc3.

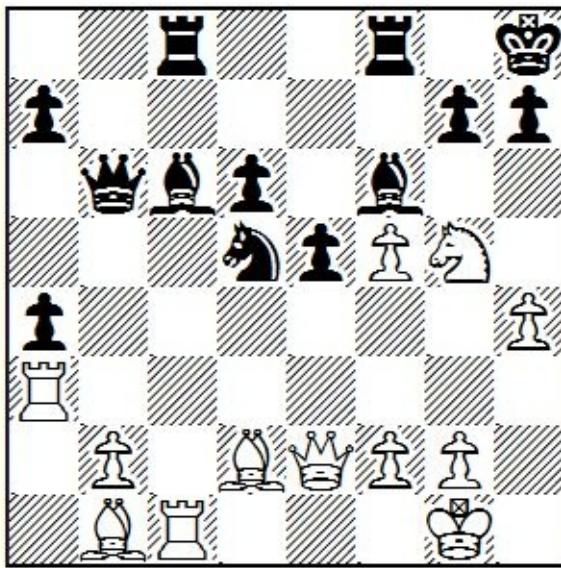
**22 ... Bc6 23 Rc1 Rc8 24 h4!?**

A masochist, by definition, welcomes pain. White continues to play as if he is the one with the advantage. He may later pay for the weakening of his king's front. Shabalov intends to erect a fence, with a clearly demarcated boundary, where White intends to own the kingside attacking chances. 24 Be4 Ne7 25 Bxc6 Rxc6 26 g4 Rxc1+ 27 Bxc1 Qc7 doesn't look particularly appetizing for White, but still looks better than the game's continuation.

**24 ... a4**

Now Black's doubled a-pawn looks rather permanent inside Black's bailiwick, and under the law, cannot be touched. It is reasonably well protected and ties White somewhat down to b2.

**25 Ra3 Qb6 26 Ng5!?**



White continues to hope, even though the stream of his initiative diminishes to a bare trickle. Shabalov refuses to go passive, avoiding 26 Ra2 Nf4 when Black takes over the initiative after 27 Bxf4 exf4 28 Rc2 Qb7.

**26 ... Qxb2 27 Ra2 Nf4!**

This clever zwischenzug prevents White's intended Qh5.

**28 Qg4!?**

It's all or nothing. White's hoped-for attack can be accurately described as institutionalized lawlessness. The adoring queen bares her deepest secrets to her soul mate, Black's king. She is somewhat disconcerted to hear his response: "Whatever", after which her half-hearted attempts fail miserably. White can try the line 28 Bxf4 Qxe2 29 Rxe2 exf4 30 Ba2 d5 31 Nf7+! Rxf7 32 Rxc6 Rff8 33 Rxc8 Rxc8 34 Bxd5 Bxh4 35 Re4 a3 36 Rxf4 Be7. I suspect it won't be so easy for White to hold the draw, despite (or perhaps because of) the opposite-coloured bishops, since that a3 passer ties White down.

**28 ... Qd4**

28 ... Qb5 29 Bxf4 Bd5! 30 Rac2 Rxc2 31 Bxc2 exf4 32 Qxf4 Qb2 33 Bxa4 Be5 34 Qe3 Bd4 is decisive, since 35 Qe1 is met with the overload shot 35 ... Bxf2+!.

**29 Be3 h5!**

A sudden counterattack creeps up, wrapped in a shroud of anonymity. Now White's dream of attack begins to spit up blood. With this move, Blatny ends White's kingside hopes.

**30 Qg3**

The angered queen gesticulates wildly, like a deranged Bette Davis in one of her many huffy roles.

**30 ... Qd5!**

Target: g2. Black also threatens ... Qxa2! followed by ... Ne2+.

**31 Rac2**

31 Bxf4 exf4 32 Qh3 Ba8 33 Re1 Rc3! 34 Qh1 Rfc8 35 Rae2 Rc1 leaves White paralysed.

**31 ... Bb7**

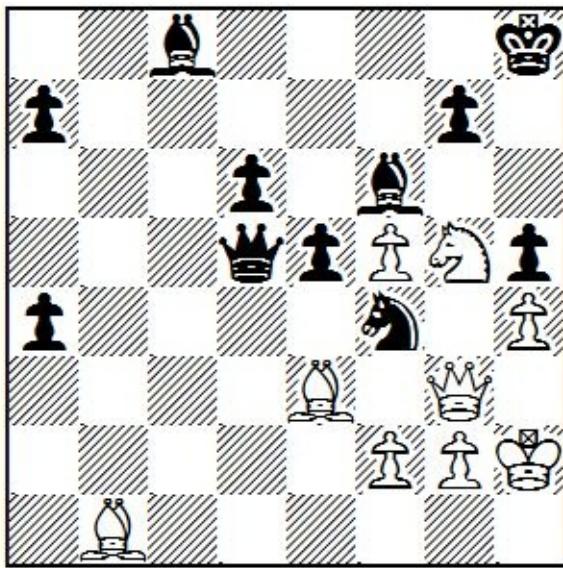
Eliminating all back-rank tricks. The bishop sternly disapproves of any public outburst of emotion which doesn't derive from a religious source.

### **32 Rxc8 Rxc8**

32 ... Ne2+ 33 Kh2 Bxc8 34 Be4 Nxg3 35 Bxd5 Nxf5 also gets the job done for Black.

### **33 Rxc8+ Bxc8 34 Kh2**

In order to evade ... Ne2+ fork cheapos.



**Exercise (planning/combination alert):** White's position is an old, punctured umbrella awaiting the storm. Find a clear conversion path for Black.

**Answer:** Weak back rank/simplification/double attack.

### **34 ... Ne2!**

Now ... Qd1 is a deadly threat.

### **35 Qh3!?**

Not all retreats are acts of contrition. White loses without a fight after 35 Qf3 Qxf3 36 Nxf3 Nc3 37 Bc2 a3 38 Bb3 a2.

### **35 ... Qd1**

Black's point: he threatens both mate on g1 and the hanging b1-bishop.

### **36 Nf7+ Kh7 37 f4 Qxb1 38 Ng5+ Kg8 39 Qf3**

Desperately trying to enter h5 or c6 with his queen.

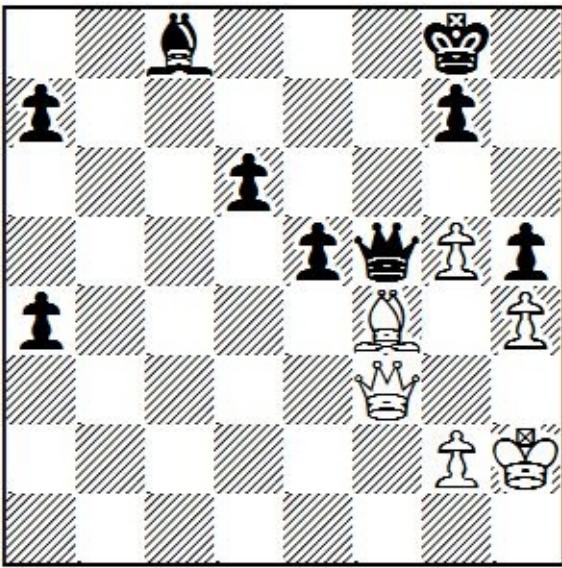
### **39 ... Bxg5**

There is no reason to enter 39 ... Qb5 40 Qxh5 Bxg5 41 fxg5 e4 which also wins for Black.

### **40 fxg5 Nf4!**

Few things in life are more infuriating than the uninvited guest, who not only refuses to leave, but is so unaware that he doesn't even know you want him to leave. Blatny forces a simple win in the ending, rather than risk 40 ... Qb5 41 g6. Black wins in this one as well, after 41 ... e4! and if 42 Qxh5 (42 Qxe4 Qe5+ also ends the game) 42 ... Qe5+ 43 Kh1 Ng3+, forking king and queen.

### **41 Bxf4 Qxf5!**



This trick forces a trivially won ending.

**42 Qd5+**

42 Bc1 Qxf3 43 gxf3 is every bit as hopeless for White as well.

**42 ... Qf7 43 Qxf7+ Kxf7**

Black is up three pawns in the ending and the opposite-coloured bishops won't help White in the least.

**44 Bc1 Bg4 45 Kg3 g6 46 Kf2 Ke6 47 Ke3 d5 0-1**

"White never did get his a-pawn back!" writes Flear.

**Summary:** The Blatny 'Ruy Lopez' line leads to positions akin to the Lopez and Old Indian.

### Game 23

**V.Baklan-P.Blatny**

Bastia (rapid) 2003

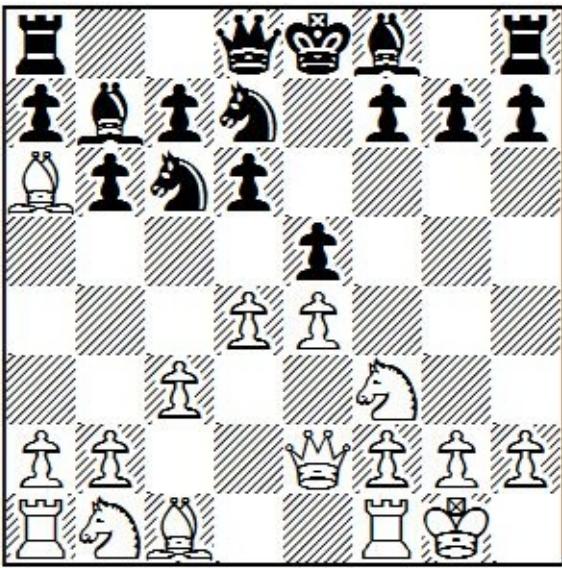
**1 e4 b6**

Compare our line to this one in the Steinitz Variation of the Ruy Lopez: 1 ... e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 d6 5 c3 Bd7 6 0-0 Nge7 7 d4 Ng6 8 d5 Nb8 9 c4 Be7 10 Nc3 0-0 11 Bxd7 Nxd7 12 g3. White stands a shade better due to his superior remaining bishop and his extra central space, V.Anand-N.Short, Monaco (rapid) 1993.

**2 d4 Bb7 3 Bd3 Nf6 4 Qe2 Nc6 5 c3 e5 6 Nf3 d6 7 0-0 Nd7**

7 ... a6!? is an unplayed idea of mine, which has the benefit of frustrating White's coming move. 8 Rd1 Nd7 doesn't look so awful for Black.

**8 Ba6!**



This is a bit of a soul-destroying idea against us 1 ... b6ers, who tend to prefer a rich battle.

**Question:** White just moved an already developed piece for the second time to swap. Why?

**Answer:** To switch the structure against Black's remaining bishop, who sits on the same colour as all of his central and queenside pawns. I think this may be one of White's best options versus Blatny's line, since the swap of bishops extracts some of the dynamism from Black's position.

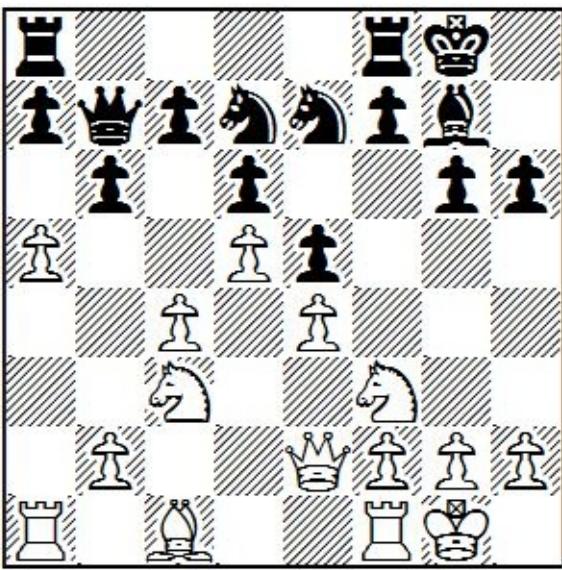
**8 ... Qc8 9 Bxb7 Qxb7 10 a4**

Instead, with 10 Na3 the knight may play to c4 and e3: 10 ... g6 11 Nc4 Bg7 12 dx5 (better than 12 d5 Ne7 and White's knight isn't so well placed on c4 anymore; Black can play for the ... 0-0, ... h6 and ... f5 plan) 12 ... dx5 13 Rd1 Rd8 14 b3 (White looks a bit better if he seizes queenside space after 14 b4! 0-0 15 a4) 14 ... 0-0 15 Ba3 Rfe8 16 Ne3 was H.Schmidt-O.Steffens, German League 2008. Black has a perfectly playable, if uninspiring position after 16 ... Nf6.

**Question:** Why not try and reach the same style of position Anand got against Short after 10 d5?

**Answer:** Believe it or not, nobody has ever tried this natural idea. Play may go 10 ... Ncb8. As I mentioned last game, I don't think e7 is such a great spot for this knight, and would rather try my luck on b8 and later try to re-route on d7. Following 11 c4 Be7 (Black can also try 11 ... g6 12 Nc3 Bg7 13 Be3 0-0 14 b4 a5 15 a3 h6 16 Qd2 Kh7 17 Rab1 Qc8 18 Rfc1 f5 19 exf5 gxf5 20 Nb5 Na6 21 Nh4 Qe8 22 Qe2 axb4 23 axb4; I still like White's position, although the game sharpened considerably and Black no longer suffers from a bad bishop) 12 Nc3 0-0 13 Be3 a5 14 b3 Na6 15 a3 White stands better, since Black, although quite solid, also appears a shade passive when deprived of his good light-squared bishop.

**10 ... g6 11 d5 Ne7 12 a5 Bg7 13 c4 0-0 14 Nc3 h6**



White reached a slightly favourable King's Indian-style position, sticking Black with a bad bishop and therefore reducing his kingside attacking chances.

**Question:** Why toss in ... h6?

**Answer:** To play ... f5 without fear of Ng5.

**15 Ne1**

This move is too slow and allows Black to equalize. I prefer the plan 15 a6! Qc8 16 Nb5, intending b4, Ba3, Rfc1 and c5. If 16 ... Nb8 17 Bd2 Nxa6 18 Rxa6 Qxa6 19 Nxc7 Qb7 20 Nxa8 Rxa8 21 Ra1 with a slight yet nagging strategic edge for White.

**15 ... Nc5 16 Be3 f5**

After 16 ... Nb3? 17 a6 Qc8 18 Ra3 Nd4 19 Qd2 Kh7 20 Bxd4 exd4 21 Nb5 f5 22 Nxd4 fxe4 23 Ne6 White has a strategically won game, since he owns a monster knight on e6 and the e4 straggler is doomed.

**17 Bxc5?!**

White would be better off editing this move. Now all which was beneficial in his position is now gone, and all which remains are the dregs. Black generates play along the opened b-file after this trade. Preferable are:

a) 17 Qc2 Nxe4 18 Nxe4 fxe4 19 Qxe4 c6! 20 dxc6 Qxc6 21 Qxc6 Nxc6 22 axb6 axb6 23 Nf3 Nd4 and Black equalized.

b) 17 axb6! axb6 18 Rxa8 Rxa8 19 f3 when b4 is coming and White looks a shade better.

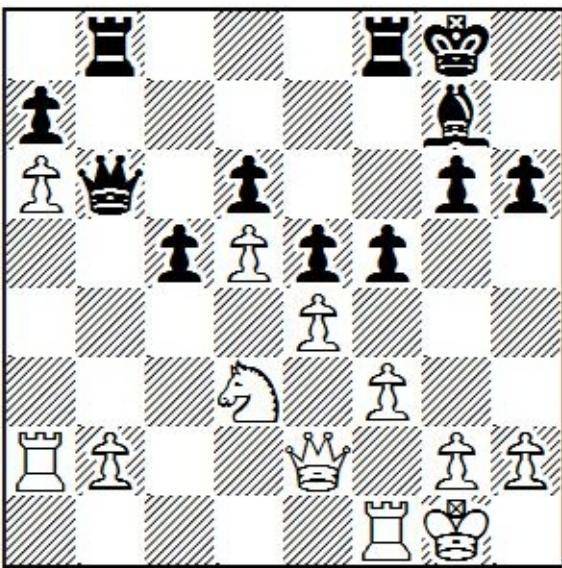
**17 ... bxc5**

Black's b-file is now open for business.

**18 a6 Qb6 19 Nd3 c6! 20 f3 cxd5 21 Nxd5?!**

To live one's life in an eternal state of vigilant preparation is to live an unhappy life. Now Black takes over the initiative. Maybe White should go into damage control mode with 21 exd5 Qb3 22 Nc1 Qb6 23 Ra3 Rab8 24 Nd3 e4! 25 fxe4 fxe4 26 Rxf8+ Rxf8 27 Nxe4 Bd4+ 28 Nef2 (28 Kh1? is met with 28 ... Bxb2! favourably regaining the lost pawn due to White's weak back rank) 28 ... Nf5 when Black gets excellent play for the sacrificed pawn since White is tied down to his weak back rank.

**21 ... Nxd5 22 cxd5 Rab8 23 Ra2**



**Exercise (planning):** In an overextended position, survival requires of us the skills of a contortionist. White finds himself tied down to both a6 and b2. How did Black considerably strengthen his position?

**Answer:** Black's not-so-bad bishop comes alive via the c1-h6 diagonal.

**23 ... h5! 24 Kh1 Qb5**

The queen, watching impassively from the sidelines, is ready to join the fight in a moment's notice.

**25 Rfa1 Bh6 26 Ra5 Qb6 27 R5a4 Qb3 28 R4a3 Qb5 29 Ra5 Qd7**

Blatny declines the draw against his higher-rated opponent.

**30 R5a4 Rb6**

Pressure mounts on both a6 and b2.

**31 Qc2?**

To shirk details when already in a critical situation is just asking to lose. This is merely another link in an endless chain of let downs. It was unwise to allow Black's bishop to transfer to a more powerful diagonal, although even after 31 exf5 gxf5! (superior to 31 ... Qxf5 32 Rc4 Rb3 33 Rc3 Rfb8 34 Rxb3 Rxb3 35 Nf2 when Black remains better, but White can take some comfort in the fact that his knight reaches e4) 32 Rh4 Qf7 33 b4 Rfb8 34 Qe1 Bg5 35 Rh3 h4 36 bxc5 dxc5 37 f4 exf4 38 Nxc5 Qxd5 39 Nd3 White remains tied down.

**31 ... Be3**

Of course. The bishop rules on the g1-a7 diagonal.

**32 exf5 Qxf5 33 Re1 Bd4**

There is no person in the world more self-congratulatory than the converted, repentant sinner. Just take a look at Black's formerly bad bishop now.

**34 Qe2 Rfb8**

As simple as that: b2 falls and White is busted.

**35 h3**

Or 35 Ra2 c4 36 Nc1 Rb4 and ... Bxb2 is next, with a winning position.

**35 ... Rb3 36 Rd1 h4**

Silence from an opponent can sometimes be more ominous than a violent reaction. There was nothing wrong with the prosaic 36 ... Bxb2 when b2 looks like the final withered rose of Autumn. I suppose

Blatny isn't interested in the table crumbs, when he envisions the prospect of so much more on the other side of the board.

**37 Rc4 Re8**

Worrying White about coming ... e4 ideas.

**38 Qc2**

38 Qe4 Qxe4 39 fxe4 Reb8 is hopeless for White as well.

**38 ... Reb8 39 Qe2**

White's queen dodges clear of the pin from her f5 sister, as if from a fearful contamination.

**39 ... Kg7 40 Rc2 Re8**

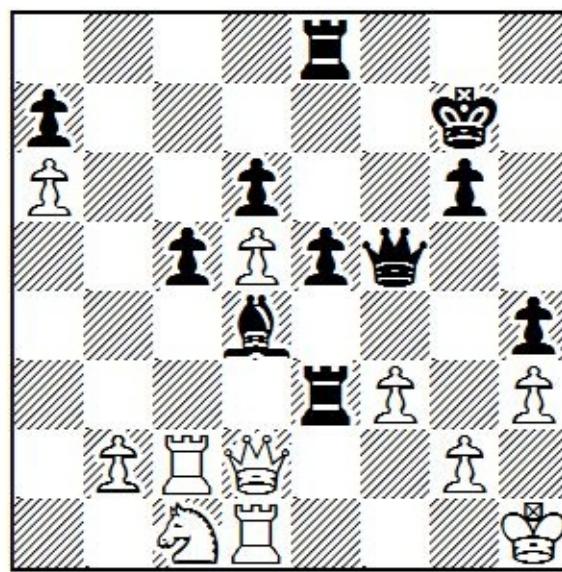
Blatny swings from wing to wing, making White dance to his threats.

**41 Nc1**

41 Kh2 e4 is hopeless as well.

**41 ... Re3 42 Qd2**

If 42 Qf2 e4 and 43 fxe4 can be met with 43 ... Rxh3+.



**Exercise (combination alert):** The white king's safety situation reminds us of the antiseptic perfection of the coffin. Black has two ways to dynamite a path to the position's stratum. Find one of them:

**Answer:** Demolition of king's cover/double attack.

**42 ... Rxf3! 0-1**

"My needs determine my ethics," whispers the rook, as he lays a cold blade to the startled f-pawn's throat. To play on with hope when all hope is in the past, is the art of ignoring the obvious. This intrusion ruins the white king's perfect world: 43 gxf3 Qxh3+ 44 Qh2 Qxf3+. Double attack, and the d1-rook falls with check.

42 ... e4 is also crushing after 43 fxe4 Rxh3+! 44 gxh3 Qxh3+ 45 Qh2 Qf3+, which is pretty much the same thing.

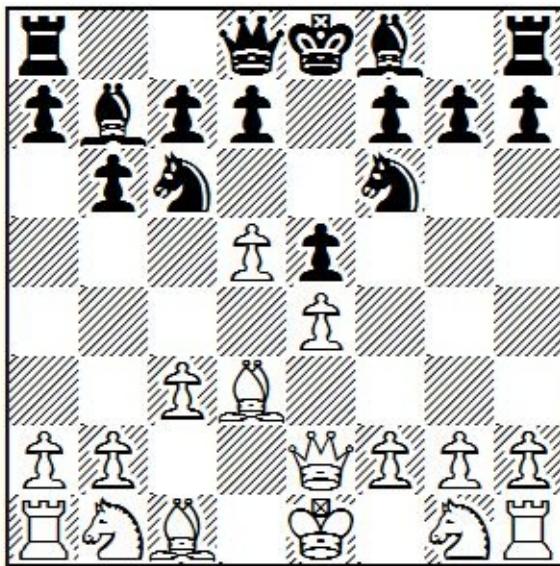
**Summary:** I prefer White's position after 8 Ba6, mainly because the line drains Black's side of some of its vitality, which looks like a slightly inferior King's Indian. If you really hate Black's position after the opening, then you may want to try my unplayed idea 7 ... a6. But if it doesn't work out, don't blame me, and just remember: there is a strict no refund policy on this excellent book!

*Game 24*

**A.Stein-A.Ivanov**

Connecticut 2005

**1 e4 b6 2 d4 Bb7 3 Bd3 Nf6 4 Qe2 Nc6 5 c3 e5 6 d5**



This move is actually quite common, and White's second choice in the position. Glenn Flear calls the pawn thrust "an imprecision which already suggests that White was not prepared for Black's opening."

**Question:** Do you agree with him?

**Answer:** Somewhat. I do believe 6 Nf3 is White's most accurate move and think White is better off waiting for ... d6, before tossing in d5.

**Question:** What difference does it make when White plays d5?

**Answer:** If Black hasn't yet played ... d6, then he has options of posting his bishop on the more active c5-square, as in this game.

**6 ... Ne7!**

**Question:** In an earlier game in the chapter, you said that you preferred b8 for the knight. Why the sudden exclamation mark for e7 in this version?

**Answer:** This position is the exception. By playing to e7 and g6, Black avoids ... d6 and allows his bishop access to the more active c5-square.

**7 Nf3 Ng6 8 0-0**

Alternatively, 8 g3 c6! 9 c4 Bc5 10 Nbd2!? (I think c3 is the better square for the knight) 10 ... a5 11 Nf1 (White believes he has all day) 11 ... 0-0 12 Ne3 b5! (Ivanov begins to dismantle White's impressive centre) 13 dxc6 Bxc6 14 cxb5 (14 Nd5 bxc4 15 Nxf6+ Qxf6 16 Bxc4 h6 17 0-0 Rab8 also looks quite pleasant for Black, but this is better than the game's continuation) 14 ... Bxe4 15 Bxe4 Nxe4 16 0-0 d5 when Black took over both the centre and the initiative, A.Bennett-A.Ivanov, New Hampshire 2000.

**8 ... c6!**

It is in Black's best interest to force White to play c4 to post a bishop on c5.

**9 c4**

Maybe White should opt for dullard mode with 9 dxc6 dxc6 10 g3, with an equal game.

**9 ... Bc5**

"With a dynamic posting thanks to the premature d4-d5," writes Flear. I still think the position is close to balanced.

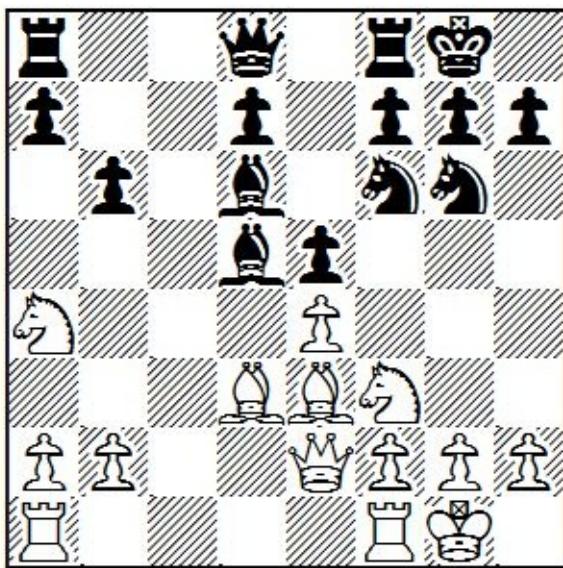
**10 Nc3 0-0 11 Na4!?**

Misposting his knight to chase away the well-placed bishop isn't of much help. 11 g3 h6 12 Bd2 Rc8 13 Rac1 Re8 14 a3 Bd4! 15 Kg2 Qe7 looks like a better way for White to maintain equality.

**11 ... Bd6 12 Be3**

Stein plays for a c5 break and queenside expansion. However, Ivanov reacts vigorously, denying White his intent.

**12 ... cxd5 13 cxd5 Bxd5!**



"You, who in the past, have taken so much from me, must realize that the universe demands a balance," the bishop informs the d5-pawn. Health and longevity on the chess board are attained through a single magical trait: alertness. Black decides the play's rehearsal must be interrupted by a costume change. White must play very carefully to remain equal after this pseudo-sacrifice. The move is based on the philosophy: if you wield arms and point them at an enemy, then you should engage.

**14 exd5 e4 15 Nc3?!**

White plays with a spirit of resignation to remaining slightly worse after this inaccuracy. Better to try 15 Bxe4 Nxe4 16 Bxb6! axb6 17 Qxe4 Re8 18 Qd4 Nf4 19 Nc3 (I like Black's initiative over White's not-so impressive pawn in the line 19 Qxb6?! Qf6 20 Nc3 Rab8 21 Qa6 Nh3+ 22 Kh1 Rxb2 23 Nd1 Rbb8 24 Rc1 g6) 19 ... Ne2+ 20 Nxe2 Rxe2 21 Rae1 Rxe1 22 Rxe1 Rxa2 23 g3. I think White should be fine here.

**15 ... exf3 16 Qxf3**

The strategically awful 16 gxf3?? isn't to be considered, since Black has a winning attack after 16 ... Nh5.

**16 ... Ne5 17 Qe2 Neg4!**

I think Black's edge is larger the way Ivanov played in the game, rather than after 17 ... Nxd3 18 Qxd3 Ng4 19 g3 Nxe3 20 Qxe3 f5 21 Qd4 Bc5 22 Qa4.

## 18 h3 Nxe3 19 Qxe3

White must lose more time. 19 fxe3? Qe7 is just strategically great for Black, who rules the dark squares.

## 19 ... Re8 20 Qf3 Be5! 21 Rac1 Rc8

Advantage Black:

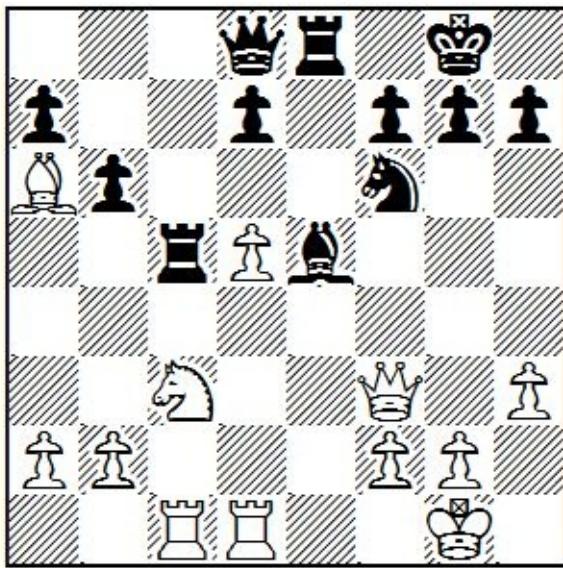
1. Who clearly got the better deal with the opposite-coloured bishops, since White gets stuck with the d5-pawn, on the same colour of his remaining bishop.

2. Black threatens ideas like ... Rc5, which not only pressure d5, but threaten to add further heat on c3, with ideas like ... Qc7.

## 22 Ba6!?

Bowing to necessity is a kind of self-preserving intelligence, stamped into our DNA. This appears to be a dearly bought life insurance policy. White begins to place his pieces awkwardly to keep a tight rein on d5. After 22 Rc2 Rc5 23 Rfc1 Qb8 24 g3 Bxc3 25 Rxc3 Rxd5 26 Rc7 b5 27 b4 a6 I don't believe in White's compensation for the pawn, but I still prefer this version over the game's continuation, since at least in this one White holds a mild initiative.

## 22 ... Rc5 23 Rfd1



**Exercise (planning/combo alert):** Ivanov discovered a very strong plan which reveals White's hidden weakness. How would you continue as Black here?

**Answer:** Interference/double attack.

## 23 ... b5!

Cutting the bishop off from the rest of White's forces.

## 24 d6!

This stopgap solution is necessary. The d6-pawn is left on its own recognizance, allowing both Bb7 and Qb7 ideas. White finds the only move to remain afloat:

a) 24 Bxb5?? Bxc3 wins a piece.

b) 24 Nxb5?? (the con artist's perfect mark is the one who seeks to acquire something for nothing; remember this next time you set up a cheapo) 24 ... Rxc1 25 Rxc1 Qb6! 26 Qa3 Ne4! wins, since 27 Rf1 is met strongly with 27 ... Bg3 or 27 ... Nc5, both of which win.

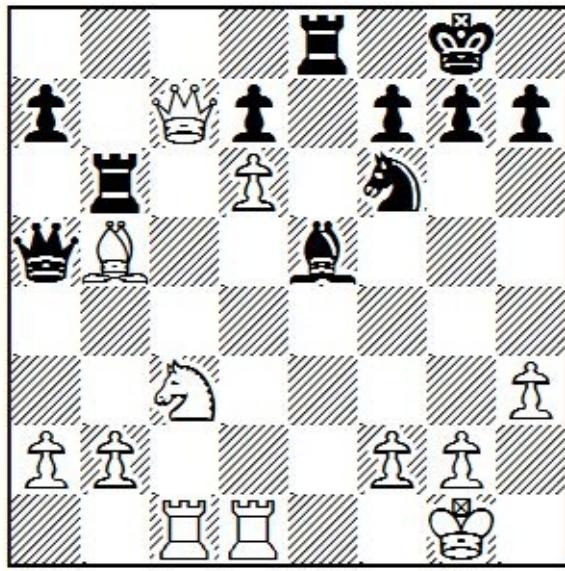
## 24 ... Qa5 25 Qb7

After 25 Bb7 b4 26 Ne4 Rxc1 27 Rxc1 Qxa2 28 b3 Qb2 29 Rd1 g6 Black has both an extra pawn and also the initiative

25 ... Rc6

The rook looks as nervous as a would-be teen shoplifter, just moments before the commission of his first crime. This is okay for Black, but stronger is 25 ... b4! 26 Ne2 Bxb2 (we have been warned that money is the root of all evil, so then why is it that we all delight when it comes our way?) 27 Rxc5 Qxc5 28 Qc7 Qe5 29 Qxa7?? Qa5! 30 Qb7 Qxa2, which is a completely winning position for Black, since the passed b-pawn ties White up.

**26 Bxb5 Rb6 27 Qc7**



**Exercise (critical decision):** Power can either construct or demolish. Black has a choice of two tempting continuations: a) 27 ... Bxc3, intending to take b5 next. b) 27 ... Rxb5, picking off two pieces for the rook. Which one would you play?

**Answer:** The two pieces for the rook is the correct path.

27 ... Rxb5!

Black is led astray if he gets greedy and goes for the full piece with 27 ... Bxc3?? 28 Bxd7!. After this powerful zwischenzug, White is the one winning, due to his powerful passed d-pawn.

**28 Nxb5 Qxb5 29 Qxa7 Qxb2 30 a4**

It looks like White may generate play with his passed a-pawn after all, but this is an illusion, since Black can go directly for mate.

30 ... Qb4?!

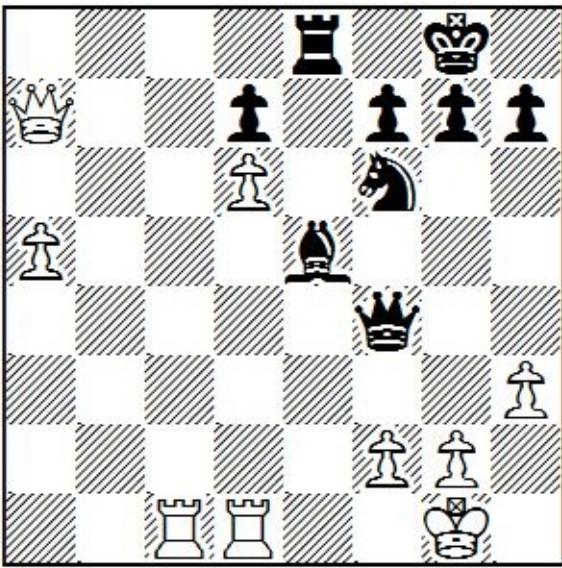
Inaccurate. Ivanov's purpose wavers slightly:

- a) 30 ... Bxd6 is possible.  
b) Even stronger is 30 ... g6! making luft for his king: 31 Rb1 Qc2 32 Rbc1 Qf5! 33 a5 Ne4 34 Re1  
7 35 Qe3 Bb2 36 Rc7 Qxa5 and ... Nxd6 follows, with a winning position.

31 a5?!

31 Rb1!, and if 31 ... Qf4 32 g3 Qf3 33 Re1 g6 34 Rb8 Qd5 35 Qb7 when Black is the one tangled and fighting for the draw.

31 ... Qf4!



Now Ivanov targets White's king, forcing concessions around the pawn front.

### **32 g3 Qf3**

After 32 ... Qg5 33 Qc5 h5 34 Rc4 Qg6 35 Re1 Bxg3 36 Rxe8+ Nxe8 37 fxg3 Qxg3+ 38 Kf1 Nxd6 39 Rc2 Qxh3+ 40 Kg1 White may be able to hold the position, due to his passed a-pawn.

### **33 Qe3?!**

33 Re1 Ne4 34 Qe3! Qxe3 35 Rxe3 f5 36 Kg2 Bd4 37 Re2 Ra8 38 Rc7 Rxa5 39 Rxd7 Bc5 40 Rb2 Ra8 41 Rbb7 Bd4 42 Rb5 Bxf2 43 Rdb7 Bxg3 44 Rb8+ Rxb8 45 Rxb8+ Kf7 46 d7 Bc7 47 d8Q Bxd8 48 Rxd8 Kf6 should be drawn.

### **33 ... Qa8!**

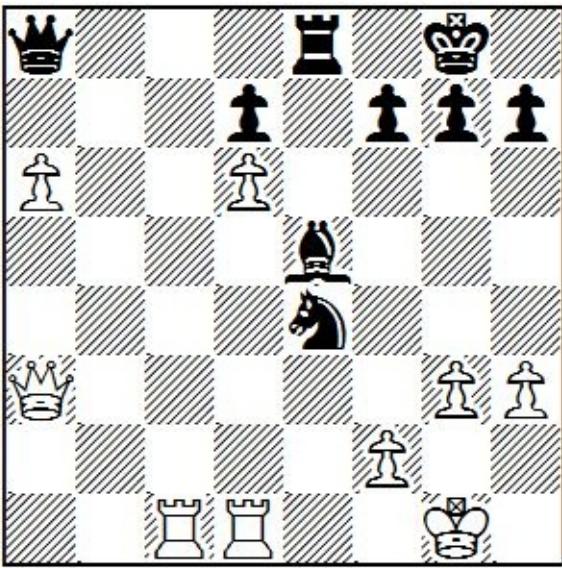
How Retiesque. Black posts his queen on a dominant square, while blockading and slowing White's a-pawn.

### **34 Qa3 Ne4!**

When Black's queen and knight get together, collusion is in the air. Ivanov jumps at the core of his idea, which is a direct assault on White's king.

### **35 a6?**

35 Qf3 Bxd6 36 Rd4 Bf8 37 Rxd7 Nf6 38 Qxa8 Rxa8 39 Rb7 Rxa5 40 Rc8 (Rcc7 is in the air) 40 ... Re5 41 Kg2 h6 42 h4 g6 43 Ra7 Rf5 and Black's two pieces for the rook constitute a serious advantage, but a win? Not so easy.



**Exercise (planning):** After 35 a6? Black has access to a crushing idea. What is it?

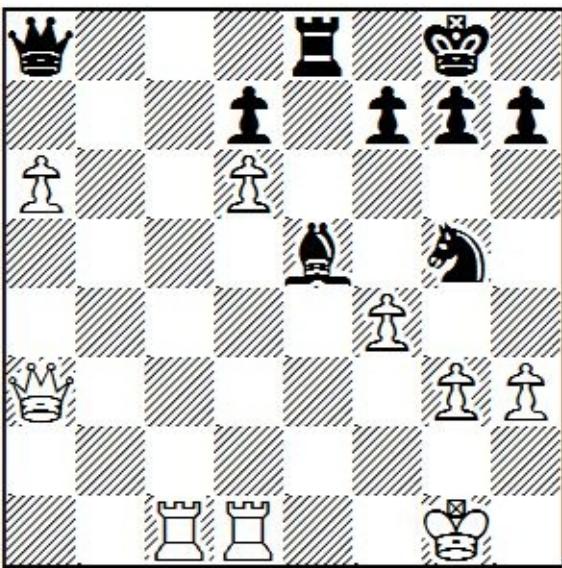
**Answer:** Obliterate the light squares around White's king.

**35 ... Ng5!**

The knight's dextrous manipulations yield rich fruit and White's king is squeezed in multiple directions by unrelenting forces.

**36 f4**

36 h4 Nf3+ 37 Kf1 Nxh4! is also crushing. The king attempts to break the awkward silence by opening with pleasant mention of the weather, but notices that he fails to break the ice with Black's angry queen.



**Exercise (combination alert):** Before us is the anatomy of a collapse and only the flimsy barrier of a semi-transparent muslin sheet separates Black from his goal:

**Answer:** Double attack. The bishop is covered by the f3 fork.

**36 ... Bd4+!**

White's king isn't exactly effervescent with joy at the thought of his relative's extended visit. Suddenly, every black piece participates in the attack.

**37 Rxd4**

Everything else loses as well.

**37 ... Nf3+**

37 ... Nxh3+ leads to a forced mate in eight, but we humans would all give check on f3.

**38 Kf2 Nxd4**

Threat: ... Re2+.

**39 Re1 0-1**

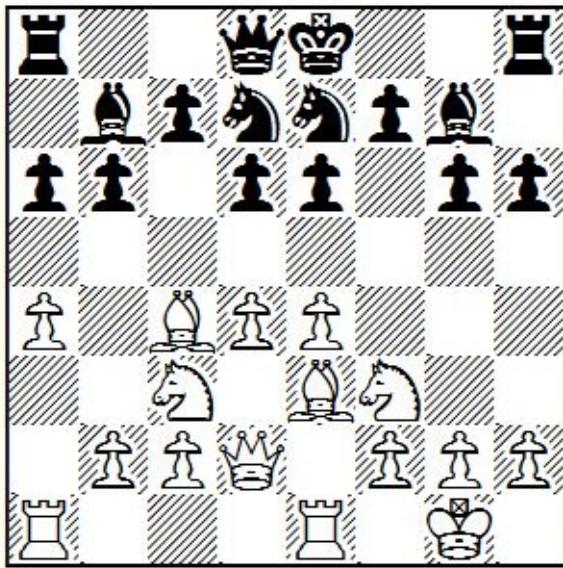
If 39 ... Rxe1 40 Kxe1 Nc2+.

**Summary:** Although 6 d5 is played often, it may be inferior to 6 Nf3, since it allows Black's bishop early access to c5.

# Chapter Four

## Hippopotamus Lines

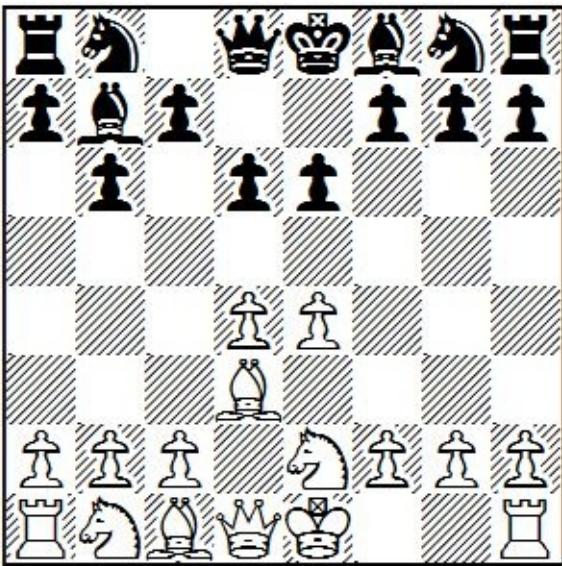
In this short, optional chapter, we cover crossover Hippopotamus lines. Now the key for entering them is when White opens with either a passive or an *anomalous set-up*. *For example:*



This is my game versus NM Bruce Baker. White set up solidly, yet non-threateningly. So a Hippo works well here. White owns central space, yet each attempt to open with e5 or d5 will be frustrated with the blocking bypasses ... d5 and ... e5. White often finds this war cannot be won by remote control and drone attacks. He or she needs boots on the ground as well. But where exactly is the battleground?

This is the elusive Hippo's strength: we keep our opponents constantly guessing just where and when we are going to strike back. On appearance it looks as if Black must deal with multiple contingencies, which in an instant, can move from the hypothetical to the here-and-now. The facts just don't bear it out. In my experience with this line, which is perfect against natural attackers, it is White who tends to generate frustration trying to punish Black for our lack of space.

The second diagram is Kogan-Spassky. Black responded to White's offbeat Ne2 with ... d6, immediately switching to the Hippo formation.



If you have experience with Modern Defence - from which the Hippo is a slippery offshoot - you may want to give it a try just to mix it up and throw off your opponents.

### *Game 25*

**A.Kogan-B.Spassky**

Corsica 1997

In *The Colle: Move by Move*, I wrote the following: “Stylistically, Spassky is ill-suited in the extreme to be the flag bearer for Owen’s Defence and its hypermodern musings.” After viewing this game, I take it all back and wholeheartedly retract my statement with deep contrition.

**1 e4 b6 2 d4 Bb7 3 Bd3 e6 4 Ne2!?**

This move is a little odd but not so terrible. White keeps f3 options open to protect his e-pawn, and also keeps the path clear for his f-pawn, enabling f4-f5 ideas later on.

**4 ... d6!**

**Question:** This looks strange. What is Black’s intended set-up?

**Answer:** Spassky, seeing an odd arrangement from White, decides to enter the Hippopotamus set-up, which is to fianchetto both bishops, and develop knights on d7 and e7.

**Question:** If this is the case, then isn’t it more accurate for Black to first play ... g6 and ... Bg7?

**Answer:** Actually, I think Spassky’s move order is the more accurate one, for two reasons:

1. By avoiding ... Bg7, he can meet f4 and f5 with ... gxf5 and ... e5!, which opens the g-file for Black, without a blocking bishop on g7.
2. By avoiding an early ... g6, Black keeps options open for a Hedgehog-like set-up, with ... Nd7, ... Ngf6, ... Be7, ... 0-0 and ... c5.

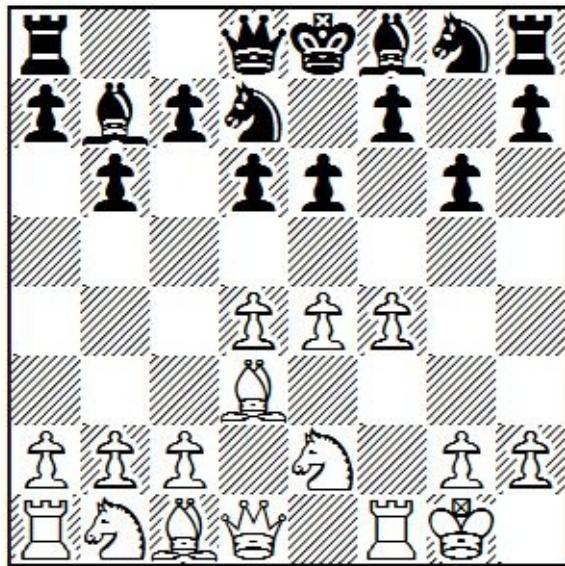
After 4 ... g6 5 0-0 Bg7 6 c3 d6 7 Nd2 Nd7 8 Ng3 (maybe White should push for f4 and f5 while she can, with 8 f4 Ne7 9 f5!? exf5 10 exf5 0-0 11 Ng3 Nf6, although Black looks okay here as well) 8 ... h5?!

(this weakens Black's future kingside castling; White probably expected 8 ... Ne7 which looks better than Spassky's move) 9 h3 Ngf6 10 Re1 0-0 11 Nf3 Nh7 Avoiding Bg5. 12 Be3 e5 13 Qd2 Qe7 White looks better since the h5-pawn may later become a sacrifice target, Xie Jun-B.Spassky, Tallinn 1998.

### 5 0-0 Nd7 6 f4!?

Clearly, White enters punishment mode, probably thinking that this move prevents ... g6, due to the f5 break. After 6 c3 Ngf6 7 Nd2 c5 (this is an example of the Hedgehog-like set-up for Black, made equal by the fact that White's knight is slightly misplaced on e2, rather than the normal f3-square) 8 Re1 Be7 9 a3 Qc7 10 b4 0-0 11 Bb2 Rfd8 Black looks just fine, Y.Shabanov-N.Gaprindashvili, Satka 2004.

### 6 ... g6!?



Anyway. Spassky is unafraid of White's f5 break, and proceeds with his Hippo set-up.

### 7 f5!?

Some plans are issued effortlessly, but then not so easy to execute. Restraint never feels as honourable as spirited defiance, yet so often on the chess board, the former is necessary, while the latter routinely leads us to ruin. Believe it or not, this natural move is new in the position.

**Question:** Why give such a natural move a dubious mark. It looks to me like Black is behind in development and in deep trouble with the f-file opening.

**Answer:** An attack is a meaningless entity if we lack the material basis to launch our dream. Ah, but the f-file isn't opening. Just watch what happens. Andrew Martin writes: "He [Kogan] really wants to punish Spassky for messing around, but it's here the advantage of delaying ... Bg7 comes to the fore and 7 f5 is revealed as premature aggression."

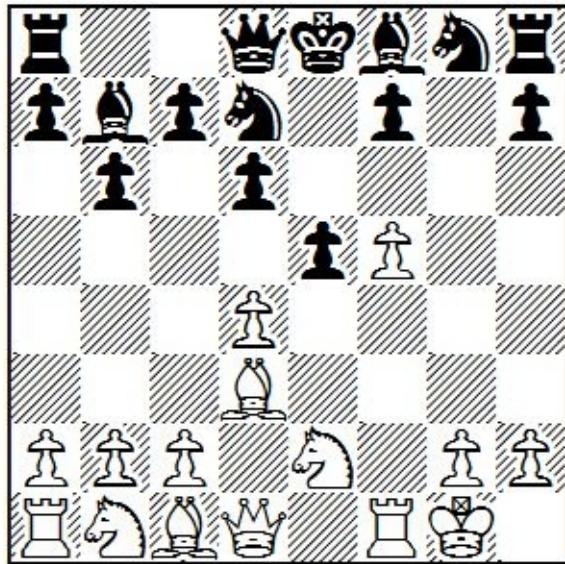
Preferable white options:

a) 7 Be3 Bg7 8 Nd2 (8 f5 is still met with 8 ... gxf5 9 exf5 e5!) 8 ... Ne7 9 c3 was L.Kuling-D.Van Dooren, Venlo 2007. Black can even think about tossing in 9 ... f5!? 10 Qb3, which can be met with 10 ... Nf6! 11 Qxe6 fxe4 12 Bb5+ (12 Nxe4?? Nxe4 13 Bxe4 d5! and if 14 Bc2 Bc8 snags White's queen in mid-board) 12 ... Kf8 13 Ng3 a6 14 Be2 Qe8! and Black actually stands better due to his powerful light-squared central control. Moreover, White is still unable to recapture e4: for example, 15 Ndx e4?? Bxe4! 16 Nxe4 Nf5! 17 Ng5 h6 and Black wins a piece.

b) 7 c4 turns the game into a kind of King's Indian Four Pawns Attack hybrid, where White's passive e2-knight allows Black reasonable chances: 7 ... Bg7 8 Nbc3 (8 f5 is once again met with 8 ... gxf5 9 exf5

e5!) 8 ... Ne7?! (Black is okay after 8 ... Nh6! 9 f5 gxf5 10 exf5 Rg8! threatening ... Bxd4!, followed by ... Rxg2+: 11 d5 Nxf5 12 Bxf5 exf5 13 Ng3 Bxc3 14 bxc3 Qh4 15 Rf4 Qf6 16 Rxf5 Qe7 and Black will castle queenside, with a sharp position) 9 f5!, S.Marton Bardocz-F.Schibuola, correspondence 2009. This is the correct timing of the move and White looks clearly better with his extra space after 9 ... e5 10 d5 gxf5 11 exf5 Ng8 12 Ng3 Ngf6 13 Bg5 Rg8 14 Nge4.

**7 ... gxf5! 8 exf5 e5!**



Advantage Black:

1. Who now controls the greater share of the centre, while menacing ... e4.
2. The f-file doesn't open after all, which was White's undoubted intention with pushing his pawn to f5.
3. White's pawn push to f5 clearly isn't the 'Open Sesame' incantation he searched for, to magically open lines to Black's king. Only Black's g-file remains open, giving him the attacking chances.

**9 Ng3 Ngf6**

There is no reason to get greedy and allow White an initiative after 9 ... exd4?! 10 Re1+ Ne5 11 Bf4 Qe7 12 Bb5+.

**10 Nc3**

"Kogan doesn't really know what to do and lurches on with his 'attack,'" writes Martin. On 10 dxe5 Black may consider 10 ... Nxe5 (or 10 ... dxe5 which frees his dark-squared bishop) 11 Bb5+ c6 12 Be2 d5 13 Kh1 Rg8 14 Bf4 Bd6, preparing ... Qc7, followed by ... 0-0-0, with the superior position.

**10 ... exd4 11 Nce4 Be7 12 a4**

Kogan plans to pre-empt Black's queenside castling plans by attacking on that wing. Spassky's next move frustrates this idea.

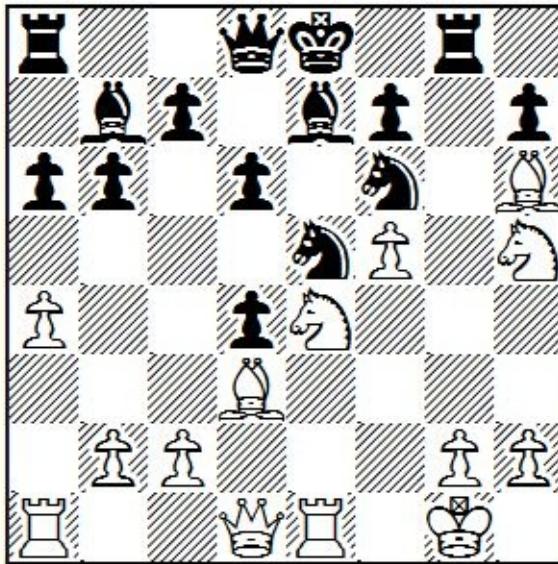
**12 ... a6! 13 Re1 Rg8??!**

Inaccurate. Black should play 13 ... Ne5 14 Nxf6+ Bxf6 15 Be4 d5 16 Bf3 Qd6 17 Bf4 0-0-0 18 Nh5 Rde8 19 Kh1 Bd8 20 f6 Rhg8, and now 21 Qe2?! is met by 21 ... d3 22 cxd3 Nxf3 23 Bxd6 Rxe2 24 Rxe2 Nd4 25 Re7 Nf5 26 Ba3 d4! 27 Re2 Ne3 28 Rg1 Rg5 29 Ng3 Bxf6 with powerful compensation for the exchange.

**14 Nh5?!**

Returning the favour. 14 a5! b5 was called for and then 15 Qe2!. White has compensation for the pawn after 15 ... Rb8, and not 15 ... Ne5? which is met with the tricky 16 Bxb5+!, and if 16 ... axb5?? 17 Qxb5+ Bc6 18 Nxf6+ Bxf6 19 Qxc6+. Oops. Black's knight is pinned and unable to recapture.

14 ... Ne5 15 Bh6



**Exercise (planning):** Before implementation, a plan is an abstraction, more than a goal. On the surface it appears as if Black's king is in trouble, since it is impossible to castle queenside. Come up with a powerful defensive plan for Black.

**Answer: 15 ... Kd7!**

Castle by hand. This move connects Black's rooks, while breaking potential trouble for Black's king on the e-file. Black's king is a lot safer than he looks.

**16 Nxf6+ Bxf6 17 Qh5**

The queen, like Narcissus before her, falls in love with her own reflection in a pool of water. She shivers at the prospect of her future glory. Unfortunately, the future turns out a bit differently than she imagined.

**17 ... Rg4!**

Threat: ... Rh4. Also, ... Qe7 and ... Rag8 is in the air, with a strong attack.

**18 Rad1?**

This loses by force. White, by now into an action of monumental excess, ignores the ... Rh4 threat at his peril. Alternatives:

a) 18 Bd2?! Qe7 19 g3 Rag8 20 Kf1 Nxd3 21 cxd3 Bxe4 22 Rxe4 Rxe4 23 dxe4 c5 with a winning position for Black.

b) 18 g3 is ugly, but is White's best move. After 18 ... Qe7 19 Nf2 Rgg8 20 Be4 Bxe4 21 Nxe4 Rae8 Black stands better with his extra pawn, but White can fight on.

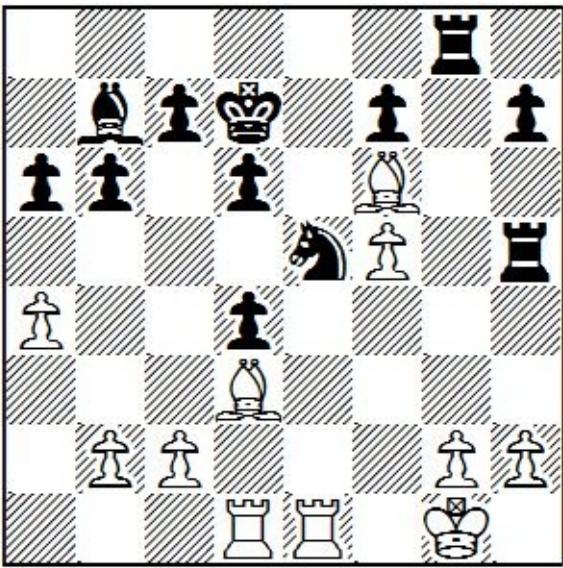
**18 ... Rh4**

Winning. White's queen is a bit taken aback by the rook's uninhibited display of affection. "I find your aspirations of grandeur uncontrollably funny," laughs the rook, as he slaps White's unamused queen on the back. The rook move extracts a stern tribute from White, who is now forced to enter emergency mode.

**19 Nxf6+ Qxf6 20 Bg5**

Kogan counted on this trick. Spassky assessed the aftermath more accurately.

**20 ... Rxh5 21 Bxf6 Rg8**



The press of bodies against g2 and f3 tangles the defence. As simple as that. White, who emerged from the melee with only the shirt on his back and little else, doesn't have time to defend and loses material in every line.

## **22 Bxe5**

Otherwise:

a) 22 Be4 Bxe4 23 Rxе4 Nf3+ 24 Kf2 Nxh2 25 Re7+ Kc6 threatens ... Ng4+ and ... Nxf6. Now if 26 Bxd4 Rxf5+ 27 Kg1 (losing g2 is also hopeless for White) 27 ... Nf3+ 28 Kh1 (28 Kf2 Nxd4+ wins) 28 ... Rh5 mate. White's king feels the blade's entry, realizing his life concludes in a wet, sticky death.

b) 22 Re2 Bf3! winning the exchange. I suspect that Kogan overlooked this trick in his analysis.

c) 22 g3 Rxg3+! is even stronger than forking on f3. Now if 23 hxg3 Rh1+ 24 Kf2 Ng4+ (the rook, knight and bishop's elegant pavane moves steadily closer to White's king) 25 Ke2 Rh2+ 26 Kf1 Rf2+ 27 Kg1 (the king's pitiful whimpering and dainty nose blowing doesn't do much for the morale level of his exasperated defenders) 27 ... Rg2+ 28 Kf1 Nh2 mate.

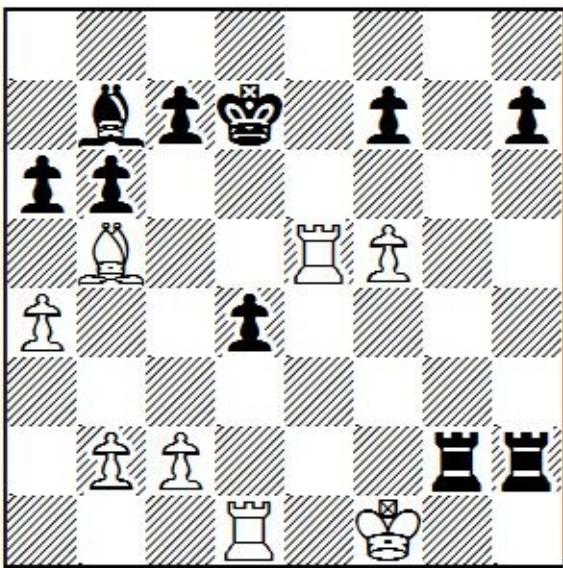
## **22 ... Rxg2+**

The use of a blunt instrument implies sudden, volcanic fury from the killer's side.

## **23 Kf1 dxе5 24 Rxе5 Rhxh2**

Threat: ... Rh1 mate.

## **25 Bb5+**



**Exercise (combination alert):** White's last move was absolute desperation. He banked on the line 25 ... axb5 26 Rxd4+ when he regains his sacrificed piece (although he is busted anyway). How did Spassky cross White's plans?

**Answer:** Double attack. Black threatens ... Rh1 mate, while White's e5-rook hangs.

**25 ... Kd6! 0-1**

"You have offended one whose station is far above yours. Naturally, there will follow unpleasant consequences," the king informs White's rook. White probably prayed for the cheapos 25 ... axb5 26 Rxd4+ Kc8?? 27 Re8 mate and 26 ... Kc6?? 27 axb5 mate, which would be a dream come true, although even here after 26 ... Bd5! 27 Rxd5+ White is still losing.

**Summary:** Our signal to enter the Hippo is when White makes some odd developing arrangement, such as posting a knight on e2, rather than the normal f3-square.

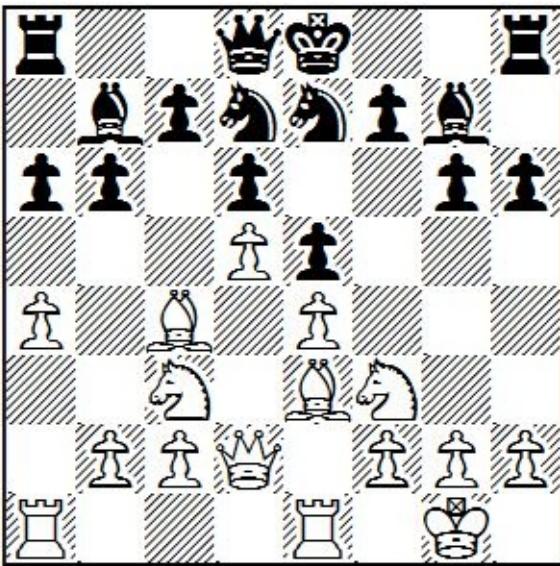
### Game 26

**J.Shaw-A.Martin**

British League 2004

**1 e4**

1 d4 g6 2 e4 Bg7 3 Nc3 d6 4 Bc4 e6 5 Nf3 Ne7 6 0-0 a6 7 a4 b6 8 Be3 is a set-up similar to the Shaw-Martin game: 8 ... Bb7 9 Qd2 h6 (oh, no you don't; Black prevents ... Bh6) 10 Rfe1 Nd7 11 d5?! e5.

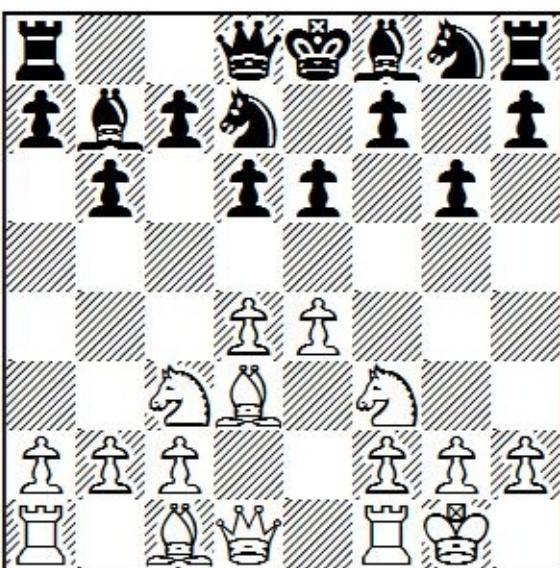


Our rule of thumb: bypass any pawn push to the fifth rank with a push of our pawn to the fourth to keep the centre closed: 12 Qe2 0-0 13 Rad1 (White's pieces, although centralized, have nothing to do) 13 ... f5 14 exf5 gxf5 (White has little to no counterplay in the centre and on the queenside, while Black leisurely builds for a kingside attack) 15 Bc1 Ng6 16 g3 Nf6 17 Nd2 Bc8 (rerouting the bishop in the direction of White's king) 18 Nf1 Kh8 19 f4 Rg8 20 Kh1 Bb7 (back to the old diagonal, since White's king looks rather uncomfortable on h1) 21 fxe5 dxe5 22 Kg1 Qd7 23 Ne3?! (23 Nd2 is better, but White is still in bad shape) 23 ... f4 24 Ng2 Qh3 25 Rd3 Ng4 26 Nh4 Nxh4 with a winning attack for Black, L.Sussman-C.Lakdawala, San Diego (rapid) 2012. Note that 27 gxf4 fails to trap Black's queen: 27 ... Nf3+! 28 Rxf3 Qh4 when White's king is caught in a crossfire.

1 ... b6 2 d4 Bb7 3 Nc3 e6 4 Nf3 d6!?

Black once again prepares for the Hippo. 4 ... Bb4 is the pathway to Chapter One.

**5 Bd3 Nd7 6 0-0 g6**



This is not such a scary Hippo for Black, with white knights posted on c3 and f3.

**Question:** Why shouldn't Black be nervous?

**Answer:** White began positionally and modestly. In this position, there is no easy method for White to open the position.

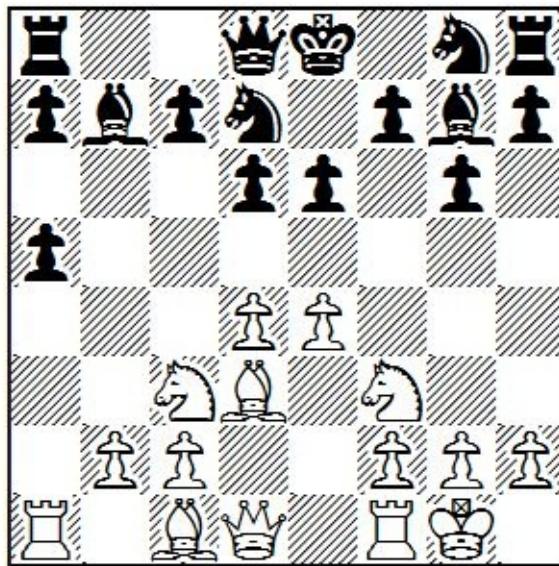
### 7 a4 Bg7?!

Not caring tends to be synonymous with not doing. Inaccurate. Black should toss in 7 ... a6 to meet a5 with ... b5: 8 Bg5 (common, but an early Bg5 tends to help Black gain a useful ... h6 tempo) 8 ... Ne7 9 e5?! (this looks premature) 9 ... h6 10 Bh4 Bg7 11 Ne4!? (in for a penny ... White speculates, offering a pawn to open central lines; Black looks slightly better in the line 11 exd6 cxd6 12 Ne4 Qc7 13 Bxe7 Kxe7 14 Qe1 Rhd8) 11 ... dxe5 12 dxe5 g5 13 Bg3 Nf5 14 Re1 Nxg3 15 hxg3? (White had to try 15 Nxg3 g4 16 Nd4 Nxe5 17 Be4) 15 ... g4 16 Nh2 was K.Shashikant-B.Murali Krishnan, Aurangabad 2011. White's position is quite wretched after 16 ... h5, as e5 falls without an iota of compensation.

### 8 a5!

More principled than 8 Be3?!, which allows Black to course-correct with 8 ... a6.

### 8 ... bxa5?!



A tiny offence, when compounded upon a daily basis, can take on monumental proportions in the eyes of the victim, inducing them well past restraint's precipice.

**Question:** Why did Black agree to weaken his structure like this?

**Answer:** Black's last move is admittedly risky, but he didn't want an eternal a6 push hovering over him.

### 9 Be3 Ngf6 10 Nd2!

The knight always has a wicked expression on his face when someone catches him thinking. Triple purpose:

1. White covers against ... Ng4.
2. White plans Nb3 and Nxa5.
3. White clears the path forward for his f-pawn.

### 10 ... 0-0 11 Nb3 c6 12 Nxa5 Qc7 13 f4

Now Black must be on the lookout for both e5 and f5 breaks.

### 13 ... Rab8 14 Qe2?!

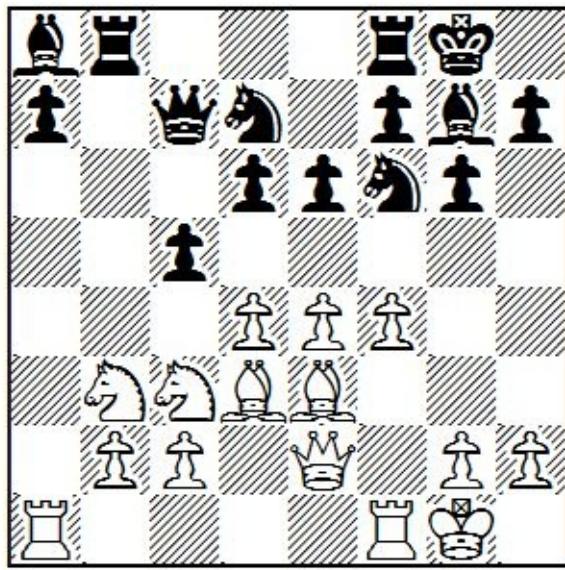
White overestimates his a5-knight. He should take on b7 to grab the bishop-pair and apply some pressure on a7: 14 Nxb7! Rxb7 15 Na4 Nb6 16 b3 Nxa4 17 Rxa4 Nd7 when White has the bishop-pair, a

strong pawn centre and the possibility of piling up on a7.

**14 ... Ba8!**

Not giving White a second chance.

**15 Nb3 c5!**



**Question:** Doesn't this move weaken Black further?

**Answer:** Black's coming activity outweighs the fact that he takes on an isolani with the move.

**16 dxc5**

After 16 Nb5!? Rxb5! 17 Bxb5 Nxe4 *Houdini* likes White, but I feel that Black gets full compensation for the exchange, picking up a pawn and breaking up White's centre.

**16 ... dxc5**

Black's structure suffers yet another smudge on c4, yet his heightened activity level compensates.

**17 Ra2**

The principled move, securing b2. White rejects a pawn offer with 17 e5 Nd5 18 Nb5 Qb6 19 Nd6! (seizing control over c4) 19 ... Bh6 (opening possibilities of dirty tricks on e5 and even f4, followed by a ... c4 discovered check) 20 Ra6 Qc7 21 Nb5 Qb7 22 Rxa7 Qb6 23 c4 Nxe3 24 Qxe3 Bc6 25 Ra5 Ra8 26 Rxa8 Rxa8 when ... Ra2 is in the air and Black gets some compensation for the pawn.

**17 ... Rb4**

Adding heat to e4 and thinking about ... c4 tricks as well.

**18 Nd2 Qb8**

Menacing b2.

**19 Nc4**

This move allows some Black tricks. Others:

a) 19 Rfa1 Rxb2 20 Rxa7 Bc6 21 Nc4 Rb4 22 e5 Nd5 23 Bd2 Rb7 24 R7a6 Nxc3 25 Bxc3 Bb5 26 R6a5 Bxc4 27 Bxc4 Nb6 28 Ba6 Ra7 and Black looks okay, since 29 Rxc5?! is met by 29 ... Nd5 with threats on f4, c3 and also of ... Qb6.

b) 19 e5 Nd5 20 Nxd5 exd5 21 b3 Re8 when Black remains active.

**19 ... Nd5!**

This pseudo sacrifice frees Black's position.

**20 exd5 exd5 21 Nxd5??**

This is one of those positions which is a seething mass of indecision, where every option looks wrong. Now the advantage swings slightly to Black, whose pieces begin to generate ferocious activity. 21 Ne5 Nxe5 22 fxe5 d4 23 Bd2 dxc3 24 Bxc3 Rh4 is dynamically balanced.

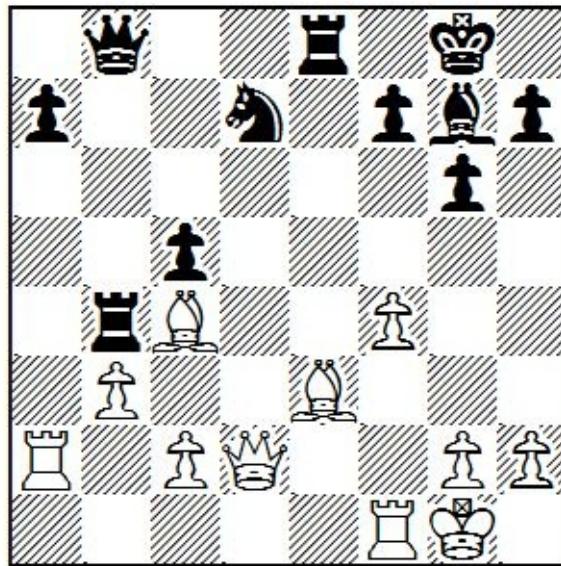
**21 ... Bxd5 22 b3?**

This move weakens d4 and now hope departs with no chance for return. Necessary was 22 c3 Rb7 23 Qf2.

**22 ... Re8**

Black threatens ... Bxc4, followed by ... Rxe3.

**23 Qd2 Bxc4! 24 Bxc4**



**Exercise (combination alert):** White pushed past the safety zone of an already precarious restraint. Black has access to two strong continuations. Find one of them.

**Answer:** Exchange sacrifice/weak back rank.

**24 ... Rxc4!**

After this shot, Black's dreams leave the realm of thought and gel into physical reality. Also winning is to reverse the order with 24 ... Rxe3! 25 Qxd7 Rxc4! 26 bxc4 Bd4, transposing to the game continuation.

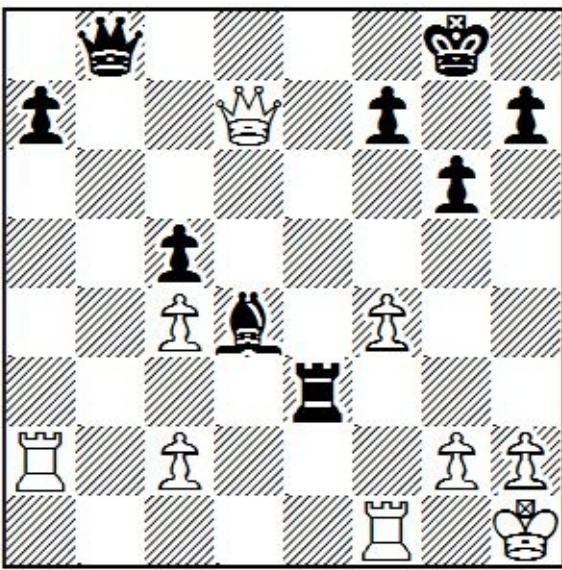
**25 Qxd7 Rxe3 26 bxc4**

26 Rxa7?? walks into 26 ... Rxf4 27 g3 Bd4! 28 gxf4 Qxa7! 29 Qxa7 Re7+, winning a piece.

**26 ... Bd4**

"The payment for your many sins will be collected at the gates of hell," the bishop warns White's king. The bitter wrangling over control of the dark squares ends in Black's favour.

**27 Kh1**



**Exercise (combination alert):** Now comes the point of Black's combination. Do you see his coming shot?

**Answer:** Weak back rank.

**27 ... Qxf4! 28 Raa1**

White regrettably returns material. 28 Rd1 is met with 28 ... Qf2, threatening back rank mates on e1, and if 29 h3 Re1+ 30 Rxe1 Qxe1+ 31 Kh2 Bg1+ 32 Kh1 Bf2+ 33 Kh2 Qg1 mate.

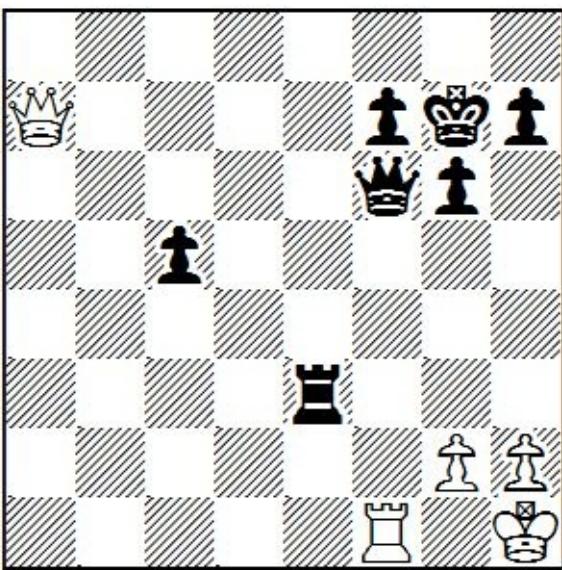
**28 ... Bxa1 29 Rxa1 Qxc4 30 Qxa7 Qxc2**

Black is up two clean pawns and I have no choice but to call upon the annotator's cliché: the rest is technique.

**31 Rf1 Qc4**

Covering f7, while attacking f1.

**32 Qa8+ Kg7 33 Qa1+ Qd4 34 Qa7 Qf6!**



Little tactics burst, like Fourth of July fireworks. Ah, yes, the old back rank again.

**35 Kg1 Qe7 36 Qa1+ f6 37 h3 Re2**

Getting White nervous about g2.

**38 Kh1 Qe5 39 Qa7+ Kh6**

Black's king, safe and snug on h6, contemptuously brushes aside his sister's nagging, as if lint on a brand new suit.

**40 Qf7 Re1**

Simplification. The queen ending is an easy win two pawns up.

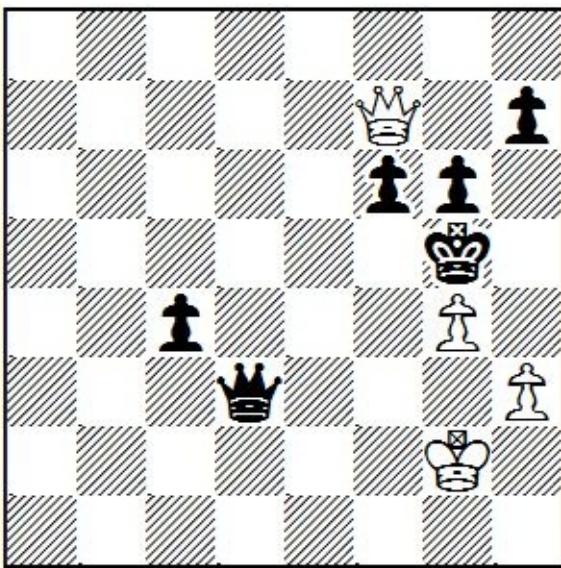
**41 Rxe1 Qxe1+ 42 Kh2 Qe5+ 43 g3**

43 Kh1 Qd4 and the c-pawn begins to roll forward.

**43 ... Qe2+ 44 Kg1 Qd1+ 45 Kf2 Qd4+ 46 Kf3 c4**

The c-pawn moves itself to the head of the queue.

**47 g4 Qd3+ 48 Kg2 Kg5!**



The h7-pawn isn't important. This move prevents any h4 and Qf8 mate cheapos White may have intended.

**49 Qf8**

The drama queen flounces out of the room in a huff. After 49 Qxh7 c3 Black's king is safe and the c-pawn continues forward.

**49 ... Qe2+ 50 Kg3 Qe3+ 51 Kg2**

Life isn't easy for White's king, under his sister's dictatorial command.

**51 ... c3 52 Qc8 Kh4**

White is about to drop his entire kingside.

**53 Qc7 Qxh3+**

Queen and king utter silent thoughts of malice to the other.

**54 Kf2 Kxg4 0-1**

**Summary:** When White plays a4, always toss in ... a6 to meet a5 with ... b5 (even though Black got away with his inaccuracy in this game).

*Game 27*

**B.Baker-C.Lakdawala**

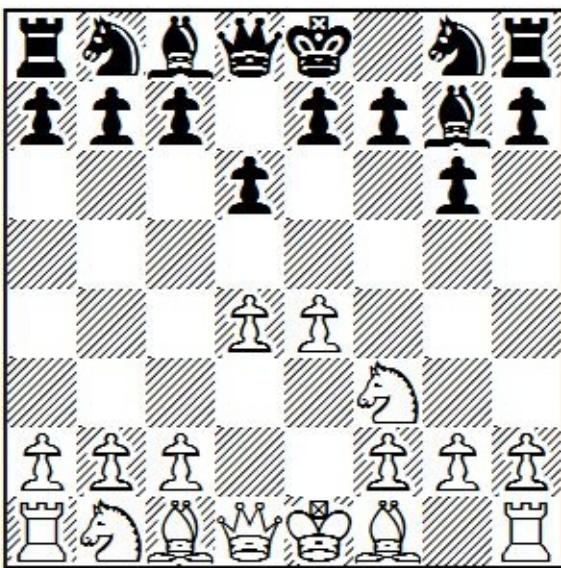
San Diego (rapid) 2013

**1 Nf3 g6**

**Question:** Did you misfile this game, which belongs in a Modern Defence book?

**Answer:** Please strive to remain calm. Our Hippo set-up can be reached through various openings. We soon transpose.

**2 e4 Bg7 3 d4 d6**



**4 Nc3**

Some other Hippos:

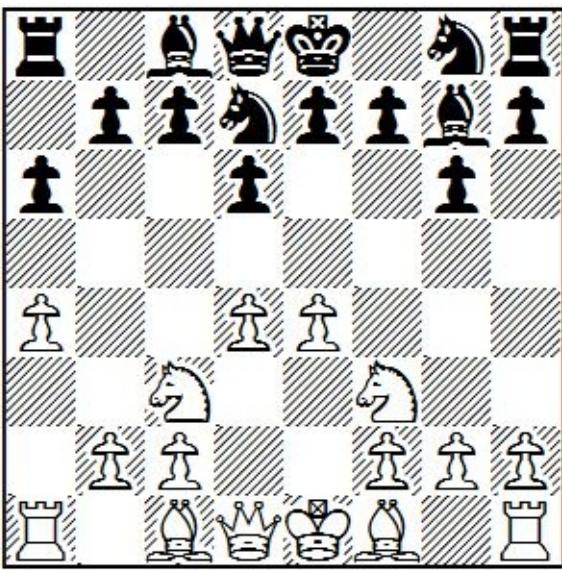
a) 4 h3 a6 5 a4 b6 6 Nc3 Bb7 7 Be3 Nd7 8 Qd2 e6 9 Be2 h6 (okay, here we are; you can easily get a position like this from the 1 ... b6 Hippo move order) 10 0-0-0!? (bold, bordering on reckless) 10 ... Ne7 11 h4 b5! 12 Bd3 (12 axb5?! axb5 13 Bxb5? Ra1+ 14 Nb1 Bxe4 works out in Black's favour) 12 ... bxa4 (Black seeks to open queenside lines) 13 Nxa4 Nf6 (going after e4 and thinking about ... Ng4) 14 d5!? (everyone is confident against the Hippo; White speculates with a pawn sacrifice to open central lines) 14 ... exd5 15 exd5 Nxd5 16 Rde1 Kf8 17 h5 was B.Stamper-C.Lakdawala, San Diego (rapid) 2013. White only has fishing chances for the two pawns after 17 ... Nxh5.

b) 4 c3 Nd7 5 Bc4 (5 Bd3 is a better move) 5 ... e6! (Black reacts to White's lame opening by switching to a Hippo) 6 Bg5?! (a waste of time, as I mentioned so many times in this chapter, since Black later gains a tempo with ... h6 - a move he wants to play anyway) 6 ... Ne7 7 Nbd2 h6 8 Bh4 a6 9 a4 b6 10 Bd3 (an admission that the bishop was misposted on c4) 10 ... Bb7 11 h3 g5! 12 Bg3 Ng6 13 h4!? Nf4 14 Bxf4 gxf4 15 h5 and I slightly prefer Black, whose domination of the dark squares looks more significant than White's on the light, C.Lakdawala-P.Graves, San Diego (rapid) 2011.

**4 ... a6 5 a4**

Suppressing ... b5.

**5 ... Nd7**



5 ... b6 discourages a5 and, with hindsight, is probably what I would play today.

### **6 Bc4**

Watch out for cheap shots on f7.

**Question:** You didn't bother tossing in ... b6 last move. How would you respond to 6 a5?

**Answer:** With something like this: 6 ... e6 7 Bg5?! (the universal inaccuracy) 7 ... Ne7 8 Be2 h6 9 Be3 d5! (Black switches formation where White's a5 doesn't make all that much sense) 10 0-0 0-0 11 Bf4?! (11 Qd2 makes more sense) 11 ... g5 12 Bg3?! (he should just return to e3) 12 ... dxе4 13 Nxe4 f5 (the Noah's Ark trap, which White probably allowed, intending to sacrifice) 14 Nxg5 hxg5 15 Nxg5 Rf6 16 Bc4 Nf8 17 Be5 Rg6 when Black's king looks safe and I don't see full compensation for White, M.Romanko-T.Gelashvili, Paleochora 2009.

### **6 ... e6**

Entering the Hippo. 6 ... b6?? walks into 7 Bxf7+ Kxf7 8 Ng5+ and Black either loses his queen or gets mated.

### **7 0-0 Ne7 8 Bg5?!**

A common inaccuracy against the Hippo, which even GMs play on me in online blitz.

**Question:** Why a dubious for the natural move?

**Answer:** The move is essentially a tempo loss for White, since Black needs to play ... h6 sooner or later.

### **8 ... h6 9 Be3 b6 10 Qd2 Bb7**

10 ... g5?! intending ... Ng6 is also possible, when Black stakes out kingside dark squares at the cost of potentially weakening.

### **11 Rfe1**

The classical mind isn't impressed with the Hippo. I have a feeling that the sight of Black's contorted position would have sickened Fred Reinfeld. Even the hypermodern-rejecting *Houdini* gives White a near half pawn plus here.

### **11 ... Nf6 12 d5**

I like Black's chances at the end of the variation 12 Bd3 Ng4 13 Bf4 g5 14 Bg3 Nf6 15 h3 Nh5 16 Bh2 Ng6 17 Ne2 0-0.

**Question:** Why doesn't White seize upon the chance to open lines with 12 e5?

**Answer:** Your suggestion is a thought. Black looks okay to me after 12 ... Ne4 13 Nxe4 Bxe4. Now ... Bxf3 is a serious strategic threat, and if 14 exd6 cxd6 15 Qe2 Bb7 Black looks just fine, with active pieces and a solid grip on the d5-square.

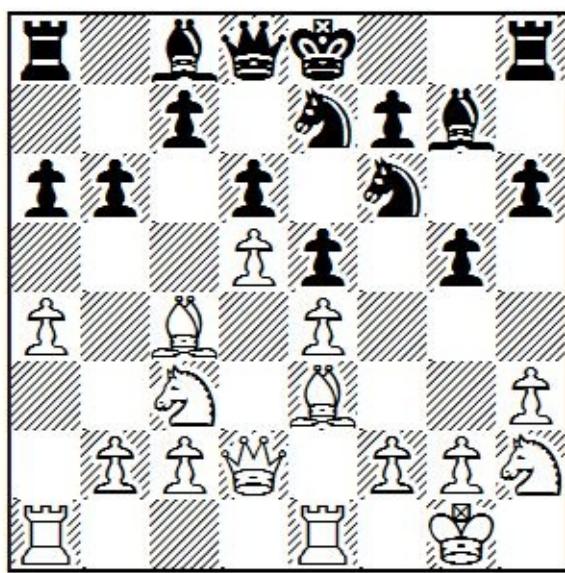
**12 ... e5**

Our Hippo principle: *bypass any central line-opening attempt from White.*

**13 h3**

Preventing ... Ng4.

**13 ... Bc8 14 Nh2 g5!?**



**Question:** Isn't this a weakening move?

**Answer:** Black suppresses White's f4 break and also clears g6 for the knight, at the cost of weakening the light squares. I have often suspected that while my subconscious mind is imaginative and daring, the corporeal Cyrus is more of a quivering dullard, who firmly plugs fingers into ears at any suggestion from the debonair subconscious Cyrus. This move may be the rare exception where both subconscious and corporeal Cyrus agree to adventure, with its accompanying risk.

**15 Nf1**

White plans Ng3, targeting the newly weakened f5-square.

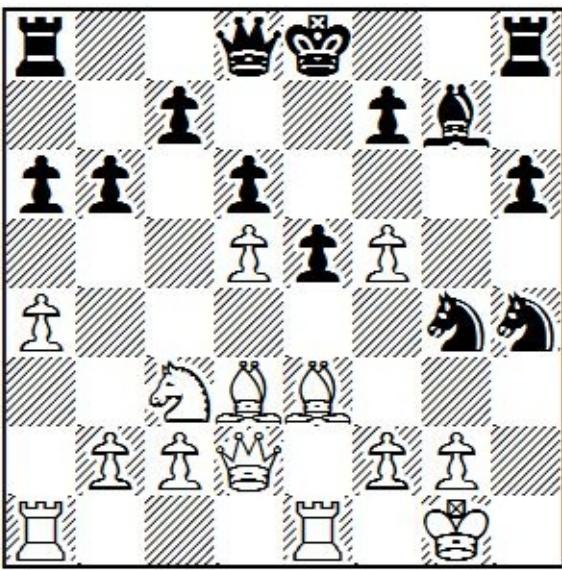
**15 ... Ng6 16 Ng3 g4!**

This chips away at the white king's pawn cover.

**17 Nf5!**

Merely thinking about food fails to appease hunger. We want the real thing. This is a sound pawn sacrifice to seize the light squares. Black looks good after 17 hxg4 Nxg4 18 Nh5 0-0 when both ... Qh4 and ... f5 are in the air.

**17 ... Bxf5 18 exf5 Nh4 19 hxg4 Nxg4 20 Bd3**



**Exercise (planning):** What is the most accurate way to pick off White's f5-pawn?

**Answer: 20 ... Qc8!**

The queen tactfully averts her eyes. This awkward move is necessary to continue to cover a6. The inaccurate 20 ... Qd7? is met with 21 Qe2! h5 22 Bxa6 when White dominates the light squares.

**21 Bf4!?**

I expected 21 Qe2 h5 22 Bd2 Nxf5 23 Ne4 when White's light-square control offers him full compensation for the pawn.

**21 ... Nxf5 22 f3 Nf6 23 Bxe5!?**

The bishop spreads his cruelty indiscriminately. If we exhaust every logical possibility and then still refuse to hold back, do we not pass determination, and teeter on obsession's edge? White meets strike with counterstrike, like a tennis player who clears the volley with an even more vicious return. My opponent allows himself to plunge into the deepest of imagination's reveries, lashing out with energetic discord, designed to confuse the defence. I'm not so sure about this sacrifice, since part of the package for White is loss of control over the dark squares. Sometimes a strength may turn into a burden. I'm almost certain that Hercules was constantly asked by his friends to help them move on weekends.

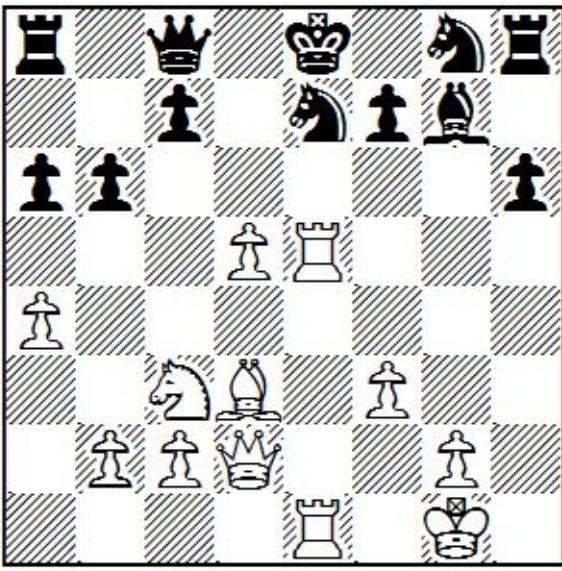
**Question:** But if not this piece sacrifice, then how does White justify his pawn sacrifice?

**Answer:** White isn't obliged to go with the large, economy size version. He can moderate his attack with 23 Nd1! 0-0 24 Ne3 Ne7 25 Bh2 Nfxd5 26 Ng4 f5 27 Nxh6+ Bxh6! 28 Qxh6 Rf6 29 Qd2 Rg6. White's bishop-pair may offer full compensation for the sacrificed pawn, but I still prefer Black's chances.

**23 ... dx5 24 Rxe5+**

Gulp! My position reminds me of the scene when Indiana Jones extracted the diamond from the idol's forehead, only to immediately get chased down by a giant boulder.

**24 ... Ne7 25 Rae1 Nfg8**



To bear one loss upon another magnifies suffering. This admittedly ugly move is necessary.

**Question:** OMG! Your position looks like a wreck. Is Black busted?

**Answer:** May I remind you that Dr. Frankenstein was ripped apart by the monster he created? It is easy to review the events of the last few moves and conclude that matters have not gone Black's way. It does, indeed, appear as if a benumbing force is applied upon Black's position, like a person in the forest, freezing to death, with the sly, quiet creep of a loss of all bodily sensation. But don't forget about Black's extra piece! Black may be royally tangled, but I don't see a white knock-out punch and neither does *Houdini*. I would label Black's position simultaneously delicate and durable.

### 26 R5e2?

I feel that this is the point where my opponent overpressed. He may have full compensation for the piece after 26 Qf4! Qd7! (or 26 ... Bxe5!? 27 Qxe5 f6 28 Qh5+ Kf8 29 Ne2! Qe8 30 Qh4 and White's raging initiative compensates for Black's extra rook; *Houdini* judges this position at dead even) 27 Rf5 Qd6 28 Rxf7 Qxf4 29 Rxf4 h5, although I prefer Black's extra piece over White's three pawns. White can try 30 d6 cxd6 31 Nd5 Be5 32 Nc7+ Kd7 33 Nxa8 Bxf4 34 Bxa6 Bg3 35 Rd1 Kc6 36 Rd4 Nd5 37 Bb5+ Kb7 38 Rxd5 Ne7 39 Rg5 Be5 40 Nxb6 Kxb6 41 c3 h4, but I still like Black's chances, despite White's three connected passers.

### 26 ... Qd7 27 Bc4 Kf8!?

The weave of the black king's life goes askew; f8 isn't intended as a permanent resting place, but rather a temporary way station. The king makes a dashing sight in court, as he pulls forth his slender rapier, lunging, thrusting and stamping at his fictional opponent for the delighted ladies of the court. However, at this point in the game, it's a completely different matter when he is forced to duel a skilled, flesh-and-blood opponent, intent on his destruction. Intuitively, I felt my king was safer on the kingside, embraced by friends. Also, I didn't want to hang my a-pawn after 27 ... 0-0-0!? 28 Bxa6+ Kb8 29 Bc4 Nf5, although here *Houdini* gives Black a solid plus.

### 28 Ne4

Perhaps angling for d6 ideas.

### 28 ... Rd8

28 ... Nf5! 29 c3 Nge7 is possibly a superior way to try and consolidate.

### 29 Qb4

After 29 a5 Nxd5 (29 ... b5 allows 30 Nc5!) 30 Bxd5 Qxd5 31 Qb4+ c5 32 Qxb6 h5! (enabling ... Rh6) 33 Qxa6 Bd4+ 34 Kf1 c4! (threat: ... Rh6! trapping White's queen) 35 Nc3 Bxc3 36 bxc3 Rh6 37 Qa7 Ra8 White's initiative is at an end.

29 ... Be5

Securing against d6 line-opening tricks. Black's king is about to emerge on g7.

**30 Bxa6 Qxd5**

Black threatens to swap queens with ... Qd4+.

31 Rd2

White may be able to offer stiffer resistance in the line 31 c3 Kg7 32 Bc4 Nc6! 33 Qb3 Qd7.

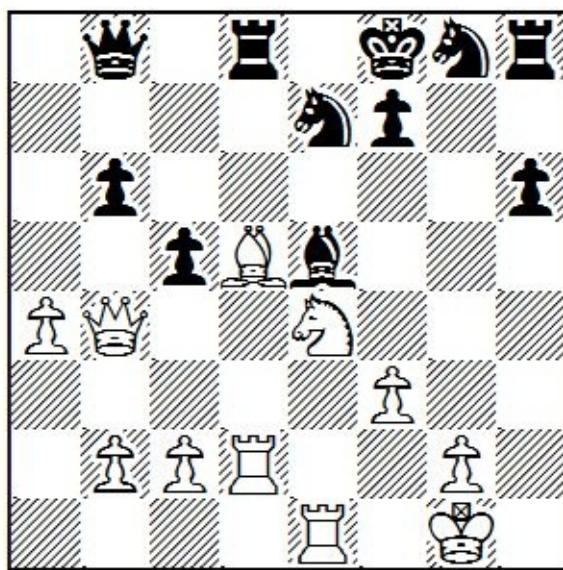
31 ... Oa8 32 Bb7

Clever yet ineffective. Black's queen simply shuffles over one square

32 ... Ob8

The queen resigns herself to the annoying bishop's afternoon programme

33 Bd5 c5!



Black's out-of-play queen emerges along the h2-b8 diagonal.

34 Qb3 Rx d5

Every swap gets Black closer to victory.

**35 Rxd5 Nxd5 36 Qxd5 Ne7**

I also considered 36 ... Nf6 which forces another swap. However, at this stage, subconscious Cyrus insisted on offense, rather than defence.

37 Qb3

37 Qd7 Rg8 38 c3 Rg6 and Black is well on his way to consolidation.

37 ... Bd4+

The bishop has a huge repertoire of wise advice, which he dishes out to people as the occasion indicates.

38 Kf1

38 Kh1 is met decisively with 38 ... Nf5.

38 ... Qh2

The long repressed queen lashes out at her brother, the way Beyoncé's sister attempted to beat the snot out of Jay-Z in the elevator.

39 Nf2

Alternatively, 39 Qxb6 Kg7 40 Qd6 Qg1+ 41 Ke2 Qxg2+ 42 Kd1 Nf5 43 Qc7 Qxf3+ 44 Kc1 Re8 45 Qc6 Be3+ and Black picks off a second piece.

**39 ... Nf5 0-1**

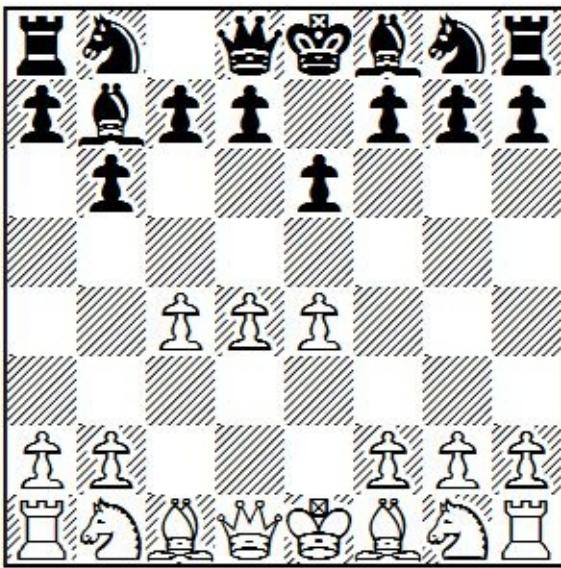
Black is not only up a piece, but also generated too many threats.

**Summary:** Consider the plan ... g5!? and ... Ng6, with the intention of annexing kingside dark squares and possibly launching an attack.

# Chapter Five

## The English Defence

1 d4 b6 2 c4 e6 3 e4 Bb7



This opening is likened to two fighters in the arena: one, brute power and mass; the other nimble skill. In this variation we perform a minimal bow before White's giant centre, which is required by opening protocol. GM Jon Tisdall calls the above variation the “ok-I'll-have-the-entire-centre- thanks, variation”. Its other name is the English Defence, first championed by British GMs Keene, Stean and Miles.

White has numerous methods of attempting to maintain his enormous space advantage. We find that in all of them, Black has access to quirky roads to counterplay, including undermining ideas like ... Bb4, ... Qh4 and ... f5. This is a fight between tacking and weaving, versus a full frontal expansion. White's centre can just as easily become a burden, rather than the imagined gift. In my research for this chapter, I noticed that White sometimes underestimated our counterplay, often tossing off all shackles of inhibition by lunging forward.

This is the largest chapter of the book and the variations are every bit as tricky as the first two king's pawn chapters. The lines are quite difficult to learn, with each clarification seeming to add a new puzzle along with it. But take heart: if it's hard for us, it is that much harder for our white opponents, who rarely face the English Defence.

*Game 28*

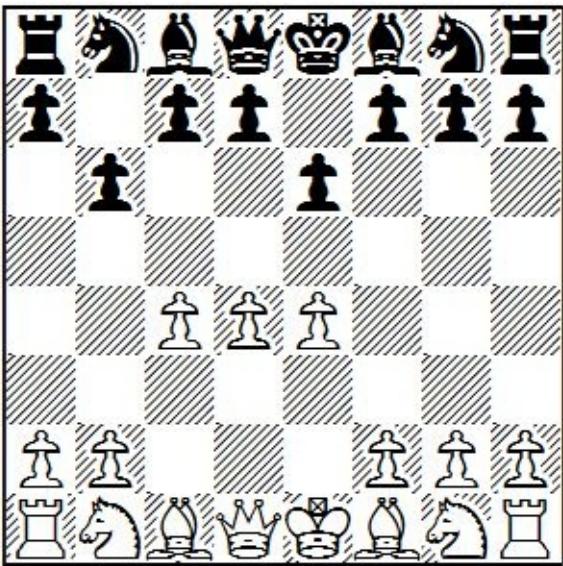
**B.Gelfand-N.Short**

Novgorod 1997

**1 d4 e6 2 c4**

We enter the queen's pawn section of the book. 2 e4 b6 invites White to play c4, or just play into one of the lines of the first four chapters in the e4-section of the book.

**2 ... b6 3 e4**



The starting position of the English Defence.

**Question:** Why is the opening called the English Defence?

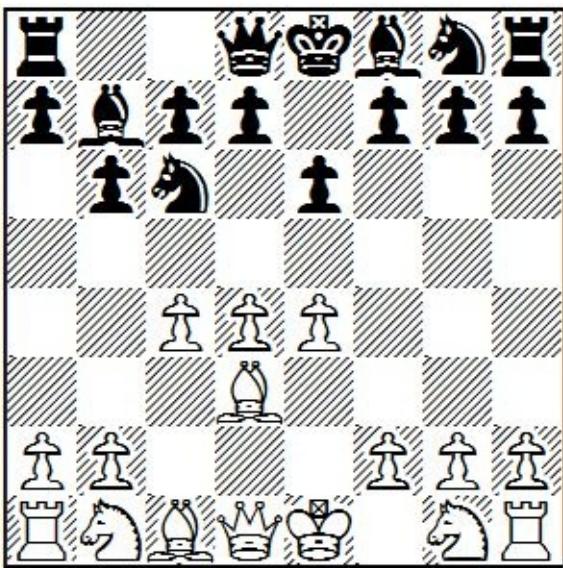
**Answer:** This hypermodern scheme was pioneered by British GMs Ray Keene, Michael Stean and Tony Miles, and then later championed by GMs Jon Speelman, Nigel Short and Michael Adams (all Brits), so it's perfectly fair that England legitimately lays claim to the opening's name.

**Question:** Are we going to putz around on the wings as White annexes the centre?

**Answer:** As we will see in the coming games, White pays a stiff tax on the privilege of owning a giant centre, which isn't so easy to keep intact.

**3 ... Bb7 4 Bd3 Nc6!?**

Shades of Blatny's 'Ruy Lopez' line. I like this quirky move better than Black's main line, 4 ... f5 covered by GM Christian Bauer in *Play 1 ... b6*, and Ilia Odessky in his *English Defence*, which we won't cover in this book, due to space considerations (mainly due to Everyman's irrational demand that my books remain no larger than a Dostoyevsky novel). The line runs 5 exf5 Bxg2 (5 ... Bb4+ 6 Kf1 is also commonly played here) 6 Qh5+ g6 7 fxg6 Bg7 8 gxh7+ Kf8 9 Ne2! Bxh1 10 Bg5! (stronger than taking g8 and promoting with check) 10 ... Nf6 11 Qh4. White has a strong attack for the sacrificed rook (which incidentally doesn't faze *Houdini*, who assesses slightly in Black's favour here), with Nf4 and Nh5, or Ng6 in the air.



**5 Ne2**

**Question:** Why play to e2, when the more aggressive f3-square is available?

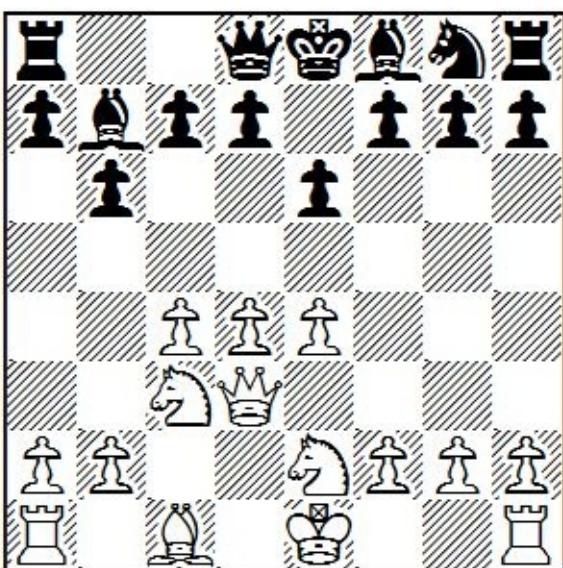
**Answer:** e2 is actually the more aggressive square, since it leaves White's f-pawn free to push forward.

Instead, after 5 d5 Ne5 6 Be2 Qh4 (White finds it awkward to defend e4) 7 Qc2 f5! (our standard mechanism to break up White's centre, which we see over and over in this chapter) 8 Nc3 Bb4 Black exerts unpleasant pressure on White's centre, T.Lanchava-A.Stefanova, Groningen 1999.

**5 ... Nb4**

Black's point: he picks up the bishop-pair.

**6 Nbc3 Nxd3+ 7 Qxd3**



**Question:** Is Black's bishop-pair an equitable deal for White's space and development lead?

**Answer:** I think so. Glenn Flear writes: "Several strong players have been willing to play this line with Black, a sign that they are happy with the bishop-pair and a certain solidity, whilst facing down White's centre. I remember for example in my youth losing as White against Miles and not really knowing where I went wrong! So I also have a healthy respect for Black's potential."

### 7 ... d6

We follow the Hippo game plan. Next game we look at 7 ... Ne7. Incidentally, the move order 8 0-0 d6 9 d5 transposes to this game.

### 8 0-0 Ne7 9 d5

Logical and multipurpose:

1. White increases his territorial advantage.
  2. White blunts Black's b7-bishop.
  3. White places his pawns on the opposite colour of his remaining bishop.
- 9 f4 generally transposes to our game.

### 9 ... Qd7 10 f4

After 10 a4 a5 11 Nb5 g6 12 Qc3 e5 13 b4 Bg7 14 bxa5 Rxa5 15 Be3 (15 Bd2, intending to move the queen and then play to open the queenside with a5 is also an idea) 15 ... 0-0 16 c5? (16 Rfb1 looks correct) 16 ... dxc5 17 Bxc5 Black found a hidden shot: 17 ... Nxd5! 18 Qd2 Rfa8 19 Bb4 and in V.Kramnik-R.Ponomariov, Zurich (rapid) 2009, Black has a winning position after the deflection/overload shot 19 ... Bh6!.

### 10 ... g6 11 Nd4

Alternatives:

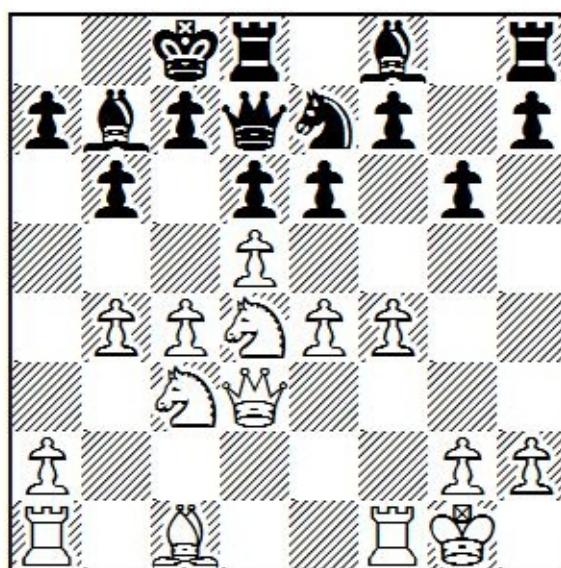
a) 11 Be3 Bg7 12 Bd4 e5 13 fxe5 dxe5 14 Be3 f5 15 Bg5 0-0! 16 Bxe7 Qxe7 17 exf5 gxf5 18 Rxf5 Qc5+ 19 Kh1 Rxf5 20 Qxf5 Qxc4 saw Black regain the sacrificed pawn with even chances, A.Breier-H.Langrock, Santanyi 2004.

b) Black can deal with the speculative sacrifice 11 f5!?: 11 ... gxf5 12 Ng3 Ng6! (Black returns the pawn to jump his knight into e5) 13 exf5 Ne5 14 Qe2 0-0-0 when I don't believe Black stands worse, D.Rost-B.Hellbing, correspondence 2008.

### 11 ... 0-0-0

Black's king, not terribly safe on either wing, looks better off on the queenside.

### 12 b4



Here he comes! Relations between the two nations - never warm - now erupt into open hostility.

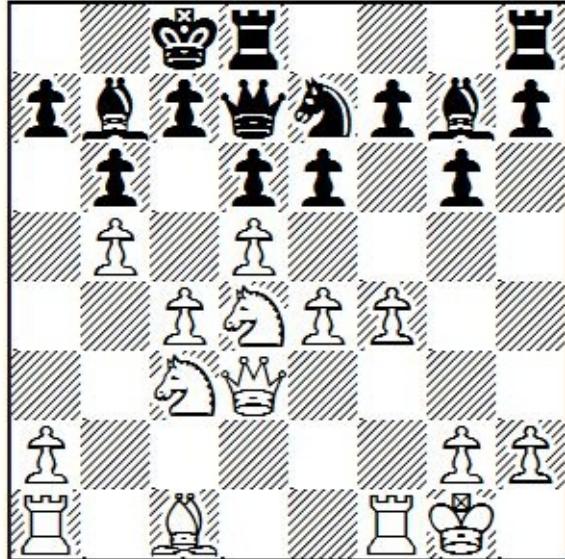
**Question:** Isn't Black getting killed? After all, White's attack is well under way, while Black's hasn't even begun on the kingside.

**Answer:** This is not a case of mutual attacks. Instead it is White's attack, versus Black's central counterattack. If the centre is fluid, as it is in this instance, White will find a c5 break very difficult, since it immediately undermines his entire centre. Houdini assesses at '+0.28', almost even.

White may have been better off by pushing his a-pawn, instead with 12 a4 c5 (this follows the principle: *counter in the centre when attacked on the wing*, but it also loosens Black's pawn front in front of his king; Black can also try 12 ... a5 13 Bd2 Bg7 14 Ncb5 exd5 15 exd5 Bxd4+ 16 Nxd4 Nf5 17 Nb5 Kb8, and now if 18 b4, he successfully counters with 18 ... c6 19 Nd4 Nxd4 20 Qxd4 axb4 21 Qxb6 c5 22 f5 Qc7 and Black is fine) 13 dxc6 Nxc6 14 Be3 f5 (Black vigorously counters in the centre) 15 a5 fxe4 16 Qe2, T.Osbahr-G.Benedetto, correspondence 2003. Black still remains in a difficult position after 16 ... Nxd4 17 Bxd4 Bg7 18 Bxg7 Qxg7 19 axb6 Qd4+ 20 Kh1 Qxb6 21 Nxe4 Kb8.

**12 ... Bg7 13 b5?!**

There is a sense of imminence in the position, similar to the citizen of Pompeii, who glances uneasily at the plumes of black smoke rising from the mouth of Mount Vesuvius, just moments before the actual eruption. White trades his not-so-likely c5 break, in exchange for control over c6. After the correct 13 a4 exd5 14 exd5 c5!? (principle: *meet a wing attack with a central counter*) 15 bxc5 (15 dxc6 Nxc6 activates Black's position) 15 ... dxc5 16 Nf3 Qf5 17 Qe3 Rhe8 18 Ne5 g5! 19 Qg3 Ng6 the game is dead even, according to *Houdini*.



**Exercise (planning):** After Short's coming plan, White experiences difficulty in maintaining his giant centre. Gelfand's mind becomes veiled by an erroneous assessment, that his centre is stable. It isn't. Come up with a clear plan to undermine White's centre.

**Answer:**

Step 1: Swap bishop for knight, which loosens White's grip on both the e6- and f5-squares.

**13 ... Bxd4+!**

"The wise have no choice but to guide the ignorant. Such is my lot in life," declares the self-righteous

bishop, who observes a life of strict moral discipline, mainly due to scarcity of opportunity to sin. Now he finally gets his chance. Undogmatic thinking by Short, who hands back the bishop-pair to avoid a Nc6 clamp, and also to undermine White's ponderous centre.

#### 14 Qxd4

Step 2: Strike at e4 from the wing.

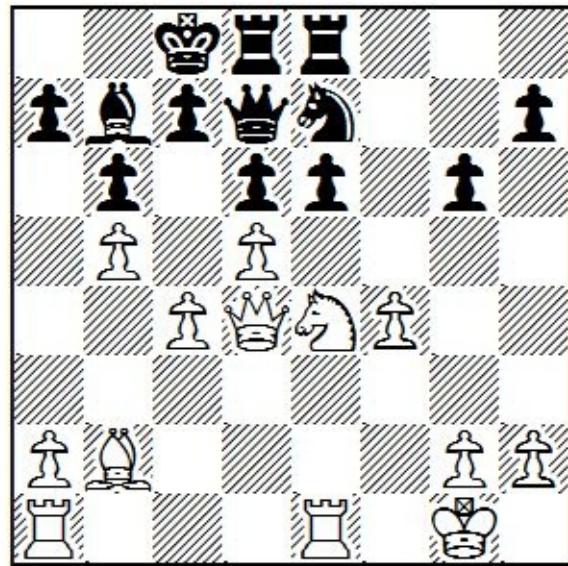
#### 14 ... f5!

The misery the white centre hoped to heap upon others, now devolves upon itself. The comp assesses at even, while I now like Black's position, which has the feel of an Alekhine Defence Four Pawns Attack, which has gone well for Black.

#### 15 Re1 Rhei8

Short completes his development. Notice that it is now Black who slightly leads in development.

#### 16 Bb2 fxe4 17 Nxe4



**Exercise (planning):** We sense political and social unrest emanating from the centre. Black can cover White's fork threat with 17 ... Ng8. Or can he allow it with 17 ... exd5. Both lines are advantageous for Black, yet his plus is larger in one of them. Which one would you play?

#### 17 ... Ng8

Covering against the threatened f6 fork. Both sides missed a tricky idea:

**Answer:** 17 ... exd5!, allowing the fork. Violence is the natural afterthought of a build-up of stress, stemming from prolonged oppression. This decision, which appears as mere flowery speculation, is instead grounded in a sound fundament: 18 Nf6 Ng5! (this move is not so easy to find; Black doesn't lose the exchange after all) 19 Qd2 (the queen agrees to the black knight's outrageous demands with a croak of dismay; 19 Rxe8 Qxe8 20 Nxe8 Nxd4 leaves Black up on material) 19 ... Rxe1+ 20 Rxe1 Qf7 21 cxd5 Ne7 (piling on d5) 22 Rd1 Ng8! 23 Ne4 Re8 24 Nc3 Nf6 when White managed to hang on to his pawns, yet his position emits a distinct feel of overextension, and I think he will be lucky if he saves the game.

#### 18 Nc3 Qf7

Short hammers away at White's d5 central wedge.

#### 19 Re3?!

It feels like White treats his cat as if it were a dog. Gelfand refuses to back down and allow attacking-

resolve to desert him. This move loses both time and the initiative. It was high time to go on the defensive with 19 Rad1 and hope for the best.

**19 ... exd5 20 Nxd5 Rxe3 21 Qxe3**

Played with the philosophy: when beginning an attack, it's best to discard all inhibitions at the outset. Instead, if 21 Nxe3 Re8 22 Nd5 Bxd5 23 cxd5 Ne7, and if 24 Rd1 Nf5 25 Qf2 (25 Qd2? Ne3 and if 26 Re1?? Nc4! wins a piece) 25 ... Ne3 26 Re1 Nxd5 with an extra pawn and a winning position.

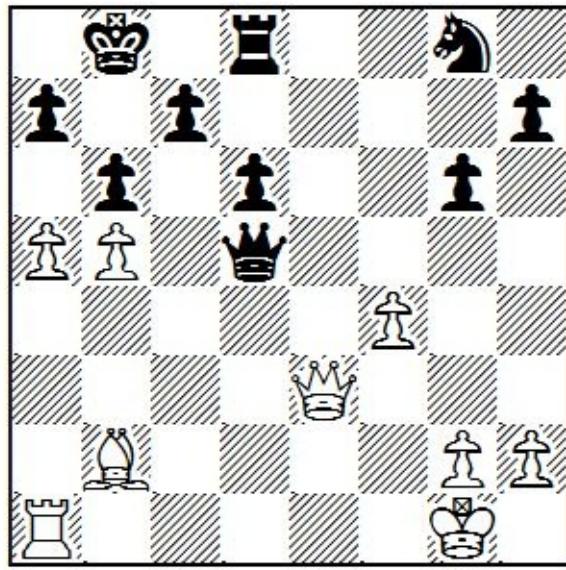
**21 ... Bxd5**

Short cashes out. 21 ... Re8! 22 Qd2 Re4 looks even stronger for Black.

**22 cxd5 Qxd5 23 a4 Kb8**

Covering against Qh3+ and Qxh7.

**24 a5!?**



White refuses to curb his vast generosity by even an iota. Gelfand, feeling that passive defence will lose in the long run, burns all bridges, offering a second pawn for vague attacking chances - risky business since there aren't so many pieces remaining on the board.

**24 ... Qxb5 25 axb6 axb6 26 Bd4**

26 Qf3 is easily met with 26 ... Kc8, intending to run to d7.

**26 ... Qc6**

Black's king will feel more secure with his queen on the h1-a8 diagonal.

**27 Rc1 Qb7 28 f5!?**

White's violent nature has yet to abate. Natural attackers seem to value initiative over money. White will probably lose in the long run if he remains passive with something like 28 Re1 c5 29 Bc3 Qd5 30 Ra1 Kb7.

**28 ... gxf5**

Black insists upon punitive war reparations, which White can ill-afford.

**29 Qg5 Re8 30 Qh5**

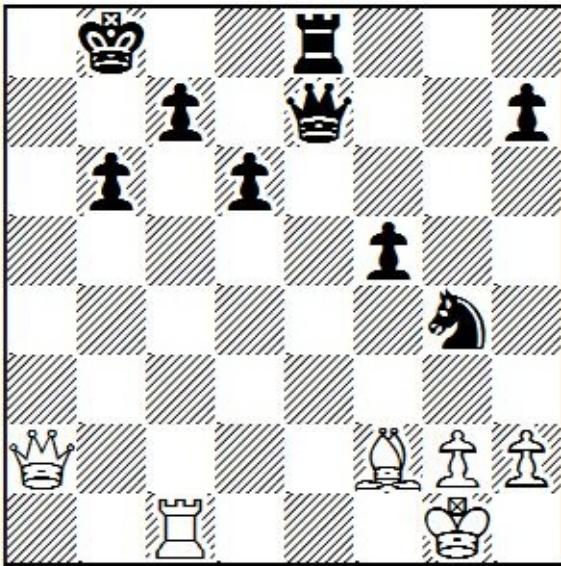
30 Qxf5 is met with 30 ... Qe4! 31 Qf2 c5 when Black has two extra pawns, plus initiative.

**30 ... Qe4**

The queen dismisses the white bishop's strictures with an airy laugh, thinking: "Arrogant man! It is for me to make rules; not follow them." Defensive principle: *centralize when under attack* (although it is highly debatable that Black is under any kind of attack at all here).

**31 Bf2**

Threatening the cheapo Re1.  
31 ... Nf6 32 Qf7 Qe7 33 Qa2 Ng4



It's all over. Black has the initiative and two extra pawns.

**34 Ra1**

Such one-move vulgarities rarely work against 2700 players.

**34 ... Qe4 35 Qa7+**

The queen has always believed that the world and its inhabitants should be manipulated and shifted about to suit her purposes. This time she won't get her way.

**35 ... Kc8**

The queenside is a realm in which White's attackers are eternally refused entrance and White's threats are easily dealt with.

**36 Rc1 Qb7 37 Qa4**

Black was happy to offer a pawn to swap queens. He wins easily after 37 Bxb6 Qxa7 38 Bxa7 c5.

**37 ... Re7 38 Qb3 0-1**

The autopsy reveals the following: White runs out of power after 38 ... Nxf2 39 Kxf2 Qe4!.

**Summary:** After 7 Qxd3, we reach a murky position, where we get the bishop-pair in exchange for White's space and slight development lead.

## Game 29

P.Eljanov-R.Ponomariov

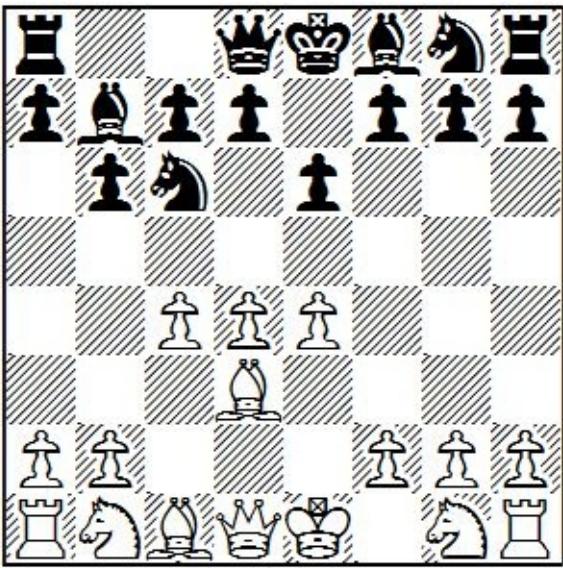
Kharkov 2009

**1 d4 e6 2 c4 b6 3 e4**

**Question:** Should we fear 3 d5?

**Answer:** I think the move is premature if Black hasn't yet committed his bishop to b7: 3 ... Nf6 4 a3 Ba6! (this is awkward for White) 5 b3 Bd6! 6 Nf3 0-0 7 Nc3 Qe7 8 e3 c6!. White's centre is under fire, she is behind in development, and will be lucky to equalize, I.Krush-J.Speelman, Hastings 2000.

**3 ... Bb7 4 Bd3 Nc6**



**5 Ne2**

**Question:** Does White have to hand over the bishop-pair?

**Answer:** I think pretty much yes. No one has dared to try the tempo loss idea 5 Be2!? which hopes to exploit the awkwardness of Black's ... Nc6.

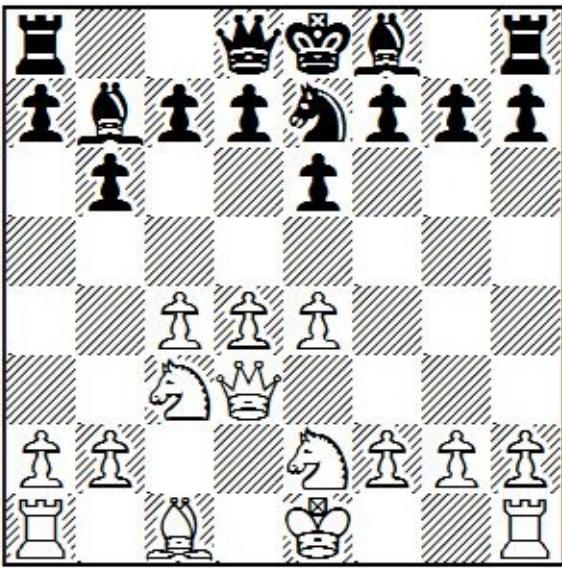
**Question:** How would Black continue?

**Answer:** Maybe something like this: 5 ... Nf6 (or 5 ... e5!? 6 dxe5 Nxe5 and now 7 f4? is met by 7 ... Bxe4 8 fxe5 Bxg2 9 Bf3 Bxh1 10 Bxh1 Qh4+ with advantage to Black) 6 e5 Ne4 (threat: ... Nxd4, followed by ... Bc5) 7 Nf3 Bb4+ 8 Nbd2 d6 9 Qc2 Nxd2 10 Bxd2 Bxd2+ 11 Qxd2 dxe5 12 dxe5 Qxd2+ 13 Kxd2 Ke7 with equality.

**5 ... Nb4**

Like last game, Black is able to eliminate one of White's bishops. In compensation White seeks to consolidate his centre.

**6 Nbc3 Nxd3+ 7 Qxd3 Ne7**



Black keeps Hippo options open with this move, but also considers ... Ng6 and ... d5, as well.

#### **8 h4**

A thematic move if Black intends playing either ... Ng6 or ... g6 to free his bishop, so Ponomariov changes tack. 8 0-0 g6 9 d5 Bg7 10 Be3 d6 11 b4 0-0 12 Bd4 Bxd4 13 Nxd4 c5 was R.Swinkels-M.Sadler, Bussum 2011, where White looks slightly better after 14 bxc5 bxc5 15 Nb3 Qd7.

#### **8 ... d5!**

Principle: *counter in the centre when menaced on the wing*. Black's move is stronger and more energetic than 8 ... d6 9 h5 h6 10 Be3 Qd7 11 d5 e5, as in A.Zhigalko-P.Nguyen, Rewal 2008. White gets a pleasant looking King's Indian-style position after 12 0-0-0 with a space advantage across the board, for which Black's unimpressive bishops fail to compensate.

#### **9 cxd5 exd5 10 e5**

**Question:** How would Black respond if White maintained the central tension with 10 f3?

**Answer:** I would try to create a light-squared puncture with something like 10 ... Qd7 11 Bf4 dxe4 12 fxe4 f5! when I prefer Black's chances.

#### **10 ... Qd7 11 h5**

Worrying Black about h6, and cutting off ... Ng6 ideas. Black must find a way to move his knight to develop his kingside ...

#### **11 ... Nc6**

... which he does with this move.

#### **12 a3**

Cutting out annoying ... Nb4 ideas, at the cost of a tempo and the weakening of his light squares.

#### **12 ... f6!**

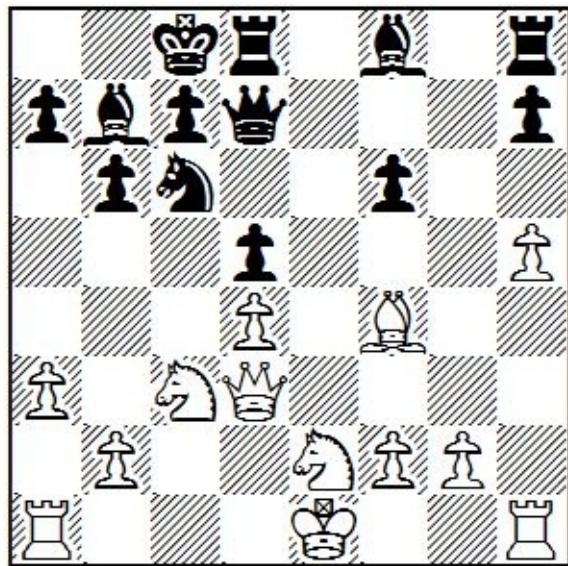
Black is justified in challenging White's centre, since he isn't behind in development anymore.

#### **13 exf6?!**

This move fails to augment White's best interests. I feel that White's coming difficulties stem from this decision, which destroys his space advantage and also opens the g-file for Black. He would be better off playing 13 f4 at the cost of weakening the light squares further and hemming in White's remaining bishop. Black looks okay even here after 13 ... Na5. Now 14 f5?! isn't such a great idea for White, after 14 ...

fxe5 15 dxe5 Nb3 16 e6 Qc6 17 Nd4 Nxd4 18 Qxd4 Bc5 19 Qd3 d4 20 Ne2 0-0! when White looks overextended. 21 h6 is met with 21 ... g6!, and now if 22 fxg6? Qxe6 23 b4 Bd6 24 gxh7+ Kh8 25 b5 Rae8 26 Bb2 Bg3+ 27 Kd2 Qxe2+! 28 Qxe2 Rxe2+ 29 Kxe2 Rf2+ 30 Kd3 Rxb2 wins.

**13 ... gxf6 14 Bf4 0-0-0**



**Question:** Haven't the lines of perpetrator and victim become increasingly blurred. Who is attacking whom?

**Answer:** As we see in the coming moves, Black's king is rather safe on the queenside, despite the open c-file for White.

**15 Rc1 Bd6**

This is a violation of the policy: don't swap one of your bishops off the board when you have the bishop-pair, yet it looks necessary, since White threatened to build pressure down the c-file.

**16 Bxd6 Qxd6 17 Rh4**

Intending to place his king on f1. If 17 0-0 then White is left wondering just why he pushed forward his h-pawn, which weakened his king. *Houdini* assesses this position slightly in White's favour. I disagree and like Black here.

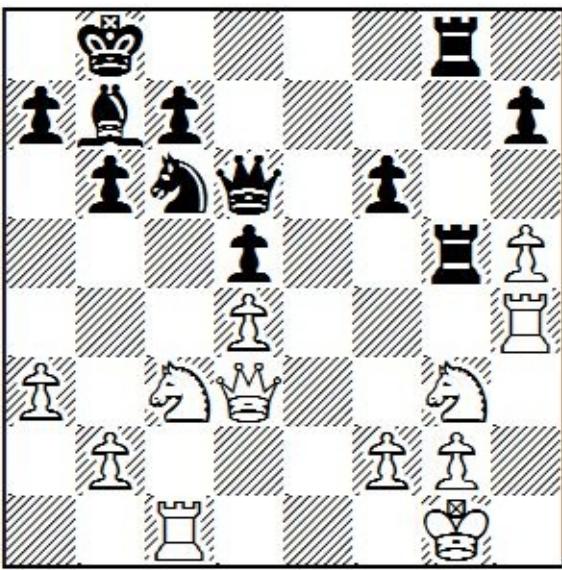
**17 ... Kb8**

A wise precaution, removing the king from the open c-file.

**18 Kf1 Rdg8**

Preparing to lift to g5 and then swing the other rook to g8.

**19 Kg1 Rg5 20 Ng3 Rhg8**



**Exercise (planning/calculation):** Black just offered h7, which would give White a passed h-pawn. Should White accept the offer or decline?

**Answer: 21 Nce2**

White correctly declines. Acceptance is disastrous after 21 Qxh7?? when Black crashes through with 21 ... Rxg3! 22 fxg3 Qxg3, and the trouble is 23 Rh2 is met with the crushing 23 ... Qe3+.

**21 ... f5!**

Excellent judgement. White's pieces are out of sync and unable to take advantage of the e5-hole.

**22 Rc3 Bc8!?**

Covering f5. The bishop wasn't doing much of anything on the h1-a8 diagonal. Now Black can think about plans like ... Nd8 and ... Ne6, intending ... f4.

**23 Rf4**

The comp doesn't like his move and suggests 23 b4 to keep Black's knight out of a5.

**23 ... Na5!**

Now c4 is a juicy square for Black's knight. 23 ... Nd8 24 Rc1 Ne6?! isn't effective after 25 Rxf5 Rxf5 26 Qxf5 Nxd4 27 Qxh7 Nxe2+ 28 Nxe2 when Black dropped a pawn and eased the pressure on White's king.

**24 Qc2 Nc4 25 Rcf3**

White's pressure on f5 is illusory, mainly since Nxf5 always hangs g2.

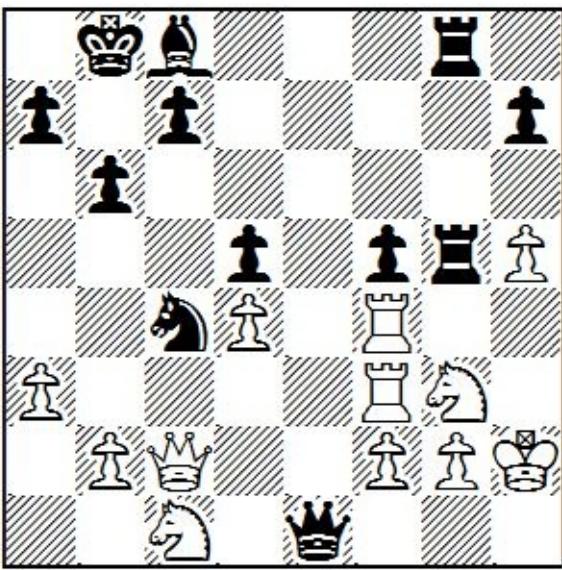
**25 ... Qe7**

Perhaps clearing the path for ... Nd6 and ... Ne4.

**26 Nc1?**

This move loses by force. White should remain passive and ask Black how he continues, with something like 26 Qc1 Nd6 27 Qc2 Ne4 28 Qd3 Kb7 29 Qd1 Qg7 30 Rh4 Bd7! (threat: ... Bb5 and ... Bxe2, whittling away at White's defenders) 31 a4 a5 32 b3 h6 33 Qd3 Be8 34 Rff4 Qe7 35 Qd1 Bd7 36 Qc1 Bc8 37 Qd1 Kb8 38 Qd3 (preventing ... Ba6) 38 ... Qb4 (threatening infiltration on e1) 39 Qd1 Ba6 (at last) 40 Rh3 Bxe2 41 Qxe2 Qxd4, although here White is busted. This line still puts up greater resistance than the way White played in the game.

**26 ... Qe1+ 27 Kh2**



**Exercise (Combination alert):** White's game collapses if you discover Black's idea. What would you play here?

**Answer:** Double attack/removal of the guard. Black threatens both the f3-rook and ... Nf1+, swapping off the g3-knight, which guards the entrance to g2.

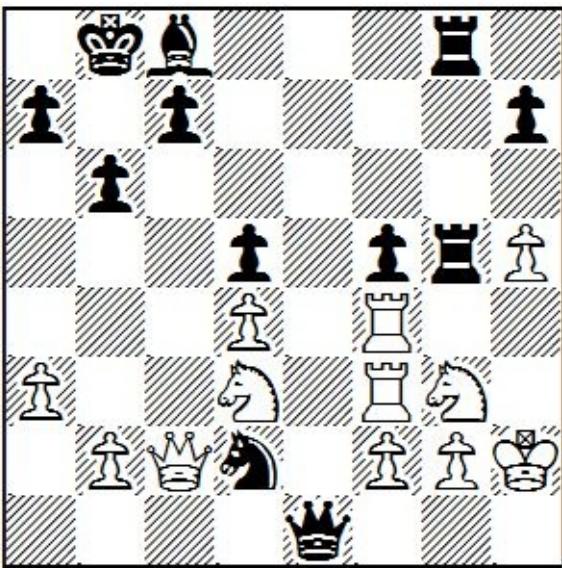
**27 ... Nd2!**

Nothing enrages a defender more than an open affront, from which he or she is powerless to respond in kind. The knight covertly studies his targets on f3 and f1.

**28 Nd3**

White's not-so-tempting options:

- 28 Re3 Nf1+ 29 Nxfl Rxh5+! (forcing mate one move faster than taking g2) 30 Kg1 Rh1+! 31 Kxh1 Qxf1+ 32 Kh2 Qxg2 mate.
- 28 Rc3 Nf1+ 29 Kh3 Rxg3+ 30 fxg3 Rxg3+ 31 Kh4 Qe7 mate.



**Exercise (combination alert):** Simply taking the exchange with 28 ... Nxf3+ wins.

But Black has a move so much stronger. Do you see what Ponomariov missed?

## 28 ... Nxf3+

The human response: why try for brilliance to excess, when a simple path will do?

**Answer:** Ponomariov missed the stunning computer shot 28 ... Qf1!! Queen sacrifice/piece sacrifice/deflection/removal of the guard. Black threatens the deadly ... Rxh5+. After 29 Rh4 (29 Nxf1 walks into a forced mate after 29 ... Nxf3+ 30 Rxf3 Rxg2+ 31 Kh1 Rg1+ 32 Kh2 R8g2+ 33 Kh3 f4+ 34 Kh4 Rh1+ 35 Nh2 Rxh2+ 36 Rh3 Rxh3 mate) 29 ... Nxf3+ 30 gxf3 Rxg3! 31 fxg3 Qxf3 White has no good way to protect g3 without heavy loss of material: for example, 32 Rh3 (32 Qf2 Qxd3 isn't much of a defence for White) 32 ... f4 wins.

## 29 Rxf3 Qf1!

A clever (non)-queen sacrifice. Threat: ... Rxh5+. But in this version White has a defence which keeps him alive for now.

## 30 Nf4!

Covering against the shot. 30 Nxf1? Rxg2+ 31 Kh1 Rg1+ 32 Kh2 R8g2+ 33 Kh3 f4+ mates.

## 30 ... Qc4 31 Qd2 Rg4 32 Rc3 Qa4 33 Nge2 Ba6!

It becomes painfully obvious that the bishop's supposed pious disposition is really the result of his superb acting skills. Black seeks to play ... Bxe2, disorganizing White's defence.

## 34 Ng1 Qb5

Black merely tangles up his own rooks after 34 ... Rh4+ 35 Ngh3 Rgg4?! 36 Kg1 Qb5 37 Rc1.

## 35 g3

35 Qc1 is met with the simplifying 35 ... Qf1! 36 Qxf1 Bxf1 37 g3 Rxf4! 38 gxf4 Rg2+ 39 Kh1 Rxf2 40 b4 Bg2+ 41 Kh2 Be4+ 42 Kh3 Rxf4 with two extra pawns and a dominating position.

## 35 ... Re8!

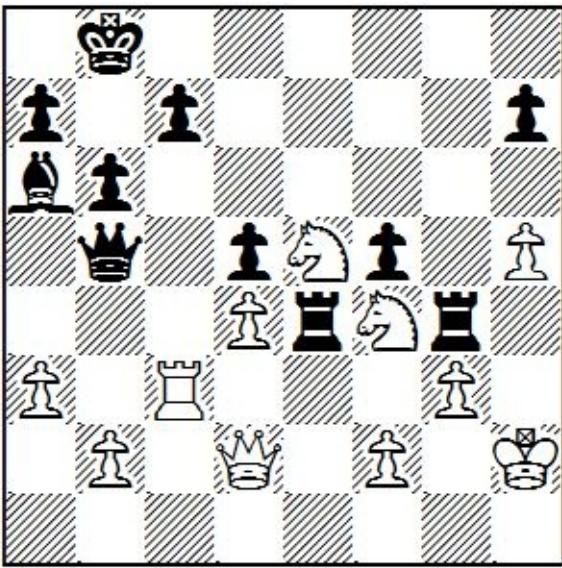
The rook seeks a fresh open file.

## 36 Nf3

Heading for e5, the knight's Valhalla.

## 36 ... Re4 37 Ne5

Up until now it felt like the battle has been nothing more than a collage of miseries for White. Now, things look better, right? After all, it appears as if Black's rooks are clumsy, appearing in a lurching stumble, like reluctant third graders, pushed on to the stage to perform lines in the Christmas pageant before the parents. Hasn't White generated play with powerfully posted knights on f4 and e5?



**Exercise (combination alert/planning):** This is all an illusion and White's defence is the case of a tiny cork, holding back the contents of a keg. If you find Black's plan, you destroy White's hopes.

**Answer: 37 ... Rgxf4!**

Exchange sacrifice/double attack. This clears the path for the coming ... Re2, which is decisive.

**38 gxf4 Re2**

Dignitaries from both sides gather around the e2-square, as if to a holy altar. "Your personal likes and dislikes must bend before urgent matters of state," the rook instructs White's reluctant queen.

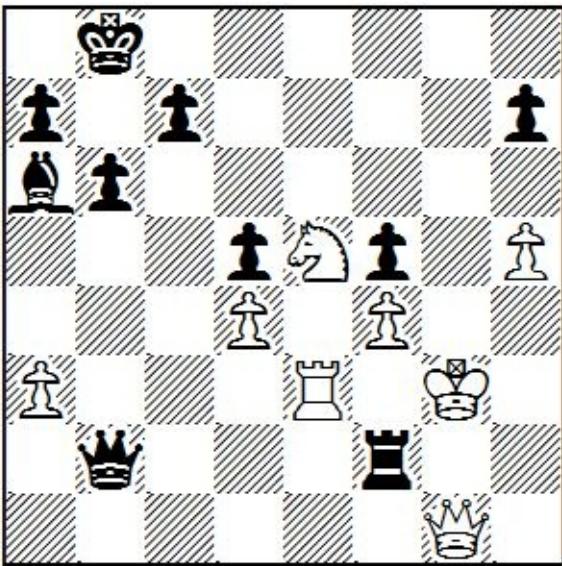
**39 Qc1 Rxf2+ 40 Kg3 Qe2 41 Qg1**

Alternatively, 41 Rxc7 Rg2+ 42 Kh4 Qf2+ 43 Kh3 Qg3 mate.

**41 ... Qxb2**

Picking off a second pawn. The position turns into a kleptocracy - one of institutionalized theft.

**42 Re3**



**Exercise (combination alert):** How did Black force White's resignation by picking off a third pawn?

**Answer:** Simplification.

**42 ... Rf1! 0-1**

43 Qg2 Qxg2+ 44 Kxg2 Rxf4 is utterly hopeless for White.

**Summary:** 7 ... Ne7 is a reasonable, closely-related alternative to Short's 7 ... d6.

*Game 30*

**E.Kobylkin-G.Pilavov**

Lugansk 2007

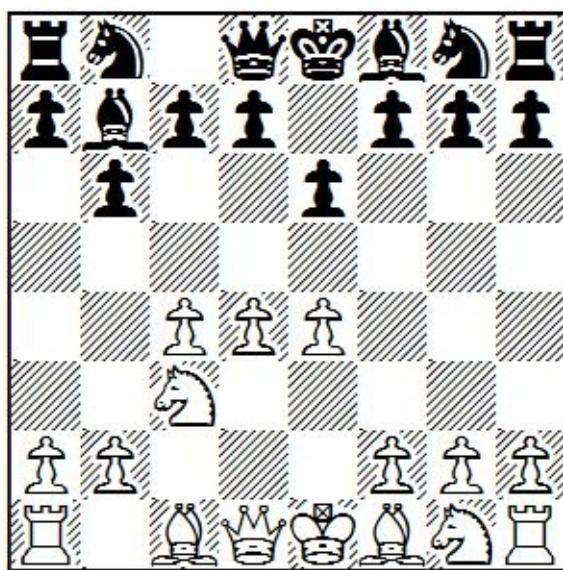
**1 d4 e6**

Our game position is somewhat similar to the now fashionable Nimzo-Indian line 1 ... Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 f3.

**Question:** What is the difference between the Nimzo-Indian version and our English Defence?

**Answer:** The main difference is that in our English Defence version, Black has access to future ... f5 ideas, while in the Nimzo-Indian, the f6-knight blocks the f-pawn. Now I'm not implying that the English Defence is superior to the Nimzo-Indian, since we must ask: do we really want to push our f-pawn? The answer is sometimes we do and sometimes we don't.

**2 c4 b6 3 e4 Bb7 4 Nc3**



This no-nonsense move is generally the choice of players who feel comfortable on the white side of certain Nimzo-Indian lines. White is unafraid of ... Bb4 and essentially tells Black: pin away to your heart's content on b4.

**4 ... Bb4**

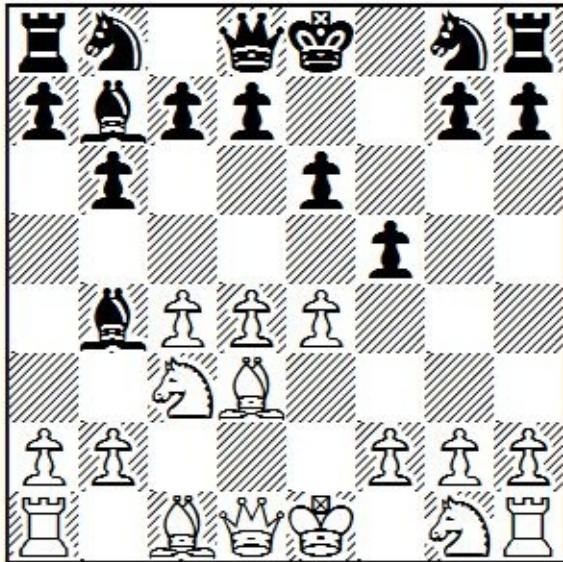
**Question:** Didn't White just achieve a kind of super-Nimzo-Indian, with e4 tossed forward in a single move?

**Answer:** I'm not so certain that achieving e4 so soon is to White's benefit, since in this version White tends to get more central space than in traditional Nimzo-Indian lines, but the question remains: can White effectively maintain such a gigantic centre? Also, keep in mind that unlike a Nimzo-Indian, Black has yet to play ... Nf6, which means we have possible access to ... f5 tricks. Having studied this line, I see that it is very easy for White to overextend.

### 5 Bd3

Next game we look at 5 f3, while 5 Qc2 Bxc3+ 6 bxc3 Qh4 7 Bd3 f5 8 g3 Qh5 9 f3 was V.Pechenkin-J.Kraai, Edmonton 2010, where Black stands at least even after 9 ... Ne7.

### 5 ... f5



Our thematic central counterstrike, now that g2 hangs.

### 6 Qe2

**Question:** Is there any merit in 6 exf5?

**Answer:** I think the rook sacrifice is suicidal, since Black's king remains quite safe in this version, after 6 ... Bxg2 7 Qh5+ Kf8. Believe it or not, this position occurs 29 times in my database, with White scoring around 20%, which I think is very high, since his position looks completely resignable! I don't see nearly enough compensation. *Houdini* assesses the position at '-3.40' - busted for White. Here is a sample game, with Tony Miles demonstrating just how to dampen White's attacking zeal: 8 fxe6 Qe8 9 Qf5+ Nf6 10 d5 dxe6 11 dxe6 Qg6! (forcing queens from the board, after which White would be down a rook in an ending) 12 Qxg6 hxg6 13 Nge2 Bxh1 14 Nf4 Rxh2 15 Nxg6+ Ke8 16 Bf4 Rh3 17 0-0-0 Bxc3 18 bxc3 Bf3 19 Re1 (19 Rd2 is met with 19 ... Ne4) 19 ... Rh1!. White ran out of would-be attackers and resigned here, F.Lopez Colon-A.Miles, Gran Canaria 1996. That didn't look all that dangerous for Black, did it?

Other alternatives:

a) 6 Qh5+ (inducing a weakening of Black's dark squares) 6 ... g6 7 Qe2 Nf6 8 f3 Nc6 9 Be3 fxe4 10 fxe4 e5! 11 d5 Nd4 12 Bxd4 exd4 13 a3 was M.Swayams-N.Short, Kolkata 2014. Black stands better after 13 ... Bxc3+ 14 bxc3 dxc3 15 e5 Nh5! when his ... g6 now comes in handy.

b) 6 d5 fxe4 7 Bxe4 Nf6 8 Bf3 (8 Bg5 is met with 8 ... Bxc3+ 9 bxc3 0-0 where White scores a rather dismal 7.1%) 8 ... Bxc3+ 9 bxc3 0-0 10 Ne2 e5 11 Ng3 d6 12 0-0 Nbd7 saw Black achieve an excellent

Nimzo-Indian-like position and attain equality at a minimum, A.Gupta-C.Bauer, Differdange 2008.

c) 6 f3 may be White's best line: 6 ... fxe4 7 fxe4 Nf6 8 Qe2!? (this drops a pawn; 8 Bg5 h6 9 Bxf6 Qxf6 10 Nf3 Nc6 11 e5 Qf4 12 Bg6+ Ke7 13 0-0 was A.Ribeiro-C.Carvalho, Vitoria 1999; at this point Black can play 13 ... Qg4! threatening the g6-bishop, as well as ... Nxd4!, and if 14 Qd3 Nxd4! when I don't believe in White's compensation after 15 h3 Qg3 16 Be4 Bxe4 17 Qxe4 Bxc3 18 bxc3 Nf5) 8 ... Bxc3+ 9 bxc3 (now Black has a trick which is familiar to all 1 b3 players) 9 ... Nxe4 (White is unable to chop the knight since ... Qh4 favourably regains the piece) 10 Nf3 Nf6 11 Ba3 c5! 12 dxc5 Na6 13 cxb6 axb6 14 Bd6 Nc5 15 Ne5 Be4 16 0-0 Bxd3 17 Nxd3 Nce4 18 Bb4 Rc8 and White's weak pawns are counterbalanced by Black's insecure king.

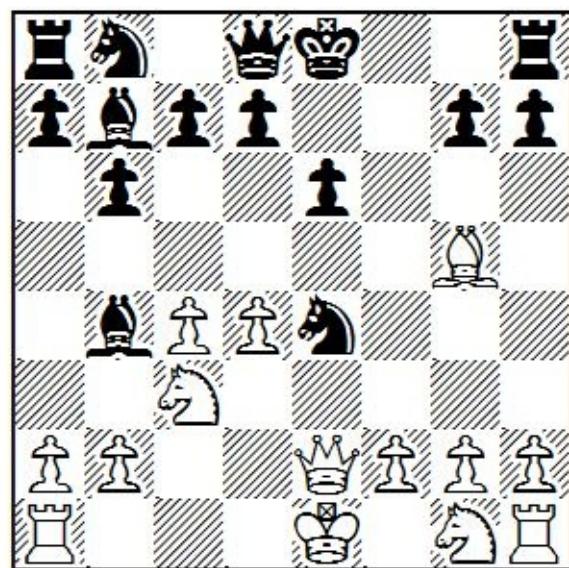
### 6 ... Nf6 7 Bg5

7 f3?! is met with 7 ... Nc6! 8 Be3 fxe4 9 fxe4 e5! 10 d5 Nd4 11 Bxd4 exd4 12 a3 Ba5!? 13 b4 (13 e5 is met by 13 ... 0-0! 14 b4 dxc3 15 bxa5 g6! with an edge for Black, since capturing on f6 is far too risky for White) 13 ... dxc3 14 bxa5 0-0 15 Nf3 Qe7 16 0-0, T.Nyback-A.Bokros, Hengelo 2002. Black looks slightly better after 16 ... Rae8 17 e5 g6.

### 7 ... fxe4 8 Bxe4

After 8 Bxf6? exd3 9 Qh5+ g6 10 Qh4 Be7 White found himself down a pawn, with no trace of compensation, A.Razmyslov-E.Kengis, Bad Zwesten 1997.

### 8 ... Nxe4!?



The knight begins to propound an incomprehensible doctrine, as he single-handedly decides to lead an armed incursion into the gates of White's city.

**Question:** Doesn't this provocation violate the prime directive, which is to never meddle in the natural evolution of a sentient world?

**Answer:** I admit this queen sacrifice may be a bit presumptuous on Black's part, but it certainly makes for an interesting game. Some ideas are tempting in the abstract. When we flesh them out and details emerge, suddenly it doesn't look so great - but not in this case. I would still play the move, despite the computer's admonition. *Houdini* says White is up less than a pawn. For us confused humans, it isn't so easy to navigate White's position.

Black can also play it safe with the position after 8 ... Bxe4. The pond's fish lie low, hugging the bottom, refusing to snap at the fisherman's bait. After 9 Bxf6 Qxf6 10 Qxe4 Bxc3+ 11 bxc3 0-0 12 Nf3

Nc6 13 0-0 Qf5 14 Qe2 an almost identical position is reached with colours reversed from the Nimzo-Larsen Attack. In this case White's extra central control balances with Black's slightly superior structure, L.Rogule-E.Paehtz, Leon 2001.

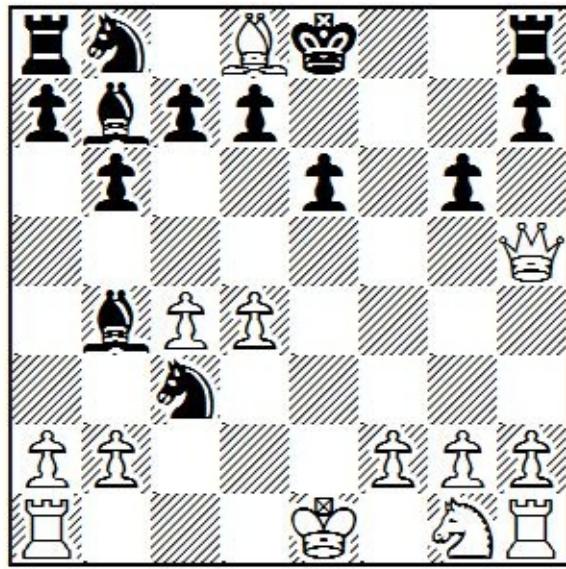
### 9 Bxd8

The beautiful/evil queen evokes both attraction and repulsion in White's bishop. He can't help himself, as his eyes brush the queen with a lustful gaze of acquisition.

### 9 ... Nxc3 10 Qh5+

10 bxc3 was given an exclam by Glenn Flear. After 10 ... Bxc3+ 11 Kf1 Bxa1 12 Bxc7 Black should play 12 ... Bxd4, which I think is an improvement over Flear's castling: 13 Bd6 Nc6 14 Nf3 Bf6. I wouldn't mind Black here, who has rook, bishop and pawn for the queen, as well as a developmental lead.

### 10 ... g6



**Exercise (critical decision):** Our candidate moves are 11 Qh4 and 11 Qe5.

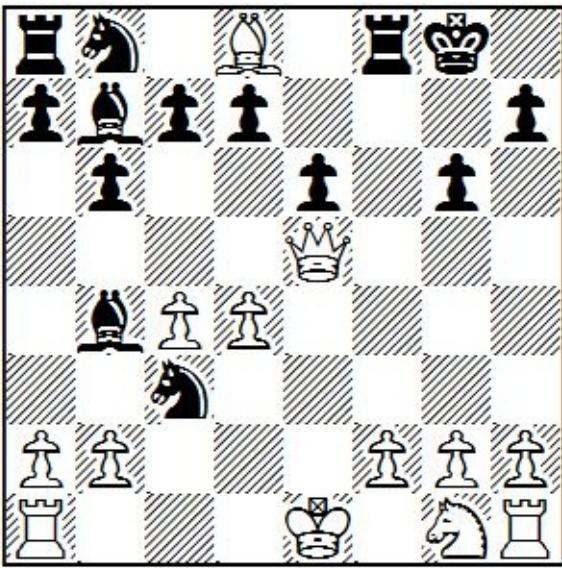
One promises White the advantage, while the other allows Black full compensation for the queen sacrifice. Analyse both and pick one.

### 11 Qe5?

A jigsaw puzzle with missing fragments turns into a meaningless pastime. With this action the vulnerable queen runs the grave risk of incurring the black pieces' displeasure. When we follow an incorrect plan and then are shown why it is incorrect, why is it that we always recoil from simple truth? This move is tempting, since it attacks h8 and c7, while remaining central, yet it is incorrect, which reveals just how difficult it is to play White's position without error.

**Answer:** Correct was the counterintuitive 11 Qh4! when after 11 ... Bxg2!? (the point is, after 11 ... 0-0?? 12 a3 Black doesn't gain a tempo on White's queen, as it did in the game's continuation: 12 ... Bd6 13 f3! Na4 14 b3 Nb2 15 Bg5 Nd3+ 16 Kd1 Nf4 17 Bh6 Rf7 18 Qd8+ Bf8 19 Bxf4 Rxf4 20 Ne2 Rf7 21 Qxc7 d5 22 Qe5 dxc4 23 Qxe6 cxb3 24 h4! and Black lacks full compensation for the queen) 12 bxc3 Bxc3+ 13 Ke2 Nc6 14 Bf6 0-0 15 Rc1 Bb4 16 Nh3! Bxh3 17 a3 Ba5 18 Rhg1 Bf5 19 Rg3 White stands better, although even here, Black retains practical chances, since it isn't so easy to play White.

### 11 ... 0-0



**Exercise (critical decision):** White can either play 12 bxc3, or 12 Kf1. Choose wisely, since one of the lines loses.

### **12 Kf1?**

Such a voluntary constraint compromises the king's dignity to a large extent. A blunder, after which Black gets a winning position.

**Answer:** White had to try 12 bxc3! Bxc3+ 13 Kf1 Bxa1 14 Be7 (the greedy 14 Qxc7?! is met with 14 ... Ba6! 15 Nf3 Nc6 with advantage to Black) 14 ... Re8 15 Bg5 Ba6 16 Ne2 Nc6 17 Qxc7 Bxc4 when I prefer Black's chances, despite the comp's even evaluation.

### **12 ... Ne4!**

A nasty reminder of White's ebbing chances. Black threatens to press his claim upon f2, which is mate on the move.

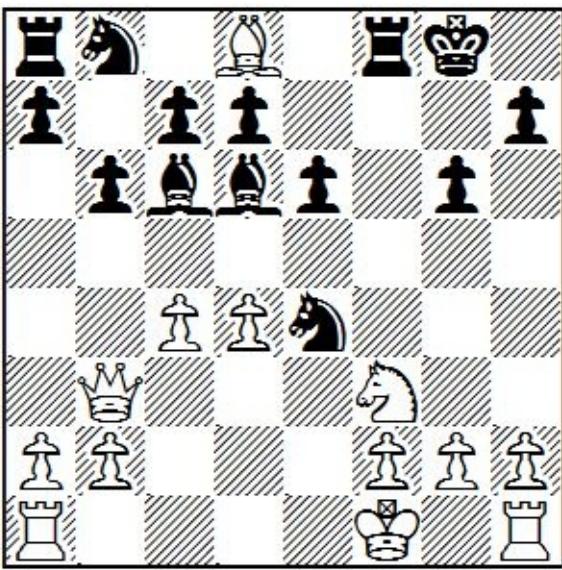
### **13 Nf3 Bd6 14 Qb5**

The queen reluctantly follows the bishop's marching orders with laggard feet.

### **14 ... Bc6!**

Chasing White's queen to a tactically unfavourable square.

### **15 Qb3**



The queen opens her mouth to scream her outrage, yet merely produces a dismal croak of frustration.

**Exercise (combination alert):** White's queen broodingly studies her unappetizing option: a single safe square on b3 - which as it turns out, isn't so safe after all. Black looks better after the simple 15 ... Rxd8. However, look closer. He has a crushing shot.

**Answer:** Removal of the guard/knight fork.

**15 ... Rxf3!**

"I merely seek redress for past wrongs. Having been dealt a just defeat for past treachery, now comes the moment for you to suffer the consequences," declares the rook.

**16 gxf3**

Hopeless, as are the lines:

a) 16 Qxf3 Nd2+;

b) 16 Qd1 Rxf2+ 17 Kg1 (the king floats alone in his private cosmos, the way George Clooney was set adrift to die in space, in the movie *Gravity*) 17 ... Na6 18 Bh4 Rxb2 with a crushing position for Black.

**16 ... Nd2+ 17 Ke2 Nxb3 18 axb3 Na6! 19 Rx a6**

19 Bh4 Nb4 is just as hopeless for White.

**19 ... Rxd8 20 Rx a7 Rf8 0-1**

White's conclave dissolves in acrimonious accusations. f3 falls and White's rooks are no match for Black's bishop-pair and rook.

**Summary:** If you are a con-man or con-woman at heart, you may want to speculate with the audacious queen sacrifice 8 ... Nxe4!? which admittedly does threaten to exceed rationality's bounds. The comps like White, but against a human, I believe Black generates very real practical chances to induce error. If you want to play it safe, putting fantasy aside to walk the path of hard reality, then 8 ... Bxe4 gives Black equality.

*Game 31*

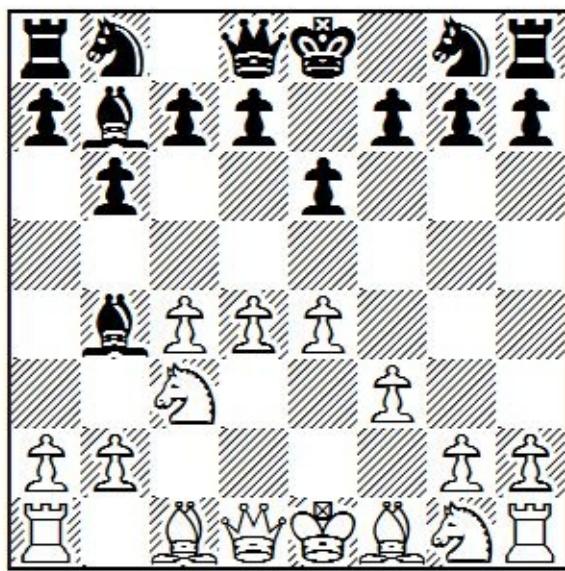
**B.Cuarta-V.Iyer**

San Diego (rapid) 2014

**1 d4 b6**

This was one of my student Venkat's first outings with 1 ... b6. With it, he took down a master, who looked unfamiliar with English Defence theory.

**2 e4 e6 3 c4 Bb7 4 Nc3 Bb4 5 f3**



**Question:** This looks like a Nimzo-Indian Sämisch with White achieving e4 in one tempo, correct?

**Answer:** Correct?

**Question:** Well, isn't the implication that the line favours White?

**Answer:** I don't think so, for the following reasons:

1. Black's f-pawn is free to play to f5, chipping away at White's centre.
2. Black's queen is free to give check on h4, which enables tactics and may force weakening on White with g3.

**5 ... f5!**

This is in essence a pawn sacrifice.

**6 e5**

When a player looks too intently forward, his or her rear flank may be left unprotected. Alternatives:

a) 6 exf5 is White's main line. After 6 ... Nh6! 7 fxe6 (7 Bxh6 fails to damage Black's structure; 7 ... Qh4+ 8 g3 Qxh6 offers Black excellent compensation for the pawn, with the bishop-pair, development lead and a weakened f3 square, L.Jakobsen-E.Kengis, Gistrup 1997) 7 ... Nf5! (threat: ... Qh4+), he has tried:

a1) 8 Bf4 dxе6 9 Nge2 0-0 10 Qd2 Qh4+ 11 g3 Qe7 12 Bg2 Nc6 13 0-0-0 was A.Donchenko-C.Bauer, Metz 2014. Black looks like he achieved dynamic equality after 13 ... e5.

a2) After 8 exd7+ Nxd7 9 Nge2 0-0 Black enjoys an enormous development lead for the pawn: 10 Kf2? (10 h4 was necessary, after which Black obtains full compensation for the pawn, with a huge development lead and numerous dark-square targets in White's position) 10 ... Qh4+ 11 Kg1 (11 g3?? Nxg3! 12 Nxg3 Bxf3 is crushing) 11 ... Ne5! Black generated a winning attack in J.Svensson-G.Forslund, correspondence 1985.

b) 6 Bd3 transposes to a line we examined in the notes of the last game.

**6 ... c5 7 d5??**

A new move in the position and no improvement over 7 a3 Bxc3+ (7 ... Ba5? 8 b4! cxb4 9 Nb5 gives White a strong initiative) 8 bxc3 Nc6 9 dxc5!?, G.Sagalchik-D.Hergott, North Bay 1996. I like Black's development lead after 9 ... Nxe5 10 Qd4 Qf6 11 cxb6 Ne7! 12 c5 N7c6 13 Qe3 axb6 14 cxb6 Na5 and don't like White's survival odds here.

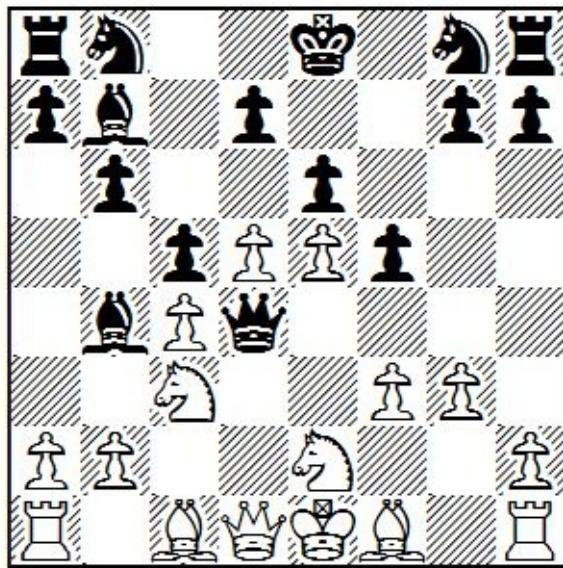
**7 ... Qh4+!**

This idea worked out well, but an even stronger version was to first toss in 7 ... exd5 8 cxd5 and only then play 8 ... Qh4+! 9 g3 Qd4! with a slightly superior version of the game's continuation.

**8 g3 Qd4!**

The queen, in flagrant violation of her d1-sister's prohibitions, finds d4 a congenial seat for her throne. She decides the moment is ripe to cause a dislocation in White's plans, before he consolidates his holdings. This isn't simply a meaningless frivolity on Black's part, since he threatens a double attack on c3 and e5.

**9 Nge2**



Curata sacrifices a pawn (without much choice I might add), for a development lead.

**9 ... Qxe5!**

"If I must kill to survive, then so be it," thinks the queen, who like the devil, is well known for her deviously bitter bargains. The correct pawn grab, despite the coming Bf4 tempo loss.

**Question:** Can Black undermine d5 by grabbing c4 with 9 ... Qxc4?

**Answer:** White actually holds a nasty initiative after 10 Kf2! Bxc3 11 Nxc3 Qd4+ 12 Be3 Qxd1 (12 ... Qxe5?! 13 dxe6 dxe6 14 Bf4! Qd4+ 15 Qxd4 cxd4 16 Nb5 favours White) 13 Rxd1. Black finds himself behind in development and under pressure. White threatens both Nb5 and also dxe6, followed by Bc4.

**10 Bf4??**

Black's queen is a master of luring her enemy/admirers to their doom with her feminine wiles. White's position already shows signs of fraying at the edges. White played this natural tempo-gainer a move too soon. 10 Kf2! prevents the doubling of White's c-pawns and may offer him some compensation for the pawn in the form of a development lead. If given a choice, I still prefer Black, who is well stocked

to withstand years of siege.

**10 ... Bxc3+**

This zwischenzug further damages White's pawns.

**11 bxc3 Qf6 12 Bg2?**

This is a line which shouldn't have been crossed. White's once disciplined intent devolves into a spatter of discordant notions. Now he is unable to support d5. He had to try 12 Qd2. Even then, I don't see full compensation after 12 ... e5 13 Bg5 Qf7.

**12 ... Ne7 13 dxe6**

White is also strategically lost after 13 d6? Ng6.

**13 ... dxe6**

White finds himself overextended, down a pawn with an inferior structure. His next move is a desperate attempt to drum up threats, which only leads to a worsening of his position.

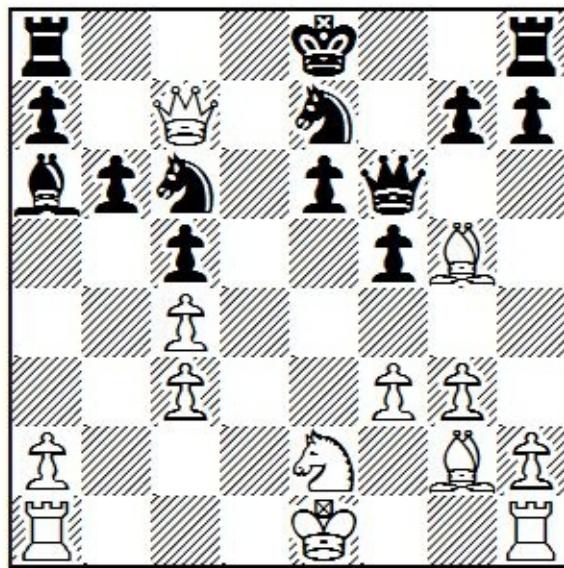
**14 Qd6??**

If White's king can't even control his queen, then how much more so his vast, overextended kingdom? This infiltration attempt fails to generate any traction, and actually loses time.

**14 ... Nbc6 15 Qc7 Ba6**

The uprising which White attempts to quell, stubbornly persists in its antagonistic path. Black covers everything and now c4 hangs. White's resources appear embarrassingly scant, yet he has one final desperate trick up his sleeve with his next move.

**16 Bg5**



Very clever, but Black doesn't have to accept. Even the patience of a saint isn't inexhaustible. The bishop, once silent as the grave, previously unable to participate, now gets his big chance.

**16 ... Qe5!**

The most accurate response. Black can even fall into White's 'trap' with 16 ... Qxg5!? ("Priest! The cudgel of my power supersedes your God's ability to protect you," rages Black's queen to the startled bishop, whose faith truly does begin to waver) 17 f4 Qf6 18 Bxc6+ Nxc6 19 Qxc6+ Kf7 20 Qa4 Bb7 when he remains up a solid pawn with a great position.

**17 Qxe5 Nxe5 18 f4**

White's intended double attack fails.

**18 ... Nd3+ 19 Kd2**

The king, expecting to be treated in a style consonant to his lofty rank, gets just the opposite from

Black's rude knight. 19 Kf1 Rd8 20 Bf3 Bxc4 is equally hopeless for White.

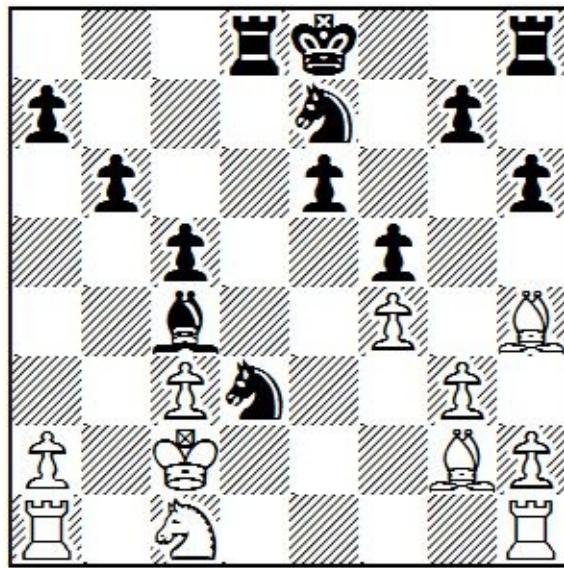
**19 ... Rd8**

Threat: ... Nxf4+.

**20 Kc2 Bxc4**

Now Black is up two pawns for zero compensation.

**21 Nc1 h6 22 Bh4**



**Exercise (combination alert):** White should have chopped the e7-knight last move. How can Black exploit White's last move?

**22 ... Rg8**

Threatening ... g5 and forcing White's response.

**Answer:** Even stronger was 22 ... g5! (deflection) 23 fxg5 Nf2!. This trick deflects White's rook from h1, or wins more material. Now if 24 Re1? hxg5 25 Bxg5 Rxh2 26 Bxe7 Kxe7 27 Bf3 Nd3+ 28 Re2 Ne1+ and it's time for White to resign.

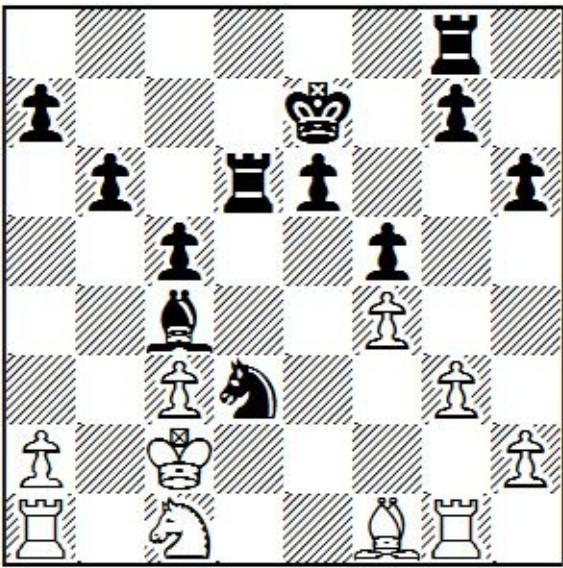
**23 Bxe7**

White realizes that ownership of the bishop-pair proved to be more bane than profit.

**23 ... Kxe7 24 Rg1**

Intending Bf1, without falling prey to ... Nf2 ideas.

**24 ... Rd6 25 Bf1**



**Exercise (combination alert):** White just blundered in an already lost position. How did Black win even more material?

**Answer:** Removal of a key defender/knight fork.

**25 ... Ne1+! 26 Kb1**

The position begins to close in on White's king, constricting all motion to a point of total stasis.

**26 ... Nf3 27 Bxc4**

27 Rh1?? fails miserably to 27 ... Bxf1 28 Rxfl Nd2+, forking king and rook. An ominous pole supports the impaled corpse of White's rook.

**27 ... Nxg1 28 Nd3 Nf3**

Threat: ... Nd2+.

**29 Kc2 Rgd8**

Black is unwilling to cede control over e5. He refuses to act until all options are made clear. Venkat is too young to understand the value of money. I would have just shamelessly chopped another pawn with 29 ... Nxh2.

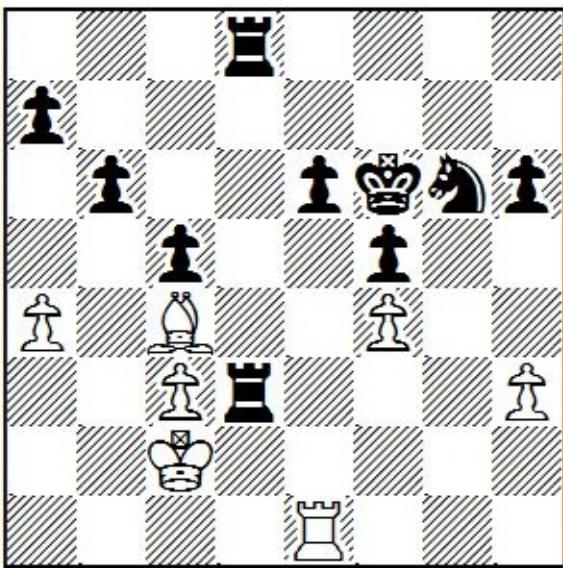
**30 h3 g5 31 a4 gxf4 32 gxf4**

Now Black's knight has an escape hatch on h4.

**32 ... Kf6 33 Rf1**

33 a5 is met with 33 ... Rg8.

**33 ... Nh4 34 Rg1 Ng6 35 Re1 Rxd3!?**



Simplification.

**36 Rxe6+**

36 Bxd3 Nxf4 leaves Black up three pawns.

**36 ... Kg7 37 Bxd3 Nxf4**

This had to have been a pretty depressing game for my friend Braulio. Now rook and bishop are simultaneously attacked.

**38 Re7+**

38 Re3 Rxd3 39 Rxd3 Nxd3 40 Kxd3 isn't exactly going to be a close king and pawn ending.

**38 ... Kf6 39 Rxa7 Rxd3 40 Rb7 Rd6 41 Kb3 0-1**

**Summary:** This game is a clear demonstration of just how theoretically confusing the English Defence lines are for White, even when played at strong club level.

*Game 32*

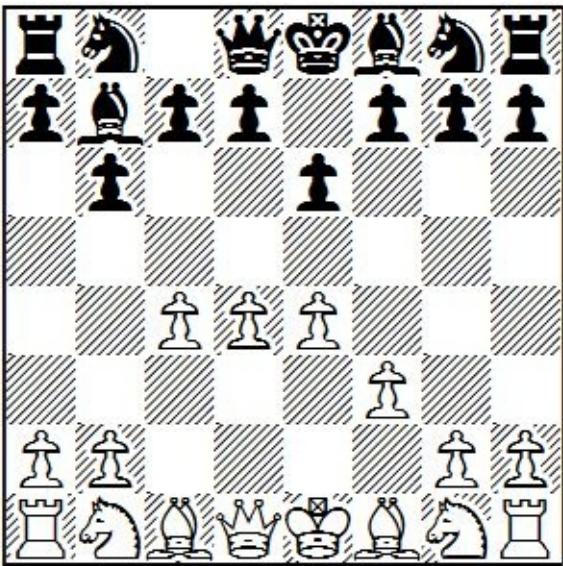
**A.Kretchetov-J.Kraai**

Burbank 2003

**1 d4 e6 2 c4**

GM Jesse Kraai is a French Defence player, so he isn't worried about 2 e4.

**2 ... b6 3 e4 Bb7 4 f3**



**Question:** This looks like a better version for White than last game, since he avoided the Nc3 Bb4 pin, correct?

**Answer:** I'm not so sure about that. White's knight must emerge at some point, and d2 is a passive square. Also, by playing this early f3, White weakened his kingside and becomes vulnerable to ... Qh4+ weakening ideas:

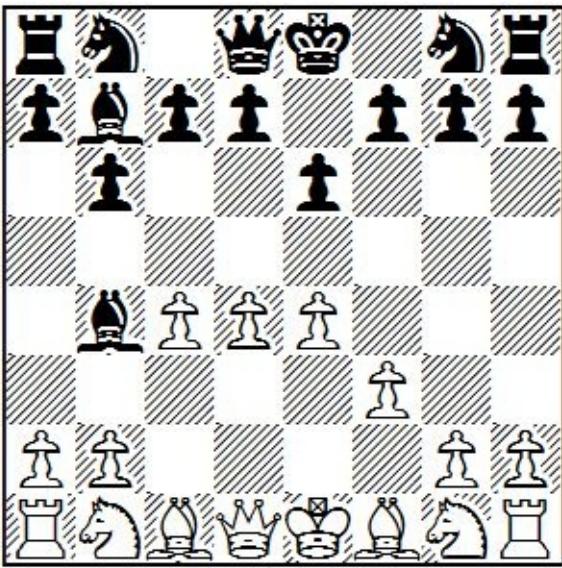
**4 ... d5!?**

The coming battle undoubtedly brought both players equal measures of misgivings and optimistic anticipation. I like this rather odd counter, which is a favourite of GMs Jesse Kraai and Pavel Blatny. Next game we look at the thematic 4 ... f5.

**Question:** Isn't ... f5 our traditional central counter in the English Defence?

**Answer:** Normally it is, but this position is an exception. We try and take advantage of White's non-Nc3 with a ... d5 counter in this version. The ... f5 counter is also playable, though.

If you want to transpose to the last game, then play 4 ... Bb4.



The point is White's best move is 5 Nc3.

**Question:** Why can't White play 5 Bd2?

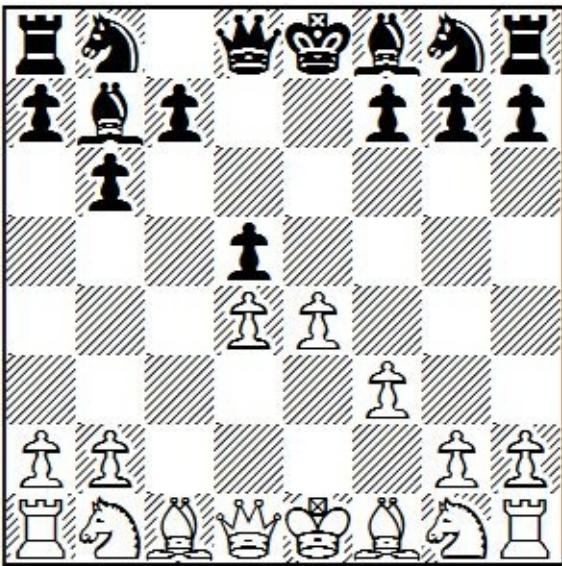
**Answer:** The swap leaves him with a slightly bad bishop, since White rarely plays f3 in Bogo-Indian structures. Black looks dynamically equal after 5 ... Bxd2+ 6 Qxd2 Nh6! (keeping open ... f5 possibilities) 7 Nc3 f5 8 0-0-0 0-0 9 Bd3 Nc6 10 Nge2 fxe4 11 Bxe4 Na5 12 Bxb7 Nxb7 13 Kb1 Nd6 14 c5 Ndf5 15 Ne4, M.Dlugy-E.Kengis, Liepaja 2001. The game looks balanced after 15 ... Ne7.

**Question:** Fair enough. Then why can't White play 5 Nd2?

**Answer:** This one looks dubious to me, since White rarely mixes Nd2 with Sämisch structures. Black can play 5 ... f5! 6 exf5 Qh4+ 7 g3 Qxd4 8 fxe6 Ne7 (as always, Black is willing to sacrifice a pawn for a development lead in this line) 9 Qe2!? (this is pretty greedy, but White doesn't have great alternatives: for example, 9 a3 Qe5+ 10 Qe2 Bxd2+ 11 Kxd2! Qf6! 12 Kc2 dxе6 13 Bd2 Nbc6 14 Bc3 e5 looks just awful for White, who remains seriously behind in development, with a weak f3 point) 9 ... 0-0 10 a3 Bxd2+ 11 Qxd2 when White's development lag threatens to equal that of some of Morphy's opponents, T.Kordsachia-M.Stean, Hamburg 1977. Black's massive development lead looks close to decisive after 11 ... Qf6.

**5 Nc3!?**

Immoderacy in optimism is a mixed blessing. Are we not all slaves to our habits and desires? White decides to stand his ground, daring Black to destabilize his giant centre. After 5 cxd5 exd5:



a) With 6 exd5?! White wants an isolani position but in this version, his f3 simply weakens e3 and his dark squares: 6 ... Bd6 (threat: ... Qh4+) 7 Bb5+ was A.Onischuk-J.Kraai, Philadelphia 2004. I prefer Black's position after 7 ... Nd7 8 Ne2 Ne7 9 Nbc3 a6. The trouble is the inclusion of f3 hurts White, since it weakens e3.

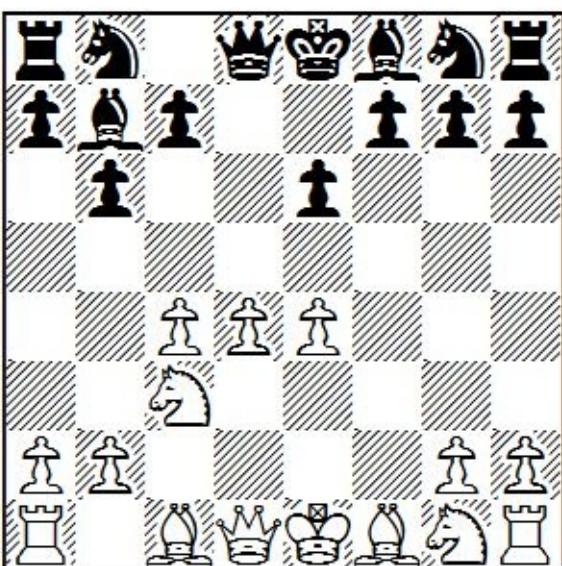
b) 6 Nc3 dxe4 7 fxe4 Nf6 8 e5 Nd5 9 Nf3 Be7 10 Bc4 0-0 11 0-0 c5 gives the game an Alekhine Defence-like flavour, where White's kingside attacking chances are counterbalanced by Black's central counter.

c) 6 e5 c5 7 f4 was Z.Haba-J.Fiala, Plzen 2012. Black gets a nice looking French Defence-like position after 7 ... Nc6 8 Nf3 Nh6!, fighting for control over the light squares and impeding f5: 9 Bd3 (or 9 Nc3 Nf5 10 Bb5 a6 11 Bxc6+ Bxc6 12 0-0 Qd7 and Black's powerful grip on the light squares gives him an edge) 9 ... Qd7 10 0-0 Be7 11 Nc3 0-0 12 Bd2. Now Black can try 12 ... Nb4 13 Bb1 Ba6 14 Re1 Rad8 when ..Nf5 and ... Nd3 are in the air, and Black looks at least even.

### 5 ... dxe4

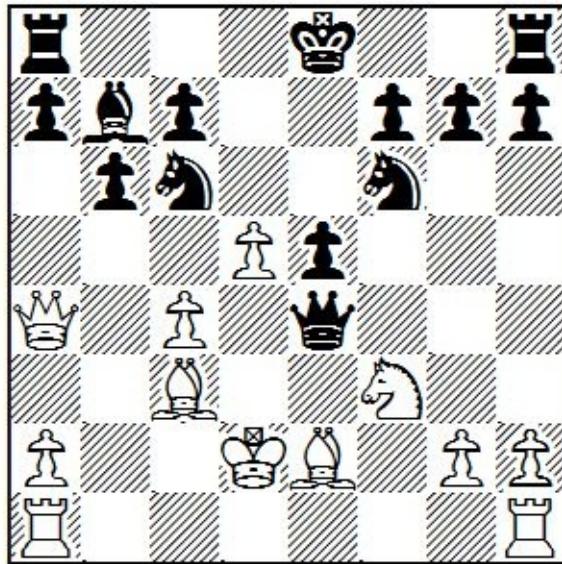
We risk opening the f-file to loosen White's gigantic centre.

### 6 fxe4



### 6 ... Nf6

6 ... e5 also gives Black dynamic equality: 7 d5 Bc5 8 b4? (this move loses; White can try Houdini's suggestion 8 Qg4 g6 with approximately even chances) 8 ... Bxb4! (Blatny correctly walks into White's trap) 9 Qa4+ Nc6 10 Bd2 (it appears as if Black is about to drop a piece) 10 ... Bxc3 11 Bxc3 Qh4+ 12 Kd2 Qxe4? (a blunder; 12 ... 0-0-0! 13 Kc1 Nd4 hangs on to the extra piece, with a clear advantage to Black) 13 Nf3? (White stands better after 13 Re1! Qf4+ 14 Kc2 Nge7 15 dxc6 Bxc6 16 Qa3) 13 ... Nf6?! (once again, 13 ... 0-0-0! is clearly in Black's favour) 14 Be2??.



**Exercise (combination alert):** How did Black avoid the loss of a piece and remain up several pawns?

**Answer:** Pin. 14 ... Nxd5!, R.Henry-P.Blatny, Boston 2001.

**7 Bg5??**

The bishop wears a guilty look on his face, like a priest who secretly reads Darwin's *On The Origin of Species*, when his brethren believe he reads scripture. We sense a touch of lastminuteship in this move. White settles for a makeshift, temporary solution for how to protect his wobbly centre, which merely puts the problem off for a move or two. A new move, but no improvement, since White essentially agrees to the loss of the bishop-pair.

White should play 7 e5 Ne4 8 Nf3. Black lost all four games in my database from this position, yet I prefer his side! After 8 ... Nxc3 9 bxc3 c5 10 Be3 cxd4! 11 cxd4 Bb4+ 12 Kf2 0-0 13 Bd3 f6 Black's position looks like a dream Alekhine Defence Four Pawns Attack. Now 14 Kg3? was J.Anselm-H.Klevenow, Langenwang 1993 (White should play the admittedly unpleasant 14 exf6 Qxf6 15 Rf1 Bxf3 16 gxf3 Nc6 17 Be4 e5 18 d5 Nd4 19 Kg2 when he keeps his disadvantage to a minimum), where White's position looks very difficult after 14 ... Nc6! 15 Rf1 Qc7. White's king is horribly misplaced on g3 and he looks busted.

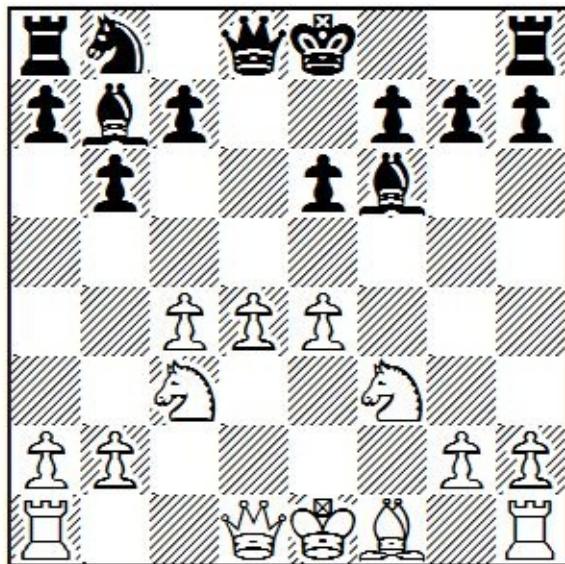
**7 ... Be7??**

This lets White off the hook for his inaccuracy. Simply 7 ... h6! forces White to part with the bishop-pair. Black stands better after 8 Bxf6 Qxf6 9 Nf3 Nc6! 10 d5 (or 10 e5?! Qf4! when both ... Qe3+ and ... 0-0-0 are in the air, and White experiences a very difficult time holding his giant pawn centre together) 10 ... 0-0-0. Advantage Black, who leads in development, owns the bishop-pair and controls the dark squares.

**8 Bxf6??**

Extra precautions don't necessarily make us extra safe. This plan all but guarantees trouble. White reluctantly agrees to a lopsided bargain, in lieu of a superior option. He fails to correctly gauge the importance of retaining his good dark-squared bishop. He was better off with 8 e5 Ne4 9 Bxe7 Qxe7 10 Nf3 0-0 11 Be2 c5 12 0-0 Nd7. I still like Black here, who soon dismantles White's central superiority, but this is better than what White got in the game.

**8 ... Bxf6 9 Nf3**



**9 ... c5**

Logically weakening White's central dark squares, yet I don't see any reason to give White a passed d-pawn. I prefer 9 ... Nc6! 10 d5 (10 e5? Bh4+ and now the trouble is 11 g3?? is met with the crushing 11 ... Nxd4! 12 Nxd4 Bxh1 13 gxh4 Qxh4+ 14 Ke2 0-0-0 when White can resign) 10 ... Ne5 11 Qa4+ Qd7 12 Qxd7+ Nxd7 with a clear advantage for Black in the ending.

**10 d5 Nd7 11 Bd3**

White is stuck with a remaining bad bishop, and its logical aftermath of weak dark squares.

**11 ... Ne5 12 Nxe5**

12 Qa4+ Qd7 13 Qxd7+ Kxd7 is a pleasant ending for Black.

**12 ... Bxe5 13 Qh5**

The queen observes the proceedings with not-so-detached disinterest. Threatening dxе6, as well as the e5-bishop. Black has a strong answer to this move. White should probably resign himself to the inferior ending with 13 Qa4+ Qd7 14 Qxd7+ Kxd7.

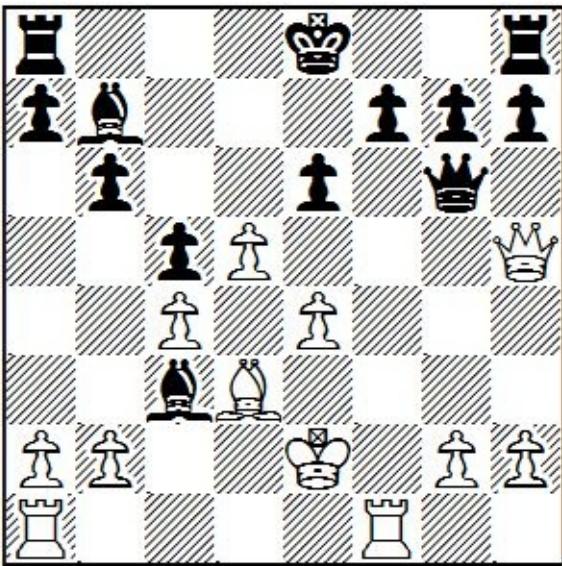
**13 ... Qf6 14 Rf1!?**

Provocation. I would have considered the calmer 14 Rc1 g6 15 Qf3 0-0.

**14 ... Bxc3+**

The townsfolk whisper and mutter amongst themselves ("He's up to no good"), their eyes darting right and left at the approach of the shady looking c3-vagrant in town.

**15 Ke2 Qg6!**



White loses a pawn.

**16 Qxg6**

The queen is unaccustomed to a treaty not of her stipulation. When we accept a flawed deviation from the ideal, its other name is practicality. White has no choice but to enter a rotten ending.

**16 ... hxg6 17 bxc3 Rxh2 18 dxe6?!**

I think this move harms more than helps. I don't see any reason to dissolve his single trump: the passed d5-pawn.

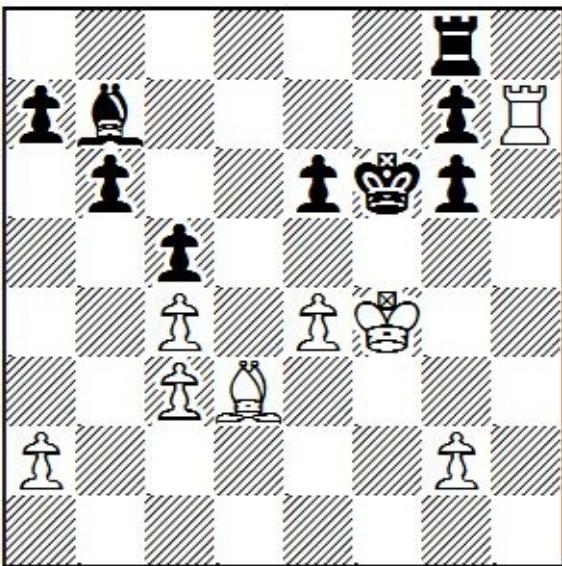
**18 ... fxe6**

Black can keep his structure intact if he finds the more accurate 18 ... f6! 19 Kf3 Ke7 when e6 falls all the same.

**19 Rh1 Rxh1?!**

I don't see any reason not to take g2: 19 ... Rxg2+! 20 Kf3 Rg5 21 Rag1 Rxg1 22 Rxg1 Rd8 23 Ke3 e5! 24 Rxg6 Kf7 with excellent winning chances.

**20 Rxh1 Ke7 21 Rh7 Rg8 22 Ke3 Kf6 23 Kf4**



This walks into exactly what Black wants, but White can do nothing but wait.

**23 ... g5+**

**Question:** Why did Kraai avoid 23 ... e5+?

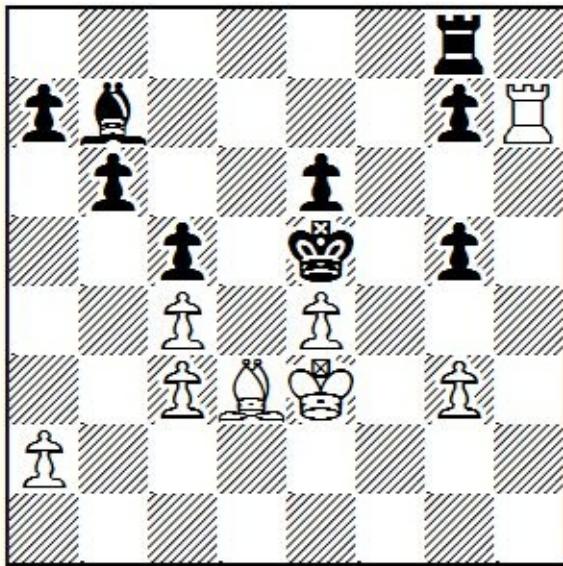
**Answer:** He wants to occupy e5 with his king.

**24 Ke3 Ke5**

The king continues to try his now demoted e3-brother's fast-draining patience.

**25 g3**

25 Rh5 is met simply by 25 ... Kf6.



Edgar Allen Poe said his stories were “predetermined”, meaning he began his work with the ending and its emotional response, and from there worked backwards. In the instance of this game, this ending was the direct result of White’s decisions 7 Bg5?! and 8 Bxf6?! which dramatically weakened his dark squares. A rising flood of evidence shows that White’s game is a strategic disaster:

1. Every pawn is isolated and/or doubled.
2. His bishop is awful.
3. Black dominates the dark squares.
4. Black has king position.
5. White’s single strength in the position is the fact that his rook ties Black’s rook down.

**Exercise (planning):** Despite all his troubles, White’s position remains standing, seemingly devoid of visible support or basis. The last few moves passed without notable event. That is about to change. How did Black manage to evict White’s annoying rook from h7?

**Answer:** Transfer a bishop to g6.

**25 ... Bc6!**

Black’s power flows through the might of his superior king and bishop.

**26 Bc2 Be8 27 Rh2 Bf7**

Black marks time, perhaps to reach the time control and have a long think.

**28 Bb3 Be8 29 Rh7 a6**

Keeping White guessing about ... b5 breaks.

**30 Kf3 Bf7 31 Rh2 Bg6**

The bishop tethers his brother to protection of e4.

### **32 Bc2**

White's king is forced to leave an important defensive task - coverage of e4 - to an incompetent subordinate.

### **32 ... Rd8 33 Ke3 b5**

Black advances on all fronts. He can also try 33 ... Rf8 34 Bd3 g4! 35 Be2 Bxe4 36 Bxg4 Rf1 when his rook infiltrates.

### **34 Rh1**

Likewise, 34 cxb5 axb5 35 Rh1 Ra8 36 Bb1 Ra3 37 Rc1 b4 (zugzwang) 38 Kd2 Bxe4 39 cxb4 Bxb1 40 Rxb1 Rxa2+ 41 Ke3 Ra3+ 42 Kf2 c4 43 b5 Rb3 wins.

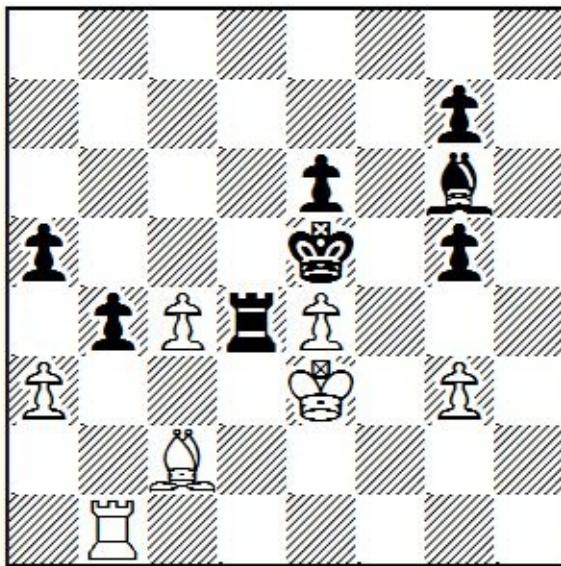
### **34 ... b4**

The human move. Black creates another dark-square puncture on d4. Of course the greedy comps prefer 34 ... bxc4, which is strong as well.

### **35 cxb4 cxb4 36 Rb1 a5 37 a3!**

White's only chance to disturb the flow.

### **37 ... Rd4!**



The rook's mind seethes with ingenious plots.

### **38 axb4**

38 Ra1! sets up a trap. Black shouldn't play 38 ... Rxc4? (38 ... Bxe4! 39 axb4 Rxc4 40 Bd3 Rxb4 41 Rxa5+ Bd5 still wins) 39 Bd3 Rc3 40 axb4 Bxe4 41 Rxa5+ Bd5 42 b5 Rb3 43 Ra4 when White has excellent chances to draw.

### **38 ... Rxc4**

Black's pieces, having tasted a trifle of this and a morsel of that, are now ready for the main course.

### **39 Bd3 Rxb4**

Pawn number two falls.

### **40 Rc1 Bxe4**

Make that number three.

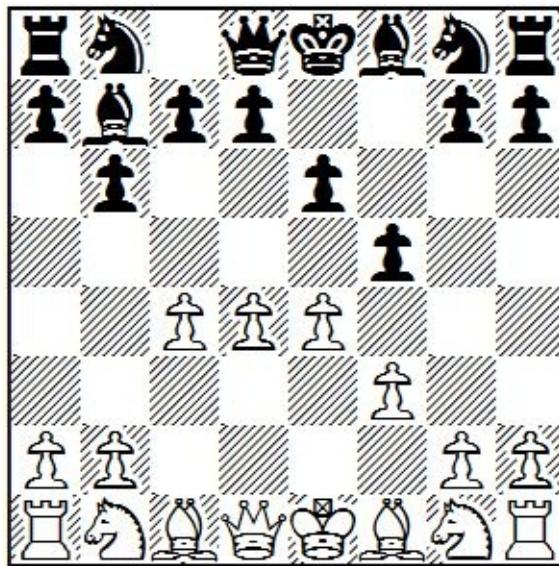
### **41 Rc5+ Kd6 42 Rxa5 Bxd3 43 Kxd3 Rg4 44 Ke3 Rxg3+ 45 Ke4 Ke7 46 Ra6 Kf7 0-1**

**Summary:** After 4 f3, you have a choice between 4 ... Bb4+, which is likely to transpose to the last game, or 4 ... d5!?, which may have the effect of confusing White further.

Game 33

D.Covic-B.Filipovic  
Bosnian League 2003

1 d4 b6 2 e4 Bb7 3 f3 e6 4 c4 f5

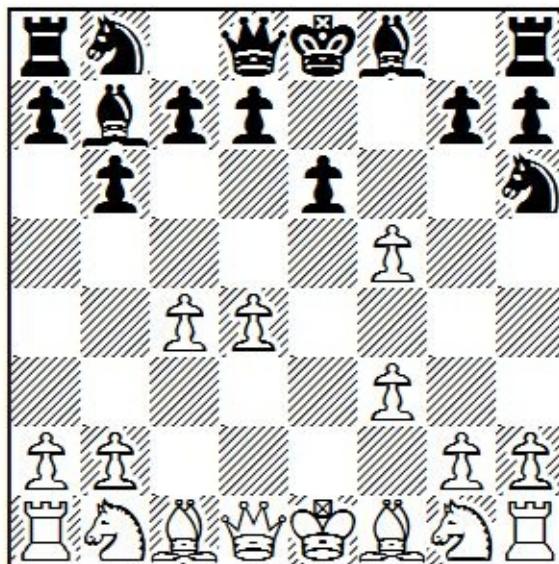


More thematic for English Defence than the 4 ... d5 break we looked at last game.

**5 exf5 Nh6**

**Question:** Is it obligatory for Black to sacrifice?

**Answer:** No. Black can also play it safe with 5 ... exf5, although after 6 Be3 Bb4+ (*Houdini* likes 6 ... Qe7!? 7 Qe2 Ba6 8 Bf2 d5 9 Qxe7+ Nxe7 with equality) 7 Nc3 Nc6 8 Qd3 Bxc3+?! (8 ... Qf6 is preferable: for instance, 9 Nge2 0-0-0 10 a3 Bxc3+ 11 Nxc3 Nge7 12 d5?! Ne5 13 Qc2 Nxc4! 14 Bxc4 Qh4+ 15 Bf2 Qxc4 16 0-0-0 c5) 9 Qxc3 Nf6 10 Bd3 Ne7 11 Nh3 White's bishop-pair and central control gave him the advantage, and my Everyman cousin and editor went on to win, R.Palliser-J.Blackburn, Blackpool 2005.

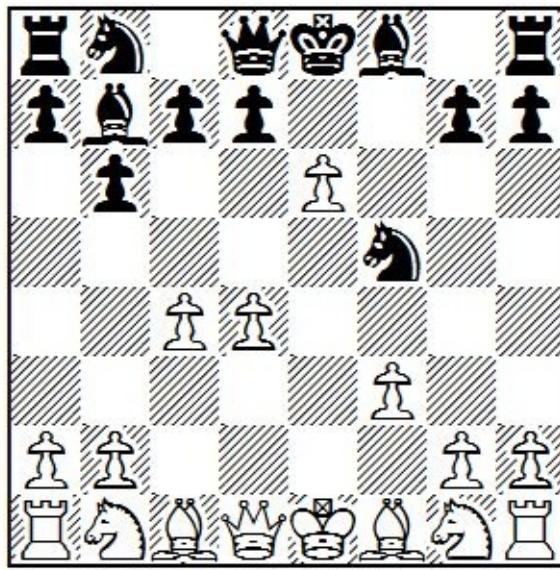


## 6 fxe6

**Question:** Why can't White damage Black's structure and remove a potential attacker with 6 Bxh6?

**Answer:** This eliminates an attacker, but at a high cost. Also, there is no damage to Black's structure after 6 ... Qh4+!. Remember this idea, which is also common to the Nimzo-Larsen Attack. After 7 g3 Qxh6 Black's bishop-pair, dark-square control and development lead give him more than enough for the pawn. 8 Qd2 Nc6!? was S.Semkov-E.Bricard, Sofia 1990, when it is anybody's game after 9 Qxh6 gxh6 10 Ne2 Bg7 11 fxe6 Nxd4 12 exd7+ Kxd7 13 Bh3+ Kd6. Black's powerful pieces, bishop-pair and development lead offer full compensation for the pawn. In fact, it is almost certain he will regain the lost pawn soon.

6 ... Nf5



Our most principled move. Black refuses to compromise and recapture on e6. He threatens ... Qh4+.

7 Bf4

White, so far behind in development, doesn't take chances and wisely declines the pawn sacrifice.

**Question:** What if I am dealing with a greedy opponent who takes everything with 7 exd7+?

**Answer:** I don't see a single game in the database with this move. The implication: the pawn grab is exceedingly risky for White. Let's take a look: 7 ... Nxd7 8 Bf4 (8 Ne2 Bd6 9 Nbc3 0-0 ... Qh4+ is once again in the air and White is almost out of useful moves; *Houdini* recommends the completely psycho-looking 10 Kd2, after which Black gets loads of compensation for the pawn) 8 ... Bd6 9 Bxd6 cxd6. Both ... Qh4+ and ... Ne3 are in the air, and if 10 Ne2? Qh4+ 11 g3 Qh6 12 Qd2 Ne3 when f3 is hanging and White's position is difficult.

Others:

a) 7 Ne2 Bd6 (renewing the ... Qh4+ threat) 8 h4 0-0 9 Bg5 Qe8 10 Qd3!? was J.Meister-G.Meier, Altenkirchen 2005 (White looks okay after 10 Nbc3 Qxe6 11 d5 Qe8 12 Ne4 h6 13 Bd2 Be5). I prefer Black's position after 10 ... Qxe6 11 Nbc3 h6 12 d5 Qe8 13 Bd2 Ng3 14 Rg1 Bc5 15 0-0-0 Bxg1 16 Nxg1 Na6 and don't believe in White's full compensation for the exchange.

b) 7 Bd3 Qh4+ 8 Kf1 Nxd4 was D.Pergericht-J.Boudre, Val Maubuee 1988. Black's initiative and development lead look far more substantial than White's measly extra pawn after 9 exd7+ Nxd7.

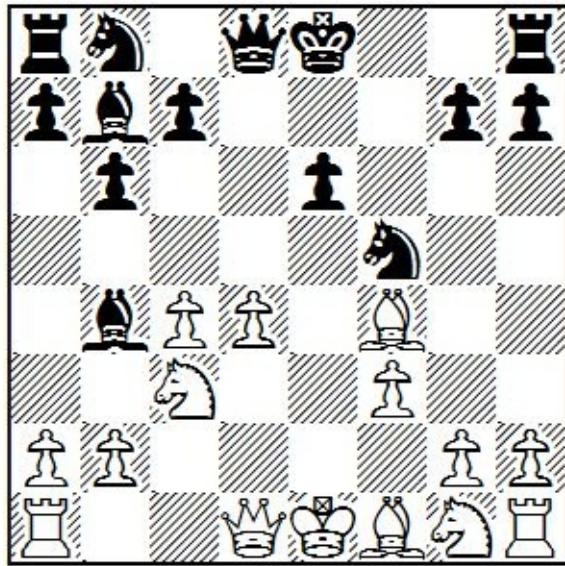
### 7 ... Bb4+

The alternative is to immediately re-establish material equality with 7 ... dxe6:

a) 8 Ne2 was seen in N.Babu-A.Miles, Sakthi 1996. I already prefer Black's game after 8 ... Nc6 9 d5 exd5 10 cxd5 Nb4 11 Nbc3 Bd6 12 a3 Nxd5. Black wins a pawn, since White shouldn't play 13 Nxd5 Bxd5 14 Qxd5?? which hangs the queen to 14 ... Bb4+. All which can be heard are the white queen's outcries, punctuated with her laments.

b) 8 d5 was J.Garcia Miracle-C.Aranda Marin, La Pobla de Lillet 2012. White's position doesn't look very promising after simply 8 ... Bc5. Now if 9 Qa4+ Black has the clever 9 ... Bc6! when White can't accept, since 10 dxc6?? is met with 10 ... Qd4! 11 Ne2 Qxb2 12 Nec3 0-0 13 Bd3 Qf2+! (initiative over material; the a1-rook isn't as important as White's king) 14 Kd1 Qxg2 15 Rf1 Rd8 when the dual threats of ... Qxf1+ and ... Rxd3+ win.

### 8 Nc3 dxe6



### 9 Qa4+

Luring Black into an awkward knight placement on c6.

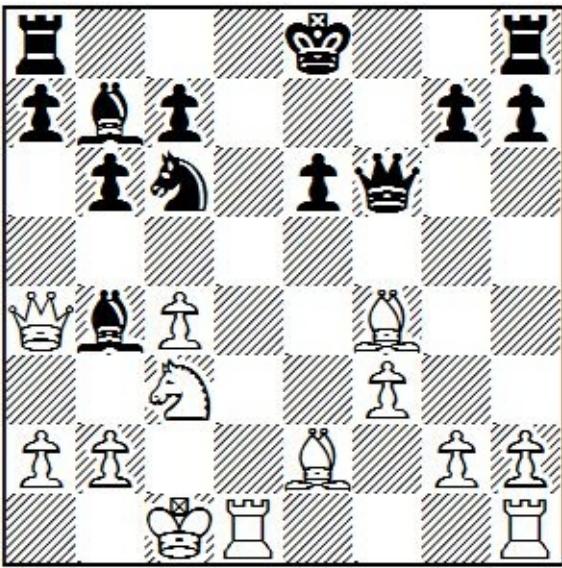
### 9 ... Nc6 10 0-0-0 Nfxd4 11 Nge2

This move is new in the position. White can also create a complications firestorm after 11 Nb5!? 0-0 12 Bxc7 Qg5+ 13 f4 Qh6 14 Nxd4 Rxf4! 15 Bxf4 Qxf4+ 16 Kb1 Nxd4 17 Nf3 (17 Qxb4?? walks into 17 ... Be4+ 18 Ka1 Nc2+) 17 ... Nxf3 18 Qxb4 Be4+ 19 Ka1 Nd4 20 Qd2 Nc2+ 21 Kb1 Nb4+ 22 Ka1 Nc2+. The game ends in perpetual check, H.Lagergren-G.Lloyd, correspondence 2007.

### 11 ... Nxe2+

Black can also try a plan to maintain the d4 outpost with 11 ... Bxc3!? 12 Nxc3 0-0 13 Bg3 Rf7 14 Bd3 Rd7, with dynamic equality.

### 12 Bxe2 Qf6!



This double attack on f4 and c3 gains time for White.

**13 Bd2??!**

After this move White's pieces begin to take on a listless quality.

**Question:** You aren't suggesting that this virtually forced move is incorrect?

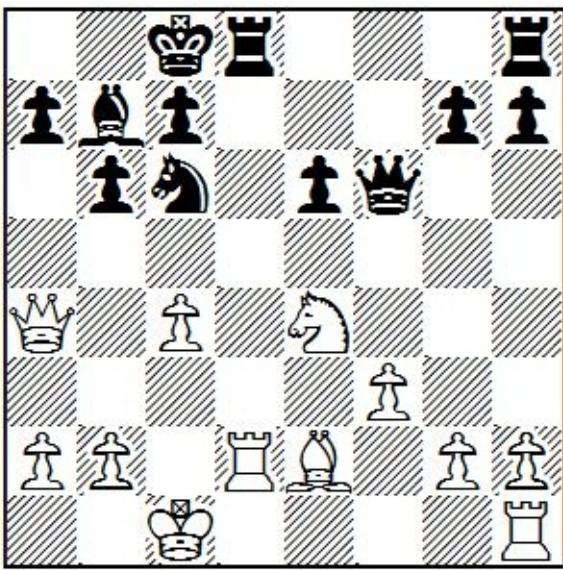
**Answer:** Apparently it is. Black now takes over the initiative. White's king is safer than he looks after the counterintuitive 13 Bxc7!. When we lack a face-saving exit, it is then when we are most sorely tempted to lash out. This move makes sense only if we shed our presuppositions that it is an error, and the radical plan certainly qualifies as an all-or-nothing entity. After 13 ... Bxc3 14 bxc3 Qxc3+ on the surface, it appears as if the shattered queenside only offers a semblance of shelter for White's king, who continues to battle the elements. However, *Houdini* actually rates the game even here. With 15 Kb1 the king remains aloof and unattainable, safe for now from the black queen, who refuses to purge herself from her impossible infatuation: 15 ... 0-0 16 Qb3 Qf6 17 Qb2 Qf7 18 Bg3 e5 19 Bd3 and despite appearances, White is okay here.

**13 ... 0-0-0 14 Ne4**

Each move played seems to add paradox upon paradox. Another natural move; another possible inaccuracy. This one weakens White on the dark squares and tangles him in a pin. The trouble is he may not have a good continuation. For example, 14 a3 Be7 15 Be3 Rxd1+ 16 Rxd1 Qe5! 17 Ne4 (17 Bg1? is met with 17 ... Qg5+ 18 Kb1 Qxg2 when White lacks compensation for the missing pawn) 17 ... Qxh2 18 Bf1 Rd8 when White struggles down a pawn without compensation.

**14 ... Bxd2+ 15 Rxd2**

15 Nxd2 is met with the same response Black played in the game.



**Exercise (combination alert):** Neither party's position experienced growth or diminution over the last few moves. That is about to change. How did Black force the win of a pawn?

**Answer:** Pin.

**15 ... Qh6!**

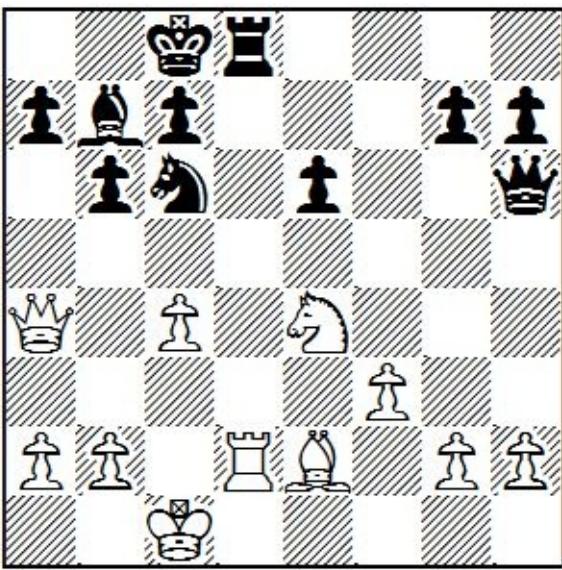
This move is disconcerting news for White, similar to when the captain of your plane informs passengers through the intercom: “Ladies and gentlemen, we thank you for choosing to fly with us. We are low on fuel, losing cabin pressure and three of four of our engines stalled. Please remain calm and remember to buckle your seatbelts and be ready with your floatation devices in case of an emergency landing.”

**16 Rhd1**

**Question:** Why does White give away his h-pawn when he can protect d2 with 16 Qd1?

**Answer:** This move fails to free White from the d2 impediment. Black wins by force after 16 ... Nb4! 17 a3 Bxe4 18 axb4 (or 18 fxe4 Rd7 19 axb4 Rhd8 and it's time for White to resign) 18 ... Rd4! (“I need say nothing. You already understand your fate,” the rook tells his d2 brother) 19 fxe4 Rhd8, which is crushing.

**16 ... Rxd2 17 Rxd2 Rd8!**



The air hangs heavy with threats felt, yet for now, left unspoken. Filipovic disdains the h2 offer and pursues his pin/initiative. There is nothing wrong with cashing out with 17 ... Qxh2.

### **18 Qb5**

The queen experiences a disorienting sense of dislocation. So she hopes to enter play once again on g5. The defence functions in a continually under-resourced state. A pair of urgencies pull White in opposite directions:

1. h2 continues to hang.
2. How to deal with the annoying d2-pin?

In this case, White considers the latter the more urgent threat and decides to offer h2. Instead, 18 h3 is met with 18 ... Nd4 19 Qd1 (19 Bd3?? walks into 19 ... Nxf3! 20 gxf3 Bxe4 21 fxe4 Rxd3 22 Qd1 when White soon enters a king and pawn ending down a pawn) 19 ... Bxe4 20 fxe4 Qg5 21 Bd3 Nc6 (threat: ... Ne5; the taint of chronically weak dark squares cleaves unpleasantly to White's position) 22 Bb1 Kb7 when White can barely move.

### **18 ... Rxd2**

Also tempting is 18 ... e5! 19 Kd1 Qxh2 20 Rxd8+ Nxd8 21 Nd2 Bc6 22 Qa6+ Kb8 23 g4 Qg1+ 24 Kc2 Ne6 and wins.

### **19 Nxd2 Qxh2**

At last. Black finally picks off h2.

### **20 Qg5 Qg1+!**

A clever way to cover g7 without weakening his pawns.

### **21 Bd1 Qd4 22 Qh5**

The queen expresses shock with a sibilant in-drawn breath, since g7 remains safe.

### **22 ... h6 23 Qe8+ Nd8**

This rearguard action is necessary for the safety and good health of Black's e-pawn. How infuriating for White. Everything is covered and he remains down a pawn.

### **24 g4**

This is probably an unwise idea, to risk fixing his pawns on light squares.

### **24 ... Bc6 25 Qg6 Bd7 26 Qe4!?**

I would have kept queens on the board. Who wants to suffer a pawn-down ending?

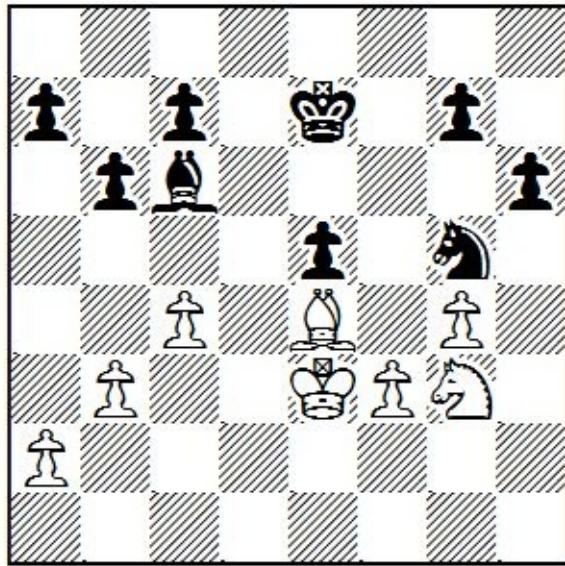
### **26 ... Qxe4 27 Nxe4 Bc6 28 Ng3 Kd7 29 Kd2 Ke7 30 Ke3 e5**

Black is up a pawn with the superior minor pieces. At some point he will force a kingside passer with

the plan: ... g6 and ... h5.

**31 Bc2 Nf7 32 b3 Ng5 33 Be4?!**

White should try 33 f4! (principle: *the pawn-down side should strive to exchange as many pawns as possible*) 33 ... exf4+ 34 Kxf4.

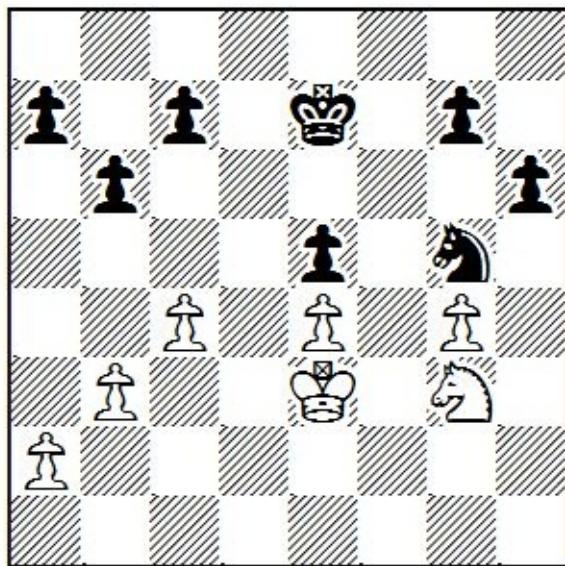


**Exercise (planning):** The concept of escape is no longer consequential to a terminally ill person. White's last move was inaccurate, since a swap of pieces only makes Black's task easier. The question is: should we chop on e4 with knight or bishop?

**Answer: 33 ... Bxe4!**

This move is slightly more accurate than 33 ... Nxe4. Principle: *the worst ending to be a pawn down, besides a pure king and pawn ending, is a knight ending.*

**34 fxe4**



**Exercise (planning):** What is Black's winning plan (hint: I already mentioned the winning plan in an earlier note)?

**Answer:** Creation of an outside passer. At some point, Black forces ... h5.

**34 ... g6! 35 Ne2 Ne6 36 Nc3 c6 37 b4 Nd4 38 b5**

This gives Black's king a dark-squared path into the queenside. The trouble is Black forces the same after 38 Kf2 Nc2! 39 b5 Kd6.

**38 ... cxb5 39 cxb5 Kd6 40 a4 Ne6! 41 Nd5 Nc5**

Tying White's knight down to the defence of a4.

**42 Nc3 0-1**

After 42 ... h5! (the correct time to distract White's king) 43 Kf3 Ne6 44 Kg3 (or 44 Nd5 Ng5+ 45 Ke3 h4 46 Nb4 h3 47 Kf2 Nxe4+ and wins) 44 ... Nf4 Black's king walks in to the queenside with ... Kc5 and ... Kb4.

**Summary:** If you prefer this game's 4 ... f5, over last game's 4 ... d5, then be prepared to continue with the detached abandon of a later Roman emperor, since we often sacrifice a pawn (or more) for a promising initiative/development lead.

### Game 34

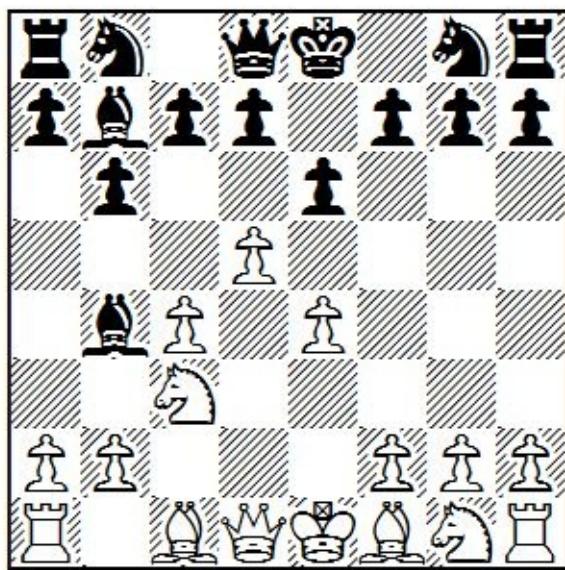
**Su.Polgar-J.Speelman**

Dutch League 1993

**1 d4 e6 2 c4 Bb4+**

I will pre-empt your coming question by saying that our move order runs 2 ... b6 3 e4 Bb7 4 Nc3 Bb4 5 d5.

**3 Nc3 b6 4 e4 Bb7 5 d5**



I think this is one of White's more shady lines of the chapter and I don't believe she can even equalize after Speelman's next move.

**Question:** Isn't this position difficult for Black, since White blocks our b7 bishop with a wall?

**Answer:** We get two compensations in return:

1. With 5 d5 White wastes time with a pawn move rather than a developing move.

2. With 5 d5 White weakens her central dark squares.

5 ... Qe7!

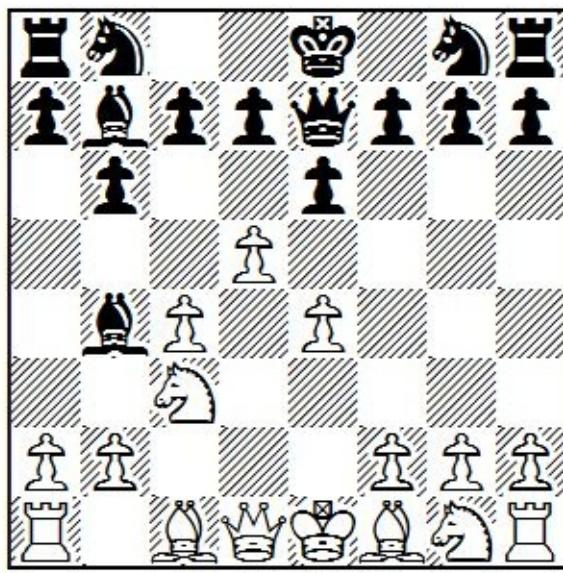
I like this sneaky idea which generates threats down the e-file.

Also good is 5 ... Nf6 6 Bd3 Bxc3+ (this capture is made more tempting by the fact that White pushed the d-pawn to d5, creating a hole on c5) 7 bxc3 d6 8 f4?! (overly ambitious and after this move White has trouble maintaining his shaky centre; better was 8 Nf3 Nbd7 9 0-0 Nc5 10 Nd4 0-0 11 f3 with approximate equality) 8 ... 0-0 9 Nf3 exd5 10 cxd5 (10 exd5 Re8+ saves White a pawn, but isn't exactly a tempting alternative) 10 ... Re8 when the dual threats of taking on e4 and d5 costs White a pawn, M.Henk-F.Dischinger, Düsseldorf 1995.

**Question:** Shouldn't we inflict damage to White's structure while we can, without committing to an early ... Nf6 with 5 ... Bxc3+?

**Answer:** Your plan is very playable and reaches Nimzo-Indian-like positions after 6 bxc3 Qe7 (*Houdini*'s recommendation) 7 Qd3? (this move drops a pawn, P.Hamley-C.Azzopardi, Lucerne 1982; correct is 7 Be2 d6 8 Nf3 Nf6 9 Qc2 Nbd7 10 Nd4 0-0 11 0-0 Nc5 12 f3 Nfd7 with balanced chances), and now 7 ... exd5! 8 cxd5 Nf6 9 f3 Nxd5 wins a pawn.

Returning to 5 ... Qe7:



## 6 Be2??

This is White's main move, but it strikes me as an overly subtle notion, akin to trying to watch the hour-hand on a clock move. She covers against threats down the e-file, but White's forces look pretty clunky and her development soon gets tangled. Alternatives:

a) 6 Nge2 exd5 7 exd5 Nf6 (White is seriously behind in development) 8 Qd4 was A.Matthaei-O.Kniest, Leverkusen 2002 (*Houdini*'s suggestion doesn't look all that encouraging for White either, 8 Bg5 Bxc3+ and now the weakness of White's structure hangs upon him like a foul stench: 9 bxc3 d6 10 Qd4 Nbd7 11 0-0-0 h6 12 Bh4 g5 13 Bg3 0-0-0 when White's extra space doesn't feel like enough compensation for the structural damage). At this point Black looks at least even after 8 ... Bc5 9 Qf4 Na6 10 a3 0-0 11 g3 Bd6 12 Qe3 Rae8 13 Qxe7 Rxe7 14 Bg5 Be5 15 0-0-0 h6 16 Bxf6 Bxf6. Black's bishop-pair and dark-square control mean slightly more than White's space advantage.

b) 6 Be3 Nf6 (threatening to chop e4) 7 Bd3 (7 e5?! Ne4 8 Qd4 was E.Almada-C.Bauer, Swiss League 2006; White is overextended after 8 ... Nxc3 9 bxc3 Bc5 10 Qe4 exd5 11 cxd5 f5! 12 Qxf5 Bxe3

13 fxe3 Bxd5) 7 ... exd5 8 exd5 c6! (principle: *create confrontation when leading in development*) 9 dxc6 (I don't believe White's compensation after 9 Nge2 cxd5 10 0-0 dxc4 11 Bxc4 0-0) 9 ... Bxc3+ 10 bxc3 dxc6 11 Nh3 0-0 12 0-0 Nbd7 13 Re1 Rfe8 and Black looks slightly better due to his superior structure, A.Abdul Wahab-H.Hamdouchi, Moscow 1994.

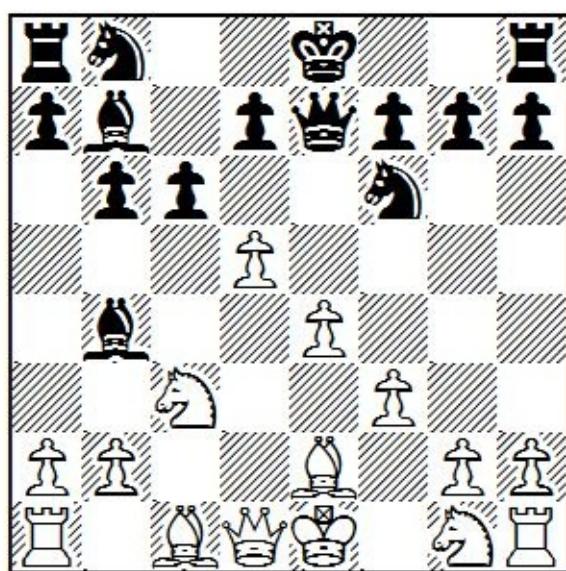
### 6 ... Nf6

Threat: ... Nxe4.

### 7 f3

After 7 Qc2 exd5 8 exd5 c6! 9 dxc6 Nxc6 10 Nf3 0-0 11 0-0 Bxc3! (inflicting damage upon White's structure) 12 bxc3 (or 12 Qxc3?! Qxe2 13 Re1 and the queen 'trap' is met by 13 ... Ne4! 14 Rxe2 Nxc3 15 bxc3 Na5 with a favourable ending for Black) 12 ... Rfe8 13 Bd3 Ne5 14 Nxe5 Qxe5 15 h3 Qc5 White's bishop-pair fails to fully make up for the chronically weak c-pawns, T.Vasilevich-S.Matveeva,c Kstovo 1998.

### 7 ... exd5 8 cxd5 c6!



Principle: *create confrontation when leading in development*.

### 9 dxc6 Nxc6!

An ideal is an abstraction, separated from a position's day-to-day reality, which forms our limited human perspective and requires merely a good move, rather than the absolute best move. In this instance, Speelman finds the ideal, absolute best plan: development trumps structure. Black's move is stronger than 9 ... dxc6 10 Nh3 0-0 11 Be3 with an approximately even game.

### 10 Nh3

The players' needs spur them on in different directions: White to complete her development; Black to see that she doesn't.

### 10 ... d5!

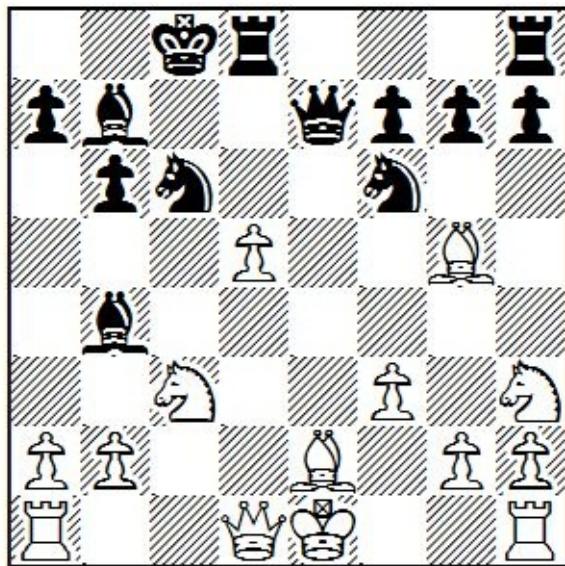
Mathematicians use proofs to separate theory from fact. We arrive at the weak link in White's development scheme. The same principle as above. Black's last move exerts a debilitating effect on White's development. My wife and son refuse to play Monopoly with me, because when I land on one of their properties, I pay the amount owed, and then always tip them \$5 as a gesture of goodwill. Speelman, who follows a rhapsodic inclination, displays a similar sense of generosity as your writer with his last move.

### 11 exd5

Polgar files away the unwelcome alteration to the back of her mind and continues her goal of castling,

which is now delayed indefinitely. 11 0-0 dxe4 12 Nxe4 Nxe4 13 fxe4 Rd8 14 Qa4 Qxe4 15 Qb5 0-0 16 Bf3 Qe7 17 Bxc6 Qc5+ leaves Black up a pawn, with the bishop-pair and better development.

**11 ... 0-0-0 12 Bg5**



**12 ... Rhe8**

Theory ends about here. White's king remains stuck in the centre. Also strong is 12 ... Qc5 13 Bxf6, T.Rodewis-G.Bogdanovich, German League 2006. Black should now play 13 ... gxf6 14 Nf4 Ne7 15 Rc1 Nxd5 16 Nfxd5 Rxd5 17 Qc2 Re8 when White's king remains trapped in the middle.

**13 Bxf6**

13 Nf4 is met by 13 ... Qe5 14 Bxf6 gxf6 15 Qc1 Rxd5 16 0-0 Rc5 17 Bd3 Rxc3! 18 bxc3 Bc5+ 19 Kh1 Be3 20 Qc2 Qxf4 with a winning position for Black.

**13 ... gxf6!**

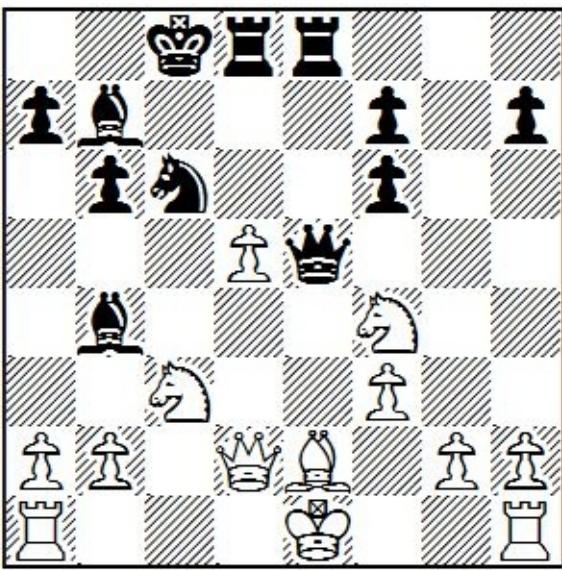
Of course the minor structural abrasion isn't important. Black continues to prevent White from castling.

**14 Nf4 Qe5**

Black's queen surveys her vast holdings with a smile of approval. Also tempting is 14 ... Bc5 15 Ne4 Nb4 16 Qc1 Nxd5 17 Nxd5 Bxd5 when Black applies tremendous pressure. White is unable to play 18 b4?? since it loses immediately to 18 ... Bxe4 19 bxc5 Bd3 20 cxb6+ Kb7 21 0-0 Bxe2 winning.

**15 Qd2??**

After 15 Qc1 (from White's standpoint, this is just barely better than nothing) 15 ... Rxd5 16 0-0 Rc5 17 Rf2 Rxc3! 18 bxc3 Bxc3 19 Rb1 Bd4 20 Bb5 Kb8 Black emerges up a pawn with the superior position.



**Exercise (combination alert):** White's position looks as if it has the equivalent structural integrity of a Jenga tower. She just blundered in an already lost position. Come up with a clear way to force the win for Black:

**Answer:** Exploitation of a pin.

Step 1: Remove the c3-knight, one of White's best defenders.

**15 ... Bxc3!**

White's queen weeps for her dead c3-hero.

**16 bxc3**

16 Qxc3? Qxf4 17 dxc6 Ba6 is an immediate game-ender.

Step 2: Exploit the pin on the c3-pawn by transferring the knight to b4, after which White's position collapses.

**16 ... Nb4!**

Threats pop up in profusion. Why is it that in our day-to-day lives, most of us operate in an honourable manner, yet at the board we all delight in our own deviousness?

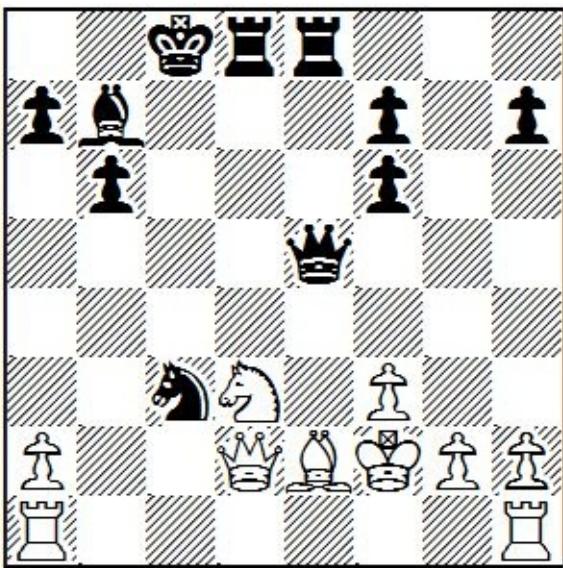
**17 Kf2**

The clinically depressed king mopes in a corner, arms around knees. Everything loses at this point.

**17 ... Nxd5 18 Nd3**

After 18 Nxd5 Rxd5 19 Qe1 Qe3+ 20 Kf1 Rde5! 21 h4 Qc5 there is no reasonable defence to the coming ... Rxe2.

**18 ... Nxc3! 0-1**



White's game collapses:

a) 19 Nxe5 Rxd2 20 Rhc1 Rxe2+ 21 Kf1 R8xe5 leaves Black up a piece.

b) 19 Rae1 Qd4+ 20 Kg3 Ne4+! (creativity and efficiency are not necessarily interchangeable qualities, but in this case they are) 21 fxe4 Rxe4 22 h3 Rg8+ 23 Kh2 Rxg2+! (the obnoxious rook continues to violate the precepts of court etiquette, this time by heartily slapping White's frail king on the back) 24 Kxg2 Rg4+ 25 Kf1 (or 25 Kh2 Rg2 mate) 25 ... Bg2 mate. "Finish him," says Black's queen to her bishop, while stifling a cavernous yawn.

c) 19 Bf1 Qd4+ 20 Kg3 Rg8+ 21 Kh3 Bxf3! 22 gxf3 Rd5 forces mate.

**Summary:** Meet 5 d5 (which probably deserves a '?!' mark) with 5 ... Qe7!, after which I don't see an easy way for White to even equalize.

### Game 35

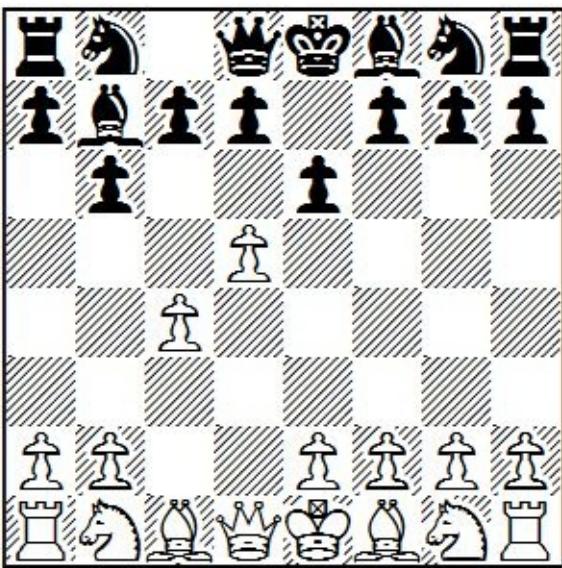
**Z.Rahman-J.Speelman**

Kolkata 1998

#### 1 c4 b6 2 d4 Bb7

I think this move order is possibly inaccurate, since Black normally reacts to an early d5 with ... Ba6!. In this case, Black would lose a wasted tempo on his early ... Bb7. A safer path into our lines is 2 ... e6 3 e4 Bb7 4 d5, which transposes to the game's continuation.

#### 3 d5! e6



**4 e4**

Now Black is okay again.

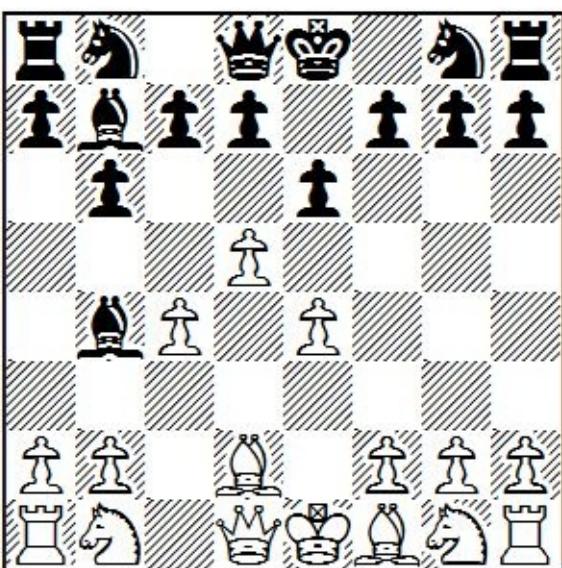
**Question:** If Black's 2 ... Bb7 is inaccurate, how does White exploit Speelman's move order?

**Answer:** Like this: 4 a3!. I think Black has a tough time equalizing from this position:

a) 4 ... Nf6 5 Nc3 Bd6 6 Nf3 exd5 7 cxd5 0-0 8 Bg5 Re8 9 e3 (this is a kind of bad Benoni for Black, with nothing to attack) 9 ... Be7 10 Bc4 h6 (the trick 10 ... Nxd5?? doesn't work every time; White wins a piece after 11 Bxd5) 11 Bf4 Nh5 12 Be5 Bf6 13 Bd4 Ba6 14 Bxa6 Nxa6 15 0-0 c5 16 Bxf6 Nxf6 17 Qd3 Qc8 18 Nd2 d6 19 Nc4 Rd8 20 e4 Nc7 21 b4 and all Black achieved was an uncomfortable Benoni, A.Karpov-A.Miles, Las Palmas 1977.

b) 4 ... f5 5 g3 Nf6 6 Bg2 Na6 7 Nh3 Bd6 8 0-0 0-0 9 b4 Be5 10 Ra2 exd5 11 cxd5 Ne4, V.Anand-M.Sadler, Monaco (rapid) 1998. Black is under pressure and his queenside pieces have trouble unravelling after 12 Qb3.

**4 ... Bb4+ 5 Bd2**



As in most Bogo-Indian positions, a swap of dark-squared bishops tends to help Black - even more so in this instance, since all of White's central pawns are fixed on light squares.

Instead, 5 Nc3 reaches the position we looked at last game.

**Question:** Since a swap of dark-squared bishops favours Black, shouldn't White consider 5 Nd2?

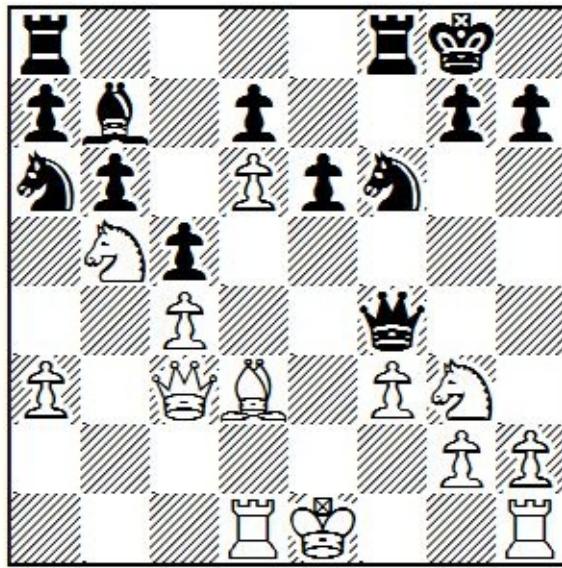
**Answer:** As always in this chapter, White pays a passivity/awkwardness price for developing the knight to d2, rather than its natural square c3. After 5 ... Qe7 6 Be2 Nf6 White can try:

a) 7 Qc2 exd5 8 exd5 0-0 9 a3, P.Eggers-D.Marshall, Seattle 1990. White experiences developmental troubles similar to Polgar's woes last game, after 9 ... Bd6 10 Ngf3 c6!.

b) 7 e5 Bxd2+! 8 Qxd2 (or 8 Bxd2 Ne4 9 Nf3 exd5 10 cxd5 Bxd5 11 0-0 when White's development lead doesn't fully make up for his lost pawn) 8 ... Ne4 9 Qd4 Qb4+ 10 Bd2 Nxd2 11 Qxd2 Qxd2+ 12 Kxd2 exd5 13 Bf3 Na6 14 cxd5 0-0-0 and White finds himself seriously lagging in development in the ending.

**5 ... Qe7 6 Bxb4 Qxb4+ 7 Qd2**

7 Nc3!? looks borderline unsound. I don't believe in White's compensation after 7 ... Qxb2 8 Nge2 Qb4 9 Qd4 f6 10 Rb1 Qe7, A.Lixa-R.Cabral, correspondence 2005. 11 Nb5 can be met with 11 ... Na6 12 d6 c5 13 Qc3 Qf7 14 f3 f5! 15 exf5 Qxf5 16 Rd1 Nf6 17 Ng3 Qf4 18 Bd3 0-0 19 a3 when the b5-knight's presence is annoying. But a full pawn's compensation? I doubt it.



**Question:** How does Black ever get his knight out of a6?

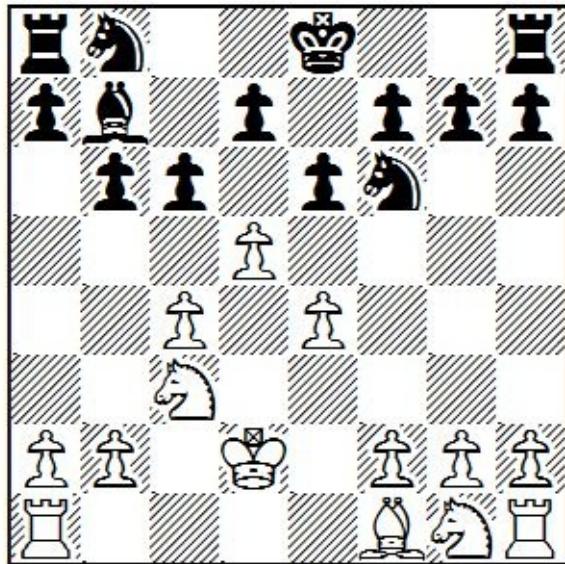
**Answer:** Black can even try the radical 19 ... Nb8!? 20 Nc7 Nc6 21 Nxa8 Bxa8 22 0-0 Nd4 when d6 falls and Black gets two pawns and a nice looking position for the exchange, with an edge.

**7 ... Qxd2+ 8 Nxd2**

I believe Black stands equal at a minimum, since White's extra space may be more of a burden than a benefit in an ending.

**Question:** Can White recapture with the king, since it's an ending?

**Answer:** Yes, White can recapture with the king, but it costs a developing tempo. Black looks at least equal after 8 Kxd2 Nf6 9 Nc3, as in J.Timman-B.Spassky, Tilburg 1983. At this stage Black can challenge White's centre with 9 ... c6!



**Question:** Can't White cramp Black with 10 d6?

**Answer:** I think White risks overextension after 10 ... c5 11 f3 Nc6. Black not only controls d4, but also the d6-pawn may later be picked up if more pieces are exchanged.

**8 ... f5!**

Speelman begins the process of dismantling White's giant centre.

**9 exf5?!**

Now the action which propels White forward cannot be undone. White, dissatisfied with his present hand, decides to radically reshuffle the structural deck. The trouble is his centre falls apart after this move. Perhaps he should resign himself to 9 0-0-0 Nf6 10 f3 fxe4 11 Nxe4, as he did in I.Morovic Fernandez-D.Hergott, Linares 1994. Black has a pleasant ending due to his superior bishop after 11 ... Nxe4 12 fxe4 Na6.

**9 ... exd5 10 Ngf3**

After 10 cxd5 Bxd5 11 Ne2 Bb7 12 f3 Nc6 13 Kf2 0-0-0 Black's pawn majority is superior to White's.

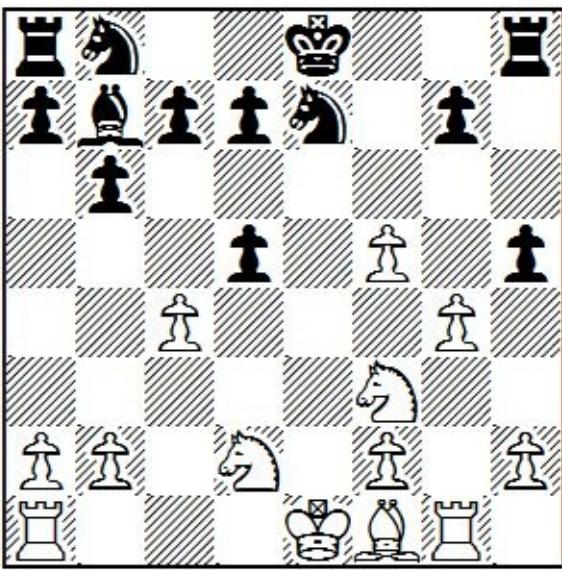
**10 ... Ne7**

10 ... Nh6! is also possible, since it prevents g4, but it feels to me like Speelman welcomes the move.

**11 g4!?**

We may not realize it, but most of our move choices are propelled by our subconscious habit-energy. White deeply believes in piece activity over structure and plays accordingly.

**11 ... h5 12 Rg1**



White presses on with his intent, wilfully oblivious to the structural dangers which swirl around him. The position has all the earmarks of a kind of hallucinogenic King's Gambit gone wrong for White, who borders on overextension. He banks on his piece activity to compensate, but I think this is a stretch, and to my mind, Black stands clearly better in the ending.

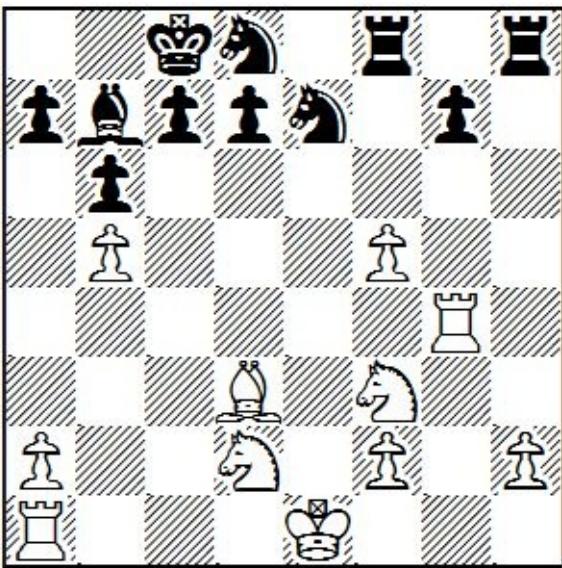
**12 ... dxc4 13 Bxc4 hxg4 14 Rxg4 Nbc6**

Black is willing to hand over g7. In the end, White's kingside pawns remain weak.

**15 Bd3 0-0-0 16 b4!?**

White remains defiant, even in the face of rising structural woes. From time to time, we all try and scale Mount Impossible. This move possibly pushes his position past its structural limits. White plays it as if queens were still on the board. Try as he may, White is unable to locate a single fissure or gap in the defence, as if it were space itself. Still, it's understandable that he didn't wish to defend in depressingly passive fashion after 16 Rxg7 Rdf8 17 Rg5 Nb4 18 Bb1 Ba6 19 h4 Rh6. Black soon regains f5 with a clear structural and developmental lead.

**16 ... Rdf8 17 b5 Nd8**



This is merely temporary discomfort, since the knight re-emerges on f7.

**18 Nh4 Nf7 19 f4!?**

Ah yes, the joys of excess. Okay, it's official: White is overextended. 19 Nhf3 Nh6 20 Rxg7 Nhxf5 21 Rg5 Nh4 22 Nxh4 Rxh4 23 Rg7 Nd5 24 Bf5 Nf6! 25 Nf1 Be4 26 Bxe4 Nxe4 27 Rd1 Nc5 28 Rd2 leaves White hopelessly passive and pawns are sure to drop at some point.

**19 ... Nd6**

The simple route. 19 ... Nd5! 20 Ndf3 Nh6 21 Rg5 Nxf4 also looks quite awful for White.

**20 0-0-0 Ndxsf5 21 Bxf5 Nxf5 22 Ng6**

Forking.

**22 ... Ne3**

Forking right back.

**23 Rdg1 Nxg4 24 Rxg4 Kd8 25 Nc4 Bd5 26 Nce5 Be6!**

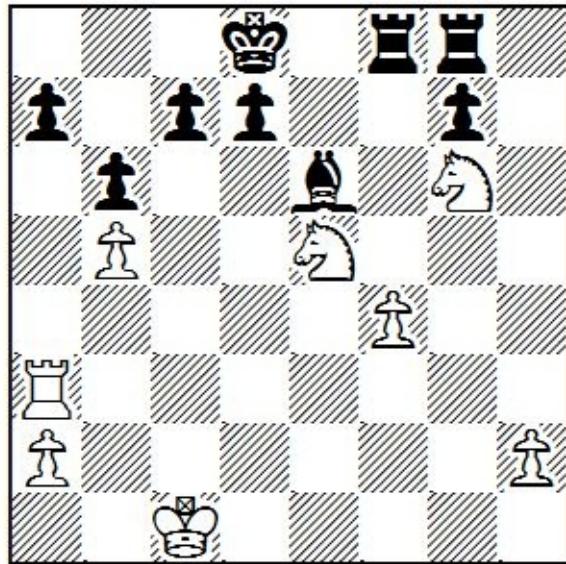
More accurate than 26 ... Bxa2 27 Nxh8 Rxh8 28 Rxg7.

**27 Rg3 Rhg8**

Virtually begging White to capture f8.

**28 Ra3!?**

A good practical try, despite *Houdini*'s admonishments. 28 Nxf8 Rxf8 29 Ng6 Rf6 30 Kb2 d6 31 h4 Bd7 32 a4 Be8 33 h5 Bxg6 34 hxg6 (not 34 Rxg6?? Rxg6 35 hxg6 Ke7 and White loses the king and pawn ending without a fight) 34 ... Rxf4 leaves White hopelessly busted in the rook and pawn ending.



**Exercise (critical decision):** In this position Black rejoices in what life bestowed upon him, while White laments his fate. Black seeks to consolidate. Should he play greedy with a move like 28 ... Rf5, or should he continue to offer the f8 exchange with 28 ... d6? One of the lines allows White to fight on; the other immediately consolidates. Which one would you play?

**28 ... d6?!**

Sometimes we find it easier to save energy by allowing an opponent his intent, weighing in the high cost of a war to alter it. Speelman's response is wary, to the point of passive/aggressive. This unnecessary precaution allows White to play on.

**Answer:** Correct was 28 ... Rf5!. Greed is good and the transaction is in Black's favour.:29 Rxa7 Bd5 30 Ra3 d6 31 Nc6+ Bxc6 32 bxc6 Ra5! when White is denied a foothold on his attacking ambitions and Black consolidates.

**29 Nc6+**

All able-bodied citizens are indentured into White's queenside war.

**29 ... Kd7 30 Nxf8+ Rxf8 31 Rxa7**

31 Rg3! Rxf4 32 Rxg7+ Rf7 33 Rxf7+ Bxf7 34 Nxa7 Bxa2 35 Nc6 Ke6 36 Kd2 Bc4 37 Kc3 Bf1 38 Nd4+ isn't going to be so easy for Black to convert, since c7 remains in constant danger if Black's king goes after White's h-pawn.

**31 ... Rxf4 32 Nb8+**

32 Ra8! threatening a cheapo mate on d8, is met with 32 ... Bd5 33 Rd8+ Ke6 34 Re8+ Kf6 35 Kd2 (35 Rc8 Bxc6 36 bxc6 Rc4+ 37 Kd2 Rxc6 is winning) 35 ... Bxc6 36 bxc6 Rc4 37 Rf8+ Ke6 38 Re8+ Kf7 39 Ra8 Rxc6 and Black eventually converts.

**32 ... Kc8 33 Nc6**

Threatening mate.

**33 ... Rf1+ 34 Kb2 Rf2+ 35 Kb1 Bf5+**

Clearing an escape route for Black's king on e6. The terrifying appearances of White's attack are imagined to be real, yet in truth are imaginary. Most certainly not the careless, not to mention greedy 35 ... Rxh2?? 36 Ra8+ and White mates next move.

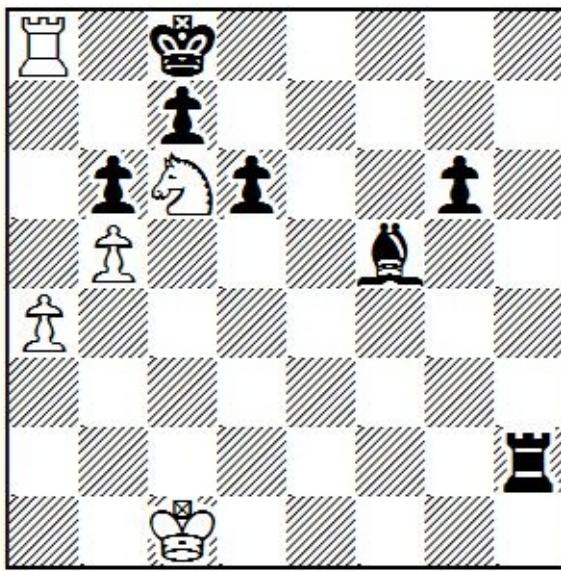
**36 Kc1 g6**

Ensuring that his g-pawn remains alive. White's h-pawn isn't running away.

**37 a4**

37 Ra8+ Kd7 38 Rh8 d5! 39 a4 Kd6 is also hopeless for White.

**37 ... Rxh2 38 Ra8+**



White's rook, battling the duel emotions of fear and anger, mingles his entreaties with fierce threats. This attempted mating attack, with rook and knight is a strange partnership, similar to the Joker telling Batman: "Look, in the past we have had our differences. But the past is past. What would you say to my proposal to team up and go into business together?"

**38 ... Kd7 39 Rd8+ Ke6 40 Re8+ Kf6 41 Rf8+ Kg7 42 Re8**

Threat: Re7+ and Rxc7.

**42 ... Rc2+ 43 Kd1 Rc4 44 Re7+ Kf6 45 Rxc7 Bc2+!**

The bishop's power extends like the splayed root of an old oak tree. He gets to the underbelly and picks off the remaining white pawns.

**46 Kd2 Bxa4**

White's rations and supplies dwindle in proportion to his fortunes in the war.

**47 Rd7 Ke6 48 Re7+ Kf5 49 Kd3 Rc5 50 Nd4+ Kg5 51 Rb7 Bxb5+**

The bishop continues to pick up stray pawns with the air of a person who has nothing better to do with his time.

**52 Kd2 Rd5 53 Ke3 Kg4 54 Rx b6 Bc4**

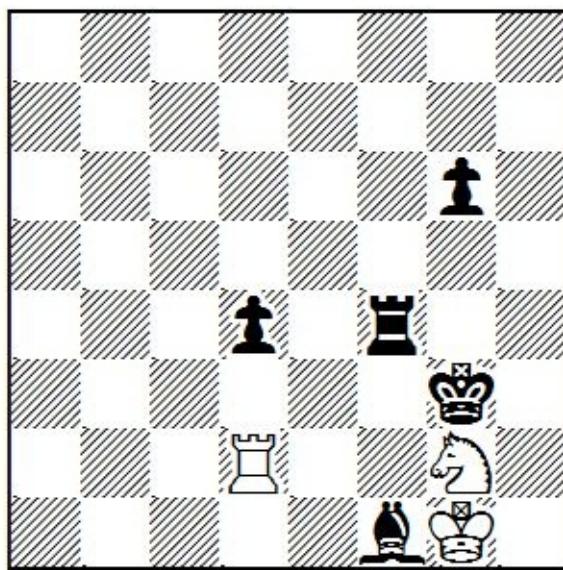
Black emerges up two clean pawns and barring a major error, will win without much trouble. White plays on, but the end result is really never in doubt.

**55 Rc6 Bf1 56 Rc1 Re5+ 57 Kf2 Re4 58 Rd1 Bc4 59 Rd2 d5 60 Nc2 Kf4 61 Ne1 d4 62 Ng2+ Kg4 63 Ne1 Rf4+ 64 Kg2 Bf1+ 65 Kg1 Kg3!**

Instructive technique. White is close to zugzwang.

**66 Ng2**

66 Ra2 d3 67 Rd2 Be2! is curtains for White.



**Exercise (planning):** The irritating knight's gyrations have a way of scraping at the black pieces' patience. Should Black chop the knight and sacrifice his g6-pawn in the process?

**Answer:** Simplification. It works.

**66 ... Bxg2! 67 Rxg2+**

The position morphs into a *Hunger Games* scenario, with every White piece for him and herself.

**67 ... Kf3 68 Kf1**

The equivalent of resignation, as is 68 Rxg6. The rook and pawn ending is a trivial win for Black: 68 ... d3 (but certainly not 68 ... Rg4+?? 69 Rxg4 Kxg4 70 Kf2 Kf4 71 Ke2 Ke4 72 Kd2 with a drawn king and pawn ending) 69 Kf1 d2 70 Rd6 Ke3+ 71 Kg1 Rd4 and wins.

**68 ... Ke4+ 69 Ke2 Kf5 70 Rg1 g5 71 Ra1 g4 72 Ra5+ Ke4 73 Ra3 Rf3 74 Ra4 Kf4!**

"I bid you a good day sirs!" says Black's king to White's king and rook as he exits to g3. The simplest. Black forces a Lucena position, which the vast majority of club players know how to win.

**75 Rxd4+ Kg3**

White's king is cut off.

**76 Ra4 Kh3 77 Re4 Rf8 78 Ke1 g3 79 Re7 g2 0-1**

Just for a refresher, this is how it's done: 80 Rh7+ Kg3 81 Rg7+ Kf3 82 Rg6 Rf4 83 Rg7 Re4+ 84

Kd2 Rg4 forces promotion.

**Summary:** Black gets a dynamically even ending after 7 ... Qxd2+. Remember to dismantle White's centre with ... f5 at some point.

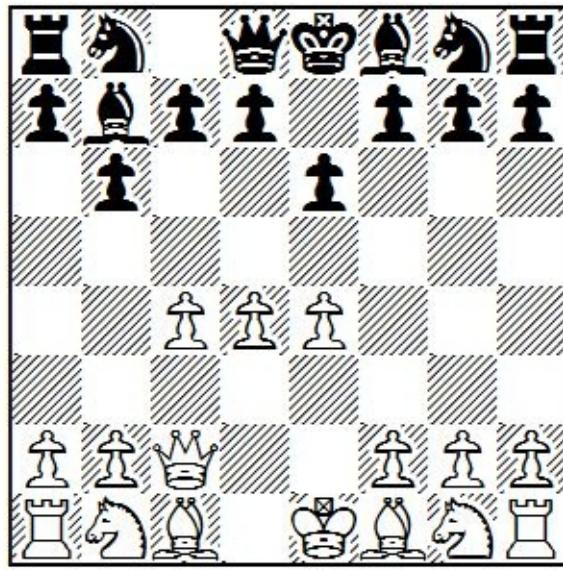
## *Game 36*

## L.Polugaevsky-V.Korchnoi

Evian 1977

GM Jon Tisdall called this game “another dazzling display of Qh4ism.”

**1 d4 e6 2 c4 b6 3 e4 Bb7 4 Qc2**



White defends e4, this time without committing the b1-knight, f1-bishop or f-pawn!

4 ... Qh4

The queen's eyes give warning to all: disrespect me at your peril. This Tarzan-like swoop is Black's main line. The queen adds a second attacker to e4, while preventing f3. Others:

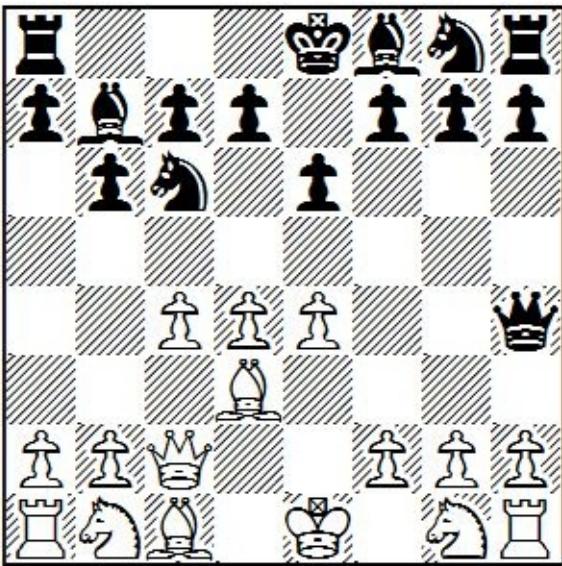
a) 4 ... Bb4+!? 5 Nc3 (5 Nd2 will be seen in Game 38, Berry-Speelman) 5 ... Qh4 6 d5 Bxc3+ 7 bxc3 Nf6 (Black can also consider decimating White's centre with 7 ... f5!? which may be an improvement; 8 exf5 exd5 9 cxd5 Bxd5 and I like Black in this position which *Houdini* rates even) 8 Bd3 Na6 9 Nf3 Qg4 10 0-0 Nc5, V.Ivanchuk-M.Sadler, Monaco (blindfold) 1998. The comp gives White an edge after 11 Re1.

b) 4 ... Nc6!? is a sort of a queenside version of Alekhine's Defence: 5 d5 Ne5 6 Be2 Bc5 7 Nf3 Qf6!? 8 0-0 Nxg3+ 9 Bxf3 Ne7 10 Be3!? (this opens the f-file, but leaves White with a potentially bad remaining bishop; 10 Bd2 looks sounder) 10 ... Bxe3 11 fxe3 Qg5 12 Qf2 Ng6 13 Nd2 0-0 and I prefer Black, who controls e5, E.Porper-N.Short, Edmonton 2013.

5 Nd2

**Question:** You mentioned earlier that development of a knight at d2, rather than c3 is awkward. Why not play 5 Bd3?

**Answer:** The move is well met with 5 ... Nc6! with sudden threats on d4, b4 and e4, if Black manages to eliminate White's light-squared bishop.



Black won all three games from this position in my database. Ilia Odessky even says White's 5th move "loses immediately". White is in deep trouble, no matter what he plays. For example:

- a) 6 Nf3 Qg4! (with dual threats on g2 and e4, after ... Nb4) 7 Nbd2 (7 Qe2 Nb4 8 d5 Nxd3+ 9 Qxd3 Nf6 10 Nc3 Bb4 11 0-0 Bxc3 12 Qxc3 Nxe4 13 Qd4 Nf6 leaves Black up a pawn for no compensation) 7 ... Nb4 8 Qb1 Nxd3+ 9 Qxd3 Qxg2 10 Rg1 Qh3 11 Rg3 Qh5 12 Rg5 Qh6! (no draw) 13 Nb3, S.Fitzpatrick-A.Tavares, correspondence 1998, and now 13 ... f6! 14 Rg3 (14 Rc5?? is met with 14 ... Qg6 15 Rxc7 Bxe4 16 Qe3 Bd6, trapping the rook) 14 ... Qh5 leaves Black up a pawn with the bishop-pair and a weakness-free position.
- b) 6 g3 Qf6! 7 d5 Nb4 8 Qe2 Qd4! 9 Bc2 Ba6 10 dxе6 fxе6 and White's position is already resignable, Z.Takac-B.Kutuzovic, Ljubljana 1998.
- c) 6 d5? Nb4 7 Qe2 Nf6 8 e5? (losing instantly, although 8 Nc3 Nxd3+ 9 Qxd3 Bb4 10 Bd2 Bxc3 11 Bxc3 Qxe4+ 12 Qxe4 Nxe4 leaves White down a pawn for nothing) 8 ... Ng4! and Black suddenly generated a million unanswerable threats, D.Brunk-F.Berebora, Berlin 1998.

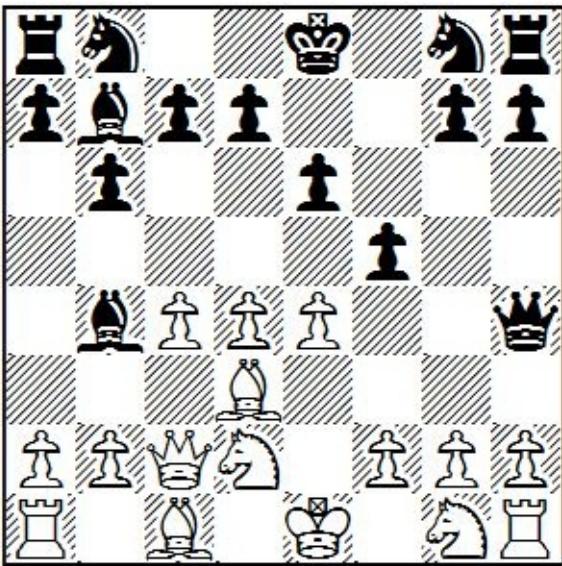
### **5 ... Bb4**

Renewing the threat to e4.

### **6 Bd3**

6 d5 Nf6 7 Bd3 was preferred in Z.Josipovic-M.Dragojevic, Makarska 2013. Play may continue 7 ... Ng4 8 g3 (8 Nh3?? walks into a deadly trap: 8 ... Ne3! when White can resign) 8 ... Qf6 9 Nh3 h5!? with approximately balanced chances in this strange position.

### **6 ... f5!**



Our trademark wing-strike, now that g2 is loose.

**7 Ngf3 Bxd2+!**

This looks superior to the alternatives:

a) 7 ... Qg4?! 8 0-0 Bxd2 9 Nxd2 Nc6 was J.Wilson-A.Avni, Hastings 1995. White stands clearly better, with the bishop-pair and a strong centre after 10 Qc3.

b) 7 ... Qh5?! 8 0-0 Nf6?! (8 ... Ne7 9 a3 Bxd2 10 Bxd2 Bxe4 11 Bxe4 fxe4 12 Qxe4 Nbc6 minimizes Black's disadvantage) 9 exf5 Bxd2 10 Nxd2 Qg4 11 d5! Na6 12 fxe6 dxe6 13 h3 Qh5 14 Qa4+ Kf8, R.Van Ketel-D.Reinderman, Leiden 2007. Black is strategically busted after 15 b4! exd5 16 c5!.

**8 Kf1!?**

A clever zwischenzug, but Black remains okay. Next game we look at the more natural and possibly superior alternative 8 Bxd2.

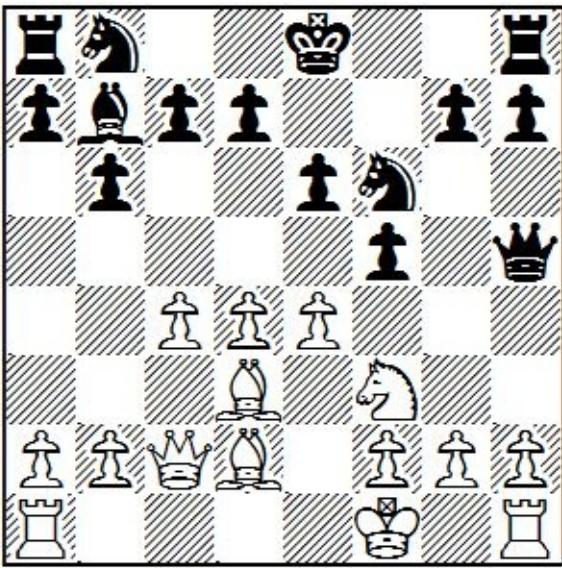
**8 ... Qh5**

8 ... Qg4 loses a tempo to 9 h3 Qh5 10 Bxd2 with a slightly favourable version for White, since h3 looks useful.

**9 Bxd2**

Finally! White recaptures.

**9 ... Nf6**



Korchnoi continues to hammer away at e4.

### **10 exf5!?**

Risky. White's potential rewards don't feel commensurate to the appalling risks undertaken. Polugaevsky gambles, not liking 10 e5 Ne4 11 Be3 0-0 when White has a problem of how to activate his h1-rook.

### **10 ... Bxf3**

The scattered campfires ahead indicate White's encampment. A position which involves an attack upon an enemy king exists in a state of chronic anger. Korchnoi is up for the challenge as well, handing his opponent both bishops for knights in an open position to weaken the pawn front around White's king.

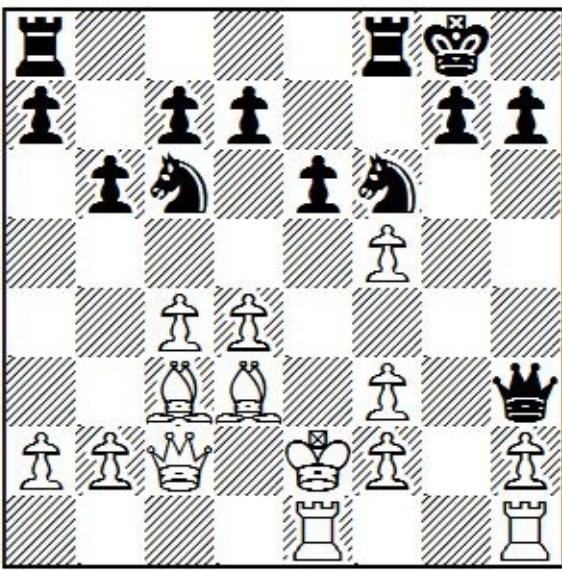
### **11 gxf3 Nc6!**

White's ferocious bishop-pair gives him full compensation for Black's extra pawn after 11 ... Qxf3 12 Rg1 0-0 13 Re1 Ng4 14 Rg2 exf5 15 Be2 Qh3 16 Bc3. Now Black shouldn't get greedy with 16 ... Nxh2+?? 17 Kg1 Ng4 (17 ... Nf3+ 18 Bxf3 Qxf3 19 d5 g6 20 Qd2 leaves Black's king helpless) 18 Bxg4 fxg4 19 Rh2! Qf3 20 Qxh7+ Kf7 21 d5 Rg8 22 Qh5+ g6 23 Qh7+ Kf8 24 Qe7 mate. "Your execution will have an educative effect on my subjects," says the queen to her brother.

### **12 Bc3 0-0**

12 ... Qh3+! also looks favourable for Black: for example, 13 Kg1 (or 13 Ke2?! 0-0-0 14 fxe6 Qxe6+ 15 Kd1 Qh3 16 Qd2 Qxf3+ 17 Kc2 Ne4! 18 Qe3 Nxc3!, and if 19 Qxf3? Nxd4+ 20 Kxc3 Nxf3, which leaves Black up a clean pawn with the superior position in the ending) 13 ... 0-0 14 fxe6 dxe6 15 Qe2 Rad8 16 Qe3 Kh8 17 f4 Qh4. *Houdini* says this is even, but I don't like the look of White's loose pawn front and favour Black here.

### **13 Re1 Qh3+! 14 Ke2!**



Practicality can have a mood-dampening effect on optimism. Polugaevsky wisely gets his king out of town and heads for the queenside.

**Question:** White's bishop-pair and open g-file look dangerous for Black. How would you assess this position?

**Answer:** This is a position difficult to assess. At first it looks like White may stand better if he gets his king over to the queenside, since then he owns the bishop-pair and an open g-file. But we must remember that not all bishops work the same way, just as a Doberman and a Yorkie are both dogs, yet one is more intimidating than the other, and therefore the superior watchdog. In this instance, Korchnoi, through skilful use of tactics, manages to reduce both bishops to a less intimidating breed. On Black's side, his pieces are active and White's f-pawns may later become weak. I think dynamically balanced is a fair assessment.

Instead, 14 Kg1?! Nh5! 15 fxe6 Nf4 16 Bf1 Qh4 (threatening mate, starting with ... Qg5+) 17 h3 Nxe6! looks very difficult for White, whose king is in serious trouble.

**14 ... Rae8 15 Kd1??!**

An inaccuracy. White should first toss in 15 fxe6 Rxe6+ 16 Kd2 Qxf3 17 Kc1 Rfe8 18 Rd1 R6e7, although I still like Black here, who will toss in ... Ne4 soon.

**15 ... e5!**

Korchnoi finds a clever method of striking back in the centre. This move is in concordance with the holiest of our scriptures: *create confrontation when leading in development*. The initiatives appear to develop isometrically - in equal proportions. In the coming moves we see this isn't the case and that it is Black who now stands clearly better, due to White's loose kingside pawns.

**16 dxe5**

16 d5? Nd4 17 Bxd4 exd4 18 Be4 is met with 18 ... Nxe4 19 fxe4 d3 20 Qc3 Qf3+ 21 Kd2 Rxe4, winning material.

**16 ... Nxe5 17 Be2**

Black's idea is that 17 Bxe5 is met with 17 ... Rxe5! and the trouble is White's h1-rook hangs if he recaptures on e5.

**17 ... Nxf3??!**

This gives away most of his advantage. Black looks better if he stabilizes his knight with 17 ... d6!.

## **18 Qd3! Rxe2?!**

Korchnoi's moves are freighted with dire portent of violence. 18 ... Ng5 19 Kc2 Qxd3+ 20 Bxd3 Nf3 21 Re2 Kf7 is a dynamically balanced ending.

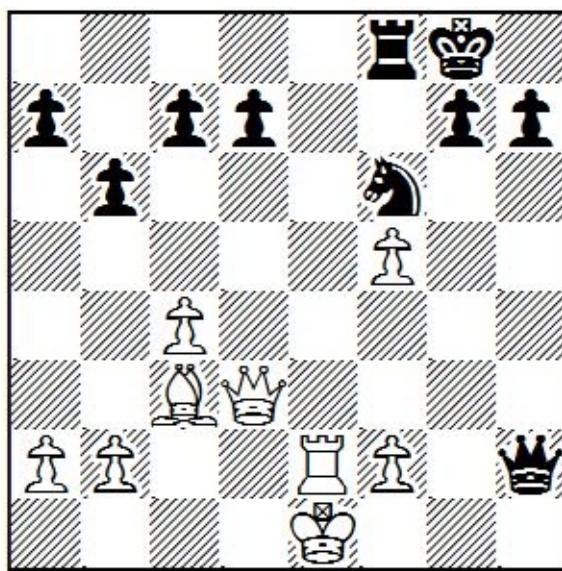
## **19 Rxe2 Qg2**

Regaining the sacrificed material.

## **20 Rhe1 Nxe1 21 Kxe1?!**

Correct is 21 Rxe1! Qxf2 22 Bxf6! gxf6 (22 ... Rxf6?? walks into mate in three moves after 23 Re8+ Rf8 24 Qd5+ Kh8 25 Rxf8) 23 Qxd7 Qxh2 24 Re7 when White stands no worse and the game is likely to end in a draw.

## **21 ... Qxh2!**

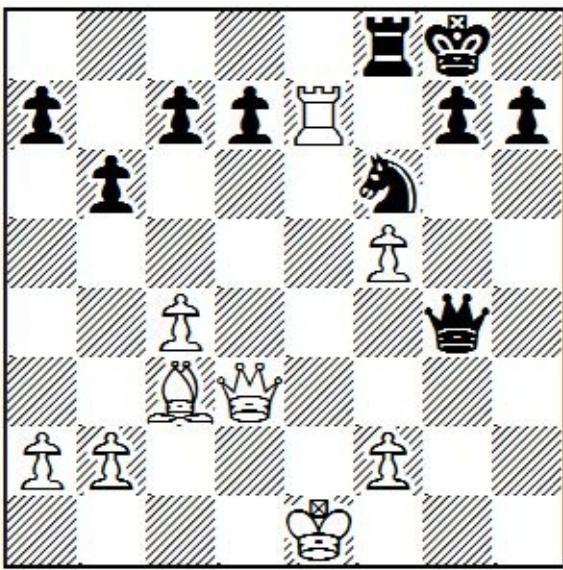


## **22 Re7**

**Question:** Why can't White continue with 22 Bxf6 as in the above note?

**Answer:** This trick no longer works, since Black has 22 ... Qh1+! 23 Kd2 Qh6+, and if 24 Kc2 Qxf6 (over time the f6-bishop gradually incurs the black queen's disfavour, which is synonymous with future pain) 25 Qxd7 Qxf5+ 26 Qxf5 Rxf5 with an extra pawn and a winning position in the ending.

## **22 ... Qg1+ 23 Ke2 Qg4+ 24 Ke1**



**Exercise (planning):** Black is up a pawn. How does he make progress?

**24 ... h5!**

**Answer:** Activate the passed h-pawn, which he now threatens to push down the board, even with queens on.

**25 Qg3!**

After 25 Bxf6?! Rxf6 26 Rxd7 Rxf5 27 Kf1 Qf4 Black covers c7, threatens mate on f2 and remains up a clean pawn.

**25 ... Qxg3 26 fxg3 Rf7 27 Bxf6!**

Now is the correct timing for this swap.

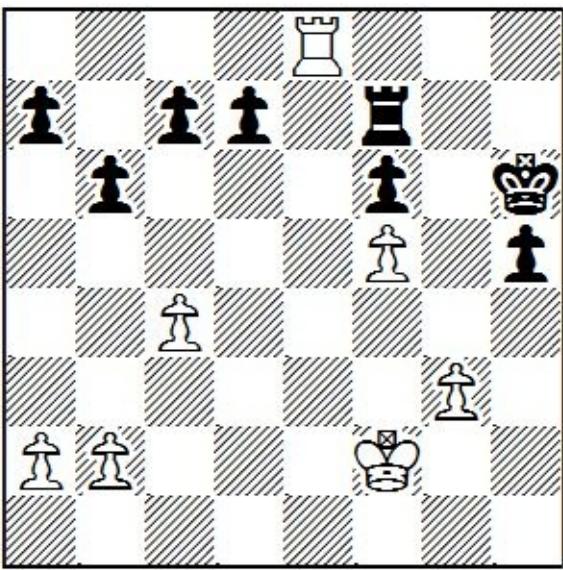
**27 ... gxf6 28 Re8+ Kh7**

Black is up a pawn in the rook and pawn ending, but conversion won't be so easy since White's rook is active.

**29 Kf2**

Or 29 c5!? Rg7 30 Kf2 Kh6 31 Rc8 bxc5 32 Rxc7 d6 33 Rc6 Rd7 34 Rc8 Kg5 35 Rh8 d5 and Black should convert.

**29 ... Kh6**



**Exercise (planning):** How did White manage to drum up counterplay?

**Answer:** Step 1: Prevent ... a5.

**30 b4!**

30 Rg8 is met with 30 ... Rg7.

**30 ... Kg5 31 Ra8**

Step 2: Pick off a7.

**31 ... Kxf5 32 Rxa7 d6 33 a4!**

Step 3: Create a passed a-pawn. White reciprocates in kind on the other side of the board.

**33 ... Ke6 34 a5 bxa5 35 Rxa5!?**

Hey, I said “Step 3: Create a passed a-pawn!” Polugaevsky decides to keep his rook active and queenside pawns intact. I suppose it’s inaccurate to label a choice as ‘faithless’ to a cause you never endorsed in the first place. Polugaevsky’s choice also draws according to the comp, but I believe this route creates more practical problems for White. Simpler and more thematic is 35 bxa5! Kd7 36 Rb7 Rf8 37 Rb5 Ra8! 38 Rxh5 c5! 39 g4 Rxa5 40 g5 fxg5 41 Rxg5 Ra3 42 Ke2 Rc3 43 Rg4 Ke6 44 Rh4 Rg3 45 Kd2. I took Black versus *Houdini* and was unable to make progress.

**35 ... f5 36 c5 Rh7!**

Intending ... h4, creating a passed f-pawn.

**37 cxd6 cxd6 38 b5**

White gets a queenside passer after all.

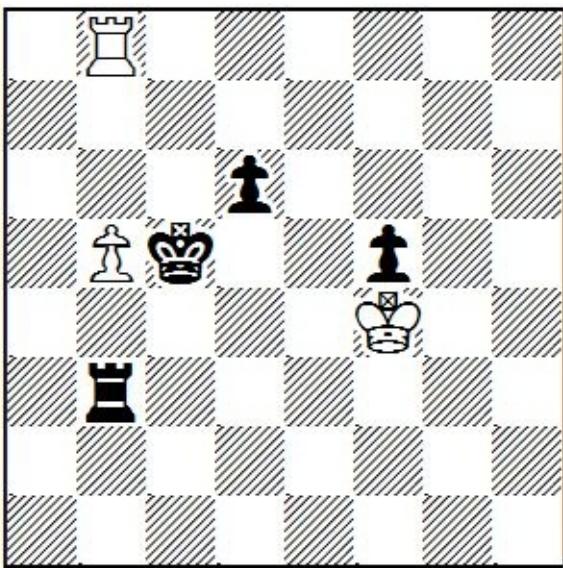
**38 ... h4 39 gxh4 Rxh4 40 Ra8 Rb4**

Endgame principle: *place your rook behind your opponent’s passed pawn.*

**41 Rb8 Kd5 42 Kf3 Rb3+**

After 42 ... Kc5 43 Rc8+ Kxb5 44 Rf8 d5 45 Rxf5 Kc4 46 Ke3 d4+ 47 Kd2 Rb2+ 48 Kc1 Rh2 49 Rf3 Re2 50 Kd1 Rg2 51 Rh3 we reach Philidor’s position, which is drawn.

**43 Kf4 Kc5**



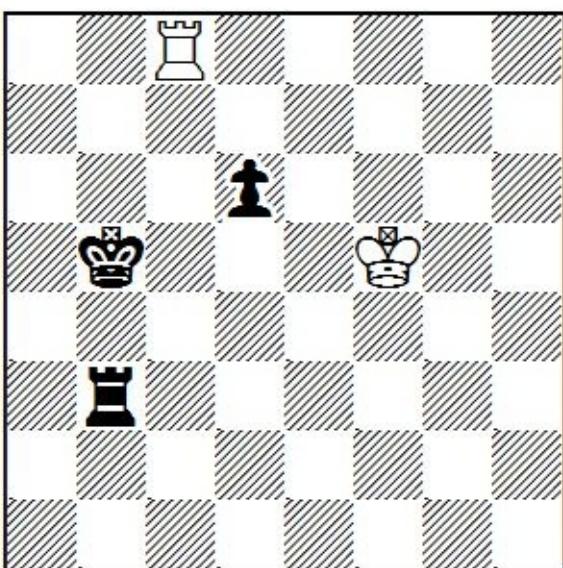
**Exercise (critical decision):** White must thread the needle to the draw. His candidate moves are 44 Kxf5 and 44 Rc8+. One draws, while the other loses. Which is which?

#### 44 Rc8+??

Every one of our blunders grinds away at our self-esteem. Some plans require addition, while others need subtraction, the way a sculptor chips away at a marble block, creating an image through the subtracting power of chisel and hammer. White added one check too many and now his hoped-for draw appears to be no more than a vivid hallucination. This innocent-looking check loses.

**Answer:** White holds the draw after 44 Kxf5! Rxb5 45 Rc8+ Kd4+ 46 Ke6! d5 47 Rc1 Rb6+ 48 Kf5 Rh6 49 Rd1+ Kc5 50 Rc1+ Kd6 51 Kf4 Rh3 52 Rc8 Ra3 53 Rc1 when Black is unable to make progress.

#### 44 ... Kxb5 45 Kxf5



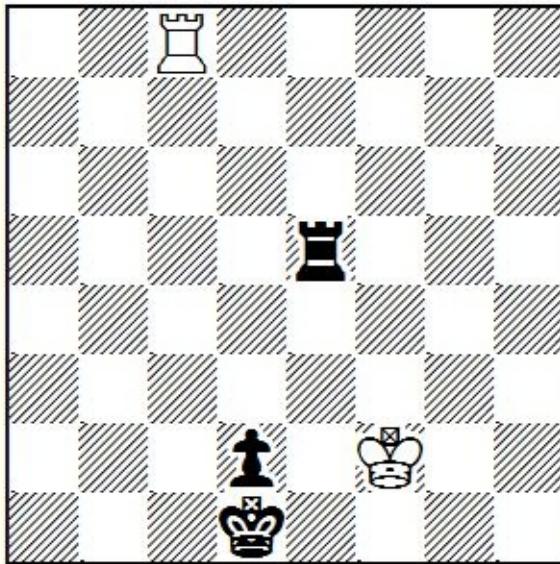
**Exercise (planning):** Black's king watches in delighted gratification, as he sees his brother consume a cup of poisoned wine. Come up with Black's winning idea:

**Answer:** Cut off White's king. This is now a theoretical win for Black.

**45 ... Re3!**

The rook refuses to ratify any kind of peace accord with White's king. Now we see the arsenical undercurrent which destroys White's hopes.

**46 Kf4 Re1 47 Rd8 Kc5 48 Rc8+ Kd4 49 Kf3 d5 50 Kf2 Re5 51 Ra8 Kc3! 52 Ra3+ Kb4 53 Ra1 d4 54 Rc1 d3 55 Rc8 d2 56 Rb8+ Kc3 57 Rc8+ Kd3 58 Rd8+ Kc2 59 Rc8+ Kd1**



We formally reach Lucena's position - a win for the pawn up side. It's unbelievable that Polu made Korchnoi play it out to the bitter end.

**60 Rc7 Rf5+ 61 Kg2**

61 Ke3 is met with 61 ... Ke1.

**61 ... Ke2**

Black's king prepares for his little dance up the board.

**62 Re7+ Kd3 63 Rd7+ Ke3 64 Re7+ Kd4 65 Rd7+ Rd5 0-1**

**Summary:** Meet 4 Qc2 with 4 ... Qh4. Keep in mind that we play ... f5 after White protects e4 with Bd3.

### Game 37

**L.Remlinger-I.Rogers**

Philadelphia 1986

**1 d4 e6 2 c4 b6 3 e4 Bb7 4 Qc2 Qh4 5 Nd2 Bb4 6 Bd3 f5 7 Ngf3 Bxd2+ 8 Bxd2**

More natural and possibly stronger than last game's 8 Kf1!?. However, in this version, White must be ready to sacrifice a pawn.

**8 ... Qg4**

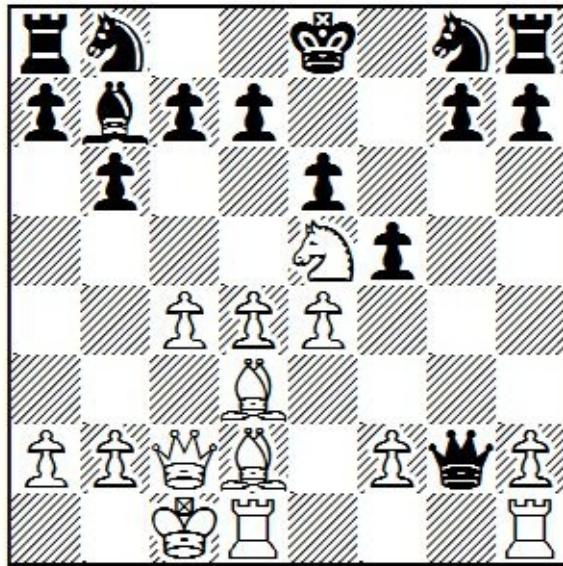
Maintaining the double attack on e4 and g2.

**9 Ne5**

Houdini suggests the unplayed 9 h3!? Qxg2 10 Ke2 Qg6 11 Rhg1 Qf7 12 Ne5 Qh5+ 13 Ke1 Ne7 14 Rxg7 Nbc6 15 Nxc6 Nxc6 16 Qc3 0-0-0 17 Be2! Qh4! 18 Bg5 Qxe4 19 Rd1!. The threat is to trap Black's queen in mid-board with f3 next (not 19 Bxd8?? Nxd4 20 Qd3 Qh1+ 21 Bf1 Nf3+ 22 Ke2 Rxd8 23 Rxh7 e5 when Black has a winning attack), and after 19 ... Qh1+ 20 Kd2 Qh2 21 Bxd8 Rxd8 22 d5 exd5 23 Qg3 Qxg3 24 fxg3 Nd4 25 cxd5 Bxd5 26 Ba6+ Kb8 an ultra-sharp ending is reached where

Black probably has enough for the exchange.

**9 ... Qxg2 10 0-0-0**



**10 ... fxe4**

**Question:** Can we grab f2 instead?

**Answer:** Unwise. Our side falls deeply behind in development after 10 ... Qxf2 11 Rhf1 Qxd4 12 Bc3 Qe3+ 13 Kb1 when White generates too many threats. If 13 ... fxe4? then 14 Qg2! is decisive.

**11 Be2 Nc6??!**

Black stands worse after this move. He should try 11 ... Nf6! 12 Be3 Qh3 13 Rhg1 g6 14 Kb1 Nc6! (14 ... 0-0? 15 Rg3 Qf5 16 Rg5 Qh3 17 Qc3! d6 18 Nxg6 hxg6 19 Rxg6+ Kf7 20 Rxf6+! Kxf6 21 Bg5+! wins the queen and forces mate) 15 Ng4 Nxg4 16 Bxg4 Qh4 17 d5 Ne5 18 Qc3 d6 19 Bxe6 Bc8! when Black is fine according to the comps.

**12 Nxc6??!**

12 Rhg1! leaves Black in serious difficulties. For example, 12 ... Qxh2 13 Rh1! Qxf2 14 Bh5+ g6 Forced. 15 Bxg6+ hxg6 16 Rxh8 0-0-0 17 Bg5 Qxc2+ 18 Kxc2 Re8 19 Nxg6 d5 20 Kc3 when Black has enough material for the exchange but remains completely tangled. *Houdini* assesses at '+1.79'.

**12 ... Bxc6 13 d5!**

Dual principles applied:

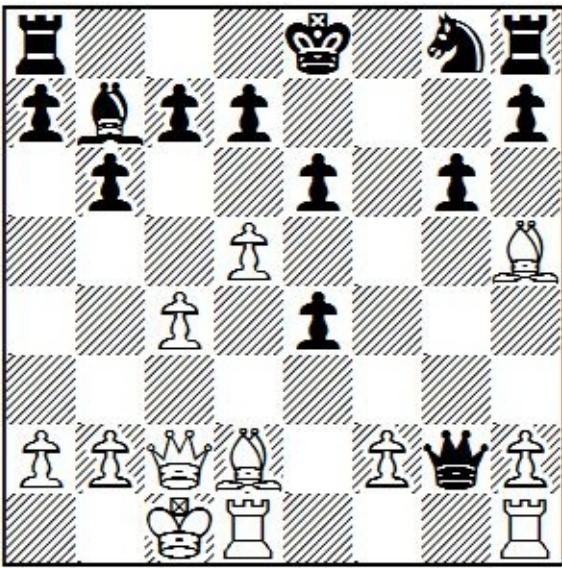
1. Open the game and create confrontation when leading in development.
2. Open the position when you own the bishop-pair.

**13 ... Bb7?**

Now Black is busted. Correct is 13 ... exd5 14 Bh5+ g6 15 Qc3 0-0-0 16 Qxh8 d4! 17 Qxd4 gxh5 18 Rhg1 Qf3 when White stands a shade better.

**14 Bh5+! g6**

14 ... Kd8 15 dxe6 is a winning attack for White as well.



**Exercise (critical decision):** It appears as if White can win material down the a1-h8 diagonal. But with what piece? Our choices are 15 Qc3 and 15 Bc3. One is completely decisive for White, while the other allows Black to take over the advantage. Which one would you play?

### 15 Bc3?

This way fails to win the rook, and walks into a counter combination.

**Answer:** Decisive was 15 Qc3! (the queen casts her control in concentric sweeps of ever enlarging radius) 15 ... 0-0-0 16 Qxh8 and the trouble is 16 ... gxh5 loses the g8-knight to the simple pile-up 17 Rhg1.

### 15 ... Qg5+!

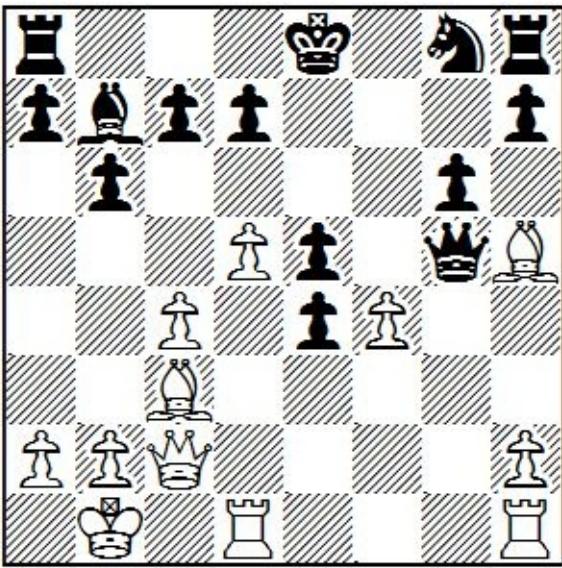
Hardship and viewing the world from its underside have a way of toughening up a person. Black defends while off balance, standing first on one foot and then the other.

### 16 Kb1 e5

Oops. This shuts down White's diagonal. Black went from losing to better.

### 17 f4!?

The sight of Black's still living king continues to give deep offence to Remlinger. White, who must deal with Black's attempted extortion, offers more material.



**Exercise (critical decision):** White believes the sluggish black defenders are napping. However, outward appearances are deceptive. Black has three choices: a) Accept the piece offer with 17 ... Qxh5. b) Capture on f3 en passant. c) Dissolve the irritating f4-pawn with 17 ... Qxf4. One line is winning, another is equal, while the last should lose. Which one should we play?

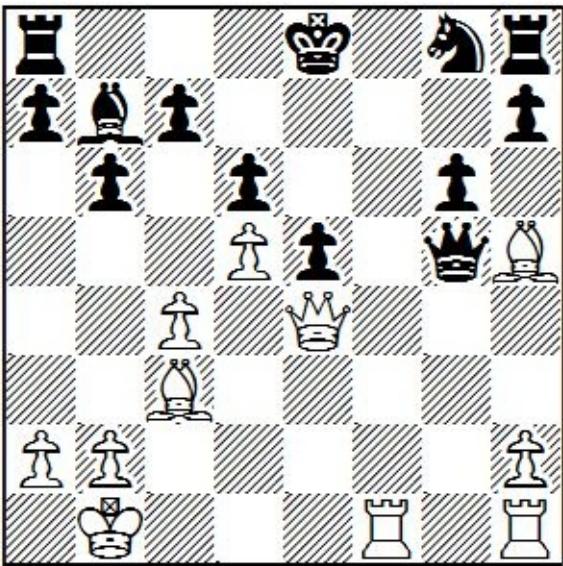
### 17 ... Qxf4?

This is the worst of the three. Sometimes in positions of great complexity, and if low on time, all we can do is guess.

**Answer:** Correct was 17 ... Qxh5!. Black should accept the h5-offer with enthusiasm and after 18 Bxe5 return the piece with 18 ... Nf6! 19 Bxf6 0-0 (yes, this move is legal) 20 Bd4 (20 Bg5 Rae8 threatening ... h6, gives Black a winning position after 21 Qc3 e3 22 Ka1 e2 23 Rde1 c6 24 dxc6 Bxc6 when the e2 passer paralyses White) 20 ... Rxf4 21 Be3 Rf5 22 Qxe4 c6! 23 Bd2 Re5 24 Qd4 Qf5+ 25 Ka1 Re4 26 Qc3 cxd5 27 cxd5 Bxd5 28 Bh6 Re7 29 Rhf1 Qe5. Black remains up two pawns and should consolidate, despite the dark-square danger to his king.

Instead, after 17 ... exf3 18 Bxe5! 0-0-0 19 Bxh8 Qxh5 20 Bc3 Black gets compensation for the exchange, but no more.

### 18 Rdf1 Qg5 19 Qxe4 d6



**Exercise (combination alert):** It's now or never. White must find a winning idea, or else Black escapes up two pawns. What would you play here?

## 20 Bd1?

This allows Black's king his escape.

**Answer:** White missed 20 Bxe5!. Now attackers merge imperceptibly, as if a single harmonious unit. After 20 ... Qxe5 (20 ... dxe5?? 21 Rf5! is crushing) 21 Bxg6+! hxg6 22 Qxg6+ Kd7 23 Qg4+ Kd8 24 Rf8+ Ke7 25 Rf5! the black queen's enemies follow her and dissolve into the shadows when she turns to find them. Black must hand over his queen, no matter how he plays it.

## 20 ... 0-0-0

Now Black is well on his way toward consolidation.

## 21 Rhg1?

White can still win some material with 21 Be1! Qh6 22 Qh4! Qxh4 23 Bxh4 and Black must give up an exchange, since 23 ... Re8 is met by 24 Bg4+ Kb8 25 Bd7 Nh6 26 Bxe8 Rxe8 with an edge to Black, who has two healthy pawns for the exchange.

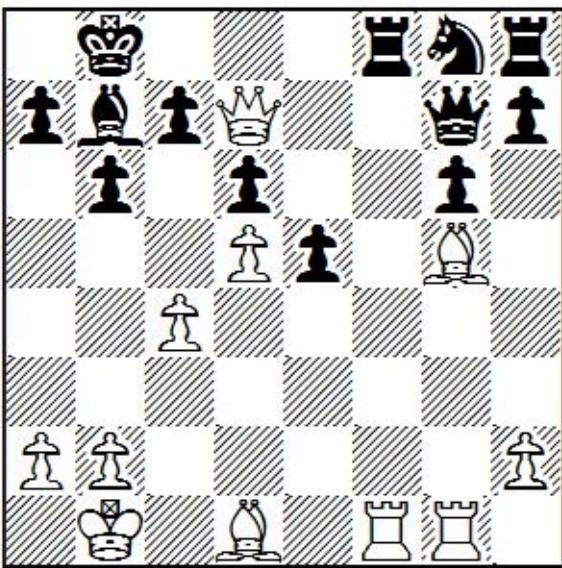
## 21 ... Qe7 22 Bd2 Rf8 23 Qg4+?!

23 Bg5 puts up stiffer resistance.

## 23 ... Kb8 24 Bg5 Qg7

Everything is covered.

## 25 Qd7!



Or is it? At the white queen's approach, the terrified villagers snatch their playing children inside their homes, slamming windows and doors shut as she passes through the empty streets. My ever resourceful friend IM Larry Remlinger continues to confuse. This doesn't work, but it's an excellent practical try. The queen attempts to perform a touch of summary justice upon her g7 sister, before turning her attention to the b8 ringleader.

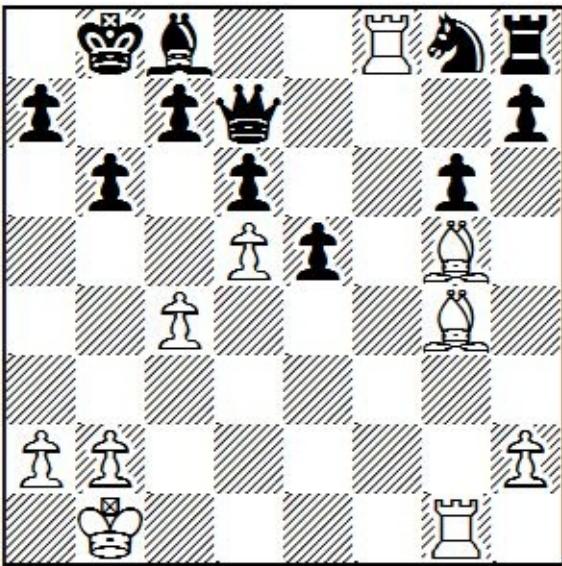
**25 ... Qxd7!**

Black can accept the sacrifice. "How amusing when the weak bluster and threaten the powerful," the queen comments to her sister.

**26 Rxf8+ Bc8!**

Correctly allowing White his coming sequence.

**27 Bg4**



**Exercise (combination alert):** Black to play and consolidate:

**27 ... Qg7?**

Back! Another error in a tense, error filled game.

**Answer:** 27 ... Nf6! consolidates in all variations: 28 Rxc8+ (28 Bxd7 Rxf8! 29 Bxc8 Kxc8 30 Bh6 Re8 31 h3 Ng8! 32 Bg5 Rf8 also gets the job done) 28 ... Rxc8! 29 Bxd7 Nxd7 30 Bh6 Nf6 31 Rf1 Ng4 32 Bc1 Nxh2 and wins.

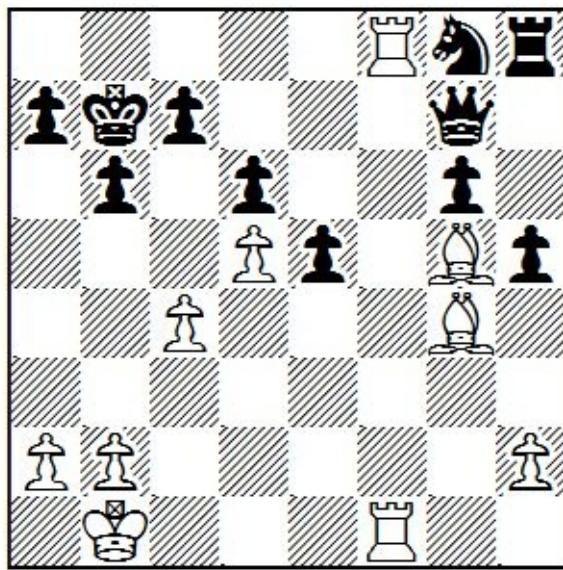
**28 Rxc8+ Kb7 29 Rf1**

Threat: Rff8.

**29 ... h5?!**

There is a fine line between imagining threats and hallucinating them. Black had to try 29 ... Ne7! 30 Rxh8 Qxh8 31 Bxe7 Qe8 32 Bg5 when the position is once again dynamically even.

**30 Rcf8??**



White pushes a bit too tenaciously to his dream. Instead, Black fights for his life after 30 Be6!. Our psychological errors tend toward the recursive, where we endlessly repeat a negative pattern - even after decades of play - simply because something in our hidden DNA demands the error. In this case, Remlinger isn't satisfied with an edge, and instead, plays to obliterate his opponent, wanting everything and getting nothing in the end. This pushes the line from improbable to impossible. White threatens both Bc8+ forcing mate, and also R1f7, trapping the queen.

**30 ... hxg4!**

At long last, Black's position is now well armed with instruments of defence. Unfortunately for White, this rather simple solution ruins everything.

**31 R1f7 Qxf7**

So what?

**32 Rxf7 Nh6 33 Rg7 Nf5 34 Rxg6 Rxh2**

Black emerges up two pawns, with a deadly passed g-pawn to boot.

**35 Bc1 g3 36 Rg5 g2 0-1**

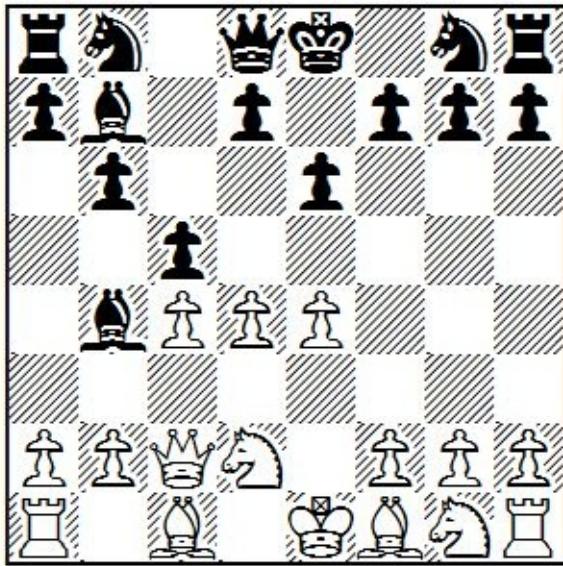
**Summary:** This is one of White's more dangerous lines of the chapter. Be prepared to go pawn-hunting after 8 Bxd2 Qg4. Also, be prepared for 9 h3?!, after which it is us who will sacrifice an exchange for compensation.

*Game 38*

**N.Berry-J.Speelman**

British League 2006

1 d4 e6 2 c4 b6 3 e4 Bb7 4 Qc2 Bb4+ 5 Nd2 c5



Speelman decides that agile improvisation is in order. He tries a recommendation by Glenn Flear. Black hits White's centre from the queenside, rather than the traditional ... Qh5 and later ... f5 plan.

### 6 d5

Logical, but White scored a rather sluggish zero points from three games in the database from this position. 6 dx<sub>c</sub>5 was preferred in V.Mikhalevski-I.Zugic, Miami 2007. Now instead of recapturing, Black can risk the promising pawn sacrifice 6 ... Nf6! 7 Bd3 (7 e5? Ng4 favours Black) 7 ... Na6! 8 cxb6 Qxb6 9 a3 Bxd2+ 10 Bxd2 Nc5 11 b4 (11 f3?! is met with 11 ... Qxb2! 12 Rb1 Qd4 13 Ke2 Ba6 14 Bc3 Qxd3+ 15 Qxd3 Nxd3 16 Kxd3 d5 when Black stands better) 11 ... Nxd3+ 12 Qxd3 Nxe4 13 Be3 Qd6 when Black stands at least even.

### 6 ... Qe7!?

A new move, but a familiar idea. Black makes life awkward for White on the e-file. 6 ... f5 also looks quite logical, going after White's massive centre: 7 a3 Ba5!? 8 b4!? (I like Black's position after 8 exf5 exd5 9 Ngf3 Nf6) 8 ... cxb4 9 Nb3 Nf6! (Black continues to apply unbearable pressure to White's now crumbling centre) 10 Bd2 Na6 11 Nxa5 bxa5 and White found himself overextended, V.Mikhalevski-A.Young, Santa Monica 2004.

### 7 Be2 exd5

I think this move is slightly inaccurate, and prefer the thematic 7 ... f5 and Black's position after 8 exf5 exd5 9 Ngf3 Nf6 10 0-0 0-0 11 a3 Bxd2 12 Qxd2 d4.

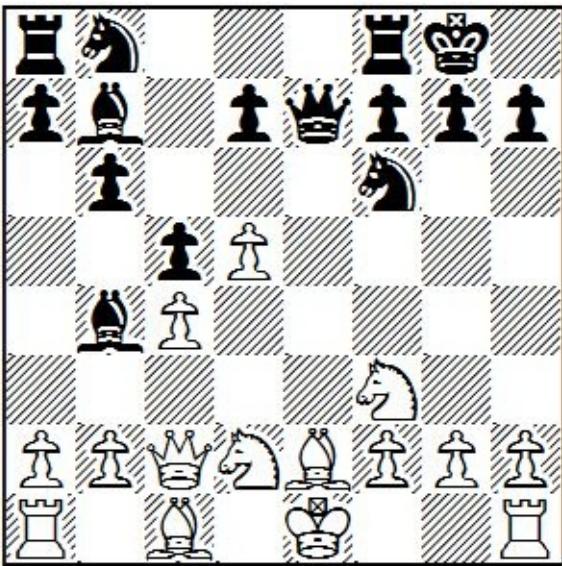
### 8 exd5

8 cxd5?! is met with the dismantling 8 ... f5! when White is unable to hold his centre together.

### 8 ... Nf6 9 Ngf3

Flear suggests 9 a3!? and to meet 9 ... Ba5 with 10 Kf1!? intending Nb3. Then he suggests 10 ... b5!? when I think Black is doing well.

### 9 ... 0-0



## 10 a3

White can improve with 10 0-0! when e2 isn't hanging just yet:

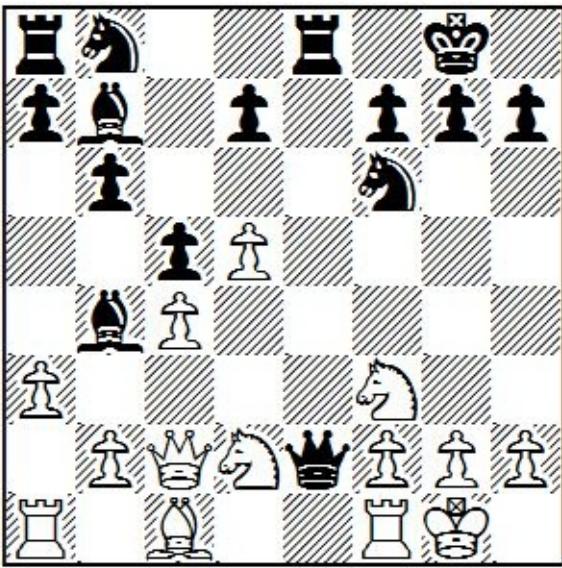
a) 10 ... Nxd5 11 cxd5 Qxe2 12 Re1 Qa6 (Black's dishevelled and flustered queen seems another person from her past self, whose facile elegance is now clearly absent; Black's pieces bunched over on the queenside allow White to make a sudden lunge on the other side) 13 Ng5! f5 14 Qb3! h6 15 d6+ c4 16 Qxb4 hxg5 17 Nxc4 Nc6 18 Qc3 Rae8 19 Bxg5 Rxe1+ 20 Rxe1 Qxa2 21 h4 when Ne5 is in the air and White stands better.

b) Black can toss in 10 ... Bxd5! 11 cxd5 Qxe2 12 Re1 Qa6 13 Ne4! b5! (not 13 ... Bxe1?? 14 Nxf6+ gxf6 15 Bh6 when White threatens both Qe4 and Rxe1, which are completely hopeless for Black) 14 Rd1 Nxe4 15 Qxe4 Qg6 16 Qe2 c4 17 Be3 Re8 18 Nd4 a6 19 a4, with a touch of pressure for White, who manages to dismantle Black's queenside structure.

## 10 ... Re8!

I like this better than the line 10 ... Ba5 11 0-0 Bxd5 12 cxd5 Qxe2 13 b4!. White isn't intemperate with his generosity and this move is sound. The idea is to gain a tempo by developing with Bb2, taking aim at f6 and Black's kingside. After 13 ... cxb4 14 axb4 Bxb4 15 Bb2 Qe7 16 Ng5 (the devil's horseman arrives with a vengeance, ready to do his dark bidding; threat: Bxf6 and Qxh7 mate) 16 ... Qc5 17 Nc4 h6 18 Ne4! (eliminating Black's lone kingside defender; in this way, White's intent is reduced to its sturkst elements) 18 ... Nxe4 19 Qxe4 a5 20 Qg4 f6 21 Rac1 Qe7! 22 Nxb6 Ra6 23 Nc4 f5 24 Qd4 d6 the position, for so long in flux, begins to coalesce into a pseudo-stability. White gets equivalent compensation for the pawn, but no more.

## 11 0-0 Qxe2



**12 axb4!**

**Question:** Why not toss in 12 Re1?

**Answer:** Black stands better, with two pieces and a rook for the queen after 12 ... Qxe1+. The queen speaks down to the rook in a bored voice, as if explaining a self-evident truth to a child: for example, 13 Nxe1 Rxe1+ 14 Nf1 Ba5 15 Rb1 b5 16 Bg5 Rxb1 17 Qxb1 Bd8.

**12 ... Na6**

Not 12 ... cxb4?, in view of 13 b3!, which is even stronger than 13 Re1 Qxe1+ 14 Nxe1 Rxe1+ 15 Nf1, which also favours White.

**13 b5**

This move allows Black full equality. White stands just a shade better in the ending after 13 bxc5! bxc5 14 Qa4 (14 Re1 is met with 14 ... Nb4) 14 ... Nb4 15 Re1 Qd3 16 Ra3 Qc2 17 Qxc2 Nxc2 18 Rxe8+ Nxe8 19 Rc3 Nb4 20 Ne4 d6 21 Bd2.

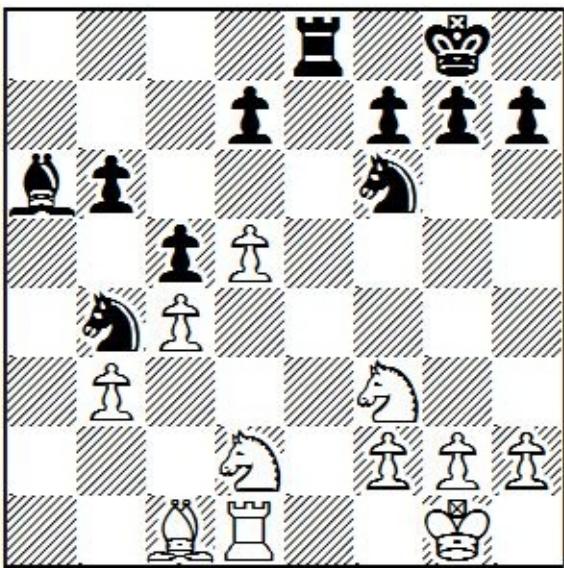
**13 ... Nb4 14 Qd1 Qxd1 15 Rxd1 a6**

Black logically erases the pressure on a7.

**16 bxa6 Rxa6 17 Rxa6?**

This move remains at the fringes of the correct plan, yet misses its essence. White mistakenly trusts the continued impregnability of his fortress. This natural move sets into motion a complex web of causation which eventuates in his own downfall. White should say 'j'adoube' to his last move. He avoids disaster with a zero margin of error with 17 Ra3! to maintain the balance.

**17 ... Bxa6 18 b3**



**Exercise (combination alert):** Sometimes we feel a secret apprehension about the stability of our position, even when all evidence points to that of a sound foundation. White appears to enjoy a relatively stable position with a space advantage. Speelman, like the Karate Kid, has been waxing cars for weeks. Now comes the time to actually practice karate. Find Black's shot.

**Answer:** Clearance.

**18 ... Nfxd5! 19 cxd5 Be2 20 Re1 Nd3**

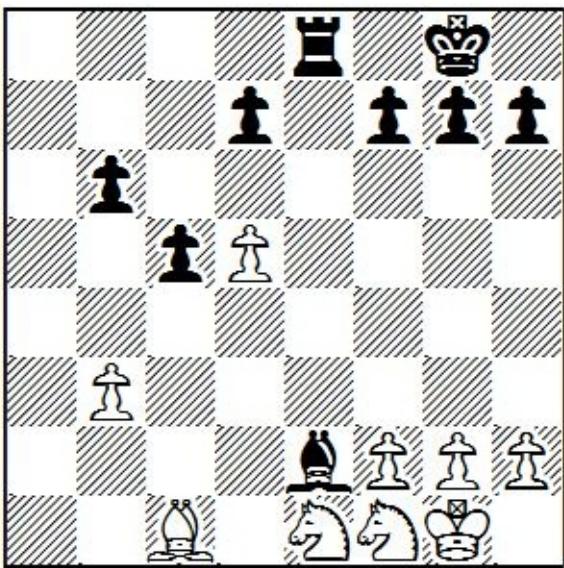
White's rook is caught.

**Question:** Why is this even categorized as a combination?

Black merely got a rook and pawn for two minor pieces.

**Answer:** A combination is not just calculation, it also includes the assessment at the finish line. You are misassessing if you believe the aftermath is even. Black's shot contained some added backspin: White's problem is that both b3 and d5, while still standing, exude a moth-eaten look. When one or both pawns fall, his minor pieces are ill equipped to deal with Black's queenside passed pawns. *Houdini* rates this position at '-1.64' - busted for White.

**21 Nf1 Nxe1 22 Nxe1**



**Exercise (combination alert):** How did Black win a key pawn?

**Answer:** Double attack. White's remaining minor pieces are helpless to halt the advance of Black's passed pawns.

**22 ... Bd1! 23 Ne3 Bxb3 24 Bb2?**

White, probably depressed about his position, just blundered. 24 Kf1 was necessary.

**24 ... Bxd5**

"I am above petty human laws," declares the bishop, as he violates his no-stealing vow.

**25 Nd3 Be6 26 Be5 d5 27 Bc7 d4 0-1**

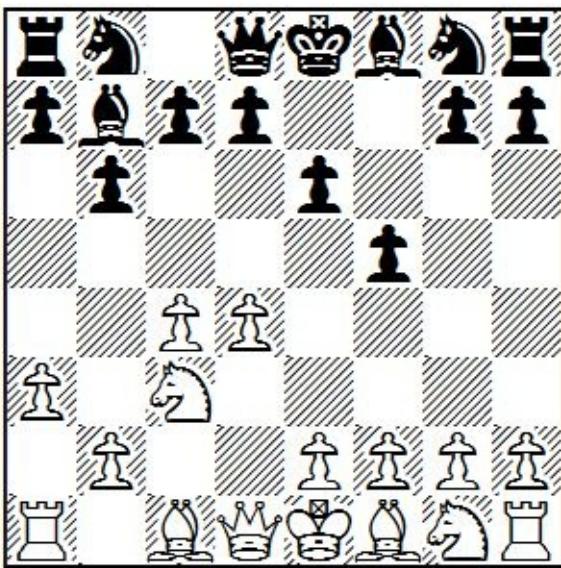
**Summary:** The rarely played 6 ... Qe7 may confuse White. I would follow up with a quick ... f5, rather than ... exd5, as played by Speelman in the game.

# **Chapter Six**

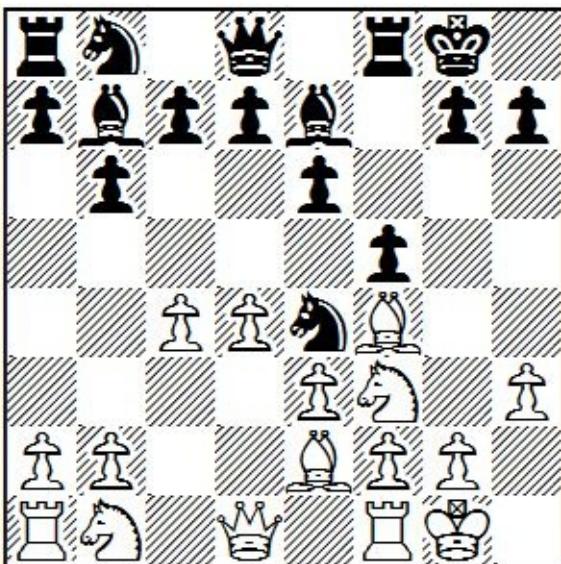
## **English Defence: Non-Critical Lines**

White's philosophy this chapter: "If I am curbed in my ambition to inflict large scale damage, then I will settle upon a strategy of a multitude of little harms upon my enemy." In this chapter we look at the less ambitious lines of the English Defence where White holds back on the d4, c4, e4 pawn wall, proceeding more modestly, seeking to make changes in himself, rather than changes in the world itself. We also cover 1 Nf3 and 1 c4 move orders.

## Examples from the chapter:



This position, from Kasparov-Morozevich, is probably our most critical one of the chapter. White blocks out ... Bb4 and plans to squeeze with d5, followed by g2 and Bg2. We meet White's idea with a Dutch-Indian set-up, mixing ... b6 with ... e6 and ... f5, which we see throughout the chapter. Our counterplay comes in the form of enhanced dark squares, the moment White plays d5.



In this second position, White meets our Owen's Defence with the most annoying opening in chess: the London System. Our path to smooth equality is to toss in an early ... Ne4!.

### Game 39

G.Kasparov-A.Morozevich

Frankfurt (rapid) 2000

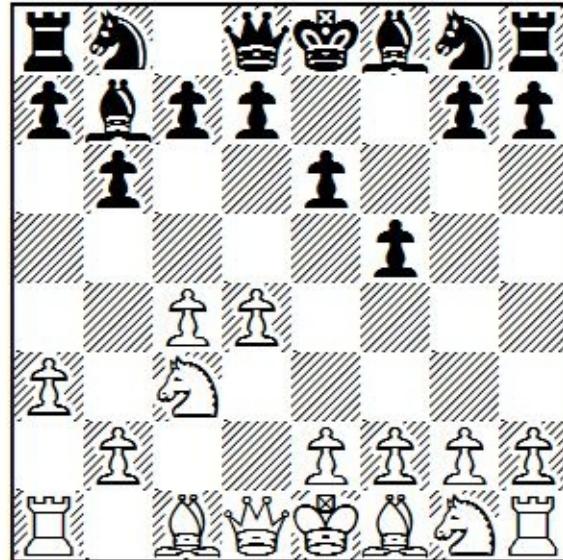
**1 d4 e6 2 c4 b6 3 a3**

In order to play Nc3 without worrying about ... Bb4.

**3 ... Bb7**

If you don't like the positions we get, Black has a quirky idea which may throw your opponents off: 3 ... Ba6!? 4 e4 d5 5 cxd5 (5 exd5 exd5 6 Nf3 Nf6 7 Nc3 Be7 seems fine for Black) 5 ... Bxf1 6 Kxf1 exd5 7 Qe2! Be7 8 Nc3 dxe4 9 Qxe4 c6 10 Bg5 h6 11 Bxe7 Nxe7 12 Re1, Zhu Chen-N.Short, Jinan 2002. Here Black can offer a pawn with 12 ... Nd7 13 Qxc6 0-0. The position of White's king and his lag in development may offer Black enough compensation for the pawn, although if given a choice I would probably take White.

**4 Nc3 f5**



In this chapter we examine Dutch Indian lines, mixing ... f5 with ... b6. As I mentioned before in the book, 4 ... Nf6?! 5 d5! is worrisome for Black, whose bishop is hemmed in on b7.

**Question:** True, but in this game Morozevich's bishop suffered the same fate. What is the difference between replacing ... Nf6 with ... f5?

**Answer:** The difference is ... f5 discourages e4 from White, which doesn't allow him to back up d5 with the pawn.

**5 d5**

The cramping d-pawn launches forth, the way a hawk glides from the treetop. This is White's best line, and our biggest theoretical concern of the chapter. Next game we look at 5 Nf3.

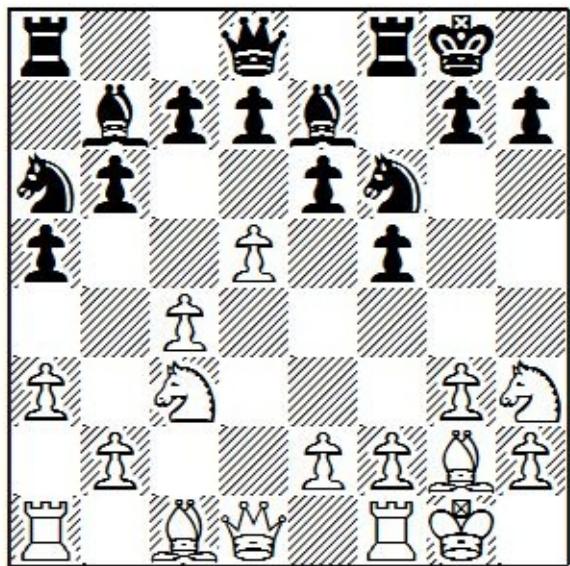
**5 ... Nf6 6 g3**

Instead, after 6 Nf3 (normally in this line, White posts the knight on h3, after which it can play to f4, where it increases pressure on e6, while backing up d5) 6 ... Bd6 7 g3 (7 Nd4!? Qe7 8 g3 Na6 9 Bg2 Nc5

10 0-0 0-0 11 Ndb5 was A.Rivera-H.Teske, Havana 1998; Black looks just fine after 11 ... Be5, despite the awkward appearance) 7 ... 0-0 8 Bg2 Na6 9 0-0 (9 b4 is met by 9 ... c5! with a perfectly playable game for Black) 9 ... Nc5 10 Nd4 a5 11 b3 Nfe4! (be on the lookout for this freeing manoeuvre) 12 Nxe4 fxe4 13 dxe6 dxe6 14 Be3 Be5! (J.Mazet-A.David, Trieste 2012) 15 Rb1 Qf6 16 Nb5 a4! 17 b4 Nb3 18 Qc2 c6 19 f4 cxb5 20 fxe5 Qxe5 21 cxb5 Rxfl+ 22 Rxfl Rc8 *Houdini* rates this chaotic situation at dead even.

### 6 ... Na6

Note and avoid 6 ... Be7 7 Bg2 0-0 8 Nh3 a5 9 0-0 Na6?? (9 ... Qc8 is correct).



**Exercise (combination alert):** White to play and win.

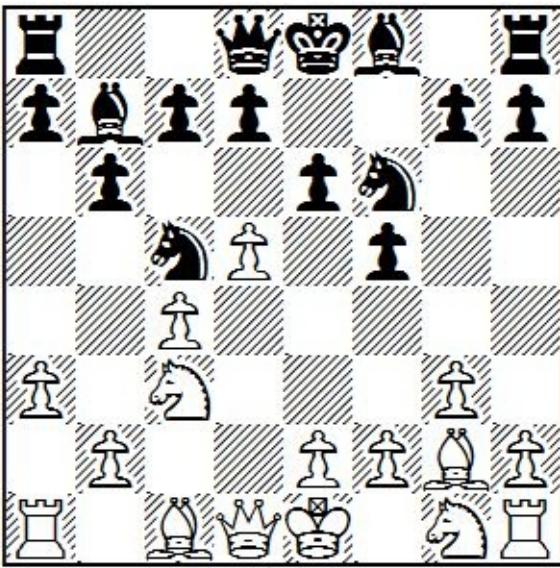
**Answer:** Double attack. The d-pawn not-so-gently deposits its intent upon e7 and b7. Black drops a piece. 10 d6! 1-0, M.Cebalo-C.Pantaleoni, Bratto 2001. Let's all vow to never fall for this cheapo.

### 7 Bg2

**Question:** Black's knight obviously heads for superior pastures on c5. So why can't White stymie this intention with 7 b4?

**Answer:** Always meet this idea with the central counter 7 ... c5!, as in G.Serper-J.Kraai, Los Angeles 2001. White has no pathway to even an edge here. In fact, the then much higher-rated Serper offered Kraai a draw in just a few moves.

### 7 ... Nc5



8 Nh3

**Question:** Why not pick up a tempo on Black's knight with 8 b4?

**Answer:** Exchanges only help Black after 8 ... Nce4 9 Nxe4 Nxe4 10 Bb2 exd5 11 cxd5 a5, J.Gil oape-A.Romero Holmes, Ponferrada 1997. Black develops nicely after 12 b5 Bc5.

8 ... Bd6

**Question:** Isn't this an unnatural square for the bishop, rather than e7?

**Answer:** The bishop holds fast to his continuously ascending pilgrimage. This is the normal square for bishop in this line, who may soon transfer to e5; ... Bd6 covers c7 and is more active than e7, which is also possible. But I ask: why settle when more is available? If 8 ... Be7 9 0-0 0-0 10 Nf4 a5 11 Be3 12 Bxc5! Bxc5 13 dxe6 Bxg2 14 exd7 This zwischenzug picks up a pawn. 14 ... Qxd7 15 Qxd7 Nxd7 16 Kxg2 left White up a pawn in the ending, H.Nakamura-psyj, Internet (blitz) 2005.

9 0-0

## Alternatives:

a) 9 Be3 Be5 10 Bxc5 bxc5 11 0-0 and then:

a1) 11 ... Bxc3?! looks premature: 12 bxc3 e5 13 Qb1! Ba6 14 Qxf5 0-0 15 Qd3 favours White.

a2) 9 ... exd5 12 cxd5 Rb8 13 Qd3 g6 14 e4 Bxc3 15 bxc3 fxe4 16 Bxe4 0-0 17 Bg2 Qe7, A.Karpov-Morozevich, Cannes 2002. Karpov failed to get much from the opening and soon offered a draw.

a3) GM Tisdall suggests 11 ... Rb8!? to cover the b7-bishop for tricks down the diagonal, while preparing to pressure b2. Black looks fine here after 12 Rb1 0-0 13 dxe6 dxe6 14 Qxd8 Rfxd8 15 Ng5 c3 16 bxc3 Bxg2 17 Kxg2 Rb6.

b) Black shouldn't fear 9 Nb5 Be5 10 f4 Bd6, as in Z.Gyimesi-K.Gawehns, Bad Wiessee 2000. Now 1 Nxd6+ cxd6 12 b4 Nce4 13 Ng5 Rc8 with a perfectly playable position for Black, which *Houdini* rates at dead even.

9 ... Be5

A thematic move in our line, preventing b4 and worrying White about ... Bxc3.

10 Qc2 0-0

Not 10 ... Bxc3 11 Qxc3 and Black is unable to win d5, since g7 hangs in the end.

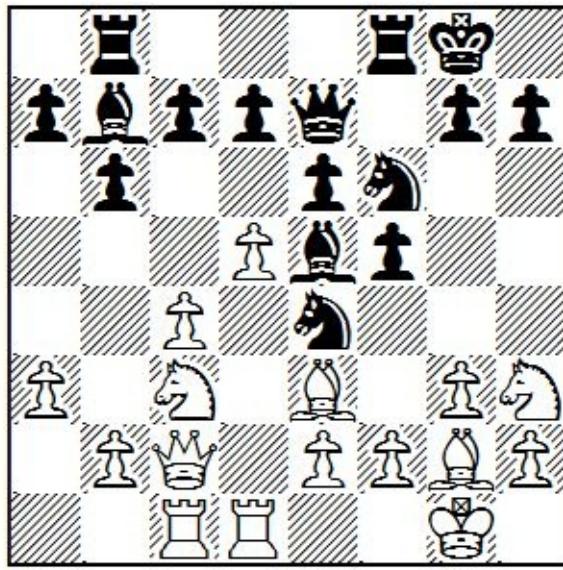
## 11 Rd1

Kasparov backs up his cramping d5-pawn.

## 11 ... Qe7 12 Be3 Rab8

A wise precaution, guarding against future d6 tricks. Also logical is to chip away at d5 with 12 ... c6 13 dxe6 (or 13 Nf4 cxd5 14 cxd5 Nfe4! 15 Nxe4 Nxe4 16 dxe6 dxe6 17 Qb3 Rfe8 and I don't see much for White here besides a sliver of an edge, while here 16 Bxe4 fxe4 17 dxe6 dxe6 is fine for Black, who gets light-square play and his own cramping e4-pawn) 13 ... dxe6 14 Rac1, M.Gurevich-C.Bauer, Clichy 2001. Play may continue 14 ... Ncd7 15 Nf4 Ng4 16 Bd2 Rad8 17 b4 Bf6 18 Na4 e5 19 Nh5 e4 when Black's central space should make up for the loss of the bishop-pair if White chooses to swap on f6.

## 13 Rac1 Nce4!?



Restlessness tends to be the soil from which ambition sprouts. The defending side generally welcomes a lull in the hostilities, but not this time. Perhaps Morozevich's intent is to address his emotions, rather than his reason. The boorish knight cuts in like a trumpet rudely interrupting a string quartet. This is actually a pawn sacrifice. Morozevich engages Black's standard - yet this time risky - freeing manoeuvre, offering a pawn.

Safer is 13 ... a5. In some positions our best bet is to relax within a position's flow, without strivings, comings or goings. This is a strengthening move, an attempt to stall a clash, the way I do when I see my dentist reach for his drill, and I bleat out a lengthy joke in a desperate attempt to forestall the inevitable. After 14 Nf4 Ng4 15 Bxc5 bxc5 16 e3 g5 17 Nd3 Bg7 Black's dark-square control makes up for White's d5 wedge.

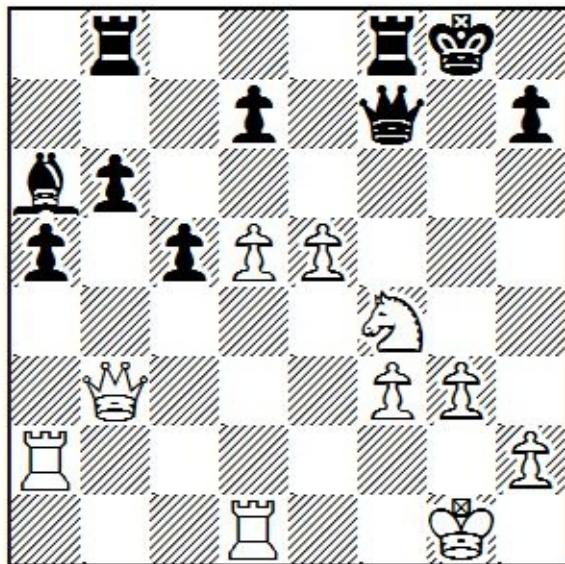
## 14 Nxe4 Nxe4 15 Nf4!?

Kasparov's play becomes an exercise in self-depravation. He decides not to take the bait, fearing that the crowded city is thick with thieves, pickpockets and charlatans. A move based on the philosophy: it takes strength of character to refuse to retaliate to a provocation if we feel we aren't ready for one.

Kasparov refuses to hand over his light-squared bishop to win a pawn, which he can do after 15 Bxe4!. The bishop's false claims of humility and poverty are betrayed when he dramatically wipes away a tear with a \$100 bill as a handkerchief. When the edge swings to your side, it is time to strike, since who knows how long this happy state of affairs remains? This is the critical test of Black's idea, and a move designed to prove the untenability of Black's sacrifice. After 15 ... fxe4 16 Ng5! (this move dooms the e4-pawn) 16 ... Rf5 17 Nxe4 Rbf8 18 f3 I have doubts about Black's full compensation for the pawn.

**15 ... c5**

Morozevich continues to offer the pawn for the light squares. I prefer White's position after the risky, yet thematic stab 15 ... g5!? (Black hopes his ramming g-pawn serves as a catalyst to his attacking plans) 16 Nh3 Bf6 17 Bxe4! fxe4 18 Qxe4 (the queen follows her inclination pensively, not at all confident in the merits of her mission) 18 ... Bxb2 19 Bxg5 Qf7 20 Rc2 Bxa3 21 Ra2 Bc5 22 Be3 Bxe3 23 Qxe3 a5 24 f3 exd5 25 cxd5 Rbe8 26 Qb3 Ba6 27 Nf4 c5 28 e4 Rb8 29 e5.



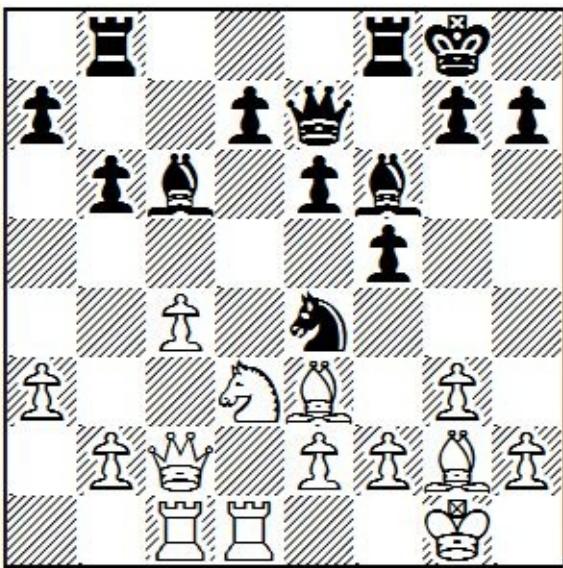
Advantage White:

1. Whose central pawn majority looks more intimidating than Black's three connected kingside passers.
2. White's knight looks stronger than its a6 counterpart.
3. Black's king looks a lot less safe than White's.

**16 dxc6**

Kasparov isn't normally the type who submits to grave acquiescence when his whims are thwarted. He loses any hope of an edge by giving away his d5 wedge. He can try 16 b4!? g5!? 17 Bxe4 fxe4 18 Nh3 exd5 19 cxd5 h6 20 Qxe4 cxb4 21 axb4 Rbe8 22 Qg6+ (the black king's depressed demeanour, brought on by his g6-sister's visit, excites remark in court) 22 ... Qg7 23 Qd3 Bb8, although *Houdini* rates this near even, giving Black full compensation for the pawn, with the bishop-pair in the open position and an offside white knight.

**16 ... Bxc6 17 Nd3 Bf6**



**18 f3**

18 c5 was later tried in B.Elisei-R.Di Pietro, correspondence 2011. Black should meet this thrust with an equal position after 18 ... Rfc8.

**18 ... Ne5 19 b4 Nxd3 20 Rxd3**

Black equalized. Now Moro looks for trouble.

**20 ... d5!?**

20 ... Rfc8 remains equal.

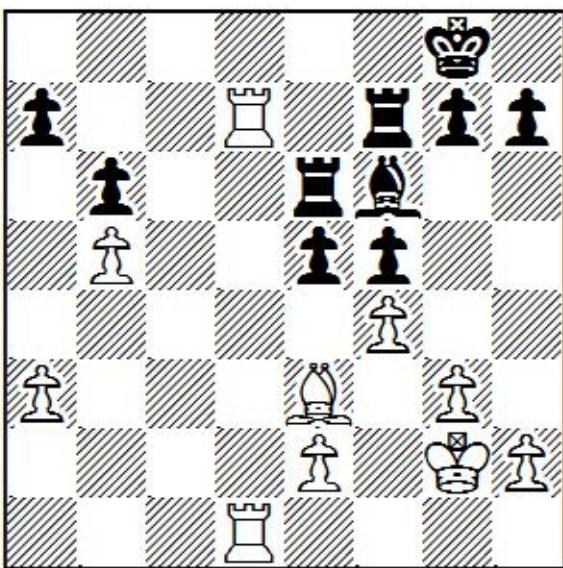
**21 f4**

If 21 c5?! Rfc8 Black's central majority is worth more than White's queenside majority.

**21 ... dxc4 22 Qxc4 Bxg2 23 Kxg2 Rf7**

It looks simpler to offer a challenge of the d-file with 23 ... Rfd8.

**24 b5 Re8 25 Rcd1 e5 26 Rd7 Qe6 27 Qxe6 Rxe6**



White is unable to do anything with his seventh rank rook. The position is even, heading for a near-certain draw.

**28 Kf3 exf4 29 gxf4 Rxd7 30 Rxd7 Re7 31 Rxe7 Bxe7 32 a4 Kf7 33 Bd4 Bd6**

Preventing any Be5 and Bb8 ideas.

### 34 e4 g6

Principle: *place as many pawns as possible on the opposite colour of your remaining bishop.* 34 ... fxe4+ 35 Kxe4 g6 36 Be5 Ke6 should also draw.

### 35 h3 Ke6 36 Bc3 Bc7 37 Bb4 Bd8 38 e5 ½-½

Neither side is able to make progress. This is admittedly a bit of a snoozer of a game (so boring that it was unable to provide us a single exercise), yet shows the variation's inherent soundness by holding Kasparov to an effortless draw.

**Summary:** The position after 4 ... f5 scores above average for White, but this may be attributed to the fact that Black's position is harder to play, rather than inherently poor, and also many players who play the English Defence with Black tend to wing it, without knowing the theory - a big mistake.

Even though Black's energy feels suppressed by the cramping effect of White's d5-pawn, it continues to function on a barely perceptible level, since its seeds remain intact. If Black knows what he or she is doing, it isn't easy at all for White to maintain even an edge. If Kasparov couldn't come up with a clear advantage versus Morozevich, then odds are neither will your opponents.

### Game 40

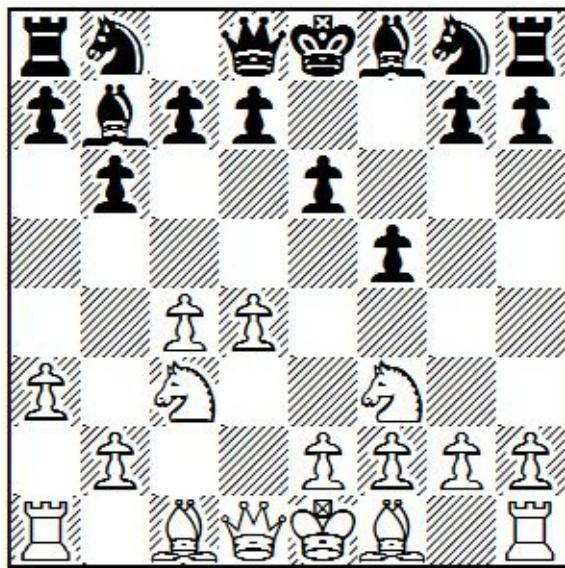
L.Portisch-R.Rapport

Budapest (rapid) 2014

### 1 d4 b6 2 c4 Bb7

As I mentioned last chapter, it may be more accurate to hold back on ... Bb7 this early and replace it with 2 ... e6, which increases ... Ba6 options.

### 3 Nc3 e6 4 a3 f5 5 Nf3



White foregoes an early d5 and makes a useful developing move.

### 5 ... Nf6 6 g3

Otherwise:

a) 6 d5 reaches positions we already examined in the notes to the last game.

b) All e3 alternatives are harmless. Our plan is the same in all three versions: play an eventual ... Ne4 freeing move. So 6 e3 Be7 7 Be2 0-0 8 0-0 Ne4!. This exchange frees Black's position and clears f6 for Black's bishop, with equality. 9 Qc2 d6 10 b4 Nd7 11 Bb2 was R.Venkatakrishnan-Z.Rahman, Chennai 2004, and now 11 ... Nxc3 12 Bxc3 Qe8 gives Black an easy position to play, with control over e4 and a

coming kingside build-up.

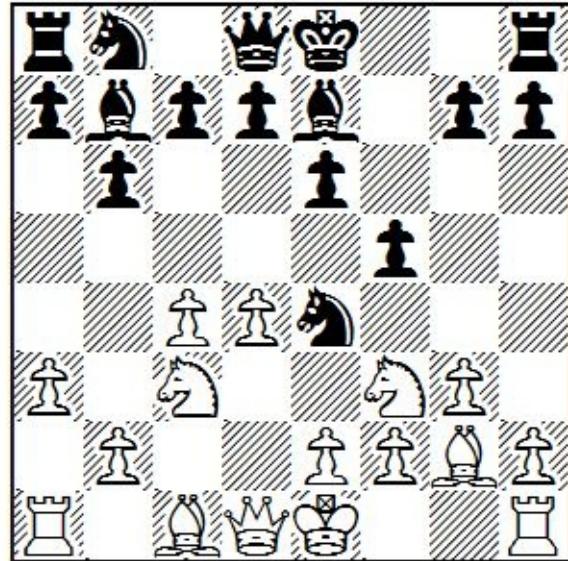
c) 6 Bg5 (we examine this set-up more closely next game) 6 ... Be7 7 e3 0-0 8 Be2 Ne4! 9 Bxe7 Qxe7 10 Rcl d6 11 0-0 and Black once again achieved comfortable equality, J.Ceko-B.Filipovic, Ljubljana 1999.

d) 6 Bf4 Be7 7 h3 0-0 8 e3 Ne4! (does this move now have a familiar ring to it?) 9 Nxe4 fxe4 10 Nd2 c5 11 dxc5 bxc5 12 Qc2 d5 and Black's strong centre offers equality at a minimum, A.Zakharchenko-E.Kengis, Nova Gorica 2004.

**6 ... Be7**

Black can also toss in the immediate 6 ... Ne4 7 Qc2 Be7 8 Bg2 Nxc3 9 Qxc3 Bf6 10 0-0 0-0 11 b4 c5 12 e3 Nc6 13 Bb2, M.Twardon-E.Kengis, Katowice 1993. Black achieves comfortable equality after 13 ... Rc8.

**7 Bg2 Ne4!**



Our now familiar equalizer is affected.

**8 Bd2**

**Question:** Why does White agree to give away the bishop-pair?

**Answer:** This response to ... Ne4 is well known from Queen's Indian lines, where White usually gets to play e4. In this case, the Bd2 move doesn't make as much sense to me, since Black already tossed in ... f5, which means that e4 isn't so easily available to White. 8 Qc2 transposes to the note to Black's sixth move.

**8 ... 0-0**

**Question:** Why didn't Black grab the bishop-pair?

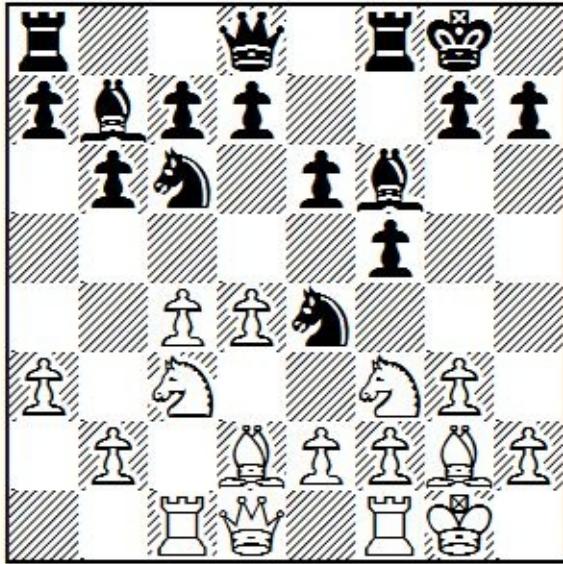
**Answer:** If we take the bishop, we invest three tempi to take a piece which has moved once. White looks slightly better after 8 ... Nxd2 9 Qxd2 Nc6!? (I wouldn't play this move until playing ... Bf6, to clear e7 for the knight) 10 b4 a5 11 b5 Na7 12 0-0, E.Bagamasbad-J.Sadorra, Cebu 2007. White eventually plays for e4, with an edge.

**9 0-0 Bf6**

Pressing d4 while keeping an eye on e5, and also clearing e7 for a black piece.

## **10 Rc1 Nc6**

Adding heat to d4, which Black can also do with 10 ... c5 11 d5 exd5 12 cxd5 d6 13 h4 h6 14 Bf4 g5!? 15 hxg5 hxg5 16 Be3, E.Tomashevsky-A.Morozevich, Tromso 2013. I prefer Black's chances after 16 ... Bxc3 17 bxc3 Qe7.



## **11 Be1**

Awkward, but White needs to cover d4.

**Question:** Why cover it at all when White can gain a tempo with 11 d5?

**Answer:** Black has a nice position here as well after 11 ... Ne7 12 dxe6 dxe6 13 Nxe4 Bxe4 14 Bc3 Nc6, with no problems at all.

## **11 ... Ne7**

Covering against d5 ideas and increasing protection on the e4 outpost.

## **12 Nxe4!?**

Black stands better now, since the f-file opens. But I don't see other useful options, since everything else looks passive.

## **12 ... fxe4 13 Ne5 Nf5**

Black also applies pressure on White's game with the undermining 13 ... c5 14 e3 Nf5.

## **14 e3 c5**

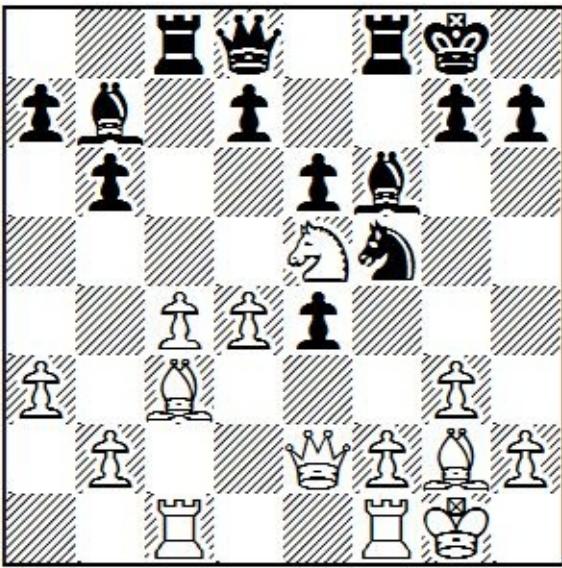
Okay, we just transposed to the above note.

## **15 Bc3 cxd4 16 exd4 Rc8**

Threatening tricks on c4.

## **17 Qe2?!**

White retains an uneasy equality after the correct 17 Qa4! Bxe5 18 dxe5 Bc6 19 Qc2 e3! 20 Bxc6 (20 f4?! hangs a pawn to 20 ... Bxg2 21 Qxg2 Rxc4) 20 ... exf2+ 21 Rxf2 dxc6 22 Rcf1 c5 23 Qe4 Qg5.



**17 ... d5**

Even better may be 17 ... d6! (undermining) 18 Ng4 Nxd4 19 Bxd4 Bxd4 20 Bxe4 Bxe4 21 Qxe4 e5 22 b4 Rc7 when Black has the initiative, the superior minor piece, and may soon pile up on the f-file.

**18 cxd5 exd5 19 Rfd1??!**

A well-intended, if misplaced idea. White equalizes if he backs up his knight with 19 f4!. The correct line is always filed away hidden somewhere in the pile, a footnote within a footnote.

**19 ... g6**

After 19 ... Qe7! 20 f4 exf3 21 Bxf3 Bxe5 22 dxe5 (22 Qxe5 Qxe5 23 dxe5 Ne3 wins the exchange) 22 ... Qc5+ 23 Kh1 Qe3! White loses material: 24 Bd2 Nxg3+ 25 hxg3 Qxf3+ 26 Qxf3 Rxf3 27 Rxc8+ Bxc8 with winning chances, despite the opposite-coloured bishops.

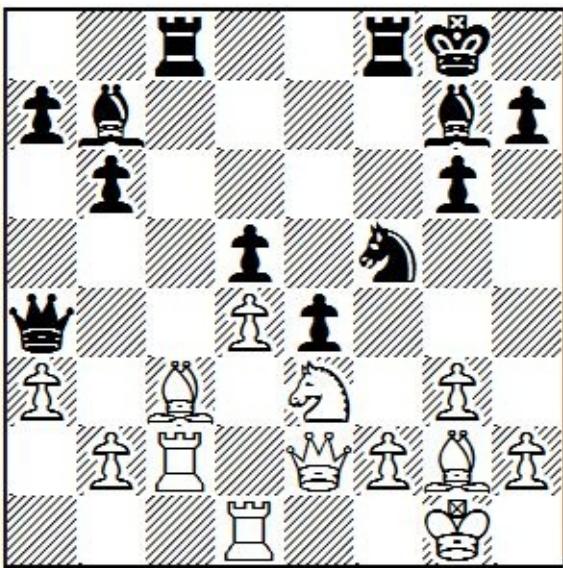
**20 Rc2 Qe8!**

Threat: ... Nxd4!. What once appeared from a distance as gentle contours, when seen up close, are ragged cliffs for White.

**21 Ng4**

Portisch regards the proceedings with growing gloom. Our natural choice when facing two unpleasant futures is to go with a familiar evil, rather than an unknown, erratic one. In this case Portisch decides to transfer his knight to e3, with tempo. But it fails to cure his difficulties. Now, though, it's too late for 21 f4 exf3 22 Bxf3 Bg5! when both ... Ne3 and ... Be3+ are in the air.

**21 ... Bg7 22 Ne3 Qa4!**



We see an example of Rapport's strangulatory (Is this a real word? One sec. Okay, I looked it up, and it is.) skills. With this move Black gives his idea full reign. The position contains two potential outflows:

1. Suddenly d4 comes under heavy assault.
2. Also ... Ba6 and ... Bd3 are in the air.

### **23 Rcd2**

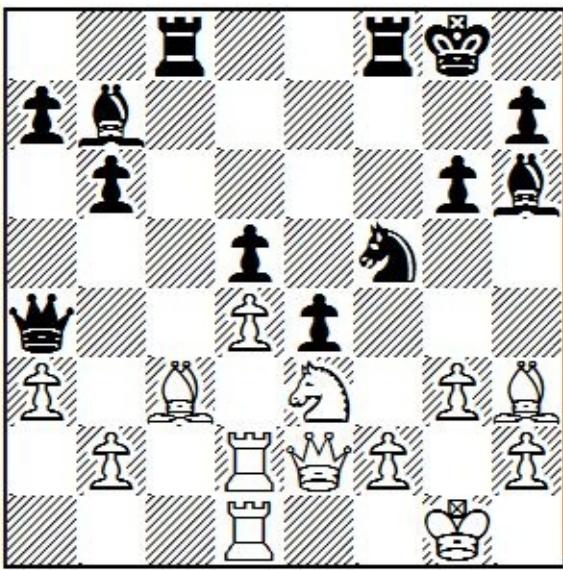
Following 23 Nxf5 Rxf5! 24 Bh3 Ba6 25 Qd2 Bh6! (deflection) 26 Qxh6 Qxc2 27 Qd2 Qxd2 28 Rxd2 Rxc3! 29 bxc3 Rf6 30 Bf1 Bxf1 31 Kxf1 Rf3! 32 Rc2 Kf7 33 a4 Ke6 34 Ke2 (34 c4? e3! is winning for Black) 34 ... Kd6 35 h4 a5 36 Rc1 Kc6 37 c4 Ra3 38 cxd5+ Kxd5 39 Rc7 Rxa4 a sense of still doom hovers over White. Black's pair of queenside passers should be faster than anything White can produce on the kingside.

### **23 ... Bh6!**

Black pieces view e3 with an owl's staring eyes.

### **24 Bh3?**

White's position has the look of a family cat who just got kicked in the rear end by the four-year-old, and then had his dinner stolen by his Pomeranian stepsister. It careens in a dire direction and his last move was a mistake in a difficult position. We feel an endless quality to Black's advantage, similar to the cyber world, which only keeps growing. 24 Re1 was necessary, when White remains under strategic pressure.



**Exercise (planning):** Black seeks the last matching fragments of his idea. He has two strong methods of converting his advantage. Find one of them.

**Answer: 24 ... Ba6!**

White's queen becomes agitated by the unseemly quality of the not-so-holy bishop's leering attentions. He plans to slowly poison her, not to kill her, but to make her more compliant to his demands.

Also good is 24 ... Nxe3 25 fxe3 Ba6 26 Qe1 Rce8! (threat: ... Rf3) 27 Bg2 Rf3! (anyway) 28 Bxf3 exf3 when e3 falls and White's game crumbles.

**25 Qg4**

The queen, a gaffed swordfish, leaps away, abandoning e3. 25 Qe1 Nxe3 26 fxe3 Rce8 transposes to the previous variation.

**25 ... Nxe3 26 Qe6+ Rf7 27 fxe3 Bxe3+**

This move denudes both white structure and its defenders, now gouged beyond recognition by time and erosion.

**28 Kh1 Bxd2 29 Rxd2 Re8 30 Qxd5 e3 31 Rg2 Bb7 0-1**

"Grandmother, save your energy and desist with your endless pleas. My mercy will not be forthcoming just because you and I - through an accident of birth - are from the same family," the ruthless bishop informs White's queen.

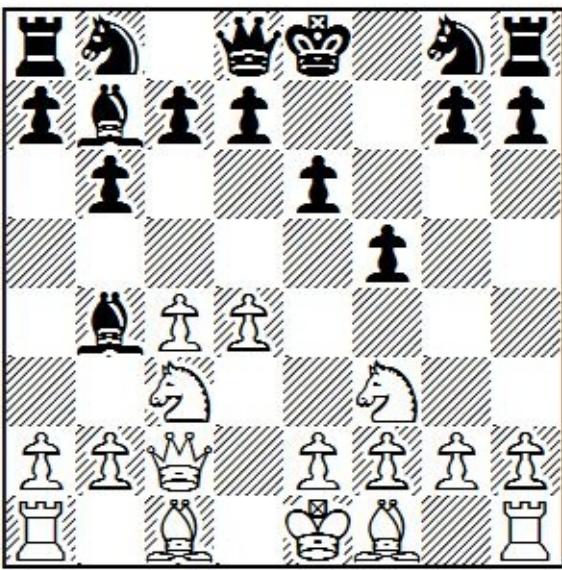
**Summary:** Black tends to equalize without breaking a sweat in the Dutch Indian lines if White refuses to play an early d5. Our universal formula is an eventual ... Ne4 freeing exchange.

*Game 41*

**D.Ippolito-A.Shabalov**

Alexandria 1996

**1 d4 e6 2 c4 b6 3 Nf3 Bb7 4 Nc3 Bb4 5 Qc2 f5**



**Question:** Have we now entered the Queen's, Dutch, Nimzo-Indian?

**Answer:** I suppose so. Some of the Owen's and English Defence lines are so neglected, that theoreticians haven't bothered to name them. I believe the inclusion of ... f5 actually gives Black a slightly favourable version of a Nimzo-Indian. In reality though, this is a reversed Bird's Opening, and I covered similar structures in my Nimzo-Larsen Attack (1 b3) book. Of course if you have the Nimzo-Indian in your theoretical pedigree, then you can play 5 ... Nf6 transposing.

### 6 Bg5

White seeks to place his bishop on the outside of the pawn chain before playing e3.

Instead, 6 a3 Bxc3+ 7 Qxc3 Nf6 and now:

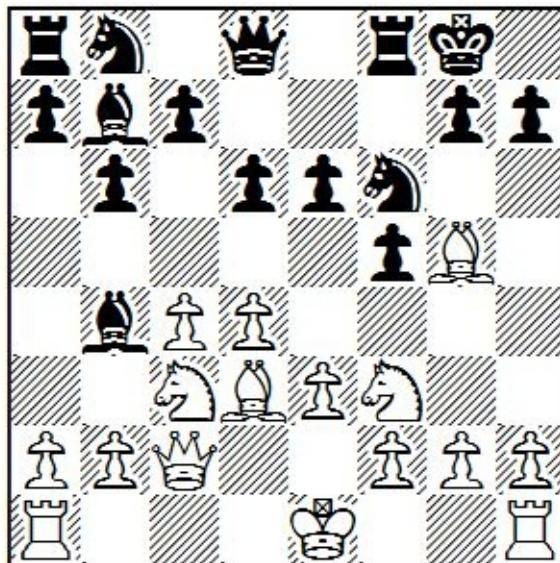
a) 8 g3 d6 9 Bg2 0-0 10 0-0 Nbd7 11 b4 Qe8 12 a4 a5 13 b5 Qh5 14 Qc2 Rae8 15 Ba3 (c5 is in the air) 15 ... f4! (Black's position is very easy to play, since all his moves are natural) 16 h3!? (safer is 16 c5 following the principle: counter in the centre when assaulted on the wing; 16 ... dxc5 17 dxc5 Nxc5 18 Bxc5 bxc5 19 Rac1 c4 20 Qxc4 fxe3 21 fxe3 Ng4 22 Nh4 Bxg2 23 Rxf8+ Kxf8 24 Qf4+ Kg8 25 Kxg2 g5 26 Rc5 e5 27 Qf3 gxh4 28 h3 Nf6 29 Qxf6 Qxe2+ 30 Qf2 Qe4+ is equal) 16 ... Be4 17 Qd1 Qg6! (adding heat to g3) 18 Kh2 Qh6 19 Bc1 g5 20 Ra3 e5 (White's game is difficult) 21 Kg1 Re7 22 e3? was V.Fedoseev-D.Khismatullin, Plovdiv 2012. A blunder in an already tough situation. Now Black can play 22 ... fxe3! 23 fxe3 g4 24 Nh4 gxh3 and if 25 Bxh3 Rg7 26 Kh2 Nh5 when his pieces perform weaving arabesques around White's bewildered king.

b) White may be better off playing 8 e3 0-0 9 Be2 d6 10 b4 Ne4 11 Qc2 Rf6 12 Bb2 Rg6 13 g3 Nd7 14 d5! exd5!? (14 ... c5! looks correct, with mutual chances) 15 Nh4 d4! 16 Nxg6 hxg6 17 Bxd4 Ng5 18 0-0-0 (18 Rg1 Nf3+ 19 Bxf3 Bxf3 offers Black excellent light-square compensation for the exchange) 18 ... Bxh1 19 Rxh1 and this sharp position looks dynamically balanced, V.Dobrov-E.Gleizerov, Abu Dhabi 2002.

### 6 ... Nf6 7 e3 0-0 8 Bd3

After 8 Be2 Qe8 9 0-0 Bxc3 10 bxc3 Ne4 11 Bf4 (this has turned into a sour looking London System for White; not only is his queenside damaged, but he also lost a tempo with Bg5 and then Bf4) 11 ... d6 12 Nd2 Nxd2 13 Qxd2 Nd7 14 f3 e5 15 Bg3 Qe7 16 Rae1 Rae8 17 Bd3 e4 18 fxe4 Bxe4 19 Bxe4 Qxe4 20 Rf4 Qe6 21 Qd3 White found himself tied down to e3, and with a hole on e4, M.D'Apa-I.Naumkin, Bresso 2004.

**8 ... d6**



**9 0-0-0!?**

“There will be no peace until his blood soaks the ground,” vows White’s king, as he declares war on his g8 brother. A radical option.

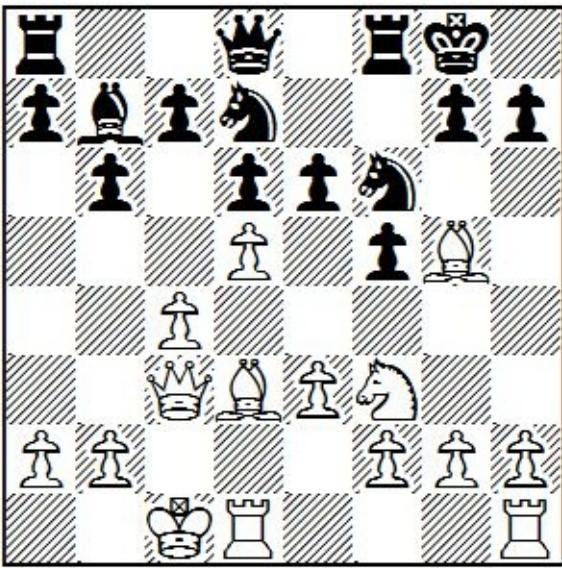
**Question:** Since castling short isn’t very tempting without a bishop on e2, what other plan do you suggest here for White?

**Answer:** In such situations White often tries to undermine f5 with 9 d5 h6 10 Nd4!?, as in R.Cousins-T.Bromley, Bedford 2011 (White goes for it; safer is 10 Bh4 exd5 11 cxd5 Qe8 12 Bxf5 Bxc3+ 13 bxc3 Bxd5 when Black enjoys the superior structure, while White’s pieces are very active and *Houdini* rates this at dead even), when 10 ... exd5 11 Ne6 Bxc3+ 12 Qxc3 Qc8 13 Nxf8 hxg5 14 Ng6 Kf7 traps the knight. White gets compensation though, after 15 h4 d4 16 exd4 Kxg6 17 hxg5 Ne4 18 Qc2 Nc6 19 Qd1 (threat: Qh5 mate) 19 ... Nxg5 20 Qh5+ Kf6 21 0-0-0, but I would still take Black in this unclear situation.

**9 ... Bxc3**

Weakening White’s grip on e4.

**10 Qxc3 Nbd7 11 d5**



This is White's thematic disrupter, designed to undermine f5 and open the game for his bishops.

**11 ... exd5 12 Bxf5 Qe8**

Enabling the f6-knight to recapture on d5.

**13 Bxd7?!**

Handing over the protector of the light squares, not to mention the bishop-pair, hands the advantage to Black. Chances look dynamically balanced after 13 cxd5 Nxd5 14 Qc2 h6 15 Bg6 Qe6 16 Nd4 Qe5 17 Bh4 Kh8.

**13 ... Nxd7!**

Stronger than 13 ... Qxd7 14 Bxf6 Rxf6 15 cxd5 c5 16 dxc6 Qxc6. Here 16 ... Bxc6? is met with the trick 17 Ne5 Qe8 18 Nxc6 d5 19 Kb1 Rxc6 20 Qd3 when White can pile up on the d5 isolani.

**14 cxd5 Nc5**

Now ... Ne4 is in the air.

**15 Rd4 c6!**

Black eliminates the c7 burden, opens the c-file for his attack and activates his bishop, at the minor cost of weakening d6.

**16 dxc6**

The tricky 16 Bh6 is met simply with 16 ... Rf7.

**16 ... Bxc6**

Advantage Black, whose domination of the light squares, control over e4, open c-file and attacking chances more than make up for his d6 isolani.

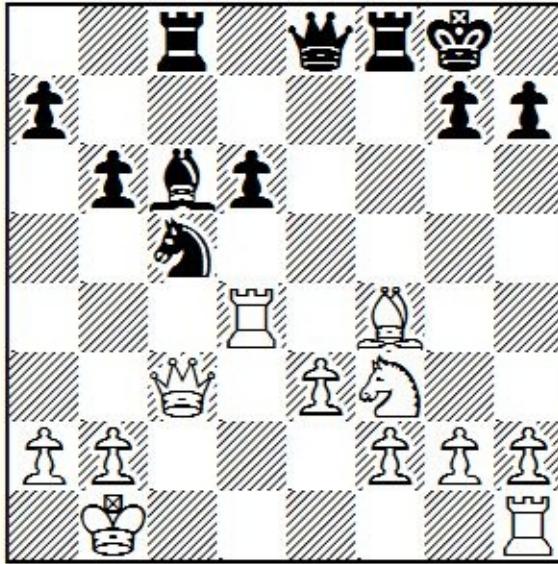
**17 Bf4**

White also experiences problems after 17 Bh6!?. Ah, yes, an attempt to set up ye olde cheapoe. The bishop, nimble as a young chimp, jumps from branch to branch. However, after 17 ... Rf7 (Black deftly slithers under the intended blow, allowing it to pass harmlessly. the naive 17 ... gxh6?? loses instantly to 18 Rg4+ Kf7 19 Rg7+ Ke6 20 Nd4+ Kd5 21 Rd1 Bd7 22 Nf5+ Kc6 23 Rxd6+ Kc7 24 Rxd7+) 18 Rg4 Qd7 19 Qc4 (threatening a cheapo on g7) 19 ... Ne6 (for all of White's futile pressing against g7, he may as well be trying to yank a giant oak tree out by its roots) 20 Kb1 Rc8 21 e4 Bb7 22 Qb3 Bxe4+! 23 Ka1 (23 Rxe4?? is met with 23 ... Nc5, winning material) 23 ... Bc2 24 Qd5 Rc5 25 Qd2 Bf5 26 Rg3 Rc2 27 Qb4 Qc8 White is in deep trouble.

**17 ... Rc8**

Threatening ... Bxf3 and then pinning White's queen on the c-file.

**18 Kb1**



**Exercise (combination alert):** Black's position produces two combinations, as if on demand. Find one of them.

**18 ... Be4+?!**

The priest's low chant grows louder and more pronounced. It's a futile exercise to try and add more to everything. Multiple combinational themes flicker in and out of focus in Shabalov's mind. White remains alive after this move.

**Answer:** Decisive is 18 ... Ne6! 19 Rc4 (19 Qb3 Kh8 20 Rxd6 Qg6+ 21 Ka1 Qxg2 22 Rb1 Nc5 wins and here 22 Rg1?? is met with the back-rank trick 22 ... Bxf3!) 19 ... d5, winning the exchange, since 20 Rb4 is met with 20 ... Qg6+ 21 Ka1 Qxg2.

Also strong is 18 ... Qg6+! (double attack) 19 Ka1 Qxg2 20 Rg1 Qxf3 21 Bh6 (White's pieces turn their attention to the Eastern front, now that the g-file opened) 21 ... Ne6 22 Rxd6 (this looks serious for Black, who appears to be under heavy assault on g7; however, he has access to a secondary combination) 22 ... Qg2!! (interference/weak back rank; sometimes an almost indefinable idea pops into our heads, which we only sense subliminally, and now the once nearly imperceptible shadow which fell upon White's position slowly turns to complete darkness) 23 Rxg2 Bxg2 24 Qe1 Rxf2! 25 Rxe6 Rf1 26 Qxf1 Bxf1 and White loses a piece, since he is unable to cover the simultaneous threats on c1 and h6.

**19 Ka1 d5 20 Qa3?!**

Not the best. White looks only slightly worse after 20 Qd2! Ne6 21 Rxd5! (when we sacrifice, we shouldn't half sacrifice) 21 ... Bxd5 22 Qxd5 with two pawns for the exchange, although all those open central files for Black's rooks are still a concern for White.

**20 ... Ne6 21 Rdd1 Nxf4 22 exf4 Rxf4**

Black regained his sacrificed pawn with a clear advantage, since he pressures f3, and by default, f2.

**23 Rc1**

23 Qe3 looks better.

**23 ... Rf8**

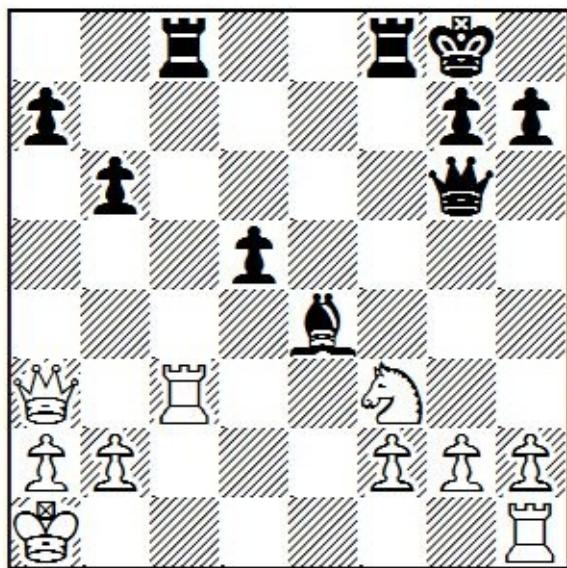
It may be wise to toss in 23 ... h6 to create luft for his king and prevent all Ng5 tricks.

**24 Rc3**

White is also in trouble after 24 Rxc8 Qxc8 25 Qxa7 Qc5 26 a3 Qxf2 27 Rc1 h6 since his kingside

pawns are sure to fall.

**24 ... Qg6!**



Now g2 comes under fire and White's position quickly destabilizes.

**25 Rhc1 Rxc3 26 Qxc3 h6**

Of course not 26 ... Qxg2? 27 Rg1 Bxf3 28 Rxg2 Bxg2 when Black is the one fighting for the draw.

**27 a3 Kh7 28 Qb4??**

White's last chance was to try a pawn-down major piece ending with 28 Nh4 Qg5 29 f3 Qxh4 30 fxe4 dxе4.

**28 ... Rf6**

Now there is no good defence to ... Qxg2.

**29 Qd4 Qxg2**

At long last, this move severs the white knight's contact with a key defender.

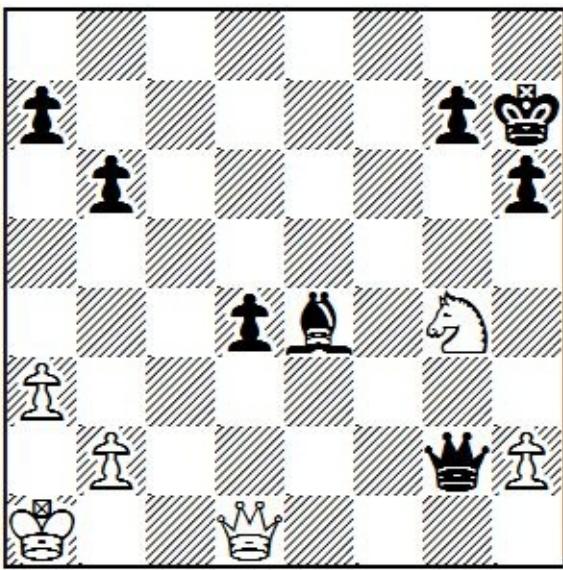
**30 Ne5 Rxf2**

White's kingside gets decimated.

**31 Ng4**

Tricky, but Black simply ignores the knight and goes about his business.

**31 ... Rf1 32 Rd1 Rxd1+ 33 Qxd1 d4! 0-1**



**Principle:** *passed pawns should be pushed.* After 34 Ne5 Bc2 35 Qe1 (or 35 Qxd4 Qf1+ 36 Ka2 Qb1 mate) 35 ... d3 36 Nc4 Qe2 37 Qc1 Qxh2 White is paralysed, three pawns down.

**Summary:** Black's chances look full even if White tries this aggressive queenside castling plan.

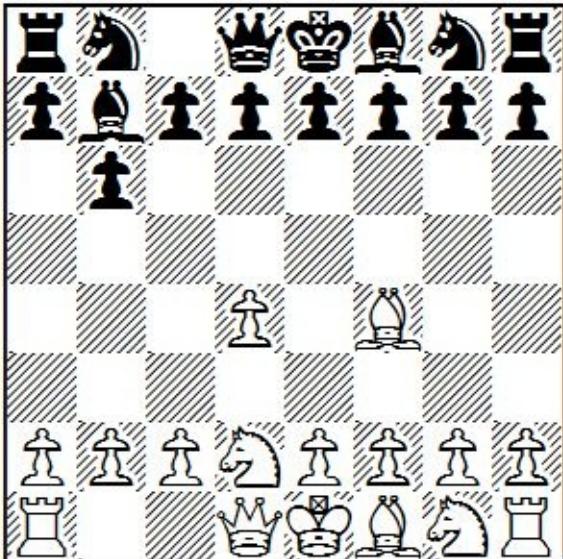
#### Game 42

**D.Vasiljevic-V.Malaniuk**

Centinje 1993

#### 1 d4 f5

Black begins with the Dutch move order. Ours, of course begins with 1 ... b6 2 Bf4. This game we look at the London System versus Owen's Defence: 2 ... Bb7 3 Nd2.



**Question:** Isn't this passive?

**Answer:** It's fair to label the entire London System a passive system. In this instance, White intends to set up the most solid (and perhaps most annoying!) way, setting up a pawn wall with e3, d4 and c3. After

3 ... f5 4 e3 Nf6 5 Ngf3 e6 6 h3 Be7 White has:

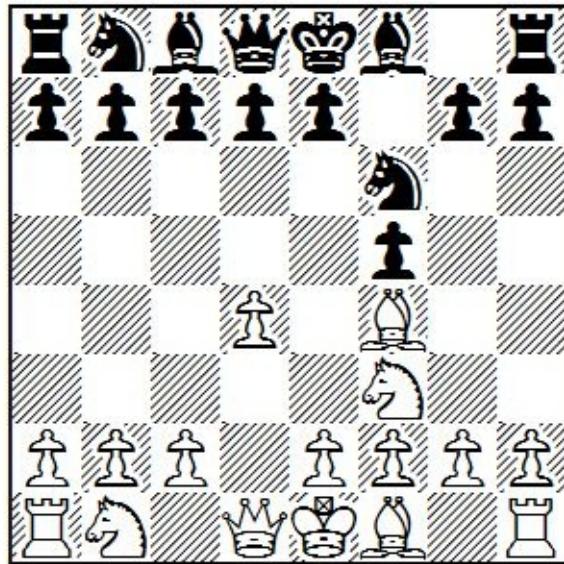
a) Normal would be 7 Be2 0-0 8 0-0 d6.

**Question:** Didn't you say earlier that we should always meet this kind of position with ... Ne4?

**Answer:** Let me qualify that by saying, yes, meet it with ... Ne4, only if White tossed in c4 - not necessarily before, although it is playable even then: 9 c4 Ne4! (okay, now Black is good to go, once White commits to c4) 10 Nxe4 Bxe4 11 Nd2 Bb7 12 Bf3 Bxf3 13 Nxf3 Nd7 14 Qb3 was A.Vunder-M.Latonin, St Petersburg 2011. The freeing exchanges benefited Black, who stands equal after 14 ... Nf6.

b) 7 g4!? and how disorienting. Here we see a rare example of an aggressive London System player: 7 ... Ne4 8 gxf5 exf5 9 Rg1 Bf6 10 Ne5 Qe7 11 Qh5+ g6 12 Rxg6!? (I don't know who taught White to play London this way, but this is an egregious violation of the opening's inherent boredom clause) 12 ... hxg6 13 Qxg6+ Kd8 14 Nf7+ Kc8 (the curve of hissing steel sings past the king's face, missing him by a fraction of measurement too small to calculate) 15 Nxh8 Bxh8, D.Kosic-Hoang Thanh Trang, Budapest 2006. I prefer Black's extra piece over White's pawns.

**2 Nf3 Nf6 3 Bf4**



Welcome to the most annoying opening in all of chess: the hated London System. I once called it the perfect opening "for the dull and the talentless".

**Question:** Don't you play it on a regular basis and haven't you written a book on it?

**Answer:** Nobody's perfect! Yes, to my deep shame, the ultra-solid positions suit my style.

**3 ... e6 4 e3 Be7**

Another route would be 4 ... b6:

a) 5 Be2 Bb7 6 h3 (or 6 a4 a5 7 c3 Be7 8 h3 0-0 9 Nbd2 Ne4 - this can also be played when White plays c3, rather than c4 - 10 Nxe4 Bxe4 11 0-0 Bb7 12 Bh2 d5?! - this Stonewall set-up plays into White's hands in a London; I would play 12 ... Bf6 intending ... d6 next - 13 Rc1 c6 14 Ne5 Na6 15 Bd3 Bd6 16 Kh1! c5 17 g4! Qh4 18 Kg2 cxd4, C.Lakdawala-L.Altounian, Costa Mesa 2003, when White stands clearly better after 19 exd4 f4 20 Qe2 since Black's position is riddled with holes) 6 ... g6 7 c4 Bg7 8 Nc3 0-0 9 0-0 Ne4! 10 Rc1 d6 11 Bh2 Nxc3 12 Rxc3 Nd7 13 b4 a5 14 a3 axb4 15 axb4,

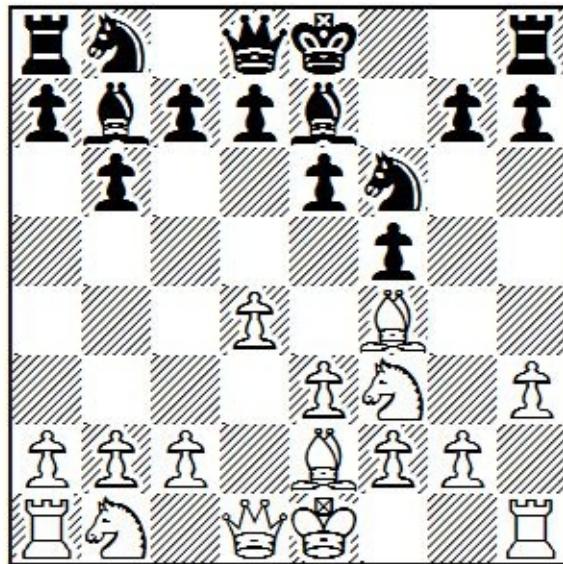
C.Lakdawala-K.Yee, Los Angeles 1999. This game is annotated in *Play the London System* and Black stands no worse after 15 ... Nf6.

b) 5 a4 a5 6 c3 Bb7 7 h3 Be7 8 Na3 Ne4 9 Nb5 Na6 10 Bd3 0-0 11 Qe2 Bf6 12 Bh2 d6 13 0-0 Qe7 14 Rfd1 Kh8 15 Nd2 e5 16 dxe5 Bxe5 (16 ... dxe5 is also playable: 17 Nxe4 fxe4 18 Bc2 Bh4 19 Bg3 Bxg3 20 fxg3 Rad8 looks fine for Black, who may later be able to play ... Nc5 and ... Nd3) 17 Bxe5 Qxe5 18 Nf3 Qe7 19 Nfd4 Nac5 when Black's active pieces and kingside chances give him equality at a minimum, C.Lakdawala-P.Hodges, San Diego (rapid) 2010.

### 5 h3 b6

There we go. Black transposes to the London versus Owen's.

### 6 Be2 Bb7



### 7 0-0 0-0 8 c4

The above note shows how to play Black when White plays the pawn to c3.

### 8 ... Ne4!

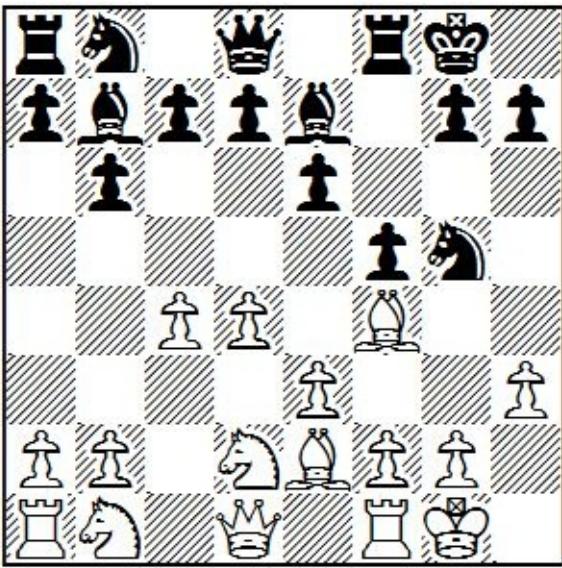
Black applies our universal formula: ... Ne4.

### 9 Nfd2

**Question:** Can White deliberately invite doubled pawns in Nimzo-Indian style with 9 Nc3?

**Answer:** Your move may be playable. But keep in mind, unlike a Nimzo-Indian, where Black hands White the bishop-pair, in this case White takes on pawn weaknesses for zero compensation: 9 ... Nxc3 10 bxc3 d6 11 c5!? (11 Qb3 c5 looks favourable for Black, since it fixes White's c-pawn) 11 ... dxc5 12 dxc5 Bd5 13 c4 Be4 14 Qxd8 Bxd8 15 Nd4 Re8 (threat: ... e5) 16 Bh2 Na6 17 cxb6 axb6 18 Nb5 e5 19 Rfd1 Nc5 when I prefer Black since he has fewer pawn islands and the more secure structure.

### 9 ... Ng5!?



An enterprising if risky new idea.

**Question:** Doesn't this violate the principle:  
*the cramped side should swap pieces when possible?*

**Answer:** It does, but Malaniuk's move has two ideas behind it:

1. Black's knight is within sacrifice range of h3, while discouraging Bf3.
2. Black can play ... Nf7, intending to strike back in the centre with ... e5.

Instead, 9 ... Bf6 intending ... d6, ... Nd7 and an eventual ... e5 break, is good enough for solid equality, O.Umetsubo-J.De Toledo, Sao Caetano do Sul 1999.

### **10 Nc3 d6 11 b4 Nd7 12 c5!?**

This may be a tad premature. White offers a pawn to open queenside lines. I prefer the slower build-up 12 Qb3! Nf7 13 c5 e5 14 cxd6 (principle: *open the centre when attacked on the wing*) 14 ... cxd6 15 dxe5 (the same principle applies) 15 ... dxe5 16 Bh2. Maybe I'm displaying Londony bias, but I prefer White's central chances over Black's kingside possibilities.

### **12 ... Nf7!?**

Malaniuk markedly ignores his queenside to pursue dreams on the other side of the board. He chooses to complicate, declining equality with the line 12 ... bxc5 13 bxc5 dxc5 14 Nb3 cxd4 15 Nxd4 c5 16 Bxg5 cxd4 17 Bxe7 Qxe7 18 Qxd4 Rac8.

### **13 cxd6 cxd6?!**

Once again, Black is inclined to retain all the pieces on the board, but this time he pushes his complicate-at-all-costs philosophy too far. Correct is 13 ... Bxd6! 14 Bxd6 cxd6 15 Qb3 d5! 16 Rac1 Nf6 17 Nf3 Ne4 when Black doesn't look worse, despite his bad bishop.

### **14 Bf3**

White misses an opportunity with 14 Qb3! Rc8 (if 14 ... d5?! 15 Nb5! and the threatened infiltration on c7 forces Black into a concession: 15 ... Ba6 16 a4 Bxb5 17 axb5 with pressure down the a- and possibly c-files) 15 Rac1 e5 16 dxe5 dxe5 17 Bh2 Bd6 18 Rfd1 Qe7 19 Nc4 Bb8 20 Nd5 Bxd5 21 Rxd5 Nf6 22 Rdd1. *Houdini* says this is close to even, but I think White's bishop-pair gives him an edge in the open position.

### **14 ... d5!?**

Obsession is a knot which logic is unable to loosen. This guy is allergic to swaps. Once again he

rejects equality with 14 ... Bxf3 15 Nxf3 Nf6 16 Qb3 Qd7.

### 15 Nb5

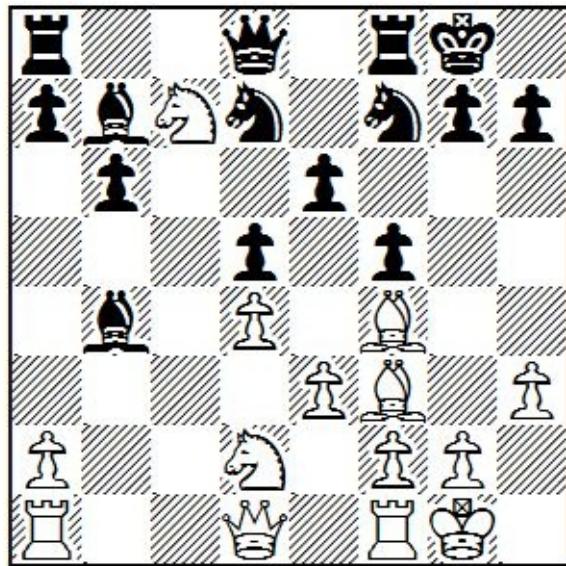
Threat: Nc7. White takes up the challenge.

### 15 ... Bxb4!?

And so does Black, with an exchange sacrifice. The bishop must decide allegiance between white and black magic. Predictably he is tempted by the latter.

### 16 Nc7??!

16 Rb1! Bxd2 17 Qxd2 e5 18 dxe5 Ndx5 19 Be2 Nc4 20 Qd4 looks slightly in White's favour, since his bishop-pair and control over d4 mean more than Black's c4 outpost.



Intuition navigates magically and blindly, the way a bat orients by absorbing rebounding sound. Shockingly, this most natural of moves is an error. When examined closer, we see that the move is more for atmospheric enhancement, rather than practical application. It is in the nature of some positions that the more we inquire, the less we understand.

**Exercise (critical decision):** Black stands better after this material grab, but only if you find the correct move. Should he play 16 ... Qe7, or 16 ... e5?

**Answer: 16 ... e5!**

The prelude to a fearsome initiative, which steams and bubbles preparing to come to an irrepressible boil. 16 ... Qe7? 17 Nxa8 Rxa8 18 Be2! intending Nf3 fails to offer Black full compensation for the exchange.

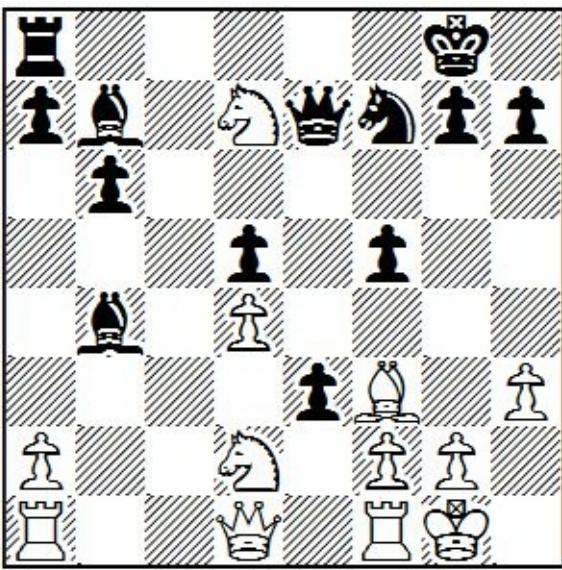
### 17 Ne6 Qe7 18 Nxf8 exf4

Black picks off White's best piece and gets into the underbelly on e3.

### 19 Nxd7

For now, Black's queen continues to tolerate the prancing knight's showy pretensions, thinking to herself: "My patience isn't endless".

### 19 ... fxe3



## **20 Nc4?!**

A starving farmer shouldn't slaughter and consume the single hen which produces his eggs. Blunders, like lightning, can strike anywhere. White had to take his chances with the admittedly difficult line 20 fxe3! Qxd7. For Black, his strategic plusses mount into a gratifying stack. Something feels out of alignment in White's position. Actually make that four or five somethings:

1. A pawn.
2. The bishop-pair.
3. Dark-square control.
4. Pressure on the backward e3-pawn.
5. Possibilities of occupying e4 with ... Nd6 and ... Ne4.

## **20 ... dxc4!**

The d-pawn slices through armour, as if it were constructed of angel food cake. Even more promising than the line 20 ... exf2+ 21 Rxf2 Qxd7 22 Ne3 f4 23 Bg4 Qe8 24 Nf1 Bd6 25 Re2 Qf8 when Black stands a shade better with two pawns for the exchange.

## **21 Ne5**

Also losing was 21 Bxb7 e2 22 Qa4 exf1Q+ 23 Kxf1 Re8 (threat: ... Qe1+!, mating) 24 Kg1 Bd6. White is down a pawn and completely busted.

## **21 ... Nxe5 22 Bxb7**

22 dxe5 loses a tempo to 22 ... Rd8 23 Qe2 Bxf3 24 Qxf3 exf2+ 25 Kh1 Qxe5 26 Qxf2 Bd6, which leaves White horribly tied up after 27 Qg1 when the queen's power is now but a memory of the dead past. She frames a bitter response to the provocation, yet fear makes the words gag in her throat.

## **22 ... exf2+**

The central brawl degenerates into a Punch and Judy show, where one puppet beats the tar out of the other. This ambitious pawn authoritatively sends White's king sprawling with a single blow.

## **23 Kh1**

The problem is 23 Rxf2 Qxb7 24 dxe5 Bc5 regains the exchange with a winning position. "Waste not, want not," declares the ever so wise bishop, as he scoops up White's pinned rook.

## **23 ... Qxb7 24 dxe5 Bc5**

Black's prospects are as luxurious as White's are bare. The aftermath is completely lost for White. Black has three pawns for the exchange and a choking f2 passer.

## **25 e6 Re8 26 Qd7**

As good a try as any. The ending is completely hopeless for White, who has no good way of dealing with the armada of black passers.

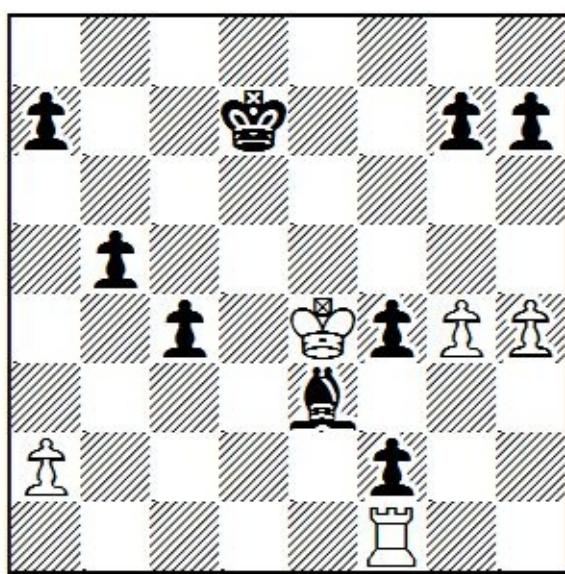
**26 ... Qxd7 27 exd7 Rd8 28 Rad1 f4 29 g4**

29 Rd5 Kf7 30 Rfd1 Ke6 31 R5d2 (or 31 a4?? and the deflection 31 ... f1Q+ wins) 31 ... c3 32 Re2+ Be3 33 Rc2 Rxd7 and it's time for White to resign.

**29 ... Kf7**

Black's king simply waltzes over and eliminates the d7-pawn. 29 ... fxe3 also wins easily.

**30 Kg2 Ke6 31 Kf3 Be3 32 Ke4 Rxd7 33 Rxd7 Kxd7 34 h4 b5**



Black simply pushes his queenside passers.

**35 h5 h6 36 a3 a5 37 Kf5**

White's king attempts to still the palpitation of agitation which assails him when in the presence of his brother, since he sees the pattern of his life as one of failure. It's not going to be much of a race.

**37 ... c3 38 Kg6 c2 0-1**

**Summary:** When White plays c4 in the London versus Owen's, then play our ... Ne4 formula. When White plays c3, then I would hold back on ... Ne4, at least for a while.

#### *Game 43*

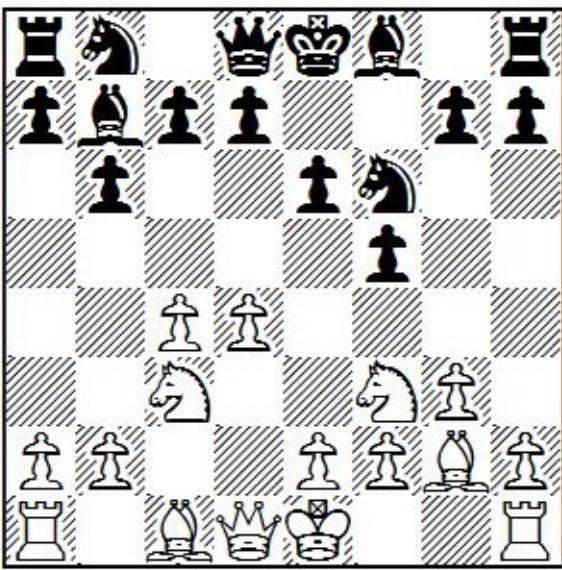
**J.Humphrey-C.Lakdawala**

San Diego (rapid) 2014

**1 Nf3 b6 2 g3 Bb7 3 Bg2 e6 4 c4 f5 5 d4**

It's slightly more flexible if White holds back the d-pawn with 5 0-0 Nf6 6 Nc3 Bb4 7 Qb3 Bxc3, A.Morozevich-H.Nakamura, Moscow (blitz) 2012. Now Moro, just to stir up trouble, recaptured with his b-pawn. The rest of us would play 8 Qxc3 with maybe just a shade of an edge for White, who owns the bishop-pair with a flexible pawn structure. In this version White has the option to play d3, rather than d4, to keep Black's pieces out of e4.

**5 ... Nf6 6 Nc3**



**Question:** Why is your opponent encouraging you to pin the c3-knight?

**Answer:** Some people, like those who play the white side of a Nimzo-Indian, are not afraid of structural damage if they get the bishop-pair in return. 6 0-0 Be7 7 Ne3 0-0 8 d5 reaches a structure similar to the Kasparov-Morozevich game, the first of the chapter, but perhaps a better version for White, since Black's bishop is on e7 rather than the normal d6-square.

**6 ... Bb4 7 0-0**

**Question:** And here, how about 7 Qc2?

**Answer:** Black still damages the structure, or picks up the bishop-pair and helpful swaps with 7 ... Ne4.

**7 ... Bxc3!?**

Tricky, because I knew he could undouble his c-pawns with an eventual Ba3 and c5.

**Question:** Then why did you allow it?

**Answer:** Three reasons:

1. The higher-rated player tends to seek imbalances, especially in quiet positions, and I'm comfortable playing knight versus bishop positions.
2. The only way to undouble is to play the above mentioned Ba3 and c5. This means that after I play ... d6, White later must later play cxd6, opening the c-file on his newly backward c3- pawn.
3. If I can induce a swap of light-squared bishops later on, then I can play for a good knight versus slightly bad remaining dark-squared bishop, as in the game continuation.

**8 bxc3 0-0**

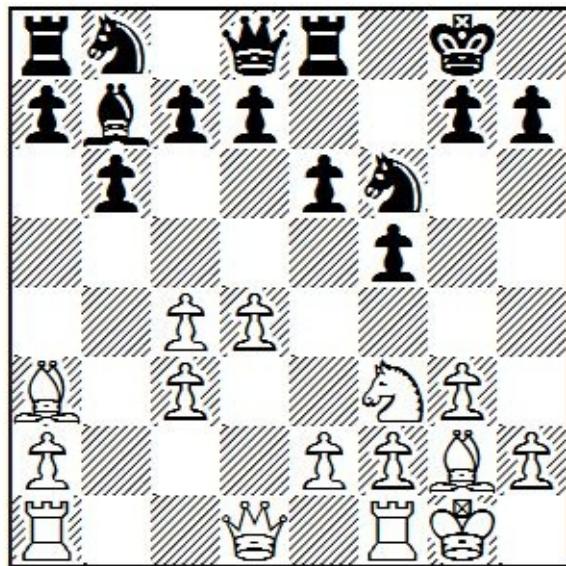
I thought about the pawn sacrifice 8 ... c5!? 9 dxc5 bxc5 10 Bf4 0-0 11 Bd6 Re8 12 Bxc5 Be4, but I'm not so sure Black gets enough, since his dark squares are weakened.

**9 Ba3**

In preparation with the above mentioned plan to undouble with c5. This looks more logical than 9 d5!? Ne4 10 dxe6 dxe6 11 Qxd8 Rxd8 12 Ng5 Re8 13 Nxe4 Bxe4 14 Bxe4 fxe4 15 c5 Nc6 16 Rd1 Rad8

17 Bg5 Rxd1+ 18 Rxd1 h6 19 Be3 Kf7. I can see the knight one day landing on c4. Also White's queenside structure is ragged and I think Black stands better, Y.Ajrapetjan-R.Ponomariov, Alushta 2009.

9 ... Re8



I wanted to keep ... d6 options open for later.

10 c5

Pretty much forcing the undoubling of his c-pawns.

10 ... Ne4 11 Qc2 Nc6 12 Nd2 Nxd2

I'm happy to swap down, because it gets me closer to the good knight versus sub-par bishop theme.

13 Qxd2 Na5

Principle: *if your opponent has the bishop-pair, strive to swap one of them off.*

14 Bxb7 Nxb7 15 Rad1 d6

At long last. I also considered 15 ... d5 which would probably have transposed in any case.

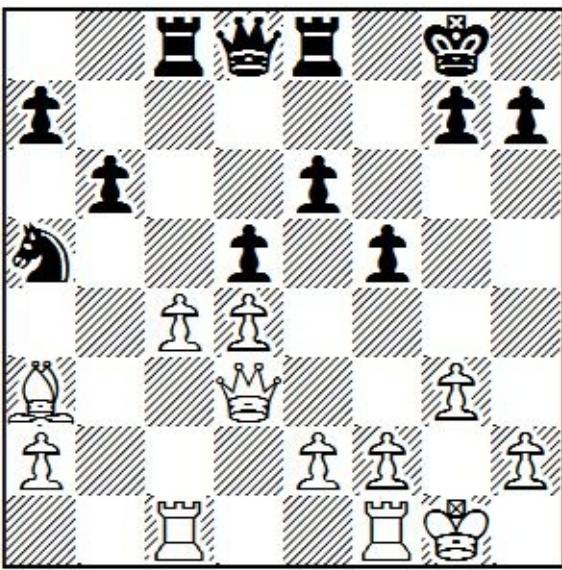
16 cxd6 cxd6

This is the kind of position I had in mind. Black can work on the c4-square and the backward c-pawn.

17 c4

17 Bb4 denies Black the ... Na5 transfer. After 17 ... Rc8 18 Qd3 d5 19 Qa6 Nd6 I still prefer Black by a shade.

17 ... Rc8 18 Rcl Na5 19 Qd3 d5



**Exercise (planning):** White has a choice between 20 cxd5 and 20 c5. Only one of them equalizes. Which one would you play?

**20 c5?!**

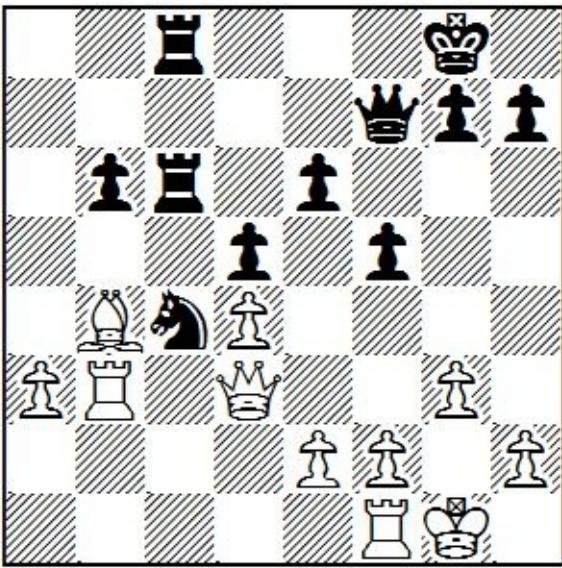
This move plays into Black's hands.

**Answer:** White should hold his own with 20 cxd5! Qxd5 21 Qa6 Nc4 22 Bc5! (I missed this interference in my analysis) 22 ... Nd2 23 Bb4! Nc4 24 Bc5, with a repetition draw.

**20 ... Nc4**

Now there is no question which side owns the superior minor piece.

**21 cxb6 axb6 22 Bb4 Qd7 23 Rb1 Rc6 24 Rb3 Rec8 25 a3 Qf7**



The queen's eyes gleam of suggestions, invitations and flirts to White's king.

**Question:** What is your queen doing on f7?

**Answer:** Looking for trouble. Principle: *when you have an opponent tied down on one wing, try*

*disorganizing the defence by opening a second front.* In this case I was looking to poke and prod with either ... Qh5 or with ... f4, opening a second front, since I didn't see how to break through on the queenside.

### **26 f3!?**

Based on the philosophy: if you have a problem, sometimes it's better to pay for it now, rather than pay a lot more later. He wants to play e4, but in doing so, weakens his kingside pawns slightly.

### **26 ... f4!?**

The alternative is to allow e4 first with 26 ... Qf6!? 27 e4 and only then toss in 27 ... f4.

### **27 Bd2 g5 28 g4!?**

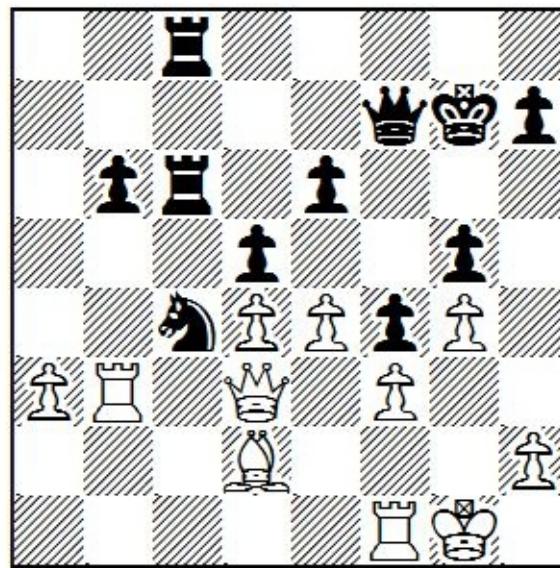
When we are confronted with two paths, we should go where our heart directs us. But what happens when our heart remains mute on the matter? Now light begins to fade from White's position as if fearful of the dark. This allows Black the plan ... h5, followed by infiltration threats on the kingside.

White's defence continues to hold after 28 gxf4 gxf4 29 Kh1 Qf6 30 Rg1+ Kh8 31 Rbb1 R6c7 32 Rg4! (this forces Black to swap away White's bad bishop) 32 ... Nxd2 33 Qxd2 Rc2 34 Qd3 with equality. What amazes me is that in most games I play, the comp always seems to find a hidden defence for the deficit side. Justice in this case may not be blind, but one does suspect the onset of macular degeneration. The moral: chess is inherently a draw.

### **28 ... Kg7**

I putz around when I should take immediate action with 28 ... h5.

### **29 e4**



This weakens his kingside further.

### **29 ... Qg6!?**

I grew up in Canada and when my family moved to San Diego, it took me almost a decade to say the word 'about' without saying 'about' (i.e. "It's about time to get out of the house", meaning "It's about time to get out of the house"). Moral: it is hard to break old habits. When getting low on the clock, it is crucial that we pause and arrange our thoughts with a degree of clarity. We sometimes react spontaneously to impulses we are unable to control. I invite a favourable ending when I should probably be attacking with 29 ... h5.

**Question:** Why did you make this decision to reject the attack?

**Answer:** To explain, I turn to the great relationship cliché: It's complicated. I traded queens for a practical reason: I'm a stronger endings player than on attack - in fact by several orders of magnitude. So with time pressure coming, I went for the position I knew I would play quickly and reasonably well. The attacking line is more promising on paper, but not if it increases complications and induces a blunder later on, with seconds on the clock.

**30 exd5 Qxd3**

The sisters haven't been on speaking terms for months now, until today.

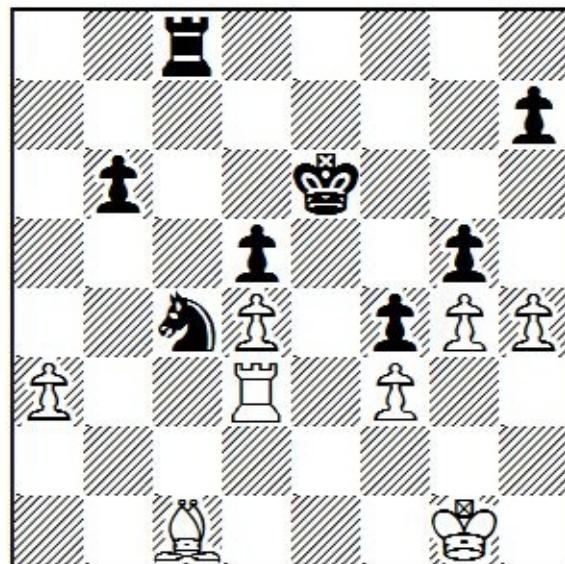
**31 Rxd3 exd5 32 Re1 Kf6**

Cutting off Re7.

**33 Bc1 Re6**

Principle: *swap off only your opponent's most active pieces.*

**34 Rxe6+ Kxe6 35 h4?**



**Exercise (combination alert):** In time pressure my opponent allowed a combination, but I spurned the gratuity. What should Black play here?

**35 ... h6?**

The thought "We shall overcome," morphs into "We shall overlook!" For a chess player, the worst part of ageing isn't the wrinkles on our skin, but instead, the wrinkles in our thought processes. I played this move instantly, and then immediately realized I missed:

**Answer:** 35 ... Ne5!. Discovered attack/double attack. The ending is hopeless for White after 36 dx5 Rxcl+ 37 Kh2 gxh4 38 Rb3 d4 39 Rxb6+ Kxe5 40 Rb5+ Ke6 and the push of Black's d-pawn will be decisive.

**36 hxg5**

It may not have been wise to open the h-file and allow Black another avenue into his position.

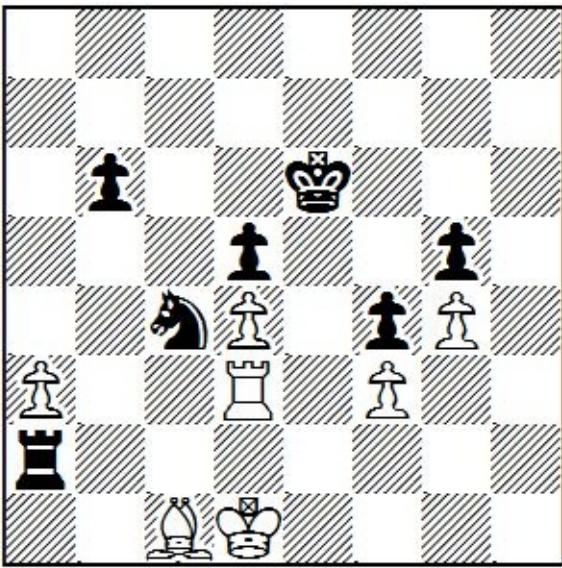
**36 ... hxg5 37 Kf2**

More accurate is 37 Rb3.

**37 ... Nd6**

Clearing the c-file for rook infiltration.

**38 Bd2 Rc2 39 Ke1 Nc4 40 Kd1 Ra2 41 Bc1**



**Exercise (planning):** White's position is very passive. His king is cut off on the first rank and his rook and bishop baby-sit a3, d4 and f3. How can Black make progress?

**Answer:** Prepare king infiltration via c6, b5 and a4.

**41 ... Kd7! 42 Rc3 Rf2**

I was nervous about allowing his rook into my position and avoided the superior line 42 ... Kc6! 43 Rb3 Na5 44 Rc3+ Kb5! 45 Rc8 (the rook rejoices in his short-lived emancipation) 45 ... Nb3! which freezes the rook, since 46 Rg8?? is met with 46 ... Kc4 47 Rxg5 Ra1.

**43 Ke1 Rh2 44 Kd1 Kc6 45 Rc2**

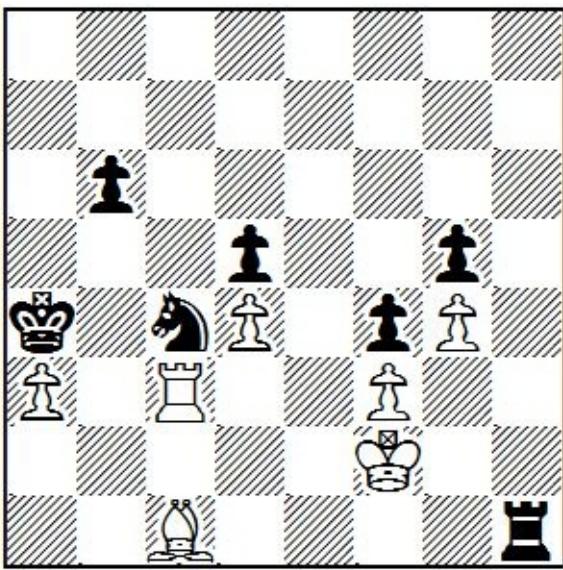
This time I saw that 45 Rb3 fails to keep my king out after 45 ... Na5 46 Rc3+ Kb5! 47 Rc8, and White has no time to go after g5, since I play 47 ... Nb3! with the deadly threat ... Rh1+: 48 Bxf4 gxf4 49 Rf8 Kc4 50 Rxf4 Kd3 51 Ke1 Ke3 and Black threatens mate on the move, while White's rook hangs on f4.

**45 ... Rh1+**

I didn't have time to calculate the line 45 ... Rxc2 46 Kxc2 Kb5 47 Kb3 Na5+ 48 Kc2 Ka4 49 Kd3 Nc4 50 Kc3 Nxa3 51 Bxf4 gxf4 52 g5 Nb5+ 53 Kd3 Nd6 54 g6 Nf5. The g-pawn has been halted and Black wins by a tempo.

**46 Ke2 Kb5 0-1**

Play might go 47 Rc3 Ka4 48 Kf2.



This is a highly stratified society, with Black's pieces taking precedence. The position is an unflattering mirror into White's difficulties:

1. Black's pieces nurse deep animosity toward the a3-pawn.
2. ... Rd1 is threatened, which means White's d-pawn must be guarded as well.
3. Not every ugly duckling grows to be a graceful swan. Sometimes they just become old, ugly ducklings, like White's remaining bishop.
4. White's king and rook, suspicious and evasive as alley cats, can do no more than await events.

**Exercise (planning):** Work out a concrete winning plan for Black.

**Answer:** 48 ... b5! 49 Ke2 b4! 50 axb4 Kxb4 51 Rc2 (51 Kd3 is met with 51 ... Rf1) 51 ... Kb3 52 Kd3 Rd1+ 53 Bd2 Nb2+ and Black wins.

**Summary:** I believe Black gets equality at a minimum if White mixes a Queen's Indian set-up with the Nimzo-Indian idea of playing an early Nc3, allowing ... Bb4 and ... Bxc3.

#### Game 44

**M.Krasenkow-E.Rozentalis**

Jersey 2013

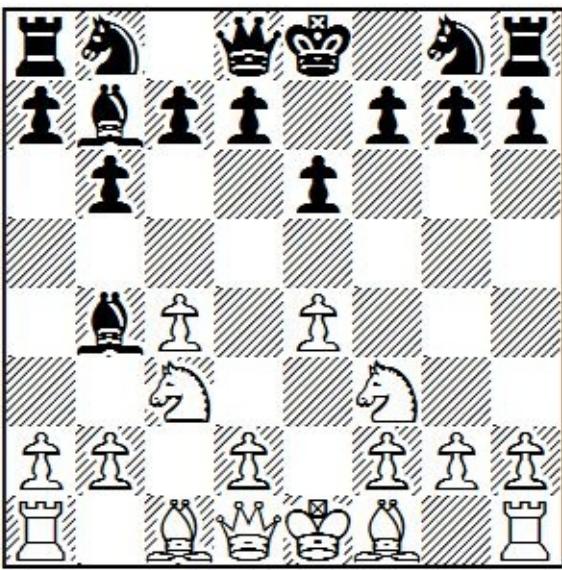
#### 1 Nf3

The position we reach is somewhat similar to this one: 1 c4 Nf6 2 Nc3 e6 3 Nf3 b6 4 e4 Bb4 5 e5 Ng8 6 d4 Bb7 7 Bd3 with a clear advantage for White, who leads in development and dominates the centre, L.Piasetski-G.Basanta, Saint John 1988.

**Question:** How is our line different?

**Answer:** Our version is far superior for Black, since we didn't waste time with ... Nf6 and then later ... Ng8. So in effect, we get Black's position tempi up.

**1 ... e6 2 c4 b6 3 e4 Bb7 4 Nc3 Bb4**



White must do something about the ... Bxc3 and ... Bxe4 threat. In this English Defence version, Black doesn't lose time with ... Nf6 and ... Ng8, as mentioned in the above note.

## 5 Bd3

**Question:** Won't this plug up White's development?

**Answer:** This cumbersome idea is White's main move. White intends to either play Bc2, clearing the path for d4. Others:

a) With 5 Qb3 White indirectly protects e4, intending to meet any ... Bxc3 ideas with Qxc3, with an attack on g7: 5 ... Na6 6 Be2 Ne7 7 0-0 0-0 8 d3 Ng6 9 Bd2 was F.Fontanella-C.Rinaldi, correspondence 2006. Black looks at least even after 9 ... f5.

b) 5 d3 Ne7 6 Be2 0-0 7 0-0 f5 (I would tend to play 7 ... Bxc3 8 bxc3 d6 keeping the structure fluid; I don't believe White stands even an iota better here) 8 e5 Ng6 9 d4, M.Zlotnikov-A.Miles, London 1982. Black looks fine after 9 ... Bxc3 10 bxc3 Nc6 since his control over the light squares easily makes up for White's bishop-pair.

c) 5 Qc2 (this natural move doesn't block White's d-pawn) 5 ... Ne7 6 d4 Bxc3+ (Black inflicts damage to White's structure while he can) 7 bxc3 d6 8 Bd3, S.Volkov-D.Khismatullin, Moscow 2013. Black looks okay in this Nimzo-Indian-like position after 8 ... Nd7 9 0-0 0-0, intending ... e5 at some point.

## 5 ... Ne7

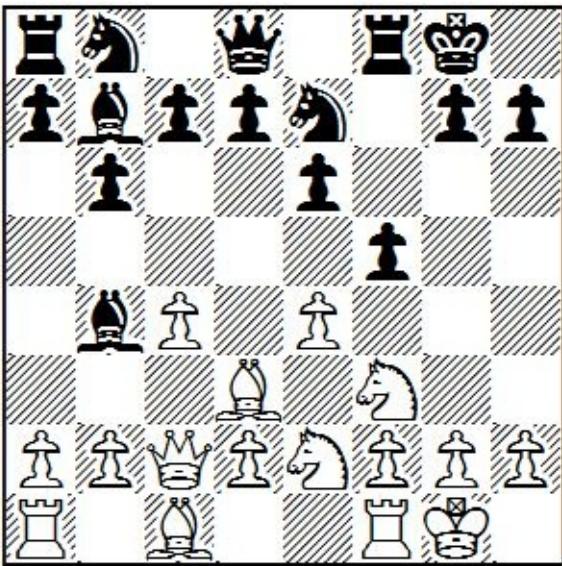
This is the knight's natural square, where it avoids tempo loss to e5, and also keeps the path clear for future ... f5 counterplay.

## 6 0-0 0-0 7 Ne2

7 Re1 f5 8 e5? was an overreaction in R.Hübner-A.Miles, Bad Lauterberg 1977 (correct is 8 a3 Bxc3 9 dxc3 fxe4 10 Bxe4 Bxe4 11 Rxe4 Nbc6 when *Houdini* prefers White, while I would take Black if given a choice), and now Black should play 8 ... Bxf3! 9 Qxf3 Nbc6 when White loses a pawn to the coming ... Ng6.

## 7 ... f5 8 Qc2

Or 8 Ng3 Bd6 9 e5 Bc5, R.Scheipl-R.Lau, Regensburg 1997, and here White should play 10 Be2 Ng6 11 d4 Be7 12 Nh5 a5 with balanced chances.



**8 ... a5!**

Staking out dark squares and preventing a3, b4 expansion/bishop trapping ideas. I think White is already in trouble. Rozentalis's idea is new, and an improvement over 8 ... Na6!? 9 a3 Nc5 10 e5 Bxf3, A.Kuligowski-G.Andruet, Dijon 1987. Now White should continue 11 axb4 Nxd3 12 Qxd3 Bxe2 13 Qxe2 f4 14 Qe4 f3 15 g3 Qe8 16 d4 Qh5 17 h4 h6 18 Ra3 and I prefer White, since both f3 and a7 are sources of worry for Black.

**9 Nfd4??**

White should go on the defensive with 9 a3 Bd6 10 Ng3 a4 11 Re1 f4 12 Ne2 Ng6 13 Qc3 Nh4 14 Bc2 c5 15 d4 Nc6 16 d5 Nd4! 17 Nxd4 cxd4 18 Qd3 Nxf3+ 19 Qxf3 e5 with some advantage to Black, since he owns a passed d-pawn and c4 may become weak.

**9 ... fxe4??**

Premature. 9 ... Nbc6! 10 exf5 Bc5! 11 Nxc6 Nxc6 12 Be4 (12 fxe6?? allows Black a sudden and winning attack after 12 ... Qh4, and if 13 Ng3 dxe6 14 Be4 Nb4 15 Qb1 Rxf2! 16 Rxf2 Rf8) 12 ... Qh4! leaves White's king and the f2-square seriously compromised.

**10 Bxe4 Bxe4 11 Qxe4 Nbc6 Nxc6 12 d4**

White's central control isn't enough to give him an edge, since Black's position is weakness free, he has an open f-file and his pieces are active.

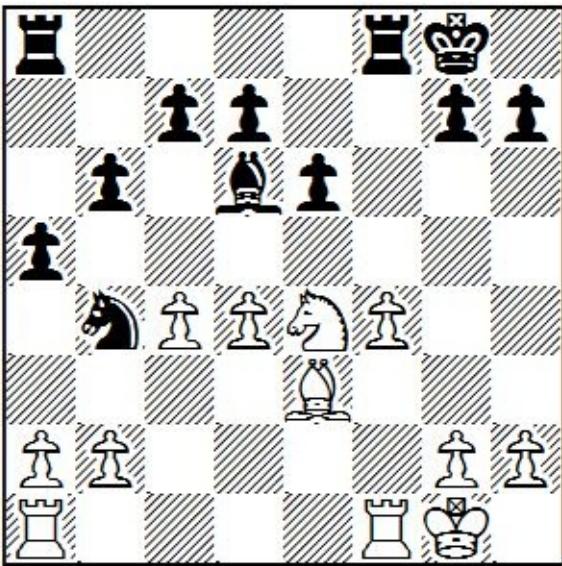
**13 ... Qf6 14 Be3 Bd6**

I would play 14 ... Qf5 based on the principle: *the cramped side should seek swaps.*

**15 f4!?**

Ambitious. White clamps down on e5, at the cost of weakening his light squares and limiting his remaining bishop.

**15 ... Qf5 16 Ng3 Qxe4 17 Nxe4 Nb4**



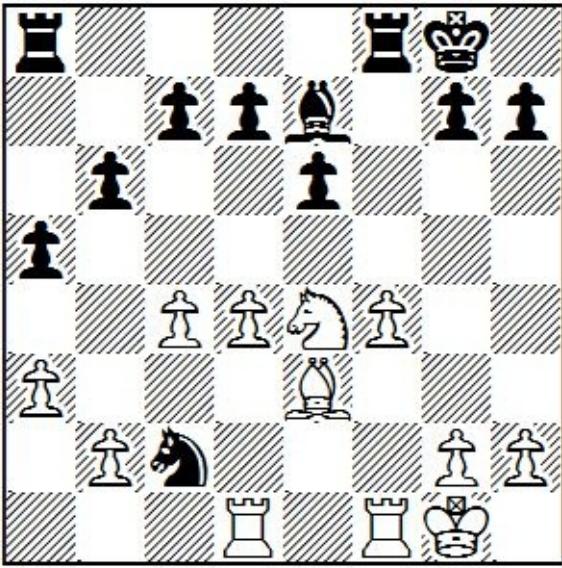
Threat: ... Nc2.

**18 Rad1! Be7!**

**Question:** Why isn't a2 hanging?

**Answer:** White stands better if Black bites with 18 ... Nxa2?! 19 Nxd6 cxd6 20 d5. A lot of Black's pawns hang and he has no clear path to even equality, despite his temporary extra pawn.

**19 a3 Nc2!!**



Black commences a plan just this side of Judgement Day. Some of our crazier ideas feel produced suspended in mid-air, rather than from our minds. The knight, believing himself protected by divine powers, feels that defence is a tawdry matter, unworthy of his time.

**Question:** This looks suicidal. Isn't the knight going to be trapped?

**Answer:** Black's idea is an odd, composite entity - like Dr. Frankenstein's creature - part objective, part subjective. Black's knight meanderings may suggest an absence of a message or direction, but this

isn't the case. It is but a single stage in a plural plan:

1. The knight may not get trapped after all, since Black has escape routes based on ... a4, ... Na1 and ... Nb3.

2. Even if White manages to trap it, Black can play ... Nxa3, earning passed queenside pawns for the piece, which may (or may not) compensate.

### **20 Bc1 d5!**

Dual purpose: Black finally takes his fair share of the centre and also threatens to push White's remaining bishop into the dreaded 'bad bishop' category.

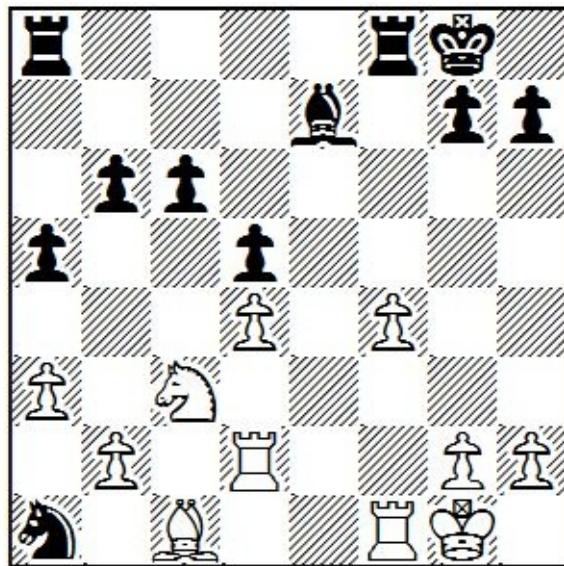
### **21 cxd5 exd5 22 Nc3 c6??**

Inaccurate. 22 ... Bf6! 23 Nxd5 Bxd4+ 24 Kh1 Rf7 is equal.

### **23 Rd2??**

White can win a pawn with 23 Rf2! Na1 24 Be3 Nb3 25 Rd3! Rae8 26 Nxd5 cxd5 27 Rxb3 a4 28 Rc3 (28 Rxb6?? loses to 28 ... Bd8) 28 ... Bf6 29 Rd2, although this position won't be so easy to convert, due to his bad bishop.

### **23 ... Na1**



For most of us, a1 is generally not considered a dream post for a knight. The knight's stubbornness proves to be exhausting to his enemies, and his inbox fills up with angry emails as we speak.

### **24 Rd3 a4 25 Be3 Nc2 26 Bf2!**

This move is enciphered more as a veiled threat to Black's knight, rather than anything overt. White realizes that d4 must be covered to win the knight; f4 doesn't matter. 26 Bd2?! Rfe8! 27 Rc1?? is met with 27 ... Nxd4! when the knight can't be taken.

### **26 ... b5!**

Not 26 ... Rxf4? 27 Rd2 Nxa3 28 bxa3 and the trouble is 28 ... Bxa3?! is met with 29 Ra2 when White regains the a-pawn and Black lacks full compensation for the piece.

### **27 Rc1**

Finally, the knight is trapped. But we are reminded of the saying: be careful what you wish for, since you may get it. Apparently the knight overstayed his welcome, but by sac'ing on a3, Black gets more than enough compensation in the form of two connected passers.

### **27 ... Nxa3 28 Re1**

Black also gets all the winning chances after 28 bxa3 Bxa3 29 Rb1 Be7 30 g3 b4 31 Na2 Rab8 32 Re3 Bd6 33 Nc1 Rfe8.

28... Nc4 29 Rxe7 b4 30 Nxa4!?

White accepts collateral damage to implement his defence. He returns the piece, fearing Black's queenside passers. He should hold the position after 30 Nd1! Rxf4 31 Rg3 Rf7 32 Re2 a3 33 bxa3 bxa3 34 Nc3 Rb7 35 Be1.

**30 ... Rxa4 31 b3 Ra1+ 32 Re1 Rfa8!?**

I insist!

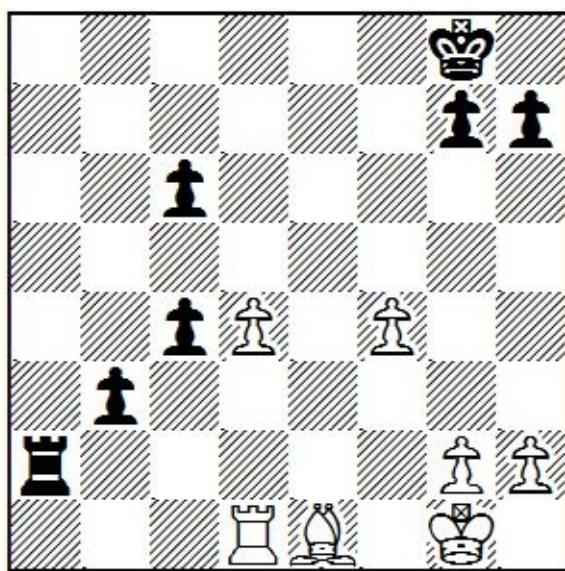
33 bxc4!?

If you steal, then it may be best to avoid taking the property of dangerous people. This acceptance is a bit like the accountant who embezzles from his mob clients. If his action is discovered, the payback will be unpleasant. Krasenkow accepts the challenge, rather than enter grovel mode with 33 Kf1 R8a3 34 Rxa1 Rxa1+ 35 Be1 Na3 36 Ke2 Nc2 37 Bd2 g6 when White's passive position isn't going to be easy to hold.

33 ... dxc4 34 Rdd1 Rxd1 35 Rxd1 b3

Those passers are intimidating. 35 ... c3 allows White to draw after 36 Be1 Rd8 37 Rc1 Rxd4 38 Bxc3 bxc3 39 Rxc3 Rxf4 40 Rxc6.

36 Be1 Ra2



**Exercise (critical decision):** This is no time to dwell on past misfortunes. We must pick from mazey-alleyed lines. Our candidate moves are 37 Bb4 and 37 Rcl. One holds the draw, while the other loses. Which one would you play?

37 Bb4??

In time pressure we tend to merge the what is what with the which is which. This plan fails to pass muster. Why is it that even our most awful mistakes are so well meaning? Good fortune (or is it blind luck?) intervenes on Black's behalf.

**Answer:** White holds the draw after 37 Rc1! b2 38 Rb1 Ra1 39 Rxb2 Rxе1+ 40 Kf2 Re4 41 g3 Rxd4 42 Ke3 Rd3+ 43 Ke4, which is equal.

37 ... Rc2!

Reality's harsh glare begins to penetrate White's blissful dream of blockade, which he is now unable to accomplish.

38 g4!

White's best practical chance.

**38 ... b2 39 Ba3 c3 40 f5 h6 41 h4 Rd2!?**

At times do we not all indulge in theatrical license? More clear is 41 ... Rg2+ 42 Kxg2 c2 43 Rg1 b1Q. "No! It can't be! I thought you dead. Am I dreaming?" asks the startled king. Black's newly emerged queen responds: "One does not experience real pain in a dream, as you are about to endure, Your Grace."

**42 Re1 Rxd4!?**

42 ... Rd1 43 Rxd1 c2 44 Rf1 b1Q almost transposes to the other winning line.

**43 g5**

White attempts to set up a g6 and Re8 back rank mating net.

**43 ... hxg5 44 hxg5 Re4 45 Rd1 Kf7 46 Kf2 Rf4+ 47 Ke3**

Or 47 Ke2 Rxf5 48 Rb1 Ra5 49 Bxb2 Ra2 50 Kd3 cxb2 51 Kc2 Kg6 52 Rd1 Kxg5 when White can't save himself.

**47 ... Rxf5 48 Rg1 Ra5 49 g6+ Ke6 0-1**

Either the bishop falls or ... Ra1 comes.

**Summary:** I think our side gets a superior version to some English/Nimzo-Indian lines, mainly because we don't waste time with ... Nf6 and then later ... Ng8 when White plays e5.

#### *Game 45*

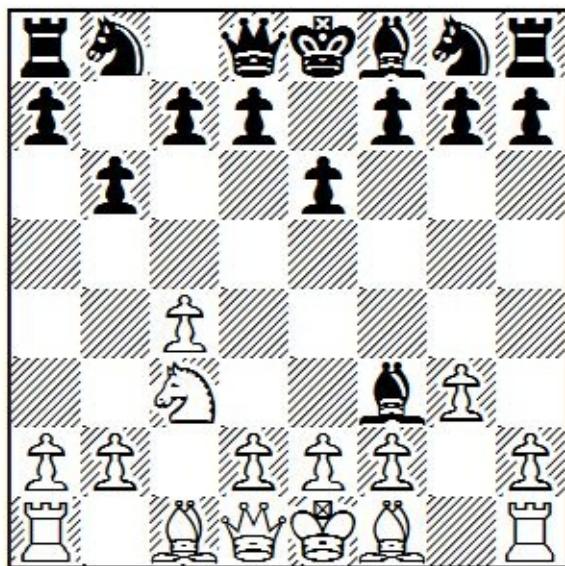
**C.Duncan-C.Ward**

British League 2002

**1 c4**

Here is the battle which never was: 1 Nf3 b6 2 c4 Bb7 3 g3 Bxf3 4 exf3 c5 5 d4 cxd4 6 Qxd4 Nc6 7 Qd2, draw agreed, C.Lakdawala-A.Miles, Los Angeles 2000. Tony offered the draw, explaining very reasonably, that forcing an honest, hardworking man to play chess at 10:00 am (to Tony, 10:00 am was synonymous with the middle of the night, when the world and its inhabitants were not quite in focus) in his mind constituted extreme cruelty.

**1 ... b6 2 Nc3 Bb7 3 Nf3 e6 4 g3 Bxf3!?**



This is an unbalancing option from our normal 4 ... f5.

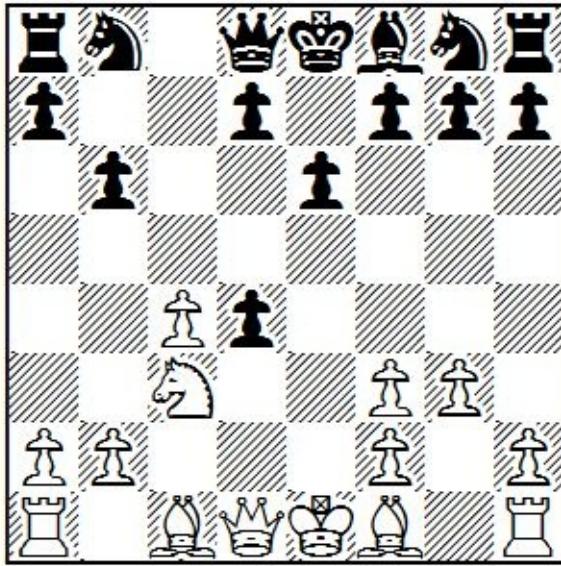
**5 exf3 c5 6 d4!**

**Question:** Why an exclamation mark for a move which loses time?

**Answer:** The move may lose time, but it serves two more important purposes:

1. It opens the position for White's bishop-pair.
2. It avoids a black clamp on the d4-square by following a line like 6 Bg2?! Nc6 7 0-0 Nge7 8 f4 g6 9 d3 Bg7 with a clear edge to Black, who dominates d4, T.Keskisarja-J.Tella, Finnish League 2001.

**6 ... cxd4**



**7 Qxd4**

**Question:** Can White avoid a loss of time on the queen with 7 Nb5, threatening to recapture on d4 with the knight, and also with possible tricks on d6 and c7?

**Answer:** Nobody has tried this idea before. *Houdini* claims it's playable. From my perspective it doesn't really help, since you dodge a tempo loss with your queen, only to lose a tempo with your knight. Black can either return the pawn by playing ... Nc6, or get ambitious with 7 ... e5!? 8 f4 a6 9 Bg2 Nc6 10 fxe5 axb5 11 cxb5 Nxe5! 12 0-0 (12 Bxa8?? Bb4+ 13 Kf1 Qxa8 14 Rg1 Nf6 15 Qxd4 Nfg4! 16 Rg2 Bc5 17 Qc3 Nf3! is hopeless for White) 12 ... Be7 13 Re1 Ng6 14 Bxa8 Qxa8 15 Qxd4 Nf6 16 Qxb6 0-0 17 Qd4 Qa5 18 Bd2 Qxb5 with a position hard to assess. *Houdini* prefers Black, who has two knights for a rook and pawn, and potential for a kingside attack on White's relatively unprotected king. However, White's two passed queenside pawns shouldn't be underestimated.

**7 ... Nc6 8 Qd1**

White can also drop the queen back to d2, 8 Qd2.

**Question:** Doesn't the queen block in your c1-bishop?

**Answer:** Not if you can get away with b3 and Bb2. 8 ... Qf6! (this move prevents a smooth b3 and Bb2 transition, by gaining a tempo on f3) 9 Be2 Bb4 10 0-0 Bxc3!? (also playable is 10 ... Nge7 11 Rd1 Rd8 which allows 12 Ne4 Qg6 when Black looks fine) 11 bxc3 Nge7 12 Ba3, B.Gerstner-C.Bauer, Biel 2011. It becomes a battle between White's powerful bishops and inferior structure, versus Black's knights after 12 ... 0-0.

**8 ... Rc8**

Alternatively, 8 ... Bb4 9 Bd2 Nge7 10 Qa4 (10 a3 Bc5 11 Ne4 0-0 12 Nxc5 bxc5 looks okay for Black as well) 10 ... 0-0 11 f4 d5 12 Bg2 Rc8 13 cxd5 Nxd5 14 0-0 Bxc3 15 Bxc3 (or 15 bxc3 and Black blockades c4 with 15 ... Na5 when his knights hold their own in an open position versus White's bishops) 15 ... Nxc3 16 bxc3 Na5 17 Rad1 Qc7 18 Rd7 Qxc3 19 Rxa7 with an equal position, D.Dimitrijevic-I.Zaja, Sibenik 2009.

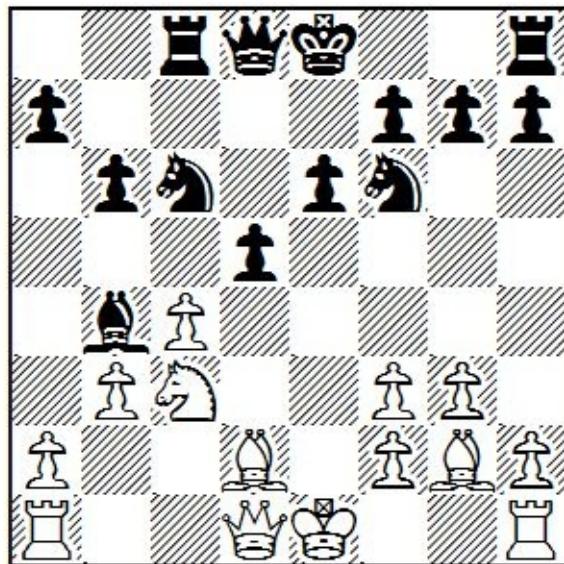
### 9 b3

Instead, after 9 Be2 Bb4 10 0-0 Bxc3 11 bxc3 Qf6 12 Be3 Nge7 13 c5 Nd5 14 cxb6 Nxe3 15 fxe3 Qxc3 (15 ... axb6 16 Qd2 Na5 17 Rab1 Qxc3 18 Rfd1 d5 19 Rxb6 Qxd2 20 Rxd2 Ke7 is also at least equal for Black) 16 b7 Qxe3+ 17 Kh1 Rc7 18 Rb1 Ke7 Black is up a pawn, but the b7-passer ties him down. I still prefer Black's side, though, A.Kosten-C.Bauer, Cap d'Agde 2008.

### 9 ... Nf6

9 ... Qf6!? 10 Bd2! (10 Bb2? hangs a pawn to 10 ... Ba3! when the sneaky bishop treads his crooked destiny along the dark squares: 11 Qd2 Bxb2 12 Qxb2 Qxf3 13 Rg1 Nf6 14 Nb5 0-0 15 Nd6 and I think Black stands better if he returns material with 15 ... Qh5! 16 Nxc8 Rxc8; the idea is 17 h3?! is met by 17 ... Qa5+! when White must move his king) 10 ... Bb4 11 Rcl Nge7 12 Bg2 0-0 13 0-0 Nf5 looks balanced.

### 10 Bg2 Bb4 11 Bd2 d5!



**Question:** Why is Black willing to open the position when his opponent owns the bishop-pair?

**Answer:** Principle: *a development lead normally takes precedence over bishop-pair*. Therefore opening the game favours Black. This ... d5 line-opening idea, when White owns the bishop-pair is well known to black-side Nimzo-Indian players.

### 12 cxd5??

Over the board we are often conflicted with the choice of serving our present comfort, versus serving our ultimate well-being. White refuses to weaken his structure even a jot, despite growing evidence that he should. This violates the principle: *don't break central pawn tension without good reason*. White hoped to spare his structure, but in doing so, falls dangerously behind in development. He does better to hand over a structural concession with 12 a3 Bxc3 13 Bxc3 dxc4 14 bxc4 Qxd1+ 15 Rxd1, although I prefer Black's structure over White's bishops.

## 12 ... Nxd5

The human move. *Houdini* found the bizarro idea 12 ... Nd4!? 13 0-0 Rxc3 14 Be1 Qxd5 15 f4 Qd6 16 a3 0-0 17 axb4 Rc7 18 Bd2 Nd5 when Black's structure gives him the edge, mainly since his powerfully centralized knights hold their own once again versus the bishops.

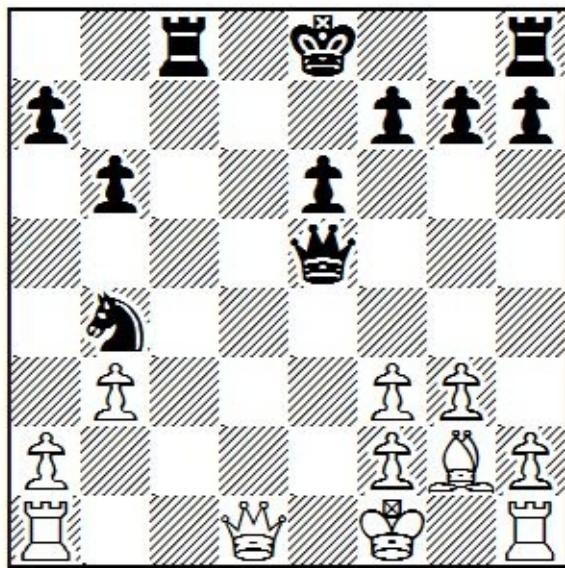
## 13 Nxd5 Qxd5 14 Bxb4 Qe5+!

Rupturing the white king's solitude. We don't have to feel the first raindrop to know a thunderstorm approaches. You can actually feel and smell it coming. White may have missed this disruptive zwischenzug.

## 15 Kf1

The king departs quickly, with the black queen's angry hissing at his back. Meanwhile, the h1-rook remains utterly still. It will be a long time - maybe never - before it can be brought into play.

## 15 ... Nxb4



**Exercise (planning/critical decision):** White's lagging development is caught between two worlds, like youth on adulthood's verge. He has a choice of plans:

- a) Play to unravel with 16 f4, intending to move the bishop, followed by Kg2.
- b) Confront Black's seventh rank invasion threat with 16 Rc1. One line may hold the game, while the other loses. Which one should White play?

## 16 Rc1??

When under fire, all threats, even imaginary ones, tend to magnify in our minds. Now the defence is stretched to bursting. This natural move violates the principle: *avoid confrontation when lagging in development*.

**Answer:** White may well survive 16 f4! Qc3 17 Be4, intending to unravel with Kg2 next, when he is almost equal. Of course, I realize that 'almost' is often depressingly synonymous with 'never' in chess.

## 16 ... 0-0!

We sense deep inefficiency in White's position, the way a person attempts to use a tool or a gadget the wrong side up. Strangely enough, White has no recourse to this simple completion of development. Black's threats begin to take on true form with an almost sensory immediacy.

## 17 Rxc8

It's too late for the f4 unravelling plan: 17 f4 Qb2 18 Rb1 Qxa2 19 Be4 Rfd8 20 Qe1 (White's king

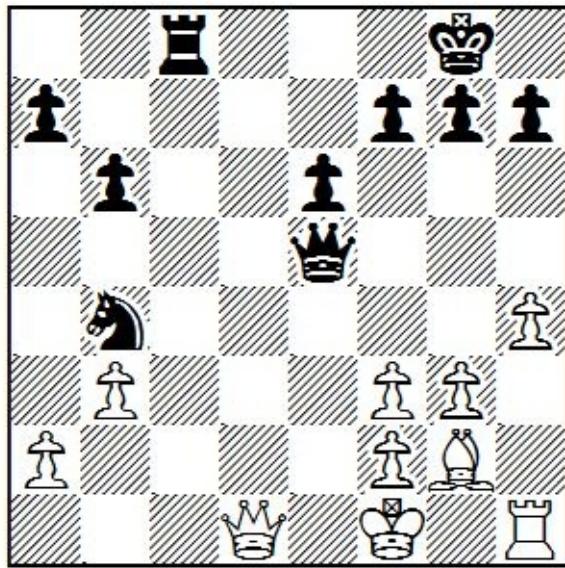
and queen clutch one another like terrified children listening to a ghost story) 20 ... Nc2 21 Bxc2 Rxc2 and if 22 Ra1 Rxf2+! and wins.

### 17 ... Rxc8

White's queenside is loose, as is his second rank, and he is essentially playing the game down a rook, since his remaining h1-rook is mostly symbolic.

### 18 h4

This loses, as do all other tries: for instance, 18 Bh3 g6 19 Kg2 Rc2 20 a3 Qb2 21 Rf1 Rd2 22 Qc1 (22 Qe1 is met with the crushing 22 ... Nd3) 22 ... Rxf2+! and the overloaded f1-rook runs afoul of the law and finds the jury stern and unmerciful.



**Exercise (combination alert):** Find one simple move and White's resistance vanishes in a fingersnap:

**Answer:** Queen trap/weak back rank. There is no defence to ... Rc1.

### 18 ... Qb2! 0-1

**Summary:** The unbalancing 4 ... Bxf3 is a very viable alternative to our normal ... f5 plan. The learning curve in this line isn't steep and it's very easy to play, since Black's moves are natural.

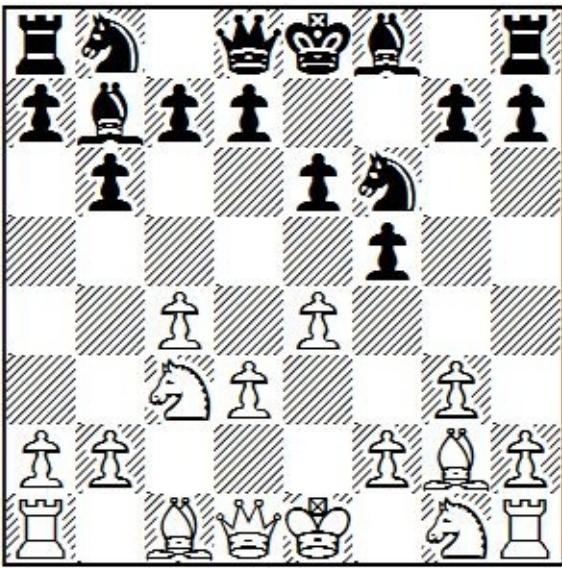
## Game 46

**N.Miezis-N.D.Short**

Puhajarve (rapid) 2012

### 1 c4 b6 2 Nc3 Bb7

Another line runs 2 ... e6 3 g3 Bb7 4 e4!? (4 Nf3 Bxf3 5 exf3 c5 transposes to our last game) 4 ... f5 (Black immediately exploits the pin to open the f-file) 5 Bg2 Nf6 6 d3.

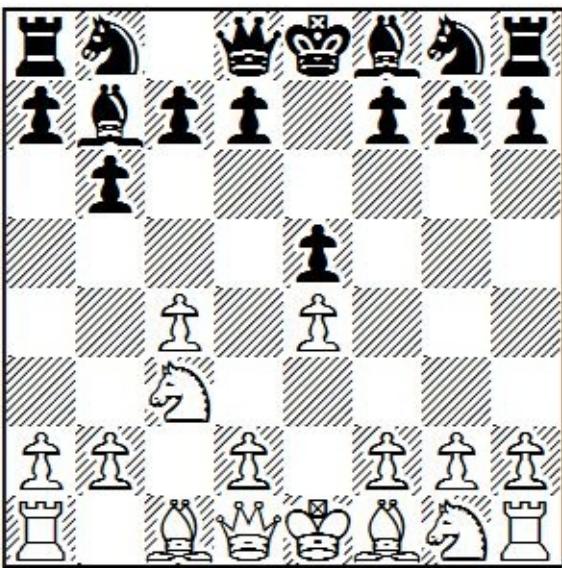


**Question:** Should the bishop be posted on c5, where it takes aim at f2?

**Answer:** I think you are correct. Maybe the bishop belongs on c5, as in Short's game. Black should play 6 ... fxe4 7 dxe4 Bc5 except structurally he's a tempo down on the Short game, since it takes Black two moves to play ... e5.

Instead, 6 ... Bb4 7 Nge2 fxe4 8 0-0 0-0 9 dxe4 Bc5?! (well, I am forced to confess to wishy washy play, since my bishop could already be on c5 in one move; I considered the line 9 ... Bxc3 10 Nxc3 e5 11 Nd5 d6 12 Be3 c5!? 13 Bg5 Nc6 14 f4 Nd4 15 fxe5 dxe5 16 Bxf6 gxf6 17 Rf2 Bxd5 18 cxd5 Qe7 19 Bh3 and wasn't quite sure how to assess it, but suspect that White stands a shade better) 10 Nf4 e5 11 Nfd5 Nxd5?! (better was 11 ... d6 with approximate equality) 12 Nxd5?! (White stands slightly better after 12 exd5! a5 13 Be4! Qf6 14 d6! Bxe4 15 Nxe4 Qe6 16 dxc7 Na6) 12 ... Nc6 13 Be3 Bxe3 14 Nxe3 (I was more worried about 14 fxe3?! which deprives my knight of d4) 14 ... Nd4 15 f4 d6 16 Qg4 Bc8 17 f5?! Kh8 18 Qh5 Bd7 19 Nd5?! (a waste of time; he should build for a kingside attack instead, perhaps starting with 19 Rf2) 19 ... c6 20 Ne3 a6! (idea: ... b5, following the principle: *counter in the centre when assaulted on the wing*) 21 Rf2 b5 22 Rafl (I expected 22 b3) 22 ... Be8 23 Qd1 bxc4 24 Nxc4 Bf7 25 f6?! (logical but also risky, since the pawn is now artificially isolated) 25 ... g6 26 Qc1 Ra7! (covering threats on g7 and h7 via long distance) 27 b3 Bxc4 28 Qxc4 a5 29 Bh3? (correct was 29 Qc1 Raf7 30 Qg5 and it's anyone's game) 29 ... Raf7 30 Qa6 h5! was S.Ramanujam-C.Lakdawala, San Diego (rapid) 2014. The overextended f6-pawn fell without compensation and White was unable to save the game. The point is 31 Bg2 is met with 31 ... Rxf6 32 Rxf6 Rxf6 33 Rxf6 Qxf6 and now White is unable to regain his pawn, since 34 Qxa5?? is met by 34 ... Ne2+ 35 Kh1 Qf2 36 Qd8+ Kh7 37 Qe7+ Kh6. This is the point of playing 30 ... h5!: there is no perpetual check for White.

**3 e4 e5**



Before beginning this book, editor GM John Emms mentioned in an email that one of his students does well with this move, so I took a closer look at it and found the position to be perfectly playable for Black.

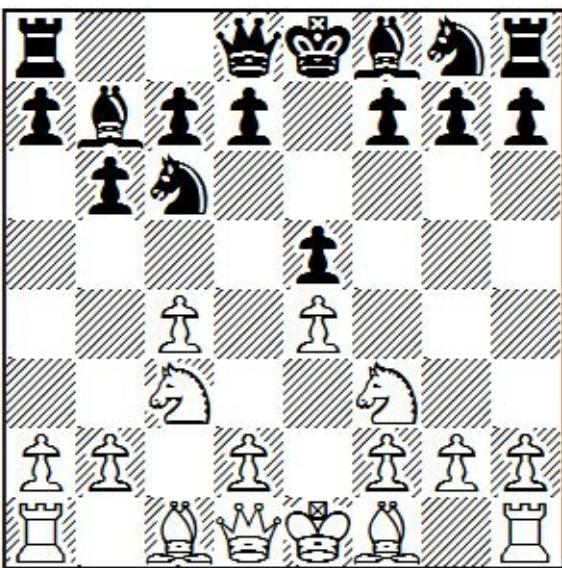
#### **4 Nf3**

Alternatives:

a) 4 d3 Bc5 5 g3 f5 6 Bg2 Nf6 7 Nf3 was V.Mikhalevski-N.Short, Edmonton 2013. At this point *Houdini* analyses 7 ... fxe4 8 Nxe5 Qe7 9 d4 Bxd4!? (safer is 9 ... Bb4 10 Ng4 Nxg4 11 Qxg4 Bxc3+ 12 bxc3 0-0 13 0-0 d6) 10 Qxd4 c5 11 Qd1 Qxe5 12 0-0 0-0 when Black is up a pawn, but White's bishop-pair and dark-square control offers full compensation. Analysis continues 13 Re1 Qf5 14 Bf4 g5!? 15 Bd6 Re8 16 Nb5 Nc6! 17 Nc7 Nd4 18 Nxe8 Rxe8 when Black gets loads of attacking compensation, with a pawn plus light squares for the exchange.

b) 4 g3 f5! (always open the f-file like this if possible) 5 Bg2 Nf6 6 d3 fxe4 7 dxe4 Bb4, P.Irwin-S.Atalik, Stillwater 2011. After 8 Nge2 We reach the position of my game versus Ramanujam, from the above notes, but with an extra tempo for Black.

#### **4 ... Nc6**



#### **5 d3**

**Question:** Why not force Black into a kind of Maroczy bind with 5 d4?

**Answer:** In this case the bind doesn't come without cost. White must agree to structural damage after 5 ... exd4 6 Nxd4 Bb4 7 Be3 (7 Nde2!? avoids structural damage at a serious loss of time, and White can hardly claim an advantage here) 7 ... Bxc3+ 8 bxc3 Nf6 9 f3 d6 10 Be2 Nd7, V.Pechenkin-N.Short, Edmonton 2012. I prefer Black's structural edge over White's attacking chances. At some point Black can pile up on c4 with ... Ba6, ... Na5 and ... Ne5.

**5 ... Bc5**

It makes sense to point pieces at the d4 hole and also f2.

**6 g3**

Logical, since White will want to play f4 and proceed in Botvinnik English fashion later on.

**6 ... Nge7!**

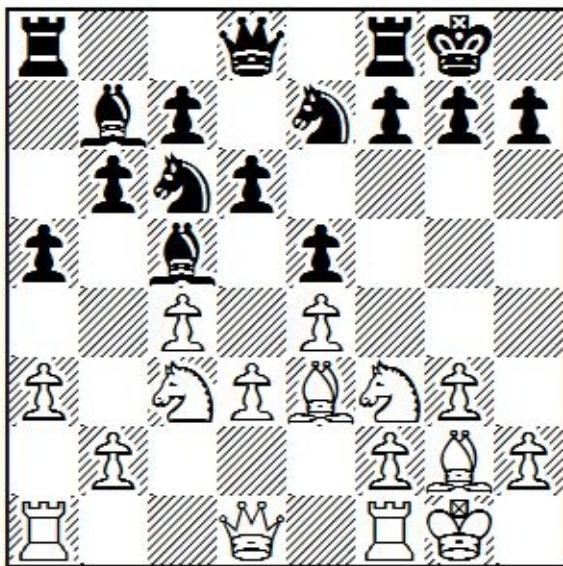
The idea is to keep the lane clear for a coming ... f5.

**7 Bg2 0-0 8 0-0 d6 9 a3**

Threatening to chase down Black's bishop with b4 next.

**9 ... a5 10 Be3**

White fights for control over d4. 10 Nh4 Nd4 11 Be3 Ne6 12 Qg4 g6 13 Bh6 Re8 14 Kh1 was V.Kramnik-A.Morozevich, Moscow (blitz) 2013. *Houdini* prefers Black after 14 ... Kh8! when 15 f4?? is met by 15 ... Ng8 16 Bg5 f6 17 fxe5 dxe5! and White is busted, since g5 and d3 hang simultaneously.



**10 ... f5!?**

Black generates play down the f-file, at the cost of weakening his central light squares. To delay a battle is in essence to issue a future challenge on your terms, not your opponent's.

**Question:** This is the most natural move. What else would you suggest?

**Answer:** It may have been wiser to slowly prepare, or even delay, the ... f5 break with 10 ... Bc8!? with counterplay for Black, who stands no worse.

**11 Ng5!**

Pouncing into the freshly created weakness on e6. The kingside represents damp clay, ready to be moulded to both sides' whimsy.

**11 ... Qd7?!**

More accurate was 11 ... Bc8! 12 exf5 Bxf5 13 Nd5 Rb8 14 Nxe7+ Nxe7 15 d4 Bxd4 16 Bxd4 exd4 17 Qxd4 Qd7 18 Rfe1 h6 19 Ne4 Rbe8 20 f4 and White's space offers him a micro-edge.

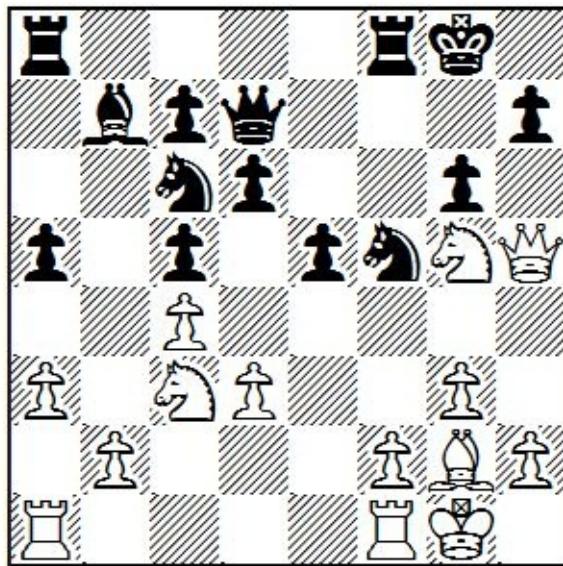
## 12 exf5! Nxf5

This leads to problems for Black on the light squares. Maybe Black should speculate with a positional exchange sacrifice with 12 ... Rxf5!? 13 Bh3 Raf8 when he gets attacking chances when White grabs the exchange.

## 13 Bxc5

After 13 Bd5+! Kh8 14 Qg4! (we sense that White's attack has been energized, fleshed out and brought to life, with the light squares being the trigger) 14 ... Rae8! (14 ... Nd8?! 15 Bxc5 bxc5 16 Bxb7 Nxb7 17 f4 Rae8 18 fxe5 and the trouble is Black is forced to play 18 ... dxe5 19 Rf3 with a clear structural edge for White, as 18 ... Rxe5?? is impossible, due to 19 Qh3! g6 20 g4, winning a piece) 15 Bxc5 bxc5 16 f4 h6 17 Qh5 g6 18 Qxg6 hxg5 19 fxg5 Qh7 20 Qxh7+ Kxh7 21 Be4 White regains the sacrificed piece with some advantage: 21 ... Kg6 22 Rxf5 Rxf5 23 g4 Kxg5 24 gxf5 Rb8 and Black struggles, yet I suspect that this one won't be so easy to convert, since Black's king participates in the defence.

## 13 ... bxc5 14 Qh5 g6



This weakening doesn't bother Black.

## 15 Qh3 Rae8

Unpinning with 15 ... Rab8 also leads to an edge for White after 16 f4 Ncd4 17 Bxb7 Rxb7 18 fxe5.

## 16 Rae1?!

Inaccurate. This is the point where White loses his edge. He should toss in 16 Bd5+! Kh8 17 Rae1 when it's harder to eject White's g5-knight, since he can ignore ... h6 due to the pin.

## 16 ... h6! 17 Nge4

It's too late for 17 Bd5+?! Kg7 18 Nge4 Bc8 when Black suddenly stands better, since ... Ncd4 and ... c6 is in the air.

## 17 ... Kg7

The king is glad to vacate the tumult of the crowd and seeks a place of silent solitude, away from white attackers.

## 18 f4 Bc8

Both sides live in mutual distrust and misunderstanding of the other's motives. Black can also play 18 ... exf4 based on the principle: *open the centre when attacked on the wing*. After 19 gxf4 Ncd4 Black's

centralized pieces, coupled with the f5 hole, give him the edge.

### 19 Nd5 Qd8!

Uncovering the c8-bishop on White's queen, which provokes the next move.

### 20 g4

White's queen's feeling of inferiority before her d8-sister gives way to jealous rage. In this case she is forced to meet her sister's steep demands. This is the willing ingestion of a calculated evil, since this move weakens all his central squares, but something had to be done about the c8-bishop's angry glare at his queen.

### 20 ... Nfd4 21 Qg3 exf4

Clearing e5 for Black's pieces.

### 22 Nxf4 Ne5

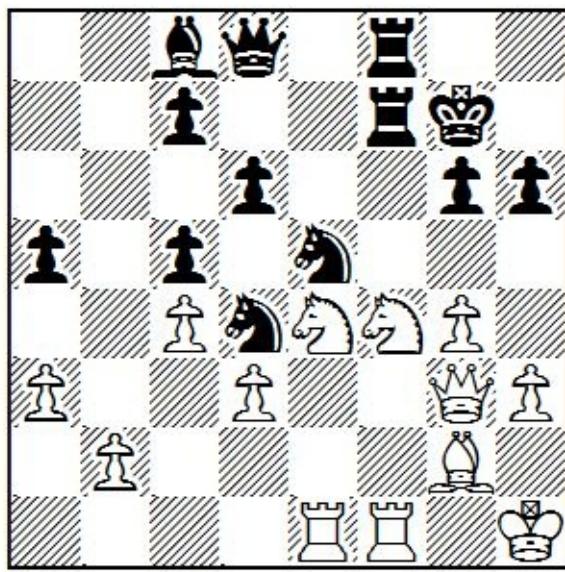
Attacking g4.

### 23 h3 Rf7

Short prepares to load up on the f-file.

### 24 Kh1 Ref8?

Correct was 24 ... Bb7, with advantage.



**Exercise (combination alert):** To see the surface isn't enough. We must also try and catch a glimpse of the shadowy structure underneath. Short's last move allowed a combination. White to play and win material:

### 25 Nd5?

Warfare tends to be frantic activity, mingled with protracted lulls. When we mark time, we become a person who goes nowhere, and doesn't really want to go anywhere. Ah yes, the burden of unfulfilled expectations.

**Answer:** White misses a golden opportunity with 25 Nxc5!, undermining. White strikes quick as a cobra's recoil, picking off a pawn, free of charge.

### 25 ... Rxf1+

Now Black once again seizes the advantage.

### 26 Rxf1 Rxf1+ 27 Bxf1 Bb7 28 Ndc3 Bc6 29 Bg2

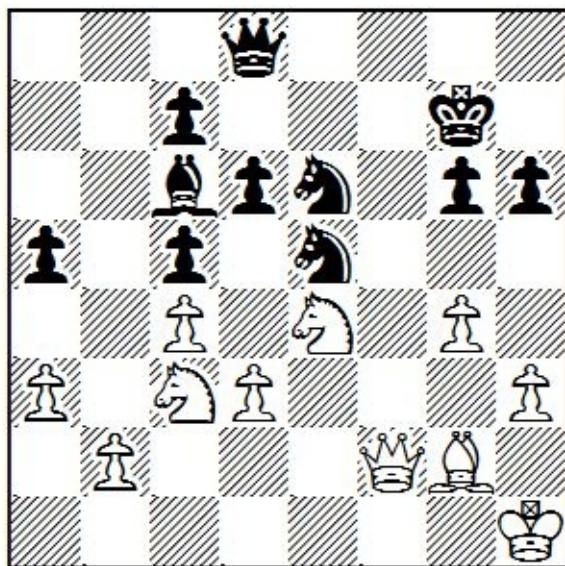
Threat: Nxc5!.

## 29 ... Ne6!

The presence of Black's knights infiltrating dark squares continues to be a source of moody concern for White, who by now probably correctly read the purpose in the intruder's eyes. Short's last move not only covered the Nxc5 threat, but also prepared ... Qf8, when White must worry about both ... Qf4 and ... Nf4.

## 30 Qf2

Much worse than waking from a nightmare is to awaken from a blissful dream, only to suffer the agony of being torn from it. At this point White must have been wondering what happened to his previously promising position. His last move is taut with concern over his rapidly deteriorating circumstances. If this doesn't qualify as suicide, then it comes close to suicide by effigy, since White simply disregards the threat to his d3 base. A strong GM has to be in serious time pressure to simply hang/sacrifice a pawn. However, he is unlikely to save the game even after 30 Nd5 Qf8 31 Qe1 a4 32 Nec3 Bxd5 33 Nxd5 c6 34 Nc3 Nf4 when d3 falls all the same.



## 30 ... Qf8

**Question:** Isn't d3 hanging?

**Answer:** A practical decision. Short wants to simplify into a winning ending. There was nothing wrong with the simple 30 ... Nxd3.

## 31 Qxf8+ Kxf8

White has no good way to save his d3-pawn.

## 32 Nd2

If 32 Bf1 Nf4 and d3 falls.

## 32 ... Bxg2+ 33 Kxg2 Nf4+ 34 Kg3 Nfxd3

Not only winning a pawn, but also forcing more pawn weakness.

## 35 b3 c6

This keeps White's knight out of b5 and d5, and also prepares to generate a queenside passer with an eventual ... d5.

## 36 a4

Now b3 is a fixed, eternal target for Black's knights.

## 36 ... Ke7

Intending ... Ke6 and ... d5.

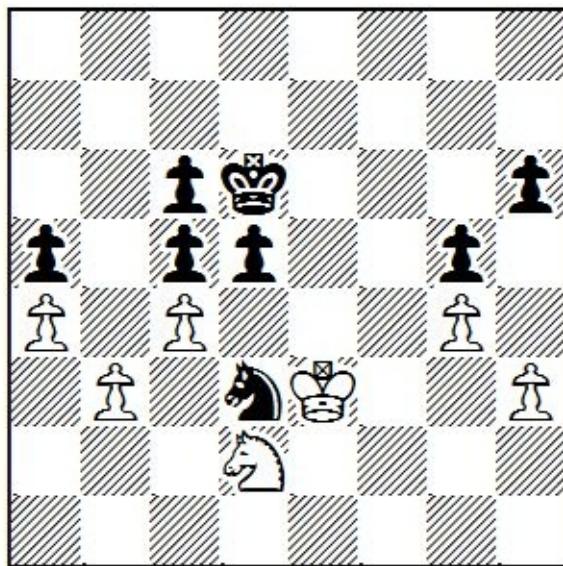
**37 Nce4 d5 38 Nf2 Kd6 39 Nxd3**

This swap makes the win even easier for Black, since it clears the path for king entry to e5, but White was lost in any case.

**39 ... Nxd3 40 Kf3 g5!**

Fixing h3 as a new target.

**41 Ke3**



**Exercise (combination alert):** There is no oasis for White's haggard pieces in this barren wasteland. This one is easy. Black to play and win a second pawn.

**Answer:** Simply attack it!

**41 ... Nf4 42 h4**

There are degrees of desperation, from mild to maniacal. this move qualifies as the latter. Of course this fails to the g2-fork - and I'm certain Miezis knew this, based on the one in billion odds that the 2700-rated Short would miss it.

**42 ... Ng2+**

The knight is the crooked employee who happily continues a string of petty piracies, embezzling the petty cash box whenever he gets the chance.

**43 Kf2 Nxh4 44 Nf1 Ke5 45 Ne3 0-1**

45 ... d4 46 Nf1 Ke4 47 Ke2 Kf4 48 Nh2 Kg3 is game over.

**Summary:** 3 ... e5 looks fully playable for our side. In such blocked positions we must be patient and expect hand-to-hand fighting at close quarters.

*Game 47*

**B.Baker-C.Lakdawala**

San Diego (rapid) 2014

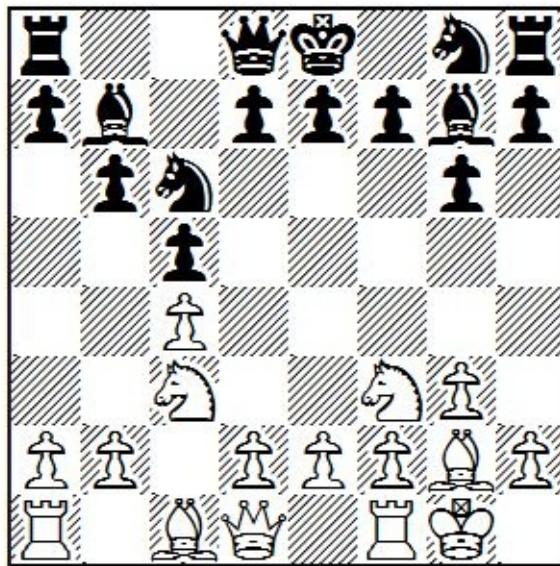
**1 Nf3 g6**

Our move order runs 1 ... b6 2 g3 Bb7 3 Bg2 g6.

**2 g3 b6 3 Bg2 Bb7 4 0-0 Bg7 5 c4 c5 6 Nc3**

Alternatively, 6 d4 cxd4 7 Nxd4 Bxg2 8 Kxg2 Nc6 9 Nc2 Rc8 10 Ne3 Nf6 11 Nc3 0-0 12 Rb1 e6! (preparing to blast in the centre with ... d5 next) 13 b3 d5 14 cxd5 Nb4 15 Ba3 a5 16 Qd2 Ng4! (Larsen is full of dirty tricks) 17 Ncd1 Nxe3+ 18 Nxe3 Bc3 19 Qd1, as in I.Jelen-B.Larsen, Ljubljana 1977. Black has full compensation for the pawns after 19 ... Qc7 20 Bxb4 axb4 21 dxe6 Rfd8 22 exf7+ Qxf7 23 Qc1 Rd2 when I think White is the one fighting to equalize, despite his temporary two-pawn surplus.

**6 ... Nc6**



It isn't so easy for White to extract an edge from such symmetrical English double fianchetto positions.

**7 d3**

Another line runs 7 e3 Bxc3!?.

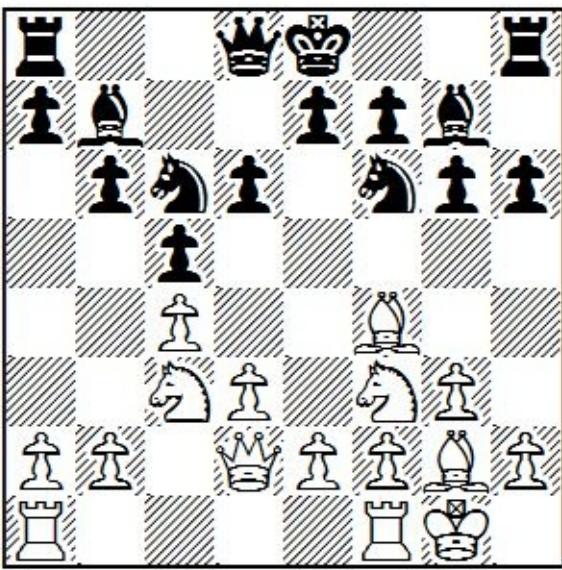
**Question:** What? Black gives away his sacred dark-squared bishop?

**Answer:** Why not? Black does it all the time in Nimzo-Indians. Christian Bauer, one of the world's leading 1 ... b6 exponents, plays this way. I looked at several of his games from this position and intended to follow suit. Giving White the bishop to slightly damage his structure isn't so radical as it looks, since it remains fluid and Black can rearrange his structure: 8 bxc3 d6 9 d3 Qd7! (Black's king is actually safer on the queenside) 10 e4 0-0-0 11 Ng5 e6 12 h4 h6 13 Nh3 Nge7 14 Bd2 f6!? (Bauer waits for White to commit to f4 before he plays ... f5) 15 f4 f5! 16 Nf2 when I don't believe Black stands any worse and in fact, actually prefer his position, L.Valdes-C.Bauer, Leon 2012.

**7 ... Nf6 8 Bf4!?**

This attempt to steer clear of theory begs for ... d6 and ... e5, but my opponent goads me into it, since in doing so, d5 is weakened. Instead, 8 Bg5 h6 9 Bd2 d5 10 Qc1!? Rc8 11 Rb1 Qd7 12 b3 d4 13 Nb5 h5 14 b4!? cxb4 15 Bxb4 a6 16 Na3 Nxb4 17 Rxb4 Nd5! 18 Rb3 Nc3 19 Qd2 was L.McShane-J.Polgar, London 2012. Black stands slightly better after 19 ... Na4 due to his bishop-pair, dark-square control and control over c3.

**8 ... d6 9 Qd2 h6**



Oh, no you don't! I prevent Bh6.

**Question:** But isn't your king now unable to castle kingside?

**Answer:** True enough. I have options of hanging around the middle, or castling queenside, initiating opposite-wing attacks.

**10 e4**

This move is new in the position and looks more logical than the drifting 10 Qc1 of L.Kovacs-G.Forintos, Budapest 1969.

**10 ... e5**

Now I can go after his bishop with ... Ng4, which also opens the path for a future ... f5.

**11 Be3 Ng4**

This creates an imbalance, which is sometimes not so easy to achieve in such symmetrical English positions.

**12 Nd5 Ne7**

Immediately challenging the d5 intruder.

**13 Nxe7!?**

I expected 13 b4 Nxd5 14 cxd5 0-0.

**13 ... Qxe7 14 Bh3!?**

Nothing spurs us on to action like regrettable necessity. A radical decision. White wants to force ... Nxe3, opening the f-file. Black looks slightly better after 14 h3 Nxe3 15 fxe3 0-0.

**14 ... Bc8**

The bishop is no longer of much use on the h1-a8 diagonal, as long as it stares at the pawn wall on e4.

**15 Bxg4!?**

A tough decision. Not many of us are born with Capa-perfect strategic pitch. The environment is an odd mix of surfaces and textures. Intuition is that strange place where we understand everything and nothing simultaneously. White gambles, hoping the closed position offsets Black's bishop-pair. The advantage turns to Black after this radical decision, which weakens his light squares.

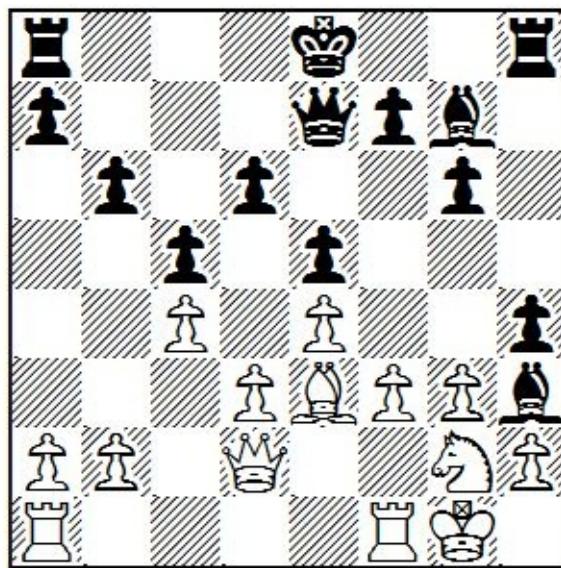
It's hard to see an active plan for White, though: for example, 15 Kg2 can be met with 15 ... h5 when ... h4 is constantly in the air and Black stands better. However, not 15 ... g5?! which pretty much forces 16 Bxg4! Bxg4 17 h3 Be6 18 g4! h5 19 Nh2 hxg4 20 hxg4 f6 21 Rh1 Qd7. I think this is the kind of position

my opponent had hoped for when he chopped my knight on g4. After 22 f3 Kf7 White looks fine since he can eventually transfer his knight to g3, but he must be careful to avoid sacs on g4.

**15 ... Bxg4 16 Nh4 Bh3 17 Ng2 h5**

White must keep close watch over ... h4 tricks. Black also looks better after 17 ... f5 18 f3 g5 19 exf5 Bxf5 20 Qe2.

**18 f3 h4**



**19 Rf2**

**Question:** Why didn't he bypass by playing g4?

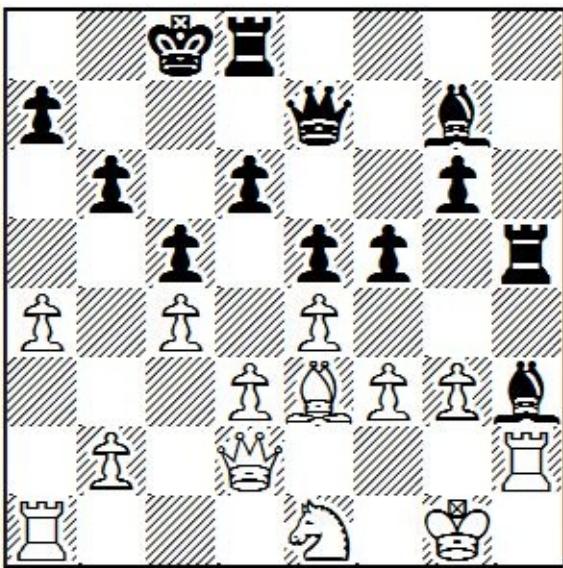
**Answer:** He agrees to the opening of the h-file, seeing that the bypassing 19 g4 f5 further opens attacking lanes for Black.

**19 ... hxg3 20 hxg3 Rh5**

Provoking g4 and also preventing Bg5.

**21 Ne1 f5 22 Rh2 0-0-0 23 a4?**

Misdirected. However, 23 Bg5?! is simply met with 23 ... Bf6, while 23 b4?? loses material to the trick 23 ... f4!, winning on the spot. White's best shot at survival is 23 Ng2!.



**Exercise (planning):** One glance tells us that Black's position is promising. Come up with an attacking plan for Black:

**Answer:** Line opening/pawn sacrifice. Black's attack is decisive if his once-buried dark-squared bishop is allowed to enter the fight.

**23 ... f4!**

Now the position ignites ragingly aflame.

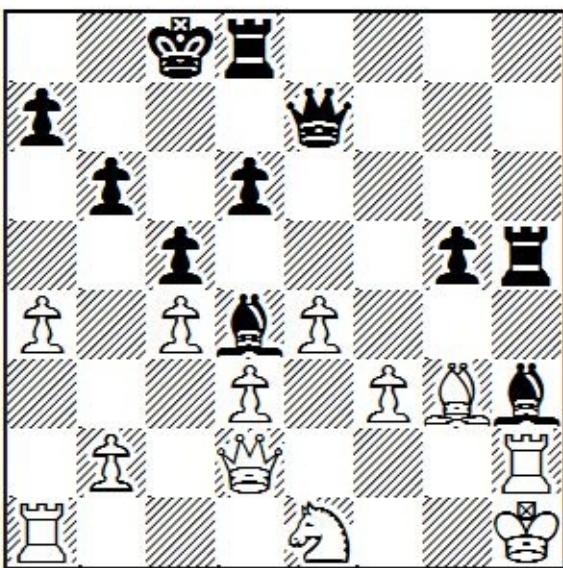
**24 gxf4 exf4 25 Bxf4 Bd4+ 26 Kh1**

The king has little choice but to hold a makeshift parliament on h1.

**26 ... g5**

Also strong is the simple 26 ... Rdh8.

**27 Bg3**



**Exercise (critical decision):** White's position continues to sicken in stages. Should Black press his attack forward with 27 ... Rdh8, or should

he take time out for a defensive precaution with 27 ... a5? Only one is correct.

### **27 ... a5?**

Luckily for me this inaccurate move didn't throw away the win. Doubt is the great inhibitor of action. From my observation, natural tacticians live in a world of make believe and imagination, while natural strategists tend to be more pragmatic, wishing to live in the real world. I felt that after this move White faces icy constraints of dealing with an attack without possibilities. The intention of the last move is to shut down all white queenside counterplay, before turning my attention to White's king. However, in this case my assessment turns out to be an uncannily inaccurate reading of the position. The story of my life: safety first.

**Answer:** Unfortunately, some instinct in my DNA prevents me from the natural 27 ... Rdh8! 28 a5 Be5 29 Bxe5 Qxe5 30 f4 (30 axb6?? is crushed by 30 ... Bg2+!, forcing mate) 30 ... gxf4 31 Nf3 Qg7! 32 Rg1 Bg4 and the defence collapses.

### **28 Rc1?**

In the rush of time pressure, mingled with crisis, our awareness either expands or contracts, but rarely retains its original size. Now the thin strand which supported White's position finally snaps, and Black's attack is once again decisive. White puts up greater resistance after 28 Nc2!, although after 28 ... Be5 29 Rg1 Rdh8 30 Ne3 Qf6 31 Qe2 Bf4! (the kingside is packed tighter than Times Square on New Year's Eve, just before the ball drops) 32 Nd5 Qe5 33 Qf2 (33 Bxf4 gxf4 34 Nxb6+ Kd8 35 Nd5 Bf1! wins) 33 ... Be6 34 Nxf4 gxf4 35 Bh4 Qd4 36 Qxd4 cxd4 37 Rg6 Rxh4 Black wins a piece.

### **28 ... Rdh8 29 Rc2**

Defenders sprawl in an untidy clutter along the second rank.

### **29 ... Bd7**

Practical. A player with attacking killer instinct would have found. 29 ... Bf1! 30 Qc1 Rh3 31 Rxh3 Rxh3+ 32 Bh2 Qe5 and there is no good defence to ... Qg3, followed by ... Be5.

### **30 Qc1**

30 b3 is met with 30 ... Rxh2+ 31 Bxh2 Qf6 32 Qd1 g4! winning.

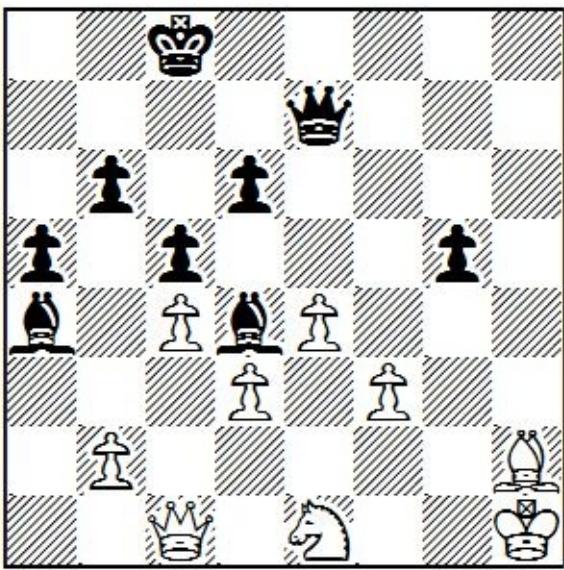
### **30 ... Bxa4**

I always breathe a sigh of relief if I can take time out to steal a pawn in the middle of an attack, because I always attack based on the assumption that I will do something stupid in time pressure and botch it. So taking a4 is basically an insurance policy against my own future ineptness.

### **31 Rxh5 Rxh5+**

The hallways of White's castle begin to empty.

### **32 Rh2 Rxh2+ 33 Bxh2**



**Exercise (combination alert):** Black to play and force the win of a second pawn.

**Answer:** 33 ... Qf6!

Now b2 falls.

**34 b3 Bxb3 35 Qb1 a4 36 Kg2 g4 37 f4**

37 fxg4 Qf2+ 38 Kh3 Qf1+ 39 Kh4 Qh1! 40 Kh3 Be5 wins.

**37 ... Qh4 0-1**

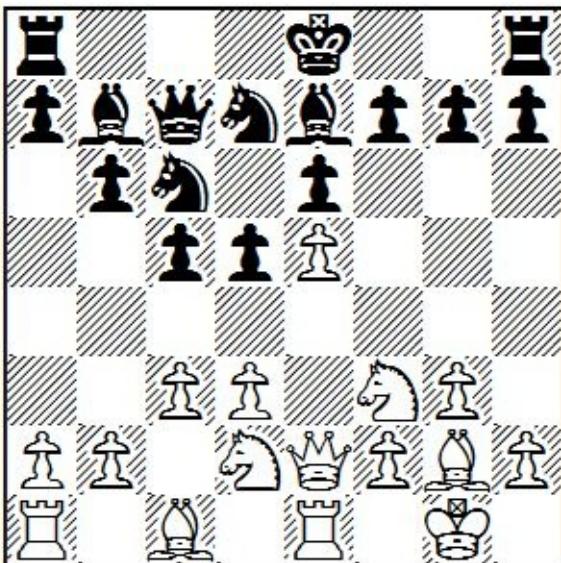
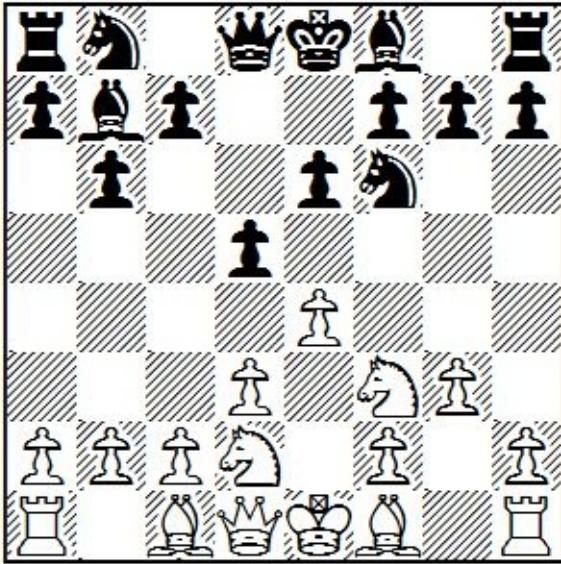
The queen's reach grows further in diameter and circumference. There is no defence to ... Qh3+, followed by ... g3.

**Summary:** I tossed this game in just to give you a choice over our normal ... e6 and ... f5 systems. The double fianchetto system versus the English is solid and it is very difficult to for White to prove even a small edge.

# Chapter Seven

## Odds and Ends

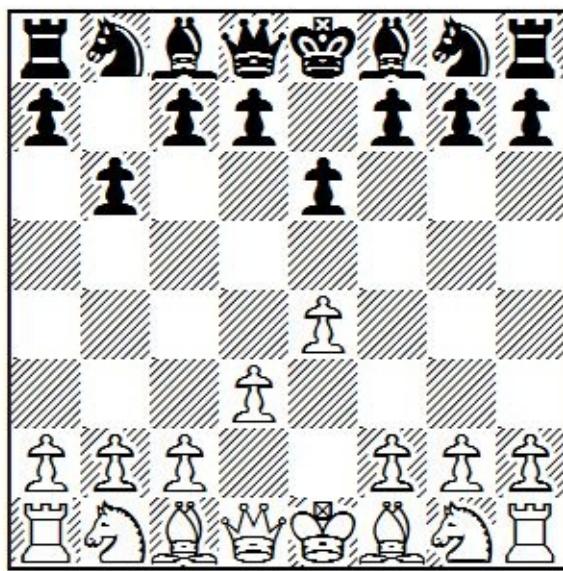
So non-threatening is 1 ... b6, that White can set up in any number of ways. In this chapter we take a look at some of White's non-standard responses to the Owen's, the most important of which is probably the King's Indian Attack, which normally arises from a French Defence move order.



The quiet-looking position (left hand diagram) can in a few moves, rage out of control, as in the right hand diagram.

The air around both kings rustles with the pent energy of an imminent explosion. Both sides' positions will soon grow precarious and fleeting as dandelion fluff on a windy day. Black can even lash out with ... g5!? here, followed by castling long. What happens after that is up to you.

**1 e4 b6 2 d3 e6**

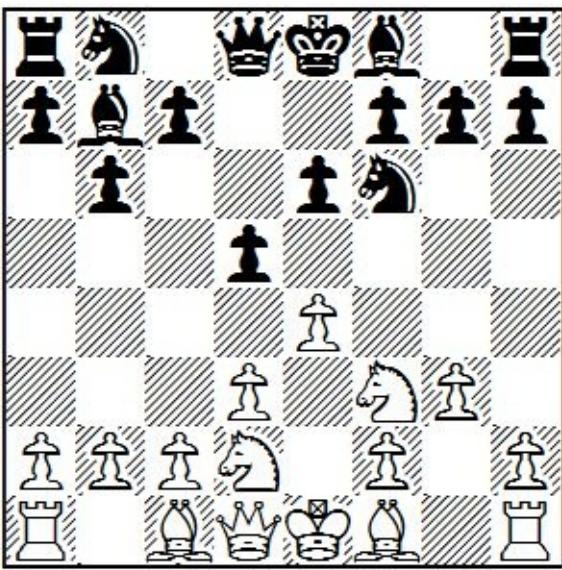


**3 Nf3**

**Question:** How do we set up when White plays 3 f4 and then keeps the central pawns fluid with c3?

**Answer:** Toss in a quick ... c5 and play it something like this: 3 ... c5 4 c3 Bb7 5 Qc2 d5 6 Nd2 (6 e5 Nc6 7 Nf3 h5 8 Be2 Nh6 is a nice looking French-style position for Black, who has equality or better, since White's queen is misplaced on the c-file and White hasn't even managed to get in d4) 6 ... Nc6 7 Nh3!? (in this case White intends to avoid e5 for as long as possible by leaving open the possibility of Nf2) 7 ... Nf6 8 Be2 Be7 9 0-0 Qc7 10 a3 a5, suppressing b4 for good, M.Surtees-A.Summerscale, Edinburgh 2009. At this point I don't see any continued benefit for White to maintain the central tension. He should probably go for 11 e5 Nd7 12 Nf3 Rc8 13 Be3 0-0 14 d4 cxd4 15 Nxd4 Nxd4 16 Bxd4 Nc5 17 f5 exf5 18 Qxf5 g6 followed by either ... Ne6 or ... Ne4, with a sharp position.

**3 ... Bb7 4 Nbd2 Nf6 5 g3 d5**



The King's Indian Attack versus the Owen's. This kind of position most commonly arises from a French move order.

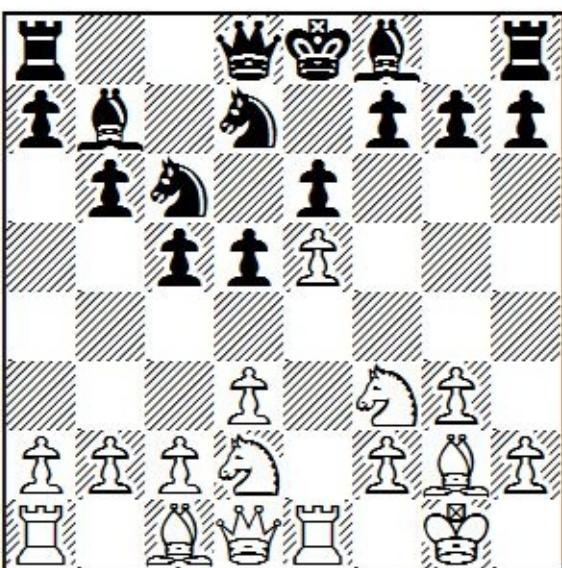
### **6 e5**

White stakes out central and kingside space.

**Question:** What happens if White refuses to play e5, and goes for the plan Qe2, followed by c3, a3 and b4?

**Answer:** I think this is White's best plan. Let's take a look: 6 Qe2 Be7 7 Bg2 c5 8 0-0 Nc6 9 Re1 Qc7 10 c3 h6! (this move prepares ... g5, yet keeps White guessing just where Black's king will go; 10 ... 0-0!? looks dangerous for Black after 11 a3 h6 12 b4 when White's attack appears more potent than Black's, L.Psakhis-A.Nikitin, Berlin 1991) 11 exd5 exd5 (Black can recapture with the pawn since White has no way to exploit the e7 pin) 12 Nb3 0-0 13 Bf4 Bd6 14 Bxd6 Qxd6 15 d4 c4 16 Nbd2 Rae8 17 Qf1, E.Vasiukov-A.Yermolinsky, Volgodonsk 1981. I actually prefer Black's game slightly, despite the semi-bad bishop after 17 ... b5, intending ... b4, since he is the only one with an active plan in the position.

**6 ... Nfd7 7 Bg2 c5 8 0-0 Nc6 9 Re1**



**9 ... Qc7**

**Question:** Isn't 9 ... g5 strong for Black?

**Answer:** It is well met with the central counter 10 c4! d4 11 Qa4! (threat: Nxd4) 11 ... Rc8, as in D.Sengupta-M.Neef, Dresden 2013. Now White can try 12 Ne4 h6 13 Nd6+ Bxd6 14 exd6 when he gets more than enough dark-square compensation, even if he loses d6.

**10 Qe2 Be7**

Now ... g5 is a serious concern for White.

**11 c3**

11 Nf1 0-0-0 12 h4 h6 13 N1h2 g5 14 hxg5 hxg5 15 Ng4 Rh5 16 c3 d4! was preferred in S.Movsesian-A.Delchev, Sibenik 2006. I like Black's kingside attacking chances after 17 Bd2 Rdh8 18 Rac1 Qd8!, intending to swing over to h7. Now White is unable to play 19 cxd4??, which is crushed by 19 ... Nxd4! 20 Qe3 (not 20 Nxd4 Rh1+ 21 Bxh1 Rxh1 mate) 20 ... Rh1+! 21 Bxh1 Rxh1+ 22 Kxh1 Bxf3+ 23 Kg1 Qh8 24 Nh2 Nxe5! and there is no reasonable defence to the coming ... Qh3.

**11 ... a5**

I would toss in 11 ... g5! since White's normal counter c4 would lose a tempo.

**12 h4 h6 13 Nf1 Ba6**

Also possible is to switch to a queenside pawn avalanche plan with 13 ... b5 14 Bf4 Nb6 15 g4 d4 16 cxd4 Nd5 17 Bg3 Nxd4 18 Nxd4 cxd4 19 Nd2 Rc8 20 Nb3 0-0 21 Rec1 Qb6, R.Lendwai-M.Cebalo, Maribor 1995. Black gets sufficient play after 22 Qe4 a4! 23 Qxd4 Qa6 24 Nc5. Now Black can either take a repetition draw with 24 ... Qb6 25 Nb3 Qa6 or go for the full point with 26 Nc5 Bxc5!? 27 Rxc5 Rxc5 28 Qxc5 Rc8 29 Qd6 Qa8 30 g5 hxg5 31 hxg5 Rd8 32 Qc5 Nf4! 33 Bf1 (33 Bxb7? is met with 33 ... Ne2+ 34 Kh2 Qxb7 when White looks overextended) 33 ... Nxd3 34 Qxb5 Rd5 35 Qb6 Nxe5 36 Bg2 Rd7 and White will be lucky to hold the draw in his overextended position.

**14 g4!?**

A new move and a very risky one. The trouble with this move, of course, is that Black hasn't committed to kingside castling. So White only managed to loosen the pawn front around his king. White is better off playing 14 N1h2 0-0-0. Even here I like Black's chances in the opposite-wing attacks.

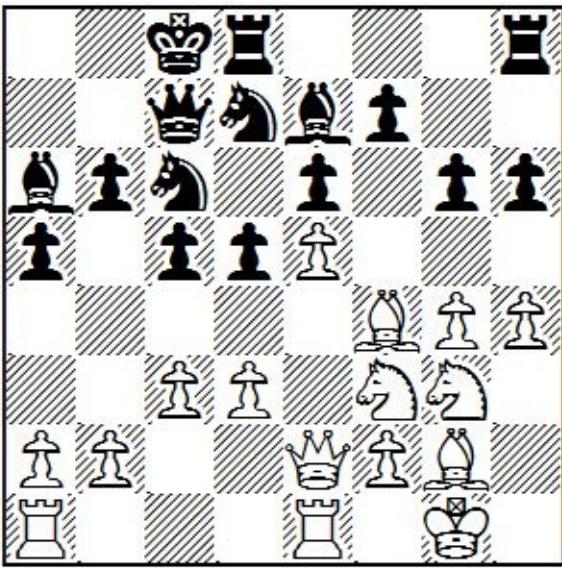
**14 ... 0-0-0**

Both parties have weakened the pawn fronts around their king, but White's looks the more seriously weakened.

**15 Ng3 g6**

I would go for an immediate 15 ... g5.

**16 Bf4??**



**Exercise (combination alert):** White's last move is inaccurate, due to a tactical issue. Black to play and seize the initiative and attack.

**16 ... Rdg8?!**

**Answer:** Venkat misses 16 ... Bxh4! 17 Nxh4 g5 18 Bxg5 hxg5 19 Nf3. Now Black can play 19 ... Rdg8 with the clearly faster attack, or speculate with a promising exchange sacrifice with the energetic 19 ... Rh4!? 20 Nxh4 gxh4 21 Nh5 Ndx e5, with huge compensation for the exchange, in the form of an extra pawn and a promising attack.

**17 b3?!**

Still missing Black's idea.

**17 ... Bxh4!**

Better late than never. Now he sees the trick. Luckily for Venkat, his position is even better than if he saw the trick last move.

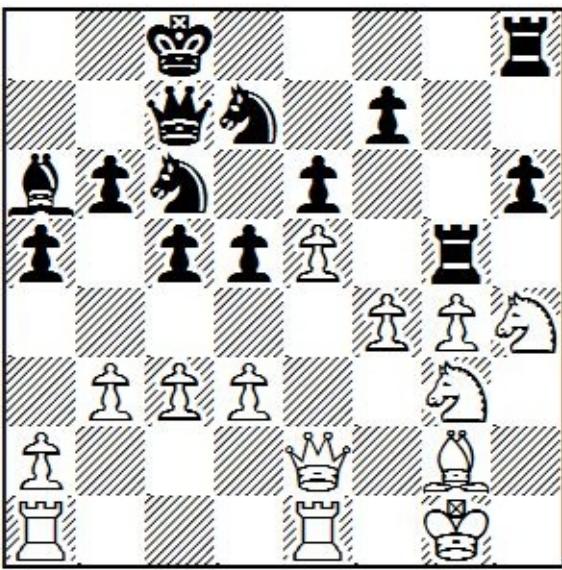
**18 Nxh4 g5**

Black favourably regains the piece.

**19 Bxg5 Rxg5!**

Both e5 and g4 are under assault.

**20 f4**



**Exercise (critical decision):** Black has a choice of two tempting sacrifices and a calm move. Our candidate moves: a) 20 ... Ndx5. b) 20 ... Bxd3. c) Calmly retreat the rook with 20 ... Rgg8. Two lines lead to a clear advantage for Black, while the other is merely unclear. Which one would you play?

### 20 ... Bxd3!?

Oops. The worst choice of the three. The drunken bishop unwisely lurches promiscuously in the direction of the white queen, whose strong suit in life is clearly not forgiveness. The positional player/strategist is a sworn enemy of the irrational, while the tactician embraces irrationality like an old friend. When we wilfully create anarchy, we essentially attempt to make the world ungovernable for the ruling authority. When we speculate/sacrifice like this, we are indemnified only with a promise - not a guarantee - of a winning attack. After this move Black fails to derive much assurance in his attack's chances for success. Black's attack now takes on a chancy, scattershot feel of wind pollination. Something may take root and grow, but then again, it may not.

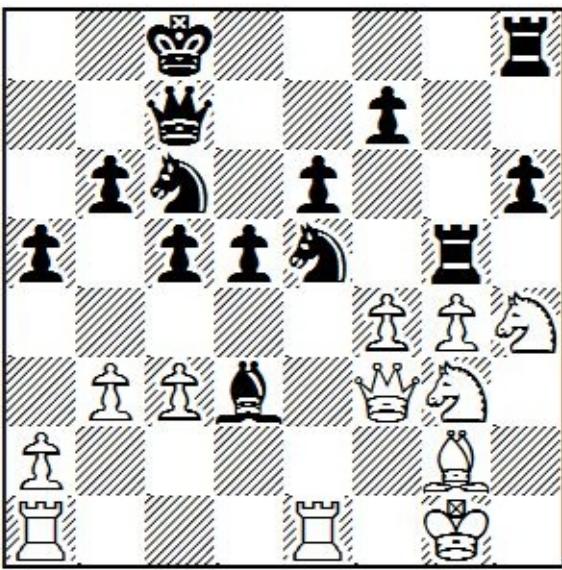
**Answer:** Black seizes a clear advantage after 20 ... Ndx5! (Black's knights are adept killers, either singularly, or in tandem) 21 fxg5 hxg5 22 Nf3 Bxd3 23 Qd1 Nxg4! (Black is down a full rook, but has a raging attack) 24 Qxd3 Qxg3 25 Re2 Kc7 26 Rf1 Rh6 27 Qd2 Nce5 28 Rxe5 Nxe5 29 Nxe5 Qh2+ 30 Kf2 Qxe5. "So, you believe you can desert me without consequences?" asks the queen of White's king. Black's four pawns are too much for White's extra bishop.

Also promising is 20 ... Rgg8! 21 Nh5 Qd8! (now g4 falls) 22 Nf3 Rxg4 when Black is up a pawn, with attacking chances.

### 21 Qf3?

This move appears at odds with logic. White hasn't yet tasted the initiative, but as the old saying goes: we don't miss that which we have never known. Correct is to accept with 21 Qxd3! Rxg4 22 Ngf5! (both sides overlooked this resource) 22 ... Kb8! 23 Qf3 h5 24 Rad1 Nf8 25 Rf1 exf5 26 Rxd5! Rxh4 27 Rd6 (White regains the piece) 27 ... Rg8 28 Rxc6 Qb7 29 Rc8+! Qxc8 30 Qa8+ Kc7 31 Qc6+ Kd8 (forced, in view of 31 ... Kb8?? 32 Qxb6+ and mate next move) 32 Rd1+ Nd7 33 Qf6+ Ke8 34 Qxh4 c4. This mess of a position is rated dead even by *Houdini*.

### 21 ... Ndx5!



The knight bows low, too low, and performs an insultingly obsequious salute to White's queen. White's disclaimer fails to cool his opponent's ardour for attack. Now Black is winning again.

### **22 fxe5 Nxe5?!**

The archer's nightmare:

1. Poor visibility.
2. A moving, fugitive target, just out of range for arrowshot.

Much stronger was to simply secure the bishop with 22 ... c4! 23 Qf4 Rhg8 24 Bh3 h5! 25 Kf2 hxg4

26 Bf1 Nxe5, with a winning position for Black.

### **23 Rxе5!**

White fights back with the best defence, seemingly after a hundred repulses. Instead, 23 Qf6? Rhg8 24 Rxе5 Rxе5 25 Nf3 Re3 26 Kf2 Rxg4 27 Kxe3 Qxg3 is hopeless for him.

### **23 ... Qxe5 24 Qxd3 Rxg4**

The point. Both knights hang and White can only save one of them.

### **25 Nh5 exf5?!**

Black's once formidable attack, now careening out of control, threatens to become a caricature of its former self. The more moves that are played, the more strained seems Black's rationale to continue playing for mate. After this inaccuracy, Black's win is no longer a trivial matter. Correct is the cool-headed 25 ... Kc7! when Black still has a winning position.

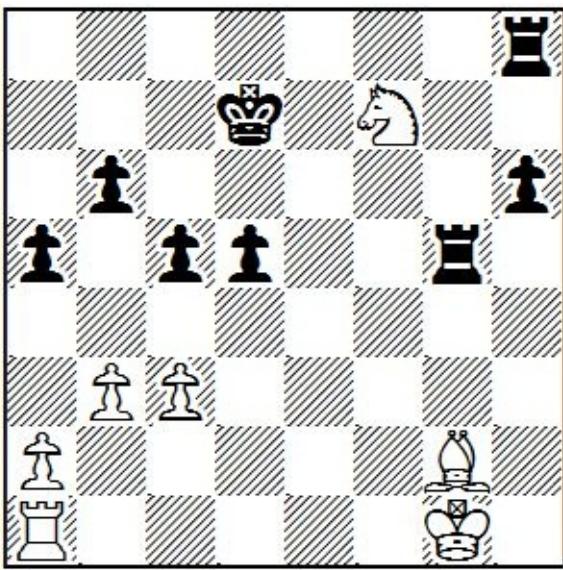
### **26 Qxf5+ Qxf5 27 Nxf5 Rg5?!**

Well, this falls a tad short of the triumphant vindication Venkat had hoped for. In the heat of battle, are we not all at times vulnerable to unforeseen bouts of nitwitery? Venkat is making a hash of things, overlooking White's next move. Black's last hope to win lay in 27 ... Kb8 28 Ne3 Rg5 29 Kf2 Rd8 30 Rh1 h5 31 Bf3 b5 32 Rxh5 Rxh5 33 Bxh5 b4! 34 cxb4 axb4, although even here, White may still draw.

### **28 Nd6+!**

Preparing to fork f7.

### **28 ... Kd7 29 Nxf7**



**Exercise (combination alert):** It appears as if Black just made a double question mark move, allowing his rooks to be forked. Luckily, he has a drawing line. What is it?

**Answer:** 29 ... Rxg2+! 30 Kxg2 Rg8+! 31 Kh3

Forced, since White's king can't enter any square on the f-file due to the ... Rf8 pin threat.

**31 ... Ke6!**

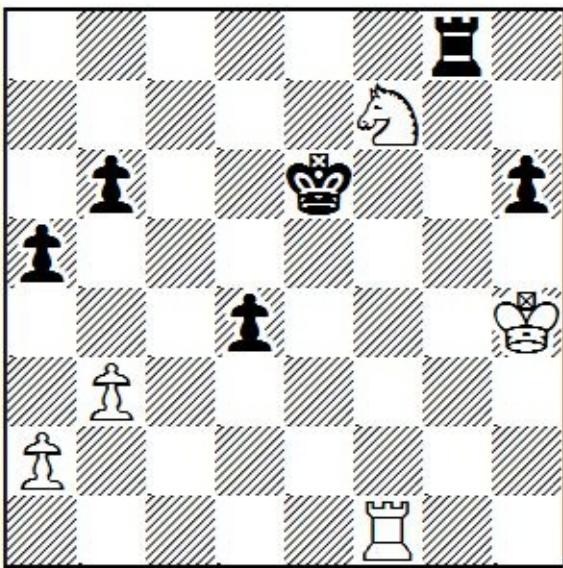
When a fat, pampered house cat hunts mice, she only plays a game of jungle predacity, while remaining fat and pampered. Oddly enough, h6 is taboo and White's trapped knight has no escape route. The position is drawn, despite White's extra piece.

**32 Rf1 d4!**

The distraction of the d-pawn earns Black a draw.

**33 cxd4 cxd4 34 Kh4?**

White draws after the correct 34 Rf3! Rg7 35 Nd8+ Kd5 36 Nf7 Ke4 (or 36 ... Ke6 37 Nd8+ with a repetition of moves) 37 Rf6 d3 38 Nd6+ Kd4 39 Nc4 b5 40 Rd6+ Kc5 41 Rxd3 bxc4 42 Rc3.



**Exercise (combination alert):** A stasis can only be broken if one side wins a preponderance in one sector or another. Now the peace accord, fragile and tentative, is about to collapse. White hopes to play Nxh6 next move, but he doesn't have the time. Black to play and win material.

**Answer:** Pin.

**34 ... Rf8!**

Trapping the knight by exploiting the white king's unfortunate position on h4, since Ng5+ fails. Now White may be busted.

**35 Rd1 Rxf7 36 Rxd4 Rf2 37 Rd8 Rc2**

Even stronger is 37 ... b5! 38 a3 Rh2+ 39 Kg4 h5+ 40 Kg5 h4 41 Kg4 h3 42 Rh8 Ra2 43 Rh6+ Kd5 44 Rh5+ Kd4! 45 Rxb5 h2 46 Rh5 Rxa3 47 Rxh2 Rxb3 48 Ra2 Rb5 49 Kf3 Kc3 50 Ke3 Re5+ 51 Kf4 Rh5 and Black wins the rook and pawn ending, since his king allows his lone passer to advance unimpeded.

**38 Kh5**

Alternatively, 38 Rb8 Rc6 39 Kh5 Kd5 40 Rd8+ Kc5 41 a3 Rd6 42 Rc8+ Kd4 43 Rc7 Ke3! (idea: ... Rd3) 44 a4 Rd3 45 Kxh6 Rxb3 46 Kg6 Kd4 47 Kf5 Rb4 48 Rc6 Kd5 and Black's king enters c4, or White drops his remaining pawn.

**38 ... Rc6**

Correct was 38 ... Rxa2! 39 Rb8 Kf5! (threatening a cheapo mate) 40 Kxh6 Re2! 41 Kg7 (or 41 Rxb6?? Re6+ 42 Rxe6 Kxe6 43 Kg5 Ke5 44 Kg4 Ke4 45 Kg3 Kd3 46 Kf3 Kc3 47 Ke3 Kxb3 48 Kd2 Kb2 when Black wins the king and pawn ending by a tempo) 41 ... Re7+ 42 Kf8 Re6 43 Kf7 Ke5 44 Rb7 Rh6 45 Rb8 Kd5 and Black's king infiltrates, since 46 Rc8 is met with 46 ... Rh3 winning White's last pawn.

**39 b4**

As good a try as any. 39 Rd2 Rd6 40 Rc2 Kd5 41 Kh4 Re6 42 Kg4 b5 43 Kf5 Re5+ 44 Kg6 h5 45 Rd2+ Ke4 46 Rf2 b4 47 Rf1 Rd5 48 Rf2 Ke3 49 Rf8 Rd2 wins.

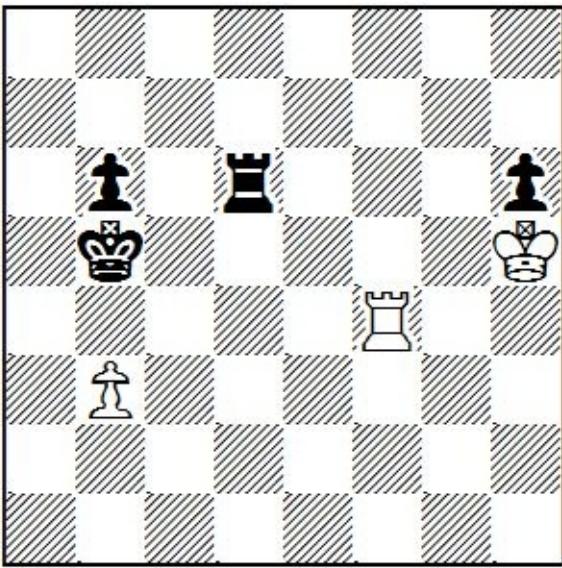
**39 ... axb4**

Or 39 ... a4 40 Ra8 b5 41 Rb8 Rc2 42 Rb6+ Kd7 43 Rxb5 Kc6 44 Ra5 Rxa2 45 Kxh6 a3 46 Kg5 Ra1 and the trouble is White has no good defence to ... a2 and a rook check, clearing the queening square.

**40 Rd4 b3! 41 axb3 Rd6 42 Rg4 Kd5 43 Rf4 Kc5 44 Rg4**

When there is no discernible counterplay, all we can do is to practice patience and reconcile ourselves to our present misery. After 44 Rg4+ Kd5 45 Rf4 b5 46 Kg4 Kc6 47 Kf3 Rd3+ 48 Ke2 Rxb3 49 Rf6+ Kc5 50 Rxh6 b4 51 Kd2 White's king is unable to enter the drawing zone: 51 ... Rc3! and Black soon reaches the winning Lucena position.

**44 ... Kb5 45 Rf4**



**Exercise (planning):** Come up with a clear winning plan for Black.

**Answer:** Head for the Lucena position (this book seems to be loaded with them). White's king is cut off, too far away to help out.

**45 ... Rd3!**

Black king and rook hope to benefit from their monopoly of the queenside.

**46 Kxh6 Rxb3 47 Kg5 Rb4 48 Rf8 Ka4 49 Kf5 Rc4!**

Black hits upon the position's sustaining principle: White's king will be cut off from defensive access.

**50 Ke5 b5 51 Kd5 Kb3 52 Rf3+ Rc3 53 Rf8 b4 54 Kd4 Kb2 55 Rf2+ Rc2 56 Rf1 b3 57 Kd3 Rh2**

Venkat never does anything the normal way. The common technique is 57 ... Rc7 58 Rf8 Kb1 59 Rf1+ Ka2 60 Rf8 b2 61 Ra8+ Kb1 62 Kd2 Rd7+ 63 Ke2 Rd5 64 Ke3 Kc2 65 Rc8+ Kb3 66 Rb8+ Kc3 67 Rc8+ Kb4 68 Rb8+ Rb5.

**58 Rf8 Kb1 59 Rf1+ Ka2 60 Rf8 Rh3+! 61 Kd2 b2 62 Ra8+ Ra3 0-1**

**Summary:** The Owen's works well for Black versus KIA. We transpose to a line of the French versus KIA, taking on the queenside castling plan, with equality at a minimum.

Here is a 1 ... b6 game between two of my top students. Previous to this game, Venkat had never defeated his opponent, the 16-year-old, almost-2400 rated Varun Krishnan, who is the reigning U.S. 11th Grade Champion.

#### Game 49

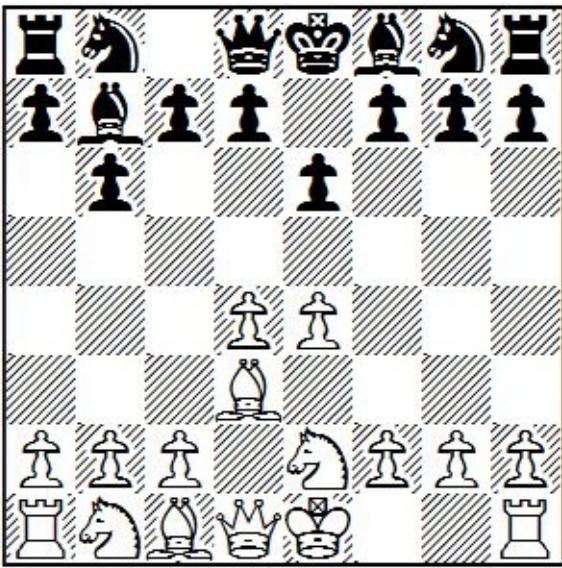
**V.Krishnan-V.Iyer**

San Diego (rapid) 2014

**1 e4 b6**

Rote, popular openings sometimes feel like a politician's well-rehearsed speech, telling people exactly what they want to hear - not what they need. 1 ... b6 certainly makes our opponents think on their second move - not on the 24th. In this case I think Venkat was wise to play 1 ... b6 on his otherwise much more heavily theoretically prepared opponent, Varun.

**2 d4 e6 3 Bd3 Bb7 4 Ne2!?**



**Question:** Why would White develop his knight on e2, rather than the more central f3-square?

**Answer:** Probably three reasons:

1. White possibly feared opening prep, and wanted to throw Black off with a non-standard line.
2. White can back up e4 with f3.
3. White leaves the path open for a future f4 and f5 ram.

**4 ... c5 5 c3**

White has no intention of allowing a break-up of his strong centre.

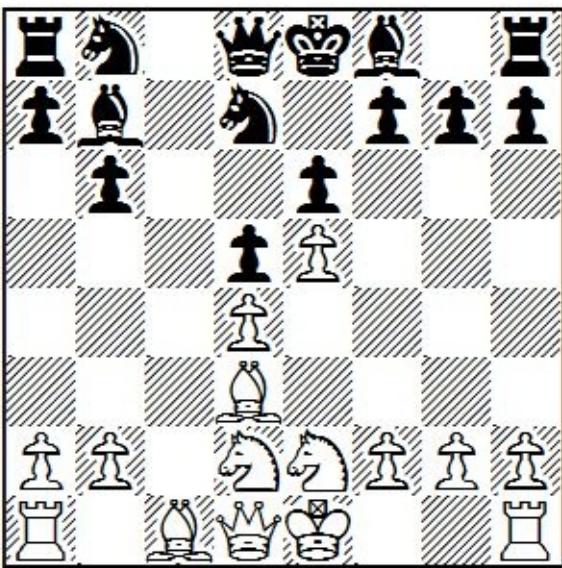
**5 ... Nf6 6 Nd2**

**Question:** How does Black generate counterplay if White creates a pawn wall on e4, with 6 f3?

**Answer:** Here is how our founding father, John Owen dealt with it: 6 ... Be7 7 Be3 d6! (I think this fluid formation is superior to ... d5 French ideas, which got Venkat in trouble early in the game) 8 Nd2 Nc6 9 0-0 0-0 10 Ng3 cxd4 11 cxd4 Nb4 12 Bb5 Rc8 (with a fork threat on c2) 13 Rc1, G.Maroczy-J.Owen, Hastings 1895. Black gets a very reasonable looking French Defence-style game after 13 ... a6 14 Rxc8 Qxc8 15 Bc4 d5 16 Bb3 Nc6 17 e5 Nd7 18 Bc2 f5 19 f4 (19 exf6 Nxf6 20 a3 Bd6 offers Black a pleasant looking French Tarrasch-style position, where White f3 hinders him on the kingside) 19 ... b5. White's g3-knight looks misplaced and Black will soon generate queenside play with ... Nb6, which in turn provokes White into pawn weaknesses with b3.

**6 ... Be7**

Another way to handle it is 6 ... cxd4 7 cxd4 d5 (7 ... Be7 8 0-0 0-0 9 a3 d6 10 f3 Nbd7 11 b4 a6 is passive, but very solid for Black; White may have a microbe of an edge due to his extra central territory) 8 e5 Nfd7, which sees Black prepare ... Ba6.

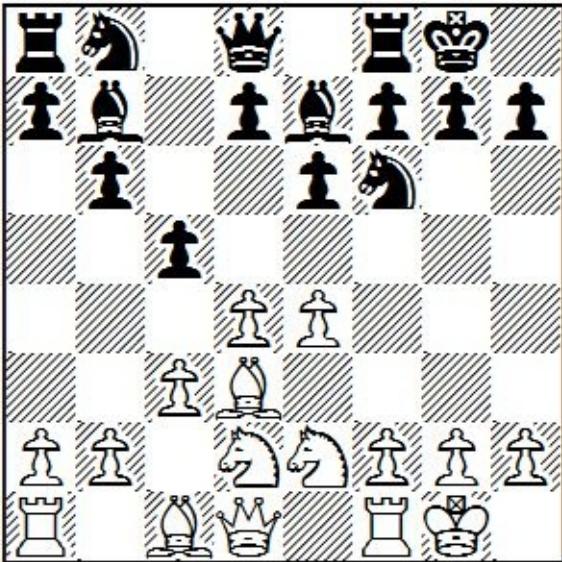


With 9 Qa4!? White radically prevents our plan, at the cost of losing time and misplaying his queen, L.Langner-P.Blatny, Czech League 2005. Here Black looks okay in the French-like position after 9 ... Nc6 10 a3 Be7 11 0-0 a6 12 Nf3 Rc8 13 Bd2 b5 14 Qd1 0-0 15 Qb1 h6.

**Question:** What happens if White just castles and allows Black the ... Ba6 plan?

**Answer:** I think Black is okay in that version as well, as long as you are comfortable in French-style positions after 9 0-0 Be7 10 Nf3 Ba6 11 Bxa6 Nxa6 12 a3 Qc8 13 Qd3 Nab8 14 Bd2 Qa6 15 Qxa6 Nxa6 16 Rac1 b5. Black follows with ... Nb6, and ... Kd7 and then challenges the c-file with a rook to c8, with a perfectly playable ending.

**7 0-0 0-0**



**8 f4**

A new move in the position:

a) 8 Bb1!? (I don't get this move, which clogs White's queenside) 8 ... d5 (Black can also go for a more fluid plan with 8 ... d6 9 f4 cxd4 10 cxd4 e5!? 11 b3 Nbd7 12 Bb2 Rc8 when I don't believe he stands any worse) 9 e5 Ne8 10 f4 g6 11 Nf3 Nc6 12 Qe1 Ng7! (White's intended f5 break isn't going to

be so easy to achieve) 13 g4 was A.Ben Said-L.Ben Houichi, Hammamet 2010. At this point, my French instincts tell me to play 13 ... f5 14 exf6 Bxf6 with dynamic equality at a minimum.

b) 8 b3 d6 9 Qc2?! threatened e5 and Bxh7+ in K.Mehling-H.Gubela, Oberhof 2013. Here Black can play 9 ... Nbd7 10 Bb2 Rc8 when White's queen is misplaced on the c-file.

### 8 ... Nc6 9 a3

Halting all ... cxd4 followed by ... Nb4 ideas.

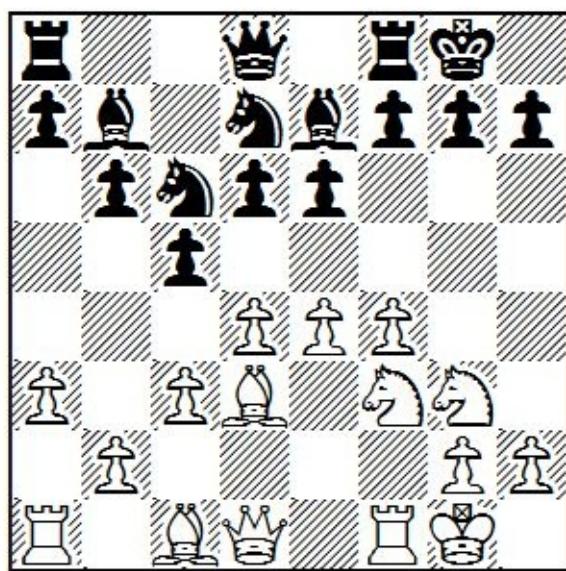
### 9 ... d6

Black keeps the centre fluid. He can also try a subspecies of the Miles plan with 9 ... Rc8 10 Qe1 Na5! 11 e5 (11 b4? c4! 12 Bc2 Nb3! 13 Nxb3 cxb3 14 Bxb3 Nxe4 favours Black, who dismantled White's once impressive centre) 11 ... Nd5 12 Rf3 c4 13 Bc2 f5. I don't have any faith in White's attack and prefer Black's side due to his light-square domination.

### 10 Nf3 Nd7?!

So that e5 won't arrive with tempo. This looks like the beginning of a mistimed plan. I would probably switch to a French/light-square strategy with 10 ... d5!. This looks correct now that White's knight vacated d2, weakening e4, and if 11 e5 Ne4 12 Be3 Na5 when ... Nc4 is in the air.

### 11 Ng3



### 11 ... cxd4

**Question:** Can Black consider sacrificing a pawn with  
11 ... Na5!? 12 b4 c4 13 Bc2 Nb3 14 Bxb3 cxb3 15 Qxb3?

**Answer:** An interesting and speculative idea. White looks better, but at least Black's light squares, bishop-pair and open c-file give him some measure of counterplay. It may well be better for Black than the way the game went.

### 12 cxd4 d5?!

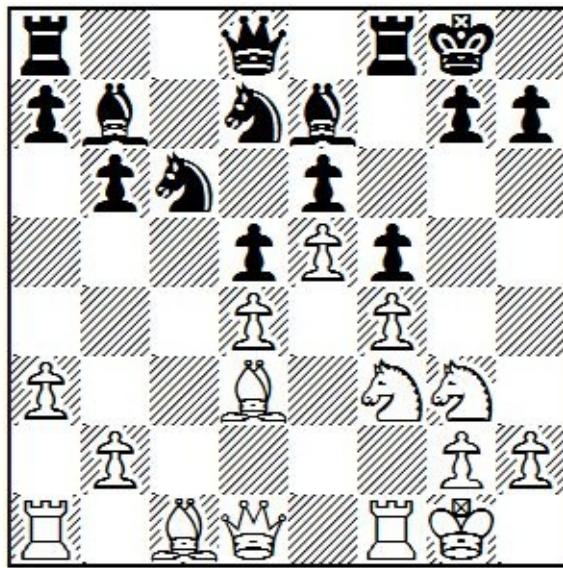
Venkat goes for a French strategy, but probably mistimes it. The move pushes past the level of provocation, into the level of a calculated affront. White looks substantially better after 12 ... Rc8 13 b4, but this is still better than what Black got in the game.

### 13 e5?!

White may not stand better after this thematic move. He generates an instant attack with 13 exd5! (clearing f5 for an attacker) 13 ... exd5 14 Nf5 Re8 15 Ne5 Bf8 (or 15 ... Nf6 16 Bb5 Qc8 17 Qc2 g6 18

Nxe7+! Nxe7 19 Qa4 with a clear advantage to White; if I were Black, I would offer the exchange here with 19 ... Nf5!? hoping for light-square compensation) 16 Qg4 threatening Nh6+, when White has a looming attack.

**13 ... f5**



**Question:** Black looks a lot worse to me. What makes this an okay French-style position?

**Answer:** White's knight is misplaced on g3, since he needs g4 to attack.

**Question:** Where is Black's counterplay?

**Answer:** Black's game appears devoid of counterplay here, but this is an illusion. He soon generates queenside play with ... a6, ... b6 and ... Nb6, while his king remains relatively safe on the other side.

**14 b4?!**

Varun decides to retain his extra space, when he should activate his pieces by opening the centre and the e5-square with 14 exf6! Bxf6 15 Ne2, which looks like a slightly favourable Tarrasch-style French position for White, mainly since Black's queenside fianchetto doesn't make as much sense here.

**14 ... a6**

Intending ... b5, ... Nb6, ... Nc4 and ... a5, with queenside counterplay.

**15 Bb2 b5 16 Nd2**

White pretty much gives up on his kingside ambitions and seeks to occupy c5 with the knight.

**16 ... Nb6 17 Nb3 Nc4**

Threatening both the b2-bishop and a fork on e3.

**18 Qe2 a5**

Forcing White's next move.

**19 Nc5 Bxc5**

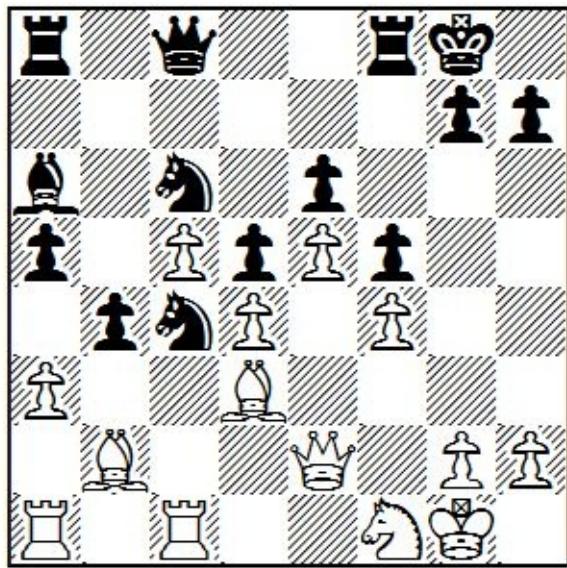
Also tempting is to delay taking on c5 with the line 19 ... Qc8 20 Bc3 Bxc5 21 dxc5 (or 21 bxc5 b4 22 axb4 axb4 23 Bb2 Ba6 24 Rfb1 Rf7 and Black looks better, since he has all the prospects on the queenside) 21 ... d4 22 Bd2 Ne7! 23 bxa5 Nxd2 24 Qxd2 Nd5 25 Rfc1 Nc3 26 Qf2 Qd7! 27 Ne2 Nxe2+ 28 Qxe2 Rxa5. White is the one fighting for equality here, since both a3 and c5 are weak and Black's

bishop is more powerful than its counterpart.

**20 bxc5 Qc8! 21 Rfc1 Ba6**

Black's bad bishop is soon to be not-so-bad after ... b4. Mysteriously, Venkat already looks better.

**22 Nf1 b4**



**Exercise (planning/critical decision):** White's position sits on the cusp of worse, and outright lost, the way brightness and gloom do battle each day at sunrise and twilight. He has a choice of two plans: a) Try and minimize the damage by playing 23 a4, attempting to close lines on the queenside. b) Take the nuclear option by sacrificing an exchange on c4. Now if you pick this plan, then you need to decide between 23 Bxc4 and 23 Rxc4. Which one would you play?

**23 Bxc4?**

When in the midst of difficulties, we sometimes change involuntary pain into the voluntary. Played with the philosophy: we sometimes regret deeds undone, even more than the mistaken actions we undertake. White insists on pushing his idea to its full scope. This is a case of picking between the lesser of two evils.

**Answer:** White should try and minimize the damage with 23 a4! Qb7 24 Rd1 b3! 25 Ne3 Qb4 when Black stands better, but White remains in the game.

Not, though 23 Rxc4?. The move order doesn't matter. Both exchange sacrifices are incorrect. After 23 ... dxc4 24 Bxc4 bxa3 25 Rxa3 Rd8 (threatening d4) 26 Ra4 Bxc4 27 Qxc4 Qd7 28 Ne3 Rab8 29 Bc3 Rb1+ 30 Kf2 Rc1 31 Ra1 Rxa1 32 Bxa1 Ne7 d5 is blockaded and White is busted.

**23 ... dxc4 24 Rxc4 Rd8**

Threat: ... Nxd4.

**25 Qc2 Bxc4?!**

An inaccuracy which allows White to fight back. Correct is the zwischenzug 25 ... bxa3! 26 Rxa3 Bxc4 27 Qxc4 Rb8 28 Bc3 Nxd4! (the knight, of course, is the prime suspect in the d4-pawn's sudden disappearance) 29 Bxd4 Rb4, which regains the piece with a winning position.

**26 Qxc4 Qd7 27 Ne3 bxa3 28 Bc3!**

White is unable to survive after 28 Rxa3? Rab8 29 Bc3 Nxd4 30 Bxa5 Rb1+ 31 Kf2 Rb2+ 32 Kg1 Ra8.

**28 ... g6**

Covering against Nxf5 tricks.

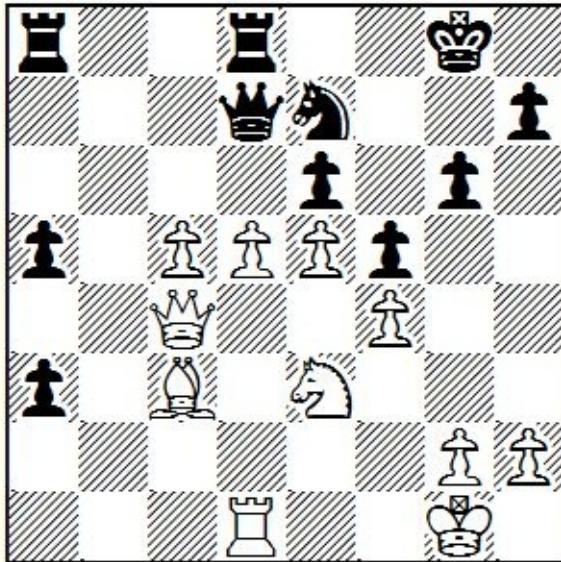
**29 Rd1!?**

29 Rxa3! puts up greater resistance.

**29 ... Ne7**

29 ... Nb4! 30 Ba1 Qc6 31 Qb3 a2 32 Nc4 Qd5 leaves White paralysed.

**30 d5!?**



White senses that passive play leads only to slow death, so he tries a desperate attempt to generate counterplay.

**30 ... exd5!**

We note a springing up of affluence, of a newly prosperous upper class in Black's position. Even a seemingly trivial level of resistance - like a single wasp, next to its hive - if left unchallenged, can grow to dangerous proportions. So Black takes vigorous measures to fight for the initiative. He avoids a trap with 30 ... Nxd5?! 31 Nxd5 exd5 32 e6! dxc4 33 exd7 Ra6 34 c6! Rxc6 35 Bxa5 Rxd7 36 Rxd7 c3 (Black's advanced pawns force White to return the extra piece) 37 Bxc3 Rxc3 38 Ra7 when it won't be so easy to win this one a single pawn up in a rook and pawn ending, although I suspect it is still a win for Black.

**31 Qa2**

The queen retreats from the d5-pawn's accusations with wounded eyes.

**31 ... Qa4!**

A pulse of energy surges through Black's position. This move prevents Nxd5.

**32 Rd2**

Or 32 Rd4 Qc6 33 Qxa3 Rdc8 and ... Qxc5 follows.

**32 ... Qe4**

The queen squeezes with a python's constrictive energy. The nature of White's debility is his weakened light squares.

**33 Nc2 Qxf4 34 Qa1**

Clearly, the white queen and bishop scheme to work an artful mischief on Black's king down the long diagonal, with e6 and Bh8, but there just isn't time.

**34 ... Rab8 35 e6 a2!**

How annoying. Black gains time with the threat to win White's queen with a rook check on b1.

**36 Qxa2 d4!**

A clever interference shot which disorganizes the white attackers.

**37 Bxa5**

37 Nxd4?? fails miserably to 37 ... Qe3+ followed by ... Qxc3.

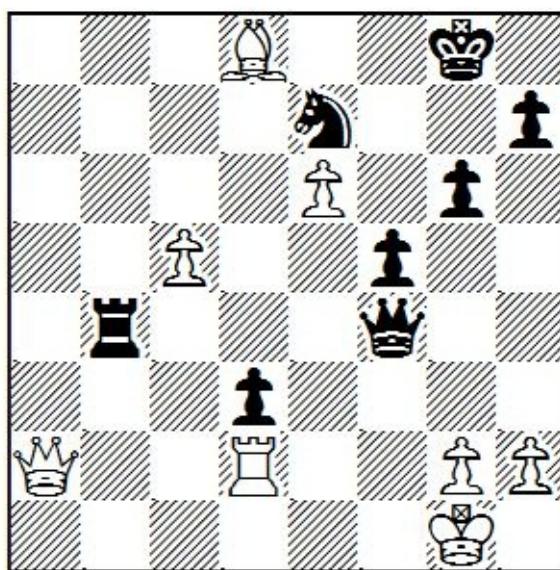
**37 ... d3**

37 ... Ra8!, threatening ... Qxd2, also wins easily.

**38 Nb4 Rxb4!**

Black returns his extra exchange in return for a deadly initiative/attack.

**39 Bxd8**



**Exercise (combination alert):** White's game vibrates with a doomsday inevitability and the face of White's king, now sagging in a petulant droop, tells the story without need of words. Black to play and force mate.

**Answer:**

Step 1: Break the d2 blockade.

**39 ... Qe3+!**

In the queen's world, internal ugliness is the norm, while kindness represents the deviation. Black's queen utilizes a trick tyrannical kings of old would use to increase their power:

1. Force your noble rivals to disarm.
2. Tax them unreasonably, beyond their ability to pay.
3. Seize their (now defenderless) land as a penalty for non-payment of taxes.

**40 Rf2**

The only way to ward off mate.

Step 2: Pin/overloaded defender/pawn promotion.

**40 ... d2! 41 Qa1**

41 Qc2 Qe1+ 42 Rf1 Rf4! forces mate.

Step 3: Pin/overloaded defender/pawn promotion/weak back rank.

**41 ... Rf4 0-1**

It's mate after 42 Qf1 Qxf2+ 43 Qxf2 d1R+ 44 Qf1 Rfxfl. "As you see, your crude attempts at subterfuge have failed miserably," the rooks inform White's king, whose hiding place has been

discovered.

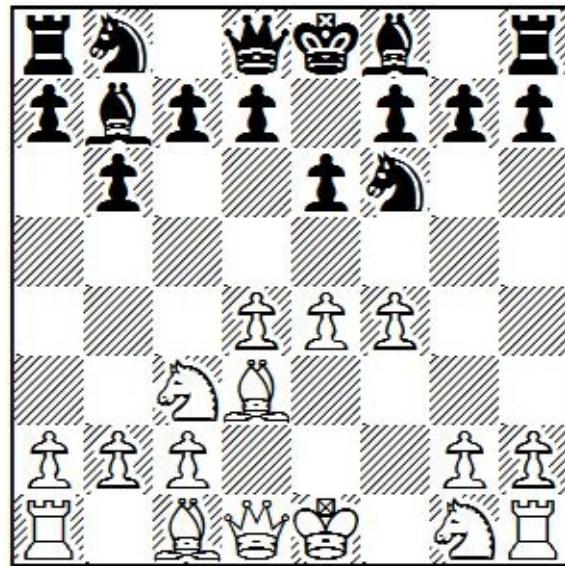
**Summary:** White's plan of Ne2, Nd2, c3 and f3 is artificial and misplaces his knights somewhat. I believe Black gets a reasonable looking French-style position.

### Game 50

**G.Singh-C.Lakdawala**

San Diego (rapid) 2014

**1 e4 b6 2 d4 Bb7 3 Bd3 Nf6 4 Nc3 e6 5 f4**



I thought about covering this more fully in Chapter One, but since this is the second time someone played it on me, I decided to give it a full game in this chapter.

**Question:** Is this our version of an Austrian Attack, which Pirc and 1 ... g6 players deal with?

**Answer:** Yes, something like it, but the Austrian Attack is a dangerous line for Pirc and Modern players, while this one is a bit milquetoast for us Owen's folk.

**Question:** Why?

**Answer:** e4 is weaker here than on the white side of an Austrian Attack versus Pirc or Modern, and White must expend energy to prop it up.

**5 ... Bb4**

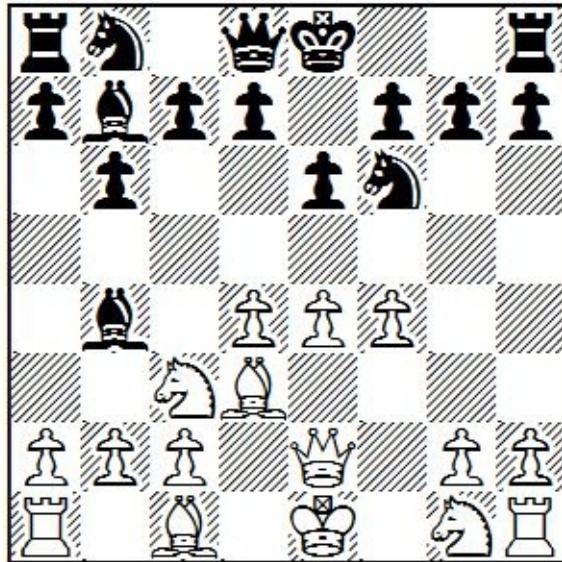
Threat: ... Nxe4.

**Question:** Can Black switch to Sicilian mode with 5 ... c5?

**Answer:** Yes, switching to Sicilian-like play is fully playable here. In fact, maybe that is exactly how I should have played it, since my opponent and student, Gurveer, always plays the Closed Sicilian as White. So he would have been unfamiliar if I had switched to Open Sicilian-style positions. 6 Nf3 cxd4 7 Nxd4 Nc6! either frees Black's position, or gains a tempo, since White's early Bd3 makes it difficult to

support his d4-knight: 8 Nb3 (or 8 Be3 Bc5 9 Nxc6 Bxc6 10 Qe2 Bxe3 11 Qxe3 d6 and the exchange of two pairs of pieces helps Black) 8 ... d5!? (this turns the game into French channels; we certainly need to be versatile in the opening to successfully navigate 1 ... b6) 9 e5 Nd7 10 0-0 Nc5 and Black achieved a reasonable French-style position, since White's knight got chased to b3 with tempo loss, J.Humphreys-P.Andreev, British League 2009. At this point 11 f5 can be met with 11 ... Qd7 12 fxe6 Nxe6 when Black can even consider the plan ... g6, ... Bg7 and ... 0-0, with a safe king, active pieces and pressure on e5.

## 6 Qe2



## 6 ... d5

**Question:** If I'm not crazy about French structures, can I strike with 6 ... c5 than with ... d5?

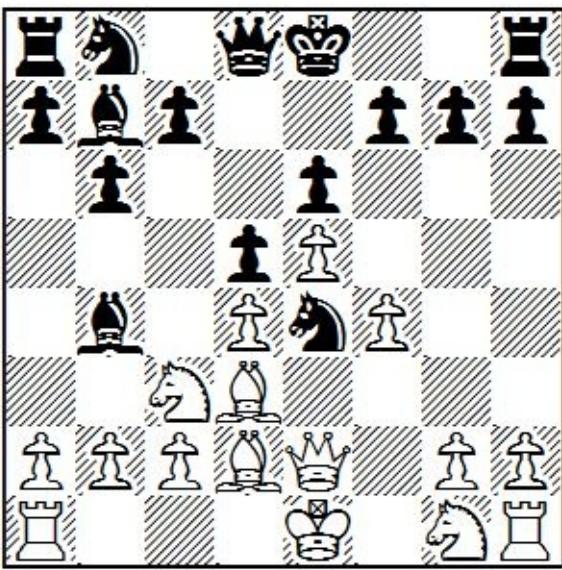
**Answer:** Yes, once again, the ... c5 break is fully playable: 7 dxc5 (7 d5? 0-0 leaves White behind in development and overextended) 7 ... bxc5 8 Bd2 Nc6 9 Nf3 d5!? (9 ... Nd4 10 Nxd4 cxd4 11 Nb5 Bc5 12 b4 a6 13 bxc5 axb5 also looks fine for Black) 10 exd5, J.Eden-B.Ider, Saint Paul Trois Chateaux 2013 (or 10 e5 Bxc3 11 Bxc3 Nh5! 12 Ba6 Bxa6 13 Qxa6 Qb6 14 Qa4 0-0 when Black leads in development, has the better centre and an open b-file; White is unable to play 15 g4? c4! 16 Bd2 Nxf4! 17 Bxf4 f6! when he is in trouble, despite his temporary extra piece). At this point Black can play 10 ... Nd4! 11 Nxd4 cxd4 12 Nb5 Nxd5 13 Nxd4 0-0 when Black's development lead and open queenside lines provide compensation for the pawn.

## 7 e5 Ne4

White only scores 38% from this position, so we can surmise that this isn't one of his best choices versus 1 ... b6.

## 8 Bd2!?

Safer is 8 Qg4 g6 9 Nge2 h5 10 Qf3 Qh4+ 11 g3 Qe7 12 0-0 Bxc3 13 Nxc3 Nxc3 14 bxc3 Nc6 15 a4 0-0-0 16 Qe2, S.Khodjabagyan-G.Biebinger, Bad Bevensen 2011. At this point Black can consider offering a pawn for the light squares with 16 ... Na5 17 Ba3 Qd7 18 Bb4 Nc4. Of course, White should probably decline with 19 a5 and it's anyone's game.



### **8 ... Nxd2**

Playing it safe by picking up the bishop-pair and the dark squares.

**Question:** Don't you win material with 8 ... Qh4+?

**Answer:** I agonized over the decision. When we are unsure if we should implement a risky idea, artistic curiosity battles fear of the unknown. And with my hyper-chicken instincts, I normally tend to go with the latter. I felt that White got big compensation after the exchange sacrifice 9 g3 Nxe3! 10 hxg3! Qxh1 11 0-0-0 when White has a massive development lead, f5 in the air and also Black's offside queen as compensation. Of course the greedy *Houdini* still prefers Black and offers the line 11 ... Bxc3 12 Bxc3 g6! when Black's queen escapes with ... Qh6 and ... Qg7. But even here, White's initiative is in little danger of guttering out and dying from lack of fuel, and I'm glad I didn't enter this line.

### **9 Qxd2 c5**

I also considered preserving the dark-squared bishop with 9 ... g6 10 Nf3 Be7, intending ... c5, but didn't want to waste the time doing so.

### **10 a3 Ba5!?**

When we deliberately complicate, we in essence agree to play blind and do battle with a blind opponent. 10 ... Bxc3 11 Qxc3 Qh4+ 12 g3 Qe7 looks about even.

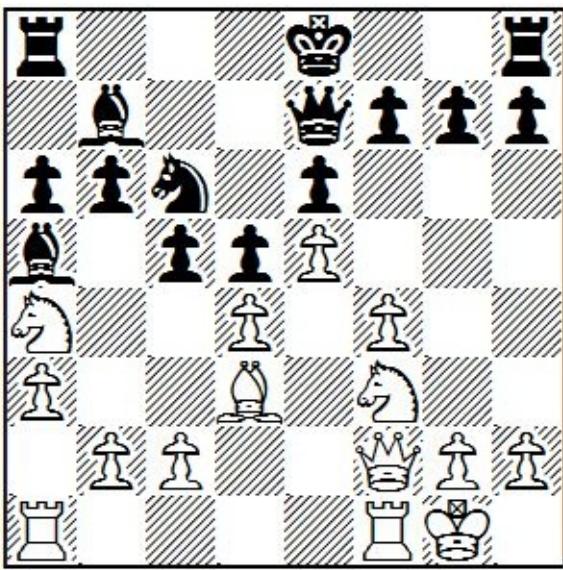
### **11 Nf3**

I expected 11 b4!? cxb4 12 Nb5 bxa3 13 c3 0-0 14 Nf3 Ba6 15 Nd6 Bxd3 16 Qxd3 h6 17 Rxa3 Nc6 when I prefer Black, since 18 f5?! is met with the undermining 18 ... f6!.

### **11 ... Nc6 12 Qf2 Qe7 13 0-0 a6!?**

Intending ... b5, ... c4 and ... Bb6. Also possible is to inflict structural damage with 13 ... Bxc3 14 bxc3 when White's kingside space makes up for Black's structural superiority on the queenside.

### **14 Na4!**



Cleverly preventing my ... b5 plan. My opponent decides upon a minor skirmish on the queenside, perhaps to test my resolve.

**14 ... c4 15 b4! cxd3?**

After this move Black's ventures tend to noticeably stagnate. I should go for 15 ... b5! 16 Nc5 cxd3 17 bxa5 dxc2 18 Qxc2 Nxa5 when White's kingside space and strong c5 outpost give him compensation for the pawn.

**16 bxa5 b5 17 Nc5?**

This transposes to the earlier note. At this point I realized that I was under pressure after 17 Nb6! Rd8 18 Qd2! dxc2 19 Rfc1 0-0 20 Rxc2, intending to swing his a-rook to c1. Black's problem then is if he ever moves his c6-knight, then White infiltrates c7 with a rook. After 20 ... f6 21 Rac1 (or 21 exf6 gxf6 22 Rc5 e5! - principle: *counter in the centre when assaulted on the wing* - 23 Qc3 exd4 24 Nxd4 Nxd4 25 Qxd4 Rf7 when the game is unclear; Black's extra pawn is offset by White's control over the dark squares) 21 ... Qxa3 (Black is badly tied up after 21 ... Qe8) 22 Rxc6 Bxc6 23 Rxc6 b4 24 exf6 Rxf6 25 Ne5 b3 26 Rc1 White is winning.

**17 ... dxc2**

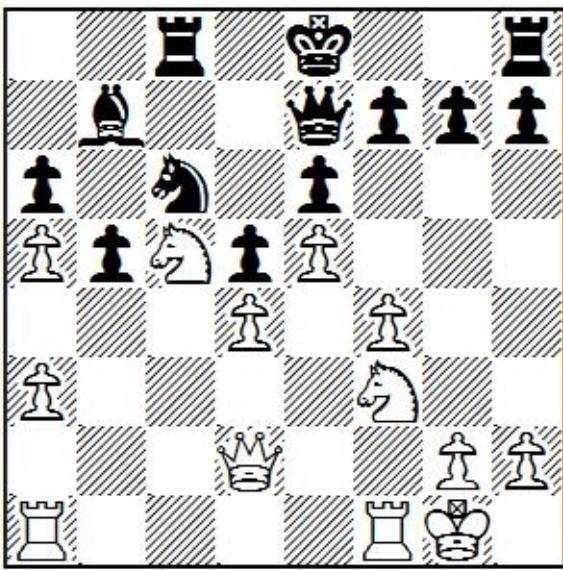
Now Black is okay again.

**18 Qxc2 Rc8??**

Setting up a cheapo. We all get clever ideas at the board. The problem, of course, arises when we attempt to convert our theory into unforgiving fact. Correct is the immediate 18 ... Nxa5 with dynamically balanced play.

**19 Qd2?**

White should go for 19 Rac1! Nxa5 20 f5 when he still gets loads of attacking compensation for the pawn.



**Exercise (combination alert):** White's last move was a blunder and a vista of opportunity opens for Black. How did Black exploit the lapse?

**Answer:** Undermining.

**19 ... Nxd4! 20 Nxb7?**

The nature of sudden trauma, no matter how initially awful, is that its effects tend to diminish with time. Which is why we should never move immediately after one (which is exactly what my opponent did!). So now the shock of allowing one blunder, prompts another one. White had to try 20 Nxd4! Rxc5 when his good knight versus Black's bad bishop gives him some, but not full compensation for the pawn.

**20 ... Nxf3+ 21 Rxf3 Qxb7 22 f5**

This attempt at kingside counterplay fails to bother Black's king.

**22 ... exf5**

If I decline to challenge my opponent's kingside recent territorial gains, his power may grow there. So I expunge his f-pawn, before it plays to f6 to consolidate space gains.

**23 Rxf5 0-0 24 Rg5!?**

The rook's thoughts travel irresistibly in the direction of g7. Some positions are driven by necessity, rather than analysis. And why not? If our nose itches, we scratch it, reacting without thought. This drawing cheapo misplaces the rook. But I suppose that if we are confronted by a problem which has no solution, then it really isn't a problem after all, is it? White should probably play 24 Rafl. When we have before us no good options, the next best thing is to pick the line which inflicts the least pain upon us.

**24 ... Qa7+!**

Black's position continues to enhance with fractional increments.

**25 Kh1**

Now White must be careful not to walk into back-rank tricks.

**25 ... Qe7 26 Rf1 Rc4 27 h3 d4**

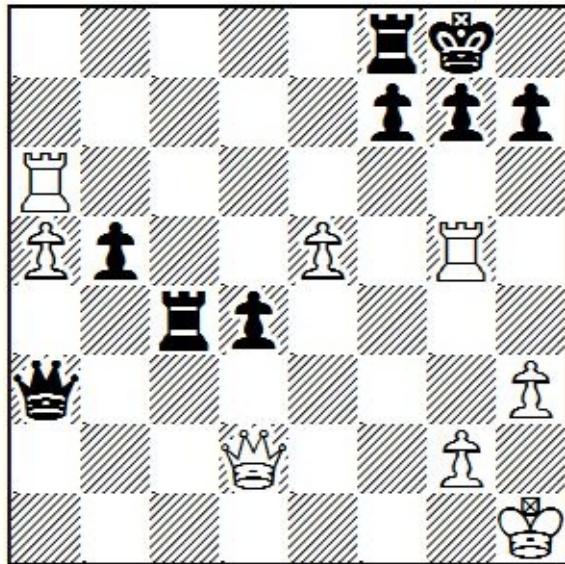
Principle: *passed pawns must be pushed.*

**28 Rf6**

A mistake in an already lost position. Black's king does his best to ignore his enemies' covert attentions. The trouble is with White's rook on f6, Black no longer needs to worry about Rxg7+ perpetual check attempts.

**28 ... Qxa3 29 Rxa6**

Or 29 e6 Qc1+ 30 Qxc1 Rxc1+ 31 Kh2 fxe6 32 Rxe6 Rd8 33 Re7 g6 34 h4 d3 35 h5 d2 36 hxg6 d1Q 37 gxh7+ Kh8 and White's insurgency flounders, then crashes into the solid rock of Black's defence.



**Exercise (planning):** How did Black convert his advantage?

**Answer:** Simplification/creation of a passed pawn.

**29 ... Qe3! 0-1**

After 30 Qxe3 dxe3 White's rooks are both horribly positioned to halt the passed pawn: 31 e6 e2 32 Re5 (response by White's anti-queening unit appears scant, and those who do show up lack enthusiasm for the task of halting the e-pawn) 32 ... Rc1+ 33 Kh2 e1Q and wins.

**Summary:** 5 f4 doesn't work well against the Owen's. Black can either play for a French or Sicilian set-up, with equality at a minimum in both versions.

*Game 51*

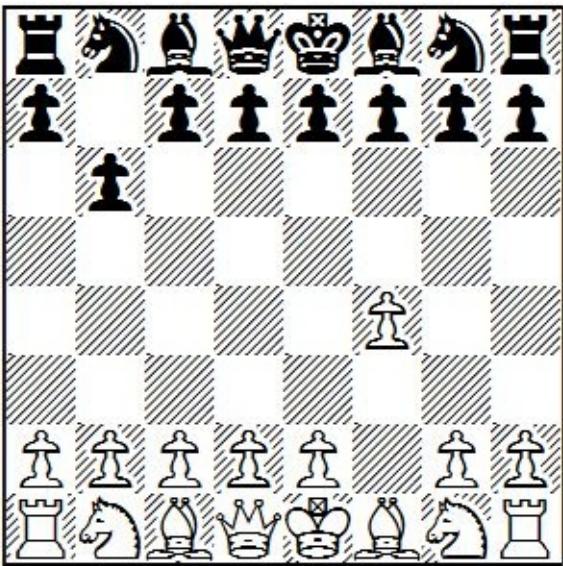
**A.Jakubiec-L.Schandorff**

Danish League 2012

**1 f4**

A Bird's opening move order, where White can play for a Dutch Defence - in any form - a move up.

**1 ... b6**



**2 e4**

**Question:** How do we set up if White plays in Reversed Classical Dutch fashion with 2 Nf3?

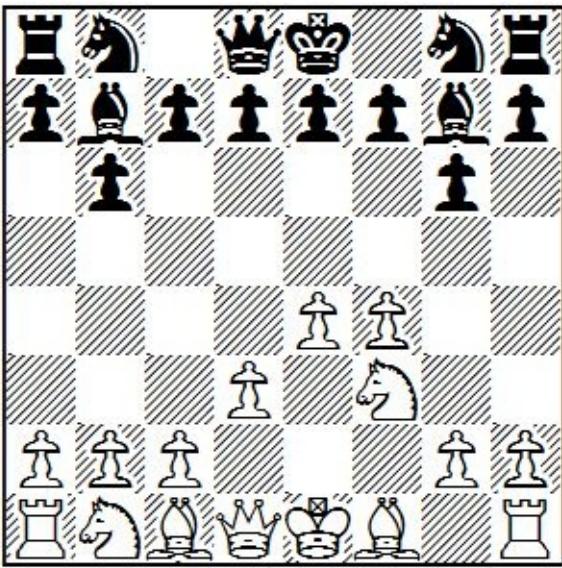
**Answer:** We have many ways to arrange our pieces. I tend to double fianchetto with something like this: 2 ... Bb7 3 e3 g6 4 Be2 Bg7 5 0-0 Nf6 6 a4 c5 7 d3 Nc6 8 Na3 0-0 9 c3 d5 (I would be more inclined to keep Black's centre more fluid with 9 ... d6) 10 Rb1 e6 11 b4, T.Taylor-A.Ivanov, Reno 2004. At this point Black has a promising pawn sacrifice with 11 ... c4! puncturing e4. Now if 12 dxc4 Ne4 when Black regains it favourably.

**Question:** What if White plays Leningrad Dutch-style with 3 g3?

**Answer:** We won't achieve a Reversed Leningrad Dutch position, since we can take on f3 and implement our plan from the last chapter with 3 ... Bxf3 4 exf3, H.Danielsen-L.Cyborowski, Mysliborz 2008. Now Black gets a nice position by playing to control d4 with 4 ... c5, intending ... Nc6, ... g6, ... Bg7, ... e6 and ... Nge7.

**2 ... Bb7 3 Nc3**

Also possible is 3 d3 g6 4 Nf3 Bg7 and then:



a) 5 Be2 (White wants to remain in pure Dutch territory) 5 ... Nh6 6 0-0 f5!? 7 e5 Nf7?! (7 ... c5 looks more accurate) 8 Qe1?! (White should back up e4 with 8 d4!) 8 ... c5 (now the position is as if Black played ... c5 on his seventh move) 9 Bd1 (this is a standard Classical Dutch manoeuvre, intending to activate the bishop via c3 and Bb3) 9 ... Nc6 10 Nc3!? (I would toss in 10 c3 intending d4 if needed) 10 ... 0-0 11 Qh4?! (this turns out to be a waste of time) 11 ... e6 12 Qf2 (Black gets equality at a minimum in the ending after 12 Qxd8 Raxd8 intending ... d6) 12 ... d6 (White's centre crumbles) 13 exd6 Qxd6 14 Kh1 Rad8 15 Qh4 Rfe8 16 Ng5 Nxg5 17 fxg5 Nd4 18 Ne2 Qc6 19 Qh3 e5 20 Be3 Ne6 21 Bd2? (a blunder, but Black dominated in any case) 21 ... c4 22 Rc1 e4 0-1, M.Hermanowski-V.Epishin, Bad Zvischenahn 2013.

b) 5 g3 e6 6 Bg2 Ne7 (Black reacts in Hippopotamus fashion) 7 0-0 0-0 8 c3 (a Bird's player is more likely to play this way since 8 Nc3 d6 9 Be3 c5 reaches positions from the Closed Sicilian) 8 ... c5 9 a4 Nbc6 10 Na3 d5 (Once again, I would keep the centre fluid with 10 ... d6) 11 e5 a6 12 d4 cxd4 13 cxd4 Rc8 14 Bd2 Nf5 15 Nc2 h5 16 b4 Qd7 17 Bh3 Nce7 and Black's queenside play looks at least as fast as White's on the other side, B.Bolderdene-M.Gunbayar, Arvaikheer 2012.

### **3 ... e6**

This move keeps all our options open. We can either play for ... d5, or we can go Hippopotamus style with ... g6, ... Bg7 and ... Ne7.

### **4 Nf3 d5**

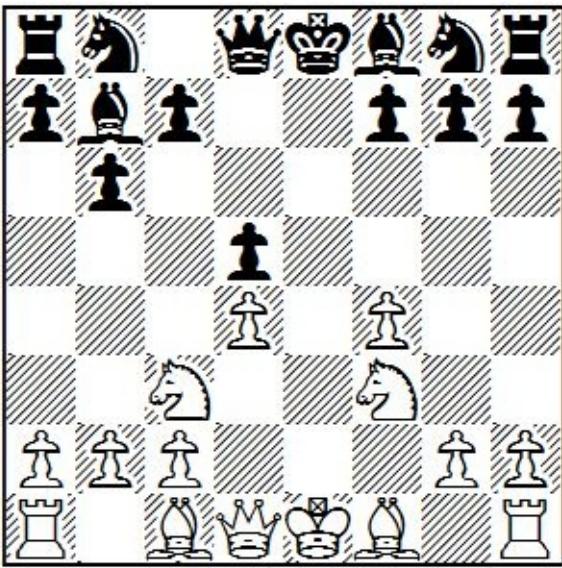
Black stakes out central territory.

### **5 exd5!?**

This is actually White's main move in the position, which leads to a strange sort of Exchange French style game, where Black stands no worse, and has the added benefit of being more dynamic than a normal Exchange French, which can sometimes be a snoozer. Instead, after 5 e5 d4! (this time-gaining strategy is familiar to 1 b3 players; why, oh why won't you listen to reason and immediately order my excellent book on the Nimzo-Larsen Attack?) 6 Nb5 Nc6 7 a4 a6 8 Na3 Nh6 Black already stood better in M.Babula-T.Kulhanek, Czech League 2009.

### **5 ... exd5 6 d4**

Otherwise Black plays ... d4, with advantage.



**Question:** Didn't White just make a huge hole on his e4-square?

**Answer:** He did just that, but gambles that his f4 is less damaging than Black's not so impressive fianchettoed b7-bishop.

**6 ... Nf6 7 Bb5+**

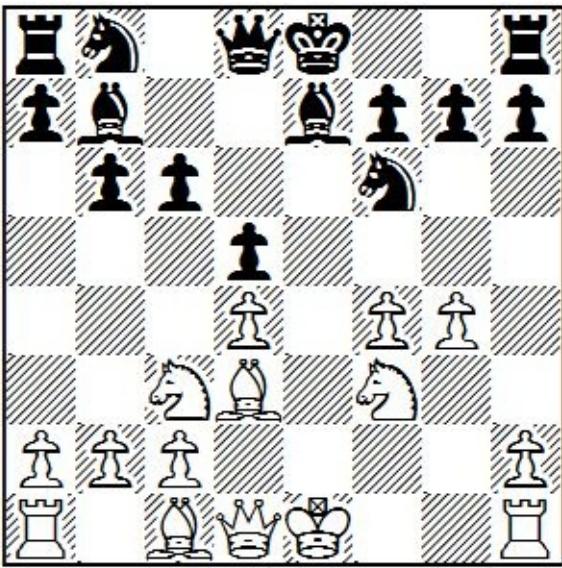
With the intention of provoking ... c6, which weakens Black's grip on e4.

**7 ... c6 8 Bd3 Be7**

**Question:** Why not pin the c3-knight?

**Answer:** 8 ... Bb4?! wastes time, unless Black is willing to take on c3 unprovoked: 9 0-0 0-0 (9 ... Bxc3?! is seemingly more logical, but this isn't the case since White gets a clear advantage in the ending after 10 Qe2+ Qe7 11 Qxe7+ Kxe7 12 bxc3 when both Re1+ and Ba3+ are in the air and Black finds himself in serious trouble in the ending, so far behind in development) 10 Ne2 and White gets a nice version of Jakubiec's position, since he gains time with c3 and transfers his knight to g3, with the hopes of building a kingside attack, A.Valsecchi-A.De Santis, Arvier 2009.

**9 g4!?**



A wild lunge, by its nature, tends to be utterly devoid of any sense of delicacy. I doubt that you will be shocked when I tell you this is a new move in the position. Is it just me, or do you think that maybe White should consider switching to decaf coffee? Normally white Exchange French players don't play the position in Sicilian Keres Attack fashion. 9 0-0 0-0 is equal, since Black meets 10 Ne5 with 10 ... c5 11 Be3 Nc6 12 Ne2 Ne4 13 c3, with dynamic equality.

**9 ... c5!**

Principle: *meet a flank attack with a central counter*. Schandorff wisely avoids early castling. White probably expected something like:

a) 9 ... 0-0 10 g5 Ne8 11 f5 Bd6 12 f6 g6 13 Be3 when Black must worry about future h4-h5 ideas.

b) I don't think it's wise for Black to go ballistic, taking up White's challenge with 9 ... Nxg4!? 10 Rg1 h5 11 h3 Bh4+ 12 Kf1 Nh6 13 Rxg7 Bc8 14 Kg2 Qd7 (or 14 ... Kf8 15 Rg5! Bxg5 16 fxg5 Nf5 17 Bf4 and I prefer White, who gets the bishop-pair and domination of the dark squares, at the bargain price of just an exchange) 15 Qh1 Bf6 16 Rg5! Bxg5 17 fxg5 Nf5 18 Bf4, which is similar to the last note, where White gets loads of dark-square compensation for the exchange.

**10 Qe2**

10 g5 just chases the knight to where it wants to go: 10 ... Ne4 and Black stands well.

**10 ... Nxg4!?**

It's probably redundant for me to inform you that this is risky, wilfully opening the g-file. Why is it that from time to time we almost purposefully endanger ourselves with such high-risk ventures? My guess: there is a part of all of us which delights in the self-generated danger out of sheer thrill-seeking caprice. We are often confronted with a difficult choice:

1. Fight with logic.
2. Fight with emotion.

In most instances, we would be well advised to place more trust in the former, although our hearts always seem to pick the latter. Sometimes it is wiser to evade a fight for which you may be unready, rather than to engage, just because 'honour' demands it.

I would be more inclined to counter in more central fashion with 10 ... cxd4. The exercising of normal precautions doesn't constitute timidity in a person. After 11 Nxd4 0-0 *Houdini* says this is equal, but I would love to play Black here. My intuition says White's king looks a lot less safe than his g8 counterpart. *Houdini* analysis runs: 12 Be3 Bb4 13 g5 Bxc3+ (or 13 ... Ne4 14 0-0-0 Bxc3 15 Bxe4 dxe4 16 Ne6 Bxb2+ 17 Kxb2 Qe7 18 Nxf8 Qb4+ 19 Kc1 Qa3+ with perpetual check) 14 bxc3 Ne4 15 Bxe4

dxe4 16 0-0-0 Ba6 17 Qg2 Qd5 18 Nb3 Qc6 19 Rd4 Bb7 20 Rhd1 Qxc3 21 Qd2 Qc6! (White may save the ending after 21 ... Qxd2+ 22 Nxd2) 22 f5 Na6 and I prefer Black's chances.

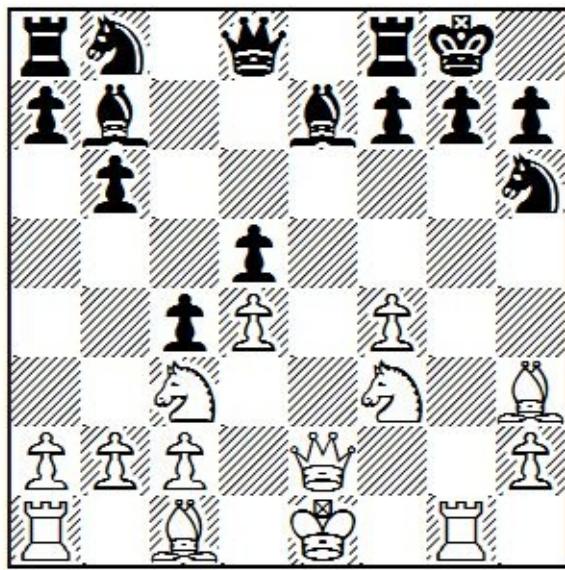
### 11 Rg1 c4!

This gives White the unpleasant choice of handing over the light squares or handing over a pawn.

### 12 Bf5!

A good decision. White loses the initiative, not to mention the light squares after 12 Rxg4?! cxd3 13 Qxd3 0-0 14 Be3 Qc8 15 Rg3 Ba6 16 Qd2 Bb4.

### 12 ... Nh6 13 Bh3 0-0!



**Question:** Isn't this suicide?

**Answer:** Schandorff displays wonderful defensive judgement by castling into it, hanging on to his extra pawn. Comp analysis backs up his decision.

### 14 f5

Uncovering the bishop's stare on the h6-knight.

### 14 ... Kh8??

But this move is inaccurate and leads to disequilibrium around his king. Correct is the central counter 14 ... Re8! (threat: ... Bh4+) 15 Qg2 Bf6+ 16 Ne2 Kh8 when Black has everything covered and after 17 Bxh6 gxh6 18 0-0-0 Qd6! stands no worse.

### 15 Bf4

The bishop surveys his h6 prey with the patient gaze of a lizard, to a landed fly. It may be better to chop h6 immediately: 15 Bxh6! gxh6 16 0-0-0! Nd7 17 Qd2 doesn't look all that healthy for Black's king.

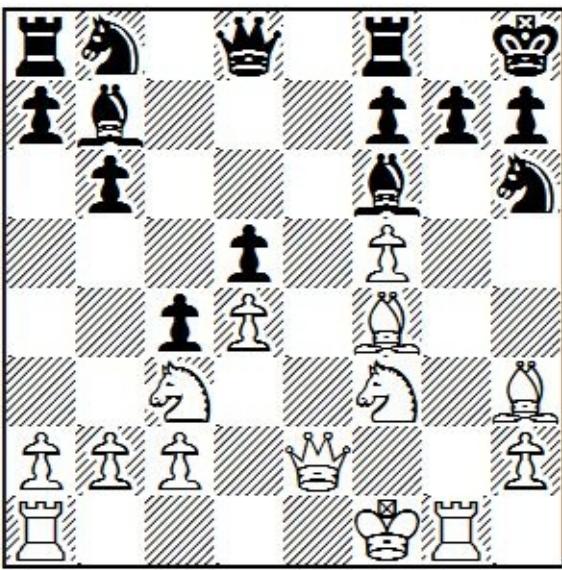
### 15 ... Bh4+

Disrupting White's king, who must get off the newly cleared e-file.

### 16 Kf1

16 Kd2! d2 looks like the safest spot for White's king. It also allows a quick transfer of the dormant a1-rook into the kingside attack. After 16 ... Bf6 17 Rad1 Nc6 18 Kc1 Ne7 (or 18 ... b5!? 19 Nxb5 Qb6 20 Bxh6 gxh6 21 Qd2! Rab8 22 Nc3 Ne7 23 Na4 Qc6 24 Nc5 with a clear advantage to White, who has the stronger attack) 19 Bxh6 gxh6 20 Qe3 Ng8 21 Kb1 I like White's chances.

### 16 ... Bf6



**17 Nb5**

**Question:** Why isn't White chopping h6?

**Answer:** White is unsatisfied with mere damage to Black's structure, and so decides to hunt for larger game. Also, he may fear a loss of control over the dark squares. Black looks no worse after 17 Bxh6 gxh6 18 Qd2 (the queen listens to the black king's conversation with his advisors with her ear pressed to the door) 18 ... Bg7 19 Qf4 Nd7 20 Nb5 Nf6.

**17 ... Ba6! 18 a4!**

18 Nc7 is met with the shocking temporary queen sacrifice 18 ... Qxc7! 19 Bxc7 c3 20 bxc3 Bxe2+ 21 Kxe2 Rc8 22 Bxb8 Raxb8 23 Kd2 Rc7 when Black's superior structure and dark-square control more than compensate for White's piece activity.

**18 ... Bxb5 19 axb5 Qd7?!**

Such critical situations are a time and place for augmented vigilance. I'm not so sure Black has time for this pawn grab. The queen treats her soon-to-be extra b5-pawn as if it were an incalculable treasure, rather than the somewhat worthless adjunct that it may be, in reality. The position remains in dynamic balance after 19 ... Nd7.

**20 Ne5?!**

Now Black gets away with grabbing b5. 20 Bxh6! gxh6 21 Qd2 wins h6, since Black has no time to take b5.

**20 ... Qxb5**

"Is it truly 'avarice' if one merely attempts to right an unjust income inequality?" asks the queen, who always finds clever ways to rationalize her petty thefts, embezzlements and extortions.

**21 c3 Nc6 22 Qg2**

White's queen feels the remorseless erosion of her influence by her haughty b5 sister.

**22 ... Rg8**

Black looks better after 22 ... Ne7! 23 Bxh6 gxh6 24 Qd2 Ng8. I don't believe White's attacking chances fully compensate for the two missing pawns.

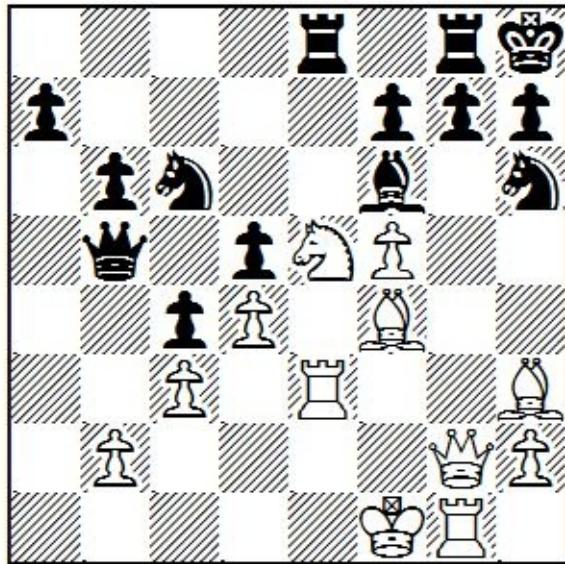
**23 Re1**

Alternatively:

a) 23 Bxh6? Nxe5 24 Be3 Nd3 25 Rb1 Rae8 26 Qd2 Re4 and White's game soon collapses.

b) 23 Qd2! Rae8 (or 23 ... a5 24 Bxh6 Bxe5 25 dxe5 gxh6 26 Qxh6 Rxg1+ 27 Kxg1 Rg8+ 28 Kh1 d4 29 Qf6+ Rg7 30 Rg1 Qxe5 31 Qxc6 Rxg1+ 32 Kxg1 dxc3 33 bxc3 Qxc3 34 f6 and Black is forced to deliver perpetual check with 34 ... Qe3+) 24 Bxh6 Bxe5 25 dxe5 gxh6 26 Qxh6 Rxg1+ 27 Kxg1 Qxb2 28 Qf6+ Kg8 29 Qg5+ with perpetual check.

**23 ... Rae8 24 Re3?**



**Exercise (combination alert):** White plans to swing his rook into the attack via g3. He doesn't have time. Black can make real his past daydreams if he finds the right line.

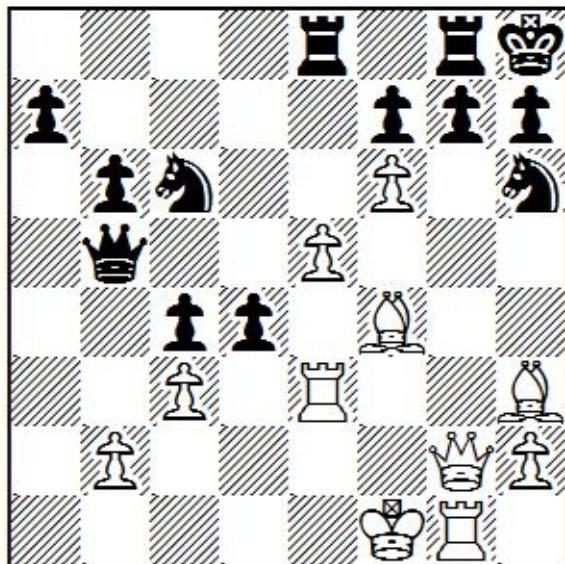
**Answer:** The old central counter principle is applied with deadly force here.

**24 ... Bxe5! 25 dxe5 d4!**

With the opening of the centre, dark, arsenical rings shadow the poisoned white king's glazed eyes.

**26 f6?**

26 cxd4 Nxd4 leaves f5 hanging, as well as the threat of ... c3+.



**Exercise (combination alert):** White's last move was a blunder

in an already lost position. How did Black exploit it?

**Answer:** Double attack/pin. e3 and g5 hang simultaneously and White can resign.

**26 ... g5! 27 Bxg5**

27 Rg3 gxf4 28 Rxg8+ Rxg8 leaves White down a piece with no attack.

**27 ... dxe3 28 Bd7**

White's problem is his pinned bishop is unable to chop the h6-knight.

**28 ... e2+! 29 Ke1**

The vagabond king wanders in whichever direction the wind blows, as his vitality and life force seep away like sand in an hourglass.

**29 ... Rxg5**

Or 29 ... Rxe5 30 Bxh6 Rxg2 31 Rxg2 Qd5! 32 Bg7+ Kg8 and Black threatens both ... Qd1+ and ... Qxg2.

**30 Qxg5**

White's threat is easy to deal with.

**30 ... Rg8 31 Qxg8+**

"You dare to indict me for so trivial a misdemeanour as murder?" asks White's dumbfounded queen, with a hurt look on her face. Now this is a pretty high degree of desperation, but if 31 Qe3 Qd5 32 Rxg8+ Nxg8 33 Bh3 Qd3 34 Qg5 Qd1+ 35 Kf2 e1Q+ 36 Kg2 Qde2 mate. Such glorious bloodbath mates are the stuff of our daydreams.

**31 ... Nxg8 32 e6 Qd5 0-1**

**Summary:** Be prepared for the multitude of Bird's (Reversed Dutch) lines.

## Game 52

**G.Kaidanov-T.Gareev**

San Diego 2014

**1 Nf3**

Compare our position to this line of the Nimzo-Larsen Attack: 1 b3 e5 2 Bb2 Nc6 3 e3 Nf6 4 Bb5 Bd6. Believe it or not, this is fast becoming one of Black's most popular responses to the Nimzo-Larsen Attack, and it is played at the very highest levels.

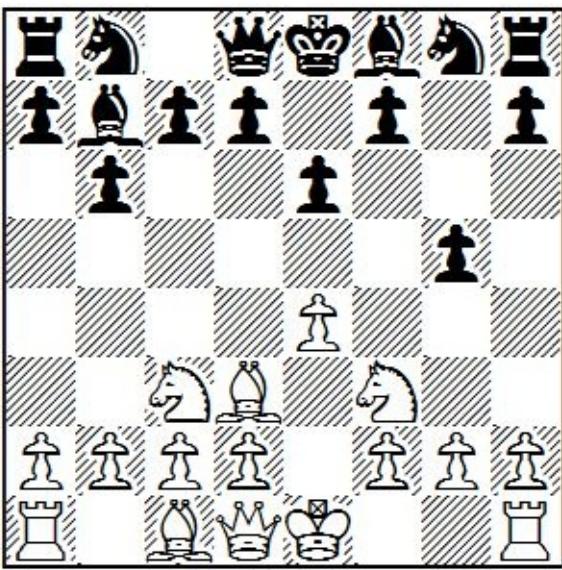
**1 ... b6 2 e4 Bb7 3 Nc3 e6 4 Bd3!?**

A move based on the philosophy: never fight an enemy in the manner of his or her preference.

**Question:** What the hay!? Why did White block his own d-pawn?

**Answer:** This is yet another familiar theme from 1 b3 (please don't make me beg you to order my Nimzo-Larsen Attack book). White plans include e5, followed by Be4, and 0-0, Re1, Bf1 and d4 in a single move, rather than having wasted a move with an earlier d3.

**4 ... g5!?**



A new move.

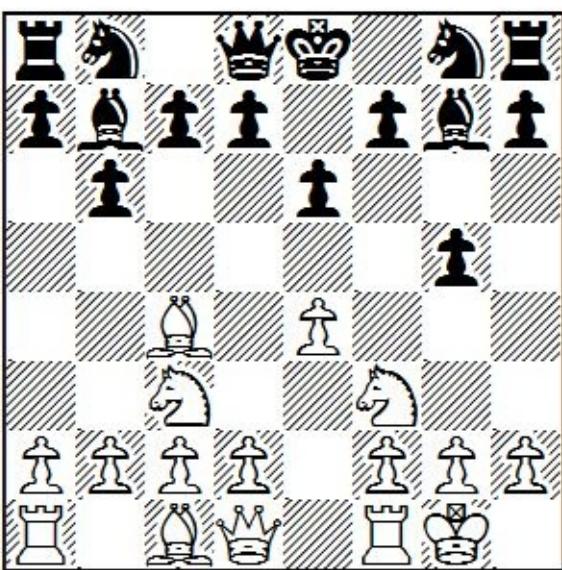
**Question:** Is this a typo?

**Answer:** Fantasy despises practical advice. It isn't a typo. After viewing this move, some of us may be tempted to clean our glasses and Kindle viewers may be adjusting their screens. Gareev takes advantage of White's artificial last move with one of equal or greater artificiality. The point is White is denied d3 or d4, at least for a while, so Black seizes a disruption opportunity from the flank. In my Nimzo-Larsen Attack book there are a huge number of games where White tosses in g4. So I ask: why not ... g5 as Black in the Owen's?

Instead, after 4 ... Nf6 5 0-0 (also very playable is the immediate 5 e5!?) 5 ... Be7 6 e5 Nd5 7 Re1 0-0 8 Ne4 (8 Nxd5 Bxd5 9 Be4 Bxe4 10 Rxe4 d5 is also fine for Black) 8 ... d6 Black equalized, A.Jansson-R.Bergstrom, Stockholm 2012.

**5 0-0 Bg7 6 Bc4!?**

Clearing the path for d4 and possibly provoking ... d5. Note that the autopilot 6 Re1?? hangs a piece to 6 ... g4 which leaves White's f3-knight red-faced.



**6 ... Nc6**

Discouraging d4.

**Question:** Why not 6 ... d5 gaining a tempo?

**Answer:** Early confrontation at this stage can only bring danger to Black, who is underdeveloped. White gets a huge position after 7 exd5 exd5 8 Re1+ Ne7 9 Bb3 h6 10 d4 0-0 11 h4 gxh4 12 Nxh4 when Qh5 is in the air and Black's damaged kingside ensures future instability for his king.

**7 d3**

7 d4?! isn't such a great idea, since it essentially agrees to swap a central d-pawn for Black's g-pawn, opening the g-file for Black's coming kingside play. We meet it with the undermining 7 ... g4 8 Nd2 Bxd4 9 Qxg4 Nf6 10 Qe2 Rg8 (Black makes good use of the newly opened g-file) 11 Nf3 Ng4! 12 Bf4 Bxc3 13 bxc3 Qf6! 14 Bxc7 Nce5 15 Nxe5 16 Bd3 Rc8 17 Bxe5 Qxe5 18 c4 Rc5 when Black's active pieces more than compensate for White's rather useless extra pawn.

**7 ... g4**

Gaining a tempo and seizing temporary control over d4 and e5. The g-pawn continues to apply oblique pressures to White's pieces.

**8 Ne1**

Kaidanov embarks upon a series of incomprehensible realignments. Now e1 turns out to be an awkward square for the knight, who has no place to go. Better was 8 Nd2 h5 when even here, I would take Black if given a choice.

**8 ... h5 9 f3**

White naturally seeks to open the f-file, yet in doing so, he self-weakens key dark squares.

**9 ... Nh6**

Black can also play 9 ... Qe7 and dare White to capture g4: 10 fxg4? is met with 10 ... hxg4 11 Qxg4 Bd4+ 12 Kh1 Nf6 13 Qe2 Be5 14 Bf4 Bxf4 15 Rxf4 Nh5 (threatening the rook and also a big fork on g3) 16 Rf3 Nd4. Black wins the exchange and may later continue to attack down the open h and g-files.

**10 Ne2**

An attempt to regain control over d4.

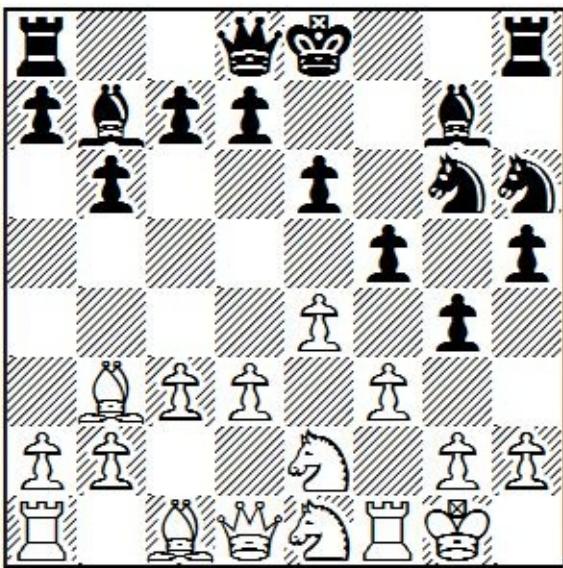
**10 ... Ne5**

Gaining a tempo on White's c4-bishop and preparing to transfer the knight over to the kingside in preparation for an attack.

**11 Bb3 Ng6**

11 ... gxf3!, and if 12 Nxf3?! Nxf3+ 13 Rxf3 f5! leaves Black in control.

**12 c3 f5!**



A Nimzowitsch-approved central undermining. White's pieces are so passively placed, that they can do nothing to punish Black's king, who continues to loiter in the centre, as if he owns the place.

**13 Nf4 Nxf4 14 Bxf4 e5!**

Seizing more dark squares.

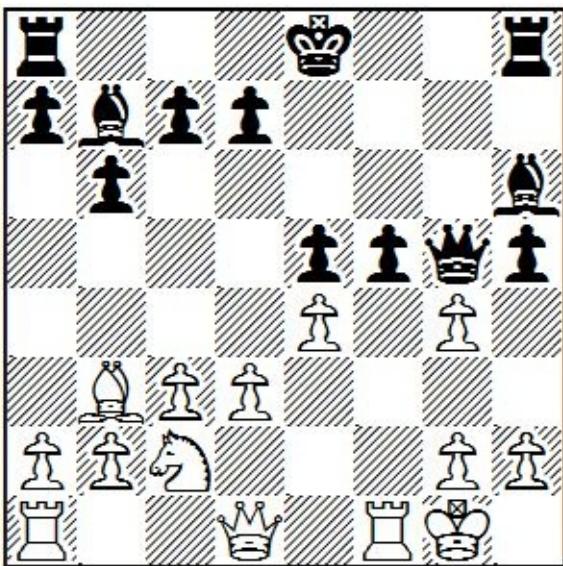
**15 Bxh6!?**

Kaidanov is anxious to eliminate potential attackers. In doing so, he weakens his dark squares further by leaving Black with an unopposed dark-squared bishop. He may have not liked the look of 15 Bd2 Qe7 16 Qe2 0-0-0 when Black's attack is obviously quicker than White's on the queenside.

**15 ... Bxh6 16 Nc2 Qg5**

There is something sinister in the queen's demeanour, which arouses the white king's suspicions.

**17 fxg4**



**Exercise (Planning):** Find Black's best continuation of his attack.

**Answer:** Close the f-file, White's only source of counterplay. Black soon gets two open kingside files down which to pursue his kingside attacking ambitions.

**17 ... f4!**

Gareev alertly adds a necessary addendum. Sometimes it's best to proceed with calculated slowness to further exasperate the defender. 17 ... fxe4 is met with 18 Rf5! Qg7 19 Bf7+ Ke7 20 Bxh5 (threat: Rf7+) 20 ... Raf8 21 dxe4 Bxe4 22 Rxf8 Rxf8 23 Qe2 Qf6 24 Nd4 d6 25 Re1 Bd3 26 Nf5+! Qxf5 27 gxf5 Bxe2 28 Rxe2 Rxf5 29 Bf3 when White is just fine in the ending.

**18 gxh5 Bf8!**

Rerouting the bishop to a superior diagonal and clearing the path for ... Rxh5.

**19 Ne1!**

Adding a much needed defender to the kingside.

**19 ... Rxh5 20 Nf3 Qg6 21 Qe2 0-0-0 22 Bd5?**

This loses time. He had to try the central counter with 22 d4! Kb8! 23 Nxe5 Rxe5! 24 dxe5 Bc5+ 25 Kh1 Rh8 26 h3 Bxe4 and White is forced to return the material with 27 Rf3 Qf5 28 Kh2 Bxf3 29 Qxf3 Qxe5 30 Rd1 Bd6 when he has reasonable chances to save the game.

**22 ... c6 23 Bb3 Ba6!**

Preventing d4.

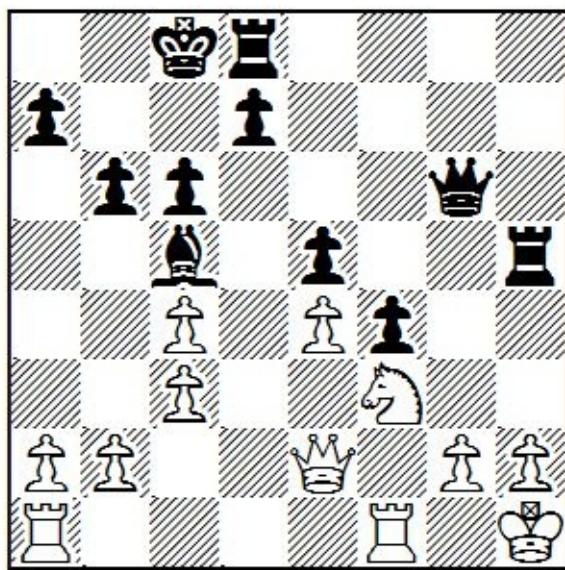
**24 Bc4**

White's game continues to degrade with languid inevitability. Admittedly the line 24 Kh1 Bc5 25 h3 Rdh8 isn't very tempting, but this is the best White had.

**24 ... Bxc4 25 dxc4 Bc5+**

The bishop, who begins to assert his authority on the g1-a7 diagonal, drops a noose over the white king's head and leads him at a stumbling trot.

**26 Kh1**



**Exercise (combination alert):** White's king hides under his bed, a beginner's error, since that is the first place the black attackers search. Malevolent faces circle and feint, before the actual attack. Black to play and force the win.

**Answer: 26 ... Rxh2+!!**

Annihilation of defensive barrier. The defence submerges under the sheer weight in numbers of attackers. This also a prelude to a pretty future queen sacrifice.

**27 Nxh2**

Or 27 Kxh2 Qh5+ and mate next move.

**27 ... Rh8 0-1**

**Question:** Why did White resign? It's clear to me that 28 g4 loses to the en passant capture, but it seems to me that White is winning here if he finds 28 Rf3, which negates ... Rxh2+ themes.

**Answer:** A skilled liar always adds a few drops of truth to further disguise the lie. When we sense the presence of a combination, yet miss it, we feel an indefinable unease, as if wondrous things are happening somewhere else, where we are not invited. In this position, Black can force mate. In fact, let's do another exercise here:

**Exercise (combination alert):** The white king's gripping fear is revealed to all, mainly through the nervous gurgling of his royal bowels. Black to play and force mate in four moves:

**Answer:** Queen sacrifice: 28 ... Qg3! (this is the beautiful point of Gareev's sacrifice; White's king is in entombed) 29 Rxg3 fxg3 and there is nothing to be done about the coming mate on h2.

**Summary:**

This game shows the scope of creativity which 1 ... b6 offers us.

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