

Cyrus Lakdawala

Anti-Sicilians

move by move



EVERYMAN CHESS

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www.everymanchess.com

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

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Introduction

Why Does White play Anti-Sicilian, rather than Open Sicilian?

Bent Larsen once wrote that when White plays 3 d4 entering an Open Sicilian, he or she basically sets up a cheap series of tactical tricks in exchange for a serious concession: White just allowed 3 ... cxd4, exchanging a wing pawn for White's more valuable central pawn.

When I was a hopelessly untalented kid, I began to play Najdorfs, hoping to be the next Bobby Fischer (no need to state the obvious, that it didn't work out as planned). Virtually 90% of my opponents responded to my 1 ... c5 with Open Sicilians, at least at my D-E level of play. As the years went by, this number continued to decrease, until today, I will bet that half the time you respond to 1 e4 with 1 ... c5, your opponents dodge the Open Sicilian, and opt for some version of an Anti-Sicilian. Now why would they do this? For several reasons:

1. We chess players live in a society of records and stored data. Make a new move – even accidentally – and somebody, somewhere, records it. These days new opening ideas travel almost instantly into the collective consciousness, laden with the latest and newest ideas. This can be a burden, since we are in a never-ending task of keeping up with the latest TN. Every time I manage to remember a long string of opening theory over the board, it reminds me of the end of the children's alphabet song: "Now I know my ABC's, next time won't you sing with me?" As the decades roll on, we face information overload.

If you play an Open Sicilian as White, there is a staggering load of data you must memorize and understand. If the opponent is a Dragon player, he or she obsessively studies the lines until move 23. Dragon players are far less likely to study the Grand Prix Attack or Closed Sicilian with the same degree of passion. So White is motivated to dodge our area of expertise. A substantial proportion of players decide they don't want to invest energy and time into a knife-edge Open Sicilian, a place where a favourite line can be rendered instantly obsolete by the finding of a single new idea for Black.

2. In an Open Sicilian, you as Black, get to pick if the game will be a Dragon, a Najdorf, a Kan, etc. When White plays the Anti-Sicilian, it is he or she who decides whether to play a King's Indian Attack, or c3-Sicilian.

3. If White studies, let's say the c3-Sicilian, there are only a few lines he needs to cover and study. Not so with Open Sicilians, where he must be ready for the Najdorf, Dragon, Kan, et. al and ad nauseam! So in a sense, the Anti-Sicilians are kind of a lazy Sicilian, easy to study and easy to play – with far less likelihood for White to get

theoretically ambushed.

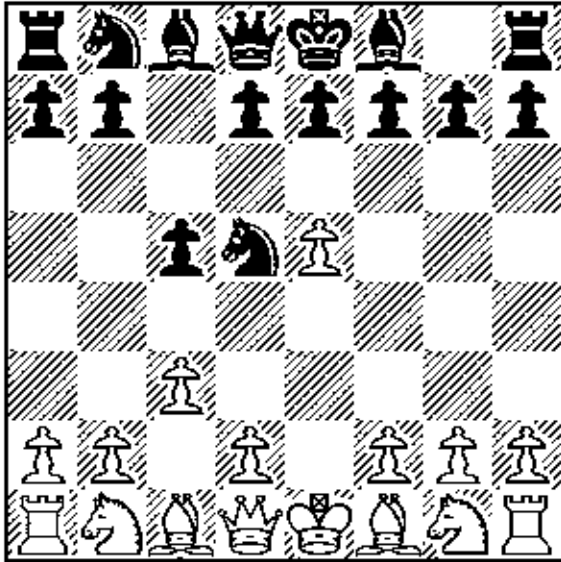
4. When you first learn how to drive a car, every step must be thought about. A decade later, our driving is completely automatized (pun intended), and instinctual, where we can be daydreaming and still reach our destination in relative safety. Now if you play Dragon for 10 years, you just have a feel for it, from sheer volume of experience. Essentially, we become lab rats who memorized the route to the cheese. When White plays an Anti-Sicilian like a b3-Sicilian, it doesn't matter how long we as Black studied it. We simply won't know and understand its subtleties to the same degree as we do the Dragon. So White removes our experiential advantage – our feel for the line – from the equation.

Handling the Anti-Sicilians

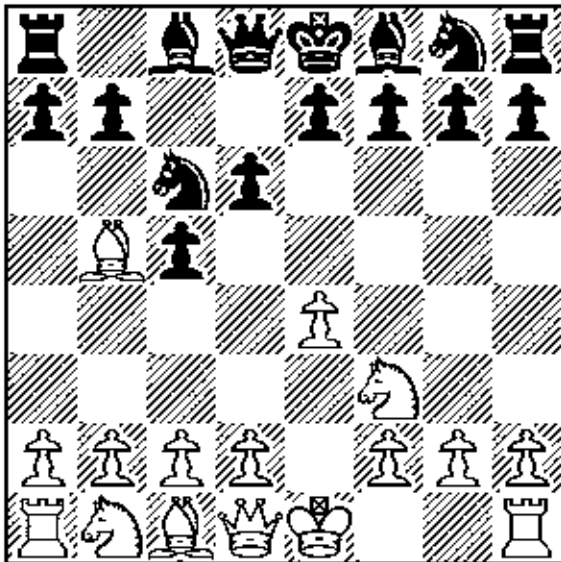
A book is a theoretical entity, while our over-the-board battle is a direct experience of its practical application. Now how do we deal with these myriad Anti-Sicilian lines over the board? In high school, your writer was an unimpressive B – average student. In college my grades jumped to a near 4.0 (it would have been 4.0 if it hadn't been for the completely unnecessary, required math and science classes!). The difference? I finally learned that it's far better to continuously go over my study material very lightly – but all semester long – rather than cram, pulling an all-nighter, before the exam. So just do a study rotation of all your potential Anti-Sicilians, rather than just prepare for one line against a specific Anti-Sicilian opponent.

Sometimes when I browse an opening book, written in the 1980's or '90's, it feels as out of date as watching the 'news' from one of those black and white 1930's news reels, which warns of the danger of war brewing in Europe. The Anti-Sicilians, once mere offshoots, are now close to surpassing the old main lines of the Open Sicilian and every bit as mainstream. The Antis aren't going away, so we must be ready for all of them.

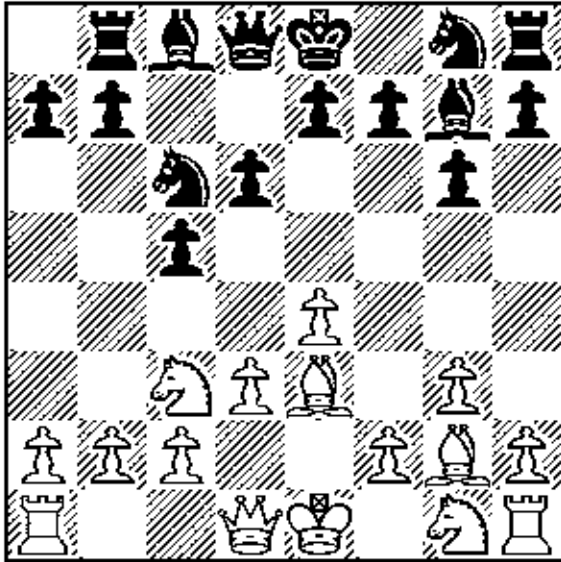
Some Anti lines may be both rigorous and exacting to our defensive abilities, yet our position's inherent soundness is never in doubt. I hope to explain the lines with only a minimal element of theoretical legalese in the process. In some variations, however, veering from observances of theory can spell immediate disaster for the unknowledgeable, or the experimenter, and theory sometimes hems in our imagination's freedom. Opening study is simultaneously the most tedious, as well as the most satisfying part of the game. So let's know our lines well. Our battlegrounds:



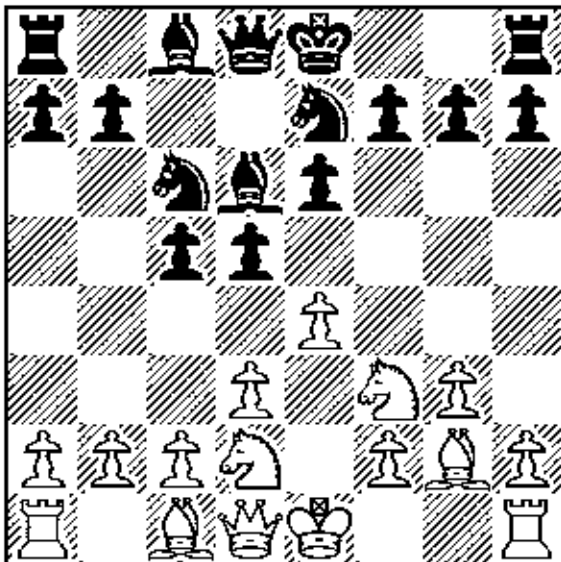
The c3-Sicilian, besides the Rossolimo and Moscow, is White's safest and soundest Anti-Sicilian.



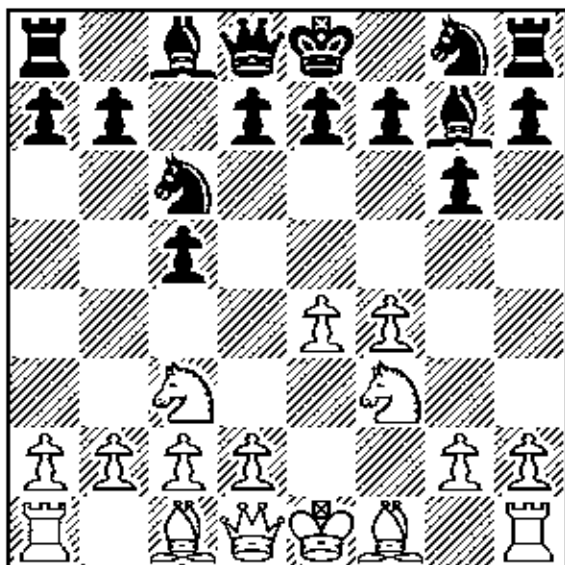
There is a big divide between learning and knowing. Here we find ourselves in both Rossolimo and Moscow variations, where we absolutely must learn our lines in detail, which isn't merely a pedant's pleasure. We must know and understand the plans, since our survival depends upon it.



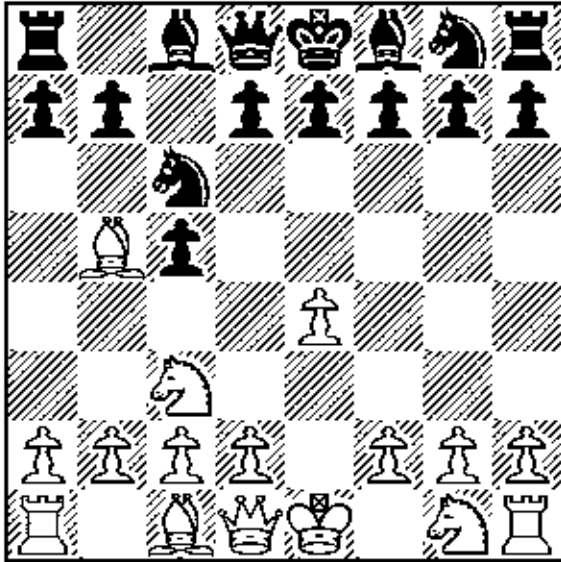
Against Closed Sicilian systems, we play an early ... Rb8, intending to make territorial gains on the queenside, while at the same time keeping our opponent guessing about how we will later set up on the kingside. Will we play ... e6 and ... Nge7, or ... e5 and ... Nge7, or ... Nf6? Only we know, while our opponents can only guess.



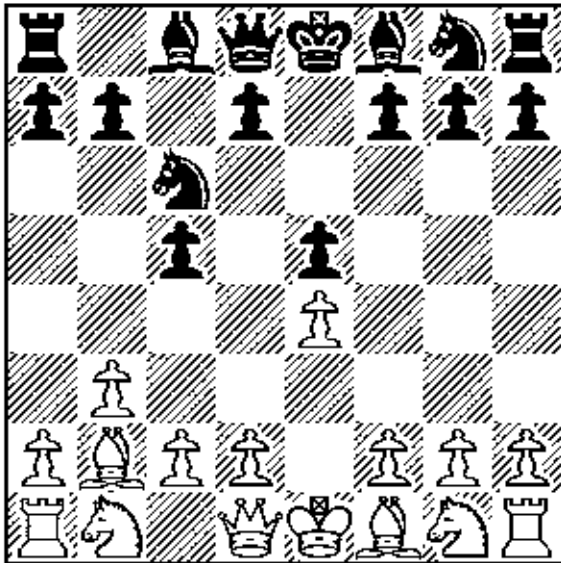
The King's Indian Attack is a one crop society. If that single crop fails, so goes the society. I advocate a line which can also arise from the French Defence vs. KIA, where we remain flexible. We make White's intended e5 – a standard move in most KIAs – next to impossible to implement, since we may follow with ... Qc7 and ... f6.



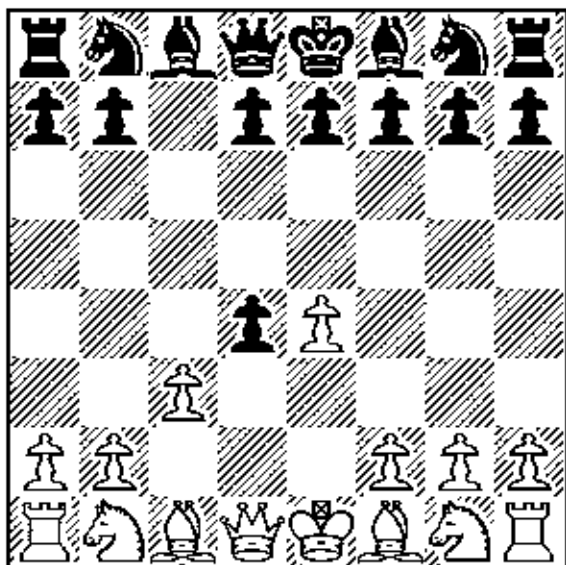
Grand Prix Attackers tend to have an unbounded propensity for violence. Unfortunately for them, modern day theory drains the attacking fun out of their line. In the 1960's and '70's almost everyone played their bishop to c4, hoping to generate an attack with 0-0, d3, Qe1, f5 and Qh4, with an ominous build-up around Black's king. Today, however, almost everyone knows the defensive mechanisms which render White's plan rather amateurish. Then later, White switches to the most positional Bb5. We respond with ... Nd4, after which we either pick up the bishop-pair, gain a future tempo with ... a6, or chase the bishop to awkward squares like c4 or d3 – neither of which is comfortable for the bishop. So a highly feared attacking line of the past has been defanged in the present.



Opening theory, as we all understand, is endlessly mutable. With each alteration, the opening becomes less and less like what it was in the past. This is Tiviakov's line, which is Rossolimo/Grand Prix-like, yet not either, since Black doesn't give White the chance to play Bxc6. Black plays 3 ... Nd4 4 Bc4 e6, after which we later harass the White's bishop with either ... a6 and ... b5, or a properly timed ... d5 break.

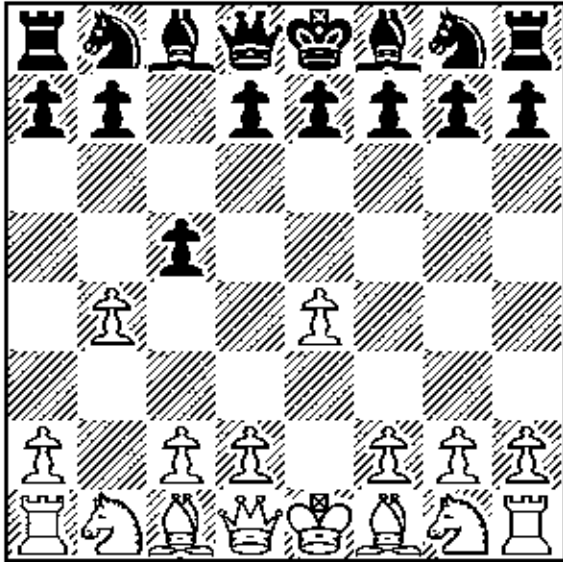


We meet the b3-Sicilian, which is rising in popularity, with a pawn wall on e5, blunting the effectiveness of White's prized b2-bishop.



Sometimes reason, rationality and logic are asked to give way to imagination – but not without complaint. There is something in human nature where the larger the contradiction to reason, the more we seek to defy it. In this chapter the lure of attack extinguishes all other concerns. The Gambits chapter (Smith-Morra and Wing Gambit) differs from all the others, primarily in a level of intensity. If you think about it, isn't it strange to give away a pawn with the white pieces, when theory says a '+=' is our natural birthright? I guess they want to bribe their way to the initiative. Of course, a positional player like me lacks the psychological metric for properly evaluating the alien mind state of the gambiteer, who doesn't strike me as a law abiding citizen of the chessboard.

To challenge and take on a single member of a cult, is to take them all on. When we accept the Smith-Morra Gambit, we do just that, walking into the lair of preparation, with the single consoling thought: the gambit may only be borderline sound (I realize this statement will earn me the undying hatred of Smith-Morra Gambiteers worldwide). The mad scientist's dream is to build a machine or a creature which thinks, feels and speaks. Of course, the second it's built, it turns evil and tries to destroy its creator. We must take on the role of the creature when facing these gambits, turning their power against White, their creator.



To declare such a gambit refuted, is to make excessive demands upon the reader's trust. This is the Wing Gambit (well, when you were young, didn't you sometimes hang out with disreputable friends?). It's time to enter Never Neverland, where White mixes ideas seen in both the Evans and Benko gambits. Gambiteers – they are essentially martyrs in search of a religion – defend the soundness of their lines, as vigorously as Clarence Darrow defended Darwin's theories in the Scopes trial.

One of my misguided students loves the Wing Gambit. I advise him: "Dump it. It doesn't love you back!" Of course, he doesn't believe me, since gambits are dopamine surges for the attacking addict. I think the Wing Gambit – more than the Smith-Morra – is an opening where the effort and cash outlay aren't commensurate with White's investment's return. For younger players though, I think gambits are fun and a good way to circumvent the theoretical legal process, and just go after the opponent in vigilante-style.

Anti-Sicilians are not New

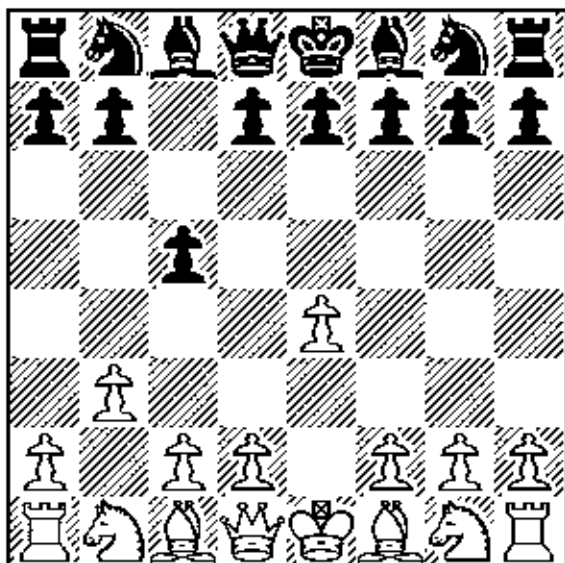
They have been around, about as long as Open Sicilians, as shown in the following game:

Game 1

O.Strobl-G.Breyer

Vienna 1921

1 e4 c5 2 b3!?



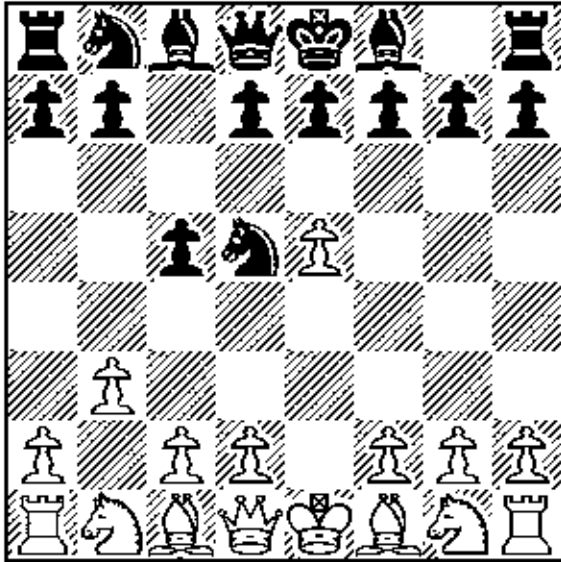
When it comes to opening theory, there is no such thing as an unalterable truth. That which is old and discarded is in the present, new again. The b3-Sicilian is gaining ground in popularity, mainly through the advocacy of super-GMs like Kramnik, Morozevich and Carlsen. The inherent problem with blindly following the dictates of complex theoretical lines is that we abandon our own research, and rely upon others to form *our* convictions. So players today seek less booked up alternatives (to the Open Sicilian), like the b3-Sicilian.

As you can see, Anti-Sicilians have been around for quite a while. A fianchetto was a strange sight in 1921, unless you were a card-carrying member of the Hypermodern movement, as Breyer was. In this instance his opponent beats him to it. The b3-Sicilian is an odd mix of Classical and Hypermodern theories, where White both seeks to occupy the centre with e4, and also control it from the wings with 2 b3.

2 ... Nf6

How unfortunate that Breyer didn't have access to this excellent book, otherwise he may have followed its suggestions. 2 ... Nc6 or 2 ... g6!?

3 e5 Nd5



The game resembles an Alekhine's Defence, with the inclusion of b3 and ... c5, which may help Black.

Question: How does this inclusion favour Black?

Answer: To me b3 is an odd posting for White's bishop, in conjunction with e4, while our c5-pawn hinders White's d4-break.

4 c4?!

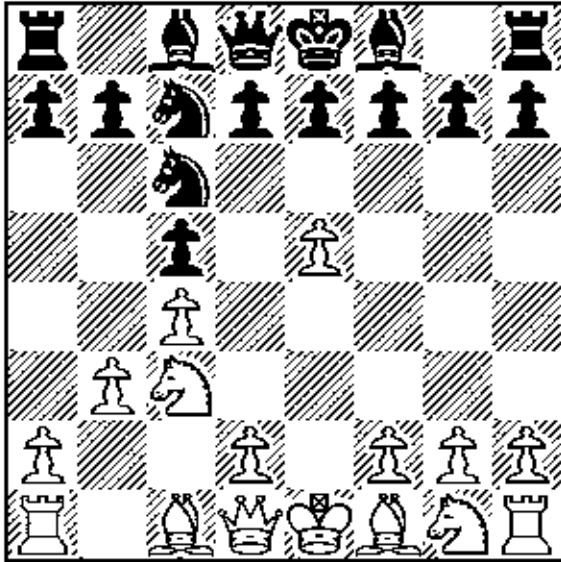
This is probably premature, since in some cases White posts a piece on c4. The modern interpretation runs 4 Bb2 Nc6 5 Nf3 g6 6 Bc4 Nb6 7 Bb5. This move turns the position into a kind of funky Rossolimo: 7 ... Bg7 8 Bxc6 bxc6 9 0-0 0-0 10 Re1 d6 11 h3 a5 12 c4 (I would avoid this move, which weakens b3 and play 12 d3) 12 ... Re8 13 a4!? (this also weakens b3, but if White allowed Black ... a4, then after ... axb3; axb3, b3 is weakened all the same) 13 ... Bf5 and Black achieved a decent looking Rossolimo-style position, H.Nakamura-A.Grischuk, Moscow (blitz) 2012.

4 ... Nc7 5 Nc3?

Question: Why would you fault a developing move?

Answer: A plan should be worked out in advance, rather than a wing-it, work in progress. White's move is inaccurate, since it blocks the path of White's bishop to protect e5.

5 ... Nc6



6 Nf3

Question: If White experiences difficulty defending e5, with pieces, then why not play 6 f4?

Answer: The move fails to develop. White looks somewhat overextended after 6 ... d6 7 exd6 (or 7 Nf3 dxe5 8 Nxe5 Nxe5 9 fxe5 g6 10 Bb2 Bg7 11 Qe2 b6 and White is already in trouble with a hole on d4 and backward d-pawn) 7 ... Qxd6 when White worries about a backward d-pawn, as well as weak d3- and d4-squares.

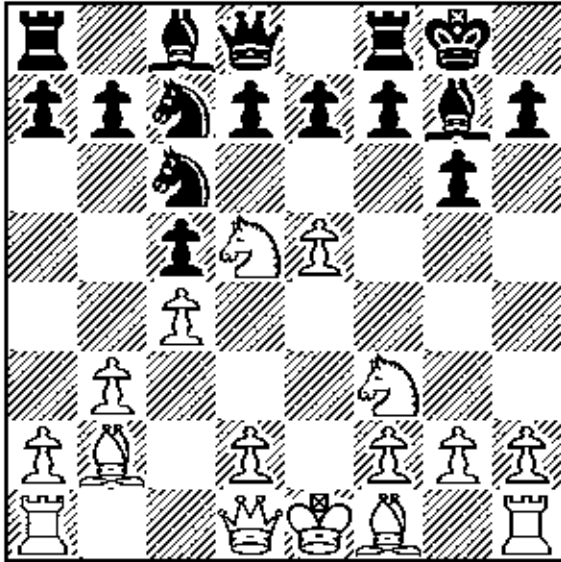
6 ... g6!

Breyer, a Hypermodern, establishes his own fianchetto. Now defence of e5 becomes an unsolvable issue for White.

7 Bb2 Bg7 8 Nd5

After 8 Qe2 0-0 9 g3 d6 White must hand over a pawn, since 10 exd6?? exd6 11 0-0-0 Re8 is completely busted for White, who finds his queen caught in the middle.

8 ... 0-0



9 h4?!

An ambitious opponent is easy to bait. The nature of an unwise decision is the current joy we experience in chasing a folly, is met with our future pain, when the effects of our decision ripen. Saleable goods are worthless if they are unable to reach the market. White's 'attack' never emerges, despite his open h-file. To change one's mind if the data calls for it is not such a great transgression; to change one's mind based on an arbitrary whim, is. White's counterplay, already late, just got later. I just read a *Washington Post* article where new research suggests that optimism is an overrated commodity, since optimists tend to push their luck too far, while pessimists, on the other hand, proceed with a kind of wise, self-preservatory caution:

a) 9 Be2 d6 10 exd6 Bxb2 11 dxc7 Qd6 12 Rb1 Bg7 13 0-0 e6 14 Nc3 Qxc7 is strategically awful for White, since Black owns the bishop-pair, the dark squares, a d4 hole and may pick on White's backward d-pawn.

b) 9 Qc2 Re8! 10 Be2 d6 11 Nxc7 (White's best is to maybe just hand over a pawn with 11 0-0) 11 ... Bf5 12 d3 Qxc7 13 exd6 Qa5+ 14 Kf1 Nb4 15 Qd2 Bxb2 16 Qxb2 Rad8 with enormous pressure.

9 ... d6 10 h5

If 10 Nxc7 Qxc7 11 exd6 Qxd6 12 Bxg7 Kxg7 13 h5 Bg4 14 h6+ Kg8 15 Be2 Rad8 and White is busted.

10 ... dxe5 11 hxg6 hxg6 12 Qc2 Nxd5

12 ... Bf5 13 Qc3 Nxd5 14 cxd5 Nb4 also looks grim for White.

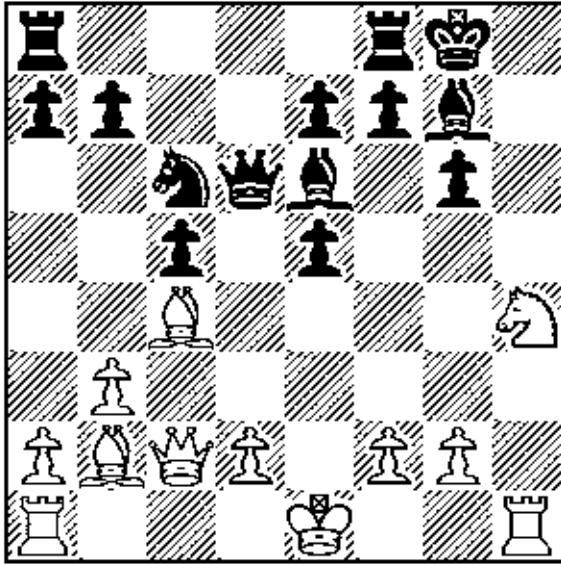
13 cxd5 Qxd5 14 Bc4 Qd6

Covering against White's crude Qxg6 threat.

15 Nh4

Renewing the threat to g6, while preventing ... Bf5.

15 ... Be6



Eliminating White's most dangerous piece. Now the would-be white initiative drains away, as quickly as it arose.

16 Bxe6

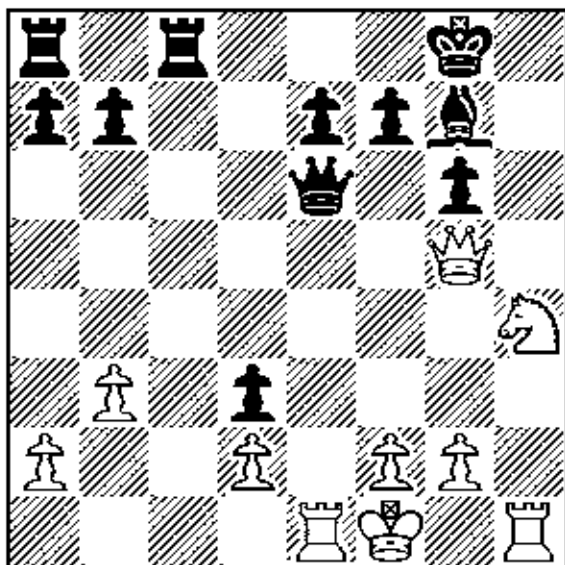
16 Nxc6 is just a shallow cheapo. Black simply responds with 16 ... fxc6! (most certainly not 16 ... Bxc4?? 17 Nxe7+ Nxe7 18 Qh7 mate) 17 Qxc6 Bxc4 18 Qh7+ Kf7 19 bxc4 Rh8 20 Qf5+ Qf6. White's checks run out and he must trade queens, down a piece.

16 ... Qxe6 17 Qxc5 Nd4

Also strong were 17 ... e4 or 17 ... Rfc8.

18 Bxd4 exd4+ 19 Kf1 Rfc8 20 Qg5 d3! 21 Re1??

When your goal is long-term survival, the fact that you are alive in the present isn't good enough, although 21 Rb1 Qe2+ 22 Kg1 Bd4 23 Qf4 e5 24 Qg3 Qxd2 25 Nxc6 Rc1+ 26 Rxc1 Qxc1+ 27 Kh2 Qh6+ 28 Nh4+ Kf8 29 Qg4 d2 is also hopeless for White.



Exercise (combination alert): White just blundered in a completely lost position. When an opponent issues a mating threat, it threatens to cast aside all other considerations. How did Breyer finish the game?

Answer: Queen sacrifice/weak back rank.

21 ... Qxe1+!

Black queen and rook's interests align. White's king was safe for a while in his secret hiding chamber, until he was unsuccessful in muffling a sneeze, which attracted his sister's attention. "We all learn life's lessons according to our mental propensities. Yours, as you may have guessed, is at a 'remedial' level," rudely lectures the queen, as she makes air quotes, stressing the word 'remedial'.

22 Kxe1

Of course for White, this is wealth accumulated in a dream, which evaporates to nothing the moment he awakens.

22 ... Rc1 mate 0-1

Summary: Today, the Anti-Sicilians rival Open Sicilians as the main line, so let's be prepared for all of them.

Acknowledgements

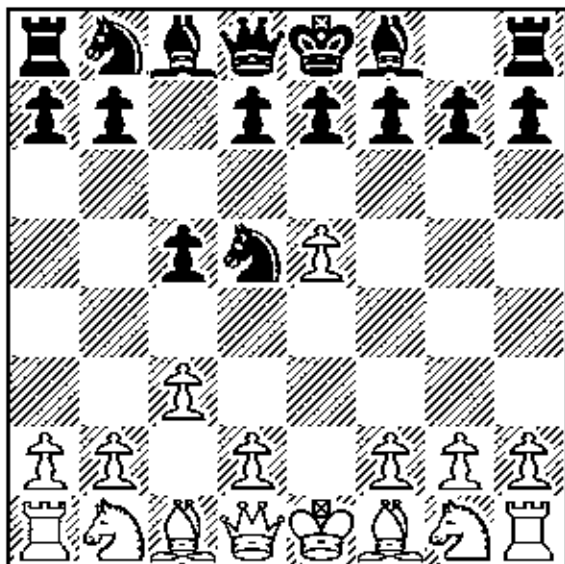
Thanks as always to Editor GM John Emms, to IM Richard Palliser for the final edit, and to Nancy, proof-reader-in-chief. May we all be so well prepared, that we make our opponents regret their choice of dodging our Open Sicilian.

Cyrus Lakdawala,
San Diego,
March 2016

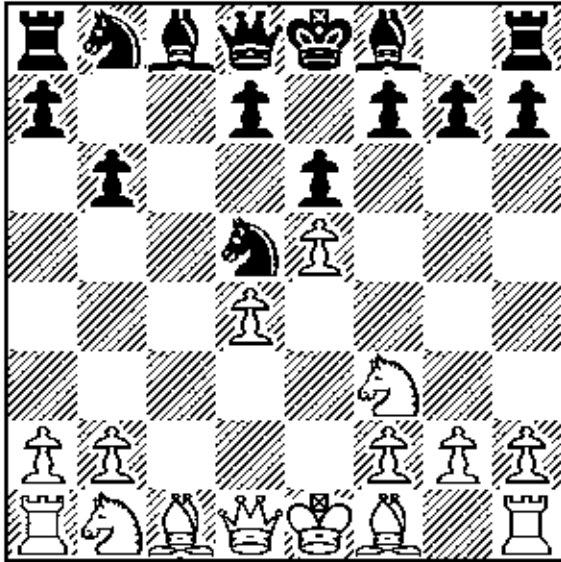
Chapter One

The c3 Sicilian

1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5



We begin the book with the c3-Sicilian, one of White's most solid choices which, to my experience, is rather difficult to beat. White confiscates a portion of our territory, with a pawn wedge on e5, which arrests our attention (have you ever noticed that all unwanted relatives rationalize their intrusion as a 'visit?'). In exchange, we often seize full control over the d5 hole. To remain entrenched in one spot is to invite the enemy (us!) to attack. We plan to chip away at White's e5 point, with future ideas like ... d6, ... Nd7 and ... Qc7, hoping to force White to swap e5 for our d6-pawn.



Later, we usually end up here. The early ... e6 and ... b6 line may slightly throw off your opponents, since it veers slightly from the main lines. It's hard for an annotator to avoid inserting his or her own stylistic values in the interpretation. I have played Black's side for a decade and a half, and am confident our side equalizes, *without* landing in a lifeless position – which is somewhat the norm with many other c3-Sicilian lines, where strategic restrictions often thwart our attempts to generate a sharp game.

Game 2

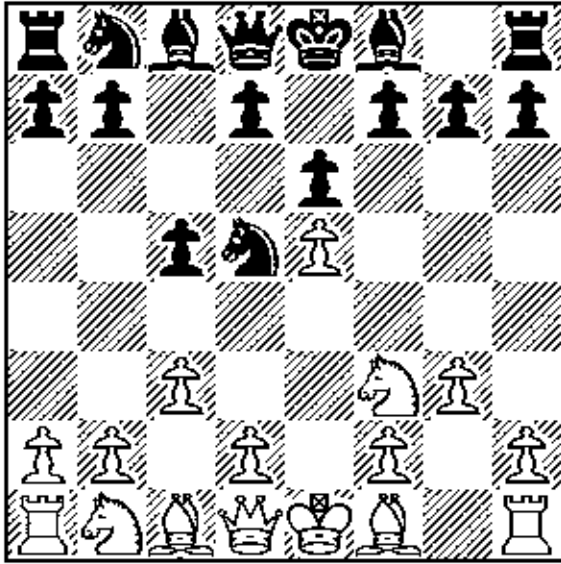
A.Ivanov-J.Ehlvest

Stratton Mountain 2000

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3

Next chapter we take a look at 2 Nf3 move order issues in greater detail. Our move order would likely arise after 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 g3 e6.

2 ... e6 3 c3 Nf6 4 e5 Nd5 5 g3



This is a line championed by GM Eduardas Rozentalis, which is quirky, but not particularly dangerous for Black if we are aware of the theory.

Question: What is White trying to achieve?

Answer: White normally hopes for a Catalan-like position when his e-pawn is traded for our d-pawn, after which White plays for d4.

5 ... Nc6 6 Bg2 Qc7

Also fine is the immediate 6 ... d6 7 exd6 Bxd6 8 0-0 0-0 9 d4 cxd4 10 Nxd4 Nxd4 11 Qxd4 when Black should offer a pawn:

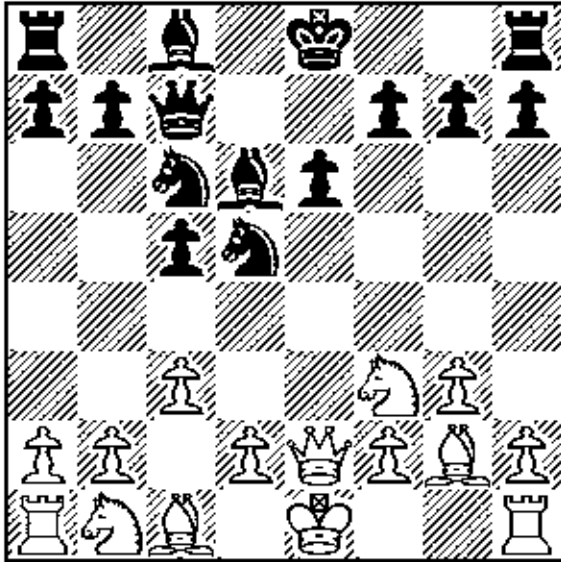
a) 11 ... Qc7! and White would be wise to decline: 12 Nd2 (of course Black would love 12 Bxd5?! exd5 13 Qxd5 when his light-square control and bishop-pair more than compensate his lost pawn) 12 ... Bd7 13 Ne4 Be5 14 Qd3 was A.Morozevich-P.Svidler, Sochi 2005. Black fully equalizes after 14 ... Rad8.

b) 11 ... Qb6!? (I'm not so sure Black equalizes here) 12 Qxb6 Nxb6?! (and here, I would risk recapture with the a-pawn) 13 Rd1 Bc7 14 Na3 a6 15 Be3 was C.Lakdawala-B.Baker, San Diego (rapid) 2011. White exerts unpleasant Catalan-like queenside pressure and it isn't easy for Black to complete development.

7 Qe2 d6

White's e5 point is challenged. 7 ... Be7 scores quite well for Black, who defers ... d6, but after 8 0-0 0-0 9 d3 Rd8 10 c4 Nb6 11 Nc3 d5 12 b3 I slightly prefer White in this position, which now resembles a King's Indian Attack, A.Finkel-L.Yudasin, Israeli League 1996.

8 exd6 Bxd6



Now if you think about it, White wasted time with e4, e5 and exd6, which helped Black's development after ... Bxd6. The open e-file doesn't mean much for White with Black's pawn on e6.

9 Na3

Intending to annoy with Nb5 next. 9 0-0 tends to simply transpose after 9 ... 0-0 10 Na3.

9 ... a6 10 Nc4 0-0

Black isn't afraid of the loss of the bishop-pair. The immediate 10 ... Be7 also offers Black full equality.

11 0-0

Question: Why doesn't White pick off the bishop-pair?

Answer: After 11 Nxd6 Qxd6, White's knight took three moves to swap itself for a piece which moved only once. Black has a perfectly good position after 12 0-0 e5 13 d3 Bg4, after which ... Rad8 arrives with pressure on the d3-pawn.

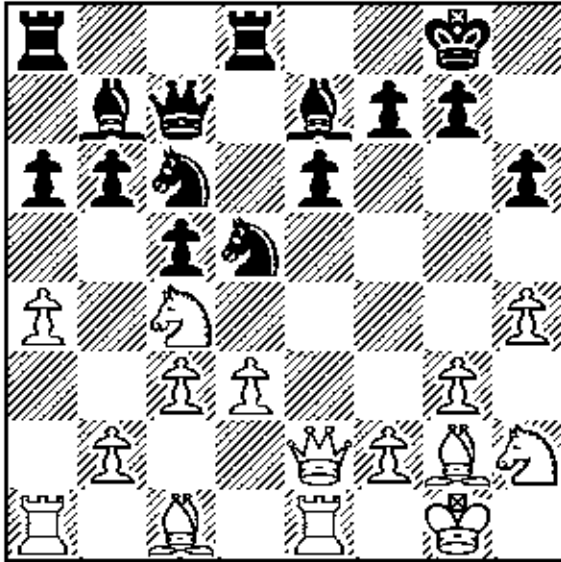
11 ... Be7

Ehlvest decides to hang on to his bishop.

12 Rd1

A new move, which has yet to be repeated. White plays for d4 in one go.

12 a4 inhibiting ... b5 feels slightly more logical, yet fails to yield White anything after 12 ... b6 13 d3 Bb7 14 Re1 h6 15 h4 Rfd8 16 Nh2. White dreams of launching a kingside attack, based on Ng4 and sacrifices on h6, but I would hardly be intimidated if I were playing Black.



Question: Why don't you fear a kingside attack?

Answer: The Nh2 manoeuvre is standard operating procedure in King's Indian Attacks, which this position only dimly resembles. The difference? In KIA, White normally retains a cramping e5-pawn, which in this position doesn't exist. The result is that Black's king is considerably safer in this version: 16 ... b5 17 axb5 axb5 18 Rxa8 Bxa8 19 Na3 b4 20 Nb5 Qb6 21 c4 Nc7 22 Nxc7 Qxc7. Black looks slightly better, due to the d4 hole and the weak d3-pawn, while White's kingside attack has yet to materialize, and probably never will, M.Markovic-M.Perunovic, Belgrade 2009.

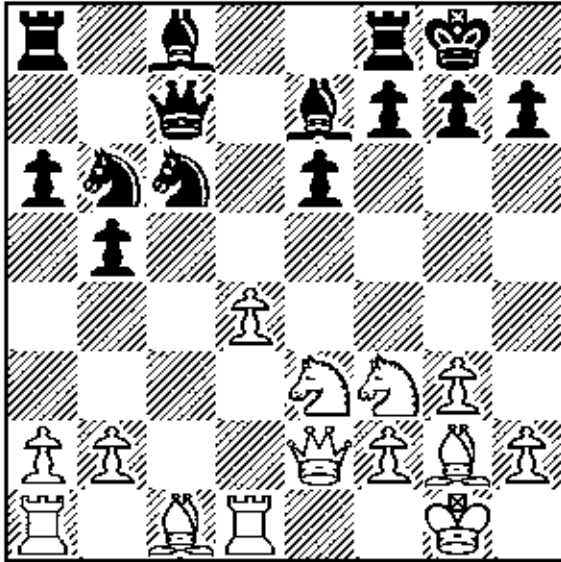
12 ... b5

Black gains useful queenside space. *Houdini* rates the game at even, while I already prefer Black.

13 Ne3

Alternatively, 13 Nce5 Bb7 14 Nxc6 Bxc6 15 Ne5 Bb7 16 d4 (16 d3 doesn't make as much sense with White's rook on d1) 16 ... cxd4 17 cxd4 Rac8 18 Bd2 Qc2 19 Rab1 Qa4 20 a3 and I prefer Black, who controls d5 and can work on White's d4 isolani.

13 ... Nb6 14 d4 cxd4 15 cxd4!?



Ivanov takes a chance, volunteering an isolated d-pawn to control the centre and create a hook for his knights on e5 and c5. Of course, if pieces get swapped down, then his decision turns into a burden. Safer and duller is 15 Nxd4 Nxd4 16 Rxd4 Bb7 17 Nf5 (flashy, but it doesn't get White anything) 17 ... Bxg2 (17 ... exf5 18 Bf4 regains the piece) 18 Nxe7+ Qxe7 19 Kxg2 Rfd8 20 Be3 Nc4. Black equalized.

15 ... Rd8 16 b3

Preparing to fianchetto, which bolsters d4, while taking aim at Black's king. However, if Black retains the d5 blockade, then White's bishop will just be staring at a wall on d4.

16 ... Bb7 17 Bb2 Nb4

The knight heads for the d5 hole.

18 Rac1 Qb8

Black correctly avoids 18 ... Qd6?! when 19 Ba3 is annoying.

19 a3 N4d5 20 Ng4

Ivanov masses pieces on the kingside, hoping for a future combination.

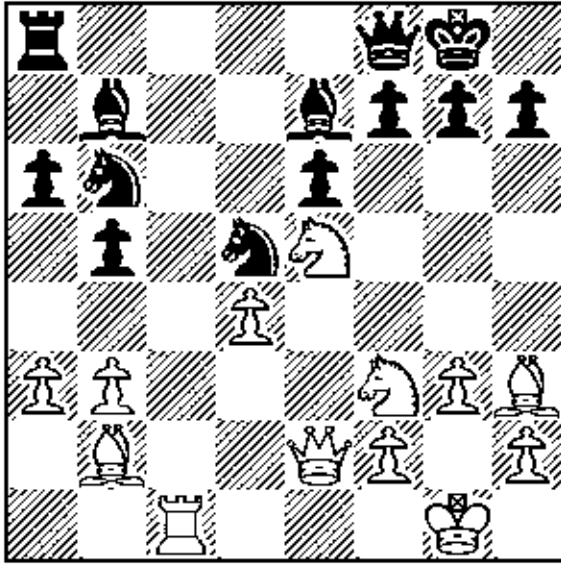
20 ... Rc8 21 Nge5 Rxc1

Every trade benefits Black.

22 Rxc1 Qf8!

A strong dual purpose move, which clears the developmental road for the a8-rook, while adding heat to a3. Ehlvest would love to provoke b4, after which Black's b6-knight can slip into either a4 or c4.

23 Bh3!



Aggressive defence. Ivanov offers a3 if in turn he generates tactical tricks on f7 and e6.

23 ... Rc8

I think he should accept White's dare with 23 ... Bxa3! 24 Bxa3 Qxa3 25 Re1 (threat: Nxf7) 25 ... Nf6! (not 25 ... Re8 26 Nxf7! and now Black should decline, since 26 ... Kxf7?? loses to 27 Ng5+ Kg8 28 Bxe6+ Kh8 29 Nf7+ Kg8 30 Nd6+) 26 Nxf7 Bd5! (26 ... Kxf7?? 27 Qxe6+ Kf8 28 Ng5 Bd5 29 Qxb6 is lost for Black) 27 N3g5 (White shouldn't get greedy with 27 Bxe6? Re8 28 N7g5+ Bxe6 29 Nxe6 Qxb3 which favours Black) 27 ... Re8 28 Qe5 Qb4. *Houdini* says even, while I prefer Black, whose structure feels a lot more secure. Also, White's forces may look scary, but I don't see a concrete threat – at least yet!

24 Rxc8

Pieces keep getting traded away, which only benefits Black. If I were White, I would take a chance on 24 Nxf7! Rxc1+ 25 Bxc1 Kxf7 26 Qxe6+ Ke8 27 Ne5 (threatening mate on the move) 27 ... Qf6 28 Qg8+ Bf8 29 Qxh7 Ne7 30 Qd3. White gets three pawns for the piece, and chances look dynamically balanced.

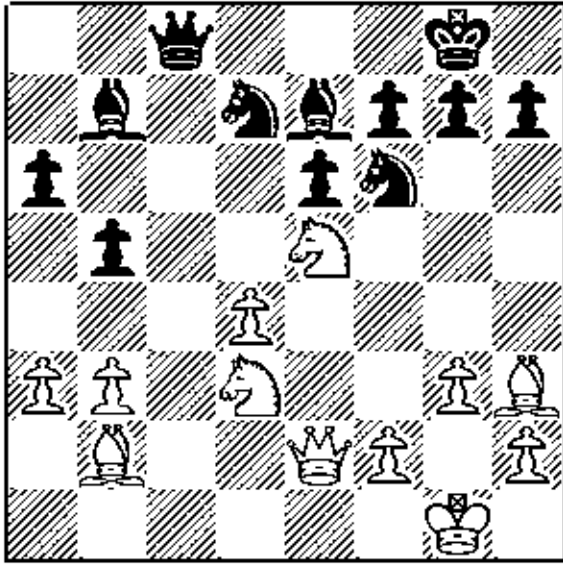
24 ... Qxc8

Whatever kingside opportunity White had is now in the past. Now Ivanov is consigned to dreary defence in a slightly inferior position, where Black owns the superior structure.

25 Ne1

Perhaps dreaming of one day re-routing the knight to c5.

25 ... Nf6 26 N1d3 Nbd7



27 Bg2

27 Nxf7?? would be too much. If we examine the sacrifice with sober perception, it soon becomes clear that White's 'attack' reached an impasse. The idea fails miserably to 27 ... Qc6!. This zwischenzug threatens mate, while adding protection to e6. After 28 Nh6+ Kf8! 29 f3 Qxf3! 30 Qxf3 Bxf3 (White's h6-knight is trapped) 31 Kf2 Be4 Black wins a piece.

27 ... Bxg2

Another harmful swap, from White's perspective, yet he had to challenge Black on the h1-a8 diagonal.

28 Kxg2 Bd6 29 a4!?

White can probably hold the draw if he manages to eliminate the queenside pawns from the board.

29 ... bxa4 30 bxa4 h6 31 Qd1 Nd5 32 Nxd7!?

There was no compelling reason to swap here, except for the practical reason: now White doesn't need to calculate the ramifications of ... Nxe5 or ... Bxe5 on every turn.

32 ... Qxd7 33 Qc2 Nb6

Provoking the a-pawn to a fixed location on a5.

34 a5 Nd5 35 Qc4 Qb7

Covering a6, while threatening the cheapo ... Ne3+.

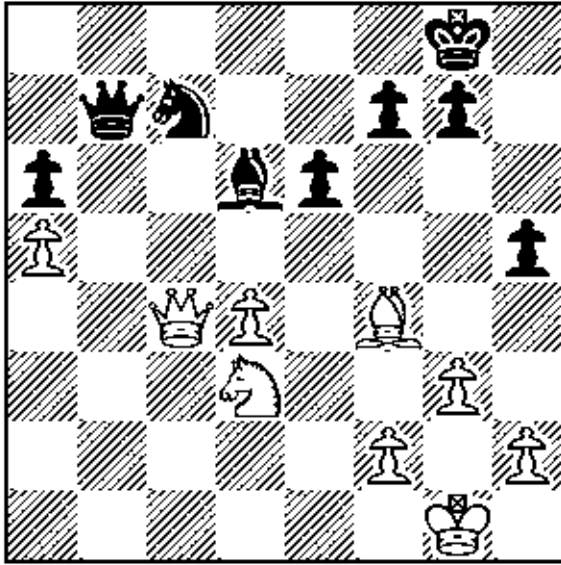
36 Kg1 h5

The idea is to either provoke h4, which weakens the white king's cover, or Black himself will play ... h4, endangering White's king. However, 36 ... Bc7! 37 Qa4 Kh7 leaves White more tied down than in the game continuation.

37 Bc1

To enable Bd2, covering a5.

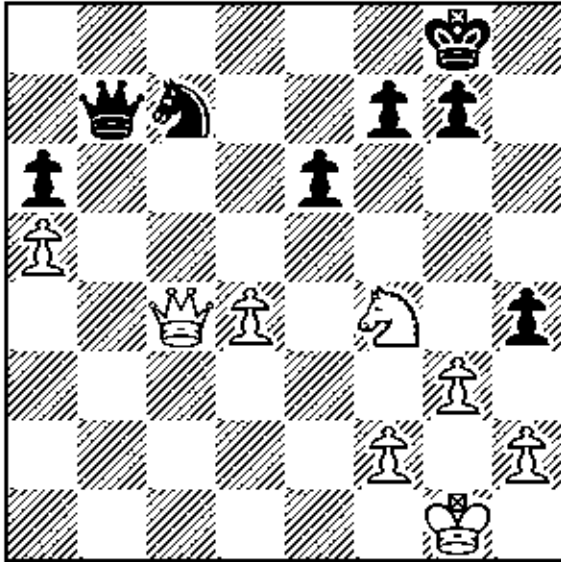
37 ... Nc7 38 Bf4!



Question: Why an exclamation mark when the move violates your philosophy on swaps when a player owns isolanis?

Answer: This move is an exception to the rule, and one of the reasons chess is such an infuriatingly difficult game. Principles are not stone tablets of laws. Moses had to honour all ten commandments. The short tempered Old Testament God would undoubtedly have been irritated if Moses interpreted two of the ten as exceptions, subject to personal choice. Not so for us chess players, who sometimes openly violate the law. In this case, I think the swap is a good idea, since with Black's bishop gone, it enables ideas like Nc5, and also Qc5, followed by Qb6.

38 ... Bxf4 39 Nxf4 h4



40 gxh4?!

This decision has all the earmarks of a distinctly unremunerative venture. Now those eyesore pawns are not easily repairable weaknesses.

Question: Why would White deliberately deface his own kingside pawn structure?

Answer: His move based on the philosophy: a pawn is a pawn, no matter the strategic inconvenience of its purchase price. GM Ivanov's highly developed precautionary instinct perhaps warned him of unseen dangers of Black's h-pawn advancing to h3. He possibly worried about ideas like ... g5, chasing off White's knight, followed by ... h3. But his move is clearly an overreaction, and the correct plan eluded him.

I don't see how Black plays for a win if White continues 40 Qc5! intending Qb6. *Houdini* now thinks Black has no better than to take perpetual check with 40 ... Qb1+ 41 Kg2 Qb7+ 42 f3 hxg3 43 hxg3 Qb2+ 44 Kh3 Qb7 45 Qe7 Qxf3 46 Qd8+ Kh7 47 Qh4+ (White shouldn't get greedy with 47 Qxc7?? Qh1+ 48 Kg4 f5+ 49 Kg5 Qh6 mate).

40 ... Qb1+ 41 Kg2 Qe4+ 42 Kg3

The king hisses insults at his sister, like an aggrieved cobra.

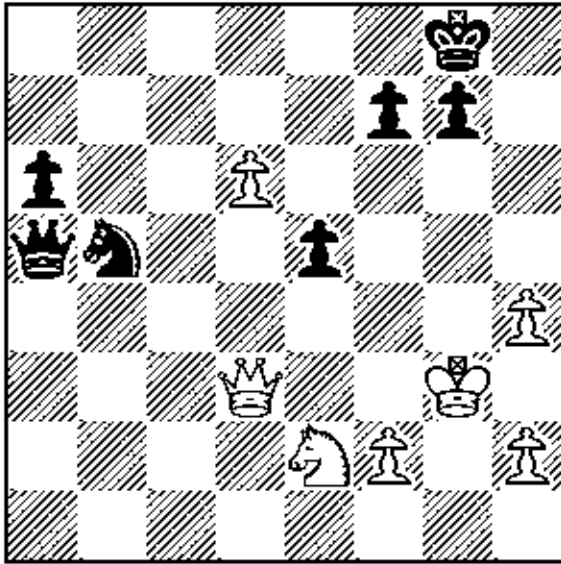
42 ... Nb5 43 Qd3 Qe1!

Ehlvest plays for the full point. 43 ... Qxd4?! (this exchange contaminates both impetus and cohesion from Black's attack, and his once robust initiative falters into uncomfortable silence) 44 Qxd4 Nxd4 45 Nd3 Nc6 46 Nc5 Nxa5 47 Nxa6 is a likely draw, despite Black's structural advantage.

44 d5 e5

The position sharpens considerably, since now White gets a surging passed d-pawn, while Black picks up the a5-pawn.

45 Ne2 Qxa5 46 d6



Exercise (critical decision): Black must do something about that surging d-pawn. His choices: a) 46 ... Kf8, calling in reinforcements, with the intention of using his king to halt the pawn; b) A deflection with 46 ... e4. One line is stronger than the other. Which one would you play?

46 ... Kf8?!

Now the results fall a tad short of Black's expectations. Correct was:

Answer: 46 ... e4! 47 Qxe4 (47 Qd1? allows the double attack 47 ... Qa3+ 48 Kg2 Nxd6 with a winning position for Black) 47 ... Nxd6 and Black's passed a-pawn offers good winning chances.

47 d7 Ke7

The greedy define their wealth, not by what they already own, but by what they lack. In this case the king's covetous eyes linger appreciatively on the potential d7 acquisition.

48 Qd5 Qa3+ 49 Kg2 Qd6 50 Qb7?

Now White hangs his d-pawn without compensation. He at least picks up e5 if he plays 50 d8R!. White's queen decides that the transaction should be performed by an underling. I just love to underpromote. Following 50 ... Qxd8 51 Qxe5+ Kf8 52 Qh5 Kg8 53 Qe5 White may be able to generate enough threats on Black's king to hold a draw, since h5 and Ng3 are coming. Note that h4 isn't really hanging, since 53 ... Qxh4 is met with 54 Qe8+ Kh7 55 Qxf7.

50 ... Nc7!

Now a6 is covered, while d7 is doomed.

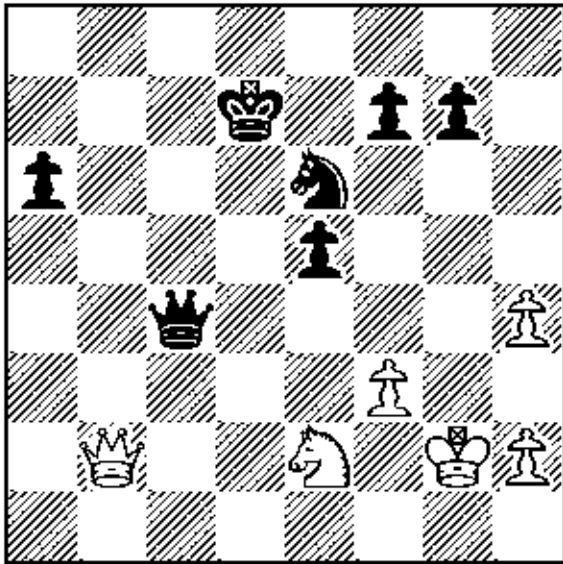
51 f3 Kxd7

And now it's just a matter of Black avoiding perpetual check.

52 Qb3 Qd5 53 Qa3 Qc4

Double attacking e2 and h4.

54 Qb2 Ne6!



An old enemy, now forgotten, is made that much more dangerous by his return, since our guard may be down.

55 Qb7+

55 Qxe5?? walks into the simplification cheapo 55 ... Qxe2+! 56 Qxe2 Nf4+ 57 Kf1 Nxe2 58 Kxe2 with a hopeless king and pawn ending for White.

55 ... Nc7 56 Qb2 Nd5!

The same cheapo applies if White grabs e5.

57 Kg3

The king covers h4, at some cost to his own safety.

57 ... Ke6

Covering e5, while escaping White's queen checks.

58 Qb7 g6!

Inhibiting h5, while enabling ... Kf6 and ... Kg7, which provides much needed shelter to Black's king. Entering a queen ending with 58 ... Qxe2? allows White better drawing chances than the game continuation. After 59 Qc6+ Ke7 60 Qc5+ Kf6 61 Qc6+ Kf5 62 Qxd5 Black's win becomes problematic, due to perpetual check concerns.

59 Ng1

The nervous knight, who views his life as an endless source of involuntary

servitude, bows convulsively before Black's queen. When you are forced into a move like this, you know your position is sinking fast. White had nothing better:

a) 59 Kf2?? hangs the h-pawn to 59 ... Qxh4+.

b) 59 Qb2 simply allows Black to begin pushing forward his a-pawn with 59 ... a5.

59 ... Nf4

Angling for ... Qf1 and ... Qg2 mate ideas. Perhaps it was more accurate to first play 59 ... Kf6 when Black's king makes it clear that he is no longer subject to the white queen's governance. In such dominating positions, it's psychologically beneficial to dally, since doing so often provokes an unwise response from a constrained and frustrated opponent.

60 Qb6+ Ke7

Stronger is 60 ... Kf5! when 61 Nh3 is met with 61 ... Qf1 forcing mate.

61 Qb8

61 Nh3 Nh5+ 62 Kg2 Qe2+ was also hopeless.

61 ... Qe6

Covering e5 and a6, while tying White's knight down to coverage of h3.

62 Qh8 Qd5 63 Nh3

The long constrained knight's indignation finally bursts. A blunder in a hopeless position, since after 63 Qc8 Qd2 64 Qc7+ Kf6 65 Qb6+ Kg7 the checks run out and White can only stave off mate by entering a resignable knight ending with 66 Qf2 Qxf2+ 67 Kxf2 when Black's a-pawn provides an easy win.

63 ... Nxb3 0-1

64 Kxb3 Qxf3 is mate.

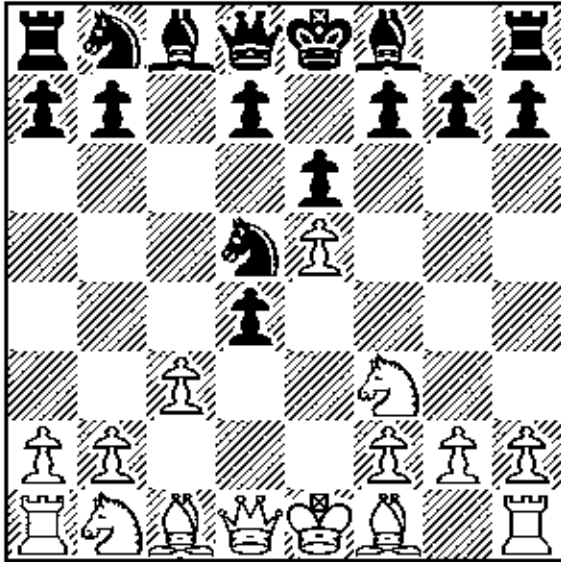
Summary: The main benefit of White playing the Rozentalis variation is surprise value. So let's not get caught unprepared.

Game 3

E.Rozentalis-I.Sokolov

Malmo 1997

1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 Nf3 e6 5 d4 cxd4



6 cxd4

Question: If the opponent plays 6 Bc4 should we fear Bxd5?

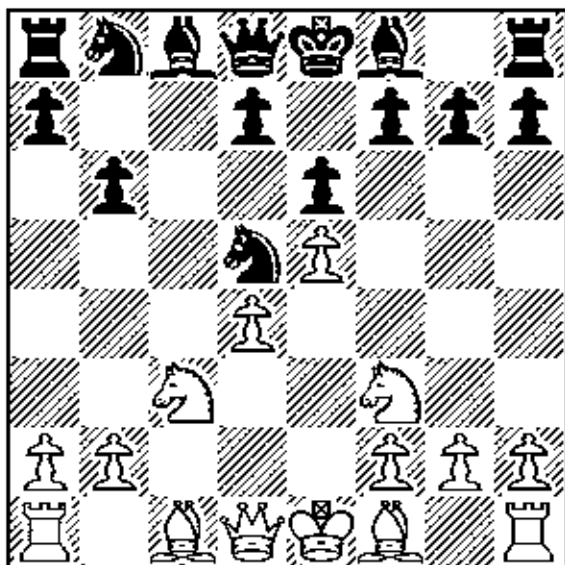
Answer: Well, we cover this line in more detail in Chapter Three. One issue is that we can't get our normal ... b6 positions, which we look at in the rest of this chapter's games.

6 ... b6

I have played this line for a long time as Black, and am convinced of its soundness. Not only does Black prepare to back up his d5 hole with ... Bb7, but in some cases, we can also consider ... Ba6, swapping away White's powerful attacking light-squared bishop.

7 Nc3

White's main move which is intended to strengthen the centre. In the next few games we look at the alternatives: 7 Bd3, 7 Bc4, and 7 Nbd2.



7 ... Nxc3

Black's main line.

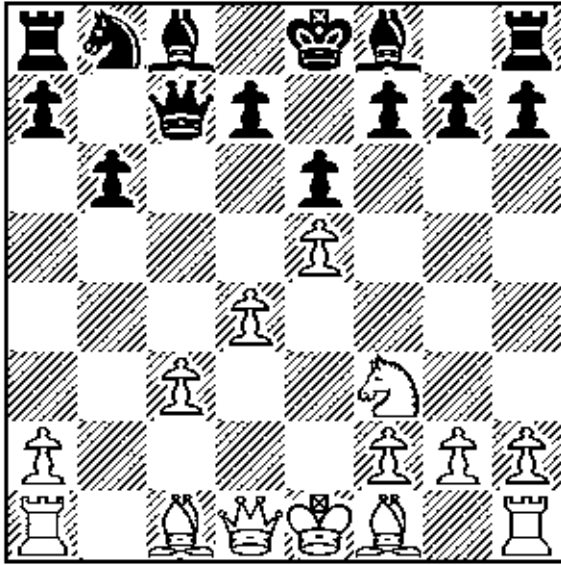
Question: Why do we comply with White's wishes and strengthen the centre, when we have 7 ... Bb7?

Answer: Your suggestion is fully playable. I actually prefer to trade on c3 for the following reasons:

1. By doing so, we plug up the c-file and enable ... Qc7, which would be unwise if the c-file were still open, since we would eventually lose a tempo to a coming Rc1.
2. By swapping on c3, I actually think White's centre becomes more vulnerable, especially if we manage to swap down to a late middlegame or ending. We will play ... d6 and an eventual ... dxe5, after which we can hammer away at White's central hanging pawns. Of course, on the down side, the hanging pawns offer White greater central control and attacking chances.

Let's look at your suggestion: 7 ... Bb7 8 Bd3 Na6. On 9 Nxd5 Black can actually play 9 ... Bxd5. This position scores poorly for White, but it shouldn't. White has a clear advantage after the untried novelty 10 Bg5! (remarkably, 10 Bxa6?! isn't all that great for White, since 10 ... b5! regains the piece: 11 0-0 Qb6 12 Bxb5 Qxb5 when Black gets the bishop-pair and light-square domination for the pawn – full compensation) 10 ... Qc8 (not 10 ... Bb4+?! 11 Kf1! Qc8 12 Rc1 Qb7 13 Qa4!, forcing Black's pieces into a serious tangle, since the a6-knight, which protects b4, is loose; after 13 ... Ba5 14 a3! Black is in serious trouble) 11 Rc1 Qb7 12 a3!. I don't like Black's position since he lags behind in development and the a6 knight is unstable, which further aggravates the development issue.

8 bxc3 Qc7



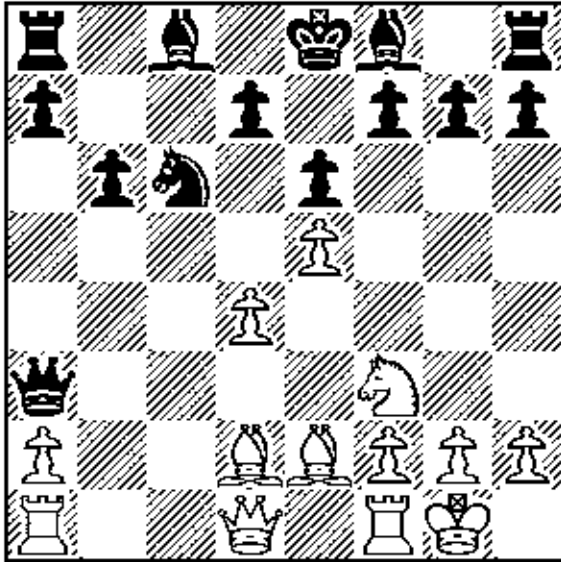
9 Bd2

Question: Why can't White offer c3 to enhance his development lead?

Answer: Nothing disorients us more than a sudden shattering of a lifelong, seemingly incontestable view. Every c3-Sicilian book I own says this sacrifice is dubious, yet when I played through the lines, *Houdini* kept working out draws! George Orwell warned us that an untruth, when endlessly repeated, becomes the truth. After 9 Be2 Qxc3+ 10 Bd2 we have:

a) The very risky 10 ... Qc7!? may be Black's only move if he isn't satisfied with a draw: 11 Rc1 Nc6 12 0-0 Bb7 13 Bd3 h6?! (this wastes a move, which may be necessary, since Ng5 is a huge concern for Black; after 13 ... Be7 14 Ng5 Qd8 15 Qh5 g6 16 Qg4 Nb4 17 Be4 Nd5 18 h4 0-0 19 Nxe7 we get another forced draw with 19 ... Kxe7 20 Qh5+ Kg8 21 Bxe7 fxe7 22 Qxe7+ Kh8 23 Qh6+) 14 d5! (White must shake up the position before Black completes development and consolidates) 14 ... exd5 15 Nd4 Qd8 16 Nf5 g6 17 Nd6+ Bxd6 18 exd6 Qf6 19 Re1+ was C.Tan-B.Belotti, Formia 1994. White is down a bunch of pawns yet seems to have full compensation after 19 ... Kf8 20 Qg4 Rd8.

b) 10 ... Qa3 is Black's main move, which I keep working out to a forced draw, despite the books' claims of a black advantage. White scores a rather sorry 12.5% after 11 0-0 Nc6, according to my database. Now ... Ba6 is coming, after which a lot of the air will be removed from White's attack (11 ... Ba6 12 d5! is *Houdini*'s suggestion and after 12 ... Bc5 13 Ng5! exd5 14 Bc1 Qa5 15 Bd2 Black must once again take the repetition draw).



Question: This still looks good for White! Why not sacrifice a second pawn anyway with 12 d5?

Answer: That is an untried suggestion, and a good one. Let's continue the analysis: 12 ... exd5 13 Bc1 Qa5 14 Rb1 (in for a penny ...) 14 ... Ba6 (or 14 ... Bc5 15 Rb5 Qxa2 16 Rb2 Qa5 and a draw by repetition of moves; so your suggestion works, if Black is okay with a draw) 15 Bxa6 Qxa6 16 Qxd5 Be7 17 Re1 0-0!. Completion of development is more important than hanging on to the extra pawn. Now if 18 Qxd7 Qxa2 19 Bg5 Bxg5 20 Qxc6 Be7 21 e6 Bf6 I like Black's chances, due to those two queenside passers.

Returning to 9 Bd2:

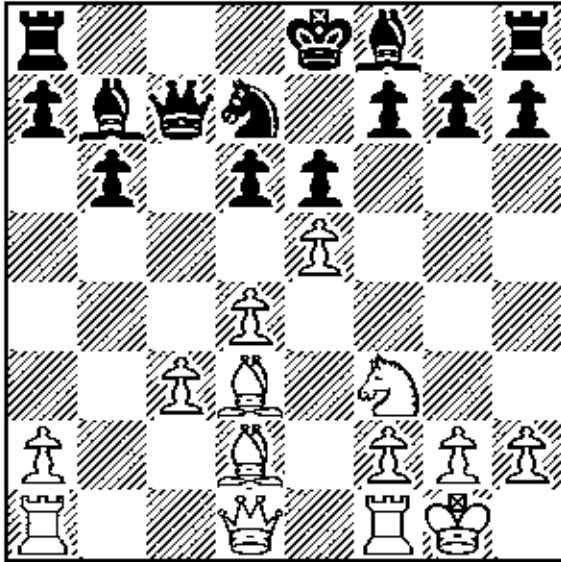
9 ... Bb7 10 Bd3 d6

We must at some point challenge White's centre.

11 0-0

11 exd6?! doesn't make sense, since it enhances Black's development.

11 ... Nd7



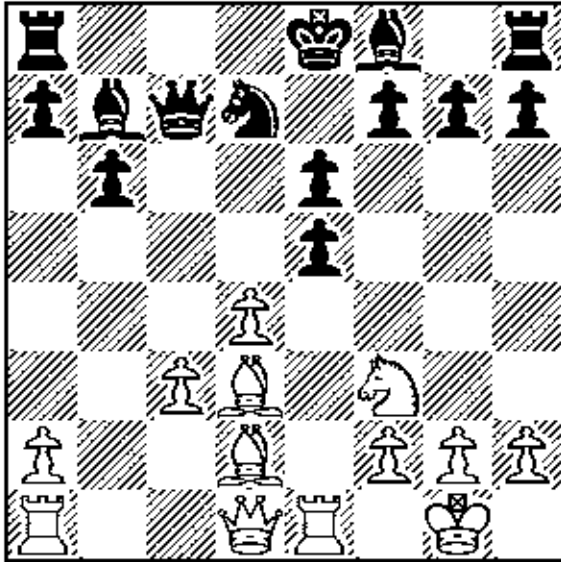
12 Re1

Alternatively:

a) 12 Bf4 Be7 (now it's too risky to grab c3) 13 Re1 (13 exd6 Bxd6 14 Bxd6 Qxd6 15 Ng5 was D.Barlov-V.Jansa, Vrnjacka Banja 1982; Black stands well after 15 ... h6 16 Ne4 Bxe4 17 Bxe4 Rc8 18 Qb3 Nf6 19 Bf3 0-0) 13 ... 0-0 14 Re3 (White is intent on playing for mate) 14 ... g6 15 Rc1 dxe5 16 Nxe5 Nxe5 17 Bxe5 Bd6 18 h4 was tried in J.Ambroz-V.Jansa, Czech Championship 1982. Black's position looks well defended after 18 ... Bxe5 19 Rxe5 Rfd8 20 h5 Rd5.

b) 12 Ng5!? is a critical pawn sacrifice we need to know well. White abandons e5 to lunge after our king. With 12 ... dxe5 13 Qh5 g6 14 Qh3 (White angles for sacrifices on e6) 14 ... Be7! 15 Rae1 (15 Nxe6? is unsound; Black stands clearly better after 15 ... fxe6 16 Bxg6+ hxg6! 17 Qxh8+ Nf8 18 dxe5 0-0-0, since his king is safe, and White's rook and two unimpressive pawns are clearly inferior to Black's two minor pieces) 15 ... h6 16 f4 Bxg5 17 fxg5 h5 18 dxe5 0-0! Black survived the storm, while retaining the superior structure, M.Neubauer-D.Collutiis, Turin Olympiad 2006. *Houdini* gives Black a solid plus here. Black's king is quite safe, since the g5-pawn clogs White's attacking lines, and Black will play ... Kg7, which immunizes him from sacrifices on h5 or g4 lunges.

12 ... dxe5



13 dxe5!?

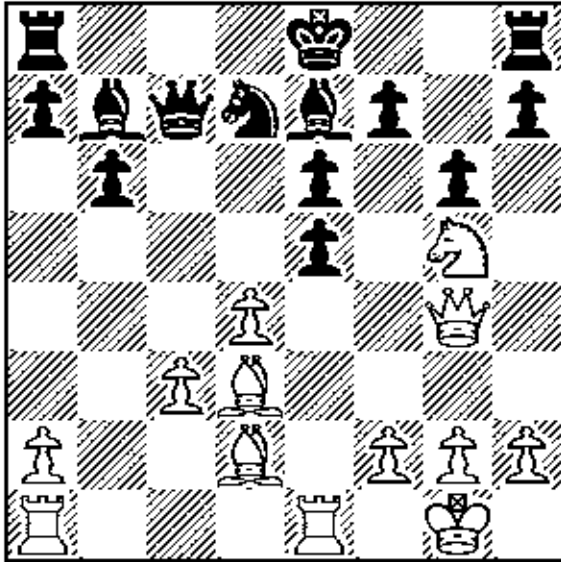
Once we incur a strategic debt, we either pledge to pay it back, or more likely, we go further in debt attempting to justify our actions. White's position is driving principle dynamism, while ours is constructed of sturdiness. Alternatives (after which our collective heads swim with disorientation):

a) 13 Nxe5 is White's main line, yet I believe Black gets the better game after 13 ... Nxe5 14 Rxe5 Bd6. For example:

a1) 15 Rh5 g6 16 Rh6 (the main problem with a move like this is: if White's attack fails to get anywhere, then the rook is misplaced) 16 ... 0-0! 17 Qg4 f5!. Black's king is quite safe and White's rook may be a source of future concern for White, E.Sevillano-C.Lakdawala, San Diego (rapid) 2006. At this point your chicken-hearted writer took the draw versus the GM. Objectively I prefer Black's position after 18 Qe2 Rae8, since White's rook looks rather above his normal social station on h6, while Black may soon threaten ... e5.

a2) 15 Bb5+ Bc6! 16 Qf3. Black can actually castle queenside here, but having looked at it, I feel like we give White practical chances and the move played is so much simpler: 16 ... Rc8! 17 Bxc6+ Qxc6 18 d5 Qc7 19 Rh5 e5 (or 19 ... g6!? 20 Qf6 0-0 21 Bh6 Qxc3 22 Qxc3 Rxc3 23 Bxf8 Bxf8 24 Rh3 Rc2 25 dxe6 fxe6 26 Rf3 Bc5 27 Rd1 Bd4! 28 a3 e5 when Black's activity and extra pawn ensure full compensation for the exchange) 20 Qh3 Qd7 21 Qh4 h6 22 Re1 f6 and I prefer Black's structure over White's kingside initiative, while *Houdini* rates it at dead even, N.Pedersen-L.Schandorff, Copenhagen 1996.

b) 13 Ng5!? (we must be ready for these lunges) 13 ... g6! (cutting out Qh5 shenanigans) 14 Qg4 Be7!.

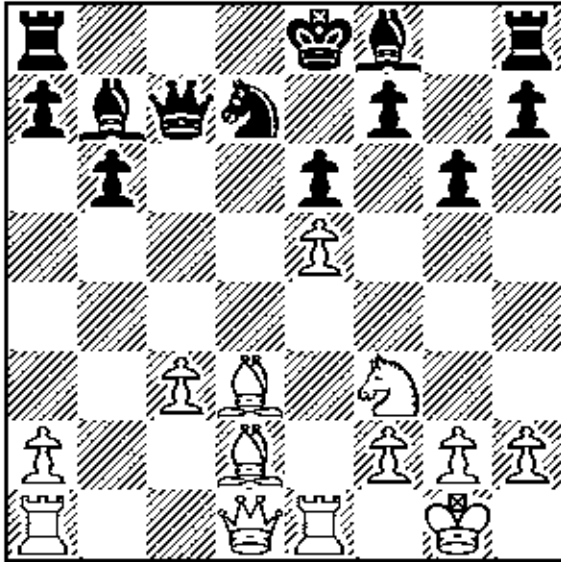


Rule of thumb: when White goes for a Ng5!? lunge (on any move order), develop your bishop to e7 to protect yourself from knight sacrifices on e6. Here 15 dxe5 was seen in S.Kabir-J.Petkevich, Elista Olympiad 1998. Our position is good, but must tread carefully, since White is up to all kinds of dirty tricks. Following 15 ... Rc8 16 Qf4 Bxg5! (when our opponent is in possession of the initiative, we have no choice but to dance ungracefully to his agenda; I think Black can survive his gaping dark-square holes) 17 Qxg5 0-0 (we build a fortress on geologically active land) 18 Qg3 Nc5 19 Bc2 Rfd8 20 Bh6 f5! 21 exf6 Qxg3 22 hxg3 Kf7 23 Re3 Kxf6 24 g4 it's anybody's game. White suffers from chronically weak queenside squares and the c3-pawn, while Black's king must tread carefully with those nasty bishops and white rook lurking on the third rank.

Now we can return to the 13 dxe5 of the game:

13 ... Be7

13 ... g6! is also playable, and would be my choice in the position.



Question: Doesn't this move create huge dark-square holes in Black's kingside?

Answer: It does just that. But keep in mind, that in such chaotic positions, there is heavy atmospheric distortion. We should play with the assumption that whatever we believe is the truth, may not be. In compensation:

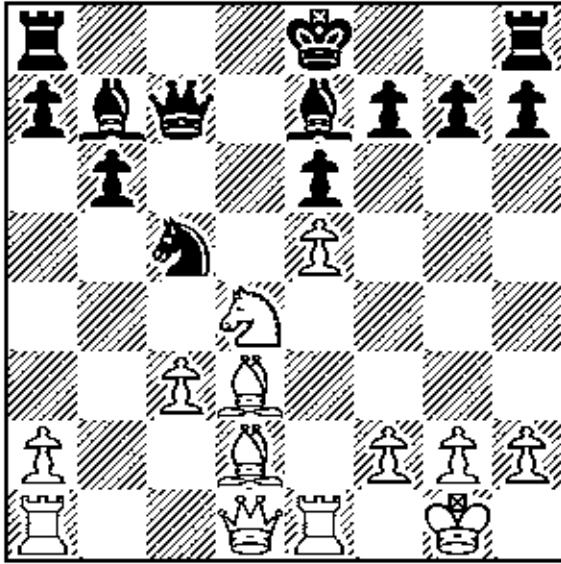
1. Black's king is made somewhat safer by the fianchetto.
2. An early ... g6 pre-empts White's potential future lunges with Ng5 and Qh5, since the h5-square is now covered.
3. By fianchettoing, Black adds further heat to e5. Now this is important, since White may not be able to pull off either Nd4 or Ng5 later on if his e5-pawn hangs.

S.Lalic-I.Stohl, Isle of Man 1994, went 14 Bf4 Bg7 15 Nd4 0-0!? (I would play 15 ... a6, keeping White's knight out of d6) 16 Nb5 Qc6 17 Be4?! (17 Bf1 Rad8 18 Nxa7 Qxc3 19 Nb5 Qc6 20 Rc1 Nc5 is about even) 17 ... Qxb5 18 Bxb7 Rab8 19 a4 Qc4 20 Qf3 Qc5! (now the e5-pawn is under tremendous pressure) 21 Qc6 and here Black should continue 21 ... Rfd8! 22 g3 Bxe5 23 Bxe5 Nxe5 24 Qxc5 bxc5 25 Rxe5 Rxb7 26 Rxc5 Rb2 27 Rc7 Rdd2 28 Rf1 Rdc2 29 Rxa7 Rxc3 30 Kg2 Ra3. White's a-pawn falls and Black gets reasonable practical chances to win in the four versus three ending.

14 Nd4

Multipurpose, clearing the way for Qg4 or Qh5, and also Nb5.

14 ... Nc5!?



Provocative. Sokolov allows either white piece into b5. Safer was 14 ... a6 15 Qg4 g6 16 Qg3, as in T.Ernst-P.Cramling, Gausdal 1987. Here maybe Black should play 16 ... Bf8 intending to relocate to g7, which brings us back to the argument that maybe 13 ... g6! intending ... Bg7 is Black's most accurate idea in the position.

15 Bc2

Instead:

a) 15 Bb5+?! is the anarchist's nightmare: after building the bomb, he flubs the triggering sequence. This superficially tempting move only benefits Black: 15 ... Kf8 (this deliberate loss of castling is also seen in some lines of the Semi-Slav, which this position resembles) 16 Bf4 h5 17 h3 g5! 18 Bh2 g4! (it becomes clear that White's king is the one in far greater danger) 19 hxg4 hxg4 20 Bf1 was J.Olsar-P.Papanetz, Slovakian League 1997. Now Black can play 20 ... f5! which threatens to swing the queen eventually over to h7.

b) 15 Nb5?! is another waste of time: 15 ... Qc6 16 Bf1 Nd3! 17 Re3 Qxb5 18 Bxd3 Qc5 19 Rg3 0-0-0!. White's position is loose and under pressure, while Black's king is safe.

15 ... h5!

Black seizes control over both g4 and h5, and opens possibilities for either a straight push further of the h-pawn, or a kingside pawn storm with ... g5. *Houdini* rates the game at even, while I already prefer Black.

16 a4

Perhaps a little reminder for Black to avoid castling long.

16 ... a6

Black cuts off Nb5, at the cost of weakening b6.

17 Qe2 Rd8

Black correctly commits his king to f8, the safest square.

18 Rab1?!

With hindsight of Black's plan, White maybe should adapt his strategy to fit the changed requirements with 18 f4!?, although this weakens his light squares.

18 ... g5!

Far more radical, and also stronger, than the more conservative plan, 18 ... g6, intending ... Kf8 and ... Kg7.

19 f3

White goes passive. White also loses the initiative if he counterattacks with 19 f4?! gxf4 20 Bxf4 Rg8 21 Nf3 Rg4. The opening of the g-file only benefited Black.

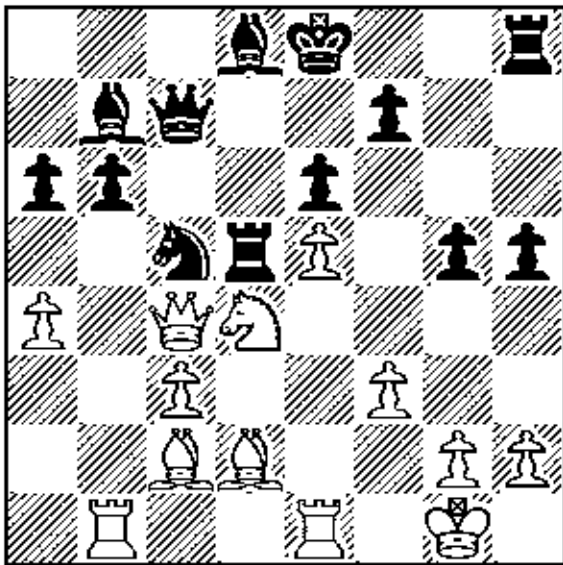
19 ... Rd5!

White's e-pawn is for all practical purposes, an isolani, ripe for plucking. Now ... Nd7 is threatened.

20 Qc4

The idea is to pin Black's c5-knight thereby preventing ... Nd7.

20 ... Bd8!



A powerful multipurpose move, which protects Black's queen, enabling ... Nd7, and now b6, Black's weakest point, is reinforced.

Instead, 20 ... Rxe5 allows White to regain the pawn after 21 Rxe5 Qxe5 22 Rxb6.

21 f4

White, in desperation, allows the opening of the f-file. The meek 21 Qe2 allows 21 ... Nd7 after which the e5-pawn falls without compensation.

21 ... gxf4 22 Bxf4 Rg8

Threat: ... Rxg2+, followed by ... Rxd4+, which wins White's queen.

23 Re2 Rg4 24 Rf1 Bg5!

Black removes a key defender of e5.

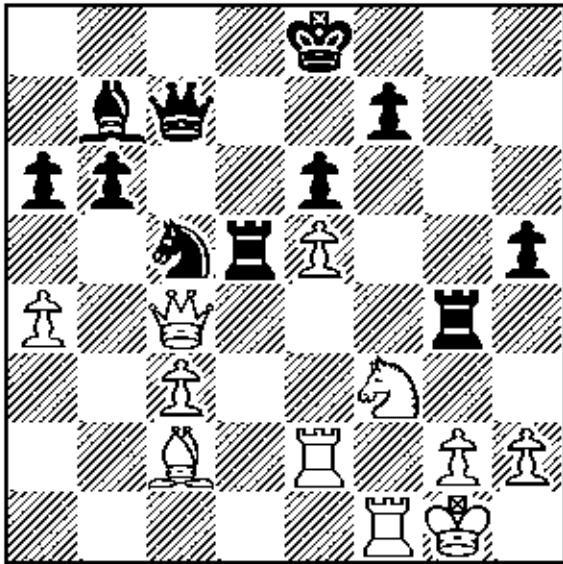
25 Bxg5

Avoiding 25 Bg3? Qd7 26 Rd1 h4 27 Be1 a5! threatening ... Ba6, and if 28 Qb5 Ba6 29 Qxd7+ Kxd7 30 Nb5 Rxd1 31 Bxd1 Nxa4 when White's game collapses.

25 ... Rxg5 26 Nf3

Not much choice, since e5 was under siege.

26 ... Rg4



27 Qa2?

White was better off entering the line 27 Re4! b5! (this tactic breaks the pin on the c5-knight) 28 axb5 axb5 29 Qxb5+ Bc6 30 Qb1 Nxe4 31 Bxe4 Rc5 32 Bxc6+ Qxc6 33 Qh7!, and if 33 ... Rxc3 (33 ... Rf4 34 Qg8+ Kd7 35 Rd1+ Rd5 36 Ra1 seems rather risky for Black, but may be playable after 36 ... Qc5+ 37 Kh1 Qb6) 34 Qh8+ Ke7 35 Qf6+ with perpetual check. Of course this is all rather difficult to find over the board!

27 ... Nd3!

Now White is back to being busted.

28 Bxd3

Not much choice since Black threatened ... Nf4.

28 ... Rxd3 29 Ne1 Qc5+

I prefer the consolidating line 29 ... Rxc3! 30 Ref2 Bd5 31 Qb1 Rg7 32 Qb2 Qxe5 if 33 Qxb6 Rh3! 34 Rf4 Re3 and White's position crumbles.

30 Ref2 Re3

Both 30 ... Rxc3 and 30 ... Rd1 were better choices.

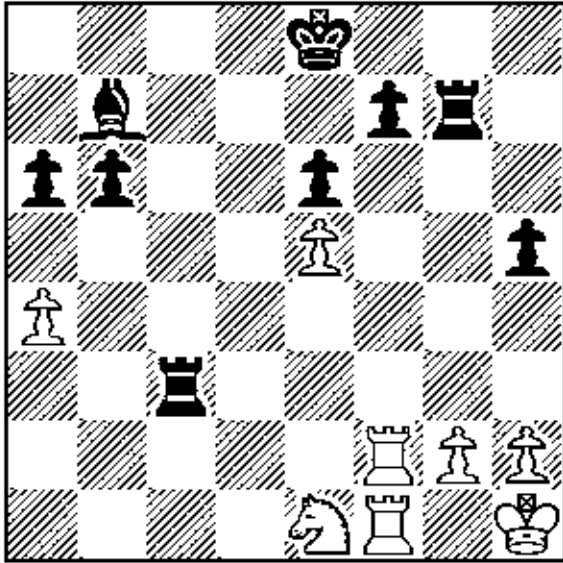
31 Qd2 Rg7

More accurate than 31 ... Rxe5?! 32 Kh1! when White gets a lot more play than in the game continuation.

32 Kh1 Qxc3

A natural decision, to enter a pawn up ending, although one might logically argue that the swap of queens actually benefits White, who had the less safe king. Black can also consider 32 ... Qxe5!?, leaving c3 as a future target.

33 Qxc3 Rxc3



Black is up a pawn in the ending with the initiative. Now comes the conversion stage.

34 Rb2 Rc1! 35 Kg1

35 Rxb6?? loses to the cheapo 35 ... Bxg2+. “It seems that large portions of your memory have been subject to redaction. Now let us see if we can fix the problem on the rack,” says the chief inquisitor to White’s king.

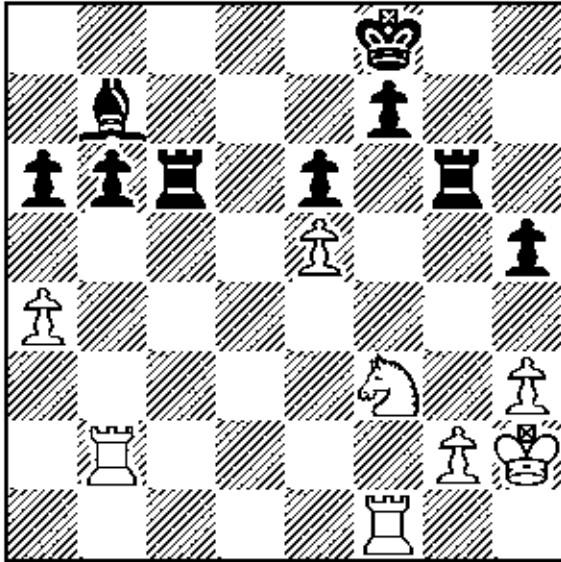
35 ... Rc6?!

A serious inaccuracy. Black blocks in his own bishop. He should play 35 ... Bd5! when his strategic pressure presses against White at every turn. White is unable to play 36 Rxb6?? due to 36 ... Bc4! 37 Rb8+ Kd7 when he drops material.

36 h3 Rg5 37 Nf3 Rg6

Sokolov must be in time pressure, since his last move was a clear waste of time, although it really isn’t clear what White can do with the tempo gained. Black should play 37 ... Rf5!, keeping a watchful eye out on f3 and e5.

38 Kh2 Kf8



39 Rff2

Question: Why does White wait when he can pile up on b6?

Answer: After 39 Rfb1 Black can respond with 39 ... Rc4! 40 Rxb6 Bxf3 41 Rb8+ Kg7 42 gxf3 Rxa4 with a likely conversion for Black.

39 ... a5!

Black plans to give up b6, but not a6.

40 Nd4 Rc4 41 Nb5!?

Threat: Nd6, hitting c4, b7 and f7. Instead, 41 Rxb6 is met with 41 ... Bd5 42 Nb5 Rf4! 43 Re2 Re4 44 Rxe4 Bxe4 45 g3 Rg5 46 Ra6 Rxe5 47 Rxa5 Rd5 48 Kg1 Kg7 when Black's powerful bishop and passed e-pawn offers winning chances.

41 ... Rxa4 42 Nd6

Black's king is not so safe after the fall of f7.

42 ... Bd5 43 Rxf7+

Otherwise:

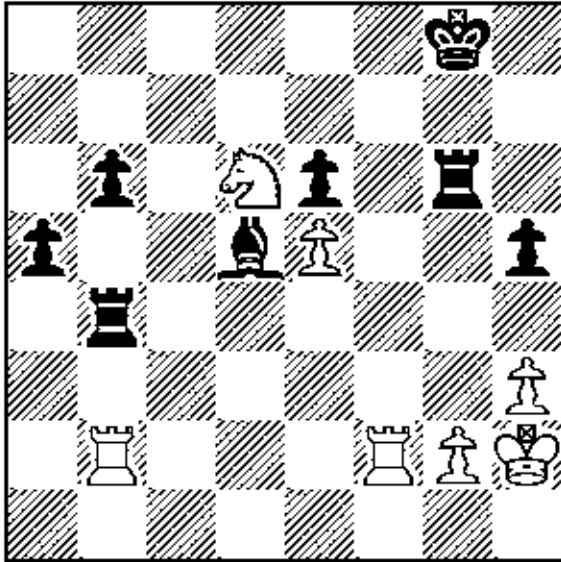
a) 43 Rxb6 Rf4! when the rook can't be taken and Black remains up a pawn, with excellent winning chances.

b) 43 Nxf7 is met with 43 ... Rxg2+! (deflection) 44 Rxg2 Bxg2 45 Kxg2 Kxf7 46 Rxb6 Rb4 47 Ra6 Rb5 and Black picks up a second pawn, which is decisive.

43 ... Kg8 44 Rff2

44 Rc2, threatening a back rank mate, is met with 44 ... Rg7.

44 ... Rb4



Exercise (critical decision): Should White trade on b4, or keep both rooks on the board

for his own attack with 45 Rbc2? Negotiate the two lines' competing claims to truth.

45 Rbc2?!

When we are simultaneously defending/attacking, the increase of one may fail to substitute for a decrease in the other. White may have suffered a loss, but not irreparably so. This tempting decision to attack is incorrect.

Answer: White may be able to hold the draw after 45 Rxb4! axb4 46 Ne8! Rxc2+ (this looks like a killing shot, but White's remaining knight performs heroically in halting Black's passers; however, if 46 ... Rg5 47 Nf6+ Kg7 48 Nxd5 exd5 49 Rb2 Rxe5 50 Rxb4 Re6 51 Kg3 Rd6 52 Kf4 Kf6 53 Ke3 Ke5 54 Rh4 Rh6 55 g4 b5 56 Kd3 b4 57 gxh5 b3 58 Kc3 and the position is drawn) 47 Rxc2+ Bxc2 48 Nf6+ Kf7 49 Kxc2 b3 50 Ne4 b2 51 Nd2 Kg6 52 Kf2 Kf5 53 Ke3 b5 54 Kd4 Kf4 55 Nb1 Kg3 56 Ke3 b4 57 Nd2 h4 58 Nb1 Kxh3 59 Kf3 and White draws.

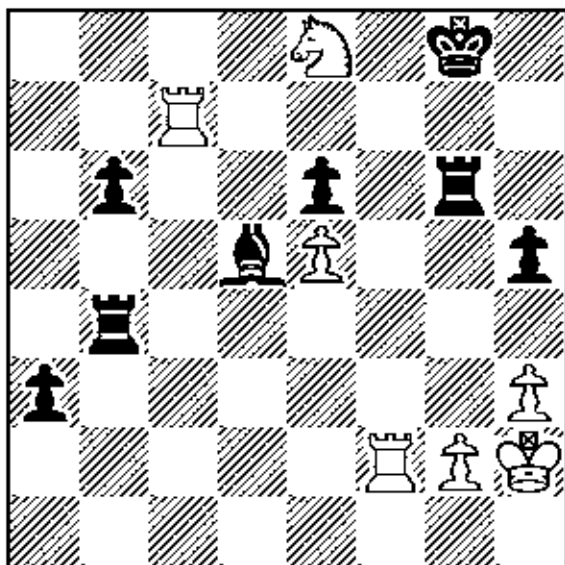
45 ... a4 46 Rc7?!

White has better chances of saving himself in the line 46 Ne8! Rc4 47 Rb2 a3! 48 Rxb6 Rf4! (deflection) 49 Rd2 Ra4! (principle: *place your rooks behind your passed pawns*) 50 Rb1 Kf7 51 Nf6 a2 52 Ra1 Rxf6! 53 exf6 Kxf6, although even here Black has excellent chances of converting, since his a-pawn paralyzes White.

46 ... a3 47 Ne8

Likewise, after 47 Rc8+ Kh7 48 Rc7+ Rg7 49 Rxc7+ (49 Nf7, intending Ng5+ and Nf7+, is met with the familiar tactic 49 ... Rf4! when Black wins) 49 ... Kxc7 50 Ne8+

Kg8 51 Nf6+ Kh8 52 Nxd5 exd5 53 e6 Kg7 54 e7 Re4 55 Ra2 Rxe7 56 Rxa3 Kf6 57 Kg3 Ke5 58 Rb3 Rb7 59 Kf3 Kd4 60 g4 b5 61 Ke2 b4 62 Kd2 Kc4 63 Kc2 hxg4 64 hxg4 Rf7 Black wins the ending.



Exercise (combination alert): An insurgency leader must be either captured or killed quickly, before his or her ideas are given time to spread treason, which leads others to join the cause. Suddenly, Black's king doesn't look so safe. If you find a tactic, you completely deflate White's intended kingside counterplay.
Hint: We have seen this same tactic multiple times in the notes.

Answer: Deflection. White's rook is driven off the f-file and therefore, out of the attack.

47 ... Rf4!

This rook, like an internet troll, seeks to cause disharmony and distort others' intent.

48 Rfc2

48 Rxf4?? Rxc2+ 49 Kh1 Rg4+ 50 Kh2 Rxf4 is completely hopeless for White.

48 ... a2

The a-pawn's influence is as ineradicable as an inoperable cancerous tumour.

49 Ra7 Rf7!

Now Black's king gets some well deserved rest, the way an elderly, arthritic person (i.e. your always-sore writer) gingerly lowers himself into a comfortable chair.

50 Ra6 Rf1

The threat to promote wins the exchange.

51 Rcx2

When we realize we are busted, the revelation doesn't make admitting the truth any

easier.

51 ... Bxa2 52 Rxa2 Rg5 0-1

White's position can't be saved after 53 Rb2 Rxe5 54 Rxb6 Re2.

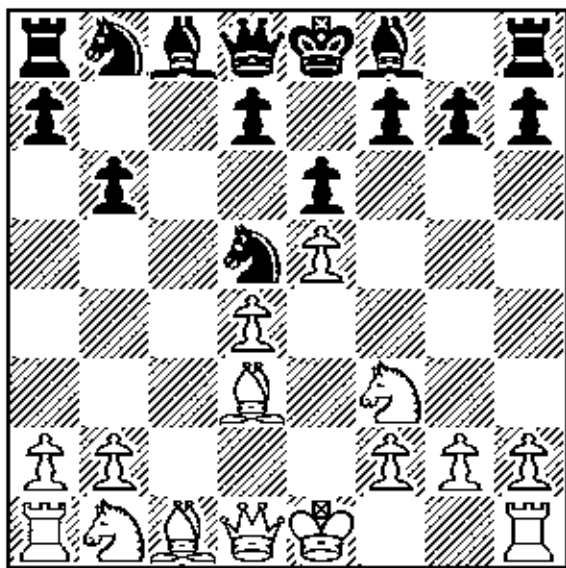
Summary: The position after 9 Bd2 is intensely theory-dense. Some of these chaotic theoretical positions are well beyond our ability to assimilate, so thank goodness for the comps. Although, be warned: they deliver variations, not answers. The key is to understand the defensive mechanisms which allow us to survive White's multiple lunges, which may come from any number of angles. Through the familiarity of constant study, even chaos can be precisely organized.

Game 4

R.Bataev-V.Zakharov

Pardubice 2005

1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nf3 e6 6 cxd4 b6 7 Bd3



Question: What is White's plan in this position?

Answer: White isn't interested in altering the structure with 7 Nc3 as we saw last game. Instead, he quietly develops, while aiming his bishop at the kingside.

7 ... Ba6!

Or not! This is the trouble with White's move, and a complete answer for Black, who has already equalized. White now loses a tempo if he chops on a6, since he already committed his bishop to d3.

8 0-0

8 Bxa6 Nxa6 fails to put the a6-knight out of play, since it can now back up its d5 counterpart via c7.

8 ... Be7

I see no point in swapping on d3, which gives White's queen a free lift to the third rank.

9 Nc3

White reverts to the previous game's strategy. He originally wanted to develop this knight to d2, which is now impossible since this hangs the d3-bishop.

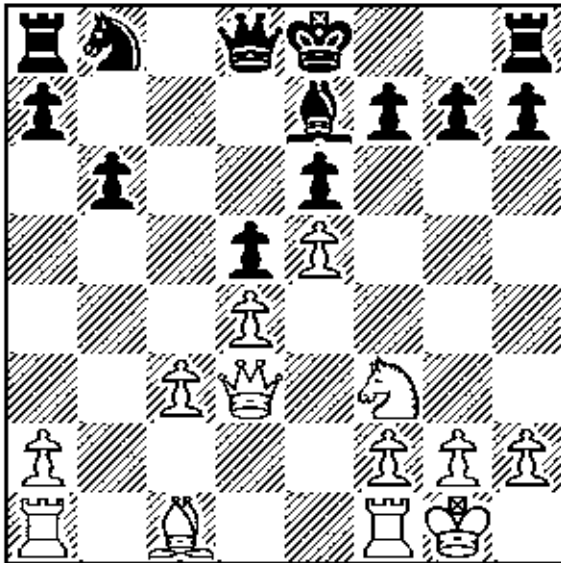
9 ... Nxc3 10 bxc3 Bxd3

Now is the correct moment.

11 Qxd3

We reach a structure similar to last game, but possibly a slightly better version for us, since we rid ourselves of White's powerful attacking bishop.

11 ... d5!?



When we violently disturb a position's balance, we know it creates great change, but what exactly that change is, worries us. This is risky, because Black falls behind in development, while allowing the game to open. It virtually begs White to take en passant.

Question: What happens if White refuses to take en passant?

Answer: Not taking en passant turns our position into a kind of Advance French, where we rid ourselves of our bad light-squared bishop. If given time, we transfer a knight to c4 and also apply pressure down the c-file to White's backward c3-pawn.

Question: Aren't you concerned that White may build up an attack on the kingside?

Answer: The promise of such an attack is similar to a minimum wage gas station cashier, who is told by a fortune teller: "I see good fortune, wealth, power, acclaim and love in your future. That will be \$20, please." I don't have much anxiety about a coming white kingside attack, mainly due to the absence of White's powerful light-squared bishop.

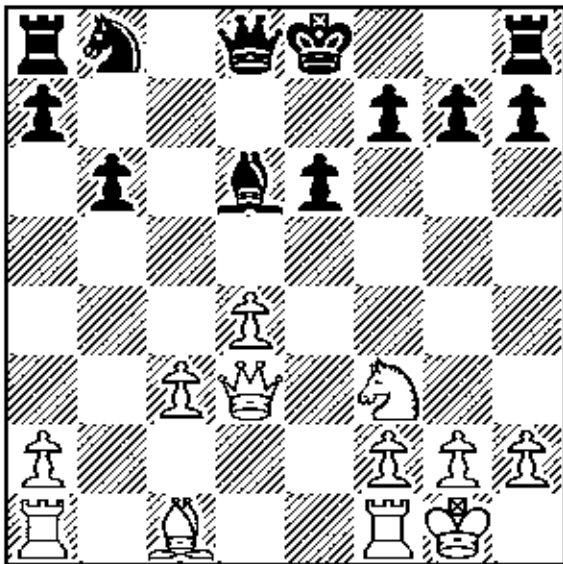
Black's most accurate move may, though, be to get the king out of the centre before playing ... d5 (or ... d6) with 11 ... 0-0!, intending to play ... d5 next move. So White pre-empt's this by playing 12 d5 exd5 13 Qxd5 (*Houdini* suggests the unplayed 13 Be3 and gives White a tiny edge; I played out a few more moves and Black equalized after the sequence 13 ... Qc7 14 Qxd5 Qc6 15 Rfd1 Rc8 16 Rac1 h6 17 h3 Bf8 18 Qxc6 dxc6; Black looks just fine here) 13 ... Na6 14 Rd1 Rc8 15 Bb2 Nc5 and Black had equalized in D.Sermek-N.Fercec, Rabac 2003.

12 exd6

The only move. White decides to go for a hanging pawns position, rather than risk a bad Advance French-like game after 12 Bd2?!. The fact that I don't see a single game with this move in my database implies that it is strategically weak.

12 ... Bxd6

12 ... Qxd6?! is inaccurate, due to 13 Ba3!. Now Black's overworked queen is a woman of manifold defensive preoccupations. Moreover, after 13 ... Qd8 (13 ... Qxa3 14 Qe4 wins the exchange) 14 Bxe7 Kxe7 (unfortunately necessary, since 14 ... Qxe7?? hangs heavy material to 15 Qe4) 15 Ne5 Black's unsafe king is a deep source of concern for Black, M.Narciso Dublan-N.Medvegy, Andorra 2001.



13 d5!

Principle: *Open the game and create confrontation when leading in development.*
Alternatives:

a) 13 Ng5 Nd7 14 f4 was R.Banegas Gomez-D.Komljenovic, Burriana 1990. At this point Black should play 14 ... g6, and if 15 d5 Nf6 16 Qb5+ (16 dxe6?? would be a wee bit of a mistake after 16 ... Bc5+, winning White's queen) 16 ... Qd7 17 Qxd7+ Kxd7! 18 Nxf7 Bc5+ 19 Kh1 Rhe8 20 Ne5+ Kc7 21 dxe6 Rxe6 Black achieves full compensation for the pawn, due to his development lead, superior structure and active king.

b) 13 Qe4 Nd7 14 Bg5 Qc8 15 Qg4 h5! 16 Qh3 was N.Pedersen-Z.Jasnikowski, Aarhus 1996, and here Black can try 16 ... Qxc3!? 17 Rac1 Qa5 18 d5 0-0! 19 Qxh5 (19 dxe6 Ne5 is fine for Black) 19 ... Qxa2 20 Rcd1 Rac8 21 dxe6 Qxe6 22 Rfe1 Ne5 23 Bf4 f6 24 Bxe5 Bxe5 25 Nxe5 fxe5 26 Rxe5 Qf7. I prefer Black's chances, due to the two queenside passers.

13 ... Be7!

Opening the game with 13 ... exd5?? is suicide after 14 Re1+ Kf8 15 Bg5 Qc7 16 Qxd5 Nc6 17 Rad1 Bc5 18 Ne5! when the defence is overloaded, due to the weak back rank, combined with the pinned black knight.

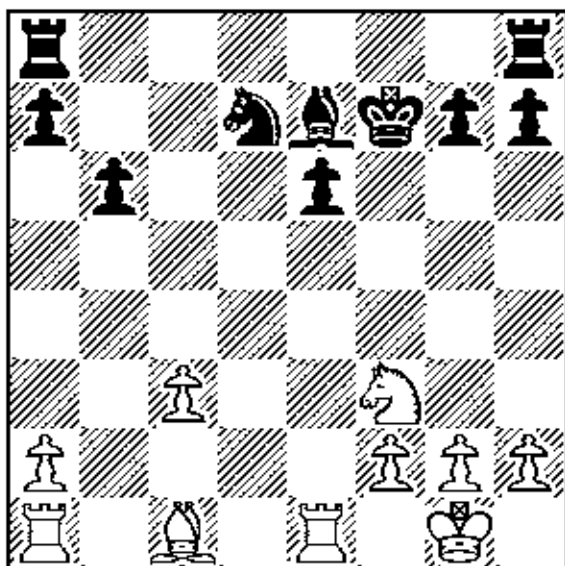
14 Qb5+

Theory ends here. The shady looking sacrifice 14 Qe2?! is certainly no improvement. White doesn't get enough for the pawn after 14 ... Qxd5 15 Rd1 Qb7, N.Khurtsidze-Zhao Xue, Batumi 2012.

14 ... Qd7 15 Qxd7+

15 a4 may be a slight improvement, although even here after 15 ... a6 16 Qxd7+ Nxd7 Black looks fine.

15 ... Nxd7 16 dxe6 fxe6 17 Re1 Kf7



I actually slightly prefer Black in the ending, for the following reasons:

1. White's c3-pawn looks weaker than the one on e6.
2. Black's king is already active.
3. Black leads slightly in development.

18 Bg5

I don't like this move. 18 Bf4 is better, fighting for control over e5.

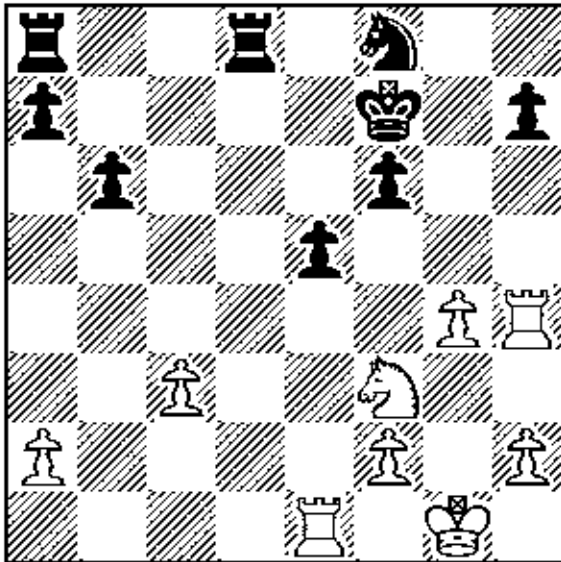
18 ... Bf6 19 Rad1 Rhd8 20 Bxf6!?

Now Black gets a greater central pawn influence. Maybe White should have gone with the more patient 20 h4.

20 ... gxf6 21 Rd4?!

This rook is just out of play on the fourth rank. White gets better chances of holding the game after 21 Nd4 Nc5 22 Nc6 Rxd1 23 Rxd1 e5 24 f3.

21 ... e5 22 Rh4 Nf8 23 g4?!



It's one thing to make an inaccuracy, and quite another to double down by compounding the first dubious move with an unrepentant second one. It feels as if once prudent decisions are being replaced by rash ones. To a no-compromise, ultra-aggressive player, to think is to act. With this move White proceeds with the eager innocence of the optimist, intending to undermine with g5, which weakens White more than it does Black.

23 ... Rd3

Double attack on f3 and c3.

24 Rh3 Kg7

Most certainly not 24 ... Rxc3?? 25 Nxe5+ which hangs the exchange.

25 g5 Rc8?!

The immediate 25 ... Rxc3! 26 Rg3 Ng6 offers White zero compensation for the lost

pawn.

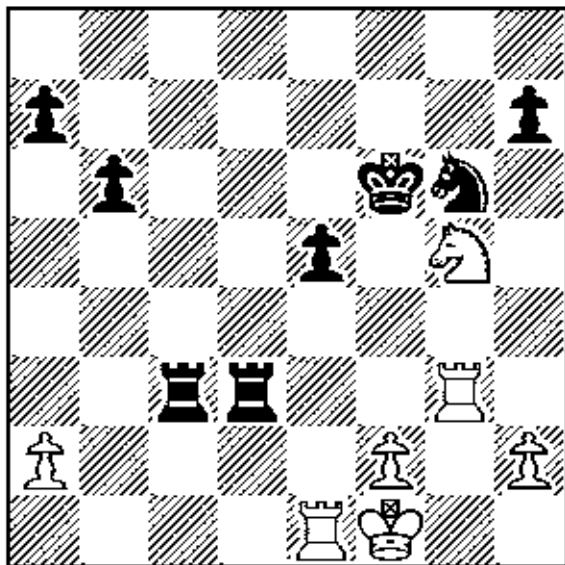
26 Rg3?!

Missing 26 gxf6+ Kxf6 27 Rh6+ Kg7 28 Nxe5 Kxh6 29 Nxd3 Rxc3 when Black's edge is unlikely to be converted.

26 ... Ng6 27 gxf6+ Kxf6 28 Kf1 Rcx3

Now White is just down a pawn, with the inferior structure – in fact, every remaining pawn is isolated.

29 Ng5



29 ... Rxg3

Question: Why did Black agree to this partial fix of White's structure?

Answer: If 29 ... Kf5 30 Ne4 Ra3 31 Rg5+ Kf4 32 Rg3 and Black may have to chop on g3 in any case.

30 Ne4+ Kf5 31 hxg3 Rc2

My preference would be for 31 ... Ra3.

32 a3 Ne7 33 Nd6+ Ke6 34 Nb5 Rc5!

Covering a7 indirectly.

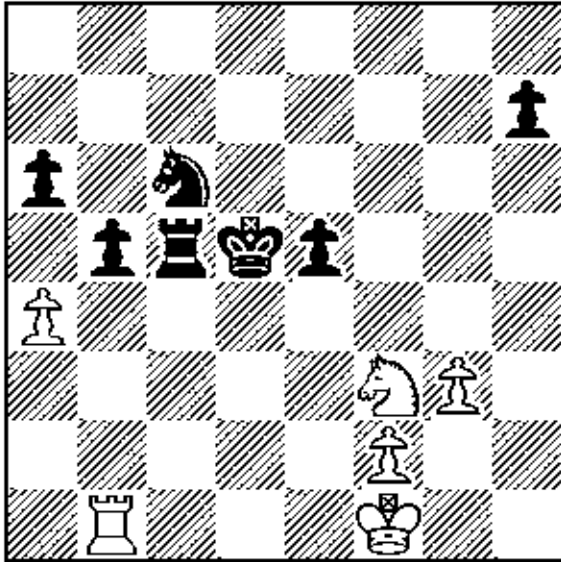
35 a4

35 Nxa7?? Ra5 traps the wayward knight.

35 ... a6 36 Nd4+ Kd5

Black makes good use of his king, which will help push forward his future queenside passed pawn.

37 Nf3 Nc6 38 Rb1 b5



The passed b-pawn is ready to march, unopposed.

39 axb5 axb5 40 g4 Nd4?!

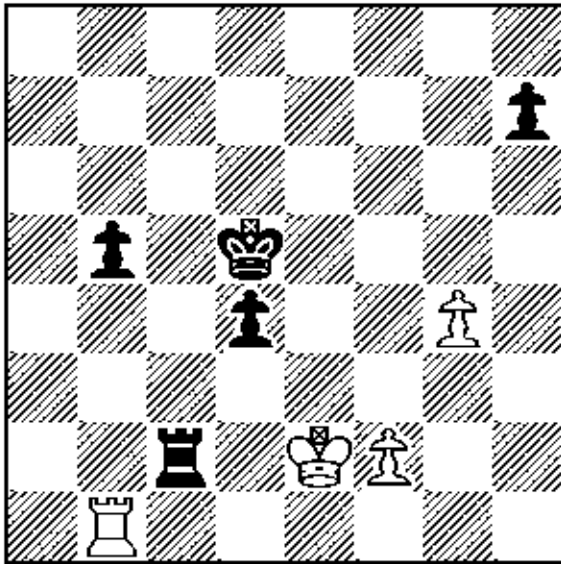
Black wants to simplify, but this move complicates his task. 40 ... b4 41 Nd2 Rc2 42 Ke1 Rc3 leaves White hopelessly tied down to Black's passed b-pawn.

41 Nxd4 exd4

This move makes it a race of majorities.

41 ... Kxd4 isn't so easy to convert after 42 Ke2 Rc2+ 43 Kf3 e4+ 44 Kg3 Rc3+ 45 Kg2 Rc5 (45 ... Kc4 46 Rh1 b4 47 Rxh7 b3 48 g5!! looks like a terrible miscalculation, since Black promotes well before White; however, after 48 ... b2 49 Rb7 Rb3 50 Rxb3! Kxb3 51 g6 b1Q we have bizarre geometry – Black queens with a move to spare, yet he has no way of halting White's g-pawn, since his loutish king and e-pawn block his newly-minted queen) 46 Kg3 Kd3 47 Kf4 (now Black experiences trouble making progress) 47 ... Kc2 48 Rh1 b4 49 Rxh7 b3 50 Kxe4 b2 51 Rb7 b1Q 52 Rxb1 Kxb1. This position is drawn according to my endgame tablebase, yet in a real game, I can easily see Black miscalculating and losing.

42 Ke2 Rc2+



Exercise (critical decision): To which square should White's king move to?

43 Kd3?

Only with hindsight do we understand the meaning of our errors. The logical process is sometimes upended by a sudden, fanciful leap of illogic. In single-answer positions, our lines are subject to invalidation by a comp's suggestion of a single odd move. This natural move allows Black's king into c4 with decisive effect.

Answer: The atonal 43 Kd1! should hold the draw. This illogical move feels oddly askew to the position's requirements, and its viability strains credulity, since we are taught to centralize – not back down. Yet it works, since it creates a double attack on the c2-rook and the b5-pawn. Indeed, after 43 ... Rc5 44 Kd2 Ke4 45 Re1+ Kf3 46 Re7 Kxg4 47 Rxh7 Black can no longer win.

43 ... Rc3+ 44 Kd2 Kc4

Now White is too slow in the mutual queening races.

45 Rh1 Rf3?!

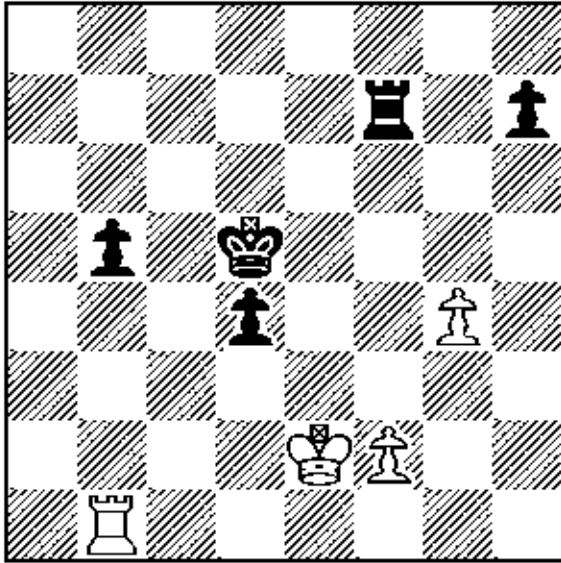
A move based on the thought: the most basic principle of a bug exterminator is that it isn't enough to kill all the insects in the infestation; you must also wipe out the larval offspring. So Black attacks White's f-pawn, the source of his kingside pawn majority to gain a tempo to defend h7. This isn't the kind of position which lends itself to a step-by-step sequential formula. Each move we make seems to come with unknown – and possibly dangerous – consequences.

There is no need to defend h7. Black should just get on with the promotion project with 45 ... d3! 46 Rxh7 Rc2+ 47 Ke3 Re2+ (this cuts White's king off) 48 Kf3 Re5 49 Kf4 d2 winning, since 50 Rd7 is met with the interference move 50 ... Rd5.

46 Ke2 Rf7 47 Rc1+ Kd5

47 ... Kb3! 48 Kd3 Rxf2 49 Rh1 Rg2 50 Rh4 (50 Rxh7 Rxd4 Black wins) 50 ... b4
51 Kxd4 Kc2 is decisive.

48 Rb1

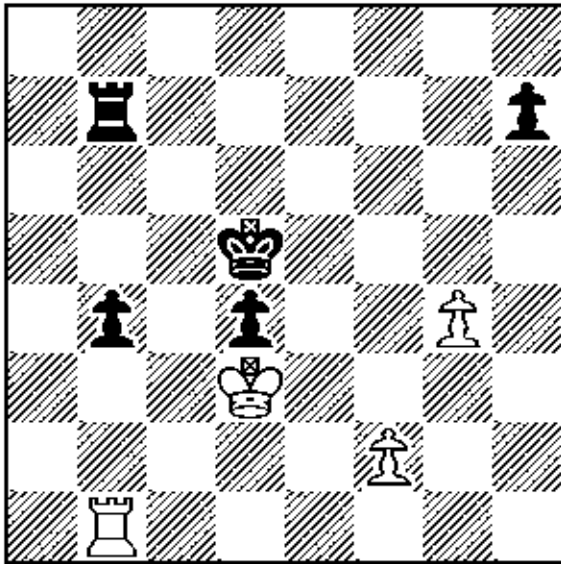


48 ... Rb7?

Question: Why a question mark? Black follows
the principle: *rooks belong behind passed pawns*.

Answer: Yet, this move is an exception. Our bureaucratic mind loves to memorize
an organization's guiding principles, and then apply them in all situations – whether
warranted or not. Black's first priority should be king entry with 48 ... Kc4! 49 Rc1+
Kb3 50 Kd3 Rxf2 51 Kxd4 Rf4+. Black wins, since 52 Kc5 is met with 52 ... Rc4+ 53
Rxc4 bxc4.

49 Kd3 b4



Exercise (critical decision): Up until now, if we made a graph of White's position, we would draw a line of gradually sloping depression. Should White activate his majority with 50 f4, or should he begin a counterattack with 50 Rh1? One line draws, while the other loses.

50 Rh1?

Neglect opportunity, and like a spurned girlfriend, it's unlikely to return. How irritating when our efforts come to fruition, but not the fruition we so desperately desired.

Answer: Activation of the majority holds the draw after 50 f4! b3 51 g5 Re7 52 f5! Re3+ 53 Kd2 Rg3 54 f6 Rxg5 55 Rxb3 Rg2+ 56 Ke1! Ke6 57 Rb7.

50 ... b3 51 Rh5+ Ke6 52 f4 b2 53 Rh6+ Kd5

And not 53 ... Kf7??, which hangs a rook to 54 Rxh7+.

54 Rh5+ Kd6 55 Rh6+ Kc5 56 Rh5+ Kb4!

The back-and-forthing reaches its conclusion with the black king's entry to b4.

57 Kc2 Kc4

Threatening to promote his b-pawn. This forces White's king back.

58 Kb1

Alternatively, 58 Rh1 d3+ 59 Kb1 and now the deflection trick wins after 59 ... d2! 60 Kc2 (or 60 Rd1 Kc3 61 Rf1 Ra7 62 Rf3+ Kc4) 60 ... b1Q+ 61 Rxb1 Rxb1.

58 ... d3 59 f5 d2 0-1

After 60 Rh1 (the rook's eyes dart about nervously, yet find no comforting sight on which to settle) 60 ... Re7! there is no answer to the coming ... Re1, which spells game over.

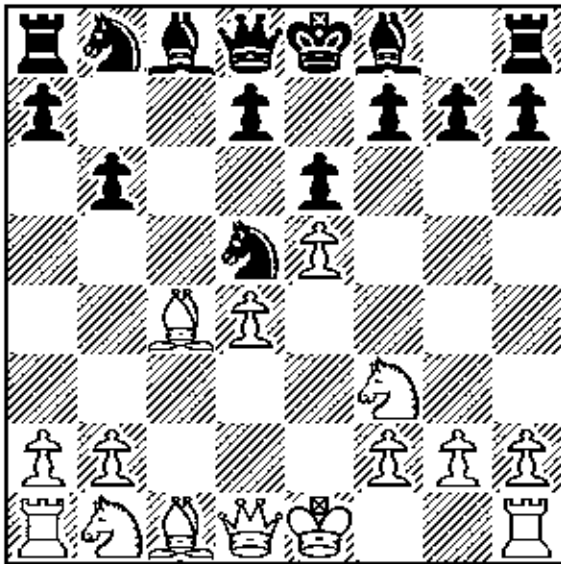
Summary: We can turn 7 Bd3 into a bit of a milquetoast line for our opponent with 7 ... Ba6! which removes White's best attacker from the board. Also, you may want to consider removing your king from the centre with 11 ... 0-0!, before playing for ... d5 (or ... d6), which may be Black's safest path to equality.

Game 5

N.Petrov-D.Khismatullin

Moscow 2015

1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 Nf3 e6 5 d4 cxd4 6 cxd4 b6 7 Bc4



I used to be afraid of this continuation, which challenges our fundamental preconceptions about our position, and still believe it is one of White's most dangerous lines of the chapter.

Question: Why? This move seems futile, since d5 is well covered by the Black's light-squared bishop.

Answer: Our d5 point is not as secure as it looks. White may soon chop on d5. After Black recaptures with his bishop, White plays Nc3. Then if Black's bishop retreats to b7, White may implement d5, with a scary development lead for White. Now saying all this, Black can neutralize this plan with exact play.

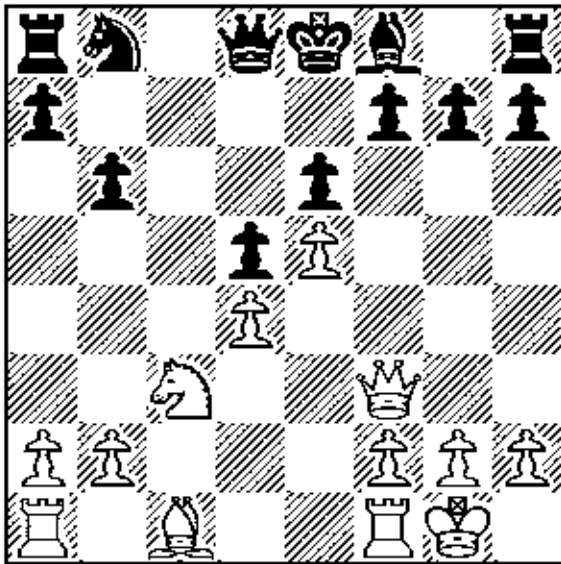
7 ... Bb7

Also very playable is the line 7 ... Ba6!?, which is in essence, a pawn sacrifice. With 8 Bxd5 exd5 9 Nc3 Bb4 10 Qb3 Nc6 11 Qxd5 White has won a pawn, at a strategic cost. Black gets compensation due to his light-square control, and White's loss

of kingside castling, as in A.Mishin-B.Firat, Pardubice 2014. Computer analysis continues: 11 ... 0-0 12 Bd2 Rc8 13 Qe4 f6 (White's king is stuck in the centre, so Black logically opens central lines) 14 Nd5 Bxd2+ 15 Kxd2 Qe8 16 Rac1 Qe6. I prefer Black's chances against White's exposed king, which looks more important than his extra pawn.

8 0-0 d6 9 Bg5

White can also implement his core idea without tossing in this bishop swap. Indeed, 9 Bxd5 may be White's most dangerous option, reaching a tricky position after 9 ... Bxd5 10 Nc3 Bxf3 (10 ... Bb7 11 d5 scores well for Black, but I don't trust it at all; White's development lead is just too formidable) 11 Qxf3 d5.



White leads massively in development and also holds a space advantage with the e5 point, which may later translate into a kingside attack. On Black's side, the position remains closed, and he has an ideal Advance French structure, without any bad bishop. After 12 Bg5 Qd7 13 Rac1 Nc6 White can try:

a) 14 Rfd1 Be7 15 Nb5 0-0 16 Bf6! Nxe5!? (discovered attack; a much safer continuation is 16 ... Rfc8 17 Bxe7 Nxe7 18 Nd6 Rf8 19 Rd3 Nc8 20 Nxc8 Raxc8 21 Rdc3 Rxc3 22 Qxc3 g6 and Black should be fine, despite White's ownership of the f-file) 17 dxe5 Bxf6 18 exf6 Qxb5 19 Qg4 (19 Qg3! is slightly more accurate, since then White's queen can operate along the dark squares, exploiting Black's weakness) 19 ... g6 20 Qf4 Kh8 21 Qh6 Rg8 22 Rc7 Qe2! (reminding White about his own weak back rank) 23 Rdc1 Rf8 (Black threatens ... Qe5, picking off f6, which forces a concession from White on his next move) 24 Qg5 d4 and as it turns out, the game is dynamically balanced and the players fight each other to a draw, N.McDonald-B.Annakov, Hastings 1999/2000.

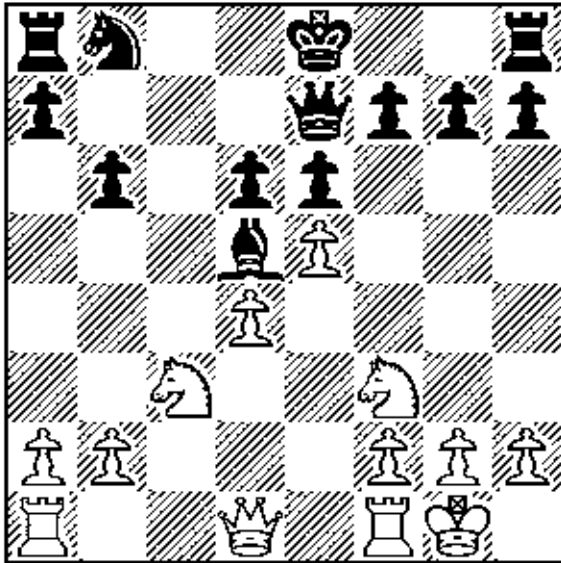
b) The untried 14 Nb5! is dangerous for Black: 14 ... h6 (14 ... a6 is met with 15

Rxc6! Qxc6 16 Rc1 Qxc1+ – forced, otherwise Rc7 is decisive – 17 Bxc1 axb5 18 Qd3 Ra5 19 Bd2 b4 20 Qb3 Kd7, which looks better for White) 15 Bf4 Be7 16 Qc3 Rc8 17 Nd6+ Bxd6 18 exd6 0-0 19 Qe3 and White may stand a shade better since his d6-pawn continues to tie Black down. Black can maybe play for a plan to implement an ... e5 break, with ... Rfe8, ... f6 and ... e5.

9 ... Be7 10 Bxd5

A key ingredient to White's opening idea.

10 ... Bxd5 11 Bxe7 Qxe7 12 Nc3



12 ... Bb7

In this position the bishop is worth keeping.

Question: Can Black opt for the Advance French plan with 12 ... Bxf3 13 Qxf3 d5?

Answer: Not this time. White wins through a tactic, with 14 Nxd5! and if 14 ... Qd8 15 Nf6+ (clearance) 15 ... gxf6 16 Qxa8, which leaves Black down an exchange and a pawn, in a resignable position.

13 d5

Question: This looks a bit scary for Black. White leads in development, with an open centre and multiple pawn confrontations. Is Black in danger?

Answer: The comps say the game is even. The trick is to ignore the central provocations and remove our king immediately from the centre.

13 ... 0-0!

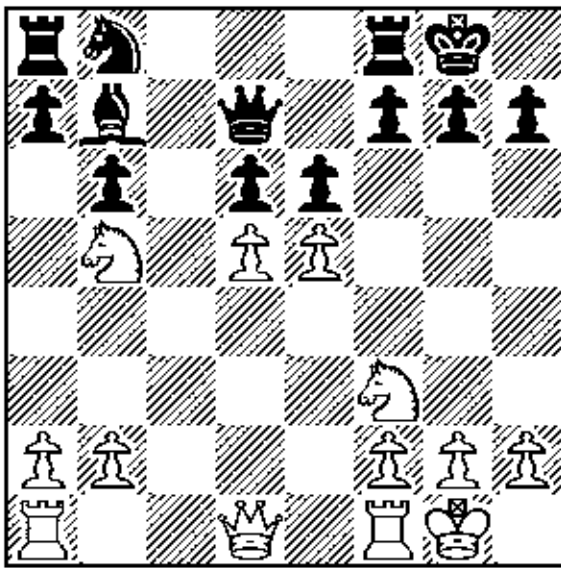
As it turns out, White has no favourable way to increase the central pressure.

14 Nb5

White opts for a forcing line. 14 Re1 can be met with 14 ... dxe5 15 Nxe5 (or 15 d6 Qf6 16 Nxe5 Rd8 17 Qd2 Nd7 18 f4 Rac8 19 Rad1 with a sharp position where it isn't completely clear if White's d6-pawn is a strength or a weakness) 15 ... Na6 and I don't think White has anything. Indeed, 16 d6 looks more risky for White than to Black, since the passed d-pawn may later fall: 16 ... Qg5 17 Nf3 Qg4 18 h3 Qf4 19 Qd4 Qxd4 20 Nxd4 Rfd8 21 Ndb5 Rd7 and I like Black's chances to round up the d6-pawn in the future.

14 ... Qd7!

A new move and a possible improvement over the older 14 ... dxe5 15 d6 Qd7 16 Nc7 (White wins the exchange, at some cost) 16 ... Nc6 (also possible is 16 ... f6 17 Rc1 Na6 18 Nxa8 Bxa8 19 Qe2 Nb4 20 Rc7 Qxd6 21 Rxa7 Qb8 when Black looks okay, with a pawn for the exchange, a powerful centre and a d5 outpost) 17 Nxa8 Bxa8 18 Rc1 of F.Jenni-J.Werle, German League 2008. Black has compensation for the exchange, although if given a choice I would still take White.



15 Nxd6

Question: Can White sacrifice a piece for two deeply entrenched pawns with the line 15 dxe6 Qxb5 16 e7 Re8 17 exd6?

Answer: Your idea looks quite playable. *Houdini* assesses at '0.00'. Let's go deeper: 17 ... Nd7 18 Rc1 Rac8 19 Rxc8 Bxc8 20 Qd4 Bb7 21 Rd1 (21 Rc1?? Bxf3 and the problem is if the bishop is captured, then ... Qg5+ picks up the loose c1-rook) 21 ... Bxf3 22 gxf3 Qg5+ 23 Kf1 Qh5 24 Kg2 Qg5+ 25 Kf1 h5 with a draw, unless White opts for 26 h4 Qf5 27 Rd3 Qe6 28 Rc3 Qxa2 29 Rc7 Qe6 30 Rxa7 Ne5 31 d7

Nxd7 32 Qxd7 Qxd7 33 Rxd7 f6 34 b4 Kf7 35 Rb7 Rxe7 36 Rxb6 Rc7. Black should hold the draw without much trouble, due to White's broken kingside pawns.

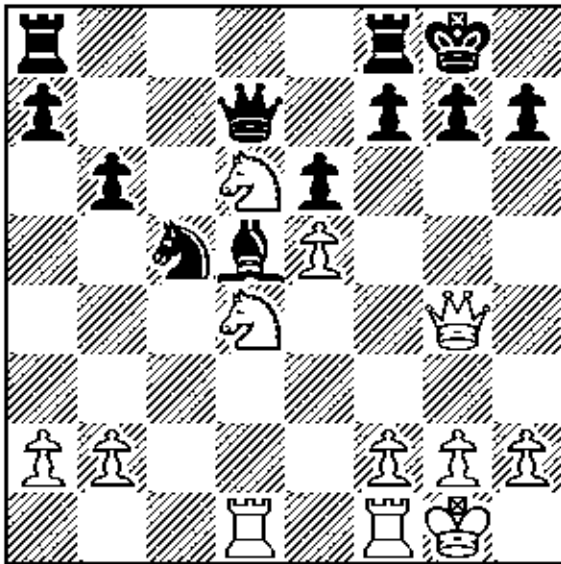
15 ... Bxd5 16 Nd4 Na6

Black equalized since he controls d5, which neutralizes White's powerfully cramping d6-knight.

17 Qg4

White's intuition posits the formation of a future attack, even if evidence of it is lacking in the present. He perhaps dreams of one day lifting a rook to g3. It's a tempting move, since king safety is not a natural endowment for our side in this chapter.

17 ... Nc5 18 Rad1



18 ... f5!?

After this decision, White's d6-knight sits as contentedly as a toad on a lily pad, with no reason to move away. It probably isn't a good idea to leave White's e5 point unchallenged. Black should begin the undermining process with 18 ... f6! 19 f4 fxe5 20 fxe5 Qa4! (attacking a2 while pinning the d4-knight) 21 a3 Nb3! 22 Rfe1 Rad8 23 Rd3 Nxd4 24 Rxd4 Qc2 25 Qe2 Qxe2 26 Rxe2 Rd7 27 Rc2 h6 and Black stands no worse in the ending.

19 Qg5?!

White seems to be grappling with hidden agendas. This move essentially drops a pawn. 19 Qh3! secures White's a-pawn, since if 19 ... Bxa2?? 20 b3 and Black's bishop is going to be trapped. When we get swindled from a good position, it almost feels as if random chance overpowers probability.

19 ... Bxa2

White's position is full of pockets, ripe for picking. Black won a pawn, yet White still holds some compensation for it, mainly due to the choking influence of his d6-

knight.

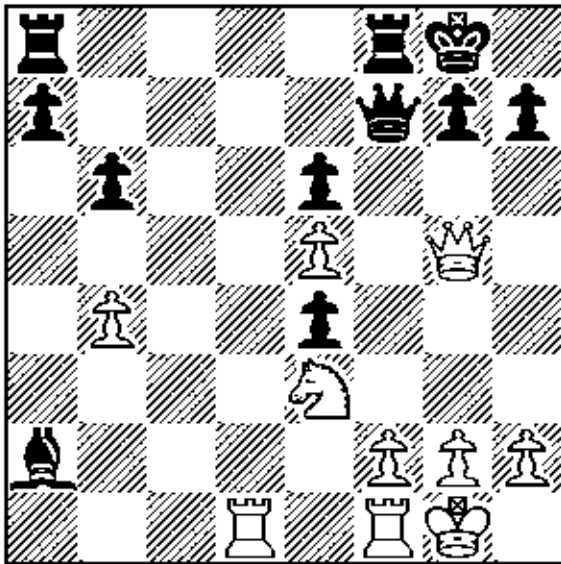
20 b4?!

Following 20 Rfe1 a5 21 Ne2 Qd8 22 Qh5 Bb3 23 Rd4 Qe7 *Houdini* claims White has full compensation for the pawn, while I would take Black's position any day of the week. Still, this is a big improvement over the way White played it in the game.

20 ... Ne4!

In a pyramidal authority structure, if the peak goes haywire, the remainder of the base freezes in indecision. It's crucial for Black to eliminate that annoying d6-knight, White's most influential piece.

21 Nxe4 fxe4 22 Nc2 Qf7 23 Ne3



Exercise (planning): We sense that the advantage has swung to Black's side. Now prove it by coming up with a concrete plan.

Answer: Creation of a passed pawn, which preoccupies White by its threat to advance.

23 ... a5! 24 bxa5 bxa5

The opaque is made transparent. Nobody is there to halt the a-pawn's run down the board.

25 Rd4

25 Qg4 Bb3 26 Ra1 a4 27 Qxe4 Qf4 28 Qxf4 Rxf4 29 f3 Rd4 30 Rfb1 Rc8 also looks quite grim for White, who is highly unlikely to save himself.

25 ... a4 26 Rxe4

White regained his lost pawn, at the high cost of allowing Black's passed a-pawn much deeper down the board.

26 ... a3 27 Rb4

The idea is to try and cut off safe squares for the bishop, with Ra1 coming next. White doesn't have time for this.

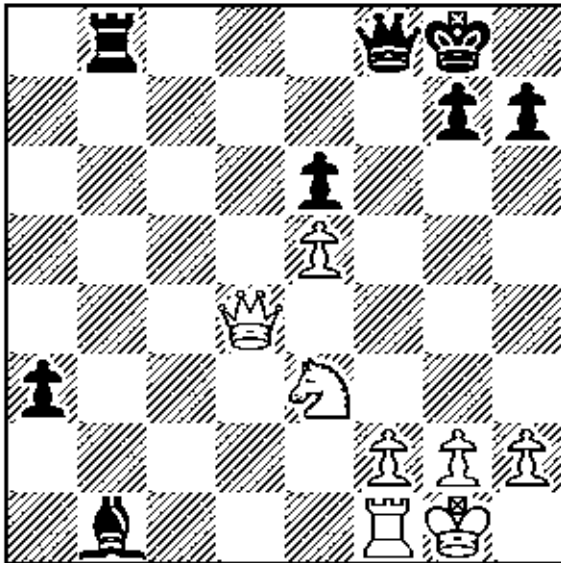
27 ... Rfb8 28 Qh4 Qf8!

The queen's hatefully narrowing eyes are a firm promise of future retribution. Black cleverly seizes control over the b-file. Also effective was the simple 28 ... Bb3! intending ... a2.

29 Rxb8

Atonement for our blunders may cleanse the spirit, but it fails to erase the past, for which we must pay for in the present. 29 Rf4 is met with the jarring response 29 ... Qxf4!! 30 Qxf4 Bb1! 31 Qd4 a2 32 Qa1 Bd3 33 Rd1 Rb1 34 f3 Rxa1 35 Rxa1 Bb1 when White's rook will never see the light of day again and 36 Nd1, intending Nd3, is met effectively with 36 ... Rc8.

29 ... Rxb8 30 Qd4 Bb1!



Black clears the way for ... a2, without even allowing Ra1. White's counterplay comes to its conclusion and I don't see any defensive ideas for an encore.

31 Nc4

After 31 Nd1 a2 32 Qa1 Qc5 White can barely move.

31 ... Qb4

Pinning the knight.

32 Qa7 a2

The comp says this is actually stronger than the simple win 32 ... Bd3 33 Qxa3 Bxf1 34 Qxb4 Rxb4 35 Ne3 Bd3 with an extra rook for Black.

33 Nd6 Rf8!

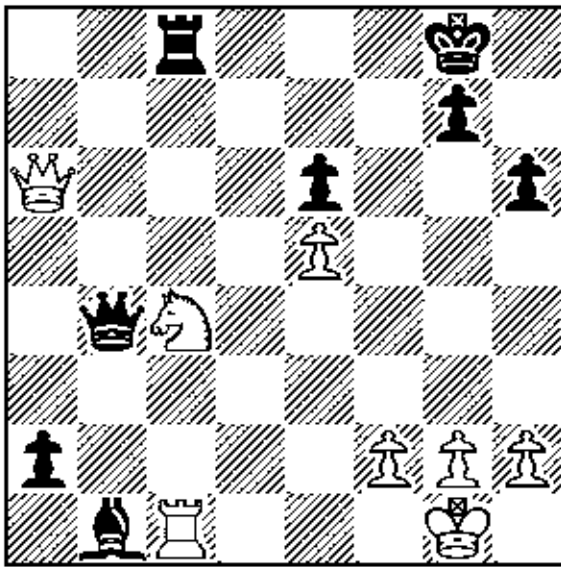
Threat: ... Qb2 (or ... Qc3) and ... a1Q. All of White's defensive problems seem to

have amalgamated into a single issue: how to prevent Black's attempted pawn promotion?

34 Rc1 h6

An unnecessary precaution. This move is made with the philosophy: when you are in command of a position, little is to be gained by a sense of urgency. Some overactive defensive instinct withholds Khismatullin from the immediate 34 ... Qb2! (this move translates Black's strategic superiority into tangible abundance) 35 Qc5 a1Q and I am at a loss of how to proceed with White when he is down a full queen for one pawn.

35 Nc4 Rc8 36 Qa6



In a terminally ill organism, even the currently healthy cells are doomed by the sick ones. Black's position throbs with forward-looking energy.

Question: How did Black force the win?

Answer: Deflection/removal of a key defender/weak back rank.

36 ... Rxc4!

"Take care to avoid deficiency in reverence toward your betters," the rook warns White's queen and rook.

37 Qxe6+

37 Rxc4 fails rather miserably to 37 ... Qe1 mate. White's queen sighs sadly, conjecting that perhaps many years ago, her incompetent husband was a victim of shaken baby syndrome.

37 ... Kh7 0-1

There is no stopping Black's promotion after 38 Qxc4 Qxc4 39 Rxc4 Bc2!. A martyr's nature is to derive ecstasy from his own suffering.

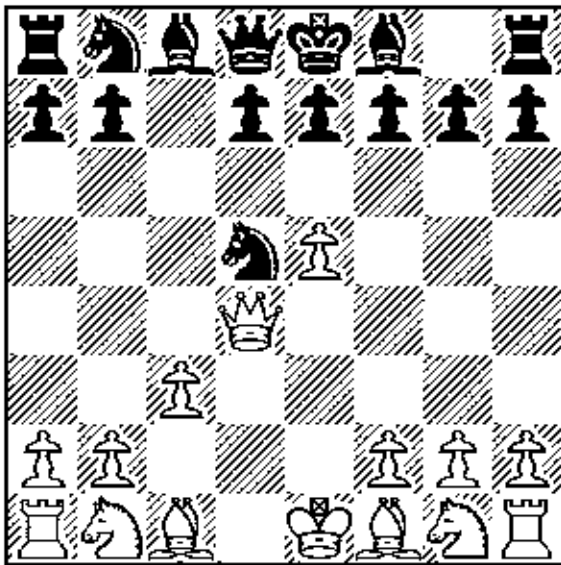
Summary: In my opinion 7 Bc4 is one of our biggest threats of the chapter. Know it well. If you don't like the position Black got in the game, then you can also opt for 7 ... Ba6, which is a sound pawn sacrifice on our part.

Game 6

D.Pirrot-A.Rotstein

Bad Wörishofen 2003

1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 d4 cxd4 5 Qxd4



With the queen's capture on d4, we get a completely different kind of position than the ones we looked at earlier in the chapter.

Question: Why would White take on d4 with the queen? It loses a tempo to a coming ... Nc6.

Answer: For White, the entire line looks like ambition outstripping ability. The move makes little sense to me either, but then again, I also play the Scandinavian, 1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Qxd5, so I am in no position to criticize the move. The 5 Qxd4 line isn't played very often, and is mainly used as a surprise weapon to throw Black off, theoretically.

5 ... e6 6 Nf3

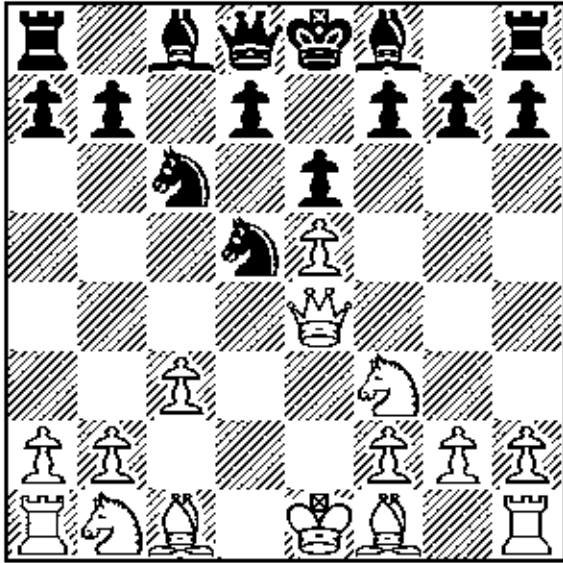
After 6 Bc4 Nc6 7 Qe4 Nb6 8 Bb3 d5 9 exd6 Bxd6 10 Nf3 Qc7 11 Be3 Bd7 12 Nbd2 Na5 13 Bxb6 axb6 I already prefer Black, who owns the superior pawn majority, and also the bishop-pair. Following 14 Bc2 f5 15 Qe2 0-0 16 0-0 e5 (threat: ... e4 and ... Bxh2+) 17 h3 Rae8 Black's kingside majority looms menacingly and he is ideally

placed to launch an attack, I.Asmundsson-H.Stefansson, Hafnarborg 2003.

6 ... Nc6

And here is our free tempo.

7 Qe4



7 ... b6!?

Question: Isn't 7 ... f5 Black's main move here?

Answer: It is. I suggest 7 ... b6 for the following reasons:

1. Your opponent, who probably played this to surprise you, may receive a surprise him or herself, with this rare line.
2. The position we reach after 7 ... b6 fits well with the earlier games of the chapter, so it's just a matter of consistency.
3. White's queen won't feel comfortable on e4, since Black's bishop watches the square after ... Bb7.
4. 7 ... b6 outscores all its competitors in the stats, where White scores a dismal 32.5%, from 60 games played.

8 g3?!

Now White's game teeters on the brink of strategic insolvency. He decides to neutralize Black's coming ... Bb7 with a fianchettoed bishop on g2. However, the idea fails to intermesh with the position's dictates. What he underestimated, or failed to consider, was that Black is by no means obliged to play his bishop to b7, since a6 will be available the second White vacates the f1-a6 diagonal. Preferable are:

a) 8 Bc4 Nde7 (Black's knight re-routes to g6, where it applies pressure to e5) 9 0-0 Bb7 (strategic threat: ... Na5 and ... Nxc4) 10 Qe2 (this is the third move with the

queen, who felt uncomfortable on e4) 10 ... Ng6 11 Re1 Qc7 12 Nbd2 d6 (Black's firepower on e5 forces White to swap on d6) 13 exd6 Bxd6 14 Ne4 Bf4 and White got nothing from the opening, F.Caruana-D.Antic, Budapest 2006.

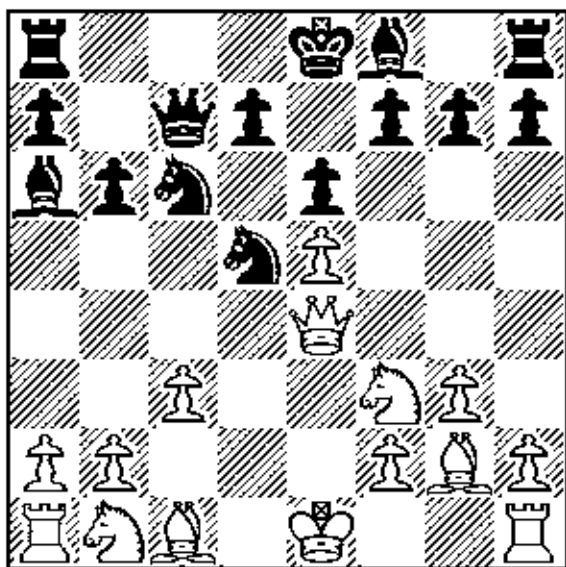
b) After 8 Nbd2 Black must watch out for Nc4: 8 ... Bb7 9 Bd3 Qc7 10 0-0 f5 11 exf6 gxf6 12 Qh4 0-0-0 left Black's chances no worse in the coming opposite-wings attacks, since he can utilize the open g-file and controls a greater share of the centre, W.Kaunz-A.Murariu, Arad 2013.

c) 8 Bd3 Bb7 9 0-0 Qc7 10 Re1 Nde7 (the same manoeuvre as in line 'a') 11 Na3 a6 (covering against Nb5) 12 Qe2 (yet another tempo loss) 12 ... Ng6 13 Nc2 (13 Nc4?! b5 14 Nd6+ Bxd6 15 exd6 Qxd6 doesn't look like a sound sacrifice on White's part) 13 ... d6 14 exd6 Bxd6 and Black equalized, A.Balberov-I.Khairullin, Sochi 2005.

8 ... Qc7 9 Bg2

Consistent yet incorrect. Our past inaccuracies are the accomplices to our opponent's future combination. Sometimes our inner voice deceives us with a dubious plan, by telling us what we want to hear, and not what we truly believe. White should admit that his kingside fianchetto plan went awry and just play the unnatural 9 Bd3 with an inferior version of the above notes. With 9 ... Ncb4 10 Bb5 Bb7 11 Qe2 Ne7 12 0-0 a6 13 Ba4 b5 14 a3 Bxf3 15 Qxf3 Nbc6 16 Bc2 Rc8 17 Re1 Nxe5 18 Qe2 N7c6 White at least gets a modicum of play for his lost pawn.

9 ... Ba6!



The wizard's spells compel absolute obedience. White is unable to castle.

10 b3?!

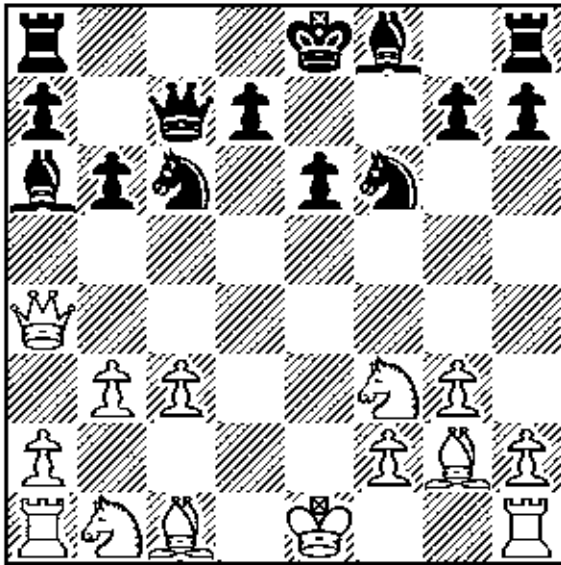
This move allows Black a winning attack.

Question: Why can't White remedy this issue with the immediate 10 c4?

Answer: It was the lesser evil. Black responds with 10 ... Rc8! 11 Nbd2 (not 11 cxd5? Nxe5 12 Nc3 Nd3+ 13 Kd2 Bb4 14 Qd4 f6 – threat: ... e5 – 15 d6 Bxd6 16 Bf1 Bc5 when Black has a winning attack, while 11 b3 f5 12 exf6 Nxf6 13 Qe2 b5! 14 0-0 bxc4 15 Nbd2 Na5 16 Ne5 Bb4 17 Rb1 0-0 18 Ndxc4 Nxc4 19 bxc4 Bxc4 20 Qxc4 Qxc4 21 Nxc4 Rxc4 leaves White with insufficient compensation for the pawn) 11 ... f5 12 exf6 Nxf6 13 Qe2 Nb4 (threatening a fork on c2, as well as ... Bxc4) 14 0-0 Bxc4 15 Nxc4 Qxc4 16 Qxc4 Rxc4 17 a3 Nd3 18 Rd1 Nxc1 19 Raxc1 Rxc1 20 Rxc1 Kd8 21 Ng5 Rg8 and Black remains up a pawn.

10 ... f5 11 exf6 Nxf6 12 Qa4

Alternatively, 12 Bf4 Nxe4 13 Bxc7 Rc8 14 Ne5 (14 Bf4 Bc5 15 Be3 Bxe3 16 fxe3 Nb4 is awful for White) 14 ... Nc5 15 Nxc6 dxc6 16 Bf4 Nd3+ 17 Kd2 Nxf4 18 gxf4 Bd6 and White is busted.



Exercise (combination alert): Sometimes compelling circumstantial evidence is the same thing as actual proof. We just sense that something awful is about to happen to White. How did Black take advantage of his huge development lead?

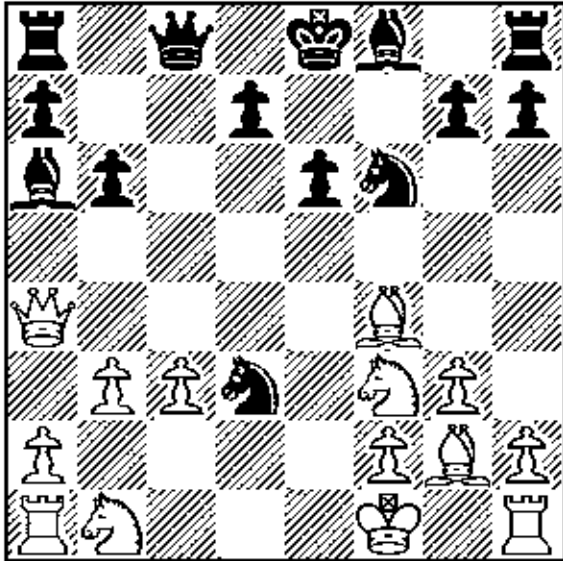
12 ... Nb4!

Answer: Pin. Black's knight works double duty, protecting the a6-bishop, while threatening nasty checks on d3 and c2. When I was a kid, I interpreted chess as a fairytale, with each game containing its individual parable. This game's parable: don't fall behind in development in an open position.

13 Bf4

a) 13 cxb4?? would be a mega-blunder: 13 ... Qxc1 is mate.

13 ... Nd3+ 14 Kf1 Qc8!



1. Black removes his queen from harm's way.

Black's move is much stronger than 14 ... Nxf4+? 15 Qxa6 Nxc2 16 Kxc2 Be7 when White may well survive.

White's defenders are as sluggish as a family who just consumed a diabetes-inducing 4,500 calorie (per person) Thanksgiving dinner. 17 Nbd2 Nd5 18 Bxc5 Nxc3 19 Qh4 Ne2+ 20 Kf1 Qxc5 21 Ne4 Qc2 22 h3 Ndc1 23 Ne1 Qb2 is game over. When we go after an opponent's king, but then win by picking off material, it's the same as arresting a criminal and then immediately freeing him to imprison his family instead.

Black threatens mate on the move.

Or 18 Qd4 Ne4 19 Qxc5 bxc5 20 h3 d5 21 Rh2 Nc1 22 c4 dxc4 23 Nbd2 Ne2+ 24 Kf1 N2xg3+! 25 fxg3 Nxd2+ 26 Ke2 c3+ 27 Ke3 Rad8 and White is crushed.

Threatening mate in two moves. The queen's angry eyes fall upon White's king with

significant emphasis.

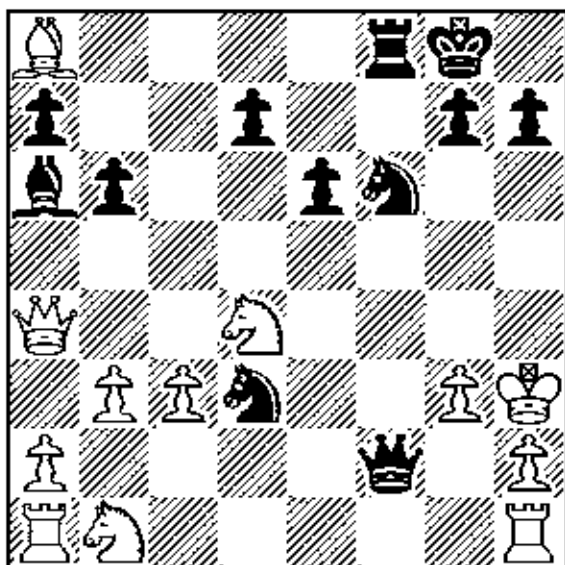
19 Bxa8

The bishop suspects that the gates of heaven will not open for him upon his death. King safety, and not a dire need of funds is White's main problem. White's last move is played with the thought: we *can* take our wealth to our graves. Instead, if 19 Nd2 Nxf2 20 Bxa8 N6g4 21 N4f3 Qe2 22 h3 Nd1! and White can resign.

19 ... Qe1+ 20 Kg2 Qxf2+

"Do not despair, brother. In 40 or 50 years, merciful death will deliver you from the loneliness of your darkened cell," says the queen.

21 Kh3



Exercise (combination alert): White's unfortunate king just entered a cul de sac on h3 and his position is a tangle of grief. In this position fate supplies us with all that we desire, conditionally upon finding the correct path. Black has several way to force the win. Find one of them.

Answer: Mating net.

21 ... Nc5! 0-1

After 22 Qa3 Rxa8 light squares are a commodity in short supply in White's camp, and with 23 Qc1 Bb7 24 Rg1 Nd3 25 Qf1 Qe3 there is no defence to the threat of ... Qh6 mate.

Answer no.2: Even more clear is 21 ... Nf4+! 22 gxf4 Nh5 which forces a quick mate.

Summary: 5 Qxd4 isn't such a great line for White, who is the one fighting for equality. I like our 7 ... b6!?, because the great majority of our opponents will expect

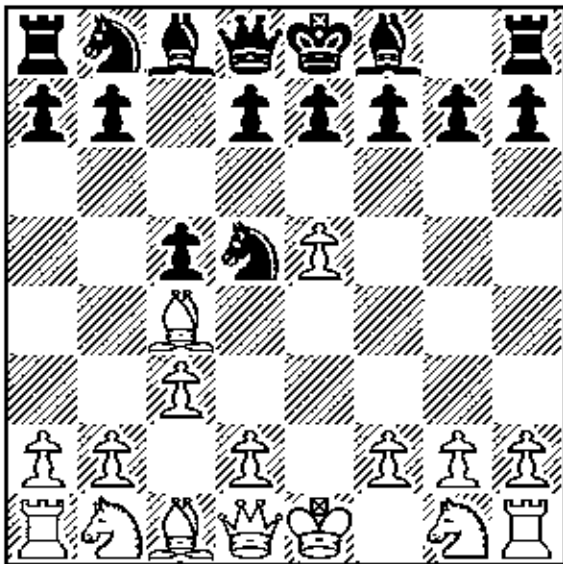
only 7 ... f5.

Game 7

S.Tiviakov-A.Shabalov

Isle of Man 2005

1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 Bc4



Before moving the d-pawn, White develops, while challenging our knight.

4 ... Nb6

Question: Why aren't we going for our normal ... b6 plan?

Answer: This line is the single exception for the entire chapter. I believe Black does better avoiding a ... b6 plan, with the way Shabalov played in the game. If you seek consistency, then go for 4 ... e6 5 Nf3 b6 6 Bxd5!? (risky for White, since he hands over an awful lot of light squares, but if 6 d4 Bb7 7 0-0 Be7 8 Nbd2 cxd4 9 cxd4 f5 10 a3 Na6 and Black equalized) 6 ... exd5 7 0-0 Ba6 8 d3 Be7 9 Re1 0-0 10 d4 d6 11 exd6 Bxd6 12 Bg5 Qd7 13 Nbd2 Nc6 14 Qa4 Bd3 15 dxc5 bxc5 16 Nb3 and Black achieved a slightly favourable hanging pawns position, with the bishop-pair to boot, S.Rublevsky-V.Topalov, Ajaccio (rapid) 2004.

5 Bb3 c4

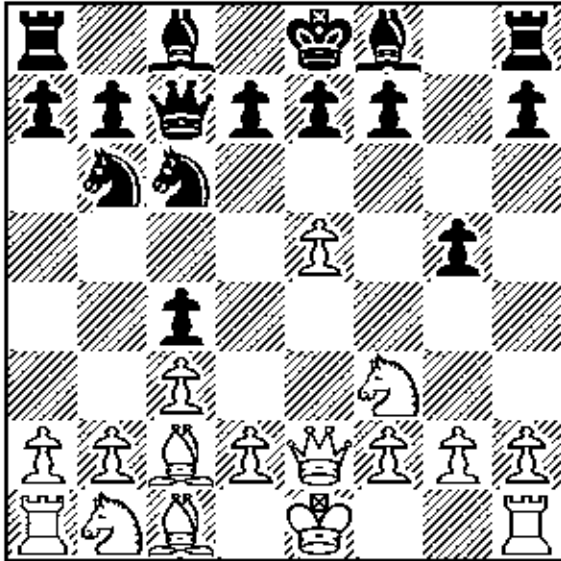
This move becomes annoying for White, since now a pawn push to d4 won't support e5, since Black can capture en passant on d3.

6 Bc2 Nc6 7 Nf3

Question: Can White back up e5 with 7 f4?

Answer: Risky, since it's a non-developing move in an open position. 7 ... d6 8 exd6 Qxd6 9 d4 cxd3 10 Qxd3 was F.Frink-S.Kustar, Hungarian League 1993, when Black stands at least equal after 10 ... Qxd3 11 Bxd3 Be6 12 Nf3 Rd8 13 Bb5 g6.

7 ... Qc7 8 Qe2 g5!



One of Black's best scoring lines and Nimzowitsch approved, challenging the centre from the wings. We see the heart of Black's idea: trade the g-pawn for White's more valuable central e5-pawn.

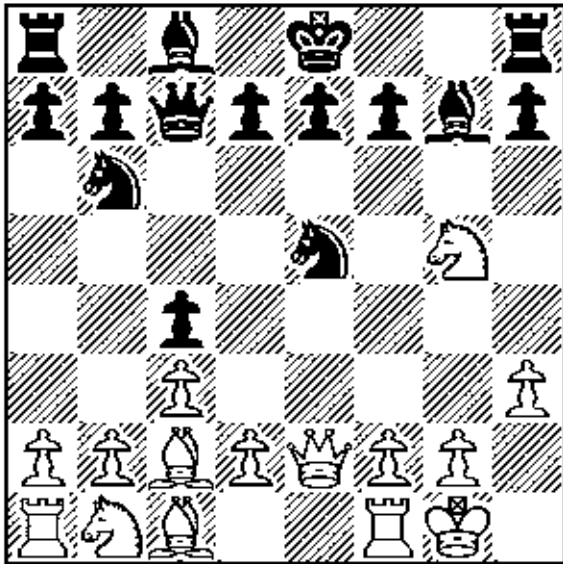
9 h3

The e-pawn comes off the board, no matter how White proceeds:

a) 9 e6 is an attempt to clog Black's development: 9 ... dxe6 10 Nxg5 Qe5 11 d4 (as in S.Tiviakov-L.Van Wely, Enschede 2005; 11 Qxe5?! Nxe5 12 Nxh7?? is far too greedy, as White is busted after the simple 12 ... Bh6) 11 ... Qxe2+ 12 Kxe2 e5 (challenging White's centre) 13 dxe5 Nxe5 14 Be3 Nd3! 15 b3 (Black gets too much compensation for the pawn after 15 Bxd3?! cxd3+ 16 Kxd3 Rg8 17 Na3 Nd5 18 Bd2 Bf5+ with a development lead and the bishop-pair in the open position, not to mention that White will probably not be able to hang on to his extra pawn) 15 ... Bg7 16 bxc4 Ne5 17 c5 Nd5 18 Bd4 Nf4+ 19 Kd1 Kf8! 20 Nxh7+ Kg8 21 Ng5 Ng4 22 Kd2 Nxg2 23 Rg1 Nf4 when White's five isolanis are a sorry structural sight and he will be lucky to hold the game.

b) 9 Nxg5 Qxe5 10 d4 cxd3 11 Bxd3 Qxe2+ 12 Bxe2 Bg7 13 0-0 0-0 14 Rd1 d5 15 Be3 Rd8 16 Bh5 Ne5 17 Bd4 Ng6 18 Na3 Bxd4 19 Rxd4 was E.Torre-V.Ivanchuk, Yerevan Olympiad 1996. I prefer Black, due to his greater central control after 19 ... e5 20 Rd2 Bd7.

9 ... Bg7 10 0-0 Nxe5 11 Nxg5



Black achieved his goal of swapping a wing pawn for White's central one, and achieved dynamic equality. White's king will never feel completely safe, now that Black may later utilize the open g-file. This fact later incites Shabalov to attacking fury.

11 ... d5

Black's main move, although the rarely-played move 11 ... Qc6 caught my eye. Now if 12 Bxh7 (wiser and safer is 12 Re1 h6 13 Ne4 Nd5 14 d4 cxd3 15 Bxd3 Nxd3 16 Qxd3 Rg8 17 Ng3 d6, although Black certainly doesn't stand worse), Black can try the unplayed 12 ... Rxh7!! Black sacrifices an exchange and a pawn for a nasty light-square bind and clogged white development. I couldn't save White's position from this point: for example, 13 Nxh7 Qg6 14 f4 Nd3 15 Ng5 d6 16 Qf3 Bd7! (now ... Bc6 is coming) 17 h4 (or 17 Qxb7? d5! 18 Na3 Bc8 19 Qc7 f6 and White is busted, since he is unable to retreat his g5-knight, due to the ... Bxh3 threat) 17 ... f6 18 f5 Qh6 19 Ne6 Bxe6 20 fxe6 Qxh4 21 Qxb7 Bh6 (threat: ... Bf4 and ... Bh2+, forcing mate) 22 Qf3 0-0 23 Qh3 Qxh3! (Black's attack continues, even with the queens off the board) 24 gxh3 Rg8+ 25 Kh1 Nd5 (White is playing without most of his army) 26 Na3 N5f4 27 Rg1 Bg5 28 Nxc4 Nxh3 29 Rg3 Nhf4 30 b3 Nxc1 31 Rxc1 Rh8+ 32 Kg1 Ne2+ and Black wins.

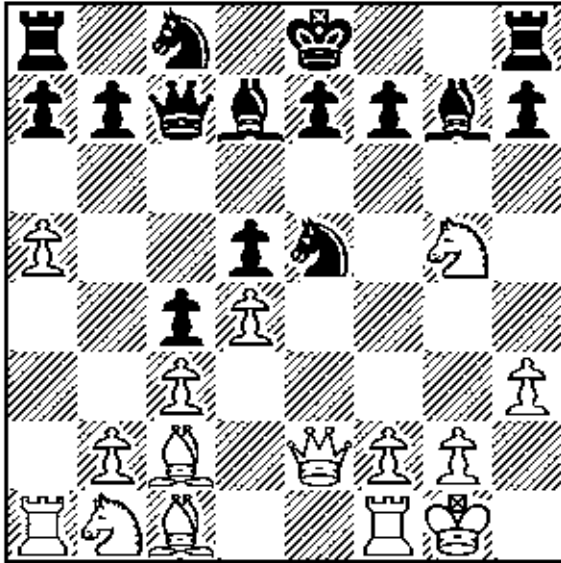
12 a4

Hoping to disrupt Black with his a-pawn, which makes sense, since Black will probably castle long. Following 12 Re1 h6 13 Nf3 Nxf3+ 14 Qxf3 e5 15 Qg3 Bf6 16 d4 cxd3 17 Bxd3 Be6 18 Na3 a6 19 Be3 0-0-0 20 Qf3, as in E.Rozentalis-L.Van Wely, Bled Olympiad 2002, I slightly prefer Black's chances after 20 ... Nd7, since he controls the centre and it feels to me like White's king is the one in greater danger.

12 ... Bd7 13 a5 Nc8

The knight will be re-routed via d6.

14 d4



A new move at the time, improving on 14 Nf3 Ng6 15 d4 cxd3 16 Bxd3 e5 17 a6 Nce7 18 axb7 Qxb7 19 Ba6 Qc7 20 Na3 0-0. It feels to me like Black got a favourable Pelikan-like position, with a powerful centre, S.Tiviakov-K.Sakaev, Khanty-Mansiysk 2005.

14 ... cxd3 15 Bxd3 Nd6 16 Re1 0-0-0

GM Jonathan Rowson writes: “It makes good sense to castle queenside, with a view to using the g-file and the central preponderance to attack the white king. It works a treat in this game, but it also looks somewhat risky to place the king on c8, where he is short of a pawn shield and so close to the intruder on a5, so it might be that White can improve.”

17 Nf3

White can also try 17 a6 b6 18 Bc2, preserving his light-squared bishop.

17 ... Nc6!?

Black prepares to roll his centre forward with ... e5. I would be tempted to pick off that light-squared bishop and go for a direct attack on g2 with 17 ... Nxd3 18 Qxd3 Rhg8.

18 a6 b6 19 Na3

Now Black must keep eternal vigilance over b5.

19 ... e5

Threat: ... e4.

20 Nb5 Nxb5 21 Bxb5 Rhg8

Black has a no-brainer plan of attacking down the g-file, while it's not nearly as clear how to proceed as White.

22 Bg5 Rde8

Black can also try 22 ... f6 23 Bh4 Ne7 24 Bxd7+ Rxd7 intending ... Nf5 next.

23 Qd2 e4!?

Aggressive and also weakening. Shabalov decides to set aside ignoble servility to launch a risky central counterattack. A more positionally-minded player may be more likely to proceed with the more cautious 23 ... f6 24 Bh4 Ne7, in this way, refusing to create central holes.

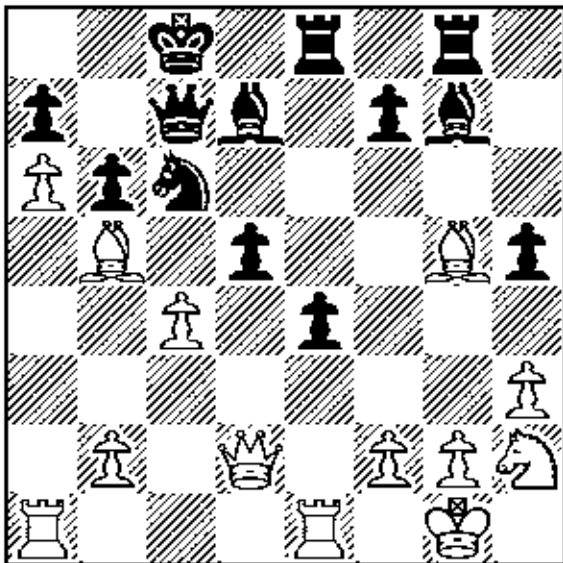
24 Nh2!?

A move played with the philosophy: sometimes our best chance to defeat an ambitious opponent is to bait him to come and get you. White's pieces resent the e4-pawn's brusqueness, yet step aside, since they respect his power. I don't much like this move and the idea feels contrived, almost to the point of arbitrary. Far more natural is 24 Bf4 Ne5 (24 ... Qd8?? fails to 25 Qxd5) 25 Bxd7+ Qxd7 26 Nxe5 Bxe5 27 Kh1 Qd6 28 Bxe5 Rxe5 29 Rad1 Qg6 30 f4 Rh5 31 Re3. *Houdini* rates this around even, while instinct tells me that Black's centre may be slightly vulnerable.

24 ... h5

Shabalov expends a tempo to prevent any thought of Ng4.

25 c4!?



Since nobody gets everything they want, longing is a suffering which afflicts us all. Tiviakov moves in the direction of simultaneous peril/opportunity, by attempting two things:

1. He wants to loosen Black's central pawns, at the grave risk of inducing them forward and energizing them.
2. He wants to launch his own queenside attack with a future c5 break.

Needless to say, this is risky and quite possibly the point where White went astray.

Instead, 25 Nf1 Be5 26 Kh1 f6 27 Bh4 Ne7 28 Bxd7+ Qxd7 29 Bg3 Nf5 30 Bxe5 fxe5 31 Ne3 Rd8 32 Rad1 Qg7 33 Rg1 Nxe3 34 fxe3 looks balanced.

25 ... d4

It's tempting to seize such a formidable centre. Black also has 25 ... Bxb2!? (overloading White's queen) 26 cxd5 (or 26 Qxb2 Rxd5 27 cxd5 Qe5! 28 Qb3 Qxd5, and if 29 Bc4 Qd4 intending to head to g7, with strong pressure down the g-file) 26 ... Bxa1 27 dxc6 Bxh3 28 Rxa1 Qe5! (this double attack wins material) 29 Qd7+ Bxd7 30 cxd7+ Kb8 31 dxe8Q+ Rxe8 (White has an awful lot of pieces hanging, yet his next move solves the issue) 32 Rb1 Rg8 33 Be3 h4 34 Nf1. The pieces are a lot for a queen and two pawns, yet I still slightly prefer Black, since he may be able to generate an attack on White's king by pushing forward his f-pawn, coupled with pressure on g2.

26 Bf4!

A little reminder to Black that his own king isn't so safe. Black's trouble is any block on e5 is met with Rxe4.

26 ... e3?

Such speculation is similar to the impulse of buying an unhousebroken puppy at the mall, for your small apartment. Now the advantage should swing back to White.

Black should play 26 ... Qd8! (26 ... Be5 27 Rxe4 Bxh3 28 g3 h4 29 Bxe5 Nxe5 30 Rxh4 Rxd3+ only forces a draw: 31 fxg3 Nf3+ 32 Nxf3 Qxd3+ 33 Kh1 Qxf3+ 34 Kh2 Re2+ 35 Qxe2 Qxe2+ 36 Kxh3 Qf3+ with perpetual check) 27 Nf1 h4 28 Rac1 Bf8 (menacing ... Bb4 and ... Bxe1) 29 c5! bxc5 30 Qc2 with a completely unclear position, where White gets full compensation for his missing pawn, since Black's king is seriously exposed.

27 fxe3 Be5

In one move Black covers his queen, clears the g-file, and threatens ... Bxh3.

28 Bxe5 Rxe5 29 Kh1!

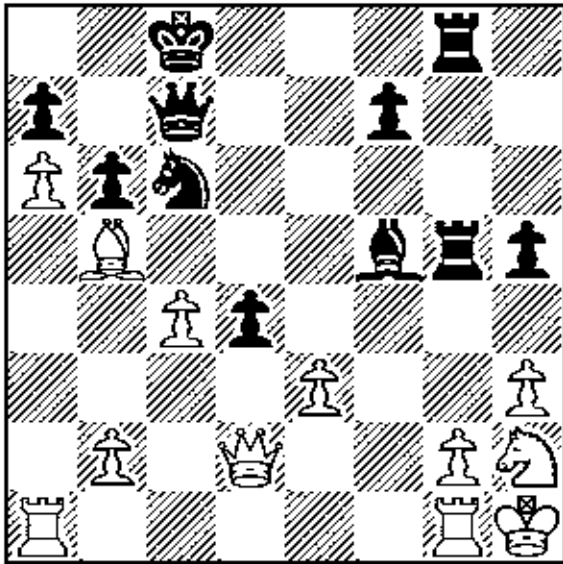
29 exd4?! is too slow, allowing 29 ... Reg5 with dual threats of ... Bxh3 and ... Rxd2+, and after 30 Nf3 Rxd2+ 31 Qxd2 Rxd2+ 32 Kxd2 h4 33 Ne5 f6 34 Nxc6 Qg3+ 35 Kf1 Qf3+ 36 Kg1 Black should take the perpetual check.

29 ... Reg5 30 Rg1!?

This is okay, but I don't understand why he went passive like this. After 30 Re2 dxe3 31 Qxe3 Rg3 32 Qe4 Black remains down a pawn and I don't see any way for him to proceed with his attack.

30 ... Bf5

Idea: ... Be4. In a chess game, we usually try to withhold information about our intent. Sometimes though, we deliberately divulge it to provoke an emotional response from our opponent. In this case, Shabalov unabashedly strives for an assault on g2, with ... Be4, willing to give up material for the right.



Exercise (critical decision): In this complex position, the mind runs unfettered on multiple tracks. Does White have the time for 31 exd4, or should he play 31 Nf3? One leads to a favourable position, while the other allows Black's attack to flare.

31 exd4?

This pawn grab fails to insulate White against Black's coming attack on g2. He just doesn't have time for this luxury, and is under no obligation to comply with Black's wishes.

Answer: White is in control after 31 Nf3! Rg3 (or 31 ... dxe3 32 Qxe3 Rg3 33 c5! and White's play looks faster after 33 ... Bxh3 34 cxb6! axb6 35 Bxc6 Bxg2+ 36 Rxc6 Rh3+ 37 Nh2!; Black's trouble is 37 ... Rxe3 is met with 38 Rxc6 Qd8 39 a7!, winning) 32 exd4 Be4 33 Ra3! Qd7 34 Bxc6 Qxc6 35 Qe2 Qe6 36 Qf1. All the threats are covered and it's hard to find a plan to improve Black's position. Black may have some compensation for the two pawns, but full compensation? I doubt it.

31 ... Be4!

The bishop, once bound by a set of strict moral covenants, decides the time has come to discard them all. Suddenly White is in deep trouble on g2.

32 Rae1

32 Nf3?? walks into the undermining shot 32 ... Rxc2! 33 Rxc2 Bxf3 34 Bxc6 Rxc2 35 Bb7+ Kd8 36 Qxc2 Bxc2+ 37 Kxc2 Qxc4 with a winning position.

32 ... Rxc2 33 Rxc2 Rxc2 34 Qxc2

White has no choice but to hand over the queen, since 34 Rxe4?? walks into 34 ... Qxh2 mate.

34 ... Bxc2+ 35 Kxc2

White has a rook, bishop and pawn for the queen, but his position probably can't be held, for two reasons:

1. Black's queen will seek out and find multiple vulnerable pawn targets.
2. Black's queen, knight and kingside pawns may organize themselves into a direct attack on White's king.

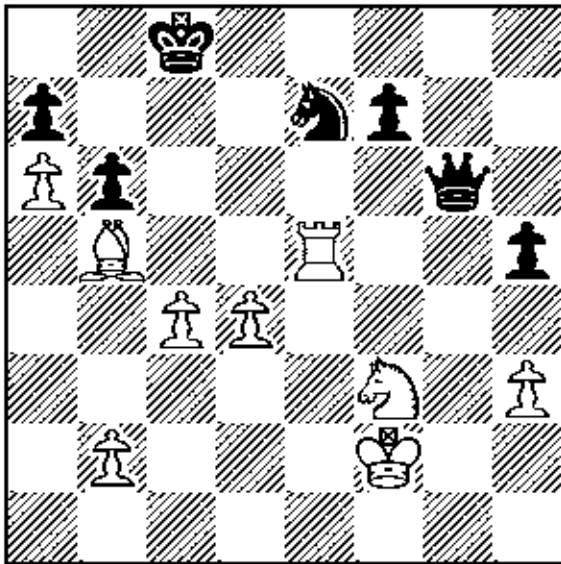
35 ... Qd6

Creating luft for his king on c7.

36 Nf3 Ne7

Shabalov's queen and knight seek out White's king.

37 Re5 Qg6+ 38 Kf2?!



This natural move isn't White's best. White puts up greater resistance with the unnatural 38 Kf1. The king steps back with the apprehension of Bambi, when the hunter passes by. Rowson asks: "but who wouldn't want to protect the knight when short of time?" That said, after 38 ... Qd3+ 39 Kf2 Nf5 40 c5!? Qxb5 41 Rxf5 h4 42 Ke3 Qxb2 43 Kf4 bxc5 44 Rxc5+ Kd8 I don't think White will hold the game.

38 ... Nf5

Black's queen infiltrates g3, which wins h3, creating a deadly passed h-pawn.

39 Bc6 Qg3+ 40 Kf1 Qxh3+ 41 Ke1 Kc7 42 Bd5 h4

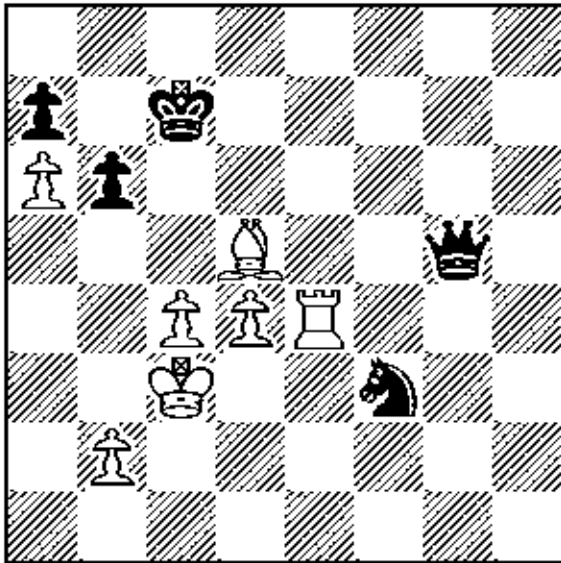
The comp suggested 42 ... Nxd4 yet I held a draw defending White after 43 Re7+ (43 Nxd4?? hangs the rook to 43 ... Qg3+) 43 ... Kd6 44 Rxf7 b5 45 Nxd4 Qh4+ 46 Rf2 Qxd4 47 Rd2 Qe3+ 48 Kd1 Kc5 49 cxb5 Kxb5. White can try to set up a fortress by sacrificing his bishop for Black's h-pawn, and then lifting his rook to c3: for example, 50 Kc2 h4 51 Rd3 Qe2+ 52 Kc3 Qe5+ 53 Kc2 h3 54 Bb7 Qe2+ 55 Kc3 h2 56 Rd5+ Kb6 (56 ... Ka4?? 57 b3+ Ka3 58 Ra5 mate would be a miraculous finish, from White's perspective) 57 Rd6+ Kc7 58 Rc6+ Kd7 59 Rc4 Qe1+ 60 Kb3 h1Q 61

Bxh1 Qxh1 62 Rc3! Qa1 63 Kc2 Qxa6 64 Kb1!. How wonderful when coincidence unexpectedly collides with intention. White achieves a fortress draw and Houdini's '-5.37' assessment should actually be '0.00'.

43 Kd2 Qg4 44 Re4 Qg3 45 Nxh4

White gives up a piece for the h-pawn and his chances dwindle to zero.

45 ... Qg5+ 46 Kc3 Nxh4 47 Bxf7 Nf3 48 Bd5



Exercise (combination alert): Find one more accurate move and you force White's resignation.

Answer: Mating net/knight fork.

48 ... Qc1+ 0-1

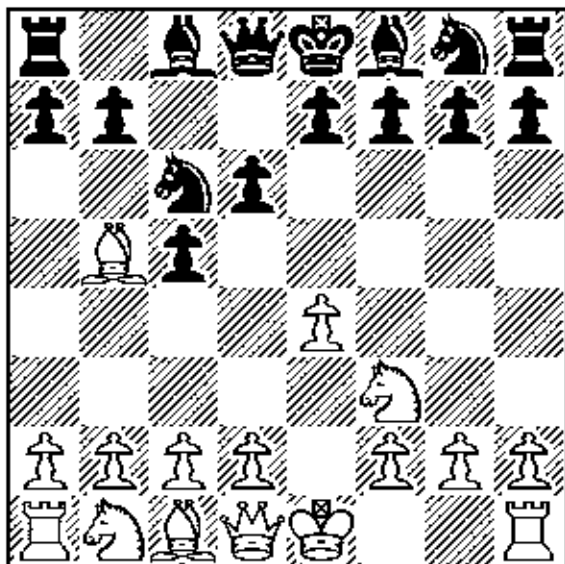
Severe punishments are visited upon any citizen depraved enough to contradict Black's queen, and if 49 Kb4 (49 Kb3 Nd2+ forks king and rook, or if 49 Kd3 Qd2 mate) 49 ... Qxb2+ 50 Ka4 Nd2 51 Re7+ Kd6 52 Rxa7 Qb3 mate.

Summary: White's 4 Bc4 is the only line in the chapter where we don't play our normal ... b6 plan. Instead, we play 4 ... Nb6, followed by 5 ... c4 to artificially isolate White's e5-pawn.

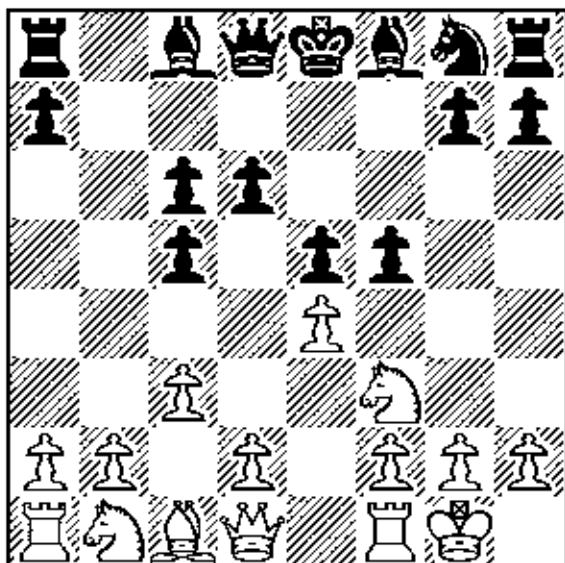
Chapter Two

Rossolimo/Moscow Variations

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 Bb5+ Nc6

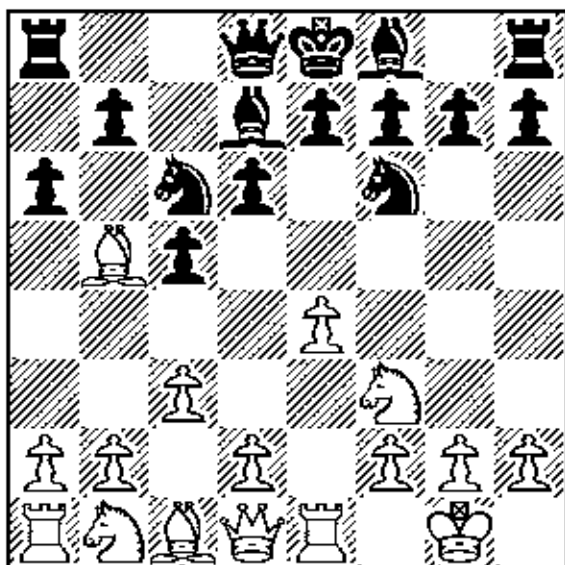


In this chapter we multitask, combining Rossolimo and Moscow lines. We get the same position, via separate openings, through these move orders: 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 d6 and 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 Bb5+ Nc6. In the above position we come to a crossroads. White can chop the c6-knight unprovoked, after which we reach this position:



White's position is a governmental system of laws, while ours has the feel of a loose coalition of tribal republics. So far the position remained unmarred by violence. However, with our last move we raise the stakes hugely with the undermining 6 ... f5!, almost in Latvian Countergambit fashion. With this approach, we alter the landscape as confusingly as one of those carnival pea-in-the-shell con games. We are compensated for White's development lead by our bishop-pair and central influence. It isn't easy for White even to get an edge if we know our theory.

White's other plan is to avoid Bxc6+ and instead slowly build for c3 and d4.



In this position White can play his bishop to a4, or slide it back to f1. In both cases

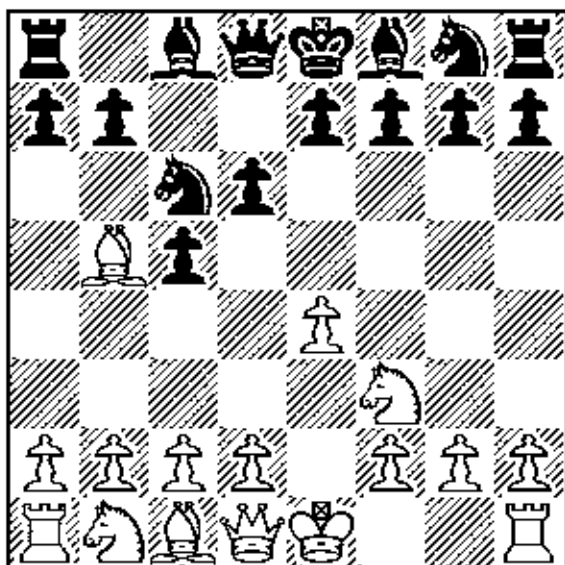
the flavour is distinctly one of a counterfeit Ruy Lopez, where the guiding principles are analogous, yet not completely the same. It's our job to understand the distinctions. In this case both sides vie silently for rights to d4, and we do everything in our power to make White's d4 pawn break as painful as possible for our opponents.

Game 8

R.Ovetchkin-S.Tiviakov

European Championship, Dresden 2007

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 Bb5+ Nc6



Welcome to the Moscow/Rossolimo Sicilian.

Question: What do you mean? This position arose from a Moscow, not a Rossolimo.

Answer: In this book we combine the Moscow and the Rossolimo by reaching the same position. The Rossolimo move order simply runs 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 d6, reaching this position.

4 Bxc6+

White decides to inflict an immediate alteration to the pawn structure. It's debatable if this move actually causes damage to Black's position:

1. Since after 4 ... bxc6, we get greater central influence.
2. We get an open b-file for our rook.
3. We get the bishop-pair.

A few games later we cover White's main line, 4 0-0, and much later in the book

we cover 4 d4 cxd4 5 Qxd4, which normally arises from a different move order.

4 ... bxc6 5 0-0

White logically continues to develop:

a) 5 h3 is awfully slow in a position where White's only real plus is his development lead. Black equalizes with 5 ... e5 6 0-0 f5!. We simply get a better version of our game's continuation, since White's h3 is clearly not as useful as c3.

b) 5 d3 does nothing to try and exploit White's lead in development. After 5 ... e5 6 c4 (Spassky wants to fix his pawns on the opposite colour of his remaining bishop) 6 ... Ne7 7 Nc3 Ng6 8 g3 Be7 I already prefer Black, who will play ... 0-0 and ... f5, opening the f-file and opening the game for his bishop-pair, B.Spassky-J.Lautier, Malmo 1998.

c) With 5 e5 White hopes to disrupt our natural flow: 5 ... Bg4 6 h3 Bh5 7 0-0!? dxe5 8 g4 e4 9 gxh5 exf3. White may have damaged Black's queenside structure, but just look at White's on the other side of the board! After 10 Nc3 (10 Qxf3 is well met with 10 ... Qd5) 10 ... Rc8 11 Qxf3 e6 12 d3 the position is dynamically equal, S.Rublevsky-A.Dreev, Moscow 2005.

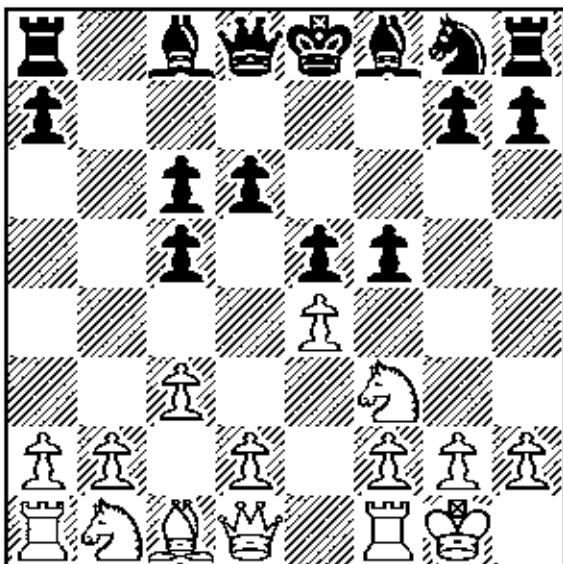
5 ... e5

Described as "the most principled move" by GM Victor Bologan. We clamp down on both the d4 and e5 pawn breaks, while seizing our fair share of the centre. We won't be covering alternatives like 5 ... Bg4, 5 ... g6, 5 ... e6 and 5 ... Nf6.

6 c3

The only worrisome move for our side. White intends to blast open the centre with d4 next.

6 ... f5!?



I like this confrontational move, which challenges White's assumption of initiative.

Question: What is wrong with 6 ... Nf6?

Answer: Nothing really and the move is quite playable. It just feels to me like this is what White wants, in that he is able to play a quick d4. Still, Black looks okay after 7 Re1 Bg4 8 h3 Bh5 9 d4 cxd4 10 cxd4 Nd7, F.Eid-V.Topalov, Istanbul Olympiad 2012.

7 exf5

This move is given an exclamation mark by Bologan. Next game we look at White's more violent option, 7 d4.

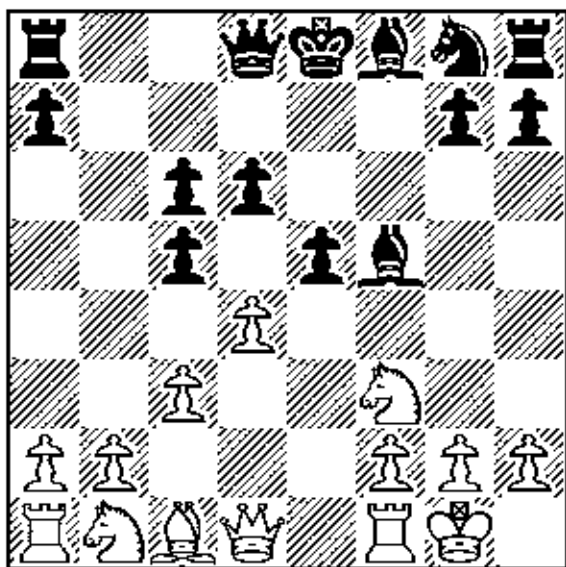
7 ... Bxf5

By no means forced:

a) After 7 ... Be7 8 d4 e4 (Black's point is that now g5 is unavailable for White's knight) 9 Nfd2 Nf6 10 dxc5 d5 11 Nb3 Bxf5 White is up a pawn and controls d4. This is counterbalanced by Black's bishop-pair, central space advantage and light-square control, V.Spasov-D.Solak, Kragujevac 2013.

b) 7 ... Nf6 8 d4 e4 9 Ng5 Bxf5!? (Black avoids ... cxd4, since this opens c3 for White's knight; however, by not exchanging on d4, he also opens d4 as a post for White's knight) 10 dxc5 d5 11 Qd4 Be7 12 f3 0-0 13 fxe4 Nxe4 14 Nxe4 Bxe4 15 Nd2 Rxf1+ 16 Nxf1 Bf6 17 Qe3 Qc7. Black's bishop-pair, light-square control and initiative look more valuable than White's extra pawn.

8 d4



Principle: *Open the position and create confrontation while leading in development.* As we will see, Black has adequate resources to deal with the imminent threat.

8 ... cxd4!

Question: Why an exclamation mark for this move?

Answer: For two reasons:

1. It's important for Black to seal d4 with a white pawn. Otherwise White's knight may sit comfortably on d4.

2. By exchanging on d4 Black remains even on material, as opposed to the line where Black avoids it and gambits the c5-pawn. Indeed, I don't trust 8 ... e4?! 9 Re1 d5 (or 9 ... Be7?! 10 dxc5 d5 11 Nd4 when White is up a pawn and his knight sits nicely on d4, V.Nozdachev-S.Novikov, Moscow 2011) 10 c4! as Black's position seriously lags behind in development, A.Khrushchiov-G.Timoshenko, Cappelle la Grande 2008.

9 cxd4 e4

Black attempts to close the game as best he can.

10 Qc2

White pins the e4-pawn, while attacking c6. Instead, if 10 Nfd2 Nf6 11 f3 (White does all he can to open the game while leading in development, but it just isn't enough to extract an advantage) 11 ... exf3 12 Qxf3 Bd7 13 Nc3 (13 Ne4 Be7 14 Nxf6+ Bxf6 15 Re1+ Kf7 doesn't really bother Black, who is fine here too) 13 ... Be7 and Black will castle next, while retaining the bishop-pair, M.Klinova-A.Kosteniuk, Konya 2009.

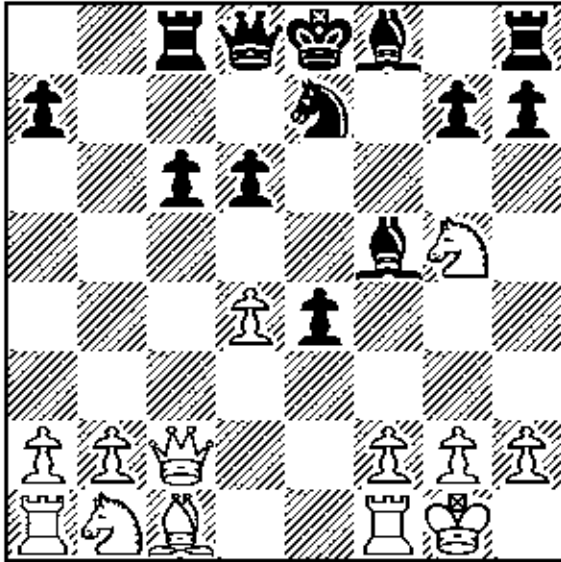
10 ... Rc8

Covering c6. Alternatives are:

a) 10 ... Nf6!? (Black sees no need to cover c6 just yet) 11 Bg5 (11 Qxc6+?? would be a foolish error; Black wins a piece after the simple 11 ... Bd7) 11 ... d5!? 12 Nbd2 (12 Qxc6+! Bd7 13 Bxf6 and now 13 ... gxf6?? 14 Qxd5 exf3 15 Qh5+ Ke7 16 Re1+ wins, since 16 ... Kd6 is met with 17 Qc5 mate, while after 13 ... Bxc6 14 Bxd8 exf3 15 Bc7 fxg2 16 Kxg2 Kd7 I doubt Black has full compensation for the pawn) 12 ... Rc8 13 Nh4 Be6 14 f3 Be7 15 Rae1 0-0 was I.Sidorenko-G.Rechlis, Israeli League 2010. The game looks approximately even after 16 fxe4 dxe4 17 Nxe4 Qxd4+.

b) 10 ... Qd7?! 11 Nh4! g6 was also sub-optimal in A.Skripchenko-S.Movsesian, Internet (blitz) 2006. Black has a difficult game after 12 Nc3 Nf6 13 f3 d5 14 Nxf5 gxf5 15 fxe4 dxe4 16 Bg5 Bg7 17 Bxf6 Bxf6 18 Nxe4 Bxd4+ 19 Kh1 0-0 20 Ng5. His king is somewhat exposed and his pawns all isolated. I don't think his strong piece activity makes up for this completely.

11 Ng5 Ne7!?



With this somewhat eccentric-looking move, Black covers his f5-bishop, at the cost of clogging his development. A new move, but probably no improvement over 11 ... Qd7 12 Qe2 (threatening Nxe4) 12 ... d5 13 f3 Nf6 14 Nc3 Be7 15 fxe4 dxe4 16 Nxe4 Nxe4 17 Nxe4, D.Pavasovic-N.Fercec, Sibenik 2007. Black stands no worse after 17 ... 0-0 18 Qc4+ Be6 19 Rxf8+ Rxf8 20 Qd3 Bf5 with obvious compensation for White's extra pawn.

12 f3!?

White crosses a threshold of strategic no-return and now Black's strategic flaws are left unseen. White seeks to punish Black for his developmental violation last move with a tempting line-opening idea. However, maybe he should go for a calmer plan with 12 Qe2! Nd5 (or 12 ... d5 13 f3 h6 14 fxe4 dxe4 15 Nxe4 Qxd4+ 16 Nf2 and Black's king is a long way from safety) 13 Nxe4 Be7 14 Nbc3 Nxc3 15 bxc3 0-0 when Black has some, but not full compensation for the pawn.

12 ... exf3 13 Qb3

White arranges his thoughts in the direction of Black's king. His attack begins early, the way the Christmas season actually begins November 1st, with his pieces eyeing both the f7 and e6 infiltration points. Black must play very carefully to maintain the balance.

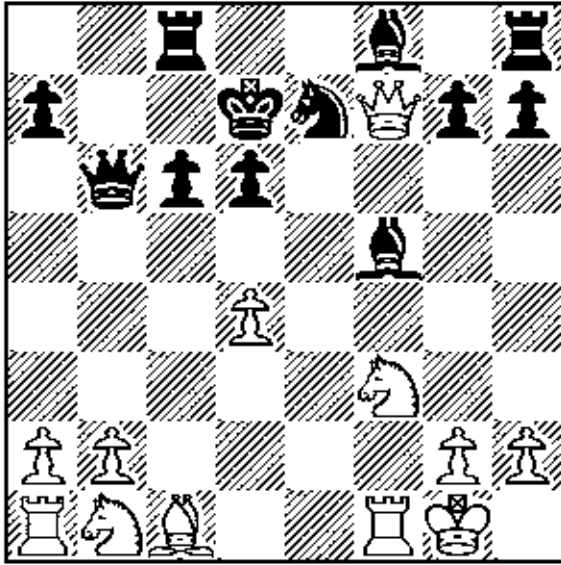
13 ... Qb6

Wisely offering a swap.

Question: Why can't Black cover f7 with the simple 13 ... Bg6?

Answer: Black looks dangerously behind in development after 14 Qxf3 when both Nf7 and Ne6 are in the air, and Black's king looks distinctly unwell.

14 Qf7+ Kd7 15 Nxf3



Question: Isn't Black busted, since his king is on the run?

Answer: We arrive in a kind of twilight assessment point – neither day nor night. *Houdini* actually rates the game at dead even, while I prefer Black's chances. White does indeed have attacking chances against Black's on-the-run king. Black though, is not without resources. He has the bishop-pair, control over the d5 hole and he also continues to derive energy from his greater influence on the light squares.

15 ... Be6 16 Qf4

The queen's love life stubs its toe, as Black's relatively safe king escapes her romantic clutches.

16 ... Nd5 17 Qg3 g5!?

Tiviakov offers his g-pawn to open the file for his rook. If the pawn isn't accepted, then ... g4 undermines a key defender of d4. 17 ... g6 is a calmer, yet less energetic response.

18 Bxg5!?

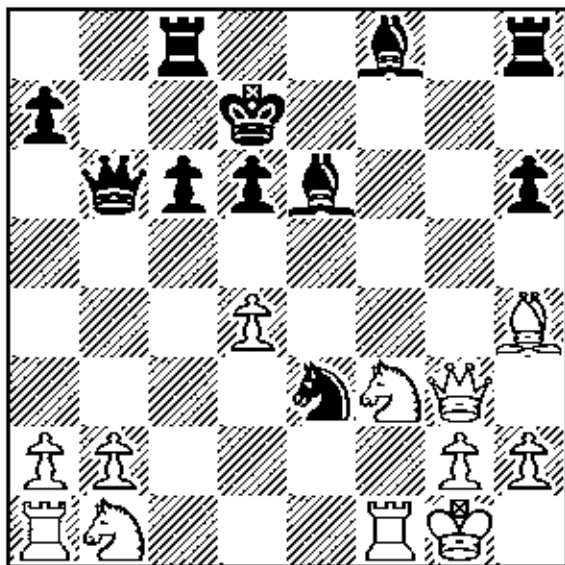
The bishop's life of uncorrupted moral discipline is about to undergo a drastic alteration. Some dares should probably be turned down. This is a case of multiple consequences arising from a single act. The pawn grab is obviously full of peril for White, since it opens the g-file.

18 ... h6 19 Bh4

Securing control over e3, but just looks nauseatingly passive. That said, Black stands clearly better after 19 Bc1?! Rg8.

19 ... Ne3

Threats: ... Rg8, as well as ... Nxf1. Also promising is the line 19 ... Rg8 20 Qf2 Nf4 (threat: ... Nh3+) 21 Bg3 Nh5 22 Nc3 Nxc3 23 hxc3 Bg7 when Black has more than enough compensation for the pawn, with the bishop-pair and pressure on both d4 and g3.



Exercise (critical decision): Should White play 20 Re1 Rg8 21 Ne5+ or should he go for the immediate discovered check with 20 Ne5+? Choose wisely and White holds his own; choose unwisely and all of White's efforts are null and void.

20 Re1?

The correct idea eludes White, who catches a portion of it, only to watch as the bulk dissipates. This move gives Black a key tempo gain.

Answer: White may yet save himself with 20 Ne5+! dxe5 21 Qxe3 exd4 22 Qd3 Qxb2 23 Bf6 Qxa1 24 Bxd4 Qxa2 25 Bxh8+ Bd5 (not only blocking the check, but also threatening mate on g2) 26 Qh3+ Kc7 27 Be5+ Kb7 28 Qd7+ Kb6 (Black's rook isn't hanging, as long as he threatens mate on g2) 29 Bd4+ c5 30 Nd2! Rc7 (30 ... Qxd2?? 31 Rb1+ forces mate in three moves) 31 Qe8 cxd4 32 Qxf8 Qxd2 33 Qd6+ Rc6 34 Rb1+ Ka6 35 Ra1+ Kb7 36 Qxd5 Qe3+ 37 Kh1 a6 38 Rf1 and the counterplay against Black's exposed king should allow White to save the game.

20 ... Rg8 21 Ne5+

The right idea comes a move late.

21 ... dxe5 22 Qxe3 Qxb2

It becomes clear that the insertion of the moves Re1 and ... Rg8 favours Black, since now he threatens mate on g2. This costs White the d4-pawn.

23 Nd2 Qxd4

Black forces an ending up a pawn and with the bishop-pair. His remaining pawns, however, are broken and isolated, so the win still requires exact technique to pull off.

24 Ne4 Qxe3+ 25 Rxe3 Rg6

Covering against the fork on f6.

26 Rc1 Bxa2! 27 Rd3+

Black should convert his extra material after 27 Ra1 Bd5 28 Rxa7+ Ke6.

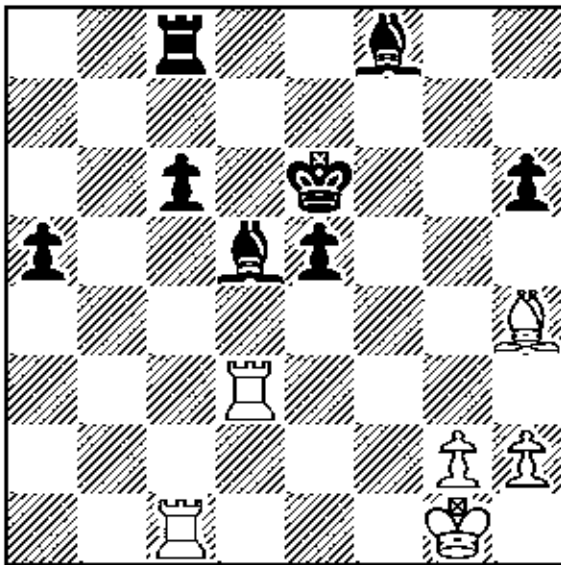
27 ... Bd5!

Avoiding 27 ... Ke6 28 Nc5+ Bxc5+ 29 Rxc5 when the presence of opposite-coloured bishops may complicate Black's task.

28 Nf6+ Rxf6

Forced, but strong. Black's needs are austere and he gets good value for his money with this exchange sacrifice. Tiviakov banks on the speed of his passers to overcome the white rook's strength in numbers. He accurately gauged that two pawns for the exchange are too much for the white defenders. Instead, 28 ... Ke6?? is of course a catastrophic error, since after 29 Nxd5 Black is unable to recapture.

29 Bxf6 Ke6 30 Bh4 a5



The a-pawn is not the hungry waif everyone imagined him to be. Here they come. White must deal with three passed pawns racing down the board, the most dangerous of which is the a-pawn.

31 Bf2

The idea is to swap away one of Black's bishops on c5. 31 Ra1 Ra8 32 Ra4 Bb4 won't help White.

31 ... a4 32 Bc5

This move fails to save White, and merely prolongs his resistance with stolen time.

32 ... Bxc5+ 33 Rxc5 Rg8

Provoking a weakening of the light squares in White's camp.

34 g3

If 34 Rd2 Ra8 and the a-pawn marches.

34 ... Ra8 35 Ra3 Kd6

The king is called up to help shepherd the passers up the board.

36 Rcc3

Determination alone isn't enough when faced with the opponent's advantage in sheer numbers.

36 ... c5

A new threat emerges in the form of the c-pawn.

37 Kf2 c4 38 Rc2 Kc5 39 Rb2

Halting ... Kb4.

39 ... Rf8+ 40 Ke2 Bc6 41 g4

A desperate attempt to energize his kingside majority with Rg3 and h4, but it's too slow. If White does nothing, then Black makes progress with 41 Rb1 e4 42 Rb2 Rf3 43 Re3 c3. When under siege, our true enemy is hunger and thirst and here White has zero chances to halt the three passed pawns.

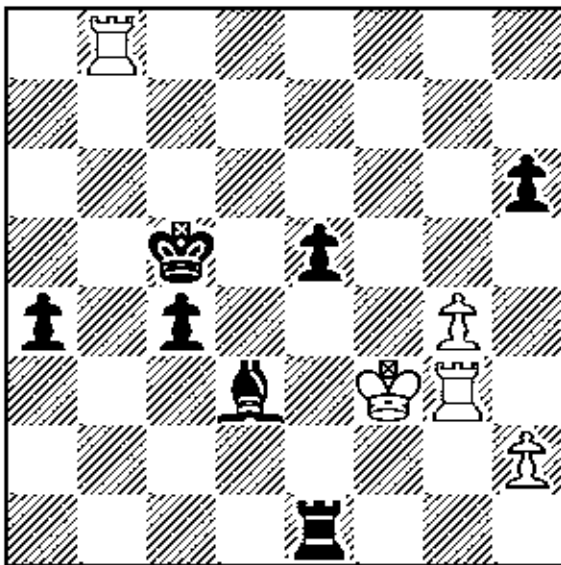
41 ... Rf4 42 Rg3 Be4!

This move ensures that a potential passed g-pawn can be either blockaded or sacrificed for on g6.

43 Rb8 Bd3+ 44 Ke3 Re4+!

Bishop and rook decide to merge their assets in the quest of a unified goal.

45 Kf3 Re1!



Now Black's e-pawn is ready to roll forward, not to mention the passed c and a-pawns as well.

46 Rc8+ Kd4 47 Rd8+ Kc3 48 Ra8 Kb3 49 Rh3

White is unable to find real counterplay, even with a jeweller's eye, but if 49 Rb8+ Kc2 50 Rg2+ (50 Ra8?? hangs a rook to 50 ... Be4+; "I don't believe in the power of magic, but I do believe in the power of fear," the wizard tells White's king and rook) 50 ... Kd1 51 Ra2 c3 52 Rxa4 e4+ 53 Kf4 c2 and the c-pawn costs White a rook.

49 ... c3 50 Rxb6

Sometimes in hopeless positions we continue to believe in our salvation, even though there is no rational reason for our belief.

50 ... c2

Nothing will stop the promotion, except the sacrifice of a full rook.

51 Rb6+ Ka3 0-1

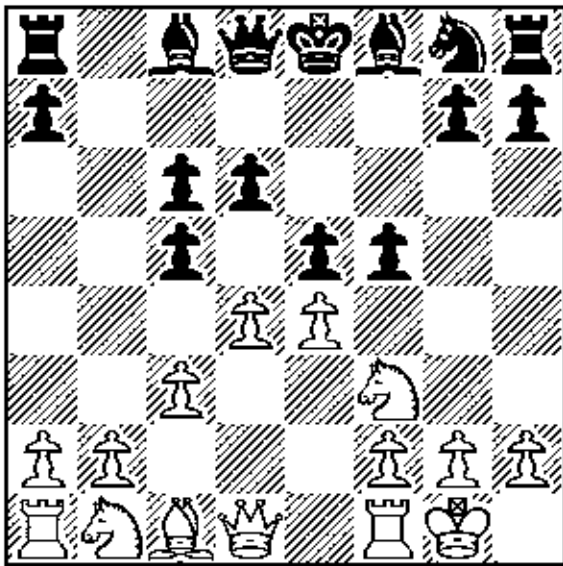
Summary: The confrontational 6 ... f5! throws a disruptive quality upon White's intended 7 d4 plan.

Game 9

V.Yandemirov-E.Sutovsky

Saint Vincent 2005

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 d6 4 Bxc6+ bxc6 5 0-0 e5 6 c3 f5 7 d4



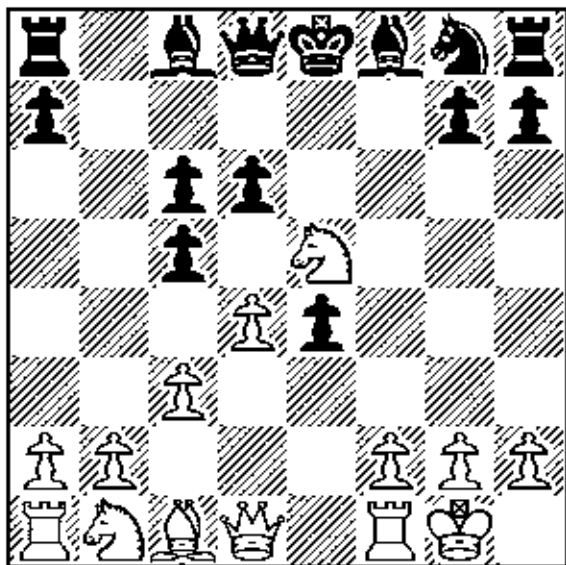
All hell breaks loose in the centre.

7 ... fxe4

Here White has access to two plans, one subtle, the other coarse. Also possible is to toss in 7 ... cxd4 8 cxd4 and then play 8 ... fxe4 9 Ng5 d5 10 dxe5 Be7 11 Qa4 Qb6 12 Nc3 (threat: Nxd5) 12 ... Qa6! 13 Qd1 Rb8 14 f3, as in A.Kovacevic-N.Fercec, Zupanja 2009. Black holds his own after 14 ... Bc5+ 15 Kh1 e3 16 Re1 h6 17 Nge4

dxe4 18 Nxe4 Bb4 19 Nd6+ Kf8 20 Rxe3 Ne7 21 Re4 Nd5 and *Houdini* even gives Black an edge. I also think Black's extra piece outweighs White's two pawns and attacking chances.

8 Nxe5!?



A new idea at the time, and not mentioned by Bologan in his Rossolimo book. White falls sway to an ungovernable impulse. Such a move is incredibly tempting for an attacker.

Question: Is White's sacrifice sound?

Answer: *Houdini* frowns on White's sacrifice, which should really get a dubious mark. I must add: from a human perspective, White certainly gets practical chances by tossing Black's king around the open centre. GMs may know how to extract every drop of energy from their positions, but they are not magicians, and are unable to conjure something out of nothing, when the causes and conditions are unfavourable. I feel like this is just such a case.

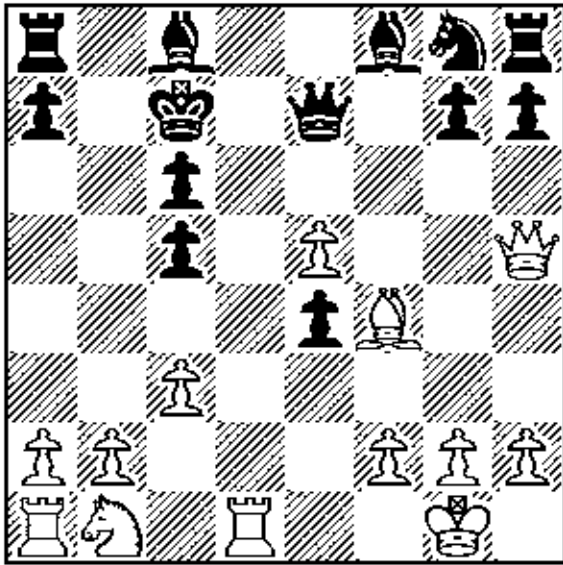
8 Ng5 is White's main move. Play gets incredibly sharp here as well after 8 ... exd4!. I think this rarely played move is Black's best path to equality (8 ... d5 is Black's main move, but I don't think he can equalize against best play, namely 9 dxe5 Be7 10 Qa4! Qb6 11 c4! Qa6 12 Qb3 13 Qxb7 Bxb7 14 Nc3; Bologan stops his analysis here and concludes that the ending is unpleasant for Black – I agree as Black's wobbly central pawns require a lot of care and White's g5-knight is about to invade e6). Here 9 Nxe4 was seen in V.Komliakov-A.Grischuk, Nizhnij Novgorod 1998. Black looks okay after 9 ... Nf6 10 Re1 Nxe4 11 Rxe4+ Kf7 12 cxd4 d5 (Black's king can always hide on g8) 13 Rf4+ Kg8 14 dxc5 Bxc5 15 Nc3 and now *Houdini* suggests the radical 15 ... h5!

16 Be3 Bb6 17 Qd3 Rh6 18 Re1 Re6 when Black's game regains its harmony.

8 ... dxe5 9 Qh5+ Kd7

The king shudders at the terrible harvest to come: his sister's arrival. Not much choice, since 9 ... g6?? hangs material to 10 Qxe5+ Kf7 11 Qxh8.

10 dxe5 Kc7 11 Rd1 Qe7 12 Bf4



12 ... Nh6?!

An inaccuracy, after which White's initiative flares:

a) 12 ... Be6?! 13 Nd2 g6 14 Qe2 g5 15 Bg3 h5 16 Nxe4! h4 17 Rd6? (right idea, wrong move order; correct is 17 Qa6! hxc3 18 Rd6! transposing to the following note) 17 ... Bc8! (17 ... hxc3 is met with 18 Qa6 gxf2+ 19 Kxf2 Kb8 20 Rxc6 Qb7 21 Qxb7+ Kxb7 22 Rxe6 Rxh2 23 Rd1 Kc7 24 Nxc5 when White has sufficient compensation for the piece) 18 Nxc5 hxc3 19 Rad1 was T.Abergel-M.Pharm, French League 2007. White's attack fails to compensate the material deficit after 19 ... Qe8!, and if 20 Rd7+? Bxd7 21 Rxd7+ Qxd7 22 Nxd7 gxh2+ 23 Kh1 Kxd7 with way too much material for the queen.

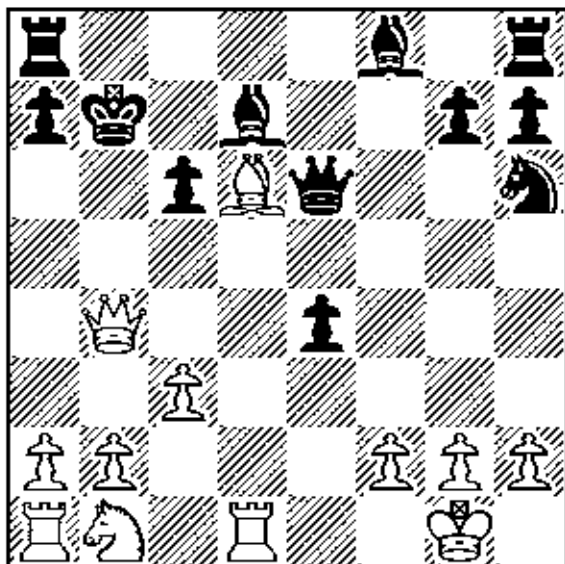
b) I don't believe in White's compensation for the piece after 12 ... Qe6!. Indeed, this line should give White some cause for reflection about the soundness of his knight sacrifice. Following 13 Qe2 Ne7 14 Qxe4 Qf5! (forcing the queens off the board) 15 e6+ Kb7 16 Re1 (White would love to keep queens on the board; the trouble is 16 Qe3? is met strongly with 16 ... Nd5 17 Rxd5 Qxd5! and Black's back-rank mating threat doesn't allow White time for the intended e7) 16 ... Bxe6 17 Qxe6 Qxf4 18 Qb3+ Kc7 it becomes clear that the fields of White's attack lay fallow, where nothing ever grows.

13 e6+ Kb7 14 Bd6! Qxe6 15 Qxc5

Black's king is seriously exposed and White's attacking chances fully compensate

his missing piece.

15 ... Bd7 16 Qb4+



Exercise (critical decision): Does Black have to take a draw with 16 ... Ka6 17 Qa4+ Kb7

18 Qb4+ Ka6 or can he risk playing for a win with 16 ... Kc8, returning the piece?

16 ... Kc8?

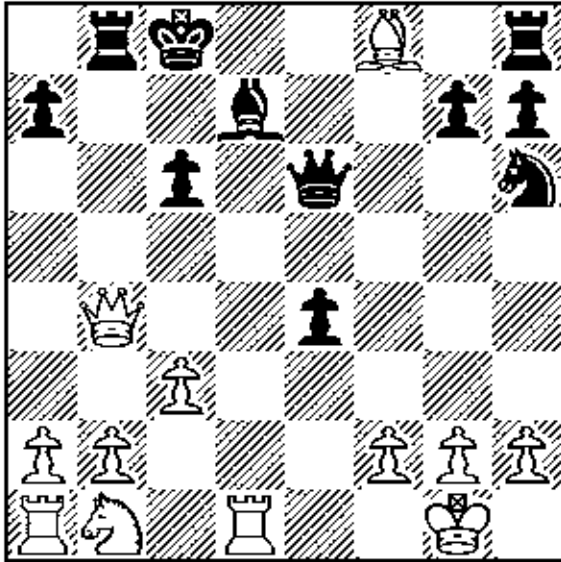
Sutovsky decides to requite aggression with aggression. This is an overreach by the higher-rated player. Black stands clearly worse by returning the piece.

Answer: He should have allowed the perpetual check with 16 ... Ka6 17 Qa3+ Kb7 18 Qb4+ Ka6.

17 Bxf8

Black is down a pawn, without sufficient compensation, since his king remains exposed.

17 ... Rb8



Exercise (critical decision): Should White's queen retreat to a3, or go forward to d6? One line gives him a winning position, while he struggles in the other.

18 Qd6?

After this move it is Black who stands better.

Answer: White should retreat the queen and cover b2 with 18 Qa3! e3 19 Bc5 exf2+ 20 Bxf2 Ng4 21 Re1 Qd5 22 c4! Qxc4 23 Nd2 Qb4 24 Bg3! Qxa3 (not 24 ... Qxd2?? 25 Qxa7 and Black must give up a queen to stave off mate) 25 bxa3 when Black is busted, since White menaces Nc4, or Ne4, and also Re7, not to mention Bxb8.

18 ... e3!

Now Black gets a nasty-looking initiative.

19 Qxe6?

A mistake, once committed can be undone; inaction following a mistake cements it in place forever. This move allows Black's f2-pawn to turn into a monster. Instead, after 19 fxe3! Qxe3+ 20 Kh1 Rb7 (covering the mating threat on d7) 21 Nd2 Ng4! (threatening mate, starting with ... Nf2+) 22 h3 Nf2+ 23 Kh2 Nxd1 24 Rxd1 Qe6 25 b3 Qxd6+ 26 Bxd6 White has a pawn for the exchange and doesn't stand much worse.

19 ... exf2+ 20 Kf1 Bxe6

The bishop approaches silently and unseen, folding himself into the shadows. Tactics soon arise based on ... Bc4+ tricks.

21 Bc5

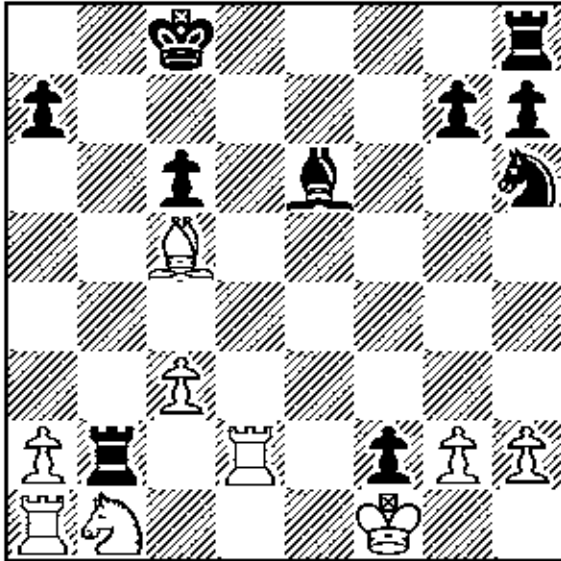
Avoiding 21 Bxg7?? Rxb2! (threatening a devastating check on c4) 22 Nd2 Ng4! 23 Ke2 (or 23 Bxh8?? Bc4+! 24 Nxc4 Nxh2 mate) 23 ... Rd8 24 Bd4 c5! 25 Bxc5 Rbxd2+! 26 Rxd2 Bc4+! 27 Kf3 Rxd2 28 Bxf2 Nxf2 with two extra pieces for Black.

21 ... Rxb2?!

Inaccurate. 21 ... Ng4! is immediately decisive after 22 Bxf2 Rf8 23 Rd2 Nxf2 24 Rxf2 Rxf2+ 25 Kxf2 Rxb2+ 26 Ke3 Rxc2 with an easy endgame win for Black.

22 Rd2?!

White continues to resist after 22 Bxf2! Ng4 23 Rd2 Bc4+ 24 Kg1 Rd8 25 h3 Rxb1+! 26 Rxb1 Rxd2 27 hxc4 Rxa2, which is similar to what happened in the game.



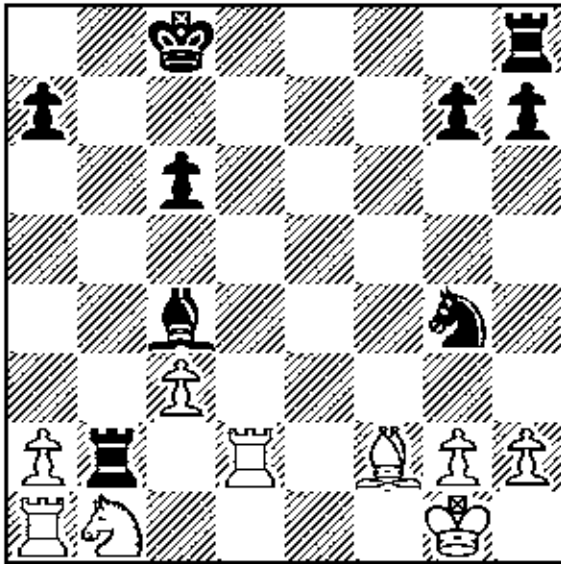
Exercise (planning/critical decision): White's king is caught in a mating net if you discover the correct plan. Should Black start with 22 ... Ng4 or 22 ... Bc4? Both lines favour Black, but only one is completely decisive.

22 ... Ng4?!

Threatening a nasty check on c4.

Answer: However, much stronger was 22 ... Bc4+! 23 Kxf2 Rb5! 24 Bd6 Rf5+ 25 Kg3 (forced) 25 ... Re8 (threatening a big check on e3) 26 h3 Rf1 27 Bc5 Ree1 28 Rb2 Nf5+ 29 Kg4 (or 29 Kh2 Rh1 mate) 29 ... Re4+ 30 Kg5 Bf7! when mate with ... h6 is threatened and White's king is caught.

23 Bxf2 Bc4+ 24 Kg1



Exercise (combination alert): How did Black press his growing initiative?

24 ... Rd8!

Answer: Weak back rank. The rook pledges peace, while secretly preparing for war.

25 h3

The only move. 25 Rxb2?? walks into a back-rank mate after 25 ... Rd1+ 26 Be1 Rxe1.

25 ... Rxb1+!

Undermining. This trick wins a pawn.

26 Rxb1 Rxd2 27 hxg4 Rxa2

Black should have enough to win, despite the opposite coloured bishops, since his pieces are more active and White's g-pawns are both weak.

28 Re1 Kd7?!

Not necessary. White wasn't threatening to invade the seventh rank. Black should just hurry his a-pawn along: 28 ... a5! and White doesn't have time for 29 Re7?? a4 30 Rxd7 a3 31 Ra7 Ra1+ 32 Kh2 a2 when Black wins.

29 Re4 Bd5 30 Rd4

Threat: c4.

30 ... Kc8

An admission that his 28th move was inaccurate.

31 g5 a5!

Black plays his single trump in the position.

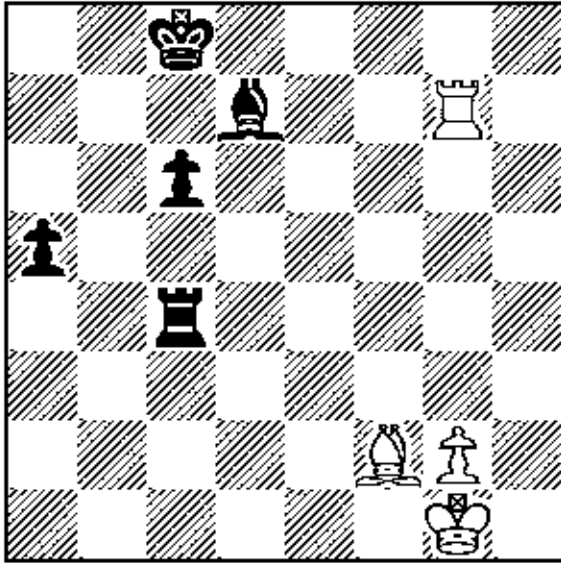
32 c4 Be6

32 ... Bf7! is more accurate.

33 Rd6! Bd7 34 g6!

White is making a fight of it. He greatly complicates his opponent's winning task by eliminating Black's kingside pawns.

34 ... hxc6 35 Rxc6 Rc2 36 Rxc7 Rxc4



White's passer lacks the firepower to reach g4. Meanwhile Black can push both of his queenside pawns.

37 Rg5 a4 38 Ra5

Endgame principle: *Place your rook behind your opponent's passed pawns.*

38 ... Kc7 39 Be3 Be6 40 g3 Bd5 41 Kf2 Rc2+ 42 Ke1 Ra2 43 Bc5 Kd7

Activating his king.

44 Ra7+ Ke6 45 Re7+ Kf5 46 Re3!

How annoying. White covers g3, while maintaining a blockade over a3.

46 ... Rc2 47 Bd4 Kg4 48 Rc3 Ra2

48 ... Rxc3?? 49 Bxc3 Kxg3 50 Kd2 is dead drawn. White's king plays to a1 and then he can even sacrifice his bishop for Black's c-pawn, since then Black's bishop is on the wrong colour for his a-pawn.

49 Bc5 Bf3 50 Bd6 Re2+ 51 Kf1 Re6 52 Kf2 Bd5 53 Bc5 Rh6 54 Ke2 Rh2+ 55 Kd1 Kf5 56 Kc1 Be4 57 Be3 Ra2 58 Bc5 Ke5?!

After this inaccuracy, the game should be drawn. Better to play 58 ... Rg2 to prevent White's king from entry to a3.

59 Ba3 Ra1+ 60 Kb2 Rh1 61 Bc5 Kd5 62 Ka3

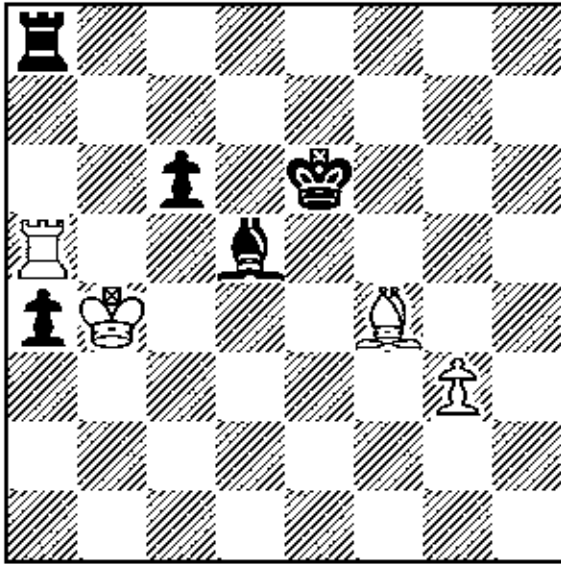
Now White's king participates in the defence and the game should be drawn.

62 ... Ra1+ 63 Kb2 Rb1+ 64 Ka3 Rb5 65 Be3 Ra5 66 Kb4 Ra8 67 Rc5+ Ke6 68 Bf4 Threatening a cheapo on e5. White's king has been allowed to participate in the

blockade effort and now White should hold the draw.

68 ... Bd5 69 Ra5?!

69 Ka3! should hold the draw without too much trouble.



Exercise (combination alert): White's last move is an error, which allows Black to press for the win. How?

Answer: Deflection/passed pawn/overloaded defender.

69 ... c5+! 70 Rxc5 a3

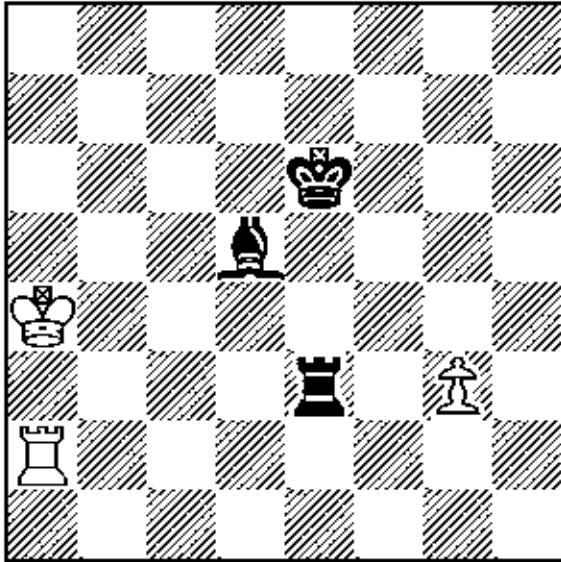
Suddenly, Black's passer goes scary deep, which is a factor not as inconsequential as it first appears. However, we mustn't forget that silver linings are merely side benefits to a still existing overall problem. I still feel like White should hold the draw here with accurate play.

71 Rc1 a2 72 Ra1 Ra7!

Intending ... Rb7 and ... Rb1.

73 Kc3?!

White should try 73 Be3 Rb7+ 74 Ka3! Rb1 75 Rxa2! Rb3+ 76 Ka4 Rxe3 which gives Black only practical chances.



Question: Isn't this ending drawn?

Answer: The comps hold the draw with rook and bishop versus rook, while we humans tend to botch the defence with distressing frequency. So a draw is really an approximately 50/50 proposition.

73 ... Rb7! 74 Bc1 Rb1 75 Bb2

White's pieces are in a terrible tangle.

75 ... Kf5 76 Kc2 Kg4 77 Be5

77 Rxb1?? fails miserably to 77 ... Be4+ 78 Kb3 axb1Q.

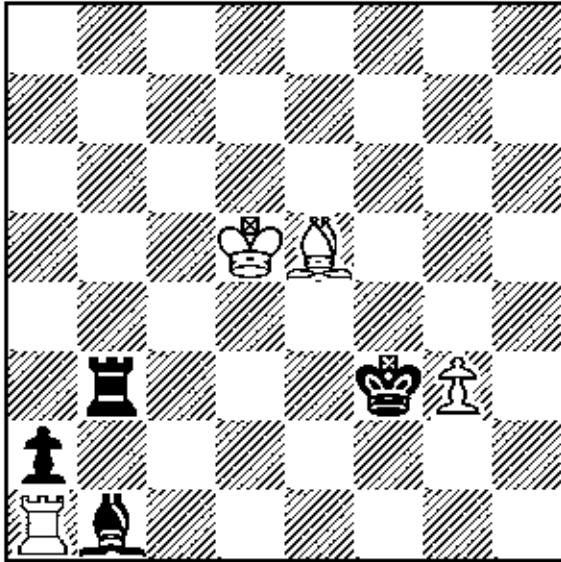
77 ... Kf3 78 Kd2 Be6 79 Kd3 Rb5 80 Bc3 Bf5+ 81 Kc4 Rb1! 82 Kd5

Instead, 82 Rxa2?? hangs a rook to 82 ... Be6+, while if 82 Kd4 Be6 and White drops his g-pawn, since his king's unfortunate position on d4 blocks access to Be5.

82 ... Rb3 83 Be5!?

Once again, White rejects the offer to go into a difficult (but drawn) ending after 83 Rxa2 Rxc3.

83 ... Bb1!



“You will not walk ahead of me, as you envisioned, but instead behind, with head bowed down,” the bishop tells White’s rook, who is forever imprisoned. It still requires a highly developed technique to win this for Black.

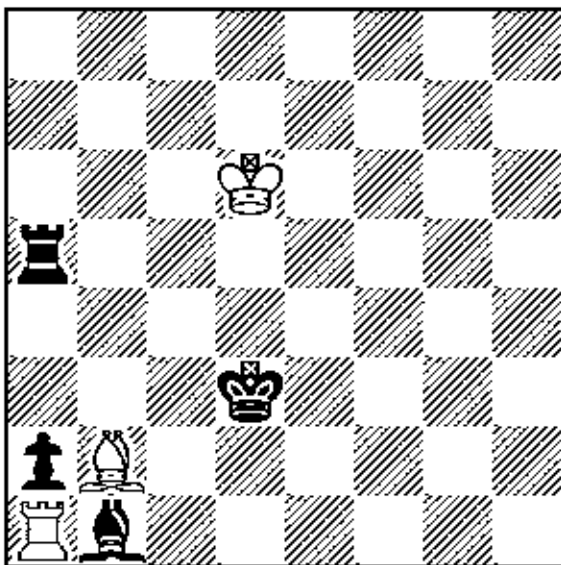
84 Kc4 Rb7 85 Kc5 Ke4 86 Bf6 Rf7 87 Bb2

If 87 Bd8 Rg7 88 Bh4 Kd3 and the eventual threat for Black’s king to reach b2 forces 89 Bd8 Rxd3.

87 ... Rf3 88 g4 Rg3

There goes White’s g-pawn.

89 Bf6 Rxd4 90 Bc3 Kd3 91 Bf6 Ra4 92 Bb2 Ra5+ 93 Kd6?



We sense a distinct lack of concern about Black's potential to encroach White's king. Now there can be no deliverance for White's king, who gets separated from his army. Few things are more annoying than a problem we believe is already solved, arising from the dead, and returning to torment us once again. I don't see how Black makes progress after 93 Kb4!. I played it out against *Houdini* and held the draw after an awful lot of take-backs!

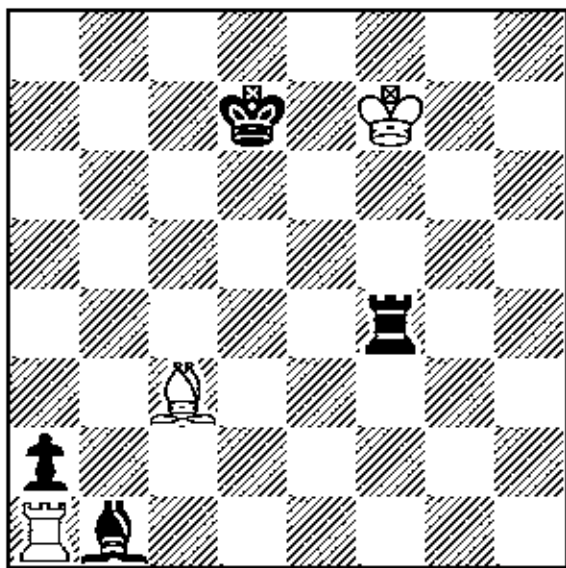
93 ... Kc4

The black king and rook's fate twine in single intent. The goal is to corner and checkmate White's king, as if the cluster of pieces on a1, a2, b1 and b2 didn't exist.

94 Bh8 Rd5+ 95 Ke7

After 95 Kc6 Rh5 96 Bg7 Rh7 97 Bb2 Rh6+ 98 Kc7 White's king slowly gets cornered, similar to what happened in the game. It's a terrible thing to see with clarity our future defeat, and at the same time, be powerless to alter the outcome.

95 ... Kc5 96 Bb2 Kc6 97 Ke6 Rd2! 98 Bc3 Re2+ 99 Kf6 Kd5 100 Kf7 Re6 101 Bb2 Kd6 102 Bc3 Kd7 103 Bb2 Re2! 104 Bd4 Re4 105 Bc3 Rf4+



White defenders are clearly AWOL. Black keeps using this same geometric trick to corner White's king, who feels the ever tightening grip of his opponent's forces.

106 Kg7

Alternatively, 106 Bf6 Rf3 107 Kg7 Ke6 108 Bb2 Rf7+ 109 Kh6 Kf5 110 Bc3 Kg4! 111 Bg7 Rd7 and zugzwang!

106 ... Ke6

Black's king loves his life of manorial feudalism, where he is lord over the disgruntled and toiling g7 serf.

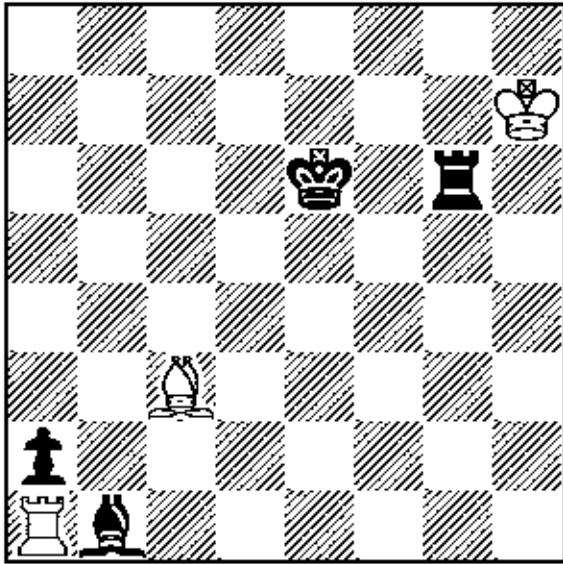
107 Kh6 Rg4 108 Bb2 Kf5! 109 Bc3

Likewise, 109 Kh7 Rg6 110 Bd4 Ke6 111 Kh8 Kf7 wins, as does 109 Kh5 Rg2.

109 ... Rg6+ 110 Kh7

The spent king can hardly put one foot in front of the other.

110 ... Ke6 0-1



111 Kh8 (111 Rxa2 is met with 111 ... Rg3+ 112 Kh6 Bxa2) 111 ... Kf7 112 Bg7 Rg5! is curtains for White.

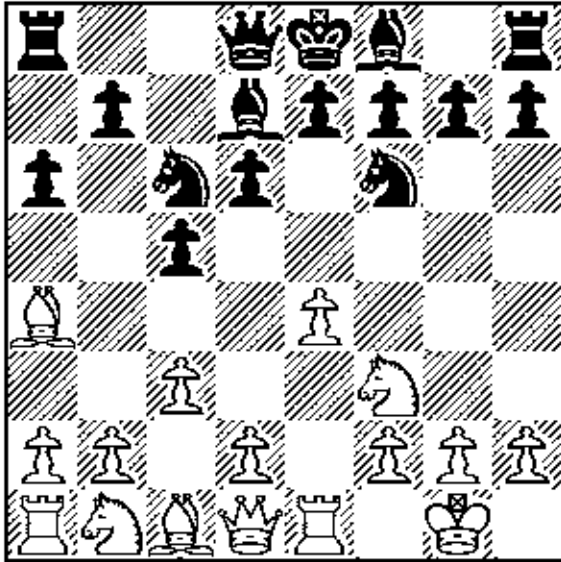
Summary: Black holds his own in the position after 7 ... fxe4.

Game 10

E.Sutovsky-T.Radjabov

World Team Championship, Ningbo 2011

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 d6 4 0-0 Bd7 5 Re1 Nf6 6 c3 a6 7 Ba4



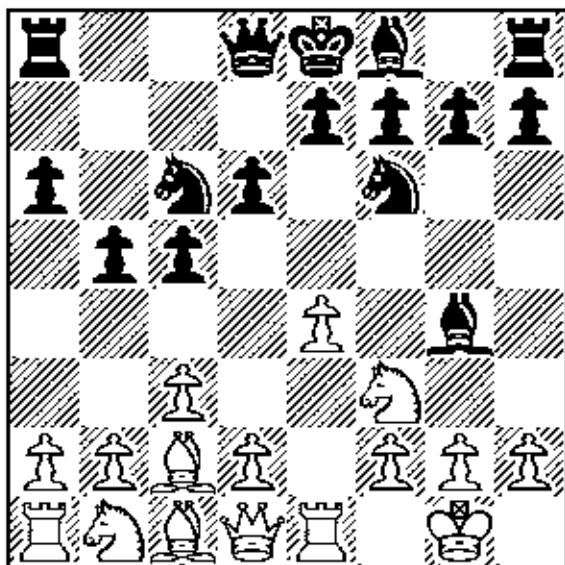
White continues in pure Ruy Lopez fashion, intending to transfer his bishop to c2, where it takes aim at Black's king. One problem with the move is that it hands Black the free expansion move ... b5. Next game we look at 7 Bf1.

7 ... b5

7 ... c4!? is an interesting way to cross White's plan of d4. After 8 Bc2 Ne5! (this move isn't mentioned by Bologan) 9 Nxe5 dxe5 10 b3 b5 11 bxc4 bxc4 12 Na3 Rc8 13 Qe2 Qc7, as in R.Hess-R.Robson, Lubbock 2009, Black looks fully equal, since White must allow damage to his structure if he challenges Black's c4-pawn with an eventual d3 or d4.

8 Bc2 Bg4!

Once more we try and make White's d4 push an ordeal for our opponents. If you like Closed Lopez positions, then also available is 8 ... e5 9 h3 Be7 10 d4 cxd4 11 cxd4 0-0 12 Nc3 Re8. This move may be Black's most accurate, since it prevents a small combination from White (12 ... Rc8 allows 13 d5 Nb4 14 Bb1 a5 and now White gets a slightly favourable version with the temporary piece sacrifice 15 Nxe5! dxe5 16 d6 Bc6 17 dxe7 Qxe7 18 Qe2; White's bishop-pair gives him an edge, S.Karjakin-A.Timofeev, Khanty-Mansiysk 2009), and reaches a typical Closed Lopez position which looks okay for Black.



9 a4

Alternatively:

a) 9 h3 Bxf3 (this move is favoured by most top players) 10 Qxf3 g6 11 d3 Bg7 12 Nd2 0-0 13 Qe2 Nd7 when Black's queenside space and control over d4 easily compensate White's bishop-pair, R.Ponomarev-V.Topalov, Las Vegas 1999.

b) 9 d3 e6 10 Nbd2 Be7 11 h3 Bh5 12 Nf1 0-0 13 g4!? (13 Ng3 is safer) 13 ... Bg6 14 Ng3 was B.Baker-C.Lakdawala, San Diego (rapid) 2006, where Black's central and queenside space compensate for White's kingside build-up.

9 ... g6

So we reach an odd Dragon/Lopez hybrid.

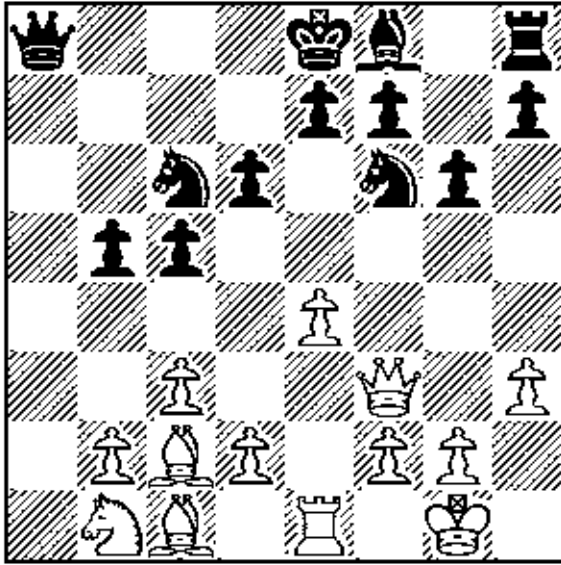
Question: Can Black play without the insertion of ... g6?

Answer: Yes, Black can play in pure Ruy Lopez fashion with 9 ... Rb8 10 axb5 axb5 11 d4 cxd4 (11 ... e5? leads to a difficult ending after 12 dxc5 dxc5 13 Qxd8+ Rxd8 14 Ra6 Bd7 15 Rb6) 12 cxd4 e5 13 d5 Nd4 14 Nbd2 Nxc2 15 Qxc2 Be7 16 Nb3 Bd7 17 Na5, A.Schilcher-M.Frerichs, correspondence 2009. However, this looks to me like an inferior Ruy Lopez position for Black, whose b-pawn is weak and who must be on constant alert for an invasion on c6.

10 axb5 axb5 11 Rxa8 Qxa8 12 h3

Instead, if 12 d4 cxd4 13 cxd4 Bg7 14 e5!? (Black is inoculated against such sudden lunges) 14 ... dxe5 15 dxe5 Nd7 16 e6 (16 Be4 Bxf3 17 gxf3 Nc5 18 Bd5 Qc8 is fine for Black, since 19 Qc2? is met with 19 ... Nb4) 16 ... Bxe6 17 Ng5, as in D.Pikula-I.Ivanisevic, Cetinje 2009, and I don't believe in White's compensation after 17 ... Nd4.

12 ... Bxf3 13 Qxf3



White intends e5 next, playing on the h1-a8 diagonal pin.

13 ... Bg7!

Radjabov doesn't care and allows White's break.

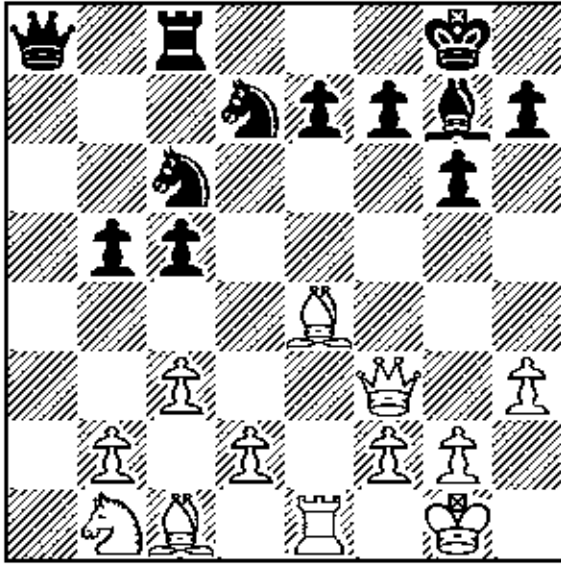
Question: Should Black prevent White's coming e5 break?

Answer: I think it's actually better for us to allow White's e5, since Black falls behind in development in the line 13 ... Qb8?! 14 Na3 Nd7 15 Qe2 b4, as in J.Fernandez Garcia-R.Edouard, Pamplona 2009. I prefer White's position after 16 Qa6! bxa3 17 Qxc6 and weirdly enough, Black loses a pawn: 17 ... a2 (the natural 17 ... axb2? opens the b-file for White's rook, which Black is unable to tolerate; indeed, 18 Bxb2 Bg7 19 Rb1 leaves him busted) 18 Qa6 Bg7 19 Qxa2 with a clean extra pawn for White.

14 e5 dxe5 15 Rxe5

Attacking the c5-pawn.

15 ... Nd7 16 Re1 0-0 17 Be4 Rc8



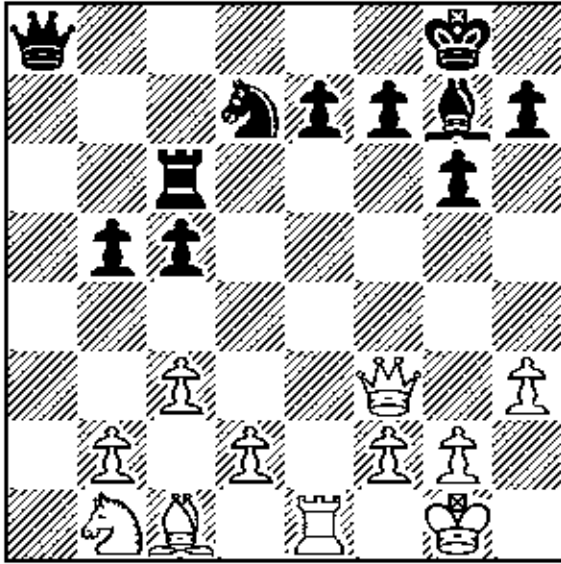
This is where theory ends. After 17 ... Nde5 18 Qe3 c4 19 f4 Nd3! 20 Bxd3 cxd3 21 Qxd3 Black has sufficient compensation for the pawn, but probably only enough to hold the draw: 21 ... b4 22 Qe4 e6 23 d4 Qa6 24 d5 exd5 25 Qxd5 Rd8 and the players agreed to a draw, H.Tauber-P.Raivio, correspondence 2011.

18 Bxc6?!

This move violates the principle: *don't voluntarily break a pin without a good reason*.

18 Na3! puts a bit of pressure on Black, but not enough to worry him too much: 18 ... Nde5 19 Qe3 (Black's queenside pawns feel loose, yet *Houdini* always found ways to cover them) 19 ... b4 20 Nc2 Qa5 21 f4 Nc4 22 Qf3 Qa4 23 Bxc6 Qxc6 24 Qxc6 Rxc6 25 Rxe7. White has won a pawn in the ending, yet the inevitability of his victory isn't as incontrovertible as it first appears. White's queenside is under pressure and his buried c1-bishop is a sorry sight, and gives us that grey, depressed feeling of two straight days of drizzly rain. Black easily holds his own after 25 ... Kf8 26 Ra7 Rd6 27 cxb4 cxb4 28 Ra8+ Ke7 29 Nxb4 Nxd2 30 Bxd2 Rxd2. White's edge just isn't enough for victory: for example, 31 Nc6+ Ke6 32 Re8+ Kf5 33 Re7 Kf6 34 Rb7 Ke6 35 b4 Bf8 36 g3 Rb2 37 Kf1 Kd5 38 Rxf7 Bd6 39 Na5 when *Houdini* worked it out to a draw after 39 ... Bxb4 40 Rb7 Kc5 41 h4 Rh2 42 Nc6 Kxc6 43 Rxb4 Kd5 44 Rb7 Ke4 45 Kg1 Rc2 46 h5 gxh5 47 Rxh7 Kf3 48 f5 Kxg3 49 Rg7+.

18 ... Rxc6



19 d4!

Sutovsky finds the only move.

Question: Why did White give up the bishop-pair and then *not* take e7?

Answer: White decides upon a homeopathic dose, seeking a cure to his developmental issues in somewhat unconventional and perhaps frowned upon objective standards. An initiative can either increase, regress or abide without shifting its intensity level.

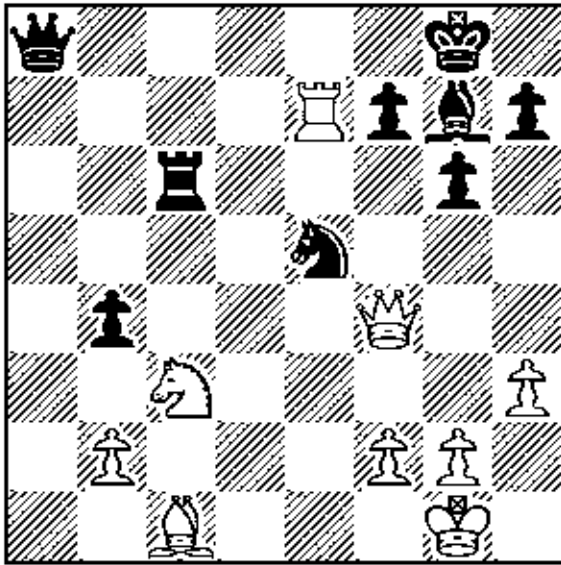
The trouble is Black's activity spikes hugely after 19 Rxe7?. The rook orders his fierce dragon's head banner hoisted high. Unfortunately, there was no wind that day, so his battle-standard merely hung limp, while the enemy laughed. After 19 ... Ne5 20 Qd5 Rc8! I couldn't find a saving line for White, who lags horribly behind in development. His position somehow reminds me of a Ruy Lopez Marshall Gambit, gone horribly wrong for White:

a) White, although a pawn up, is unable to hold the ending, due to the awful placement of his bishop and knight: 21 Qxa8 Rxa8 22 d4 Nd3 23 Bd2 (23 Be3 cxd4 24 cxd4 Bf8 25 Rb7 Ra1 wins) 23 ... cxd4 24 Kh2 Bf8 25 Rd7 Ra1 26 Rxd4 (26 Na3 Rd1 27 Bg5 dxc3 28 Rd8 Nxf2 wins) 26 ... Nxb2 and White's knight is trapped.

b) 21 Rxe5 Bxe5 22 Qxe5 Re8 (now the fire of Black's initiative threatens to consume all in its path; White is technically up material, but one glance at his lazily undeveloped queenside pieces and we see that he is the one in deep trouble, since there is no way to stop the coming ... Re1+) 23 Qd6 (23 Qxc5?? Re1+ 24 Kh2 Qb8+! forces a mating pattern and, indeed, mate after 25 g3 Qb7) 23 ... Re6 24 Qf4 Re4 25 Qd6 Re1+ 26 Kh2 Rxc1 27 Na3 Qe8 28 Kg3 (28 Qxc5?? is met with the familiar theme 28

... Qb8+ 29 g3 Qb7) 28 ... Rd1 29 Nc2 Qe6 30 Qxe6 fxe6 (White is unable to hold the ending) 31 d4 Rd3+ 32 f3 c4 (threat: ... Rd2) 33 Na3 b4! 34 Nxc4 (34 cxb4? Rxa3! wins, since White's king is outside of the soon-to-be-passed c-pawn's square) 34 ... bxc3 35 bxc3 Rxc3 and Black wins.

19 ... cxd4 20 Rxe7 Ne5 21 Qf4 dxc3 22 Nxc3 b4!



Exercise (critical decision): White loses material whichever way he plays. Should White play 23 Qxb4 allowing 23 ... Be7 or should he play the immediate 23 Rxe5? One line loses, while White holds the draw in the other.

23 Qxb4?

A substitute is rarely as good as the original. When we commence a sequence which is askew by only a hair's breadth at the beginning, you may be off by a mile by its completion.

Answer: White's rapid deterioration necessitates the energetic measure 23 Rxe5!. This move halts Black's initiative in its tracks like a bullet wound. White regains the initiative and holds the draw after 23 ... Bxe5 (23 ... bxc3 24 Rb5 covers b2, while threatening Rb8+) 24 Qxe5 Re6 25 Qd4 Re1+ (25 ... bxc3?? 26 Bh6 and glory is ours when our vulgar cheapo is crowned with success; after 26 ... f6 27 Qd7 Re1+ 28 Kh2 Qb8+ 29 f4 Black's checks run out and he must hand over his queen to avoid mate) 26 Kh2 Rxc1 27 Nd5! (threat: Ne7+, Qh8+ and Qxa8; from the vacancy of the central void, something arises from nothing) 27 ... Qf8 (27 ... f5 28 Ne7+ Kf7 29 Nxf5! gxf5 30 Qd7+ Kf6 31 Qd6+ is perpetual check) 28 Nf6+ Kh8 29 Nh5+ f6 (otherwise it's a draw by perpetual check) 30 Nxf6 Qc5 31 Qd2 Qc7+ 32 g3 Rc6 33 Ne4 (Qd4+ is in the air) 33 ... Re6 34 Qxb4 and by now White should hold the game without too much

sweat.

23 ... Bf8 24 Bh6!

A clever move which creates threats to Black's future back rank.

24 ... Bxe7

Of course, 24 ... Bxh6? lets White escape after 25 Rxe5.

25 Qxe7 Re6

White has a pawn for the exchange and also controls the dark squares. Yet Black's super-activity outweighs these factors.

26 Qc5 Qb8 27 Qd4 Qb6!

Radjabov begins to challenge for control of the dark squares. 27 ... Qxb2?? would be a monumental goof up after 28 Qd8+ Re8 29 Qxe8 mate.

28 Qd5

Threatening the back rank again on a8.

28 ... Nc6!

Dual purpose:

1. Now the b2-pawn really is hanging, since Black covered the back rank threat on d8.

2. Black threatens ... Re1+, followed by ... Qxf2.

29 Qd2 Qd4 30 Qc1

When suffering a long siege, each day which passes is a gift to the enemy, since it is our side which grows weaker with time. He can't afford to swap queens, and with each retreat, White's game is in visible decline.

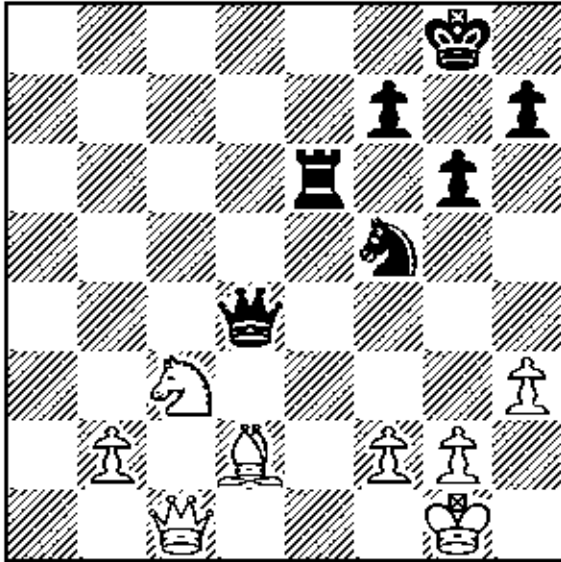
30 ... Qe5!

Threatening to take queens off the board with ... Qe1+. This forces yet another retreat concession from White.

31 Be3 Nd4!

Spotting that f5 is the perfect placement for the knight, where it ejects the bishop's e3 post, while covering the h6-square as well.

32 Qf1 Nf5 33 Bd2 Qd4 34 Qc1



Exercise (planning): We reach one of those familiar positions, where we know we are winning, but have no idea of how to extract the win. Find a clear plan for Black to make progress.

Answer: 34 ... h5!

Another powerful move, with three intentions:

1. Radjabov increases the safety of his king from back rank mates.
2. He ensures that a white g4 thrust will fail miserably.
3. Most importantly, he prepares for a direct assault on White's king with an eventual pawn storm, with ... f6, ... g5 and possibly ... g4, which decisively weakens White's king.

35 Nb5

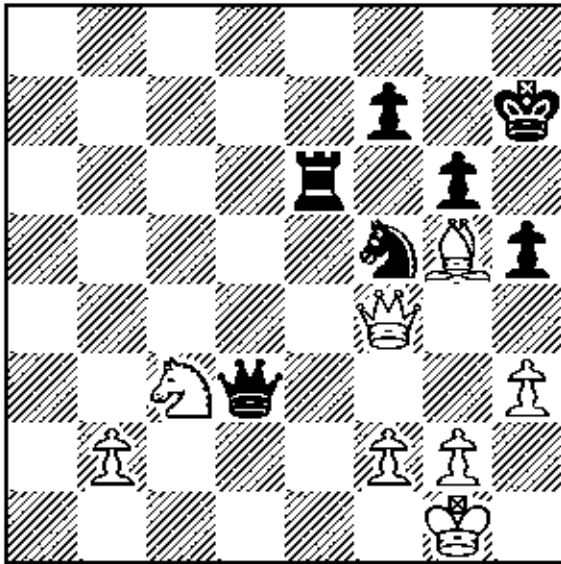
This knight has no stable outposts, except for c3.

35 ... Qd7 36 Nc3 Qd3 37 Bg5 Kh7

Tra, la la, la la. Radjabov acts as if he has all day – and he does! In such positions there is no rush. *Houdini* prefers 37 ... f6 38 Bd2 Kg7 39 Bf4 g5 40 Bd2 Rd6 when White's bishop runs out of safe squares: 41 Be1 Nd4 42 Kh2 h4 43 Kg1 Nb3 44 Qe3 Qxe3 45 fxe3 Nc5 46 Kf1 Nd3 47 Nd1 Nxe1 48 Kxe1 Kg6 49 Ke2 Kf5 and White is unable to hold the ending.

38 Qf4?

The normally sleepless guardian of her king seems to have dozed off and left the shop unlocked. After 38 Bf4 f6 Black slowly engineers the position he gets in the above note. White of course puts up greater resistance in this line, but still shoulders a lost cause.



Exercise (combination alert): It's raining and the white king hears thunder, which in reality is the rumbling, pounding sound of the battering ram, just outside his castle's gate. This one is so easy, that it is served up to you on a plate. White just blundered in a lost position. How did Radjabov end the game?

Answer: Weak back rank.

38 ... Re1+ 39 Kh2 Qf1 0-1

"You are bound to me for all eternity," declares the queen, whose unnatural attraction to her brother is something she normally would never utter out loud. Of course g3 is barred to White's king and Sutovsky must hand over his queen to avoid mate.

Summary: When White plays 7 Ba4, in Closed Ruy Lopez style, our plan is: ... b5, ... Bg4, and then the Dragon-like development with ... g6.

Game 11

B.Macieja-L.Aronian

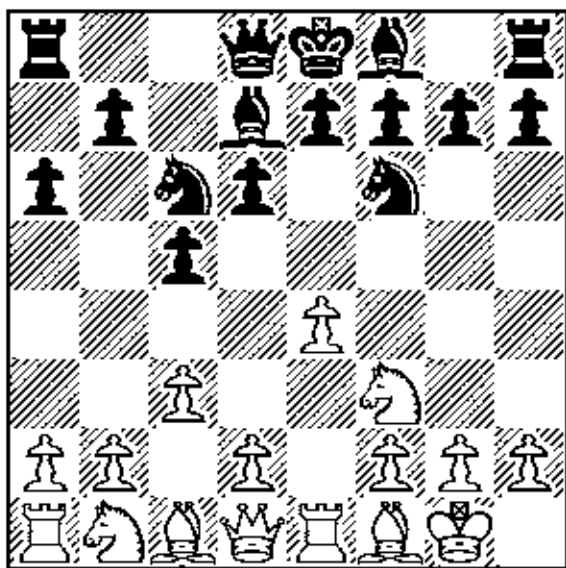
Stepanakert 2005

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 Bb5+ Nc6 4 0-0 Bd7 5 Re1 Nf6 6 c3

6 h3 has the idea that Black lacks the resource ... Bg4 later on, which often impedes White's d4 intent. Likewise, 6 ... e6 makes sense, now that we don't have ... Bg4 later on. Following 7 c3 d5 (or 7 ... Be7 8 d4 cxd4 9 cxd4 d5 10 e5 Ne4 11 Bd3 and now Black has a pawn sacrifice idea with 11 ... Nb4! 12 Bxe4 dxe4 13 Rxe4 h5! – preventing Rg4 – 14 Nc3 Bc6 15 Re1 Bxf3 16 gxf3 Qd7, Z.Hracek-M.Parligras,

Dresden 2007; greedy *Houdini* still prefers White, while I think Black's control over d5 and also White's weak pawn structure offers Black ample compensation for the pawn) 8 d3 (8 e5? just hangs a pawn to the trick 8 ... Nxe5!) 8 ... a6 9 Ba4 b5 10 Bc2 dxe4 11 dxe4 e5 the players reach a kind of Closed Lopez position, common to this variation of the Moscow/Rossolimo. The game looks approximately even to me and was covered in *Carlsen: Move by Move*, V.Bologan-M.Carlsen, Biel 2012.

6 ... a6 7 Bf1



Question: What are the differences between 7 Bf1 and 7 Ba4?

Answer: When White plays 7 Ba4, he or she offers Black free tempi with ... b5. On the plus side, White's bishop is probably better posted on c2, than on f1, since the c2-square allows the bishop to watch over the key e4-square. The idea of Bf1 is to regroup without loss of tempi, and then later slowly build for a d4 push.

7 ... Bg4

We do all we can to make the d4 push difficult for White.

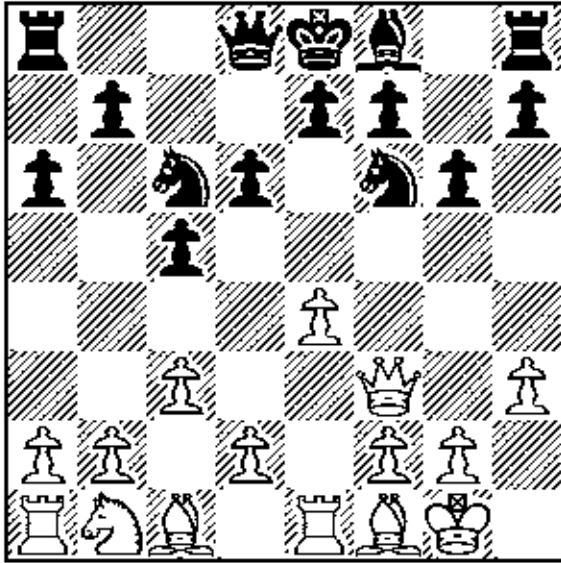
8 d3

White can also kick immediately with 8 h3:

a) I think 8 ... Bh5!? is rather risky, and would avoid this line: 9 g4! Bg6 10 d4! (White offers e4, banking on his development lead and open e-file, should Black accept) 10 ... cxd4 11 cxd4 e5! (11 ... Bxe4? is met with the tactic 12 Rxe4! Nxe4 13 d5 and White gets two pieces for the rook and two pawns, since Black's c6-knight is unable to move due to the Qa4+ threat; White stands clearly better after 13 ... Rc8 14 dxc6 Rxc6 15 Nbd2 with a huge development lead) 12 Nc3 Be7 13 Nd5! 0-0 14 Nxe7+ Qxe7 15 d5 Nb8 16 Bg5 Nbd7 17 Nd2. I prefer White, who owns greater space, and

also Black's remaining bishop feels shut out of the game, Z.Efimenko-A.Moiseenko, Kiev 2012.

b) 8 ... Bxf3! is Black's safer and probably superior alternative to backing up the bishop. Black hands over the bishop-pair, but gains considerable time after 9 Qxf3 g6.



With a bishop posted on g7, Black fights for control over d4:

b1) With 10 Qd1 White wants to achieve d4 in one go. Black's next move crosses this idea: 10 ... Bh6! is a very annoying idea for White:

1. Who is still unable to play d4.

2. Who is prevented from playing f4.

3. Nor does White want to swap off the light-squared bishops, since this would dismantle his bishop-pair.

After 11 Na3 0-0 12 Nc2 e5 13 g3 (or 13 d4 Bxc1 14 Rxc1 exd4 15 cxd4 Re8 and Black doesn't stand worse) 13 ... b5 14 d4 Bxc1 (at last) 15 Rxc1 Kg7 Black achieved an even Lopez position, since he managed to swap off two sets of minor pieces, E.Sutovsky-S.Tiviakov, Leon 2001.

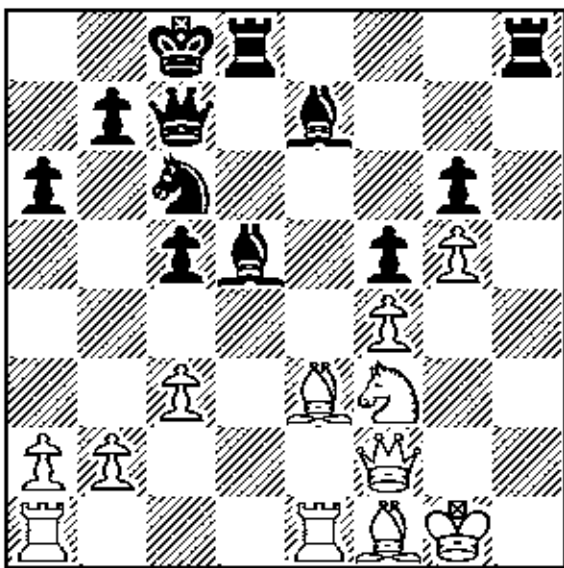
b2) 10 d3 (White is willing to lose a tempo to prevent Black's intended ... Bh6!) 10 ... Bg7 11 Be3 Nd7 12 Nd2 0-0 13 Qd1 (in preparation for Nf3 and d4, but White takes so long on the project, that it allows Black to drum up queenside counterplay) 13 ... b5 14 Nf3 Nde5! (swaps help Black) 15 Nh2 (White refuses to oblige) 15 ... Rb8 16 f4 Nd7 17 Nf3 Nb6 (also possible is the very sharp idea 17 ... e5!? 18 f5 gxf5 19 exf5 Ne7 20 g4 Nd5 21 Bf2 b4 22 c4 Nf4 when I prefer White, who is strong on the light squares) 18 Rc1 Qd7 19 d4 cxd4 20 cxd4 d5 (at some point, White's mammoth centre must be challenged) 21 e5 Nc4 22 Qc2 Rfc8 when Black's queenside play compensates White's central and kingside space, Y.Kuzubov-Z.Andriasian, Martuni 2014.

8 ... e6

Not the only approach. With 8 ... g6 9 Nbd2 Bh6! we once again use our ... Bh6 resource to eliminate White's bishop-pair: for example, 10 h3 Bxf3 11 Nxf3 Bxc1 12 Rxc1 0-0 13 d4 e5 14 Qd2 Kg7. Once again, Black reached a Closed Lopez-style position where the pair of piece swaps helped him equalize, A.David-M.Vachier Lagrave, Paris 2008.

9 h3

Another high-level encounter saw 9 Nbd2 Be7 10 h3 Bh5 11 g4 Bg6 12 Nh4 Nd7! (Black is happy to open the h-file if he is uncastled, since he can castle long and go after White's king) 13 Ng2?! (this move loses time; 13 Nxg6 hxg6 14 Nf3 Nde5 is dynamically balanced) 13 ... h5 14 f4 (Black also stands slightly better after 14 Nf4 Bg5 15 Nc4 Bxf4 16 Bxf4 Nde5 17 Nxe5 dxe5 18 Be3 hxg4 19 hxg4 Qe7) 14 ... hxg4 15 hxg4 Qc7 16 Nf3 0-0-0 (Black's king is safer than White's) 17 Ne3?! (correct was 17 d4) 17 ... Nb6! 18 Nc4? (18 f5 was necessary) 18 ... Nxc4 19 dxc4 f5 20 exf5 exf5 21 g5 Bf7 (preparing to open the game later on with ... d5) 22 Qc2 g6 23 Qf2 d5 (it becomes clear that White's king is in serious trouble) 24 cxd5 Bxd5 25 Be3.



Exercise (combination alert): Carlsen found a combination here, without sight of the board. Can you find it?

Answer: Clearance/overloaded defender: 25 ... Bxg5!, V.Anand-M.Carlsen, Nice (blindfold) 2009. If 26 fxg5 (26 Nxg5?? Rh1 mate) 26 ... Bxf3! and White is unable to recapture, due to the mate threat on h2.

9 ... Bh5

9 ... Bxf3 doesn't make as much sense here.

Question: Why?

Answer: GM Jonathan Rowson responds after 10 Qxf3: “Generally speaking, ... Bxf3 works better in conjunction with ... g6, and ... Bh5 works better with ... e6.”

10 g4

10 Nbd2 Be7 11 g4 Bg6 transposes to the Anand-Carlsen note above.

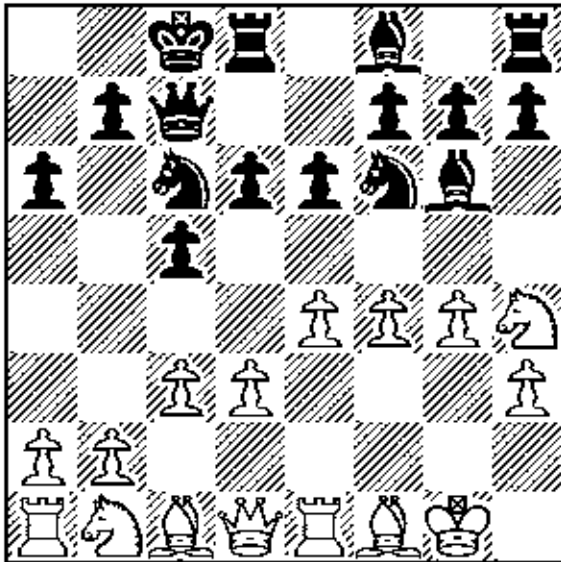
10 ... Bg6 11 Nh4 Qc7

With 11 ... Nd7 Black induces White into Nxb6 or Ng2, but after 12 Nxb6 hxb6 13 d4 g5 14 Be3 Qf6 15 b4! I prefer White, who owns the centre and the bishop-pair, M.Glazman-A.Kazoks, correspondence 2006.

12 f4

Threatening to smother Black's g6-bishop with f5, next.

12 ... 0-0-0!



Which Black ignores! Aronian discovers structure in the position's apparent randomness, with a move which declares to the opponent that his previous views are about to be contradicted.

Question: Isn't Black just losing now?

Answer: Black deals with White's f5 threat tactically (as we will see in the coming notes). Now if f5 doesn't work, then this means that White pushed a lot of pawns in front of his king, endangering it.

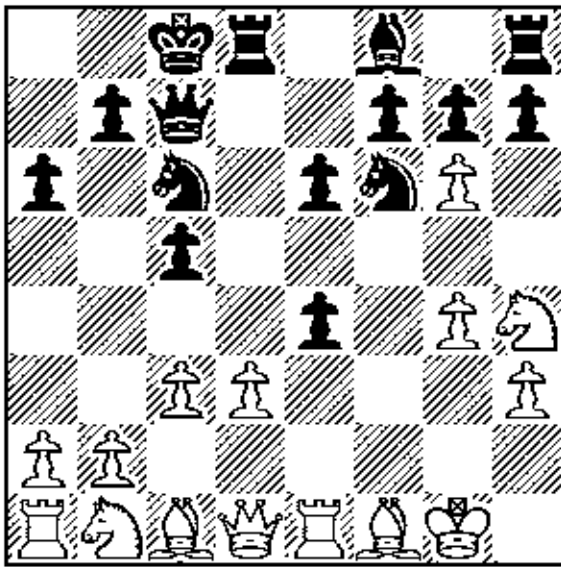
13 Nd2!

Events right themselves in due course, contingent that White finds the correct plan. Macieja deftly extracts the kernel of truth from a bewildering array of temptations:

Black's bishop is indeed trapped, but the cost is too high for White. White has a choice of two plans in ascending order of chances of success:

1. Take the offered piece and expose his king.
2. Decline the piece and just play for central space.

If White succumbs to temptation, hardening himself to the coming inevitable wave, with 13 f5? he faces disaster after 13 ... d5! when the terrain makes for treacherous footing for White, whose position is unable to withstand the comp's scrutiny after 14 fxg6 (or 14 exd5 Nxd5 15 Qf3 Bd6 16 fxg6 Bg3 17 Qxf7 Rd7 18 Qxe6 Bxh4 19 Re2 hxg6 and White's king remains seriously exposed) 14 ... dxe4!:



a) 15 gxf7 Qg3+ 16 Ng2 (16 Bg2 Ne5 is also rough for White) 16 ... Bd6 with mounting threats. It doesn't require Nostradamus' power of inner sight to realize that all is not well in White's position, with the likelihood that matters will get worse in the coming moves.

b) 15 Ng2 hxg6 16 g5 Nh5 17 Rxe4 Bd6 18 Kf2 Bh2! 19 Be3 Ng3 with threats of ... Nxe4 and also ... Rxh3.

c) 15 g5 hxg6 16 gxf6 Rxh4 17 Nd2 exd3 18 Nf3 Rh5 19 fxg7 Bxg7 20 Be3 Qg3+ 21 Bg2 Rxh3 and White is highly unlikely to survive.

13 ... d5!

Black's position bubbles over with a yeasty malevolence. Once again, he doesn't concern himself with the protection of his 'trapped' g6-bishop.

14 e5

It feels as if the g6-bishop remains damned in eternal perdition, yet all attempts to trap it seem to work out badly for White. 14 f5? is still suicide for White after 14 ... Qg3+ 15 Ng2 Bd6 with a winning attack.

14 ... Nd7 15 Ndf3

Sometimes we are perfectly aware of a truth in our hearts, yet our conscious mind fears to acknowledge it. 15 f5? once again overextends White after 15 ... exf5 16 gxf5 Be7! when he doesn't even win a piece for his miserable position.

15 ... Be7 16 Bg2

GM Meier attempted to improve on White's play a couple of years later with 16 Qe2 Kb8 17 Bd2 Rde8 18 Qg2 f6 19 exf6 Bxf6 20 g5 Bd8 21 Nxc6 hxg6 22 Re2 Qd6 23 Rae1 Bc7. The game remains uneasily even, G.Meier-G.Gopal, Yerevan 2007.

16 ... Kb8 17 Be3 f6

Black finally chips away at White's huge centre.

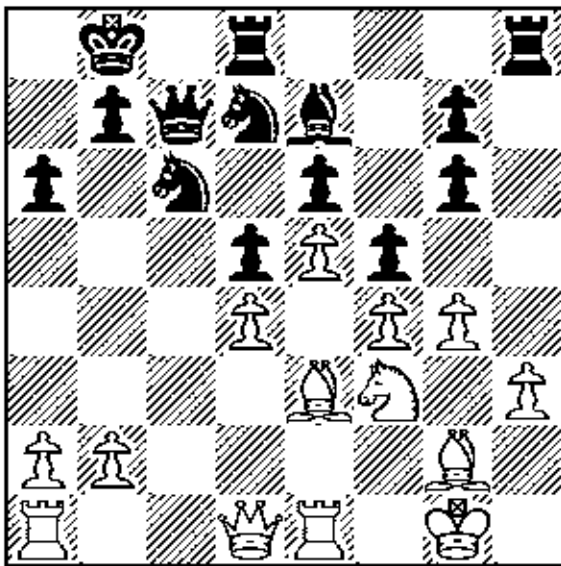
18 Nxc6 hxg6 19 d4

White's king is now reasonably safe, with the centre stabilized.

19 ... cxd4

It may have been a better plan to retain central tension and play for a ... g5 break, since opening the c-file probably helps White.

20 cxd4 f5!?



Aronian offers to close the kingside and take his chances on the queenside.

21 g5 Rc8

"Now the position seems about equal, but White has the more probable weaknesses, and the position is a lot easier for Black to play," writes Rowson.

22 Re2 Na5 23 Rc1

23 b3 allows 23 ... Ba3, seizing control over c1, and therefore the c-file.

23 ... Qb6 24 Rxc8+ Rxc8 25 Rc2 Nc4 26 Bc1 Rc6 27 Bf1

Note that Black must keep his knight on d7, since he must meet Nh4 with ... Nf8.

27 ... Na5 28 Kf2 Bd8 29 Be3 Nc4

I imagine that Aronian did this while his opponent was rather short of time.

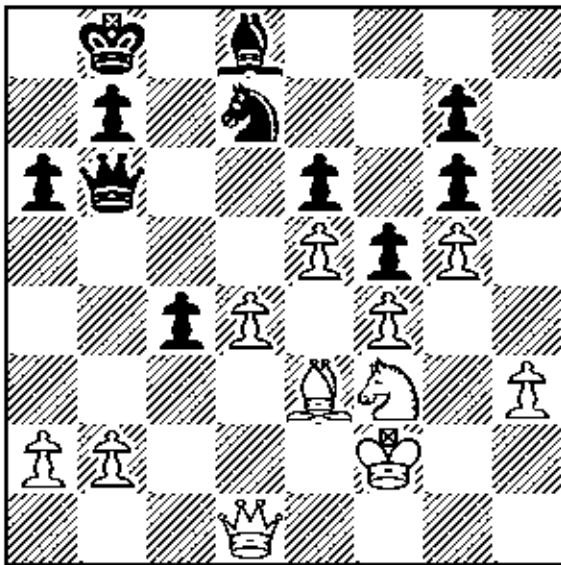
30 Bxc4!?

White gives away his best piece, for one of Black's best pieces. The move weakens his light squares. 30 Bc1 is safer and keeps the game in the balance.

30 ... Rxc4 31 Rxc4!?

Each loss is a chronicle of our shortcomings. In this case Macieja overpressed, pushing too hard to unbalance the game. It's always dangerous if our confidence rises to the level where we can't even imagine the possibility of defeat. 31 b3 Rxc2+ 32 Qxc2 Be7 33 Nh4 Nf8 is equal.

31 ... dxc4



32 d5!?

White recognizes that he can't allow Black to blockade d5, so he sacrifices a pawn to break through in the centre. He may have waited to implement his d5 idea with 32 b3!? Qc6 33 bxc4 Qxc4 34 Qb3 Qxb3 35 axb3 Be7 36 d5!? exd5 37 Nd4 Nf8 38 h4 Bb4 39 e6 Kc7 40 h5 (undermining f5) 40 ... Kd8 41 hxg6 Bc3 42 Nxf5 Nxe6. The position is tricky, and should work out to a draw with correct play.

32 ... Qxb2+ 33 Kg3?

This looks like time-pressure reflex, more than conscious decision. The king looks completely safe on g3, but it is the wrong square, which falls afowl to Black's future tactical tricks.

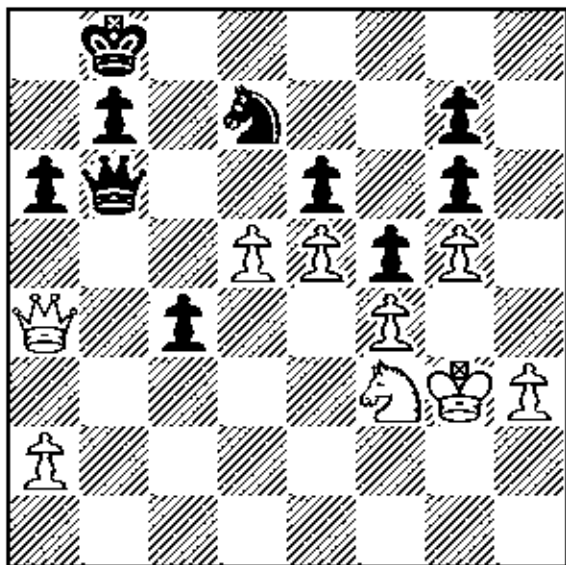
White should play 33 Kf1! exd5 34 Qxd5 Bb6! 35 Nd4 Qa3 36 Kf2 Nc5 37 Qg8+ Ka7 38 Qxc4 Ne4+ 39 Ke2 Qb2+ 40 Qc2 Qa1 41 Nc6+! (this move saves White) 41 ... bxc6 42 Bxb6+ Kxb6 43 Qb3+ Kc7 (or 43 ... Kc5 44 Qa3+ Kb5 45 Qd3+ and Black is unable to evade perpetual check) 44 Qf7+ with perpetual check.

33 ... Bb6! 34 Bxb6

34 Qg1 Bxe3 35 Qxe3 Qb6! gives Black a winning position: 36 Nd4 (or 36 Qxb6

Nxb6 37 dxe6 Nd5 38 Nd4 Kc7 39 h4 c3 40 Kf3 Kd8 41 a4 b6 42 Nc6+ Ke8 43 Nd4 b5! when the blockade is broken; after 44 axb5 axb5 the b-pawn can't be taken and Black's queenside passers win the game) 36 ... Nc5! 37 Kf3 Qd8! 38 d6 Qa5 39 Nc2 Qb5. White's single passer is blocked, while Black's queenside majority rolls forward, like pallbearers sombrely walking the coffin to the grave.

34 ... Qxb6! 35 Qa4?



Exercise (combination alert): One king is about to lose his kingdom, while the other retains his. White's last move was a mistake in an already lost position. How did Aronian end the game?

Answer: Mating net. Black either wins a second pawn, or weaves a mating net.

35 ... Nc5! 0-1

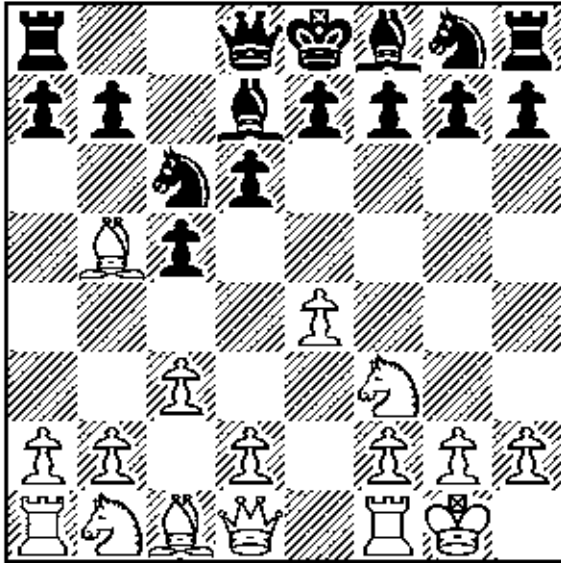
An unseen enemy is a hundred times more dangerous than the one who stands openly before you. From nowhere, White's king is faced with insoluble threats. It's mate after 36 Qxc4 (or 36 Qc2 Ne4+ 37 Kg2 exd5 when White is helplessly tied down to defence of f2, and can resign) 36 ... Ne4+ 37 Kg2 Qf2+ 38 Kh1 Ng3.

Summary: After 7 Bf1, we play 7 ... Bg4 to stall White's intended d4 plan. Remember: if we decide to set up with ... g6, then play a future ... Bxf3 on White's h3; if we set up with ... e6, then play ... Bh5, provoking the weakening g4, as in this game's continuation.

Game 12

Wen Yang-Wang Yue
Shandong Zonal 2007

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 d6 4 0-0 Bd7 5 c3



This time White skips Re1 and proceeds to build his centre immediately.

5 ... a6 6 Bxc6

Question: Why would White just hand over the valuable bishop-pair like this?

Answer: Because retreating it involves a loss of time. White's move is the prelude to a dangerous pawn sacrifice. Instead, 6 Ba4 Nf6 7 Re1 b5 8 Bc2 Bg4 transposes to the Sutovsky-Radjabov game, which we looked at earlier in the chapter.

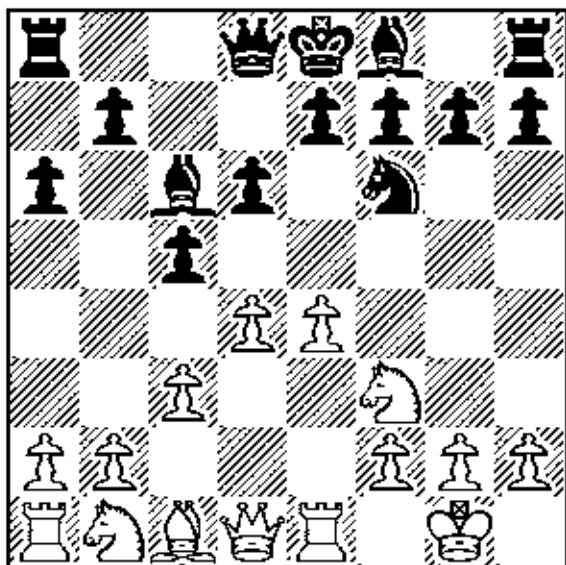
6 ... Bxc6 7 Re1

White is ready for d4.

7 ... Nf6

We develop, while attacking e4. Note that 5 Re1 Nf6 6 c3 a6 7 Bxc6 Bxc6 would be but another route to this position.

8 d4



Which White ignores! Sometimes when we sacrifice, our only compensation is what we pretend it to be – but not in this case. This is the beginning of a rather dangerous sacrifice, which we need to know well. For the e-pawn, White gets an open e-file and a scary development lead.

Alternatives give White nothing:

a) 8 e5 dxe5 9 Nxe5 Rc8 (more forcing is 9 ... Qd5 which threatens mate on g2 and virtually forces White to swap on c6; after 10 Nxc6 Qxc6 Black intends to place his rook on the d-file, with equality at a minimum) 10 d3 e6 11 Nd2 Be7 12 Nxc6 Rxc6 13 Nc4 0-0 14 Qf3. If anyone stands better, it is Black, who can maybe later apply pressure down the d-file, P.Brochet-A.Areshchenko, Plovdiv 2010.

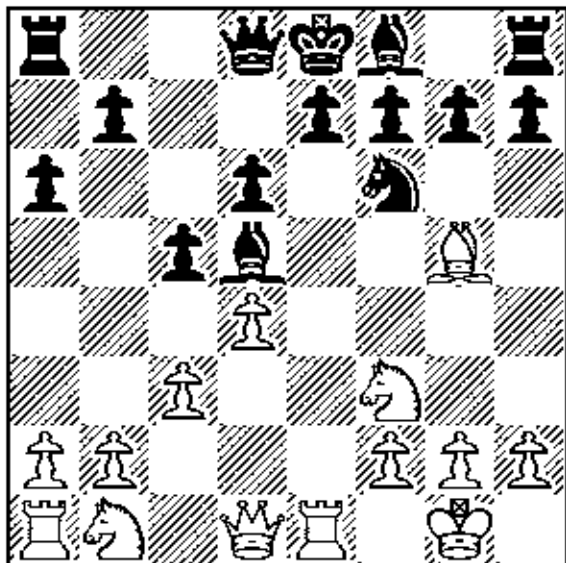
b) 8 d3 too is way too mild to produce anything for White: 8 ... g6 (also fine for Black is to set up with 8 ... e6 9 Nbd2 Be7 10 d4 cxd4 11 Nxd4 Qc7 and all White achieved was a passive looking Open Sicilian, R.Weemaes-H.Cardon, Sas van Gent 1988) 9 Bg5 Bg7 10 Qc1 0-0 11 Bh6 e5! (a good move which grabs a fair chunk of the centre, ensuring that after White swaps on g7, Black remains with a good bishop) 12 Bxg7 Kxg7 13 Nbd2, was A.Bannikova-P.Smirnov, Novokuznetsk 2007. Black already stands slightly better after 13 ... Nh5 with ... Nf4 and ... f5 to follow.

8 ... Bxe4

We grab the offered pawn and make White prove compensation. To my mind there is no good reason for us to toss in 8 ... cxd4!? 9 cxd4 which only benefits White, since we opened the c3-square for a knight. However, since a player as strong as Gelfand tried it, let's look closer: 9 ... Bxe4 10 Nc3 Bxf3 (10 ... Bg6?! 11 d5 and it won't be easy to develop Black's kingside pieces) 11 Qxf3 e6 (Gelfand returns the pawn to develop) 12 Qxb7 Qc8 13 Qf3 Be7 14 Qg3 0-0 15 Bh6 Ne8. Black successfully completed his development and equalized, V.Topalov-B.Gelfand, Astana (rapid) 2012.

So tossing in 8 ... cxd4 may be playable, but this just seems like a passive – if still solid – interpretation of the position.

9 Bg5 Bd5!



Question: d5 seems a rather artificial square for the bishop. Wouldn't g6 be a better option?

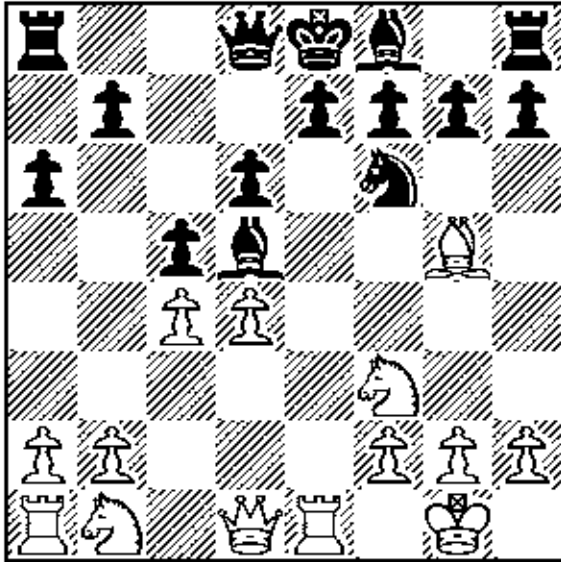
Answer: General consensus says this is Black's best move, which contains two ideas:

1. Black slows down any d5 ideas from White.
2. Black covers against c4 as well.

Houdini actually prefers your suggestion of playing the bishop to g6, which has been tried in a high-level game: 9 ... Bg6!? 10 d5 (this is the trouble with developing the bishop to g6; it allows White d5, which inhibits Black's kingside development) 10 ... Qd7 (now Black leaves options open for ... e5 and also queenside castling(11 Nbd2 0-0-0 (11 ... Nxd5?? is way too greedy, and Black pays for it after 12 Nc4 Qc6 13 Na5 Qc7 14 Qxd5; White won a piece, since if Black tries to regain it with 14 ... Qxa5?? 15 Qxb7 White threatens the a8-rook and Rxe7+, and 15 ... Qd8 fails miserably to 16 Qc6+) 12 Nc4 (threatening a cheapo on b6) 12 ... Kb8. Greed-driven *Houdini* still prefers Black, while most humans would take White due to the coming queenside attacking chances, E.Ghaem Maghami-A.Motylev, German League 2010.

10 Nbd2

White prepares c4. There's also the immediate 10 c4!?. Computer analysis indicates this second pawn sacrifice is also fully playable for White.



Question: Hey, didn't you earlier say "Black covers against c4 as well"?

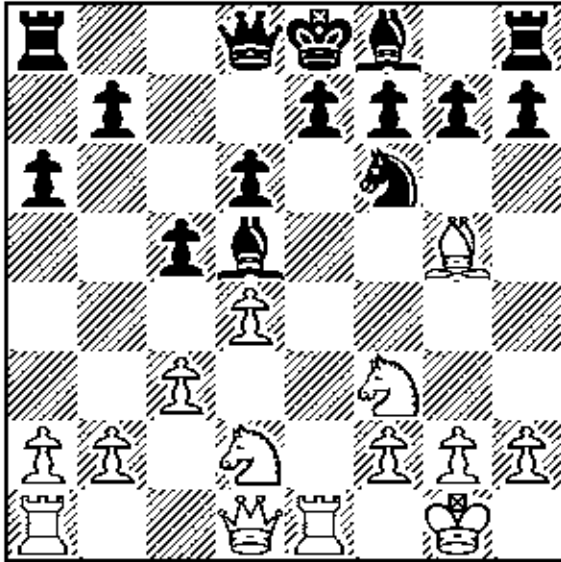
Answer: Well, maybe I should have reworded my previous statement from "covers" to "discourages". This is White's nuclear option, which we should be ready for, since we fall considerably behind in development. Of course, we do have two extra pawns to comfort us in our time of need after 10 ... Bxc4 11 Nc3:

a) I don't trust 11 ... cxd4?!, which accelerates White's development lead: 12 Nxd4 e6? (Black has to try 12 ... e5 13 Qf3 Be6 14 Nxe6 fxe6 15 Rad1 h6 16 Bxf6 gxf6 17 Ne4 Be7 and pray he can hang on) 13 Bxf6! gxf6 (or 13 ... Qxf6 14 Qa4+ b5, Li Chao-Bu Xiangzhi, Shenzhen 2011, when Black is crushed after 15 Ncxb5) 14 b3 Bb5 15 Nd5! (threat Qh5 and Nxe6) 15 ... h5 16 Qc2! with too many threats. If 16 ... Rc8? 17 Rxe6+! fxe6 18 Qg6+ Kd7 19 Qf7+ which is deadly.

b) 11 ... e6 12 Bxf6 gxf6 13 d5 e5 14 Nh4 Bb5 15 Ne4 Bd7 16 Qh5 and White's powerful light-square central blockade ensures full compensation for the two missing pawns, S.Martinovic-V.Anand, Groningen 1989.

c) 11 ... Be6! (*Houdini*'s top choice) 12 dxc5 dxc5 13 Qa4+ b5 14 Qh4 Qb6 15 a4, S.Martinovic-M.Petursson, Athens 1993. The white attack's fire doesn't quite come to a full boil. *Houdini* still rates this at '0.00'. White still has some compensation for the two missing pawns, but in this case I like Black's chances of surviving the storm and converting.

Returning to 10 Nbd2:



10 ... e6

Our structure is designed for durability, rather than flair.

Question: Black's last move allowed White his intent.
Why not play 10 ... c4, preventing White's c4 idea?

Answer: I think this is not such a good idea for Black, who gets so caught up in preventing c4, that she falls behind in development after 11 b3 b5 12 bxc4 bxc4 13 Nf1!. Suddenly, I think Black is in trouble, since Ne3 follows with great force: 13 ... e6 14 Ne3 Qa5 15 Bxf6 gxf6 16 Nd2 Rg8 17 Ndx4 (the simple 17 g3 also leaves White with a clear advantage) 17 ... Bxc4?! (I would try and mix it up with 17 ... Rxc2+!? 18 Nxc2 Bxc4, although, objectively, White must have the advantage here, as well) 18 Nxc4 Qb5 19 Ne3 with a clear advantage for White, who regained the sacrificed pawn, with Black's king still stuck in the middle, E.Sedina-A.Kosteniuk, Dresden 2004.

11 c4

11 Bxf6 gxf6 12 c4 Bxf3 13 Qxf3 cxd4 14 Qxb7 transposes to the game.

11 ... Bxf3

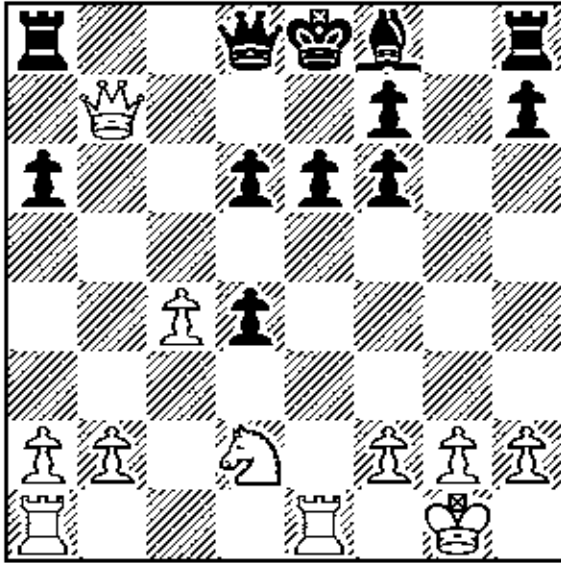
We should make this concession. 11 ... Bc6?! allows White's initiative to expand after 12 d5 Bd7 13 Ne4 Be7 14 Bxf6 gxf6, S.Brynell-T.Ernst, Malmo 1988. I like White's chances after 15 Nh4! Kf8 (15 ... f5? 16 dxe6 Bxe6? is met with 17 Nxf5! when Black can no longer keep White's threats in abeyance: for instance, 17 ... Bxf5 18 Nxd6+ Kf8 19 Nxf5 with a completely winning position for White) 16 Qh5 f5 17 Nxf5! exf5 18 Nxd6! Bxd6 19 Qh6+ Kg8 20 Qxd6 (White threatens both Qxc5 and Re7) 20 ... Be8 21 Qxc5. White has huge compensation for the piece, with two pawns, Black's h8-rook shut out of the game, and also a looming attack over Black's king.

12 Qxf3 cxd4

By eliminating White's d-pawn, Black's king grows considerably safer.

13 Bxf6 gxf6

Our queen is required to cover our a8-rook.

14 Qxb7**14 ... Rb8**

Alternatively, 14 ... Bg7 15 Qc6+ Kf8!? (*Houdini's* choice, over the e7-square, which is more common) 16 Ne4 was seen in A.Cherniaev-I.Yagupov, Russia 1995. Black still looks okay if he plays 16 ... Rb8 17 c5 dxc5 18 Qxa6 f5 19 Nxc5 Qd5 20 Rac1 Bf6 (preparing for ... Kg7) 21 Nxe6+ fxe6 22 Rxe6 Be7 23 Rc7 Rg8 24 g3 Re8 and now White has nothing better than to take the draw with 25 Rf6+ Kg7 26 Re6 Kf8 27 Rf6+.

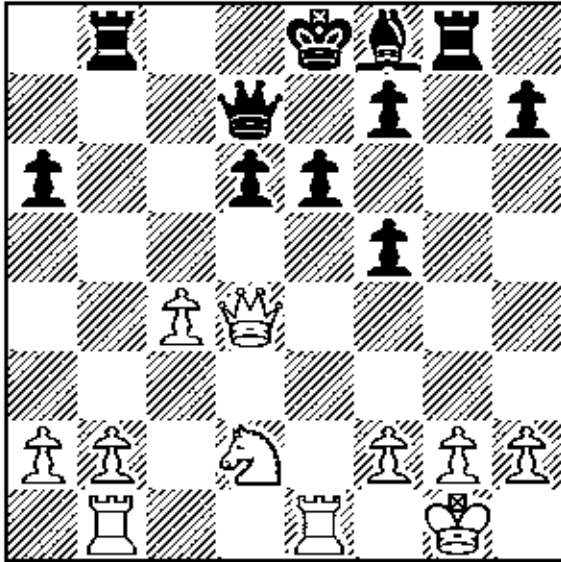
15 Qc6+ Qd7 16 Qe4

After 16 Qxa6 Bg7 17 Nb3 0-0 18 Nxd4 f5 19 Nb5 Rfc8 20 Qa4 d5 21 Rad1 Qb7 22 b3 Ra8 23 Qb4 Rxa2 Black stands slightly better. If 24 cxd5? exd5 25 Re3 Qb6 26 g3 d4 27 Ree1 Ra5 White drops his knight.

16 ... f5 17 Qxd4 Rg8

Black's rook makes good use of the open g-file.

18 Rab1



Theory ends here.

Question: Who stands better?

Answer: A cluttered mess seems to occupy the volume of the entire board. Let's try to make sense of it and assess:

1. Black's central pawns offer reasonable cover to his king, who will probably hide on f8.
2. Black's bishop is a potentially stronger piece than White's knight – unless there are tactics on Black's king.
3. White's queenside majority can be launched with a timely b4.
4. The two kings look equally insecure, since White will be forced into playing g3.

Conclusion: Chances appear dynamically balanced.

18 Nb3 was no improvement. 18 ... Qc6 (threatening mate on g2) 19 g3 Bg7 20 Qh4 Kf8 21 Rac1!? (safer was 21 Re2) 21 ... Bxb2 22 Rb1?! (necessary was 22 Nd4! Qc8 23 Qf6! Rg4 24 Qh8+ Ke7 25 Nxf5+ Kd7 26 Qxh7 Qg8 27 Qxg8 Rgxg8 28 Nh6 Bxc1 29 Nxc8 Bg5 30 f4 Rxc8 31 fxc5 Rxc5; I slightly favour Black's chances, since his king is more active, although the correct result should probably be a future draw) 22 ... Rg4 23 Qxh7 Bg7 when White's queen found herself out of play and White's queenside pawns are weak, O.Nikolenko-E.Gasanov, Dagomys 2009.

18 ... Qc6 19 g3 a5

A good move which slows White's queenside majority.

20 b3 Qc5 21 Qd3

White's goal is to continue endangering Black's king. I prefer Black's chances in the ending after 21 Qxc5 dxc5 since White's majority has been nullified.

21 ... Be7

Preparing ... h5 and ... h4, which chips away at the white king's pawn cover.

22 Nf3 h5!

Black arranges his thoughts in the direction of White's king.

23 Nd4 Rg6

An insurance policy that sacrifices on e6 will fail for White.

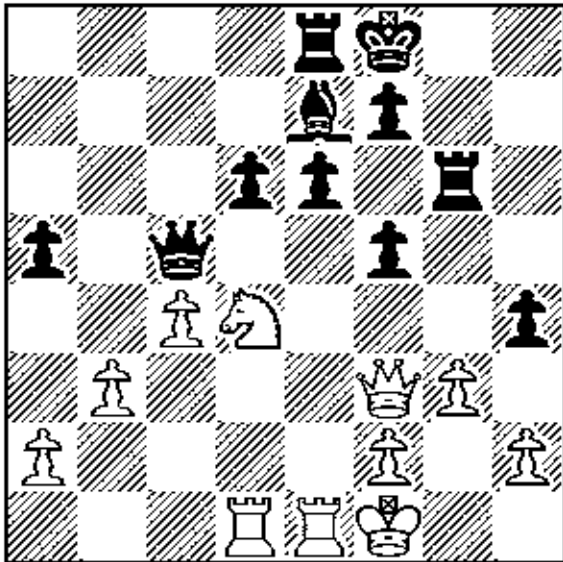
24 Kf1 h4

Houdini rates the game at '0.00', while I prefer Black's chances.

25 Rbd1 Kf8

It's wise for Black's king to remove himself from the e-file, due to potential future cheapos on f5 or e6.

26 Qf3 Re8



Preparing ... Bf6.

27 Ne2

Intending to transfer to f4. White still wants to attack, refusing to play 27 Qc6 hxg3 28 hxg3 a4 29 Qxc5 dxc5 30 Nc6 axb3 31 axb3 Bf6 32 Ne5 (threatening Nxc6+, as well as Nd7+ and Nxc5, which forces Black's next move) 32 ... Bxe5 33 Rxe5 Rc8 with a likely draw.

27 ... Rh6 28 Nf4 Bg5 29 Nd3 Qc7 30 c5!?

This move ups the ante, giving both sides two pawn majorities.

30 ... d5!?

Black is up for the challenge. 30 ... dxc5 31 Ne5 Rd8 is a safer route for him.

31 a3

White prepares to roll his majority forward.

31 ... Qb7 32 Ne5?!

White's optimistic assessment is checked by the position's reality. He wanders off message, when his goal should be to push forward his majority with 32 b4 Bf6 33 Rb1 Qb5 34 Kg2 which maintains the uneasy balance.

32 ... Bf6

White's game comes under greater pressure after 32 ... hxc3! 33 hxc3 Kg7 34 Qd3 Bf6 35 Nf3 Rc8.

33 Kg1 hxc3 34 hxc3?!

Believe it or not, this is the wrong recapture. White's king is a lot safer after the unnatural 34 fxg3! since it allows his rooks lateral protection of h2.

34 ... Kg7

Preparing to swing his e-rook to h8.

35 Nc4

Threatening a fork on d6, as well as Nxa5.

35 ... Reh8!

It's tempting to walk on and on the road of preparation. Wang Yue decides this is the moment to veer way and take action. So he offers his a-pawn to accelerate his attack.

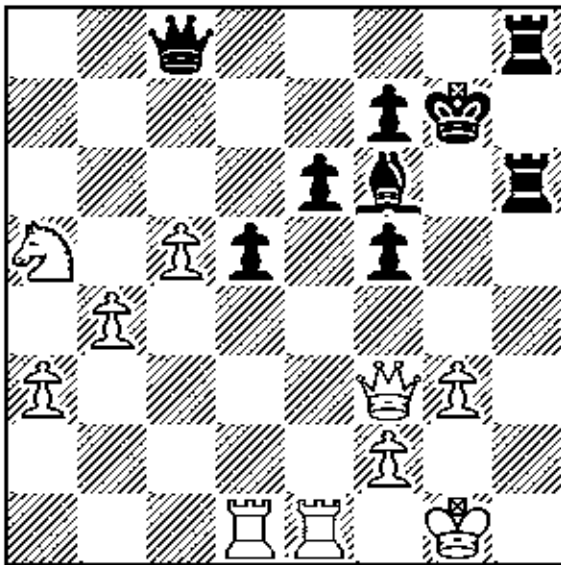
36 Nxa5

White has a completely winning position, if his king survives – which it won't! The trouble is the new situation of White's king safety – or lack of it – completely submerges his plan to push his queenside passers to victory.

36 ... Qc8!?

The position brims with those on-the-one hand/on-the-other-hand decisions. More accurate was 36 ... Qa6! retaining control over the f1 flight square for White's king, and if 37 b4 Rh2 38 Nb3 e5! with the murderous threat of ... e4!, with a decisive attack.

37 b4



Exercise (planning): There is no turning back for Black now, since he is highly unlikely

to amortize his considerable debt of one pawn, coupled with White's three connected queenside passed pawns. Black must whip up a winning attack. But how?

Answer: Pawn sacrifice. Black must include his kingside and central pawns in his attack to loosen the pawn front around White's king, and most importantly, play ... e5 and ... e4, seizing control over the f3-square.

37 ... e5!

New threats germinate afresh around White's king.

38 Rxd5 e4 39 Qg2

And not 39 Qxf5?? Rh1+ 40 Kg2 R8h2 mate.

39 ... f4!

Also crushing was 39 ... Qe6 40 Rdd1 f4! threatening ... f3:

a) 41 Rd6 Rh1+ 42 Qxh1 Rxh1+ 43 Kxh1 Qh3+ 44 Kg1 f3 forces mate next move.

b) 41 gxf4+ Rg6 wins White's queen.

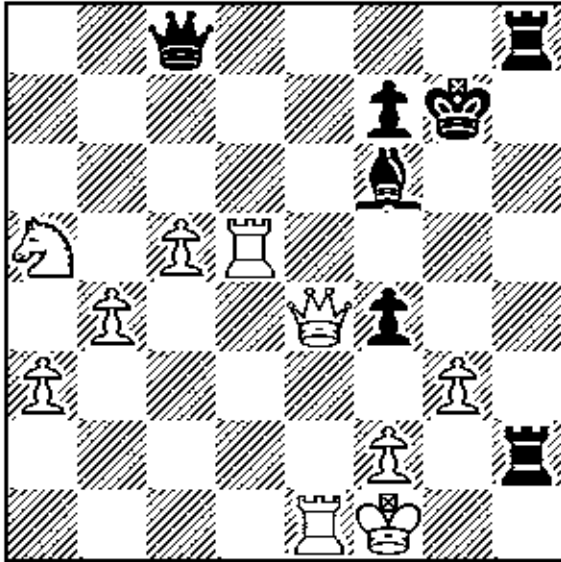
c) 41 Qxe4 Rh1+ 42 Kg2 Qh3+! (not so clear is 42 ... Qxe4+? 43 Rxe4 Rxd1 44 Rxf4 when White's extra four pawns give him perhaps full compensation for Black's extra rook) 43 Kf3 Qh5+ 44 Kxf4 Bg5+ 45 Ke5 Rxe1 46 Rxe1 Rd8! (even more deadly than the simple rook check on e8, which also wins) 47 Nc6 Be3+ 48 Qf5 Re8+ 49 Kd6 Qxf5 and wins.

40 Qxe4 Rh2!

Threat: ... Qh3.

41 Kf1

After 41 Qxf4 Rh1+ 42 Kg2 R8h2+ 43 Kf3 Rxe1 Black picks up a rook and continues his attack. Note that White is unable to play 44 Qg4+ since he drops another pawn after 44 ... Qxg4+ 45 Kxg4 Rxf2. Now if White attempts to promote with 46 c6, Black's attack regains its previous momentum, despite the absence of queens, after 46 ... Be5! 47 b5 f5+ 48 Kh4 Rh1+ 49 Kg5 Bf6 mate.



Exercise (combination alert): One glance tells us that this is not a congenial environment for White's king. His last move offers only mild, temporary comfort, as a painkiller medication to a person with an excruciatingly tormenting terminal illness. Black to play and force mate.

Answer: Principle: *In a king hunt, don't chase the opponent's king; instead, cut off flight squares.*

41 ... Qg4!

The queen watches over e2, the way an unscrupulous shopkeeper spouts an impossibly high sum, for an item he knows you desperately desire. Black's king is denied access to e2.

42 Kg1 Rh1+! 43 Qxh1 Rxh1+ 44 Kxh1 Qh3+ 0-1

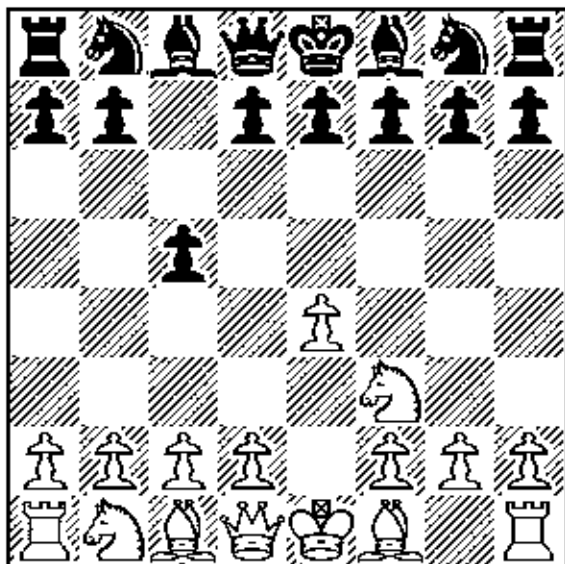
All tender emotions had long since atrophied in the queen's heart, as she eyes White's caged king with the curiosity of a small child at the zoo. After 45 Kg1 f3 a deadly threat finally penetrates the once-dense surface of White's defensive barrier and there is no escape for White's king.

Summary: White's pawn sacrifice after 8 d4!? is sound and we must know the theory well in order to reach dynamic equality.

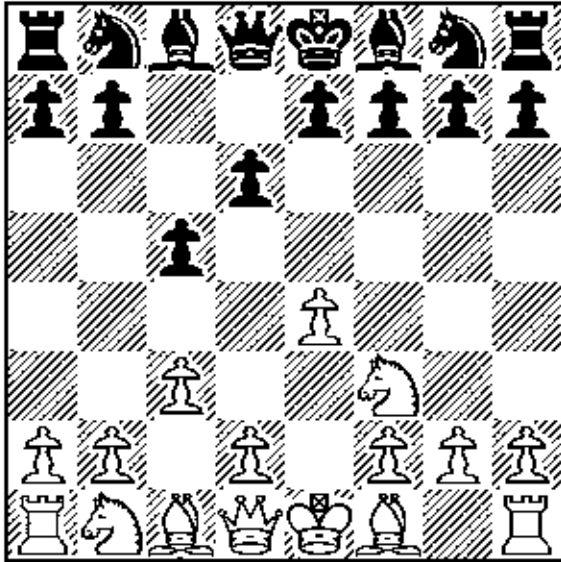
Chapter Three

2 Nf3 Move Orders

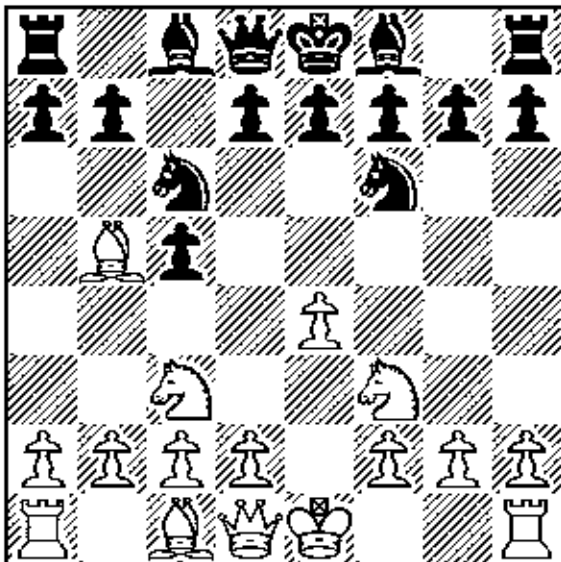
1 e4 c5 2 Nf3



“Ah, me! It’s a wicked world, and when a clever man turns his brain to crime, it is the worst of all,” lamented Sherlock Holmes. In this chapter we deal with White’s devious attempts at misdirection, with 2 Nf3 move order issues, which can easily throw us off our normal lines if we aren’t paying attention. After 2 Nf3, we must not continue with the assumption that the game is destined for Open Sicilian territory, and proceed with the airy unconcern of one who feels that all is well in the world. For example:



If we are Najdorf or Dragon players, we play the move order 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6. Now White tosses in 3 c3, after which we enter a hybrid c3-Sicilian system, which is very different from the normal 2 c3 Sicilian move orders.



In this position, White played the move order 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3. Now if we are Pelikan players, we play 3 ... Nf6. Then White responds with 4 Bb5, after which we reach a kind of pseudo-Rossolimo, with the insertion of the moves Nc3 and ... Nf6. As you may have guessed, the strategy is completely different from our normal Rossolimo lines. So in this chapter, our job is to stay alert, disentangle the actual from

the hallucinatory, and not get tricked out of our favourite lines.

Game 13

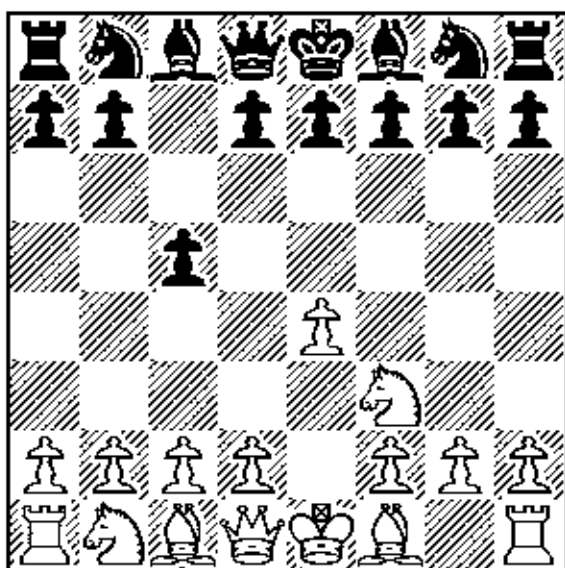
G.Lazarev-D.Andreikin

Moscow 2012

1 e4 c5 2 d4

Question: Did you misfile this game into the wrong chapter?

Answer: Please remain calm. Our normal move order would be 2 Nf3.

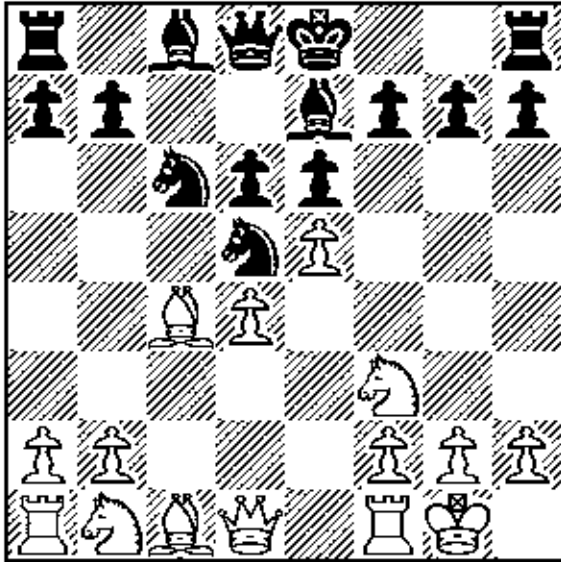


In this chapter we cover White's various tricky move orders, with 2 Nf3. Here 2 ... e6 3 c3 Nf6 4 e5 Nd5 5 d4 cxd4 6 Bc4 would transpose to the game.

Question: I play the Pelikan Sicilian as Black and always respond with 2 ... Nc6. Will this move order alter anything?

Answer: Yes. This move order knocks Black out of our planned ... b6 set-ups, as we examined in the first chapter of the book. Next game we will deal with this move order issue, with the line 3 c3 Nf6 4 e5 Nd5 5 d4 cxd4 which gets us into a main line of the c3-Sicilian, with thousands of games played from this position. One issue is that your opponent will be very well versed in this position.

Another line here is 5 Bc4 when 5 ... Nb6 6 Bb3 c4 7 Bc2 Qc7 8 Qe2 g5 transposes to a position we looked at in the final game of Chapter One. Black can also try 5 ... e6 6 d4 cxd4 7 cxd4 d6 8 0-0 Be7.



Question: Should we worry about 9 Bxd5?

Answer: No. The move does little damage, since White gives up the bishop-pair and we later undouble our pawns with ... d6 and ... dxe5. For example, 9 ... exd5 10 Nc3 Be6 11 Bf4 dxe5 12 Nxe5 Rc8 and Black equalized, J.Blauert-Z.Kozul, Portoroz 1997.

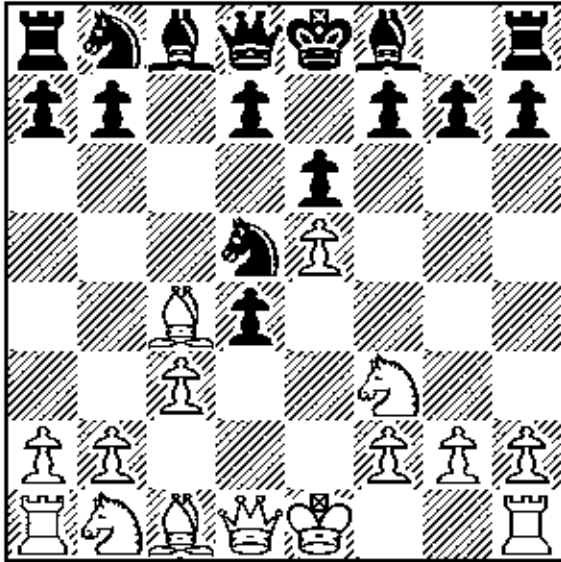
Instead, after 9 Qe2 0-0 10 Nc3 (or 10 Qe4 Bd7 11 Bd3 f5 12 exf6 Nxf6 13 Qe2 Qa5 14 Nc3 Qh5 and Black stood no worse in D.Brandenburg-A.Giri, Groningen 2009; note that here if 11 Bxd5?! exd5 12 Qxd5 Nb4! 13 Qb3 dxe5 Black regains the pawn with a clear advantage after 14 Nxe5 Be6 15 Qd1 Nxa2) 10 ... Nxc3 11 bxc3 dxe5 12 dxe5 (capturing e5 with the knight is just dead even; White agrees to damage to his structure, hoping to generate attacking chances with his e5-pawn) 12 ... b6 13 Rd1 Qc7 14 Bd3 Bb7 15 h4 Rfd8 16 Bf4 Rd5 17 Bc2 in M.Vachier Lagrave-A.Grischuk, Beijing (rapid) 2014, I prefer Black's better structure over White's kingside chances, after 17 ... Rad8.

Returning to 2 d4:

2 ... cxd4 3 c3

White offers a Smith Morra Gambit, which is declined, transposing back to c3-Sicilian lines. Later in the book we examine the acceptance of the gambit.

3 ... Nf6 4 e5 Nd5 5 Nf3 e6 6 Bc4



Okay, so we ignore the Smith Morra part of this game and get back to c3-Sicilian.

Question: Why isn't this game in the first chapter, on the c3-Sicilian?

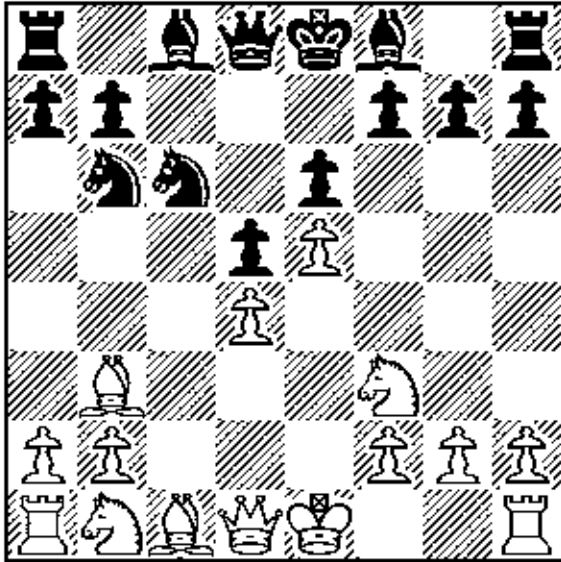
Answer: I wanted to separate this position from the games of the first chapter, mainly since we are unable to play our normal ... b6 lines in this version. We are forced into a 'real' c3-Sicilian, and must be ready for it. White can only force us into these positions with the move order 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3.

Instead, here 6 cxd4 b6 gets us to the lines we already examined in Chapter One.

6 ... Nb6

One issue with ... Nb6 is that it places the knight further away from Black's king, where it may later be needed for defence. Instead, 6 ... Nc6 transposes to the Vachier Lagrave-Grischuk note from above.

7 Bb3 Nc6 8 cxd4 d5



Question: I don't care for French-style positions. Can I thus opt for 8 ... d6?

Answer: Yes, this is a way out for you if you don't like Advance French structures for Black's side: 9 0-0 (9 exd6 transposes to our game) 9 ... dxe5 10 dxe5 Qxd1 11 Rxd1 Bd7 12 Nc3 is in fact a playable ending for Black, where it isn't clear if White's e5-pawn constitutes a strength or a weakness. 12 ... Na5 13 Bc2 Rc8 14 a3 Be7 15 Be4 was K.Georgilakis-T.Gelashvili, Nikea 2006, when I actually slightly prefer Black after 15 ... Na4 since White's structure is constructed for an attack, not a queenless middlegame/ending.

9 exd6

Question: Why does White deliberately give himself an isolani?

Answer: We all differ in our definitions of what exactly constitutes happiness. A player who willingly takes on such a structural burden may not stand up under Petrosian's standards, but he would under Tal's. Most c3-Sicilian players are comfortable in isolani positions, if in return they get attacking chances.

Question: What if White refuses to take en passant. This time his light-squared bishop is on the board, so doesn't he get a dangerous looking Advance French position?

Answer: Black has adequate resources to deal with White's attacking chances. For example, 9 0-0 (in this version the cramping e5-pawn fastens itself to the square like a

stubborn burr in a dog's fur) 9 ... Be7 10 Nc3 Bd7! (notice how Black stalls kingside castling, frustrating White's attempts to attack on that wing) 11 Bc2 Rc8 12 a3 a6! (planning the French Defence manoeuvre ... Na7! and either ... Nb5 or ... Bb5) 13 Re1 Na7! 14 Bd3 a5 (Black continues his no-castling policy and we see a revision of boundaries, as Black begins to take over the queenside; instead, after 14 ... 0-0!? 15 h4!? Bxh4 16 Nxh4 Qxh4 17 Re3 f5 18 Rh3 Qe7 19 Qh5 g6 20 Bg5 Qf7 21 Qh4 I prefer White's chances along those kingside dark squares, over Black's extra pawn) 15 Ne2, S.Tiviakov-A.Kovalyov, Montreal 2014. Black's chances look fully equal to me after 15 ... Bb5, intending to exchange off White's best attacker. If 16 Bb1 0-0. Now is the time to castle. It's probably my French-player's stylistic bias, but I prefer Black's queenside chances with those weakened light squares, over White's chances on the kingside.

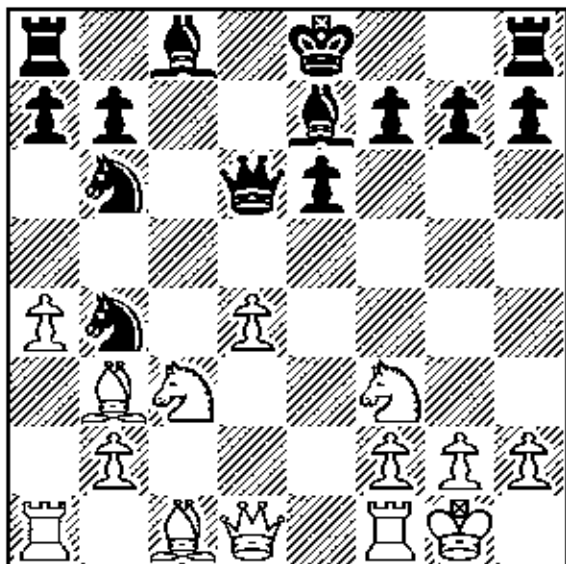
9 ... Qxd6 10 Nc3 Be7 11 0-0

White can also consider tossing in 11 a3 to deprive Black of the ... Nb4 and ... N4d5 transfer. Then 11 ... 0-0 12 Qd3 Rd8 was M.Praet-D.De Wit, Belgian League 2003. We reach a typical isolani position after 13 Be3 Nd5 14 0-0 and whose side you prefer probably depends upon your style.

11 ... Nb4

So Black prepares to transfer his knight to the d5 hole. *Houdini* frowns upon this move, since it cedes control over e5 to White's knight. Black can consider 11 ... 0-0 12 Ne4 Qd8 13 a3 Nd5 14 Qd3 Qb6 (Black applies direct pressure to d4) 15 Bc2 Rd8, D.Merlini-V.Jemec, correspondence 2003. Black's pressure on d4 and b2 compensates for White's kingside attacking chances.

12 a4!?



White decides to avoid a doctrinal discussion of opening theory by launching an

aggressive new idea (deep down, I suspect White's idea deserves admonition more than praise), which initiates a chain of events which will either lead to his advantage, or if he is wrong, his opponent's. At first glance White's plan feels wildly unsuitable for the position's requirements. His idea is to disrupt Black's flow with a5 and possibly a6. The problem, of course, is White hands b4 over to his opponent.

The normal course would be something like 12 Ne5 0-0 13 Ne4 Qd8 14 Be3 N4d5 15 Qd3 f6 16 Nf3, J.Mellado Trivino-F.Costa, Caceres 1996. *Houdini* rates this position at even, while I still slightly prefer White's position.

12 ... 0-0 13 a5

White's point is to send the 'wrong' knight to d5, but I don't really think the b4-knight is all that misplaced. Still, Black must be very careful, since many of his defenders reside on the queenside – a danger, since White intends to build for a kingside attack.

13 ... N6d5 14 Ne4 Qa6!

The queen is content to live on the outskirts. We note a previously undefined dimension to the position: Weak light squares in White's camp, especially d3. This move is stronger than the routine 14 ... Qd8 which White may have expected.

15 Bg5

Provoking a weakness in Black's position, which is okay with Andreikin, since ... f6 also conveniently covers the e5-square. Safer is 15 Nc5 Bxc5 16 dxc5 Bd7 17 Ne5 Bb5 18 Re1 f6 19 Nf3 Bc4! 20 Bxc4 Qxc4 21 Rxe6 Qxc5 when Black's knights sit nicely and I don't believe he stands worse.

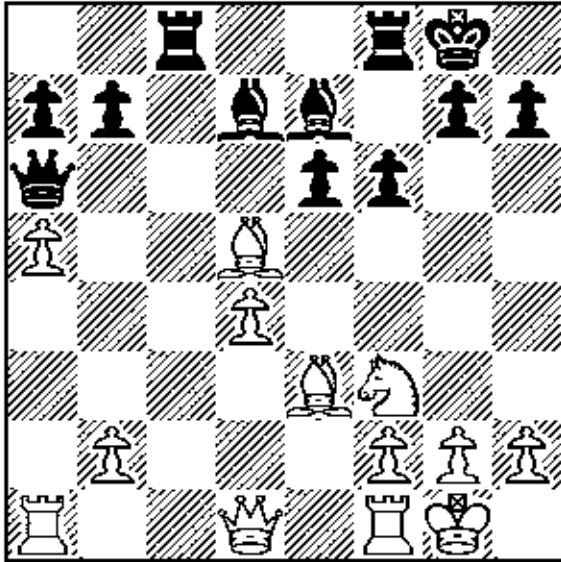
15 ... f6 16 Be3 Bd7

White's a4-a5 experiment clearly failed to reach the intended results. I now prefer Black, who completes development of his minor pieces and connects his rooks, while keeping control over both d5 and b4. Notice how White has no obvious way to proceed with a kingside attack.

17 Nc3?!

I think this is the beginning of White's true decline. He sees no path toward a kingside attack (I don't either), and decides to play positionally, challenging d5. The trouble is Black can place more defenders on the square than White can attackers. White can still maintain a shaky equality with 17 Nc5 Bxc5 18 dxc5 Kh8 (18 ... Nxe3 19 fxe3 Nd3 20 Qb1 Nxc5 21 Bc2 f5 22 b4 Ne4 23 Bxe4 fxe4 24 Qxe4 Qc6 is also even) 19 Qd4 Bb5 20 Rfd1 Be2 21 Rd2 Bxf3 22 gxf3 Rac8 with a messy and probably balanced game.

17 ... Rac8 18 Nxd5 Nxd5 19 Bxd5?!



White arrives in one of those awful situations where our position is souring and we have no idea how to proceed, yet we feel we must act – even if taking action harms us! Competing motivations crowded White’s mind and he makes the wrong choice. White incorrectly decides that ridding himself of Black’s d5-knight is the first step to rehabilitation, since it hands Black his own isolani. But at too high a cost of handing over both bishop-pair, and more importantly, the light squares. White should just put up with the d5-knight’s smiling insolence and play 19 Re1, with a slight inferiority.

19 ... exd5 20 Qb3 Qc4

Black earns himself a superior ending. The less fancy 20 ... Qb5! is actually slightly more accurate, since it forces White to swap immediately.

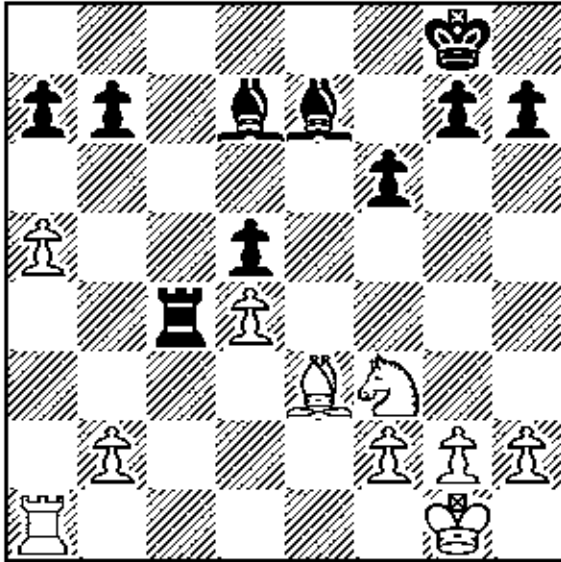
21 Qxc4

White’s queen walks past the b7 temptation without too much regret:

a) 21 Qxb7?? would be an embarrassing blunder. White loses heavy material after the simple 21 ... Rc7, after which White’s queen is out of squares.

b) 21 Nd2 is probably White’s best move. After 21 ... Qb5 22 Qxb5 Bxb5 23 Rfc1 White gets a slightly better version of what he got in the game.

21 ... Rxc4 22 Rfc1 Rfc8 23 Rxc4 Rxc4



Strategic woes enclose around White's position in an ever tightening grip:

1. Black owns the bishop-pair.
2. Black dominates the light squares.
3. Black owns the superior structure, since White is slightly overextended on the queenside.
4. White is stuck with a bad bishop, with several of his pawns fixed on the same colour.

24 Rc1?!

White should try 24 Bd2 Bg4 25 Bc3 Bxf3 26 gxf3 Bd6 27 h3 Kf7 with a tough ending for White to hold, but still better than the game's continuation.

24 ... Ra4! 25 Bd2

25 Rc7?? just hangs a pawn to 25 ... Bd6. White is unable to touch the d7-bishop, due to his weak back rank, and must play 26 Rc1 Rxa5 when Black wins a clean pawn, while retaining his other advantages.

25 ... Bd6

Black seals the c7 entry point.

26 h3

Preventing future ... Bg4 ideas.

26 ... Kf7

My inclination would be to seize kingside space with 26 ... h5 intending ... g5.

27 Bc3 b5!?

This isn't necessary right away. Black's idea is to play an eventual ... b4, disrupting the defence. Black can also reserve ... b4 for later and continue to improve his position with 27 ... Ra2 28 Ne1 Bf4 29 Rd1 Bb5 30 Nc2 Ba4 31 Nb4 Rxb2 32 Bxb2 Bxd1 33 Nxd5 Bd6. Black's queenside pawn majority, coupled with his bishop-pair and king

position gives him good chances to convert.

28 axb6 axb6 29 b3?!

This move creates a fresh weakness. White puts up greater barriers with 29 Ne1 Bf5 30 Kf1 h5 31 Ke2 when conversion won't be such an easy task for Black.

29 ... Ra3 30 Nd2 Ra2

Better may be to immediately transfer the light-squared bishop to d3, starting with 30 ... Bf5.

31 Nf1 Ra3 32 Ne3?

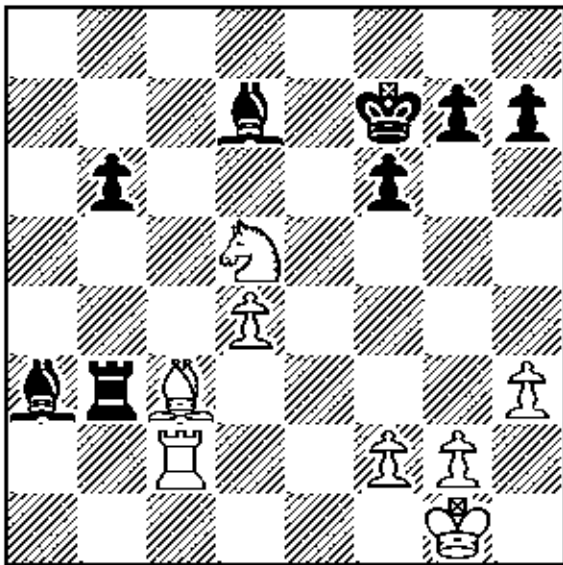
White puts up a better fight by repeating with 32 Nd2 Bf5 33 Kf1 Bd3+ 34 Ke1 Ra7! (threat: ... Re7+ and ... Re2) 35 Nf1 b5 36 Ne3 Ra3 37 Kd2 Bg6 38 b4 Ra2+ 39 Ke1 Bd3 40 Bd2 Bc4. Black still requires work to bring in the full point.

32 ... Rxb3 33 Nxd5?

The knight is given bad advice through a sea of heads engaging in flattering nods. If you steal an item, which is later stolen back from you, then calling the police is not an option. This move loses a piece by force. 33 Be1 saves the piece, but not the game after 33 ... Ke6, after which Black is up a pawn, with a winning position.

33 ... Ba3! 34 Rc2

Alternatively, 34 Ra1 Bc6 35 Nxb6 Rxc3 and Black wins a piece.



king must be driven to h2.

35 Kh2

Step 2: The bishop check forces a disastrous weakening in White's camp.

35 ... Bd6+! 36 f4

After 36 g3 Bc6 the awkward silence is broken by the grinding of the knight's teeth. It can't move due to mate on h1.

Step 3: Attack the knight, which has no safe square.

36 ... Be6! 0-1

"Well, at least you lived an eventful, if short life," the bishop tells White's trapped knight.

Summary: In the position after 8 ... d5, our opponent can play 9 exd6, which gets us into a position where we play against White's isolani, or, White can just castle, after which we reach an Advance French Defence-like position. The trick in this version is not to castle too early.

Game 14

K.Griffith-C.Lakdawala

San Diego (rapid) 2011

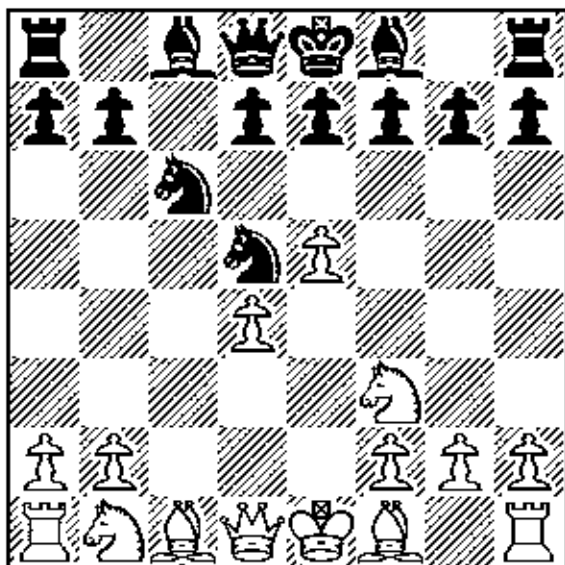
1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6

Those who play the Pelikan Sicilian must play this move order.

3 c3 Nf6 4 e5 Nd5 5 d4 cxd4 6 cxd4

So by White's devious 2 Nf3 and 3 c3, we have been forced into a line of the c3 Sicilian which we wouldn't necessarily want to play, since we prefer the ... e6 and ... b6 set-ups from Chapter 1.

Instead, 6 Bc4 e6 (or 6 ... Nb6 7 Bb3 d5 8 exd6 e6 9 cxd4 Qxd6 and we get a direct transposition to Lazarev-Andreikin, the last game we examined) 7 cxd4 transposes to the Vachier Lagrave-Grischuk note from the last game.



6 ... d6

Question: If we prefer the ... e6 and ... b6 lines against the c3-Sicilian, then wouldn't it be more consistent for us to play 6 ... e6?

Answer: The trouble is we really wanted the ... e6 and ... b6 line *without* the insertion of ... Nc6. White's move order forced us into this position, so I see no reason why we must play ... e6 – voluntarily restricting our c8-bishop – if we reach this position, since the ... b6 lines don't work out well for Black with our knight on c6.

7 Bc4

Alternatively:

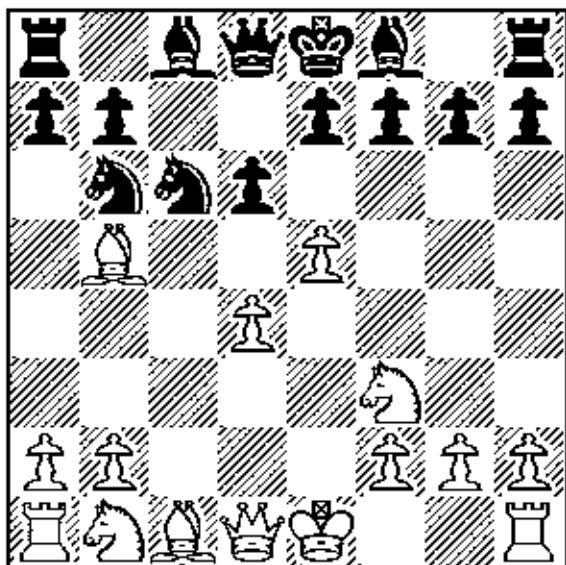
a) 7 Nc3 gets White nowhere after 7 ... dxe5 8 dxe5 Nxc3 9 Qxd8+ Nxd8 10 bxc3 Bd7 11 Be3 e6 12 Nd4 Rc8 13 Kd2 Bc5. I don't believe that White's extra space fully makes up for his broken queenside pawns, E.Sveshnikov-O.Korneev, Sochi 2006.

b) 7 exd6 Qxd6 8 Nc3 Bg4 (I think it's not necessary to keep this bishop inside the pawn chain; just watch out for early Qb3 ideas, which simultaneously attack d5 and b7) 9 Be2 (9 Qb3?! Bxf3 10 gxf3 e6 is just fine for Black as White doesn't have time to grab b7) 9 ... e6 10 0-0 Be7 11 Be3 0-0 12 Qb3 Rfd8 (b7 doesn't require defence at this point) 13 Rac1 Rab8 14 Rfd1 Nf4 and if anyone stands better, it's Black, R.Mamedov-B.Avrukh, Cala Mayor 2008.

7 ... Nb6 8 Bb5

8 Bb3 is White's main option here. If you are comfortable on the black side of an Advance French, then you can play 8 ... d5 9 h3 (to prevent ... Bg4) 9 ... Bf5 10 Nh4 (necessary, since if Black gets to play ... e6, then he gets a dream Advance French, with the traditionally bad light-squared bishop now on the outside of the pawn chain) 10 ...

Bxb1 11 Rxb1 e6 12 Nf3. We reach an Advanced French, sans bad bishop for Black, whose position I would be happy to play, E.Ghaem Maghami-E.Moradiabadi, Teheran 2001.



8 ... d5!?

This is the line I play. My goal, as mentioned previously in the notes, is to reach the black side of an Advanced French, with my traditionally bad light-squared bishop either on the outside of the chain, or eliminated through a swap.

More common is 8 ... dxe5 9 Nxe5 Bd7 which is supposed to give Black dynamic equality.

8 ... Bd7!? is also interesting: 9 exd6 e6! (Black intends to recapture d6 with a bishop, rather than a pawn) 10 0-0 (10 Bf4 is well met with 10 ... Nd5! which threatens ... Nxf4 and also ... Qa5+) 10 ... Bxd6 11 Nc3 Ne7! 12 Bd3 Bc6. Black can be happy with the result of the opening. He can work on White's isolani and the d5-square, his pieces are developed harmoniously and his king, for now, looks safe enough.

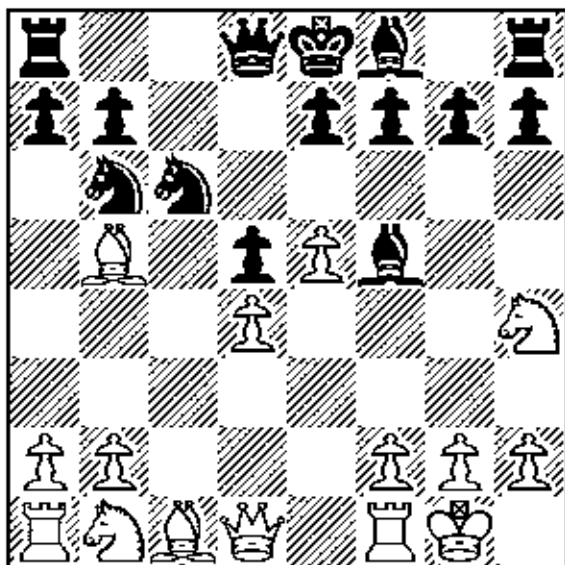
9 0-0 Bf5

Question: Why not pin with 9 ... Bg4?

Answer: I didn't like the line 10 h3 when I have to hand over the bishop-pair, since 10 ... Bh5? (relatively best is 10 ... Bxf3 11 Qxf3 e6 12 Qg3 with a slight yet nagging edge for White, H.Simonsen-S.Thorsteinsson, Vagur 2006) 11 e6! is very promising for White: 11 ... fxe6 12 g4 Bf7 13 Ne5 Rc8 14 Qf3 Bg8 and it becomes obvious that the opening horribly misfired for Black, C.Gokerkan-T.He, Maribor 2012.

10 Nh4!

White's only move. 10 Nc3?! e6 is a French player's dream come true.



10 ... Bd7!?

Threat: ... Nxe5!. I think this move is more accurate than chopping on b1.

Question: If your light-squared bishop is the bad bishop, then why didn't you take your chance to dump it with 10 ... Bxb1?

Answer: It may be a bad bishop, but in a weird way, we still need it, to suppress White's future f4 and f5 break. Of course, your suggestion is both logical and very playable. After 11 Rxb1 e6 12 Qg4 it feels to me like White holds an edge, due to Black's kingside developmental issues, C.Lalanne-R.Perez Marco, French League 1995.

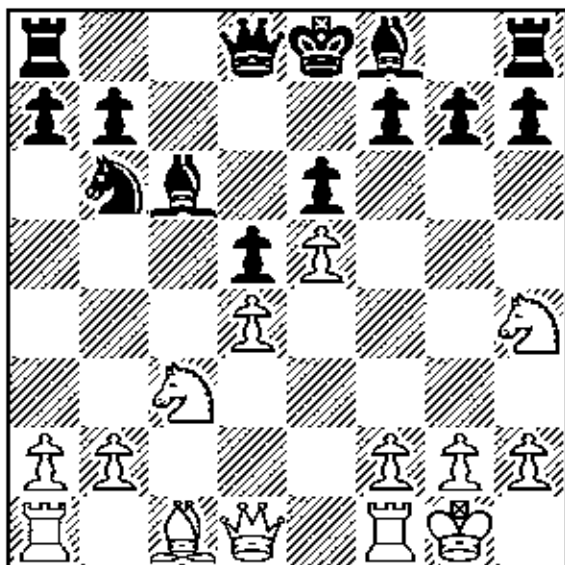
11 Nc3 e6

We arrive in a hybrid Advance French.

12 Bxc6!?

White doesn't want to waste time later on retreating his bishop, so he swaps it away, unprovoked, at the grave risk of weakening his light squares. The alternative is 12 Nf3 Be7 13 a3! (to prevent ... Nb4 tricks) 13 ... 0-0 14 Bd3 Rc8 15 Bc2 f5 16 exf6 Bxf6 17 Qd3 g6 18 Bh6 Bg7 19 Bxg7 Kxg7. Positions like this arise from the Tarrasch French, where Black's pressure on d4 compensates for his backward e-pawn, M.Sycova-I.Nordhaug, Szeged 1994.

12 ... Bxc6



A new move in the position.

Question: Why wouldn't you recapture with your b-pawn, and then follow with ... c5?

Answer: I avoided recapture with my b-pawn for two reasons:

1. I'm not really sure if I want to play ... c5, since dxc5 opens the d4-square for White's pieces.
2. ... c5 won't be so easy to implement if White plays his queen to g4. I thought it was too soon to open with 12 ... bxc6 13 Qg4. The ... c5 break will be tough to achieve, since Black's dark-squared bishop is needed to cover g7.

13 Qg4

He covers his knight, ties down my dark-squared bishop to defence of g7, and also prepares a potential for an f4 and f5 break.

13 ... Nc8!

Question: Why did you retreat this knight?

Answer: For the following reasons:

1. The move helps fight White's plan of f4-f5, by redeploying the knight to e7, which adds coverage to the f5-square.
2. Black clears the path for ... Qb6 which hits d4 and b2.
3. Number two on the list leaves open the possibility of ... Bb5, activating the light-squared bishop.

14 Bg5 Qb6 15 Rab1

Covering b2.

15 ... h6

Ejecting White's annoying bishop. After 15 ... Ne7 16 Rfc1 (16 Bxe7!? is met with 16 ... Kxe7!) 16 ... Ng6 17 Nxg6 hxg6 it's hard to get rid of that g5-bishop.

16 Be3

White can speculate here with piece sacrifice with 16 Ng6!? (hey, I said: "Ejecting White's annoying bishop!") 16 ... h5 17 Qh3 fxg6 18 Qxe6+ Ne7 19 Bxe7 Bxe7 20 Qxg6+ Kd8 21 Qxg7 Rf8 22 Rfd1 Qc7. White got three pawns for the piece and *Houdini* rates this position at dead even.

16 ... Ne7

As mentioned earlier, Black fights for control over f5.

17 f4

He goes for the f5 plan. The only option is to play on other side of the board with 17 Rfc1 g6 18 b4 Rc8 19 a4 Bd7 20 Qd1 Bg7 21 a5 Qd8 22 Qd2 g5 23 Nf3 0-0 24 Ne2 Nf5. My French instincts tell me that Black stands at least equal, if not better due to his control over the light squares.

17 ... g6

Oh, no you don't!

18 Qd1

He clears the way for g4 and g5. 18 b4 can be met with 18 ... Bb5 19 Nxb5 Qxb5 20 Rfc1 Rc8 21 Rxc8+ Nxc8 when Black already holds the advantage, due to his superior structure. Now if 22 Nxg6? Qd3! crosses White's plans: 23 Nxh8 Qxb1+ 24 Kf2 Qc2+ 25 Kf1 Qh7 (White's knight is trapped and he has insufficient compensation) 26 f5 h5 27 Qh3 Qxf5+! 28 Qxf5 exf5 (threat: ... Bg7) 29 e6 (the only move to free the stranded knight) 29 ... fxe6 (now Black threatens to win a second pawn on b4) 30 Ng6 (30 a3?? Ne7 re-traps the knight) 30 ... Bxb4 31 Nf4 Kf7 32 Nxh5 and Black has a solid extra pawn in the ending.

18 ... a5!?

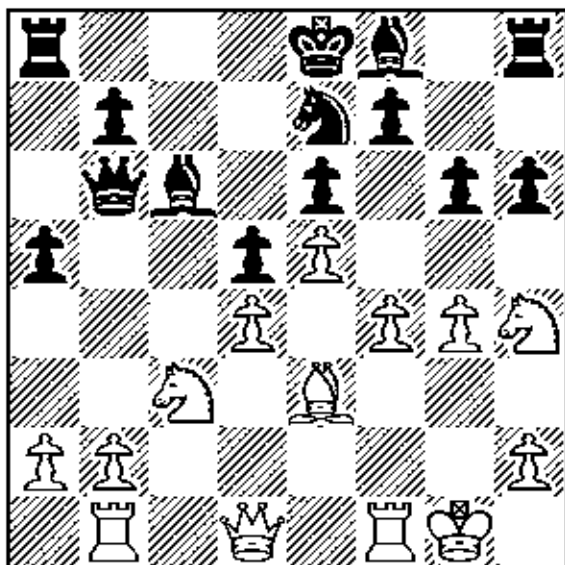
Preventing b4. Otherwise:

a) 18 ... Nf5 is an option, when 19 Nxf5 gxf5 is dynamically balanced.

b) 18 ... 0-0-0? just walks into an attack after 19 b4.

19 g4!

Preparing a piece sac. Natural attackers/tacticians tend to enfold and embrace complications like a lover. Much safer is 19 Nf3 Nf5 20 Bf2 h5 21 Nh4 Be7 22 Nxf5 gxf5.



19 ... h5?!

This induces White into a promising piece sacrifice.

Question: Then why did you allow it?

Answer: I get deeply offended when at Chinese restaurants they place a mat in front of me with the Chinese animal zodiac, which informs me that I am a rat. Now the rat is supposed to be intelligent (which I heartily approve of and agree with!), but also fearful (which I feel is a bunch of dirty lies, spread by the other, envious animals in the zodiac). So to refute the 'fearful' part of the prediction, your writer sometimes provokes his opponents, well past tolerable limits, as in this case.

Black stands no worse in a horribly complex position after the correct 19 ... Bd7 20 f5 gxf5 21 gxf5 exf5 22 Kh1 Rg8 23 Na4 Qb4 24 Nc5 Be6.

20 f5!

The depth and extent of White's belligerence is now made manifestly clear. A move made with the philosophy: sometimes we must prod and poke our opponent out of his comfort zone, and into action. Now powerful vested interests array themselves against my king. White pushes on with his attack, driven by fierce need. Kyron, who regards closed games the same way a biblical prophet confronts sin, refuses to accept my prodding of a closed, controlled positional struggle with supine acquiescence. Instead, after 20 g5?! Black's king is safe and he can play on the queenside.

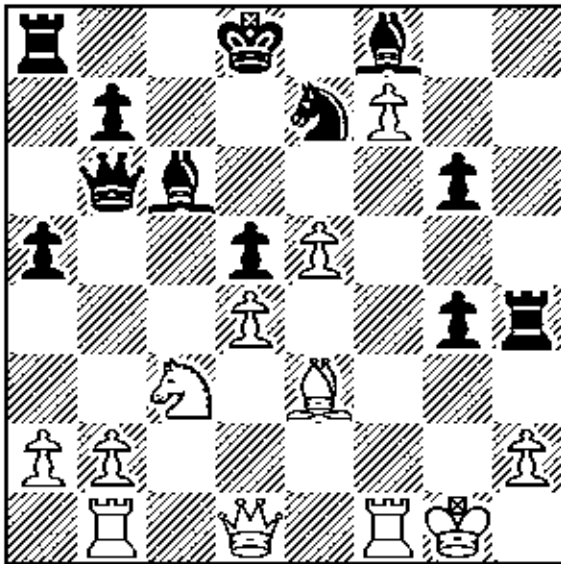
20 ... hxg4?!

Ah, yes, my specialty: headstrong folly. I suppose the injured party in any accident is usually okay with a cash settlement. Chess is a terrible mirror which reflects our flaws directly back at us. Ever since childhood, I somehow always believed my

defensive abilities would bail me out. So over the years, I have grabbed risky pawns and pieces when I should have abstained. As in all fairy tales, I believe all that matters is that I end happily ever after, even though the logical part of my brain (I assure you, a very small portion) tells me that I will perish in this doomed endeavour. Now the drab defensive chore which awaits is something less than a ringing endorsement of my greed. I just couldn't resist the temptation to win a piece.

I should have gone for 20 ... gxf5 21 gxf5 Bd7 22 f6 Nc6 23 Nf3 Qa6 with a dynamically balanced game. White's massing kingside space is tempered by his weakness on light squares and potentially insecure king.

21 fxe6 Rxh4 22 exf7+ Kd8



Even a cowardly wolf may grow emboldened if he is still surrounded by his pack. The internal connections of scattered data now grow into a network of more defined geometries:

1. For the piece White got only one pawn, but a second is his if he chases away the h4-rook with Bg5.
2. White got two deeply entrenched passers on f7 and e5.
3. Black's king is in far more danger than White's and will not be safe any place on the board.

Conclusion: Acceptance of the piece sacrifice was a bad bargain for Black, who is now in deep trouble.

Black's king walks into a tempo loss after 22 ... Kd7?!. "It's nothing. I'm fine. Just a touch of indigestion," says the king, as he takes a second sip of the poisoned wine. After 23 Bg5 Rh5 24 e6+! Kc7 (24 ... Kxe6?? 25 Qxg4+ Nf5 26 Rxf5 wins) 25 Bf4+ Kc8 26 Rc1 Rf5 White has a dangerous attack for the piece.

23 Bg5

Alternatively:

a) 23 Na4 Qb5 24 Nc5 and White's attack looks quite promising.

b) 23 Rf6 Kc7 24 Na4 Bxa4 25 Qxa4 Nc6 26 e6 Bd6 27 Bf4 Bxf4 28 e7! Be3+ 29 Kg2 R8h8! 30 e8Q Rxh2+ 31 Kg3 R8h3+ 32 Kxg4 Rh4+ 33 Kg3 R4h3+ when the game ends in perpetual check.

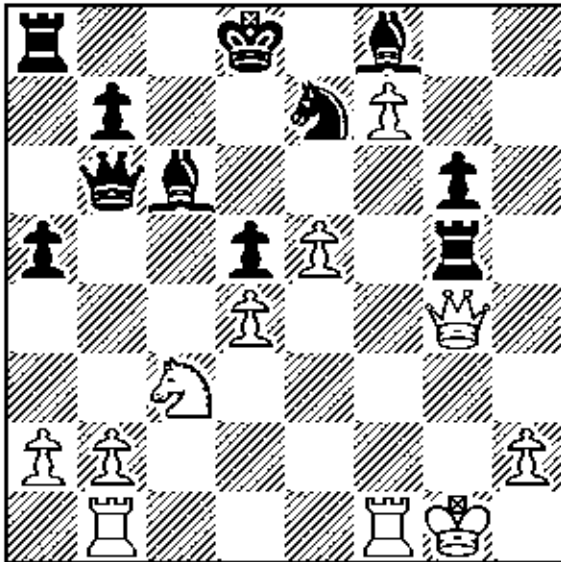
23 ... Rh5 24 Qxg4

Trust is a luxury Black's king can ill afford, with his devious sister lurking about:

a) 24 Bxe7+?! Kxe7 25 Qxg4 Rxe5! 26 Rbe1 Rxe1 27 Rxe1+ Kxf7 28 Re6 Bg7 29 Qxg6+ Kg8 and it appears as if White's attack is doomed, but he has a comp-generated trick with 30 Nb5!! (threat: Re7, mating) 30 ... Kf8 31 Qf5+ Kg8 with a repetition of moves.

b) 24 Bf6 Kc7 25 Qxg4 Rd8 26 e6 Kb8 with a completely unclear mess.

24 ... Rxc5!



Sometimes when defending an inferior position, we must take immediate action, since waiting allows the enemy to grow stronger with each move, while our side wastes away, drifting to the state of a spent force. Now we get a sense that White's initiative functions with diminished effectiveness. Black takes the initiative by removing White's best attacker, and also dismantling White's centre.

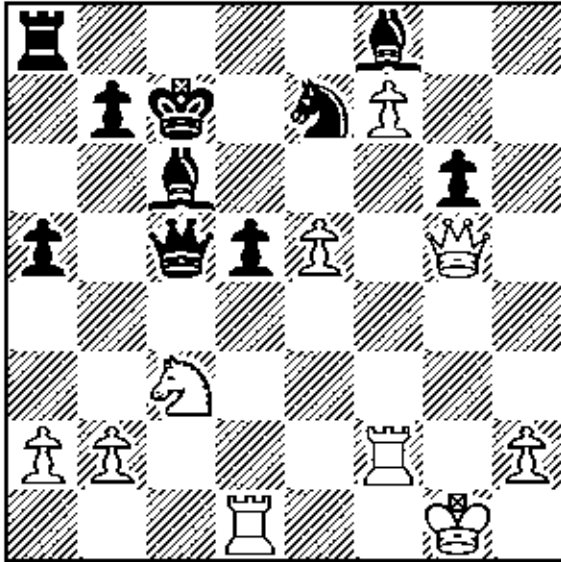
25 Qxg5 Qxd4+ 26 Rf2!

26 Kh1? is met with 26 ... Qc4, threatening ... d4+.

26 ... Kc7

The lights flicker and plaster falls from the ceiling, yet the defence holds firm. *Houdini* still slightly prefers White. I get my king out of the centre while clearing the path for my rook to enter the game.

27 Rd1 Qc5



Exercise (critical decision): The position is a god-awful mess. Should White play 28 Rc1, going after Black's king on the open file, or should he play 28 Ne2, planning to transfer the knight to d4? White secures the advantage in one, while he is busted in the other. Which one would you play?

28 Rc1?

The wind alters direction once again in White's severe time pressure. When I was a kid, one of my cruel teachers made me memorize Tennyson's poem, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*. I forgot the poem (something about "cannons to the left, and cannons to the right"), but remember the gist of it: the 600 soldiers rode into the Valley of Death, much like White's current attackers.

Answer: Correct was: 28 Ne2! d4 29 Nxd4 Qd5 30 Qg2! Qxe5 (30 ... Qxg2+?? 31 Rxc2 Bxc2 32 Ne6+ Kb6 33 Kxc2 Nf5 34 Rd7 Bh6 35 Kf3 favours White, whose passed pawns are too dangerous) 31 Re2, which still probably favours White.

28 ... d4

Of course. Now the light squares grow chronically weak in White's camp.

29 Ne4 Qd5 30 Ng3?

30 Re1 is met with 30 ... Kb6.

30 ... d3

The surging d-pawn will be a distraction for White. Also, I hoped to have the time to get my dark-squared bishop to c5.

31 Qf4 Nf5!

Going after the defender of h1, while worrying White about bishop checks on c5.

32 Ne4

And not 32 Nxf5?? Qh1 mate. White's king nods sadly in verification of long held suspicion of his f5 'defender's' IQ.

32 ... Kb6

The king travels incognito, posing as a simple peasant. He is surprisingly safe, posted on b6. Also winning was 32 ... Bh6 33 Rxc6+ bxc6 34 Ng5 Bxg5 35 Qxg5 Qxf7, with an extra piece and a safe king.

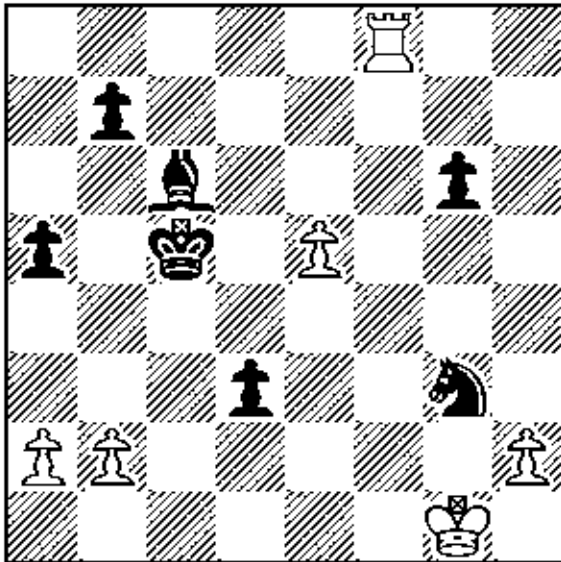
33 Ng3 Nxc3 34 Qe3+

34 Rxc6+ bxc6 35 Qxg3 Bc5 wins.

34 ... Bc5

The old, blind bishop with the milky white eyes still senses the presence of his enemy, and lays in wait with a dagger hidden in his robes.

35 Qxc5+ Qxc5 36 Rxc5 Kxc5 37 f8Q+ Rxf8 38 Rxf8



Exercise (combination alert): This one is easy. How did Black force the win?

Answer: Pawn promotion. The d-pawn hopes to sneak by unobserved.

38 ... d2

The d-pawn promotes.

39 Rd8 Bd5 0-1

Summary: After 8 ... d5 the positions we reach resemble the Advance French.

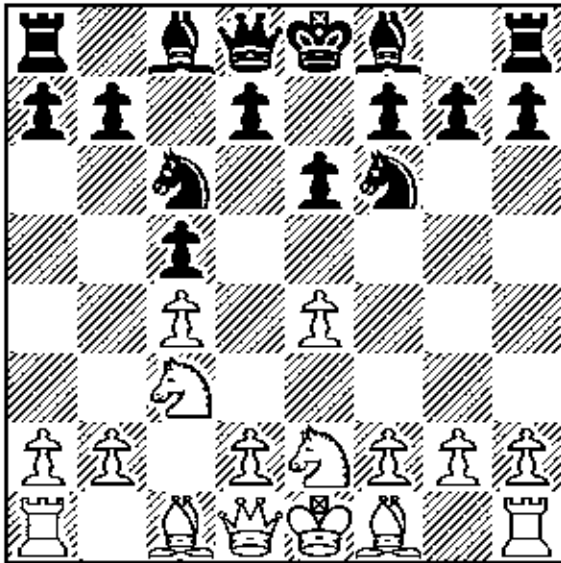
Game 15

E.Inarkiev-S.Mamedyarov

Astrakhan 2010

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3

We cover 2 Ne2 in the Odds and Ends Chapter, but since in this version White threw in c4, we will take a quick look at it here, as well. After 2 ... Nc6 3 c4!? Nf6 (3 ... g6 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nxd4 transposes to the Maroczy Bind – which I don't play as Black!) 4 Nbc3 e6 (I hesitate to play 4 ... e5 because White will be quick in achieving an f4 break later; I can't do the same, since my f6-knight blocks the f-pawn), we have:



a) 5 d4 cxd4 6 Nxd4 Bb4 leads to an acceptable Open Sicilian position for Black – provided we know the theory. An example, 7 Nxc6 bxc6 8 Bd3 e5 9 0-0 0-0 10 Bg5 h6 11 Bh4 Bc5! (Black's dark-squared bishop is too valuable to trade away on c3) 12 Kh1 d6 13 f3 Be6 14 Qc2 Rb8 15 Rad1 Bd4 16 b3 g5 17 Bf2 c5 and I prefer Black, due to his control over d4, H.Nakamura-B.Gelfand, Wijk aan Zee 2014.

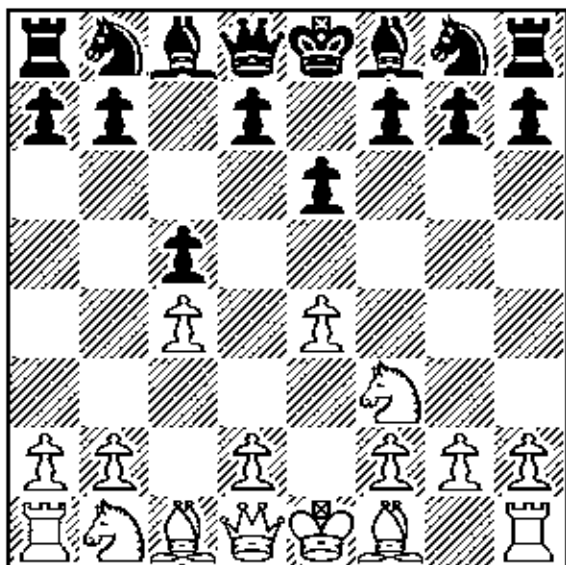
b) 5 f4!? (my opponent is determined to weird it up to take me out of theory's reach) 5 ... d5 6 e5 d4 (6 ... Ng4! is Black's best move, which so far has scored five wins, no losses and no draws: 7 h3 Nh6 favours Black and after 7 d3 dxc4 8 dxc4 Qxd1+ 9 Nxd1 Nb4! 10 Kd2 Bd7 11 Nec3 0-0-0 one sorrowful glance at White's disorganized position is all we need to know, M.Strbac-Z.Arsovic, Mataruska Banja 2007) 7 exf6 dxc3 8 fxg7 cxd2+ 9 Qxd2 (White may have been better off retaining queens with 9 Bxd2 Bxg7 10 Bc3 Nd4) 9 ... Bxg7 10 Qxd8+ Kxd8 11 Be3 b6 12 0-0-0+ Ke7 13 Ng3 Bb7 14 f5 Bd4 15 Bxd4 Nxd4 16 fxe6 fxe6. Black stood better with control over d4 and coming kingside pressure with the plan ... h5, ... Rag8 and ... h4, B.Stamper-C.Lakdawala, San Diego (rapid) 2012.

2 ... e6

Question: How do we deal with White's early c4 if we play the move order 2 ... Nc6?

Answer: We transpose to our game after the moves 3 c4 e6 4 Nc3 Nd4.

3 c4



Let's take a look at some other of White's third move options:

a) 3 d3 and we look at this line in our King's Indian Attack (KIA) chapter.

b) 3 b3 is covered in the b3-Sicilian chapter.

c) 3 Qe2 Nc6 is examined in the KIA chapter.

d) 3 g3 will normally transpose to KIA. A deviation could be 3 ... Nc6 4 Bg2 Nf6 5 Qe2 d5 6 d3 Be7 which we cover in the KIA section of the book.

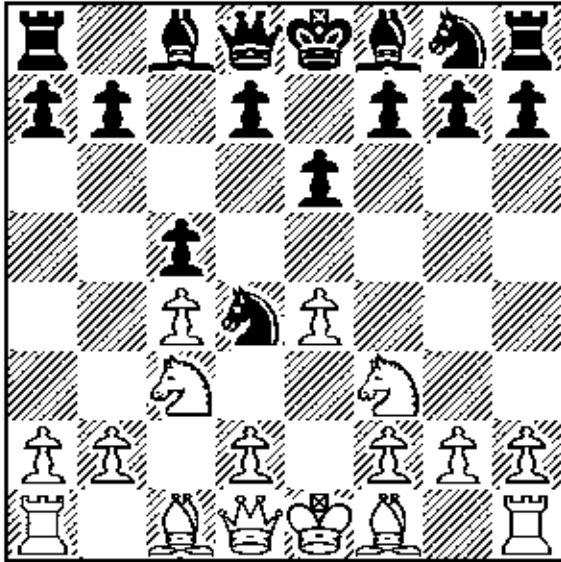
e) 3 Bc4 is not such a good fit for White against ... e6 lines, mainly since White is certain to lose a tempo when ... d5 arrives. After 3 ... Nc6 4 Nc3 a6 5 a4 Nf6 6 d3 d5 7 exd5 exd5 8 Bb3 Be7 9 0-0 0-0 10 Bg5 Be6 11 Re1 ... c4 is in the air and Black already stood slightly better, F.Mercado Garcia-R.Felgaer, Toluca 2011.

f) 3 b4 is the delayed Wing Gambit, covered in the Gambits chapter of the book.

3 ... Nc6 4 Nc3?!

When we make a move which is contrary to our natural style, it's almost as if we do it in the third person, as if someone else actually makes the move. This gesture ends up being more ornamental than remunerative. Sometimes we follow a very reasonable looking supposition, and then realize we were completely off track. I think White actually stands worse after this move. He should go for the Open Sicilian set-up with 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nxd4 Nf6 6 Nc3 Bb4, which transposes to the Nakamura-Gelfand note above.

4 ... Nd4!



I like this disruptive idea, which crosses White's plans for a leisurely d4, sometime in the future.

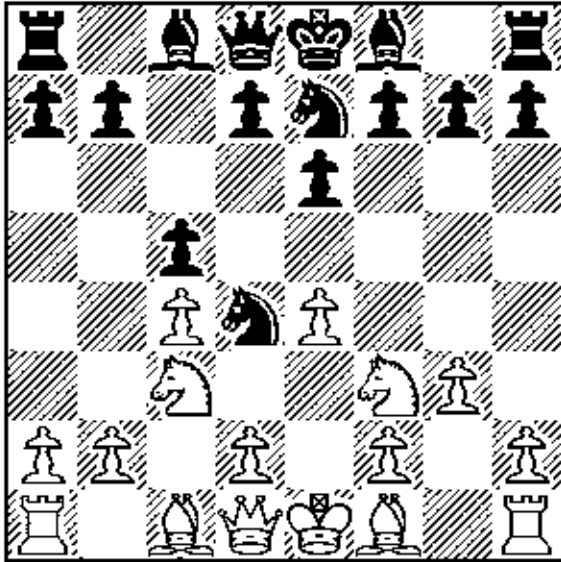
5 g3

Alternatively:

a) 5 d3 Ne7 6 Nxd4 cxd4 (we gain time, since White's knight must move, and e2 isn't such a great outpost) 7 Ne2 Nc6 8 a3 (to prevent ... Bb4+, which would swap away White's good bishop) 8 ... b5! (now White finds himself awkwardly placed, while confronted on the queenside) 9 b4 (after 9 cxb5?! Qa5+ 10 Bd2 Qxb5 11 b4 a5! Black avoids chopping d3 which gets the queen trapped after Ng3, and here 12 bxa5 Rb8 leaves White completely tied up) 9 ... Rb8 10 Ng3?! (White had better survival chances with 10 Bd2) 10 ... a5! (principle: *open the game and create confrontation while leading in development*) 11 cxb5 Rxb5 12 bxa5 (A.Zhurikhin-A.Gabrielian, Samara 2012) 12 ... Qxa5+ 13 Bd2 Qb6 threatens ... Bxa3!, and if 14 a4? Rb2 is a winning position for Black.

b) 5 Nxd4 cxd4 6 Ne2 Nf6! 7 d3 (7 e5 Ng4 8 f4 d6! leaves White in a developmental tangle) 7 ... d5 (I would be tempted to play 7 ... Bb4+ 8 Bd2 Bxd2+ 9 Qxd2 e5, burdening White with a remaining bad bishop, B.Kovanova-E.Danielian, Eilat 2012) 8 cxd5 exd5 9 Nxd4 Qb6 10 Nc2 dxe4. White lags in development and already fights for equality, M.Al Modiahki-D.Navara, Sochi 2008.

5 ... Ne7



6 Nxd4!?

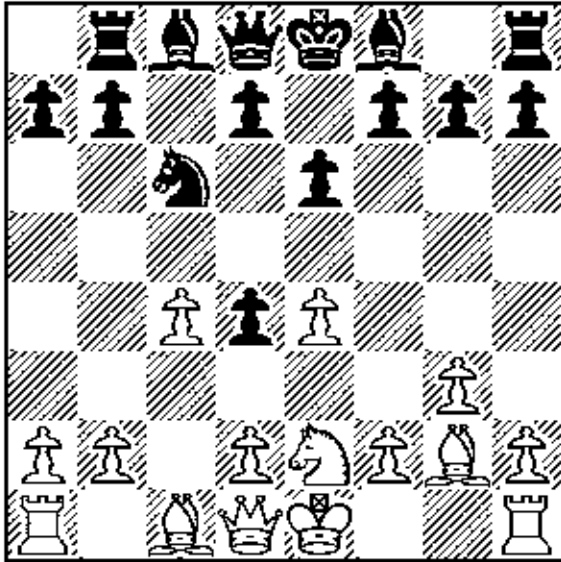
Question: This move sends White's remaining knight on an awkward journey. Would White be better off just ignoring Black's d4-knight?

Answer: I think that would be the wiser course. He should first get castled, and only then play Nxd4. Even in this case, I feel like Black stands better: for example, 6 Bg2 Nc6 7 0-0 Be7 8 d3 0-0 9 Nxd4 (now is the correct moment) 9 ... cxd4 10 Ne2 Rb8! (... b5 is coming) 11 e5 b5 12 b3 Qb6 13 Bb2 Bb7 and I still prefer Black's position since he holds a slight queenside initiative, V.Iovcov-V.Babula, Jerusalem 2015.

6 ... cxd4 7 Ne2 Nc6

Also possible is 7 ... e5 8 d3, as in O.Vasina-O.Ivanenko, Lugansk 2010. At this point Black can play 8 ... b5!.

8 Bg2 Rb8!



We must remember this important idea. Black is quick to generate queenside play with the coming ... b5.

9 0-0

Question: If White sees ... b5 coming, then shouldn't he hurry to shore up the c4 point with a quick 9 d3 and then b3?

Answer: After 9 ... b5 10 b3 bxc4 11 bxc4 White managed to avoid giving Black a passed d-pawn, but he opened a new and possibly more dangerous issue with 11 ... Bb4+. White's king must forfeit castling privileges, since 12 Bd2?! Qa5 is quite awkward for him.

9 ... b5 10 d3

Question: This allows Black a passed d-pawn. Why not interchange White's last move with 10 b3?

Answer: White will soon lose a pawn after 10 ... bxc4 11 bxc4 d3! 12 Nc3 Qa5 when ideas like ... Ba6 and ... Ne5 gravely endanger White's weak c-pawn.

10 ... bxc4

Now Black earns himself a protected, passed d-pawn.

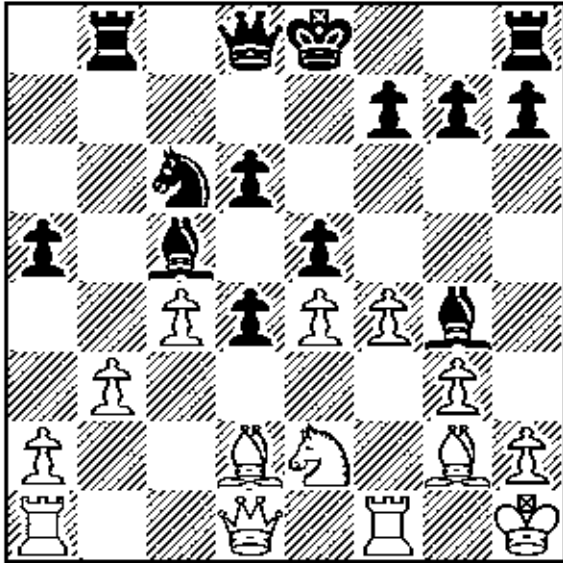
11 dxc4 e5 12 b3 a5

Reminding White that he may later face a queenside minority attack with ... a4 and ... axb3, after which White's b-pawn becomes a target and b4 is a ripe hole for a black piece. It becomes clear that the opening has gone badly wrong for White.

13 f4 Bc5

Threatening the cheapo ... d3+ and ... dxe2.

14 Kh1 d6 15 Bd2 Bg4!



Threat: ... d3.

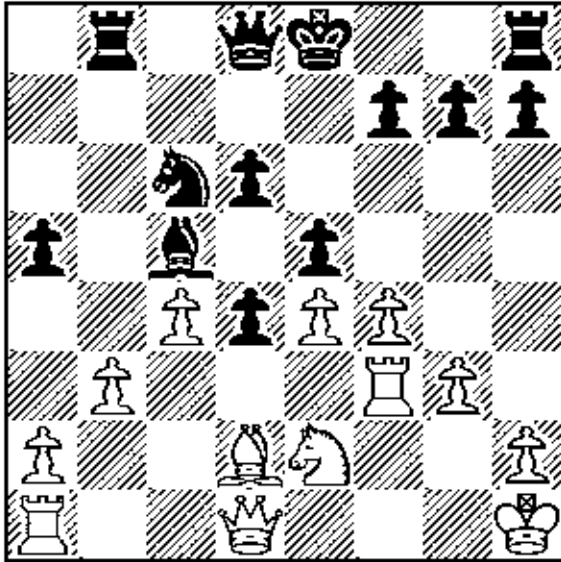
16 Bf3!?

With this swap, White's lifeless position sinks into further submissiveness, and is threatened with dire retribution for his previous structural offences. The swap weakens White's e-pawn and also all the light squares around his king.

Question: Why didn't White just pick up the bishop-pair with 16 h3?

Answer: This may have been a better option, but Black may have no intention of handing over the bishop-pair. He can play 16 ... Bh5!, intending ... f6. Now if White plays 17 g4?? this allows the dirty trick 17 ... Bxg4! when the bishop can't be touched, due to the line 18 hxg4?? Qh4+ 19 Kg1 d3+ with annihilating effect.

16 ... Bxf3+ 17 Rxf3



Exercise (planning): How did Black take over the initiative?

Answer: A central strike, reminiscent of our ... f5! move in the Rossolimo/Moscow chapter of the book.

17 ... f5!

Black chafes under the slow rhythms and seeks to up the tempo of the game. Now White's wobbly structure is no longer anchored in reliability.

18 Qc2

Not 18 exf5?? e4 19 Rf1 Qe7 and the threat of ... e3, followed by ... Qe4+ and ... d3 is decisive.

18 ... Qe7

Preparing to meet 19 exf5?? with 19 ... e4.

19 Re1 0-0 20 Nc1

Reinforcing e4, while hoping to later post the knight on d3.

20 ... Nb4

20 ... Rbe8! 21 Nd3 Qb7! is very difficult for White to meet: for instance, 22 h3 exf4 23 Rxf4 Ne5 24 Nxe5 dxe5 25 Rf3 fxe4 26 Rxf8+ Rxf8 27 Qxe4 Qxe4+ 28 Rxe4 d3! 29 Rxe5 Rf1+ 30 Kg2 Rf2+ 31 Kg1 Rf5+ 32 Rxc5 Rxc5 33 Kf2 Re5 34 Be3 Kf7 and Black should convert.

21 Bxb4 Bxb4 22 Re2 Qb7!

Too many enemy eyes watch over e4 and White's difficulties spike past tolerable levels. Black's last move prevents Nd3, while threatening ... Ba3 and ... Bxc1, which would knock off a defender of e4.

23 Kg1

The king wisely steps off the h1-a8 diagonal.

23 ... Ba3

Threat: ... Bxc1 and ... fxe4.

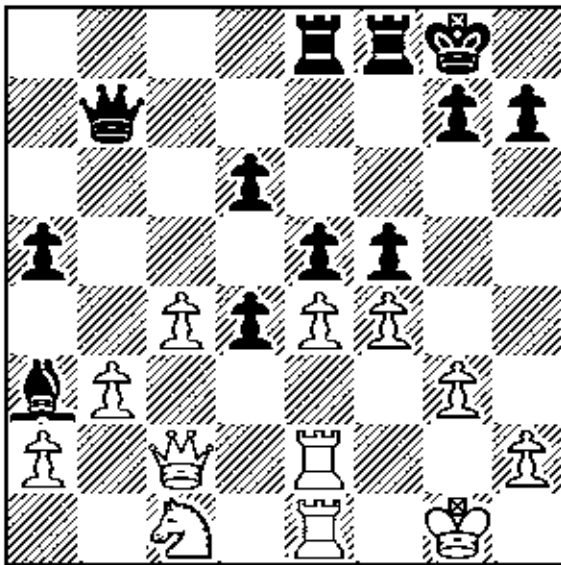
24 Rf1 Rbe8

Further indirect pressure is brought to e4. Now White must be on high alert for ... exf4, followed by ... fxe4.

25 Rfe1

25 exf5?? e4 is completely hopeless for White.

25 ... Bb4 26 Rf1 Ba3 27 Rfe1



Exercise (planning): Every Bond villain dreams of that button, which when pressed, wreaks havoc upon the world. Black has many tempting options. Come up with a plan which gives him a winning position.

Answer: Compliance is imposed under duress. The pawn sacrifice breaks White's flimsy e4 blockade. Don't worry. I'm just as disoriented as you are. White has a choice of painful options, only separated by degree in the misery index.

27 ... d5!!

Mamedyarov's move is more energetic and also stronger than 27 ... Bxc1 28 Rxc1 exf4 29 exf5 fxe4 30 Rf1 gxe4+ 31 Rxe4.

28 cxd5

Opening the c-file proves to be disastrous for White. The geometry meshes happily for Black and everything else loses as well. For example:

a) 28 exd5 e4 29 Kg2 Bb4 30 Rf1 Qa7 when White's two passers are firmly blockaded, while Black's are free to move forward. This may be White's best line in a

gaggle of bad choices.

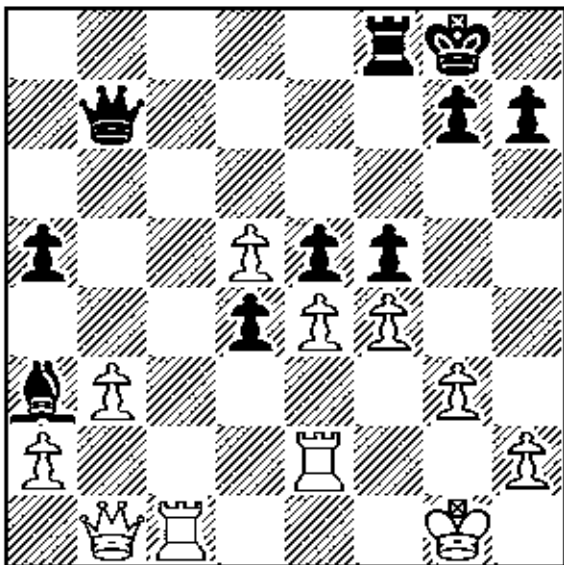
b) 28 exf5 e4 looks resignable for White.

c) 28 fxe5 dxe4 and, once again, it's time for White to resign.

28 ... Rc8 29 Qb1 Rxc1

Mamedyarov begins to go astray. After 29 ... fxe4! 30 Rxe4 exf4 31 gxf4 Qxd5 32 Nd3 Rc3 33 Qd1 Qb5 34 Nf2 d3 35 Rc4 Rxc4 36 bxc4 Qxc4 37 Qxd3 Qxf4 White is unlikely to survive, down a pawn and with an exposed king.

30 Rxc1



Exercise (critical decision): We can have the right idea, but still botch it, if we play the moves in the wrong sequence. Black can play either 30 ... Bxc1, followed by ... d3, or, he can play 30 ... d3 first. One line leads to a winning position, while the other offers White undeserved counter chances. Which one should Black play?

30 ... d3?

Mamedyarov reverses the sequence. A clear path to victory lies in:

Answer: 30 ... Bxc1! 31 Qxc1 d3 32 Re1 Rc8 33 Qe3 fxe4 and White's problem is the intended 34 Qxe4?? fails miserably to 34 ... d2 35 Rd1 Rc1 36 Qe2 Qxd5 37 fxe5 Qc5+ 38 Kf1 (or 38 Kg2 Rxd1 39 Qxd1 Qc1 40 Qg4 d1Q 41 Qe6+ Kf8 42 Qf5+ Ke7 and White's checks run out) 38 ... Qc2 and White collapses.

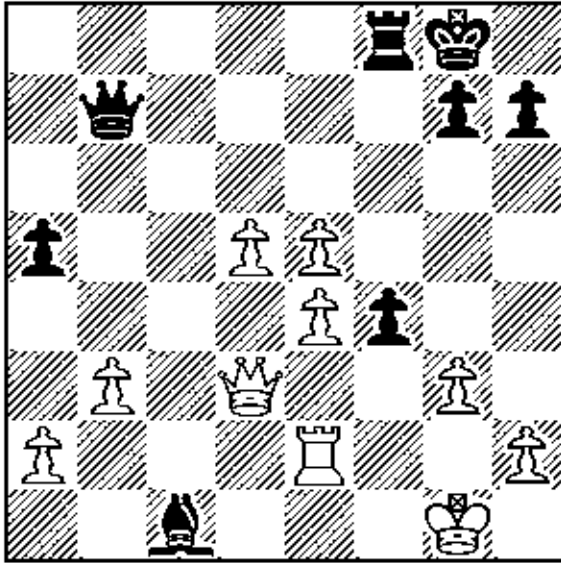
31 Qxd3!

The queen operates in a criminal/altruistic manner similar to Prometheus when he stole fire from the gods and gave it to us humans. White's best chance is to give up a piece for three pawns. 31 Rd2?? fxe4 32 Rc4 Qxd5 is hopeless for White.

31 ... Bxc1 32 fxe5

White got three pawns for the piece, and now he is the one who owns two connected passers. However, he still carries concerns about the safety of his exposed king.

32 ... f4!



Black does all he can to expose White's king.

33 gxf4?

Now White's pawns get blockaded. White may well have saved the game with two superior options:

a) 33 Kh1! Be3 34 d6! (34 e6? Qe7 35 Re1 Qg5 36 gxf4 Bxf4 37 Rf1 Bd6 38 Rxf8+ Kxf8 39 Qc4 Qe5 40 Qf1+ Qf4 41 Qxf4+ Bxf4 is lost for White, since his passers are blockaded: for example, 42 Kg2 Ke7 43 h3 Bd6 44 Kf3 Kf6 45 Kf2 Ke5 46 Ke3 h5 47 Kf3 Bc5 48 a4 g5 is zugzwang) 34 ... Qf7 35 Rc2 fxg3 36 Qc4! gxf4 37 Qxf7+ Kxf7 38 Rc7+ Kg6 (38 ... Ke6?? would be a monumental goof up after 39 Re7 mate) 39 e6 (the deeply entrenched passers save White) 39 ... Kf6 40 e7 Rg8 41 Rd7! (intending Rd8 next) 41 ... Bb6 42 Rb7 Bc5 43 Rd7 Bb6 44 Rb7 with a repetition draw.

b) 33 d6! also saves White, since 33 ... Be3+ 34 Kh1 Qf7 35 Rc2 fxg3 36 Qc4! gxf4 transposes to line 'a'.

33 ... Bxf4 34 e6 Be5

Materially, White is fine, but now his passers are blockaded and he is unable to overcome the burden of his exposed king.

35 Qe3 Qb4 36 Kg2 h6

Giving his king a little air is a wise precaution against future cheapos.

37 Qd2 Qc5

37 ... Qe7! 38 Rf2 Qh4 39 Rxf8+ Kxf8 and White drops a pawn.

38 Qe3 Qb4

38 ... Bd4! 39 Qd2 Qe7 40 Qe1 Qf6 and White is unable to cover the f3-square.

39 Qd2 Qe7!

Now he gets the right idea, which is to swing the queen over to the kingside, penetrating the white king's once inviolate perimeter.

40 h3

40 Rf2 Qh4 41 Rxf8+ Kxf8 transposes to the above note, which is hopeless for White.

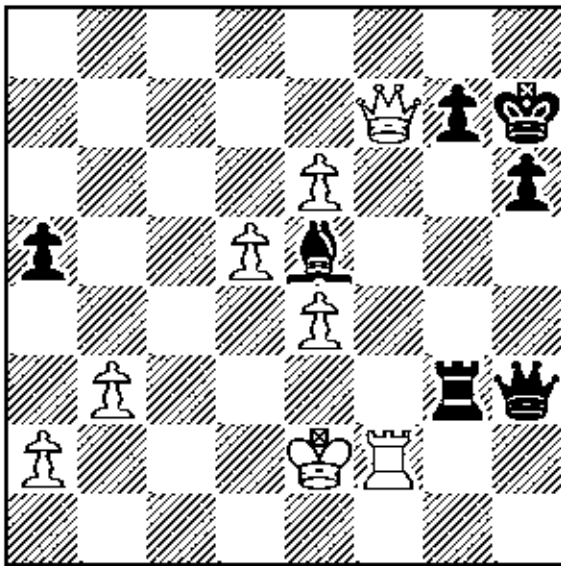
40 ... Qh4 41 Qe3 Rf6!

The human move. White's king is unable to withstand the third attacker. The comp found 41 ... Bd4!! (the thaumaturge senses the ambience of magic nearby) 42 Qg3 (42 Qxd4 Qg5+ 43 Kh2 Qf4+ 44 Kh1 Qf1+ pops the rook) 42 ... Qf6 43 Re1 Rc8 (White is unable to cover both c2 and c1 infiltration points) 44 e5 (44 h4 Rc2+ 45 Kh3 Be5 forces mate) 44 ... Rc2+ 45 Kh1 Bxe5! And Black wins.

42 Rf2 Rg6+ 43 Kf1 Rg3 44 Qa7

44 Rf3 Qxh3+ 45 Ke2 Rxf3 46 Qxf3 Qxf3+ 47 Kxf3 h5 is a totally hopeless ending for White after 48 a3 Kf8 49 b4 axb4 50 axb4 Ke7 51 b5 Kd6. All of White's passers are halted, while Black's passed h- and g-pawns are free to move forward.

44 ... Qxh3+ 45 Ke2 Kh7 46 Qf7



Exercise (calculation): The delivery of checkmate tends to wash all other considerations away. Black to play and force mate.

Answer: Knowledge of the white king's infirmity, once a closely guarded secret, is now information in the public domain.

46 ... Re3+ 0-1

47 Kd1 Rd3+ 48 Rd2 Qh1+ 49 Ke2 Qxe4+ 50 Kd1 Qg4+ (the deranged queen loves White's king, the way John Hinckley loved Jodie Foster) 51 Ke1 Bg3+ forces mate.

Summary: If White plays the set-up e4 and c4, and then stalls on playing d4, then our pre-emptive ... Nd4! seems like a complete answer, after which it is White who struggles for equality.

Game 16

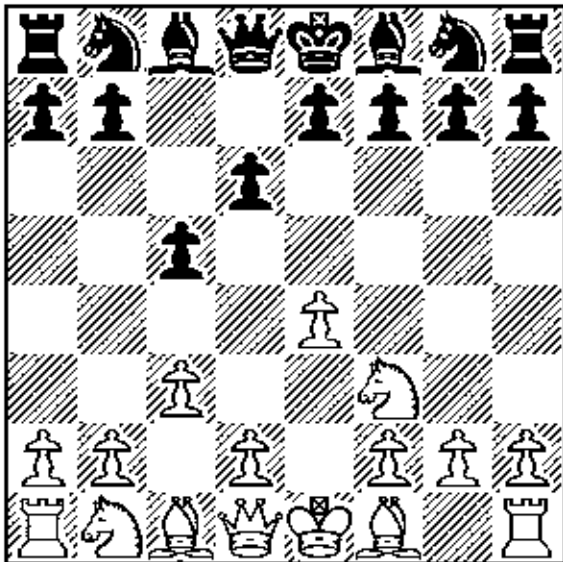
J.Polgar-S.Karjakin

Odessa (rapid) 2008

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6

Note that 2 ... Nc6 3 c3 Nf6 4 Bd3?! is an inferior version of the Kopec system for White, since he is a tempo short when compared to the notes below (4 d3 is also too passive for White to hope for an edge and the simple 4 ... d5 offers Black equality at a minimum): 4 ... d5 5 e5 (after 5 exd5 Qxd5 Black is a full move up over the version we look at later, since he played ... d5 in one go) 5 ... c4! (this move cuts out White's ability to later protect his e5-pawn with d4) 6 Bc2 Ng4 7 Qe2 Qc7 8 Ba4 Bd7 9 Bxc6 was P.Bontempi-A.Rotstein, Porto San Giorgio 2007. I prefer Black's position after 9 ... Qxc6 since he rules the light squares.

3 c3



Polgar nearly always plays the Open Sicilian. She understands that if we play only one version all our lives, we fall into the danger of regressing into an insular rut, and may play our opening phase by mindless habit. So she surprises Karjakin with a rare

offshoot, the Kopec line. This is the 2 ... d6 Sicilian player's version of White's delayed-c3-Sicilian systems. So all the lines we looked at in Chapter One don't apply here.

3 ... Nf6

Our most natural developing move. It's important to note that we are not threatening ... Nxe4 just yet, since this hangs our knight to Qa4+ ideas.

4 Be2

Question: Why would White play his bishop to this passive square, rather than c4.

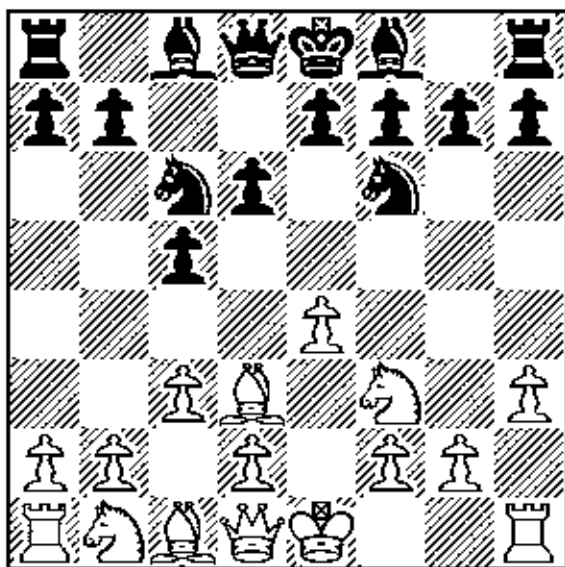
Answer: Some reasons why White often prefers e2:

1. After 4 Bc4, 4 ... Nxe4! is possible, since this no longer hangs a piece for Black.
2. White's bishop on e2 nullifies any coming ... Bg4 ideas from Black.

Instead:

a) 4 h3 has the idea is to eliminate ... Bg4. The trouble is h3 is not a developing move, so after 4 ... Nc6 now ... Nxe4 is a real threat, since White lacks the Qa4+ trick:

a1) The odd looking move 5 Bd3 is a specialty of my old friend IM Danny Kopec.



Question: The move looks amateurish. Doesn't the bishop clog White's development?

Answer: The line is fully playable for White, who simply plans to continue with a future Bc2 and d4, continuing in Ruy Lopez fashion. Black's next move is an attempt to disrupt the smooth flow of this plan: 5 ... d5!. This forces the game into Advance French lines, where White's d3-bishop really is awkwardly placed on d3, where it

blocks the d-pawn.

Question: Didn't Black lose a tempo with ... d6 and then ... d5?

Answer: True, but White's d3-bishop clearly needs to move as well, so this nullifies Black's tempo loss. Now:

a11) 6 exd5 Qxd5 allows Black a decent ... Qxd5 version of a c3-Sicilian after 7 Qe2 Bf5 8 Bc4 Qd6 9 0-0 e6 10 d4 cxd4 11 Rd1, V.Arapovic-G.Vucinic, Kragujevac 2014. Black should continue 11 ... a6 12 cxd4 Be7 13 Nc3 Na5! (eliminating White's most dangerous piece) 14 Bd3 Bxd3 15 Rxd3 Nc6 16 a3 0-0 and Black achieved a very acceptable game with the elimination of White's light-squared bishop.

a12) 6 e5 Nd7 7 Bb5 e6 8 0-0 Be7 9 d4 a6 10 Bd3 (White lost an awful lot of time with this bishop, since this is the third time it moved in the opening) 10 ... b5 11 a3 c4!? (White was threatening to resolve queenside tension with b4, so Black does it first, gaining considerable queenside space in the process) 12 Bc2 a5 13 Re1 Bb7 14 Qd2 b4 15 Qf4 g6 16 Nbd2 was L.Aronian-A.Grischuk, Monaco (rapid) 2006. At this point, my French instincts tell me to close the queenside with 16 ... b3 17 Bd1 and then transfer Black's king to the queenside, with a sharp coming struggle on the kingside. If the game reaches an ending, White is in trouble since Black may be able to set up a very promising piece sacrifice for two deeply entrenched passers by transferring knights to a4 and b5, after which White must be on constant alert for sacrifices on a3, b2 and c3.

a2) 5 d4? is an inferior version of a sacrifice we look at in the notes below, where White replaces the useful developing move Be2, with h3, which makes his coming pawn sacrifices unsound: 5 ... cxd4 6 cxd4 Nxe4! (now this pawn grab favours Black) 7 d5 Qa5+ 8 Nc3 Nxc3 9 bxc3 Ne5 10 Nxe5 (10 Be2 g6 11 Nxe5 Bg7! also favours Black, who is up a pawn, and well developed) 10 ... Qxc3+ 11 Bd2 Qxe5+ 12 Be2. White is down a full tempo over a line we look at later in the notes, and his pawn sacrifices fail to compensate, D.Kaforos-H.Banikas, Athens 2010.

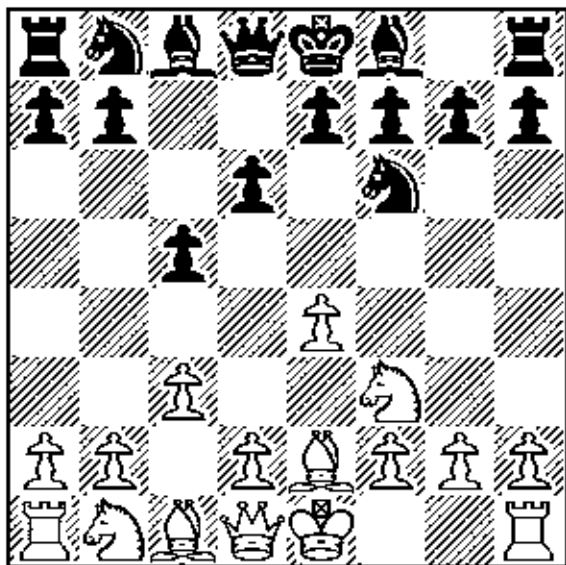
a3) With 5 Qc2 White stabilizes the e-pawn and prepares for a future d4. The trouble is the queen isn't well placed on the c-file, since if White does manage to achieve d4, then ... cxd4 opens the c-file and the queen is vulnerable to ... Rc8: 5 ... g6 6 d4 cxd4 7 cxd4 d5! 8 e5 Ne4 9 Nc3 Bg7! 10 Bd3 (or 10 Nxe4 dxe4 11 Qxe4 Bf5 12 Qf4 Qb6 13 Be2 Rd8 and White is unable to hang on to his extra pawn) 10 ... 0-0 11 a3 Nxc3 12 Qxc3 (12 bxc3 f6 also looks slightly better for Black) 12 ... Be6 13 b4 Rc8 14 Qb2 f6 when White lags in development and stands slightly worse, N.Managadze-I.Nikolaidis, Korinthos 1998.

b) 4 Bd3 Nc6 5 h3 transposes back to variation 'a'.

c) 4 Bc4?! is strategically suspect: 4 ... Nxe4 5 Qa4+ Nc6 6 Bxf7+ Kxf7 7 Qxe4 (White regained the piece at the cost of handing over his best piece, his light-squared

bishop; Black's king is in no real danger due to this fact) 7 ... Qd7! (principle: *operate on your strong colour*) 8 0-0 Qf5 9 Qe2 e6 10 d4 cxd4 11 cxd4 Be7 12 Na3 Rf8 13 Bd2 Kg8 and now it is just as if Black castled. Black stands better due to his bishop-pair, control over the light squares and open f-file, J.Rusche-S.Bromberger, Munich 2009.

Returning to Polgar's 4 Be2:



4 ... Bg4

The bishop picks up his cue and enters the scene. Black's safest move. It avoids White's berserker triple pawn sacrifice line 4 ... Nc6 5 d4 cxd4 6 cxd4 Nxe4 7 d5 Qa5+ 8 Nc3 Nxc3 9 bxc3 Ne5 10 Nxe5 Qxc3+ 11 Bd2 Qxe5 12 0-0 Qxd5 13 Rb1 f6. White is down a whopping three pawns, but as you may have noticed, Black is just a tad behind in development! Now just because your reckless writer risked such a line as Black, doesn't mean that you must as well. It's a very bad sign for Black when my normally material-loving comp rates this position slightly in White's favour, V.Salespurens-C.Lakdawala, San Diego 2000.

5 0-0 e6

Planning for a future ... d5.

6 h3

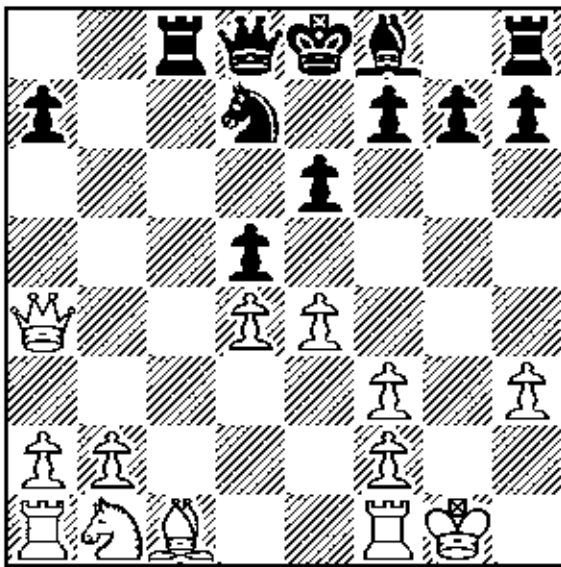
After 6 Re1 Be7 7 d4 cxd4 8 cxd4 d5 9 exd5 (9 e5 Ne4 is fine for Black) 9 ... Nxd5 10 Qb3, as in V.Akopian-S.Karjakin, Turin Olympiad 2006, Black seems to have excellent compensation if he offers his b-pawn: 10 ... Nc6 11 Qxb7 Ndb4 (threatening to trap the queen with ... Rb8) 12 Bf4 0-0 13 Nc3 Na5 14 Qb5 Nc2 15 d5 Nxa1 16 Rxa1 Qb6. White gets compensation for the exchange, but Black certainly doesn't stand worse.

6 ... Bh5 7 d4!?

It's so easy and so much fun to declare war on the chessboard, yet so worrying to realize its mounting expense. Polgar offers her e-pawn for a development lead. Instead, 7 Re1 Be7 8 d4 0-0! (there is no reason to open the c3-square for White's knight after 8 ... cxd4 9 cxd4) 9 Qb3 Qb6 saw Black equalize in A.Minasian-A.Khalifman, Moscow 2008.

7 ... Nxe4!?

Karjakin accepts the challenge. Safer is to decline the gift with 7 ... cxd4 8 cxd4 d5 9 Bb5+ (after 9 Qb3 Qb6 10 Qxb6 axb6 11 Bb5+ Nc6 12 Ne5 Rc8 13 exd5 Nxd5 14 Nc3 Nxc3 15 bxc3 Kd8 16 Re1 Nxe5 17 Rxe5 Bg6 18 Re3 Be7 19 Bb2 Kc7 Black looks okay in the ending) 9 ... Nc6 10 Qa4 Bxf3 11 Bxc6+?! (correct was 11 gxf3 Qd7) 11 ... bxc6 12 Qxc6+?? Nd7 13 gxf3 Rc8! 14 Qa4.



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

Answer: Attraction/double attack. With 14 ... Rxc1! the rook places aside the decencies of debate and decides to let the c1-bishop have it, with a right hook. Black wins a piece, since recapture is met with ... Qg5+ and ... Qxc1, C.Lupulescu-S.Bogner, Dubai 2014.

8 d5

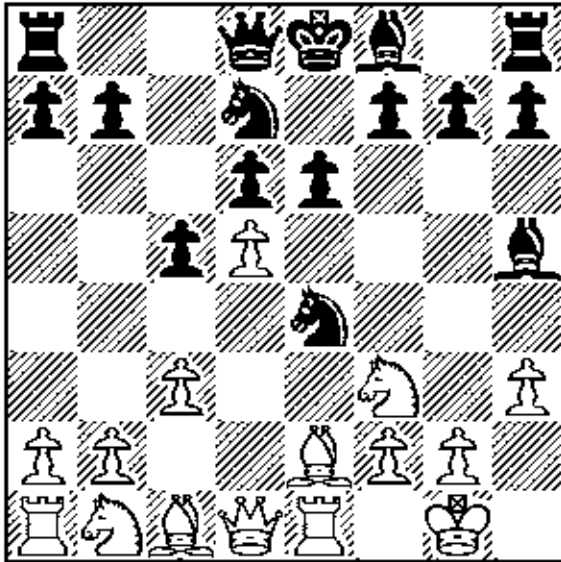
An important adjunct to the sacrifice, which prevents ... d5.

8 ... Nd7

After this natural response, White gets dangerous compensation for the pawn. 8 ... Qd7! is Black's most accurate move: 9 Re1 Be7 10 dxe6 (or 10 c4 Na6 when the knight heads for c7, where it offers extra coverage to e6; I wouldn't mind taking on Black here, with the extra pawn) 10 ... fxe6 11 Qb3 Nc6 12 Ne5 Nxe5 13 Bxh5+ g6 14 Rxe4

gxh5 15 Qd1 0-0-0, H.Hofstetter-G.Deschamp, correspondence 1998. Black stands better, due to his strong central control and open lines against White's king.

9 Re1



9 ... Be7

Question: Black lags in development. Why doesn't he take the opportunity to close lines with 9 ... e5?

Answer: Black would love to clog central lines, but your suggestion walks into the tactic 10 Nxe5! Bxe2 11 Qxe2 Nxc3 12 Nxc3 dxe5, which allows White to regain her sacrificed pawn with a clear advantage.

10 Bc4

With a double attack on e4 and e6, which forces Black's response.

10 ... exd5 11 Bxd5 Nef6 12 Bxb7

White regained her pawn, but lost her initiative in the process, since Black caught up in development.

12 ... Rb8 13 Bc6 0-0

Houdini rates the game at dead even. I think this is a misassessment and prefer Black, who now leads in development.

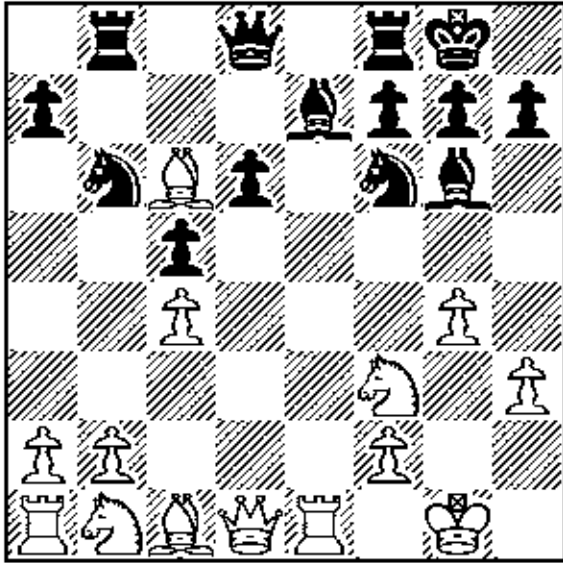
14 g4

Oh, the things we endure for the initiative! This concession looks necessary, and is played with the philosophy: if we don't go to the problem, then the problem will come to us. White's trouble is that a quiet developing move like 14 Nbd2?! is met with 14 ... Ne5 15 Ba4 Nd3 16 Re3 Nxc1 17 Qxc1 Nd5 18 Re4 f5 19 Re1 Nf4 (threat: ... Nd3) 20 Qc2 d5 with a strong initiative and potential kingside attack for Black.

14 ... Bg6 15 c4

Clearing room for her b1-knight on c3. The comp suggests 15 g5 Nh5 16 c4, but White's game looks rather loose to me after 16 ... f6.

15 ... Nb6!



This move makes it very awkward for White to cover c4.

16 Nc3

Alternatively:

a) 16 b3? is met with the shot 16 ... Nxg4! when the threat of ... Bf6 allows Black's knight to escape.

b) 16 Bb5 h5 17 Nh4 Bh7 and I don't much like White, who looks slightly overextended.

16 ... Nxc4 17 Qe2

This double attack regains the lost pawn, yet White's game looks looser and looser.

17 ... Ne5 18 Nxe5 dxe5 19 g5

19 Qxe5 Bd6 20 Qe2 Bd3! 21 Qf3 c4 is annoying for White.

19 ... Ne8

After 19 ... Nd7 20 Qg4 Nb6 21 Rxe5 f6 White's king may later get exposed.

20 h4?!

The fact that White is overextended isn't exactly front page headline news. The middlegame is fraught with danger for White's king. Polgar probably should head for a slightly inferior ending with the continuation 20 Qxe5! Bd6 21 Qxe8! Rxe8 22 Rxe8+ Qxe8 23 Bxe8 Rxe8 24 Be3. White has good chances to hold the ending, since c5 is weak.

20 ... f6

White is in serious trouble if Black found the line 20 ... Bd6! 21 h5 Bf5 22 Qf3 Qc8

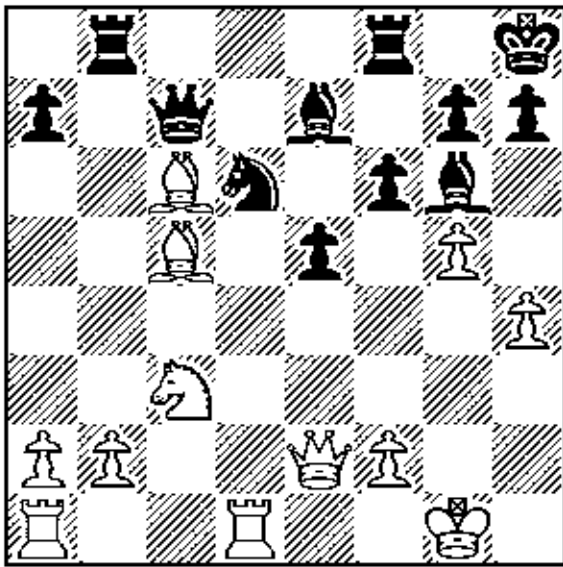
23 Ne4 Rb6 24 Ba4 f6 when White's king is in serious trouble.

21 Rd1 Nd6 22 Be3 Kh8

Karjakin probably didn't like White's activity in the line 22 ... Qc8! 23 gxf6 gxf6 24 Bg2 Nf5 25 Nd5 Bd8 26 Rac1 Nxe3 27 fxe3 where White achieved some degree of activity. Still, I would take Black any day here, with the extra pawn, bishop-pair and safer king.

23 Bxc5 Qc7

After 23 ... Rc8 24 Qa6 Qc7 25 Nd5! Qxc6 26 Qxc6 Rxc6 27 Nxe7 Rxc5 28 Rxd6 Bh5 29 Rc6 White should hold the game.



24 Bxd6?

This leads to an overextended position. Black had two superior alternatives:

a) 24 Qa6! Rbc8 25 Nd5! Qxc6 26 Qxc6 Rxc6 27 Nxe7 Rxc5 28 Rxd6 Bh5 29 Rc6 transposes to the above variation to Black's 23rd, where White shouldn't lose.

b) 24 Rac1! Qxc6 25 Nd5 Qe8 26 Nxe7 Bh5 27 f3 Nb7 28 Ba3 fxg5 29 Rf1 e4 30 Qxe4 Qb5 31 Qd5 Qxd5 32 Nxd5 Rxf3 33 hxg5 Rg3+ 34 Kh2 Rxc5 35 Rc7 (threat: Rxb7) 35 ... h6 and White's activity is enough to hold the game.

24 ... Bxd6 25 Be4

Polgar agrees to a tempo loss to eliminate Black's threat to take on g5. 25 Nb5 Qxc6 26 Nxd6 Rb4 27 Rac1 Qd7 looks lost for White, whose king is open to the winds.

25 ... f5 26 h5

If we reach for too much territory too quickly, our overstretched resources may turn scattershot and ineffective. This further loosens White's pawns. White had better survival chances in the line 26 Rac1 Qd7 27 Bg2 e4.

26 ... Be8 27 Bg2 e4

Black's kingside initiative threatens to grow out of control. No single factor is

enough to defeat White, yet the sum total begins to take its toll.

28 Nd5 Qf7 29 g6

Resentment heightens to saturation levels. White must hand over a pawn, which coupled with her overextended position, leaves her busted. 29 h6 opens the g-file with harmful consequences after 29 ... gxf6.

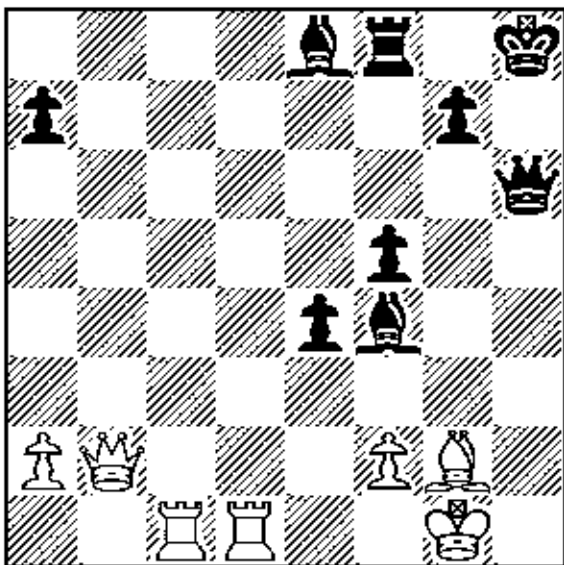
29 ... hxg6 30 hxg6 Qxg6 31 Qe3

Not 31 Rac1? Qh6 and Black has too many threats.

31 ... Rxb2 32 Rac1 Qh7

Black's queen seeks to enter h2.

33 Nf4 Qh6 34 Qd4 Bxf4 35 Qxb2



Exercise (combination alert): Black is winning whichever way he plays it. However, one path is far stronger than another. Black can play 35 ... Bxc1, or first toss in 35 ... Qh2+, and then take on c1. What is Black's best continuation?

35 ... Bxc1

Answer: Karjakin missed 35 ... Qh2+! (sending White's king to the tactically unfavourable square, f1) 36 Kf1 (the king doodles a caricature of his sister, with enormous buck teeth, oversized nose, a scar, and a pirate's eye patch; unfortunately she is standing right next to him and recognizes herself in the drawing) 36 ... Bxc1 37 Rxc1 and now Black has the crushing move 37 ... a6!, the punch line to a cruel joke, which clears the way for a deadly check on b5. This is the move Karjakin probably missed in his calculations.

36 Rxc1 Bh5!

"You are an inhuman monster without a shred of compassion," Black's queen tells

her bishop, adding: “But never forget: you are my monster.” Now ... Bf3 becomes a serious concern for White.

37 Qa3!

Covering f3, while threatening Qxf8+.

37 ... Rd8 38 Rb1 Qg5

Threat: ... Bf3.

39 Kh2 Qf4+ 40 Qg3

The ending is lost. White had no choice since 40 Kg1?? Bf3 41 Qe7 Rd6 leads to immediate collapse.

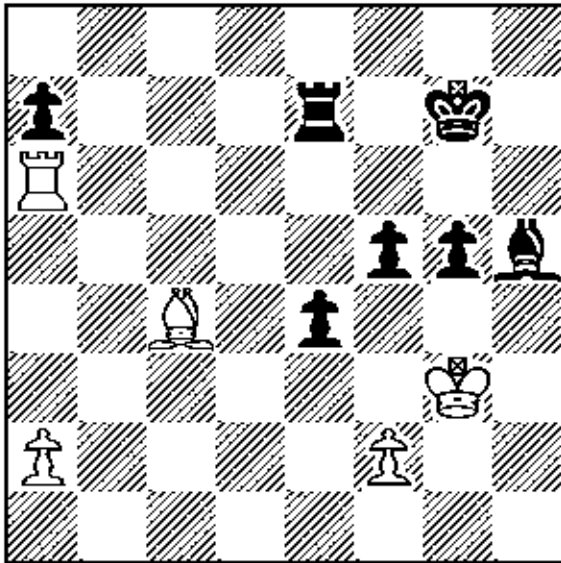
40 ... Qxg3+ 41 Kxg3 g5

Cutting off both f4 and h4 from White’s king, who now feels as if an elephant sits on his chest.

42 Rb5 Bg6 43 Ra5 Rd7 44 Bh3 Rf7

Everything is covered and White can only wait while Black improves his king’s position.

45 Bf1 Kg7 46 Bc4 Rc7 47 Bb3 Kf6 48 Ra6+ Kg7 49 Ra5 Bh7 50 Ra6 Re7 51 Be6 Bg6 52 Bc4 Bh5!



Black wants to implement ... f4, but doesn’t want to allow the white king access to g4.

53 Ra5 f4+ 54 Kg2

In a futile gesture, the king raises his fist and vows to retake lost lands.

54 ... Kf6 55 Ra6+ Ke5 56 Kf1

56 Ra5+ Kd4 57 Bb3 Bf3+ wins.

56 ... Bf3

Black consolidates and the game is over.

57 Ra5+ 0-1

The rook's lectures have this odd quality of seeming a lot longer than they actually are.

Summary: The perfect face of a criminal is one with no distinguishing marks. This plain, every man (or every woman) look is not so easy to identify in a police line up. The systems covered in this game fit this description. If you play the 2 ... d6 move order, then be aware of all the 3 c3 sidelines, which can be quite dangerous, unless we fully understand the theory.

Game 17

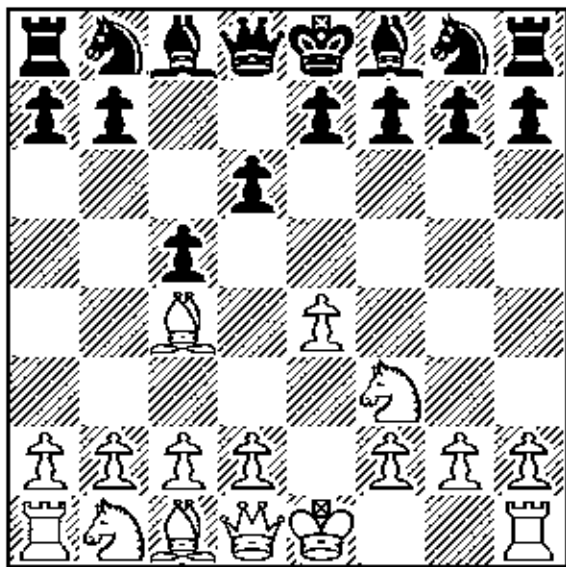
A. Timofeev-G. Kasparov

Russian Championship, Moscow 2004

1 e4 c5

Every game for a player of Kasparov's legendary calibre must be a stressful affair, since the public's expectation of a 100% win ratio is unreasonable.

2 Nf3 d6 3 Bc4



This bishop's development on c4, championed by the likes of McShane and Morozevich, is a lot more playable when Black tosses in an early ... d6, because then ... e6 and ... d5 costs Black a tempo from having moved the d-pawn twice.

3 ... Nf6 4 d3

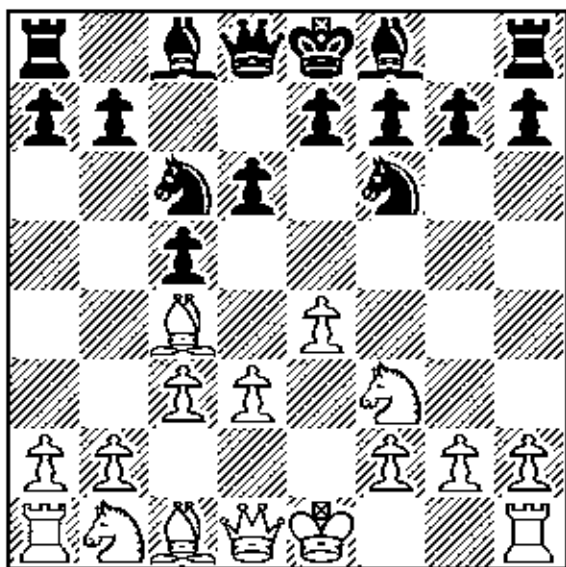
If White plays 4 Nc3 be careful not to be tricked out of your normal Open Sicilian. For example, 4 ... Nc6 (note that this move wouldn't work if you are a Najdorf player who always meets the Sozin with the set-up ... e6, ... a6 and ... Nbd7; the Najdorfer may want to play the move order 4 ... e6 5 0-0 Be7) 5 d3 (5 d4 cxd4 6 Nxd4 e6 transposes

to a Sozin) 5 ... e6 6 0-0 Be7 7 a3 0-0 saw White play too passively to hope for an edge, D.Dzupin-A.Zubov, Alushta 2004.

4 ... Nc6

4 ... Bg4?! may be premature due to the tactic 5 e5! d5 (and not 5 ... dxe5?? 6 Nxe5! when 6 ... Be6 7 Bxe6 fxe6 leaves White with a strategically won game, but 6 ... Bh5?? is met with 7 Qxh5! Qa5+ 8 Bd2 Qxd2+ 9 Kxd2 Nxe5 10 Bxf7+ Kd8 11 Bxe5, when Black comes out a piece behind) 6 Bb3 Ng8 7 h3 Bf5 8 0-0, which leaves White with a big development lead and a clear edge.

5 c3



Question: What is White's intent?

Answer: White plays it slowly, in Closed Ruy Lopez style, planning to build the centre with an eventual d4. This plan, however, takes a lot of time and Black in my opinion has several paths to equality.

Question: What are Black's plans in this position?

Answer: Black has a choice of three set-ups:

a) Play ... Bg4 and then ... e6. White may eventually respond with h3 and g4, with a structure similar to ones we examined last chapter.

b) Play ... e6, keeping the light-squared bishop on the inside of the pawn chain, and follow with ... d5, with a French-like structure.

c) Play ... g6 in Dragon fashion, as Kasparov did in the game. Black can follow with queenside play with ... Rb8, ... b5, and if necessary ... e5, the inclusion of which

gives him a position a few tempi up over a normal Closed Lopez.

Since White later played Bb3, c3, a3 and Ba2, there is something to be said about playing the immediate 5 a3. If he plays the same manoeuvre, he cuts out the unnecessary Bb3 move Timofeev played in the game. Of course then Black can try a different set-up, like ... e6 and ... d5, so maybe this theory doesn't really hold up.

Question: How did Black gain time in this version over a Ruy Lopez?

Answer: In a normal Lopez, Black often plays ... e5, ... d6, ... Nf6, ... Be7, ... 0-0, ... Re8, ... Bf8, ... g6 and ... Bg7. In our version we get the same set-up much faster, cutting out the middleman by playing an immediate fianchetto. We avoided the laborious ... Be7 and ... Bf8 and therefore picked up tempi. Also, in a normal Closed Ruy, White often plays d4 in one go. In the Anti-Sicilian version, White must first play d3 and then later d4, losing more time.

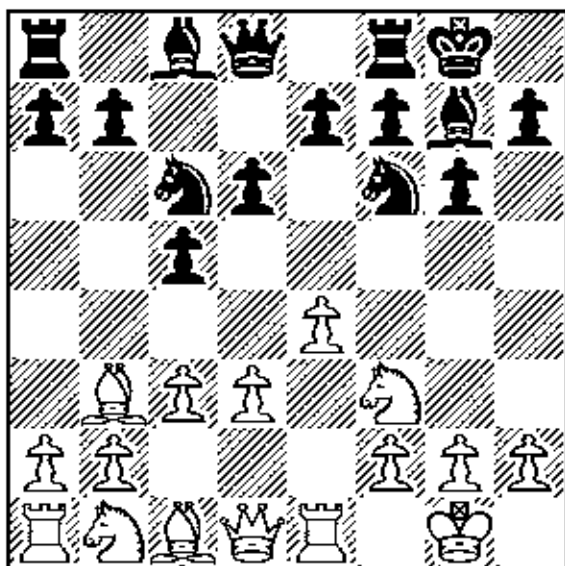
5 ... g6 6 0-0

6 h3 is sometimes tossed in first. It feels awfully slow to me: for example, 6 ... Bg7 7 Bb3 0-0 8 0-0 b5 9 Re1 (White can also toss in the immediate 9 d4 e5 10 a4 Na5!? 11 dxe5 dxe5 12 axb5 Nxb3 13 Qxb3 Nxe4 14 Qc4 Bb7 15 Re1 Nd6! 16 Qxc5 Rc8 17 Qb4 Bxf3 18 gxf3 Rc4! when White's king is in serious trouble, L.McShane-D.Gormally, British Championship, Street 2000, while here 10 ... b4 is safer) 9 ... b4 10 d4 bxc3 11 bxc3 cxd4 12 cxd4 d5! 13 e5 Ne4 and the open queenside ensures Black adequate play, L.Aronian-P.Leko, Monaco (rapid) 2006.

6 ... Bg7 7 Bb3

This move gets out of the way of future ... d5, ... b5 or ... Na5 tricks from Black.

7 ... 0-0 8 Re1



8 ... b5

8 ... e5 turning the game into a mock Ruy Lopez is appealing, since Black gets a slightly better version than normal lines: 9 Nbd2 h6 10 Nf1 Be6 11 Bxe6 (11 Ne3 allows Black 11 ... d5 12 exd5 Nxd5 with a pleasant central space edge) 11 ... fxe6 12 Nh4 Kh7 13 g3 d5 14 Qe2 Qd7 15 Bd2 Rad8 16 Rad1 Qf7 17 Bc1 c4! 18 dxc4 Nxe4 and Black seized a dangerous initiative, E.Najer-V.Gashimov, Internet (blitz) 2006.

9 a3

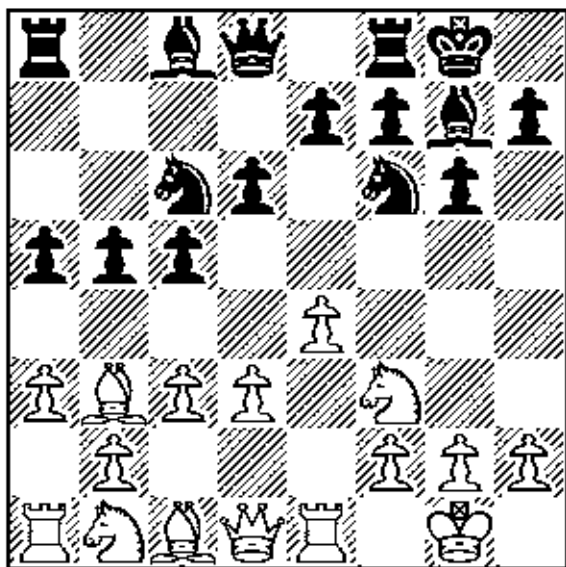
Otherwise:

a) 9 h3 transposes to the Leko-Aronian note from above.

b) 9 Nbd2 a5 10 a3 a4 11 Bc2 e5 and Black got himself a very comfortable Lopez-like position, M.Kobalia-A.Fedorov, Internet (blitz) 2006.

c) 9 d4 and 'achieving' d4 isn't all that wonderful for White, since his centre comes under pressure: 9 ... Bg4 10 Be3 cxd4 (be careful not to fall for the trick 10 ... Nxe4? 11 Bd5 cxd4 12 cxd4 Rc8 13 Bxe4 d5 14 Bd3 Nxd4 15 Nbd2 Nxf3+ 16 Nxf3 Bxb2 17 Bh6 when Black doesn't have enough compensation for the piece) 11 cxd4 Na5 12 Nc3 b4 13 Nd5 Nxe4 14 Bf4, L.Bergez-P.Smirnov, Fuegen 2006. Black has the slight upper hand in the complications after 14 ... Nxb3 15 Qxb3 Bxf3 16 gxf3 (16 Qxf3 f5 favours Black) 16 ... e5! 17 dxe5 dxe5 18 Rxe4 exf4 when White's damaged kingside may be a source of future difficulties.

9 ... a5



Kasparov continues to annex queenside territory.

10 h3

Question: It looks to me like White is allowing Black to push him around on the queenside. Why not challenge with 10 a4 b4 11 Nbd2 and then use c4 for his

pieces?

Answer: First, your suggestion 10 a4 violates the principle: *don't challenge the opponent on his or her strong wing*. But saying this, your suggestion actually looks quite playable after 11 ... Nd7 (threatening c3) 12 Qc2 bxc3 (12 ... Ba6 13 Nc4 Nb6 14 Nxb6 Qxb6 15 Rb1 Rab8 16 Be3 Qc7 17 Qd2 e6 looks balanced) 13 bxc3. Now if Black chooses, he can win an exchange with 13 ... Nb4!? (Black can also play it safe with 13 ... Ba6 14 Nc4 Nb6 15 Nxb6 Qxb6 16 Rb1 Qc7 17 Be3 Rab8 with an equal position) 14 cxb4 Bxa1 15 b5 Bg7 16 Bd5 Rb8 17 Nc4 Nb6 18 Nxb6 (18 Nxa5?? loses to 18 ... Nxd5 19 Nc6 Nb4) 18 ... Rxb6 19 Bd2 e6 20 Ba2 Rb8. Black's a5-pawn is a constant source of worry and it feels to me like White received full compensation for the exchange.

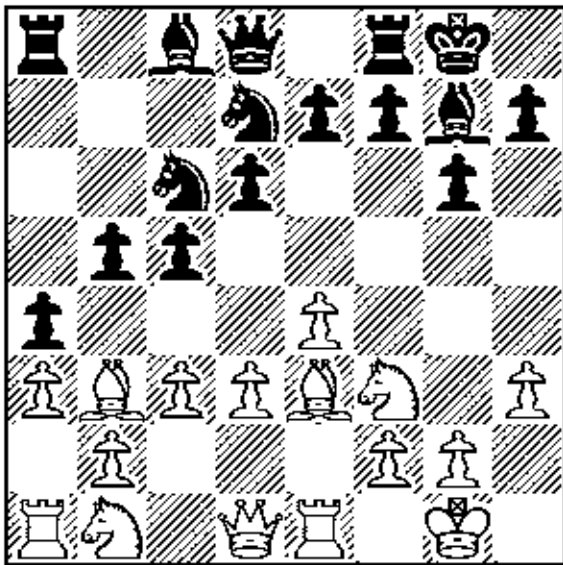
10 ... Nd7

10 ... a4 is similar: 11 Ba2 Bb7 12 Be3 Qc7 13 Nbd2 (White is all set to play d4 next, which Black discourages with his next move) 13 ... e5! 14 Rc1 (also possible is 14 d4 c4, and if 15 d5 Na5 when Black can re-route his knight to c5, via b7 and maybe later play for ... f5) 14 ... h6 15 Nf1 Na5. The players agreed to a draw in this position which I feel slightly favours Black, who once again looks like he achieved an excellent Closed Lopez, A.Timofeev-K.Sakaev, Sochi 2005.

11 Be3

White can also just play 11 d4 without preparation: 11 ... a4 12 Ba2 Bb7 13 Be3 and here I would play 13 ... c4 14 Nbd2 e5, hoping to provoke White's d-pawn to d5, after which Black's knight has access to the c5-square. If White leaves the central tension, then he must calculate for ... exd4 tricks on every move.

11 ... a4



Theory ends here. Instead, 11 ... Ba6 12 d4 b4 (Black challenges White's pawn chain at its base) 13 Nbd2 Qc7 14 Qc2 was D.Lutz-A.Seyb, Bad Wiessee 2005. At this point Black should release the pawn tension with 14 ... bxc3 15 bxc3 Rac8 16 Qa2 Nb6! and if 17 dxc5 dxc5 18 Bxc5 a4 19 Bxb6 Qxb6 20 Bxa4 Ne5 when White's two extra pawns probably won't be extra soon. Black exerts tremendous strategic pressure and has more than enough compensation. Indeed, I prefer his position.

12 Bc2!

A move which displays understanding of the position's subtleties.

Question: It seems like Timofeev went to a lot of trouble to ensure a safe haven for his bishop on a2, and then decided to play it to c2. Why?

Answer: I think he feared that he would have to play it to the b1-h7 diagonal anyway, after a continuation like 12 Ba2 Bb7 13 Nbd2 Qc7 14 d4 c4!. Black blunts the a2-bishop which now needs to be re-routed later to b1, with loss of time after 15 Rc1 e5 16 Bb1.

12 ... Nb6

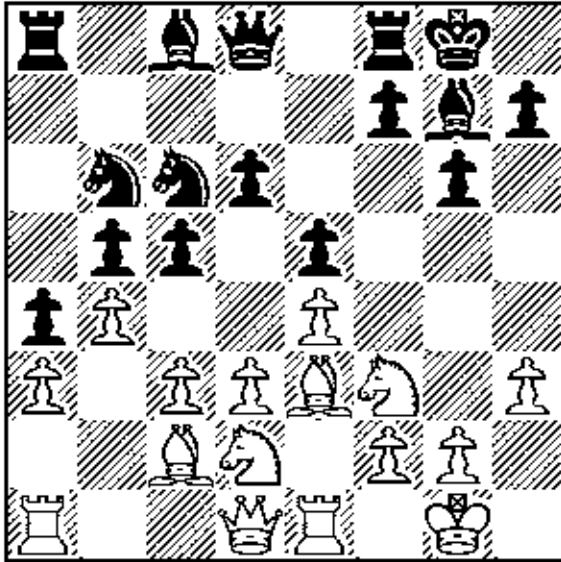
12 ... e5 is tempting, now that White's light-squared bishop no longer controls d5.

13 Nbd2 e5!

Both sides proceed with their respective plans, yet we sense that White's is more laboured in its process. To me this just feels like a passive Lopez, gone slightly wrong for White. It looks as if White made reasonable moves, yet stands worse. I think the reason for this is simply that White's 3 Bc4 pseudo-Lopez plan is awfully slow, when juxtaposed with a real Closed Ruy Lopez.

Rowson suggested 13 ... f5!? then added, "but there is no need to weaken the kingside for uncertain gains at this stage." Play may go 14 exf5 Bxf5 15 Rc1 Nd5 16 d4 cxd4 17 Bxf5 Rxf5 18 cxd4 Qd7 19 Qc2 Na5 20 Qe4 e6 21 Rc2 with a balanced game. I prefer Kasparov's move, after which he keeps White worried about ... f5.

14 b4!



When we deal with multiple defensive issues, it's imperative that we triage them in order of degree of potential peril. I believe this move displays brilliant judgement, in a difficult position. Principle: *Counter a wing attack (Black's kingside potential with a coming ... f5) with a central distraction* (White pressures c5). White voluntarily weakens his queenside, yet I believe the move is a necessary evil. He feared a King's Indian-style attack from Black with a coming ... f5 if he played more slowly: for example, 14 Rc1 f5 15 exf5 gxf5 16 Bg5 Qc7 when Black can later try building an attack down the open g-file with his major pieces. I don't have much faith in White's central counters here.

14 ... axb3 15 Bxb3 Bd7 16 Qc2 Ra6

This simple plan stresses White about a potential for tripling major pieces along the open a-file.

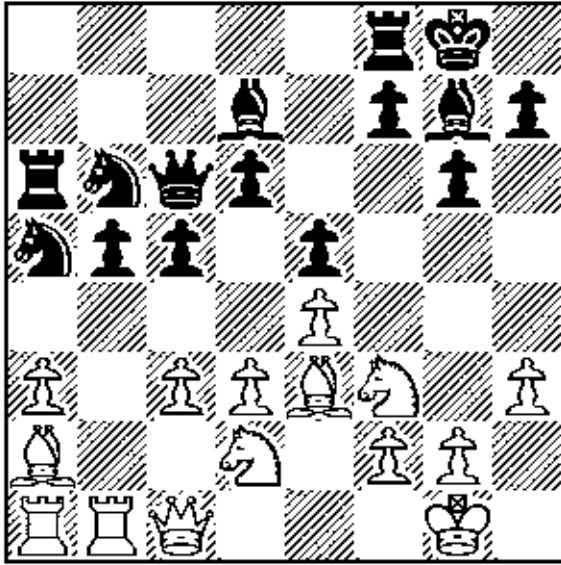
17 Reb1 Qa8 18 Qc1 Na5!

Something pierced Black's iron resolve to hammer away at the a-pawn.

Question: Why didn't Kasparov pursue his plan of tripling on the a-file?

Answer: I think his defensive sixth sense correctly warned him that too many of his pieces drifted to the queenside, leaving his king in danger on the other wing. An example: 18 ... Ra5 19 h4! and now let's say that Black pursues his a-file agenda with blinders with 19 ... Qa6 (19 ... h5 20 Ng5 offers White counterplay on f7) 20 h5 Ra8 21 Qd1! and if 21 ... Rxa3? (correct is 21 ... Be8 22 Nh2 Qc8 23 Qc1) 22 Rxa3 Qxa3 23 Ng5 suddenly, White generated a wicked attack on Black's king. Following 23 ... Nd8 24 Qf3 Be8 25 Nxh7! Kxh7 26 hxg6+ Kg8 (26 ... fxg6?? walks into 27 Qh3+ Bh6 28 Qxh6 mate) 27 Qh3 Kf8 28 Qh7, Bh6 is coming and White has a winning attack.

19 Ba2 Qc6!



Dual purpose:

1. Kasparov covers his c5-pawn to play a future ... d5 break.
2. He reinforces a ... c4 break as well.

20 d4?!

White has been itching to make this break, and mistimes it. I would try to distract Black with a kingside advance with 20 h4 h6 21 Nf1 Kh7 22 h5 when White may generate enough play to reach dynamic equality.

20 ... c4?!

Black seizes the advantage if he opens the centre with 20 ... exd4! 21 cxd4 Rc8 22 h4 Qb7 23 Qe1 c4 (the passed c-pawn disorganizes White's defence) 24 h5 gxh5 25 Bf4 c3 26 Nf1 Nac4 and White's a-pawn soon falls.

21 dxe5

There is no reason to hand over the c5-square to Black. 21 Rb4! maintaining control over c5, and preparing to double rooks to pressure b5, seems to be White's best defence.

21 ... dxe5 22 Bxb6?!

I'm not so sure this embellishment is a necessary ingredient. White obviously feared ... Na4 and ... Nc5. 22 Rb4! was still White's best plan. He isn't so badly off after 22 ... Na4 23 Rab1 Rc8 24 Rxb5 Nb3! 25 Nxb3 cxb3 26 R5xb3 Nxc3 27 Rxc3 Qxc3 28 Qxc3 Rxc3 29 Rb7! (suddenly, White generates serious counterplay) 29 ... Bc8 30 Rxf7 Rcx3 31 Rd7+ Rxa2 32 Rd8+ Kf7 33 Ng5+ Ke7 34 Rxc8 and the game should probably end in a draw.

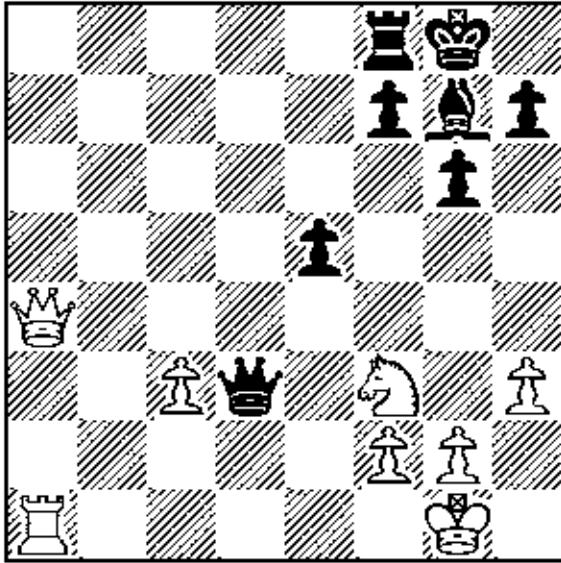
22 ... Rxb6 23 a4

Undermining Black's pawn chain doesn't help White in this case.

23 ... bxa4 24 Rxb6 Qxb6 25 Nxc4 Nxc4 26 Bxc4 Qc5 27 Qd1

After 27 Bd5! Rc8 28 c4 Rb8 Black's a-pawn is clearly more valuable than White's c-pawn, but I still think this is White's best bet to try and hold the game.

27 ... Qxc4 28 Qxd7 Qxe4 29 Qxa4 Qd3!



Clearing the path for ... e4. Despite the simplification, White is still in danger for the following reasons:

1. White's c-pawn is weak.
2. Black's kingside majority is ready to be pushed.
3. Black's bishop is a far stronger minor piece than White's remaining knight.
4. The cumulative effect of numbers 2 and 3 on the list means that White's king is in potential danger.

30 c4?!

White encourages his passed c-pawn forward, with bullhorn and riding crop. However, this plan weakens d4, a square Black's bishop would love to occupy. To be preferred was the passive 30 Rc1.

30 ... e4 31 Rd1 Qe2 32 Nh2

An unfortunate necessity since:

- a) 32 Nd4?? Bxd4 33 Rxd4 e3! is immediately decisive.
- b) 32 Re1?? exf3! 33 Rxe2 fxe2 34 Qa5 Re8 35 Qe1 Bc3 and Black makes a new queen, with an extra rook's interest.

32 ... Bc3!

The bishop once only denounced White's king in whispered tones. Now emboldened, he does so openly. Threat: ... Be1.

33 Rf1

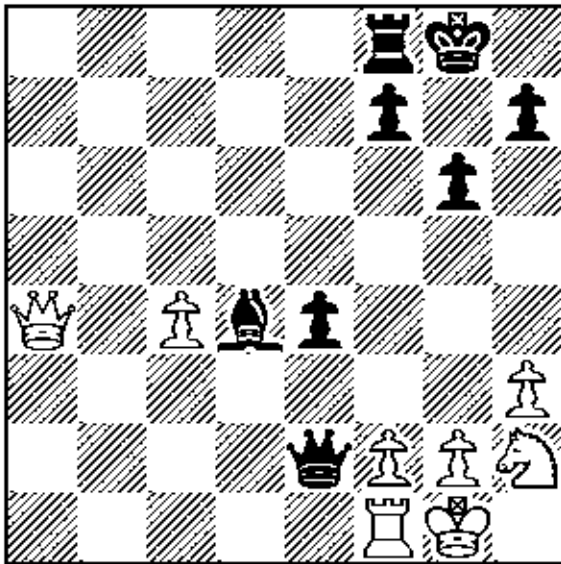
White's army is in full retreat mode.

33 ... Bd4?

Black had two promising continuations with:

a) 33 ... Rc8! ("It is rarely a mistake to bring your last piece into the game, writes Rowson) 34 Ng4 Qxc4 (but not 34 ... Rxc4?? 35 Qe8+ Kg7 36 Ne5! threatening f7, and also Nd7, which forces Black into 36 ... Bxe5 37 Qxe5+ Kg8 38 Qe8+; the game ends with one of those gerbil-wheel-rotation perpetual check deals) 35 Qxc4 Rxc4 36 Rc1 Kg7 37 Ne3 Rc5 38 Kf1 f5 and Black has chances to convert the technical ending.

b) 33 ... h5 34 c5 Rd8 35 c6 Be5 36 Qa5 Re8 37 Re1 Qc4 38 Qb6 Bd4 39 Qb1 e3 40 fxe3 Rxe3 41 Kh1 Qxc6 42 Rxe3 Bxe3 43 Nf3 Bf4 when Black can play to expose White's king with the plan ... g5 and ... g4, with good chances of conversion.



Exercise (combination alert/critical decision): Kasparov's last move – a mistake, which

imperils the whole – allows White back into the game. White has a choice of 34 Ng4 or 34 Qc6. One of these lines allows a miracle save. Which move is best?

34 Qc6?

Missing a beautiful pattern is like when you own something of great value, yet circumstances keep it temporarily out of our reach, which is no different than not owning it in the first place.

Answer: White missed the problem-like save with 34 Ng4!. The knight's outer appearance exudes innocence, while his mind churns out evil thoughts, unseen to those around him. After 34 ... h5 White has the surprising resource 35 c5!! Bxc5 (if 35 ... Qb2 36 Ne3 f5? 37 Nd5! when Black is in deep trouble, since if 37 ... Bxc5 38 Qc6 Qd4 39 Qxg6+ Kh8 40 Qxh5+ and Black is the one fighting for the draw, and unlikely to get it)

36 Nf6+ Kg7 37 Nxe4 Be7 38 Qa1+ f6 39 Re1 with a likely draw.

34 ... h5!

Now it's too late for White's knight, who gets imprisoned.

35 Qd5 Qd3

The queen's reproachful tone carries dire warning. The idea is that any c5 attempt will be met with ... Bxf2+, winning White's queen.

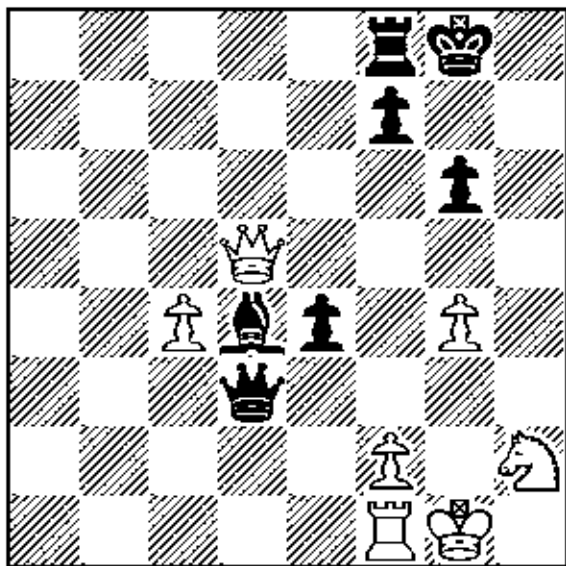
36 g4?

When we self-destruct in time pressure, is it not a symbol of the logic process of our mind unravelling before our own eyes? White's kingside shelters its fair share of tortured souls, the most tortured of whom is his knight, who is desperate to escape his sarcophagally designed prison. Such a weakening lash out is suicidal.

White's best practical chance may be 36 Re1! Qd2 37 Rf1 Re8 38 Qc6 Re6 (the rook's goal is f6, where it adds unbearable pressure to f2) 39 Qa8+ Kg7 40 Qb7 Rf6 41 Qxe4 Rxf2 42 Qxd4+! (42 Kh1?? Rxf1+ 43 Nxf1 Qf2 is a game-ender) 42 ... Qxd4 43 Rxf2 Qxc4 when White has good practical chances to draw, since he can try and set up a knight sacrifice to reach a fortress. Of course, if Black is aware of the fortress/sacrifice ideas, he will be careful not to give White an opportunity. I would say White has a 50/50 practical chance to hold the game here.

36 ... hxg4 37 hxg4

Alternatively, 37 Nxg4 Qg3+ 38 Kh1 (the once snugly protected king finds himself alfresco, but not much able to enjoy the great outdoors) 38 ... Qxh3+ 39 Nh2 Qd3 40 Rg1 Kg7! (preparing to bring his rook into the attack, via the h-file) 41 Rg3 Qd2 42 Ng4 Rh8+ 43 Kg2 Qd1 (threat: ... Qh1 mate) 44 Nh2 Qa1! (... Be5 is in the air), and now if 45 Qxe4 Bxf2! is decisive after 46 Rxg6+ Kf8!.



Exercise (planning): Find Black's best attacking plan.

Answer: Move the king to transfer his rook to the h-file.

37 ... Kg7! 38 Kg2 Rh8 39 Qd6 Qh3+ 40 Kg1

"God will surely protect me," claims the king.

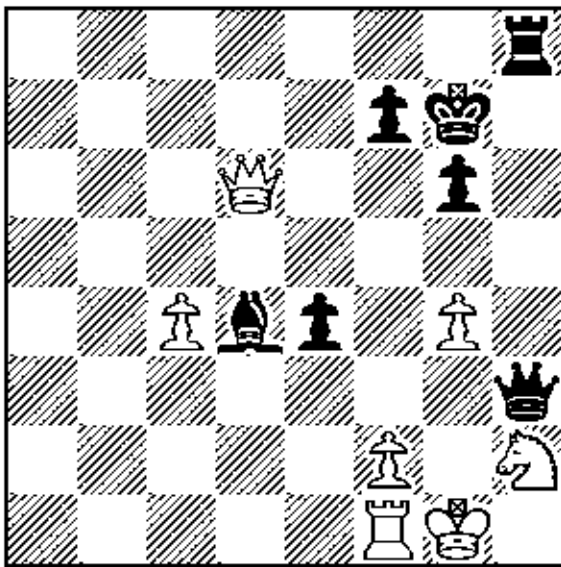
40 ... Qd3

"Will He?" replies Black's queen. Threat: ... Bxf2+ and ... Qxd6.

41 Kg2

The king is the salmon, who with futile energy, flips and flops in the net, slowly being dragged to the air above the water.

41 ... Qh3+ 42 Kg1



Exercise (planning): Find one key idea and White's resistance ends.

Answer: Black queen and bishop cast their net over the dark squares. Transfer the queen to c3, after which there is no defence to the coming ... Be5.

42 ... Qc3! 0-1

Summary: Our goal against 3 Bc4 is to try and lure White into an unfavourable Closed Ruy Lopez position.

Game 18

V.Laznicka-A.Morozevich

Pamplona 2006

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6

For the Kan/Taimanov move order, you play 2 ... e6 3 Nc3 and then:

a) 3 ... a6 4 g3 (4 d4 transposes to an Open Sicilian) 4 ... b5 5 Bg2 Bb7 6 d3 (6 d4 cxd4 7 Nxd4 Qc7 gets us to a g3 line of the Kan Sicilian) 6 ... d6 7 0-0 and I feel like Black equalized, since White got a slightly inferior version of a Closed Sicilian, as the f3-knight blocks White's f-pawn. This means he must lose time if he intends a future f4 plan: 7 ... Nd7 8 a3 Rc8 9 Bd2 Ngf6 10 Nh4 was N.Short-G.Kasparov, Tilburg 1991. Black should play 10 ... Qc7, covering against e5 tricks, after which the position is dynamically balanced.

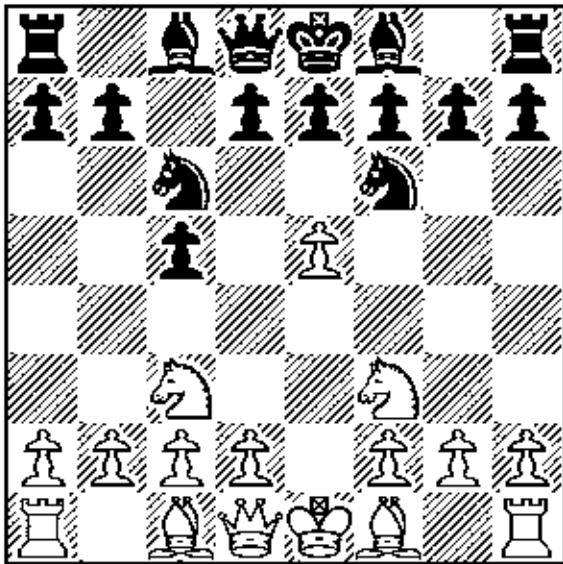
b) 3 ... Nc6 4 Bb5 Nge7 5 0-0 a6 6 Bxc6 Nxc6 (Black picked up the bishop-pair without any ill effects to his position) 7 d4 cxd4 8 Nxd4 Qc7 9 Re1 (White is toying with Nd5 sacrificial ideas) 9 ... Bd6! 10 g3 Nxd4 11 Qxd4 Be5 12 Qd3 and my opponent offered a draw, which I accepted, A.Matikozyan-C.Lakdawala, Southern California Championship, Costa Mesa 2003. I probably should have played on, since Black already may stand slightly better after 12 ... b5.

Instead, the Najdorf player may try the move order 2 ... d6 3 Nc3 a6 when White has nothing better than to enter Open Sicilian with 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nxd4 Nf6.

3 Bb5

We would reach our coming position though the move order 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bb5.

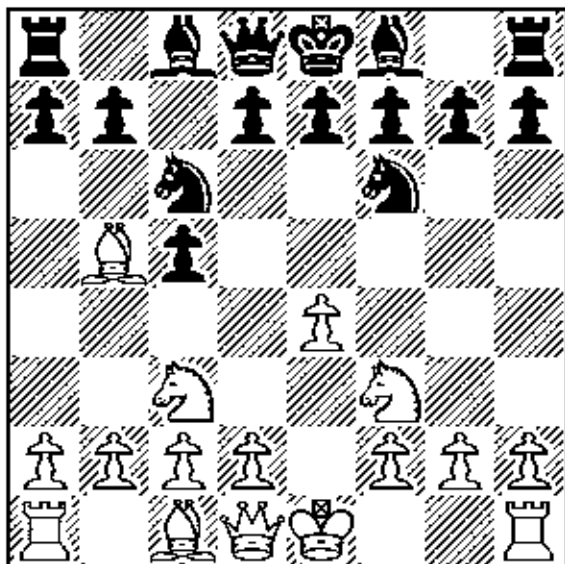
Question: If we use this move order then can White play the disruptive 4 e5?



Answer: It looks premature and the e-pawn becomes weak after 4 ... Ng4 5 Qe2 Qc7 6 Nb5 Qb8 7 d4 cxd4 8 Bf4 f6 9 Nh4 fxe5 10 Qxg4 exf4 11 Qh5+ Kd8 12 Ng6 hxg6 13 Qxh8 Qe5+ 14 Be2, J.Wegerle-V.Ikonnikov, Vlissingen 2005. After 14 ... Ke8 Black gets two healthy central pawns for the exchange, with a clear advantage.

Instead, after 3 Nc3 Kalashnikov/Lowenthal players should consider 3 ... e5 to avoid getting tricked into an Open Sicilian outside their theoretical realm. Black renounces control – at least for now – over d5, in order that we grab extra central influence, pretty much ending White's d4 options. For example, 4 Bc4 Be7 5 d3 d6 6 Nd2 Bg5 7 h4 (with 7 Nf1 the knight heads for f1, via e3; we, on the other hand, get to swap off our bad bishop, and after 7 ... Bxc1 8 Rxc1 Nge7 9 Ne3 0-0 10 0-0 Be6 11 f4 exf4 12 Rxf4 Ng6 13 Rf2 Qg5 14 Qd2 Nge5 Black's control over e5 compensates White's grip on d5, A.Grischuk-V.Kramnik, Cap d'Agde (rapid) 2003) 7 ... Bh6 8 Qh5 Qd7 9 Nd5 Rb8 10 c3 b5 11 Bb3 Nce7 12 Ne3 c4!? 13 dxc4 Bxe3 14 fxe3 Nf6 15 Qf3 0-0 16 0-0 Ba6 17 cxb5 Qxb5 when the damage to White's structure gave Black full compensation for the pawn, P.Leko-V.Kramnik, Monaco (rapid) 2004.

3 ... Nf6 4 Nc3



Question: Are we back in a Rossolimo?

Answer: Not quite. This is an independent line, where it's Rossolimo-like, with the insertion of Nc3 and ... Nf6. Now I believe this slightly favours our side over a real Rossolimo, since it denies White a c3 and d4 central build-up plan.

4 ... Qc7

The simplest move. Black covers the c6-knight from any coming structural damage involving Bxc6, and also keeps an eye out on the e5-square, preventing White's e-pawn from moving forward.

I tried 4 ... Nd4 on GM Alexander Ivanov and got a reasonable game after 5 e5 Nxb5 6 Nxb5 Nd5 7 Ng5 (Qf3 is in the air) 7 ... f6 8 Ne4 (I think 8 Qf3! is White's best line, and if 8 ... Nc7 9 exf6 exf6 10 Qe4+ Ne6 11 Nxh7 d5 12 Qg6+ Kd7 13 Nxf8+

Qxf8 14 d3, as in R.Edouard-B.Korsus, Bad Wiessee 2008; Black's central space and open h-file constitute some compensation, but I would still rather take White here if given a choice) 8 ... f5 9 Ng5 e6 10 Nf3 a6 11 Nc3 Nxc3 12 dxc3 Be7 13 Bf4 b5 14 Qe2 Bb7 15 0-0-0, A.Ivanov-C.Lakdawala, Reno 2003. Black's control over the light squares more than makes up for White's pressure on d7.

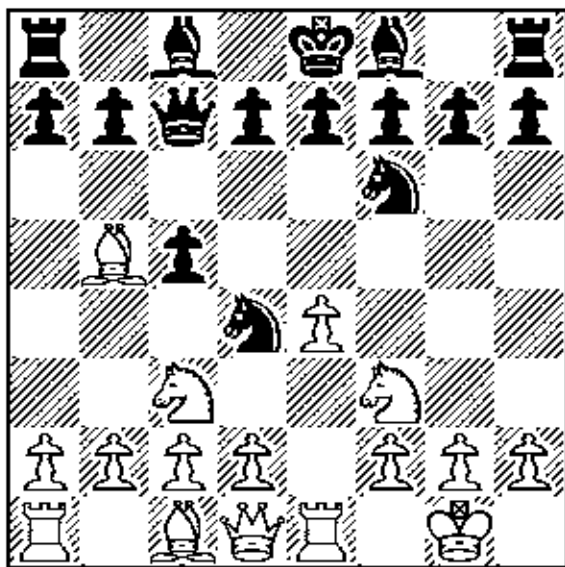
5 0-0

Question: Should we be worried about the disruptive move 5 Nd5?

Answer: It works out well for Black after 5 ... Nxd5 6 exd5 Nb4 7 Bc4 b5! 8 Bxb5 Nxd5. Black managed to swap a wing pawn for a more valuable central pawn, V.Sanal-S.Ter Sahakyan, Akhisar Manisa 2009.

5 ... Nd4 6 Re1

This move makes room for the bishop on f1. White earns no advantage with 6 Nxd4 cxd4 7 Nd5 Nxd5 8 exd5 Qc5 9 c4 a6 (not 9 ... dxc3?! 10 Qb3 with a dangerous development lead for White) 10 b4 Qxb4 11 Ba4 b5! (11 ... Qxc4!? is probably playable, but a tad greedy for my blood; White probably has full compensation for the pawns after 12 Bb3 Qd3 13 Ba3) 12 cxb5 axb5 13 Bb3 g6 (in this way Black completes his development harmoniously) 14 d3 Bg7 15 Bd2 Qd6 16 Qe1! Qf6! (16 ... 0-0? carelessly hangs material back after 17 Bb4) 17 Bb4 d6 18 a4 bxa4!? (18 ... 0-0 19 axb5 Rb8 20 Bc4 Bd7 21 Ra5 Rfe8 looks even) 19 Bxa4+ Kf8 20 Bd2 h6 21 Qc1 Kg8 22 Qc6 Rb8 23 Qc7 Ra8 24 Qc6 and the game ended in a repetition draw, V.Tseshkovsky-E.Alekseev, Biel 2005.

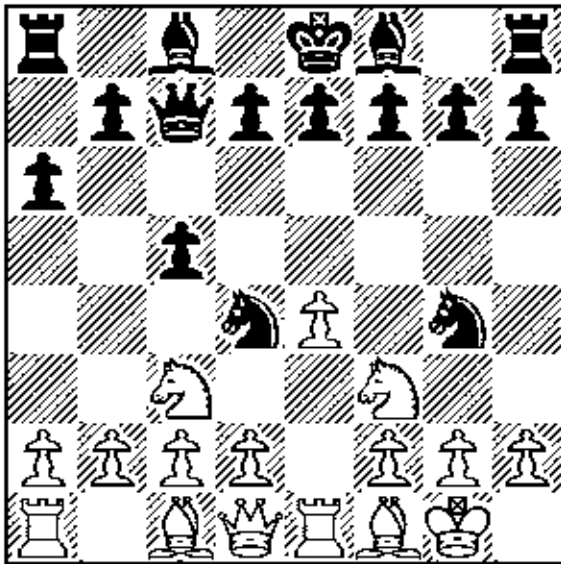


6 ... a6

Question: Can we pick up the bishop-pair with 6 ... Nxb5?

Answer: I would absolutely avoid it, since White's development lead grows to dangerous proportions after 7 Nxb5 Qb6, K.Georgiev-M.Godard, Agneaux 1998. I feel like Black's position is vulnerable after 8 a4 a6 9 Na3 d6 10 e5 (principle: *create confrontation when leading in development*) 10 ... dxe5 11 Nxe5 g6 12 Nac4 Qc7 13 d3 (Bf4 is in the air) 13 ... Nd5 14 Bd2 Bg7 15 Ba5! Qb8 (15 ... b6?? loses to 16 Qf3 Be6 17 Nxb6!) 16 Qf3 Be6 17 h3 0-0 18 Nd7! Bxd7 19 Qxd5 Be6 20 Qxc5, which clearly favours White.

7 Bf1 Ng4!



Well, is it a crime to live in hope? Threat: ... Nxf3+ and ... Qxh2 mate. This move equalizes.

8 g3

Forced, since Black was threatening to eliminate a key defender of f2.

8 ... Nxf3+ 9 Qxf3 Ne5 10 Qe2

Alternatively:

a) 10 Qd1 e6 11 Bg2 Be7 12 a4 b6 13 d3 Bb7 14 f4 Nc6 15 Be3 0-0 16 Qd2 Rad8 17 Rad1 Nb4 18 f5 d5 (White's attempt at a wing attack is met with a central counter) 19 fxe6 fxe6 20 exd5 exd5 21 Bf4 Qd7 22 Rxe7 Qxe7 23 Bg5 was A.Naiditsch-Ni Hua, Villarrobledo (rapid) 2009. Black should be okay after 23 ... Qd7 24 Bxd8 Rxd8 25 d4 c4 26 Re1 Re8 27 Bh3 Qd8 28 Rxe8+ Qxe8 29 Nd1 a5. The ending is even.

b) 10 Qe3 (a clumsy looking move; I'm not quite sure what White's idea is behind this mysterious move) 10 ... e6 11 Bg2 d6 12 Ne2 Be7 13 f4 (after 13 d4 cxd4 14 Nxd4 Bd7 White seems to have landed in a rather toothless Scheveningen, with his queen misplaced on e3) 13 ... Nc6 14 c3 (White seeks to build a big centre) 14 ... c4!? (we

have seen this idea in other chapters, when White holds his d-pawn back for a long time; 14 ... e5 is also fine when White should probably avoid 15 d4!? cxd4 16 cxd4 Bg4, which sees Black apply strong pressure to White's centre, which now looks like a bit of a liability) 15 d4 cxd3 16 Qxd3 0-0 17 Be3 and Black reached a Scheveningen-style position, where White's pieces are too passively posted to claim an edge, H.Elwert-J.Van Oosterom, correspondence 2003.

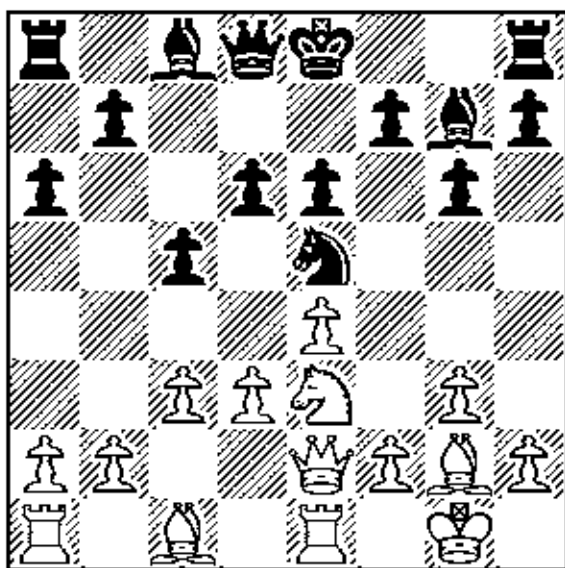
10 ... d6

10 ... e6 is also known to be fine for Black: 11 Bg2 d6 12 d3 Be7 13 Be3 0-0 14 a4 Nc6 15 Qd2 Bf6 and White got a milquetoast Closed Sicilian set-up, where he stood no better, P.Harikrishna-S.Zhigalko, Dubai (rapid) 2014.

11 Nd5 Qd8 12 Bg2

After 12 Ne3 g6 13 c3 Nc6 14 f4 Bg7 15 Bg2 Bd7 16 d3 Rb8 17 h4 b5 18 a3 a5 19 Bd2 0-0 20 Rf1 b4 Black reached an acceptable Closed Sicilian set-up, T.Hillarp Persson-P.Cramling, Vasteras 2011.

12 ... g6 13 d3 Bg7 14 c3 e6 15 Ne3



A new move, but nothing which worries Black.

15 ... Nc6

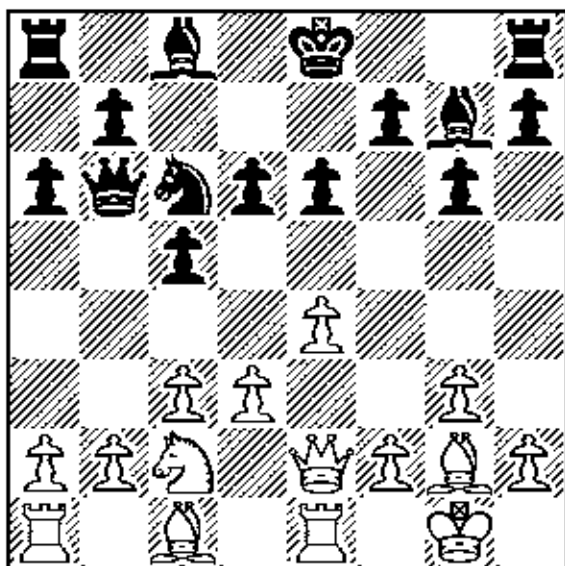
After 15 ... 0-0 16 Bd2 Rb8 17 a3 b5 18 b4 Bb7 19 Rad1 Nc6 20 f4 Re8 21 Kh1 Rc8 22 Rc1 Qd7 23 Qf2 a5 24 f5? (the game was approximately balanced, until White's last move) 24 ... exf5 25 exf5 Ne5 26 Qf1 Bxg2+ 27 Nxd2 Qxf5 28 Qxf5 gxf5 Black won a pawn and had the initiative, D.Sadvakasov-H.Nakamura, Internet (blitz) 2004.

16 Nc2

Question: What is White doing, retreating his knight like this?

Answer: White plays for a central clamp, intending Be3 and d4. I agree that the plan is slow. The alternative is a kingside pawn storm: 16 f4 0-0 17 g4 Rb8 18 g5 f6 (countering in the centre before White's kingside attack gains momentum) 19 Ng4 fxe5 20 fxe5 Ne5 (chasing off White's most dangerous attacker) 21 Nxe5 Bxe5 and White stands no better.

16 ... Qb6!?



Question: Isn't this normally an beginner's move, where the queen is incorrectly placed in front of his b-pawn?

Answer: I admit this move looks as out of place as an owl in mid-afternoon. The move, while appearing to be a bit on the incoherent side of the ledger, actually contains some sneaky points:

1. Black adds more heat to the d4-square, making it that much more difficult for White to implement his d4 plan.
2. The queen attacks b2, which for now ties down the c1-bishop. If White plays Rb1, then he faces the pin tactic ... Bxc3.
3. The queen's placement on b6 is temporary. She can later move elsewhere, allowing for ... b5. So it's not like Black made some major commitment in moving the queen to b6.

17 Bf4!?

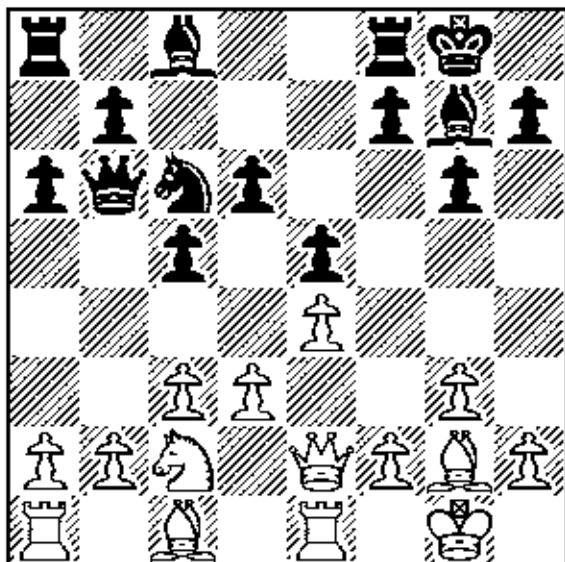
White feels the need to expend two tempi to induce ... e5. White should actually 'fall' into the trap with 17 Rb1!! Bxc3?! (this looks like a shot, but at the end of the line, it is White who gets a very promising attack; perhaps Black should play the restrained

17 ... 0-0 18 Be3 Qc7 19 d4 cxd4 20 cxd4 Bd7 21 Rbc1 Rac8 when White stands a sliver better due to the extra central space) 18 bxc3!. This exchange sacrifice gives White a close-to-winning attack, and can be played intuitively, without need of explicit analytical detail: 18 ... Qxb1 19 Na3 Qb6 20 Nc4 Qc7 21 e5! Nxe5 (if 21 ... d5?? 22 Nd6+ Ke7 23 Bg5+ Kf8 24 Qe3! h5 25 Bh6+ Ke7 26 Qf4 Rh7 27 Bxd5! with a crushing position for White, since the piece can't be accepted after 27 ... exd5?? 28 Qf6+ Kd7 29 e6+ Kxd6 30 exf7+ Be6 31 Qxe6 mate) 22 Nxe5 dxe5 23 Bg5 f5 24 Bf6 0-0 25 Bxe5 Qe7 26 Rb1. Black's tangled up development and chronically weak dark squares outweigh his almost useless extra exchange.

17 ... e5 18 Bc1

Back to the drawing board.

18 ... 0-0



19 b4!?

19 Ne3 Qd8 is at least even for Black, who is quick with the ... f5 break.

19 ... cxb4 20 Nxb4

After 20 Rb1 a5 21 Be3 Qc7 22 cxb4 Be6 23 bxa5 Qxa5 24 Rb2 Qc3 25 Reb1 Rxa2 26 Rxa2 Bxa2 27 Rxb7 Bb3 28 Ne1 Rb8 29 Rxb8+ Nxb8 30 Qd2 the game should probably end in a draw.

20 ... Nxb4 21 Rb1?!

An inaccurate move order, after which Black gets a nagging strategic edge. Correct is 21 Be3! Qa5 22 cxb4 Qa3 (22 ... Qxb4 23 a4 offers White full compensation for the pawn, due to the coming pressure down the b-file) 23 Qd2 Bd7 24 Qc1 Qxb4 25 Rb1 Qa5 26 Rxb7 Be6 27 Re2 Rab8 28 Rbb2 with an even position.

21 ... Qc6!

Now a future ... Qa4 is a worry for White.

22 cxb4 Be6 23 a3

If 23 Be3 Rfc8, and if 24 Rec1 Qa4! when a white pawn falls.

23 ... Rac8

I would be inclined to move the other rook to c8, just in case I need ... a5 at some future point.

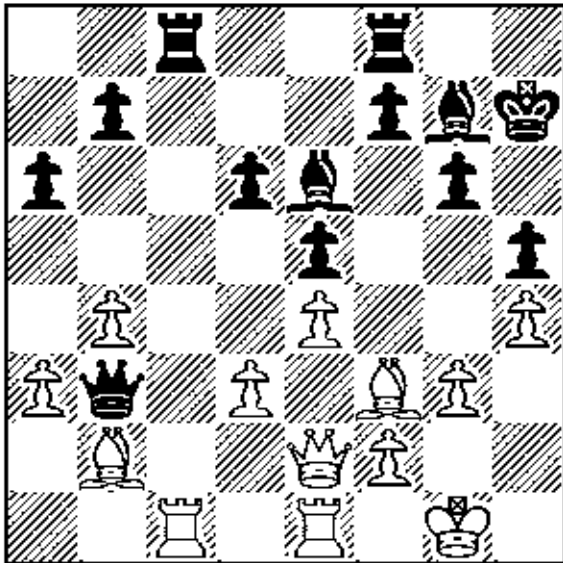
24 Bb2 Qc2

24 ... Qa4! is slightly more accurate, since 25 Rec1 is met with 25 ... Bh6! 26 f4 exf4 27 Qd2 Rxc1+ 28 Rxc1 Qb3 29 Rc2 (29 gxf4?? loses to 29 ... Bxf4!) 29 ... Bd7! when ... Ba4 is in the air and White is busted.

25 Bf3

Following 25 Rbc1 Qxe2 26 Rxe2 Rxc1+ 27 Bxc1 Rc8 (Black's rook seizes the only open file) 28 Re1 Rc3 29 Bf1 White's pieces are passively placed and it will be difficult for him to hang on.

25 ... h5 26 h4 Kh7 27 Rbc1 Qb3!



The queen will be very difficult to eject from its powerfully infiltrated post.

28 Rxc8 Rxc8 29 Rc1 Bh6!

This move cuts off White's future trading resource Qd2 and Qc3.

30 Rxc8 Bxc8 31 Kh2 Bd7!

Threat: ... Bb5.

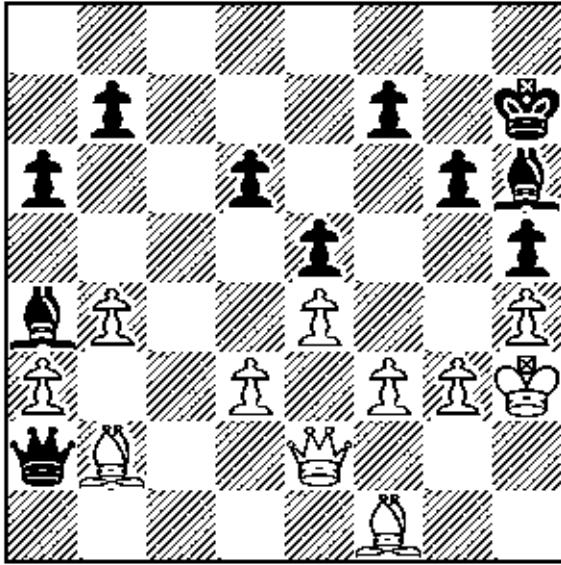
32 Bg2 Bg4!

Morozevich induces a weakening of White's kingside pawn front.

33 f3 Bd7 34 Bf1 Ba4 35 Kg2 Qa2!

Morozevich rejects 35 ... Bb5 (threat: ... Bxd3) 36 Kh2 Bxd3 37 Qxd3 Qxb2+ 38 Bg2 Bf8 39 Qd5 Kg7 40 Qxb7 Qxa3 when White may be able to hold the draw, due to the bishops of opposite colour.

36 Kh3



Exercise (planning): Come up with a clear plan for Black to win material.

Answer: Infiltrate b1.

36 ... Qb1!

Now White is unable to halt ... Bc2, followed by ... Bc1, which picks off a3.

37 Kg2 b5 38 Bc3 Bc1

And there goes the a3-pawn.

39 g4!?

History has shown that armies which march off to war in winter are destined for failure. This is merely a half-hearted war cry, in a desperate attempt to expose Black's king. Still, Morozevich takes the threat seriously, believing an enemy is at its most dangerous when desperate and cornered, since he considers himself already dead, with nothing to lose.

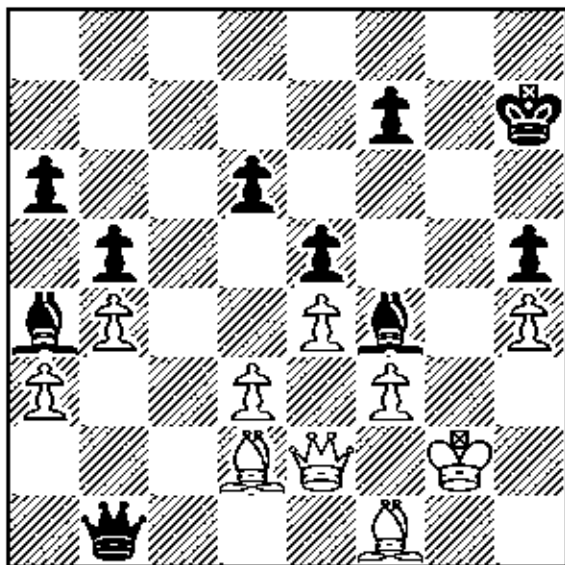
39 ... Bf4!?

Moro gives credence in White's kingside counterplay, veering from his original plan of 39 ... hxc4. Maybe he feared he would have trouble winning the technical ending after 40 fxc4 Bxa3 41 Qe1 Qxe1 42 Bxe1.

40 gxh5 gxh5 41 Bd2?

White can save himself with 41 Qb2!. After this move, Black's wobbly initiative exists only in a provisional state, subject to sudden alteration: for example, 41 ... Qd1 42 d4 f6 43 Be2! (this key move cleanses the landscape of a key black potential attacker) 43 ... Qb3 44 Qxb3 Bxb3 45 Kf2! Bc1 46 dxe5 dxe5 47 a4! bxa4 (47 ... Bxa4 48 Bf1! and White regains his lost pawn after the manoeuvre Bh3 and Bc8) 48 Bxa6 a3

49 Ke2 a2 50 Kd3 Ba3 51 Bc4 Bxb4! 52 Bxb3 Bxc3 53 Bxa2 Be1 54 Bf7 Kh6 55 Ke3 Bxh4 56 f4 Bg3 57 fxe5 fxe5 58 Kf3 Bf4 59 Be6 and the game is dead drawn, since Black's passed h-pawn will never get by the h3-square, and the sentries march back and forth endlessly.



Exercise (combination alert): White's heavily perspiring defenders tie themselves into a gigantic, apologetic knot. White tends to his pawn weaknesses like a poultice on a grievous battle wound, which continues to fester. His last move is a blunder. How should Black respond?

Answer: Overloaded defender.

41 ... Bd1!

"Bring in the royal bone-breaker," commands Black's queen, as she waves her inquisitor forward.

42 Qf2 Bxd2 43 Qxd2 Bxf3+!

A pulsing glow of sorcerous light appears at the bishop's fingertip, as he points to White's king, who until now, disbelieved in such power. Black is up a clean pawn.

44 Kf2

Question: Doesn't White have greater drawing chances if he enters a pawn-down queen ending?

Answer: The problem is after 44 Kxf3?? (the king thinks back fondly to the pre-sister era, and realizes those happy days will never return again) 44 ... Qxf1+ 45 Kg3 Qg1+ 46 Kf3 (46 Qg2 Qxg2+ 47 Kxg2 f5! 48 exf5 Kg7 49 Kf3 d5 and White can

resign) 46 ... Qg4+ 47 Kf2 Qxh4+ Black wins a second pawn, with an easy win.

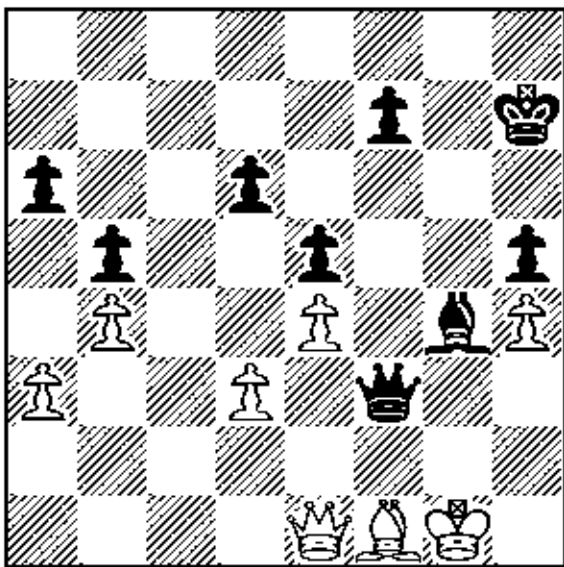
44 ... Bg4 45 Qc3

Contemplating a queen raid to c7.

45 ... Qd1! 46 Qe1

White's queen is required for defensive duties. If 46 Qc7?? Qf3+ 47 Kg1 (47 Ke1?? Qe3+ 48 Be2 Qxe2 mate) 47 ... Qg3+ 48 Bg2 Qe1+ 49 Bf1 Qe3+ 50 Kh1 Qf2 51 Bg2 Qxh4+ 52 Kg1 Qe1+ 53 Bf1 Qg3+ 54 Bg2 Qe3+ 55 Kh2 Qf2 and White is unable to take d6, since ... Bf3 wins on the spot.

46 ... Qf3+ 47 Kg1



Exercise (planning): What is Black's best path to a win?

Answer: 47 ... Bh3!

Forcing a queen ending wins more material. Black's king is surprisingly safe from checks in this version.

48 Bxh3 Qxh3 49 Qf2 Kg6 50 Qb6 Qg3+ 51 Kh1 Qxd3 52 Qxa6 Qxe4+

Black wins way too many pawns, and White has no prayer of delivering perpetual check.

53 Kg1 Qg4+ 54 Kf1 Qf3+ 55 Kg1 Qg3+ 56 Kf1 Qd3+ 57 Kg1 Kf5 58 a4

This desperate attempt to create a passed pawn, is too little to save him.

58 ... Qd1+ 59 Kg2 bxa4

59 ... Qxa4 is also good enough.

60 b5 Qg4+ 61 Kf1

White's scrawny king has no chance in a fight against Black's queen, who resembles a well-fed gorilla, with a lifetime gym membership.

61 ... Qc4+ 62 Kg2 Ke6 0-1

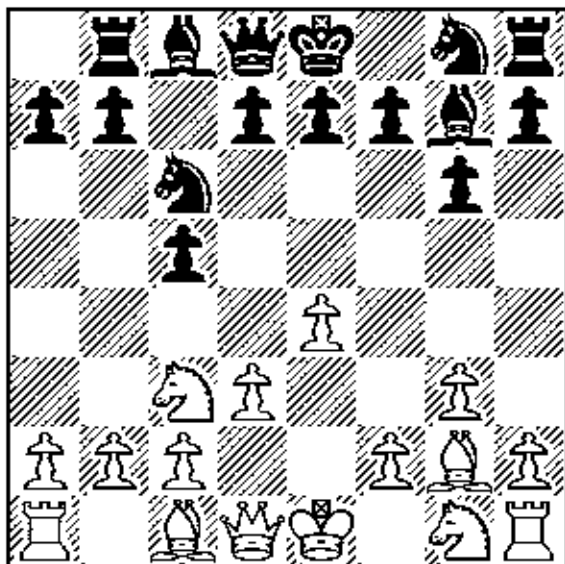
With 63 Qa5 f5 64 b6 f4 65 Qa7 Qe2+ 66 Kh1 (the king runs, but no object can step outside the domain of infinite space) 66 ... Qf3+ 67 Kg1 Qg3+ (the queen blushes prettily, the colour of Pepto Bismal, as she nears the love of her life, who wants nothing to do with her) 68 Kf1 f3 (threatening mate in two moves) 69 Qa6 Qg2+ 70 Ke1 f2+ Black promotes first.

Summary: 4 ... Qc7, intending ... Nd4, seems to be Black's most reliable equalizer when White sets up with Nf3, Nc3 and Bb5.

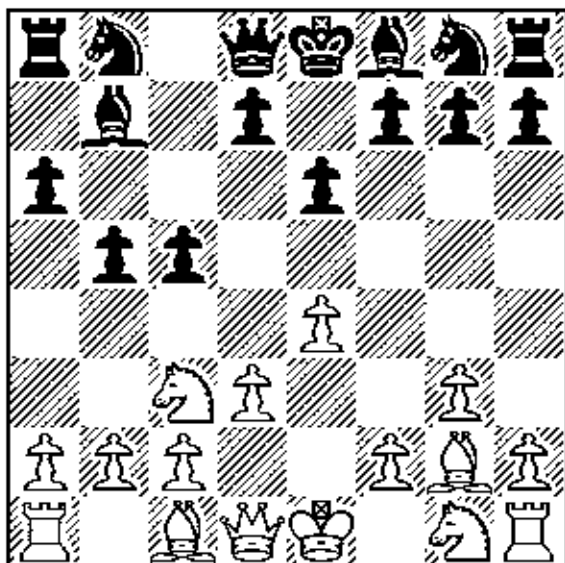
Chapter Four

The Closed Sicilian

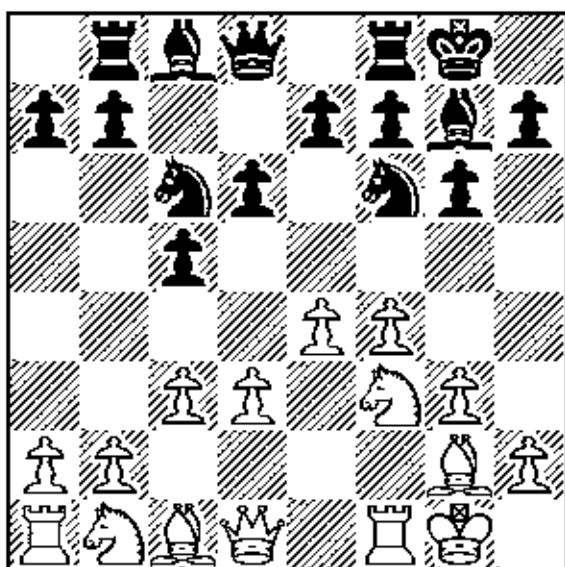
1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 Rb8



Against the main lines of the Closed Sicilian, we play one of Black's highest scoring lines, which involves an early ... Rb8, ... b5 and ... b4. This plan feels counter-intuitive, since we busy ourselves on the queenside and act as if our kingside development doesn't matter. The fact is by stalling on the kingside, we keep White guessing as to how we set up on that wing. Also, our queenside squeeze, if left unchallenged by White, is the creeping vine which strangles a once powerful tree. So the plan tends to distract White from his or her kingside ambitions.



Kan players may want to try this set-up, which prevents White from tricking them out of their favourite Open Sicilian line. So far, our intent is only vaguely defined, and we experience the contrast of simultaneous promise/danger. Black's plan, an unlikely amalgam of flexibility and provocation, is a quick ... d5 and ... Nf6, followed by an undermining ... b4, which pressures White into resolution of central pawn tension, since our light-square power insinuates itself into the core of White's centre. Of course, we must be careful, since in some variations we push a lot of pawns, while neglecting our development, so we must be on high alert, since the schemer sometimes falls into the trap he dug for an opponent.



The above diagram is the Clamp, kind of a pseudo-Closed-Sicilian line, where White's hopes raise themselves in grand expectation, replacing Nc3 with c3, intending to build a huge centre with d4 later on. We again resort to our early ... Rb8, ... b5 and ... b4 plan, which offers us quick counterplay on the queenside.

Game 19

B.Baker-C.Lakdawala

San Diego (rapid) 2014

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6

Depending on your defence to the Open, you may prefer:

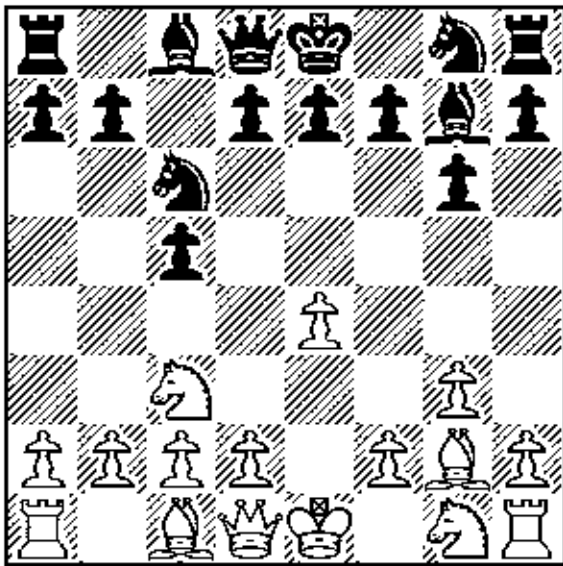
a) 2 ... e6 3 g3 a6. We look at this Kan move order near the end of the chapter in Game 22.

b) The Najdorf and Dragon player may want to play the following move order: 2 ... d6 3 g3 and now that White has pretty much committed to Closed Sicilian (or the not-so-dangerous g3 Open Sicilian lines), only then play 3 ... Nc6.

3 g3

So White commits to a Closed Sicilian.

3 ... g6 4 Bg2 Bg7



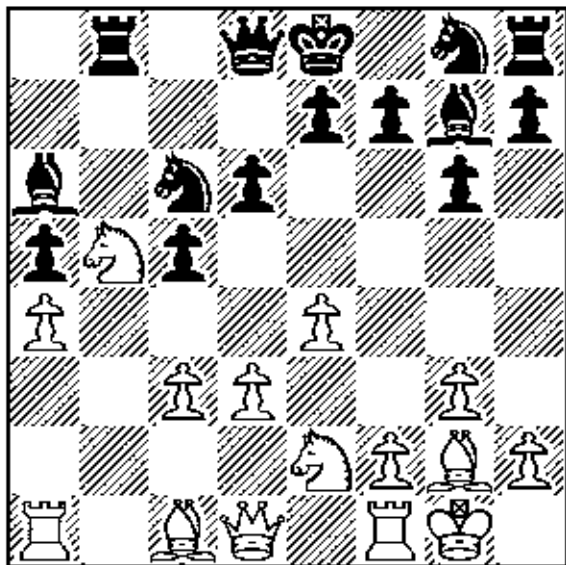
5 d3

Usual, but there's also:

a) 5 Nge2 often just transposes. The move does later deprive White of Nce2, in case we toss in an early ... b5 and ... b4: for instance, 5 ... d6 6 d3 Rb8 (in this chapter we concentrate on the early ... Rb8 lines, although in this version there is nothing wrong with the immediate Reversed Botvinnik English set-up: 6 ... e5 7 0-0 Nge7 8 a3 0-0 9

Rb1 h6 10 b4 b6 11 Be3 Nd4 12 Qd2 Kh7 13 f4 Be6 and Black achieved comfortable equality in P.Eljanov-E.Najer, Netanya 2009) 7 a3 (in order to take some of the sting out of Black's coming ... b5 and ... b4; 7 a4 a6 8 Be3 b5 9 axb5 axb5 10 Qd2 b4 11 Nd1 was preferred in L.Boehle-V.Kunin, Bad Wörishofen 2008, and after 11 ... Nf6 12 h3 0-0 13 0-0 the game is even, since if White plays for a c3 and d4 set-up, play may continue 13 ... Qc7 14 c3 Bd7 15 d4?! Na5 with advantage to Black, who threatens both ... Nb3 and also ... Nc4) 7 ... b5 8 0-0. Here:

a1) I would avoid 8 ... a5 9 a4! b4 10 Nb5 Ba6 11 c4 bxc3 12 bxc3.



I prefer White, who now owns a nice looking knight outpost on b5, R.Ossig-E.Kouznetsova, German League 2001.

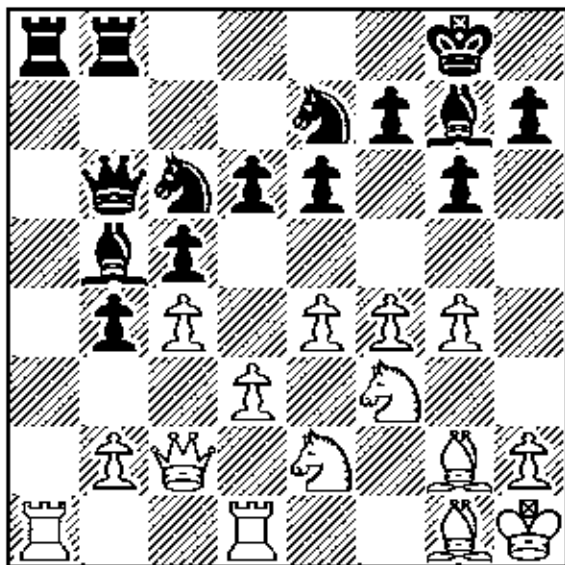
Question: Why can't Black just win a pawn here with 12 ... Bxb5?

Answer: White generates way too much pressure for the pawn after 13 axb5 Rxb5 14 Qa4 Rb6 15 e5 Qd7 16 exd6 exd6 17 Re1 Nge7 18 Bg5 f6 19 Bd2 0-0 20 d4 when Black's position is strategically busted, despite the extra pawn.

a2) 8 ... e6 9 Be3 (d4 is in the air) 9 ... b4!? 10 axb4 cxb4 11 Na4 Nge7 12 Qd2 (or 12 d4 0-0 13 Qd2 a5 intending ... Ba6, with a dynamically even position) 12 ... 0-0 13 Bh6 Bxh6 14 Qxh6 a5 15 b3 Kh8 16 Ra2 e5 (Nakamura swapped away his dark-squared bishop, and then switched the pawn structure to favour his remaining bishop) 17 Qe3 Qc7 18 Nb2 Bg4 19 f3 Be6 20 Nc4 d5 21 exd5 Nxd5 22 Qc5 Rfc8 with a balanced position, N.Short-H.Nakamura, London (rapid) 2013.

b) 5 f4 sees White commit to an early f4, which reduces options like a future Be3, Qd2 and Bh6: 5 ... d6 6 d3 Rb8 7 Nf3 b5 8 0-0 b4 9 Ne2 Qb6 10 Kh1 e6 (this is the most consistent move with our other games in the chapter) 11 a3 a5 12 axb4 axb4 13 c3

Nge7 14 Be3 (White prepares for d4) 14 ... 0-0 15 Qc2 (15 d4?! looks premature, since Black applies unpleasant pressure after 15 ... Ba6 16 Bg1 bxc3 17 bxc3 Bc4) 15 ... Ba6 16 Rfd1 Ra8 17 Bg1 Rfb8 18 g4 Bb5 19 c4?? (White has to play 19 Rxa8 Rxa8 20 c4 Ba6 21 d4 b3! 22 Qc3 Qb4 23 Ra1 when Black only stands a shade better).

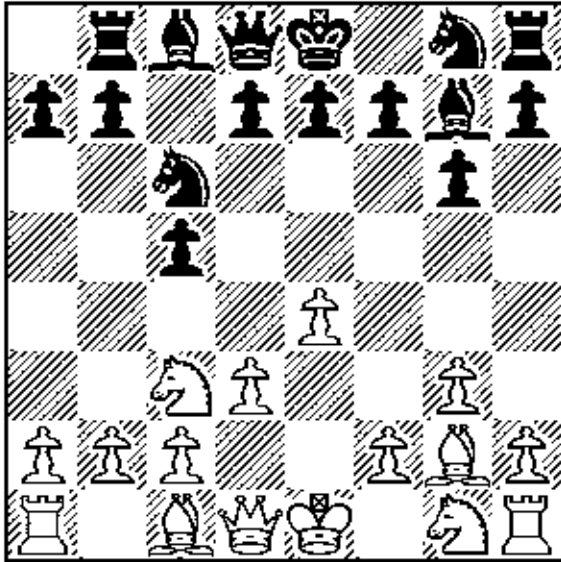


Exercise (combination alert): White blundered on his last move. How did Aronian exploit it?

Answer: Zwischenzug/interference: 19 ... Ba4! 20 Rxa4 b3! 21 Qc1 Rxa4 and Black won a full exchange and converted the remainder without a problem, K.Bjerring-L.Aronian, Ubeda 2000.

c) 5 Nf3 blocks White's f-pawn. Then 5 ... d6 6 d3 Rb8 7 Be3 Nd4 8 Qd2 Bg4! is awkward for White, who now probably wished he hadn't played Nf3 so early: 9 Nh4 b5 10 h3 Bd7 11 0-0 b4 12 Nd1 was V.Koubek-A.Simunek, Czech League 2011, where Black stands well after 12 ... Qc8 13 Kh2 Nf6.

5 ... Rb8



In this chapter, we mainly concentrate early on the ... Rb8 idea, which is one of Black's highest scoring lines against Closed Sicilian.

Question: What is Black's intent?

Answer: Our intent is to hide our intent, for as long as possible! We know we want to expand on the queenside with ... Rb8, ... b5 and ... b4. What we keep White guessing about is the remainder of our set-up. Our possibilities:

1. We play ... d6, ... e5 and ... Nge7, with a reversed Botvinnik English.
2. We play ... d6, ... e6, ... Nge7 and ... Nd4, which retains maximum flexibility in our structure. We can play for a future ... d5, or ... e5, or ... f5 breaks, depending on how White plays.
3. In some cases we can even set up with ... d6, ... Nh6!?, ... f5 and ... e6 challenging White in the centre and on the kingside.

5 ... d6 6 Be3 Rb8 simply transposes.

6 Be3

White's most flexible set-up. 6 f4 d6 transposes to note 'b' to White's 5th above.

6 ... d6 7 Nge2

Alternatively, 7 Qd2 b5 8 f4 (8 Nge2 transposes to our game's continuation) 8 ... b4 9 Nd1 Qb6 10 Nf3 Nh6 (here is an example of the ... Nh6 set-up, discussed in an earlier note) 11 a3 a5 12 axb4 axb4 13 h3 f5 14 0-0 0-0 15 Bf2 e6 16 Ne3 Nf7 17 Nc4 Qc7 18 Rfe1 Rd8 19 exf5 exf5 20 c3 bxc3 21 bxc3 d5 22 Nce5?! (22 Ne3 Ne7 is even) 22 ... Nfxe5 23 fxe5 Nxe5 24 Nxe5 Bxe5 25 Qg5 was N.Short-V.Kramnik, Wijk aan Zee 2005. At this point Black can seize the advantage with 25 ... Bxc3! 26 Ra7 Rb7 27 Rxb7 Bxb7 28 Re7 Rd7 29 Rxd7 Qxd7 30 Bxc5 Be5, pocketing a clean, extra pawn.

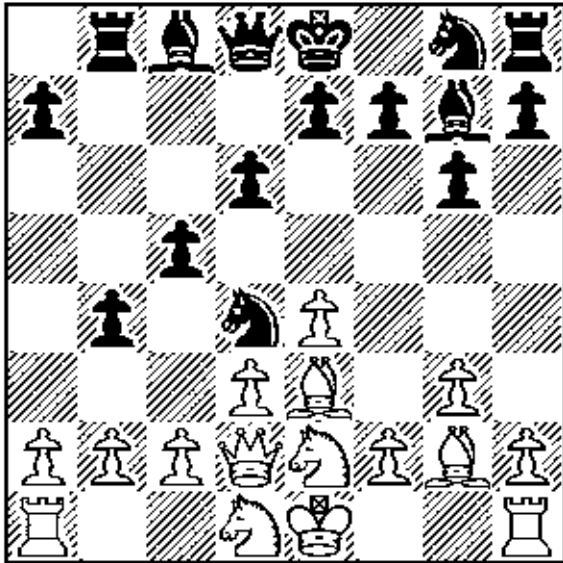
7 ... b5 8 Qd2 b4

Similar is 8 ... Nd4 9 0-0 e6 10 Nd1 b4 11 Nc1 Ne7 12 c3 bxc3 13 bxc3 Ndc6 14 Bh6 0-0 15 Bxg7 Kxg7 16 Ne3 Ba6 17 Rd1 with an even position, M.Brooks-J.Benjamin, Las Vegas 1992. Note that White's kingside attack just never got underway.

9 Nd1

White's philosophy is to leave his queenside as untouched as possible, maximizing Black's difficulties in opening lines on that wing.

9 ... Nd4



Question: Why play ... Nd4 when White can respond with Nc1 and c3, kicking your knight out?

Answer: I played ... Nd4 for the following reasons:

1. The manoeuvre you mentioned, Nc1 and c3, does indeed kick Black's knight out, but at cost of time for White who must play Nc1 and then later move his knight back to e2.
2. If we provoke White into c3, then haven't we achieved our aim, which is to force an opening of the queenside?
3. If White later trades on d4, then after ... cxd4, we can pressure c2, down the newly opened c-file.

Black can also clamp down on the d4-square with 9 ... e5 10 0-0 Nge7 11 f4 Nd4 12 fxe5 Nxe2+ 13 Qxe2 Bxe5 14 Bh6 Be6 15 Ne3!? Bxb2 16 Nd5 Nc6 17 e5, as in the earlier B.Baker-C.Lakdawala, San Diego 2004. Black gets more than enough compensation for the queen after 17 ... Nxe5! 18 Nf6+ Qxf6 19 Rxf6 Bxa1.

10 h3

10 0-0 is White's main line. The move my opponent chose can easily transpose.

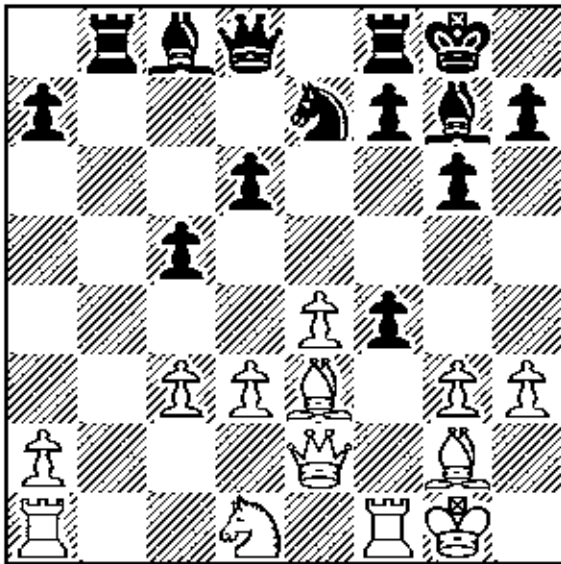
10 ... e5

I tend to favour the Botvinnicizing (it would be best if you didn't google this 'word') of the structure, over ... e6 and ... Nh6 lines.

11 f4 Ne7 12 0-0 0-0 13 c3

This move has to be played at some point, since White can't ignore Black's powerful d4-knight forever. 13 Nc1 f5 14 c3 bxc3 15 bxc3 Ne6 16 Ne2 Ba6 and Black already stands better, with some nagging central pressure, D.Sonjaya-I.Rogers, Kuala Lumpur 2005.

13 ... bxc3 14 bxc3 Nxe2+ 15 Qxe2 exf4



A new move. I was still in my comp-generated home preparation. I recently read an article by Nicholas Carr, called 'The Great Forgetting', which is about how technologies like computers, calculators and GPS actually coax our brains' laziness and deep reliance – to the point of total dependence – on machines, who take over the job of thinking for us. I tend to agree with Carr's assessment. Although I blindly followed my comp/database suggestions to reach this position, I realized that the careful thought I would put into opening prep in the pre-comp era is missing, due to my misplaced trust in the computer's alleged omniscience.

Previously, 15 ... Qa5 was seen in E.Reer-W.Rosen, Bad Liebenzell 1996. Now White can go for 16 fxe5 Bxe5 17 Bh6 Bg7 18 Bxg7 Kxg7 19 Qd2 with approximately even chances.

16 Bxf4

16 gxf4?! is met with 16 ... f5. White's central pawns have no punch and may later be targets. I think Black already stands better in this version.

16 ... Ba6 17 Rc1

To develop his d1-knight, by freeing it from guard duty to c3.

17 ... Nc6

If you raise an army, you must pay it, clothe it and feed it. I think White's central pawns are more liability than benefit. White made no mistakes which I spotted, yet I feel like he struggles to equalize against Black's pressure, which is shapeless and almost unidentifiable. Have the comps really worked out Closed Sicilian to an '=+' assessment?

18 h4!?

This attempted uprising – more a veiled warning, than an overt threat – is easily contained and put down. He attempts to stir up something on the kingside, risking a weakened g4-square in the attempt. However, after 18 Qd2 Rb7 19 Rf2 Ne5, ... c4 is in the air and I prefer Black.

18 ... Ne5 19 Nf2

His pieces creep toward my king, but as they do so, his central and queenside pawns become slightly more vulnerable.

19 ... Qa5 20 Qc2

20 h5 is more consistent, if he hopes to later generate an attack on Black's king.

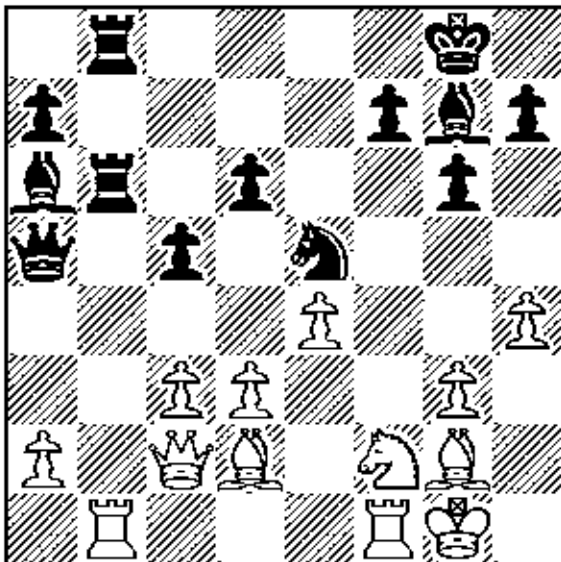
20 ... Rb6

Intending to double rooks on the b-file and then infiltrate b2.

21 Bd2

There is much bowing, genuflecting and crossing himself in the bishop's life, when he is in the presence of Black's queen. 21 Rb1 Rfb8 22 Rxb6 Rxb6 isn't any easier on White's defence.

21 ... Rfb8 22 Rb1



Exercise (planning): With his last move, White hopes to ease the pressure by swapping off rooks. Come up with a plan for Black to increase his queenside pressure.

Answer: Transfer the light-squared bishop to e6, after which White either drops his a-pawn, or is forced to play the serious structural concession, c4.

22 ... Bc8!

Idea ... Be6.

23 Kh1

Houdini claims he should play 23 Rxb6, although this move by no means solves his queenside and central structural issues.

23 ... Be6

The human move. *Houdini* prefers 23 ... Rxb1! 24 Rxb1 Rxb1+ 25 Qxb1 Be6. This line got me nervous because now White infiltrates Black's back rank. Of course, if we discount human paranoia, the comps declare that White has nothing after 26 Qb8+ Bf8 27 Bh6 Nd7 28 Qa8 Qxc3 when ... Qe1+ which is threatened and White has zero compensation for the pawn.

24 Bh3?!

Now his position falls into a well of misery. This move, a disproportionate response, signifies a radical revision of his previous outlook on the position. Sometimes we long to be free of our thralldom and agree to rash action, when it would be in our best interest to just keep defending.

White had to play the admittedly unpleasant 24 c4 Qa6 25 Bf4 Nc6 26 Rxb6 Rxb6 and the trouble is 27 Bc1 is met with 27 ... Nb4 28 Qe2 Nxa2, picking off the a-pawn. The difference is White can at least try a final lunge at Black's king in this version, while in the one he played, he remains down a pawn, with queens off the board.

24 ... Qxa2

Black's 250 pound Amazon queen is an indiscriminate back-slapper, who sent more people to the chiropractor than she would like to remember. Now Black's extra and passed a-pawn is ready to be pushed down the board.

25 Qxa2

It's hopeless to swap queens in such a position, but then again, it's even more hopeless if he retains them with 25 Rxb6? Rxb6 26 Qd1 Bxh3 27 Nxh3 Rb2 and White can resign.

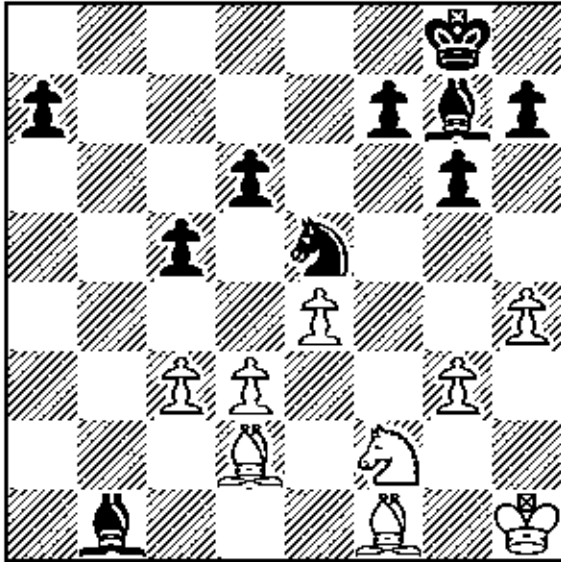
25 ... Bxa2 26 Rxb6

26 Ra1 Rb2 27 Bf4 Rc2 28 Rac1 Rxc1 29 Rxc1 Rb2 30 Nd1 Rb1 is a relatively easily won ending for Black, similar to what happened in the game.

26 ... Rxb6 27 Ra1 Rb1+

Simplest. 27 ... Rb2 is also completely winning.

28 Rxb1 Bxb1 29 Bf1



Exercise (combination alert): Your daydreaming writer, intent on promoting his a-pawn, missed a simple win of material here. What is Black's most accurate move?

29 ... a5?!

The pampered dog on a5 has his leash lengthened. I banged out this move instantly, based on the philosophy: if there is no departure, then there can be no arrival. I completely missed:

Answer: Removal of a key defender/pawn promotion: 29 ... Nf3! 30 Bf4 Bxc3 (Black's bishop controls the pathway to the a1-promotion square) 31 Bxd6 (the definition of a blood-feud: kill a member of my clan, and in retaliation, we will kill two of your loved ones; and this cycle goes on, generation after generation) 31 ... Bd4! (dual purpose: the bishop covers c5, while simultaneously attacking White's knight; this means White lacks the time for Bc7) 32 Ng4 a5 33 Be2 a4! 34 Bd1 a3 35 Bb3 Nd2 ("Priest! You of all people should be the first to realize that corporeal flesh does not last long in this impermanent world," threatens the knight) 36 Bd5 Bxd3 and if 37 e5 Be4+ removes the last blockader of the a-pawn from the board.

30 Kg2 a4 31 Bc1

The problem bubbles up and returns, like a hastily-buried murder victim, whose left toe sticks out of the dirt. The bishop, clinging to the a3 blockade proves to be a hard man to remove.

31 ... Bc2 32 Ba3 Nc6

Attacking c3.

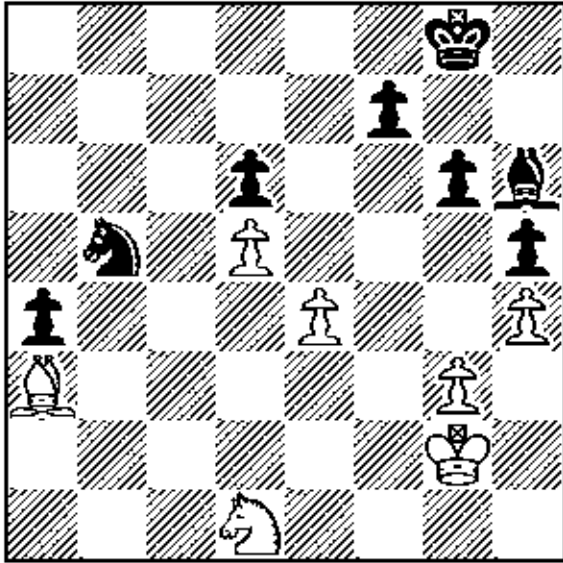
33 Bb2 h5 34 Be2 Ne5 35 Ba3 Bh6!

Threat: ... Be3, ... Bxf2 and ... Bxd3, winning a second pawn.

36 d4 cxd4 37 cxd4 Nc6 38 d5 Nd4

White lacks the time to pick off d6.

39 Bd1 Bxd1 40 Nxd1 Nb5



Conveniently covering d6, while ejecting the a3 blockader.

41 Bb2

By now, the long suffering bishop is immune to the effects of humiliation. He prays to keep the passed a-pawn at bay, until his knees are bruised.

41 ... a3 0-1

The crowd parts, to make way for the a-pawn. 42 Ba1 Bg7 eliminates the passer's final blockader.

Summary: I think the ... Rb8 line is one of Black's best systems against Closed Sicilian, since we keep White guessing as to how we will eventually set up.

Game 20

L.Lorenzo de la Riva-T.Gelashvili

Balaguer 2007

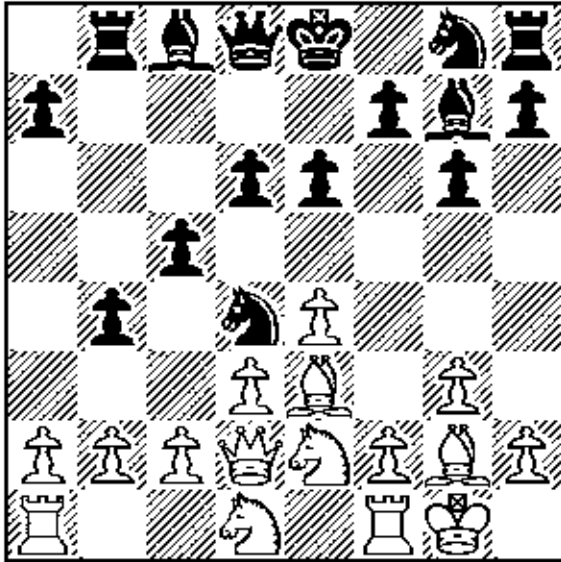
1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 Be3 Rb8 7 Qd2 b5 8 Nge2

Next game we look at 8 f4.

8 ... b4 9 Nd1 Nd4 10 0-0

Later, White places his knight on c1, but note that it is too early here. If 10 Nc1?! Bg4 pretty much forces White to hand over the bishop-pair unfavourably with 11 Bxd4 cxd4 with a rather sorry looking game for White.

10 ... e6



This time we look at an ... e6 version of development.

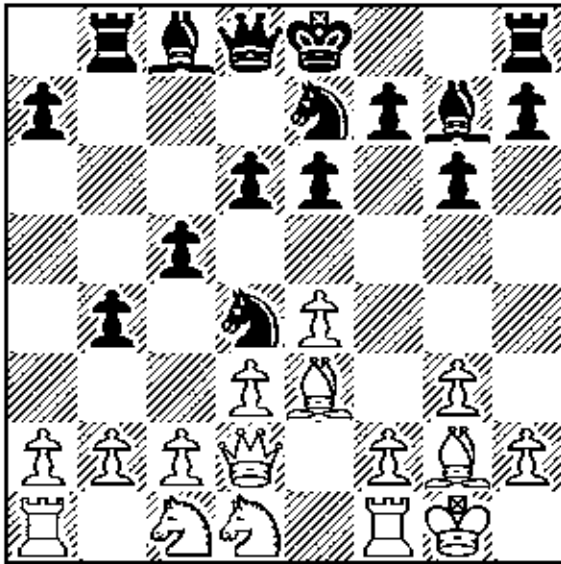
Question: What are the differences between the ... e5 and the ... e6 set-ups?

Answer: ... e5 is the more aggressive and also more committal set-up, since we do create a hole on d5, while gaining central space. The ... e6 set-up is more passive, but also more flexible, since it leaves Black with three breaks: ... d5, ... e5 and ... f5, all of which keep White guessing. One isn't superior to the other, and it's just a matter of personal taste.

11 Nc1

This move is given an exclamation mark by my Everyman cousin and editor, Richard Palliser, in his book *Starting Out: Closed Sicilian*. After 11 f4 Ne7 12 g4 f5 (Black's standard response to the g4 pawn storm) 13 gxf5 Nxe2+ 14 Qxe2 exf5 15 a3 b3!? (15 ... a5 is the normal move in such situations) 16 c3 0-0 17 Re1 g5!? (17 ... Bb7 18 Nf2 Qc7 is a safer route) 18 Nf2?! (18 Rf1 Ng6 19 exf5 Nxf4 20 Bxf4 gxf4 21 Rxf4 Rxf5 22 Rxf5 Bxf5 23 Ne3 Bg6 24 Be4 looks balanced) 18 ... gxf4 19 Bxf4 Ng6 20 Bd2 Qh4, ... Be5 is threatened and Black whipped up a strong attack in M.Ashley-J.Nunn, San Francisco 1995.

11 ... Ne7



This is Black's most flexible approach. White is left with the following issues:

1. If White plays c3, this opens the b-file, which is generally in Black's favour.
2. If White ever exchanges on d4, then ... cxd4 allows Black to apply pressure down the newly opened c-file.
3. If White attempts to whip up a kingside assault with f4 and g4, then Black halts it with ... f5.

Conclusion: According to theory this position is even. I actually prefer Black, who can try and make headway on the queenside. The question arises: where is White's play, besides the plan c3 and d4, after which it's questionable if White's centre is a strength or a liability?

12 c3

This move is usually tossed in, at some point or another.

12 a3 is actually quite sensible. In this way, White ensures he will not be left with an isolated a-pawn, which can become weak, as seen last game. Following 12 ... a5 13 axb4 axb4 14 c3 bxc3 15 bxc3 Ndc6 16 Bh6 (at club level, this move tends to be played with the rather optimistic assumption that a quick mate will follow, around Black's weakened dark squares; the truth is Black's king is as safe as can be) 16 ... 0-0 17 Bxg7 Kxg7 18 Ne3 d5 19 Qc2 (19 Ng4 is easily met with 19 ... f5 with a gain of time) 19 ... d4 20 Nc4 e5 21 Nb3, as in B.Spassky-L.Portisch, Mexico 1980, I would speculate with 21 ... Be6!? 22 Nxc5 Bxc4 23 dxc4 dxc3 24 Qxc3 Nd4 25 Qa5 Qd6 26 Na6 Rb2, with loads of compensation for White's not-very-valuable extra pawn.

12 ... bxc3 13 bxc3 Ndc6 14 Bh6 0-0 15 Bxg7 Kxg7 16 f4

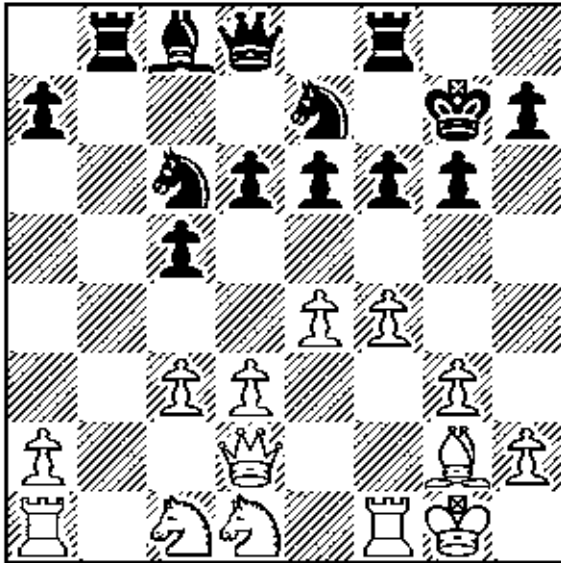
My inclination would be to hold off on f4 and play something like 16 Ne3. "White may attack on the kingside," writes Palliser. As much as it pains me to contradict my beloved cousin, I don't see any real possibility of a white attack, despite the fact that

Black's kingside dark squares look weak. 16 ... Qb6 17 Nb3 (17 Ng4 is easily countered with 17 ... f5 18 exf5 Nxf5 19 Nb3 e5 20 Rab1 Qc7 and I don't think Black stands worse) 17 ... Ba6 18 Rfd1 Rfc8 with level chances, L.Ljubojevic-G.Sosonko, Tilburg 1981.

16 ... f5

This move pretty much puts an end to White's kingside attacking ambitions, but is by no means the only option:

- a) The tortoise-like move 16 ... f6 maximizes Black's kingside structural flexibility.

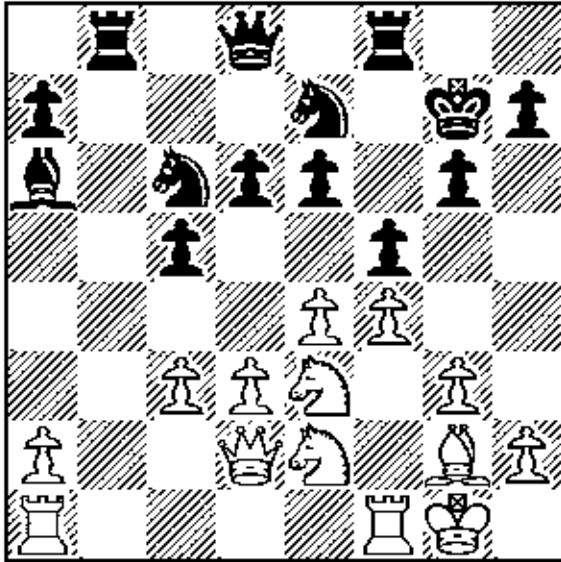


Question: What is the point of ... f6?

Answer: IM Andrew Martin responds: "It's very tough for White to break through on the kingside now and meanwhile Black develops queenside play." For example, 17 Ne3 Ba6 18 Nb3 Qc7 19 Rfe1 Na5 20 Nxa5 Qxa5 21 Bh3, A.Gassanov-S.Krivoshey, Istanbul 2006. After 21 ... e5 White's kingside play hasn't gotten him anywhere.

b) 16 ... d5 17 e5 (N.Dudukovic-M.Milenkovic, Vrnjacka Banja 2009) 17 ... Ba6 18 Rf2 Qb6 and I prefer Black's queenside chances over White's on the other side of the board.

17 Ne3 Ba6 18 Ne2



This is new in the position. Previously, 18 exf5 gxf5 19 Nb3 was seen in M.Uritsky-K.Zalkind, Rishon Le Ziyon 1997. In this position Black might consider 19 ... h5 to suppress g4, and perhaps later worry White about ... h4. The position looks dynamically balanced to me.

18 ... Qb6

Worrying White about ... Qb2.

19 Rac1

Played to meet ... Qb2 with Rc2.

19 ... Qb5 20 Rfd1

White covers the d3-pawn.

20 ... Qa4 21 c4!?

White wants to snuff out the a6-bishop's influence, and he is willing to weaken both the d4- and b4-squares to do it.

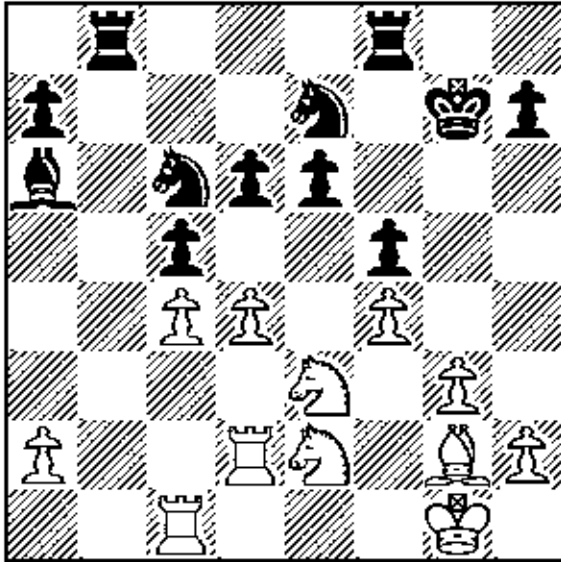
21 ... Qb4

The rule of thumb in Closed Sicilian positions: if Black manages to swap queens, he or she generally stands better, since it effectively eliminates White's main driver of a kingside attack. The position here is still probably even, although stylistically, I still favour Black.

22 exf5 gxf5

22 ... exf5 is also possible. Gelashvili is the higher-rated player and seeks to create an imbalance in an otherwise balanced position.

23 d4 Qxd2 24 Rxd2



24 ... cxd4!?

This is risky. After 24 ... Rfd8 25 Rcd1 Kf6 the game remains even.

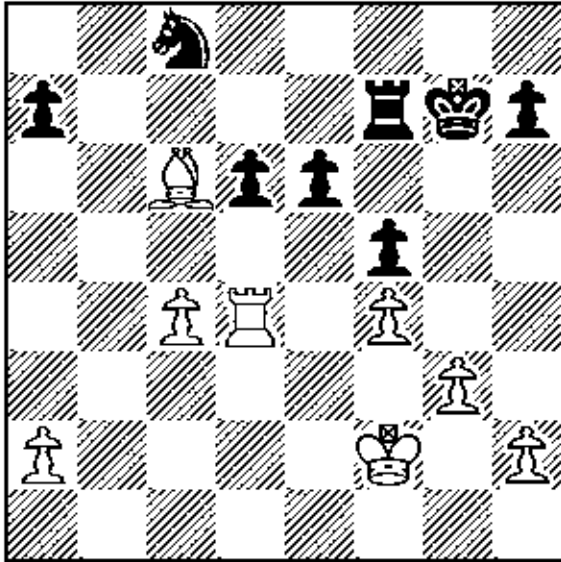
25 Nxd4 Nxd4 26 Rxd4 Nc8!?

The higher-rated player borders on an overpress/contortion to keep his winning chances alive. Objectively better was the line 26 ... Rb6 27 c5 dxc5 28 Rd7 Kf6 29 Rxc5 Rb1+ 30 Kf2 Rb2+ 31 Rc2 Rfb8 32 Rdd2 when the game is likely to end in a draw.

27 Rc3!?

A single chronic weakness in our camp can have the same effect as a small hole in the hull of a ship. White refuses to play c5, which either eliminates a potential future weakness, or creates a powerful passed pawn. On 27 c5! I'm pretty certain Gelashvili planned the unbalancing 27 ... d5!? (once again, objectively better was 27 ... dxc5 28 Rxc5 Rb1+ 29 Rd1 Rxd1+ 30 Nxd1 Kf6 31 Ne3 Rd8 when Black stands slightly worse, but should hold the draw) 28 Ra4 Bd3 29 Nc2! Rb2 30 Nd4 Rf6 31 Re1 Be4 32 Re2 Rb1+ 33 Kf2 Kf7 34 Ra5. White has all the winning chances, based on his passed c-pawn and blockade of d4.

27 ... Rb1+ 28 Kf2 Rb2+ 29 Rc2 Rxc2+ 30 Nxc2 Rf7 31 Nb4 Bb7 32 Nc6 Bxc6 33 Bxc6



In such drawish situations, the higher-rated player craves imbalance, the way an addict craves his drug of choice.

Question: Isn't White's bishop the superior minor piece in this situation?

Answer: I don't think so. White's earlier refusal to play c5 means that his c4 pawn is stuck on the same colour as his remaining bishop. Black may be able to set up with a plan like ... Rc7, ... Kf6, ... Ke7 and ... Nb6, with pressure on c4. Also the knight may later sit nicely on c5. I think chances are still even.

33 ... Kf6 34 a4!?

We have no need to seek out an enemy, if he is always coming to you. I would have left the a-pawn alone and played 34 Bb5.

34 ... a6

Black wants to play ... Rc7, without allowing ... Bb5.

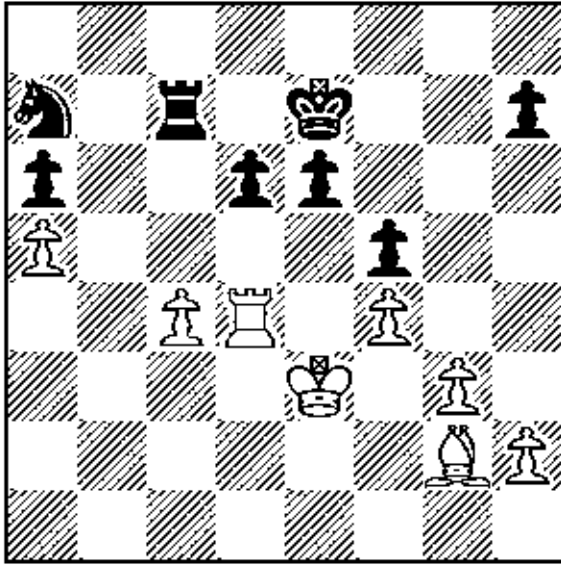
35 a5!?

White fixes a6 as a target. In order to do so, he also weakens his own a-pawn, but after 35 Ke3 Rc7 36 Bf3 a5 I'm starting to like Black's position, since he created dual targets on a4 and c4.

35 ... Rc7 36 Bg2

Instead, f3 is a slightly more accurate square for the bishop, since White can drum up counterplay with g4. For example, 36 Bf3! Ke7 37 g4! Rc5 38 gxf5 Rxf5 39 Bg4 Rf6 (or 39 ... Rxa5 40 Re4 Rc5 41 Bxe6 Kf6 42 Ke3 a5 43 Bd7 Nb6 44 Re6+ Kf7 45 Rxd6 Nxc4+ 46 Kd4 Nxd6 47 Kxc5 and the game heads for a draw) 40 Bf3 Na7 41 Ke3 Kd7 42 Rd2 Nc6 43 Bxc6+ Kxc6 44 Rb2 Kc5 45 Rb6 Rh6 46 Rxa6 Rxh2 47 Ra7 Kxc4 48 Re7 Kd5 49 f5! exf5 50 a6 Ra2 51 a7 h5 52 Kf4 h4 53 Rh7 and White holds the draw.

36 ... Ke7 37 Ke3 Na7



Exercise (critical decision): The position suggests that White's current level of comfort isn't going to last. Black threatens ... Rc5 and ... Rxa5. Should White proceed calmly with 38 Kd3, which provides a migration corridor for White's king to the queenside, or should he go into emergency mode and sacrifice a pawn for activity, with 38 Rd1 Rxc4 39 Rb1? One line holds the draw, while the other gets him into deep trouble.

38 Kd3?

Sometimes the worst thing we can do in an emergency is to stay calm, since in doing so, we may not take action.

Answer: Correct was to shift into urgency mode with 38 Rd2!. This new found freedom gives White the elbow room he needs to redeploy his forces to optimal posts. He should hold the draw with accurate play: for example, 38 ... Rxc4 39 Rb2 Nb5 40 Bf1 Rc5 41 Bxb5 axb5 (41 ... Rxb5?? is the move of a math-challenged player; after 42 Rxb5 axb5 43 a6 and Black's king mopes outside the square of the passed a-pawn) 42 Ra2 Rc7 43 Rb2 Rb7 44 Kd4 Kd7 45 Kc3 b4+ (simplest, although after 45 ... Kc6 46 Kb4 Ra7 47 Rc2+ Kd7 48 Kxb5 Rb7+ 49 Ka4 Rb1 the game should still end in a draw) 46 Rxb4 Rxb4 47 Kxb4 Kc6 48 h3 h5 49 Kc4 d5+ 50 Kb4 Kb7 51 Kb5 Ka7 52 h4 Kb7 53 Kc5 Ka6 54 Kb4 Ka7. Is it just me, or do you also feel that this position lacks sustained dramatic interest? The king and pawn ending is drawn.

38 ... Rc5

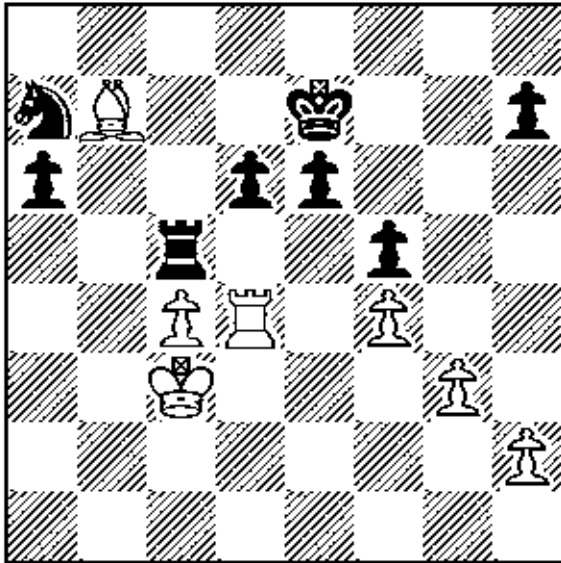
Now White's a5 wound sheds red tears.

39 Bb7 Rxa5

The rook berates White's a-pawn in the attitude of a Saxon Lord, dealing with an indolent serf, way behind on his taxes.

40 Kc3 Rc5?!

Our inner voice tells us that the GM is up to no good. And soon we conclude that our inner voice was dead right. Black is tempted to set up a cheapo and worsens his position in order to do so. More accurate is 40 ... Kd7! 41 Rd1 Kc7 42 Ba8 Nc8 43 Re1 Nb6 44 Bh1 Kd7 45 Rb1 Ra3+ 46 Kb4 Ra2 47 c5 Nc8 and Black has good chances to consolidate.



41 Kb3?!

If you have an important appointment with a powerful person, you would be wise to arrive on time. White misses a good opportunity:

a) 41 Bxa6?? falls directly into Gelashvili's trap: 41 ... Rc6! and Black unexpectedly traps the stray bishop.

b) 41 Rd2! may well save White: 41 ... a5 42 Rb2 Kd7 43 Ba6 Rc6 44 Bb5 Nxb5+ 45 Rxb5 d5 46 Rxa5 Rxc4+ 47 Kd3 and I don't think Black can win the rook ending, since the h-pawn is weak: 47 ... h5 48 Ra7+ Rc7 49 Ra8 h4 50 gxh4 Ke7 51 h5 Kf6 52 Rf8+ Kg7 53 Re8 Kf7 54 Rh8 Rc4 55 Rh7+ Kf6 56 Ke3 Re4+ 57 Kf3 d4 58 Rd7 with a drawn ending.

41 ... Nc6!

A position's truth sometimes takes a while to travel to our consciousness. Before that, our subconscious mind often picks up on a clue here and a hint there. Gelashvili turns away from his own difficulties to concentrate on the more agreeable subject of his opponent's troubles. This move forces White into a lost rook ending.

42 Bxc6

No choice as 42 Rd1?? hangs a piece to 42 ... Na5+. "Your prayers will rise and

travel through the endless void of space for all eternity, without anyone hearing them,” says the knight to White’s bishop.

42 ... Rxc6 43 Rd2 a5 44 h3 h5

Suppressing g4.

45 Rd1 Rb6+ 46 Ka3

Instead, 46 Ka4 Rb4+ 47 Kxa5 Rxc4 is an easy win for Black, or if 46 Kc3 a4 and the threat ... Rb3+ is decisive.

46 ... Rb4 47 Rc1 Kd7

The king heads for c5.

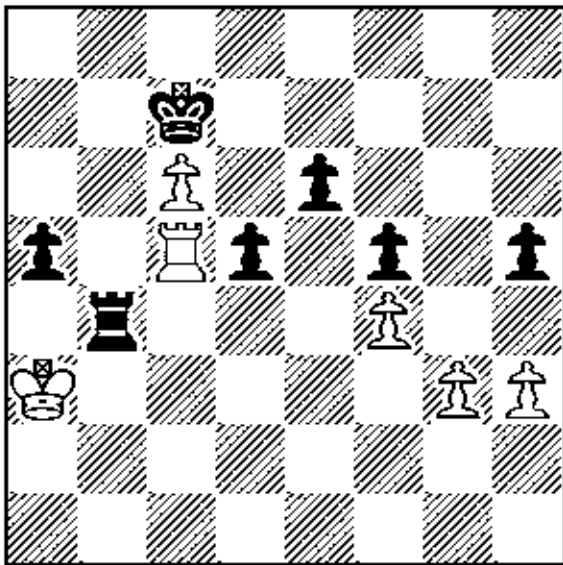
48 c5 d5

After 48 ... h4! White’s kingside pawns are beaten into insensibility.

49 c6+ Kc7

In a two-pronged assault, the defender may be resilient enough to hold off one or the other, but not both simultaneously. White is unable to simultaneously cover c6, and also his kingside pawns.

50 Rc5



50 ... Re4

Threat: ... Re3+ and ... Rxc3. Again, 50 ... h4! is strong, when White’s kingside pawns have the appearance of shattered teeth, after an uneven bar fight.

51 Rxa5 Kxc6

Again, 51 ... h4! and soon, White’s kingside pawns will lie inert, in a crumpled heap (I’m running out of metaphors to describe ... h4).

52 Ra6+ Kb5

The king always speaks in a whisper. Even when White’s rook yells in his face.

53 Rd6 Kc5 54 Ra6 Kd4

Black's king slips into the kingside and picks off all of White's pawns.

55 Kb3 0-1

Summary: This game is a good example of the flexible ... e6 set-up.

Game 21

A.Krapivin-A.Timofeev

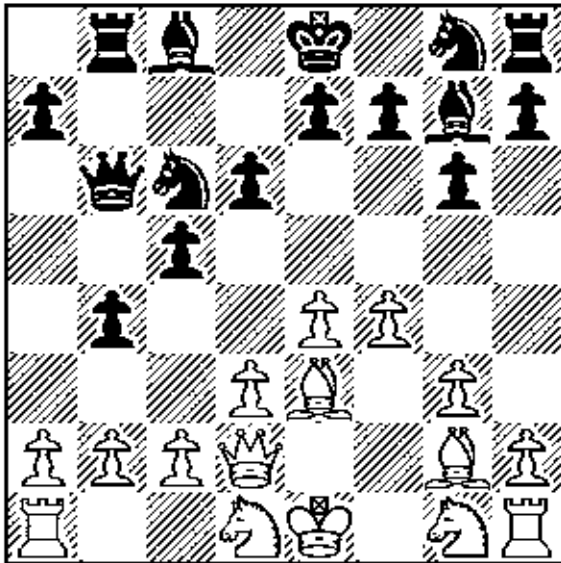
Moscow 2012

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d3 d6 6 Be3 Rb8 7 Qd2 b5 8 f4

In this case, White avoids the Nge2 lines and plans to set up with the more traditional Closed Sicilian plan of f4, followed by Nf3.

8 ... b4 9 Nd1 e6

9 ... Qb6 is a line recommended by GM Joe Gallagher in *Beating the Anti-Sicilians*.



Question: The queen seems strangely placed on b6, with White's e3-bishop on the same diagonal. What is the idea behind the move?

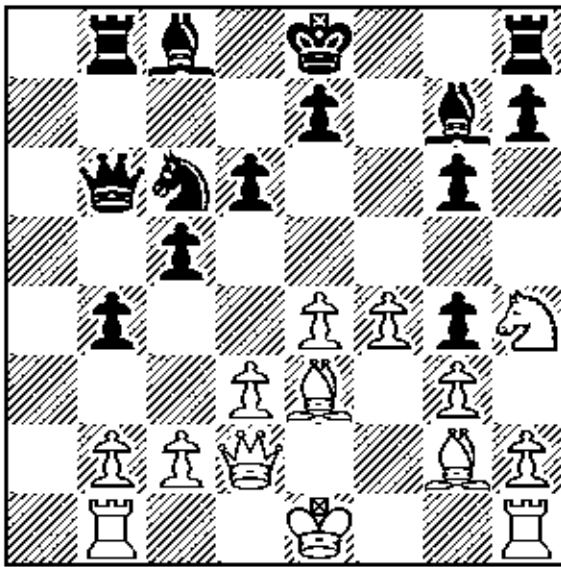
Answer: The move clamps down on the d4-square. Black can continue with two plans:

1. Play the normal ... e6, ... Nge7 and ... Nd4. Now if White plays c3, then after ... bxc3, Black's queen is well placed on b6, on the newly opened b-file, while also working to prevent d4 from White.

2. Black can play for ... f5, applying pressure to e4. Now White is unable to play e5, since Black's queen covers both c6-knight and also the c5-pawn.

After 10 Nf3 we have:

a) 10 ... f5 11 a3 a5 12 axb4 axb4 13 Rb1 Nf6 (Black places his knight on f6, as opposed to h6, where it adds pressure to e4, but may also be more vulnerable to e5 tricks from White) 14 Nf2 (or 14 exf5 gxf5 15 h3 Nd4 and I slightly prefer Black's game; 16 Qf2 can be met with 16 ... b3! with an edge for Black) 14 ... Ng4! (this move takes care of the e5 problem) 15 Nxg4? (White should try 15 exf5 Nxe3 16 Qxe3 Nd4 17 Nxd4 Bxd4 18 Qe2 gxf5! – control over e4 is more important than castling rights – 19 Qh5+ Kd8 20 0-0, although I still prefer Black, whose dark-square control outweighs the fact that he can't castle) 15 ... fxg4 16 Nh4.



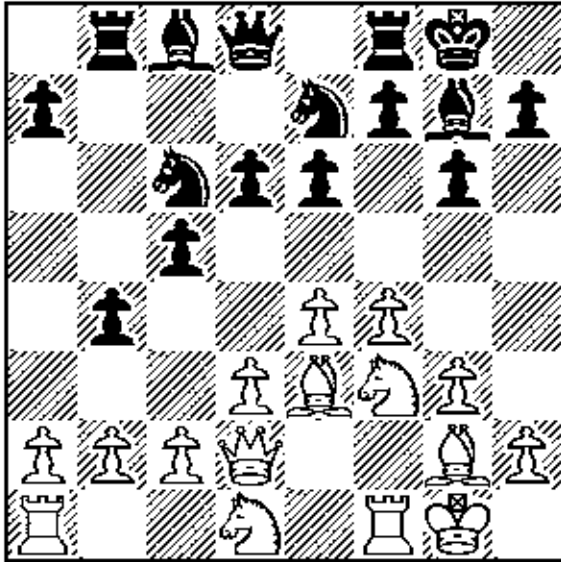
Exercise (combination alert): Black to play and win material.

Answer: Pin/clearance/double attack: 16 ... Bc3! 17 bxc3 bxc3 18 Qxc3 Qxb1+ 19 Kd2 Qb2. Without this move, the combination wouldn't have worked, but now Black is up a clean exchange, L.Yudasin-S.Kiselev, Podolsk 1991.

b) 10 ... e6 (Black proceeds with the more traditional set-up) 11 0-0 Nge7 12 Qf2 (White angles for e5 tricks, which weaken c5; this isn't so easy to implement, since e5 allows Black both ... Nd5 and ... Nf5 responses) 12 ... 0-0 13 Nh4 (after 13 e5 Nf5 14 exd6 Nxe3 15 Nxe3 Ba6 Black will regain his pawn and stand slightly better) 13 ... a5 14 g4?! f5 (our standard response to the g4-pawn storm) 15 gxf5 exf5 and all White achieved with his kingside 'attack' was to weaken his central pawns. Black stands clearly better, S.Stoljarov-L.Aronian, Moscow 1997.

c) 10 ... Nh6!? takes play back into the realm of Short-Kramnik. See the note to White's 7th back in Game 19.

10 Nf3 Nge7 11 0-0 0-0!?



Black avoids 11 ... Nd4.

Question: What is the difference between playing ... Nd4 and castling?

Answer: By castling, Black allows White the d4 break (which White may or may not choose to implement), which turns the game into a kind of hybrid Open Sicilian – but one which is still fully playable for Black, since our king is relatively safe and the queenside is open, which tends to be in Black's favour. Instead, 12 Nh4 transposes to the coming Romanishin-Kuczynski note.

12 a3

White has tried several other moves:

a) 12 g4 f5 (by now this should be an automatic reaction for us) 13 h3 a5 14 Rc1 Ba6 15 Re1 Qd7 16 Bf2 e5! 17 exf5 gxf5 (I would try 17 ... exf4 18 fxg6 Nxg6) 18 fxe5 Nxe5 19 Nxe5 Bxe5 20 Bxc5? (some combinations should be avoided, even when we spot them; 20 d4 looks correct) 20 ... Ng6 21 gxf5 Qxf5 and Black whipped up a winning attack, A.Chigvintsev-S.Ivanov, Tomsk 2001.

b) 12 c3 bxc3 13 bxc3 Qa5 14 Rc1 Ba6 15 g4 Qa3 16 f5?! (Black already stood better, and this makes matters worse for White) 16 ... exf5 17 gxf5 gxf5 18 exf5 Nxf5 19 Ng5 Nce7 20 Bf4 h6 21 Ne4 Rb6 when White lacked full compensation for the pawn, A.Krapivin-K.Sakaev, Moscow 2009.

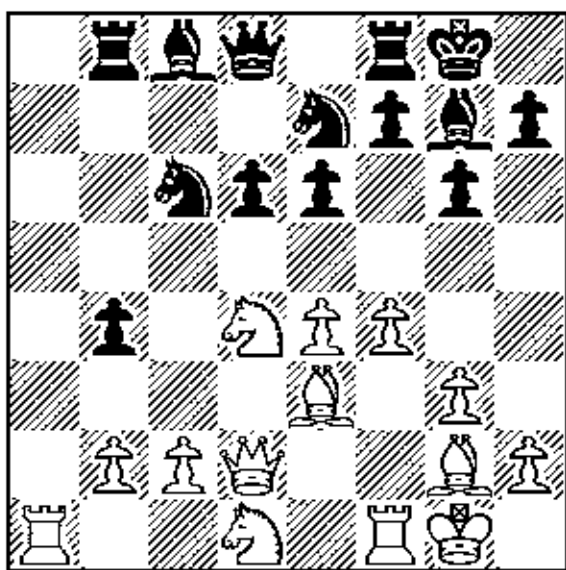
c) With 12 Nh4 Nd4 Black is willing to give up some time to provoke an opening of the queenside with c3: 13 c3 bxc3 14 bxc3 Nb5 (I would just retreat the knight with 14 ... Ndc6 15 f5 f6! 16 d4 cxd4 17 cxd4 Na5, with a decent game for Black) 15 a4 Nc7 16 d4 cxd4 17 Bxd4 Bxd4+ (17 ... e5!? is risky, but possibly playable: 18 Bxa7 Rb7 19 Bf2 exf4 20 gxf4 Rb3 and Black has reasonable compensation for the pawn, with

multiple targets at hand) 18 cxd4 f5 (18 ... Ba6 19 Rf2 d5 20 e5 Qd7 21 Ne3 is dangerous for Black's king) 19 Ne3 Bb7 20 exf5 gxf5 21 Rfe1 Qd7 and Black's control over d5 easily offsets White's potential pressure on e6, O.Romanishin-R.Kuczynski, Polanica Zdroj 1993.

d) 12 Qf2 Qb6 transposes to the Stoljarov-Aronian note from Black's 9th, above.

e) 12 d4 cxd4 13 Nxd4 Qc7 14 Nf2 was seen in J.Houska-D.Hamelink, Amsterdam 2004. I like Black's chances after 14 ... Rd8 15 Rad1 Ba6! 16 Nxc6 (or 16 Rfe1 Nxd4 17 Bxd4 e5 18 Be3 Bc4 and I prefer Black) 16 ... Nxc6 17 Nd3 Bxd3! 18 cxd3 (I'm not so confident in White's compensation for the pawn after 18 Qxd3!? Bxb2 19 f5) 18 ... b3 19 a3 Nd4 as Black's control over d4 offers him the better chances.

12 ... a5 13 axb4 axb4 14 d4 cxd4 15 Nxd4



15 ... Qc7

This is the point where theory ends. Black has also tried 15 ... Nxd4 which allows him to counter in the centre with ... e5 next, i.e. 16 Bxd4 e5:

a) 17 Ba7?! Ra8 18 Nf2 was A.Krapivin-Wei Yi, Moscow 2012. The complications favour Black after 18 ... exf4! 19 Qxf4 (Black gets too much for the exchange after 19 e5? Rxa7 20 Rxa7 fxe3 21 hxe3 Bxe5) 19 ... Bb7 20 Qe3 Bxb2 21 Rab1 Bg7 22 Rxb4 Nc6! 23 Rxb7 Rxa7 24 Rxa7 Bd4 25 Qe2 Bxa7. Black's dark-squared bishop is obviously more powerful than White's clunky light-squared model.

b) Best may be 17 Bf2: 17 ... exf4 18 gxf4 Nc6 19 f5!? (19 e5? is met with 19 ... dxe5!) 19 ... Re8 20 Bg3 Rb6! 21 Qd5 (after 21 Qxd6? Qxd6 22 Bxd6 gxf5 23 exf5 Nd4 24 Bc5 Rb5 Black regains the pawn favourably) 21 ... gxf5 22 exf5 Bb7 23 Qxd6 Qxd6 24 Bxd6 Nd4 25 Bc5 Rb5 26 Bxb7 Rxc5 27 f6 Rg5+! 28 Kh1 Bxf6! with an equal position.

16 Nxc6

This knocks out plans like ... Nxd4, followed by ... e5.

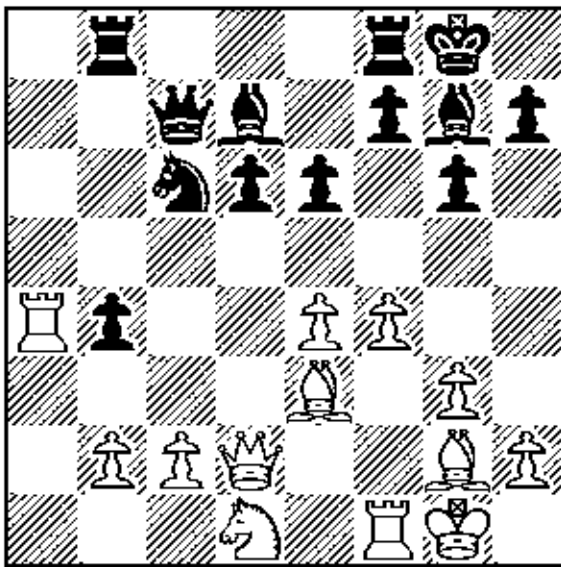
16 ... Nxc6

Black can be happy with the opening's outcome. His weakness on d6 is easily compensated by White's weak b2- and c2-pawns.

17 Ra4!?

White's plan to apply pressure to b4 doesn't work out well. This is a tactically unfavourable square for the rook. Instead, 17 Qf2 Rd8 18 c3!? (that d1-knight needs to be freed from its baby-sitting duties of the b2-pawn) 18 ... d5 19 e5 looks a bit like a favourable French, where I prefer Black's queenside chances over White's on the kingside.

17 ... Bd7



18 b3!?

Question: Now White will be stuck with a weak queenside. Does he have a more active plan?

Answer: I don't see one. If:

a) 18 Ra6 Ra8 19 Rb6 Rfb8 20 Rxb8+ Rxb8 and now what? White has nothing to do but defend his queenside.

b) If White attempts to launch a kingside pawn storm with 18 g4? Black meets it with 18 ... Nd4! 19 Rxb4 Nxc2 20 Rxb8 Rxb8, and now if White tries to preserve his dark-squared bishop with 21 Bf2? he drops an exchange after 21 ... Bb5.

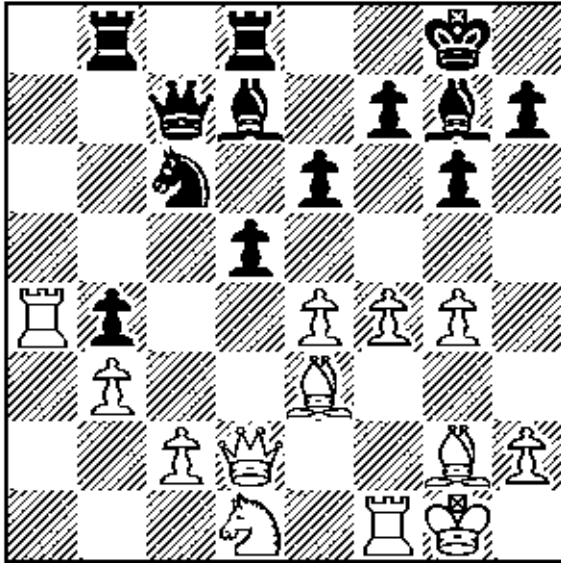
18 ... Rfd8

Preparing ... d5.

19 g4!?

Here they come.

19 ... d5!



Perfect timing. Principle: *Meet a wing attack with a central counter.*

20 exd5 exd5 21 f5

White stakes all on a kingside attack.

21 ... d4

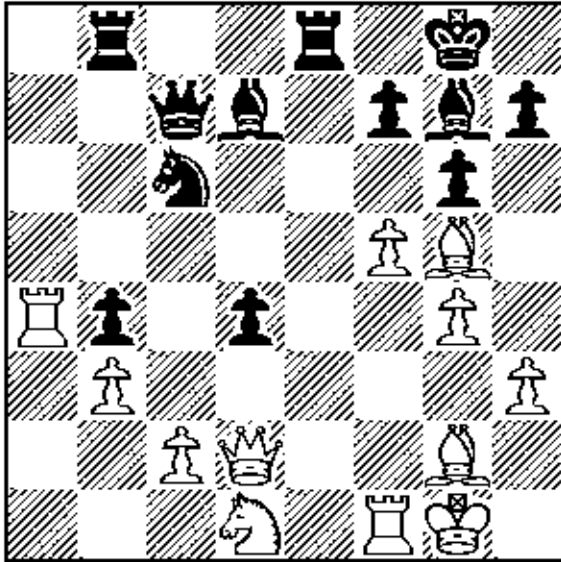
Another central counter, gaining a tempo and clamping down on c2 as a permanent target.

22 Bg5

After 22 Bf4 Ne5 23 Ra2 Re8 24 Nf2!? (24 Qxd4? is met with 24 ... g5! 25 Bg3 Nf3+ 26 Kh1 Qxg3! 27 Qxg7+ Kxg7 28 hxg3 Nd2 29 Rg1 Rb6! threatening ... Rh6+; White's king is boxed in and after 30 Nf2 Rh6+ 31 Nh3 Re2 there is no defence to the threat of ... Bc6!) 24 ... gxf5 25 Nd3 fxe4 26 Bg3 Rb6 27 Bd5 Be6 28 Be4 f6 White is down material, but at least he holds an initiative in this version.

22 ... Re8 23 h3?

23 Ra2 admittedly looks depressing, but had to be tried.



Exercise (combination alert): White's last move allowed a combination which wins material. How did Black proceed?

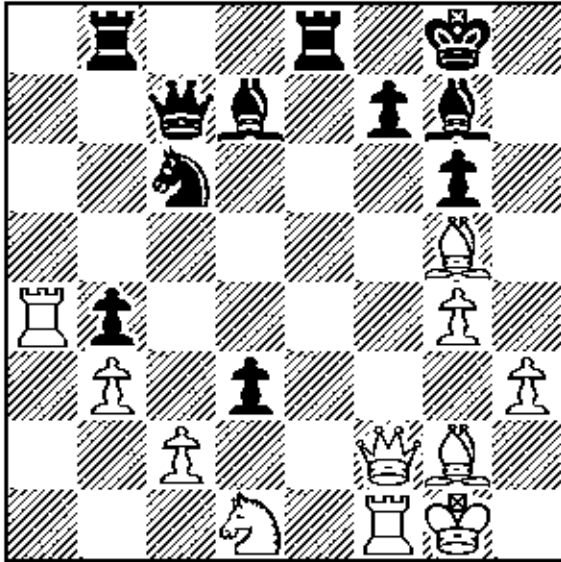
Answer: Clearance/attraction/double attack.

23 ... d3! 24 fxg6

24 Qxd3 Ne5 picks off the exchange on a4, while after 24 cxd3 Nd4 25 Ra2 (25 Ra6?? Ne2+ wins) 25 ... Re2 26 Qxe2 Nxe2+ 27 Rxe2 White doesn't have enough for the queen.

24 ... hxg6 25 Qf2

25 Qxd3? walks into the familiar trick 25 ... Ne5.



Exercise (combination alert): White just attacked f7. Black responded with the human move 25 ... Ne5. The comp, however, pointed out a crushing double exclamation instead. Take your time and look for a move stronger than 25 ... Ne5.

25 ... Ne5

Logical, and yet not best. Black simultaneously covers f7, while opening up an attack on White's a4-rook.

Answer: *Houdini* points out the annihilation of defensive barrier/knight fork: 25 ... Nd4!! The knight emerges, shrieking like a banshee. This move, which marshals chaos into neat rows of order, is tough for a human to find, since our first instinct is to protect f7, which in this case, has no need of defence. Even if we see it, we humans, unlike our more confident comp-colleagues, grow suspicious if our combination grows to a long chain, since odds are, one of the links may ring falsely. However, here after 26 Qxf7+ Kh8 27 cxd3 Ne2+ 28 Kh1 Ng3+ 29 Kg1 Nxf1 30 Qxf1 (30 Kxf1 Rf8 wins the queen) 30 ... Bxa4 31 bxa4 Qc5+ White drops even more material.

26 Ra2 Be6! 27 Ne3 Qd7

27 ... Rbc8! applies greater pressure to White's game.

28 Ra5 Qc7 29 Ra2 Qd6 30 Bf4 Qd4 31 Nd5

White can't hold out after the more accurate 31 Rd1 Rbd8 32 Kh2 Qc3 when Black's pieces continue to caress c2- and b3-pawns lovingly.

31 ... Bxd5! 32 Qxd4 Nf3+

Black regains the queen instantly.

33 Bxf3 Bxd4+

White's queen can only stare aghast at the old bishop's impertinent suggestion, wide

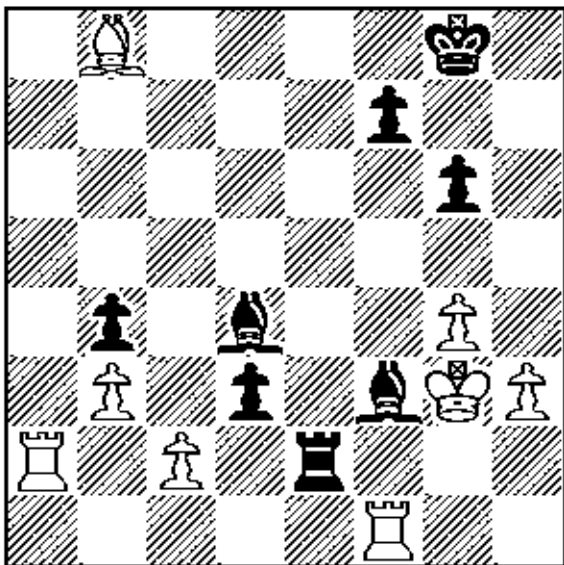
eyed and open mouthed.

34 Kg2

Instead, 34 Kh1 Bxf3+ 35 Rxf3 Re1+ 36 Kg2 Re2+ 37 Kg3 d2 38 Rd3 Rd8! 39 Bxd2 (39 Rxd2 Bf2+ 40 Kf3 Rxd2 41 Bxd2 Rxd2 leaves Black up a piece) 39 ... Rxd2! 40 Rxd2 Be5+ sees a disturbance on e5 mar the overall serenity of the white king's Sunday morning. Black wins.

34 ... Re2+ 35 Kg3 Bxf3! 36 Bxb8

36 Rxf3 d2 37 Rd3 Rd8! transposes to the winning line we just looked at above.



Exercise (critical decision): Black can play his bishop to either d5 or b7. One wins instantly, while the other allows White to continue. Find the correct choice.

36 ... Bd5?

Black's vigilance slackens. When we get low on the clock, our mind experiences trouble differentiating perceptions and the candidate lines all begin to look equally alike in their power to confuse.

Answer: Black missed 36 ... Bb7!, which converts easily after 37 Bf4 dxc2 38 Ra5 Rg2+ 39 Kh4 f6! 40 g5 Rf2! 41 Rxf2 Bxf2+ 42 Kg4 f5+ and wins.

37 Ra5?

White misses a big opportunity with 37 c4! Rxa2 38 cxd5 Ra5 39 Rd1 Rxd5 40 Kf3 (40 Rxd3?? loses to the discovery 40 ... Be5+) 40 ... Bc3 41 Ba7 f5 42 Be3 Kf7 43 gxf5 gxf5 44 h4 when White still has chances to hold the game.

37 ... Bg2

White's defenderless king is ill-equipped to thrive in this hostile environment. Black's forces continually harry, the way Viking raiders loot and pillage as they sail up

and down a lightly defended coast.

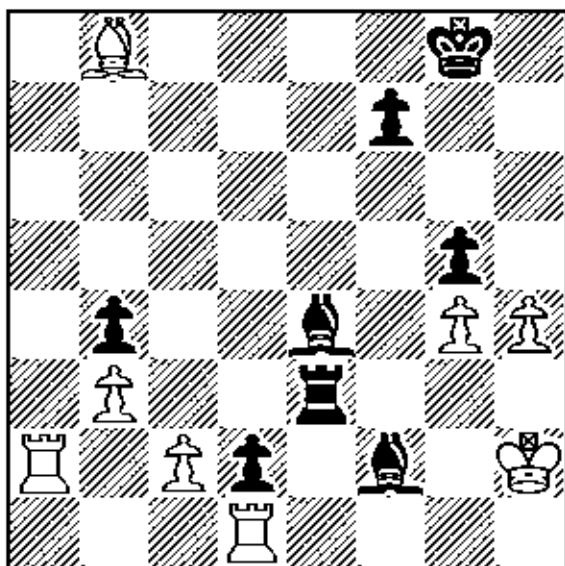
38 Rc1 d2 39 Rd1 Be4

Threatening ... Bxc2.

40 Ra2 g5!

Principle: *In a king hunt, cut off the flight squares of the enemy king, rather than mindlessly chasing him with checks.*

41 h4 Bf2+ 42 Kh3 Re3+ 43 Kh2



Exercise (combination alert): The white king's once sheltered life is about to undergo a drastic alteration. Black to play and force the win.

Answer: Pin.

43 ... Re1! 44 Raa1

Not 44 Rxd2? Rh1 mate. The 300 pound rook, an aspiring dancer, tackles White's 98 pound king, with what he considers pirouettic grace. Everyone watching thinks that maybe his 202 pound weight advantage may have had something to do with it. So familiar are some mating patterns, that it becomes chess clichés.

44 ... Bg1+!

This is a more medieval torture implement, than it is an attack on White's king.

45 Kh3

"Ha!" exclaims the king, who mistakenly believes he successfully evaded justice. Soon he comes to realize that his comment failed to contribute anything meaningful to the debate.

45 ... Re3+

Now we see the sharpened teeth of Black's intent: he forces White into a losing pin.

46 Bg3

The bishop begins his daily “Please-God-get-me-through-this-day” prayer.

46 ... Bf2 47 Rxd2 Bxg3 0-1

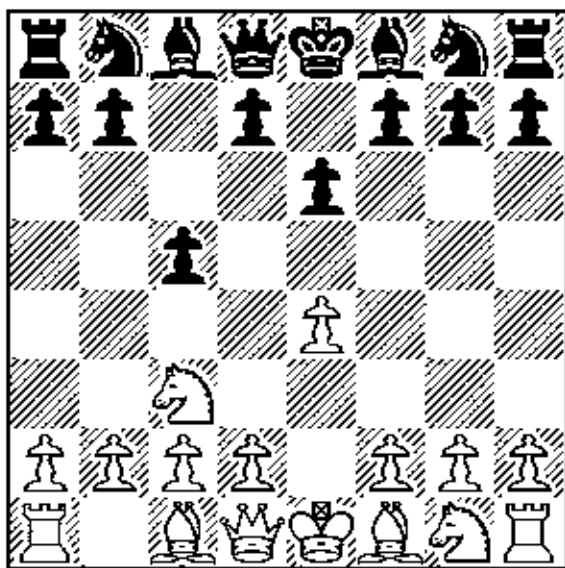
Summary: Don't be afraid of White playing d4. We get an at least even version of a g3 Open Sicilian.

Game 22

B.Baker-C.Lakdawala

San Diego (rapid) 2008

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 e6



The Kan player's favourite move order versus 3 Nc3. 2 ... a6 is another common move order, which usually transposes to the 2 ... e6 and 3 ... a6 move order:

a) 3 f4 is dealt with in the Grand Prix Attack chapter.

b) 3 Nge2 b5 4 g3 Bb7 5 Bg2 e6 6 0-0 Nf6 7 d3 b4 8 Nb1 d5 and Black stood no worse, since White wasted time with Nc3 and Nb1, M.De Heer-D.Sadvakasov, Amsterdam 2002.

c) 3 g3 b5 4 Bg2 Bb7 5 d3 e6 transposes to our game.

3 g3

Alternatively:

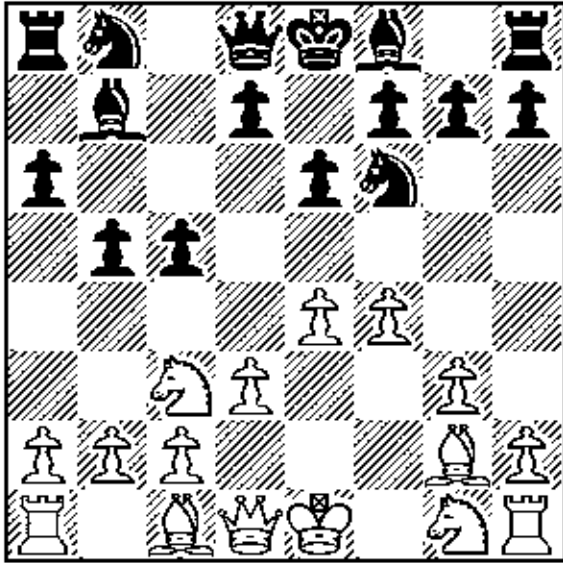
a) 3 f4 is covered in the Grand Prix Attack chapter of the book.

b) 3 Nf3 a6 4 g3 b5 5 Bg2 Bb7 6 d3 d6 7 0-0 Nd7 8 a3 Rc8 9 Bd2 Ngf6 10 Nh4 was tried in N.Short-G.Kasparov, Tilburg 1991. Black should play 10 ... Qc7 to cover against e5 tricks. The position is balanced. White will try a kingside pawn storm, while Black will look for ways to open the centre and queenside.

3 ... a6 4 Bg2 b5 5 d3

Instead, 5 Nf3 and 5 Nge2 will likely transpose to the variations shown above, while 5 f4 Bb7 6 d3 transposes to our game.

5 ... Bb7 6 f4 Nf6



Question: Can you develop this knight to e7, so that if White plays e5, it isn't with tempo? Also, then the knight has access to f5.

Answer: I don't really like this move for the following reasons:

1. If White refuses to push to e5 and keeps the e-pawn at e4, then Black's e7-knight interferes with development.

2. The knight at e7 does nothing to put pressure on White's e4-pawn.

After 6 ... Ne7 7 Nf3 d5 8 Qe2 b4, as in G.Pitl-T.Fogarasi, Budapest 2005, I would play 9 Na4 when White looks a little better to me, since Black's e7-knight gets in the way of his natural development flow.

However, 6 ... d5 may be Black's most accurate move, since he doesn't really need a knight to enforce the ... d5 break:

a) 7 Qe2!? Nc6 (intending ... Nd4) 8 Nf3 Nd4 9 Nxd4 cxd4 10 Nd1 dxe4 11 dxe4 Rc8 12 0-0 Nf6 13 Nf2 Be7, P.Harikrishna-Bu Xiangzhi, Tiayuan 2005. After 14 Rd1 Qc7 Black's pressure down the c-file easily compensates for the weakness of d4.

b) 7 e5?! should probably be avoided when Black's knight is allowed to reach f5. It allows Black a very comfortable French-style position after 7 ... h5 8 Nf3 Nh6 9 0-0 Nf5, A.Tamra-E.Ghaem Maghami, Doha 2013. White must be on constant alert for ... h4 and ... h3 ideas.

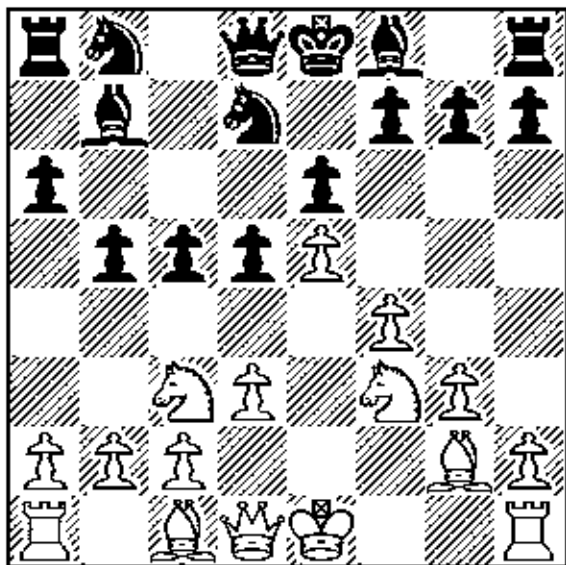
7 Nf3 d5

Black engages White in the centre. I don't care for the positions Black reaches after 7 ... d6 8 0-0, which will be similar to the Short-Kasparov note from above.

8 0-0

By no means forced:

a) 8 e5 is White's main move, when we go 8 ... Nfd7.



Question: Is 9 f5 a sound sacrifice?

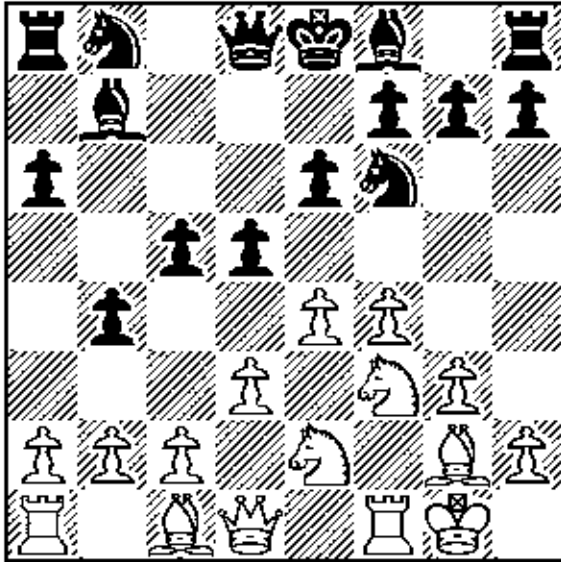
Answer: Your move is a TN. Let's look: 9 ... exf5 10 0-0 d4 11 Ne2 Bxf3! (eliminating a key white attacker, while removing White's control over e5) 12 Rxf3 g6 13 a4 (or 13 Rxf5 Ra7 14 Rf1 Nxe5 15 a4 b4 when Black is ready for ... Bg7 and castling, and I don't believe in White's full compensation for the pawn) 13 ... b4 14 Rxf5 Ra7 15 Bg5 Be7 16 Bxe7 Qxe7 17 Rf1 Nxe5 18 Nf4 Qd6 19 Nd5 0-0 20 Qd2 f6 and I don't see full compensation. So your sacrificial idea, while offering White practical chances, doesn't hold up on the full soundness scale when examined with the comps.

b) 8 exd5 gives White nothing after 8 ... exd5 9 0-0 Be7 10 Ne5 0-0 11 f5?! (this move destabilizes e5; maybe White should try 11 g4!? b4 12 Ne2 Nc6 13 Ng3 Nd7 with even chances) 11 ... Nbd7 12 Bf4 Nxe5 13 Bxe5, F.Hujbert-E.Vegh, Budapest 2007. I prefer Black's position after 13 ... Re8.

8 ... b4

I wanted to keep the game complicated. After 8 ... dxe4 White regains his pawn with 9 Ng5 Be7 10 Ncxe4 Nxe4 11 Nxe4 Qb6, with equality.

9 Ne2



Theory ends around here.

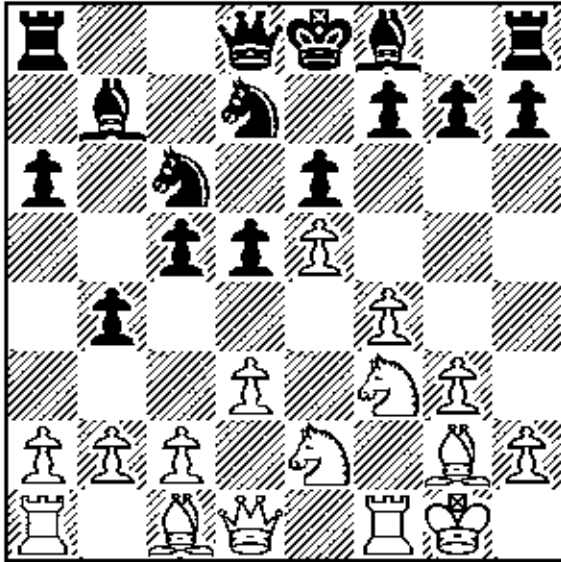
9 ... Nc6

Instead, 9 ... dxe4 10 Ng5?! (10 Nd2! is correct, suppressing Black's coming ... c4 idea) 10 ... c4! 11 Be3 was J.Sierra Aguerri-B.Firat, Zaragoza 2013, when Black has a clear advantage after 11 ... Ng4. Analysis runs: 12 Qd2 cxd3 13 cxd3 Qxd3! 14 Qxd3 exd3 15 Bxb7 Nxe3 16 Bxa8 dxe2 17 Rfc1 e1R+! 18 Rxe1 Nc2 19 Rxe6+ fxe6 20 Rc1 b3 21 axb3 Nb4 22 Be4 (22 Rc8+? Kd7 23 Rxb8?? loses to 23 ... Bc5+) 22 ... Nd7 23 Nxe6 g6 24 f5 Nf6 25 Bb1 gxf5 26 Bxf5 Rg8 27 Rc7 Be7 28 Ra7 Kf7 and White probably doesn't have enough for the piece.

10 e5

The game sharpens, where each party strives to make progress on its dominant wing. Black stands at least even after 10 exd5 exd5 when White's f-pawn's push prevents access to f4 for his pieces and weakens squares like e3.

10 ... Nd7



11 c3

He wants to build his centre with d4, and then prepare f5. One issue he never resolves in the game is that by playing d4, it offers Black opportunity to open the queenside.

Question: I see Black lagging in development and keep wanting to play f5. Is it sound here?

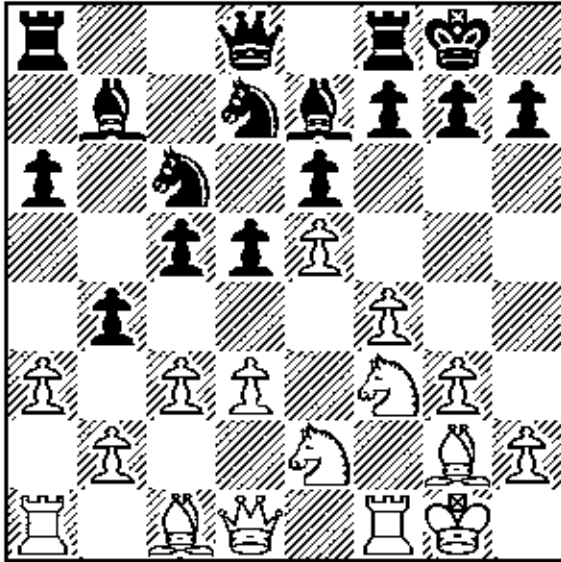
Answer: To make such a speculative sac over the board, one must first forcibly expel fear of loss from the premises. 11 f5!? is logical, following the principle: *open the game when ahead in development*: 11 ... exf5! (11 ... Ndx5? allows White a dangerous attack after 12 Nxe5 Nxe5 13 fxe6, since if Black replies with the natural 13 ... fxe6? there follows 14 Nf4 Qd6 15 Re1 with too many threats to e5 and e6) 12 Nf4 Nxe5 13 Nxe5 Nxe5 14 Qe2 f6 15 c4! Bd6! (15 ... bxc3? 16 bxc3 and White threatens both d4 and c4, with a winning position) 16 a3 a5 17 Nxd5 0-0 18 Rxf5 Qd7 19 Rf1 Rae8. Now Black is the one down the pawn, but *Houdini* rates it at '0.00', since Black owns big squares, like e5 and applies compensating pressure.

11 ... Be7 12 a3!?

He wants to clarify the queenside tension.

12 ... 0-0!?

12 ... a5 would be a safer response.



13 Be3

Question: Why not 13 axb4 which takes over the d4-square?

Answer: The move also accelerates Black's queenside play after 13 ... cxb4 14 Ned4 Nxd4 15 Nxd4 Rc8 16 Bd2 Qb6 17 Qe2 a5 18 Kh1 Bc5. I'm used to playing such French-like positions. This one looks balanced.

13 ... a5 14 axb4 axb4

14 ... cxb4!? reverts to a position similar to what we just examined in the notes above.

15 Qd2

Ideally, White wants to play d4 and then attack with f5. This plan, however, allows serious counterplay: 15 d4 Rxa1 16 Qxa1 Qb6 17 f5 cxd4! (principle: *create a central counter when assaulted on the wing*) 18 Nexd4 (18 cxd4?? hangs an important pawn to 18 ... Ndx5) 18 ... exf5! 19 Nxf5 Bc5 20 Qc1 g6 21 N5d4 Ndx5 and I don't see any compensation for the pawn.

15 ... Qc7 16 Bh3!?

16 d4?! once again allows Black too much leeway on the queenside after 16 ... Na5 17 Qc2 b3 18 Qc1 Nc4 19 Rb1 Ra2 20 Rf2 Ndb6 21 f5 exf5 22 Nf4 Re8. Black's chances of success on the queenside outweigh White's on the other side.

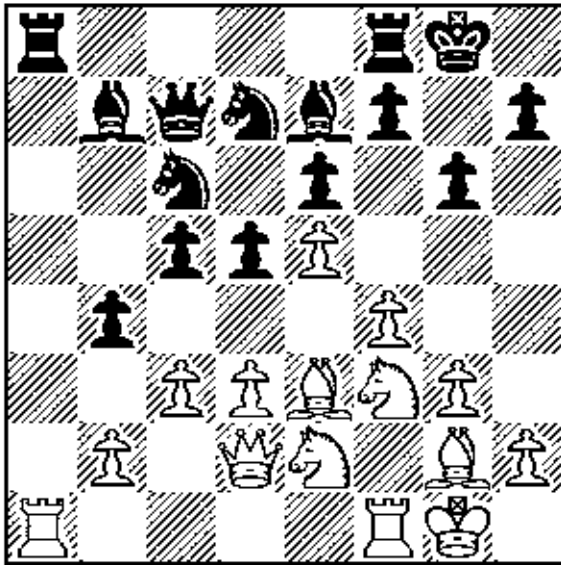
16 ... g6

I wanted to make the f5 break as painful as possible for White.

17 Bg2?!

This basically loses two tempi, since it nullifies his previous move. I expected 17 g4 Rxa1 18 Rxa1 Ra8 19 Rxa8+ (19 Rf1 allows 19 ... Ra2) 19 ... Bxa8 and with rooks

off the board my king feels safer. *Houdini* rates this close to even, while I like Black's queenside chances.



17 ... Rxa1

Question: Why didn't you play 17 ... Ra5 which takes over the a-file?

Answer: I considered your suggestion. I was afraid he would move his rook to e1 and keep all the rooks on the board, thereby increasing his chances of mating me. I thought by swapping off all the rooks, I retain queenside pressure, while his odds of checkmating my king decrease.

18 Rxa1 Ra8 19 Rxa8+ Bxa8

Now I felt comfortable in the belief that my king wouldn't get mated.

20 h4

He is still hoping to stir up something on the kingside.

20 ... Bb7

The bishop returns to play and heads for a6 where it pressures d3.

21 Ng5

I expected 21 g4 Ba6 22 Ng3 bxc3 23 bxc3 Qa5 24 h5 Nb6, intending ... Na4, when I still prefer Black's queenside chances.

21 ... Ba6 22 Bh3

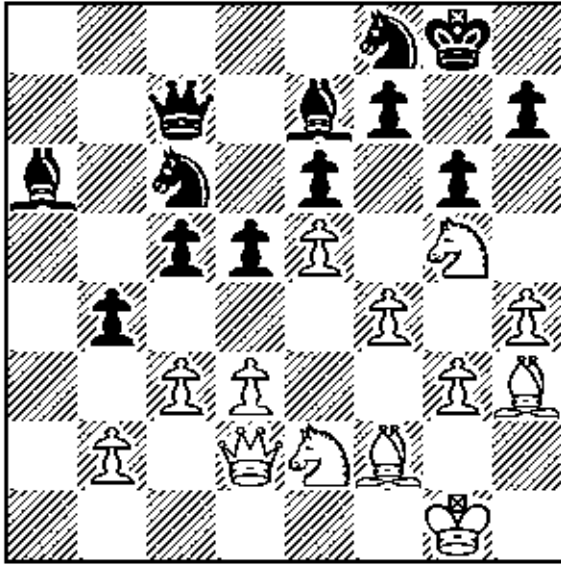
Fishing for shots on e6, while continuing his kingside build-up.

22 ... Nf8

Adding a defender to my king, while covering e6, I create a kind of makeshift Bastille for my nervous king.

23 Bf2

My opponent debates the advisability of a direct attack.



Question: What is White's plan? It seems to me he needs to attack here.

Answer: When we should attack but don't, it's as if we have the resources of a land-owning, rich baron, with the mindset of a serf. In this position I don't know if White actually *does* have a viable attacking plan. The problem is that he needs an f5 break to really push the attack. The trouble is this plan always drops the e5-pawn. White's options:

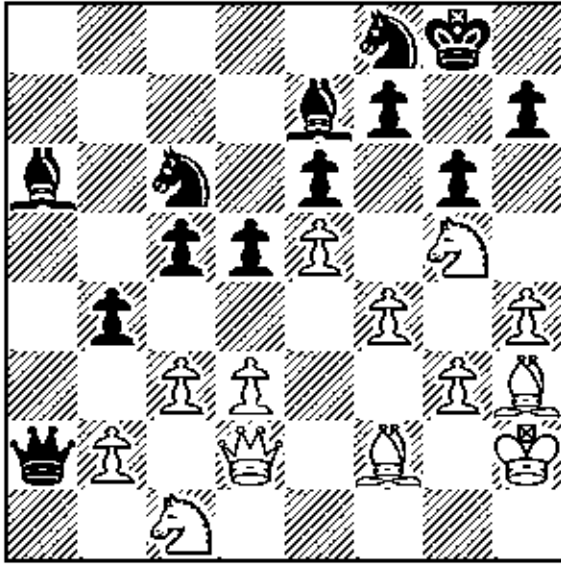
1. Play g4 and f5 and sacrifice the e-pawn.
2. Play d4, and then g4 and f5. The problem with this plan is that d4 accelerates Black's queenside attack.
3. Essentially do nothing and just cover the pawn weaknesses.

My opponent goes for the third option, since numbers 1 and 2 are high-risk projects. If the basic ingredients are missing, an active plan won't arise purely through the strain of will power.

23 ... Qa5 24 Kh2 Qa2!

Strategic threat: ... bxc3, after which White must recapture with a piece, leaving him with two isolanis. I didn't like 24 ... bxc3 25 bxc3 d4 which opened the e4-square for one of White's knights.

25 Nc1



25 ... Qb1?!

Nature unfortunately failed to design your writer's brain for strenuous exercise. I should jump on the chance to weaken his pawns with 25 ... bxc3 26 Qxc3 Qb1 27 Bxc5. This move is why I rejected the line. However, I had completely missed 27 ... d4! 28 Qa3 Nxe5!!, which works out in Black's favour in every variation. For example:

a) 29 Qxa6 Qxb2+ 30 Bg2 Ng4+ 31 Kh3 Nf2+ 32 Kh2 Bxc5 33 Qb7 Qxb7 34 Bxb7 when White is down a pawn and struggling.

b) 29 Bxe7?? Qc2+ 30 Bg2 Ng4+ 31 Kh3 Ne3 32 Bf3 Qf2! 33 Bxf8 Bb7!! forces mate.

c) 29 fxe5 Qc2+ 30 Bg2 Bb7 31 Ne4 Bxe4 32 dxe4 Bxc5 with a winning position for Black.

26 Bg4!

The bishop comes to the aid of the queenside.

26 ... bxc3 27 bxc3 c4!

The target is c3.

28 d4?!

White has good chances to hold the game by utilizing the d4-square with 28 dxc4! Bxc4 29 Bd1 Ba3 30 Ne2. Black still stands better, although not as much as in the game's continuation.

28 ... Ba3 29 Ne2 Bb5!

The bishop removes himself from cloistral seclusion to go to town to raise some hell. Idea ... Ba4, ... Bd1 and ... Bxe2, eliminating a defender of c3.

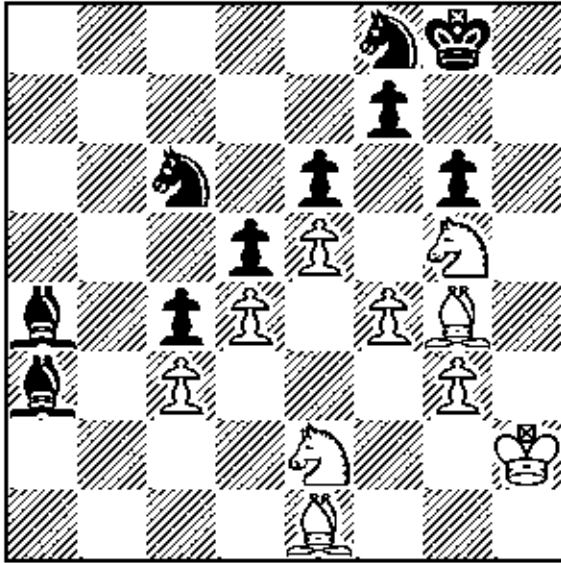
30 h5

Attackers continue to assemble around White's king.

30 ... Ba4 31 hxc6 hxc6 32 Qe1!?

He feels Black's queen is too powerful to keep on the board. After 32 Nh3 Bc2 33 Bf3 Na5 and with ... Nb3 coming, White pretty much should try and get queens off the board.

32 ... Qxe1 33 Bxe1



Okay, I'm game. With queens off the board, extended defensive labours stretch out before White like a dusty road, since c3 won't be so easy to defend.

33 ... Bd1?!

Premature. 33 ... Bb2 34 Bd2 Na7 (Black threatens ... Bd1, followed by ... Nb5) 35 f5 gxf5 36 Bh5 Be8 and Black has good chances to convert.

34 Nh3!

An excellent defensive move. He puts the question to the bishop on d1 and also heads for d1 to protect his pawn on c3.

34 ... Na7

Heading for b5.

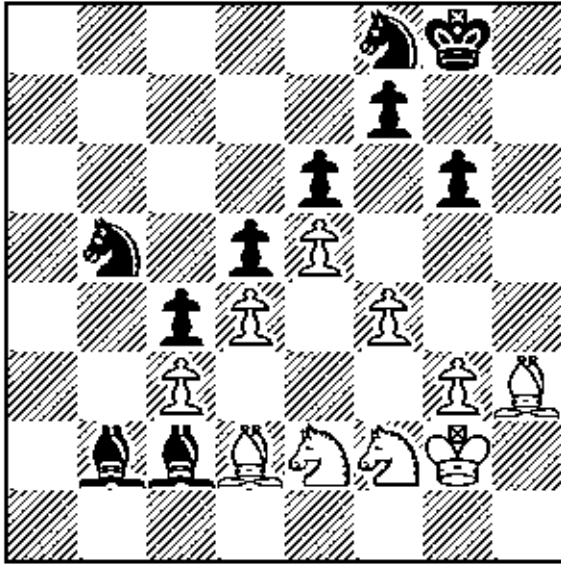
35 Nf2 Bc2?!

I thought I needed to hang on to this piece for a while longer. I missed a win with 35 ... Bxe2! 36 Bxe2 Nb5 37 Kg2 Bb2 38 Nd1 Ba1 39 Kf3. Now I thought he could draw the game by bringing his king over to c2. What I missed was the idea 39 ... Na3!! 40 Ke3 Nb1!. White's king has been cut off from entry to c2, and White is curiously helpless against the plan ... Nd7, ... Nb6 and ... Na4, after which c3 falls.

36 Bd2?!

The ending is impossibly difficult to play, for both sides, especially in a G/45 rapid game. With 36 Bh3! Nb5 37 g4 Bb2 38 Kg3 Bd3 39 Nd1! Ba1 40 Kf2 Nd7 41 f5 exf5 42 gxf5 gxf5 43 Nf4 Be4 44 Ne3! Nb6 45 Bxf5 Bxc3 46 Bxc3 Nxc3 47 Bxe4 dxe4 48 Ne2! Ncd5 49 Ng3 Nc3 50 Ne2 White holds a draw.

36 ... Nb5 37 Kg2 Bb2 38 Bh3



Exercise (critical decision): Black's plan is to go after White's c3-pawn, but he faces a quandary of having to pick from dual tempting lines. Should Black go for the immediate 38 ... Bd3, going after a defender of c3, or play the slower 38 ... Nd7, intending ... Nb6 and ... Na4? One line is more efficient than the other.

38 ... Bd3?!

This bishop follows White's defender of c3 around the same way the little lamb (whose fleece was white as snow) followed Mary.

Answer: Somehow during the game I thought 38 ... Nd7! was too slow, but it should win easily after 39 g4 Nb6 40 f5 gxf5 41 gxf5 exf5 42 Kf3 Na4 (the four-headed creature has the c3-pawn in its clammy grip) 43 Kf4 Naxc3 44 Nxc3 Nxc3 45 Bxf5 Ne2+ 46 Kg5 Bxf5 47 Kxf5 Bxd4.

39 Nxd3!

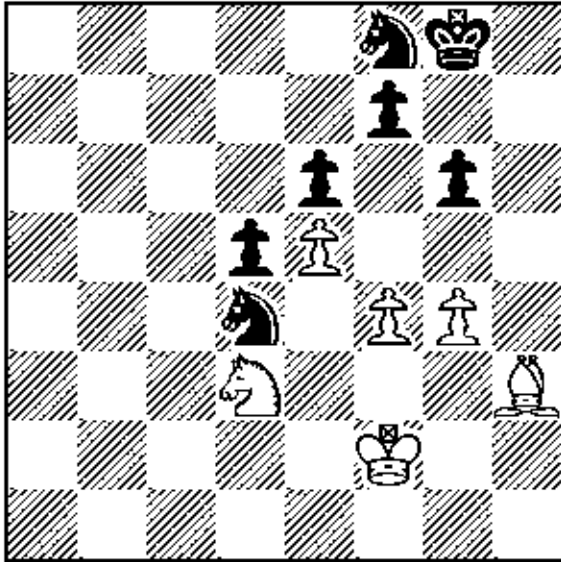
White contests my intent, avoiding 39 Nd1? Ba1! 40 Kf2 Nd7! 41 Nc1 Bc2 42 Ne3 Be4 43 Nd1 Nb6 44 Bg2 Bc2 45 Ne3 Bb3! (depriving White of Nd1 defensive ideas) 46 Ne2 Na4 and c3 falls.

39 ... cxd3 40 Nc1 Bxc3 41 Bxc3 Nxc3 42 Nxd3 Ne2

So I win a pawn, where conversion won't be so easy. It's frustrating when your position sours, which points to negligence on our part. Even more frustrating is when we are unable to locate the point of the problem's origin. I knew something had gone wrong, because now White has reasonable drawing chances.

43 Kf2 Nxd4 44 g4?!

It won't be so easy to extract a win for Black after something like 44 Nc5.



Exercise (critical decision): My opponent and I were both below the one minute mark

on our clocks and living off the five-second increment. This is a situation of fast-vanishing opportunity. What move is critical here for Black if he is to secure the win?

44 ... Nc6?

The correct idea shimmers in the mist, yet remains unidentifiable. I realized this move was an error as soon as I played it.

Answer: Necessary was the disruptive 44 ... g5! which divides White's pawn chain into separate, vulnerable parts: 45 fxf5 (or 45 f5?! Nd7 46 Ke3 Nc6 and e5 falls) 45 ... Nc6 46 Bg2 Ng6 47 Kg3 Ngxe5. White is only down one pawn, yet he won't hold the game, since his doubled g-pawns effectively make him down two pawns. Black's d- and e-pawn passers win. One point of warning though: Black must be careful not to allow White to sacrifice both his minor pieces for all three of his pawns, leaving him with two knights against lone king – a draw.

45 Bg2?

Now White's drawing hopes trip over their shoelaces. Luckily for me, my opponent had no time to think either. 45 g5! would have made the win exceedingly tough – if at all possible.

45 ... g5!

Not missing my chance for the second time.

46 fxf5

After 46 Ke3 gxf4+ 47 Kxf4 Ng6+ the e5-pawn falls.

46 ... Ng6 47 Nb4?

This is an undertaking which lacks resources White needs to complete it. In severe time pressure my opponent's mind's focus accommodates within it two simultaneous and contradictory ideas. White was lost anyway. I think the reason he put the knight on b4 was to be able to sacrifice his knight on d5 for two pawns, and sacrifice his bishop on f7 for my remaining pawn, leaving me with an unwinnable two knights scenario.

However, after 47 Ke3 Ncxe5 White is busted, since after 48 Nb4 Nxb4+ 49 Kd2 Nf4 he isn't allowed the intended d5 sacrifice.

47 ... Nxb4 0-1

Summary: Kan players may want to meet the Closed Sicilian with ... e6 and ... a6, almost playing as if the game were an Open Sicilian.

Game 23

V.Podinic-A.Delchev

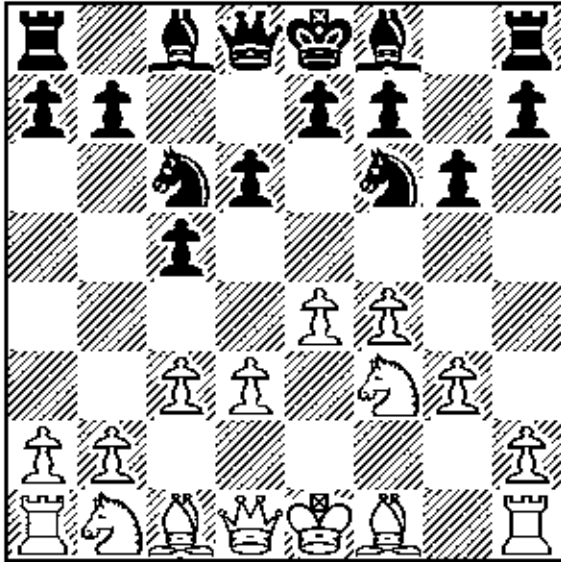
Bijelo Polje 2005

1 e4 c5 2 c3

Question: What?

Answer: I believe I spoke before of the benefits of remaining calm (FYI: soothing camomile tea is available in bulk on the internet). I haven't misfiled the game. We soon transpose to a position known as the Clamp, which is a subset of Closed Sicilian. The Clamp is reached via the following move order: 2 d3 Nc6 3 f4 g6 4 Nf3 Bg7 5 g3 d6 6 Bg2 Rb8 7 c3. In this position our best bet is to deploy our knight to f6, 7 ... Nf6. Note that this is the *only* version in the entire chapter where Black's knight is developed to f6 after he goes ... g6.

2 ... Nf6 3 d3 Nc6 4 f4 d6 5 Nf3 g6 6 g3



Question: Where did the Closed Sicilian go?

Answer: This is the Clamp, a close cousin of the Closed Sicilian, where White dispenses with Nc3 and replaces it with c3, intending to build a giant centre with d4 at some point.

Question: Does our ... Rb8 and ... b5 plan work against this set-up.

Answer: The ... Rb8 and early ... b5 set-up works just as effectively against this set-up.

6 ... Bg7 7 Bg2 0-0 8 0-0 Rb8

Our ... b5, ... b4 strategy remains the same.

9 h3

Question: Is White planning a pawn storm, with g4, or is he planning to build a big centre with Be3, Nbd2 and d4?

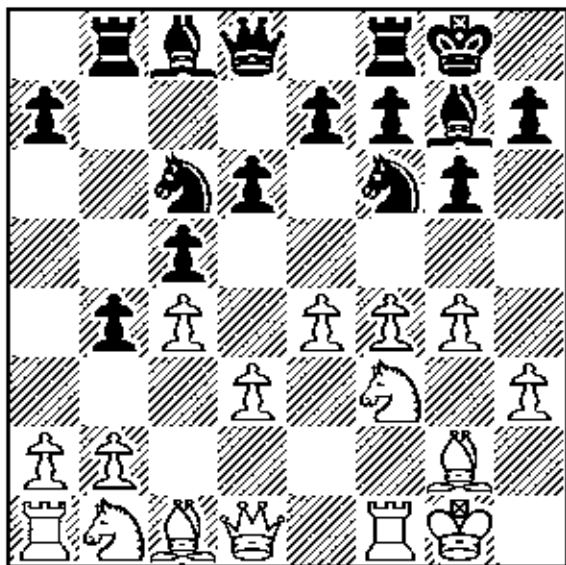
Answer: 9 h3 is White's most flexible move, which allows for both plans, depending on White's inclination.

Next game we look at 9 a4, while 9 Nh4 Qc7 10 h3 b5 11 a3 a5 12 Be3 a4 13 Nd2 Bd7 14 g4 Rfc8 15 g5 Ne8 16 f5 b4 17 Rc1 bxc3 18 bxc3 Ne5 19 Ndf3 was R.Tischbierek-I.Sorkin, New York 1998. Black's queenside attack is stronger than White's kingside attack after 19 ... Rb3.

9 ... b5 10 g4

10 Be3 is White's central build-up plan: 10 ... b4 11 Nbd2 bxc3 12 bxc3 Ba6 13 Qc2 Qa5 (it's hard to imagine White ever achieving the d4 break, since his queen sits on the c-file) 14 Rfe1 Rfc8. I already prefer Black's position, where his queenside play looks far more potent than anything White can achieve in the centre, E.Maggiolo-J.Seminara, Buenos Aires 1998.

10 ... b4 11 c4



Podinic's specialty.

Question: Why would White hand over a hole to Black on d4 like this?

Answer: This is actually White's most logical move. The idea is to avoid ... bxc3, which opens the queenside in Black's favour. Of course the concession is the d4 hole, similar to a Botvinnik English position. If 11 Be3?! bxc3 12 bxc3 Nd7 is quite awkward for White, and 13 Qc2 Nb4 is annoying. After 14 Qd2 Ba6 15 Ne1 Qc7 White's pieces are tangled and Black enjoys a clear queenside initiative.

11 ... e6

Contesting the d5- and f5-squares. Black also has:

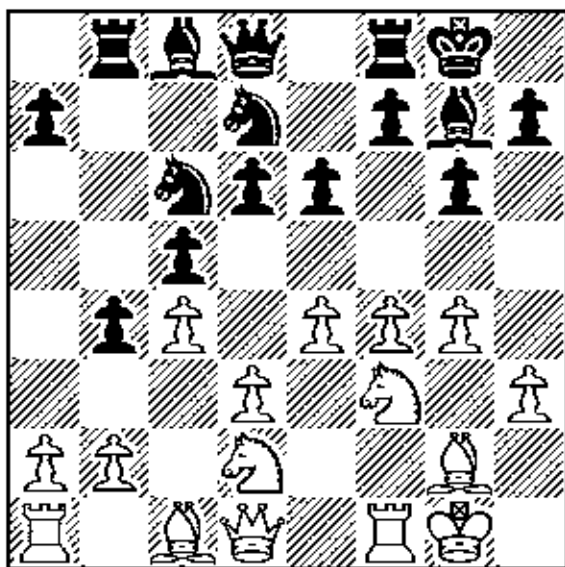
a) 11 ... Nd7 and then:

a1) 12 Qc2?! (this waste of time costs White heavily) 12 ... a5! 13 Qf2 a4 (... a3 threatens to open the queenside, which White wanted closed) 14 Nbd2 (14 a3 Na5 is difficult for White) 14 ... a3 15 Rb1 axb2 16 Bxb2 and so the queenside opens anyway, leaving White with a weakened a-pawn, M.Khademi-M.Darban, Zahedan 2012.

a2) 12 Nbd2 a5 13 Rf2 Nb6 (13 ... a4 is met with 14 Rb1 which keeps the queenside closed) 14 Nf1 Nd4 15 g5 e6 16 Be3, V.Podinic-R.Dimitrijevic, Belgrade 2013. I slightly prefer Black's position after the central counter 16 ... f5.

b) While 11 ... Ne8 is playable, I think the knight is more logically placed on d7, where it has more opportunity on the queenside. Indeed, after 12 f5 Nd4 13 Nbd2 a5 14 Nxd4 Bxd4+ 15 Kh1 Bg7 16 Nf3 Bd7 17 Qe1 e6 18 Bg5! f6 19 Be3 the queenside is blocked and I prefer White's kingside chances, I. Levitina-A. Kushnir, Dortmund 1977. If Black tries to win a pawn, he comes under attack after 19 ... exf5? 20 exf5 gxf5 21 Nh4! fxg4 22 Bd5+! Rf7 (22 ... Kh8?? walks into mate after 23 Ng6+ hxc6 24 Qh4+ Bh6 25 Qxh6) 23 Nf5 Bxf5 24 Rxf5 gxh3 25 Qg3 with complete domination of the light squares and a crushing kingside bind.

12 Nbd2 Nd7



Theory ends here. Once again, I think d7 is the knight's best outpost.

Question: Why do you believe d7 is a superior outpost to e8?

Answer: Two reasons:

1. Black plays ... Nd4 and if White ever trades, then after ... cxd4, Black's d7-knight has a beautiful outpost on c5.
2. If White ever plays f5 to attack Black's king, then the d7-knight slips into the newly created hole on e5.

13 Kh1 Bb7

The bishop is well posted on b7, where it can prepare either a ... d5 or an ... f5 break.

14 Rb1 Qe7 15 Nb3

If White tries to attack with 15 f5 a5 16 g5 then Black responds with the central counter 16 ... f6! with a clear advantage, no matter how White responds.

15 ... f5

Delchev prefers a thematic central counter to a queenside agenda, which would probably be my choice. I like Black's queenside chances after 15 ... a5 16 a4 bxa3 17 bxa3 Ba8 18 Be3 Rb6, intending ... Rfb8.

16 exf5 gxf5 17 g5

White hopes to threaten Black's king with his kingside majority. This plan, however, is slow, when juxtaposed with Black's quick central majority.

17 ... e5

This move is not such a bad idea, now that White has no knight aiming at d5.

18 Nh4 Qe6

A visually odd move, allowing White the 'pin' on d5.

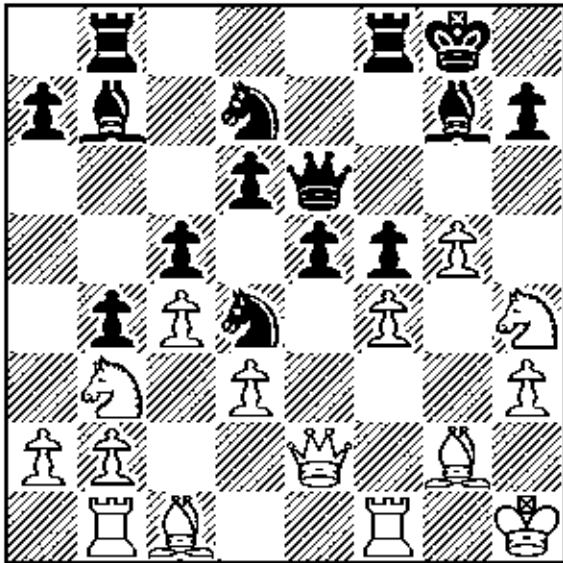
19 Qe2?!

This move encourages ... Nd4:

a) 19 Bd5 doesn't get the job done after the counter-pinning 19 ... Ne7 when the swap of bishops only benefits Black.

b) Relatively best is 19 Re1 Ne7 with close to even chances.

19 ... Nd4.



Exercise (critical decision): Assessment is the art of weighting this versus that, without getting fooled in the process. White can either step away with 20 Qf2, or he can trade knights on d4. One of these is an error. What route would you take?

Answer: White should avoid the swap.

20 Nxd4?

It's so difficult to keep our mind in that sane nook, between exaggerating our chances and underestimating them. The players agree to a deal, but not on the mode of

distribution. If we weigh the profit versus loss ledger, we note that it feels weighted in deference to the latter. After the exchange, Black's central pawns gain immense power.

20 Qf2 was to be preferred.

20 ... cxd4

Now c5 beckons the d7-knight. It becomes clear that Black's central majority is overwhelmingly superior to White's ineffective kingside majority.

21 Bd2 Nc5

And now ... e4 becomes a serious worry for White.

22 Rbe1 a5 23 Kh2 Bxg2 24 Kxg2 Rbe8 25 b3 Qd7

Suddenly ... e4 looms.

26 Kh2

White has better survival chances with 26 Bc1! e4 27 dxe4:

a) 27 ... fxe4 28 f5 Be5 29 f6 e3 30 Bb2 Re6 31 Qg4 d3 32 Bxe5 Rxe5 33 Nf5 d2 34 Rxe3 Rxf5 35 Rxf5 d1Q 36 Qxd1 Qxf5 37 h4 when White has serious chances to hold the game, since his kingside pawns are deeply entrenched;

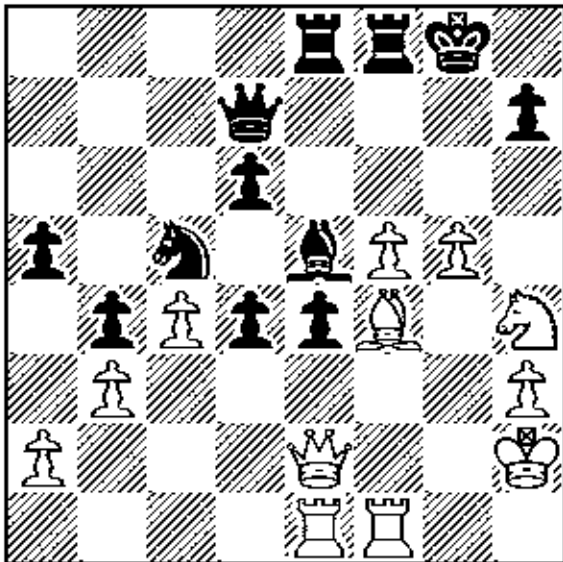
b) 27 ... Rxe4! 28 Qf3 d5 29 cxd5 Qxd5 30 Bd2 Rfe8 with a winning bind for Black.

26 ... e4 27 dxe4 fxe4 28 f5

Both majorities roll, and soon it becomes clear that Black's dominates.

28 ... Be5+ 29 Bf4

29 Kh1? e3 30 Bc1 Bg3 is a game-ender.



Exercise (combination alert): The strategic rot has spread too far, too fast in White's position. Black wins material. How?

Answer: Attraction/knight fork. White's rook is lured to f4, after which Black forks on d3.

29 ... Bxf4+! 30 Rxf4 Nd3 31 Rg4

A desperate/suicidal opponent is the most dangerous one we face, since who can intimidate a person who doesn't fear death? White swivels the apparatus in the direction of Black's king, however, it doesn't help to be a skilled general if reduced troop levels make it a certainty that you are unable to carry out your plan.

At a quick glance, White's last move, a self-imposed material fast, feels absurdly generous to the opponent. White can't be faulted, though, since as we all know, a drowning person is partial to grasping at anything which floats. The trouble is 31 Rxe4 allows Black to simplify to an easy win with 31 ... Rxe4 32 Qxe4 Nxe1 33 Qxe1 Qe8 34 Qf2 d3, which is completely without hope for White.

31 ... Nxe1 32 Qxe1 Rxf5!

Delchev twists seamlessly to the new, unanticipated line of assault from his opponent. This is Black's most practical move, after which White's attacking hopes sour like unrefrigerated milk. Black offers to return the exchange to take the juice out of White's majority.

33 g6 h5

Lines remain closed against Black's king.

34 Nxf5 Qxf5 35 Qh4 e3

The land hungry central passers creep closer to their promotion square now, whereas 35 ... hxg4?? would be a monumental blunder: 36 Qh7+ Kf8 37 g7+ Ke7 38 Qxf5 and White wins.

36 Rg5 Qc2+ 37 Rg2 Qe4 38 Rg4

The rook reminds us of the worried infantryman at the Battle of Waterloo, who forms a clear picture of which way the battle's wind blows.

38 ... Qe5+ 0-1

The winner of a chess game always tends to get in the final word. Now h5 is secured and ... e2 and ... e1Q follow, but again not 38 ... hxg4?? 39 Qh7+ Kf8 40 Qf7 mate. Lines like this only happen in our dreams.

Summary: Be aware of the Clamp, where White attempts to build a large centre with c3, replacing Nc3. Also, note this is the only version in the chapter where we develop our knight directly to f6 after the counter kingside fianchetto.

Game 24

A.Nadanian-M.Kobalia

Khanty-Mansiysk (rapid) 2013

1 e4 c5 2 d3

This is the more traditional move order when White enters the Clamp.

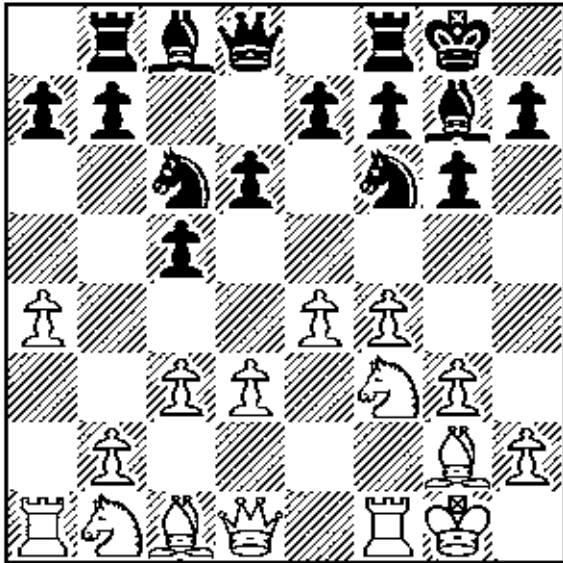
2 ... Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 f4

5 Nf3 is the King's Indian Attack, which we cover in the next chapter.

5 ... d6 6 Nf3 Nf6

We wouldn't play this move order, since if White now plays Nc3, we get into a Closed Sicilian line which we don't cover in the book. Our move order would be 6 ... Rb8 7 0-0 b5 and only when White commits to 8 c3 do we then commit our knight to f6 with 8 ... Nf6, where we soon reach a transposition to our Clamp lines.

7 0-0 0-0 8 c3 Rb8 9 a4



Question: What are the differences between White tossing in a4, and avoiding it?

Answer:

1. When White plays a4, he weakens b3 and focuses attention on Black's strong wing, actually ensuring the queenside opens later on.

2. By playing a4, White rids himself of a potentially weak a-pawn and also opens a file for the a1-rook.

9 ... a6 10 Qe2

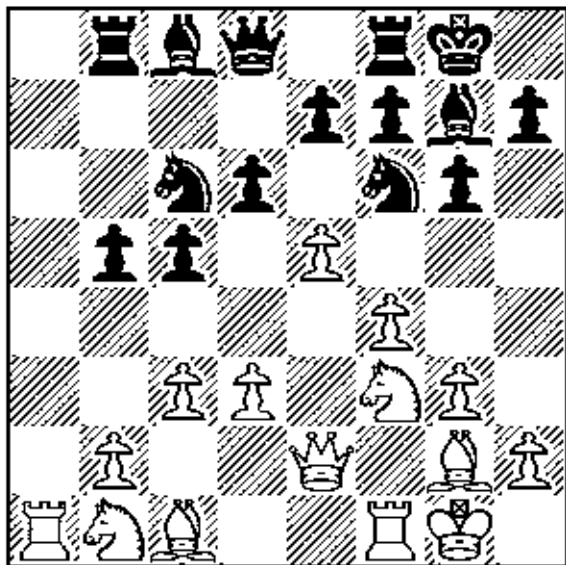
Alternatively:

a) 10 h3 b5 11 axb5 axb5 12 g4 Bb7 13 Be3 Ra8! (Black will seize the opened a-file, or initiate mass exchanges down the file, weakening White's chances for a kingside attack) 14 Nbd2 Rxa1 15 Qxa1 Qa8 16 Bf2 Nd7 17 Re1 b4 18 d4 cxd4 19 cxd4 Rc8 20 e5 Na5 21 Rc1 Rxc1+ 22 Qxc1 Nb3! 23 Nxb3 Bxf3 24 Bxf3 Qxf3 was V.Vorotnikov-B.Annakov, Sochi 1997. Chances are probably balanced after 25 Qe3 Qd1+ 26 Kg2 Bf8.

b) With 10 Na3 White plans to play his knight to c2, after which he may transfer it

to e3: 10 ... b5 11 axb5 axb5 12 Nc2 b4 13 Ne3 Ng4! (White wasted an awful lot of time transferring his knight to e3, so Black gains some time by swapping it off) 14 d4 bxc3 15 bxc3 cxd4 16 cxd4 Nxe3 17 Bxe3 d5 (this move allows Black to regain some lost ground in central control) 18 e5 (as in C.Barlocco-R.Martinez Porto San Giorgio 2013; 18 exd5 Nb4 19 Ne5 Nxd5 is slightly better for Black, since White doesn't have time for a c6 fork, as his own bishop hangs on e3) 18 ... Bf5 19 Nh4 Be4! is fine for Black.

10 ... b5 11 axb5 axb5 12 e5



White wants the initiative. This move doesn't bother Black though, since it opens d5 for Black's knight.

12 ... Nd5

Black can also exchange on e5, which weakens c5, but also adds pressure to White's e5-pawn: 12 ... dxe5 13 fxe5 Nd5! (I would avoid 13 ... Ng4?! 14 Bf4 Rb6 15 h3 and Black must make a speculative piece sacrifice on e5, since 15 ... Nh6? 16 Qe3! Nf5 17 Qxc5 is completely lost for him) 14 Nbd2 Bf5 15 Ne4 Qb6 16 Qf2 c4 17 dxc4 Bxe4 18 cxd5 Qxf2+ 19 Rxf2 Bxd5 20 Bf4 e6 and the ending is approximately even, V.Yemelin-D.Swiercz, Czech League 2011.

13 Qf2 b4 14 Ng5

Uncovering on the d5-knight. After 14 c4 Nc7 15 Nbd2 Ne6 16 Nb3 dxe5 17 Nxc5 exf4 18 Nxe6 fxe3 19 Qc5 Bxe6 20 Qxc6 gxe3+ 21 Kh1 Qxd3 Black gets more than enough compensation for the piece.

14 ... e6

This move weakens d6 and c5, which prompts White into rash action.

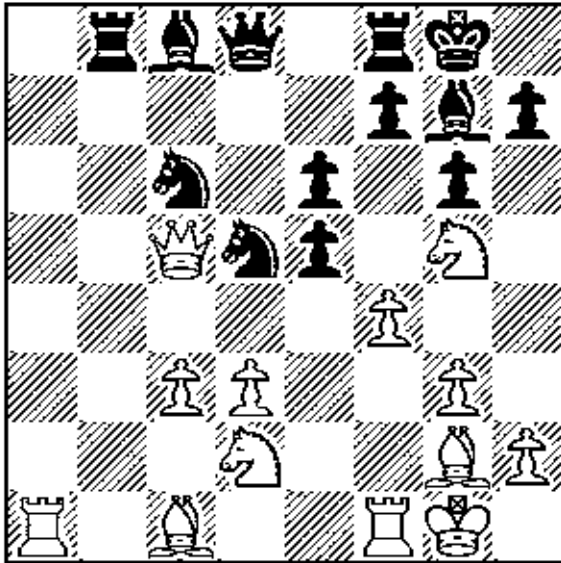
15 Nd2?

White's fantasy collides with the real, with unfortunate results. A makeshift solution

can sometimes be worse than no solution at all. This overly ambitious plan stretches White too thinly, and his perceived gain loses more in return. White plays his move on the philosophy: the decision to go passive turns us from actors who mould our own destiny, to that of a passive observer.

After 15 c4 Nde7 16 Be3 dxe5 17 Bxc5 exf4 18 Qxf4 Bxb2 19 Nxf7 Bd4+ 20 Qxd4 Qxd4+ 21 Bxd4 Nxd4 22 Ne5 the ending is only slightly better for Black, who blockades d4.

15 ... bxc3 16 bxc3 dxe5 17 Qxc5



Exercise (combination alert): Find the mini-combination which got Black a winning position.

Answer: Double attack.

17 ... exf4!

Suddenly, the g5-knight is loose, as well as the c3-pawn.

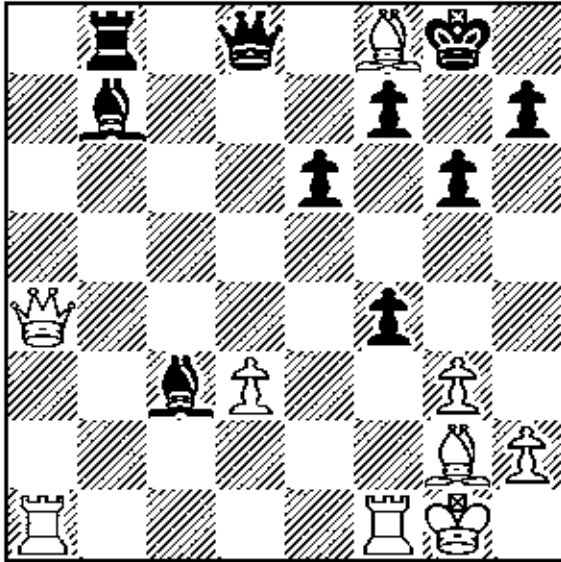
18 Qxc6 Qxg5

Even stronger was 18 ... Nxc3! 19 Ngf3 Bb7 20 Qc4 Rc8 21 Qb4 Ne2+ 22 Kh1 (22 Kf2 Qxd3 is lost for White, since ... Qe3+ is a terrible threat, as well as ... Bxa1; if 23 Ra3 Bc3 gives Black a winning attack) 22 ... Bxa1, winning material.

19 Ne4 Qd8 20 Ba3 Bb7

Missing 20 ... Bd7! 21 Qd6 Rb6 22 Qc5 f5 23 Nf2 Nxc3 and White can resign.

21 Qa4 Nxc3 22 Nxc3 Bxc3 23 Bxf8



Exercise (critical decision/calculation): Black's position give us the sense of a hungry wolf, who bides his time in the shadows of the forest, watching the sheep fatten. Now is the time to strike. Black can give check on d4, with either his queen or his bishop. One of them wins easily, while the other allows White to put up resistance. The evaluation requires us to coordinate and assess the interaction of multiple variables. Which one would you play?

23 ... Qd4+?!

The queen touches her sword's hilt for luck, just before the battle, with gleaming eyes and a vengeful smile. A chaotic position is that place where our brain is excused for its temporary irrational behaviour.

Answer: Mating attack: 23 ... Bd4+! is a killer. Black probably rejected his line, since the longer the variation, the greater the odds of a potential error multiply, but 24 Kh1 Bxg2+ 25 Kxg2 Qd5+ 26 Kh3 Qh5+ 27 Kg2 Rb2+ forces mate.

24 Qxd4 Bxd4+ 25 Kh1 Bxg2+ 26 Kxg2 Bxa1 27 Bd6 Ra8?!

Another inaccuracy. 27 ... Rb2+! 28 Kf3 Rd2! 29 Kxf4 Rxd3 30 Rxa1 Rxd6 is a simple win for Black.

28 Bxf4 Bd4

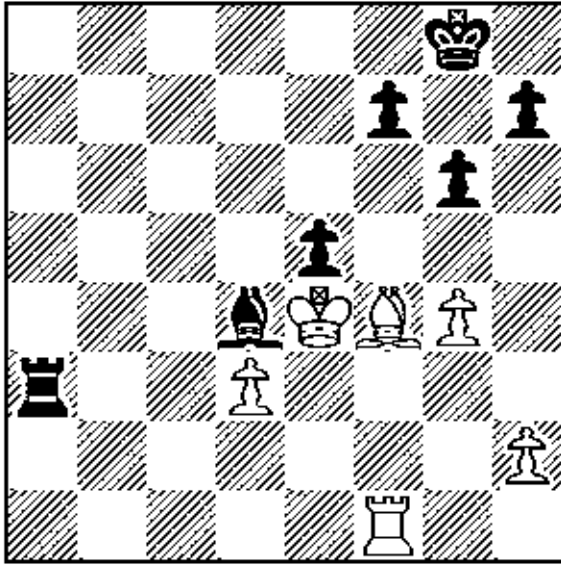
Suddenly, conversion won't be all that easy for Black, who is only up one pawn. However, Black is still winning, since d3 is weak and a source of worry for White.

29 g4 Ra3 30 Kf3

White resists with the dour resolution of the desperate. He won't hold in the long run by going passive with 30 Rd1 f5.

30 ... e5 31 Ke4

31 Bg3 Rxd3+ 32 Ke4 Re3+ and Black wins a second pawn.



Exercise (combination alert): Black forces the win of more material. How?

Answer: Deflection.

31 ... f5+!

The period of upheaval isn't over for White's king.

32 gxf5 gxf5+ 33 Kxf5

33 Kd5 still loses a piece to 33 ... Ra5+ 34 Ke6 exf4.

33 ... exf4

"Whimper at your alter. It will not save you," says the e-pawn to White's bishop.

34 Rxf4 Rxd3

Question: Does White have any drawing chances here?

Answer: No. He can resign here. Rook and bishop versus rook is hard enough to draw. When one set of h-pawn remains on the board, the situation is hopeless for White. One note though: Black must be careful to avoid a rook swap, since then he ends up with the wrong-coloured rook pawn, and the game really is drawn.

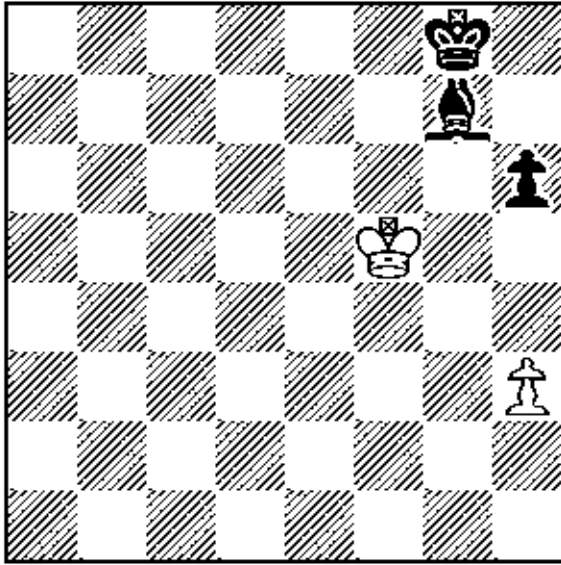
35 Ke4 Rd2 36 h3 Bg7 37 Kf5 Rd5+ 38 Kg4 h6

A good move, preparing to creep forward with his king to g6.

39 Rf5 Rd6

Remember, 39 ... Rxf5?? (Black's king regards his rook with the same level of disgust of William Wallace, when he discovered that Robert the Bruce made a secret deal with Edward Longshanks, in *Braveheart*) 40 Kxf5 is dead drawn, due to the

wrong-coloured h-pawn.



Question: What is White's drawing technique?

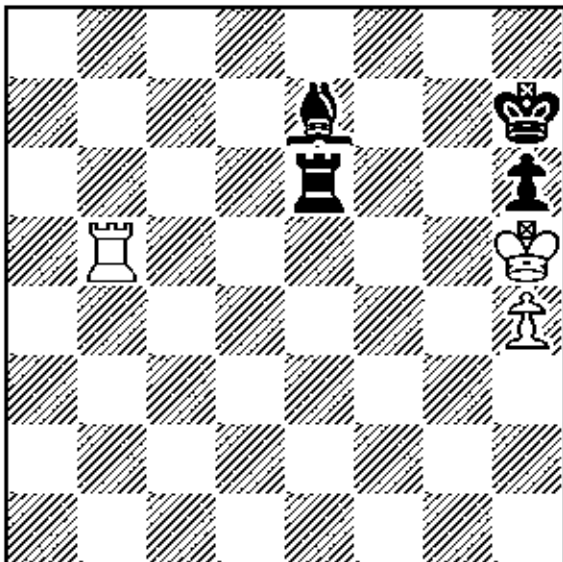
Answer: This is a basic ending which everyone should know. Just bring the king to the corner and shuffle from h1 to g1, until kingdom come. For example, 40 ... Kf7 41 Kg4 Kg6 42 Kf3 Kg5 43 Kg2 Kh4 44 Kh1 (please be my guest; the king mopes and sulks his way into the corner, yet remains relevant) 44 ... Kxh3 45 Kg1 h5 46 Kh1 Kg3 47 Kg1 h4 48 Kh1 h3 49 Kg1 Bd4+ 50 Kh1 Be5 51 Kg1. The defender is as immovable as a granite gargoyle on a building, and there is no way for Black to make progress.

40 Kh5 Kh7 41 Rb5 Re6 42 h4

Instead, if 42 Rd5 Bf6 43 Rd7+ Be7 and if 44 Rb7? Re4 is either mate on h4, or sees the loss of White's rook for Black's bishop.

42 ... Bf6 43 Rb7+ Be7 44 Rb5

44 Kg4 Kg6 and it's just a matter of time before Black secures the win.



Exercise (combination alert): White's last move walks into either mate or heavy loss of material. How? Hint: I just showed the winning idea in an earlier note!

Answer: Mating net.

44 ... Re4

Black rook and bishop flank White's king, the way jailers escort a condemned prisoner to the execution chamber.

45 Rb4!

Sneaky!

45 ... Re5+! 0-1

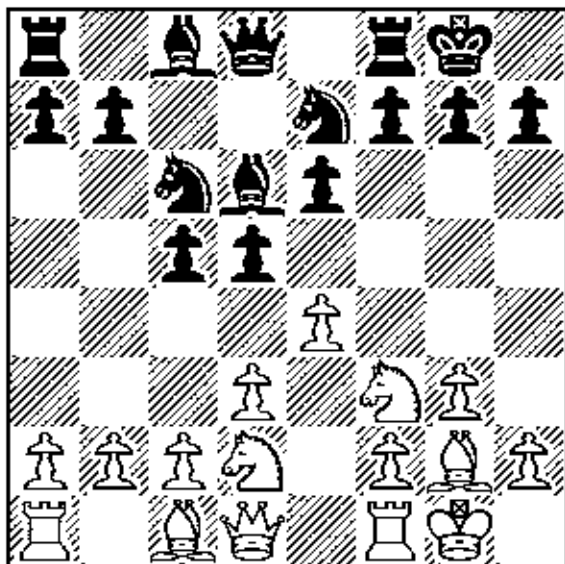
Oh, nyet you don't! Now the hanging b4-rook's influence slides a tad down on the social ladder. GMs don't fall for tricks like 45 ... Rxb4?? stalemate, or for that matter, 45 ... Bxb4?? stalemate.

Summary: When White plays a4, he or she eliminates a potentially weak a-pawn, at the cost of further opening the queenside, which helps Black.

Chapter Five

The King's Indian Attack

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d3 e6 4 g3 d5 5 Nbd2 Bd6 6 Bg2 Nge7 7 0-0 0-0

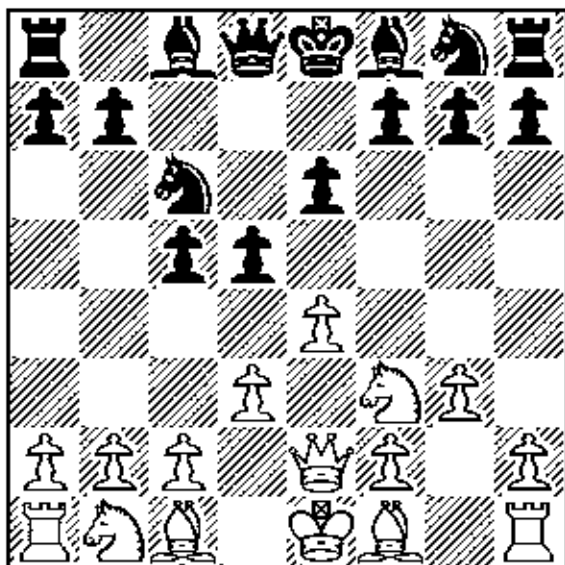


In this chapter we attempt to shift the King's Indian Attack player out of his or her automated zone, with one of our most flexible set-ups. We can bravely meet a problem head on, yet sometimes the best path is to just go around it. In this line we go with the latter. The players have overlapping interests concerning the e5-square, so first, we make it very difficult for White to achieve e5 – normally White's birthright in many KIA lines – by placing our pieces in a protective barrier around e5, with knight on c6, bishop on d6, and if needed, our queen on c7, with ... f6 as an option.

White has a few fundamental plans in the position:

1. Play exd5 and follow with d4, or c3 and d4.
2. Leave the central pawns as are, and then play to expand on the queenside with a3, c3 and b4.
3. Play Nh4, f5 and f5.

We are well equipped to meet every version.



In the second diagram, White attempts to waylay our intended set-up with an early Qe2. We meet it with ... Nge7, ... g6 and ... Bg7. White usually later seizes space with an enforced e5. The sheep know their place when the wolf walks by, so we tap into our hidden reservoir of ideas, and either undermine the opponent's strong point with ... Qc7, ... h6 and ... g5!?, or, we can just castle and meet e5 head on with ... f6, playing it in French Defence fashion.

White can also just retain central tension and play for queenside expansion with a3, c3 and b4. In any case, our resources are many and our worries few.

Game 25

B.Amin-V.Gashimov

Abu Dhabi 2006

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6

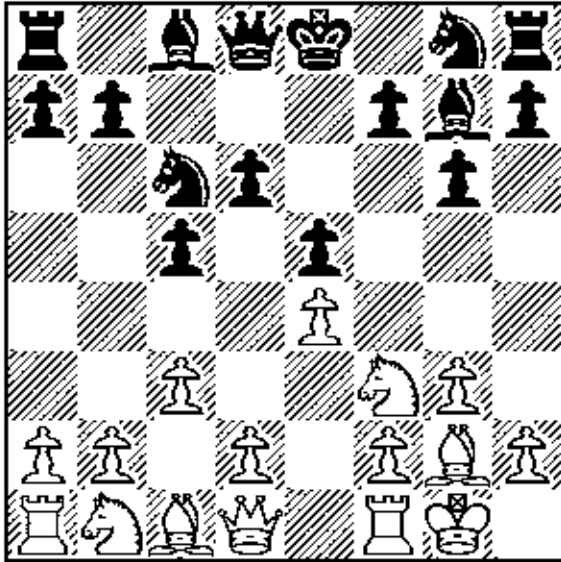
This is the move order used by Najdorf and Dragon (as well as some Richter-Rauzer and Scheveningen) players.

3 d3

After 3 g3 there are two points to remember if White plays this move order:

1. Keep in mind that White can always play d4, switching to a fianchetto line of an Open Sicilian. So don't get tricked out of your normal move orders.

2. White can play for a Clamp-like plan (without f4), by playing for c3 and d4 in one go. For example, 3 ... Nc6 4 Bg2 g6 5 0-0 Bg7 6 c3 e5.



Question: We now have four attackers on d4, while White has only three. Has White's d4 plan been foiled?

Answer: Not yet. His next move attempts to reinforce the d4-square by transferring his knight to c2, 7 Na3 Nge7 8 Nc2.

Question: Now how do we prevent White's d4 break?

Answer: We can't. What we can do is reach a nice looking Benoni-style position after 8 ... 0-0 9 d4 exd4! 10 cxd4 Bg4. We continue to apply pressure to d4:

a) 11 Be3 Qb6 (White scores a less-than-stellar 5.6%, from nine games, from this position in my database) 12 dxc5 dxc5 13 b4 Rfd8 14 bxc5 Rxd1 15 cxb6 Rxa1 16 Nxa1 axb6 17 Nb3 Rxa2 18 Rb1 (18 Bxb6?? hangs a piece to 18 ... Rb2 19 Nfd2 Be6) 18 ... b5 and Black is up a pawn, with all the winning chances, P.Keres-B.Spassky, Tbilisi 1959.

b) 11 dxc5 dxc5 12 Ne3 Be6 (Black can also just chop the knight and occupy d4, with the line 12 ... h5 13 h3 Bxf3 14 Bxf3 Nd4 15 Bg2 Qb6 with equality at a minimum) 13 Ng5 Bd7 14 Nh3 (intending to transfer the knight to d5) 14 ... Nd4 15 Nf4, V.Klyuner-H.Steingrimsson, German League 2006. Black has the more active position after 15 ... Bb5 16 Re1 Re8.

c) 11 d5 leads to an inferior Benoni structure for White: 11 ... Ne5 12 Bf4 (*Houdini* suggests the grovelly 12 Nce1, a move no sober human would play) 12 ... f5 13 Bxe5 Bxe5 14 Ne3 fxe4 15 Nxe4 exf3 16 Bxf3 Bd4 17 Re1 Nf5. Advantage Black, who owns the more powerful bishop, as well as potential pressure down the open f-file,

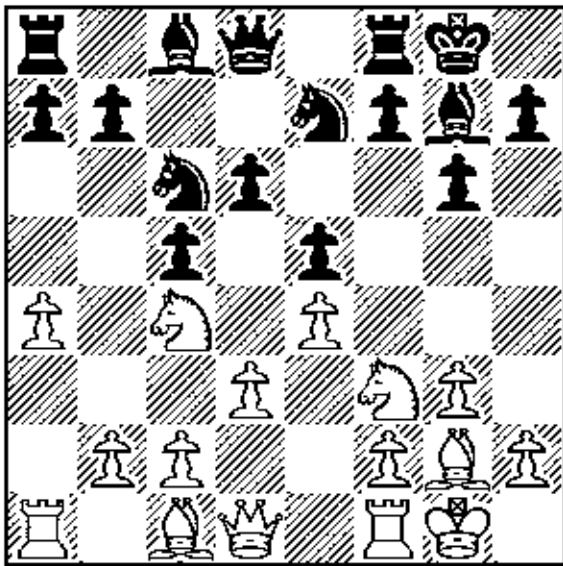
J.Markos-C.Horvath, Hungarian League 2014.

3 ... Nc6 4 g3 g6 5 Bg2 Bg7 6 0-0 e5

Once again I favour the Reversed Botvinnik English Structure, over 6 ... Nf6 and 6 ... e6.

7 c3

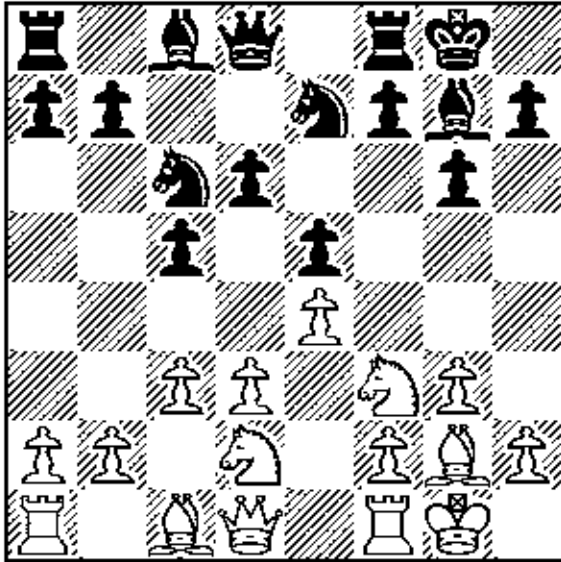
7 Nbd2 Nge7 usually just transposes, unless White goes for the plan 8 a4 0-0 9 Nc4.



Question: What *is* White's plan here?

Answer: It beats me! When I was a kid, I was so entranced by Fischer's KIA games, that I took up the opening myself, taking the almost unprecedented step of buying a book on the opening. The writer (I forgot who wrote the book) suggested the plan a4 and Nc4 in such structures. I remember asking myself: "And then what should White do?". The writer didn't answer the question, and to this day, I don't see a plan for White, except to wait for Black's intent. Black can play for both ... f5 and ... d5. The ... f5 break looks more logical to me, since it keeps White's knights without a purpose on their squares. For example, 9 ... f5 10 c3 h6 (White is zero for five after this move, although I would consider the immediate 10 ... f4) 11 exf5 gxf5 12 Nh4 d5 13 Ne3 f4 14 Nc2 Be6. Black controls the centre and should have an edge, despite *Houdini's* near equal evaluation, P.Oreskovic-D.Feletar, Osijek 2008.

7 ... Nge7 8 Nbd2 0-0



9 Nh4

White plays for f4. White's other plan in this position is to annex queenside space with a3 and b4, i.e. 9 a3 h6.

Question: Why not halt White's intent with 9 ... a5?

Answer: Your idea is playable. Still, I would avoid ... a5 here, since White then shifts plans with 10 a4! which creates new holes in Black's position, on b5 and c4. 10 ... h6 11 Nc4 Be6 12 Nfd2 f5 was M.Brooks-C.Van Buskirk, Los Angeles 1998, where White stands at least equal after 13 Ne3 f4 14 Nd5 g5 15 Nc4. Black's kingside attacking ambitions are hampered by White's queenside and central pressure caused by his knights

Following 9 ... h6 10 b4 Be6 11 Bb2 b6 12 Nc4 b5!? 13 Ne3 cxb4 14 axb4 a5 15 bxa5 Rxa5 16 d4, B.Amin-B.Gelfand, Almaty (blitz) 2008, the game is approximately even after 16 ... exd4 17 cxd4 d5 18 e5 Rxa1 19 Qxa1 Qb6.

9 ... Kh8

The king removes himself from the sensitive a2-g8 diagonal, evading potential queen checks on b3, while also making room for his bishop on g8, after ... f5 and ... Be6. Instead, 9 ... Be6 10 f4 exf4 11 gxf4 f5 12 Ndf3 Kh8 13 Ng5 Bg8 14 Be3 transposes to the game continuation.

10 f4 f5

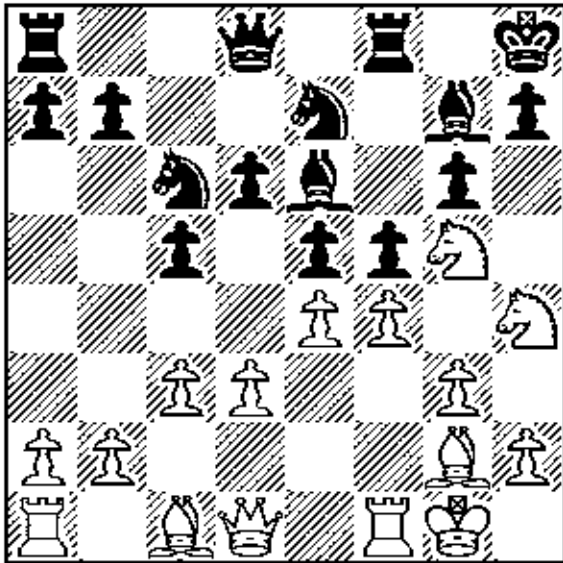
Black can also hand White the immediate hanging pawns after 10 ... exf4 11 gxf4 f5 12 Ndf3, as in B.Amin-S.Zhigalko, Martuni 2008. In this position, I like the unplayed, Morozevich-like move 12 ... Qb6!?, threatening to disrupt with ... c4+. The queen move clears the way for a future ... Rae8, and intends ... Qa6, pressuring d3. After 13 Kh1

Bd7 14 Ng5 Rae8 I prefer Black's position.

11 Ndf3

11 Nc4 Be6 12 Ne3 Qd7 13 Nd5 and four moves is a lot of time to get a knight to d5, A.Nascimento-P.Arrata, Lucerne Olympiad 1982. I prefer Black's game after 13 ... fxe4 14 dxe4 exf4 15 gxf4 Rae8.

11 ... Be6 12 Ng5



The knight pulls off his solo-attack performance to a capacity audience.

Question: What is the point of such a move, if Black regains the tempo later on with ... h6?

Answer: I think White plays the move to provoke ... h6, which weakens the g6-square and Black's king in general.

12 ... Bg8

Now we see one of Black's points for his earlier ... Kh8. The g8-bishop adds a defender to his king.

13 Be3

This move is new, in place of 13 exf5:

a) 13 ... gxf5 14 fxe5 dxe5 15 Bh3 (White applies pressure to the f5-pawn) 15 ... c4 16 Nxf5 Nxf5 17 Bxf5 Qb6+ 18 Kg2 h6 19 Be4 (19 Ne4 Ne7 20 Bg4 Rfd8 favours Black) 19 ... Rxf1 20 Qxf1 hxg5 21 Qe2 (threatening a nasty check on h5) 21 ... Na5 22 Bxg5 and White has compensation for the piece.

b) 13 ... Nxf5 (Black's safer route) 14 Nxf5 Rxf5 15 Bh3, V.Ciocaltea-B.Brinck Claussen, Lugano 1968. Now Black should cover the e6 invasion point with 15 ... Rf6 16 Ne4 Rf8 17 f5 gxf5 18 Bxf5 c4 19 dxc4 Bxc4 20 Qh5 Qb6+ 21 Rf2 Bg8 22 g4 Ne7

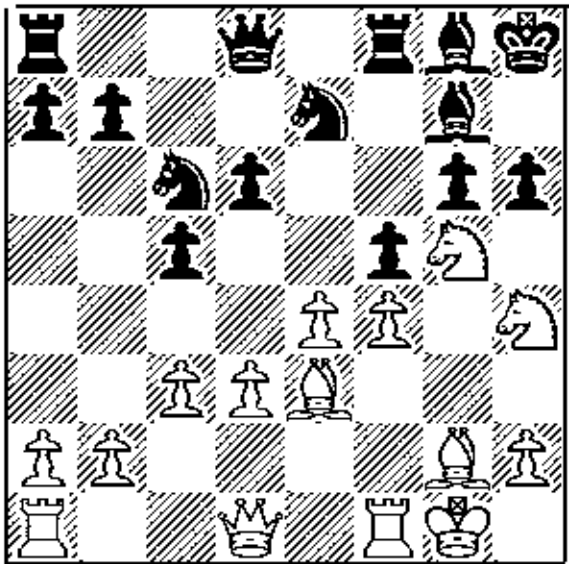
23 Ng3. The position is probably dynamically balanced.

13 ... exf4 14 gxf4

GM (IM at the time of the game, though) Bassem Amin, one of the world's leading KIA practitioners, wants to make a fight of it, accepting hanging pawns. Safer is 14 Bxf4 Qb6 15 exf5 Nxf5 16 Nxf5 Rxf5 17 Qd2 Ne5 18 Rae1 Re8! with about even chances. The naive attempt to exploit the 'pinned' e5-knight with 19 d4?? fails miserably to 19 ... cxd4 20 cxd4 Nc4 21 Qc2 Rxe1 22 Rxe1 Bxd4+ 23 Kh1 Ne3 24 Bxe3 Bxe3 25 Nf3 d5 when Black has a dominating position and an extra, passed d-pawn.

14 ... h6

0



15 exf5!?

Amin is the first to initiate violence, rejecting 15 Ngf3 Kh7 which looks about even.

15 ... Rxf5!?

In a raging battlefield, my guess is that only one soldier out of five actually wants to be there. Black's f5-rook is that one in five anomaly. This artificial move should hand White an edge.

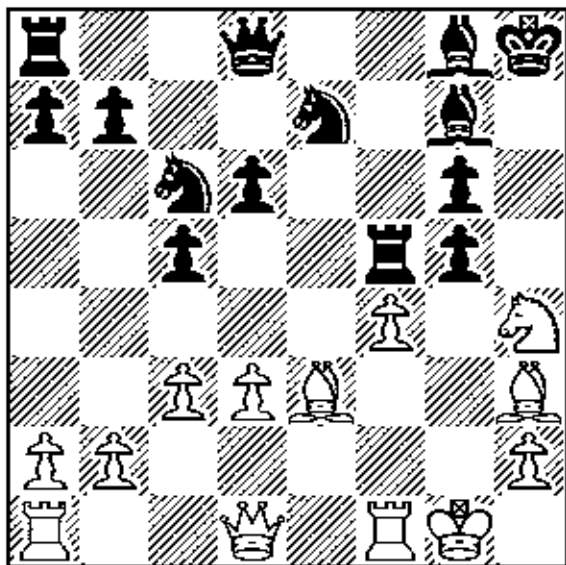
Acceptance of the piece offer is out of the question. If 15 ... hxf5?? 16 Nxf6+ Nxf6 (16 ... Kh7 17 Qh5+ Bh6 18 fxf5 forces mate) 17 Qh5+ Bh7 18 fxf6 ends the game, but Black's safest line is 15 ... gxf5. This move eases the position's mood, like a light-dimmer switch turned to barely visible illumination. After 16 Qh5 (if White attempts to keep queens on the board, he stands worse after 16 Ngf3 Bf6 17 Kh1 Bd5 18 Qd2 Rg8 19 Rg1 Qd7 as Black's pieces are more actively posted) 16 ... Qe8 17 Qxe8 Rxe8 18 Ngf3 Kh7 I feel like Black stands a shade better in the ending, since White's aggressively posted kingside pieces don't make much sense anymore.

16 Bh3!?

Neither side backs down. After gathering all necessary strategic necessities, we can launch our attack with a clean conscience, and with the certitude that right is on our side. However, I'm not so sure this position qualifies as one of those moments! Amin decides to probe his initiative/attack to its furthest depths. Some players are constitutionally incapable of holding back, once they spot an idea – even a risky one. Such positions affect them the way catnip acts on your cat. Sometimes I feel like GMs play chess at a natural disadvantage, since their surplus of talent demands a creative outcome – whether the position approves of it or not.

Instead, 16 Nxf5?! looks a shade unsound after 16 ... Nxf5 17 Qf3 hxd5 18 Qh3+ Bh7 19 fxd5 Ne5. Black's king is safe and his two minor pieces look better than White's rook and pawn. However, in this case the simple route is the best one. Black's extravagant f5-rook recapture is best punished by ignoring it: 16 Ne4! Rf8 17 Qg4 Bh7 18 Rael b6 19 Bd2 d5 20 Ng3. Troubled currents run just below the still surface. Black's king looks slightly uncomfortable and his pieces are on the defensive after 20 ... Rf6.

16 ... hxd5



Exercise (combination alert): The position resembles one of those early Picasso cubist paintings, with no single point of reference – except for the f5-rook. What is White's best continuation of his kingside attack?

Answer: Undermining.

17 Nxf6+!

This move gives White full compensation for the material sacrificed as the game turns into a battle of savagery versus savagery.

Incorrect is 17 Nxf5?. Now White's sacrifice is as bogus as that time my wife forced me to watch *The Wizard of Oz*, describing it as a "Sci-fi movie". After 17 ... Nxf5 18 Bxf5 gxf5 19 fxg5 Qe8 20 Qf3 Bh7 21 Bf4 Rd8 22 Rae1 Qf7 White's attack is at an end. Black has two minor pieces versus rook and pawn, and his control over the light squares gives him a clear advantage.

17 ... Nxe6 18 Bxf5 Nce7

Black wisely recruits a new defender to assist his g6-knight, and more importantly, his king.

19 Be4 gxf4

More accurate is 19 ... d5! which lightens the defensive load: 20 Qh5+ Bh7 21 Bg2 Nf5 22 Bd2 Nxf4 23 Bxf4 gxf4 24 Rxf4 Ne3 25 Re1 Nxe2 26 Kxe2. Black stands no worse, since he managed to remove a few potential attackers from the board, and his king looks a tad safer than in the version he got in the game's continuation.

20 Qh5+ Bh7 21 Rxf4!

Amin utilizes the g6 pin to add yet another attacker. Now Black's position is under pressure.

21 ... Qg8 22 Rg4 d5!

Just because an opponent is baffled, doesn't automatically mean that he is defeated, as well. Principle: *Meet a wing attack with a central counter*.

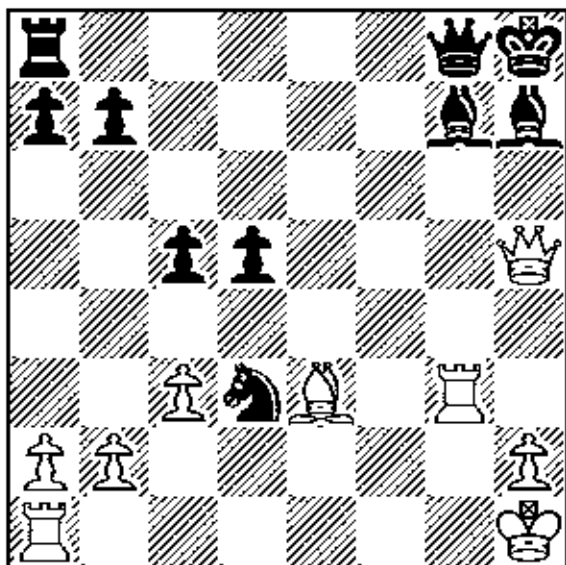
23 Bxe6!?

The never-back-down mindset continues. I would invest a tempo to keep control over the light squares with 23 Bg2! Ne5 24 Rh4 when White exerts pressure.

23 ... Nxe6 24 Kh1?!

He pushes it too far. White should pause to take an important pawn with 24 Bxc5, which clears the way for Bd4, after which he doesn't stand worse.

24 ... Ne5 25 Rg3 Nxd3!



When our opponent calmly ignores our threats and brazenly grabs such a pawn from us, we consider the theft an act of vile criminality of the lowest order. Gashimov ignores White's threats of Bh6 and also Rag1, as his knight exerts his authority to impound the d3-pawn. Now White must be on alert for any check along the h1-a8 diagonal. Black remains unscathed, while White suffers the normal wear and tear of an attack slightly gone astray.

Black's move is much stronger than 25 ... Qe8?! 26 Qh3 d4 27 cxd4 Qc6+ 28 Kg1 Nxd3 29 Rf1!. Now 29 ... cxd4 is met with 30 Qg4 Qc7 31 Bxd4 Be5 32 Qh4! (threat: Qf6+!) 32 ... Rg8 33 Bxe5+ Nxe5 34 Qf6+ Rg7 35 Qf8+ Bg8 36 Rxg7 Qxg7+ 37 Qxg7+ Kxg7 38 b3 when White's rook and pawn fully compensate Black's two minor pieces.

26 Rh3

One of several possibilities:

a) 26 Rf1 Rf8 27 Rxf8 Qxf8 28 Rxg7 Qxg7 29 Bxc5. It looks like White is getting somewhere. After all Bd4 is threatened, and Black is unable to play ... Kg8. However he has access to a simplification trick with the shocking 29 ... Qg2+! 30 Kxg2 Nf4+ 31 Kf3 Nxh5 32 Bxa7 Kg7. Black has all the winning chances in the ending.

b) The seemingly winning 26 Rag1?? loses to the unpinning trick 26 ... Qe8! 27 Qxe8+ Rxe8 when White is hopelessly busted, since 28 Rxg7 is met with 28 ... Be4+ 29 R1g2 Bxg2+ 30 Rxg2 Rxe3, winning.

c) 26 Bh6? fails to 26 ... Bxh6! 27 Qxh6 (after 27 Rxg8+?? Rxg8 Black threatens mates on e4 and also f2, to which there is no good defence) 27 ... Qf8 28 Qh5 Qf5 29 Qh6 Nf2+ 30 Kg1 Ng4 31 Qd2 Rg8. Black defended successfully and should convert.

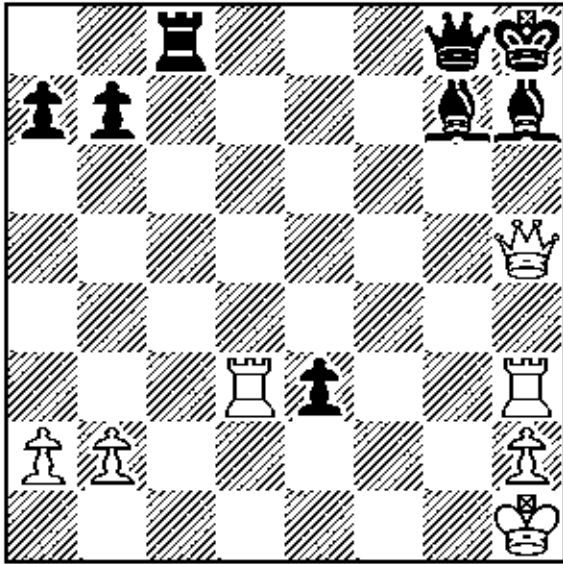
26 ... d4!

Attacking White's bishop, who watches over the f2 fork square.

27 cxd4 cxd4 28 Rd1

White's only move.

28 ... dxe3 29 Rxd3 Rc8



Black uses the lull to threaten White's back rank.

30 Rdxex3 Bd4! 31 Re1

White must cover his first rank, and not 31 Reg3?? when Black forces mate with 31 ... Rc1+ 32 Kg2 Rg1+ 33 Kf3 Qf8+ 34 Kg4 Qc8+ 35 Kf4 Qc7+ 36 Kg4 Qd7+ 37 Kh4 (or 37 Kf3 Qc6+ 38 Kf4 Qe4+ 39 Kg5 Qf5+ 40 Kh4 Bf6+ 41 Qg5 Bxg5+ 42 Rxd5 Qxg5 mate) 37 ... Bf6+ and game over.

31 ... Bxb2?!

Black doesn't have time for this pawn grab. He has good chances to consolidate after 31 ... Rf8! 32 b3 Qg7.

32 Rg1?!

White misses a chance to split the point with 32 Qb5! Bc3 33 Re7 Bg7 34 Rxh7+! Qxh7 35 Re8+ Rxe8 36 Qxe8+ Qg8 37 Qh5+ Qh7 38 Qe8+ with perpetual check.

32 ... Bg7 33 Rhg3 Rc7

Everyone is covered and Black now can slowly try and create a passed pawn on the queenside.

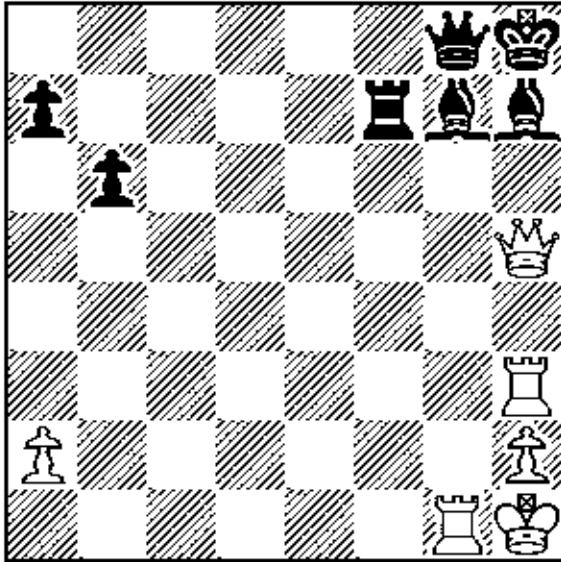
34 Re3

Threatening a cheapo on e8.

34 ... Rf7 35 Rh3

White has no way to make progress and can only wait.

35 ... b6!



The greater Black's grip on the light squares, the more acute White's pain. Black threatens a sneaky little mating attack, starting with ... Qa8+!.

36 Qd5

Amin covers the long diagonal.

36 ... Qe8 37 Rh4

One of those just-in-case moves. Black wasn't yet threatening ... Be4+.

37 ... Re7 38 Qg2 Bf6! 39 Rf4

The embarrassed rook's mucousy cough is nothing short of a bronchial white flag of surrender. This allows ... Be4. However, White is unable to save himself in the line 39 Rh3 Rg7! 40 Qf3 Rxc1+ 41 Kxc1 Qg6+ 42 Kf2 Qc2+ 43 Qe2 Bd4+ 44 Kf3 Qc6+ 45 Kg4 Bf6 46 Kg3 Kg7. Black slowly unravels and wins.

39 ... Be4 40 Rxe4 Rxe4

The all-clear signal sounds, and the remainder is easy for Black.

41 Qf3 Bg7 42 Qh3+ Kg8 0-1

Summary: Play a Botvinnik-style structure against White's KIA, and we get dynamic equality, no matter how White plays it. One note: be aware of White's attempt to play the Clamp (without f4), with the 3 g3 move order. Our answer is to head for a favourable Benoni structure.

Game 26

R.Calvo Minguez-A.Karpov

Madrid 1973

1 e4 c5

As a French player, I reach our position from the following move order: 1 ... e6 2

d3 d5 3 Nd2 c5 4 Ngf3 Nc6 5 g3 Bd6.

2 Nf3 e6 3 d3

“Psychologically speaking, already the losing move,” wrote GM Edmar Mednis, in a wee bit of an overstatement. He claimed that IM Calvo, an attacking player, had no chance against the then world champion Karpov, one of the greatest strategists of all time, in a King’s Indian Attack. Of course this is untrue, and Mednis’ statement was certainly influenced by the outcome of the game.

The KIA offers White all kinds of tactical chances, as we will see in this chapter, but I do agree with Mednis in a sense, in that Calvo was rather unfamiliar with the line and should probably have stuck with his normal Open Sicilian lines – even if Karpov was a near-certainty to have out-booked him. When we veer from our normal lines, we travel an unknown road in a foreign country. We don’t know what lies ahead, except for the certainty of surprises.

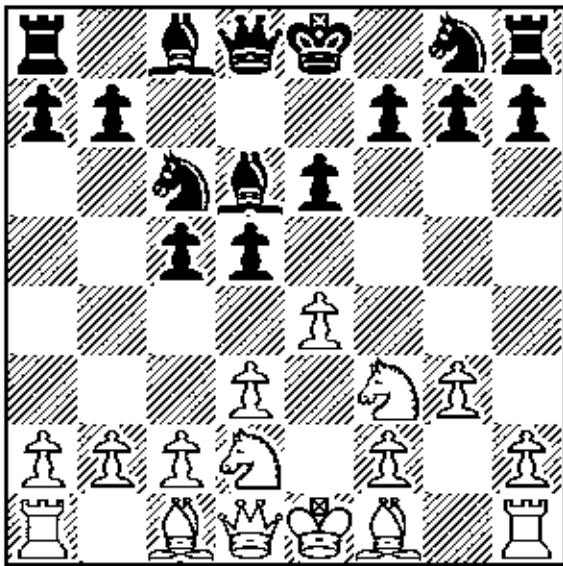
3 ... Nc6 4 g3

In the final game of the chapter we look at versions involving an early 4 Qe2.

4 ... d5 5 Nbd2

5 Qe2 would mess up our intended set-up. We deal with this problem in a later game in the chapter.

5 ... Bd6



I was so struck by Karpov’s play in this game that I began playing this system from then on (although, usually from a French Defence move order).

Question: What is Black’s idea?

Answer: Black’s set-up is designed to frustrate White’s intended e5 push, where

we pile up force on e5, with ... Nge7, (sometimes) ... Qc7, and ... f6 later on. It's one of Black's highest scoring lines, where White is just below the 50% mark.

6 Bg2 Nge7

This move avoids fork possibilities by avoiding ... Nf6, while also opening the idea of ... f6, to frustrate White's attempts to force through the e5 break.

7 0-0 0-0 8 Re1

We look at White's alternative plan 8 Nh4 in the game after next.

8 ... Qc7

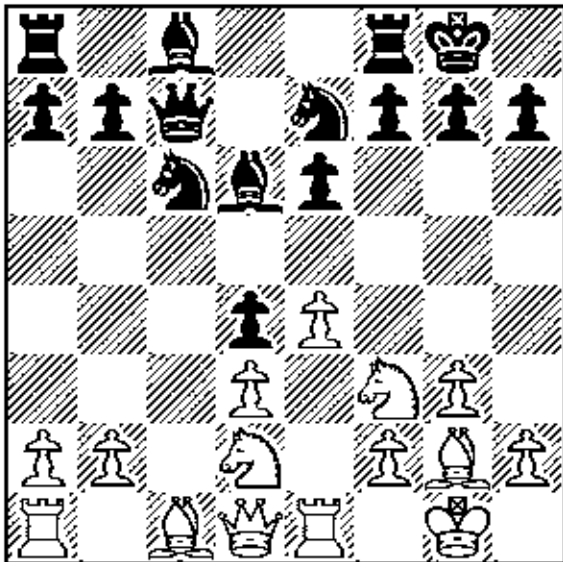
Black continues his plan to add maximum force to the e5-square. Next game we look at the more flexible 8 ... Bc7.

Instead, with 8 ... f6 Black prepares to switch to a reversed King's Indian position with ... d4 next: 9 exd5 (this exchange is considered White's most active plan) 9 ... exd5 10 d4 c4 11 Nf1 b5 (Black consolidates this c4 point, before White chips away at it with b3) 12 Ne3 was C.Maier-A.Strikovc, La Roda 2015. The position is approximately balanced after 12 ... Rb8 13 Nh4 Bc7, although stylistically, I like Black's queenside space.

9 b3!?

This plan presages trouble on the queenside dark squares and isn't so great for White (although I see it played quite often at the club level today), since he prepares to fianchetto his bishop into a pawn wall on d4. White has a superior alternative in 9 c3:

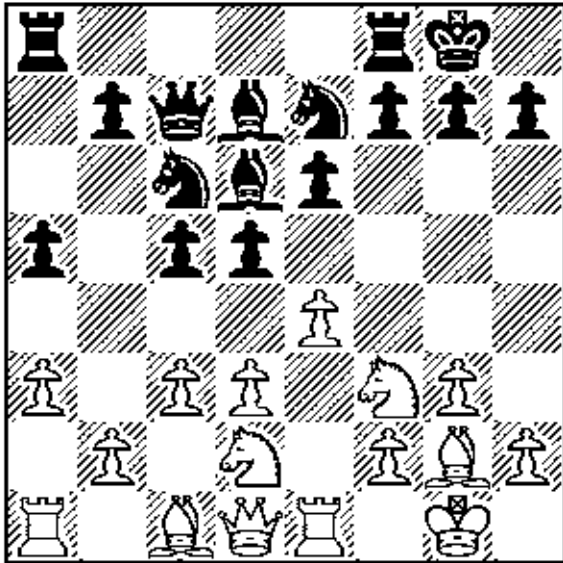
a) 9 ... d4 10 cxd4 cxd4 and we reach a reversed King's Indian position, where Black's queen and White's e1-rook are misplaced.



Question: I understand that Black's queen is misplaced, since she sits on the open c-file, but why is White's e1-rook misplaced?

Answer: Black will soon play ... e5. This means White needs an f4 break, with his rook required on f1, not e1. After 11 a3 e5 12 b4 b5 13 Nb3 f6 14 Bd2 Be6 15 Nh4 Rac8 (15 ... Qd7 16 f4 Bf7 17 Rc1 a5 18 Nc5 Bxc5 19 Rxc5 exf4 20 gxf4 axb4 21 axb4 Ra2 is assessed at dead even by the comp) 16 Rc1, B.Amin-K.Wageih, Tripoli 2009, the game looks approximately balanced following 16 ... Qd7 17 Nc5 Bxc5 18 Rxc5 Nb8! 19 Rxc8 Rxc8 20 f4 Qd6 21 Nf3 Nd7.

b) 9 ... Bd7 10 a3 a5 is another way of handling the black position.



Question: Wait a minute. In a note last game, you said you would avoid this move, due to a4, when White plays for the newly created hold on b5. What changed?

Answer: This position is different:

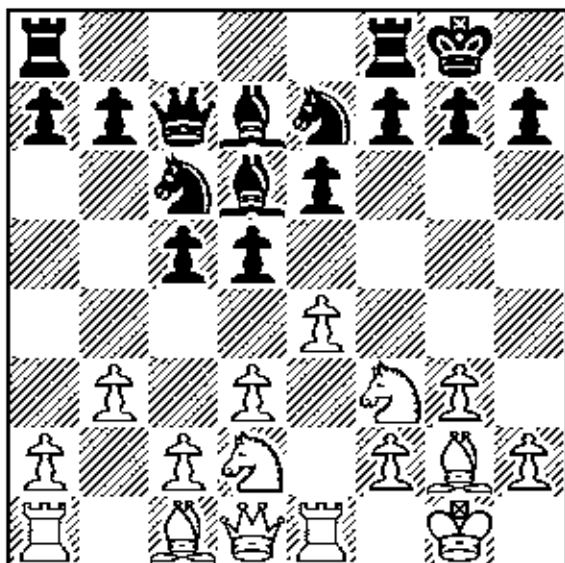
1. First, in the other position, White's knight was still on b1, which meant he had easy access to Na3 and Nb5. In this case, White's d2-knight would have to retreat to b1 to get to b5 – a loss of two full tempi (Nd2 and then Nb1).

2. In the other position, White had control over c4. In this case he doesn't.

3. In this position Black's d7-bishop can challenge White's control over b5.

After 11 a4 Rad8 12 Nb1 f6 13 Na3 Na7 14 Qb3 Kh8 15 Bd2 b6 White didn't get any mileage out of his b5 hole and the game is approximately even, H.Doeres-Z.Ribli, German League 2012.

9 ... Bd7



10 Bb2

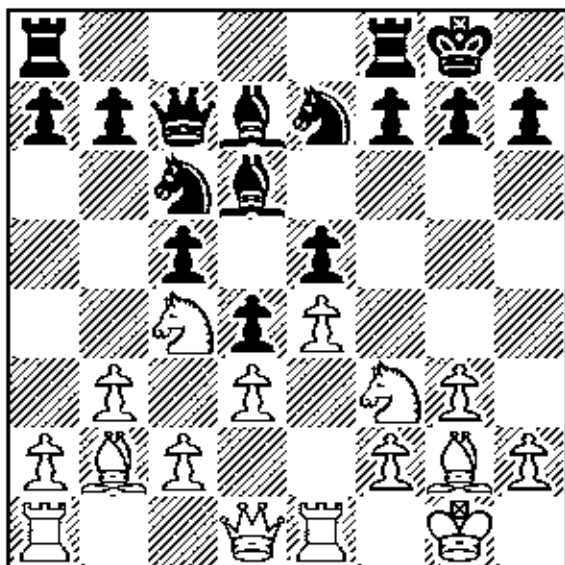
Question: Can White temporarily sacrifice a pawn to activate his pieces with 10 exd5 exd5 11 d4?

Answer: I'm not so sure about your "temporary" label. It looks to me like Black just hangs on to the extra pawn after 11 ... cxd4 12 Bb2 Qb6 13 Nf1 Bc5, and if 14 a3 a5 15 Qd2 Rae8 16 Rad1 Nf5 17 h3 Re6 18 g4 (this fails to regain the pawn) 18 ... Nd6 19 Rxe6 fxe6 20 Nxd4 Nc4! 21 bxc4 Qxb2 which leaves White busted.

10 ... d4

This move gains space and snuffs out the b2-bishop's influence. After 10 ... f6 11 exd5 exd5 12 c4 Nb4 13 Nf1 d4 (blunting White's b2-bishop's scope) 14 a3 Nbc6 15 N1d2 Ng6 16 b4 b6 17 b5 Na5 18 Ne4 Be7 19 Bc1 Rae8 20 h3 Qc8 21 Kh2 f5 22 Ned2 Qc7 23 Nf1 h6 Black stands a shade better due to his threatening posture over White's kingside, Y.Balashov-V.Shtyrenkov, Smolensk 1991.

11 Nc4 e5



Mednis, by this point in the game, awarded Karpov three exclams, for some rather obvious moves. Black achieved equality and then some, in a reversed KID position.

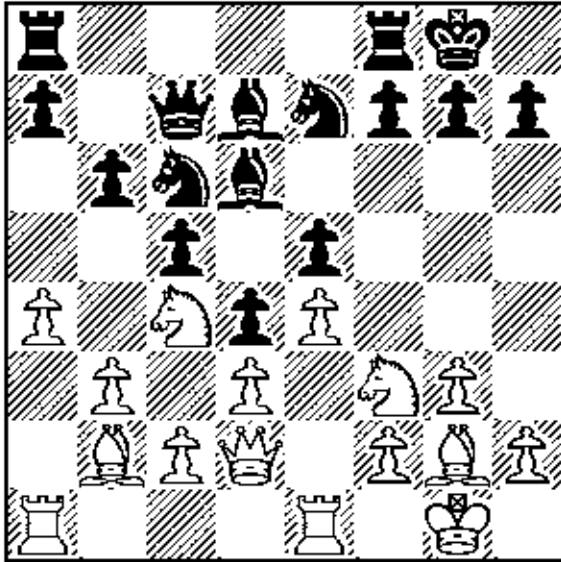
Question: What about the fact that White can win the bishop-pair?

Answer: I'm not sure the bishop-pair is such a great prize in this position, since it's Black's bad bishop, and the game for now is closed, so Black's knights easily hold their own.

12 a4?!

I don't like this move, which renders White's play starchy and stiff. He should take immediate action with 12 c3 b5 13 Nxd6 Qxd6 14 cxd4 cxd4 15 Nh4 Rac8 16 Rf1 (as mentioned in a note above, White's rook is misplaced on e1 when the game turns into a reversed KID) 16 ... Nb4! 17 f4 (if 17 a3 Nc2 and White must give up his a-pawn, since 18 Ra2? is met strongly with 18 ... Be6) 17 ... f6 18 fxe5 fxe5 19 Rxf8+ Rxf8 20 a3 Nbc6. The players agreed to a draw in this approximately even position, B.Khatanbaatar-J.Sequera Paolini, Bled Olympiad 2002.

12 ... b6 13 Qd2



We arrive at theory's end around here. Black achieved an excellent reversed KID position for the following reasons:

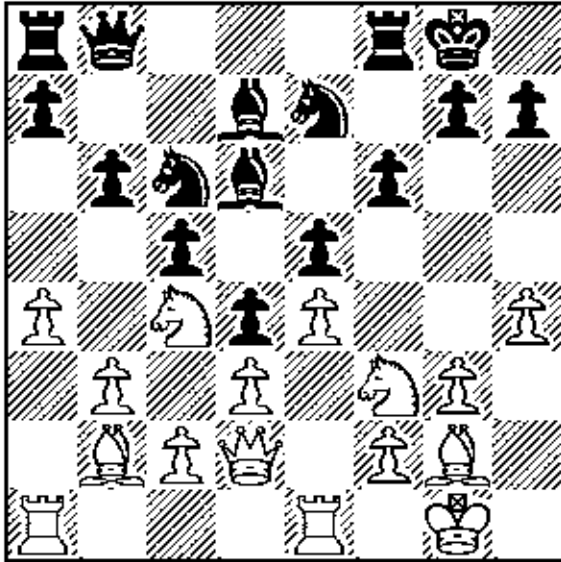
1. White's b2-bishop is obviously misplaced, since it stares at a wall on d4.
2. White's rook belongs on f1, rather than e1.
3. Black has access to quick queenside play with ... a6 and ... b5.
4. In some cases, as in this game, Black can go for a direct attack on White's king with an ... f5 break.

Instead, 13 Nh4 a6 14 Qh5 b5 (14 ... f6! 15 Nf5 g6 16 Nh6+ Kg7 17 Qh4 Nb4 18 Re2 b5 19 Nxd6 Qxd6 favours Black, since the opening of the a-file leads to infiltration, while 20 a5 dooms the artificially isolated a-pawn, eventually) 15 Nxd6 Qxd6 16 Nf5 Nxf5 17 exf5 bxa4 18 Rxa4 Nb4 19 Bxa8?! (White should be okay after the correct 19 Ra5! Bc6 20 Re2 f6) 19 ... Bxa4 was M.Tonnicchi-D.Schmidt, correspondence 1999. My database has White resigning here, when the position is still close to even after 20 Be4 Nxc2 21 bxa4! Nxe1 22 Ba3 when Qe2 is coming and the knight is trapped. The game is unclear after 22 ... Nxd3 23 Bxd3 Rb8 24 Qf3.

13 ... f6 14 h4!?

This ambitious move is questionable, since it weakens White's king. It does, however, prevent ... g5 and also worries Black about future ideas like Kh2 and Bh3.

14 ... Qb8



Sigh. Mednis gives this move and Karpov's next three moves exclaims. In the 80's I was a book reviewer (and a very kindly one – not like some of the mean-spirited buggers who infest the chess world today!), and as I recall, a Mednis book was the only one which I reviewed slightly unfavourably, since he showered his favourite sons with undeserved exclams! I'm not so sure this move is so great. The idea is to provoke Nxd6. Alternatives:

a) 14 ... a6 15 a5! Nxa5 (not 15 ... b5?! 16 Nb6 Rab8 17 Nxd7, swapping away Black's best minor piece) 16 Nxa5 bxa5 17 Rxa5 Nc6 18 Raa1 a5, intending to pry open the queenside with an eventual ... a4.

b) 14 ... h6?! (the beginning of an incorrect plan) 15 Kh2 g5!? move halts the intended Bh3. White can now sac with 16 hxc5 hxc5 17 Nxc5! fxc5 18 Qxc5+ Kf7 19 Bf3 Ke8 20 Qh6 (threatening d6) 20 ... Nc8 21 Bh5+ Kd8 22 Bc1! Qb8 23 Bg5+ Kc7 24 f4 when I think White's attack and two pawns are worth more than Black's extra piece.

15 Ba3?!

A violation of the principle: *The cramped side should seek exchanges*. I think he should take the bad bishop and hope to open the position later on, with 15 Nxd6.

15 ... Bc7

Following the above principle.

16 Reb1

I think this may be another violation of principle: *Don't play on the opponent's strong wing*. Black has a space advantage on the queenside. Therefore White should think about something like 16 h5 a6 (threat: ... b5 and ... b4, winning a piece) 17 Qe2 Bg4 18 h6 g6 19 Kh2 b5 20 Ncd2, although Black stands clearly better here as well.

16 ... Be6 17 Kh2

Intending Kh2.

17 ... Qc8

Preventing Bh3.

18 Qe2?!

A waste of time. Nobody can claim this game represents a clash of elemental passions. White is trying to out-Karpov, Karpov, which isn't so easy to do. Maybe White should go into desperation mode and strike out with the anti-positional 18 b4!? cxb4 19 Bxb4 Nxb4 20 Qxb4 Nc6 21 Qb5 with an inferior position, but also some possibility of play on the queenside.

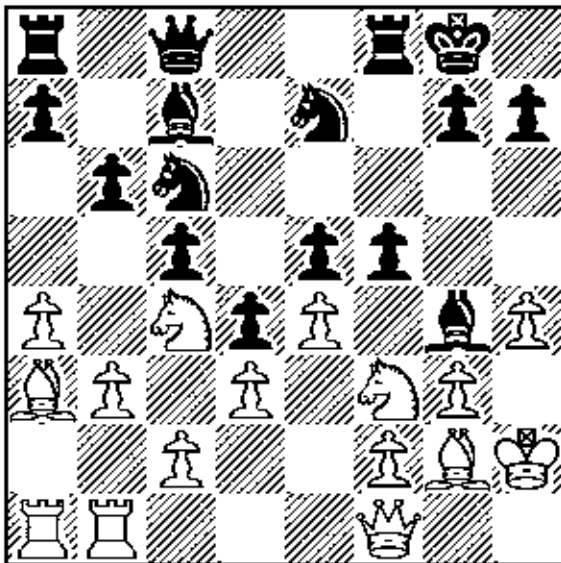
18 ... Bg4!

Intending ... f5.

19 Qf1?!

If we are going to worry and expend tremendous amounts of energy on a project, then make certain it is something worthwhile. This pretzel-like move, keeping the queen on the soon-to-open f-file, basically tells the opponent: "Here I am. Come and get me." White should just admit his last move wasn't so great, and get out of the pin and off the f-file with 19 Qd2 f5.

19 ... f5



One sec. Let me check if Mednis gave this completely natural move an exclamation ... Hi, I'm back. Yes, he did give it an exclamation. Petrosian once wrote that he often experienced hesitation taking action when in a superior position, since he wanted to prolong his edge ad infinitum, without altering the landscape and risking change. I consider Karpov kind of a super-Petrosian, who not only had Petrosian's strategic power of bleeding the opponent's position dry of dynamism, but also proactively took action when needed.

20 Ncd2

20 exf5 hangs a pawn to 20 ... Qxf5 21 Ng5 Qxf2.

20 ... f4!

Karpov goes for strangulation.

21 Bh3 h5!

Now White can't afford to swap away his bad bishop.

22 Qg2 Ng6

Pieces continue to congregate around White's king.

23 Ng5

This move just loses time. I think White has to try something, anything, or he risks slow death on the kingside. I would once again try 23 b4.

23 ... Bd8 24 Ngf3

After 24 Ndf3 Nb4 25 Rb2 Qd7 Black can slowly prepare to double rooks on the f-file.

24 ... Be7

Clamping down on b4 desperadoes.

25 Rg1 Qe6 26 Raf1 Rf7 27 Rh1 Raf8 28 Kg1 Qd6 29 Kh2 a6!

Principle: *When you tie an opponent down on one side, open up a second front, where the unprepared defenders experience difficulty coordinating.*

30 Kg1 Rf6 31 Bxg4!?

Gulp! Don't toss a bucket of chum into the ocean, if you don't want to attract sharks. Believe it or not, this strategically hideous move may not be worse than his alternatives, of which he has none. White should probably just shuffle, although his odds of saving the game there are close to nil, against a squeezer of Karpov's calibre. One example of a fatal do-nothing strategy: 31 Rh2 Qd8 32 Rh1 c4! (this temporary pawn sacrifice allows Black's queen entry to the queenside) 33 Bxe7 Qxe7 34 bxc4 Qb4 35 Kh2 Qc3 c2 falls and White can resign.

31 ... hxg4 32 Ng5

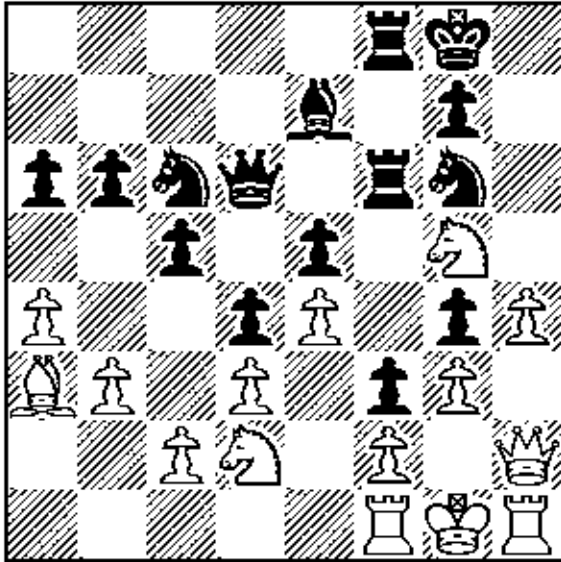
32 Ne1 f3 33 Qh2 b5 and Black simply wins on the queenside, since White is in essence, down a queen and two rooks on the kingside.

32 ... f3

Menace can take small shapes, as when the mail-carrier spots the belligerent Chihuahua in dangerous juxtaposition to his left ankle.

33 Qh2

"Have you no sense of mercy? Have you? Well, have you?" the queen asks the f3-pawn, who replies to all three questions with: "No, no, and no!". When we realize we are losing, but have no idea of how we got here, we are a man or woman, having to serve a life sentence for a hideous murder, but having no memory of the commission of the crime, since we were intoxicated at the time.



Exercise (planning/combination alert): The defence is held together by a porous membrane. Come up with a winning plan for Black to exploit White's sorry looking tangle on the kingside.

Answer: Clearance/pin. There is no good answer to ..Rh6 and ... Bxg5.

33 ... Nh8!

Nimzowitsch-approved.

34 Rc1

34 Nb1, intending Bc1, is met with 34 ... Nb4 35 Bc1 Nxc2 36 Bd2 Rh6 37 Rc1 Ne3! 38 fxe3 f2+ 39 Kf1 (or 39 Kg2 Bxg5) 39 ... dxe3 40 Bxe3 Qxd3+. The silent screaming inside the king's head renders his d3 sister's lecture virtually inaudible. White is slaughtered.

34 ... Rh6 35 Nc4 Qc7 0-1

White loses a piece.

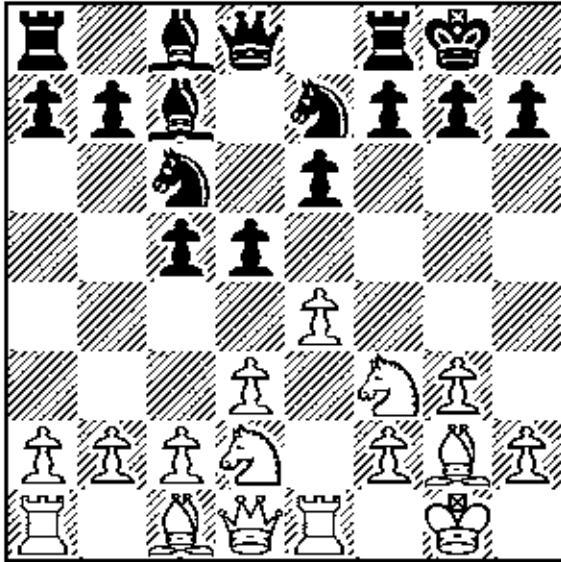
Summary: The ... Nc6, ... Bd6 and ... Nge7 plan is one of Black's most flexible (and in my opinion best) methods of meeting KIA.

Game 27

C.Maier-R.Kasimdzhhanov

European Club Cup, Rogaska Slatina 2011

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d3 Nc6 4 g3 d5 5 Nbd2 Bd6 6 Bg2 Nge7 7 0-0 0-0 8 Re1 Bc7



I think this move is slightly more flexible, but not necessarily better than 8 ... Qc7.

Question: What are the differences between 8 ... Qc7 and 8 ... Bc7?

Answer: Multipurpose:

1. With 8 ... Qc7, Black tries to prevent White from playing e5; with 8 ... Bc7, Black encourages e5, hoping that it overextends White.

2. 8 ... Bc7 allows Black's queen to protect d5, which is often White's target square in this line.

3. 8 ... Bc7 in a sense loses a tempo, since White hasn't used a move to chase the bishop away.

8 ... b6 is also playable here:

a) 9 e5 Bc7 10 c3 Ba6 (after 10 ... a5 11 Nf1 Ba6 12 h4 d4!? 13 c4 Qd7 14 N1h2 I don't like Black's position, since the queenside is somewhat closed and White can play for mate on the kingside, A.Sznepik-A.Karpov, Skopje 1972; 14 ... b5 can be met with 15 Ng5!, and if 15 ... bxc4?? 16 Qh5 h6 17 Ng4 gives White a winning attack) 11 d4 Bd3! (Black's king is far more secure with the help of his light-squared bishop, on the b1-h7 diagonal) 12 Nb3 was M.Dzhumaev-A.Graf, Yerevan 2001. I slightly prefer Black's game after 12 ... c4 since his queenside space is more meaningful than White's central space, if White is unable to threaten Black's king.

b) 9 c3 Bc7 (or 9 ... a5 10 a4 Ba6 11 exd5 exd5 12 Nb3 Qd7 13 d4, A.Strikov- J.Granda Zuniga, Las Palmas 2011; the game remains balanced after 13 ... h6 14 Be3 Qa7 15 Qd2 Rad8) 10 exd5 Nxd5 (perfectly playable is 10 ... exd5 11 d4 Rb8) 11 Nc4 Bb7 12 d4 cxd4 13 Nxd4 Rc8 14 Nxc6 Bxc6 15 Ne3 Ne7 and Black equalized in V.Klyuner-P.Nikolic, German League 2012.

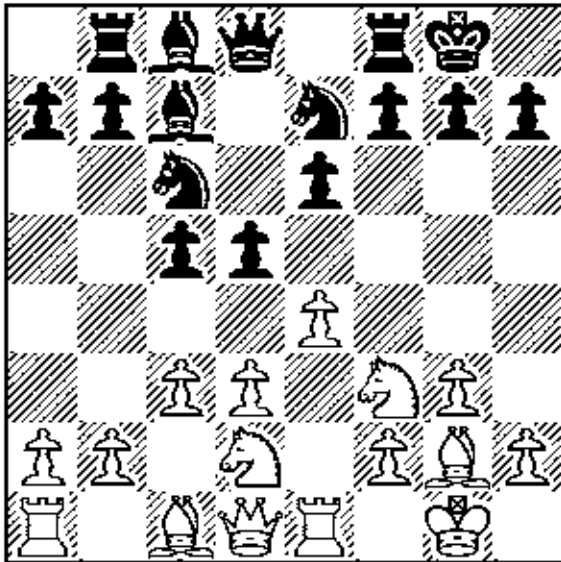
9 c3

After 9 exd5 Black can play for safe equality by recapture with the knight, or sharpen the game by recapture with the pawn:

a) 9 ... exd5 would be my choice: 10 d4 c4 (if you like isolani positions, then also possible is 10 ... cxd4 11 Nb3 Bg4 12 Nbx d4 Qd7) 11 Nf1 Rb8 (preparing to seize queenside space with ... b5 next) 12 h4 h6 13 N1h2 b5 14 h5 f5!? 15 Ne5 Nxe5 16 dxe5 d4 17 Bf4 Be6 18 Nf3 Bb6, P.Maruschenko-A.Galkin, Port Erin 2001. At this point the comp wants to force a draw with the line 19 Qd2 Nd5 20 Bxh6 gxh6 21 Qxh6 Nc7 22 Qg6+.

b) 9 ... Nxd5 10 Nb3 b6 11 c4 (White attempts to exploit his development lead by initiating confrontation) 11 ... Nde7 12 d4 Ba6! 13 dxc5 Bxc4 14 Be3 Bd5 and Black equalized, T.Warakomski-R.Edouard, Warsaw (rapid) 2012.

9 ... Rb8!?



Ambitious and slightly unusual.

Question: What is Black's idea?

Answer: Black isn't interested in stabilizing his position with ... b6. Instead, he plans to flood the queenside with pawns, starting with ... b5. Following 9 ... b6 10 a3!? (always be aware of White's c3, a3 and b4 expansion idea; in this case ... a5 is correct, since White's knight is far away from the b5-square) 10 ... a5 11 a4 Ba6 12 exd5 Nxd5 (this move gives up control over c4; 12 ... exd5 is also fully playable, and would be my choice) 13 Nc4 Qd7 14 Qe2 h6 15 Bd2 Rad8 16 Rad1 Nce7 (attacking a4) 17 b3 Nc6 18 Nfe5 Nxe5 19 Nxe5 Bxe5 20 Qxe5 Ne7 Black looks comfortable and stands no worse, H.Hamdouchi-R.Edouard, Pau 2012.

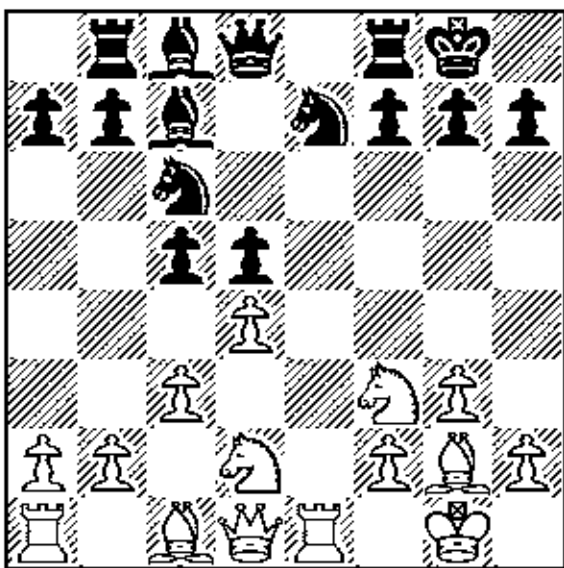
10 exd5

White seeks to create trouble in the centre to counter Black's queenside ambitions. White can also play to suppress ... b5 with 10 a4 b6 11 exd5 Nxd5 12 Ne4 Bb7 13 d4 cxd4 14 Nxd4 Nxd4 15 Qxd4 a6 16 Ng5. The players agreed to a draw in this even position, E.Miroshnichenko-V.Yemelin, Amman 2008.

10 ... exd5

The more ambitious recapture. Nobody has tried 10 ... Nxd5 and White may be able to extract the tiniest of edges after 11 Nb3 b6 12 d4 c4 13 Nbd2 b5 14 Ne4 h6. I'm not really sure if White's control over c5 means anything, and Black's position looks perfectly playable.

11 d4



A new move, and a probable improvement over 11 Nb3 b6 12 d4 c4 13 Nbd2 (White lost two moves with Nb3 and Nbd2) 13 ... b5 14 Nf1 b4, U.Kersten-T.Luther, Gladenbach 1997. Black looks a shade better, due to his queenside space, after 15 Ne3 h6 16 Bd2 Be6.

11 ... cxd4

11 ... c4 doesn't make as much sense here, since White didn't lose the two tempi to stabilize the centre with Nb3 and Nd2, as in the Kersten-Luther note from just above. Following 12 b3 b5 13 a4 a6 14 Ba3 Bd6 15 Bxd6 Qxd6 16 axb5 axb5 17 b4 White looks a shade better, since his pawns are on the opposite colour to his remaining bishop.

However, 11 ... b6 would be my choice, to retain the central tension, and after 12 a3 a5 13 Nf1 h6 14 Ne3 Be6 the game is dynamically balanced.

12 cxd4

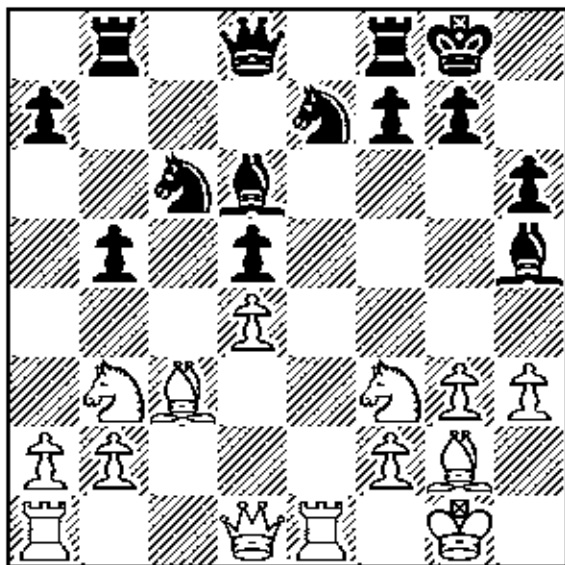
White keeps pieces on the board. If 12 Nxd4 Nxd4 13 cxd4 Be6 14 Nf3 Rc8 and

White gets nothing from the opening, although the line is fine if White is playing for a draw.

12 ... Bg4

Hoping to provoke a weakness with h3.

13 h3 Bh5 14 Nb3 h6 15 Bd2 Bd6 16 Bc3 b5!?



Kasimdzhannov opens an alternative insight avenue to the position's norm, with a risky/dynamic decision, where Black is willing to weaken c5 if he can gain queenside space and disrupt with ... a5, ... b4 and ... a4, which in turn destabilizes d4. Instead, 16 ... b6 is even, and probably the move your safety-first-minded writer would play.

17 g4!?

White places his fortunes to the test, with a risky undertaking, rather than:

a) 17 Rc1 a5 pretty much forces White into 18 g4.

b) 17 a4! may be the best method of disrupting Black's plan, and if 17 ... b4 18 Bd2.

At least now Black doesn't have ... a5 and ... a4, chasing away the b3-knight.

17 ... Bg6 18 Ne5 Bh7?!

Kasimdzhannov, a normally ardent attacker, decides upon a meek response and tips the balance in his opponent's favour, in what is otherwise an evenly matched contest. I don't think Nxg6 is a threat, so Black's last move is in effect the loss of a tempo. Better to play 18 ... Rc8! 19 Rc1 (if 19 Nxg6!? Nxg6! and now White should avoid 20 Bxd5? Bh2+ 21 Kxh2 Qxd5 22 Re3 f5 which offers Black a strong attack for the pawn) 19 ... a5 20 a3 b4 21 axb4 Nxb4 when ... Na2 is in the air, and Black doesn't stand worse.

19 Rc1 Kh8 20 Qf3!?

This begs for Black's next move, although I think the complications are still in White's favour.

20 ... f5

Black hopes his f-pawn is the power generator which lights up his kingside attacking chances.

21 Nxc6

White secures a clear advantage by closing lines with 21 g5! hxg5 22 Qh5. Black is unable to hang on to his extra pawn and stands clearly worse, due to his multiple pawn weaknesses.

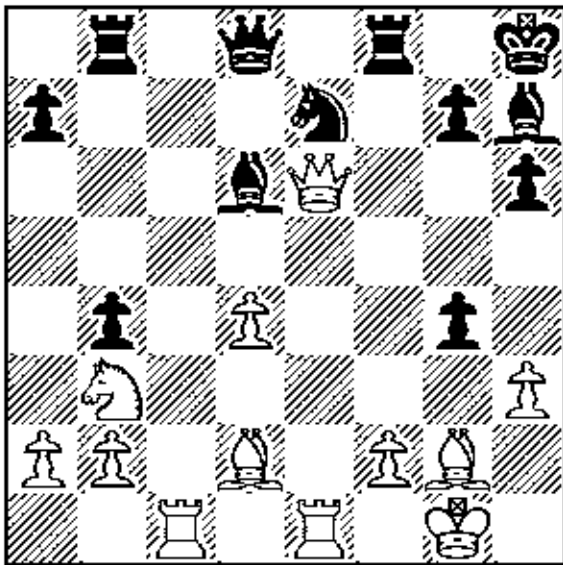
21 ... Nxc6 22 Qxd5!?

White refuses to withhold or evade confrontation. It isn't too late for 22 g5! (White's defence requires a mandatory tax of one pawn, which clogs Black's attacking lanes) 22 ... hxg5 23 Nc5 Rf6 24 Ne6 Qd7 25 Qxd5 Bg8 26 Qxc6 Qxc6 27 Bxc6 Rxe6 28 Rxe6 Bxe6 29 d5 Bf7 with an equal position.

22 ... Ne7 23 Qe6

With his weakened king, White would be wise to remove queens from the board with 23 Ba5! Nxd5 24 Bxd8 Rbxd8 25 Bxd5 fxg4 26 hxg4 a5 27 Bg2 Bf4 28 Rc6 Bg8 (or 28 ... a4 29 Nc5 and Black must watch over the e6 megafork) 29 Rd1 a4 30 Nc5 Bxa2 31 d5 Rd6 32 Nb7 Rd7 33 Nc5 Rd6 with a repetition draw.

23 ... b4 24 Bd2 fxg4



Exercise (critical decision): Should White recapture g4 with his queen, or his h-pawn? There is the well-tempered, kindly honey bee, and then there is its ferocious sub-species cousin, Apis, Mellifera Scutellata, aka the 'killer bee'. I read that if you accidentally bump into a honey bee nest, around 100 may attempt to sting you. Bump a killer bee nest and the number of attackers grows alarmingly to the 100% fatal, 1,000 range. White's two choices may look alike, but one specimen is far more dangerous for him than the other.

25 hxg4?

Answer: White should recapture with the queen, so that ... Rb6 doesn't carry the same force: 25 Qxg4! quiets the noisy position down, to a manageable degree for White. After 25 ... Nf5 26 Nc5 White threatens Ne6 and looks slightly better in the complications. That's because Black's last move was inaccurate. He should have played 24 ... Rb6!, forcing the game's continuation.

25 ... Rb6!

The swarm arises. Threat: ... Bh2+. Now Black generates a nasty kingside attack.

26 Qe2 Ng6

Suddenly f4 and h4 are juicy, occupiable holes for the knight.

27 Nc5?

It's a profitless vigil if your sentries wander off while on guard duty. Now Black's attack rages out of control. White had to try the desperado line 27 Be4 Qh4 28 f3 Nf4 29 Bxf4 Bxf4 30 Bxh7! Bxc1 31 Rxc1 Kxh7 32 Qd3+ Kh8 33 Kg2 Rbf6 34 Rf1. White isn't going to last in the long run. Still, this line is infinitely better than what he got in the game.

27 ... Qh4

A reminder to White that the chess board is a small, enclosed place, where 'next door' is everywhere. Threat: ... Qh2+, followed by ... Nh4.

28 Be4

I suspect that at this point White harboured strong doubts about the credibility of his survival chances. After 28 Kf1 Qh2 29 Bd5 Bxc5 30 Rxc5 Re6!! (the rook is ungovernably arrogant, headstrong and impervious to reason; and this is why he will go down in the history books as a great warrior) 31 Be3 Nh4 32 Bb7 Be4! White is mated.

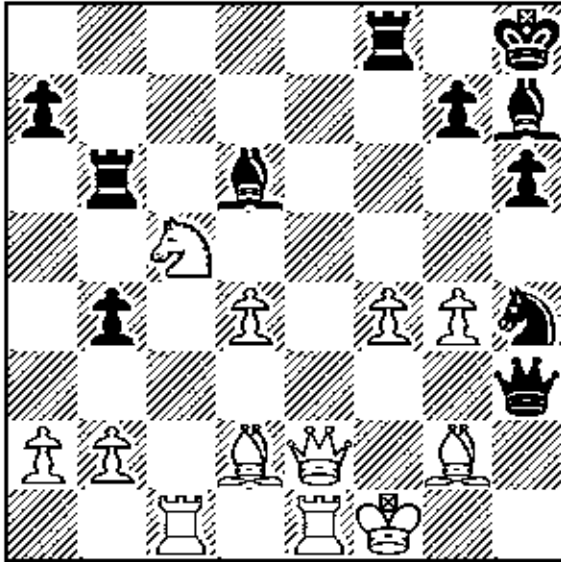
28 ... Qh2+ 29 Kf1 Nh4

Black threatens devastation, with ... Qh3+, ... Bxe4 and ... Nf3+.

30 f4

White's only move.

30 ... Qh3+ 31 Bg2



Exercise (combination alert): The vultures, too hungry to wait, begin to gnaw away at the white king's flesh while he still lives. Do you see Black's crushing shot?

Answer: Queen sacrifice/annihilation of defensive barrier.

31 ... Bxf4! 32 Bxh3 Be3+!

This is the important move you needed to visualize when you initiated the queen sacrifice.

33 Qf2 Rxf2+ 0-1

It's mate after 34 Kg1 Nf3+ 35 Kh1 Rh2 mate.

Summary: The flexible 8 ... Bc7 is Black's main alternative to 8 ... Qc7.

Game 28

V.Saulespurens-C.Lakdawala

Los Angeles 1998

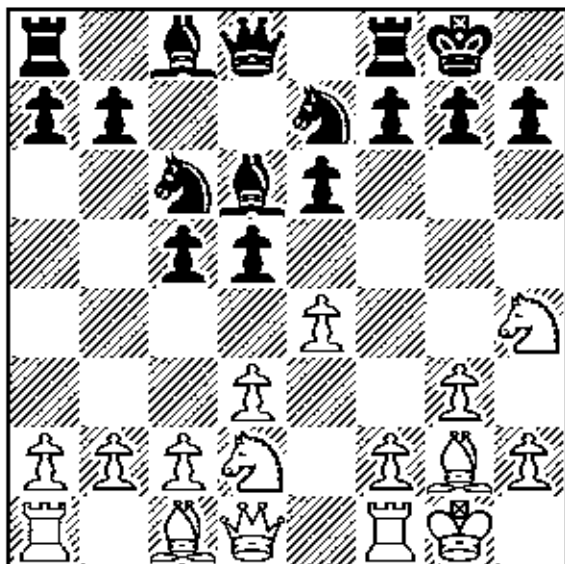
1 e4 c5

My old buddy Valdis Saulespurens was a key San Diego rival at the time, so I jumped at every opportunity to discipline the lad to keep him in his place!

2 Nf3 e6 3 d3

Since I hated facing the Rossolimo at the time (I didn't have access to this excellent book in 1998; if only I knew how to build a time machine ...), I entered the Pelikan Sicilian via the following move order: 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Nc6 6 Ndb5 d6 7 Bf4 e5 8 Bg5 a6 9 Na3 b5.

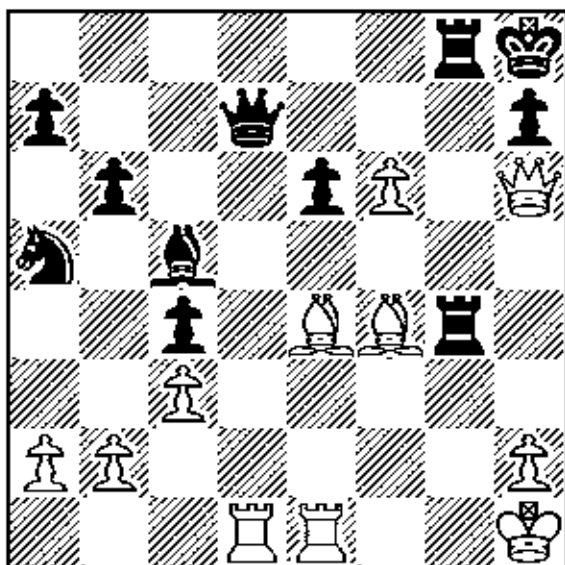
3 ... d5 4 Nbd2 Nc6 5 g3 Bd6 6 Bg2 Nge7 7 0-0 0-0 8 Nh4



The Fischer plan. White plays for f4, in traditional King's Indian fashion.

8 ... Bd7

Here is what can happen if we mishandle the line as Black: 8 ... b6 9 f4 dxe4?! 10 dxe4 Ba6 11 Re1 c4!? 12 c3 Na5?! 13 e5 Bc5+ 14 Kh1 Nd5 15 Ne4 Bb7 16 Qh5 Ne7 17 g4! Bxe4 18 Bxe4 g6 19 Qh6 Nd5 20 f5 Re8 21 fxg6! fxg6 22 Nxg6! Qd7 (or 22 ... hxg6 23 Qxg6+ Kf8 24 Bh6+ Ke7 25 Qg7 mate) 23 Nf4 Rad8 24 Nh5 Kh8 25 Nf6 Nxf6 26 exf6 Rg8 27 Bf4! Rxg4 28 Rad1 Rdg8.



Exercise (combination alert): White to play and force mate.

Answer: Clearance. 29 f7! 1-0, R.Fischer-B.Ivkov, Santa Monica 1966 (I hope nobody walked into the cheapo 29 Rxd7?? Rg1+ 30 Rxd7 Rxd7 mate). This game is annotated in *Fischer: Move by Move*.

However, as well as the text, Black has:

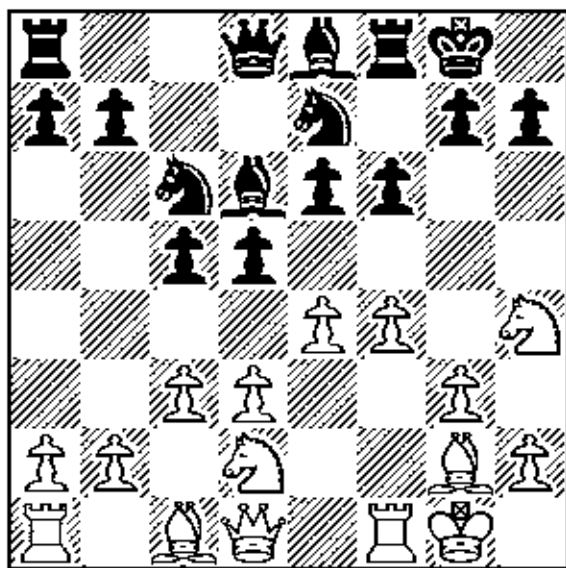
a) 8 ... Bc7 9 f4 f6 10 f5!? (this rather huffy move looks premature to me, since it cedes control over e5; better is the calmer 10 c3) 10 ... dxe4 11 dxe4 b6 12 c3 Ba6 13 Re1 exf5 14 exf5, A.Fier-Zhang Zhong, Beijing (rapid) 2008, when I prefer Black's position after 14 ... Ne5.

b) 8 ... Qc7 9 f4 f6 10 c3 Bd7 11 Nb3 d4 12 c4 a6 13 Bd2 Rab8 14 Rc1 Be8 15 Qe2 Bf7 16 Nf3 e5 17 f5 b5! when Black achieved an advantageous reversed King's Indian, and his queenside play clearly looked faster than White's on the kingside, V.Nevednichy-J.Horvath, Odorheiu Secuiesc 1993.

9 f4 f6

Black can also play to block White's coming kingside advance with 9 ... f5 10 exd5 Nxd5 11 Nc4 Bc7 12 Nf3 b5 13 Ne3, S.B.Hansen-A.Graf, German League 2007. Black looks okay after 13 ... Qf6.

10 c3 Be8



A rare move, either played out of my own ignorance of theory, or to get my opponent out of his home prep. I can't remember which!

Question: What is your intent?

Answer: First, I wanted to halt White's kingside build-up by preventing Qh5.

Secondly, I wanted to transfer my bishop to f7, where it watched over d5.

10 ... Qc7 would get us to the Nevednichy-Horvath note from above.

11 f5

Logical, now that Black's bishop no longer protects e6.

11 ... dxe4

After 11 ... g5!? 12 fxg6 hxg6 13 Qg4 Qc8 14 Ndf3 Kg7 Black's position is playable, but probably unwise against a natural attacker/tactician like my opponent.

12 Nxe4

Valdis opts for piece play. 12 dxe4 Bf7 was T.Finnbogadottir-J.Halldorsson, Reykjavik 2014, when White should play 13 Nc4 Bc7 14 Qg4 exf5 15 exf5 Kh8 16 Re1 (16 Bxc6!? Nxc6 17 Ng6+ Bxg6 18 fxg6 Qe8 19 gxh7 b5 20 Ne3 Ne5 21 Qe4 Bb6 and I prefer Black's game) 16 ... Qd3 17 Bf1 Qd7, which is about even.

12 ... Bf7?!

This move allows White tactical opportunity. It may have been wiser to release the tension on f5 with 12 ... Nxf5 13 Nxf5 exf5 14 Rxf5 Ne5 when Black doesn't stand worse.

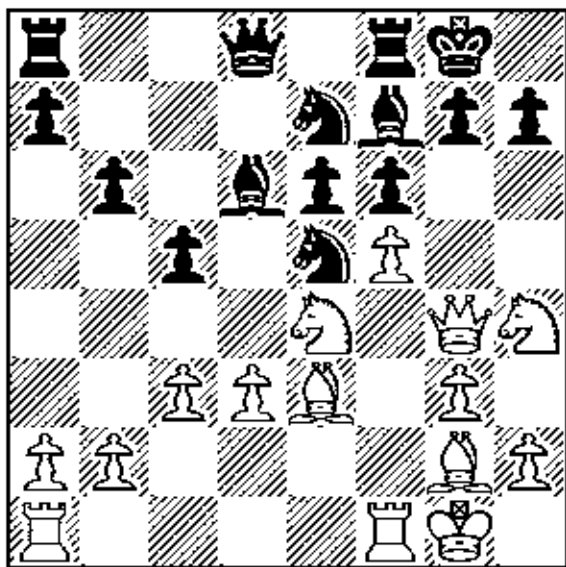
13 Be3 b6

Covering c5. 13 ... exf5 14 Nxf5 Nxf5 15 Rxf5 c4 16 d4 favours White.

14 Qg4

Black is threatened with Nxf6+, Bh6 and also fxe6. 14 Nxf6+! gxf6 15 Qg4+ Kh8 16 fxe6 is similar to the game's continuation, and superior, since it limits Black's responses.

14 ... Ne5!



Question: Why would you ignore White's threat to take f6 with check?

Answer: Very few people in the world are purely altruistic. When we give, most of us secretly expect something in return. Ignoring White's f6 threat is Black's only viable path. Black is just busted after 14 ... Kh8? 15 fxe6 Ne5 16 Qh3 Bg8.

15 Nxf6+

The knight's hissing sword cleaves the air, missing my king's throat by a fraction of an inch.

15 ... Kh8 16 Qe4 gxf6?

Sometimes your normally timid writer plays in a style which bears a shadowy resemblance to bravery – and I nearly always get punished for it. This move allows White a dangerous attack. Now my once upscale neighbourhood goes to hell with White's pieces moving in next door, and the days of restful solitude for my king are over. I realized that I had been outmanoeuvred by Valdis, whose feel for irrational positions is superior to mine.

I should try 16 ... exf5! 17 Qxa8 Qxa8 18 Bxa8 Rxa8 19 Nxf5 Nxf5 20 Rxf5 Be6 21 Rxe5 Bxe5 22 Ne4. Black's bishop-pair and White's d3 target offer Black full compensation for the pawn.

17 fxe6 Bg8

The elderly bishop gets creakily to his knees, to give thanks to God for allowing him to live another day. No time to waste in regret on the may-have-beens. Now for nearly the remainder of the game, I was forced to endure the society of that irritating e6-pawn, which reminded me of a particular vacuous cow, gaping at me over the fence.

17 ... Bxe6?? loses instantly to 18 Qxa8 Qxa8 19 Bxa8 and if 19 ... Rxa8 20 Rxf6 and Black drops one of his bishops.

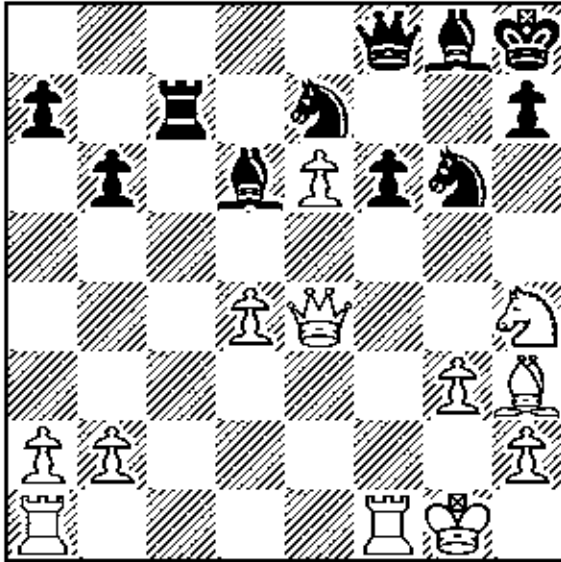
18 Bh6

"Day after day, in every way, I am getting better and better." Oh, sorry. I paused to recite a daily affirmation to halt the spread of a growing inferiority complex. Boy, this is really getting unpleasant. Both my rooks are under attack and f6 doesn't look all that stable either.

18 ... Rc8 19 Bh3 Rc7 20 d4

There goes my e5 outpost. The complications reach a bottomless quality, where no amount of analysis at the board will give us an answer to the position's truth.

20 ... cxd4 21 cxd4 N5g6 22 Bxf8 Qxf8

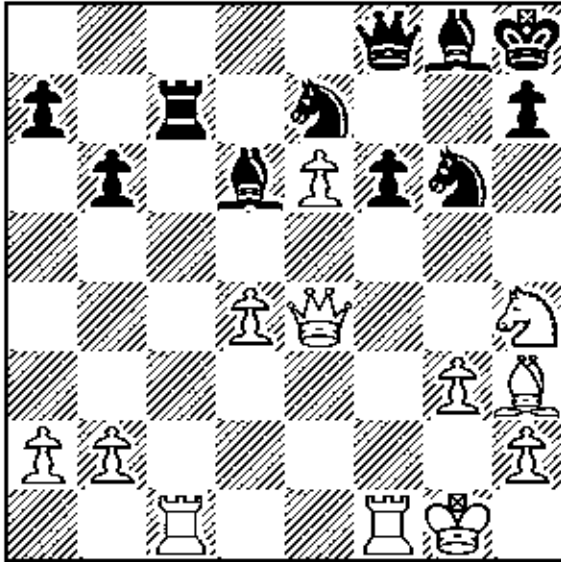


No doubt White made progress, with two pawns and a rook for two minor pieces – too much, considering his choking e6-pawn. But if he can't come up with the correct plan, his attainments are vulnerable to regression. My position does contain multiple alarm systems:

1. White has no entry squares into my position on the queenside for his rooks.
2. My king is flanked with defenders and is relatively safe.
3. Black has a strong dark square blockade – the price White paid for his capture of my f8-rook, earlier in the game.

23 Rac1?

White should continue 23 Nf5! Nxf5 24 Qxf5 Kg7 which is met with 25 Qd5 Rc2 26 Rf2 Rxf2 27 Kxf2 Qb8 28 Rc1 Ne7 29 Qh5. All points of entry are sealed for now, but White obviously continues to hold an edge.



Exercise (combination alert): This offer to exchange helps Black. How did he exploit White's last move to seize advantage?

Answer: Step 1: Lure White's other rook to c1.

23 ... Rxc1 24 Rxc1 Qh6!

Step 2: Double attack c1 and h4, after which White's position sours considerably.

25 Rf1 Nxh4 26 gxh4?!

Our motivation behind a move can be just as important as the move itself. When we attack madly and fail, then comes the time to get out our check book and write out a fat payment for war reparations. Valdis overestimates his own attacking chances, while underestimating the dangers to his own king. He refused to enter an inferior ending after 26 Qxh4 Qxh4 27 gxh4 Kg7 28 Rd1 f5 29 d5 Kf6 30 Bg2 h6 31 Kf2 Bh7 32 Bf3 f4 with a difficult ending for White, but still a possibly better try than the game continuation.

26 ... f5!

The e6-pawn, White's pride and joy, falls. To make matters worse, Valdis was in his customary dire time pressure at this stage.

27 Bxf5 Nxf5

"I know you can pray, but can you fight?" the knight asks the bishop.

28 Rxf5 Qg6+ 29 Kh1 Bxe6

The advantage switched hands. I perceived a monstrous previous injustice (the fact that Valdis completely outplayed me earlier in the game!), and now seek redress. White's overextended position reminds us of Babylon and ancient Rome, whose decadence induced their fall.

30 Qa8+ Bg8

31 ... h6?!

Answer: I missed the idea of pinning: 31 ... Qg4! when White is curiously helpless against the threat of ... Bf4! followed by ... Qf3+ and ... Be3 mate. For example:

b) 32 Rf8 Qe4+ 33 Kg1 Qxd4+ 34 Kf1 Bxf8 wins.

32 h5?

32 ... Qg4!

33 Rf8 Qe4+ 34 Kg1 Qxd4+ 35 Kf1 Bxf8 36 Qxf8 Qg7 0-1

Summary: White's 8 Nh4 plan is no longer considered dangerous for Black, who has multiple equalizing responses.

Game 29

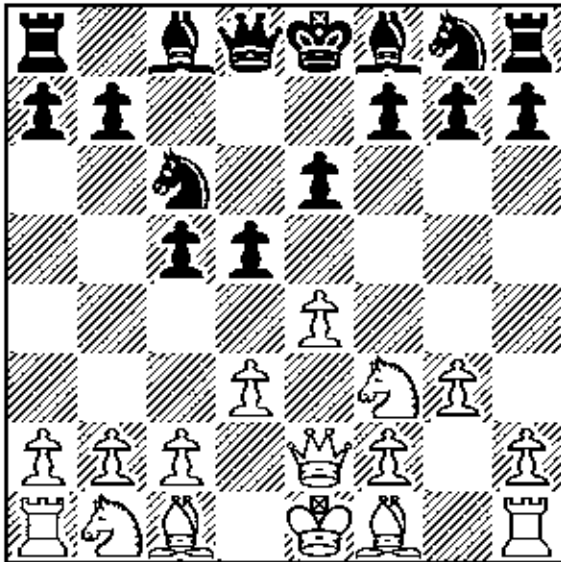
J.Maiwald-M.Gurevich

Groningen 1997

1 e4 e6

We can also reach our position via a French move order: 1 ... c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 Qe2 Nc6 4 g3 g6 5 Bg2 Bg7 6 0-0 Nge7 7 d3 (7 c3 d5 8 d3 h6 is the position we examine next game) 7 ... d5 transposes to our game's position.

2 d3 c5 3 Nf3 Nc6 4 g3 d5 5 Qe2



This is a dangerous move order advocated by GM Gawain Jones, in *How to Beat the Sicilian Defence*.

Question: How does an early Qe2 alter anything?

Answer: An early Qe2 forces us to radically alter our strategy:

1. First of all, it prevents our preferred move order, since 5 ... Bd6?? simply hangs our d5-pawn to 6 exd5.

2. White hasn't committed to Nbd2. This means he can play e5 and back up this e-pawn with Bf4.

3. Since White hasn't committed to Nbd2, we must be on the lookout for switches, with Nc3, which apply more pressure to our d5-pawn.

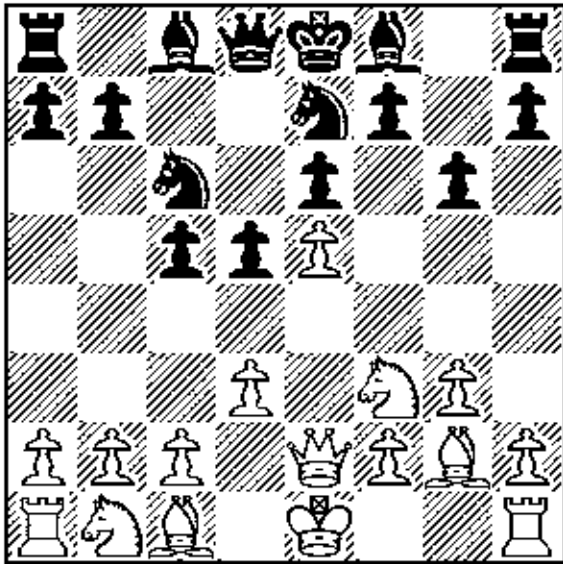
5 ... Nge7

I suggest this set-up. We avoid main lines in KIA by developing our knight to e7, rather than f6, which later loses a tempo to e5.

Question: How do we develop our kingside?

Answer: We fianchetto, which conveniently pressures White's (future) e5-pawn.

6 Bg2 g6 7 e5



White commits to an e5-pawn wedge, which seizes serious central space, but may also be a liability.

Question: How is e5 a liability? I see only three black attackers on e5, when Black plays ... Bg7 and ... Qc7.

Answer: A common strategy for Black is to go for deflection tricks with ... h6 and ... g5! (and ... Ng6, if necessary), undermining e5. This plan didn't happen in the game, but we will look at it in the notes which follow.

Next game we look at 7 h4 h6 8 0-0 Bg7 9 c3.

7 ... Bg7 8 0-0 h6!

Multipurpose:

1. This move gets White nervous about the plan ... g5 and ... Ng6, which virtually forces White's next move.

2. We avoid castling early, which would conveniently provide White with a clear plan, to go after our king. By stalling, we keep White wondering about the final placement of our king. Kingside? Queenside? Or will our king remain in the centre? We won't say!

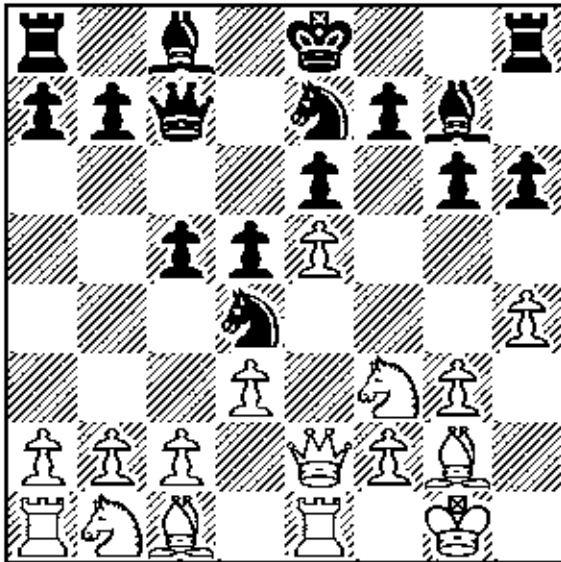
9 h4

White suppresses ... g5, which he may not be able to do eternally.

9 ... Qc7

My database games are evenly split between 9 ... Qc7 and 9 ... b6. After the latter, 10 c3 Ba6 11 Re1 Qc7 12 a4 Na5 13 Nbd2 Nec6 14 b3 g5! (there is Black's familiar undermining theme) 15 hxg5 hxg5 16 Rb1?! (necessary was 16 g4 0-0-0 17 Rb1 d4 18 c4 Bb7 19 Nf1 Nb4 20 Bxg5 Rdg8 21 Ng3 Nac6 22 Bf4 when Black had compensation for the sacrificed pawn) 16 ... g4 17 b4 gxf3 18 Nxf3 Nxe5 19 Nxe5 Qxe5 20 Qxe5 Bxe5 21 Rxe5 Bxd3 22 Rb2 Nc4 23 Bxd5 0-0-0 24 Bxc4 Bxc4 25 Kg2 Rd1 26 Bg5 Bf1+ 27 Kf3 f6! 28 Bxf6 Rf8 29 Rxe6 Bc4 30 Rc6+ Kd7 31 b5 Rd6! Black won a piece, and the game soon after, D.Salvador Lopez-A.Delchev, Cullera 2001.

10 Re1 Nd4!?



This move attempts to exploit the fact that White didn't bother to play an early c3 (as he does in the next game in the chapter). Black opens the c-file, hoping to apply pressure on c2 later on.

Instead, 10 ... b6 11 c3 Ba6 12 Bf4 g5! 13 hxg5 Ng6 14 c4 (as in S.Novikov-S.Mamedyarov, Mainz (rapid) 2009; 14 gxh6? Nxf4 15 hxg7?? doesn't work, since 15 ... Nxe2+ comes with check) 14 ... Nxf4 15 gxf4 dxc4 16 dxc4 hxg5 17 Nxc5 Nd4 18 Qe4 0-0-0 when Black gets good play for the pawn. 19 Qa8+?! fails to bother Black at all, after 19 ... Kd7 20 Qe4 Ke7 21 Nd2 Bh6. One of Black's rooks will come to g8 next, with dangerous attacking chances for the pawn.

11 Nxd4 cxd4 12 c4!

Principle: *Create confrontation when leading in development.* White doesn't plan to sit around and wait, while Black piles up on c2.

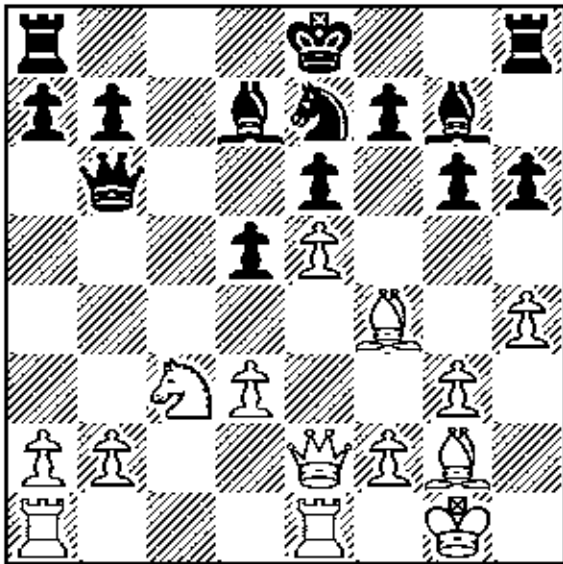
12 ... dxc3

Also possible is 12 ... dxc4 13 dxc4 Bd7, L.Psakhis-I.Khenkin, Chalkidiki 1992. White can try 14 Bf4 Bc6 15 Nd2 Bxg2 16 Kxg2. I slightly prefer White, since he may be later able to use e4, and also he can go after Black's artificially isolated d4-pawn.

13 Nxc3

We reach the end of theory here. Threat: Nb5 and Nd6+. White goes for piece play, over structure. 13 bxc3 intending Ba3, is also playable, as in L.Bruzon Batista-H.Urday Caceres, Cali 2000. I would continue with 13 ... Bd7 14 Ba3 Rc8 and pile on c2, making it difficult for White to develop his queenside. The game looks dynamically balanced to me.

13 ... Bd7 14 Bf4 Qb6

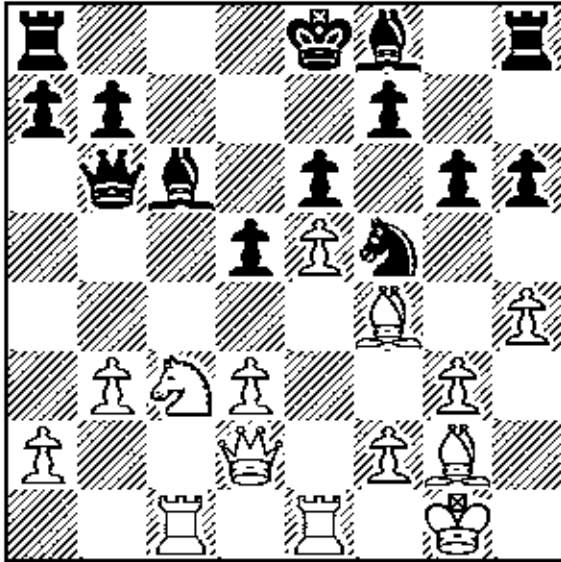


It's human nature to superimpose upon a position attributes partial to our style. Somehow Gurevich, a French Defence expert, managed to turn a French into a Sicilian, and then right back into a French-like position once again. He eyes both b2 and d4-squares, while removing his queen off the open c-file. The game looks even. Notice that Black still stalls his castling, keeping White guessing.

15 Qd2 Nf5 16 Rac1 Bc6

A careful move, watching for piece sacrifices on d5. Also possible is the adventurous 16 ... g5!?. White must be on the lookout for ... g5 tricks all though the game. This one, though, works out slightly in White's favour after 17 hxg5 hxg5 18 Bxg5 Nxc3 19 Qf4 Nf5 is met with 20 Nxd5! exd5 21 e6! Bxe6 22 Qxf5 0-0 23 Qf4 Qxb2 24 Rb1 Qd4 25 Rxb7 Qxf4 26 Bxf4 Bd4 27 Be5 Bxe5 28 Rxe5 and Black is the one who fights for the draw.

17 b3 Bf8!



The mark of a flexible mind. Black's bishop is more active on the a3-f8 diagonal, than on its 'developed' square, g7, where it just stares at e5.

18 Red1 Be7 19 d4 Qd8!

Getting White nervous about ... g5.

20 Qd3

Anticipating ... g5, White clears d2 for his bishop.

20 ... g5 21 hxg5 hxg5 22 Bd2 Qd7

The idea is to pin down White's knight, or else Black plays ... Bb5.

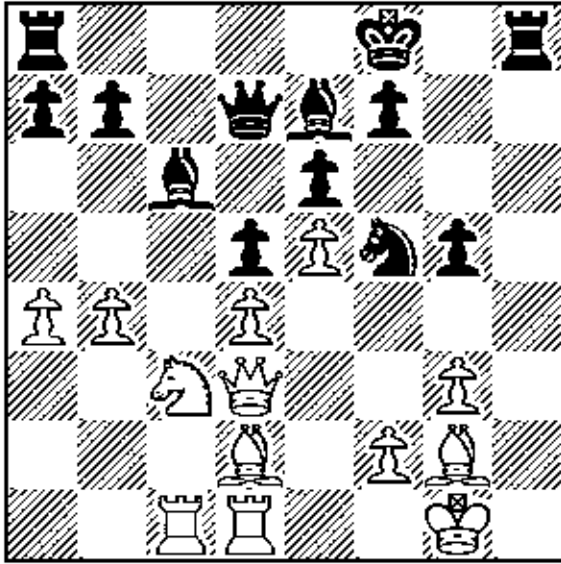
23 a4

White shuts that idea down, while preparing a queenside pawn advance.

23 ... Kf8

The king is safest on f8 or g7, where he connects his rooks. Of course Black isn't about to castle long, where he faces the advance of White's a- and b-pawns.

24 b4!?



Threat: b5, trapping Black's c6-bishop. White risks overextension, at the same time embracing the promise of extra territory.

24 ... Qd8

24 ... Bxa4!? sharpens the game. When you are outnumbered by an enemy on one wing, a face-to-face assault is a high-risk strategy. Analysis proves it is playable after 25 Nxa4 Qxa4 26 Bxd5! Nxd4 27 Bxb7 Rd8 28 Be1 Kg7 29 Qc4 Nf5 when the game looks dynamically balanced to me.

25 b5 Bd7 26 Na2

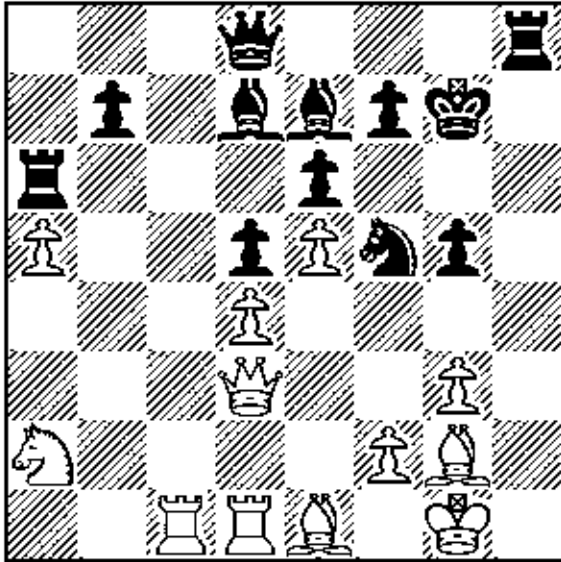
Intending Bb4, swapping away Black's e7-bishop, a key defender of his dark squares.

26 ... a6!

Gurevich perfectly times his break, chipping away at White's advanced queenside pawns.

27 bxa6 Rxa6 28 a5 Kg7 29 Be1?!

A single lax moment can tarnish an otherwise well played game. I'm not sure why White employed an abbreviation of his original intent. It isn't a good idea to make aggressive gestures, and then qualify them with a defensive move. Maybe it's just that our intention sometimes gets degraded by the passage of time, coupled with petty distractions. Correct is 29 Rb1! Qa8 30 Rdc1 Rc6 31 Rxc6 Bxc6 32 Nb4 Bd7 33 Nc2 Bc6 and White can choose between a repetition draw with 34 Nb4 or play for a win with 34 Ne3 Nxe3 35 Qxe3.



Exercise (combination alert): White's last move was inaccurate, allowing Black to win the a5-pawn. How?

Answer: Attraction/interference. The bishop forces White's rook to d2, where it interferes with the e1-bishop's coverage of a5.

29 ... Ba4!

The bishop read many times in the scriptures on the shortcomings of selfishness. Yet from his experience, he suspects the opposite is true.

30 Rd2 Rxa5 31 Rb2 Ra7

So Black won a pawn. Conversion, however, doesn't look all that easy.

32 Nb4?!

White should swap away Black's best piece with 32 Bb4! when he gets some compensation for the pawn.

32 ... Bd7 33 Bf1?!

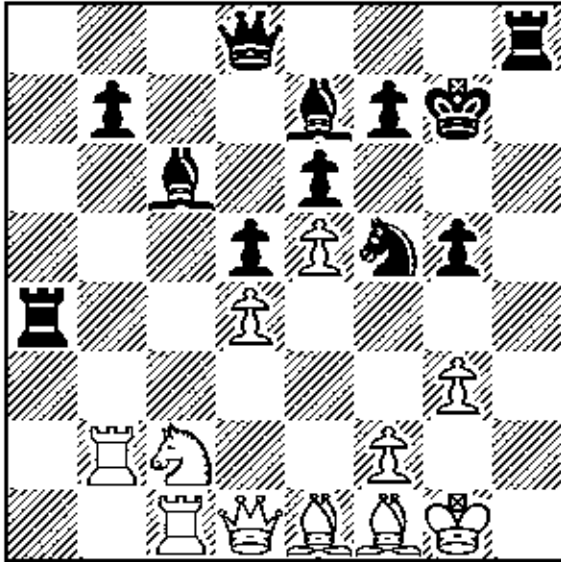
33 Nc2 was necessary.

33 ... Ra4!

Gurevich begins a campaign to go after d4.

34 Nc2 Bc6 35 Qd1?!

35 Bb4 was White's last prayer.



Exercise (planning): “There is nothing so unnatural as the commonplace,” declared the sleuth, to Dr. Watson. We shouldn’t mistake peace, with an enemy who is merely biding his time. Some of the most placid looking positions, when analyzed deeply, may contain a drop of poison. White looks okay here. He isn’t. Find one key idea, and you induce White’s resignation.

Answer: Transfer the queen to h7, via g8.

35 ... Qg8! 0-1

White resigned here, based on the philosophy: an attempt to ‘solve’ an insoluble problem is obviously a waste of time and energy. White’s resignation was not premature. Gurevich makes a difficult task look so commonplace, like a workman at his trade, who performed the same difficult task a thousand times. Sometimes a war can be won without fighting. How? If your army arrives with overwhelming force, you may convince the enemy to lay down arms, without a fight.

Believe it or not, White is hopelessly busted here: 36 Bg2 Qh7 (the queen takes aim at h2 and indirectly at c2) 37 Rbb1 (or 37 Rb6 Rc4 38 Ne3 Nxe3 39 fxe3 Rxc1 40 Qxc1 Qh2+ 41 Kf1 Rf8! when the position is suddenly shorn of its murk; the f-file opens, and White’s king finds himself wading waist deep in mud, with 42 Bf2 f6 43 exf6+ Rxf6 44 Qd2 Bd6 leaving no good defence to ... Bxg3) 37 ... Rc4! (to win d4, Black must first get around the c2 gatekeeper; ... Ba4 is in the air, and the d4-pawn is destabilized) 38 Qd3 (38 Qd2 Qh2+ 39 Kf1 Rc8 40 Qd3 Ba4 41 Rb2 Nxd4 and White’s game collapses) 38 ... Nxd4! wins a second pawn.

Summary: I once read a claim that the Archaeopteryx was the missing link, the intermediate stage between prehistoric reptiles and modern day birds. The early Qe2

system is our Archaeopteryx. It's a KIA, and also not quite a KIA, evolving into something new and unfamiliar. I consider it one of White's most dangerous variants. Not only is it flexible, but it also knocks us out of our preferred ... Bd6, ... Nge7 set-ups. So let's study it well.

Game 30

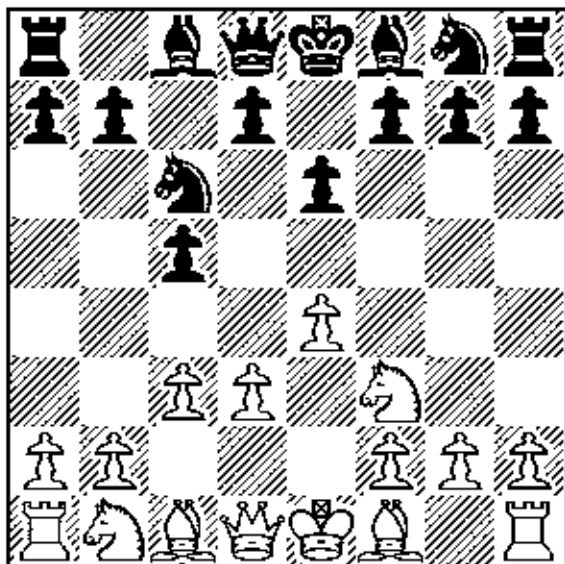
A.Fedorov-A.Timofeev

European Rapid Championship, Warsaw 2011

1 e4 e6 2 d3 c5 3 Nf3

3 Qe2 Nc6 4 g3 d5! should get us to our game's position. Note that 5 exd5? is weak, due to 5 ... Nd4 6 Qd1 Qxd5 7 f3 b6 and Black already stands clearly better.

3 ... Nc6 4 c3



Question: How does this move order alter things from last game?

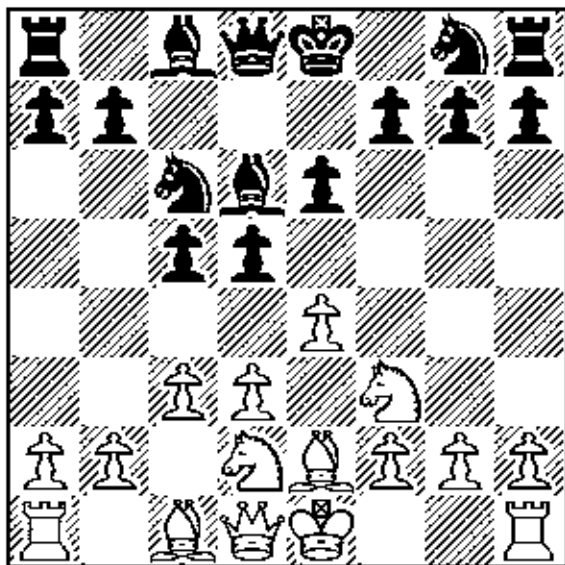
Answer: With this move order, White denies us the ... Nd4 idea we saw last game.

4 ... d5 5 Qe2

We continue examining the early Qe2 lines of King's Indian Attack. Instead:

a) 5 Nbd2 Bd6 6 g3 Nge7 7 Bg2 0-0 8 0-0 Qc7 9 Re1 Bd7 10 Qe2 f6 11 a3 a5! (remember: ... a5! is best played when White's b1-knight commits to d2) 12 Nh4?! (a waste of time; White should try 12 d4 cxd4 13 cxd4, although even then, I slightly prefer Black's position after 13 ... a4) 12 ... g5! 13 Nhf3 h6 14 Nf1 d4 and Black got a nice looking reversed King's Indian position, M.Dzhumaev-Zhang Zhong, Bled Olympiad 2002.

Question: How do we play the position if White continues in Old Indian style with 6 Be2?



Answer: I think the set-up we played earlier in the chapter is fine for Black. White's piece posting is too mild to worry us, after 6 ... Nge7 7 0-0 0-0 8 Re1 a6 9 Bf1 Qc7 10 a3, K.Kuderinov-P.Kotsur, Astana 2011. Here Black can play 10 ... f6 11 b4 (11 d4 cxd4 12 cxd4 Qb6 13 Qb3 Qxb3 14 Nxb3 dxe4 15 Rxe4 b6 is at least even for Black) 11 ... b6 when I don't see an active plan for White, other than the comp-suggested 12 g3, after which White ends up in a rather slow version of the normal KIA set-up.

b) 5 e5 is just a lousy Advance French-like position, where White's d-pawn belongs on d4. The move probably deserves a dubious mark: 5 ... Nge7 6 Be2 (or 6 g3 Qc7! 7 d4 cxd4 8 cxd4 Nf5 9 Nc3 Qb6 10 Ne2 Bb4+, J.Rouleau-A.Hambleton, Victoria 2005, and Black gets a good Advance French position after 11 Bd2 Be7 12 Bc3 f6 with at least equality) 6 ... Nf5 7 0-0 h5 8 h3 Be7 9 a3 g5! when ... g4 is coming and Black already has a promising attack, Z.Saric-E.Goric, Neum 2012.

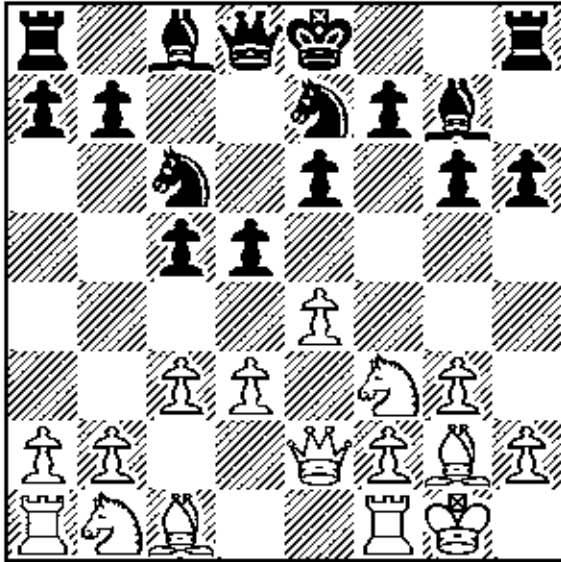
5 ... Nge7

We set up just like last game. The nice thing about following a recipe is that you don't have to understand the mechanics of every detail of how the end product results. You just follow directions and you get there.

6 g3 g6 7 Bg2

7 h4 h6 8 Bg2 Bg7 9 0-0 0-0 transposes to the game.

7 ... Bg7 8 0-0 h6



Toying with ... g5 ideas. 8 ... 0-0 9 e5 h6 10 h4 is another transposition.

9 h4

White suppresses Black's thematic ... g5 ideas.

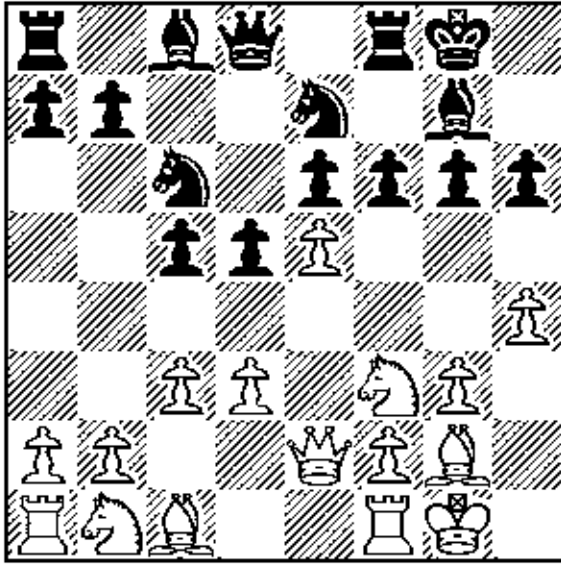
9 ... 0-0

I would probably avoid 9 ... d4 10 e5 (White doesn't have time to close the centre with 10 c4?! e5 when Black already stands slightly better due to his extra central space) 10 ... dxc3 (Black believes it's logical to open the centre, since White plans a wing attack on the kingside; the problem is his move violates the principle: *avoid confrontation when lagging in development*, although even 10 ... 0-0 11 Nbd2 b6 12 c4 Bb7 13 Ne4 Nf5 14 Bf4 looks promising for White, since the centre and queenside are clogged for now) 11 bxc3 b6 (intending ... Ba6) 12 d4! cxd4 13 Nxd4 Bd7, R.Djurhuus-B.Ostenstad, Norwegian League 2012. Black's position looks unpleasant after 14 Ba3!.

10 e5

White seizes his traditional space edge and we arrive at a critical juncture.

10 ... f6!?



There can never be peace if both players covet the same square. In some positions there can be many reasons for optimism, yet if our assessment is off and we back down, we can miss all of them.

Question: Doesn't this move give Black a backward e-pawn?

Answer: A seasoned French Defence player wouldn't hesitate to make such a move. The backward e-pawn isn't so weak, Black's piece activity level increases, and White loses his central space advantage. There are basically two philosophies when White plays e5:

1. Ignore it and play around the e5-pawn, when Black risks getting mated.
2. Play ... f6, taking on the backward e6-pawn, which dissolves the e5 wedge, while activating Black's game.

My inclination is for number 2. Let's take a look at plan number 1 on the list: 10 ... Nf5 11 Bf4 b5 12 Nbd2 Rb8. Now:

a) 13 Rfc1!? (I don't get this move; it feels like White should be concentrating on the kingside, rather than playing to halt Black's queenside play) 13 ... Rb6 14 Bh3 Re8 15 Nf1 b4 16 N1h2 Ba6 17 Ng4 bxc3 18 bxc3 h5 19 Ne3 d4! (the centre opens in Black's favour) 20 Nxf5?! (necessary was 20 Nc4 Bxc4 21 dxc4 dxc3 22 Bxf5 exf5 23 Rxc3) 20 ... exf5 21 c4 f6 22 e6 Bc8. Black is winning, since White's e-pawn is a goner, M.Langer-G.Kaidanov, Las Vegas 2010.

b) 13 Nb3 c4 14 Nc5 cxd3 15 Qxd3 Qc7 16 Qe2 a5 (16 ... Nxe5?? hangs material to 17 Bxe5 Bxe5 18 Qxe5) 17 Bh3 Qb6 18 Bxf5 Qxc5 19 Bd3 when I prefer White's kingside attacking chances over Black's on the queenside.

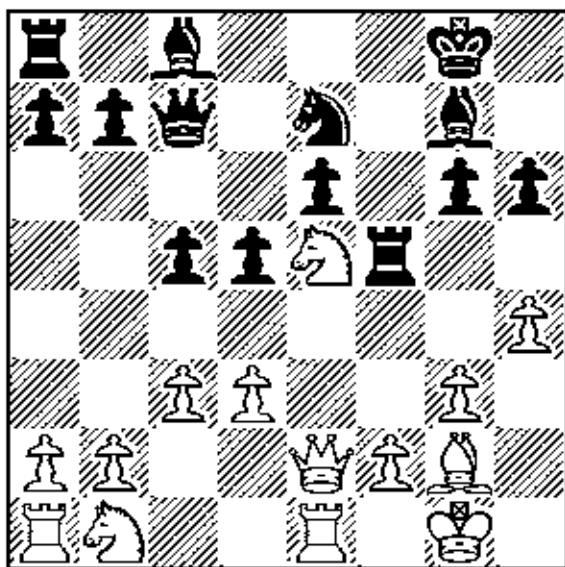
11 Bf4

I would avoid this move, since the bishop itself is a target on the f4-square. Instead, 11 exf6 Rxf6 12 Bf4 (12 Nbd2 b6 13 Re1 Rf8 also looks just fine for Black, who remains active, while controlling more than his share of the centre) 12 ... Rxf4! (I think this exchange sacrifice is a good deal for Black, who gets White's important dark-squared bishop, while damaging White's kingside structure and creating a hole on f5) 13 gxf4 Qd6 14 Bh3 was J.Lipka-L.Psakhis, Pardubice 2003. Here Black should play 14 ... Qxf4 15 Bxe6+ Kh7 with loads of compensation for the exchange, and probably the far better practical chances.

11 ... fxe5 12 Bxe5?!

Now White's counterplay resources are nearly consumed. White's blockade of e5 is an impermanent entity, whose nature is to come and go. This hands over the bishop-pair and dark-square control, as well as the initiative to Black. White should probably try 12 Nxe5 when Black has a choice between a safe line and the thematic exchange sacrifice with 12 ... Rxf4! (or the safer line 12 ... Rf5 13 Nxc6 Nxc6 14 Be3 Qd6 and Black stands no worse) 13 gxf4 Qf8 with clear compensation for Black, although in this one at least White gets paid material for his structural misery.

12 ... Nxe5 13 Nxe5 Qc7 14 Re1 Rf5!



Black's pieces wiggle free of the bind, by fighting for control over the key e5 blockade square.

15 Ng4

Preferable to both:

a) 15 f4? Bxe5 (the bishop has the quick fingers of a pickpocket) 16 fxe5 Nc6 wins the e-pawn, since 17 Qd2?? fails to 17 ... Nxe5 18 Qxh6 Nf3+ 19 Bxf3 Qxg3+ 20 Bg2 Qxe1+ 21 Kh2 Qe5+ 22 Kh3 g5 and Black wins.

b) 15 d4? cxd4 16 cxd4 Nc6! 17 Nxc6 bxc6 18 Qd2 (18 Bh3?? Bxd4 19 Bxf5

Qxg3+ 20 Kh1 Qxh4+ 21 Kg2 gxf5 is resignable for White) 18 ... Qb6 19 Bh3 Rf7 and White is busted, since 20 Bxe6? loses to 20 ... Bxe6 21 Rxe6 Raf8 when White is unable to defend b2, d4 and f2 points.

15 ... Bd7

15 ... e5? is a blunder, which hangs an exchange after 16 Ne3 Be6 17 Nxf5 gxf5 18 Nd2. I don't believe in Black's full compensation.

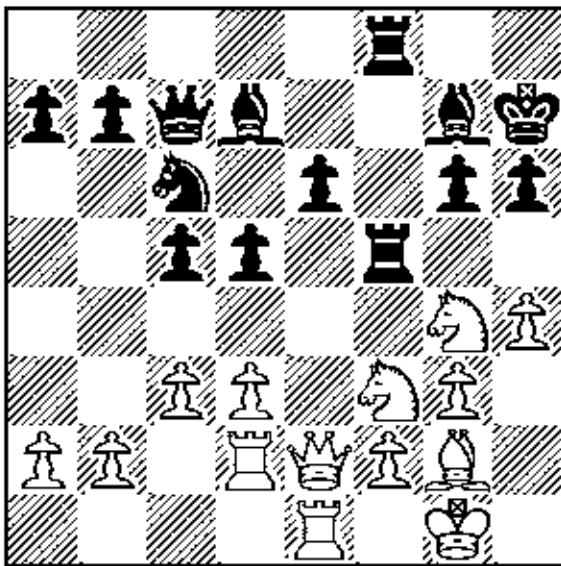
16 Nd2 Raf8

Another benefit of ... f6: Black gets play down the open f-file.

17 Nf3

White may have a plan here, but somehow the complications snatch away its meaning, as his position slowly goes downhill. It isn't clear if White does better with 17 Rf1 Kh7 18 Rae1 Qb6 19 c4! Nc6 20 cxd5 Nd4 21 Qd1 Qxb2 22 d6 b5 23 Ne4 Qxa2 24 Ne3 Bc6! 25 Nxf5 exf5 26 Nc3 Qa6. Black's queenside passers are worth more than White's exchange.

17 ... Nc6 18 Rad1 Kh7 19 Rd2



White clearly doesn't have anything to do, and the stoking of his non-existent initiative is akin to the attempt to set ablaze a water-logged tree stump.

19 ... b5

Meanwhile Black expands on the queenside. Now White must watch out for ... d5 and ... b5, both of which open the queenside in Black's favour.

20 Red1 b4?!

An inaccuracy, after which White should survive. 20 ... d4! is stronger. White looks like he is in bad shape after 21 Rc2 dxc3 22 bxc3 b4.

21 d4 Qa5

Hammering away at c3 and a2.

22 c4?

White should try 22 Qe3! Rxf3! 23 Bxf3 h5 24 Nh2 Bh6 25 Qe2 bxc3 26 bxc3 Bxd2 27 Qxd2 cxd4 28 cxd4 Qxd2 29 Rxd2 Rb8 30 Bd1 when he should hold the ending.

22 ... cxd4 23 cxd5 exd5

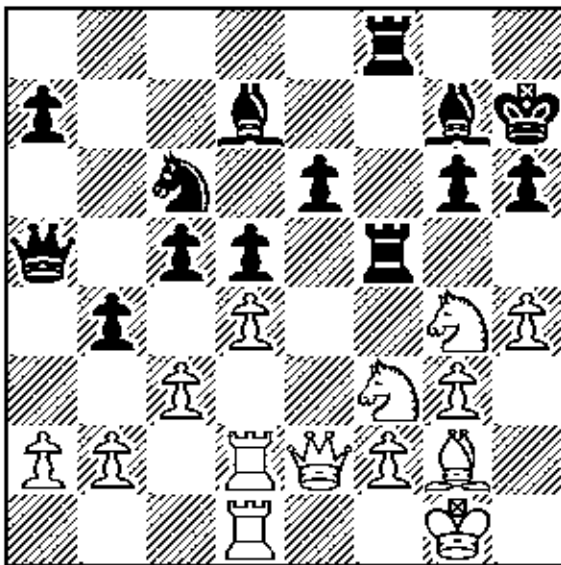
White is just down a pawn, with an awful, tied-down position.

24 Ngh2 Qxa2

24 ... Ne5 and if 25 Nxe5 Rxe5 26 Qd3 Bb5 27 Qb1 Re2 28 Nf3 b3! is awful for White.

25 Bh3?

White had to try something like 25 Rc1, although it's highly unlikely he will save himself in this variation.



Exercise (combination alert): Black to play and gain a decisive advantage.

Answer: Discovered attack.

25 ... Rxf3!

People who ask too many questions about this rook's shady activities, are soon discovered dead.

26 Bxd7 Rxf2

White's king is exposed and he lost too many pawns to have any chance of saving this.

27 Qxf2 Rxf2

"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," recites the inquisitor.

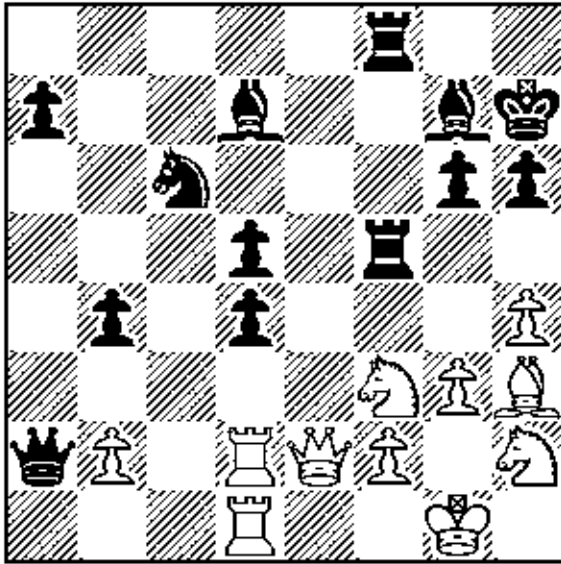
28 Kxf2 Ne5

Attacking White's bishop with tempo.

29 Bh3 d3

White can barely breathe.

30 Nf3



Exercise (combination alert): Black to play and pick off more material.

Answer: Attraction/knight fork.

30 ... Nc4

This is the loose floorboard in White's logic. Black forces the rook to d3 and then forks on b2.

31 Rxd3 Nxb2 0-1

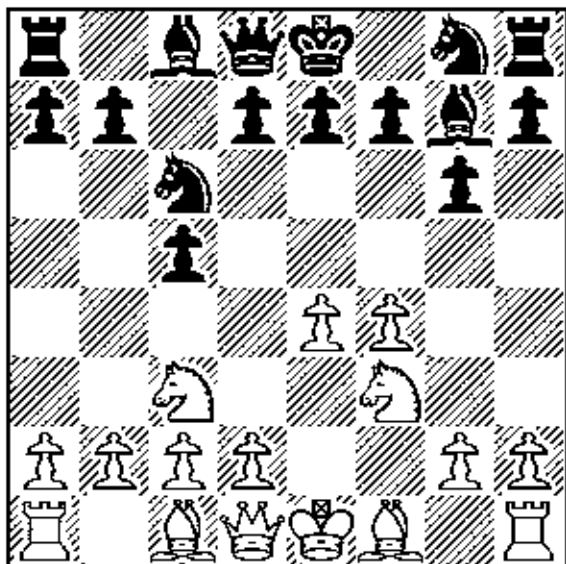
By now the beaten down rooks begin to apologize in their sleep.

Summary: When White grabs central space with e5, then don't be afraid to take on a backward e-pawn with ... f6. The benefits easily compensate the downside.

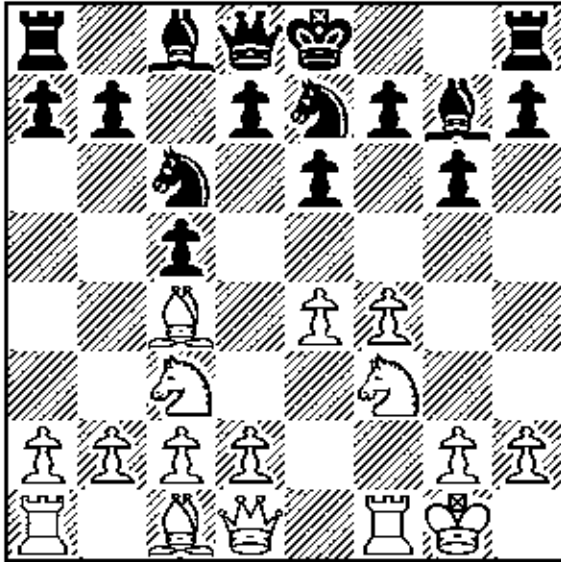
Chapter Six

The Grand Prix Attack

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 f4 g6 4 Nf3 Bg7



In those misty pre-comp days I used to fear the Grand Prix Attack. Those days are over. The variation has been worked out to a point where White gets the Grand Prix part, but rarely the attack. In this position White can play a bishop to b5, after which we deny him or her Bxc6 possibilities with ... Nd4. Now if the bishop remains in place, then we have pleasant options, like ... Nxb5, picking up the bishop-pair, or simply ... a6 gaining a tempo. If they play Bc4, then the bishop is once again targeted for tempo loss with ... e6, ... Ne7 and ... d5. If White plays the bishop to d3, then the posting distorts the position's geometric ideal, blocking in the d2-pawn and clogging development in general.



It is human nature to expend large blocks of our energy in thinking about things we want, but can't have. In the innocent days of the past, White often played his bishop to c4, where the call of glory and sacrifice whispered sweet endearments. Today, we can easily swerve aside from White's sincerely intended, yet clumsily aimed, blow. This plan is considered somewhat barbaric, since it is well met with ... e6, ... Nge7 and ... d5. In the comp era moody Caissa withholds her blessings to White's set-up and I think the days when the Grand Prix intimidated us are over.

Game 31

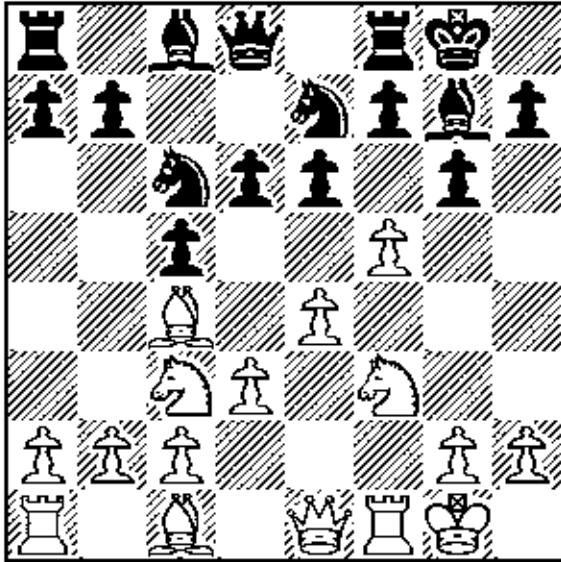
D.Aldama Degurnay-Li Chao

North American Open, Las Vegas 2012

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6

At the end of the chapter we look at the Kan player's move order 2 ... e6 3 f4 a6.

White's set-up makes a lot more sense if Black plays the Najdorf player's move order: 2 ... d6 3 f4 Nc6 4 Nf3 g6 5 Bc4 (White is a full move ahead of our game's continuation, since if Black later plays the ... e6 and ... d5 plan, he takes two moves to achieve the ... d5 break) 5 ... Bg7 6 0-0 e6 7 d3 Nge7 8 Qe1 (heading for h4) 8 ... 0-0 9 f5!?.



Be warned Najdorf players: you must play very accurately from this point on, or risk getting crushed by White's attack:

a) 9 ... gxf5! is the superior recapture: 10 Qh4 fxe4 11 dxe4 Ng6 12 Qh5 Nce5 13 Bh6 (13 Be2 f6! and it's not so easy for White to prove full compensation for the missing pawn) 13 ... f6! 14 Nxe5 Nxe5 15 Be2 Bd7 16 Rad1 Qe7. I don't believe in White's compensation for the pawn and prefer Black's chances, H.Simonian-Wang Hao, Yerevan 2007.

b) White scores nearly 80% after 9 ... exf5?! 10 Qh4:

b1) Watch how easy it is for Black's game to collapse: 10 ... Nd4?? 11 Bg5! Re8 (11 ... Nxf3+ 12 gxf3 Re8 13 Nd5 wins a piece, with a crushing attack to boot) 12 Nd5 Ndc6 13 Nf6+ Bxf6 14 Bxf6 h5 15 Qg5 and game over, J.Chabanon-A.Marcet Bisbal, Sitges 1999.

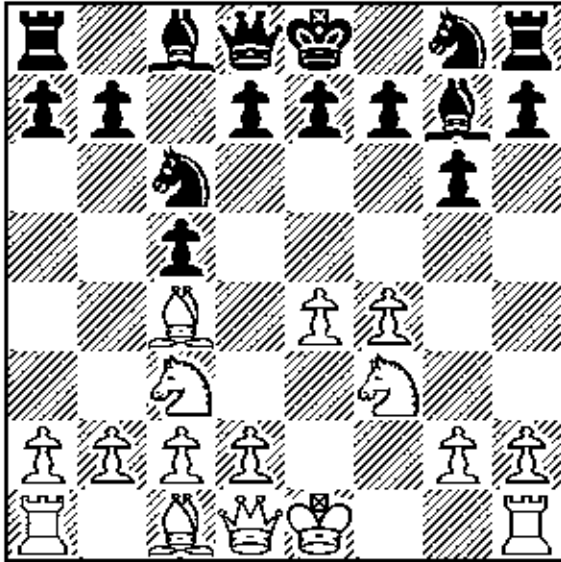
b2) 10 ... h5 11 Bg5 Qc7 12 Rae1 fxe4 13 Qxe4 Bf5 14 Qf4 Qd7 15 Nh4 Be5 16 Qf2 Bd4 17 Be3, M.Bulgarini Torres-G.Carlsson, correspondence 2001. Black is under pressure, but hanging on after 17 ... Bg7.

Returning to 2 ... Nc6:

3 f4

This move sends the game into Grand Prix Attack territory.

3 ... g6 4 Nf3 Bg7 5 Bc4!?



Natural attackers are a tribe who draw their sense of identity through an entrenched belief in the philosophy: no reverse gear. There is no known way to ward off opponents' belligerence. If they want to pick a fight, there is little choice for us but to fight back. I think this move is probably White's worst line of the chapter, since he is the one fighting for equality in most of the variations. The bishop walks straight into a tempo loss after Black plays ... e6 and ... d5.

Question: What is White hoping for by posting his bishop on c4?

Answer: White hopes to generate an attack down the f-file, focusing on an f5 break, in conjunction with 0-0. Also, in some lines White hopes to transfer his queen to h4, play f5 (even as a pawn sacrifice), and then follow with Bh6, or Bg5, with an attack. These kind of attacks often succeeded in the pre-comp era. The trouble is today the lines have been worked out to the point where White fights for equality.

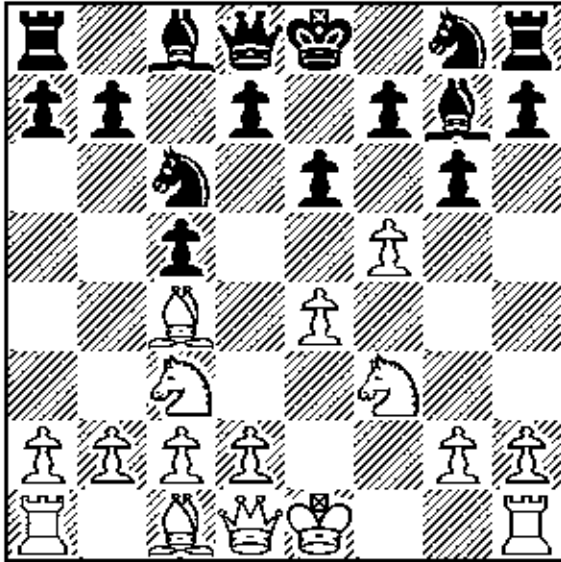
Next game we look at 5 Bb5.

5 ... e6

Black's most logical follow-up, intending to gain time with ... Nge7 and ... d5.

6 0-0

Question: What do we do if White lunges immediately with 6 f5?

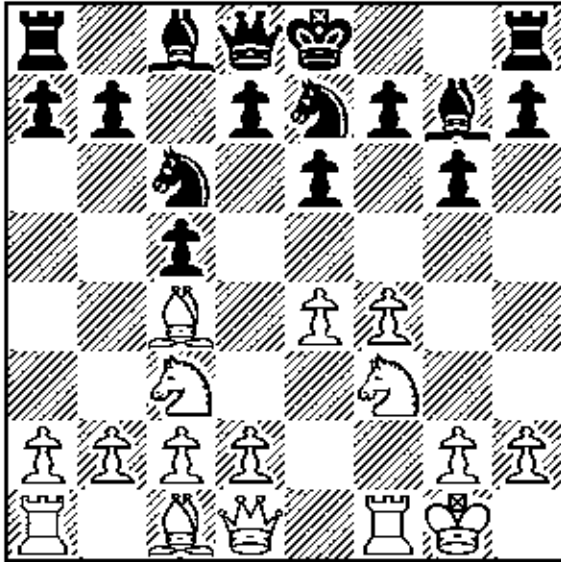


Answer: We ignore it. Black achieves a good position after 6 ... Nge7 7 fxe6 (7 0-0?! d5 8 Bb3 c4 9 fxg6 hxg6 10 exd5 exd5 11 Ba4 Bg4 12 d4 Qb8! 13 h3 Rxh3! and White is losing, since he can't afford 14 gxh3?? Qg3+ 15 Kh1 Qxh3+ 16 Kg1 Qg3+ 17 Kh1 0-0-0 when there is no cure to the coming ... Rh8+), and then:

a) 7 ... fxe6 is Black's most ambitious move, which I don't like as much as line 'b', mainly since it leads to the kind of messy positions Grand Prix players love. After 8 d3 d5 9 Bb3 b5! 10 0-0! (White ignores Black's ... c4 threat, increasing his development lead; 10 Nxb5? is met with 10 ... Qa5+ 11 Nc3 c4!, which clogs White's attacking diagonal, and if 12 dxc4 d4 when White doesn't have enough compensation for the piece) 10 ... c4 11 dxc4 dxc4 12 Qxd8+ Kxd8 (12 ... Nxd8?! 13 Nxb5 cxb3 14 Nc7+ Kd7 15 Nxa8 bxc2 16 Rf2 Bb7 17 Rd2+ Kc8 18 Rxc2+ Nec6 19 Be3 Kb8 20 Nb6 axb6 21 Bxb6 and I slightly prefer White, who has a rook and two pawns for the piece, D.Sonjaya-S.Ganguly, Jakarta 2011) 13 Rd1+ Bd7 14 Nxb5 cxb3 15 axb3 White has two pawns for the piece and a strong initiative, due to Black's shaky king position, which gives him full compensation, T.Karlsson-B.Svensson, Swedish League 2013.

b) 7 ... dxe6 is less ambitious and gives Black easy equality. I like this line better, because it drains the position of the Grand Prix player's fun: 8 d3 0-0 9 0-0 a6 10 a4 Nd4 11 Bg5 h6 12 Be3 Nec6 13 Qd2 (13 Ne2 is more accurate) 13 ... Kh7 14 Qf2 b6 15 Nd1 Bb7 16 Nxd4 cxd4 17 Bd2 Ne5 18 Bb3 f5! (Black takes over the initiative) 19 exf5 exf5 20 h3? f4! 21 Bb4 Rf5! and there is no defence to the coming ... Rg5, F.Niebling-V.Kramnik, Frankfurt (simul) 1996.

6 ... Nge7



Seizing control over both key f5 and d5-squares.

7 d3

7 Qe1 0-0 8 d3 d5 9 Bb3 transposes.

Question: Does 7 e5 prevent the coming ... d5's tempo loss?

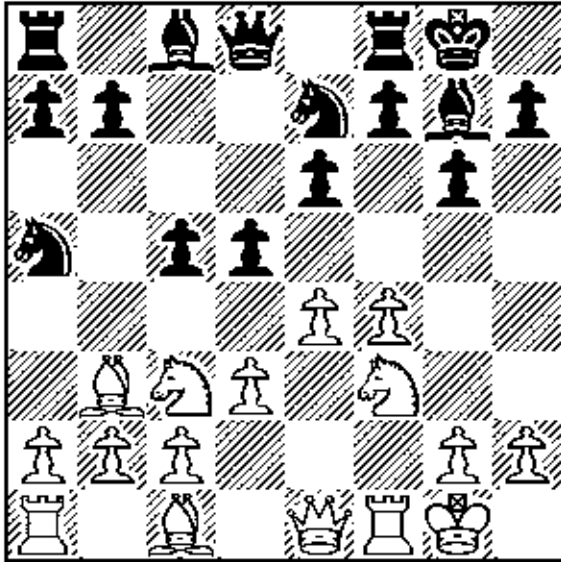
Answer: Not really, since you wasted a tempo playing e5. Black can continue 7 ... d5 8 exd6 Qxd6 9 Ne4 Qc7 with an excellent position. Note that White can't play 10 Nxc5??, since it hangs a piece to 10 ... Nd4 11 Ne4 f5.

7 ... 0-0 8 Qe1

Question: Why can't White make air for his bishop with 8 a3?

Answer: The move costs him time and slightly weakens his queenside. Black looks good after 8 ... d5 9 Ba2 b6 10 Qe1 Nd4, our standard response to any Qe1 ideas. Now c2 is hanging. Following 11 Nxd4 cxd4 12 Nd1 dxe4 13 dxe4 (13 Qxe4 Bd7 14 Bd2 Rc8 is clearly better for Black) 13 ... Ba6 14 Rf3 Rc8 15 Bb3 More time is lost defending c2. 15 ... Nc6 16 Bd2 d3 17 c3 Na5 Black has a queenside initiative, while White's is non-existent on the kingside, T.Huesmann-M.Tratar, San Sebastian 2007.

8 ... d5 9 Bb3 Na5



I think this is Black's best line, ensuring the gain of the bishop-pair, and I already prefer his position.

10 Bd2

Threatening the dirty discovery trick Nxd5!. Alternatively:

a) 10 Qh4 Nec6! (White certainly doesn't want to swap queens) 11 Qf2 b6 12 Bd2 Nd4 13 Rac1 Nxf3+ 14 Qxf3 c4 15 Ba4 dxe4 16 Nxe4 Bb7 17 Bxa5 bxa5 18 Nf6+ (18 Kh1 Rb8 also looks quite awful after 19 Qf2 Bxb2) 18 ... Bxf6 19 Qxb7 cxd3 threatens ... Qd4+. White is down a pawn, with no compensation, and with more material to possibly fall, B.Carlier-I.Rogers, Budapest 1991.

b) 10 f5? looks pretty shady after 10 ... Nxb3 11 axb3 exf5 12 Qh4 fxe4 13 dxe4 d4 14 Nb5 Nc6 15 Bg5 f6 16 Bh6 Be6. Black is up a pawn, with a safe king and the superior position, A.Agouridis-A.Naiditsch, Peristeri 2010.

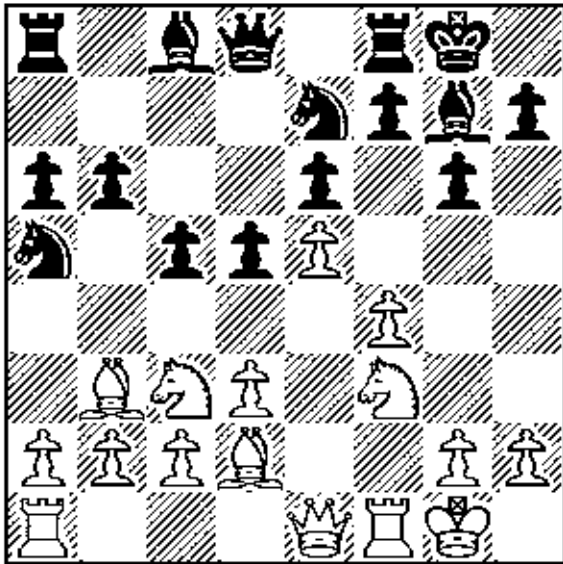
10 ... b6

He keeps White worrying about a possible ... c4 break. This move is possibly more accurate than 10 ... Nxb3 11 axb3 Nc6 12 e5 Bd7 13 Qg3 f6 14 Ne2!?, D.Aldama-C.Lakdawala, San Diego (rapid) 2009 (I expected 14 exf6 Qxf6 15 Rae1 Rae8 16 h4 Nd4 17 Nxd4 Qxd4+ 18 Kh2 Qf6 when Black is secure on the kingside, and may continue making queenside gains with ... b5 later on). Here Black seizes the initiative after 14 ... fxe5 15 fxe5 Rf5! 16 Bf4 Qb6 17 Nh4 Rf7 18 Nf3 Raf8. Both ... c4+ and ... Nb4 worry White, who struggles to remain even.

11 e5

Following 11 Qh4?! c4 12 Ba4 a6! (threatening ... b5) 13 dxc4 dxc4 14 Nd1 b5 15 Bxa5 Qxa5 16 Qxe7 bxa4! 17 e5 Qb6+ 18 Kh1 Bb7 19 c3 White is weak on the light squares and is tied down to the defence of b2, K.Amir-I.Cheparinov, Khanty-Mansiysk 2010.

11 ... a6!



A new move. What at first sight seems a superficial divergence from the position's essence is in reality the start of a cunning plan: Black prevents Nb5, while preparing ... Nec6!, which renews the ... c4 threat. I think Black's move is an improvement over the normal 11 ... Nxb3 since now White must be on a constant watch for ... c4 tricks.

12 Nd1

The knight logically head to the kingside, while White's d2-bishop gets a bead on Black's a5-knight.

12 ... Nec6!

Threat ... c4.

13 Bxa5

The facts come to light: Aldama concedes both bishops, and he had no choice, since any other random move, like 13 Kh1??, loses instantly to 13 ... c4 14 dxc4 dxc4 15 Ba4 b5 16 b4 Nb7 and White's a4-bishop remains trapped. Or if 13 a3? Nxb3 14 cxb3 f6 15 Bc3 d4 16 exf6 Qxf6 17 Bd2 e5 and Black seizes the initiative.

13 ... Nxa5 14 c3 d4! 15 cxd4

Otherwise:

a) 15 c4 shuts in the b3-bishop's diagonal: 15 ... f6 16 exf6 Qxf6 17 g3 Nxb3 18 axb3 Bb7 19 b4 Qf5 when White's light squares look awfully weak.

b) 15 Bc2 Bb7 16 c4 b5 17 b3 also looks clearly better for Black.

15 ... Nxb3 16 axb3 Bb7!

Li imparts a terrible secret: he wants to open the game for his bishop-pair. 16 ... cxd4 17 Ra4 Bb7 18 Rxd4 Qe7 also offers Black good compensation for the pawn.

17 dxc5!

Agreeing to his opponent's demands is deeply antithetical to Aldama's aggressive

style. Here necessity dictates the terms. After 17 Qf2?! Bxf3 18 Qxf3 Qxd4+ 19 Nf2 a5 20 Ra2 Rad8 21 Kh1 Qb4 22 Ra3 f6 23 exf6 Rxf6 24 Ne4 Rf7 25 Ng5 Re7 White's structure is a wreck and his a3-rook is tangled up.

17 ... Qxd3 18 cxb6 Qxb3

A good general never allows an enemy to choose the site of the battle. The position is way too open for a white kingside assault to succeed. Now play focuses on the queenside and centre – Black's playground.

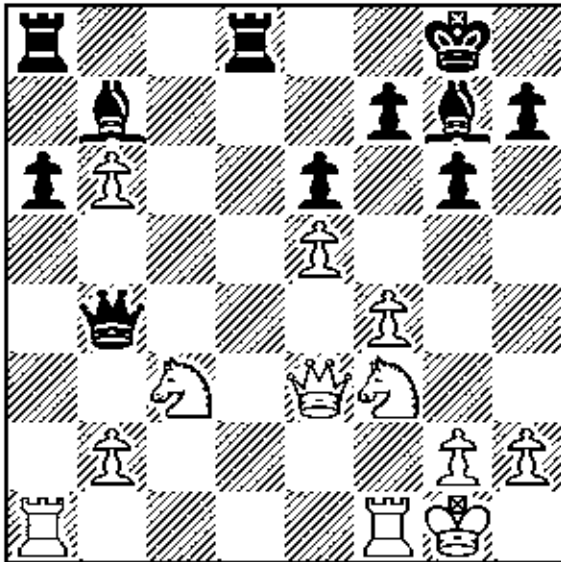
19 Qe3 Qb4

White's extra b6-pawn is difficult to hang on to.

20 Nc3

White gets a slightly better version with 20 Ra3! Rfd8 21 Rb3.

20 ... Rfd8



Exercise (critical decision): Should White try and hang on to both b-pawns, with 21 Na4, or should he return material to activate his pieces with 21 Ra4?

21 Na4?!

The temporary calm blunts White's appreciation of the dangers around him. After this move White's forces lose cohesion. Now Black's bishops rule.

Answer: Houdini worked out a draw after 21 Ra4 Qxb2 22 Rb1 Qc2 23 Rc4 Rab8 24 Rc7 Bh6 25 Rxb7! Rxb7 26 Nd4 Rxd4 27 Qxd4 Bxf4 28 Qxf4 Qxc3 29 Rc1 Qb2 30 Rc8+ Kg7 31 Qf6+ Kh6 32 Qh4+ with perpetual check.

21 ... Rac8 22 b3 Bh6!

Inducing White's next move, which weakens his light squares even more.

23 g3 Bf8

Transferring the bishop back to its best diagonal.

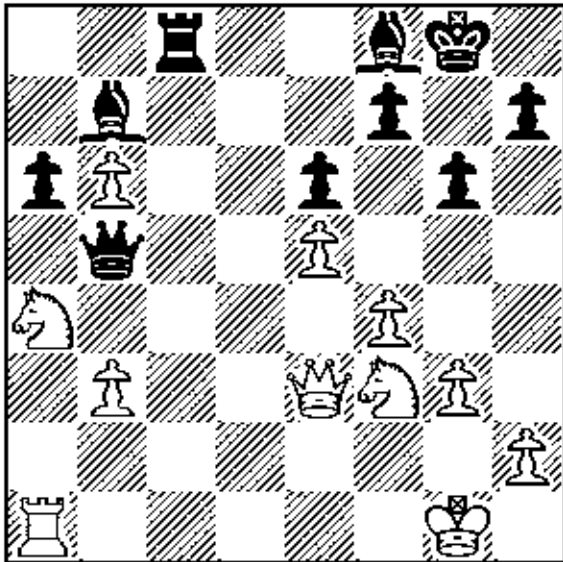
24 Rfc1 Qb5!

Now ... Qd5 is in the air.

25 Rxc8?

If your army is in trouble, the last thing a commanding officer should do is to tell his soldiers that they are about to die. Aldama decides he can't wait for providence to provide an avenue of escape and he takes action, hoping to reduce Black's attacking force. However his move is a concession, and Black's multiple sources of infiltration can't be halted. White has drawing chances at the end of the variation 25 Kf2 Rd3 26 Nd4 Rxe3 27 Nxb5 Rxc1 28 Rxc1 Rf3+ 29 Ke2 axb5 30 Nc5 Bxc5 31 Rxc5 Rxb3 32 Rc7 Be4 33 b7 Rb2+ 34 Ke3 Bxb7 35 Rxb7 b4 with chances to save the game.

25 ... Rxc8



26 h4

Likewise, 26 Rd1 Rc2 27 Rd3 Qc6 28 Kf1 Bb4 29 Kg1 a5! (intending to meet Kf1 with ... Ba6) 30 Rd8+ Kg7 31 f5 Rc1+ 32 Kf2 exf5 33 e6 Rc2+ 34 Kg1 Be7! when 35 Rd7 is met with 35 ... Rc1+ 36 Kg2 Bg5! 37 Qd3 Rc2+ 38 Kg1 Qxf3 39 Qxf3 Bxf3 (there is no remedy to the coming ... Be3+ and ... Rc1 mate) 40 Rd3 Be4 41 Rc3 Rxc3 42 Nxc3 Bc6 is hopeless for White.

26 ... Rc2

When a horde descends upon our position, if we kill a single attacker, it feels as if two more are resurrected in its place.

27 Rd1 Bd5

The human move, closing the d-file for White's rook, while threatening b3. The comp points out 27 ... Re2! 28 Qd3 Ra2 29 h5 Qc6 30 Rf1 gxf5 (White is almost in zugzwang) 31 Rf2 Ra1+ 32 Kg2 Qc1 33 Qf1 Qxf1+ 34 Rxf1 Rxf1 35 Kxf1 Bxf3,

picking off a piece.

28 Rd2

28 Nd4?? Rg2+ 29 Kh1 Rd2+ forces mate.

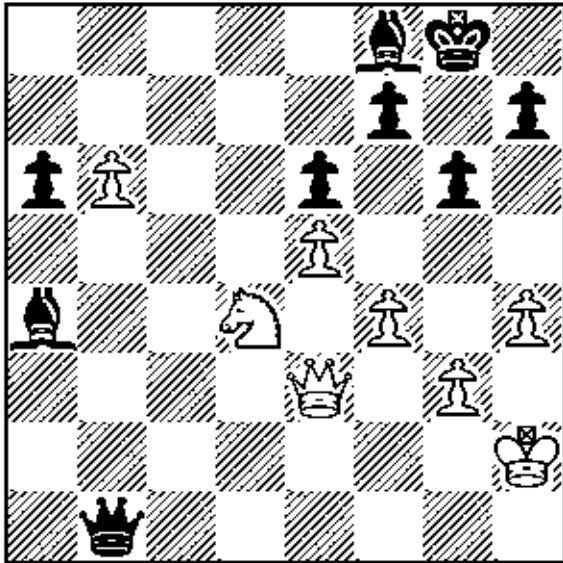
28 ... Bxb3

Undermining the a4-knight's source of support.

29 Rxc2 Bxc2 30 Nd4

30 Nc3 loses a piece to 30 ... Bc5.

30 ... Qb1+ 31 Kh2 Bxa4



White's army is a finite resource which diminishes with its own exertion, coupled with time. Black won a piece and all that is left for White is a last ditch desperado attack.

32 f5

Aldama turns his position upside down to search for something which doesn't exist: a way out.

32 ... Bc6

Threatening mate. There is nothing wrong with taking the materialistic route with 32 ... exf5! 33 e6 Qxb6 34 exf7+ Kxf7 and White's would-be initiative vanishes.

33 Nxc6

The knight reacts with a blink of surprise.

33 ... Qc2+

Black immediately regains the piece.

34 Kh3 Qxc6 35 fxg6 hxg6 36 Qb3

Silence on a matter can be sometimes interpreted as accusatory. My friend IM Dionisio Aldama, a true optimist, plays on down a piece against a FIDE 2700-rated player – an act which can't be described as one guided by sober reason. Of course the

b-pawn is going nowhere.

36 ... Qh1+ 37 Kg4 Qe4+ 38 Kh3 Qf5+ 39 Kg2 Qxe5 40 b7 Bd6 0-1

The b8-square is locked down.

Summary: The crude 5 Bc4 – which almost brings associations of a Romantic age – is probably White's worst line of the Grand Prix.

Game 32

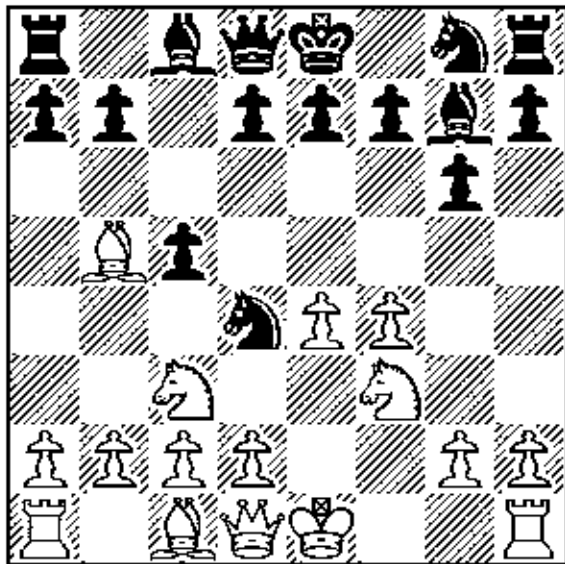
W.Arencibia Rodriguez-L.Bruzon Batista

Capablanca Memorial, Havana 2001

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 f4 g6 4 Nf3 Bg7 5 Bb5

I think this move is superior to the c4 posting we saw last game.

5 ... Nd4



The knight continues its morning calisthenics routine. This ... Nd4 pseudo-tempo gaining move is considered Black's best, both in the Grand Prix Attack and also in next chapter's Tiviakov's line.

6 0-0

White's main line:

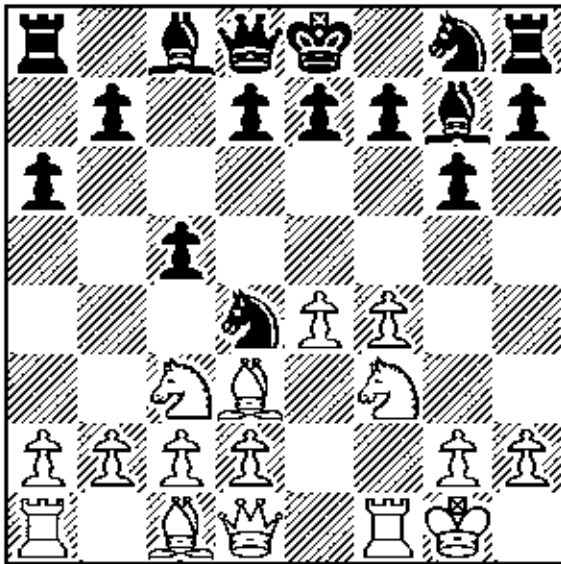
a) 6 Nxd4 cxd4 7 Ne2 a6 8 Bd3 d6 9 0-0 Nf6 transposes to our game.

b) 6 Bd3 d6 (... Bg4 is a worry for White) 7 Nxd4 cxd4 8 Ne2 Nf6 9 0-0 0-0 10 Qe1 (10 c3 dxc3 11 dxc3 a6 transposes to our game's continuation) 10 ... Nd7 11 Bc4 d5! 12 exd5 (12 Bxd5 Nf6 regains the pawn favourably as well) 12 ... Nb6 13 d3 Nxc4! (even stronger than 13 ... Nxd5) 14 dxc4 b5 15 Qf2 bxc4 16 Nxd4 Qxd5 17 Be3 and advantage Black, who regained the lost pawn, picking up the bishop-pair, light-square control and the open b-file in the process, J.Polgar-V.Topalov, Dortmund 1996.

c) 6 a4 will be seen in Game 34, Quast-Schlosser.

d) 6 Bc4 leads to the same old problem. When White plays Bc4, Black gets ... e6 and ... d5 with tempo: 6 ... e6 7 0-0 Ne7 8 Nxd4 Bxd4+ 9 Kh1 d5 10 Bb5+ Kf8!? (now White must be on alert for an idea like ... c4, followed by ... a6 and ... b5; instead, 10 ... Bd7 11 a4 a6 12 Bxd7+ Qxd7 13 e5 c4 14 Ne2 Bc5 15 d3 cxd3 16 Qxd3 Rc8 17 c3 h5 looks like a favourable Classical French position for Black) 11 Be2 dxe4 12 Nxe4 b6 13 c3 Bg7 14 d3 Bb7 15 Qc2 Qc7 16 Bd2 h6 17 Rae1 Rd8 18 Bf3 Nf5 and I prefer Black, who can follow with ... Kg8 and ... Kh7, as if he had castled all along, D.Dinev-B.Damljanovic, Skopje 2014.

6 ... a6 7 Bd3



Question: This move looks completely unnatural, since it clogs White's queenside development. Why is White constantly avoiding the c4-square in most of the variations we have seen?

Answer: Next game we look at 7 Bc4. The main problem with the c4 post is Black's ... e6 and ... d5 idea, not to mention an immediate tempo-gaining ... b5.

7 ... d6 8 Nxd4

Pretty much forced, since ... Bg4 was coming.

8 ... cxd4

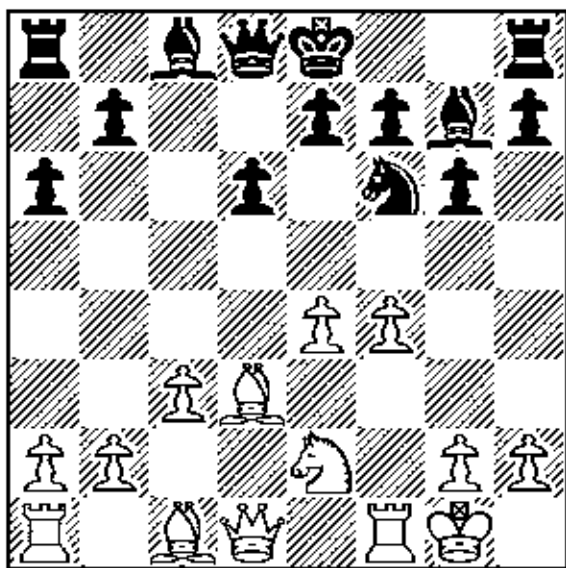
The tempo-gaining move is more logical than the bishop recapture.

9 Ne2 Nf6 10 c3

10 Kh1, getting off the g1-a7 diagonal, is White's main alternative: 10 ... Nd7 11 b4 (I don't trust White's structural integrity after 11 c3!? Nc5 12 Bc4 Nxe4 13 Nxd4 Bxd4; yes, this risks trouble later on the dark squares, yet it feels like a good deal for Black,

who now gets a serious structural advantage: for example, 14 cxd4 0-0 15 d3 Nf6 16 Bd2 b5 17 Bb3 Be6!? 18 Bxe6 fxe6 19 Re1 Qd7 20 Qe2 and now I would just ignore the 'threat' to e6 and play 20 ... Rac8, since 21 Qxe6+?? Qxe6 22 Rxe6 Rc2 23 Bc3 Nd5 is a lost ending for White) 11 ... 0-0 12 Bb2 Qb6 13 Rb1, M.Adams-V.Anand, Groningen 1997. Now simplest is 13 ... e5 14 c3 dxc3 15 Bxc3 Qd8 with dynamic equality.

10 ... dxc3 11 dxc3

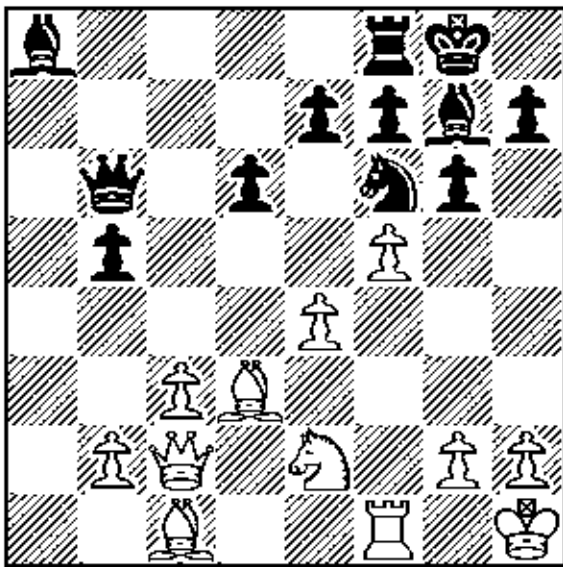


... Nf6 20 Bg5 Bc4! 21 Qf2 Bd3 22 Nc5 Ng4! 23 Qh4 Qb6 24 fxg6 hxg6 25 Bxd3 Qxc5 26 Qxg4 exd3 27 Rxd3 Qc4 28 Qxc4 bxc4 29 Rd2 Rab8 30 Rad1 Rb7 and a draw should be the most likely result.

13 ... Bb7 14 Qc2

Preferable to 14 Ng3?! h5! (threatening to undermine e4; White must also worry about ... h4 and ... h3 lunges) 15 Qf3 Qd7 16 axb5 axb5 17 Rxa8 Bxa8 18 Re1 h4 19 Nf1 d5 20 Nd2? (White had to try 20 e5 d4 21 Qe2 h3 22 Kg1 Nd5 23 cxd4 Nb4 24 Bxb5 Qxd4+ 25 Be3 Qd5 26 Bd2 Rd8! when even here, White's position borders on the desperate) 20 ... dxe4 21 Nxe4 Rd8, T.Kulhanek-V.Jansa, Czech League 2011. White loses a piece after 22 Bc2 Nxe4 23 Bxe4 Qe6! 24 h3 f5.

14 ... Qb6 15 axb5 axb5 16 Rxa8 Bxa8 17 f5!?



Apparently White's attacking mood has yet to exhaust itself. This move may hasten White's decline, but it's hard to fault him for this decision.

Question: Is it worth it for White to hand over the e5-square to Black?

Answer: I think White is in one of those damned-if-you-do-and-damned-if-you-don't places. It does feel like White's attack is a temporary thing, a footprint on a muddy road. An army requires a leader; give it two leaders and its resources are stretched in opposite directions. White's problem: he wants to attack, but at the same time he must allocate resources to the defence of his queenside. On the other hand, if he refuses to take risks and just sits around, then Black makes headway on the queenside with a minority attack and will stand better. White's fears of doing nothing are well founded. If White plays quietly with 17 Nd4 he may get lulled into the false conviction that all roads lead to a quiet draw, but after 17 ... b4 18 Qe2 bxc3 19 bxc3 Nd7 c3 is

weak and Black has all the chances.

17 ... b4

Black engages his minority attack.

18 cxb4

18 c4?? loses on the spot to 18 ... b3 19 Qb1 Ng4 20 g3 gxf5 21 Rxf5 e6 22 Rf4 f5 and White's game collapses.

18 ... Qxb4

Advantage Black:

1. Who owns e5.
2. Who pressures the b2- and e4-pawns.
3. Whose pawn chain is a single island, while White deals with two pawn islands and an isolani.

19 Nc3 Ng4

Heading for e5. 19 ... Rb8, tying White's c1-bishop down, was a thought.

20 Be2 Nf6!?

A bit wishy-washy, but no harm done, since White has no clear way to improve his position. 20 ... Ne5 allows 21 Nd5 Bxd5 22 exd5 Rb8, but Black holds a clear advantage in this position, since he has zero weaknesses and can pick on b2.

21 Bd3 Nd7

Intending ... Nc5.

22 Bg5?!

White's already inferior position gets even worse after the coming swap. I think White has a better chance of saving the game with 22 Nd5 Bxd5 23 exd5 Rb8 24 Qe2 Ne5 25 Bc2, with an inferior but still defensible position.

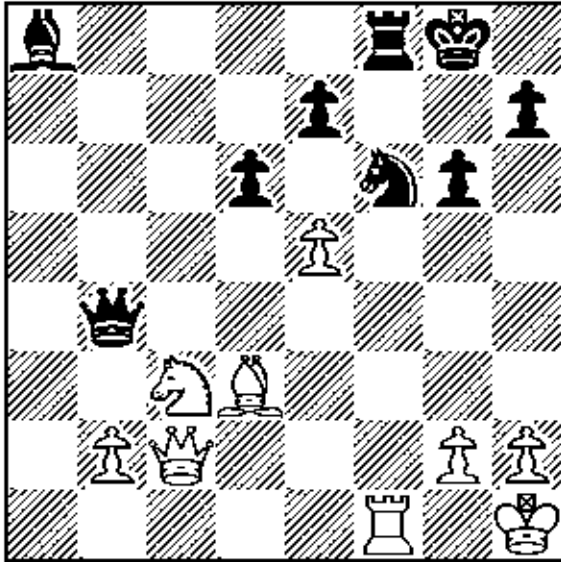
22 ... Bf6 23 Bxf6

White won't survive the line 23 Bh6 Rb8 24 Bc1 Nc5 25 Nd5 Bxd5 26 exd5 Nxd3 27 Qxd3 Qb5 28 Qxb5 Rxb5 29 fxg6 hxg6 30 Rd1 Bxb2 31 Bxb2 Rxb2. The rook ending is lost for White, since he is down a pawn and is tied down to defence of d5.

23 ... Nxf6

Black is okay with the exchange of dark-squared bishops, since it then leaves White with a remaining bad bishop.

24 fxg6 fxg6 25 e5?



This petulant swat only helps Black.

Exercise (combination alert): How did Black exploit White's last move?

Answer: Weak back rank/mating attack.

25 ... Ng4!

A weak, indecisive king invites invasion from ambitious neighbouring powers. Now White is roused from his attacking meditations with a harsh pounding at his own king's door.

26 Rxf8+ Kxf8

Black threatens the deadly ... Qf4.

27 h3

White has no choice but to drop his e5-pawn: 27 exd6?? is met with the pretty mating line 27 ... Qf4! (oddly enough, White is unable to defend h2) 28 dxe7+ Kg7! 29 e8N+ (underpromotions are only wonderful when they work!) 29 ... Kf8! 30 Kg1 Qe3+! 31 Kh1 (or 31 Kf1 Nxh2 mate) 31 ... Qe1+ 32 Bf1 Qxf1 mate.

27 ... Nxe5

Black wins a clean pawn and now owns two connected central passers.

28 Be4

Of course every exchange benefits Black, the pawn up side. White factors in that Black's bishop was too powerful on its diagonal.

28 ... Bxe4 29 Nxe4 h6 30 Kh2 Qd4 31 Qc8+ Kf7 32 Qc2 Nd3!

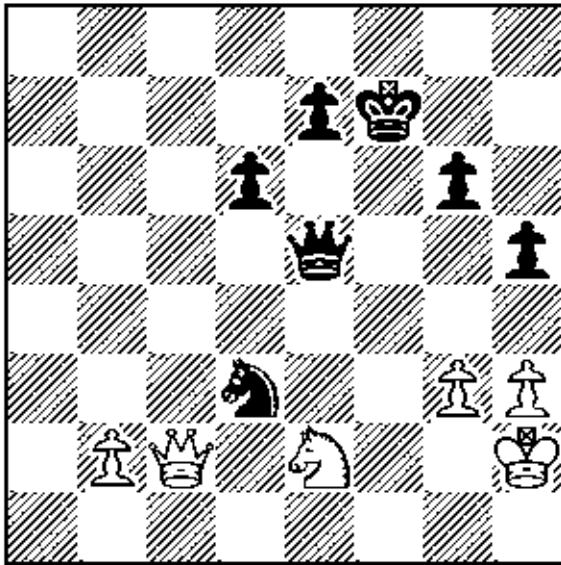
Destabilizing the e4-knight, sending it to the inferior c3-square.

33 Nc3 h5!

White's pieces are tied down on the kingside and are unable to help his king.

34 Ne2 Qe5+ 35 g3

35 Kg1 Nxb2 wins a second pawn.



Exercise (critical decision): Should Black play 35 ... Qe3, going after White's king, or should he just chop the b2-pawn with 35 ... Nxb2? Be careful. One line wins, while the other allows White to escape with a miracle draw.

Answer: Black should go after White's king.

35 ... Qe3! 0-1

Wisely avoiding 35 ... Nxb2?? 36 Nf4 Qf6 37 h4! When Black's winning process proves to be exacting, to the point of impossible. How infuriating when we overlook a trifling seeming geometric detail, which somehow contrives to waylay our entire grand plan. Weirdly enough, Black is unable to make progress. The b2-knight is frozen to its square, as is Black's queen on her diagonal. The push of the e-pawn fails as well, since it exposes Black's king: 37 ... Kg7 (not 37 ... e5?? 38 Qb3+ Kg7 39 Ne6+ Kh6 40 Qe3+ Kh7 41 Ng5+ Kg7 42 Qa7+ Kg8 43 Qb8+ Qf8 44 Qb3+ Kh8 45 Qxb2 and Black is busted) 38 Nd5 Qe5 39 Nf4 Qf6 with a draw.

However, with 35 ... Qe3! Black threatens to weave a mating net with ... Qf2+, followed by either ... Ne1 or ... Ne5: 36 Qc4+ Kg7 37 Nf4 (37 Qd4+ Qxd4 38 Nxd4 Nxb2 is completely resignable for White) 37 ... Qf2+ 38 Kh1 Nxf4 39 gxf4 Qxb2. After this much appreciated restorative, the rest will be an easy conversion for Black.

Summary: 5 Bb5 should be met with 5 ... Nd4, after which White has trouble deciding what to do with his bishop. Not a single line produces an edge for White from that position.

Game 33

N.Arutyunov-C.Lakdawala

San Diego (rapid) 2015

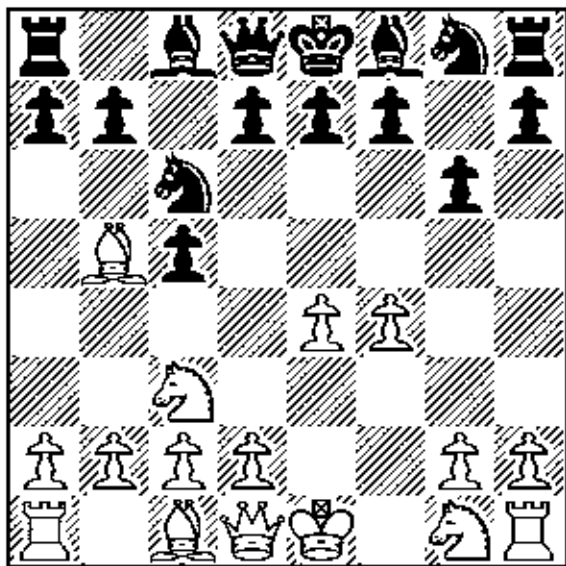
1 e4 c5 2 Nc3

I'm convinced that my friend Nikolai is clairvoyant (knowing that at the time I was writing a book on the Anti-Sicilian), and played this move to get himself into this book. I have never seen him play any other move than 2 Nf3 and 3 d4, entering the Open Sicilian.

2 ... Nc6 3 f4

Wow. He really means it. I was sure he would play 3 Nf3 hoping to switch back to the Open Sicilian.

3 ... g6 4 Bb5



Question: White normally plays Nf3 here. Does his move order change anything?

Answer: No, it makes no difference. We just transpose in a couple of moves.

4 ... Nd4 5 Nf3

5 Bc4?! Bg7 6 Nf3 a6 7 0-0 b5 transposes to the game.

5 ... Bg7

We reached the position from last game, from a slightly altered move order.

6 0-0

Next game we look at 6 a4.

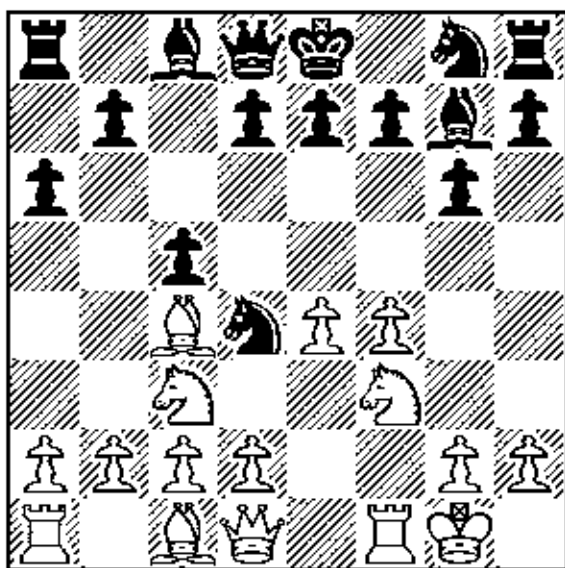
6 ... a6

Alternatively:

a) 6 ... Nxb5 is fully playable for Black: 7 Nxb5 d5! 8 exd5 (8 e5 d4 leaves Black slightly better, due to control over the light squares) 8 ... a6 9 Nc3 Nf6 (Black regains the temporarily sacrificed pawn) 10 d4 Nxd5 (10 ... c4!? 11 Qe2 b5 12 a4 b4 13 Nd1 a5 14 Qxc4 0-0 15 Re1 Ba6 16 Qa2 was A.Belezky-H.Hamdouchi, Lugano 2008; after 16 ... Rc8 17 Ne3 Bb7 Black will regain one of his sacrificed pawns and apply strong pressure on White's centre) 11 dxc5 Nxc3 12 Qxd8+ Kxd8 13 bxc3 Bxc3 14 Rb1 Kc7 15 Rb3 Bf6 16 Bd2 a5 17 Rfb1, A.Tamra-M.Al Modiahki, Dubai 2011. The game is dynamically balanced after 17 ... Rd8.

b) 6 ... e6 7 e5 a6 8 Bd3 f5! (denying White's pieces use of e4) 9 Nxd4 cxd4 10 Ne2 d6 11 exd6 Qxd6 12 a4 (intending b3 and Ba3) 12 ... b6 13 Qe1 (after 13 b3 Bb7 14 Ba3 Qc6 15 Rf2 Kf7! Black stands at least equal, due to his grip on the light squares) 13 ... Nf6 14 b3 Bb7 15 Ng3?! (this knight is misplaced and without scope on g3; 15 Bb2 was needed) 15 ... 0-0 16 Rf2 Rfe8 17 Ba3 Qc6 when White found himself in deep trouble and without counterplay, J.Schilperoort-V.Ikonnikov, Vlissingen 2008.

7 Bc4?!



Question: Isn't this a book line? If so, why mark it dubious?

Answer: This move is played quite often, and has a rotten score for White, around 40%. The move feels illogical to me, since White gives his opponent ... b5 – a useful move – for free.

7 ... b5

I think this move is better than 7 ... e6.

8 Bd5 Ra7!?

Question: Why a7, instead of b8?

Answer: Going to a7 actually scores higher for Black. The admittedly wishful idea is that the rook can much later swing over to the kingside or centre after Black moves his d- and e-pawns forward.

9 a4

White is zero for four in my database with this move, which he just doesn't have time for. He should try the alternative 9 d3, which admittedly isn't so joyful for White after 9 ... e6 10 Bb3 d5! 11 exd5 exd5!:

a) 12 Bxd5?? drops a piece to 12 ... b4.

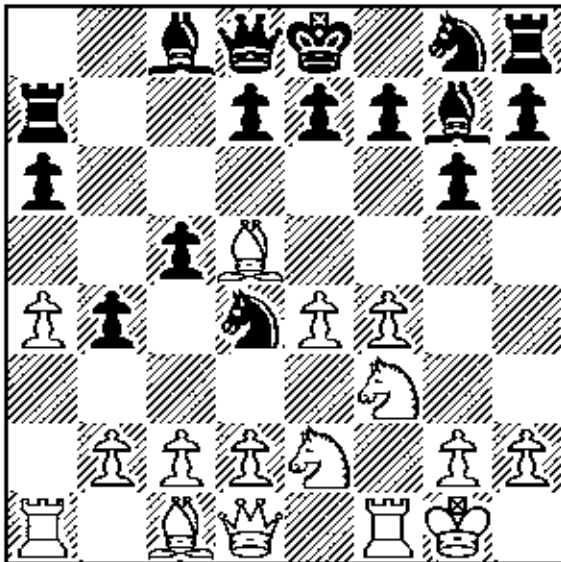
b) As does 12 Nxd5 Nxb3 13 Re1+ Be6.

c) 12 Re1+ Ne7 13 Nxd5 0-0 (White is in grave danger even here) 14 Ne3 (or 14 Nxe7+ Rxe7 15 Rxe7 Qxe7 16 c3 Nxb3 17 axb3 Re8 18 h3 Qd6 when Black's development lead and bishop-pair give him massive compensation for one measly pawn) 14 ... Re8 15 c3 Nxb3 16 Qxb3 Rd7 17 a4 b4! left White underdeveloped and struggling, A.De Groot-I.Brooks, correspondence 2006.

9 ... b4!

This move is slightly stronger than the also promising 9 ... e6 10 Ba2 Ne7 of T.Farley-M.Leong, Calvia Olympiad 2004. White keeps his disadvantage to a minimum after 11 d3 b4 12 Ne2 Nxf3+ 13 Rxf3 0-0 14 c3 d5 15 e5.

10 Ne2



10 ... Nxf3+!

A new move, and an improvement over 10 ... Nf6 11 Nexd4 cxd4 12 Ba2 Nxe4, P.Veenstra-T.Lanchava, Leeuwarden 2002. White should go into desperado mode with 13 d3 Nc5 14 f5. White follows his first sacrifice with a generously appreciative

gratuity of a second pawn. He is down material, but at least his pieces are active and attacking.

11 gxf3

White allows an ugly rupture in his once pristine structure, but if 11 Rxf3?! Nf6 12 d3 Nxd5 13 exd5 d6. The d5-pawn is weak and White, who has zero play, is strategically lost.

11 ... Nf6 12 Bb3 d5 13 d3 Bh3 14 e5

14 Rf2?? gets crushed after 14 ... dxe4, and if 15 fxe4 Nxe4 16 Rf3 Bg4 17 Re3 Nd6 when White's game is a wreck.

14 ... Nd7

I thought about the line 14 ... Nh5 which *Houdini* prefers, and if 15 Rf2 e6 when Black builds against f4, with ideas like ... Bh6, ... Qh4 and ... f6.

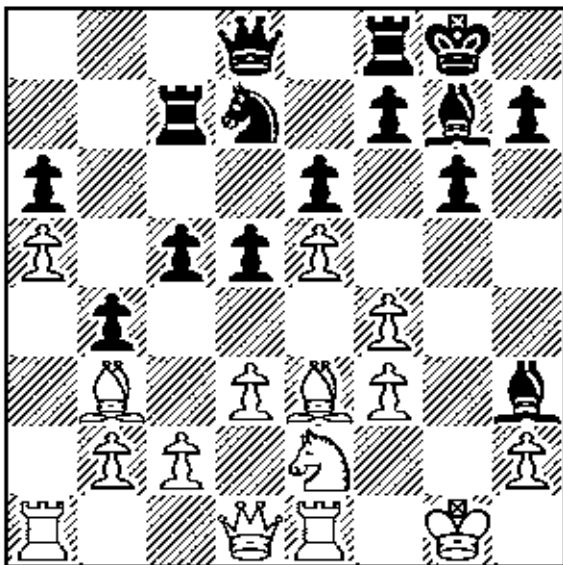
15 Re1

The long suffering rook has more reason to frown than to smile, since he must now make hard choices between unpleasant alternatives. I thought this was the wrong square for the rook, preferring 15 Rf2 e6 16 c3, after which his rook covers both sensitive g2- and f3-squares.

15 ... e6 16 a5

Cutting off b6 for Black's queen and knight.

16 ... 0-0 17 Be3 Rc7



Dual purpose:

1. Black covers c5, which allows his knight to move.
2. White must now watch out for ... c4 ideas.

18 c3 bxc3 19 bxc3 f6!

Your writer, one of world's least gifted attackers, plucks up his courage and goes

for it.

20 d4 fxe5 21 dxe5

Not 21 fxe5?? Rxf3 and now we see why White's rook belonged on f2.

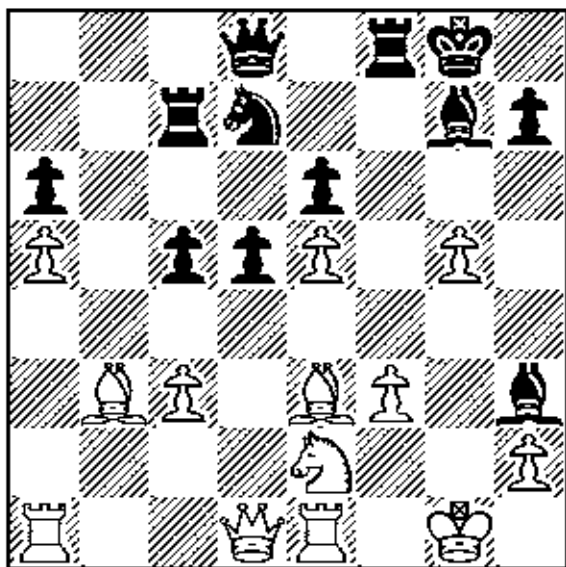
21 ... g5?!

I continue to finance my empire in Gatsby-like fashion, striving always to buy low and sell high. I was low on the clock. A time pressure addict tends to veer slightly from an absolute truth, to a practicality, since avoiding flagging is our prime directive. I picked the safe (and inferior) line, which is the positional player's archetypal angst, of never taking risks when we should.

I looked briefly at 21 ... Nxe5! and incorrectly concluded that such sacrifices, like tourist brochures, make extravagant claims about the view. Strong attackers don't require tangible evidence in their decision to sacrifice. Weak ones like me, do. If I don't have the time to work out details, I tend to avoid sacrificial speculation. After 22 fxe5 Rxf3 White's king is seriously hemmed in by hostiles in his vicinity: for example, 23 Ng3 Rcf7 24 Ra2 Bxe5 25 Rf2 Bg4 26 Qd2 Bxg3 27 hxxg3 Rxxg3+ 28 Rg2 Qh4 when White's king tenaciously fights for his dwindling right to live, and is highly unlikely to achieve his goal.

22 fxg5?

22 Kh1 Bf5 23 Bc2 Bxc2 24 Qxc2 was the only way to keep White alive for the moment.



Exercise (critical decision): Should Black continue with 22 ... Rxf3, or should he play 22 ... Nxe5? One continuation puts White away immediately.

22 ... Rxf3?!

In time pressure the lines began to look alike and impossible to untangle. Black is still winning though.

Answer: I missed 22 ... Nxe5! 23 Nf4. I instantly rejected the line here, forgetting that his knight blocks protection of g5: 23 ... Qxg5+ 24 Kh1 Rxf4 and game over.

23 Ng3 Bg4

Stronger is 23 ... Nxe5! 24 Bd2 Rcf7.

24 Qd2 Nxe5

Sigh. *Houdini* evaluation: ‘-4.86’ – about the equivalent of a rook up for Black. I stopped writing the moves here, and later allowed a draw (½-½), even though this position should be one of those rich-get-richer situations. Sometimes it just feels as if the universe conspires against our every wish. Playing under time pressure is exactly like inhabiting a dream, where characters, real and imagined, say and do irrational things. All I remember about the remainder was that I instinctively went into ‘safe mode’, and with each safe move, I gave way a concession, until I reduced my advantage to unwinability.

The moral: when you make a long string of second and third rate moves, your resources are not bottomless. I saw a documentary recently which said our oceans have too many fishermen and not enough fish. This is the trouble with such positions: you don’t have one winning line. Instead, you have multiple promising possibilities, which invariably leads us into picking the anomaly which doesn’t work.

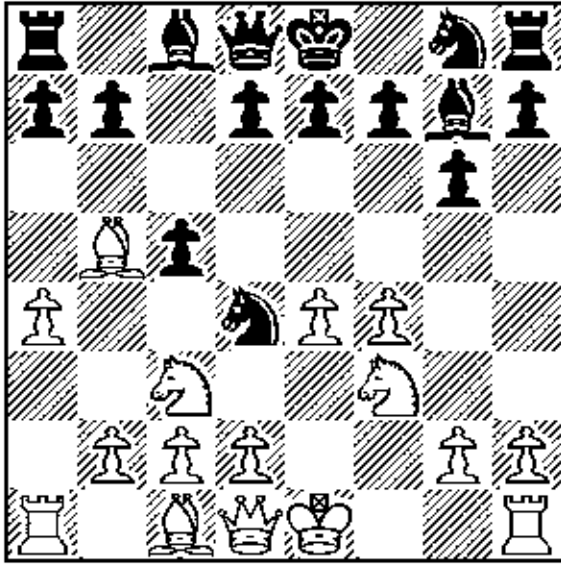
Summary: 7 Bc4?! may be book, but makes no sense to me, since White’s bishop virtually begs for further tempo losses.

Game 34

M.Quast-P.Schlosser

German League 2005

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 f4 g6 4 Nf3 Bg7 5 Bb5 Nd4 6 a4



This move is given an exclamation mark by GM Evgeny Sveshnikov in his book *Sveshnikov vs. the Anti-Sicilians*.

Question: Why would this move be White's most accurate choice?

Answer: For the following reasons:

1. It puts an immediate halt to Black's tempo-gaining ... b5 queenside expansion plans.
2. It gives Black the chance go astray, if he or she immediately plays 6 ... Nxb5?!, which is shown in the note below.

6 ... a6

The illogical move 6 ... Nxb5, which perhaps deserves a dubious mark, plays into White's hands. Black took three moves to trade the knight for White's b5-bishop, at the same time improving White's structure: 7 axb5 (now Black must exercise vigilance over his a-pawn) 7 ... d6 (or 7 ... e6?! 8 e5! d5 9 d4 Qb6, A.Loginov-S.Fomichev, Sochi 2012; White gets a highly favourable Classical French structure after 10 dxc5! Qxc5 11 Qd3 intending Be3, when Black lags in development, his dark squares are weak, as is his a7-pawn) 8 0-0 Nf6 9 d3 0-0 10 Qe1 (White scores very well from this position, where he plans the Qh4, f5, Bh6 attacking plan) 10 ... e6 was B.Malisov-M.Kerner, Jerusalem 2014. Black intends to meet Qh4 with ... Nh5, followed by ... f5. Now White should switch plans with 11 e5! Ne8 when White looks better, due to his central space and dark-square control.

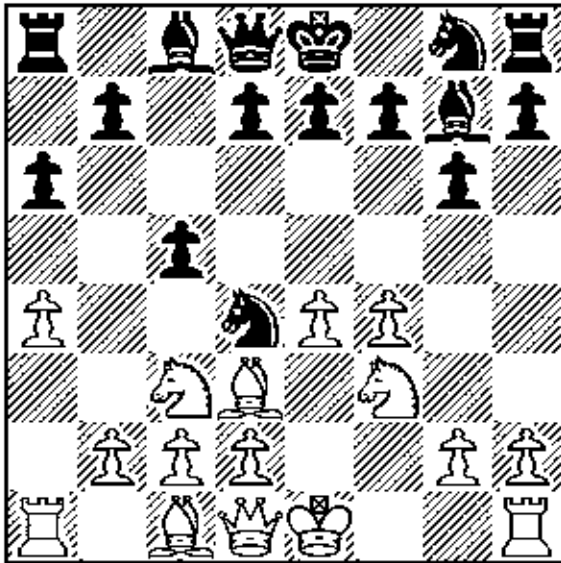
Instead, with 6 ... e6 Black holds back on ... a6 for now. After 7 0-0 Ne7 8 e5 a6 9 Bd3 (9 Bc4 transposes to our game) 9 ... Nxf3+ 10 Qxf3 d5 11 b3 Nc6 12 Ne2 0-0 13 Ba3 b6 14 Rae1 f6 15 exf6 Bxf6 White's piece set-up looks artificial, while Black

controls more than his fair share of the centre and stands slightly better, M.Adams-I.Morovic Fernandez, Las Palmas 1993.

7 Bc4

White's main line, but maybe it shouldn't be, since the c4 posting walks into our ... e6, ... Ne7 and ... d5 plan. In fact, I think White again struggles to equalize.

7 Bd3 may be a better choice, which still gives White nothing:



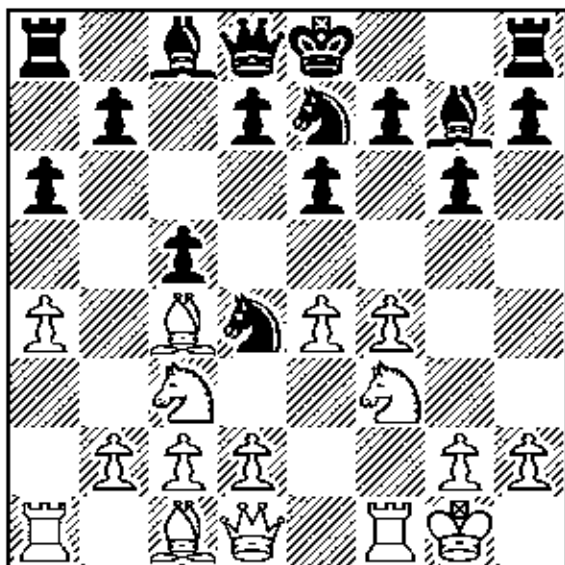
a) 7 ... d6 8 Nxd4 cxd4 9 Ne2 Nf6 10 Nxd4 Nxe4 11 Bxe4 Bxd4 12 Qf3 Qc7 13 c3 f5! 14 Bd5 was S.Kindermann-Z.Ribli, Altensteig 1992. The game is approximately even after 14 ... Bf6 15 0-0 e6 16 Ba2 0-0 17 d4 Bd7.

b) 7 ... e6 8 Nxd4 (or 8 e5 d6 9 exd6 Qxd6 10 Nxd4 cxd4 11 Ne2 Ne7 12 0-0 0-0 13 b3 Rd8 14 Ng3, as in W.Beckemeier-V.Meier, German League 1997; here *Houdini* suggests the completely inhuman self-pinning idea 14 ... Nd5!? 15 Ba3 Nb4 16 Ne4 Qb6 and White has nothing better than to chop the annoying b4-knight, after which I prefer Black's position) 8 ... cxd4 9 Ne2 Ne7 10 0-0 (with 10 b4 White does get to develop his c1-bishop after all; following 10 ... d6 11 0-0 0-0 12 Kh1 f5 13 c3 dxc3 14 dxc3 Kh8 15 Be3 e5 16 Qe1 Be6 17 Rd1 Qc7 the game is sharp, and probably balanced, D.Campora-A.Khalifman, New York 1998) 10 ... d6 11 c3 Nc6 12 Qe1 0-0 13 Qf2 d5 14 Ng3 (14 e5?! is met with 14 ... f6! with an edge for Black) 14 ... dxe4 15 Bxe4 f5! 16 Bb1 when White's queenside development is clogged and Black enjoys a pleasant edge, V.Milanovic-I.Horvath, Nagykanizsa 1988, but if 16 Bxc6 bxc6 and White gives away all his light squares.

7 ... e6

We jump on the chance to get our ... Ne7, ... d5 machinery into motion, especially since White's bishop is a target on c4.

8 0-0 Ne7



9 e5

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, this move doesn't really escape the coming tempo loss, since White takes a move to prevent the tempo loss.

Instead, 9 d3 d5 10 Ba2 0-0 11 Kh1 b5!? (ambitious; a more cautious man would have played 11 ... b6) 12 axb5? (now White's a2-bishop is pinned) 12 ... axb5 13 Nxd4 (or 13 e5 Nxf3 14 Qxf3 b4 15 Ne2 Ra4! 16 Bd2 Qa5 17 Nc1 Bb7 when White is completely tangled up on the a2 pin and is busted) 13 ... cxd4 14 Ne2 (14 Nxb5 Ba6 15 c4 dxc3 16 Nxc3 dxe4 is clearly in Black's favour: 17 Bc4 Bxc4 18 Rxa8 Qxa8 19 dxc4 Bxc3 20 bxc3 Rd8 21 Qb3 Nf5 when Black dominates, with a superior structure and the superior minor piece) 14 ... dxe4 15 dxe4 Bb7 16 Qd3 Ra7! 17 f5 Qa8! 18 f6 Bxe4 19 Qg3 was G.Hernandez-B.Gulko, Yucatan 1999. White is busted after 19 ... Nf5! 20 Rxf5 exf5 21 fxg7 Re8 since his a2-bishop falls: 22 Bh6 Rxa2 23 Rxa2 Qxa2 24 Qd6 Qa1+ 25 Nc1 Qa8 26 Qf8+ Rxf8 27 gxf8Q+ Qxf8 28 Bxf8 Kxf8 leaves White down two pawns.

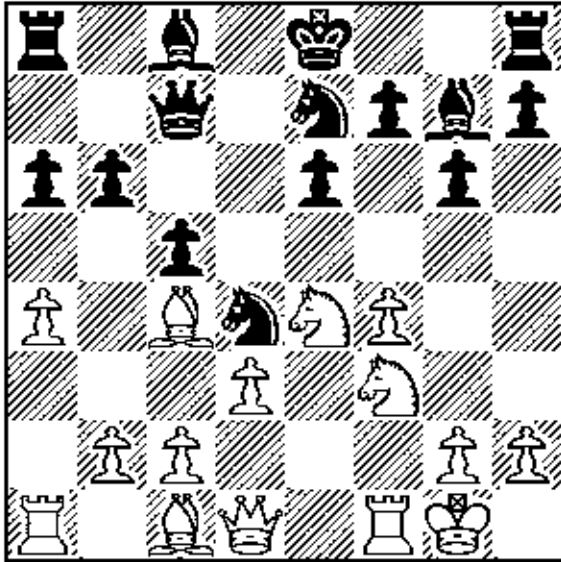
9 ... d5 10 exd6 Qxd6

Also possible is to capture the d6-pawn with a knight. After 10 ... Nef5 11 Ne4 Nxd6 12 Nxd6+ Qxd6 13 d3 b6 14 c3 Nc6 15 Qe2 0-0 16 Be3 Bb7 17 Rad1 Na5 18 Qf2 Rac8 I prefer Black's queenside play over anything White can generate on the kingside, G.Jiroveanu-C.Navrotescu, Eforie Nord 1998.

11 d3 Qc7 12 Ne4

After 12 Ne5, of course, this pawn offer shouldn't be accepted, since it would puncture all of Black's kingside dark squares, so we calmly go 12 ... 0-0 13 Re1 b6 14 Ne4 Ndc6 15 Nxc6 Qxc6 16 Qd2 Nf5. White has nothing to do and Black already stands slightly better, P.Klochan-S.Capak, correspondence 2008.

12 ... b6



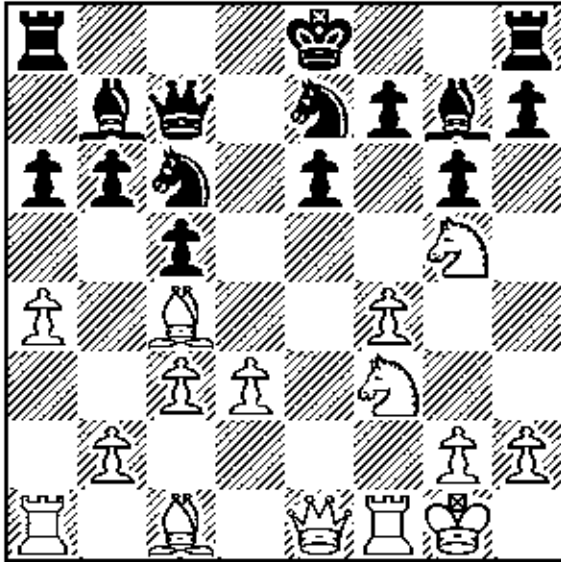
13 c3

Theory ends around here. This move ejects the annoying knight, at the cost of turning d3 into a backward pawn on an open file. I already prefer Black's position, but 13 Nxd4!? is an even bigger concession for White: 13 ... cxd4 14 Qe2 0-0 15 Bd2 Bb7 16 Bb4 Rfd8 17 Ng3?! (he should chop the e7-knight and just admit his position soured) 17 ... Nd5 18 Bd2 Qc6 when ... Ne3 tricks are in the air and White is left with an unpleasant defensive task, C.Laurent-Dechesne, correspondence 1980.

13 ... Ndc6

The GM seeks a complex position. There was nothing wrong with the simplifying 13 ... Nxf3+.

14 Qe1 Bb7 15 Neg5!



Going for a cheapo on f7.

15 ... Nd8

If you make an outward show of weakness, the opponent may come after you – and that can be a good thing!

Question: Is this move really necessary? Why can't Black just castle?

Answer: I think Schlosser made a good practical decision, since 15 ... 0-0 allows White all sorts of trickery. Let's look at two possibilities:

a) 16 Nxh7!? doesn't work under the comp's light, but certainly offers White practical chances: 16 ... Kxh7 17 Ng5+ Kg8 18 Qh4 Rfe8 19 Bxe6! looks like a killing shot, but the comps say no. Black diffuses it with the cool response 19 ... Nf5! 20 Qh7+ Kf8 21 Bxf7 Qxf7! 22 Nxf7 Kxf7 (threat: ... Rh8, trapping White's queen) 23 Qh3 Ncd4!! when White is in deep trouble. For example, 24 cxd4?? (correct is 24 Bd2! Ne2+ 25 Kf2 Rh8 26 Qg4 Rxh2 27 Rh1 Rxd2+ 28 Qxd2 Bxd2 29 Kxd2 Nc3 30 Rhe1 Nh5 with a clear advantage for Black in the ending) 24 ... Bxd4+ 25 Kh1 Re2 26 Rg1 Rh8 27 Qg4 Bf2! with the threat: ... Ng3+. White is crushed. Of course if Schlosser could see this over the board, then he, not Carlsen, would be world champion.

b) 16 Nxf7 Rxf7 17 Qxe6 Nd8 18 Qh3 Bc8 19 g4 h5! and White is in trouble: 20 Qg2 hxg4 21 Ng5 Ra7 22 Re1 Bf5 23 Qf2 Qc6 when ... Nd5 is coming and I don't see a way for White to generate anything against Black's king.

16 Bd2 h6

The invasion force is repelled.

17 Ne4 Bd5

I don't really like this move and would just castle.

18 Qh4?!

Grand Prix attackers always want to mate us. White is probably better off taking the strategic route with 18 Bxd5! Nxd5 19 a5 b5 20 Ne5. Those annoying white knights are not so easy to eject.

18 ... Nf5 19 Qh3!?

Still insisting on attacking. I think he would be better served with 19 Qf2 Bxc4 20 dxc4 Nb7.

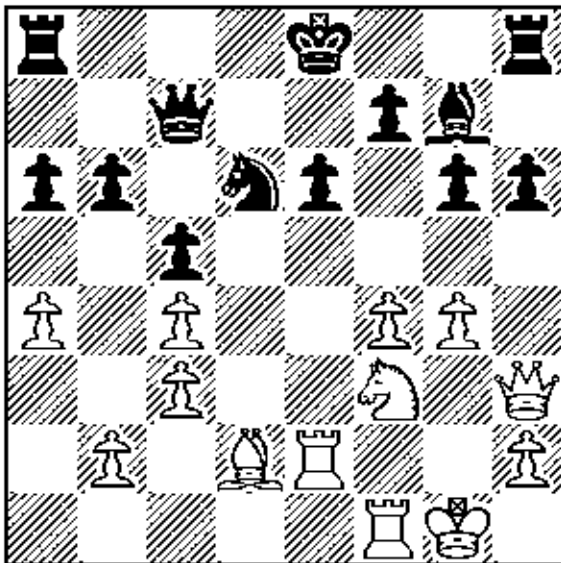
19 ... Bxc4

Handing White a partially crippled majority on the queenside. White would lose if the position magically turned into a king and pawn ending here.

20 dxc4 Nb7 21 g4!?

White is a player unaccustomed to taking the route of passive acquiescence. Like my behemoth Akita, Emma, who growls at all my students with paranoid mistrust, these Grand Prixers are born with an aggressive gene. White, with his last move, refuses to delineate limits to his vast ambition to take down a GM.

21 ... Nfd6 22 Rae1 Nxe4 23 Rxe4 Nd6 24 Re2



Exercise (planning): Find one strong idea, and you remind White that he isn't the only one attacking here.

Answer: Threaten to either close the kingside, or open the h-file.

24 ... h5!

Now White is on strategically unstable ground, no matter how he plays it.

25 f5!?

One of the crucial lessons we learn from fairy tales: be careful if someone –

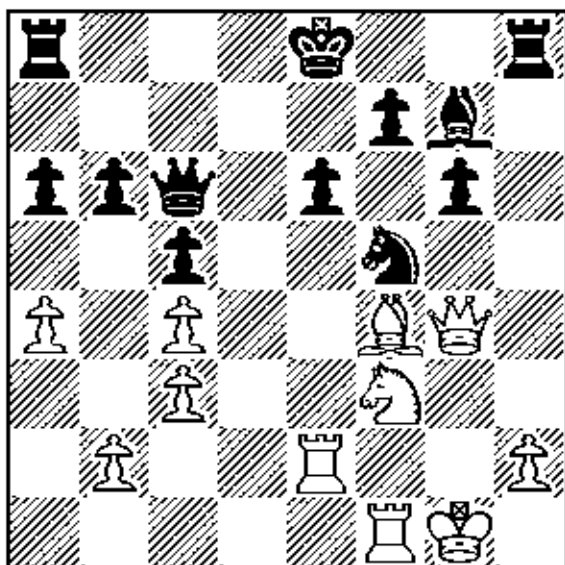
especially a witch, like the one on h3 – offers you a gift, since it usually comes with a painful price. White's move, encrusted with deep warning, is made with the philosophy: we can't be absolved for a sin which we had no opportunity to commit. We note a growing disparity between incoming revenue and mounting outlay. White's resolve to attack hardens to the point of implacability. The intuitive player moves on impulse and hunches, rather than on schematic logic. I don't blame White. He feels he passed a point of no return and offers a pawn to partially open the f-file and also activate his bishop. Now he gets a mild, but annoyingly long-term initiative for the pawn.

25 Ne5! was a more cautious, and probably superior approach (rather than 25 g5?!, which allows Black to castle kingside with safety, while handing Black's knight f5), although Black stands better after 25 ... Rd8 26 Be1 hgx4 27 Qxg4:

a) 27 ... Nf5 allows White to go for it with 28 Nxg6! fxg6 29 Qxg6+ Kf8 30 Rxe6 Qf7 31 Rxb6 Ne3 32 Rf2 Nxc4 33 Rxa6 Qxg6+ 34 Rxg6 Re8 35 Bd2 Kf7. Black is obviously the only one with winning chances, yet White may pull off a draw, since Black has only one pawn remaining on the board.

b) 27 ... Bxe5!? gives away an awful lot of dark squares. In exchange, Black gets a powerfully blocking knight on f5, which may just as strong a minor piece as White's remaining bishop: 28 fxe5 Nf5 29 Bd2 Rd3 (29 ... Rxd2 30 Rxd2 Ne3 31 Qe4 Nxf1 32 Kxf1 Rh5 33 Rd6 offers White chances to hold the game) 30 Qg2 Rh5 31 Bg5 Ng3! 32 hgx3 Rxg5 when White is unlikely to save himself here.

25 ... hgx4 26 Qxg4 Nxf5 27 Bf4 Qc6



The queen seizes an important diagonal, while attacking a4.

28 Be5

White may be better off creating a bishop/knight imbalance with 28 Ne5 Bxe5 29

Bxe5 Rh4 30 Qg5 Rh5 31 Qf6 Rd8 32 Rfe1 Rd7 33 Bb8 (threat: Rxe6+) 33 ... Ne7 34 Rf1 Rh7 35 a5 bxa5 and Black is winning. However, conversion won't be so easy and he can easily go astray if he allows White's dark-square control to get out of hand.

28 ... Kf8

The kingside is still the safest place for Black's king.

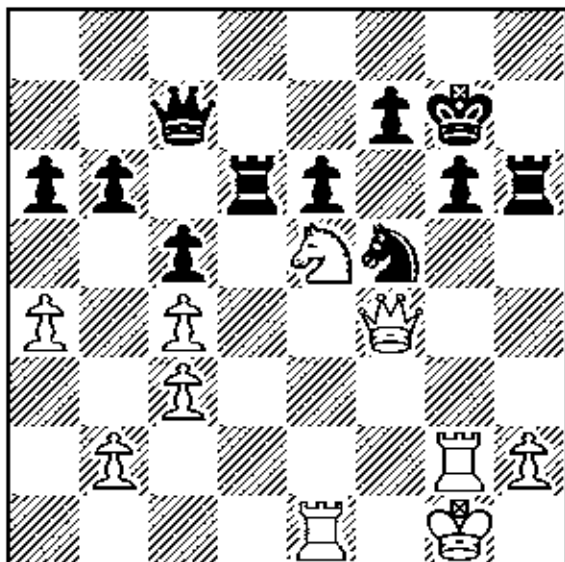
29 Bxg7+ Kxg7 30 Ne5 Qc7 31 Rfe1 Rad8 32 Rg2

All White has is easy-to-spot cheapos. Black's next move prevents any sacrificial ideas on g6.

32 ... Rh6 33 Qf4

Tricky. White threatens Nxg6!. Pockets of annoyance still lurk within the recesses of the position.

33 ... Rd6!



Schlosser has an eye out for shenanigans, the way some of my near-clairvoyant teachers always knew when I had a surreptitious stick of gum in my mouth during class.

34 Ng4 Rh4 35 Qe5+ Kf8 36 Nf2 a5!

Now he doesn't need to calculate White's undermining a5 tricks on each move.

37 Ne4 Rd7 38 Nf6

More tricks.

38 ... Re7

38 ... Qxe5?? hangs a rook to 39 Nxd7+ Ke7 40 Nxe5.

39 Qe2 Kg7 40 Nh5+ Kh8 41 Nf6 Qf4

Threatening to clip c4.

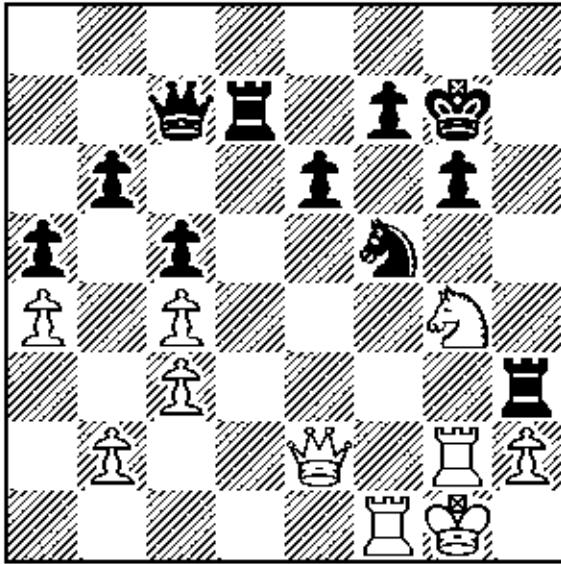
42 Ng4 Kg7 43 Rf1 Qc7 44 Ne5 Rh3

Threat: ... Re3, winning White's knight.

45 Ng4

This move allows Black's worst piece back into the game, although after 45 Qg4 Rh4 46 Qe2 Qb7 47 Qd2 Re8 Black's rook is activated, either on the d or h-file.

45 ... Rd7



Black seized control over both open files. Now the hunter's natural exhilaration of pursuit reverses itself upon White, who soon becomes the hunted.

46 Rf3

A huge concession, since swaps are poison to White. 46 Qe4 Rdd3 47 Re2 Qd6 and it's just a matter of time before Black converts.

46 ... Rxf3 47 Qxf3 Qd8

Threat: ... Rd1+, followed by ... Qd2+.

48 Rf2 Rd1+ 49 Rf1 Rxf1+ 50 Kxf1 Qd2

The game is essentially over.

51 Qe2 Qf4+

He doesn't even want to swap down into a winning knight ending with 51 ... Qxe2+ 52 Kxe2 f6.

52 Ke1

"Pray, please continue your most fascinating discourse," says White's king to his sister, who always takes at least 15 minutes to come to the point of her lectures.

52 ... f6 0-1

The central pawns advance and White can do nothing about it.

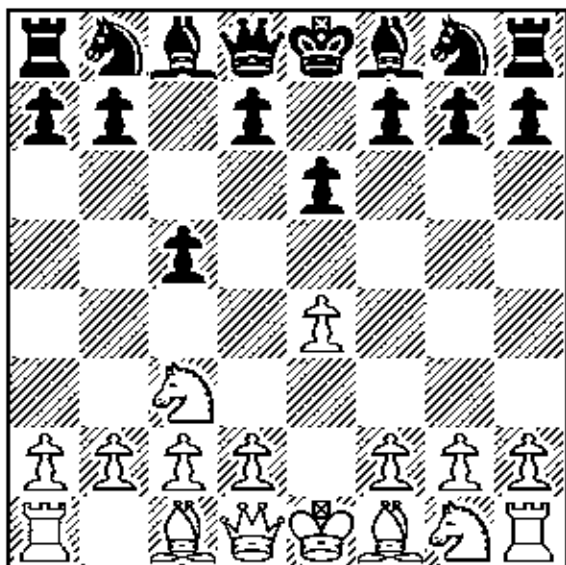
Summary: 6 a4 isn't a worry for us, as long as we remember not to play 6 ... Nxb5?!, which plays into White's plans.

Game 35

L.Aronian-V.Ivanchuk

Monaco (rapid) 2006

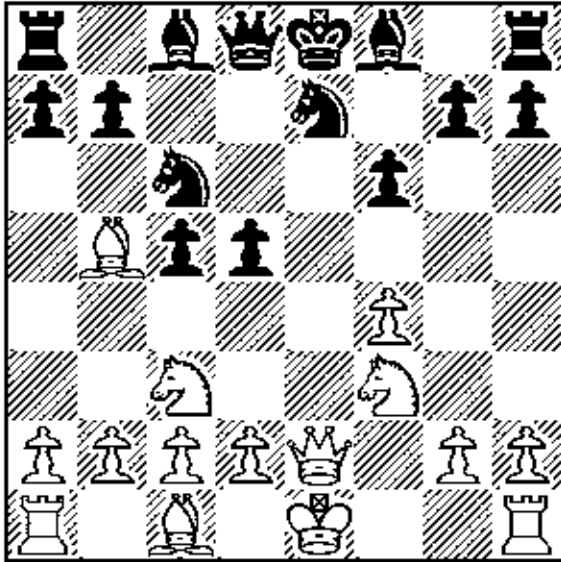
1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 e6



This is the Kan player's move order versus the Grand Prix.

3 f4 a6

Instead, 3 ... Nc6 4 Nf3 d5 5 Bb5 Nge7!? (GM Boris Avrukh advocates this line in *Experts on the Anti-Sicilian*) 6 exd5 (White opens the game when leading in development; after 6 0-0 simplest is 6 ... dxe4 7 Nxe4 a6 8 Bxc6+ Nxc6 9 d3 Be7 10 Be3 b6 11 Ne5 Bb7 12 Qh5 g6 13 Nxc6 Bxc6 14 Qe5 0-0 15 Rf2 Bd5 16 c4 f6 17 Qc3 Bb7 18 Re1 Qd7 19 Qb3 Qc6 when I already prefer Black, due to his bishop-pair, O.Romanishin-L.Ljubojevic, Tilburg 1985) 6 ... exd5 7 Qe2 f6! is given an exclamation mark by Avrukh.



Question: What is Black's idea?

Answer: First, it prevents Ne5. More importantly, it prepares to slide Black's king to f7, out of the e-file pin. White hasn't been able to produce an edge from this point: for example, 8 Bxc6+ (or 8 d4 Kf7 9 dxc5 Nf5 10 Nxd5 Be6 11 Bxc6 bxc6 12 Nc3 Bxc5 13 Bd2 Rb8 14 0-0-0 Qa5 15 Rde1 Rhe8 when Black's bishop-pair, open b-file and attacking chances offered full compensation for the pawn, A.Evans-E.Davis, correspondence 2001) 8 ... bxc6 9 0-0 Kf7 10 d3 Nf5 11 Na4 Bd6 12 Re1 Re8 13 Qxe8+ Qxe8 14 Rxe8 Kxe8 15 b3 Kf7 16 Ba3 (if 16 g3 c4! 17 dxc4 dxc4 when Black stands at least even) 16 ... Bxf4 17 Bxc5 when White is compensated of the loss of bishop-pair by his blockade of c5, Wang Chen-S.Sethuraman, Hyderabad 2015.

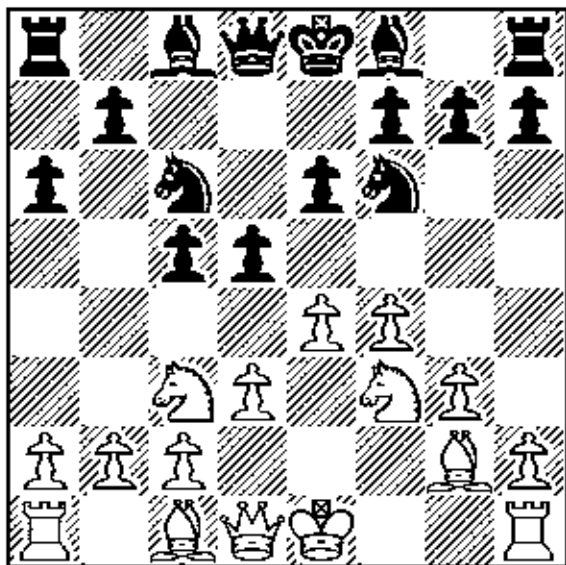
4 Nf3 Nc6

Alternatively, 4 ... b5 5 d3 (5 d4 cxd4 6 Nxd4 Qc7 7 Bd3 gets the game back to a Kan Sicilian) 5 ... Bb7 6 Qe2 Nc6 7 Be3 Qb6 8 g4!? (or 8 0-0-0!? Nf6 9 Kb1 Nd4 10 Qe1 Be7 11 Ne2 Nxe2 12 Bxe2 0-0 and Black's chances are at least even in the opposite wings attack) 8 ... Nd4 9 Qf2 Nxf3+ 10 Qxf3 d5! 11 Bd2 (11 exd5?? is met with 11 ... b4 12 Ne4 exd5 13 Ng3 d4 and White drops a piece) 11 ... b4 12 Ne2 dxe4 13 dxe4 was G.Kamsky-V.Anand, Groningen 1993. The players agreed to a draw here, which was probably a mistake on Anand's part. Black stands clearly better after 13 ... f5! 14 Ng3 Nf6 15 Qe2 Nxe4 16 Nxe4 Bxe4 17 Bg2 Be7 18 Bxe4 Bh4+ 19 Kf1 fxe4 20 Kg2 (20 Qxe4 Rd8 is also unpleasant for White) 20 ... Qc6 21 Kh3 Bf6 22 Rae1 Bxb2 23 Qxe4 Qxe4 24 Rxe4 Kf7 and White will have a rough time holding the pawn-down ending.

5 d3

5 g3 d5 6 d3 transposes to the game, while after 5 a4 d5 6 d3 Nf6 7 e5 Nd7 8 g3 f6 9 exf6 Nxf6 10 Bg2 Bd6 11 0-0 0-0 12 Re1 Qc7 13 Bd2 Bd7 Black's control over e5 ensures that he stands equal at a minimum, K.Spicak-S.Movsesian, Warsaw (blitz) 2011.

5 ... d5 6 g3 Nf6 7 Bg2

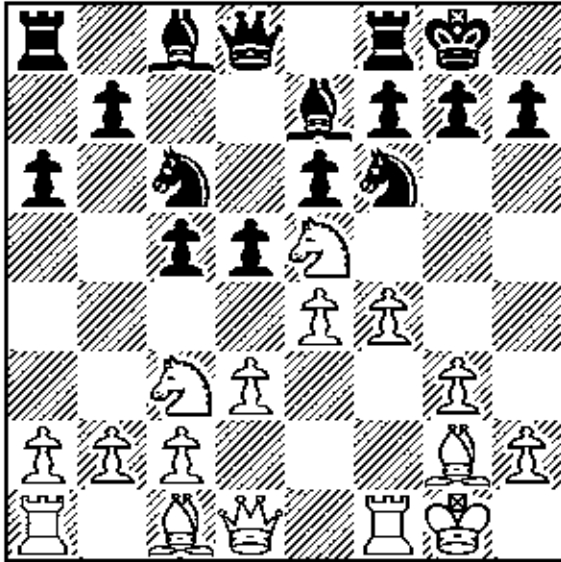


7 ... Be7

Question: Isn't Black better in the ending after
7 ... dxe4 8 Nxe4 Nxe4 9 dxe4 Qxd1+ 10 Kxd1?

Answer: I actually prefer White, due to the extra central space, although the game is probably even. An example: 10 ... b5 11 c3 Bb7 12 Be3 Be7 13 Nd2 Na5 14 Kc2 0-0 (14 ... 0-0-0 is also possible to keep Black's king active) 15 Rhe1 Rfc8 16 Bh1 f6 17 Bf2 Kf7 18 g4 Bc6 19 Re2 Rab8 20 e5 Bxh1?! (20 ... fxe5 is equal) 21 exf6! gxf6 22 Rxh1 Rc6 23 f5 e5 24 h4 c4, G.Jones-C.Pritchett, British League 2005. White owns e4 and has the superior majority after 25 g5!.

8 0-0 0-0 9 Ne5



White's main move, which clears the way for a future kingside pawn storm with g4. Alternatives are:

a) 9 Qe2 is played here as well, which seems illogical after Black's next move: 9 ... Nd4 10 Qd1 b5 11 e5 Nd7 12 Nxd4 cxd4 13 Ne2 Qb6 14 b3 Bc5 15 Bb2 Nb8 16 a3 a5 17 b4 axb4 18 axb4 Rxa1 19 Qxa1 Bxb4 20 Bxd4 Bc5 21 Qc3 Bxd4+ 22 Qxd4 Qc7 23 c3 Bd7 24 Ra1 Rc8 with an even position, J.Hodgson-J.Tisdall, Brighton 1982.

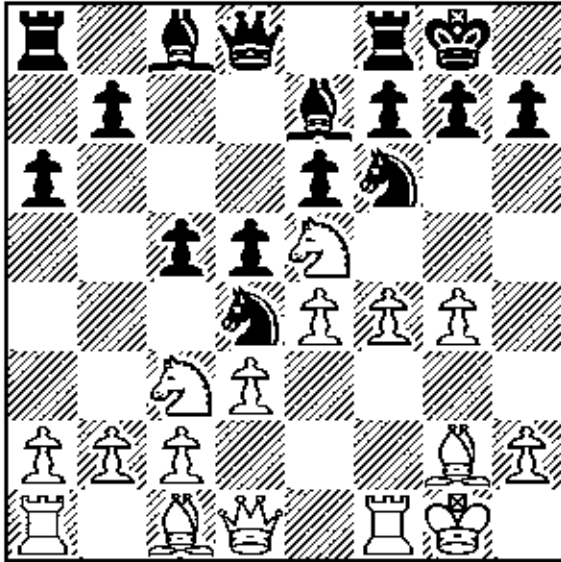
b) 9 e5 Nd7 10 g4 b5 11 Ne2 Bb7 12 Ng3 Re8! 13 Qe2 Bf8 (now Black can toss in ... f6 when needed) 14 c3 d4 15 Ne4 Nb6 16 Bd2 Rc8 17 Rad1 a5 18 Bc1 a4 19 Qf2 a3 and it feels to me like Black's queenside attack progresses faster than White's on the other side, S.Agrest-A.Skripchenko, Bled Olympiad 2002.

9 ... Nd4 10 g4!?

A new move in the position, which can't be described as a temperate response. As the old saying goes: no person can serve two masters. We must make the decision to play it safe or risk it all. It looks like White's most thematic choice, yet works out rather badly for White in the game. Aronian goes for the direct pawn storm plan, rather than:

a) 10 exd5 Nxd5 11 Nxd5 exd5 12 Be3 f6 13 Nf3 Nc6 14 d4 c4 15 Nh4 Be6 16 f5 Bf7 17 c3 Re8 18 Qd2 b5 19 Bf3 b4 20 Bf4 a5 21 Rfe1 a4! and Black makes progress on the queenside, while White struggles for a counterbalancing plan, N.Short-J.Polgar, Buenos Aires 2001.

b) 10 Be3 Nb5!?! (oddly enough, this is Black's main move in the position, and also *Houdini's* top choice; I would be more inclined to play 10 ... Rb8) 11 exd5 Nxc3 12 bxc3 Nxd5 13 Bd2 f6 14 Nf3 Re8 (I would play 14 ... c4!? 15 Kh1 Qc7) 15 c4 Nb4 16 Nh4 was G.Rechlis-O.Panno, Thessaloniki Olympiad 1988. The game is dynamically balanced after 16 ... Bd6 17 f5 Be5 18 Rb1 Rb8 19 a3 Nc6.



10 ... dxe4!

Principle: *Meet a wing attack with a central counter.*

Question: Earlier in the book you said that normally Black avoids exchanging in the centre in such structures, since after e5, White's pieces are allowed access to e4. What changed?

Answer: On first glance it does appear that Black's last move is subversive to the norm. This position is an exception to that rule, since White's knight occupies e5, making White's e5 push far more difficult to implement.

11 dxe4!?

This possibly overly optimistic move allows Black's d4-knight to hang around for a long time. Aronian probably should have gone for 11 Nxe4 Nxe4 12 dxe4 f6 13 Nc4 Bd7 14 c3 Bb5 15 b3 Bxc4 16 bxc4 Nc6. At least in this line White gets the bishop-pair to ease his structural pain.

11 ... b5

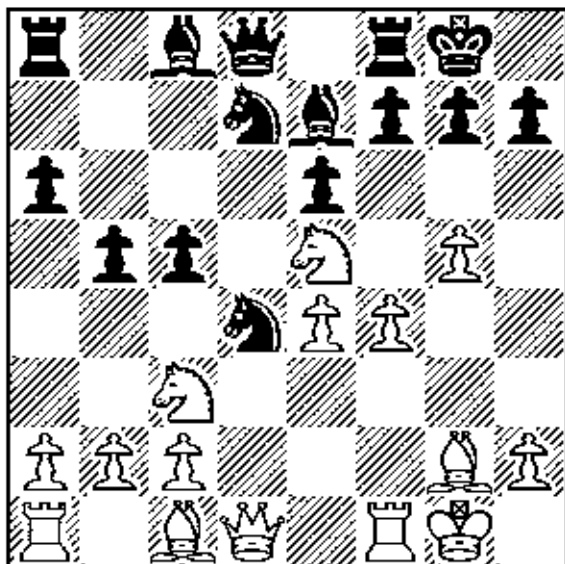
Intending to apply pressure to e4, after ... Bb7 and ... b4.

12 g5!?

I don't trust this pawn storm with an open centre. White should go for the forcing variation 12 Nxf7! Rxf7 13 e5 Nd5 14 Nxd5 exd5 15 c3 Ne6 16 Qxd5 Ra7 17 f5 Qb6! 18 fxe6 c4+ 19 Qd4 Bc5 (we all learned from King Kong, that once a giant ape gets loose in New York city, his first act is to grab a beautiful young blonde, and then carry her to the top of the Empire State building; White's queen now realizes that she plays the role of the endlessly screaming blonde) 20 exf7+ Rxf7 21 Be3 Bxd4 22 Bxd4 Qe6 23 Rxf7 Kxf7 24 Rf1+ Ke8 25 h3. White gets rook, bishop and pawn for the queen – a

fair trade. The game looks balanced to me.

12 ... Nd7



13 Nf3?!

Scurrying back may not be best:

a) After 13 Ng4 Bb7 14 Ne2 e5! 15 fxe5 Bxg5! (Black offers a pawn to open queenside lines) 16 Nxd4 cxd4 17 Qxd4 Be7 18 Kh1 Nc5 Black gets more than enough compensation for the pawn and is unlikely to get mated with the open centre.

b) 13 Nxd7! is White's best move, since his e5-knight just can't seem to find a stable home: 13 ... Qxd7 14 Nb1 Ra7 15 c3 Nc6 16 Be3 Rd8 17 Nd2 Qd3 18 Qe1 Na5 19 Rf2 and White looks okay to me.

13 ... Bb7 14 Kh1 b4 15 Nxd4 cxd4 16 Ne2 Nc5 17 Ng3?!

White should be thinking of bailing out with 17 Qxd4 Nxe4 18 Qd3 Qd5 19 a3 bxa3 20 b3 f6 21 gxf6 Bxf6 22 Rxa3 Rfc8 23 Ra4 Qxd3 24 cxd3 Nc5 25 Bxb7 Nxb7 26 Ba3. White has chances to hold the ending, despite his four isolanis, versus Black's two.

17 ... Rc8 18 b3

This makes matters worse. White should avoid further weakness and try 18 Rf2 f6 19 gxf6 Bxf6 20 Qg4 Qd7. Even here White looks overextended and borderline busted.

18 ... d3

Black's central counterattack completely sweeps aside White's kingside attacking possibilities.

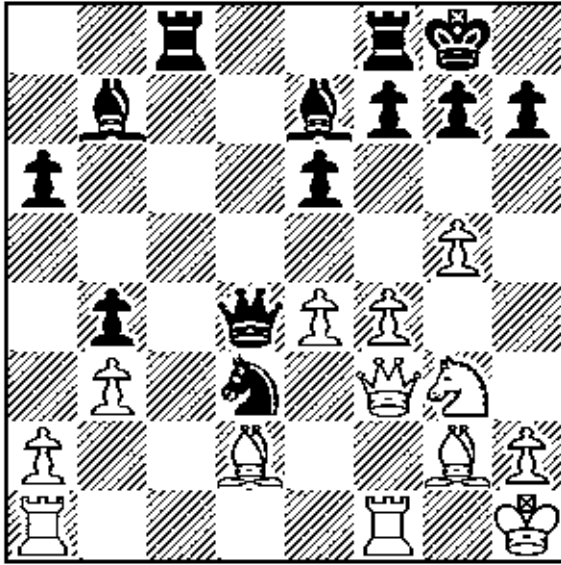
19 cxd3

19 Be3? just drops a key pawn after 19 ... dxc2 20 Qxc2 Nxe4.

19 ... Qd4! 20 Bd2

Or 20 Rb1 Nxd3 21 Qe2 Bc5 22 e5 Bd5 23 h3 Rfd8 with dominant centralization for Black.

20 ... Nxd3 21 Qf3



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

Answer: There is to be no remedy to ... Nf2+, but to hand over the exchange.

21 ... Bc5!

Black's pieces just seem to be dropping on to White's side of the board.

22 f5

What White mistakes for morning mist, is in actuality, the smoke from his burning city. We sense a negative duality in White's position, which attempts to attack, while on the defensive. If instead 22 h3 Nf2+ 23 Qxf2 Qxf2 24 Rxf2 Bxf2 and it's time for White to resign.

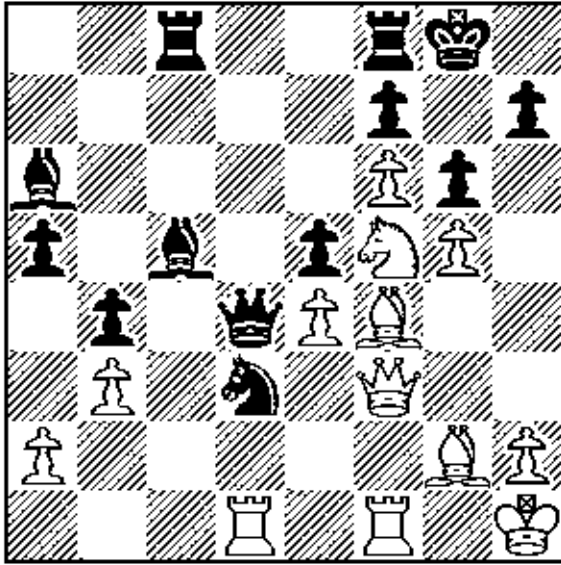
22 ... a5!

The ... Nf2+ threat isn't running away, so Ivanchuk secures b4, while opening the possibility for a future ... Ba6. Nobody likes to be kept waiting. When you have your opponent in a hopeless situation, sometimes it's best to take our time in the winning process, since prolonging the game may induce the desperate opponent to lash out. Of course, one may argue the opposite: never willingly complicate in a winning position. After all, why risk a fight with an already beaten opponent? Ivanchuk could also play 22 ... Nf2+ 23 Qxf2 Qxf2 24 Rxf2 Bxf2 25 Bxb4 Rfd8 with a winning ending for Black.

23 Bf4 e5

Once again, there is nothing wrong with the simpler line 23 ... Nf2+ 24 Rxf2 Qxa1+ 25 Rf1 Qxa2 26 Be5 Qd2 27 h4 Ba6 28 Rd1 Qc2 29 Ra1 (29 Nh5?? Be2 instantly ends the game) 29 ... Bb6 and White's intended attack is at a standstill, since, once again, 30 Nh5?? is met with 30 ... Be2.

24 f6 g6 25 Rad1 Ba6 26 Nf5



Exercise (critical decision): Aronian takes all his chips and places them on f5. Should Black risk accepting the piece, or should he play 26 ... Nf2+ instead?

Answer: In complications, confusion is to be expected, since we can't see all the variables. But that which dooms us is indecision. Don't fear ghosts. White has no chance to deliver mate. Black should accept the piece.

26 ... gxf5!

White's last move was an attempt to seek a lofty goal with the click of a button. Ivanchuk calls his opponent's bluff, without even a moment's hair-pulling, cringing or fingers-in-mouth-nail biting. Instead, 26 ... Nf2+?? allows White to escape after 27 Rxf2 Qxf2 28 Qxf2 Bxf2 29 Ne7+ Kh8 30 Nxc8 Rxc8 31 Bh3 Be2! 32 Kg2 Bxd1 33 Bxc8 Bd4 34 Bc1 with a likely draw.

27 Bg3 f4 28 Bh4 Qe3 29 Qh5

White's queen seeks to distance herself from her undesirable e3 acquaintance. Threat: Qh6 and Qg7 mate, which is easily dealt with.

29 ... Rfd8

Black defenders easily weave and evade the would-be attacker's attempts, like a hunted wild boar pursued by an elderly, overweight hunter. Now ... Bf8 covers all mating attempts on g7.

29 ... Kh8 also works when 30 Rf3 Qe2! 31 Rdf1 Bb7 is similar to the game continuation.

30 Rf3

"It's not who we are which defines us. Instead, it's what we do," orates the rook,

who is soon embarrassed, since he realized he just inadvertently quoted one of Christian Bale's lines from a Batman movie. White's attempt to lift the rook to h3 fails, to Black's next move.

30 ... Qe2!

The black queen's hateful stare creates painful psychic blisters on her h5 sister's sensitive skin. This move pins the f3-rook and essentially shuts down White's mating attempts.

31 Rdf1 Bb7 0-1

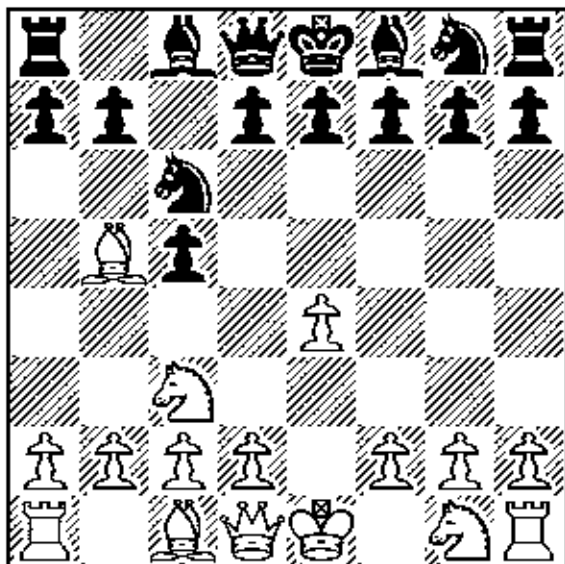
White's attack reached a dead end.

Summary: The 2 ... e6 and 3 ... a6 Kan move order is a completely viable option for Black, against both the Grand Prix and the Closed Sicilian.

Chapter Seven

Tiviakov's Variation

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 Bb5



GM Sergey Tiviakov's line resembles a Rossolimo and Grand Prix, except that in this version, Black doesn't give White a chance to play Bxc6. In this position, we continue with 3 ... Nd4 4 Bc4 e6. Our d4-knight can sometimes have the effect on White of a swollen foot inside an overly tight boot. We get decent play against White's bishop, either with ... a6 and ... b5, or a well-timed ... d5 break. White usually sets up with Nge2, d3, 0-0, and then begins aggressive intentions on the kingside with f4. At this point, rival differences begin to amplify, with White surging on the kingside while we make headway in either the centre or queenside.

An enemy is that much more a heightened danger if he approaches you in the guise of mild appearance. I play this mild-looking line and accumulated a heavy winning percentage, not because the line is inherently advantageous for White, but because my opponents (especially at the club level) are routinely unfamiliar with the ideas. Let's not make this mistake, since if we are well versed with the theory, we should achieve dynamic equality at a minimum.

Game 36

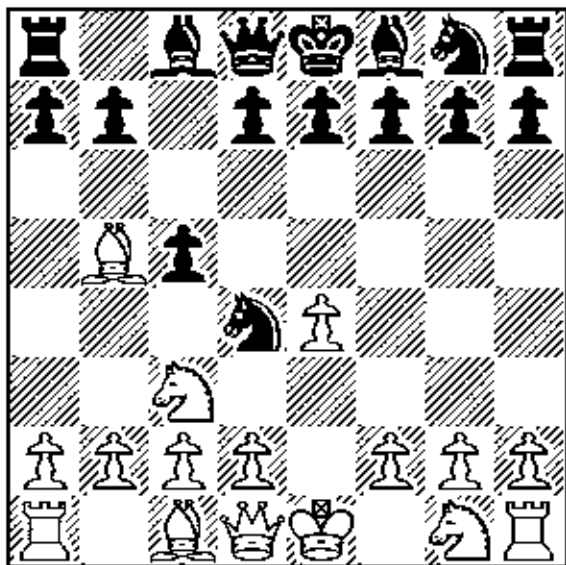
C.Lakdawala-D.Hart

San Diego (rapid) 2005

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 Bb5

The starting position of Tiviakov's line, which is a pseudo Rossolimo/Grand Prix, yet not either.

3 ... Nd4



Just as in the Grand Prix Attack, this disruptive move is Black's best, since it evades White's attempts to partially inflict damage to our structure with Bxc6, and also threatens to (eventually) pick up the bishop-pair.

4 Bc4

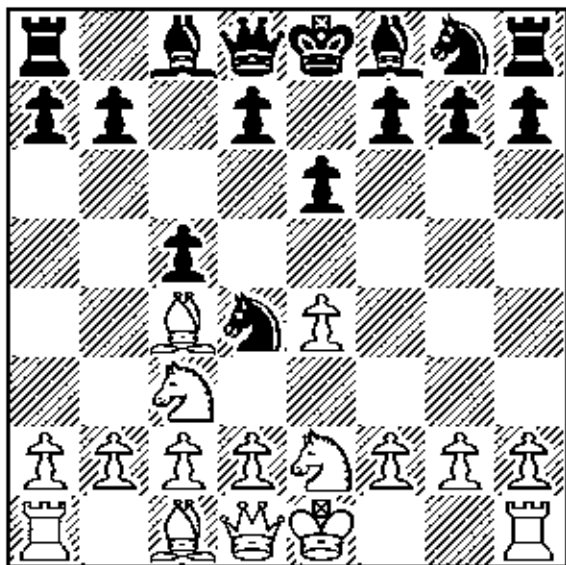
White hangs on to his bishop, avoiding:

a) With 4 Nf3 White eggs us on to capture on b5, which increases our development lag. It's best if we ignore the bishop: 4 ... e6 5 0-0 (5 Nxd4? walks into our trap: 5 ... cxd4 6 Ne2 Qg5! with a double attack on b5 and g2, and if 7 Bd3 Qxg2 8 Ng3 Qh3 when White lacks compensation for the pawn, J.Seils-G.Sax, German League 1992) 5 ... a6 6 Bd3 Ne7 7 Nxd4 cxd4 8 Ne2 Nc6 9 b3 Bc5 10 Bb2 0-0 11 c3 dxc3 12 dxc3 d6. If anyone is better, it is Black, who achieved an excellent Kan-like position, F.Vallejo Pons-B.Gelfand, Istanbul Olympiad 2012.

b) 4 Ba4 Qa5! (threatening ... b5 and ... c4, smothering White's bishop) 5 Nf3 (5 d3 b5 6 Bb3 Nxb3 7 cxb3 b4 8 Nce2 e6 looks just fine for Black, who picked up both the bishop-pair and the slightly superior structure, which means more than White's development lead) 5 ... b5 6 Nxd4 cxd4 7 b4 was I.Bitensky-V.Mikhalevski, Israeli League 2011. Black stands better in the complications after 7 ... Qxb4! 8 Nxb5 (8 Rb1?? drops a piece to 8 ... Qa5 9 Rxb5 Qa6) 8 ... Qxa4 9 Nc7+ Kd8 10 Nxa8 Qc6 11 d3 Qxa8 12 Qh5 Ke8 13 Qc5 e6 14 Qxd4 Ne7 when his two minor pieces are worth more than White's rook and pawn.

c) 4 a4 a6 5 Bc4 e6 6 Nf3 Ne7 7 Nxd4 cxd4 8 Ne2 Nc6 is similar to our game's continuation, except that White tossed in a4, rather than a3 – which I think is slightly in our favour, since it allows us to open the queenside faster, K.Nuber-L.Deglmann, Augsburg 2012.

4 ... e6 5 Nge2



Next game we look at 5 Nf3.

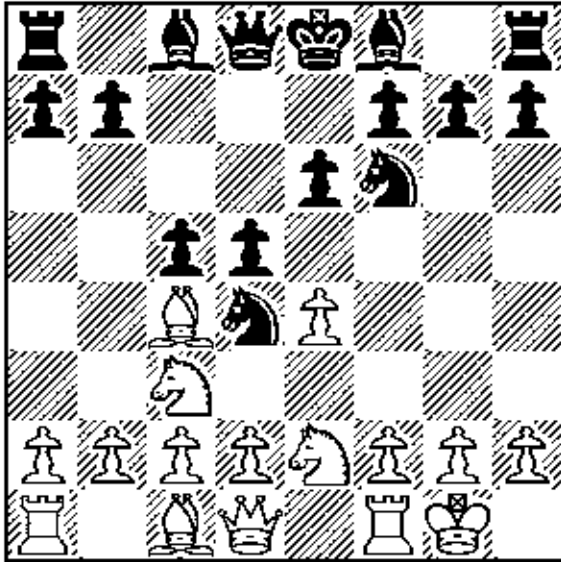
Question: What is the difference between e2 and f3 outposts?

Answer: Going to e2 keeps White's f-pawn free to push forward, as it did in this game, while f3 is simply a more centralized, more aggressive posting for the knight.

5 ... Ne7

Developing the g8-knight to e7 seems to be a recurring theme in this book.

Next game we look at 5 ... Nf6 6 0-0 (6 e5?! is met with 6 ... d5!) and we examine 6 ... a6 7 d3 b5 8 Bb3 Nxb3 9 axb3, but not here 6 ... d5?.



Exercise (combination alert): This is a recurring trap we see throughout the chapter. How does White get a winning attack?

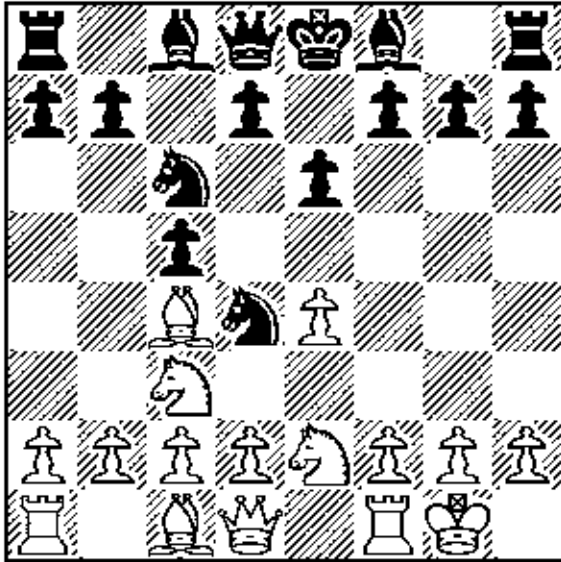
Answer: Piece sacrifice/pin: 7 exd5 exd5 and now White has 8 Nxd5! Nxd5 9 Nxd4 cxd4 10 Qh5! when Black has only bad choices:

a) 10 ... Be6 11 Re1, C.Lakdawala-Corper, San Diego (rapid) 2006. Oddly enough, Black has no good way to save the piece, since both Rxe6+ and Qxd5 are simultaneously threatened. Black will end up down a line, however he plays it.

b) 10 ... Ne7 is the only way to hang on to the extra piece, but after 11 Qxf7+ Kd7 12 Re1, as in E.Liu-D.Pruess, Peabody 2007, White has two pawns for the piece and a massive development lead. This should yield a winning attack.

6 0-0 Nec6

6 ... d5? 7 exd5 exd5 8 Nxd5! Nxd5 transposes to the above note.



7 Nxd4

I wanted to swap, so that I clear e2 for my other knight. 7 d3 Be7 8 Nxd4 cxd4 9 Ne2 transposes.

7 ... cxd4

Question: Is there anything wrong with recapturing with the knight?

Answer: Probably not. It isn't a popular move, maybe because it lacks the dynamism of ... cxd4, which stakes out a key point in White's territory. Also, ... cxd4 allows Black to later pressure the c2 point down the newly opened c-file. After 7 ... Nxd4 8 d3 Be7 9 Be3 0-0 10 f4 f5 11 Kh1 Kh8 12 Bb3 b6 13 Bxd4 cxd4 14 Ne2 Bc5 15 exf5 Rxf5 16 Ng3 Rf6 17 f5 Rh6 18 Qg4 Bb7 19 fxe6, S.Collins-D.Murray, Dublin 2014, Black should continue with 19 ... Rh4 20 Qf5 Bd6 21 Kg1 dxe6 22 Bxe6 Rh6 23 Rae1 Bxg2! 24 Kxg2 Rxh2+ 25 Kxh2 Qh4+ 26 Qh3 Bxg3+ 27 Kg2 Bxe1 28 Qxh4 Bxh4 29 Rf7. Black stands no worse in the ending, since his extra pawn compensates White's dominating rook post on the seventh rank.

8 Ne2 Be7

Also logical is to overprotect d4 with 8 ... Bc5 9 c3 0-0 10 d3 d5 11 Bb3 dxc3 12 Nxc3 dxe4 13 dxe4 Nd4 14 Bc4 Qh4 15 Be3 Rd8 and Black seized the initiative in A.Asanov-A.Goganov, Samara 2014.

9 d3 0-0 10 a3

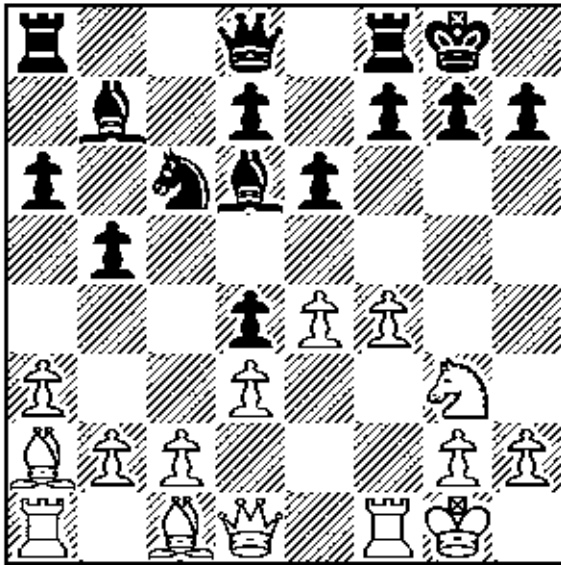
I prefer this move to 10 a4, since it doesn't give Black use of the b4-square.

10 ... a6 11 f4

Now we see the earlier point of White's choice of e2 for the knight: a quick f4 is available. However, this doesn't guarantee White an automatic attack, since Black's

kingside is weakness free.

11 ... b5 12 Ba2 Bb7 13 Ng3 Bd6!?



A new move. I'm not so sure about this provocative move, since I want to play e5 to use the e4-square. Instead, 13 ... Kh8 14 f5 Ne5 15 Qh5 Bf6 16 Bf4 g6 17 Qh3 was J.Alonso Moyano-J.Torres Sanchez, Mislata 2008. Black's position is satisfactory after 17 ... Rc8 18 Bb3 a5 19 a4 bxa4 20 Bxa4 Bc6 when his queenside pressure compensates for White's kingside build-up.

14 Bd2 Qh4?!

Black's queen makes a fist and swings out at empty air. It tends to be an odd assumption of authority when we attempt to engage our opponent on his or her strong wing. This plan, which is out of context with his position's needs, loses time, walking into an eventual Rf3 and Rh3. 14 ... Rc8 looks correct, when Black attempts to make headway on the queenside.

15 e5 Bc7?!

Suffering's interval tends to alter our standards of what is important and what isn't. The black king's sentinel falls asleep at his post, when he is needed in defence of the kingside. Black may still be okay after 15 ... Be7! 16 Ne4 Kh8 17 Rf3 Qh5 18 Qf1 Rac8 19 Rh3 Qg6 when it's not so easy to make headway for White.

16 Ne4 Ne7

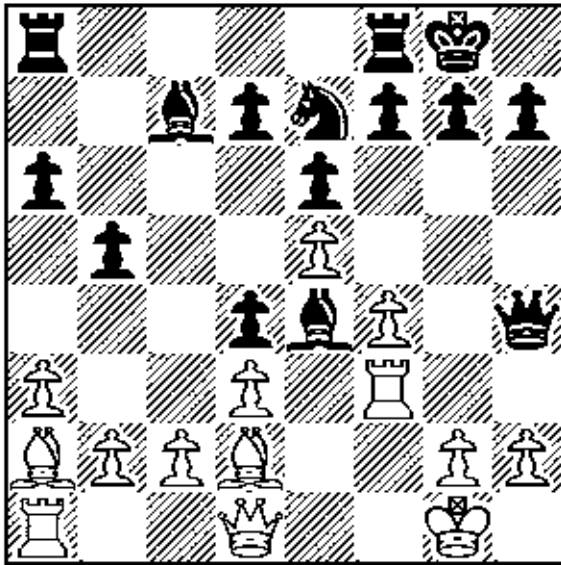
16 ... Qd8 17 Qh5 and if 17 ... Ne7? 18 f5! gives White a winning attack: 18 ... Nxf5 19 Bg5 f6 20 exf6 gxf6 21 Nxf6+! Rxf6 22 Bxf6 Qxf6 23 Rxf5 and wins.

17 Rf3

There is no reason to veil our intent in ambiguity. White threatens to trap Black's queen with Rh3.

17 ... Bxe4

After 17 ... Nf5 18 Rh3 Qd8 19 Nf6+! gxf6 20 Qh5 h6 21 g4 Kh8 22 Kf2 Rg8 23 Rg1 Qf8 24 exf6 Rg6 25 gxf5 Rxf6 26 Kxf6 Black is busted.



Exercise (critical decision): Menace lurks in every crevice and fold in the position.

18 dxe4 offers White a promising attack. However, we also have access to the zwischenzug 18 Rh3 which traps Black's queen. Which move is stronger?

Answer: The simple recapture on e4 is best, after which White has:

1. Control over both d5- and f5-squares.
2. The bishop-pair.
3. Enhanced control over the light squares.
4. A promising kingside assault.

18 dxe4!

18 Rh3? gives Black loads of compensation for the queen after 18 ... Qxh3 (something shifts suddenly and we get that uncomfortable feeling of the new kid on the playground, who isn't familiar with the rules of the other kids' games) 19 gxh3 Bc6 20 Bb4 Rfe8 21 Bxe7 Rxe7. White's kingside initiative suddenly grows quiet, as if embarrassed. He may not stand all that much better here – if at all – since Black got rook, bishop and a superior structure for the queen.

18 ... Ng6

18 ... Nc6 19 Rh3 Qe7 20 Qh5 h6 21 f5 f6 22 Bxh6 still gives White a winning attack.

19 Rh3 Qe7 20 Qh5 h6 21 f5

So obvious that it doesn't even deserve an exclamation. Bxh6 is coming.

21 ... Nxe5 22 Bxh6 f6

The only move.

23 fxe6

Missing 23 Bxg7! Qxg7 24 fxe6! (I only looked at 24 Rg3? Qxg3 25 hxxg3 Kg7! threatening ... Bb6; Black has full compensation for the queen here) 24 ... Nc4 25 Rh4! and there is no stopping Rg4.

23 ... Nc4!

His best chance:

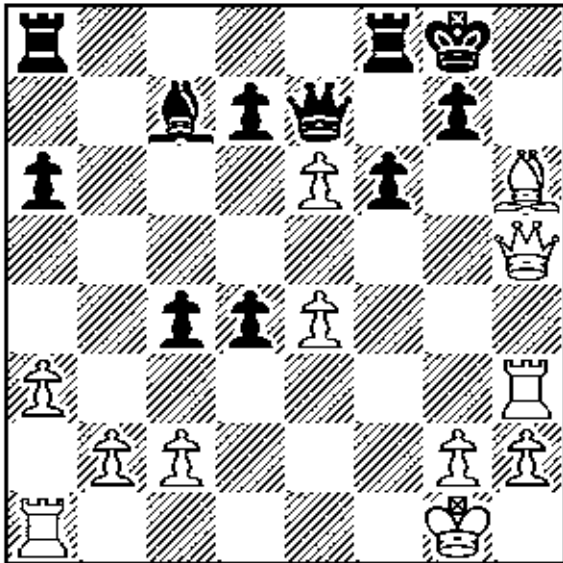
a) 23 ... dxe6 24 Bxg7 Qxg7 25 Bxe6+ Nf7 26 Rh4! with Rg4 to follow.

b) 23 ... gxh6 24 Qxh6 Qg7 25 Rg3 Nf3+ 26 gxf3 Bxg3 27 exd7+ Rf7 28 Qxg7+ Kxg7 29 Bxf7 Be5 30 Be6 with a won ending for White.

24 Bxc4

24 Bxg7! Qxg7 25 Rh4 also works.

24 ... bxc4



Exercise (combination alert): The preparatory work is completed and now comes a time to take action. White to play and win material. Hint: I already showed the combination several times in the previous notes!

Answer: Attraction/pin.

25 Bxg7!

“Your future is self-evident,” the bishop tells Black’s king, in a hurt voice, as soft as a prayer. The devil has long taken a liking to g7. For so many moves, this sacrifice tempted me, like one of those blaring TV commercials: “0% down! 0% interest! Pay nothing until next January!”

25 ... Qxg7 26 Rh4!

Sometimes I wish life came with dramatic background music. This is an indispensable adjunct to White's idea. The rook rises threateningly, and Rg4 follows.

26 ... dxe6 27 Rg4 Be5 28 Rf1

Intending to airlift my last undeveloped piece into the attack.

28 ... Ra7

Black has better survival chances with 28 ... Qxg4 29 Qxg4+ Kf7.

29 Rf3 Rff7

After 29 ... Qxg4 30 Qxg4+ Kf7 31 Rh3 Rg8 32 Rh7+ Kf8 33 Qxg8+ Kxg8 34 Rxa7 d3 35 Ra8+! (in order to avoid ... Bd4+ cheapo) 35 ... Kf7 36 cxd3 cxd3 37 Kf2 Bxb2 38 Ke3 Bxa3 39 Ra7+ Kg6 40 Rxa6 White picks up both the e6- and d3-pawns.

30 Rxg7+ Kxg7 31 Qg4+ 1-0

Now e6 falls, after which White's win is simple.

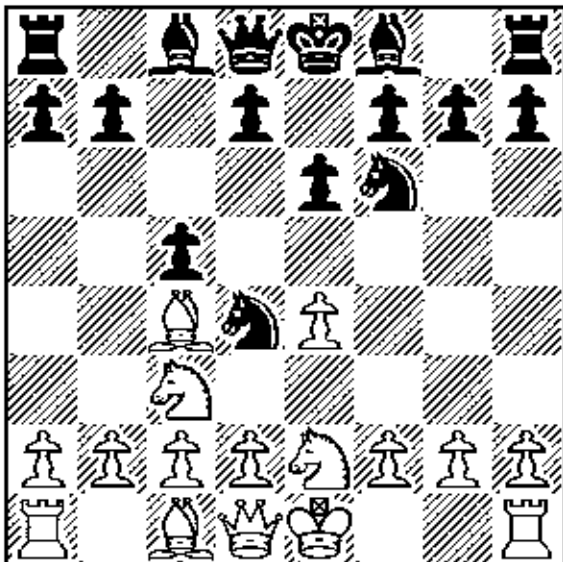
Summary: We gain an awful lot of time against White's Tiviakov's Grand Prix. White's light-squared bishop usually goes to b5, then c4 and finally to a2, all with loss of time, which should ensure us a playable game. Also, in Tiviakov's system, White doesn't challenge for the d4-square, which we soon occupy, either with a knight or a pawn.

Game 37

S.Tiviakov-A.Shirov

Wijk aan Zee 2010

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nd4 4 Bc4 e6 5 Nge2 Nf6



This is more direct than last game, where Black developed the knight to e7.

6 0-0

Question: What do we do about 6 e5?

Answer: White's last move is inaccurate, since we have access to the vigorous central counter 6 ... d5!, after which Black stands clearly better. For example:

a) 7 Nxd4 cxd4 8 Bb5+ Nd7 9 Ne2 was M.Khademi-E.Ghaem Maghami, Rasht 2015. At this point Black can play 9 ... Qg5 with a dual attack on g2 and e5: 10 Nxd4 Qxe5+ 11 Ne2 d4! (anticipating White's d4) 12 a4 a6 13 Bc4 b6 14 0-0 Bb7 15 d3 Be7 and Black's d4-pawn exerts a cramping influence on White's game. If he plays c3, then Black simply exchanges and enjoys the superior structure.

b) After 7 exf6 dxc4 8 fxg7 Bxg7 Black owns the bishop-pair, controls far more central space and may even be able to utilize the open g-file against White's king. Also, it isn't easy for White to develop his c1-bishop, since doing so risks compromising his pawn structure.

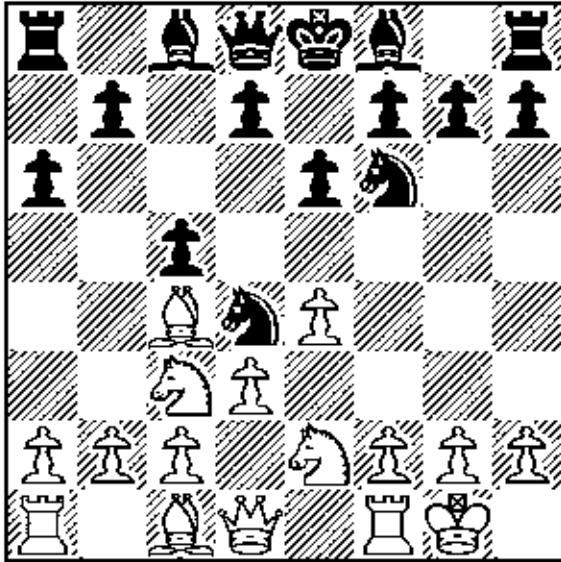
c) 7 exd6 is an admission that his earlier 6 e5?! was weak. Black already stands better after 7 ... Bxd6 since he owns more space and his pieces are also slightly more active than White's.

6 ... a6

6 ... d5? once again falls for White's trap: 7 exd5 exd5 8 Nxd5! Nxd5 9 Nxd4 cxd4 10 Qh5 which is pretty much losing for Black.

7 d3

Next game we look at a set-up involving 7 a4. Instead, with 7 a3 White hangs on to his bishop by making room for it on a2: 7 ... d5 (7 ... b5 8 Ba2 Bb7 9 d3 d5 10 exd5 Nxd5 also gives Black comfortable equality, M.Pirs-C.Cruzado Duenas, correspondence 2010) 8 exd5 exd5 9 Ba2 Be7 10 d3 Bg4 11 h3 Nxe2+ 12 Nxe2 Bd7 13 Bg5 0-0 14 c3 (or 14 Bxf6 Bxf6 15 Bxd5 Bxh3 and Black stands slightly better) 14 ... Bc6 15 Re1 h6 16 Bh4 Re8 17 Qd2 when Black controls the greater share of the centre and stands no worse, S.Movsesian-P.Tregubov, Odessa (rapid) 2009.

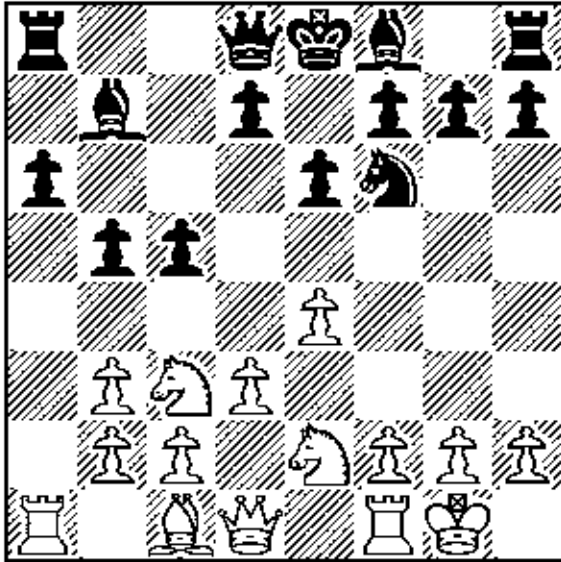


7 ... b5

Question: You keep telling us not to play an early ... d5 because of that exd5 and Nxd5 trap, but is this position an exception, as after 7 ... d5 8 exd5 exd5 9 Nxd5 now we have the zwischenzug 9 ... Nf3+, so does Black stand better?

Answer: It's the same trap, with a different wrapping. White has an amazing counter-zwischenzug coming in a couple of moves: 10 Kh1! Nxd5 11 Nc3!! Nd4 (11 ... Nxc3?? 12 Qxf3 Be6 13 Bxe6 fxe6 14 Qh5+!, and if 14 ... g6 15 Qe5 Qd4 16 Qxe6+ Be7 17 bxc3 when Black is completely busted) 12 Qh5 which gives White a winning attack after 12 ... Ne7 13 Bxf7+ Kd7 14 Na4! (now Black must watch over the c5- and b6-squares) 14 ... Nec6 15 c3 Nb5 16 Bg5 Be7 17 Bxe7 Kxe7 18 Rae1+ Kd7 19 Qxc5 (threat: Nb6+) 19 ... Kc7 20 Nb6 Ra7 21 a4 Nd6 22 Re7+! (the rook can't be touched, due to a d5-knight fork) 22 ... Kb8 23 Nd7+! Bxd7 24 Qxd6+ and Black can resign, since 24 ... Kc8?? is met with 25 Rxd7!.

8 Bb3 Nxb3 9 axb3 Bb7



10 f4

This may be White's best move in the position. Black navigated the opening well. He picked up the bishop-pair and owns queenside space, while White's f-pawn is free to move forward into the attack. This factor doesn't scare me, since we, as Black, haven't committed to kingside castling.

Alternatives:

a) I think 10 Bg5?! is superficial and believe Black already stands better here. After 10 ... Be7 11 f4 h6! White can try:

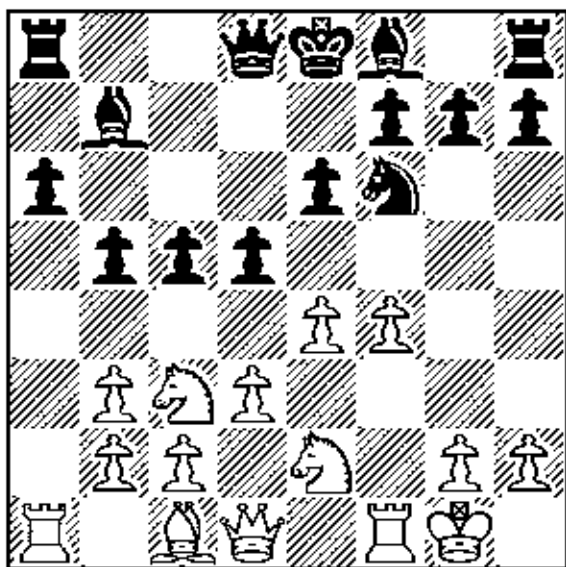
a1) After 12 Bxf6 gxf6! (Black avoids the loss of time with the bishop recapture and also increases central influence, while opening the g-file) 13 Ng3 h5! 14 Qf3? (14 Nxf5!? is his only try; I prefer Black after 14 ... Qb6 15 Rf2 0-0-0 16 Ng3 Rh7, since the open h- and g-files, along with those menacing bishops, give Black obvious compensation for one measly pawn) 14 ... h4 15 Nge2 f5 Black owns a nasty set of bishops and whipped up a strong attack, where he didn't even have to sacrifice his h-pawn to achieve it, M.Thesing-F.Handke, Muelheim 2010.

a2) 12 Bh4 is well met with 12 ... g5! 13 fxg5? (retreating the bishop to f2 is met with ... Ng4, which is unpleasant, but far preferable to the move White played) 13 ... Ng4 (pinning White's g5-pawn, while menacing a fork on e3) 14 Qd2? (he had to try 14 Ng3 hxg5 15 Qxg4 Rxh4 16 Qf3 f5) 14 ... Nxf2! and White's position collapsed in I.Shkuro-Y.Vovk, Alushta 2009.

b) 10 Ng3?! is passive, and loses time to Black's coming ... h5! and ... h4 idea: 10 ... d6 (10 ... d5 is also fine: 11 e5 Nd7 12 f4 g6 13 d4 cxd4 14 Nce2 b4 15 Nxd4 Nc5 with a Classical French-like position, where Black's bishop-pair is balanced out by White's control over d4, I.Padurariu-L.Miron, Bucharest 2008) 11 f4 h5! (an idea borrowed from the Kan; 11 ... Be7 is perhaps too quiet for the position's needs and 12

Qe2 0-0 13 Bd2 Qb6 14 Kh1 Rae8 15 f5 allows White to slowly build for an attack) 12 Nh1 (“Hmm ... ” writes my buddy, IM David Vigorito, about this move; the knight runs before it is hit with ... h4, and the fact that a knight reaches h1 on the white side of a Sicilian Defence, is probably a bad omen for him) 12 ... d5 13 e5 d4 14 Ne2 Qd5! (sometimes a crude mate in one threat can be effective, even when the opponent sees the mate; Black begins to generate serious pressure on g2 and White’s kingside light squares) 15 Rf3 Ng4 16 h3 Nh6 17 Neg3 Nf5 18 Ne4, S.Tiviakov-V.Kotronias, French League 2007. Black stands clearly better after 18 ... h4.

10 ... d5



Black needs a central counter to White’s slow kingside build-up. There is no reason for Black to hold back with 10 ... d6.

11 e5 d4

The principled reaction. Black opens the position for his bishops, which looks better than the continuation 11 ... Nd7 12 d4 Qc7 13 Be3 g6 14 Qe1 Be7 15 Qf2 h5. White’s extra central space and Black’s bishop-pair is a fair trade, A.Cherniaev-R.Pert, British League 2009.

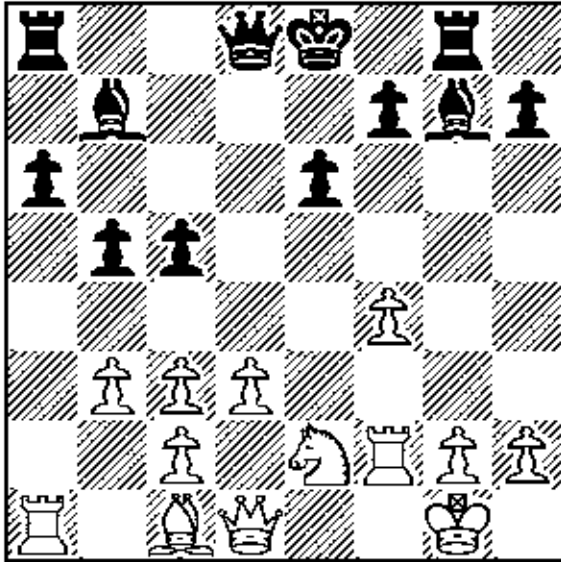
12 exf6 dxc3 13 fxg7

White can try to muck it up with 13 f5!? Qxf6 14 fxe6 cxb2 15 Bxb2 Qxb2 16 exf7+ Kd7 17 c3, as in J.Wegerle-G.Pitl, Austrian League 2015. Here the game should end in a repetition draw after 17 ... Rd8 18 Rb1 Qa3 19 Ra1 Qb2 20 Rb1.

13 ... Bxg7 14 bxc3 Rg8!

Threat: ... Bd4+!, followed by ... Rxg2+. The rook views the g-file as an area of potential profit. A new move at the time and one which looks like a clear improvement over 14 ... Qd7.

15 Rf2



Question: Does Black get full compensation for his pawn sacrifice?

Answer: Shirov foresaw that he would regain the pawn through a combination. Let's pause and solve it:

Exercise (combination alert): How did Shirov make use of the position's tactical elements to regain his sacrificed pawn?

Answer: Attraction/double attack/pin.

15 ... Bxc3! 16 Nxc3 Qd4!

Black regains the sacrificed piece, since White can't afford ... Rxc3+.

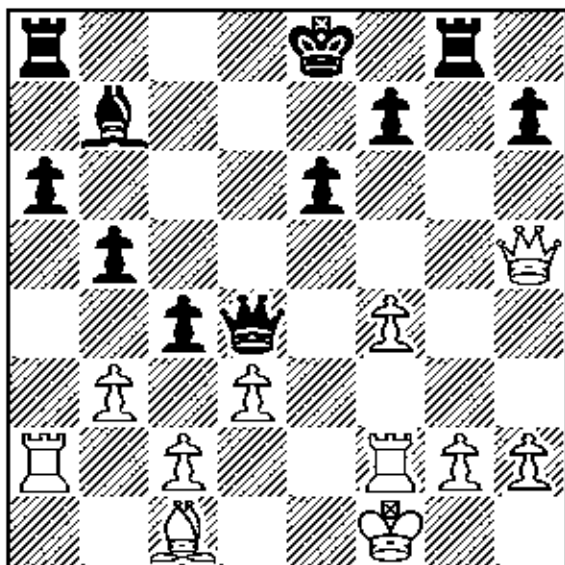
17 Kf1

17 Qe1? fails to 17 ... Rxc3+ 18 Kf1 Rxf2+ (this deflects White's queen from coverage of c3) 19 Qxf2 Qxc3 when White is in obvious trouble and down a pawn.

17 ... Qxc3 18 Ra2 Qd4 19 Qh5

In such situations the opposite-coloured bishops factor means that the side who seizes either initiative or attack is likely to succeed, since the defending side is unable to support the colour opposite his own bishop's colour.

19 ... c4!



A brilliant insight. Shirov realizes that his king is actually safer in the middle, rather than the queenside. His move is superior to the rote 19 ... 0-0-0?! 20 Qxf7 Qd5 21 Ke1 c4 (or 21 ... Rxc2 22 Rxc2 Qxc2 23 Qxe6+ Rd7 24 Be3 Qxh2 25 Qe8+ Rd8 26 Qe7 Qh5 27 Kd2 Qf5 28 Bxc5 Qxf4+ 29 Kc3 Qc7 30 Qe3 and White's chances are superior, since he has the safer king) 22 Be3 cxd3 23 cxd3 when Black remains down a pawn, since he can't play 23 ... Qxd3?? 24 Rfc2+ Kb8 25 Qc7+ Ka8 26 Rxa6+! (deflection) 26 ... Bxa6 27 Qa7 mate.

20 bxc4 bxc4 21 Ra4 Bd5 22 f5 e5 23 Qxh7?

A free person doesn't allow himself to be sold into bondage. White is poised for action, but in the wrong direction. In this case, Tiviakov's craving for opportunity conflicts with his desire to remain safe, as he violates the principle: *opposite-coloured bishops favour the attacker, so never give up initiative in such situations – even for material.*

Up until this moment, both sides surmounted the other's attacking wave. After his last move, Tiviakov allows himself to get deflected from the position's essential point, badly misassessing the consequences of this capture, which wastes time and opens lines against his own king. He should have gone for 23 Re2! Rb8 (intending ... Rb1) 24 f6 (or 24 g3 Rb1 25 Re1 Kd7 26 Rd1 Kc7 27 Qe2 cxd3 28 Rxd4 dxe2+ 29 Kxe2 exd4 30 Bf4+ Kc6 31 Rxb1 with a likely draw) 24 ... Kd8 25 Qxe5 Bxg2+ 26 Ke1 Qxe5 27 Rxe5 Rb1 28 Kd2 c3+! (this wins a piece, but not the game) 29 Kxc3 Rxc1 30 Re7 Rg5 31 Rxf7 Rc5+ 32 Kd4 R1xc2 33 Rxh7 and White should hold the draw.

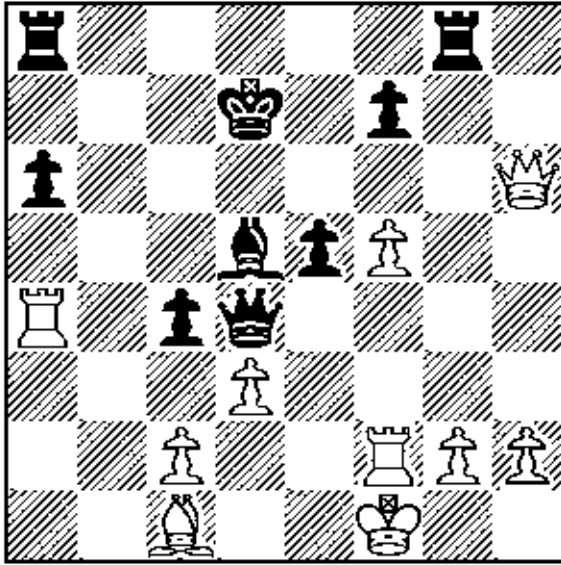
23 ... Kd7!

Black's king is remarkably safe, while connecting his rooks.

24 Qh6

24 f6 with the idea of Qh3+ is met with 24 ... Rab8, intending ... Rb1. After 25

Qh3+ Kc7 26 c3 Qxc3 27 Qe3 cxd3 28 Ra3 Qc4 White is busted.



Exercise (combination alert): Black passed the transitional stage of the attack, and now comes the time to strike. How did Shirov break down White's defence?

Answer: Annihilation of defensive barrier.

24 ... Bxg2+!

The bishop rubs his eyes in disbelief, unable to fathom the miracle he just performed.

25 Ke1

The offer must be declined: 25 Rxc2?? loses to 25 ... Rxc2 26 Kxc2 Rg8+ 27 Kf1 (or 27 Bg5 Qg4+ 28 Kf2 Rxc5 and Black gets there first) 27 ... Rg1+ 28 Ke2 Rg2+ 29 Kf3 Qg4+ 30 Ke3 Qe2 mate.

25 ... Bd5

Black's willingness to attack is a demand to which there is no short supply of resources to do so. Note how Black's king remains oddly safe in the middle, while White's king and his ineffective defenders are encircled by hostiles.

26 Ba3?!

In such situations, we almost welcome death. This move walks into mate. White puts up greater resistance with 26 Qe3 Rg1+ 27 Rf1 Qh4+ 28 Qf2 Qxf2+ 29 Kxf2 Rg2+ 30 Ke3 Rh8! (threat: ... Rh3+, which forces mate) 31 Rf2 Rxf2 32 Kxf2 Rxh2+ 33 Kg3 Rxc2 34 dxc4 Bxc4 with two extra pawns and a relatively easy technical win.

26 ... Rg1+ 27 Ke2

Now White's king is swept away by the current.

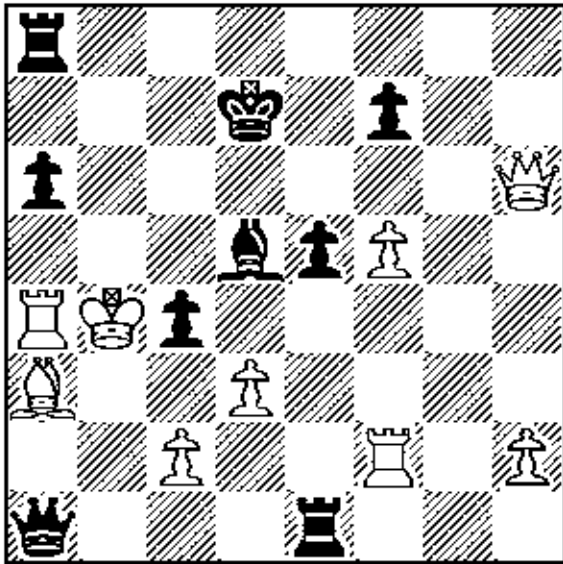
27 ... Qg4+ 28 Ke3 Re1+ 29 Kd2 Qd1+ 30 Kc3

Every step the king takes, pushes him farther from his goal of safety.

30 ... Qa1+!

This move seals every avenue of escape. The queen, whose heart hasn't softened from witnessing her brother's suffering, continues to give chase, always a single step behind White's king. Shirov exploits the fact that White's bishop is pinned and unable to block on b2.

31 Kb4



Exercise (combination alert): Force mate in three moves.

Answer: 31 ... Rb1+ 0-1

32 Bb2 Qxb2+ 33 Kc5 Qd4 is mate.

Summary: The position after 14 ... Rg8! is dynamically balanced, with both kings in peril.

Game 38

T.Radjabov-M.Carlsen

Medias 2010

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nd4 4 Bc4 Nf6

This isn't our normal move order. We soon transpose.

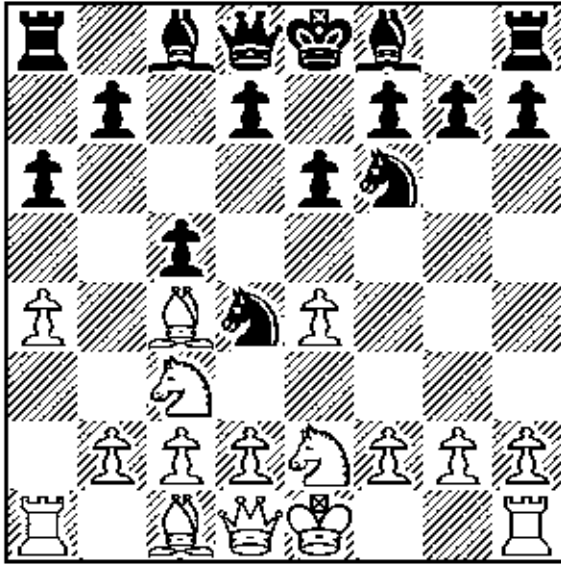
5 Nge2

5 e5 is well met with 5 ... d5!.

5 ... a6 6 a4

Here is an example of White's a4 set-up.

6 ... e6



Okay, now we transposed.

7 0-0

White leads slightly in development, so he isn't afraid of the coming ... d5.

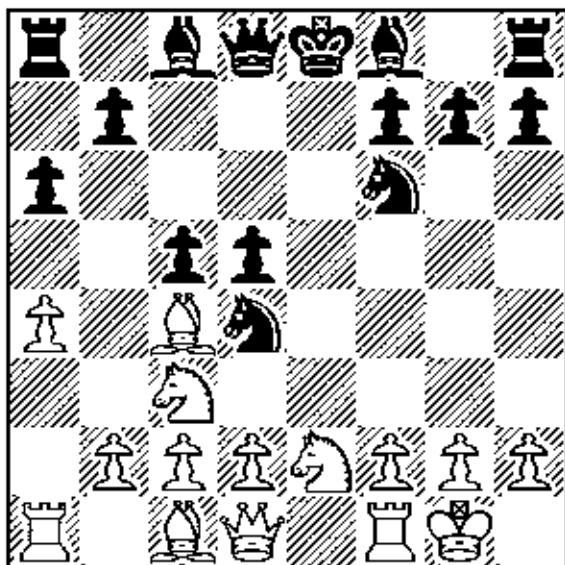
7 ... d5

White may want us to play ... d5, but we want the move as well, since we gain space and also a tempo.

Question: If this is the case, then can we avoid playing into White's wishes with 7 ... Nxe4?

Answer: Your suggestion is also perfectly playable. After 8 Nxe4 d5 9 Nxd4 cxd4 10 Bd3 dxe4 11 Bxe4 Bd6 12 Qh5 g6 13 Qe2 Qc7 14 Kh1 0-0 15 c3 Be5 16 a5 Bd7 17 c4 Bg7 18 d3 the players reached a balanced Benoni-style structure, G.Hernandez Guerrero-Z.Izoria, Miami 2007.

8 exd5 exd5



9 Ba2

Question: I don't get it. You showed us at least 100 times that the minute Black plays ... d5?, White responds with the winning Nxd5. Doesn't that theme still work here?

Answer: No. This position is the exception. White essentially wasted a tempo with his earlier a4, so our development lag isn't fatal. In fact, Black stands clearly better if White mistakenly goes for 9 Nxd5? Nxd5 10 Nxd4 cxd4 11 Qh5 Be6! 12 Re1. This time Black has an out with 12 ... Be7! 13 Rxe6 Nf4! and this zwischenzug wins material: 14 Rxe7+ Qxe7 15 Qg4 d3!, threatening a back-rank mate, while clogging White's queenside development. White's position looks lost after 16 h3 (S.Williams-D.Gormally, Hastings 2001/02) 16 ... Qe5.

9 ... Bg4

9 ... Bd6 is Black's main move in the position: 10 d3 0-0 11 Nxd4 cxd4 12 Ne2 Bg4 13 f3 Bd7 14 Bg5 (after 14 Nxd4?! Qc7 15 h3 Bxa4 16 Be3 Rfe8 Black reaches a very promising isolani position, due to those kingside dark-square holes) 14 ... Re8 15 Qd2 Rc8 16 Nxd4 h6 17 Bh4 Be5 18 Qf2 Qc7 19 Kh1, G.Staf-L.Andersen, correspondence 2006. Black stands no worse after 19 ... Bxa4 20 c3.

10 f3

This move breaks the annoying pin at the cost of the future weakening of e3. 10 h3 may be a slight improvement, but not enough to earn White an edge:

a) After 10 ... Bh5 GM John Shaw suggests the odd looking 11 f3!? intending Nf4. White wins a pawn, but it's debatable if he has even an edge after 11 ... Be7 12 Nf4 0-0 13 Ncxd5 Nxd5 14 Nxd5 Bd6 15 c3 Nf5 16 Ne3 Ng3 17 Re1 Bg6. It feels to me like

Black piece activity and occupied holes offer full compensation for the pawn.

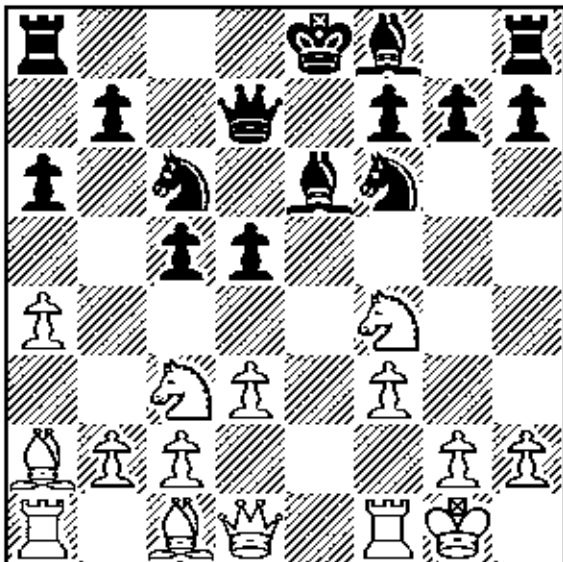
b) 10 ... Be6 11 Nxd4 cxd4 12 Ne2 d3 13 cxd3 was H.Simonian-A.Flumbort, Budapest 2012. I prefer White after 13 ... Bd6 14 d4 0-0 15 d3 Re8 16 Be3 mainly since a pawn is a pawn, even when doubled.

c) 10 ... Bxe2 11 Nxe2 Ne6 12 Re1 Bd6 13 d4 c4 14 Nf4 0-0! 15 Nxe6 fxe6 16 Rxe6 was B.Macieja-T.Nedev, Antalya 2004. Black looks fine after 16 ... Qd7 with a double attack on e6 and a4.

10 ... Be6 11 d3 Nc6

Alternatively, 11 ... Nxe2+ 12 Qxe2 Be7 13 f4, as in R.Hess-D.Vigorito, Peabody 2007. Here I think it's worthwhile to prevent f5, with 13 ... g6 followed by castling, with a perfectly good game for Black.

12 Nf4 Qd7



Question: Who stands better here?

Answer: I feel like Black gets a long-term nagging edge, since he controls more space, while White has no visible counterplay source and can only wait.

13 Bd2 Be7 14 Nce2

The knight wasn't doing much on c3, so he transferred it over to the kingside, while freeing up c3 and d4 ideas.

14 ... 0-0 15 c3

White's bishop-pair is unimpressive after 15 Nxe6. This move only solidifies Black's control over d5 and opens the f-file for Black's rooks: 15 ... fxe6 16 c3 b5 17 Re1 Bd6 with an edge for Black.

15 ... b5

Black continues to annex more space.

16 Bb1 Rab8 17 axb5 axb5 18 Bc2 Bd6 19 Qe1 Rfe8 20 Qf2 Qc7 21 Kh1

This move clearly indicates that White has no constructive plan, except to await events.

21 ... b4 22 d4!

There are two forms of entrenchment we must avoid:

1. The headstrong, stubborn, unchanging kind.
2. Number 1's opposite, timidity, and the decision not to act, when we should.

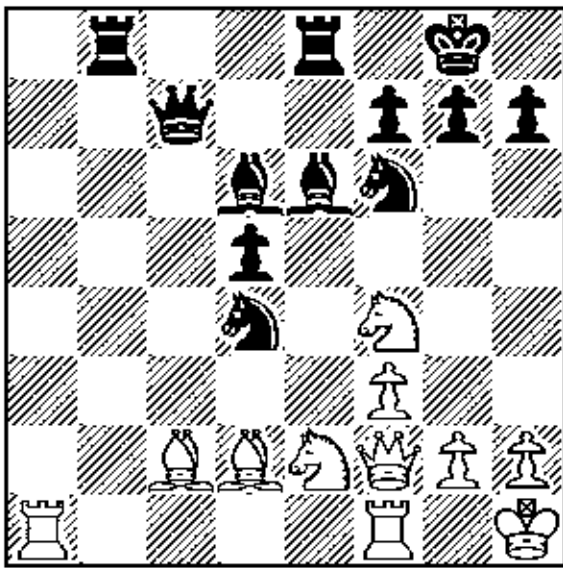
White's advance is well timed, and we note a fractional shift of increase in White's piece activity level. White must fight back and regain some lost space, or else risk a slow squeeze.

22 ... bxc3 23 bxc3 cxd4

Carlsen exchanges so that he can make use of b4, or possibly exploit tactics on d4.

23 ... c4 is better for Black, but still miles away from a win.

24 cxd4 Nxd4!



All thieves believe their need overcomes their desire to remain honourable. Simmering animosity welters over to open violence. When we set a trap, our initial action must have the appearance of un-premeditation. Just like that, without warning, the position leaves behind its sense of ordinariness. This is Black's only try for the win. Of course this move doesn't win a pawn, since White's bishop pulls a kamazee/zwischenzug on h7.

After 24 ... Nb4 25 Ba4 Bd7 26 Rfc1 Qd8 27 Bxd7 Qxd7 Black still stands a shade better. However, it's just not enough to win the game.

25 Bxh7+

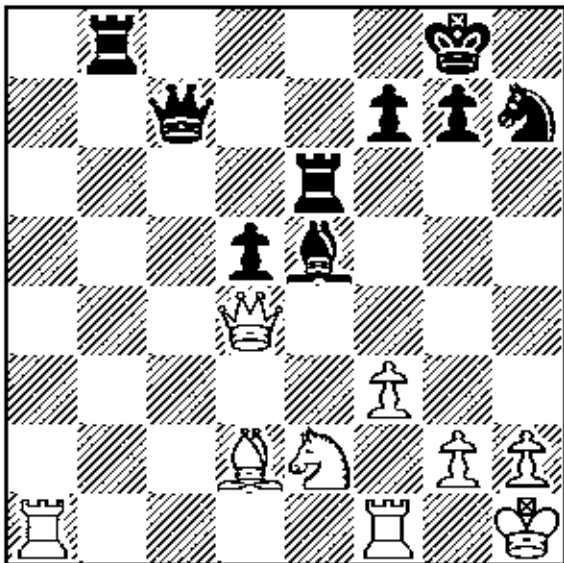
Being thrown out of a bar by a bouncer, isn't the same as leaving drunk on your own

accord.

25 ... Nxb7 26 Qxd4 Be5

“Do I know you? Your face looks familiar,” asks the bishop. “No, I just have one of those faces,” lies the queen, who wants to be anywhere but where she is.

27 Nxe6 Rxe6



Exercise (calculation/critical decision): This position is a zoo for our mind, which has trouble categorizing the good, from the not-so-good, to the awful. We have three potential responses to Black’s last move, which skewers white queen and a1-rook: a) 28 Qa7; b) 28 Ra7; c) 28 Bf4. Only one of the three lines works. Calculate the consequences of each line and pick the right one:

Answer: Only line ‘c’ works.

28 Bf4!

Lithe as a cat, Radjabov twists away from the intended blow, with a move which undermines Black’s assumptions. Now the potential black combination’s constituents have been adulterated to the point where it no longer wins material. The other two fail:

a) 28 Qa7? Bxb2 29 Qxc7 Bxc7 30 Nd4 Ree8 with an extra pawn for Black, with reasonable winning chances.

b) 28 Ra7?? represents a huge miscalculation, in that a portion of the fictive managed to contaminate the actual fact: 28 ... Bxd4 29 Rxc7 Rxe2. White dropped a piece and a pawn, and can resign.

28 ... Bxd4 29 Bxc7 Bxa1 30 Bxb8 Rxe2 31 Rxa1

It’s even materially, yet Black still has a slim chance since he owns a passed d-pawn. Carlsen, the world’s premier endgame player (yes, even back in 2010), nearly

pulls it off.

31 ... Ng5

For now e6 is the best post for the knight.

32 Kg1

No more back-rank mates to worry about.

32 ... Ne6 33 Rd1 d4 34 Kf1

Radjabov didn't want to risk having his king confined to the first rank in the line 34 Ba7! Nf4 35 g3 Nh3+ 36 Kf1 Rf2+ 37 Ke1 Rxe2 38 Bxd4 Ng5 39 Rd3, but White should draw without too much effort.

34 ... Rb2 35 Be5 Rb5 36 Bg3

36 Bxd4?? would be a monumental flub after 36 ... Rd5, winning a piece.

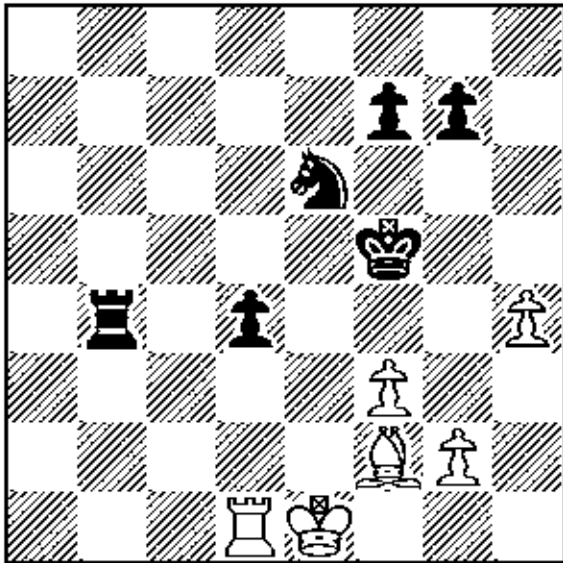
36 ... Kh7 37 Bf2 Kg6

Carlsen activates his king.

38 Ke1

Now the d-pawn really is under attack.

38 ... Rb4 39 h4 Kf5



40 g3?!

This attempt to keep the knight out of f4, weakens White's pawns, which allows further probing. I don't see how Black can win in the fortress line 40 Bg3! Rb2 (or 40 ... Nf4 41 Rd2 f6 42 Bxf4 Kxf4 43 Kf2 Ke5 44 Re2+ Kd5 45 Ra2 Rb7 46 Ke2 and the game is drawn, despite Black's passer and king position) 41 Kf1 when I don't see an easy way to make progress.

40 ... Ke5 41 Ke2 Kd5 42 Rd2 Ra4 43 Rb2 Nc5

Cutting off Rb7, while preparing to eventually push the d-pawn to d3.

44 Rd2 Nb3 45 Rc2 Ra7

Carlsen covers his second rank.

46 h5

It is in White's best interest to push his kingside forward, with either exchanges or the generation of a passer.

46 ... f6 47 Rb2 Re7+ 48 Kd3 Nc5+

The knight pesters White's king, like an importunately questioning four-year-old to his weary father.

49 Kd2 Ra7 50 Ke2 Ra4 51 Rd2 Nd7 52 Be3 Ne5 53 g4

Radjabov hopes to either swap away all the kingside pawns, or create a passer of his own.

53 ... Nf7

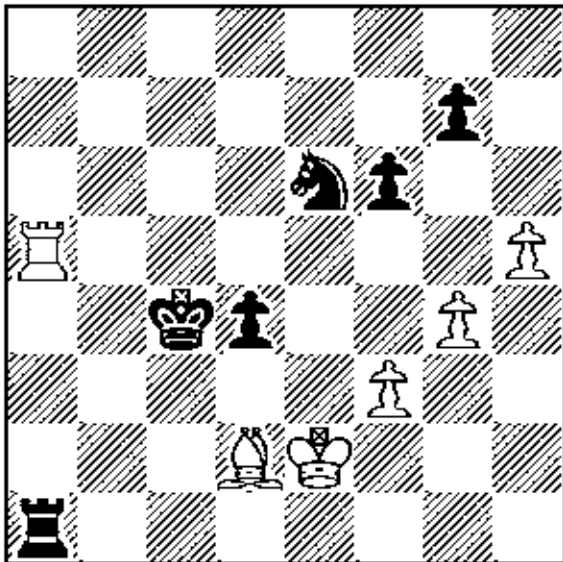
This path provides little in the way of economic opportunity. Carlsen missed perhaps his final practical opportunity here with 53 ... d3+!:

a) 54 Kf2!? Ra3 55 Rb2 Nc4 56 Rb5+ Ke6 57 Bf4 Ra2+ 58 Kg3 Ra1 59 Rb7 d2 60 Bxd2 Nxd2 61 Kf2! (61 Rxd2? Ra3 f3 falls and Black should win) 61 ... Ra3 62 f4 Ne4+ 63 Ke2 Nc3+ 64 Kd2! Nd5 65 Rxd2 Ra2+ 66 Kd1 Nxf4 67 h6 Rh2 68 g5 f5 69 h7 and White should hold the draw.

b) 54 Rxd3+! Nxd3 55 Kxd3 when Black gets practical chances, but White should hold the draw with correct play.

54 Bf4 Nd8 55 Rb2 Ne6 56 Bd2 Ra1 57 Rb5+ Kc4 58 Ra5?

After this move White risks losing. Correct is 58 Rb4+ Kc5 59 Rb7 when White should hold the position.



Exercise (combination alert): If you find Carlsen's shot, Black continues to make headway.

Answer: Overloaded defender.

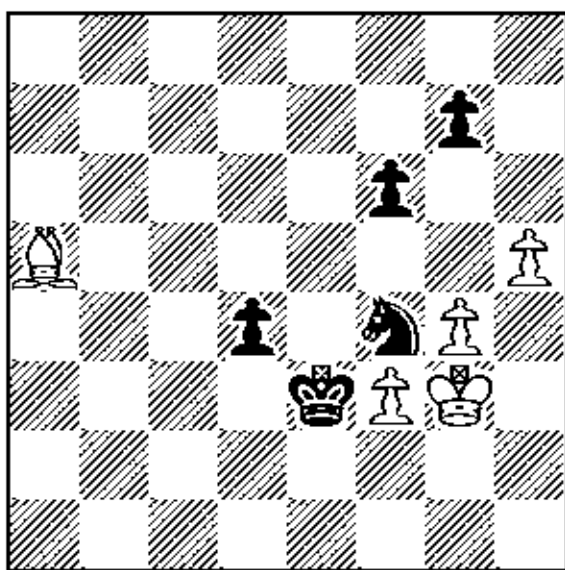
58 ... Nf4+!

When persuasion fails to sway, the next step is physical coercion. The knight, like a good prosecutor, circles back to the initial line of questioning. White's bishop is needed to guard his rook. After this shot, Black's king infiltrates d3.

59 Kf2 Rxa5 60 Bxa5 Kd3

This is getting really scary for White, since Black's king will assist the knight to force his d-pawn through. White's only hope is that his kingside majority provides enough of a distraction to earn a draw.

61 Kg3 Ne2+ 62 Kf2 Nf4 63 Kg3 Ke3



Exercise (planning): White found a clear path to a draw. How did he accomplish it?

Answer: Clearance. White's king gains a pathway into the kingside.

64 g5!

A new priority emerges: eliminate all the kingside pawns. In the past Black's activity appeared and reappeared in spasmodic bursts. Those days are over and now White establishes a clean path to a draw in eliminating the kingside pawns. However, not 64 Bb6? Ne2+ 65 Kg2 Kd2 66 f4 Ke3! 67 g5 fxg5 68 f5 (68 fxg5 Nf4+ 69 Kg3 Nxf5+ 70 Kg4 g6 and Black wins) 68 ... g4 69 f6 Nf4+ 70 Kh2 g3+! Kxg3 (or 71 Kg1 Kf3! 72 fxg7 Ne2+ 73 Kf1 g2+ and Black wins the promotion race by a tempo) 71 ... Nxf5+ 72 Kg4 Nxf6+ 73 Kf5 Kd3 74 Kg6 Ne8!, and if 75 Kf7?? g5 when White's bishop is unable to halt both passers.

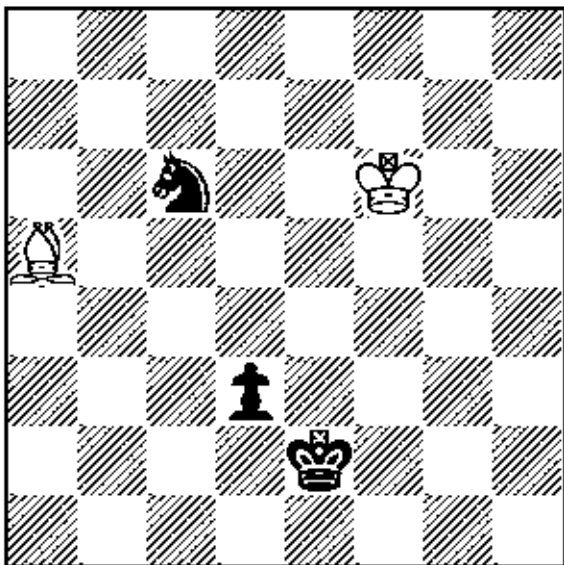
64 ... fxc5

Alternatively, 64 ... Nxh5+ 65 Kg4 Nf4 66 gxf6 gxf6 67 Kf5 is drawn, or 64 ... f5 65 h6 d3 66 Bb6+! Ke2 67 Kxf4! gxh6 68 gxh6 d2 69 h7 d1Q 70 h8Q Qd6+ 71 Kxf5 Qd5+ 72 Kg4 Qxf3+ and it's a draw again, despite White's extra bishop.

65 Kg4 d3 66 Kxg5 Kxf3 67 h6

This move liquidates the kingside pawns, while White's bishop can handle the d-pawn.

67 ... Ne6+ 68 Kg6 gxh6 69 Kxh6 Ke2 70 Kg6 Nd4 71 Kf6 Nc6



Luckily for White, his bishop always has one square available, since the king/knight team can only cover four of five available squares on the bishop's diagonal.

72 Bc3

The bishop may chafe under the knight's ridicule, yet he realizes that mere words are unable to inflict bodily harm. "An easy 'only move'," writes GM John Shaw.

72 ... Ne5

72 ... Kd1 73 Ke6 Kc2 doesn't cut it, since White has 74 Be1.

73 Kxe5 d2 74 Bxd2 ½-½

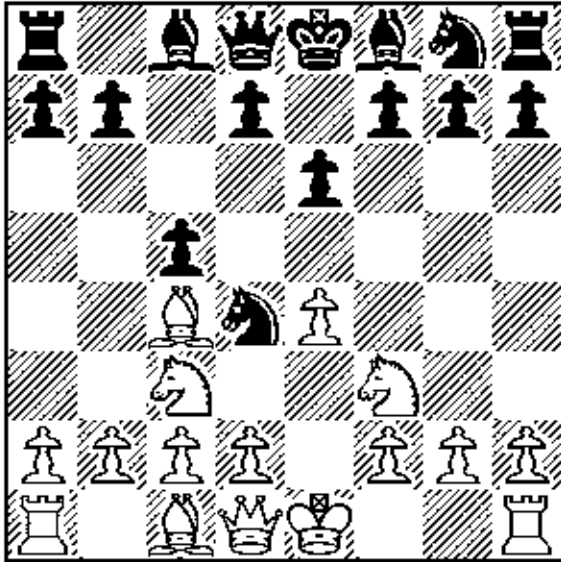
Summary: After 7 ... d5, Black appears to be on the better end of equality.

Game 39

S.Iuldachev-L.Aronian

Calvia Olympiad 2004

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nd4 4 Bc4 e6 5 Nf3



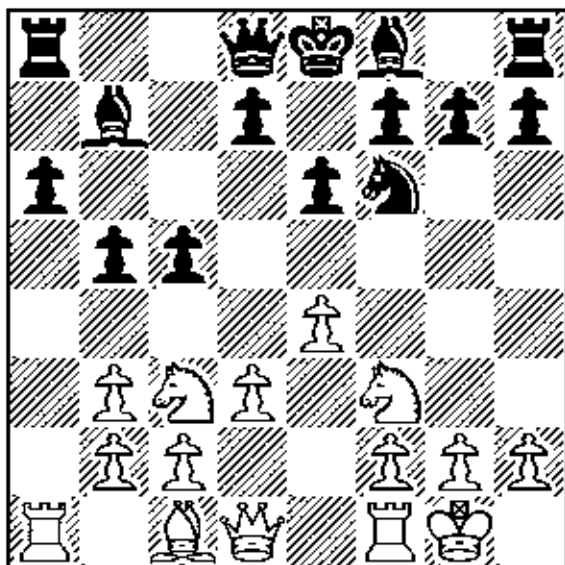
Question: When you play White in Tiviakov's line, do you personally prefer f3 or e2 for your knight?

Answer: I never play this version as White, since I don't like the fact that the f3-knight blocks my f-pawn – White's main source of counterplay. On the plus side of the f3 choice, White's knight is one square higher, and therefore more centralized than on e2. It also makes it easier for White to play e5, if Black plays his knight to f6. Of course, the point becomes moot if White exchanges knights later on d4, since then it doesn't matter if the exchange occurred from e2 or from f3.

5 ... Nf6 6 0-0 a6!

I'm going to remind you for the umpteenth (yes; I looked it up and umpteenth is a real word!) time to avoid 6 ... d5? 7 exd5 exd5 8 Nxd5! Nxd5 9 Nxd4 cxd4 10 Qh5.

7 d3 b5 8 Bb3 Nxb3 9 axb3 Bb7



We reach the same position as last game, except the White's knight sits on f3, rather than e2. The fact that it blocks his f-pawn makes his position rather barren of active ideas.

10 e5

White's main move, where he chases away the f6-knight and clears e4 for occupation. 10 Bg5 shouldn't worry us either: 10 ... h6 11 Bh4 d6 12 Re1 g5! (it's worth it to chase down the bishop and seize control over the dark squares) 13 Bg3 Nh5 14 Qe2 Bg7 15 e5 Nxc3 16 hxc3 Rc8 17 exd6 Qxd6 18 Ne4 Qc7 19 c4 0-0. The apparent weakening of Black's kingside is for now, unexploitable, while his bishops are meaningful in the semi-open position, R.Lilja-A.Dreev, Helsingor 2012.

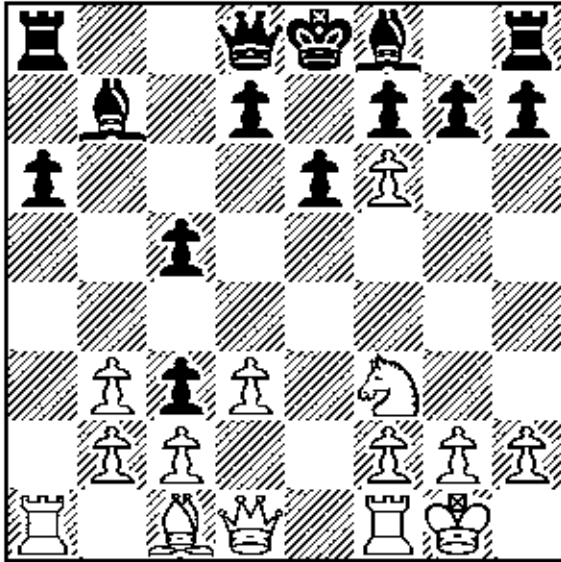
10 ... b4

The idea is similar to last game, where Black denies White's knight use of e4. 10 ... Nd5 is also playable: 11 Ne4 Be7 12 Bg5 f6 13 exf6 Nxf6 14 Bxf6 gxf6 15 Re1 0-0 (Black's king is a lot safer than it looks; she also may be able to make good use of the g-file for her rook) 16 d4 cxd4 17 Nxd4 Kh8 18 Ng3 Rg8 19 f3 Qc7 and I prefer Black, who can build with moves like ... Rg6, ... Rag8 and ... Bd6, Hou Yifan-A.Ushenina, Krasnoturinsk 2007.

11 exf6

Similar to last game. Instead, after 11 Na4 Nd5 12 d4 cxd4 13 Qxd4 Rc8 14 c4 bxc3 15 bxc3 Ne7! 16 Bg5 Qc7 17 Rfd1 Bxf3 18 gxf3 Nc6 19 Qe3 Nxe5!? 20 Bf4 f6 (M.Tissir-P.Wells, Caleta 2005) 21 b4 White's development lead offers compensation for the pawn, but just barely, and I still prefer Black.

11 ... bxc3



12 fxg7

Question: Since 12 fxg7 opens the g-file, why can't White play 12 bxc3?

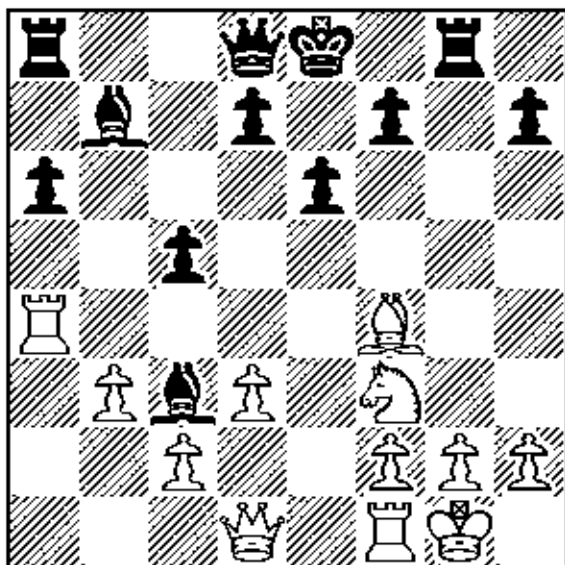
Answer: Your suggestion is unplayed. 12 fxg7 does open the g-file, but it also means that Black's king will be insecure for the remainder of the game. Let's look at your suggestion. I already prefer Black after 12 ... Qxf6 13 Bd2 Be7 (I would avoid 13 ... Bxf3 14 Qxf3 Qxf3 15 gxf3 when a6 is weak and a prime target for White's rooks) 14 Re1 Qg6 15 c4 0-0 16 Bc3 d6 17 b4 cxb4 18 Bxb4 Rab8 19 Bc3 e5, since he can build on the kingside with ... f5 to follow.

12 ... Bxg7 13 bxc3 Bxc3 14 Ra4 Rg8

Once again Black gets to attack down the open g-file.

15 Bf4?!

15 g3 was tried in an email game, S.Andeer-J.Martello, correspondence 2009. It looks awfully scary to weaken all those kingside light squares like this, but it's still superior to White's play in the game's continuation. At this point chances look even after 15 ... d6 16 Nd2 Bc6 17 Rf4 Be5 18 Rg4 Rg6 19 Nc4 Bf6 20 Qe2 Kf8.



Exercise (combination alert): White's mechanical last move allows Black a forcing line which compromises White's pawn structure. How?

Answer: 15 ... Qf6!

Now ... Bxf3 follows and White's disfigured structure is a burden he must carry into either the middlegame or ending.

16 Bg3 Bxf3 17 gxf3!?

Question: Isn't it crazy for White to keep queens on the board?

Answer: A past sour transaction may precipitate a brand new act of folly. It's a high-risk proposition. Iuldachev doesn't care to enter an inferior ending and retains queens, hoping Black's king isn't so safe either. I would have gone into grovel mode with 17 Qxf3 Qxf3 18 gxf3 d5 19 Rh4 Rg7 which leaves White with an unpleasant, but certainly not insurmountable defensive task in the ending.

17 ... h5

Threatening ... h4.

18 Kh1 Bd4

This move shuts White's a4-rook out of the kingside.

19 h4

He didn't want ... h4 hanging over his head forever. His move, however, weakens both the h4- and g3-squares.

19 ... Ke7 20 Qe2 Rg6 21 Rg1 Rag8!?

A move like this is incomprehensible to all safety-minded players except Aronian –

one of the most confrontational players out there. He willingly hands over his a-pawn to activate his a8-rook. If he keeps his pawn with 21 ... a5 22 Qe4 d5 23 Qe2 Qf5 24 Kh2 I don't see a clear plan for Black to make progress, unless he hands over his a-pawn.

22 Rxa6

The rook unwraps the beribboned gift with anticipatory hands.

22 ... Kf8

Aronian swings his king over to h7, the safest square.

23 Ra4 Kg7 24 b4

White attempts to semi-undermine Black's powerfully centralized bishop.

24 ... cxb4 25 Rxb4

Threat: Rxd4, followed by Be5+.

25 ... Kh7

Strangely enough, Black can fall into the 'trap' 25 ... d5 26 Rxd4 Qxd4 27 Be5+ and still escape with a draw after 27 ... Kh7! 28 Bxd4 Rxd4 29 Kh2 R1g2+, and White must take a draw with 30 Kh1! (30 Kh3?? loses to the shot 30 ... R8g3+! 31 fxg3 Rxe2).

26 Rg2 Qg7!

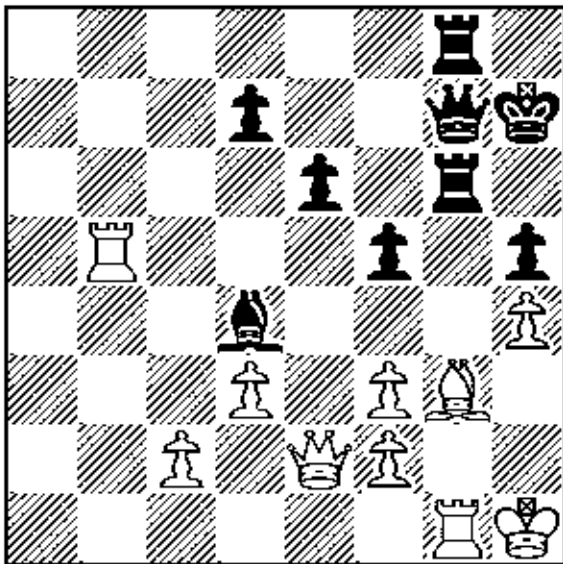
Aronian divulges his intent, introducing dual threats:

1. The pseudo-sacrifice ... Bxf2!
2. Rolling the pawns with ... f5, (... e5 if needed), and ... f4:

27 Rb5?!

The human move, after which Black stands clearly better. The comp points out a quirky and difficult-to-see line with 27 f4! Bxf2 28 f5! Rxd3 29 Qxh5+ Qh6 30 Qxh6+ Kxh6 31 Rxf2 Rh3+ 32 Rh2 Rf3 33 Rg2 Rxd2 34 Kxg2 Rxf5, with a likely draw.

27 ... f5 28 Rg1



Exercise: (critical decision): Aronian has two potential ideas in mind: 1. The first is a combinational strike with 28 ... Bxf2. 2. The second path is the slow build with 28 ... e5, intending ... f4. Which one is the clearly superior path?

Answer: The slow build path gives Black a winning position.

28 ... e5!

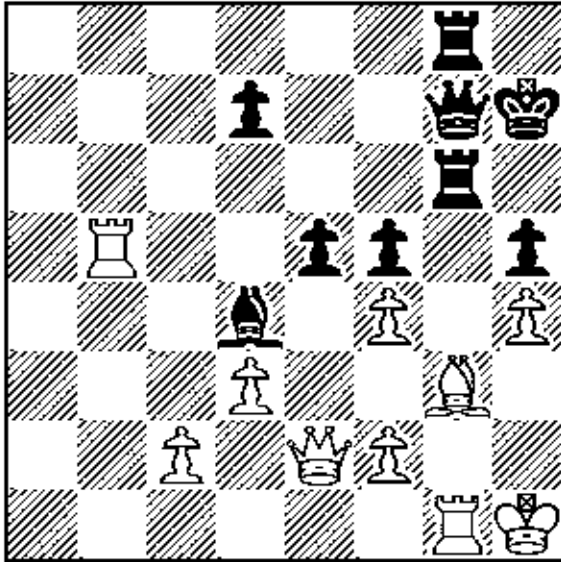
In the world of the strategist, systematic thought is a highly prized commodity. The f4-square is the scaffolding upon which Aronian frames his idea. This plan is Black's best shot at a win, and it grows clear that White's present material prosperity is merely a temporary state. Death by suffocation becomes a very real danger for White's bishop, since if it is pushed to h2, it will never see the light of day again.

28 ... Bxf2? only leads to a draw after 29 Qxf2 Rxf3 30 Qxf3 Qxf3 31 Rxf3 Rxf3 32 Rb7 Rxf3 33 Rxd7+ Kg6 34 Kg2 Rf4 35 Kh3 Rf2 36 c4 Rf3+ 37 Kg2 Rf4 38 c5! Rxh4. Black won a pawn, at the cost of allowing White a gain of time with his passed c-pawn: 39 c6 Ra4 40 c7 Ra2+ 41 Kg3 Rc2 42 d4 Kg5 43 Rg7+ Kf6 44 Rh7 Rc4 45 Rd7 Rc3+ 46 Kf4 h4 47 Rh7 h3 48 Rxh3 Rxc7 49 Rh6+ and the game is drawn.

29 f4?

Threat: Qxh5+. Even a tiny cog, if removed, can throw a large, complex machine into a state of disarray. White resisted many minor temptations, only to fall sway to a major one. This move is the entrance to the netherworld.

White may still be able to save the game by going completely passive with 29 Rbb1! (if our plane is about to crash, we increase survival chances by strapping ourselves down in our seat belt) 29 ... Qf6 30 c4 f4 31 Bh2 Rxf1+ 32 Rxf1 Rxf1+ 33 Kxf1 Qxh4 34 Kg2 Qg5+ 35 Kh1 Qf5. It's not easy to meet intolerance with tolerance. At this stage White lives in abject dependence upon his final prayer of a fortress. White's bishop is imprisoned and it appears that he is lost. *Houdini* misassesses at '-1.73', yet I managed to hold the draw with White after 36 Kg2 Kg6 37 Bg1 Kg5 (I also tried the plan of bringing Black's king around to raid the queenside, but it didn't work: for example, 37 ... Kf7 38 Kh2 Ke6 39 Kg2 Kd6 40 Kh2 Kc5 41 Qd1 Kb4 42 Qb1+ Kc3 43 Qe1+ Kc2 44 Qe2+ Kb3 45 Qd1+ Ka3 46 Qc1+ Bb2 47 Qb1 Kb3 48 Qd1+ Kc3 49 Qe1+! when d3 is tactically covered and no progress is visible for Black) 38 Kh2 Kh4 (threatening mate on h3) 39 Kh1 Qe6 40 Bh2 Qh3 41 Kg1 Kg5 42 Kh1 h4 43 Kg1 Qf5 44 Kg2 h3+ 45 Kh1 Kh4 46 Qf1 Qh5 47 Qe2 Qg6 48 Qf1 Bc5 49 Qg1 Qh5 50 Qd1 Bd4 51 Qe2 Qg6 52 Qf1 Bc5 53 Bg1 and one step follows another without perceptible change. *Houdini* assessment: '-2.11', yet it was unable to make progress.



Exercise (combination alert): White's last move, an attempt to block ... f4 and stage a central counter, fails. How did Black exploit the move?

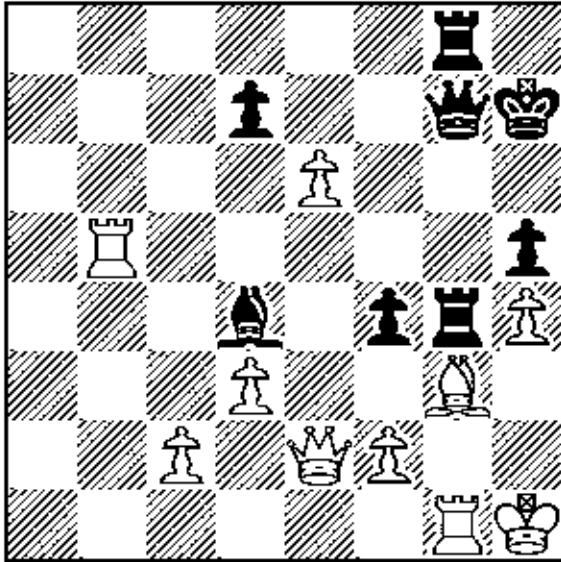
Answer: Pin/overloaded defender.

29 ... Rg4!

Not only does this cut off White's threatened Qxh5+, but it also threatens ... Rxh4+, as well as ... exf4.

30 fxe5 f4! 31 e6

A last ditch try, hoping to get time for Rxh5+. 31 Qe4+ Kh8 32 Qxd4 Rxh4+ 33 Kg2 f3+ wins White's queen.



Exercise (combination alert): When we sense the presence of a combination, we can usually arrive at its solution by a process of exclusion. Here there is only one path. Black to play and force mate.

Answer: Queen sacrifice/annihilation of defensive barrier.

31 ... Rxh4+

This move sets up Black's coming queen sacrifice.

32 Kg2

The variation 32 Bxh4 Qxg1 mate is not so hard to calculate. If you desperately wish someone dead, and that person dies, does your malevolent thought make you a karmic agent if that person happens to die?

32 ... Qxg3+! 0-1

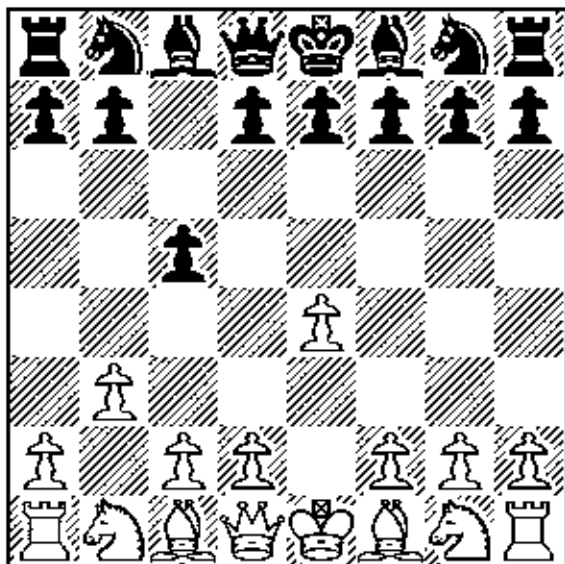
For the queen, anything short of a death sentence is an act of kindness. 33 fxc3 Rxc3+ 34 Kf1 Rxc1 is mate.

Summary: I have never worried about 5 Nf3, since the knight blocks White's main theme in this line, which is the forward push of the f-pawn.

Chapter Eight

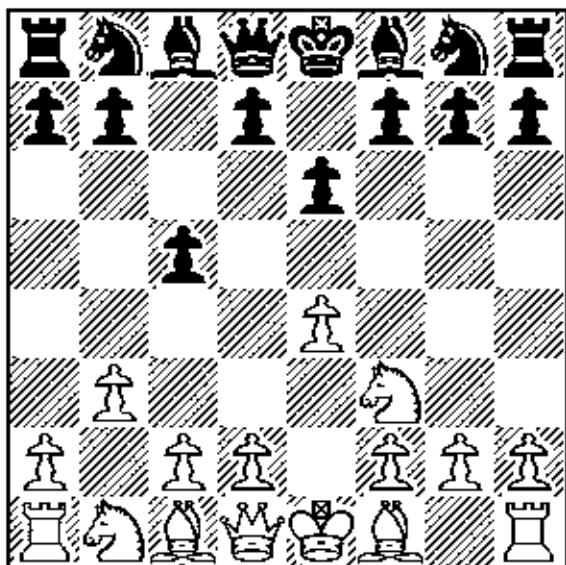
The b3 Sicilian

1 e4 c5 2 b3



I was under the false impression that the b3-Sicilian must be a relatively new opening. Checking the database, I noticed that Kieseritzky, Cochrane, and Paulsen played the line for White in the mid to late 1800's. The line's single benefit is that it most certainly shoves us Sicilian players out of our pet lines. White hopes for a theoretically unprepared opponent that will grope along for the plan and guess, the way a blind person touches a friend's face, attempting to read and visualize it.

Our solution is to meet White's fianchetto with ... Nc6, and ... e5, which effectively builds a wall, blunting the b2-bishop's Medusa stare across the board, halting it at e5. Recent games show that Black equalizes quite comfortably with this plan.



The second diagram is a bit more tricky and involves the Kan, Taimanov and Scheveningen move order 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6, and only now 3 b3. This delayed version is a little harder for Black, as the ... Nc6 and ... e5 plan is not so tempting anymore, since our side wasted a move with ... e6 first. I think our best bet is to avoid an early ... e5 and play the position as if it were an Open Sicilian, with ... Nc6, ... d6, ... Nf6, ... Be7 and ... 0-0. White can either play a delayed d4, transposing to a fianchettoed version of an Open Sicilian, or play a more restrained closed game. In either case, our position is hardly likely to come under a deluge of difficulties to solve over the board.

Game 40

E.Sveshnikov-A.Shirov

1st matchgame, Riga (rapid) 2014

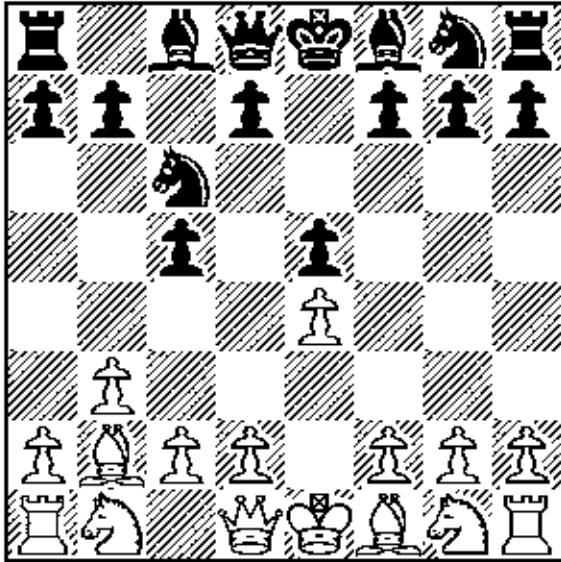
1 e4 c5 2 b3

The b3-Sicilian's greatest advantage is that it removes most Sicilian players from their theoretical niches, into a grove of White's making.

2 ... Nc6

We look at an ... e6 version in the final game of the chapter. Later in the chapter we also look at the bizarre and theoretically trendy provocation, 2 ... g6!?

3 Bb2 e5



In this chapter we concentrate on this move, which I believe is one of Black's best responses, and is also given the seal of approval by GM Evgeny Sveshnikov, in his book *Sveshnikov vs. the Anti-Sicilians*. We plant a pawn on e5 to limit the b2-bishop's scope and also grab more than our fair share of the centre.

Question: Don't we lose control over d5?

Answer: That is the concession we agree to, for the advantages we gain, as listed above. I think it's a good deal for our side. White can't make important use of d5, since we can usually either swap it away, or play around the d5 occupier.

4 Bc4

This move is in favour since Kramnik took up the line as White.

Question: What is White's intended set-up?

Answer: White intends to follow with Nge2, 0-0 and f4, with kingside attacking chances. Of course Black gets use of the d4-square and owns a good chunk of the centre, so we are assured of adequate counter-chances.

Alternatively:

a) 4 Nf3 is rather lame, and fails to pressure Black's centre: 4 ... d6 5 Bb5 Bd7 (there is no reason to allow White Bxc6+) 6 0-0 Nf6 7 Re1 a6 8 Bf1 (White hopes to have time for his plan of c3 and d4) 8 ... g6! 9 c3 Bg7 10 d4, S.Cucancic-D.Pavasovic, Pula 2000. I would continue 10 ... exd4 11 cxd4 cxd4 12 Nxd4 0-0 13 Nd2 Re8 14 Rc1 d5 15 Nxc6 Bxc6 16 e5 Ne4 when Black stands no worse.

b) With 4 Bb5 White intends Ne2, 0-0 and f4: 4 ... Nd4 (just as in Tiviakov's Line

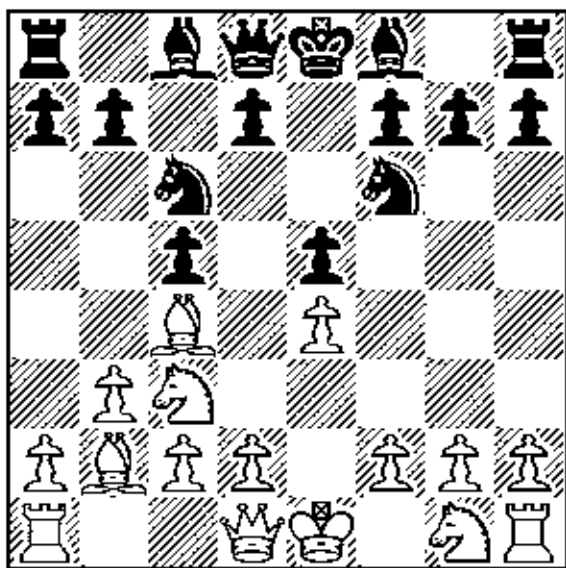
and the Grand Prix, we meet Bb5 with an immediate ... Nd4) 5 Bc4 (White can hardly hope to gain an opening edge by handing over his prized fianchettoed bishop: 5 Bxd4 cxd4 6 Nf3 Nf6 7 0-0 a6 8 Bd3 was A.Wohl-M.Palac, Metz 2001; Black reaches a good position after 8 ... Bd6 9 c3 dxc3 10 Nxc3 0-0 when his potential control over the dark squares makes his position slightly preferable) 5 ... Nf6 6 Nc3 Be7 7 Nge2 0-0 8 d3 Rb8 9 a4 a6 10 a5 d6, T.Gelashvili-E.Najer, Panormo 2001. Black achieves equality after 11 0-0 Be6 12 h3 Qd7 13 f4 and now he can take a draw if he wants, with 13 ... Bxh3 14 gxh3 Qxh3 15 Nxd4 Qg3+ 16 Kh1 Qh3+.

4 ... Nf6

Instead, 4 ... d6 5 d3 Nf6 6 Ne2 Be7 7 Nbc3 Nd4 8 0-0 0-0 9 f4 is Kramnik's idea: He gains play down the f-file and may be able to build an attack later on with Ng3, and either Nh5 or Nf5: 9 ... a6 10 a4 b6 11 Nd5 Rb8 12 fxe5 dxe5 13 Ng3 Nxd5 14 Bxd5 Bh4 (perhaps slightly more accurate is the immediate 14 ... g6 followed by ... Bg5) 15 Qh5 (with a dual attack on f7) 15 ... Bf6 16 c4 g6 17 Qd1 was V.Kramnik-M.Kobalia, Tromso 2013. After 17 ... Bg5, ... Kg7 may follow and I don't see how White builds his attack. It feels to me like Black stands slightly better since he is the only one with the ... f5 and ... b5 breaks for the future.

5 Nc3

5 d3 intending Nge2, 0-0 and f4 will transpose to the Kramnik-Kobalia note.



5 ... Nxe4!?

This kind of disruptive temporary piece sacrifice is well known in the Four Knights' Opening. 5 ... d6 6 Nge2 Be7 once again will reach the Kramnik-Kobalia position.

6 Nxe4

Question: Why would White avoid 6 Bxf7+ which disrupts Black's castling?

Answer: I don't see a single game with this move in the database. The move is a strategic error for the following reasons:

1. It hands Black the centre.
2. Black gains the bishop-pair.
3. Black gains time with ... d5.
4. The move may even allow Black future use of the open f-file or a rook.

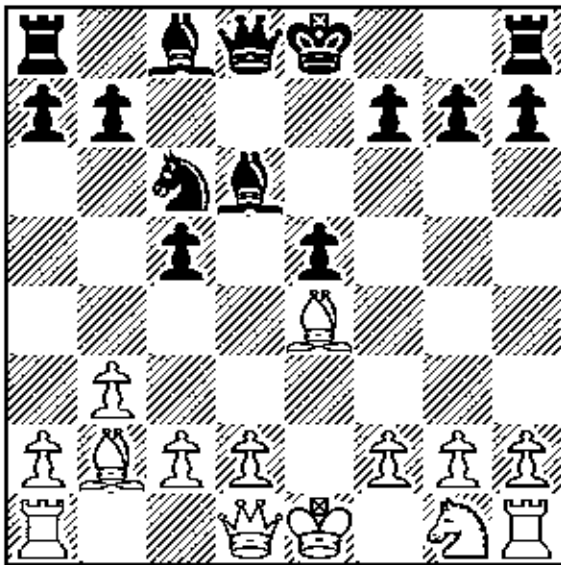
Following 6 ... Kxf7 7 Nxe4 d5 8 Ng3 Be7 9 Nf3 (or 9 N1e2 h5! 10 0-0 h4 11 Nh1 Bf5 with an initiative and also strategic advantage for Black) 9 ... Bf6 10 d3 h5! 11 h4 Bg4 12 Qd2 Bxf3 13 gxf3, h4 is weak and liable to fall, and Black's structure is superior as well.

6 ... d5

Black immediately regains the piece, while seizing the centre.

7 Bd3 dxe4 8 Bxe4 Bd6

Shirov eggs his opponent on, allowing Bxc6+. He can also play it safer with 8 ... Bd7 9 Nf3 Bd6 10 Qe2 f6 11 Nh4 g6 12 f4 Qc7!? (12 ... Qe7! is more accurate, since in this version Black doesn't lose castling rights, unless White swaps queens, and can castle queenside; 13 0-0-0 0-0-0 looks fine for Black) 13 f5 g5 (now 13 ... 0-0-0!? looks overly risky: 14 fxg6 Nd4 15 Bxd4 exd4 16 gxh7 Rde8 17 0-0-0 Rxh7 18 Nf5 Bxh2 19 Qf3 Rhh8 20 g3 Kb8 21 Rdf1 Bxf5 22 Qxf5 Bxg3 23 Rxh8 Rxh8 24 Qxf6 and White stands a shade better since the presence of opposite-coloured bishops favours him) 14 Qh5+ Ke7 15 Nf3 h6. Black's control of the centre allows his king to remain relatively safe, although I would still be nervous about a future plan of c4 and d4, E.Romanov-V.Laznicka, Istanbul 2005.



9 Qh5

Preventing castling, as well as threatening Bxc6+, followed by Bxe5.

Question: Why wouldn't White inflict structural damage with 9 Bxc6+?

Answer: The light-squared bishop is a valuable piece and Black gets clear compensation. In the four GM games from this position, not a single player chose to make this exchange. Let's examine it: 9 ... bxc6 10 Ne2 0-0 11 0-0 f5 12 d3 Qh4 and I slightly prefer Black, who threatens to build on the kingside. His c-pawns are not weak at this point.

9 ... h6?!

Shirov is one of those players who refuses to stand on the middle rung of the human ladder. His actions either push him to the top, or toss him to the bottom. When a higher-rated player gambits unsoundly against me, I tend to paranoidly interpret it as a sign of his contempt for my chess ability. Black's last move is a Shirovian decision, if ever there was one. He severs his constraining mooring line and launches off to who-knows-where?

This radical, very likely dubious move is unsound, according to the comp, who isn't so convinced of the validity of Black's supposition. Shirov wastes a full move with ... h6 and allows his e-pawn to fall, since at the end he hopes to seize an initiative and development lead. Stylistic underpinnings don't justify a weak move. One warning though: even an unsound idea may contain a key mitigating quality, in the form of practical chances, which is exactly what happened in the game.

Black's best move is 9 ... Nd4! which removes Bxc6+ from the table, while safeguarding e5. After 10 Nf3 (E.Romanov-A.Frolov, Kazan 2003), Black has a good position following 10 ... g6 11 Qh6 Bf8 12 Qe3 Bg7 13 c3 Ne6. Black's central space is meaningful, while White's pieces look oddly placed, with nothing constructive to do.

10 Bxc6+

Sveshnikov accepts the offer. He can also first toss in 10 f4! 0-0 11 Bxc6 bxc6 12 fxe5 Re8 13 0-0-0 and I just don't believe in Black's compensation.

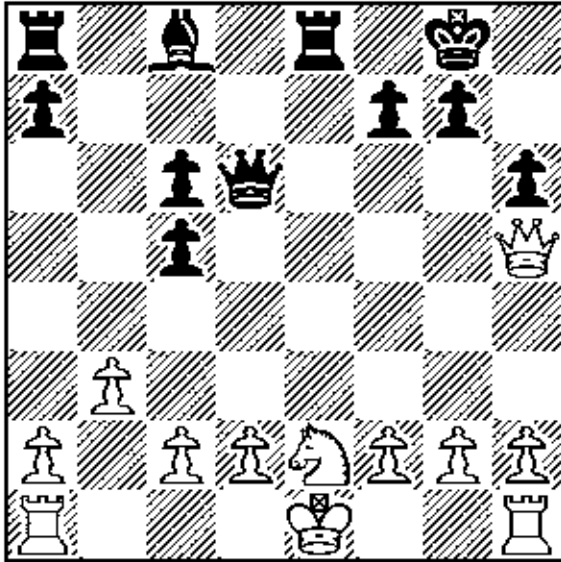
10 ... bxc6 11 Bxe5?!

Shirov's gamble hinged on this key premise. White finally acquires the coveted object, but in the wrong way. This allows Shirov his intent. Correct was 11 f4! 0-0 12 fxe5, transposing to the favourable line above.

11 ... 0-0

This forces White to castle long, after which Black's attack comes quickly.

12 Bxd6 Re8+ 13 Ne2 Qxd6



Exercise (critical decision): Tempting possibilities hover before White's eyes. Should he castle long or short?

14 0-0-0?

This step, once taken, is impossible to reverse. Castling long retains his extra pawn, at the steep cost of placing his king in great peril.

Answer: White still remains approximately even after 14 0-0!. White should judge defence of d2 a superficial consideration, when compared to his king's safety, and disavow his original intent: 14 ... Qxd2 15 Ng3 Qc3 16 Rfd1 Be6 17 Ne4 Qxc2 18 f3 Rad8 19 Rdc1 Qe2 20 Qxc5 Bd5 with approximate equality.

14 ... c4!

We arrive at an inescapable truth, that White is already busted. Shirov, who from this point, plays with great energy, sustained by his goal of an attack, quickly loosens the pawn front around White's king. White has absolutely no time to organize his own attack on the other side, or even time to defend his own king.

15 Nc3 Qa3+ 16 Kb1

The king acutely senses the discomfort of his dangerous surroundings.

16 ... Be6 17 Rhe1 Rab8!

17 ... Reb8?! is met with 18 Rxe6 cxb3 19 cxb3 fxe6 20 Qg6 when White gets a touch of compensation for the exchange, mainly since his king got a lot safer.

18 Ka1?!

Complete desperation. White's position collapses after this move. He puts up greater resistance with 18 Re4 c5 19 Qe2 cxb3 20 cxb3 Re7! (threatening mate, with ... Bxb3 next) 21 Nb5 Qa6 22 Nc3 c4 23 Kb2 Qd6 24 Rxc4 Bxc4 25 Qxc4 Re1! 26 Kc2

Rxd1 27 Kxd1 Qxh2 and Black is winning.

18 ... cxb3 19 cxb3 Bxb3

Even more crushing is 19 ... Rxb3! 20 Rb1 Reb8 21 Qe5 R8b6! (threat: ... Rxc3 and Qxa2 mate) 22 Rxb3 Rxb3 and now there is no defence to the coming ... Rxc3.

20 Rxe8+ Rxe8 21 Rh1

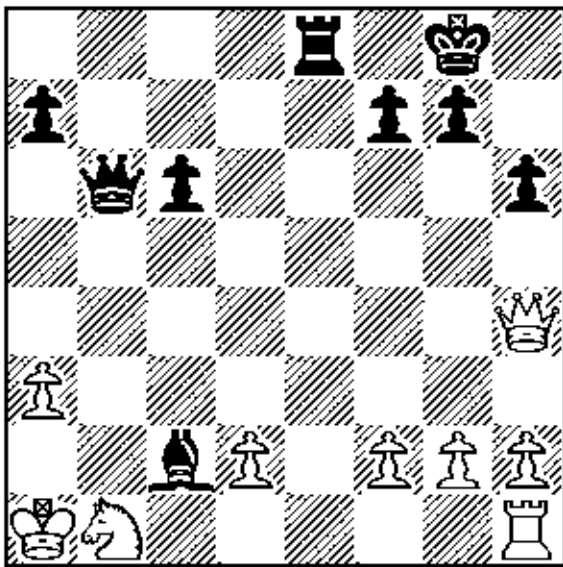
21 Rb1 just loses time to 21 ... Bc2.

21 ... Bc2

Threat: ... Rb8 and ... Qb2 mate.

22 Nb1 Qb4 23 a3 Qb6 24 Qh4

24 Qh3 Rb8 25 Qc3 covers the mate threat on b2, only to hang a piece to 25 ... Bxb1.



Exercise (planning/combination alert): White intends to meet 24 ... Rb8 with 25 Qb4. How did Shirov brush aside Sveshnikov's intent?

Answer: Interference. Black prevents Qb4, while threatening ... Rb8.

24 ... Be4!

Black's pieces come and go as they please, uncloaked and without anonymity.

25 Nc3 Rb8 26 Na4

Our helplessness sometimes mocks us into ineffectively wrathful action.

26 ... Qd4+ 0-1

The queen likes to substitute the word 'sanction', when in reality she means 'murder'. 27 Nc3 Qxd2 ends the game.

Summary: I think the ... Nc6 and ... e5 plan is one of Black's most effective against the b3-Sicilian, since it blunts the scope of White's prized b2-bishop. It also seizes a

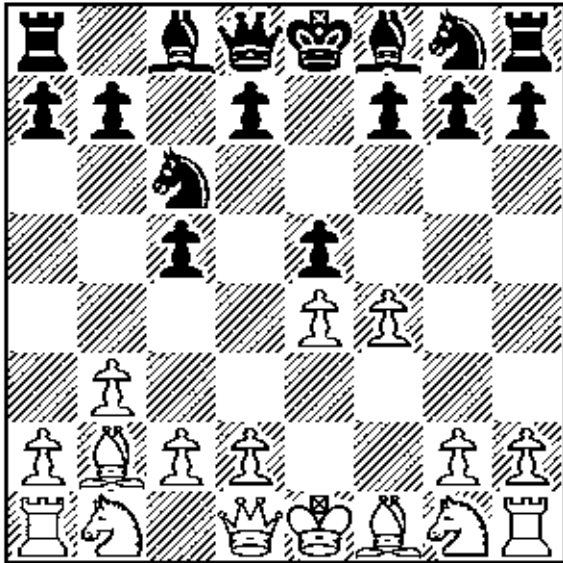
fair chunk of the centre, while it isn't so easy for White to make good use of the d5 hole.

Game 41

R.Walfort-P.Wells

Regensburg 1996

1 e4 c5 2 b3 Nc6 3 Bb2 e5 4 f4!?



Obviously, this move, which instigates immediate unrest in the centre, ignores the opening's normal social protocol. This is the King's Gambit version for White, who decides that he has had enough of bylaws, resolutions and minutes. The meeting is over and it's time to take action.

Question: Isn't White up a move on the King's gambit, since we tossed in ... c5?

Answer: No. It's essentially a King's Gambit with the extra moves b3 and Bb2 for White, and ... c5 and ... Nc6 for Black. Now I think this isn't such a bad deal for our side, for the following reasons:

1. White has trouble playing an easy d4, unlike most King's Gambits.
2. I actually think White's fianchettoed dark-squared bishop is misplaced in a King's Gambit formation, since in a normal KGA, White plays on our f4-pawn with d3 and later h4. On b2, White's bishop puts no pressure on f4, allowing us a better chance to hang on to it permanently.
3. Now on the downside, we can't play typical KGA move ... g5 either, since this hangs our h8-rook.

4 ... exf4

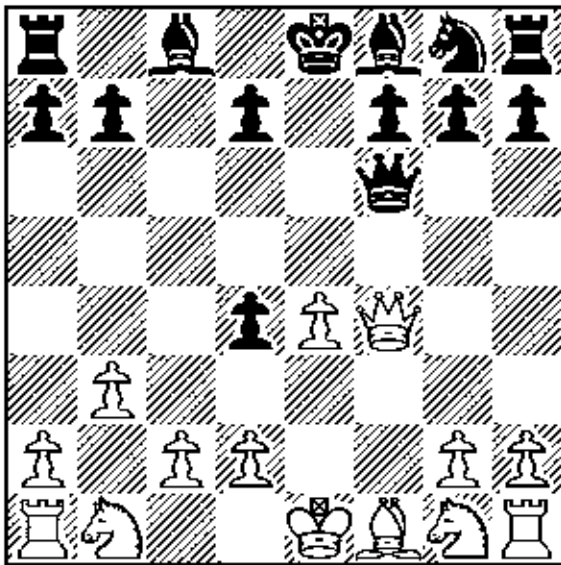
Let's accept and make White sweat to win it back.

Question: Can we decline with 4 ... d6?

Answer: We can play it this way. However, after White's next move we need to accept the gambit, since we have no good way to continue to protect e5. For example, 5 Nf3 and now what? We certainly don't want to play either ... f6 or ... Qc7, so we must accept the gambit after all with 5 ... exf4 6 Bb5 Nf6 7 0-0 Bd7 8 Nc3 Be7 9 d3 Ne5 10 Bxd7+ Qxd7 11 Qd2 Ng6 12 Ne2 Nh5. For now Black grimly hangs on to his extra pawn, and it looks to me like White struggles for full compensation, S.Sulskis-S.Dvoirys, Koszalin 1999.

5 Nf3

5 Qf3 is IM Reprintsev's rather shady looking specialty. I recollect several blitz games we played on the internet back in the 1990's from this position. After 5 ... Nd4! (this move weakens White on the dark squares) 6 Bxd4 cxd4 7 Qxf4 Qf6! I think that White is the one struggling for equality:



a) 8 g3?! Bd6 9 Qxf6 Nxf6 10 Bg2 0-0 11 Ne2 Re8 12 d3, A.Reprintsev-Y.Yuan, Ottawa 2007. Black can play 12 ... Bc5, intending to exploit his development lead and bishop-pair with ... d5 next, with advantage.

b) White should try 8 Qxf6 Nxf6 9 e5 Ng4 10 Nf3 d6 11 Na3 dxe5 12 Nb5 e4! (Black ignores the c7 fork for several moves) 13 Nfxd4 Bc5! 14 h3 Nf6, although Black stands better, since White is still unable to play 15 Nc7+? Kd7 16 Nxa8 Bxd4 17 0-0-0 Kd6 18 Bc4 Be6 19 Bxe6 fxe6 20 c3 Be5 and the stranded a8-knight is doomed, leaving Black with two pieces for the rook.

5 ... Nf6

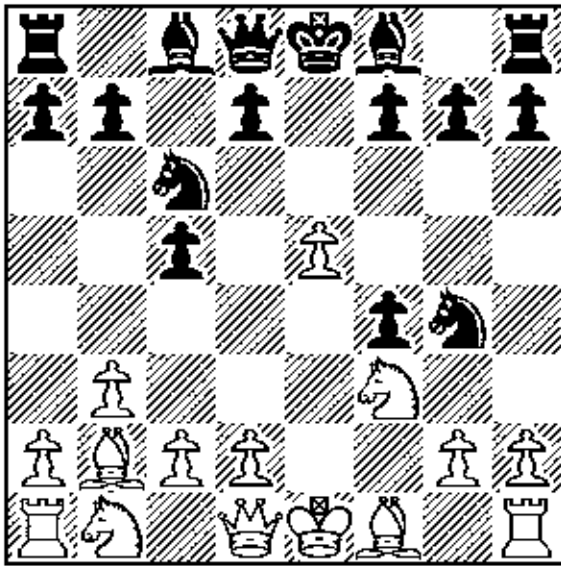
Wells eggs the e-pawn forward, which in turn slightly weakens White's central light squares.

5 ... d6 6 Bb5 reaches the position from the note just above.

6 e5

Alternatively, 6 Nc3 Be7 7 Bc4 0-0 8 d3 (8 Qe2 d6 9 0-0-0 a6 10 a4 Bg4, intending ... Ne5, also looks better for Black) 8 ... Ng4! and Black eyes the e3 hole, while opening the possibility of ... Bh4+. 9 Qe2 was tried in D.Wallhof-V.Chuchelov, Hamburg 1997, and at this point Black gave a check on h4. It was probably better to skip the check and just play the immediate 9 ... Bf6! 10 0-0-0 Ne3 11 Rdg1 d6 12 g3 Nxc4 13 dxc4 Bg4 (threat: ... Nd4) 14 Qg2 Bxf3 15 Qxf3 Nd4 16 Qg4 (16 Qxf4?? hangs the queen to 16 ... Bg5) 16 ... f3 when ... a6 and ... b5 is coming and Black has a nagging strategic edge, due to the weak dark squares in White's centre. The fact that he owns d5 doesn't fully compensate.

6 ... Ng4!



The beginning of a clever idea, which for now, draws a curtain across its actual intent.

7 h3?!

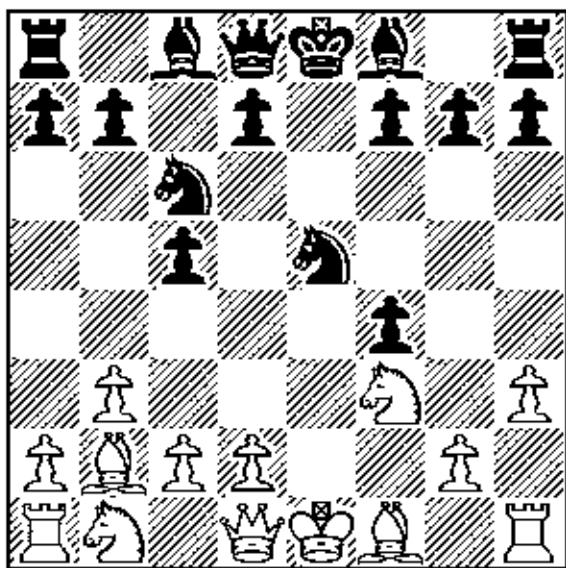
The largest stake you can ever gamble with is your life. A new move, and not such a good one, since it allows Black a ferocious attack:

a) 7 Bb5 which is *Houdini*'s top choice, just feels too milquetoast. After 7 ... a6 8 Bxc6 dxc6 9 0-0 Be7 Black hangs on to the extra pawn for now and owns the bishop-pair as well. Note that 10 Nc3 can be met with the trick 10 ... Nxe5! and if White takes it, ... Qd4+ regains the piece, with interest.

b) 7 Bc4 Be7 8 Qe2?! (castling looks wiser: 8 0-0 0-0 9 h3 d5 10 exd6 Bf6 11 Nc3

Nh6, although even here, I still prefer Black, who continues with ... Nf5, hitting weak squares like g3 and d4) 8 ... 0-0 9 h3?! was A.Sasu Ducsoara-V.Karasev, Kamena Vourla 2012 (or 9 0-0 d5 10 exd6 Bxd6 when I don't see White's compensation for the missing pawn). Black can now seize a clear advantage if he continues 9 ... Bh4+ 10 Nxb4 Qxb4+ 11 Kf1 d6 12 exd6 Bf5 13 Kg1 Nf6 14 Qf2 Qxf2+ 15 Kxf2 Ne4+ 16 Kf3 Nxd6 with a wretched ending for White.

7 ... Ngxe5!



Wells is the first to draw blood from his opponent's lips, since his peace treaty tends to only last a few minutes until he violates it. I like this bold sacrifice, which disrupts the white king's castling. Black's sacrifice looks more promising than 7 ... Nh6 8 Bd3 Nb4 9 Qe2, intending Nc3 and 0-0-0, with some measure of compensation for the pawn.

8 Bxe5 Nxe5 9 Nxe5 Qh4+ 10 g3!

The conversation touches dangerous ground. The only move. 10 Ke2?? hangs the piece back to 10 ... Qe7 11 d4 cxd4 12 Qxd4 f6 when White is busted.

10 ... Qxg3+

Everyone knows the black queen and white king indulge in unnatural 'appetites', much like Cersei and Jaime, the twisted Lannister twins, in *Game of Thrones*. 10 ... fxg3? is well met with 11 Bg2.

11 Ke2

Black got three pawns for the piece and a terribly insecure white king in the bargain.

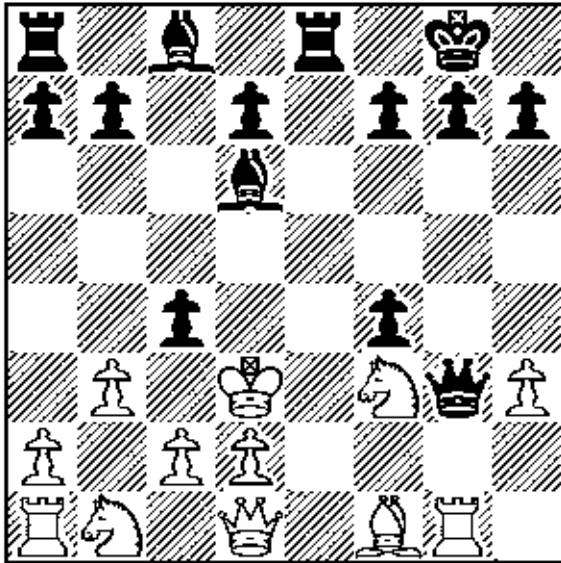
11 ... Bd6?!

This move defeats his previous efforts and allows White to reach an unclear position. Black missed a strong opportunity with 11 ... b5! 12 Qe1 Bd6 13 Qxg3 fxg3

14 Nf3 0-0 15 Bg2 Re8+ 16 Kd1 Bb7 17 Nc3 Bc6 18 Nh4 g6 19 Bxc6 dxc6 when ... f5 which is coming and White's clunky king blocks the a1-rook's communication to the centre and kingside.

12 Nf3 0-0 13 Rg1 Re8+ 14 Kd3 c4+!

Sveshnikov suggests 14 ... Qf2. I think White is okay after 15 c4 Be5 16 Rg2 d5! 17 Kc2! (not 17 Rxf2?? Bf5+ 18 Ke2 Bxa1+ 19 Ne5 Rxe5+ 20 Kf3 Be4+ and White's king gets fried) 17 ... Qxg2 18 Bxg2 Bxa1 19 cxd5. I don't think White stands worse and actually prefer his chances.



Well, nobody said that this game represents the Age of Reason. GM Sveshnikov gave this move a dubious, while I like it.

Exercise (critical decision): White has a choice of three moves:

a) 15 Kc3; b) 15 Kxc4; c) 15 bxc4. Two of the moves lose, while the other reaches a messy position. Which one should White play?

15 bxc4?

One of two misguided options:

a) 15 Kc3?? loses instantly to 15 ... Be5+ 16 d4 cxd3+ 17 Nxe5 dxc2+ 18 Kxc2 Qxg1.

b) Correct is the completely counter-intuitive 15 Kxc4! which looks like it would be the first choice of most of Morphy's hopelessly incompetent NN opponents. Is it just me, or does White's king remind you of the groom who gets a hernia on his honeymoon, when he attempts to lift his obese bride over the threshold? 15 ... b5+ 16 Kc3 Qf2 17 Rg2 Qc5+ 18 Kb2 Bb7 19 d4 Qd5 20 Nbd2 Re3 21 a4 with a messy position, although I would still take Black's side in a heartbeat, if given a choice (and not 21 Rf2? Bb4 22

Bd3 Rc8 when White is busted).

15 ... Qf2

The queen heads for c5, to be nearer to White's king.

16 c3

I hate that uneasy feeling when you realize that something of great importance transpired, and yet you are unable to put your finger on just what it is. White's 15th move blunder places his king in great jeopardy, and 16 Kc3? b5! 17 a3 (or 17 cxb5?? Bb7 18 Bg2 Bxf3 19 Bxf3 Qc5+ 20 Kb2 Qxb5+ 21 Kc1 Rab8 22 d3 Qb2+ 23 Kd2 Bb4+ 24 Nc3 Bxc3 mate) 17 ... Bb7 18 Bg2 bxc4 leaves White's king hopelessly caught in the middle of the board.

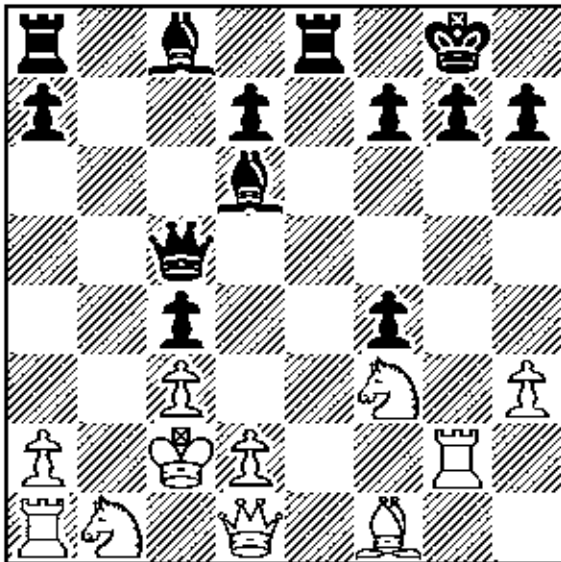
16 ... b5!

The b-pawn is led in tow as a client state to Black's vast ambition. The void of an empty throne tends to attract those who would be king. Lines open with terrible force. Morphy and the Great Romantics would be impressed with Wells's energetic attack, coupled with an almost spiritual disdain for all things material. Even the stodgy 16 ... b6 will win the game after 17 Kc2 Bb7 18 Bg2 Bc5 19 Qf1 Be4+ 20 Kb3 Bxf3 which wins material back, with a winning position: 21 Qxf2 Bxf2 22 Bxf3 Bxg1 23 Bxa8 Rxa8 leaves Black two pawns up.

17 Rg2 bxc4+ 18 Kc2

Not 18 Kxc4?? Qb6 (threat: ... Ba6+) 19 Kd3 Qb2 and it's time for White to resign.

18 ... Qc5



The c4-pawn clogs White's queenside development.

19 Rg5 f5?!

This move is more decorative than useful. This attempt to reupholster the structure fails to make it an iota prettier, since f5 comes under attack. Much stronger is 19 ...

Qc7! 20 Nd4 Be5.

20 Nd4 Bb7

Played since ... Be4+ covers f5 for now.

21 Qh5

21 d3 looks a little better, but is still busted for White.

21 ... Be4+ 22 Kd1 Be7?!

Now Black's once powerful attack looks like a large bird with undersized wings, which is never destined to take flight. This inaccuracy allows White to fight back. Wells must have been in time trouble, because he made multiple inaccuracies from this stage, but not so many that he failed to take the point. The comp offers 22 ... Be5! 23 Nxf5 (not 23 Rxf5?? Bxf5 24 Nxf5 Rab8 and White is crushed, with no way to proceed with his development) 23 ... g6 24 Nh6+ Kg7 25 Qh4 Qb5 26 Nf7 Bf3+ 27 Kc1 Rab8 (threatening mate on the move) 28 Qh6+ Kg8! 29 Rxc6+ hxc6 30 Qxc6+ Kf8 when White is out of checks and getting mated.

23 Rxf5!

This exchange sacrifice is a terrific bargain for White, who eliminates Black's most dangerous attacker.

23 ... Bxf5 24 Qxf5 Qxf5?!

Surely White's king is in more danger than Black's? He should retain queens with 24 ... d5.

25 Nxf5 d5 26 Nxe7+ Rxe7 27 Na3

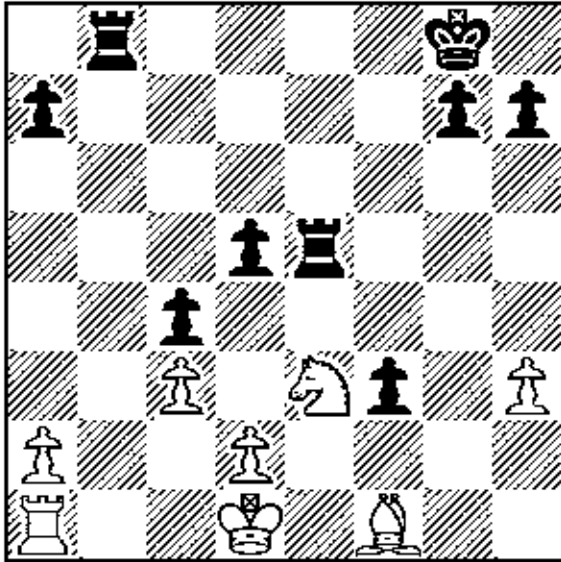
At long last, the queenside gets developed.

27 ... Rb8

27 ... Rae8 28 Nc2 covers access to the e-file.

28 Nc2 f3 29 Ne3 Re5

Instead, 29 ... Rxe3 30 dxe3 Rb2 31 Rc1 Rf2 32 Ke1 Rxa2 33 Rb1 (and not 33 Rd1?? f2 mate) 33 ... Kf7 34 Rb7+ Kf6 35 Rd7 Ke5 36 Rxc7 f2+ 37 Kd1 Ke4 38 Rg3 Ra1+ 39 Ke2 Ra2+ is drawn.



Exercise (combination alert): White equalizes if you find his combination.

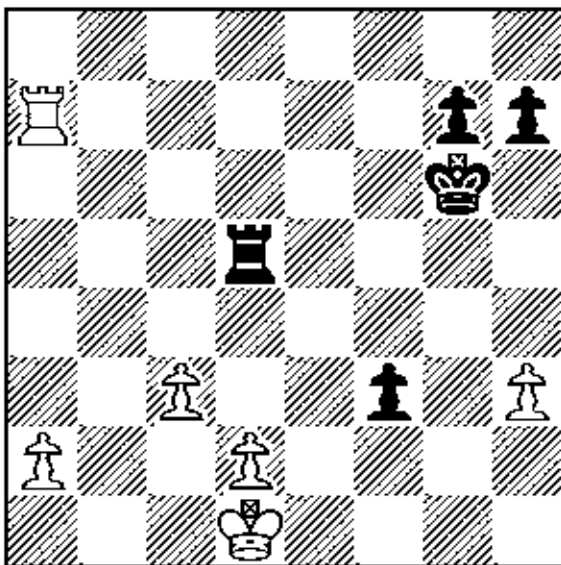
Answer: Attraction/pin.

30 Nxd5! Rxd5 31 Bxc4 Rbd8 32 Rb1 Kf8 33 Bxd5 Rxd5 34 Rb8+

Missing 34 Rb4! g5 35 Ke1 h5 36 Kf2 Rxd2+ 37 Kxf3 Rxa2 38 Rb5 with a likely draw.

34 ... Kf7 35 Rb7+ Kg6 36 Rxa7??

36 Ke1! should hold the draw.



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

Answer: Pawn promotion.

36 ... Re5!

Black cuts off White's king.

37 Ra4 f2 38 Rf4 Re1+ 39 Kc2 f1Q 40 Rxf1 Rxf1

White's three passers aren't good enough.

41 a4 Ra1 42 Kb3 Kf5 43 d3 g5 44 Kb4 h5

Black is way too fast in the queening race.

45 a5 g4 0-1

Summary: I feel like 4 f4?! is borderline dubious, and a not-so-scary King's Gambit, since we probably get the better of the deal with the insertion of b3 and ... c5.

Game 42

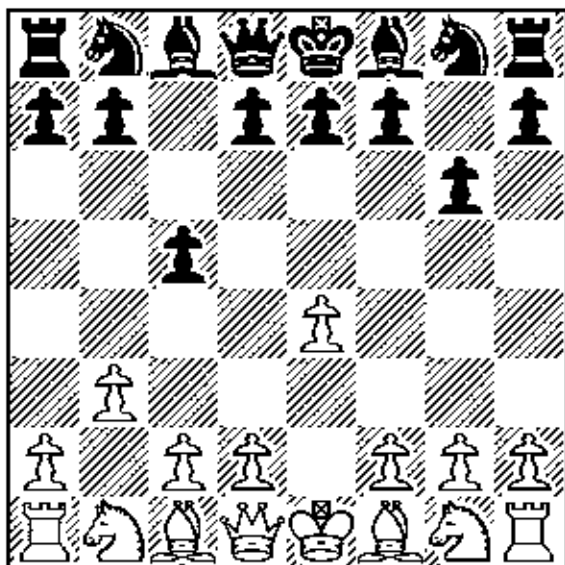
N.Kabanov-D.Navara

Khanty-Mansiysk 2011

1 e4

1 b3 g6 2 Bb2 Nf6 3 e4 was H.Nakamura-V.Kramnik, London (blitz) 2014. Nakamura has several games from this position in the database. Now his opponents all play 3 ... Bg7. However, if they play 3 ... c5 we transpose to the position in our game.

1 ... c5 2 b3 g6!?



Politicians tend to promise us a utopian society, at the high cost of restricting freedoms. One of the ideas behind the b3-Sicilian is that White's fianchettoed bishop

discourages black kingside fianchettoes. Apparently nobody told Navara, who isn't discouraged in the least, and decides to swim upstream and counter-fianchetto.

Question: Is this a joke?

Answer: No joke. I added this line to emphasize that your writer is hip, trendy, and follows all the latest theoretical fashions – even the ridiculous looking ones! Actually this move isn't as bad as it appears, and is the current darling of top GMs. In fact, *New in Chess*, the world's premier opening theory magazine, committed an entire article on it by IM Jeroen Bosch.

3 Bb2

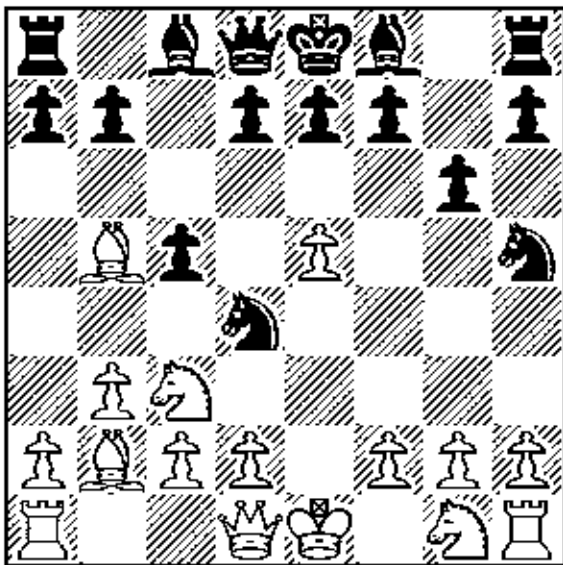
"That which awaits you, will not be to your liking," boasts the bishop, who overestimates his own power.

3 ... Nf6 4 e5

The position resembles a rather pleasant Alekhine's Defence for Black after this move, since White's fianchettoed bishop is probably on the wrong diagonal, and also, he can't seize the centre with d4 without allowing ... cxd4.

Alternatively:

a) After 4 Nc3 Nc6 5 Bb5 Nd4 (now we get Tiviakov's line, with the addition of b3 and ... g6) 6 e5 (6 Bd3 Bg7 7 Nge2 d6 8 Nxd4 cxd4 9 Ne2 e5 10 c3 d5! 11 cxd4 dxe4 12 Bb5+ Bd7 13 Bxd7+ Nxd7 looks quite pleasant for Black, who sits on the better end of equality) 6 ... Nh5 Bosch points out in his article that Black isn't bothered with such e5 Nh5 ideas.

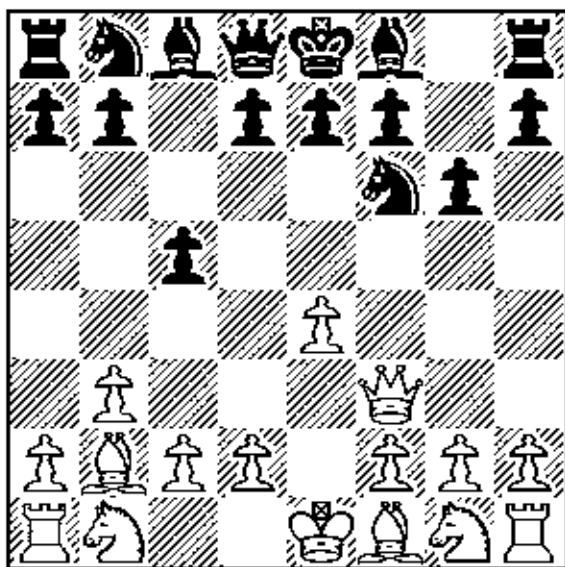


Question: Why is Black okay with this decentralization?

Answer: First, any time White plays e5, he or she gives some degree of control over d5. Secondly, White has no way to effectively exploit the h5-knight's presence, since g4!? ideas tend to loosen White's kingside: 7 Nge2 Bg7! 8 g4 Bxe5 (or 8 ... Nf3+!? 9 Kf1 a6 10 Bd3 d5! when the h5-knight is immune, due to the mate threat on h3 and 11 h3 d4 12 Na4 Qd5! threatens ... Nxd2+, exposing the h1-rook to attack; following 13 gxh5 Nxd2+ 14 Kg1 Nf3+ 15 Kf1 Nh4 16 Ng3 Bxe5 I like Black's chances) 9 Nxd4 cxd4 10 gxh5 dxc3 11 Bxc3 Qc7 12 Bxe5?! (12 Qf3 looks better) 12 ... Qxe5+ 13 Be2 d5 14 d4 Qe4 15 Rg1 Bf5 White is tangled up and in trouble, A.Morozevich-I.Nepomniachtchi, Moscow (rapid) 2014.

b) 4 Nf3 Bg7 5 e5 Nd5 reaches another funky Alekhine's-like position. After 6 Nc3 (V.Smyslov-A.Adorjan, Amsterdam 1971) Black successfully navigates the opening with 6 ... Nxc3 7 Bxc3 0-0 8 Bc4 d5 9 exd6 Qxd6. I prefer Black, who can play for central space with a future ... Nc6 and ... e5.

c) 4 Qf3!? was tried in N.Short-G.Jones, Bunratty 2012. This move, although artificial, has some bite to it.



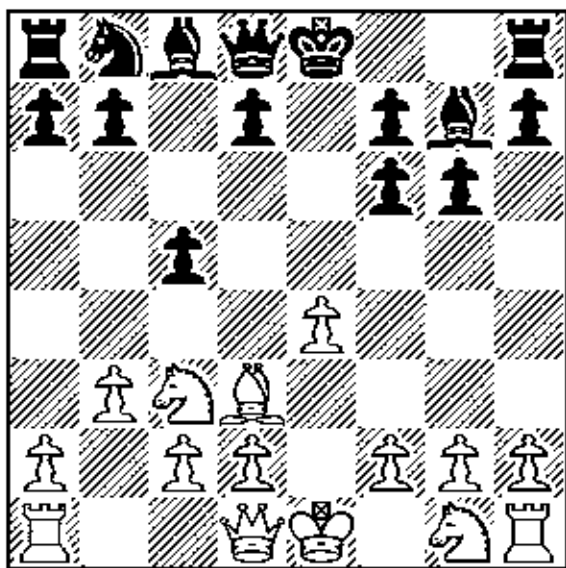
Question: What is the point of White's early queen move?

Answer: The idea is to play e5, while preventing ... Nd5, but after 4 ... d6! (taking the punch out of e5) 5 Bb5+ Nbd7 6 Bxf6 exf6 7 Nc3 Bg7 8 h4! 0-0 9 h5 Ne5 10 Qg3 f5 having achieved his freeing break, Black equalized.

d) 4 Bxf6 exf6 5 Nc3 Bg7 6 Bc4 d6 7 Nge2 0-0 (the immediate 7 ... f5 isn't such a bad plan either) 8 Ng3 (once again White attempts to hinder ... f5) 8 ... Nc6 9 0-0 h5!

(this move pretty much ejects the g3 annoyance) 10 h3 h4 11 Nge2 f5 when Black's bishops come alive and her position is preferable, Ju Wenjun-Hou Yifan, Beijing (blitz) 2014.

Question: How do we play Black here after 6 Bd3? The idea is to suppress ... f5, at the cost of placing the bishop on a rather poor square.



Answer: I think we can get away with an ... f5! pawn sacrifice to enhance our bishop-pair with 6 ... 0-0 7 f4 f5! 8 exf5 d5. Now ... Re8+ is in the air and Black gets loads of compensation for the pawn, with:

1. A development lead.
2. White's king is insecure.
3. Black controls the centre.

Returning to the principled 4 e5:

4 ... Nd5 5 Qf3!?

I'm also a Scandinavian player (1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Qxd5), and therefore extremely sympathetic to amateurish looking early queen moves! White also has:

a) 5 Nf3 Bg7 reaches the Smyslov-Adorjan note from above.

b) 5 Bc4 Nb6 6 e6 f6 7 exd7+ Bxd7 and White scores a rather sorry 8% from here. I think Black already stands better, since he can expand easily in the centre.

c) 5 e6 doesn't hurt Black at all, since White ended up wasting time pushing his e-pawn to nowhere: 5 ... f6 6 exd7+ Bxd7 7 Bc4 Nf4 8 g3 Bc6 9 Nf3 b5 10 Bf1 Nd5 11 d4 Nb6 12 c3 e5! 13 Bg2, M.Narciso Dublan-P.H.Nielsen, Spanish Team Championship 2004. Black stands well after 13 ... cxd4 14 cxd4 Bb4+ 15 Bc3 Bxc3+ 16 Nxc3 e4 17 Ng1 b4 18 Nce2 0-0. I like Black's development, his coverage of the

d5- and c3-squares, and also the fact that d4 could become weak later on.

5 ... Nb4

The chased knight makes a nuisance of itself, menacing c2.

6 Bc4

When I first learned chess I always went for the trap 1 e4 e5 (at that time neither my chess friends nor I were aware that any response other than 1 ... e5 was legal) 2 Bc4 Bc5 3 Qf3 (or sometimes I would play the even more cunning 3 Qh5), and from this point, about half of my opponents fell for 4 Qxf7 mate! It's refreshing to see a GM play for my old favourite trap.

Instead, 6 Na3 Bg7 7 e6 (this trick almost never seems to bother Black) 7 ... 0-0 8 Bxg7 Kxg7 9 exf7 N8c6 10 c3 (cutting off the intended ... Nd4) 10 ... Rxf7 11 Qg3 Nd5 12 Bc4 Rf5 13 Bxd5 Rxd5 14 h4 Re5+ 15 Kf1 Rh5 16 Nf3 was E.Romanov-E.Shaposhnikov, St Petersburg 2006. I prefer Black's position after 16 ... d5 intending ... e5 next, since Black controls the centre and White's h1-rook may be out of play for a while.

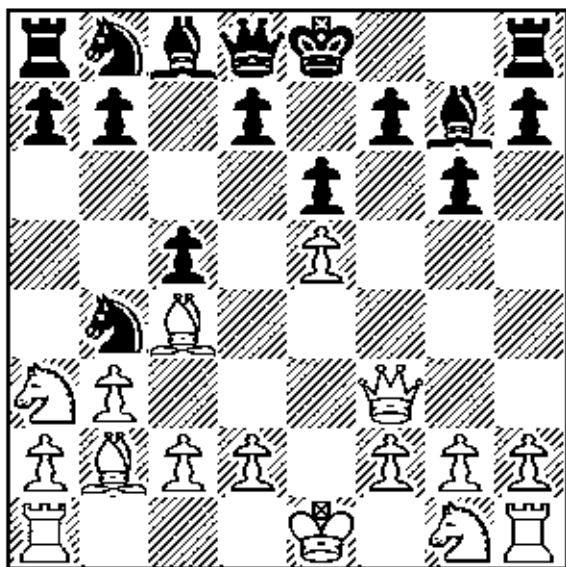
6 ... e6

The 2722-rated GM Navara sees the mate in one trap.

7 Na3

Covering c2.

7 ... Bg7



8 Nb5?

When we speculate, we hope to meet luck half way, but as we all know from personal experience, logic alone isn't enough to vanquish our irrational desires. This new move suggests attempted mischief with the knight's uncalled for presence. There is negligence and then there is wilful negligence. White doesn't have the luxury for this

time-wasting move. White has superior alternatives with:

a) 8 Qe2 a6 9 c3 N4c6 10 f4, S.Gvetadze-G.Nikolashvili, Tbilisi 2009. I like Black's position after 10 ... d5 11 Bd3 f6 12 exf6 Qxf6 13 Nh3 Qh4+ 14 Qf2 Qxf2+ 15 Nxf2 0-0, and if 16 g3 e5 Black seizes a central initiative.

b) 8 0-0-0 N8c6 9 Qe3 Qa5 10 c3 Nd5 11 Bxd5 exd5 12 f4, M.Mattsson-C.Cederstam Barsk, Stockholm 2012. I like Black's chances after 12 ... 0-0 13 Nf3 d6! 14 exd6 d4! 15 Qe2 Qd8 when he regains the sacrificed pawn with the superior position.

8 ... 0-0

It's not so difficult to see that c2 is taboo: 8 ... Nxc2+?? 9 Kd1 Nxa1?? 10 Nd6+ Ke7 11 Qxf7 mate.

9 0-0-0

White chooses defiance over deference, as the Cold War turns into a real one. This is White's idea. He gives away his a-pawn, hoping that he gains compensation in the time gained. He doesn't! However, 9 Na3? is suicidal. It saves a pawn, while admitting that he wasted two full moves in an opposite wings attack position: 9 ... N8c6 10 Qg3 d5! 11 Be2 Nd4 12 Bd1 f6! 13 c3 Nf5 14 Qh3 Nc6. White's position is hopelessly out of alignment and his centre is about to crumble.

9 ... Nxa2+

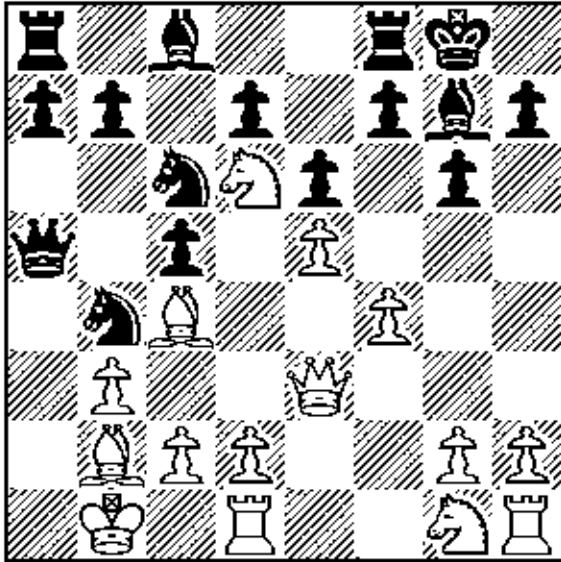
This not only wins a pawn, but also seriously compromises White's king. Also, now White lacks a3 to eject Black's b4-knight, meaning that White will have to live with the knight's presence, or play the ugly c3.

10 Kb1 Nb4 11 Qe3 Qa5 12 Nd6

12 Qxc5?? hangs a piece to 12 ... a6.

12 ... N8c6 13 f4?!

White had to try the unappetizing 13 Nf3 Rb8 14 Bb5.



Exercise (combination alert): White's last move is too slow in an already deteriorating position. How did Black take advantage of it?

Answer: Hidden tactics allow for this powerful central counter, which utterly disorganizes the white king's defences.

13 ... Nd4!

In this game, White's position is riddled with multiple liabilities and few assets. His intention to attack Black's king is the unattended tea kettle, left on the hot stove to boil, until the water evaporates and cracks the dry kettle.

14 c3

White braces for the coming wave, but if 14 Bxd4?? Qa2+ 15 Kc1 Qxc2 mate. The queen gently touches her brother's complaining lips, as a silencing gesture.

14 ... Qa2+ 15 Kc1

White's poor king rattles around like a car-sick Chihuahua in the back of a pick-up truck.

15 ... b5!

The b-pawn performs feats of strength, involving the bending of iron bars and the breaking of his enemies' bones. This is the move you needed to see if you found 13 ... Nd4!.

16 cxb4!

White's best chance. Survival is an ugly business, since most of us are willing to take extreme measures, and suffer extreme privations for its continuity:

a) 16 Nxb5 is met with the killing shot 16 ... d5! 17 cxb4 (17 exd6 Nxb3+ 18 Bxb3 Qxb3 19 Qe4 Bb7 20 Qb1 Na2+ wins the queen) 17 ... dxc4 18 Nxd4 cxd4 19 Qxd4

cx b3 20 Ne2 Bb7 21 Nc3 Rfc8 22 Rhe1 a5 23 bxa5 (or 23 b5 a4 and there is no stopping ... a3) 23 ... Bf8! when White's exposed king has no chance to survive.

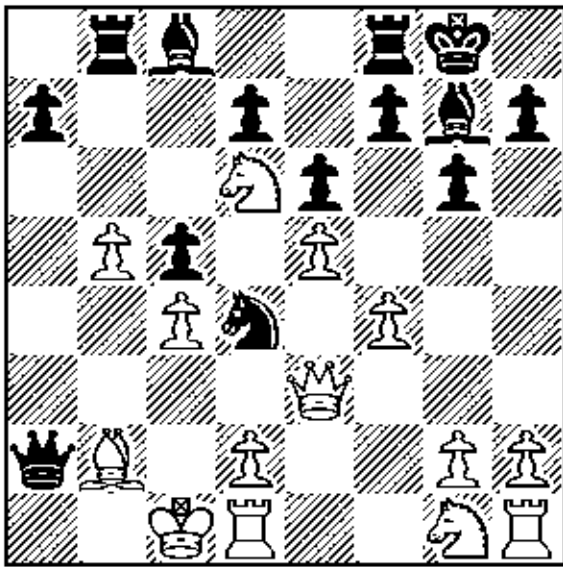
b) 16 Bf1?? doesn't work out all that well after 16 ... Nxb3 mate.

16 ... bxc4 17 bxc4 Rb8!

Also strong was the deflection 17 ... Nf5! 18 Nxf5 exf5 19 d3 cxb4 20 Rd2 d5! 21 c5 a5 22 Nf3 Be6. White can't withstand the surging queenside passers.

18 b5

White can try and cut his losses with 18 Qa3 Qxa3 19 Bxa3 cxb4 20 Bb2 Nf5 21 Nxf5 exf5, but is unlikely to survive a pawn down in the ending.



Exercise (planning): How did Black increase his mounting advantage?

Answer: Deflection/removal of a key defender.

18 ... Nf5!

White's position collapses after the removal of his best piece, his d6-knight.

19 Qa3

When a normally aggressive opponent offers a peace treaty, we tend to suspect either weakness in his camp, or insincerity in an attempt to lure us into a trap. This is the case of the former. White's desperate king needs queens off the board. After 19 Nxf5 Qxc4+ 20 Qc3 Qxc3+ 21 dxc3 exf5 22 c4 a6 Black won a second pawn.

19 ... Qxa3 20 Bxa3 Nxd6 21 exd6 Bb7

Black can also first toss in 21 ... a6 22 bxa6 Bxa6 23 d3 Bb7 with a winning position.

22 Bxc5

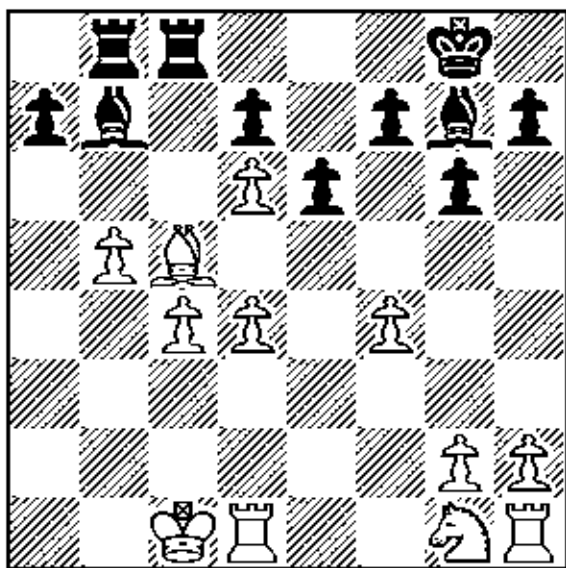
Alternatively, 22 Nf3 a6! 23 bxa6 (23 Ne5 Bxe5 24 fxe5 axb5 25 Rhg1 bxc4 26

Rde1 Rfc8 27 Kc2 Bc6 28 Re3 Rb5 29 g4 Ra8 and White won't save himself, despite the presence of opposite-coloured bishops) 23 ... Bxf3 24 gxf3 Bd4 and White eventually loses both a- and d-pawns.

22 ... Rfc8!

This is much stronger than the greedy 22 ... Bxg2? 23 Ne2 Bxh1 24 Rxh1 Rfc8 25 d4 when White's impressive pawn chain offers some compensation for the exchange.

23 d4



Exercise (combination alert): We can play 23 ... Bxg2, but there is a much stronger move, after which White's game collapses. What is it?

Answer: Deflection/overloaded defender.

23 ... Bxd4!

White's once impressive centre is barred from all achievement by Black's disruptive bishop. You needed to see this crushing shot beforehand, if you picked the correct 22 ... Rfc8!.

24 Rxd4

Following 24 Bxd4 Rxc4+ 25 Kb2 Bxg2 26 Ne2 Bxh1 27 Rxh1 Rxb5+ (this move sends White's king into a dangerous place) 28 Ka3 Rc6 (threatening mate on a6) 29 Ka4 Rb8 (threatening it again) 30 Ka5 (the king is now very glad he installed a secret passageway in his chamber) 30 ... Rc2 (with the dual threats ... Ra2 mate, and ... Rxe2) 31 Nc3 Rb3 32 Na4 Rc4 (threatening the bishop, and also ... Ra3) 33 Bc5 Rxf4 White is tied up and Black wins with the simple plan of pushing forward his kingside super majority.

24 ... Bxg2 25 Ne2 Bxh1 26 Ba3

26 Bxa7 is also met with 26 ... Rxb5.

26 ... Rxb5 0-1

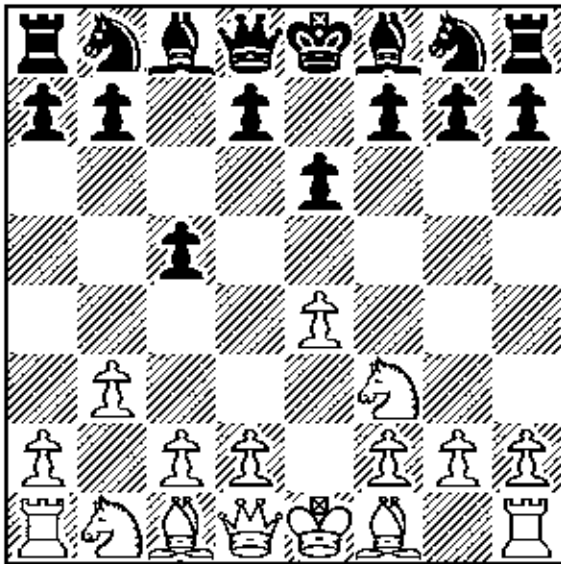
Summary: Despite its ugly outer appearance, the provocative 2 ... g6!? looks fully playable.

Game 43

C.Lakdawala-B.Baker

San Diego (rapid) 2005

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 b3



I sometimes play this delayed version as White, which makes Black commit to ... e6, before playing b3.

Question: What is the difference?

Answer: The difference is Black would lose a tempo if he later tried the set-up with ... e5, since he moved his pawn to e6. So Black is somewhat cornered in his or her responses.

3 ... Nc6

Important alternatives are:

a) 3 ... b6 makes a lot of sense, since Black can try to tie White down to defence of e4, or force the pawn to e5, which I rarely like to play as White, and after 4 Bb2 Bb7 White has:

a1) 5 Bd3!? Nc6 6 c3 (the idea is to later move the bishop and then play d4) 6 ... Nf6 7 Bc2 d5 8 e5 Nd7 9 d4 cxd4 10 cxd4 Nb4 (I wrote a book on 1 ... b6, and can tell

you with authority that Black has a dream Owen's Defence, since he gets to pick off White's powerful light-squared bishop; this means that Black's bishop can occupy a6 and cut a swath through the centre, and also his king is far safer with White's light-squared bishop gone) 11 0-0 Rc8 12 Nc3 Nxc2 13 Qxc2 Be7 14 Qd2 0-0 15 Ne2 Ba6 16 Rfc1 Rxc1+ 17 Rxc1 Qb8 18 h4 Rc8 and I prefer Black's position, M.Carlsen-F.Caruana, Moscow (blitz) 2012.

a2) 5 Nc3 Nf6 6 e5 (with 6 d3 d5 White landed in a somewhat disorganized looking King's Indian Attack, with a fianchetto on the wrong side of the board) 6 ... Nd5 7 Nxd5 Bxd5 8 c4 Bb7 9 Be2 Nc6 10 0-0 Qc7 11 Re1 d6 12 d4 cxd4 13 Nxd4 dxe5!? (13 ... Nxd4 14 Qxd4 dxe5 15 Qxe5 Qxe5 16 Bxe5 Bb4 17 Red1 f6 is a safe equality for Black) 14 Nb5 Qd8 15 Bf3 was B.Maddex-M.Tal, Chicago 1988. The game remains balanced after 15 ... a6 16 Qxd8+ Rxd8 17 Bxc6+ Bxc6 18 Nc7+ Kd7 19 Bxe5 Kc8 20 Red1 Rxd1+ 21 Rxd1 a5.

b) 3 ... a6 (the idea is to prevent the Rossolimoization of the position after Bb5) 4 Bb2 Nc6 5 c4 Qc7 6 g3 Nf6 7 e5 Ng4 8 Qe2 Nh6 9 Na3 Be7 10 Nc2 0-0 11 Bg2 b5! 12 0-0 bxc4 13 Qxc4?! (13 bxc4 Rb8 14 Bc3 is even) 13 ... a5! (intending ... Ba6) 14 Rfe1 Ba6 15 Qc3 Nb4. Black is making headway on the queenside and already stands a shade better, E.Romanov-P.Svidler, Sochi 2012.

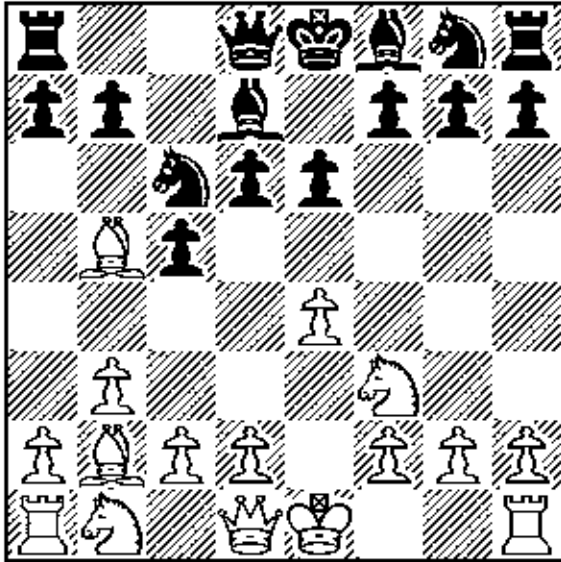
4 Bb2 d6

4 ... d5!? may be playable, although it violates the principle: *Avoid opening the position when lagging in development*: 5 exd5 exd5 6 Bb5 Qe7+ 7 Be2!? (7 Qe2 Qxe2+ 8 Kxe2 Nge7 9 Nc3 Be6 and White is unable to exploit his development lead) 7 ... Bg4 8 0-0 0-0-0 9 Re1 Nf6 10 d4 Qc7 11 Nbd2 Bd6 12 h3 Bh5 13 Rc1! Kb8 14 c4 dxc4 15 Rxc4 Rhe8, L.McShane-D.Navara, Lausanne 2004. White holds a nagging edge after 16 Bf1 Rxe1 17 Qxe1 Re8 18 Qa1 Qe7 19 dxc5 Bxc5 20 Bxf6 gxf6 21 Ne4 Bxf3 22 Nxc5, with a structural advantage for White.

5 Bb5

Don't forget that White can always revert to an Open Sicilian structure with 5 d4 cxd4 6 Nxd4 Nf6 7 Nxc6 bxc6 8 Bd3 Be7 9 0-0. This is a slightly favourable Kan for Black, since she didn't waste a tempo on ... a6, M.Carlsen-J.Polgar, Moscow (blitz) 2009.

5 ... Bd7



Ruining White's intended structural fun on c6.

6 0-0

6 d4, as noted above, turns the game into a Open Sicilian.

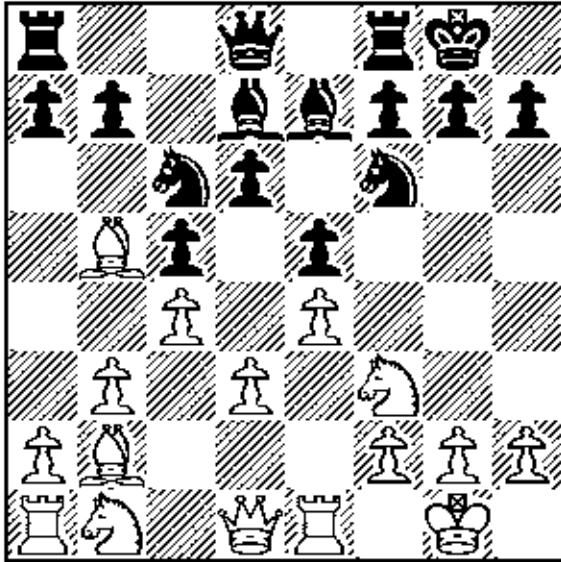
6 ... Nf6 7 Re1 Be7 8 c4

This move keeps the game independent of an Open Sicilian: 8 d4 cxd4 9 Nxd4 0-0 10 Bxc6 Bxc6 11 Nd2 with an equal position, V.Karasev-A.Timofeev, St Petersburg 2014. Here Black may want to consider 11 ... Be8!? preserving his bishop-pair. If White plays c4, Black can prepare a queenside break with ... a6, intending ... b5.

8 ... 0-0 9 d3

I always feel more comfortable in closed positions, so I once again avoid 9 d4.

9 ... e5!



This move makes a mockery of my b2-bishop and knocks out White's d4 and e5 options.

Question: Why is Black avoiding ... a6?

Answer: I placed most of my pawns on light squares, so I actually want to swap away my b5-bishop.

10 Nbd2

Question: You have an awaiting hole on d5, so why avoid 10 Nc3?

Answer: I feared the pinning 10 ... Bg4! 11 h3 Bh5. Now if I attempted to break the pin with 12 g4? (correct is 12 Bxc6 bxc6 13 Kh2! intending Rg1 and g4, although even here I prefer Black's game after 13 ... Ne8 14 g4 Bg6; Black follows with ... Nc7 and ... Ne6, with the superior position, due to his dark-square grip), I was certain my aggressive opponent would sacrifice with 12 ... Nxg4!?. This game was played in the final round where I led the tournament. I didn't want to give my opponent an opportunity for such a do-or-die play. Moreover, 13 hxg4 Bxg4 looks bad for White, since ... f5 is coming, intensifying the pressure on the pin.

10 ... Ne8!

Multipurpose:

1. Black prepares ... f5.
2. Black plans ... Nc7, after which ... Nxb5 damages White's structure and picks up the bishop-pair. Black can also play for ... Ne6 and then enter either d4 or f4 with his knight.

11 Nf1 Nc7

On 11 ... f5 I planned the continuation 12 exf5!? (principle: *counter in the centre when attacked on the wing*; I didn't want to allow ... f4, followed by a kingside pawn storm) 12 ... Rxf5 13 Ne3 Rf7 14 Nd2 Nc7 15 Bxc6 bxc6 (this move ensures that a white knight will not later sit on d5) 16 Ne4 Ne6 17 f3 intending to stir up queenside play with a3, Bc3, Rb1 and b4. Even here, *Houdini* slightly favours Black's position, while I'm okay with White's.

12 Ne3!?

Allowing some damage to my structure, although I'm not completely convinced that such self-mortification is productive. I want to avoid 12 Bxc6 bxc6 since now my knight can't ever enter d5, and if 13 Ne3 g6! intending to later attack with ... f5, with an edge for Black.

12 ... Nxb5 13 cxb5 Nd4 14 a4 Be6

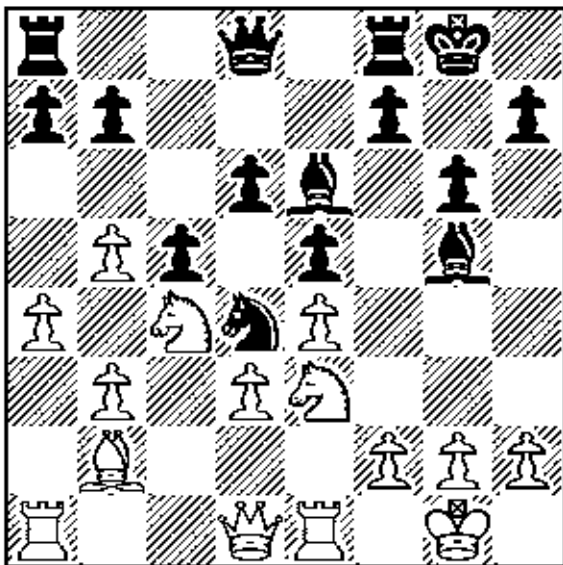
I'm okay with White's position after 14 ... a6 15 bxa6 Nxf3+ 16 Qxf3 bxa6 17 Bc3 Rb8 18 Rab1 Be6 19 Nc4 f5 20 Qe2 Qd7 21 f3, although I readily admit that the comp and most players prefer Black's side. At some point I will engineer a b4 break.

15 Nd2 Bg5

This isn't such a bad bishop.

16 Ndc4 g6!

Black feels that his kingside opportunities are as yet unharvested.



Exercise (planning): Now ... f5 is coming. We can't allow ourselves to drift down a languid current of inaction. White must come up with a vigorous plan to counter Black's kingside attack. What should we play?

Answer: Principle: *Meet a wing attack with a central counter* (yes, b4! counts as ‘central’, since it threatens to undermine c5 and d4).

17 b4!

This is an attempt to turn a defect into a grace.

17 ... b6

White must play very carefully after 17 ... cxb4 18 Bxd4 exd4 19 Nd5 Rc8 20 Rb1 f5 21 Rxb4 fxe4 22 dxe4 Bxd5 23 exd5 Qc7 24 Qxd4 Bf6 25 Qe3 Qc5 26 Qxc5 Rxc5 27 Re4 (27 Nxd6? allows 27 ... Bc3) 27 ... Rxd5 (threatening a back-rank mate) 28 Kf1 Rd4 29 Ne3 Rd2 30 Rf4 d5 31 Rb1. White stands a shade worse, but should hold the ending.

18 bxc5

This move gives me a queenside pawn majority.

18 ... bxc5 19 Nd5 f5 20 Bxd4!?

My fellow San Diegans IMs John Watson and Keaton Kiewra constantly accuse me of being a biased knight-loving, bishop hater. I see absolutely no evidence to back up their outrageous accusation! I recently sent Keaton my loss in a close ending to GM Sevillano. His response: “I knew you were in deep trouble when you ended up with the bishop versus Sevillano’s knight!”

20 ... cxd4 21 Qb3

I should probably back up my e-pawn with 21 f3 fxe4 22 fxe4 when White doesn’t stand worse.

21 ... Rc8

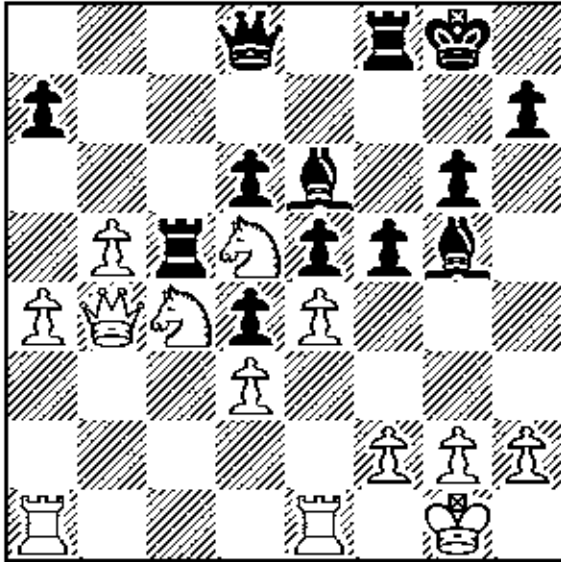
After 21 ... fxe4 22 dxe4 Bxd5 23 exd5 Qc7 24 Rab1 Rac8 25 b6! axb6! (25 ... Qxc4 26 b7 Qxb3 27 bxc8Q Qxd5 28 Qa6 e4 29 Qxa7 Bh4 30 g3 e3 31 fxe3 Qf3 32 Rf1 Qxe3+ 33 Kg2 Qe2+ 34 Kg1 Qe3+ is perpetual check) 26 Nxb6 Rb8 Black’s passed d-pawn is worth more than White’s passed a-pawn.

22 Qb4?

Necessary was 22 Ra2! fxe4 23 dxe4 Rc5 24 a5 Bxd5 25 exd5 when White’s queenside majority becomes rather dangerous.

22 ... Rc5?!

Black should play 22 ... fxe4! 23 dxe4 Bxd5 24 exd5 Qc7! 25 Na5 (25 Nxd6?? is met with 25 ... Be7) 25 ... Qf7! (with a double attack on f2 and d5) 26 f3 Rc2! (threat: ... Rxc2+ and ... Qxf3+, with a mating attack) 27 Qb3 Rc3 28 Qb2 Qxd5 when White lacks compensation for the pawn.



Exercise (combination alert): Black's last move, which turns a potential something,

into a nothing, overlooks a shot, after which White is back in the game. Where is it?

Answer: Overloaded defender.

23 Nxe5!

Now White is able to hold things together.

23 ... fxe4 24 dxe4 Bxd5 25 exd5 Rc2

Not 25 ... Rxd5?? 26 Nc6 Qd7 27 Qc4 Qf7 28 f3 Bf6 29 Ne7+! Bxe7 30 Rxe7 Qxe7 31 Qxd5+ Kg7 32 Qxd4+ Qf6 33 Rd1 Qxd4+ 34 Rxd4 Rd8 35 Kf2 when Black struggles in a lost pawn-down rook and pawn ending.

26 Nd3

Okay, fine. I admit it: I love knights over bishops. This one is a star:

1. It eliminated Black's e5-pawn.
2. It establishes the ideal blockade square on d3.
3. The knight halts the d4-pawn's advance.
4. It covers f2.

26 ... Bd2! 27 Qb1!

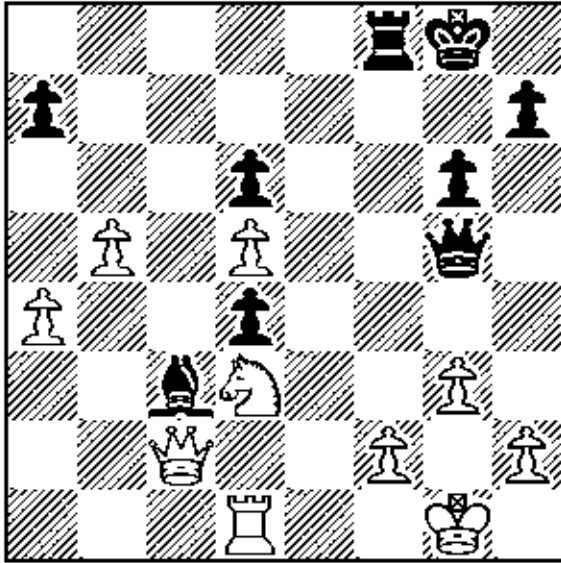
This is an important part of the combination, which White had to foresee on his 23rd move. I don't lose material after all.

27 ... Bxe1?!

Now the advantage slightly swings to White. Correct is 27 ... Qc7! 28 Rd1 Qc4 29 Ra3 Be3. This move leads to a forced draw after 30 fxe3 Rxe2+ 31 Kxe2 Qxd5+ 32 Kg1 Qg5+ 33 Kh1 Qd5+.

28 Qxc2 Bc3 29 Rd1 Qg5 30 g3?!

It isn't easy to assimilate the data. 30 Nc1! Qe5 31 g3 Ba5 32 Ne2 Bb6 33 Qd2 Qxd5 34 a5 Bc5 35 Nxd4 and White retains the advantage, while Black should avoid 35 ... Bxd4? 36 Qxd4 Qxb5 37 Qxa7 when the a-pawn's push will be decisive.



30 ... Rf3?!

Not the best choice:

a) 30 ... Qg4! 31 Ne1 Re8 32 Ng2 Qe2 33 Qxe2 Rxe2 34 Nf4 Ra2 35 Rb1 Rxa4 when the game should end in a draw.

b) After 30 ... Qxd5?! 31 Nf4 Qf7 32 h4 White stands slightly better due to his power on the light squares and the superiority of the knight over the bishop.

31 Qe2 Qxd5?

Necessary was 31 ... Rf7 32 Qe4.

32 Nf4 Rxf4

Not much choice, since 32 ... Qb7?? allows 33 Qe8+ Kg7 34 Qc6! Qxc6 35 bxc6 Ba5 36 Rxd4 g5 37 Nd5 Rf7 38 Rc4 which leaves Black down a pawn, while hopelessly tied down.

33 gxf4 Qb3 34 f5!

Exposing Black's king.

34 ... gxf5 35 Qf3 Kf7?

A mistake in a lost position. 35 ... Qf7 36 Qg3+ Qg6 37 Kf1 White consolidates.

36 Rd3?

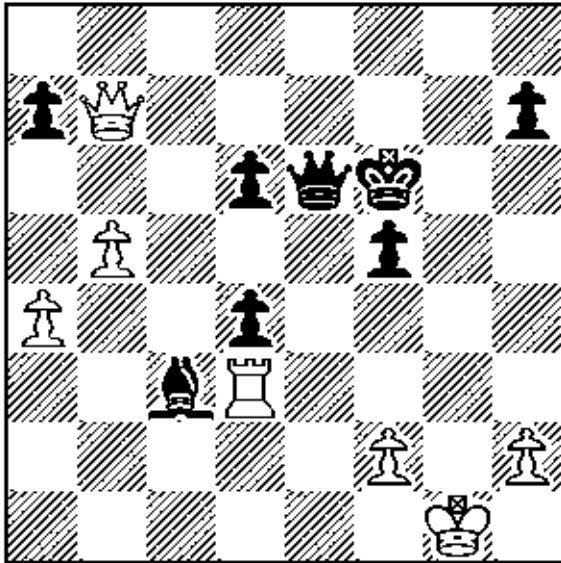
Reasoned impartiality is a myth, when it comes to our styles. I continue haltingly with this 'safe' move, as if to define and fill out what is just a partially formed thought. When I come home from my weekly Saturday Gambito G/45 tournament and put my games through the hateful lens of my chess engines, I chafe at the inadequacy of the

human mind (especially this human!), particularly when my clock's reduction perfectly corresponds with my degrading level of play. Your writer's heart contracts painfully, when recalling such a stupid over-the-board decision. I missed two simple ways to win:

a) 36 Rxd4 wins an important pawn, while safeguarding a4.

b) Please don't ask me why I didn't play 36 Qxf5+ Ke8 37 Rd3 which also wins easily.

36 ... Qe6 37 Qb7+ Kf6



Exercise (critical decision): Chess is a realm where vast fortunes have a way of vanishing on the turn of a single move. Should White play 38 Rf3, or can he get away with 38 Qxa7, picking up two connected passed pawns on the queenside? Only one line wins for White.

38 Qxa7??

My obese queen reminds us of a pregnant sow when she eats – which is often. A move based on the military term: use it or lose it. I thought that if I didn't take this pawn, while I had the opportunity, then I would be unable to do so later on. My wife Nancy tells me that I possess a remarkable anti-intuition when it comes to directions: whichever way I pick is always the exact opposite direction to my actual destination. Maybe in time pressure, I should make a choice and then play its opposite: the move I rejected!

Answer: The safety-minded 38 Rf3! consolidates.

38 ... Qe1+ 39 Kg2 Qe4+ 40 Rf3 Qg4+??

Our eyes have yet to adjust to the new setting and the geometric framework eludes

both sides. Bruce and I both missed 40 ... f4!, after which White is unable to escape perpetual check after 41 h4 (or 41 b6 Qg6+ 42 Kf1 Qb1+ 43 Kg2 Qg6+ and no escape for White) 41 ... Qg6+ 42 Kh3 Qe4 43 Kg2 Qg6+ 44 Kh2 (White is no closer to his goal, than he was moves ago) 44 ... Qe4. Now if White attempts 45 Rh3 d3, only Black can win and White must play exactly to hold the draw: 46 Qc7 Be5 47 Qd8+ Kf5 48 Qf8+ Ke6 49 Qg8+ Kd7 50 Qg4+ Kc7 51 Qf3 d5 52 Kg2 d2 53 Rh1 Qg6+ 54 Kh3 Qf5+ 55 Qg4 Qd3+ 56 Kg2 Qe4+ with perpetual check.

41 Rg3 Qe4+ 42 Kh3 1-0

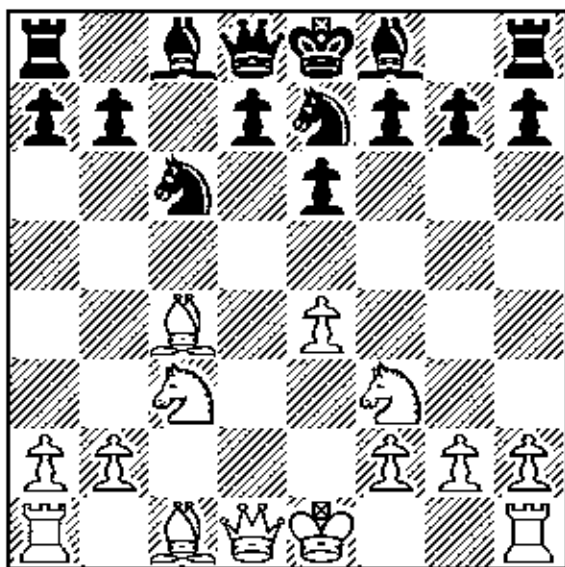
A leader's first duty is to defend his people. So my king begins the process by saving his own skin first. Black's checks run out and White wins easily after 42 ... Qb1 (or 42 ... f4 43 Qg7+ Ke6 44 Qg8+ Ke5 45 Qe8+ Kf5 46 Qf7+ Ke5 47 Rg5+ Qf5+ 48 Qxf5 mate) 43 Qg7+ Ke6 44 Qxh7 Qf1+ 45 Kh4 Qxf2 46 Kg5 Bd2+ 47 Kg6, consolidating.

Summary: Beware 2 ... e6 players: this move order allows White a better version than the one he or she gets after 2 ... Nc6. However, Black still should equalize with correct play.

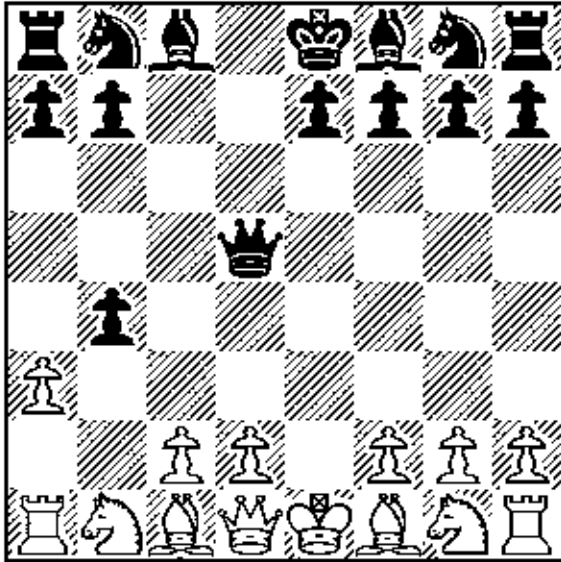
Chapter Nine

The Smith-Morra and Wing Gambit

The pattern of my pawn thievery was established from adolescence, so I suggest we accept White's pawn offer in both gambits. My feeling is that White gets only partial recompense for the investment – on condition that we know our lines well.



Against the Smith-Morra, 1 e4 c5 2 d4 cxd4 3 c3, I suggest we go for a slightly offbeat but high scoring line for Black, where we play it in Kan-like fashion, almost ignoring the fact that it's a Smith-Morra.



Against the somewhat disreputable Wing Gambit, 1 e4 c5 2 b4, we play it by the book. Why change things when they are going well for our side? Current theory is of the opinion that it is White who struggles to equalize here.

Now here is the issue: we aren't going to see these gambits too often, so it's likely we will be hazy on our theory (when we are unable to remember our theory, it feels as if we studied a book written in disappearing ink) when we do encounter them. So be sure to include this chapter in a repetitive study program, so we don't get caught unprepared over the board.

Game 44

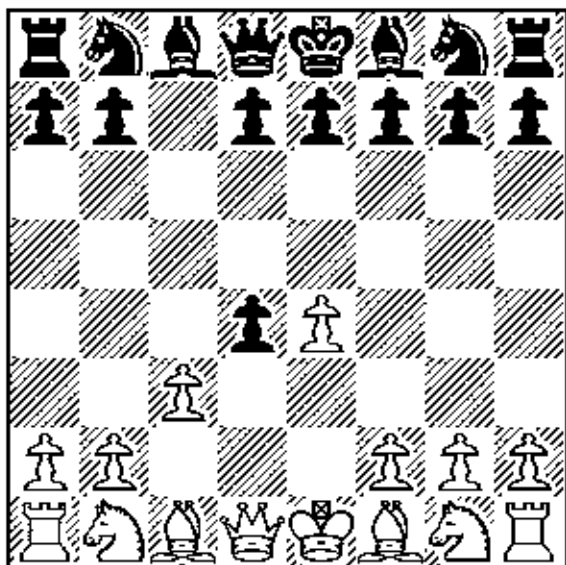
G.Richter-V.Hort

Boeblingen 1985

1 e4 c5 2 d4

The start of the Smith-Morra Gambit. Ken Smith, the line's messiah, once played White against some GM. The game went 1 e4 e6. The annotator (I forget who) gave Black's first move a dubious mark, writing "1 ... c5! wins a pawn, since Smith always plays the Smith-Morra Gambit!". Of course this was a (semi) joke, and the gambit must be taken seriously, mainly since we won't face it that often, while our Morra Gambit-loving opponent plays it each time he or she is White against Sicilian.

2 ... cxd4 3 c3



Question: Do you believe the gambit is sound?

Answer: Whether or not the gambit is sound depends on the neurological structure of your brain. Positional players like your writer consider the gambit – how shall I put this politely? – downright stupid. On the other hand, a club level tactician and natural attacker thinks: “What an awesome gambit! With it, I will create mayhem and rule the world!”

3 ... dxc3

I suggest we accept.

Question: Do we have to accept the gambit?

Answer: No it's perfectly acceptable to decline with 3 ... Nf6 4 e5 Nd5 which transposes to the c3-Sicilian, which we covered earlier in the book. In fact, I remember in the early 1970's, I saw GM Walter Browne, who was at that time maybe only second to Fischer in the U.S. rankings, decline the gambit against some expert. So if a player as strong as Browne declined the gambit, we as well should take it seriously.

4 Nxc3 Nc6

Everyman cousin/editor IM Richard Palliser covers the line 4 ... e6 5 Nf3 a6 6 Bc4 b5 7 Bb3 Bb7 in *Fighting the Anti-Sicilians*, and makes a very good case for Black's side in this line. In fact, I considered this line as our main line in the book, until I discovered that he beat me to it in his book.

5 Nf3 e6

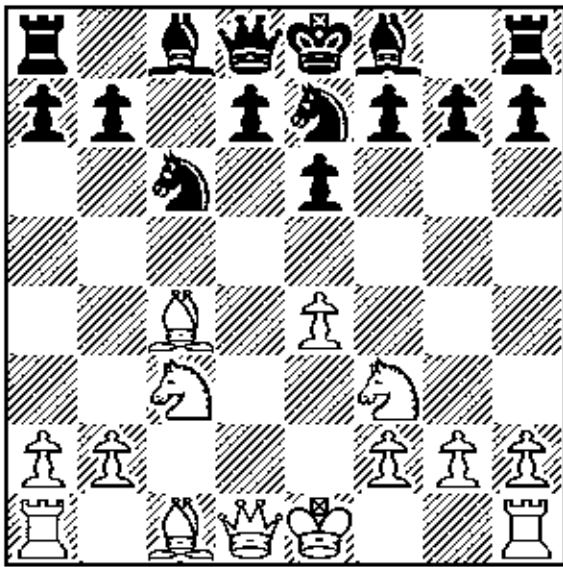
I suggest we go for Black's secondary line, rather than enter the main line 5 ... d6.

We almost play the position as if we are in an Open Kan Sicilian, developing our g8-knight to e7, and then to g6.

Question: Do you believe the 5 ... e6 line is superior to the main line 5..d6?

Answer: No, I think the two lines are equivalent. The reason I think you will do better with 5 ... e6 is simply because your Morra opponents will be far more booked up on the main line.

Bc4 Nge7



This rare line scores very well for Black, and I feel like it is White who fights to equalize. Of course this is under the impractical assumption that we will all defend Black perfectly – which we won't. So count on White getting practical chances, if not objectively, then from the fact that he or she will most certainly be more familiar with the positions we reach in the early middlegame.

Otherwise:

a) 6 ... d6 reverts to the main line, which we aren't playing.

b) The move order 6 ... a6 7 0-0 Nge7 is likely to transpose after 8 Bg5 f6. Notice too 8 Bf4 Ng6 and then:

b1) 9 Bd6?! scores miserably for White, since it involves a loss of time for White, which is his single commodity for having handed us a pawn: 9 ... Bxd6 10 Qxd6 Qe7 11 Qxe7+ (it doesn't make much sense to me to gambit a pawn in the opening, and then immediately agree to a queen swap; 11 Rad1 is marginally better: 11 ... b5 12 Bb3 was D.Brinovec-J.Egyed, Mureck 2008, and here Black should play 12 ... Qxd6 13 Rxd6 Ra7 14 Rfd1 Rc7, but now what? Black will slowly unravel with a plan like ... Ke7, ... f6, ... Nge5 and ... Nf7, ejecting White's d6-rook) 11 ... Kxe7 and I don't see White's

compensation, L.Csuri-G.Toth, Hungarian League 1996.

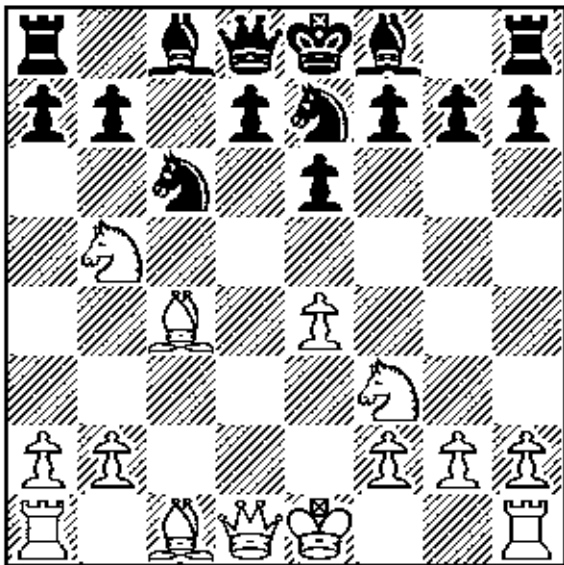
b2) 9 Bg3 (preserving the bishop and avoiding swaps looks more logical) 9 ... Be7 10 Qe2 0-0 11 Rad1 d6 (the GM feels it necessary to play this move, otherwise White doubles on the d-file and Black won't get the chance again) 12 Rd2 Qc7 (this is a relatively safe square for the queen now that White committed his a1-rook to d1, rather than c1) 13 a3 b5 14 Ba2 Bb7 15 Rfd1 Rfd8 16 Rc2 Qb6 17 b4 Rac8 when Black developed harmoniously and White is down a pawn, without a plan, H.Kleinhenz-H.Stefansson, Las Vegas 1997.

7 Bg5

White hopes to provoke ... f6, which slightly weakens e6.

Next game we look at 7 0-0.

Question: Why can't White immediately take advantage of the d6 hole with 7 Nb5?



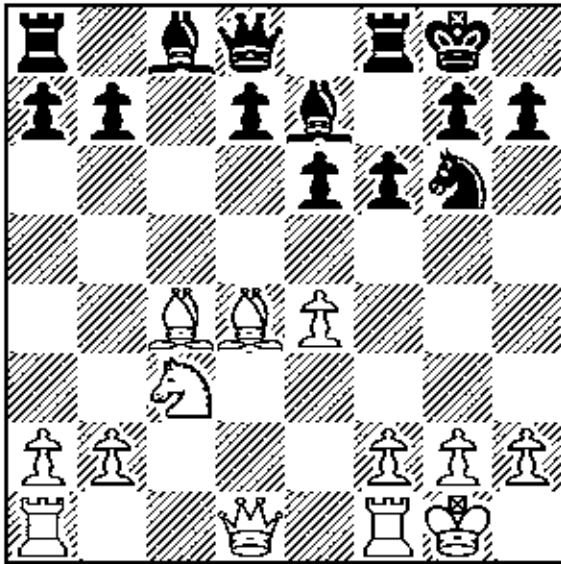
Answer: First of all, you can avoid this line entirely by replacing 6 ... Nge7 with 6 ... a6. Secondly, White's knight wastes a lot of time with Nc3, Nb5 and Nd6+, so we don't mind Black's position after 7 ... Ng6 8 0-0 a6 (come on in!) 9 Nd6+ Bxd6 10 Qxd6 Qe7 11 Qg3 0-0 12 h4 (or 12 Rd1 b5 13 Bb3 Bb7 14 h4 f6 15 h5 Nge5 16 Bf4 Nxf3+ 17 Qxf3 Ne5 and I don't see full compensation for White, since Black nearly completes development) 12 ... f6 13 Be3 Nce5 14 Nxe5 fxe5 (14 ... Nxe5 15 Be2 b5 also favours Black) 15 h5 Nf4 16 Qg4 (Z.Gicov-A.Czebe, Ohrid 2001; I also prefer Black after 16 a4 d6 17 h6 g6, since that advanced h-pawn can easily turn into a liability later in the game if a few pieces get swapped). Here Black can try 16 ... d5! 17 Bb3 d4 with the superior position. I don't see White's full compensation here.

7 ... f6

Yes, this weakening move can be interpreted as a bit of a concession for our side. On the plus side, ... f6 can actually be a move we want, since it disallows White e5 ideas.

8 Bf4

8 Be3 is White's main move here, and after 8 ... Ng6 9 0-0 (with 9 Nb5?! Bb4+ 10 Ke2 a6 11 Nd6+ Ke7! 12 Nxc8+ Rxc8 White simply wasted time and helped Black develop) 9 ... Be7 10 Nd4 Nxd4 11 Bxd4 0-0 he has:



a) 12 Rc1! a6 13 Bb3 Kh8 14 f4 b5 15 Qh5 Qe8 16 f5 Ne5 17 Qh3 Nc4 (after 17 ... Bd6 18 Ne2 a5 19 Nf4 a4 20 Bd1 Kg8 21 Bh5 White's kingside pressure looks ominous and I don't much like Black's position anymore) 18 Rf4 g5! 19 Rff1 e5 20 Bf2 Bb7 21 Bxc4 bxc4 22 Rfd1 when White's d-file pressure and control over d5 offer some compensation for the pawn.

b) 12 f4? Qc7! (with a double attack on c4 and f4) 13 Bb3 Nxf4 and Black won a second pawn, M.Esserman-A.Shabalov, Ledyard 2008.

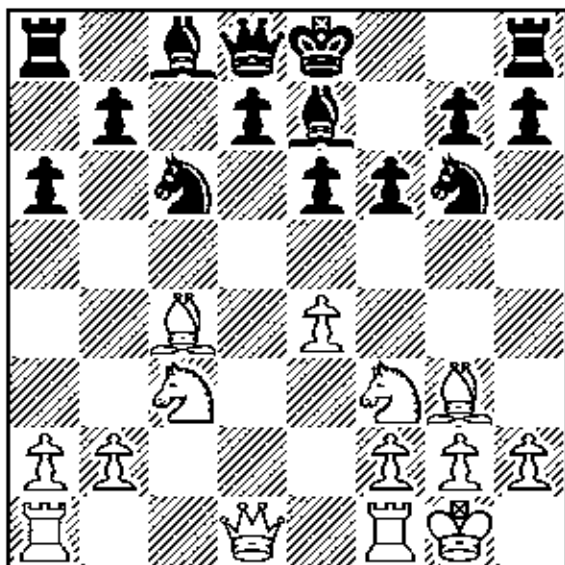
8 ... Ng6 9 Bg3 a6

Putting an end to Nb5 ideas, while preparing ... b5.

10 0-0

10 a4 should be met with 10 ... b6 11 0-0 Bc5 12 Rc1 0-0 13 Qe2 Qe7 14 Rfd1 Kh8 when either ... d6 and ... f5 may follow. I don't see a constructive idea for White. It just feels like he is down a pawn for nothing.

10 ... Be7



11 Qe2

This is the main line. However, White's best idea may be the new move, played by IM Kamran Shirazi, 11 Rc1!. Following 11 ... b5 (more accurate than 11 ... 0-0, K.Shirazi-B.Laubach, Paris 2005, which allows White the trick 12 Nd5; now Black should just decline with 12 ... Nge5 13 Nxe7+ Qxe7 14 Bb3 when White's bishop-pair and development lead offer White enough compensation for the pawn) 12 Bb3 Bb7 13 Nd5 (once again, Black should decline) 13 ... Rc8 14 Nxe7 Ngxe7 15 Nd4 Ne5 16 Qh5+ g6 17 Qh4 N7c6 18 Nxc6 Rxc6 19 Qh6 Qe7 It feels to me like White once again gets adequate compensation for the pawn.

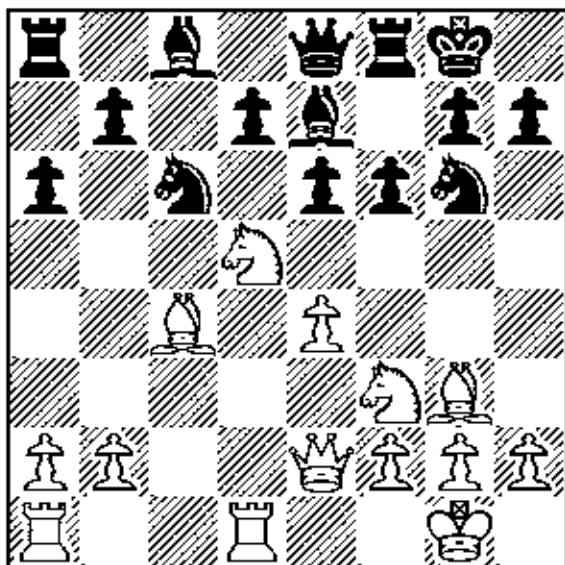
11 ... 0-0 12 Rfd1

Nobody has tried 12 Nd5 b5 13 Nxe7+ Qxe7 14 Bb3 Bb7 15 Rfd1 Nge5 16 Nd4 Nxd4 17 Rxd4 Rac8 18 Rad1 (18 f4 Nc6 19 Rd3 Na5 looks better for Black) 18 ... Bc6 19 Qd2 when White has some, but probably not full compensation for the pawn.

12 ... Qe8

12 ... d6 is *Houdini*'s top choice. After 13 a3 Kh8 14 Rd2 Nge5 15 Ba2 Nxf3+ 16 Qxf3 e5! (a good decision, as Black hands over control over d5 to seize control of d4; the difference is that the move snuffs out the g3-bishop's influence for now) 17 Qd1 f5! (the players reach a Pelikan-like position, except that Black happens to be up a pawn in this one) 18 f3 Nd4 19 Bf2 Bg5 20 Rd3 fxe4 21 Nxe4 Bf5 22 Nxg5 Qxg5 23 Rxd4 exd4 24 Qxd4 Rac8 White lacked full compensation for the exchange, F.Bravo de los Santos-D.Paunovic, Seville 2008.

13 Nd5!?



When our stock of patience runs low, action – either harmful or beneficial – generally follows. We reach theory's end. At first glance, it feels as if White gives forceful expression to his purpose with this shot, pushing his line of inquiry as far as it will go. In reality the move fails to achieve anything, other than swapping (which Black wants), and unravelling Black's once clogged queenside development.

Alternatives are:

a) 13 Rac1 was B.Calas-P.Julve, French League 2005. Black can continue 13 ... b5 14 Bb3 Bb7 15 Qd3 Na5 16 Qxd7 (16 Bc2 Bc6 also favours Black) 16 ... Qxd7 17 Rxd7 Nxb3 18 axb3 Bc6 19 Rc7 Rfc8 20 Nd4 Rxc7 21 Bxc7 Bd7. Black returned his pawn but keeps his advantage, with the bishop-pair and superior structure in the ending.

b) 13 Na4 is *Houdini's* unplayed suggestion, and may be White's best move: 13 ... b5 14 Nb6 Ra7 15 Bb3 Bc5 16 Nxc8 Qxc8. White gets the bishop-pair and some file pressure down the d-file for the pawn.

13 ... exd5

Forced, but also strong. Black easily unravels.

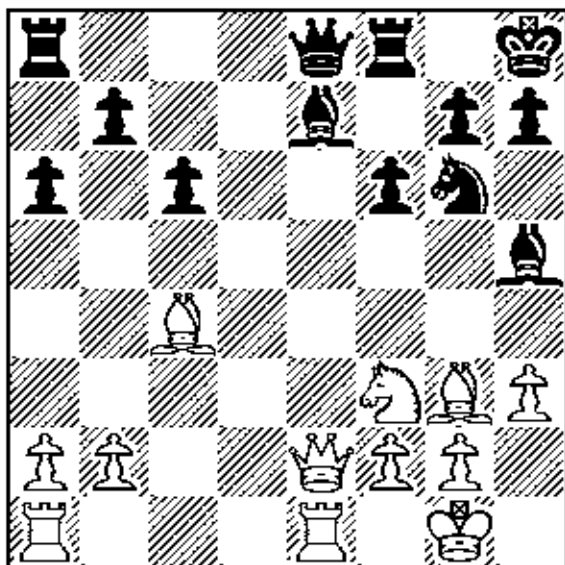
14 exd5 Kh8

Also favouring Black is the comp's choice: 14 ... b5 15 Bb3 Na5 16 d6+ Nxb3 17 dxe7 Qxe7 18 Qxe7 Nxe7 19 axb3 Re8. Black is up a pawn and retains decent chances of converting, despite the bishops of opposite colour.

15 dxc6 dxc6

Black emerged with an extra pawn, for which White's slightly enhanced piece activity fails to make up.

16 Re1 Bg4 17 h3 Bh5



18 Qe3

White breaks the pin, but possibly the wrong way. He can try 18 Bh2 (threat: g4) 18 ... Bxf3 19 Qxf3 Ne5 20 Qe2 Bc5 21 Bb3 Rd8 22 Bc2 Qe7 23 Rad1 Rxd1 24 Rxd1 g6 when Black still holds a nagging one pawn lead, although conversion won't be so easy. Note that White shouldn't opt for opposite-coloured bishops with 25 Bxe5? since he loses the initiative and gets tied down to f2 after 25 ... fxe5 26 Rf1 Bd4.

18 ... Bb4

"There was a time when you frightened me. Now I frighten you," Black's queen tells her e3 sister. The juice is gone from White's initiative and all which remains is the rind. Hort forces wholesale exchanges, with each one bringing him closer to victory.

19 Qxe8

How discouraging when we pursue our idea to its logical conclusion, and then come to realize that it led nowhere. It's always a bad sign when White is forced to swap queens in this or any other gambit.

19 ... Raxe8 20 Red1 f5!

Threatening to smother the g3-bishop with ... f4.

21 Bc7

Following 21 Rd7 b5 22 Bf7 Re7 23 Bxg6 hxg6 24 Rd4 Bc5 25 Bd6 Bxd6 26 Rxd6 Bxf3 27 gxf3 Rf6 28 Rxf6 gxf6 29 Rc1 Rc7 30 Rc5 Kg7 Black has excellent chances to convert, since White struggles down a pawn, with the added burden of a weakened kingside structure.

21 ... Bxf3

Hort avoids the complications arising from 21 ... Nh4 22 Ng5 (22 Nxf4? Bxd1 23 Rxd1 Re4 Black picks up another piece, which will leave White down an exchange) 22 ... Be7 23 Ne6 Bxd1 24 Nxf8 Bf3! 25 gxf3 Nxf3+ 26 Kg2 Nh4+ 27 Kg3 Rxf8 28 Rd1

Ng6 29 f4 when Black is up two pawns, yet remains tied down.

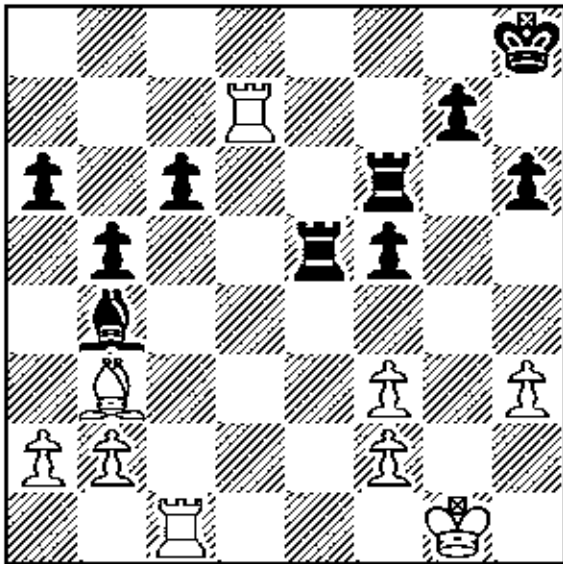
22 gxf3 Ne5 23 Bxe5

White places his hopes in the bishops of opposite colours. 23 Be2 Re7 24 Bd8 Re6 25 Kf1 Rfe8 looks tough for White, since he must watch out for ... Rh6 tricks.

23 ... Rxe5 24 Rd7 b5 25 Bb3 h6

Clearing his back rank of future cheapos. After 25 ... Re2 26 Rc1 c5 (or 26 ... Rxb2 27 Rxc6 Be1 28 Rc2 Rxc2 29 Bxc2 g6 30 h4 Bb4 31 h5 and I don't think Black has enough to win) 27 a3 Be1! 28 Rxc5 Bxf2+ 29 Kf1 Rxb2 30 Rxf5 Rb8 31 Rb7 Ra8 32 Rbf7 g6 33 Bd5 Rd8 34 Rf8+ Rxf8 35 Rxf8+ Kg7 36 Ra8 White should hold the draw.

26 Rc1 Rf6



Exercise (critical decision): White can play 27 h4, intending h5, which boxes in Black's king, or he can play 27 Rc5. One of the lines should draw, while the other allows deterioration in White's position. Which one should he play?

27 h4?

Now White's chances recede like a closing door and his store of counterplay is exhausted. His h-pawn will never reach h5. The move allows Black to fix a future target on h4.

Answer: 27 Rc7! should hold the draw after 27 ... c5 28 a3! c4 (or 28 ... Bd2 29 Rc8+ Kh7 30 Bg8+ Kg6 31 R1xc5 Bf4 32 R5c6 Re2 33 Rxf6+ Kxf6 34 Rf8+ Kg5 35 Bh7 Re5 36 h4+ Kxh4 37 Rxf5 Rxf5 38 Bxf5 Bc1 39 b4 Bxa3 40 Bc8 Bxb4 41 Bxa6 and the game is drawn) 29 Bxc4 Bd6 30 Rc8+ Kh7 31 Bg8+ Kg6. White should hold the position without a problem.

27 ... h5! 28 Kh2

Alternatively:

a) 28 Rc7! c5 29 a3 Bd2 30 Rc8+ Kh7 31 Bg8+ Kh6 and the trouble is White is unable to play 32 R1xc5?? due to 32 ... Re1+ 33 Kh2 Bf4+ 34 Kh3 Rg6. White's king, sick and unattended, lies helplessly, awaiting the inevitable. White must hand over a full rook to evade mate.

b) 28 Rf7 c5 29 Rxf6 gxf6 30 Kf1 c4 31 Bc2 f4 32 Be4 f5 33 Bb7 a5 34 a4 bxa4 35 Rxc4 Rc5 36 Ba6 Rxc4 37 Bxc4 Kg7 38 Bd3 Kg6 39 Bb5 a3 40 bxa3 Bxa3 41 Kg2 (it is critical to cover h4; after 41 Be8+ Kh6 42 Bd7 Be7 43 Kg2 Bxh4 44 Bxf5 a4 45 Be6 a3 Black's two h-pawns will eventually force the win) 41 ... Be7 42 Be8+ Kh6 43 Kh3 Kg7!. A once tiny issue surfaces in such a conspicuous way, that it can no longer be put aside. Defence of h4 arrests White's attention. He is in zugzwang and must hand over h4, since if 44 Bxh5?? a4 and the pawn promotes.

28 ... Re2 29 Bf7?!

29 Rc2 Rxc2 30 Bxc2 g6 is probably lost in the long run, but it was White's last chance to save himself.

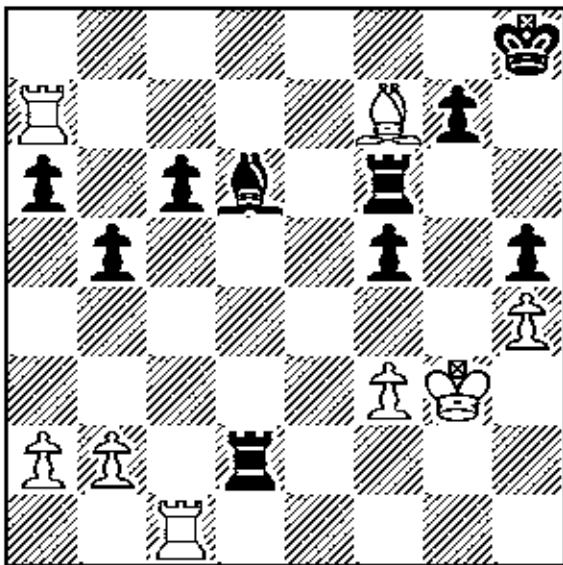
29 ... Rxf2+ 30 Kg3 Rd2?!

Black's plan, like a distant radio station, keeps tuning in and out. Overthinking and indecision have a way of crowding out action. Hort sees a ghost and I have no idea why he rejected the obvious and winning move 30 ... Rxb2.

31 Ra7

It feels like both sides are in time pressure. 31 Rxd2 Bxd2 32 Rd1 f4+ 33 Kg2 Rxf7 34 Rxd2 Kh7 is lost for White, who is down two pawns.

31 ... Bd6+!



The bishop suddenly remembers a scriptural provision which allows his morality to be 'relaxed', during times of extreme need, like this one. This wins White's f-pawn and

later the h-pawn, which creates three connected kingside passers.

32 f4

The other defensive safeguard fails miserably after 32 Kh3?? Rh2 mate. The rook's enemies have the habit of vanishing without a trace, as if they never existed in the first place.

32 ... Rd3+ 33 Kf2 Bxf4

It's no longer a battle if its outcome is predetermined. Now Black is clearly winning once again.

34 Ra8+ Kh7 35 Bg8+ Kh6 36 Rf1 Bg3+ 37 Ke2 Rd4 38 Rg1 Rg4 39 Rd1 Bxh4

With such black predominance in numbers, playing on is as futile as King Canute's attempt to turn back the tide, simply based on his royal status. There is no point in attempting to negotiate with the Grim Reaper. He isn't going to look the other way and spare you, since death comes for all those in a terminal state. White can resign here with a clear conscience, since he has no prayer against Black's three connected kingside passers.

40 Rd7 g6 41 Rxa6 Kg5 42 b3 Bg3 0-1

The h-pawn is too fast.

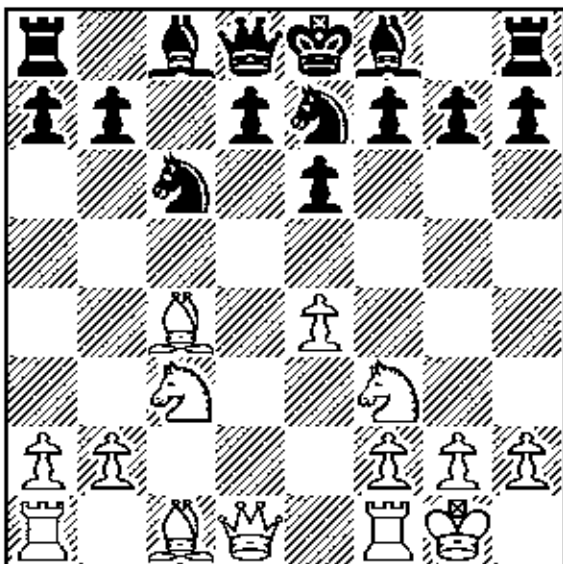
Summary: I like the 6 ... Nge7 line against the Smith-Morra Gambit, where we develop our pieces in Kan Sicilian fashion.

Game 45

V.Chladek-V.Gashimov

Mainz (rapid) 2010

1 e4 c5 2 d4 cxd4 3 c3 dxc3 4 Nxc3 Nc6 5 Nf3 e6 6 Bc4 Nge7 7 0-0



In this game we look at a position where White refuses to toss in Bg5, which provokes Black into a concession with 7 ... f6.

Question: Which version is better for Black?

Answer: I think Black benefits when White fails to play Bg5, since ... f6 loosens our pawn front and weakens e6. In this game's version, Black's position looks more solid than last game's, and so logically, White's compensation is less as well.

7 ... Ng6

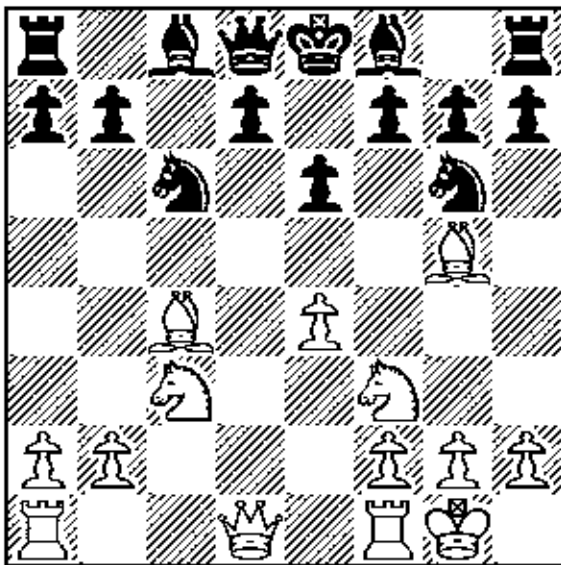
7 ... a6 is more commonly played, and normally transposes to positions we reach later on.

8 Qe2

Alternatively:

a) 8 Be3 Be7 (I would prevent Bg5 as quickly as possible) 9 Rc1 0-0 10 a3 a6 11 b4 b5 12 Ba2 Bb7 13 Qe2 Rc8 14 Rfd1 Nce5 (intending to occupy c4) 15 Nd2?! (White loses the initiative after this passive move; he should think about the bailout line 15 Nxe5 Nxe5 16 Bd4 Nc4 17 a4 e5 18 Bc5 Bxc5 19 bxc5 Rxc5 20 axb5 axb5 21 Nxb5 Rxb5 22 Bxc4 Rb6 when Black is up a pawn, but conversion is a long way off) 15 ... Bg5! (seizing control over f4) 16 Nb3, B.Berg-L.Degerman, Stockholm 1994. Black has an extra pawn and a strategically won game after 16 ... Nf4 17 Bxf4 Bxf4 18 Rc2 Qh4! 19 h3 d6.

b) As the old saying goes: Better late than never. I think 8 Bg5 is still White's best move.



Question: Can't Black gain time with 8 ... Be7?

Answer: Black gains time at the cost of weakening d6 after 9 Bxe7 Qxe7 10 Nb5 0-0 11 Nd6. That annoying d6-knight offers compensation for White, B.Skonieczna-R.Estey, correspondence 2008.

So instead we go 8 ... f6 9 Be3 a6 10 Bb3 b5 11 Nd5!? (Esserman, an expert on the line, wrote a book on the Smith-Morra, and knows what he is doing; this is a tricky sac, after which Black must play very accurately) and then:

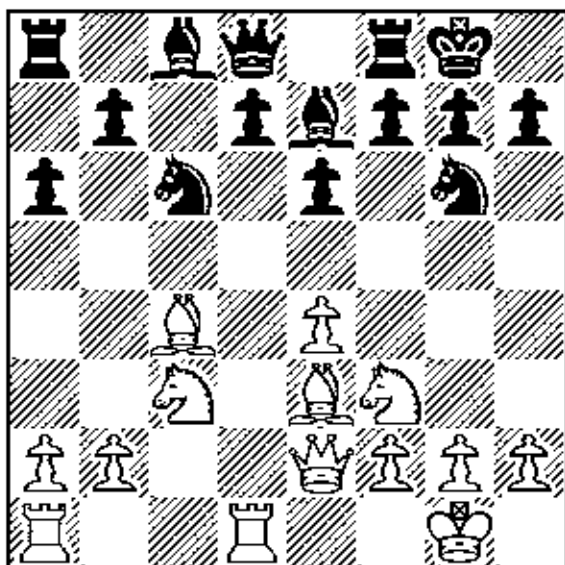
b1) 11 ... exd5?! (the most ambitious response, but not the best one) 12 exd5 Nce5 13 d6! Bb7 14 Nxe5 fxe5 15 f4!, M.Esserman-L.Van Wely, Orlando 2011. Black's best is to enter the admittedly terrifying line 15 ... exf4! 16 Re1! fxe3 17 Rxe3+ Be7 18 Qd4 Qc8 19 Rae1 Qc6 20 Rf3. *Houdini* rates this as only a slight plus for White, which is probably true if you are a comp. If you are a human, you have good reason to worry if you are Black.

b2) The comp wants to decline with 11 ... Rb8! 12 Re1 Nce5 13 Nxe5 fxe5 when White has nothing better than to retreat with 14 Nc3 Be7. Black castles next, with the superior position.

8 ... Be7 9 Be3

9 Rd1 a6 10 a4 0-0 11 Be3 was E.Kristiansen-S.Agdestein, Asker 2003. I prefer Black's game after 11 ... b6 12 Rac1 Bb7 13 Qd2 Nge5 14 Nxe5 Nxe5 15 Be2 d6. The game just looks like a normal Open Sicilian, where White is down a pawn for no good reason.

9 ... 0-0 10 Rfd1 a6



11 Rac1

Question: Shouldn't White target the b6 hole with 11 Na4?

Answer: The move gets White the bishop-pair, at a loss of time – his main commodity in the position. Following 11 ... b5 12 Nb6 Rb8 13 Nxc8 Qxc8 14 Bd3 Rd8 15 Rac1 Qb7 16 Bb1 Rbc8 Black should be satisfied with the opening's outcome.

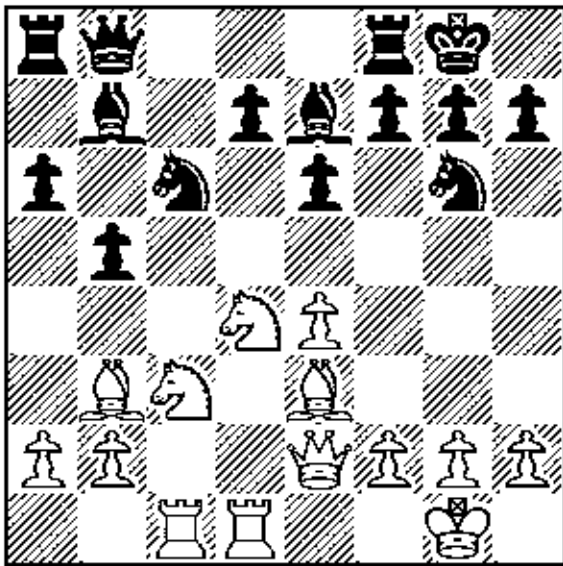
11 ... b5 12 Bb3 Bb7

Also logical is 12 ... Na5! which picks off the bishop-pair and reduces White's attacking force through an exchange: 13 Nd4 Nxb3 14 Nxb3 Bb7 15 Nc5 Bc6 16 b4, I.Mohacsi-Z.Hajnal, Hungary 2002. Black can continue 16 ... Ne5 17 Bd4 Nc4 18 e5 Qb8 and now let's say White builds for a kingside assault with 19 Rd3, Black should vigorously counter with 19 ... a5 20 bxa5 Rc8 (threat: ... Bxc5, followed by ... Qxe5) 21 f4 Rxa5 22 Rg3 Ra3 23 f5 g6 24 fxg6 fxg6 (principle: *capture away from the centre if you feel your king is in danger*) 25 Qh5 Kh8 (Black returns the pawn to seize the initiative) 26 Rxc6 Rg8 27 Rg3 Qa8 28 Rxc8+ Qxc8 29 Qe2 Qg6. The invasion force has been repelled and Black holds all strategic trumps.

13 Nd4

13 Rd2 d6 14 Qd1 was preferred in V.Dumas-A.Istratescu, Fourmies 2011. Black stands clearly better after 14 ... Na5, swapping off an important white attacker, while picking up the bishop-pair.

13 ... Qb8



Every theoretical novelty, by its nature, is a deviation from the golden mean of precedent. A new move. Gashimov clears c8 for his f8-rook. Previously:

a) 13 ... Nxd4 14 Bxd4 Rc8 15 a3 was F.Vidalina-S.Martinovic, Croatian Team Championship 2011. Black seizes the initiative after 15 ... f5!.

b) 13 ... Qe8!? seems like a funky way of getting the queen off the d-file. Black probably wants to redeploy the queen to f7, after playing a future ... f5: 14 f4? (correct

is 14 Nxc6) 14 ... Nxd4 15 Rxd4 Bc5 and White loses an exchange, since any rook move walks into ... Nxf4, M.Portero Garnica-B.Damljanovic, Zaragoza 1994.

14 g3!?

White seizes control over f4, at the cost of weakening the light squares around his king – a factor for which he later pays dearly. However, if 14 a3 Rc8 and the trouble is I don't see a plan for White, other than to play the unsavoury g3 anyway.

14 ... Na5!

White must choose sides: defiance, or defence. He is faced with a pair of intractable issues:

1. It's obviously in Black's best interest to swap away White's light-squared bishop, since White's king will then feel the power of Black's b7-bishop down the weakened h1-a8 diagonal.

2. Black threatens ... b4, followed by ... Bxe4.

15 f4!?

White ignores Black's ... b4 and ... Bxe4 idea. Silence from a listener can be either interpreted as a sympathetic ear, or, the simple fact that he or she isn't listening to you. White's move is made with the thought: there is no point in locking an empty warehouse. Finding the burden of passivity increasingly tiresome, White plays with the heady exultation of one who knows he is busted, and has nothing to lose. Believe it or not, this is *Houdini's* top choice, since if 15 f3 (it's impossible to play such a move without at least a twinge of embarrassment; this move saves the e-pawn but is painfully passive, especially to a Smith-Morra guy) 15 ... Ne5 when Black stands clearly better.

15 ... b4

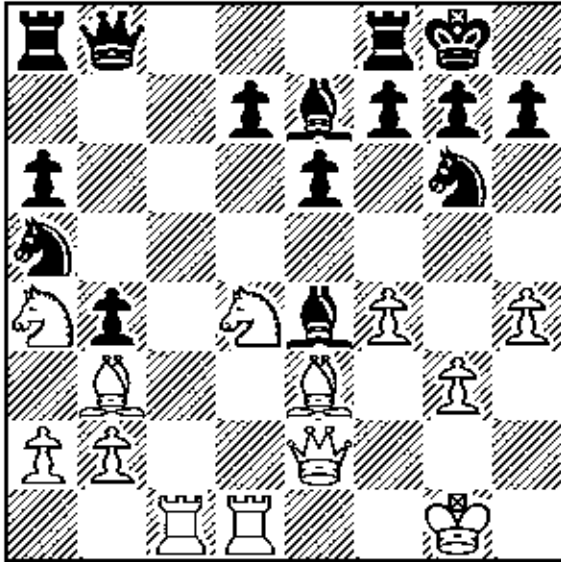
Why not? Black wins a second pawn.

16 Na4 Bxe4

The bishop, although instructed to love his enemies, doesn't. This move raises the importance of Black's light-squared bind, as if italicized. White hasn't really made any clear mistake I spotted, yet is two pawns down, with very little activity to show for it. Conclusion: if Black plays against the Smith-Morra with perfect, comp-like precision, he or she stands clearly better. The trouble is in real life, especially at the club level, this nearly never happens, and the Smith-Morra players score their fair share of points.

17 h4?

White had to try a line like 17 Bc2 Bxc2 18 Rxc2 Qb7 19 Nc5 Bxc5 20 Rxc5 Nc6 21 Nxc6 dxc6 when White still exerts some pressure on Black's queenside pawns, although not enough to justify two pawns in the hole.



Exercise (planning): White, whose last move is akin to spitting into a gale, reasons that the black king's safety is the only blackmailable object in the position. How did Black seize the initiative?

Answer: Principle: *Meet a wing attack with a central counter.*

17 ... e5!

Now the consequences of White's last move sink in.

18 h5

After 18 fxe5 Qxe5 19 Bf2 Nxb3 20 axb3 d5 Black rules the kingside light squares and is up two pawns. If 21 Nb6 Rad8, and now if White forks with 22 Nc6 Qe6 23 Nxd8? Qh3! the zwischenzug costs White his queen.

18 ... exd4 19 Rxd4 Nxb3 20 axb3 Bc6

Of course Black wants to retain his prize bishop, which dominates the light squares.

21 hxg6 hxg6 22 Rd2 Qb7

Queen and bishop team up on the long diagonal.

23 Qg4

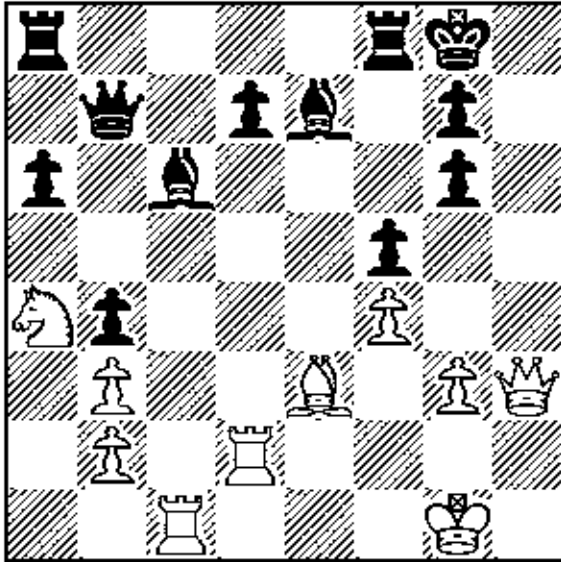
White hopes to have time for Rh2 and Qh3. He doesn't.

23 ... f5!

Black's king is apprised of a potential intruder on palatial grounds.

24 Qh3

24 Qxg6 fails to 24 ... Rf6 25 Qg5 Re6 26 Nc5 Bxg5 27 Nxb7 Rxe3 28 Rxc6 dxc6 29 fxg5 Rxc3+ 30 Kf1 Rxc5 which leaves Black up an exchange and three pawns.



Exercise (planning): How did Black begin a kingside attack?

Answer: Move the king to clear the path for ... Rh8.

24 ... Kf7!

“Clearly, you have not been burdened, as I have, with an excess of cunning and intelligence,” remarks the king to his bewildered h3 sister, who now finds herself without an assassination target.

25 Rh2 Qb5

White must watch out for infiltrations to d3, d5 and even e2, if Black tosses in ... Rh8 and swaps away White’s h2-rook. 25 ... Rh8 is also an easy win for Black after 26 Qxh8 Rxh8 27 Rxh8 Qb5 when White’s king has no hope of long-term survival.

26 Rxc6 Qxc6 0-1

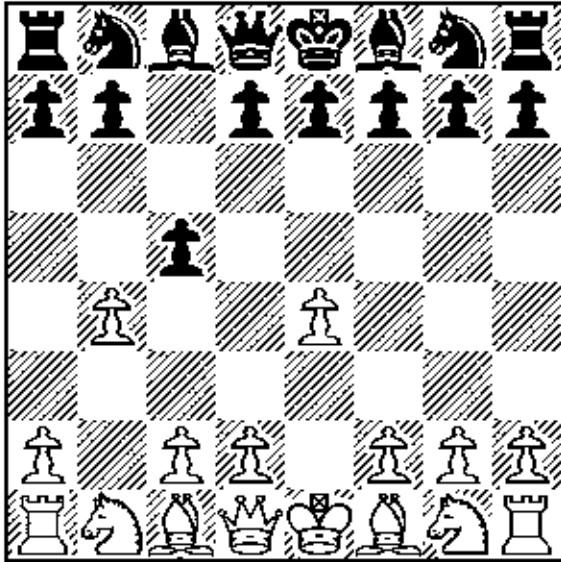
Summary: I believe White gets an inferior version when he or she declines to play an early Bg5, which provokes a concession from our side with ... f6.

Game 46

A.Rombaldoni-I.Miladinovic

Assisi 2003

1 e4 c5 2 b4



We enter the realm of the Wing Gambit, after which I believe White has little to gain and a lot to lose.

Question: What is White's idea?

Answer: Think of it as a mixture of Evans and Benko Gambits of the Sicilian. White encourages a deflection of our c-pawn to b4, followed with a3, after which he or she hopes to dominate the centre and later generate an attack with d4. The comps have worked out the lines to where it is White who fights for equality.

2 ... cxb4

Thanks! As in the Smith-Morra, we grab the pawn and make White prove compensation.

3 a3

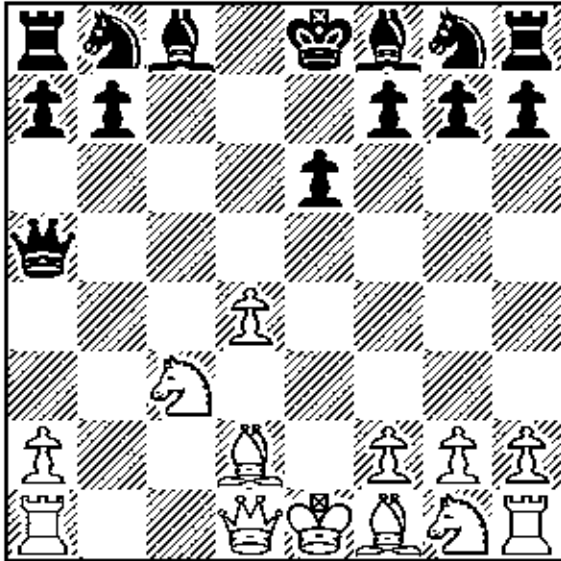
White's main line. He hopes to turn the game into a combination of Evans Gambit and Benko Gambit themes. Other options are:

a) 3 d4 d5 and then:

a1) 4 e5 Nc6 5 a3 Qb6 6 Ne2 Bf5 7 axb4 Nxb4 8 Na3 Rc8 9 Nf4, S.Mariotti-G.Kuzmin, Leningrad 1977. Black should continue 9 ... a6! (White should survive 9 ... Nxc2+ 10 Nxc2 Bxc2 11 Nxd5 Qb3 12 Qf3) 10 c4 dxc4 11 Bxc4 Nc2+! (deflection) 12 Nxc2 Rxc4 13 Ne3 Rxd4 14 Bd2 Rxf4 15 Ba5 (threatening the queen and a mate on d8, if she moves to the wrong square) 15 ... Qd4 (Black must return the piece) 16 Qxd4 (or 16 0-0 Qxd1 17 Rfxd1 Bd7 18 Nd5 Rc4 19 Nb6 Rc7 20 Nxd7 Rxd7 21 Rac1 Rxd1+ 22 Rxd1 e6 23 Rd8+ Ke7 24 Rc8 Nf6 25 exf6+ Kxf6 26 Bb4 Bxb4 27 Rxh8 Bc5 when Black's three pawns for the exchange are too much for White, who probably won't save the game) 16 ... Rxd4 17 Nxf5 Re4+ 18 Ne3 Rxe5 19 0-0 when White's massive

development lead fails to compensate for Black's three extra pawns. The comp consolidates the following way: 19 ... Rb5 20 Rfd1 f5 21 Nd5 Kf7 22 Nc7 Rc5 23 Rdb1 g6 24 Rxb7 Bg7 25 Nxa6 Bxa1 26 Nxc5 Nf6 with an extra pawn and all the winning chances.

a2) 4 exd5 Qxd5 5 c4 bxc3! (this tempo loss is worth it to break up White's centre and create a hole on d5) 6 Nxc3 Qa5 7 Bd2 e6 and here:

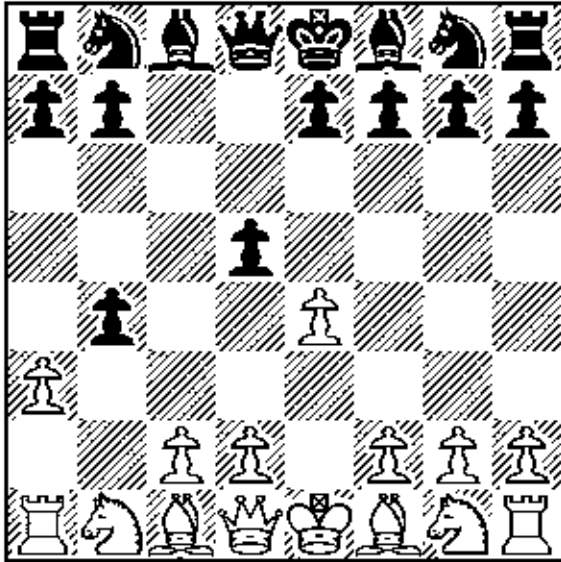


a21) 8 Nb5 (this leads nowhere) 8 ... Qd8 9 Nf3 Nf6 10 Bd3 Nc6 11 Rc1 a6 12 Nc3 Be7 and I don't believe in White's compensation. The position looks to me like a normal isolani position, except White is missing his b-pawn, F.Schlag-B.Soos, German League 1996.

a22) White should apply the principle: *Open the position when leading in development*, with the unplayed move 8 d5 exd5 9 Bb5+ Nc6 10 Qe2+ Be7 11 Nxd5 Qd8 12 Nb4 Bd7 13 Nxc6 bxc6 14 Bc4 Nf6 15 Nf3 0-0 16 0-0 Re8 17 Ne5 Nd5 18 Nxd7 Qxd7 19 Qd3 Bc5. At least in this version White gets the bishop-pair in an open position, which provides some measure of compensation, although Black still stands better even here.

b) 3 Bb2 d5 4 exd5 Nf6 5 Bb5+ Bd7 6 Bc4 b5 7 Bb3 a5 8 a3 Na6 9 Nf3 a4 10 Ba2 bxa3 11 Nxa3 Nb4 12 0-0 Nxa2 13 Bxf6 gxf6 14 Rxa2 and White regained the sacrificed pawn at the cost of handing Black the bishop-pair and losing the initiative, J.Knudsen-I.Kurnosov, Helsingor 2011. Black's position shines with promise after 14 ... Rg8.

3 ... d5!



We can still diplomatize a position, even when the opponent insists upon war. I almost consider this move a refutation of White's main line in the Wing Gambit. It breaks up White's centre, while allowing Black to develop harmoniously.

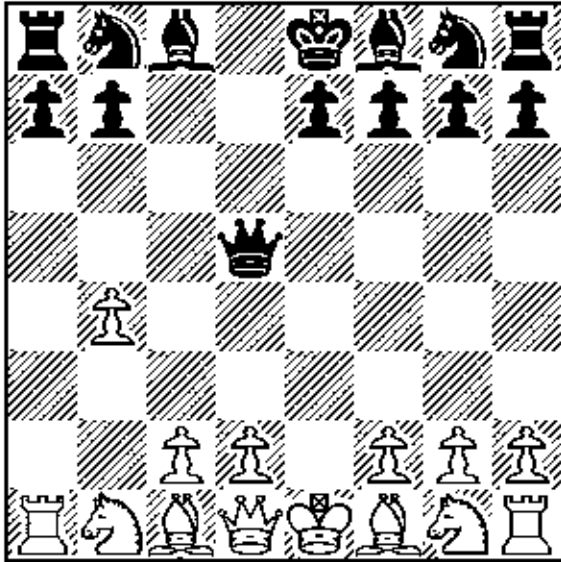
4 exd5

Instead, 4 e5 Nc6 5 d4 transposes to the Mariotti-Kuzman note from above.

4 ... Qxd5 5 Nf3

Question: Why didn't White regain the pawn with 5 axb4?

Answer: Double question mark! This is a trap which loses instantly for White. Let's turn it into an exercise:



Exercise (combination alert): Black's next move forced White's resignation. What did he play?

Answer: Double attack. White hangs his a1-rook. 5 ... Qe5+ 0-1, K.Shirazi-J.Peters, Berkeley 1984. My long time buddy and co-author of our 'Cy and Jack' *Rank and File* magazine column, IM Jack Peters, received Caissa's sweet caress that day. You can't do too much better than to win a game in the U.S. Closed Championship, in five moves – with the black pieces!

5 ... e5

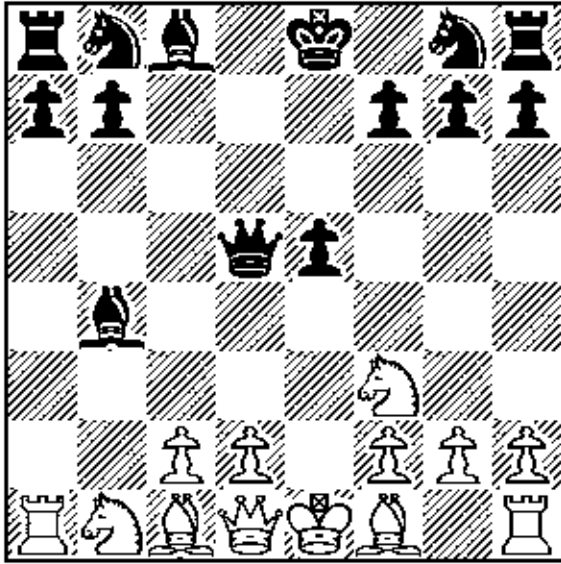
Black is the one with greater central influence, which is completely counter to White's original intent when he engaged the gambit.

6 axb4

After 6 Bb2 Nc6 7 c4 Qe6 8 Bd3 Nf6 (I would avoid an adventure like 8 ... e4 9 0-0) 9 0-0 Qd6! 10 Qe2, W.Belka-L.Parsons, correspondence 2010, Black stands at least equal after the unplayed 10 ... Bg4 11 axb4 0-0-0 12 b5 Qxd3 13 Qxd3 Rxd3 14 bxc6 Bxf3 15 gxf3 bxc6 16 Rxa7 (16 Bxe5 Bc5 is also a shade better for Black) 16 ... Nd7 17 Nc3 Bd6.

Likewise, if 6 c4 Qe6 7 Bd3 Nc6 8 0-0 Bd6 9 Bb2 Nf6 10 Re1 0-0 11 axb4 Nxb4 12 Bf1 e4 13 d3 Qd7! 14 dxe4 Nxe4! when Black's e4-knight is tactically guarded by the ... Bxh2+ discovery, and he remains up a pawn, O.Bortnyk-A.Terekhov, Kiev 2010.

6 ... Bxb4



Black's position enters a band of positive astrological influence. Our side reached a dream Scandinavian position:

1. Black is up a pawn.
2. White lacks the tempo-gaining Nc3.

7 c3

Instead, 7 Na3 Nf6 8 Bc4 Qe4+ 9 Be2 0-0 10 Nb5 Nc6 11 0-0 was R.Erkens-A.Krueger, German League 1991. Black should continue with 11 ... a6 12 c3 Be7 13 d4 Bg4 14 dxe5 axb5 15 Rxa8 Rxa8 16 exf6 Bxf6 17 Bxb5 Rd8 18 Qe2 Qxe2 19 Bxe2 Bxc3 with an extra pawn, and excellent chances to convert in the ending.

7 ... Bd6

A small twist interrupts the position's equilibrium, since it interferes with White's compensation for the pawn.

Question: Isn't Black's last move clumsy?

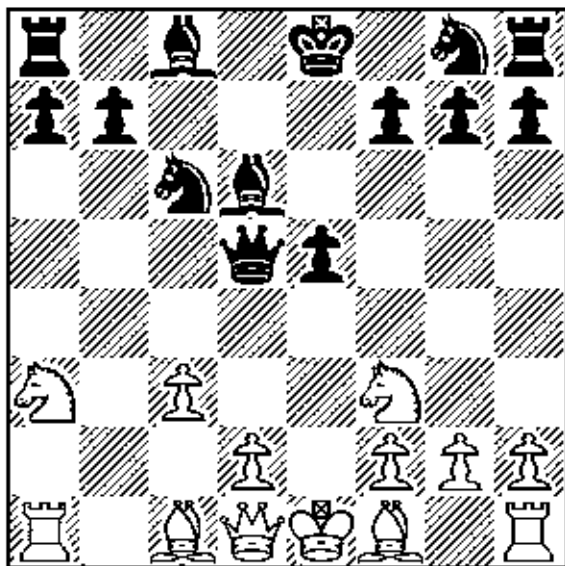
Answer: I like this move best, since it covers our two problem points in the position: e5 and c7.

7 ... Be7 is Black's main line, which is less ambitious: 8 Na3 Nc6 9 Nb5 Qd8 10 d4 e4 and now White's best response may be the counterintuitive 11 Ng1! a6 12 Bf4 Bg4 13 Qxg4 axb5 14 Rxa8 Qxa8 15 Qd1 Qa5 16 d5 when Black can force a draw after 16 ... Bd6 17 Bxd6 Qxc3+ 18 Qd2 Qa1+ 19 Qd1 (19 Ke2?? Nd4+ 20 Ke3 Nf5+ 21 Ke2 Nxd6 leaves White hopelessly busted, since his only developed pieces are his king and queen) 19 ... Qc3+ 20 Qd2.

8 Na3

Both Bc4 and Nb5 are in the air.

8 ... Nc6



9 Nb5

A new move:

a) 9 Bc4 Qe4+ 10 Be2 Nge7 11 Nb5 Bb8 12 0-0 0-0 13 Re1 Qf5 14 d4 Rd8 15 Bd3 Qh5 16 h3 Be6 17 Be2 (White continues to harass Black's queen) 17 ... Qg6 18 Ng5 h6 19 Bh5 Qf6 20 Nxe6 Qxe6 21 Qc2 Qf6 when White's bishop-pair and development lead compensate for his missing pawn, J.Moreira-R.Meissner, correspondence 2011.

b) 9 Nc4 Bc7 10 Ne3 Qd8 11 Bc4 e4 (this move gains us much needed time) 12 Ng1?! (White can't afford this time loss and should play 12 Nd4 Nxd4 13 cxd4 Ne7 14 Ba3 0-0 15 Qb1 Bd6 16 Qxe4 Bxa3 17 Rxa3 Nf5! 18 0-0 Qxd4 19 Qc2; even here, he doesn't have enough to justify being a pawn down) 12 ... Ne5 with an extra pawn and a clear advantage for Black, G.Balakanova-E.Chernenko, Pavlodar 2008.

9 ... Bb8

This is the point of our earlier ... Bd6. The bishop hides on b8, covering c7 and e5. On the down side, it will be difficult to eject White's b5-knight, since our demands are ignored if we play ... a6, since our a8-rook hangs if we chop his knight.

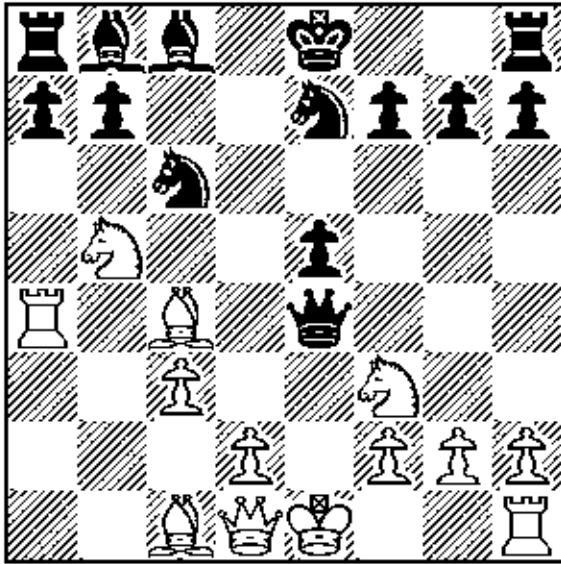
10 Ra4!?

A violation of the principle: *Don't lift your rooks in a crowded middlegame*. The idea is to get Bc4 with tempo, and also perhaps swing the rook into the kingside later on, after Black castles. The problem is White uses up a tempo to set up a tempo-gaining move! 10 d4 fails to equalize either, after 10 ... Nf6 11 c4. Notice too that here 11 Ba3? fails miserably to 11 ... a6 when White has nothing better than 12 Bc5 Nd7 13 c4 Qe4+ 14 Be2 Qg6 15 0-0 e4 16 Nh4 Qf6 17 g3 g5 18 Ng2 b6 19 d5 Nxc5 20 dxc6 Be5 and Black rules the board.

10 ... Nge7

Ensuring that Ba3 won't stop Black from castling.

11 Bc4 Qe4+



12 Kf1?!

We sense a half-yielding to Black's pressure. Preoccupation with his non-existent attack causes impaction of his h1-rook. He wants to attack with h4, which puts the h1-rook's future in jeopardy, since it will remain out of play for a long time. However, after 12 Be2 Qg6 13 0-0 0-0 I don't see any compensation for the lost pawn for White, but at least in this version, his h1-rook participates in the proceedings.

12 ... Qg6

The queen slides in and out through walls like a ghost. White threatened Bxf7+, followed by Rxe4.

13 d4

13 h4 a6 14 h5 Qf5 15 h6 g6 doesn't bother Black at all.

13 ... 0-0 14 d5

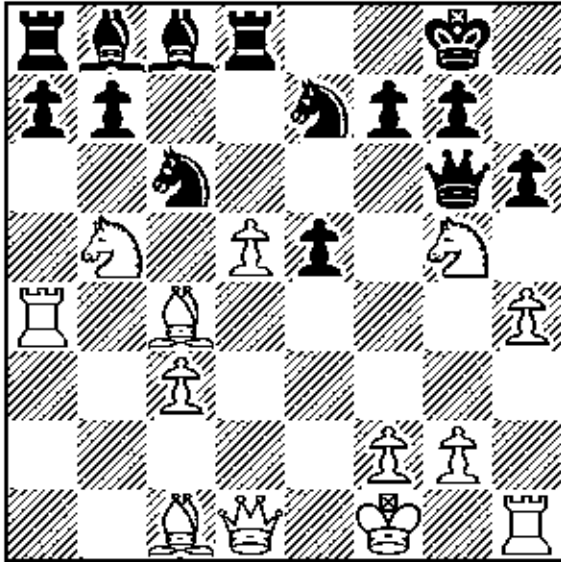
14 h4 e4 15 h5 Qf5 also looks lost for White.

14 ... Rd8 15 Ng5?

White's position is way too disorganized to successfully launch an attack. He had to try 15 h4 and pray for fishing chances.

15 ... h6 16 h4!?

16 Nf3 is just an abject admission that his 15th move went nowhere.



Exercise (critical decision): White's last move is based on the philosophy: We may see the inevitability of our fate, but this doesn't mean we have to meekly accept it. Should we accept the g5 offer and allow White an open h-file?

Answer: Principle: *Don't fear ghosts.* White's disorganized forces have no pathway to Black's king, and we should accept.

16 ... hxg5!

White's sacrifice pursues a vague hypothesis, which can't be proven.

17 hxg5 e4!

The door to Black's sanctuary remains closed to white attackers. Black's last move clears e5 for his knight, while interfering with White's dream of swinging his a4 rook to h4. White can resign here, since he has nothing for the piece.

18 Qe1 Nxd5 19 Bxd5 Rxd5 20 Rxe4

Threatening a back-rank mate, which is very easy to defend against.

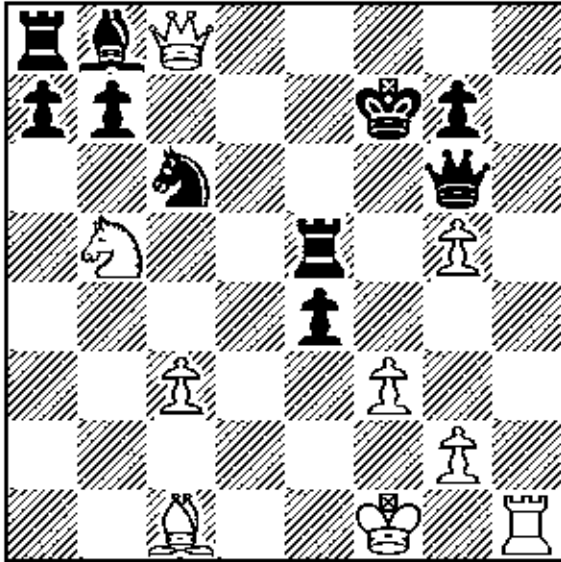
20 ... Re5 21 f3 f5!

From this point Miladinovic presses his attack with cold, reptilian malevolence, increasing threat levels until his opponent collapses.

22 Qh4

Imaginative ideas are worthless gifts if we don't have the means to implement them. He hopes to get something going with his queen infiltration to h8. 22 gxf6 Rxe4 23 fxe4 Qxf6+ 24 Kg1 a6 is game over.

22 ... fxe4 23 Qh8+ Kf7 24 Qxc8



Exercise (combination alert): White's queen, who doesn't strike us as a discriminating shopper, threatens to take on b7 with check, followed by Qxa8. Should we bother to defend the threat?

Answer: Mating net. Mate takes precedence over material. Black mates after:
24 ... exf3! 0-1

White's king cover proves to be a shallow receptacle, unable to withstand the pounding: 25 Qxb7+ Kg8 26 Qxa8 (26 Qc8+ Re8 is also futile for White) 26 ... Qd3+ 27 Kg1 Re1+ 28 Kf2 Qe2 is mate.

Summary: The Wing Gambit was a dangerous white weapon in the pre-comp days. Those days are over. The comps today have worked out forcing lines, like the one seen in this game, where White will be very fortunate to equalize.

Game 47

P.Dankert-A.Karpov

Munich 1979

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3

Be aware of the deferred line 2 a3!?. After 2 ... e6! 3 b4 cxb4 4 axb4 Bxb4 5 c3 Be7 6 d4 d5 7 e5 we reach a structure which we discuss with greater details in the notes later on, J.Hoogendoorn-M.Feygin, Dutch League 2001.

2 ... e6

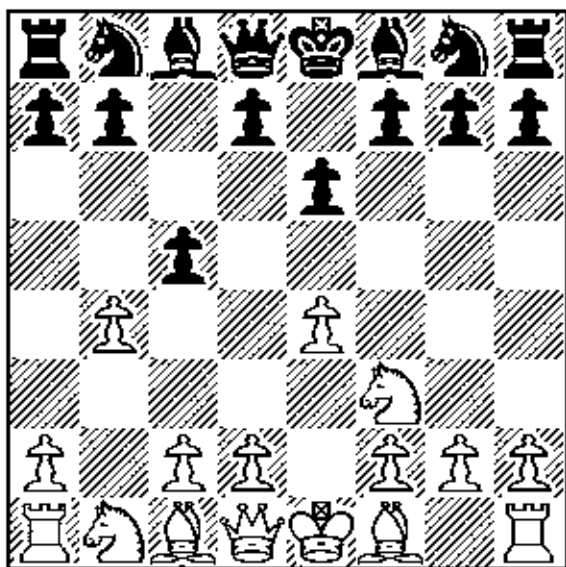
A delayed Wing Gambit is also possible after:

a) 2 ... d6 3 b4 (it takes a lot of nerve to play this on someone as strong as Kamsky,

in the U.S. Championship) 3 ... cxb4 4 d4 Nf6 5 Bd3 g6 (Black can also set up with 5 ... e6 6 0-0 Be7 7 a3 Nc6 8 Re1 0-0 9 axb4 Nxb4 10 Bf1 b6 11 c3 Nc6 12 Nbd2 Bb7 13 Bd3 Qc7 14 Bb2 Rfd8 15 Qb1 g6 when White's central control offers some degree of compensation for the pawn, but full compensation? I doubt it, V.Zvjaginsev-I.Khairullin, Belgorod 2010) 6 a3 (as always, White tosses in this Benko Gambit-like theme to eliminate Black's b4-pawn, open queenside lines and secure the centre) 6 ... bxa3 7 0-0 Bg7 8 h3 0-0 9 Bg5 Nc6 10 Nc3 was T.Gareev-G.Kamsky, U.S. Championship, Saint Louis 2015. Black still stands a shade better after 10 ... Nb4.

b) 2 ... Nc6 3 b4 Nxb4 (I would take with the knight, rather than with c-pawn to retain as much central influence as possible) 4 c3 Nc6 5 d4 cxd4 6 cxd4 e6 7 Nc3 (7 d5?? is met with the surprising 7 ... Qf6!, winning material) 7 ... Bb4 (my inclination would be to play 7 ... d5 which is so far unplayed: 8 e5 Nge7 9 Bd3 Nf5 10 Ne2 Nh4 11 Nxh4 Bb4+ 12 Bd2 Qxh4 13 Rb1 a5 14 Rb3 f6 15 g3 Qh5 16 exf6 gxf6 17 0-0 0-0 with a French-like position with an extra pawn; once again, White has some, but not full compensation for a pawn) 8 Bd2 Nf6 9 d5? (correct is 9 Bd3 0-0 10 0-0 b6 when at least White gets central control for the pawn) 9 ... Bxc3! 10 Bxc3 Nxe4 11 dxc6 (after 11 Bxg7 Rg8 12 Bb2 Qb6 13 Qc2 exd5 14 0-0-0 Qxf2 15 Qb3 d6 16 Qxd5 Qe3+ 17 Kb1 Be6 18 Qb5 0-0-0 Black should consolidate and win) 11 ... Nxc3 12 Qb3 Qa5! 13 cxb7, C.Boehmer-M.Krasenkow, Mainz 2002. Now Black should play 13 ... Bxb7 14 Qxb7 Na4+ 15 Kd1 0-0 16 Bd3 Rab8 17 Qa6 Qb4 with a winning attack.

3 b4



I have found that the most dangerous opponent is the one who isn't fearful of the consequence of his or her high-risk ventures, and plays not for the result, but for the battle itself. Such a decision indicates a clear absence of courtesy when facing a reigning world champion! Just as in the b3-Sicilian, I think White gets slightly better

chances in the deferred lines, since we as Black must commit our structures early.

3 ... cxb4 4 d4 d5

Black gets an Advanced French position with an extra pawn. He can also hold his central pawns back, with 4 ... Nf6 5 Bd3 b6 6 a3 bxa3 7 Bxa3 Bxa3 8 Nxa3 Nc6 9 Qe2. White's central control gives him partial compensation for the pawn, J.Knudsen-N.Vitiugov, Horsholm 2008.

5 e5

Question: What compensation does White get for the pawn?

Answer: The following:

1. Central space, with his e5-pawn wedge, which automatically offers kingside attacking chances.

2. If Black castles long, then White also gets attacking chances from the open lines.

3. Note that Black lacks a ... c5 counter, which he or she gets in French positions. This means White's central wedge is more stable than in a normal Advance French. Now saying this, I still think Black should consolidate with correct play. I'm a French player and I get this kind of position all the time – except that I'm not up a pawn!

5 ... Nc6 6 a3

And there is his Benko Gambit theme again.

Question: It seems to me that White should concentrate on the kingside, where he owns more space. Can he avoid a3 and just develop?

Answer: I think a3 is necessary. The problem with your suggested plan is that d4 quickly becomes a target for Black's pieces after 6 Bd3 Bd7:

a) 7 a3 (so a3 is played anyway, in a deferred fashion) 7 ... Qb6 8 axb4 (8 Be3 Nge7 intending ... Rc8 and ... Nf5 looks favourable for Black) 8 ... Nxd4 9 0-0 and now *Houdini* thinks there is also nothing wrong with grabbing a second pawn with 9 ... Bxb4!?

b) 7 0-0 Qb6 8 Be3 Rc8 9 Nbd2 was B.Husarik-T.Nguyen, Czech League 2013. I don't see a viable attacking plan for White after 9 ... Nge7.

6 ... Bd7 7 axb4 Nxb4!?

This is rare, but I suppose a conformist's mind, like your writer's, always looks upon those who deviate from the norm with some degree of suspicion. For some reason Karpov actually wants to keep his bishop on f8, rather than accept a free jump to e7 after 7 ... Bxb4+, which is the main line, and the move I always play: 8 c3 Be7 9 Bd3 h5 10 0-0 Nh6 11 Na3 a6 12 Nc2 Rc8 13 Ne3 Na7! 14 Bd2 Bb5! and with the removal of White's powerful light-squared bishop, I don't believe anymore in White's compensation for the pawn, J.Ballard-C.Lakdawala, San Diego (rapid) 2003.

8 c3 Nc6

Black could have had the extra move ... Be7 here, but Karpov wanted to keep the square open for his g8-knight.

9 Bd3 h6

This halts all Ng5 and Qh5 lunges.

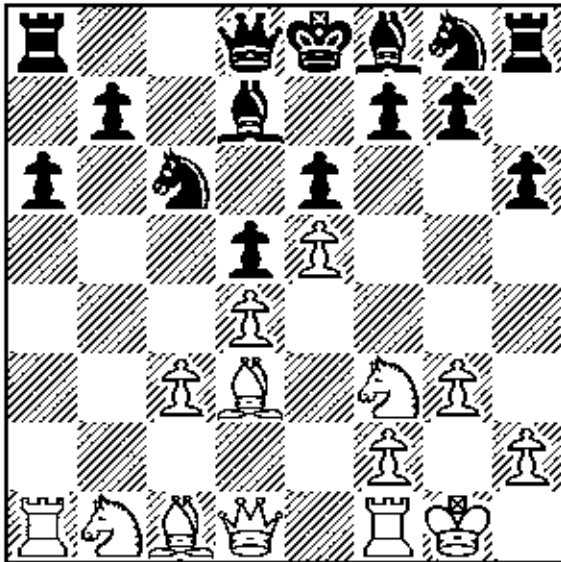
10 0-0 a6

A useful move, which prepares two possible future plans:

1. The ... Na7 and ... Bb5 manoeuvre, as demonstrated in the note to my game against Ballard.

2. Black can clamp down on the queenside with ... b5 and ... Na5, as Karpov did in this game.

11 g3



Theory ends here. White prepares Nh4 and f4. 11 Bf4 is the alternative. At this stage I would continue with my favourite plan 11 ... Na7! followed by ... Bb5.

11 ... Nge7

Once again, I would opt for 11 ... Na7.

Question: Why can't White halt your intended ... Bb5 with 12 Na3?

Answer: Black would continue 12 ... Rc8 13 Qb3 Bxa3! (yes; it's this important for Black to seize control over b5) 14 Bxa3 Bb5 15 Rfd1 Bxd3 16 Rxd3 Nb5 17 Bc5 Ne7 18 Nd2 Qc7! (or 18 ... 0-0 19 c4 dxc4 20 Nxc4 Re8 21 Nd6 Nxd6 22 exd6 Nf5 23 Qxb7 Nxd6 24 Bxd6 Qxd6 25 Rxa6 Qe7 with a very likely draw) 19 Qb2 (Black's idea is that 19 c4?? is met with the shot 19 ... Nxd4! 20 Bxd4 dxc4 21 Nxc4 Qxc4 22 Qd1 0-0; Black is up two pawns and winning) 19 ... Nc6 20 Re3 b6! (this move runs the dark-

squared bishop off the diagonal) 21 Rxa6 bxc5 22 Qxb5 cxd4 23 cxd4 0-0 24 Qb2 Ne7. I have about four decades of experience in French, and can tell you that Black stands slightly better here, since d4 may be a future target, and Black is the only one with a break, with ... f6.

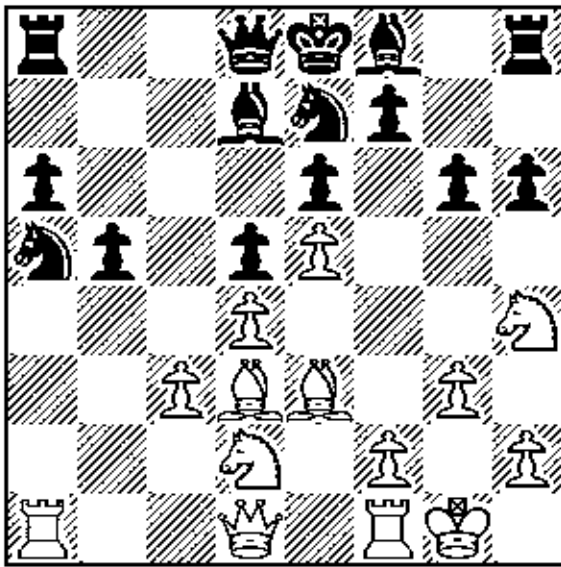
12 Nh4 g6

Karpov sets up a French-like defensive wall on f5.

13 Be3 b5

Clamping down on the c4 break.

14 Nd2 Na5



Not only is White's c3-pawn backward, but he must also be on constant lookout for ... Nc4 ideas.

15 Qf3

Question: White keeps relying on piece play.

Shouldn't he be trying to implement an f5 break?

Answer: I don't see it happening. Let's survey the environment: 15 f4 Nc4 16 Nxc4 dxc4 17 Be4 Bc6 (this move sticks White with a remaining bad bishop) 18 Bxc6+ Nxc6 19 Qc2 (maybe thinking of fishing it up with a sacrifice on g6) 19 ... Ne7! (which we prevent for now) 20 Bd2 Nd5!. My mistake. Go ahead and sac! The game resembles a Slav Geller Gambit gone badly wrong for White. If he goes for it with 21 Nxg6 fxe6 22 Qxg6+ Kd7 23 f5 Qe8! 24 Qg4 a5 I don't see a follow up to White's attack: 25 Rf3 a4 26 Ra1 a3! (the passed a-pawn distracts White from his attack) 27 fxe6+ Qxe6 28 Rf7+ Be7 29 Qe4 a2 and now what? White can resign.

15 ... Qc7 16 Rfc1 Bc6

Now ... Nc4 is coming.

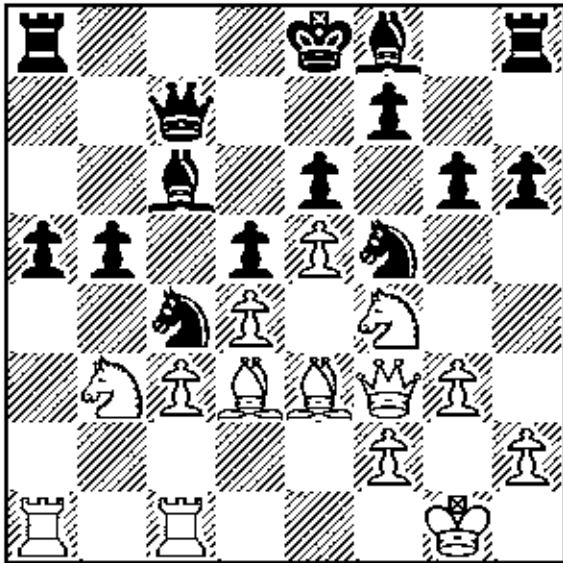
17 Ng2

17 Qf6 Rg8 doesn't bother Black at all.

17 ... Nc4 18 Nb3 a5! 19 Nf4

All the sacrifice squares, like e6 and g6, are well covered.

19 ... Nf5!



Karpov intends to place his king on the queenside, where his preponderance of defenders lie. I like this plan better than castling kingside, since White may get attacking chances after a line like 19 ... Bg7 20 g4 a4 21 Nc5 0-0 22 Qh3 Ra7 23 Ne2 Nxe3 24 Qxe3 Rb8 25 h4 Be8 26 f4.

20 Bxf5

This seriously weakens White's light squares. As some compensation, White's pieces now get access to h5. After 20 g4? Nfxe3 21 fxe3 Be7 22 Bxg6 (if White refuses to sacrifice, then Black simply has a strategically won game, with a clean extra pawn) 22 ... fxg6 23 Nxe6 Qd7 24 Nbc5 Bxc5 25 Nxc5 Qf7 White's attack runs aground.

20 ... gxf5 21 Qh5

Threat: Nxe6. Instead, after 21 Nh5 Be7 22 Nf6+ Bxf6 23 exf6 Qd8 24 Bf4 a4 25 Nc5 (or 25 Nd2 Nxd2 26 Bxd2 Qxf6 27 c4 0-0!; now it's safe to castle short and I just don't see enough compensation for White here) 25 ... Qxf6 26 Nd3 a natural attacker may feel like White's grip on the dark squares offers some practical chances. However, I think Black's two extra pawns are more meaningful.

21 ... Qe7 22 Nc5

Renewing the threat.

22 ... Kd8!

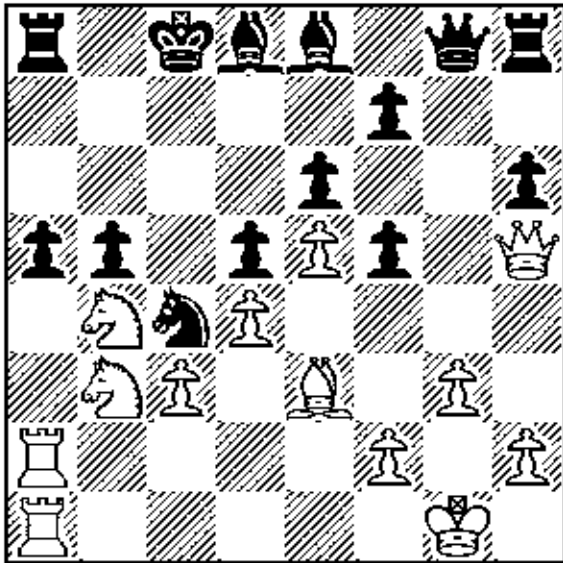
The black king's sepulchral living arrangements don't worry him, since he gets the

freedom he seeks on the queenside, where he remains perfectly safe, while refusing to relinquish his initial gambit pawn.

23 Nfd3 Kc8 24 Rcb1 Qe8 25 Ra2 Be7 26 Rba1 Qg8!

Karpov continues to make creeping gains. He threatens to push back with ... Qg6 and ... h5.

27 Nb3 Bd8 28 Nb4 Be8!



Now White must watch out for ... f6 tricks, as well as ... Qg4!, which removes queens from the board. I love these Steinitz-approved retreats. Who but Karpov can arrange virtually his entire army arrayed on his first rank, and still have a winning position? Such is the arcane mystery of his strategic magic.

29 Qe2 h5!

Now ... h4 is coming, while White's attack stalled on the other side, with his pieces still and silent as exhibits in a house of wax figures.

30 Nd2 h4 31 Bf4

31 Nxc4 bxc4 doesn't worry Black.

31 ... Qg4 32 Nf3 Rb8

Now the b4-knight really does hang.

33 Nc2 Bc6 34 Ne3 Qg6

I would retain the pin and move the queen to the h-file with 34 ... Qh5.

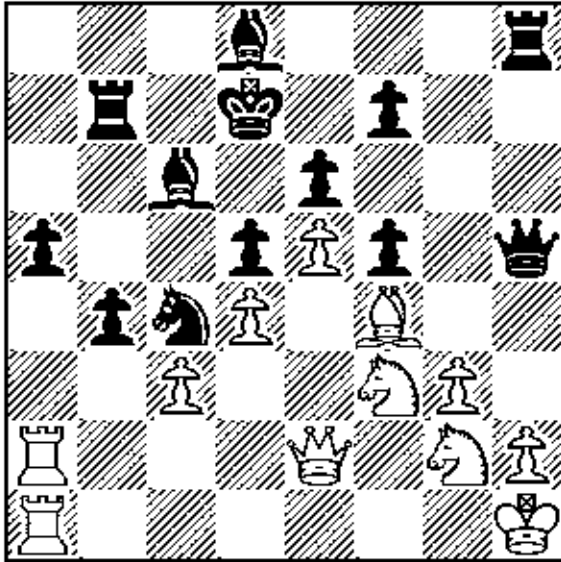
35 Kh1 hxg3 36 fxg3 Rb7 37 Ng2

We note White's contracting interest in his queenside attacking project.

37 ... Qg4 38 Ne3 Qh3 39 Ng1 Qh5 40 Nf3 Kd7!

Preparing ... b4.

41 Ng2 b4!



Old pain for White, thought long gone, suddenly erupts in heat. White is tied down on the kingside, so now is the correct moment to switch attention to the other wing, by creating a passed b-pawn.

42 cxb4 axb4 43 Ra7 Rxa7 44 Rxa7+ Bc7 45 Bc1 Qg4

Threat: ... Qxg3.

46 Nf4

46 Kg1 walks into 46 ... b3 47 Nf4 b2! 48 Bxb2 Nxb2, winning a piece, since White's queen is overloaded: 49 Qxb2 Qxf3 50 Qb6 fails miserably to 50 ... Qd1+ 51 Kg2 Qc2+ 52 Kf1 Rc8 and now 53 Nh5?? is met with 53 ... Qd1+ 54 Kg2 Qxh5.

46 ... Qxg3

And game over.

47 Nd3

Hey, I said "And game over"! Through the 1980's I was a writer for the *San Diego Union-Tribune*. For years and years I viewed my mundane life through headlines: 'Man Sits in Park, Feeds Pigeons', or 'Chess Writer's Front Left Tire Runs Low, Needs Air'. In this position the headline would read: 'White Busted Against World Chess Champ, Plays On Anyway'.

47 ... Rh3!?

Black's queen allows her underlings to do much of her dirty work. 47 ... b3! is stronger.

48 Nc5+ Kc8 49 Ng1 Bb6!?

I studied the games of every world champion, and to my mind, Karpov's play is the most mysterious. Karpov offers the exchange, which is thin consolation for White, when compared to his overall misery index. Still, why sacrifice an exchange when you can win without it? Karpov just followed his own internal strategic laws, which the rest of

his find hard to fathom. I would have just played the simple 49 ... Rh8.

50 Nxh3

50 Rxf7? walks into Karpov's devilish trap after 50 ... Bxc5 51 Nxh3 Qxh3, and now 52 dxc5 d4+ 53 Kg1 d3 54 Rf8+ Kd7 55 Qf1 Qg4+ 56 Kf2 Qh4+ 57 Kg1 Qd4+ 58 Qf2 Qg4+ 59 Qg3 Qd1+ 60 Kf2 Qc2+. The c1-bishop falls with check, after which White is mated. When variations begin to fit perfectly like this, it's generally the hallmark of future happiness to come.

50 ... Qxh3 51 Ra6

51 Rxf7 Bxc5 transposes to the above variation.

51 ... Kc7

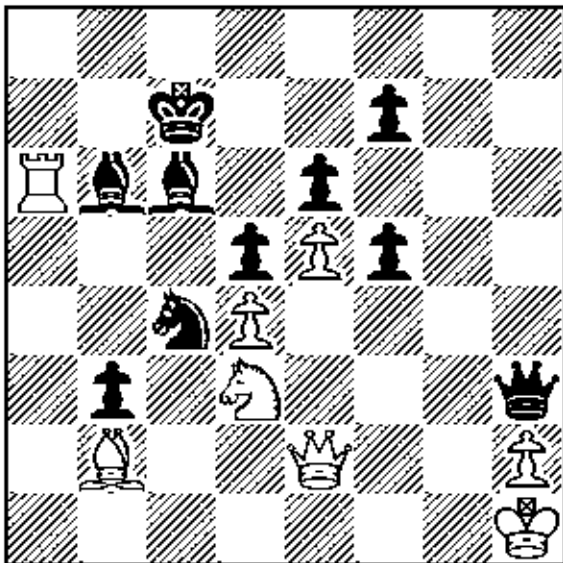
White is up the exchange, but is paralyzed by threats to his king, as well as his issues with Black's passed b-pawn.

52 Nd3 b3!

The passed b-pawn presses the white defence past tolerable limits.

53 Bb2

It's mate after 53 Ra1 Qh4! 54 Rb1 Qxd4 55 Bg5 Qe4+ 56 Qxe4 dxe4 57 Nb4 Bb7! 58 Rxb3 (58 h4 e3+ 59 Kh2 e2 60 Re1 b2 61 Nd3 Ba5 62 Rb1 Be4 wins) 58 ... e3+ (a tightening ring surrounds White's king) 59 Kg1 e2+ 60 Be3 e1Q.



Exercise (combination alert): How did Karpov break the thin membrane which separates him from victory?

Answer: Overloaded defender/double attack/mating net.

53 ... Nxb2! 0-1

This variation is the string which unravels Karpov's intent: 54 Nxb2 Bb5! (this shot

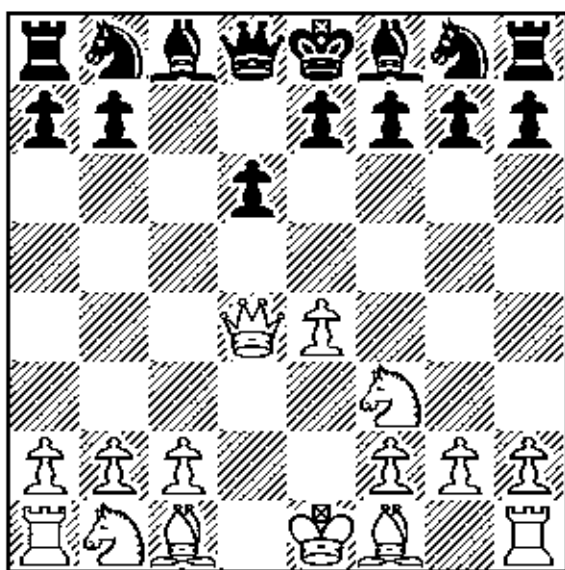
overloads White's queen) 55 Qxb5 Qf3+ and now comes the mating net 56 Kgl Bxd4 mate.

Summary: Just as in the b3-Sicilian, I think White gets slightly more compensation in the deferred lines than the main line, since Black must commit him or herself structurally.

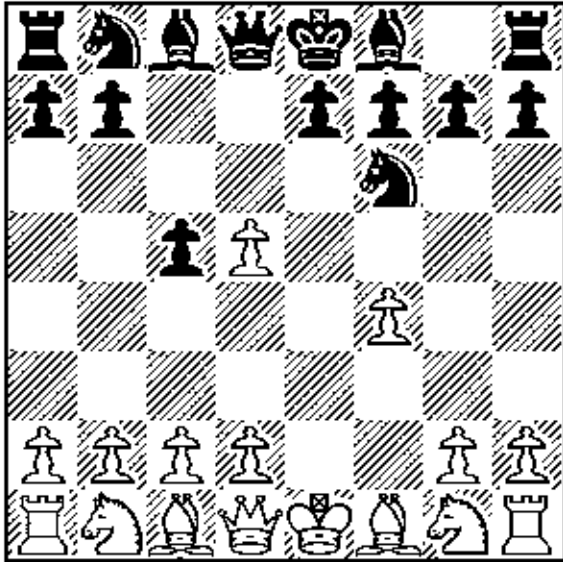
Chapter Ten

Odds and Ends

In most Sicilian lines, the moves have been played so often, that our hands move the pieces responsibly forward to the tabiya, while our minds may wander elsewhere. In this chapter, however, we take a look at a few lesser played lines which didn't deserve an independent chapter. The most important games are the first two of the chapter.



In the above diagram, White recaptures with the queen, rather than the knight on d4, giving the game a pseudo-Open Sicilian flavour. We either gain a tempo on White's queen, after ... Nc6, or the bishop-pair if White plays Bb5. In either case, we equalize.



In the second position White opened with the move order 1 e4 c5 2 f4. Now if we choose, we can just ignore this and transpose into either a Closed Sicilian, Grand Prix, or a harmless line of the Dragon. Or we can immediately open the door to our liberation with the enterprising pawn sacrifice 2 ... d5 and 3 ... Nf6. White can hang on to the pawn with either c4, or Bb5+ and then c4 – both at a steep cost to development. Now this isn't just a case of borrowed goods. It's a permanent pawn sacrifice, so we don't take such a choice lightly. In either case, we get loads of compensation, and our goal is to teach White that hoarding wealth is a dangerous practice on the chess board.

Game 48

P.Svidler-G.Kasparov

Linares 1999

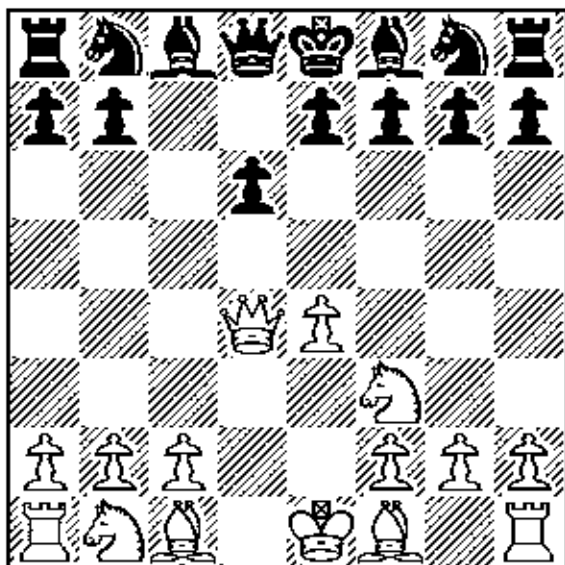
1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6

This move order applies to Najdorf, Dragon and Richter-Rauzer players.

3 d4

Similar is 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 d4 cxd4 5 Qxd4 Bd7 (intending to gain a tempo, rather than the bishop-pair, with ... Nc6 next) 6 Bg5 Nc6 7 Qd2 Rc8 8 Bb5?! (the bishop doesn't belong here; correct is 8 0-0-0 Qa5 9 Kb1 a6 10 Bxf6 gxf6 11 Nd4 Nxd4 12 Qxd4 Qc5 13 Qd2 h5 14 Bd3 e6 with a typical looking Richter-Rauzer, with about even chances, J.Grachev-C.Liang, Internet (blitz) 2004) 8 ... Qa5 9 0-0!? Nxe4! (deflection) 10 Nxe4 Qxb5 11 Rfe1 (threatening all sorts of nasty things on d6) 11 ... Be6! 12 Rad1 h6 13 Bh4 g5 14 Bg3 Bg7 15 b3 0-0 16 c4 Qa5 and White lacked compensation for the pawn, D.Aldama-K.Kiewra, San Diego (rapid) 2015.

3 ... cxd4 4 Qxd4



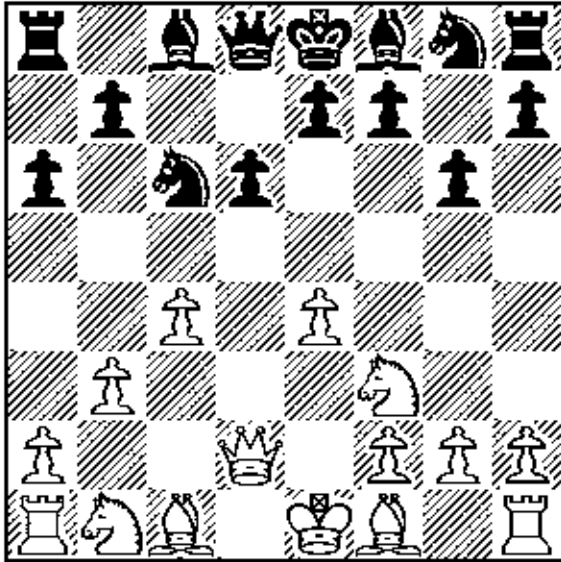
The positions we reach in this variation resemble an Open Sicilian, more than an Anti-Sicilian.

Question: This move seems highly illogical, since White will later either lose a tempo with ... Nc6 or ... e5. Do you agree?

Answer: I partially agree, but matters of tempo loss are not so simple. If we play ... Nc6, then White can play Bb5, as in the game, and then give up bishop for a knight. In return, White gets a development lead. If we play ... e5, then sure, we gain a tempo, at the cost of creating a d5 hole.

4 ... Nc6

The most direct move. 4 ... a6 prevents Bb5 and gains a pure tempo with the coming ... Nc6. However, the loss of a single move allows White a Maroczy bind set up with c4, with approximately even play: 5 c4 Nc6 6 Qd2 (White plans to develop his c1-bishop via a fianchetto) 6 ... g6 7 b3.



Question: Can't Black stick White with a bad bishop with the swapping manoeuvre 7 ... Bh6?

Answer: A swap of dark-squared bishops would benefit Black. Unfortunately we don't get the swap if White plays 8 Qc3! Qa5 9 Qxa5 Nxa5 10 Bb2 when I prefer White's chances in the ending.

Instead, 7 ... Bg7 8 Nc3 Nf6 9 Bb2 0-0 10 h3 Qa5 11 Bd3 was J.Gallagher-E.L'Ami, Plovdiv 2012. Black achieved an at least even version of a Maroczy Bind position after 11 ... Nd7 since White's f3-knight is misplaced and blocks the pathway for his f-pawn to either f3 or f4.

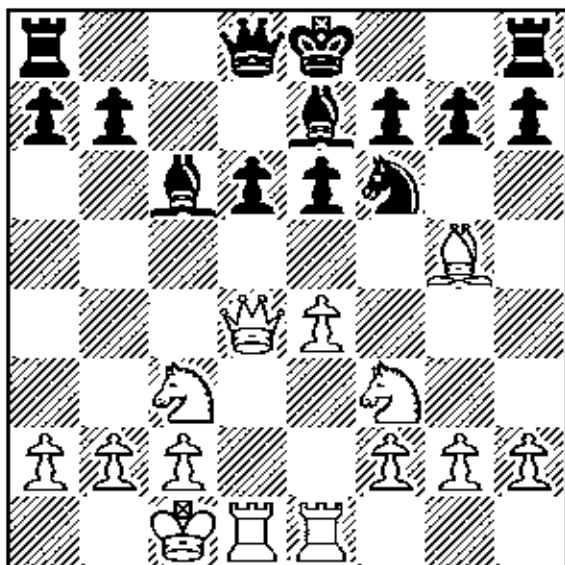
5 Bb5 Bd7 6 Bxc6

The most principled move. White offers the bishop-pair in exchange for rapid development. 6 Qd3 Nf6 7 Bg5 e6 8 Nc3 Be7 9 0-0-0 a6 10 Bxc6 Bxc6 (Black gets the bishop-pair anyway) 11 Nd4 0-0 12 h4 (12 Nxc6?! bxc6 regains the bishop-pair, at the high cost of wasting time and allowing Black an open b-file, and a strengthened centre) 12 ... Qa5 13 g4 Rac8 14 Bxf6 Bxf6 15 g5 Be7 16 Rdg1 b5 17 Kb1 b4 18 Nce2 Bb5! 19 Qf3 Bc4 20 Nc1 Qc5 21 Qe3 a5 22 h5 was D.Andreikin-B.Gelfand, Moscow (blitz) 2013. Black's chances are superior if he finds 22 ... Bd8! intending ... Bb6.

6 ... Bxc6

6 ... bxc6 gets us back into Maroczy Bind territory after 7 c4 e5 8 Qd3 Qb8 9 0-0 h6 10 Nc3 Nf6 11 b3 Be7, Z.Zahariev-E.Grivas, Chania 1995. I prefer White's chances after 12 Ba3.

7 Nc3 Nf6 8 Bg5 e6 9 0-0-0 Be7 10 Rhe1



We reach the tabiya position in this variation. White completes development, yet he faces some nagging issues:

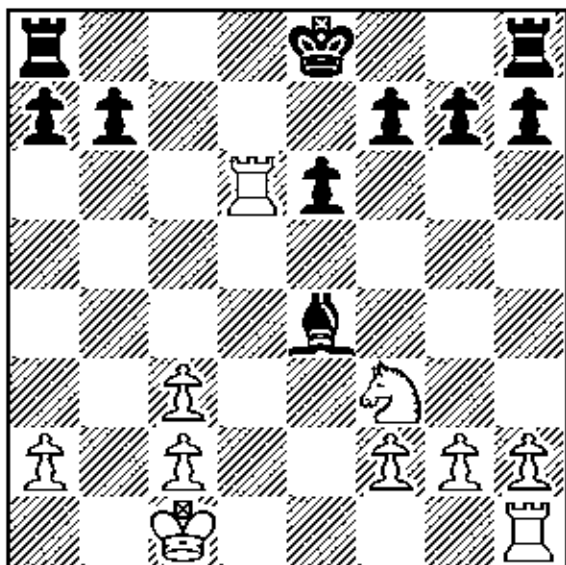
1. The f3-knight is misplaced, since it is in the way and disallows White's standard kingside pawn storm plan with f3, g4 and h4.

2. White can play e5 next, but all this does is eliminate Black's only weakness on d6. Conclusion: White's position, while appealing to the eye, lacks a constructive plan. Black, on the other hand, knows exactly what to do: go after White's king, using the open c-file, and possibly pushing both b- and a-pawns. I think Black's chances from this point are at least even.

Alternatively, 10 Qd3 Qa5 11 h4 h6 12 Bd2 Qa6! 13 Qxa6 bxa6 (the open queenside lines compensate Black's weakened pawns) 14 Rhe1 Ng4 15 Re2 0-0 16 Nd4 Bd7 17 f3 Ne5 18 h5 Rfc8 19 b3 Rc5 20 Be1 Rac8 21 Nb1 Rb8 (preventing Bb4) 22 Bf2 was M.Kaminski-B.Gelfand, Polanica Zdroj 1997. Black's chances are at least even in this ending after 22 ... Ra5 23 a4 Rc5.

Question: Can White disrupt Black's kingside pawns by handing over the other bishop with 10 Bxf6?

Answer: We don't have to recapture with the pawn. We can play 10 ... Bxf6 11 Qxd6 Qxd6 12 Rxd6 Bxc3 13 bxc3 Bxe4.

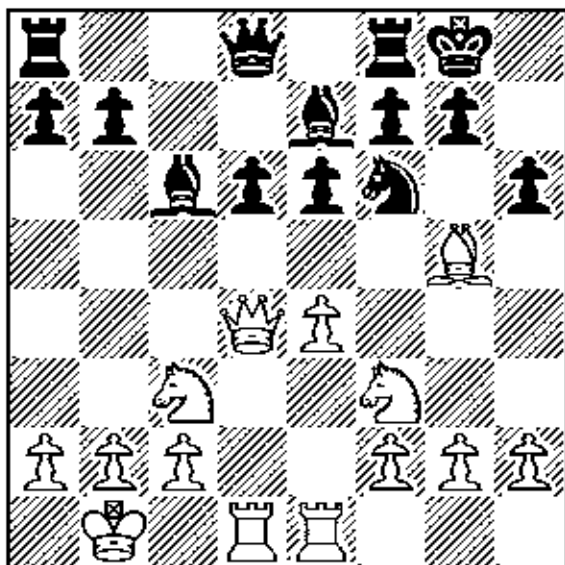


Black regained the sacrificed pawn and now owns the superior structure. White, however, still retains compensation from his development lead after 14 Ne5 Rc8 15 Rd4 Bd5 16 c4 Bxg2 17 Rg1 f6 18 Nd7 Ke7! 19 Rxd7 g6 20 Rg3 Rc7 21 Rgd3 Rd8 (White's knight is trapped) 22 Rh4 Rxd7 23 Rxd7+ Ke8 24 Rh8+ Ke7 25 Rh7+ Ke8 26 Rh8+ and the game was drawn by perpetual check, V.Zvjaginsev-D.Khismatulli, Moscow 2010.

10 ... 0-0 11 Kb1

In theory 11 e5 looks logical, since it opens the game when White leads in development. Black is compensated by the fact that White's move allows him to swap off his weak d6-pawn, while initiating swaps down the newly opened d-file: 11 ... dxe5 12 Qh4 Qc7 13 Nxe5 Rfd8 14 Ng4 Nxe4 15 Bxe7 Rxd1+ 16 Rxd1 Nh6! 17 Bd8?! (A.Dueckstein-G.Sosonko, Amsterdam 1978; correct is 17 Bd6 Nf5 18 Bxc7 Nxe4 with an even ending), when Black stands slightly better after 17 ... Qe5! 18 Bb6 (threatening a back-rank cheapo) 18 ... f6 19 f4 (19 Bd4? is met with 19 ... Nf5!, winning a pawn) 19 ... Qf5. Black stands better due to his grip on the light squares.

11 ... h6



I generally avoid such moves, since they may later provide White with a target, with a future g4, g5 plan. After 11 ... Qa5 12 Qd2 Qa6 13 Nd4 b5 14 f3 Rfc8 15 g4 Be8 16 Nce2 Rc4 17 b3 Rc7 18 Ng3 Rac8 19 Rc1 the position resembles a Najdorf English Attack, which worked out slightly better for Black, whose attack looks more promising than White's on the kingside, S.Zhigalko-A.Shirov, Jurmala 2013.

12 Bh4

Alternatively, 12 Bxf6 (once again this capture gets White nothing) 12 ... Bxf6 13 Qxd6 Bxc3 14 bxc3 Qb6+ 15 Qb4 Qxf2 (15 ... Qc7 16 Qc5 Rfd8 17 Rd3 looks slightly better for White, who can build on the d-file) 16 Qd4! (if not for this move, White would be structurally busted) 16 ... Qxd4 17 cxd4 with a dynamically balanced ending, D.Svetushkin-S.Marjanovic, Bucharest 1999.

12 ... Re8 13 Bg3

Following 13 Qd2 Rc8 (13 ... Qa5 walks into White's trap, yet is actually playable after 14 Nd5 Qxd2 15 Nxe7+ Rxe7 16 Nxd2 g5 17 Bg3 Rd7; Black still looks okay in the ending) 14 Nd4 and now Black has a little excelsior theme combination with 14 ... Nxe4! 15 Nxe4 Bxh4 16 Nxc6 Rxc6 17 Nxd6 Rf8 18 g3 Be7 19 Ne4 (19 Nxb7?? self-traps the knight after 19 ... Qb6 20 Na5 Bb4 21 Qxb4 Qxb4 22 Nxc6 Qc5 23 Nd4 Rd8 24 c3 e5 25 Nb3 Rxd1+ 26 Rxd1 Qxf2 which leaves White busted) 19 ... Qc7 20 Re3 Rc8 21 Rc3 f5 22 Rxc6 Qxc6 23 Nc3 Bf6 Black's chances look slightly better since he owns the superior minor piece, S.Cao-P.Darini, Mashhad 2011.

13 ... d5

This thematic central break leaves Black at least even.

14 e5 Ne4!

14 ... Nd7 resembles a Classical French, which is pleasant for White, who owns d4. I prefer his chances after 15 Bh4.

15 Nxe4 dxe4 16 Qxd8

16 Qe3 Qb6 forces queens off the board all the same: 17 Qxb6 axb6 18 Nd4 Rd8 19 Bf4 Bc5 20 c3, S.Morin-M.Noblesse, French League 2002. The ending is balanced after 20 ... Rd5.

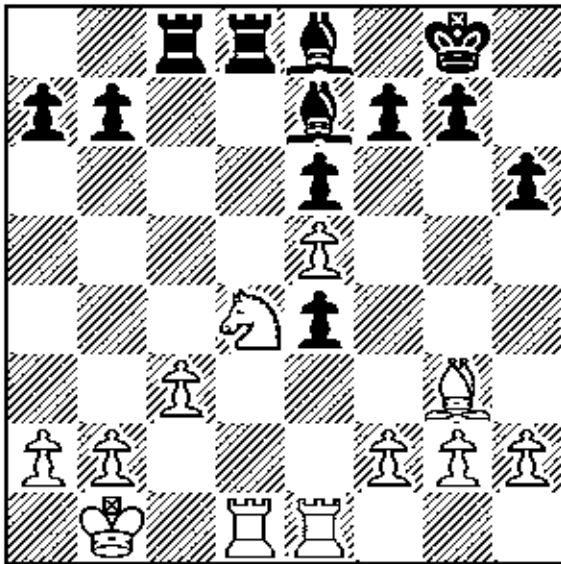
16 ... Rxd8 17 Nd4 Be8

17 ... Bd5 18 b3 Bb4 19 Re2 was V.Ciubara-M.Huda, Predeal 2007. Black looks good after 19 ... b6.

18 c3

18 Rxe4?! Bc6 19 Re3 Bxg2 leaves Black better, due to his bishops.

18 ... Rac8!?



We reach theory's end. Kasparov plays for a win, banking on the power of his bishop-pair, over White's potential to later pick off the e4-pawn. If Black wants an immediate draw, he has it with 18 ... Bc5 19 Kc2 Bxd4 20 Rxd4 Rxd4 21 cxd4, T.Collin-R.Amico, correspondence 2008. The position is 99% likely drawn after 21 ... Bc6.

19 Kc2 b5!?

Of all the seven deadly sins, pride is the most dangerous, as well as the most potentially profitable. The tacit premise of Kasparov's move: my bishop-pair is worth more than your extra pawn. We gather data to determine the beneficial from the detrimental. Yet here it's impossible to reach a definitive conclusion on the sacrifice's soundness level. A sacrifice like this is beyond the reach of empirical confirmation – at least over the board, when we drift completely, from one guess to another. It takes enormous self-confidence to agree to a decision like this – which is more an exploratory gamble, rather than a raid – especially when Black has a draw in hand.

It isn't too late to play for a draw with 19 ... Bc5 20 Nb3 Bb6 21 Rxd8 Rxd8 22

Nd2 e3 23 fxe3 Bb5 24 c4 Ba4+ 25 b3 Bc6 26 Re2 Ba5 27 Be1 and if Black wants the draw, all he needs to do is chop on d2, since White won't be able to convert the extra pawn, due to the opposite-coloured bishops. Or he can simply play 27 ... Bc7 28 Bg3 Ba5.

20 Rxe4 b4

Kasparov opens the queenside with his minority attack.

21 Re3 a5

Black's bishop-pair and queenside initiative fully compensate his missing pawn – or at least this is Kasparov's intuitive assessment.

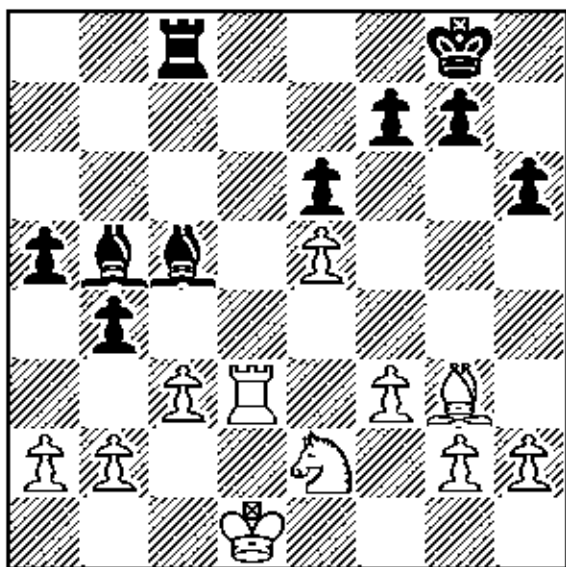
22 Ne2?!

On the chessboard, boundaries are simultaneously imaginary and real. Before this move, Kasparov's compensation was closer to the former. Now it shifts directly to the latter. A well defended fortress is also a prison camp, since to lock someone out, we in turn, must lock ourselves in. There is no justification for this swap-inducing, voluntary decentralization, which allows Black's light-squared bishop activity. The position remains in dynamic equilibrium after 22 Red3.

22 ... Bc6 23 f3 Rxd1 24 Kxd1 Bc5 25 Rd3

Black also applies pressure after 25 Nd4 Bd5 26 b3 Bb7 27 Rd3 Rd8 28 Kc2 Ba6 29 Rd1 bxc3 30 Bf2 (30 Kxc3?? Be2 wins) 30 ... f6 31 f4 Rd5 32 exf6 gxf6 33 Bg1 Kf7 34 Nf3 Rxd1 35 Kxd1 Bxg1 36 Nxg1 Bd3 which leaves White struggling for the draw.

25 ... Bb5



It grows clear that White's extra pawn is about as useful as a barbecue cookbook, for a vegan couple.

26 Rd2 Be3

White's once powerful fortress isn't of much use, since he lacks the manpower to garrison it with the necessary defenders.

27 Rd6

White's beleaguered rook is the panting foe, who finally evades the pursuing pack of wolves.

27 ... bxc3 28 Nxc3

White is in deep trouble after 28 bxc3 Bc4 29 Nc1 Bf1.

28 ... Bf1

A weakened kingdom invites invaders. When a person slowly recovers from a surgery, in the back of his mind, he expects the agony of the old illness to return. Svidler loses his extra pawn, as Kasparov gets to the underbelly of the kingside structure, with his terrible bishops, who act like an army of phantoms, who appear, inflict damage, and then fade into the mist.

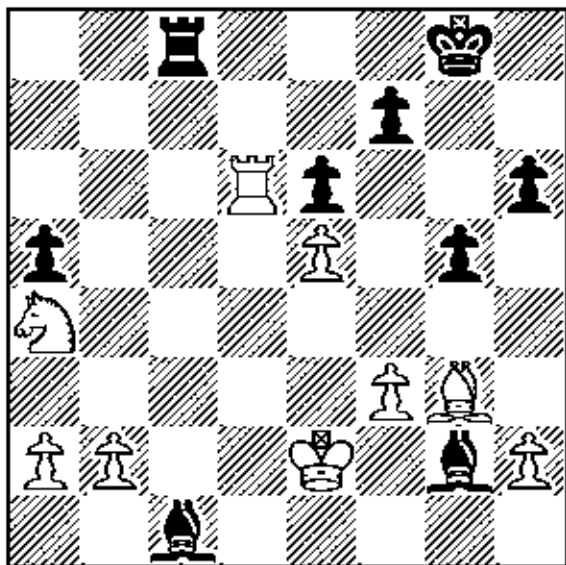
29 Bh4 g5 30 Be1 Bxg2

Black regained his sacrificed pawn, while retaining his bishop-pair.

31 Ke2 Bf4 32 Bg3 Bc1

Kasparov begins to undermine the other side of the board.

33 Na4



Exercise (planning): Kasparov found a clear plan to make progress. How would you proceed?

Answer: Removal of a key defender.

33 ... h5!

Threat: ... h4 and ... Bf4. Kasparov adds yet another worry to Svidler's many

burdens.

34 Rd1

Alternatively:

a) 34 h4 Rc2+ 35 Kd3 gxh4! 36 Bxh4 (36 Kxc2?? hxg3 37 Kxc1 Bxf3 38 Rd2 h4 leaves White helpless, despite his extra rook) 36 ... Rd2+ 37 Kc3 Re2 38 Rd1 Bf4 39 Bf6 Kh7 40 a3 Bg3! and there is no defence to the push of Black's h-pawn.

b) 34 Rd4 Kg7 35 h4 Kg6 36 hxg5 Bxg5 37 Nc3 Bc1 38 Na4 Bh3 39 Bf4 Bxf4 40 Rxf4 Rc2+ 41 Ke3 Bf5 when ... Kg5 followed by the h-pawn's push is decisive.

34 ... h4 35 Be1 Bf4 36 Bc3

What a helpless feeling when we know exactly where and when our opponent will strike, and yet we are powerless to do anything about it.

36 ... Kg7

White's h-pawn isn't running away.

37 Nb6

37 Bxa5? Rc2+ 38 Kd3 Rf2 39 Bc3 Bxh2 and the race won't even be close.

37 ... Rh8!

Principle: *Place your rook behind (future) passed pawns.*

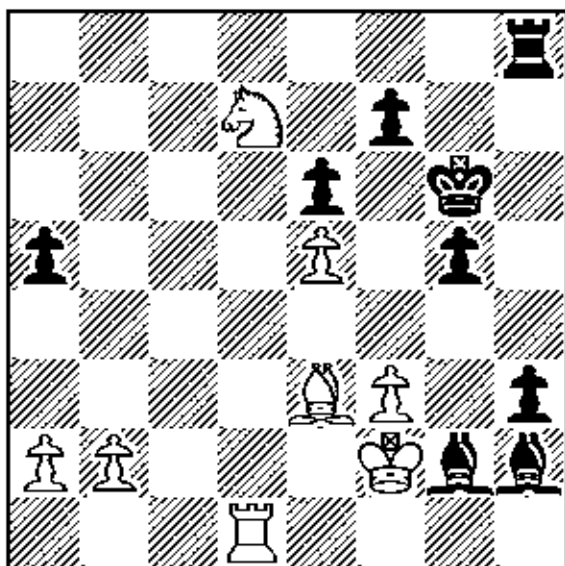
38 Kf2 h3 39 Bd2 Bxh2

"With all your accomplishments destroyed, all you leave behind as a legacy are your bones," boasts the bishop to White's depressed king, who can only watch as his kingdom unravels before his eyes. Slightly more accurate is 39 ... Rd8 40 Nc4 Bxh2 when White's bishop is pinned and can't capture g5.

40 Nd7

40 Bxg5 Bxe5 41 Nc4 Bc7 42 Be7 Rh6!, intending ... Rg6! and ... h2, is decisive.

40 ... Kg6 41 Be3



Exercise (combination alert): How did Kasparov break down the final barrier of White's resistance?

41 ... g4! 42 fxg4 Bc6! 0-1

Black's h-pawn is unstoppable after 43 Nc5 Bxe5 44 Nd3 Bc7 45 Ke2 Bb5! 46 Bg1 h2 47 Bxh2 Rxh2+.

Summary: After 4 Qxd4 we reach a dynamically balanced Open Sicilian-style game, with the bishop-pair.

Game 49

V.Ivanchuk-A.Giri

Leon (rapid) 2013

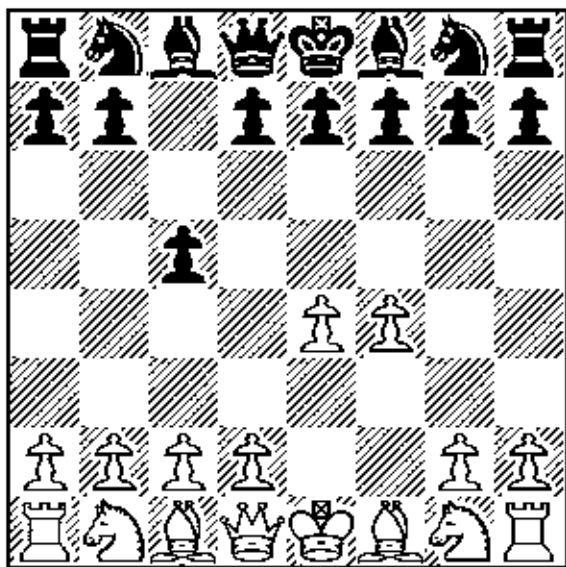
1 e4 c5

The positions we reach run similar to the ... Nf6 Scandinavian, after 1 ... d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 Bb5+ (or 3 c4 c6 4 dxc6 Nxc6) 3 ... Nbd7 4 c4 a6 5 Ba4 b5.

Question: How is our Sicilian version different?

Answer: In our version, we insert the moves f4 and ... c5, which I believe benefit us, since f4 simply loosens White's position, while ... c5 is useful for our side, since it hinders White's d4.

2 f4



This move order allows White to get to all sorts of variations, like the Grand Prix, Closed Sicilian, or even Open Sicilian.

Question: Is there a way we can narrow White's choices?

Answer: Please see Black's next move!

2 ... d5

This move turns the position into an independent variation:

a) 2 ... Nc6 will turn into something else: 3 Nc3 (if you aren't a Dragon player, then be careful not to get tricked out of your normal Open Sicilian with 3 Nf3 g6 – or 3 ... e6 4 d4 – 4 d4) 3 ... g6 4 Nf3 Bg7 when 5 Bb5 and also 5 Bc4 is the Grand Prix, while 5 d3 d6 6 g3 is the Closed Sicilian.

b) 2 ... e6 3 Nf3 Nc6 4 Bb5 Nge7 5 0-0 a6 6 Bxc6 Nxc6 and Black already stands well. White can't play 7 d4? since he or she walks into trouble with a pin on the g1-a7 diagonal after 7 ... cxd4 8 Nxd4 (8 c3 dxc3 9 Nxc3 Bc5+ is just a lousy Smith-Morra for White, who gave away control of the dark squares) 8 ... Bc5 9 c3 Qb6 10 b4 Nxb4 11 Na3 Nc6 12 Nc4 Qa7. White lacks sufficient compensation for the pawn.

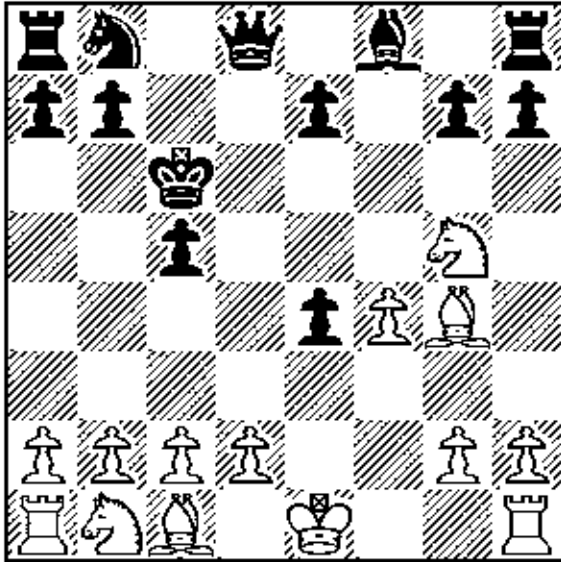
3 exd5

The only real try for an edge:

a) 3 e5 essentially gives Black a French structure without a bad bishop after 3 ... Nc6 4 Nf3 Bg4 5 c3 e6 6 Bb5 Nge7 7 0-0 a6. I already feel like Black stands better, P.Dimitrov-G.Szabo, Sunny Beach 2009.

b) 3 Nc3 d4! (Black's most ambitious, and I believe best move; The simple move 3 ... dxe4 offers Black easy equality, without any drama: 4 Nxe4 e6 5 Bb5+ Bd7 6 Qe2 Bxb5 7 Qxb5+ Qd7 8 a4 Nh6 9 b3 Nf5 10 Bb2 Nc6 11 Nf3 Rc8 12 Ne5 Nxe5 13 fxe5 Be7 14 g4 Nd4 15 Qxd7+ Kxd7 16 0-0-0 Rhd8 with an even ending, S.Sulskis-I.Novikov, Koszalin 1999) 4 Nce2 (4 Nb1 e5! 5 Nf3 exf4 6 Bc4 Nc6 7 d3 was M.Hebden-K.Arkell, Issy les Moulineaux 1984; it looks to me like White landed in a bad King's Gambit after 7 ... Bd6 8 0-0 Bg4 9 Qe1 Bxf3 10 Rxf3 g5 when I think White is already in trouble) 4 ... Nc6 5 Ng3 Nf6 6 Be2 h5! 7 h4 (7 e5? is met with 7 ... h4 with a clear advantage for Black) 7 ... Bg4 8 d3 g6 9 e5 Bxe2 10 Qxe2 was D.Barlov-I.Smirin, Las Palmas 1997. After 10 ... Ng4 Black's control over g4 and d5 is more meaningful than White's of e4.

c) 3 Nf3?! is a somewhat shady looking gambit of which you should be aware. The correspondence master Krol plays it with success, so we should be on guard: 3 ... dxe4 (we should accept) 4 Ng5 Bf5! is GM Colin McNab's suggestion in *Experts on the Anti-Sicilian*. Instead, 4 ... Nf6 is just what White wants. 5 Bc4 Bg4! 6 Bxf7+! Kd7 7 Qxg4+ Nxg4 8 Be6+ Kc6 9 Bxg4, W.Krol-N.Robson, correspondence 2004.



Question: What do you mean “is just what White wants”? He is down a queen for only two pieces!

Answer: Of course the comps agree with your favourable assessment for Black. However, for us incompetent humans, the position is not so easy to navigate the black king – his only developed piece! – floating around the centre. White scores over 60% from this position, so enter it at your own risk!

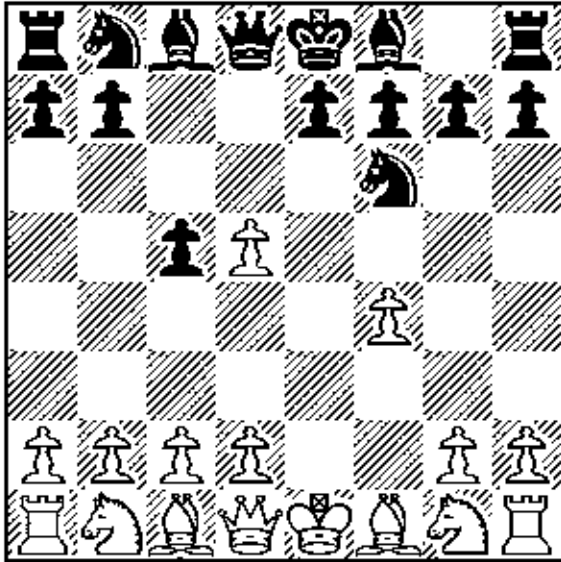
After 4 ... Bf5! White can try:

c1) 5 Bc4 e6 6 g4!? (as my friend, the late Senior Master Boris Baczynskyj, was fond of repeating during our myriad blitz games: “Onward and upward!”; natural attackers just can’t help themselves from such lunges) 6 ... h6! 7 gxf5 hxg5 8 Qg4 (8 fxe6 f5! 9 fxg5 Qxg5 favours Black as well) 8 ... Nf6! 9 Qg2 (not 9 Qxg5? exf5 10 Qxf5?? Rh5 and White’s queen is trapped in mid-board) 9 ... exf5 10 fxg5 Ng4 11 d3 Nc6 12 dxe4 Qd4 13 Be2 Ne3 14 Bxe3 Qxb2 15 exf5 Qxa1 16 Qe4+ was W.Krol-S.Lucki, correspondence 2010. White lacks compensation for the exchange after 16 ... Qe5.

c2) 5 g4 Bd7 6 Nc3 e6 7 Bg2 h6 8 Ngxe4 Qh4+ 9 Nf2 Bc6 10 0-0 Bxg2 11 Kxg2 Nc6 12 d3 0-0-0 and I like Black’s chances against White’s king, whose pawn front has been loosened, W.Krol-J.Staniszewski, correspondence 2009.

Returning to 3 exd5:

3 ... Nf6



Question: You want us to gambit a pawn as Black?

Answer: In this instance we are not mortgaging our future merely for present happiness. Normally your material-loving writer's eyes widen in offence whenever a gambit is trotted out – but not this time. I realize that a book is a theoretical entity, while playing a gambit over the board is a direct experience, with practical application – not to mention a lot more at stake. And I also understand that when a chess writer advocates a line, this is a bit like the judge who allows the jury access to hearsay testimony – it isn't real proof.

When we are unable to validate a gambit's soundness, even with the help of the computers, it generally constitutes grounds for rejection. If you put this line on the comps, they will give Black's position the thumbs up, all the way. Trust me on this one. It's a completely sound gambit. If you lose, it won't be because the gambit is unsound.

4 Bb5+

After 4 c4 e6 5 dxe6 Bxe6 6 Nf3 Nc6 and for the pawn, Black gets the following:

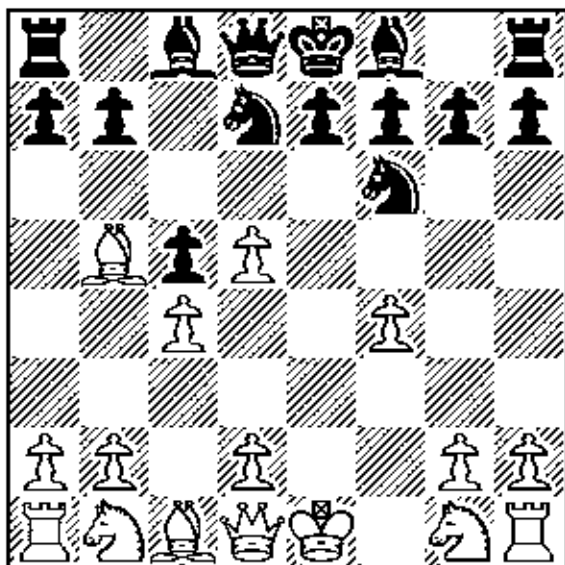
1. A development lead in an open position.
2. An occupiable hole on d4.
3. White's d3-pawn is both backward and weak.

Conclusion: Black gets more than enough compensation.

4 ... Nbd7

4 ... Bd7 is also played, but in this book we exclusively cover the higher-scoring 4 ... Nbd7, since there is no reason for you to study two lines to White's system.

5 c4



5 ... g6!?

This is a rare sideline. In case you are worried about this line's soundness, White scores a rather underwhelming 28.8% from this position. 5 ... a6 is Black's main move:

a) 6 Bxd7+ Bxd7 7 Nf3 e6 (it's important to continually chip away White's d5 point) 8 dxe6 Bxe6 9 d3 Be7 10 0-0 0-0. Current theory judges that Black's bishop-pair and active position are sufficient compensation for the pawn.

b) 6 Ba4 b5 7 cxb5 Nxd5 8 Nf3 N7b6 9 bxa6+ Nxa4 10 Qxa4+ Qd7 11 Qxd7+ Bxd7 12 0-0 Nxf4 13 Nc3 Nd3 14 Nd5 Ra7 15 b3 Bb5 when Black regains his sacrificed material and already stands better, H.Matthias-S.Arkipov, Lippstadt 1994.

6 a4!?

A new move, which fails to confuse Giri:

a) With 6 b3 White challenges Black's future fianchetto: 6 ... Bg7 7 Bb2 0-0 8 Bxd7 Qxd7 9 Nf3 e6 with terrific compensation for the pawn, S.Sulskis-A.Shirov, Riga (rapid) 2014.

b) 6 Nf3 is White's main line: 6 ... Bg7 7 Nc3 0-0 8 0-0 Nb6 9 d3 e6 10 dxe6 Bxe6 11 Kh1 Qc7. Black's compensation looks sufficient, with a development lead, potential pressure down the d-file, and the bishop-pair, any time Black wants it, if he plays ... a6, S.Iuldachev-M.Tissir, Abu Dhabi 2004.

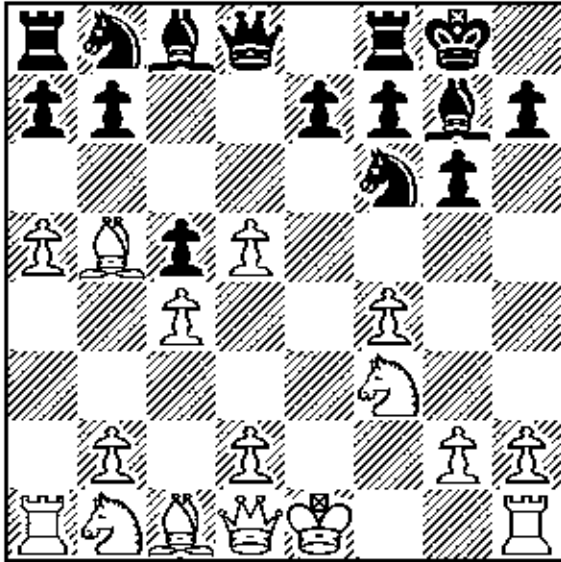
6 ... Bg7

I think Ivanchuk's idea is that on 6 ... a6 7 Bxd7+ Bxd7 8 a5 White blocks all ... b5 ideas. I actually like Black's position here as well, after 8 ... e6 when his bishop-pair and development lead offer loads of compensation for the pawn.

7 a5

Ivanchuk gives his bishop air, but seems to have forgotten about his development.

7 ... 0-0 8 Nf3 Nb8!?



Now a retreat is not something you see very often from a player who earlier offers a gambit pawn. Black's idea regains his lost pawn, since after the coming ... a6, White's bishop must play to a4, allowing ... Qxa5. I think stronger was the simple 8 ... a6 9 Bxd7 (after 9 Ba4 Qxa5 10 Ra3 Qc7 Black regained his pawn, while retaining a development lead) 9 ... Bxd7 10 0-0 e6 11 dxe6 Bxe6 12 d3 Bf5 13 Ra3. Black gets huge compensation for the pawn, with the bishop-pair, development lead and a weak d3-pawn to pick on.

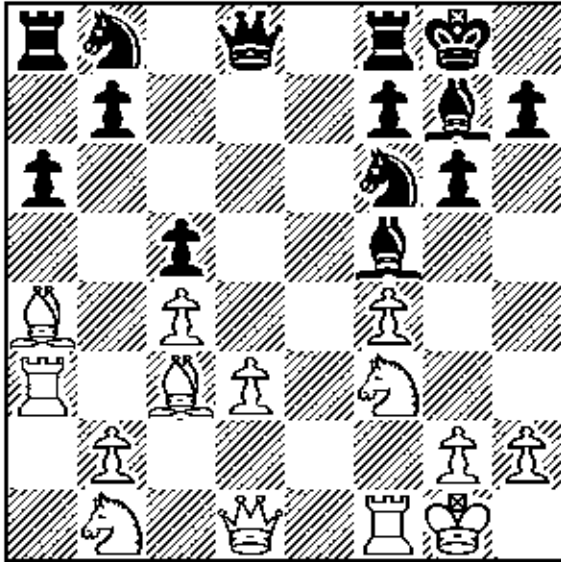
9 d3

After 9 a6 Nxa6 10 Bxa6 bxa6 the doubled a-pawns are more than compensated by the fact that Black may apply pressure down the b-file later on.

9 ... a6 10 Ba4 Qxa5+ 11 Bd2 Qd8

I would play 11 ... Qc7, reserving d8 for a rook.

12 Bc3 e6 13 dxe6 Bxe6 14 0-0 Bf5 15 Ra3!



This move hangs on to d3. Black regained his lost pawn, while White caught up somewhat, but not completely in development. Black still holds a slight edge, due to White's backward d3-pawn.

15 ... Nbd7

15 ... Qxd3? fails to 16 Qxd3 Bxd3 17 Bxf6 Bxf1 18 Bxg7 which attacks the f8-rook, forcing 18 ... Kxg7 19 Kxf1 with a clear advantage for White, who gets two pieces for a rook and pawn.

16 Nbd2?

A move whose intent is clouded in a shroud of secrecy. This was a rapid game, so perhaps it was a simple oversight. On the other hand, ideas, both good and bad, tend to forge from emotions. Ivanchuk may have deliberately sacrificed (with the pretence of carelessness), looking upon d3 with contemptuous eyes of disregard. In any case, he operated on generalities, rather than specifics. The lesson learned here is that material matters, and you don't just give away a free pawn – however weak – to a world top-10 player, and expect to survive. Correct was 16 Nh4 Bg4 17 Nf3 Rb8 18 Bc2.

16 ... Bxd3

When this bishop visits, people put locks on all cabinets and drawers, for obvious reasons.

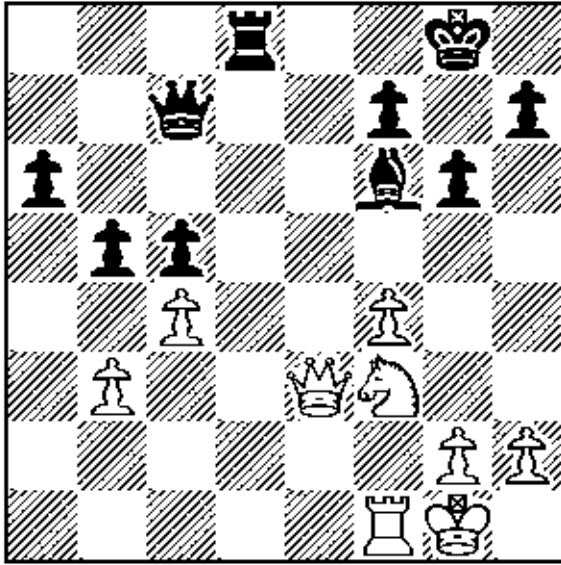
17 Ba5 Qxa5 18 Rxd3 Rad8 19 Bxd7 Rxd7

Interesting is 19 ... Qc7! allowing 20 Bf5 gxf5 when Black's doubled f-pawn prevents Ne4. Black's advantage is larger here than in the game's continuation.

20 Rxd7 Nxd7 21 Ne4 Qc7 22 Qd2

Alternatively, 22 Qd6 Qxd6 23 Nxd6 Rd8! 24 Nxb7 Rb8 25 Nd6 Bxb2 26 Re1 (intending Re7) 26 ... Kf8 27 Ng5 h6 28 Nh7+ Kg8 29 Re7 Bd4+ 30 Kf1 Nb6 31 Rxf7 Nxc4! 32 Nf6+ Bxf6 33 Rxf6 Rb6 and Black's queenside passers will be decisive.

22 ... Nf6 23 Nxf6+ Bxf6 24 b3 Rd8 25 Qe3 b5



Principle: *Try and create a passed pawn on the side of your majority.*

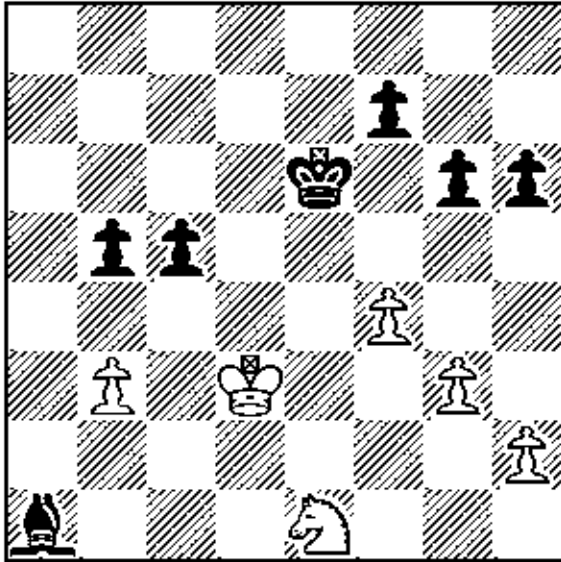
26 Qe4 Qd6 27 g3 Kg7 28 Kg2 Qd3 29 Qxd3 Rxd3 30 cxb5 axb5 31 Rc1 Rc3 32 Rxc3

We all dread that moment when our opponent's move asserts an intolerable claim: that we are busted. Black now wins easily, with an extra pawn and superior minor piece, but if 32 Rb1 Rc2+ 33 Kh3 h5 and White's pieces are hopelessly passive.

32 ... Bxc3 33 Ng5 Bb4 34 Kf1 h6 35 Nf3

35 Ne4 f5 36 Nd6?? (36 Nf2 Bc3 37 Nd3 c4 38 bxc4 bxc4 is also hopeless for White) 36 ... c4! 37 Nxb5 cxb3 and Black promotes.

35 ... Kf6 36 Ke2 Bc3 37 Kd3 Ba1 38 Ne1 Ke6



Question: Why didn't Black's king try and enter via f5?

Answer: White seals the entry with 38 ... Kf5 39 Nc2 Bb2 40 Ne3+ and the knight exerts a repulsive force which keeps Black's king out of the kingside for now.

39 Nc2 Bb2 40 Ne3 h5 41 h3 f5

Principle: *Place your pawns on the opposite colour of your remaining bishop.* Black king and bishop form a mutually beneficial association. They plan ... Bd4, followed by ... Kd5 and ... c4+.

42 Ng2 Bf6

When your opponent is forewarned of your intended threat, then it's not much of a threat. Black halts Nh4.

43 Ne1 Kd5

Now Black adds king position to his other trumps.

44 Nf3 c4+ 45 bxc4+ bxc4+ 46 Ke3 Kc5 47 Kd2 Kd6 48 Ke2 Kc6 49 Kd2 Kc5 0-1

After 50 Kc2 (50 Ke3 c3 51 Kd3 Kb4 52 Kc2 Kc4 53 h4 Bd4 54 Ng5 Bf2 wins) 50 ... Kd5 51 Nd2 c3 Black's king enters via e4.

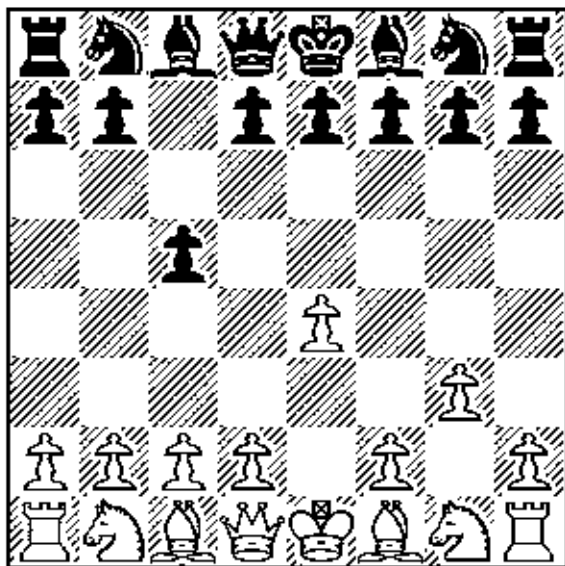
Summary: Our sacrifice is sound after 2 ... d5, so don't be afraid to offer the gambit.

Game 50

N.Short-E.Sveshnikov

Solingen 1992

1 e4 c5 2 g3



Question: Isn't this just going to transpose to either a Closed Sicilian or a King's Indian Attack?

Answer: If we choose to, we can give the position an independent flavour with our next move.

2 ... d5

Black's most challenging response, which steers the game away from both the Closed Sicilian and KIA.

3 exd5

The only move to challenge Black. Others allow easy equality and better:

a) 3 Bg2?! dxe4 4 Bxe4 Nf6 when White loses a clean tempo and can hardly hope for more than the bad end of equality.

b) 3 d3 Nf6 (our simplest path; we can also play 3 ... dxe4 4 dxe4 Qxd1+ 5 Kxd1 Nc6 6 Be3 b6 7 c3 Nf6 8 f3 Bb7 9 Nd2 e6 10 a4 Nd7 11 Kc2 with approximately even chances in the ending, Y.Seirawan-G.Kamsky, Internet (blitz) 2006) 4 Nd2 Nc6 5 Bg2 where we reach our KIA lines after 5 ... e6.

c) 3 Nc3 (this move equalizes) 3 ... dxe4 4 Nxe4 e6 5 Bg2 Be7 6 Nf3 Nf6 7 Nxf6+ Bxf6 8 0-0 0-0 9 d3 Nc6 10 Re1 Qd7 11 Ng5 b6 12 Ne4 Be7 13 Bg5 Bb7 14 h4 f6 15 Bd2 e5 and by now Black's central space already offered him the superior chances, V.Koziak-V.Malakhatko, Alushta 1999.

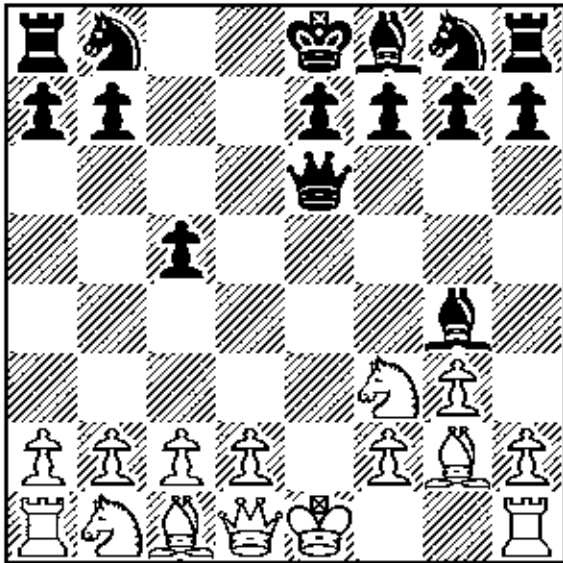
3 ... Qxd5

The fact that Black's queen attacks the h1-rook offers our side a kind of super-Scandinavian.

4 Nf3 Bg4 5 Bg2

It doesn't make much sense to me to play g3, preparing a fianchetto, and then later develop the bishop to e2: 5 Be2 Nc6 6 Nc3 Qd7 7 d3 Nf6. Black stands slightly better than even, since the inclusion of the unnecessary g3 weakens White's kingside light squares, S.Brandner-A.Denk, Austrian League 1990.

5 ... Qe6+!



This move is annoying for White. We dodge our (future Nc3) tempo loss by giving a disruptive check.

6 Kf1

Question: This looks crazy. Now the h1-rook will be out of play for a long time. Why didn't White block with his queen?

Answer: Short's move is the main line. The trouble with 6 Qe2 is that Black stands pleasantly better in the ending after 6 ... Qxe2+ 7 Kxe2 Nc6 8 c3 0-0-0 9 d3 e5. Black owns extra space, while White must nurse the backward d3-pawn, P.Peelen-R.Cifuentes Parada, Groningen 1990.

6 ... Nc6 7 h3 Bh5 8 Nc3

8 d3 Qd7 9 Nc3 transposes.

8 ... Qd7

The queen was misplaced on e6, since it clogged Black's kingside development. After 8 ... Nf6 9 d3 Qd7 10 g4 Bg6 11 Nh4 White gets the bishop-pair and light-square control to offset his own strategic difficulties: 11 ... e6 12 Be3 0-0-0 (or 12 ... Be7 13 Nxc6 hxc6 14 h4 Nd4 15 a4 Rd8 16 Rh3 Kf8 when Black's king mirrors White's; after 17 Kg1 b6 18 Rc1 Kg8 19 b3 I slightly prefer Black's position, since he owns greater

central influence and may initiate queenside play with ... a6 and ... b5 later on, V.Hort-Z.Ribli, Baden-Baden 1992) 13 Nxd5 hxd5 14 g5 Nd5 15 Nxd5 exd5 16 a3 and I like Black's chances. His attack looks more promising and he can occupy f5 later with a piece, M.Nei-K.Kiik, Helsinki 1993.

9 d3 e6 10 a4

After 10 Be3 Nf6 11 g4 don't fear the loss of the bishop-pair, since White must weaken his pawns to get it: 11 ... Bg6 12 d4!? (opening the position is probably a bad idea, with the h1-rook inactive; 12 Nh4 Be7 transposes to the Hort-Ribli note from above) 12 ... cxd4 13 Nxd4 Nb4 14 Qf3 Nfd5 15 Nxd5 Nxd5 16 Bg5 Rc8 17 c3?! (correct was 17 Re1 Be7) 17 ... h6 18 Bh4, B.Certic-G.Timoshenko, Tivat 1995. After 18 ... Bc5 Black stands clearly better, since White suffers from the potential for long-term inactivity of his h1-rook, which grows in importance as the game opens.

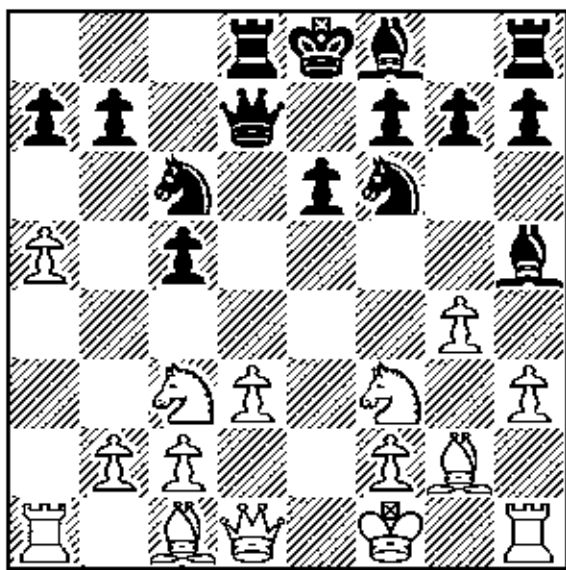
10 ... Nf6 11 a5

Short thinks about loosening the queenside light squares with a6. He once again declines to bag the bishop-pair with 11 g4 Bg6 12 Nh4.

11 ... Rd8

Sveshnikov gets his rook off the h1-a8 diagonal and worries White with potential ... c4 tricks.

12 g4



Theory ends here. Finally, Short goes for the bishop-pair, accepting a loosening of his kingside pawns to get it. Instead, after 12 Be3 Black can play 12 ... h6, preserving his bishop-pair, when he stands at least even.

12 ... Bg6 13 Nh4 Be7 14 Nxd5 hxd5 15 h4!

I think this move is necessary for two reasons:

1. By pushing the h-pawn, White offers possible employment to his h1-rook.

2. By playing h4, White avoids potential problems later on if Black moves his f6-knight, which seizes control over h4 and the kingside dark squares.

15 ... a6

Black knocks out the eternal a6 threat and fixes a5 as a potential target, at the cost of slightly weakening c5.

16 Be3 Qc7

Attacking a5.

17 g5 Nh5!?

The knight is both in-play and out-of-play on h5, depending on your perspective. I like Black's choice better than 17 ... Nd7, which allows White to press forward on the kingside with 18 h5.

18 Bxc6+

Giving away his precious light-squared bishop is a big concession, but Short didn't want to hang a5.

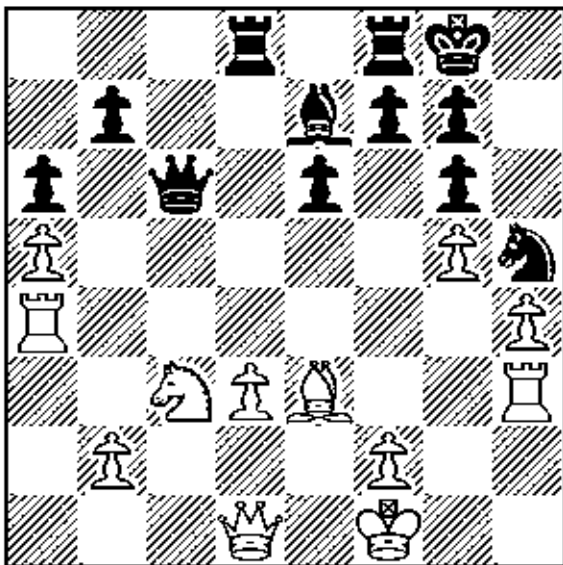
18 ... Qxc6 19 Rh3 c4

A good move, which hands White a new weakness.

20 Ra4!?

Short agrees to a d3 weakness, rejecting the passive 20 d4 0-0 21 Ra4 f5 22 Qe2 Rc8. I prefer Black's game, since I don't see an active plan for White.

20 ... cxd3 21 cxd3 0-0



Advantage Black:

1. Who has a solid and safe pawn structure. Compare this with White's ragged formation, with a d3 isolani and an overall overextended feel to his game.

2. White's king look far less safe than Black's, since the f-file may later open if Black engineers a future ... f6 break.

22 Bb6 Rc8

After 22 ... Rd6 White can't play 23 Ne4? Nf4! 24 Nf6+ (24 Rf3?? Nxd3 25 Nxd6 Nxb2 26 Qe2 Nxa4 wins) 24 ... gxf6 25 Rxf4 fxe5 26 hxe5 Bxe5 27 Rg4 Bf6. I don't think White can make good use of his two open kingside files and Black should consolidate his extra pawn.

23 Qg4 Qd7

I would fight for control over f4, with 23 ... Bd6 24 Rc4 Qd7.

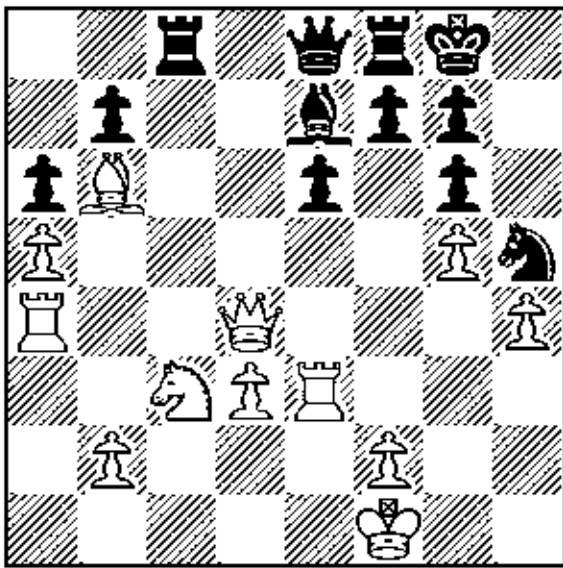
24 Qd4?!

Correct was 24 Rd4.

24 ... Qe8?!

24 ... Bd6! and if 25 Ne4?? (or 25 Rf3 Nf4! when the knight can't be touched due to Black's ... e5 trick, and if 26 Rc4 e5 27 Qe4 Rfe8 with advantage to Black, since White's king is weak and his structure overextended) 25 ... e5! is a decisive discovered attack on the loose h3-rook.

25 Re3



Short coordinates as best he can, but lacks targets in Black's position.

25 ... Rc6

25 ... Bd8 26 Bc5 Be7 27 Bb6 and Black makes no headway.

26 Rc4 Qc8 27 Qe4 Bc5!?

Possibly a waste of time. 27 ... Rxc4 28 dxc4 Bc5 29 Bxc5 (29 Rd3? f5! is difficult for White) 29 ... Qxc5 30 b3 Rb8 31 Qe5 Qxe5 32 Rxe5 Nf4 33 Rc5 Rd8 34 Kg1! and the ending is even.

28 d4 Bd6

Or 28 ... f5 29 Qf3 Bxb6 30 Rxc6 bxc6 31 axb6 Qd7 32 Ne2 Rb8 33 Rb3 a5 with a dynamically balanced game.

29 Rxc6 bxc6 30 Ne2

Now the game is even, since the weakness of c6 offsets White's weaknesses.

30 ... Qd7 31 Rc3 Rc8 32 Kg2 Kh7 33 Kf1 Kg8 34 Qd3 Qb7 35 Qe4 Bb8 36 Rf3 Qd7 37 Bc5 Bc7 38 b4 Re8 39 Nc3 Bb8 40 Qg4 Qc7 41 Ne2 Ba7 42 Rd3 Rd8 43 Qe4 Rd5

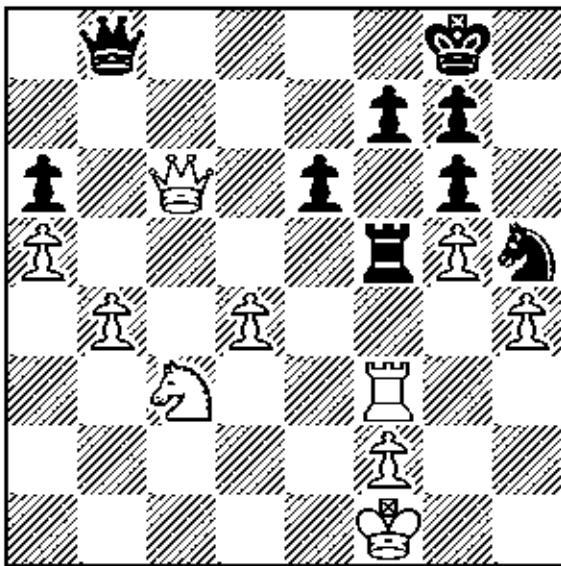
There White's army sits, and there Black's army sits, and nothing happens. The players tuck about, with neither side making headway.

44 Bxa7?!

Short begins to overpress. When one of our key pieces gets swapped away, it's similar to when a novelist removes a crucial character from the narrative, by killing him or her. This exchange favours Black, since White with the White bishop's absence, both b4 and d4 are weakened.

44 ... Qxa7 45 Nc3 Rf5! 46 Qxc6 Qb8! 47 Rf3

After 47 Qxa6 Kh7 48 Qc4 Qh2 49 Nd1 Nf4 50 Ke1 Nxd3+ 51 Qxd3 Qd6 52 b5 Qb4+ 53 Nc3 Qxa5 White won't save the game.



Exercise (critical decision): Black can play 47 ... Rxf3, or keep pieces on with the block 47 ... Nf4. One line gives Black a winning position, while the other leaves him in deep trouble. Which one should he play?

47 ... Nf4?

In such a position, the seeing or not seeing of even a trivial seeming detail, can be of life or death consequences. Sveshnikov exaggerates his attack's viability with a move which, instead, clogs Black's activity.

Answer: Correct was to swap with 47 ... Rxf3! 48 Qxf3 Qxb4 49 d5 Nf4 50 dxe6

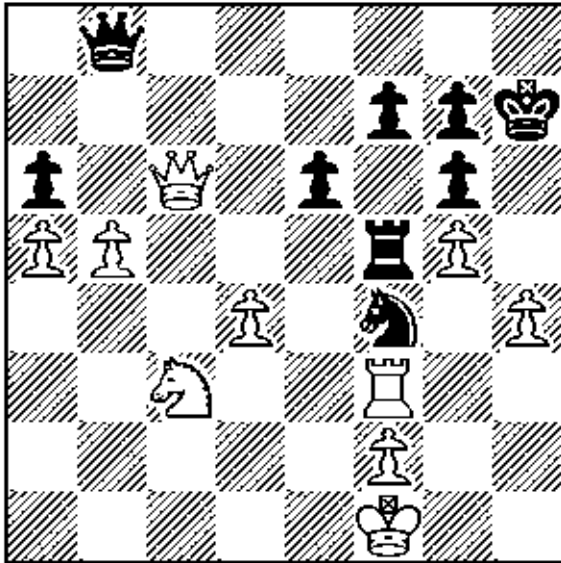
Nxe6 51 Nd5 Qc4+! (51 ... Qxa5? 52 Ne7+ Kf8 53 Nxe6+ Kg8 54 Ne7+ is drawn) 52 Kg1 Qxh4 when White is unlikely to save the game.

48 b5!

Short creates a dangerous passer. Now White is close to winning.

48 ... Kh7?!

Black can still resist with 48 ... axb5 49 a6 Kh7 50 Ne2 Nd5 51 Rxf5 gxf5 52 h5 b4 53 g6+! fxg6 54 hxg6+ Kxg6 55 Qxe6+ Nf6 56 Nc1 Qb5+ 57 Kg1, although White's passed a-pawn offers winning chances.



Exercise (critical decision): Should White play 49 Qxa6 or should he play 49 b6? One line is far stronger than the other.

49 Qxa6?

Even though White's queen is some distance apart from her king, she shares a psychological complicity in his eventual downfall, stemming from her refusal to come to his aid. This allows Black's queen to activate and go after White's king.

Answer: Correct was 49 b6! Rxa5 50 Ke1! Nd5 51 Nxd5 Rxd5 52 Qc7 Qf8 53 Rb3 Rd8 54 b7 Rb8 55 Ke2. The b-pawn exerts a paralyzing influence and White's win is just a matter of time.

49 ... Qc7!

The queen takes note of her sister's vacancy and seizes power. When I cross that invisible point of no return, ironically I am relieved of all concerns, since there are no more difficult choices left to make. Black must either deliver perpetual check or generate a mating attack, otherwise, White's advanced b- and c-pawns will be decisive. Black's position, which previously chafed with a desiccating mood of endless

contraction, now experiences a period of expansion.

50 b6?!

Now the protective envelope around White's king is unsealed. Tempting but incorrect. He should settle for a draw with the line 50 Qc6 Qxa5 51 Qe4 Qa1+ 52 Qe1 Qa8 53 Qe4 Qa1+.

50 ... Qc6

The position's dynamic shifts abruptly. Now Black's queen weaves her way in, through the light squares, threatening f3 on the way.

51 d5

51 Rxf4 merely exchanges one fear for another: 51 ... Rxf4 52 Qd3 Rf5 53 d5 exd5 54 Qd4 (intending a6) 54 ... Rf3 55 Ne2 Rb3 and Black should eventually convert, since White's passers are frozen in place.

51 ... Nxd5 52 Nxd5

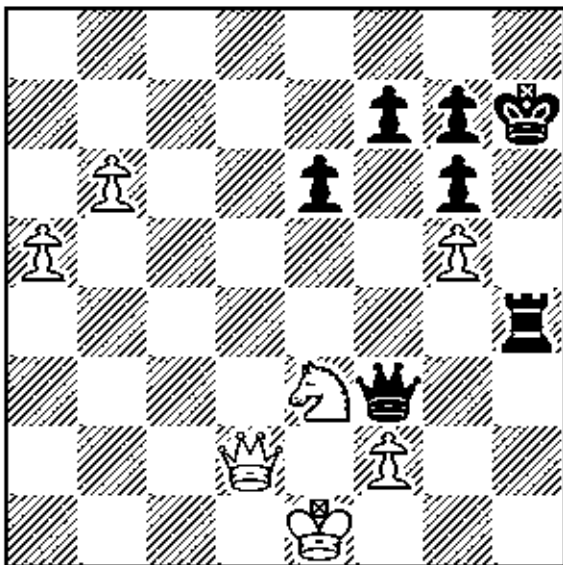
White puts up greater resistance with 52 Rxf5 Nxc3 53 Kg1! gxf5 54 Qd3 Nd5, but Black should still convert this.

52 ... Rxf3 53 Ne3 Rf4 54 Qd3 Qf3 55 Qd2 Rxh4

White's king is caught.

56 Ke1

A grievously wounded soldier may accept his pain, since it is a reminder that he remains alive.



Exercise (combination alert): White operates in a weakened gravity field and his passed pawns are vulnerable. How did Black force the win of White's queenside pawns?

Answer: Step 1: Force the knight to f1.

56 ... Rh1+ 57 Nf1 Qh3

Step 2: Attack the knight twice, forcing White's queen to leave her post. In this case queen and rook issue a joint statement of condemnation towards White's king.

58 Qe2 Qc3+!

Step 3: Double attack, after which White is unable to interpose with his queen, since it walks into a simple tactic.

59 Kd1

59 Qd2?? is met with 59 ... Rxf1+.

59 ... Qxa5

Step 4: Eat a5, after which the b-pawn falls as well.

60 b7

White urges and pleads his b-pawn toward the promotion square, when there is no sense in paying tribute to an ideal in which you no longer believe.

60 ... Qd5+ 0-1

Summary: If White plays the 2 g3 move order, we are better off playing the disruptive 2 ... d5, rather than just allow White to enter normal Closed Sicilian or KIA lines.

Game 51

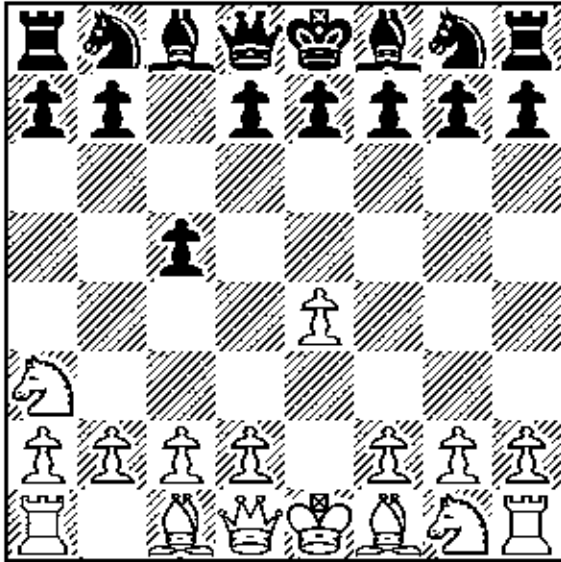
E.Walther-M.Tal

Munich Olympiad 1958

1 e4 c5 2 Ne2

This game we examine a few odd, second move alternatives, including too:

a) 2 Na3. This bizarre move has been used by GM Vadim Zvjaginsev.



Question: What could possibly be White's idea, by placing his knight offside so early?

Answer: A few theories why White plays this move:

1. White can later build for d4 with c3, Nc2 and d4.

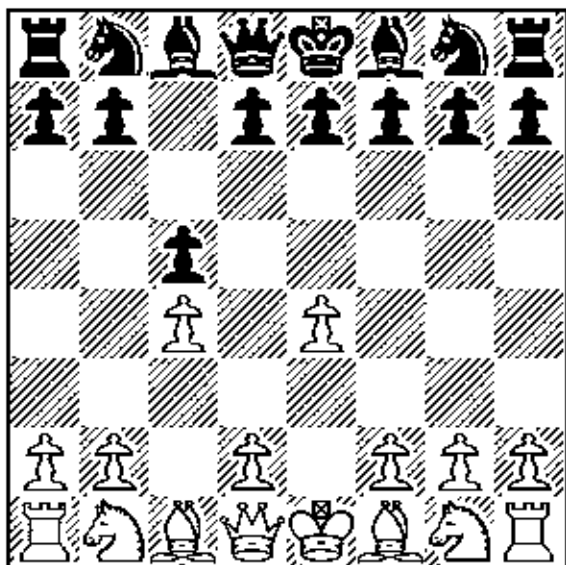
2. If White gets a Rossolimo-style position with Bb5 and Bxc6, he may be able to play his knight to c4 under the proper conditions.

3. I think the main idea behind this move is to outrage Black and provoke us into hasty action! Be careful though, the move, although optically bizarre, isn't nearly as bad as it looks:

a1) 2 ... e6 (as a French player, this would be my natural reaction) 3 c3 d5 4 e5 Nc6 5 Nf3 Bd7 6 g3 a6 7 Nc2 Rc8 8 Bg2 Qc7 9 Qe2 and Black achieved a pleasant Advance French-style position, V.Zvjaginsev-A.Dreev, Moscow 2005.

a2) 2 ... Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 d3 (4 Bxc6 dxc6 5 d3 g6 6 Ne2 Bg7 7 c3?! – castling, with an approximately even position, was a more sensible option – 7 ... b6 8 f3 0-0 9 Be3 Ba6 10 Nc4 when Black owns the bishop-pair and the safety of White's d3-pawn is a concern, I.Graeber-M.Jedrzejowski, correspondence 2007) 4 ... Nd4 5 Nf3 Nxb5 6 Nxb5 a6 7 Nc3 d6 Black, having picked up the bishop-pair, can be happy with the opening's outcome, J.Cano Cabanillas-J.Granda Zuniga, La Roda 2012.

b) 2 c4 is an attempt to trick us out of our normal Sicilian, and lead us into either a Botvinnik English, or Maroczy bind position:



b1) 2 ... e6 3 Nc3 Nc6 4 Nf3 (or 4 f4 Nge7 5 d3 d5 6 Nf3 a6 7 Be2 g6 8 d4!? cxd4 9 Nxd4 dxe4 10 Nxc6 Qxd1+ 11 Bxd1 Nxc6 12 Nxe4 f5 when Black's chances are at least even in the ending, R.Barcelona-H.Nakamura, Internet (blitz) 2010) and now if you want to avoid d4, which enters a line of the Kan, you can try 4 ... Nd4!? 5 g3 Ne7 6 Nxd4 cxd4 7 Ne2 Nc6 and if this position looks familiar to you, it's because we already covered this game earlier in the book, Inarkiev-Mamedyarov, Astrakhan 2010 (see Chapter Three).

b2) 2 ... Nc6 (our most flexible move) 3 Nc3 (3 Nf3 e5 leaves our side slightly better placed, since we can play for a quick ... f5 break, while White's f3-knight blocks his or her f-pawn: 4 Nc3 g6 5 Nd5 Bg7 6 d3 h6 7 Be2 d6 8 Rb1 Nge7 and Black's coming ... f5 offers him at least even chances, J.Kiltti-S.Ivanov, Laukaa 2000) 3 ... e6 (3 ... g6 4 g3 Bg7 5 Bg2 d6 is a Botvinnik English, which you should only enter if you are familiar with its intricacies) 4 g3 Nf6 5 Bg2 Be7 6 Nge2 d6 7 0-0 a6 (V.Shalimov-P.Eljanov, Kharkov 2000) 8 d4 cxd4 9 Nxd4 transposes to a version of the Kan Sicilian where White gets a Maroczy bind. Don't enter this version unless you are familiar with the structure.

c) 2 Bc4 doesn't work out so well for White when Black hasn't yet played ... d6, since our ... e6 and ... d5, or ... a6 and ... b5, gain a future tempo: 2 ... e6 3 Nc3 Nc6 4 Nf3 a6 5 a3 (or 5 a4 Nf6 6 d3 d5 7 exd5 exd5 8 Bb3 Be7 9 0-0 0-0 10 Bg5 Be6 and Black already stands slightly better, due to his enhanced central control, F.Mercado Garcia-R.Felgaer, Toluca 2011) 5 ... b5 6 Ba2 Bb7 7 d3 Nge7 8 Be3 Ng6 9 0-0 Be7 when Black should be happy with the result of the opening, N.Cardi-E.Bacrot, Calvi (rapid) 2013.

Returning to 2 Ne2:

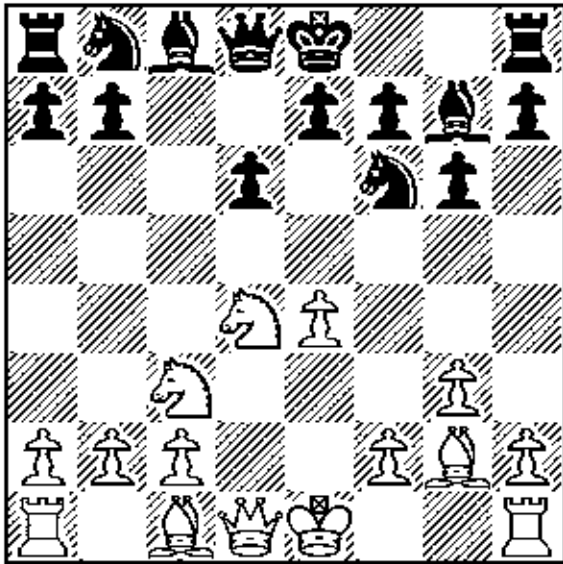
2 ... Nf6

This move reduces White's options to either a Closed Sicilian, KIA, or a harmless line of the Dragon. Or White can also transpose to the mainline Sicilian (... d6 lines) after 3 Nc3 d6 4 d4. Be careful. 2 Ne2 is a sneaky move, which disguises White's intent.

3 d3

More sneaky is 3 Nbc3 d6 4 g3 g6 5 Bg2 Bg7 and then:

a) 6 d4 cxd4 7 Nxd4.

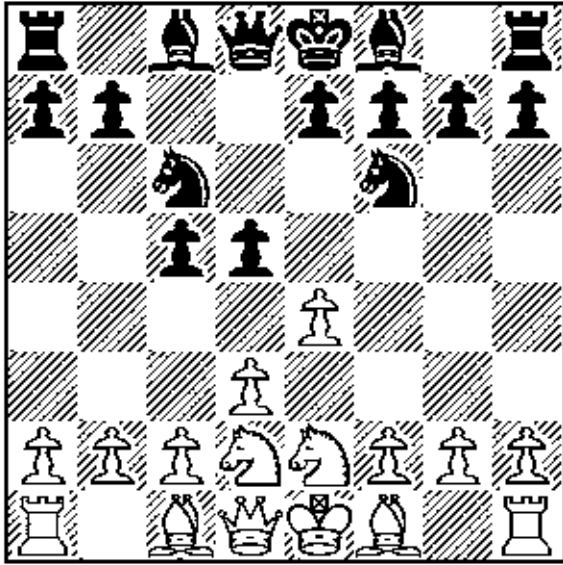


Question: I'm not a Dragon player. So what am I doing here?

Answer: You don't need to play the Dragon to know how to play this version. The fianchetto line is a rather tame version for White and we don't need to know reams of theory to equalize. For example: 7 ... 0-0 8 0-0 Nc6 9 Nde2 Bd7 10 h3 Rc8 11 Rb1 a6 12 g4 b5 13 Ng3 Be6 14 a3 b4 15 axb4 Nxb4 16 f4 Nd7 17 Bd2 Nb6 18 f5 Bd7 19 g5 Nc4. Black's queenside attack looks more promising than White's kingside attacking chances, J.Polgar-V.Gashimov, Moscow (blitz) 2009.

b) 6 0-0 Nc6 7 d3. Now be careful. This isn't the line we looked at in our Closed Sicilian section, in which we avoided an early ... Nf6 in favour of ... Rb8 – but the themes are similar. White gets a slightly inferior version of the ... Nf6 line of the Closed Sicilian, since his g1-knight is on e2, rather than on f3 or h3: 7 ... 0-0 8 h3 Rb8 9 f4 Nd7 10 g4 b5 11 Ng3 b4 12 Nce2 Qb6 (also interesting is 12 ... c4 13 d4 c3!? 14 bxc3 bxc3 when Black will get loads of play for the pawn, with the open queenside lines, if White accepts c3, B.Jobava-R.Wojtaszek, Warsaw (blitz) 2010) 13 Kh2 Ba6 14 Rb1 c4 and Black's queenside play proceeds faster than White's on the other side, J.Barle-V.Mencinger, Ljubljana 2010.

3 ... Nc6 4 Nd2 d5



Now White just gets a rather passive version of a KIA.

5 c3 dxe4?!

This looks premature, There is no reason to allow White's light-squared bishop his freedom, although even here Black looks slightly better, since White's misplaced e2-knight hampers his development. Black does better with either 5 ... e5 with a favourable reversed King's Indian Defence, or 5 ... e6 with a favourable KIA.

Question: Why are both lines favourable for Black?

Answer: Both lines favour Black, since White's knight sits oddly on the more passive e2-square, rather than the traditional f3-square.

6 dxe4 g6 7 Qc2 Bg7 8 a4?!

It's dangerous to tweak some strategic detail when you lag in development. It's doubly dangerous if your opponent is Mikhail Tal. Instead, 8 Ng3 0-0 (8 ... h5 9 h3 h4?! – this move, while disruptive, weakens h4 – 10 Ne2 Qc7 11 Nf3 Bd7 12 Bf4 e5 13 Bg5 is fine for White, who will pick off h4) 9 Be2 Qc7 10 0-0 is about even.

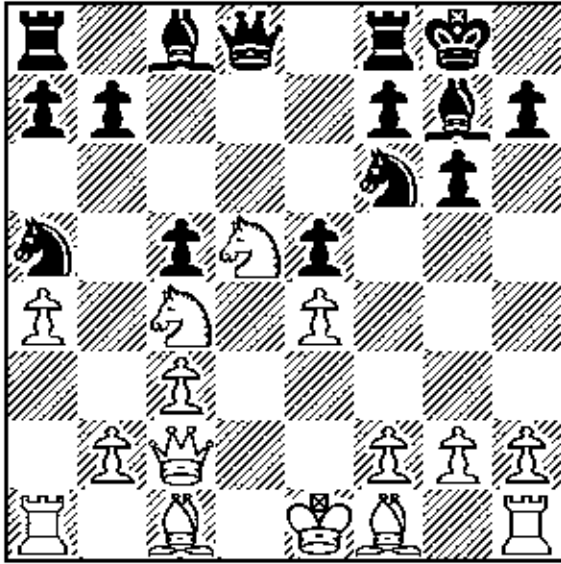
8 ... 0-0 9 Nc4 Na5

Tal immediately challenges White's best piece. 9 ... b6 is the alternative.

10 Nf4

Following 10 Nxa5 Qxa5 11 Nf4 Bd7 12 Be2 Bc6 13 f3 Nd7 14 0-0 (or 14 Nd5?! Bxd5 15 exd5 Nb6 and White will lose his d-pawn) 14 ... Nb6 White's a-pawn is awfully weak.

10 ... e5 11 Nd5



Exercise (combination alert): Black is considerably ahead in development. How did Tal exploit this factor?

Answer: Undermining.

11 ... Nxe4!

At this point, White's game sags as unpleasantly as an overfed toddler's diaper, now filled to capacity. Now Tal swims in his element. Players who rely on logic (i.e. your unfortunate, complications-challenged writer) are considerably weakened in such chaotic positions, since they are deprived of points of strategic reference. White survives after 11 ... Nxd5 12 exd5 Bf5 13 Qd1.

12 Qxe4?

Walther, like the great majority of Tal's opponents, gets boggled by the rapidly increasing complications. Correct was to just give up a pawn with 12 Nxa5 Qxd5 13 Bc4 Qd8 14 Qxe4 Qxa5 15 0-0 Qc7.

12 ... Nb3! 13 Ra3

Alternatively:

a) 13 Nce3 Nxa1 14 Bc4 Kh8 15 Qb1 f5 16 Qxa1 f4, and if 17 Nc2? Bf5 18 Na3 Be4! 19 Qa2 Bxg2 20 Rg1 Be4. White's pieces are in an awful tangle and he won't survive.

b) 13 Rb1?? fails miserably to 13 ... Bf5. Oh, that rapturous feeling when our opponent walks into our low-brow trap.

13 ... Bf5 14 Qe3

White's queen bridles at the black bishop's unseemly suggestion.

14 ... Nxc1 15 Qxc5

15 Qxc1 Qxd5 16 Ne3 Qe4 leaves Black a pawn up, with the bishop-pair and development lead, with a winning position.

15 ... Re8! 16 Qe3 Bf8

Stronger is 16 ... Nd3+! 17 Bxd3 Qxd5 with a double attack on d3 and g2, which is hopeless for White.

17 Nb4 a5! 18 Nxa5

He was better off with 18 Qxc1 axb4 19 Ra1 Rc8 20 Ne3 bxc3 21 bxc3 Qa5 22 Nc4 Qd5 23 Ne3 Qe4 which is admittedly also lost for White.

18 ... Qxa5 19 Qxc1 Bxb4

Stronger was 19 ... Rec8! 20 Nc2 Bxc2 21 Qxc2 Bxa3 and White can resign.

20 cxb4 Qxb4+ 21 Rc3 Qe4+

Tal wants to keep White's king in the middle. Also winning is 21 ... Rxa4 22 Be2 Ra2 23 0-0 Qxb2 with two extra pawns and an easy win.

22 Be2

22 Re3 Rac8 23 Qa1 Qb4+ 24 Rc3 Rxc3 25 bxc3 Qe4+ 26 Be2 Qxg2 and White can resign.

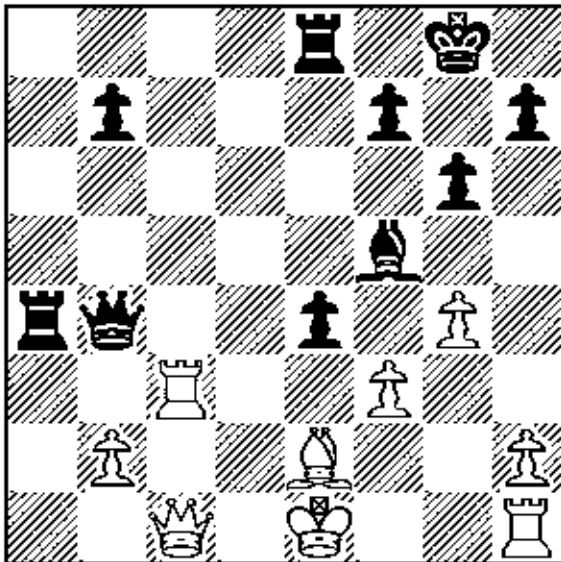
22 ... Rxa4!

22 ... Qxg2?? 23 Bf3 Qh3 24 Bxb7 allows White right back into the game.

23 f3 Qb4 24 g4

A weakening move is not the right prescription for an already wobbly position. White puts up better resistance with 24 Bd1.

24 ... e4!



Principle: *Create confrontation and open the position when leading in development.*

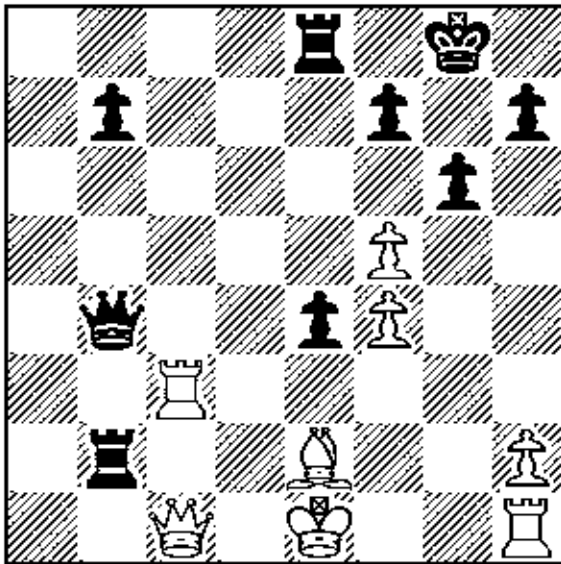
25 f4

25 gxf5?? exf3 is crushing.

25 ... Ra2?

Tal attempts to sell stolen goods to an undercover police officer. This is the problem with having too much talent: Sometimes genius imputes a combination when one doesn't actually exist. Psychologically it isn't an easy thing to volunteer a risk when your position is full of prosperity – unless you are Tal. I suppose the lure of checkmating White's king reached out to Tal, like a lover's caress, and he just couldn't resist. The unimaginative – but stronger! – continuation 25 ... Bd7 26 0-0 Ra2 wins easily.

26 gxf5 Rxb2



Exercise (critical decision): White's fate dangles precariously upon his next move. Should he play 27 Kf2, or should he return the piece and castle?

27 0-0??

The king, once determined to die with a defiant curse on his lips, now whimpers for mercy. Returning the piece is akin to resigning. Some of Tal's critics claimed that he was lucky, more than strong, since his opponents invariably committed inexplicable, monstrous blunders against him on a routine basis. The reason, of course, is that Tal pressed each opponent and forced calculation upon them, until they cracked from sheer nerves or fatigue.

Answer: White still has chances to survive 27 Kf2! e3+ 28 Rxe3! Qxf4+ 29 Ke1!. Abruptly, Black's win is in question and the comps rate the position at even. This is the move Walther (and Tal!) probably missed. A con artist may sometimes take on the guise of an innocent person, of diminished mental capacity. Remember this when you set up a

trap. The mark (our opponent!) must believe *he* is the con artist.

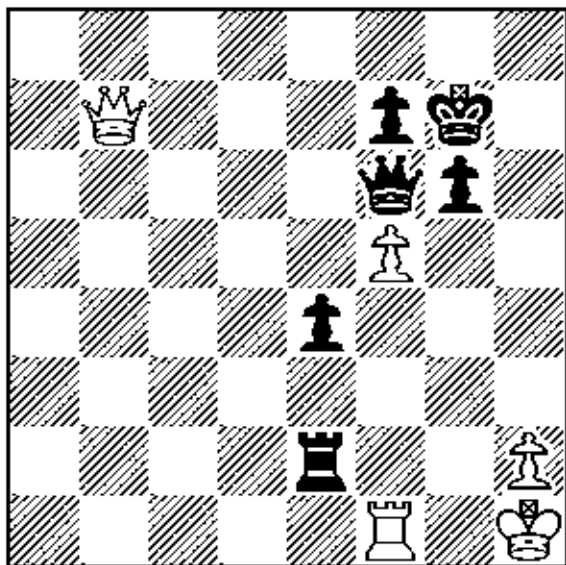
27 ... Rxe2

Bolshoe spasibo! – thanks very much!

28 Rc8 Qb6+

More accurate is 28 ... Qd4+ 29 Kh1 Rxc8 30 Qxc8+ Kg7.

29 Kh1 Rxc8 30 Qxc8+ Kg7 31 fxg6 hxg6 32 f5 Qf6 33 Qxb7



Exercise (combination alert): White just blundered in a hopeless position, and his youthful king finds death before decrepitude. How did Tal exact harsh retribution, forcing mate?

Answer: Threaten h2, while cutting off a Qc7 or Qb8 defence.

33 ... Qe5 0-1

"If your fate is to die, then why must you be so noisy about it?" asks the queen. Also mating is 33 ... Qd6.

Summary: Obviously, none of these offbeat second move alternatives for White are designed to leave us quaking in fear. The only danger is that we won't be ready for them, so let's not get surprised over the board.

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