

DANGEROUS WEAPONS: THE RUY LOPEZ



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EVERYMAN CHESS

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www.everymanchess.com

First published in 2012 by Gloucester Publishers Limited, Northburgh House,
10 Northburgh Street, London EC1V 0AT.

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978 1 78194 007 5

Distributed in North America by The Globe Pequot Press, P.O Box 480,
246 Goose Lane, Guilford, CT 06437-0480.

All other sales enquiries should be directed to Everyman Chess,
Northburgh House, 10 Northburgh Street, London EC1V 0AT
tel: 020 7253 7887; fax: 020 7490 3708
email: info@everymarchess.com : website: www.everymarchess.com

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Everyman Chess Series Chief Advisor: Byron Jacobs

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Typeset and edited by First Rank Publishing, Brighton.

Cover design by Horatio Monteverde.

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John Cox is an International Master and a former British Junior Champion. His books for Everyman Chess, including *Dealing with d4 Deviations*, *Starting Out: 1 d4!* and *Starting Out: Alekhine's Defence*, have established him as a writer with impressive credentials.

Contents

[About the Authors](#)

[Preface](#)

[Series Introduction](#)

[1 The Aronian Variation](#)

(1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nge7) [2 Classical Berlin: Introduction](#)

(1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Bc5) [3 Classical Berlin: 5 c3 Main Line](#)

(1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Bc5 4 0-0 Nf6 5 c3) [4 6 Ba4 versus the Berlin](#)

(1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Nd6 6 Ba4) [5 New Ideas in the 4 d3 Berlin](#)

(1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 d3) [6 An Evans Gambit in the Lopez](#)

(1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Bc5 4 0-0 Nd4 5 b4) [7 Fighting the Exchange Variation](#)

(1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Bxc6 dxc6 5 0-0 Bg4 6 h3 Bh5) [8 New Ways to Play d3](#)

(1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 d3) [9 Another g4 Lunge](#)

(1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 d3 b5 6 Bb3 Be7 7 g4) [10 A Gambit against the Anti-Marshall](#)

(1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 a4 Na5) [11 The 9 ... a5 Variation](#)

(1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 a5) [12 An Open Chigorin](#)

(1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 Na5 10 Bc2 c5 11 d4 exd4) [Index of Games](#)

Preface

The Ruy Lopez enjoys a long and distinguished history, and one would be forgiven for thinking that, by now, its theory would have almost settled. Recent evidence, however, suggests that the opposite is true; its theory is still developing rapidly and no doubt there are many discoveries yet to be made. These days Black players are less likely to choose the ‘main lines’ – there are a greater number of options for Black that are now recognized as fully acceptable. Perhaps the most obvious example is the Berlin Defence, which Kramnik used so effectively to frustrate Kasparov in their 2000 World Championship match, but there are many other possibilities too. In turn, White players have been forced to fight back. No longer can White expect to apply the Spanish Torture, game after game. Lopez players must be more flexible and prepared to take on a wider variety of positions, or employ a system-type approach with d2-d3, a choice which has become noticeably popular in recent times.

I would like to thank my co-authors Tony Kosten and John Cox, for all their hard work and enthusiasm in researching and writing their chapters. I very much hope that readers are inspired to try out the ideas discussed in this book, whether they are playing the Ruy Lopez or fighting against it.

John Emms,
Kent,
November 2012

Series Introduction

The original concept behind *Dangerous Weapons* was to take a major chess opening and to approach it in a completely different way: to concentrate on variations that are ambitious, sharp, innovative, disruptive, tricky, enjoyable to analyse; ones not already weighed down by huge mountains of theory, and ones unfairly ignored or discredited. To me this seemed like an author's paradise, which I'm sure contributed somewhat towards the inspiration behind this series!

The main motivation behind studying major openings in such a way is to be able to present the reader (not forgetting the author!) with a considerable number of fresh, hard-hitting opening weapons for both White and Black; in some cases to create repertoires and in others to enhance and rejuvenate existing ones.

What is a Dangerous Weapon?

For the purpose of choosing opening variations for this series, usually a *Dangerous Weapon* fits into one or more of these overlapping categories:

1. Moves that create complex, original positions full of razor-sharp tactics or rich positional ideas where creative, attacking play is rewarded; moves which are new, rare or very fresh, leaving plenty of scope for research.

It should be pointed out that even though mainline theory produces a vast number of wonderfully complicated positions, these opening variations lose out heavily in the 'danger' stakes. No matter how sharp and difficult the position, the opening phase is nowhere near as hazardous for your opponent if he is able to fall back on that comfort blanket known as theory. I've played plenty of incredibly sharp lines without any real fear simply because of reasonable book knowledge and some solid home preparation. Apart from a few exceptions, in *Dangerous Weapons* the emphasis has generally been on non-theoretical lines, where your opponent is left to his own devices at a very early stage.

2. Moves that are highly ambitious; ones which aim for total domination.

Perfect for those not satisfied with a quiet theoretical edge as White and eager to search for a big advantage or even a direct refutation, albeit at some risk; or for those as Black who prefer to strive for the initiative at any cost, preferring this over a manageable disadvantage or sterile equality.

3. Moves that have been previously ignored, discarded or discredited by theory, perhaps unfairly so or maybe for the wrong reasons.

Discredited lines can be especially dangerous – the psychological element cannot be

ignored. Facing an opening like this, I find myself asking the question, ‘Why is he playing this variation if it is meant to be bad?’ Often there is a very good reason (a logical improvement, perhaps, which overturns a previous assessment), and in any case how are you supposed to remember a hypothetical 15-move refutation when you only browsed it in a book once, and that was a few years ago?

4. Moves that are visually shocking; moves which seem to contradict the laws of the game.

Disregarding the question of objective merit for the moment, there’s no doubt that a crazy-looking move has at the very least some psychological value. Unleashed on an opponent, it can produce a range of emotions: uncontrolled laughter, perhaps followed by over-confidence; anger (at being insulted by such a move) followed by over-aggression; or perhaps discomfort, followed by timidity. Of course you may instead encounter understanding followed by objectivity – you have to pick and choose your opponents.

Dangerous for Whom?

It would be difficult, probably impossible, to guarantee that every single variation in this book is 100% sound. You have to understand that in some cases ‘dangerous’ can mean ‘dangerous for both sides’. What I do expect, or at least hope, is that your opponent’s ride throughout the opening should be far bumpier than yours!

Guiding You Through Throughout the book there are some icons together with explanatory notes to emphasize significant points. They should be fairly self-explanatory, but here’s a brief summary:

DANGEROUS WEAPON! This signifies a game, variation, sub-variation or position where the Dangerous Weapon has obviously produced the desired effect.

BEWARE! Pointing out immediate danger for the player using the Dangerous Weapon.

ROLL THE DICE! Signifying a variation or sub-variation which is perhaps more suited for games with short time-limits or for players who enjoy taking risks.

TRICKY TRANSPOSITION: This indicates a transposition to a different opening variation. Using different move orders to reach a desirable position or to trick your opponent into something with which he is unfamiliar is becoming a weapon of increasing value.

As the title suggests, *Dangerous Weapons* may not be for the faint-hearted! More than anything, it is aimed at players of all levels who like to be entertained, those who are happy to try out fun-to-play openings at their local chess club, on the Internet, in tournaments, wherever they choose to play.

Good luck studying and playing your *Dangerous Weapons*!

John Emms
Everyman Chess

Chapter One

The Aronian Variation

Tony Kosten

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nge7 (Diagram 1)

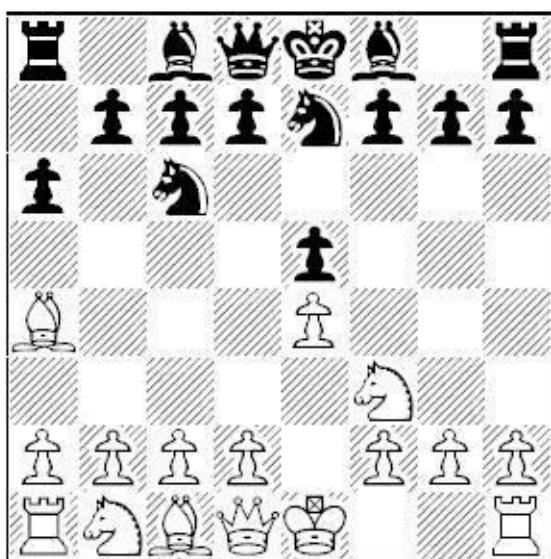


Diagram 1 (W)

I first became aware of this line when I saw Aronian playing it a lot, and getting good results with it (although mostly in quick games I should add). Of course, Aronian is incredibly strong, but this must be one of very few lines where Black has a big plus score in the Ruy Lopez.

Game 1

P.Leko-L.Aronian

World Blitz Championship, Moscow 2009

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nge7

Defending the c6-knight and so dissuading White from taking it.

TRICKY TRANPOSITION: I prefer to play 3 ... a6 first myself, but Aronian's move is a good choice against players who like to play the Exchange Variation (4 Bxc6).

4 0-0

4 c3 a6 5 Ba4 g6 6 d4 exd4 7 cxd4 b5 8 Bb3 Bg7 9 0-0 0-0 10 Nc3 d6 11 h3

transposes to the game. 4 ... d5!? 5 Nxe5 dxe4 is also possible with this particular move order, transposing to a sort of Ponziani.

BEWARE! Black should be aware of 4 Nc3 with this move order, as then if 4 ... g6 5 d4 exd4 6 Nd5 is annoying.

4 ... g6 5 c3 a6

5 ... Bg7 6 d4 exd4 7 cxd4 a6 8 Ba4 b5 9 Bb3 0-0 would also transpose.

6 Ba4 Bg7 7 h3

7 d4 first is more usual: 7 ... exd4 8 cxd4 b5 9 Bb3 0-0 10 Nc3 when 10 ... d6 11 h3 reaches the game position.

7 ... 0-0 8 d4 b5 9 Bb3 exd4 10 cxd4 d6 11 Nc3 Na5 12 Bc2 c5 (Diagram 2)

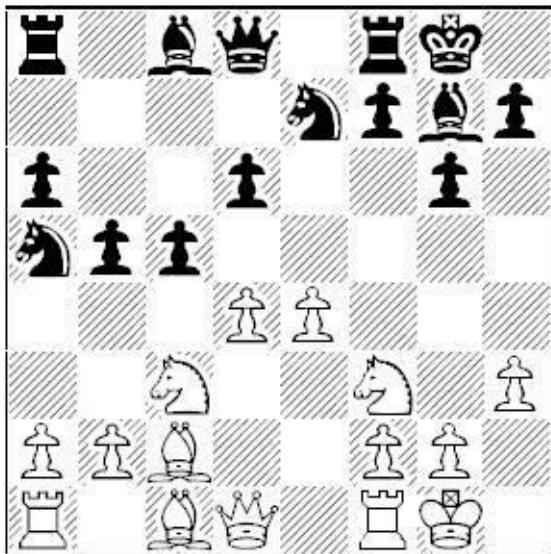


Diagram 2 (W)

13 Re1

For White's other choices see the next section.

13 ... h6!?

Aronian often prefers this way of playing, to stop Bg5, possibly as it leads to a complicated struggle.

My recommendation throughout this chapter is to prefer a more open game, and so I would play 13 ... cxd4 here, aiming for the active backward d-pawn position: 14 Nxd4 Bb7 15 Bg5 h6 16 Bf4 (or 16 Bh4, S.Velickovic-I.Martic, Valjevo 2012, 16 ... Rc8 and then ... Re8 and ... Qb6) 16 ... Rc8 (**Diagram 3**)

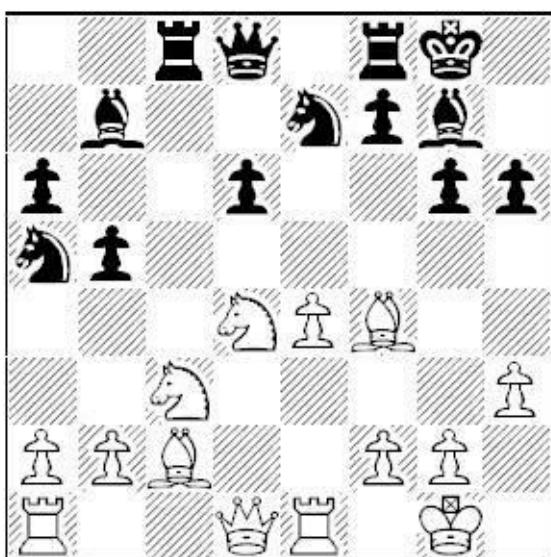


Diagram 3 (W)

(Black's pieces come easily to active posts) 17 Nce2 d5!? (now the e-pawn advances and the game gets a bit messy; 17 ... Nec6! is more natural – 18 Nxc6 Bxc6!? as on 19 Bxd6 Re8 White cannot defend both b2 and e4) 18 e5 Nc4 19 e6! Nxb2 20 Qb1 Nc4 21 exf7+ Kxf7 (21 ... Rxf7!? 22 Bxg6 Nxg6 23 Qxg6 Qf6 would be safer) 22 a4! Qb6 23 axb5! (White grabs his chance to play for the attack, and is not afraid to sacrifice material) 23 ... Bxd4 24 Nxd4 Qxd4 25 Bxh6 axb5 26 Bxf8 Rxf8 (26 ... Kxf8!?) 27 Qxb5 was unclear but unpleasant for Black in I.Chirila-A.Shabalov, Richardson 2011.

14 Rb1 Nec6!? 15 d5

Ambitious – Leko heads for a Benoni-style position, which most 1 e4 players are loath to do.

15 dxc5 dxc5 16 Nd5 is nothing special for White: 16 ... Be6 17 Be3 Bxd5 18 exd5 Nd4.

15 ... Nb4 16 a3 Nxc2 17 Qxc2 Re8 (Diagram 4)

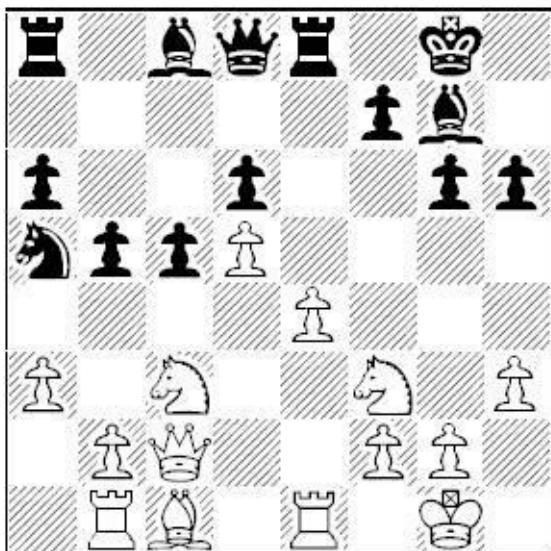


Diagram 4 (W)

Black has a nice Benoni position – his queenside pawns are already advanced and White's central majority is ineffective.

18 b4 Nc4

The ‘offside’ knight is rather useful too, and will now hop around causing havoc wherever it lands.

19 Nd2 Ne5 20 f4 Ng4!? **21 Nf3**

21 hxg4?? is impossible: 21 ... Bd4+ 22 Kf1 Qh4 23 Ke2 Qxg4+ 24 Kd3 Qxg2 with a devastating attack.

21 ... cxb4 22 axb4 Qc7!? **23 Bd2**

23 hxg4 was the safest: 23 ... Qxc3 24 Qf2 Bxg4 25 Bb2 when White is not worse.

23 ... Qa7+ 24 Kh1 Nf2+ 25 Kh2 Nxh3! (**Diagram 5**)

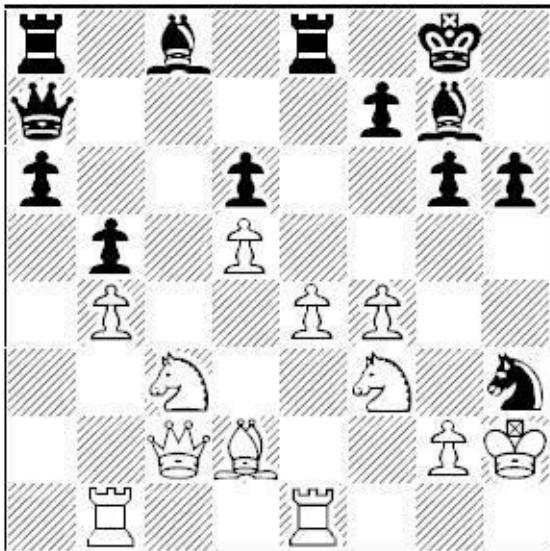


Diagram 5 (W)

No let-up! It is difficult to believe that this was only a blitz game.

26 Be3

Certainly not 26 gxh3?? Qf2+ 27 Kh1 Qxf3+.

But 26 Nd1! would force 26 ... Nf2 when 27 Nxf2 Qxf2 28 f5 would have been messy.

26 ... Qd7! 27 Qd2 Qg4 28 Rf1?

White was in a difficult position anyway, and even after a better move such as 28 Rbc1 (to defend the c3-knight) 28 ... Qh5 29 Kg3 Bf6 he would have to find some good moves to hang on. Still, the black knight on h3 does look a bit strange.

28 ... Nxf4

Aronian wants to play all his moves with either his knight or queen!

Otherwise he could have moved a bishop – 28 ... Bxc3 29 Qxc3 Qh5 and White is quite lost: neither 30 Kg3 Rxe4 nor 30 gxh3 Bxh3 31 Rf2 Bg4+ 32 Kg2 Qh3+ 33 Kg1 Bxf3 will save him.

29 Bxf4 Bxc3 30 Qe3

Or 30 Qxc3 Qxf4+ 31 Kh1 Bg4 32 Nd2 Qg5.

30 ... Bg7

With more time on the clock Black would surely play 30 ... Bf5 first: 31 Bg3 Bg7 and a third pawn drops.

31 Rbe1 Bf5 32 e5

If 32 Nd2 then 32 ... Bxe4 33 Nxe4 f5.

32 ... Rac8 33 Rf2 Rc4 34 Bg3 Re4 35 Qd2 Rxe1 36 Qxe1 dxe5 37 Nxe5?

Losing a piece, but White was quite lost anyway.

37 ... Qh5+ 38 Kg1 Bg4 39 d6 Bxe5 0-1

Looking a Little Deeper

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6

TRICKY TRANSPOSITION: The beauty of this line is that it can arise from so many different move orders (see below).

For example, 3 ... g6 (**Diagram 6**) and now:

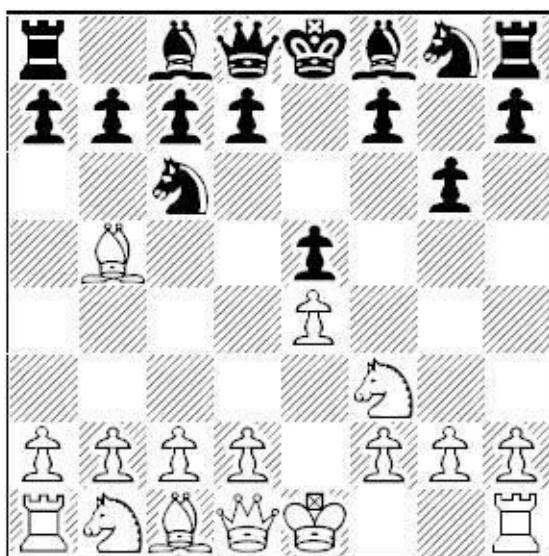


Diagram 6 (W)

a) 4 c3 a6 5 Ba4 Bg7 6 d4 b5 7 Bb3 exd4 8 cxd4 Nge7 9 0-0 0-0.

b) Or 4 0-0 Bg7 5 c3 a6 6 Ba4 (6 Bxc6 dxc6 7 d4 exd4 8 cxd4 Ne7 9 Nc3 Bg4 10 Be3 0-0 is comfortable for Black; 11 h3 Bxf3 12 Qxf3 f5!, M.Chandler-B.Spassky, Vienna 1986) 6 ... Nge7 7 d4 exd4 8 cxd4 b5 9 Bb3 etc.

c) Or even 4 d4 exd4 5 c3 a6 6 Ba4 Bg7 7 cxd4 b5 8 Bb3 Nge7 9 0-0.

However, playing 3 ... g6 you should be ready for 4 d4 exd4 5 Bg5 Be7 6 Bxe7 Qxe7 7 Bxc6 dxc6 8 Qxd4 with an Exchange-type position which is more comfortable for White.

4 d4 exd4 5 Nxd4 is common, but not very good here: 5 ... Bg7 6 Be3 Nf6 7 Nc3 0-0 8 0-0 Ne7! an idea played by Steinitz a few times, Black plans ... d5 with at least equality.

Finally, 3 ... Nge7 4 0-0 g6 5 c3 was the move order in our introductory game Leko-Aronian.

4 Ba4 Nge7

This particular move order might be the most accurate, but that would probably depend on whether you were happy allowing the Exchange Spanish – if your opponent is an expert on the Exchange then you could choose 3 ... g6 or 3 ... Nge7 instead.

Of course, whichever line you choose you will need to examine the early move alternatives for White in greater depth – Ivan Sokolov's recent book *The Ruy Lopez Revisited* has chapters on both third moves (and a lot more besides).

4 ... g6 5 c3 Bg7 6 d4 exd4 7 cxd4 b5 8 Bb3 Nge7 9 0-0 is yet another possible move sequence.

5 0-0

Another move order is 5 c3 g6 6 d4 exd4 7 cxd4 b5 (note that Black should play this before White can advance his d-pawn to d5!) 8 Bb3 Bg7 9 0-0 0-0.

BEWARE! If you use the 3 ... a6 4 Ba4 Nge7 move order, be aware of the tricky 5 Nc3?! g6 6 d4 exd4 7 Nd5, although Black can defend with care: 7 ... Bg7 8 Bg5 h6 9 Bf6 Bxf6 10 Nxf6+ Kf8 11 0-0 Kg7 12 Nd5 b5 13 Bb3 Nxd5 14 Bxd5 Bb7 15 Nxd4 Qf6 16 c3 Rab8, M.Sebag-Zhu Chen, Ulaanbaatar 2010.

Note that many strong players prefer to avoid this and play 5 Nc3 d6 (**Diagram 7**).

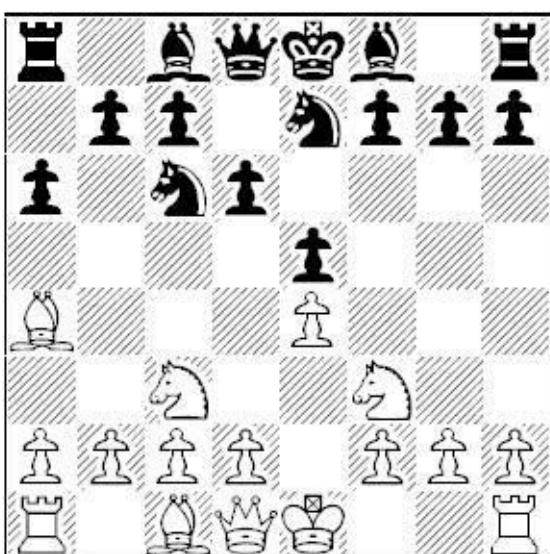


Diagram 7 (W)

For example:

a) 6 d4 allows 6 ... b5 7 Bb3 Nxd4 8 Nxd4 exd4 9 Qh5 (9 Qxd4? falls into the well-known trap 9 ... c5 and ... c4, winning the b3-bishop) 9 ... Ng6, S.Das-G.Pap, Chennai 2011, when White could (and probably should) have played for a repetition by 10 Qd5 Be6 11 Qc6+ Bd7 12 Qd5 although Black would certainly have tried to keep the game alive by 12 ... Ne5 13 f4 c6 14 Qxd4 Ng4.

b) 6 0-0 Bd7 when the natural 7 d4 is once again met by 7 ... b5 8 Bb3 Nxd4 9 Nxd4 exd4 10 Qh5 (10 Qxd4?! is not quite so bad now: 10 ... c5 11 Qxd6 c4, A.Schroeder-D.Janowski, New York 1916, 12 Be3 and White gets a couple of pawns and some play for the trapped bishop) 10 ... Ng6 11 Nd5!? (11 Qd5 Be6 12 Qc6+ Bd7 13 Qd5 repeats) 11 ... c6 12 Bg5 Qc8 13 Rfe1 (M.Fierro Baquero-V.Raineri, Fermo 2010) 13 ... Bg4 14 Nc7+ Qxc7 15 Qxg4 Be7.

c) 6 a3 h6 7 h3 (to stop ... Bg4) 7 ... g6 8 d4 b5 9 Bb3 exd4 10 Nxd4 Na5 11 Ba2 Bg7 12 Bf4 0-0 13 0-0 Nc4 14 Rb1 c5!? 15 Nde2 Be6 16 Bxc4 Bxc4 with good play for Black, E.Berg-S.Ernst, Maastricht 2011, as after 17 Bxd6 Bxc3 18 Nxc3 Bxf1 19 Kxf1 Re8 20 Bxc5 Rc8 White has enough for the exchange, but no more.

BEWARE! 5 Bb3!? (Diagram 8) threatens the not-too-subtle Ng5!

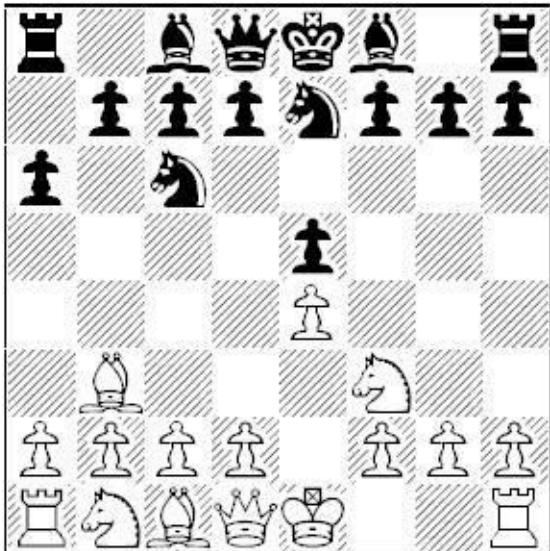


Diagram 8 (B)

5 ... Ng6 is the safest response to 5 Bb3, but 6 d4 exd4 7 0-0 is a little uncomfortable for Black, K.Kulaots-A.Kosten, Belfort 2012.

5 ... h6!? plans ... g6, ... Bg7 and ... 0-0: 6 0-0 (6 d4 exd4 7 Nxd4 Nxd4 8 Qxd4 d6 9 Nc3 Nc6 10 Qd3 g6 11 Be3 Bg7 12 0-0-0 0-0 is dangerous for Black, O.Kanmazalp-D.Hristodorescu, Plovdiv 2012; 7 ... d6 is better) 6 ... g6 7 c3 Bg7 8 d4 exd4 9 cxd4 Na5 10 Bc2 0-0 11 Nc3 d6 12 h3 b5 13 d5 Bb7 14 Re1 (B.Starke-A.Proudian, Sao Paulo 2012) 14 ... Rc8 and ... c6 reaches positions similar to the later material with ... h6 played (which is sometimes useful).

5 ... g6 6 c3

The most popular and strongest move. White plans to construct a centre and put pressure on e5.

6 d4 exd4 7 Nxd4 Bg7 8 Be3 0-0 9 Nc3 isn't very effective here: 9 ... b5 (or 9 ... Na5!?) 10 Nde2 b5 11 Bb3 Nxb3 12 axb3 Bb7, A.Kovalev-L.Keitlinghaus, Ostrava 1993) 10 Bb3 Na5 with a threat of ... c5–c4 trapping the bishop.

6 ... Bg7 7 d4 exd4

This is a positional concession according to classical thinking; normally in the Lopez Black attempts to hold on to his e5 strong point in the centre.

Here, in return for allowing White a mobile centre and c3-square for his queen's knight Black will develop quickly and well, and will then pressure the white centre with classic flanking blows, mostly ... c5 but sometimes ... f5.

8 cxd4 b5 (Diagram 9)

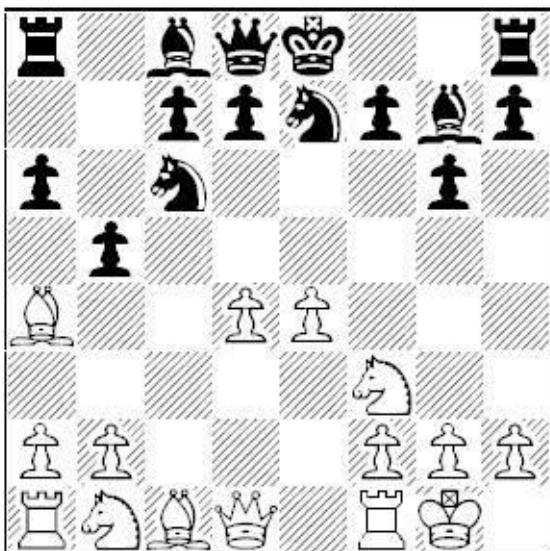


Diagram 9 (W)

Once again notice that Black might as well play this move before White gets the chance to play d5, as the knight would then be short of decent squares.

Still, 8 ... 0-0 is fine, as 9 d5 b5 transposes to 9 d5 bxa4 below, after 10 dxc6 bxa4 11 Qxa4 Nxc6.

After 8 ... b5 we reach the basic position and the question is whether White retreats his bishop to b3 (the most common as he will want to control d5 and maybe attack f7) or c2.

A: 9 Bc2

B: 9 Bb3

Alternatively, 9 d5 Na5 10 Bc2 0-0 transposes to Variation A (9 Bc2 0-0 10 d5 Na5) but 9 ... bxa4 10 dxc6 Nxc6 11 Qxa4 0-0 can't be bad either: 12 Bg5 f6 (12 ... Qe8 13 Nc3 Ne5 14 Nxe5 Qxe5 15 Be3 Rb8 is also possible) 13 Bf4 Rb8 14 Nc3, V.Yemelin-A.Dokutchaev, Finland 2012, when 14 ... Rb4 15 Qc2 f5 16 a3 fxe4 looks like fun for Black.

Before we move on to the nitty-gritty, a quick word about a common position-type which will occur in the theoretical section should White either play d5, Black respond with ... c6 and White capture on c6 (occasionally Black will play ... c5 instead and White will capture en passant) or where Black plays ... c5 and then captures on d4, and this will happen a lot!

Compare with 4 ... Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 c3 d6 9 h3 Na5 10 Bc2 c5 11 d4 when there are many different lines where Black captures twice on d4, for instance 11 ... cxd4 12 cxd4 exd4 13 Nxd4 Bb7 (**Diagram 10**):

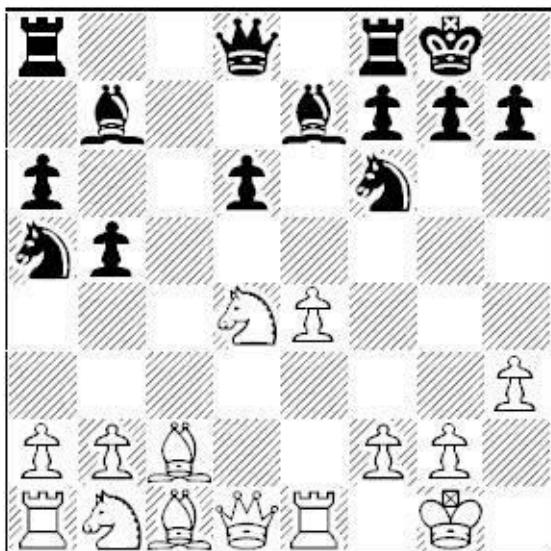


Diagram 10 (W)

Black will continue ... Re8, ... Bf8, ... g6 and ... Bg7 during which White will have plenty of time to put his pieces on good squares.

But now look at the position after 14 moves of I.Chirila-A.Shabalov, say (**Diagram 11**) (and there are many similar positions):

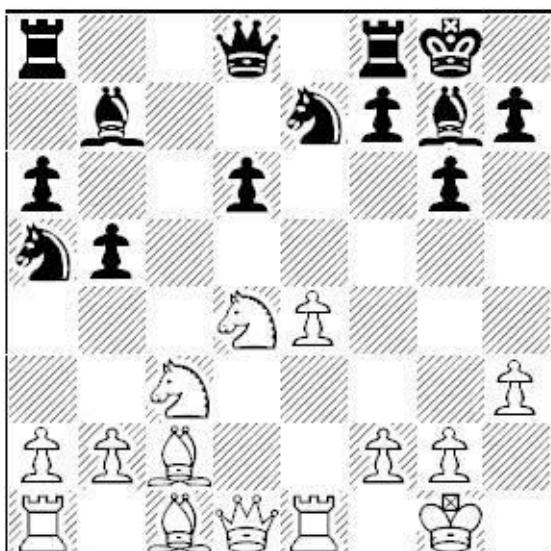


Diagram 11 (W)

The major difference is that Black's bishop is already on the ideal g7-square, pressing on d4, c3 and in particular b2 (often in conjunction with the a5-knight when it moves to the post on c4). Also, Black's king's knight is on e7 rather than f6, and while it no longer eyes e4, on e7 it doesn't get in the way of the g7-bishop and can put

additional pressure on d4 from c6.

In short, Black gets a much more active version of standard lines where his subsequent moves, such as ... Rc8, maybe ... Re8, ... Qb6 and a well-timed ... d5, are natural and strong, without allowing the complete blocking of the position that White can achieve in the Chigorin with pawn-d5.

White, on the other hand, must try to keep a lid on Black's activity which is far from evident, and this explains White's abysmal score in this line.

A) 9 Bc2 (Diagram 12)

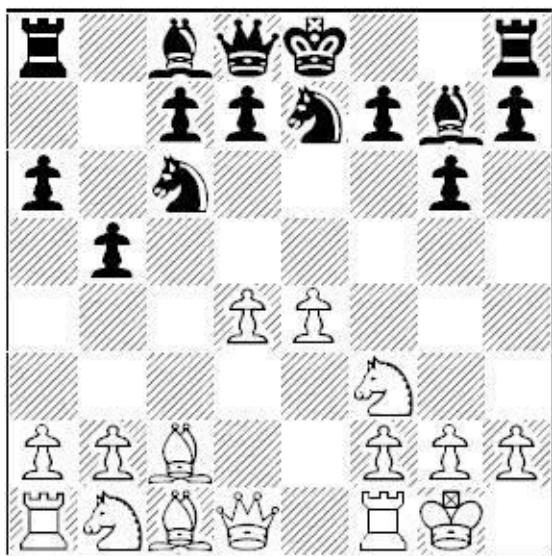


Diagram 12 (B)

This retreat stops Black gaining a tempo when he plays ... Na5, but is quite rare, although I'm not entirely sure why as White will be a tempo up in certain positions.

9 ... 0-0 10 d5

However, with the bishop on c2, 10 Nc3 is probably not a good idea as White is no longer controlling d5 adequately and Black can play:

a) 10 ... d5 11 e5 (otherwise White will be left with an exposed IQP, although this is not the end of the world by any means: 11 exd5 Nb4 or 11 h3 dxe4 12 Bxe4 b4 13 Ne2 Bf5, 11 Bg5 h6 12 Bh4 dxe4 13 Bxe4 g5 14 Bg3, S.De Filomeno-S.Galdunts, Cesenatico 2011, 14 ... Bg4 and ... f5) 11 ... Bg4 (**Diagram 13**).

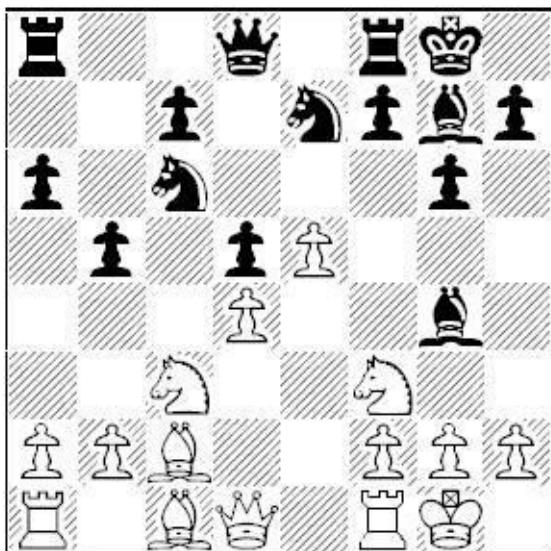


Diagram 13 (W)

This is the problem. 12 Be3 f6! 13 exf6 Rxf6 14 Bg5 (or 14 Kh1 Qf8 15 Bb3 Qf7 16 h3? Bxf3 17 gxf3 Rxf3 with a crushing advantage, T.Esadze-K.Strukova, Albena 2011, and even better is 15 ... Rd8! planning ... Rxf3!) 14 ... Rf7 15 Nxd5?! Qxd5 16 Bb3 Qf5 (White is lost) 17 Bxe7 Nxe7 18 Bxf7+ Qxf7 19 Rc1 Nd5 20 Rc5 Nf4 21 Qc2 Bxf3 22 Rxc7 Ne2+ 23 Kh1 Qd5 0-1, K.Messinger-M.Cornette, St Chely d'Aubrac 2011.

b) 10 ... d6 (or 10 ... b4!? first, to drive the knight back: 11 Ne2 d5 12 e5 Bg4 13 h3 Bxf3 14 gxf3 Qd7 15 Kh2 with mutual chances in R.Potze-F.Erwich, Hoogeveen 2011) 11 h3 can also be played, as in the main line with the white bishop on b3. 11 ... Bb7 (Black develops his final minor piece, ready to counterattack the white centre) 12 Bf4 (12 Re1 Rc8 13 Bf4 Na5 14 Qe2 c5 15 dxc5 Rxc5 16 Rad1 Nc4 17 Bb3 Nxb2 18 Rxd6 Qc8 19 Nb1 Nc4 was fine for Black in B.Firat-V.Erdos, Sarajevo 2011) 12 ... Na5 (still good, even if it doesn't gain a tempo) 13 d5 Nc4 14 Qc1 b4 15 Nd1 c6! 16 dxc6 Nxc6 17 Bh6 N4e5! 18 Nxe5 dxe5 19 Bxg7 Kxg7 20 Ba4 Nd4 with a powerful knight and better bishop, S.Grover-I.Sokolov, Reykjavik 2011.

10 ... Na5 11 Nc3 (Diagram 14)

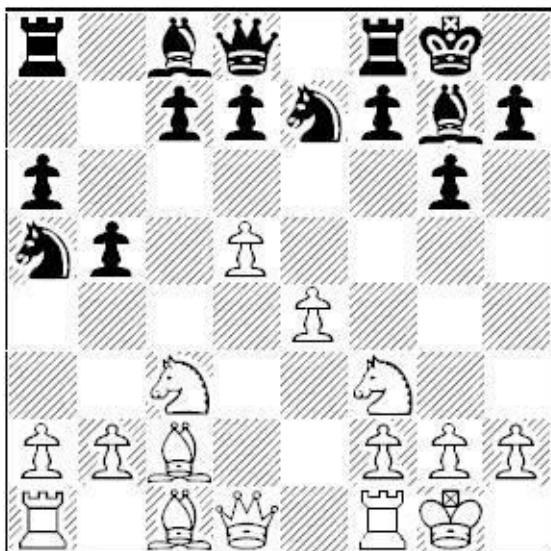


Diagram 14 (B)

Natural and logical, but White has some alternatives:

a) 11 Nbd2 impedes the a5-knight. 11 ... d6 (11 ... c5!? is interesting: 12 Nb3 Nxb3 13 Bxb3 d6 14 Re1 Bg4 15 h3 Bxf3 16 Qxf3 Qd7 17 Qg3 c4 18 Bd1 f5! and Black is already better, P.Skovgaard-N.Nestorovic, Paracin 2012. Instead, 12 dxc6 dxc6 is good, W.Wittmann-K.Pilgaard, Budapest 2007; 12 ... Nexc6!? likewise.) and now:

a1) 12 Nb3 c5 led to a Benoni position in D.Sharma-M.Venkatesh, Aurangabad 2011: 13 Nxa5 Qxa5 14 a4 Rb8 15 Bf4 Qd8 16 axb5 Rxb5 17 Ra2 f5! (an advantage of having the king's knight on e7) 18 exf5 Nxf5 19 Bg5 Bf6 20 Bc1 Nd4 and Black was on top.

a2) 12 Rb1 (White is ready to play b4) 12 ... c6 13 b4 (13 dxc6 Nxc6 14 b4 d5 equalizes immediately, R.Meessen-M.Geenen, Eupen 2008) 13 ... Nc4 (13 ... Nb7!? is reasonable; the idea is to play ... a5 and ... c5, then exchange twice on b4 and get the c5-square for the knight) 14 Nxc4 bxc4 15 dxc6 Nxc6 16 h3 (16 Qd5!?) 16 ... Bb7 (16 ... Be6) 17 Bg5 Qd7 18 a3 h6 19 Bh4 (K.Sasikiran-L.Gofshtein, Zafra 2007) 19 ... Rfe8 20 Re1 Ne5 21 Nxe5 Rxe5 planning ... Rae8 and maybe ... d5.

b) 11 a4 (to weaken Black's control of c4) 11 ... b4 12 Nbd2 d6 (**Diagram 15**) and now:

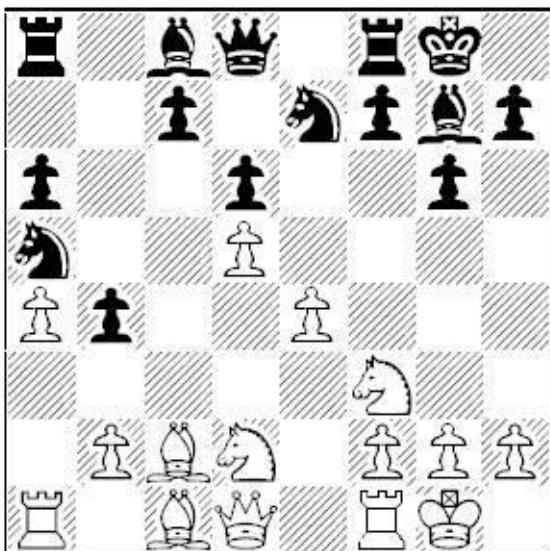


Diagram 15 (W)

b1) 13 Re1 c6 14 Nb3 (14 dxc6 Nexc6) 14 ... Nxb3 (or 14 ... cxd5 15 exd5 Re8) 15 Bxb3 Bg4 16 Bg5 c5 17 Rb1 h6 18 Bh4 g5 19 Bg3 f5! 20 exf5 Nxg5 and the pin on f3 is very awkward for White, V.Kupreichik-S.Arkhipov, Muenster 1991.

b2) 13 Nb3 c5 (13 ... c6!?) 14 Nxa5 Qxa5 15 Nd2 Qd8 with a further split:

b21) 16 a5 f5! (with the knight on e7 Black always has this possibility to weaken White's centre and gain play on the kingside) 17 Nc4 fxe4 18 Bxe4 Bf5 19 Bf3 Ra7 20 Be3 Bc8! 21 Re1 Nf5 22 Bf4 Raf7. Black has strong play on the f-file and use of the d4-square, D.Sharma-A.Abdulla, Dhaka 2004. In addition, 18 ... Nf5 first, and then ... Ra7 might be even more accurate.

b22) With 16 Nc4 White achieves his positional aim and establishes a piece on c4, threatening Bf4, but Black has plenty of resources: 16 ... a5! 17 Re1 (17 Bf4 Ba6) 17 ... Ba6 18 Bb3 Nc8 (if Black can't successfully play ... f5 here then his knight is misplaced on e7, so he hastens to improve it; 18 ... f5?! is met by 19 e5) 19 Rb1 Nb6!? (19 ... Bxc4!? 20 Bxc4 Nb6 21 Bb5 c4, and 19 ... f5 is playable now, with the knight on c8: 20 Bf4 Ra7) 20 Nxa5 Qc7 21 Be3 (21 Nc6! c4 22 a5 saves the bishop; 22 ... Nd7 23 Ba4 Nc5 24 Be3 Nd3 25 Bb6 Qb7 26 Re2 and it's not clear to me that Black has quite enough compensation for the pawn) 21 ... Nxa4! 22 Bxa4 Qxa5 23 Bc6 Ra7 24 Ra1 Qb6 25 Qd2 Bb7 26 Rxa7 Qxa7 27 Bxb7 Qxb7 28 Bh6 Bxh6 29 Qxh6 c4 and following ... Rc8 and ... c3 Black will have a dangerous passed c-pawn, M.Palac-S.Arkhipov, Kecskemet 1991.

c) 11 d6?! (**Diagram 16**) is pointless, as it does nothing to inhibit Black's development:

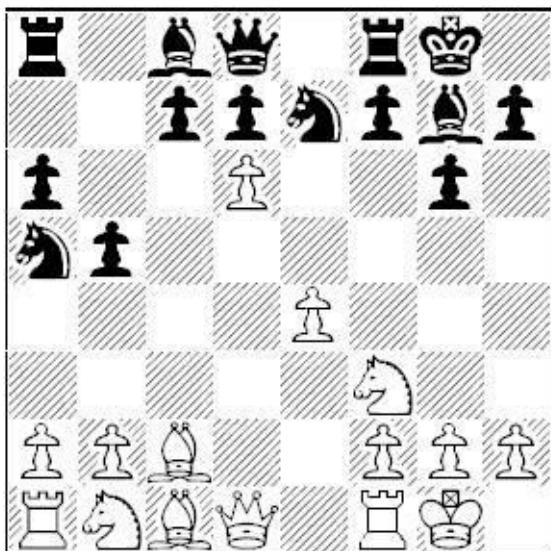


Diagram 16 (B)

11 ... cxd6 12 Nc3 Bb7 13 Qxd6 Nc4 14 Qd3 d5 and Black is already better, F.Rattinger-C.Hanley, Feffernitz 2005.

d) 11 Bd2!? c5 (after 11 ... Nc4 12 Bc3 Nxb2 13 Qe2 Nc4 14 Bxg7 Kxg7 15 Nbd2 White has some compensation for the pawn) 12 d6 Nec6 13 Nc3 Nc4 (13 ... Bb7 14 Nd5 Nc4 15 Bg5 f6 is a safe alternative) 14 Bg5 Nxb2!? 15 Qc1 f6 16 Be3 Nc4 17 Bxc5 Bb7 18 Nd5 Kh8 19 Rb1 N6e5 20 Nxe5 Bxd5 21 Nxg6+ hxg6 22 exd5 f5 23 Re1 Qf6 24 Rb3 Rfc8 25 Bb4 Nxd6 26 Qd1 with chances to both sides, Y.Zherebukh-V.Zvjaginsev, Aix-les-Bains 2011.

11 ... d6 (Diagram 17)

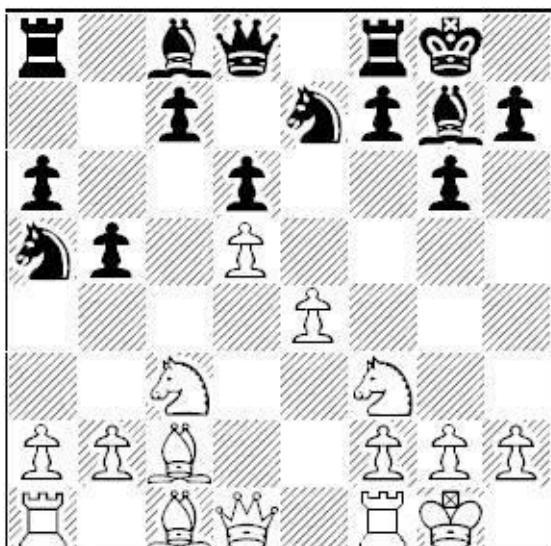


Diagram 17 (W)

Black will now prepare ... c6 (or ... c5).

Should Black play ... c6 or ... c5?

In most of the games where White plays an early d5 Black quickly responds with ... c5, and White captures en passant, thus reaching the same position as if Black had played ... c6 and White took on c6, of course.

However, when Black plays ... c6 White rarely or never allows Black to take on d5, as not only would his d5-pawn then be under constant pressure, but he would allow Black to use the f5-square for his pieces (this could prove particularly interesting to the e7-knight, which currently lacks a move).

On the other hand, when Black prefers ... c5 he not only allows d5xc6 e.p., but also gives White the option of playing a Benoni-style position. Of course, Black might be happy with this – he already has his ... b5 queenside advance played so doesn't have to worry about White playing a4 and planting a knight on the strong c4-square (as happens in so many mainline Modern Benonis), but his e7-knight is short of moves and he has no counterplay against e4. Black's one advantage on the kingside is that he might be able to arrange a timely ... f5 (taking care not to allow a white knight into e6 via g5 or f4!). That being so he can then capture on e4 when he will have the f5-square for his knight and play on the f-file (reinforced by ... Ra7–f7).

In short, I recommend playing ... c6 (after appropriate preparation) rather than ... c5 in most such positions.

Actually, I suspect that the reason White rarely avoids the capture on c6 is that, as a 1 e4 player he is not comfortable playing Benoni positions! This would also explain why he tends to play them badly when they do arise!

12 Re1

White has a choice:

a) 12 Rb1. Often a useful move for White, defending b2 and taking the rook off a potentially exposed diagonal. 12 ... Bb7 (or 12 ... Re8 13 h3 b4 14 Ne2 c5 15 dxc6 Nexc6 16 Bg5 Bf6 17 Bf4 Ne5 18 Nxe5 dxe5 19 Qxd8 Rxd8 20 Be3 Nc4 with advantage, M.Andersen-J.Glud, Aarhus 2009) and now:

a1) 13 Be3 (to exchange dark-squared bishops with Bd4) 13 ... c5 14 dxc6 Naxc6 15 Bf4 Ne5 16 Nxe5 dxe5 (16 ... Bxe5!?) 17 Bg5 Qxd1 18 Rfxd1 Nc6 19 Bb3 b4 20 Nd5 h6 21 Be3 Nd4 22 Bc4 Kh7 23 f4?! Rac8 (23 ... Nc2) 24 Rbc1 Bxd5! 25 exd5 Nf5 26 Bb6 exf4 27 b3 was not too clear in S.Alavi Moghaddam-H.Nezad, Sharjah 2011.

a2) 13 h3 Rc8! 14 Bg5 h6 and now:

a21) 15 Bh4 Qd7 16 Qd3 c6 17 dxc6 Bxc6! (keeping the two knights controlling d5 and c4) 18 Nd4 Ba8 19 Bg3 Rfd8 20 Rfe1 Qa7 (without making any obvious mistakes White is already in trouble!) 21 Nde2 Nc4 22 Red1 d5!. The ‘freeing’ blow – Black’s pieces are so active that White is close to losing, V.Duscheck-H.Nezad, Biel 2010.

a22) 15 Bf4 Nc4 16 Nd4 c6 17 dxc6 Nxc6 18 Nxc6 Rxc6 19 Bb3 and here Black captured on b2 in F.Corrales Jimenez-M.Narciso Dublan, Barbera del Valles 2008, but 19 ... Re8 is better, keeping the threats and bringing an extra unit into the fray.

b) 12 Nd4 (**Diagram 18**) tries to control c6, but Black has just too many pieces covering this square.

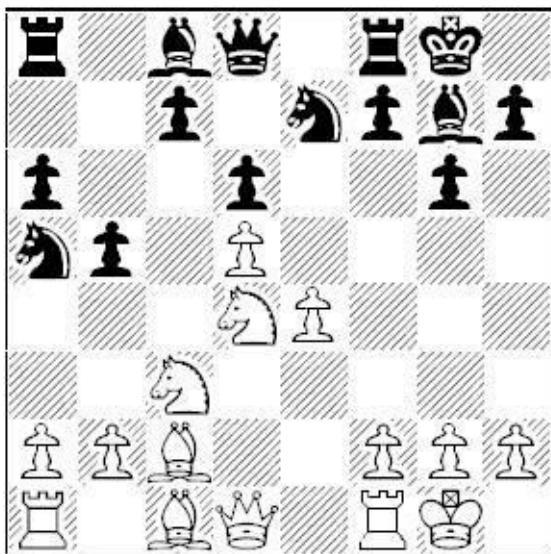


Diagram 18 (B)

12 ... Bb7 13 Rb1 c5 (13 ... c6 is likely to transpose, but I like 13 ... Rc8!, just waiting to see what White will play before breaking with ... c6, or playing ... b4 first and then ... c6) 14 dxc6 Naxc6 (14 ... Nexc6 15 Nxc6 Bxc6 is also good: 16 Nd5 Bxd5

17 exd5 Nc4) 15 Nxc6 Nxc6 16 Be3 Rc8 17 a4 Nb4 18 Bb3 bxa4 19 Bxa4 and now 19 ... d5 20 exd5 Nxd5 21 Nxd5 Qxd5 22 Qxd5 Bxd5 led to a draw in M.Brodsky-J.Murey, Rishon Le Ziyyon 1998.

12 ... Bb7

12 ... b4 is also logical. 13 Ne2 (the knight is not well placed here and will have to move again) 13 ... Bg4 (the immediate 13 ... c6 – or 13 ... c5 – 14 dxc6 Bg4 might be more accurate, when 15 Ned4 Nexc6 transposes) 14 Ned4 (14 Nf4) 14 ... c5 15 dxc6 Nexc6 16 Nxc6 Nxc6 17 Qd5 (17 h3 is met by 17 ... Bxf3 18 Qxf3 Nd4 19 Qd3 Nxc2 20 Qxc2 Rc8) 17 ... Rc8 18 Ba4 Be6 19 Qd3 Ne5 20 Nxe5 Bxe5 21 Bb3 a5 22 Rb1 Qf6 and Black's active pieces more than make up for the backward d-pawn, B.Munguntuul-Zhu Chen, Ulaanbaatar 2010.

13 Nd4 c5

Or 13 ... Rc8 first, then ... c6.

14 dxc6 Nexc6 15 Nxc6 Bxc6 16 Nd5 Rc8 17 Bb3 (Diagram 19)

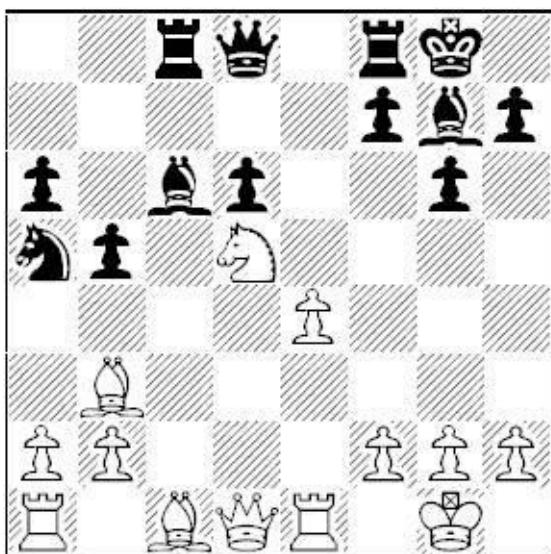


Diagram 19 (B)

17 ... Nc4

I prefer the more flexible 17 ... Re8 myself, keeping the option of capturing on b3.

18 Rb1 Re8

18 ... Ba8! is better, as Black would prefer recapturing on c4 with his rook.

19 Bxc4 bxc4 20 Bd2

20 Bf4.

20 ... Bxd5 21 exd5 Qb6

21 ... Rxe1+ 22 Qxe1 Qe8! might give Black a little nibble.

22 Bc3 Qc5

This is roughly equal, Z.Fusthy-E.Mozes, Hungarian League 1994.

B) 9 Bb3 0-0 (Diagram 20)

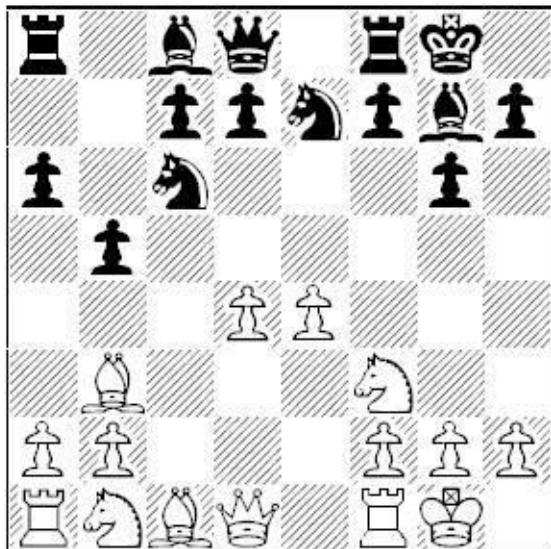


Diagram 20 (W)

Now there is a further sub-division:

B1: 10 d5

B2: 10 Nc3

Other typical moves will almost certainly transpose to Variation B2. For example, 10 h3 d6 11 Nc3 or 10 Re1 d6 11 h3 Na5 12 Bc2 c5 13 Nc3.

10 Bg5 h6 11 Bh4 d6 12 h3 has some independent value: 12 ... Na5 (12 ... g5!? is a bit risky: 13 Bxg5 hxg5 14 Nxg5 Bf6 15 Qh5 Bxg5 16 Qxg5+, and now not 14 ... Nf5??, D.Boix Moreno-L.Ventos Navarro, La Pobla de Lillet 1996, as 15 Qh5 Nh6 16 Qg6 wins) 13 Bc2 Re8.

10 a4!? likewise: 10 ... Na5!? 11 axb5 Nxb3 12 Qxb3 Rb8 13 Nc3 axb5 14 Bg5 h6 15 Bh4 g5 16 Bg3 d6 17 h3 Kh8 18 Ra5 Bd7 (18 ... f5!?) 19 Nd5? Be6 winning a pawn, M.Kunal-M.Dzhumaev, New Delhi 2012.

B1) 10 d5

This advance is possible here, too, although White may find himself a tempo down on the lines in Variation A.

10 ... Na5 (Diagram 21)

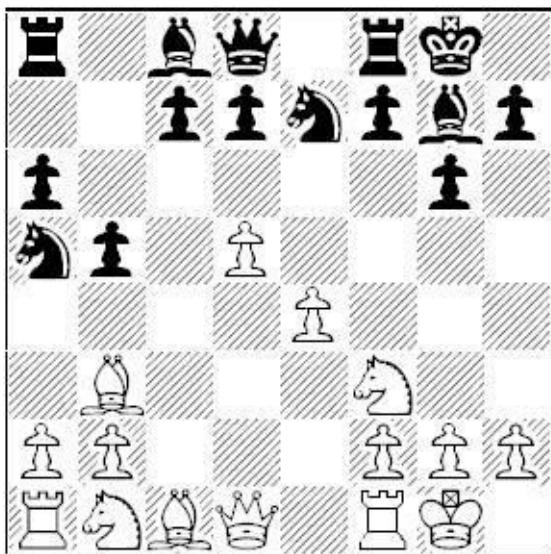


Diagram 21 (W)

11 Bc2

a) 11 Bd2!? is interesting. 11 ... Nxb3 (11 ... Bxb2 12 Bxa5 Bxa1 13 d6 is the point, although after 13 ... Nc6 14 dxc7 Qf6 it is not clear that White has quite enough compensation for the exchange; 11 ... c5 12 Bc3 d6 would give Black a reasonable Benoni-type position) 12 Qxb3 d6 (12 ... c5 is again possible: 13 Bc3 d6 14 Rd1!? f6! – keeping the dark-squared bishops on – 15 h3 g5!? 16 Nh2 Ng6 17 Bd2 f5! with advantage, D.Rogic-M.Rade, Sibenik 2012, but 14 Bxg7 is better) 13 Bc3 c5 14 dxc6 Be6 15 Qa3, S.Erenburg-L.Gofshtein, Ashdod 2004, when 15 ... Bxc3 16 Nxc3 Nxc6 threatens ... b4 and so White has no time to attack d6. Play is equal.

b) 11 d6!? cxd6 12 Qxd6 is invariably met by 12 ... Nb7!? (although 12 ... Bb7 13 Nc3 Nc8 looks good to me, the c8-knight can go to b6 afterwards). For example, 13 Qf4 (13 Qg3 Nc5 14 Qh4 d5!, A.Neiksans-D.Howell, Porto Carras 2011) 13 ... Nc5 14 Rd1 Bb7 (14 ... d5!? 15 Bxd5?! Nxd5 16 exd5 Bf5 17 Nc3 Nd3 18 Qd2 b4 with a strong initiative, A.Shomoev-V.Zvjaginsev, Moscow 2011, but 15 Nc3 is superior) 15 Nc3 Nxb3 16 axb3 f5 (this shows an advantage of having the knight on e7) 17 Qh4 Qe8 18 Bg5 Rf7 19 Re1 Qf8 20 Rad1 fxe4 21 Nxe4 Nf5 with a plus, I.Provotorov-P.Ponkratov, Voronezh 2012.

11 ... d6 (Diagram 22)

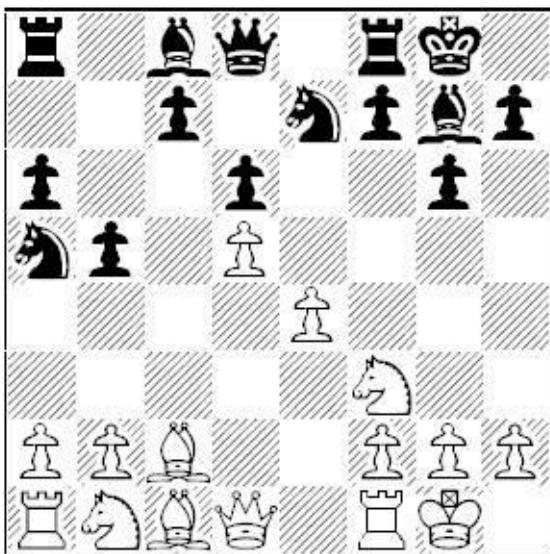


Diagram 22 (W)

12 Nc3

This is the same position as in Variation A, except this time it's Black to move!

Alternatively:

- a) 12 Nd4 looks to control c6, but Black is in a good position to contest this: 12 ... Bb7 13 Nc3 (**Diagram 23**) and now:

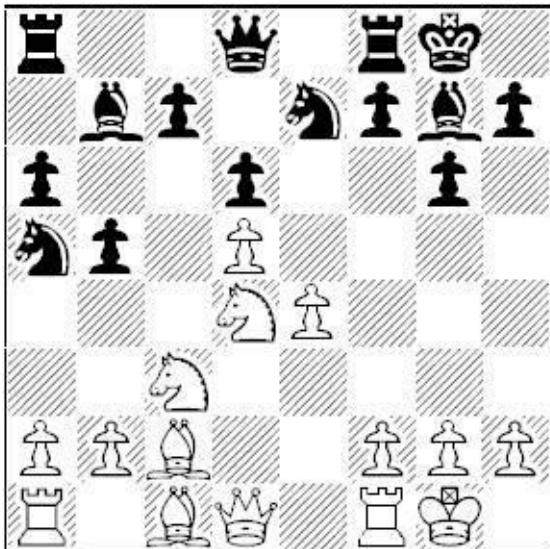


Diagram 23 (B)

a1) 12 ... b4 14 Nce2 c5 (14 ... c6 looks more accurate, hitting d5 and so forcing 15 dxc6 Nexc6 transposing) 15 dxc6 (15 Nf3!?) 15 ... Nexc6 16 Be3 (or 16 Nf3 Nc4 17 Rb1, B.Burg-T.Lammens, Paleochora 2011, 17 ... Rc8 followed by putting a knight on e5, with the more active position) 16 ... Rc8 17 Nxc6 Nxc6 (in this position recapturing with the knight is correct, to control d4 and stop White from playing Bd4) 18 Rb1 Ne5 19 Bd4 Re8 (19 ... Qh4 20 f3 d5! opens the position to exploit Black's more active pieces) 20 f3, S.Meera-N.Mohota, Chennai 2011, when 20 ... d5 is logical.

a2) 13 ... c5 14 dxc6 Nexc6 15 Nxc6 Bxc6 is also good, but allows the c3-knight the possibility of coming to d5: 16 Rb1 Nc4 17 Nd5 Rc8 18 b3 Bxd5 19 Qxd5 Nb6 20 Qd3 d5 21 exd5 Nxd5 22 Bd2 Nc3 23 Bxc3 Rxc3 24 Qxd8 Rxd8 25 Rfd1. Black was better in G.Garcia-J.Oms Pallisse, La Pobla de Lillet 1996, but the opposite-coloured bishops make the draw very likely.

a3) 13 ... Rc8 keeps the tension. Black will play ... c6 or ... c5, or first ... b4, as in the other lines, but first he reinforces his control of the c-file and waits to see what White does.

b) 12 h3 c6 (12 ... f5!? is fun: 13 Nbd2 fxe4 14 Nxe4 Nc4 15 Rb1, J.Sanchez-C.Papatriyfonos, Khanty-Mansiysk 2010, 15 ... Bb7 winning the d-pawn; 12 ... Bb7 13 Nc3 c6 14 dxc6 Bxc6 is also perfectly satisfactory) 13 dxc6 Nexc6 14 Nc3 Be6 15 Nd5 Nc4 16 Rb1 Bxd5 17 exd5 Nb4!? (17 ... N6e5 18 Nxe5 Nxe5) 18 Bb3 a5 19 a3 Na6 20 Nd4 Qb6 21 Nc6, N.Djukic-A.Khalifman, Aix-les-Bains 2011, 21 ... Rfe8 is about equal.

c) 12 Nb d2?! is passive: 12 ... c6! 13 dx c6 N e x c6 with an edge.

12 ... b4 (Diagram 24)

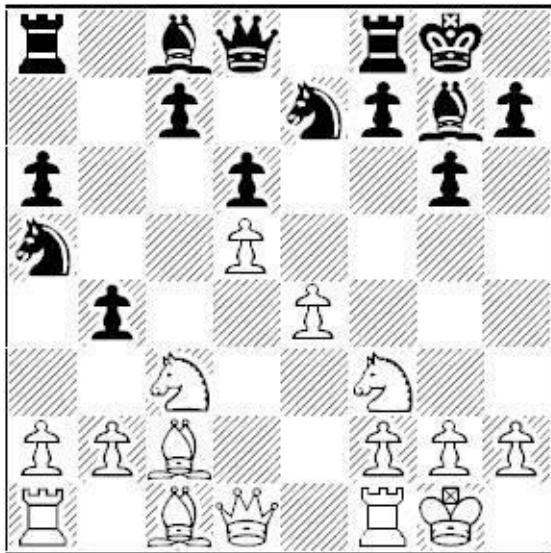


Diagram 24 (W)

Black has a number of possibilities here, but I like to play a quick ... c6 and it makes sense to drive the knight from c3 first, so that it can't hop into d5 later.

12 ... Bb7 is very rare in this exact position, but is the same as Variation A except that Black has an extra move (!) so it must also be good. 13 Rb1 b4 was the actual move order of the Sokolov game in the next note, and is fine, but 13 ... Rc8 appeals to me once again!

13 Ne2

13 Na4 puts the knight offside, but it is not ridiculous bearing in mind that Black will play ... c6, when b6 would be weakened. Now 13 ... Bb7 14 Rb1 c6 transposes to N.Kosintseva-I.Sokolov, Sarajevo 2010, which continued 15 dxc6 Bxc6 16 Be3 Rb8 17 Bd4 Qd7 18 b3 Bh6!? 19 Bd3 Bb5 20 Qe2 Nac6 21 Ba1 Ne5!? sacrificing a pawn with a complicated struggle in prospect. However, with my preferred move order 13 ... Bd7 would be better: 14 Rb1 Bb5 15 Re1 c6 (or 15 ... c5) 16 dxc6 Nexc6.

13 ... c5

13 ... c6 14 dxc6 Nexc6 would transpose, and might be more accurate. Certainly I would play this way myself – see the explanation above.

14 dxc6

White doesn't have to play this – a 1 d4 player would probably prefer to keep his pawn on d5 and play a Benoni position.

14 ... Nexc6 (Diagram 25)

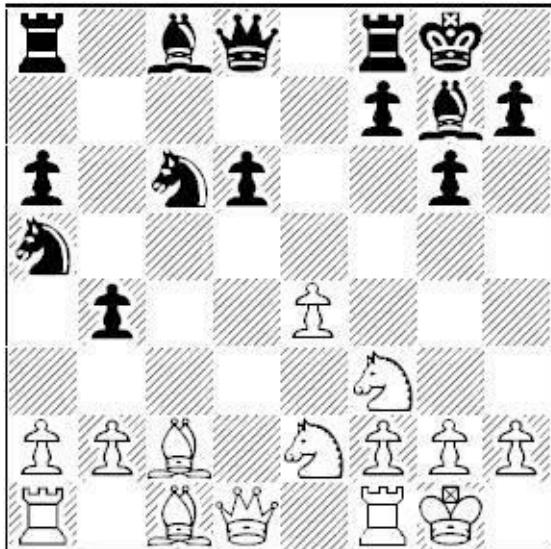


Diagram 25 (W)

14 ... Bg4!? first and then 15 Nf4 Nexc6 is interesting, to say the least.

15 h3

15 Ned4 Qb6 (15 ... Nxd4! 16 Nxd4 Bb7 followed by the obvious moves ... Rc8, ... Re8 or ... Nc4, as appropriate, is very nice for Black – how does White continue? For instance, 17 Re1 Rc8 18 Rb1 Re8 19 Nf3 Nc4 20 h3 d5.) 16 Nxc6 Qxc6 17 Nd4 Qb6 18 Be3 Nc4 19 Nf5 Nxe3 20 Nxe3 Be6 21 Bb3 Bxb2 22 Bxe6 Bxa1 23 Bd5 Bd4 24 Bxa8 Rxa8 25 Nd5 Qc5 26 Qd2 Bc3 and Black eventually made his extra pawn count in J.Banas-N.Nestorovic, Hungarian League 2011.

15 ... Bb7 16 Rb1 Ne5

16 ... Rc8 and ... Re8 is also strong.

17 Nf4 Nxf3+ 18 Qxf3 Rc8 19 Qd1 Re8 20 Nd5

By playing ... b4 before ... c6 Black has forced White to waste a move bringing his knight to this square.

20 ... Nc4

You should always attempt to bring your worst-placed piece into the game! 20 ... Bxd5 21 exd5 Nc4 would be another way.

21 Nx b4 Bxe4 22 b3 Nb6

Or 22 ... Bxc2 23 Nxc2 Ne5.

23 Be3?!

23 Bxe4 Rxe4 24 Nxa6 is possible: 24 ... Ra8 25 Qd3 Rd4 26 Qb5 Rd5 27 Qe2 and it seems that Black has no more than a draw by 27 ... Re5 28 Qd3 Rd5.

23 ... Bb7

23 ... Ba8!.

24 Bd3 a5 25 Nc2 Nd5 26 Bd2 Nc3 27 Bxc3 Rxc3 28 Ne3? Qg5

The threat of ... Rxe3 and mate on g2 is too strong.

29 h4 Qxh4 30 Bb5 Rxe3

White resigned, T.Meurs-J.De Jong, Amersfoort 2010.

B2) 9 Bb3 0-0 10 Nc3 (Diagram 26)

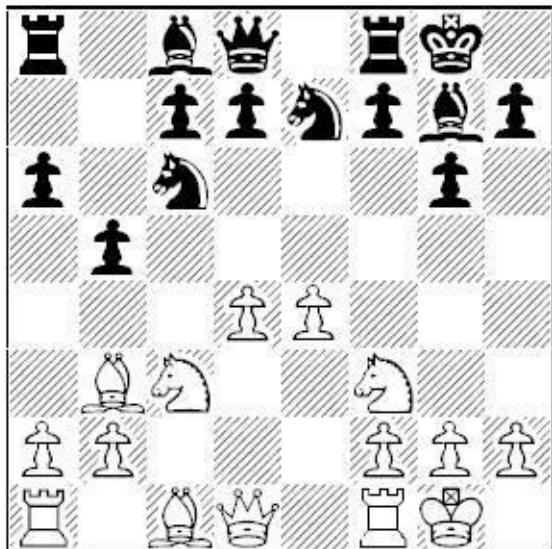


Diagram 26 (B)

One problem from a Black point of view is that an early capture on d4 allows White to develop his knight directly to this good natural square, rather than have to play Nbd2-f1-g3 as in many of the Closed Spanish lines.

10 ... d6 11 h3

Simple, logical chess: White stops ... Bg4 and keeps his centre intact.

Alternatively:

- a) 11 Nd5 (**Diagram 27**).

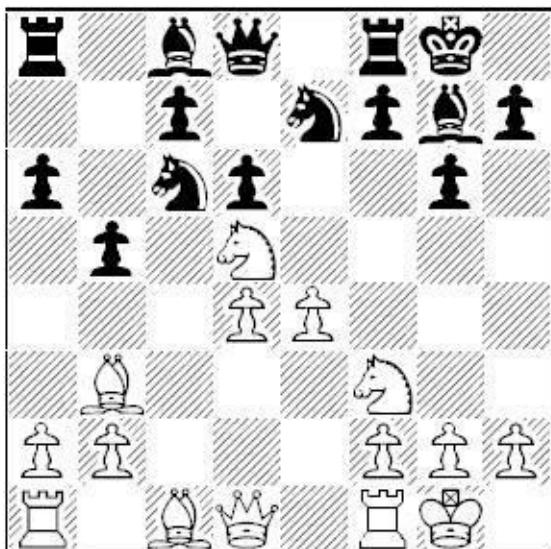


Diagram 27 (N)

This is a problematic line, threatening $Bg5$, and thus stopping ... $Na5$. 11 ... $h6!$ (11 ... $Nxd5?!$ 12 $Bxd5$ $Bb7$ 13 $Bg5$ $Qd7$ 14 $Qd2$ is too easy for White, B.Bok-S.Ernst, Eindhoven 2010) 12 $Nxe7+$ (the logical follow-up; 12 $Be3$ allows 12 ... $Na5$ 13 $Nxe7+$ $Qxe7$ 14 $Bc2$ $c5$ 15 $b3$ $Bg4$ 16 $Rc1$ $Nc6$ 17 $dxc5$ $dxc5$ 18 $Qd5$, J.Neubronner-Y.Chan, Singapore 2009, 18 ... $Nb4!$ 19 $Qxc5$ $Qxc5$ 20 $Bxc5$ $Nxa2$ 21 $Bxf8$ $Nxc1$ 22 $Bxg7$ $Ne2+$ 23 $Kh1$ $Kxg7$ 24 $Ne5$ $Be6$ with a clear advantage in the endgame, or 13 $Nf4$ $Bb7$ 14 $Bc2$ $Nc4$ 15 $Bc1$ E.Mortensen-L.Keitlinghaus, Copenhagen 1997, when the thematic 15 ... $c5$ is good) 12 ... $Nxe7?!$ (this is the most popular, keeping control of $d5$ and preparing ... $f5$, and has even been played by Aronian, but 12 ... $Qxe7$ seems okay to me: 13 $Bd5$ $Bb7$ 14 $Re1$ $Nd8$ 15 $Bxb7$ $Nxb7$ 16 $d5$ $Na5$ 17 $Rb1$, A.Nimmy-A.Ramaswamy, Chennai 2011, 17 ... $c5$ 18 $dxc6$ $Rac8$ 19 $Bf4$ $Rfd8$ followed by recapturing the c -pawn, or 16 $Bf4$ $c5$ 17 $Qd2$ $g5$ 18 $Bg3$ $Rfe8$) 13 $Be3$ (or 13 $Re1$ $c5$ 14 $h3$ $Bb7$ 15 $Bc2$, P.Vishnu-J.Deepan, Chakravarthy, Dieren 2011, when I would play 15 ... $cxd4$ 16 $Nxd4$ $Re8$, e.g. 17 $Bf4$ $Nd5!$ 18 $exd5$ $Rxe1+$ 19 $Qxe1$ $Bxd4$) 13 ... $Kh7$ (unpinning the f -pawn) 14 $Rc1$ $f5$ (**Diagram 28**) with:

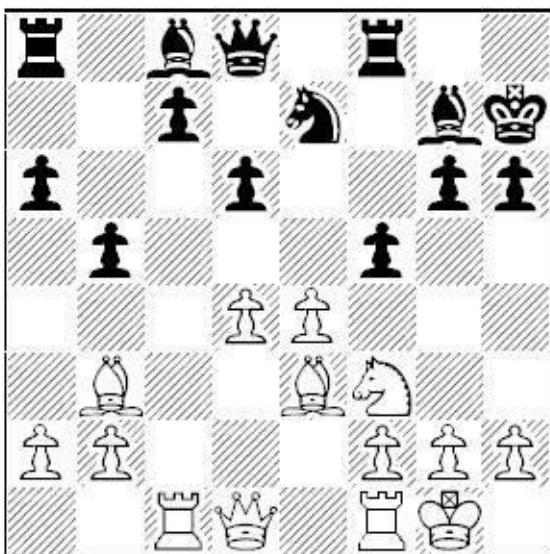


Diagram 28 (W)

a1) 15 $e5$ $Bb7$ 16 $Re1$ $a5$ 17 $Qe2$ $f4$ 18 $exd6!$ (18 $Bd2$ $Bxf3$ 19 $Qxf3$ $dxe5$ wins a pawn, although White has good compensation on the light squares: 20 $d5$ $Nf5$ 21 $Qe4$ $Nd6$ 22 $Qb1$ $Rf7$ 23 $Bc2$ $Qg5$ 24 $Be4$ $Nxe4$ 25 $Qxe4$ $Qf5$ 26 $Qe2$ $b4$ 27 $Rc5$ $Bf8$ 28 $Rb5$ $Bd6$ with a clear advantage to Black, L.Dominguez Perez-L.Aronian, Moscow 2009, but 20 $Qb7!$ is better) 18 ... $Qxd6$ 19 $Bxf4$ $Qxf4$ 20 $Qxe7$ $Rac8!$ (20 ... $Bxf3$ 21 $Rxc7$ $Qxd4$ 22 $Re5!$ forces 22 ... $Rf7$ 23 $Qxf7$ $Qxe5$ 24 $gxf3$ but I wouldn't fancy being Black here) 21 $Rc3$ $Bxf3$ 22 $Rxf3$ $Qxd4$ and Black is suffering a bit.

a2) 15 $Qc2$ $c6$ (15 ... $Bb7$ 16 $Qxc7$ $Bxe4$ 17 $Bf4$ $Nd5$ 18 $Bxd5$ $Bxd5$ 19 $Qxd6$ $Qxd6$ 20 $Bxd6$ $Rfc8$ 21 $Be5$ $Bxa2$ should be okay) 16 $Rfe1$ (16 $h3!$) 16 ... $f4$ 17 $Bd2$

Bg4 18 Bc3 a5 19 a3 Bxf3 20 gxf3 d5 21 Kh1 Qd7 22 Qd3, K.Kulaots-U.Krstic, Istanbul 2004, 22 ... dxe4! 23 Rxe4 (23 fxe4? c5) 23 ... Nd5.

BEWARE! a3) 15 Qd3!? is tricky: 15 ... Bb7?? (15 ... c6 perhaps, as in the Krstic game below) 16 Ng5+! and wins!! 16 ... hxg5 17 Bxg5 (had Black's light-squared bishop been on c8 then he could just move his f5-pawn to control h3, but now Qh3+ is a decisive threat) 17 ... d5 18 exd5 Bf6 19 Qh3+ Kg7 20 Qh6+ Kf7 21 d6+ Nd5 22 Rxc7+ Qxc7 (was Black relying on this?) 23 Bxf6! (23 dxc7?? Rh8) 23 ... Qd7 24 Qg7+ Ke6 25 Re1+ Kxd6 26 Be5+ Kc6 27 Rc1+ 1-0 D.Danilenko-A.Dounis, Paleochora 2011.

b) 11 d5 Na5 12 Nd4 (12 h3 Nxb3 13 axb3 b4 14 Ne2, S.SulskisM.Ivanov, Finland 2011, 14 ... Bb7 and ... c6; 12 Bc2 transposes to variation B1) 12 ... Bb7 13 Bg5 h6 (13 ... Qd7 14 Qd2 Rfe8 15 Rad1 Nxb3 16 axb3 c5 17 dxc6 Nxc6 18 Nxc6 ½-½ S.Cigan-T.Sakelsek, Murska Sobota 2007) 14 Bh4 Qd7 15 f4 Nxb3 16 axb3 b4 17 Na4 f5! (undermining d5) 18 Ne6 fxe4 19 Bxe7 Qxe7 20 Rc1 (M.Kolosowski-D.Sadzikowski, Polanica Zdroj 2010) 20 ... Rac8 21 Nxf8 Rxf8. Despite the exchange less Black has a clear advantage: his bishops are strong and the white knight is awful.

c) 11 Bg5 h6 12 Be3 is naturally answered by 12 ... Bg4 13 Qd2 (or 13 Ne2 d5 14 e5 Bxf3 15 gxf3 Qd7) 13 ... Bxf3 14 gxf3, Y.Ainutdinova-E.Levushkina, Moscow 2011, and as there is no real threat to h6, 14 ... Qd7 to h3 is best.

11 ... Na5 (Diagram 29)

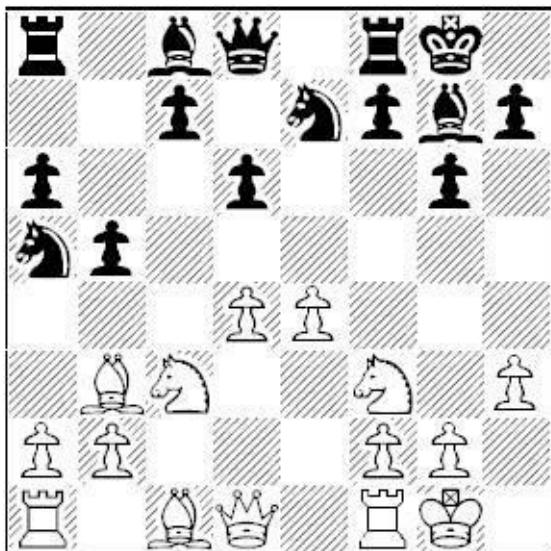


Diagram 29 (W)

11 ... Bb7 is also good, but I think the text is stronger, and the bishop might find a better square on e6 or g4 later.

12 Bc2

12 Bg5 is occasionally preferred, White continues his development at the cost of the bishop pair. 12 ... h6 giving the bishop a choice:

a) 13 Bh4 (White insists on the pin, and provokes Black into playing ... g5) 13 ... Nxb3 (13 ... g5 is a bit risky – 14 Bxg5 hxg5 15 Nxg5 Nxb3? 16 Qh5; there is nothing wrong with 13 ... Bb7 14 Re1 Re8 with good play) 14 Qxb3 g5 15 Bg3 Kh8!? (intending ... f5) 16 e5 (16 a4 bxa4 17 Rxa4 f5 18 exf5 – if White allows ... f4 he will have to do without his dark-squared bishop for a long time – 18 ... Nxf5 19 d5 Bd7 20 Raa1 Nxg3 21 fxe3 c5 22 dxc6 Bxc6 with two bishops, a passed d-pawn and pressure on b2, C.Samuelson-K.Pilgaard, Torshavn 2003) 16 ... Bb7 (16 ... Nf5 17 Bh2 Bb7 18 d5 c5 19 exd6 Nxd6 20 Rfe1 Nf5 21 Be5 f6 22 Bh2 Nd4 23 Qd1 b4 won a good pawn in D.Swiercz-I.Ivanisevic, Wijk aan Zee 2011) 17 d5 dxe5 (17 ... Nf5 18 Bh2 c5 transposes into the Ivanisevic game; 17 ... f5!? is thematic, threatening to smother the g3-bishop, the tactical justification being 18 Nd4 dxe5 19 Ne6 Qd6 20 Nxf8 Rxf8 with big compensation for the exchange) 18 Bxe5 f6 19 Bg3 Nxd5 20 Rad1 c6 21 Nd4 Qd7 22 Ne4 f5 23 Nc5 Qe7 24 Nde6 f4 25 Nxf8?! Rxf8 26 Nxb7 fxe3 27 fxe3 Rxf1+ 28 Rxf1 Qxb7 winning material, B.Smith-A.Brkic, Zagreb 2011.

b) 13 Be3 Nxb3 (or 13 ... Bb7 14 a3 Nxb3 15 Qxb3, A.Lyashenko-A.Karayev, Novokuznetsk 2007, 15 ... Qd7) 14 Qxb3 c6 15 a4 bxa4 (15 ... Be6 16 d5 bxa4 17 Rxa4 Rb8 18 Qa2 cxd5 19 exd5 Bd7 is also good: 20 Rxa6 Bxc3 21 bxc3 Bb5 22 Bxh6 Re8 gains the exchange, with a rough equality) 16 Rxa4, A.Bezgodov-A.Shimanov, Khanty-Mansiysk 2011, 16 ... Qc7 planning ... Rb8.

c) It is difficult to believe that 13 Bxe7 Qxe7 14 Nd5 can justify the loss of the dark-squared bishop, 14 ... Qd8 15 Rc1, M.Pacher-A.Mista, Czechia 2011, can be met by the natural 15 ... Bb7! as 16 Nxc7?! Rc8 17 Nd5 Rxc1 18 Qxc1 Nxb3 19 axb3 Re8 regains the pawn with a clear advantage, *i.e.* 20 Re1 f5.

12 ... c5 (Diagram 30)

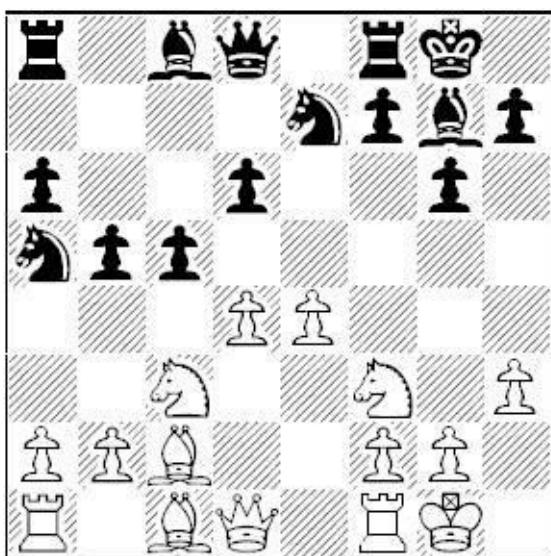


Diagram 30 (W)

Hitting back at White's centre, and setting his queenside pawn majority into motion.

12 ... Bb7 13 Re1 c5 is also possible, but this bishop might be better on e6 in certain variations.

13 Bg5

White has a big choice:

- a) 13 dxc5 is presently the 2nd most common move. 13 ... dxc5 and now:
 - a1) 14 Qxd8 Rxd8 (**Diagram 31**).

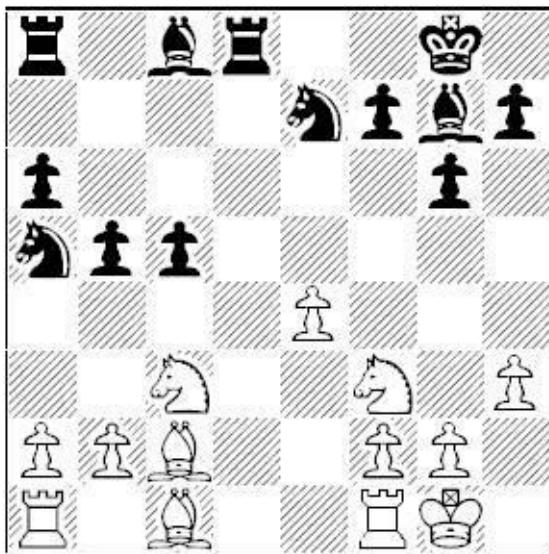


Diagram 31 (W)

White has conceded the d-file and freed Black's queenside majority – a classic advantage in the endgame. 15 Be3 (the point of White's play, hitting the c5-pawn; after 15 Bg5 Re8 16 Rad1 Be6 17 e5?! Nc4! 18 Ne4 Nxb2 19 Rb1 Nc4 20 Nxc5 Bd5 21 Be4 Nxe5 22 Nxe5 Bxe5 Black had a solid extra pawn and won easily, P.Solovjov-S.Pavlov, Odessa 2010):

a1) 15 ... Be6!? Development and activity! Black will regain the sacrificed c-pawn with interest. 16 Bxc5 Nec6 (**Diagram 32**)

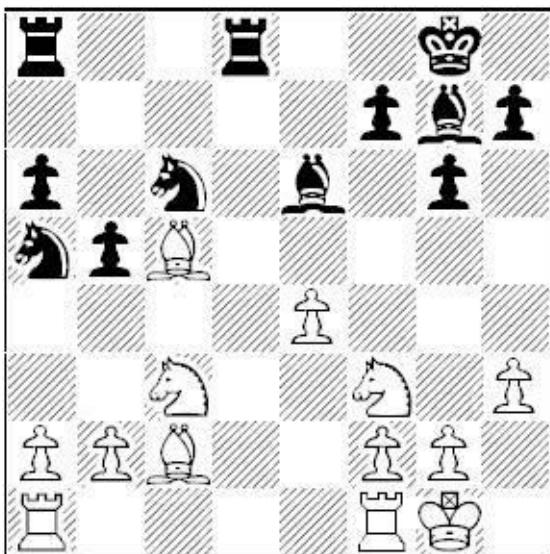


Diagram 32 (W)

17 Rac1 (17 Rad1 Nc4 18 Ng5?! Nxb2 19 Nxe6 fxe6 20 Rxd8+, D.Kojovic-S.Pavlov, Paracin 2010, 20 ... Nxd8! obviously, to free the c-file for the black rook, i.e. 21 Nd1 Rc8 22 Be7 Rxc2 23 Bxd8 Nc4 winning the a-pawn when the advance of the connected passed pawns will be decisive) 17 ... Nc4 18 Ng5 (18 Bb3 Nxb2 19 Bb6 Nd3 20 Bxe6 fxe6 21 Bxd8 Nxc1 22 Rxc1 Nxd8 is equal) 18 ... Nxb2 (regaining the pawn and creating a useful two-to-one pawn majority) 19 Nxe6 fxe6 20 Ne2, R.Van Kampen-S.Ernst, Groningen 2010, 20 ... Ne5 21 Bb3 Nec4 followed by ... Kf7 and ... Rac8 with the better chances.

a12) 15 ... Nc4!? is a similar idea, and can easily transpose: 16 Bxc5 Nc6 17 Nd5 (17 Rad1 Be6 transposes to the Pavlov game, while 17 Rac1 Be6 transposes to the Ernst game, both below; however, 17 a4 is possible here, and equal) 17 ... Be6! 18 Nc7 Rac8 19 Nxe6 fxe6 20 Rad1 Nxb2 21 Rxd8+? (21 Bb3) 21 ... Nxd8 22 Bb6 Rxc2 23 Bxd8 h6 24 Bb6 Nc4 25 Bd4 Rxa2 winning a pawn and the game, O.Guttulsrud-D.Harika, Reykjavik 2010 – Black subsequently prepared the advance of the b-pawn.

a13) 15 ... Nb7 is the most popular here, and has been played by both Aronian and Karjakin (both against Smeets, although both in quick games), but while it is okay, it seems a little too passive for my taste.

a2) 14 Bg5 might well turn out to be stronger: 14 ... Qc7 (better than 14 ... Qxd1 15 Raxd1 Nec6 16 Be3, S.Ansell-A.Kosten, British League 2011, as 16 ... Nc4!? 17 Bxc5 Re8 18 Nd5 Nxb2 19 Nc7 Nxd1 20 Nxe8 Nc3 21 Nxg7 Kxg7 22 Nd4 and White has the bishop pair) 15 Qc1 (to exchange Black's powerful dark-squared bishop; 15 Nd5?! Nxd5 16 exd5, L.Di Nicolantonio-A.Tomazini, Albena 2011, when I would probably play 16 ... Nc4 17 b3 Nd6 with a lovely blockading knight, followed by advancing the queenside majority) 15 ... Nc4 16 Bh6 Be6 17 Bxg7 Kxg7 18 b3 Nb6 (18 ... Ne5 19 Ng5 N5c6 is a good alternative, heading for d4) 19 e5 Nc6 20 Qf4 with equal chances in A.Kosteniuk-L.Aronian, Moscow 2009.

b) 13 Bf4 is logical, taking aim at the backward d6-pawn when Black's dark-squared bishop is not able to defend it, but on the other hand it leaves d4, c3 and b2

weakened. 13 ... cxd4 14 Nxd4 Bb7 (**Diagram 33**)

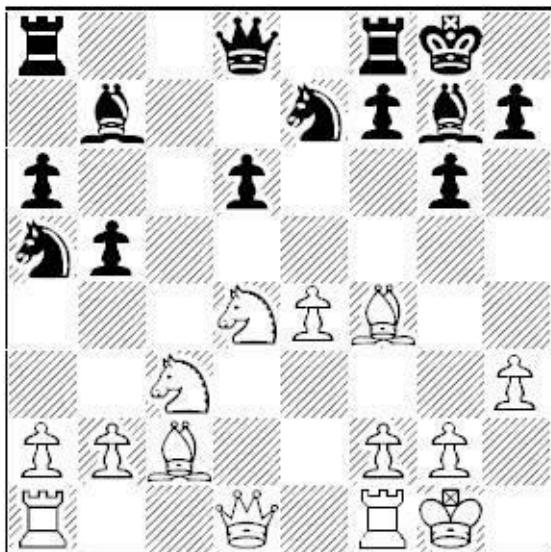


Diagram 33 (W)

(developing another minor piece is normal, but 14 ... Nc4 is also more than playable: 15 b3 Na3 16 Rc1 – the c2-bishop can't escape – 16 ... Bb7 17 Qd2 Rc8 18 Be3 d5 19 Bd3 Qd7 20 Nxd5?? Nxd5 21 exd5 Bxd4 and White lost a piece, D.Rogic-A.Brkic, Stari Mikanovci 2011, as 22 Bxd4 Qxd5 forks the bishop and the g2-square) and now:

b1) 15 Re1 Nc4 (15 ... Rc8) 16 b3 Na3 17 Nce2 Qb6 18 Be3 Nxc2 19 Qxc2 ½-½ S.Vedmediuc-A.Brkic, Porto Carras 2011, 19 ... Rac8 20 Qd3 Qa5 which looks roughly equal, although the black bishops might give him a small plus.

b2) 15 b3 stops the knight coming to c4, but weakens the long diagonal: 15 ... Rc8 16 Nce2 d5! 17 e5, N.Shyam-N.Huschenbeth, Chennai 2011, and now 17 ... Nec6 wins the e5-pawn, as 18 Nf3 is met by 18 ... Re8.

b3) 15 Nce2 bolsters d4, 15 ... Re8 (15 ... Rc8) 16 Bg3?! Nec6 and again White is in trouble: 17 Re1 Nxd4 18 Nxd4 Rc8 (simple and strong; the immediate threat is ... Bxd4 winning a piece) 19 Re2 Nc4 20 Rb1 Qb6 (all Black's pieces are involved in the struggle and White is already close to losing) 21 Nf3 Nxb2 22 Qxd6 Qxd6 23 Bxd6 Nc4 24 Rd1 (24 Bf4? Na3) 24 ... Rcd8 25 Bc5 Rxd1+ 26 Bxd1 Rxe4 winning a pawn and the game, P.Zhao-J.Le Roux, Montreal 2011.

b4) 15 Rb1 Nc4 16 Bg5 h6 17 Bh4 Re8 18 Qd3 Rc8 19 Rfd1 Qb6 (once again Black's pieces come naturally to powerful posts, and once again White is on the edge of the precipice) 20 Nde2, K.Arakhamia Grant-A.Wohl, Arco 2008, and now Black had several strong continuations, but 20 ... d5! is the most thematic: 21 Bxe7 (21 exd5 Nf5 22 Bg3 Nce3! 23 fxe3 Nxg3 24 Nd4 Re5 25 Bb3 Rce8 26 Re1?? Rxe3!, and 24 Nxg3? Rxe3 wins immediately) 21 ... d4! 22 Nxd4 Rxe7 23 Nde2 b4 24 Na4 Qc6 (menacing ... Ne5) 25 Bb3 Rxe4 regaining the pawn with the bishop pair and some nasty threats.

c) 13 d5 goes for a Benoni position, where Black's queenside is already in motion and his knights are on unusual squares, e7 and a5 instead of, say, f6 and d7. 13

... Nc4 (**Diagram 34**) and now:

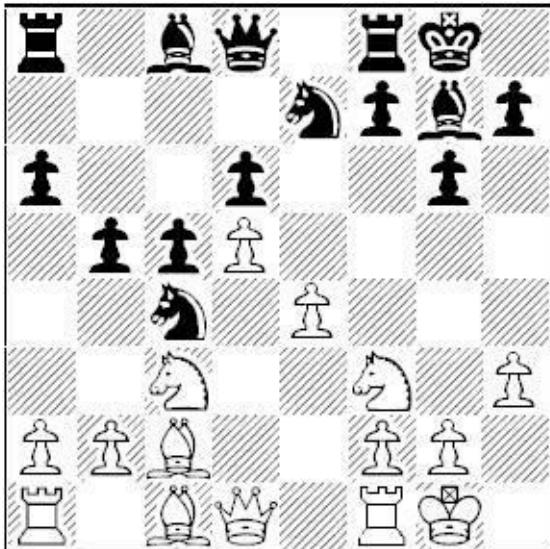


Diagram 34 (W)

c1) 14 Bd3 Nb6 15 Qc2 Bd7 (15 ... c4 16 Be2 f5!? shows one advantage of having the knight on e7 – the f-pawn is free and ... f5 is supported: 17 Bg5 fxe4 18 Qxe4 Re8 19 Rae1 Bf5 with lots of activity) 16 Bg5 c4 17 Be2 b4 18 Nd1 Rc8 19 Rc1 Bb5 20 Qd2!? c3! 21 bxc3 bxc3 22 Nxc3 (22 Rxc3!?) 22 ... Rxc3! 23 Rxc3 Bxe2 24 Nd4? Bxf1 25 Nc6, E.Homiakova-E.Levushkina, Khanty-Mansiysk 2010, when 25 ... Bxc3 seems to win, as 26 Qxc3 is answered by 26 ... Nxd5.

c2) 14 Rb1 h6 15 Ne2 Qa5 (15 ... f5 16 b3 Nb6 17 Nf4) 16 a3 Bb7 17 Bd3 Ne5!? (17 ... Qc7) 18 Nxe5 dxe5 19 b4 Qd8 20 bxc5 Nxd5! 21 c6 Bxc6 22 exd5 Qxd5 23 f3 Rad8 24 Rb3 e4 25 fxe4 Qc5+ 26 Kh1 Bxe4 27 Nf4 g5 with adequate play, E.Rozentalis-A.Wohl, Queenstown 2009.

d) 13 Rb1 Bb7 (13 ... cxd4) 14 d5 Nc4 15 Ne2 b4 16 Bd3 Nb6 17 b3 a5 18 Qd2 a4 (Black continues his queenside advance) 19 Bb2 axb3 20 axb3 Ra2, P.Papp-V.Erdos, Roszke 2011.

e) 13 Re1 is examined in the introductory game, Aronian-Leko, Moscow 2009.

f) 13 a3 cxd4 14 Nxd4 Bb7 15 Bg5 h6 16 Bh4 Rc8 17 Nce2 d5 already favoured Black in K.Alekseenko-H.Stefansson, Plovdiv 2012.

13 ... h6 (Diagram 35)

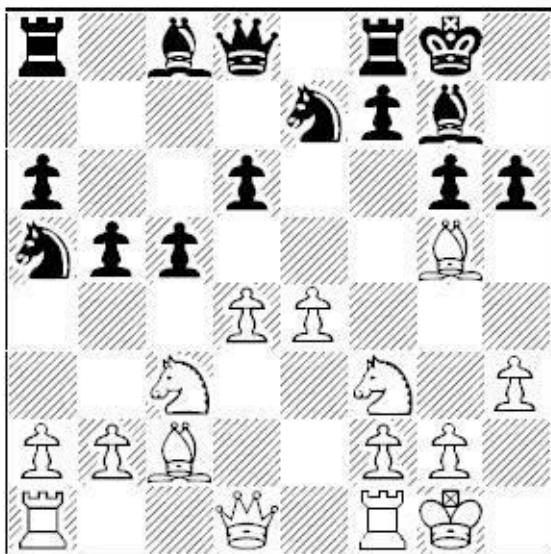


Diagram 35 (W)

14 Bh4

14 Bf4 is essentially the same as 13 Bf4:

a) For 14 ... cxd4 15 Nxd4 Bb7 compare with the games featuring 13 Bf4, or 15 ... Nc4 16 Nce2 Qb6 17 b3 Na3 18 Be3 Nxc2 19 Qxc2 Qb7 as in B.Bok-F.Erwich, Hoogeveen 2007.

b) But 14 ... g5 can also be played, as in the main line: 15 Bh2 (15 Bg3 would transpose directly to the main line) 15 ... Nc4 16 b3 Na3 (a strange manoeuvre, putting the knight back onto ‘the rim’, but it often works here) 17 Bd3 g4 (Black plays very actively; 17 ... Nc6!? is also possible) 18 hxg4 Bxg4 19 Ne2 c4 20 bxc4 bxc4 21 Bc2 Ng6 22 Ba4 Rc8 23 Kh1 Nb5 (the knight can’t stay on a3 forever) 24 Qd2 f5 25 Bc2 Na3! (or can it?) 26 Nc3 Qa5 (26 ... Bxf3 27 gxf3 Nxc2 28 Qxc2 Nh4 is also strong – f3 is dropping) 27 Rac1 Nxc2 28 Qxc2 fxe4 29 Qxe4 Qh5 30 Nd2 Rf4 31 Qd5+ Qxd5 32 Nxd5 Rxd4 winning material, M.Agopov-S.Ernst, German League 2010.

14 ... g5

Black breaks the pin immediately. This is certainly not forced, and he can play other moves, such as 14 ... cxd4 15 Nxd4 Bb7 followed by ... Rc8 and maybe ... Re8 and keep ... g5 in reserve. Still, 14 ... g5 fits in with Black’s active strategy. He will often follow up with ... f5 which again shows an advantage of having the knight on e7 as opposed to f6.

15 Bg3 (Diagram 36)

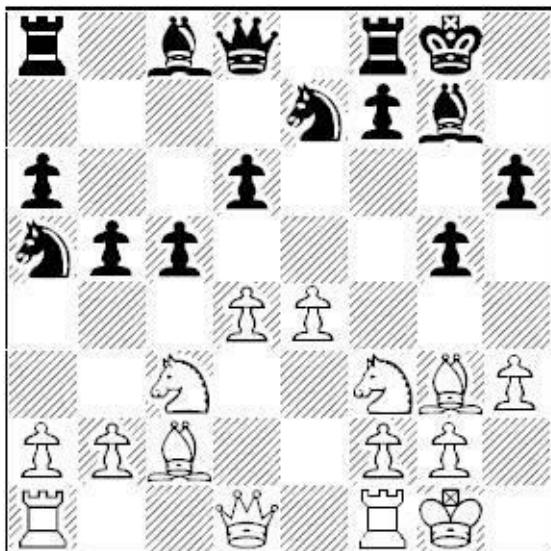


Diagram 36 (B)

15 ... Nc4

This is one position where it is probably better to avoid 15 ... cxd4 16 Nxd4 as the weakness of f5 gives White extra possibilities.

16 Rb1

Defending b2, but now the c4-knight can't be driven away by b3 for a while.

a) 16 b3 is again met by 16 ... Na3 and:

a1) 17 Rc1 f5! (threatening both to bury the g3-bishop by ... f4, and maybe play ...

g4) 18 exf5 Nxc2 19 Rxc2 (19 f6?! can be answered by 19 ... Nxd4! 20 fxg7 Rxf3! 21 gxf3 Qd7 with a powerful attack: 20 Nxd4 Bxf6 21 Nf3 d5) 19 ... Nxf5 (hitting both g3 and d4) 20 dxc5 Nxg3 21 fxg3 Bf5 22 Rc1 dxc5 (Black has the bishop pair and a mobile queenside majority) 23 Nd5 Be4 24 Ne3 Qc7 25 Qe2 Qxg3 26 Ng4 Rae8 27 Qf2? (but White was quite lost anyway) 27 ... Rxf3 0-1, K.Adamowicz-P.Papp, Iasi 2011.

a2) 17 Bd3 Nc6 (further pressurizing the dark squares while the c3-knight is loose, but conceding control of d5; 17 ... f5!? is again reasonable, 18 exf5 Nxf5 19 Be4 Ra7) 18 Nd5 Nxd4 19 Nxd4 Bxd4 20 Qh5 and here, in J.Polgar-T.Banusz, Warsaw 2011, Black should play 20 ... Kg7 21 Rad1 Ra7 keeping the d-file blocked, rather than 20 ... Bg7 21 Rad1 c4 22 Be2 c3?! when 23 Nxc3! Bxc3 24 Bxd6 was very unpleasant.

b) 16 dxc5 Nxb2!? (16 ... dxc5 and why not? Black certainly doesn't fear the endgame) 17 Qxd6 Qxd6!? (Black is intent on complicating against his weaker opponent; 17 ... Nc4! 18 Qxd8 Rxd8 19 Rad1 Bb7) 18 Bxd6 Bxc3 19 Bxe7 Re8 20 Bd6 Bb7 21 Rac1 b4 22 e5 a5 23 Bf5 Bc6?! (missing ...) 24 Rxc3! bxc3, S.Soumya-E.Moradiabadi, Chalkis 2010, 25 Rc1 with a clear advantage.

16 ... Nc6 (Diagram 37)

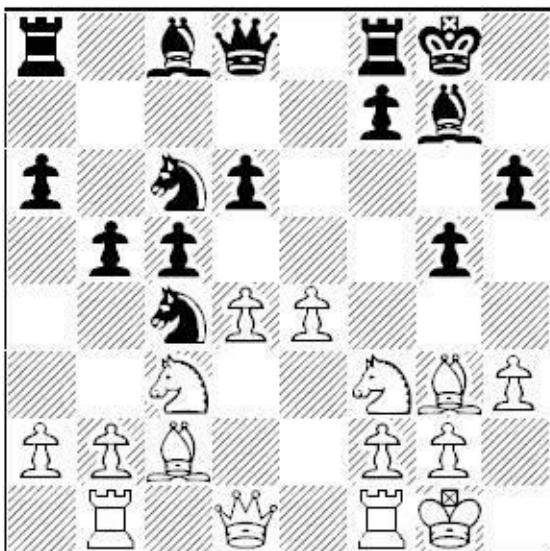


Diagram 37 (W)

The immediate 16 ... g4 17 hxg4 Bxg4 allows 18 Bh4, N.Georgiadis-Z.Tomazini, Burdur 2010, although 18 ... Qd7 19 dxc5 Ng6 20 Bg3 dxc5 is still promising for Black.

17 Ne2

White bolsters the defence of d4. Others:

a) 17 dxc5 dxc5 18 Nd5 Ra7 (a nice move to both defend c7 and bring the rook into play on the seventh rank) 19 b3 Nb6 (19 ... Na3?! 20 Rc1 and Black will have problems defending c5) 20 Qd3 (lining up a mating battery, but 20 Ne3 is better, controlling g4 and f5) 20 ... f5! (now White is in trouble) 21 Nxb6 Qxb6 22 Qd5+ (22 exf5 Nb4 23 Qd6 Qxd6 24 Bxd6 Nxc2 25 Bxc5 Rc7 26 Bxf8 Kxf8 and ... Bxf5) 22 ... Raf7 23 Bd6 Nb4 24 Qxc5 Qxc5 25 Bxc5 Nxc2 26 Rbc1 (the knight is trapped, but Black has seen further) 26 ... fxe4 27 Bxf8?! (the f3-knight has no good square, as 27 Nd2? Nd4, but 27 Nxg5! hxg5 28 Bxf8 Bxf8 29 Rxc2 would at least net an extra pawn than in the game) 27 ... Rxf8 28 Rxc2 exf3 and with two massive bishops against a rook Black should win easily, E.Kislik-T.Banusz, Hungarian League 2011.

b) 17 e5 cxd4 (17 ... dxe5! 18 dxc5 f5 gives Black a nice mobile kingside majority) 18 Qd3 (threatening mate!) 18 ... f5 (18 ... Re8 looks sounder) 19 exf6 Qxf6? (19 ... Rxf6 is forced, as now 20 Qh7+ Kf8) 20 Nd5? (20 Qh7+ Kf7 21 Nd5 wins material) 20 ... Qf5 21 b3 Na3 22 Qxf5 Bxf5 23 Bxf5 Rxf5 24 Rbc1 Rxd5 25 Rxc6 d3 26 Rd1 Nc2 27 Rxd6 Rxd6 28 Bxd6 Rd8 29 Rxd3?, I.Ocampos-A.Navarrete Garcia, Bento Goncalves 2010, and now it was Black's turn to miss a win by 29 ... Nd4! 30 Bb4 Ne2+.

c) 17 d5?! Nb4 threatening ... Nxb2.

17 ... g4 18 hxg4

18 Bh4 gxf3! 19 Bxd8 fxe2 20 Qxe2 Nxd4 21 Qd1 Rxd8 not only leaves Black with the standard three minor pieces for queen advantage, but also a monster knight on d4.

18 ... Bxg4 (Diagram 38)

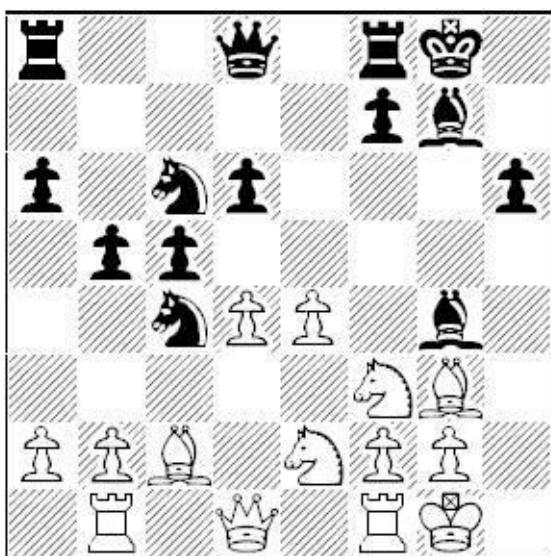


Diagram 38 (W)

Once again putting d4 under pressure.

19 e5

Opening the b1-h7 diagonal and trying to close the h8-a1 diagonal.

19 d5 Nb4 20 Bb3 Nxb2 21 Qd2 Bxf3! (21 ... Nc4?! 22 Qf4? f5 23 Rbd1? Ne5! 24 Nxe5 dxe5 and White is lost, M.Burrows-C.Hanley, Scarborough 2004, but 22 Bxc4 bxc4 23 Rbc1 is level) 22 gxf3 N4d3 23 Bc2 c4 looks crushing: 24 Kg2 f5 25 Rg1 Qf6 26 Rxb2 fxe4 27 Bxd3 exd3 winning material, V.Jansa-Z.Tomazini, Pardubice 2012.

19 ... dxe5 20 Qd3

20 dxc5 Bxf3 (20 ... f5! also looks strong – ... e4 is a nasty threat) 21 gxf3 Nd2 22 Be4 Rc8 23 Bh4?! (23 Qc2 Nxb1 24 Rxb1 would allow White excellent light-square control to compensate the lost exchange) 23 ... Nxf3+ 24 Bxf3 Qxh4 25 Qd3 Rfd8 26 Qe4 Qxe4 27 Bxe4 Nd4 28 Nxd4 Rxd4 29 f3 Rxc5 with two extra pawns, although the opposite-coloured bishops will provide certain technical problems, O.Wieczorek-T.Banusz, Krakow 2011.

20 ... f5 21 dxe5 Qxd3 22 Bxd3 N6xe5 23 Nxe5 Nxe5 24 Bxe5 Bxe5 25 f3 (Diagram 39)

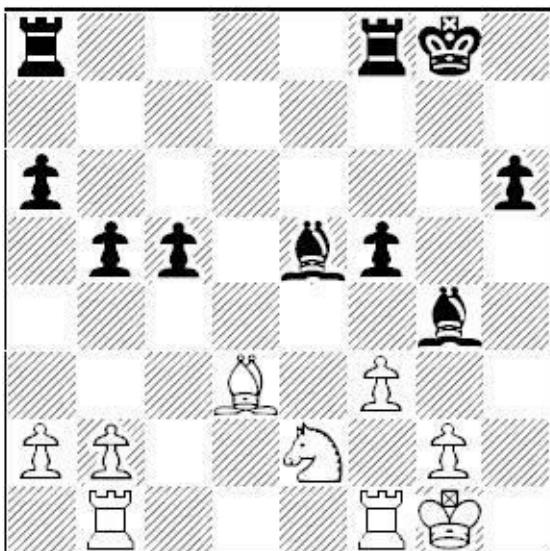


Diagram 39 (W)

Black has an extra pawn and the bishop pair in an ending, V.Rasulov-A.Mammadov, Baku 2011, although to convert this to a win against good defence is not so easy and White eventually managed to draw.

Summary

Aronian's Variation offers a number of important advantages: an unrivalled move-order flexibility to out-manoeuvre your opponent in the opening, straightforward development and a simple plan involving accepting a backward d6-pawn in exchange for open files and diagonals.

White has yet to find a good counter method and tends to score very poorly, even at the very highest levels.

Chapter Two

Classical Berlin: Introduction Tony Kosten

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Bc5 (Diagram 1)

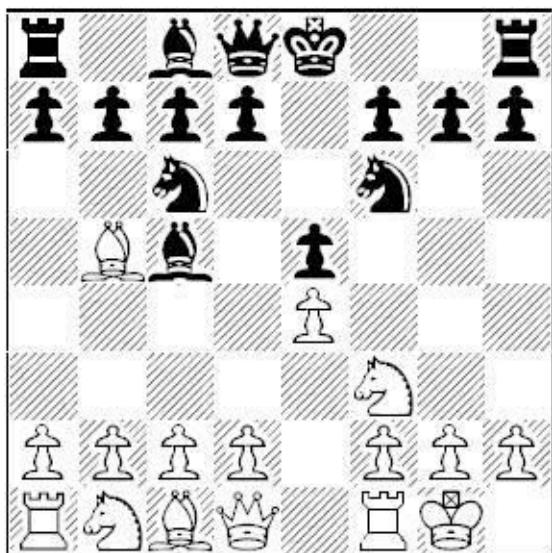


Diagram 1 (W)

Placing the bishop outside the pawn chain (i.e. before Black plays ... d6 to defend his e5-pawn) is ambitious, but risky as White can play c3 and d4 to force the bishop back and then pin the f6-knight with Bg5.

Black is simply relying on natural development and active piece play to counter White's positional pressure, and should White make the smallest inaccuracy Black will hope to pounce with some tactics against d4 or f2!

This line was a favourite of World Champions Boris Spassky, and more recently Anand, plus super-GMs such as Topalov, Leko and Ivanchuk.

Of course, objectively White should be a little better (having the first move), but it takes a strong player to keep hold of that advantage, and a lid on Black's counterplay, for very long.

Game 2

A.Goloshchapov-H.Klip Belgian League 2003

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 (Diagram 2)

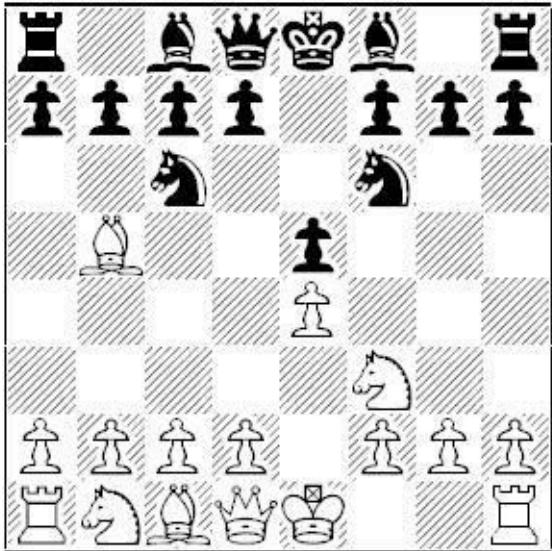


Diagram 2 (W)

I've played quite a lot of different moves in this position over the years. 3 ... a6, of course, but also 3 ... d6, 3 ... g6, etc, but the moves I've had the most success with are 3 ... Bc5 and this move, 3 ... Nf6.

Why is this move so 'strong'? For me it goes back to the Kasparov-Kramnik World Championship match where Kramnik played the Berlin Defence (or 'Berlin Wall') as Black to such good effect, and since then it has become one of Black's main defences at the very highest levels. Not only is the main line (where Black captures immediately on e4) intrinsically strong, it is also annoying for White players who have to head straight for an endgame where their opponent enjoys the bishop pair if they want to obtain any advantage. In this section I am going to recommend another method of play (not capturing on e4), but we will profit from the opponent's fear of allowing the Berlin Wall, as my experience suggests that a lot of players prefer to avoid it and thus defend their e4-pawn which allows Black almost immediate equality! Chessplayers are very fond of the quote *the threat is stronger than the execution*, and this is one case where it might actually be true.

Another advantage of 3 ... Nf6 is that Black avoids all the lesser but still annoying lines like the Exchange Spanish, Exchange Deferred, some early d4 lines, etc.

4 0-0 Bc5 5 Nxe5 Nxe5 6 d4 a6 7 Be2 Nxe4 8 dxc5 Nxc5 9 Qd4 d6 (Diagram 3)

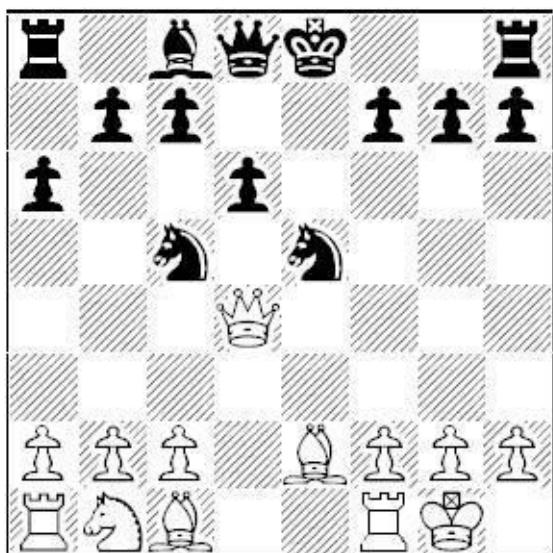


Diagram 3 (B)

10 f4 Ng6 11 Qxg7

White regains his pawn.

11 ... Bf5 12 g4

This move is very risky, but critical, as if the f5-bishop moves then f5 will attack the knight defending the h8-rook.

12 ... Qe7! 13 gxf5 Qxe2 14 fxg6 Qg4+

An important check, to pin the g6-pawn.

15 Kh1 0-0-0 (Diagram 4)

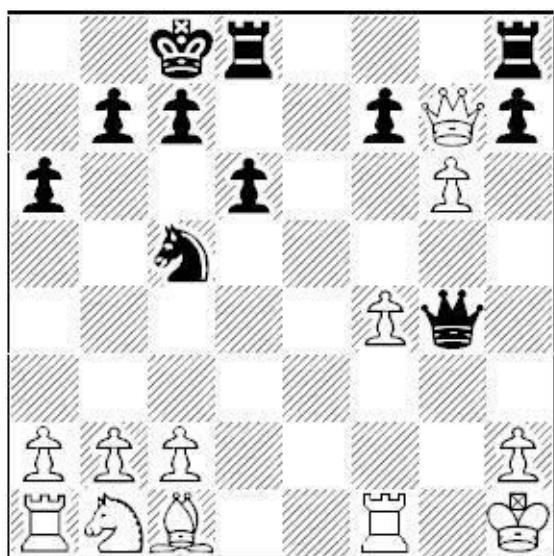


Diagram 4 (W)

Black is a piece down but has obvious compensation: he is way ahead in development and threatens to open the h-file against the weakened white king position.

16 Nc3

The most human reply, developing a piece.

The alternatives are examined in the ‘Looking a Little Deeper’ section.

16 ... Ne6

This useful move stops the white queen from returning to the defence.

16 ... hxg6 17 Qd4 transposes to 16 Qd4.

17 Qf6

Forced.

17 ... hxg6 (Diagram 5)

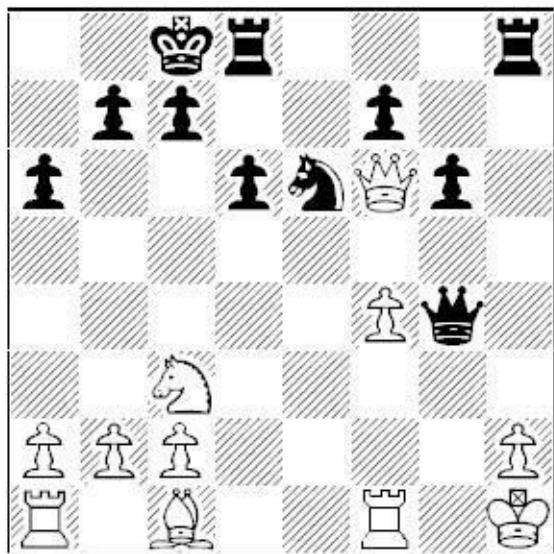


Diagram 5 (W)

The first thing to notice is that the white queen has to keep control of h8, and White must also defend against ... Qg3 and mate on h2.

18 Be3

The best try, White has two other moves that might repeat ... and everything else loses!

a) 18 Rg1 Qf3+ 19 Rg2 Qf1+ 20 Rg1 and Black may have no better than to repeat, with 20 ... Qf2 21 Rg2 Qf1+ 22 Rg1 but he might try 22 ... Qc4!? 23 Be3 d5 planning ... d4.

b) 18 Rf2 Qg3 19 Ne4 (19 Rg2 Qe1+ 20 Rg1 Qf2 21 Rg2 Qf1+ is the same as above) forces 19 ... Rxh2+! 20 Rxh2 Qe1+ 21 Kg2 Qxe4+ 22 Kg3 Nd4 23 Rf2 (23 Rh8 Qf3+ 24 Kh2 Qf2+ with a repetition) 23 ... Nf5+ 24 Kh2 Qe1 25 Rg2 Ng7 26 Qxg7 Qh4+ drawing.

18 ... Rh5

Not only doubling rooks, but also keeping an option of ... Rf5 (possibly prefaced by ... Re8, trapping the queen).

19 Rae1!

19 Rf2 is the only other move that keeps White in the game (if instead 19 Bg1?, then 19 ... Rf5 20 Qe7 Rxf4 leaves White in all sorts of trouble). 19 ... Rdh8 (menace: ... Qg3, or ... Rf5 and after the queen goes to e7, ... Rxh2+) 20 Ne4! (else White loses) 20 ... Rxh2+ 21 Rxh2 Qf3+ 22 Kg1 Qxe3+ 23 Rf2 (all forced) 23 ... Qh3 and: a) 24 Rg2 Nxf4! 25 Qxf4 Qh1+ 26 Kf2 Qxa1. With three pawns for the piece and by far the safer king, Black should have reasonable chances to get the full point, A.Rassler-L.Hyldkrog, correspondence 2008.

b) 24 Nxd6+ Kb8 (rather than 24 ... cxd6 25 Qc3+ swapping queens) 25 Rg2 cxd6 and White will have to be a computer to save this position.

19 ... Rf5

Not the most accurate. 19 ... Qh3! (**Diagram 6**) is strongest:

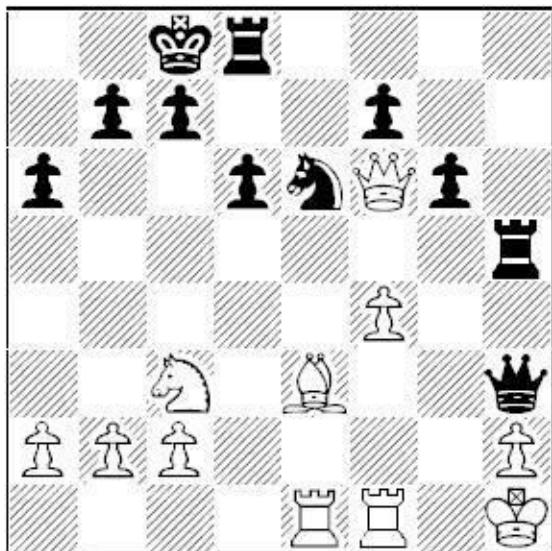


Diagram 6 (W)

a) 20 Bg1 (forced) 20 ... Rf5 21 Qe7 g5!? 22 Rf2 Rxf4 and now Black can take a repetition if he wants by ... Rd7-d8, or play for a win, depending on White's reply.

b) 20 Rf2?! Rf5 21 Qe7 Qh8! wins the white queen: 22 Rd2 Rd7 23 Bd4 (what

else?) 23 ... Qh5 24 Qe8+ Rd8 25 Rxe6 (25 Qe7? Qf3+ 26 Rg2 Nxd4) 25 ... Qf3+ 26 Rg2 Rxe8 27 Rxe8+ Kd7 28 Ree2 Qxf4 with fair winning chances.

20 Qe7 Rd7 21 Qe8+ Rd8 22 Qa4

White bravely plays for the win.

22 Qe7 Rd7 repeats.

22 ... d5 23 Ne2 d4 24 Bg1 g5! 25 Qb3 d3 26 cxd3 gxf4 (Diagram 7)

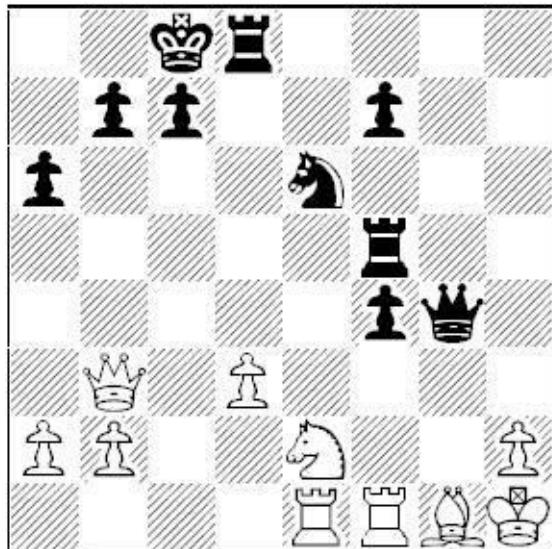


Diagram 7 (W)

27 Qc2?!

After excellent defence White finally cracks – even strong grandmasters have problems when under so much pressure for so long.

27 d4! f3 28 Ng3 Rh8! 29 Rxe6 Qh3 30 Rf2 Rb5 31 Qxf3 fxe6 fights off the attack, with some advantage for White.

27 ... Rg8 28 Rf2

28 Nd4! f3 29 Nxf3 Rxf3 30 Qe2 might hold.

28 ... Rfg5?!

28 ... Qh3! and the threat of ... f3 is decisive.

29 Qd2 f3 30 Ng3

Forced. 30 Nc3?? Qxg1+ 31 Rxg1 Rxg1 mate.

30 ... Qh3 31 Rxf3

31 Rxf3 Rxg3 32 Rxg3 Rxg3 regains the piece with a slight advantage.

$\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$

Looking a Little Deeper 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6

3 ... Bc5 4 0-0 Nf6 would transpose, but doesn't threaten to play the 'Berlin Wall', and also the immediate 4 c3 is annoying.

4 0-0

The best move, objectively, and by far the most popular.

4 ... Bc5 (**Diagram 8**)

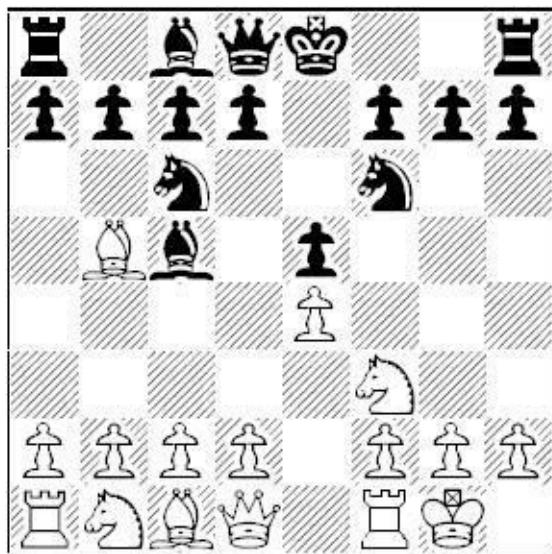


Diagram 8 (W)

Now White's main move is 5 c3, intending 6 d4, and this is the subject of Chapter 3. Here we will consider his important 5th move alternatives:

A: 5 Bxc6

B: 5 Nc3

C: 5 d3

D: 5 Nxe5

Alternatively:

5 Re1

With 5 Qe2 White plays a Worrall Attack. 5 ... 0-0 (5 ... Nd4 would be less good here, as White hasn't played d3, so 6 Nxd4 Bxd4 7 c3 Bb6 8 d4 doesn't waste a tempo) and now: a) 6 d3 Nd4! is a different story, of course: 7 Nxd4 Bxd4 8 c3 (8 Bg5?? Bxb2 was a horrible blunder by the future GM, A.Cherniaev-A.Mukhaev, Moscow 1996) 8 ... Bb6 9 Bg5 (9 Nd2 c6 10 Ba4 d5) 9 ... h6 10 Bh4 c6 11 Ba4 d6 12 Kh1 (12 Bxf6?! Qxf6 13 Nd2 d5 14 Rae1 Bc7 15 f4?!, V.Serebriakov-N.Kabanov, Ekaterinburg 2008, 15 ... exf4 16 e5 Qg6 17 Rxf4 Bf5 18 Bc2 f6 winning material) 12 ... g5 13 Bg3 Bg4 14 f3 Be6 15 Rd1 Nh5 16 Bf2 Nf4 17 Qe1 Qf6 18 d4?, O.Sarana Hungeling-P.Lebed, Kiev 1999, when Black missed a chance to win the game immediately by 18 ... Nxe2! 19 Kxg2 Bh3+ 20 Kg1 Qxf3.

b) 6 c3 Re8 (**Diagram 9**)

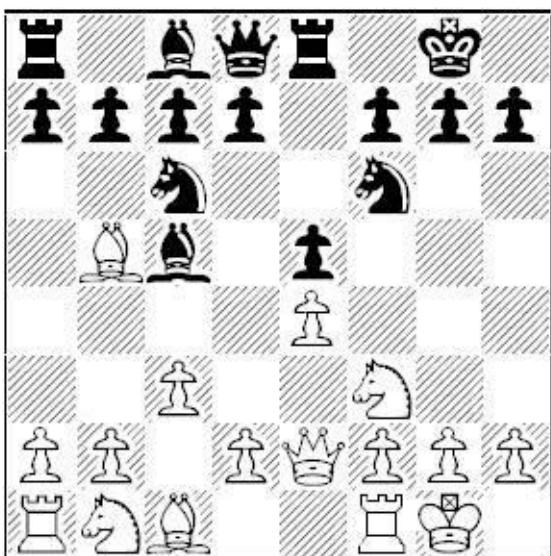


Diagram 9 (W)

Black might as well keep the option of playing ... d5 in one go, and the rook is always going to be well placed opposite the white queen. Now: b1) 7 Rd1 doesn't make much sense as White is not going to be able to play d4 for a long time: 7 ... d5!? (7 ... d6 8 d3 a6 9 Bxc6 bxc6 10 Nbd2 a5 11 Nc4 h6 12 Nxa5!? Rxa5 13 b4 Bxb4 14 cxb4 Ra4 15 a3 Bd7 16 Nd2 Qa8 17 Bb2 looked about level here in G.Milos-G.Kasparov, Prague 2002, although the World Champion went on to win, naturally) 8 exd5? (8 d3 of course) 8 ... e4! 9 dxc6 exf3 10 Qf1 (10 Qxf3?? Bg4) 10 ... Ng4 (10 ... bxc6! 11 Bxc6 Ng4 12 d4 Ba6! 13 dxc5 Qh4 and wins) 11 d4 Bd6? 12 g3 b6?! 13 h3?, S.Sahl-V.Sipila, Reykjavik 2011, 13 ... Bxg3!! 14 fxg3 f2+ 15 Kh1 Qd5+.

b2) 7 d3 h6 (to stop the Bg5 pin) 8 Nbd2 a6 9 Ba4 b5 10 Bb3 (10 Bc2 d6 11 a4 A.Vouldis-Z.Gyimesi, Szeged 1994, and now 11 ... Be6) 10 ... d6 11 Rd1 (11 h3 Nh5! and ... Nf4) 11 ... Ng4 (11 ... Ne7 12 Nf1 Ng6 is a good alternative) 12 Rf1 (it doesn't say a lot for White's opening play if he is reduced to this!) 12 ... Bb6 (12 ... Nf6 with a draw offer?) 13 h3 Nf6 14 Rd1 Ne7 (14 ... Nh5! 15 Nf1 Qf6 and ... Nf4) 15 Nh4 g5!? 16 Qf3 Kg7 17 Nf5+ Nxf5 18 exf5 d5 19 Nf1 Bb7 20 h4 g4 21 Qg3 Qd7 22 Ne3 h5 23 d4 Ne4 24 Qh2 exd4 25 cxd4, I.Robertson-J.Parker, Scotland 1994, 25 ... g3! 26 fxg3

Qd6 27 Qh3 Nxg3 and the immediate threat is ... Bxd4.

5 ... Ng4!? (Diagram 10)

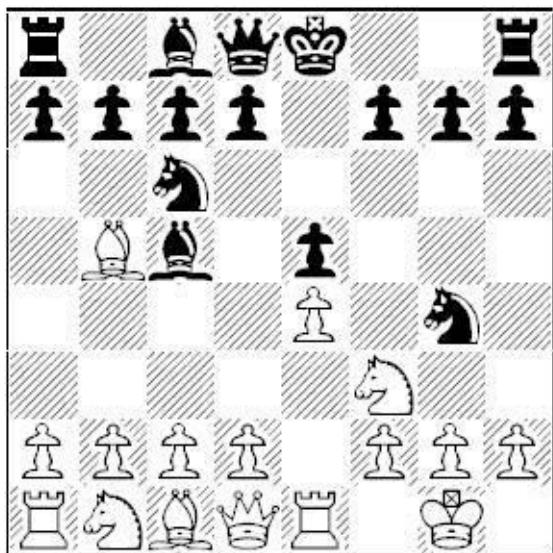


Diagram 10 (W)

DANGEROUS WEAPON! This already gives White headaches!

5 ... 0-0 6 c3 d6 7 d4 Bb6 transposes to the next chapter, and is a good choice as the Re1 lines are not particularly critical for Black.

6 Re2

6 Rf1 might be better, but it is obviously a bit embarrassing for White. 6 ... 0-0 7 h3 Nf6 8 Re1 Nd4!? (8 ... d6 9 c3 Ne7! 10 d4 Bb6 would transpose to the next chapter) 9 Nxd4 (9 Bc4 can be met by 9 ... c6!?, e.g. 10 Nxe5 d5 11 exd5 cxd5 12 Bf1 Ne4) 9 ... Bxd4 10 c3 Bb6 11 d4 d5! 12 exd5 (12 dxe5 Nxe4 13 Be3 c6 14 Bd3 Bf5 with a nice position for Black) 12 ... exd4 13 c4 Qd6 14 b3, B.Bruned-J.Vion, Sautron 2002, 14 ... c5 threatening ... Bc7 and leaving the b5-bishop stuck out on a limb.

6 ... Nd4 7 Nxd4 Bxd4 8 h3 (Diagram 11)

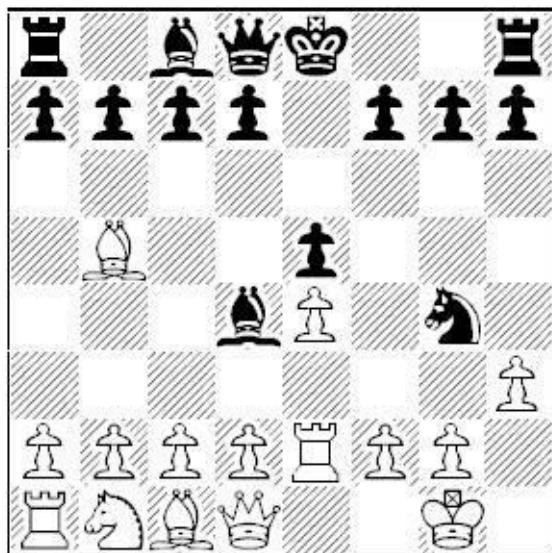


Diagram 11 (B)

White must take care: 8 c3?? Qh4 is winning.

8 ... Nxf2!?

8 ... c6 is worth a try, as 9 Ba4 Nxf2 10 Rxf2 Bxf2+ 11 Kxf2 Qh4+ (11 ... d5!?) 12 Kg1 Qxe4 is also fun (12 ... d5 13 d3 Bxh3 14 gxh3 Qg3+ forces a perpetual.) 13 Nc3 Qd4+ 14 Kh2 d5 15 d3 0-0 and I prefer Black.

9 Rxf2 Bxf2+ 10 Kxf2 Qf6+

Black gets two pawns and rook for the two minor pieces.

11 Ke1

11 Ke2 Qg6 12 Kf1 Qxe4 transposes. Or 11 Kg1?! Qb6+.

11 ... Qh4+ 12 Kf1 Qxe4 13 Nc3 Qf4+ 14 Kg1 c6 15 Bf1 d5

15 ... Qd4+ 16 Kh2 0-0 followed by ... d5 might be slightly more accurate.

16 Qe1

A.Groszpeter-W.Tonoli, Groningen 1977, and now:

16 ... Qd4+ 17 Kh1 0-0 18 d3 Re8

Black's rook and two pawns should be the match of White's minor pieces, especially when considering his strong centre.

A)

5

Bxc6

dxc6

(Diagram

12)

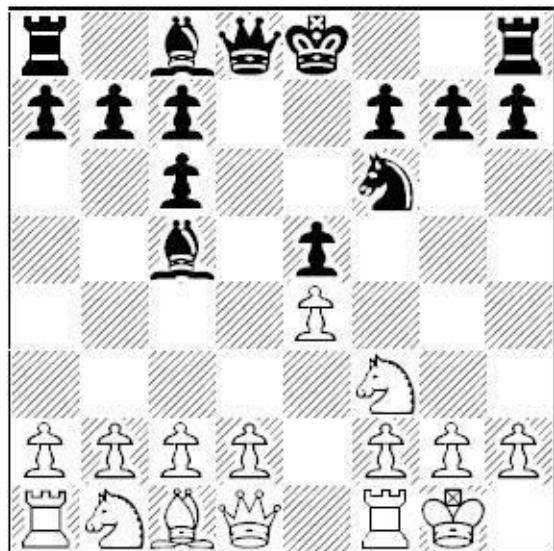


Diagram 12 (W)

6 Nxe5

Playing for tactics along the e-file.

6 d3 (**Diagram 13**)

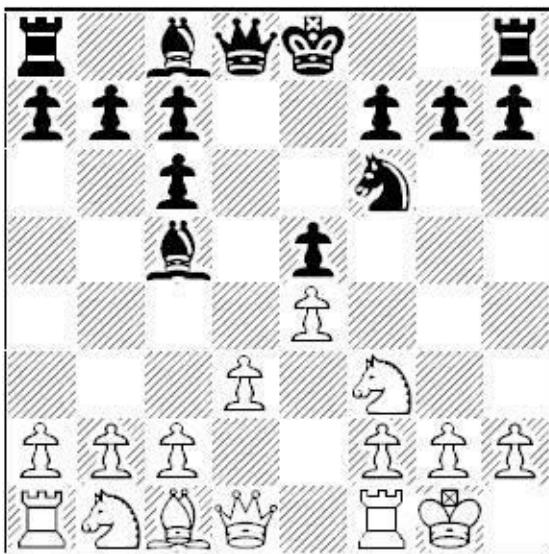


Diagram 13 (B)

This is solid but uninspiring, and is similar to some slower lines in the Exchange Spanish, except that Black hasn't wasted a move on ... a6. An important point to note is that White's basic 'winning plan' in the Exchange is to play d4, exchange the white d-pawn for the black e-pawn and create a mobile 4 to 3 pawn majority on the kingside – Black's doubled c-pawn greatly hampers his possibility to create a passed pawn on the queenside, of course. Here this is obviously not possible, so we can say that Black is already comfortably equal.

6 ... Qe7

Black will generally try to implement his standard plan here: play ... c5 and then manoeuvre the knight to d4 via d7 and f8 (or c5) and e6. He will play ... f6 to defend the e-pawn, and should White play c3 to control d4 he weakens his d3-pawn on the open d-file.

White has a choice:

a) 7 Be3 Bg4 8 Nbd2 Nd7 9 Qe2 (9 Qe1 0-0-0 10 Bxc5 Qxc5 11 Rc1 f6 12 Qe3 Kb8 13 Nc4 Qxe3 14 fxe3 Be6 15 Ncd2 c5 16 b3 Nb6, planning ... Nc8-d6 and a queenside pawn advance, R.Weill-A.Kosten, Clermont-Ferrand 2012; 9 Nc4 transposes to 9 Be3, below) 9 ... 0-0-0 10 Bxc5 Nxc5 11 Qe3 Bxf3 12 Nxf3 Kb8 13 Rad1 f6 14 Rfe1 Ne6 15 g3 c5, Sanchez J.Almeyra-G.Mahia, Buenos Aires 2000. In order to stop ... Nd4, White played 16 c3 but now d3 is weak: 16 ... Rd7 17 Rd2 Rhd8.

b) 7 Bg5 h6 8 Bh4 Bg4 9 h3 Bh5 10 Nbd2 was met by the aggressive 10 ... 0-0-0 11 Qe2 g5 12 Bg3 g4 13 hxg4 Bxg4 14 Rfe1 Rhg8 in D.Solak-M.Bartel, Plovdiv 2012.

c) 7 Nbd2 (the most common) 7 ... Bg4 8 Nc4 (8 h3 Bh5 9 Nc4 is similar – 9 ... Nd7 10 a3 f6 11 b4 Bd4 12 Rb1 Nb6 13 Ne3 Na4 14 Nf5, J.Roebers-H.Jonkman, Amsterdam 2000, 14 ... Qd7 15 N5xd4 exd4) 8 ... Nd7 and now: c1) 9 Be3 Bd6!? (I would prefer 9 ... f6 10 h3 Bh5 transposing to 9 h3) 10 h3 Bh5 11 Re1 (11 a4 f6 12 c3

b6 13 Re1 0-0 14 Bc1 Rfd8 15 Ne3 Qf7 16 Nf5 Bf8 17 Be3 Nc5 18 Bxc5 Bxc5 19 a5 b5; the knights are probably the match of the bishops here, J.Van der Wiel-V.Salov, Rotterdam 1989) 11 ... 0-0 12 g4!? Bg6 13 Nh2 f6 14 Nfl (coming to f5) 14 ... Bf7 15 Ncd2 c5 16 Ng3 g6 17 Qf3 Rfe8 18 Bh6 Qd8 19 Kh2 Bf8 20 Be3 Nb8! (a different route to d4!) 21 Rh1 Nc6 22 Rag1 Nd4 and Black's positional play triumphed over White's crude attempts at starting a kingside attack in M.Dzhumaev-A.Utegaliev, Tashkent 2009.

c2) 9 h3 Bh5 10 Be3 f6 (**Diagram 14**)

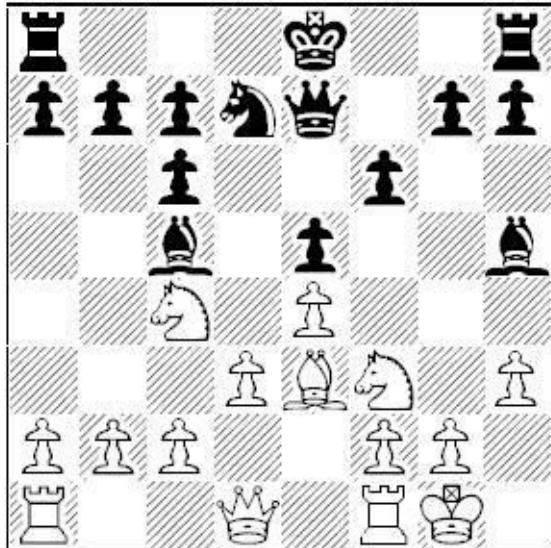


Diagram 14 (W)

11 Qe2 (11 Rb1 0-0 12 g4!? Bf7 13 b3, F.Bellini-M.Malloni, Spoleto 2011, when Black can still play 'the plan' by 13 ... Rfd8 14 Qe2 Nf8 but 13 ... a5! is good, planning ... a4, and if 14 a4 then 14 ... Bb4 15 Bd2 Bxc4! 16 dxc4 Bxd2 17 Qxd2 Rfd8 and ... Nc5-e6) 11 ... Nf8 (always the same plan!) 12 c3 (12 Bxc5 Qxc5 13 b4 Qe7 14 Qe3 Ne6 15 Rab1 0-0 16 Kh2 b5 17 Na5 Bxf3 18 Qxf3 c5 19 a3 cxb4 20 axb4 c5 21 bxc5 Qxc5 with an edge, M.Ghinda-K.Ninov, Stara Zagora 1990) 12 ... Ne6 13 b4 Bxe3 14 Qxe3 c5 15 b5 0-0-0!? (15 ... 0-0 is safer) 16 a4 Nf4 17 Rfd1 Qf7 (17 ... Qe6) 18 Kh2 Nxd3 winning material in P.Martynov-E.Ovod, St Petersburg 2011.

6 ... Nxe4 (Diagram 15)

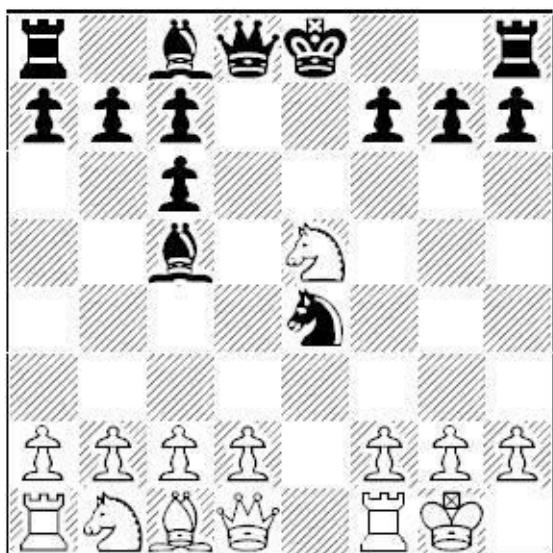


Diagram 15 (W)

7 Qe2

The only dangerous move, otherwise Black would enjoy good development and the bishop pair at no cost: 7 Qf3 Ng5 8 Qg3 0-0 9 d3 Ne6, for instance. Other moves are even worse: 7 Re1?? loses to 7 ... Bxf2+ of course.

7 d3? Nx_f2 8 Rx_f2 (or 8 Qe2 Ng4+ 9 Kh1 Qe7 winning a piece) 8 ... Bxf2+ 9 Kx_f2, S.Hingst-M.Baessler, German League 2004, 9 ... Qd4+ 10 Be3 Qxe5.

DANGEROUS WEAPON! 7 Nc3? Nx_f2 8 Rx_f2 (8 Qe2 0-0 9 Rx_f2 Re8) 8 ... Bxf2+ 9 Kxf2 Qd4+ picks up the e5-knight, Y.Ivanov-A.Samoilov, Kolomna 2010.

7 ... Qd5

Forced.

8 Nd3

Alternatively:

a) 8 d4 Bxd4 9 Nf3 Be6! with:

a1) 10 c4 is tricky, but ultimately unsuccessful: 10 ... Qxc4 11 Qxc4 (11 Qxe4?? Bxf2+) 11 ... Bxf2+! 12 Rxf2 Bxc4 (winning an exchange back) 13 Nc3 (13 Rc2 0-0-0 14 Nc3 Bd3, or 13 Nbd2 Nxf2 14 Nxc4 Nd3 N.Povah-D.Rumens, Portsmouth 1976) 13 ... Nxf2 14 Kxf2 0-0-0 when rook and three pawns outguns the two white pieces in the endgame, A.Zapata-M.Rohde, New York 1988.

a2) 10 Nxd4 Qxd4 11 Rd1 can be met by 11 ... Qc4 12 Qxc4 Bxc4 13 Bf4 (or 13 Re1 0-0-0 and the knight is safe because of White's weak back rank) 13 ... Nd6. Black has an extra pawn, and regaining it by 14 Bxd6 (14 Nd2, A.Naiditsch-T.Karolyi, Paks 1998, 14 ... Be6 15 Bxd6 cxd6 16 Ne4 d5 17 Nd6+ Ke7 18 Nxb7 Rab8 19 Na5 Rhc8) 14 ... cxd6 15 Na3 (15 Rxd6? Bd5 traps the rook) 15 ... Be6 16 Rxd6 leaves Black on top after 16 ... Ke7 17 Rd2 Rhd8, V.Hresc-Z.Basagic, Pula 1984.

b) 8 d3?! is met by 8 ... Qxe5 9 Qxe4 (9 Nc3 f5) 9 ... Qxe4 10 dxe4 Be6 (10 ... 0-0 11 Bf4 f5 is also strong: 12 e5 Be6 13 Nd2 h6 14 Rfe1 Rad8 with a nice edge for Black in T.Heinz-D.Anic, Port Barcares 2005) 11 Nc3 0-0-0 12 Bf4 (or 12 Na4 Bd4 13 c3 Bf6 14 Nc5 Bc4 15 Re1 Rhe8, M.Meszaros-M.Podoba, Slovakian League 2001) 12 ... Bd4 13 a3 Rhe8 with advantage to Black because of his bishops, development advantage and pressure on e4 in J.Lappage-J.Rudd, Frome 2001.

c) 8 Nxc6!? Be6 9 d4 Bb6 10 Nb4 Qxd4 11 Nd3 0-0 12 Be3 Qd5.

8 ... 0-0 (Diagram 16)

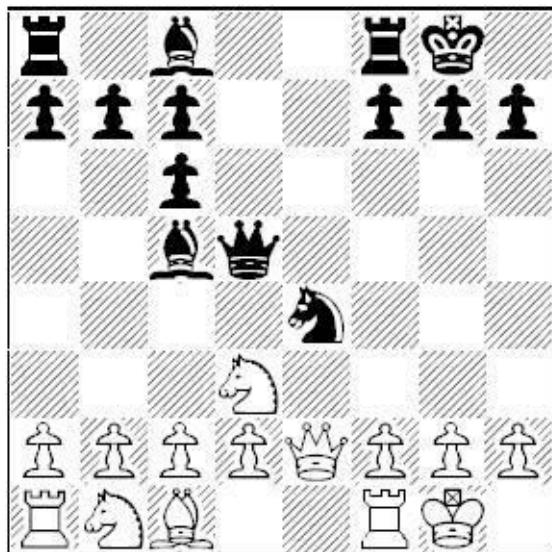


Diagram 16 (W)

8 ... Be6!? is more combative: 9 Nxc5 Nxc5 10 Nc3 Qf5 11 d3 0-0-0 12 Be3 h5!? planning ... h4-h3 to weaken the kingside light squares in I.Valencia-R.Kleinschroth, Giessen 1991.

9 Nxc5

If 9 Re1 Bf5.

9 ... Nxc5 10 Nc3 Qf5

10 ... Qd6 11 d3 f5!?, threatening ... f4, is worth trying.

11 d3

11 d4 Ne6 12 Be3 b6 13 f3 Qa5 14 Rfd1 Ba6 15 Qf2 Rad8 16 a3, J.Gomez Baillo-J.De Paz San Martin, Benidorm 1992. Now Black should give his queen some room by 16 ... Bb7 say, instead of 16 ... Rd7?? 17 d5! Rxd5 18 Rxd5! 1-0, since 18 ... cxd5 is met by 19 b4.

11 ... Ne6

11 ... Bd7 12 Be3 (this is not very exciting, with opposite-coloured bishops on the board, but Black has no problems whatsoever) 12 ... Rae8, S.Dvoirys-I.Efimov, Gausdal 1991.

12 Be3 c5 13 Rfe1 b6 14 Ne4 Bb7 (Diagram 17)

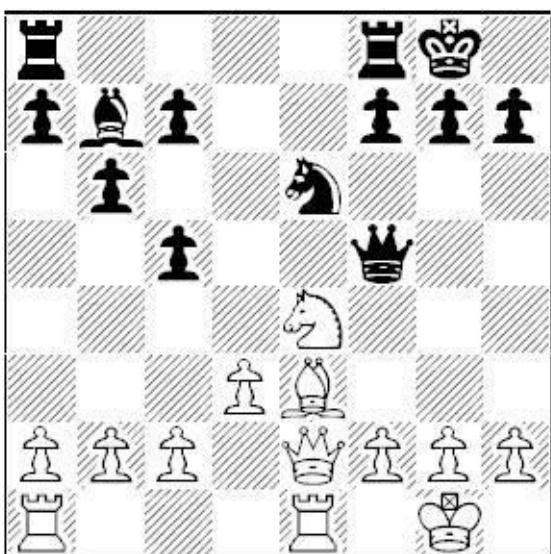


Diagram 17 (W)

With harmonious development in J.Sosovicka-M.Hruba, Piestany 2007. Black can consider continuing with ... Qg6, ... Rae8 and maybe ... f5-f4.

B) 5 Nc3

4 Nc3 Bc5 5 0-0 0-0 also leads to our main line.

4 ... Bc5 5 Nc3 0-0

Black simply continues his development.

TRICKY TRANSPOSITION: “This position often arises from 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bb5 Bc5 5 0-0 0-0. Indeed, if Black plays the Classical Defense to the Spanish, he may as well play 4 ... Bc5 against the Four Knights, and save himself some memory work.” (Mark Morss) BEWARE! After 5 ... d6 White will continue 6 d4 exd4 7 Nxd4 with a typical ‘small centre’ plus.

6 Nxe5

6 d3 is a bit limp, and now there is a choice: a) 6 ... Nd4!? is the fun line:

a1) 7 Nxe5!? (Diagram 18)

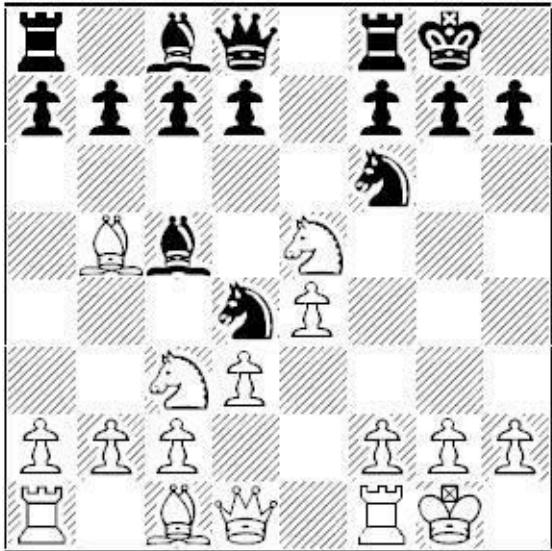


Diagram 18 (B)

This is critical, but it transposes to something resembling Rubinstein's line against the Four Knights, and is not a very practical choice for White: he gets a lot of headaches in return for the hot pawn!

7 ... d6 8 Nf3 (obviously forced) 8 ... Bg4 (**Diagram 19**)

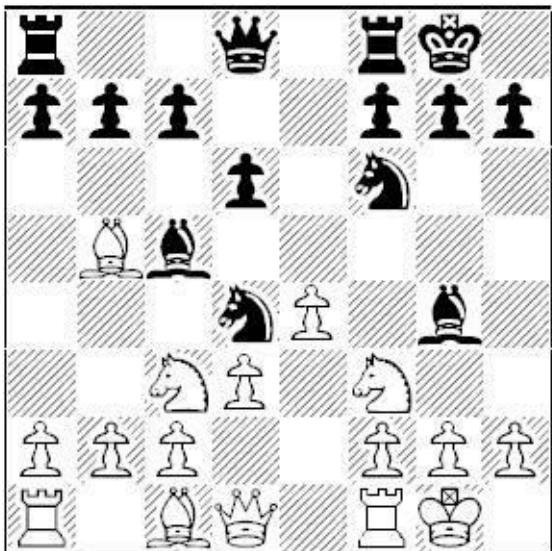


Diagram 19 (W)

The main point. White's kingside will be devastated – his first step is to parry Black's menace of ... c6 followed by ... Nd7-e5.

9 Be3

To capture on d4. Alternatively, 9 Bg5 c6 10 Bc4 Qc8!? (I can't think of any reason Black would prefer this to 10 ... Qd7! 11 Bxf6 gxf6 with the same unpleasant threats) 11 Bxf6 gxf6 12 Na4?? Bxf3 13 gxf3 Qh3 14 Kh1 Nxf3 15 Rg1+ Kh8 16 Rg2, B.Oliveira-J.Ramos, Vitoria 1999, when Black has various ways to finish the game, 16 ... Rg8 17 Qf1 Rg4 being the most obvious.

9 ... Bxf3 10 gxf3 c6 11 Ba4 b5 12 Bb3 Nh5 13 Kh1

Or 13 Bxd4 Bxd4 14 f4 Qh4 15 Ne2 (S.Tarrasch-J.Perlis, San Sebastian 1912) 15 ... Bxb2 16 Rb1 Bf6 regaining the pawn with a strong attack.

13 ... Qh4 14 Rg1

You don't get to 2700 without being able to defend!

14 ... Qh3 (14 ... a5 15 a4 b4 16 Nb1 d5 is another try, threatening ... Bd6 and ... f5) 15 Qf1 Qxf3+ 16 Qg2 a5 17 a4 b4 18 Nb1 Qxg2+ 19 Rxg2 Nxb3 20 cxb3 f5! 21 Nd2 Bxe3 22 fxe3 fxe4 23 Nxe4 d5 24 Nc5 Rae8 25 Re1 Rf3 26 Rge2 d4 27 Kg2 Rf5 28 Ne4 dxe3 29 Rxe3 Rd8 (29 ... Nf4+) 30 Rc1 Nf4+ 31 Kg3?! Nxd3?! (31 ... Rdf8! threatening ... Nd5 followed by ... Rf3+ should win) 32 Rxc6 and somehow White managed to draw this, P.Svidler-P.Nielsen, Copenhagen 2010.

a2) As in previous similar lines, 7 Nxd4 Bxd4 is very simple for Black: 8 Bg5 (8 Ne2 Bb6 9 Ng3 c6 10 Ba4 d5 11 h3 dxe4 12 dxe4 is equal, G.Milos-I.Morovic Fernandez, Santiago de Chile 1989) 8 ... c6 9 Bc4 (or 9 Ba4 h6 10 Bh4 d6 11 Kh1, Y.Solodovnichenko-K.Chojnacki, Poznan 2003, when 11 ... a5 is often a good move in such positions – Black threatens to trap the bishop with ... b5!; 12 a3 Be6 with a plus) 9 ... h6 10 Bh4 b5 11 Bb3, A.Petrisor-P.Nielsen, Aix-les-Bains 2011, and now 11 ... d6.

a3) 7 Ba4 d6 8 h3 c6 9 Nxd4 Bxd4 10 Ne2 Bb6 with very easy equality for Black, A.Heimann-O.Korneev, Neustadt an der Weinstrasse 2012.

b) Of course, 6 ... d6 (**Diagram 20**) is a perfectly solid alternative:

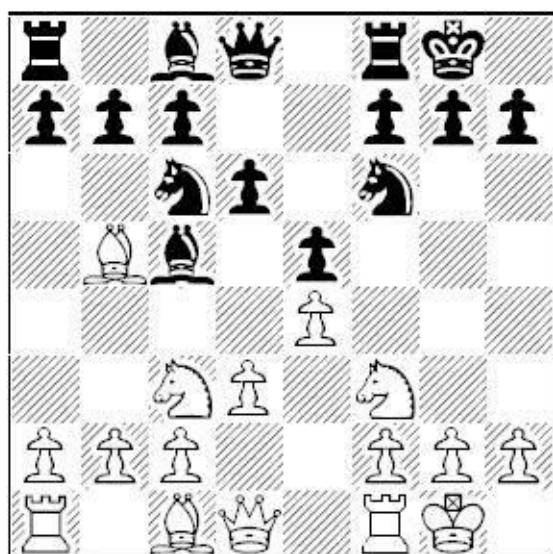


Diagram 20 (W)

7 Na4 (White grabs the pair of bishops; other moves are nothing at all, for instance

7 h3 Nd4 8 Nxd4 Bxd4 9 Ne2 Bb6 10 Ng3 c6, J.Polgar-A.Grischuk, Moscow 2002, or 7 Bg5 h6 8 Bh4 Bg4 9 h3 Bxf3 10 Qxf3 Nd4 11 Qd1 c6 12 Bc4 b5 13 Bb3 a5, M.Grill-C.Marcelin, Montlucon 1997, and here 8 ... Nd4 is also good) 7 ... Bb6 8 Nxb6 axb6 9 c3 Ne7 (9 ... h6 10 h3 Bd7 11 Ba4 Re8 12 Bb3 Be6 13 Bc2 d5 and Black has equalized, P.Svidler-V.Kramnik, Dortmund 2004) 10 Re1 Bd7 (to get rid of White's bishop pair; 10 ... Ng6 11 d4 Qe7 12 Bd3 h6 13 h3 Nh7 14 Nh2 Qh4 with near equality in M.Cornette-A.Kosten, Montpellier 2006) 11 Bxd7 (11 Bc4 Ba4 12 Bb3 Bxb3 13 Qxb3 Ng6 is equal, S.Maze-K.Georgiev, French League 2007) 11 ... Nxd7 12 d4 Ng6 and again Black is perfectly okay, C.Balogh-F.Vallejo Pons, Heviz 2008.

Meanwhile, capturing the pawn by 6 Bxc6 dxc6 7 Nxe5?! is quite weak (7 d3 Qe7 is similar to Variation A, 5 Bxc6, but the knight is misplaced on c3) 7 ... Re8 8 Nf3 (or 8 Nd3 Bg4 9 Qe1 Bd4 with advantage, K.Gawehns-O.Korneev, Wiesbaden 2012) 8 ... Nxe4 9 Nxe4 Rxe4 and Black has the bishop pair, K.Huchwajda-M.Zajecki, Poznan 1997.

6 ... Nxe5 7 d4 Bd6 (Diagram 21)

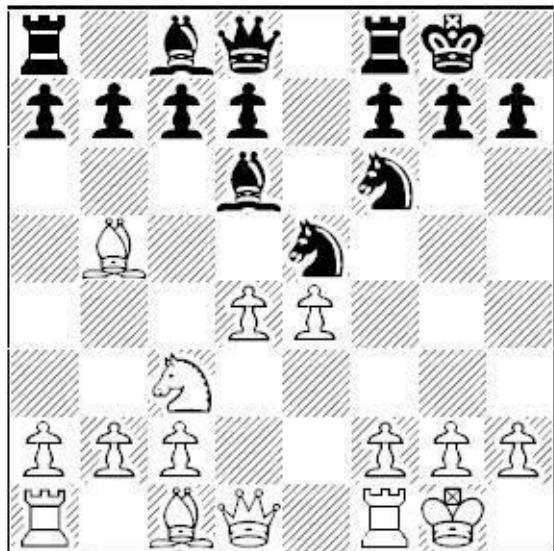


Diagram 21 (W)

8 f4

This has long been known to be the critical move.

8 dxe5 Bxe5 is too easy for Black. White can't envisage f4 just yet as Black will simply capture on c3 then on e4.

a) 9 Re1 Re8 10 Bg5 (10 Bd3 transposes to 9 Bd3) 10 ... h6 11 Bh4 and now, rather than go pawn-grabbing by 11 ... g5 12 Bg3 Bxc3 13 bxc3 Nxe4, as in E.Dashibalov-D.Frolov, Tomsk 2003, which was a bit dicey after 14 Qh5, I would prefer to complete my development by 11 ... c6 12 Bd3 d6 , ... Be6, ... Qb6, etc.

b) 9 Bg5 h6 10 Bh4 c6 11 Bd3 Qb6 (to hinder f4 and unpin the f6-knight; the natural 11 ... d6!? is possible, as 12 f4 Bg4 13 Qd2 can be answered by the trick 13 ... Bd4+ 14 Kh1 Nxe4!) 12 Rb1 (12 Na4 Qa5 13 c3 d5 14 f4 Bg4 15 Qe1 Qxa4 16 fxe5 Nxe4 17 Be7 Rfe8 18 Qh4 Be6 19 Bf6 Qa5 was a bit wild, E.Matseyko-A.Burtasova, Kharkov 2006) 12 ... Re8 13 Ne2?! d5 freeing Black's game, A.Van de Oudeweetering-L.Winants, Netherlands 1987.

c) 9 Bd3 Re8 (renewing the threats to e4) 10 Bg5 (10 Re1 d6 11 h3 c6 12 Bd2 b5 13 a3 a6 14 Qf3 c5! 15 Rab1 c4 16 Bf1 Bb7 – a nice plan from Black, targeting the e4-pawn – 17 Nd5? Nxe4! winning, B.Lengyel-S.Husari, Budapest 2002) 10 ... h6 11 Bh4 when rather than 11 ... Bxc3 12 bxc3 g5 13 Bg3 Nxe4 14 Qh5, S.Nitin-S.Shyam, Chennai 2011, 11 ... d6 looks simplest, just intending to complete development, e.g. 12 f4 Bg4 13 Bxf6 Qd7! 14 Qd2 Bxf6 15 h3 (if 15 f5 to trap the bishop, 15 ... Bh5 16 h3 Bd4+ 17 Kh1 Bxc3 18 Qxc3 f6) 15 ... Bd4+ 16 Kh2 Qd8!? as the bishop is immune from capture.

8 ... Nc6 (Diagram 22)

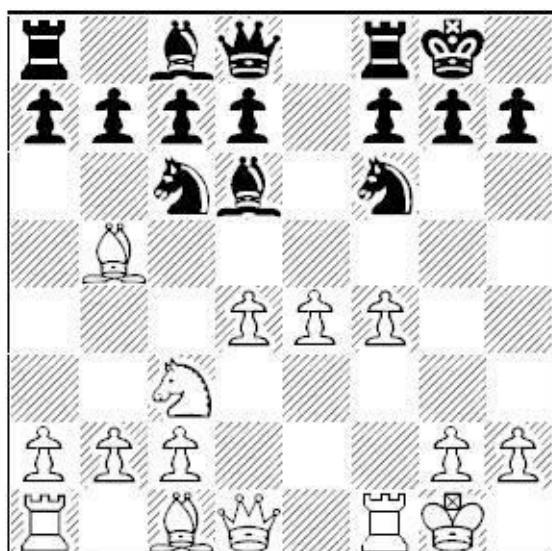


Diagram 22 (W)

8 ... Neg4 is a reasonable alternative, and scores well in practice, e.g. 9 e5 Bb4 10 exf6 (or 10 f5!? d5 11 Be2, P.Acs-L.Winants, Rethymnon 2003, 11 ... Nxe5 12 dxe5 Bc5+ 13 Kh1 Ne4) 10 ... Nxf6 11 f5 d5 12 Bg5 c6 13 Bd3 Re8 14 Qf3 h6 15 Bh4 Be7 16 Rae1 Bd7 and Black was fine in V.Vehi Bach-O.Korneev, Navalmoral 2000.

9 e5 Bb4!? (Diagram 23)

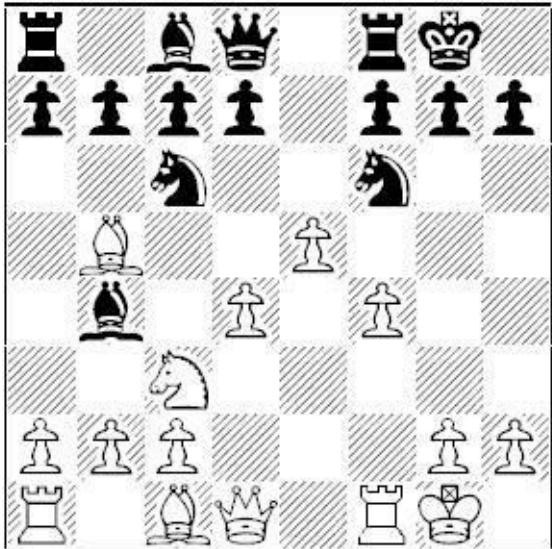


Diagram 23 (W)

I always thought that this move looked like the logical choice here, although most players prefer to retreat to e7. Anyway, it might take a Four Knights player away from his theory.

For what it's worth, the main line goes 9 ... Be7 10 d5 Nb4 11 exf6 Bxf6 12 a3 (but White has other, better, tries, such as 12 Bc4 d6 13 Ne4, J.Gallagher-M.Sbarra, Geneva 2005, when White has more space and the b4-knight is misplaced) 12 ... Bxc3 13 bxc3 Nxd5 14 Qxd5 c6.

10 d5

The main line.

10 exf6 Qxf6 11 Nd5 (11 Be3 was nothing in C.Goering-S.Mieses, Leipzig 1871, after 11 ... Bxc3 12 bxc3 d5 intending ... Bf5) and now there is a choice: a) 11 ... Qxd4+ is possible: 12 Be3 (I'm not very keen on lines such as 12 Qxd4!? Nxd4 13 Nxc7 Nxc2 for Black myself, though: 14 Nxa8 Bc5+ 15 Kh1 Nxa1 16 Bd3 and the black knight is trapped, although the position remains unclear) 12 ... Qxd1 13 Raxd1 Bd6 14 f5 f6 15 Bf4 Ne5 16 Bxe5 fxe5! (16 ... Bxe5 17 Ne7+ Kh8 18 Nxc8 Raxc8 19 Bxd7 is about level) 17 f6, K.Kulaots-M.Roiz, Plovdiv 2012, when 17 ... Bc5+ 18 Kh1 c6 19 Ne7+ Kh8 looks a bit better for Black.

b) 11 ... Qd6!? with the possibilities:

b1) 12 Bc4 Na5 13 b3 b5 14 Be2 Qxd5 15 Bf3 Qd6 16 Bxa8 Bc3 17 Rb1 b4 (planning ... Ba6; 17 ... c6 is maybe a bit too greedy: 18 Rf3 b4 19 Qd3 Bxd4+ 20 Be3 Bxe3+ 21 Qxe3 Qc7 22 f5 Ba6 23 Re1 h6 24 f6) 18 Be4! Ba6 19 Bd3 Qxd4+ 20 Kh1 Bxd3 21 Qxd3 Qxd3 22 cxd3 Nc6 with fair compensation for the exchange, as e1 is covered.

b2) 12 Nxb4 Qxb4 13 Bxc6 (13 c4 d5) 13 ... dxc6 14 f5 f6 15 Qd3 c5 16 dxc5 Qxc5+ 17 Be3 Qc6 18 Rad1 b6 19 Rd2 Bb7 and it seems to me that White's light squares are weaker than Black's dark squares, although a draw is likely, of course.

10 ... a6! (Diagram 24)

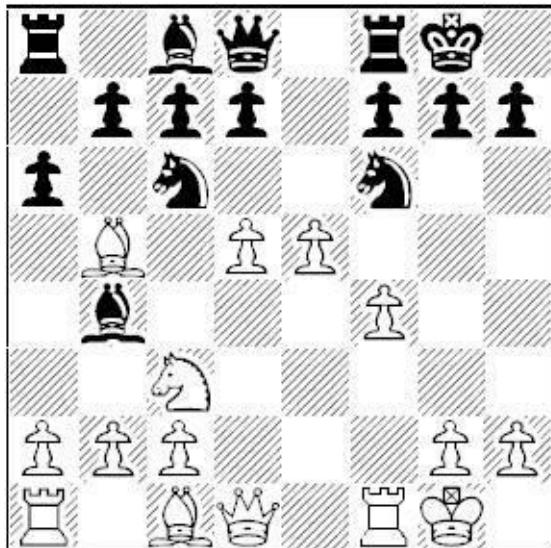


Diagram 24 (W)

Tricky, but rare, I have played 10 ... Bxc3 myself: 11 bxc3 Ne4 (11 ... Nxe5!? 12 fxe5 Nxd5 13 Qxd5 c6 14 Qf3 Qb6+, D.Krajina-R.Stern, German League 2006, 15 Be3 Qxb5 16 Qg3) 12 Qf3 f5 13 dxc6 bxc6 14 Bd3 d5 15 exd6 cxd6 16 Bxe4 fxe4 17 Qxe4, D.Marciano-A.Kosten, Belfort 1997, when 17 ... d5 18 Qd4 Bf5 is almost equal.

11 Be2

Or:

a) 11 dxc6 axb5 12 exf6 dxc6 13 fxg7 Re8. Black will recapture the g-pawn after exchanging queens, when his bishops and open a-file promise him excellent play.

b) 11 Ba4 Na5 12 exf6 Bxc3 13 bxc3 Qxf6 14 Qf3 b5 15 Bb3 Re8 16 Bd2 Bb7 and White has problems with his d-pawn.

11 ... Bc5+ 12 Kh1 (Diagram 25)

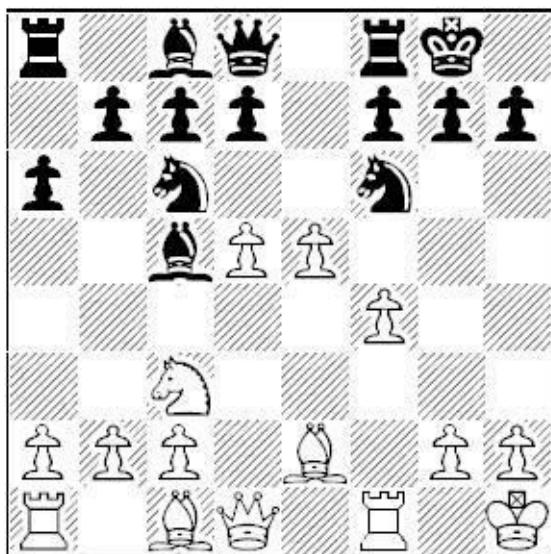


Diagram 25 (B)

12 ... Nxd5 13 Nxd5

My (old!) copy of *ECO C* prefers 13 Qxd5 but after 13 ... d6 Black threatens ... Be6 and should be fine. 14 Ne4 Nd4!? is the point, with a nasty threat to trap the queen by ... Be6! (14 ... Ba7 15 exd6 cxd6 is also fine, as the d-pawn is a bit poisonous: 16 Qxd6 Bf5 17 Qxd8 Raxd8 18 Bd3 Rd5 – intending ... Nb4 – 19 Nf2 Rfd8 20 Bxf5 Rxf5 when White has development and weak back-rank problems, or 16 Nxd6 Nb4 17 Qd1 Qc7 18 Nxc8 Raxc8 19 c3 Rcd8 20 Qb3 Rfe8) 15 exd6 (15 Nxc5 dxc5 16 Qxd8 Rxd8 17 Bd3 c4 18 Be4 Bf5) 15 ... cxd6 16 Bd3 Be6 17 Qh5 g6 18 Qd1 Nf5 19 Re1 Rc8 with active play for the IQP.

13 ... d6 14 Bd3

If 14 exd6 Bxd6. Or 14 f5 dxe5 15 f6 Be6 16 fxg7 Kxg7 17 c4 f5 with an extra pawn.

14 ... dxe5

14 ... Be6 15 c4 (15 Nc3 dxe5 16 Ne4) 15 ... dxe5 16 fxe5 Nxe5 17 Bxh7+ Kxh7 18 Qh5+ Kg8 19 Qxe5 Bxd5 20 cxd5 Re8 is also pleasant for Black.

15 fxe5 Nxe5! 16 Bxh7+ Kxh7 17 Qh5+ Kg8 18 Qxe5 (Diagram 26)

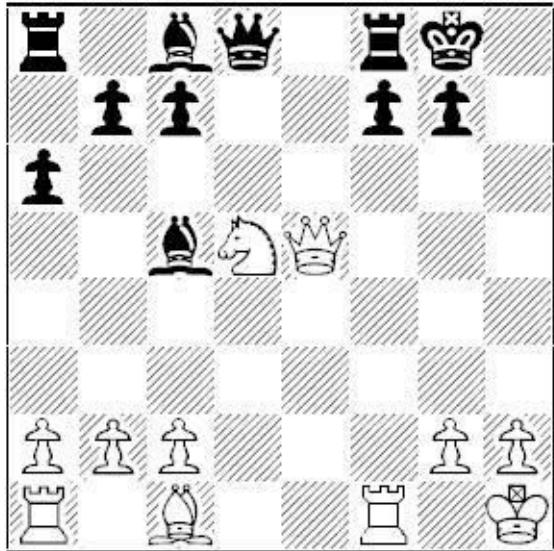


Diagram 26 (B)

So far this is N.Short-M.Adams, England 1991.

18 ... f6

Instead of Adams' 18 ... Bd6.

19 Qh5

19 Nxf6+ Rxf6 20 Bg5 Rxf1+ 21 Rxf1 Bd4! 22 Qe2 Qxg5 23 Qe8+ (23 Qc4+ Be6) 23 ... Kh7 24 Qe4+ Bf5 (no draw!) 25 Rxf5 Qe3 wins.

19 ... Be6!?

This should be at least equal for Black: he has the bishop pair and slightly better development.

19 ... Bg4 20 Qxg4 Qxd5 is level.

20 Rd1 (Diagram 27)

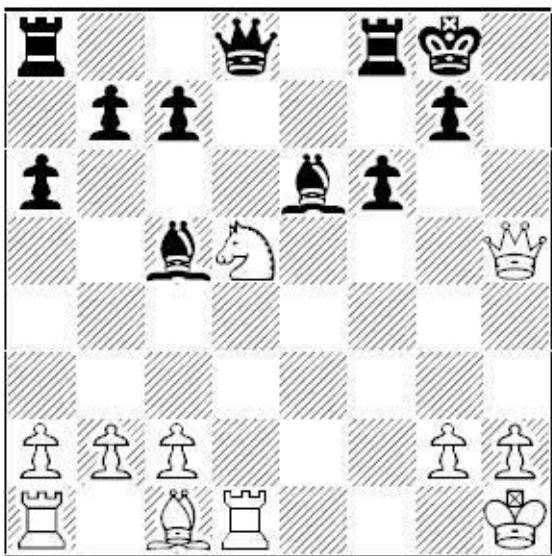


Diagram 27 (W)

20 Nxf6+ Rxf6 21 Rxf6 Qxf6 22 Qxc5 wins a pawn, but 22 ... b6 23 Qg1 Rf8 gives Black more than sufficient compensation, for example 24 c3 Qf1 25 Bg5 Qb5 attacking g5, b2 and also a2.

20 Nf4 Bc4 21 Re1 Bf2 22 Rd1 Qe8 23 Qf3 Rd8 not giving the white pieces a moment's respite.

20 ... Bxd5! 21 Rxd5

21 Qxd5+ Qxd5 22 Rxd5 Rad8 23 Rxd8 Rxd8 24 Bf4 Re8 to come to e2, with an edge.

21 ... Qe8 22 Qh4 Qe2 23 Bd2 Bf2 24 Qh3 Rad8

Black's pieces are active, and White's back rank a bit weak.

C) 5 d3

This quiet move is actually the most popular of all the alternatives to 5 c3, but allows Black an easy game.

TRICKY TRANPOSITION: 4 d3 Bc5 5 0-0 Nd4! will transpose, but 5 c3 is almost as popular and leads to Bishop's Opening style play.

5 ... Nd4! (Diagram 28)

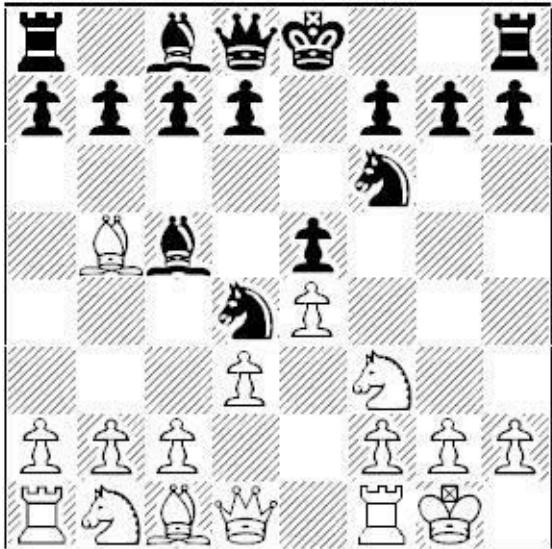


Diagram 28 (W)

‘Forking’ White’s two developed minor pieces. It seems odd to move Black’s developed pieces twice (and in the case of the dark-squared bishop maybe three times) before castling, but Black will regain these tempi on the b5-bishop, which has been left ‘hanging’.

Black actually has a positive score with this move, and my own experience has been very pleasant indeed.

6 Nxd4

Standard, but there are alternatives:

a) 6 Ba4 is sometimes played by strong players, and is almost certainly White's best try, although it is somewhat rare. By keeping the pin on the d-pawn and the attack on e5 White forces Black to make a decision about his e5-pawn. 6 ... Nxf3+ 7 Qxf3 0-0 (7 ... c6!? is also possible, as 8 Qg3 d6 9 Qxg7 Rg8 10 Qh6 Rg6 11 Qh4 Rg4 12 Qh6 Rg6 forces a draw, and 8 Nc3 0-0 transposes to 7 ... 0-0) and now: a1) 8 Qg3 d6 9 Bg5 c6 10 Bb3 Nh5 11 Qh4 Nf6 12 Nc3 h6 13 Bd2 a5 gave Black no problems in M.Carlsen-V.Anand, Moscow 2011, and he went on to win.

a2) 8 Bg5 can be met by 8 ... h6 as 9 Bxf6 Qxf6 10 Qxf6 gxf6 favours Black with his bishop pair, e.g. 11 Nc3 c6 12 Ne2 (else Black will move his d-pawn and then liquidate the doubled f-pawn by ... f5) 12 ... Rd8 13 Ng3 a5 (threatening ... b5 to trap the bishop) 14 c3 d5.

a3) 8 Nc3 c6 9 Bb3 a5 10 a4 d6 11 Kh1 Be6 12 Bxe6 fxe6 is fairly level, although Black has some pressure on the f-file, N.Firman-C.Balogh, German League 2009.

b) 6 Bc4 d6 7 Nxd4 (7 Ng5? Bg4! 8 Qd2 h6! 9 Nxf7 Qd7 should have led to a swift debacle in V.Kupreichik-Y.Malinin, St Petersburg 1998: 10 Kh1 Bf3! 11 Qe3 Ng4 and White had lost his queen) 7 ... Bxd4 8 c3 Bb6 9 Bg5 h6 10 Be3, J.Soalleiro-E.Gaudineau, French League 1999, 10 ... 0-0 11 Nd2 c6 and ... d5.

6 ... Bxd4 (Diagram 29)

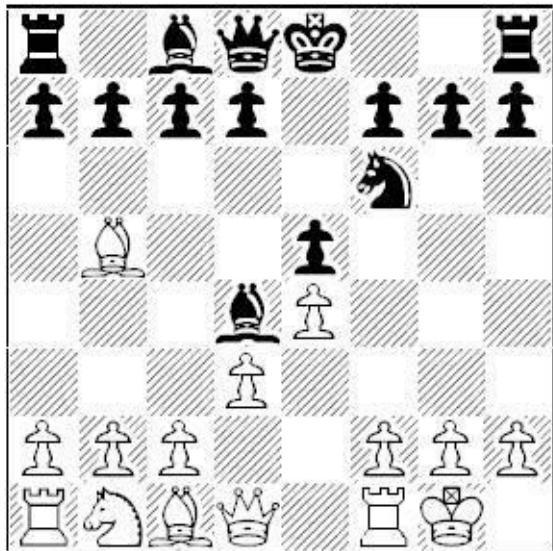


Diagram 29 (W)

7 c3

7 Nd2 has become quite popular with strong players recently. The idea is to defer c3, and now: a) 7 ... c6 8 Ba4 Bb6!? (rare; 8 ... d6 9 c3 Bb6 is much more common, and also fine, but this would deprive Black of the ... d5 possibility) 9 Nc4 Bc7 10 Bb3 0-0 (10 ... a5!?, 10 ... d6) 11 Bg5 h6 12 Bh4 d6 13 Ne3 g5 14 Bg3 h5!? 15 h3 (or 15 h4 Ng4 16 hxg5 Qxg5, A.Kovacevic-M.Neubauer, Rijeka 2010) 15 ... Be6 was messy in J.Radulski-J.Hammer, Tromsø 2009.

b) 7 ... 0-0!? If this is playable, then it should be played: b1) 8 c3 Bb6 9 Nc4 (9 Nf3 transposes to 7 c3 after 9 ... c6 10 Ba4) 9 ... d5 (or 9 ... c6 10 Nxb6 axb6 11 Ba4 d5) 10 Nxb6 axb6 is okay for Black, even though he has conceded the bishop pair, e.g. 11 exd5 (11 f4!? c6 12 fxe5 Bg4 13 Qc2 Nd7 14 Ba4 Nc5) 11 ... Bg4 12 f3 Qxd5 13 Bc4 Qc5+.

b2) 8 Nf3 Bb6 9 Nxe5 d5 and Black regains his pawn with at least equality: 10 Bf4 (10 Bg5 c6 11 Ba4 dxe4 12 dxe4 Qxd1 13 Raxd1 Nxe4, 10 exd5?? Qxd5 loses a piece) 10 ... c6 11 Ba4 dxe4 12 dxe4 Qxd1 13 Raxd1 Nxe4 14 Bb3 Nc5 with equality in M.Kobalija-R.Hovhannisyan, Plovdiv 2012.

7 Qf3 c6 8 Bc4 d5 9 exd5 cxd5 10 Bb5+ Bd7 11 Bxd7+ Qxd7 12 c3 Bb6 led to a nice tactical win for Black in S.Collins-A.Kosten, British League 2007.

7 ... Bb6 (Diagram 30)

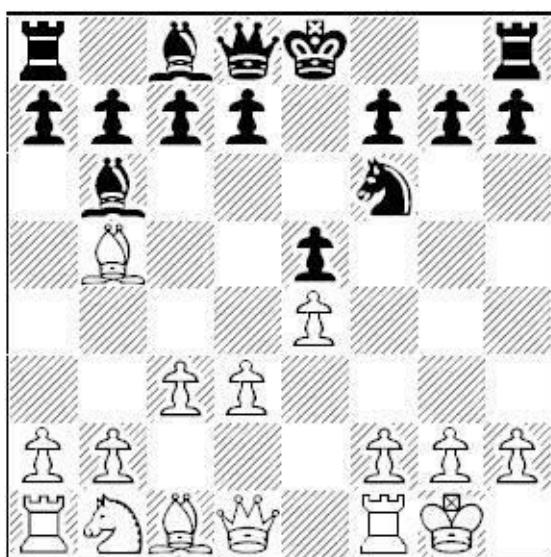


Diagram 30 (W)

This position is very comfortable for Black. He will play ... c6 (gaining a tempo on the b5-bishop), then ... d5 or ... d6 as appropriate, and ... 0-0 when it suits him.

8 Nd2

This is the most logical – the knight heads for a good square. Note that Black's lone knight is already well placed!

Alternatively:

a) 8 Bg5?! is the most popular and looks aggressive, but as Black hasn't castled yet the bishop can become a target. 8 ... h6 9 Bh4 c6 (**Diagram 31**) and now:

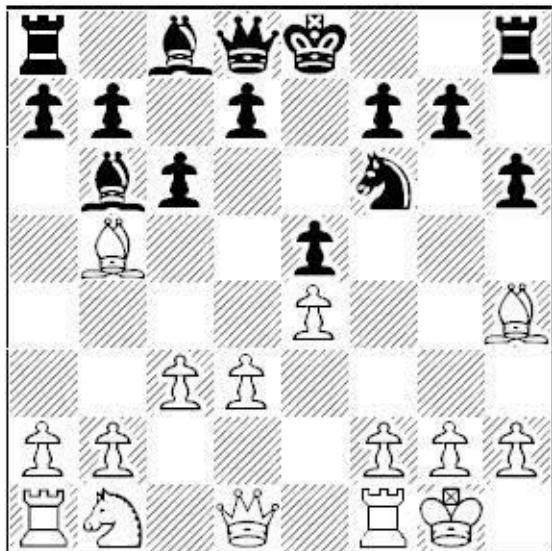


Diagram 31 (W)

a1) 10 Bc4 d6 11 Nd2 Qe7 (or 11 ... g5 12 Bg3 h5 13 h4 Bg4 14 Qb3 Qd7 15 hxg5? h4 16 Bh2 Nh7 and White was in trouble in D.Howell-D.McMahon, Bunratty Open 2000) 12 Bb3 g5! 13 Bg3, O.Mihok-M.Rachela, Szombathely 2008, 13 ... h5 14 h4 Bg4 15 Qc2 Nd7 with a powerful kingside attack.

a2) 10 Ba4 d6 11 Nd2 (or 11 d4? g5 12 Bg3 Nxe4 13 Nd2 Nxg3 14 fxg3 Be6 15 Bb3 d5 White is a pawn down for nothing, G.Guseinov-L.Aronian, Tripoli 2004) 11 ... g5! 12 Bg3 h5 13 h4 (after 13 h3? h4 14 Bh2 g4 15 hxg4 Bxg4 White didn't survive very long in L.Torres-N.Rua, Bucaramanga 2008) 13 ... Bg4 14 Qe1 (or 14 Qc1 Nh7 15 hxg5 Nxg5 16 Nc4 h4 17 Nxd6+? – but White is already lost – 17 ... Qxd6 18 Qxg5 hxg3 19 Qxg4 Qh6 20 Qh3 gxf2+ 21 Kh1 0-1, A.Collins-D.McMahon, London 2012) 14 ... Nd7 (14 ... Nh7) 15 Nc4 gxh4 16 Nxd6+ Kf8 17 Bh2, J.Betancort Curbelo-D.Lima, Las Palmas 1989, 17 ... Rg8 and ... Bf3 will be decisive.

b) 8 d4 0-0 9 Bg5 (after 9 dxe5 Nxe4 10 Bd3 d5 11 exd6 Nxd6 12 Qc2 Qh4 Black has no problems, M.Palac-C.Marcelin, Lausanne 2003, but there is also 11 ... Re8!? as 12 dxc7?! Qh4 13 Bxe4 Bxc7 14 g3 Qxe4 is very dangerous for White) 9 ... h6 10 dxe5 (10 Bxf6?! Qxf6 11 dxe5 Qxe5 12 Bd3 Rd8 13 Kh1 Qf4 14 Qd2 Qxd2 15 Nxd2 d5 and Black has a plus, J.Polgar-V.Anand, Kristiansand 2010) 10 ... hxg5 11 exf6 Qxf6 12 Nd2 a6 13 Bd3 d6 14 Nc4 Ba7 15 Ne3 Bxe3 16 fxe3 Qe5 17 Qh5 Be6. Black is again favourite with his superior structure, Z.Sturua-G.Sargissian, Dubai 2005.

c) 8 Kh1?! aims for f4: 8 ... c6 9 Ba4 d5! (**Diagram 32**)

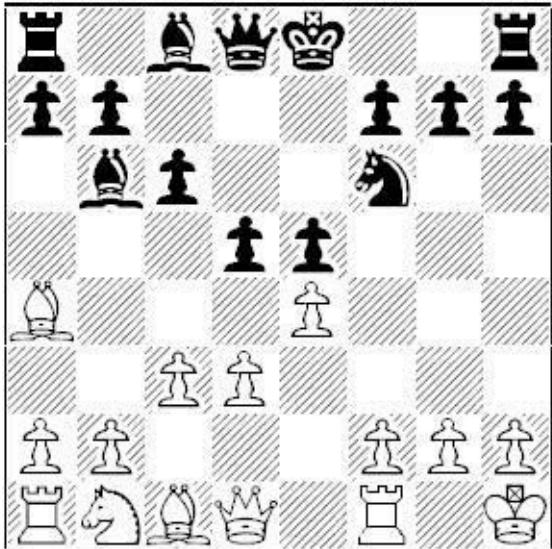


Diagram 32 (W)

10 Qe2 (10 exd5?!, J.Smeets-M.Bosman, Netherlands League 2008, 10 ... Ng4! 11 dxc6 0-0 12 cxb7? Qh4 and wins, as 13 h3 Nxf2+ 14 Rxf2 Bxb7 threatens ... Qxh3+ and then ... Qxg2 mate) 10 ... dxe4 (10 ... 0-0 11 Bg5 h6 12 Bh4 dxe4 13 dxe4 Qe7 is level, B.Grimberg-V.Erdos, Deizisau 2010) 11 dxe4, S.Movsesian-Z.Hracek, Sibenik 2009, 11 ... Ng4!? 12 h3 Qh4 13 Kg1 Nf6 with some nasty threats, *i.e.* 14 Nd2 Bxh3! 15 gxh3 Qg3+ winning, or 14 Be3 Bg4! 15 f3 Bxh3!.

8 ... c6

If Black can successfully play ... d5 he will be at least equal.

9 Ba4 0-0 (Diagram 33)

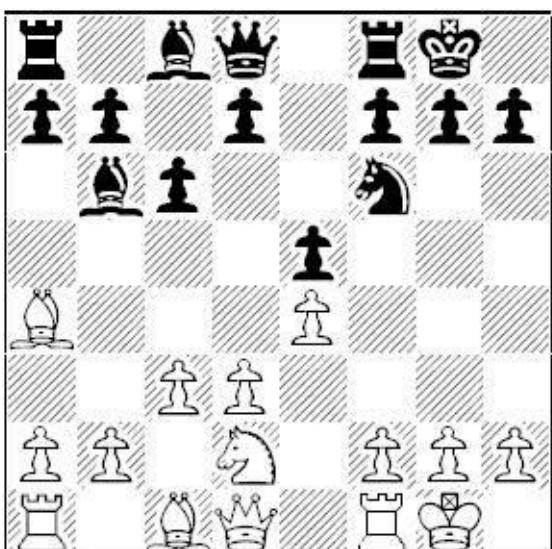


Diagram 33 (W)

10 Nf3

10 Nc4 Bc7 11 Ne3 d5 12 Qf3 d4 13 cxd4 (13 Nf5 Bxf5 14 exf5 ½-½, T.Luther-K.Volke, Austrian League 2006, but Black can play 14 ... Qd6 with threats of ... e4, and bringing the rooks to the centre) 13 ... Qxd4 14 Bc2 Be6 and Black is at least equal, V.Anand-V.Kramnik, Moscow 2011.

10 ... d5!?

10 ... d6 11 Bb3 is a symmetrical position where Black is to move!

11 exd5

11 Qe2 dxe4 12 dxe4 Bg4 13 h3 Bh5 14 Bg5 h6 15 Rad1 Qe7 is symmetric and equal, L.Kotan-V.Kalisky, Slovakian League 2003.

ROLL THE DICE! If Black feels a bit more ambitious against 11 Qe2 then 11 ... h6!? is possible: 12 exd5 Nxd5 13 Qxe5 (13 Nxe5 Re8) 13 ... Re8 14 Qg3 Bc7 15 Qh4 Qd6 16 d4 Qg6 with a strong initiative.

11 ... Qxd5 12 Bb3 Qd6 13 h3 Bf5 14 d4

Or 14 Re1 Rfe8 15 Ng5 Re7.

14 ... exd4 15 Nxd4

K.Visweswaran-S.Ovsejevitsch, Kolkata 2002. Now Black can play 15 ... Be4 16 Re1 Rad8 with more space.

D)

5

Nxe5

(Diagram

34)

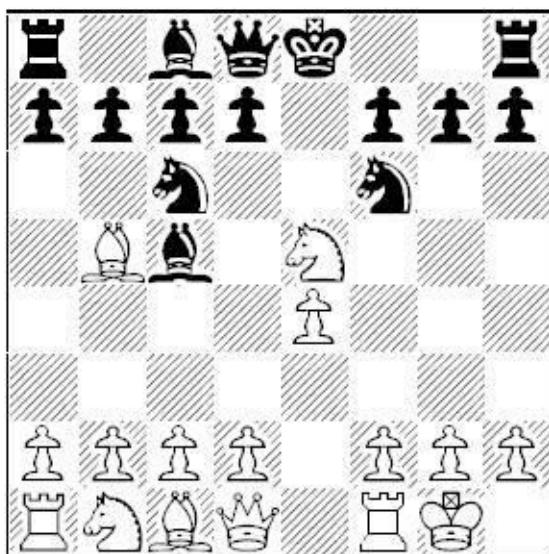


Diagram 34 (B)

This is the most important alternative to 5 c3, and the only one which gives Black any theoretical problems.

5 ... Nxe5!?

Objectively this is probably not the best move ... but it is the most fun!

5 ... Nxe4!? is the alternative, and is played by all the super-GMs when they play the Classical Berlin. The problem is that after 6 Qe2 Nxe5 7 Qxe4 Qe7 8 d4 (or 8 Nc3 Ng6 9 Qxe7+) 8 ... Nc6 9 Qxe7+ Bxe7 10 c3 we reach a dull symmetric endgame where White has a space advantage. I have played this as Black, and managed to win (against a much weaker player), but it was hard work and I can't really recommend such a position in a Dangerous Weapons book!

6 d4 a6

A clever intermezzo, driving the bishop back and breaking the pin on the d7-pawn.

7 Be2

Almost certainly the strongest reply, but now the bishop blocks the e-file and so cuts out moves such as Qe2 or Qg4 which are so awkward for Black in other lines.

The two alternatives are 7 Ba4 and 7 dxe5.

7 Ba4 is met by the unpinning 7 ... b5 (**Diagram 35**) and:

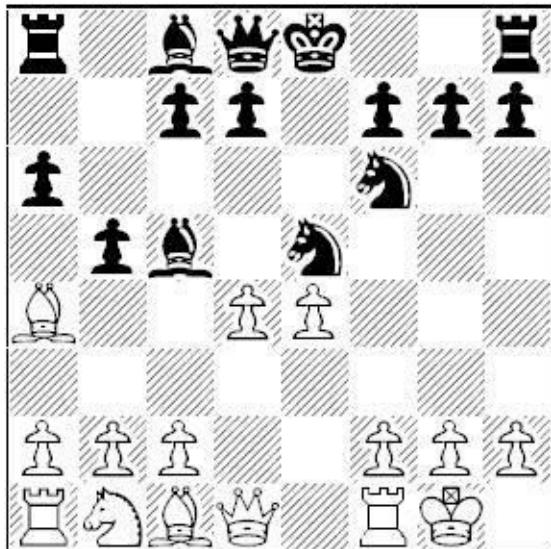


Diagram 35 (W)

a) 8 dxe5 Nxe4. Now White only has one good reply (9 Bb3), but first let's look at the two tempting alternatives:

DANGEROUS WEAPON! 9 Qd5? looks enticing, but falls into a neat trap: 9 ... Bb7! 10 Qxb7 c6 (**Diagram 36**).

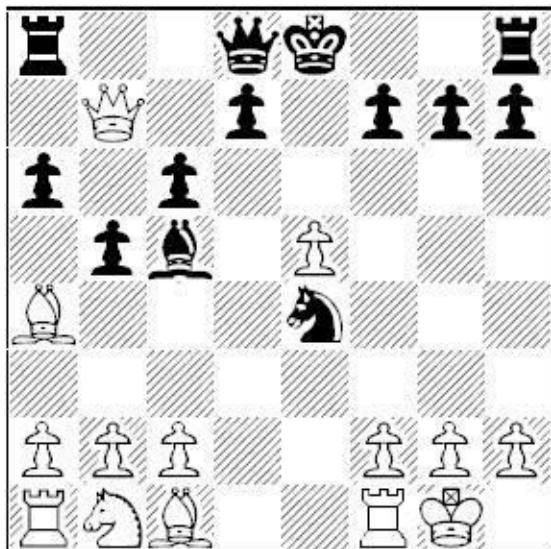


Diagram 36 (W)

The queen is ensnared! Black threatens ... Ra7, so 11 Nc3 (11 Be3? Bxe3 12 fxe3 Nc5 is even worse, G.Garcia-T.Gareev, Orlando 2011; 11 Nd2 is possible, but 11 ... Nxf2! should win: 12 Rxf2? Ra7) 11 ... Nxc3 (11 ... Ra7? 12 Nxe4 Rxb7 13 Nxc5 is the point) 12 bxc3. Now, instead of 12 ... Ra7? allowing the resource 13 Bg5 Qxg5 14 Qb8+ Qd8 15 Qxd8+ Kxd8 16 Bb3 reaching an ending (albeit more pleasant for Black) in S.Berger-J.Gustafsson, Böblingen 2002, 12 ... 0-0! keeps all the threats: 13 Bb3 Ra7 with a winning advantage.

9 Qg4!? also appears annoying, but once again Black has the natural reply 9 ... Bb7.

DANGEROUS WEAPON! Now 10 Qxg7? loses to a move from another epoch: 10 ... Qh4!! (Diagram 37). For example, 11 Qxh8+ Ke7 12 Qg7 Bxf2+.

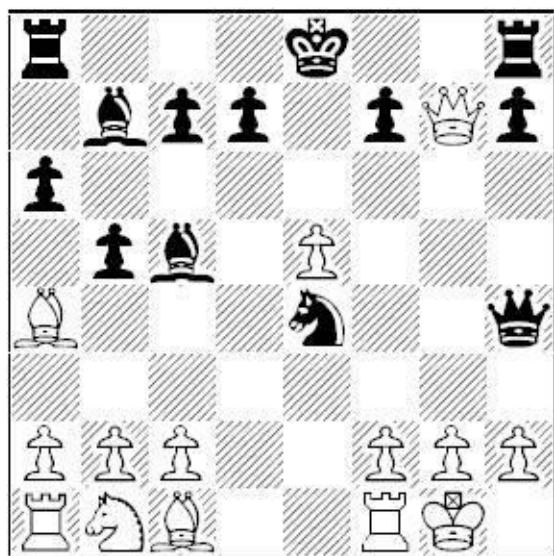


Diagram 37 (W)

So, 10 Bb3 Qe7 11 Nc3 (11 Qxg7? is asking for trouble: 11 ... 0-0-0 12 Qxf7 Qxe5 13 Qf4 Qe8 14 Be3 Rf8 15 Qh4 Bxe3 16 fxe3 Rxf1+ 17 Kxf1 Qg6 and White can resign, C.Von Rosenberg-J.Schmitz, Internet 2008) 11 ... Nxc3 12 bxc3 0-0-0 (aggressive, but Black's invariable choice here; 12 ... 0-0!? isn't ridiculous – 13 Bf4 d5 14 exd6 cxd6 is fine for Black, and 13 Bh6? is met by 13 ... Qxe5) 13 Bg5 (Capablanca once preferred 13 Re1 ... which means that it's probably White's best move! 13 ... h5 14 Qh3, J.Capablanca-A.Pulvermacher, New York 1907, 14 ... f6! is unclear) 13 ... f6 14 exf6 gxf6 15 Bh4 Qe5 (15 ... h5 16 Qg6 Rdf8 is also okay, K.Van der Weide-J.Piket, Leeuwarden 2001) 16 Rfe1?! Qxc3 17 Rad1 Bc6 with an extra pawn, S.Berndt-M.Becker, German League 1997.

Back to White's best option, 9 Bb3 Bb7 and here 10 Bd5 critical. Instead 10 Nc3, of N.Short-A.Onischuk, Wijk aan Zee 1997, can be met by 10 ... Nxc3 11 bxc3 Qe7, when Black keeps the option of castling either side according to circumstances – ... 0-0-0 followed by ... g5 would be interesting if Black wanted to play sharply for the win. Also, 10 Qg4 Qe7 transposes to 9 Qg4.

Returning to 10 Bd5:

ROLL THE DICE! a1) 10 ... Qh4!? (Diagram 38) is unplayed, but tricky:

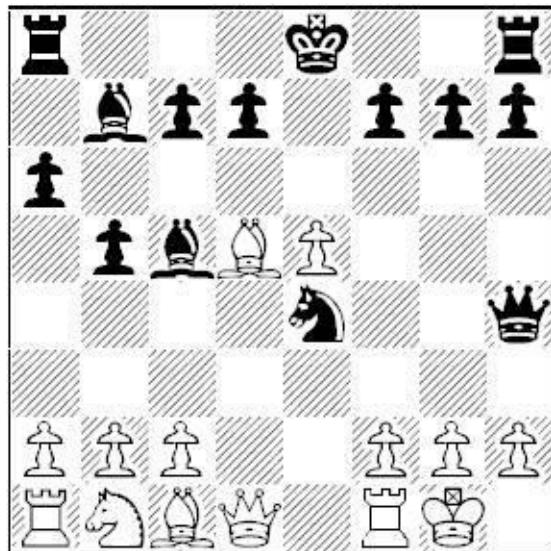


Diagram 38 (W)

After 10 ... Qh4 White has two options:

11 Be3 might be safest: 11 ... Bxd5 12 Qxd5 Bxe3 13 fxe3 (13 Qxa8+ Ke7 14 g3 – the only move – 14 ... Qg4 15 Qxh8 Nxg3 16 fxe3 Ne4+ 17 Kh1 Nf2+ 18 Rxf2 Qd1+ 19 Kg2 Qg4+ draws) 13 ... 0-0 14 Qxd7?! Rae8 15 Qxc7 Rc8 16 Qb7 Rxc2 when White must find 17 Nc3 to avoid immediate defeat.

11 Bxb7 Nxf2 12 Rxf2 Bxf2+ 13 Kh1 Bg3 14 h3 Rb8 15 Bf3 0-0 16 Nd2 Bxe5 is interesting.

a2) 10 ... Nxf2 (the main choice) 11 Rxf2 Bxf2+ 12 Kxf2 Qh4+ 13 Kf1 (forced) 13 ... Bxd5 (13 ... Bc6!?) is interesting, although untried, the point being that should White capture on c6 Black would be able to use the open d-file) 14 Qxd5 0-0 15 Nd2 (the knight rushes over to help the king; 15 h3 c6 16 Qb3 Rfe8 17 Nd2 Rxe5 18 Nf3, A.Thiyagarajah-M.McGuirk, Cammeray 2010, when 18 ... Qf6 19 Be3 Re4 followed by ... Rae8 is promising) 15 ... Qxh2 16 Nf3 Qh5 (Black pins the e-pawn; 16 ... Qh1+ 17 Kf2 d6 is also possible, but White can continue his development by 18 b3 planning Bb2 which gains a tempo on the black queen, N.Speck-G.West, Melbourne 2002) 17 b3 (17 Be3 d6 18 Kf2 Rfe8 19 a4, V.Sareen-A.Stefanova, Moscow 2006, 19 ... Qf5! 20 axb5 Qxc2+ 21 Bd2 Qxb2 22 Rxa6 Rxa6 23 bxa6 Qb6+ picking up the a-pawn, and only Black can win this; or 17 a4!? c6!? 18 Qxd7 Rfd8 19 Qxc6 Rac8 20 Qe4 Rc4 21 Qe2 Qf5 22 c3 Rxa4 23 Rxa4 bxa4) 17 ... Rae8 (17 ... Qf5!?) 18 Bb2 (18 Ba3 d6) 18 ... d6 19 Rd1 dxe5 20 Ba3 c6! 21 Qd7 when Black decided to force a draw by 21 ... e4 22 Bxf8 exf3 23 Qxe8 Qh1+ 24 Kf2 Qxg2+ 25 Ke1 Qg1+ 26 Kd2 Qd4+ 27 Kc1 Qa1+, ½-½ P.Haba-D.Gross, Czech League 2001.

b) 8 Bb3 transposes to a line in the Archangel which has been discarded, as 8 ... Bxd4 9 Qxd4 d6 is fine for Black. Very briefly: b1) 10 f4 Nc6 11 Qc3 Bb7 12 e5 Ne4 13 Qe3 Na5 14 Nd2 Nxb3 15 axb3 (or 15 cxb3 Nxd2 16 Bxd2 0-0 17 Bc3 Qh4 18 Rae1 Rfe8 19 Qf2 Qxf2+ 20 Rxf2 dxe5 ½-½, V.Anand-V.Topalov, Linares 1997) 15

... Nxd2 16 Bxd2 ½-½ P.Svidler-A.Shirov, Groningen 1996.

b2) 10 c3 (giving the bishop an escape route as Black was threatening ... c5–c4) 10 ... c5 (10 ... 0-0 and 10 ... Bb7 are also fine) 11 Qd1 (or 11 Qe3 0-0 followed by ... Bb7, ... Re8) 11 ... 0-0 12 Bg5 h6 13 Bh4 Ng6 14 Bxf6 Qxf6 15 g3 Bh3 16 Re1 Ne5 with advantage, G.Marin-R.Diaz, Caracas 1999.

7 dxe5 axb5 8 exf6 Qxf6 is the second alternative to the main 7 Be2. This was popular nearly twenty years ago, but Black has the bishop pair and an open a-file for his rook. 9 Nc3 c6 (**Diagram 39**) and now:

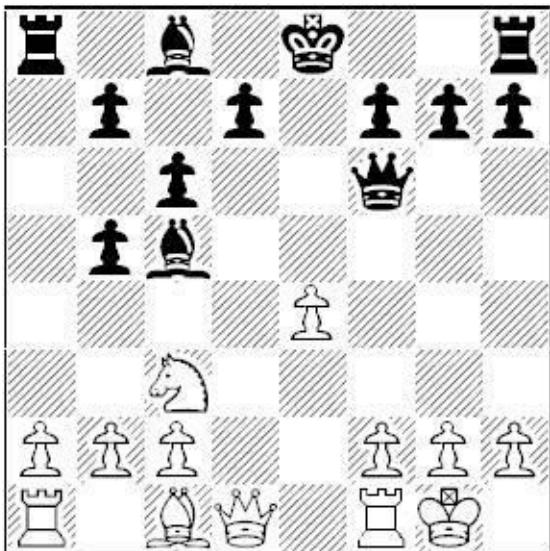


Diagram 39 (W)

a) 10 Qd3 0-0 (10 ... d6 11 Be3 Be6!? is also interesting: 12 Bxc5 dxc5 13 Qe3 Qd4 14 Qxd4 cxd4 15 Ne2 Bc4 16 Rfe1 c5 with an edge, W.Wittmann-D.Boros, Budapest 2012; likewise 10 ... b4!?) 11 Be3 Bxe3 12 Qxe3 with a further branch: a1) 12 ... Re8 13 Qc5 (13 a3 d5 14 Rad1 Bf5 15 f3 Bg6 16 Qb6 dxe4 17 fxe4 Qe7 18 Rd3 Rad8 was nice for Black in A.Gavrilov-E.Ovod, St Petersburg 2002, as e4 is weak) 13 ... d6 14 Qb4 Qf4 15 a3? (15 Rad1 d5 16 Rfe1 Bg4 17 f3 Bh5 is equal) 15 ... Re6 16 Rad1?! lost quickly after 16 ... Rh6 17 g3 Qf3 18 Rd3 Qh5 19 h4 g5 in J.Timman-A.Beliavsky, Linares 1993, but 20 e5 d5 21 Qe7 would keep White fighting.

a2) 12 ... b4 13 Nd1 (13 e5 Qe7 14 Nd1 d5 15 exd6 Qxd6) 13 ... Re8 14 f3 d5 with an edge – Black has the better minor piece and a2 is exposed.

b) I would meet 10 e5 Qf5 11 Ne2 (11 Qd3 d5), as in E.Berg-A.Antoniou, Bled 2002, with 11 ... 0-0! 12 Bf4 (12 Nf4 d6 13 exd6 Rd8) 12 ... f6 (exchanging the e-pawn) 13 exf6 Qxf6 followed by ... d5 or ... d6 with an advantage.

c) 10 Be3 (accepting a pawn weakness to exchange one of Black's bishops) 10 ... Bxe3 (10 ... d6!? 11 Bxc5 dxc5 is worth a try) 11 fxe3 Qe7 (11 ... Qe5 12 Qd4 d6 13 a3 is equal, G.Kuzmin-A.Lokasto, Moscow 1992) 12 Qd4 0-0 13 a3 d6 14 Rad1 Rd8 15 e5 d5 16 Qf4 Be6 (Black has the superior pawn structure, and this should count for something sooner or later) 17 Rf2 Rd7 18 h3 h6 19 Kh2 Rf8 20 Ne2 Qd8 21 Nd4 Re7 22 c3 Qc7 23 Rdf1 Bc8 24 Nf3 Bd7 25 Kg1 Ra8 26 Rd1 Ra4 27 Rd4 c5 28 Rxa4 bxa4 29 Rd2 Bc6 30 Kf2 Re6 31 Qh4 b5 32 Qf4 Qe7 33 Kg1 f6 34 exf6 (one weak e-pawn leaves the board ... but there is another one right behind it!) 34 ... Rxf6 35 Qb8+ Kh7

36 Re2, E.Vasiukov-A.Morozevich, Elista 1995. After a good deal of quiet manoeuvring, it was probably time for a breakthrough: 36 ... d4! 37 Ne5 d3! 38 Nxd3 Bxg2! 39 Rxg2 Qxe3+ 40 Kh2 (40 Nf2 Qe1+ 41 Kh2 Rxf2) 40 ... Rf3! 41 Nf4 Qxf4+ 42 Qxf4 Rxf4, although White has good chances to draw this anyway.

7 ... Nxe4 (Diagram 40)

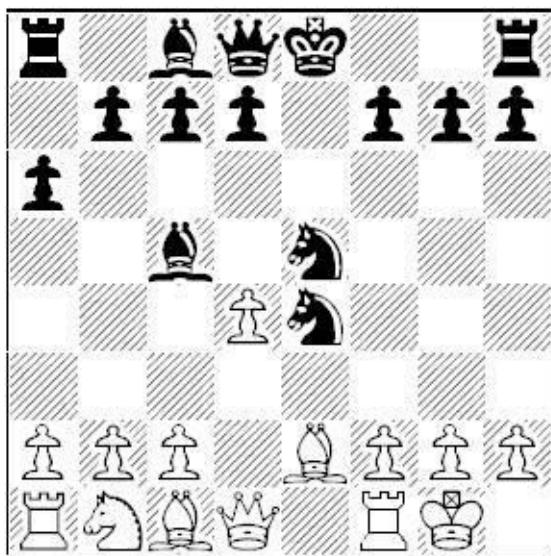


Diagram 40 (W)

Now that the e-file is blocked Black can grab the e-pawn.

8 dxc5!

8 dxe5 d5 9 exd6 Qxd6 is equal (9 ... Bxd6 10 Nd2 Nxd2 11 Bxd2 0-0 is also perfectly fine and has the merit of keeping the queens on the board): 10 Qxd6 Nxd6 11 Nc3 (11 Bf4 Be6 12 Nd2 0-0-0 13 Nb3 Bb6 is even slightly better for Black, D.Ledger-R.James, British League 2003) 11 ... Be6 12 Bf4 0-0-0 13 Rad1 ½-½, M.Makropoulou-V.Misanovic, Pula 1990, although Black can continue here, of course, with 13 ... Rhe8.

8 ... Nxc5 (Diagram 41)

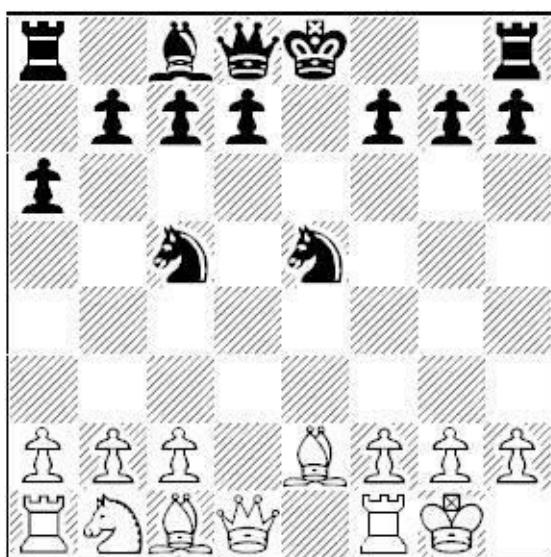


Diagram 41 (W)

Black has won a pawn, but at the cost of the bishop pair and his development. This line is risky, but can be rewarding – Black goes for the full point. Now White has a choice between two sharp moves. Anything else and he will be a pawn down for nothing.

D1: 9 b4

D2: 9 Qd4

In the first White plays for the initiative and a lead in development, and in the second he regains his pawn immediately, but at the cost of his own development.

D1) 9 b4 Ne6 10 f4

This line is tricky for Black. He has a pawn more but White has the bishop pair and a lead in development.

10 Bb2 is mentioned in my copy of *ECO C* and assessed as much better for White by Euwe, but I can only assume this is an error, or that he overlooked that White was a whole pawn down. 10 ... Ng6, stopping f4.

10 ... Nc6 (Diagram 42)

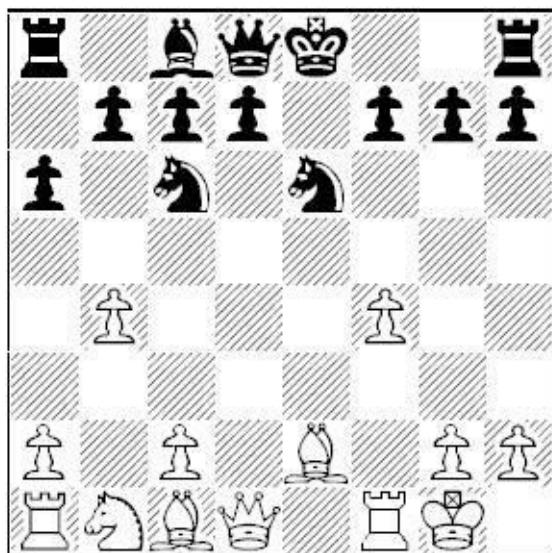


Diagram 42 (W)

Forced.

11 Bb2

Ivan Sokolov suggests that 11 f5!? might be better, and I believe this was even given as a refutation of 7 ... Nxe4 in Suetin's *The Complete Spanish*. 11 ... Ned4 (11 ... Qf6? is tempting, but loses: 12 fxe6 Qxa1 13 exf7+ Kf8 14 c3! Qxb1 15 Bd3 Qxa2 16 Re1 Qxf7 17 Rf1 Ne5 18 Bc4! Nxc4 19 Rxf7+ Kxf7 20 Qd5+ Kg6 21 Qe4+ Kf6 22 Qf4+ Ke7 23 Qh4+ Ke8 24 Qe4+ and wins, F.Epiney-M.Bulgarini Torres, correspondence 2003, or 17 ... d6? 18 Bc4! 1-0, L.Morin-B.Krikke, correspondence 1978) 12 f6 (12 Bb2!? Qf6 13 Kh1 0-0 14 Rf4 Qe5 15 Rxd4 Re8 16 Bf1 Nxd4 17 Bxd4 Qxf5 18 Bd3 is unclear, but probably a bit better for White) 12 ... g6 (12 ... d5?! 13 Bb2 Nf5 14 fxg7 Rg8 15 Bh5 d4 16 Re1+ Nce7 17 Nd2 Rxg7 18 Nf3 favours White who will regain his pawn after capturing on d4) 13 c3 (13 a4 d5 14 Ba3 0-0!? 15 b5, N.Coenen-P.Gruen, German League 1994, 15 ... Re8 16 bxc6 Nxe2+ 17 Kh1 d4 with complicated play, but 14 ... Be6 15 b5 Nxe2+ 16 Qxe2 Nd4-f5 is a solid alternative) (**Diagram 43**) 13 ... Ne6.

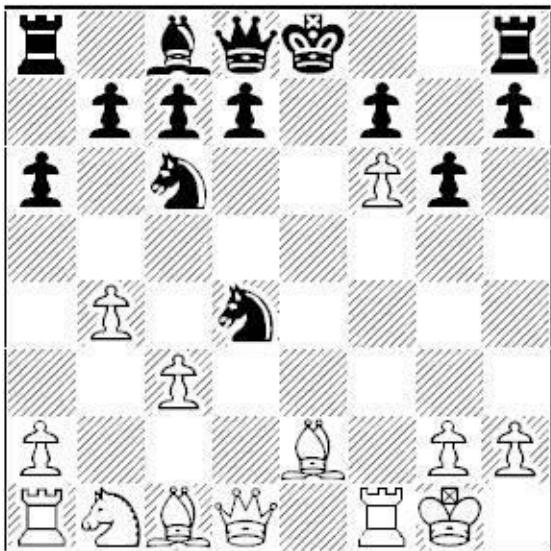


Diagram 43 (W)

ROLL THE DICE! 13 ... Nf5!? offers to sacrifice a piece for three pawns. After 14 g4 Qxf6 15 gxf5 gxf5 the open white king position gives Black real practical chances.

Returning to 13 ... Ne6 14 Bh6. “White obviously has compensation. Is it more?” – Ivan Sokolov. Let’s have a look: 14 ... d6 (or 14 ... Ne5!?) first, and then 15 Na3 d5; 14 ... a5 15 b5 Ne5 also has its points – Black would like to continue ... d6, and then maybe ... b6 and ... Bb7 when his queenside structure is solid) 15 Nd2 Ne5 (trying to finish development by ... Bd7-c6, ... Qd7, etc.) 16 Nc4 Nxc4 17 Bxc4 c6 18 Qd2 d5 19 Bb3 a5!?. Black has yet to finish his development, but he still has a pawn more.

11 ... d5

A natural move. Black aims to get on with his development, and the pawn might provide a useful outpost for the black knight after f5, ... Ng5-e4.

12 f5

After less forcing moves such as 12 a3 (defending the b4-pawn) Black should probably avoid castling kingside, but instead play 12 ... Qd6 (attacking f4 and preparing ... Bd7 and ... 0-0-0) 13 Qd2 h6 to have the g5-square available for the knight in case of f5.

12 ... Ng5 (Diagram 44)

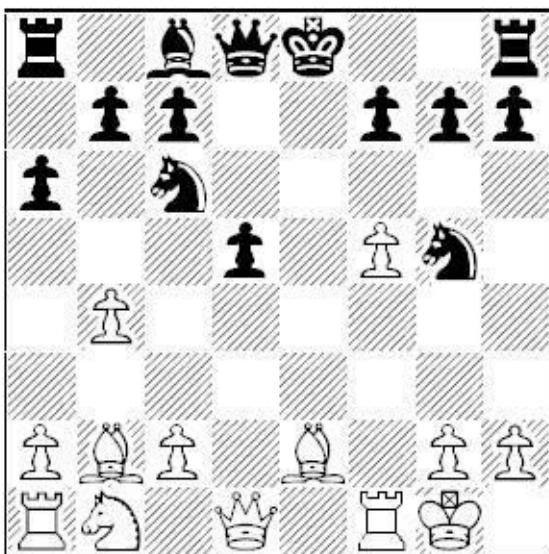


Diagram 44 (W)

13 c4!

Opening the position for the white bishops while Black is behind in development.

Other moves:

- 13 b5 axb5 14 Bxb5 f6!? (rather than 14 ... Qd6, D.King-S.Ansell, British League 2006, 15 Re1+) 15 Nc3 0-0 16 Qxd5+ Nf7.
- The 13 Qe1 of R.Pert-S.Ansell, Hastings 2006, should be met by 13 ... 0-0! as 14 f6 Re8 15 fxg7? is answered by 15 ... Bg4.
- 13 Bxg7 Rg8 14 f6 Be6 seems okay for Black, *e.g.* 15 a3 Qd6 and ... 0-0-0.
- 13 f6 looks dangerous: 13 ... Rg8!? (13 ... g6 14 c4 Be6 15 cxd5 Qxd5 16 Qxd5! Bxd5 17 Nc3 0-0-0 18 Rad1 and White wins material, *i.e.* 18 ... Be6 19 h4) 14 c4 (14 fxg7 d4) 14 ... d4 15 b5 axb5 16 cxb5 Ne5 17 Qxd4 Qxd4+ 18 Bxd4 gxf6 19 Rxf6 Ng4 (19 ... Bg4!?) 20 Bxg4 Bxg4 21 Nc3 0-0-0 22 Be5 Bh5 defending f7, and Black is fine.

13 ... d4 14 b5

14 Nd2 (threatening to embarrass the g5-knight by h4) 14 ... f6 (14 ... 0-0!? 15 h4 Nh3+ 16 gxh3 Qxh4 is rather more adventurous!) 15 Bh5+ Nf7 16 Nf3 (regaining the pawn; if 16 Qe2+ Nce5) 16 ... 0-0 17 Nxd4 Nxd4 18 Bxd4 when Black should probably play 18 ... b6 and ... Bb7.

14 ... axb5 15 cxb5 Ne7 16 Bd3 (Diagram 45)

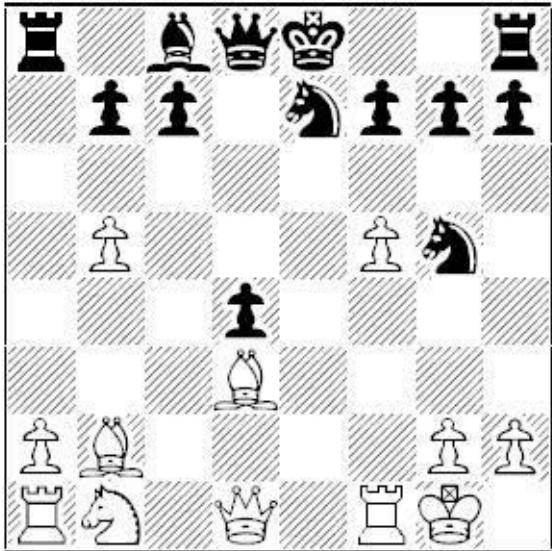


Diagram 45 (B)

16 ... h6

16 ... f6! (I.Sokolov) is more solid. Not only does this move stop the onward rush of White's f-pawn and blunt the b2-bishop's diagonal, it also provides an outpost on e5. 17 Nd2 0-0 18 Nb3 Kh8 19 Nxd4 c5 20 bxc6 Nxc6 21 Nxc6 bxc6 and Black is fine.

17 Nd2 c5 18 bxc6 0-0! 19 h4

19 f6 Nxc6 20 fxg7 is unpleasant.

19 ... Nh7 20 cxb7 Bxb7 21 f6 Nxf6 22 Rxf6 gxf6 23 Qg4+ Kh8 24 Bxd4 Nc6

I.Salgado Lopez-F.Vallejo Pons, Pamplona 2008. Now 25 Qf5 Qxd4+ 26 Kh1 forces Black to take a perpetual.

D2)

9

Qd4

d6

(Diagram

46)

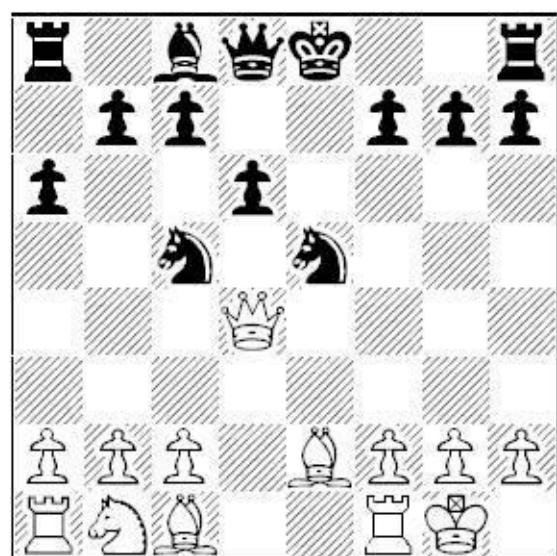


Diagram 46 (W)

10 f4 Ng6

Not forced, as 10 ... Ned7 is also possible: 11 Qxg7 Qf6 12 Qg3 Nb6 13 f5!, but White is better here, D.Josenhans-C.Weldon, Long Island 1992.

11 Qxg7 Bf5 (Diagram 47)

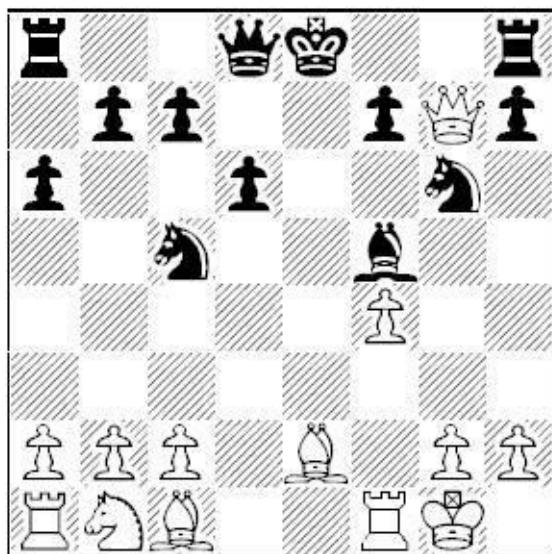


Diagram 47 (W)

Black must stop f5. Black intends to move his queen, castle queenside (the king should be reasonably safe here) and then use the open g-file to attack the white king.

12 g4

Critical. The other possibilities:

a) 12 Nc3 and now:

a1) 12 ... Qh4?! (aggressive, but faulty) 13 Nd5 Ne6 14 Nf6+? (14 Qc3 0-0-0 15 g3 with advantage) 14 ... Kd8 15 Qxf7? (15 g3) 15 ... Nd4! 16 Bc4 Rf8 17 Qd5 Qxf6 winning material in B.Szuk-N.Resika, Budapest 1999.

a2) 12 ... Ne6 13 Qh6 Rg8 is stronger, leaving the white queen offside: 14 Rf2 c6 intending ... Qf6, ... 0-0-0 and maybe ... d5 – Black has good counterplay.

a3) Even 12 ... Qe7 is better: 13 Qd4 0-0-0 transposing to the 12 Qd4 note below.

b) 12 Bf3 (**Diagram 48**) is Rybka's choice.

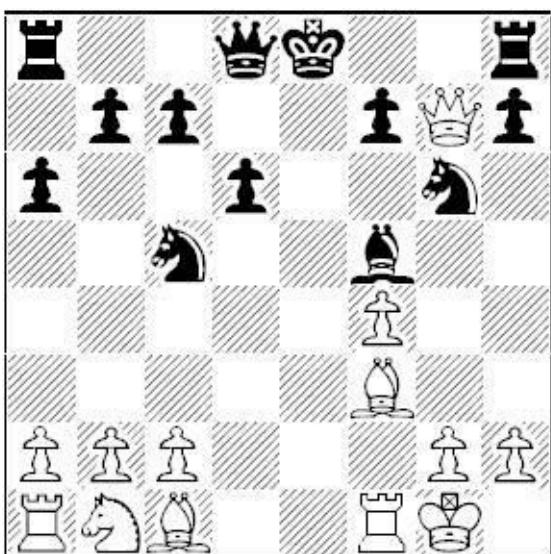


Diagram 48 (B)

12 ... Qe7 13 b4 ("Black is fine in case of" 13 Nc3 0-0-0 14 Nd5 Qe6 – Ivan Sokolov) 13 ... Ne4! with: b1) 14 Qd4 0-0-0 (or 14 ... c5 15 Qc4 Nh4 – I.Sokolov). Black has a useful lead in development, and need not fear 15 Qa7?! as 15 ... Nh4 16 Qa8+? Kd7 17 Qxb7 Rhg8 18 Qxa6 Rxg2+! 19 Bxg2 Rg8 wins.

b2) 14 g4? 0-0-0! (even better than 14 ... Bxg4 15 Bxg4 Nf6 which hits g4 and threatens to win the white queen: 16 f5 Rg8 17 Qxg8+ Nxg8 18 fxg6 hxg6 19 Bd2 Kf8 – else Re1 – 20 Bf3 Qh4 21 Nc3 Nf6 22 Rad1 Re8 is very messy, but favours Black because of the relative security of the two kings; 16 Bf3? Rg8 wins, likewise 16 Bd2 Rg8 17 Qxg8+ Nxg8 18 Re1 Ne5) 15 Nd2 (15 gxf5? Nh4 16 Kh1 Rhg8 17 Qd4 Ng3+! 18 hxg3 Rhg3 "and Black wins" – Ivan Sokolov) 15 ... Rhg8 16 Qh6 (16 Qd4 Nh4) 16 ... Qf6 17 Nb3 Nh4 18 Qxf6 Nxf3+ 19 Rxf3 Rg4+ wins a pawn.

c) 12 Qd4 is sensible, bringing the queen back to the centre of the board. 12 ... Qe7 13 Nc3 0-0-0 with chances to both sides. For example, 14 Bd2 (14 Be3 Nh4 15 b4 Rhg8 16 g3 Rde8 17 Bf2? Na4! 18 Nxa4 Qxe2 and White is crushed: 19 Qf6 Nf3+ 20 Kg2 Qe4 0-1 P.Sowray-S.Collins, Dublin 2012; 17 Nd5 was better) 14 ... d5! 15 Rae1 Ne6 16 Qa7 Qc5+ 17 Qxc5 Nxc5 18 Bf3 Ne4 19 Bxe4 dxe4 ½-½ J.Gdanski-B.Grabarczyk, Brzeg Dolny 1996 – equal pawns and opposite-coloured bishops.

12 ... Qe7! (**Diagram 49**)

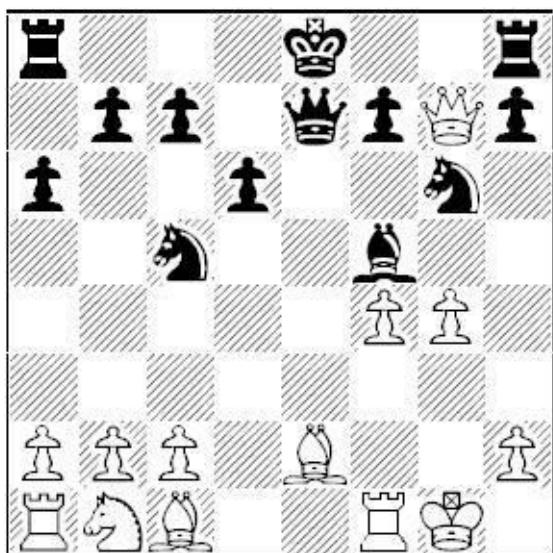


Diagram 49 (W)

13 gxf5

“The proof of the pudding is in the eating.”

Anyway, the alternatives are none too palatable:

a) 13 Re1?! 0-0-0 14 gxf5? (one move too late!) 14 ... Rhg8 (good, and winning, but 14 ... Qh4! is even stronger: 15 Qc3 Ne4) 15 Qxg8 Rxg8 16 fxg6 Rxg6+ 17 Kf1 Qh4 18 Bf3 Rg1+! 0-1 Y.Penas Hernandez-E.Ovod, Oropesa del Mar 1999, in view of 19 Kxg1 Qxe1+ 20 Kg2 Qxc1.

b) 13 Bf3!? 0-0-0!? (13 ... Be4 14 f5 Qe5 is perfectly satisfactory) 14 gxf5 Nh4 (14 ... Rhg8 15 Qc3 Nh4+ 16 Kh1 transposes) 15 Qc3 Rhg8+ 16 Kh1 Nxf5. White's queenside isn't participating at all, but he is a piece up and with care might defend against the attack: b1) 17 Bd2 Ne4 18 Bxe4 Qxe4+ 19 Qf3 Qe6 (threatening ... Ng3+) 17 Nd2?! Rde8! and White is lost, e.g. 18 Nb3 Ne4 19 Bxe4 Qxe4+ 20 Rf3 Qxf3+ 21 Qxf3 Re1+.

b2) 17 Qe1! Qd7! (Black aims at h3 so that ... Ng3+ becomes a big threat once again) 18 Rg1 Nd4 19 Qd1 (19 Qf2 Rxg1+ 20 Kxg1 Qe6) 19 ... Rxg1+ 20 Kxg1 Rg8+ 21 Kf2 Nxc2!? 22 Qxc2 Qh3 23 Qe2 Qxh2+ 24 Ke1 Rg1+ 25 Kd2 Qxf4+ 26 Qe3 Qxe3+ 27 Kxe3 Rxc1. After the fireworks Black has four pawns for the piece, and the white queenside is temporarily undeveloped, so I think Black should be better.

c) 13 Bd1?! 0-0-0! 14 gxf5? (losing, but White is in trouble anyway; 14 Qh6 might be the best chance, but after 14 ... Bd7 Black will get a strong attack without having to sacrifice his bishop) 14 ... Rhg8 15 Qd4 (15 Qc3 Nh4+ 16 Kh1 Qe4+ 17 Bf3 Qxf5) 15 ... Nh4+ 16 Kh1 Nxf5 17 Qd5 and here 17 ... Qd7!! threatening ... Ng3+ is decisive.

13 ... Qxe2 14 fxg6 Qg4+ 15 Kh1 0-0-0 (Diagram 50)

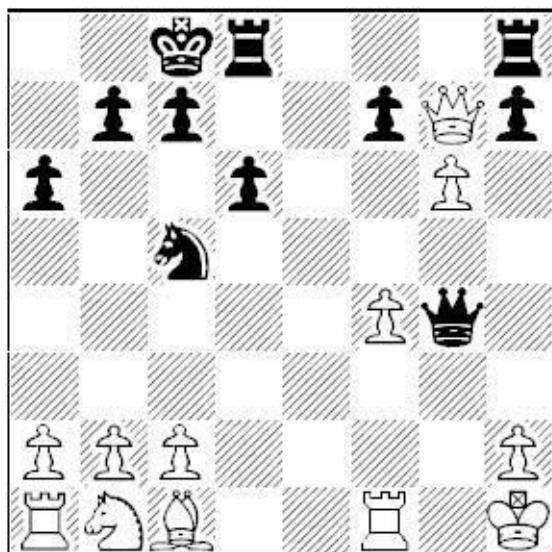


Diagram 50 (W)

The critical position, White is on the edge of a precipice.

16 Qd4!

The best. White brings the queen back into the action.

The alternatives, from best to worst:

a) 16 Nc3 is examined in the introductory game, Goloshchapov-Klip.

b) 16 Nd2!? hxg6 17 Qd4 Rh3 (Black can also force a draw with 17 ... Rxh2+ 18 Kxh2 Qh4+ 19 Kg2 Qg4+ if he wants, as 20 Kf2 Re8 21 Nf3 Ne4+ forces White to part with his queen: 22 Qxe4 Rxe4 etc.) 18 Qg1 Qh5 19 Rf2 Rh8 with a strong attack.

c) 16 Be3? loses as it fails to control e4: 16 ... Ne4! 17 Nc3 Ng3+ 18 hxg3 Qh3+ 19 Kg1 Qxg3+ 20 Kh1 hxg6+ and mate next go.

d) 16 Qxf7?? hxg6 (threatening mate with ... Rxh2+) 17 Qf6 Qg3 and it's all over.

16 ... hxg6

Threatening ... Ne4-g3 as the white queen must control h8 to avoid ... Rxh2+.

17 Nc3 (Diagram 51)

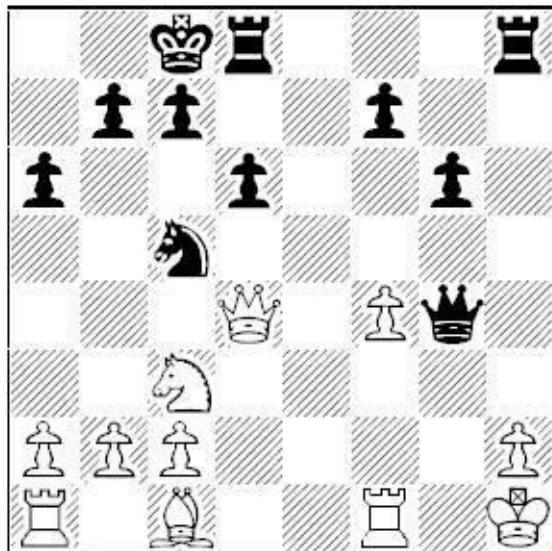


Diagram 51 (B)

17 Qg1! might be the most accurate move, forcing the black queen back and defending the h2-pawn. 17 ... Qf5 18 Nc3 Qxc2!? (or 18 ... Rh3 transposing below) 19 Qg2 Qf5 20 Be3 Nd3 21 Rf3 Rh5 22 Rd1 Rdh8 23 Bg1 Nxf4 worked well in T.Bueno-J.Ledezma Alvarez, correspondence 2008, but 19 f5 gxf5 20 Qf2 Qxf2 21 Rxf2 is possible when the white bishop can come to f4.

17 ... Rh3

If Black is happy with a draw then he can play the spectacular 17 ... Rxh2+!! 18 Kxh2 f6! 19 Qxf6 Re8! (**Diagram 52**).

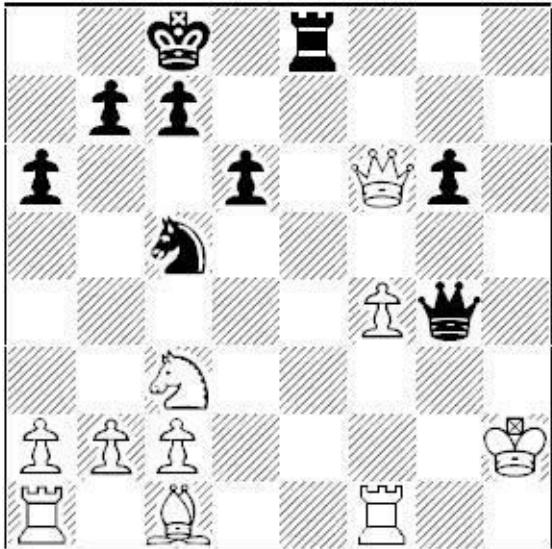


Diagram 52 (W)

It seems that White can't stop Black from forcing a perpetual check, with either ... Re2+ or ... Nd7 followed by ... Qh4+. For example:

- 20 Rg1 Re2+ 21 Nxe2 Qxe2+.
- 20 Bd2 Nd7 21 Qg7 Qh4+ 22 Kg2 Qg4+.
- 20 Be3 Rxe3 21 Qh8+ Kd7 22 f5 Qg3+ 23 Kh1 Qg4 24 Kh2 Qg3+.
- 20 Rf2 is no improvement: 20 ... Nd7 21 Qg7 Qh4+ 22 Kg2 Qg4+ 23 Kf1 Qh3+ 24 Rg2 Qh1+ 25 Kf2 Qh4+ etc. I can take no credit for this analysis – it was discovered by *Houdini* when I left it running on my machine a while, thus completely justifying some of its hype.

18 Qg1!

18 Be3 is natural, but Black gets good chances by playing 18 ... Ne6 19 Qd2 Ng7! 20 Rf2 Nf5 for instance 21 Rg2 Qh5 22 Bd4 Nh4.

18 ... Qf5

18 ... Qh5 is answered by 19 f5! as shown by Morss on the ChessPub.com Forum: 19 ... Rh8 20 Rf2 gxf5 21 Bf4 Ne6 22 Ne2.

19 Qg5

Also mentioned by Morss.

19 Rf2 Rdh8 20 Qg5 is another possibility: 20 ... Qd7 21 Bd2 Ne6 22 Qd5 c6 23 Qe4, but Black gets adequate play by 23 ... f5 24 Qg2 Nd4.

19 ... Qxc2 20 Qg4+

The point of White's play, forcing the exchange of queens.

20 ... Qf5 21 Qxf5+ gxf5 (Diagram 53)

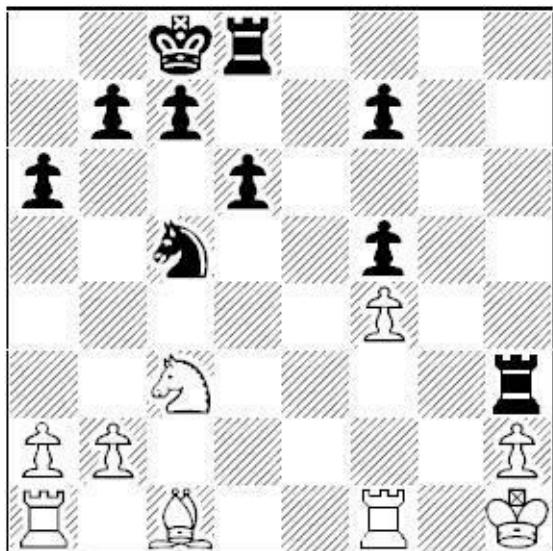


Diagram 53 (W)

Reaching an endgame where Black has only two pawns for the piece, but the advance of the d-pawn and activity of his pieces should be sufficient. For example: **22 Bd2 d5 23 Kg2 Rdh8 24 Rh1 d4 25 Ne2 Ne4 26 Rad1 c5**

And now 27 Ng3 can be answered by 27 ... Rxg3+! 28 hxg3 Rxh1 29 Rxh1 (29 Kxh1?? Nf2+) 29 ... Nxd2 30 Rh6 Ne4 31 Rh5 Nd6 32 g4 (else Black could well be better; he will advance his king and then his queenside majority) 32 ... Nc4 33 Kf3 Nxb2 34 Rxf5 c4 which is probably level, as White will have to swap his rook for the knight and two passed pawns.

Summary Most of these lesser variations allow Black good play very easily.

5 Nxe5 is the only really dangerous move, and with super accurate play White might be able to gain an edge somewhere along the line, but I think that over the board Black has the easier play and good practical chances.

Should White discover a clear path to an advantage in either of Variation D1 or D2 in the future then Black will have to resort to playing the solid (if dull) 5 ... Nxe4.

Chapter Three

Classical Berlin: 5 c3 Main Line

Tony Kosten

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Bc5 4 0-0 Nf6 5 c3 (Diagram 1)

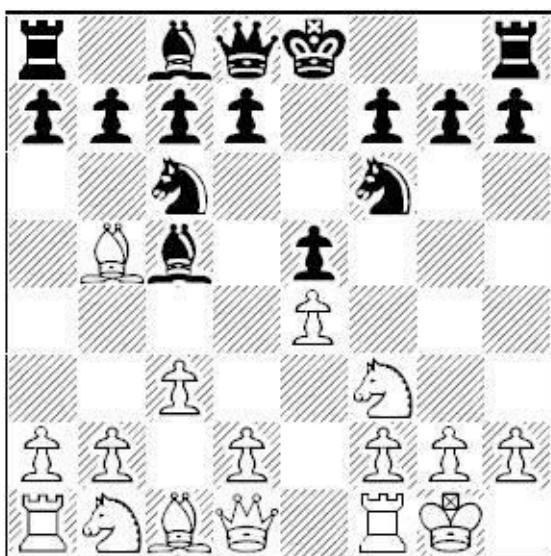


Diagram 1 (W)

White prepares to expand in the centre with d4, simultaneously hitting the black bishop on c5. Not only is this move the strongest and most logical, it also by far the most common!

Game 3

Y.Zinchenko-D.Chuprov

Voronezh 2008

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Bc5 4 c3 Nf6 5 0-0 0-0 6 d4 Bb6 7 Bg5 d6 8 Qd3

Defending both d4 and e4, and preparing to develop the queen's knight to d2 with a harmonious setup. This is generally considered White's strongest.

8 ... Qe7

The queen defends e5, stops White from exchanging queens, and frees the 'problem' c6-knight from its defensive duties so that it can relocate to a better square.

9 Re1

9 Nbd2 is the main line, and is examined in the ‘Looking a Little Deeper’ section.

9 ... Nd8! (Diagram 2)

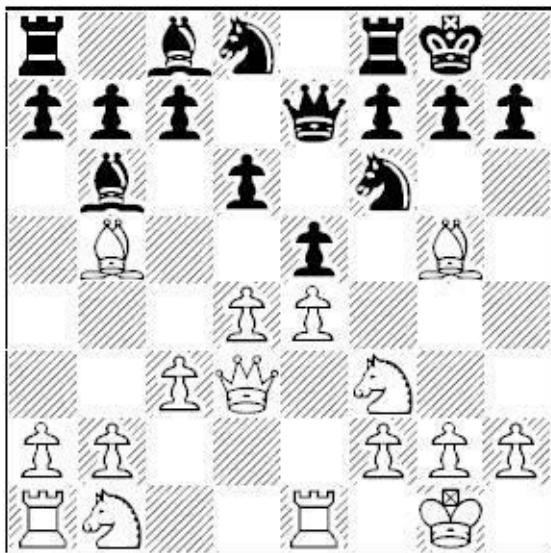


Diagram 2 (W)

This strange knight move is also recommended in the main line, but is even stronger here for tactical reasons. Rather than wait for White to capture on c6, the knight aims for the e6-square where it will not only attack the g5-bishop (which is why Black deferred ... h6), but also d4, and if it gets to f4 or c5 it will gain a tempo on the white queen.

10 Bh4

The bishop moves before being shoved. Alternatively:

a) 10 d5 (K.Quecke-A.Otto, Jena 1953) should be answered by 10 ... h6 11 Bh4, but now Black might as well play 11 ... g5! immediately, as the normal ‘refutation’ 12 Nxg5? (12 Bg3 is better, of course, but 12 ... Nh5 13 Nbd2 a6 14 Ba4 f5 is a dream for Black) 12 ... hxg5 13 Bxg5 fails this time because of the tactic 13 ... Bxf2+! 14 Kxf2 Ng4+ 15 Kg1 Qxg5 winning – note this only occurs when the rook is on e1.

b) 10 Nh4!? of Y.Solodovnichenko-L.Winants, French League 2007, is interesting, but leaves the knight loose and offside. I think the simplest is 10 ... h6, for instance 11 Bd2 c6 12 Ba4 Re8 (or 12 ... d5!? 13 exd5 e4 14 dxc6 Nxc6) 13 Na3 d5 (or 13 ... Bc7 planning ... d5. 14 exd5 e4 15 Qf1 Nxd5, or 11 Be3 c6 12 Ba4 d5 13 Nf5 Bxf5 14 exf5 e4.

10 ... Ne6!

Anyway!

11 Bg3

11 dxe5 dxe5 12 Nxe5? loses to 12 ... Nf4 and ... Qxe5, of course.

11 ... Nh5 12 dxe5 dxe5 13 Bxe5 Rd8 14 Qe2 Nef4 (Diagram 3)

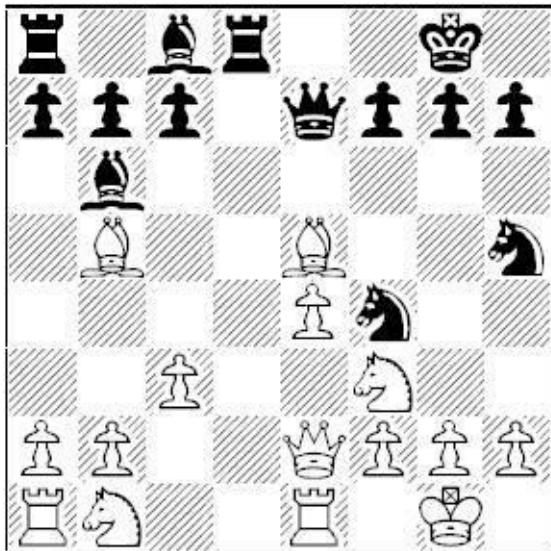


Diagram 3 (W)

DANGEROUS WEAPON! The black knight hops from an exposed square on c6, first to d8 then e6 and finally f4. White (a strong grandmaster) is probably already lost after just 14 moves despite having only made ‘normal’ moves!

15 Bxf4

15 Qf1 Bg4 is very unpleasant.

15 ... Nxf4 16 Qc2 Bg4 17 Be2 Bxf3! 18 Bxf3 Qg5

18 ... Rd3! might be even more accurate, threatening ... Rxf3.

19 g3 Rd3!

And White is lost.

20 Bh1?! Rxg3+!

Forcing mate.

21 hxg3 Qxg3+ 22 Kf1 Qh2 0-1

Looking a Little Deeper

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Bc5 5 c3 0-0 6 d4

6 Re1 d6 7 d4 transposes to 7 Re1, below.

6 d3 is very rare here. White will prepare d4, but as he can play it immediately this doesn't make a lot of sense to me. 6 ... d6 7 Nbd2 a6 8 Ba4 Ba7 and the bishop gets to the nice square on a7, instead of the more exposed b6 in the main line. I continue ... Ne7-g6 next, with a good position.

6 ... Bb6 (Diagram 4)

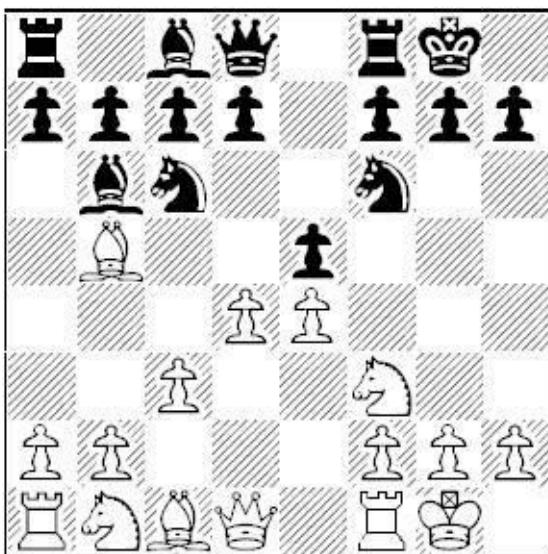


Diagram 4 (W)

The bishop can retreat here immediately. Black is not worried about White capturing on e5 as he can answer by taking on e4.

Now White normally chooses between three lines, of which the last is critical:

A: 7 Re1

B: 7 dxе5

C: 7 Bg5

Other moves tend to be inferior, or will transpose:

7 Qd3

Here this seems inaccurate. Others:

a) 7 d5 is a positional concession, taking more space but opening the g1-a7 diagonal for the black bishop. 7 ... Ne7 (**Diagram 5**) with three main possibilities:

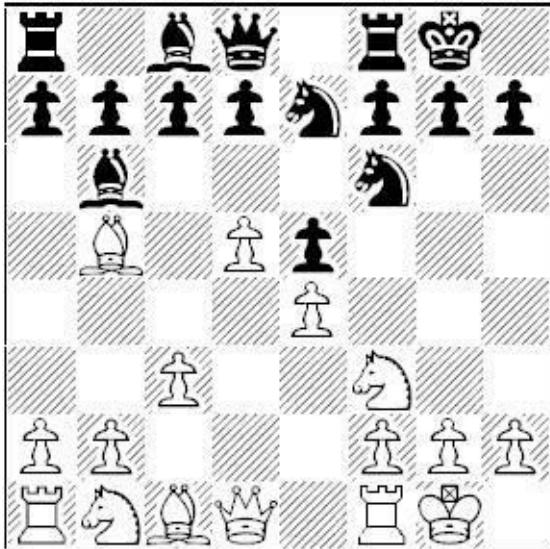


Diagram 5 (W)

a1) 8 Nxe5 Nxe4 9 Bd3 (9 Nc4? Bxf2+! 10 Rxf2 Nxf2 11 Kxf2 a6 wins material, L.Betko-L.Dworakowski, Bratislava 1993) 9 ... d6 10 Nf3 (or 10 Nc4 Nxf2!? 11 Rxf2 Bxf2+ 12 Kxf2 Nxd5 13 Qf3 Qh4+ 14 Qg3 Qxg3+ 15 hxg3 Nf6 16 Ne3, R.Erlener-W.Wernert, German League 2000, 16 ... d5 with perhaps an edge to Black, but he can also play 10 ... Nc5 11 Nxb6 axb6 12 Bc2 Bf5) 10 ... Nf6 11 c4 Bg4 12 Nbd2 Qd7 13 Qc2 Ng6 14 Ng5 Rae8 (Black simply develops his pieces, which is often a sound policy!) 15 Nde4 Nxe4 16 Nxe4 Ne5 17 Nc3 f5!? (17 ... Nxd3 18 Qxd3 Qf5! 19 Qxf5 Bxf5 20 b3 Bd3 21 Rd1 Be2! 22 Re1 Bxc4! wins a pawn) 18 Be3?! Ba5 19 Rae1 Nxd3 20 Qxd3 f4 21 Bd4 f3 22 Re3 Bh5 23 Rfe1?? Qg4 24 g3 Bg6 25 h3 Qxg3+! 0-1 S.Fishburne-L.Trent, British League 2004.

a2) 8 Re1 d6 and now:

a21) 9 Bd3 Ng4! 10 Be3 (10 Re2 f5 is the dangerous point) 10 ... Nxe3 11 fxe3 f5! 12 Nbd2 a6 13 Kh1 f4 (or 13 ... Qe8-h5) 14 exf4 Rxf4 15 g3 Rf6 16 Ng1 c6 17 c4 Bd4 18 Rb1 Qb6 19 Nb3 Bf2 20 Rf1 Bd7 21 Be2 Raf8 22 Kg2? Qe3 (winning) 23 Nf3 Rxf3 24 Bxf3 Rxf3 0-1 E.Nash-V.Guala, Cleveland 1957, as 25 Qxf3 Bh3+.

a22) 9 Bg5?! Ng6 (natural) 10 Nbd2 h6 11 Be3 Bxe3 12 Rxe3?! Ng4! 13 Re1 c6! 14 dxc6 Qb6 15 Qe2, H.Henkes-F.Mayer, Dresden 2001, 15 ... Nf4 16 Qf1 Nxf2 17 Qxf2 Qxb5 with the threat of taking on b2, c6 and the fork ... Nd3.

ROLL THE DICE! Black can play even more dynamically after 9 Bg5 with 9 ...

Ng4 10 Re2 f6 11 Bh4 g5 12 Bg3 f5!, i.e. 13 h3 fxe4 14 Rxe4 Nf6 15 Re2 Nh5 16 Bh2 Bxh3 which looks winning.

a3) 8 Bd3 d6 and now:

a31) 9 Bg5?! is a waste of time here, as after 9 ... Ng6 White has no retreat square on the h4-d8 diagonal after Black's coming ... h6, and 10 Nh4 doesn't help: 10 ... h6 (anyway!) 11 Nxg6 fxg6 (**Diagram 6**).

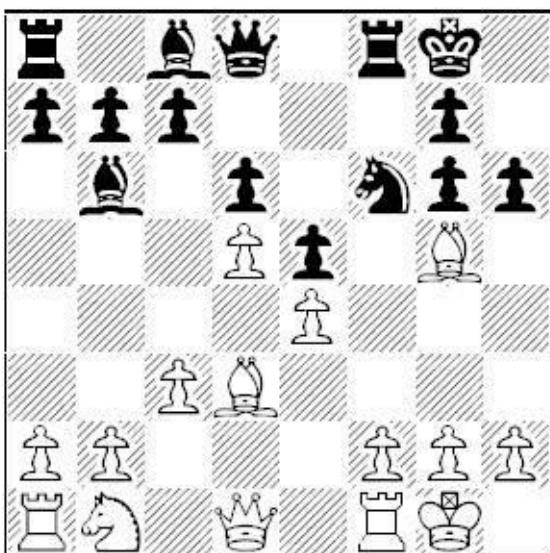


Diagram 6 (W)

DANGEROUS WEAPON! If now 12 Bh4?? then 12 ... g5! 13 Bg3, S.Schmidt-R.Sutterer, Kehl 1989, 13 ... h5! and White is quite lost: 14 h3 (or 14 h4 Ng4 15 hxg5 Qxg5) 14 ... h4 15 Bh2 g4 16 hxg4 (hopeless, but otherwise ... g3, of course) 16 ... Nxg4 and f2 falls – a triumph for Black's dark-squared bishop!

a32) 9 Nbd2 a6 10 Nc4 Ba7 11 Be3 b5! 12 Na3 Bxe3 13 fxe3, J.Bibiloni-O.Ossa, Cali 2007, 13 ... c6 14 dxc6 Qb6 15 Qe2 Qxc6 with an obvious advantage.

a33) 9 h3 Ng6 10 a4 a6 (10 ... c6) 11 Na3 (or 11 b4 Qe7 12 Na3 Nh5 13 Nc4 Ba7 14 Be3 Bxe3 15 fxe3 Ng3 16 Rf2 f5 17 exf5 Bxf5 18 Bxf5 Rxf5 19 Qc2 Raf8 and White is in big trouble; 20 e4 is forced, K.Fels-W.Ziltener, Bad Wörishofen 2000, and now 20 ... Rxf3!? 21 Rxf3 Rxf3 22 gxf3 Qg5 is fun) 11 ... Nh5!? (or 11 ... Qe7 12 Nc4 Ba7 followed by ... Nh5-f4, ... f5, etc.) 12 Nc4 Ba7 13 Nfxe5 Nxe5 14 Nxe5 Ng3 15 Nf3!? (15 Re1 dxe5 16 Be3 would regain the piece, with near equality after 16 ... Qh4 17 Bxa7 Rxa7 18 fxg3 Qxg3 and a sure draw after 19 Kh1 Bxh3 20 gxh3 Qxh3+) 15 ... Nxf1 16 Kxf1, D.Bocina-B.Jukic, Pula 1992, and now 16 ... f5!.

b) 7 a4 (**Diagram 7**)

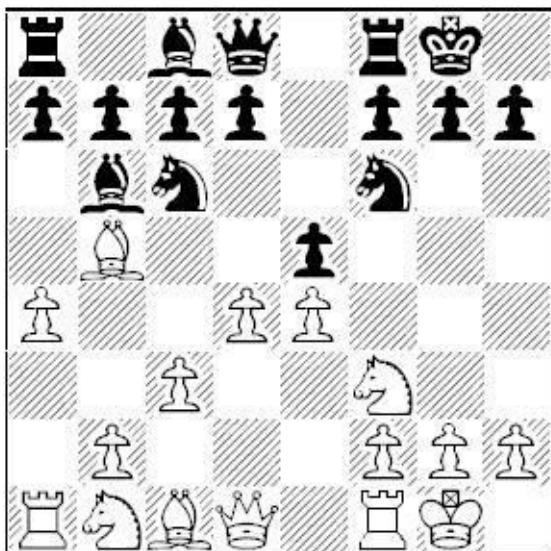


Diagram 7 (b)

This is a common theme in the Classical, threatening to win a piece by Bxc6 and a5 of course. 7 ... a5 and now:

- b1) 8 Bg5 d6 transposes to 7 Bg5 d6 8 a4 a5 in Variation C2.
- b2) 8 Re1 d6 transposes to 7 Re1 d6 8 a4 a5 in Variation A.
- b3) 8 Na3 exd4 9 e5 Ne4 10 cxd4 d5 11 Be3, N.Karaklajic-J.Fichtl, Vienna 1957, 11 ... f5 (or 11 ... Bg4) 12 exf6 Qxf6 with active play.
- b4) 8 Nbd2 exd4 9 e5 Nd5 10 cxd4 d6 11 Nc4 Bg4 12 h3 Bh5 13 exd6 cxd6 14 Bg5 f6 15 Bh4 Bc7 16 Bg3 Rc8 17 Re1 Ndb4 was very comfortable for Black in G.Kamsky-M.Adams, Wijk aan Zee 2009.
- b5) 8 dxe5 Nxe4 9 Qd5 Nc5 should be compared with the same line without a4 and ... a5. 10 Bg5 Ne7 11 Qd1 Ne4 12 Bh4 d5 13 Nbd2 c6 14 Bd3 Bf5 15 Qc2 (**Diagram 8**)

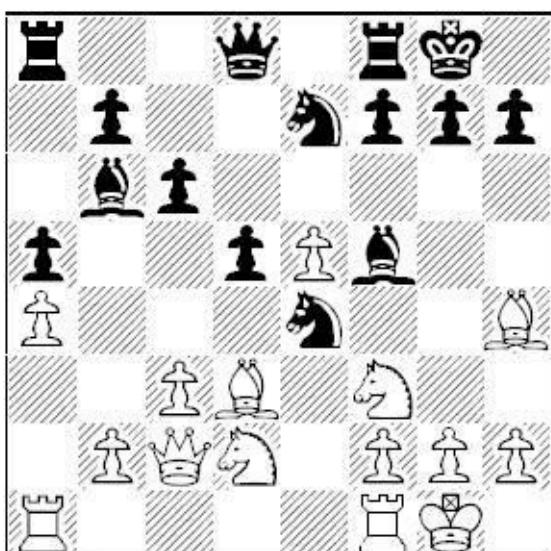


Diagram 8 (B)

15 ... Nxd2 16 Bxf5 Nxf3+ 17 gxf3 Kh8 18 f4 Qc7 is identical to the 7 dxe5 main line in Variation B, with the exception of the advanced a-pawns, which changes next-to-nothing. 19 Bxh7? (but this is different; A.Gubajdullin-A.Kuznetsov, Krasnodar 2004) 19 ... g6 and White loses a piece. He regains it after 20 Qd3 Kxh7 21 Qh3 Qc8 22 e6 Qxe6 23 Qxe6 fxe6 24 Bxe7, but 24 ... Rxf4 wins a pawn for Black!

7 ... d5!?

Or 7 ... d6 8 Bg5 which would transpose to 7 Bg5 d6 8 Qd3 – Variation C3.

8 Bxc6

8 dxe5?! dxe4 9 Qxd8 Rxd8 10 exf6 exf3 favours Black: 11 fxg7 Ne5 12 Bf4, P.Wells-M.Adams, London 2008, 12 ... fyg2 13 Kxg2 Ng6 when 14 Bh6? loses to 14 ... Nh4+ 15 Kh1 Bf5.

8 exd5?! is met by 8 ... e4 9 Qd1 Qxd5.

8 ... bxc6 9 Nxe5 (Diagram 9)

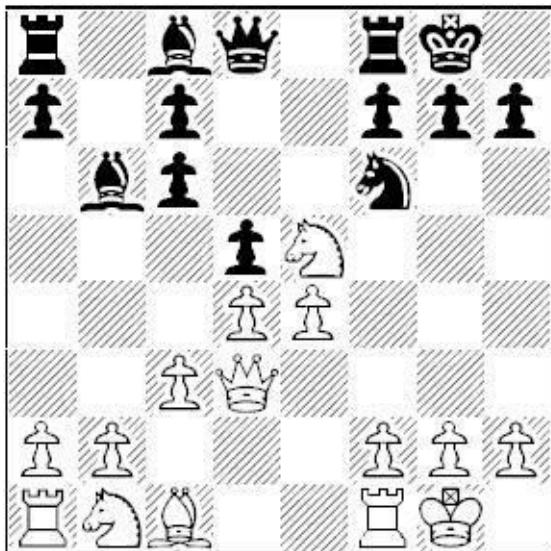


Diagram 9 (B)

9 ... Nxe4

ROLL THE DICE! After 9 ... c5!? 10 dxc5 Bxc5 11 exd5 Re8 (or 11 ... Qd6!? 12 Nf3 Ba6 13 c4 c6) 12 Nf3 Qxd5 13 Qxd5 Nxd5 Black's activity provides more than enough compensation for the pawn.

10 Nd2

10 Nxc6!? is risky: 10 ... Qf6 (or 10 ... Qd6 11 Ne5 f6 12 Nf3 c5) 11 Ne5 c5! 12 Nd2 cxd4 13 cxd4 Bf5 14 Nxe4 dxe4 (14 ... Bxe4!? 15 Qg3 Qe6 16 Be3 Rac8) 15 Qd1 Qe6 16 b3 Rad8 with good compensation for the pawn, K.Starp-F.Levin, Recklinghausen 2000.

10 ... Bf5 11 Qf3

So far this is J.Ehlvest-N.Short, Belgrade 1989. Now 11 ... Nxd2 12 Bxd2 Be4 13 Qg3 f6 (13 ... c5 is also good) 14 Nxc6 Qd7 15 Nb4 a5 16 Nd3 Qb5 17 Bh6 Rf7 18 Rad1 Bxd3 19 Rxd3 Qxb2 is equal.

A) 7 Re1 d6 (Diagram 10)

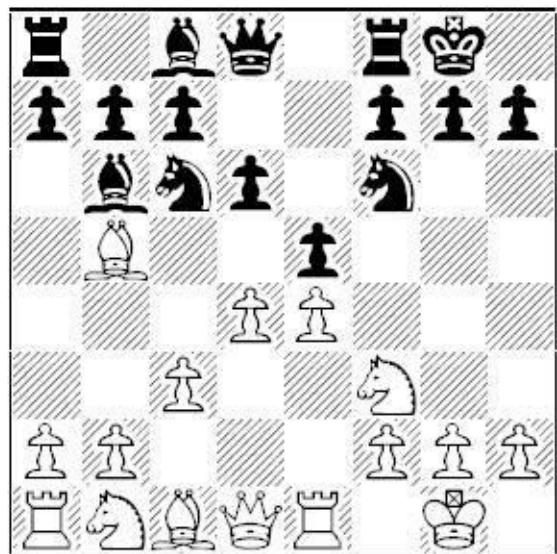


Diagram 10 (W)

8 h3

By far the most popular move at this juncture. White stops ... Bg4 and ... Ng4 and thus prepares to put his dark-squared bishop on e3.

Other tries:

- a) 8 a4

BEWARE! White threatens to trap the bishop by Bxc6 and a5.

8 ... a5 9 h3 (**Diagram 11**)

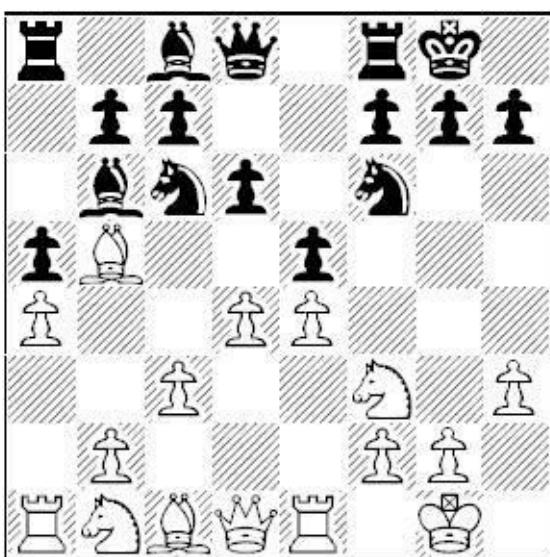


Diagram 11 (B)

BEWARE! With the a-pawns advanced, our favourite manoeuvre 9 ... Ne7?! 10 dx_e5 dx_e5 11 Qxd8 Rx_d8 12 Nx_e5 Nx_e4 13 Rx_e4 Rd1+ 14 Kh2 Bf5 (14 ... Rx_c1? 15 Nd3!) 15 Nd2 Bx_e4 16 Nx_e4 is now good for White as the b5-bishop is defended!

Black has an extra possibility here that he doesn't have in lines without a4 and ... a5: he can capture on d4 and then put his knight on the hole created on b4.

After 9 ... h6 there is a further sub-division:

a1) 10 Na3 exd4 11 cxd4 d5 (11 ... Nb4 is also perfectly reasonable, of course) 12 e5 (12 exd5 Nxd5 13 Nc4 Ncb4 14 Nxb6, Ye Jiangchuan-Peng Xiaomin, Beijing 2000, and now 14 ... Nxb6 15 Bf4 Bf5 16 Rc1 c6 with a pleasant IQP position) 12 ... Ne4 13 Nc2 (or 13 Bxc6?! bxc6 14 Be3, C.Radovici-W.Pietzsch, Sofia 1967, 14 ... f5 15 exf6 Qxf6 menacing ... Bxh3) 13 ... Ne7 14 Ne3, A.Galkin-L.Winants, Internet 2007, 14 ... Nf5 15 Nxf5 Bxf5 with the nice pawn levers ... f6 and ... c5.

a2) 10 Bxc6?! (a common ploy that weakens Black's queenside structure) 10 ... bxc6 11 dx_e5 dx_e5 12 Qxd8 Rx_d8 13 Nbd2 (if 13 Nx_e5? Nx_e4 in view of 14 Rx_e4 Rd1+ 15 Kh2 Rx_c1) 13 ... Nd7! when ... f6 followed by ... Nc5 was a menace, aiming for the weak light squares on d3 and b3, and Black was doing fine in the endgame in K.Georgiev-M.Mitkov, Istanbul Olympiad 2000.

a3) 10 dx_e5 should often be answered by 10 ... Nx_e5! leaving the b5-bishop

misplaced: 11 Nxe5 (or 11 Be3 Bxe3 12 Rxe3 c6 13 Bf1 Nxf3+ 14 Qxf3 Qb6 15 Nd2 B.Lengyel-H.Hecht, Balatonlelle 2004, when 15 ... Be6 was probably the simplest) 11 ... dxe5 12 Qe2 Be6, S.Pimankin-D.Frolov, Novosibirsk 2003. Black stands well, although the pawn structure is symmetric and so the game is a bit drawish.

a4) 10 Be3 (**Diagram 12**) and now:

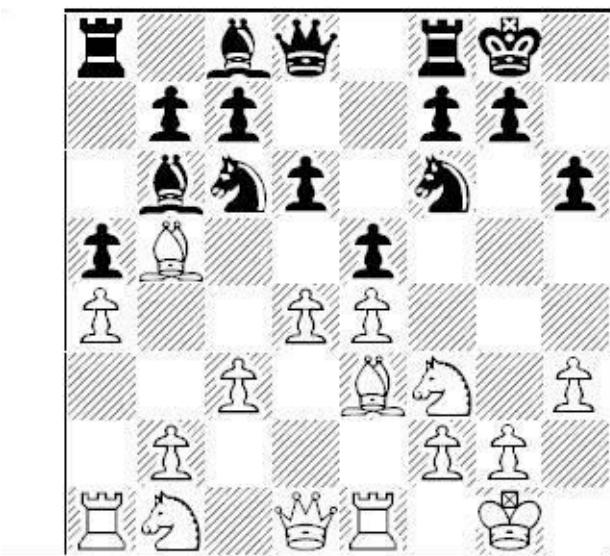


Diagram 12 (B)

ROLL THE DICE! a41) 10 ... Nxe4!? is not really a blunder here, as 11 d5 Bxe3 12 Rxe3 Nxf2 13 Kxf2 Ne7 14 Bc4 c6 is actually quite tricky: Black menaces ... Nf5 and ... Qb6+.

a42) 11 ... exd4 11 cxd4 Nb4 12 Nc3 d5 (or 12 ... c6!? 13 Bd3, T.Kokkila-E.Ovod, Finnish League 2007, 13 ... Be6 14 Rc1 Re8) 13 e5 Ne4 14 Nd2 is nothing for White: 14 ... f5!? (14 ... Nxd2 15 Qxd2 Bf5 16 Rac1 c6 is simple and good) 15 Nxe4 fxe4 is equal, E.Van den Doel-I.Sokolov, Rotterdam 1999.

b) 8 Bxc6 is nothing: 8 ... bxc6 9 dxe5 (9 h3 is better: 9 ... exd4 10 cxd4, B.Anhchimeg-Li Ruofan, Ulaanbaatar 2002, 10 ... h6 11 Nc3 Re8, but Black is fine with his bishop pair and open files for his rooks) 9 ... Ng4! (**Diagram 13**) (of course 9 ... dxe5 is perfectly alright: 10 Qxd8 Rxd8 11 Bg5 h6 12 Bh4 Re8, L.Bartek-P.Palider, Slovakian League 2009, and not 11 Nxe5? Nxe4 when White has to defend f2 by 12 Be3 Bxe3 13 fxe3) and now:

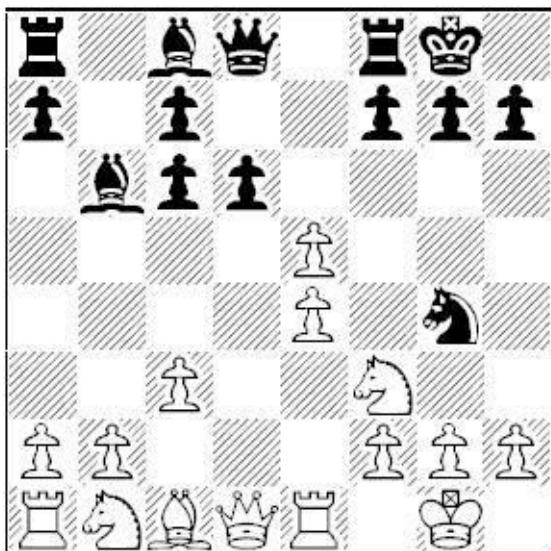


Diagram 13 (W)

DANGEROUS WEAPON! b1) 10 Re2 could be met by 10 ... Ba6!? (the simple 10 ... Nxe5 11 Nxe5 dx5 12 Qc2 f5 is fine for Black) 11 Rd2 Re8 12 a4 f5!? (or 12 ... d5 13 a5 Bxf2+! 14 Rxf2 dx4) with a powerful initiative, *e.g.* 13 exf6 Qxf6 14 h3 Nxf2 15 Rxf2 Bxf2+ 16 Kxf2 Rxe4.

b2) 10 Be3 Bxe3 11 fxe3 Nxe5 12 Nxe5 dx5 with the better minor piece, A.Kobalc-J.Garmendia, correspondence 1994.

c) 8 Bg5 transposes to 7 Bg5 d6 8 Re1, Variation C.

8 ... Ne7!? (**Diagram 14**)

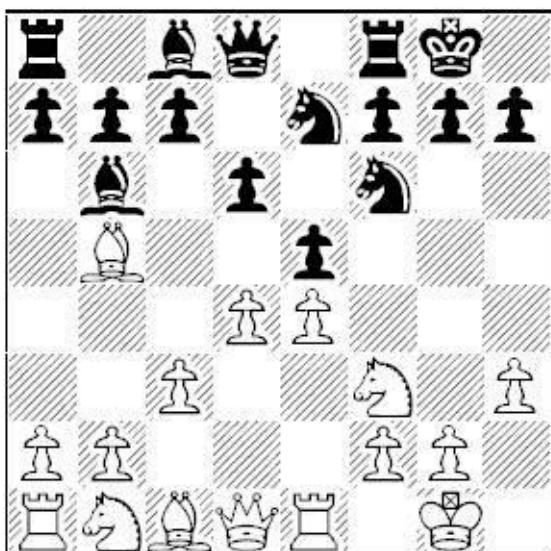


Diagram 14 (W)

“The knight transfer from c6 to g6 is always good for Black in such lines” – I.Sokolov. Indeed, I almost always play this manoeuvre in the Giuoco Piano/Bishop’s

Opening as Black – it is Black's equivalent manoeuvre to White's Nbd2-f1 to g3 in the Lopez. A later ... Nh5 and ... Qf6 followed by ... Nf4 can lead to a strong kingside attack, and the particular advantage here is that Black can hit the b5-bishop with the useful ... c6, preparing a square for the bishop on c7.

The neat tactical point, similar to many other such lines in this variation, is that the e-pawn is 'defended' by a back rank trick.

BEWARE! Note the configuration after 8 ... h6 9 Be3 Bd7 (9 ... Nxe4?? would lose a piece to 10 d5 Ne7 11 Bxb6), as Black threatens a neat trick ... Nxd4!. Therefore White must defend or move the b5-bishop. However, after 10 Bd3 Re8 11 Nbd2, as in P.Svidler-Peng Xiaomin, New Delhi/Teheran 2000, White reaches the type of position he is aiming for, with a well-supported centre. Definitely to be avoided as Black, in my opinion, as he is lacking counterplay.

9 dxe5

The alternatives are preferable:

a) 9 Nbd2 c6 and now:

a1) 10 Bf1!

White might want to play g3 to keep a black knight out of f4.

10 ... Ng6 11 Nc4 Bc7 (**Diagram 15**)

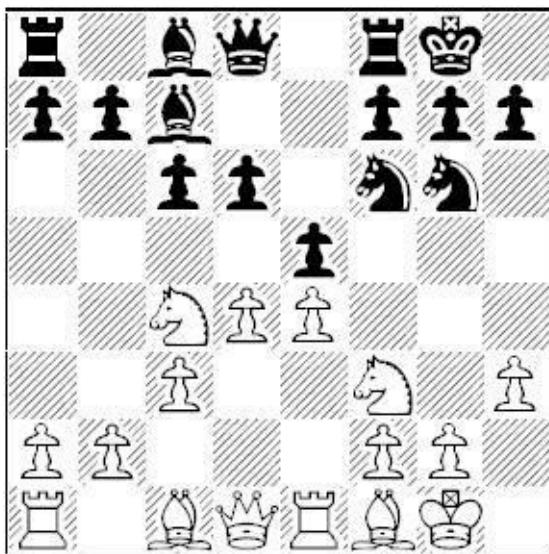


Diagram 15 (W)

12 dxe5

A positional concession, swapping d-pawns, but if, say, 12 a4 then Black can play the standard idea 12 ... exd4 13 cxd4 Re8 14 Bd3 d5 15 exd5 Rxe1+ 16 Qxe1 Nxd5.

12 ... dxe5 13 Qc2

The position is dull and symmetric, which is not really what Black wants, but White's first move should count for something. Alternatively, 13 Bg5 h6 14 Qxd8 Rxd8 15 Bxf6 gxf6 16 g3, V.Vltavsky-V.Kovar, Czech League 2002, when 16 ... Be6 is equal – the doubled f-pawns are easily defended and can be liquidated by a well-timed ... f5, or 13 ... Qe7 14 Qc2 h6 to keep queens on.

13 ... h6 14 b3

The only move that causes Black problems. White wants to play Ba3 and then put a piece on d6. Instead 14 Be3, S.Smagin-C.Navrotescu, Biel 1990, 14 ... Qe7 is equal.

14 ... Be6

14 ... b5?! 15 Rd1 Qe7 16 Ne3 a6 17 a4 with a small advantage, J-N.Riff-A.Kosten, Belfort 2012 – Black should avoid giving White a queenside target like this. 14 ... b6!? is possible, though.

15 Ba3 Re8 16 Rad1 Qb8

This was suggested by Philipp Schlosser. Now 17 Nd6 (17 Rd2 a5) 17 ... Rd8 (fighting for d6) 18 Nf5 Rxd1 19 Rxd1 Qe8 and ... Rd8 with a solid position for Black.

a2) 10 Bd3 Ng6 11 Nc4 Bc7 12 a4 Re8 13 dxe5 (or 13 Qc2 A.Forgacs-G.Kende, Hungarian League 1999, when the simplest is 13 ... exd4 14 cxd4 d5) 13 ... dxe5 and play is equal. T.Szegi-V.Kalisky, Slovakian League 2009, continued 14 a5 h6 15 Be3 Be6 16 Qc2 Nh5 17 Red1 Qf6 18 Nh2 Ngf4 (18 ... Nhf4!) 19 Ng4 Qg6 20 f3?? Nxd3 21 Qxd3 Rad8 0-1, as White loses a piece after 22 Qe2 Ng3 23 Qe1 Bxc4 24 Qxg3 h5.

b) 9 Bg5 Ng6 (now ... h6 will kick the bishop away and break the pin as h4 is no longer available for the bishop) 10 Nbd2 (or 10 dxe5 dxe5 11 Qxd8 Rxd8 12 Nbd2, P.Ostojic-H.Hahne, Hamburg 1981, and it's probably a good time for 12 ... h6 13 Bxf6 gxf6 since White can't stop ... Nf4 here with g3 as the h-pawn is loose) 10 ... h6 11 Be3 c6 12 Bf1 Be6 with a quick draw, A.Ruiz Bravo-R.Minguez Rodriguez, Terrassa 1996.

c) 9 Na3 c6 10 Bf1 Ng6 11 Nc4 transposes to 9 Nbd2.

9 ... dxe5 10 Qxd8

Or 10 Nbd2 Ng6 with a likely transposition above.

10 ... Rxd8 (Diagram 16)

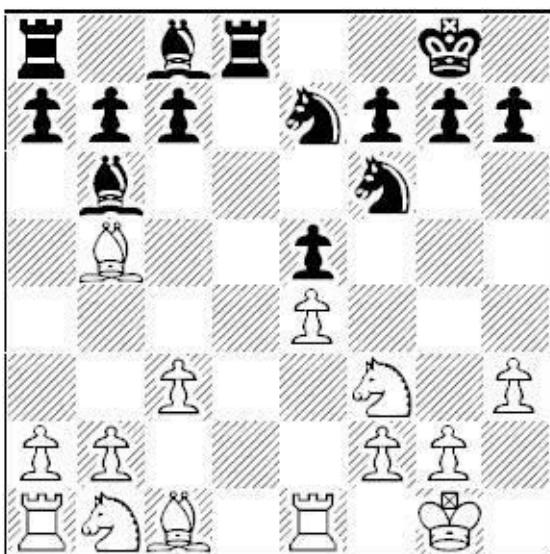


Diagram 16 (W)

11 Nxe5?

DANGEROUS WEAPON! Following a series of fairly natural moves, White grabs a pawn and immediately falls prey to a tactic based on Black's active dark-squared bishop.

11 Nbd2 c6 12 Bf1 Ng6 13 Nc4 Bc7 14 Bg5 Be6 15 Ne3 Rd7 16 Bxf6 gxf6 is nice for Black, E.Torre-L.Kavalek, Biel 1977.

11 ... Nxe4! (Diagram 17)

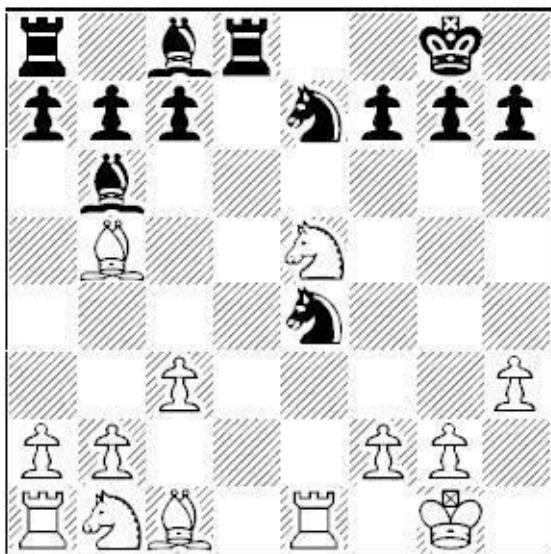


Diagram 17 (W)

12 Rxe4

12 Be3 Bxe3 13 fxe3?? is even worse: 13 ... Rd5 forking two minor pieces, W.Carl-T.Bittner, Baden 1995.

12 ... Rd1+ 13 Kh2 Bf5! 14 Re2

14 Nd2 Bxe4 15 Nxe4 Rd5 forks b5 and e5 again: 16 f4 Rxb5 17 c4 Rb4 and Black wins, B.Nielsen-O.Krause, Copenhagen 1934.

14 ... Rxc1

J.Lenz-C.Costello, Bad Homburg 2010. After 15 Nd3 Bxd3 16 Bxd3 Rd8 White will find it very difficult to unpin his knight, and 17 Rxe7? loses to 17 ... Kf8 18 Re2 Rxd3.

B) 7 dxe5

This is the third most popular move by a very long way, although it seems funny to go to all the trouble of forming a strong centre with c3 and d4 and then immediately dissolve it.

7 ... Nxe4 (Diagram 18)

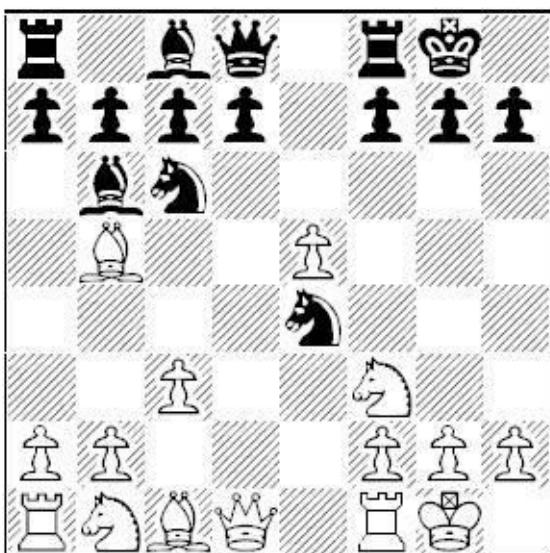


Diagram 18 (W)

8 Qd5

The only move that hinders Black from playing ... d5, when he would equalize immediately. Some examples:

a) 8 Qc2 d5 9 exd6 (or 9 Nbd2 f5) 9 ... Nxd6 10 Bd3 h6 11 Nbd2 Re8 (**Diagram 19**).

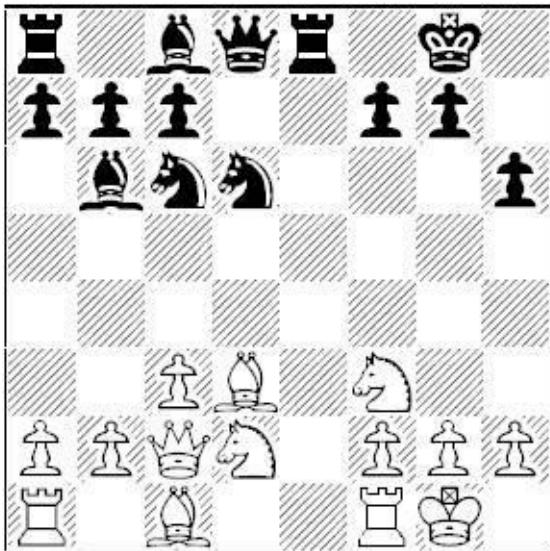


Diagram 19 (W)

The lack of central pawns makes these positions a little drawish, but otherwise Black has active pieces, a slight development advantage, and plenty of reasons to be happy. For example:

a1) 12 Nc4?! (White is too keen on exchanges) 12 ... Nxc4 13 Bxc4 Qf6 14 Be3 Bf5 15 Bd3 Bxd3 16 Qxd3, A.Kornev-A.Kuznesov, Kiselevsk 2011, 16 ... Rad8 17 Qb5 a6 18 Qb3 Bxe3 19 fxe3 Na5 with a clear plus.

a2) 12 b3 Qf6 13 Ba3 Bg4 14 Rae1 Ne5 15 Rxe5 (15 Nxe5 Rxe5 16 Bxd6? Bxf2+) 15 ... Rxe5 16 Bxd6 cxd6 17 Nxe5 dxe5 is equal, D.Keller-B.Spassky, Zurich 1984.

b) 8 Bd3 is similar: 8 ... d5 9 exd6 Nxd6 10 Bg5 (10 Qc2 transposes to 8 Qc2) 10 ... f6 11 Bf4 Bg4!? (or 11 ... Bf5 12 Na3 Bxd3 13 Qxd3 Nf7 with equality, H.Pilnik-J.Fichtl, Marianske Lazne 1956) 12 Nbd2 g5!? (12 ... Qd7 13 Qc2 g6 is more circumspect) 13 Bxd6 Qxd6 14 Qc2 Kg7!? (14 ... Qd7) 15 Bf5, D.Bronstein-B.Spassky, Mar del Plata 1960, 15 ... Bxf5 16 Qxf5 Rad8 17 Rad1 Qd5 with an edge. 15 h3! seems stronger, as 15 ... Bxh3 16 gxh3 Qg3+ 17 Kh1 Qxh3+ 18 Nh2 Ne5 19 Bf5 defends.

c) 8 Nbd2 d5 and now:

c1) 9 Qe2 Bf5 (the aggressive 9 ... f5 is also worth consideration) 10 Nb3 Bg4 11 Bxc6 bxc6 12 Be3 Re8 13 h3 Bxf3!? (13 ... Bh5 14 g4 Bg6 is clearly good) 14 gxf3 (14 Qxf3 Rxe5) 14 ... Bxe3 15 fxe4?! (15 Qxe3 Nd6 is only slightly better for Black), F.Cuijpers-R.Ris, Netherlands League 2011, when 15 ... Bb6 16 exd5 Qg5+ looks winning.

c2) 9 Bxc6?! bxc6. Now ... Ba6 is a threat, so 10 Nxe4 dxe4 11 Nd4 (11 Qxd8 Rxd8 12 Ng5 Bf5 and ... h6) 11 ... c5 (closing the b6-bishop's diagonal) 12 Nc2 Ba6 13 Re1 Qxd1 14 Rxd1 Bd3 15 Ne1 c4 and now re-opening the g1-a7 diagonal with a clear advantage, O.Guenthner-R.Sutterer, Lauda 1986.

c3) 9 exd6 Nxd6 10 Bd3 Re8 when 11 Qc2 transposes to 8 Qc2.

8 ... Nc5 (Diagram 20)

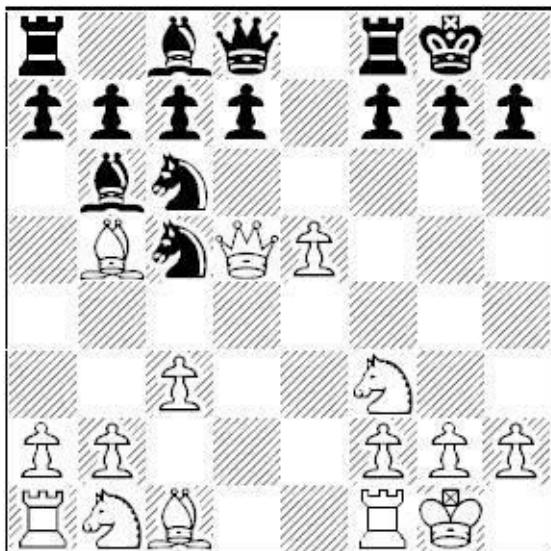


Diagram 20 (W)

From here the knight can either go to e6 or return to e4, depending on White's play.

9 Bg5

By far the most popular move. Against this and most of the other moves Black will generally play ... Ne7 to drive the queen home, then ... Ne4 followed by ... d5:

a) 9 b4 Ne7 10 Qd1 Ne4 11 Bd3 (11 a4, R.Mateo-L.Winants, Thessaloniki 1988, is best met by 11 ... a5 12 Bd3 d5) 11 ... d5 (the standard recipe) 12 Qc2 (or 12 exd6 Nxd6 13 c4 c5 14 a3 Bf5 15 Bb2 Rc8 16 b5 Ng6 17 Re1 Ba5 18 Nc3 Nf4, S.Schmidt Schaeffer-A.Alawieh, Cannes 1995) 12 ... f5 (12 ... Bf5 13 Nbd2 Nxd2 14 Bxd2 Qd7 is simple, and equal) 13 exf6 (or 13 c4, M.Zembrzuska-J.Paprocki, Poland 2007, 13 ... Nc6 14 a3 Nd4 15 Nxd4 Bxd4 16 Bb2 Bxb2 17 Qxb2 Be6) 13 ... Nxf6 14 Bg5 h6 15 Bh4 a5 16 Nbd2 axb4 17 cxb4 Nc6 with the usual active pieces in E.Mnatsakanian-M.Mukhiddinov, Soviet Union 1962.

b) 9 Be3 (threatening the knight) 9 ... Ne7 10 Qd1 c6 (10 ... d5 11 exd6 cxd6 12 Nbd2 a6 is fine if you're happy playing IQP positions) 11 Bc4 d5 12 exd6 Nf5 13 Bf4 Ne4 (regaining the pawn) 14 Nbd2 Nfxd6 15 Nxe4 (15 Bd3 Nc5 16 Bc2, A.Demianjuk-E.Ovod, St Petersburg 2011, 16 ... Bf5 equal) 15 ... Nxe4 (15 ... Nxc4!? grabs the bishop pair: 16 Qe2 Qd5 17 Rad1 Qf5 – the tactical point – 18 Bg3 Be6 and Black is fine) 16 Qe2 (16 Qxd8! Rxd8 17 Rae1 is a little awkward) 16 ... Bf5 (16 ... Re8 17 Ne5 Nd6) 17 Rad1, C.Kleijn-M.Bosman, Netherland League 2010, 17 ... Qf6 18 Be5 Qg6 19 Nh4 Qg5 20 Nxf5 Qxf5 21 Bd4 Rae8 with active play.

c) 9 Na3 (**Diagram 21**) has a very good pedigree, having attracted the attention of a number of very strong players.

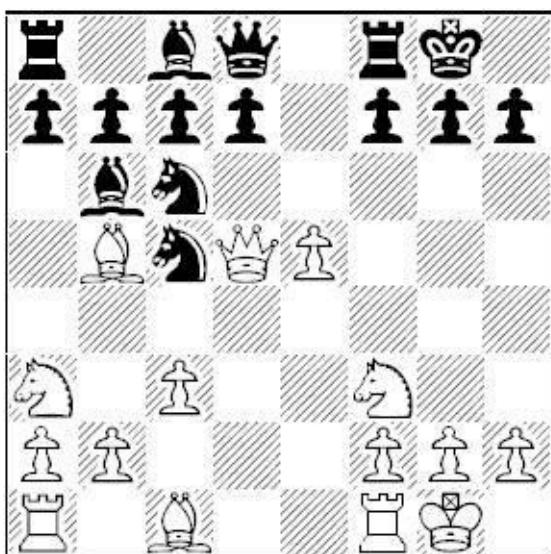
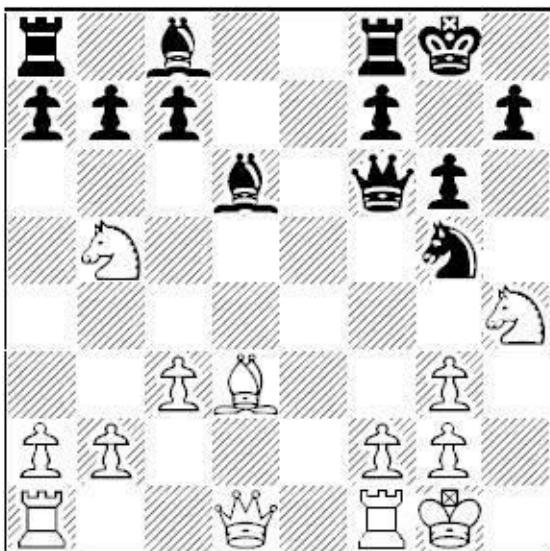


Diagram 21 (B)

9 ... d6!? (as in the other lines, 9 ... Ne7 10 Qd1 Ne4 11 Bd3 d5 is also more than adequate: 12 exd6 Nxd6 13 Bg5 h6 14 Bh4 Ndf5 15 Bg3 Nxg3 16 hxg3 Nf5, A.Shirov-V.Topalov, Sofia 2009) 10 Bg5 (10 exd6 Be6 11 Qh5 Qxd6 is nothing for White) 10 ... Be6! 11 Qd1 Qd7 12 exd6 cxd6 13 Nc2 a6. Black has a fair IQP position, as soon as he plays ... d5, although he never actually did in E.Inarkiev-D.Svetushkin, Moscow 2009.

d) 9 Bf4!?. Sokolov wrote that he thought this move was “interesting”. White hinders Black from playing his freeing ... d5 move, but now Black can gain time with ... Ne6 instead. 9 ... Ne7 and now:

d1) 10 Qd1 Ne6 11 Bg3 Nf5 12 Na3 Bc5 13 Nc2 d5 14 exd6 (14 Qd2, A.Stripunsky-S.Barbeau, Montreal 2004, can be answered by 14 ... Bb6 intending ... Nc5-e4) 14 ... Nxg3 15 hxg3 Bxd6 (or 15 ... Qxd6 16 Qxd6 Bxd6 transposing directly to the Rijnaarts-Bosman game, below) 16 Ncd4 Ng5 (16 ... Qf6 is more natural) 17 Nh4?! Qf6 18 Bd3 g6 19 Nb5?! (**Diagram 22**).



10 ... Ne4 (Diagram 23)

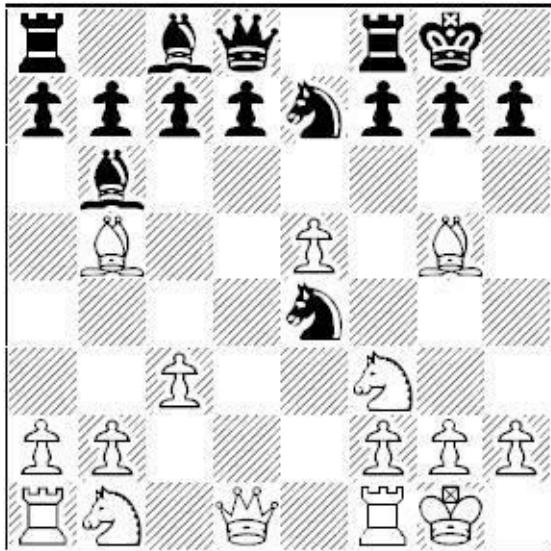


Diagram 23 (B)

The simplest. Rather than going to e6 Black returns here to control d6 so that he can continue ... d5 next go – better not leave the d-pawn backward for too long as the queenside will need to be developed!

11 Bh4

11 Bd3!? of T.Kabisch-A.Zude, German League 1989, should probably be met by 11 ... d5 12 exd6 (12 Bxe4 dxe4 13 Qxd8 Rxd8 14 Bxe7 is nothing: 14 ... Re8 15 Nfd2 Rxe7 with advantage) 12 ... Nxd6 13 Re1 Re8 14 Nbd2 h6 with equality.

b) 11 Bf4 d5 12 Nbd2?!, L.Polugaevsky-I.Boleslavsky, Moscow 1963, 12 ... Ng6! 13 Bg3 h5! and White's g3-bishop is in trouble.

11 ... d5

Black gains a strong central outpost and can now develop his c8-bishop.

12 Nbd2 (Diagram 24)

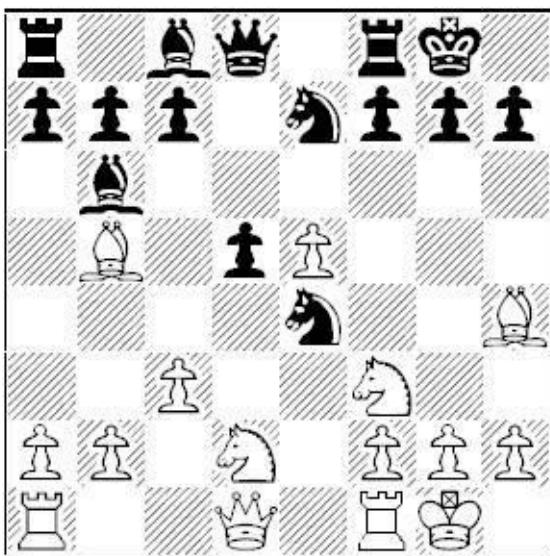


Diagram 24 (B)

This is one position where White normally prefers to keep the central tension.
Alternatives:

a) 12 exd6 Nxd6 13 Bd3 Bf5 is a bit dull: 14 Re1 (14 Na3 Re8 15 Nc4 Bxd3 16 Qxd3 Nxc4 17 Qxc4 Qd5 was level, and shortly drawn, in E.Bacrot-I.Sokolov, Albert 2004, while 15 Re1 f6 transposes to 14 Re1) 14 ... Re8 15 Na3 f6 16 Bg3 Bxd3 17 Qxd3 Nef5 18 Bf4 Qd7 (18 ... Bxf2+? 19 Kxf2 Ne4+ is met by 20 Qxe4 Rxe4 21 Rxe4) 19 Qd5+ Qf7 20 Qxf7+ Kxf7 with a pleasant game for Black in J.Jaquez-L.Fressinet, Dresden 2008.

b) 12 c4 c6 13 Ba4, G.Hernandez-W.Sariego, Cienfuegos 1991, when 13 ... Re8 is the simplest, so that 14 cxd5 can be met by 14 ... Qxd5 15 Qxd5 Nxd5 16 Bc2 Nc5 with an edge.

c) 12 Bd3 Qe8 13 Qc2 Bg4!? (13 ... Ng6 14 Bxe4 dxe4 15 Qxe4 f6 is interesting, intending 16 Nbd2 fxe5 17 Bg3 Bf5) 14 Nbd2 (14 Bxe4 dxe4 15 Qxe4 Bxf3 16 Qxf3 Ng6 17 Bg3 Nxe5 regains the pawn – after 18 Qxb7?! Qb5 19 Qe4 Qxb2 20 Bxe5 Qxa1 21 Qc2 Rfe8 22 Nd2 Qxf1+ 23 Kxf1 Rxe5 Black's rooks are preferable to White's queen, A.Dubinsky-A.Zakharov, Leningrad 1962) 14 ... Nxd2 (or 14 ... Ng6!? 15 Bxe4 dxe4 16 Qxe4 Qd7 with threats to h4, so 17 Bg3 Bf5 18 Qb4 a5 with enough compensation for the pawn) 15 Nxd2 Ng6 16 Bg3 f5!? (risky; 16 ... Qe7 is safer) 17

exf6 Rxf6 18 Rae1 Qf7 19 c4 with a plus, J.Tompa-A.Zakharov, Budapest 1963.

12 ... c6

The sharp theoretical main line. Instead, I would be tempted to play one of two alternatives at this juncture.

12 ... Bf5 is supposed to be bad because of 13 Nd4 (13 Qe2 Nc5 14 Nd4 Bg6 15 Qg4 c6 16 Be2 Qc7 17 f4 Ne6! 18 Bxe7 Qxe7 19 f5? h5! 20 Qh3 Nxd4 21 cxd4 Qxe5 wins easily for Black, E.Dervishi-H.Stefansson, Leon 2001) but after 13 ... Bg6 14 Nxe4 Bxe4 I don't see anything wrong with Black's position (**Diagram 25**):

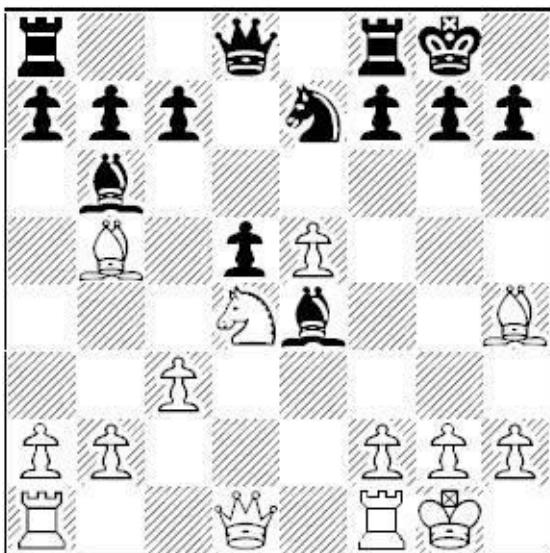


Diagram 25 (W)

15 f3 Bg6 16 f4, E.Vasiukov-H.Hecht, Lignano Sabbiadoro 2005, and now 16 ... c5 17 Nb3 c4+ 18 Nd4 Bd3.

ROLL THE DICE! 12 ... Nc5!? would be a good try to avoid known channels: 13 Nb3 (13 Re1 c6 14 Bf1 Bg4 looks like a good Open Spanish without any queenside weaknesses; Black might continue with ... Ne6 and/or ... Qd7 and ... Nf5) 13 ... a6 14 Be2 Be6 15 Nfd4 Qd7. Black unpins the e7-knight ready to play ... Ng6 or ... Nf5, and after that he will be able to bring his rooks to the centre and play ... c5.

13 Bd3 Bf5 (Diagram 26)

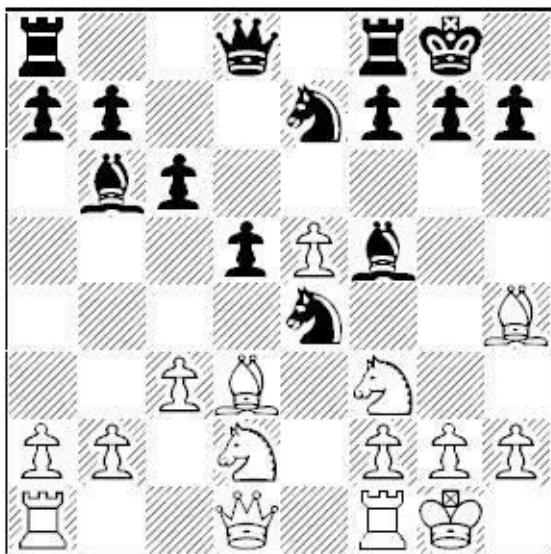


Diagram 26 (W)

14 Qc2

14 Qe2 Nxd2 15 Bxf5!? (15 Nxd2 Bxd3 16 Qxd3 Qd7 is easy for Black, I.Arest-L.Ordez Valdes, Khanty-Mansiysk 2010) 15 ... Nxf1!? (15 ... Nxf3+ 16 Qxf3 Qc7 17 Bc2 Ng6 18 Bg3 Rae8 is somewhat safer) 16 Bxh7+ Kxh7 17 Ng5+ Kh6 18 Qd3 f5! (18 ... Ng6!? is possible; after 19 Nxf7+ Rxf7 20 Bxd8 Bxf2+ 21 Kh1 Ng3+ 22 hxg3 Rxd8 23 Rf1 Rdf8 24 e6 Rf6 Black has to take care, but his pieces should outgun the queen eventually) 19 exf6 Ng6 20 Ne6 Qd6 21 Bg5+ Kh7 22 Qh3+ Kg8 23 Rxf1, G.Putzbach-F.Hegeler, Hamburg 1991, 23 ... Qd7 and Black should win, e.g. 24 Nxf8 Qxh3 25 gxh3 Rxf8.

14 ... Nxd2 15 Bxf5 (Diagram 27)

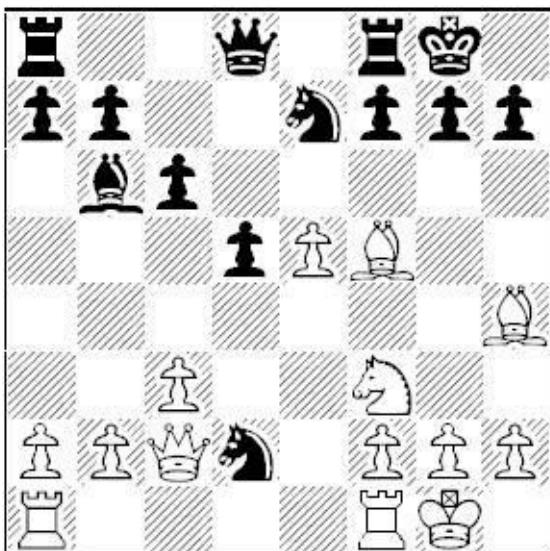


Diagram 27 (B)

15 Nxd2 is nothing for White: 15 ... Qd7 16 Bxe7 Bxd3 17 Qxd3 Qxe7, Z.Zelic-Z.Basagic, Zlatibor 1989.

15 ... Nxf3+

BEWARE! 15 ... Nxf1?! is too risky: 16 Bxh7+ Kh8 17 Rxf1 Qd7 18 e6 fxe6 19 Ne5 Qd6 20 Re1 with an attack, L.Aronin-L.Stein, Riga 1962 – no-one has bothered to play this line since!

16 gxf3 Kh8

Played so the h-pawn can't be taken with check; Black wants to avoid weakening his kingside with ... h6. Now he will unpin the knight (mostly by ... Qc7) and play ... Rae8.

17 f4

Alternatively:

a) 17 Rae1 Qc7 (17 ... g5!? is appealing: 18 Bg3 Nxf5 19 Qxf5 Qe7 20 f4 gxf4 21 Qxf4 Rg8, not 18 Bxg5?! Rg8 19 f4 h6) 18 Bh3 (18 Bxh7? g6 19 Bf6+ Kxh7 20 Qa4 Nf5 21 Qg4 Ng7 and ... Nh5) 18 ... Rae8 19 f4 f5 (19 ... f6 20 exf6 comes to the same, but is probably more accurate) 20 exf6 Ng6! 21 Bg3 (21 fxe7+?! Qxg7 22 Bg3 Nxf4) 21 ... gxf6 22 Be6 Qg7 23 f5 Nh4 24 Kh1 Nf3 ($\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$, E.Geller-B.Spassky, Leningrad 1962) 25 Re2?! Qg4 26 Qd3, A.Bass-A.Aparicio, Quilmes 1980, 26 ... h5! and ... h4.

b) 17 Bxh7?! g6 18 Bf6+ Kxh7 19 Qa4 d4 20 cxd4 Qe8 21 d5 Nf5 defends, but is complicated.

17 ... Qc7 (Diagram 28)

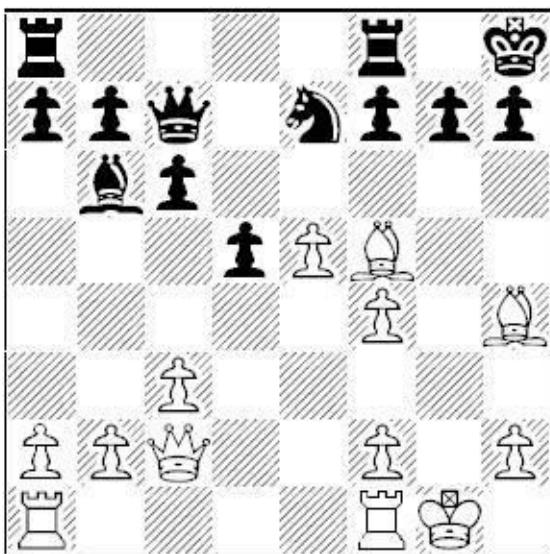


Diagram 28 (W)

17 ... Qe8!? is quite playable: 18 Kh1 (18 Bd3) 18 ... Nxf5 19 Qxf5, D.Feletar-D.Pavasovic, Pula 2000, 19 ... Qe6 20 Qd3 Bd8.

18 Kh1

Freeing the g-file for the rooks.

It also makes sense to keep the bishop pair: 18 Bh3 Ng6 19 Bg3 f6! 20 Rae1 fxe5 (20 ... Rae8 transposes to 17 Rae1) 21 fxe5 Nf4 22 Bf5 g6 23 Bxf4 Rxf5 24 Bg3 Qe7 25 Kg2 Qe6 26 f4 Raf8 with a nice light-squared blockade, and some advantage, B.Lengyel-C.Tesik, Budapest 2011.

18 ... Nxf5

ROLL THE DICE! 18 ... f6!? is fun: 19 exf6 (19 Bxh7 fxe5 20 fxe5 Qxe5 21 Rae1 Qh5 22 Bg3 Nf5) 19 ... Qxf4 20 fxg7+ (20 fxe7 Qf3+ 21 Kg1 Rxf5) 20 ... Kxg7 21 Rg1+ (forced; 21 Bxe7?? Qf3+ 22 Kg1 Rxf5) 21 ... Kh8 22 Bxe7 Qf3+ 23 Rg2 Rxf5 and Black seems to be doing well in all lines.

19 Qxf5 Qc8 20 Qh5 (Diagram 29)

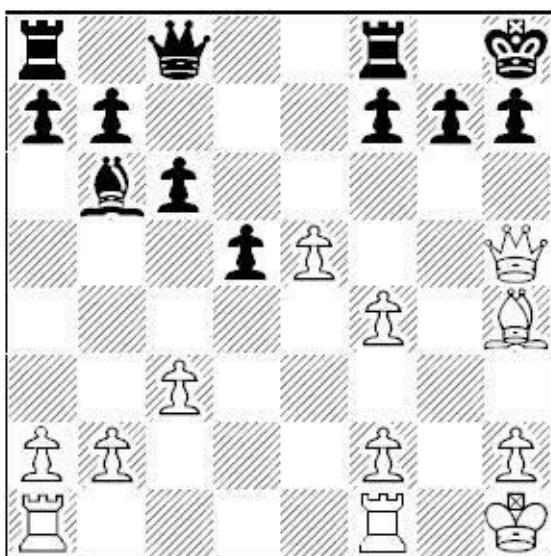


Diagram 29 (B)

The ending after 20 Qxc8 Raxc8 21 f5!? is not very clear: 21 ... Bd8 22 Bxd8 Rxd8 is probably drawish.

20 Qg5 is met by 20 ... f6!

20 ... Bd8

Definitely the safest line:

a) 20 ... Qe6 21 f5!? Qxe5 22 Rae1 with a dangerous initiative in S.Dhar Barua-C.Gokhale, Sangli 2000.

b) 20 ... Qh3!?, pinning the h4-bishop, is suggested by Mark Morss: 21 Rg1 (forced, as ... Bd8 is threatened, e.g. 21 f5? Bd8 22 f6 g5! “wins most amazingly for Black” – Morss) 21 ... Rg8 (also forced!) 22 Rg3 Qe6 23 Rag1 g6 (23 ... Bxf2?? 24 Rxg7!) 24 f5!? Qxe5 25 fxg6! Qxh5 26 Bf6+ Rg7 27 gxf7 Qxf7 28 Bxg7+ Kg8 29 Bh6+ should be a repetition, but as Larsen said: “Long variation ... wrong variation!” In other words there may be improvements lurking!

21 Bxd8 Rxd8

To keep the queen on the c8-h3 diagonal.
21 ... Qxd8 22 f5 g6 23 Qh6 is not so clear.

22 Rg1

If 22 Qxf7 then 22 ... Rf8 23 Qe7 Rxf4.

22 ... g6 23 Qg5 Qe6 24 Rae1 Rg8

24 ... d4 25 f5 Qxf5 26 Qxf5 gxf5 27 Rg5 dxc3 28 bxc3 Rd7 29 Rxf5 Rg8 looks pretty drawish.

25 Rg3

½-½, M.Ghinda-C.Navrotescu, Odorheiu Secuiesc 1993.

C) 7 Bg5

The strongest, and by far the most common move. White pins the f6-knight to exploit the absence of Black's bishop from the kingside.

7 ... d6 (Diagram 30)

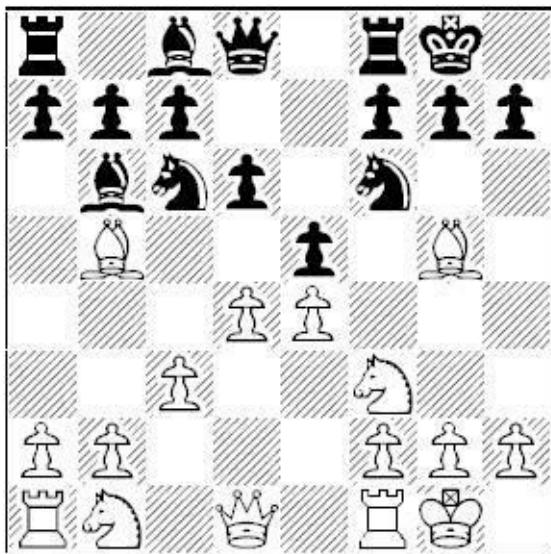


Diagram 30 (W)

Obvious, and in my opinion the strongest.

Black can also play 7 ... h6 8 Bh4 immediately and then 8 ... d6 but for reasons we will see later I like to keep ... h6 in reserve, and the white bishop on g5.

Now White has a major choice between:

C1: 8 Bxc6

C2: 8 a4

C3: 8 Qd3

Otherwise:

8 Re1

This is sensible, and the sort of move White might play if he doesn't know the theory very well.

DANGEROUS WEAPON! The obvious 8 Nbd2? allows 8 ... exd4 9 Bxc6 (or 9 cxd4 Nxd4 10 Nxd4 Bxd4 Black has a solid pawn more, N.Grigoriev-P.Romanovsky, Petrograd 1923) 9 ... dxc3! (Diagram 31) with advantage:

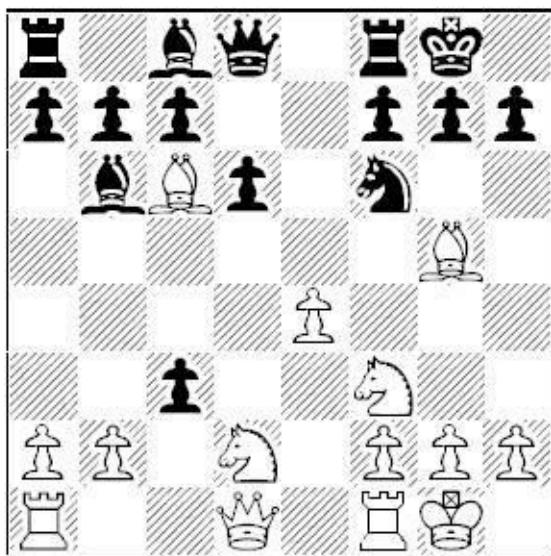


Diagram 31 (W)

For example, 10 Bxb7 (10 bxc3 bxc6 11 e5 dxe5 12 Nxe5 might be a slightly better try, but 12 ... Re8 13 Nxc6 Qd6 is clearly better for Black with two bishops on an open board) 10 ... Bxb7 11 bxc3 and now:

a) 11 ... Re8 12 Qc2 h6 13 Bxf6 (or 13 Bh4, R.Calvo Minguez-M.Markus, The Hague 1961, when 13 ... g5 is very strong) 13 ... Qxf6 14 Rfe1 Re7 15 Rac1 Rae8 and Black is better, with two powerful bishops and pressure against e4.

b) 11 ... h6 is also good: 12 Bh4 (or 12 Bxf6 Qxf6 when 13 Qc2 Rfe8 14 Rfe1 Re7 transposes to note 'a', above) 12 ... g5! 13 Nxg5 (13 Bg3 allows 13 ... Nxe4) 13 ... hxg5 14 Bxg5, B.Kreiman-B.Finegold, Philadelphia 2002, when the most accurate is 14 ... Re8 15 Qf3 Re6 followed by ... Kg7 and unpinning the knight, after which White's two pawns are insufficient compensation for the piece..

8 ... h6 9 Bh4 exd4

This is similar to Variation C2, without a4 and ... a5 included, and the play should be compared.

10 Bxc6 (Diagram 32)

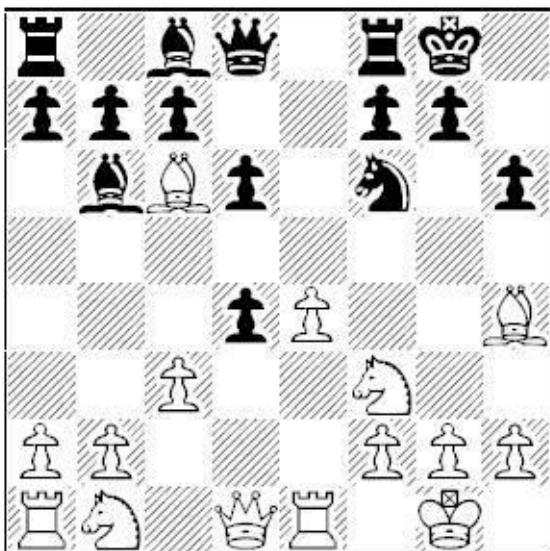


Diagram 32 (B)

Or:

a) 10 Nxd4 Ne5 11 Nd2 Ng6 12 Bg3 c6 13 Bf1 Bg4 14 Qc2 Nh5 15 Nc4 Bc7 16 f3 Nxg3 17 hxg3 Bd7 18 Ne3 Qg5 19 Ndf5? Bxf5 20 exf5 (20 Nxf5 Bb6+) 20 ... Bb6! 21 Qf2 Rae8 22 f4 Qe7 and wins, D.Kononenko-M.Godena, Internet 2008.

b) 10 cxd4 Bg4 11 Bxc6 bxc6 12 Nc3 (12 Nbd2!? offers a pawn: 12 ... g5 13 Bg3 Bxd4 14 Qc2 Bc5 15 e5 Nh5! 16 Nb3 Bb6 17 Qxc6, W.So-M.Krasenkow, Belfort 2012, when 17 ... Nxg3 18 hxg3 Re8 looks simple and good) 12 ... g5 (12 ... Re8 is possible, as with the pawns on a4 and a5 in Variation C2, although that difference means that 13 Qa4!? is feasible: 13 ... Bxf3 14 gxf3) 13 Bg3 Nh5 14 d5 (14 Re3 Qf6 15 Ne2 c5 16 e5 Qg6 17 Qa4 cxd4 18 Nfxd4?!, G.Mathe-S.Dolmatov, Cacak 1991, 18 ... Rae8 with advantage, as 19 exd6 Rxe3 20 fxe3 Bxe2 21 Nxe2 allows 21 ... Bxe3+ 22 Kh1 cxd6) 14 ... f5! 15 exf5 Rxf5 16 dxc6 Qf8 17 Nd5 Bxf3 18 gxf3 Nxg3 19 hxg3 Rxf3 20 Nxb6 axb6 21 Re2 Qf5 22 Qd4 Rd3 23 Qc4+ d5 24 Qb4 Rf8 25 Rae1 Rf7 is roughly equal, M.Agopov-S.Sulskis, Kaunas 2010.

10 ... dxc3!?

Possible without the white pawn on a4, but a bit greedy.

10 ... bxc6 is quite reasonable here, of course, and play can continue in much the same way as in Variation C2 by 11 Nxd4 Re8 12 Nd2 (12 Nxc6?! is even worse here, as after 12 ... Qd7 13 Bxf6 Qxc6 14 Bd4 Rxe4 Black doesn't have to worry about White taking on b6 and messing up his pawn structure) 12 ... g5 13 Bg3 c5 etc. In fact, I think I would play like this myself in a real game, rather than go pawn-grabbing!

11 Nxc3

11 Ba4?? cxb2 is the point.

11 ... bxc6 12 Qa4

12 e5!? dxe5 13 Nxe5 (13 Qa4!?), Y.Shen-F.Amos, Palma de Mallorca 2009, 13 ... Qxd1 14 Raxd1 g5 15 Bg3 Bb7 with an extra (if devalued) pawn, and the bishop pair.

12 ... g5

12 ... Qd7!? 13 Bxf6 gxf6 14 h3 with structural compensation for the pawn, L.Kavalek-B.Spassky, Solingen 1977.

13 Nxg5!?

Or 13 Bg3 with some compensation.

13 ... hxg5 14 Bxg5 (Diagram 33)

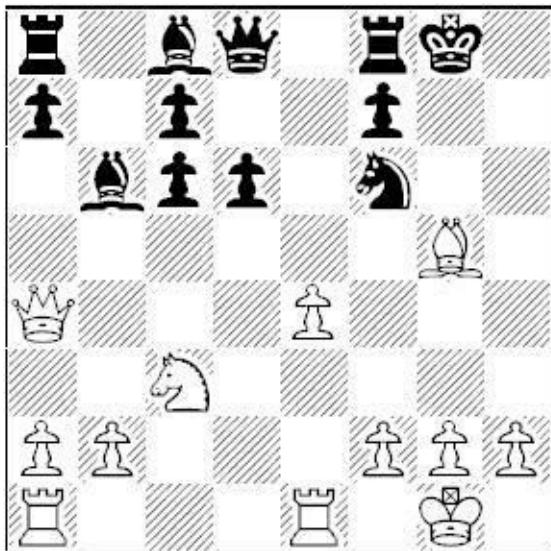


Diagram 33 (B)

14 ... Bxf2+

I bet White missed this!

15 Kh1

15 Kxf2? Ng4+.

15 ... Bxe1 16 Rxe1 Re8 17 Rf1 Re6 18 Qd4

G.Cabrilo-D.Gliksman, Bor 1976. White is a rook down but the pin on f6 is very strong. Perhaps Black's best chance is 18 ... Ba6 19 Rxf6 (19 Rf3!?) 19 ... Qf8 but I would prefer not to have to play such a position myself. Indeed, in the game White actually won.

C1) 8 Bxc6

This move is actually the most common here, but scores catastrophically for White. It might be that the doubled pawns provide insufficient compensation for the bishop pair and the time White wastes inflicting them.

8 ... bxc6 (Diagram 34)

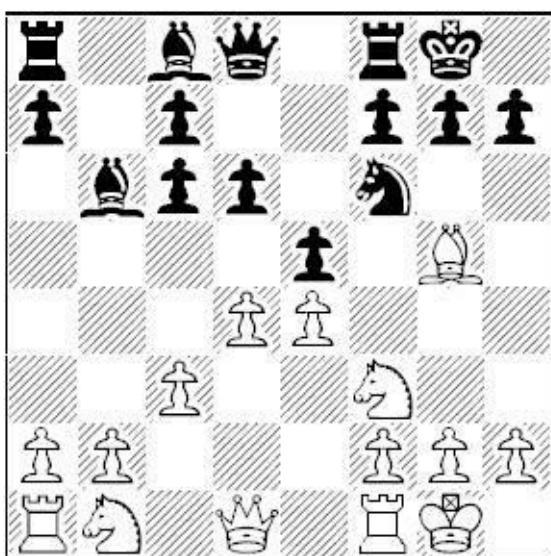


Diagram 34 (W)

9 dxe5

9 Nbd2 is possible, but then 9 ... h6 10 Bh4 exd4 (Black often makes this capture when he has the doubled c-pawns as he would prefer to keep his d-pawn on d6 to help them, rather than on e5) and now:

a) 11 Nxd4 g5 – as there is no possible knight sacrifice on g5 now – 12 Bg3 c5 13 Nf5 (13 Nc2, M.Pavlov-A.Khudyakov, Alushta 2009, 13 ... Re8) 13 ... Bxf5 14 exf5 Re8 intending ... Qd7, ... d5 and ... c4 if possible.

b) 11 cxd4 Re8 12 Qa4 (12 e5 dxe5 13 dxe5 g5 14 Bg3 Nh5) 12 ... Bd7 13 e5 g5 14 Nxg5 (14 Bg3 Nh5) 14 ... hxg5 15 Bxg5 dxe5 and now:

b1) 16 dxe5 Rxe5 17 Qh4 Rxg5 18 Qxg5+, D.Stellwagen-P.Nielsen, Amsterdam 2009, 18 ... Kh7! with a likely repetition after 19 Qh4+ Kg7 20 Qg5+.

b2) 16 Ne4 Nxe4! 17 Bxd8 Raxd8 18 dxe5 Bf5 is an atypical three pieces versus queen scenario. White currently has two more pawns as well, but the pressure on f2 is a big plus for Black, *e.g.* 19 Rad1 Rxd1 20 Qxd1 Rxe5 21 h3 Bg6 intending ... Nxf2. I think I would prefer Black here.

9 a4 doesn't seem to have been played yet, but is probably best: 9 ... a5 with a transposition to 9 Bxc6 in Variation C2.

9 ... dxe5 (Diagram 35)

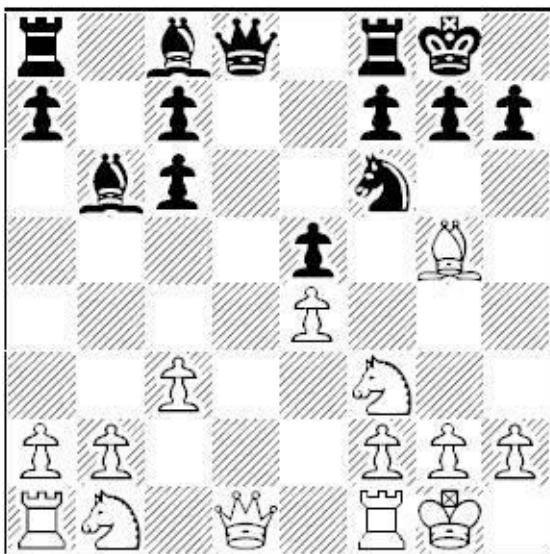


Diagram 35 (W)

10 Qxd8

Exchanging queens concedes the d-file. Others:

a) 10 Qa4 is less common, but probably better: 10 ... h6 11 Bh4 (11 Qxc6? hxg5 12 Qxa8 Qd6 traps the white queen.) 11 ... Qd6 (**Diagram 36**)

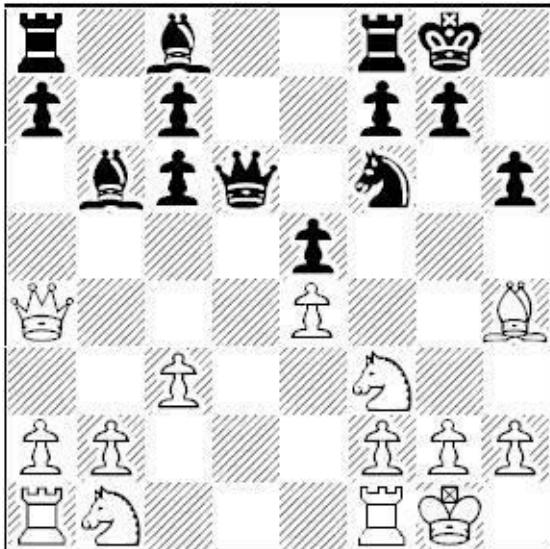


Diagram 36 (W)

(planning ... Nd7–c5, a common theme) and now:

a1) 12 Na3 Nd7! 13 Nc4 (13 Rfd1 can be met by the natural 13 ... Qg6 14 Qc2 f6 planning ... Nc5-e6, but also by 13 ... Nc5!? 14 Qc2 Qe6) 13 ... Qe6 14 Nxb6 cxb6, S.Jovic-V.Sokolov, Vrnjacka Banja 1962. If anything Black is better as White's dark-squared bishop is not very useful.

a2) 12 Nbd2 Nd7! 13 Nc4 transposes to 12 Na3.

a3) 12 Rd1 Qe6 13 Nbd2 (13 Bxf6?! Qxf6 14 Na3?! Bg4 15 Rd3 Rfd8 16 Qc2 Rxd3 17 Qxd3 Rd8 18 Qe2 Bxf3 19 Qxf3 Qxf3 20 gxf3 Rd2 gave Black the better endgame in L.Psakhis-J.Parker, Isle of Man 1999) 13 ... Nd7 (13 ... Nh5!?) 14 b4 (to stop ... Nc5) 14 ... a5 15 Qb3 Re8 (my computer suggests the anti-positional ... but tactical (!) line 15 ... axb4 16 Qxe6 fxe6 17 cxb4 g5 18 Bg3 g4 19 Nxe5 Nxe5 20 Bxe5 Rxf2 21 Nc4 Re2+ 22 Bd4 Re1+ 23 Rxe1 Bxd4+ 24 Kh1 Bxa1 25 Rxa1 c5 26 bxc5 Ra4 27 Nd2 Rd4 which might, indeed, be quite promising; however, 22 Nxb6 cxb6 23 Rd8+ Kh7 24 Rh8+ Kg6 25 Rg8+ Kh5 wouldn't be my cup of tea!) 16 Qxe6 Rxe6 17 Nc4 f6 was soon drawn, V.Topalov-P.Leko, Linares 1999.

b) 10 Nbd2 and now:

ROLL THE DICE! b1) 10 ... Ba6!? is good for a laugh: 11 Re1 (11 c4 Qd6) 11 ... Ng4! 12 Bxd8 (12 Bh4 Qxh4 13 Nxh4 Nxf2 amounts to the same) 12 ... Nxf2 13 Qb3 Nh3+ 14 Kh1 Nf2+ forcing a perpetual!

b2) 10 ... Qd6. As above, this move is defending e5 and unpinning the knight, which may head for d3 via d7 and c5. 11 Qc2 (11 Qa4 Nd7 12 Nc4 Nc5 13 Qa3 Qe6) 11 ...

Nh5! (Diagram 37)

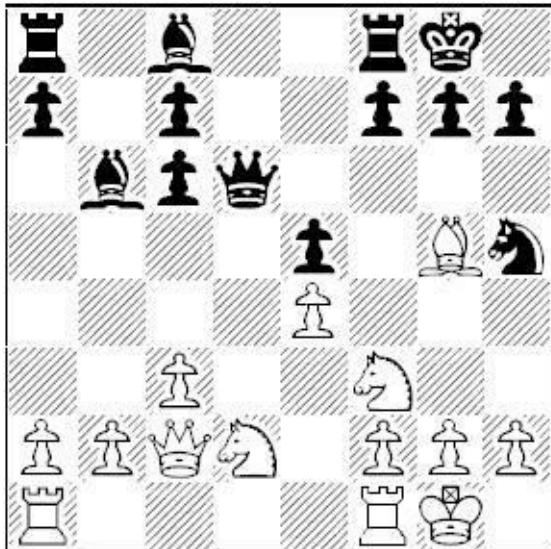


Diagram 37 (W)

(planning ... Qg6 and ... Nf4 to attack on the kingside; 11 ... Nd7 is also good) 12 Rfe1?! (12 Nc4 Qe6) 12 ... Qg6 (this is possible with White's dark-squared bishop still on g5 – with ... h6 and Bh4 included this move would blunder the e5-pawn) 13 Be3 Nf4 14 g3?! (14 Bxf4 exf4 15 Ne5 Qf6 16 Ndf3) 14 ... f6 15 a4 Be6 16 a5 (16 Bxf4) 16 ... Bxe3 17 Rxe3 Rad8 18 Nb3 Qh5 19 Nh4 Nh3+ 20 Kg2 Ng5 21 Nc5 Bh3+ 22 Kg1 Bg4 23 Kg2?! Bd1 24 Qc1 f5 25 exf5 Rxf5 with a winning attack, E.Wiersma-I.Sokolov, Netherlands League 2000.

10 ... Rxd8 11 Nxe5?!

For better or for worse White should try something else, although 11 Nbd2 h6 forces him to fight with two knights versus two bishops: 12 Bxf6 (12 Bh4? g5 13 Bg3 g4 14 Bh4 gxf3 15 Nxf3 Rd6, A.D'Alessio-G.Facchetti, Milan 2010) 12 ... gxf6 13 Nc4 Be6 14 Nxb6 axb6 with a clear edge in the endgame, T.Povall-D.Ledger, Southend 2004, as 15 a3 Bb3 controls d1 and allows Black to double rooks on the only fully open file.

11 ... Ba6 (Diagram 38)

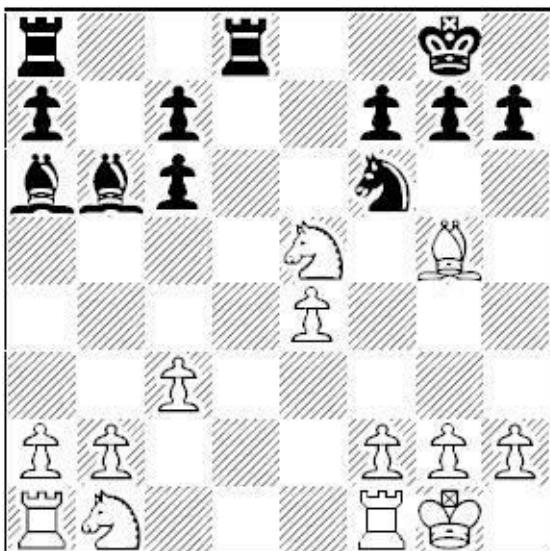


Diagram 38 (W)

DANGEROUS WEAPON! White's natural moves have led him to the edge of a precipice!

12 Re1

Natural, but not forced. Alternatively:

a) 12 c4 might be the best chance: 12 ... Bd4 13 Nxc6 Bxb2 14 Bxf6? (14 Nxd8 Bxa1 15 Nd2 Bc3 16 Nc6 Bxd2 17 Bxd2 Nxe4 and the c4-pawn is captured next go, but White should be able to draw) 14 ... gxf6 15 Nxd8 Rxd8 16 Na3 Bxa3 winning, C.Micheli-A.Sydor, Bari 1972.

b) 12 Nxc6 Bxf1 13 Nxd8 with a choice for Black:

b1) 13 ... Rxd8 14 Kxf1 Rd1+ 15 Ke2 Rg1 16 Bxf6 (16 Be3 Nxe4 17 Bxb6 cxb6 18 a4?! f5 19 a5 b5 20 a6 Rxg2 21 Na3 Rxf2+ 22 Ke3 Rxb2 and Black should win, Hernandez A.Leon-Z.Novoselski, El Sauzal 2007) 16 ... gxf6 17 g3 (otherwise how can White move his pieces?) 17 ... Kg7 18 a4 a6 19 a5 Ba7 20 Kd3 Bxf2 21 Kc2 (finally freeing the rook!) 21 ... h5 22 Ra4 Rh1 23 Nd2 Rxh2 24 Nf3 Rh3, J.Chavez Lazo-I.Sanchez, Barquisimeto 2004. Black will take the g-pawn and push his h-pawn.

b2) 13 ... Bb5!? (to control the knight's exit square) 14 Na3 (**Diagram 39**) and now:

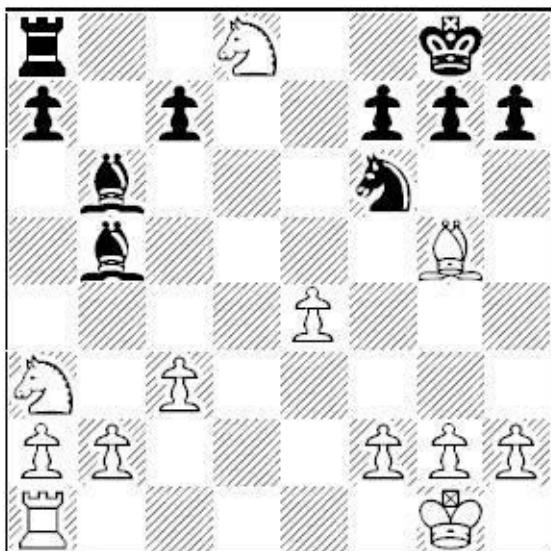


Diagram 39 (B)

b21) 14 ... Bd7 15 e5 Ne4 16 Be7 Bxf2+ 17 Kf1 Bc5 18 Bxc5 Nxc5 19 b4 (somehow White avoids losing a whole piece) 19 ... Rxd8 20 bxc5 Bc6 threatening ... Rd2 or ... Rd3 with advantage, but White is still fighting.

b22) 14 ... Ba4!? hopes to provoke 15 b3, when 15 ... Bd7 16 e5 is answered by 16 ... h6! 17 Bxf6 (or 17 Be3 Ng4! and if White captures on b6 then ... axb6 and both knights are hanging!) 17 ... gxf6 18 Nb7 Bc6. Black wins a piece, albeit for three pawns, following 19 Nd6 cxd6 20 exd6.

c) 12 Bxf6? gxf6 13 Nxc6 Bxf1 14 Nxd8 Bb5 (14 ... Rxd8 15 Kxf1 Rd1+) 15 Na3 Bd7 and the knight is lost, A.Velibekov-K.Klaman, Baku 1951.

12 ... Nxe4! (Diagram 40)

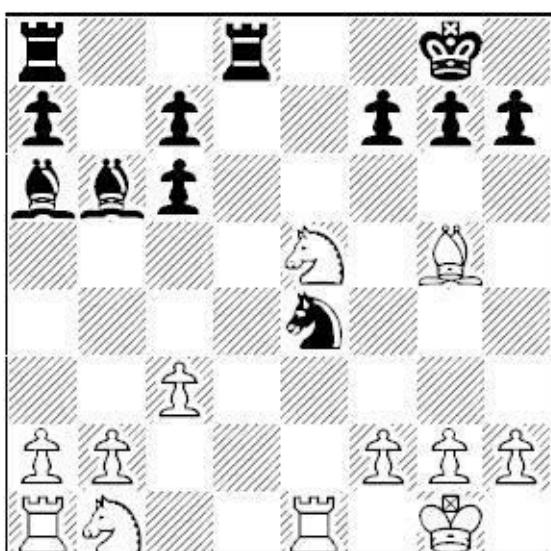


Diagram 40 (W)

The neat point, exploiting Black's lead in development and the weakness of the white back rank.

13 Be3

Alternatively:

a) 13 Bh4 is worse: 13 ... g5! 14 Nf3 (14 Na3 f5 15 Bg3 Nxg3 16 hxg3 Rd2 17 Red1 Bxf2+ winning easily, E.Karastoichev-V.Urseanu, Bucharest 1951; or 14 Bg3 f5) 14 ... Re8 (14 ... gxh4 15 Rxe4 Rd1+ 16 Re1 Rxe1+ 17 Nxe1 Rd8 18 Na3 Rd2 may be even stronger) 15 Bg3 f5 (15 ... Nxg3! 16 hxg3 Rxe1+ 17 Nxe1 Re8 is also crushing) 16 Nd4 Bxd4 17 cxd4 f4 18 f3 Nxg3 19 Rxe8+ Rxe8 20 hxg3 Re1+ 21 Kf2?? (21 Kh2 Bd3) 21 ... Rf1 mate, E.Velasco-D.Lopez, Lima 2004.

b) 13 Bxd8 Bxf2+ 14 Kh1 Rxd8 (14 ... Bxe1 15 Bxc7 Rc8 is also good: 16 Ba5 Re8 with the initiative) 15 Na3 (15 Rc1? Be3) 15 ... Bxe1 16 Rxe1 f5 17 Nxc6 Rd2 18 Nb4, A.Mandler-K.Poschauko, Vienna 1921, and now 18 ... Rxb2! 19 Nxa6 Rxa2 (two knights on the rim!) 20 Nxc7 Rxa3 and Black will have two extra pawns.

13 ... Bxe3 14 fxe3 c5

14 ... Rd6 15 Na3 Rad8 is a logical alternative.

15 Na3 f6 (Diagram 41)

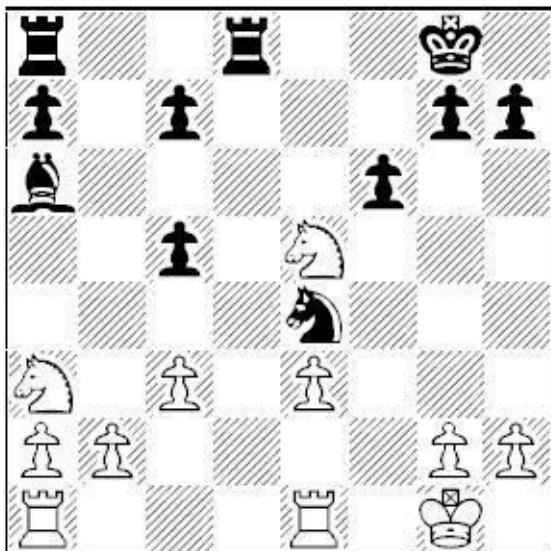


Diagram 41 (W)

16 Nf3?!

16 Nec4 Rab8 17 Rad1 Kf7 with a significant plus for Black.

16 ... Rab8! 17 Reb1 Nd2

Winning quickly, A.Poulsen-J.Hvenekilde, Copenhagen 1981.

C2) 8 a4

This is one of White's strongest lines. He threatens to win a piece by Bxc6 and a5, and also gives his queen's rook a little room, but his real idea is a positional one.

8 ... a5 (Diagram 42)

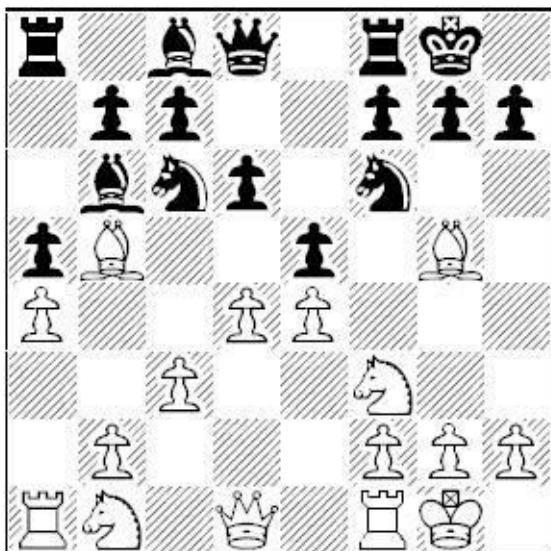


Diagram 42 (W)

It's important to stop the further advance of the white a-pawn, and this is the right way to do it. However, now Black will have a problem when a white knight comes to c4, as this will threaten both to ruin the black structure by capturing on b6 and also to take a pawn on e5. Black will normally react by taking on d4, conceding the centre for active piece play.

BEWARE! 8 ... a6?! is worse: 9 Bxc6 bxc6 10 a5 Ba7 11 dxe5 dxe5 12 Qxd8 Rxd8 13 Nxe5, threatening to capture on c6 and fork the black rook and bishop. Note that Black's light-squared bishop is also deprived of his active post on a6 which is important in some lines.

9 Re1

9 Na3, coming to c4 while keeping d4 defended, is definitely one of White's better choices.

BEWARE! 9 ... h6?! is met by 10 Bxf6 Qxf6 11 Nc4 which is a bit annoying.

After 9 Na3 exd4 White has a choice:

a) Following 10 cxd4, 10 ... Bg4 is the usual reply, putting pressure on d4: 11 Bxc6 bxc6 12 Nc4 h6 13 Nxb6 cxb6 14 Bxf6 Qxf6 15 Ra3, S.Eriksen-J.Hvenekilde, Odense 1975, 15 ... c5!? 16 h3 Bh5 17 Re1 Rac8 planning to take on f3 and then d4, or 15 ... Rfe8 with no problems. 11 Nc4 is similar: 11 ... h6 12 Nxb6 cxb6 13 Bxf6 Qxf6 14 Ra3 Rac8 threatening to take on f3 then d4, and here 14 Bxc6 bxc6 transposes to 11 Bxc6, of course.

b) 10 Bxc6 bxc6 11 Nxd4 (**Diagram 43**).

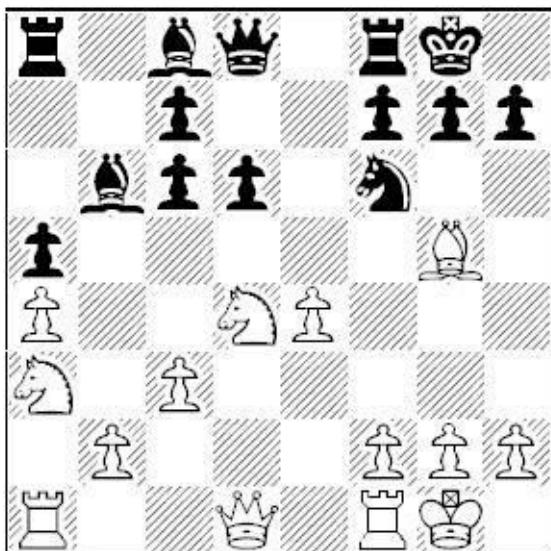


Diagram 43 (B)

This is White's plan. Nxc6 is the immediate menace and Qf3, Nc4 is coming, but Black has the bishop pair. Now:

b1) 11 ... Bxd4 12 Qxd4 h6 13 Bxf6 Qxf6 14 Qxf6 gxf6 15 Nc2 Be6 16 Rfb1 c5 and Black drew comfortably in A.Naiditsch-V.Anand, Mainz 2009, but this is not very exciting!

b2) 11 ... h6!? is certainly playable: 12 Nxc6 Qe8 13 Bxf6 Qxc6 14 Bd4 Rb8 with compensation, I.Yagupov-S.Domogaev, Tula 2006, because of the b-file and offside knight. Compare this with the Naiditsch-Vallejo Pons game below (note on 13 Nxc6), with Re1 and ... Re8 added, although here White has the extra move Na3.

ROLL THE DICE! Untried in over-the-board chess, but possible, is b3) 11 ... c5!? (Diagram 44):

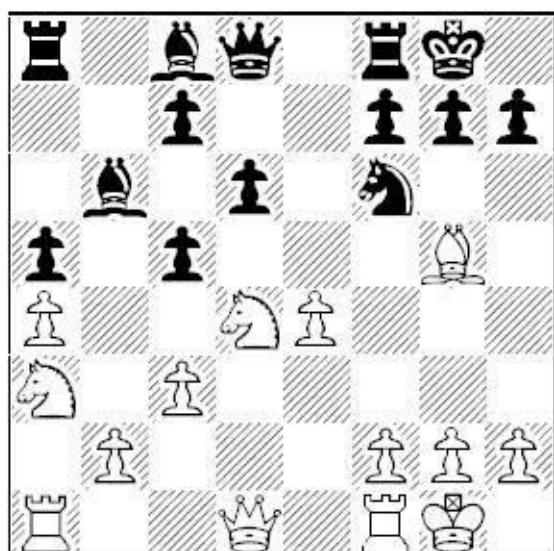


Diagram 44 (W)

b31) 12 Nf5 h6 (12 ... Bxf5 is worse, S.Goerlinger-A.Angulo, correspondence 2000) and now:

b311) 13 Bh4 Kh7!? (defending h6 and threatening to break the pin with ... g5) 14 Nc4 (14 Qc2 Bxf5 15 exf5 d5 planning ... c6, and possibly ... c4 and ... Bc7 – the knight on a3 could prove to be a liability for White, and also the backward b2-pawn) 14 ... g5 15 Bg3 Bxf5 (15 ... Nxe4!? 16 Nxb6 cxb6 17 Nxd6 Nxd6 18 Bxd6 Re8) 16 exf5 d5 17 Ne5 c4.

b312) 13 Nxh6+!? gxh6 14 Bh4 is awkward, though, with White planning Qf3. For example: 14 ... Kg7 15 Qf3 – e5 is the threat – 15 ... Ra6 16 Qg3+ Kh7 17 Qf3 repeating; instead 14 ... Qe8 15 Bxf6 Qxe4 16 Re1 Qg6 could be tried, but it's a bit double-edged.

b32) 12 Nf3 h6 13 Be3?! Ba6 14 Re1 Nxe4 15 Bxh6 Nxf2 16 Kxf2 gxh6 and White's compensation is insufficient, S.Shah-R.Harper, correspondence 2005.

b33) 12 Ndb5 Be6!? 13 Qf3 h6 14 Bxf6 Qxf6 15 Qxf6 gxf6 16 c4 f5 17 exf5 Bxf5. Black's bishops outweigh his pawn weaknesses, S.Sacerdotali-I.Schrancz, correspondence 2001.

Returning to 8 ... a5, other White moves are rare in this precise position:

a) 9 Bxc6 bxc6 and now:

a1) With both a-pawns advanced, 10 Nbd2 can be met by 10 ... Ba6! to stop White playing Nc4 (**Diagram 45**).

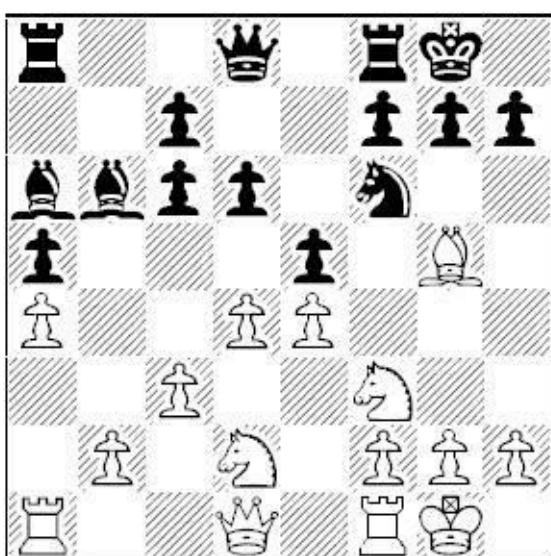


Diagram 45 (W)

11 Re1 h6 12 Bh4 Qe7 and now:

a12) 13 d5!? looks odd, but stops Black from unpinning by ... Qe6: 13 ... g5!? (fearless! 13 ... cxd5 14 exd5 g5 15 Nxg5 Nxd5! 16 Nde4 Nf4 17 Nf3 f6 is also very ambitious – 18 Nd4! Qg7 with a strong centre and powerful bishops) 14 Nxg5 hxg5 15 Bxg5 Kg7 16 b4? (16 Qf3 Rh8 17 h4 is far from clear) 16 ... cxd5 17 exd5 Qd7! 18 Qf3, F.Nijboer-V.Anand, Wijk aan Zee 1990, 18 ... Ng4! which must win.

a12) 13 Nf1 Qe6! intending ... Nh5, W.Schmidt-D.Maric, German League 2011.

a13) 13 Qc2 Qe6! (**Diagram 46**) unpinning the knight and planning to play ... Nh5-f4.

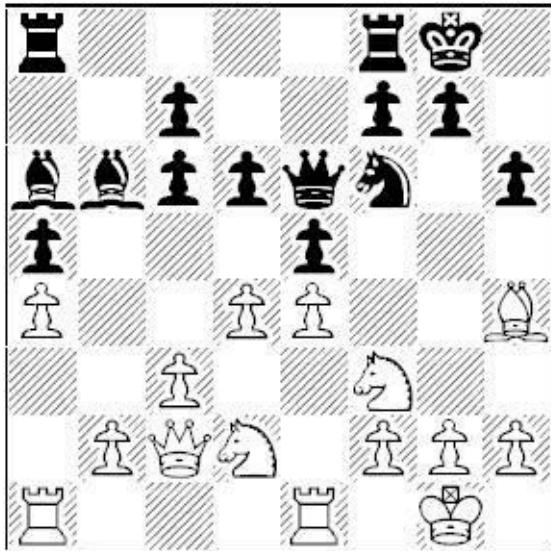


Diagram 46 (W)

14 Rad1 Nh5 15 b3 (or 15 Bg3, K.Wiman-J.Wieweg, Stockholm 1993, 15 ... Nxg3 16 hxg3 f6) 15 ... Rfe8 16 Nf1 exd4!? 17 Nxd4, U.Kersten-H.Tabatt, Saarbruecken 2002, 17 ... Qg6 with very active pieces. The obvious 18 Nxc6? loses to 18 ... Bb7! 19 Ne7+ Rxe7 20 Bxe7 Re8 21 Bh4 Rxe4! with nasty threats against g2 and the loose white queen.

a2) 10 dxe5 dxe5 11 Qxd8 Rxd8 12 Nxe5 (**Diagram 47**)

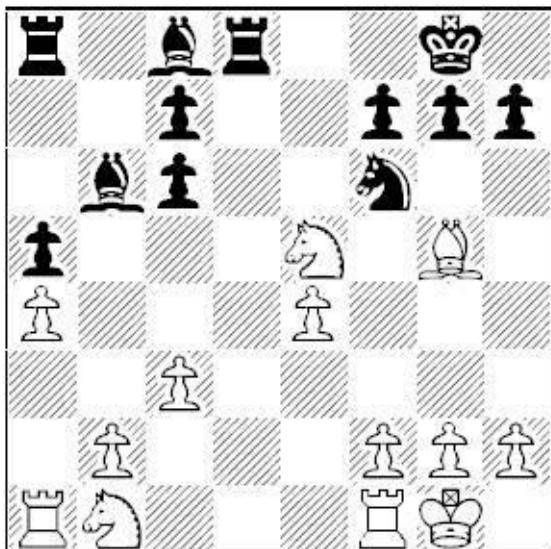


Diagram 47 (B)

is better here than with the a-pawns on their original squares (see Variation C1), but is still not especially good! 12 ... Ba6 (12 ... Re8 13 Bxf6 gxf6 14 Nxc6 Bb7 15 Nd4 Rxe4 is also reasonable) attacking the rook:

a21) 13 c4 Rd4 14 Rc1?! (14 Nxc6 Rxe4 15 Nd2 Re6 16 b4! h6 17 Bxf6 Rxc6! 18 b5 Rxf6 19 bxa6 Rxa6 is only very slightly better for Black) 14 ... Nxe4 15 Be3 Rd6 16 g3?! (16 c5 Nxc5 17 Bxc5 Bxc5 and the bishop is immune from capture because of the weak back rank) 16 ... Bxe3 17 fxe3, M.Gaiduk-M.Sjusjko, Ukraine 2000, and now 17 ... Nc5 18 Ra3 Re8 (or 18 ... Rb8) 19 Nf3 Nd3 is crushing.

a22) 13 Re1 Nxe4! 14 Be3 (14 Bxd8 Bxf2+ 15 Kh1 Rxd8) 14 ... Bxe3 15 fxe3, J.Szily-W.Pietzsch, correspondence 1961, 15 ... c5 16 Na3 f6 17 Nec4 Nd6 18 Nxa5 Rdb8 and the a5-knight is in trouble.

a23) 13 Bxf6! gxf6 14 Nxc6 Bxf1 15 Nxd8 Rxd8!? (15 ... Bxg2! 16 Kxg2 Rxd8 17 Na3 Rd2 18 Nc4 Rxf2+ 19 Kg3 Re2 looks very drawish, G.Morais-I.Schrancz, correspondence 2000) 16 Kxf1 Rd1+ 17 Ke2 Rg1 18 b4 (18 g3 first looks better) 18 ... axb4 19 a5, F.Vasconcellos-A.Ferreira de Souza, Juiz de Fora 1966, 19 ... bxc3!? (the fun line! 19 ... Bxa5 20 Rxa5 Rxb1 21 cxb4 Rxb4 is certainly drawn) 20 axb6 c2 21 bxc7 (**Diagram 48**)

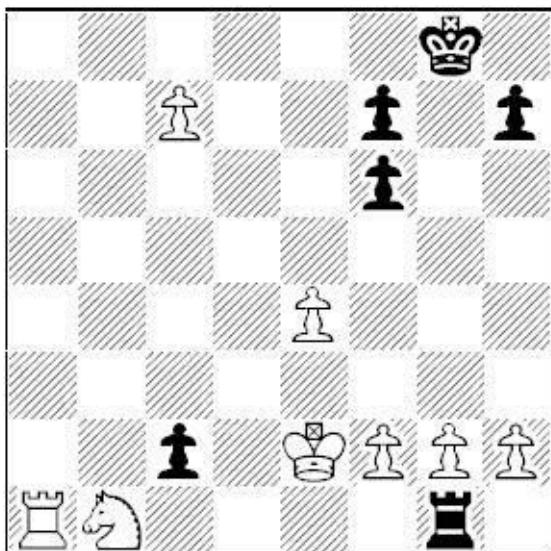


Diagram 48 (B)

21 ... c1Q 22 Ra8+ Kg7 23 c8Q Qd1+ 24 Ke3 Re1+ 25 Kf4 Qd6+ (so far all forced) 26 Kg4 Rxe4+ 27 Kh3 Qf4 28 g3 Qxf2 29 Nd2 Re5 and White will give a perpetual, as 30 Ra4 Rh5+ 31 Rh4 Rxh4+ 32 gxh4 Qe3+ 33 Kg2 Qxd2+ leaves him a pawn down.

b) 9 dxe5 first is less accurate, as Black can recapture with his knight: 9 ... Nxe5! 10 Nxe5 dxe5 11 Qf3 h6 and now:

b1) 12 Bxf6 Qxf6 13 Qxf6 gxf6 is pleasant for Black who has the bishop pair and can undouble his pawns by ... f5 when he wants: 14 Na3 Bc5 (14 ... Rd8! 15 Rad1 Bg4 16 Rxd8+ Rxd8 grabs the open file) 15 Rfd1 Be6 16 Be2 Bxa3 17 Rxa3 Rfd8 18 Kf1 b6 19 Ke1 f5 20 exf5 Bxf5 21 c4 ½-½, C.ValienteD.Izquierdo, Argentina 1991.

b2) 12 Rd1 (**Diagram 49**)

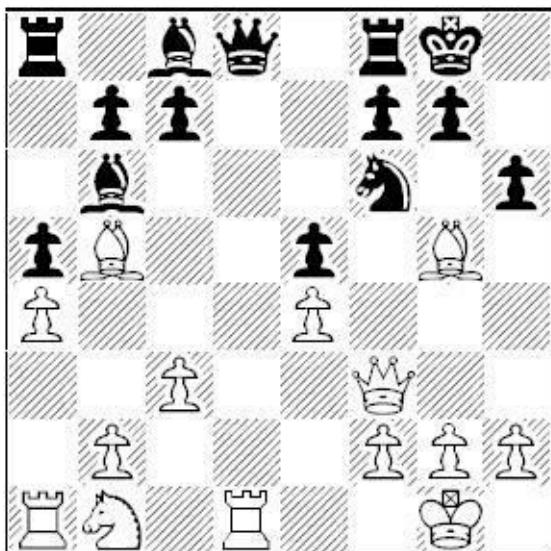


Diagram 49 (B)

12 ... hxg5! (a nice positional queen sacrifice; 12 ... Qxd1+ 13 Qxd1 hxg5 is also rather good, as White can't stop both of ... Ng4 and ... Nxe4) 13 Rxd8 Rxd8 14 h3 (14 Na3 Rd2 15 Rf1 Bg4 16 Qg3 Rad8 with excellent compensation – the threat is ... Rxf2) 14 ... g4 15 Qe2 gxh3 16 gxh3?! (or 16 Nd2 Ng4 17 Rf1 c6 18 Bc4 hxg2 19 Kxg2 Rd6 20 Nf3 Rg6 with an ongoing attack) 16 ... Bxh3 17 Kh2 Bg4 18 f3 Be6 19 Na3 Nh5 20 Bc4 Nf4 21 Qc2 Rd6 22 Rd1 Rad8 23 Rxd6 Rxd6 24 Bxe6 Rxe6 (**Diagram 50**).

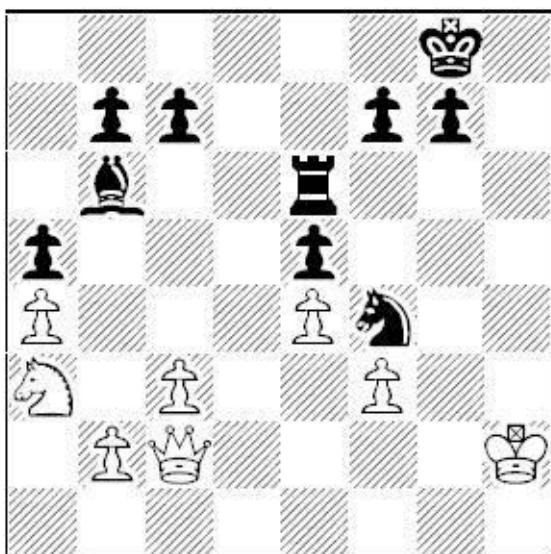


Diagram 50 (W)

The black pieces combine well, and White is lost: 25 Nc4 Rh6+ 26 Kg3 Rg6+ 27 Kh2 Bg1+ 28 Kh1 f6 29 Qd2 Bc5 (29 ... Ba7!) 30 Kh2? (30 Ne3) 30 ... Rh6+ 31 Kg3 Bg1 32 Ne3 Rh3+ 33 Kg4 Rh2 (33 ... Bxe3 34 Qxe3 Rh2 would be a nice finish) 34

Qd8+ Kh7 35 Nf1 Rg2+ 0-1, N.Karaklajic-E.Vasiukov, Bela Crkva 1989.

9 ... h6 10 Bh4 exd4! 11 Bxc6

If 11 Nxd4 first then 11 ... Ne5 12 Nd2 Ng6 13 Bg3 Bg4 14 Qc2 Nh5 15 f3, V.Rasulov-T.Nabaty, Kemer 2009, 15 ... Be6 16 Bf2 Ne5 with good piece play. The knight will come to f4 and Black can attack on the kingside or expand in the centre.

11 cxd4 Bg4 12 Bxc6 bxc6 13 Nc3 (13 Ra3!? g5 14 Bg3 d5 15 e5 Ne4 16 h3 Bh5 17 Bh2 c5 18 g4 Bg6 favoured Black in C.Lutz-P.Leko, Frankfurt 1999) 13 ... Re8 and “Black is fine” – Ivan Sokolov. He threatens both ... Bxf3 and ... g5 followed by ... Nh5. A game C.Fenwick-J.Rhodes, correspondence 2007, continued 14 Qd2 Bxf3 15 gxf3 g5 16 Bg3 Nh5 17 Kg2 Re6.

11 ... bxc6 12 Nxd4

12 cxd4 Bg4 transposes to 11 cxd4, above.

12 ... Re8 13 Nd2 (Diagram 51)

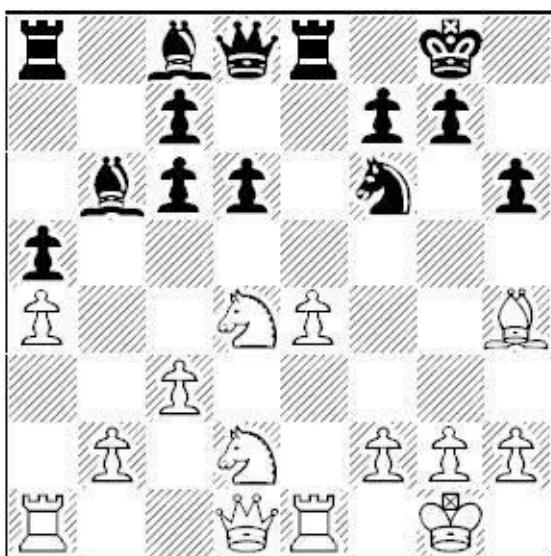


Diagram 51 (B)

The critical position. White eyes the c6-pawn, and plans Qf3 and Nc4.

13 Nxc6?! Qd7 14 Bxf6 Qxc6 15 Bd4 Rb8! 16 Bxb6 Rxb6 17 Qc2 Qb7 18 Re2 Be6 19 Na3 Bb3 20 Qb1 d5 21 e5 Rbe6 22 Qd3 Rxe5 wins back the pawn with a good game, A.Naiditsch-F.Vallejo Pons, Heviz 2008; the white knight is offside.

13 ... c5!

It looks anti-positional to entomb the b6-bishop like this, but the advantages outweigh the disadvantages: Black drives the central white knight back, and meanwhile opens the h1-a8 diagonal to put further pressure on e4 with his light-squared bishop.

14 Nc2

The most common; the knight heads for e3. Alternative knight moves:

a) 14 Nf5 Bxf5 15 exf5, P.Held-T.Lang, German League 1990, 15 ... Rxe1+ 16 Qxe1 d5 17 Qe5 c4! (the pawns go onto light squares) 18 Nf3 (or 18 Bxf6 Qxf6 19 Qxf6 – not 19 Qxd5?? Rd8 – 19 ... gxf6 and the backward b-pawn will be a problem for White) 18 ... c6 19 Re1 Bc5 “maintains equality” – I.Sokolov.

b) 14 N4f3 Bb7 15 Qc2 Re6 (15 ... g5!? 16 Bg3 Qd7) 16 Re3 (16 e5 dxe5 17 Nxe5 Qe8 18 Ndc4) 16 ... Qe8 (16 ... g5 17 Bg3 d5 is dynamic) 17 Bxf6 Rxf6 18 Nc4 Re6 19 Rae1 Qc6 is equal, K.Thorsteins-B.Spassky, Reykjavik 1985.

14 ... g5

More activity.

14 ... Bb7 is also good, but after 15 f3 the h4-bishop can drop straight back to f2 in the event of ... g5, H.Ree-M.Knezevic, Kiev 1978.

15 Bg3 Bb7 (Diagram 52)

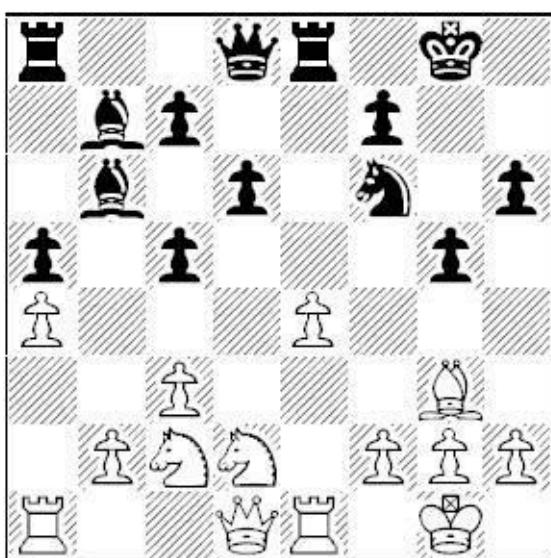


Diagram 52 (W)

Black has excellent counterplay.

16 f3

16 e5 dxe5 17 Rxe5 Rxe5 18 Bxe5 Qd5 19 Qf3 Qxf3 20 Nxf3 Ne4 (20 ... Nd7!?
21 Bg3 f5 could be even stronger, as 22 Ne5 Nxe5 23 Bxe5 Re8 24 f4 gxf4 25 Re1
c4+ 26 Nd4 f3 27 gxf3 Bxf3 wins a pawn) 21 h3 f6 is good for Black, despite the odd-
looking bishop on b6 – note that its counterpart is hardly any better.

16 ... d5! (Diagram 53)

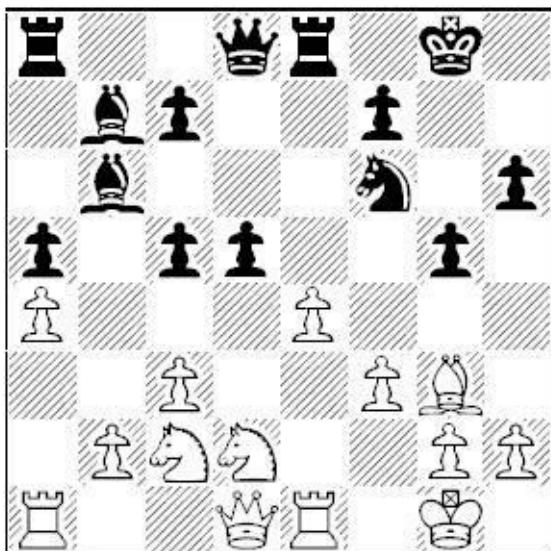


Diagram 53 (W)

17 exd5

17 e5?! Nh5 18 Nf1 d4 19 Na3 Qd5! 20 c4 Qc6 with a considerable advantage in Z.Lanka-I.Sokolov, Batumi 1999.

17 ... c4+ 18 Nd4

Black also has enough play after 18 Bf2 Bxf2+ 19 Kxf2 Qxd5 20 Rxe8+ (or 20 Ne3 Qc5 21 Ndxcc4 Rad8) 20 ... Rxe8 21 Ne3 Qe5.

18 ... Qxd5 19 Nf1

19 Bf2 Rxe1+ (19 ... g4) 20 Qxe1 Ng4!?.

19 ... Rxe1 20 Qxe1 Re8 21 Qd2

This looks very equal, especially as Black can capture on d4 and force opposite-coloured bishops.

C3) 8 Qd3 (Diagram 54)

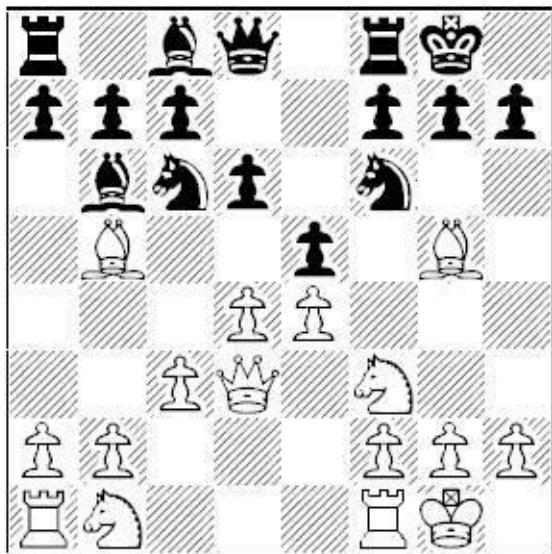


Diagram 54 (W)

Defending both d4 and e5, and preparing to develop the queen's knight to d2 with a harmonious setup. This is generally considered to be White's strongest.

8 ... Qe7

The queen defends e5, stops White from exchanging queens, and frees the 'problem' c6-knight from its defensive duties so that it can relocate to a better square.

9 Nbd2

The natural follow-up, but very occasionally White tries something else:

a) 9 Re1 Nd8!, the same plan as in the main line, is examined in the introductory game, Y.Zinchenko-D.Chuprov, Voronezh 2008.

b) 9 Bxc6 bxc6 10 Nbd2, G.Sax-L.Winants, Eupen 1999, could be answered by 10 ... h6 11 Bh4 exd4 12 cxd4 Qe6 to unpin.

c) 9 d5 is ugly but here Black should reply 9 ... Nb8 10 Nbd2 a6 11 Ba4 Nbd7, and now a blitz game of mine, against *Fritz 12*, continued 12 b4 (to stop ... Nc5) 12 ... h6 13 Bh4 Rd8 (13 ... Ba7! first is more accurate) 14 a3 (14 Nc4) 14 ... Nf8 15 Nc4 Ba7 16 Ne3 Ng6 unpinning the knight with advantage, *i.e.* 17 Bg3 Nf4.

9 ... Nd8!? (Diagram 55)

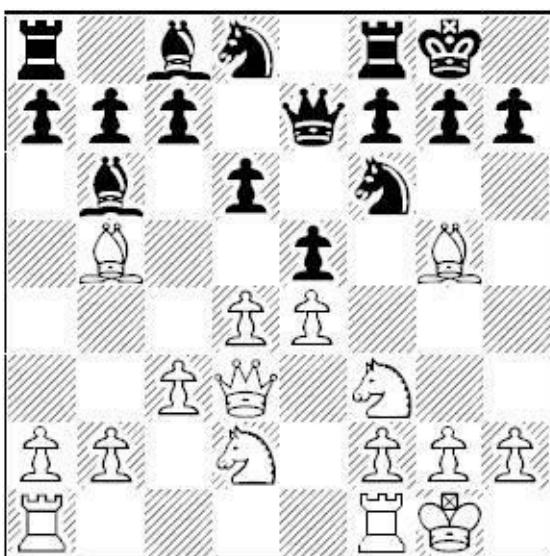


Diagram 55 (W)

The knight heads for e6 to attack the g5-bishop and invade on f4, hitting the white queen. This also leaves the white b5-bishop looking a bit silly, and Black will gain a useful tempo after a subsequent ... c6 or ... a6.

9 ... h6 10 Bh4 Nb8 is most common (10 ... Bd7 is also common, but too passive), when Black intends ... c6 and then ... Nbd7 to lend support to the f6-knight, followed by ... Re8 and ... Qf8 to unpin. However, this is slow: 11 Rfe1 (11 Ba4 c6 12 Bc2 Nbd7 13 Nc4 Bc7 14 Ne3 Re8 15 Nf5 Qf8 is similar – 16 dxe5 dxe5 17 Qd2 Nh5 18 Rad1 Nb6 and Black was slowly uncoiling, Y.Kryvoruchko-P.Staniszewski, Ustron 2008) 11 ... c6 12 Ba4 Nbd7 (12 ... Bc7 13 Nf1 Nbd7 14 Ng3 g6 15 Qd2 Kh7 16 h3 Rg8 17 Nf1 g5 18 Bg3 Nh5 was a similar kingside plan to our main line, with the important difference that White hasn't closed the centre with d5 here, E.Bacrot-I.Sokolov, Albert 2004) 13 Nc4 Bc7 14 Ne3 Re8 15 Nf5 Qf8 (this unpins the f6-knight, ready for ... Nh5) 16 Rad1 Nh5 17 Bc2 Nb6 18 b3 Be6. White has more space and nicely centralized pieces, A.Shirov-P.Leko, Frankfurt 2000.

Of course, if defending a passive but solid position for hours on end is your cup of tea then this line is fine. However, I'm a coffee drinker myself and want something

more active, even if there are inevitably more risks!

10 d5! (Diagram 56)

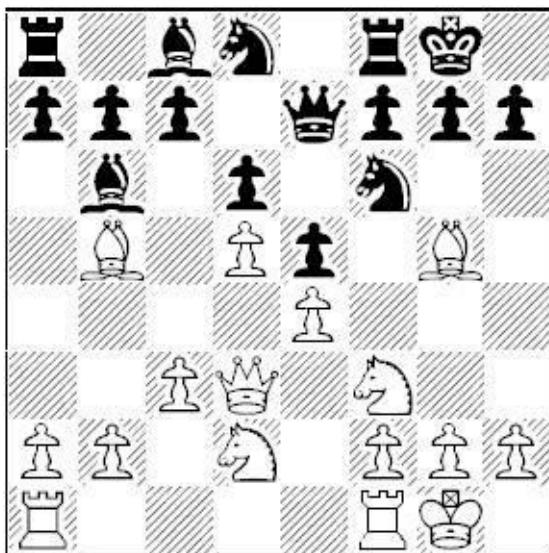


Diagram 56 (B)

Certainly the strongest move, almost invariably played in practice, and also the first choice of my computer. White gains space and controls both c6 and e6, stopping Black from using his queen's knight. As long as the white pawn stays on d5 the d8-knight will only be able to move to f7 or b7 (after the respective pawns have advanced, of course), and as the second of these isn't very helpful (White will probably stop the knight continuing to c5 by playing b4) then we can see that Black will have to unpin the f6 knight by ... h6 and ... g5, move this piece and then play ... f6 and ... Nf7.

Now while I could appreciate the logic of 10 d5, I could also see that it had drawbacks: White relieves the tension in the centre and pressure on e5, and also opens the g1-a7 diagonal for Black's dark-squared bishop.

If you compare this position with a King's Indian, it surely must be better to have the bishop on b6 rather than closed in on g7?

The more flexible alternatives are inferior, as Black often has tactics based on hitting the white queen that allow him to develop his (for the moment extremely poorly placed) d8-knight:

a) 10 Nc4 Ne6 and now:

a1) 11 Be3 c6 12 Ba4 Bc7 13 dxe5 dxe5 14 Bc2 Ng4 15 Rad1 b5 (15 ... Nxe3 16 Nxe3 Nf4) 16 Nd6 Nxe3 17 Nxc8 Raxc8 18 Qxe3 Bb6 occurred in another blitz game of mine. Black is obviously more than fine.

a2) 11 dxe5 dxe5 transposes to 10 dxe5, but 11 ... Nxf5 is perfectly acceptable.

a3) 11 Bxf6 Qxf6 12 g3 (This is ugly, but f4 was weak and 12 dxe5 dxe5 13 Ncxe5?! c6 14 Bc4 Nf4 15 Qc2 Bc7 is a problem. White should probably capture on f7, as the alternative 16 Nd3?! (Diagram 57)

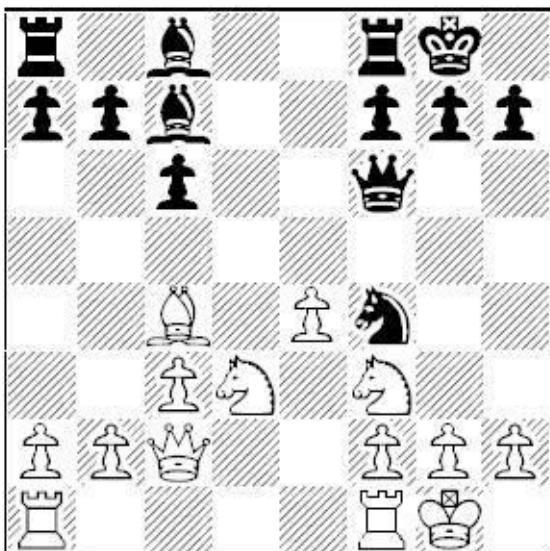


Diagram 57 (B)

is met by the classic combo 16 ... Nxg2! winning because of 17 Kxg2? Bh3+ 18 Kxh3 Qxf3+ 19 Kh4 Bd8 mate.) 12 ... c6 13 Nxb6 axb6 14 Bc4 h6 (14 ... Nc7) 15 Qe3 b5 16 Bb3, S.Zagrebelyn-H.Groetz, Aghios Kirykos 2009. Here Black decided to go on the attack by 16 ... g5!? 17 Rfd1 g4 18 Bxe6 (18 Nh4 Ng5) 18 ... Bxe6 19 Nh4 Qg5 20 f4 gxf3 21 Qxg5+ hxg5 22 Nxf3 when 22 ... f6 would have left him with the better minor piece in the endgame.

b) 10 dxe5 is obviously something of a concession, liquidating the central tension to reach a symmetrical pawn structure where White's queen and light-squared bishop are exposed. 10 ... dxe5 and now:

b1) 11 Nh4!? Ne6 12 Nf5 Qd8 (already White must cede control of the d-file) 13 Qxd8 Rxd8 14 Bxf6, T.Luther-L.Winants, Chalkidiki 2002, 14 ... Rxd2 15 Bxe5 Rxb2 16 a4 c6 – or 16 ... f6 – 17 Bc4 Ng5 18 Nd6 Be6 19 Bxe6 Nxe6 with a small edge for Black.

b2) 11 Nc4 and now 11 ... Ne6! is an important point (11 ... c6 12 Nxb6 axb6 is not bad, either, and soon drawn in T.Kett-D.Ledger, Liverpool 2008): 12 Bxf6 (or 12 Nxb6 axb6 13 Bh4 c6 14 Bc4 Nf4 15 Qe3 b5 16 Bb3 h6 17 h3 Rd8 18 Rad1 Be6 with active play, while 12 Ncxe5?? Nxg5 wins a piece) 12 ... Qxf6! (**Diagram 58**).

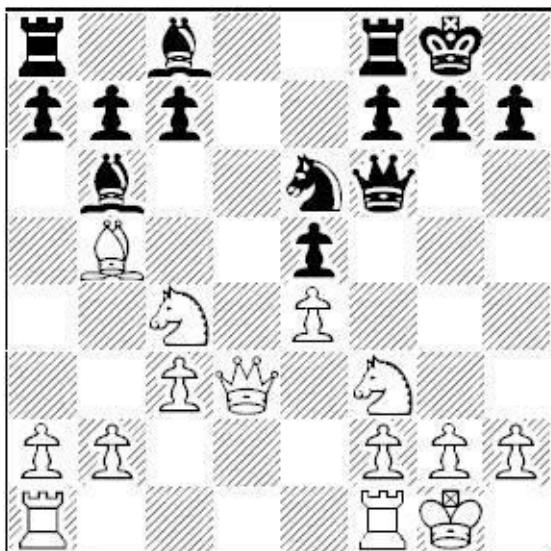


Diagram 58 (W)

DANGEROUS WEAPON! Black offers a pawn for a strong initiative. After 13 Nxe5 c6 14 Bc4 Nf4 15 Qd1 Bc7 White is already in trouble, e.g. 16 Nd3 Nxg2! 17 Kxg2 Qg6+ 18 Kh1 Qxe4 19 b3 Bg4 20 Nde1 Rfe8. Black threatens ... Qf4 and ... Rad8 and is close to winning.

c) 10 Bh4 attempts to pre-empt ... Ne6, but here Black has saved a tempo on ... h6: 10 ... c6 (10 ... Ne6!? 11 Bg3 Nh5 resembles the Zinchenk-Chuprov game: 12 dxe5 dxe5 13 Bxe5 Rd8 14 Qe2 Nef4 15 Qe1 Bg4 with a virulent initiative – ... Rxd2 is one of the threats) 11 Ba4 Ne6 (always try to find a tactical justification to play the moves you want to play!) 12 Bg3 (12 dxe5 dxe5 13 Nxe5? Nc5 wins a piece) 12 ... Bc7 13 Rfe1 Nh5 coming to f4, D.Maximov-A.Nechaev, Alushta 2011.

10 ... a6 (Diagram 59)

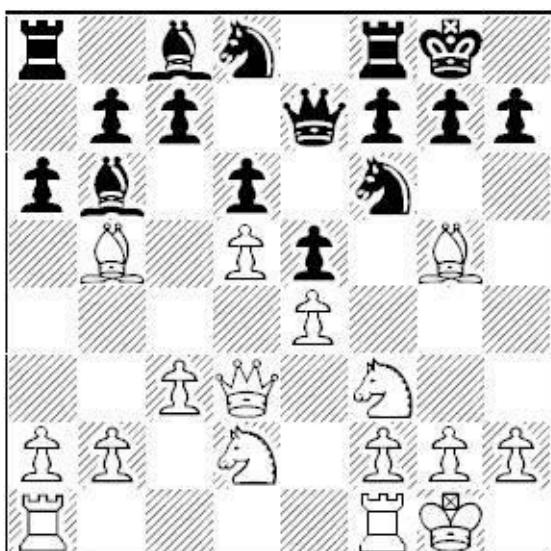


Diagram 59 (W)

Now that there is no possibility of White capturing the knight on c6, Black gains a free hit on the white light-squared bishop, simultaneously providing a safe retreat on a7 for his own dark-squared bishop.

11 Ba4

11 Bc4 is worse, as the bishop occupies the knight's only good square: 11 ... h6 12 Bh4 Kh8 (I would probably play 12 ... Kh7 myself) 13 Rfe1 Rg8 14 Nf1 (the knight must take this route to e3 as c4 is not available) 14 ... g5 15 Bg3 Nh5 16 Ne3 Ng7!? (16 ... Bxe3 17 Qxe3 f6 followed by ... Nf7, ... Nf4 etc. is fine, but I like 16 ... f6 17 Nf5 Bxf5 18 exf5 Nxg3 19 hxg3 Qh7 followed by ... Nf7 and ... h5) 17 Nf5 (17 Bb3!) 17 ... Qf6 18 Nxg7 Qxg7 (Black will continue ... f6, ... Nf7, then ... h5, ... Nh6 with a slow but effective attack) 19 h4?? gxh4 0-1, H.Groetz-M.Bosman, Olomouc 2007 – after 20 Nxh4 Qxg3 the f-pawn is pinned.

11 ... h6 12 Bh4 Ba7! (Diagram 60)



Diagram 60 (W)

An important finesse, gaining a move. The point is that 13 Nc4?? would now lose a piece to 13 ... b5.

Otherwise, 12 ... Kh7 allows the immediate 13 Nc4 which hits b6 and gains time to play Ne3-f5: 13 ... Ba7 14 Ne3 g5!? (no time for 14 ... Rg8 now, as 15 Nf5 Bxf5 16 exf5 is quite good; note that 16 ... e4 is nothing after 17 Bxf6 gxf6 18 Rae1) 15 Bg3 (15 Nxg5+!? is tricky, and thematic, but probably not very good! 15 ... hxg5 16 Bxg5 Rg8 17 Bh4, A.Berelowitsch-L.Winants, Belgian League 2008, when I would want to play 17 ... Rg6 to bolster f6, with an unclear position) 15 ... Nh5 16 Nf5 Bxf5 17 exf5 f6. This position occurred in P.Bobras-H.Groetz, Aghios Kirykos 2009, except that the black king was on h8 instead of h7, and that game continued 18 Bc2 (18 Nd2 might be better; the white knight will have a lovely square on e4, although Black will also have reasons to be cheerful) 18 ... Rg8 19 Kh1 Nf7 20 h3 Nxg3+ 21 fxg3 h5 22 Nd2 Rg7 when a draw was likely because of the opposite-coloured bishops and closed nature of the position.

Instead of 18 ... Rg8, Black can play 18 ... Nxg3! before White moves his king: 19 hxg3 (Diagram 61)

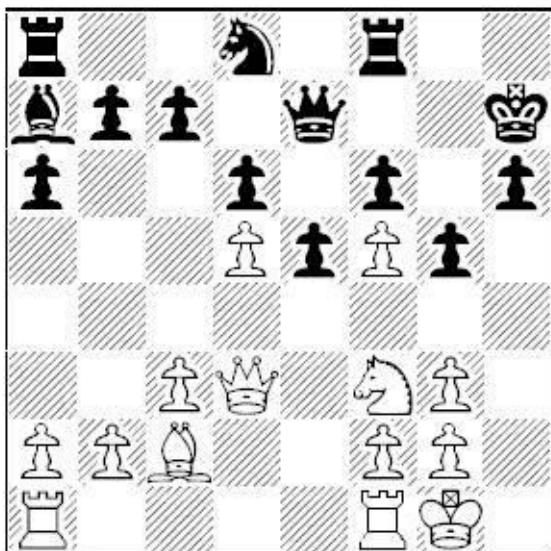


Diagram 61 (B)

19 ... Kg7! (intending ... h5) 20 Nd2 h5 planning ... Rh8, ... Nf7 and the knight can either come to g4 via h6, or to g5 after ... g4.

BEWARE! Black should take care to avoid Nxg5 shots when his king is on the same diagonal as the white queen and bishop! In the variation above, 19 ... h5?? runs into 20 Nxg5+!!

13 Bc2 (Diagram 62)

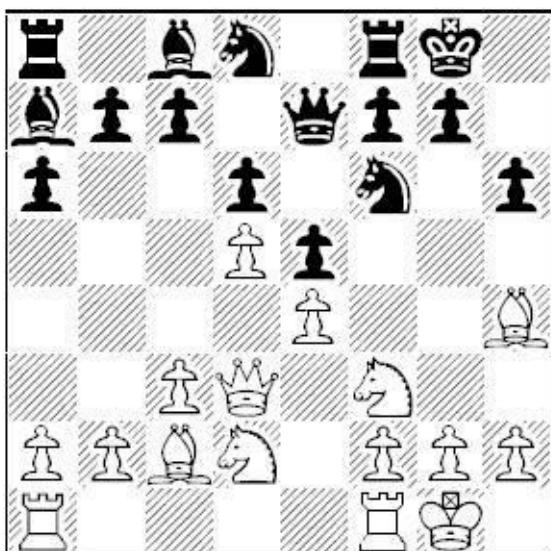


Diagram 62 (B)

This move seems logical, bringing the bishop to a more useful square and

preparing Nc4-e3-f5 and a2-a4-a5.

13 b4 also makes sense, intending to expand on the queenside:

a) 13 ... Kh8!? I can see no reason Black would want to put his king here when it can go to h7, and although it will probably amount to the same it might make a difference. For instance, 14 c4 Rg8 15 Qc3 (preparing the thematic c5) 15 ... g5 16 Bg3, and unfortunately Black's best move may now be 16 ... Kh7 as 16 ... Nh5!? was met by 17 Nxe5! Nxg3? 18 Nef3+ f6 19 hxg3 winning an important pawn in N.Doric-F.Rodman, Ljubljana 2008. 17 ... dxe5 18 Qxe5+ Qxe5 19 Bxe5+ f6 20 Bxc7 was the point, when White has a powerful mobile central phalanx for the piece. Still, Black should definitely have tried this as 20 ... Bd4 21 Rac1 Nf7 allows him to resist.

a2) 13 ... Kh7 14 c4 (White plays in the same fashion as above; 14 Bc2 Rg8 15 a4 g5 16 Bg3 Nh5 17 Nc4 f6 18 a5 Nf7 transposes to 14 a4, below) 14 ... Rg8 and now:

a) 15 Qc3 g5 16 Bg3 Nh5 is possible, as now 17 Nxe5? Nxg3 wins a piece! Note also that after 17 Rac1 Black might play on the queenside as well by 17 ... a5!?, as 18 a3 axb4 19 axb4 Nxg3 20 hxg3 Bxf2+ 21 Rxf2 Rxa4 is possible.

b) 15 Nb3 prepares c5 more efficiently, although it is not clear that having the bishop on a4 is a good idea for White in such positions as Black may have the tactical resource of ... b5 when White plays c5, e.g. 15 ... g5 16 Bg3 Nh5 17 Rac1 Nf4 (without the bishop on c2 and knight on e3 White has less control over f5, so 17 ... f5!? can be tried: 18 exf5 Qf6 19 Nbd2 Bxf5 20 Ne4 Qg6) 18 Bxf4 (18 Qc2 Bg4) 18 ... gxf4 19 Kh1 f6 20 c5 Nf7 (20 ... b5!? 21 cxb6 Bxb6) 21 Rc3 dxc5!? 22 bxc5 b5 23 cxb6 Bxb6 when Black's knight has a nice square on d6, although the price is that c7 is exposed on an open file.

Returning to 13 Bc2, now we come to the next stage of Black's plan, unpinning the knight:

13 ... Kh7 (Diagram 63)

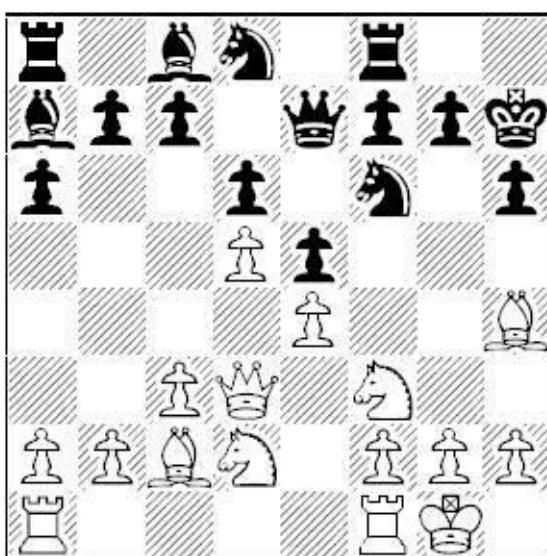


Diagram 63 (W)

An important preparatory move, intending ... Rg8 then ... g5 (or ... g5 immediately) to free the f6-knight and gain space on the kingside.

Black's play seems slow, but the position is closed and so he has the time to manoeuvre his pieces to better squares. The nice thing from Black's perspective is that his plan is actually fairly obvious, and even almost forced, whereas White has a multitude of different possibilities to consider.

13 ... Kh8 is also playable, but feels slightly less accurate to me. For one thing, the ... Nf7-h8-g6 manoeuvre will no longer be possible. After 14 Nc4 Rg8 15 Ne3 g5 16 Bg3 Nh5 17 Nf5, B.Bok-M.Bosman, Netherlands League 2009, I would play 17 ... Bxf5 18 exf5 f6 as below, but I think White is better here after, say, 19 Nd2.

BEWARE! As always, 13 ... g5? should be avoided without due preparation, or a strong tactical justification: 14 Nxg5! hxg5 15 Bxg5 Kg7 16 Qg3 and the pin on f6 is annoying – the immediate threat is Bxf6+ winning.

14 Kh1

By moving the king off the g1-a7 diagonal White unpins his f-pawn.

This position is virtually unexplored, but here are three likely alternatives, the first two intending a queenside advance, and the third intending to counter Black's kingside play:

a) 14 a4

White's advantage lies on the queenside, but the typical KID plan of b4 and c5 is difficult to arrange here. Instead White is planning the standard a5 to gain space, then b4 and c4-c5 later.

14 ... Rg8

The point: the g-pawn is solidly supported.

15 a5 g5 16 Bg3 Nh5

The knight can capture on g3, but will most likely hop into a powerful square on f4. Should White capture this then Black will recapture with the g-pawn and use the g-file for a mating attack. By a stroke of good fortune the black rook is already stationed on g8!

17 Nc4

Next, White will play b4, move his c4-knight and play for c4-c5. Black should bring his d8-knight back into the fray, and liberate his back rank.

17 ... f6 (**Diagram 64**) and now:

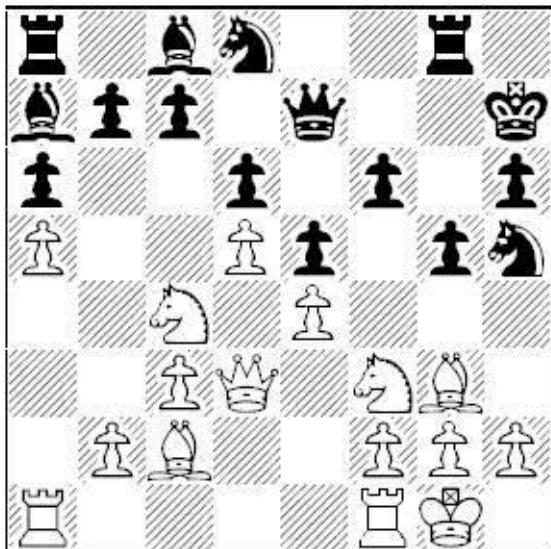


Diagram 64 (W)

a1) 18 Ne3 can be met by 18 ... Nf7 (or by 18 ... Bxe3 as in the Frolov game) 19 Nf5 Bxf5 20 exf5 Nxg3 21 hxg3 h5 and the knight will finally find a decent square after ... Nh6-g4, or (should the f3-knight move) ... g4 and ... Ng5. Also, ... Kg7 and ... Rh8 is a good idea.

a2) 18 Ne1 Nf7 19 Qd2 Nf4 20 Nd3 h5 21 h3? and now, in a recent blitz game, I missed 21 ... Bxh3! as 22 gxh3 Qd7 23 Bxf4? gxf4+ 24 Kh2 Ng5 mates quickly – the revenge of the queen's knight!

a3) 18 b4 Nf7 (now, or before, Black could flick in 18 ... Nxg3 19 hxg3 Nf7 followed by ... h5, ... Nh6) 19 Ne3 Bxe3 (19 ... Nf4 20 Qd2 Nh8 21 Nf5 Qf7 is reasonable, intending ... Nhg6; 19 ... Nxg3 here could tempt White into replying 20 fxg3!? though) 20 Qxe3 Nf4 21 c4 Nh8 22 c5 Nhg6 23 Rac1 h5 where I would prefer to be the one attacking on the kingside.

b) 14 b4 intending Nb3 and c4-c5 (possibly with a preparatory a4-a5) gets the queenside moving quicker, and now:

b1) 14 ... Rg8 is the solid choice: 15 Nb3 (or 15 a4 g5 16 Bg3 Nh5 17 Nc4 f6 18 a5 Nf7 transposing to 14 a4, above) 15 ... g5 16 Bg3 Nh5 17 c4 Nf4 (or 17 ... f6) 18 Qd1 f6 19 Rc1 Nf7. White is still having difficulties playing c5 successfully, and even if he does there is no evident follow-up as his pieces are misplaced.

ROLL THE DICE! b2) 14 ... g5!? is possible with the king on h7, the point being that 15 Nxg5+?! hxg5 16 Bxg5 can be met by 16 ... Rg8 (**Diagram 65**).

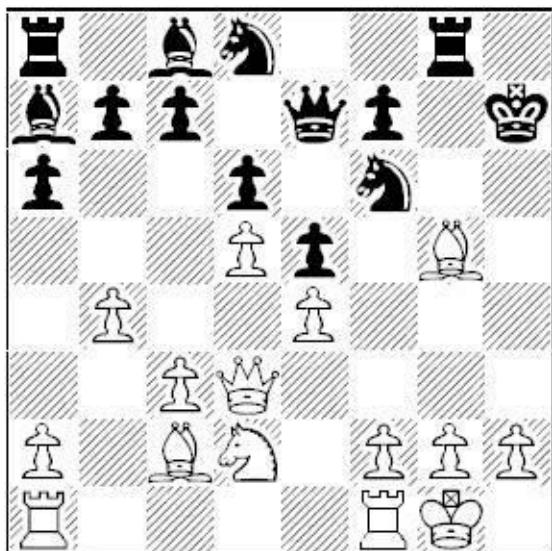


Diagram 65 (W)

For example, 17 Qg3 (17 h4 Rxg5! 18 hxg5 Nh5 19 Nf3 Bg4) 17 ... Rg6 18 Kh1 (to open the f-file; if 18 Nc4 then 18 ... Qf8 19 Ne3 Qg7 20 h4 Nh5 21 Qf3 Rxg5 22 hxg5 Qxg5 with advantage) 18 ... Kg7 (or 18 ... Qd7 to play ... Qg4, as 19 Qh4+ Kg7 20 f4 Qg4 21 fxe5 Rxg5 22 exf6+ Kf8 23 Qxg4 Bxg4 wins a piece for three pawns, although the d8-knight is a problem) 19 f4 Nh5! 20 Bxe7 Nxg3+ 21 hxg3 f6! (threatening mate in one!) 22 Nf3 Nf7 promises some advantage to Black as the e7-bishop is trapped.

So against 14 ... g5!?, 15 Bg3 is a better response:

b11) 15 ... Kg7 16 Nc4 Nh5 17 Ne3 f6 18 a4 Nf7 with good play for Black.

b12) After 15 ... Nh5 Black plans ... Nxe3 or ... Nf4, can even consider ... f5, and hopes to gain a move on other lines. However, with the black king on the same diagonal as White's queen and bishop battery, 16 Nd4! is possible, bringing the knight straight to f5: 16 ... Nxe3 17 hxe3 f6 18 Nf5 Bxf5 19 exf5 h5 20 Bd1 g4 21 a4 Nf7 22 a5 Ng5 23 Re1 and Ne4 when a draw would seem a likely result.

b13) 15 ... Rg8 transposes to 14 ... Rg8 after, say, 16 Nb3.

c) 14 Nc4 and now:

c1) Whereas I mostly prefer to preface ... g5 with ... Rg8, here I feel that Black doesn't have the time. Let's see why:

14 ... Rg8 15 Ne3! g5 16 Bg3 Nh5 17 Nf5 Bxf5

The Dutch FIDE Master Bosman often prefers to play 17 ... Qf6 followed by ... Ng7 to exchange his knight for the white knight on f5, but he hasn't had a great deal of success with this so far, as White gains time for his queenside assault. Still, it seems playable.

18 exf5 f6 19 Nd2 (Diagram 66)

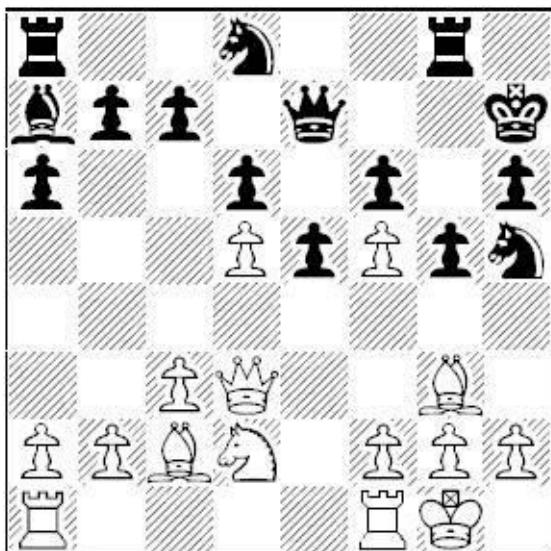


Diagram 66 (B)

Heading for the strong square on e4, which dissuades Black from taking on g3, as N_xg3-h5 would follow.

19 ... Nf7

I'm not keen on capturing the g3-bishop when White can recapture with a piece: 19 ... N_xg3?! 20 Q_xg3 h5 21 Ne4 Nf7 22 Bd1 h4 23 Qh3 and Black has allowed his kingside pawns to become fixed on dark squares, thereby weakening his light-squared control, e.g. 23 ... Nh6 24 Bh5.

BETTER! Never allow a white piece to control h5 (20 ... Nf7? 21 Qg4! in the line above) as then it would signal the end of Black's kingside chances:

20 Ne4 Nf4 21 Qd1

Else ... h5, but now the black attack is a bit stymied. For example, 21 ... Rg7 (intending ... Rh8 and ... h5) 22 a4 Rh8 23 Kh1 h5 24 h3 (and not 24 h4?! N_xg2! 25 N_xg5+ N_xg5 26 K_xg2 Nf7 the knight will come to g4 via h6) 24 ... Kg8 25 Ra3 and Rb3.

c2) 14 ... g5! (**Diagram 67**) when:

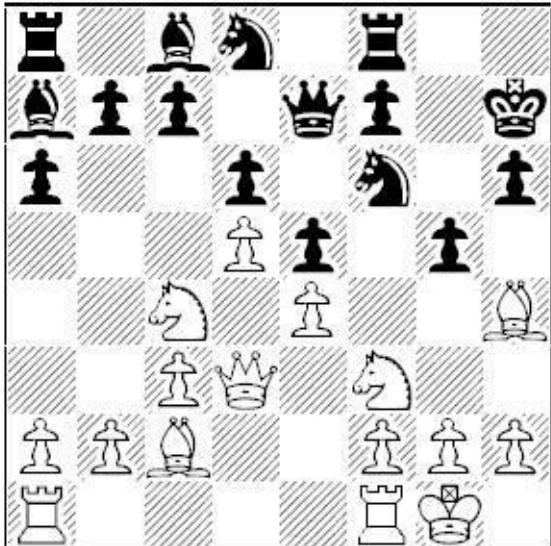


Diagram 67 (W)

c21) 15 Nxg5+!? hxg5 16 Bxg5 would be the usual ‘refutation’, but with the king on h7 Black has a big resource: 16 ... Rg8! 17 Qg3 (17 h4 Rxg5 18 hxg5 Nh5 19 Bd1 Qxg5 20 Bxh5 Qxh5 21 Ne3 f6) 17 ... Rxg5! (17 ... Rg6 18 Qh4+ Kg8 19 Ne3) 18 Qxg5 Ng8 19 Qh5+ (19 Qxe7 Nxe7 20 Rfe1 f6 21 a4 Nf7 looks good for Black as the white rooks lack files, and thus activity) 19 ... Nh6 and Black has the useful threat of ... Bg4 winning the queen! The position after 20 h3 f6 is not very clear. Black will play ... Bd7, ... Qg7, ... Nf7 and bring his rook to the kingside – definitely worth a try! For example: 21 Rad1 (21 Ne3 Qg7 22 Nf5 Qg5 or 22 ... Bxf5 23 exf5 Ndf7) 21 ... Qg7 22 Rd3 Ndf7 23 Rf3 (23 Rg3?? Qxg3) 23 ... Bd7 24 Ne3 Qg5 25 Qxg5 fxg5 26 Bd1 Kg6 and I would prefer to have the minor pieces here.

c22) 15 Bg3 Nh5 and now:

c221) Again White has the tactic 16 Nd4 Nxg3 17 hxg3 f6 18 Nf5 Bxf5 19 exf5, although 19 ... h5 (to stop Bd1-h5) 20 a4 Nf7 is fine for Black. He might be able to play ... Nh6-g4, but otherwise will settle for ... g4 and ... Ng5, followed by attempting to lever open the h-file. 16 ... Nf4!? (instead of 16 ... Nxg3) 17 Bxf4 gxf4 18 Nf5 Bxf5 19 exf5 f6 is also feasible – Black can play ... Nf7 and then double rooks on the g-file.

c222) 16 Ne3 is probably best. White controls the hole on f5 (with the rook on f8 Black might have considered playing ... f5 himself) and brings a piece over to help defend the kingside. 16 ... f6 (16 ... Bxe3 is once again playable: 17 fxe3 Nxg3 18 hxg3 f6 just like the Frolov game) 17 Nf5 Bxf5 18 exf5 (**Diagram 68**).

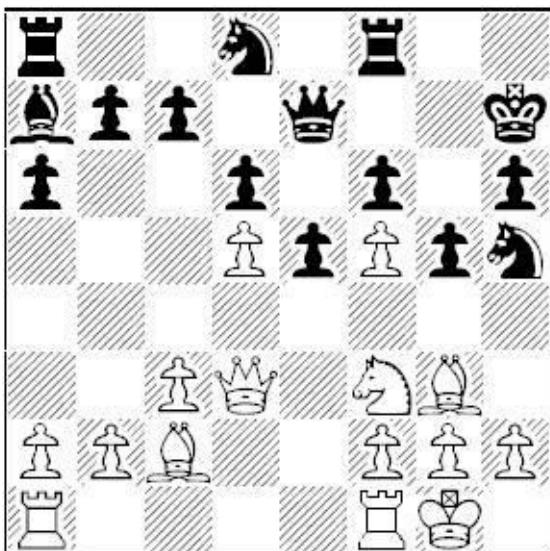


Diagram 68 (B)

Looking at this position my impression is that Black's kingside attacking chances are somewhat diminished by the exchange of his light-squared bishop and the arrival of a pawn on f5 – he can no longer play ... f5 himself or use the g6-square for his ... Nf7-h8-g6 manoeuvre.

Rather than continue as in the other lines with ... Nf4, it might be better to instead capture the bishop on g3. This will introduce opposite-coloured bishops which:

1) Favours the attacker (Black's dark-squared bishop is much more useful than White's light-squared one, which is impeded by its own pawns; and

2) Increases the drawing possibilities. This may be a problem, but can also be a help should things go wrong. At any rate it makes sense for the player with less space to exchange a pair of pieces and it will be more difficult for White to make the crucial c5 advance later on.

Let's look at some lines:

BEWARE! 18 ... Nf4?! is a mistake with the knight on f3 and black pawn on f6, because of 19 Bxf4 gxf4 20 Nh4 and Ng6.

Black can play 18 ... Nf7. The knight is not a great piece, yet, but at least it is better here than on d8 – the rooks are now connected, for one thing – and can hope to reach a strong square on d6, e5, g5 or h6 in due course should the black pawns move or be exchanged. 19 Nd2 Nf4 20 Qf3 Rg8 is playable, but it will be complicated to prepare the ... h5 advance successfully.

18 ... Nxg3! is best. 19 hxg3 (this is the difference with the line beginning 14 ... Rg8 – there White has an extra move and can recapture on g3 with a piece – an important distinction) 19 ... Kg7! (to prepare ... h5, ... Nf7, ... Rh8, etc; not 19 ... Nf7?! 20 g4, and Black must avoid the tactic 19 ... h5?? 20 Nxg5+!) 20 Nd2 h5 21 a4 Nf7 and I would be happy with Black's game.

14 ... Rg8 (Diagram 69)

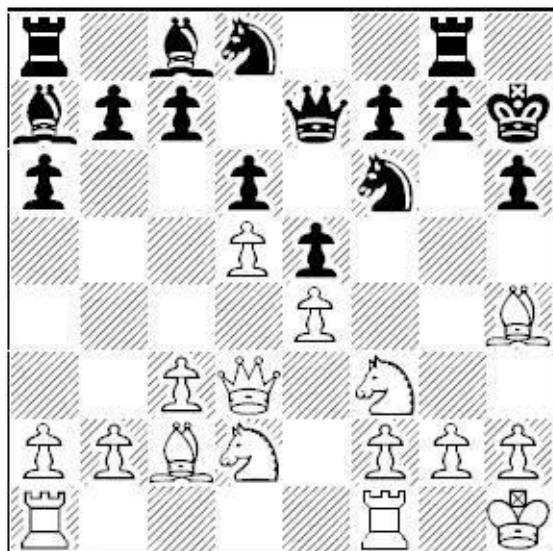


Diagram 69 (W)

15 Nc4

15 Bxf6 isn't stupid, as it stops the bishop being kicked around: 15 ... Qxf6 16 Nc4 Qe7 17 Ne3 Bxe3!? (there is no particular need to play this, as the bishop on a7 is strong and does a good job of controlling c5; Black might prefer to rearrange his kingside by, say, 17 ... g6 18 a4 f6 and ... Nf7) 18 Qxe3 occurred in the game D.Lampe-C.Nogly, German League 2009, except that Black had lost a move by ... Kh8 then ... Kh7, and here White played b4, followed by a4-a5 and c4-c5.

15 ... g5 16 Bg3 Nh5 17 Ne3 Bxe3!?

17 ... f6 is possible, as in some previous lines, but this capture is simpler.

18 fxe3

Or 18 Qxe3 f6 intending the usual ... Nf7, ... Nf4 etc.

18 ... Nxg3+ 19 hxg3 (Diagram 70)

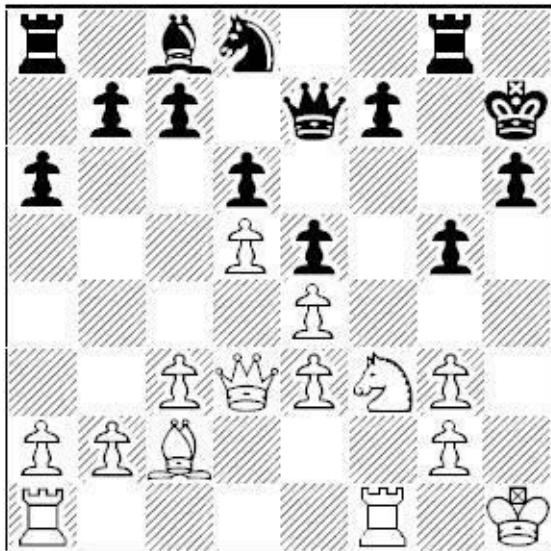


Diagram 70 (B)

White has two open files, but a horrible pawn structure!

19 ... f6 20 Rf2 Nf7 21 Kg1 Bd7 22 Raf1 Rg6 23 Bd1 h5 24 Rc2 a5 25 Kf2 Kg7 26 Rh1 Rh6 27 b4 b6 (Diagram 71)

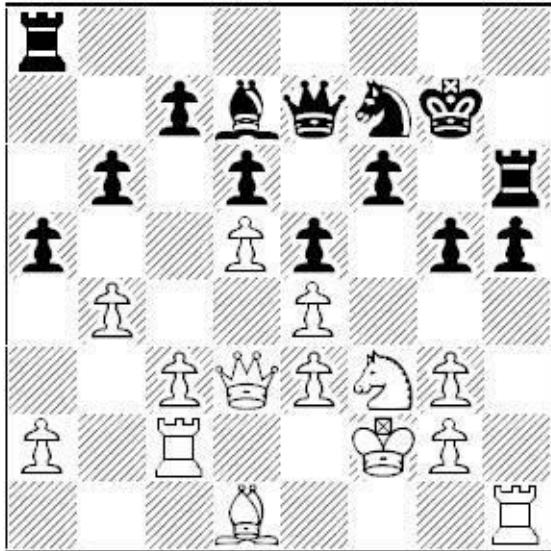


Diagram 71 (W)

Black has been slowly improving his pieces and his pawn structure – almost all

of them are now on dark squares, the opposite colour to his bishop of course!

28 a3 Nh8 29 Be2 Ng6 30 c4 axb4 31 axb4 Rf8

D.Shmakov-D.Frolov, Tomsk 2003. Black has the only two meaningful pawn breaks (... f5 and ... h4), and eventually won by swapping his bishop for the knight and playing an ending with the superior minor piece.

Summary

Once White constructs his strong centre by c3 and d4 Black must play accurately to avoid obtaining a passive position. Nevertheless, with the exception of a few variations where White keeps a small plus Black's chances are very good, and once he frees the g1-a7 diagonal for his dark-squared bishop he can look forward to plenty of tactical opportunities.

I very much like the key ... Nd8-e6-f4 manoeuvre which I believe resuscitates his chances in the main line.

Chapter Four

6 Ba4 versus the Berlin John Cox

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Nd6 6 Ba4 (Diagram 1)

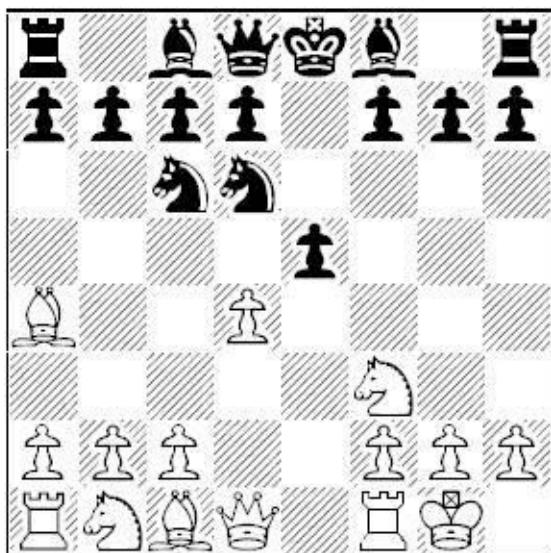


Diagram 1 (B)

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6

The solid Berlin Defence, or Berlin Wall as some people call it. White's main try against this (4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Nd6 6 Bxc6 dxc6 7 dxе5 Nf5 8 Qxd8+ Kxd8), involves an intricate and frequently bewildering early endgame which is absolutely not everyone's cup of tea, while 4 d3 (which we'll see a version of in the next chapter) also leads to a rather slow game. In this chapter I want to show a dangerous and slightly neglected gambit: **4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Nd6 6 Ba4**

Rather a natural move, actually. White simply points out that Black's last move didn't do much for his development, and invites him to demonstrate how he's going to get his bishops into action. This move first underwent testing in a match in 1901 for the championship of the USA between Showalter (White) and Pillsbury, and after that lapsed into obscurity until – well, now, really. Its rediscovery was mostly down to the Indian GM Ganguly, who has racked up 4½/5 with it (being forced to allow Ivanchuk off with a draw). One considerable advantage of the line is that it forces Black into the kind of hand-to-hand fighting which Berlin devotees normally prefer to avoid. Another is the fact that such authorities as Cox (2008) dismiss it with the words “Black can play either 6 ... e4 or 6 ... exd4”.

Game 4

S.Ganguly-A.Ismagambetov New Delhi 2006

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Nd6 6 Ba4 exd4

Black's alternatives are 6 ... e4 and 6 ... Be7, which we'll consider in the 'Looking a Little Deeper' section.

7 c3 Be7

Black could be a man and play 7 ... dxc3, of course, but Ismagambetov (a respectable 2420 at the time of this game, by the way) is happy with one pawn. Another way of doing that is 7 ... d3, and we'll consider both these moves later.

8 cxd4 (Diagram 2)

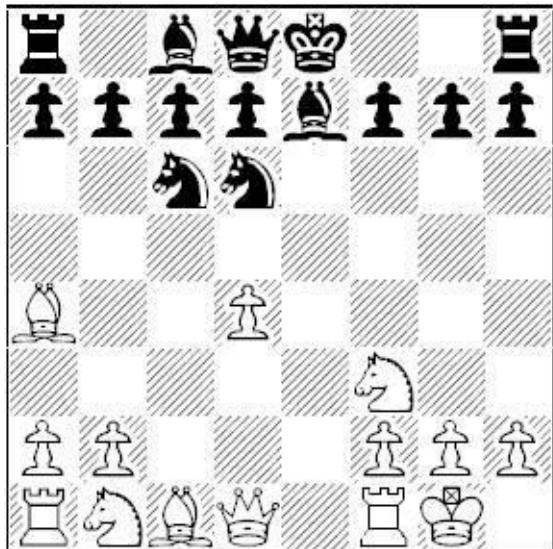


Diagram 2 (B)

8 ... 0-0

8 ... b5 is another possibility, which is seen in the next section.

9 Nc3 Nf5

Trying to develop the bishop, but Ganguly has other ideas.

10 d5 Nb8 (Diagram 3)

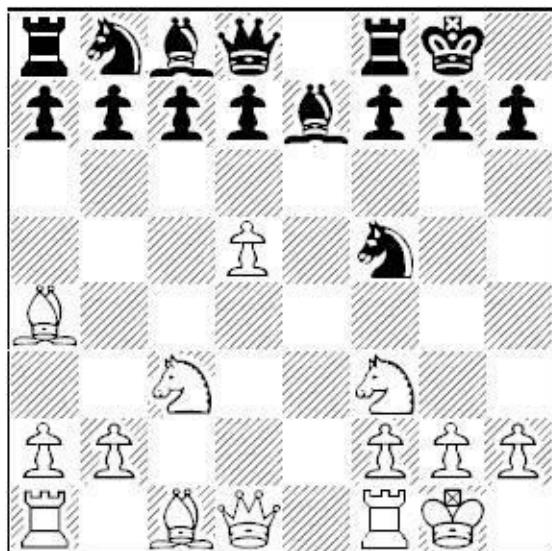


Diagram 3 (W)

11 d6!?

White needs to play this blocking sacrifice in some form or another. An alternative of roughly equal merit was 11 g4 Nh4 (after 11 ... Nd6 12 Re1 b6 13 Bf4 Bb7 Black has difficulty in moving any more pieces usefully, and White has ample compensation) 12 Nxh4 Bxh4 13 d6, which also gives White at least enough play for his pawn, for example 13 ... cxd6 14 Bf4 Nc6 15 Bxd6 Be7 16 Re1 Bxd6 17 Qxd6.

11 ... Nxd6

11 ... Bxd6 leaves the f5-knight horribly embarrassed after 12 Bc2 Nh4 (12 ... Ne7 13 Nb5 is also strong, *e.g.* 13 ... Bc5 14 Qd3 Ng6 – or 14 ... g6 15 Qc3 followed by Bh6 – 15 Bg5 f6 16 Qd5+ Kh8 17 Qxc5 Na6 18 Qe3 fxg5 19 Bxg6 hxg6 20 Nxg5) 13 Ng5 h6 (both 13 ... Ng6 14 Qh5 and 13 ... g6 14 Qg4 virtually lose) 14 Qd3 g6 15 Nge4 Be5 16 Bxh6, and in view of the threat of Bg5 White wins his material back and stands better.

12 Bc2

12 Nd5!? is an interesting notion. After that 12 ... Nc6 would lead to a position we'll see later in Line A2 in the next section, while 12 ... c6? drops a piece to 13 Nxe7+ Qxe7 14 Re1 Ne4 15 Nd4 followed by f3. Instead 12 ... Bf6 13 Bf4 Ne8 14 Re1 Nc6 would lead to the position after White's 11th (!) in Line A2, where Black is almost lost. This idea isn't easy to meet and is quite logical, really – Nd5, Bf4 and Re1 are all essential attacking moves, whereas it isn't clear that Bc2 is going to be necessary.

12 ... Ne8 (Diagram 4)

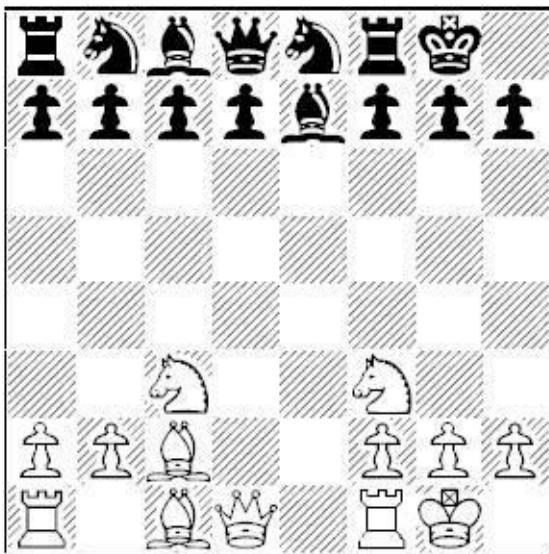


Diagram 4 (W)

DANGEROUS WEAPON! This is the critical position in the game. I don't doubt that Black can demonstrate equality, but by the same token I don't think White is risking much objectively, and there's no denying that his position is easier to play and he's going to have all the fun.

Let's have a look at a couple of other natural ways to play: a) 12 ... Nc6 13 Nd5 Re8 14 Bf4 b6 leaves White with a choice: 15 Nxe7+ (White doesn't have to resolve the tension like this; 15 Qd3 g6 16 Rad1 Bb7 17 Rfe1 a6 18 h3 leaves Black with hardly any moves, but on the other hand White is still a couple of pawns in arrears – I suspect the position is about equal) 15 ... Rxe7 (15 ... Nxe7 16 Bxd6 cxd6 17 Ng5 is terrible) 16 Bg5 and now: a1) 16 ... Ba6 17 Bxe7 Qxe7 18 Re1 Qf6 is probably a little better for White.

a2) 16 ... f6 basically burns out to a draw: 17 Qd3 Re4 18 Nd2 Nb4 19 Bxf6! Nxd3 (19 ... Qxf6 20 Nxe4 and 19 ... gxf6 20 Qg3+ both lose) 20 Bxd8 Re2 21 Bxd3 Rxd2 22 Rfd1 Rxd1+ 23 Rxd1 Ba6 24 Bxc7 Bxd3 25 Rxd3 Rc8 26 Rxd6 Rxc7.

b) Black might also try to keep the knight off d5 with 12 ... c6 but White's other pieces more than make up for the knight's restriction, *e.g.* 13 Qd3 f5 (13 ... g6 14 Bh6 Re8 15 Qd4 f6 16 Ng5 is pretty much devastating) 14 Re1 Ne8 (14 ... Na6 15 Rxe7

$Qxe7$ 16 $Bg5$ is worse) 15 $Qe2$ $Bf6$ 16 $Bxf5$ $Bxc3$ 17 bx_c3 $Rxf5$ 18 $Qxe8+$ $Qxe8$ 19 $Rxe8+$ $Rf8$ 20 $Rxf8+$ $Kxf8$ 21 $Ba3+$, when White's activity at least compensates for his pawn deficit.

c) 12 ... $b6$ is probably Black's best defence, to allow the bishop to $a6$. After 13 $Nd5$ $Ba6$ 14 $Re1$ $Re8$ 15 $Bf4$ $Nc6$ White still has a lot of compensation, but nothing immediate is apparent.

13 Re1 Nc6

13 ... Nf6 14 Qd3 g6 15 Bg5 d6 16 Rxe7 Qxe7 17 Re1 Qd8 18 Nd5 Nbd7 19 Qd4 is pretty much the sort of thing Black should be avoiding.

14 Nd5 (Diagram 5)

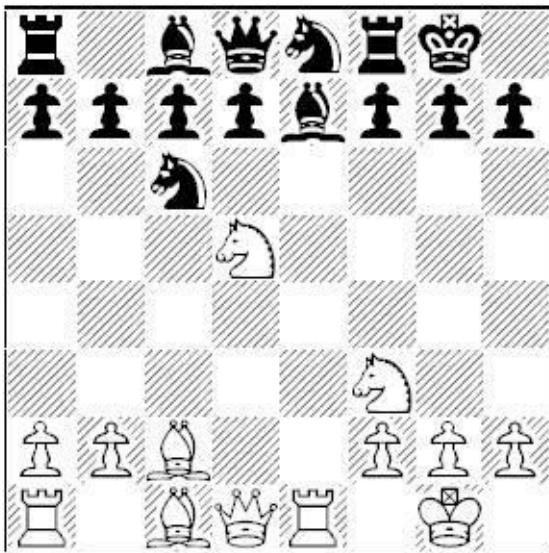


Diagram 5 (B)

14 ... g6?

This basically loses, but it isn't easy for Black to find the right move. 14 ... Bf6 15 Qe2 Kh8 (White was threatening Qe4) 16 Ng5 Bxg5 17 Bxg5 Qxg5 18 Qxe8 Qd8 19 Qxd8 Rxd8 20 Nxc7 Rb8 21 Rad1 gives White adequate compensation, but probably nothing more.

15 Bh6 Ng7 16 Rxe7 Nxe7 17 Bg5 Re8 18 Nf6+

This is the problem for Black: White doesn't just win the exchange back; he gives mate.

18 ... Kh8 19 Qd4 Rf8 20 Nxh7 Kxh7 21 Qh4+ Kg8 22 Bxe7 Qe8 23 Ng5 Nh5 24 Qxh5! 1-0

Ole!

Looking a Little Deeper 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Nd6 6 Ba4 Here Black has three options:

A: 6 ... exd4

B: 6 ... e4

C: 6 ... Be7

A) 6 ... exd4 7 c3 (Diagram 6)

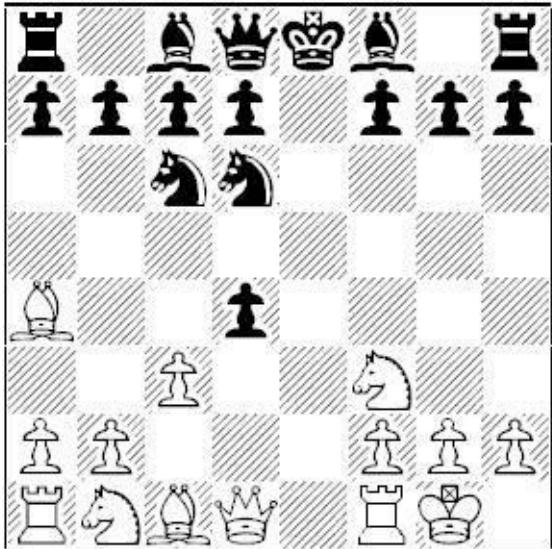


Diagram 6 (B)

And now there's a further choice:

A1: 7 ... Be7

A2: 7 ... dxc3

A3: 7 ... d3

A1) 7 ... Be7 8 cxd4

We saw all this in Ganguly-Ismagambetov, but with Black's next move he prefers to leave his d6-knight where it is and start with his queenside.

8 ... b5 9 Bb3

White might try instead 9 Bc2 0-0 10 Nc3 Bb7 11 Qd3 g6 12 a3 (12 Nd5 can be met by the annoying 12 ... Nb4!? 13 Nxb4 a5), for example 12 ... Na5 13 Bf4 a6 14 Rfe1 Re8 15 b3, when Black remains a little tangled up.

9 ... Bb7 10 Re1 0-0 11 Nc3 Na5 12 Bc2 (Diagram 7)

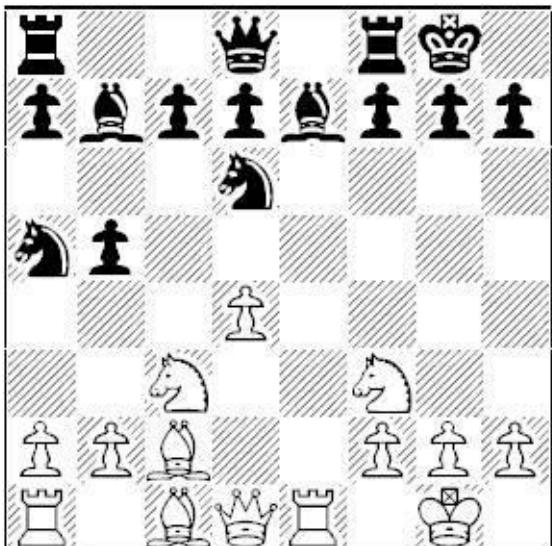


Diagram 7 (B)

All very natural so far.

12 ... f5

White was threatening to regain his pawn with Nxb5 (and Qd3), but Black might have considered the less loosening 12 ... g6, with the idea that if White continues as in the game then 13 Qe2 Re8 14 Nxb5 Bf6 is quite comfortable for him.

13 Qe2 b4

Again 13 ... Re8 14 Nxb5 Bf6 was an option, with about equality. Aleksandrov wants to unbalance the game more. Lysyj and Ovetchkin, in their excellent recent book on the Berlin, continued this line with 15 Qf1 Bxf3 16 Rxe8+ Nxe8 17 gxf3 c6 18 Nc3 Bxd4 19 Bxf5 g6 20 Bh3 d5 with a rather horrid position for White in my opinion, though my computer isn't too upset. It seems to me White would do better with 16 Nxd6 Rxe1 17 Qxe1 cxd6 18 gxf3, when material is level and White can hope that a bishop on d5 will be strong one day and that his kingside won't be too much of a problem – the king can always defend from g2 if necessary. Probably it's about equal.

14 Qxe7 bxc3 15 bxc3 Be4 16 Qxd8 Rfxd8 17 Bd1

With an unbalanced struggle in S.Sulskis-A.Aleksandrov, Dubai 2005. White could be pretty happy with this outcome to the opening; Black's options earlier on are more worrying and this is definitely Black's easiest method against our gambit.

A2) 7 ... dxc3

This one is probably going a bit far, to be honest – certainly White should be happy to see it.

8 Nxc3 Be7 9 Nd5 0-0

TRICKY TRANPOSITION: Strangely enough, this same position would have been reached in Ganguly-Ismagambetov if White had played 12 Nd5 and Black had replied 12 ... Nc6 (which he probably wouldn't have done).

No-one as Black has taken the second pawn since Pillsbury, in a match game against Showalter in 1897, which went on: **10 Re1 Bf6?!**

10 ... b5 11 Bc2 Bb7 made more sense, with a similar type of position to A1.

11 Bf4 Ne8 (Diagram 8)

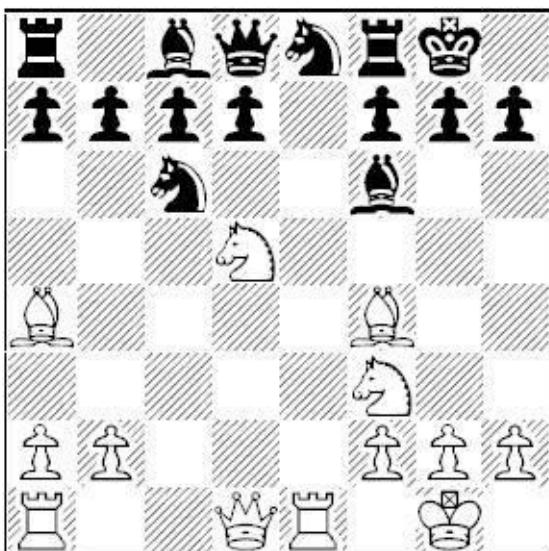


Diagram 8 (W)

Allowing a little combination, but Black's position wasn't good anyway.

12 Rxe8 Qxe8 13 Nxc7 Qe4 14 Bd6 Rb8 15 Bc2?

15 Nd5 was much stronger, threatening Bxc6; Black can't avoid losing the exchange and having his kingside broken up.

15 ... Qg4 16 Bxf8 Kxf8 17 Qd6+ Be7 18 Re1 (Diagram 9)

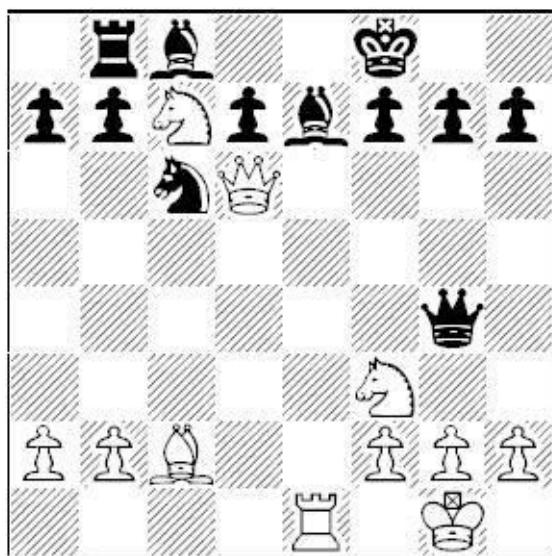


Diagram 9 (B)

18 ... g6??

Black wasn't too bad after, say, 18 ... Qh5, but this just loses.

19 Qd2 Qh5 20 Nd5 Bd8 21 Qc3!

The key idea.

21 ... f6 22 Nxf6 Ba5 23 Nxd7+ Bxd7 24 Qf6+ Kg8 25 Bb3+ Qd5 26 Bxd5+ Be6

27 Bxe6 mate J.Showalter-H.Pillsbury, New York 1897.

A3) 7 ... d3

Ivanchuk's choice. The loss of tempo is compensated by the fact that White's best square for the queen's knight remains blocked.

8 Qxd3 Be7 9 Bc2!

A cunning move, forcing weaknesses if Black wants to castle.

9 ... g6 (Diagram 10)

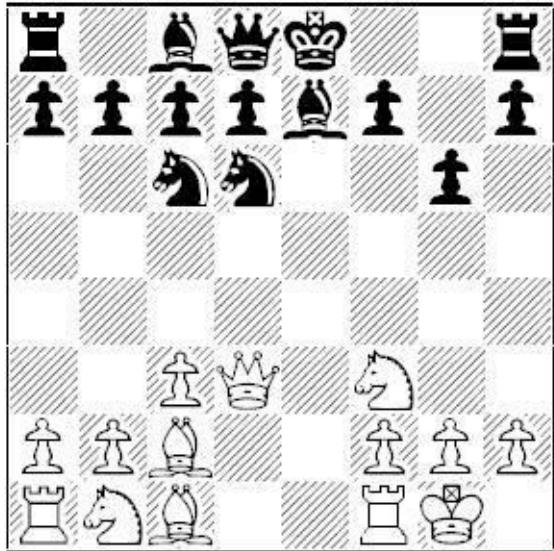


Diagram 10 (W)

10 Bh6

A natural move, but in A.Muzychuk-J.Zawadzka, European Women's Ch., Tbilisi 2011, the Slovenian woman preferred to keep more fluid compensation for the pawn with 10 Re1 0-0 11 Bh6 Re8. The game continued 12 Qd2 Bf6 (12 ... Nc4 13 Qf4 d5 was very possible here; perhaps White should have preferred 12 Na3 to forestall this idea) 13 Na3 b6 14 Qf4 Ba6 15 Rxe8+ Nxe8 16 Bb3 Ng7 and now Black cracked under the pressure with 17 Ng5 Ne6 (the unnatural 17 ... Ne5 was best) 18 Nxe6 fxe6 19 Rd1, when White had a dangerous initiative.

10 ... Nf5 11 Qd2 d6 12 Re1 Be6 13 Ba4 (Diagram 11)

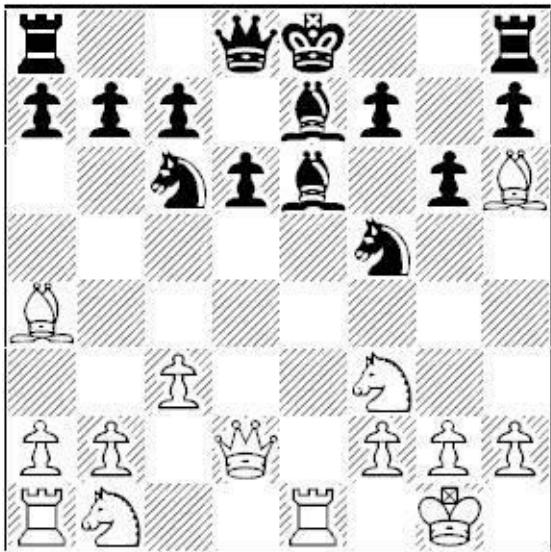


Diagram 11 (B)

13 Na3 Nxh6 14 Qxh6 Bf8 15 Qe3 Bg7 16 Ng5 is much the same as the game.

13 ... Nxh6

After 13 ... Qd7 14 Na3 0-0-0 15 Nb5 Kb8 16 Nbd4 White's initiative gives full compensation for the pawn.

14 Qxh6 Bf8 15 Qe3 Bg7 16 Ng5 Qd7 17 Nxe6 fxe6 18 Qxe6+ Qxe6 19 Rxe6+
½-½

S.Ganguly-V.Ivanchuk, Edmonton 2005.

B) 6 ... e4

The safest continuation, according to the Israeli GM and Berlin expert Postny.

7 Re1 Be7 8 Ne5 0-0 9 Nc3 (Diagram 12)

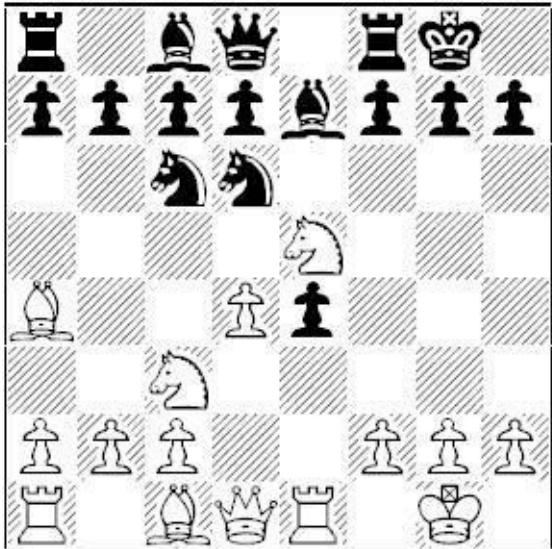


Diagram 12 (B)

9 ... Nf5

Up to here both sides' moves have been natural and obvious, but here Black has a wide choice: a) 9 ... f6 is a safe move:

a1) 10 Nxc6 dxc6 11 Nxe4 Nxe4 12 Rxe4 f5 13 Re1 f4 has been played on a couple of occasions by Aronian and gives Black an equal position.

a2) 10 Ng4 keeps the pieces for the moment, but all the way through 10 ... f5 11 Ne5 Nxe5 12 dx5 Nf7 13 Bb3 Kh8 14 Bxf7 Rxf7 15 Bf4 d6 16 Qd5 Rf8 17 exd6 Bxd6 18 Rad1 Bd7 19 Bxd6 Bc6 20 Qe5 cxd6 21 Rxd6 Qh4, which was equal and drawn in V.Kotronias-K.Georgiev, Calvia Olympiad 2004, White's pressure looked more or less exactly sufficient to regain his pawn, no more, no less.

b) 9 ... Bg5 seeks to simplify, but 10 Bxg5 Qxg5 11 Nxe4 (instead 11 Bxc6 dxc6 12 Nxe4 Nxe4 13 Rxe4 was equal in S.Ganguly-R.Laxman, Hyderabad 2005) 11 ... Nxe4 12 Rxe4 probably enables White to claim a slight edge.

c) 9 ... Bf6 was Black's choice in the very first game with 6 Ba4 and is still a good move today. 10 Bf4 Nf5 (**Diagram 13**) and now:

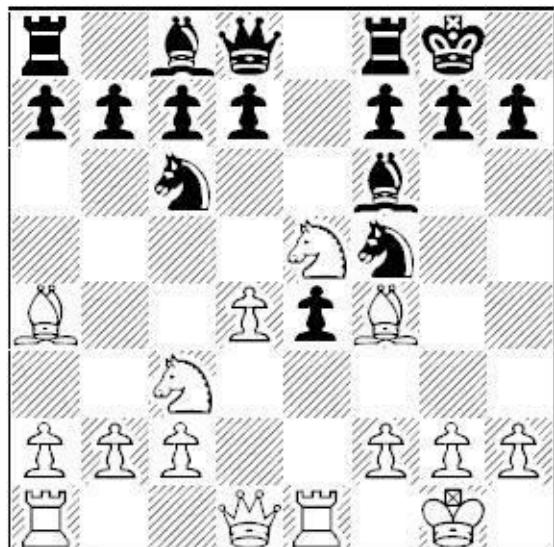


Diagram 13 (W)

c1) 11 Nxe4 Ncxd4 (not 11 ... Nfxd4? 12 Nxc6 Nxc6 13 Nxf6+ Qxf6 14 Bxc7) 12 Nxf6+ Qxf6 13 Nxd7 Bxd7 14 Bxd7 Rad8 15 Be5 Qb6 16 Bxf5 Nxf5; and c2) 11 Bxc6 dxc6 12 Nxe4 Be6 (12 ... Qxd4?! 13 Nxf6+ gxf6 14 Nd3 is less reliable) 13 c3 are both about equal, and probably in truth White ought to prefer one of these to 11 Rxе4.

c3) 11 Rxе4 and now:

c31) 11 ... Nfxd4 12 Ng4 Ne6 13 Nxf6+ Qxf6 14 Nd5 Qd8 15 Qh5 and White had roughly sufficient compensation in J.Showalter-H.Pillsbury, New York 1897.

c32) 11 ... Ncxd4 might be a good move; White has a couple of obvious attacking tries but I don't think they quite work: 12 Ng4 (12 g4 Ne6 13 Nxd7 Bxd7 14 Bxd7 Nxf4 15 Bxf5 Ng6 also survives with Black for choice if anything) 12 ... Ne6 13 Nxf6+ Qxf6 14 Nd5 Qd8 15 Qg4 d6! (even after 15 ... Nxf4 16 Rxf4 – or 16 Qxf5 Nxd5 17 Qxd5 d6 – 16 ... Ne7 17 Nf6+ I don't think White can achieve anything, for instance 17 ... Kh8 18 Qh3 h6 19 Rh4 Ng8 20 Nh5 Qg5 21 Qg3 Nf6) 16 Qxf5 Nc5! and White is reduced to 17 Ne7+ Qxe7 18 Rxе7 Bxf5 19 Bb3 Rac8, followed by grovelling.

10 Rxe4 Nfxd4

10 ... Nxe5 11 dxe5 d6 12 exd6 Bxd6 is probably safer, as in P.Negi-E.L'Ami, Hoogeveen 2005, although perhaps White could pretend to have a shade of initiative with 13 Qf3.

11 Nxc6 Nxc6 12 Nd5 Bf6 13 Qf3 (Diagram 14)

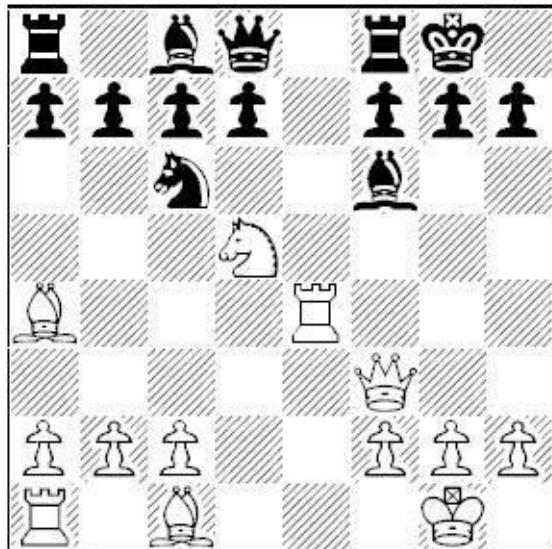


Diagram 14 (B)

13 ... Be5

13 ... d6 14 Nxf6+ Qxf6 15 Qxf6 gxf6 16 Bxc6 bxc6 17 Bh6 Rd8 18 Re3 Kh8 19 Re7 Be6 20 Rxc7 Rdc8 was agreed drawn in P.Czarnota-M.Grabarczyk Poznan 2005, but as Manchester City fans will tell you, some strange stuff goes on in Poznan. Black faces a tiresome task here.

13 ... Be5 was Black's choice in S.Ganguly-E.Van den Doel, Calvia Olympiad 2004, which we shall now follow:

14 Qh5

Lesser men would have played 14 Bxc6 dxc6 15 Rxe5 cxd5 16 Rxd5 Qe7 17 Bf4, although the result is almost certain to be a draw. Ganguly prefers to keep playing for the attack.

14 ... d6 15 Bg5 f6 16 Bd2 g6

I really don't know how Ganguly would have played after the natural 16 ... Be6. 17 Nb4 is splendid if Black falls for 17 ... Nxb4 18 Rxb4 Rb8? 19 Rh4 h6 20 Bxh6!, but 18 ... Rf7 19 Rxb7 c5 is much better and pleasant for Black.

17 Qh6 Bf5 18 Re3 Ne7 19 Nxe7+ Qxe7 20 c3 (Diagram 15)

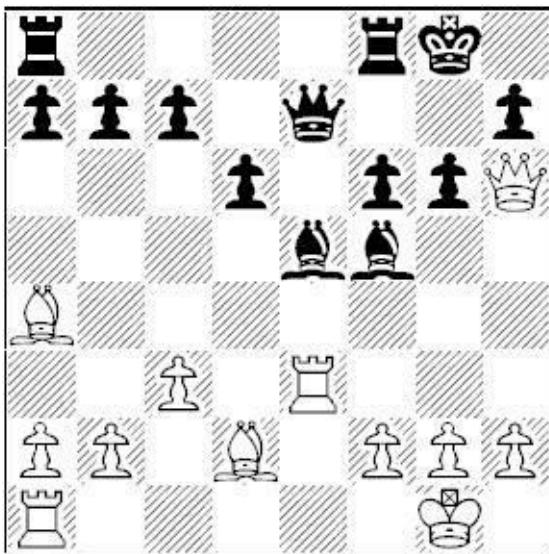


Diagram 15 (B)

20 ... d5?

Losing in one move. 20 ... g5 was forced. I don't imagine Van den Doel overlooked the possibility of f2-f4, so he must have been pretty certain White had some sacrificial blow against this, but whatever he thought it was it can't have been as bad as losing a piece for nothing, and anyway I don't think White had anything in particular after 20 ... g5.

21 f4 Qc5 22 fxe5 fxe5 23 b4 Qb6 24 Qg5 a5 25 Bb3 c6 26 bxa5 Rxa5 27 c4 Re5 28 cxd5 cxd5 29 Kh1 e4 30 Be3 1-0

6 ... e4 is a very sound move and should enable Black to equalize.

C)

6

...

Be7

(Diagram

16)

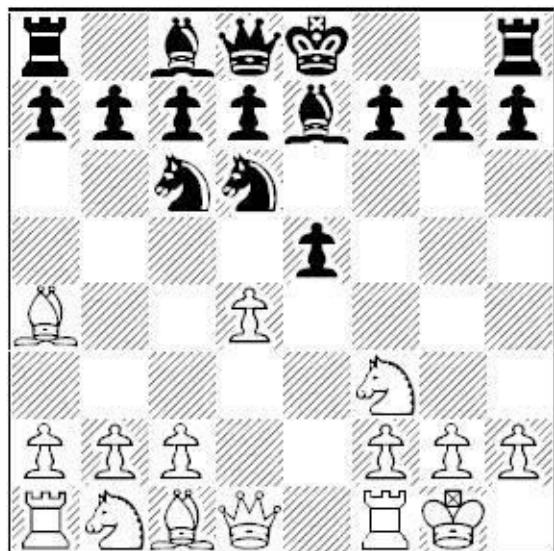


Diagram 16 (W)

A slightly strange move, declining the chance to gain either material with 6 ... exd4 or time with 6 ... e4, but not so bad.

7 dxe5 Ne4 8 Be3 Nc5

After 8 ... d5 9 c4 would be a good move, for example 9 ... dxc4 10 Qc1 Be6 11 Rd1 Bd5 (or 11 ... Qc8 12 Nd4) 12 b3 c3 13 Nd4.

9 Bxc5 Bxc5 10 Nc3 0-0

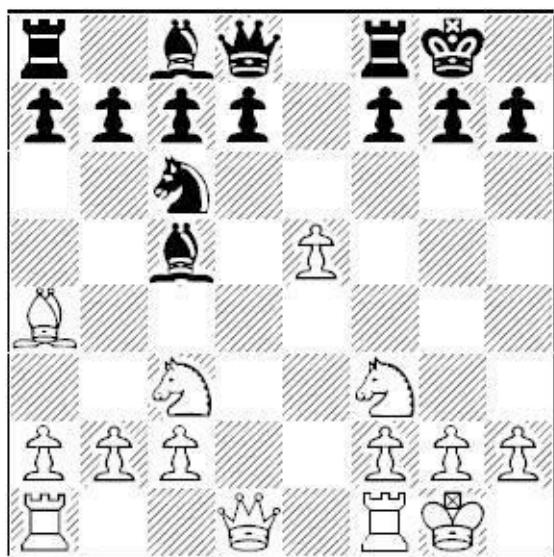


Diagram 17 (W)

11 Qd5

White needs to do better than this; he underestimated Black's next. Maybe he could try 11 Ne4, for instance 11 ... Qe7 12 Qd5 Bb6 13 Rad1 Qe6 14 Rfe1 Qxd5 15 Rxd5, when White maintains a fair amount of pressure.

11 ... d6!

An excellent pawn sacrifice; Black is at least equal now.

12 Bxc6 bxc6 13 Qxc6 Rb8 14 Qd5 Rxb2

Black had no problems at all in C.Sandipan-S.Kayumov, Hyderabad 2005.

Summary White shouldn't kid himself; I don't have any doubt Black can equalize after 6 Ba4. Probably there's nothing wrong with 6 ... exd4, although Black has to be careful, and 6 ... e4 is a good move as well. But what White does achieve is to dictate the terms of the game. For one thing Black probably doesn't have a particular line in mind, and for another Berlin merchants tend to favour the endgame, and White instead forces open tactical play on Black. Ganguly's adventures with the line show how effective this can be.

In the next chapter we're going to see a very different offbeat way of tackling the Berlin, but some other areas White might care to investigate are 5 Qe2, 6 dxe5 Nxb5 7 a4 Nbd4 8 Nxd4 Nxd4 9 Qxd4 d5 10 Nc3 c6, and 5 d4 Nd6 6 Bg5!?. All of these have the same merit of forcing Black into tactical complications which aren't likely to have been his game plan (unless in the last case he wants to try 6 ... Be7, which is probably a better version of the typical Berlin semi-Exchange positions than the usual 6 Bxc6 dxc6 7 dxe5 Nf5 8 Qxd8+ Kxd8).

Chapter Five

New Ideas in the 4 d3 Berlin John Cox

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 d3 (Diagram 1)

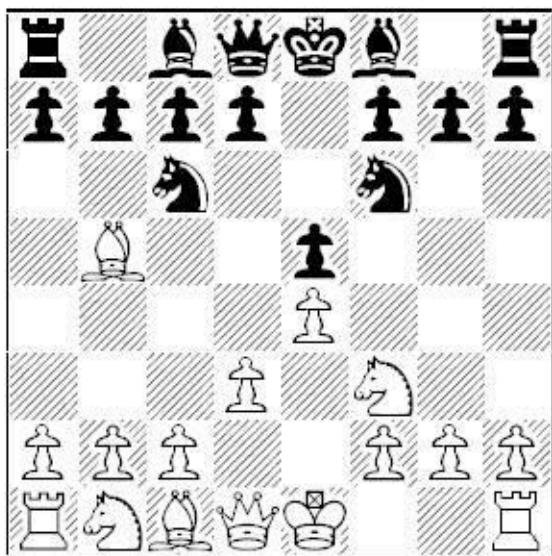


Diagram 1 (B)

This is the move Kasparov said later he wished he'd tried in London in 2000. It provides a calm strategic alternative to the main endgame line of the Berlin, yet with a drop of poison. Before proceeding further, though, let's take a trip back a hundred years and let one of the greatest show us how to deal with the structure which arises in the system I'm recommending:

Game 5
J.Capablanca-D.Janowsky New York 1913

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bb5 a6 5 Bxc6 dxc6 6 0-0 Bg4 7 h3 Bh5 8 Qe2 Bd6 9 d3 Qe7 10 Nd1 0-0-0 11 Ne3 Bg6 12 Nh4 Rhg8 13 Nef5 Qe6 14 f4 Bxf5 15 Nxf5 exf4 16 Bxf4 Bc5+ 17 Be3 Bf8 18 Qf2 Rd7 19 Bc5 Bxc5 20 Qxc5 Kb8 21 Rf2 Ne8 22 Raf1 f6 23 b3 Nd6 24 Rf4 Nxf5 25 Qxf5 Qxf5 26 Rxf5 Re8 27 g4 b6 28 b4 (Diagram 2)

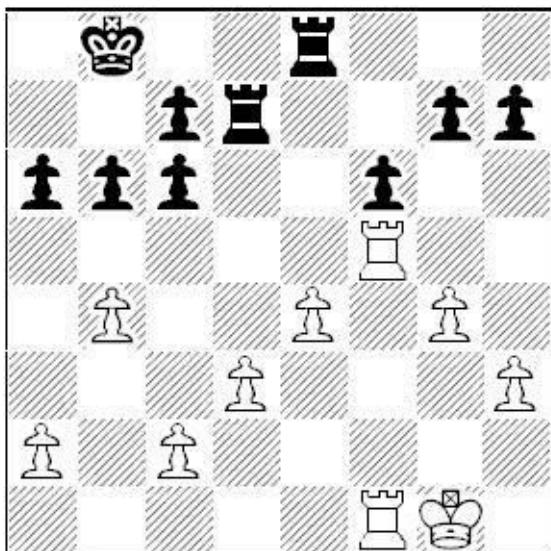


Diagram 2 (B)

28 ... Kb7 29 Kf2 b5 30 a4 Rd4 31 Rb1 Re5 32 Ke3 Rd7 33 a5 Re6 34 Rbf1 Rde7 (Diagram 3)

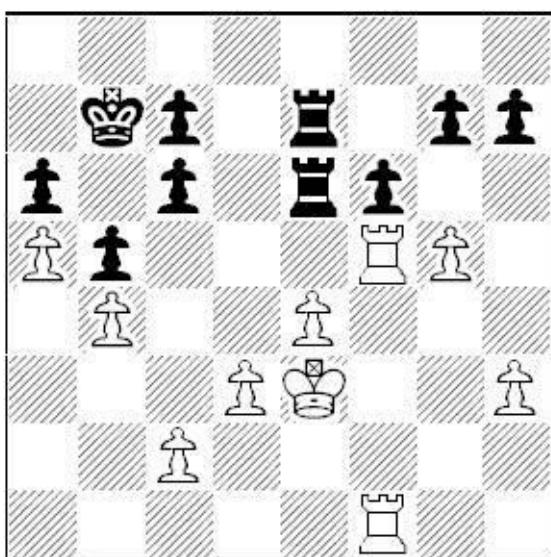


Diagram 3 (W)

35 g5 fxg5 36 Rxg5 Rh6 37 Rg3 Rhe6 38 h4 g6 39 Rg5 h6 40 Rg4 Rg7 41 d4 Kc8 42 Rf8+ Kb7 43 e5 g5 44 Ke4 Ree7 45 hxg5 hxg5 46 Rf5 Kc8 47 Rgxg5 Rh7 48 Rh5 Kd7 49 Rxh7 Rxh7 50 Rf8 Rh4+ 51 Kd3 Rh3+ 52 Kd2 c5 53 bxc5 Ra3 54 d5 1-0

This game doesn't really need notes, but there are two points I want to make about it.

First of all, you don't have to be on the queenside to play a minority attack; although the pawn structure is different from the classic QGD structure, White's g4-g5 was just that. There's more ways to play the Spanish Exchange structure than d4, takes, recaptures with a piece, trade all the pieces, win the ending, effective though that approach can be in the right hands, and the system we're going to look at in this chapter

generally involves White playing f4 rather than d4, as in this game.

Secondly, observe White's handling of the queenside pawns. Generally White can do one of two things to frustrate Black's majority. He can place his pawns in a sort of bowl shape; either c4/b3/a4 (watch out for the unopposed light-squared bishop, though) or c3/b2/a3. The advantage of both structures is that Black can't make a passed pawn without actually taking one of White's pawns with a piece. The other is to play b4 as Capa did, fixing the pawns where they are. The danger in that is that if Black manages to get control of the fourth rank or even just c5, he can play ... c5 and dissolve the doubled pawns. The advantage, though, is that if Black doesn't manage that then his pawns are fixed, immobile and hence weak – in this game indeed Janowsky allowed them to become irredeemably fixed and proceeded to lose some of them, but even without Black's rash ... b5 the point would have stood.

Now let's move on to the system against the Berlin:

Game 6

L.McShane-J.Parker British League 2011

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 d3 Bc5 (Diagram 4)

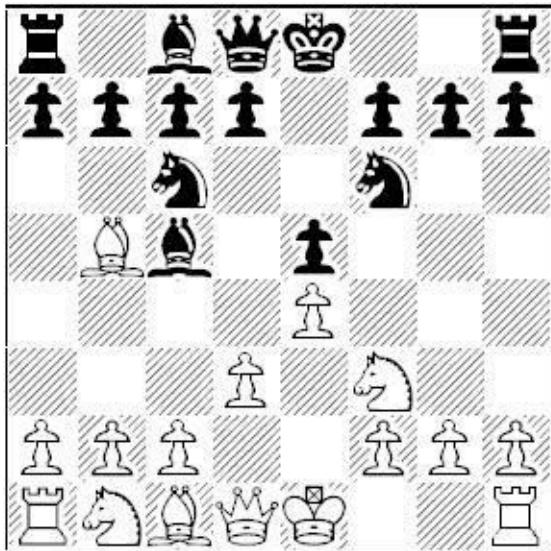


Diagram 4 (W)

This is the classical reply and pretty much the invariable choice of the top players these days; of course Black can play many moves and we'll have a quick look at some of them in the 'Looking a Little Deeper' section. This is the position in which Luke McShane has a new idea.

5 Bxc6

The line established back in the 19th century was 5 c3 (5 0-0 Nd4 is pretty comfortable for Black) 5 ... 0-0 6 Bxc6 bxc6 7 Nxe5 d5, when Black has enough compensation for the pawn. 6 0-0 allows either 6 ... d6 with a kind of Giuoco Pianissimo where White's bishop has overshot to b5, or 6 ... d5, a more forthright attempt to equalize which seems to have gone out of fashion a little bit.

5 ... dxc6

Jonathan thought for about ten minutes over this move. "I thought 5 ... bxc6 might just lose a pawn", he told me afterwards, and indeed obviously Black would prefer to have castled while White wastes time on c3, as in the old line. Probably Jonathan's sage observation is more or less correct despite a bit of initial optimism from the machines. For example, even the naive line 6 Nxe5 d5 7 exd5!? Qxd5 8 Nf3 0-0 9 0-0 Re8 10 Nc3 Qd6 11 Re1 Bf5 12 Be3 sees Black struggling to demonstrate any reasonable compensation. 7 ... Nxd5 8 d4 Bd6 9 Nxc6 Qf6 10 0-0 Bxh2+ 11 Kxh2 Qxc6 isn't much better, largely because White has the vexing 12 Qe2+, when 12 ... Be6? loses a piece to c4, d5 and so on.

6 b3 (Diagram 5)

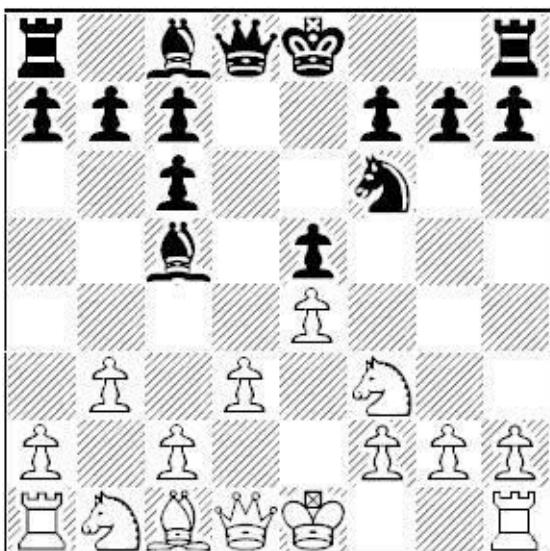


Diagram 5 (B)

This was Luke's new idea. "This structure is underrated for White", he tells me.

6 ... Qe7

Luke went to the well again in L.McShane-V.Kramnik, London Chess Classic 2011, which followed a thrilling course after some initially unpromising stuff: 6 ... Bg4 (after the present game Jonathan Parker felt he should have unloaded this bishop like this) 7 Nbd2 Nd7 8 Bb2 f6 9 Nf1 Nf8 10 h3 Bxf3 11 Qxf3 Ne6 12 Ne3 Qd7 (of course Black is very solid here, but still it feels as though White has slightly more possibilities, although the ones Luke now finds wouldn't occur to every player) 13 h4 a5 14 a4 0-0 15 h5 Bxe3 16 Qxe3 c5 17 Qh3 Qc6 18 0-0 Nf4 19 Qh2 Qe8 20 h6 g5 21 g3 Ne6 22 f4 gxf4 23 gxf4 Nxsf4 24 Rxf4 exf4 25 Kf2 Rf7 26 Qh5 Qe6 27 Qxc5 Kh8 28

Qc4 Re8 29 Rh1 Qd7 30 Qb5 Re6 31 Qxd7 Rxd7 32 Rg1 Rc6 33 Kf3 Rd8 34 Rg5 Rf8 35 Rg2 Rg8 36 Rh2 Rg1 37 d4 Rf1+ 38 Kg4 f3 39 d5 Rd6 40 c4 Kg8 41 c5 f5+ 42 Kxf5 Rg6 43 Bd4 Rd1 44 Be3 Rg2 45 Rh3 f2 46 Bxf2 Rxf2+ 47 Ke6 Rf7 48 d6 c6 49 Ke5 Kf8 50 Rh2 Rg1 51 b4 axb4 52 Rb2 Rg5+ 53 Ke6 Rg6+ 54 Ke5 Rxh6 55 a5 Rh5+ 56 Ke6 Rh6+ 57 Ke5 Rh5+ 58 Ke6 Ke8 59 a6 Rh6+ 60 Ke5 bxa6 61 Rxb4 Ra7 62 Rb8+ Kf7 63 Rc8 Re6+ 64 Kf5 a5 65 Rh8 Rf6+ 66 Ke5 Kg7 67 Rc8 a4 68 Rxc6 a3 69 d7 a2 0-1. This very complicated game has been analysed in a few places, and the consensus seems to me that White had at least equality following his exchange sacrifice but went astray in time trouble, although as often happens there's rather less consensus about where exactly this occurred.

Jonathan faced McShane's idea again in L.Trent-J.Parker, British League 2012, and this time followed Kramnik's example: 6 ... Bg4 7 Bb2 Nd7 8 Nbd2 f6 9 h3 Bxf3 10 Nxf3 Qe7 11 a3 0-0-0 12 b4 Bd6 13 c3 Nf8 14 Qa4 Kb8 15 0-0-0 (it's hard to believe in the combination of the queenside pawn advances and this queenside castling) Ne6 16 Qc2 c5 17 Nd2 c6 18 Nc4 ½-½. Black is better here, but Jonathan agreed the draw in view of the state of the match. Sadly, that didn't mean my Barbican team had got on top and Jonathan was agreeing a draw to make sure of victory; on the contrary things had already gone so horribly wrong that Jonathan judged the situation as hopeless and gave up in disgust.

7 Bb2 (Diagram 6)

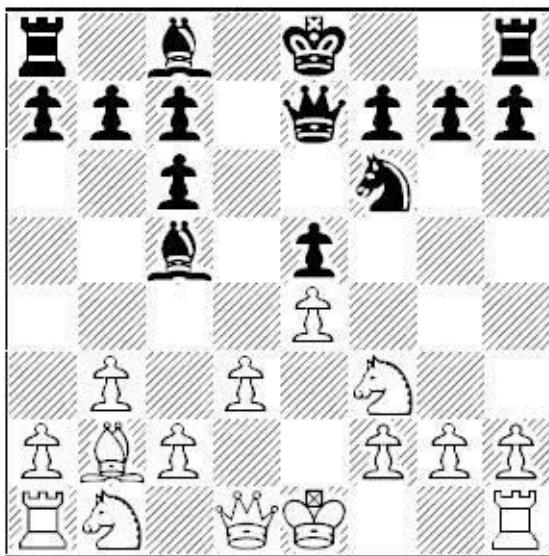


Diagram 6 (B)

7 ... Nd7

Lysyj and Ovetchkin like 7 ... Bb4+, but they don't consider White's most obvious reply. The lines they give are 8 Bc3 Bxc3+ 9 Nxc3 Bg4 10 0-0 (or 10 Qd2?! Bxf3 11 gxf3 Nh5 with an edge for Black) 10 ... Nd7, and 8 Nbd2 Bg4 9 c3 Bd6 10 h3 Bh5 11 Nc4 Nd7, assessing both lines as equal.

These are all convincing enough but I'm pretty sure Luke would have played 8 Nc3. As the game shows, he wouldn't have feared ... Ba3, 8 ... Qc5 9 Qd2 is nothing, and while the machine is confident about its position after 8 ... 0-0 9 0-0 I think this is more or less what White wants; he continues with Ne2-g3 and so forth and angles for a convenient f4 or d4 break. The computer wants to play the disruptive 9 ... Rd8 when

White has to be careful to arrange his desired manoeuvre; perhaps he should start with 10 h3 (to prepare Qc1 without running into ... Bg4).

8 Nc3 0-0 9 Ne2 (Diagram 7)

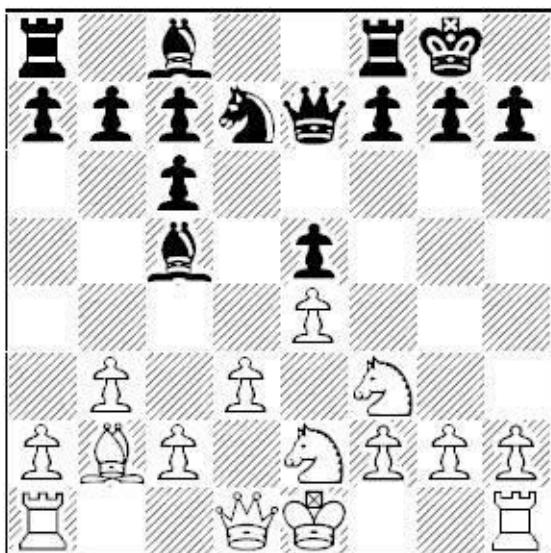


Diagram 7 (B)

This is White's usual manoeuvre in this structure; the knight is on its way to g3. Black doesn't usually want to play ... g6, which gives White a variety of handles, so he has to be constantly wary of a Nf5 leap, and White can get ready for f4 to liberate his rooks.

9 ... Ba3

A controversial moment; obviously Black could play ... Bd6, ... c5, ... Re8, ... f6 and Nf8-e6 instead, digging in and treating his 'bad' bishop, in Bellin's marvellous phrase, "like a girder in a building". That would perhaps be the more conventional option, but it's a different game, as they say. Still, it's easy to see why Parker wanted to remove the b2-bishop, which would certainly have pointed malevolently at his kingside after a later f4 break.

10 Bxa3 Qxa3 11 0-0 Qe7 12 Ng3 Nc5

These moves need no real commentary; the players follow their respective plans.

13 b4 (Diagram 8)

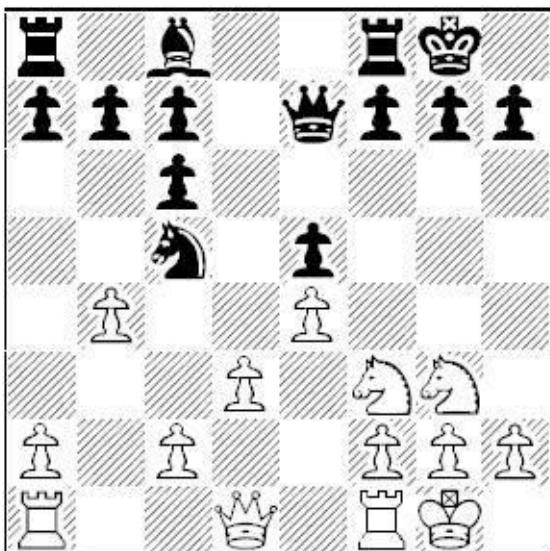


Diagram 8 (B)

A difficult choice. As I said before, White's move doesn't give him such a secure blockade as the other sort of arrangement of his queenside. What it does do in the short term, however, is prevent Black from establishing a pawn on c5 and thus secure White's control of the d4-square and his advantage in the centre. McShane demonstrates an ability which all strong players have but which is perhaps particularly a mark of his style, to change his plans according to events.

13 ... Na6

13 ... Na4 was also possible, but it doesn't change the play all that much. It looks attractive to bring the knight to b6 and to be ready to invade on c4 if White does play d4, but actually it doesn't help half as much as one might think – as they say, it's only a square. White can bring a knight round to e3 and trade the knight off, and the bishop isn't stable on c4 unless Black plays ... b5, which is obviously not what his queenside pawns want to see. Many of these issues came up in a slightly different form in Capablanca's game.

14 c3 c5 15 a3 cxb4 16 axb4 c5 17 bxc5 Nxc5 (Diagram 9)

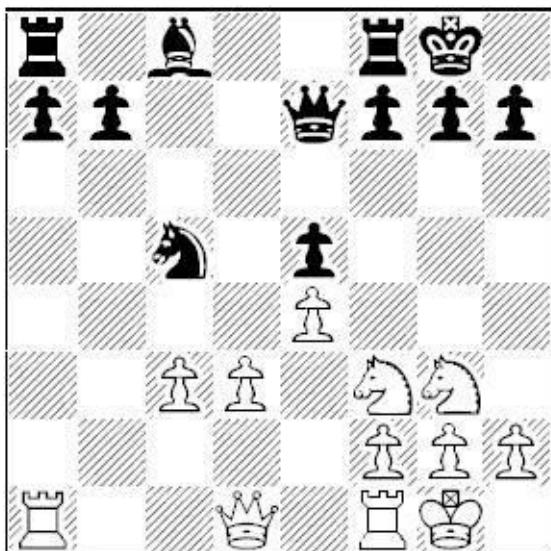


Diagram 9 (W)

This was Black's idea; he has solved his structural issues on the queenside, but the trouble is that in so doing he has allowed White a central majority and better control of that sector. Jonathan told me after the game he was surprised by the way his troubles endured here and the way the White knights continue to outplay his bishop.

18 Re1 g6

It looks natural to begin an assault on the White centre, but the trouble is that it just doesn't work: 18 ... Rd8 19 d4 exd4 20 cxd4 Bg4 21 h3 Bxf3 22 Qxf3 Rxd4? 23 Nf5.

19 d4 Nd7 20 Qb3 Kg7 21 Nf1 Qe6!?

Symptomatic of Black's problems. His structurally marvellous exchange of the c-pawns has left him unable to contest the centre against White's active pieces, and he feels obliged to go for this horrible exchange rather than something like 21 ... exd4 22 cxd4 Nb6 23 d5 f6 24 Nd4 Bd7 25 Ne3 Rfc8 26 Qb2, and the pressure mounts grimly.

22 Qxe6 fxe6 23 Nxe5 Nxe5 24 dxe5 Bd7 25 Ne3 (Diagram 10)

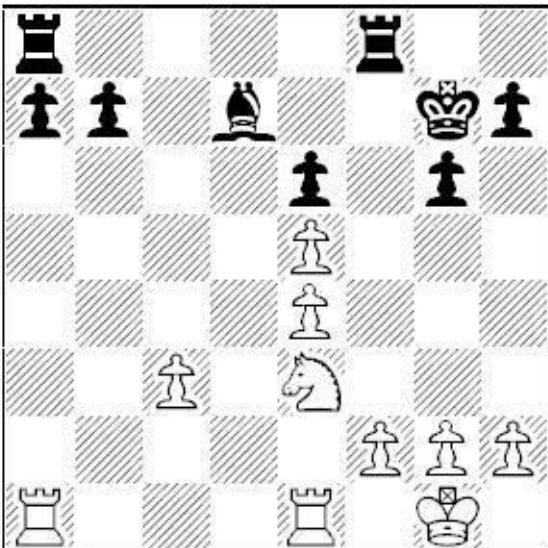


Diagram 10 (B)

Black's sacrifice has at least given his rooks some possibilities on the c-file, brought the a-pawn into the equation and ensured that in the end there will be play on both wings and he can hope that his bishop will be the more effective minor piece, and he does have possibilities to resist stoutly in this endgame. Still, you would think White should be winning, and McShane gets there in the end, although Parker displays some excellent grittiness – everyone has their style, and being very hard to put away in this kind of position is a trademark of Jonathan's.

25 ... Rfc8 26 Red1 Be8 27 Rd6 Kf7 28 Ra3 Rc5 29 f4 a5 30 Kf2 a4 31 Ke2 Rac8 32 Kd3 b5 33 g4 Ke7 34 h4 Bc6 35 g5 Ba8 36 Nc2 Bc6 37 Nd4 Bd7 38 Ne2 R5c7 39 Rb6 Rc5 40 Ra1 Bc6 41 Ra3 Rf8 42 Ra6 Bd7 43 Ra7 Rb8 44 Ke3 Rbc8 45 Ra1 R8c7 46 Rxc7 Rxc7 47 Rb1 Rc8 48 Kd3 Rf8 49 Kd2 Rf7 50 Ke3 Rf8 51 Nd4 Rc8 52 Kd3 Rf8 53 Rf1 Ra8 54 Rf2 Rf8 55 Rf1 Ra8 (Diagram 11)

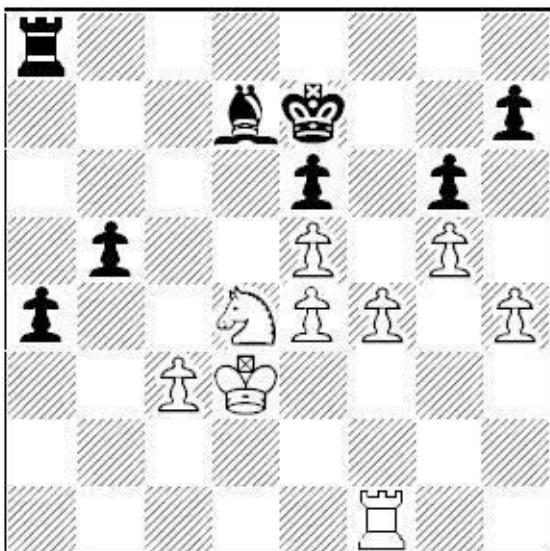


Diagram 11 (W)

Black has defended really well with his annoying alternating pressure on f4 and c3, and round about here I thought my Barbican teammate might even hold on, but McShane is a formidable practical opponent in this type of position (ask Nigel Short!), and has timed his next move cleverly for Black's habitual time pressure.

56 h5 gxh5 57 Rh1 a3?

Black goes down in a surprisingly undignified heap; 57 ... Be8 was essential: 58 f5 exf5 59 exf5 is of course alarming but it's far from clear that it is winning or that White is even better at all. For example, 59 ... a3 60 f6+ Kf8 61 e6 a2 62 Ra1 h4! (a voice from the back!) 63 f7 Bxf7 64 exf7 Kxf7, and White should even give some passing thought to how not to lose, which a careless fellow could achieve, for example, with the over-ambitious plan 65 Nf3? h3 66 Kc2 Kg6 67 Kb2 Kh5 68 Rxa2 Rxa2+ 69 Kxa2 Kg4 70 Nh2+ Kxg5 71 Kb3 Kf4.

58 Rxh5 a2 59 Rxh7+ Kd8 60 Nxe6+ 1-0

It's not so easy to trick Parker even in time trouble, but Luke has managed it: White deftly stops the pawn after 60 ... Kc8 61 Rh8+ Kb7 62 Nc5+ Ka7 63 Rxa8+ Kxa8 64 Nb3, and it's over.

A game which is somehow rather typical of Luke McShane's approach to chess; he has an unconventional (although obviously at bottom correct) understanding of the game, and it's often difficult to follow where his opponents have gone wrong. I remember being rather baffled by this game when I saw it, and Parker's post-mortem observations are also rather suggestive.

Game 7

E.Sutovsky-V.Kramnik Dortmund 2005

Let's have a look at Black's most common alternative to 4 ... Bc5.

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 d3 d6 (Diagram 12)

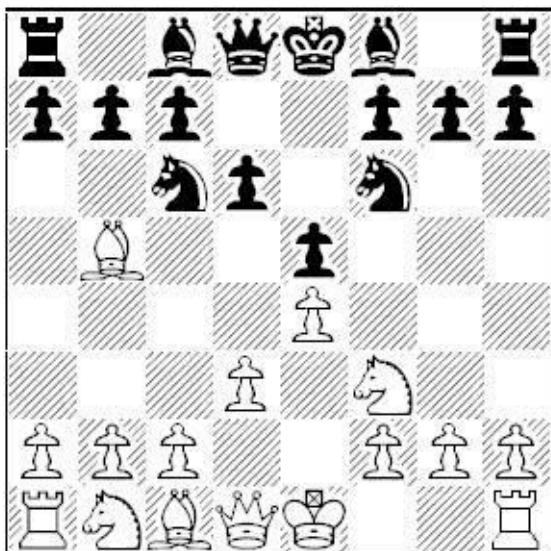


Diagram 12 (W)

Black takes play into something resembling a Steinitz set-up. For some reason this move is less common here, whereas after 3 ... a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 d3 Black is much more likely to choose ... d6 and ... g6 (or ... Be7) over ... Bc5 lines. So far as I know there isn't any hugely compelling technical reason for this; perhaps it's just a consequence of the different mindsets of players who play the main line Ruy and the Berlin.

5 0-0

White's main alternative is to play 5 c3 and continue as in an old Steinitz set-up for White, with Nbd2-f1-g3 and so on, as in A.Morozevich-M.Krasenkow, Plovdiv 2003, which continued 5 ... Bd7 6 0-0 g6 7 Nbd2 Bg7 8 Re1 0-0 9 Nf1 Nh5 10 Ba4 Qe8 11 Bb3 Kh8. However, if White is going to do this then first of all he would rather have had ... a6/Ba4 played so that his bishop can find a home on c2 in some lines (see Moro's tenth move), and probably also he usually wouldn't castle so early – certainly not if he was Steinitz, who used to favour an h4 thrust and sometimes even queenside castling in such positions, as in some games by the recently reincarnated English GM Matthew Sadler.

5 ... g6 6 d4!? (Diagram 13)

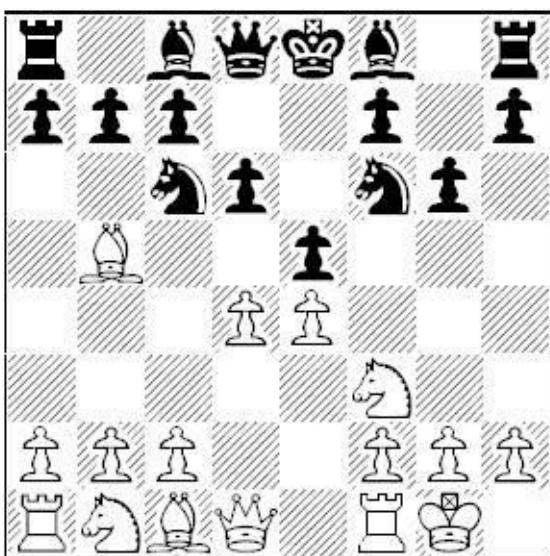


Diagram 13 (B)

DANGEROUS WEAPON! Even without the tempo, this move is still critical.

White is only in a sense losing a tempo; the point is that that in lines with 3 ... d6 4 d4 Black has to develop his bishop on e7. Here, having spent his extra tempo on ... g6, presumably Black is going to play ... Bg7, so actually he isn't going to manage to develop any faster.

6 ... Bd7

6 ... exd4 7 Nxd4 Bd7 8 Re1 Bg7 9 Bxc6 Bxc6 10 Nxc6 bxc6 11 e5 dxe5 12 Rxe5+ Kf8 13 Qf3 doesn't have to be terrible for Black, but you can see why Kramnik didn't want to go in for it. The combination of ... Nf6 and ... Bg7 is always one Black has to be careful of in the Ruy; only the fact that White has lost a tempo in this version makes it possible at all.

7 Re1

This move looks a little strange in conjunction with the next one, although it was introduced by the ever-creative Alexander Morozevich against Berlin specialist Kiril Georgiev at the Calvia Olympiad the year before. White could certainly just develop with 7 Nc3, or alternatively it would make a lot of sense to play 7 d5 straightaway, as the young Ukrainian star Alexander Arshchenko did. A typical continuation then would be 7 d5 Ne7 (7 ... Nb8 is also possible although Black should avoid 8 Bxd7+ Nbx_d7 9 Re1 Nc5?! 10 b4 Ncx_e4 11 Qd3! Bg7 12 Rx_e4 Nx_e4 13 Qx_e4, as in A.Arshchenko-E.Postny, Isle of Man 2005) 8 Bxd7+ Nxd7 9 Be3 Bg7 10 c4 0-0 11 Nc3 h6 (Black usually finds it necessary to play this before going ... f5, in order to avoid any unpleasantness connected with Ng5-e6) 12 Nd2 f5 13 f3 f4 (Black has generally done better when he has refrained from this move; the problem is that without his ‘venom tooth’ on c8 he finds it difficult to demolish the White kingside, and in fact this was exactly his problem in the game in question) 14 Bf2 g5, when White won a one-sided race in W.So-E.Moriadabadi, Asian Continental Open, Subic Bay 2009. This would actually be my choice with White.

7 ... Bg7

After 7 ... Nxd4 8 Nxd4 exd4 9 Bxd7+ Qxd7 10 Qxd4 Bg7 11 e5!? Qe6, E.Rozentalis-V.Koziak, Dzwirzyno 2004, White had the rather splendid computer shot 12 Bh6 Bxh6 13 Nc3, when Black’s best defence in turn is the equally silicon-inspired 13 ... Bd2, although White obtains a serious initiative after 14 Qxd2 dx_e5 15 Nb5 Rc8 16 Nx_a7 Rd8 17 Qb4.

If 7 ... exd4 8 Nxd4 Bg7 then again White has the annoying 9 Bxc6 bx_c6 10 e5.

8 d5

The most principled move by far: White closes the centre and allows Black to develop, but in return achieves a King's Indian structure with the light-squared bishops exchanged, which is always an achievement for him.

White certainly shouldn't be tempted by 8 Bxc6?! Bxc6 9 dxe5 Nxe4 10 Qd3, when either 10 ... d5 or 10 ... dxe5! 11 Rxe4 Bxe4 12 Qxe4 Qd1+ 13 Qe1 0-0-0 14 Nc3 Qxc2, as in several games, is fine for Black.

8 ... Ne7 9 Bxd7+ Nxd7 (Diagram 14)

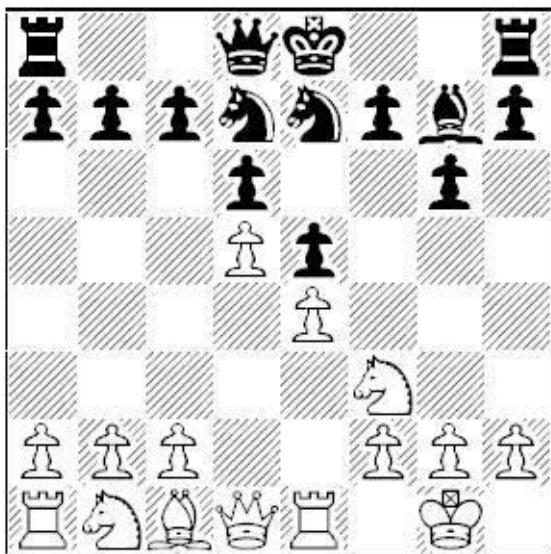


Diagram 14 (W)

The obvious move, making way for the f-pawn. The position now is similar to a main line of the modern Steinitz defence (3 ... a6 4 Ba4 d6), but there White would normally have the pawn already on c3 (not a particular achievement necessarily) and Black would have the extra ... a6, also of questionable utility.

10 Be3

10 c4 is the commonest move here (also with the pawn on c3), while Morozevich had his own way of introducing the attack on the queenside: 10 a4 0-0 11 a5 a6 12 c4 h6 13 Ra3 f5 14 b4 Nf6 15 Nbd2 Qd7 16 Qc2 g5 17 h3 Rac8 18 exf5 Qxf5 19 Qa2, a series of very Morozevichian moves which nonetheless left White slightly for choice in A.Morozevich-K.Georgiev, Calvia Olympiad 2004.

10 ... f5 (Diagram 15)

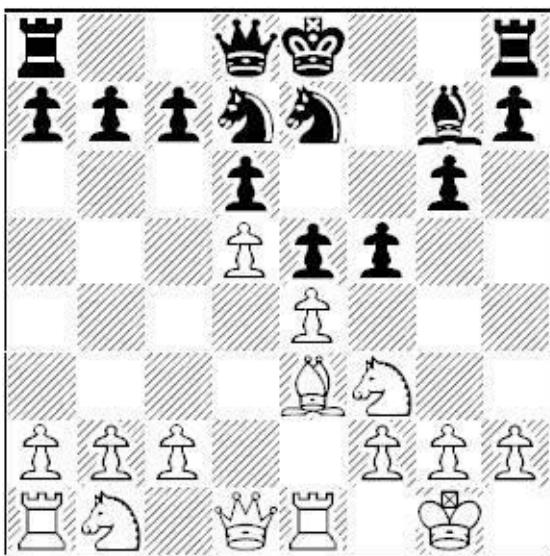


Diagram 15 (W)

Kramnik is not afraid of Ng5 and plays this move at once in order to have f8 free for a knight in the event of such a move. After either 10 ... 0-0 or 10 ... h6 Black would obtain a version of So-Moriadabadi in which White had spent a tempo on the not-obviously-useful move Re1.

11 Ng5!

Emphasizing the drawback of Black's previous move.

11 ... Nf8 12 exf5 gxf5

Of course "every Russian schoolboy knows" that this has to be played, dangerous or not, rather than taking with the knight and letting White have the e4-square.

13 f4 Qd7

It looks as though Black is aiming to evacuate the king to the queenside, but this doesn't prove possible. However in truth Kramnik's bold idea at move 10 looks hard to justify, since 13 ... exf4 14 Bd4! is simply bad, while after Postny's 13 ... Neg6!? 14 fxe5 dxe5 15 Qf3 Qd7 16 Nc3 0-0-0 17 Rad1 Black also has difficulty in keeping the situation under control.

14 c4 Neg6 15 Nc3 h6 16 Nf3 e4 17 Nd4 (Diagram 16)

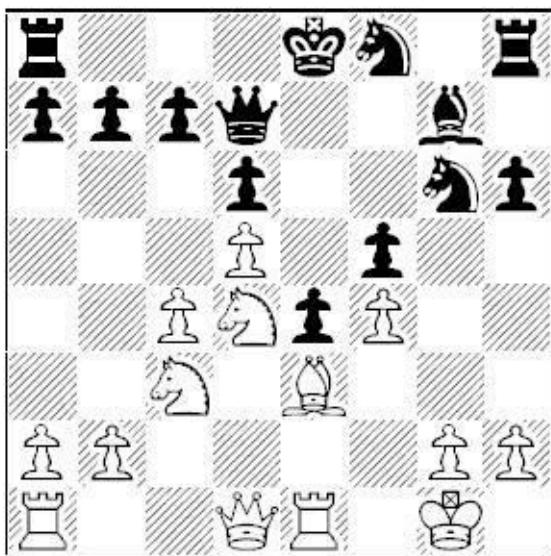


Diagram 16 (B)

17 ... h5

Directed against Qh5, but still a rather desperate-looking move; where is Black's king going to go? Black decides against 17 ... 0-0-0, no doubt in view of 18 Ncb5 a6 19 Na7+! Kb8 20 Ndc6+ Ka8 (20 ... bxc6 21 dxc6 wins) 21 Nxd8 Qxd8 22 Qa4 (Erenburg), when White is probably winning.

18 Ncb5 Kf7

Black is torn to pieces after 18 ... a6 19 Nxf5!, for example 19 ... Bxb2 (19 ... axb5 20 Nxg7+ Qxg7 21 Bd4 Qf7 22 Bxh8 Nxh8 23 Rxe4+ Kd8 24 Qb3 is also terrible) 20 Qa4 Kd8 21 Rab1 Bf6 22 Qa5, when there is no real alternative to just playing 22 ... Kc8 and carrying on in a dire position.

19 Ne6! Nxe6 20 dxe6+ Kxe6 21 Qd5+ Ke7 (Diagram 17)

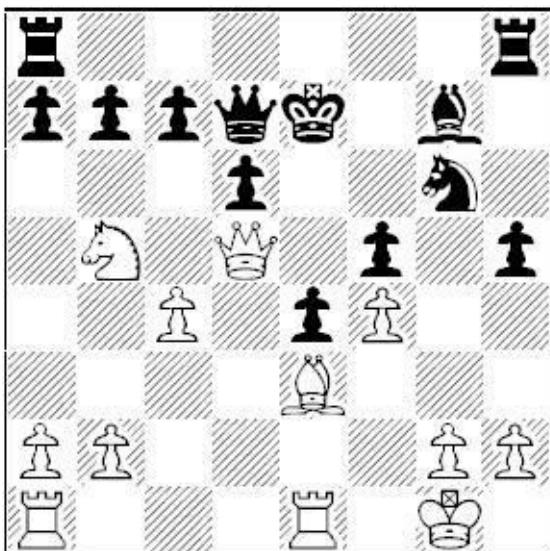


Diagram 17 (W)

22 c5!?

Possibly Sutovsky gets a bit carried away here. It seems as though the strongest move was 22 Rad1, when 22 ... c6 23 Qxd6+ Qxd6 24 Nxd6 is much better for White than a similar continuation after the game move, since White is not only better developed, but also still has the square c5 available for his pieces. 22 Nxc7 Qxc7 23 Qxf5 too is probably a better way to sacrifice a piece than the game.

22 ... c6

The only move: 22 ... Qc6 23 cxd6+ cxd6 24 Qb3 is dreadful.

23 cxd6+

In contrast to 22 Rad1, 23 Qxd6+ Qxd6 24 Nxd6 Ke6 now gives White nothing.

23 ... Kf8 24 Qb3 cxb5 25 Rac1

A bold sacrifice, but probably it shouldn't have been enough.

25 ... Qf7

The only move, but the associated run with the king to h7 turns out not to be the right idea. If 25 ... Qxd6 White doesn't fall for 26 Bc5?? Bd4+ but just brings all his pieces into the attack and wins: 26 Red1 Qf6 27 Rc7.

26 Qxb5 a6 27 Qb6 (Diagram 18)

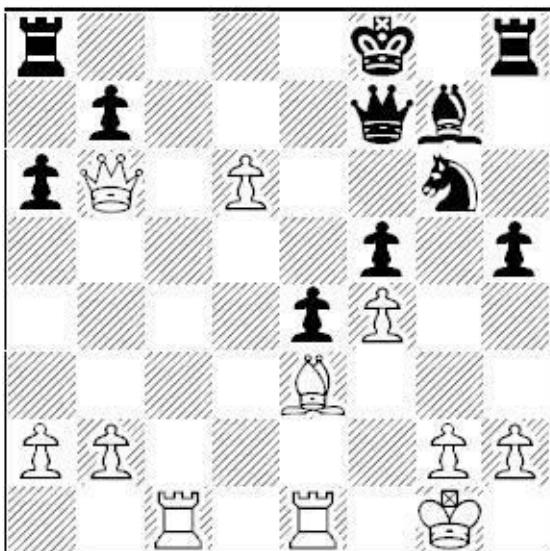


Diagram 18 (B)

27 ... Kg8?

As Erenburg shows, the alternative set-up with 27 ... Bf6! probably refutes White's attack: 28 Rc7 Qe6 29 Rd1 (29 Qxb7 Rd8 30 Bc5? Nxf4 wins for Black) 29 ... Rd8 30 Qxb7 Rg8, when Black's pieces all come into active play and the king on f8 is surprisingly invulnerable. However, as he points out with a certain amount of understatement, "for human player is not so easy".

28 Red1 Kh7?

This loses; still 28 ... Bf6 was better, even with the lost tempo and g8 blocked off for the rook, but Kramnik was hardly likely to play it in this worse version.

29 Rc7 Qf8 30 Bd4 Rg8 31 Qxb7 e3 (Diagram 19)

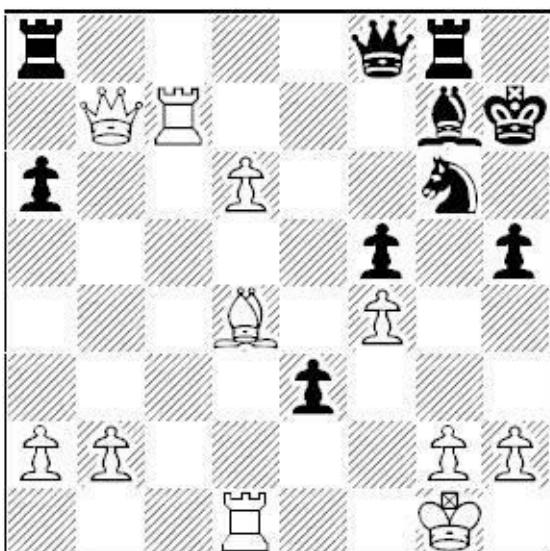


Diagram 19 (W)

32 Rf7!

Not of course 32 Bxg7?? Rxg7 33 Rxg7+ Qxg7 34 Qxa8 e2 35 Re1 Qd4+ 36 Kh1 Qf2.

32 ... Rb8

32 ... e2 33 Re1 changes nothing.

33 Qd7 Rd8 34 Qxf5 Qxf7 35 Qxf7 Rxd6 36 Kf1 Nxf4 37 Qf5+ Rg6 38 Qxf4 Rf8 39 Qxf8 Bxf8 40 Bxe3 Re6 41 Kf2 Kg6 42 Rd5 Be7 43 Bc5 Bf6 44 b3 Be5 45 g3 h4 46 gxh4 Bxh2 47 h5+ Kh7 48 Kf3 Be5 49 Rd7+ Kh6 50 Kg4 Bg7 51 Rd6 1-0

A fine attacking game, although actually a little untypical for the play after 4 ... d6. Still, White can always expect a pleasant game in these lines, I think; the exchange of the light-squared bishops and the space advantage always make his game more comfortable.

Looking a Little Deeper 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 d3

Black has tried a multitude of moves at this point, as you can imagine. Besides the main 4 ... Bc5 and 4 ... d6, 4 ... Bd6 and 4 ... Ne7 are both very decent moves occasionally punted even by the 2600+ club, and 4 ... Nd4 is also worth a look.

4 ... Bd6 (Diagram 20)

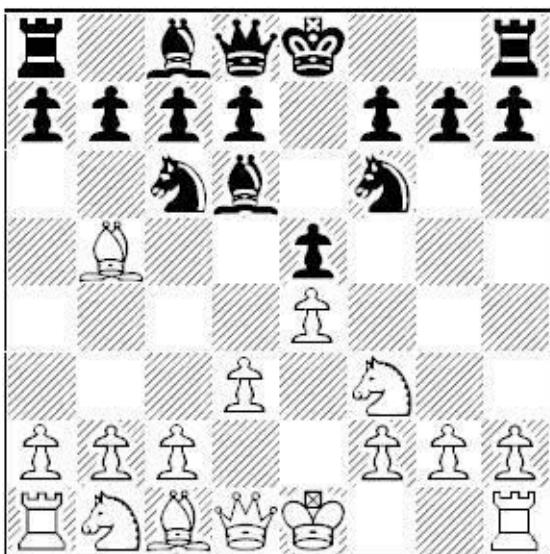


Diagram 20 (W)

This is a very reasonable move, similar to the recently fashionable 4 ... Bd6 after 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bb5 (or indeed 1 b3 e5 2 Bb2 Nc6 3 e3 Nf6 4 Bb5). Black intends to play ... 0-0 ... Re8 and ... Bf8, with or without ... a6, reaching a normal Lopez position, and he figures White's slow development is going to stop him doing anything much in the centre in the meantime.

Alternatively:

a) 4 ... Ne7 (Diagram 21),

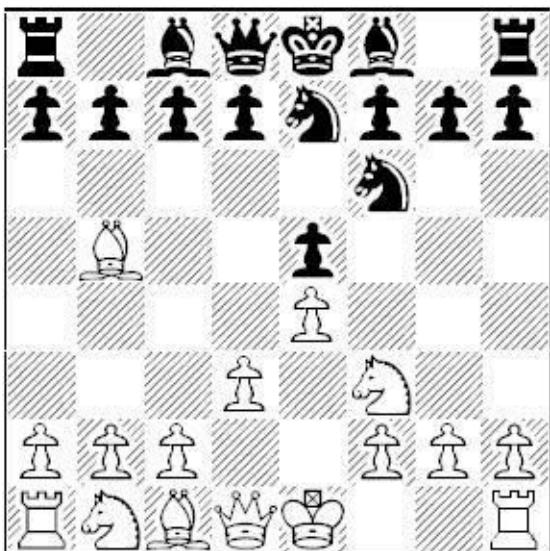


Diagram 21 (W)

a theoretical battleground of the 1880's, relies on the entertaining trick 5 Nxe5?? c6 followed by ... Qa5+, but also begins the ... Ne7-g6 manoeuvre typical of these quiet Ruy/Giuoco positions. White shouldn't let Black play that in peace; if Black is wasting two tempi White can afford to spend two on d3-d4, so 5 0-0 Ng6 (after the immediate 5 ... c6 I think White should go for 6 Bc4, with the same idea of breaking in the centre, and so that after 6 ... Ng6 7 d4 Black has no time for 7 ... d6? in view of 8 dx5 Nxe5 9 Nxe5 dx5 10 Bxf7+) 6 d4 (Black can't hold the centre in view of the pin on the d-pawn) 6 ... c6 7 dx5 Nxe4 8 Bd3 (White might also venture 8 Re1 Nxf2 9 Kxf2 Qb6+ 10 Kg3!? cxb5 11 Be3, but probably it's more relaxing not to play with the king on g3) 8 ... d5 (8 ... Nc5 9 Bg5 Be7 10 Bxe7 Qxe7 11 Nc3 is also nice for White) 9 exd6 Nxd6 10 Re1+ Be7 11 Qe2 Bf5 12 Bg5 Bxd3 13 Qxd3 0-0 14 Bxe7 Nxe7 15 Nc3, and White enjoyed a decided initiative in this symmetrical structure, V.Papin-Y.Vovk, Lvov 2008.

b) 4 ... Nd4 is actually not a great move; White's d3 is a more useful developing move than Black's ... Nf6 in a Bird, and by comparison with Rubinstein's 4 ... Nd4 in the Four Knights, d3 is obviously a better move to have in than Nc3. White should continue in obvious fashion with 5 Nxd4 exd4 6 e5 Nd5 7 0-0, and now Black's only reasonable move is 7 ... c6 (7 ... Bc5?! 8 Qg4 was already dreadful in M.Palac-L.Susini, Corsica 2009) 8 Bc4 d6 (8 ... Nb6 9 Bb3 d5 10 exd6 Qxd6 – 10 ... Bxd6 11 Re1+ is even worse – 11 Re1+ is very nice for White), but after the pragmatic 9 Bxd5 cxd5 10 Bf4 White is simply better; he meets either 10 ... Be7 or 10 ... Be6 with 11 Nd2, going to b3.

c) 4 ... Bc5 and 4 ... d6 are the two main moves, of course, and we saw them both in the introductory games.

Returning to 4 ... Bd6, White does best to change plans slightly – ... Bd6 is an ideal move for Black in a set-up with Bxc6 – with:

5 c3 a6

Black basically has to choose between a ... Bc5 and a ... Bf8 set-up. An example of the ... Bf8 approach is 5 ... 0-0 6 0-0 Re8 7 Nbd2 a6 8 Ba4 Bf8 9 Re1 b5 10 Bb3 Na5 11 Bc2 c5 12 d4 cxd4 13 cxd4 d6 14 b3 exd4 15 Nxd4 Bb7 16 Bb2 g6, a pretty normal series of Lopez moves in M. Perez Candelario-S.Yeke, European Ch., Kusadasi 2006, and now maybe White might have tried 17 a4, for example 17 ... bxa4 18 Rxa4 Bg7 19 Qa1, and perhaps White can make something of his extra pawn after 19 ... Nc6 20 Nxc6 Bxc6 21 Rxa6.

6 Ba4 b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 Nbd2 Bc5 9 0-0 (Diagram 22)

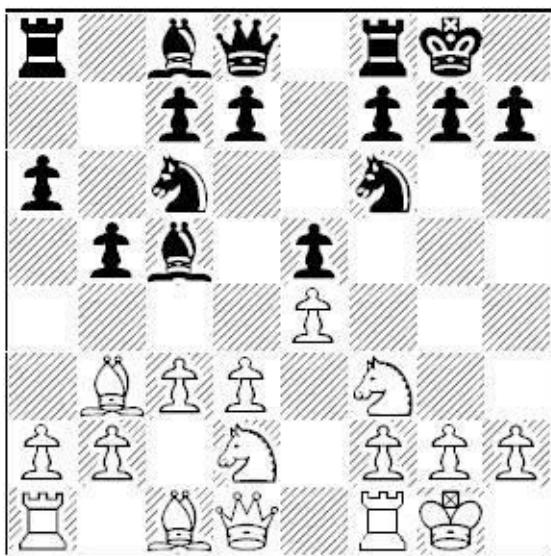


Diagram 22 (B)

9 ... d5

If Black doesn't do this then he is a tempo down on the popular system with 3 ... a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Bc5!?, albeit that White is playing a rather uncritical d3 set-up.

10 exd5 Nxd5 11 Ne4 Be7 12 Re1 Kh8 (Diagram 23)

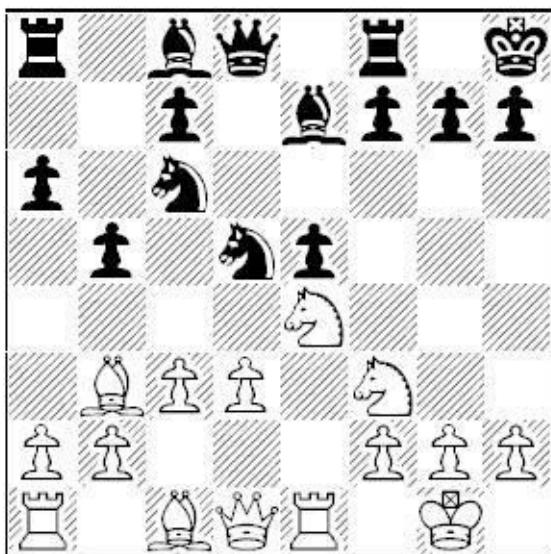


Diagram 23 (B)

A.Berescu-E.Chifor, Sarata Monteou 2011. Now perhaps White should have tried the immediate 13 d4, for example 13 ... exd4 14 Nxd4 Nxd4 15 Qxd4 Be6 16 Be3 when, surprisingly at first sight, White's more compact pawns give him a definite small edge.

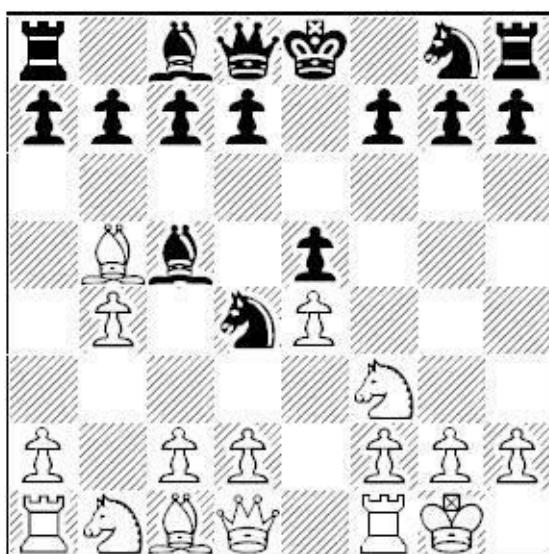
Summary

6 b3 is a clever attempt to breathe some life into a variation which is normally regarded as a little stodgy. It's very typical of Luke McShane's approach to the game; really White just wants to develop his pieces and play, but he makes Black solve slightly different problems from the normal Berlin or Exchange schemas. It would suit players who like a more complex middlegame struggle as opposed to the technical Berlin semi-endgame.

Chapter Six

An Evans Gambit in the Lopez John Emms

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Bc5 4 0-0 Nd4 5 b4!? (Diagram



1)

Diagram 1 (B)

Black often meets 3 ... Bc5 4 0-0 with 4 ... Nf6, reaching the Classical Berlin Variation. In fact, until I checked my databases I was sure that 4 ... Nf6 was *the* most popular choice, but I was mistaken – by a short distance the most popular move is actually 4 ... Nd4.

4 ... Nd4 is a strange line – strange in that it feels like this second move from Black's knight should somehow lead to a comfortable edge for White, whereas in reality White finds it quite tough to obtain anything meaningful in the main line after 5 Nxd4 Bxd4 6 c3 Bb6 7 d4 c6 8 Ba4 d6. What's more, if White isn't careful (or maybe even if he is!) there's a danger of the position fizzling out into a lifeless equality.

Given that the b5-bishop is attacked, White's choices after 4 ... Nd4 are limited. However, there *is* one way for White to mix things up: the Evans-style gambit 5 b4!?, and this is the subject of this chapter. I can't remember exactly when I first became aware of the existence of 5 b4 (it was first played in the 1960s), but I do remember being attracted to it – both by the possibilities it creates and its surprise value.

Just recently I was given the opportunity to play 5 b4 in a London League match, and this provided an ignition to take an updated look at the gambit.

J.Emms-A.Adelaja London League 2012

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Bc5 4 0-0 Nd4 5 b4!?

Played after some thought. I'd done no specific preparation for the game, certainly wasn't ready for 4 ... Nd4, and feared that 5 Nxd4 might easily peter out into equality. So I tried a gambit I'd previously had some success with, albeit quite a long time ago!

5 ... Nxf3+

This move was played quickly, but I became more confident after my opponent then thought a while over his next move.

Alternatives, here and on Black's next move, will be covered later.

6 Qxf3 Bxb4 7 Bb2 (Diagram 2)

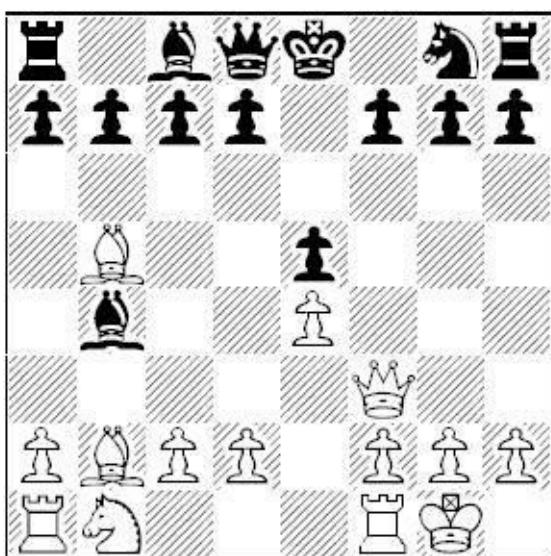


Diagram 2 (B)

By this stage I was very happy with my decision to play 5 b4. In this line I feel that White's development lead and activity is worth more than a pawn.

7 ... Qe7

DANGEROUS WEAPON! 7 ... Qf6?! is strongly met by 8 Qg3! (Diagram 3). This is a key move for White, whose advantage is already close to decisive. Notice that the b5-bishop plays a vital role by preventing ... d6.

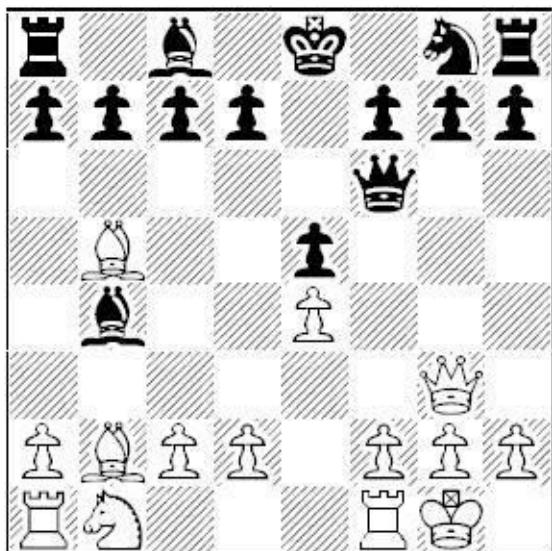


Diagram 3 (B)

A young Rafael Vaganian once stumbled into this position, and even someone who was later to become a Soviet Champion and a World Championship Candidate was unable to hold it: 8 ... Bd6 9 f4! Bf8 (a bizarre-looking move, but Black was already in trouble) 10 Nc3 (Black's idea was ... Qb6+) 10 ... exf4 11 Rxf4 Qd4+ 12 Kh1 c6 13 Na4! Qd6 14 Bxg7 Bxg7 15 Qxg7 Qxf4 16 Rf1 Qxe4 17 Qxh8 Kf8 18 Bd3 Qxa4 19 Bxh7 Qg4 20 Re1! d5 21 Bxg8 Qxg8 22 Re8+ 1-0, S.Makarichev-R.Vaganian, Soviet Union 1968.

Some other possible lines:

a) 7 ... Nf6 8 d4! (this is even better than 8 Bxe5) 8 ... exd4 9 e5 Ng8 looks very good for White.

b) 7 ... Ne7 8 Bxe5 c6 (8 ... 0-0 9 Qg3!) 9 a3 Ba5 10 Bc4 0-0 11 Qg3 Ng6 12 Bd6 with a clear advantage.

c) 7 ... c6 8 Bc4 Qe7 9 d4 d6 10 Qb3! Ba5 11 dxe5 dxe5 12 Rd1 with good compensation – Ba3 is one idea.

d) During the game I wondered about 7 ... Qg5!? here, and when I looked up the position later on, I noticed it had been played before. 8 h4 Qe7 9 Qg3 f6 10 d4 Bd6 11 Nd2 (N.AlexandriaL.Semenova, Riga 1975) is similar to the main game, and the extra h2-h4 doesn't seem to make a great deal of difference either way.

8 Qg3

8 d4!? looks like a promising alternative. One line from here is 8 ... c6 9 Bc4 (9 Ba4!?) 9 ... Nf6!?, intending 10 dxe5 Nxe4! 11 Qxe4 d5 when Black is alive.

8 ... f6

No one has played 8 ... Nf6!? here, but it might not be a bad move: 9 Bxe5 (9 Qxe5 Qxe5 10 Bxe5 c6 is perhaps a tiny edge for White) 9 ... Nh5!? 10 Qb3 Qxe5 11 Qxb4 c6 (11 ... Qxa1 12 Nc3 traps the queen) 12 Bc4 Nf4 is unclear although I would slightly favour White.

9 d4

Trying to blast through in the centre is logical, and of course very tempting. However, it's possibly better to precede d2-d4 with 9 Bc4 (**Diagram 4**).

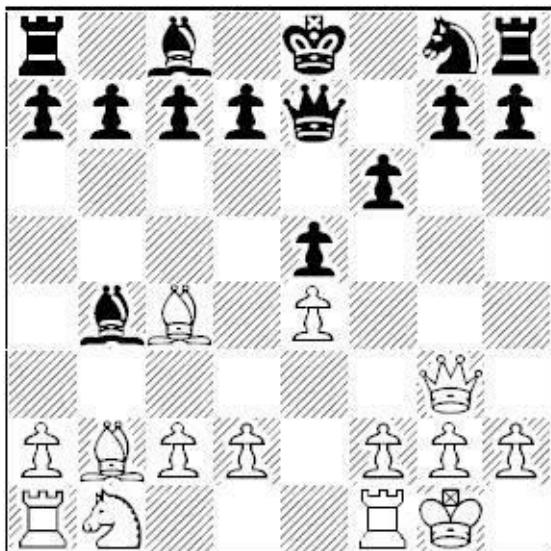


Diagram 4 (B) DANGEROUS WEAPON! 9 Bc4 introduces tactical tricks involving Qb3. For example, 9 ... d6? 10 Qb3! or 9 ... Nh6 10 d4 d6? 11 Qb3.

After 9 Bc4 Nh6 10 d4, it's wiser for Black to play 10 ... exd4 11 Bxd4, but White still has excellent compensation.

9 ... Bd6! (**Diagram 5**)

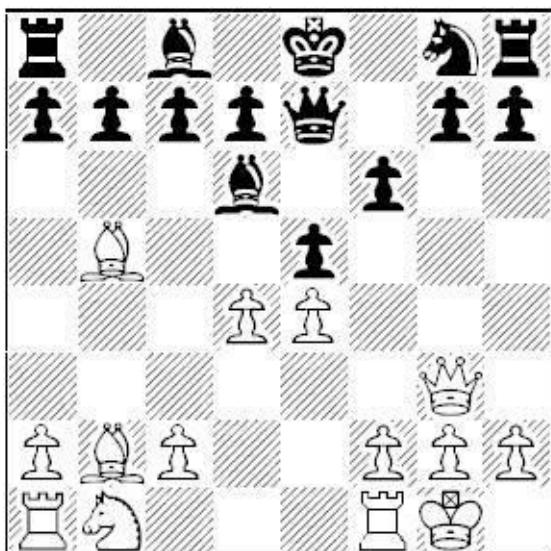


Diagram 5 (W)

Trying to keep things closed. The drawback, of course, is that the d-pawn is now blocked, but Black can hope to develop the light-squared bishop via b7, or by ... c6, ...

Bc7 and ... d6.

10 Nd2

Intending Nc4 and thus forcing Black's hand in the centre.

10 ... exd4 11 Qb3

During the game I considered sacrificing a third pawn with 11 e5! fxe5 (11 ... Bxe5? 12 f4!) but couldn't work out the consequences and so settled for something less committal. *Houdini* seems to favour White in this line, despite the three-pawn deficit. For example, 12 Rae1 Nh6 (if 12 ... Nf6 then 13 f4 e4 14 Bd3!) 13 f4! Nf5 14 Qd3 Ne3 15 fxe5! Nxfl 16 Qxf1 Rf8 17 exd6 Rxfl+ 18 Kxfl Qxe1+ 19 Kxe1 and I prefer White in this complicated ending.

11 f4 is also possible.

11 ... c6 12 Bd3

12 Bc4 seems more natural, but Black's knight is going to h6 in any case, and I felt that Black may later gain time with ... b5.

12 ... Nh6 (Diagram 6)

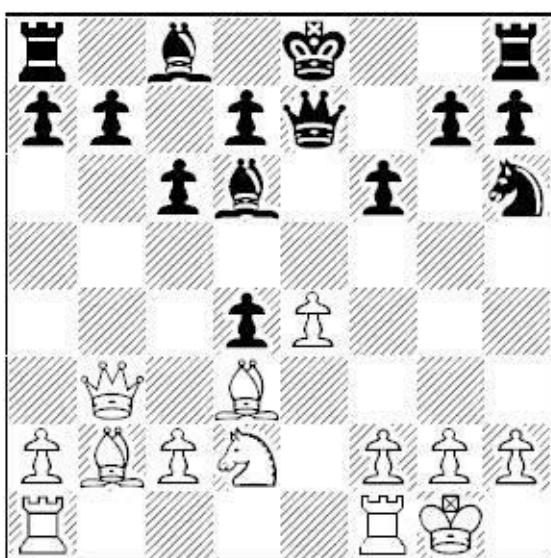


Diagram 6 (W)

13 Nf3?

This is too slow. White should get on with it, with 13 f4!.

13 ... Be5

My plan was to answer 13 ... c5 with 14 c3, but here 14 ... b5! would suddenly give Black counterplay. That said, 13 ... Be5 is also not bad.

14 Nxe5 fxe5 15 f4 d6 16 fxe5 dxe5 17 Ba3? Qg5??

I was certainly helped here by the fact that my opponent was already in huge time trouble. Both of us overlooked the simple counter-threat 17 ... Be6! when Black grabs the advantage.

18 Rf2 (Diagram 7)

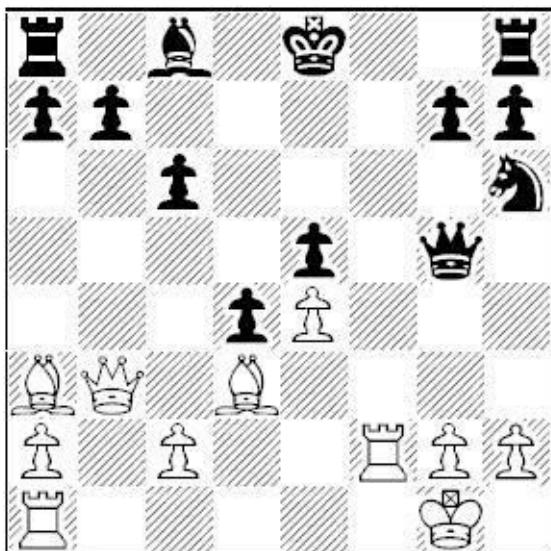


Diagram 7 (B)

18 ... Qg6?

Losing immediately. I was planning to answer 18 ... Ng4 with 19 Rafl! Nxf2 20 Rxf2, when White's attack with queen, rook and two bishops will prove too strong for Black.

19 Qb4

The dual threat of mate on e7 and Rf8+ is decisive.

19 ... Qg5 20 Rf8+ Rxf8 21 Qxf8+ Kd7 22 Qd6+ Ke8 23 Rf1 1-0

Looking a Little Deeper 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Bc5 4 0-0 Nd4 5 b4!?

In this position Black has played the following three moves:

A: 5 ... Bxb4

B: 5 ... Bb6

C: 5 ... Nxf3+

The only other remotely sensible-looking move is 5 ... Nxb5?!, but 6 bxc5 looks good for White, who should somehow be able to exploit the poor position of Black's knight.

A) 5 ... Bxb4

Black takes the pawn immediately, without exchanging on f3. This prevents White from activating his queen via Qxf3-g3, as we saw in my game with Adelaja. On the other hand, White is able to compromise Black's structure by taking on d4.

6 Nxd4 exd4 (Diagram 8)

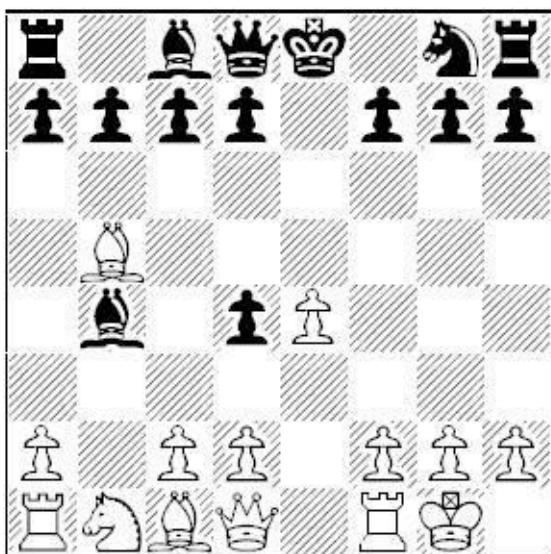


Diagram 8 (W) TRICKY TRANPOSITION: This position could also be reached via the Bird Defence: 3 ... Nd4 4 Nxd4 exd4 5 0-0 Bc5 and now 6 b4!? Bxb4.

7 c3!?

I feel that this pawn move, virtually a novelty, might be an important nuance which gives Black new problems to solve.

White has nearly always played 7 Bb2 here, after which 7 ... Bc5 (the most common response) 8 c3 transposes to our main line, below, as does 7 ... Qf6 8 c3 Bc5. However, Black has a safer option with 7 ... Ne7! 8 Bxd4 0-0, returning the pawn and focussing on catching up in development. Black seems to have good chances of

equalizing here. For example, 9 Qc1 a6 10 Be2 Nc6 11 Be3 d5 12 c3 Be7 13 exd5 Qxd5 14 d4 Bf5 15 Nd2 Rfe8 with a roughly level position, similar to one in the mainline Petroff, M.Jurcik-T.Hirneise, Prievidza 2009. The main idea behind 7 c3 is to eliminate this safer option for Black.

7 ... Bc5

Black has a number of alternatives here. It's by no means easy to dampen White's initiative, but Black might be able to do it with precise defence. Let's take a look at a few lines: a) 7 ... dxc3 8 Qb3! (**Diagram 9**) gives White promising play.

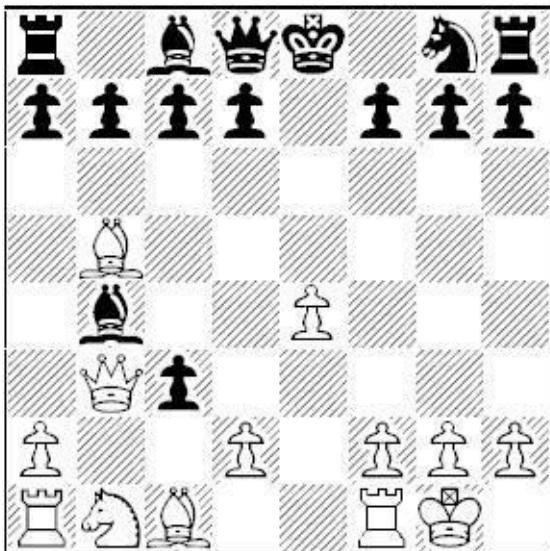


Diagram 9 (B)

For example, 8 ... Qe7 (if 8 ... cxd2 then 9 Bb2! forces the ugly 9 ... Bf8) 9 Nxc3 (or 9 d4!? c6 10 Bd3 Nf6 11 Nxc3 with good compensation) 9 ... c6 (if 9 ... Nf6? then 10 Bb2! Nf6 (10 ... cxb5? loses to 11 Nd5) 11 e5 Ng4 12 h3 Bxc3 (or 12 ... Nxe5 13 Rfe1) 13 Ba3!.

b) 7 ... c6 8 Bc4 (8 cxb4 cxb5 9 Bb2 Ne7 10 Bxd4 0-0 11 Nc3 looks very slightly better for White) 8 ... Be7! (8 ... Bc5? is met by 9 Bxf7+!, 8 ... Bd6 by 9 e5!, and 8 ... dxc3 9 Qb3 Qe7 10 Nxc3 offers White good compensation) 9 Re1 transposes to line 'c'.

c) 7 ... Be7!? is a clever defence. Black allows White to regain his pawn and plans to fight back in the centre with ... c6 and ... d5.

c1) 8 cxd4 c6 9 Bc4 d5 10 exd5 cxd5 (10 ... Nf6!?) 11 Bb5+ Bd7 12 Bxd7+ Qxd7 13 Re1 reaches an interesting position. White's doubled d-pawns mean that Black is doing well from a structural point of view, but this is counterbalanced by problems with his king. 13 ... Nf6? is answered by 14 Ba3, so Black will have to make some kind of concession, probably by either castling into an open queenside or by ... Kf8.

c2) 8 Re1!?

(**Diagram 10**)

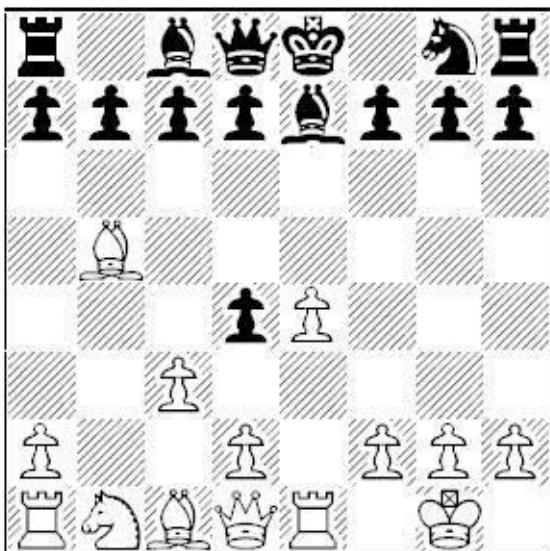


Diagram 10 (B)

keeps the gambit offer open and takes steps against Black's plan of ... c6 and ... d5. Black can either grab the pawn or carry on developing: c21) 8 ... dxc3 9 d4!? (or 9 Nxc3 c6 10 Bc4 d6 11 Qb3 Nh6 12 d4 with good play) 9 ... c6 10 Bc4 with excellent compensation, e.g. 10 ... d5 11 exd5 cxd5 12 Bb5+ Bd7 13 Nxc3 and the threats include Ba3.

c22) 8 ... c6 9 Bc4 d5 (9 ... d6 10 Qb3 Nh6 11 cxd4 0-0 12 Bb2 feels better for White) 10 exd5 cxd5 (10 ... Nf6?? 11 Ba3 wins) 11 Bb5+. Here Black must play 11 ... Kf8, which looks easier to play for White, as 11 ... Bd7 is strongly met by 12 Qg4!.

8 Bb2! (Diagram 11)

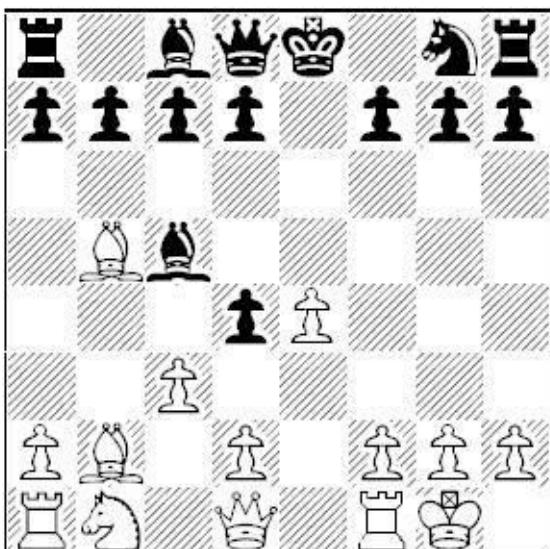


Diagram 11 (B)

Now we've transposed to the position normally reached via 7 Bb2 Bc5 (instead of 7 ... Ne7!) 8 c3.

8 ... Qf6

Alternatively:

a) 8 ... dxc3 9 Nxc3 is very risky here. For example, 9 ... c6 10 Nd5!? (10 Bc4 is also good) 10 ... Bf8 11 Qh5 cxd5 12 exd5 Qb6 13 Rae1+ Ne7 14 Ba3 Kd8 15 d6 1-0, C. Jensen-P.Nielsen, correspondence 2009.

b) 8 ... c6 9 cxd4! Be7 is much more favourable for White than the comparable lines with 7 ... Be7, because in effect Black has lost a tempo with ... Bb4-c5-e7. 10 Ba4 d5 11 exd5 Qxd5 was A.Naiditsch-R.Kula, Trzcianka 2012, and here the simple 12 Re1! leaves Black with many problems to solve.

c) 8 ... d3 only temporarily disrupts White, who is left with a strong pawn centre: 9 Bxd3 Ne7 (or 9 ... d5 10 exd5 Qxd5 11 Be4!) 10 Bc2 0-0 11 d4 Bb6 12 c4 d6 13 Nc3 with some advantage, S.Sulskis-A.Khamidulin, St Petersburg 1996.

d) 8 ... Ne7!? might be Black's best option here. After 9 cxd4 Bb6 10 d5 0-0 11 Bc4 (11 d6!? or 11 Na3 intending Nc4) 11 ... d6 12 d4 Ng6 White occupied the centre but Black's set-up was pretty solid in R.Kasimdzhanov-B.Lepelletier, French League 2007.

9 Qh5! Bb6 10 cxd4 (Diagram 12)

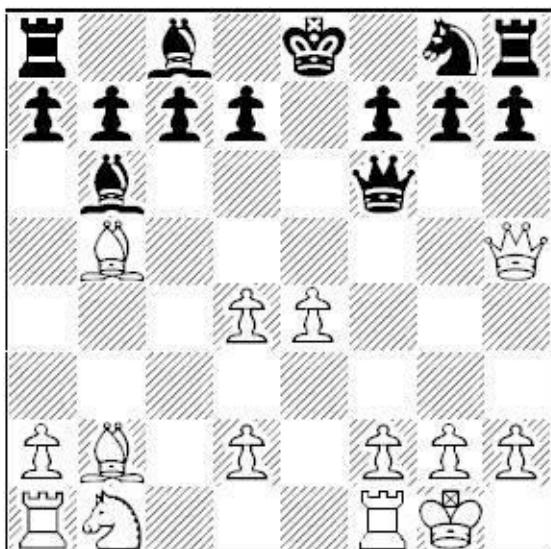


Diagram 12 (B)

10 ... Ne7!

DANGEROUS WEAPON! 10 ... Bxd4? loses to 11 e5 Qb6 12 e6!, exploiting pins on both the f7-and d7-pawns! 12 ... Nh6 13 exd7+ Bxd7 14 Bxd7+ (P.Staniszewski-A.Ostoja Domaradzka, Wisla 1992) wins a piece in view of 14 ... Kxd7 15 Qd5+.

If 10 ... c6 White could just play 10 Bc4, but I would also be tempted by 11 Bd3 which takes squares away from the black queen in the event of e4-e5.

11 e5 Qf5

11 ... Qg6 12 Qf3! would be similar.

12 Qe2 0-0 (Diagram 13)

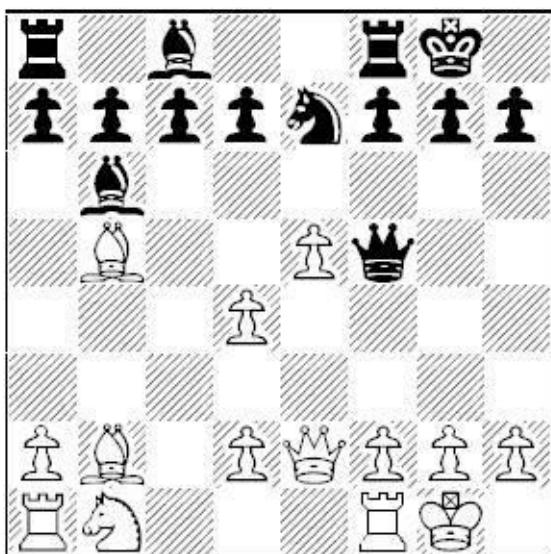


Diagram 13 (W)

We've been following the game L.Masieev-A.Tolush, correspondence 1969. White has a number of options here, but one way to keep an edge is 13 a4 c6 (if 13 ... a5 then 14 Na3 intending Nc4) 14 Bd3 Qe6 15 a5 Bc7 16 Nc3, maintaining the pressure.

B) 5 ... Bb6 (Diagram 14)

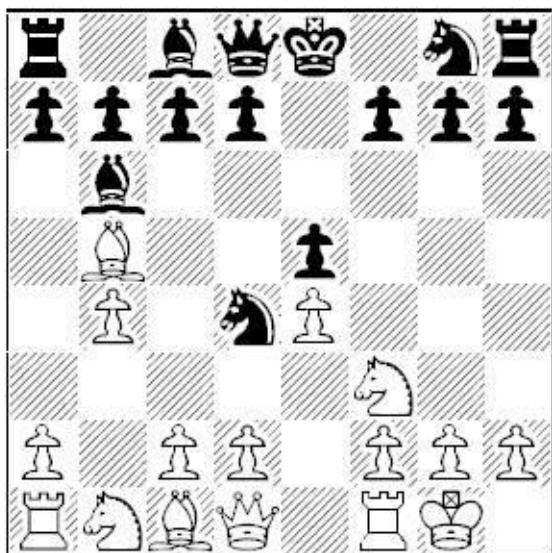


Diagram 14 (W)

The solid option. Black declines the pawn.

6 Nxd4 Bxd4

TRICKY TRANSPOSITION: 6 ... exd4 would again transpose to the Bird Defence. This time it's 3 ... Nd4 4 Nxd4 exd4 5 0-0 Bc5 6 b4 Bb6.

White has more than one way to strive for an advantage here: a) 7 c4 c6 (or 7 ... dxc3 8 Nxc3 c6 9 Ba4 Ne7 10 d4 d5, A.Gipslis-O.Pavlenko, Riga 1975, and now 11 b5 0-0 12 Ba3 – Gipslis) 8 Ba4 d6 9 d3 Ne7 10 Nd2 0-0 11 Qh5 Be6 12 f4 f6 13 Nf3 Bf7 14 Qh3, R.Soffer-J.Jirka, Tel Aviv 2012. Because of the favourable pawn structure, White has possibilities on both sides of the board.

b) 7 Na3 a6 8 Bd3 Ne7 9 e5 0-0 10 Nc4 Ba7 11 a4 d5 12 exd6 cxd6 13 Ba3 Be6 14 b5, again with a small advantage for White, A.Naiditsch-R.Rapport, Eretia 2011.

7 c3 Bb6 8 d4 c6 9 Ba4 d6

9 ... Nf6? 10 dxe5 Nxe4 11 Qg4 is good for White.

The position after 9 ... d6 should be compared to the main line, 5 Nxd4 Bxd4 6 c3 Bb6 7 d4 c6 8 Ba4 d6. The question is can White in some way utilize his extra b2-b4 move?

10 b5! (Diagram 15)

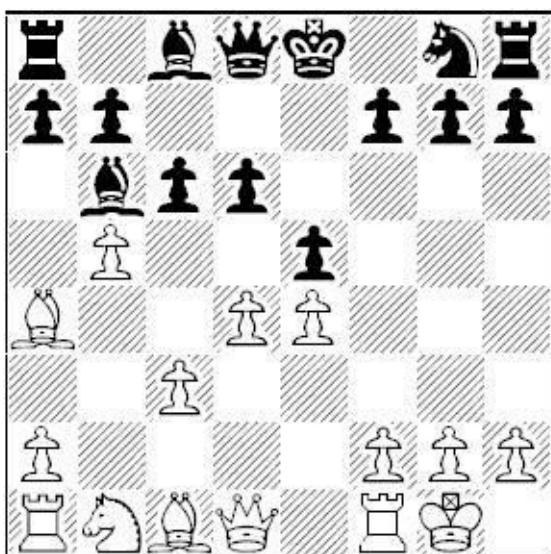


Diagram 15 (B)

Yes he can! Pressuring the c6-pawn induces Black to develop his knight on e7 rather than the more active f6. Black might be able to equalize with precise defence, but White's position is certainly the easier to play.

10 ... Ne7

10 ... cxb5 11 Bxb5+ Bd7 12 Na3! also looks like an edge for White.

11 bxc6 bxc6

Here Black equalized after 12 Ba3 Ba6! 13 Re1 Bb5 14 Bb3 Ng6 in A.Lutikov-D.Godes, Kishinev 1967. A possible improvement for White is 12 dxe5 dxe5 13 Qh5!, so that ... Ba6 can now be met more actively, with Rd1. Following 13 ... 0-0 14 Ba3 Qc7 15 Nd2 Ba6 16 Rfd1 the position is close to symmetrical but still looks more comfortable for White, whose ideas include Nf3 and Bb3.

C) 5 ... Nxf3+ 6 Qxf3

If I had to make a choice, I would say that 5 ... Nxf3+ is the move White players would be most happy to see. The active possibilities White gains by having the queen on f3 can soon lead to danger for Black.

6 ... Bd4

This is the only sensible alternative to 6 ... Bxb4, which was covered in my game with Adelaja, since 6 ... Bb6? simply loses a pawn to the double attack 7 Qg3!.

7 c3 Bb6 8 Qg3!

Once again this move is strong. White could also play 8 d4 exd4 and only now 9 Qg3, when 9 ... Qf6 transposes to 9 d4, below.

8 ... Qf6 (Diagram 16)

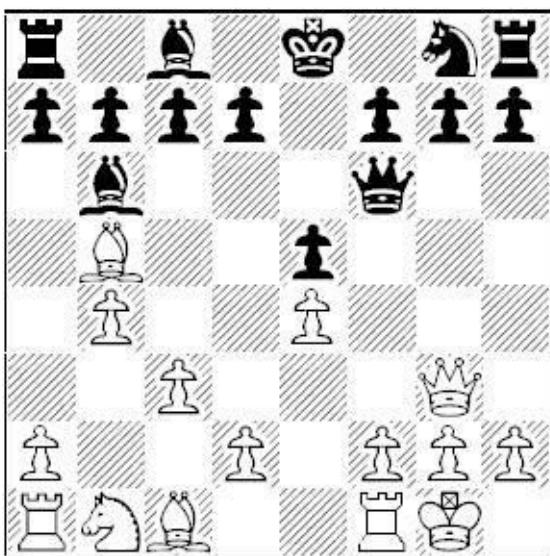


Diagram 16 (W)

9 Na3

Intending, if allowed, to eliminate the bishop with Nc4xb6. Then White will look to play the pawn break d2-d4, or f2-f4, or both!

Other options also look promising for White. For example: a) 9 d4!? exd4 10 Bf4! (10 Bg5 Qg6 11 Qe5+?! Kf8 forces Black's king to move but loses valuable time, F.Borkowski-L.Dobrovolsky, Myslenice 1987) 10 ... Ne7 11 Bxc7 Bxc7 12 Qxc7 with a small edge for White.

b) I was successful with 9 d3 (intending Bg5) 9 ... h6 10 Na3 c6 11 Ba4 g5?! (the critical line is 11 ... Ne7 12 Nc4 Bc7 13 f4!? b5 14 fxe5 Qg6 15 Nd6+ Bxd6 16 exd6 Qxg3 17 hxg3 bxa4 18 dxe7 with just a small advantage for White) 12 d4 d6 13 Nc4 Bc7 14 b5, J.Emms-A.Payen, Paris 1994 (**Diagram 17**).

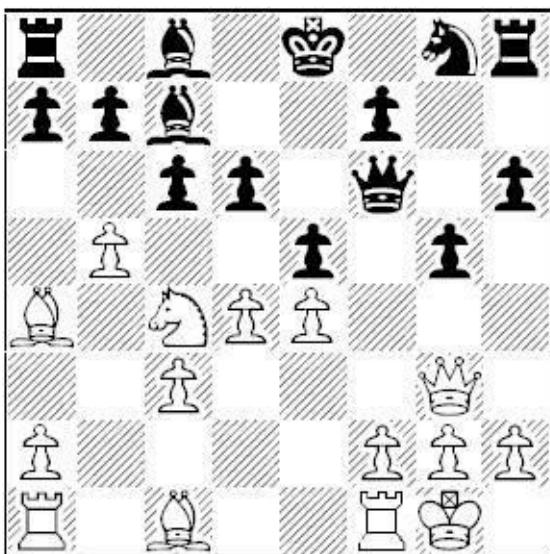


Diagram 17 (B)

Black is already in some trouble, and 14 ... a6? 15 b6! only made matters worse.

Looking at the position after 9 d3 today, it appears that Bg5 isn't such a big deal and Black probably does better to delay or even avoid ... h6. For example, 9 ... Ne7 10 Na3 (10 Bg5 Qg6 11 Qh4 f6 12 Be3 0-0 is okay for Black) 10 ... c6 (not 10 ... 0-0 11 Bg5!) 11 Ba4 Bc7 (or even 11 ... d5!?). Overall, it seems to be more logical for White to keep the option of playing d4 in one go.

9 ... c6

Another typical line would be 9 ... Ne7 10 Nc4 (10 d4!? exd4 11 Nc4; 10 Be2!?) 10 ... c6 11 Ba4 (11 Nxb6 axb6 12 Bc4 is also possible) 11 ... Bc7 12 d4 b5! (if 12 ... d6 13 b5! and Black is under some pressure) 13 dxe5 Qg6 14 Nd6+ Bxd6 15 exd6 Qxg3 16 hxg3 bxa4 17 dxe7 Kxe7 and White enjoys a slight edge in view of his stronger pawn structure.

10 Be2! (**Diagram 18**)

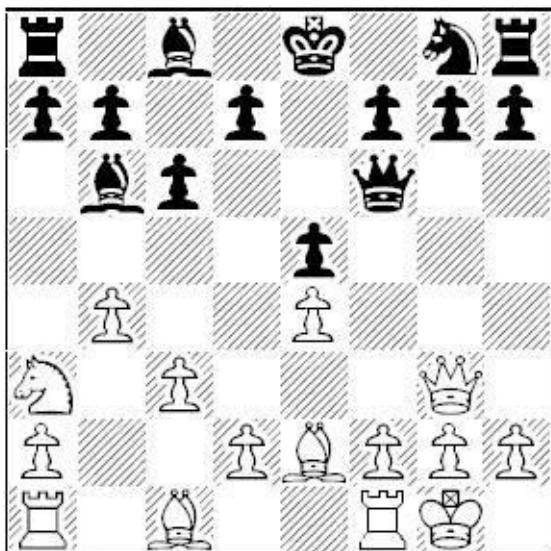


Diagram 18 (B)

Clearing the bishop out of the way and avoiding any ... b5 forks which might occur after Ba4. White is ready to play Nc4 and then aim for the d2-d4 or f2-f4 break.

10 ... d6 11 Nc4 Ne7 12 d4 (Diagram 19)

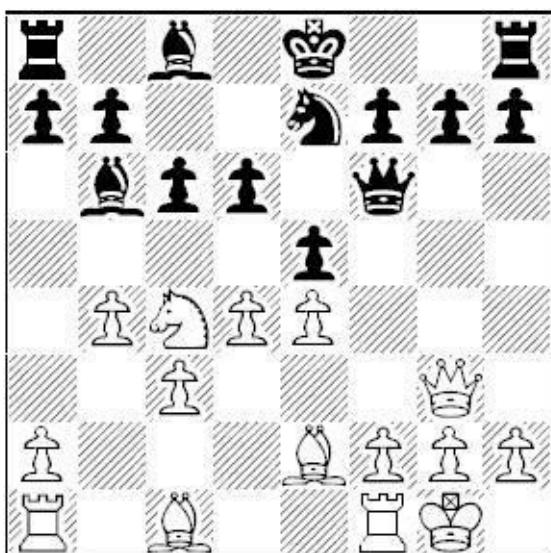


Diagram 19 (B)

This is a very nice position for White. J.Sendera-W.Zygo, Rzeszow 2000, continued: **12 ... Ng6**

12 ... Bc7 is wiser.

13 Bg5

13 f4! exd4 14 e5! is very strong.

13 ... Qe6 14 f4 exf4 15 Bxf4 Nxf4 16 Qxf4 Bc7 17 Ne3 0-0 18 Bg4 Qe7 19 Bxc8 Raxc8 20 Rf3 Rce8 21 Nf5 Qe6 and White had built up a powerful attack on the kingside. Indeed, after 22 Raf1!, threatening Rg3 followed by Qh6, there's very little that Black can do. For example, 22 ... f6 23 Rh3 g6 24 Rxh7!.

Summary I can recommend 5 b4!? as a sharp weapon for White after 3 ... Bc5 4 0-0 Nd4. It's certainly not a new line, but it's still rare enough to carry some surprise value, and in any case I feel that White has good chances of keeping some advantage.

5 ... Nxf3+ 6 Qxf3 (Line C) looks good for White, whether Black takes on b4 or not. Declining the pawn with 5 ... Bb6 is more solid, but Line B shows how White can utilize his advanced b-pawn. Finally, 5 ... Bxb4 (Line A) is generally considered to be Black's theoretically approved response, but here I feel that 6 Nxd4 exd4 7 c3! (rather than the usual 7 Bb2) gives Black some new problems to solve.

Chapter Seven

Fighting the Exchange Variation

John Cox

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Bxc6 dxc6 5 0-0 Bg4 6 h3 Bh5 (Diagram 1)

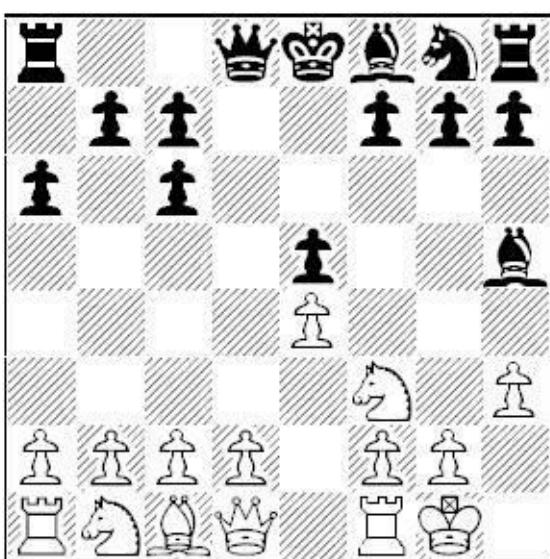


Diagram 1 (W)

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Bxc6 dxc6

The Exchange Variation. Many openings have one of these – the French, the Slav, the Caro, the Alekhine, the QGD, the QGA ... They are always annoying to the ambitious Black, and the Ruy Exchange has the additional disadvantage from Black's point of view of also being quite a strong system. Black's methods of defence in the main lines have been fairly well worked out, but White doesn't have to know very much to be very hard to beat in these.

What is needed if Black wants to keep chances to win is something more offbeat which can wrench White out of his positional, endgame-oriented course. There are quite a few methods on the market, which vary quite widely on the soundness/unbalancing spectrum. The one I'm going to discuss here is really quite unbalancing with everything that implies, but some 2600+ players – like Black in the following game – have been willing to venture it, so it certainly isn't entirely off the wall.

Game 9

R.Seger-G.Meier

Griesheim 2011

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Bxc6 dxc6 5 0-0 Bg4 (Diagram 2)

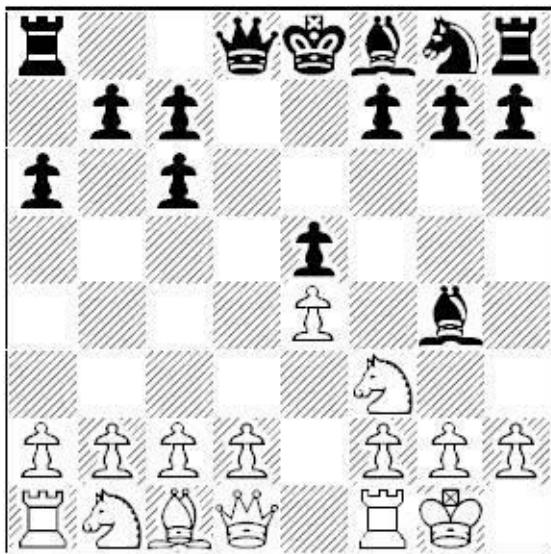


Diagram 2 (W)

This is still one of the main lines, of course.

6 h3

If White doesn't do this then Black simply defends the e-pawn at his next turn with a reasonable game in the style of various delayed Exchange systems in the Ruy, so this is the only move Black needs to prepare for.

6 ... Bh5 (Diagram 3)

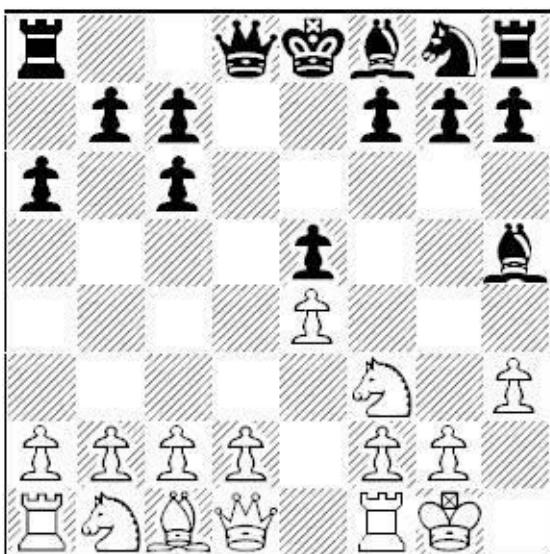


Diagram 3 (W)

But this is Black's big idea; of course he could play ... Bxf3, but if he gives up the two bishops like that he has to expect that White will always be a little better, while 6 ... h5 is the main move and the scene of some important theoretical disputes in the 1950's (at one time this system for Black was thought to be the reason why 5 0-0 was not good), and some very much less important theoretical discussions between the Kosintseva sisters, whose games against each other invariably feature this variation and continue with 7 c3 Qd3 8 hxg4 hxg4 9 Nxe5 Bd6 10 Nxd3 Bh2+ draw agreed. In our day the inventive Swede Jonny Hector was for some time the lone advocate of Black's gambit (which has recently become quite fashionable at grandmaster level).

7 g4 Bg6 8 Nxe5 Qh4

Black has also tried both 8 ... Bd6 and 8 ... f6, and we'll have a look at those in the 'Looking a Little Deeper' section, but this move, bringing the queen into the game in a very natural way, is the move which has really been revitalizing Hector's pawn sacrifice.

9 Qf3 f6 10 Nxg6

White can't hope for much if he allows this bishop to live, for example 10 Nc4 h5 11 d3 Bf7 12 Kg2 Be6.

10 ... hxg6 11 Kg2 (Diagram 4)

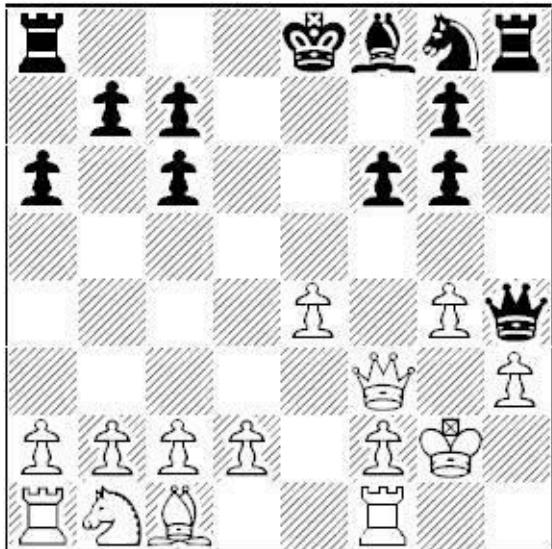


Diagram 4 (B)

11 ... g5

Again Black has some obvious alternatives, but this move will always be necessary, clamping White's weaknesses on the kingside and making room for the knight on g6.

12 d3

White has a lot of alternatives – indeed choosing among his plethora of possible arrangements of his forces while trying to get to grips with Black's somewhat indeterminate compensation is his main problem in this variation – but basically the immediate choice is between Nc3-e2 and Nd2-c4, and also d3 or d4.

12 ... Ne7 13 Rh1

13 Qg3 Qh7 wouldn't help much; Black gains a tempo on the queen with ... Bd6.

13 ... Qh7 14 Kg1

A slightly passive-looking move, but White has to move either king or queen in reply to ... Ng6.

14 ... 0-0-0 15 Nc3 Kb8 16 Be3 Ng6 17 Ne2 Bd6 (Diagram 5)

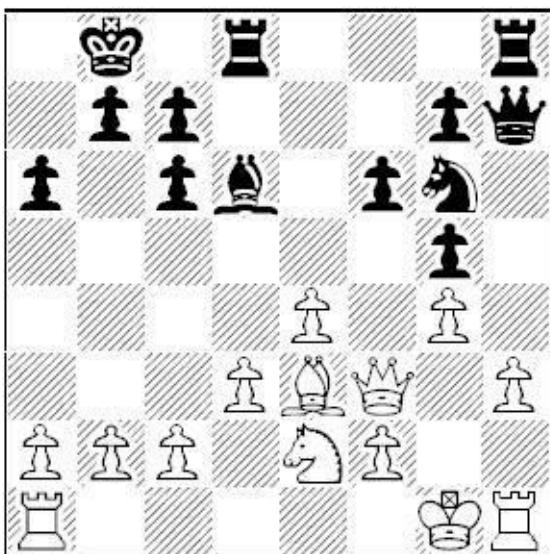


Diagram 5 (W)

Both players have finished their development in a very natural way, and it's time to assess the position and Black's compensation. This basically consists of White's rather unsafe king position, which is going to remain slightly insecure until the end of the game, and the blockade which Black enjoys over White's kingside pawns.

18 Ng3

Black is able to stop this knight coming to f5 or h5 and this move ends up being rather useless, but it's not at all easy to say what White should do instead.

DANGEROUS WEAPON! Black's compensation is probably already objectively sufficient, and what is quite certain is that his position is much easier to play.

18 ... Nh4 19 Qe2 g6 20 Kf1 Qe7 21 Rg1 Bf4

Underlining the folly of White's knight manoeuvre to g3; he loses control over f4.

22 Ke1 c5 23 Rd1

White's last few moves look as though he harboured hopes of getting away to the queenside with his king, but if so he must have realized about here that 23 Kd2 c4 24 Rad1 Qb4+ 25 Kc1 c3 26 bxc3 Qxc3 leaves him with hardly any moves he can sensibly make.

23 ... Rhe8 24 Rd2

24 Kd2 c4 25 Kc1 c3 is still very uncomfortable, for instance 26 bxc3 Qa3+ 27 Kd2 Be5. Instead White is now aiming to run his king to the queenside behind the broad back of this rook, but it's too late.

24 ... Qe6 25 c4 f5! (Diagram 6)

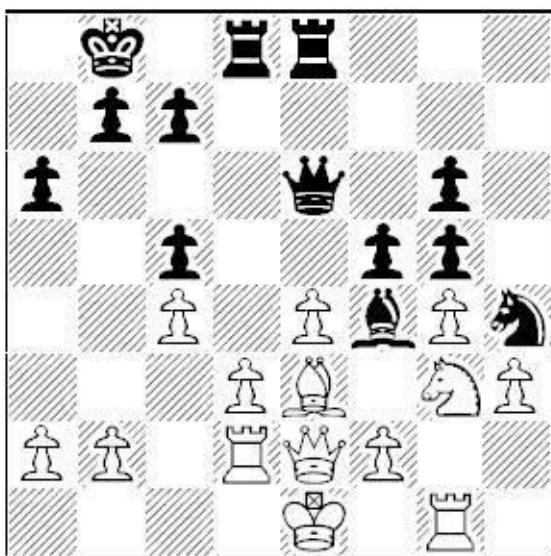


Diagram 6 (W)

Black cracks open the position before the White king can run.

26 gxf5

It looks to me as though White should nonetheless have run for it with 26 Kd1, either here or at his next turn, although to be sure his situation after 26 ... Bxe3 27 fxe3 f4 28 Nf1 f3 29 Qf2 continues to be extremely awkward.

26 ... gxf5 27 Nx_f5 Nx_f5 28 exf5 Qxf5 29 Qg4

Probably White had relied on this, but after the calm reply it is clear that he has simply misplaced the queen.

29 ... Qh7 30 Ke2 Rd4 31 Qf3 Bxe3 32 fxe3 Rf4 33 Qg3 Qh5+ 34 Ke1 Rf3 35 Qg4 Rxe3+ 36 Re2?

A dreadful move. White has simply been too battered to go on calculating. It was essential to try and run with the king with 36 Kd1, when Black doesn't have anything much better than taking the double rook ending with an extra pawn, which gives White fair chances to resist.

36 ... Qf7? (Diagram 7)

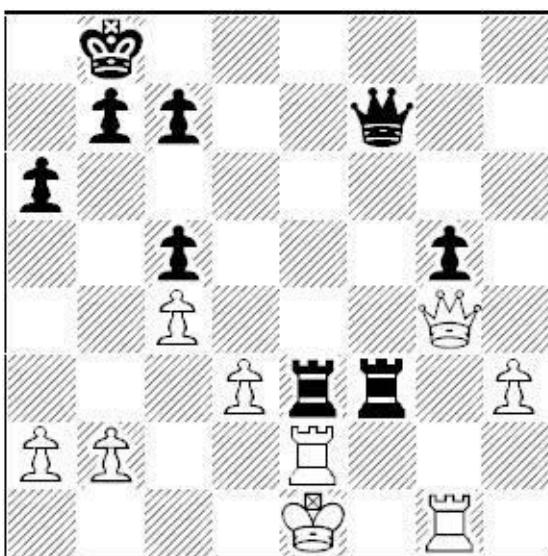


Diagram 7 (W)

And this is a horrible error in reply; no doubt the players were very short of time. 36 ... Qh7 was the way to do it; the difference is that 37 Qxg5 now allows a decisive capture on d3.

37 Rgg2?

White spurns the chance of salvation: 37 Qxg5 threatens both Rxe3 and Qg8+, and would still have allowed White to escape with his skin.

37 ... Rxd3 38 Rgf2 Rf4 39 Qxg5 Rxf2 40 Rxf2 Qxc4

The end of the time scramble, no doubt. White's king is too exposed for serious resistance in the heavy piece endgame.

41 Re2 Rxh3 42 Qd8+ Ka7 43 Qxc7 Rf3 44 Kd2 Qd3+ 45 Ke1 Qb1+ 0-1

An impressive advertisement for Black's gambit, no question. But can Black really get away with such a cavalier attitude to pawns? In the next game we'll have a look at a grandmaster attempting to deal with Black's gambit.

Game 10

M.Turner-J.L.Hammer

British League 2010

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Bxc6 dxc6 5 0-0 Bg4 6 h3 Bh5 7 g4 Bg6 8 Nxe5 Qh4
9 Qf3 f6 10 Nxg6 hxg6 11 Kg2 g5**

All as in the previous game.

12 Nc3

The first diversion. White commits himself with his knight but keeps open his options for the d-pawn.

12 ... Ne7 13 e5?! (Diagram 8)

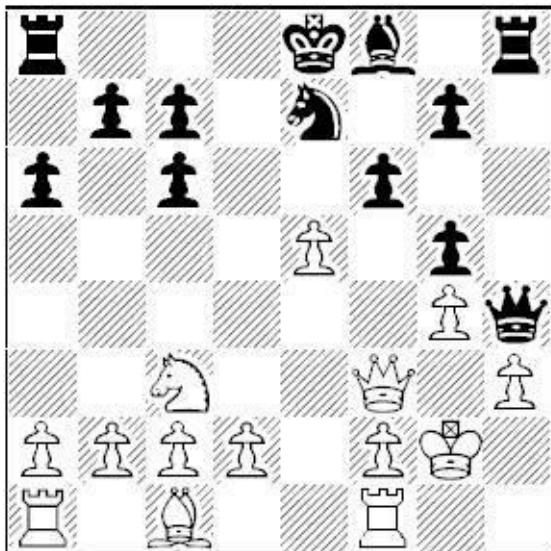


Diagram 8 (B)

Quite tempting, and briefly my computer's top choice, but it seems that Black has at least equal chances after this. Generally Matthew doesn't like to suffer without the initiative, though – perhaps there was a psychological element in Hammer's opening choice.

13 ... Ng6

A difficult choice. It was clear from the clock times that White had been caught unprepared in the opening and that Black was now in the same position. White's idea presumably was 13 ... fxe5 14 d4 but even after that Black seems to be fine; he continues not 14 ... exd4? 15 Ne4, when White does indeed succeed in grasping the initiative, but with the calm 14 ... Ng6 anyway, after which there follows 15 dxe5 Be7 when Black has pretty reasonable chances – as often in this variation the idea of ... Qh7 and ... Nh4+ is useful, when Black might even be so cheeky as to take the c2-pawn, while his pieces all have attractive prospects and the passed e-pawn is no particular danger.

14 d4

Of course not 14 exf6 Nf4+.

Black could now transpose to the line above with 14 ... fxe5, but he prefers rapid development.

14 ... 0-0-0 15 Ne2

This was White's idea, of course, to fight against the f8-bishop and protect his weakness on f4 that way. After the computer suggestion of 15 exf6 gxf6 16 Rd1 the bishop comes to d6 and Black simply has easy play and is better.

15 ... Qh7! (Diagram 9)

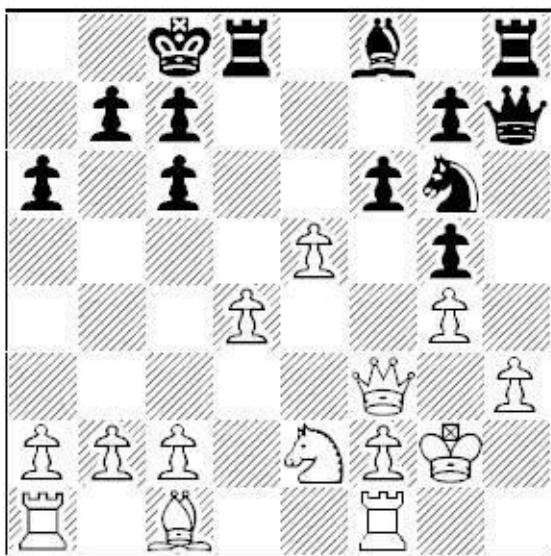


Diagram 9 (W)

DANGEROUS WEAPON! An excellent move. White can't try and cling on to all his pawns with 16 Qc3? because of 16 ... Nh4+ 17 Kg1 Qe4, so he has to give back a pawn, after which Black's activity means that he is already better.

Instead, after 15 ... fxe5 there follows the virtually forced line 16 Qf5+ Kb8 17 Rh1 Nf4+ 18 Bxf4 exf4 19 Ng1!, when the knight comes to f3 and White consolidates with approximate equality.

16 Kh2

16 ... Nh4 17 Qd3 Qxd3 18 cxd3 fxe5 19 dxe5 Rxd3 20 Be3

White is struggling, since g5 is immune because of the fork. The rest of the game is not of so much interest.

20 ... Rd5 21 e6 Rh6 22 Nc3 Re5 23 Kh1 c5 (Diagram 10)

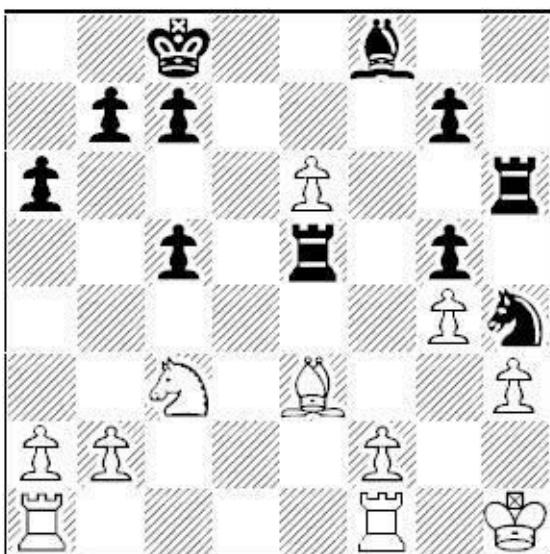


Diagram 10 (W)

A human choice. The computer is very confident about the complications attendant on the more natural 23 ... Be7 24 Bd4 Rxe6 25 Bxg7 Rh7 26 Bd4 Nf3 27 Be3 Rxh3+ 28 Kg2 Reh6 29 Ne4, but it's easy to see why they didn't appeal to Hammer.

24 Bxg5!?

A very typical Turner move. The computer prefers to continue resisting stolidly with 24 Rad1 Nf3 25 Rd5 Rxе6 26 Rfd1, which certainly gives White's pieces the best views they've had for some time, but actually the move in the game doesn't achieve any complications; it simply comes down to a choice of which miserable pawn-down position White would like to play.

24 ... Rxg5 25 f4 Rgg6 26 f5 Nxf5

The rook was trapped, so this is the only move, but good enough.

27 Rxf5 Bd6 28 Kg2 Rxе6 29 Raf1 b5 30 b3 Kb7 31 R1f2 Kc6 32 Ne2 Re3 33 Ng1 Rg3+ 34 Kf1 Rc3 35 Rg5 c4 36 bxc4 Bc5 37 cxb5+ axb5 38 Ne2 Rxh3 39 Rff5 Rh1+ 40 Kg2 R6h2+ 41 Kg3 Rh3+ 42 Kg2 R3h2+ 43 Kg3 Bd6+ 44 Kf3 Rf1+ 45 Ke3 Re1 46 Rf2 Rh3+ 47 Rf3 Rh2 48 Rf2 Bf4+ 49 Rxf4 Rexe2+ 50 Kd3 Rxa2 51 Rb4 Ra5 52 Rxg7 Ra3+ 53 Kd4 Kb6 54 Rg6+ c6 55 Rb1 Ra4+ 56 Ke5 Re2+ 57 Kf5 Rf2+ 58 Ke5 Rff4 (Diagram 11)

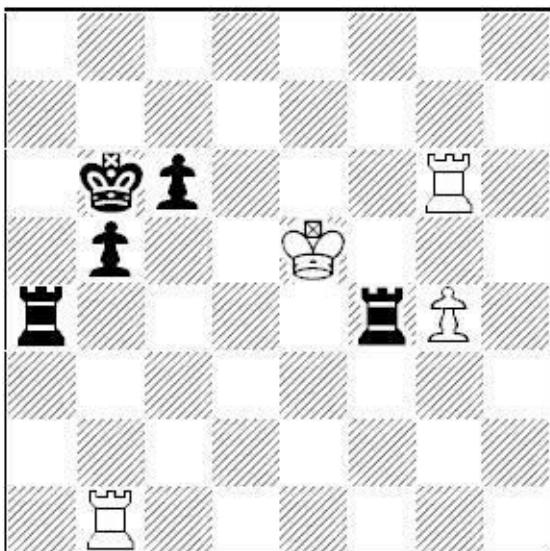


Diagram 11 (W)

59 g5

This just loses the pawn, after which it's hopeless. Matt must have missed something, since otherwise he would surely have played 59 Rg1 Rae4+ 60 Kd6 b4 61 g5, when at least he can move his passed pawn, although Black's duo should get there pretty comfortably first.

59 ... Rae4+ 60 Kd6 Rf5 61 Rd1 Rg4 62 Kd7 Rc5 63 Rg8 Rxg5 64 Rb8+ Kc5 65 Rc1+ Rc4 66 Re1 Rg7+ 67 Ke6 Rg3 68 Re5+ Kb4 69 Kd6 Rg6+ 70 Kc7 Rh4 71 Rc8 c5 72 Kb7 c4 73 Rc6 Rxc6 74 Kxc6 Rh6+ 75 Kd5 c3 0-1

No-one ever won a game by resigning, as they say, but Matt had finally had enough. This game had an entertaining sequel; in the following year's 4NCL the same pair met again, and this time Matt managed a steady draw with White after a dubious-looking piece sacrifice succeeded in delivering perpetual check. This so upset the impressionable young Black player that he rushed off at the conclusion of the game without a word, causing the other players to look at one another with pursed lips and raised eyebrows, quite the commotion in the cloistered world of these GM encounters at the top end of the 4NCL. But Matthew was understanding. "It's okay", he said. "I expect he's in a hurry to go and celebrate."

Before we get to the theory, let's just have a look at what happens if White doesn't take up the challenge. Much of the appeal of this particular Dangerous Weapon is that White doesn't have a good way of doing this at all – if he doesn't dance to Black's tune then he has to admit that his opening has failed and he is playing for equality at best.

Game 11

M.Dann-L.D.Nisipeanu

Pardubice 2012

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Bxc6 dxc6 5 0-0 Bg4 6 h3 Bh5 7 d3

The only other way White might try to play is something like 7 c3 Nf6 8 Re1 (8 d4?! exd4 9 cxd4 Bxf3 10 gxf3 Qd7 is not good), but then 8 ... Qd7 is a good move, preventing White from breaking the pin with 9 g4?? in view of 9 ... Nxg4. The best White can do then is settle for something between equality and slight inferiority with 9 Nxe5 Bxd1 10 Nxd7 Kxd7 11 Rxd1 Nxe4.

7 ... f6 (Diagram 12)

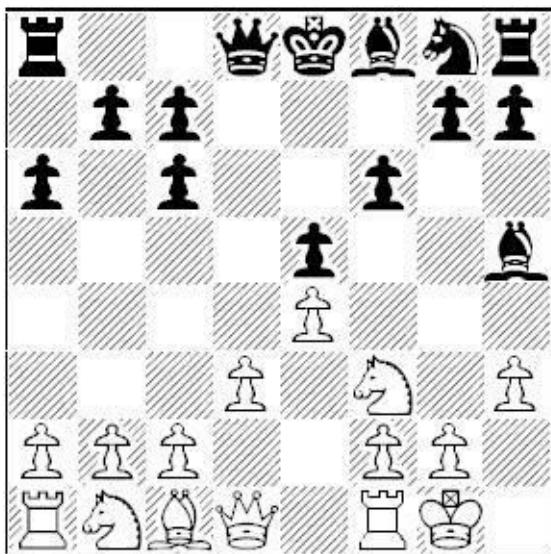


Diagram 12 (W)

8 Be3

White developed in a different way in another example, R.Smith-S.Collins, Khanty-Mansiysk Olympiad 2010, with no greater success: 8 Nbd2 c5 9 Re1 Ne7 10 Nf1 Nc6 11 Ng3 Bf7 12 Be3 Qd7 13 a3 g6 14 Nd2 Be7 15 f4 (it's difficult to see how the move a3 fitted into this plan, but this is rather typical for this variation; White needs to get organized and do something before Black gets perfectly arranged and begins to press forward with ... Nd4 and suchlike, using his space advantage and two bishops, but the trouble is that White often finds that anything he attempts makes his position worse, and that's what happens here) 15 ... exf4 16 Bxf4 0-0-0 17 Nf3 c4 18 dxc4 Bc5+ 19 Kh1 Qxd1 20 Raxd1 Bxc4, and White's tatty pawn structure and Black's bishops proved decisive in the ending.

8 ... Bd6

Now, unlike Collins, Black needs to develop this bishop first so as to keep ... c5 in reserve.

9 Nbd2 c5 10 c3 Ne7 11 Qc2

11 d4 cxd4 12 cxd4 exd4 13 Bxd4 Bf4 14 Nb3 Nc6 doesn't achieve anything either; Black is still slightly better with his two bishops.

11 ... Nc6 12 Rfe1 Qd7 13 Nh4 0-0 14 Nf1

White is welcome to play 14 Nf5 Rfd8 15 Nxd6. Black wouldn't even bother to 'repair' his pawn structure, preferring to keep the d-file as an avenue for his pieces with 15 ... Qxd6

14 ... Rfd8 15 g4?! (Diagram 13)

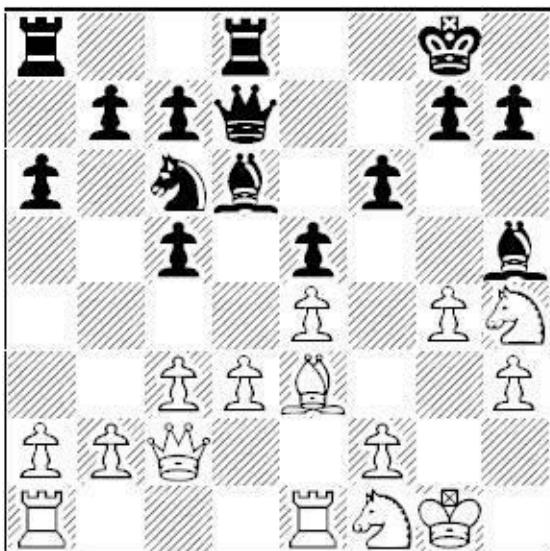


Diagram 13 (B)

A bad move, but typical of the phenomenon I mentioned before in this structure; it's very hard to find anything to do for White, while Black has plenty of useful ways to build up his position.

15 ... Bf7 16 Ng3 c4 17 dxc4 Bxc4 18 b3 Be6

Already it's clear that White's best move would be g4-g2. Perhaps he was just

focussed on his d3 weakness and it never occurred to him that Black might exchange it with ... c4 in order to distract White from whatever he had in mind on the kingside.

19 Rad1 Qf7 20 Kg2 a5 21 Nf3 a4 22 c4 Be7 23 Rxd8+ Rxd8 24 Rd1 Rxd1 25 Qxd1 Bf8 26 Qb1

It's difficult to see how this helps – did White have some sort of bxa4 move in mind? – but it would always be very hard to defend this sort of position against someone of Nisipeanu's superior class.

26 ... Qd7 (Diagram 14)

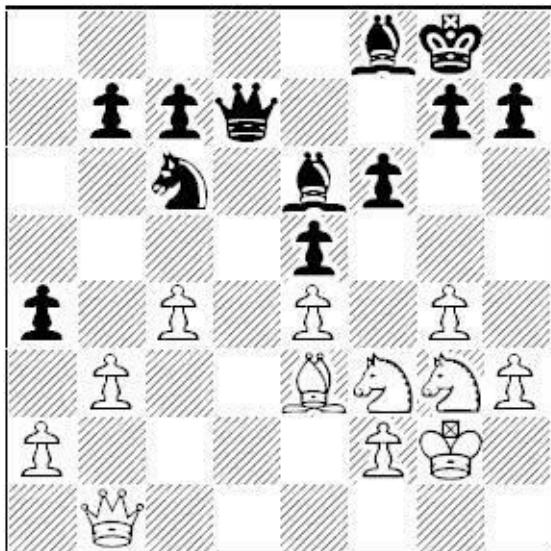


Diagram 14 (W)

27 Nf5

Maybe White should have gone for it – 27 bxa4 Na5 28 Qb5 Nxc4 29 Qxb7 Nxe3+ 30 fxe3 Qxa4 31 Qxc7 Qxa2+ 32 Kg1 g6, for example, is pretty grim, but I'm not sure it was any grimmer than the game.

27 ... Nb4 28 Ne1 a3 29 Ng3 b5 30 cxb5 Qxb5 31 g5

After 31 Nc2 Qd3 32 Nxa3 Qxb1 33 Nxb1 Nxa2 34 Nd2 Nc1 Black wins the b-pawn, so White can't challenge the b4-knight and the end becomes more or less inevitable.

31 ... fxg5 32 Bxg5 c5 33 Bc1 Qa6 34 Nf3 Nd3 35 Ng5 Bc8 36 Kg1 c4 (Diagram 15)

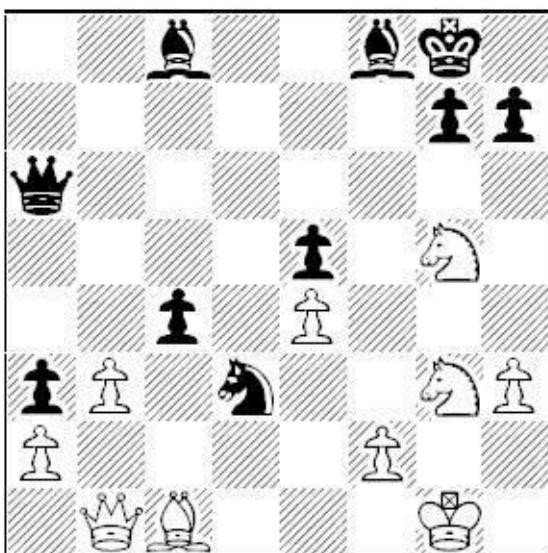


Diagram 15 (W)

37 Qc2??

A bit yielding, but 37 bxc4 Qxc4 38 Be3 h6 39 Nf3 Bxh3 wasn't really any better.

37 ... h6 38 bxc4

38 Nf3 Nxc1 39 Qxc1 cxb3 40 axb3 a2 41 Qa1 Bb4 is also the end.

38 ... Nxc1 39 Nf3 Nxa2 40 Qxa2 Be6 41 Nxe5 Bd6 42 Qa1 a2 43 Ng4 Bxg4 44 hxg4 Be5 0-1

A miserable game for White, who was crushed without Black needing to break sweat.

DANGEROUS WEAPON! The moral is clear: White really does need to take up the gauntlet against Black's system.

Looking a Little Deeper

Let's move on to examine the actual theory of Black's gambit.

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Bxc6 dxc6 5 0-0 Bg4 6 h3 Bh5 7 g4 Bg6 8 Nxe5

(Diagram 16)

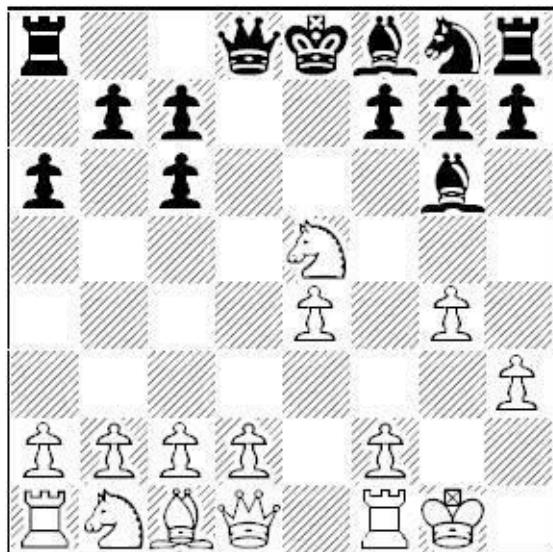


Diagram 16 (B)

Now 8 ... Qh4 is the main line, but we shall also consider two other options:

A: 8 ... Bd6

B: 8 ... f6

C: 8 ... Qh4

A) 8 ... Bd6 (Diagram 17)

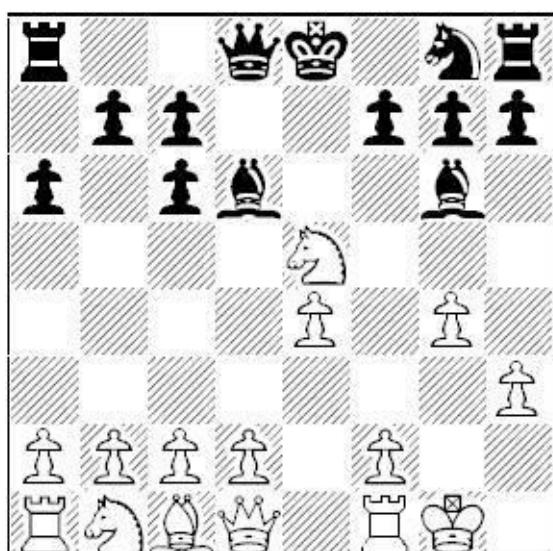


Diagram 17 (W)

This move (another Hector invention) is definitely worth a try; Black aims for the

f4 hole and intends, ultimately, to trade the bishop, which is his least obviously effective piece, to accentuate the weaknesses on White's kingside.

9 Nxg6

White doesn't have to do this. 9 d4 Bxe5 10 dxe5 Qxd1 11 Rxd1 Bxe4 is not worth considering at all – any Berlin player will tell you that Black is more than fine here with the opposite-coloured bishops and the over-advanced e-pawn, and Black can even still castle! But even Hector once struggled against 9 Nf3, although having said that it looks to me as though he achieved exactly the sort of position an aficionado of this gambit ought to like, with amorphous long-term chances for the pawn, after the natural sequence 9 ... h5 10 g5 (Altermann did an ICC video on this gambit, and here he offered the entertaining line 10 e5 hxg4! 11 hxg4 Bc5 12 d4 – 12 d3 Qd7 13 e6 fxe6 is about the best White can do – 12 ... Be4 13 c3 Rh3 14 Nbd2 Qh4, and Black mates) 10 ... Qd7 11 Kg2 Ne7 12 Nc3 h4 13 d4, J.Aabing Thomsen-J.Hector, Copenhagen 2007. At this point Hector played 13 ... Bb4, which seems a bit committal. I prefer the natural 13 ... 0-0-0. If White insists then on preventing ... Bb4 with 14 a3 Qe6 15 e5 then Black has 15 ... Bc5 16 Be3 Bh5! with excellent play, while otherwise Black has lots of ideas, for example ... Qe6, ... Ng6, sometimes an ... f6 break if White does nothing active. I think this position is quite uncomfortable for White.

9 ... hxg6 10 Kg2 Qh4 11 Qf3 Bf4 (Diagram 18)

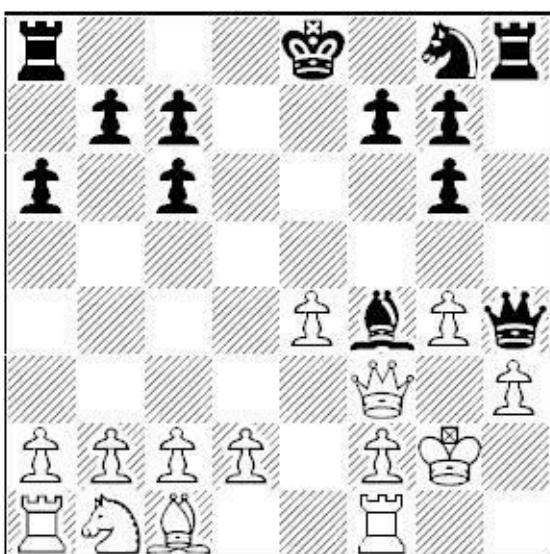


Diagram 18 (W)

This little trick is the point of Black's 8 ... Bd6. A young Magnus Carlsen once tried 11 ... Nf6, an interesting move which does have the drawback that 12 e5 Nd5 13 exd6 Nf4+ 14 Kh1 Qxh3+ 15 Qxh3 Rxh3+ forces a draw at once. Instead White's best is 12 d4 Be7 and now not 13 e5 Nd5 transposing to Carlsen's game, but simply 13 Rh1 followed by Nc3, Be3 and so on, when Black finds it hard to create any counterplay.

12 d3

White does better to keep his d-pawn on d3 in this line; there's no real point in d4, both because it offers Black unnecessary chances against the centre and because it closes the g1-a7 diagonal, which otherwise may come in useful to enable White to prevent queenside castling at some moment. These points were well illustrated in R.Djurhuus-J.Hector, Malmo 1995, in which Hector scored another victory with his pet system. Let's follow this game:

12 Nc3 Ne7 13 d4

White could also choose the more restrained 13 d3 when Kinsman gave 13 ... g5 14 Ne2 Ng6 15 Nxf4 gxf4 16 Rh1 Qg5 17 Kf1 0-0-0 “with prospects of consolidating the extra pawn”. This is a fairly typical way of saying that what is actually needed is more practice; one might equally say that Black has the usual sort of compensation and ought to be happy with this position. In specific terms, assuming White wants to win it's not easy to see how he's going to ‘consolidate his extra pawn’ if Black simply triples on the h-file, since any defence of the h-pawn by Kg2 can be met with a move of the h4-rook threatening ... Nh4+ and forcing the king to retreat. This drawing mechanism has been seen in a few games in this line.

13 ... g5 (**Diagram 19**)

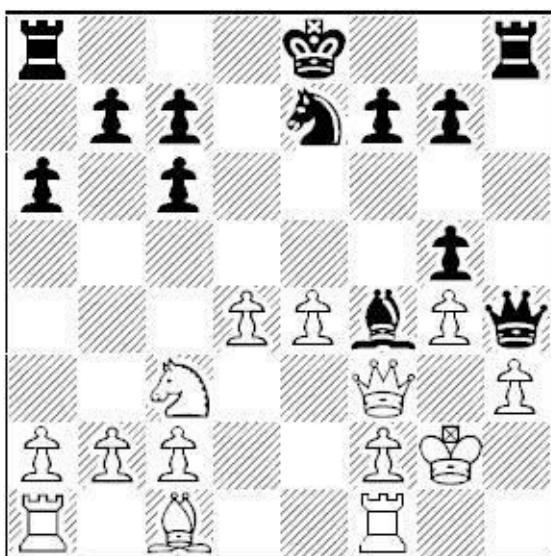


Diagram 19 (W)

14 Ne2

Instead 14 Bxf4 gxf4 15 Ne2 (after 15 Rh1 Alterman mentioned 15 ... Qg5, perhaps overlooking 16 h4 Rxh4 17 Rxh4 Qxh4 18 Qxf4; instead either 15 ... g5 or 15 ... Ng6 should be fine for Black, with the usual sort of compensation) 15 ... Ng6 16 Rh1 Qg5 17 Qb3 Nh4+ 18 Kf1 0-0-0 19 f3 was given as better and unclear by Wedberg (and Finkel), but Black can be pretty happy here; he is already ready with the typical break 19 ... f5.

14 ... Ng6 15 Rh1 Qh6 16 Kf1 Nh4 17 Qd3

Here 17 Qb3 0-0-0 18 Bxf4 gxf4 19 f3 was another Wedberg proposal adopted by Finkel and endorsed by Kinsman. I'm not sure how much it really alters the play. Fundamentally Black's compensation resides in the airy white king and the kingside weaknesses, and only practice can tell whether it's enough over the board. What's certain is that White's position is harder to play.

17 ... Bxc1 18 Rxc1 0-0-0 19 Qe3 Rhe8

White was already struggling to keep a lid on Black's counterplay, with ... f5 next up.

Returning to the main line:

12 ... g5 13 Bxf4 gxf4 (**Diagram 20**)

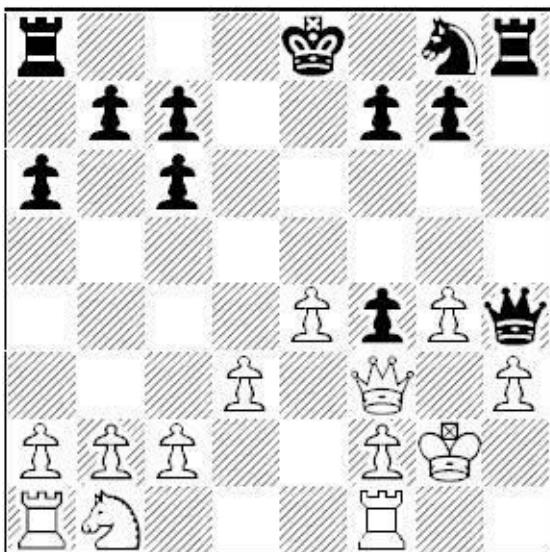


Diagram 20 (W)

14 Nd2

White could also threaten f4 directly by covering h3 with 14 Rh1, when possible is 14 ... Qf6?! (14 ... Ne7) 15 c3?! Ne7 16 Qe2 Ng6 17 f3 0-0-0, as in H.Rolletschek-S.Brandner, Mureck 2001, when Black was already getting good play; the d3 weakness hurts White. However, far better was 15 Nc3 Ne7 16 e5!, so that if 16 ... Qxe5 17 Rae1 Qd6 18 Ne4 with a strong initiative. Black in turn would do better to play 14 ... g5 rather than falling for this, when the play is similar to the main line, although Black is committed to ... g5.

14 ... Ne7 15 Rh1 Ng6 16 Qe2 0-0-0 17 Nf3 Qe7 (Diagram 21)

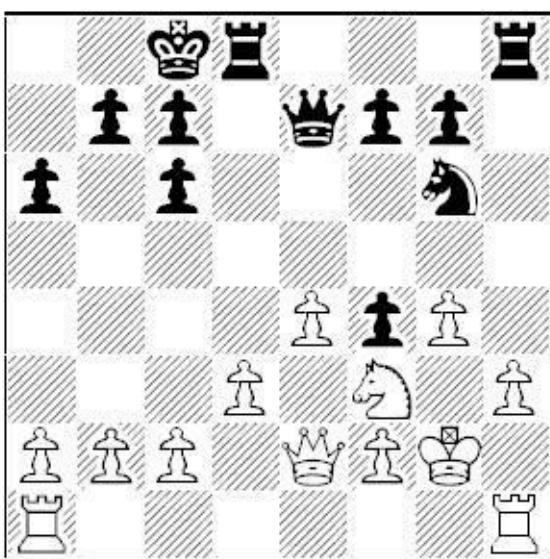


Diagram 21 (W)

This was suggested by Wedberg, who claimed a slight advantage for White, and endorsed enthusiastically for White by Kinsman, who said that “it is actually quite hard to see where Black’s compensation lies in this position”. Well, I think it’s fairly plain to see where it lies; Black will need to seek his chances in the insecure position of the white king once the game opens up. Still, it’s hard to disagree with Wedberg that White ought to stand at least a little better.

B) 8 ... f6

This doesn’t look as natural as 8 ... Qh4, but perhaps that square is better reserved for the knight after all and the queen can find employment on d7. Still, White played disturbingly natural moves in the slight encounter E.Alvarez Fernandez-F.San Claudio Gonzales, Asturias 2000, which proceeded:

9 Nxg6 hxg6 10 Qf3 Qd7 11 d3 0-0-0 12 Bf4 Ne7 13 Qe3 Kb8 14 Kg2 g5 15 Bg3 Ng6 16 Nd2 Bd6 17 Nf3 (Diagram 22)

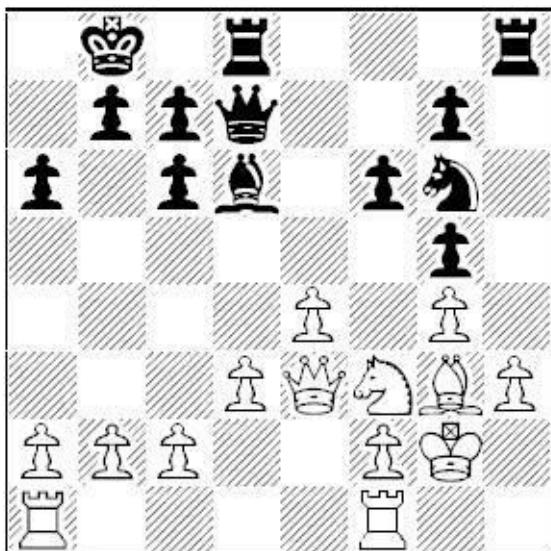


Diagram 22 (B)

and now the alarmingly crushing 17 ... Rxh3.

Evidently White needs to aim to do better than that. One simple way to do that is what Joel Benjamin did in J.Benjamin-J.Van der Wiel, Cannes (rapid) 1992, and seize the initiative back with 11 Nc3 0-0-0 12 d4 Qxd4 13 Rd1 Qc4 14 Rxd8+ Kxd8 15 Bf4 Kc8 16 Rd1 (**Diagram 23**),

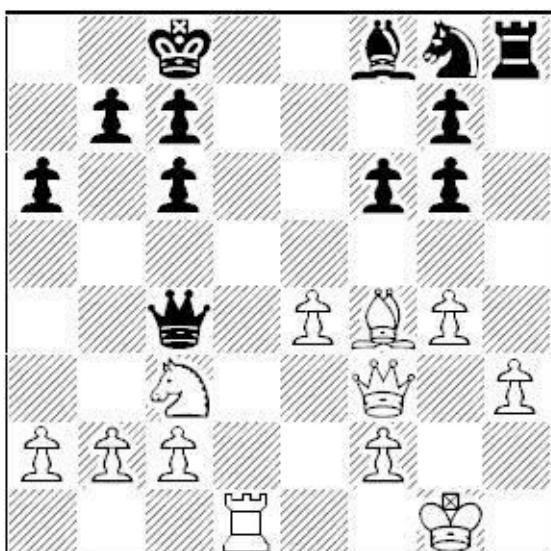


Diagram 23 (B)

with a pleasant advantage. Alternatively, the only reason Black's combination worked in the Spanish game was the inept 13 Qe3? giving Black the crucial tempo, so White could instead play more sensibly as Jesus de Villa Garcia did with 10 Kg2 Qd7 11 d3 0-0-0 12 Bf4 g5 13 Bg3 Bd6 14 Nd2 Ne7 15 Qf3 Bf4 16 Nc4 Ng6 17 a4; this

was against the same San Claudio Gonzales, at Alicante 1989, and White produced a convincing victory. I don't think Black can really hope for anything like theoretical equality from this line.

C) 8 ... Qh4 9 Qf3 f6 10 Nxg6 hxg6 11 Kg2

White doesn't have to defend this pawn, of course, and perhaps he could even claim to be better after a move like 11 d4 (or the still more pusillanimous 11 Qg3, occasionally seen) 11 ... Qxh3 12 Qxh3 Rxh3 13 Kg2. Still, even if he does opt for a move which leaves h3 en prise Black can continue without taking it, and the likelihood is that White will find he doesn't have a better move than Kg2 sooner or later.

11 ... g5 (Diagram 24)

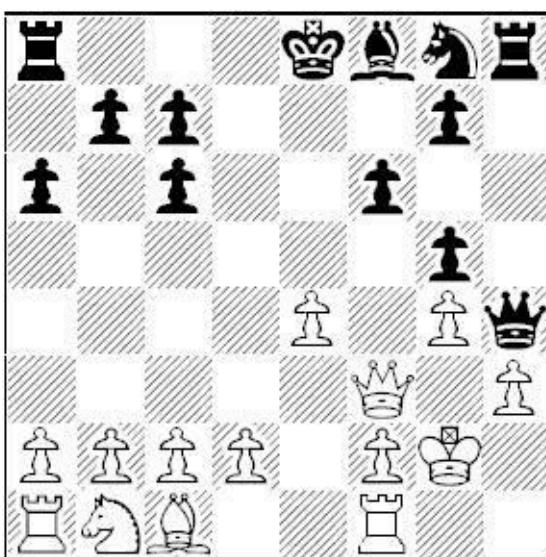


Diagram 24 (W)

This flexible move seems to be the best, although as far as I can tell it wasn't played until 2009, when a game a few days before Turner-Hammer introduced it, although doubtless Turner-Hammer and the winner's enthusiastic notes in *New in Chess* were, so to speak, the spark that set the flame.

Actually many of the games follow a different move order at this point, and to be honest I can't discern any reason why it's important whether Black starts with this move or 11 ... 0-0-0. Black can hardly think of any plan which doesn't include both castling queenside and also taking control of f4 and h4 like this, clearing the perfect post for the knight on g6.

As I said in the introductory game, White's choices divide basically into plans with Nc3 and those with Nd2, so we'll need one more split:

C1: 12 Nc3

C2: 12 d3 (without Nc3)

C1) 12 Nc3

White could play 12 d4 at once, and indeed there's a lot to be said for that if he wants to play a d4 set-up, since this way he doesn't give Black time to castle and force the

knock to go to e2 to defend the pawn before White can go d4. In J.Rosner-A.Karpatchev, Deizisau 2010, Black played all the normal moves: 12 ... 0-0-0 13 Be3 Ne7 14 Nc3 Ng6 15 Rh1 Kb8 16 Rad1 Qh7 17 Kf1 Nh4 (not a conspicuously necessary move at this point) 18 Qe2 Bd6 19 f3 Rhe8 20 Ke1 Bf4 21 Bxf4 gxf4 22 Kf1 g5 23 Rh2 Rd7, and the usual difficult struggle resulted; White is disorganized and has weaknesses around his king, but Black has no immediate way of prosecuting his initiative.

12 ... 0-0-0 (Diagram 25)

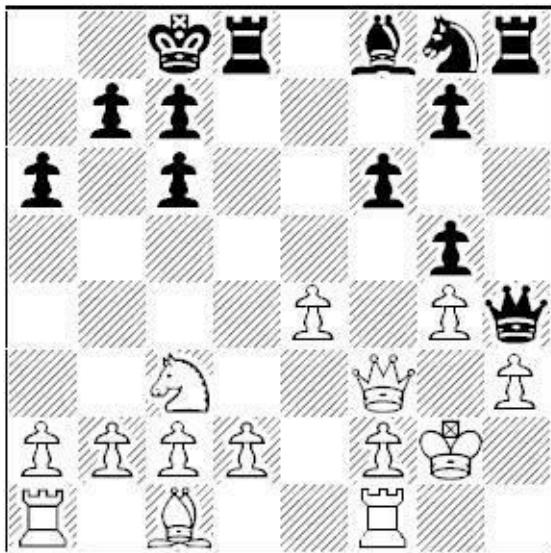


Diagram 25 (W)

13 Ne2

It's natural to play this if White wants to play d4, and indeed White did exactly that in the first game our system was played, an obscure encounter at Barmen 1905 in which Black was the unknown (to me) player Georg Schories.

White can also consider 13 d4 at once, relying perhaps on the Turner-like tactic 13 ... Rxd4 14 Be3 Rd8 15 Rad1 Bd6 16 e5 fxe5 17 Ne4, but Black can defuse this with one accurate move: 17 ... Nf6 18 Bxg5 Qh7 is fine for him.

Another set-up is 13 d3 Bd6 14 Ne2 Ne7 15 Rh1 Kb8, when White has tried two moves:

a) 16 Bd2 Qh7 17 Kf1 Ng6 18 Bc3 (not an obviously compelling plan; what's the bishop doing here?) 18 ... Rhe8 19 b4 Qg8 20 a4 Qf8 21 Rb1 Qf7 22 Rb3 Nh4 23 Qe3 Rd7 24 Nd4 Bf4 25 Qe2 Red8 26 Nf5 Rxd3, and following this breakthrough White went down in flames in D.Collutiis-D.Pavasovic, Bratto 2009.

b) 16 Ng3 Qh7 17 Nf5 Ng6 18 Be3 Qg8 19 Qe2 Be5 20 c3 Bf4 21 a3 Rh7 22 Rad1 Qe6 (**Diagram 26**),

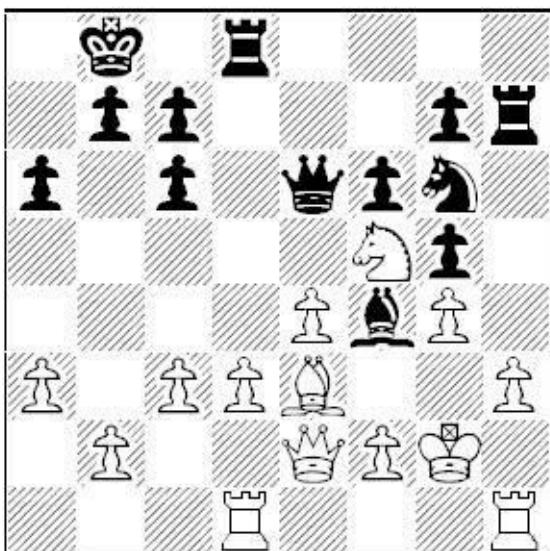


Diagram 26 (W)

when White found himself in trouble finding a piece to move in M.Normantas-A.Delorme, World Junior Ch., Chotowa 2010. I think the trouble is that the knight on f5 is pretty but it's not effective; it doesn't cooperate with the other white pieces, and in the end White couldn't think of anything better than retreating it: 23 Ng3 Nh4+ 24 Kf1 g6 25 Rg1 Re7 26 f3 f5, and again White was disorganized and succumbed to this typical breakthrough.

13 ... Bd6 14 d4 Ne7 15 Rh1 Kb8

Obviously White's last was designed to prevent 15 ... Ng6?? 16 Qf5+, but Black could also have tried 15 ... Qh7; the king move isn't always necessary or even useful; if White gets in an a4/b4-b5 plan then the king may be safer on c8.

16 Ng3 (**Diagram 27**)

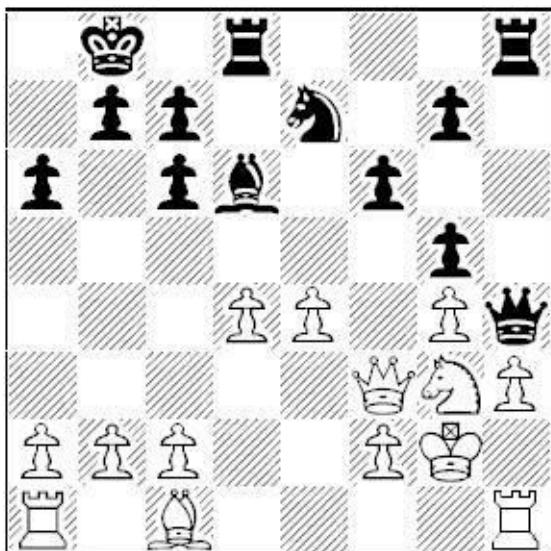


Diagram 27 (B)

E.Dyckhoff-G.Schorries, Barmen 1905. At this point Schories tried 16 ... c5, which should have been refuted by the brutal modern tactic 17 e5 fxe5 18 dxc5 Bxc5 19 Ne4. Instead the prophylactic 16 ... Qh7, to take the sting out of White's coming Nf5, would have provided Black with a normal position for this gambit.

C2) 12 d3 (Diagram 28)

In this section we're going to confine ourselves to plans without Nc3. In a way this leaves f4 to Black's mercy, but actually, as we'll see, White's knight can fight for this square in other ways, and this is in my view definitely White's most dangerous way to combat our gambit.

12 d4 Ne7 13 Rh1 Qh7 14 Kg1 0-0-0 15 Be3 Kb8 16 Nd2 Qg8 17 b4 Ng6 18 c3 Bd6 (it doesn't seem to matter sometimes what order Black plays his moves in this line!) 19 Qe2 19 ... Rh6 20 a4 Qh7 21 Qf3

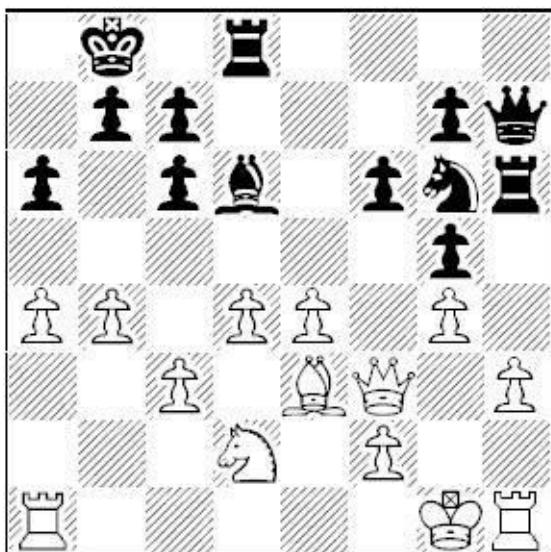


Diagram 28 (B)

21 ... Nh4 22 Qe2 Ng6 was J.Magem Badals-J.Gustafsson, Spanish League 2010, in which Black had already established a typical drawing mechanism for this line, although in the game he preferred to play on.

19 a4 (instead of 19 Qe2) was played in J.Ramon Perez-J.Guerra Mendez, Balaguer 2011, and actually looks more to the point to me despite White's lowly rating in comparison; Black can counter with 19 ... Rh6 in the same way as Gustafsson, but with the h-pawn still doubly defended the play is sharper. White can't get anywhere on the queenside without a4, so it makes sense to start with this move in the absence of any other considerations.

12 ... Ne7 (Diagram 29)

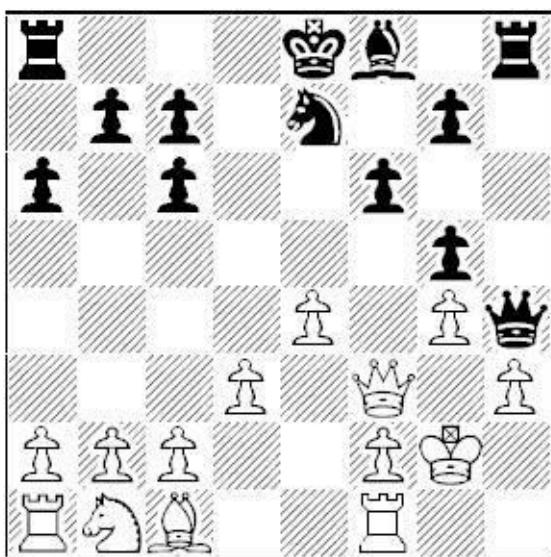


Diagram 29 (W)

13 Be3

Alternatively:

a) 13 Rh1 might be an important move; its object is to inhibit an early ... Ng6 without castling. Now:

a1) 13 ... Ng6 is not a good move in this exact position because of 14 Qf5 (this was the point of 13 Rh1), but instead 14 Nd2 Bd6 15 Nc4 Qh7 16 a4 Qg8 17 Bd2 Qe6 would transpose into F.Slingerland-G.Arnaudov, Haarlem 2011, in which Black demonstrated the typical mechanism again: 18 Nxd6+ cxd6 19 Kf1 Rh6 20 b4 Ne5 21 Qg2 Kd7 22 Ke2 Kc7 23 Be3 Ng6 24 Qg3 Rah8 25 Kd2 Qe5 26 Qf3 Nh4 27 Qe2 Ng2 28 Qf3, and now Black chose to play on, but couldn't disturb the equilibrium in the end. This is an important reference, since it shows that Black can afford to allow even Nc4xd6 and still have his usual compensation.

a2) 13 ... Qh7 was tried in the high-level dual G.Guseinov-K.Szabo, Moscow 2012, which continued 14 Kf1 Qg8 (14 ... Ng6 15 Qf5 again) 15 e5 Rh6 16 Nc3 0-0-0 17 Bd2 Ng6!? 18 exf6 gxf6 19 Qxf6 Be7 20 Qf5+ Kb8, when Black had almost-adequate compensation for his two pawns; the position is very complicated but maybe White should have gone for the brave 21 Bxg5 Rf8 22 Bxh6 Rxf5 23 gxf5.

a3) 13 ... 0-0-0 14 Nd2 Kb8 15 Qe3 (15 Nc4 at this point would likely lead to Swinkels-Sokolov, our main line below) 15 ... Ng6 16 Nf3 Qh7 17 Qe1 was D.Solak-S.Kapnisis, Isthmia 2011, and now rather than the game's 17 ... c5 I don't really understand why Black didn't play the obvious 17 ... Bd6 with a normal position for the line.

b) 13 Qg3 Ng6! (Black could also retreat the queen, but this surprising move gives him the time to get in down the h-file) 14 Rh1 Bd6 15 Qxh4 Nxh4+ 16 Kf1 Kd7 17 Nc3 Rh7 18 Ne2 Rah8 19 Be3 Ng6 was D.Solak-L.E.Johannessen, Plovdiv 2010, in which Black had equalized efficiently, since if 20 Kg2 Nh4+ 21 Kf1 Ng6, and if White tries 22 Ng1 Bf4 then he can't avoid dropping a pawn if he wants to play on, for instance 23 Ke2 Bxe3 24 Kxe3 Nf4 (or 24 fxe3 Ne5).

c) 13 Nd2 would be White's most flexible way to achieve Nc4 set-ups in a way if it worked. It doesn't seem to have been played, but might introduce new pages: 13 ... Ng6 14 Nc4 b5, for example, and now 15 e5 0-0-0 16 Rh1! bxc4 17 Qf5+ Kb7 18 Qxg6 Bc5 19 Be3 Bxe3 20 fxe3 Rhe8, or 15 Na5 Qh6!; in both cases Black seems to be fine.

13 ... 0-0-0 (Diagram 30)

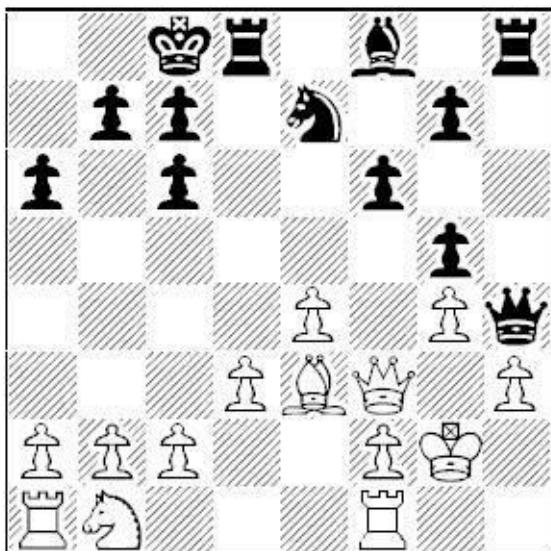


Diagram 30 (W)

This might not be the best move; it's the only one of Black's natural developing moves which he could perhaps delay and sometimes do without, and in W.Wandzik-A.Shirov, Warsaw (rapid) 2010, the Latvian/Spanish super-GM tried 13 ... Qh7 14 Rh1 Ng6 15 Qe2 Qg8 16 Nd2 Bd6 17 Nc4 Bf4, a move order which also had the advantage of smuggling the bishop over the d6-square to f4 before it can be taken off on d6. 18 a4 Qe6 19 b4 Kf7! then shows another advantage of delaying castling and left White's pawn advances looking like nothing but weaknesses, something which the follow-up rapidly demonstrated: 20 Na5 b6 21 Nb3 Be5 22 Rab1 Bc3 and White started shedding pawns. Food for thought.

14 Nd2 Kb8 15 Rh1

15 Qg3 was K.Zenelis-R.Rapport, Greek League 2011, in which Black could have equalized with the usual 15 ... Ng6 16 Qxh4 Nxh4+ 17 Kg1 Ng6, but in view of the 350-point rating discrepancy Black preferred to retreat the queen and play on in a more complicated position.

15 ... Qh7 16 Nc4 Ng6 17 Kg1 Qg8 (Diagram 31)

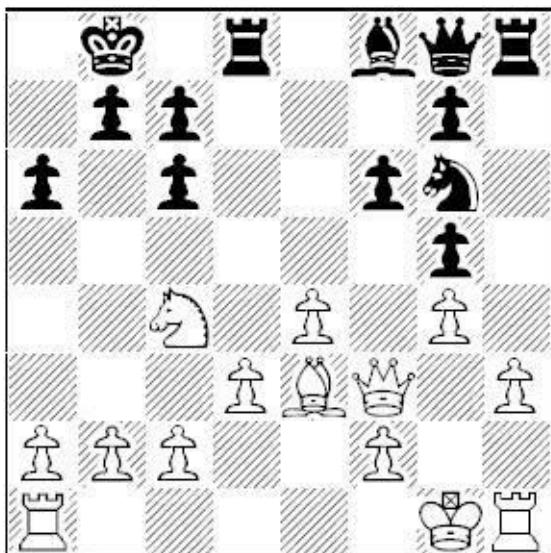


Diagram 31 (W)

This has transposed to R.Swinkels-I.Sokolov, Netherlands Championship 2011, a very important reference in which the high-class transplanted GM lost very convincingly to the young native talent. This position seems to be critical for the entire variation.

18 a3

With the king on f1, White instead continued 18 Qf5 Rh6 19 a4 Bb4 20 Qf3 in W.So-A.Kolev, Philadelphia 2012; the advantage of a4 is to enable a5 solidifying the knight on c4, but I'm not sure about the Qf3-f5-f3 business. Black should have kept his queen in the centre with 20 ... Qe6 now, and perhaps thereafter to e7 to allow ... Bc5, possibly.

After 18 a3, I suspect Sokolov was led astray by his desire to win the game. It seems to me that Black's soundest plan was 18 ... Rh6 with the idea to continue with ... Qe6, ... Be7, ... Rdh8, and then perhaps ... b5 and ... Bd6, when Black will be ready for the usual ... Nh4-g6-h4 routine, so if White wants to demonstrate a theoretical advantage he needs to come up with a counter to that, which in the game Swinkels didn't have to demonstrate. It also seems to me that White would be better off playing Bd2 in this set-up if he could, and then a4 and b4 as quickly as possible. I suspect this might be the best place for White to look if he wants to refute Black's system, but as I suggested before, the question might be how White can work out his move order to achieve such a set-up.

Summary

This final section (C2) has been rather a formless one, but the move orders here have yet to be worked out. It seems to me that it is here that Black's idea is under the greatest pressure, but White has by no means yet shown a clear path to an advantage. The position after 17 moves in So-Kolev and Swinkels-Sokolov is probably a good starting point for investigation.

Chapter Eight

New Ways to Play d3

John Emms

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 d3
(Diagram 1)**

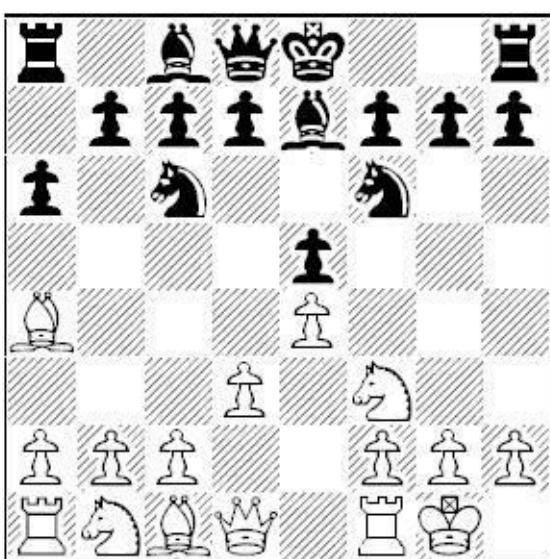


Diagram 1 (B)

It's been very noticeable in recent years that more and more players, including those at the very highest level, have introduced d3 systems into their Lopez repertoires. And not just Anti-Marshall systems; players are also choosing d3 earlier in the game, both in the main line (3 ... a6) and against the Berlin Defence (3 ... Nf6). The rise in popularity of d3 has coincided with the general acceptance that some main lines, including the Berlin, are now considered to be fully satisfactory for Black, and White players are not quite as eager these days to leave their precious e4-pawns hanging!

However, this is only part of the reason. A few new possibilities for White have developed in the d3 systems, and in this chapter we'll take a look at some ideas, in particular those based on:

- 1) An early a2-a4.
- 2) Delaying or avoiding the usual Re1.
- 3) Aiming for an f2-f4 pawn break.

Before we get going, a quick word on move orders. I've chosen to focus on the position after 3 ... a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 d3, since the ideas noted above work best

when Black has already committed his bishop to e7. With this move order, of course, White must be prepared to face the Open Variation (5 ... Nxe4). 5 d3 prevents the Open Variation but on the other hand it allows Black to adopt the solid set-up with ... d6, ... g6 and ... Bg7. Also, Black can play the ... b5/ ... Bc5 Archangel/Møller lines against either 5 0-0 or 5 d3, although by choosing 5 0-0 White still has the option, if he so wishes, of meeting 5 ... b5 6 Bb3 Bc5 and 5 ... Bc5 with the c3/d4 main lines.

Returning to the position after 6 d3, the main line runs **6 ... b5** (6 ... d6 is also possible, and is considered here) **7 Bb3** and now either **7 ... d6** or **7 ... 0-0**. In either case White responds with **8 a4** and Black has a decision to make. Let's begin by looking at two grandmaster clashes where White's opening and middlegame strategy proved to be successful.

Game 12

I.Nepomniachtchi-H.Melkumyan

European Championship, Rijeka 2010

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 d3

Nepomniachtchi chooses the 5 d3 move order. The move order with 5 0-0 Be7 6 d3 would transpose to the game after 6 ... b5 7 Bb3 d6

5 ... b5 6 Bb3 Be7 7 0-0 d6

We could also reach the game position via the 7 ... 0-0 move order, after 8 a4 b4 9 Nbd2 d6 10 a5 (see Line A1, later in the chapter).

8 a4 b4

Meeting a4 with ... b4 has become increasingly popular in recent times, with many Black players preferring to maintain maximum flexibility with regards to piece placement. Alternatives such as 8 ... Bd7, 8 ... Bg4 and 8 ... Rb8 will be covered later.

9 a5! (Diagram 2)

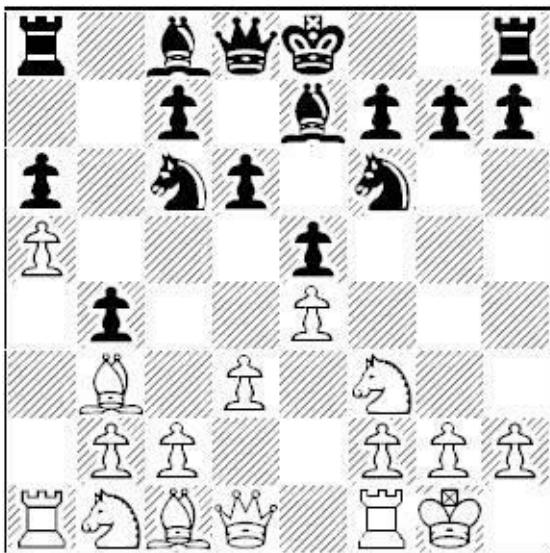


Diagram 2 (B)

This pawn advance is a typical reaction to ... b4, and it has more than one benefit:

- 1) It fixes the a6-pawn and isolates the b4-pawn, both of which could become targets.
- 2) It prevents Black's natural queenside expansion plan with ... Na5 and ... c5.
- 3) It creates the possibility of Ba4, often a useful move for White, or even sometimes even Ra4.

On the other hand, the a5-pawn could itself become a weakness, and also Black now has access to the b5-square – ... Rb8-b5 is one idea to watch out for.

9 ... 0-0 10 Nbd2!?

10 Re1 would transpose to a mainline 8 a4 Anti-Marshall: 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 a4 b4 9 d3 d6 10 a5. Of course, even if White's plan was to head back directly into the main lines at some stage, there's certainly no immediate rush to move the rook to e1. More importantly, though, in this game Nepomniachtchi demonstrates a different way for White to play it.

10 ... Rb8

This rook move, avoiding any Bd5 pins and eyeing the b5-square, is usually played at some moment.

11 Nc4 h6 12 h3 Be6 13 Be3

Still White delays Rf1-e1.

13 ... Qc8 14 Nfd2! (Diagram 3)

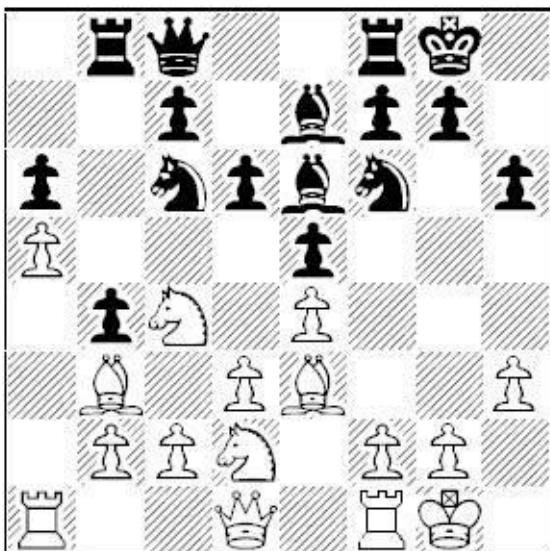


Diagram 3 (B)

DANGEROUS WEAPON! Now it's becoming clear that Nepomniachtchi isn't going to move his rook after all. Instead he plans to keep it on f1, where it's ideally placed to support a rare pawn break in the Ruy Lopez ... f2-f4!

14 Re1 would still transpose back into the 8 a4 Anti-Marshall. For example, 14 ... Rd8 15 Ba4 (or 15 Qe2 Bf8 16 Nfd2 Qb7 17 Qf3 Kh7 18 Nf1 Ne7 19 Ng3 Ng6 20 Nh5 ½-½, P.Svidler-L.Aronian, Morelia/Linares 2006) 15 ... Qb7 16 Nfd2 Nh7 17 Qf3 Bg5 with roughly level chances, A.Kosteniuk-T.Shadrina, Moscow 2011. Looking at the position in our main game after 13 ... Qc8, though, it does seem a bit odd to play 14 Re1, especially when you consider that Kosteniuk's next move was 18 Rf1! (Of course she had played Re1 way back on move six, so the decision to return to f1 probably didn't seem so strange.)

14 ... Rd8

A logical response by Black, who is looking to answer the f4 break with one of his own in ... d5.

An earlier game, Z.Hracek-D.Howell, Hastings 2009/10, continued 14 ... Nh7 (14 ... Nd7!?) 15 Ba4 Nd8 (Stohl suggests 15 ... Qb7) 16 f4! exf4 17 Bxf4 f5 18 exf5 Bxf5. Black has met White's f2-f4 with a mirror-image pawn break ... f5, but White's better coordinated pieces should offer an edge here, after either the game's 19 Qe2 Ne6 20 Be3 Kh8 21 Nb3 or Stohl's suggestion of 19 Ne3 Be6 20 d4.

15 Qe2!

The f4 break isn't the only idea, and in any case White must show some patience. After 15 f4 exf4! 16 Bxf4 d5! Black strikes in the centre and gains a full share of the chances.

15 ... Qb7

Likewise, 15 ... d5 is also premature. After 16 Ba4! (this move crops up all the time!) 16 ... dxc4 17 Bxc6 cxd3 18 cxd3 (Stohl) White will follow up with Rfc1 and gain strong pressure down the c-file.

16 Ba4 Nd7 17 c3! (Diagram 4)

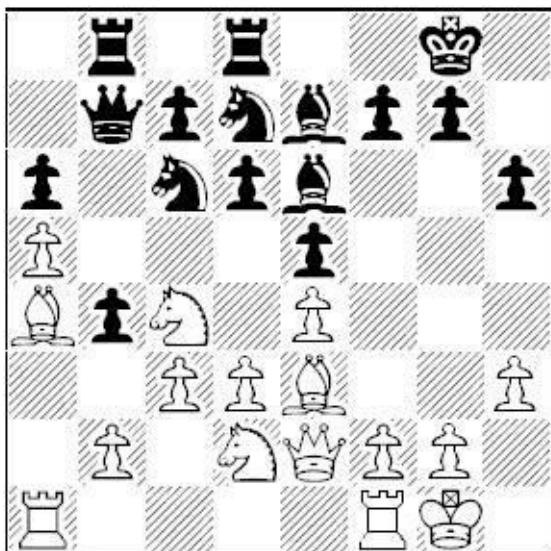


Diagram 4 (B)

Nepomniachtchi continues to keep the tension. Now Black has to watch out for both f2-f4 and d3-d4.

Black was ready to meet 17 f4 with 17 ... exf4 18 Rxf4 (or 18 Bxf4 Nc5) 18 ... Nce5.

17 ... d5??!

Totally natural, of course, but this move also marks the beginning of Black's troubles. It's always more difficult to sit tight than to "do something", but sitting tight is exactly what Black should have done. Stohl suggests 17 ... Na7, intending to answer 18 d4 with 18 ... bxc3 19 bxc3 exd4 20 cxd4 d5 when Black is okay.

18 exd5 Bxd5 19 f4!

Here comes the f-pawn!

19 ... exf4 20 Bxf4 (Diagram 5)

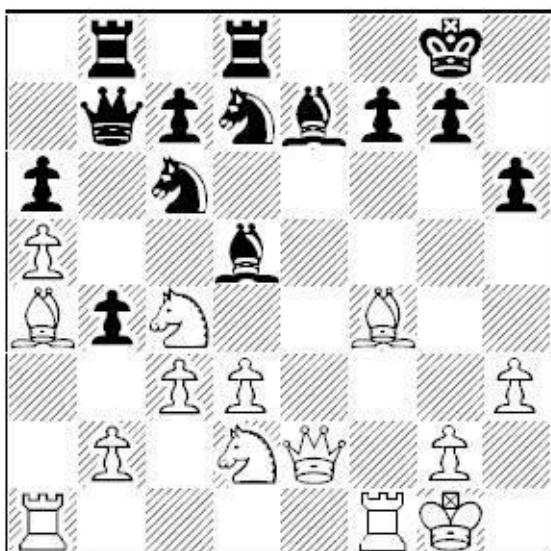


Diagram 5 (B)

Even though it came after Black's, White's pawn break has been more effective. The opening of the position on the kingside favours White, whose pieces are well placed to take advantage of the open spaces. For example, notice the difference in scope between the two queens.

20 ... Re8

After 20 ... Bf6 21 Ne3 Nc5? White can unleash the newly found power of the f1-rook by 22 Bxh6! (Stohl).

If 20 ... Bg5 21 Bxg5 hxg5 White plays 22 d4, preventing ... Nc5 and maintaining the advantage.

21 d4!

Unafraid of discovered attacks, Nepomniachtchi grabs some key squares in the centre. This King's Gambit-type pawn structure is known to favour White, who enjoys more control of the centre and, of course, the open f-file.

21 ... Bg5 22 Qf2

Houdini prefers 22 Ne3 here. After 22 ... Bxf4 23 Rxf4 bxc3 24 bxc3 Qb2 25 Raf1 there's no way for Black to exploit the pins on the knights, and meanwhile White's threats are growing.

22 ... Bxf4 23 Qxf4 (Diagram 6)

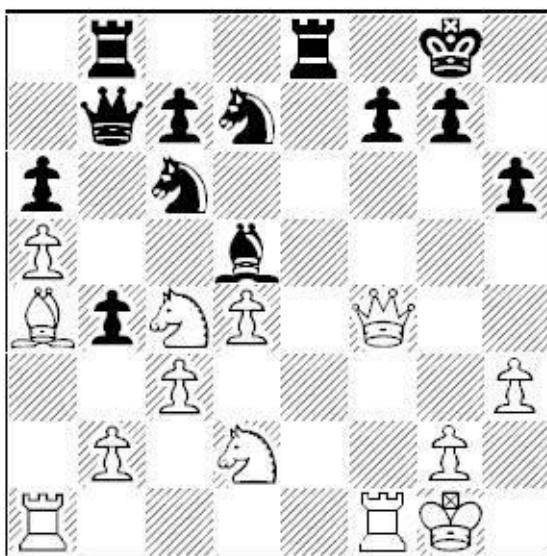


Diagram 6 (B)

23 ... Nf6?

Melkumyan errs in a difficult position. Black could stay in the game and prevent White's advantage from increasing with the sequence 23 ... Re2! 24 Ne3! Ne7! (24 ... Rxd2?? 25 Nxd5 wins) 25 Bxd7 Ng6! 26 Qg4 Rxe3! (but not 26 ... Rxd2 27 c4 intending 27 ... Bc6 28 Rxf7!) 27 c4 Be6 28 Bxe6 Rxe6 29 Nb3, as given by Stohl.

24 Ne3!

The threats are looming and Black's position is on the verge of collapse.

24 ... Be6

24 ... Rbd8 is met by the calm 25 Rae1!, while after 24 ... Re7 25 Qg3 Ne4 White can even play 26 Nxd5! Nxg3 27 Bxc6.

25 Qf3! Bd7 26 Nd5! Re6 27 Ne4! (Diagram 7)

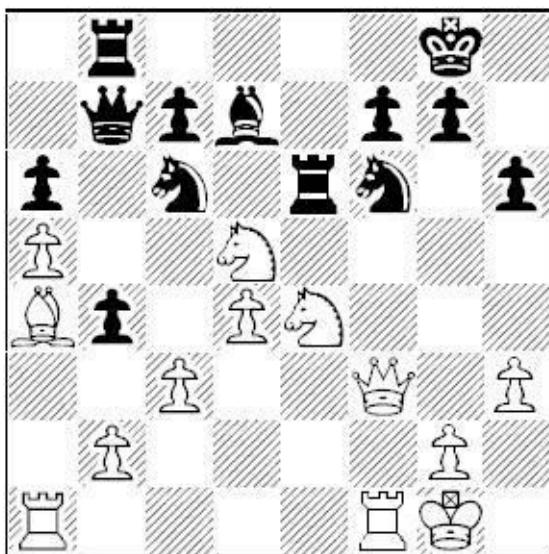


Diagram 7 (B)

Winning a pawn, and then some more. White's threats include Nc5 forking the rook and the offside queen, whose lack of effectiveness has been a major problem for Black throughout the tactical phase of the game.

27 ... Nxe4 28 Qxf7+ Kh8 29 Qxd7 Rd6 30 Bxc6 Rxc6

If 30 ... Rxd7 there follows 31 Bxb7 bxc3 (or 31 ... Rxb7 32 Nxb4) 32 Nxc3 Nxc3 33 Bxa6 (Stohl) and the passed a-pawn will decide.

31 Qe7 Rd6 32 Rf8+! Rxf8 33 Qxf8+ Kh7 34 Ne7 Nf6 35 Rf1 1-0

Rxf6 and Qg8 mate is coming.

Game 13

P.Leko-V.Kramnik

Rapid Match (Game 6), Miskolc 2007

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 d3 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 a4 Bd7 (Diagram 8)

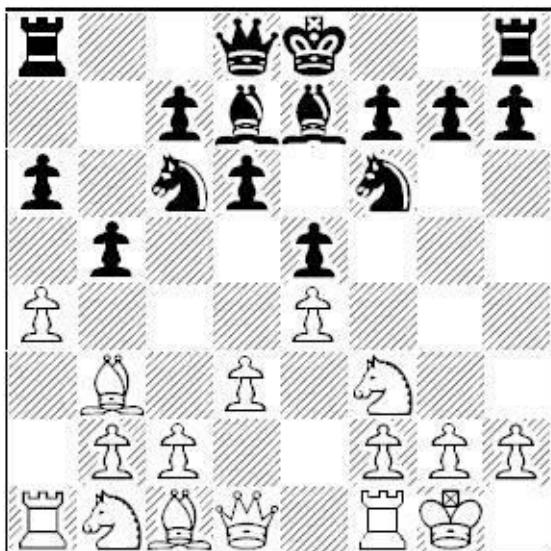


Diagram 8 (W)

This bishop move, along with 8 ... Rb8, is Black's most flexible option. He deals with the threat of axb5 without committing to any structural change (... b4), or moving his bishop off its home diagonal (... Bb7). The option of meeting 8 a4 with 8 ... Bd7 is, of course, only available if Black chooses 7 ... d6 over 7 ... 0-0.

9 Nc3

Leko chooses the typical Lopez plan of bringing the queen's knight over to g3. In this instance, Nc3-e2-g3 is more logical than Nbd2-f1-g3, since the latter manoeuvre would require White to spend a move on Re1. As we shall see, this is not something Leko is planning to do.

9 ... Na5 10 Ba2 b4 11 Ne2 c5 12 Ng3 0-0 13 Nh4!? (Diagram 9)

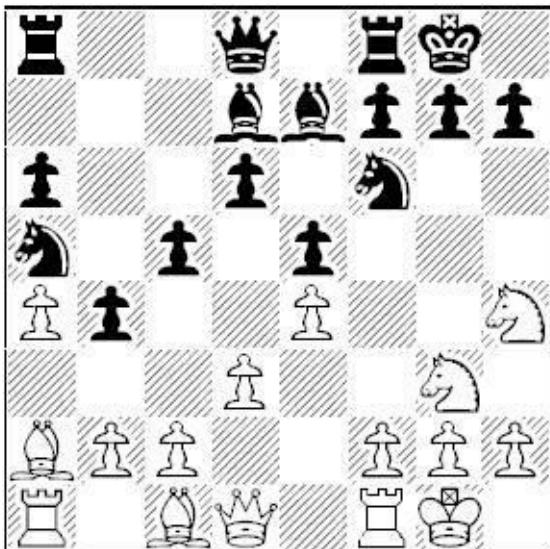


Diagram 9 (B)

Just like Nepomniachtchi in our previous game, Leko avoids Re1 and instead aims to use the rook on f1 by opening the f-file, King's Gambit style.

13 ... g6 14 Bh6 Re8 15 Bd2!

White wants to play f2-f4, of course, but first of all Leko safeguards the bishop against the threat of ... Ng4.

15 ... Bg4

Kramnik wants to swap off White's strong light-squared bishop, but first he flicks in an attack on White's queen.

16 f3 Be6 17 Bxe6 fxe6 18 f4! exf4 19 Bxf4 (Diagram 10)

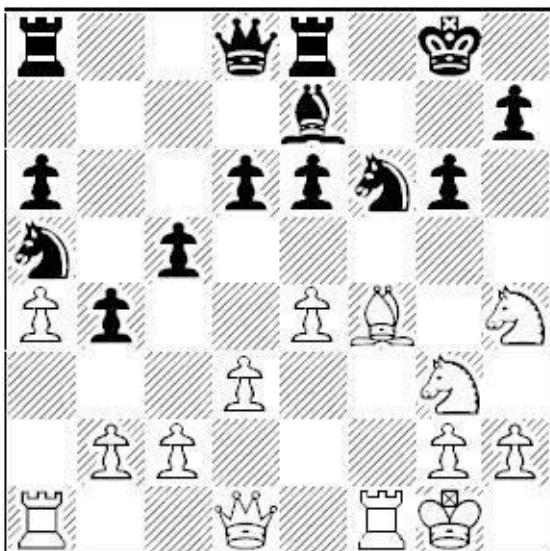


Diagram 10 (B)

Sooner or later Black will have to reckon with e4-e5.

19 ... Nc6!

Kramnik's wonderful sense of danger doesn't desert him. He realizes that it's the right time for the knight to leave a5 and rejoin the action, helping Black in the centre and on the kingside.

DANGEROUS WEAPON! An example of the difficulties facing Black is seen in the variation 19 ... d5? 20 e5 Nd7 21 Nxe5!! Nxe5 22 Qg4 Nf8 23 Bh6! Ra7 24 Nh5 (threatening Rxf8+) 24 ... Kh7 25 Qh3! (Leko) and White's attack is decisive – 25 ... Kxh6 26 Rxf8! gxh5 27 Qxe6+ Bf6 28 Rxe8 etc.

20 Nf3 Nd7

Kramnik continues to protect the dark squares in the centre, but in his notes for *Chess Informant* Leko suggests that Black could do the same, but in a more active way, with 20 ... Ng4!. For example, 21 c3 (or 21 h3 Rf8) 21 ... bxc3 22 bxc3 Rf8 with roughly balanced chances.

21 c3!

As we saw in Nepomniachtchi-Melkumyan, White can combine the f4 break with typical play in the centre. The d3-d4 advance comes into consideration now, as does Qb3 hitting Black's vulnerable e6-point.

21 ... bxc3 22 bxc3 (Diagram 11)

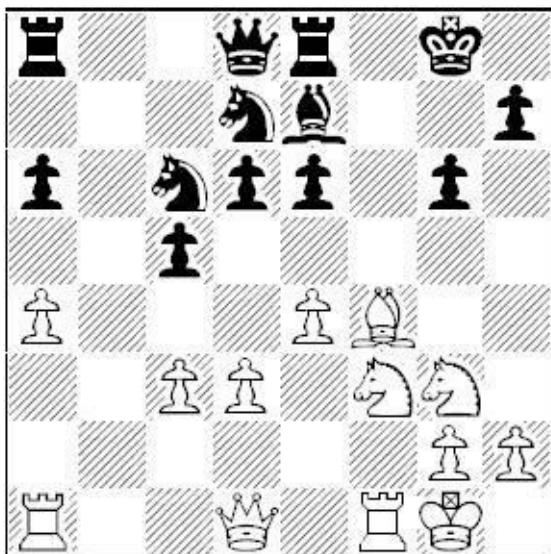


Diagram 11 (B)

22 ... Nde5!

Good play by Kramnik, who is prepared to accept weaknesses in order to change the course of the game.

After 22 ... Rb8 23 d4! cxd4 24 cxd4 Qb6 25 Kh1 (Leko) White enjoys a clear edge in view of his superiority in the centre.

23 Bxe5!

Leko accepts the challenge.

23 ... dxe5 24 Qc2

This position is easier for White to play. Both sides have pawn weaknesses, but Black's weaknesses are weaker than White's!

24 ... Ra7

Leko suggests that Black can maintain enough counterplay with 24 ... c4! intending 25 dxc4 Qc7 and ... Na5.

25 Rfd1

25 Qa2! is possibly more accurate. Here 25 ... Qd6 26 Rad1 Rd7 27 Nd2! Na5 28 Nc4 Nxc4 29 Qxc4 Bg5 30 Kh1 Rf8 31 Rxf8+ Kxf8 32 Ne2 Kg7 33 Ng1! (Berkes/Meszaros), intending Nf3, is a good example of how the position can evolve very much in White's favour. The simplification has not eased Black's defence in any way and, if anything, his pawn weaknesses are now more pronounced.

25 ... Bf8 26 Nf1!

Strong play by Leko, improving his worst-placed piece. Kramnik takes the opportunity to exchange his bad bishop, but his position remains difficult. Basically, Black will have to sit and wait while White manoeuvres around, and then defend accurately when White takes action.

26 ... Bh6 27 N1d2 Bxd2 28 Rxd2 Rd7 29 Rb1 Kg7 30 h3 Qc7 31 Rf1 Nd8 32 Rdf2 Qd6 33 Qc1!? Nf7 (Diagram 12)

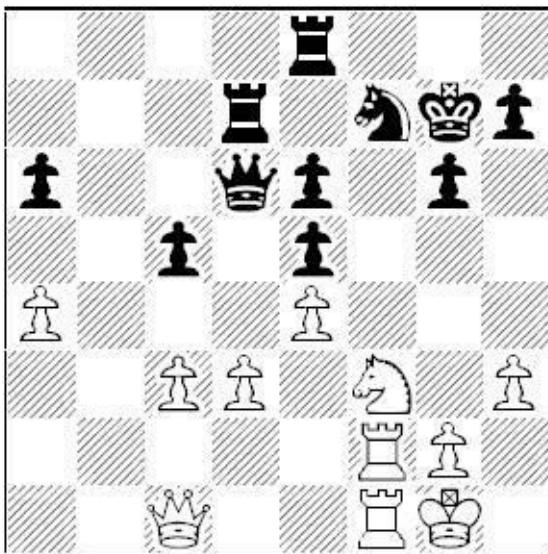


Diagram 12 (W)

34 Nh2!

Threatening Ng4, which Kramnik feels obliged to prevent at the cost of further weakening. The more direct 34 Ng5 can be met by calm defence with 34 ... Ree7! (Leko).

34 ... h5!

After 34 ... Qxd3? 35 Ng4 the threats include 36 Rxf7+ and 36 Nf6, and Black's struggles to defend against White's attack: for example, 35 ... Ree7 36 Qe1! Rb7 37 Rf3 Qd6 38 Qh4 h5 39 Ne3 (Leko), or here 39 Rg3! hxg4 40 Rxg4 g5 41 Rxg5+ Nxg5 42 Qxg5+ Kh7 43 Rf8!.

35 Qe3 Ree7 36 Rf3 c4!

Excellent play by Kramnik, who realizes that some action by Black is essential. If Black just continues to sit and wait, White will increase the pressure with Rg3, targeting the new weakness on g6.

37 dxcc4 Qd2! 38 Qb6 Ng5 39 Re3 (Diagram 13)

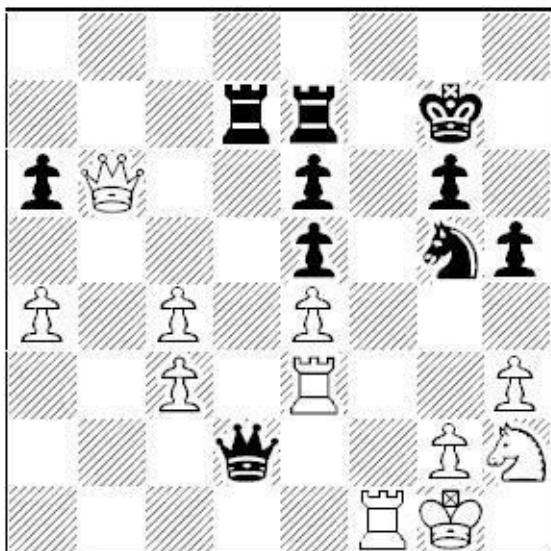


Diagram 13 (B)

39 ... Rf7?

Finally, there's a decisive mistake. This game was played at a rapidplay time limit, Kramnik was running out of time, and Leko's pressure finally takes its toll.

Black can defend with 39 ... Rb7! 40 Qc5 Nf7, as after 41 Nf3 Black has the resource 41 ... Rec7! (Leko).

40 h4!

Now Black's position falls apart: 40 ... Rxfl+ 41 Nxfl loses a piece, while if 40 ... Nh7 41 Nf3 Black is dropping lots of pawns.

40 ... Rb7 41 Qc5 Rb2 42 Qxe5+ Kh7 43 Qxg5 Rxf1+ 44 Nxfl Qf2+ 45 Kh2 Qxf1 46 Rg3!

The tactics have left White two pawns ahead, and Black's king is the more vulnerable.

46 ... Qf7 47 c5 Re2 48 Qe5 Qb7 49 Rg6! 1-0

After 49 ... Kxg6 50 Qg5+ Kh7 51 Qxh5+ White regains the rook and is many pawns ahead.

Looking a Little Deeper

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 d3 (Diagram 14)

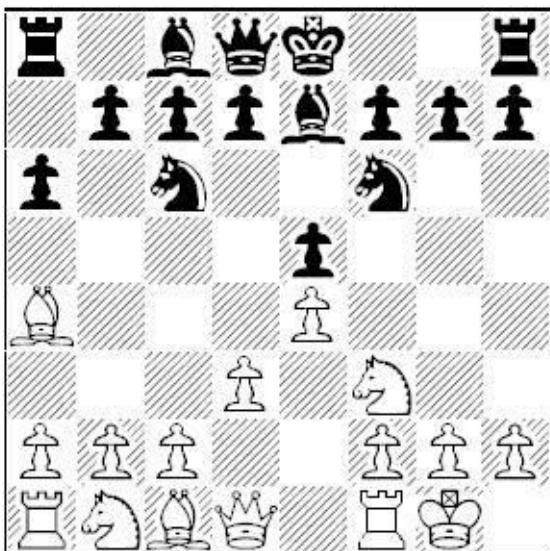


Diagram 14 (B)

Amongst other things, White's last move also threatens to win a pawn with Bxc6 and Nxe5 , so Black must either play 6 ... b5 or 6 ... d6 here. We shall look at the following options for Black:

A: 6 ... b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 a4

B: 6 ... b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 a4

C: 6 ... d6

A) 6 ... b5 7 Bb3 0-0

7 ... 0-0 and 7 ... d6 are very similar and often simply transpose to each other. The two main differences between the two are:

1) 7 ... 0-0 doesn't commit the d-pawn, which means that for the moment at least Black maintains the option of playing ... d7-d5 .

2) By delaying ... d6 , Black loses some options involving the quick development of the c8-bishop, including meeting 8 a4 with either 8 ... Bd7 or 8 ... Bg4 .

8 a4 (Diagram 15)

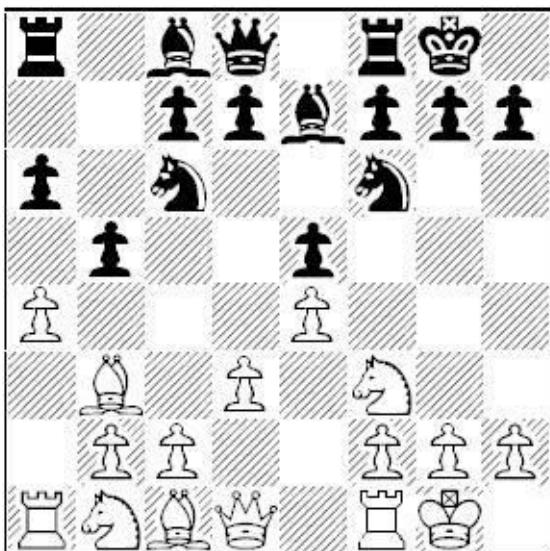


Diagram 15 (B)

Now there are three main moves:

A1: 8 ... b4

A2: 8 ... Rb8

A3: 8 ... Bb7

8 ... Na5 is a rare but interesting option for Black in the 8 a4 Anti-Marshall (see Chapter 10). Here, however, it doesn't quite work, as White's d2-d3 is much more useful than Re1. A key difference is seen in the line 9 Ba2! d6? (9 ... d5 10 exd5 Nxd5 11 Nxe5 is an inferior Marshall) 10 axb5 axb5 11 b4! when the d3-pawn prevents ... Nc4 and White wins material after 11 ... Nc6 12 Bxf7+!.

A1) 8 ... b4 9 Nbd2

White can also play 9 a5 first, which usually transposes after 9 ... d6 10 Nbd2. The alternative is 9 ... d5!? 10 exd5 Nxd5, but the structure on the queenside in an otherwise standard ... d5, exd5 position seems to be in White's favour: the c4-square is a useful outpost, and Ba4 proves awkward for Black on occasions. After 11 h3 Bb7 12 Nbd2 Nd4 13 Nxd4 exd4 14 Re1 Qd7 15 Qg4! Qxg4 16 hxg4 Rae8 17 Ne4 h6 18 Bd2 White's pieces are well placed and Black's queenside weaknesses remain, N.Bojkovic-A.Van Weersel, Rijeka 2010.

9 ... d6

9 ... Bc5!? is rare but has been tried by both Aronian and Adams, and this double bishop move is sometimes seen in similar positions. Black transposes to a ... Bc5 Lopez, more specifically the Møller Variation, but one where he is down a tempo. However, Black can get away with this loss of tempo because White's d3 set-up isn't the most direct. 10 h3 d6 11 c3 Rb8 12 Re1 Re8 13 a5 Ba7 14 Nf1 Ne7 15 Ng3 Ng6 16 d4 h6 reached a typically tense position with perhaps just the tiniest of edges for White in S.Karjakin-L.Aronian, Wijk aan Zee 2012.

10 a5

As mentioned in the Nepomniachtchi-Melkumyan game, 10 Re1 would transpose to the 8 a4 b4 Anti-Marshall, but here we're looking at lines where White delays the rook move, or avoids it entirely.

10 ... Be6

10 ... Rb8 11 Nc4 h6 is the Nepomniachtchi-Melkumyan game, while 11 ... Bg4 12 Be3 Rb7 13 h3 Bh5 14 Re1 h6 15 g4! Bg6 16 Nh4 Kh8 17 Nf5 left White with an active position in T.Fogarasi-G.Kjartansson, Budapest 2010.

11 Nc4

White can also play 11 Bc4 here, but we'll focus on the knight move.

11 ... Rb8 (Diagram 16)

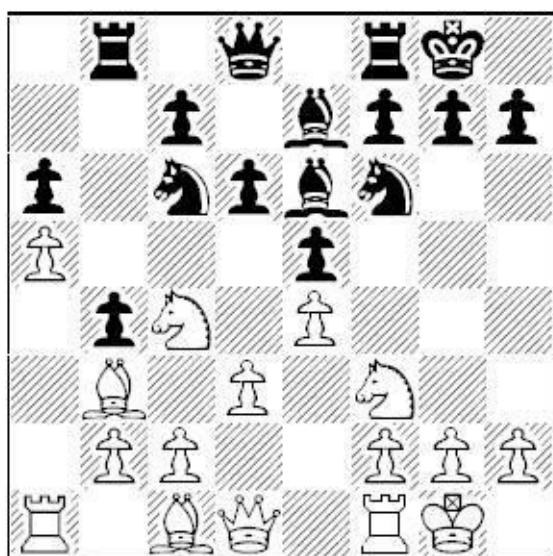


Diagram 16 (W)

12 c3

12 Be3 is the “main line”, and then 12 ... Qc8 13 h3 h6 14 Nfd2 would transpose to the Nepomniachtchi-Melkumyan game, above. Here we’ll look at 12 c3 instead. White reverts back to more typical plans, but Re1 still isn’t obligatory.

12 ... bxc3!

DANGEROUS WEAPON! 12 ... h6?! allows White to play d3-d4 without further preparation: 13 d4! exd4 (13 ... bxc3 14 d5!) 14 cxd4 d5 15 Nce5! Na7 16 exd5 Bxd5 17 Nh4! Nc6 18 Nxc6 Bxc6 19 Ng6 Re8 20 Bxf7+! and White won quickly, T.Kosintseva-J.Jackova, Ekaterinburg 2007.

13 bxc3 (Diagram 17)

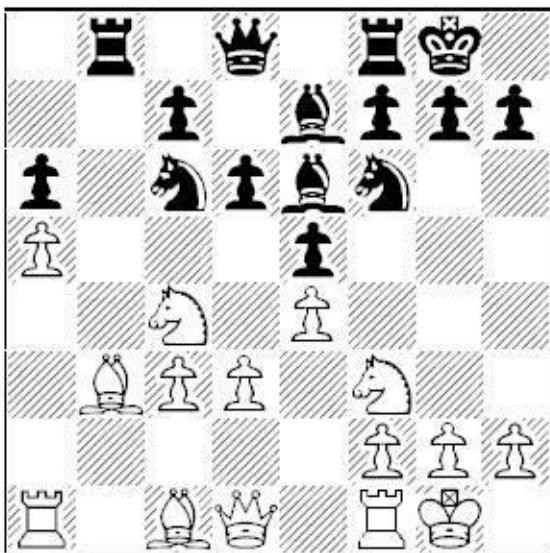


Diagram 17 (B)

Now:

a) 13 ... Bg4 14 Ba4! Na7 15 Ne3 Be6 16 Ng5 Bd7 17 Bxd7 Nxd7 18 Nf3 Nc6 19 Nd5 with a clear edge for White in A.Grischuk-E.Bacrot, Moscow (blitz) 2007, which increased after 19 ... Nc5 20 Be3 Nb3 21 Ra3 Nbxa5 22 Qa1 Rb5 23 c4.

b) 13 ... Na7! 14 Ng5!? (White could play more simply with 14 h3 Nb5 15 Qc2, or 14 Qc2) 14 ... Bg4! 15 f3 Bh5 16 Qc2 Nd7 17 Nh3 Kh8 18 Ne3 Nb5 19 Nf5 Bg6 20 Nxe7 Qxe7 21 Be3 c6 22 Nf2 Rfc8 23 Rfb1 d5 24 Ba4 with roughly level chances, P.Svidler-G.Sargissian, Ningbo 2011.

A2) 8 ... Rb8 (Diagram 18)

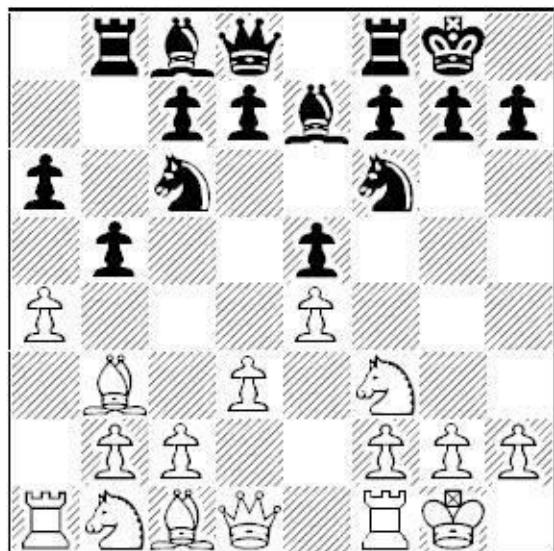


Diagram 18 (W)

If Black wants to keep his structure intact on the queenside, while also keeping the bishop on the c8-h3 diagonal, 8 ... Rb8 is the only option here.

9 axb5

White is planning Nc3, and possibly Nd5.

The traditional approach is 9 Nbd2 d6. Some recent examples:

a) 10 c3 Nd7 (or 10 ... Na5 11 Bc2 c5 12 d4 cxd4 13 cxd4 Nc6 14 axb5 axb5 15 Nb3 with a slight edge for White, Y.Quesada Perez-R.Hernandez Onna, Santa Clara 2008) 11 axb5 axb5 12 Re1 Bf6 13 Nf1 Nc5 14 Ba2 Bg4?! (14 ... Be6! looks wiser, and close to equal) 15 b4 Ne6 16 Ne3 Bxf3 17 Qxf3 with a clear plus for White in M.Carlsen-L.Fressinet, Kemer 2007, which continued 17 ... Bg5 18 Bd5 Qd7 19 Nf5 Ne7 20 Nxg7! and White went on to win.

b) 10 axb5 axb5 11 Re1 Bd7 (11 ... Be6 feels more natural) 12 c3 Ra8 13 Rxa8 Qxa8 14 d4 (White enjoys a nice edge) 14 ... h6 15 Nf1 Re8 16 Ng3 Qc8 17 Nh4! (“His Qc8 allowed the knight to go via h4 and g6 to trade off his dark square bishop after which f4 initiates a crushing attack” – Carlsen) 17 ... Bf8 18 Ng6! Na5 19 Nxf8 Rxf8 20 Bc2 Re8 21 f4 Bg4 22 Qd3 exf4 23 Bxf4 Nc4 24 Bc1 c5 25 Rf1 cxd4 26 cxd4 Qd8 27 h3 Be6 28 b3 Qa5 29 Kh2 Nh7 30 e5 g6 31 d5 Nxe5 32 dxe6 1-0, M.Carlsen-V.Topalov, Nanjing 2010.

DANGEROUS WEAPON! A crushing win by Carlsen, and a further demonstration that, in the right hands, this line contains some real bite.

9 ... axb5 10 Nc3 d6 (Diagram 19)

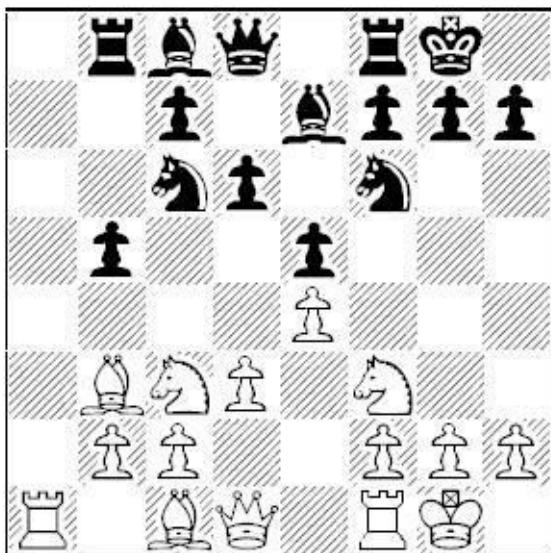


Diagram 19 (W)

11 Nd5

A key alternative here is 11 h3, preventing ... Bg4 and maintaining the tension. Now:

a) The old move 11 ... Be6 is well met by 12 Nd5! Bxd5 (12 ... Nd4 13 Nxd4 exd4 14 Ra7 Nxd5 15 exd5 Bf5 is similar to our main line, below: 16 Bd2 Ra8 17 Qa1 Re8 18 Re1 Kf8? 19 Qa5 Rxa7 20 Qxa7 Bg5 21 Rxe8+ Kxe8 22 Ba5! and Black lost his c7-pawn and the game, Y.Hambartsumian-S.Brandner, Kallithea 2008) 13 exd5 Nb4 14 d4! e4 15 Ng5 (**Diagram 20**).

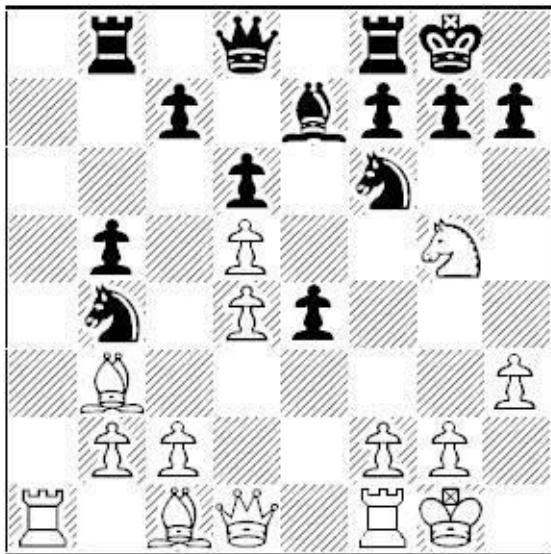


Diagram 20 (B)

The knight on g5 isn't as vulnerable as it looks, and White gets an edge here in all lines:

a1) If 15 ... h6 then 16 Nxe4! Nxe4 17 Qe1 (or 17 c3) regains the piece: 17 ... Nxc2 18 Bxc2 Nf6 19 Bb3, R.Edouard-J.Smeets, Liverpool 2008.

a2) 15 ... Nbxd5 16 Nxe4 Nxe4 17 Bxd5 Nf6 18 Bc6!? d5 19 Qd3 (Romanishin).

a3) 15 ... c5 16 dxc6!? (16 c3 Nbxd5 17 dxc5 dxc5 18 Nxe4 c4 19 Bc2 leads to a safer advantage for White, O.Romanishin-J.Nunn, Debrecen 1992) 16 ... d5 17 f3! exf3 (after 17 ... h6!? 18 Nxf7! Rxf7 19 fxe4 – Dvoiry – the complications seem to favour White) 18 Nxf3 Nxc6 19 Ne5, S.Dvoiry-V.Shinkevich, St Petersburg 1999.

b) 11 ... Nd4!? 12 Nxd4 exd4 13 Nd5 (13 Ne2 c5 14 Bg5 Be6 gives level chances) 13 ... Nxd5 14 exd5 is similar to the main line, below.

c) 11 ... Nb4! (**Diagram 21**)

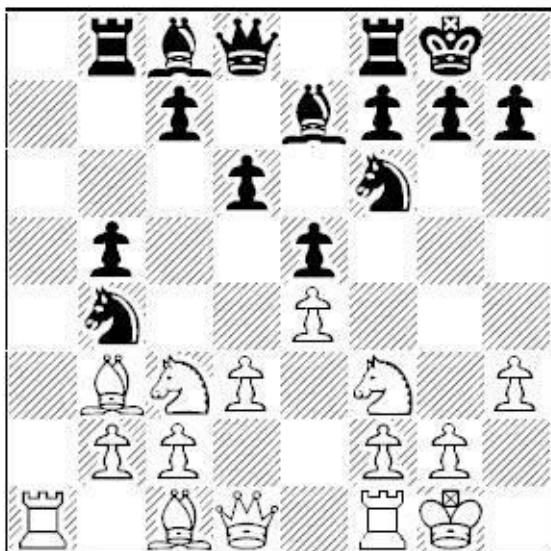


Diagram 21 (W)

is Aronian's excellent novelty, which goes a long way to solving Black's problems. Unusually for the Lopez, Black is able to use the b4-square, and he does it in order to take the sting out of Nd5. 12 Ne2 c5 13 Ng3 Be6 14 Bxe6 fxe6 15 c3 Nc6 was balanced in M.Carlsen-L.Aronian, Elista 2007.

11 ... Nxd5

11 ... Bg4 12 c3 is not easy for Black: for example, 12 ... Qd7 (or 12 ... b4 13 Ra6!) 13 h3 Bh5 14 Ra6! with some awkward pressure.

12 exd5!

Black equalizes comfortably after 12 Bxd5 Nb4! 13 Bb3 c5.

12 ... Nd4 13 Nxd4 exd4 14 Bd2 Bd7 15 Ra5 (Diagram 22)

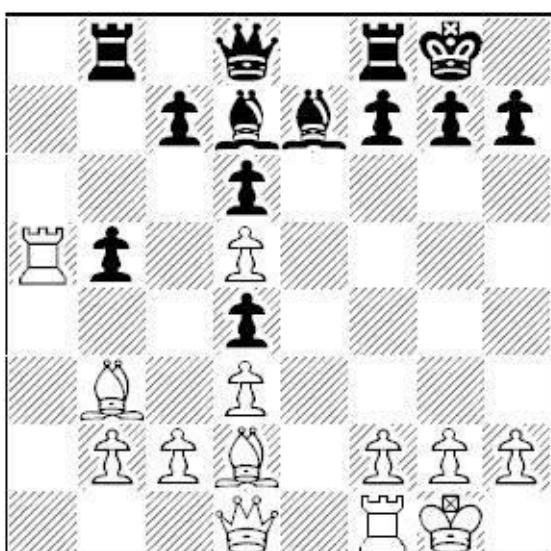


Diagram 22 (B)

Don't be fooled by this nearly symmetrical position. White's control of the a-file and the potential targets on d4, c7 and b5 mean that he can comfortably play for two results. This position is actually somewhat uncomfortable for Black, and even grandmasters with sound defensive techniques have struggled to draw from here. Some examples:

a) 15 ... Rb7 16 Re1 Bg5 17 Re4 Bf6 18 Qa1 Bf5 19 Re1 Be5 20 h3 Qh4 21 Qd1 Bd7 22 Qf3 Re8 23 Re4 Qd8 24 Qd1 h6 25 f4 Bf6 26 Rxe8+ Qxe8 27 Qe1 and White's advantage remains, A.Naiditsch-M.Carlsen, Khanty-Mansiysk 2007.

b) 15 ... Re8 16 Re1 Bg5 17 Rxe8+ Bxe8 18 Ra7 Bxd2 19 Qxd2 Rc8 (19 ... Ra8!?) 20 Qf4 Qe7 21 Qe4! Qxe4 22 dx4 g5 23 f3 Bd7 24 Ra1! Kg7 25 Rd1. White won the d4-pawn and later the game in A.Naiditsch-J.Rowson, Dresden Olympiad 2008.

c) 15 ... Ra8 16 Qa1 Qc8 17 Qa2 Qb7 18 Ra1 Rxa5 19 Qxa5 Rc8 20 Qa7 Qxa7 21 Rxa7 Kf8 22 Ba5 Bd8 23 Kf1 f5 24 Ke2 Ke8 25 f4 h6 26 Kd2 (**Diagram 23**)

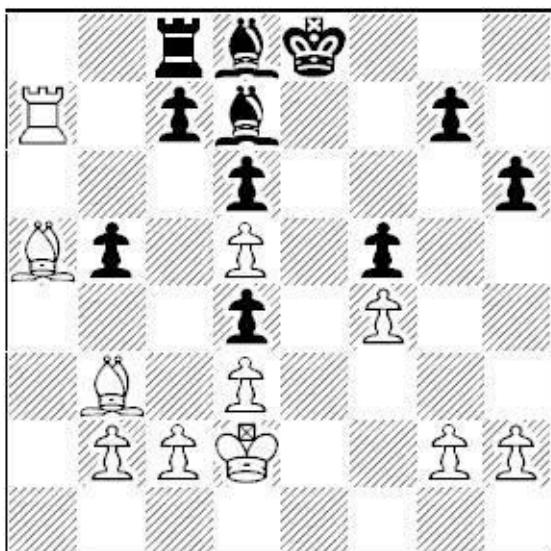


Diagram 23 (B)

and again White is pushing, E.Bacrot-J.Gustafsson, German League 2007. It's worth playing through the rest of this game, to see the various problems Bacrot posed and also Gustafsson's resilient and ultimately successful defence: 26 ... g5 27 g3 Ke7 28 c4 dxc3+ 29 bxc3 Ke8 30 d4 Kf7 31 Bc2 Kg6 32 Bd1 Be8 33 Bf3 g4 34 Bg2 h5 35 h4 gxh3! 36 Bxh3 Bf7 37 Bg2 Kf6 38 Bf3 Ke7 39 Rb7 Kd7! (39 ... Be8 40 Be2) 40 Rxb5 Ra8 (Black wisely gives up a pawn to untangle) 41 c4 Bf6 42 c5 Kc8! (if 42 ... Bxd4 White has 43 c6+ Kc8 44 Bxc7!) 43 Bc3 (43 c6!? may be more challenging) 43 ... Ra2+ 44 Ke3 Ra3 45 Kd3 dxc5 46 Rxc5 Be7 47 Rb5 Bd6 48 Rb1 Kd7 49 Rb8 Ke7 50 Kc2 Ra2+ 51 Bb2 Ba3 52 Kb1 Rxb2+ 53 Rxb2 Bxb2 54 Kxb2 Kd6 55 Kc3 Bxd5 56 Bxh5 c5 57 Be2 cxd4+ 58 Kxd4 Be6 ½-½.

A3) 8 ... Bb7 (Diagram 24)

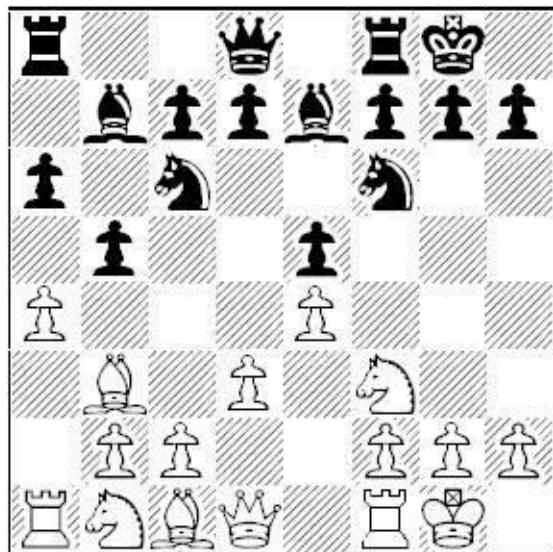


Diagram 24 (W)

This bishop fianchetto was initially Black's most popular response to a2-a4, both here and in the mainline Anti-Marshall 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 a4. In recent years, however, grandmasters have appreciated more the problems with committing the bishop to the long diagonal, and also the benefits of removing the tension with ... b4, and at the moment 8 ... Bb7 is quite rare at elite level chess.

9 Nc3

I've chosen 9 Nc3 as the "main line" here, but only because it fits with the general approach in this chapter of delaying or omitting Re1. However, I do feel that in this instance 9 Re1!, transposing to the 8 a4 Bb7 Anti-Marshall, is objectively White's strongest response. Players such as Kasparov, Svidler and Topalov showed how to put Black under pressure in this line, and in turn this led to grandmasters more or less abandoning 8 ... Bb7 in favour of 8 ... b4. Here's a brief summary of key lines:

- a) 9 ... d6 10 Nbd2 (**Diagram 25**)

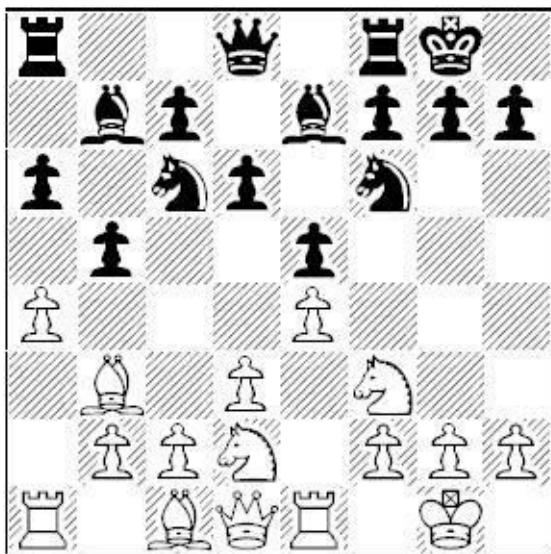


Diagram 25 (B)

and now:

a1) 10 ... Nd7 11 c3 Nc5 12 axb5 axb5 13 Rxa8 Qxa8 14 Bc2 b4 15 d4 bxc3 16 bxc3 Nd7 17 Nf1 Bf6 18 d5 Ncb8 19 h4 and White has the initiative, G.Kasparov-V.Topalov, Linares 2004.

a2) 10 ... Re8 11 Nf1 h6 12 Bd2!? (preventing ... Na5) 12 ... Bf8 13 c4! bxc4 (or 13 ... b4 14 a5! Nd7 15 Ba4 Rb8 16 Ne3, A.Grischuk-V.Tkachiev, Enghien les Bains 2001) 14 Bxc4 Rb8 15 Bc3 Ne7 16 Ng3 Ng6 17 d4 exd4 18 Qxd4 with some advantage for White, G.Kasparov-V.Tkachiev, Cannes 2001.

a3) 10 ... Na5 11 Ba2 c5 12 Nf1 b4 (or 12 ... Re8 13 Ne3 h6 14 Bd2 c4 15 Bc3! Qb6 16 Nd2!, G.Kasparov-P.Leko, Linares 2001) 13 c3 (13 Ne3 is also possible) 13 ... bxc3 14 bxc3 c4 15 Ng3 cxd3 16 Qxd3 Bc8 17 Ba3. White's activity gives him the edge, P.Svidler-V.Ivanchuk, Morelia/Linares 2006 (and others).

DANGEROUS WEAPON! Ivanchuk's tempo loss on his 16th move underlines a basic problem for Black in this line – often the bishop is better placed on c8, where it covers e6 and f5, than it is on b7.

b) 9 ... Re8 (keeping the option of ... d7-d5 in one go) 10 c3 h6 (10 ... Bf8 11 Bg5! h6 12 Bh4 d6 13 Na3 b4 14 Nc4 is better for White, P.Svidler-A.Onischuk, Calvia

Olympiad 2004) 11 Nbd2 Bf8 12 Ba2! (**Diagram 26**).

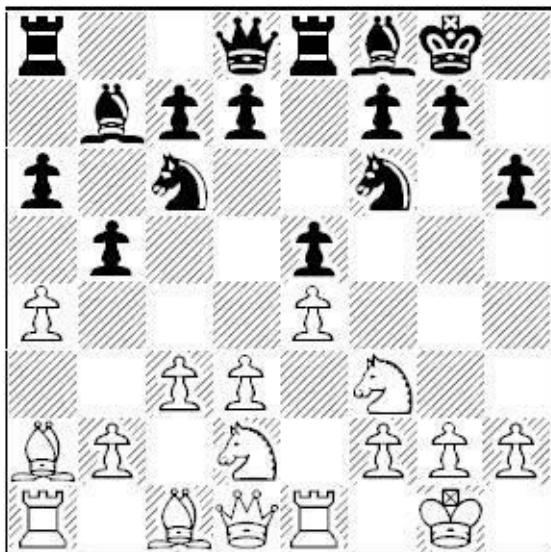


Diagram 26 (B)

This was Kasparov's clever idea, not allowing the tempo gain with ... Na5, which he introduced against Short in their 1993 match. 12 ... d5 (Short opted for 12 ... d6 but Kasparov kept an edge with 13 Nh4! Qd7 14 Ng6!) 13 exd5 Nxd5 14 Ne4!. Black has achieved the ... d5 break, but he is still under some pressure, thanks in part to White's strong bishop on a2. White threatens the typical tactic Bxh6, Bxd5 and Nf6+, and Black's position isn't easy to play. For example, 14 ... Re6 (or 14 ... Nf6 15 Qb3!) 15 Be3 Nxe3 16 Rxe3 Re7 17 Nh4! Rd7 18 Qh5 Kh8 19 Rf3 f6 20 Ng6+ Kh7 21 Qf5 1-0, M.Rytshagov-T.Sammalvuo, Helsinki 1994. Black could defend better, of course, but overall this looks pleasant for White.

Returning to 9 Nc3 (**Diagram 27**):

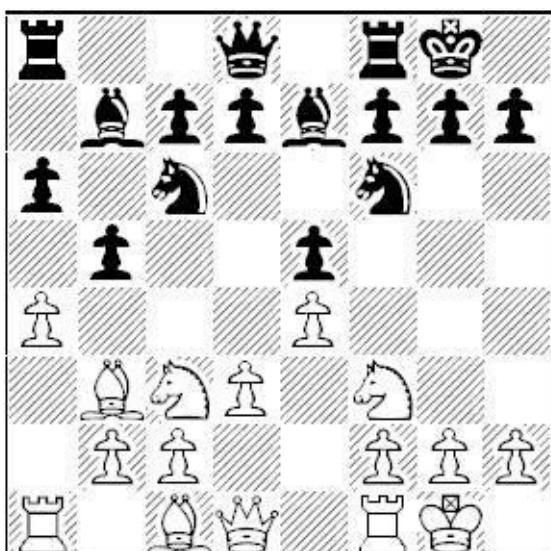


Diagram 27 (B)

9 ... b4

9 ... b4 is certainly Black's most popular response to 9 Nc3, but I'm not sure it's the best.

9 ... Na5!? is a key alternative:

a) Black gets compensation if White grabs the pawn, e.g. 10 axb5 Nxb3 11 cxb3 axb5 12 Rxa8 Qxa8 and now 13 Nxb5 Rb8 or 13 Nxe5 b4 14 Ne2 d5!.

b) 10 Ba2! b4 11 Nd5 (11 Ne2 d6 12 Ng3 is very nice for White, but 11 ... d5! 12 exd5 Bxd5 equalizes) 11 ... Nxd5 12 Bxd5! (if 12 exd5?! then 12 ... b3! 13 cxb3 – or 13 Bd2 bxa2 14 Bxa5 Bxd5 – 13 ... Bxd5 14 Nxe5 Rb8 with good compensation) 12 ... Bxd5 13 exd5 d6 14 Re1! c5! (14 ... c6 15 d4! e4! 16 Rxe4 cxd5 17 Re2 feels slightly better for White, S.Brenjo-J.Petronic, Kladovo 1994) 15 dxc6 Nxc6 16 d4 Qc7 17 c3 bxc3 18 bxc3 Rfe8 with level chances, P.Vesely-M.Geenen, correspondence 2006.

10 Nd5 (Diagram 28)

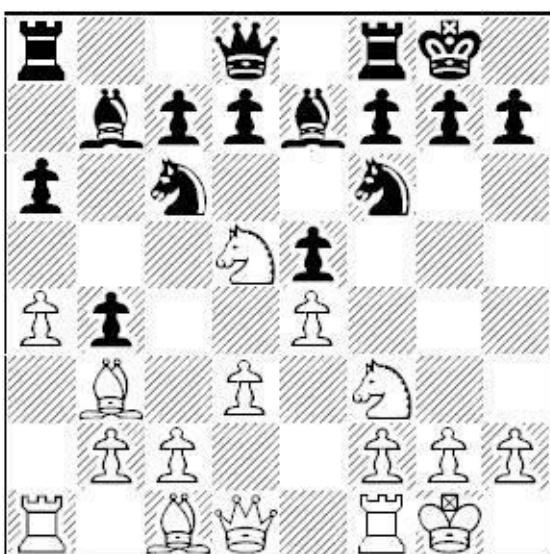


Diagram 28 (B)

10 ... Na5!

Black frees his position at the cost of allowing a knight-for-bishop exchange. This is the wisest course of action, since 10 ... Nxd5 11 Bxd5 leaves Black temporarily tied up in view of the awkward pin. White has good chances of an advantage here. For example, 11 ... d6 12 Bd2 a5 13 c3 bxc3 (13 ... Rb8!?) 14 Bxc3 Qb8 15 d4 Nxd4 16 Nxd4 exd4 17 Bxd4 Bxd5 18 exd5, S.Dvoiryš-Y.Balashov, Samara 1998.

BEWARE! 12 a5?! looks tempting in this line, but there's a tactical trick which completely solves Black's problems: 12 ... Nxa5! 13 Rxa5 c6.

11 Nxe7+

11 Ba2 would transpose to the 9 ... Na5 note, above, but here White takes the opportunity to grab the bishop pair first.

11 ... Qxe7 12 Ba2 d5!

Typical strategy. Black wants to exploit his activity and open up the position as soon as possible, in spite of White's two bishops, because keeping the position closed would only allow White to fully mobilize his army and then open the position himself at a much more convenient time.

After 12 ... c5 13 Bg5 h6 14 Bh4 d6 15 Bg3! Bc8 16 Nh4! Be6 17 Bxe6 Qxe6 18 f4 c4 19 Nf5 White gained a strong attack in S.Dvoiryss-P.Svidler, Moscow 1992.

13 exd5 (Diagram 29)

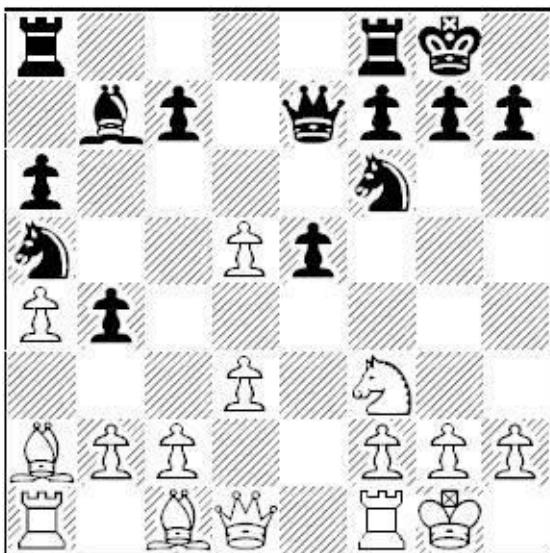


Diagram 29 (B)

13 ... Bxd5

Alternatively:

a) Taking with the knight feels less natural, as Black really should be trying to neutralize White's a2-bishop. 13 ... Nxd5 14 Re1 f6 15 Bd2 c5 16 c3 Rad8 17 cxb4 cxb4 was M.Stolz-R.Mainka, German League 1996, and here 18 d4 looks good. 18 ... e4 can be met by 19 Rc1! intending Rc5, and 19 ... Rc8 20 Rc5! Rxc5 21 dxc5 Qxc5 22 Rxe4 is much better for White.

b) With 13 ... Qd6!? Black takes steps against Re1 (14 Re1 is now met by 14 ... Rfe8!) before recapturing on d5. D.Navarra-D.Jakovenko, Sochi 2008, continued 14 Qe1! (after 14 c4 bxc3 15 bxc3 Bxd5 White has 16 Ba3!, but Black can hold on with 16 ... c5!) 14 ... Rfe8 15 Bd2 Nxd5 16 Ng5 b3 (if 16 ... h6 then 17 Ne4 Qg6 18 Bxb4 Nf4 19 g3 Nc6 20 Bc3) 17 cxb3! (a novelty; previously 17 Bxa5 bxa2 18 Qe4 Qh6 19 Bd2 Rab8 was unclear in K.Kulaots-A.Delchev, Istanbul 2003) 17 ... Nc6 18 Qe4 Nf6 19 Qc4 Qd7 20 b4! and White had the advantage.

14 Re1 Nc6

14 ... Bxa2 15 Rxe5!? Be6 16 Rxa5 c5 (**Diagram 30**)

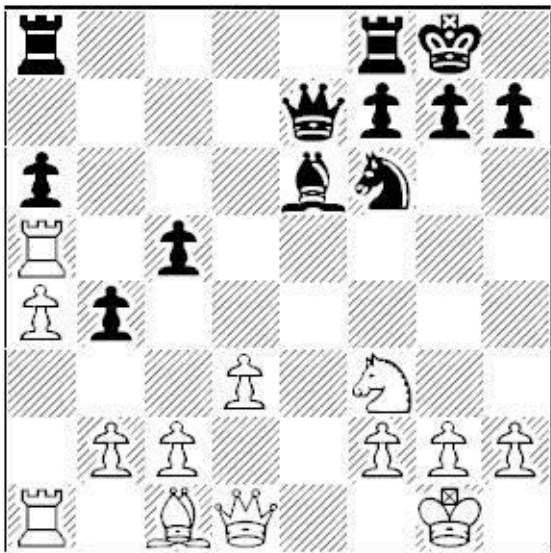


Diagram 30 (B)

reaches an intriguing, unclear position, with a number of factors in play:

1) White is a pawn ahead.

2) White's rook on a5 can't move. It's vulnerable, but it also attacks Black's weak c5-pawn and is difficult to trap.

3) White can try to free the rook with d3-d4.

4) In some lines White can give up the rook for a piece and two pawns.

Two examples from games:

a) 17 d4 cxd4 18 Bg5 Rfd8 19 Qd2 b3! 20 cxb3 d3 and Black's passer on d3 gives him compensation for the pawn, T.Oim-A.Hermlin, correspondence 1985.

b) 17 Be3 Nd7 18 Ng5 Bd5 19 Nxh7! Rfc8! 20 Qh5 Qd6 21 d4 (21 Re1!?) 21 ... f6 22 dxc5 Qc6 23 Rd1 Ne5! 24 Nxf6+ gxf6 25 Bd4 Rc7 26 Bxe5 fxe5 27 Rd3 Rg7 28 g3 Rf8 29 Qxe5 Bh1 30 f3 Rxf3 31 Qd5+ Rgf7 32 Kxh1 ½-½, M.Ripper-H.Hausdorf, correspondence 2008; it's perpetual check after 32 ... Rf1+ 33 Kg2 R1f2+.

15 Bf4

White can win a pawn with 15 Bxd5 Nxd5 16 Nxe5 Nxe5 17 d4, but then 17 ... Nf3+! 18 gxf3 Qf6 gives Black clear compensation.

15 ... Bxf3!

15 ... Bxa2 16 Rxa2 Nd7 17 d4 looks a touch better for White.

16 Qxf3 Qd6 17 Bg3

17 Be3!?.

17 ... Nd4 18 Qd1 Rae8 19 h3 (Diagram 31)

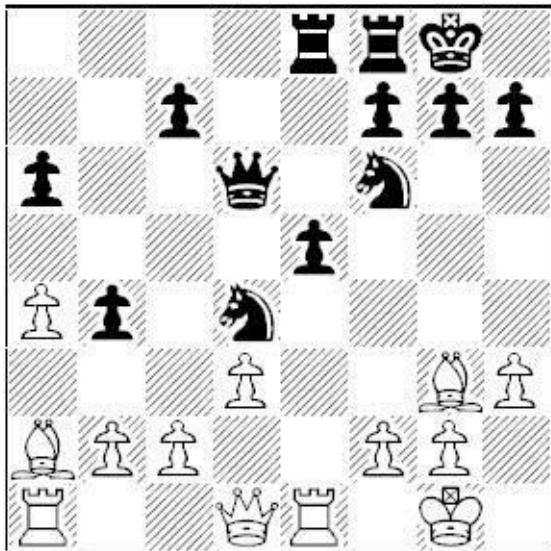


Diagram 31 (B)

19 h3 is to give the g3-bishop an escape square on h2 after ... Nf5. White has the advantage of two bishops against two knights, but it seems that Black's space and active pieces allow him to hold the balance with careful play. For example, 19 ... Nd5 20 Qd2 g6! (20 ... f5 21 c3!) 21 Rad1 Nf4 22 c3 bxc3 23 bxc3 Nf5 24 Bxf4 exf4 25 Re4 f3 26 g4 Ng3! 27 Bxf7+! Kxf7 28 Qf4+ Qxf4 29 Rxf4+ Kg7 30 fxg3 Re2 31 Rxf8 Kxf8 32 Kf1 Rg2 33 Re1 Rxg3 34 Re6 Rxh3 35 Rxa6 Rg3 36 Kf2 Rxg4 37 Kxf3 h5 38 Rc6 Rxa4 39 Rxg6 Ke7 40 c4 ½-½, R.Kruis-P.Chopin, correspondence 2009.

In summary, 9 Nc3 might be a useful surprise weapon here, but objectively White has more chances of gaining an advantage with 9 Re1.

B) 6 ... b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 a4 (Diagram 31)

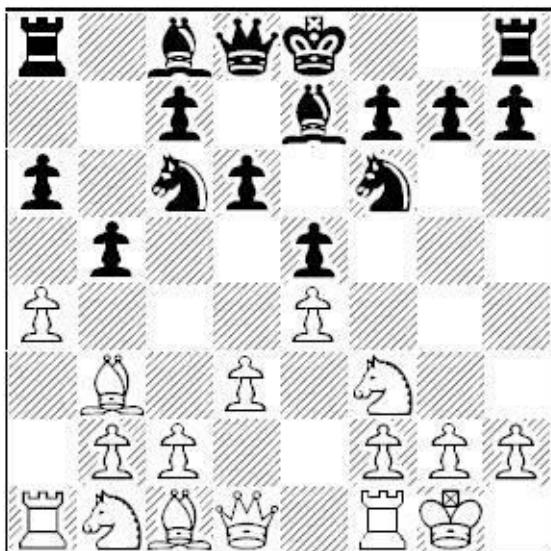


Diagram 32 (B)

In this section we'll look at lines which are associated with 7 ... d6 and, for the main part, independent of 7 ... 0-0 transpositions. This includes the possibilities of ... Bd7 and ... Bg4. Here we'll consider:

B1: 8 ... Bg4

B2: 8 ... Bd7

B3: 8 ... Na5

DANGEROUS WEAPON! 8 ... Be6? loses a pawn, to 9 Bxe6 fxe6 10 Ng5! and Black's queen will be overloaded.

Other moves are likely to transpose to lines already discussed:

a) 8 ... b4 is a popular move here and transposes to Line A1 after 9 a5! 0-0 10 Nbd2.

b) 8 ... Rb8 is also very likely to lead to a transposition, this time to Line B2: 9 axb5 axb5 10 Nc3 (10 h3 0-0 11 Nc3 is Line B2) 10 ... 0-0 is Line B2, while 10 ... Bg4 11 Be3 0-0 12 h3 Bh5 (12 ... Be6!?) 13 g4 Bg6 14 Nh4 favours White, J.Elburg-H.Seemann, correspondence 1986.

c) 8 ... Bb7 gives Black fewer options than 7 ... 0-0 8 a4 Bb7, since he can no longer play ... d5 in one go. 9 Nc3 (or 9 Re1 0-0 with an 8 a4 Anti-Marshall – see Line A3) 9 ... Na5 (9 ... b4 10 Ne2 Na5 11 Ba2 0-0 12 Ng3 c5 comes to the same thing) 10 Ba2 b4 11 Ne2 c5 12 Ng3 0-0 13 Bd2!? (to prevent the possibility of ... b3, at least for the moment) 13 ... Rb8 14 Nf5 Bc8 15 N3h4 (**Diagram 33**)

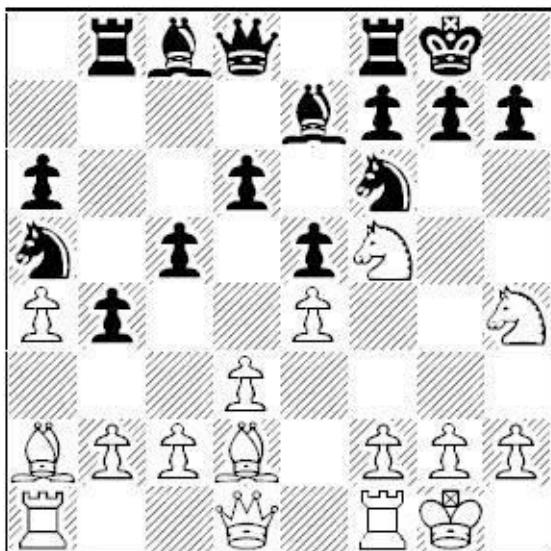


Diagram 33 (B)

gave White good attacking chances in V.Topalov-A.Beliavsky, Batumi 1999. Again White's idea is to play f2-f4, which Topalov achieved after 15 ... Be6 16 Qf3 Ne8 17 Nxe7+ Qxe7 18 Nf5 Qd7 19 Qg4 Kh8 20 f4.

B1) 8 ... Bg4 (Diagram 34)

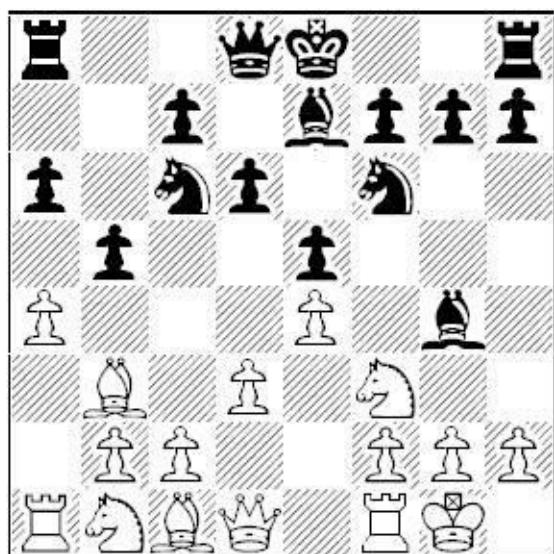


Diagram 34 (W)

An early ... Bg4 is often unwise in the Ruy Lopez because the bishop can become a target in White's plans (e.g. h2-h3 and g2-g4, or h3 and Nd2-f1-g3). In this instance, though, ... Bg4 is more justified. Black might exchange on f3 and then try to gain counterplay on the queenside, or just accept a tempo loss by answering h2-h3 with ...

Bd7.

9 c3

White has to prevent ... Nd4, but an interesting alternative is 9 Be3!?, after which 9 ... 0-0 10 h3 Bh5?! (accepting a tempo loss with 10 ... Be6! looks wiser) 11 g4! Bg6 12 Nh4 gives White a quick initiative. A. Vovk-M.Kravtsiv, Lvov 2008, continued 12 ... Qd7 13 Nf5 Rfb8 14 Nxe7+ Nxe7 15 Bg5! d5 16 Bxf6 gxf6 17 Qf3 dxe4 18 dxe4 Kg7 19 Rd1 Qc6 20 Nc3 with a clear advantage for White.

9 ... 0-0

Or 9 ... Na5 10 Bc2 b4 11 d4! (11 cxb4 Nc6!) 11 ... c5 12 cxb4 cxb4 13 Nbd2 Nd7 14 h3 Bh5 15 Nb3 Rc8 16 Nxa5 Qxa5 17 Bb3 Nf6 18 Re1 (**Diagram 35**)

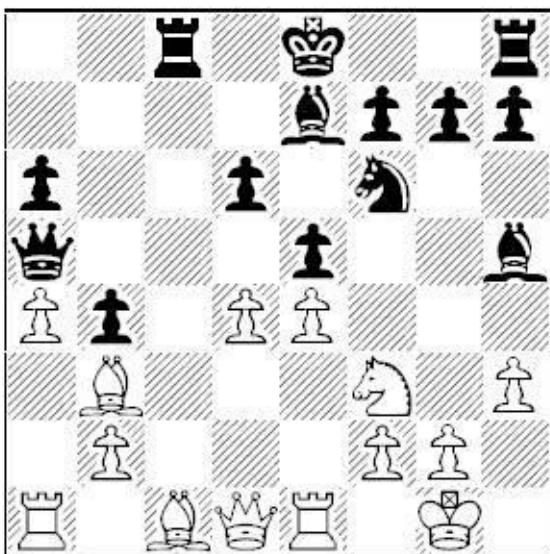


Diagram 35 (B)

with an edge for White, F.Caruana-V.Korchnoi, Dresden Olympiad 2008. Korchnoi characteristically grabbed a pawn with 18 ... Bxf3 19 Qxf3 exd4 but after 20 Bf4! the threat of e4-e5 was annoying, 20 ... Nd7? 21 Qg4! made matters a whole lot worse for him, and White won in 28 moves.

10 h3

White can also play 10 Nbd2 first, but there's no harm in putting the question to the bishop straightaway.

10 ... Bd7

Black accepts the tempo loss – h2-h3 is virtually always a useful move – and heads back to d7 with the bishop. Of course Black could have moved the bishop to d7 straightaway, with 8 ... Bd7, although by playing to g4 first he has at least narrowed White's options – after 8 ... Bd7 White can play 9 Nc3, as we'll see in Line B2.

Strong players are wary of 10 ... Bh5, and for good reason since White can target the bishop and attack on the kingside. I would be tempted by the direct 11 g4 Bg6 12 Nh4, but White's play in H.Ziska-G.Thorhallsson, Reykjavik 2011, looks convincing: 11 Bg5 Na5 12 Ba2 (**Diagram 36**)

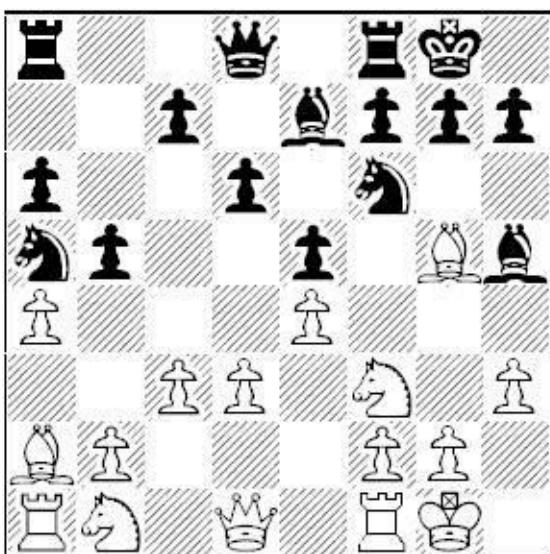


Diagram 36 (B)

12 ... Qd7 (12 ... c5 is better, but then even the simple plan of 13 Bxf6 Bxf6 14 Bd5 Rc8 15 axb5 axb5 16 Nbd2 looks nice for White) 13 b4! Nb7 14 Bxf6! Bxf6 15 Nxe5! dxе5 16 Qxh5 Qxd3? 17 Bd5! Rab8 18 Rd1 g6 19 Qg4 and Black resigned in view of 19 ... Qc2 20 Ra2 trapping the queen.

Giving up the bishop with 10 ... Bxf3 11 Qxf3 looks strange, but in fact it's a typical idea against a2-a4 lines. The advance of this pawn allows Black to gain a degree of counterplay on the queenside, which goes some way to compensate for giving up the bishop pair.

a) 11 ... b4 12 a5! bxc3 13 bxc3 Rb8 14 Nd2 Nd7 15 Bc4 with an edge for White, F.Caruana-M.Ragger, Chur 2010.

b) 11 ... Na5 (**Diagram 37**) and now:

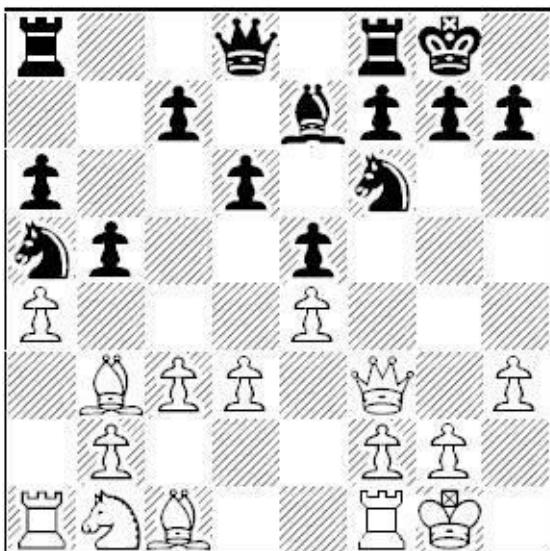


Diagram 37 (W)

b1) 12 Bc2 c5 (12 ... b4 13 Nd2 c5 14 Nb3 bxc3 15 bxc3 Nxb3 16 Bxb3 Qa5 17 Bd2 Rab8 18 Rab1 is better for White, A.Lukin-K.Andreev, St Petersburg 1997) 13 Nd2 Nd7 14 Nb3! Nc6! 15 Qe2 (15 Qg3!?) 15 ... Nb6 16 a5 Nd7 17 g3 Re8 18 f4 exf4 19 gxf4 Bf8 20 Kh2 d5 21 e5 d4 22 cxd4 cxd4 reached a complex position with roughly level chances in D.Svetushkin-P.Nikolic, Plovdiv 2008.

b2) 12 Bd1!? b4 13 Qg3! is a new and interesting idea. White aims directly for f2-f4, and the bishop on d1 prevents ... Nh5. 13 ... Nd7 14 f4 exf4 15 Bxf4 Bf6 16 d4 Re8 17 Nd2 Rb8 18 Bc2 bxc3 19 bxc3 Rb2 20 Qd3 was J.Geller-M.Kravtsiv, Lvov 2007, and I prefer White in this position.

11 Bc2!? (Diagram 38)

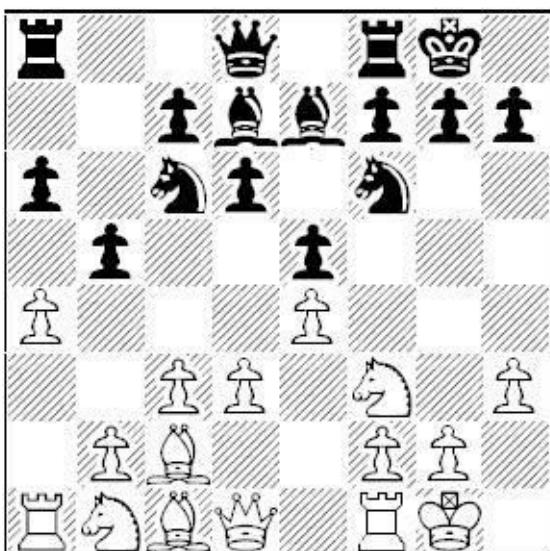


Diagram 38 (B)

This volunteered retreat seems strange at first sight, until one realizes that Bc2 more or less prevents Black's key plan for queenside counterplay, ... Na5 and ... c5 (... Na5 can now be met by b2-b4). Compare White's idea here with Kasparov's 12 Ba2! in Line A3.

The main alternative is 11 Nbd2 (or 11 Re1) which would probably lead to a typical Lopez Chigorin position after, for example, 11 ... Na5 12 Bc2 (12 Ba2!?) 12 ... c5 13 Re1 Re8 14 Nf1 h6 15 Ng3 Bf8 16 d4. Other possibilities for White are 11 a5!? and 11 Ba2!?.

11 ... Re8

11 ... b4!? is an alternative: 12 Nbd2 Rb8 13 d4 bxc3 14 bxc3 exd4 15 cxd4 Nb4 16 Bb1 Bc6 17 d5 (perhaps 17 Re1!?) 17 ... Bd7 18 Nc4 c6! and Black equalized, T.Kosintseva-Zhao Xue, Nizhnij Novgorod 2007.

12 Re1 h6 13 Nbd2 Bf8 14 Nf1 (Diagram 39)

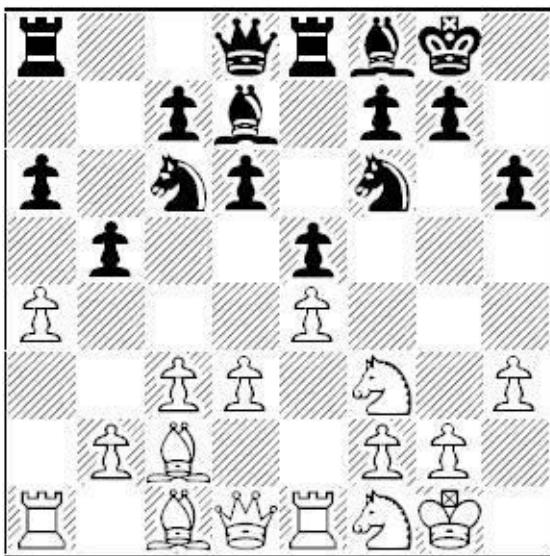


Diagram 39 (B)

White enjoys a small advantage here. Two examples:

a) 14 ... Na5 15 b4! Nc6 16 Bd2 Ne7 17 Ng3 Ng6 18 d4 c6 19 Bb3 Qc7 20 Ra2 with a nice space edge, N.Kosintseva-T.Shadrina, Gorodets 2006.

b) 14 ... d5 15 Ne3 dxe4 16 dxe4 b4 17 a5! Bc5 18 Nd5! with a strong knight in the centre, A.Timofeev-A.Korotylev, Krasnoyarsk 2007.

B2) 8 ... Bd7

As played in the Leko-Kramnik game earlier in the chapter.

9 Nc3

White also has 9 c3, of course. Then we reach positions like those seen in Line B1, except White doesn't have the extra (and useful) move h2-h3.

White can also play 9 Nbd2 and delay c2-c3. For example, 9 ... 0-0 10 Re1 Na5 11 Ba2 c5 12 Nf1 bxa4!? (winning a pawn at the cost of messing up his queenside structure; 12 ... b4 is a safer option) 13 Ne3 Rb8 14 h3 Ne8 15 Nf5 with excellent compensation for White, L.Bruzon Batista-V.Bhat, Badalona 2010.

9 ... Na5

9 ... b4 10 Ne2 (10 Nd5 Na5!) 10 ... Na5 11 Ba2 comes to the same thing.

10 Ba2 b4

Against 10 ... 0-0 White could play 11 Bd2 followed by Ne2, or 11 Be3, but Notkin suggests changing the character of the position with 11 d4!?. If 11 ... b4 (11 ... Nc6!?) 12 Nd5 Nxe4? then 13 Re1 is a real problem for Black – 13 ... Bf5 14 Nxe7+ Qxe7 15 Bd5 wins material.

11 Ne2 c5 (Diagram 40)

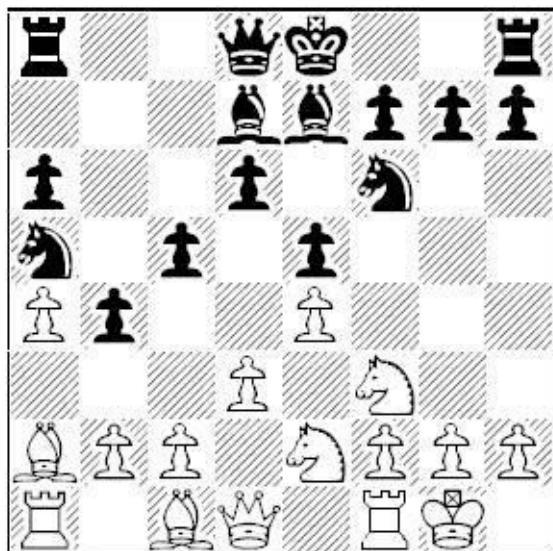


Diagram 40 (W)

12 Ng3

Magnus Carlsen has demonstrated another way for White to prepare the f2-f4 break, with 12 Nd2!? Be6 13 f4 Bxa2 14 Rxa2 0-0 15 Nf3 Nc6 16 Ng3 exf4 17 Bxf4 d5 18 e5 Ne8 19 Nf5 Nc7 20 Ra1 Ne6 21 Bg3, M.Carlsen-P.Svidler, Moscow (blitz) 2010. I slightly prefer White here, and in view of Black's improvements below in the main line, 12 Nd2 might be the way forward for White.

12 ... 0-0 13 Nh4!? Nxe4!

A critical response to 13 Nh4.

13 ... g6 14 Bh6 Re8 15 Bd2, followed by f2-f4, promises White an initiative, as we saw in the Leko-Kramnik game.

The positional pawn sacrifice 13 ... b3!? also looks more challenging than Kramnik's 13 ... g6, and Black gets decent compensation after 14 cxb3 (or 14 Bxb3 Nxb3 15 cxb3 Rb8) 14 ... Nc6 15 Nhf5 Be6.

14 dxe4 Bxh4 15 Qxd6 (Diagram 41)

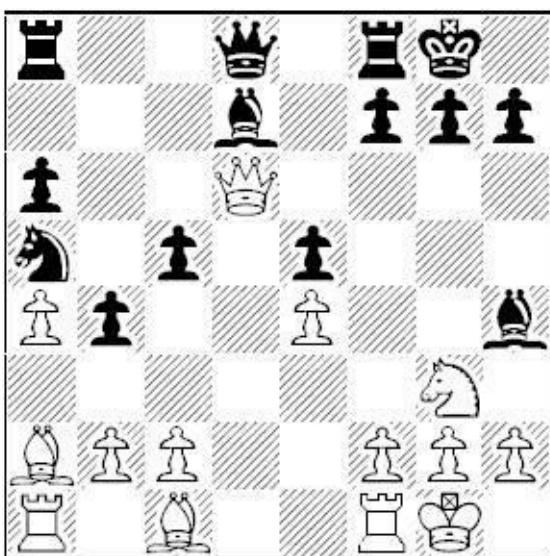


Diagram 41 (B)

Now:

a) 15 ... Qe7 (G.Guseinov-P.Thipsay, Moscow 2004) 16 Qxe7 Bxe7 17 Rd1 Rfd8 18 Bd5 Rab8 19 Be3 looks roughly level.

b) 15 ... b3!? 16 cxb3 Qe7 17 Rd1 Bg4 18 Qxe7 Bxe7 19 Nf5! Bxf5 (19 ... Bxd1? 20 Nxe7+ Kh8 21 Bd2 wins for White) 20 exf5 Nc6 21 Be3 Nd4 22 g4 (22 b4!?) 22 ... Rab8 23 Kg2 Rb7 24 Rac1 Rfb8 25 Rc4 Rb4 26 Rxb4 Rxb4 27 Bd2 Rb8 28 f4 exf4 29 Bxf4 Rb7 30 Rd3 g6 31 fxg6 hxg6 32 Bd2 Bf6 33 Bc3 Ne2 34 Bd2 Bxb2 35 b4 cxb4 36 Bc4 Nd4 37 Bxa6 Ra7 38 Bb5 Nxb5 39 axb5 Rb7 40 Bxb4 ½-½, Ni Hua-L.Johannessen, Dresden Olympiad 2008.

Overall Black seems to be okay after either 12 Ng3 0-0 13 Nh4 Nxe4 or 13 ... b3, so White players aiming for the f4 break might prefer to focus on Carlsen's 12 Nd2.

B3: 8 ... Na5!? (Diagram 42)

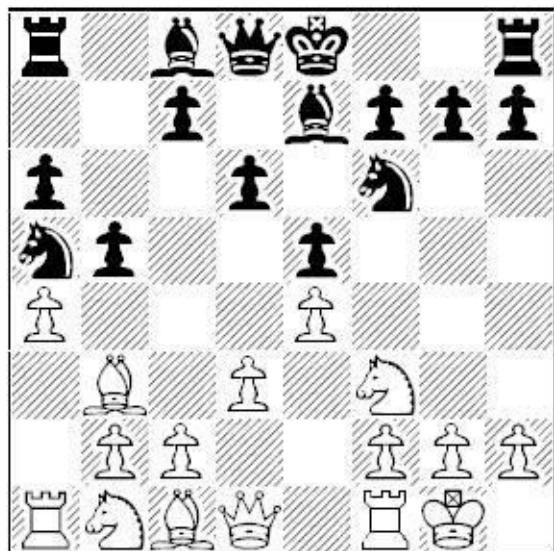


Diagram 42 (W)

None of the World's elite play this knight move, which makes me think that White should grab the pawn.

9 axb5

The alternative is 9 Ba2 b4 10 Nbd2. This transposes to 8 a4 b4 9 Nbd2 Na5 10 Ba2 (a line White can avoid in that move order with 9 a5!). An example: 10 ... c5 11 c3 Rb8 12 Nc4 0-0 13 Nxa5 Qxa5 14 Bd2 bxc3 15 Bxc3 Qd8 16 Nd2 Be6 17 Nc4 Qc8 18 Qf3 Bg4 19 Qe3 Be6 20 Qe2 Rd8 21 a5 with the slightest of edges for White, V.Anand-L.Aronian, Sao Paulo/Bilbao 2011.

9 ... Nxb3

No-one has played 9 ... axb5, unsurprisingly so as it looks very risky to allow the knight on a5 to be pinned this way. However, there appears to be no concrete way to refute it. 10 Ng5 is the most obvious try, with 10 ... 0-0? 11 Nxf7! Rxf7 12 Bxf7+ Kxf7 13 b4 being White's idea. However, 10 ... d5! looks playable for Black, e.g. 11 Qe1 b4 12 f4 exf4 13 Bxf4 0-0.

10 cxb3 0-0 11 Nbd2! (Diagram 43)

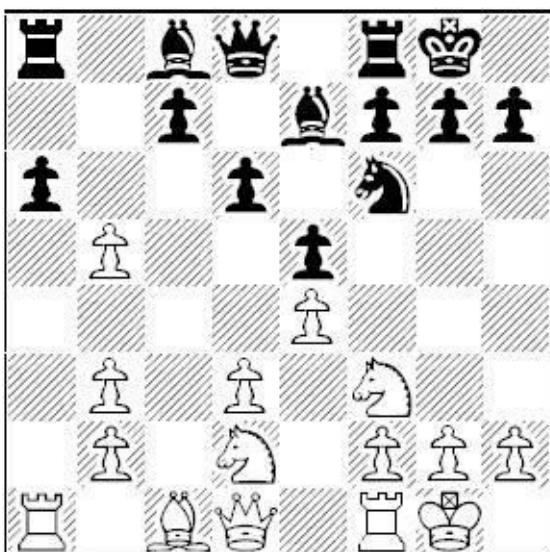


Diagram 43 (B)

Tiviakov's idea. The knight goes to the outpost on c4, where it shields White's queenside weaknesses and keeps an eye on the centre. After the more standard 11 Nc3 Bb7 12 bxa6 Rxa6 13 Rxa6 Bxa6 Black has typical compensation for the pawn.

11 ... Bb7 12 bxa6 Rxa6 13 Rxa6 Bxa6 14 Nc4!

Blunting the a6-bishop.

14 ... Qb8 15 Qc2 Qb5 16 Bd2 Rb8 17 Ra1!

S.Tiviakov-K.Kuderinov, Moscow 2011. Black's compensation looks insufficient here. After 17 ... Bc8 18 Na5 (18 d4!?) 18 ... c5 19 b4! Bg4 (19 ... cxb4 20 Nc6 wins) 20 bxc5 Bxf3 21 gxf3 dxc5 22 Nc4 White gained a clear advantage and later won.

C) 6 ... d6 7 c3! (Diagram 44)

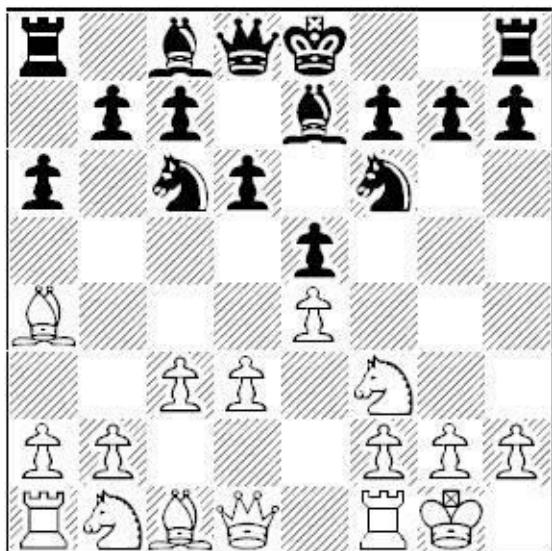


Diagram 44 (B)

There are two significant differences between 6 ... d6 and the more popular 6 ... b5:

- 1) By delaying or even avoiding ... b5, Black eliminates many a2-a4 options for White.
- 2) Playing 7 c3! offers White a second option against any later ... b5: the bishop can retreat to c2 as well as b3.

BEWARE! Trying to transpose back to 6 ... b5 lines with 7 Nc3 doesn't work. For one thing, Black still doesn't have to play ... b5. Even worse, he could play 7 ... b5 8 Bb3 and then 8 ... Na5! to force a knight-for-bishop exchange before White has a chance to play a2-a4.

7 ... 0-0 8 Re1 (Diagram 45)

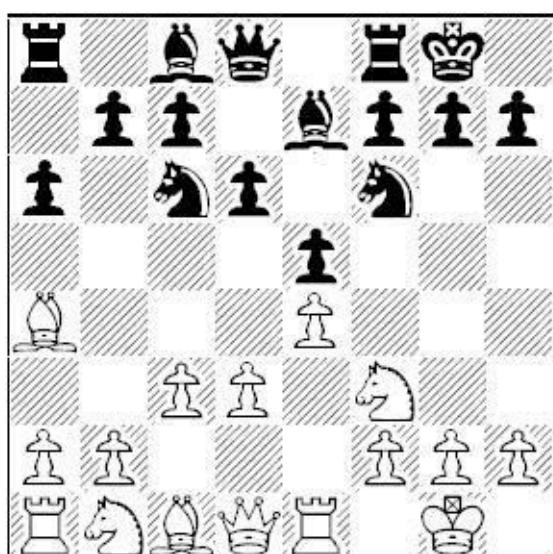


Diagram 45 (B)

8 Nbd2 often transposes but it slightly reduces White's options. See, for example, the note on 8 ... Nd7, where White plays an early Be3.

8 ... b5

The most popular choice, but there are other plans which either delay or avoid this advance. For example:

a) 8 ... Bg4 (this position is more often reached via the move order 6 Re1 d6 7 c3 Bg4 8 d3 0-0) 9 h3 Bh5 10 Nbd2 Nd7!. Black plans ... Nc5 and possibly ... Bg5. This is the only real way to justify ... Bg4, otherwise White just gets an easy advantage with Nf1-g3. 11 Nf1 Nc5 12 Bxc6!? bxc6 13 d4 Bxf3 (13 ... exd4 14 cxd4 Ne6 15 g4 Bg6 16 Ng3 – Kasimdzhanov – looks slightly better for White) 14 Qxf3 exd4 15 cxd4 Ne6 16 Be3 d5 17 Ng3 with an edge for White, V.Jansa-J.Lechtynsky, Kouty nad Desnou 2012.

b) 8 ... Nd7 (Diagram 46)

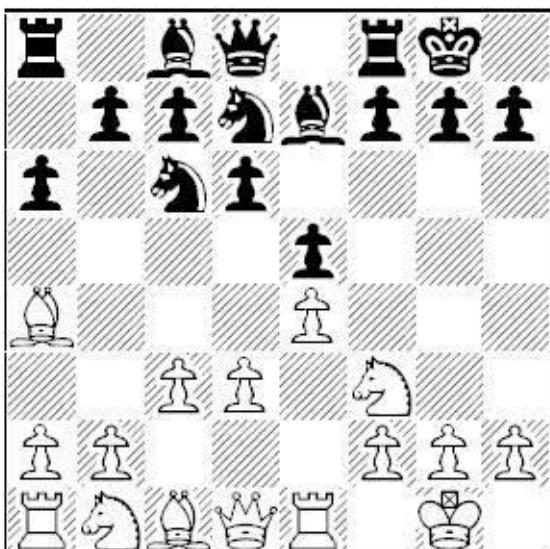


Diagram 46 (W)

intends ... Nc5 and possibly ... f5, so White's response should be immediate: 9 d4! (9 Be3 Nb6 10 Bb3 Kh8 11 Nbd2 f5! sees Black's plan in action; he was already fine, maybe even slightly better, in F.Caruana-V.Korchnoi, Caleta 2011) 9 ... Bf6 10 Be3 (or 10 Bc2 Nb6 11 h3 Bd7 12 b3 exd4 13 cxd4 Nb4 14 Nc3 Nxc2 15 Qxc2 with an edge for White, A.Shirov-N.Short, Dos Hermanas 1997) 10 ... Nb6 11 Bxc6 bxc6 12 Nbd2 a5 13 Qc2 a4 14 dxe5 Bxe5 15 c4 Nd7 (V.Gashimov-E.Najer, German League 2011) and here Gashimov gives 16 Nxe5! dxe5 (or 16 ... Nxe5 17 f4 Ng4 18 Bd4) 17 c5 and “+=“.

c) White has more than one way to play after 8 ... Re8 9 Nbd2 Bf8. The usual choice is 10 Nf1, but 10 d4 b5 11 Bc2 transposes to our main line, below.

9 Bc2!? (Diagram 47)

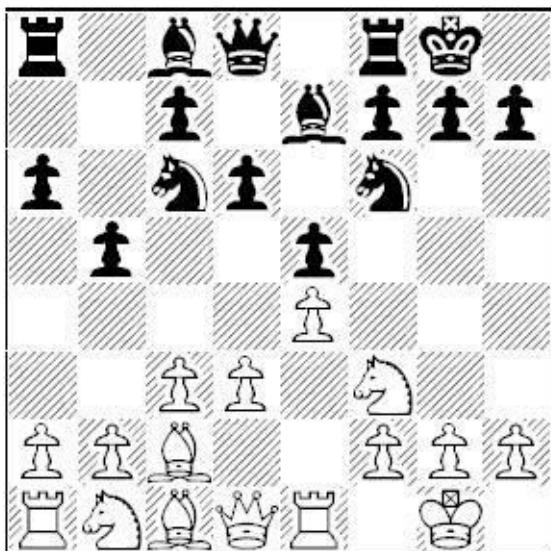


Diagram 47 (B)

This is the move which separates this variation from normal d3 Lopez lines. White exploits the fact that Black has delayed ... b7-b5 by retreating to c2 instead of b3. Of course the bishop is more active on b3, but crucially 9 Bc2 prevents Black's usual queenside expansion plan with ... Na5 and ... c5. White's own plans often involve a quick d3-d4 (see below).

9 Bb3 transposes to the mainline d3 Lopez, and the usual continuation here is 9 ... Na5 10 Bc2 c5 11 Nbd2.

9 ... Re8

Alternatively:

a) 9 ... Bb7 10 Nbd2 Re8 11 d4 (11 Nf1 Bf8 12 Bg5 is also possible) 11 ... Bf8 transposes to our main line, below.

b) 9 ... d5 (**Diagram 48**) would just lose a pawn if played against 9 Bb3, but it's playable against 9 Bc2 and objectively might even be Black's strongest move.

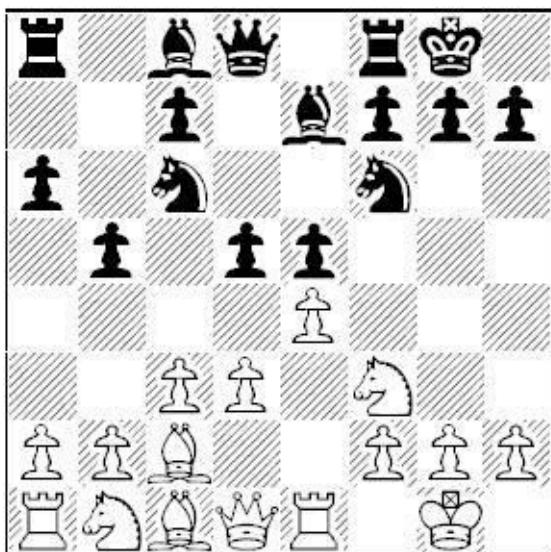


Diagram 48 (W)

White gained a slight advantage after 10 Nbd2 dxe4 11 dxe4 Be6 12 h3 Nd7 13 Nf1 Nc5 14 Ne3 Qxd1 15 Rxd1 f6 16 Nd5 Bd6 17 Be3 Nb7 18 b4 in M.Carlsen-L.Aronian, Sao Paulo/Bilbao 2011. The knight manoeuvre to d5 is certainly a plan to remember, and the use of the d5-square sometimes gives White something to hold on to. In reality, though, Black should be okay in this line, and in a later game Aronian more or less equalized after 12 ... Bc5 13 a4 Ba7 14 Nf1 h6 15 Ne3 Qd6 16 Qe2 Bxe3 17 Bxe3 Bc4, S.Karjakin-L.Aronian, Moscow 2011.

10 exd5 Qxd5 reaches a position with more imbalances. For example, 11 Qe2 Bb7 12 Nbd2 Rad8 13 a4 Rfe8 14 b4 with roughly level chances.

10 Nbd2 Bf8 11 d4 (Diagram 49)

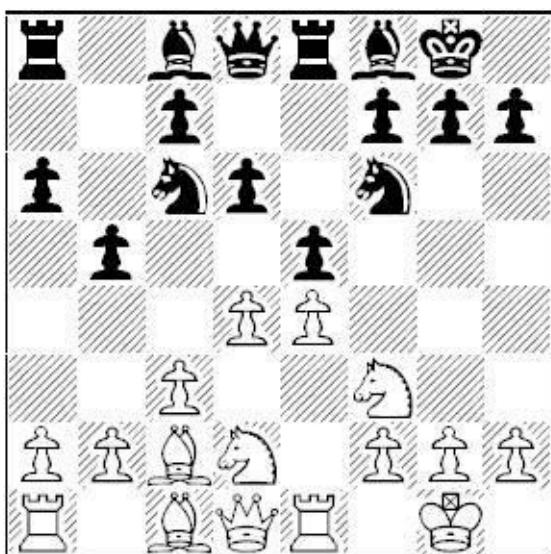


Diagram 49 (B)

We've reached a type of Closed Lopez, Zaitsev/Smyslov position, and it's unclear who if anyone is favoured by the slight differences:

- 1) White has spent two moves on d2-d4.
- 2) White has avoided h2-h3.
- 3) White's light-squared bishop is on c2 rather than b3.

Clearly point 1 favours Black. However, points 2 and 3 – although less clear cut – are more likely to favour White.

In all honesty, it's unlikely these differences amount to a great deal. Practical considerations are probably more important here. For example, a Black player might not feel so comfortable in these positions if he is more used to Marshall, Anti-Marshall and Chigorin (... Na5 and ... c5) type positions.

White more often plays 11 Nf1 here, with the lazy reasoning that there's no need to think before getting the knight to g3! However, after 11 ... h6 12 Ng3 g6 White can't really do much without d3-d4, and 13 h3 Bg7 14 d4 Bb7 is the usual course. That way

is also fine, of course, but with 11 d4 White can consider lines where the knight stays on d2 for a while (see below).

11 ... Bb7

... Bg4 is a typical response to d4 if White forgoes h2-h3, but after 11 ... Bg4 White gets a good version of the 9 d4 Bg4 Lopez: 12 h3 Bh5 13 d5! Ne7 (or 13 ... Na7 14 Nf1 c6 15 Ng3 Bg6 16 Bg5 cxd5 17 Bxf6 Qxf6 18 Qxd5 Rab8 19 h4 h6 20 h5 Bh7 21 Nh2 Nc8 22 Ng4 Qf4 23 Ne3 Nb6 24 Qd1 and White has a grip on the light squares, V.Akopian-S.Atalik, Heraklion 2007) 14 Nf1 h6 15 a4 (or 15 g4!? Bg6 16 Ng3, K.Piorun-A.Baryshpolets, Krakow 2008) 15 ... c6 16 dxc6 Nxc6 17 Ng3 Bxf3 18 Qxf3 b4 19 Nf5! (**Diagram 50**)

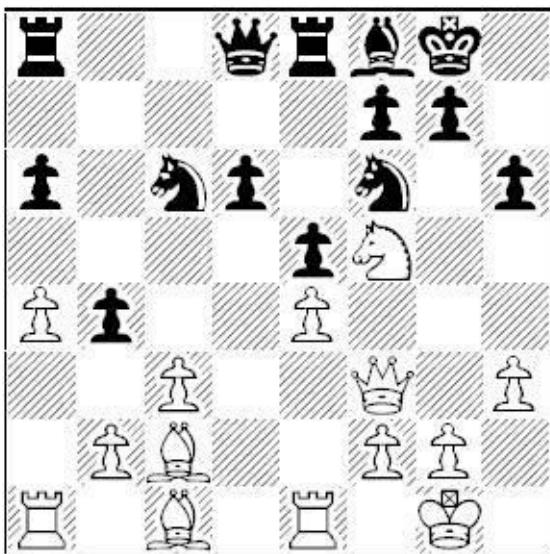


Diagram 50 (B)

and the strong knight on f5 guarantees White the initiative, P.Leko-J.Gustafsson, Dortmund 2012.

In the very recent game A.Grischuk-S.Mamedyarov, FIDE Grand Prix, London 2012, Black captured on d4 first before playing ... Bg4: 11 ... exd4!? 12 cxd4 Bg4 13 h3 Bh5 14 g4! Bg6 15 a3 h5 16 g5 Nh7 17 Nf1 with a complex position which I feel slightly favours White.

Returning to the position after 11 ... Bb7, White has more than one possibility here:

12 a3!?

Alternatively:

a) 12 a4 exd4!? 13 cxd4 Nb4 14 Bb1 c5 15 d5 Nd7 16 Ra3 (S.Dvoirys-D.Jakovenko, Elista 2001) transposes to one of the sharpest lines of the Ruy Lopez Zaitsev Variation, with the exception that the pawn moves h2-h3 and ... h7-h6 haven't been played. It would definitely be worthwhile studying that Zaitsev line before entering this one.

b) 12 d5 Nb8 13 b3 c6 14 c4 Nbd7 15 a4 Qc7 16 Ba3 bxc4 17 bxc4 a5! with balanced chances, P.Popovic-V.Vujosevic, Banja Vrucica 1991.

a2-a3 is a typical idea in the Zaitsev, preventing the ... exd4, cxd4 Nb4 plan and preparing queenside expansion with b2-b4. Here 12 a3!? (**Diagram 51**) is an

interesting attempt to exploit the slight differences between this line and the mainline Zaitsev.

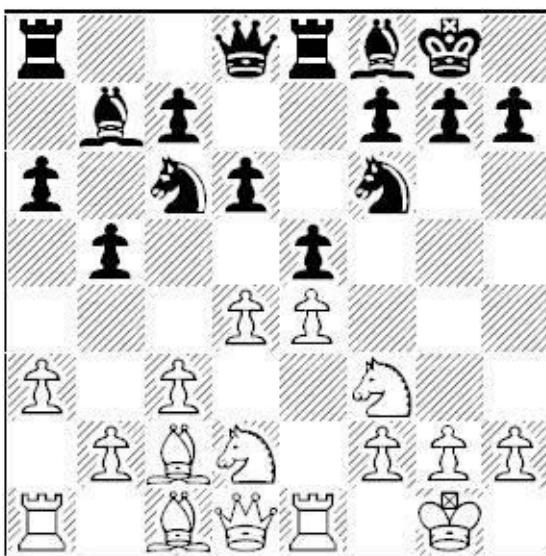


Diagram 51 (B)

After 12 ... g6 White could transpose directly to the mainline Zaitsev with 13 h3, but here h2-h3 seems unnecessary, and it feels more beneficial to use the spare tempo advancing with 13 b4. For example, 13 ... Nb8 (13 ... Bg7 14 Nb3; 13 ... a5 14 d5 Ne7 15 Nb3!) 14 Bb2 Nbd7 (a typical Breyer-style re-routing of the knight) 15 Qb1 (15 c4!?) 15 ... a5 16 Nb3 axb4 17 cxb4 Rb8 18 Na5 Ba8 19 d5 with some advantage to White, L.Psakhis-G.Uusi, Krasnoyarsk 1980.

Summary

- 1) The key difference between 6 d3 and other Anti-Marshall systems is that White can sometimes exploit the delay or absence of the move Rf1-e1. He can do this either by using the extra tempo elsewhere to achieve a strategic aim, or by utilizing the rook on f1 to prepare an f2-f4 pawn break, as we see in both Nepomniachtchi-Melkumyan and Leko-Kramnik.
- 2) If the a2-a4 break is met by ... b4, a typical reaction by White is a4-a5!. This fixes the a6-pawn, isolates the b4-pawn, creates the possibility of Ba4 and prevents Black's natural queenside expansion plan with ... Na5 and ... c5. Not bad for one little pawn move!
- 3) In these lines White often plays Nc3 rather than Nbd2. See, for example, 6 ... b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 a4 Rb8 9 axb5 axb5 10 Nc3 (Line A2) and 6 ... b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 a4 Bd7 9 Nc3 (Line B2). White can also meet 6 ... b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 a4 Bb7 (Line A3) with 9 Nc3!?, although this is one line where I feel that transposing back to the Anti-Marshall with 9 Re1 is objectively White's strongest option.
- 4) 6 ... b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 a4 Na5!? (Line B3) is a rare choice by Black. White should probably accept the pawn offer, as declining is a concession because it allows Black to avoid certain lines. I like Tiviakov's Nbd2-c4 plan in this line.

5) 6 ... d6 (Line C) is a solid option for Black which avoids White's plans involving an early a2-a4. Here White plays 7 c3!, not only to preserve the bishop but also to allow an immediate retreat to c2 after ... b5.

Chapter Nine

Another g4 Lunge

John Emms

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 d3 b5 6 Bb3 Be7
7 g4!? (Diagram 1)**

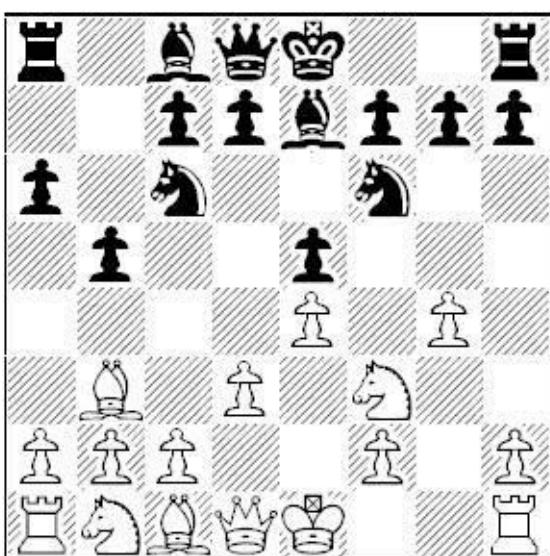


Diagram 1 (B)

Shirov and Shabalov's 7 g4!? in the Semi-Slav (played after 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 Nc3 e6 5 e3 Nbd7 6 Qc2 Bd6) created quite a stir when it first appeared in the 1990s. Previously it was thought that this lunge on the wing was, apart from one or two exceptions, only justified in openings such as the Open Sicilian. However, these days it's widely accepted that the idea of an early g2-g4 advance is viable in many more openings.

The subject of this chapter is 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 d3 b5 6 Bb3 Be7 7 g4??. This particular g2-g4 advance is by no means established theory – so far it has been played in only a handful of games. Let's take a look at one of these:

Game 14

N.Firman-M.Kravtsiv

Ukrainian Championship, Alushta 2008

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 d3 b5 6 Bb3 Be7 7 g4!? h6

Kravtsiv chooses the most natural reaction to the g4 lunge. For the time being at

least, he discourages the pawn from moving further forward.

Alternatives, such as 7 ... d6 inviting the pawn forward, will be covered later.

DANGEROUS WEAPON! 7 ... Nxg4 feels wrong, and it's unsurprising that no-one has been tempted by this move. After 8 Rg1 Nf6 (8 ... d6?? loses to 9 Bd5!) 9 Rxg7 it's clear that only White has benefited from the opening on the g-file.

8 Nc3! (Diagram 2)

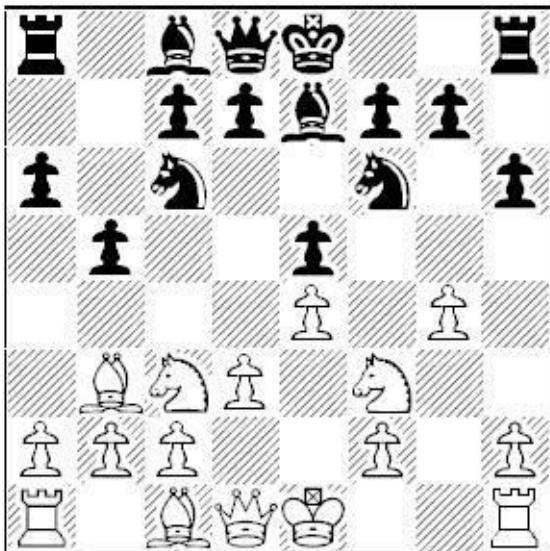


Diagram 2 (B)

Firman realizes that it's important to prevent, or at least discourage, Black from playing ... d5, which of course would be a principled counter in the centre to White's aggression on the wing. For example, 8 g5 hxg5 9 Nxg5 (9 Bxg5 is better) would be met strongly by 9 ... d5! 10 exd5 (or 10 Nc3 Nd4!) 10 ... Nd4!, while 8 Rg1 d5! is also fine for Black (Ivanchuk).

8 ... d6 9 g5

Now there is no longer any need to delay this advance.

9 ... hxg5 10 Nxg5! (Diagram 3)

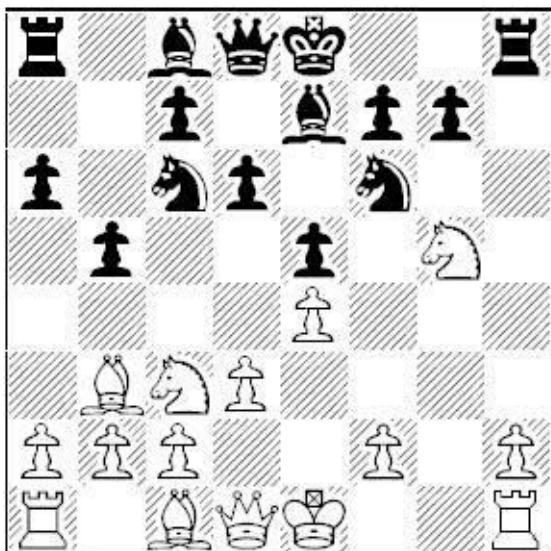


Diagram 3 (B)

10 ... Rf8

DANGEROUS WEAPON! **10 ... 0-0?!** is incredibly risky here, and a perfect example of “castling into it”. White’s attack runs like clockwork.

For example, 10 ... 0-0?! 11 Rg1 Nd4 12 Nd5 Nxb3 (12 ... Be6 looks more resilient) 13 Nxf6+! Bxf6 14 Qh5! Bxg5 15 Bxg5 f6 (15 ... Qe8 16 Bf6 mates) 16 Bh6 Rf7 17 axb3 Be6 18 0-0-0 c5 19 Rg6 Raa7 20 Rdg1 and Black is unlikely to survive the onslaught. One possible continuation is 20 ... a5 21 f4 exf4 22 Bxf4 (threatening Rh6) 22 ... Kf8 23 Bh6 Kg8 24 Be3! Kf8 25 e5!! and Black’s defence collapses.

Houdini wants to play the outrageous 10 ... Bg4!? (**Diagram 4**) allowing White to capture on f7 with either bishop or knight:

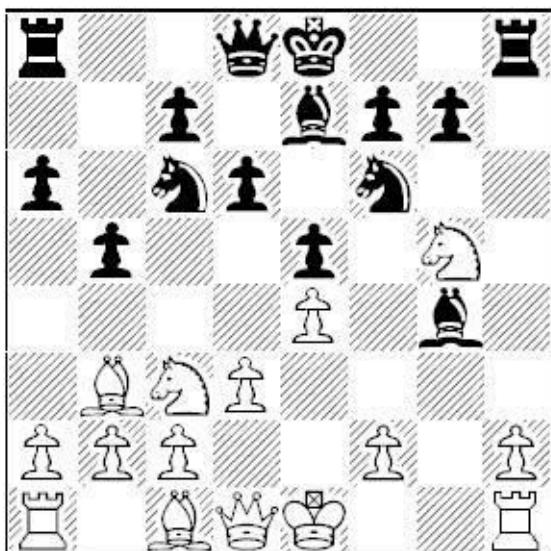


Diagram 4 (W)

It seems strange to allow 11 Bxf7+ but computer engines are second-to-none at

finding hidden resources, and after 11 ... Kd7! Black gets counterplay and the position is quite unclear. For example, if 12 f3 then 12 ... Nh7! is an attacking retreat which is often invisible to human eyes but seen immediately by computers. Black is better here! Or 12 Ne2 Qf8! (12 ... Nd4? is tempting, but White can sacrifice the queen: 13 Nxd4! Bxd1 14 Be6+ Ke8 and then win it back with 15 Nc6!) 13 f3 Nh7! and again, if anyone is better it is Black.

11 Nxf7 might well be stronger. After 11 ... Bxd1 12 Nxd8 Bf3! 13 Nxc6 Bxh1 14 Nd5! (**Diagram 5**),

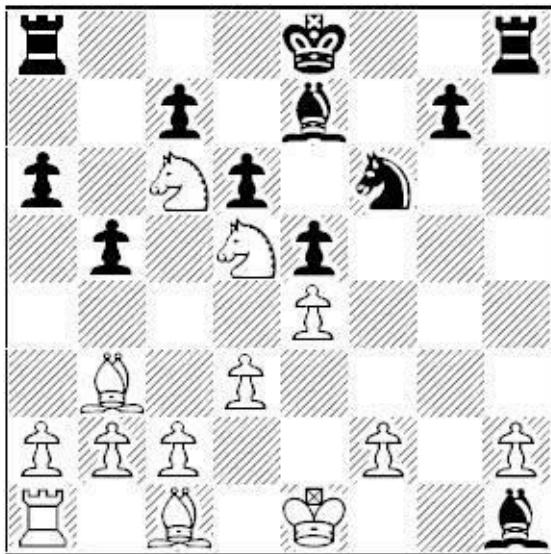


Diagram 5 (B)

White has a slight material disadvantage which is counterbalanced by wonderful knights on outposts and the possibility to strike on the queenside with a2-a4. The chances look roughly balanced after, for instance, 14 ... Bd8 15 a4 b4 16 Be3 (or 16 Nxd8 Kxd8 17 Bg5) 16 ... Rxh2 17 Ke2.

11 Be3 Nd4

11 ... Ng4 is another critical option, leading to great complications with roughly level chances. For example:

a) 12 Bxf7+!? Rxf7 13 Nxf7 Kxf7 14 Qf3+, T.Olsarova-S.Suchomelova, Orlova 2011, looks insufficient for White after 14 ... Kg8 15 Rg1 Qf8!.

b) 12 Bd5 Bd7 (or 12 ... Nb4!? 13 Bxa8 Nxe3 14 fxe3 Bxg5 15 Qe2 Bxe3 16 Bc6+! Nxc6 17 Qxe3) 13 Nh7! Rh8 14 Qf3! Nf6 (14 ... Bf6!?) 15 Ng5 Rf8 16 h4. I prefer White here, but only just.

12 Bxd4 exd4 13 Nd5 (Diagram 6)

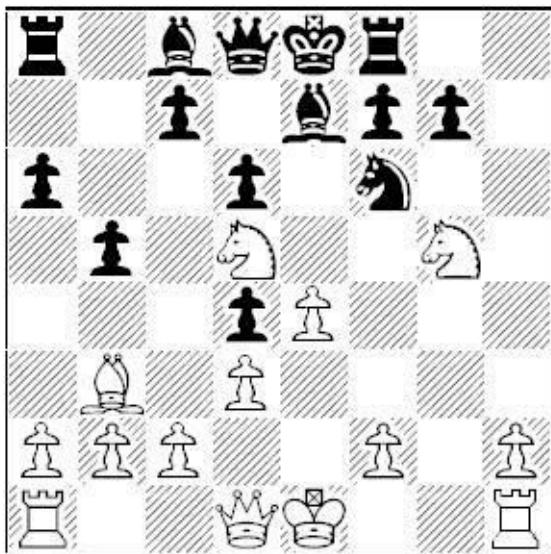


Diagram 6 (B)

13 ... Bb7

If 13 ... Nxd5?! 14 Bxd5 Rb8 (14 ... Bxg5! 15 Bxa8 Qf6 is wiser, with some compensation) White has the tactic 15 Nxf7! intending 15 ... Rxf7 16 Qh5. Black can hang on with the brilliant resource 15 ... Bh4! but White keeps the advantage after 16 Qh5! (16 Nxd8 Bxf2+ draws!) 16 ... g6! (16 ... Qf6 loses to 17 Ng5+! Kd8 18 Qxh4) 17 Qxg6 Qf6 18 Nxd6+ Ke7 19 Nxc8+ Rbxc8 20 Qxf6+ Rxf6 21 0-0.

14 Nf4 c5

Another possible line is 14 ... d5 15 e5 Nd7 16 Nfe6!? (or 16 Nh7 Rh8 17 Qh5!) 16 ... Bb4+! (only move!) 17 c3 dxc3 18 Nxd8 (18 Nxg7+ Ke7 19 Nf5+ Ke8 is perpetual check) 18 ... c2+ 19 Qd2 Bxd2+ 20 Kxd2 Rxd8 21 d4 and White is slightly better.

15 Rg1 d5 (Diagram 7)

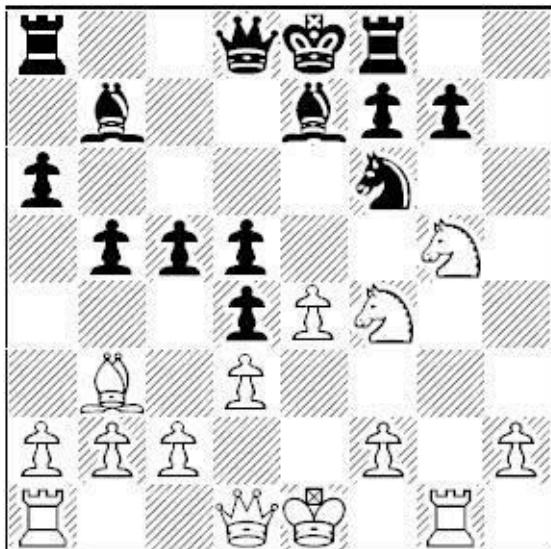


Diagram 7 (W)

16 e5!

Firman keeps up the pressure. 16 exd5 is met with 16 ... Qc7! followed by ... 0-0-0 and Black has more than solved his problems.

16 ... c4

16 ... Nd7 17 e6! Bxg5 18 exd7+ Kxd7 19 Qg4+ Kd6 20 Qxg5 Qxg5 21 Rxg5 c4 22 Rxg7 Rg8 23 Rg3 cxb3 24 axb3 is good for White.

17 exf6 gxf6?

The first real mistake. Kravtsiv was clearly concerned about White's possibilities after 17 ... Bxf6!, including Qe2+, but although I prefer White's position, there's certainly nothing decisive here.

18 Nh7! Rh8 19 Rg7! Qd6 20 Qg4!

Preventing queenside castling. Now Black should be in some trouble.

20 ... cxb3 (Diagram 8)

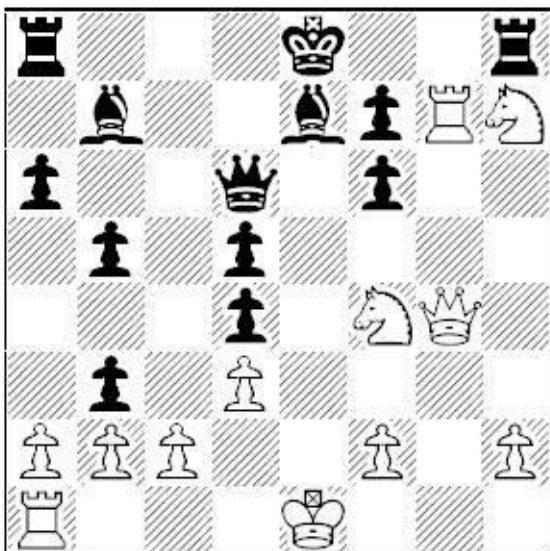


Diagram 8 (W)

21 cxb3?

A missed chance. 21 Rxf7! would have rewarded White's previous play with a winning position. The rook cannot be captured because of mate with Qg6, and White's queen, rook and two knights are about to cause havoc. For example, 21 ... bxc2 22 Rc1! Rc8 23 Qg7 Rc7 (or 23 ... Kd7 24 Nxf6+) 24 Kf1! (threatening simply Rxe7+) 24 ... Qxf4 (if 24 ... Rxh7 then 25 Qg8+! Kd7 26 Qg4+! wins) 25 Rxe7+ Rxe7 26 Nxf6+ Qxf6 (26 ... Kd8 27 Qxh8+) 27 Qxf6 Rxh2 28 Rxc2 and White wins.

21 ... Bc8!

White has missed his window of opportunity. This clever resource saves Black, and play leads into an unclear endgame where White's extra pawn is counterbalanced by Black's activity.

22 Rg8+

If 22 Qh5 Qe5+!, or 22 Qf3 Bf5!.

22 ... Rxg8 23 Qxg8+ Kd7 24 Qxf7 Qxf4 25 Nf8+ Kd6 26 Qxe7+

26 Ng6 Qg5! 27 Qxe7+ Kc6 and surprisingly White has nothing better than a draw here. Crucially, Black's queen prevents Rc1+.

26 ... Kxe7 27 Ng6+ Kd6 28 Nxf4 Bf5 29 Ke2 Rh8 30 Rh1 Ke5 31 Ng2 Rh3 32 f3 Bg6 33 Ne1 Bh5 34 Kf2 Kf4! (Diagram 9)

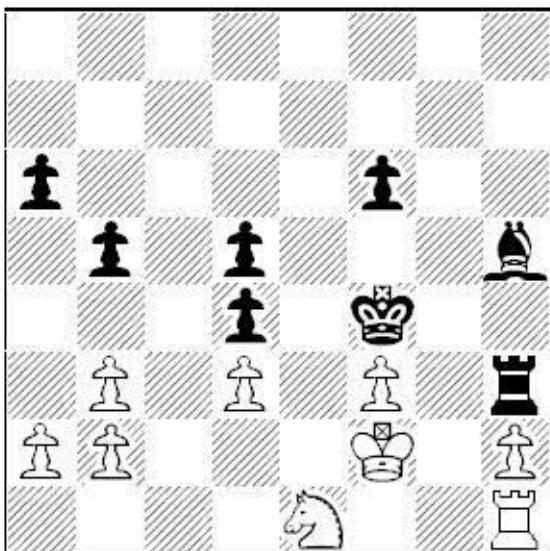


Diagram 9 (W)

35 Rg1?!

Very risky. It's much wiser to force the king back with 35 Ng2+ Ke5 36 Ne1, with a repetition of moves.

35 ... Bxf3 36 Rg6 Rxh2+ 37 Kg1 Rh1+ 38 Kf2 Rh2+ 39 Kg1 Re2! 40 Rxf6+ Ke5 41 Rxf3 Rxe1+ 42 Kf2 Ra1 43 a3 Rb1 44 b4 Rxb2+ 45 Kg3 Rb3 46 Kg4 Rxa3

Now only Black can win, of course. Perhaps Black does miss a chance somewhere, but White is saved firstly by the pawn structure preventing Black's king from entering, and ultimately by his own very active king.

47 Rh3 Rc3 48 Rh5+ Kd6 49 Rh3 Rb3 50 Rh6+ Kc7 51 Rh7+ Kd8 52 Kf5 Rxb4 53 Ke5 a5 54 Kd6 Ke8 55 Ke6 Kf8 56 Rf7+

56 Ra7! a4 57 Kf6 forces a draw: 57 ... Ke8 58 Ke6 Kd8 59 Kd6 Kc8 60 Kc6 Kb8 61 Rb7+ and Black even loses if he tries 61 ... Ka8?? 62 Kb6 Rb1 63 Rd7.

56 ... Kg8 57 Ra7 a4 58 Kxd5 Kf8

58 ... Rb3! keeps some chances.

59 Ke5 Rb3 60 Kf6 Ke8 61 Ke6 Kd8 62 Kd6 Kc8 63 Kc6 Kd8 64 Kd6 Rc3 65 Ra8+ Rc8 66 Ra7 Ke8 67 Rb7 Rc3 68 Rxb5 Rxd3 69 Kd5 Rb3 70 Ra5 d3 71 Rxa4 d2 72 Re4+ Kf7 73 Rd4 Rb2 74 Kc4 Ke6 75 Kc3 Ra2 76 Rxd2 Rxd2 77 Kxd2 ½-½

Looking a Little Deeper

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 d3 b5 6 Bb3 Be7

If Black wants to play the main ... b5/ ... Be7 lines and avoid g2-g4, he can do so by choosing 6 ... d6, but this does give White another option. He could revert to lines seen in Chapter 8, for example with 7 a4 b4 8 a5 Be7 9 0-0. However, there's also the possibility of 7 Ng5!? exploiting the weakness of f7, Two Knights Defence-style: 7 ... d5 8 exd5 (**Diagram 10**).

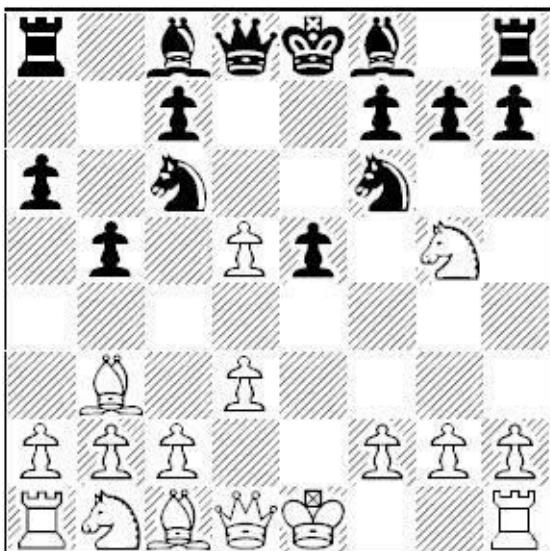


Diagram 10 (B)

DANGEROUS WEAPON! 8 ... Nxd5? allows a highly favourable version of the Fried Liver Attack: 9 Nxf7! (both 9 Nc3! and 9 Qf3! are also strong) 9 ... Kxf7 10 Qf3+ Ke6 11 Nc3 Nce7 12 Nxd5 Nxd5 13 Bg5 Qd7 14 c4!.

Black should instead play 8 ... Nd4!, when White must decide whether or not to hang on to the extra pawn:

a) 9 c4 Bc5 (9 ... Bg4 10 f3 Bh5 11 0-0! Bc5 12 Kh1 and White is ready to consolidate with Nc3 and Ne4, H.Elissalt Cardenas-A.Corzo, Isla Guitart 1994) 10 Nc3 (10 h3!?) 10 ... Bg4 11 Qd2! (if 11 f3 Bf5 and White can't castle) 11 ... 0-0 and Black certainly has some compensation for the pawn.

b) 9 0-0! (**Diagram 11**).

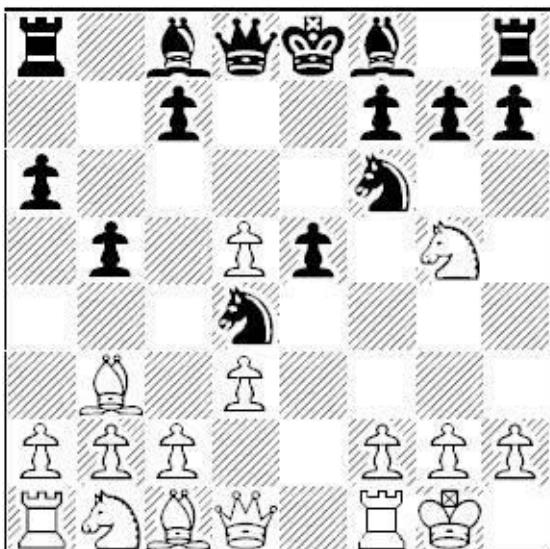


Diagram 11 (B)

White returns the pawn and tries to exploit Black's lag in development: 9 ... Nxb3 10 axb3 Nxd5 (10 ... Qxd5 11 Nc3 Qc6 12 Re1 Bd6 13 Qf3 Qxf3 14 Nxf3 and White won a pawn, J.Murin-A.Vekony, Hungarian League 1994) 11 Re1 f6 12 Qf3 (or 12 Qh5+!? g6 13 Qf3). Now Black must be very careful:

b1) 12 ... Be7? runs into 13 Rxe5!, P.Masic-A.Danilovic, Palic 1999.

b2) 12 ... Bb7? meets the same fate: 13 Rxe5+!.

b3) 12 ... Rb8! is much more resilient: 13 Rxe5+!? (13 Nc3 Nxc3 14 bxc3 Bd6 15 Ne4 0-0 16 Ba3 might be slightly better for White) 13 ... Ne7 14 Nc3 fxe5! (14 ... fxe5 15 Bxg5 is winning for White) 15 Qf7+ Kd7 and White should probably take the perpetual check on offer sooner rather than later.

BEWARE! The discovered attack/zwischenzug idea with 9 d6 Nxb3 10 dxc7 looks tempting, but Black isn't obliged to take on c7: 10 ... Qd5! 11 axb3 Qxg2 12 Qf3 Qxf3 13 Nxf3 Bb7 14 Ke2 Bd6 and Black has the advantage.

7 g4

While studying the lines in this chapter I began to wonder whether there were similar positions in which White could play g2-g4. He can't hang around, otherwise Black will play ... d6, but the typical 7 a4 could act as a precursor to the g-pawn lunge. For example:

a) 7 ... Rb8 8 axb5 axb5 9 g4!? (9 Nc3 is the usual move) 9 ... d6 (9 ... h6 10 Nc3 d6 11 g5 hxg5 12 Nxg5 can be compared to Firman-Kravtsiv) 10 g5 Nd7 is similar to the main line, below.

b) 7 ... b4 8 g4!? h6 9 a5!? d5 (9 ... d6) 10 Ba4! Bd7 11 Nbd2 0-0 12 Rg1 Re8 13 c3 (Why open the queenside? 13 h4! and get on with it!) 13 ... bxc3 14 bxc3 dxe4 (14 ... Rb8!) 15 Nxe4 Nxe4 16 dxe4 Bc5? (G.Kuzmin-V.Bezman, Alushta 1999) and here the simple 17 g5! would have caused Black problems.

7 ... d6

This was Ivanchuk's choice when he faced Morozhevich at the 2005 Russian Team Championship – the only time so far that 7 g4!? has been tried at 2700+ level. Black doesn't give White a hook to attack with ... h6 and accepts that his f6-knight will be pushed back with g4-g5.

Alternatively:

a) 7 ... d5? looks unsound: 8 g5 dxe4 9 gxf6 Bxf6 10 Ng5! (not 10 dxe4?? Qxd1+ 11 Kxd1 Bg4 12 Nbd2 Nd4! and Black regains his piece) 10 ... Bxg5 11 Qh5! and White wins.

b) 7 ... 0-0 feels riskier than Ivanchuk's 7 ... d6, as Black runs the risk of walking into a kingside attack. 8 g5 Ne8 9 Bd5 (or simply 9 h4!? Bb7 10 h5) 9 ... Bb7 10 h4 (10 Nc3 d6 11 h4 Na5 12 Bxb7 Nxb7 13 Be3 looks better for White) 10 ... Na5!? 11 Bxb7 (11 Nxe5 Bxd5 12 exd5 f6 was unclear in N.Huschenbeth-E.Degtiarev, Osterburg 2006) 11 ... Nxb7 12 Nxe5 f6 (**Diagram 12**).

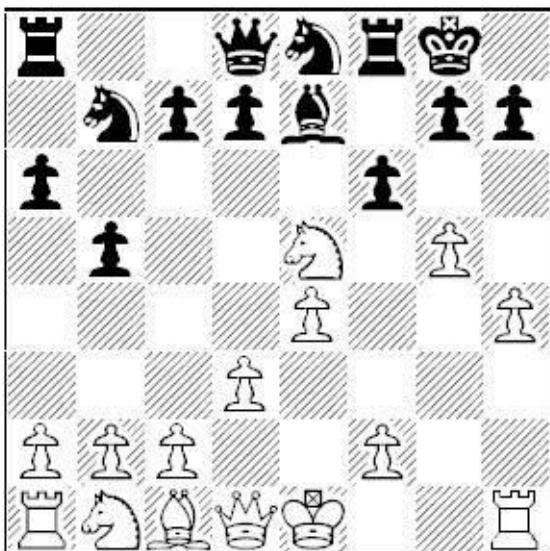


Diagram 12 (W)

Here it's unclear whether Black has enough compensation after 13 Nf3, and 13 Ng6!? hxg6 14 h5 is an interesting piece sacrifice. White is attacking with only queen and rook, and his queenside is sleeping, but *Houdini* insists the attack is still really dangerous! For example, 14 ... fxg5 (14 ... gxh5 15 g6! mates) 15 hxg6 Nf6 16 Bxg5 Bb4+ (16 ... Qe8 17 Bxf6 Rxf6 18 Rh8+! mates) 17 c3 Bc5 18 Bxf6 Bxf2+! 19 Kd2! Rxf6 20 Qh5 Kf8 21 e5 and White's attack continues.

c) 7 ... h6!? 8 Nc3 d6 was covered in Firman-Kravtsiv, but Black can also play 8 ... Bb7!? (**Diagram 13**), aiming for a quick counter in the centre with ... d5.

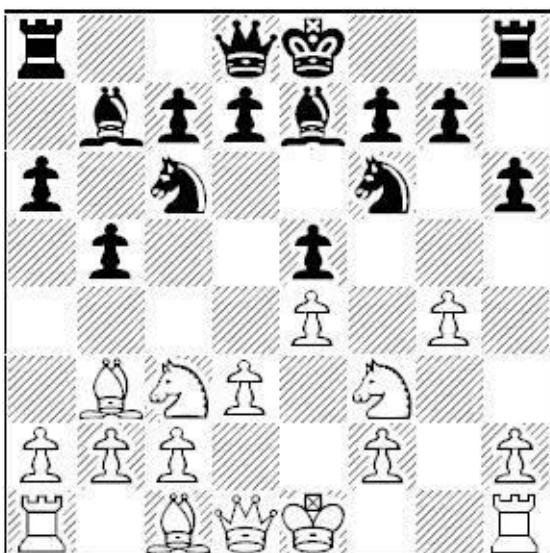


Diagram 13 (W)

9 g5 hxg5 10 Nxg5 (10 Bxg5 b4 11 Bxf6 Bxf6 12 Nd5 looks roughly equal) 10 ...

d5! sees Black's idea in action: 11 Bxd5 (11 exd5 Nd4!, or 11 Nxd5 Nxd5 12 exd5 Nd4!) 11 ... Nxd5 12 Nxd5 Bxg5 13 Bxg5 Qxg5 14 Nxc7+ Kf8 15 Nxa8 Qg2 (Ivanchuk) and it's advantage Black.

White does much better to hold back on g4-g5. For example, 9 Rg1 Nd4!? 10 h4 (if 10 Nxe5 then 10 ... Nxb3 11 axb3 d5 with compensation for Black) 10 ... Nxb3 11 axb3 d6 12 g5 hxg5 13 hxg5 Nd7 14 Qe2, or 9 Bd2 Nd4 10 Nxd4 exd4 11 Nd5 Nxd5 12 Bxd5 Bxd5 13 exd5 0-0 14 Qf3 with level chances in both cases.

8 g5 Nd7 (Diagram 14)

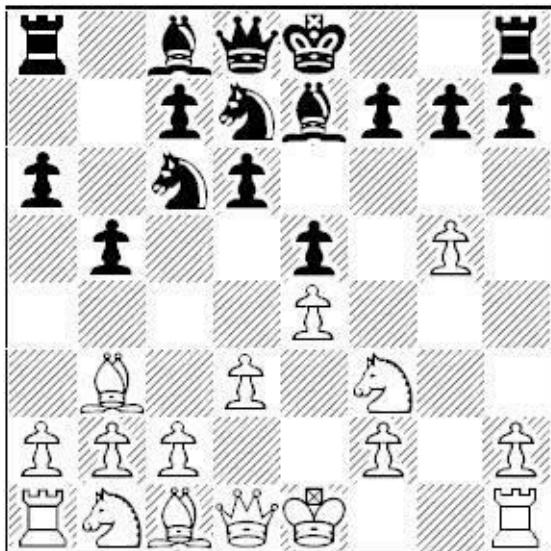


Diagram 14 (W)

9 Bd5

In his *Chess Informant* notes to his game against Morozevich, Ivanchuk prefers 9 c3. He gives the long line 9 ... Nb6 (9 ... Na5 10 Bc2 c5 is equal – Ivanchuk) 10 Be3 0-0 11 Nbd2 (11 h4 Be6 12 h5 d5!) 11 ... Be6 12 Bxb6 cxb6 13 h4 d5 14 exd5 (14 Qe2!?) 14 ... Bxd5 15 Qe2 (“unclear” – Ivanchuk) 15 ... Bxb3 16 axb3 Qd7 (16 ... Qd5 17 Qe4) 17 h5 Rfd8 18 Qe4 and by this stage White’s position is looking good.

However, Morozevich’s 9 Bd5 is tempting, and it certainly has some merit too – it forces Black to reorganize and White gets to keep his bishop on the a2-g8 diagonal. 9 Be3 is less good, in view of 9 ... Na5!.

9 ... Bb7 10 Be3! (Diagram 15)

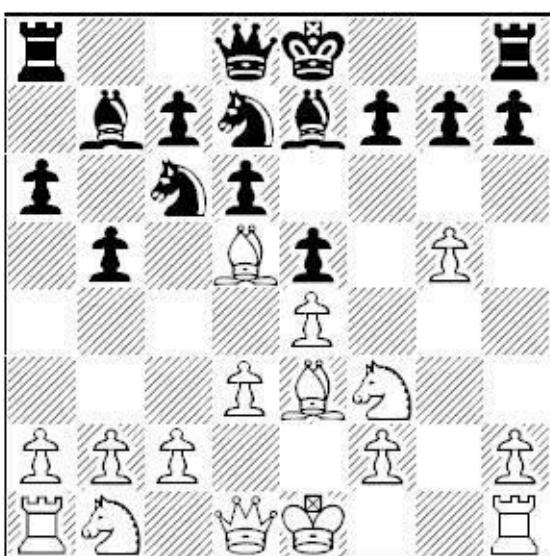


Diagram 15 (B)

Intending to take the knight if it goes to b6, so that White can keep his strong light-squared bishop. Ivanchuk assesses 10 ... Nb6 11 Bxb6 cxb6 12 Rg1 as unclear, although I slightly prefer White here.

10 ... Qc8

Planning ... Nd8. The only other game to reach this position continued 10 ... Na5 11 a3!? c6 (maybe Black didn’t like the idea of the knight being sidelined on a5, but even so 11 ... Bxd5 12 exd5 0-0 13 Nc3 looks better) 12 Ba2! (White already threatens b2-b4 winning a piece, and Black is in a bit of a tangle) 12 ... Bc8 (if 12 ... c5 13 Nc3 and the d5-square beckons) 13 Nbd2 Nf8 14 b4 Nb7 15 d4! Bg4!? 16 dxе5 Ng6 (16 ... dxе5?? loses to 17 Nxe5!) 17 Rg1 Bh5 18 e6 0-0 19 exf7+ Kh8 20 Rg3 d5 21 exd5 Nd6 22 dxс6 Nf5 23 Rh3 Bg4 (Black has sacrificed four pawns to try to seize the initiative, but is shocked by White’s next move) 24 Nh4! Bxh3 (24 ... Bxd1 25 Nxg6 mate!) 25 Nxg6+ hxg6 26 Qf3 Bxg5 27 Qxh3+ Bh6 28 Bxh6 (28 Ne4! is more ambitious and possibly stronger too) 28 ... gxh6 29 Qc3+ Qd4 30 Qxd4+ Nxd4 31 0-0-0 and White was better in the ending, G.Needleman-R.Hungaski, Villa Martelli 2006.

11 a4

White could also consider forgoing this advance in favour of 11 Nc3, anticipating 11 ... Nd8 12 Bxb7 Qxb7 13 Nd5! (**Diagram 16**).

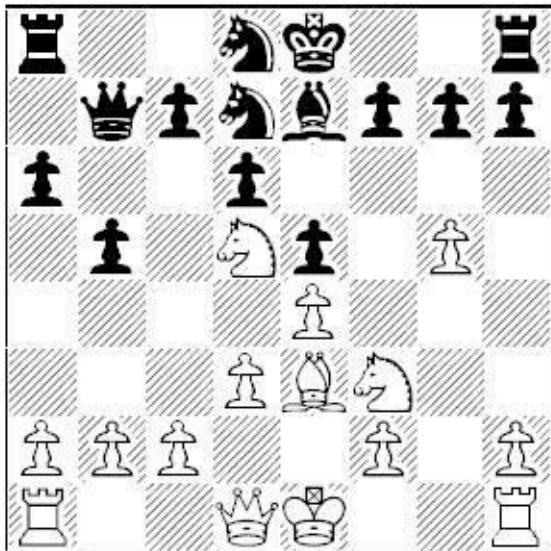


Diagram 16 (B)

It's not clear to me why White should be so keen to open up the queenside with a2-a4 here. After 13 Nd5 White still has the option of castling queenside and attacking on the kingside.

11 ... Nd8 12 Nc3!

Ivanchuk assesses 12 Bxb7 Qxb7 13 axb5 axb5 14 Rxa8 Qxa8 15 Nc3 c6 16 d4 0-0 17 0-0 as equal.

12 ... c6 13 Ba2 Ne6 14 h4 Qc7 (Diagram 17)

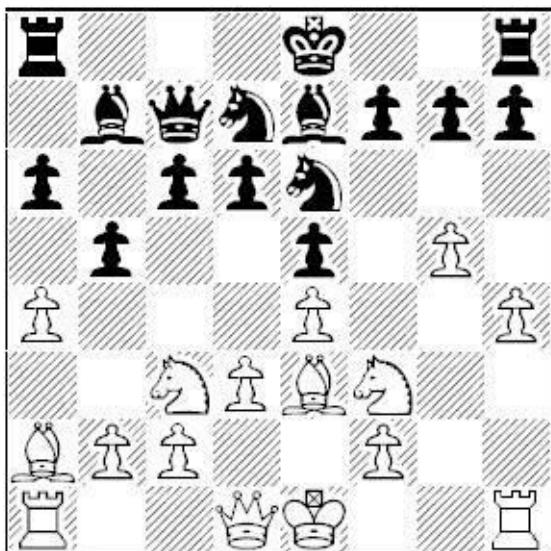


Diagram 17 (B)

We've been following A.Morozevich-V.Ivanchuk, Sochi 2005. Here Morozevich erred with 15 d4?! and after 15 ... b4! 16 d5 Nf4 17 dxc6 Bxc6 18 Nd5 Nxd5 19 Bxd5 Rc8 Ivanchuk secured strong counterplay and later won. Ivanchuk suggests as an improvement 15 h5 b4 16 Ne2 d5 17 Ng3 and assesses this position as unclear. It certainly makes more sense for White to hold the centre, and Nf5 is one of his attacking ideas here.

Summary

While 7 g4 is not likely to refute Black's opening anytime soon, it's certainly not a bad option for White. It obviously contains some surprise value, and the sudden change in character of the position could easily make opponents feel uncomfortable.

Chapter Ten

A Gambit against the Anti-Marshall

John Emms

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5
7 Bb3 0-0 8 a4 Na5!?** (Diagram 1)

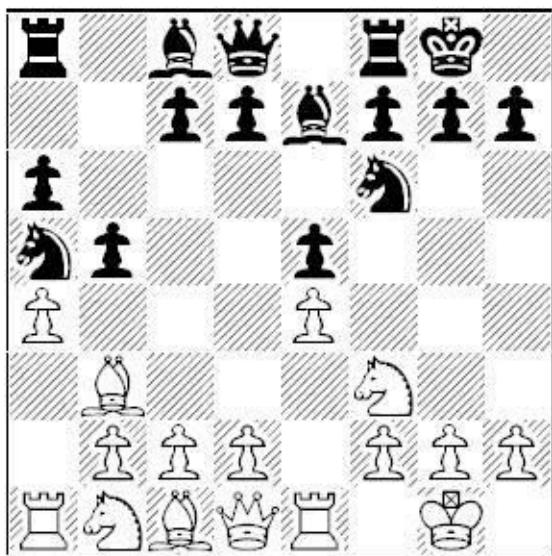


Diagram 1 (W)

... Na5 is, of course, a key move for Black in the mainline Ruy Lopez, but usually Black plays it only after safeguarding his e5-pawn with ... d6. That is not the case here. With 8 ... Na5, Black is offering a pawn in return for long-term positional compensation caused by a desirable knight-for-bishop exchange on b3 – which is even more attractive now that White would have to wreck his pawn structure by recapturing with the c-pawn.

The question is, does the rare 8 ... Na5 provide Black with an interesting alternative to the main choices 8 ... Bb7 and 8 ... b4? Let's begin our search for the answer by looking at a game where White accepts the gambit.

Game 15

E.Domancich-A.Civitillo Correspondence 2008

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 a4 Na5!?

8 ... Na5 has appeared in a number of correspondence games, and correspondence chess is normally a good place to look for opening ideas.

9 axb5

The other pawn grab, 9 Nxe5, is considered later.

9 ... Nxb3!

Black shouldn't pass up the opportunity to grab the bishop. Trading knight for bishop on b3 virtually always assures Black of long-term compensation, for two reasons: 1) White's pawn structure on the queenside is smashed.

2) Black gets the bishop pair.

10 cxb3 (Diagram 2)

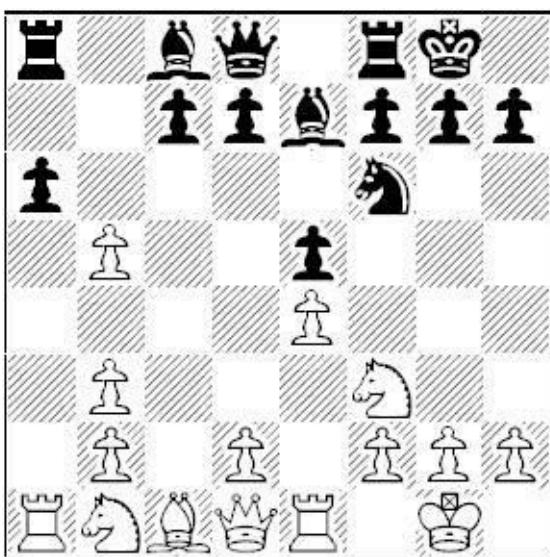


Diagram 2 (B)

10 ... d5!?

Civitillo adds more wood to the fire with this Marshall-style gambit.

10 ... Bb7 has also been played here. For example, 11 bxa6 Bxe4 12 d3 Bb7! 13 a7 d5 (13 ... d6!?) 14 Nxe5 Bc5 15 Be3 d4 16 Bg5 h6 17 Bxf6 Qxf6 18 f3 (18 Nd7 Qc6) 18 ... Qf5 19 Qc2 Bxa7 20 Nd2 Bb8!? 21 Rxa8 Bxa8 22 Nf1 Re8 23 f4 Kh7 24 b4 Bb7 25 Qf2 f6 26 Ng3 Qc8 27 Nf3 Rxe1+ 28 Nxe1 c5 29 Kf1 Qc6 30 bxc5 Qxc5 31 Qd2 Qb6 32 Kf2 Bd6 33 Nf3 Bc5 34 Ne2 Bd5 35 Qc1 Qb4 36 h3 Bb7 ½-½, E.Domancich-S.Diaz, correspondence 2008. Black, with his bishop pair, extra space and activity, seemed to have enough play for the pawn throughout.

I also wondered about keeping the centre tight with 10 ... d6, but 11 d4! looks like a good reply, and 11 ... Bb7 12 bxa6 Bxa6 13 Nc3 feels a bit better for White, V.Kupreichik-S.Brenjo, Nis 1994.

11 Nxe5

DANGEROUS WEAPON! Careless, greedy play by White could be punished here. For example, if 11 bxa6 dxe4 12 Nxe5 Bd6! 13 Nc4?? (Diagram 3) (13 d4! is the only defence) then 13 ... Bxh2+! is already a winning Greek gift sacrifice: 14 Kxh2 Ng4+ 15 Kg3 h5 16 Rh1 Qg5 and White can't survive.

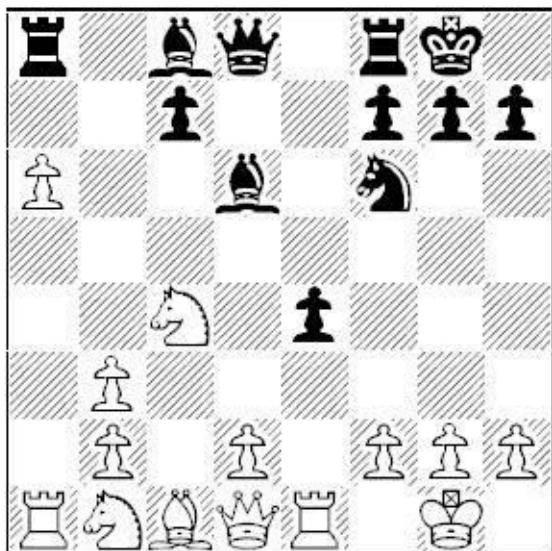


Diagram 3 (B)

11 ... Bb7 12 Nc6

It's only natural to force the exchange of one of Black's bishops, although by doing so White is forced to part with his only active piece.

12 bxa6 could lead to an unusual position where White has three(!) knights on the board: 12 ... dxe4!? (12 ... Bxa6) 13 axb7! Rxa1 14 Nc6 Qd6 15 Qc2! (if 15 b8Q Rxb8 16 Nxb8 Rxb1 17 Qc2 Ra1 18 Nc6 Bf8 and White is a bit tied up) 15 ... Ra6!? 16 b8N! (16 b8Q Rxc6 is good for Black) 16 ... Rb6 17 Nc3 Rxc6 18 Nxc6 Qxc6 and Black still has some compensation for the pawn.

Other possible variations include 12 d4 axb5 13 Rxa8 Bxa8 and 12 exd5 Qxd5 13 Nf3 Bd6; in both cases Black's positional compensation looks worth a pawn.

12 ... Bxc6 13 bxc6 dxe4 14 Nc3 a5!! (Diagram 4)

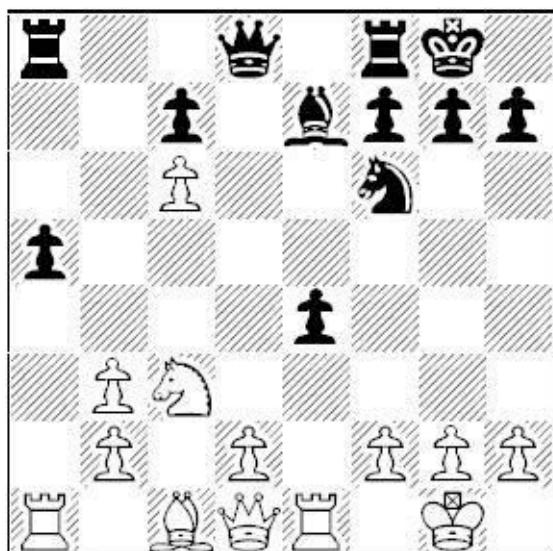


Diagram 4 (W)

A brilliant idea from Civitillo. He lets White have the e4-pawn, but plans to gum up White's entire queenside with ... Bb4. White goes two pawns ahead, but can't get his queenside pieces into action.

Trying to keep hold of the e4-pawn was futile in any case, since 14 ... Qd3 could be met by the horizontal attack 15 Ra4!.

15 Qc2

Black also meets 15 Nxe4 with 15 ... Bb4!, although this might have been a wiser plan of action for White, who then has more options including 16 Nc3.

15 ... Bb4! 16 Nxe4 Re8

The pin on the d2-pawn, created by ... Bb4, is really annoying for White. 17 Re2, breaking the pin, would be met in the same way as the game, so Domancich wisely decides to at least give his king a bolthole against a later back-rank check.

17 h3 Nxe4 18 Rxe4 Rxe4 19 Qxe4 Qf8! (Diagram 5)

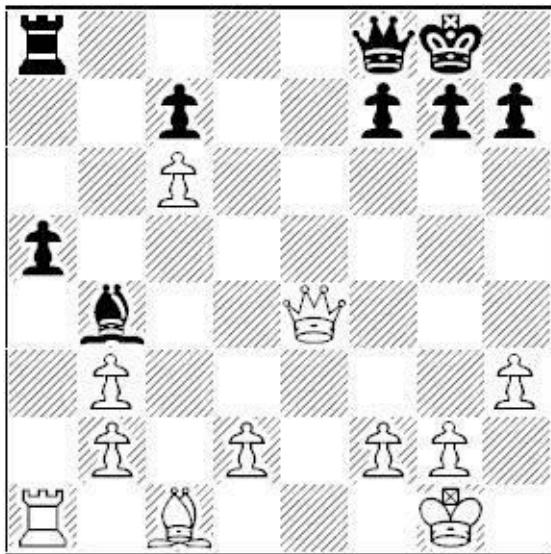


Diagram 5 (W)

Planning ... Re8-e1+.

20 d4

White could try to avoid the rook reaching e1 by retreating the queen with 20 Qg4 Re8 21 Qd1, but then it would be impossible to move the d-pawn! White would hardly be able to move at all and Black would begin to infiltrate with his queen.

20 ... Re8 21 Qf5 g6 22 Qf6 Re6

The rook forces White's queen to retreat before checking on e1.

23 Qf3 Re1+ 24 Kh2 h5!

A really strong move, with the idea of ... h4 to restrict and further weaken the white king. Black's plan involves ... Qa8-a6-f1, which could easily be crushing. However, getting the timing wrong might allow White to escape via a defensive resource. For example, 24 ... Qa8 25 g3 Qa6 26 Bh6! Rxa1 27 Qf6 Bf8 28 Qd8 and here Black would be losing were it not for 28 ... Rh1+! 29 Kxh1 Qf1+ with perpetual check.

25 g3?

Houdini suggests the calm 25 h4!, preventing ... h4. Black doesn't seem to have an obvious way to exploit the temporarily unguarded pawn, and White's Bh6 resource is still in play. For example, 25 ... Qe8 (or 25 ... Qa8 26 g3) 26 g3! Rf1 27 Kg2! Qe1 28 Bh6! Rg1+ 29 Kh2 Qxa1 30 Qf6 Rh1+ 31 Kg2 Qf1+ 32 Kf3 and crazy as it seems, Black can do no better than draw.

25 ... h4!

Now, with White's king further weakened, Black takes complete control.

26 Kg2 (Diagram 6)

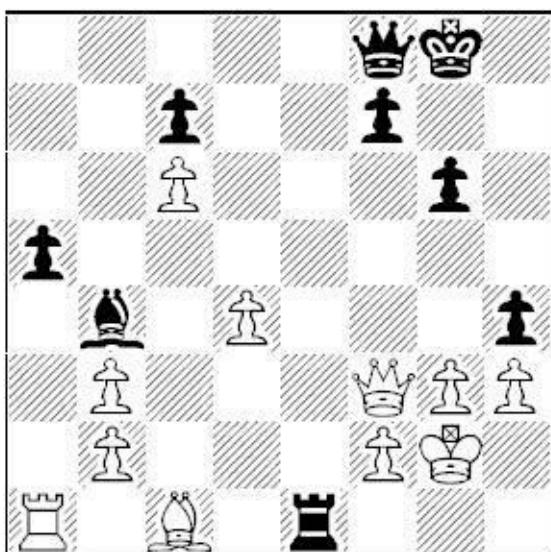


Diagram 6 (W)

26 ... Qa8!

Threatening ... Qa6.

27 Qd5

To meet ... Qa6 with Qc4.

27 Kh2 Qa6 28 Bh6 no longer works: 28 ... Rxa1 29 Qf6 hxg3+ 30 Kxg3 Qd3+ 31 f3 Bd6+ 32 Kh4 Be7! 33 Qxe7 Qxd4+ and Black mates.

27 ... hxg3 28 fxg3 Qe8!

A lovely switchback.

29 Qf3 Qe6 30 g4 g5!! (Diagram 7)

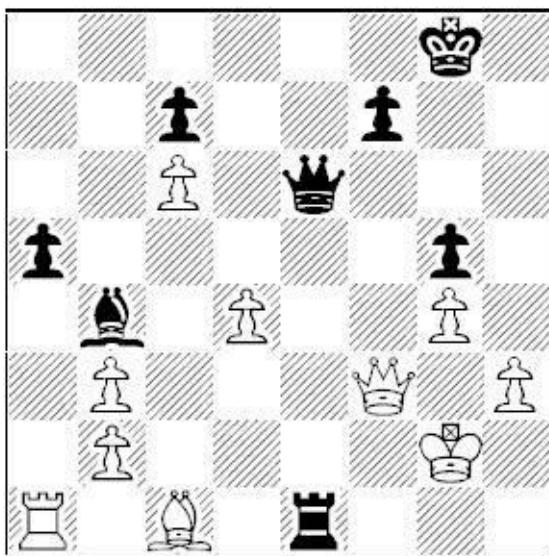


Diagram 7 (W)

And this is very nice too. Black wins simply by running White out of moves.

31 Rb1 Kf8! 32 d5 Qe5 0-1

There's no dealing with the various threats: ... Qd4, ... Bd6 or even ... Rxc1+ and ... Qxb2+.

Of course, there's no obligation to grab a pawn after 8 ... Na5. In the following game White chooses a more cautious path.

Game 16

A.Kosteniuk-I.Ivanisevic Mainz (rapid) 2008

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 a4 Na5 9 Ba2

The most common response to 8 ... Na5, and probably the best move, at least practically. Here, and in similar positions, most white players prefer to keep the bishop rather than grabbing a pawn and accepting weaknesses after ... Nxb3.

9 ... d5!? (Diagram 8)

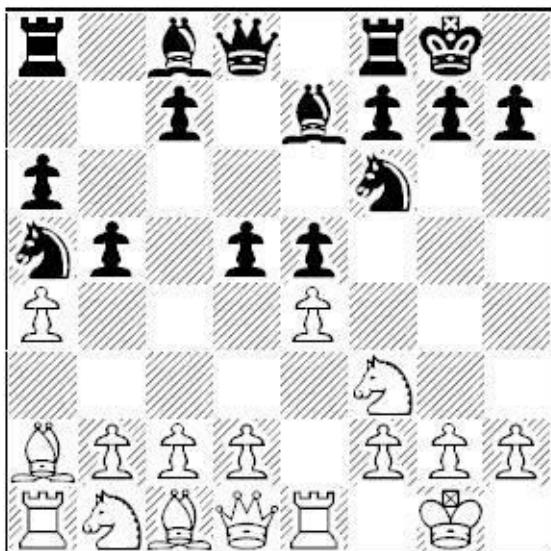


Diagram 8 (W)

A shocking move! I'm reminded a bit of the Gajewski Gambit, 8 c3 d6 9 h3 Na5 10 Bc2 d5!?, in that Black is playing a Marshall-style gambit with his queen's knight on a5 rather than c6. A major difference between this and the Gajewski, though, is that the Gajewski already has a significant number of games and theory attached to it, whereas Ivanisevic's move has only been played in a handful of games, despite being around for longer. The earliest games with 9 ... d5 I could find were played in 2001, both by the Serbian IM Slavisa Brenjo.

One merit of 8 ... Na5 is that Black isn't committed to this gambit. 9 ... d6 is a solid alternative, which we shall look at later.

10 d4!?

Perhaps surprised, and possibly surprised twice – first by 8 ... Na5!? and then by 9 ... d5!? – Kosteniuk decides not to accept the gambit and instead fights back in the centre.

10 exd5 and other options for White are covered later on.

10 ... dxe4

Black could also consider 10 ... Nxe4. For example, 11 Nxe5 (or 11 dxe5 Nc4) 11 ... Be6 12 Nd2 (12 c3 c5!?) 12 ... Nxd2 13 Bxd2 Nc4.

11 Nxe5 Bb7 (Diagram 9)

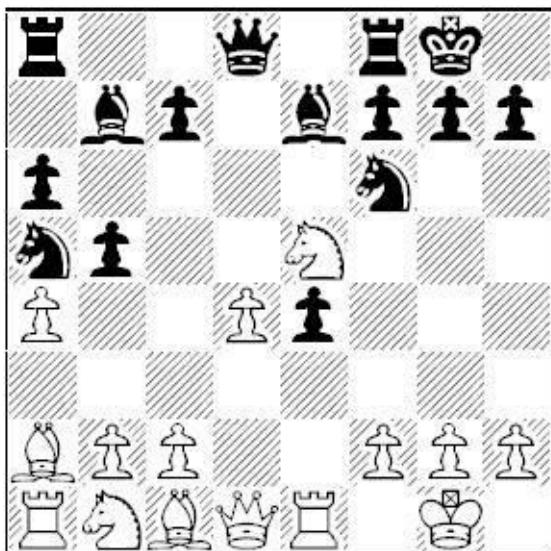


Diagram 9 (W)

12 Bg5!

In earlier games Brenjo twice faced the less active 12 c3 and on both occasions he got a good position: a) 12 ... Bd5!? 13 b3!? (13 Nd2) 13 ... Nd7 14 Nxd7 Qxd7 15 Nd2 f5 16 c4?! (16 b4) 16 ... Bf7 17 d5 c6! and Black was better in B.Ivanovic-S.Brenjo, Herceg Novi 2001.

b) In a slightly later game Brenjo switched to the natural-looking 12 ... b4, and 13 cxb4 Bxb4 14 Nc3 c5 15 dxc5 Bxc5 16 Bg5 Bd4 was balanced in A.Kovacevic-S.Brenjo, Jahorina 2001.

12 ... c5

BEWARE! 12 ... b4, with ... b3 ideas, feels natural, but the knight is vulnerable on a5! 13 Bxf6! Bxf6 14 Nxf7 Rxf7 15 Bxf7+ Kxf7 16 Qh5+ Kg8 17 Qxa5 wins material.

13 c3

13 dxc5!? is interesting and possibly more challenging for Black. After 13 ... Qc7 (13 ... b4!?) White could try 14 Nxf7 Rxf7 15 axb5 axb5 16 Bxf7+ Kxf7 17 b4 Rd8 18 Qe2 Nc6. *Houdini* slightly prefers White's rook and two pawns to the two minor pieces, but all three results are still possible.

13 ... b4! (Diagram 10)

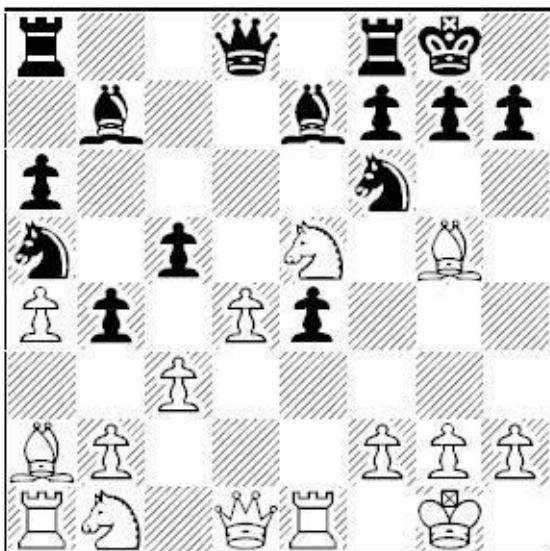


Diagram 10 (W)

Now this move is both desirable and possible.

14 Be3?!

Another passive move, and this time Kosteniuk will pay for her caution.

After 14 cxb4 cxb4 White can solve the problem of her undeveloped knight by 15 Nd2!. If then 15 ... Qxd4 there could follow 16 Ndc4!? Qxd1 17 Raxd1 with good compensation for the pawn.

14 ... Nd5!

Advantage Black. White can't develop her queen's knight, in view of ... bxc3, so she is forced to accept a concession.

15 cxb4 Nxb4

White's light-squared bishop couldn't escape from a black knight after all!

16 Nc3?

White's position isn't so hot after 16 dxc5 Nxa2 17 Rxa2 (or 17 Qxd8 Rfxd8 18 Rxa2 Bd5 and ... f6) 17 ... Qc7, but this is still a lot better than what happens in the game.

16 ... Nxa2 17 Rxa2 f6 18 Ng4 (Diagram 11)

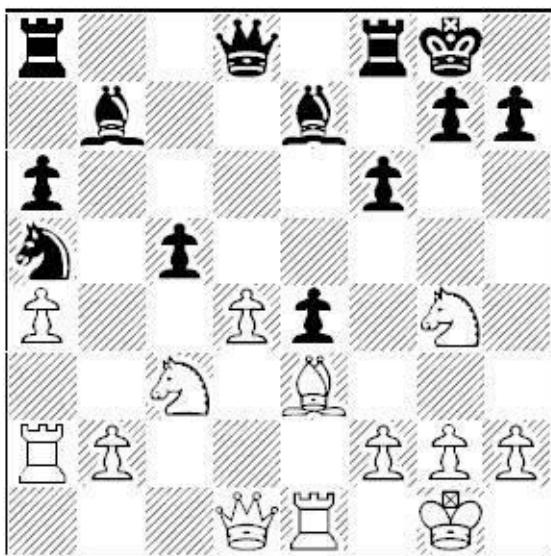


Diagram 11 (B)

18 ... f5!

Stronger, and much cleaner than 18 ... h5 19 Nh6+ gxh6 20 Qxh5.

19 Ne5 f4 20 Bd2 e3! 21 fxe3 cxd4 22 exd4 Qxd4+

Black's position is too strong, and White's is too dishevelled to be able to resist a direct attack.

23 Kh1 Rad8

The immediate 23 ... Bh4! is also good.

24 Nf3 Bxf3 25 gxf3 Bh4 26 Re2 Nc4 27 Ne4 Qd3! 28 Qf1 Rde8 29 b3 Rxe4!
30 fxe4 f3 31 Rf2 Qxb3 32 Bc1 Bxf2 33 Rxf2 Ne5 34 Bg5 Ng4 35 Rd2 f2 0-1

Looking a Little Deeper 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 a4 Na5!? 9 Ba2

Alternatively:

a) 9 axb5 was covered in Domancich-Civitillo.

b) 9 Nxe5 Nxb3 10 cxb3 Bb7 is similar to ‘a’, with Black once again getting long-term compensation. For example, 11 d3 d5 12 exd5 (or 12 Nc3 dxe4 13 Bf4 exd3 14 Nxd3 b4 15 Na2 a5 with an edge for Black, C.Cranbourne-A.Civitillo, correspondence 2005) 12 ... Nxd5 (12 ... Qxd5!?) 13 Nc3 Bf6 14 d4 c5, A.Bjorkqvist-A.Gavrilov, correspondence 1973.

After 9 Ba2 we shall consider:

A: 9 ... d5

B: 9 ... d6

It’s worth noting that 9 ... Bb7 has also been played a few times, but it’s probably a slightly inaccurate move order. 10 d3! d6 11 Nc3 transposes to one of the main lines after 8 a4, *i.e.* 8 ... Bb7 9 d3 d6 10 Nc3 Na5 11 Ba2. However, the tricky 11 Bd2! might well be stronger. The point is that after 11 ... c5 White has the counterintuitive idea 12 Bxa5! Qxa5 13 axb5, when Black must recapture on b5 with the queen and accept a weakness to his pawn structure.

A)

9

...

d5

(Diagram

12)

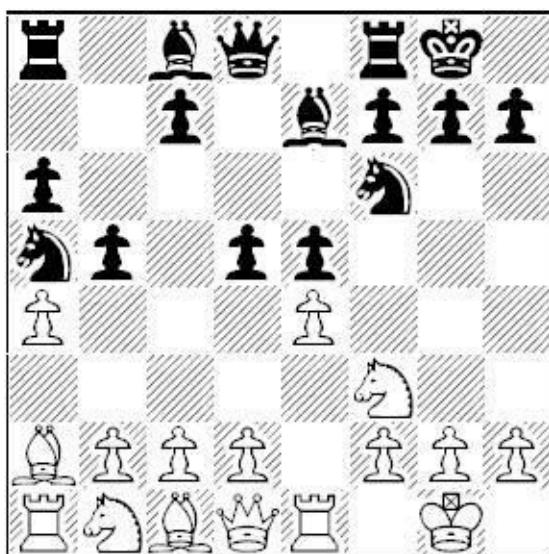


Diagram 12 (W)

10 exd5

The most obvious attempt by White to gain an advantage. Alternatively: a) 10 d4 was covered in Kosteniuk-Ivanisevic.

b) 10 Nxe5 dxe4 11 d4 transposes to 10 d4.

c) 10 Bxd5 Nxd5 11 axb5!? was a suggestion from John Shaw in *Starting Out: The Ruy Lopez*. After, for example, 11 ... axb5 12 exd5 Bb7 13 Rxe5 Bf6 14 Re1 b4 15 d3 Qxd5 16 Nbd2 Black certainly enjoys typical Marshall-style compensation, but whether it's objectively enough is unclear, and this looks as good as anything else I've seen for White.

d) 10 Nc3!? is another rare but interesting try: 10 ... d4 (Black gets compensation after 10 ... dxe4 11 Nxe4 Nxe4 12 Rxe4 Bb7 13 Rxe5 Bf6 14 Re1 Re8) 11 Nd5 Nxd5!? (11 ... c6 12 Nxe7+ Qxe7 13 d3 looks a touch better for White, A.Chudinovskih-K.Neumeier, Moscow 2006) 12 exd5 (if 12 Bxd5 then 12 ... c6 13 Ba2 Qc7) 12 ... Bd6 13 Nxe5 and now 13 ... Qf6 intending 14 Nf3 d3! 15 cxd3 to clog up White's queenside is one idea for Black.

10 ... e4 11 Ne5! (Diagram 13)

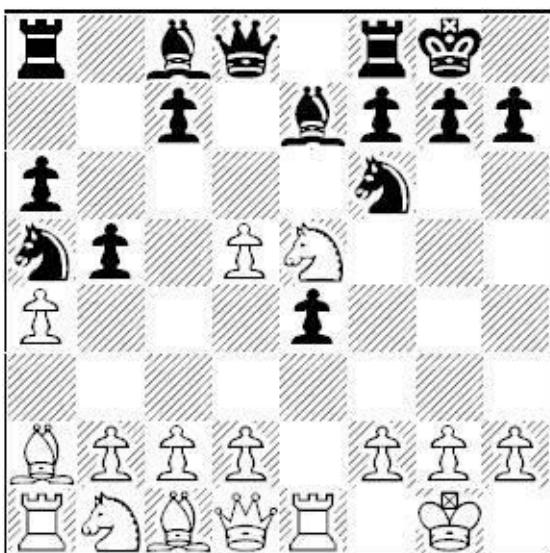


Diagram 13 (B)

If 11 Ng5 then simply 11 ... Bg4 12 f3 exf3 13 Nxf3 Re8 followed by ... Nxd5 is good enough for Black.

11 ... Bb7

This was Brenjo's choice when he reached this position. The alternative is 11 ... Nxd5, after which 12 Rxe4 Bb7 gives Black typical compensation but 12 Nc3 might be stronger. Black got good play following 12 ... Nb4 13 Nxe4 Nxa2 14 Rxa2 Bb7 in Y.Quezada Perez-R.Perez Garcia, Cuba (rapid) 2008, but as an improvement Quezada gives 13 axb5! axb5 14 Nxf7 Rxf7 15 Bxf7+ Kxf7 16 Nxe4 Bf5 17 d4 which he assesses as slightly better for White.

12 Nc3

Against 12 d3, 12 ... Bd6 looks like a natural reply, intending 13 d4 Nxd5. Or if 12 d4 then 12 ... Nxd5 looks okay for Black.

12 ... b4!

Black gives up a second pawn. After 12 ... Nxd5?! 13 Nxe4 White is much more active than usual: d2-d3 or d2-d4 is coming very quickly and Black has no compensation at all.

13 Nxe4 b3! (Diagram 14)

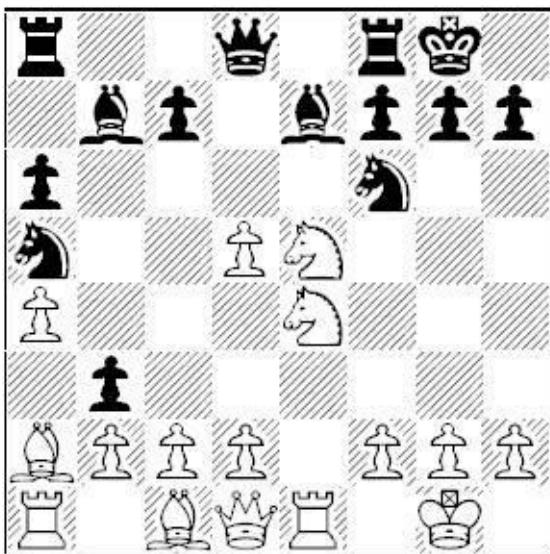


Diagram 14 (W)

DANGEROUS WEAPON! This is a key idea. Black insists on ruining White's queenside, and giving up another pawn to do so is a small price to pay.

14 cxb3!

It's better to keep the bishop, even though it's horribly hemmed in by the b3-pawn. White will look for ways to reactivate the bishop via b3-b4, even if this returns one of his pawns.

After 14 Bxb3?! Nxb3 15 cxb3 Nxe4 16 Rxe4 Qxd5 Black's piece activity, development lead and positional advantages add up to be worth more than two pawns. 17 f3 f5 18 Re1 Bc5+ 19 Kh1 Rae8 20 d4 Bxd4 21 Nd3 Rxe1+ 22 Nxe1 (22 Qxe1? Qxf3!) 22 ... Re8 and I prefer Black here.

14 ... Nxe4 15 Rxe4 Qxd5 16 d3 Bb4! (Diagram 15)

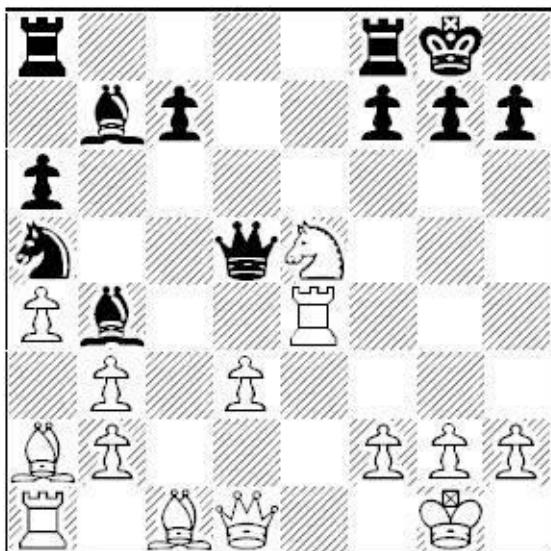


Diagram 15 (W)

A stunning move, which reminds me of Black's similar idea in Domancich-Civitillo. By denying White the opportunity to play b3-b4, Black keeps the a2-bishop firmly out of the action.

We've been following the game M.Roganovic-S.Brenjo, Kragujevac 2009, which continued:

17 Nf3

Houdini prefers 17 Bd2 c5 18 f3, but Black still has significant compensation for the two pawns.

17 ... c5 18 Bd2 Nc6 19 Bc3 Rad8 20 Qf1 a5 21 Rg4 g6 22 d4 cxd4 23 Nxd4 Nxd4 (23 ... Rfe8!?) 24 Rxd4 Qxd4!? 25 Bxd4 Rxd4 26 Bb1 ½-½

A draw was agreed here, but of course there's a lot of play left in this position. Following 26 ... Rfd8!, White still hasn't solved the problem of his light-squared bishop!

B) 9 ... d6 (Diagram 16)

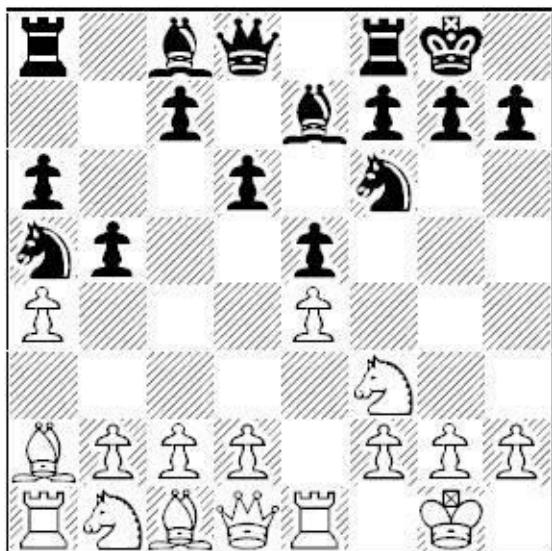


Diagram 16 (W)

The solid option.

10 d3

Now play develops in a similar fashion to some main lines after 8 a4 b4 or 8 a4 Bb7. Similar, but crucially *not exactly the same*, and a savvy Black player might hope to exploit the little differences.

White has a number of alternatives to 10 d3: a) 10 d4 exd4!? (10 ... Bb7 is solid, e.g. 11 Nc3 b4 12 Nd5 Nxd5 13 Bxd5 c6 14 Ba2 Qc7 15 c3 bxc3 16 bxc3 c5 with a level position, A.Alvir-P.Van der Sterren, Dieren 1986) 11 Nxd4 c5 12 Nf5 (or 12 Nf3 Bb7 13 Nc3 c4 blocking the bishop, with good counterplay) 12 ... Bxf5 13 exf5 b4 14 c3 Re8 15 Nd2 bxc3 16 bxc3 Qd7 17 Qc2 d5 and Black is fine, J.Janos-V.Malinin, correspondence 1998.

b) 10 c3 b4! (a typical idea in similar positions where White mixes c3 with a4; 10 ... c5 also looks okay, intending 11 d4 Qc7) 11 d4 (if 11 cxb4 Nc6 and Black regains the b-pawn) 11 ... c5! 12 cxb4 cxb4 (**Diagram 17**).

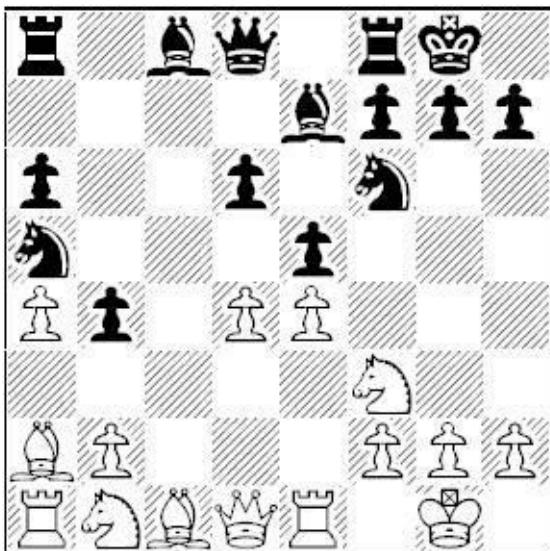


Diagram 17 (W)

DANGEROUS WEAPON: Now if White tries to win a pawn with 13 dxe5?! (13 Nbd2 Qc7 looks level) 13 ... dxe5 14 Nxe5?, Black wins a piece with 14 ... Qxd1 15 Rxd1 b3!.

c) 10 b4!? has some merit. White's idea is to chase the a5-knight away before Black has a chance to secure it with ... c5 or ... b4. After 10 ... Nc6 11 c3 (if 11 axb5 Nxb4), a solid plan for Black is 11 ... Bd7 12 d3 h6 intending a typical regrouping with ... Re8, ... Bf8, ... g6, ... Bg7 etc.

ROLL THE DICE! A much more aggressive choice for Black is a delayed Marshall Gambit with 11 ... d5!? 12 exd5 Nxd5 13 Nxe5 Nxe5 14 Rxe5. Do White's extra moves (a4, b4 and Ba2) help or hinder him? As well as 14 ... c6,

Black could consider other options such as or 14 ... Nb6!? intending 15 a5 Bd6 16 Re1 Qh4!.

d) 10 axb5 axb5 11 b4 Nc4! (this time Black must avoid 11 ... Nc6?, because of 12 Bxf7+!) 12 d3 Nb6 looks fine for Black, e.g. 13 Nc3 Be6 14 Be3 Bxa2 15 Rxa2 Rxa2 16 Nxa2 Qa8.

Returning to 10 d3:

10 ... c5!? (Diagram 18)

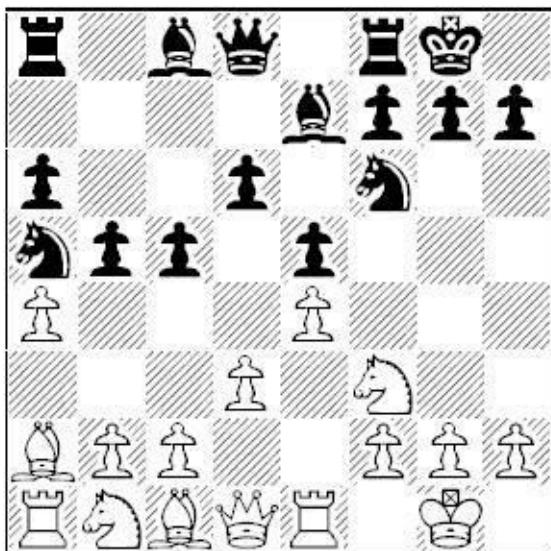


Diagram 18 (W)

TRICKY TRANSPOSITION: 10 ... b4 11 Nbd2 c5 (or 11 ... Be6) transposes to a main line of the 8 a4 Anti-Marshall (8 ... b4 9 d3 d6 10 Nbd2 Na5 11 Ba2 c5) which is perfectly acceptable for Black, and this move-order even has the advantage of ruling out a key option for White in 10 a5.

However, with 10 ... c5 Black is trying to further exploit the 8 ... Na5 move order. Theb4 advance is by no means obligatory, and Black's idea is to play it only if an opportune moment arises.

11 Nbd2

One merit of Black's idea is seen most clearly after 11 Nc3 b4! 12 Ne2 Bb7?. This would transpose directly to a well-known main line: 8 a4 Bb7 9 d3 d6 10 Nc3 Na5 11 Ba2 b4 12 Ne2 c5, which is again perfectly okay for Black.

However, whereas 8 ... Bb7 is perfectly logical in the position after 8 a4, why on earth would Black play 12 ... Bb7? here, with the pawn structure is fixed so that the bishop is hitting a brick wall? The choice of 12 ... Bb7 becomes even more ludicrous if you consider the main line above continues 13 Ng3 Bc8!. So, in effect, by choosing a much more logical 12th move, such as 12 ... Be6!, Black is more or less playing a main line but with two extra tempi! Clearly this means a comfortable position for him at the very least.

DANGEROUS WEAPON! One of the advantages of 8 ... Na5 9 Ba2 d6 is its flexibility. Black has neither committed his pawn to b4 nor his bishop to b7.

11 Bg5 was played in B.Ivanovic-P.Nikolic, Bor 1986, and Black equalized easily after 11 ... Be6 12 c3 c4!? 13 Nbd2 Nd7 14 Bxe7 Qxe7 15 d4 Bg4 16 Bb1 Nb6.

11 ... Be6

11 ... b4 would again transpose to a main line with 8 a4 b4, while 11 ... Bd7 is also playable and could be reached via 6 d3 lines (compare Chapter 8). However, exchanging light-squared bishops with ... Be6 is a key idea for Black, so why not do it straightaway?

12 Bxe6 fxe6 13 c3 Qd7 14 Qe2 Nc6 15 Nb3 h6 (Diagram 19)

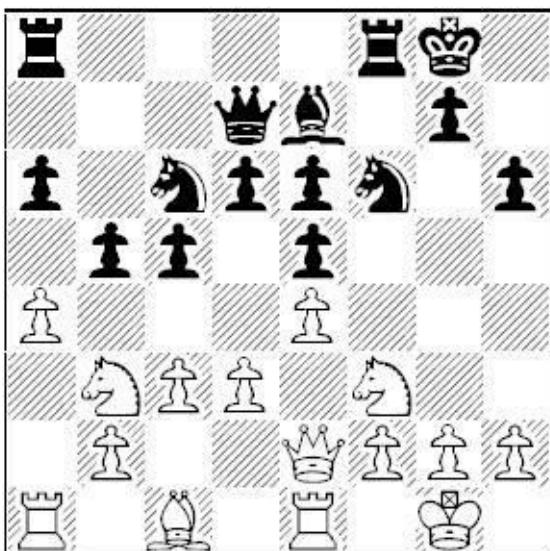


Diagram 19 (W)

Space, good central control and a half-open f-file offer Black a full share of the chances, P.Wolff-G.Kaidanov, Hastings 1989/90.

Summary 1) Black gets good play if White accepts the gambit with either 9 axb5

or 9 Nx e5. Essentially, the bishop pair and White's compromised queenside pawn structure assures Black of long-term compensation.

2) 9 Ba2 is a more likely response by White, and here Black can maintain the gambit theme with 9 ... d5!?. This move certainly carries a surprise punch, as we saw when White reacted passively in Kosteniuk-Ivanisevic. However, even if White plays more strongly, Black should gain at least some Marshall Gambit-like compensation.

3) Black has a second option against 9 Ba2, with 9 ... d6. Here the positions are similar to those in mainline 8 a4 Anti-Marshalls. However, Black can look to exploit the unusual move order to his advantage (see Line B).

Chapter Eleven

The 9 ... a5 Variation

John Cox

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5
7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 a5 (Diagram 1)**

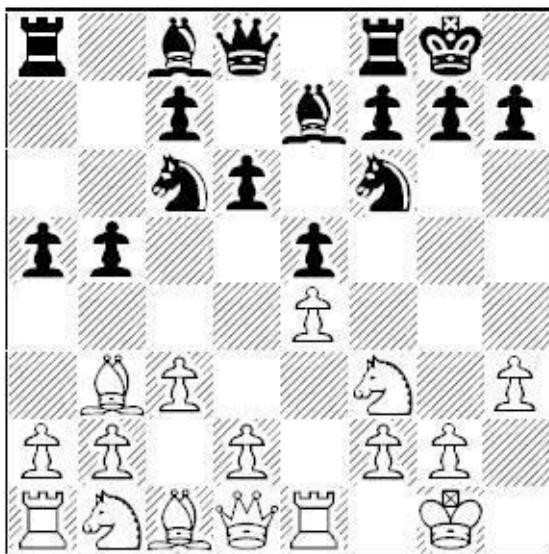


Diagram 1 (W)

Game 17

T.Selbes-A.Mirzoev

Turkish League, Konya 2010

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3
(Diagram 2)**

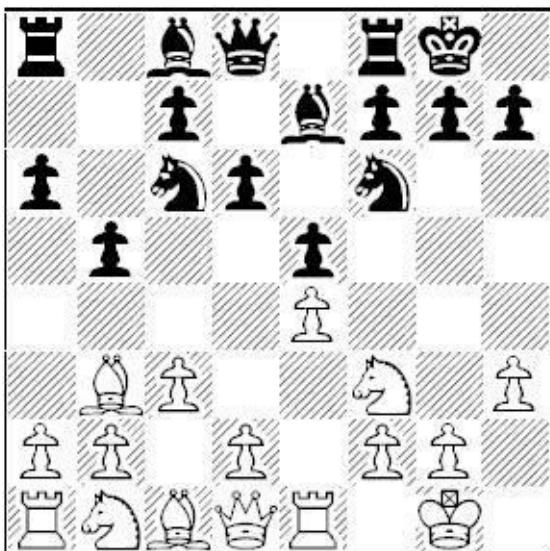


Diagram 2 (B)

The venerable tabiya of the Closed Ruy Lopez, and the starting point for the first chess book I ever bought, Batsford's very prettily-covered 1971 work by Wade, Blackstock and Booth, an entirely unsuitable waste of 46 shillings of my second prize in the Warwickshire U-12 tournament, circa 1973. I still have my copy signed by the equally venerable W. Ritson Morry, the legendary Midlands organiser of the period.

It's a little late in the game for a Dangerous Weapon, but of course the sequence to date is hallowed by time and has been played in many, many games, and even in amateur chess this position arises with fair regularity for defenders of the Lopez.

9 ... a5

Black has of course a multitude of systems at this point, including besides the three most prevalent at high level, 9 ... Na5 (Chigorin), 9 ... Nb8 (Breyer) and 9 ... Bb7 (or 9 ... Re8 – Zaitsev), the less popular 9 ... h6 (Smyslov), 9 ... Nd7 (Keres), 9 ... Be6 (Kholmov) and even 9 ... Qd7. The text move used to be associated with an idea of Bondarevsky's, subsequently adopted like most good things in the Ruy by Keres, but in recent times it has been revived with a different notion of simply playing the usual Closed Ruy schemas after first gaining space on the queenside.

10 d4

This is always the main move, of course, but in the next section we'll also consider the usual alternatives 10 d3, 10 a4 and also 10 a3.

10 ... a4 11 Bc2 (Diagram 3)

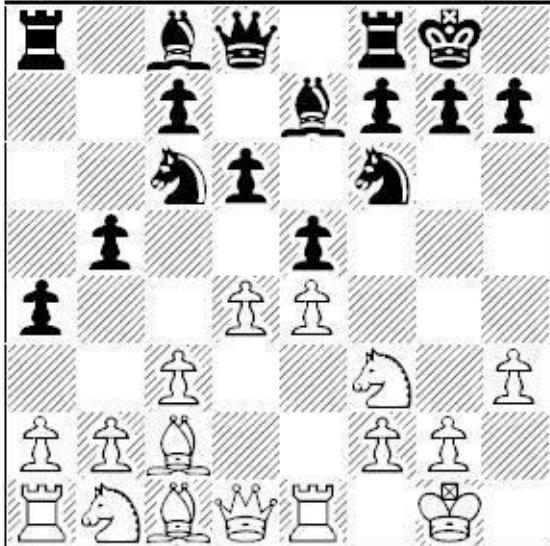


Diagram 3 (B)

11 ... Bd7

This is the modern way to play the variation, which seems to have been introduced by Simen Agdestein in 1988: Keres' idea was 11 ... exd4 12 cxd4 Nb4 removing White's bishop. 13 d5 then is supposed to be better for White based on a game Spassky-Keres in the 1961 USSR Championships, and I fear this is probably true.

11 ... Bd7 is a natural move offering support to the b5-pawn; Black has gained space on the queenside with his thrust on the ninth move, but he needs to be careful he doesn't lose control of the squares left behind, for example b4.

12 Nbd2

12 Na3 is another main move which we'll look in the next game, but it's natural to start with the normal Ruy trip to the kingside.

12 ... Re8 13 Nf1 h6 14 Ng3 Bf8 (Diagram 4)

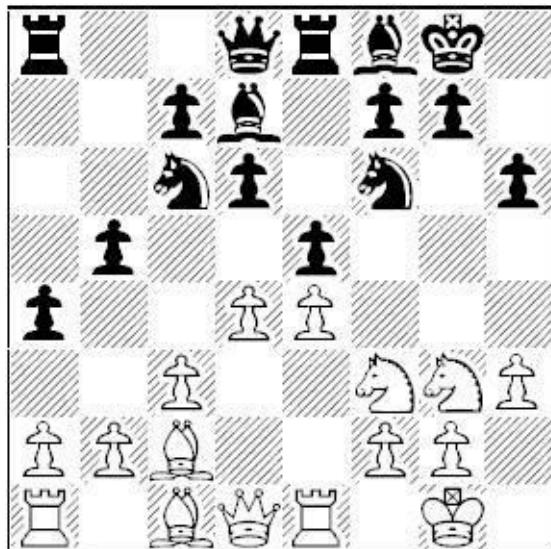


Diagram 4 (W)

This position arises by the most natural lines and should by rights be a tabiya, but in fact because of the few games played in the line there are only a handful of examples.

15 Rb1

White decides to tackle the a-pawn, not a terribly challenging idea.

DANGEROUS WEAPON! White's problem really is that 15 d5 (something he would normally be contemplating in the Ruy somewhere around this point) simply leads nowhere after 15 ... Na5; Black has a nice square for this piece on c4, a possible break with ... c6, and good prospects for all his other pieces.

Alternatively:

a) 15 Bd2 Na5 (or 15 ... Qc8 16 Bd3 Qb7 17 Qc2 g6 18 b4 Bg7 19 a3 Rac8 as in J.Polgar-H.Nakamura, Cap d'Agde 2010, with a typical Lopez position where Black's extra space on the queenside certainly isn't doing him any harm) 16 b3 axb3 17 axb3 c5 18 d5 Qc7 19 Nh2 c4 20 b4 Nb7 21 Qf3 Nh7 22 Ng4 Rec8 23 Be3 Qd8 24 Ba7 (**Diagram 5**) was F.Vallejo Pons-R.Ponomariov, Leon rapid 2003.

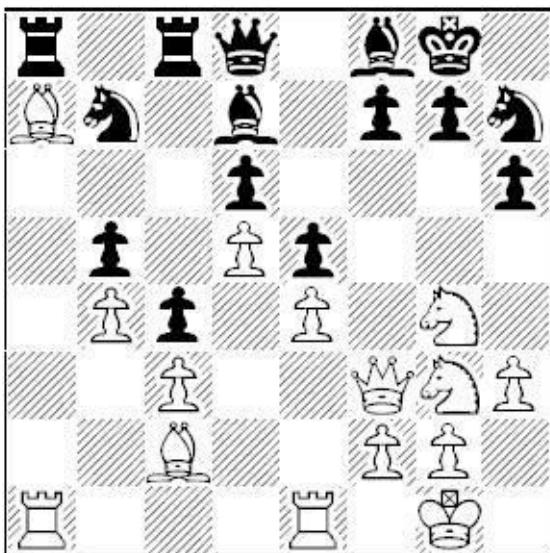


Diagram 5 (B)

This is a typical kind of position from which Karpov won crushingly in a famous game against Unzicker, but Ponomariov defended rather better and drew handily. One advantage of Black's ... a4 is that it is he who has the option when to open the a-file in these positions, in contrast to what happens after the sequence ... c5; d5 ... b4 c4; a4 in the more usual Ruy with the a6/b5 structure maintained. Still, it would be more comfortable to avoid such positions, and it seems to me that Black would do better to take care of business first on the kingside with 19 ... g6. If White now plays in the same way with 20 Qf3 Nh7 (not 20 ... Bg7?! 21 Bxh6 Bxh6 22 Qxf6 Bd2 when White has at the very least 23 Rfd1 Bxc3 24 Nf5 gxf5 25 Rd3, winning back the piece with advantage) 21 Ng4 (if White delays with 21 Be3 then Black has time for 21 ... h5) then now is the time for 21 ... c4 22 b4 Nb3!?, so that if 23 Rxa8 Nxd2 or 23 Bxb3 Bxg4.

b) 15 Be3 can be met in the same way: 15 ... Na5 16 b3 axb3 17 axb3 c5 18 d5 Qc7, although after 19 Nh2 Black has to recognize that the lines given in the last note

don't work because there is no bishop hanging on d2, and instead play something like 19 ... Qb7 20 Qf3 Be7 (to stop Bxh6) followed by capturing any knights that appear on the kingside and getting on with it on the queenside, for example 21 Nf5 Bxf5 22 Qxf5 c4 23 b4 Nb3 24 Rab1 Ra2 25 Bxb3 cxb3 26 Rxb3 Qc8 27 Qxc8 Rxc8, when Black's active rooks and his idea of ... Nh5-f4 give him excellent compensation for the pawn.

After 18 Qd2 (instead of 18 d5, above) I didn't much like Black's play in I.Saric-H.Stevic, Stary Mikanovci (rapid) 2010, which went 18 ... c4 (18 ... Qc7 appeals to me more, keeping the tension) 19 b4 Nc6 20 dxe5 (associated with a bad idea; the obvious 20 d5 Ne7 was better, when Black is not badly off, although I would prefer to try to avoid this sort of position) 20 ... dxe5 21 Rxa8 Qxa8 22 Nh5?! Nxh5 23 Qxd7 when Black would have been a good deal better after the obvious 23 ... Rd8.

c) 15 Bd3, while superficially attractive, rather asks for counterplay along the lines demonstrated in F.Perez Ponsa-M.Hebden, Internet blitz 2008, with 15 ... Na5 16 Rb1 c5 17 b3 (not forced, of course, but anyway Black has a very active version of the usual Ruy structure) 17 ... axb3 18 axb3 Qc7 19 d5 Nxb3!.

d) 15 Nh2 is covered in the 'Looking a Little Deeper' section (Line D).

15 ... g6 16 b4 axb3 17 axb3 Bg7 18 b4 Qb8 19 dxe5 dxe5 (Diagram 6)

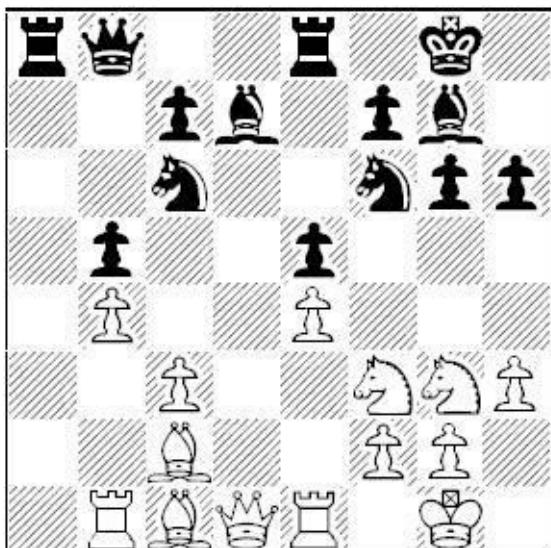


Diagram 6 (W)

A quiet symmetrical position of the sort White can always opt for in the Ruy, but Black's early gain of space on the queenside means that he doesn't have too much to fear here.

20 Nd2 Nd8 21 Nb3 c6 22 Be3 h5 23 Qd2 Qc7 24 Red1 Ne6 25 Ra1 Red8 26 Rxa8 Rxa8 27 Nc5 Nxc5 28 Bxc5 Be6 29 Qg5 Nd7 30 Bd6 Qc8 31 Nf5?!

This doesn't really work, but perhaps Black was making the typical very slow progress which he needs to aim for in this sort of position; he will aim to use his active rook on the a-file, trade the dark-squared bishops, and perhaps break with ... c5 to get to the c-pawn. It's not much, but it's more than White has.

31 ... gxf5 32 exf5 f6 33 Qxh5 Bf7 34 Qg4 Qe8 35 Rd3 Kh7 36 f4 Ra1+ 37 Kh2 Bh6 38 Qh4 Bh5 39 fxe5 Nxe5 40 Rg3 (Diagram 7)

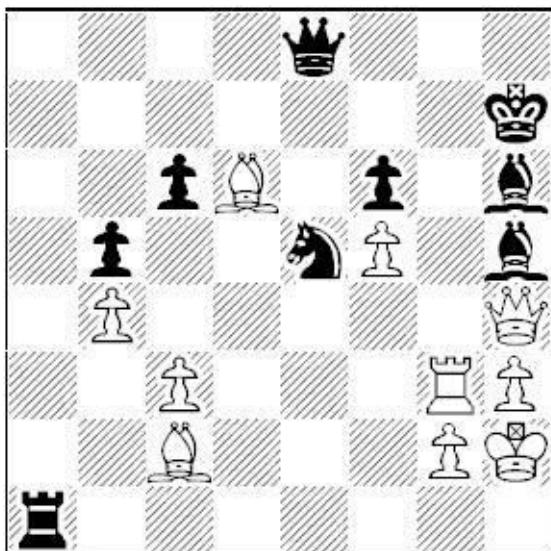


Diagram 7 (B)

40 ... Bg5

40 ... Nf3+ was working already since 41 gxf3 Qe1 is the end, but there's nothing wrong with the move played, although it would be mildly interesting to know whether Black had seen his 42nd move in advance on the last move of the time control.

41 Rxg5 fxg5 42 Qe4 Re1!

The only winning move, I think, but removing all White's illusions at a stroke.

43 Qd4 Nf3+ 0-1

That pretty much concludes what Black needs to know about White's most natural continuations.

DANGEROUS WEAPON! The extra tension and space on the queenside mean that White can't really get on with a kingside attack in peace and quiet, and without that it's difficult for White to find a plan.

Game 18

V.Ivanchuk-M.Carlsen

Wijk aan Zee 2009

1 e4 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 a5 10 d4 a4 11 Bc2 Bd7

All as in the last game so far, but now Ivanchuk leaves the usual Ruy paths and instead introduces a manoeuvre designed to clamp down on Black's queenside weaknesses.

12 Na3 Rb8! (Diagram 8)

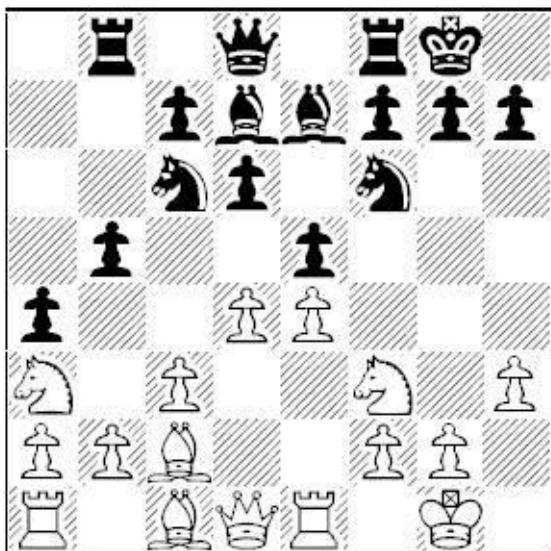


Diagram 8 (W)

A novelty in this game. The trouble with the older 12 ... Qb8 is that White ought to continue, along the lines of Spassky-Keres, with 13 Bd3 exd4 14 cxd4 Nb4 15 d5!, when Black doesn't have at all a good version of this idea.

13 d5

After 13 Bd3, 13 ... exd4 14 cxd4 Nb4 15 d5 is still good for White. I suppose that the point of Carlsen's novelty was rather to play 13 ... b4, when 14 Nc4 bxc3 15 bxc3 (15 dxe5 Nxe5 16 Nfxe5 dxe5 17 bxc3 Rb5 was nothing for White in L.Dominguez Perez-L.Bruzon Bautista, Havana 2009) 15 ... exd4 16 cxd4 Nb4 17 d5 is much more acceptable for Black having activated his rook and eliminated the b5 weakness; he can continue simply with 17 ... Re8 followed by redeploying his bishop to g7.

A much more critical test is 14 cxb4, when it isn't easy to find a wholly acceptable continuation for Black, for example after 14 ... Nxd4 15 Nxd4 exd4 16 b5 he loses a pawn for speculative compensation, say after 16 ... c5 17 Qxa4; undoubtedly Black obtains some compensation here, but it isn't easy to believe it is fully adequate. It seems to me that this is probably the hardest line for Black to meet after 9 ... a5.

13 Bd2 is another natural move (A.Rasmussen-J.Kvisla, Tromsø 2009) (**Diagram 9**).

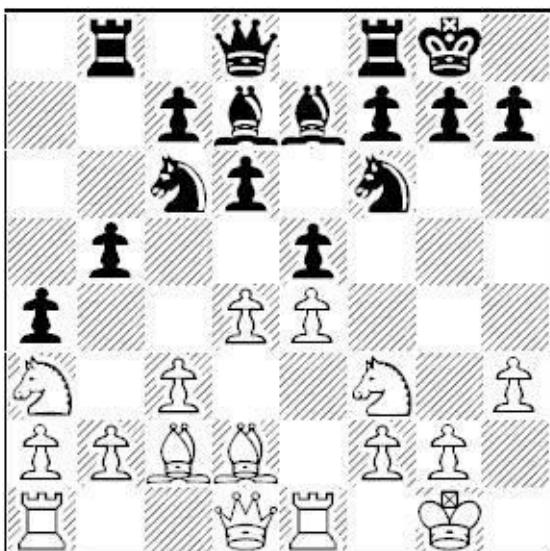


Diagram 9 (B)

Perhaps Black should try the pawn sacrifice 13 ... exd4 14 cxd4 d5 15 e5 Ne4 then; he gets reasonable compensation if this is accepted, with the dominating d5-square, the pair of bishops and the offside white knight.

13 ... Na7

An interesting moment. I don't really understand why the natural 13 ... Na5 couldn't be played. Certainly White didn't show anything very much after 14 b4 axb3 15 axb3 c5 16 b4 cxb4 17 cxb4 Nc4 (M.Tazbir-J.Kvisla, Helsingør 2009), and neither 14 Qe2 c5 nor 16 dxc6 Nxc6 is so obviously wonderful for White either.

14 c4

A very concrete continuation. After 14 Be3 I suppose that Black is going to play 14 ... c5; he has to reckon with 15 Nxe5 dxe5 16 d6 Rc8 17 dxe7 Qxe7, but in this position his extra space provides at least some consolation for the concession of the bishop pair.

14 ... Ra8!?

After 14 ... b4 15 Nb1 Qe8 16 c5 Black loses a pawn, so he would have to indulge in some sort of ... a3-related effort to try to obtain counterplay.

15 Be3

This allows what was bad before thanks to a tactical trick. The computer has a host of other suggestions, but Black seems to be okay. For example, after 15 c5 c6 16 Bg5 Qb8 White has slightly the more freedom but Black seems to be able to equalize, while 15 Bd2 Qb8, followed by a combination of ... c6 and ... bxc4 when desirable, is also acceptable for Black.

15 ... b4 16 Nb1 c5 (Diagram 10)

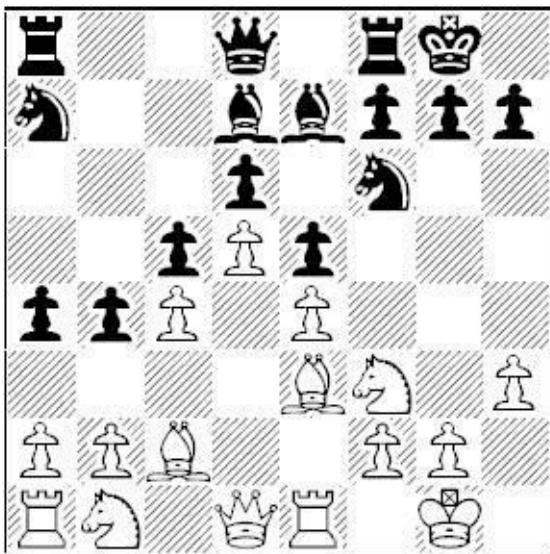


Diagram 10 (W)

Since 17 Bxa4 allows 17 ... Nxe4, White has to allow the closing of the queenside.

17 a3 b3 18 Bd3 Nxe4 19 Bxe4 f5 (Diagram 11)

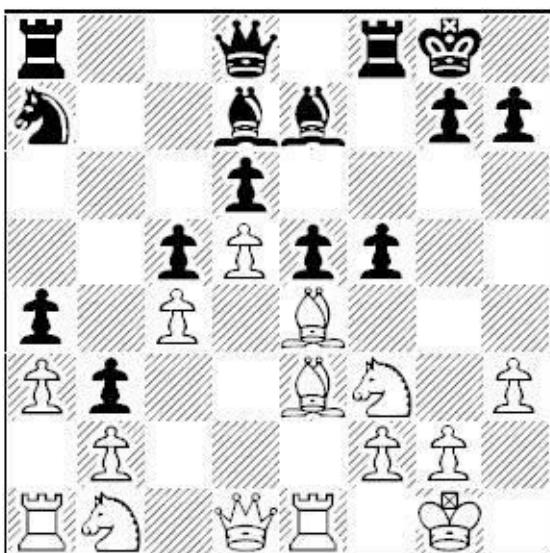


Diagram 11 (W)

20 Nfd2

Of course if 20 Bd3 then 20 ... e4. In any of these positions Black's aggressive posture on the queenside compensates him in the long run for the strange knight on a7 and the nice square on e4.

20 ... fxe4 21 Qh5 Be8 22 Qe2 Bd7 23 Qh5 Be8 24 Qe2 Bd7 ½-½

Ivanchuk settles for the draw. Either side could continue, of course, but for Black in particular it is hard to disturb the equilibrium if White is happy with it.

Looking a Little Deeper

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 a5

White's main alternatives are as follows:

A: 10 a4

B: 10 d3

There's also some sense in **C: 10 a3**.

Finally we look at **D: Some variations we haven't already seen after 10 d4**.

A) 10 a4

White refuses to allow himself to be dictated to on the queenside, and instead fixes the cheeky a5-pawn, ensures his bishop the b3-square and obtains control over c4.

10 ... b4 (Diagram 12)

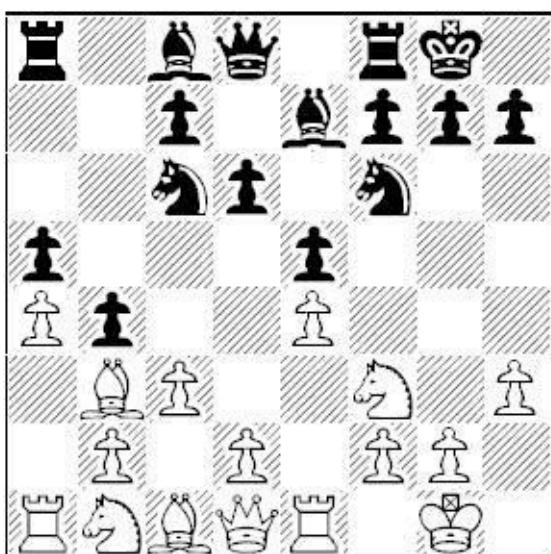


Diagram 12 (W)

White now faces the classic one-step/ two-step decision over his queen's pawn:

A1: 11 d4

A2: 11 d3

11 Bc4, which was played in A.Kveinys-G.Kaidanov, Calvia Olympiad 2004, can be well met by 11 ... Be6.

A1) 11 d4 bxc3 12 bxc3

12 Nxc3 Nxd4 13 Nxd4 exd4 14 Qxd4 Rb8 15 Bc4 c6 offers White nothing; V.Kotronias-L.Hansen, Stockholm 2006.

12 ... exd4 13 cxd4

13 Nxd4 doesn't look right, and in A.Rombaldoni-J.Borisek, Bratto 2009, Black was soon much better after 13 ... Bb7 14 Nf5 Ne5 15 Nxe7+ Qxe7 16 f4 Ned7 17 e5 dxe5 18 fxe5 Nxe5 19 Bf4, when 19 ... Rad8 would have left him well on top.

13 ... d5 (Diagram 13)

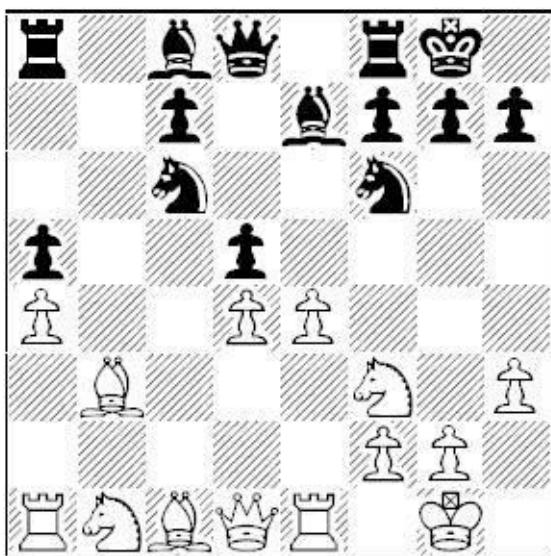


Diagram 13 (W)

This is the most natural way for Black to make use of the hole on b4; all his pieces obtain good squares and he equalizes easily.

14 Ne5

White has tried every conceivable move here:

a) After 14 Nc3 dxe4 15 Nxe4 perhaps Black's most accurate is 15 ... Rb8 (in S.Joachim-L.Hansen, German League 1999, Black exchanged immediately, but the rook proved surprisingly dangerous on the fourth rank).

b) 14 exd5 Nxd5 15 Bxd5 Qxd5 16 Nc3 Qd8 17 Nb5 Nb4 was fine for Black in T.Warakomski-O.Romanishin, Warsaw 2011.

14 e5 Ne4 15 Nbd2 Bf5 16 Ba3 Nb4 17 Nf1 c5 saw Black already taking the initiative in C.Joecks-L.Hansen, German League 1998.

14 ... Nb4 15 Nc3 Be6 16 exd5 Nfxd5 17 Bd2

After 17 Ne4 f6 Black was fine in R.van Kampen-S.Ernst, Netherlands Championship 2010.

17 ... Nxc3 18 Bxc3 Bd5

This is Black's most accurate move, and he is now comfortable enough.

A2) 11 d3 Ba6 (Diagram 14)

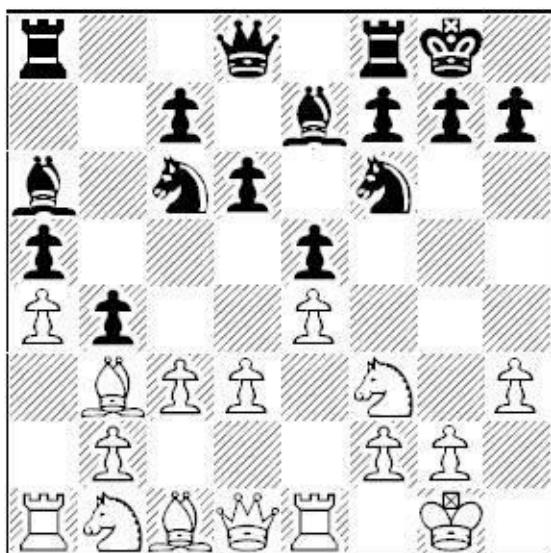


Diagram 14 (W)

DANGEROUS WEAPON! Black takes advantage of developments on the queenside to give his bishop an unusually good view.

12 Qc2 Rb8 13 Nbd2

This position arises after natural moves and has been reached in a few games. Very bad now is 13 ... bxc3 14 bxc3 d5? 15 exd5 Nxd5 16 Nc4 Nxc3?! 17 Ncxe5! (K. Lahno-M.Hebden, Hastings 2004), while I don't really care either for the 13 ... Qc8 which has usually been played. Instead I propose an oafishly simple plan of development:

13 ... bxc3 14 bxc3 Qd7 15 Bc4

After 15 Nc4 I like 15 ... Rb7, for example 16 Ne3 Rfb8 17 Ba2 h6 18 Nf5 Bf8, when Black's pieces are all active and he can look to the future with confidence.

15 ... Bxc4 16 Nxc4 h6 (Diagram 15)

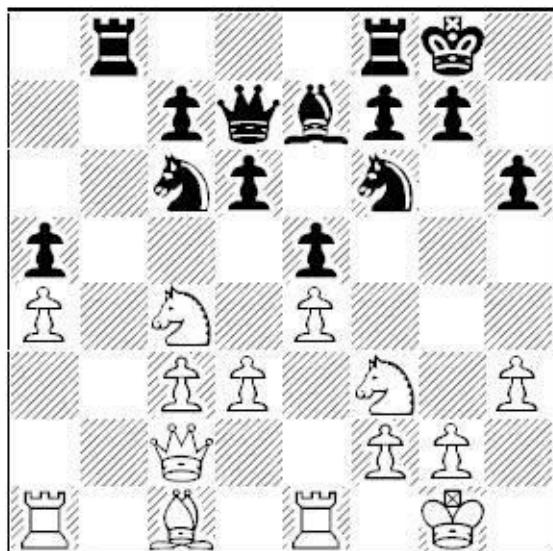


Diagram 15 (W)

This position could use some practical tests, but it seems to me that Black can hold his own. For example:

17 d4

After any slower move Black's next move is probably ... Qe6, or perhaps ... Rfe8.

17 ... exd4 18 cxd4 d5 19 exd5 Nb4!?

19 ... Qxd5 20 Ne3 Qd7 21 Ne5 Nxe5 22 dxe5 Nd5 is also possible.

20 Qe2 Rfe8

Black is sacrificing a pawn, but after 21 Nxa5 Qxd5 22 Nc4 Nc6 he has surprisingly good compensation.

B) 10 d3 a4 11 Bc2 Bd7 12 Nbd2 Re8 13 Nf1 Bf8 14 Ng3

14 Bg5 h6 15 Bd2 d5 16 Ng3 Be6 17 Qe2 was fairly equal in J.Cabrera Trujillo-A.Mirzoev, Seville 2010. Black might consider 17 ... a3 18 b4 d5 now, although there also wasn't anything wrong with the game's 17 ... Qb8 18 Nxe5 Nxe5 19 f4 dxe4 20 fxe5 exd3 21 Bxd3 Nd7 22 Bxb5 c6 23 Bd3 Qxb2.

14 Ne3 h6 15 Bd2 Ne7 16 Qc1 Ng6 17 Nf5 d5 also saw a Ruy veteran equalizing comfortably in J.Rudd-M.Hebden, European Union Ch., Liverpool 2006.

14 ... h6 (Diagram 16)

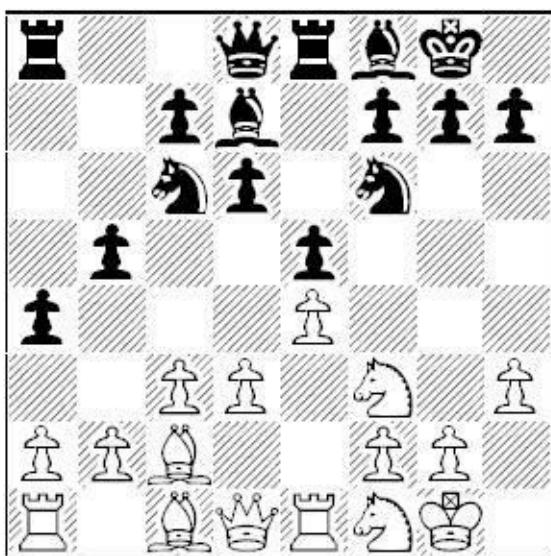


Diagram 16 (W)

15 Nh2

15 d4 “is better for White” (Koneru), although whether she meant it’s better than 15 Nh2 or actually produces an advantage is open to conjecture; at any rate it leaves White a straight tempo down on the introductory game Selbes-Mirzoev. Black could play along the same lines as that game, or alternatively 15 ... g6 16 Be3 a3 17 b3 exd4 18 cxd4 Nb4 19 Bb1 c5 was possible, as in C.Sandipan-I.Ibragimov, Bad Wiessee 2001.

15 a3 Na5 16 d4 c5 17 d5 g6 produces a typical Ruy position in which Black’s gain of space on the queenside makes his life easier than usual, and led to a memorable Black giant-killing for a regular exponent of our variation in A.Shchekachev-A.Payen, Issy les Moulineaux 2003.

15 ... d5!?

This move was proposed by Humpy Koneru after she used our Dangerous Weapon to win the 2009 FIDE Grand Prix in a crucial last-round game against Marie Sebag.

15 ... Na5 16 f4 c5 17 Nf3 Nc6 saw both sides carrying on regardless and produced a tense and roughly equal struggle in V.Bologan-Xie Jun, Shanghai 2001, while 15 ... Ne7 16 Qf3 Ng6 17 Ng4 Nxg4 18 hxg4 Qg5 was also fine for her in M.Sebag-H.Koneru, Istanbul 2009.

16 exd5 Nxd5 17 Qf3 Be6 (Diagram 17)

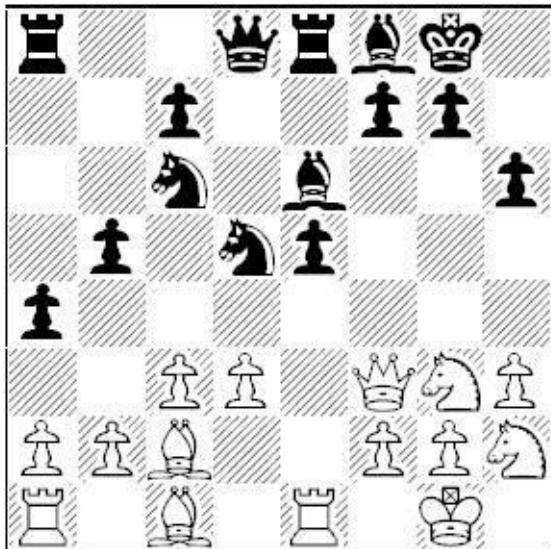


Diagram 17 (W)

18 a3

Or 18 Ng4 b4 19 Nxe5 Nxe5 20 Rxe5 bxc3 21 bxc3 Nxc3 22 Bb2 Qd4 23 Rae1 (Black is better after either 23 Re4 Ne2+ 24 Qxe2 Qxb2, or 23 Bxa4 Rxa4 24 Re4 Qb6 25 Bxc3 Ra3 26 Bd4 c5 27 Be3 Bd5) 23 ... Qb4 with an edge for Black (Koneru)

18 ... Nde7 19 Ng4 Bd5 20 Qd1 Ng6

With an equal position (Koneru). In general it doesn't look to me as though this line is too dangerous for Black; White's play on the kingside is a little too one-dimensional, and Black's queenside space is useful for him.

C) 10 a3

Again White looks to secure the bishop's diagonal, although this time he doesn't invite the opening of the b-file as 10 a4 did.

10 ... a4 11 Ba2 (Diagram 18)

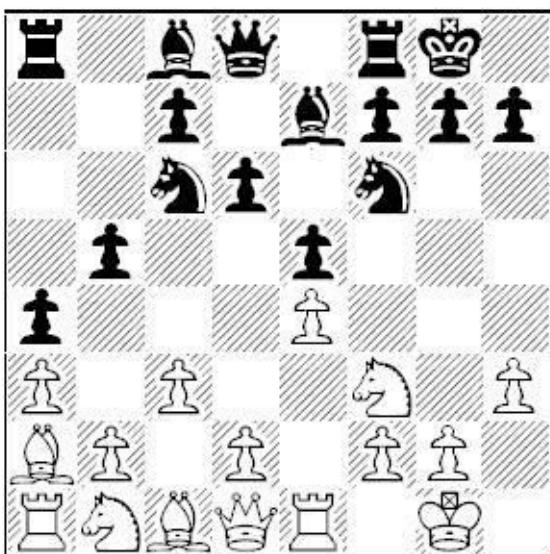


Diagram 18 (B)

If White's going to play 11 Bc2 anyway then it isn't clear what he played 10 a3 for. The game can easily transpose by, say, 11 ... Re8 12 d4 Bd7 13 Nbd2 h6 14 Nf1 Bf8 15 Ng3 to the position which would be reached after 15 a3 in the introductory game Selbes-Mirzoev, as it did in I.Poulsen-L.Hansen, Bornholm 2008. Instead 11 ... Re8 (after 11 ... d5 12 exd5 Qxd5 13 d4 e4 14 c4 Qd8 as in D.Pikula-H.Stevic, Bihac 2010, White can gain the upper hand with the unexpected 15 Rxe4, and if 15 ... Nxe4 16 Bxe4 Bb7 17 cxb5 Na5 18 Bxb7 Nxb7 19 Nc3) 12 d4 Bd7 13 Be3 was tried in N.De Firmian-L.Hansen, Esbjerg 2000, and now Black played the esoteric 13 ... h6 14 Nbd2 Qb8!?, which produced a heavyweight battle after 15 Nh2 Na5 16 f4 c5 17 d5 c4, when Black could be pretty happy with the outcome of the opening (notice how much more active his queen's knight is than in the usual Closed Ruy lines, because of his gain of space with the a-pawn).

11 ... Bb7

This was the choice of the Norwegian GM Leif Erland Johannessen, but

obviously Black could play any of the usual moves he plays at move nine in a normal Closed Ruy. I rather like the look of 11 ... Be6; the weakened light squares on the queenside invite this, and by comparison with Kholmov's line the normal 12 d4 Bxa2 13 Rxa2 d5!? looks a little strange with the rook coming to a2 (as opposed to 9 ... Be6 10 d4 Bxb3 11 axb3). 12 Bxe6 fxe6 13 d4 gives White nothing either after various moves, for example 13 ... Na5 14 Nbd2 Nd7 15 dxe5 dxe5 16 Qc2 c6.

12 d3 Na5

A slightly strange move to combine with ... Bb7. Black could equally consider developing as he would in a normal Zaitsev with 12 ... Re8 13 Nbd2 Bf8 14 Nf1, and now perhaps even 14 ... d5.

13 Nbd2 Re8 14 Nf1 c5 15 Ng3 h6 16 Nh2 d5 17 Ng4 (Diagram 19)

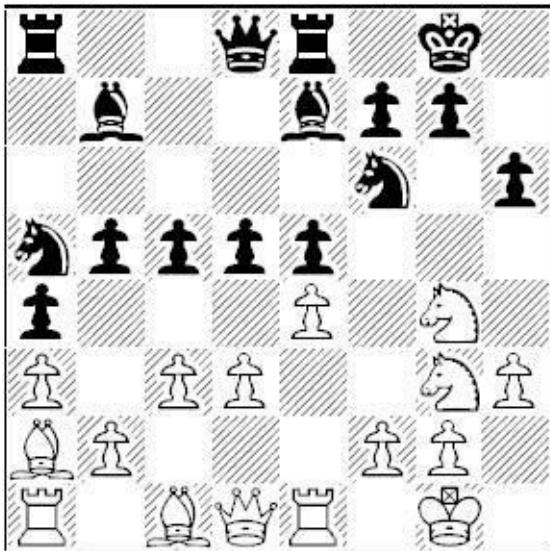


Diagram 19 (B)

This was S.Rocha-L.E.Johannessen, in which Black played 17 ... dxe4 allowing the very dangerous blow 18 Bxh6 gxh6 19 Nxh6+ Kh7 20 Nxf7 Qd7 21 Qc1 Ng8, and now White cravenly forced a draw with 22 Qd1 Nf6 23 Qc1 rather than continuing with 22 Nxe5, giving him three pawns for the piece and a lively attack.

Returning to Black's 17th move, perhaps Black could keep the game alive by killing the a2-bishop with 17 ... c4!? (always a move worth considering in these d3 Ruys where Black plays ... d5 and White doesn't take at once). The immediate sacrifices on the kingside no longer work, and White needs to find a way to do something over there before Black's play in the centre becomes the dominant feature of the position, which I don't see how he can easily do.

D) 10 d4

White's main move, of course. We've already seen White's 'main line' (insofar as there is such a thing) in our introductory game, and another dangerous try in Ivanchuk-Carlsen, but now I'd like to have a look at some other moves and consider whether Black might perhaps have another viable way to play this variation.

10 ... a4

Invariably played of course; this is Black's idea.

11 Bc2 Bd7

And again, this move is ‘always’ played these days; it’s a natural enough deployment in the Ruy anyway, and it’s logical for Black to think that the b5-pawn might require a bit of support.

Still, in D.Alsina Leal-D.Suarez Pousa, Spanish League 2011, Black introduced the also-logical 11 ... Rb8 12 Nbd2 Re8 (**Diagram 20**) and now:

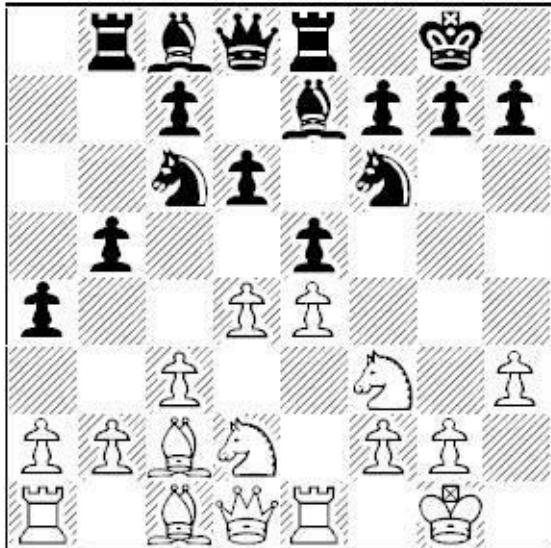


Diagram 20 (W)

a) Perhaps after 13 Nf1 now is the time for 13 ... exd4 14 cxd4 Nb4 while White’s f1-knight is miles away from c6. Black can then develop with ... Nd7-c5, ... Bf6 and ... Bb7, and doesn’t stand too badly, although at some point it’s probably going to be necessary to go ... c6 and incur some pawn weaknesses. Still, that happens in the Ruy, and at least he has the two bishops to console him.

b) In the game White elected to go for 13 d5. After 13 ... Na5 14 b4 axb3 15 axb3 c5 White discovered that 16 dxc6 Nxc6 leads to a position where he can’t stop ... d5, so instead 16 b4 Nb7 17 Nf1 Bd7 18 Be3 Qc7 19 Qe2 Ra8 (**Diagram 21**)

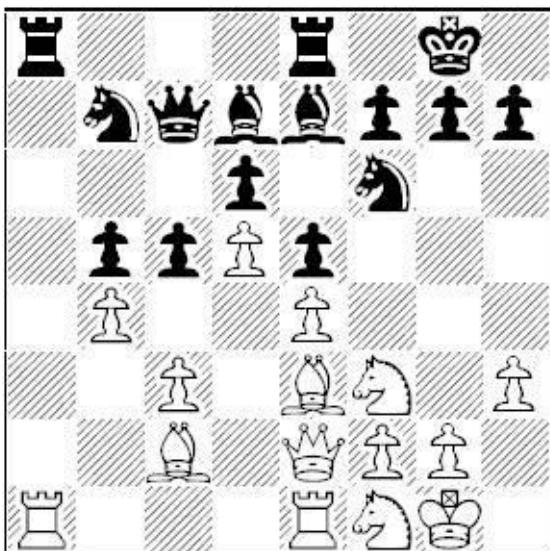


Diagram 21 (W)

produced a position very similar to, if not identical to, the old Rubinstein variation (9 ... Na5 10 Bc2 c5 11 d4 Qc7 12 Nbd2 Nc6). Black has saved two tempi in a way since his knight has reached b7 in two moves rather than four as it would in the Rubinstein variation, but on the other hand he's also played ... Rb8 and is going to need to go ... Ra8 at some point. Still, that happens in the Rubinstein too sometimes, and my impression is that Black is ahead rather than behind. This might be another fresh way of playing the line to look into, although it would be interesting to know whether Black has anything better in mind after 12 Na3 than transposing to Ivanchuk-Carlsen with 12 ... Bd7. Maybe his idea is the pawn sacrifice 12 ... cxd4 13 exd4 d5 14 e5 Ne4!?. Black obtains at least some compensation after 15 Bxe4 dxe4 16 Rxe4 Qd5 followed by moves like ... f6 and ... Bf5.

12 Nbd2

12 Be3 was played in L.Psakhis-S.Smagin, Chigorin Memorial, Sochi 1988. 9 ... a5 wasn't exactly a sentimental choice from Smagin in the Chigorin Memorial, but perhaps he thought surprising Psakhis was a higher priority than paying tribute to the great man. Anyway, he demonstrated an excellent grasp of the opening by showing that now Keres' 12 ... exd4 13 cxd4 Nb4 (**Diagram 22**)

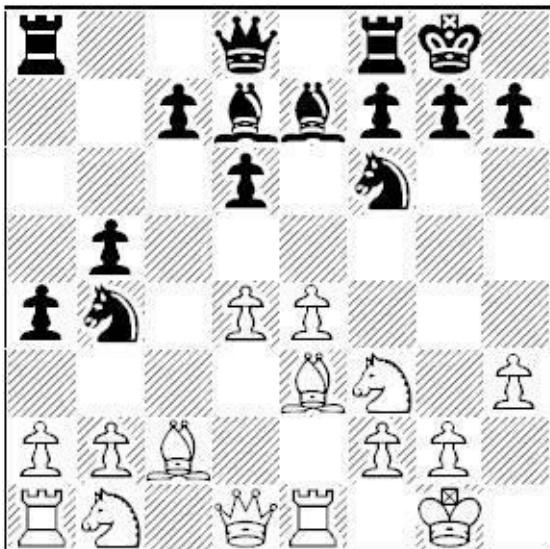


Diagram 22 (W)

is good after all, since after 14 d5 Black is ready for 14 ... c5, when 15 dxc6 Bxc6 gives White no advantage at all. So Psakhis continued tamely with 14 Nc3, but after 14 ... Nxc2 15 Qxc2 b4 16 Ne2 c5 17 d5 Re8 Black was obviously fine.

12 Bd3 is another sensible move aiming at Black's queenside weakness: 12 ... Rb8 (12 ... Qb8 13 Na3 exd4 is another idea, when 14 cxd4 Nb4 15 Bf1 d5 16 e5 Ne4 is fine, and perhaps 14 Nxb5 dxc3 15 Nxc3 Ne5 is as well) 13 Na3 b4 14 Nc4 was said to favour White by Patrick Wolff in his notes to P.Wolff-M.Hebden, London 1990, but it doesn't actually seem too terrible; 14 ... bxc3 15 bxc3 exd4 16 cxd4 Nb4 gives Black pretty reasonable chances of equalizing, for instance 17 d5 c6 18 dxc6 Bxc6.

12 d5 isn't at all well-timed; after 12 ... Na5 13 Na3 c5 14 dxc6 Bxc6 15 Bd3 Nc4 Black was already fine in N.Djuric-I.Savic, Bosna 2011.

12 ... Re8 (Diagram 23)

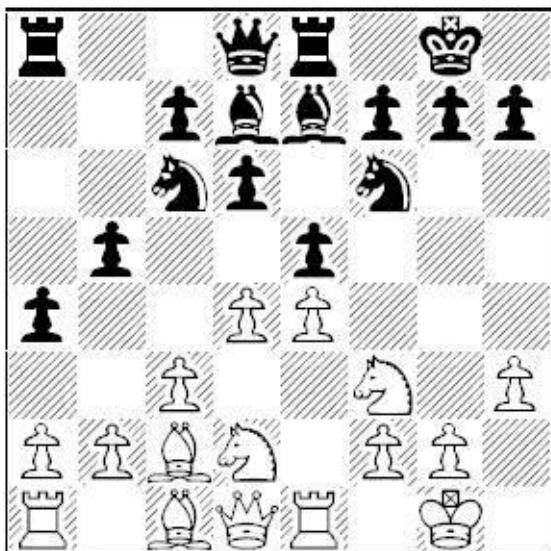


Diagram 23 (W)

13 Nf1

13 d5 is ineffective; in J.Hodgson-M.Hebden, Edinburgh 1989, Black met this with 13 ... Nb8 14 c4 c6 and an (accepted) draw offer, but 13 ... Na5 was equally possible and if 14 b4 axb3 15 axb3 c5, as in the Suarez Pousa game.

There is some point in 13 Bd3 at this moment while 13 ... Na5 is still impossible in reply, but in S.KudrinG.Kaidanov, US Ch., San Diego 2004 White got nowhere much after 13 ... Qb8 14 Nf1 (if 14 Qe2 then 14 ... exd4 15 cxd4 Nb4) 14 ... Bf8 15 Ng3 h6 16 Bd2 g6 17 d5 Na5 with equality; as usual Black is better placed on the queenside than in a usual closed Ruy. If White wants to play Bd3 I feel he needs to have Na3 available as well.

13 ... Bf8

This seems more accurate than 13 ... h6 to me since it prevents 14 Ne3 by the attack on the e-pawn, but good players have used both move orders, so perhaps it doesn't matter.

14 Ng3 h6 15 Nh2 (Diagram 24)

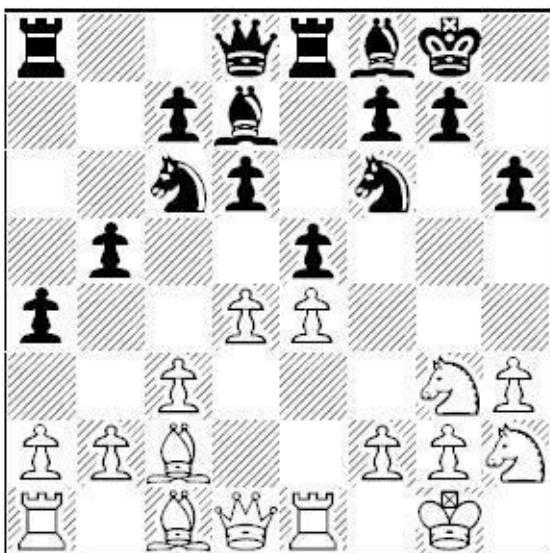


Diagram 24 (B)

This dangerous move was played in J.Benjamin-I.Ivanov, US Championship 1989, and Black found himself lost with alarming speed after 15 ... Na5 (Smagin's cold-blooded 15 ... g6 16 f4 a3 17 bxa3 exf4 18 Bxf4 Rxa3 is also interesting) 16 f4 c5 17 dxe5 dxe5 18 fxe5 Rxe5 19 Bf4.

The culprit was his sixteenth move; Black needs to give some love to the e5-square with 16 ... Nc4 (**Diagram 25**).

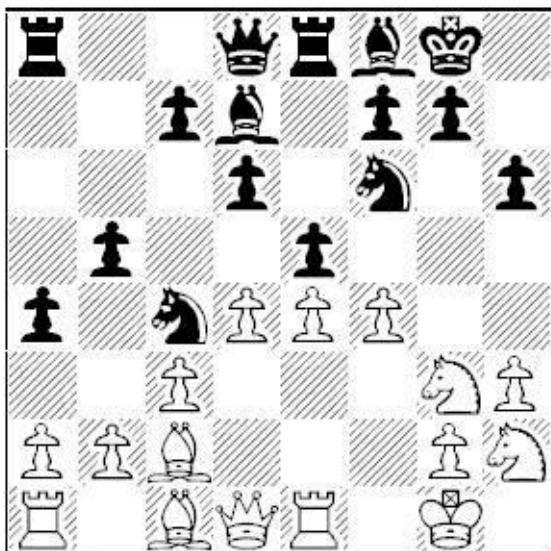


Diagram 25 (W)

The threat of ... exf4; Bxf4 Nxb2 obliges White to take some action, but if he goes 17 fxe5 dxe5 18 Nf3 Black can activate the bishop as well with 18 ... Bd6. Alternatively 17 Rb1 Qb8 18 b3 axb3 19 axb3 Na3! continues the fight for e5 by half-forcing White to part with the f4-bishop. Black ought to be able to hold his own in the complications after that.

Summary

In conclusion, I'm sure White should be able to maintain some advantage somehow after 9 ... a5, but at the moment he hasn't yet identified a clear route to do so, and Black's play has the advantage that he's forcing White a little out of the usual closed Ruy paths and making him think for himself; whatever White's best line does eventually turn out to be, I'm pretty sure it isn't going to be ignoring Black's moves on the queenside and carrying on as normal.

Chapter Twelve

An Open Chigorin

John Emms

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5
7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 Na5 10 Bc2 c5 11 d4 exd4**
(Diagram 1)

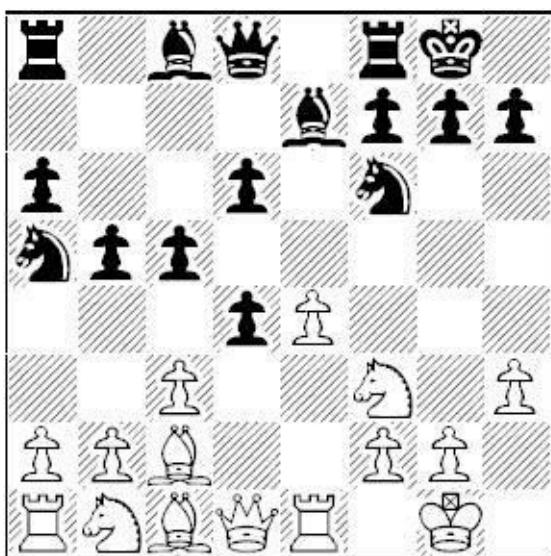


Diagram 1 (W)

A general aim for this chapter was to find another way for Black to inject some activity and imbalance into the Chigorin Variation. 11 ... exd4!? certainly does this. The merit of exchanging so early in the centre is that Black immediately creates an asymmetrical pawn structure (before White has a chance to block things up with d4-d5) and with it some dynamic possibilities:

- 1) If White continues with d4-d5, a Modern Benoni pawn structure is reached. Both sides have pawn majorities: Black on the queenside and White in the centre.
- 2) If White exchanges pawns on c5, again there's an imbalance: kingside pawn majority vs. queenside pawn majority.
- 3) If Black exchanges pawns on d4, the position becomes quite open and Black gains counterplay by attacking the e4-pawn with ... Bb7, ... Re8 etc, as in the Romanishin Variation.

The big question is, is 11 ... exd4 playable for Black? Let's take a look and find out!

Game 19

S.Hayakawa-T.Klausen

Correspondence 2005

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 Na5 10 Bc2 c5 11 d4 exd4 12 cxd4 (Diagram 2)

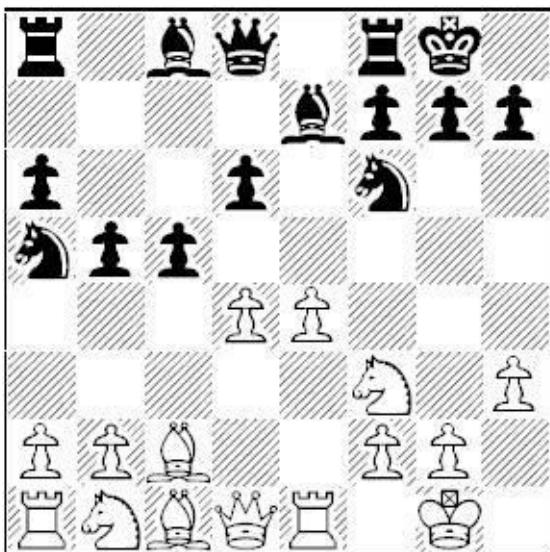


Diagram 2 (B)

12 ... Re8!?

TRICKY TRANSPOSITION: The game's actual move order was 12 ... Bb7 13 Nc3 Re8. However, that move order allows White the extra possibility of 12 ... Bb7 13 d5!, leaving the b7-bishop hitting a brick wall.

I'm trying to find lines where Black delays the development of the light-squared bishop until the position in the centre has clarified, or some other factor is introduced which makes ... Bb7 more desirable even if White can still play d4-d5. For this reason I'm suggesting the very rare move order 11 ... exd4 12 cxd4 Re8!?. My choice was influenced to some extent by a similar line, Murey's 11 ... Re8. I've played 11 ... Re8 in the past and it was also very much a favourite of Mark Hebden's. Unfortunately for Black, the assessment of the critical gambit line 11 ... Re8 12 dxe5! dx5 13 Nxe5! is not looking good, but with 11 ... exd4 12 cxd4 Re8!? we avoid that problem!

13 Nc3

This feels like the most natural move, at least at first sight. White is taking advantage of the fact that Black traded early on d4 by developing his queen's knight to a more active post. Certainly the knight is more active on c3 than on d2, and furthermore the c1-bishop isn't blocked.

However, things aren't quite so simple, for the following reasons:

1) The knight on c3 is more vulnerable – it can be harassed by Black's queenside counterplay.

2) With no white knight on d2, the a5-knight, sometimes a problem piece for Black, has nothing to prevent it from re-entering the game via c4.

13 ... Bb7

The alternative is to resolve the tension in the centre with 13 ... cxd4 14 Nxd4, a typical plan for Black, as we'll see later. The problem here, though, is that after 14 ... Bb7 White is in a better position than normal to exploit the f5-square. 15 Nf5! looks better for White, and following 15 ... Bf8 16 Qf3! h6 17 Rd1 Nc4 18 Qg3 Black was already in some trouble and soon lost in K.Spraggett-M.Müller, Port Erin 2007. Black should almost certainly prefer 14 ... Bd7! if he plays this way, when White enjoys only a small advantage.

14 e5 (Diagram 3)

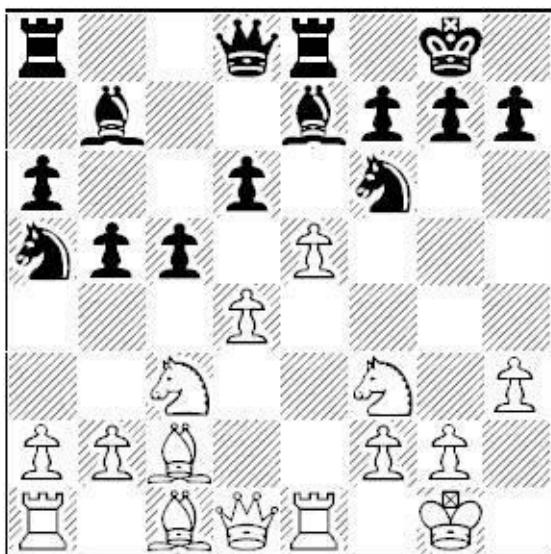


Diagram 3 (B)

Another logical move, again trying to take advantage of Black's early ... exd4. This move is very tempting because White opens up lines of attack on the kingside. On the other hand, it's also quite committal. White loses some grip on the centre, Black's b7-bishop becomes a strong piece, and the structural imbalance created assures Black of counterplay.

A very natural question to ask is shouldn't White just play 14 d5 here? After all, this is exactly the logical reply to ... Bb7 I mentioned earlier. However, while 15 d5 is certainly a decent option for White, Black can argue that he is better off here than in

similar positions where White's queen's knight is on d2 instead of c3, because it's easier for Black to arrange queenside counterplay. For example, 14 ... Nd7 (**Diagram 4**) (14 ... Nc4!?) and now:

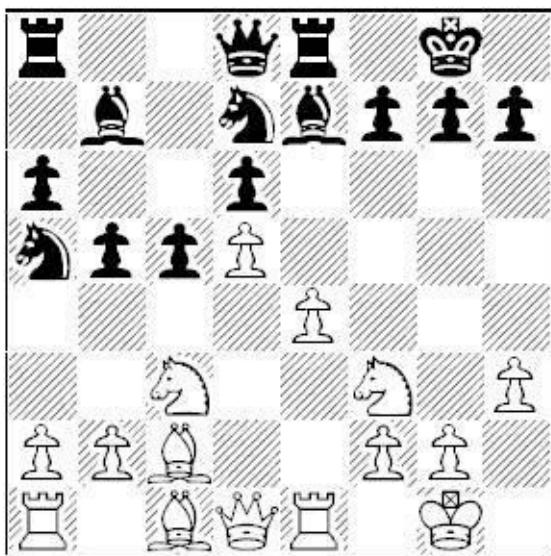


Diagram 4 (W)

a) 15 Ne2 Nc4 16 b3 Bf6 17 Rb1 Nce5 18 Nh2!? Bh4!? 19 g3 Be7 20 f4 Ng6 with an unclear position, R.Haag-R.Cento, correspondence 2002. White has made a little progress, but at the cost of weakening his kingside.

b) 15 b3! (to prevent Black from getting his knight back into the game with ... Nc4) 15 ... Bf6 16 Bb2 Ne5 17 Rb1! (17 Nh2? Nec4!) 17 ... Bc8! (returning to a better diagonal and giving the knight the b7-square) 18 Nxe5 Bxe5 19 Qd2 Qf6 20 Nd1 Nb7 21 Bxe5 dx5! 22 Rc1 Bd7 23 Bd3 Rec8 24 Qe3 Rc7 25 Re2 Rac8 26 Rec2 Qd6 and Black was just about equal, F.Bellia-A.Geler, Tivat 2011. The game continued 27 Qe2 f6 28 Ne3 Qb6 29 a4 c4! 30 bxc4 b4 31 d6 Qxd6 32 Nd5 Nc5! with good counterplay.

Another option for White is 14 b3, both preparing Bb2 and preventing ... Nc4. In this position Black is more favourably placed to resolve the tension in the centre with 14 ... cxd4! 15 Nxd4, since this is much better for Black than the Spraggett-Müller game, above. After 15 ... Rc8 (or 15 ... Nc6!?) 16 Bb2 Bf8 (16 ... Nc6!?) 17 Qd2 (17 Nf5 g6!) 17 ... g6, Black has prevented Nf5, and a Romanishin-type position is reached where he is holding his own. For example, 18 Rad1 Bg7 19 Bb1 b4 20 Nd5 Nxd5 21 exd5 Rxe1+ 22 Rxe1 Rc5 23 Qxb4 Bxd5 24 Qd2 Bb7 25 Bd3 Rg5 26 Be4 Bxe4 27 Rxe4 Re5 and Black has equalized, E.Trexler-M.Votypka, correspondence 2004. Finally, 14 dxc5 dxc5 15 e5 transposes to the main game.

14 ... dxe5 15 dxe5 (Diagram 5)

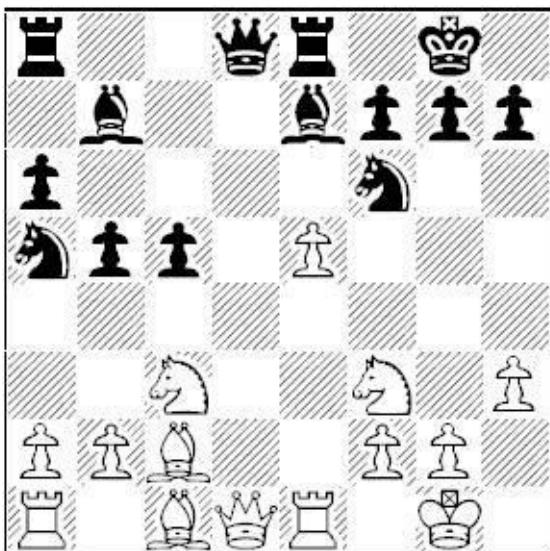


Diagram 5 (B)

15 ... Nd5!

It might be tempting to get the queens off the board, but 15 ... Qxd1 16 Rxd1 loses control of d5 and 16 ... Nh5 17 Nd5 looks like an edge for White.

15 ... Nd7, to protect h7 with ... Nf8, is the alternative, but 16 a4 b4 17 Nd5 Nf8 18 Be4 looks slightly better for White, B.Johansson-J.Filipek, correspondence 2001.

16 Qd3 g6 (Diagram 6)

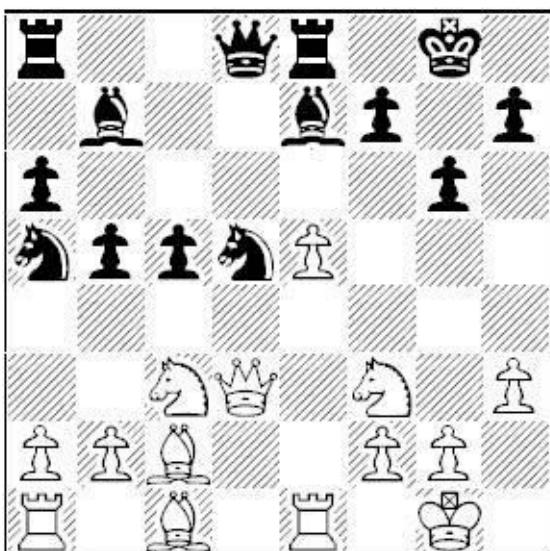


Diagram 6 (W)

We've reached a really sharp position, full of imbalances. There's no doubt that White's kingside initiative looks dangerous. On the other hand, two factors help Black:

- 1) His pieces are very active.

2) Endgames are likely to be favourable to him, because of his mobile queenside pawn majority.

17 Rd1

The immediate concern for White here was ... Nb4. Ignoring this possibility could lead White into trouble. For example, 17 Bh6? Nb4! 18 Qxd8 (or 18 Qe2 Bxf3!) 18 ... Raxd8 19 Be4 Bxe4 20 Rxe4 Nd3 and it's advantage Black. Even the dangerous-looking 17 e6 can be ignored: 17 ... Nb4! 18 exf7+ Kxf7 19 Qe2 (Black is at least equal after 19 Qxd8 Raxd8) 19 ... Nxc2 20 Qxc2 Bxf3 21 gxf3 Nc6 and again Black is better.

White's choice in the game, 17 Rd1, removes some of the sting from ... Nb4. Black is forced to spend a tempo removing his queen from attack, and this gives White time to save his bishop, or at least swap it for Black's own light-squared bishop.

17 ... Nb4

17 ... Nxc3 is also possible. For example, 18 Qxc3 Qc7 19 Bf4 c4 (19 ... b4!?) 20 Bg3 Qb6 21 e6 f6 22 Rd2 b4 23 Qd4 Bc5!? 24 Qxf6 Rxe6 25 Qh4 Bxf3 26 gxf3 Be7 27 Qg4 h5 28 Qd4 Qxd4 29 Rxd4 Bf6 30 Re4 Rc6 was roughly equal in T.Bueno-P.Schuster, correspondence 2002.

BEWARE! An example of how things could quickly go pear-shaped for Black is 18 ... Qb6 (instead of 18 ... Qc7) 19 Bh6 Rad8? (Black can solve his problems simply by 19 ... b4!) 20 e6! f6 21 Nh4! and now it's too late for Black to do anything against the mounting threats on the kingside: 21 ... Qc7 22 Bxg6! hxg6 23 Qc2 f5 24 Nxg6! and Black resigned, J.Marti Pericot-L.Ginzborsky, correspondence 2008.

18 Qe2 Qc7 (Diagram 7)

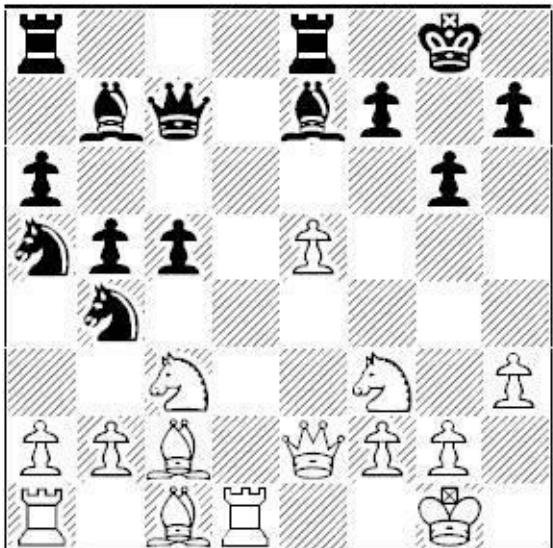


Diagram 7 (W)

19 Be4

Otherwise Black will definitely take on c2, and possibly f3 as well.

19 ... Rad8 20 Bh6 Bxe4 21 Nxe4 Nc4! 22 Nc3!?

The position is hotting up. White's idea with 22 Nc3 is to hit the b4-knight with a2-a3 and then sink his own knight in on d5. Black's next move prevents this.

22 ... Nb6! 23 Rxd8 Rxd8 24 Ng5

A novelty! In a previous correspondence game White had struck on the queenside with 24 a4, and 24 ... bxa4 25 Nxa4 Nxa4 26 Rxa4 Qd7 27 Ra1 Qe6 28 Rd1 led to an equal position and a quick draw in J.Timm-A.Hotting, correspondence 1999. White's choice in the main game is certainly more ambitious, but perhaps worse!

24 ... Nc6!

Threatening both the e5-pawn and also ... Nd4-f5 trapping the bishop. White is forced into action.

25 e6 f6!

Black keeps it tight at the back. The knight is invited into f7, but the game continuation shows that it's more vulnerable on that square than it is dangerous.

26 Nf7 Nd4! (Diagram 8)

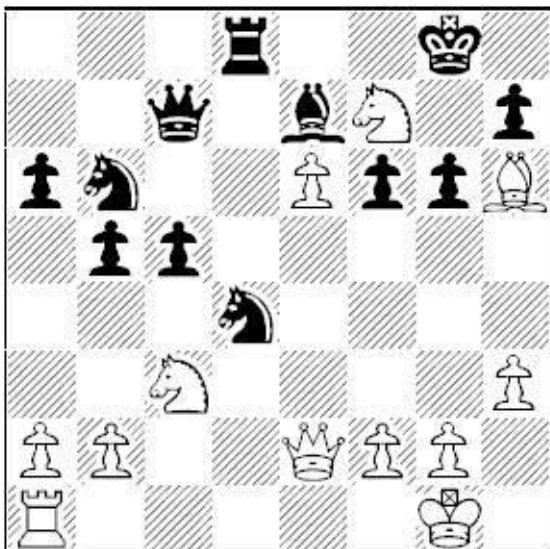


Diagram 8 (W)

DANGEROUS WEAPON! Advantage Black. The key point is that the knight on d4 is a monster which cannot easily be eliminated. White's e6-pawn is well blocked and also vulnerable to attack.

27 Qg4 Re8 28 Re1 Bf8! 29 b4!?

If 29 Bxf8 Kxf8 30 b4 Black has the tactic 30 ... Rxe6! 31 Rxe6 f5!.

29 ... f5! 30 Qd1 Rxe6 31 Bxf8 Kxf8 32 bxc5 Na4! 33 Rxe6 Nxe6 34 Nxa4 Kxf7 35 Nb6 Nxc5 36 Nd5 Qd6 (Diagram 9)

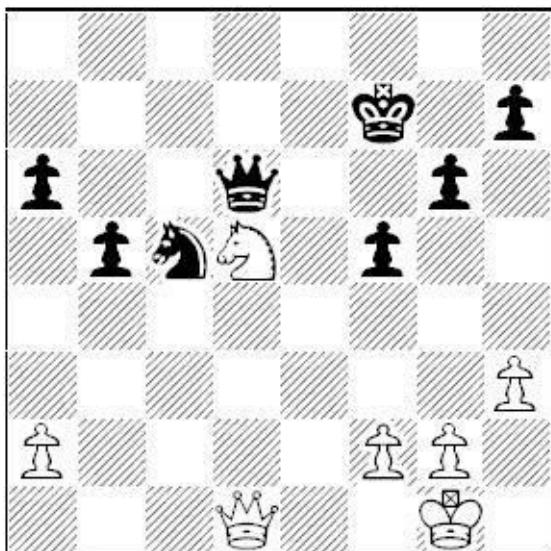


Diagram 9 (W)

Black has won a pawn and has good chances to convert.

37 Qf3 Ne4 38 Ne3 h5 39 g4 Ng5 40 Qb7+ Kf6 41 gxf5 Nxh3+ 42 Kf1 gxf5 43
 Qh7 Qd3+ 44 Kg2 Nf4+ 45 Kh2 Qe4 46 Qh8+ Ke7 47 Qg7+ Ke8 48 Qg8+ Kd7 49
 Qf7+ Kc8 50 Qf8+ Kc7 51 Qc5+ Qc6 52 Qxf5 Qd6 53 Kg3 Nd5+ 54 Kh4 Qf4+ 55
 Qxf4+ Nxf4 56 f3 Kd6 57 Kg5 Ke5 58 Ne2 a5 59 Na3 Ne6+ 60 Kxh5 Ne7 0-1
 61 Nc2 (or 61 Kg4 Kd4 62 f4 Kc3) 61 ... Kf4 is winning for Black.

Looking a Little Deeper

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3
 Na5 10 Bc2 c5 11 d4 exd4 12 cxd4 Re8 (Diagram 10)

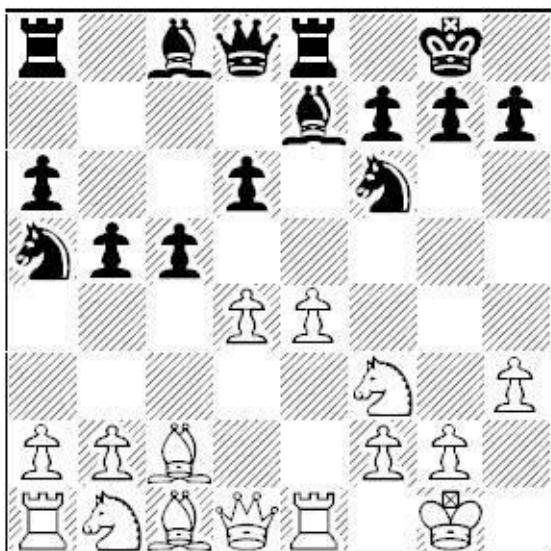


Diagram 10 (W)

13 Nc3 was considered in Hayawaka-Clausen, and the two other options we'll consider in detail are:

A: 13 Nbd2

B: 13 d5

Alternatively:

a) 13 e5 dxe5 14 dxe5 doesn't look dangerous. For example, 14 ... Qxd1 (or 14 ... Nd5!? with similar play to Hayawaka-Calusen) 15 Rxd1 Nd7 16 Be4 (16 Nc3 Nc4; 16 b3!?) 16 ... Ra7 17 Bf4 Nf8 18 Nc3 Ne6 with balanced chances. The asymmetrical pawn structure offers both sides the chance to fight for the advantage, even in the ending. However, an early queen exchange generally favours Black, who no longer has to worry about a direct kingside attack.

b) 13 dxc5 dxc5 14 Nc3 (14 e5 transposes to 13 e5) 14 ... Qxd1 (14 ... Bb7 transposes to Hayawaka-Clausen) 15 Rxd1 Be6 16 e5 Nd7 is similar to 'a' and again offers balanced chances.

c) 13 a4 Bb7! 14 d5. White has followed the principle of waiting for ... Bb7 before advancing with d4-d5. However, his waiting move, 13 a4, turns out to be a weakness which allows Black greater counterplay on the queenside than usual. After 14 ... Nd7 15 Nbd2 Bf6 (**Diagram 11**), Black is ready to activate with ... c4 and ... Nc5.

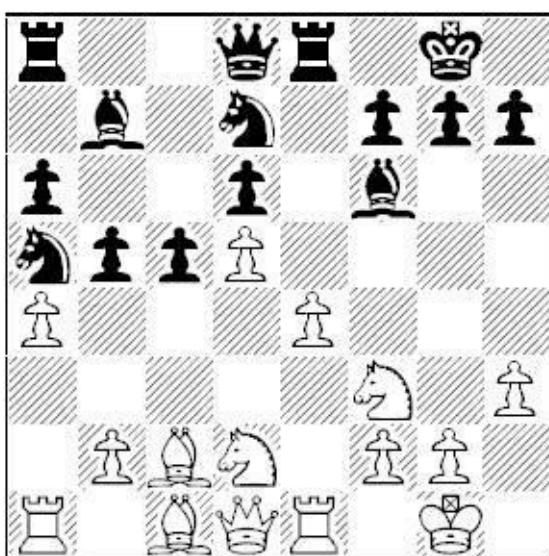


Diagram 11 (W)

d) 13 Bf4 Bb7 and now:

d1) This time after 14 d5 Black can exploit White's early bishop development with 14 ... Nh5!, intending 15 Bh2 (or 15 Be3 Nc4) 15 ... Bf6 and ... Nc4 with counterplay.

d2) 14 Nbd2 cxd4 (if 14 ... Qb6 then 15 d5) 15 Nxd4 reaches a typical

Romanishin-type position, with the slight difference being White's dark-squared bishop has developed earlier than usual. Here I suggest 15 ... g6 (15 ... Bf8 16 Bg5 h6 17 Bh4 Nc6 18 Nxc6 Bxc6 19 Qf3 looks slightly better for White, N.Djukic-N.Doric, Paracin 2011), and if 16 Nf1 Bf8 17 Ng3 we transpose to Line A1, note on 17 Bf4.

A) 13 Nbd2

In the handful of games with 11 ... exd4 12 cxd4 Re8, this typical knight move has been the most common choice for White.

13 ... cxd4! 14 Nxd4 Bb7 (Diagram 12)

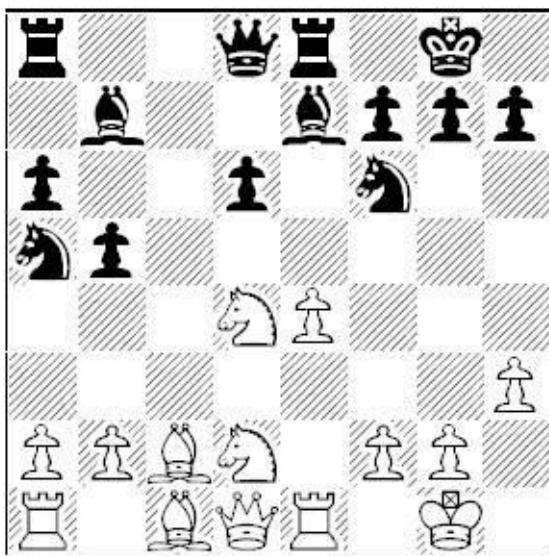


Diagram 12 (W)

TRICKY TRANSPOSITION: We have transposed directly to the Romanishin Variation: 11 ... Bb7 12 Nbd2 cxd4! 13 cxd4 exd4 14 Nxd4 Re8. Crucially, however, Black has bypassed 11 ... Bb7 12 d5!, which is the theoretically approved line for White and also one where Black struggles to find active counterplay.

In contrast, here Black enjoys good piece activity and has a number of ideas:

- 1) ... Bf8, ... g6,Bg7, to intensify the pressure on the e4-pawn and to activate bishop on the long diagonal.
- 2) ... Nd7 and ... Bf6, again activating the bishop and the e8-rook.
- 3) ... Rc8 to activate the queen's rook.
- 4) ... Nc4 to activate the knight (after White has moved the d2-knight).
- 5) ... Nc6, to offer a trade of knights.
- 6) ... d5, to break in the centre at the right moment.

Let's look at the main lines to see how this works in practice. In this position there are three key options for White:

A1: 15 Nf1

A2: 15 b3

A3: 15 b4

15 Nf5?! is premature here. After 15 ... Bf8 Black will force the knight to retreat with ... g6 and White just loses time.

A1) 15 Nf1

White gets on with the Lopez knight manoeuvre to g3. Black reacts in typical fashion with ... Bf8 and ... g6.

15 ... Bf8 16 Ng3 g6 (Diagram 13)

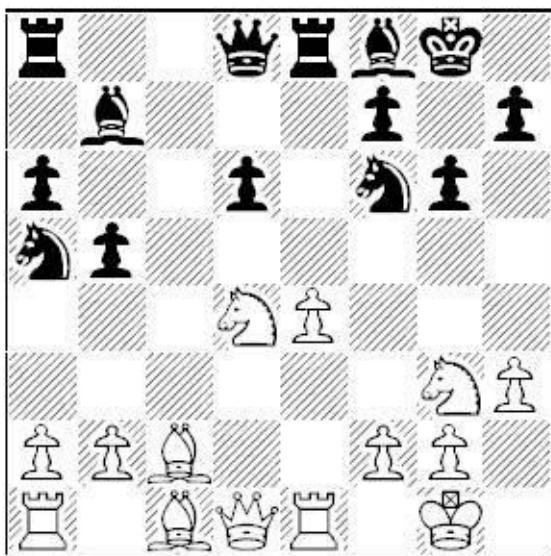


Diagram 13 (W)

This is a key position. White has tried a number of plans here, but the general consensus is that Black is fine.

17 b3

The usual choice. White prevents ... Nc4 and gets ready to put his bishop on the long diagonal.

Alternatively:

a) 17 a4 b4! probably helps Black. After 18 b3 we'll reach similar positions to the main lines, but Black gains extra counterplay due to the weakness on b3. 18 ... Bg7 19 Bb2 Nd7 20 Qd2 Qb6 was good for Black in I.Smirin-N.Davies, Tel Aviv 1991.

b) 17 Bg5 h6 18 Bf4 Qb6! (**Diagram 14**) leaves Black very active.

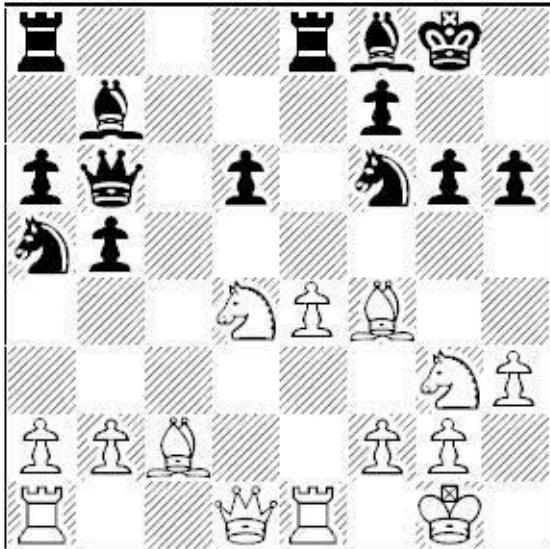


Diagram 14 (W)

DANGEROUS WEAPON! White has to be careful here. If he plays the natural 19 b3, to prevent ... Nc4, Black can seize the initiative with 19 ... d5!.

For example, 20 Be3 (20 e5 Bc5!) 20 ... Qd8 21 e5!? (21 exd5 Nxd5) 21 ... Rxe5 22 f4 Rxe3! 23 Rxe3 Qb6 24 Kh2 Nc6 25 Rd3 Nxd4 26 Rxd4 Bg7 (26 ... Rc8!) 27 Rd2 Qe3 28 Qe1 Qxf4 29 Rad1 Nh5 30 Re2 Bf8 31 Rd3 Bb4 32 Re8+ Kh7 33 Qe5 Qxe5 34 Rxe5 Nxg3 35 Rxg3 Bd6 36 Re2 Rc8 0-1, S.Smagin-M.Hebden, Copenhagen 1992 – a crushing win for Black against a strong grandmaster.

19 Nf3 is probably wiser than 19 b3, and 19 ... Nc4 20 b3 Ne5 21 Be3 Qa5 looks equal, H.Hunt-M.Hebden, British Rapidplay Ch., Halifax 2005.

c) 17 Bf4 is similar to 17 Bg5 h6 18 Bf4. Black has played various moves here, but I see no reason to avoid 17 ... Qb6! with very similar play to the previous note.

17 ... Nd7?!

I've given this as the main move, only because it keeps the most tension in the position, not because it's necessarily the best move objectively. If Black is happy to 'only' equalize, then 17 ... d5! 18 e5 Ne4! does the job. After 19 Nxe4 dxe4 20 Bxe4 Bxe4 21 Rxe4 Qd5! (**Diagram 15**) White can't keep his extra pawn:

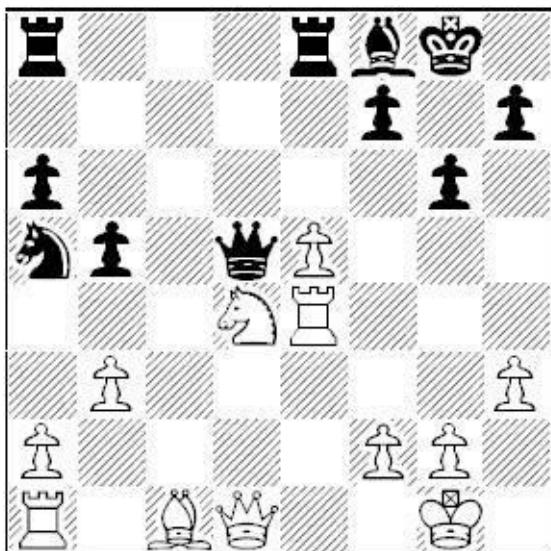


Diagram 15 (W)

22 Qf3 (or 22 Re2 Rad8 23 Be3 Qxe5, J.Pierrot-C.Garcia Palermo, Pinamar 2002) 22 ... Rac8! (not 22 ... f5?? 23 Nxf5!) 23 Bb2 (or 23 e6 f5! 24 Rf4 Qxf3 25 Rxf3 Nc6) 23 ... Rxe5 24 Rxe5 Qxe5 with a level position, R.Rodriguez-M.Hebden, Candas 1992.

DANGEROUS WEAPON! If White tries to hold on to his extra pawn with 22 Qf3 Rac8! 23 Bf4??, he gets hit by 23 ... f5! winning a piece – an easy tactic to overlook!

One idea that Black must constantly be wary of is a knight sacrifice on f5. For this reason, it might be wise to delay ... Bg7. For example, 17 ... Bg7 18 Bb2 d5 looks natural, but 19 Ndf5!! gxf5 20 Nxf5 (**Diagram 16**) leaves Black in some trouble.

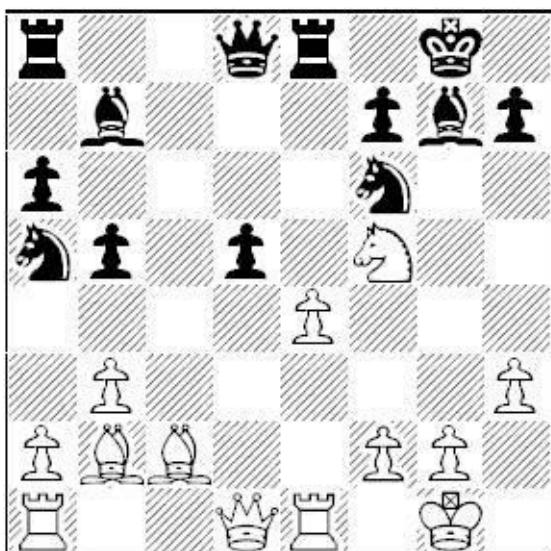


Diagram 16 (B)

For example, 20 ... dxe4 21 Qc1 Re6 22 Nxg7 Kxg7 23 Qg5+ Kf8 24 Ba3+ Ke8 25 Rad1 (25 Qg7!?) 25 ... Qc7? (Black can only stay in the game with 25 ... Qb6 26 Bc5 h6 27 Bxb6 hxg5 28 Bxa5) 26 Qg7 Bd5 27 Rxd5 Nxd5 28 Qf8+ Kd7 29 Qxf7+ and Black resigned, O.Maiorov-V.Baikov, Sochi 1996.

Returning to 17 ... Nd7:

18 Bb2 Rc8 19 Qd2 Bg7 20 Rad1 (Diagram 17)

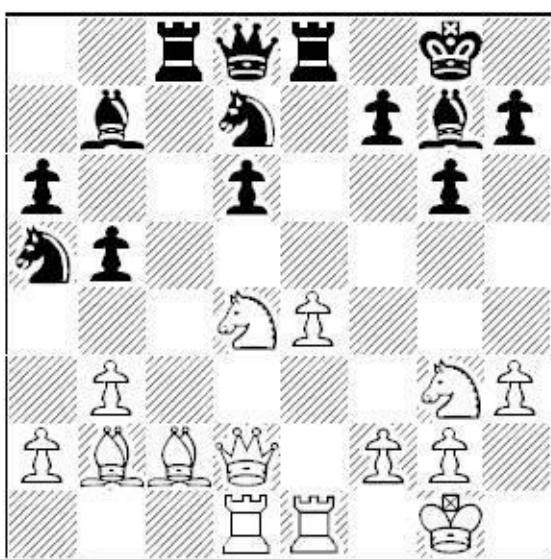


Diagram 17 (B)

Now:

a) Black should probably avoid some simplification with 20 ... Nc6 21 Nxc6 Rxc6 22 Bxg7 Kxg7, B.Jonsson-J.Hjartarson, Iceland 1993. The exchanges have only made Black's d6 weakness more prominent, and White's position looks the easier to play here.

b) The active 20 ... Ne5!? has been played by Romanishin. White has to be careful here. For example, 21 Bc3?! Nac6 22 f4? Nxd4 23 Bxd4 Nf3+! 24 gxf3 Bxd4+ 25 Qxd4 Rxc2 26 Re2 Rxe2 27 Nxe2 d5! 28 e5 Qh4 29 Kg2 Bc8 30 Ng1 Be6 with a clear plus for Black, P.Cladouras-O.Romanishin, German League 1992.

However, the natural 21 Bb1! is stronger. Objectively this position looks a bit better for White, although there are plenty of possibilities for both sides. For example, 21 ... Qb6 (lining up ... Nc4 ideas) 22 Ndf5!? (or 22 Nde2 Nac6 23 Nc3 Qd8! 24 Nd5 Qh4, A.Wagner-O.Romanishin, Munich 1992) 22 ... gxf5 23 Nxf5 Re6 24 Nxg7 Kxg7 25 Bd4 Qd8 26 f4 Nac6 27 fxe5 dxe5 28 Be3 Qxd2 29 Rxd2, A.Toth-T.Szakall, Paks 1998.

c) Romanishin has also tried 20 ... Ba8 21 Bb1 Nb7!?, which looks strange but does have some merit: 22 Re3 (if 22 b4, to prevent ... Nbc5, then 22 ... Ne5! exploits the c4 outpost and Black will aim for ... d5) 22 ... Be5 23 Nde2 Nf8 24 f4 Bxb2 25 Qxb2 Qb6 26 Qd4 Qxd4 27 Nxd4 Nc5 28 Kf2 h5 with level chances, M.Stolz-O.Romanishin, German League 1992.

In summary, Black is absolutely fine after 17 ... d5. 17 ... Nd7!? keeps more tension in the position but White might be very slightly better here.

A2) 15 b3

White keeps the knight on d2 for the moment and gets on with developing his queenside. 16 b3 is probably more challenging for Black than 16 Nf1, as there is no easy equalizer with ... d5. Still, grandmasters such as Grischuk have shown how Black can reach a good position.

15 ... Bf8 16 Bb2 g6 (Diagram 18)

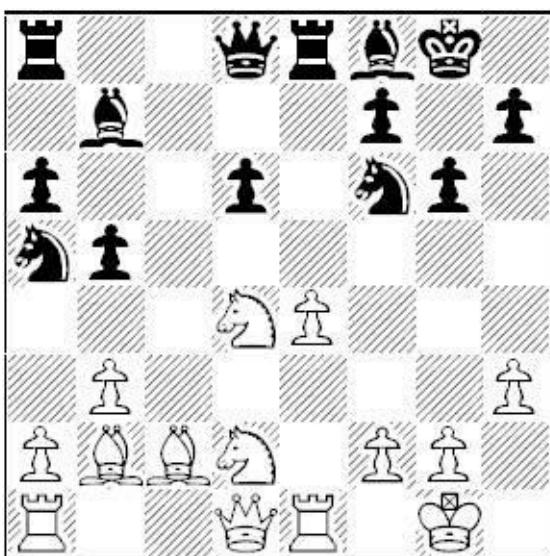


Diagram 18 (W)

Black chooses the same plan as before. The pressure on e4 makes it difficult to play N(d2)f1-g3, but White has other ideas in mind.

17 Qf3!

Pressuring f6 and planning to organize White's forces with Rad1 (with Bb1 in answer to ... Rc8).

Alternatively:

a) 17 a4?! b4 helps Black, once again because b3 is fixed as a weakness. 18 N4f3 Rc8 19 Rc1 Bh6 20 Bd3 Rxcl 21 Bxc1 Bg7 22 Bb2 Nd7 23 Bxg7 Kxg7 24 Nc4 Ne5 25 Nfxe5 dx5 26 Nxa5 Qxa5 27 Bc4 Rd8 28 Qe2 Rd4 with an edge for Black, Y.Balashov-A.Beliavsky, Azov 1991.

b) 17 Re2 Bg7 18 Qe1 looks slightly clumsy, and 18 ... Rc8 19 Rd1 Nh5 20 Bb1 Nf4 21 Re3 Qf6 (**Diagram 19**)

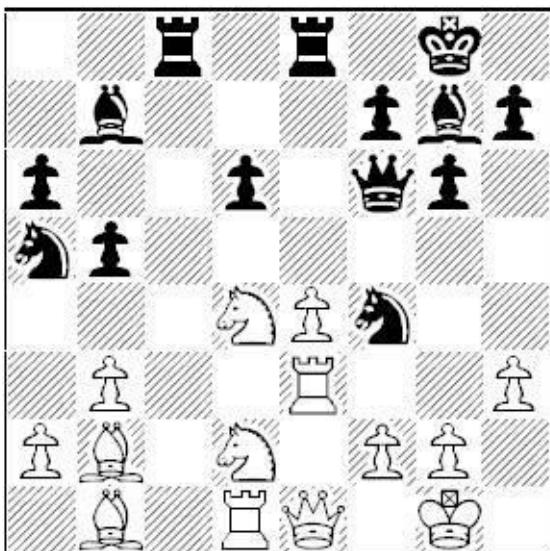


Diagram 19 (W)

left Black very active in P.Leko-Comp Fritz 6, Frankfurt 1999. This is not the sort of position you would want to have against a computer, even one from 13 years ago! After 22 N2f3 Nc6 23 Kh2 Ne5 Leko tried to get rid of the f4-knight with 24 g3 but missed the tactical idea 24 ... Nd5! and was clearly worse following 25 exd5 Nxf3+ 26 Nxf3 Rxe3 27 Bxf6 Rxe1 28 Nxe1 Bxf6.

c) 17 b4!? is interesting. By playing b2-b3 and then b3-b4, White loses a tempo in comparison to 15 b4 (Line A3). On the other hand, Black is committed to the ... Bf8, ... g6 plan which he avoids in the 15 b4 line. Following 17 ... Nc6 (17 ... Nc4!?) 18 Nxc6 Bxc6 19 Qf3 Bg7 20 Bb3, Black should avoid 20 ... d5? 21 exd5 Rxe1+ 22 Rxe1 Nxd5 23 Bxg7 Kxg7 24 Rc1 Qd7 25 Rxc6 Qxc6 26 Bxd5, G.Milos-H.Spangenberg, Buenos Aires 1998, and instead simply keep the pressure on the e4-pawn with 20 ... Qe7! 21 Rac1 Rac8, with equal chances, H.Koch-J.Goth, correspondence 2005.

17 ... Bg7 18 Rad1 Rc8 19 Bb1 Nc6! (Diagram 20)

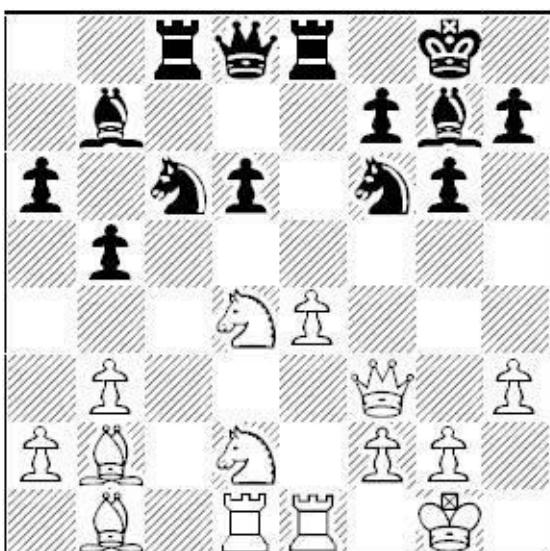


Diagram 20 (W)

In this particular line, in contrast to some others, ... Nc6 is a good plan. Black is able to keep the dark-squared bishops on the board and his pressure against e4 counterbalances White's against d6.

If Black is going to play ... Nc6, it's probably better to do it straightaway. 19 ... Qe7 20 Qe3 Nc6 21 Nf1 Nxd4 22 Bxd4 is similar to the main text but White is slightly better organized, N.Short-P.Thipsay, British Ch. 1998.

20 Nxc6

20 Nf1 Nxd4 21 Bxd4 Re6 is similar. In this line Black can also play 20 ... Ne5!? 21 Qe3 Ned7! when he is ready to advance with ... d5. J.Polgar-G.Milos, Buenos Aires 2000, continued 22 Qf4 d5 23 Ng3 Qc7 (23 ... Nxe4!?) 24 e5! Rxe5 25 Rxe5 Qxe5 26 Qd2!? (26 Qxe5! Nxe5 27 Ndf5 gxf5 28 Bxe5 Re8 29 Bd4 Ne4 looks equal) 26 ... Nh5 27 Nxh5 Qxh5 28 Re1 and now Black should play 28 ... Nc5! (Wedberg) when White doesn't have enough for the pawn.

20 ... Bxc6 21 Bd4

If 21 Nf1 then 21 ... Re6.

21 ... Re6! (Diagram 21)

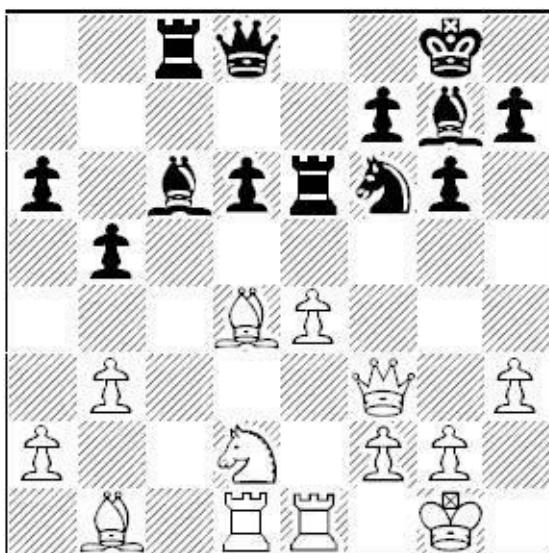


Diagram 21 (W)

Dual purpose: Black protects d6 and gets ready to line up on the e-file against the e4-pawn. Black enjoys a full share of the chances here. For example: 22 b4 Qe7 23 Qa3 ½-½, P.Svidler-A.Grischuk, Cannes (rapid) 2001; or 22 Qf4 Qe7 23 Nf3 Bb7 24 Ng5 Bh6! 25 Qh4 Nh5 26 Be3 Rc5! 27 Nf3 Qxh4 28 Nxh4 Bxe3 29 Rxe3 Nf6 30 Rde1 d5! and by this stage Black is slightly better, Z.Jerabek-Z.Straka, correspondence 2002.

A3) 15 b4

This is similar to 15 b3, but more forcing.

15 ... Nc6

Black should avoid 15 ... Nc4?! 16 Nxc4 bxc4 17 Ba4 Rf8 18 Bg5.

16 Nxc6 Bxc6 17 Bb2 Nd7! (Diagram 22)

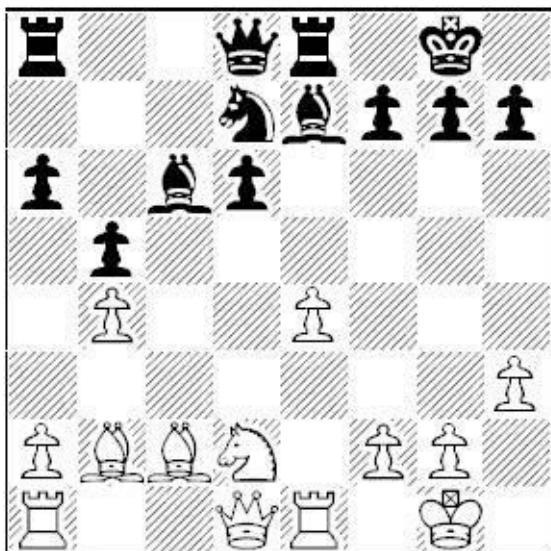


Diagram 22 (W)

Black changes plan from the one chosen against 15 b3. This time he'll play ... Bf6 to swap bishops and then try to exploit the new outpost on c4 – this is the drawback of b2-b4.

In contrast, the ... Bf8 plan, which works well against 15 b3, is too slow here: 17 ... Bf8 18 Qf3! Rc8 19 Bb3! (demonstrating a positive of b2-b4 over b2-b3 – the bishop is actively placed here) 19 ... Qe7 20 Rad1 Bb7 21 Qf5 and Black was under considerable pressure in Xie Jun-M.Chiburdanidze, Women's World Ch., Manila 1991.

18 Bb3

The alternative is to transfer the knight to d4: 18 Nb3 Bf6 19 Bxf6 (or 19 Nd4 Bb7) 19 ... Qxf6 20 Nd4 (20 Na5 Rac8 achieves nothing for White) 20 ... Ne5 (this time 20 ... Rac8 can be met by 21 Nf5) 21 Nxc6 Nxc6 22 Qd2 Rac8 23 Bb3 Nd4 with equality, P.Popovic-O.Romanishin, Novy Smokovec 1992.

18 ... Bf6 19 Bxf6 Nxf6

The problem for White in this position is the passive knight on d2, which is tied to the defence of e4. If the knight were on c3, White could claim some advantage. As it stands, though, Black has no problems whatsoever.

20 Rc1 Rc8 21 Qf3 Bb7 22 Rxc8

Or 22 Rcd1 Rc7! 23 Re3 Rce7 and the pressure against e4 assures Black of enough counterplay, V.Lukov-O.Romanishin, Tbilisi 1988.

22 ... Qxc8 23 Qf4 Qc7 24 f3 (Diagram 23)

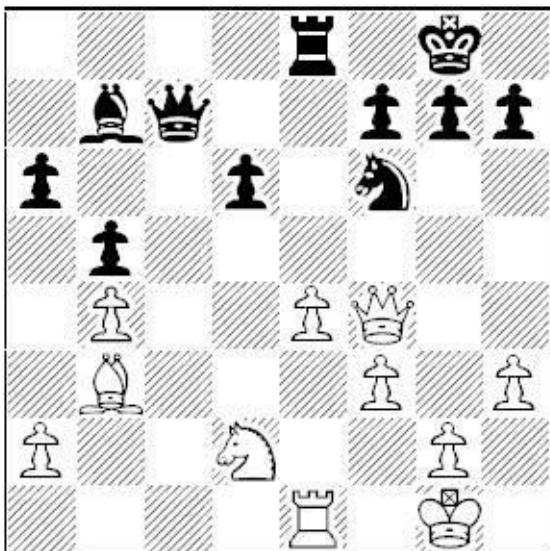


Diagram 23 (B)

White's slightly better pawn structure is counterbalanced by Black's active pieces. We have been following J.Polgar-A.Grischuk, Linares 2001, which continued 24 ... Qb6+ 25 Qe3 (Grischuk prefers 25 Kh2 and assesses 25 ... Qd4 26 Rc1 Rc8 27 Rxc8+ Bxc8 28 a3 as equal) 25 ... Qxe3+ 26 Rxe3 d5! (=/+ according to Grischuk) 27 e5 Nh5 28 Bc2 Rc8 29 Bf5 Rc1+ 30 Kf2 g6 31 Nb3 Rc4 32 Bd3 Rxb4 and Black won a pawn.

B) 13 d5!? (Diagram 24)

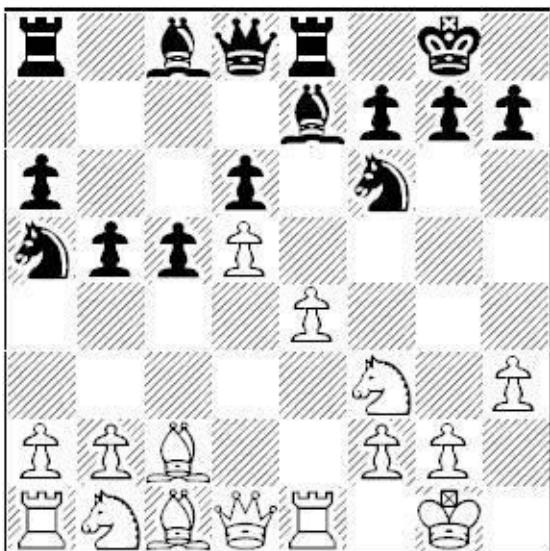


Diagram 24 (B)

As of yet, no strong player has tried this move, but significantly it was recommended by Alexander Khalifman in the *Opening for White according to Anand* series. It might seem somewhat counterintuitive to block the centre before Black has played ... Bb7, as the bishop certainly prefers to be back on the c8-square after White's d5 push. However, playing 13 d5 does rule out ... cxd4 and clarifies the situation in the centre.

We've now got a Modern Benoni pawn structure. In Black's favour is the fact he has been able to gain space on the queenside with ... a6 and ... b5 (in the Modern Benoni this expansion is often prevented). In White's favour is the knight on a5. This is often Black's problem piece in Chigorin variations, and this case is no different.

13 ... Nd7

As we've seen before, ... Nd7 and ... Bf6 is the typical reaction to d4-d5. Black could improve the queen's knight with 13 ... Nc4, but this looks a little slow, and I suspect White gets some sort of edge after 14 b3 Nb6 (or 14 ... Ne5 15 Nxe5 dxe5 16 a4 – Khalifman) 15 a4!.

14 Nbd2! (Diagram 25)

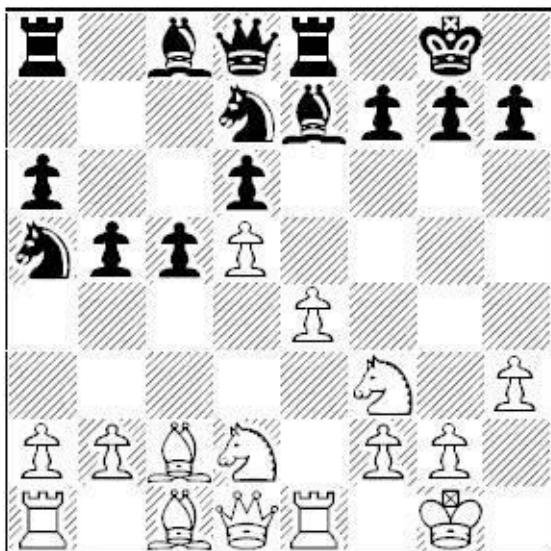


Diagram 25 (B)

Keeping the knight out of c4. This is much better than 14 Nc3?! Bf6!, with excellent counterplay for Black.

TRICKY TRANSPOSITION: After 14 Nbd2 we've actually transposed to a line of the Keres Variation: 11 ... Nd7 12 Nbd2 exd4 13 cxd4 Re8!? (a new idea; 13 ... Nc6 is more common) 14 d5. Indeed, the following games in the notes all came via the Keres move order.

14 ... Bf6 15 Rb1 Ra7

The stem game in this line was N.Short-H.Mecking, Bazna 2008, which continued 15 ... Nb6 16 Nf1 Nac4 17 Ng3 Ne5 18 Nh2 g6 with level chances. This game inspired Short to try the line with Black, although he chose 15 ... Ra7 instead of Mecking's 15 ... Nb6. Possibly Short was afraid of 16 b3 (**Diagram 26**), and keeping the knights out of c4 does look like the critical option.

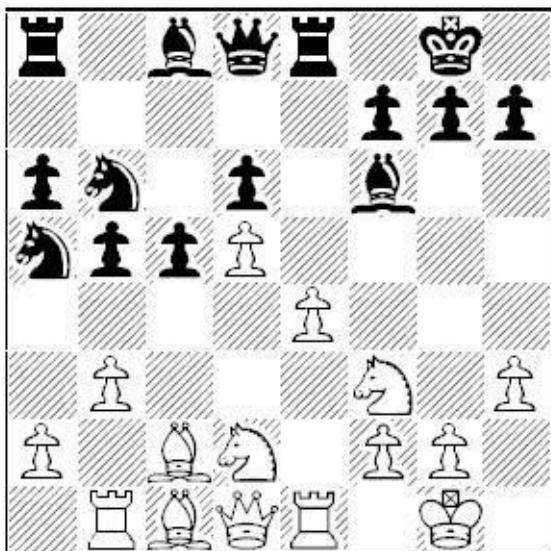


Diagram 26 (B)

Marin, however, believes that Black can get reasonable queenside counterplay in this case. He gives 16 ... Bc3 17 Re3 b4 18 Bd3 Bd7 19 a3 Bb5, and Black does look quite active here. There are other possibilities for both sides in this sequence, but my feeling is that 15 ... Nb6 remains a decent option for Black.

Another idea for Black is 15 ... c4, but giving up the d4-square feels a bit too committal after either 16 Nf1 Nb7 17 Nd4 (Khalifman) or 16 b4 cxb3 17 axb3 (Marin).

16 b3 h6

16 ... c4 looks tempting, but 17 b4! is a strong reply. After 17 ... Nb7 the protected passed c4-pawn doesn't provide enough compensation for the miserable knight on b7 and for giving up the d4-square.

17 Nf1 Ne5 18 Bf4 (Diagram 27)

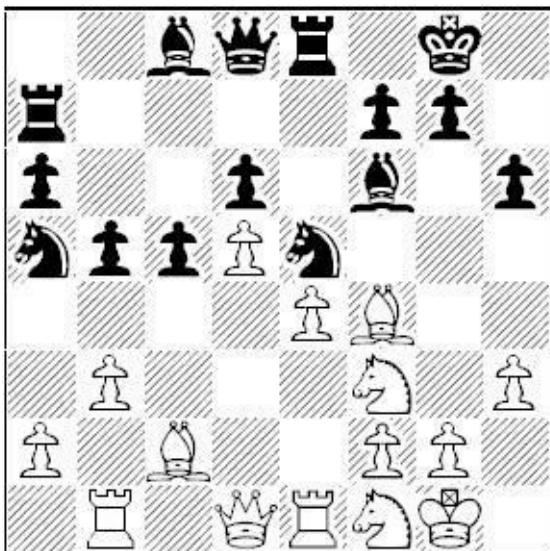


Diagram 27 (B)

We have been following S.Karjakin-N.Short, Wijk aan Zee 2010. The game continued 18 ... Rc7 19 Ng3 Nxf3+ 20 Qxf3 Nb7 21 Nh5 Be5 22 Re3 Qh4 23 Bg3 Bxg3 24 Nxg3 Qg5 25 Rf1 Rce7 26 Qe2 f5 (otherwise f2-f4 was coming) 27 f4 Qf6 28 Nh5 with some advantage to White, although there's still much to play for after 28 ... Qf7!.

Short never fully solved the issue of his a5-knight in this game, but Marin suggests quite a convincing way for Black to do so: 18 ... Rae7 (instead of Short's 18 ... Rc7) 19 Ng3 b4! (Black wants to play ... c4, but without allowing b3-b4 as a reply) 20 Nh5 Nxf3+ 21 Qxf3 Be5 22 Bd3 Bxf4 23 Qxf4 Re5, intending ... Qg5. "Given Black's good overall coordination, White cannot keep the a5-knight out of play easily. At some point, ... c4 is likely to free his position" – Marin.

Summary

11 ... exd4 12 cxd4 Re8 seems like an interesting option for Black in the Chigorin Ruy Lopez. Black succeeds in bringing some imbalance into the position and I don't see a clear way for White to gain a meaningful advantage. The positions after 13 Nc3 are sharp but Black gains good counterplay, while 13 Nbd2 allows Black to transpose into one of the more favourable lines of the Romanishin Variation. Perhaps White's best bet for an edge is with Khalifman's recommendation of 13 d5?!, although even here the Modern Benoni structure assures Black of decent counterplay.

Index of Games

- Capablanca.J-Janowsky.D, New York 1913
- Dann.M-Nisipeanu.L.D, Pardubice 2012
- Domancich.E-Civitillo.A, Correspondence 2008
- Emms.J-Adelaja.A, London League 2012
- Firman.N-Kravtsiv.M, Ukrainian Championship, Alushta 2008
- Ganguly.S-Ismagambetov.A, New Delhi 2006
- Goloshchapov.A-Klip.H, Belgian League 2003
- Hayakawa.S-Klausen.T, Correspondence 2005
- Ivanchuk.V-Carlsen.M, Wijk aan Zee 2009
- Kosteniuk.A-Ivanisevic.I, Mainz (rapid) 2008
- Leko.P-Aronian.L, World Blitz Championship, Moscow 2009
- Leko.P-Kramnik.V, Rapid Match (Game 6), Miskolc 2007
- McShane.L-Parker.J, British League 2011
- Nepomniachtchi.I-Melkumyan.H, European Championship, Rijeka 2010
- Seger.R-Meier.G, Griesheim 2011
- Selbes.T-Mirzoev.A, Turkish League, Konya 2010
- Sutovsky.E-Kramnik.V, Dortmund 2005
- Turner.M-Hammer.J.L, British League 2010
- Zinchenko.Y-Chuprov.D, Voronezh 2008