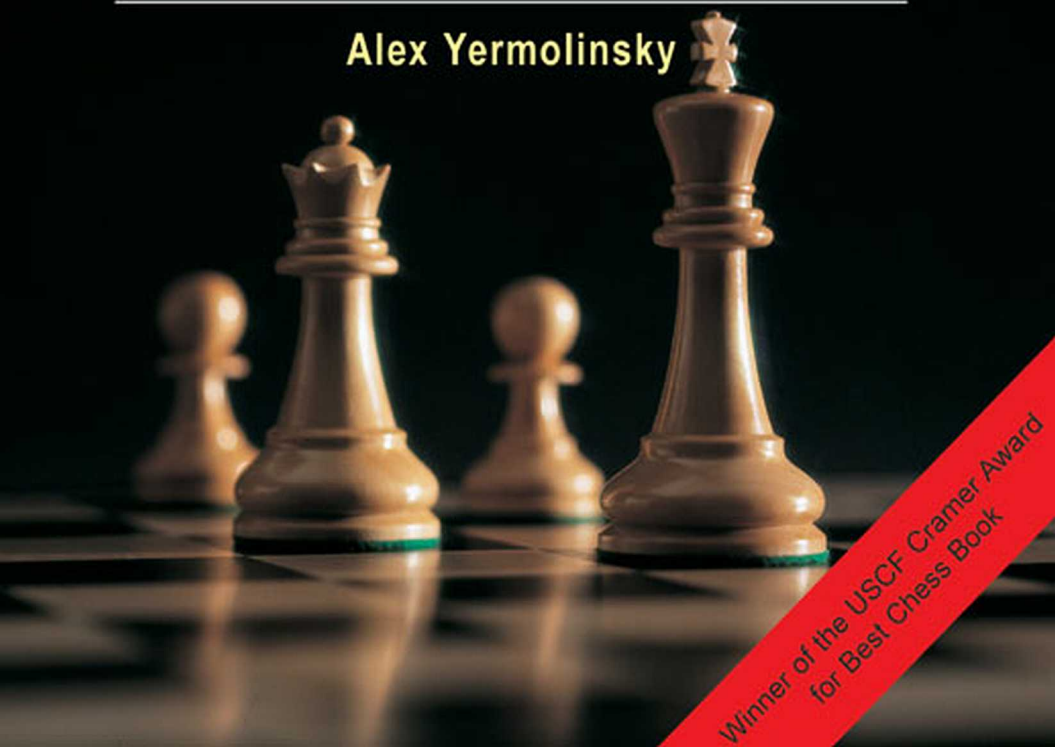
GAMBIT

THE ROAD TO CHESS IMPROVEMENT

A US Champion provides solutions to real-life chess problems

Alex Yermolinsky



Winner of the USCF Cramer Award for Best Chess Book

Contents

+	check
++	double check
#	checkmate
!!	brilliant move
!	good move
!?	interesting move
?!	dubious move
?	bad move
??	blunder
+–	White is winning
±	White is much better
⩲	White is slightly better
=	equal position
⩱	Black is slightly better
∓	Black is much better
–+	Black is winning
Ch	championship
G/60	time limit of 60 minutes for the whole game
1-0	the game ends in a win for White
½-½	the game ends in a draw
0-1	the game ends in a win for Black
(D)	see next diagram

The book you are about to read is essentially a collection of Alex Yermolinsky's games and analyses I've made in the course of my everyday work that began a long time ago.

Having started to attend a junior chess club at the age of 8, I was marked as a promising kid, but hardly a prodigy – I think in the early stages of my career my results didn't match the time and effort put in – and I constantly let other kids surpass me. They would quickly jump through the grades up to Category One level, while I was taking a year or more for every step. It was the most frustrating thing at the time, but it may have also been a blessing in disguise. I got to play a lot of games against worthy opposition, quite a few tournaments in every Category, until I was absolutely ready to move on. And having moved up a step, I would already be good enough to compete at the new level, or, at least, avoid being blown away. This kind of slow rise, even if it's highly atypical for a future grandmaster, has its merits. If anything, it did a good job preparing me for future disappointments and frustrations that essentially make up a lifelong chess career.

The Soviet School of Chess was strong in numbers. There were many talented kids in our chess club, much more in the whole country, but only a handful of us made it to become grandmasters. Why and what is a decisive criteria for a future success – I don't know. Speaking for myself, I think I made my first step on that long road in 1972, when I turned 14. I don't remember who it was, and how he/she managed to convince me – or maybe I simply picked it up from Alekhine's autobiography, the only chess book I had at that time – but one day I began to collect my games. Today, with the help of PC, it is something that every chess beginner does, simply out of a desire to see a 'MyGames' database next to 'KaspWhite' or 'KarpEnd'. Don't be ashamed, there's nothing wrong with treating yourself as a chess-player. In fact, it's a good start, and I'll be talking about its benefits throughout this book.

Anyway, I just wanted to make the point that it was no easy feat back then, when scoresheets had no carbon copies and were often substituted by a piece of scrap paper. To my genuine surprise – I think my mother was impressed too – this new job took off quite easily, and soon I started getting a huge kick out of meticulously entering moves into a thick workbook, along with results, crosstables and statistics. Looking back, I realize now that the benefits were almost instant. I began to obtain:

a) a real sense of purpose in my chess career as I could set my goals short- and long-term;

b) a feeling if I was doing things right or wrong, depending on ups and downs of my tournament results;

c) some necessary work habits that are essential for every chess-player, namely the ability to sit down and concentrate – even for a small task, such copying your own games.

The quality of my analysis was lagging behind. Soon I made a habit of entering, along with the game score, some of the variations I calculated during the game, including the stuff me and my opponent looked into during the post-mortem, but I hardly did any serious work after the game to verify their soundness. Mostly, my notes remained on a level of one-move suggestions and game and move annotations, coded with '*Informator*' signs. That's where most people stop, as the desire to see your games appearing on the computer screen eventually gets saturated, and there's no incentive to put any additional work into something that will not look an ounce better no matter what you do. I felt the same way for a long time. The games were there, I also had nice statistical tables rounding up every year, and that was it. I needed to take the next step and deepen my analysis.

The real purpose of my work had slowly begun to come out, as I noticed that with time my game entries would take more and more space on the pages of my workbooks.

Still, my game comments had remained on a level of personal notes, never rising to the level of a professionally annotated game, even if I was getting some experience with that kind of work. Having served as Irina Levitina's second during her fantastic run in the Women's Championship Cycle of 1982-4, I later wrote a few articles about her matches against Nona Gaprindashvili, Nana Alexandria and Lidiya Semionova for a Russian-language magazine *Shakhmaty* that was published in Latvia. The articles were a success, proving that I was getting some knack of annotating chess games, but I could not convince myself that such work should be done with every game I played.

Not until 1986. At that time I was already an established player somewhere between strong IM and weak GM strength, even if I held no international title. I could cite the lack of opportunities afforded to me by the Soviet State, but, honestly, I am not sure I deserved many of those. Year after year, I went through the same mesh system of qualification tournaments, only to prove once again that I was good enough to reach the First League of the USSR Championship, but not good enough to get to the Premier League. Seven years, man, it was going on for seven years, and back to Square One every spring! Well, the competition was stiff, with many talented players bashing heads with each other, and some real talents breaking through every once in a while. I felt like I was back in my junior years, when in every tournament there would be somebody else, not me, taking that next step. I think I could easily have quit chess, but to my surprise I never did.

The problem I had to acknowledge was the stagnation of my development. I was simply going nowhere. It's not that I lacked experience – I was 28 years old then, and I had been playing chess for some 20 years up to that point – it was rather a sad realization that my game was not improving. In search for inspiration I decided to follow the most common advice one can find in the works of Alekhine (my most favourite player) and Botvinnik (one of the least favourite ones), which can be put into simple words – **study your games.** Ever since, every game I played has been extensively annotated.

Care to take a peek? Be my guest.

A Sneak Preview into what this book is really about

I admit to it, every once in a while I play a game that really leaves me confused. It's like, I can't believe I blew such a great position! For somebody who takes his chess very seriously this could be a very disappointing experience leading to sleepless nights, a general feeling of disgust and a loss of confidence.

On the other hand, I realize that those games could become a valuable learning material. It is no secret that we, chess-players, get very happy when we win, so happy that we tend to:

a) downplay the problems our opponents might have presented us with sturdier resistance;

b) skip all unclear lines while annotating the game or showing it to friends; and overall,

c) lose our sense of objectivity.

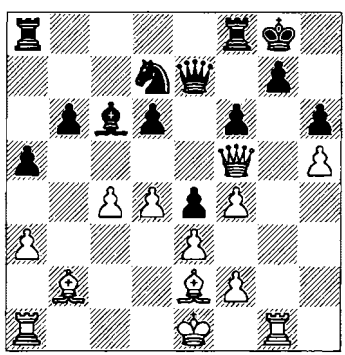
Won games are meant for bragging, lost games are meant for studying. As much as I hate to do it sometimes, I study all my games, including the lost ones, study to find out what really happened. If anything, it might help me to avoid making the same mistakes in the future.

How can an advantage slip away? How can a good position turn into a bad one? In many ways. One is the easiest and most frequent: a blunder. Blunders are good (bad) enough to spoil any position. Many things could be said about blunders and what causes them, as I have certainly had my share of those, but, you know what, there are slower and more painful ways we throw away the fruits of our work. These are also much more difficult to detect, because it takes more courage to admit your shortcomings in certain areas of chess skill, rather than simply write it off as infrequent lapses of concentration that blunders in fact are. So, you're tired of kidding yourself and want to take the next step? Very well, but beware, once you analyse your games in detail, you may not like what you see.

Indecisiveness is Evil

The following game is an example of one of the worst sins. My position was so great that I could not choose between many attractive options, wasted time and practically invited my opponent back to the game. Ultimately, it was decided by a blunder, but a careful and honest analysis proves that in this particular case it was no accident, and the blunder was set up by the entire course the game took in the previous 20 or so moves.

W



Yermolinsky – Braude
New York Open 1992

After only twenty moves Black's position looks pretty miserable: a collection of weak pawns, passive pieces, suspicious-looking king, and no counterplay to speak of. White, in turn, has the bishop-pair, open files for his rooks, an active queen, and possibilities to play on both wings.

21 a4!

Taking away the retreat square from his bishop (21 d5? ♗a4) and preparing to hit d6.

21...♔h8

If 21...♖fe8 then 22 ♔d2 ♔h8 (there's no time to harass the white queen: 22...♘f8 23 d5 ♗d7 24 ♕xf6) 23 ♖g3, and the g7-pawn will need some fast rescue after 24 ♖ag1.

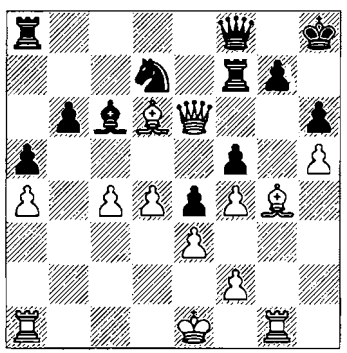
After the text-move, however, I realized that the direct assault on the g-file might not work, because the e8-rook is ready to protect and serve: 22 ♔d2 ♖f7 or 22 ♗d1 ♖fe8. In both cases Black will move his knight to f8, often threatening my queen with ...♗d7. I began to consider other plans, particularly the ones including a queen swap.

22 ♗g4 ♖f7 23 ♕e6 ♕f8!?

At least this leaves some practical chances; after 23...♘f8 24 ♕xe7 ♖xe7 25 ♗a3 ♖d8 26 ♖b1 ♖b7 the move 27 ♗f5 hits e4, thus eliminating the threat to the a-pawn. Black then would be tied up and practically helpless against the simple plan of doubling the white rooks on the b-file.

24 ♗a3 f5 25 ♗xd6 *(D)*

B



23...♕g8

Correctly avoiding both 25...♖f6 26 ♗xf8 ♖xe6 27 ♗xg7+ ♔xg7 28 ♗xf5+ ♔f6 29 ♗xe6 ♔xe6 30 d5+ and 25...♖e8 26 ♗xf8 ♖xe6 27 ♗xf5, which branches out to:

a) 27...♖xf5 28 ♗xg7+ ♔h7 29 d5 ♗xd5 30 cxd5 ♖xd5 31 ♖d1 ♖xd1+ 32 ♔xd1 ♘c5 33 ♗d4 ♖e7 34 ♗xc5! bxc5 35 ♖g6 ♖b7 36 ♖a6, picking up pawns at will.

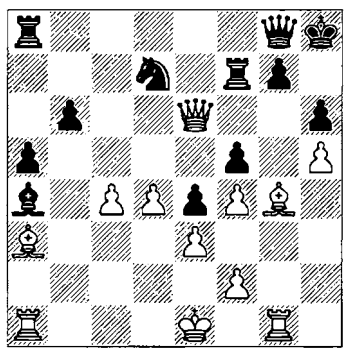
b) 27...♖ef6! 28 ♗xd7 ♗xd7 29 ♗a3 ♗xa4 is more challenging, but White has 30 ♗e7! ♖xe7 31 ♖xa4 ♖f5 32 ♖g6 ♖b7 33 ♖e6 with a much better rook ending.

These are the variations I calculated during the game, and I genuinely hoped to see one of them actually played; my opponent's stubbornness began to annoy me.

26 ♗a3 ♗xa4 *(D)*

The option 26...fxg4 27 ♕xc6 ♖c8 28 ♕xe4 ♖xc4 29 ♕e6 is unsatisfactory, as 29...♖xa4? loses to 30 ♕c6.

W



27 ♗e2?

A turning point. I rejected the correct move on superficial grounds, thinking that things might become unclear after an exchange sacrifice. A concrete analysis proves me totally wrong. 27 ♗xf5! beats both:

a) 27...♖xf5 28 ♕xf5 ♕xc4 29 ♖c1 ♕b3 (the line 29...♕d3 30 ♕f7 ♖g8 31 ♖xg7! ♖xg7 32 ♖c8+ ♔h7 33 ♕f5+ shows what happens if Black decides to hang on to the e4-pawn) 30 ♕xe4 ♖g8 31 ♗d6 ♘f6 32 ♕b1 ♕d5 33 ♗e5 – Black's initiative has fizzled out.

b) 27...♖e8 28 ♕g6 ♖xf5 (there is no point in trying 28...♘f6, as White quickly wins after 29 d5, followed by ♗f5-e6; 28...♖f6 29 ♕g4 doesn't change anything) 29 ♕xf5 ♕xc4 30 ♖xg7! (this shot quickly finishes the game) 30...♕c3+ 31 ♔f1 ♕xa1+ 32 ♔g2 ♔xg7 33 ♕g6+ ♔h8 34 ♕xe8+ ♔g7 35 ♕g6+ ♔h8 36 ♕xh6+ ♔g8 37 ♕g6+ ♔h8 38 h6.

The text-move does cement White's advantage, just as I thought, but this advantage is no longer decisive. A long fight lies ahead, and I

had already passed up a forced win in favour of satisfying the false sense of security that overcame me after I won the d6-pawn.

27...♖e8 28 ♕g6 ♖f6 29 ♕g3 ♗c2?

29...♗b3 right away would have been better; White can continue with 30 d5 ♖f7 31 ♗b2 ♘f8 32 ♗d4.

30 ♗b2 ♖f7 31 d5 ♘f8

This looks horribly passive, but 31...♘f6 allows 32 ♕g6.

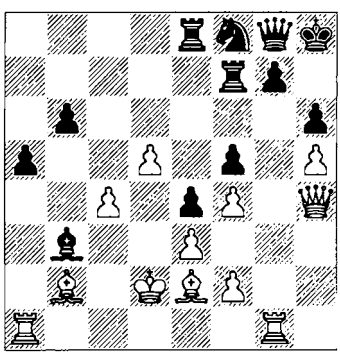
32 ♔d2?

32 ♗d4 should suffice to keep White on top. The text-move only speeds up Black's sole counterplay (...b5) and exposes the king to all kinds of dangers.

32...♗b3 33 ♕h4?! *(D)*

Another critical juncture. Feeling annoyed by the unexpected difficulties, e.g. 33 ♗d4 ♖c8 34 ♖gc1 ♖b7, followed by ...a4 and ...b5, White decides to finish the game with a mating attack regardless of the obvious strategic risk involved as the rooks go to the kingside.

B



33...♔h7!

Parrying two threats at once. I counted on:

a) 33...a4 34 ♖xg7! ♖xg7 35 ♖g1 a3 (if Black plays 35...♖e7, then 36 ♕xe7) 36 ♗xg7+ ♕xg7 (36...♔h7 37 ♕f6) 37 ♖xg7 ♔xg7 38 ♔c3 ♖a8 39 ♕h1 a2 40 ♕a1.

b) 33...♖c8 34 ♖g6! ♗xc4 (34...♘xg6 35 hxg6, and 36 ♕xh6+ cannot be stopped) 35 ♖xh6+ ♘h7 36 ♖xb6, with the decisive 37 h6 to follow.

34 ♖g3

As much as I hated to slow down, 34 ♖g6 would lead nowhere: 34...♘xg6 35 hxg6+ ♔xg6 36 ♖g1+ ♔h7 37 ♗h5 (37 ♕h5 ♕f8) 37...g6 38 ♗d1? (beginning a faulty combination, but what else? 38 ♗xg6+ ♕xg6 and Black is perfectly fine) 38...♗xd1 39 ♕xh6+? ♔xh6 40 ♖h1+ ♗h5.

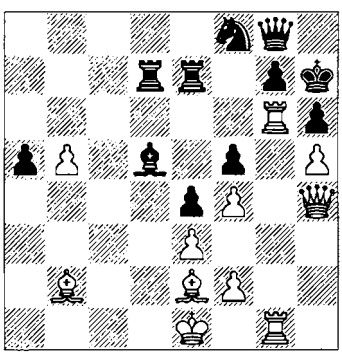
34...♖ee7 35 ♖ag1 ♖d7

Black has managed to defend and is ready to play 36...b5. At that point the reality began to set in; I could only regret missing the chance to finish him off earlier (27 ♗xf5!). In the meantime things were to get worse in time-trouble.

36 ♔e1 b5! 37 cxb5 ♗xd5 38 ♖g6 ♖fe7! *(D)*

Faced with a tough defensive task, Mikhail Braude demonstrates extraordinary alertness and great presence of mind. All his moves were measured defences, such as this one that refuses to fall for 38...♘e6 39 ♖xh6+!! gxh6 (or 39...♔xh6 40 ♖g6+ ♔h7 41 h6 ♕d8 42 hxg7+ ♕xh4 43 g8♕#) 40 ♖xg8 ♔xg8 41 ♕g3+ ♘g7 42 ♕g6.

W

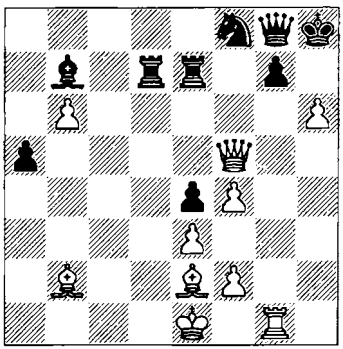


39 ♕h3

White fails to follow through. I had to play 39 b6 simply because this move just has to be right – passed pawns are meant to be pushed forward. Then Black must avoid all the pitfalls: 39...a4 40 ♗b5; 39...♗c4 40 ♗xc4 ♕xc4 41 ♕xe7! ♖xe7 42 ♖xg7+; or 39...♘e6 40 ♖xh6+! ♔xh6 41 ♖g6+ ♔h7 42 h6 – all lose on the spot. If he plays the best move again – the inspired Mikhail Braude would probably do just

that – White would finally get a chance to execute his main combinational idea. Watch this: 39...♗b7 40 ♖xh6+! ♔xh6 (40...gxh6 41 ♖xg8 ♔xg8 42 ♗c4+ ♔h7 43 ♕f6 is curtains) 41 ♕g5+ ♔h7 42 ♕xf5+ ♔h8 43 h6 *(D)* with a powerful attack.

B



Black has no defence:

a) 43...♕d5 44 hxg7+ ♖xg7 45 ♕xf8+ ♕g8 46 ♖h1#.

b) 43...♗c8 44 hxg7+ ♖xg7 45 ♖xg7 ♖xg7 46 ♕xc8.

c) 43...♗d5 44 hxg7+ ♖xg7 45 ♖h1+ ♘h7 46 ♕xd7.

d) 43...♗c6 (best) 44 hxg7+ ♖xg7 45 ♖h1+ ♘h7 46 ♗c4 ♖d5 (46...♗d5 47 ♕xd7 ♗xc4 48 ♖g1) 47 ♗xd5 ♗xd5 48 ♖xh7+ ♕xh7 49 ♕xd5 ♕h1+ 50 ♔d2 ♕f1 51 ♕d4.

The text-move is yet another hesitation. The queen really looks stupid on h3.

39...♗e6 40 b6 ♖b7 41 ♖xe6??

Suddenly, now that the time-control has been passed, White lashes out with a crazy shot, simply missing the obvious refutation.

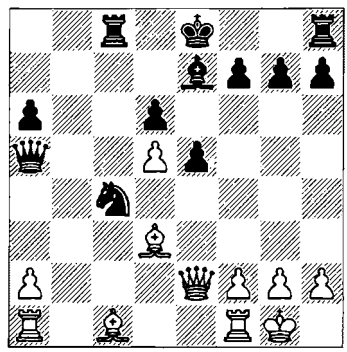
41...♕xe6

With no compensation for the exchange, White lost after a few meaningless moves.

It is amazing how much calculating White had to endure (and that ultimately took its toll) to create a second wave of attack only because of the lazy move 27 ♗e2. Failure to calculate (and to go for it!) a seemingly risky line in a better position could be attributed to the fear of blundering. The problem is that the 'safer' move may lead to even greater danger due to increasing complications in the later play. Problems tend to snowball, multiplied by your perception; it seems like all 'dark forces' of chess rise against you to punish the coward.

Here are two more quick examples to support this hypothesis.

B



Yermolinsky – Manion
Chicago 1995

Black had already won a pawn and could pick off another by 18...♕xd5. The storm he would have to weather would soon pass by: 19 ♕g4 0-0 20 ♗h6 ♗f6 21 ♕f5 ♖fd8 22 ♕xh7+ ♔f8. The king is safe, and the threat of ...♔e7, ...♖h8 gives Black the edge.

My young opponent, however, decided to avoid any danger by defending the c8-rook in advance.

18...♕c5? 19 ♗h6!!

The bishop that looked completely bottled up suddenly jumps into action, while clearing the way for a rook.

19...♕xd5

Too little too late... He didn't like the look of 19...gxh6 20 ♖ac1, where neither 20...0-0? 21 ♖xc4 ♕xd5 22 ♖xc8 ♖xc8 23 ♕g4+, nor 20...♕xd5 21 ♗xc4 ♕a8 22 ♗d5 ♕b8 23 ♕xa6 ♖xc1 24 ♖xc1 seemed particularly pleasant, especially when compared with what Black had just a move ago.

20 ♕g4!

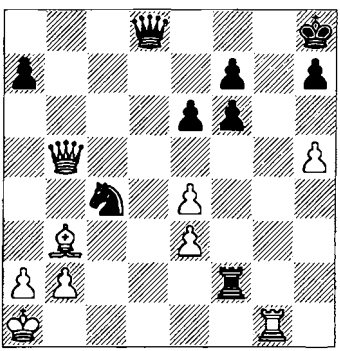
The queen, not the bishop, will be much more useful on g7.

20...♖c5 21 ♕xg7 ♕xd3 22 ♕xh8+ ♔d7 23 ♖ab1

Suddenly Black is the exchange down and almost lost. The only chance to continue the fight was 23...♖b5, but Josh was visibly shaken up.

23...♖c7? 24 ♖b8 ♕g6 25 ♕e8+ ♔e6 26 ♖c8 ♖d7 27 ♖xc4 ♕xh6 28 ♕c8 ♕f8 29 ♕xa6 1-0

B



Yermolinsky – *WChess*
G/25, Harvard Cup Computer Challenge, Boston 1994

The position after the normal 27...♘e5 is unclear, but what's normal for a human player may not be normal for a computer – and vice versa!

27...♘xb2?!

I wouldn't have believed my eyes at this move, if I hadn't known how computers play. The knight is not coming back of course, as ...♘d3 will always be met by ♖d1. The real question is how to punish Black for such a liberty. I saw the strong response 28 ♖c1!, threatening 29 ♗c2. I knew that would net White an exchange – not a bad deal by any means – but decided (once again, superficially!) to seal the fate of the black king first.

28 h6?

This looks deadly, but the machine finds an amazing rejoinder.

28...♕c8!!

This stops 29 ♖c1, but only for a moment, right?

29 ♔b1 a6!

Throwing the white queen off balance. Now the knight will get back from the suicide mission.

30 ♕b6?

The only way was 30 ♕b4 ♘d3 31 ♕e7, setting up 31...♘e5? 32 ♖d1. Amazingly, it seems to me that White can still come away with a draw – Black's best is 31...♖b2+ 32 ♔a1 ♖f2 33 ♔b1, etc. – despite his own king being wide open. Now it's all over in a hurry.

30...♘d3 31 ♕d4

31 ♖d1 (intended) 31...♖d2! (rats!).

31...♘e5 32 ♖d1 ♖g2 33 ♕b6 ♖g8 34 ♕d6 ♕a8 35 ♕d4 ♕f8 36 ♖h1 ♖g6 37 ♕b6 ♘f3 38 ♕xa6 ♘d2+ 39 ♔a1 ♕c5 40 ♕d3 ♘xb3+ 41 axb3 ♕a5+ 42 ♔b1 ♖g2 0-1

The above games clearly demonstrate how quickly things can turn sour. A failure to produce the best moves in a winning position is bad enough in a chess sense, as you may not be given a second chance to put him away, but it's the **psychological impact** that delivers a crushing blow.

Often, I'd find myself coming back to the critical position (mentally), even while the game was still in progress – a very human trait – over and over again. As soon as I realize that it could have been over a long time ago, the sense of self-disgust begins to interfere with my thinking process. Instead of working on solving the current problems, I tend to keep kicking myself hard for creating that mess in the first place. Even if that phenomenon can certainly be attributed to the lack of self-discipline – another area that might use some work – I'd much prefer not to deal with that problem too often. It's quite difficult to continue playing up to your potential when you are in a bad mood. Indeed, feeling bad about yourself during a chess game is a certain path to defeat.

After many bitter experiences from the past, I now find it very helpful to be aware of my emotional state and the changes it undergoes in

the course of a battle, even if sometimes there's nothing I can do about it.

Ruled By Emotions

Chess-players are often presented with a problem: how to choose between several moves that seem equally attractive (or unattractive, depending on the situation). Certain moves we make automatically, because they are forced; certain positions we play in the 'cruise control mode', because they are trivial; but every so often our database of knowledge along with our computing ability is not enough to provide us with a clear answer. Chess is just too deep and complicated (that's why it survives in this computer age) to be decided by brute force alone. Creators of chess-playing computer programs have for a long time tried to 'solve' chess as a mathematical equation.

So far, they have failed to do so; even the best of their monsters are not at the GM level yet, Deep Blue notwithstanding. Deep understanding of positional principles, intuitive powers to rely on in tactical complications, experience in real game situations – these all play large parts. One strong GM once told me that during the game we (he meant World Top 100 or so) may happen to know, able to calculate, or in any other way find the best move in approximately 90 percent of positions. This means that, if an average game lasts 50 moves, there will be 5 times during the game when we won't know what to do! There comes the most interesting, yet difficult part. He also said that these moments are very characteristic for a chess-player's style and personality; sometimes, they could provide a chance to recognize who played this game, if we are only given a game score without the names. In other words, today's top-level chess is 90 percent technique and 10 percent inspiration. Boring.

For lower-rated players the ratio changes towards more exciting proportions. The decision-making time occurs almost every move. It is very important to study this process.

If the computers, when unable to find a clear line, would start aimlessly moving pieces around, then what to say about us, fragile human beings, who are affected by a change of environment (earlier start of the last round, uncomfortable chair, headache, just to name a few obstacles) to the point of not being able to perform at the usual level? How do we make our choices? With great difficulty, of course. Some of the worst cases of the 'zeitnot' disease can be attributed to inability to make those decisions in a fast and confident way. We may also act differently in similar game situations, depending on the way we feel at the moment.

During the game we are exposed to surges of emotions: elation, fear, hate, indifference, boredom, desperation. And we still have decisions to make.

Hodgson – Yermolinsky
Hastings Premier 1995/6

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♗g5

This is my opponent's favourite weapon, and I was quite aware of the dangers awaiting me. Still, no player should ever abandon his openings out of fear of the opponent's superior preparation. Often I see my students going into inferior lines because, 'Oh, I didn't want to play a normal line, I've seen him play this stuff so many times...' To reveal a little secret, I study theoretical lines in hope that my opponents will avoid them! Nothing makes a GM happier than when his less experienced opponent gets 'creative' from the very first moves. Don't make that mistake. If you think your openings are good, play them against anyone, especially grandmasters!

Interestingly, I made this mistake in my previous encounter with Julian Hodgson (PCA Grand Prix, New York 1995), where I decided to avoid 2 ♗g5 and answered 1 d4 with 1...e6. There immediately followed 2 e4! and I found myself in the French Defence, an opening I play sometimes, but have no particular love for. Disgusted, I proceeded to lose that game in a miserable fashion.

2...♘e4 3 ♗f4

For years Julian was experimenting with 3 h4!?. He scored some impressive victories over

weaker players, who would take on g5 too early and with no particular goal in mind. However, I knew that this sharp move can be double-edged: 3...c5 4 d5 ♕b6, and White is practically forced to sacrifice a pawn with 5 ♘d2 (senseless is 5 ♕c1 e6, and the knight cannot be driven away – 6 f3? ♘g3) with unclear consequences.

In the last few years after this variation had become fashionable, many players fell under its spell, and I was no exception. Twice I played it with the white pieces (against 2350-2450 players; I still wouldn't dare to try it against somebody my own size) and won both games easily! But, once again, I had never been sure about its true value. What would be a better chance to test it than to let the 'founding father', GM Julian Hodgson, exercise his options. This gutsy move uplifted my spirit for the duration of the game. When Julian played the less sharp 3 ♗f4 I felt I had scored a psychological victory.

In the game continuation White is willing to lose a couple of tempi to lure black pieces to vulnerable squares. For example: 3...c5 4 d5 (4 f3 ♕a5+ 5 c3 ♘f6 6 ♘d2 cxd4 7 ♘b3 ♕d8 8 cxd4 is also possible; White then moves his king's knight to c3, getting a favourable version of the Exchange Slav) 4...♕b6 5 ♗c1! g6 6 f3 ♘f6 7 e4 d6 8 c4 ♗g7 9 ♘c3, and here the extra move ...♕d8-b6, in fact, hurts Black by blocking his own b-pawn and exposing the queen to attack after White plays a combination of ♖b1, ♗e3 and b4!.

3...d5 4 e3

Julian keeps on making some fine adjustments. He used to play the sharp line, 4 f3 ♘f6 5 e4!? (or 5 ♘c3), here. I had some pleasant experience against this idea in a 1995 U.S. Championship game against Joel Benjamin: 5...dxe4 6 ♘c3 e3!?. By declining the gambit Black achieves some important goals: he keeps the f-file closed, deprives the white king's knight of its natural f3-square, and catches up in development. Later I had a feeling: I knew I was playing a Caro-Kann, while Joel had no idea what he was doing. My success in that game (Joel's 2 ♗g5 had given me fits in the past) gave me confidence in the 3...d5 move, and I felt ready to play it again. If it ain't broke, don't fix it!

4 e3 is a quiet move not without poison. Black is invited to play 4...♗f5, when the white pawns would drive everything away: 5 f3 ♘f6 6 g4 ♗g6 7 h4 h6 8 ♘c3 e6 9 h5 ♗h7 10 ♗d3 ♗xd3 11 ♕xd3 ♗d6 12 ♘ge2, followed by 0-0-0 with somewhat better chances for White. Julian has won many games that started off in such an innocent fashion.

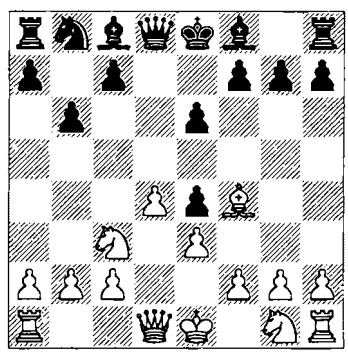
The ability to anticipate the opponent's plans is very important in chess. I played a more modest move without giving him any targets.

4...e6 5 ♗d3 b6!?

Black had some good alternatives here, such as 5...♗d6 or 5...c5. The move I played is very provocative. Black wants to support the centralized knight after 6 ♘d2 ♗b7, but allows White to get a dangerous lead in development.

6 ♗xe4 dxe4 7 ♘c3 *(D)*

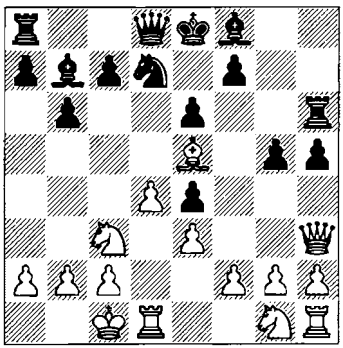
B



That's what I expected. Julian Hodgson is a very imaginative player who likes to grab the initiative as soon as possible. Here after the expected 7...♗b7 8 ♕g4 he would achieve his primary goal. Black has difficulties because of the strong pressure against g7, and an attempt to bring the knight to the rescue, 8...♘d7, runs into 9 ♕g3! (but not 9 ♘b5 ♘f6 10 ♕g3 ♘h5! 11 ♘xc7+ ♔d7 12 ♕g4 ♘xf4 13 ♘xa8 ♘g6 – advantage to Black) 9...♖c8 10 ♘b5, etc. Meanwhile White is ready to castle long, bringing the rook to the d-file. Threats like ♗f4-g5 and ♘g1-h3-g5 can also be considered dangerous.

Black's only choice is to be aggressive: 8...h5! 9 ♕h3 (if 9 ♕g3 h4 10 ♕g4, then

10...♘d7 becomes possible: 11 ♘b5 ♘f6 12 ♕e2 ♘d5, or 11 ♗g5 ♘f6 12 ♗xf6 ♕xf6! 13 ♘xe4? ♕f5 14 ♕xf5 exf5) 9...g5!? 10 ♗e5 ♖h6 11 0-0-0 ♘d7 *(D)*.



Despite its ugly appearance Black's position is fully playable. The white queen is out of play, f3 is difficult to play (due to the lack of the light-squared bishop!), and if Black gets time for playing the easy-to-find moves ...♘xe5, ...♕e7 and ...♗g7, he might take over the initiative.

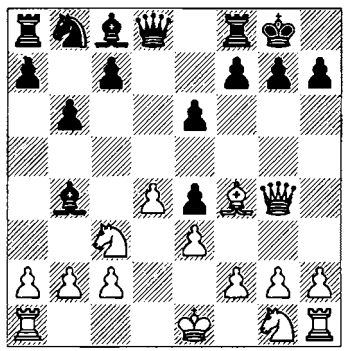
Overall, the position is difficult to evaluate, because there are so many factors to take into account; White's lead in development and Black's strong light-squared bishop are only two of them. Dynamically, it can go either way. During the game I couldn't be sure about anything, and had to rely on my intuition. It told me to choose an even more complicated continuation. Apparently, my confidence was growing as the game progressed.

7...♗b4!? 8 ♕g4

Armchair generals – or Monday morning quarterbacks, like we call them in America – might suggest the cautious 8 ♘e2, but then the white queen doesn't get to g4, and the game reduces to approximate equality after 8...♗b7 9 a3 ♗d6.

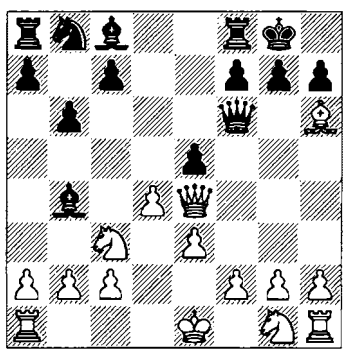
8...0-0 *(D)*

The critical point of the game. Due to the 9...e5 threat (that's why the bishop had to stay on c8) White's options are limited to 9 ♗e5, 9 ♗h6 and the text-move, 9 ♕g3. Both bishop



moves apparently lead to the capture of the e4-pawn, but the following complications are enormous.

a) 9 ♗h6 ♕f6 10 ♕xe4 e5! *(D)* (my opponent also saw this idea, a fantastic move designed to establish control over the c6-square in the variation 11 dxe5 ♕xh6 12 ♕xa8 ♗xc3+ 13 bxc3 ♘c6, and the white queen is trapped; the alternatives to 10...e5 are too timid; for example, 10...♗d7 11 ♕xa8 ♗c6 12 ♕xa7 ♗xg2 13 ♗f4 ♗xh1 14 ♕xc7, escaping with a couple of extra pawns) and now:



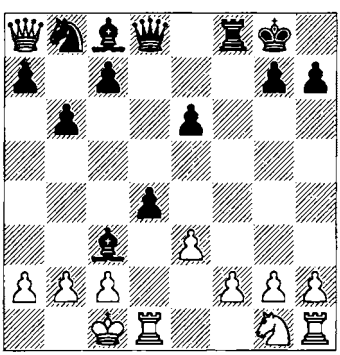
a1) 11 ♕xa8 exd4 12 ♕f3 (unsatisfactory for White is 12 exd4 ♘c6 13 ♗e3 ♗xc3+ 14 bxc3 ♗a6 15 ♕xf8+ ♔xf8; Black has good attacking chances: the queen coordinates well with the bishop, and the knight soon will be headed to c4) 12...♕xh6 13 exd4 (interesting here is 13 a3!?, intending to keep the e-file

closed; Black then would be advised to play for positional compensation after 13...♗xc3+ 14 bxc3 dxe3) 13...♖e8+ 14 ♘e2 (14 ♔d1!? is more combative, but 14...♘c6 gives Black a powerful attack against the king helplessly stuck in the centre, e.g. 15 ♘ge2 ♗a6 16 ♖e1 ♖d8 17 d5 ♘e5 18 ♕e3 ♕xh2, etc.) 14...♗xc3+ 15 ♕xc3 ♗a6 16 0-0 ♗xe2 17 ♖fe1 ♕d6. Black has gained a small material advantage, which will provide him with the better chances once he unpins the bishop after, say, 18 ♖ad1 ♖e6 19 ♖d2 ♗c4.

a2) 11 ♘f3!? (a dynamic move that adheres to the golden rule: develop first!) 11...♕xh6 (11...gxh6 is bad: 12 ♕xa8 exd4 13 ♘xd4 c5 14 ♕f3!, bringing the queen back with a tempo) 12 ♕xa8 exd4 13 ♘xd4 c5 14 a3 (an attempt to keep all the material with 14 ♘db5?! backfires after 14...♗a6 15 ♘xa7 ♕f6!) 14...cxd4 15 axb4 dxc3 16 ♕xb8 cxb2 17 ♖b1, and White seems to be holding on. However, there's no need to be discouraged if you are rooting for Black. He can continue with 17...♕f6 18 0-0 ♗a6 19 ♕xa7 ♗xf1 20 ♔xf1 ♕d6!, winning the kingside pawns.

b) 9 ♗e5 f6 10 ♕xe4 fxe5 11 ♕xa8 exd4 12 0-0-0 ♗xc3 *(D)*, and White once again finds himself at a crossroads.

W



b1) 13 ♕xb8 ♕d6 (13...♕d5 most probably leads to a draw after 14 bxc3 ♕xa2 15 ♘e2 e5 16 ♕xc7 ♗f5 17 cxd4 ♖c8 18 ♕xc8+ ♗xc8 19 dxe5) 14 ♘e2 ♗xb2+ 15 ♔xb2 ♗a6 16 ♕xa7 (the endgame after 16 ♖xd4 ♖xb8 17 ♖xd6 cxd6 favours Black) 16...♕b4+ 17 ♔a1 ♗xe2 18 ♖xd4 ♕c3+ 19 ♔b1 c5. Black has some play, but hardly enough for more than a draw.

b2) 13 bxc3 ♕d6 14 ♖xd4 ♕a3+ 15 ♔b1 ♘d7 16 ♖f4 (16 ♘e2 ♘c5 17 ♖f4 ♖e8!? 18 ♕c6 ♗d7 19 ♕xc7 e5 looks good for Black) 16...♘f6 (16...♖e8 17 ♕c6 and 16...♕xc3 17 ♖xf8+ ♘xf8 18 ♘e2 ♕b4+ 19 ♔a1 both favour White) 17 ♕c6! ♗d7 18 ♕c4 c5 19 ♘e2 b5 20 ♕b3 ♕a6 21 ♖d1 ♕c6 is not yet clear, even if I admit White's success in fighting off Black's initiative.

It's a real jungle out there, isn't it? But there are some guidelines:

1) Black delays taking on c3, because the white knight might be attacked by a pawn;

2) Black tries to keep the white queen bottled up in the corner, for the ...♗a6 opportunity to be there when needed;

3) White needs development (♘f3 or ♘e2 as soon as possible!);

4) White welcomes every exchange as it diminishes Black's attacking chances.

The rest is variations, tactical shots, attacks and defences. There are a lot of things to see or miss, blunders are quite possible too; but, in my opinion, the chances are approximately even. Providing that both sides keep their cool, a draw will be a likely result.

My opponent looked at some of the variations shown above, and didn't like the direction the game would be going. If he took up the challenge, White would have to defend. Not only does Julian hate defending in principle; in this particular case he thought he had the initiative after 6 ♗xe4 dxe4 7 ♘c3. He was annoyed by the fact that he had to calculate all those dangerous lines, and lost control over his emotions. He simply couldn't take it anymore. The result? He played a bad move.

9 ♕g3? ♗xc3+!

Now Black can part with the bishop, because the following play escalates on the light squares only. The fact that White can win the c7-pawn is irrelevant.

10 bxc3 ♘c6 11 ♘h3

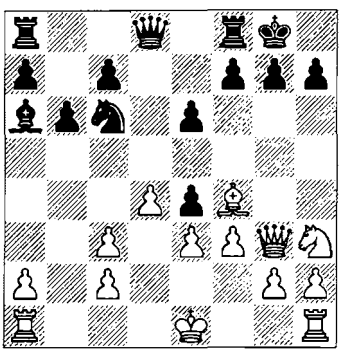
Just look at 11 ♗xc7? ♕d5 12 ♕d6 ♕c4 13 ♘e2 ♗b7 with 14...♖ac8 to follow. White is

completely paralysed. I think Jules experienced a rude awakening around these parts.

11...♗a6 12 f3 *(D)*

White had no other choice than the text. Queenside castling has been ruled out by the wrecking of the white pawns on the queenside, while Black's light-squared bishop takes away the option of castling short. Now White resorts to trying to connect his rooks artificially. The king gets a flight square on f2, and the black stronghold in the centre is under attack. You can't ask more from one move.

B



Here I neglected a chance to start a big-time king-hunt: 12...f6 13 fxe4 e5 14 dxe5 (otherwise the bishop is lost) 14...fxe5 15 ♗xe5 ♘xe5 16 ♕xe5 ♕h4+ 17 ♔d2 ♖ad8+ 18 ♔c1 ♖fe8 19 ♕f4 ♕e7. That would be the choice of many attacking players, with no second thoughts to hold them back. I was ready to go for it, but then accidentally stumbled upon a long line with a little tactical twist at the end. I checked my calculations and decided to give it a shot. It almost happened in the game! Must have been my lucky day: twice I gambled on guessing my opponent's intentions, and twice I was right!

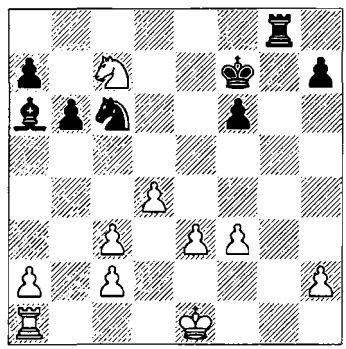
12...exf3 13 gxf3 f6

Black is about to cover the g7-square and continue with his plans: ...♘a5-c4, ...c5, ...e5, etc. White is nearing desperation; he needs to do something active.

14 ♗h6 ♖f7 15 ♖g1 ♕e7 16 ♘f4 ♔h8

Only at this point did Julian realize that the intended 17 ♗xg7+ ♖xg7 18 ♕xg7+ ♕xg7 19 ♖xg7 ♔xg7 20 ♘xe6+ ♔f7 21 ♘xc7 would not regain the piece due to 21...♖g8! *(D)*.

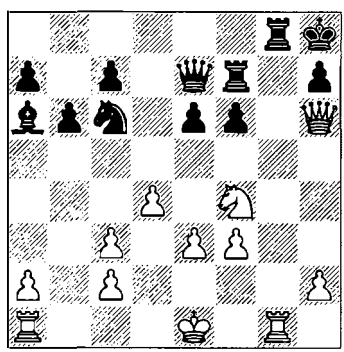
W



The endgame with three pawns (all fractured and immobile) for a bishop didn't look promising: 22 ♔f2 ♗c4 23 a4 ♖g5, followed by ...♖a5 and ...b5 winning. By the time Julian saw all this it was too late for White to change track, as the bishop had no retreat squares.

17 ♕h4 gxh6 18 ♕xh6 ♖g8 *(D)*

W



19 ♘g6+

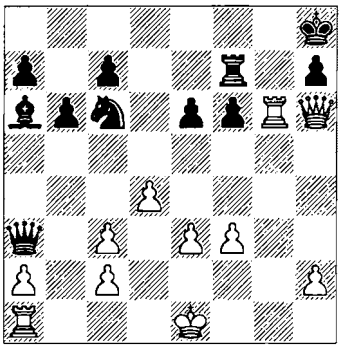
A belated attempt to connect the rooks with 19 ♔f2 is too slow. Black defends easily with 19...♖fg7.

19...♖xg6 20 ♖xg6

White has got back some of the sacrificed material and now hoped to put up a long fight after ♔f2, ♖ag1, etc. He never gets a chance.

20...♕a3! *(D)*

W



The counterattack finishes off: 21 ♖xf6 ♕xc3+ 22 ♔f2 (22 ♔d1 ♘xd4) 22...♕d2+ 23 ♔g3 ♖g7+ 24 ♔f4 e5+! 25 dxe5 ♕b4+ 26 ♔f5 ♘e7+ 27 ♔e6 ♗c8#. Black also has a nice defensive rejoinder: 21 ♖d1 ♕xc3+ 22 ♖d2 ♘e7! 23 ♖xf6 ♘g8. All in all, it's game over.

21 ♔d2 ♘e5! 0-1

It is not really hard to calculate: 22 dxe5 ♖d7+ 23 ♔e1 ♕xc3+ 24 ♔f2 ♕xc2+ 25 ♔g3 ♕xg6+.

Fun games, aren't they? So, Yermo thinks he's so big the world can't continue to go round without a book of his best games? And the poor reader is going to be subjected to another 200 pages or so of clogged-up chess variations? Sorry guys, that would mean letting you off the hook too easily. This book is a very ambitious project. It's meant to have some educational value, along with entertaining my reader at the same time. As a matter of fact, the author intends to make an attempt to teach you how to improve in chess.

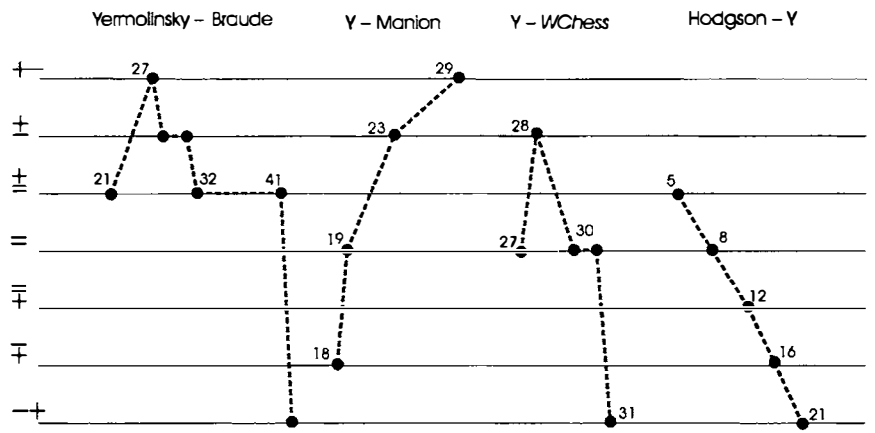
Hold off your great expectations, I haven't developed a new revolutionary theory or system, neither have I any dreadful secrets of the Soviet School of Chess to reveal. I'm just an experienced player who has done a lot of work on my own, and I'm willing to share some of the ideas and methods I have used in my attempts to improve as a chess-player with those of you who are treading the same road. I can say that I have been moderately successful, but exactly how useful my advice can be for others still remains to be seen.

A little bit of history. In the summer of 1995 I was on the move again, this time to Cleveland, Ohio. This old town is one of the jewels of the infamous Rust Belt – remnants of the dying American steel industry – and the old-time honest blue-collar work ethics are embedded in the local culture. My idea of contributing to this work ethic took the form of something we call the Yermo Chess Academy. How did it start? Well, I was lucky to meet Boris Men, a truly remarkable individual, who earned two PhD's in mathematics and mathematical physics while in the Soviet Union, but still managed to keep a great love for the game of chess throughout his scientific career. Boris is not a bad player himself – a few titles of State Champion and his participation in the 1992 US Championships vouch for that – but, most importantly, he brings in his unique experience as a lecturer, scientist and thinker. Many of the concepts that made the fabric of this book have been derived from his ideas, and I'm very grateful to Boris for his generous permission to use them here.

Originally we created our Academy in the form of monthly seminars with live lectures delivered to a small audience of 7-12 people. Sometimes we would have two lectures dealing with one subject, and then the difference in our respective approaches would become visible. While I, as a practical player, was engulfing the audience in purely chess matters, Boris was able to tackle the problem from quite a different angle. What came out of this? You just saw the games and analysis that made the core of the first two lectures. And I've got more to come.

Part 1: Trends, Turning Points and Emotional Shifts

For starters I am going to make you feel like you're back in school. Let's attempt to build a graph representing changes in positional evaluations move by move, while stopping at critical points of the games we just saw.



Dots are evaluations of positions taken at certain (critical) points. The lines connecting the dots represent directions the game is going. These I call trends. As you can see, trends are sharply reversed by mistakes, but they can also tell much more.

In **Graph 1 (Y – Braude)** White had gradually increased his advantage from move 21 until it could have become decisive had he not made an error on move 27, which led to the decline of the evaluation from '+–' to '±'. Unable to stop the trend, I made another mistake on move 32, and White's advantage slipped to '±', where it stood until the time-control and then came the decisive blunder. It is interesting that White had not been able to reverse the unfavourable trend that was established after move 27.

Graph 2 (Y – Manion) starts off with Black sitting on a nice advantage at move 18. There he makes a mistake, similar to my mistake in Game 1, and the trend instantly reverses. In two moves it climbs to '=' (which is more like 'unclear' at that point), and still continues going up. By move 23 White's firmly in control and the game is decided few moves later.

The next chart **(Y – *WChess*)** begins with Black's extremely risky 27th move that should have moved the evaluation to '±', if White had reacted correctly. His erroneous reply returned it to '=', where it stood until another error on move 30 sank White's ship. My inability to keep the balance can be explained by a severe time shortage, which itself was a by-product of trend shifts around moves 27-28.

It was all downhill for White in the last chart. Julian's mistake on move 8 (!) set off an extremely unfavourable trend, which could not be reversed for the rest of the game.

The fact of the matter is, in a game between two equally skilled players, mistakes cannot be counted on, thus we must assume that trends

are not easily reversed. Instead, things tend to snowball: problems on the board are aggravated by negative emotional state, while time-trouble and fatigue contribute heavily; and at the end mistakes become more likely. Like it was said long ago, 'Mistakes are easily made in bad positions', we just didn't know why.

Unlike psychologically vulnerable carbon-based players, the silicon ones are much sturdier defenders – small wonder, if you consider the above said. The computers are not affected by those factors, and the trend doesn't get accelerated by anything that lies outside the chessboard. What is a bad position anyway? The perception depends on the individual characteristics of a particular player. Some find it playable, when most of us would walk away in disgust. These few are often ridiculed along the lines such as 'he just doesn't understand how bad his position is, that's why he continues fighting', but in the final analysis they may get the credit they deserve – Gata Kamsky comes to mind first. In a broad sense, the ability to perform well in extremely adverse situations is a mark of true greatness.

Sometimes, a position may not be bad, but we just don't like it. One important hindrance on the way to improvement in chess is playing positions that are alien to your nature. Here I'd like to propose a language to discuss different personalities in chess. I will talk about 'pace of events' for chess positions without defining this concept formally. One can view it as a rate of risk or a degree of non-balance or as a speed of changes. Let's imagine that we are given two choices, and our built-in machine of rational preferences refuses to work. Then your emotions dictate to you the 'right' choice, which may be not be right, by the way, in a strictly chess point of view as can be proven by further analysis. One of the great advantages offered to a chess-player by analysing his games is a chance to validate the intuitive decisions taken over the board against the 'chess truth' available to a researcher afterwards. There are certain tendencies we follow in our intuitive process, and they can be attributed to individual characteristics.

You may prefer **'higher pace' (denote this choice '+')** or **'lower pace' ('–').** Of course, your choice may be different in different circumstances. There are certain factors that may influence your choice. We need to know how you behave when trends are established (up or down), and also after a critical moment when you feel a change in the major trend. We need to know what your choice will be when a position is equal. We need to know how your opponent's personality and rating affect your emotional preferences. Fill up the table below with '+' or '–', and you can double it up to emphasize your preferences.

No Trend	Up Trend	Down Trend	Change in Trend (up → down)	Change in Trend (down → up)	Rating Difference	
					in your favour	not in your favour
+ or –	+ or –	+ or –	+ or –	+ or –	+ or –	+ or –

Personal Characteristics

Based on my personal experience I can try to fill out this chart myself:

Yermo:

–	– –	–	+ –	+ +	+	–

Explanations:

I am a positional player, who believes in his ability to win strategic battles. **'No Trend'** appearance doesn't bother me, as long as there's enough life left in the position – that explains a **'–'** in the first column.

'Up Trend' means I'm getting closer to winning, so I'd like to exercise some extra care not to blow it. Special attention should be given to the opponent's counterplay attempts, which may only speed up his demise; that's why a **'double –'** appears in the second column.

'Down Trend' is a very sad thing, and I usually double-check if it's really happening. That explains a **'–'** there, even if I realize that I may do better in practical chess by reacting more violently.

A sudden unfavourable change, **'Trend Up to Down'**, provokes mixed reactions. Sometimes I sit in disbelief, sometimes I lash out. In my opinion, the latter is a much lesser evil than the former, and I wish I were more aggressive in these cases. Honestly, I can't give any other answer than both **'+'** and **'–'**.

With **'Trend Down to Up'**, I try to speed things up to pound my opponent while he's shaken up. That's a professional trait, which works out very well in most cases, but being 'double +' may hurt you against computers.

A **'+'** in the sixth column may be attributed to the need of finishing games against **lower-rated** opponents more quickly, in order to save energy for the GM battles later in the event.

The last column is some sort of mystery to me. Until recently, I had hardly had any chance to compete against the world's best, and my usual circuit of open tournaments was largely giving me a steady diet of quite an opposite scenario (I was higher-rated than most of my opponents). The experience I derived from the high-category Round-Robins in 1998-9 was rather negative, as I played passively and paid for it in both Madrid and Wijk aan Zee. Given another chance, I'd love to erase the **'–'** personality that takes over when I'm faced with **higher-rated** opposition.

If I attempt to apply this chart to other players – an iffy thing, as it's really difficult to get inside someone else's mind – I'd probably say that, largely, '+' personalities do better in modern chess. Garry Kasparov would fill it up with all pluses, with an exception of the last column, which would probably get a 'N/A' entry.

You can do it yourself or with help from an experienced instructor by analysing your own games. It is important to remember, though, that you have to exclude the situations where decisions have been made on some rational basis. After the task is completed your instructor will be able to help you, among other things, to revise your opening repertoire. Possibly, to find openings that are in line with your nature, making sure the resulting middlegame positions require the 'pace of events' which you naturally prefer.

A Really Long Game with a Little Bonus

Trends and emotion shifts we discussed above may have left you with a certain feeling of helplessness. What can I do if the trend is unfavourable? Do I succumb to the inevitable? Of course not. Chess game is no mathematical problem, it takes two people to play it. The probability of making a mistake (and once again reversing the trend!) is high. Some even say that a chess game is not won by one of the players, but that it is lost by his opponent. The advice is old and simple: keep on fighting and good things will happen. Many great players possess that ability to fight till the end, to find new chances, to pose new problems for the opponent.

That is true for both attack and defence. If your initial attack has failed, there almost for sure will be some possibilities to create a second wave of attack. You may have to defend for a while, as attacking always creates some weaknesses in your camp, but there will be a second chance later on. The psychological aspects of such transition periods are rather complicated. Some chess-players tend to dwell on the past too much. Say, suddenly you see a good move you could have made a few moves ago, the move that would have won the game.

That way you may easily get frustrated with the missed opportunity, and that creates a distraction that is difficult to overcome. One of the advantages computers have over us humans is that they have no 'memory', no recollections of what happened in the game before this particular position. Another bad case is when your advantage is gone, but you're still playing under the impression of the past glory. That's why so many 'won' positions turn into losses. If you had got to the same equal position from an inferior situation, you would have approached it differently. In defence, we often underestimate our chances when things suddenly start looking up. After 40 moves of defending we are mentally ready to agree to a draw, because we remember how bad the position was before. Gata Kamsky never does that! He knows how bad his opponent feels, having blown his advantage, and considers this an ideal situation to play for a win!

Chesswise, always look for changes in the pawn-structure that may have happened in a flurry of tactics – a sure indication that the position needs to be re-evaluated. Chess presents us with many opportunities, and acquiring the ability to find those opportunities and make the most out of them is every chess-player's dream.

The following game is nothing special, just a good example of grandmaster chess, where both opponents demonstrated resourcefulness and stamina throughout 80+ moves of play.

Yermolinsky – Serper
US Masters, Chicago 1996

1	**d4**	**d5**
2	**c4**	**c6**
3	**♘f3**	**♘f6**
4	**♘c3**	**e6**
5	**♗g5**	**h6**
6	**♗xf6**	**♕xf6**
7	**♕c2!?**	

7 e3 is 'book', and I have also tried 7 a3!? on numerous occasions. The 7 ♕c2 move is less well known, and I thought it would be a good idea to get my opponent out to the open field as soon as possible.

7 ... ♘d7

It is too early to talk about inferior choices, but 7...dxc4 looks more challenging. The original idea (invented by then IM Smbat Lputian) was to win the pawn back by utilizing a well-known tactical idea: 8 e3 b5 9 ♘xb5!? cxb5 10 ♕e4. However, tournament practice shows that life after winning the exchange is not a pleasure cruise for White; GM Kramnik recommends 10...♗b4+ 11 ♔d1 ♕d8! 12 ♕xa8 ♕c7 with a strong initiative.

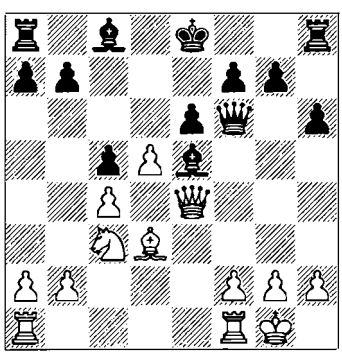
I was going to play 8 g3 instead, retaining some compensation for the lost pawn. Serper's 7...♘d7 is not bad, but at least it allows White to execute his main idea: e2-e4 in one move, without having to worry about ...♗b4+.

8 e4! dxe4
9 ♕xe4

I had this position on the board years ago.

In **Yermolinsky – Gorelov**, *USSR Ch, First League, Telavi 1982* Black continued with **9...♗d6 10 ♗d3 c5 11 d5 ♘e5 12 ♘xe5 ♗xe5**. I think 12...♕xe5 13 0-0-0 would also be slightly better for White. A few rounds later in the tournament Sergey Gorelov tried to defend Black's colours again, but couldn't completely solve his problems and lost a long game to Georgy Agzamov. **13 0-0!** *(D)* A thematic pawn sacrifice (you'll see a lot of this kind in this book – I just love that stuff!) for quick development and open files.

B



13...♗xc3 White's pressure after the best defence, 13...♕f4! 14 ♕xf4 ♗xf4 15 ♖ad1 ♗d7

16 dxe6 ♗xe6 17 ♗e4, still amounts to a little something. **14 bxc3 ♕xc3 15 ♖ad1** I knew I had a move in hand, but couldn't decide between the text-move and 15 ♖ab1, the move directed against Black's queenside development, but somewhat deficient in case Black centralizes his queen like he did in the game: 15...♕d4 16 dxe6 ♗xe6 (now possible), and White is restricted to fishing for endgame chances after 17 ♕xd4 cxd4 18 ♖xb7. The move I made should have been answered by 15...♗d7, planning ...0-0-0. **15...♕d4 16 dxe6 fxe6?** This move equals suicide. While 16...♕xe4 17 exf7+ ♔xf7 18 ♗xe4 looks unpleasant, accurate defence can save the day. By the way, the idea of White's 15th is revealed in case of 16...♗xe6 17 ♕xb7, and Black still can't castle. **17 ♕g6+ ♔e7 18 ♗e4 ♕f6 19 ♕g3**, with a big edge to White.

Serper's choice is more obvious, as Black needs to be able to castle.

9	**...**	**g6**
10	**♗d3**	**♗g7**
11	**0-0**	**0-0**
12	**♖fe1**	

Just in time to stop ...e5. Now Black can either hang tough with 12...♕d8 13 ♖ad1 ♕c7, preparing ...b6, or try to free his position immediately.

Trend Down, and Gregory reacts the way most of us do: he speeds things up.

12	**...**	**c5?!**
13	**d5**	**♘b6**

13...e5 would have worked out fine, if he had time for ...a6, ...♕d6 and ...f5. The problem is that White is also playing chess out there, and he will not accommodate Black's ambitious plans. 14 ♗c2 ♘b6! 15 ♕e2 ♗g4 16 ♘e4 ♕f4 is unclear, but 14 ♖ad1 a6 15 ♕e3! sets up the d5-d6 push and creates various possibilities for White, whose forces are fully mobilized and ready for action. In a situation like this certain sacrificial attacks might come as no surprise.

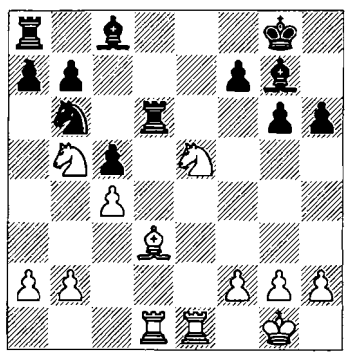
The text-move prepares ...exd5 by controlling the d5-square and opening a path for the light-squared bishop. It seems that Black is about to equalize, but the fearless pawn continues marching on.

14	**d6!**	

This thorn is not easy to remove: 14...♖d8 15 ♕e3, or 14...♕d8 15 ♕f4 e5 (during the game I thought Black can't sit and wait, while White is improving with 16 ♖ad1 – but more about this tricky position later on) 16 ♘xe5 ♕xd6 17 ♖ad1 (threatening 18 ♘g6) 17...♕f6 18 ♕xf6 ♗xf6 19 f4 with annoying pressure on Black's position.

14	**...**	**e5**
15	**♕xe5**	**♕xe5**
16	**♘xe5**	**♖d8**
17	**♖ad1**	**♖xd6**
18	**♘b5!** *(D)*	

B



Black gets no break! Even with all the good things he has done, he's still far away from equality. My opening has worked out to full extent, but the game is still to be won, and I have been robbed before by Gregory Serper's sturdy defence!

18	**...**	**♗xe5?**

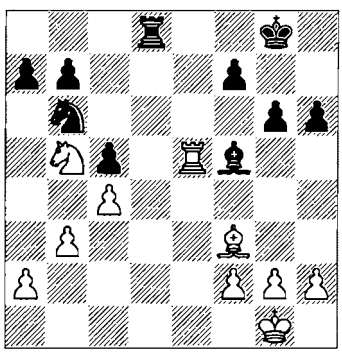
He's rattled! I would expect him to play it cool: 18...♖e6! 19 f4 (19 ♘c7 doesn't work: 19...♖xe5 20 ♘xa8 ♘xa8 21 ♖xe5 ♗xe5 22 ♖e1 f6 23 f4 ♗d4+) 19...♖e7. Here, despite certain inconveniences, Black's position appears to be defensible: 20 b3 ♘d7! 21 ♗e4? ♘xe5 22 ♖d8+ ♔h7 23 fxe5 ♖xe5 with 24...f5 coming as the saving grace.

After the game Gregory expressed his astonishment with the speed of my play (I had spent about 40 minutes up to here), and I confessed that I had analysed all this at home. He was

impressed with the quality of my home preparation (for so many years of knowing me he had never witnessed my passion for homework), and probably cursed his bad luck. Walking into Yermo's prepared line, it's really a long shot! Yes, my analysis stopped right at 18 ♘b5, then I thought I found the obvious continuation, 18...♖d8 19 ♘xf7! ♔xf7 20 ♗xg6+ ♔xg6 21 ♖xd8 with a big edge, at the board; but who knows, I may have seen it before, I just don't remember.

Anyway, 18...♗xe5 came as a big relief, and I began smelling victory.

19 ♖xe5 ♖d8
20 b3 ♗f5
21 ♗e2 ♖xd1+
22 ♗xd1 ♖d8
23 ♗f3 *(D)*



B

'A Knight on b3 (b6) is always bad', as the founding father of chess dogmatism Dr Tarrasch told us a long time ago. Man, was the dude right, or what? In this particular situation no one would disagree. Black's queenside is in deep trouble here, and, nearing time-trouble, Gregory Serper desperately seeks counterplay. Same strategy again: when 'Trend Down' is established, look for the sharpest option.

23 ... ♖d2
24 ♖xc5

I didn't want to weaken my position with 24 g4?!, the move my opponent feared for some reason, as the bishop could go to b1.

24 ... ♖xa2
25 h4

By the strange logic of chess this pawn will fall on h4. After the game Dmitry Gurevich asked me if 25 h3 was better. The answer will be given later.

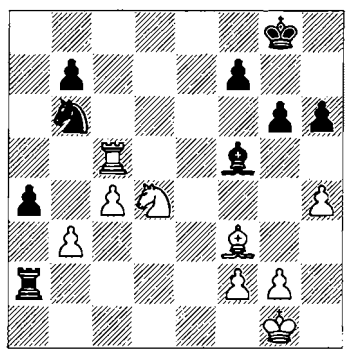
25 ... a5!

The two attempts to break the trend (12...c5 and 18...♗xe5) have failed, bringing Black's game to the brink of disaster. GM Serper, however, doesn't get discouraged and finds the only way to continue fighting. I immediately recognized the danger this excellent move brings, and sank into a deep think.

26 ♘d4

Simple pawn-grabbing with 26 ♗xb7 a4 27 bxa4 ♖xa4 28 ♘d6 ♗e6 didn't look convincing at all.

26 a4! *(D)*



W

Black is making a serious bid for counterplay. I spent a lot of time here before I found the winning line, or rather what I thought it would be. I was wrong. The right move, 27 ♖b5!, didn't escape my attention; I just failed to appreciate its strength. Let's see: 27...a3! (27...axb3 28 ♖xb6 b2 29 ♘xf5 ♖a1+ 30 ♔h2 b1♕ 31 ♖xb1 ♖xb1 32 ♘xh6+ ♔g7 33 ♘g4 ♖b4 34 ♘e3 is a technical win) 28 ♖a5! (no time to get comfortable: 28 ♘xf5 ♖b2!! 29 ♖a5 a2 30 ♘d6 ♖b1+ 31 ♔h2 a1♕ 32 ♖xa1 ♖xa1 33 c5 ♘d7 34 ♘xb7 and White might, or might not, be winning) 28...♗d7 29 ♘b5! (29 ♗xb7 ♘a4!? 30 ♗c6 ♗xc6 31 ♘xc6 ♘c3 32 ♘b4 ♖a1+ 33 ♔h2 a2 34 c5 is also good) 29...♗xb5 30 cxb5

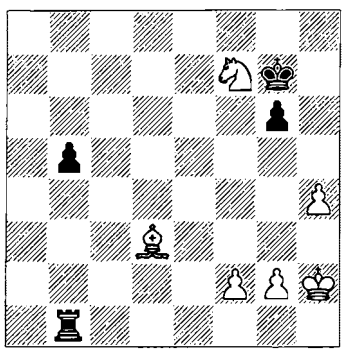
♘d7 31 ♗xb7 ♘e5 32 ♗d5 ♘g4 33 g3, finally driving a point home. My calculations went on another line. I wanted to exchange the black bishop first, to eliminate any surprise factor.

27	**♘xf5?**	**axb3!**

Of course! He's not going down silently after 27...gxf5 28 ♖b5, etc. Here comes a forced sequence of moves.

28	**♖b5**	**♘xc4**
29	**♗d5**	**b2**
30	**♗xc4**	**♖a1+**
31	**♔h2**	**b1♕**
32	**♖xb1**	**♖xb1**
33	**♘xh6+**	**♔g7**
34	**♘xf7**	**b5**
35	**♗d3!** *(D)*	

B



This is what I counted on. The ending after 35...♖d1 36 ♘e5 b4 37 f4 b3 38 ♗xg6 promises an easy win, and a relatively better try, 35...♖e1 36 ♘d6 b4 37 ♘c4 b3 38 f4 ♖d1 39 ♘e5 b2 40 ♗xg6 ♖d6 41 ♗b1 ♖d1 42 ♗f5, only stalls White for a few more moves.

35	**...**	**♖b4!**

The overextended h-pawn haunts White. So, was 25 h3 better? I don't know. Being able to foresee this ten moves ago is certainly beyond my scope; and then, would winning the g-pawn (see notes to the previous move) be that easy with the pawn on h3? Chess is a twisted game for twisted minds.

36	**♘d6**

I thought 36 ♘e5 ♖xh4+ 37 ♔g3 ♖d4 would leave me empty-handed:

a) 38 ♗xb5 ♖d5 =.

b) 38 ♗xg6 ♖d5 39 f4? (39 ♔f4 ♔f6 40 ♘c6! is what I missed; White would retain excellent winning chances) 39...♖xe5 40 fxe5 ♔xg64 1 ♔f4 b4 42 ♔e4 b3 43 ♔d3♔f5, drawing.

c) 38 f4 b4 39 ♗xg6 b3, and after Black wins a piece for his passed pawn, White will have only two pawns for the exchange, which is not enough to win.

36	**...**	**♖xh4+**
37	**♔g3**	**♖d4**
38	**♘e8+**	**♔f8**
39	**♗xb5**	

This is the only way I could find to eliminate the black passed pawn. Ironically, it has put my pieces in a comical situation. One move, 39...♔e7 that is, would send White fishing for problematic chances after 40 ♘c7 ♔d6 41 ♘a6 g5 42 ♔f3 ♖d2 43 ♔e3 ♖b2.

Gregory Serper only had seconds left on his clock.

39	**...**	**♖d5?**

Now White is winning handily, or so I thought.

40	**♘c7**	**♖g5+**
41	**♔f3**	**♖f5+**
42	**♔e3**	**♖e5+**
43	**♔d4**	**♖e1**
44	**♗d3**	

In principle, White would want to nail the black pawn on g6, but I was afraid of more surprises after 44 f4 ♖g1 45 ♗c6 ♖c1 46 ♔d5 ♔e7, and chose a safer route – a good example of how my 'double minus' personality takes over in winning positions.

44	**...**	**g5**
45	**♘d5**	**♔g7**
46	**♘e3**	**♔f6**
47	**♔e4**	**♖a1**
48	**♘g4+**	**♔g6**
49	**♔e5+**	**♔g7**
50	**g3**	**♖a2**
51	**♔e6**	**♖a3**
52	**♘e5**	

All in all, there was nothing wrong with the direct approach: 52 ♗e4 ♖a6+ 53 ♔f5 ♖a5+ 54 ♘e5 ♖b5 55 f4, as a bishop's pawn wins easily,

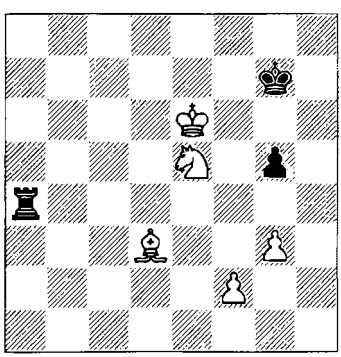
but there could be some pitfalls, and later a task to checkmate with bishop and knight in the sudden death time-control. I was not afraid of the latter – no person with any self-respect should be – but I thought I could always get back to that plan, as long as I'm staying ahead on the clock. Sudden-death time-controls have brought a new dimension in tournament chess.

In the last round of the 1997 American Open in Los Angeles I found myself defending the notorious ♖+♗ vs ♖ ending against Larry Christiansen with about 15 minutes left on my clock. Usually people stop keeping score as soon as one of the players gets down to five minutes, but I realized I couldn't do that! Because if I abandon my scoresheet, I won't be able to claim anything, and the 50-move rule may become a 200-move practical extension. Having done some mental arithmetic, I figured I had to produce a move (and write it down) every 12 seconds, if I was going to avoid this hopeless situation.

I managed to keep the schedule and I'm proud of it, but the real credit goes to Larry, who carried himself like a gentleman throughout the whole circus show.

52 ... ♖a4! *(D)*

W



He stops White playing f4. OK, then I'll try to win his remaining pawn.

53 ♗c4 ♖a8
54 f3 ♖f8
55 ♗d3 ♖f6+
56 ♔e7 ♖f8
57 ♗e4 ♖f6
58 ♘d7 ♖a6
59 ♘c5 ♖a7+
60 ♔e6 ♖a5
61 ♘b3 ♖b5
62 ♘d4 ♖a5
63 ♘f5+ ♔g6

He's not afraid of a discovered check, but I'll get my king to g4 anyway.

64 ♘e3+ ♔g7
65 ♘d5 ♖a6+
66 ♔f5 ♔h6
67 ♔g4 ♖a5
68 ♘e3 ♖a7
69 ♘f5+ ♔g6

Black is hanging on by the skin of his teeth. Had it been his turn to move, we'd have a nice zugzwang situation: 70...♔f6 71 ♘e3 followed by 72 ♘d5; 70...♖c7 71 ♘d4+ ♔h6 72 ♘e6; or 70...♖a1 71 ♘d6+ ♔h6 72 ♘f7+. The question is how to lose a tempo.

70 ♘d6+ ♔h6
71 ♔f5 ♖a5+
72 ♔g4 ♖a7
73 ♗c2 ♖c7
74 ♗b1 ♖d7!

The tricky devil! If 74...♖a7, then 75 ♗e4 and I would have achieved my goal.

At this point I became somewhat nervous. It took some effort to get my brain back to work – good thing that I still had enough time to give myself a little pep talk – and I finally found a pretty way to finish this torture of a game.

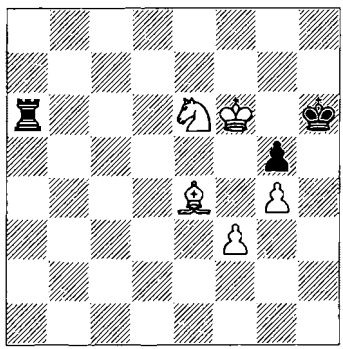
75 ♘f5+ ♔g6
76 ♗e4 ♖a7
77 ♘d4+! ♔h6

77...♔f6 78 ♘c2 ♖g7 79 ♘e3 ♖g8 80 ♘d5+ ♔e5 81 ♔h5 g4 82 f4+! ♔xe4 83 ♘f6+ ♔f3 84 ♘xg8 ♔xg3 85 f5 ♔h3 86 ♘e7 g3 87 ♘d5 was the line I double- and triple-checked.

78 ♔f5 ♖a6

78...♖f7+ 79 ♔e6 ♖f8 80 ♔e7 ♖b8 81 ♘e6 would only delay the inevitable.

79 ♘e6 ♖a3
80 ♘d8 ♖a5+
81 ♔f6 ♖a6+
82 ♘e6 ♖b6
83 g4 ♖a6 *(D)*



84 f4 gxf4 85 g5+ ♔h5 86 g6 ♔h6 is far from being clear, but White has something better up his sleeve.

84 ♗g6!

Now 85 f4 becomes a real threat. Gregory sets up a final devilish trap.

84 ... ♖a3
85 f4 ♖f3!?

There it is: 86 ♘xg5?? ♖xf4+ 87 ♗f5 ♖xg4!!, draw.

86 ♗f5! gxf4
87 ♘d8 1-0

There is no stopping 88 ♘f7#.

So, what we have got here is a long game, not particularly overloaded with tactics. Let's now try to break it down into parts, while outlining the ever-changing strategic concepts and tactical implications.

a) At the cost of surrendering the bishop-pair, White gets to play e4, and gains some spatial advantage in the centre. However, there's nothing unusual about the resulting pawn-structure. The white pawns on c4 and d4 versus the black ones on c6 and e6 are a feature of many openings (the Slav, the Rubinstein French, the Caro-Kann), and it's pointless to discuss the structural advantages and disadvantages for either side. It's the pieces, time and energy that determine who gets the upper hand.

b) Time-wise White has something to be happy about. Black spent a tempo on ...h6 to force White to exchange off his bishop. He was also forced to recapture with the queen. The position of the black queen on f6 may be disadvantageous, as White can sometimes gain a further tempo by ♘c3-e4. However, there's a bright side too: Black's got early pressure against d4 that extends all the way along the a1-h8 diagonal. Having the white queen on e4 is somewhat strange. Normally, that square belongs to the knight; from there it can be headed to d6 after White fixes the pawn-structure with c4-c5. In our case, White has to try to exploit the advantages ♕e4 can provide before moving on to the standard plan outlined above. The ♗d3-♕e4 battery forces Black to fianchetto his dark-squared bishop, while the queen also looks the other way, to c6, making the fate of the other black bishop somewhat vague, as the standard fianchetto procedure is impossible.

c) White must stop the liberating advance ...e5, and he manages to do so just in time. As early as on move 12 Black is facing a big decision that will have a long-lasting impact for the rest of the game. Should he dig in with defensive manoeuvring (...♕d8-c7 to prepare ...b6, for instance), or take a risk by initiating pawn confrontations in the centre while underdeveloped?

Both roads may be treacherous. In the former case, White would be given all the time in the world to reposition his pieces the way he sees fit (♕e3, ♘e4), or even try to loosen up the black king's residence with h4-h5. Black decides to go for the ...c5 break. The middlegame fight begins.

d) White advances his pawn to d5, thus giving his opponent a shot at a perfect dark-square blockade beginning with ...e5. Black declines the offer for the reasons described in the move notes. He knows he must solve the problem of the c8-bishop, so he puts more pressure on d5 by the awkward looking move 13...♘b6. In reply, White finds a way to keep that bishop bottled up. The d-pawn moves on and it's going to be lost, as Black exchanges down to the endgame.

e) Optically, it seems that Black is going to be able to solve his problem, and possibly even get a better game thanks to the bishop-pair. White's 18 ♘b5, however, introduces a new

tactical twist: the unprotected black rook on the d-file, along with a couple of kingside pawns, is going to be exchanged for the two white minor pieces. The dominating feature of the resulting position would be the activity of the white rooks, especially the one occupying the 8th rank. Rattled by the relentless pressure, Black exchanges down again, this time to a clearly inferior ending.

f) What makes White's advantage at move 22 so big? The difference in strength of the minor pieces. The white f3-bishop and b5-knight are threatening to rip the queenside pawns apart, while the black f5-bishop is an innocent-looking bystander, and the b6-knight is severely restricted. There's simply no other way for Black, other than pitching his rook to the second rank. The real counterplay begins with a swift advance of the a-pawn. A critical moment arises on move 26. White must carefully calculate the resulting complications that would lead to a few different technical endings, and he falters right there! The pace of events was too quick for me to handle. The move 27 ♘xf5? is a clear indication of White's desire to find a simple solution, which, of course, requires exchanging pieces (the same thing that got Black in trouble early on), that turns out not to be simple at all. Interesting fact – I was not afraid of calculating deep variations (see notes to White 35th), as long as it's a forced line with a very few pieces remaining on the board; while paying considerably less attention to the stronger alternative 27 ♖b5. The very presence of the extra set of minor pieces on the board made me unsure. I was particularly concerned with the possibility of Black blocking the a-file with a timely ...♘a4 or ...♗a4 (see notes to the analysis diagram) that would help Black to promote his a-pawn.

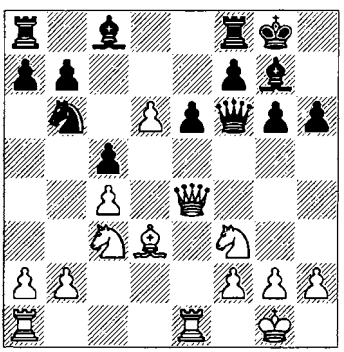
g) Black's excellent resourcefulness in heavy time-trouble (see his 35th move) brought me down to Earth. White has lost his h-pawn, and was very fortunate to bring back the knight from a long journey. Gregory's time-trouble error on move 39 spoiled his tremendous effort, and the game moved on to its final stage, a technical ending. Strictly speaking, White should be winning by simply advancing his pawns to create a passed pawn. According to endgame theory, the f-pawn wins easily (as long as you know how to checkmate a bare king with knight and bishop – and I did not worry about that part), while the g-pawn presents considerable difficulties. The difference lies in the ability to hide the white king behind the pawn, when the opposing rook begins harassing him from the side, and it's much easier to do when you have room on the other side of the pawn. Also, the knight would have to lose some of its power by having to hang around near the edge of the board. During my post-game analysis I gave myself a nice training session in this type of ending.

h) The game took a different course, as I decided to be practical. Gregory Serper defended stoically, but he was taking too much time on his moves on a Sudden Death time-control. Later he explained to me that he was operating under the wrong assumption that another pawn exchange would lead to a draw. My manoeuvring actions, which I took for various reasons (one of them was to calm myself and regain confidence as the opponent's clock was ticking down), incidentally seemed to be confirming this opinion. I kept refusing the natural plan of creating and advancing a passed pawn – Greg saw me getting nowhere and began to believe he could hold on. That put an additional burden on his shoulders. After a long exercise in roundabout manoeuvres, I finally got down to business and managed to weave a mating net around the black king as Greg's time was expiring.

I guess I learned a few things from this game, and especially my post-game analysis. Now I know more about my opponent, and that will be important one day, as we often meet each other in open tournaments here in the United States. Gregory Serper seems to possess a strong '+' personality, when dealing with a difficult defensive task, he's good in finding active counterplay, but he tends to spend too much time when forced into passivity – a serious detrimental factor in practical play. The analytical work I had to perform has expanded my horizons in a

particular kind of technical endgame: ♗+♘+♙ vs ♖, but, most importantly, I will remember how I failed to find the winning continuation in the diagrammed position after Black's 26th move due to the reasons described above, and I hope I can avoid similar mistakes in the future.

I also got a little bonus: the acquired knowledge about this particular opening paid off a few months later, as I was able to cash in a quick point against a strong GM in the last round money-game of an open tournament in Germany.



Yermolinsky – Luther
Bad Zwesten 1997

A familiar position – no wonder I was an hour ahead on the clock. Good preparation paid off, while my opponent, who didn't know the Serper game, was swimming there on his own.

Thomas Luther took a different path from the diagrammed position, without realizing that his move was going to be a novelty.

14...♕d8 15 ♕f4 g5?

We already discussed 15...e5 16 ♘xe5 ♕xd6 17 ♖ad1, with a dangerous lead in development that is beginning to produce tactical threats such as 18 ♘xg6. In the later game Atalik-Bacrot, Wijk aan Zee B-Group 1997 Black came up with a big improvement: 15...♗d7! 16 ♖ad1 ♗c6. It turned out that White can't follow up with the natural 17 ♘e5, because Black simply takes the d-pawn, viz. 17...♕xd6 18 ♗xg6 (18 ♘xg6 ♕xf4 19 ♘xf4 ♖ad8 gives Black a better endgame) 18...fxg6 19 ♕g4 ♕e7! 20 ♘xg6 ♕f6 21 ♘xf8 ♖xf8 22 ♖e2 ♕f5!, with the edge shifting to Black. The continuation of that game, 17 ♗e4, led to even worse consequences after 17...♘xc4! (the sidelined knight enters the fray) 18 ♗xc6 ♘xb2 19 ♗xb7 ♖b8. In reviewing this important game I can only mention 17 ♕g3 as a possible improvement.

The move made by Thomas has obvious drawbacks, as his king's residence becomes draughty. There's also a tactical detail that will be revealed below. Frankly, the more I look at this position, the harder it becomes to understand the idea behind 15...g5, unless we assume that Black planned to advance his pawns to chase the white queen – see the notes to Black's 17th move.

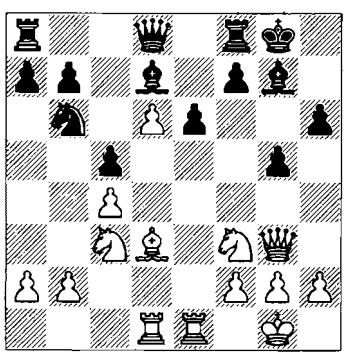
16 ♕g3

16 ♕d2 was a decent alternative, but I felt my queen belonged on the kingside. Choosing between two or more good moves is such a torture!

16...♗d7

Black eschews the further weakening of the kingside. Indeed, the seemingly active 16...f5 17 ♖ad1 f4 18 ♕g4 e5 19 ♕h5 would have led him nowhere. The queen is safe and ready to exploit new-born weaknesses in Black's position.

17 ♖ad1 *(D)*



White has completed his development, and the passed pawn is still alive. These two factors certainly spell bad news for his opponent. What

can Black do to minimize the damage? There are a couple of natural-looking ideas we should look at:

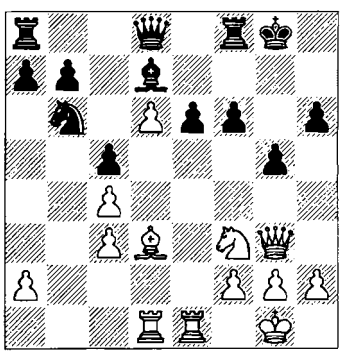
a) 17...♘a4 certainly has its merits – Black gets rid of his worst piece. The problem is, exchanges bring no relief, because they only make the white passed pawn stronger. After 18 ♘xa4 ♗xa4 19 b3 ♗c6 20 ♘e5 ♖c8 White has a pleasant choice between a positional continuation, 21 ♗e4 ♗xe4 22 ♖xe4 ♗xe5 23 ♕xe5 ♖c6 24 h4; and a promising attacking plan that begins with 21 ♗c2, to be followed by ♕g3-d3. Either possibility would give Black a lot of headaches.

b) 17...♗c6 is answered by 18 ♘e5, and, unlike in Atalik-Bacrot, the d-pawn stays alive: 18...♕xd6?? 19 ♗h7+ – that's the difference! In that situation Black would have no choice but say good-bye to a good pawn: 18...♖c8 19 ♘xc6 ♖xc6 20 ♗e4 ♖c8 21 ♗xb7 ♖b8 22 ♗a6 with no compensation in sight.

In the view of these variations it's understandable why Thomas was looking for desperate measures.

17...♗xc3!? 18 bxc3 f6 *(D)*

W



Black's idea makes sense: White's queenside is permanently compromised, and if Black can organize a defensive line behind his pawn majority, he'll be back in the game. It's interesting that both Serper and Luther could not find a better use for Black's powerful dark-squared bishop, whose white counterpart had been gone ever since the opening moves, than to exchange it for a knight in a vain hope to slow White down.

19 h4!

In such positions energy is the key to success. With this pawn move White wastes no time in probing Black's defences. It is easy to see that 19...e5, the move Black would very much like to play, now falls victim to a destructive sacrifice, 20 hxg5 hxg5 21 ♘xg5 fxg5 22 ♖xe5.

19...♖f7 20 ♘h2!

Now the knight can show off his agility, while clearing the way for the f-pawn.

20...♕f8

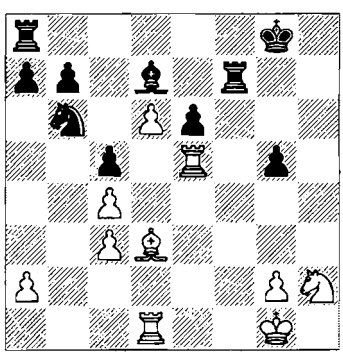
Passive, but the rook won't be able to do the defensive job alone. After 20...♖g7 the simple continuation 21 hxg5 hxg5 22 ♘g4 gives White a free ride at Black's position. However, I'd have to be careful to avoid the tempting 21 ♘g4?, which runs into 21...h5! 22 ♘h6+ ♔f8 23 hxg5 ♖xg5 24 ♕h4 f5!, and the knight is not coming back, while the shot 25 ♘xf5?! ♖xf5 26 ♕e7+ hits the air: 26...♕xe7 27 dxe7+ ♔f7!, and Black should prevail in this ending.

21 f4 ♕g7 22 hxg5 fxg5 23 fxg5 ♕xg5

A tough decision. No doubt Thomas realized that the endgame is not going to be a picnic, but what choice was there? Both 23...♖af8 24 ♘g4 hxg5 25 ♖e5 and 23...hxg5 24 ♖e5 would lead to a quick finish.

24 ♕xg5+ hxg5 25 ♖e5 *(D)*

B



Black's position is a shambles. 25...♖g7 will meet with 26 ♘g4. With his last seconds ticking

away, Thomas comes up with a free pawn offer, all just to create some space for his poor king.

25...♘a4 26 ♘g4

White says, 'Thanks, but no thanks' to 26 ♖xg5+? ♖g7.

26...♔f8 27 ♖xg5 1-0

Despite the easy success in this game, I do not tend to overestimate my chances of catching opponents in opening traps, and I don't think that should be viewed as a major benefit of studying one's games – while I'm willing to accept it as a side perk – simply because the possibility of someone walking into your home prep is insignificantly low, unless your name is Garry Kasparov. As the man himself proves day in and day out, high-grade preparation pays off; but think about it, it takes a gigantic amount of work done on a daily basis by an extremely talented person, aided by computers and teams of strong players/helpers. Let us also not forget that Garry laid out the foundation of today's success many years ago, when 50% (I give his adversary, Anatoly Karpov, the other half) of the mighty Soviet Chess Machine was available at his service. Many can try to imitate Kasparov's approach to studying openings, but how many are going to succeed? As a rule, I dislike long theoretical lines and try not to enter them, unless I'm absolutely forced to. I am not particularly proud of that trait; it's just the way I've always been, and I think it's a bit too late for me to try to change it. In later chapters I will be talking openings, so we'll have a chance to return to this very important subject.

Trend-Breaking Tools

So how do we get that second wind that might help to turn things around? Actually it takes a conscious effort. Imagine a familiar scenario: your position is worse; moreover you feel that the trend is unfavourable. You can't just sit around and wait, making normal, solid moves and watching your decline to continue – you may as well resign. This is what many chessplayers do – they mentally resign when things don't go their way. However, our analytical approach can be put to good use here: we will try to assess the situation and to determine what kind of action is needed. First, let's consider a question: when and how does a trend change? There may be several reasons.

1) If the current advantage is not sufficient to win then, by definition, a skilful defence should sooner or later stop the decline. Thereupon, the trend will be reversed.

2) A blunder, of course, would cause an immediate major shift in trend.

3) A wrong strategic plan may bring about a gradual reverse in trend.

Based on this there are a few viable options in fighting an unfavourable trend. Your choice would depend a lot on your personality in the majority of cases, but it can (and should!) also be influenced by the personality of your opponent. Ideally, a chess-player will possess the ability to discard (or at least downplay) his own preferences and go along the strategic line that would be most unpleasant for this particular opponent. Speaking of myself, I have noticed that I do need to know my opponent well – not just from his games found in databases, but from the experience of our previous encounters – in order to make the right choice.

Option 1: Putting up a stubborn defence

For many people it would mean suppressing their personality. You may hate yourself for defending passively for many moves, but look at a bright side: your opponent knows he's better and he feels obliged to win – isn't that a pressure? Put yourself into your opponent's shoes. Would you want to sit there for hours, if you were him? Most of your opponents would be content with keeping their advantage in a secret hope that you'd go mad and self-destruct. If you simply can avoid that by just staying put, you'd be gaining some psychological edge even when your position is not improving. Remember, a chess position is a pretty durable structure and it takes a lot to bring it down, if you only refuse to cooperate. How to hold the fort? Firstly, try to determine what he intends to do, and play

against his intentions. If your assumption about defensibility of the position was correct, you should be rewarded. The trend will change. The problem here that this type of strategy demands almost superhuman control over one's emotions.

Lautier – Yermolinsky
Wijk aan Zee 1997

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 e3 0-0 5 ♗d3 c5 6 ♘f3 d5 7 0-0 ♘c6 8 a3 ♗xc3 9 bxc3 dxc4 10 ♗xc4 ♕c7 11 ♗b5!

This move has been recently rejuvenated by Gata Kamsky. The idea is simple: before transposing to the main lines White wants to provoke the weakening move ...a6.

11...a6 12 ♗e2 ♖d8

In case of 12...e5 White gets an edge due to the tactical trick 13 d5 ♖d8 14 e4!, when the centre stays perfect, as 14...♘xe4? fails to 15 ♕c2, winning a piece.

13 ♕c2 e5 14 ♗b2

Once again tactics serve a strategic purpose. After 14...cxd4? 15 cxd4 the knight on c6 is pinned, and White wins a battle in the centre, getting some diagonals open for his bishops. 15 e4 is a threat for the same reason, and if White is allowed to play d5, he'll have a long-lasting advantage. Black has to put more pressure to the centre.

14...♗g4 15 dxe5

Correctly avoiding 15 h3?! ♗xf3 16 ♗xf3 ♖ac8, where Black is fully mobilized and ready to take on d4. If 17 ♗xc6, then I'm happy with the pawn sac 17...♕xc6! 18 dxe5 ♕e4!, and Black is taking over in the endgame.

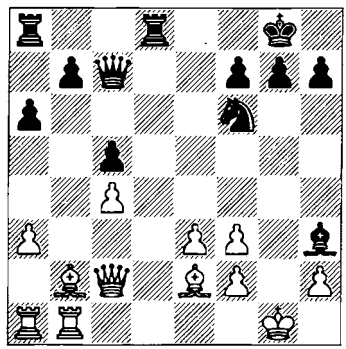
15...♘xe5 16 c4 ♘xf3+ 17 gxf3 ♗h3?

This error leads Black to a difficult position. As it will be seen later, the bishop belongs to g6; that's why 17...♗h5 should have been played at once. There may follow: 18 ♖fd1 (after 18 ♔h1, the reply 18...♕c6 will remind White that his position is not perfect) 18...♘d7!? (beginning to regroup his pieces) 19 ♖d2 ♘f8 20 ♖ad1 f6 21 ♗c3 ♗f7, and Black is quite solid there.

18 ♖fb1! *(D)*

I was only counting with the automatic 18 ♖fd1 ♖xd1+ 19 ♖xd1 ♖d8, when after the rook swaps are completed the white king may be troubled by the weak back rank.

B



By keeping the rooks on the board Joel leaves his options open: queenside expansion with a4-a5, kingside demonstrations after doubling on the g-file, or back to the d-file when the moment is right.

18...♕e7

I wanted to prevent the ♗e5-g3 manoeuvre, which would cement White's kingside and free his hands for ganging up on the weak b6-pawn, while the b8-square would be inaccessible for my rook.

19 ♔h1 ♕e6 20 ♖g1 ♗f5

I had to admit my mistake on move 17. The bishop is coming back, because White's pressure against g7, both diagonally and along the g-file, may produce dangerous tactics if not taken care of.

21 ♕c3 ♗g6 22 ♖g5 b6

Now it's time to take stock. The following factors constitute White's advantage here:

a) the bishop-pair;

b) a half-open g-file against the black king;

c) undisputed control over the a1-h8 diagonal; and

d) the pawn-structure, as two white pawns easily hold Black's pawn majority on the queenside.

Is there anything in the position that speaks in Black's favour? The only thing we can notice

is the d-file, but as we about to see, White will take it over as well. So, do you suggest resignation? If not, what should Black do here? I came up with the following guidelines:

a) Take care of the immediate threats. In this case, White wants to get his centre moving. The e4 advance, followed by f4-f5, will threaten the g6-bishop. The only way to stop this plan is to concentrate more firepower on the e4-square.

b) Do not allow him to create a second weakness in my position. Black already has his hands full of trouble in the centre and the kingside, so the queenside stability should be preserved.

c) In general, don't panic, and keep my position the way it is. Remember, the pressure is on White; he has to win this game. Be optimistic, he might overplay his hand and give Black something to play for later on.

23 a4

White wants to play a5 to create the second weakness.

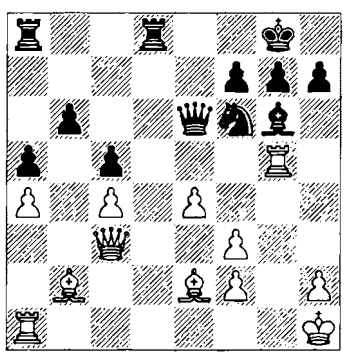
23...a5!

According to section 'b' of our game plan we just don't allow it.

24 e4 *(D)*

24 f4 is refuted by 24...h6 25 f5? ♕c6+; so White plays his main trump, and I had to react accordingly.

B



24...♖e8

Another interesting idea was to continue 24...♖d4!?. The dangerous diagonal is temporarily blocked, and 25 ♕e3 is simply answered with 25...♖d7.

25 ♖d5 ♕c6

Reminding White that the a-pawn can also be weak. In order to take care of that Lautier decides to reposition his light-squared bishop. From c2 it will do two jobs: defend a4 and support e4. The latter is important for White's plans, as he still dreams of the f4-f5 advance. I realized that I had to put more pressure on the e4-pawn to stop this dangerous development.

26 ♗d3 ♖e6! 27 ♗c2 ♖ae8 28 ♖ad1 ♕c7 29 ♖g1 h6

This move can be considered weakening, but I saw no way White could exploit it.

30 ♖g4 ♔h7!

Suddenly Black has a threat of 31...♖g8, unpinning the knight that would take one of the white rooks.

31 ♖g1 ♖g8 32 ♖d2 ♖d8!

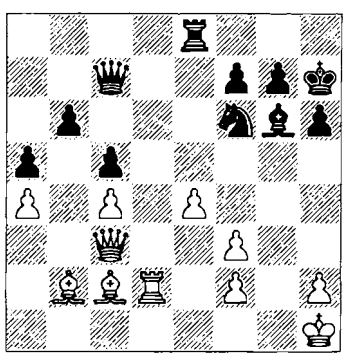
Exchanging pieces is the cornerstone of many defensive concepts. In this case it greatly reduces White's attacking potential.

33 ♖d5

To gain time. It is interesting that despite the familiar opening – he made his first 17 moves almost instantly – Joel was nearing time-trouble at this point. Black's position turned out to be a tough nut to crack!

33...♖g8 34 ♖d2 ♖d8 35 ♖gd1 ♖xd2 36 ♖xd2 ♖e8 *(D)*

W



Covering the back rank, and getting ready for some activity: ...♕f4, ...♗h5, etc. Joel still felt obliged to do something and went for a dubious pawn advance.

37 e5?!

This could easily land White in trouble. With the light-squared bishops getting swapped, the remaining bishop becomes a liability.

37...♘h5 38 ♗xg6+ fxg6 39 ♖d6 ♘f4

The knight has many wonderful squares to hop to.

40 ♕e3 ♕f7?!

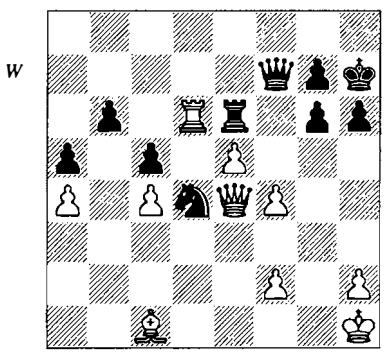
The last move before the time-control allows White to escape. 40...♖f8 41 ♕e4 ♕e7, threatening 42...♕g5, was much stronger.

41 ♕e4 ♘e6

Due to the dominating position of the white queen the game is pretty balanced now.

42 ♗c1 ♘d4 43 f4 ♖e6 *(D)*

I couldn't see any other way to cover g6.



44 ♖d8 ♖e8

In case of 44...♕f5 White wouldn't fall for 45 ♕a8? g5, which gives Black an overwhelming attack, but would simply take the queen. The ending after 45 ♕xf5 gxf5 46 ♔g2 doesn't offer winning chances to either side: White suffers from a bad bishop and dead pawn-structure; Black has to contain the active white rook and keep an eye on the e-pawn.

45 ♖d6 ♖e6 46 ♖d8 ♖e8 47 ♕d5 ♕xd5+ 48 ♖xd5 ♔g8 49 ♗e3 ♘f5 50 ♖d7

Otherwise Black plays ...♔f7, and chases the rook: ♖d6 is met by ...♖e6, ♖d7 by ...♖e7, and ♖d8 by ...♖e8. It's a dead draw, of course.

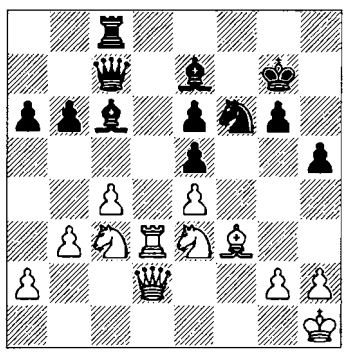
50...g5!

Liquidating.

51 fxg5 ♘xe3 52 fxe3 hxg5 53 ♖b7 ½-½

It must have been very frustrating for an attacking player, and Joel certainly is one of the best in the business, not to be able to land a single punch from such a promising position. Those are the wonders of modern defensive technique – aren't they the reason why our beloved game has become unwanted for sports page editors, who know well enough that the public wants blood and will never accept a non-decisive result. The cure, anyone?

The second example proves that even a position with great structural deficiency can be held, if the defender keeps a clear head.



Yermolinsky – S. Kovačević
Arco di Trento 1989

As often happens in the Hedgehog, at some point White overplayed his hand. As a result, he is now saddled with permanent weaknesses on the dark squares that have a paralysing effect on his minor pieces. The doubled pawns on the e-file are not to Black's disadvantage, of course.

The last move (41...♗b7-c6) is close to being a big mistake, as White is given a chance to reverse the trend by means of a violent tactic. 42 ♘ed5?! (not 42 ♘cd5? exd5 43 cxd5 ♗b7 44 d6 ♕c1+, and Black wins), when the meek 42...♕b7 allows White to get rid of the opponent's dominating dark-squared bishop, while 42...exd5 seems to be punished by 43 exd5 e4 (otherwise 44 d6 regains a piece) 44 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 45 ♗xe4 ♕e5 46 dxc6 ♕xe4 47 ♖e3. This line looks neat, and indeed Black would be

busted here if it weren't for 47...♖f8!, reminding White of his back rank in a ruthless way. Nevertheless, it was a close call for Black! Regardless of the objective value of 42 ♘ed5 (it loses) one thing remains true: I didn't feel the urgency of the moment, and quickly sealed (the tournament was played with adjournments) an indifferent move.

42 a4

During the intermission both players came to appreciate the strength of the ♘d5 idea, but it was too late for White.

42...♖d8

The rook swap will make White's defensive task easier, but my opponent was concerned with taking the sting out of the above-mentioned idea. Practical? Perhaps, but in my opinion 42...♘d7! was possible:

a) 43 ♘cd5 exd5 44 exd5 ♘c5 45 dxc6 (45 d6 ♕d7, and the rook on d3 is hanging) 45...e4 46 ♘d5 ♕e5 47 ♖e3 ♗g5, and wins.

b) 43 ♘ed5 ♗xd5! (not 43...exd5 44 exd5 ♘c5 45 dxc6 ♘xd3 46 ♕xd3, with plenty of compensation) 44 exd5 ♘c5 45 d6 (45 ♖e3 ♗g5) 45...♕d7 46 ♘e4 (the knight ending after 46 dxe7 ♕xd3 47 ♕xd3 ♘xd3 48 ♗c6 ♔f7 is going to be hard to save) 46...♘xd3 47 ♕xd3 (47 dxe7 ♖e8) 47...♖d8 48 ♗xh5 ♗xd6, and Black is obviously better, even though White might be able to set up some defences.

c) 43 ♕c2 ♘c5 44 ♖d1 a5 45 ♘b5 ♕b8 favours Black, who can steadily improve his position with ...♘a6-b4 followed by ...♗c5.

Having spent a lot of time verifying these analyses, I hardly paid any attention to what I was going to do in case of the rook exchange. One thing was clear – hang tough!

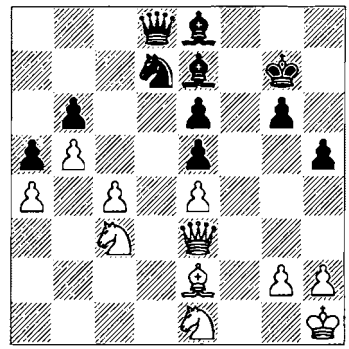
43 ♖xd8 ♗xd8 44 b4

White takes advantage of an opportunity to gain some space on the queenside.

44...♗e7 45 ♘c2 ♗e8?

In a way, Black had to make an important choice as far as the future of his light-squared bishop goes. I'd prefer the natural 45...a5! 46 b5 ♗b7, to keep some pressure against the e4-pawn.

46 ♗e2 a5 47 b5 ♘d7 48 ♕e3 ♕d8 49 ♘e1! *(D)*

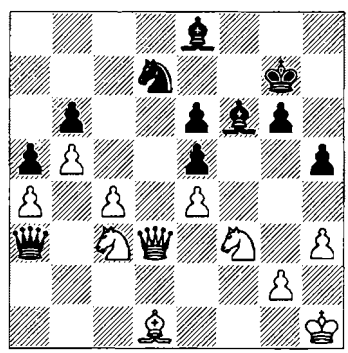

B

With a certain freedom allowed to his pieces by the lack of pressure from Black, White takes the opportunity to reorganize his forces. The knight is headed for f3; that way his opponent is reminded that Black's pawn-structure is not without some deficiencies either.

49...♗g5 50 ♕d3 ♕e7 51 ♘f3 ♗f6 52 h3 ♕a3

It may seem that Black's penetration is going to be decisive, but it's only an illusion.

53 ♗d1! *(D)*


B

Defending a4 just in time. The best way for Black to continue was now 53...♘c5 54 ♕c2 (54 ♕d2 ♕b4) 54...g5!, trying to bring the idle light-squared bishop into play. I'd have no choice then but to play 55 g3 ♗g6 56 ♔g2, uneasily awaiting further developments. What can you do – such is the position!

53...♗e7? 54 ♗c2 ♕c1+ 55 ♘d1!

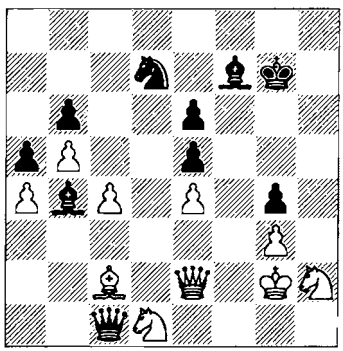
Now the other knight is taking off in search of greener pastures.

55...♗b4 56 ♕e2 ♗f7 57 g3

Suddenly White's ideas crystallize into a positional threat of ♔g2, followed by ♘f2-d3. If this happens, the black pieces will be driven back. Overcome with frustration, my opponent went on with a suspicious-looking pawn advance.

57...g5?! 58 ♔g2 g4 59 hxg4 hxg4 60 ♘h2 *(D)*

B



60...♗h5?

With the major trend-shift looming large, Kovačević hits a panic button. That bishop does look ugly on h5, and, generally speaking, it was high time for Black to reconsider his priorities.

60...♘f6 61 ♘f2 ♗c5 62 ♕d1 is only equal, but there was nothing else to do. Black must be able to keep the queens on the board: 62...♕b2, and capturing the g4-pawn is dangerous on the account of ...♗h5.

61 ♘f2 ♗c5 62 ♕d1

The knight hangs with check, so Black's answer is forced.

62...♕xd1 63 ♗xd1 ♗xf2?

Parting with his only good piece is another mistake. He had to play 63...♘f6, and Black should never lose the ending after 64 ♗xg4 ♗xf2 65 ♗xh5 ♗d4 66 ♗f3 ♔g6.

64 ♔xf2 ♘c5

64...♘f6 65 ♔e3, and c4-c5 is coming.

65 ♔e3 ♔f8 66 ♗xg4 ♗xg4 67 ♘xg4 ♘xa4 68 ♘xe5 ♔e7 69 ♔d4

and White went on to convert the extra pawn into a win.

Games like these would go a long way towards establishing confidence in your defensive abilities. Suddenly, no position would seem hopeless, as long as you can see the light at the end of the tunnel. In my experience, I have always felt great after a successful defence; the uplifting feeling is at least equal to the one derived from an attacking game. The danger lies in overdoing it. Sometimes, a passive position may just be lost, and since your opponent has the luxury of exploring his options without being bothered by counterplay, he's very likely to find the way.

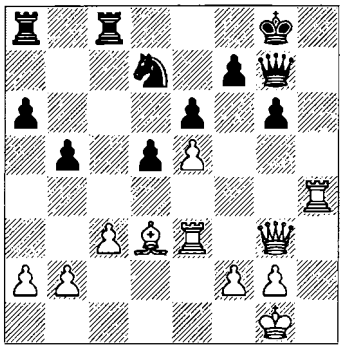
If you suspect that's going to be the case, or if you feel you don't have the stomach for a long defence, then there is:

Option 2: Create a position where your opponent has a multiple choice of reasonable ideas

Certainly, it is much easier to stray from the right plan when there seem to be many of them. What the defender (or a player stuck with an unfavourable trend, as it may also lead to a draw, which is unacceptable for him for one reason or another) has to do is to create a situation where his opponent is suddenly faced with a number of equally promising options. The pressure shifts on the attacker, who would certainly sit down to burn a few precious minutes. This effect is multiplied as he naturally senses the critical moment and realizes that he has to do his best right now, or the advantage may slip away. If your opponent rises to the challenge – well, then you must admit that your risky strategy has failed. However, chances are he will make a mistake, especially if the right way requires energetic measures. For examples of typical indecisiveness go back to Sneak Preview and see once again how hard it is 'to go for it', when apparently safer options are available.

To sum it up: in order to be able to execute this option, you must be a very skilful and imaginative player, yet in any case, you'd better be ready for a disappointment.

B



Edelman – Yermolinsky
G/50, World Open, Philadelphia 1998

30...♖ab8

There was not a lot I could do against the threat of tripling on the h-file. If 30...♖c5 31 ♕h2 ♖ac8, then 32 f4 safely defends the e5-pawn with the deadly ♖eh3 to follow. The text-move calmly prepares the only counterplay available to Black, which is to play ...b4, while seemingly ignoring White's threats against the king.

31 ♕h2 b4

A more radical idea would be to continue 31...♖c4!?, but White can ignore the bait, while going about his business with 32 f4. After the text-move White is presented with a first challenge: does 32 ♖eh3 win on the spot?

32 f4

It seems like he made the right choice, as 32 ♖eh3? ♕xe5 33 ♖h8+ ♔g7 34 ♖3h7+ ♔f6 35 ♕h4+ g5 36 ♕h5 ♖f8 fails to impress.

32...bxc3 33 bxc3

Danny rejected 33 ♖eh3 ♔f8 34 ♖h7 as unclear after 34...c2 35 ♗xc2 ♖xc2 36 ♖xg7 ♖c1+ 37 ♔f2 ♖xb2+ 38 ♔g3 ♖c3+ 39 ♔g4 ♖xh3. However, if he had continued this line with a desperado sac 40 ♖xf7+!, he would have noticed that White wins easily: 40...♔xf7 41 ♕xh3 ♘f8 42 a3.

33...♖xc3

Continuing the same daredevil strategy. Honestly, there was not much else to do.

34 ♖eh3 ♔f8 35 ♖h7 ♖c1+ 36 ♔f2

The line 36 ♗f1 ♖bb1 37 ♖f3 secures White an extra queen, but 37...♘c5! 38 ♖xg7 ♔xg7, with an annoying pin on the first rank, did not seem comfortable for IM Dan Edelman, who started to get into time-trouble. A little detail: the time-control was game in 50 minutes, so there was no solace in reaching move 40.

36...♖b2+

I saw a nice trick here: 36...♘f6!?. However, White would be winning handily after both:

a) 37 ♖h8+ ♘g8 (37...♔e7 38 exf6+ ♕xf6 39 ♖xb8 ♕d4+ 40 ♖e3 gives White too much material) 38 ♖3h7 ♖b2+ 39 ♔e3, finally capturing the queen for small change.

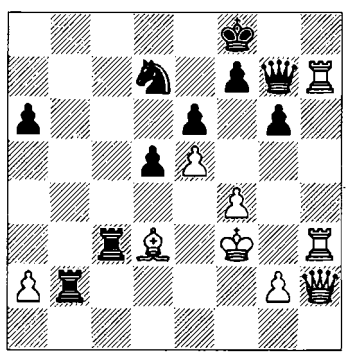
b) 37 ♖xg7 ♘g4+ 38 ♔g3 ♘xh2 39 ♖gh7 ♖b7 40 ♔xh2, with the unstoppable threat of ♗g6.

37 ♔f3

37 ♔e3? does make 37...♘f6 work, but 37 ♔g3 would amount to the same thing as the game continuation.

37...♖c3 *(D)*

W



The moment of truth. The straightforward 38 ♖xg7 ♖xd3+ 39 ♔g4 ♖xh3 40 ♖xf7+ ♔xf7 41 ♕xh3 would have won the game, just as in the note to White's 33rd move. Instead, my weary opponent embarks his king on a suicide mission.

38 ♔g4? ♘f6+ 39 ♔g5??

It was not too late to hit the brakes. The cold-blooded 39 exf6 ♕xf6 40 ♖h8+ ♔e7 41 ♕g1 d4 42 ♗b1 would lead to an unclear situation; for example, 42...e5 (42...♖c5!? may be

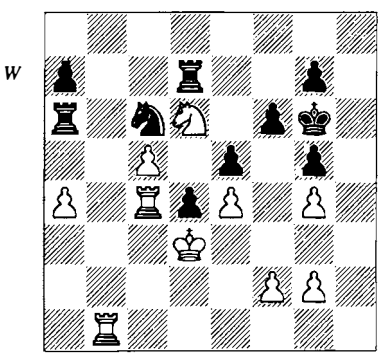
Black's best) 43 ♖xc3 ♕xf4+ 44 ♔h3 dxc3 walks into a shot, 45 ♗xg6!.

The text-move blunders everything away.

39...♘xh7+ 40 ♖xh7 ♖xg2+ 41 ♕xg2 ♕xh7 42 ♗e2 ♖h3 43 ♕f2 ♕h6+ 0-1

Incredible, simply incredible. I must confess that White's task was not too difficult, and I'm sure there are hundreds of players around (including Danny himself on a better day) who would simply put Black away, choices or not. Simple tactical proficiency – that's all it would take, but don't you admit, there are times when your head spins and all the variations you calculate over and over again only make matters worse by mixing together in a single blur? And it all seems so easy after the game ends... It has happened to me many, many times.

In the next episode I went for Option 2 to avoid obviously drawish continuations.



Yermolinsky – I. Ivanov
Reno 1996

In a long positional struggle I had tried hard to outplay my opponent, only to realize just before the time-control that I no longer had any advantage. Black's pawn-structure boasts a monstrous protected passed pawn on d4, and his pieces are in no way inferior to their white counterparts. What can White do here? The active knight on d6 is complemented by the active rook on the b-file, but the other white rook is clumsy on c4, and it seemed that White has hit a brick wall with developing any play here. Nearing time-trouble, I made a 'consolidating' move that didn't have much to do with anything my position could use as improvements.

38 ♖b5?

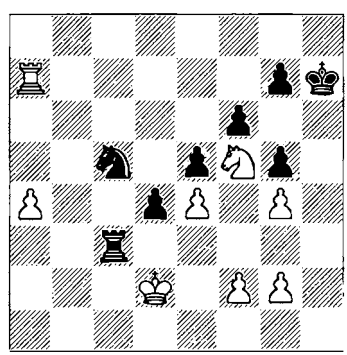
Better was 38 g3 to anticipate the following black knight manoeuvre.

38...♘d8!

Suddenly things are not so rosy anymore. The natural move is 39 g3, but Black continues with 39...♘e6 40 ♘b7 ♖c7, and the threat of ...♖ac6 forces the white pieces into a near-zugzwang situation after 41 ♘a5 ♔f7. Black would be just better then! In desperation, I hastily cooked up some wild ideas, hoping to confuse my opponent.

39 ♖b8!? ♘e6 40 ♘f5 ♖xa4?

And he bit on it! It was hard to resist the pawn of course, especially when it looked like White simply blundered it! Igor took my pawn instantly. However, the much stronger move 40...♖c7! would have made White very sorry for what he has done to his position. After 41 c6 ♔h7! the black king escapes the danger zone (42 ♖b1 g6), leaving White hardly any choice except for 42 ♖b7. That was as far as I could go in my calculations. I thought I would be out of danger, but there follows 42...♖cxc6 43 ♖xc6 ♖xc6 44 ♖xa7 ♖c3+ 45 ♔d2 ♘c5 *(D)*.



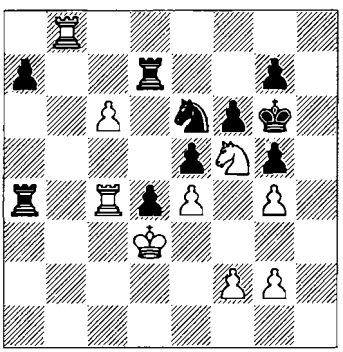
Black's threats, 46...♘b3+ 47 ♔d1 d3 being the deadliest of them, will easily draw White's complete attention. After a few minutes of analysis I could only see one way to escape: 46 f3

♘b3+ 47 ♔e1 d3 48 ♖xg7+ ♔h8 49 ♖d7 d2+ 50 ♖xd2! (this sacrifice is forced: 50 ♔e2 ♖c1 51 ♖d8+ ♔h7 52 ♖d7+ ♔g8 53 ♘e3 ♖e1+ 54 ♔f2 ♘d4 and wins; it is the same story after 50 ♔f2 ♖c1! {but not 50...♘d4 51 ♖xd4 exd4 52 ♔e2 with good drawing chances} 51 ♘e3 ♘d4, followed by ♖c1-e1xe3) 50...♘xd2 51 ♔xd2, and White must be able to hold his own in the resulting ♖ vs ♘ ending.

This line shows the strength of the black d4-pawn, which of course comes as no surprise.

41 c6! *(D)*

B



An all-important rejoinder. Now 41...♖c7? loses to 42 ♖xa4 ♘c5+ 43 ♔d2 ♘xa4 44 ♖b7, winning the rook, so he has to give check first.

41...♖a3+ 42 ♔d2 ♖c7 43 ♖b7 ♖a2+

Choices, choices. Igor also had to consider 43...♖c3 44 ♖xc7, and now:

a) 44...♖xc4 45 ♖xa7 ♔h7 46 ♘e7 ♘c5 47 c7 ♘b3+ 48 ♔d1 ♖c1+ 49 ♔e2 ♖c2+ with perpetual check.

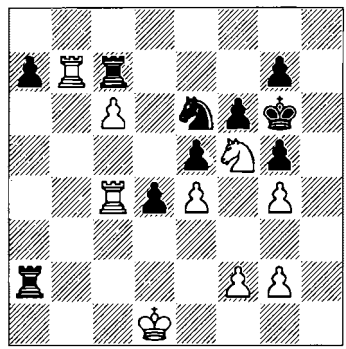
b) 44...♘xc7 45 ♖xc3 dxc3+ 46 ♔xc3 ♔f7 47 ♔c4 g6 48 ♘e3 ♔e6 49 ♔c5 ♘a6+ 50 ♔b5 ♘c7+ 51 ♔c5, with the same outcome.

Most likely, he decided he can make a draw the easy way, as the white king doesn't seem to be able to escape checks.

44 ♔d1!? *(D)*

Nevertheless, I try. Of course, 44 ♔e1 ♖a1+ 'shake hands' was there, but after a long think I found a fantastic idea of weaving a mating net around the black king. The only problem was leaving the kingside pawns at the mercy of the black rook, but I figured that with an extra knight I wouldn't seriously risk losing this game.

B



Once again, Black is presented with a multiple choice of moves. First, he has to discard 44...♖xb7? 45 cxb7 ♖b2, as White gets excellent winning chances after 46 ♘d6 ♘d8 47 ♖c7 a5 48 ♖d7 ♘xb7 49 ♖xb7 ♖xf2 50 ♘f5 ♔h7 51 ♘xg7 – that part was easy. Then, the idea of immediately capturing the kingside pawns comes to mind: 44...♖xf2 45 ♘e7+ ♔h6 46 ♖xc7 (46 ♘d5? ♖xc6! 47 ♖xc6 ♘d8 is a nice trap; Black would be nearly winning then) 46...♘xc7 47 ♘d5 ♘e6, and it turns out that White can't get more than a piece for his efforts, while his pawns are dropping like flies.

In this situation I'd have to swallow my pride and take the draw while it's there: 48 ♖c2 ♖f1+ 49 ♔e2 ♖g1 50 ♔d3 ♖d1+ 51 ♔e2 ♖g1, with repetition (but not 51...d3+? 52 ♔xd1 dxc2+ 53 ♔c1!, and wins) because the alternative, 48 c7 ♘xc7 49 ♖xc7 ♖xg2 50 ♘e7 ♖xg4 51 ♘f5+ ♔h5 52 ♖xa7, just doesn't seem like a viable winning attempt, to say the least.

To my great relief Igor did not bother with much thinking and quickly continued checking my king.

44...♖a1+? 45 ♔c2 ♖a2+ 46 ♔b1

46 ♔b3 would be the same thing, by the way.

46...♖xf2

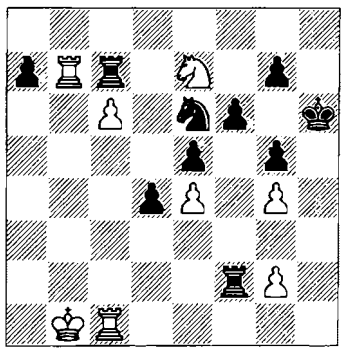
It looks like Black got himself an improved version of the variation given above, as the white king is out of the way. In a sense this is true – but it is out of the way of my rook!

47 ♘e7+ ♔h6

Black is lost in every variation. 47...♔f7 48 ♘d5 costs him a whole rook for nothing, while 47...♔h7 48 ♖c1! ignites a swift and deadly mating attack: 48...g6 49 ♘d5 ♖g7 50 ♖h1+ ♔g8 51 ♖b8+ ♔f7 52 ♖hh8 d3 53 ♖he8, and there's no stopping ♖e7#.

48 ♖c1! *(D)*

B



That's why I needed my king on b1!

48...g6 49 ♘d5 1-0

Black had nothing else left to do but resign, because the intended 49...♖xc6 now meets with the 'intermediate' checkmate, 50 ♖h1#.

Take notice of how the black king fell victim to a mating attack, even though it seemed absolutely safeguarded by his pawns. The strange logic of chess makes the whole concept of king safety change like a chameleon, as the game moves on from middlegame to endgame. At the Yermo Chess Academy I had a special session devoted to attacking the king in the endgame, and if I ever get to write an endgame book, I'll surely regret that I wasted such a great example on a totally unrelated middlegame subject.

Speaking of the soundness of Option 2, I realize of course that with deeper analysis (Fritz to the rescue) my concept will start falling apart – and that's OK by me. The whole idea is to outline some options a chess-player may use during a **practical game**, regardless of their absolute value. Having to start from an inferior situation doesn't help either – still one has to fight.

The next game may be viewed as another illustration of Option 2, but I would like to move it on to the next category.

Option 3: Sacrifice material to release the hidden energy of your pieces

Be aware that theoretically speaking this speeds up your defeat. But this does require a huge effort from your opponent, as he instantly needs to readjust to a new situation. All the plans he had worked out before would have to be discarded to concentrate his efforts on extinguishing that sudden gust of energy. He may not be able to do this.

In any case, unbalancing the position is a good method if the position is inferior. Having an advantage, your opponent is likely to opt for risk-avoiding continuations, which may be wrong. Use this factor to your advantage, and remember, even if you eventually lose, you lose like a man.

Yermolinsky – Novikov

Orlando 1999

A typical situation: going into the last round I trailed my opponent by half a point. Igor Novikov is a solid player, who has kept his opening repertoire virtually unchanged for 20 years. On one hand, it makes it easy to guess his openings, but there's not much you can do in a few short hours before the game to shatter them. I decided to play a gambit line that has recently become the latest rage of fashion.

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 c6 4 ♘f3 ♘f6 5 ♗g5 h6 6 ♗h4 dxc4 7 e4 g5 8 ♗g3 b5 9 ♗e2 ♘bd7! *(D)*

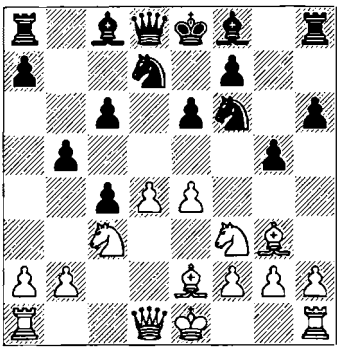
As I might have expected from an accomplished theoretician, Igor comes up with the best move-order. Neither 9...♗b7 10 h4 g4 11 ♘e5, nor the greedy 9...b4?! 10 ♘a4 ♘xe4 11 ♗e5! has worked well for Black in recent practice.

With the text-move Black controls the e5-square early, thus making a lot of things much harder for his opponent.

10 ♕c2

I realize that I shouldn't be talking theory here. Firstly, I'm not a big expert in this line

W



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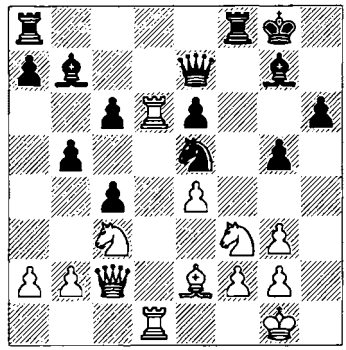


(certainly not in the ranks of Sakaev or Khalifman), and, secondly, by the time this book sees the light of the day, new ideas will have been found to overturn whatever evaluations I may be able to come up with. The queen move looks logical, as Black no longer has ...g4 and ...♕xd4.

10...♗b7 11 0-0

Now I'm not sure White can afford to waste a tempo on castling. 11 ♖d1 ♘h5 12 d5 looks more direct.

11...♘h5!

Going after the bishop is Priority One. Black would be embarrassed by 11...♗g7 12 ♗d6!.

12 ♖ad1 ♘xg3 13 hxg3 ♗g7 14 d5 0-0!?

This natural move may have been a novelty (it certainly was for me). Previously seen was 14...♕e7, as played in Bosboom-Kramnik, Hoogovens Blitz, Wijk aan Zee 1999. In my opinion, the only way to put it to the test is the fearless 15 d6!?. After 15...♕f6 White should probably continue with 16 ♘d4, because the tempting 16 e5? ♘xe5 17 ♘e4 ♘xf3+ 18 ♗xf3 ♕xb2 19 ♕xb2 ♗xb2 just gives Black too many pawns (20 ♘c5 0-0-0!). As far as the position after 16 ♘d4 goes, I am not able to offer any enlightened opinions, for the reasons I described above.

15 dxe6 fxe6 16 ♖d6

I assume that was the move Kramnik feared. White hits the e6-pawn and prepares to double on the d-file.

16...♕e7 17 ♖fd1 ♘e5! *(D)*

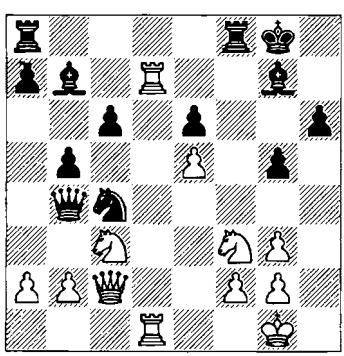
A rude awakening. Any other knight move would allow White to play e5 with a powerful initiative, but what to do now? The extra piece White gains after 18 ♘xe5 ♗xe5 19 ♖d7 ♕f6! is of insignificant value. The only defence against the threatened 20...♕xf2+ seems to be 20 f4, but then the straightforward continuation 20...gxf4 21 ♖xb7 fxg3 22 ♗f3 ♕h4 gives Black a decisive attack.

I came to look at 20 ♗xc4 only to be put off by the *zwischenzug* 20...♗c8. As panic was about to set in, I suddenly discovered an amazing idea.

18 ♗xc4!

At first, I thought I would be fighting for a draw in a gloomy ending: 18...♘xc4 19 ♖d7 ♕b4 20 ♖xb7 ♕xb2 21 ♕xb2 ♘xb2 22 ♖dd7 ♗xc3 23 e5 ♖xf3 24 ♖g7+ ♔f8 25 gxf3 ♗xe5 26 ♖bf7+ ♔e8 27 ♖h7, but while my opponent was contemplating his choices, I came to realize that there would be a much better move, 20 e5! *(D)*.

B

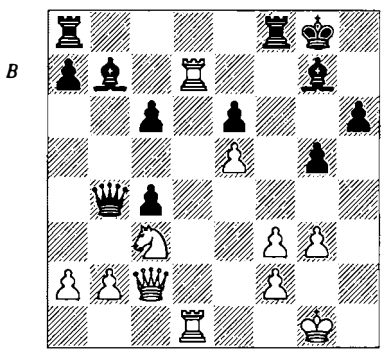


The threat of penetrating to g6 is surprisingly strong, and it can't be slowed down by half-measures such as 20...♗c8. Essentially, Black is down to two choices:

a) 20...♖f5 21 ♖xb7 ♕xb2 22 ♕xb2 ♘xb2 23 ♖dd7, and there we have a standard case of absolute domination on the seventh rank. The line may continue 23...♗h8 24 g4 (better than 24 ♘e4 g4 25 ♘h4 ♖xe5 26 ♘g6 ♖xe4 27 ♘xh8, which gives just a draw) 24...♖f4 25 ♖e7 ♖c4 26 ♘e2 (or 26 ♖xe6!?), and White is cruising with ♖xe6-g6xh6 to follow.

b) 20...♖xf3!? is an interesting attempt to bring back the queen. However, after 21 ♕g6 ♕f8 22 gxf3 ♖b8, White's got 23 f4!, and his attack is raging on.

Novikov's clock kept ticking, and I lazily double-checked 18...♖xf3 19 ♗xe6+♖f7 20 f4 and 18...♘xf3+ 19 gxf3 bxc4 20 ♖d7 ♕b4. In the last line once again White goes for the throat with 21 e5! *(D)*.

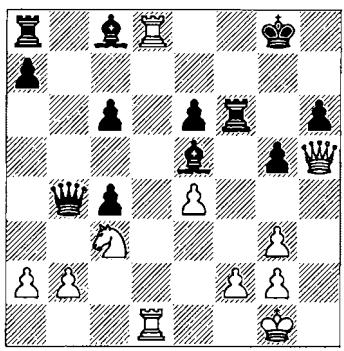


21...♖f5 (what else? 21...♔h8 22 ♕g6 ♖g8 23 ♘e4 leads to checkmate) 22 g4 ♖xe5 23 ♕g6 ♕f8 24 ♖xb7 (not the optimistic 24 ♘e4? in view of 24...♖d5!) 24...♕f6 25 ♕xf6 ♗xf6 26 ♖d6, with excellent endgame prospects despite the pawn deficit.

It took Igor Novikov over an hour to make a decision.

18...bxc4 19 ♘xe5 ♗xe5 20 ♖d7 ♕f6!?

What's this? Wouldn't the natural move, 20...♕b4, send White fishing for a repetition of moves with 21 a3, e.g. 21...♕b6 22 ♘a4 ♕b5 23 ♘c3? Instead, Black can force his opponent to give a perpetual check in the rook ending after 21...♕b3!? 22 ♕xb3 cxb3 23 ♖xb7 ♗xc3 24 bxc3 ♖fb8 25 ♖dd7 b2. So, why not 20...♕b4? The thing is, White is not interested in regaining the piece, and instead he goes 21 ♕e2!. I saw this move during the game and understood the ideas (♕h5 and/or f4) behind it. Black can take care of the former threat with 21...♖f6, but then comes the latter: 22 f4! ♕b6+ 23 ♔h2 ♗xc3 24 bxc3 c5 25 e5 ♖g6 26 ♕c2, winning on the spot. There are more variations I worked out after the game. The most important line begins with 21...♗c8 22 ♕h5 ♖f6 (obviously not 22...♗xd7 23 ♕g6+, followed by 24 ♖d7) 23 ♖d8+ *(D)*, and now:



a) 23...♔g7 24 ♕e8 ♖f8 25 ♖1d7+ ♗xd7 26 ♖xd7+♔f6 and the black king is out. White completes the hunt with 27 ♕h5 ♗xc3 28 ♕xh6+ ♔e5 29 ♕xg5+ ♖f5 30 exf5.

b) 23...♔h7! 24 f4 (24 ♕e8 fails to impress: 24...♖g6) 24...♗xc3 (after 24...♗c7 25 ♕e8 ♗xd8 26 ♖xd8 Black would have to give back the rook by 26...♖f8 just to prolong the game without any chances of survival) 25 bxc3 ♕e7 26 fxg5 ♕f7 27 ♕h4. The final position is not so clear, but White's compensation for a piece should not be underestimated.

The text-move hands White a pleasant advantage without any risks.

21 ♖xb7 ♖ad8 22 ♖dd7! ♖xd7 23 ♖xd7 *(D)*

The black pawns on the c-file are hopelessly weak. I was now mostly concerned with the

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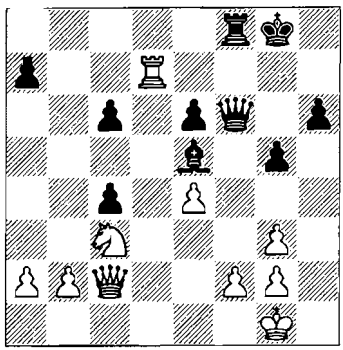


counter-punch 23...♗xg3!, because 24 fxg3? ♕f1+ 25 ♔h2 ♖f2 simply loses for White. My intention was to play 24 ♘d1 ♗e5 25 ♕xc4 ♗xb2 26 ♖d6 with an undisputed advantage. Igor was already low on time, and just wanted to exchange more pieces.

23...♖f7 24 ♖xf7 ♔xf7 25 ♘d1 ♗d4 26 ♕xc4 ♗xb2 27 ♕xc6

The gutsy decision I took on move 18 has fully paid off. White sits on a solid extra pawn, even if the unfortunate position of the d1-knight promises Black some drawing chances.

A wonderful game! It perfectly fits the description of my style offered by American chess critic James Schroeder in his pamphlet, 'Yermo puts a scare on his opponents with a ghost of attack to lure them into bailing out to a bad ending, but he's not really a good attacker, and once his opponents have figured that out they won't do it anymore. As a result, Yermo hardly wins any games against decent competition...' Or something to that effect – I don't remember the exact way he put it in words.

There's some truth in this, I admit it; but honestly, in this particular case I'd much prefer to see 20...♕b4 played on the board. Not only that would have given me a chance to prove my attacking skills to Mr Schroeder, maybe I would have actually have won this game in the process! Because, in reality, I was not able to convert my endgame advantage into a win, and the featured game ended in a disappointing draw, agreed on move 39.

Seriously, I have my doubts about the inclusion of this game in this particular chapter. White hardly had any choice after walking into Black's prepared line, especially since the tournament situation made a loss and a draw practically the same. I wish for two things:

a) White had another playable option on move 18;

b) the attack begun with 18 ♗xc4 could be refuted in the post-mortem analysis.

That way I could attribute my success in reversing the trend to the psychological effect, rather than to the pure chess quality of the operation undertaken. To make up for my shortcomings I'd like to offer to your attention another game; but first, let's round up what we have discovered about Options 1, 2 and 3.

Once a trend has been established (and gone too far!) the 'normal' course of events will not reverse it. You must remember that great positional advantages, such as structural ones, increase in significance as the game goes on, and allowing your opponent to tighten the screws equals resignation.

a) The unfavourable trend needs to be recognized. We can't deal with a problem without admitting its existence.

b) Some drastic measures could be undertaken in order to break the trend. We may be willing to take enormous risks, risks we'd never take under normal circumstances, because we've got nothing to lose! It doesn't matter how a game is lost – we couldn't get less than zero in the wall chart!

c) There are different degrees of risk, and different situations call for more or less desperate measures. Don't hit the panic button too early! – remember Option 1.

d) Sacrifices are great tools for unbalancing the position. Pitching a pawn at the right moment can throw your opponent off his game plan, and make him solve new problems. Very often this strategy works when the opponent is enjoying a stable positional advantage and expects you to resign.

In the following game I found myself in serious trouble, but was able to capitalize on the sudden effects of a timely pawn sac.

Hjartarson – Yermolinsky

Iceland – USA, Chess Olympiad, Erevan 1996

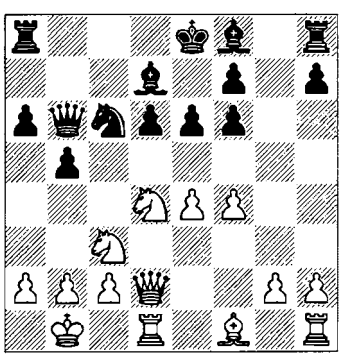
1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 ♘c6 6 ♗g5 e6 7 ♕d2 a6 8 0-0-0 ♗d7 9 f4 b5 10 ♗xf6 gxf6

A difficult system for Black. I played it extensively in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and suffered many bitter defeats. The main drawbacks are quite visible: Black is stuck with doubled pawns and an unsafe king. Some 80 years ago the top players would have refused even to look at a position like this, but times change. In the 1950s Mikhail Botvinnik began to experiment with this pawn-structure, often forcing it with the extremely provocative move 8...h6!?. His reasons were such that Black gets some long-term pluses in the form of the bishop-pair and a strong pawn-mass in the centre. In short, Botvinnik's idea was to create an unbalanced position, where his superior skills would tell in the course of the upcoming strategic battle. He was a very courageous player.

11 ♔b1

Having been surprised by a rare opening, my opponent, an experienced GM, makes a wise decision. Instead of sharp lines, such as 11 ♘xc6 ♗xc6 12 ♕e3, or 11 f5, he chooses a safe continuation, designed for a quick and harmonious development.

11...♕b6 *(D)*



Threatening to enter an ending, which would drastically improve Black's chances. Indeed, with the danger to his king gone forever, Black could set to work exploiting his positional advantages.

12 ♘ce2 ♖c8

Black castles long sometimes, but in this case he has to watch his king's safety too, as the advanced queenside pawns don't form a natural shelter. The further advance of the a- and b-pawns would be all but ruled out, so where's Black play then? He may try for the ...d5 advance, but not only does it take a special set-up with the bishop on b7 instead of d7; the sad truth is that often it brings no relief: White simply exchanges the pawns and light-squared bishops, leaving his opponent with an even more exposed king and a bunch of weak pawns. What is left for Black is to play on with the king committed to stay in the centre. It is quite safe there for now, thanks to the pawn wall, but there's another matter: the rooks lack coordination. Look now at the queen's rook, which is dangerously operating on the c-file; it's all alone there – Black has no firepower to develop anything against the white king.

13 g3

Played in the spirit of the chosen strategy. White eschews the sharper continuation, 13 f5, which had been tried on numerous occasions. Black then should never allow fxe6, and he goes for 13...♘xd4 14 ♘xd4 e5, setting up a typical pawn-structure, where his fate depends on piece activity and the ability to prevent the white knight from getting to d5.

13...h5 14 ♗g2 ♘a5 15 b3 ♘c6!?

It seems like Black is just wasting time, but the idea is to provoke some weakening pawn moves, while awaiting further developments. 15...♘b7, followed by ...♘c5, is another option.

16 ♖hf1 ♕a5 17 c3

The only way to keep the queens on the board without allowing 17 ♕e3 ♘b4.

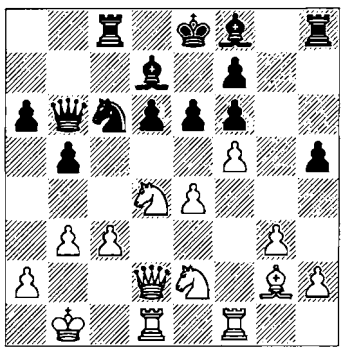
17...♕b6?

One step too far in that wait-and-see policy. Much better – in fact, it seems like the only reasonable thing to do – was 17...♘xd4 18 ♕xd4 ♗e7, and the awkward e2-knight slows White down considerably. I forgot my own game,

because 17...♘xd4 was exactly what I did against Josh Waitzkin in New York Open a few years earlier. The only difference was that Josh put his rook on e1 instead of f1, but it hardly matters.

18 f5! *(D)*

B



White gets down to business. His plan is simple and strong: exchange pawns on e6, attack the pawn with ♗h3, thus forcing the horrible concession ...e5. As we already discussed, Black has just one way to avoid such a positional nightmare.

18...♘xd4 19 ♘xd4

The alternative, 19 cxd4 e5 20 ♘c3, had a tactical flaw: 20...♕c7!. Honestly, White doesn't miss it too much, because the knight is very active on d4. In order not to be blown away, Black must keep the position closed. He develops his dark-squared bishop to a backwater diagonal, where at best it takes some squares away from White's heavy pieces, while waiting for a chance to be swapped off for the white knight in case it tries to sneak out to d5 via e3.

19...♗h6 20 ♕e1 e5 21 ♘c2

The knight keeps finding good routes; now Black must stop the positional threat of ♘b4-d5.

21...a5 22 h4

White has consolidated his advantage. Black's weak pawns on d6 and h5, uncoordinated rooks and suspicious king give him plenty of trouble. The trend chart would show a steady rise between moves 12-22. By now Black must realize that 'normal' play will get him nowhere. My vast experience in this system largely consists of me being ground to dust in the hopeless d5-knight vs f8-bishop situations. I knew better than to allow this to happen one more time!

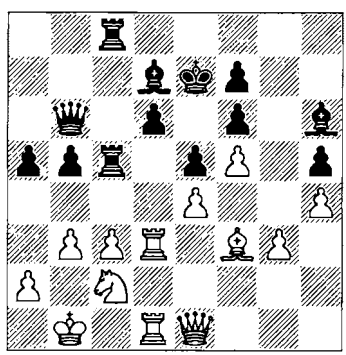
22...♔e7 23 ♖f3 ♖c5

I correctly judged that in this very favourable position my opponent wouldn't want to take any risk; otherwise 24 b4!?, trying to win the b4-square for the knight, might have discouraged me from playing 23...♖c5. Really bad positions can make us brave.

24 ♖fd3 ♖hc8 25 ♗f3?! *(D)*

25 ♖xd6? ♕xd6 26 ♖xd6 ♔xd6 would be a nice relief for Black. Johann correctly avoids this, but shows some impatience with the other weakness. 25 ♔b2! was much better; now White is ready: 25...d5? 26 exd5 ♗xf5 27 d6+ ♔d7 28 ♕f2! ♗xd3 29 ♖xd3 with a dangerous attack against the wayward black king.

B



25...d5!!

This is the strongest trend-breaking tool, an unexpected sacrifice. It is understandable that White wants to avoid the mess resulting after 26 exd5 ♗xf5 27 d6+ ♔d8 28 ♗e4 ♗g4 29 ♕f2 f5!, even if the complications must be favourable for him. I think Johann took the pawn with a light heart, viewing it as a well-deserved reward for conducting the right strategic plan. If that's how he felt, he was in for a big disappointment.

26 ♖xd5 ♖xd5 27 ♖xd5 ♗c6 28 ♖d3 ♖d8

What does Black get for the pawn? The disappearance of the rooks will make the white king vulnerable to attacks on the back rank. That's basically all. The real effect is psychological. Instead of methodically grinding out his opponent from a luxury of a superior position (every player's dream) White suddenly has to immerse himself in a maze of complicated variations – a most unwelcome change.

29 ♖xd8 ♕xd8 30 ♗xh5 ♗d2!?

Feeling his opponent's uneasiness, Black eschews the acceptable 30...♕d3 31 ♗e2 ♕xe4, in favour of a more complicated line.

31 ♕f2!

Hjartarson is up to the task! 31 ♕e2 ♗xc3 leaves White's queenside all tied up.

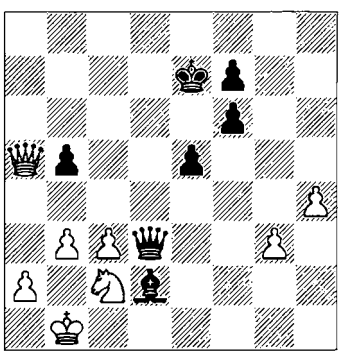
31...♗xe4 32 ♕a7+ ♕d7 33 ♕xa5!

Once again played with a great presence of mind. 33 ♕xd7+? ♔xd7 34 ♗xf7 ♔e7! (better than 34...♗xf5 35 h5, followed by 36 ♗g6) 35 ♗g6 ♗d3! and the e-pawn rolls forward, while the king easily contains White's passed pawns.

33...♗xf5

If 33...♕xf5, then White is happy with the ending: 34 ♕c7+ ♕d7 35 ♕xd7+ ♔xd7 36 ♗xf7 ♗xc3 37 h5.

34 ♗e2 ♗d3 35 ♗xd3 ♕xd3 *(D)*



36 ♕c7+?

The pressure finally gets to Johann. This stupid check only allows the black king to escape. The right move, 36 ♔b2 would have probably led to a draw.

36...♔f8 37 ♔b2 ♔g7! 38 ♘b4

38 a4 would cost a piece: 38...♕f1 39 ♔a3 ♕c1+ 40 ♔b4 ♕xc2 41 axb5 ♕e4+ 42 ♕c4, and the elegant 42...♕d4! puts White in a fatal zugzwang. The same queen move comes in now, all of a sudden launching a deadly attack.

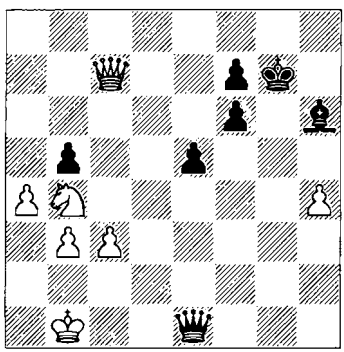
38...♕f1 39 ♔c2 ♗h6 40 a4

To open the a2-square, but after clearing the time-control, Black calmly calculates a forced win.

40...♕c1+ 41 ♔d3 ♕d2+ 42 ♔e4 ♕g2+! 43 ♔d3 ♕xg3+

It is always useful to pick up another pawn with check.

44 ♔c2 ♕f2+ 45 ♔b1 ♕e1+ *(D)*



46 ♔a2

There is no difference in the final result after 46 ♔b2 ♕e2+ 47 ♘c2 ♕d2. The whole ending is a rare display of ♕+♗ harmony.

46...♕e2+ 47 ♔b1 ♕d1+ 48 ♔a2 ♗c1! 49 ♔b1

A sad necessity.

49...bxa4 50 bxa4 ♗a3+ 0-1

No choice, when facing the loss of all the pawns after 51 ♔a2 ♗xb4 52 cxb4 ♕xa4+ 53 ♔b2 ♕xb4+ 54 ♔c2 ♕xh4.

In a perfect world all three options described above must be considered equally, but your personal characteristics and preferences tend to take over. The question is, should you follow them or fight them? I do what I do, but every chess player must develop his own methods of dealing with adverse situations. I would be

pleased if you find the ideas expressed above useful, but remember that you need not take anything for granted, and any external advice should be individually crafted to suit your chess personality.

How to do it? This is the junction when my esteemed YCA colleague, Boris Men, takes the stage to share his thoughts. The following is based on transcripts of his lectures delivered at Yermo Chess Academy with my comments in *italics*.

Burn Bridges Now or Preserve the Status Quo?

Why and when do we use the expression 'burning bridges' as compared to 'taking an irreversible action'? Surely, the former is a particular case of the latter. But this is a very specific case, a case where your action will trigger a chain of consequences resulting in a win or a loss, rather than simply produce a better or worse position. Another feature of this class of decisions is creating a situation of uncertainty, whereas for some irreversible actions you can be quite certain about the outcome. The combination of uncertainty and high stakes creates a unique environment. You must rely on your intuition, but can you trust it under such circumstances?

Many chess-players are so averse to 'burning bridges' that they automatically reject the whole idea. I'm not sure I will criticize them here. Statistically, this level-headed approach works well in the majority of game situations. What I'm about to describe is a type of decision that can only be justified under very special game or tournament standings or conditions.

Also, observations show that if the right moment is missed, chances are that by 'burning bridges' you'll burn your game as well. And the right moment only lasts one move; it's now or never! Before you embark on a one-way trip, however, you had better ask yourself a few questions.

a) Am I keeping my cool?

Remember, this is not an emotional decision. If you are taking it only because something in your game bothers you so much that you 'can't stand it anymore', you won't succeed.

b) Is my intuition telling me I'm going to be all right?

You have nothing as important as your intuitive feelings to rely on. They should be listened to.

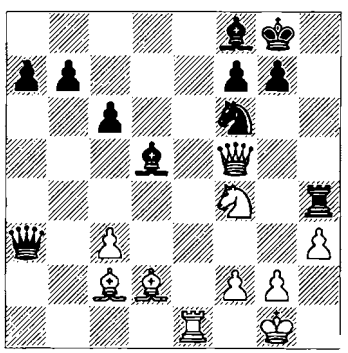
c) Why am I doing this?

Although only intuition can help to choose the right moment for the 'win or die' decision, the prerequisites for such a decision are accessible for rational analysis. It could be one of the following:

c1) You have already sacrificed something for your initiative or attack and are beginning to feel that your energy gust will soon be exhausted.

c2) You're going for a win at all cost, but he played well and equalized. Here is an instant chance to seriously imbalance the position and it won't last.

c3) You have been outplayed and now sense the early indications of 'unfavourable trend' – inconveniences with your position.



Men – Dandridge
Midwest Amateur Team Ch, Chicago 1998

It's the last round, and our team is in the contest for first place. The result of this game reflected on the team's overall result as follows: a win would make us tie for first, a draw would make us tie for second, and a loss would make us tie for third. This all could be easily figured

out by the time this position occurred on the board. Answering the question 'a' I must admit that I was affected by the tournament situation.

Let's look at the board. White has sacrificed a pawn and there are two factors that constitute his compensation: White's initiative on the kingside and the misplaced black rook on h4. However, Black's pawn-structure is very solid, his minor pieces control the penetration squares on the e-file, and, most importantly, he knows what to do – just push the a-pawn forward and damn the torpedoes!

I had a choice between preserving the status quo with 26 g3 ♖h8 27 h4, and going for an all-out attack with 26 g4 or maybe 26 g3 ♖h8 27 g4 – in both cases representing a 'burning bridges' decision.

I had an uneasy feeling that my initiative was not substantial enough to win the game with normal moves. It wouldn't have bothered me that much if it weren't for my emotional state being affected by the tournament situation. I kept looking at the move g4, even if I felt strongly repulsed by this move – negative answer to question 'b' – and suddenly it descended on me. The ♘f4-h5 idea! The ghost of this move kept lingering in my mind until I gave up.

26 g4!?

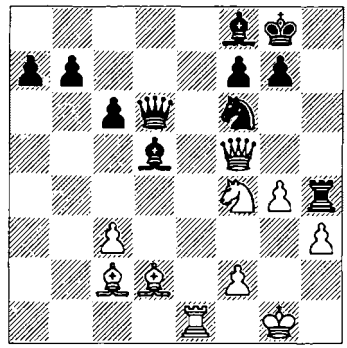
Wait a minute, how about 26...♘xg4 here? In my desire to find a justification for the emotions-driven g4 move I totally forgot about tactics. Luckily this self-induced blindness can't be punished right away: 26...♘xg4? 27 ♘xd5, but it may happen in the future. I began to second-guess myself: maybe in this respect the rook had to be driven to h8 with 26 g3 ♖h8 27 g4, who knows?

26...♕d6! *(D)*

Now I realized just how bad my previous decision was. 27 ♘h5 does cut the rook off from the h7-square, but after 27...♖xh3 28 ♘xf6+ (removing the defender of the h7-square) 28...gxf6, the rook gets open again and still controls h7! I began to panic. If not 27 ♘h5, then what?

The alternative 27 g5 ♗e4! 28 ♗xe4 ♕xd2 is intolerable. Maybe I should keep the status quo for now and remove the bishop from the

W



shaky d-file? Going back and forth in my calculations caused utter confusion.

27 ♗c1?

An elementary blunder in a very bad emotional state.

Chesswise, this position was quite playable after 27 ♘xd5. Both the middlegame, 27...♘xd5 28 ♔g2 g6 29 ♕f3 b5 30 ♗b3, and the endgame, 27...♕xd5 28 ♕xd5 ♘xd5 29 ♔g2 a5 30 ♖e8, situations don't look hopeless, thanks to the major positional factor: the incarcerated black rook.

27...♘xg4!

Now it's all over. My saving grace 28 ♘xd5 fails to 28...♕h2+ 29 ♔f1 ♕xh3+ 30 ♔e2 cxd5. A few moves later I arrived in a hopeless ending.

28 c4 g6 29 ♕d3 ♘e5 30 ♖xe5 ♕xe5 31 cxd5 ♖xf4 32 ♗xf4 ♕xf4 33 dxc6 bxc6

Let's analyse White's decision on move 26 in terms of answering the important questions listed above.

a) Grossly violated. I considered the tournament situation and was rather captivated by the drama. I couldn't keep my cool.

b) To be candid, I was being whispered over and over: 'Don't do it'. But, as in the famous Russian anecdote, I decided to show my inner voice that I am not a slave of his.

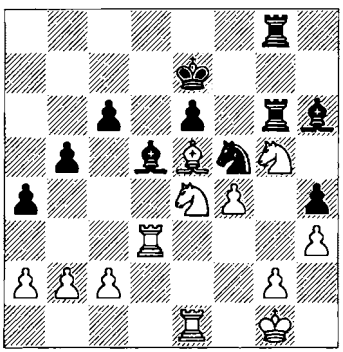
c1 and c2) Yes, I felt disappointed with my inability to develop the initiative into anything tangible. Normally I would very carefully consider the consequences of 26 g3 ♖h8 27 h4, but

did I do it? Not really. After 27...♕d6 28 ♗e3 a5 29 ♗d4 White seems to be doing OK, although a draw is a likely result after 29...b5, e.g., 30 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 31 ♕xf6 gxf6 32 ♘xd5 cxd5 33 ♖d1 ♖h5 34 ♗b3.

Even Boris's 26 g4 would not look so bad if he followed the recommendations given in the notes to White's 27th move.

So, my only rationale – the gut feeling about my compensation being on the verge of extinction – was not exactly true. There was enough potential to restore the equilibrium on the board.

W



Yermolinsky – Men
Cardinal Open, Columbus 1998

After 28 moves and almost four hours of exhaustingly slow and profound manoeuvres we arrived at this position. Alex faced a big decision here.

He could preserve the status quo with 29 b3. This would allow me to get my pawn back and simplify to an approximately even position after 29...♗xe4 30 ♖xe4 ♗xg5 31 fxg5 ♖xg5.

I'd prefer the same thing only begun with 29 a3. In the final position White plays 32 ♖d2, and he's slightly better due to his superior minor piece, more compact pawn-structure, and the opportunity to play c4 at an appropriate moment.

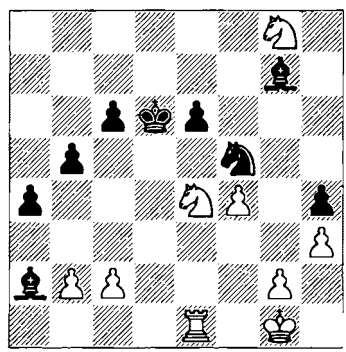
Instead he went for a combination.

29 ♖d2 ♗xa2 30 ♗f6+? ♖xf6 31 ♖d7+ ♔xd7 32 ♘xf6+ ♔d6

Boris skips this moment in his analysis, but I think that was exactly the point where he began to drift. The right idea was to move the king away from the centre to avoid any knight checks. After the correct 32...♔c7! 33 ♘xg8 ♗g7 I would be totally busted. The threat to my stranded knight eliminates 34 c3, due to 34...e5 35 fxe5 ♗xg8, so White has no choice but to try 34 b3!?, which is refuted by the intermediate move 34...♗c3!, and the black pawns look unstoppable after 35 ♖xe6 axb3 36 cxb3 ♗xb3.

33 ♘xg8 ♗g7 34 ♘e4+ *(D)*

B



Alex's choice led to a very unbalanced position where White's material advantage is compensated by Black's two dangerous bishops. The white knight is stuck on g8, away from the developing action on the queenside, where Black dreams of creating a passed pawn. Without a very thorough post-mortem analysis it is hard to say who is better. White may have a won position, but he also may be lost. What do you think?

How did Alex rationalize his 'burning bridges' decision? Yes, that's 'c2'. This chance to unbalance the position won't last. We both have been pretty calm up to this point, but Alex is 10 years younger. Unbalancing the position after three-and-a-half hours of manoeuvring against an older opponent is generally a good idea.

I confess I was so attracted to the combination itself that I subconsciously downplayed all doubts about the resulting position. I wanted it to work so much, I couldn't reason with myself.

34...♔c7?

Already bad. Black must challenge the knight on f6, so that the pawn on b2 and the entire white set-up will be in danger. Black is trying to escape from checks and he ends up avoiding critical continuations where the precision play is required. Why? Long tough game, old age, you know what I'm saying...

However, after 34...♔d7! 35 ♘c5+ (a bad move, but for some reason I was afraid of checks) 35...♔e8 36 ♘xe6 ♗xe6 37 ♖xe6+ ♔f7 38 ♖xc6 White can never win:

a) 38...♗xb2!? 39 ♘h6+ ♘xh6 40 ♖xh6 ♗f6! 41 ♖h7+ ♗g7 forces him to give up his rook for the a-pawn after 42 ♖h5 a3 43 ♖xb5 a2 44 ♖a5, which leads to a draw.

b) 38...♔xg8 is also playable: 39 c3 b4! 40 cxb4 ♗xb2 41 ♖a6 a3 42 b5, likely with the same outcome.

Black can do even better by completely ignoring the g8-knight with 37...♔d7!?, which forces White, who can't stomach losing the b2-pawn, into a knight ending: 38 ♖f6 ♗xf6 39 ♘xf6+ ♔e6, where, despite a pawn deficit, Black is the one playing to win.

These variations may be long but they are not too difficult.

In case of 34...♔d7, which indeed was Black's best practical chance, I was going to play 35 c3. Principally, there's not much difference between this position and the game continuation, as White has already saved his stray g8-knight from the ...e6-e5 idea thanks to Boris's mistake on move 32 that allowed me to play 34 ♘e4 with check.

Alex's gamble paid off due to the unfortunate (for me) combination of fatigue and time-trouble. I simply couldn't think straight.

35 ♘gf6 ♔c8 36 c3

With that move White quietly stabilized the position, and went on to win.

I don't know what Alex's intuition told him, but I was very confident in the strength of my position until move 35. All in all, here we have an example of 'burning bridges' being successfully implemented, because all the necessary components and prerequisites of this decision were present at the time of decision.

Like I said, my affection for the beautiful combination that began with 30 ♗f6+ somewhat clouded my judgement, so I can't give myself full credit for fulfilling the requirement 'a'. I could still reconsider with 30 ♘d6?!, but I was already committed to action by sacrificing the a-pawn, so 'c1 'played a role too.

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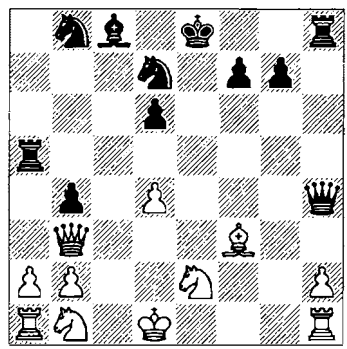


Berkovich – Men
Cleveland 1997

Here's another one of my memorable games. Things went out of control right from the opening, and after 18 moves we arrived at a highly unusual position.

I couldn't decide between the crazy line 18...♗a6!? 19 ♕xb4 ♖f5 20 ♘d2 ♕f2, hoping to lure White into accepting a queen sacrifice by 21 ♖f1 ♖xf3! 22 ♖xf2 ♖xf2 23 ♘g3 ♖hxh2, and the quiet continuation 18...♘a6.

What would you choose, and why?

Normally I do not hesitate in such situations and even enjoy burning bridges first time I have a chance. But here for some reason I decided to put immediate actions on hold, quite contradictory to what my intuition suggested. I simply could not rationalize the decision to part with the b-pawn. Neither 'c1' – Black hasn't sacrificed anything yet – nor 'c2' – my opponent was a respected Senior Master – was there to tilt my decision towards 18...♗a6!?.

Perhaps, bad memories about my last 'burning' decision (against Dandridge) played a role.

18...♘a6

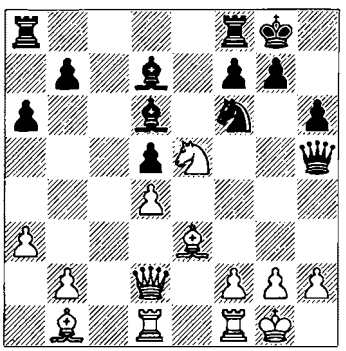
The game continued with normal (by the standards of such position) moves.

19 ♘d2 ♘b6 20 ♗c6+ ♔f8 21 ♖f1 ♕e7 22 ♘f4

and I began to feel it slipping away. It's still complicated and by no means clear; but Black's superior energy I felt around move 18 seems to have vanished.

Why? The moment was missed.

W



Men – Umezinwa
Cardinal Open, Columbus 1997

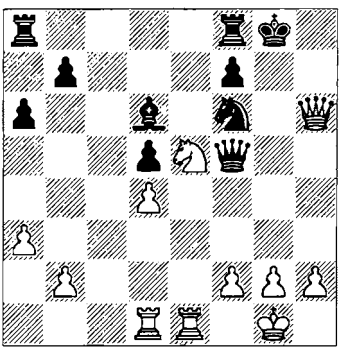
I emerged from the opening with my favourite pawn-structure, the isolated d4-pawn. This is my speciality, and I take pride in scoring very highly in these or similar structures. After some manoeuvring the pawn-structure had been altered and we arrived at the diagrammed position.

I was disappointed that my 2300+ rated opponent was not going to roll over and die. Why should this be happening in my favourite structure? I was getting progressively nervous. One more move, 18...♗f5, and it'll become dead even. I mobilized my resources in finding some ideas, and came up with the game continuation and the following line: 18 ♗f4 ♗f5 19 ♘d7! ♘xd7 20 ♗xd6 ♖fe8 21 ♗a2, and White preserves his advantage. My next move would be 22 f3, and I'm not particularly scared of 21...♖e2 22 ♕b4. Good choice, isn't it?

However, I rejected it in favour of what seemed a more decisive continuation.

18 ♖fe1 ♗f5 19 ♗xf5 ♕xf5 20 ♗xh6 gxh6 21 ♕xh6 *(D)*

B



As you can see the bridges have been burnt. My hopes lay in a quick mate based on the rook-lift. The threat of ♖e3 seemed very strong.

Everything was shattered in two moves.

21...♗xe5

What is he doing?

22 ♖xe5 ♕xf2+!

Shock.

23 ♔h1 ♘h7 24 ♖g5+ ½-½

All the requirements 'a', 'b', and 'c2' were violated. I was not emotionally stable enough to calculate simple variations, my intuition was mute, and, most importantly, I was dead wrong in my assessment of the main alternative, 18 ♗f4. I can hardly recall another occasion when my decision to burn bridges was as wrong as in this game.

Boris must consider himself lucky. His crazy sacrifice could be refuted outright by 21...♖fe8! 22 ♖e3 (22 f4 ♗f8) 22...♗xe5 23 dxe5 ♘g4 (23...♘h5 would also do the trick) 24 ♖g3 ♖e6 25 ♕h4 ♖g6.

Thank you, Boris! It would be interesting to take some of the trend-breaking decisions we saw in the previous chapter and analyse them under Boris's angle, but instead I would like to move on to a reversed situation, something I am very much familiar with. Just like in my game

against Boris, I often find myself in a must-win situation, simply because of my high rating and the structure of open tournaments in America. That puts a lot of pressure on my shoulders, not an ounce less when compared with simply being in a worse position against my fellow GM. The next chapter will outline some difficulties I encounter trying to increase my advantage.

The Burden of Small Advantages

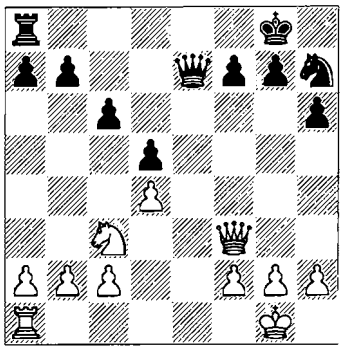
Some time ago at YCA I had a lecture that defined different types of advantage. Let me quickly outline my general ideas.

There are types of advantage large enough to guarantee a win in the normal course of events; such as a substantial advantage in material (two pawns, an exchange, or extra piece) that will play itself to a victory – all you need to do is to consolidate your position, avoid blunders and steadily initiate exchanges. Those I call Advantages of Classes Three and Four, that differ from one another by only the size of the material margin. An advantage of Class Two is characterized by a vastly superior pawn-structure that will not change in the normal cause of events. Thus this kind of advantage is permanent, but yet not large enough to lead to a win by itself. Here we talk about technical manoeuvring, creating a second weakness and other methods the strong side applies in such cases in order to increase his advantage.

Class One represents the most elusive kind of advantage, which is determined by short-lived positional factors, such as a lead in development, control of an open file, the bishop-pair. In most cases, when the permanent damage has not yet been inflicted on his position, the defender can isolate the problem and contain it with measured play. Indeed, the open file can be intercepted, or the heavy pieces may get exchanged to make this advantage obsolete; the bishop-pair advantage often depends on the pawn-structure, or it becomes no advantage at all; and, certainly, one catches up in development if given a chance. Even a seriously compromising factor like an unsafe king is ambiguous: exchange queens and the centralized king will turn from a weakness into a strong point. These advantages are small, they are described as 'plus over equal' in chess literature; and that's the most popular evaluation we find in opening books – White is **slightly better**.

The positional theory of Steinitz-Tarrasch teaches us (as generations of chess-players before) to attack when we are better, otherwise the advantage will disappear – some sort of 'use it or lose it' advice. And we should follow it, because it's true; however, a fine balance has to be found between active play and unsound attacks; when our advantage is small it usually means that at the end of most forced sequences we'll get nothing at all. Many games are lost because the player who considered his position far superior to the opponent's, embarked on some sort of unjustified action that ultimately led to the destruction of his position. In order to find such balance we must, at first, clearly define the positional factors that make our position look pleasant. Our actions must serve the purpose of preserving our strengths, whether they are the two bishops, better-located pieces, or a strong pawn-centre. Often these advantages can be transformed into something new; for example, with the bishop-pair we sometimes can exchange one of them for a knight to compromise our opponent's pawn-structure.

Let's turn to supplemental games. The first example presents a seemingly equal position with symmetrical pawns, where Black's advantage is almost negligible: just little things, like a slightly more active queen, and chances to put a rook on the open file ahead of the opponent. Even more interesting is to follow Black's strategy, as he invests some queen moves to induce the loosening of the white queenside pawns and to provoke the erroneous knight manoeuvre. After the above goals have been achieved, Black returns his queen to the kingside, while White is busy getting rid of the rooks, and starts threatening with penetration. White's task is aggravated by the absence of *luft* – a flight square for the king – and it proved to be too difficult for my opponent.



C. Adelman – Yermolinsky
Cardinal Open, Columbus 1998

18 ♕e3

Aiming for a draw from move 1, my opponent confidently marched to a worse position. The real game starts from here with odds favouring Black. The pawn-structure is symmetrical, but the white knight is misplaced – notice that White would very much like to play c3 to solidify his position – and the white pawns are more vulnerable to attacks. The little fact that the white king could use some *luft* helps Black to develop his initiative in a tactical way.

18...♕b4

I decide to keep the queens on, even though the ending would be pleasant too. 18...♕xe3 19 fxe3 ♖e8 20 ♔f2 f5 21 ♖f1 ♘f6 22 h3 ♔f7 23 g3 g5 is what I would have done with no second thoughts if my opponent had been a GM.

Playing against somebody 300 rating points below can be a torture. I couldn't get on with my positional considerations, because of the nagging feeling that while my advantage may be increasing with every little concession he makes, every exchange brings him closer to a draw.

19 ♖b1?

My little demonstration on the queenside would be harmless if White reacted correctly. Improving the knight should be his Priority One. After 19 ♘d1 ♘f6 20 c3 I would have to retreat. Nothing could be gained by 20...♕b5 21 ♕d2 ♖e8 22 ♘e3, and the black queen is misplaced, while 20...♕b6 21 ♕e2 ♖e8 22 ♘e3 a5 is not much of an improvement.

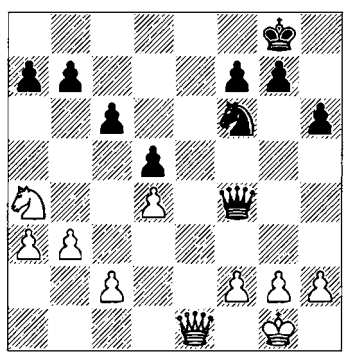
19...♘f6 20 a3 ♕b6 21 ♘a4?!

Instead of defending patiently, White embarks on an ill-advised knight journey that will further complicate his task. He would be better off following his major plan: 21 ♕d3 ♖e8 22 ♘e2 ♘e4 23 c3. Still not much there for Black, and likely I would continue with 23...a5, threatening to fix the queenside with ...a4, and hoping to provoke some overreaction. For example, 24 b4?! ♘d6 eyeing the c4-square.

21...♕a5 22 b3

White keeps making wrong pawn moves, but if 22 ♘c5, then 22...♖e8! would remind him of the back rank. After 23 ♕d3 ♖e1+ 24 ♖xe1 ♕xe1+ 25 ♕f1 ♕d2 26 ♘xb7 ♕xd4 Black has made huge progress.

22...♖e8 23 ♕c3 ♕c7 24 ♖e1 ♖xe1+ 25 ♕xe1 ♕f4 *(D)*



My patience has brought some dividends. It even seems that the rook exchange has worked in Black's favour. White's queenside is a collection of loose pawns, he's still having a back-rank problem, and his knight is stationed on a rim.

26 c3

What about 26 ♕e3? Well, the ending brings no relief: 26...♕xe3 27 fxe3 ♘g4 28 ♘c5 ♘xe3 29 c3 b6 30 ♘d7 ♘f5 with a solid extra pawn.

26...♕f5!

The new situation calls for action, as 26...b6 27 ♘b2 ♕f5 28 ♕c1 ♘e4 29 ♘d3 would give White time to consolidate.

27 h3?

Faced with real difficulties, White immediately collapses. He had a wide choice of moves, but only one was good:

a) 27 ♘c5 ♕c2 28 ♘xb7 ♕xb3, and the counterattacking attempt 29 ♘d8 will cost him dearly after 29...♕b6.

b) 27 ♕c1 ♕d3! (a more energetic move than 27...♘e4 28 f3 ♘d6) 28 ♘c5 ♕e2 29 ♘xb7 ♘e4 30 ♕f1 (or 30 f3 ♕f2+ 31 ♔h1 ♘xc3) 30...♘xc3 31 ♘a5 ♕c2, and White loses his d-pawn.

c) 27 ♕d1! was the most stubborn defence, and I expected him to find it. I briefly looked at 27...b6 28 ♘b2 ♘e4 29 ♕c2 ♕g5 30 ♘d3 c5 as a possibility, but soon switched to considering a more complicated continuation. At first sight, 27...♘g4!? 28 f3 ♘e3 29 ♕e1 ♕g5 is very annoying for White. Nearing time-trouble my opponent would have to reject the active line 30 g3 ♘c2 31 ♕e8+ ♔h7 32 ♕xf7?, which is refuted by 32...♕c1+ 33 ♔g2 ♘e3+ 34 ♔h3 ♕c2, delivering checkmate soon. He would have to find the only defence in 30 ♕d2!, which, incidentally, immediately equalizes the game.

If he had played 27 ♕d1, what would I have done? Frankly, I don't know. The game is still within the bounds of a draw, and I would have to make a very tough decision. The situation is analogous to what we face in defence – no amount of computing work is going to make a call for you, and you are way beyond any positional considerations.

Luckily, it was not the case in this game. After 27 h3? I won easily.

27...♕c2 28 ♕e7 ♕xb3 29 ♘c5 ♕xc3 30 ♘xb7 ♕a1+! 31 ♔h2 ♕xd4

White resigned a few moves later.

It's amazing how this seemingly quiet positional game strictly depended on calculating a lot of variations. The nature of the pieces present, queens and knights, had a lot to do with that.

Next example starts off from a typical Sicilian position with an additional plus to Black in the form of the bishop-pair. White, however, is too solid in the centre to be rocked, and he even finds it possible to offer a pawn sacrifice on three moves in a row. I could have accepted it at some point, but, instead, decided to stick to my plan, which was simply to nail his c-pawn down to the initial square. For all the goodies it brought I couldn't make any real headway. And then I got plain old lucky. In search for counterchances White decided to drop the weak pawn to gain time for obtaining a dark-square domination, but the black bishops came to life in a tactical fashion, and after a temporary exchange sacrifice it all boiled down to a winning endgame.

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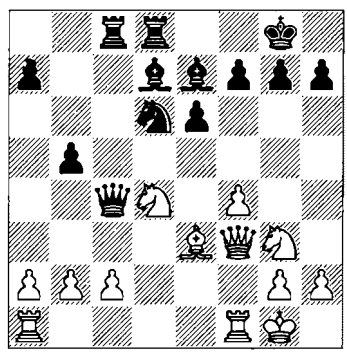

D. Schneider – Yermolinsky
Liberty Bell Open, Philadelphia 1998

My opponent's play in the opening will hardly inspire Sicilian-busters. Black won the two bishops advantage, and completed his development along with the king evacuation virtually unhindered. However, his chances should not be overestimated. The white pieces provide enough central control to make any immediate gains from the black side highly unlikely.

20 ♖ad1!? a5

Here I wisely refrained from accepting the gift on a2. I didn't like the forced line that begins with 20...♕xa2 21 b3! ♕a5 22 ♖a1 ♕c7 23 ♖xa7! ♕xa7 24 ♘df5, and leaves me with two choices:

a) 24...♘xf5!? 25 ♗xa7 ♘xg3 26 ♕xg3 ♖xc2 27 ♗d4 g6. All is well and Black has

excellent compensation, but winning this kind of position is always difficult.

b) 24...♕a8 25 ♘xe7+ ♔f8 26 ♘xc8 ♕xf3 27 ♖xf3 ♖xc8 28 ♖f2. Once again nice, but how am I going to win this?

Another move that drew my attention was the surprising 20...♗c6!?. Black goes straight out to the endgame: 21 ♘xc6 ♕xc6 22 ♕xc6 ♖xc6 23 c3, and keeps better chances there with 23...♖dc8 or 23...g6. Once again there's a danger of not being able to get more than half a point out of this.

So, having burned a lot of time for nothing, I went on with a standard minority attack.

21 ♖d3?

Here I think I could have accepted the offer. I thought I had made a decision not to be distracted by the a2-pawn once and for all, and played the next two moves very quickly. My refusal to carefully consider taking the pawn was partially caused by the lack of confidence in my calculating abilities. My young opponent's speedy and challenging play was getting on my nerves. Instead of calculating variations I engaged myself in mind games.

I took his stubborn refusal to play b3 as an indication of something going wrong with his judgement, and was inclined to win this battle by finally forcing him to play it! This stuff could be appropriate in some other situations, maybe such as the previous game where my advantage could not be increased by pure chess means, but not here!

21...b4?

21...♕xa2! 22 b3 a4 leaves White empty-handed.

22 ♖fd1

Here things are different again. After playing 22...♕xa2?! 23 b3 Black gets no more than a draw out of the queen rescue attempt, 23...a4 24 ♕f1! ♖c3 25 ♖a1 ♕b2 26 ♖b1 ♕a3 27 ♖a1 ♖xd3!? 28 cxd3 ♕b2 29 ♖b1 ♕c3 30 ♖c1, etc. In the meantime, he must avoid 23...♘b5? due to 24 ♘c6!, the shot that underlines his back-rank problem. With my next I took care of that problem, but allowed the dark squares around my king to become weak.

22...g6?! 23 b3 ♕c7

Even if I could have taken the a2-pawn on move 21, I still thought Black must happy with the progress made. The c2-pawn is nailed down. My opponent's move came as an unpleasant surprise – after the bishop transfer I might regret playing 22...g6.

24 ♗c1!? ♘b5 25 ♗b2?

Finally a mistake I can take advantage of. It was necessary to maintain a knight on d4 with 25 ♘ge2 ♘xd4 26 ♘xd4 a4 27 ♗b2. That way Black's advantage would be kept to minimum. What does it mean? Well, it was never big in the first place, that's why I had to pay better attention to the ...♕xa2 opportunities on every move. There was only one moment, on move 21, when it would have worked, and I missed it!

25...♘xd4 26 ♗xd4 ♕xc2! *(D)*

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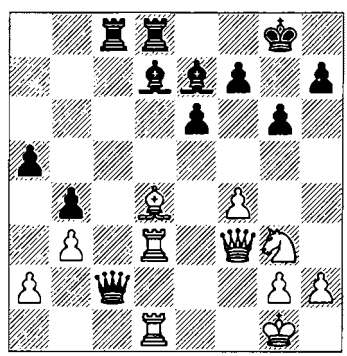

Tactics abound, and this time I was up to challenge. Black controls everything: 27 ♘e4 ♗c6; 27 ♖3d2 ♕c7 28 ♗e5 ♕b6+ 29 ♗d4 ♕b5; and the text-move as well.

27 ♕e3

White is one move, 28 ♘e4 or 28 ♕e5, away from obtaining serious counterplay.

27...♗b5 28 ♕e5

28 ♖3d2 ♖xd4 is the same story: Black's exchange sacrifice is only temporary.

28...♖xd4 29 ♖xd4 ♗c5

I could tell from his body language that in his calculations the young Dmitry Schneider obviously missed the threat of 30...♕xd1+.

30 ♔h1 ♗xd4 31 ♕xd4 ♗c6 32 ♖d2 ♕b1+ 33 ♕g1 ♕xg1+ 34 ♔xg1 ♗d5

After a short tactical skirmish Black safely arrived at an easily won ending.

Sometimes you have to defend for a while, if that's what it takes to preserve your small advantage. In the next game I would like to offer to your attention featured a scenario that is quite different from what we have seen so far.

I had no initiative to work with! White accepted an inferior pawn-structure (nothing really bad, just split pawns on the queenside) in return for some activity for his minor pieces. The method used by Black to extinguish this temporary initiative is very instructive: I didn't mind retreating my pieces (the queen and the light-squared bishop) in order to prevent White repairing the damage to his pawns. My opponent had some choices, but nothing that would clearly get him out of trouble; as often happens he chose the least resistant continuation that left him with broken pawns all over the place.

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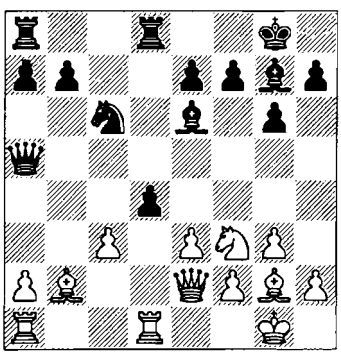

Arnett – Yermolinsky
New York Open 1998

In a typical Grünfeld position White decides to initiate some exchanges, obviously thinking that will help him to reach a draw. Soon we'll see just how mistaken this kind of strategy can be.

13 ♘xd4?!

There's no question about it, 13 cxd4 ♖ac8 14 a3 ♕a4 was better.

13...♗d7 14 ♘b3

14 ♘xc6 ♗xc6 15 ♗xc6 bxc6 – looks even, right? Wrong! Due to the active position of the black queen, which keeps a keen eye on the a2-pawn, White doesn't have time for the equalizing c3-c4, and his weak pawns may fall at any moment. I was also prepared for 14 c4, planning 14...♕a6 to preserve the favourable difference in the respective pawn-structures, and 15 ♘b5 ♗xb2 16 ♕xb2 ♖ac8 17 ♖ab1 ♗f5 still leaves Black on top.

14...♕c7 15 ♘c5

Looks active, but Black doesn't mind a temporary retreat.

15...♗e8 *(D)*

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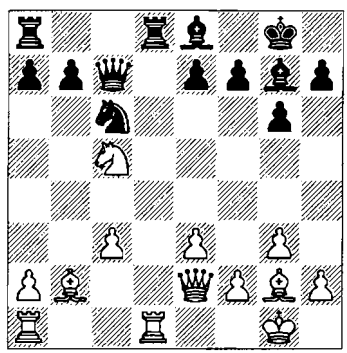


I'm in love with Black's position! This is exactly the kind of small advantage I'm most comfortable with. The pressure is on White as he has to compensate for his pawn weaknesses with piece activity. In this particular situation it's a tall order.

16 c4 ♘e5! 17 ♗d4?!

Half-measures won't do any good here. White would be much better off concentrating his efforts on the bail-out attempt 17 ♗xe5 ♗xe5 18 ♘xb7 ♖xd1+ 19 ♖xd1 ♖b8. Now:

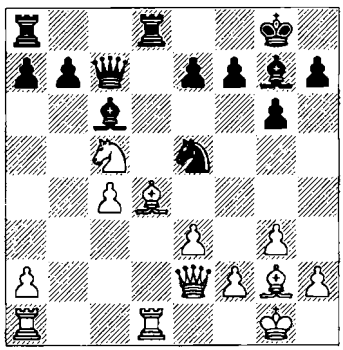
a) 20 ♖b1 ♗c6 21 f4 ♗f6 22 ♗xc6 ♕xc6 23 ♕g2 ♕xc4 leaves him all tied up.

b) 20 c5 ♖xb7 21 ♗xb7 ♕xb7 22 ♖d8 ♕c6 is hardly convincing.

c) 20 ♕f3 ♕xc4 21 ♕e4 ♕xe4 22 ♗xe4 ♖c8 is the best he can get, but nevertheless it's a very unpleasant endgame if you're White.

17...♗c6 *(D)*

From now on Black holds an undisputed advantage.



18 f4?!

First White lets it go too far, then lashes out with ill-considered counterplay attempt. I have seen this scenario in literally hundreds of my games.

For White to keep any hope, he must retain his fianchettoed bishop. If I were him I would have looked at 18 ♘e4 ♖ac8 19 ♖ab1 b6 20 c5 ♗xe4 21 ♗xe4 bxc5 22 ♖dc1 ♕d6 23 ♗xe5 ♕xe5 24 ♖c4 with some chances of survival; and, possibly, at 18 f3 ♖ac8 19 ♘b3, hanging tough.

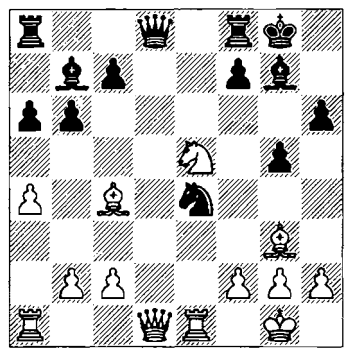
18...♗xg2 19 ♔xg2?

Another mistake and it's all over for Mr Arnett. He had to play 19 ♕xg2 and hope for the best. I'd be choosing between 19...♘xc4 20 ♕xb7 ♕xb7 21 ♘xb7 ♗xd4 22 exd4 ♖d7, and 19...b6!? 20 ♕b7 ♕xb7 21 ♘xb7 ♖db8, with the latter option getting more votes.

19...b6!

The rest was automatic. White can't prevent the loss of a pawn on e5, and he's left with more pawn weaknesses.

The toughest test comes in the next episode – no wonder I couldn't get the job done. White came out of the opening with a purely dynamical advantage, not even a development lead, just a tad more energy in his pieces. The target (f7-pawn) was clearly visible, and it was all a 'simple' matter of calculation. I failed to find a combination when it was there for a short while (just one move), and my advantage disappeared. I must admit my shortcomings – even if I can boast a considerable number of sacrificial attacks and smashing victories in my career – most of the time I'd prefer to sit on a small but stable advantage, rather than face such situations.



Yermolinsky – Schmaltz
New York Open 1998

White has achieved a dream attacking position right out of the opening. Black's kingside is weak, and the white pieces are dangerously ganging up on the f7-pawn. However, these advantages could be nullified by a few exchanges and consolidating moves if Black is allowed to make them.

15 ♕h5

The most obvious continuation, but I had more options, as the following variations demonstrate:

a) 15 ♘xf7 ♖xf7 16 ♗xf7+ ♔xf7 17 ♕f3+ ♕f6 18 ♖xe4 ♕xf3 19 gxf3 ♗xe4 20 fxe4 ♖e8 21 ♖e1 ♗xb2 22 ♗xc7 ♗d4 23 ♖e2 – an endgame with an extra pawn. Not bad, but I didn't feel like cashing my chips too early.

b) 15 ♕f3! is a stronger version of the same idea. 15...♘d6 (15...♗xe5 16 ♗xe5 ♘d6 17 ♗d5 ♗xd5 18 ♕xd5 ♖e8 19 ♕c6 gives White a free ride) 16 ♗xf7+. Now it's Black's turn to torment himself:

b1) 16...♖xf7 17 ♘xf7 ♗xf3 (there's no ray of hope for Black after 17...♕b8 18 ♘xh6+

♗xh6 19 ♕b3+ ♔f8 20 ♖ad1) 18 ♘xd8 ♖xd8 19 gxf3 ♗xb2 20 ♖ad1, winning easily.

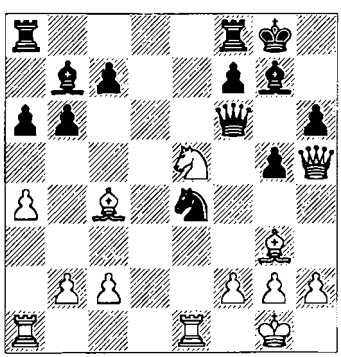
b2) 16...♘xf7 17 ♕xb7 ♘xe5 18 ♗xe5 ♗xe5 (18...♕d2 fails to scare White: 19 ♗xg7 ♕xf2+ 20 ♔h1 ♔xg7 21 ♕xc7+ ♔h8 22 ♕c3+ ♔g8 23 ♕d3) 19 ♖xe5 ♕f6 20 ♕d5+ ♔h8 21 ♖f1 ♖ad8 22 ♕e4 and here Black has almost no chances of survival.

15 ♕f3 has an obvious advantage over the text-move due to its more forcing nature. An opportunity to clarify the situation should never be wasted.

15...♕f6 *(D)*

I thought this move was forced, as 15...♕e8 16 ♘g6 ♗xb2 17 ♖ab1 ♗c3 18 ♕xh6 ♗g7 19 ♕h5 gives White a winning position, but this may not be true. The surprising 15...♕e7! invites 16 ♘g6 ♕c5 with serious complications, e.g. 17 ♘xf8 ♕xc4 18 ♘d7 ♕e6! 19 ♖ad1 ♖d8, and the knight is not coming out of there alive.

This line underlines a problem with using 'good' moves in sharp positions. The bottom line is, there's no substitute for precise calculation. You miss a put-away, such as 15 ♕f3 in this game, and it gets more and more complex with each move.



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Black has defended f7, and we are already familiar with 16 ♘d7 ♕c6 17 ♘xf8 ♕xc4.

Meanwhile, White can't afford the luxury of preserving the status quo: 16 ♖ad1? ♘xg3 17 hxg3 ♖ae8, and Black's raging bishops take over the game. My only idea was to continue attacking the f7-pawn with a rook-lift.

16 ♖e3!

It took me quite a while to grasp a subtle difference between the text-move and seemingly more attractive 16 ♖a3. One rook goes to f3, that part is clear, but where should the other one be? On the e1-square it looks more active, plus ...♕xb2 will not win a tempo. So, your vote goes for 16 ♖a3. Now watch this: 16...♖ad8! 17 ♘xf7 ♘xg3 18 ♘xd8+ ♔h7 19 ♗d3+ ♔h8, and the other rook turns out to be vulnerable to ...♕xf2+. I'd have to bail out with 17 ♖ae3 ♘xg3 18 hxg3 ♖d2 19 ♖3e2, which leaves White slightly worse after 19...♖xe2 20 ♖xe2 b5! 21 axb5 axb5 22 ♗xb5 c5, followed by 23...c4. Once the pressure against f7 is gone White's got nothing to show for his efforts.

16...♘d6

16...♖ad8 17 ♘xf7 ♘xg3 18 ♘xd8+ ♔h7 19 ♖xg3 ♕xf2+ 20 ♔h1 (now there's no rook hanging on e1 – that's the difference between 16 ♖a3? and 16 ♖e3!) – and White picks up a quick point after 20...♖xd8 21 ♗d3+. By the way, no problem is presented by 17...♖xf7. I calculated a forced win after 18 ♖f3 ♘xg3 (White consolidates after 18...♕xb2 19 ♕xf7+ ♔h8 20 ♖e1) 19 ♕xf7+ ♕xf7 20 ♗xf7+ ♔h7 (20...♔f8 21 ♗d5+) 21 ♖xg3 ♖d2 22 c3 ♖xb2 23 ♖e1. The final position is not resignable yet, but the combined forces of rooks and bishop should be able to make quick work on the black king while the rest of his army is busy picking up pawns on the queenside.

So, what's the deal with 16...♘d6? Can White land a knock-out punch now? I thought I could, but... After calculating the variations shown above – and many more I had to reject – I got tired. Everything became a blur, and fearing time-trouble, I decided to make a consolidating move.

17 ♗d3?

The way the winning line would begin, 17 ♘g4! ♕xb2, didn't appeal to me – too many pieces hanging. I did look three moves deeper: 18 ♗e5 ♗xe5 19 ♘xh6+ ♔g7 20 ♕xg5+ ♔h8, couldn't make it work, and decided to cut myself a little slack from computing. I must say I chose the least appropriate moment to rely on my positional skills.

First of all, even the final position of my calculated line is won. 21 ♖h3!, and 21...♕xa1+ is no checkmate, stupid – 22 ♔f1 forces immediate resignation.

Second, why not transpose moves? 18 ♘xh6+ ♔xh6 19 ♗e5 wins the queen, 19...♕xe5 20 ♖xe5 ♘xc4, and the game after 21 ♖xg5+.

17...♘f5

and my opponent successfully defended.

So, this is how I deal with the problem of building up from a position of small advantage. I deliberately selected games where I had a substantial rating edge over my opponents, to accentuate the need to win. This outside factor inevitably bears a lot of significance to the course of the game and influences my decision-making process in critical moments. Like I said, the pressure I feel in those situations is no less than that put on me by a surging Joel Lautier or another GM going after my hide.

It would be interesting to reverse the situation, and use the games we just saw in determining the most appropriate game-plan to be used against a higher-rated opponent. I am not assuming that you'll always be slightly worse against the big boys, it's not that; what's important is that they are always going to behave like they have a small advantage. A lower-rated player can and should expect to be pressed hard, and he could use some advice from, who else, Boris Men.

Surviving The Monster

What should you and what should you not do against a higher-rated player?

You may have a 'situation-built-in' advantage or disadvantage. There are several rational and emotional factors to be taken into consideration when you are aware of your opponent's superior rating. Some of them favour you (later we'll denote these factors as '+'), some are against you '–'.

This lecture attempts to create a checklist for you. Awareness of the factors and the ability to accentuate the positive factors and to diminish the negative factors influencing your (and your opponent's) decision-making process is the key to compensate for the rating difference and may even turn the odds in your favour. The first question to be answered is: why? That is, why his rating is higher or what he is doing better than you do chesswise? If you know your opponent, know his style, his strong and weak characteristics you may be able to answer this question. If you don't know that person, then chances are for the following:

a) 1800 vs 1600 blunders less frequently;

b) 2000 vs 1800 better understands his set of transitional positions from opening to the middlegame;

c) 2200 vs 2000 better feels the flow of the middlegame, uptrends and downtrends, critical points;

d) 2400 vs 2200 better performs in the transitional stage from the middlegame to the endgame and knows and plays the endgame better;

e) 2600 vs 2400 has much more knowledge of typical middlegame and endgame positions (as a result of the elaborate preparation of one's opening repertoire) and more skilful in tactics and time management.

If and when you have answered the 'Why' question, you can make rational adjustments to your decision-making process about the choice of opening or the general course of the game. If you don't know the answer and/or are not capable of this analytical effort, then it is likely that your emotions will play a more substantial role during the entire game. Some of them by pure chance may lead to decisions that could be justified rationally, and some could point you in the wrong direction. This bias in the thinking process is an inevitable element of the situation when you compete against somebody who ranks higher than you do. The magnitude of the bias depends on your personality.

The bottom line is, correct conscious adjustment to your thinking pattern is always a positive factor, while subconscious adjustments can be either positive (if in retrospect they can be rationally justified) or negative factors. Statistically they prove to be negative more often than positive. This is why we emphasize the importance of answering the above question: in

what respect is this player better than I am? Being emotionally uncomfortable with the situation and not capable of analysing it will only diminish your odds.

Decisions Checklist (Yermo's comments in *italics*)

Decision Type	Emotional Impulse	Rationale
1. Deviation from the Opening Set-ups you are accustomed to. *Occurs very frequently – one of the worst evils.*	My usual openings are just not safe enough or not good enough against this guy. *My student Boris Kreiman once tried the QGD (first time in his life!) against me on the grounds of his usual KID or Grünfeld not being too solid.* *He played a theoretical line for some 12 moves, got himself disoriented and didn't put up much resistance for the rest of the game.*	**Justification 1.** I will have better chance in this mutually unknown line. I figured that he is higher rated because he spends so much time memorizing theoretical lines. He does not display better understanding of chess. **Justification 2.** I will have better chances in this line although I realize that he knows it better than I do. But the resulting middlegame positions are not to his liking.
2. Simplification *Probably the second worst sin.*	That way I'll have a better chance to draw against this shark! *We saw that in my game against Adelman – a very faulty strategy.* *Same thing happened to Arnett, who only wanted to exchange a pair of knights with his 13 ♘xd4?! – that was enough to get him in trouble.*	**Justification 1.** The position requires it. **Justification 2.** I know that his tactical skills are superior. Let's reduce material, even if this is detrimental to my position. I'll outplay him later (or will be able to hold) if no tactics are involved. ***Justification 3.*** *He may reject good moves only because they lead to simplifications.*
3. Creating a Material Imbalance or, alternatively **Refusal to do so**	I'll have a better chance in muddied waters. He is too damn good in positional play. *Successfully implemented by Schmaltz (consciously or not is hard to tell).* Alternatively, I can't stand the thought of being an exchange (or a pawn) down against this guy.	**Justification 1.** The position requires it. **Justification 2.** You know that his rating advantage is due to his better performance in complicated unbalanced positions (unlikely if we are not talking about 2400-2600). **Justification 3.** You are not sure that your use of a temporary gust of extra energy will be equal to the guy's defending abilities if you decide to go ahead and sacrifice.

4. Time Management *Getting into time-trouble when facing a GM is a sure road to defeat.* *On the other hand, your opponent would be afraid of time-trouble even more.*	I had better check my calculations several times. There will be no mercy if I missed something. *Schneider's success with continuously daring me with a pawn sac (it cost me a lot of time) is an example of 'reverse' time management.*	**Justification 1.** The position requires it. Here is a critical moment. This decision will have a long-lasting impact. I had better check the results a couple of times. **Justification 2.** I blunder more often than he does. If I take care of this problem he is not really better than me.
5. Manoeuvring or alternatively **Inviting Earlier Crisis** *It's tough to use Defensive Option I (my strategy against Lautier and Kovačević), but if successful it could be very frustrating for your opponent.* *Option 2 turns into a self-destruction device if used too late.*	I can't bear to fight the guy head-on. Let's wait and see. Alternatively, he is slowly strangling me. Better glorious death than infinite suffering. *To avoid long technical work many GMs would intentionally give you a glimpse of hope. Be very careful with liberating moves. Had they been truly liberating, your more skilled opponent would have prevented them.*	**Justification 1.** The position requires it. **Justification 2.** I know that I will have a relative advantage if the character of this position suddenly changes, even if objectively this change is not favourable for me. I am more psychologically stable or better understand the resulting position. **Justification 3.** I spent too much time checking and rechecking my calculations. I must invite a crisis now or face deadly time-trouble a little later.
6. Assuming a Defensive Stance rather than **Continuing with your Plan**	I see his threats coming. Better to be safe than sorry. *Arnett's 17 ♗d4 is a good illustration of what happens when you abandon your plan. Try to be more persistent with your ideas, and stay positive.*	**Justification 1.** The position requires it. **Justification 2.** He is an attacker. Other than that he is not really that formidable. I stop his attack now and then see how good he is in quiet positions.
7. Attacking to the Better or Bitter End versus **Simplifying**	I have no choice. My attack may fall on its face, but if I retreat he'll surely outplay me in the ending. He is a notorious technician. *Generally speaking, active play offers you better percentage chances against Alex Yermolinsky.*	**Justification 1.** The position requires it. All bridges have been burnt. **Justification 2.** This is exactly why he is higher rated than I am. He knows endgames better. **Justification 3.** I am more psychologically stable. Let the fire continue. He is under more strain. He can't afford to lose.

Here I would like to offer a few games for you to look at. There's no point in trying to analyse them to death, only deep enough to answer the accompanying questions.

Game 1. Black faces a higher-rated opponent who is a devoted chess technician.

1 c4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 e5 5 ♘c2 f5 6 ♘c3 ♗e6 7 e4 f4 8 g3 fxg3 9 hxg3 ♘c6 10 ♘e3 ♘f6 11 ♗h3 ♗xh3 12 ♖xh3 ♘d4 13 ♘ed5 ♘xd5 14 cxd5 g6 15 ♗e3 ♕d7 16 ♖h1 ♗g7 17 ♗xd4 exd4 18 ♘e2 ♕b5 19 ♘f4 0-0 20 ♕e2 d3 21 ♘xd3 ♖ae8 22 f3 ♖f7 23 ♖c1 ♕a5+ 24 b4 ♕b5 25 ♖c2 ♖f5 26 ♘f4 ♕xb4+ 27 ♔f2

a) What was Black's approach to the opening?

b) How did it carry on to the middlegame?

Game 2. Black faces a higher-rated opponent, one of the best players in the United States.

1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 ♘c3 d5 4 cxd5 ♘xd5 5 d4 cxd4 6 ♕xd4 ♘xc3 7 ♕xc3 ♘c6 8 e4 ♗d7 9 ♗e2 e5 10 0-0 ♕c7 11 ♗e3 ♗b4 12 ♕c2 0-0 13 ♖ac1 ♗e7 14 a3 ♖fd8 15 b4 a6 16 ♕b2 ♗g4 17 h3 ♗xf3 18 ♗xf3 ♗f6 19 ♗e2 ♕b8 20 ♗b6 ♖e8 21 ♗c4 ♗d8 22 ♗c5 ♗e7 23 ♕a2 ♖f8 24 ♗d5

Same questions as to Game 1.

Game 3. White faces a higher-rated opponent, a very good tactician and theoretician.

1 e4 d6 2 d4 ♘f6 3 f3 c5 4 dxc5 ♕a5+ 5 ♕d2 ♕xc5 6 ♕c3

Do you think this was an emotional decision? Was it justified?

Game 4. White faces a higher-rated opponent, the best and the bravest tactician in the USA.

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 ♘c3 ♘b6 4 a4 d6 5 a5 ♘6d7 6 exd6 cxd6 7 d4 g6 8 ♗e3 ♗g7 9 ♕d2 ♘c6 10 d5 ♘ce5 11 h3 ♘f6 12 g4 0-0 13 f4 ♘ed7 14 ♘ge2 b5 15 b4 ♗b7 16 ♗g2 e6 17 ♖d1 ♖e8 18 0-0 ♘xd5 19 ♘xd5 ♗xd5 20 ♗xd5 exd5 21 ♖fe1 a6 22 ♘c3 ♕h4 23 ♔g2 d4 24 ♗f2 dxc3 25 ♕xd6 ♕d8 26 ♕xd7 ♕xd7 27 ♖xd7 ♖xe1 28 ♗xe1 ♖e8 29 ♗f2 ♗f8 30 ♗c5 ♗xc5 31 bxc5

a) Why did White reject the line 12 ♗b5+ ♘ed7 13 ♘f3 0-0 14 ♗xd7 ?

b) Why did White reject the line 16 a6 ♗xd5 17 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 18 ♕xd5 ♗xa1 19 c3 ♖c8 ?

c) Your comments on 12 g4. Did play White it to invite an early crisis?

Game 5. White faces a higher-rated opponent, specializing in unbalanced positions.

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 ♘f6 3 d4 ♘xd5 4 c4 ♘b6 5 ♘c3 e5 6 ♕e2 ♗e7 7 dxe5 ♘c6 8 ♗e3 ♗b4 9 ♘f3 ♗g4 10 h3 ♗xf3 11 gxf3 ♕e7 12 f4 0-0-0 13 a3 ♗xc3+ 14 bxc3 f6 15 ♗g2 fxe5 16 ♗xc6 bxc6 17 c5 ♘d5 18 ♕a6+ ♔d7 19 0-0-0 exf4 20 ♗d4

a) What was White's approach on move 6 (assuming defensive stance)?

b) Did it pay off?

c) 11 gxf3 stands out as kind of strange. Was it a rational or emotional decision?

Game 6. White faces a superior technician, specializing in a wait-and-see approach.

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 c3 ♘f6 4 ♗d3 g6 5 0-0 ♗g7 6 ♖e1 0-0 7 ♗f1 ♘c6 8 h3 e5 9 d4 cxd4 10 cxd4 exd4 11 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 12 ♕xd4 ♖e8 13 ♕d3 ♗f5 14 ♘c3 d5

a) White deviated from his usual opening set-ups in favour of a 'safer one' – a purely emotional decision. Can it be justified?

b) On move 9 White invited an early crisis although the position didn't warrant it – again a purely emotional decision. Can it be justified?

I remember I enjoyed this lecture very much, and along with our students took a shot at Boris's questions. Try to do it yourself and compare with my answers given at the end of this chapter.

In the meantime, I will round up what we have discussed so far. It's hard to make game-time decisions. Indeed, they come at critical moments of the game when our factual knowledge, calculating skills and positional understanding get stretched to the limit, without producing clear-cut answers to the needs of the

position. Like I mentioned before, it's every chess-player's plight. No matter how good you are, quality opposition will every once in a while put you in a spot, and that is a real test of your chess-playing skills. Yes, grandmasters are subjected to it relatively less often, as their opening knowledge extends deeper into the middlegame and often gets connected with the specific knowledge of typical endgames that might be arising at the end of a forced, thus calculable, line. Thus, a 2600+ grandmaster can and will defeat less sophisticated opposition with apparent ease. There's nothing mysterious about his ability to keep the flow of the game under control, simply because he operates from a position of superior knowledge and hardly has to take any non-linear decisions – junctions where he might go wrong – until his technique can take over.

The computing ability varies from player to player, but, in general, every strong GM is able to calculate deeply enough when needed. Exactly how deep? Well, it depends. What's the problem, somebody like Vasily Ivanchuk would say, you just keep giving checks or attack his pieces, or create threats any other way, and your opponent's answers are forced; then all you have to do in order to continue is to be able to visualize the resulting positions clearly. Easy for him to say. Visualization is the point where chess-players begin to differ from one another, ranked by a degree of natural talent.

Visualization is a pattern thing. It's much easier to mentally analyse a game you just finished, rather than someone else's; yet I get surprised every time I try to engage my opponent in a little post-game blindfold talk. Mostly, I get a blank stare in return, and even after consulting their scoresheets most of my opponents – I'm talking 2200 strength, not my esteemed GM colleagues – are not able to understand what I'm talking about. Makes me wonder how they can play at all. Probably, the same thought has crossed Kramnik and Svidler's minds quite a few times while they watched my feeble attempts to keep up with their blindfold analysis between drinks in Wijk aan Zee bars. Everybody has his place in this hierarchy, but that doesn't mean it's set for all times and there's nothing one can do about it.

Unfortunately, today's somewhat relaxed chess training regimen does not help us to hone our visualization skills. Watching the games on the computer screen, enjoying chess videos and one-on-one instructional sessions, all this stuff has largely replaced good old chess-book reading. Think about it, no matter how many diagrams are put there, it still takes an effort to follow the game from one to another. Your brain gets conditioned to doing so – in a situation quite similar to a real game. When every move made immediately produces a position to be seen, and that's the case with the above-mentioned innovations, the best training method chess-players could ever find is getting irreplaceably lost. For anyone who picks up this book, especially the advanced reader, I can even cautiously suggest reading it without the assistance of a chess set.

Instant memorizing of random chess positions and/or an ability to quickly get your bearings in them is a special gift given to the precious few. For most of us mortals, solving chess problems is a mind-boggling exercise, and I, for example, was never keen on that. Just a casual look at a mate-in-three problem that featured 18-20 pieces configured in a weird order – and anything not reminiscent of an actual game situation is weird – would give me a headache and make me want to go away from a chess board. Walking away is what I did, and I never bothered to do anything about it. Would it be a good idea to try to change this attitude? In other words, are chess problems a good training material? I still doubt it, even though I recall how in my junior years there was a kid one year older than me, who at the age of 10 was cracking three-movers just like that. Later on he became a strong player, but maybe not as strong as some people predicted he would be. His ability to visualize chess positions was never in doubt, but the ease he was finding his way in the jungle of chess variations may have played a detrimental role in his development, as he learned to rely on it too heavily. Other areas of improvement were somewhat neglected, and,

who knows, maybe the chess world had lost one of its greatest talents. Alexei Yuneev is an IM now with a FIDE rating in the upper 2400s, but he hardly plays a lot, working as a chess teacher in the same club we both attended some thirty years ago.

The limits of visualization only constitute one problem. According to the late Efim Geller, what really matters is the wear and tear of computing workload. During the course of the game the need to calculate hardly ever lets up, and in order to be able to lead a full-blooded battle, we virtually have to calculate variations on every move. As we get older, the strain becomes unbearable, and an ageing grandmaster begins to look for an escape, which often takes the form of avoiding tense positional battles – ironically, exactly the area where his superior knowledge would give him the edge – in favour of simpler play. Simplifying robs his game of its colours, and the once-feared GM becomes a listless old man.

What about the infamous 'positional understanding' old classics are known for? Doesn't it come to the rescue to substitute for the fading calculating machine? Well, something we may call 'understanding' (Botvinnik just loved that word!) does exist, and we'll be talking about its great merits; but, in a way, it represents a vague form of reaching to 'higher' levels of calculating, almost as if the player sees deeply into the position without consciously calculating variations – some sort of 'chess sleepwalking'. From that we can derive the idea that understanding does not substitute for calculating, but rather deepens it, or helps to point it in the right direction. When a chess-player 'feels' that a position is good for him, that's understanding; when he knows – it's factual knowledge. The latter tends to be somewhat more reliable.

Still, as I demonstrated in many examples in the first part of this book, every now and then chess throws at us a non-linear puzzle. It's exciting to deal with it, and it may become very satisfying if we solve it correctly; but frankly, I'd prefer to know, be able to calculate, or in any other way figure out what the best move is in every position. The tools I have got certainly help, don't get me wrong, but why not expand your arsenal? Then, we may be able to avoid uncertainty and play chess with new-found confidence. That idea is hotly embraced by rank-and-file chess-players, who experience the agony I described in the games shown above, virtually on every move. Chances to go wrong naturally increase, and what do they do? They go wrong. Isn't it my, or any other GM-writer's, obligation to help them out?

Here we plunge into the area of 'chess improvement' heavily covered by numerous chess books filled to the brim with theoretical variations and practical advice. Don't worry, I have got a share of my own stuff, and we are about to move on to it; but please, be careful with your expectations. Nobody knows everything about chess, not even Garry Kasparov or the entity that defeated Garry in a 6-game match. Nobody. There are certain limits to one's chess knowledge, and believe me, most chess-players I know, myself included, **know chess better than they play it**. Whenever I realize during a game that I don't remember a damn thing about a position I analysed for hours just over the last weekend, I think of Clint Eastwood's character in the movie *Magnum Force*, whose favourite line was, 'Man's gotta know his limitations'.

Answers to Game 1

a) Black's opening choice is Decision-Type 1, loosely based on Justification 1. The problem is, it carried him away from every positional principle known to man.

b) Badly. The only way to justify his previous play would be the exchange sacrifice, 18...0-0 (instead of 18...♕b5?) 19 ♘f4 ♖xf4 20 gxf4 ♖e8, with some practical chances. I detect a total failure in Decision-Type 3, likely due to Justification 3.

Answers to Game 2

a) Good dynamic choice: Decision-Type 1 on Justification 2.

b) Not listed in the chart. Black took a light-hearted approach to the position right after the opening. 14...a5!? (instead of the vague 14...♖fd8) would stop White's expansion on

the queenside. The decision to part with a bishop on move 16 (I assume, to be followed by ...♘d4, but it never happened), is Type 5 (Inviting crisis) with no comments on possible Justification. It proved to be costly.

Answer to Game 3

Purely emotional decision. Get the queens off at any cost – probably taken on the spur of the moment. However, it can be justified in retrospect as Type 2, Justification 2.

Answers to Game 4

a) Didn't want to give up the two bishops. Justification 1 on all counts.

b) Refused to do a Type 3, on the grounds of Justification 3.

c) Yes, I think so. Type 6 – no yield, continue your plan regardless of who sits across the board. Justification 1 applied.

Answers to Game 5

a) Yes, otherwise he would have gone for 6 dxe5 ♕xd1+ 7 ♘xd1 ♘c6 8 f4, which is more critical. White was hoping to see it as Type 2 – Justification 2, but Black didn't play 6...♕xd4, which allows White to simplify after 7 ♘f3 ♕c5 8 ♕xe5+.

b) It did not. Despite his efforts White was drawn into a sharp battle.

c) Emotional. White was obviously rocked by the unexpected course this game took.

Answers to Game 6

a) Type 1 is here. Any attempt to rationalize it with Justification 1 would be a self-comforting lie. There's no way White should throw away his normal openings, and play an inferior line he's not familiar with (I judge by the subsequent play; for example 7 ♗f1, instead of 7 ♗c2, looks very strange).

b) No, that's emotions taking over. I detect a strong sense of self-disgust caused by walking away from his own openings. Possibly, Justification 3 of Type 5 – even at such early stage of the game, who knows?

Part 2: Openings and Early Middlegame Structures

Yes, there are certain limits to an individual's brain capacity when it comes to chess matters. In his excellent book *Secrets of Modern Chess Strategy* John Watson compares acquiring chess knowledge with learning a language. Having moved to the United States at the ripe age of 31, I have first-hand experience with foreign languages. Faced with such a task, an adult mind constantly tries to apply logical concepts to 'learning' a language, just like it is done with other subjects in the material world. We go down a beaten path of scientific research: break it down to parts, analyse each part separately, then systemize by drawing similarities between some of the parts, and finally, synthesize them back into something that should work. The result is a sad disappointment millions of people have gone through – you still can't speak the language! It's almost like it doesn't matter how hard you work, or even how smart you are to begin with, especially when you watch your kids picking it up on the fly, without any conscious efforts. The trick is to take a plunge into a new environment, just as kids do, and learn it from the inside. Instead of steaming about 'incorrectness' of the English language – how come they say 'went' instead of 'goed'? – we must learn to accept it as a whole thing. A native speaker doesn't have to analyse and systemize the words and rules of his language – he just speaks it – and anybody who wants to become like him has no other way than imitating.

This is a harsh truth, and John Watson made this into a centrepiece of his work: chess can't be studied as a science, simply because of its nature; thus you shouldn't even attempt to study its elements one by one. I'd go even further and say that the traditional methods of studying chess elements by taking them separately under a microscope are harmful for your development. Chess is a hard enough game to present you with a challenge, and the last thing we need is a worry about 'doing the right thing', which means following the positional rules that are, in fact, not more than statistical probabilities, distorted by the selection criteria chosen by the authors of chess books. Studying linguistic books doesn't help anyone to acquire a language, the same way chess books are often taken for a wrong purpose. Suppose, somebody is purely interested in scientific research in chess. He may take a certain positional element, say an open file, and run a statistical study on how it affects the outcome of a chess game. Hundreds of thousands of games would pop up on his computer screen. He would have no choice but to narrow it down to a few dozen examples that will be selected to support his thesis, the one he came up with even before he started his work! Small wonder that such work would be biased towards the author's beliefs.

In short, analytical research in chess doesn't have much to do with creating a learning material for others. It's rather a self-satisfying work made for scientific purposes only. I attempted such a task when I was twenty. I deliberately set aside all endgame books, and took up the challenge of analysing all positions with rook vs bishop with two pawns or less. My project was never completed, because it was such an arduous task I had no patience for, and mainly because I realized that at best I'll be repeating and rediscovering the stuff somebody has found in the past. I can't say, however, it was a totally wasted effort, as I gave myself a hard training session that might have paid off later on. It was the process, not the results, that mattered! By that time I already was a decent player, who needed to discipline himself a little, and the sustained effort I had to put in the course of

studying those endings served as a useful exercise. In the same way, the famous basketball player Michael Jordan would shoot free throws in practice, but one can never become a Michael Jordan by shooting free throws alone.

The traditional scientific approach to studying chess is not going to do you any good, unless you are writing a book about a specific problem, such as bishop vs knight for example, and that kind of work is not for students, but rather for somebody with a certain level of proficiency in chess matters. Even those guys get very little for themselves as chess-players. Mark Taimanov wrote a book about the Nimzo-Indian Defence, but it didn't make him unbeatable in the Nimzo, and I don't think he ever hoped for such an impossibility. Bent Larsen once said that writing a book about a particular opening is his way of saying good-bye to it – he is never going to play that opening again. So where is the benefit? Are we doomed to eternally staying on the same level of chess mastery we are entitled to as if it were determined from above? Not necessarily.

So many high hopes died in vain attempts to apply an acquired knowledge (an abstract one) to every practical situation that appears on the chessboard that I tend to be a little sceptical about the future of my book. Is it destined to join the hundreds of others relegated to dusty shelves after a few hours of casual reading? What is going to make this book different from the others written at the same time? I'll try to do my best, of course, even though I understand how futile my attempts can be. The idea is to teach by example, rather than offer ready-to-consume recipes. Who knows, maybe chess should be observed, just like a language should be spoken around you, in order to be understood and transformed into a skill. I'll select a few examples on each area – knowledge, tactical ability, and intuition – that in no way pretend to cover everything, but instead serve as illustrations of how such work of improvement can be done.

In the beginning of Yermo Chess Academy I toyed with an idea of entirely skipping the opening as a subject of my lectures. The temptation was strong: I was going to prove to my students that they can make progress in chess without buying and extensively studying the numerous books on the opening. I kind of stick to that idea even now, even if I'm willing to admit a certain failure on this part. The thing was, as I went along with my middlegame lectures I had begun to notice that in spite of my good intentions I was plunging into subjects closely related to opening theory more and more often. It turned out to be impossible to talk about the middlegame without mentioning the roots of a particular position. Many features of a middlegame position are carried over from the opening: the pawn-structure, remaining minor pieces, safety of the kings and such. Soon I realized that I had to back off on my promise not to bother people with frequent excursions into the depths of opening theory. I had to do something, and the result took a form of going over certain early middlegame set-ups, which, in fact, are considered parts of the opening theory as we know it these days.

What choice do we have, if the middlegame, the most complicated, and often decisive part, has no known theory? Naturally, we try to extend our opening knowledge deeper into the middlegame. Garry Kasparov looks by far the best in this department, because, as I mentioned earlier, he possesses unique qualities and abilities to make this approach work. In his games we often witness the elimination of the middlegame – or, at least, large chunks of it – achieved through opening research. Indeed, if one of the players knows the best moves, then his opponent, who is operating from a usual position of uncertainty, is at an obvious disadvantage. It would be unfair to blame Garry for advancing chess as a science, especially since it hasn't come at the cost of turning chess into a technical exercise. The ghost of 'death by drawing' raised by the defeated champions of the past lies largely forgotten – quite the opposite thing happens, and Garry still plays the most exciting chess among the world elite. In a way, he can only be held responsible for taking to the next level the same thing that every chess-player does day in and day out, and the generations

before him have done from the times of Philidor – home preparation for future battles, that is.

Before we sit down to study opening theory we must determine what our approach should be. I, for that matter, have always been modest in my opening ambitions. Achieving a comfortable middlegame position is all I ask for from the first 10-15 moves, and a thorough study of my personal characteristics (see Chapter One) provided me with some ideas what 'comfortable' would mean in my individual case. I grew up as a 1 d4 player, and up to this point my deeply-set personality keeps resisting the attempts to introduce 'the other good move', 1 e4, into my opening repertoire, even though I play it in occasional games. The dominance of 'minuses' in the pace chart dictates my opening choices in the majority of defences against 1 d4. Generally, I prefer a slow pace of events, when White takes his time achieving long-term positional advantages such as space and centre control at the expense of surrendering a short-term initiative to the opponent. The next 10 moves may be spent on carefully extinguishing Black's initiative until my positional pluses can take over. There's nothing new – or terribly exciting – about this approach, which is shared by a large number of chess professionals. This phenomenon was noticed by John Watson, who noted that in today's chess the traditional roles reverse as White gets something 'to look forward to exploiting later on' out of his opening initiative, and in return he's willing to suffer Black's activity in the early middlegame. A number of modern openings demonstrate such a pattern: the Benko Gambit and Modern Benoni, for instance.

This is not to say, of course, that all 1 d4 players are defenders by nature. Modern theory offers a variety of choices in any of Black's defences, and it's up to a particular player to decide which one will suit him best. From the same opening position, Khalifman goes for the kill, but Kramnik patiently waits. Speaking for myself, I have decided that the long-term advantages a better pawn-structure can offer are more valuable than an early initiative – and that, once again, is how it works for me.

Pawn structure is usually determined by the opening. The Nimzo-Indian is surely different from the Poisoned Pawn Najdorf, we understand that much. Pawn structure is not necessarily fixed (unmoveable, such in after 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5 4 ♘c3 d6 5 e4), it tends to change shape; but certain patterns are already pre-set into its fabric and, while they may or may not appear in every game played in this particular opening, we still are able to recognize them. Also it works the other way around: give us a middlegame position and the chances are we'll be able to guess correctly the opening the game had started from by the remnants of the pawn-structure alone.

The Exchange QGD: Staying Flexible in a Rigid Pawn Structure

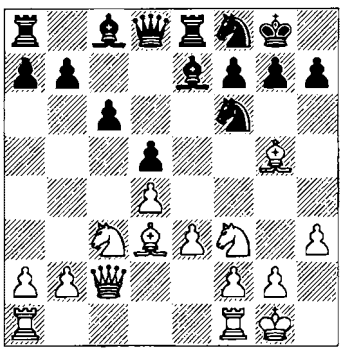
We need something to begin with, and it may very well be one of the most common pawn-structures, the one that appears in the Exchange Variation of the QGD.

I don't really know why, but in Russian-language chess literature this variation is called the 'Karlsbad', probably in a tribute to the Central European resort town that hosted a string of major chess tournaments in the first decades of the century. It's quite possible that in one of those tournaments somebody played a pawn exchange against the Queen's Gambit Declined, **1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 cxd5**. I bet first time around this move came as a shock, because in the classic treatment it was considered obvious that White should avoid this exchange in order to keep the c8-bishop out of play. A strange thing happened – White began winning games in easy-to-understand and convincing fashion. In 1930s the subsequent theoretical research and practical testing continued. The starting position, after some natural developing moves **4...exd5 5 ♗g5 ♗e7 6 e3 c6 7 ♕c2 0-0 8 ♗d3 ♘bd7 9 ♘f3 ♖e8 10 0-0 ♘f8**, had quickly become a frequent guest in almost every round of any tournament. The richness of the ideas for both sides and its rock-solid soundness have

kept it on the cutting edge of chess theory and practice for many years.

11 ♖abl (longest tenure), 11 a3 and 11 ♖ael have all seen their glory days as the main move here, but in the recent years another little move, **11 h3** *(D)*, has begun to draw attention to its virtues.

B



It's hard to understand why, if you're not familiar with all the ideas here. Systematic research, however, can reveal underlying patterns and hidden nuances well concealed from a casual glance. We start from the beginning.

What does White do here? What plans does he have at his disposal? Here's a short list in descending order of relative importance.

a) The minority attack.

White plays for a b4-b5 advance.

b) The centre-breaking pawn advance.

White plays e3-e4. It creates an isolated pawn on d4 with all its typical implications.

c) The centre build-up.

White plays f3 and e4.

d) The post-up.

White puts his knight on e5, and supports it with f4.

The minority attack plan has long been a darling for middlegame book writers. Its strategic simplicity is attractive and easy to explain. All White has to do is push his pawn to b5 (the a-pawns may get swapped in the process), and Black won't be able to avoid getting saddled with one weakness (the backward c6-pawn after bxc6 is met by ...bxc6), or another (isolated d5-pawn and abandoned queenside if bxc6 is met with a piece recapture, or after ...cxb5). A battle blueprint can be drawn in minutes: White attacks on one side of the board, Black goes to the opposite – some sort of a Dragon gameplan, only slower in execution and less violent by the means used.

Deeper research targeting a more advanced audience reveals the truth. In his 1980s lectures delivered to 2400+ students, the Russian Junior Team coach GM Alexander Panchenko offered extensive coverage of Black's defensive options. It turned out that the minority attack can be handled after all. It had long been known in GM circles, and the popularity of the Exchange Variation at top level fell down to marginal proportions by the end of the 1970s.

Many years later, for the reasons I'll outline below, I decided to try to resurrect it for my own practical use. I took a path quite different from what you see in the books. I invite you to follow my line of research on one condition: you must take into consideration all the plans mentioned above, not only the minority attack.

You see, these plans are often woven into an intricate net of positional manoeuvring, as White must stop Black's ideas first, while keeping his own options open. That explains why I, along with many other GMs, took up that little h3 move. Besides being a useful waiting move, it's designed to open the h2-square as a retreat for the bishop (or a hole for the king, sometimes), and take control over the g4-square. The last consideration underlines how Black's 'liberated' c8-bishop suddenly finds itself deprived of activity.

According to the classical theory, Black must establish a 'post' on the half-open e-file, so the move **11...♘e4** naturally comes to mind. Indeed, it has been played in this particular position many times. In the Exchange Variation Black nearly always seeks to exchange the dark-squared bishops, because he needs to free his play and complete development. In our case, however, White can refuse to cooperate. He chooses **12 ♗f4** instead, the move that keeps the bishop, and incidentally, leaves the black centralized knight lacking support. There's a

lot to be said about mutual chances in this position, but I'll try to concentrate on other possibilities Black has in the diagrammed position. I have had a vast amount of experience on the white side of this opening, and some of those games may well illustrate the complexity of the featured pawn-structure.

I'll begin with a typical example of Plan A.

Yermolinsky – Gild. Garcia
St Martin 1993

11...♘g6 12 ♗xf6!

This somewhat surprising decision is loosely based on the awkward position of the g6-knight. It can't move anywhere but back to f8, because the h-pawn needs protection. Take a note of how White parts with the bishop before Black can continue with his plan and play ...♘e4.

12...♗xf6 13 b4

An additional perk of the bishop for knight exchange is that the pawn can advance quickly. White is well on his way to executing Plan A.

13...♗e7 *(D)*

A sensible attempt to re-deploy his pieces. In principle, Black might want to keep that bishop on f6 for a while, anticipating the possibility of opening the long diagonal by meeting b5 with ...c5, but where's his active counterplay then?

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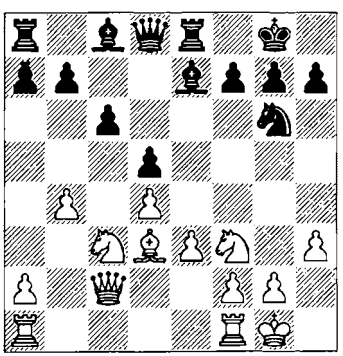

14 b5 ♗d6 15 bxc6 bxc6

White has achieved his primary goal, which is creating a weakness, but now he's facing an unpleasant threat of ...♕f6 and ...♗xh3. In the meantime, his own knight blocks the c-file. That's why White's next is very logical. According to John Watson, backward moves are accepted as long as they serve the purpose – that's modern chess.

16 ♘b1! ♕f6 17 ♘bd2 h6 18 ♖fc1 ♘e7 19 ♕d1 *(D)*

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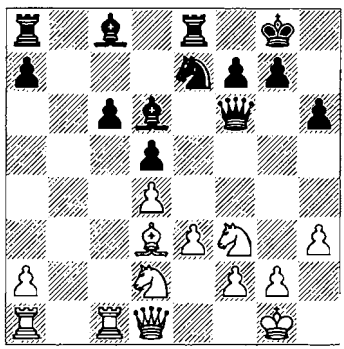


The same purpose as White's 16th. Look how economically White's pieces work, how they share defensive duties with each other until the moment arrives to improve one of them. The knight has concluded its purpose on d2, and now it's free to join the queenside attack. The queen replaces the knight in guarding f3, while stepping back from the rooks' way. The pace of the game is very slow now, and that's exactly what White needs.

I even turned down the opportunity to grab the b-file with 19 ♖ab1 – so happy was I with my regrouping strategy.

19...♖b8 20 ♘b3 ♖b6 21 ♖c2 ♘f5

In search of activity Black abandons the c-pawn. Was it forced? Of course not. He could sit and wait for many moves, but passive defence is not to everyone's liking.

22 ♘c5 g6 23 ♖ac1 ♔g7?!

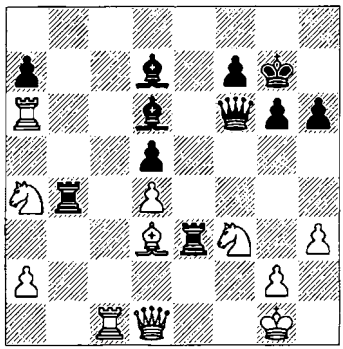
23...♘e7 was more prudent.

24 ♘a4 ♖b4 25 ♖xc6 ♗d7 26 ♖a6

White has won a pawn, and now Black really has no choice but to go for broke.

26...♘xe3 27 fxe3 ♖xe3 *(D)*

Here White could have won the game with the simple 28 ♘c3, since the d-pawn cannot be



defended. A few fireworks such as 28...♖xd4 29 ♖xd6 ♖exd3 30 ♖xf6 ♖xd1+ 31 ♘xd1, 28...♖xf3 29 ♕xf3 ♕xd4+ 30 ♔h1 ♕e5 31 ♖xd6 or 28...♖b2 29 ♘xd5 ♖xg2+ 30 ♔xg2 ♗xh3+ 31 ♔f2, shouldn't have scared me off this move.

Instead I went on with a 'consolidating' (but meek) move, **28 ♘c5?** (refer to Part I for explanations), got hit by **28...♗xh3!**, drifted into time-trouble and eventually lost.

Plan B, which creates an isolated pawn on d4, and often is accompanied by mass-exchanges, sometimes gets a bad rap as being toothless. Certainly, there was a large number of games where White was simply shooting for a quick draw (you may suspect that was the case in the next game, but honestly, I was trying to win) and took the first opportunity to play e4 regardless of its objective value. However, things are not so simple. Often White is forced to switch to that plan after good play by Black has taken care of everything else. And it still carries some poison.

Yermolinsky – Yusupov
US Masters, Chicago 1996

With a world-class player commanding the black pieces, we are going to see a totally different scenario. First of all, Black somewhat surprisingly moves his light-squared bishop to a passive square.

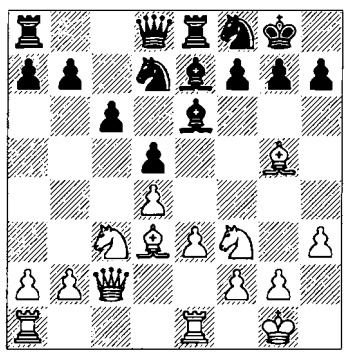
11...♗e6

Indeed, the bishop looks a bit stupid here, but the point is revealed after 12 ♗xf6?! (see previous game) 12...♗xf6 13 b4 ♖c8!, when Black is ready to meet 14 b5 with 14...c5!. Artur knows prophylaxis, what can I say?

12 ♖fe1!

Black is ready to exchange the dark-squared bishops, and White will choose his strategy depending on the position of the black knight. If 12...♘h5, then 13 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 14 ♖ab1, switching to Plan A, while Black's thematic counterplay on the e-file is hampered by his own bishop on e6.

12...♘6d7 *(D)*



13 ♗f4!

Now White keeps the bishops, as Black's position lacks sufficient space. What was wrong with Plan A, you may ask. Well, with that knight close to the queenside Black can try a radical plan: 13 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 14 ♖ab1 a5 15 a3 ♖ec8 16 b4 b5!, followed by ...♘b6-c4.

13...♘g6 14 ♗h2 ♘df8

Awkward, but necessary. 14...♘f6 would allow 15 ♘e5! (Plan D) with pressure.

15 ♖ad1 ♘h4!

Once again, 15...♗d6 would be met by 16 ♘e5.

Artur's play is very consistent. He eliminates the white knight, which simply has no good square to go to.

16 ♘xh4

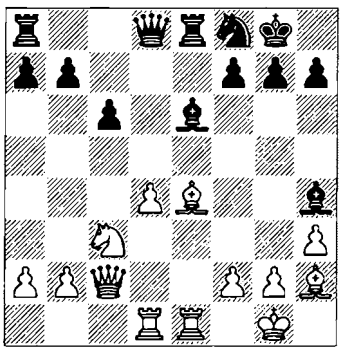
16 ♘e5? f6 17 ♘g4 h5 18 ♗g3 hxg4 19 ♗xh4 gxh3 strongly favours Black.

16...♗xh4

What now? There's simply nothing left in the position but to try to take advantage of Black's slight underdevelopment.

17 e4! dxe4 18 ♗xe4 *(D)*

B



Due to his timely pawn advance White enjoys a positional plus. d5 is a big threat here. I think from such a position I would have had good chances to beat many people, but Artur Yusupov is not one of them. Also, the tournament situation called for 'safety first', and the game was quickly drawn.

The Plan C involves the f3 move that is not technically possible in our starting position. For more examples the reader must refer to another opening line of the Karlsbad, that deviates with 9 ♘ge2. Nevertheless, I managed to get that plan going in the next game, when I was well aided by my opponent's mistakes.

Yermolinsky – Cooke

G/30, Manhattan Chess Club, New York 1995

11...h6?!

An unfortunate reaction to White's slow build-up. In a way, 11 h3 is an excellent waiting move that often provokes Black into doing something inappropriate. The text-move chases the bishop to a better diagonal, while doing nothing for Black's position except for rendering the g6-square inaccessible for his own knight.

12 ♗f4

White can also try Plan A after 12 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 13 b4. With the moves h3 and ...h6 included, White clearly has gained more because he doesn't have to worry about the ...♗g4 move any more.

12...♘e6 13 ♗e5!

It's interesting how the e5-square is used by the white pieces. The bishop gets there, and it's going to be chased or exchanged, but that's the provocative effect White is after. Look at it from this point of view: Black has failed to execute the desirable exchange of the dark-squared bishops, so his pieces are in the way of each other. He might overreact to temporary difficulties and do something really damaging to his position.

This was exactly the case in this game. The sense of urgency began to set in, because Eric Cooke knew that White was only going to improve his position with time.

13...♘g5?!

Just like Yusupov did in the previous game, Eric is seeking exchanges to relieve the cramping effect on his position. However, not every exchange is going to be good for Black. For example, this move does more damage to Black's kingside pawns than my careless opponent thought.

14 ♘xg5 hxg5

There was now something to be said in favour of the energetic 15 f4!? g4 16 f5, but I preferred the quiet way.

15 f3! *(D)*

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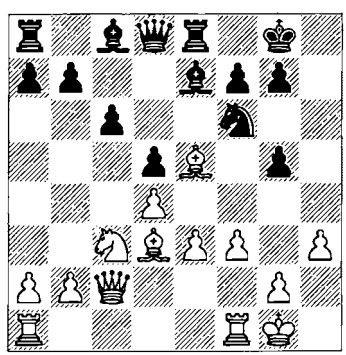

The first idea is to take care of the ...g4 possibility, but there's much more to it than just prophylaxis. In fact, 15 f3 is a very ambitious move: having got rid of the clumsy f3-knight, White is planning to get the central pawns going.

15...♗d6 16 ♗xd6 ♕xd6 17 ♕f2 ♗e6

Exchanges have been achieved, but at a higher price than Black could afford.

18 ♖ad1!

Better than 18 e4 dxe4 19 fxe4 ♖ad8, when the d-pawn comes under attack. White's ultra-solid position allows him to take all the time in the world for his preparatory moves.

18...♖ad8 19 ♗b1

Finally, the stage is set for e3-e4. Black, who has not done much up to this point, suddenly realizes the danger and instantly feels obliged to do something.

19...c5?!

A thematic advance against the f3 plans in the Karlsbad. By eliminating the d4-pawn Black destroys White's centre before it takes the ultimate form, with pawns on d4 and e4. Nice intentions, but as it often happens, the remedy is worse than the disease.

20 dxc5 ♕xc5 21 ♖d4

This simple move effectively covers the only weakness in White's camp, the e3-pawn, and calmly prepares an all-out assault against the d-pawn. The technical stage of converting White's advantage would take a long time, if it weren't for the other weakness Black seemed to forget about.

21...b5? 22 ♕g3

The g5-pawn fell, and White won easily.

Plan D is known to us courtesy of Harry Nelson Pillsbury, the first player who really understood this pawn-structure. Many attacking games have been won by the same method: ♘e5, f4, ♖f3-h3 etc. Soon the defence caught up, and since then White's success has become spotty. Usually Black fights with an early capture on e5, followed by ...f6, and inserting a timely ...♘e4. Does that mean the end of Plan D? Not at all. It still might work when the situation is right. Often White takes advantage of Black's own ideas, mostly directed against the traditional pawn minority attack, to suddenly change gears into Plan D.

Yermolinsky – Hergott

North Bay 1994

11...♘h5

Incidentally, this might be Black's best. The knight goes to the rim, but the bishop exchange is guaranteed, and that may be worth the trouble.

12 ♗xe7 ♕xe7

Igor Ivanov played 12...♖xe7 in the 1996 US Championship, but I got Plan A jump-started: 13 b4! with advantage to White.

13 ♖fe1!

Threatening e3-e4 (Plan B) and overprotecting the e-pawn (the f-pawn may start moving). You'll see in a few moves why it is so important.

13...♕f6?

Many times I have seen my opponents trying to take advantage of that h3 move. So far I've been able to handle this transparent threat (...♗xh3) without much inconvenience. Better is 13...♘f6 14 ♖ab1 (back to Plan A) 14...a5 15 a3 g6 16 b4 axb4 17 axb4 ♘e6 18 b5 ♘g7, with the idea of ...♗f5 – a typical defensive plan. In most cases, Black survives an inferior ending with a weak c6-pawn, providing that he has managed to exchange light-squared bishops.

14 ♘e5! ♘g6 15 f4 *(D)*

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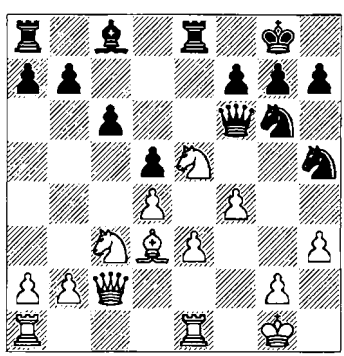

This simple advance is surprisingly strong here. The h5-knight is out of play, and an attempt

to bring it back would give White some extra time necessary to grab serious space on the kingside: 15...♘g3 16 ♕f2 ♘f5 17 g4 ♘d6 18 ♕g3 with a lot of pressure on Black's position. The e5-knight cannot be dislodged, and the initiative rolls along smoothly.

Let's go back and imagine that White had played the conventional 13 ♖ab1 instead of the multi-purpose move 13 ♖fe1. Then Black would have followed with 15...♘g3 16 ♖f3 (if 16 ♖fe1, then Black gets in the all-important move 16...♗f5) 16...♘f5 17 g4 ♘gh4!, initiating enormous complications. In the game Black tried to do the same under far less favourable conditions.

15...♘xe5?! 16 dxe5

I could actually transpose the moves. 16 ♗xh7+ ♔h8 17 dxe5 would be more forceful.

16...♕h4

He didn't like the looks of 16...♕h6 17 ♕f2 g6 18 ♕h4 ♕f8 (only move), and I wouldn't blame anybody for that feeling. It's another story that given a choice between this line and the game continuation I'd grind my teeth and try to defend. Why not? There's no checkmate in sight, and, who knows, White might overextend himself while trying to do too much. My opponent apparently didn't have that kind of optimism. In a fashion typical of today's practical players, he went for a pawn sacrifice that, incidentally, met a quick and convincing refutation. The question is, was this game won by accident? I don't think so.

Interestingly, there seems to be a pattern that repeats itself in one game after another: in the beginning Black allows things to drift too far, and then overreacts at the first sight of positional difficulties. It makes me think that not too many players are well-suited for the Queen's Gambit Declined as this opening often requires the enormous patience and self-control that are necessary to cope with defending difficult positions.

17 ♗xh7+ ♔h8 18 ♗f5 d4 19 ♗xc8 ♖axc8

The rook walks into a fork, but neither 19...♖exc8 20 exd4 ♘xf4 21 ♖e4, nor 19...dxc3 20 ♗g4 cxb2 21 ♕xb2 looked particularly promising.

20 ♘e4 *(D)*

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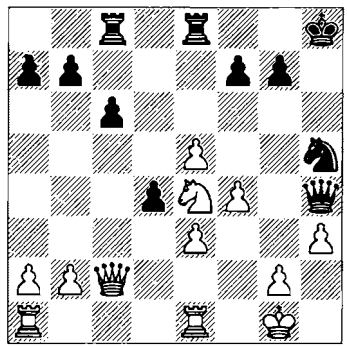


If this guy gets to g5... – you better watch out! However, 20...♖f8 21 ♘g5 g6 22 ♘f3 ♕g3 23 ♘xd4 is now too painful even to think about. Deen Hergott decides to make a run for it.

20...dxe3 21 ♘d6 ♕g3

Unfortunately for him 21...♘xf4 22 ♖xe3 ♖e6!? is stopped cold by 23 g3! ♕xh3 24 ♘xf7+ ♔g8 25 ♘g5.

22 ♖f1!

The last precise move kills Black's activity.

22...e2

If 22...♘xf4, then 23 ♖f3 ♘xh3+ 24 ♔f1 finishes him off.

23 ♕xe2 ♘xf4 24 ♕g4

White won the exchange and converted his advantage to victory.

Frankly, the above games (and the analyses of course) pretty much cover my limited knowledge of the Karlsbad set-up. I saw the 11 h3 move in Karpov's games some time ago when I was searching for a new weapon against the QGD. Years ago, as a junior, I used to play the sharp lines of the Karlsbad involving long castling, then I figured them not solid enough to be tried against better opposition. In later years I exclusively played the main lines of QGD with 4 ♗g5, etc., because I usually opened the game with 1 ♘f3, a move that practically cuts out the cxd5 option. Are you wondering why? It's because in that case Black can develop the light-squared bishop, e.g. 1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3

d5 4 d4 ♗e7 5 cxd5?! exd5 6 ♗g5 c6 7 ♕c2 g6!, followed by ...♗f5 with complete equality. So, the main line with 5 ♗g5 or 5 ♗f4, is what White chooses. I was happy with my treatment of the 5 ♗g5 line, but the gradual transition to 1 d4 has opened the Karlsbad option and, naturally, I wanted to get a reliable secondary weapon against QGD. The first time I saw 11 h3 I couldn't understand a thing about it. Why would White waste a tempo on a weakening pawn move when his area of interest lies on the queenside? Still without a clue, I played it a few times in the early 1990s, and gradually came to appreciate its subtlety. Take my word for it, I hardly did any work, except for analysing my own games – sort of learning on the go – and I just shared with you the results of my study. Three games out of four saw Black getting in some sort of trouble right out of the opening, with only exception being the Yusupov game, where I faced a really formidable player.

I must admit, that particular line of the QGD is not very challenging. White can get by with very little actual knowledge of the variations involved and still be OK – a rare event in today's chess. The extremely slow pace of events, characteristic for this pawn-structure, allows White a luxury of operating with 'good moves', and finding those is not such hard work for an experienced player. The drawback? White's advantage is really small, and I realize that a good player will likely hold it to a draw as Black. Nevertheless, I intend to keep this system among my opening choices to be used occasionally.

The Queen's Gambit Declined doesn't have to be as boring as the games shown above might lead you to believe. There are many sharp systems there, and White must be well equipped to meet the challenge face to face in the Botvinnik Anti-Meran or the Vienna Variation. There will be many more lines and variations to study before you can consider yourself ready for the QGD, and I'm tempted to throw in a few examples of considerably sharper play arising after 1 d4 d5 to counterbalance the dry technical examples given above, but this book is not meant to be a guide to a complete opening repertoire for a 1 d4 player. With that in mind I'd like to move on to entirely different types of early middlegame set-ups.

What Good are Central Pawns against the Grünfeld Defence? (with another little bonus)

Obtaining a mobile pair of pawns in the centre is the ultimate goal of many, if not all, opening systems. On move one White plays either 1 e4 or 1 d4 with the idea of creating that big centre, and Black considers it imperative to do something about it. Often some action is taken on move one – 1 e4 is most frequently met by 1...e5 or 1...c5, both moves making d2-d4 difficult to achieve – or in the immediate future, such is the case in the Caro-Kann and the French. Some hundred and fifty years ago the ruling opinion was that if White gets both pawns in the centre he holds an advantage; that's why 1 e4 e5 was considered the only correct way to open the game. The development of modern opening systems backed up by decades of practical verification has shifted our opinion towards a more flexible approach. We don't fear the big centre any more as long as there are some means to undermine it with flank pawns, or put pressure on it with the pieces. In fact, some pawn-structures where White is allowed to keep his pawns on e4 and d4 for a while are not considered finalized until one of the players makes a commitment to change the pawn-structure.

For example, in the Classical King's Indian Defence after 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♘f3 0-0 6 ♗e2 e5 7 0-0 *(D)* three possible scenarios may develop:

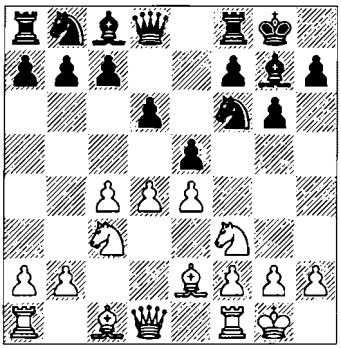
a) White takes on e5 and Black recaptures with the pawn.

b) White closes the position with d5.

c) Black takes on d4.

Either one presents us with a totally different pawn-structure that would dictate its own positional considerations.

Or in the Pirc Defence: 1 e4 g6 2 d4 ♗g7 3 c3 d6 4 ♘f3 ♘f6 5 ♗d3 0-0 6 0-0 e5. In both cases the white pawn-pair in the centre was contested by the black pawn on e5, thus its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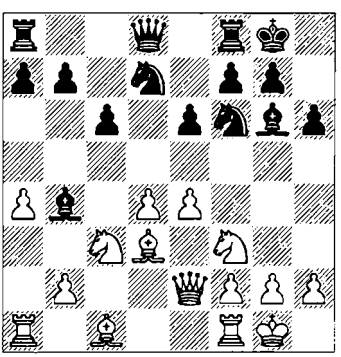
mobility was severely impaired. We can't even say that White has any advantage in the centre yet; otherwise why would Black voluntarily enter these systems?

Nimzowitsch's discovery of the merits of surrendering the centre by means of ...exd4 in the Philidor or Ruy Lopez, and ...dxe4 in the Rubinstein French was truly revolutionary for its day. The modern players took these ideas to become cornerstones of many opening systems of today.

In the Slav Defence one of the main line runs as follows: 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 dxc4 5 a4 ♗f5 6 e3 e6 7 ♗xc4 ♗b4 8 0-0 0-0 9 ♕e2 ♘bd7 10 e4 ♗g6 11 ♗d3 h6 *(D)*.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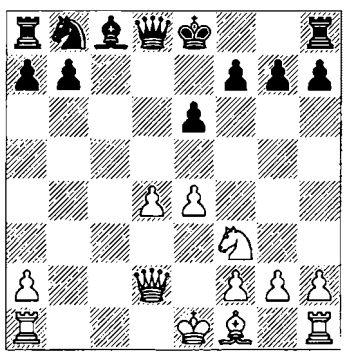
From the standpoint of classical chess White stands better. Indeed, he has established a central pawn pair, but what about its mobility? The d4-d5 break is hard to engineer, and what if it does happen? Just mass-exchanges, leading to a draw. The assumption that the side with the better central control can operate on a side of the board with greater efficiency doesn't seem to stand here. Neither the queenside, severely compromised by the move a4, nor kingside, reinforced by Black's g6-bishop, offer White any visible targets. Ironically, White is hard-pressed to find a plan here, often resorting to the e4-e5 advance that may not be effective at all. In the meantime, Black has a few useful moves to make in the immediate future, such as ...♖e8, ...a6, ...♖c8, before contesting the centre with ...c5 or ...e5.

Sometimes, White's pawn dominance in the centre can take even more visible shapes.

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 c5 5 cxd5 ♘xd5 (5...exd5 leads to the main-line Tarrasch) 6 e4 ♘xc3 7 bxc3 cxd4 8 cxd4 ♗b4+ 9 ♗d2 ♗xd2+ 10 ♕xd2 *(D)*.

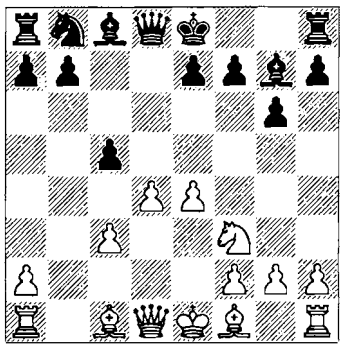

B

White can push forward either of his central pawns, so the mobility is there, while Black doesn't have the c-pawn to strike with ...c5 to remove the d4-pawn. Does that mean an advantage for White? I wouldn't be so sure, as this line remains legitimate from the theoretical point of view. Most of today's GMs would be happier as White, true; but the reason for that is not the dominating white centre – that kind of abstract reasoning hardly exists these days – it's the diminutive counterplay possibilities offered to Black in this particular position. Change one little detail, the position of Black's dark-squared

bishop, and here we are, in the Grünfeld – one of the most popular openings of today.

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 d5 4 cxd5 ♘xd5 5 e4 ♘xc3 6 bxc3 ♗g7 7 ♘f3 c5 *(D)*

W



Theoretical variations aside, we can imagine the following scenarios:

a) White plays e5, blocking the bishop that attacks the d4-pawn. As a result, the d5-square will fall into Black's hands, but White is assured of sufficient space on the kingside for future actions against the king. This plan often works out OK from the previous diagram, where a d3-bishop is unobstructed, and serves as a major participant in White's offensive. A typical build-up, ♕e4-g4, forces the weakening ...g6 move and White rolls on with an attack. It's quite a different story in the Grünfeld: the pawn is already on g6, but the fianchettoed bishop defends the king well. While White may still succeed with his attack under certain favourable conditions, a general estimation of the respective chances of the players, based on practical games, favours Black.

b) White plays d5 before Black exchanges on d4, then supports it with c4. The course of action then may take place in the centre, where White ambitiously goes for f4 and e5, such as the case in the line popular in the early 1980s, 8 ♖b1 0-0 9 ♗e2 ♘c6 10 d5 ♘e5 11 ♘xe5 ♗xe5 12 ♕d2; or, sometimes, the action shifts to the queenside, where White launches a typical pawn minority attack with a4-a5, after Black is forced to play ...b6.

c) Black exerts pressure against the d-pawn by means of playing ...♘c6 and ...♗g4 with or without exchanging pawns on d4. White uses tactical means to deal with the problem.

The last scenario has a lot to do with what I'm going to talk about. How does White make use of his pawns when they are targeted by the black pieces? In the short term, the pawn-centre gives him nothing but headaches. Moving the d-pawn forward, away from being attacked, is difficult for tactical reasons – the powerful g7-bishop threatens to gobble up everything that's left on its diagonal: the c3-pawn or the a1-rook. White often resorts to sacrifices – and if we examine White's moves in theoretical lines spawned from the diagrammed position, we'll see a lot of early rook moves (to b1 or c1), along with ♕d2. All with one single priority: to make the d5 advance. Is there any other way for White? The hottest discussion these days is raging on in the line where the a2-pawn is sacrificed in order to preserve the stability of the central pawn pair: 8 ♖b1 0-0 9 ♗e2 cxd4 10 cxd4 ♕a5+ 11 ♗d2 ♕xa2 12 0-0, etc.

I could go on and on talking about positional implications and tactical nuances of this sacrifice. Introducing the clashing positional and material factors is very typical of modern chess and it surely deserved to be looked at. On the other hand, will we be able to find our way in a maze of forced variations extending deep into the middlegame? Indeed, a difficult task. I have been a Grünfeld Defence fan throughout my entire career, and I remember the days when exposing the knight to a ...♗g4 pin was considered inferior to the lines with ♗c4 and ♘e2. Suddenly it started to change and I had to catch up with the newest tendencies in an opening I considered myself an expert in. Ultimately I did my homework, and now I don't fear the Grünfeld as White – see ya later 1 ♘f3 – and continue to play it as Black. How did I manage? I must admit that I was blessed with exceptional luck. Before I got any experience in more principled lines, I kept being confronted with one particular variation of the Grünfeld, which, in my opinion, gives White a free hand in exploiting the endless opportunities the mobile pawn

pair in the centre can bring. The knowledge I gained from the games you are about to see went a long way in helping me to understand the ideas that still rule every topical variation stemming from the initial position of the ♘f3 line.

Yermolinsky – Schebenyk
Leningrad 1985

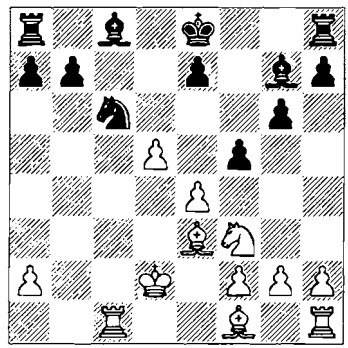
1	**d4**	**♘f6**
2	**c4**	**g6**
3	**♘c3**	**d5**
4	**♘f3**	**♗g7**
5	**cxd5**	**♘xd5**
6	**e4**	**♘xc3**
7	**bxc3**	**0-0?!**

As we are about to witness in this and the following games, one little hesitation can cost Black dearly. The correct strategy is to pressure the white centre before the opponent can complete his development. That's why 7...c5! is the only good move here. White has a choice:

a) 8 ♗e3 ♕a5 9 ♕d2 (in order to protect his centre White has to concede a queen swap that will reduce his attacking potential; this is a feature of the 8 ♗e3 variation) 9...♘c6 (both 9...0-0 and the newest 9...♗g4, favoured by Kasparov and Svidler, are more popular now) 10 ♖c1. White is persistently working for d4-d5, which will come with gain of tempo. We will now follow the old game **Shereshevsky – Yermolinsky**, *Odessa 1981*: **10...cxd4 11 cxd4 ♕xd2+ 12 ♔xd2 f5** An interesting attempt to switch targets. A more conventional way of continuing to pressure the centre is 12...0-0 13 d5 ♖d8, planning ...e6. **13 d5** *(D)*

Instead of crowning White's achievements in positional play, this move opens the floodgates for a tactical mêlée – an interesting twist! **13...fxe4 14 ♘g5 ♘d4 15 ♖xc8+** I think White had a better move here. After 15 d6! exd6 16 ♖c7 Black is looking at some dangerous threats to his well-being. What about the pawn-centre, the reader may ask, how come White gave it away so quickly? Well, that's the dynamics of today's Grünfeld: to avoid getting squeezed Black has to strike up counterplay early, often using pawn thrusts before completing his

B



development; in turn, White has to play energetically, push his central pawns forward and sometimes sacrifice them in order to get to the opponent's weak points. **15...♖xc8 16 ♗xd4 ♗xd4 17 ♗b5+ ♔f8** 17...♔d8?? 18 ♘e6# would be embarrassing. **18 ♘e6+ ♔f7 19 ♘xd4 ♖hd8 20 ♔e3 ♖xd5 21 ♔xe4** with approximately equal chances in the unbalanced endgame.

b) 8 ♖b1, as I mentioned earlier.

c) 8 ♗e2 (considered inferior) 8...♘c6 (what is White to do now?) 9 ♗e3 (the inspired sacrifice 9 d5!? ♗xc3+ 10 ♗d2 ♗xa1 11 ♕xa1 ♘d4 12 ♘xd4 cxd4 13 ♕xd4 has been tried a few times with chequered success) 9...♗g4 10 e5 (the centre is collapsing while 10 d5 is impossible, because the c3-pawn hangs with check). What we got here is Scenario 1: White had to resort to moving the other pawn. When such an advance is forced, rather than intelligently chosen, it usually means trouble for White.

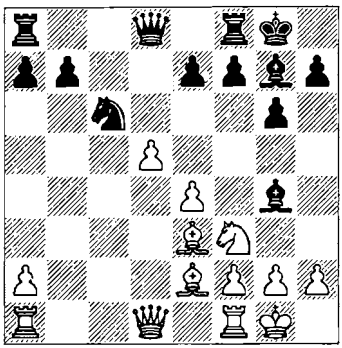
This little overview by no means pretends to be an extensive study of the theory of the Grünfeld Defence, so please accept the variations given above as samples – illustrations of typical ideas. Back to the game now.

8	**♗e2**	**c5**
9	**0-0**	**cxd4**
10	**cxd4**	**♘c6**
11	**♗e3**	**♗g4**

Black thinks he's doing things by the book. The pressure on White's centre has reached its maximum. Isn't e4-e5 forced?

12 d5! *(D)*

B



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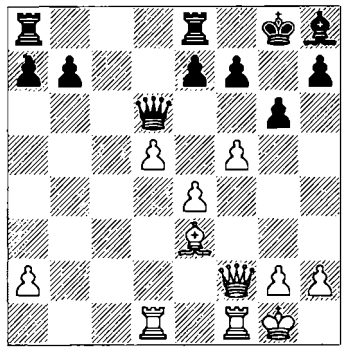


The fact that White has already castled makes this powerful thrust possible. We can now see and appreciate the difference between 7...0-0? and 7...c5!.

12 ... ♘e5
13 ♘xe5 ♗xe2
14 ♕xe2 ♗xe5
15 ♖ad1

The situation doesn't look that hopeless for Black. Three pairs of minor pieces are gone, and the white pawns seem to have been slowed down. The problem is, it's only temporary! The exposed position of the e5-bishop invites f4, to be followed by e5, shutting the bishop out.

15 ... ♕a5
16 ♗h6!?

An unexpected twist. White rejects the natural plan outlined in the previous note. Why? I simply saw a better alternative. If now 16...♗g7, then White picks off a pawn: 17 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 18 ♕b2+ ♔g8 19 ♕xb7 ♕xa2 20 ♕xe7 ♖fe8 21 ♕b4 a5 22 ♕d4 with a decisive edge. As the game develops, Black's king becomes exposed.

16 ... ♖fe8
17 f4 ♗h8
18 f5!?

Once again White demonstrates flexibility. Instead of the trivial 18 e5 he launches a swift strike against the underprotected f7-pawn.

18 ... ♕b6+
19 ♗e3 ♕d6
20 ♕f2 *(D)*

Just a few moves into the middlegame, and already Black faces an uphill battle:

a) 20...♗e5 21 fxg6 ♗xh2+ 22 ♔h1 fxg6 23 ♗c5 ♕b8 24 ♖d3, and White's attack (♕f7 and ♖h3) crashes through.

b) 20...b6 21 fxg6 ♕xg6 22 ♖d3 ♖ad8 23 ♗f4, with strong threats developing against the vulnerable black king.

20 ... ♖f8?

This move simply ignores the other threat.

21 ♗xa7 ♗e5
22 h3 gxf5!?

An understandable attempt to stir up some tactics – nevertheless, with White's superiority all over the board, it only speeds up the end.

23 ♗c5 ♕f6
24 ♕xf5 ♖xa2
25 ♕xf6! ♗xf6
26 d6

That pawn has great potential – once it gets on the move, look out! Here, it's more like the end of the game, or so I thought when I played it. The toughest resistance would now be offered by 26...♖c2!. White then would have to proceed with caution: 27 dxe7 (27 ♗b4 ♖c4 only improves Black's chances) 27...♖e8 28 ♖xf6 ♖xc5 29 ♖d8 ♔g7! (I don't think I saw this resource during the game; fortunately the win is still there) 30 ♖e6! fxe6 31 ♖xe8 ♔f7 32 ♖b8 ♔xe7 33 ♖xb7+ ♔f6 34 ♖xh7 ♖c4 35 ♖h4.

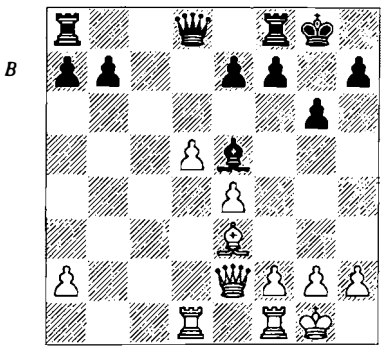
26 ... ♔g7

After this meek move Black is losing the exchange, and he can't even hope to create technical difficulties for his opponent, because White is going to keep the passed pawn alive.

27 d7 ♖aa8

28	**e5**	**♗xe5**
29	**♗xe7**	**1-0**

Let's go back to the position after White's 15th, and see what happens when Black defends better.



Yermolinsky – Nestorović
San Benedetto 1989

15...♕d7 16 f4!?

For the alternative, 16 ♗h6, see the next game.

With the text-move White aims to re-establish the mobility of his pawn pair. That is best achieved by lining them up. Incidentally, as the pawns move forward they win more space.

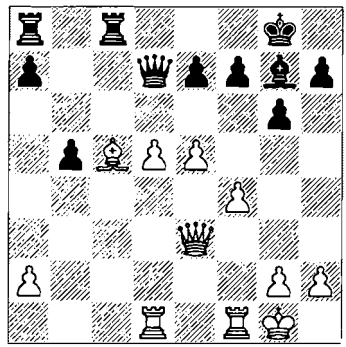
16...♗g7 17 e5 b5!?

As a result of White's expansion Black is suffering from a lack of space. That factor, however, may not have been decisive, if he had avoided weakening his position. I vote for 17...♖fc8! with reasonable hopes of holding on.

18 ♗c5!?

Tightening the noose. The black rooks are locked in as well as his dark-squared bishop.

18...♖fc8 19 ♕e3 *(D)*



I was wondering what White should do next after, say, 19...a5. The automatic 20 d6? fails to impress, because the passed pawn is safely blockaded. Maybe White should switch to the kingside? Under different circumstances (with more minor pieces on the board) a kingside attack would have brought it home without much hindrance. But not here. Neither 20 f5? ♗xe5, nor 20 e6 fxe6 21 dxe6 ♕c7 seemed to be doing me any good.

I intended to be patient for the time being. White can slightly improve his position with moves such as a3 and h3, while waiting for an opportunity to rip the kingside apart with e6, to be followed by f5.

19...e6?

This came as a pleasant surprise. White is handed a powerful protected passed pawn to work with. Similar situations arise sometimes in the 7...c5 8 ♖b1 0-0 9 ♗e2 ♘c6 line, but with White lagging in the development department, which is not the case here.

20 d6 f6 21 ♗d4! fxe5

What I really wanted to see was 21...f5 22 ♖c1, and White effortlessly switches to the queenside, while the black bishop remains incarcerated.

22 ♗xe5

What's this? Why does White want to exchange the bishops now? The answer brings us to a very difficult point every chess instructor encounters every once in a while. Sometimes I can spend hours showing a game of mine to YCA students, while constantly stressing the importance of a certain positional principle – a severely restricted piece in this case – that plays a dominant role in a strategic battle. Then comes a moment when I have to explain why I made a decision that seems totally inconsistent with what I have said before! Well, it's called flexibility. In today's chess clean-cut games that can

serve as examples of a successfully implemented strategic plan, solely based on just one positional principle, are rare. The more sophisticated opposition, compared with what the classic players of the 1920s had to deal with, can and will put up greater resistance. Suppose I recapture with the pawn now. Yes, the black bishop will remain locked up as long as White can protect the e5-pawn, but what would it take? My own bishop will be relegated to a passive role of defending the pawn, and may become a defensive liability itself, simply because it lacks a safe square on the a1-h8 diagonal.

Instead, I changed my plan. From now on the dominant theme is promoting the d-pawn, and for that purpose exposing the black king also comes in handy.

22...♖c2 23 ♖c1! ♖ac8 24 ♖xc2 ♖xc2 25 ♖c1 *(D)*

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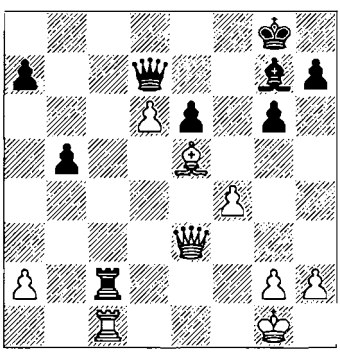

By consistently eliminating pieces White paves a smooth road for the d6-pawn, his pride and glory. The queen ending after 25...♖xc1+ 26 ♕xc1 ♗xe5 27 fxe5 is automatic; but the obvious 25...♕c6 only makes it slightly more difficult in a technical sense: 26 ♖xc2 ♕xc2 27 ♗xg7 (White can also try 27 ♕d4 or 27 h3) 27...♕d1+ 28 ♔f2 ♔xg7 29 ♕xe6 ♕d2+ 30 ♔f3 ♕d3+ 31 ♔g4, etc. Give credit to my opponent for finding best chances in a difficult situation.

25...♗xe5 26 ♖xc2?

And it suddenly pays off, as White takes a step in the wrong direction. Simple and strong was 26 fxe5. There may follow 26...♖xa2 (we already know what happens in case of 26...♕c6 27 ♖xc2 ♕xc2 28 ♕d4!) 27 ♖c7 ♕d8 28 ♕h6 ♖a1+ 29 ♔f2 ♕f8+ 30 ♕xf8+ ♔xf8 31 ♖c8+ ♔f7 32 d7 and Black can give up.

26...♗xd6

and White had to overcome serious technical difficulties to convert his advantage.

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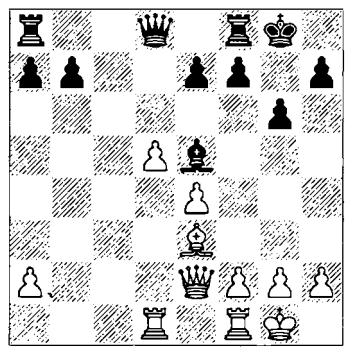


Yermolinsky – Chiaudano

Manhattan Chess Club, New York 1989

15...♕d7

I must tell you, this move is better than 15...♕a5. Interestingly, despite the success of the f4, e5 plan I enjoyed in the previous game, I deliberately decided to give this game an original course.

16 ♗h6 ♗g7

Black hardly gains any advantages by moving the rook that defends his king. 16...♖fc8 would be answered by 17 f4 ♗g7 18 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 19 e5, with f5 to follow.

17 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 18 e5

White has restored his mobile pawn pair on the 5th rank and, naturally, its strength increases as the pawns advance. Despite the total disappearance of the minor pieces Black has to be extremely careful.

18...♖ac8 19 ♖d3 ♕f5 20 ♖fd1 ♖c4 21 d6!

With this logical advance White creates a powerful passed pawn.

21...♖e4!

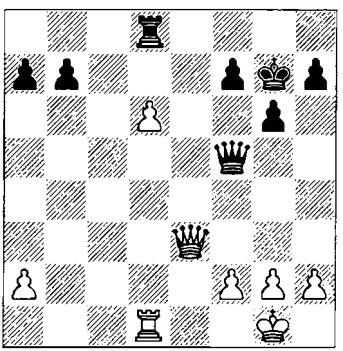
Exchanging pieces is Black's only reasonable strategy. An attempt to counterattack with 21...♖fc8 would bring no relief. 22 dxe7 ♖c2 23 ♖3d2 ♖xd2 24 ♕xd2 ♕xe5 25 ♕d8 ♕e6 26 h4, and Black is tied up hand and foot, while White can freely go about his business with, for example, g3 setting up the decisive operation: ♕xc8, and ♖d8.

22 ♖e3 ♖xe3 23 ♕xe3 exd6?

23...♖d8! 24 ♕d4 ♕e6 is much better. As the game continuation demonstrates, Black needs to keep the e-file closed to guarantee his king's safety.

24 exd6 ♖d8 *(D)*

W



There follows the white queen dance that breaks Black's defences. There was no easy way to do it: 25 ♕xa7 ♖xd6 or 25 ♕d4+ ♕f6.

25 ♕c3+! f6

Because 25...♕f6 26 ♕c7 would tie him up for good.

26 ♕e3!

Having forced the deadly weakening of the 7th rank, the white queen returns to the e-file. By the way, 26 ♕d4 ♖d7 27 ♕xa7 ♕c2! didn't look convincing to me.

26...♖d7 27 ♕e8! ♔h6

Starting a mad king rush in his own time-trouble, but 27...♕g4 28 ♖e1 was hardly encouraging.

28 h3 ♔g5? 29 ♕e3+ 1-0

Because Black saw 29...♕f4 (29...♔h4 30 ♕h6+) 30 ♖d5+ f5 31 h4+ ♔g4 32 f3+ ♔g3 33 ♕e1#.

Speaking of the relative strength of the two plans I tried after 15...♕d7, I find the one with the immediate f4 somewhat more attractive. The presence of the bishops naturally gives White a wider choice of plans (and chances for his opponent to go wrong), while the success of a straightforward pawn push attempted in the last game largely depends on tactical details. A small conclusion after such lengthy analysis, but I'll take it.

Going back to the position after 12 d5!, I have more games to show, and they will feature other moves than the relatively best 12...♘e5.

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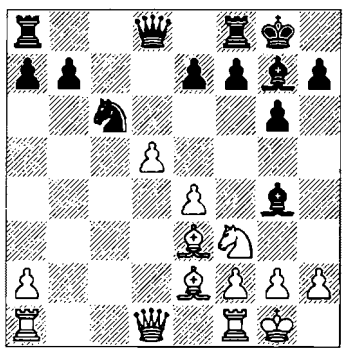


Yermolinsky – Shershen
Leningrad 1986

12...♗xa1?!

Winning the exchange is only temporary, while the knight will have to go to the rim – that consideration alone speaks volumes.

13 ♕xa1 ♘a5 14 ♗h6 f6 15 ♗xf8 ♔xf8?

Things wouldn't be that simple after the correct 15...♕xf8. All the goodies, including the pawn-centre, a slightly weakened black king, and a misplaced black knight, are there; but, if he wants to increase his advantage, White must draw a blueprint for a battle. The imminent question is what to do about the pin. White could think of exchanging the bishops, as 16 ♘d4 will win him the e6-square, but it is not clear how important that advantage would be after 16...♗xe2 17 ♘xe2 (notice the time wasted) 17...♘c4 18 ♘d4 ♖c8. With just a few pieces

left on the board, Black may be able to survive the intruder, 19 ♘e6 ♕h6, as the other white pieces are quite passive.

Another idea is to leave yourself with the bishop, 16 h3 ♗xf3 17 ♗xf3, with the good intention of bringing it to e6. Say, 17...♘c4 (rats, that knight is back in the picture) 18 ♗g4. Indeed, the automatic 18...♘d6? 19 ♗e6+ ♔h8 20 ♕d4, followed by f4, seems like a nice exercise in converting a large space advantage, but what if Black risks 18...f5!? to avoid this sad fate?

The immediate 16 e5 once again lets the guard off that knight: 16...♗xf3! 17 ♗xf3 ♘c4 18 d6 (otherwise White may even stand worse) 18...♘xe5 19 ♗xb7 ♖b8 20 ♗d5+ ♔g7 21 ♕d4! – White keeps some initiative going, but there's a danger of not being able to cash a full point on it, simply because of the reduced material on the board.

I say, White has to set his priorities right. His Number One positional concern should be preventing the a5-knight from entering the fray. 16 ♕d4! serves the purpose perfectly. In addition a keen eye is kept on the a7-pawn, plus the e4-e5 break is enforced by the attack on the g4-bishop.

As the game continuation went, my opponent forgot about a little trick.

16 ♘d4

This comes with no bishop exchange in the offing: 16...♗xe2? 17 ♘e6+. Black has to retreat.

16...♗d7 17 e5!?

This and especially the following move show my impatience. I guess, the decision was influenced by the ease with which White obtained such a good position.

17...♔g8! 18 ♖d1?!

This is just too much. The simple 18 exf6 exf6 19 ♕c3 ♖c8 20 ♕e3 would give me a nice position.

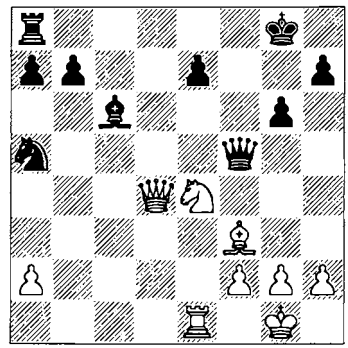
18...fxe5 19 ♘f3 ♗a4!

What a shot! The consequences of the move 20 ♖d2 (weakening the back rank) didn't look appetizing: 20...♖c8 21 ♘xe5 ♕c7!, and I decided on a speculative pawn sacrifice.

20 ♖e1!? e4 21 ♘g5 ♕xd5 22 ♘xe4 ♗c6

Avoiding a trap: 22...♕xe4? 23 ♗f3, and White wins.

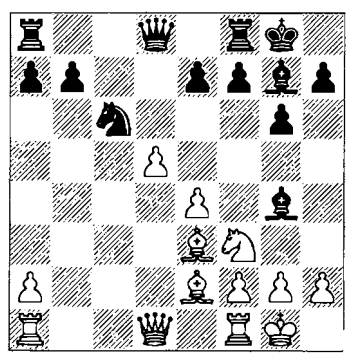
23 ♗f3 ♕f5 24 ♕d4 *(D)*



After a few mistakes from my lower-rated opponent I managed to win this game, but what to say about the diagrammed position? There is plenty of play for White, but still not a lot to show for the promising position I had after the opening.

I would like another shot at Black's position after 12...♗xa1?!, but nobody has tried it again – yet.

Instead, I got to see a grim move, 12...♘a5, on two occasions.



Yermolinsky – Sarno
Varallo 1989

12...♘a5?!

In many variations of the Grünfeld Black actually provokes the d5 ♘a5 sequence. Black soon begins pounding on the d5-pawn with ...c6 and/or ...e6. Obviously, when the d5-pawn gets exchanged, the knight can return to c6, but the real test is getting that knight back into play via c4 in case White manages to keep his pawn on d5. White would use any means available to prevent it – if Black succeeds he usually gets a good game.

Unfortunately for him, this is not the case here. Black lacks the c7-pawn to undermine d5; meanwhile, White has got all his pieces developed and he'll easily prevail in the battle for the c4-square.

13 ♖c1 e6

Black seeks counterplay – a typical reaction for a Grünfeld player, who hates positions such as the one arising after the passive 13...e5 14 ♘d2 (even 14 ♕a4!? ♗d7 15 ♗b5 deserves attention) 14...♗d7 15 ♗d3 f5 16 f3. The a5-knight is a royal pain, the Grünfeld bishop's dead... At least there's hope after 13...e6.

14 ♗c5

White would like to force Black to resolve the tension, and he has the tactical means to do so. However, the thematic 14 h3 ♗xf3 15 ♗xf3 – the bishop-pair! – is also very promising.

14...♗xf3

It turns out that the exchange sac, 14...♖e8? 15 ♗b5 exd5 16 ♗xe8 dxe4, doesn't work on the account of 17 ♕xd8 ♖xd8 18 ♗xf7+ ♔xf7 19 ♘g5+ ♔g8 20 ♘xe4. There goes the bishop-pair anyway.

15 ♗xf3 ♖e8 16 ♗b4!?

The idea is to force ...b6, which would soften the c6-square and make the knight's return unlikely even after White has played his pawn forward to d6.

16...♗f8

White's idea would be fully realized after 16...b6 17 d6!, with the decisive threat of d7. My opponent found a better move. "Is it really so?", the sceptical reader might ask, "What does 16...♗f8 change? Isn't White simply winning after 17 d6, anyway?". That's not true. White does win something after 17 d6, but that something might not be enough to claim any advantage, let alone the game, because Black would continue in a true Grünfeld fashion, happily shedding an exchange for a pawn and dark-square domination: 17...♘c6! 18 d7 ♗xb4 19 dxe8♕+ ♕xe8 20 e5 ♘xe5 21 ♗xb7 ♖d8, etc.

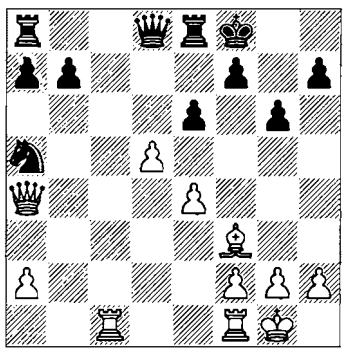
As a matter of fact, White doesn't mind kissing good-bye to his short-lived two bishops advantage, if that's what it takes to make things happen.

17 ♗xf8 ♔xf8

The other recapture, 17...♖xf8, would make me think of securing a really nice advantage by simply playing 18 dxe6 fxe6 19 e5.

18 ♕a4 *(D)*

B



The absence of the dark-squared bishops would make Black's life easy, if only he could set up a blockade on the d6-square. But it just doesn't seem possible:

a) After 18...exd5 19 exd5, nothing has changed, except for the white bishop getting greater power.

b) 18...e5 19 ♕b4+! ♔g7 20 d6, and Black still can't play ...♘c6 due to tactical inconveniences: 20...♘c6 21 ♕xb7 ♘d4 22 d7 ♖e7? 23 ♖c8, or 20...♖b8 21 d7 ♖e7? 22 ♖c8.

c) 18...♕b6? would be interesting if it weren't for 19 ♕a3+ ♔g8 20 ♖c5, winning the unfortunate knight.

d) The improved version of the previous line, 18...♔g8 19 ♖fd1 ♕b6, keeps the material balance, but gives White time to execute his plans with 20 ♖b1! ♕a6 21 d6 e5 22 d7 ♖ed8 23 ♕h5, with a large advantage in the endgame.

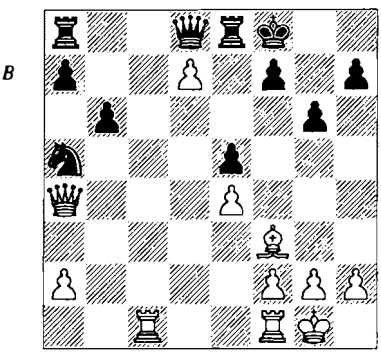
18...b6

Mission accomplished (see note to White's 16th), and White's troops can proceed deeper into the enemy's camp.

19 d6! e5?

It's all downhill after this mistake. While the exchange sac is not nearly as good as it could have been (see the note to Black's 16th), it was clearly the only way to go. The position after 19...♕xd6 20 e5 ♕xe5 21 ♗xa8 ♖xa8 22 ♕d7!, with ♖c7 to follow, favours White, no doubt about it, but it would certainly take many more moves to win it.

20 d7 *(D)*



The sheer strength of White's far-advanced passed pawn decides the game within a few moves.

20...♖e7 21 ♖fd1!

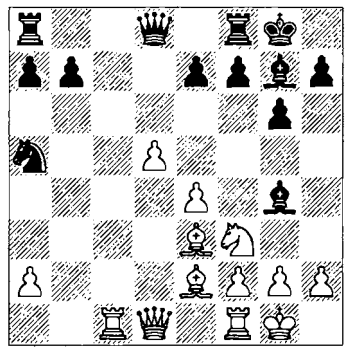
Even better than 21 ♗g4 f5 (what else to do against ♖c8?) 22 exf5 ♕xd7 23 ♕xd7 ♖xd7 24 fxg6 ♖g7 25 gxh7 ♖xh7, which would hardly present White with a difficult task.

21...♔g7

Black's misadventures are a bit comical in case of 21...♘b7 22 ♕c6 ♖b8 (22...♘c5 23 ♕xa8) 23 ♕c8!, to be continued with ♗e2-a6, while 23...♘c5 allows 24 ♕xb8. He could try 21...h5, but the bishop can come from the other side, ♗e2-a6.

22 ♗g4 h5 23 ♖c8 hxg4 24 ♖xa8 1-0

We return to the position after 12...♘a5?! 13 ♖c1 for one last example.



Yermolinsky – Kreiman
World Open, Philadelphia 1996

My last victim in this variation was Boris Kreiman, one of the most promising young players in the US, who, for reasons unknown, decided to part with the bishop right away.

13...♗xf3 14 ♗xf3 b6

Played without any encouragement from White, who often has to invest a considerable effort into provoking this move. Boris must have thought sooner or later Black would be forced to concede the queenside weakening, if only to free the rook from defending a7.

15 ♕a4 ♕d6 16 g3

A multi-purpose move. White's in no hurry, so he takes a time-out to prepare ♗g2, f4 and e5, an operation to destroy Black's shaky dark-square blockade. In the same time the g2-square may also be useful for the king, and, finally, ♗e3-f4 becomes a possibility.

16...e6?!

Just like in the previous example, this move only serves to increase White's tactical potential. The passive features of Black's position are in discord with the active nature of the Grünfeld Defence – an observation that makes my opponent's impatience more understandable.

17 e5! ♕xe5

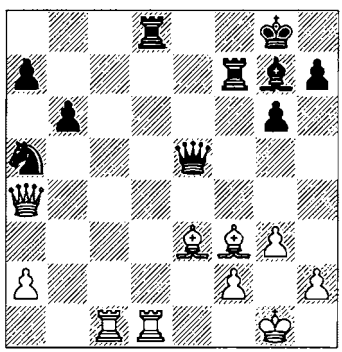
Black avoids losing the exchange in the variation 17...♗xe5 18 dxe6 ♖ab8 19 exf7+ ♖xf7 20 ♖fd1 ♕f6 21 ♗d5, with no hope of surviving.

18 dxe6 ♖ad8 19 exf7+!

I was able to resist the temptation: 19 ♖fe1 ♕xe6 20 ♗c5 (20 ♗g5? doesn't do anything: 20...♖d4!) 20...♕f6 21 ♗xf8 ♗xf8, with decent compensation for the exchange. In principle, White must be wary of cashing his chips too early, because his position may deliver more than just a minimal material advantage. As an important detail, I'd like to mention that the opposite-coloured bishops would increase Black's ability to resist – if so, White would prefer to keep his dark-squared bishop on the board.

19...♖xf7 20 ♖fd1! *(D)*

B



The bishops rule the board – notice that the pitiful fate of the a5-knight has not changed after the d5-pawn disappeared – and material gains will soon follow. Black would have done slightly better by not surrendering the d-file; that's why I prefer 20...♖ff8 here.

20...♖xd1+? 21 ♕xd1 ♖f8 22 ♔g2 ♔h8 23 ♕d7 ♕f6 24 ♗d5

With that bishop accepting a dominant role, Black is helpless against the threats of ♖c8 and/or ♖c7.

24...a6 25 ♖c8 h6 26 ♖xf8+ ♗xf8 27 ♕c7 1-0

Six out of six – an impressive record, isn't it? Even with all the good moves I made and all the mistakes my opponents committed later on, I can hardly attribute this success to anything but the fact that after 12 d5! White's position is already clearly superior. Here are a few conclusions I drew after playing and analysing the above games:

The Schebenyk game gives an example of switching the attack from one flank to another. White can do it almost effortlessly because he holds the space advantage.

The Nestorović game illustrates how White can consolidate his structural advantage – you saw the d-pawn turning into a protected passed pawn deep in Black's territory.

The Chiaudano game shows the strength of a passed pawn (unprotected in this case!) and the tactical opportunities revolving around it.

The Shershen game warns you against rushing things – White went after the king, but his centre was destroyed.

The last two games are tactically charged battles, where the bishop-pair and an unfortunate position of one piece (the black knight on a5) were the major factors working to White's favour.

All in all, these are the things I learned on the job. Now I have some understanding of the advantages the d5 move can bring, and some positional and tactical implications of the subsequent playing scenarios. My belief in White's chances in similar positions now based on my personal experience (let it be in a near ideal situation, thanks to the wrong move-order from Black: 7...0-0?, instead of the common 7...c5), and I feel ready to join theoretical battles in the main lines, where the ideas I learned are still present. Their implementation may be more difficult, and often would require a pawn sacrifice, but, at least, I know what to shoot for.

Need proof? Check this one out.

Yermolinsky – Kreiman

G/45, Chicago 1998

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 d5 4 cxd5 ♘xd5 5 e4 ♘xc3 6 bxc3 ♗g7 7 ♗e3

Boris is my long-time student. We began working together in 1991, when he was 14 years old, and have gone through many learning techniques that ultimately formed part of the basis for this book. As a teacher I have learned a lot, possibly no less than Boris as a

student, but where are the results? While I can credit myself for helping Boris to become a full-fledged 2450 player, the next step, getting his GM title, remains elusive. I suspect (and secretly hope!) Boris is on the right track, only he's taking a long road to success, just as I did – I got my GM title at the ripe age of 34 – and that is a bad example. In today's chess world one has to be considered a prodigy to get opportunities to develop one's potential to the full.

As usual, I digress from the subject. After our previous encounter in the Grünfeld – the game you just saw – we invested a serious effort into studying the hidden subtleties of this line. Boris has learned well, and the next time around he played the best move.

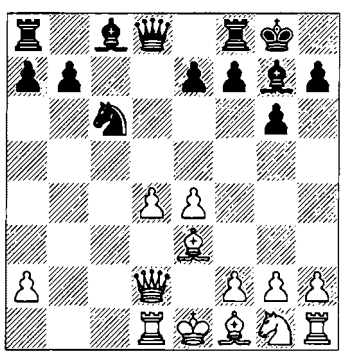
7...c5 8 ♕d2

This move-order is designed to avoid the pin that is possible after 8 ♘f3 ♗g4. I don't really have an opinion about the relative strength of these two.

8...cxd4 9 cxd4 ♘c6!

Black hits the centre early – a correct strategy that forces the white rook to adopt a defensive role. I'd much prefer to place that piece on an open file, b1 or c1.

10 ♖d1 0-0 *(D)*



White is at a crossroads:

a) 11 ♗c4 ♗d7 12 ♘e2 (this set-up doesn't fit the spirit of the variation; White is hoping to transpose into the 7 ♗c4 ... 8 ♘e2 line, but Black can remove the sting from White's attacking plans by immediately forcing a queen swap) 12...♕a5 13 ♖b1 ♕xd2+ 14 ♔xd2 ♘a5 15 ♗d3 ♖ac8 16 ♖hc1 e6, and White has precious little, if anything.

b) 11 ♘f3 ♗g4 (that pin again; doesn't it signify the failure of White's move-order?) 12 ♗e2 ♖c8 (look at 12...e6 13 0-0 ♕e7 14 d5 exd5 15 exd5 ♗xf3 16 ♗xf3 ♘e5; can you see the difference between this and what we saw in previous games? The knight comfortably nests in the centre, and White's chances for achieving an advantage are greatly diminished; 17 ♗e2 ♕d6 18 ♖b1 b6 19 ♖bc1 – not much there) 13 0-0 ♕a5 (Black doesn't need to go to the endgame to equalize: 13...♕d7 14 h3 ♗xf3 15 ♗xf3 ♖fd8 16 e5 e6, an example of the harmless pawn-structure we discussed in the beginning of the lecture) 14 ♕xa5 ♘xa5 (oh, we have seen this before, but can the knight be held here?) 15 ♖c1 ♗xf3 16 ♗xf3 (should White try 16 gxf3?) 16...♘c4 17 e5, and a few practical games that took off from this point did not convince anybody that White can realistically hope to win this ending.

A long excursion into theory, but, being armed with the knowledge of strategic ideas, I think we can afford it now.

11 ♗e2!?

An attempt to invert the moves and avoid the pin. All is well, but he can strike in the centre.

11...e5 12 d5 ♘d4 13 ♘f3

I didn't like the looks of 13 f4 ♘xe2 14 ♘xe2 ♗g4 – White's position is not fundamentally sound without the 'bad' bishop.

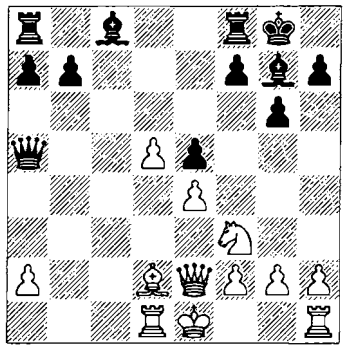
13...♘xe2 14 ♕xe2 ♕a5+

I had reasons to be happy with my pawn-structure, but what to do now? 15 ♕d2 ♕a4 is extremely inconvenient. Once again, I cursed my luck for having to surrender the 'bad' light-squared bishop, a piece that defends my good pawns in such a natural way (another insight from the John Watson's book I read like a bible). The decision came quickly – this one being G/45 made me more resolute than usual – White will offer a pawn sacrifice.

15 ♗d2! *(D)*

The other way, 15 ♘d2 is more attractive optically, but once you see 15...b6!, you'll quickly change your mind.

B

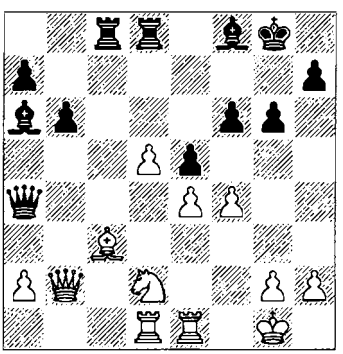


15...♕xa2

Taking the pawn seemed so natural, and yet 15...♕a4! was much stronger. White's difficulties are telling in the line 16 0-0 b6 17 ♖fe1 ♗a6 18 ♕e3 (real clumsy) 18...♖ac8 19 ♗c3 f6; that's why I was planning 16 ♗c3 as an improvement, but even so, Black retains good counterchances:

a) 16...f6 17 0-0 b6 18 ♖fe1 ♗a6 19 ♕b2 ♖ac8 20 ♘d2 ♖fd8 21 f4 ♗f8! *(D)*.

W



This is a very opportunistic move, typical for Black's approach to this position. It shines with the idea of meeting 22 fxe5 fxe5 23 ♗xe5 with 23...♗c5+ 24 ♔h1 ♗f2, and White's compensation for the exchange after 25 ♗h8 ♖d7 26 ♘f3 ♗xe1 27 ♖xe1 may not be sufficient. All the while the cautious 22 ♘b3 runs into the disruptive shot 22...♗a3! 23 ♕d2 ♕c4 24 ♖e3 ♗d6 – unclear.

b) 16...♗g4 17 h3 ♗xf3 18 gxf3 ♖ac8 19 ♖d3, and Black's initiative is augmented by White's own pawn weakness.

16 0-0 ♕a4 17 ♖a1 ♕d7 18 ♗e3

White's pawn sacrifice fits quite well alongside modern concepts – we will take a closer look into such strategy in later chapters – the pawn is sacrificed for long-term positional gains. The paradox is, unlike in old gambits originated in the 19th century, White is not seeking confrontation immediately. On the contrary, he needs time to bring his knight into play (the d2-c4 route being the most obvious), before he is even ready for a battle. This detail has a lot to do with one feature of this position I will never get tired of stressing – the absence of the white light-squared bishop.

18...a6?!

In view of the above comments, Black's wait-and-see policy hardly seems appropriate. One can have his own opinion about the position after 18...b5 19 ♖fb1 a6 20 ♖xb5 axb5 21 ♖xa8 ♗b7 22 ♖xf8+ ♔xf8 23 ♗c5+ ♔g8 24 ♘d2 f5 25 f3. I bet Yasser Seirawan, who has been having an affair with the e4-d5 pawn-structure ever since he reached a legal chess-playing age, would declare it technically won for White, while I hold a less definite opinion. It doesn't really matter, because, the truth is, Black must just leave the queenside alone and strive for counterplay: 18...f5! 19 ♖xa7 ♖xa7 20 ♗xa7 fxe4 21 ♕xe4 ♖f4 22 ♕c2 b5, with excellent prospects.

If that's a fact, was White's sacrifice just plain wrong? Not at all, it did what it was supposed to do – that is to change the unfavourable trend, established after the opening – and its failure to produce an advantage for White in no way diminishes its merits.

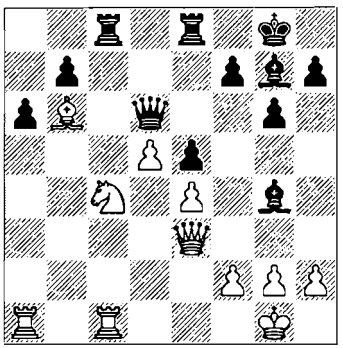
19 ♗b6 ♖e8

White's pressure begins to amount to something. We already can detect the paralysing effect it brought to Black's queenside. A more experienced player would smell a rat here, but Boris stays passive. A few moves later he will begin to regret it.

In case of 19...f5!, which I considered Black's only real option, I thought of a strange move, 20

♖a5!, with the ideas of stopping 20...♕d6 due to 21 ♗c5 and defending the d5-pawn, all in one shot.

20 ♖fc1 ♕d6 21 ♕e3 ♗g4 22 ♘d2 ♖ac8 23 ♘c4 *(D)*



White has achieved his goals, and what about the black queen? The most convenient square is d7, but it has to be shared with the light-squared bishop...

23...♕f6 24 d6!

That d-pawn just keeps on going! The positional threat of shutting down the black rooks with ♗b6-c7 forces Black's hand. In the meantime, it becomes clear that Black will have to sac the exchange at some point.

24...♖c6 25 ♗c7 ♗f8

The line 25...♕f4 26 ♘b6 ♕xe3 27 fxe3 ♖xc1+ 28 ♖xc1 ♗f6 29 d7 ♖f8 30 ♗d6 ♖d8 31 ♖c7 proves that White means business. We mentioned exchange sacrifice; should he do it now? However, 25...b5 26 ♘b6 ♖xd6 27 ♗xd6 ♕xd6 28 ♖xa6 doesn't seem satisfactory: after one preparatory move, ♖ca1, the knight will assume a dominating post on d5.

Boris's move logically prevents ♘c4-b6, and awaits further developments from White.

26 ♕d2!

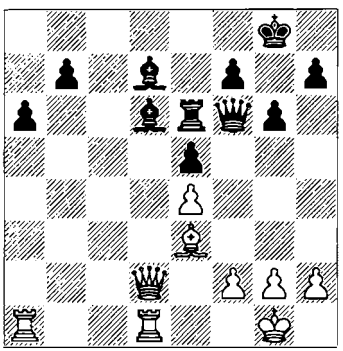
Here they come! The threat of d7 can now be stopped in two ways. One is 26...♖c8, but then follows 27 ♘b6 ♖6xc7 28 ♘xc8 (not 28 ♖xc7? ♖xc7 29 dxc7 ♕xb6 30 ♕d8 ♕c5, and Black wins) 28...♖xc8 29 ♖xc8 ♗xc8 30 d7 ♗xd7 31 ♕xd7 ♕b6; can Black survive after, say 32 h4?

Boris chose the other option, because he wanted to keep more pieces on the board.

26...♗d7 27 ♘b6 ♖xb6

Too late for anything else: 27...♖xc1+ 28 ♖xc1 ♕e6 29 ♕d5 might cause more damage.

28 ♗xb6 ♗xd6 29 ♖d1 ♖e6 30 ♗e3 *(D)*



With two passed pawns to complement the bishop-pair, Boris, a real optimist, was probably looking forward to an easily won ending. Indeed, Black's position looks very safe and it's easy to let your guard down a bit.

30...♗c6?

After the correct 30...♕e7 Black would be out of danger. I wrote this, and stopped. Would a harsh critic – and my readers are encouraged to be critical of everything I suggest – let me get away with a casual remark like this after I have filled a couple of pages glorifying White's pawn sac and criticizing Black's play? Am I not supposed to bow my head before the chess truth? The thing is, as we had a chance to learn from the games and analysis of Part 1, that truth is enriched – say distorted, if you wish, but I stick to my opinion – by various psychological factors embedded into the fabric of the game in question. Boris had to be extremely careful in the course of the last 10 moves; isn't it natural to play one move instantly, when you feel that danger has gone, especially in rapid chess? By the way, what's wrong with 30...♗c6?

31 ♗g5 ♕g7 32 ♕xd6! ♖xd6 33 ♖xd6

Here's the answer. White rolls on with a powerful attack on the dark squares. To avoid

more serious consequences Black begins to shed pawns.

33...f6

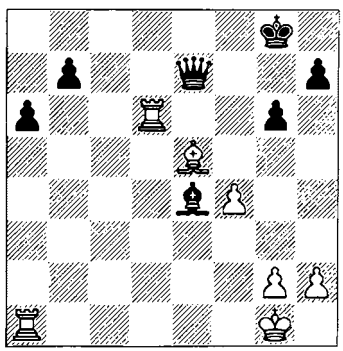
The bishop easily deals with pawns after 33...f5 34 ♖d8+ ♔f7 35 ♖adl fxe4 36 ♖1d7+ ♗xd7 37 ♖xd7+ ♔g8 38 ♖xg7+ ♔xg7 39 ♔f1.

34 ♗xf6 ♕c7!

The best defence, as 34...♕f7 35 f3 would allow White to keep his e-pawn.

35 ♗xe5 ♕e7 36 f4 ♗xe4 *(D)*

W



37 ♖e1

White's got the perpetual any time he wants, but is there more? I rejected the natural 37 ♖ad1 ♗c6 38 h3 because of 38...♕h4?, with threats to the g2-pawn, missing that 39 ♖f6! would then win. Black should instead stay put, and advance his a-pawn.

37...♗c6 38 ♖e3 a5 39 h3

The first order of business is to safeguard the king. The black queenside pawns are not going anywhere, and based on that assumption I concluded that White has to be winning. However, as the game continuation shows, the a-pawn does count for something! To add to the excitement: both players began to experience some shortage of time around these parts.

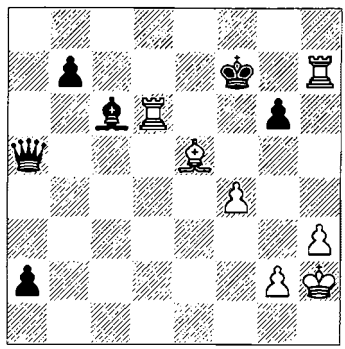
39...a4 40 ♔h2 ♕h4 41 ♖d2 ♕e7 42 ♖ed3 ♕b4 43 ♖d4 ♕a5?!

Frankly, I don't see how White makes progress after 43...♕e7 44 ♗d6 ♕e1 45 ♗b4 ♕f1. Boris's move is inferior because it allows both white rooks to join the attack. On the other hand that frees up the a-pawn...

I think Boris still hoped to win this game and went looking for a practical chance.

44 ♖d8+ ♔f7 45 ♖2d6 a3 46 ♖h8? a2 47 ♖xh7+ *(D)*

B



I thought I could win after 47...♔e8 48 ♖xg6 ♗d5 49 ♖gg7 ♗f7 50 ♖xf7 ♕xe5 51 fxe5 a1♕ 52 ♖e7+ ♔f8 53 h4; but 47...♔f8! seems to hold: 48 ♗a1! (48 ♖f6+ ♔g8 49 ♖h8+ ♔g7 50 ♖xc6+ ♕xe5 is a great escape) 48...♕b4! 49 ♖f6+ (49 ♖d8+ ♗e8 50 ♗e5 a1♕ 51 ♖h8+ ♔f7 52 ♖h7+ ♔f8, when White has to keep on checking, comes to the same thing) 49...♔e8 50 ♗e5 a1♕ 51 ♗xa1 ♕e4 52 ♖h8+ ♔e7, and the mate threat forces White to give perpetual check by 53 ♖h7+, etc.

With hindsight, White should therefore have played 46 ♖f6+! ♔e7 47 ♖h8, denying the black king the f8-square; after 47...a2 48 ♖xh7+ ♔e8 we already know the rest.

47...♔g8?? 48 ♖d8+ 1-0

I credit the extensive work I had done on the 'easy' games, shown in the beginning of this chapter, for advancing my knowledge in the main lines of the Grünfeld. It surely helped me in this game and other major battles I had to endure. Maybe the classics were right, and the strategic contours, indeed, are more visible in the games not blurred by tactical sophistication caused by too strong a resistance? After all, Capa and other greats only selected 'easy' games for their works. Easy to play, easier to understand?

Side-stepping the 'Real' Benko

From the early days of my development as a chess-player I hated gambit play. The more my coaches fed me with gambits during our theoretical seminars, the stronger my aversion grew. Once a week I would sit in a back row of a classroom in the Pioneer's Palace Chess Club to watch Vladimir Zak demonstrating the old Chigorin games in the Two Knights Opening and it felt like a hated biology class in school or something! I just couldn't accept this as chess. I don't think my attitude had anything to do with being a coward, I just wasn't happy with gambits' offerings. All classic gambits seemed to lead to the same scenario: White (in most cases, but sometimes it can be Black – anyway, a gambiteer) has to rush things up, has to try to transform his short-lived initiative into an attack against the black king. If it works out, he wins a beautiful game (as described by annotators; personally I never found these flashy attacks beautiful); if not – I don't know, those games never seem to get published – maybe he loses? This is a kind of situation I didn't want to be in, I instinctively knew there was much more to chess than gambit play that felt like flipping a coin. My 1 ♘f3 was a form of rebellion against the gambit establishment.

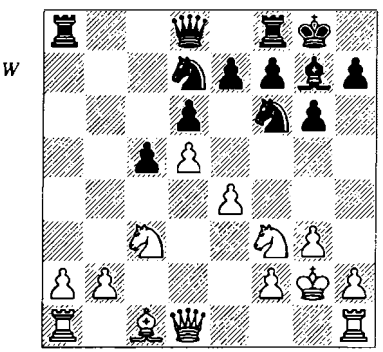
Looking back I realize now, things were not so simple. My stubborn refusal to accept gambit play as an important part of chess strategy inevitably caused me to miss something. I missed a chance to learn how to play wide open positions, when your pieces seem to be hanging in the air, and there are maybe 2-3 moves given to you to create something, before they get exchanged or driven back. The hard work I had to put up to overcome this case of arrested development (we'll talk about tactical play and gambits in later chapters) could have been easily avoided if I had given myself a little practice in my younger days.

Many years later, when I was making my transition back from 1 ♘f3 to become a regular 1 d4 player again, I had to deal with a number of openings I used to ignore. I already told you the Grünfeld story, but among those that gave me most fits was the Benko Gambit. Simply put, I didn't know what to do against it! I looked at many games all played in different systems, saw White being successful sometimes, but I couldn't get a feel of what White should do in principle. Extinguish Black's initiative – easier said than done! It's one thing when White builds up and then deals with the opponent's temporary initiative from a position of structural strength, such as the case in KID with ...exd4, or any Maroczy Bind kind of structure. True, White suffers for a while, but he always has a lot to look forward to. Some 10-15 moves later his time comes, and White will naturally take over. The book on the Benko is different, it seems like the longer the game goes the stronger Black's initiative becomes. The result of my study was unexpected – I began to play this strange gambit as Black. Occasionally in its pure form, but more often as a delayed version arising from various lines of the King's Indian Defence, my favourite opening in the 1980s. As I told you before, I was far away from considering myself a gambit specialist, but there was something attractive about Black's position in the Benko. I could tell it was different from a gambit in a traditional sense, when a pawn is pitched to obtain better development and/or to achieve a temporary increase in your pieces' energy. Really different.

For the sake of argument, let's forget everything we know and take a fresh look at the position after the opening moves **1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 ♗xa6 6 ♘c3 g6**. Isn't that bizarre – Black has sacrificed a pawn, and what is his compensation? Easy to see: the two open files on the queenside with the white a- and b-pawns as targets for the black rooks aided by the immense strength of the dark-squared bishop. The c5-pawn will be strongly supported by the black pawn-chain d6-e7, the base of which, the e7-pawn, lies deeply in Black's camp and cannot easily be attacked. We can go as far as stating that Black has a certain structural advantage. Under the shield of this long-term factor Black's initiative develops naturally, while he's not looking to cash it in quickly,

simply because he doesn't have to! In the meantime, White's task is aggravated by the presence of the black bishop on the a6-f1 diagonal. How to develop without losing the right to castle? He can either forfeit that right by playing 7 e4 ♗xf1 8 ♔xf1, or fianchetto his king's bishop.

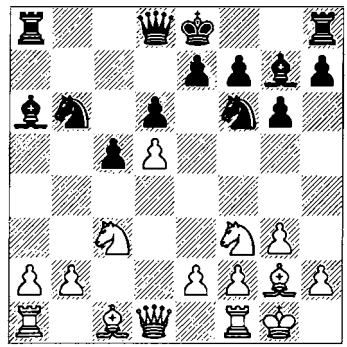
a) After the logical moves, 7 e4 ♗xf1 8 ♔xf1 ♗g7 9 g3 0-0 10 ♔g2 d6 11 ♘f3 ♘bd7 *(D)* White has completed the artificial castling procedure.



Then he would like to achieve the e4-e5 break, but after 12 ♖e1 Black plays 12...♘g4!, stopping this idea in its tracks. The subsequent play – quite approximate, I realize, but we agreed to discard theory for a moment – may follow: 13 h3 ♘ge5 14 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 15 ♕e2 ♕b6. Here we have a typical Benko position where Black's got perfect development, while White is experiencing difficulties with his b2-pawn. Black will follow with ...♖fb8, and, possibly, ...♕a6. Strangely, Black's positional compensation plays an even bigger role in the endgame.

b) If White decides to avoid the inconveniences of artificial castling and plays 7 ♘f3 ♗g7 8 g3 instead, he'll find it suddenly difficult to provide his d-pawn with sufficient protection: 8...d6 9 ♗g2 ♘bd7 10 0-0 ♘b6! *(D)*, and the black minor pieces are very active.

If White manages to support his centre with e4 (after the necessary ♖e1), he still may not be able to push that pawn forward to e5. In the meantime, the squares behind his advanced



pawns, namely d3 and d4, may be occupied by the black pieces.

Both scenarios have something in common: White can't get on track with his development, and the natural push e4-e5 is all but ruled out. Compared with regular Benoni positions, Black gets his play going very easily, and he doesn't have to worry about White's activity in the centre and on the kingside, the areas where White enjoys a spatial advantage and where he should be concentrating his efforts. It takes great effort from a very strong player to handle the white pieces in this situation – no wonder that statistics (at least in the games between low-rated players) strongly favour Black. Hundreds of practical games and dozens of books of theoretical research have dealt with this unusual gambit. It proved to be very resilient and has earned the right to be represented in the theory of chess openings. Speaking of books, I can recommend anything written on the subject by GM John Fedorowicz for those of you who decide to take up the Benko.

For years I've been experimenting with different systems on the white side of the Benko, not necessarily accepting the pawn, simply because I didn't want to be put into the defensive situation. The radical 4 a4?! served me well on a weaker level of competition, but gradually I grew dissatisfied with White's chances after 4...b4 – with half the board locked, there are simply not enough options left. The 4 cxb5 a6 5 f3 variation seemed attractive for a while, then I was turned off by the practical games and

extensive analyses that swarmed all over the critical 5...e6 line. Years went by, and I was still struggling. Recently I took up 5 b6 as a radical solution to White's problems. Only time will tell how long I can hold on to this system, before succumbing to the inevitable (some of my GM friends have been predicting this all along) and finally, getting back to the main theoretical lines. Boy, am I going to hate this!

As an example of the temporary solutions I've gone through, I'd like to introduce you to a rather obscure system. Instead of immediately taking on b5, White first plays 4 ♘f3, and only after 4...g6 does he take the pawn: 5 cxb5 a6. The point is revealed right away: 6 ♕c2!?. The idea of this move-order is to achieve the e4 advance with the pawn still on b5. That way White ensures his smooth development, while making things more difficult for his opponent.

What is a difference between this and regular lines of the Benko? The black bishop doesn't get to a6! Check out a couple of games, which effectively demonstrate the advantages White gains out of this, seemingly unimportant, detail. Inexperienced Benko players are easily lured into White's preparation only to find things quite different from what they are in the regular Benko lines.

Yermolinsky – Wheeler

Kings Island Open, Cincinnati 1995

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 ♘f3 g6

Of course, Black has other options; namely 4...bxc4, 4...b4, 4...♗b7 or 4...e6 – the last being the Blumenfeld Gambit – but the text-move is most consistent with the Benko Gambit ideas.

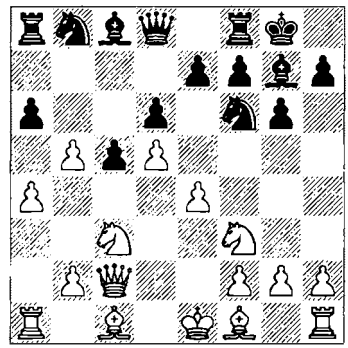
5 cxb5 a6 6 ♕c2!?

This is a crucial move of White's build-up. The threat to the c5-pawn is meant to win a tempo for the e4 advance.

6...d6

Later we'll take a closer look at alternatives at Black's disposal. So far we have to establish what happens if Black just goes on with his developing moves.

7 e4 ♗g7 8 ♘c3 0-0 9 a4 *(D)*



B

It turns out that White's idea is to hold his extra pawn on b5, where it hinders the opponent's queenside development. Instead of having his bishop on a6, and king's rook on b8 (a normal Benko pattern), Black is stuck with a new problem. Should he take on b5? Hardly a good idea: 9...axb5 10 ♗xb5 ♗a6 11 0-0 ♗xb5 12 ♘xb5, followed by ♗d2-c3, leads to a kind of position White only dreams about in the regular Benko lines.

9...e6!?

A valid attempt to punish White for delaying his kingside development. Black plans to blast the centre open, and possibly even get to the white king!

10 dxe6 ♗xe6 11 ♗e2

Usual procedure: Black waits for that bishop to waste a move, then takes on b5.

11...axb5 12 ♗xb5 d5

Consistent. Black is getting rid of a backward pawn, while opening diagonals for his bishops. The alternative, 12...♘a6 13 0-0 ♘b4, is also attractive, because Black wins a tempo and establishes the knight on a good outpost. Nevertheless, White still stands well after the further moves 14 ♕e2 d5 15 exd5 ♘fxd5 16 ♘e4 ♕c7 17 ♖d1.

13 exd5

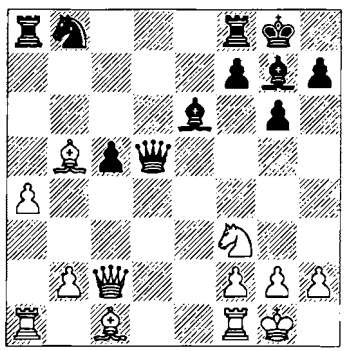
I remember I spent some time looking at 13 ♘g5!?. Going after the bishop is tempting, but White's underdevelopment makes it a double-edged affair. For example, 13...d4 14 ♘xe6 fxe6 15 ♘e2 ♘g4 16 0-0 ♕d6 (patience is recommended: 16...♕h4? 17 h3 ♘xf2 18 ♘f4 clearly

favours White) 17 f4 e5 with some substantial counterplay brewing on the dark squares.

13...♘xd5 14 ♘xd5 ♕xd5

I didn't consider a second pawn sac to be quite sound: 14...♗xd5? 15 ♕xc5 ♗xf3 16 gxf3 ♘a6 17 ♕g5. If necessary, the white king will find a shelter on f1, while the bishops dominate the board.

15 0-0 *(D)*



B

15...♘a6

15...♘c6 was an important alternative. The knight is headed to d4, and White must choose between different simplifying procedures.

a) 16 ♖d1 ♘d4 17 ♘xd4 cxd4 18 ♗c6 ♖ac8 19 ♗xd5 ♖xc2 20 ♗e4 ♖cc8. White might want to consider 21 ♖a3 here, because 21 a5 allows 21...♗b3.

b) 16 ♗e3 ♘d4 17 ♗xd4 cxd4 18 ♗c6 ♖ac8 19 ♗xd5 ♖xc2 20 ♗xe6 fxe6 21 b4.

It's hard to tell which one is better.

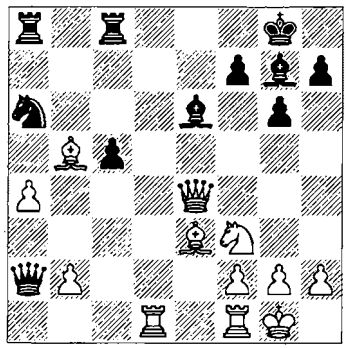
16 ♗e3 ♖fc8 17 ♖ad1

Look at White's development! His pieces enter the play unhindered. The pressure is on Black now, if only because he's down a pawn and has to do something to prove his compensation.

17...♕a2?

I'd take a good look at 17...♕b3!. For example, 18 ♕e4 ♕b4! 19 ♘g5 ♕xe4 20 ♘xe4 ♗xb2, and what is White to do? Neither 21 ♗xa6 ♖xa6 22 ♘xc5 ♖a5 23 ♘xe6 fxe6 24 ♗d4 ♖c2 nor 21 ♖d6 ♘c7 22 ♘xc5 ♘xb5 23 axb5 ♗c4 looks any good.

18 ♕e4! *(D)*



B

While his opponent is busy regaining the pawn, White starts moving his army in the general direction of the black king.

18...c4?

This move looks really bad, as it cuts off the black queen. However, the other options are pretty grim too:

a) 18...♕xb2 19 ♘g5 ♗f5 20 ♕h4 h6 21 ♘xf7!, with a raging attack.

b) 18...♘c7 19 ♗c6 ♖a5 20 ♘g5 doesn't slow White a bit.

c) 18...♗xb2 19 ♖d2 is embarrassing.

19 ♘g5 ♘c7 20 ♘xe6 ♘xe6 21 ♖c1

Having eliminated one of the opponent's bishops, White is now ganging up on the weak c4-pawn. I thought 21 ♗d7 ♕xb2! 22 ♗xc8 ♖xc8 could make matters less clear.

21...♖xa4

Desperation time. The following simple variations prove that Black was lost anyway:

a) 21...♗xb2 22 ♖xc4 ♖xc4 23 ♕xa8+.

b) 21...♖ab8 22 ♗xc4 ♕xa4 23 b3! ♖xb3 24 ♗xe6 ♕xe4 25 ♖xc8+ ♗f8 26 ♗h6.

22 ♗xa4 ♕xa4 23 ♖c2 ♕b3 24 ♖fc1 ♗xb2 25 ♖xc4

The exchange up, White won easily.

What makes this otherwise colourless game special is how different it was from the usual Benko patterns. Instead of sitting on long-range positional compensation in a familiar pawn-structure, Black found himself a pawn down in

an open position full of tactical content. Jerry Wheeler, a 2200+ player, could not solve his problems. That's what counts, regardless of the objective evaluation of the position after 17 moves, or the entire line. The Benko Gambit is very popular in the United States: it sells well to players of all walks of chess strength as an aggressive yet strategically simple system. They take lessons, buy books and videos, then practice in blitz games – these guys become good. I didn't do a study, but it seems to me every time I play on the Internet Chess Club it's an endless string of Benkos; even the computers play it! The ideas that make up Black's play are easy to understand and not so difficult to execute. I know it for sure, lots of people would look like grandmasters if I allowed the game to slip into the territory well covered by the theory and practice of their favourite opening set-up. I'm just trying to be practical out there.

Yermolinsky – Gelman
Hawaii 1997

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 ♘f3 g6 5 cxb5 a6 6 ♕c2 d6 7 e4 ♗g7 8 ♘c3 0-0 9 a4 ♘e8 *(D)*

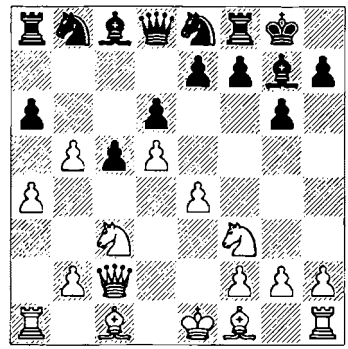
No 9...e6 this time – Black sticks to his Benko guns. His plan is to induce the bxa6 move that would help developing his queenside play. Before we proceed with the game continuation I'd like to take another look at the position after 9...axb5 10 ♗xb5 ♘a6:

a) 11 0-0 (a big plus – White gets to castle without difficulty, but let's throw in a few more moves) 11...♘b4 12 ♕e2 and after 12...♕b6 13 ♘d2 ♗a6 14 ♘c4 ♕b8 15 ♗g5 White is doing great, but 12...♗g4!? is interesting. After 13 h3 ♗xf3 14 ♕xf3 ♘c2 15 ♖b1 ♘d4 this knight is quite annoying.

b) 11 h3!? (to stop all that ...♗g4 nonsense) 11...♘b4 12 ♕e2 ♗a6 13 0-0, with a safe and sound extra pawn.

All clear? Back to the game then.

The move Black made does look a bit weird – he gambited a pawn, yet another piece joins the back-rankers. The Benko Gambit is a strange bird! Thinking of what White should do here, I don't see anything wrong with the normal 10



W

♗e2. There may follow 10...axb5 11 ♘xb5 (it's more logical to recapture with the knight now, as the bishop has already moved) 11...♘c7 12 0-0 ♘xb5 (delaying the exchanges won't do any good: 12...♗d7 13 ♗d2 ♘ba6 14 ♗c3 ♘xb5 15 axb5 ♘c7 16 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 17 b4!, and it looks like a Benoni gone wrong if you're Black) 13 ♗xb5 ♗a6 14 ♖a3 ♘d7 15 ♗xa6 ♖xa6 16 ♗d2 ♕a8 17 a5 ♖b8 18 ♖b1. Check this out: Black managed to get his pieces on the desired squares, but failed to apply sufficient pressure on White's position in the early going, which is the main theme of the Benko. As a result, the game is going to be nearly one-sided: either White converts his extra pawn or Black manages to squeeze out a hard-earned draw.

10 ♖b1!?

A very principled move. White wants to able to recapture with the pawn to keep Black's queenside at bay. I also looked at 10 ♖a3!?, a move that carries the same idea as 10 ♖b1, but it seemed too ambitious. Among other ideas Black can try 10...axb5 11 axb5 ♖xa3 12 bxa3 ♕a5 13 ♗b2 f5! 14 exf5 ♗xf5 15 ♗d3 ♗xc3+ (don't disregard 15...♘d7 as a valid alternative) 16 ♗xc3 ♗xd3 17 ♕xd3 ♕xa3 18 0-0, with chances for both sides.

10...axb5 11 axb5 ♕a5?!

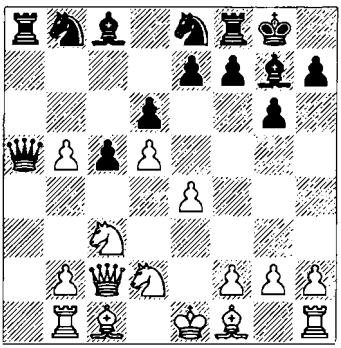
The beginning of a dangerous journey. The queen will get tangled up there, but I find it hard to suggest any viable alternatives for Black.

12 ♘d2 *(D)*

Easy may not do it: after 12 ♗d2 ♗g4 13 ♗e2 ♘c7 14 0-0 ♘d7, Black has hopes of

winning the b5-pawn. If it happens, White will be worse!

B

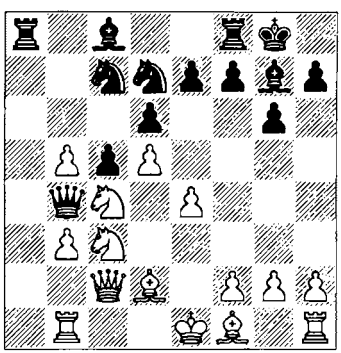


12...♘d7 13 ♘c4 ♕b4

It's too late to go back off: 13...♕a7 14 ♗e3, with the idea b4 that will take care of Black's threat to the safety of the b5-pawn.

14 ♗d2 ♘c7 15 b3 *(D)*

B



15...f5!

Just as White has rounded up the daring queen, my opponent finds the only way to create a mess! I was hoping for 15...♘xb5 16 ♘xb5 ♕xb5 17 ♘xd6 with a clear advantage, but the text-move presented me with a difficult choice. We have already seen similar situations in Part 1, and guess what, I failed again!

Only during my customary post-game analysis did I find out that a simple pawn capture, 16 exf5, was in fact winning by force:

a) 16...♘xb5 17 ♘xb5 ♕xb5 18 ♘xd6 ♕b8 19 ♘xc8.

b) 16...♗d4 17 ♘e4 ♕xb5 18 ♘cxd6 exd6 19 ♗xb5 ♘xb5 20 fxg6.

c) 16...♘e5 17 ♘e4 ♘xd5 18 ♗xb4 ♘xb4 19 ♕e2 ♗xf5 20 ♘xe5 ♗xe5 21 g4.

d) 16...♖f5 17 ♘e4 ♕xb5 18 ♘cxd6 exd6 19 ♗xb5 ♘xb5 20 0-0 ♘d4 21 ♕d1.

In all these lines Black's compensation for heavy material losses is obviously inadequate.

16 ♘a4?

But I couldn't resist the temptation to win the queen right away.

16...♕xb5 17 ♘cb6

The same thing goes for 17 ♘xd6 exd6 18 ♗xb5 ♘xb5 – Black suddenly gets a lot of play for the queen.

17...♕xb6 18 ♘xb6 ♘xb6

At this point I realized how uncomfortable my position could get after 19 f3 fxe4 20 fxe4 ♗d4. The black pieces are very active, and his perfect pawn-structure offers some good defensive possibilities (fortress?) even in the unlikely case of White managing to consolidate his position without suffering material losses. A sample variation, 21 ♗e2 ♖f2 22 ♗c3? ♘b5! *(D)*, unnerved me even more.

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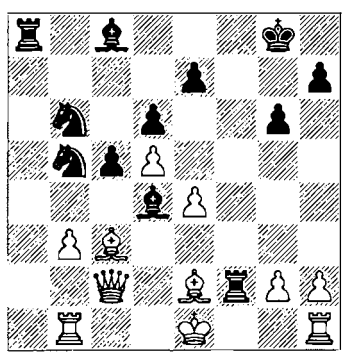


I could feel the trend shifting in my opponent's favour.

19 b4!?

After a long think I finally decided to embark on this adventurous attempt to wrest the initiative out of Black's hands. The resulting

complications were enormous and I'm sure Black missed a lot of opportunities. At the end I managed to win this game with great difficulty...

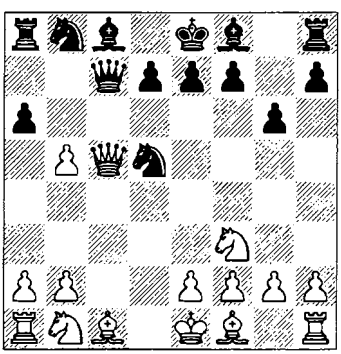
In the next game I encountered a determined opponent who was not going to let me get away with my tricky move-order. I did get him out of the usual Benko procedures; the question is at what cost.

Yermolinsky – Mason
New York Open 1996

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 ♘f3 g6 5 cxb5 a6 6 ♕c2 ♘xd5

6...♗g7!?, as played and recommended by Alexander Khalifman, is very interesting too. Black plays for quick development, showing his disregard for pawns. I don't intend to engage in a theoretical discussion that begins after 7 ♕xc5 0-0. Black's doing well there; take my word for it.

7 ♕xc5 ♕c7!? *(D)*



That's an idea! Notice that Black is headed for an endgame despite his material deficit – a strategy typical of the Benko.

8 ♕xc7 ♘xc7

What is White to do in this unusual situation? The automatic 9 bxa6 ♗xa6 gives Black development and open files on the queenside – all a Benko player dreams of. I thought of a different scenario.

9 b6!? ♘d5 10 ♘c3

I was surely tempted to avoid splitting my pawns (as happened in the game), but in case of 10 e4 I didn't like the strong reply 10...♘b4!.

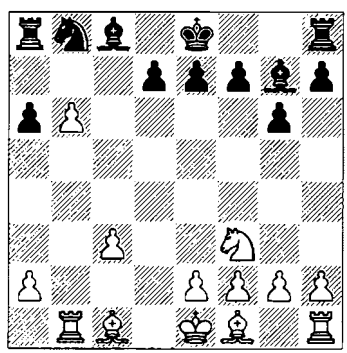
10...♘xc3!

My opponent shows profound positional understanding. He dismisses 10...♘xb6? 11 ♗e3 ♘c4 12 ♗d4 f6 13 e4 at first sight – indeed, that's a kind of position Black must avoid at any cost. Neither is he tempted by 10...♘b4 11 ♖b1, and Black has achieved nothing.

A valid option was 10...♗b7!? 11 ♘xd5 ♗xd5 12 ♗e3 ♘c6! (12...♗g7 13 ♖d1 favours White, because the a-pawn is untouchable) 13 a3 ♗g7. It's interesting how powerless the white b6-pawn is. The best I can think of is the careful 14 0-0-0 ♗b3 15 ♖d3 ♗c4 16 ♖d2 ♘a5 17 ♖c2, when White can hope to consolidate.

11 bxc3 ♗g7 12 ♖b1!? *(D)*

Setting a positional trap. By that time I already came to the conclusion that 'normal' play would not suffice, e.g. 12 ♗d2 ♗b7 13 g3 d6 14 ♗g2 ♘d7 15 ♖b1 ♖b8 16 0-0 0-0. Soon Black will take on f3 and b6, or play ...♖fc8. I don't see any way for White to continue.



12...♗xc3+?

Lucky me, Black gets distracted by a free pawn offer. I was much more concerned with 12...♗b7! 13 c4 d6, and I think Black can equalize: 14 ♗e3 (or 14 ♗b2 ♗xb2 15 ♖xb2 ♘d7) 14...♘d7 15 g3 ♘e5. Notice how bad White's light-squared bishop is.

13 ♗d2 ♗xd2+ 14 ♔xd2 ♗b7 15 e3?

My turn to get too happy. Much more to the point would be 15 g3! d6 16 ♗h3 ♘d7 17 ♖hc1 ♘c5 18 ♘e1, followed by ♘d3.

15...d6 16 a4 ♘d7

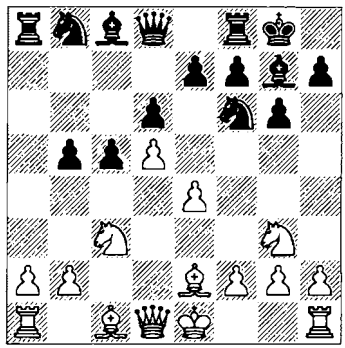
Understandably Black didn't want to give up the b5-square. After 16...a5 17 ♗b5+ ♔f8 18 ♖hc1 he suffers from bad development. As the game went, after...

17 a5

...I got myself a powerful protected passed pawn, which I was able to turn into a win, but only after a long struggle.

So, what is my assessment of this system? Based on the games and analyses you just saw, I must conclude that it works very well against inexperienced opponents. Most of them would automatically proceed with usual developing moves, thus giving White a chance (he only needs one move, e4) to achieve his goals. I can also tell you what, there's no mystery of the Benko Gambit any more. I cracked it – the mystery, not the opening; it'll be around long after I'm gone. The reason for Black's success is not the pawn-structure, it is simply the quick development he gets after bxa6, such as ...♗xa6. That lead in development doesn't bring him a blazing attack, but it transforms into a long-lasting compensation. In conventional gambits the gambiteer gets a short-term initiative based on positional factors; in the Benko it's the other way around. White can't develop his pieces normally, can't castle, so naturally he has to concentrate on the task in hand. By the time he has fixed it up, Black is there with the rooks on the open files, active queen, minor pieces set to stop e4-e5, all that stuff we love this opening for. **Short-term initiative**. Take that away, and what we have here is a Benoni a pawn down – no more, no less. No wonder most of the delayed Benko systems in the King's Indian don't fare well these days.

For example, after **1 c4 ♘f6 2 ♘c3 g6 3 e4 d6 4 d4 ♗g7 5 ♘ge2 0-0 6 ♘g3** Black has a number of good options, but for some reason I was for a long time attracted to **6...a6 7 ♗e2 c5 8 d5 b5 9 cxb5 axb5** *(D)*, which brings us right to the subject.



Nenashev – Yermolinsky
Sverdlovsk 1987

This was the first in a string of games I wish I had never played. The results (two draws and a loss) hardly reflect the gloominess of Black's prospects here – it could have been much worse. Why would I enter such line? I was fascinated with the Benko set-up for Black and believed that the position of the knight on g3, away from the developing action on the queenside, would justify the delayed transposition.

10 ♗xb5 ♗a6 11 0-0

An important detail – White castles unhindered.

11...♕b6?!

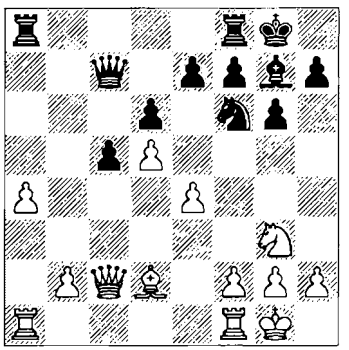
Black needs to exchange a few pieces to open room for his rooks. In principle, the exchanges on the queenside can be achieved, but the whole procedure is kind of slow and self-absorbing. Time is what White usually lacks in the Benko; he's always on the run catching up in development, protecting his extra pawn and such. Different story here: White gets all the time in the world, and we are about to see how he puts it to good use.

I rejected the more natural continuation 11...♗xb5 12 ♘xb5 ♘a6 13 ♗d2 ♘c7, because of the possible retreat, 14 ♘c3!?. With that knight stuck on c7 Black has nothing else but to insist on a knight swap with 14...♕d7 (an unnatural square for the queen in the Benko), but then comes the restricting 15 a4 ♖fb8 16 b3. One more move, ♖b1, and White secures the

queenside. Black's position remains playable, but it's a far cry from what he usually gets. The text-move puts the pressure on the b-pawn early; thus the knight exchange is guaranteed, but that doesn't stop White from achieving his goals.

12 a4 ♗xb5 13 ♘xb5 ♘a6 14 ♗d2! ♘c7 15 ♘xc7 ♕xc7 16 ♕c2! *(D)*

B



In my opinion, Black's position is already unsatisfactory. White's development is adequate, he's about to unload the long diagonal to render Black's fianchettoed bishop useless, and even the g3-knight is playing an important role for the time being – e4 is kept safely protected. The best Black can do is to react to White's intentions. Among those, the b4 advance stands out as the most dangerous.

16...♘d7 17 ♖a3?

The rook may find itself somewhat misplaced here. I'd play 17 ♖a2!, with b4 coming on the next move no matter what.

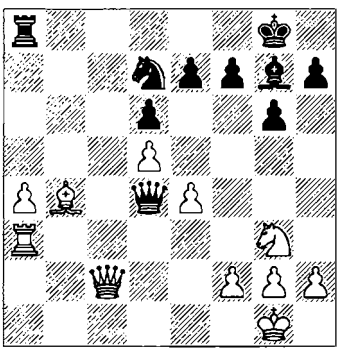
17...♖fb8 18 ♖b1

White has made things a bit more difficult for himself, but even so, 18 b4 deserved serious attention. Black can continue with 18...♕a7 – thanks to the trick 19 b5? ♖xb5 – in hopes of developing some piece play in case of 19 bxc5 ♖b2 20 ♕d1 ♕xc5 21 ♖b3 ♖a2. True, but 19 ♖b1 (see below) keeps it going for White.

18...♕a7

If my opponent had understood the critical nature of this moment for the course of the game, I'm sure he would have taken a better look at 19 b4!. By virtue of exchanging his backward pawn, White eliminates the last positional component of Black's compensation for a pawn. There would be nothing left for Black, but to look for a tactical escape after 19...cxb4 20 ♖xb4 ♖xb4 21 ♗xb4 ♕d4 *(D)*.

W



White is experiencing some inconvenience here. For example 22 ♕d2 ♕xd2 23 ♗xd2, and 23...♘b6 saves the day, or 22 ♗c3 ♕c4; but with a little bit of calculating he can solve his problems: 22 ♗d2! ♘b6 23 ♗e3 ♕b4 (23...♕c4 24 ♕xc4 ♘xc4 25 ♖a2 ♘xe3 26 fxe3 is a grim scenario) 24 ♖b3! ♕e1+ (24...♕c4 25 ♕b1, with the same idea of exploiting the back-rank weakness) 25 ♘f1 ♘xa4 (or 25...♖c8 26 ♕d3 ♘xa4? 27 ♕a6) 26 ♕c6 ♕a5 27 ♗d2! ♕d8 (27...♕a7 28 ♖b7 costs a pawn), and White finishes the game with a typical tactical motif: 28 ♖a3 ♘b6 29 ♕xb6! ♕xb6 30 ♖xa8+ ♗f8 31 ♗h6.

Alexander Nenashev hesitated for just one move and let me off the hook.

19 ♘f1

For that matter, 19 ♘e2 would be no improvement: 19...♘e5 20 ♗c3 ♕a6.

19...♗d4!

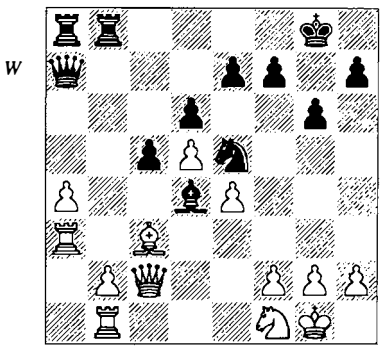
Black found a way to stop b4 for a while, but White could now insist on it by covering the f2-pawn with 20 ♘e3. After 20...♘e5 21 b4 cxb4 22 ♖xb4, Black can mix things up by 22...♖c8! (since 22...♖xb4 23 ♗xb4 ♗xe3 24 fxe3 offers little chances of survival) 23 ♕b3 ♗c5 24 ♖b7 ♕xb7 25 ♕xb7 ♗xa3. The resulting position is

unclear, even if Black ends up losing the e7-pawn.

20 ♗c3

My opponent was counting on 20...♗xc3 21 bxc3, with a healthy extra pawn after the subsequent c3-c4, but Black can do better than that.

20...♘e5! *(D)*



The two connected passed pawns will be irrelevant in case of 21 ♗xd4 cxd4 22 b4 d3 23 ♕d1 ♕d4, when Black dominates the centre.

21 ♘d2 ♗xc3 22 ♕xc3

The alternative capture, 22 bxc3, seems more to the point. Alexander Nenashev must have been concerned with the reply 22...c4!. Indeed, it gives Black counterchances, e.g. 23 ♖xb8+ ♖xb8 24 a5 ♘d3! 25 ♘xc4 ♘xf2 26 ♘b6 ♖xb6 27 axb6 ♕xa3 28 ♕xf2 (or 28 b7 ♕a7) 28...♕c1+ 29 ♕f1 ♕e3+, forcing White to accept the draw.

22...♖b4 23 b3 ♖ab8

In this position, more typical of the Benko than the tactical stuff we have dealt with earlier, Black can consider himself out of danger. The possibility of ...c4 limits White's options, and the a-pawn is going nowhere. Somewhat frustrated by the way things had turned out, Nenashev offered a draw, which was happily accepted.

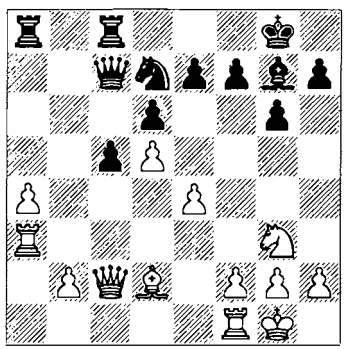
½-½

An interesting observation: due to a different move-order (not a regular Benko) White was given much more freedom to execute his plans (b4!), but after he missed his chances Black caught up with developing his play (...♕c7-a7, ...♖f8-b8, ...♗g7-d4 and ...♘d7-e5) and got right back into it. I may have realized these implications during and after the Nenashev game, but the knowledge did not set in permanently. Almost ten years later I gave this variation another try.

Serper – Yermolinsky
Springfield 1996

The first 17 moves, including the dubious 17 ♖a3, were as before. I now deviated with:

17...♖fc8 *(D)*



This move is more directly pointed to preventing b4, and it could be considered an improvement over the previously-seen 17...♖fb8. The game continued along the familiar lines.

18 ♖b1 ♕a7 19 ♘f1 ♕a6?

For the reasons unknown I rejected 19...♗d4 20 ♗c3 ♘e5 this time around. The text-move is very passive.

20 a5 ♖ab8 21 ♘e3 ♗d4 22 ♘c4 ♘e5 23 ♘xe5 dxe5!?

An interesting twist of the pawn formation. One way or another Black needs to reinforce his bishop's position on the long diagonal, and he could also try 23...♗xe5 24 ♗c3 f6, planning ...♖b5.

24 ♗c3 ♖b5 25 g3 ♖a8 26 ♔g2 f6 27 h4 ♔g7

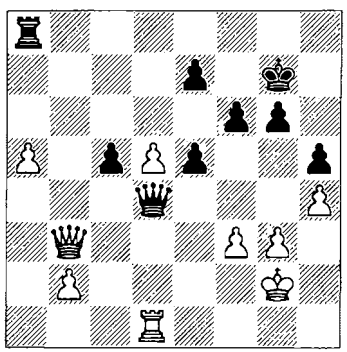
Not falling for 27...♗xc3 28 ♕xc3 ♖xa5 29 ♖ba1!. Black has long abandoned any ambitions in this game; he only wants to survive.

28 ♖c1 h5 29 ♖b3!

An excellent decision by Greg. With time-trouble looming large he offers Black a wide choice of promising continuations, but neither one looks convincing enough. A good example of Option 2 of trend-shattering weapons, and it worked to perfection here.

29...♗xc3

I had to consider seriously the line 29...♖xb3 30 ♕xb3, and now 30...♕d3 doesn't work: 31 ♕b7! ♕xe4+ 32 ♔g1 ♖e8 33 a6, and the pawn becomes unstoppable. 30...♕e2 looks better, but after 31 ♗xd4 ♕xe4+ White has a strong idea in 32 f3 (not 32 ♕f3? ♕xd4, when 33 d6 is neutralized by 33...e4) 32...♕xd4 33 ♖d1! *(D)*. Suddenly the queen has no place to go.



The resulting rook endings are not too difficult to assess correctly. The first two, 33...♕b4 34 ♕xb4 cxb4 35 ♖a1 and 33...c4 34 ♖xd4 cxb3 35 ♖a4, must be lost plain and simple due to the lack of counterplay, but the third option, 33...♖b8! 34 ♖xd4 ♖xb3 35 ♖a4 ♖xb2+ 36 ♔f1 c4, is a bit trickier. Still, I believe White is winning after 37 ♔e1! c3 38 ♔d1 ♖d2+ 39 ♔c1 ♖xd5 40 ♔c2.

Nice analyses, but it doesn't mean 29...♖xb3 was bad. Black can still transpose to the line given in the next note: 30 ♕xb3 ♗xc3! 31 ♕xc3 ♕xa5 32 ♕xc5, etc.

30 ♖xc3

Now I had to accept my fate and try to save a difficult rook ending arising after 30...♕xa5 31 ♖xc5 ♖xc5 32 ♕xc5 ♕xc5 33 ♖xc5 ♖b8 34 ♖c7 ♔f8 35 ♖c2 ♖b3 36 ♔f1 f5. An attempt to be cute gets rebuffed in a decisive fashion.

30...♖c8? 31 b4! ♖xb4 32 ♖xc5 ♖xc5 33 ♕xc5

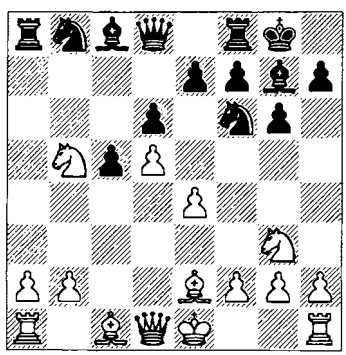
and White won easily.

Once again, a troubled scenario: Black gets nothing going and simply defends in a pawn-down situation – hardly a promising course of events.

To make matters even worse, I must add that White can also take on b5 with the knight.

Novikov – Yermolinsky
USSR Ch, First League 1986

10 ♘xb5 *(D)*



There followed:

10...♘a6 11 0-0 ♘c7 12 ♗d2! ♘xb5 13 ♗xb5 ♗a6

Black feels compelled to continue with his piece-swapping policy, but better chances are offered by 13...♖b8! 14 a4 (14 ♕e2 ♕b6 15 ♗d3 concerned me, but this doesn't work for White due to 15...♗g4!) 14...♗d7 15 ♗xd7 ♘xd7 16 ♗c3 ♗xc3 17 bxc3 ♕a5.

14 ♗xa6 ♖xa6 15 ♕c2 ♘d7 16 a4

Again, Black's got nothing but trouble for his pawn sacrifice.

I guess those three games should pretty much cover the subject. In addition, I must mention that in a variety of KID systems (the

Averbakh, for example) White meets the Benko ideas by taking on b5 and successfully supporting the pawn there, just as we saw in Yermolinsky-Gelman.

Transpositions don't come cheap: in the Benko Gambit White's centre gets immediately challenged, and there are a number of lines where Black follows on with ...e6; such is the case in the 4 cxb5 a6 5 e3 variation. Attempt a delayed version, and White can simply ignore Black's play on the queenside. The following game and notes are taken from the article I wrote for *New In Chess* a couple of years ago. While it deals with the matters somewhat different from our topic, I think it's worth taking a look.

Yermolinsky – Piket
Wijk aan Zee 1997

1	**d4**	**♘f6**
2	**c4**	**g6**
3	**♘c3**	**♗g7**
4	**e4**	**d6**
5	**h3**	**0-0**
6	**♗g5**	

I have played this system many times before, so the 15 minutes Jeroen invested here came as a surprise. Didn't he prepare for the game at all or was he just considering his options? Anyway, after some thought he embarked on an idea of another participant in the tournament, Igor Glek.

6 ... a6?!

This move is usually regarded as a thinly-veiled preparation for transposing to Benko Gambit-sort of play. I think what Kramnik did against Kasparov in Las Palmas (6...♘a6 7 ♗d3 e5, etc.) makes a little more sense.

7 ♗d3

White can hardly stop Black's plans, as 7 ♕d2 c5 8 d5 ♕a5 is rather annoying.

7 ... c5
8 d5 b5

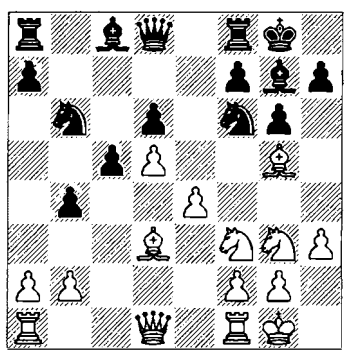
It's not a real gambit. White runs into trouble in case of 9 cxb5? axb5 10 ♘xb5 (10 ♗xb5 is met by 10...♘xe4, of course) 10...♘xe4! 11 ♗xe4 ♕a5+ 12 ♘c3 ♗xc3+ 13 bxc3 ♕xc3+ 14 ♔f1 (or 14 ♗d2 ♕e5, pinning) 14...♕e5, and both white bishops are under attack.

9 ♘f3!

With this simple developing move, it is as if White is asking, "Is that all you've got?". Indeed, the ...b5 advance gives Black surprisingly little in this particular situation. With e4 safely protected, White is inviting 9...b4 10 ♘e2 with open arms.

In 1993, in the one and only PCA Qualifier in Groningen, I played a similar idea against Patrick Wolff: **1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 ♘f3 b4 5 ♘bd2 g6 6 e4 d6 7 ♗d3 ♗g7 8 ♘f1 0-0 9 ♘g3 e6 10 0-0 exd5 11 cxd5 ♘bd7 12 h3 ♘b6** In my opinion, that knight must stay on d7 for some time to control the vital e5-square and restrict White's play in the centre. The plan with exchanging light-squared bishops can be executed immediately: 12...a5 13 ♗g5 ♗a6 14 ♗xa6 ♖xa6 15 ♖c1 ♖e8 with chances for both sides. **13 ♗g5** *(D)*

B



As the game went on I was able to develop some dangerous threats against Patrick's king, and deliver checkmate just as his queenside pawns were about to reach the first rank. With your permission I'll save the finish of this exciting game for some other time – I'm afraid of straying too far away from our topic, the Benko structures.

It's easy to see that Piket's circumstances are even less favourable, as the ...a6 move turns out to be totally useless, and the rest of the tempi count is the same. Black's best may very well be 9...b4 10 ♘e2 a5 11 0-0 e5, but this passive set-up is not to everybody's liking.

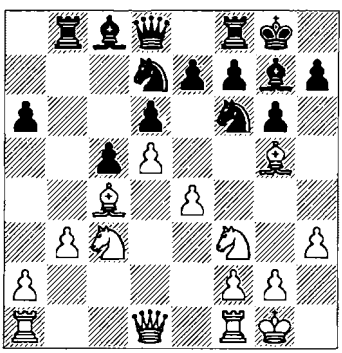
9	**...**	**bxc4**
10	**♗xc4**	**♘bd7**
11	**0-0**	**♖b8**

Black got his (previously wasted on ...a6) tempo back, due to the extra step the white bishop had to take, and the position is now reminiscent of the 5 b6 line in the Benko. Jeroen's last move deviates from G.Flear-B.Mortensen, Hastings Challengers 1995/6, which continued 11...♘b6 12 ♗d3 e6 13 dxe6 ♗xe6 14 ♕d2 ♖e8 15 ♖ad1 ♕b8 16 ♖fe1 with a normal opening advantage to White.

12 b3!? *(D)*

I didn't like the look of 12 ♕e2 because of 12...♕a5 13 ♖ab1 ♘b6 14 ♗d3 ♘a4, with some initiative developing, and both 12 ♕d2 and 12 ♕c2 seemed too trivial to me.

B



After the text-move I had to reckon with 12...♘g4!?, however. White then has to choose between two options:

a) 13 hxg4 ♗xc3 14 ♗h6 ♗xa1 (both 14...♗g7 15 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 16 g5, and 14...♖e8?! 15 ♖c1 ♗h8 16 ♘g5 look good for White) 15 ♕xa1 f6 16 ♗xf8 ♕xf8 17 g5 ♘e5 18 ♘xe5 fxe5 19 f4 exf4 20 ♕c1, with some initiative that might, however, quickly fizzle out.

b) 13 ♖c1 ♘ge5 14 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 15 ♗e2, preparing f4.

I still think Black shouldn't have wasted an opportunity to exchange a pair of knights while it was there.

12	**...**	**♘e8**
13	**♖c1**	

The following set-up of the white rooks and queen is rather unusual, and it cost me some time and self-convincing efforts to start believing in it. The idea is to boost up the e4-e5 advance, while allowing Black to exchange my light-squared bishop. The next few moves were easy to predict.

13	**...**	**♘c7**
14	**♕e2**	**♘b6**
15	**♖fd1!**	

From now on 16 e5 dxe5 17 d6 is a predominant motif.

15	**...**	**♘xc4**
16	**bxc4**	**♗d7**

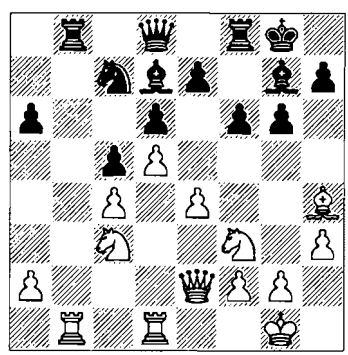
So far so good. Jeroen didn't have to worry about his position after 17 e5 f6 18 exf6 (18 e6?! fxg5 19 exd7 looks dubious) 18...exf6 19 ♗f4 ♘e8. To make e4-e5 a real threat White needs one more preparatory move.

17 ♗h4

17 ♗f4 would make e4-e5 less dangerous; for example, 17...♘e8 18 e5 dxe5 19 ♗xe5 ♘d6 20 ♘e4 ♕c7. After the text-move Black has to take extreme measures, otherwise his position will be ripped apart.

17	**...**	**f6**
18	**♖b1!** *(D)*	

B



Suddenly White is about to take over the b-file. An attempt at counterplay gives away too much: 18...♖xb1 19 ♖xb1 g5 20 ♗g3 f5 21 e5 f4 22 ♗h2 ♗f5 23 ♖b7 ♕c8 24 ♖b6, with strong pressure all over the board. A radical way to change the course of events was suggested by

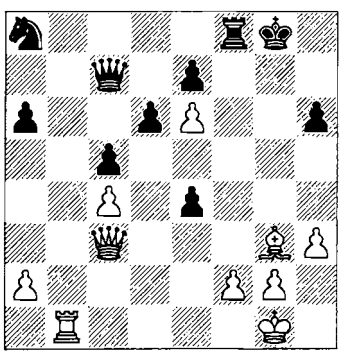
Gregory Serper: 18...e5?!, but it looks suspicious, to say the least. Without racking his brains White keeps a steady plus after 19 dxe6 ♖xb1 20 ♖xb1 ♘xe6 21 ♘d5. I don't think Jeroen felt any kind of urgency at the moment. The white minor pieces are quite passive, and it seems that Black should be able to survive even with the b-file belonging to White.

18	**...**	**♘a8**
19	**♖xb8**	**♕xb8**
20	**♖b1**	**♕c7**
21	**♕b2**	**♕a5**

This move was accompanied with a draw offer. I declined it with no hesitation. It seemed like I had everything figured out, and, to tell you the truth, I thought I was winning!

Instead, as an alternative, Black could try to slow White down with a pawn sacrifice: 21...g5 22 ♗g3 f5 23 ♘xg5 fxe4, but White doesn't have to fall for 24 ♘gxe4? ♗f5 25 ♖e1 ♕a5 26 ♕c1 ♘b6, which gives Black plenty of play. 24 ♕c2! is much stronger.

Another line starts with 23...h6, but after 24 ♘e6 ♗xe6 25 dxe6 fxe4 26 ♕c2 ♗xc3 27 ♕xc3 *(D)* Black is in trouble:



a) 27...♘b6 28 ♕e3.

b) 27...♖f6 28 ♕d2 ♘b6 29 ♕a5 ♘d5 30 ♕xa6.

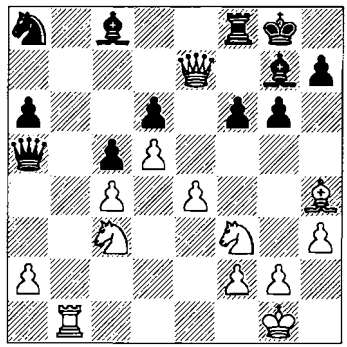
c) 27...♕c8 28 ♗xd6! exd6 29 e7 ♖e8 (or 29...♖f7 30 ♕g3+ ♔h7 31 ♕xd6) 30 ♕f6 ♕d7 31 ♖b7.

Small wonder, if you look at the knight on a8.

22	**♕b7!**	**♗c8**

22...♖d8 23 ♖b3 is simply hopeless.

23	**♕xe7!** *(D)*	



This was my trump card. While I was licking my chops, anticipating 23...♕xc3 24 ♖b8 (threatening 25 ♖xc8 and 25 ♖xa8) 24...♗xh3 25 ♖b7 f5 26 e5 ♕a1+ (or 26...♕c1+ 27 ♔h2 ♕h6 28 ♗g5) 27 ♔h2 ♗xe5+ 28 ♘xe5 (now I can see that 28 ♗g3 ♗g7 29 ♘e5!! checkmates) 28...♕xe5+ 29 ♕xe5 dxe5 30 d6, where Black is totally helpless, Jeroen worked out a sufficient defence!

23	**...**	**♘b6!**

Then it was my turn to sit there incredulously. I ruled out 24 ♕xd6? first, because of 24...♘xc4 25 ♕c6 ♕xc3 26 ♖b8 ♘e5! 27 ♘xe5 ♕a1+ 28 ♔h2 ♕xe5+ 29 ♗g3 ♕e8, defending with an extra piece.

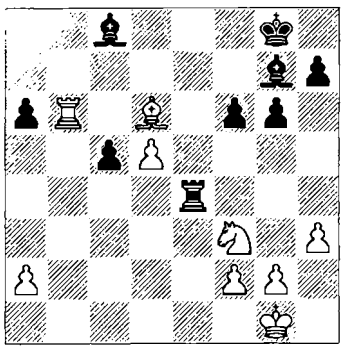
24 e5!? was worth considering, but I couldn't find anything concrete, even if both 24...g5 25 e6! and 24...dxe5 25 ♘e4 g5 26 ♘d6 gxh4 27 ♘xh4 would promise some interesting possibilities. Finally, I made a practical decision.

24	**♗g3**	**♘xc4**
25	**♖b8**	**♕d8**
26	**♕xd8**	**♖xd8**
27	**♘a4**	

I wished I could play 27 ♘b1 here, with the idea of 28 ♘bd2 – interesting that White has to invest a lot of effort in trying to eliminate the black knight, the same piece that seemed so miserable stationed on a8 just a few moves ago – but 27...♗h6! would disrupt my plans.

27	**...**	**♖e8**
28	**♘b6**	**♘xb6**
29	**♖xb6**	**♖xe4**
30	**♗xd6** *(D)*	

B



30 ... c4?

Jeroen was in serious time-trouble, and played this 'natural' move instantly. In the post-mortem, however, he pointed out 30...♖b4!?, as an interesting attempt to bail out. Some understatement! In fact, 30...♖b4 deserves a full exclamation mark, because it would save the game! After 31 ♖xb4 cxb4 32 ♗xb4 ♔f7 33 ♘d4 f5 34 ♘c6 f4 Black coasts to a draw with no difficulties whatsoever. If so, where did White make his mistakes? I honestly don't know. My position seemed so great, everything went smoothly, and there had to be one little move at the end of the line that turned my beautiful game into a garbage win. This sucks!

31 ♗b4!

With this move all the white pieces assume dominating positions, and Black is in serious trouble now. Jeroen's time-trouble could only speed up the inevitable.

31	**...**	**f5**
32	**♖c6**	**♖e8**

Both 32...♗b7 33 ♖c7 ♗xd5 34 ♖c8+ ♔f7 35 ♘g5+ and 32...♗d7 33 ♖c7 ♗b5 34 d6 ♖e8 35 d7 ♖d8 36 ♖c8 ♗f6 37 ♗a5 just lose on the spot.

33	**♖xc4**	**♖d8**
34	**♖c7**	**♗f6**
35	**♗e7**	**♗xe7**
36	**♖xe7**	**a5?!**

Played with just seconds left. The rest is a mop-up job.

37	**d6**	**♔f8**
38	**♖xh7**	**♗e6**
39	**♘e5**	**♖xd6**
40	**♘xg6+**	**♔g8**
41	**♖a7**	**♗xa2**
42	**♖xa5**	**1-0**

Let's go back to what we started from. The Benko Gambit lives! I'm sure top players such as Veselin Topalov, Alexander Khalifman and Peter Leko will see to it. Anybody willing to study hard and incorporate this opening into his repertoire is going to be rewarded. From the other side of the board, it can be avoided altogether by adapting one's opening move-order, just like I was doing with my 1 ♘f3 for many years, but it'll come with a price tag – many good set-ups will become unavailable against Black's other defences. I couldn't live with it any more – and made a full-fledged switch to 1 d4. Ever since, I have had to deal with Benkos and Benonis (see next chapter), even if my personal preferences are in contrast with the nature of some of the resulting positions. I honestly tried to study the modern theory only to be further repulsed by the conventional methods of White's play. Does that sound familiar?

In principle, temporary solutions, such as my experiments with the 6 ♕c2 system, can get you by for a considerable period of time. At least, until you obtain the necessary knowledge that will help you to understand the underlying patterns of play, and then you'll be ready to move on to the main lines. In my opinion, it's a better way than blindly repeating some 20 moves of theory, and then be unable to continue on your own.

In conclusion of our study of the objective value of the 6 ♕c2 system, I'd like to point out once again that Black must react accordingly, and the Mason game gives us a pretty good idea of what Black can do, besides making 'automatic' developing moves. I wasn't able to prove White's clear superiority in the game continuation, even though I'd try again, if given a chance.

I'm even more worried about the 6...♗g7 move, the sacrificial line. In my opinion, it offers Black full compensation. For those of my readers who play the Benko as Black, take my advice: study the concrete variations after 6 ♕c2; otherwise one day you may be in for a big disappointment.

Relax; It's Just a Benoni

If only I knew how to make money writing chess books I'd make this into a brochure under a saleable title 'How to Bust the Modern Defence'. But I won't do it, and not just because I don't buy into such an approach. In general, I think it could be a proper idea to identify the target before shooting at it, and I'm not only talking police brutality issues.

What is a Modern Defence, after all? Does any game begun with 1...g6 qualify? What about numerous transpositions to the Pirc, KID, English Opening, Dragon Sicilian, and many other 'legitimate' openings? I don't know what's going on in here. These days I'm pretty much confused with chess openings terminology: Indian, Old Indian, Modern Benoni, Czech Benoni – OK, but would you please give me the moves, so I know what you're talking about. The Informator Opening Code doesn't help either, because it becomes a blur once transpositions get involved.

Recently I played a game against Shabalov that started as a KID, 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♗d3 0-0 6 ♘ge2. E70, right? Heck, I spent half an hour searching through my databases under that index for the game continuation, 6...c5 7 d5 e6 8 0-0 exd5 9 cxd5, and couldn't find anything! Seemed like everybody played 9 exd5 instead, until I realized that after my move the game is classified as a Modern Benoni, and I should have looked in A65.

The Modern Defence. This 'universal' method of solving opening problems has been widely popularized recently. Some of its protagonists even claim that White has no way of earning the opening advantage after **1 d4 g6 2 e4 ♗g7**. Some statement, isn't it? By the way, it can hardly be supported or overturned by statistical research. The thing is, in these days of open tournaments, there are many situations when Black feels obliged to play for a win. It could be the sheer difference in the players' strength that determines the choice of opening and, at the same time, affects the outcome. If we mostly see grandmasters playing it as Black against masters (USCF 2200) and experts (USCF 2000), what do you think we'll get? A statistical edge to Black, of course.

It's true, there are some strong players who play the Modern against any opposition. Peter Svidler or Zurab Azmaiparashvili, for example. However, the bottom line is that Black's choice of move-order is determined by concrete preparation for particular opponents. When you know somebody really well, you can more or less correctly guess his opening move-order, and, given a certain flexibility of your opening repertoire, select your moves accordingly. Alec Wojtkiewicz, who's quite proficient in both the Pirc and KID, often plays 1...g6 only to transpose to his main openings after avoiding some dangerous lines, like the Austrian Attack with e4-e5, for example. These are the nuances of modern opening mastery, and what do they have to do with the abstract value of 1...g6? One has to be very skilled in a variety of opening systems to take full advantage of this flexible move-order.

One of the Roman Dzindzi's videos offers a complete opening repertoire derived from that move-order with no mainstream theory included. Allow me to disagree with this entire concept. With all due respect to the ingenuity of **1 d4 g6 2 c4 ♗g7 3 ♘c3 c5 4 d5 ♗xc3+!? 5 bxc3 f5**, which Roman has developed, it is yet to be established as a correct opening. Independent? Yes, but wait until somebody tries it against Kasparov. Until that happens I will reserve my judgement.

The real problem with selling 1...g6 as a self-sufficient opening begins when White ignores Black's trickery and sticks to his classical guns. Say, after **1 e4 g6 2 d4 ♗g7 3 ♘c3 c6!?** (intending 4 f4 d5, which, I admit, leads to unclear positions, but, nevertheless, has to be playable for White) **4 ♘f3**, Black plays **4...d6 –**

what we will get here is the Classical Pirc Defence. A lot to study there, even if Black has avoided some lines with f4 or f3. The same thing goes for **1 d4 g6 2 c4 ♗g7 3 e4**. Black can go for the early ...e5 systems with or without putting his knight on c6 first, or simply transpose to the KID. The former brings nothing new to the mix; it has been played for quite some time with chequered success. As for the latter – where's your originality? With a straight face Roman insists on **3...c5**. Well, it's consistent with the previously outlined ideas, but isn't that a Benoni after White goes **4 d5**? Of course it is, and it could be reached through a regular Benoni move-order – see the games below.

So, even after 1...g6 there's going to be some theory to study. Maybe not a lot compared with other openings, but still... (Come to think of that, have you ever wondered why there is much less theory there than in the Sicilian, for example? Maybe because White's task of obtaining an opening advantage is achieved relatively free of problems?). Here comes a slightly embarrassing moment for the lecturer. His major selling point is that Black doesn't have to memorize many long variations, operating with 'ideas' and 'schemes' instead. With the game inevitably transposing into known theory he's about to lose this major asset, as a discoverer of a 'new' approach to solving Black's opening problems. What to do? Downplay the problem. In his video Roman takes just one variation of the Delayed Benoni, not particularly dangerous for Black, reviews it and presents it as a logical continuation of the Modern Defence's ideas.

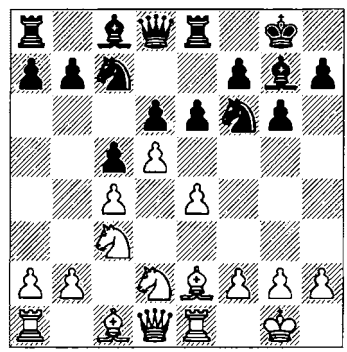
Yermolinsky – Masculo
National Open, Chicago 1991

1	**d4**	**♘f6**
2	**c4**	**c5**
3	**d5**	**g6**
4	**♘c3**	**♗g7**
5	**e4**	**d6**

One of the key positions. It can also be reached with another move-order: 1 d4 g6 2 e4 ♗g7 3 c4 c5 4 d5 d6 5 ♘c3 ♘f6.

6 ♗d3!

White begins his set-up, which, incidentally, is much more aggressive than the meek 6 ♘f3 0-0 7 ♗e2, which allows Black to reach Dzindzi's favourite position after 7...e6 8 0-0 ♖e8 (threatening 9...exd5 as White won't be able to recapture with the c-pawn) 9 ♘d2 ♘a6 10 ♖e1 ♘c7 *(D)*.



In the 1996 US Championship I had a first-hand experience dealing with that position against Dzindzi himself and it was not a very pleasant one. We arrived at the diagrammed position from a very different move-order: **1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♗e2 0-0 6 ♘f3 ♘a6!? 7 ♘d2!? c5! 8 d5 e6 9 0-0 ♘c7 10 ♖e1 ♖e8**. White's problem is the uncertainty of his plans. In Modern Benoni the d2-square is used as a transfer point for the knight headed to c4, but it's not available yet, and who knows when Black will finally decide to resolve the pawn tension in the centre. In the meantime, White has to play something. I looked at 11 f3, but didn't feel comfortable with 11...♘h5 12 ♘f1 ♗d4+ 13 ♗e3 e5, and the logical (and possibly best) 11 ♗f1 a6 12 a4 b6 13 ♖b1, intending b4 at some point, seemed a bit slow. **11 a4** I was hoping to provoke the knight's return to b4: 11...♘a6 12 dxe6 fxe6 13 ♘f1, with complex play, but Roman simply continued with his plans. **11...a6 12 a5?! exd5!** After this well-timed exchange I realized that 13 cxd5 would surrender the b5-square to the black pieces. What I did in the game, **13 exd5 ♖b8 14 ♘f1 b5 15 axb6 ♖xb6 16 ♘g3**, was hardly inspiring and

brought White no glory, especially after Roman played another very strong move. **16...h5!** White was never better, and the game was drawn before the time-control.

His success in that game, and likely in many others, brought Roman to the idea of offering his expertise to the general public. In the video he goes on from there, explaining the advantages Black gets from delaying the capture on d5. His explanations are excellent, and very much to the point, but in no way do they cover the whole spectrum of ideas White possesses on his 6th move. These days, White prefers other developing systems to the classical set-up with ♘f3 and ♗e2 even against a regular Modern Benoni move-order, and he's by no means restricted to it in this case. How about 6 f3 0-0 7 ♗g5, 6 h3 0-0 7 ♗g5 or 6 ♗d3 0-0 7 ♘ge2?

6	**...**	**0-0**
7	**h3**	

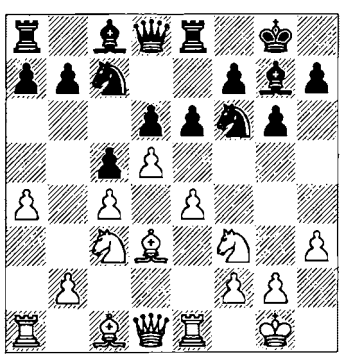
White takes care to preserve the king's knight, which is instrumental in engineering the e4-e5 break. Black's life is much easier after 7 ♘f3? ♗g4!.

7	**...**	**e6**
8	**♘f3**	**♘a6**

Black neglects his last chance to transpose to the Modern Benoni with 8...exd5 9 cxd5 (9 exd5 ♖e8+ 10 ♗e3 ♗h6 11 0-0 is an interesting line), and now 9...b5 remains on the cutting edge of today's fashion.

9	**0-0**	**♘c7**
10	**♖e1**	**♖e8**
11	**a4** *(D)*	

B



And what exactly has Black achieved with his tricky opening strategy? Delaying the ...exd5 capture was meant to confuse White, but apparently it didn't stop him from harmoniously developing his pieces. White can easily find logical continuations such as ♗e3, ♕d2, ♖ad1, etc. It's much harder to recommend anything to Black. Playing ...e5 would mean transposing to horribly passive set-ups of the Czech Benoni (1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5), where the king's rook is better off on f8 rather than e8, and another tempo is wasted on ...e6-e5. If not that then he can still take on d5. Let's see:

a) 11...e5!? 12 a5 ♘a6 13 ♗f1 ♘b4 14 g3, followed by ♗d2 and ♘a2 is a King's Indian scenario not many of its adepts would like.

b) 11...exd5. I am not sure what I would do here. 12 cxd5, transposing to a Modern Benoni book line is possible, but what if White is no longer going to forgive Black for his opening liberties? The position after 12 exd5 is also interesting to discuss. The c7-knight has no prospects, the c8-bishop is severely restricted – these are big pluses for White. A sample variation: 12...♖xe1+ 13 ♕xe1 ♘a6 14 ♗f4 ♘b4 15 ♖d1! (the positional threat of ♗b1 forces the play) 15...♘xd3 16 ♖xd3 ♗f5 17 ♖e3, and White is fully mobilized and ready for action: ♘b5 and g4. Black will be hard-pressed just to survive out there.

11	**...**	**♘a6?**

My opponent laid his eyes on the b4-square. His move is very consistent with the existing theory of positional play in one of its elementary interpretations: always seek outposts for your knights. In that respect, White's previous move may even be considered a mistake. What's wrong with this reasoning is underestimation of dynamic factors in semi-closed positions – quite characteristic for the old school of thinking.

In one of the critical positions of the Old Indian Defence, after 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 d6 3 ♘c3 c6 4 e4 ♘bd7 5 ♘f3 e5 6 g3 ♗e7 7 ♗g2 0-0 8 0-0, Black goes 8...a6 to unroll his counterplay with ...b5. Various methods had been tried to deal with this idea, but nobody thought of the straightforward 9 a4!? until Yusupov played it

in one of his games (I'm proud to say that I played 9 a4 as far back as 1982). The mental block was caused by aversion to freezing up the queenside pawns after Black answers with 9...a5. Indeed, Yusupov's opponent did just that and soon moved his knight to b4, where it stood on the sidelines while Black's defences in the centre and kingside were being demolished. Come to think of it, 9 a4 reaches its goals of stopping Black's counterplay in its tracks, so it must be considered worthy of attention, to say the least.

As we all know from Geller's and Bronstein's classic games of the 1950s in similar positions arising in the KID, Black's plans often include ...a5-a4-a3 to undermine White's c3-knight and set the stage for tactical explosions. Little is remembered however, of Botvinnik's and Ståhlberg's idea of preventing such stuff by a3, a move that effectively carries the same paralysing effect on White's pawn-structure and nevertheless remains playable.

If we religiously stick to the postulates, then how are we going to explain White's next move?

12 dxe6!

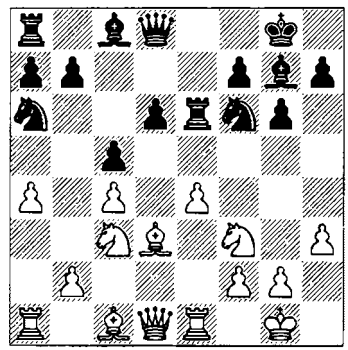
What, surrendering the centre? Indeed, you don't see it too often in the Benoni, and I wonder why. Isn't the d6-pawn supposed to be a little weak? What would the classics say? Silence is the answer. This type of position was virtually unknown at the time the last truly independent book on middlegame theory was written. Looks like we are left on our own.

There is, however, a convincing chain of logic. In the beginning White invests some moves to capturing extra space, naturally falling back in development. Under these circumstances opening the position with dxe6 would nullify White's previous gains, and Black should be able to hold his own. The situation may change later on after White catches up with developing his pieces and assumes his usual centre-oriented strategic stand. That's exactly what we have here with Black having wasted a lot of time on knight moves.

Simple reason: White's lead in development justifies this otherwise speculative exchange. With the pawn-structure changing towards more open formations White finds direct channels to release his accumulated energy.

12 ... ♖xe6 *(D)*

The rook is certainly clumsy in the centre of the board, but the other ways to recapture were simply no good: 12...fxe6 13 e5, or 12...♗xe6 13 ♗f4.



13 ♗f4 ♘b4

What is White now going to do with the bishop? It seems like it can't find a good square: 14 ♗f1 is answered by 14...b6, and the black bishop will put pressure against the suddenly vulnerable e4-pawn, while 14 ♗b1? is locking up his own rook. I found a good answer.

14 ♕d2!

Ignore it for the time being! White takes into consideration his sizeable lead in development. If Black now takes the bishop, 14...♘xd3 15 ♕xd3, does the future look bright for the d6-pawn? If not, White will be ready to redirect the bishop according to circumstances. Say, after 14...♘d7, then 15 ♗f1! makes perfect sense.

14 ... b6

15 ♖ad1 ♘xd3?

There's nothing good I can say about Black's position after 15...♗b7 16 ♗b1 ♘e8, but there, at least, he is not losing a pawn yet. At that point White can choose between 17 ♘b5, 17 ♘d5 and 17 ♘g5 – you pick.

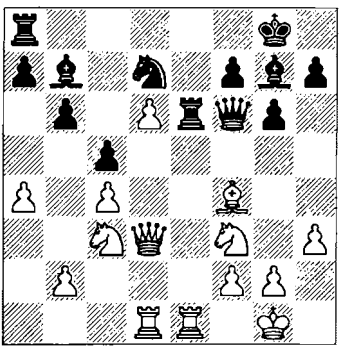
16 ♕xd3 ♗b7

Ironically, just as Black is finishing the mobilization of his forces he gets hit right in the middle.

17 e5 ♘d7

17...♘h5 would have put that knight in jeopardy: 18 ♗h2, followed by g4.

18 exd6 ♕f6 *(D)*



W

19 ♗g5

Even stronger may have been 19 ♖xe6! ♕xe6 (no problem is presented by 19...fxe6 20 ♕e3 ♗xf3 21 ♕xf3 ♖f8, as White simply goes 22 g3) 20 ♖e1 ♕f5 21 ♕xf5 gxf5 22 ♘h4. Compared with the game continuation Black would have no stronghold on e6.

19 ... ♕f5
20 ♕xf5 gxf5
21 ♘h4 ♖ae8
22 ♗e7

The rest of the game was not particularly difficult for White.

I don't know what my opponent was thinking, but his opening strategy was not up to par. It seems that he was playing his pre-programmed moves, ...♖e8, ...♘a6-c7, without realizing how different the situation was, simply because White had put his light-squared bishop on d3 instead of e2. The result? Without any titanic efforts White built a powerful position in the centre, and was on his way to easy victory well under 20 moves into the game.

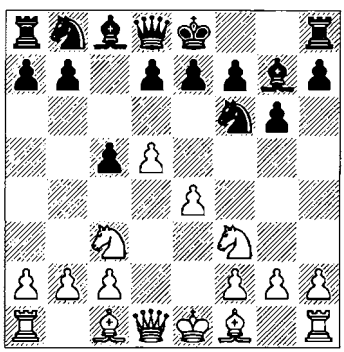
So, what is my strategy against the Modern Defence? Well, I don't get to see it very often, and it would depend a lot on who my opponent is and what information about his opening preferences I've got. If none is available, usually I don't neglect a chance to put my pawn on c4. I believe in spatial advantage, and I'm good with it – so why waste a good chance to grab as much elbow room as possible? That's how it is now, but in the olddays, when I was wary of the Benko and the Modern Benoni, I worked out a different move-order, designed to avoid these openings. I can still use it from time to time.

Yermolinsky – Khmelnitsky
US Ch, Modesto 1995

1 d4 ♘f6
2 ♘f3 c5
3 d5 g6
4 ♘c3

Here it is. White is content with a solid position many Benoni specialists hate to play against.

4 ... ♗g7
5 e4 *(D)*



B

Let's update our theoretical knowledge here. Black's automatic response to the e4-e5 threat is to play 5...d6, but there then comes a nasty check, 6 ♗b5+, that forces Black to interpose one of his pieces on d7. If 6...♘bd7, then 7 a4 0-0 8 0-0, and ...e6 is difficult to achieve, because the d6-pawn is no longer protected by the queen. Otherwise Black will be left with no counterplay. Usually Black goes for 6...♗d7 7 a4 0-0 8 0-0 ♗g4 (the best future for the bishop is to be exchanged for White's knight; 8...♗xb5? 9 axb5 would only improve White's chances on

the queenside) 9 ♖e1 ♘bd7 10 h3 ♗xf3 11 ♕xf3 ♘e8 12 ♗f1. The resulting position is pleasant for White, who complements his centre by the bishop-pair, but he's somewhat devoid of a direct plan. The standard procedure with e4-e5 is hard to achieve, because the f3-knight is gone. The pace of the game will slow down, and that may be considered an achievement for Black. He knows what to do: ...♘c7, ...a6, ...b6, ...♖b8 – these moves are nearly automatic. An interesting detail: now White would be happier if he had a pawn on c4, so he wouldn't have to worry at all about Black's slow-simmering plan with ...b5. Such are the implications of 4 ♘c3: in the long run White might have to move it somewhere to clear the way for the c-pawn.

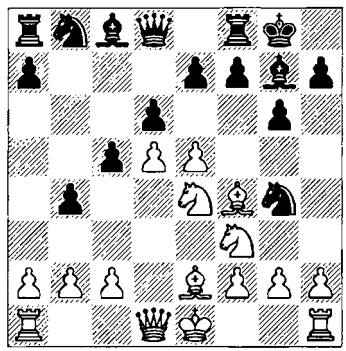
5 ... 0-0!?

This move represents a latest attempt in improving Black's chances of winning – don't forget, we get to see a lot of Benonis when a higher-rated player pushes hard as Black – by initiating complex tactical play in the early going.

The point is revealed after **6 ♗e2**, and it's not only the fact that delaying ...d6 robs White of the good opportunity (♗b5+) described above, Black can actually go for much more with **6...b5!?**. The daring pawn threatens to chase the white knight away. By the way, taking it is not advised – after 7 ♗xb5? ♘xe4 8 ♘xe4 ♕a5+ 9 ♘c3 ♗xc3+ 10 bxc3 ♕xb5 Black is much better. White is obliged to move his e-pawn forward and then things can get real messy real quick. **7 e5 ♘g4 8 ♗f4** I'd like to call a time-out right here. Shouldn't White consider 8 ♗xb5!? ♘xe5 9 ♘xe5 ♗xe5 10 ♗h6 ♖e8 11 0-0 as an alternative? At least he's well developed there. **8...b4 9 ♘e4 d6** *(D)*.

The recent game **Ziatdinov – Ehlvest**, *Las Vegas 1999* is a good example of the dangers awaiting White. **10 exd6 exd6 11 0-0** Capturing on d6 is not so good: 11 ♘xd6 ♗xb2 12 ♖b1 ♗c3+, messing up White's development. **11...♘f6! 12 ♘xd6?** White could simplify with 12 ♗g5 ♖e8 13 ♘xf6+, etc., but he suddenly gets too ambitious for his own good. In his articles written for *Chess Life* Rashid Ziatdinov

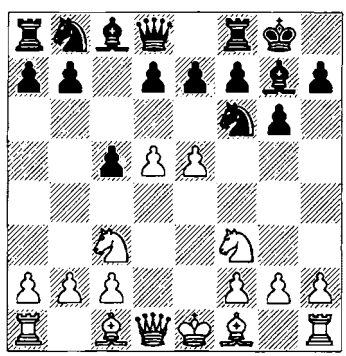
W



proclaims himself a positional player who takes special pride in games where success was achieved without calculating a lot of variations. I guess these honours come with a price tag sometimes... **12...♘h5 13 ♕d2 ♗xb2 14 ♖ad1 ♕f6 15 g3 ♗c3 16 ♘e4 ♕xf4!** After this shot it became clear that White can only be worse in any of the resulting endgames.

6 e5! *(D)*

B



This powerful move puts a big question mark to the soundness of Black's idea. White acts like he's pushed to the limits of his patience by the daring play of his opponent. He realizes that his pieces won't be able to support the far-advanced central pawns, but the time gained in the process of driving the f6-knight back can be used to launch a swift kingside attack. A similar pawn advance doesn't work in the King's Indian Defence, but here White is

aided by the tempo saved on the c4 move – a little detail that makes all the difference.

6 ... ♘e8

A more logical choice would be to keep the knight active with 6...♘g4, but it may end up trapped in the centre of the board! The tactical idea of 7 ♘g5 ♘xe5 8 f4 is what White is playing for. The knight can be saved, but only at the cost of exposing the black king to mortal danger after 8...f6 9 ♘xh7 ♔xh7 10 fxe5 f5 (10...fxe5 11 ♗d3 looks even worse) 11 h4, etc.

In the game Khuzman – Minasian, European Team Ch, Pula 1997, Black tried 7...♘h6, but got steamrollered after 8 h4 f6 9 ♘ge4 ♘f7 10 h5 f5 11 ♘g5 ♘xg5 12 ♗xg5 ♗xe5 13 hxg6 hxg6 14 d6!.

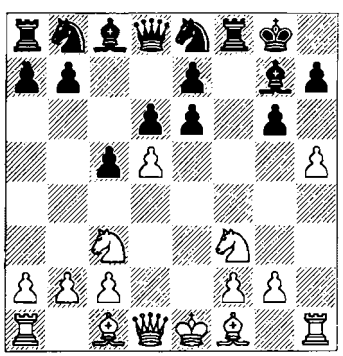
The same idea of ramming Black's kingside with a h4-h5 attack is the key to White's strategy in the game continuation.

7 h4 d6

Black has no choice but to try to destroy the white pawn-centre. 7...h5 8 ♗c4 looks depressing for Black; then 8...d6 is strongly answered by 9 e6.

8 e6 fxe6

9 h5 *(D)*



White's attack follows in the steps of a familiar pattern. In the Grünfeld Defence Black often answers 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 d5 4 ♘f3 ♗g7 5 ♕b3 dxc4 6 ♕xc4 0-0 7 e4 with the provocative 7...a6. Recently this idea has been put to the survival test after 8 e5 b5 9 ♕b3 ♘fd7 10 h4 (or the immediate 10 e6) 10...c5 11 e6, when 11...fxe6 (11...c4 is somewhat better) is met by 12 h5!, etc.

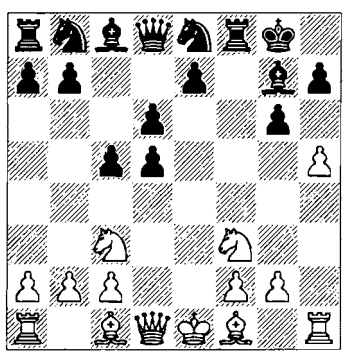
We can also find examples of similar attacks in other openings. The e5-e6 move has a short-term arresting effect on Black's development, it splits the board in two; and while Black is scrambling to bring his defenders to the kingside, White is already there going for the throat!

9 ... exd5 *(D)*

Igor plays his main trump to destroy the white centre. Black had some alternatives that can't be discarded without concrete analysis:

a) 9...e5?! 10 hxg6 hxg6 11 ♗d3 ♗f5 12 ♘h4!? (the positional 12 ♗xf5 gxf5 13 ♘g5, deserves attention as well) 12...e4!? (Black's only real chance is tactics; otherwise the g6-pawn falls, bringing down the whole position) 13 ♘xe4 c4 14 ♘xf5 gxf5 (14...cxd3 15 ♘h6+ ♗xh6 16 ♖xh6) 15 ♕h5 fxe4 16 ♕h7+ ♔f7 17 ♕xe4 and wins.

b) 9...gxh5 10 ♘g5 exd5 11 ♘xd5 (after 11 ♕xd5+ e6 12 ♕d3 ♘f6 13 ♘ce4 ♘xe4 14 ♕xe4 ♖f5, White can't play 15 ♘xe6 because of 15...♕f6) 11...h6 12 ♕xh5 gives White swindling chances, e.g. 12...e6 13 ♕g6 hxg5 14 ♗d3 threatening 15 ♖h8+, or 12...♖f5 13 ♗d3 ♖e5+ 14 ♔f1 hxg5 15 ♗xg5 ♖xd5 16 ♗h7+ ♔f8 17 ♕f3+ ♘f6 18 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 19 ♕xd5 e6 20 ♕f3, planning 21 ♖h6.



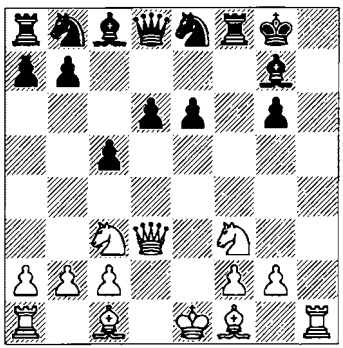
10 hxg6 hxg6

The reckless 10...d4?! can hardly be recommended here, as the brutal method 11 gxh7+ ♔h8 12 ♘h4 gives Black too much to handle:

12...♖f6 13 ♘d5 ♖e6+ 14 ♗e2 ♔xh7 15 ♕d3+ ♔g8 16 ♘f5.

11	**♕xd5+**	**e6**
12	**♕d3** *(D)*	

B



In one of his games Peter Svidler played 12 ♕e4, which seems less precise, because this square could also be useful for the knight. Nevertheless, the very fact that one of the best players in the world found my opening idea worth repeating fills my heart with pride.

12	**...**	**♖f5**

White stands very well after 12...♕f6 13 ♘e4 ♕f5 14 ♘h4 ♕f7 15 ♗e3. His development is nearly complete and the time for kingside action will come shortly:

a) 15...♘c6 16 ♘g5 ♘e5 17 ♘xf7 ♘xd3+ 18 ♗xd3 ♖xf7 19 ♗xg6 ♖f8 20 0-0-0 with a large advantage in the endgame.

b) 15...♗xb2 16 ♖b1 ♗d4 17 ♘g5 ♕f6 18 ♕xg6+ ♕xg6 19 ♘xg6, picking up an exchange or forking the c8-bishop.

13	**♘h4**	**♘c6**

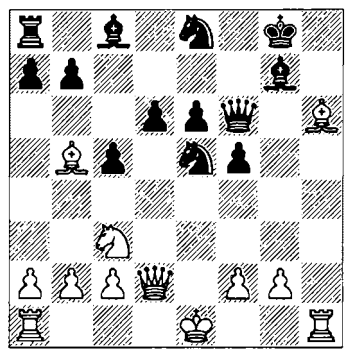
Black decides to give up an exchange rather than the g6-pawn. Under different circumstances the pawn-mass would provide him with ample compensation, but here the situation is aggravated by the lack of queenside development and the shaky king.

14	**♘xf5**	**gxf5**
15	**♗h6**	**♘e5**
16	**♕d2**	**♕f6**

He could try to keep the bishop: 16...♗f6, but after some automatic moves, 17 ♗e2 ♗d7 18 0-0-0 ♗c6 19 ♖h3, White sets off to attack the king, while the central pawns are yet to begin moving. Igor figured his chances would increase in the endgame, but I didn't have to comply.

17	**♗b5!** *(D)*	

B



Continuing development and probing Black's weaknesses in one go. White really doesn't mind the possible exchange of his light-squared bishop.

17	**...**	**♗d7**
18	**♗xd7**	**♘xd7**
19	**♗xg7**	**♔xg7**
20	**0-0-0**	**♘e5**
21	**♖h3**	

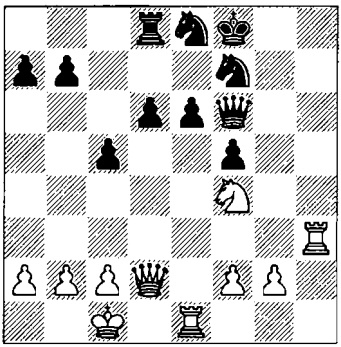
The white rooks are entering the fray, and Black is still moves away from generating any counterplay. For example, 21...d5 would now get punished by 22 ♘xd5! exd5 23 ♕xd5 ♘f7 24 ♕xb7 ♖d8 25 ♖xd8 ♕xd8 26 ♖g3+ ♔f8 27 ♕xa7, where White collects a truckload of pawns.

Igor decided to consolidate his defensive forces by bringing everything close to his king, but that allowed White to re-deploy his knight to great effect.

21	**...**	**♘f7**
22	**♘e2!**	**♖d8**
23	**♘f4**	**♔f8**
24	**♖e1** *(D)*	
24	**...**	**♘g7**

Surrendering the d5-square after 24...e5 25 ♘d5 would be totally hopeless, while 24...♘e5

B



loses to 25 ♖xe5 dxe5 26 ♘xe6+. The text-move allows a decisive penetration of the rook, followed by an exchange sacrifice that will rip Black's position apart.

25	**♖h7**	**♘g5**
26	**♖xg7!**	**♕xg7**
27	**♖xe6**	

and White won easily.

There are many more set-ups to study in the Modern Defence. Black is not restricted to playing ...c5, of course. And even if he does, these two games do not pretend to cover too much ground. I have deliberately chosen them to illustrate the two different approaches White can take to building up his opening strategy against the delayed version of the Benoni.

Fast or slow? It depends. First of all, after the opening moves 1 d4 g6 2 e4 ♗g7 it is White's call between playing or not playing c4. This decision will determine the course of the game for many moves to come. Masters of the positional squeeze may prefer to put an extra pawn in the centre, while the less patient tactical wizards would try to put the tempo to another use: quicker development with ♘c3. In other words, what one should do against 1...g6 depends on one's regular opening repertoire. As for playing the Modern Defence with Black, this would require a great deal of knowledge – opposite to what it seems or has been advertised – of many related opening systems. Then, and only then, can Black take advantage of the flexibility offered by this unusual move-order.

The Once-Feared Grand Prix Attack Now Rings Hollow

Nearly all grandmasters in the United States are involved in the teaching business, at least to some extent. While some, and I should mention my dear friend Gregory Kaidanov before anyone else, have found this line of work enjoyable and financially rewarding, most of us simply do it out of necessity. Prizes alone can sustain a responsible grown-up's existence only when you play well, and when you hit a bad spot, you suddenly recall that it might be a good idea to get some students. When you view teaching as something you can always do any time, day or night, it creates a certain attitude that carries on over the years and contributes to the overall poor quality of common chess instruction. Many think they can teach anybody below their level simply due to the sheer difference in chess strength – do you think it's true? Then take any sub-10 second 100-metre dash specialist and offer him a full professorship in athletic conditioning, human body biomechanics and sports psychology at your finest university.

The chess instructions market is totally unregulated. There are no other guidelines than a 'trial-and-error' method that basically tells you that you're doing well when you keep your students, or that something must be changed when your students begin to disappear. As a result, what a teacher does is to follow his students, not the other way around like it's supposed to be. You had better do what your student wants you to do, or he will find someone else – this 'customer is always right' rule might work OK in the fast-food business – but not in something as difficult to master and derive satisfaction from as chess.

Most people who take lessons from grandmasters tend to have their own goals, modest ones, such as getting their rating up a hundred points, or preparing for a big tournament in the hope of winning a large class prize. Therefore, they are looking for a 'quick fix', some practical advice, something that will produce results in the near future. And, as a rule, sooner or later

they come out disappointed. The question is, why?

From my experience I have learned that the initial gain in results, produced by the boost of confidence given by the very fact that one is taking lessons from a grandmaster, soon wears off. Most of my students would relatively quickly move up the ladder, say from 1600 to 1800, and then get stuck there, simply because they have not improved in chess from my lessons. And I simply didn't know how to help them. So many areas could use work – I didn't know where to begin. Therefore, most of our lessons would consist of going over the students' games, pointing out obvious mistakes that would usually begin piling up right from the first moves. Like many amateur chess teachers before and after me I was tempted to cut down that number by offering 'simpler' opening systems. But soon I realized that an uncanny ability to teach chess off the top of my head, with no additional work to put in is not reliable. In fact, it's no more than an illusion, and practising it borders on plain old cheating. Yes, it is easy to convince your students in pretty much anything, when your grandmaster credentials speak for you. The teacher can adjust the chess truth a little – with the good intention of making things easier to understand – by omitting critical variations from his opening reviews. This patronizing attitude – 'I know what's good for you, and what is the stuff you'd better to be blissfully unaware of' – creates an illusory world of 'simple chess' that keeps its doors open for anybody with a few hundred dollars to spare for lessons. Open your chequebook and you'll be welcome to join.

There are plenty of examples of bad teaching. A disproportionately large number of class players (i.e. below 2000 USCF) in the United States think they have what you call 'an attacking style'. Usually, it's expressed by pitching a pawn early in off-beat openings such as 1 d4 d5 2 e4?. The books written on that subject are very enthusiastic; they keep popping up every year even if the practical material of such study remains thin and mostly refers to obscure games. Such conditioning goes a long way towards creating an illusion of 'originality', and 'making your opponent think on his own as early as possible' regardless of the true chess value of what you do on the chessboard. A friend of mine, who had been brainwashed by these methods of 'teaching' for years, ended up with the weirdest opening repertoire I have ever seen. He would open with 1 e4 with one idea in mind: to sac this pawn as soon as possible. Variations such as 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 dxe4 4 f3 and 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 a3 ♗xc3+ 5 bxc3 dxe4 6 f3 were his dogma – he couldn't even think of anything else. Since he would also complement his opening strategy with similar ideas as Black, naturally the Albin Countergambit had become his main weapon against 1 d4. As a result, nearly every game of his saw the same scenario: he would drop a pawn in the opening, then invest more material into 'sustaining' his non-existent initiative, get a couple of fireworks out of it and soon resign. It was painful to watch him struggle with positions even I would find difficult to play. Instead of putting the pressure on his opponent – like the books he bought and studied promised – he was dealing with enormous pressure himself, the pressure of having to find the only moves and ideas that would justify, at least to some extent, his sacrificial strategy. It's amazing how the gambit style of play gets widely advertised in books targeted for class players. Nobody thinks that Shirov's style is easy to master, or easier compared with say, Kramnik's; but for some reason, imitating it is considered advisable to weaker players.

Another hot-selling item is an approach familiar to us from analysing the Modern Defence topic. Wide masses of rank-and-file chessplayers are being told that there are certain 'secret' openings that would allow them to handle the resulting positions with ease, operating with 'ideas' and 'schemes' instead of memorizing variations and calculating tactics. That would usually mean avoiding main lines as White, striving instead for playable positions known from the theory of colour-reversed openings. The Colle System, the Trompowsky and, last but not the least, judging from US

open tournament practice, the Grand Prix Attack – all of those have their mirror images in Black's opening repertoire.

Many years ago I played a game that left a deep impression. I got outplayed by an unknown opponent (now a grandmaster) from Lithuania, and it happened right in the opening, in a line I had not hitherto considered dangerous.

Kveinys – Yermolinsky
Vilnius 1979

1 e4 c5 2 f4 ♘c6

Later I found out about 2...d5!? 3 exd5 ♘f6, a promising pawn sacrifice. I won a couple of nice games you will see in later chapters of this book. It's not really to the point, simply because White can transpose the moves, 2 ♘c3 e6 3 f4 ♘c6 4 ♘f3, getting to our position anyway.

3 ♘c3 e6 4 ♘f3 d5?!

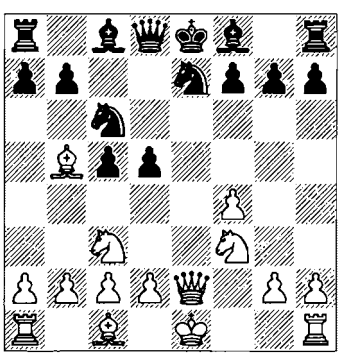
How can this logical move be a mistake? Easily, as it allows White to reach a desired set-up.

5 ♗b5! ♘e7

I became concerned with keeping my pawn-structure intact. The space-grabbing 5...d4, and 5...♘f6, featured in the next game, both allow White to compromise his opponent's pawn-structure with 6 ♗xc6+.

6 exd5 exd5 7 ♕e2! *(D)*

B

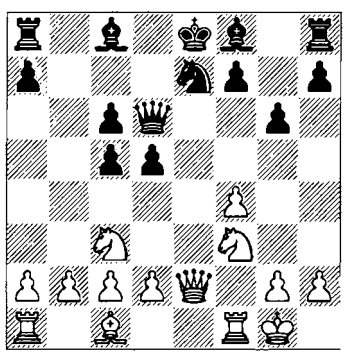


Such an annoying move. The threat of ♗xc6+ is resumed, and the e7-knight will remain pinned, hampering my development. I looked at 7...♗g4! 8 ♗xc6+ bxc6 9 0-0 g6 10 ♕e5 ♖g8 11 ♕e3, and didn't like what I saw. White is threatening 12 ♘e5, while 11...d4 invites the spectacular riposte 12 ♘e4. Now I would be more appreciative of dynamic features Black's position after 11...♗xf3 12 ♕xf3 ♕b6 13 ♔h1 0-0-0!, but back in those years I worshipped the pawn-structure...

7...♕d6?! 8 0-0 g6 9 ♗xc6+ bxc6 *(D)*

Like it or not, I had to reject 9...♕xc6. White's lead in development would be converted into a dangerous initiative after 10 ♘e5 ♕d6 11 ♖e1! (less impressive are 11 d4 cxd4 12 ♕b5+ ♗d7 13 ♕xb7 ♖b8 14 ♕xd7+ ♕xd7 15 ♘xd7 ♔xd7 and 11 ♕b5+ ♘c6 12 ♖e1 ♗e7 13 d4 0-0) 11...a6 (11...♗g7? 12 ♕b5+) 12 b3 ♗g7 13 ♗a3. The threat of 14 d4 practically forces 13...b5, but then there is a promising piece sac, 14 ♘xb5! axb5 15 ♕xb5+ ♗d7 16 ♗xc5 ♗xb5 17 ♗xd6. With three pawns for a bishop already in his pocket White retains dangerous threats against the black king.

W



10 d3

The enterprising pawn sac, 10 b3!?, deserved serious attention. After 10...♕xf4?! 11 ♗a3 c4 12 ♖ae1 ♗e6 13 ♘e5 White's attack will soon crash through. Otherwise, the pressure against c5 would come even quicker than in the game.

10...♗g7 11 ♖e1 ♗f6?

Black has to defend the knight in order to be able to castle, but the way he does it takes way too much time. The right idea was to shed a pawn for development in the line 11...♗e6 12

♘g5?! (White would be better off continuing his main plan with 12 ♗e3) 12...♘f5! 13 ♘xe6 fxe6 14 ♕xe6+ ♕xe6 15 ♖xe6+ ♔d7 16 ♖e2 ♖he8, with excellent play.

12 ♗e3!

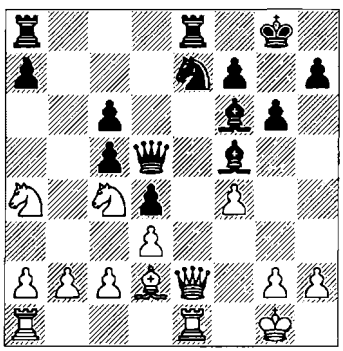
White begins a typical procedure set to exploit the weakness on c5.

12...♗f5 13 ♘a4 d4

Forced. Now the black pawn-structure is paralysed.

14 ♗d2 0-0 15 ♘e5 ♖fe8 16 ♘c4 ♕d5 *(D)*

W



It is obvious that White stands better. His knights are worth much more than Black's passive bishops. However, Black is strong in the centre, and if he gets control over the e-file, things may become unclear. My opponent's plan is very instructive for this type of position. He's willing to undouble Black's pawns, because 'the square will remain weak even after the pawn is gone' – or something to that sense – a great proclamation by Nimzowitsch. As an additional perk White will get plenty of play on the a-file.

17 a3! ♗d7?

Planning 18...♘f5, but White's next move takes care of that. My situation was desperate enough to try something like 17...♗h4 18 g3 ♗h3!?, hoping to create confusion after 19 gxh4 ♘f5.

18 ♕e4! ♖ac8 19 b4 ♘f5 20 ♘e5 ♗xe5 21 fxe5 cxb4 22 axb4 ♕xe4 23 ♖xe4

I could not put up any significant resistance for the rest of the game.

A tough loss, but time heals all wounds, and for many years I didn't worry about this variation. Nobody played it against me for a long time, until I came to the United States.

Weeramantry – Yermolinsky

National Chess Congress, Philadelphia 1990

1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 e6 3 f4!? ♘c6 4 ♘f3 d5?!

Sunil Weeramantry is a smart player, and I should have expected some opening trickery.

5 ♗b5!

Only after this move did I begin to recall my game with Kveinys. Tell you what, the recollections weren't pleasant. After some thought I decided to deviate immediately, but the move I made was too passive and did nothing to interfere with White's plans.

5...♘f6? 6 d3?

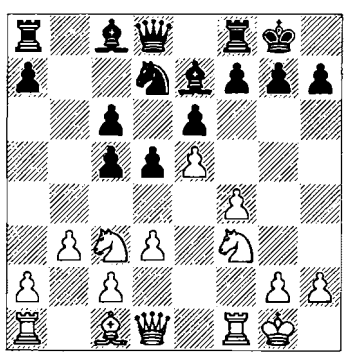
Better was 6 ♗xc6+ right away.

6...♗e7?

Black misses a chance to take care of his pawns with 6...♗d7!. There was no need to worry about the knight being pushed around with 7 e5, because Black has 7...d4!.

7 e5 ♘d7 8 ♗xc6 bxc6 9 0-0 0-0 10 b3 *(D)*

B



This position is quintessential of what White plays this entire opening system for. It's like his ultimate goal. If you reversed the colours, you'd immediately recognize it as a Nimzo-Indian with all its typical features: doubled c-pawns, bad bishop on c8, nice blockade in the centre with the far-advanced e5-pawn. On top

of everything else White is a whole bunch of tempi ahead of schedule: one tempo comes naturally as for being White, a second one is won by achieving e4 in one go (opposed to ...e6-e5 in the Nimzo), that's two; plus, if you wish, count two more for the f-pawn getting ahead of the knight (Black has to play 1...♘g8-f6 to get to the Nimzo). Actually, the last consideration refers to something White would like to take back. With his pawn still on f2, he would have less to worry about in terms of the light squares, and his remaining bishop would be more active. Quite a peculiar case of 'overdevelopment', and Black's next brings it to attention.

10...f6!?

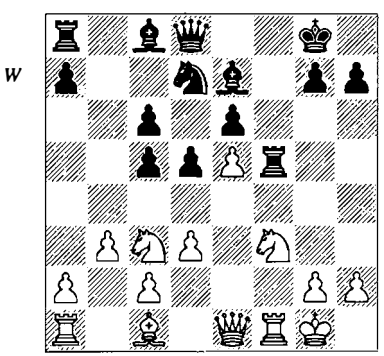
It was easy to play this move, as there was no decent alternative available. I didn't like the other active plan, 10...c4 11 dxc4 dxc4 12 ♘e4 ♕b6+ 13 ♔h1 ♖d8 14 ♕e1 ♗a6 15 ♖f2, when Black's initiative fizzles out, while the weakness of the dark-squared complex remains a permanent feature.

11 ♕e1 fxe5

And again, 11...♕e8 12 ♘a4 c4 13 dxc4 dxc4 14 ♗b2 f5 15 ♖d1, and White has clearly benefited from the last few moves.

12 fxe5 ♖f5!? *(D)*

By that time I realized that I had to put some pressure against the e5-pawn, and do it fast. Otherwise, White will commence his operation against my weak c5-pawn (square) with the standard moves ♘a4 and ♗a3.



13 ♕g3 ♘f8 14 ♘d1! ♘g6 15 ♘e3 ♖f7

A nice knight manoeuvre has pushed the black rook back, and what's next? The usual procedure against the c5-pawn is no longer available, but Sunil doesn't get discouraged. Not with his experience – without a doubt, he has been spelling out the whole system over and over again to his students in New York – and, of course, he's familiar with another idea that is often used in similar positions.

16 c4?!

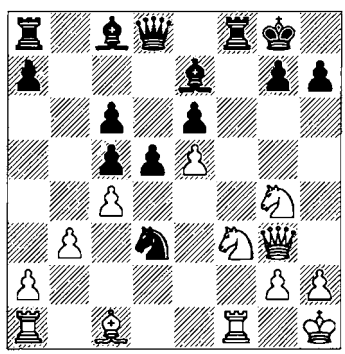
Played without any hesitation, but 16 ♗d2, followed by ♖ae1, would be more appropriate.

16...♘f4

Suddenly Black gets something to suffer for – he wins a pawn.

17 ♔h1 ♘xd3 18 ♘g4! ♖f8 *(D)*

I didn't want to give White an easy ride to my king after 18...♔h8 19 ♗g5! ♗a6 20 ♕h4, etc.



Here White had the good quiet move 19 ♗d2!, because he needs to connect his rooks before launching any tactical shots. I was going to defend with 19...♕e8; but not 19...dxc4, as 20 ♘h6+ ♔h8 21 ♘g5 gxh6 22 ♘f7+ ♖xf7 23 ♖xf7 ♗g5 24 ♖af1! ♗a6 25 h4 gives him a powerful attack.

Instead, Sunil surprised me with a bizarre move.

19 ♗h6?! gxh6

I thought the idea was to regain a piece after 20 ♘f2+ or 20 ♘d2, with some compensation as Black's queenside remains locked up, but there followed something really stupid.

20 ♘xh6++? ♔h8 21 ♘g5?

In the spirit of Nimzowitsch would be to play for an absolute blockade after 21 ♘d2 ♘xe5 22 ♕xe5+ ♗f6 23 ♖xf6 ♕xf6 24 ♘f3, but somehow I don't believe it. Black easily breaks through with 24...a5!.

21...♗xg5 22 ♘f7+ ♖xf7 23 ♖xf7 ♕g8 24 ♖af1 ♗f4!

Did he miss that move?

25 ♕xd3

A bit more stubborn would be 25 ♖1xf4 ♕xg3 26 hxg3 ♘xe5 27 ♖f8+ ♔g7 28 ♖e8 ♘g6 29 ♖f1 e5 30 ♖d8, but of course Black must be winning after 30...d4.

25...♕xf7 26 g3 ♕f5 0-1

I had my reasons to be unhappy with the way I handled the opening in those two games. Since I couldn't find real improvements for Black in the position after 5 ♗b5! I had to make some adjustments with the earlier move-order. The simplest solution would be to enter the main variations of the Grand Prix Attack after 2...♘c6 3 f4 g6 (we'll look at that later), but I was reluctant to abandon my 2...e6 move. The thing is, besides being connected with 3 f4, the 2 ♘c3 move can also be an introduction to the Closed Sicilian, and I had such great success in the 1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 e6 3 g3 d5 system...

The solution came in the form of two different move-orders, both designed to avoid the creation of doubled pawns after ♗b5xc6. I was aided by a certain flexibility my expertise in different Open Sicilian systems provides for: I could play the Paulsen (...a6) or the Taimanov (...♘g8-e7) if needed. The rest was relatively easy, as I started to get good positions.

V. Segal – Yermolinsky

Reno 1994

1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 e6 3 f4 ♘e7!? 4 ♘f3 ♘bc6

White can now transpose to the Open Sicilian with 5 d4, but the early f4 line is not considered dangerous against the Taimanov.

5 ♗b5 a6

Another good option for Black is to play 5...♘d4. White gets next to nothing after 6 e5 ♘xb5 7 ♘xb5 ♘f5 8 g4 a6, so he must go for 6 ♘xd4 cxd4 7 ♘e2 ♘c6 8 0-0, which is no big deal either.

6 ♗xc6 ♘xc6

Black has managed to gain the bishop-pair without damaging his pawn-structure – the whole idea of developing the knight on e7 (plus, e4-e5 doesn't come with a tempo), but, overall, White's game is very solid.

7 d3 ♗e7 8 0-0 0-0 9 ♘e2!

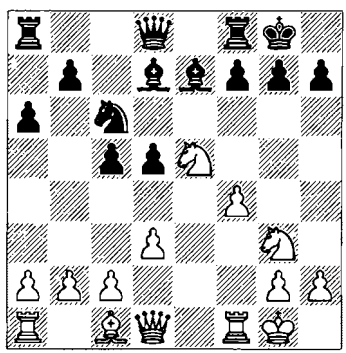
Re-deploying the knight is a good idea. On c3 it could be targeted by the black pawns: ...b5-b4 or ...d5-d4.

9...d5 10 ♘g3 ♗d7!?

Black has to keep an eye on the f4-f5 advance.

11 exd5 exd5 12 ♘e5 *(D)*

B



White's last move poses a certain problem. I didn't want to take on e5, as it would revive the c1-bishop and give White some space for kingside activity. On the other hand, mass-exchanges after 12...f6 13 ♘xc6 (or 13 ♘xd7 ♕xd7 14 f5 ♗d6 15 ♗f4, with equality) 13...♗xc6 14 ♘f5 would deprive me of any chances to win. I ended up playing a double-edged move that restricts two of the white minor pieces at the cost of weakening the dark squares.

12...f5!? 13 ♕f3?

Much better was 13 ♕e2!, when Black has difficulties in resolving the tension. 13...♗d6? 14 ♘xc6 bxc6 (14...♗xc6 15 ♕e6+) 15 c4 is unsatisfactory; and since 13...♘d4 14 ♕f2 leads Black nowhere, I could think of nothing better

than 13...g6!? in order to overprotect the f5-pawn.

Valery's move allowed me to set up a more combative pawn-structure.

13...♘xe5 14 fxe5 ♗e6

with a little edge to Black.

B. Turner – Yermolinsky

Asheville 1999

1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 e6 3 f4 a6

The most resolute way to deal with the ♗b5 idea.

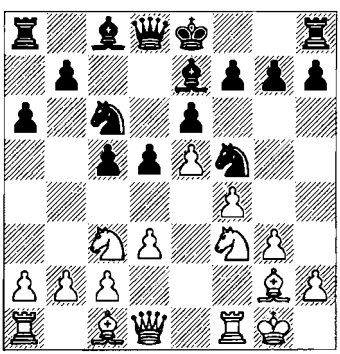
4 ♘f3 d5 5 e5?

After this move White just gets a bad French. He could play for simple positions with 5 d4 dxe4 6 ♘xe4 b6 7 c3 ♗b7 8 ♗d3 ♘d7 9 ♕e2 cxd4 10 ♘xd4 ♘c5 or 5 exd5 exd5 6 d4 ♘f6, but I'd prefer 5 d3, to be followed by g3, etc. In the Closed Sicilian Black usually gets by without wasting a tempo on the ...a6 move.

5...♘c6 6 d3 ♘h6 7 g3 ♘f5 8 ♗g2 ♗e7 9 0-0 *(D)*

9 ♘e2 h5 10 c3 seems more prudent, as the white king may get in trouble on the kingside.

B



9...h5 10 ♘e2 ♕b6

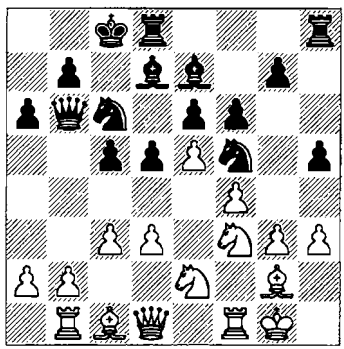
I thought a lot about playing 10...h4 11 g4 h3 12 ♗h1 ♘h6 13 g5 ♘f5 in an attempt to compromise the white king, but the position may remain closed for a long time, thus rendering this factor relatively unimportant. Meanwhile White gets some space for his pieces after 14 ♘g3.

11 c3 ♗d7 12 ♖b1?!

This move prepares b4, and it fits into White's plans in principle; but still, 12 ♖f2 0-0-0 13 d4 would seem more appropriate. The king can't step away from the g1-a7 diagonal (12 ♔h1? h4 13 g4 h3), so it must be blocked by the rook to guarantee White his peace of mind.

12...0-0-0 13 h3 f6! *(D)*

W



Hitting White where it hurts. The centre comes under attack at the right moment, after the h3 move has made the prospects of opening the g-file highly unpleasant for White.

He could try to hold his position together with 14 ♔h2, but Black would push forward in any case: 14...fxe5 15 fxe5 g5! 16 ♘xg5 (16 ♗xg5? loses the exchange: 16...♗xg5 17 ♘xg5 ♘e3) 16...♘xe5 17 d4 ♖dg8, retaining good attacking chances.

The more aggressive way, 14 b4!? cxb4+ 15 d4, is tactically flawless, but positionally suspect. The black pieces will occupy all the vital squares after 15...♘a5! 16 cxb4 ♘c4.

My inexperienced opponent played a natural move, and fell into a trap.

14 d4? cxd4 15 cxd4 ♘cxd4!

This shot absolutely destroys White's proud centre.

16 ♘exd4

Black gains a material advantage after 16 ♘fxd4 ♗c5 17 exf6 ♘xd4 18 fxg7 ♘xe2+ 19 ♔h2 ♖hg8 20 ♕xe2 ♗b5.

16...♗c5?

I knew I had to exchange pawns on e5 at some moment, but missed that after 16...fxe5

17 ♘xe5 ♗c5 18 ♘f7 I could delay capturing on d4 with 18...♗b5!. Now 19 ♖f3 is answered by 19...♘xd4, and there's no other way for White to save his rook.

17 b4!

White's only real chance. Now 17...♗xd4+? 18 ♘xd4 ♕xd4+ 19 ♕xd4 ♘xd4 20 exf6 (the reason why I wanted to exchange pawns earlier) 20...gxf6 21 ♗b2 e5 can only be good enough for a draw.

17...♘xd4 18 ♔h2

This somewhat limits White's options after Black captures on f3, but my opponent probably decided against 18 ♔h1 ♘xf3 19 ♕c2 ♘d4 20 bxc5 ♕c7 21 ♕f2 fxe5 22 fxe5 ♘f5 anyway. The advanced pawns on c5 and e5 are doing more harm to White's position than any dangers they pose for the opponent.

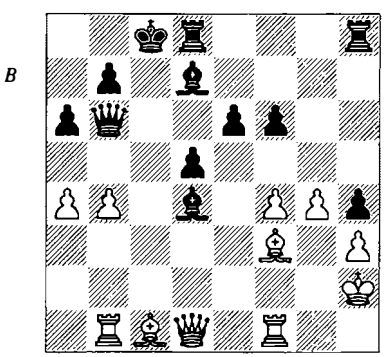
18...♘xf3+ 19 ♗xf3?

This just doesn't feel right. White had two pieces, the queen and the f1-rook, that could use some improvement, and instead he takes with the bishop. Both 19 ♕xf3 ♗d4 20 exf6 gxf6 21 ♗d2 and especially 19 ♖xf3! ♗d4 20 exf6 ♗xf6 (20...gxf6 21 ♖d3) 21 a4 were better.

19...♗d4 20 exf6 h4!

Did my opponent missed this in-between move?

21 g4 gxf6 22 a4! *(D)*



22...e5!?

Facing White's developing activity, I decided to pitch back my extra pawn. In return, Black will get natural, easy-to-handle tactical play, as opposed to defensive suffering after 22...♔b8 23 a5 ♕a7 24 ♗e2.

Too many times in the past couple of years has the burden of defending turned out to be too heavy for a tired, overworked 40-year-old grandmaster, yours truly. I love defending – don't get me wrong – but in today's chess it's all about being practical.

23 ♗xd5 ♔b8!

Black has numerous tactical threats and my less experienced opponent couldn't handle it in time-trouble. He begins with missing the best move.

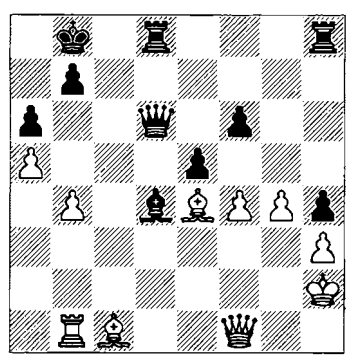
24 a5?

24 ♗e4! would preserve the material balance.

24...♕d6 25 ♕f3?!

And again, a bishop move was called for. After 25 ♗g2 White is not afraid of 25...♗b5 26 ♕f3! ♗c6 27 ♕e2 ♗xg2 28 ♔xg2, even if 28...f5 would give Black some attacking hopes. Another line I find interesting is 25...f5 26 b5! ♗xb5 27 gxf5 ♖hg8 28 ♕f3 ♖d7 29 ♖d1 ♖dg7, and it looks like Black is getting there well ahead of his opponent.

25...♗b5 26 ♗e4 ♗xf1 27 ♕xf1 *(D)*



After winning the exchange I honestly believed the game would be over in a few moves. Surprisingly, White is very much alive here.

27...exf4 28 ♕f3

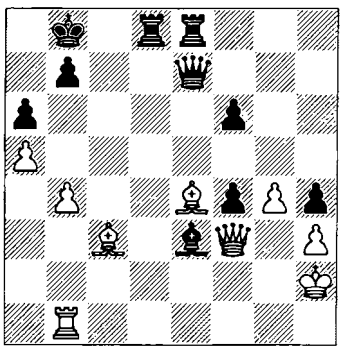
I was a bit worried about 28 b5 until I found 28...f5! 29 gxf5 f3+ 30 ♔h1 ♖hg8 31 bxa6 ♖g1+ 32 ♕xg1 ♗xg1 33 ♖xb7+ ♔c8, winning.

28...♗e3! 29 ♗b2

No real chances were offered by 29 b5 ♗xc1 30 bxa6 ♕d2+ 31 ♕g2 ♔a7 32 axb7 ♕e3.

29...♕e7 30 ♗c3 ♖he8 *(D)*

W



31 ♗d5?

The final mistake, but 31 ♗g6 ♖g8 32 ♗e4 ♖g5 wouldn't keep White in the game for much longer.

31...♕c7 32 ♖b3 ♖xd5 33 ♕xd5 f3+ 34 ♔h1 ♕g3 0-1

All very well, but this is not a Grand Prix Attack as most people know it. What about the main lines where the bishop goes to c4, followed by the f4-f5 pawn sacrifice? There's some theory there, but, like I said, for many years I had no use for it, because my move-order, 2...e6, would cut that option out. Nevertheless, I knew sooner or later I would have to expand my opening repertoire.

To my genuine surprise, there turned out not to be a lot to study. The best solutions for Black had been found some time ago, approved by practice, published and widely circulated in books and magazines. I practically didn't have to do any research to get myself ready for the GPA.

In today's GM practice the move-order **1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3** is rarely viewed as an introduction to the Closed Sicilian, unless your opponent's name is Mickey Adams. Rather that it is a tricky move-order, handcrafted to throw Najdorf devotees off balance. The best moves, 2...♘c6 and 2...e6, are regularly met with 3 ♘f3, and sorry, no Najdorf today!

What happens after **2...d6**, when **3 f4**, and the Grand Prix Attack gains in strength with Black often having to spend extra tempo on ...d6-d5? The following are excerpts from my annotations for *New In Chess* magazine.

Short – Oll

Keres Memorial, Tallinn/Pärnu 1998

3...♘c6 4 ♘f3 g6 5 ♗c4 ♗g7 6 0-0 e6 7 d3 ♘ge7 8 ♕e1 0-0?!

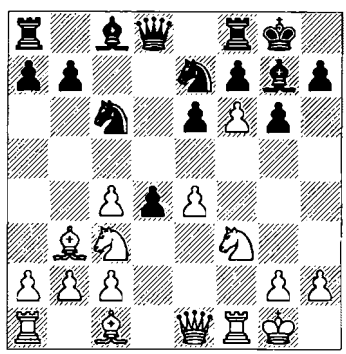
Nigel's little trickery apparently had an overblown effect on Lembit's ability to think, as he immediately fell for a well-known trap. Black is doing much better after 8...h6, which stops the f4-f5 attacks.

9 f5 d5 10 ♗b3 c4?

One further step in the wrong direction. 10...gxf5 11 exd5 exd5 12 ♘e2 ♘g6 had to be played.

11 dxc4 d4 12 f6! *(D)*

B



'I think I saw this idea before', said El Khalif after the game. Indeed, after consulting his database he found the game Khalifman(!)-Savon, Tal memorial, Moscow 1992.

12...♗xf6 13 e5

This is the idea. White makes time to get his knight to e4; and while the outcome may not be clear yet, Black will have to part with his valuable dark-squared bishop. Lembit looked very unhappy at the moment.

13...♗g7

13...♗xe5 14 ♘xe5 dxc3 15 ♕xc3 ♘xe5 16 ♕xe5 ♘f5 was played in the above-mentioned game. White's best is 17 c3, to keep the queens on the board.

14 ♘e4 ♘xe5 15 ♘xe5 ♗xe5 16 ♗g5

Nigel correctly rejects the other promising continuation, 16 ♗h6. Black would continue 16...♗g7 17 ♘f6+ ♗xf6 18 ♗xf8 ♘f5! with great compensation.

16...f5

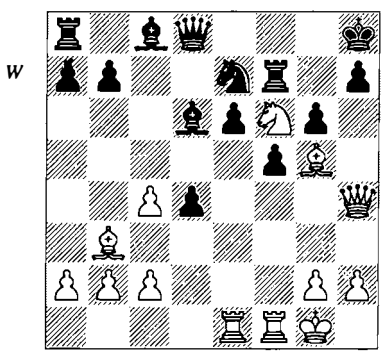
16...♕c7 17 ♘f6+ ♔g7 18 ♗h6+ ♔xh6 19 ♕h4+ is one of many dangerous variations awaiting Black.

17 ♕h4 ♖f7

Not 17...fxe4, which just loses to 18 ♗xe7 ♖xf1+ 19 ♖xf1 ♕c7 20 ♖f8+ ♔g7 21 ♖e8, with the unstoppable threat of 22 ♗f8+.

18 ♘f6+ ♗xf6

The no-yield attempt 18...♔h8 19 ♖ae1 ♗d6 *(D)* is a stubborn defence that is not easy to break down.



White would have to find a spectacular idea: 20 c5! (20 ♘e4 ♗b4 leads nowhere) 20...♗xc5 21 ♘e4 ♗b6 22 ♗f6+ ♔g8 23 ♘g5 d3+ 24 ♔h1 ♖xf6 25 ♖xe6! ♗xe6 26 ♕xh7+ ♔f8 27 ♘xe6+ ♖xe6 28 ♗xe6 with an unavoidable mate-in-one to follow.

19 ♗xf6 ♕f8 20 ♗xd4

Now White is enjoying a free ride based on the unchallenged strength of his dark-squared bishop.

20...♘c6 21 ♗e3 ♕e7 22 ♕xe7?!

A hard decision to understand. Keeping the queens would uphold White's advantage no matter what...

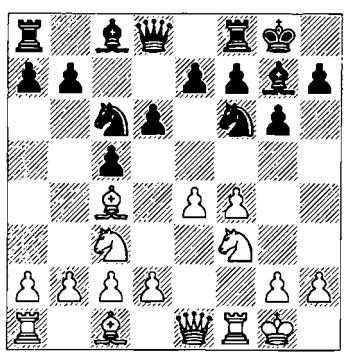
In any case, this was an impressive handling of the opening by the British super-GM. Some errors made his road to victory a little more rocky than it should have been, but he got there in the end (1-0, 53). Nigel has had a lot of experience on the white side of the GPA against the best in business, Boris Gelfand included. However, it would be wrong to say that his opening repertoire is solely based on this opening system. More about the proper place for the Grand Prix Attack and other openings of its stature later, but now I'd like to counterbalance the above game with an example of more efficient treatment as Black. Follow my notes to:

Kudrin – de Firmian

US Ch, Denver 1998

(same as above up to and including White's 6th move)

6...♘f6 7 ♕e1 0-0 *(D)*

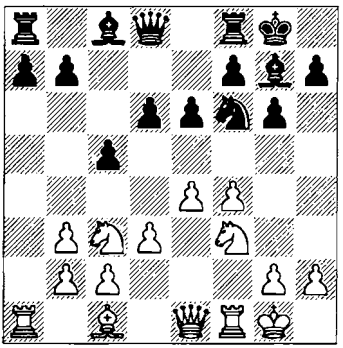


8 d3

White must play f4-f5 in this system and he's better off doing it right away: 8 f5 e6 (8...gxf5 9 d3 ♘a5 10 ♗d5 e6 11 ♗b3 fxe4 12 dxe4 is what White is playing for) 9 fxe6 fxe6 10 e5!? dxe5 11 d3 ♘d4 with a good game for Black in the old game Dorfman-Polugaevsky, USSR Ch 1976.

8...♘d4 9 ♗b3 ♘xb3 10 axb3 e6! *(D)*

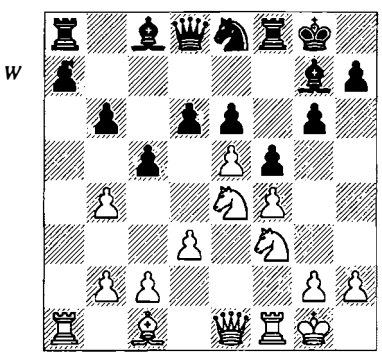
Much stronger than the mindless developing move 10...♗d7, which allows White to execute his plan: 11 f5! gxf5 12 ♕h4.



11 e5

Think what you like, but I call this move wrong. White has given up one of his bishops, and the other one is screaming his head off for the f4-pawn to move. What does White do? Moves the wrong pawn!

11...♘e8 12 ♘e4 b6 13 b4 f5! *(D)*



Around these parts Nick somewhat generously offered a draw that was turned down by Sergey, who some two moves later returned the offer, but then it was Nick's turn to change his mind.

14 ♘f2 cxb4 15 exd6?

15 ♕xb4 was called for, but even then 15...♗b7 would give Black a superior game. Notice that 16 ♘g5 runs into 16...dxe5, and now 17 ♘xe6? loses to 17...♕d5.

15...b3! 16 cxb3?

After this submission White's position is dead. For better of worse he had to try something else, 16 c4 ♘xd6 17 ♘d2 for example...

After such a long digression I'm happy to turn back to my own games. Five years after our first encounter I met Sunil Weeramantry again. This time I was ready for the main-line GPA.

Weeramantry – Yermolinsky
Harpers Ferry 1995

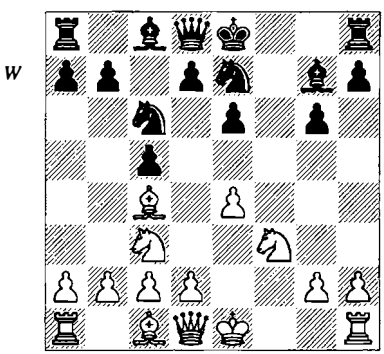
1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 f4 g6 4 ♘f3 ♗g7 5 ♗c4 e6 6 f5

This move often gets an exclamation mark that could have been deserved if Black had to accept the sacrifice.

6...♘ge7!

But he simply ignores it!

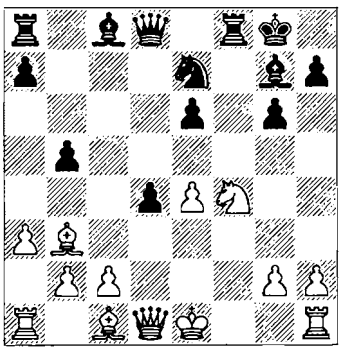
7 fxe6 fxe6 *(D)*



All general theory so far, and White must take care of his bishop with 8 d3 d5 9 ♗b3. In this position Black has an excellent move in 9...b5!. The bishop is in danger again. White has tried various sacrifices here, e.g. 10 0-0?! c4 11 ♘g5 or 10 exd5 exd5 11 0-0, but neither has proves to be really good. In the latter case Black is doing well after 11...c4 12 dxc4 dxc4 13 ♕xd8+ ♘xd8 14 ♘xb5 cxb3 15 ♘c7+ ♔d7 16 ♘xa8 bxc2.

White's best option is the careful 10 a3. The Armenian GM Artashes Minasian is one of the very few people who has liked this line as White. One of his games went: 10...♘d4 11 ♘xd4 cxd4 12 ♘e2 dxe4 13 dxe4 0-0 14 ♘f4 *(D)*.

B



14...♔h8 (14...♕b6!? could improve) 15 0-0 ♕b6 16 ♘d3 ♗b7 17 ♗g5 ♖xf1+ 18 ♕xf1 ♖f8 19 ♕e2 ♘g8 20 ♕g4 ♘f6 21 ♗xf6 ♖xf6 22 ♖f1 ♖xf1+ 23 ♔xf1 ♕c6 24 ♘f2, keeping the balance.

Good job by Artashes so far, and I think he even won that game. The question is, why enter such play? I'll try to answer it once we are done with the games.

Sunil made a move that shows his approach to the opening as part of a chess game – he is just content with a playable position. Never mind that he gives up the two bishops, yields a lot of space and, generally speaking, forfeits the advantage of having the white pieces to begin with.

8 0-0?! d5 9 ♗b5 0-0

Now Black wants to play 10...♘d4, so there will be no further encouragement for the bishop with ...a6.

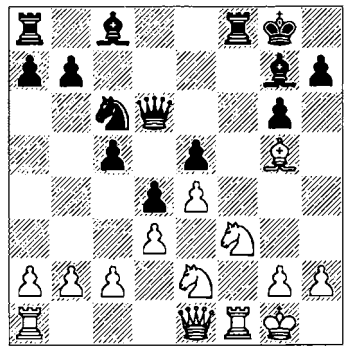
10 ♗xc6 ♘xc6 11 d3 d4 12 ♘e2 e5 13 ♗g5 ♕d6 14 ♕e1! *(D)*

A good defensive idea. White plans a king-side demonstration by ♕h4, ♗h6, ♘g5 – and secretly hopes for exchanges!

14...♗g4 15 ♕h4 ♕e6

Nothing could be gained by 15...♗xf3 16 gxf3 ♘b4? 17 ♗e7.

B



16 a3 c4 17 ♖ad1

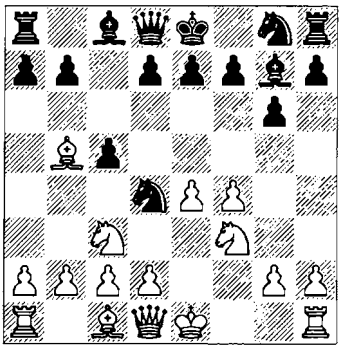
To defend in case of 17...cxd3 18 cxd3 ♗xf3 19 gxf3 ♕b3 with 20 ♖d2.

All in all, White's position is quite solid. It took many efforts from Black and a number of inaccuracies from White to bring it down. Ultimately, I won in the endgame.

Is that all White has in the Grand Prix Attack? Pretty much. Doesn't look like a lot, but the reasons why Nigel Short, Artashes Minasian and some others keep it in their opening repertoires are purely practical. One day, in a particular tournament situation, against a particular opponent it might be a good idea to play it or use a threat of playing it to make him alter his normal opening move-order.

But wait, there's another idea, similar to what we saw in the earlier games with 2...e6. After **1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 f4 g6 4 ♘f3 ♗g7** White can also play **5 ♗b5**, still trying to double the black pawns. It has been advertised as 'an improved version of the Rossolimo (I e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5), because the pawn being on f4 makes White's position more active'. This or a similar pitch we get to hear from master chess-players turned salesmen trying to peddle their product (in paper or tape form) to helplessly confused masses of club players. Wake up, people! Open an *Informator* – I forgot what number and who the following analyses belong to, so please accept my apology, dear stranger(s) – and find this:

5...♘d4! *(D)*



Black takes advantage of the very fact that White has put his pawn on f4. The weakness of the g1-a7 diagonal, and the sorry fate of the dark-squared bishop, are telling in every line White may try here:

a) 6 ♗d3 d6, and the threat of 7...♗g4 forces White's hand: 7 ♘xd4 cxd4 8 ♘e2 ♘f6!. After this simple developing move White has nothing better than to accept a dead-even position after 9 ♘xd4 ♘xe4 10 ♗xe4 ♗xd4 11 c3 ♗f6 12 d4 d5.

b) 6 0-0 ♘xb5 7 ♘xb5, and here comes a very instructive sequence: 7...d5! 8 exd5 a6 9 ♘c3 ♘f6. Black will get his pawn back on the very next move, and can look forward to exploiting his bishop-pair advantage.

c) The main line...

6 a4 e6

Black plans to complete his development by ...♘e7 and ...0-0, and then to continue ...d5. There's only one way for White to interfere with this intention.

7 e5!?

The threat of ♘e4-d6 looks scary, but Black has a good response.

7...a6 8 ♗c4 d5 9 exd6 ♘h6!

It's the knight and not the queen who's going to take on d6.

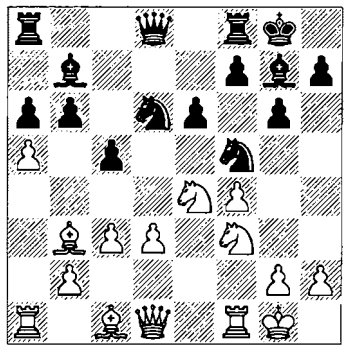
10 d3 ♘hf5 11 ♘e4 ♘xd6 12 c3 ♘4f5 13 ♗b3

A wild attempt to grab a pawn, 13 g4?! ♘e7 14 ♘xc5, will cost White dearly after 14...♕c7 15 ♗e3 b6.

13...b6 14 a5

What else? White must try to sustain his initiative, or he'll be simply worse.

14...0-0 15 0-0 ♗b7 *(D)*



16 ♗c2

Note how many moves White has wasted to bring that bishop to a passive position, but 16 axb6 c4! 17 ♘xd6 ♕xb6+ 18 ♔h1 ♘xd6 19 dxc4 ♖fd8 gives Black a powerful initiative – just look at his bishops firing right across the board.

16...c4! 17 ♘xd6 ♕xd6 18 dxc4 ♕c5+ 19 ♔h1 bxa5 20 ♕e2 ♖ac8 21 ♗d3 ♖fd8

Black has the advantage.

To sum it up, this is what I said to my students at the Yermo Chess Academy:

"With no disrespect to GM Roman Dzindzichashvili on my mind I nevertheless would like to present a series of lectures dealing with the unusual openings suggested in the 'Roman Forum' chess videos. I can think of the two reasons why it is important to address this issue.

"1) These videos have become very popular, and people who bought them naturally play the openings suggested. The Yermo Chess Academy feels obliged to help its students to meet the challenge.

"2) I'd like to take a look at some of these opening set-ups from a position of modern theory and practice. I don't think it would be too difficult for you to follow, while you will be able to see how the best players approach various opening problems.

"I could never suggest a blind copying of Kasparov's opening repertoire, for example. Individual choice of openings is based on the results of careful self-studying. This doesn't mean, however, that the modern sophisticated openings are for GMs only, and that less experienced players should stick with off-beat lines. On the contrary, I encourage you to play the most complicated opening set-ups, but on one condition: you should play them not for fashion's sake and not because somebody told you so, but because of the resulting middlegame positions.

"Chess-players study openings to get to favourable middlegame positions. And you must think about the future. It is much better to take on some openings that will serve you for years to come, rather than restrict yourself to primitive set-ups designed to avoid theory.

"Some chess teachers have a low opinion of their audience; they fear their students will not understand sophisticated positional and tactical concepts. Here, at the Yermo Chess Academy, we do not practise a 'quick fix approach' that is popularized by many teaching GMs. There's no 'chess made easy' advice that would immediately improve your chess. Widely disseminated promises to introduce 'new methods', to reveal 'secrets of the Soviet School of Chess', etc. are no more than smart advertising moves..."

On the War Path: The Sicilian Counterattack

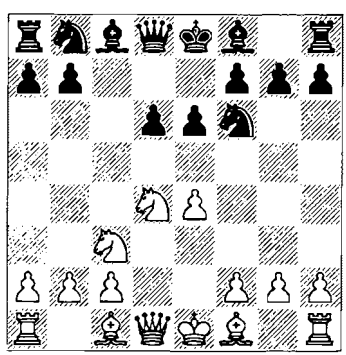
There is an interesting paradox. You know what happens when you're mastering the Sicilian Defence, for example? Many hours of work are invested into studying main lines – any variation, it doesn't matter which – and when you finally feel ready, you get no chance to show your stuff! I bet soon you'll forget why you decided to play 1...c5 in the first place. Game after game you get to see 'side' variations, such as the Alapin (2 c3), the Closed Variation (with g3), the Grand Prix Attack (see above), the Rossolimo (3 ♗b5).

Should you consider those lines in your preparation? Absolutely, yes. This is exactly what top players do, and they come well-prepared. While each of these lines may present its own positional and tactical implications, they can be successfully dealt with. None of them should become so feared that you would reject the Sicilian as a cornerstone of your opening repertoire. Whenever I see this weak stuff played against me I feel my confidence growing and usually do well. Statistics only prove the point: Black scores at least 50% in those lines in today's practice.

As a matter of fact, Black's life is much easier in any secondary continuation after 1 e4 c5, rather than the Open Sicilian (2 ♘f3, followed by 3 d4), where his position gets challenged in the most principled way. Don't shift your priorities – prepare for real battles. Every Sicilian devotee knows what it's like to be sitting there with your king stuck under the crossfire of White's attacking power, and what a great feeling it is to escape unscathed.

The Sicilian Defence. I could be talking about the Sveshnikov or the Dragon here, but I prefer to concentrate on a typical position that may come from the Scheveningen (...d6, ...♘f6, ...e6), the Najdorf (...d6, ...♘f6, ...a6), the Paulsen/Kan (...e6, ...a6) or the Classical (...d6, ...♘f6, ...♘c6), as all these systems allow numerous transpositions. To begin with we'll try to look at the pawn-structure from an abstract point of view, disregarding theoretical variations for the time being.

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 e6 *(D)*



What we have got here is a fluid pawn-structure in the centre. Later it may take a more stable shape; such is the case when White answers ...d5 with e5 (French-like formation), or when Black exchanges off his e-pawn for the opponent's f-pawn (isolated pawns for both sides), but for a while it may stay the way it is. What are the implications?

a) White has a certain space advantage. The fifth rank is a confrontation line, where all the central squares are attacked by pawns of both colour – we assume that White will play f4, which he does in the majority of games – and no piece can lodge there without being taken off the board. The fifth rank is disputed, so it leaves White with four ranks to operate, while Black controls only three.

b) As a result, the white pieces have more room to operate. Let's compare the king's bishops, for example. The white one has a choice of three squares: c4, d3, e2 (and yes, b5, but it can hang on there only for a short while), and his black counterpart can go to e7 only.

c) Development. Black is making a lot of little pawn moves, four so far and with ...a6 soon to come, that's five. All this while his opponent is developing pieces. That factor alone would make Black's strategy at least suspicious if not suicidal, from the old classical point of view.

d) White has freedom to operate on the kingside. No black pieces, except for the f6-knight, extend their influence to that area of the board.

All these factors combined bring us to the conclusion that White has all the reasons to be optimistic about his attacking chances. Indeed, many games end quickly and decisively to White's favour. How is it done? In many ways.

1) White's most straightforward and dangerous plan is to push e4-e5, opening the f-file (after ...dxe5, fxe5), the b1-h7 and c1-h6 diagonals for the bishops, and getting the transfer square e4 for the knight. The only defender of the black kingside, the f6-knight, will be driven away in the process.

This plan is often executed in various white set-ups: the Richter-Rauzer (♗g5), the Fischer-Sozin (♗c4), the Classical (♗e2 and later ♗d3, or ♗f3).

2) He can play f4-f5, bringing a lot of pressure against the e6-pawn. If that pawn moves forward, the d5-square becomes available for the c3-knight that otherwise plays a defensive role protecting e4, and often gets under attack by Black's b-pawn (more of that later). This plan gains in strength when White's light-squared bishop is developed on the a2-g8 diagonal.

3) When the moment is right White can drop an H-Bomb on Black's position. Various piece sacrifices happen on the critical squares b5, e6, d5 and f5.

4) White takes advantage of Factor 'd' by launching the g-pawn forward. When it gets to g5 it pushes the f6-knight away, thus opening new venues for White, who then either continues with f4-f5-f6, or brings the heavy artillery over to the h-file to checkmate the under-defended black king.

If you want to play the Sicilian with Black you must be ready to meet anything White can (and will) throw at you. In my career I think I have seen it all. For over 30 years, the Sicilian (I mean the Scheveningen-Najdorf-Classical-Paulsen set-up, as I have rarely played the Dragon and never the Sveshnikov) has served me many bitter defeats and sweet victories. I could probably write a book 'How To Get Beaten in the Sicilian' based solely on my personal experiences. There's so much to talk about, and I could go on and on generalizing on statistical tendencies, such as 'White wins short games and loses the long ones', or 'when White is forced to play a3 to stop ...b4, Black has already taken over', but I have to be careful. Any attempt to extrapolate this 'scientific' approach to concrete variations is doomed to fail in any opening, let alone in a sharp one, such as the Sicilian Defence.

Also, keep in mind – this is not an opening book, so I have to keep down the number of theoretical variations mentioned on these pages. Or shorten them whenever possible. If the reader wants theory he can find it elsewhere: in the computer databases, *ECO* or Dr Nunn's books. So, no generalization and no theory either. What's left? Teaching by example, what else?

I'd like to concentrate on the situations when White uses Option 4 in his attacking game-plan.

What does Black do? He counterattacks. The games selected and shown below illustrate typical counterattacking patterns in the Sicilian Defence.

From my YCA lecture:

"Counterattack is a weapon of the second player. Feeling too comfortable in the opening and early middlegame, White often launches his offensive before completing his development...

"The Sicilian Defence is my favourite playground for counterattacking... From the very first move this opening sets the stage for a sharp battle. White gets a lead in development and a space advantage...

"When White does go for the throat, the pace of events becomes very fast. The outcome of the game can be decided in the next few moves...

"Counterattack is often ignited by a sacrifice meant to eliminate an important attacking piece and wrest the initiative..."

V. Fedorov – Yermolinsky

Leningrad Ch 1985

1	**e4**	**c5**
2	**♘f3**	**d6**
3	**d4**	**cxd4**
4	**♘xd4**	**♘f6**
5	**♘c3**	**e6**
6	**g4!**	

The Keres Attack. Today we take it for granted, but try to imagine how difficult it must have been to come up with such a move 50+ years ago! John Watson singles it out as the most striking example of modern chess strategy. He wisely mentions Black's failure to refute White's 'premature' attack by the means of a classical blow in the centre, 6...d5. Indeed, White obtains a large, uncontested positional plus after 7 exd5 ♘xd5 8 ♗b5+ ♗d7 (the move Black must avoid, but there is nothing else to do here) 9 ♘xd5 exd5 10 ♕e2+ ♕e7 11 ♗e3, as in the ancient game Fischer-Reshevsky, New York 1967.

6 ... h6

If not the best, then by far the most popular response. Black concedes a significant weakening of his kingside pawn formation – kingside castling is all but ruled out now – to slow White down. The whole thing is about keeping that knight on f6. Not only does it represent Black's only developed piece, but it is also instrumental in both attack and defence.

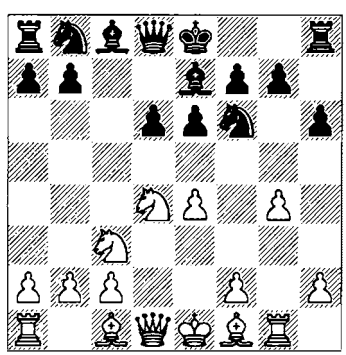
7 ♖g1

One of many good options in White's possession. He can also continue with 7 g5 hxg5 8 ♗xg5, speeding up his development and later castling queenside, or consolidate his spatial gains with 7 h3, followed by ♗g2 and 0-0. In this case White gets himself a souped-up version of the g3 variation, or at least he thinks he does.

7 h4 is also popular here. Basically, both ♖g1 and h4 have to be played in order to resume the g5 threat, so White can vary with the move-order. Either way, Black must make up his mind about the looming g5 threat. What he does looks bizarre at first sight: 7 ♖g1 ♘c6 8 h4 (or 8 ♖g1 if White begins with 7 h4), and now 8...h5!. We are going to see the same scenario in the featured game continuation, so hold off your questions for a while. I am only going to say that 9 gxh5 ♘xh5 10 ♗g5 ♕b6 11 ♘b3 has been played in hundreds of games.

7 ... ♗e7!? *(D)*

This little 'half-developing' takes precedence over the more logical 'knights before bishops' 7...♘c6, but why? It will begin making a lot of sense if you take a closer look.



A little bit of theory can't be avoided, so I'll take a time-out from the featured game to outline both sides' possibilities in the diagrammed position. Right now the big question is, why can't White insist on g4-g5 here? Yes, he can, but the point of 7...♗e7 is revealed after...

8 h4 d5!

And now, 9 ♗b5+?! will be answered with 9...♔f8. Losing the right to castle is no big deal (think about it; ...0-0 is suicidal after ...h6, and ...0-0-0 is quite difficult to make time for), while that ugly ...♗d7 move has been avoided. White finds his centre challenged in a big way, and the stupid-looking b5-bishop sticks out like a sore thumb. White gets next to nothing after 10 exd5 (10 e5?! ♘fd7 11 ♗f4 ♗xh4 is a dubious pawn sac) 10...♘xd5 11 ♘xd5 ♕xd5 12 ♗e3 ♘c6 (even 12...♗xh4 is possible here) 13 ♘xc6 bxc6 14 ♕xd5 cxd5.

Instead of 9 ♗b5+, other moves deserve better attention:

a) 9 ♗f4!? is an inspired pawn sacrifice best answered by 9...a6 (9...♘xe4? 10 ♘xe4 dxe4 11 ♘b5 gives White a dangerous initiative) 10 exd5 ♘xd5 11 ♘xd5 ♕xd5 12 ♗g2 ♕c4 13 ♗g3 ♗d7! 14 c3 ♘c6 with equality, unless you are fascinated with Timman's idea, 9...♗b4!? 10 ♘b5 ♘xe4.

b) **9 exd5 ♘xd5 10 ♘xd5**

This is normal. Now we'll branch out into two radically different continuations.

Lalić – Yermolinsky

World Team Ch, Lucerne 1997

In this game I tried a risky line I had analysed for some time in the early 1990s.

10...exd5?! 11 g5

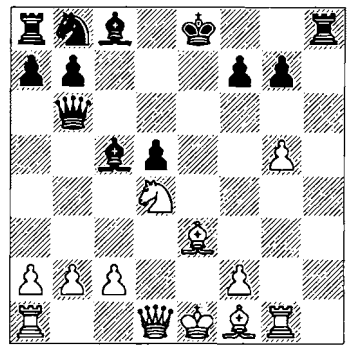
Once again, White can ignore the threat to the h-pawn. After 11 ♗e3 ♗xh4 12 ♕d2 (12 ♕e2 can be answered by 12...0-0! 13 0-0-0 ♘c6 14 ♘f5 ♗f6 with unclear consequences) 12...♘c6 13 0-0-0 ♗f6 14 ♗b5 ♗d7 15 ♗xc6 bxc6 16 g5 hxg5 17 ♗xg5 ♔f8 White retains some compensation.

11...hxg5 12 hxg5 ♗c5!?

A somewhat strange-looking move, but not without some logical reasoning behind it. Black wants to put pressure on d4, but he must avoid 12...♘c6 13 ♗b5 at the same time.

13 ♗e3 ♕b6 *(D)*

W



14 g6

I think White has a stronger move in 14 ♕e2!, although the position after 14...♔f8 15 0-0-0 ♘c6 16 c3 ♖h4! is not entirely clear. White can choose between a middlegame initiative given by 17 ♘xc6 ♗xe3+ 18 fxe3 bxc6 19 ♖d4 ♖h8 20 g6 f6 21 e4, and 17 ♘b3 ♗xe3+ (17...d4 is cut down by 18 ♕c4!) 18 ♕xe3 ♕xe3+ 19 fxe3 ♘e7 20 ♗g2, which delivers a promising endgame.

14...♘c6!?

In typical Sicilian fashion Black makes a developing move, leaving it to his king to take care of himself. I saw I couldn't play 14...♕xb2 on the account of 15 gxf7+ ♔xf7 (no help is coming by the way of 15...♔f8 16 ♘e6+ ♗xe6 17 ♗xc5+ ♔xf7 18 ♗d4) 16 ♕f3+ ♔e8 17 ♖xg7 ♕xa1+ 18 ♔e2 with checkmate delivered shortly.

The alternative was to play 14...fxg6, but I didn't like Black's prospects after 15 ♗d3 or 15 ♕d3.

15 ♗b5!

It's amazing how persistent some strategic ideas are; they can survive through any tactical turmoil. In this variation it seems like ...♘c6 is always answered by ♗b5, no matter what. Well, the control over the d4-square is crucial for the outcome of the battle. Bogdan refused to get distracted by 15 gxf7+ or 15 ♕e2 (both

would be answered by 15...♔f8), and, as a reward, kept his advantage going. Only a calculating lapse at a critical point few moves later allowed me to escape with a draw.

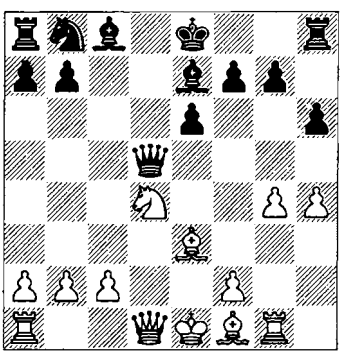
I can't say I was happy with my opening experiment in that game. An isolated pawn and very shaky king represent two major problems, which I was not quite able to solve in the above game. My lengthy post-game analysis did nothing but confirm what I already knew.

I simply had no other choice than to return to the theoretically approved line, which promises Black no more than equality, and even that can only be achieved with very precise play. I don't think I came to the grips with that reality during the following game.

Fedorowicz – Yermolinsky
Chicago 1998

10...♕xd5 11 ♗e3 *(D)*

B



In this position Black must play 11...♗d7!, preparing ...♘c6. He survives 12 ♗g2 thanks to the trick 12...♕c4! 13 c3 (13 ♗xb7?? ♕b4+) 13...♘c6, equalizing. White can try 12 ♘b5 instead, but he hardly gets a lot against the isolated pawn after 12...♗xb5! 13 ♕xd5 exd5 14 ♗xb5+ ♘c6 15 0-0-0 a6. For example, 16 ♗a4 (16 ♗xc6+ bxc6 17 ♖ge1 0-0-0 18 h5 =; 16 ♗e2 0-0-0 17 h5 d4 18 ♗f4 ♗g5 19 ♗xg5 hxg5 20 ♖ge1 ♖he8 =) 16...0-0-0 17 h5 d4 18 ♗f4 ♗h4! with sufficient counterplay.

I don't know what interfered with my thinking process, but I quickly played an inferior move.

11...a6? 12 ♕d2!

This eliminates the ...♕c4-b4+ idea, thus freezing Black's queenside. John showed his determination to ignore the h-pawn, and my analysis confirms he was right. Now 12...♗xh4?! would run into the disruptive 13 ♕c3!, and then:

a) White's attack is raging on after 13...0-0 14 0-0-0! ♕xa2 15 ♗c4 ♕a1+ 16 ♔d2 ♕a4 17 g5!, with both 17...e5 18 g6! ♔h8 19 gxf7 ♗f6 20 ♗xh6! and 17...hxg5 18 ♗xg5 ♗xg5+ 19 ♖xg5 ♖d8 20 ♔e2 being quite convincing illustrations.

b) 13...♘d7 14 ♗c4 ♕e4 15 0-0-0 gives White a scary lead in development. 15...♘e5? is no go, as 16 ♘f5! exf5 17 ♗d5 wins outright, but 15...♘b6 brings no relief: 16 f3 ♕g6 17 ♗b3.

As the game went, John seized a nice advantage after...

12...♘d7 13 c4 ♕d6 14 0-0-0

...and was able to turn it into a convincing victory.

These two games well illustrate how treacherous Black's path to equality can be after 8 h4!?.

The highly recommended 'universal' method of dealing with early flank attacks, the pawn counterblow in the centre, 8...d5, doesn't even come close to shattering White's position. And why should it? After all, White can always make time for hiding his king on the queenside (Black's position lacks punch due to his own underdevelopment), thus making his kingside pawn-storm totally acceptable from the classical point of view. He just does these two things, development and pawn attack, in a different order.

With all the bases covered I can now return to the position after 7...♗e7 in the game V.Fedorov-Yermolinsky. My opponent chose a different path that has also been trodden on numerous occasions.

8 ♗e3

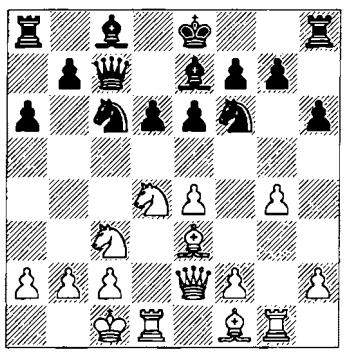
This move sends a message. White shows his willingness to slow down his offensive in order to consolidate the strategic gains on the kingside with speedy development, aimed at castling queenside. Black gets a little breather, but not for long.

8 ... ♘c6
9 ♕e2

There are a few advantages this move has over the usual 9 ♕d2. The g4-pawn stays extra protected, and the queen doesn't block the d-file, where the white rook will soon be opposing the black queen, creating a threat of e5. Remember, that centre push is White's attacking Option Number 1. To take care of it Black makes two typically Sicilian moves.

9 ... a6
10 0-0-0 ♕c7 *(D)*

W



Even a casual look at the diagrammed position is enough to predict the hard times coming for Black. His king is in the centre, his pieces are under-developed, and there's no visible positional factors to counterbalance.

No wonder the best masters of the early 20th century would flat out refuse even to consider Black's position as playable. But today's players do! Here I must bow my head to the giants of the game, the post-war generation of chessplayers, who brought us the Sicilian Defence.

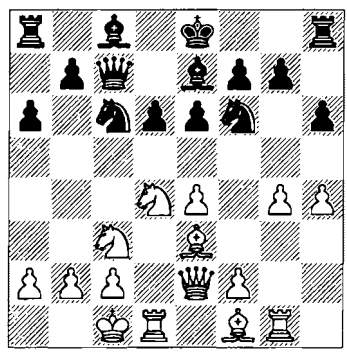
Open Lev Polugaevsky's book and read his heart-warming story of creating his own system 7...b5 in the Najdorf. Think how much work was invested in finding those amazing ideas and how much courage it took to put it to the test against the best players in the world. A whole new philosophy of **counterattack** was drawn out of this unforgettable experience.

When your opponent is attacking, two things usually happen. His pawns march forward, thus creating holes in his position, and his pieces are drifting away from the centre. These tendencies can easily undermine a seemingly superior position. The defender should have the presence of mind to notice the underlying changes and have faith in his ability to turn things around.

11 h4?! *(D)*

Logical and aggressive as it is, this move allows Black his first shot at counterplay. 11 f4! serves the same purpose, to prepare the g5 push, only much more effectively.

B



11 ... h5!

'Don't play on the side of the board where the opponent has an advantage' – remember that message from the classical school of chess? I bet the people who gave this advice knew better for themselves, otherwise they wouldn't have been writing the classics.

With this seemingly illogical advance Black fights to achieve important goals. What was so dangerous about the g4-g5 push? The knight would be driven away from f6 to d7, where it would inadvertently block his own light-squared bishop, which would leave the e6-pawn hanging after White's move g5-g6. And when e6 goes, there goes the entire black position. A

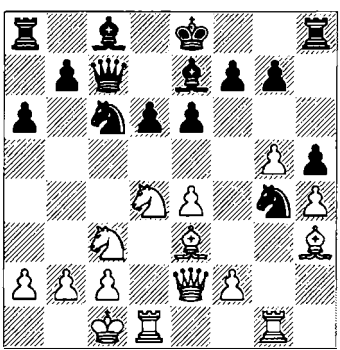
pretty simple chain of logic. So, what Black wants is to win the g4-square and so temporarily – it's all it takes! – slow White down.

After 12 gxh5 ♘xh5 Black is OK, simply because his modest but sturdy pawn-centre survives. So, White feels compelled to continue his strategic plan even at the cost of opening the b-file.

12 ♘xc6?

White could delay this capture for one move, and do it after 12 g5 ♘g4 – it doesn't matter, because it's fundamentally wrong. So what if the black knight gets exchanged for White's dark-squared bishop? Good-bad piece considerations are better left for the Queen's Gambit Exchange Variation – look it up in the beginning of this chapter – and such. The initiative is what matters here, and the initiative is what White would retain after the correct 13 ♗h3! *(D)*. Black then would have to think hard about how to continue.

B

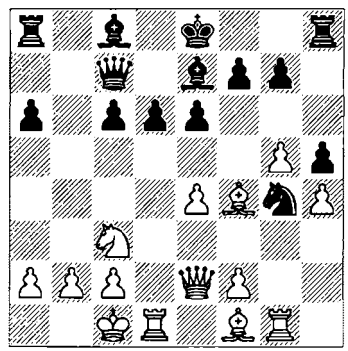


a) 13...♘xe3? (this is simply bad; I'd never do it) 14 ♕xe3 g6 (14...♘e5?! only helps White: 15 f4 ♘c4 16 ♕g3 g6 17 f5, etc.) 15 f4 0-0 16 f5. What we've got here is White's Attacking Option 2 well under way. White attacks the e6-pawn in a situation where ...e5 is all but ruled out (♘c3-d5). All because Black was late with his counterplay. Imagine if he had ...b5 in, then ...b4 would push that knight away, thus making ...e5 possible. So much time has been wasted on ...♘f6-g4xe3, and now White's play rolls on unhindered: 16...♘xd4 17 ♕xd4 ♖d8 18 ♖gf1. This line demonstrates how little is amiss in White's attacking machine with the dark-squared bishop gone.

b) 13...g6! (the needs of the position are best served by this quiet move that eliminates White's most dangerous threat, which is undoubtedly g5-g6, and lures his opponent into winning a pawn) 14 ♗xg4 hxg4 15 ♘xc6 bxc6 16 ♕xg4 ♖b8. That would lead to a scenario similar to the game continuation, but with some extra tempi for White.

12 ... bxc6
13 g5 ♘g4
14 ♗f4 *(D)*

B



As I mentioned before, my opponent has shown an exaggerated respect for this particular piece. He gets nothing but headaches from his dark-squared bishop for the rest of the game.

14 ... ♖b8! *(D)*

This move signals the beginning of the counterattack. The move itself is easy to find – the rook goes to the newly-opened file. The question is, why does it take preference over, say, 14...0-0? The reasons are in what I call the philosophy of Sicilian Counterattack. Black must stay active and interfere with his opponent's plans if he expects to survive this opening.

Here, despite his success over the previous 3-4 moves, Black is not quite out of the woods yet. Given time, White will play ♗h3xg4 winning a pawn, and, more importantly, unlocking the kingside for a future attack with h5. As you

can imagine, Black castling kingside would then look rather inappropriate.

Thanks to the changed pawn-structure (a big minus of the 12 ♘xc6 move) Black now can give the ...e5 more consideration, because under the present circumstances it will not surrender the important d5-square. Let's see now it would work out: 14...0-0 15 ♗h3? e5 16 ♗d2. The g4-knight has no 'safe' retreat-squares from the f3 threat, but there comes a tactical shot: 16...♘xf2!, and Black wins.

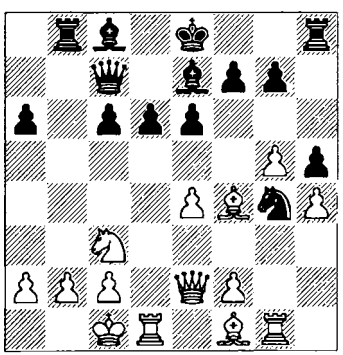
This random line should not, however, overturn the positional considerations we described above. To counterbalance it, I can suggest another line which I would definitely consider, had I been in White's shoes here: 14...0-0 15 ♖xg4! hxg4 (15...e5 16 ♖g1 exf4 17 ♕xh5 must be good for White, who complements his extra pawn with good attacking chances) 16 e5!. This inspired sacrifice gives White one of the following:

a) A long-term initiative after 16...dxe5 17 ♗xe5 ♕a5 18 ♗g2, thanks to his powerful bishops and Black's development problems.

b) Excellent attacking prospects against the abandoned black king in 16...d5 17 ♕xg4 c5 18 h5.

c) An immediate win after 16...♖d8? 17 exd6 ♗xd6 18 ♖xd6 ♖xd6 19 ♕e5.

W



15	**b3**	**♕a5**
16	**♘a4**	**♕b4!**

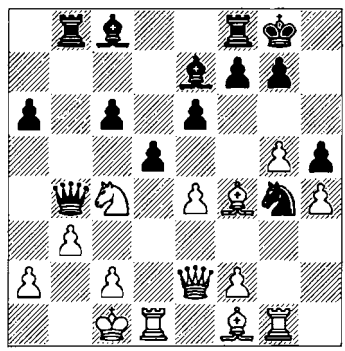
Black's queen and rook are not supported by the other pieces, but they are good enough to create some annoying threats, such as 17...♕a3+. White begins drifting onto the defensive.

17	**♘b2**	**0-0**

Finally (only now!), when White's opening initiative has been contained, Black takes time to castle. White's next looks like a no-brainer, but...

18	**♘c4?**	**d5!** *(D)*

W



This sacrifice jump-starts the swift queenside attack.

19	**♗xb8?!**	

While 19 ♗d2 allows the cute 19...♕xc4!, his best chance may have been represented by the horrendously passive 19 ♘b2 e5 20 ♗d2 ♕c5 21 ♗e1.

19	**...**	**dxc4**
20	**♗f4**	**e5**

White's dark-squared bishop is the target! As soon as it leaves the diagonal, by 21 ♗g3 for instance, Black wins with 21...♕a3+ 22 ♔b1 c3.

21	**♗e3**	**♘xe3**
22	**♕xe3**	**♗c5**

The same thing is now happening to the white queen.

23	**♕g3**	**c3**
24	**♖d3**	

The white queen is overloaded after 24 ♔b1 ♗xf2!.

24	**...**	**♕a3+**
25	**♔d1**	**♕xa2**
26	**♖xc3**	**♕a1+**
27	**♔e2**	

27 ♔d2 ♗b4 is hopeless.

27 ... ♗g4+
28 ♔d2

A big time-trouble blunder, but 28 ♖f3 ♕d4 29 ♗g2 ♕xe4+ 30 ♔f1 ♖d8 is not a pretty sight if you are White.

28 ... ♕d1# (0-1)

Note the sorry fate of White's light-squared bishop, which never took part in the action and only interfered with white rooks' coordination.

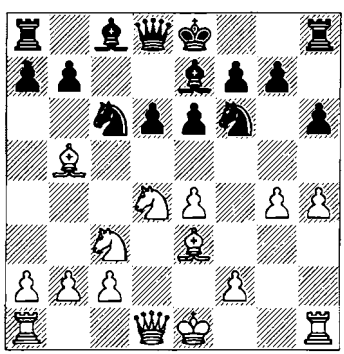
In the view of this, White's idea to get rid of that bishop early, invented by the Latvian attacking demon Zigurds Lanka, suddenly makes some sense.

Lanka – Yermolinsky

USSR Young Masters Ch, Jurmala 1983

1	**e4**	**c5**
2	**♘f3**	**d6**
3	**d4**	**cxd4**
4	**♘xd4**	**♘f6**
5	**♘c3**	**e6**
6	**g4**	**h6**
7	**h4**	**♗e7**
8	**♗e3**	**♘c6**
9	**♗b5?!** *(D)*	

B



White leaves his rook on the h-file, anticipating it to get open after the eventual push g4-g5. For that to happen the rook needs to be protected, so White's last move has cleared the back rank, enabling him to connect the rooks without delay. It also accelerates his development to maximum speed, with moves like f4, ♕f3 and 0-0-0 coming up next.

If so, why the 'dubious' mark? The thing is, the ♗b5 move will inevitably lead to an exchange on c6, thus improving Black's pawn-structure and giving him the two bishops.

I wrote this and thought how dogmatic it sounds. What can I do, sometimes even the 'listed' positional elements can be important. No one here is attempting to rewrite a positional theory of chess by eliminating old postulates and introducing new ones. The whole idea is to reject any postulates in principle, only to be replaced by concrete analysis.

It took me two shots at White's position to uncover the drawbacks of Zigurds's idea.

In our previous encounter, **Lanka – Yermolinsky**, *Army Team Ch, Erevan 1982*, I quickly played a couple of natural-looking moves: **9...♗d7 10 ♕e2 h5** If not now, then on the next move it will forced anyway. The alternative was to exchange a few pieces, but the ending after 10...♘xd4 11 ♗xd4 ♗xb5 12 ♕xb5+ ♕d7 13 f3 brings Black little relief. He still has to worry about the g5 threat (obviously, White will castle long first chance he gets a free move), but the powerful d4-bishop also looks the other way, keeping a keen eye on the a7-pawn. These small details turn an otherwise promising Sicilian endgame into nothing but trouble. **11 gxh5 ♘xh5** 11...♖xh5 looks better, but White continues with 12 0-0-0 ♕c7 13 f4. I wanted to stop f4, by having the reply ...♘g3. **12 0-0-0 a6?** Careless. I should have anticipated the following sequence. **13 ♗xc6 bxc6 14 e5! d5 15 ♘b3** White has established a firm grip on the dark squares – a typical strategy: after parting with a bishop, develop your play on the squares of opposite colour – and after a few mistakes on my part quickly demolished Black's feeble defences.

Next time around I came better prepared!

9 ... ♕c7!

The queen steps away from the trouble brewing on the d-file, while the light-squared bishop is better off on the initial position.

10	**f4**	**a6**
11	**♗xc6+**	**bxc6** *(D)*

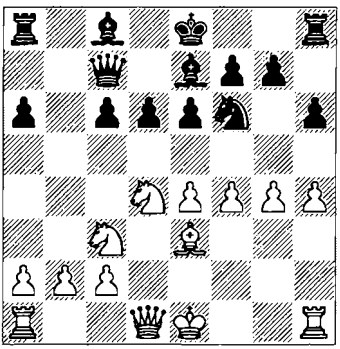
Just like in Fedorov-Yermolinsky Black is very happy with this pawn-structure change. With the pawn having moved from b7 to c6 Black gets:

a) extra control over the d5-square; thus ...e5 becomes possible;

b) an opportunity to play ...d5;

c) the half-open b-file to attack the white king.

W



12 ♕f3

The threat of g5 looms large. We'd think of 12...h5!? as the way to fight against it, but I found a more direct way to deal with Lanka's ambitious plans.

A general piece of advice: don't panic when your opponent is trying to get to your king; keep your tactical eye sharply peeled. There will be chances to shake the attacker with a counterblow. Timing is very important, however; one move too late and his attack will crash through.

12 ... c5
13 ♘de2?

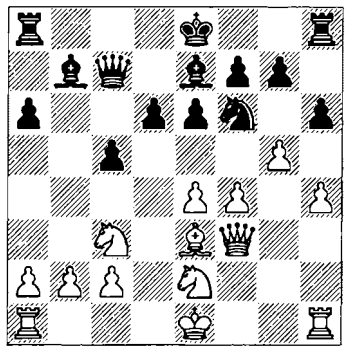
If my opponent realized what was coming, he would have thought of 13 ♘b3 as a safer route.

13 ... ♗b7
14 g5 *(D)*

In case of 14 ♘g3, there comes 14...d5! – an automatic response. White suffers badly from underdevelopment and weakening of the entire light-square complex.

14 ... ♘xe4!

B



Making sure White will regret the liberties of his opening strategy. The light-squared bishop, so casually exchanged a few moves ago, is going to be missed in the defence.

15 ♘xe4 d5

Black's sacrifice turns out to be only temporary. The b7-bishop comes to life, and where's his white counterpart? The line 16 ♘4g3 d4 17 ♘e4 hxg5! 18 fxg5 (18 hxg5 ♖xh1+ 19 ♕xh1 dxe3 20 0-0-0 is totally busted by 20...♖d8!) 18...dxe3 19 0-0-0 0-0 (delayed castling once again) 20 ♕xe3 ♕e5 21 ♘2c3 ♖ad8, with ...♖d4 coming in, illustrates it well.

16 ♘xc5 ♗xc5
17 ♘d4

Not 17 ♗xc5 d4; but the alternative 17 ♗d4! would promise better defensive chances.

17 ... hxg5
18 hxg5?

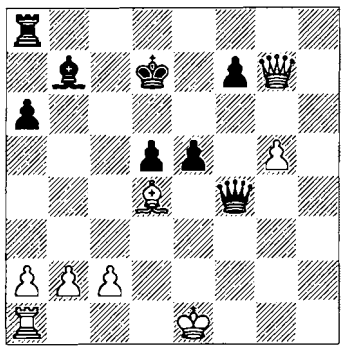
In the Sicilian the initiative is more important than pawns; thus 18 0-0-0!? has to be a better try. Never mind that Black keeps his extra pawn with 18...♖c8 19 c3 gxh4 20 ♕g4 ♗f8 (the attempt to get cute by 20...♗a3?! may backfire: 21 bxa3 ♕xc3+ 22 ♔b1 ♕xe3 23 ♕xg7 ♕e4+ 24 ♔a1 ♕h7 25 ♕e5 ♔d7 26 f5 with a strong white initiative) 21 ♖xh4 ♖xh4 22 ♕xh4 ♕c4 – there would be a lot of play left.

The game continuation led Lanka to a total disaster.

18 ... ♖xh1+
19 ♕xh1 ♗xd4
20 ♗xd4 ♕xf4
21 ♕h8+ ♔d7

22 ♕xg7 e5! *(D)*

W



This shot changes the make-up of the position. White's hopes to keep his dark-square blockades are shattered, and the black pieces will flood in, beginning with the rook.

23 ♗f2 ♖c8
24 ♕h7 ♖c4
25 ♔f1

25 ♕h3+ was necessary. I think I would be content with taking a technical endgame win after 25...♕g4 26 ♕xg4+ ♖xg4 27 ♔e2 ♖xg5.

25 ... ♕f3!

From here the black queen plays a role of the baseball cut-off man, preventing the white queen from running home to save the king's life. There's a certain justice in the fact that White is dying on the light squares after giving up the bishop in such casual fashion.

26 ♖e1 ♖f4
27 ♖e2

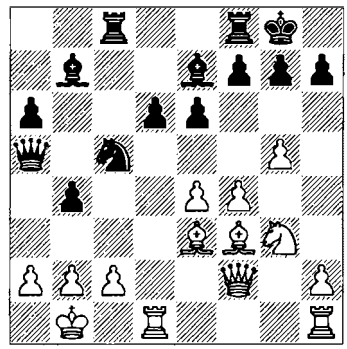
The only defence, but there comes the last black piece.

27 ... a5
28 b3 d4
29 ♖d2 ♗e4
30 ♕h8 ♗f5
0-1

So, you grab the initiative, attack and win; is it that simple in the Sicilian? Not at all.

The next example shows how balanced attack and defence must be to guarantee success in such complex situations.

B



Tate – Yermolinsky
New York Open 1993

This position represents a more typical class than what we saw before. Both players have completed their development, castling to the opposite sides of the board. Next on the agenda is who gets to the opponent's king first. I understood that much and went on with a logical continuation.

20...♘a4

I was not entirely happy with the way I had handled the opening since White did manage to get something going. I knew I had made some errors earlier, but nevertheless I felt rather optimistic – that is, until Emory Tate played an energetic move aimed directly at my king.

21 f5!

White ignores the non-existent (as yet!) threat of ...♘c3+, and kicks off his own attack. I spent a lot of time here being torn between a desire to attack by 21...♘c3+ 22 bxc3 bxc3 23 ♔a1 ♖c4, which is refuted by 24 ♖d4 ♖xd4 25 ♗xd4 ♗xg5 26 ♘e2, and a nagging feeling that defence won't do it either. A sample line is 21...♖fe8 22 ♘h5 exf5 23 exf5, when 23...♖xc2 seems winning, but after 24 ♕xc2 ♗xf3 25 ♘xg7, things are far from clear. I found myself in one of those situations I described in Part 1. My calculating ability was not sufficient to provide me with clear answers, and I had to go along with my intuition. I must admit that for this game my intuition showed up overly aggressive and adrenaline-driven.

21...d5!?

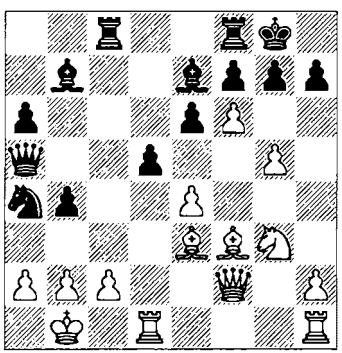
This has the idea of giving my bishop some elbow room – he will certainly need it after White plays f6.

22 f6!? *(D)*

Another point of 21...d5 is revealed after 22 exd5 ♗xd5 23 ♗xd5 exd5 24 f6 ♘c3+, and Black will be able to utilize the b-file now, as the useless b7-bishop is gone: 25 bxc3 bxc3 26 ♔a1 ♗a3 27 ♗c1 ♖b8 with a decisive attack. White could also try prophylaxis, but 22 ♔a1 ♖fd8 23 f6 ♗f8 would give Black an excellent game.

Emory may have certain shortcomings when it comes to all-around play, but he's not the kind of guy to back down from a challenge. After the text-move I had to choose between defence and counterattack yet again.

B



22...♘c3+?!

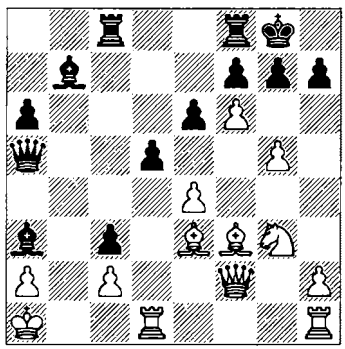
With all the flash and loud noises this move brings about, a sober post-game analysis proved it could be refuted by a cold-blooded defence. The defensive option 22...gxf6 was to be preferred:

a) 23 ♘h5 fxg5 24 ♗xg5? ♗xg5 25 ♖hg1 dxe4 (25...f6 is also fine) 26 ♕d4 f6 27 ♘xf6+ ♔h8!, and White has nothing to show; any knight move will be answered by 28...e5; better is 24 exd5, hoping for 24...♗xd5? 25 ♗xd5 exd5 26 ♘f6+ ♗xf6 27 ♕xf6, and White is doing great, so Black must tough it out in defence after 24...exd5 25 ♗d4. For all I know, two pawns up, he may succeed.

b) 23 gxf6 ♗xf6 24 ♘h5 ♗xb2 (with that pawn gone Black only needs one move to get to White's king) 25 ♖hg1+ ♔h8 26 ♗d4+ ♗xd4 27 ♕xd4+ f6 28 ♘xf6 (here it comes) 28...♘c3+ 29 ♔c1 ♘xa2+ 30 ♔d2 b3+ 31 ♔e2 ♘c3+, and Black wins.

23 bxc3 bxc3 24 ♔a1 ♗a3 *(D)*

W



The main idea of 21...d5 has been accomplished: the bishop joins the attack. The line 25 fxg7 ♕b4 26 gxf8♕+ ♖xf8 27 ♖b1 ♗b2+ shows how dangerous it can be.

However, there was a straightforward defence that would leave me empty-handed. It begins with 25 ♗c1!. Now Black has no time to get comfortable with the kingside, 25...g6 26 ♗xa3 ♕xa3 27 ♖b1 beats it off; so I'd have to burn my bridges **before** crossing them (that's the way American chess maven Dr Daniel Olim describes Alexander Shabalov's style of play) and play 25...♖c5 (25...♖c4 is no improvement: 26 fxg7 ♕b4 27 gxf8♕+ ♔xf8 28 ♗xa3 ♕xa3 29 ♕b6, over and out) 26 fxg7 ♖fc8 (Black gets it on the chin after 26...♔xg7 27 ♘h5+ ♔g8 28 ♘f6+ ♔g7 29 ♕h4, while 26...♕b4 27 gxf8♕+ ♔xf8 28 ♗xa3 ♕xa3 sheds too much material and loses to 29 ♕xc5+ ♕xc5 30 ♖b1) 27 ♗h5! (the key move) 27...♖8c7 28 ♖hf1 ♗b2+ 29 ♗xb2 cxb2+ 30 ♔b1. These variations only prove how badly I overreacted on move 22.

Luckily, White chose an inferior move.

25 ♖b1? ♗b2+ 26 ♖xb2 cxb2+ 27 ♔b1 g6

Suddenly Black is very much in the game; he may even be better here. White's attack has

been slowed down, and that's not a kind of change Emory Tate was happy with. His subsequent play was marred by bad time-trouble.

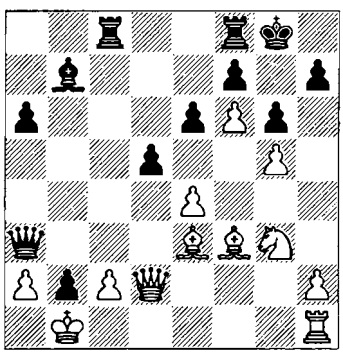
28 ♕d2?

He had to play 28 ♖d1. Now 28...dxe4? 29 ♗xe4 ♗xe4 30 ♘xe4 ♖fd8 only helps White, who welcomes exchanges in principle. The essence of this position is that with Black's firepower greatly reduced, he'll simply be material down.

I think I'd try something like 28...♖c4, hoping to attack the king.

28...♕a3! *(D)*

W



White's clumsy bishops on the third rank require protection. It gives Black just enough time to get to the king. The rook-lift is coming.

29 ♖e1 ♖c4

To stop 30...♖a4 White has to lose a tempo.

30 ♕d3 ♖c3 31 ♕d4 ♖xc2!?

I wanted to speed it up and also thought White would get a ray of hope in case of 31...♖fc8 32 ♗d1, but the obvious 32...♖8c5 somehow went unnoticed.

32 exd5

He had no choice but to accept the very difficult position arising after 32 ♔xc2 ♕xa2 33 ♔d3 ♖d8 34 e5 b1♕+ 35 ♖xb1 ♕xb1+ 36 ♔e2 a5. The text-move just loses.

32...♖fc8 33 ♘e2 ♗xd5 34 ♗xd5 ♖xe2

With the same motif: 35 ♖xe2 ♖c1+.

35 ♖d1 exd5 36 ♕xd5 0-1

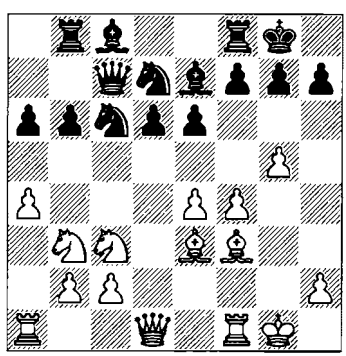
Emory resigned before I could take his e3-bishop off the board.

To complete my little overview here is another typical scenario: White castles short, and then attacks with the g-pawn. The pace of play then is much slower, and both sides must show a lot of restraint in executing their plans.

I. Ivanov – Yermolinsky
World Open, Philadelphia 1994

1	**e4**	**c5**
2	**♘f3**	**d6**
3	**d4**	**cxd4**
4	**♘xd4**	**♘f6**
5	**♘c3**	**♘c6**
6	**♗c4**	**♕b6**
7	**♘b3**	**e6**
8	**0-0**	**♗e7**
9	**♗e3**	**♕c7**
10	**f4**	**0-0**
11	**♗e2?!**	**a6**
12	**a4**	**b6**
13	**♗f3**	**♖b8**
14	**g4**	**♘d7**
15	**g5** *(D)*	

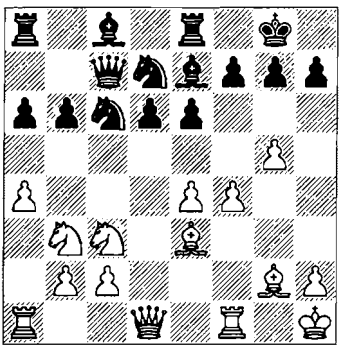
B



It is interesting to compare this position with a similar one, resulting after the moves **1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗e2 e6 7 0-0 ♗e7 8 f4 0-0 9 a4 ♕c7 10 ♔h1 ♘c6 11 ♗e3 ♖e8 12 ♗f3 ♗d7 13 ♘b3 b6 14 g4 ♗c8 15 g5 ♘d7 16 ♗g2** *(D)*.

This is a very well known situation. Lots of games have begun that way, but there's one I'm particularly impressed with.

B



Tiviakov – Van Wely
Groningen 1995

16...♗b7 17 ♕h5 g6 18 ♕h3 ♘b4

This is too risky, because White can ignore the threat to the pawn. Better was the standard 18...♗f8, in order to meet 19 f5 by 19...♘de5.

19 f5! ♘xc2?

This fails to stop White. Opening the e-file and the long diagonal with 19...exf5 is a big improvement. Then I thought White might get something going with 20 exf5 ♘xc2 21 fxg6 hxg6 22 ♘d5!? (22 ♖xf7? ♗xg2+ 23 ♔xg2 ♘xe3+ eliminates White's attacking potential) but Black has 22...♕c4!, when White can still force a draw with 23 ♖xf7 ♔xf7 24 ♕h7+, while 23 ♘d2 ♕xd5! 24 ♗xd5 ♗xd5+ 25 ♔g1 ♗e6 gives Black a lot for the queen. I suspect Loek avoided 19...exf5 because of the quiet 20 ♘d4!. White reinforces his control over the vital squares (c2 included) and is still ready to pounce with ♖xf7, in case the f-file gets open.

Hence Black's best is still 19...♘e5!. After 20 fxe6 fxe6 the pawn looks appetizing but can give White indigestion after 21 ♕xe6+? ♔h8, as 22...♗c8, 22...♗xg5 and 22...♘xc2 threaten at the same time. Better is 21 ♘d4 ♕d7, when White has a sure plus, but he's not winning yet.

20 fxg6 fxg6 21 ♖f7!

This typical shot brings Black's position down like a house of cards.

21...♘f8 22 ♖af1 ♕c4 23 ♗d2 e5 24 ♘d5 ♗xd5 25 exd5 h5 26 gxh6 ♔h8 27 ♖g7 ♘h7 28 ♕e6 1-0

It's easy to see that my situation was far superior to what Loek van Wely got himself in.

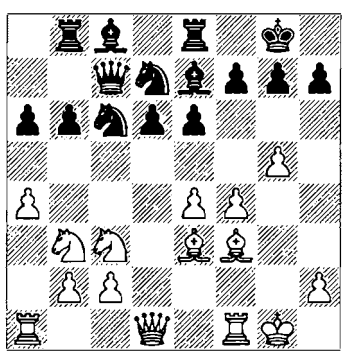
In my game both sides took an extra move each to get to this set-up, White with the bishop (c4-e2), Black with the queen (b6-c7). The difference is the ♘b3 move, which Tiviakov played only after Loek's 12...♗d7 (which prepared ...♘xd4 to be followed by ...♗c6), while Igor did it with the black bishop on c8. As a result I was two tempi up compared with Loek, who had to waste them on ...♗c8-d7-c8. White may have saved one of those on the king move, as it remains to be seen if the king will be better off on h1 at all.

Actually, my position was so good that I could get by without my next move, but simply continue with 15...♘a5!. The threat of 16...♘c4 is very unpleasant, but White can hardly be happy with 16 ♘xa5 bxa5, which opens a lot of room on the queenside to be used by Black.

15 ... ♖e8 *(D)*

These days this little move is considered a must-do in Black's defensive schemes. When White plays f5, Black must be able to counter it with ...♘de5 without worrying about f6, which now will be answered by ...♗f8. In addition, the e6-pawn gets extra protection. All these details only became clear after many years of theoretical research and practical application.

W



16 ♗g2 ♗f8
17 ♕h5!

The most direct and dangerous plan. White intends to lift a rook on the third rank and

further to h3. There's also an additional benefit. Now 17...♘a5 is coming a bit late: 18 ♖f3 g6 19 ♕h4 ♗g7 20 ♖af1, and White is ready to answer 20...♘c4 with 21 ♗c1.

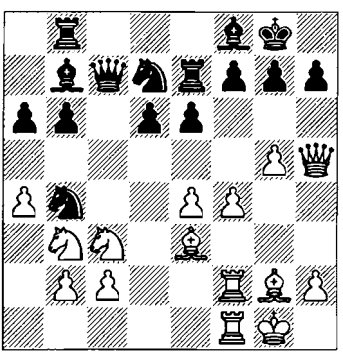
Igor's energetic move made me want to slow White down with a threat to the c2-pawn. All this is suspiciously reminiscent of the Tiviakov-Van Wely game, but thanks to the extra tempi my kingside was better protected.

17 ... ♘b4
18 ♖f2

The rook abandons its ambitions, but 18 ♖ac1 g6 19 ♕h4 ♗g7 wouldn't bother Black much. Now it looks like White will be playing for the f4-f5 advance, which, generally speaking, offers him very little, unless some sort of sacrificial attack breaks through. I made sure it won't happen in this game.

18 ... ♗b7
19 ♖af1 ♖e7! *(D)*

W



Brought you by the genius of Garry Kasparov, who shocked the chess world with this move in the decisive Game 24 of the 1985 Championship match against Anatoly Karpov. Boy, did it look ugly when he played it, but a few moves later his ideas crystallized into a beautiful counterplay pattern, and Garry won the game, match and title! Many players, the author included, took notice of the unusual rook manoeuvre.

As a matter of fact, Black anticipates the e-file getting open, so the rook will find employment some time soon.

20 ♗c1

Already White must be on the alert: 20 ♘d4 g6 21 ♕h4 e5 gives Black good chances.

20 ... g6
21 ♕h4 ♘c5

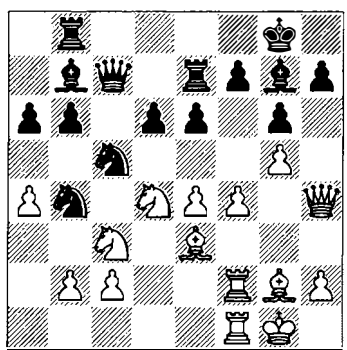
After a long string of defensive preparatory moves Black finally makes a threat to White's position. That's 22...♘xc2. Keep in mind that ♖h3 will not lead to checkmate: Black always has ...h5!

22 ♘d4

The knight had to enter the danger zone, but the ...e5 shot is now in the air.

22 ... ♗g7
23 ♗e3 *(D)*

B



23 ... ♖be8!

Backing up a passive rook with yet another one would have been shocking, if it hadn't been done in the past.

24 ♖d2

One move, 25 ♘de2, and ...e5 will be answered by f5.

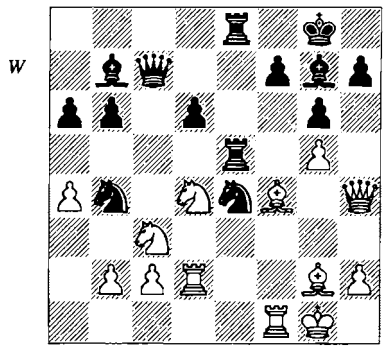
24 ... e5!

Not a chance in the world!

25 fxe5 ♖xe5
26 ♗f4 ♘xe4!? *(D)*

The simple move 26...♖5e7 would give Black a nice game, but I wanted more. I could already see the exchange sacrifice and the position that would actually happen in the game after mass-exchanges on e4; I just didn't know how to eliminate White's other possibilities. Transposing the moves with 26...♖xe4? would

be wrong as White can play 27 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 28 ♖e1! with a very unpleasant pin.



27 ♘xe4

Igor played this quickly, and I felt a great relief. It was hard to get through the tactical mess initiated by the alternative, 27 ♗xe5. Being short of time I was unsure of my calculations. In retrospect it seems there was not much White could do there: 27...♘xd2 28 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 (just step around 28...♘xf1?? 29 ♗f6, if you please) 29 ♖f4 ♗xg2 30 ♔xg2 ♕b7+ 31 ♔g1 ♘d5!? (also good is 31...♔g8) 32 ♕h6+ ♔g8 33 ♖h4 ♖e1+ 34 ♔f2 ♖f1+ 35 ♔g3 ♘xc3 36 ♕xh7+ ♔f8 37 ♕h8+ ♔e7, and White's desperation attack runs out of gas.

27	**...**	**♖xe4**
28	**♗xe4**	**♖xe4**

Now 29 ♕f2? loses on the spot to 29...♖xd4 30 ♖xd4 ♕c6, while 29 ♖e1 ♕e7 brings no relief. All in all, White's position is seriously compromised by his weak king and discoordinated pieces. Igor played the best move.

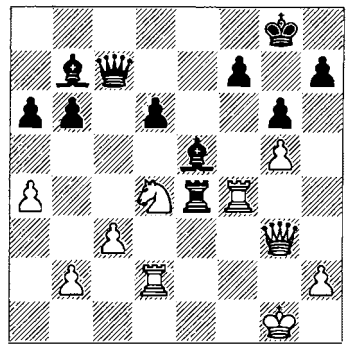
29	**c3**	**♘d5**
30	**♕g3**	

30 ♘e2 is no improvement, as 30...♕c5+ 31 ♕f2 ♖xf4 wins on the spot, e.g. 32 ♘xf4 ♘xf4 33 ♕xc5 ♘h3#.

30	**...**	**♘xf4**
31	**♖xf4**	**♗e5** *(D)*

With this move Black gets his exchange back, while retaining his positional and material gains.

32 ♖df2



Not much hope is offered to White by 32 ♖xe4 ♗xg3 33 ♖e8+ ♔g7 34 hxg3 ♕d7 (better than 34...♕c5 35 ♖e7) 35 ♖de2 ♕g4 36 ♔f2 ♕xg5, with a win just around the corner.

32	**...**	**♗xf4**
33	**♖xf4**	**♕e7**
34	**♖xe4**	**♕xe4**
35	**♔f2**	**♔g7!**
36	**♕xd6?!**	**♕g2+**
37	**♔e1**	**♕xg5**
38	**♕xb6**	**♕g1+**
39	**♔d2**	**♕xh2+**
40	**♔e3**	**♕e5+**
41	**♔d2**	**♕f4+**
42	**♔c2**	**♕e4+**
43	**♔d2**	**h5**

0-1

In conclusion of this rather messy account, I'd like to say that counterattacking patterns for Black in the Sicilian Defence are not easily defined. Yes, there is the c-file, and the pawn push ...b5-b4, but often a position will require different measures on the other side of the board or in the centre. Let me remind you once again that there is no ready-to-follow advice of how and, most importantly, when moves like ...d5 or ...e5 should be made. It all depends on the underlying nuances of a particular position.

Black will have to defend his king, no doubt about it, but the defence must be economical. The lack of space makes gathering your pieces around the king pointless, or often even harmful.

It is more important to get your counterplay going early – that's why castling is often delayed – to distract White from executing his plans unhindered. Be brave, and good luck – you might need it.

The Pros and Cons of the Double Fianchetto

The idea of the fianchetto is very attractive. Covered by the pawns the bishop is invulnerable to direct attacks from the opposing pieces, let it be rooks or knights. It also nicely complements the surrounding pawns, providing an impregnable barrier for the invading opponent's pieces – that's why the king often feels safe behind the fianchettoed bishop. The bishop is a long-range piece, so it doesn't have to be in the middle of the board to participate in action; from b2 (g2) it can exert pressure on the long diagonal that extends deep into the enemy camp. All these considerations made the bishop fianchetto an organic feature of many opening set-ups.

With emergence of the 'new' positional school of chess in the late 19th century, chessplayers slowly learned to appreciate the advantages of the fianchetto, as they began to realize that there's much more to the use of the bishop than just going to c4 or d3, only to be sacrificed on the kingside later. An important opening innovation was the discovery of the Catalan Opening, which soon became a valid weapon against the Queen's Gambit Declined, which was immensely popular at that time. After the moves 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 ♘f6, White goes 4 g3. In this new approach White seems to abandon the general idea of the Queen's Gambit (that is to play e3-e4 to eliminate the d5-pawn and obtain a spatial advantage), and he may have difficulties regaining the pawn after ...dxc4. The bishop cannot recapture, but it's looking forward to a bright future after the long diagonal opens up. The subsequent moves, 4...♗e7 5 ♗g2 0-0 6 0-0 ♘bd7 7 ♕c2 c6 8 ♖d1 b6 lead us directly to the topic, as White often chooses to fianchetto the other bishop with 8 b3. Notice how efficiently the white bishops work in providing support for the central pawns, and when the centre opens up their activity will only increase.

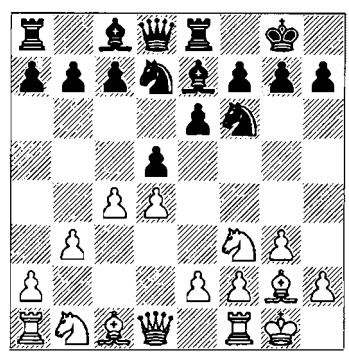
The convincing white victory in the following game went a long way to establishing my faith in the Catalan, and, despite being a tad naïve (both future grandmasters were teenagers back then), still serves as a good illustration of what was said above.

Yermolinsky – Malaniuk
Leningrad 1972

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 g3 ♗e7 5 ♗g2 0-0 6 0-0 ♘bd7 7 b3 ♖e8? *(D)*

Black chooses a passive system that is bound to crack and fail under the pressure of White's central strategy. The liberating advance ...e5, which this move is supposed to bring about, simply can't be achieved here, because of the extended control over the e5-square provided by White's fianchettoed dark-squared bishop.

Black has to take his time and slowly work towards solving the problem of the c8-bishop with a fianchetto of his own: ...c6, ...b6, and ...♗b7; hoping one day to equalize with ...c5.



8 ♗b2 ♘f8 9 ♘c3 c6 10 ♘e5!?

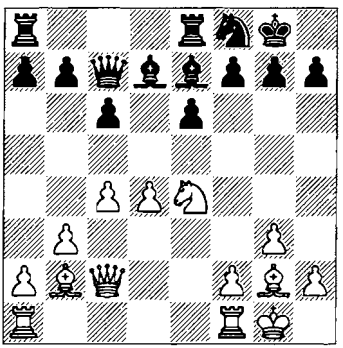
This is not a post-up play we saw in the Karlsbad QGD structure. White won't even try to support the knight with f4, and it will get exchanged on the next move. What's the point then? Very simple: White gains time for e4.

10...♘6d7 11 ♘xd7 ♗xd7 12 e4 dxe4

12...dxc4 13 bxc4 c5 14 d5 offers White a powerful protected passed pawn in the centre. It may not be such a big thing under different circumstances, but notice how far away the black knight is from blockading duty on d6.

13 ♘xe4 ♕c7 14 ♕c2 *(D)*

B



14...♘g6

A very important moment of the game. Having established superior centre control, White must now switch gears to consolidating his gains. The simple move 15 f4 would take care of the ...e5 possibility once and for all and free White's hands elsewhere on the board.

15 h4!?

About the move I made. A young player's desire to expand on the kingside is understandable. The pawn threatens to march all the way to h6 to weaken the dark squares around the black king – that would work out nicely for White's dark-squared bishop – and there's also time to be gained in the process. The black knight that took three moves to get to g6 can't find peace there, and soon will hit the road again. Nice ideas; too bad I failed to follow them up.

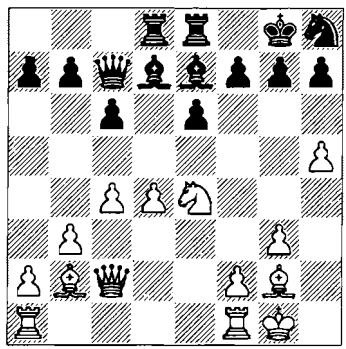
15...♖ad8?

It was easy to reject 15...e5? 16 h5 ♘f8 17 dxe5, and Black will never get his pawn back. The real question is, should Black play the prophylactic 15...h6, putting to stop the white h-pawn's ambitions. I would think so.

16 h5 ♘h8! *(D)*

Actually better than 16...♘f8, because Black is going to play ...f5 some time soon and bring the knight back via f7.

W



17 ♖fe1?

After a little kingside demonstration White switches back to the centre. It's interesting to see if he could be more persistent with his ideas.

a) 17 ♕c3 looks strong, but Black can answer it with the brave 17...f5. He seems to be doing well after 18 d5 ♗f8 19 d6?! (more prudent is 19 ♘g5, but Black holds with 19...♘f7) 19...♕b8 20 ♘c5 ♗c8. Amazing: all the black pieces are on the back rank, and I can see no way to take advantage of it: 21 h6 is parried by 21...e5. What's going on here?

b) 17 h6! is both logical and strong. After 17...gxh6 White continues with 18 d5! cxd5 19 ♘f6+ ♗xf6 20 ♗xf6, and the fianchettoed bishop's dreams finally come true. I'm surprised White didn't do that – I honestly thought I was a better player back then.

The text-move can't be criticized in itself; it's just inconsistent with 15 h4. By the way, if I wanted to consolidate my positional gains, why not do it in the most resolute way?

c) 17 f4 suggests itself. I imagine Vlad would have played 17...f5 18 ♘d2 ♘f7, getting a bit more breathing room for his pieces. White would then consider 19 ♘f3 ♗f6 20 ♖ad1 ♘h6 21 ♘e5 as a natural way of increasing his advantage.

17...♗c8? 18 ♖ad1?

All the above said about the possibility of h6 remained in force for one more move until Vlad moved on with his ideas.

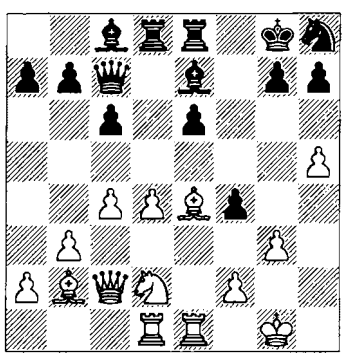
18...f5 19 ♘d2 f4?

Too bad he followed a good move with a really bad one. The text-move is so bad it can be considered a decisive mistake. The black pieces are not nearly ready to support any kind of offensive. The consolidating 19...♗f6 20 ♘f3 ♘f7 would be a reasonable continuation of Black's plan. In this new situation White should avoid the straightforward 21 ♘e5? ♘xe5 22 dxe5 ♖xd1 23 ♕xd1 ♖d8, where the recent exchanges and pawn-structure changes reduce his advantage to a minimum.

Instead, 21 b4! deserves attention. The liberating advance 21...e5 is still impossible (22 dxe5 ♖xd1 23 ♕xd1), and Black is hard-pressed to find anything worth trying.

20 ♗e4! *(D)*

B



I recall I was very pleased with this move. In my favourite book of Alexander Alekhine's best games, the great champion described such powerful bishop moves as hammer-blows by the effect they have on the opponent's position.

20...fxg3

20...h6 21 ♗h7+ ♔f8 22 ♘f3! ♘f7 (22...fxg3 23 ♘e5 spells the end) 23 ♘e5! ♘xe5 24 dxe5 fxg3 25 fxg3 leaves the black king exposed to the f-file killing shots.

21 ♗xh7+ ♔f8 22 ♘e4 g2 23 ♖d3

The white pieces just enter the stage one after another.

23...♗d6 24 ♖f3+ ♔e7 25 ♘xd6 ♕xd6 26 d5!

Finally the other bishop gets its turn.

26...♖f8 27 ♖fe3 ♕c5 28 b4! ♕b6 29 d6+ ♔d7 30 ♖xe6 ♖f7 31 ♖e7+ 1-0

My apologies to Grandmaster Malaniuk for digging this game out. Even by those days' standards he had a very bad day; we met each other often in our junior years, and the overall score reflects his well-deserved edge.

The Catalan and some variations of the Queen's Indian Defence are special cases, where White first establishes his pawns in the centre, and then supports them with the fianchettoed bishops. The problem in achieving success with this strategy is that it takes some extra time to complete your build-up. With energetic play your opponent may be able to exploit his advantages in development of the pieces. The best answer to the Catalan is 6...dxc4! 7 ♘e5 ♘c6!, where Black accepts an inferior pawn-structure in return for tremendous piece activity.

If that's the case (we may not have time to develop properly if we want to fianchetto the bishops in 'normal openings), then maybe we can reverse the process. Let's fianchetto and develop first, and then move the central pawns – this was a brilliant idea of the founder of 'Hypermodern' school of chess, the Czech grandmaster Richard Réti. His games of the 1910s and 1920s often featured a complete disregard to the predominant 'rules' of his time. He would purposely ignore his central pawns in the opening, trying instead to attack the centre with the pieces, especially with the fianchettoed bishops. The Réti Opening begins with 1 ♘f3 d5 2 g3 ♘f6 3 ♗g2 e6 4 0-0 ♗e7 5 b3 0-0 6 ♗b2, and only now is White ready to play c4 and, only possibly, he achieves the d4 advance much later in the game. Such strategy met sceptical looks and raised eyebrows among Réti's contemporaries, but it survived the test of time. Later, new generations of players accepted this approach with open arms and applied it to a wide variety of opening systems. It is no longer about the first move – 1 ♘f3 is not necessarily followed by any fianchettoes – it is

the way of thinking; there are and always will be people whose personalities are best suited to avoiding confrontations in the early stage of the game.

I was able to implement Réti's strategic ideas in the next game, even if my dark-squared bishop never went to b2!

Yermolinsky – Zilberman
Alma-Ata 1985

1 ♘f3 d5 2 g3 c6 3 ♗g2 ♗g4

One of the most solid systems against the double fianchetto. Black develops his light-squared bishop, then builds a concrete barrier of pawns to neutralize the white fianchettoed bishop.

4 c4 ♗xf3?!

Too straightforward. Usually White has to sweat a little before he obtains the two-bishop advantage. At least, Black could wait for one more move, 4...e6 5 cxd5!?, and now 5...♗xf3 (to avoid losing the bishop after 5...cxd5?? 6 ♕a4+; in the meantime 5...exd5 is completely acceptable) 6 ♗xf3 cxd5. Compared with the game continuation, White has lost some of his flexibility due to an early pawn exchange in the centre.

5 ♗xf3 e6 6 ♕c2

Now White is going to keep all the pawns on the board. 6 b3 would serve the same purpose, while offering an interesting pawn sacrifice. After 6...dxc4 7 bxc4 ♕d4 8 ♘c3 White gains good compensation: 8...♗c5 (or 8...♕xc4 9 ♖b1 b6 10 ♘b5! – the same idea) 9 0-0 ♕xc4 10 ♖b1 ♗b6 11 ♘b5!, and his large lead in development begins to produce results: 11...♔d7 12 ♗a3.

6...♘d7 7 ♗g2 ♗d6 8 0-0 ♘e7 9 b3 0-0 10 d3

Very characteristic of White's strategy in such positions. He keeps his pawn-chain flexible and avoids any immediate confrontations that may expose his underdevelopment.

10...f5!?

The Dutch Stonewall usually means a king-side attack led by the strong knight on the e4-outpost. Here that square is inaccessible, thus this move has to be associated with other ideas.

11 ♘d2 *(D)*

In accord with Réti 'rules', White eschews the less flexible 11 ♘c3.

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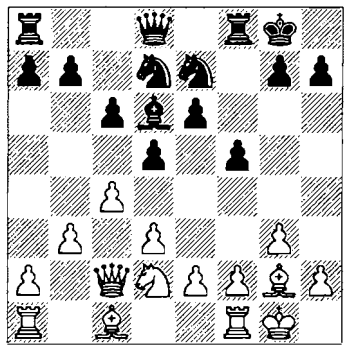


On d2, the knight doesn't interfere with the dark-squared bishop's plan to operate on the long diagonal, while making it possible to bring reinforcements to the kingside – just in case. The drawback is the lack of pressure on d5, and that Black could counter with a logical and strong plan of central pawn expansion. I would likely meet 11...e5 with a central counter-thrust of my own, 12 e4. The position resulting after 12...fxe4 13 dxe4 d4 14 a3 a5 15 ♘f3 is difficult to access. White will continue with a standard ♘e1-d3 blockading manoeuvre to be followed by f4. Black's plans are not as clearly defined; he surely misses his light-squared bishop now, but the spatial advantage gives him counter-chances in any case.

My opponent went on with a wrong plan that eerily resembles what Vladimir Malaniuk did in the game above. There must be something in that fianchetto thing that causes your opponents to overreact – a red cloth effect.

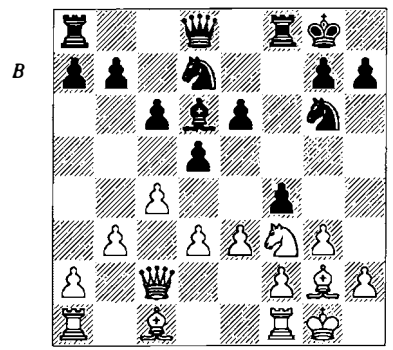
11...f4? 12 ♘f3

The knight is right there to defend the king-side. In the meantime, White is threatening the highly unpleasant 13 ♘g5, probing the soft un-derbelly of Black's pawn formation.

12...♘g6 13 e3! *(D)*

An important step in my plans. In general, White is trying to open the game up for his bishops, but the immediate goal is even more

relevant here: asking the f-pawn about its intentions is a very useful thing to do.



13...fxg3

After this exchange Black has nothing to show for his efforts. His activity began on move 10 has evaporated quickly, leaving nothing but weaknesses in his own position. Other choices didn't look promising either:

a) 13...fxe3 14 ♗xe3 e5? (obviously wrong, but otherwise White simply develops his play on the e-file) 15 ♘g5! (an attempt to improve by 15 cxd5? cxd5 16 ♘g5 misses the tactical detail 16...♘f6!, when 17 ♘e6 ♕c8 is harmless) 15...♖f5!? 16 cxd5 ♖xg5 17 dxc6, winning immediately.

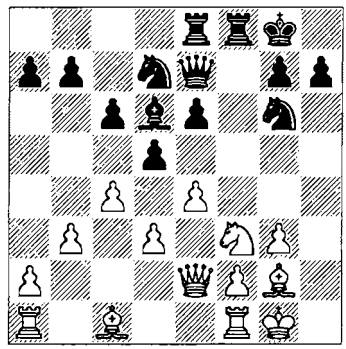
b) 13...e5 14 exf4 exf4 15 ♗b2 could have been the lesser evil. Still, White has every reason to be very happy with his fianchettoed bishops here, that's for sure.

14 hxg3 ♕e7 15 ♕e2 ♖ae8

Having beaten off the premature offensive on the part of his opponent, White is all set to work on increasing his advantage. What I did has certain merits, even if I am aware of other plans possible in this situation. I know, 16 d4 would be most players' natural choice. White doesn't have to worry much about surrendering the e4-square, as long as 16...♘f6 17 ♗b2 ♘e4 18 ♘d2! only leads to a favourable knight swap.

My move is far more ambitious. Notice that the dark-squared bishop doesn't complete the fianchetto yet, because it might have a brighter future elsewhere.

16 e4!? *(D)*



16...♘ge5

Black begins to fight for the dark squares, which represents his only plausible strategy here. As usual, finding the right plan is much easier than working out its correct tactical implementation. I think 16...dxc4 17 dxc4 ♘ge5 was better, as White would see more obstacles. For instance, I don't trust 18 ♘h2 ♗c5 19 ♔h1 ♖d8 20 f4 ♘d3, when great complications arise. Also possible was 16...dxe4, offering White a choice between the line shown above (i.e. 17 dxe4, etc.) and 17 ♕xe4 ♘c5 18 ♕e3 e5 19 ♘g5! (not falling for 19 ♗b2? ♘xd3! when the advantage shifts to Black) 19...a5 20 ♗b2, where his chances would be slightly higher.

17 ♘h2!

A timely retreat from any exchanges, as the black pieces are about to be pushed around. d4 is a threat and it can't be avoided.

17...dxc4

Interesting complications would arise after the other capture: 17...dxe4 18 d4!. Then Black has to go after a pawn with 18...♘f3+ (not 18...♘d3?, which leads to big trouble after 19 ♗d2 ♘f6 20 ♗xe4 ♘xe4 21 ♕xe4) 19 ♘xf3 exf3 20 ♗xf3 ♕f6 (20...e5 21 d5 e4 22 ♗g4 leaves White slightly better thanks to his strong light-squared bishop) 21 ♗e4 ♕xd4. White takes advantage of the situation for catching up in development: 22 ♗b2 ♕c5 23 ♖adl ♘f6 24 ♗d4 ♕a3, and now he's ready to regain the pawn with 25 ♗xf6 ♖xf6 26 ♗xh7+, etc.

I must admit that despite White's structural plus and the strength of his light-squared bishop, the chances are somewhat balanced by Black's better development. Maybe I should have not tried to go against the spirit of Réti's system, initiating complications before my position was ready.

18 d4! ♘d3 19 ♗d2?

Too optimistic. I had to be content with some advantage delivered by 19 e5 ♘xc1 20 ♖axc1 ♗a3 21 ♖xc4 ♘b6 22 ♖c2 ♘d5 23 ♘g4. White's more compact pawn-structure restricts Black's pieces and promises some kingside activity: ♗e4, f4, etc.

The text-move saves the bishop, and I played it without much thinking.

19...b5 20 e5 *(D)*

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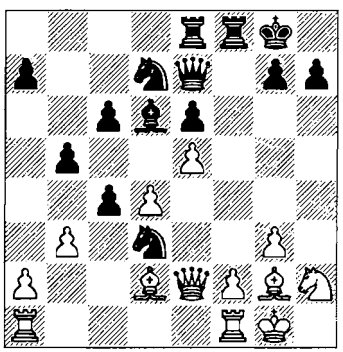


At this point I thought I had achieved a dream Catalan position. What I didn't see was a tactic! Black could turn things around by exploiting the weakness on d4: 20...♗a3 21 ♗xc6 ♗b2 22 ♖adl ♗xd4, and now 23 ♘f3 runs into 23...♖xf3! 24 ♗xf3 ♘7xe5, when Black has great compensation for the exchange. Luckily for me, my opponent played a weaker move.

20...♗b4? 21 ♗xc6 a6 22 a4

and White took control of the game.

What is the best strategy when facing Double Fianchetto? I prefer the classical approach: if you can grab the centre – do so! An example of this strategy comes next: Black advances his central pawns and locks the position up. As a result, one of the bishops is killed; the other bishop may seem active, but it can be exchanged, or rendered useless by removing its targets from the long diagonal. With adequate technique to back it up, this method may be the best against the double fianchetto.

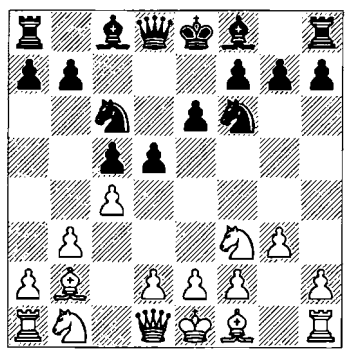
O. Chernin – Yermolinsky

Marshall Chess Club, New York 1991

Please note that my opponent in this game was **not** the famous Ukrainian-Hungarian grandmaster.

1 c4 e6 2 ♘f3 d5 3 b3 ♘f6 4 ♗b2 c5 5 g3 ♘c6 *(D)*

W



Developing his pieces through the centre, Black intends to capture as much space as he can.

6 ♗g2

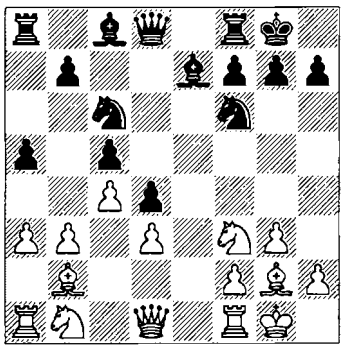
If White wants to avoid what happened in the game, his logical choice is 6 e3. In this theoretical position Black has other options as well as the enterprising 6...d4!? 7 exd4 cxd4 8 ♗g2 ♗d6 9 0-0 0-0 10 d3 e5, transposing to a Modern Benoni with colours reversed. What about the tempi lost: one on being Black, and another on ...e6-e5? No big deal. First of all, Black must be satisfied with the pawn-structure in general, and then, the tempi White won (or rather was given by his opponent) went to the useless fianchetto. As we can see the b2-bishop is definitely misplaced there.

6...d4 7 e3 e5 8 exd4 exd4

Black's strategy is keep the b2-bishop bottled up.

9 0-0 ♗e7 10 d3 0-0 11 a3 a5 *(D)*

W



A Benoni situation familiar to us from previous studies.

12 ♘bd2?!

Simple development won't do it here. White needed to expand the scope of his better bishop by playing 12 ♖e1 ♗f5 13 ♘e5 immediately. After 13...♘xe5 14 ♖xe5 Black can try either 14...♗g4 15 ♗f3 ♗d6 or 14...♕d7 15 ♕f3 ♗e6. In any case he's having a hard time getting anything more than a slight pull, as the active white pieces can only be exchanged, not driven away.

Speaking the truth, that was White's only method of equalizing as any delay with that plan will inevitably lead him to trouble.

12...♗f5 13 ♕c2 h6 14 ♖ae1 ♕d7

Stopping White's intentions with 14...♗d6? would be wrong. After 15 ♘h4 ♗h7 16 ♘e4 White achieves favourable exchanges anyway. I felt that Black needs to complete his development first, and then try to put a squeeze on.

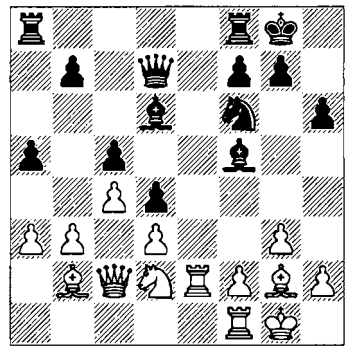
15 ♘e5 ♘xe5 16 ♖xe5 ♗d6 17 ♖e2 *(D)*

My opponent wanted to contest the e-file (possibly to get more exchanges out of it), but I managed to interfere with his plans.

17...♗g4!?

This disruptive move provoked the overreaction with serious consequences. White had to be consistent and avoid weakening his position. After 18 ♖ee1 ♖fe8 19 ♘e4 ♘xe4 20 ♗xe4 (or

B



20 ♖xe4 ♗f5) 20...♗h3 21 ♗g2 ♗xg2 22 ♔xg2 ♕c6+ Black has some advantage, though. All the pieces except the passive b2-bishop are gone, and what do you do now? 23 f3 weakens the second rank, and 23 ♔g1 ♕f3 is discomforting.

I understand that most (if not all) of my GM colleagues would just shrug their shoulders and coast to a draw with their eyes closed – but that's not the point. All I care about is to show that Black's opening strategy of grabbing space and closing the centre against the double fianchetto was an obvious success.

18 f3?!

This and, especially, the next move, do a lot of damage to White's position.

18...♗e6 19 ♘e4? ♘xe4 20 fxe4

White has no convenient way to recapture. 20 dxe4? is a nice trap: 20...♗xg3?? 21 hxg3 d3 22 ♕c3, and wins; but what if Black spots it? He would probably go 20...a4, undermining White's shaky pawn-chain. 20 ♖xe4 is a better choice, but Black would get his attack rolling with 20...b5 21 f4 ♖ab8, and the same threat, 22...a4 is looming large.

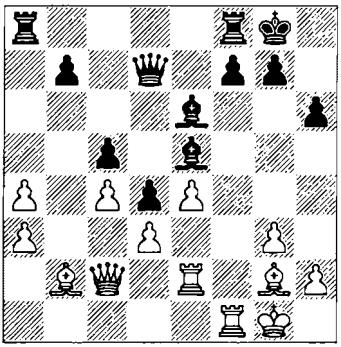
With the text-move White transforms it into a KID structure, which would have become very durable if he could only get a3-a4 in.

20...a4!

Not today!

21 bxa4 ♗e5 *(D)*

Having rendered the white bishops useless, Black enjoys a significant positional advantage.

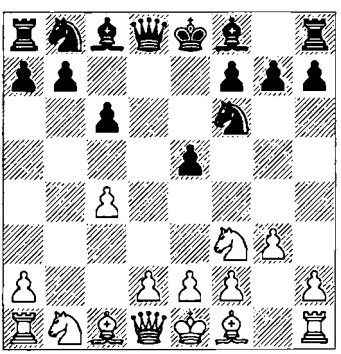


The next game introduces a hyper-aggressive way to play against hypermodern openings: Black exchanges off one of his central pawns and sends the other one forward. With the black pieces quickly assuming the most active positions (the rooks go to the half-open central files too) White finds himself unable to move his central pawns from the initial position. His game becomes cramped, and he rapidly goes down.

Schutt – Yermolinsky

Manhattan Chess Club, New York 1991

1 c4 ♘f6 2 g3 c6 3 ♘f3 d5 4 b3 dxc4!? 5 bxc4 e5! *(D)*



Cleverly using tactics, Black establishes an adequate pawn presence in the centre and gets easy development for his pieces.

6 ♗b2

The trap is transparent: 6 ♘xe5?? ♕d4, and naturally, White wants to plug the dangerous diagonal as soon as possible. However, 6 ♗g2 e4 7 ♘g5 was worthy of consideration.

6...e4 7 ♘d4

As the game went White didn't pressure e4 at all, but 7 ♘g5 h6 8 ♘h3 ♗f5 wouldn't help either.

7...♗d6

If I were White I would have given a thought to consolidating my position with ♘c2-e3. White can't be more than equal, though. Such is the nature of the position, and the whole set-up reminds me of an Alekhine Defence gone awry.

The author of that opening (Alekhine may have not been the inventor, but he did much to popularize it) used a similar strategy (exchange a central pawn and play on the open files) in his famous game against Réti in Baden-Baden 1925. In his notes to the game the future World Champion harshly criticized Réti's opening treatment, and many years later some chess historians find his arguments inconsistent or even dogmatic. In my opinion, Alekhine was right, even if he stood worse later in that particular game. He understood the difference in opening philosophies for White and Black, and realized they just can't be the same! White is supposed to try for more than just obtaining a comfortable game in reversed colour opening set-ups, and, as the statistics show – surprisingly for a lot of people, but not for me – White doesn't even score as well as Black does in the same positions with his extra tempo and all.

Vladimir Malaniuk, who has made a nice living on the black side of the Leningrad Dutch against the best of the best, Karpov included, once made a deep impression on me by casually dismissing someone's suggestion that he should try 1 f4 as White. He smiled and said, 'That extra move's gonna hurt me'.

8 ♕c2 0-0 9 ♗g2 ♖e8 10 ♘c3 ♗e5!

Now the knight is being sent into exile. Black's game keeps flowing naturally, with all his pieces finding good squares with ease.

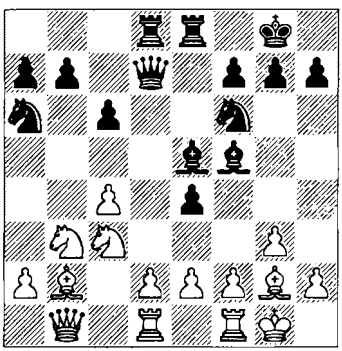
11 ♘b3 ♘a6 12 0-0 ♗f5 13 ♖ad1?

Wrong. Now it was necessary to transfer the c3-knight to the blockading e3-square with 13 ♘d1!.

13...♕d7 14 ♕b1?

Keeping that queen on the same diagonal with the black bishop would make a lot of people nervous. My opponent apparently didn't mind, or else he was concerned with 14 ♕c1 ♗h3. Indeed, I'd do just that. It's a typical technique – with the exchange of the fianchettoed bishop the king will begin to feel insecure.

14...♖ad8 *(D)*



Look how harmoniously all the black pieces work. One more mistake from my opponent and the game will be over.

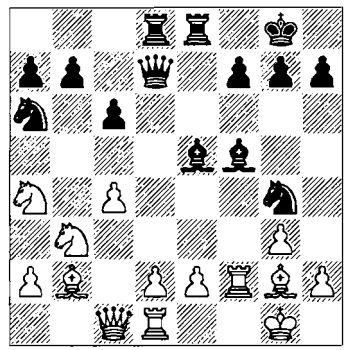
15 ♘a4?

Here it comes. With all my ill-concealed disgust towards White's position I can recommend 15 ♕a1, stepping away from the dangerous diagonal and hoping for a miracle. After 15...♗h3 White can try 16 d4, putting his hopes on the exchanges: 16...exd3 17 ♖xd3 ♕g4 18 ♖xd8 ♖xd8 19 ♖d1, but Black would likely want to keep his strong e4-pawn where it is. So he simply goes 16...♗c7, planning to mount a kingside attack.

Come to think of that, 15...h5 also looks good.

15...e3 16 ♕c1 exf2+ 17 ♖xf2 ♘g4! *(D)*

And just like that White can't avoid material losses. I looked at 18 ♗xe5 ♘xf2, and 18 ♖ff1 ♗xb2 19 ♕xb2 ♖xe2 20 ♘c3 ♖xg2+ 21 ♔xg2 ♘e5. Neither one has a prayer.



18 ♘ac5 ♘xc5 19 ♘xc5 ♕e7

After this move my opponent realized that the line 20 ♖xf5 ♕xc5+ 21 e3 (21 d4 ♗xd4+ costs the f5-rook) 21...♗xb2 22 ♖xc5 ♗xc1 23 ♖xc1 ♖xd2 would lead to a painful ending, and stopped the clock.

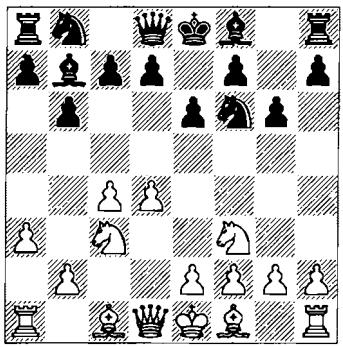
So far we have been talking about White going trendy with the double fianchetto – can Black do the same? The answer is a likely 'no'. I wouldn't recommend going extravaganza in the opening, such as 1 e4 g6 2 d4 b6? – in the hands of an experienced player the punishment will be swift – even though in some modern variations of the Pirc Defence Black does fianchetto his light-squared bishop sometimes, usually in the expanded version of ...a6 and ...b5. The dangers are multiplied by the very fact that the opponent already had an extra tempo to grab the centre or develop by virtue of being White.

In the game that comes next my opponent tried a double fianchetto in the Queen's Indian Defence only to find it too difficult to confront White's logical strategy that – yeah, you guessed right – went on through the centre.

Yermolinsky – Danailov
Tbilisi 1986

1	**d4**	**♘f6**
2	**♘f3**	**e6**
3	**c4**	**b6**
4	**a3**	**♗b7**

5 ♘c3 g6?! *(D)*



Black eschews the normal 5...d5 in favour of a risky double fianchetto set-up.

6 d5

I answered with this space-grabber, which is of course nothing more or less than White's main idea in the Petrosian Queen's Indian.

6 ♕c2 is the other good move in this position. White achieved a beautiful victory in the following game.

Khalifman – Romanishin
World Team Ch, Lucerne 1997

6...♗xf3

Well, White was going to play 7 e4.

7 exf3 ♗g7 8 ♗g5 c5?

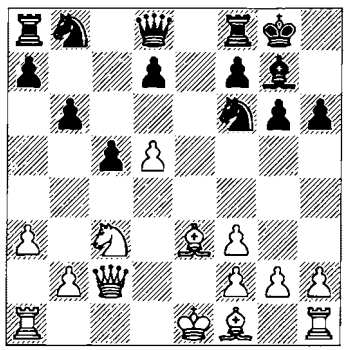
Such ideas as 6...♗xf3 are widely used in today's theory and practice. John Watson gives a few examples of this treatment in his book, and they are excellent. John's big point is that having surrendered the two bishops Black doesn't feel restricted to keeping the position closed; on the contrary, he often initiates confrontations before his opponent can get down to exploiting his long-term plus.

Good thinking, and I can only add a little detail: it's one thing to play for such exchanges in a quiet unassuming opening, say, after 1 ♘f3 d5 2 b3 ♗g4 3 ♗b2 ♗xf3; and it's a totally different ballgame when Black tries something like this against more aggressive set-ups. Romanishin's move is a mistake, and he should have tried to keep the position closed with moves like 8...c6. I don't like his idea of going to a Benoni-type of structure.

9 d5 h6

This move is weakening, but how else can Black resolve the tension? The pin is very unpleasant.

10 ♗e3 exd5 11 cxd5 0-0 *(D)*



At first sight Black is doing OK. He got himself a pawn majority on the queenside, while his opponent's pawns are damaged, and isn't Black going for the same piece exchange with ♗g4 in many lines of the Benoni? The main question, with no usual plan of e4-e5 present, what is White going to do? El Khalif provides the answer.

12 g4!

Signalling the beginning of a punishing kingside attack. By the way, the text-move is more precise than 12 h4?! h5!, when Black hangs on.

12...d6 13 h4 ♘bd7

Still, 13...h5 was worth a look. I think White would continue with 14 0-0-0 ♘bd7 15 ♗g5, and the black queen can't find a good square to escape the pin.

14 g5 hxg5

It's very difficult to believe that Black could hold his blockade with 14...♘h5?! 15 gxh6 ♗e5 (15...♗xc3+, anyone? Looks like Black's best chance, by the way), not with that g6-pawn getting under fire after 16 ♗d3.

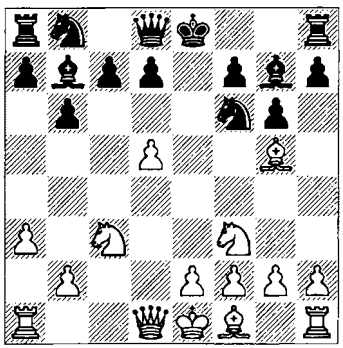
15 hxg5 ♘h7 16 f4 ♖e8 17 ♗b5 ♘hf8 18 0-0-0

and now anyone can witness the failure of Black's strategy. Romanishin got checkmated in ten more moves.

We return now to the game Yermolinsky – Danailov.

6	**...**	**exd5**
7	**cxd5**	**♗g7**
8	**♗g5!** *(D)*	

B



This one and the next few moves are designed to support the d5-pawn, which serves as a stopper to the b7-bishop.

8	**...**	**h6**
9	**♗h4**	**0-0**
10	**e3**	**c6?!**

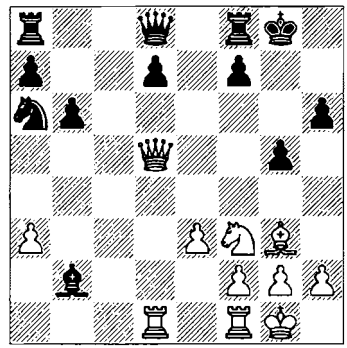
Black is trying to remove the obstacle from the long diagonal, but the price turns out to be too high. Well, he could go for 10...c5 11 ♗c4 d6 12 0-0 ♘bd7 13 h3, but once again that's the Benoni set-up with the passive b7-bishop.

11	**♗c4**	**♘a6**
12	**0-0**	**cxd5?!**

Black decides to accept the pawn sac, but it leads to his pieces being misplaced and a dangerous weakening of his king. More chances would be offered by the sharp continuation 12...b5!? 13 ♗a2 (possibly better is 13 ♗b3 ♘c5 14 ♗c2) 13...b4! 14 axb4 ♘xb4.

13	**♗xd5**	**♗xd5**
14	**♘xd5**	**g5**
15	**♗g3**	**♘xd5**
16	**♕xd5**	**♗xb2**
17	**♖ad1** *(D)*	

B



17	**...**	**♗g7**

With this simple retreat Black fails to stop White's initiative, but his choices were grim. The bottom line is, Black has to watch out for 18 ♕b5, so he's down to:

a) 17...♕f6 18 h4 gxh4 (18...g4 19 ♘h2) 19 ♗xh4 ♕c3 20 ♕h5.

b) 17...♘c5 18 h4 gxh4 19 ♘xh4 ♗xa3 20 ♘f5 ♕f6 21 ♗f4.

In both cases White's attack is deadly.

18	**h4**	**gxh4**

After 18...g4 19 ♘h2 Black loses a pawn.

19	**♘xh4!**	

Way back, in 1977, we played a qualification tournament for the World Juniors. One day a young (14 years old then) Garry Kasparov won a nice attacking game against Leonid Zaid. After the game he proudly said, 'When I get my knight to f5, nobody can stop me!'

19	**...**	**♘c5**
20	**♘f5**	**♕f6**
21	**♕f3!**	**♖ae8?**

A blunders in a critical situation. If 21...♖fe8 then 22 ♖d6 cannot be answered by 22...♖e6.

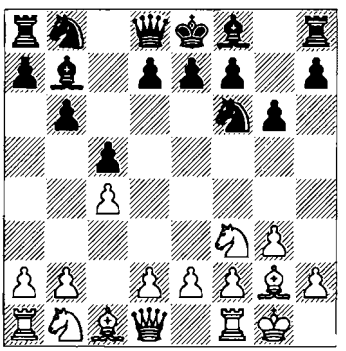
22	**♗d6**	**♖e6**
23	**♗xf8**	**♗xf8**
24	**♖d4**	**♖e5**
25	**♖d5**	**♘e4?**
26	**♘xh6+**	**1-0**

One conclusion: the number of openings where Black can try the double fianchetto is quite limited. Usually it may work only after White has chosen a slow way of developing the

game – just as it happened in the following game (and many others played in this and similar lines of the English Opening).

Yermolinsky – Psakhis
National Open, Las Vegas 1997

1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 c4 b6 3 g3 c5 4 ♗g2 ♗b7 5 0-0 g6!? *(D)*



White has held off advancing his central pawns on the first moves, and Black can go for the English Double Fianchetto with no risk – speaking relatively, of course, but theory and practice support this assessment – of getting mowed down.

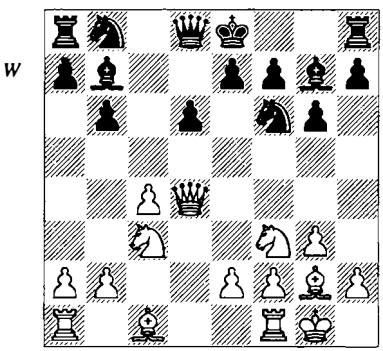
White would love to grab space with central pawns advancing, but how? It turns out that the e4 advance is impossible to achieve without some time-consuming preparation. After 6 ♘c3 ♗g7 White needs one more move, but 7 ♖e1 can be met by 7...♘e4!, while 7 d3 is modest and, at best, gives White an English Opening/Closed Sicilian kind of set-up with the vital d4-square belonging to Black. So, the other central pawn moves forward only to be exchanged right away.

6 d4 cxd4 7 ♕xd4

The advantages of the double fianchetto are visible after 7 ♘xd4 ♗xg2 8 ♔xg2. Even the dreaded Maroczy Bind doesn't look that dangerous with the light-squared bishops gone from the board. White pawns on c4 and e4; which black piece are they supposed to make feel miserable – the c8-bishop, right? There are also some immediate tactical considerations about the safety of White's position. For example, after 8...♗g7 9 ♘c3 0-0 an attempt to capture space with 10 e4?! meets with 10...♕c7 11 b3 ♘xe4! 12 ♘xe4 ♕e5.

To keep the bishops on the board White has to recapture with the queen, and that will cost him more time.

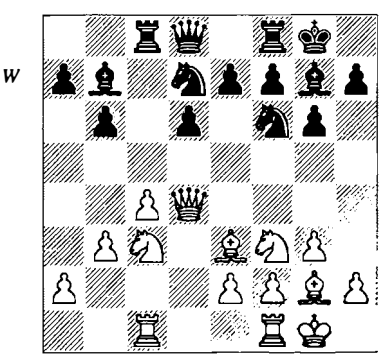
7...♗g7 8 ♘c3 d6 *(D)*



9 ♗e3

Looks awkward, and indeed it is, but 9 e4 0-0 brings about some tactical inconveniences. Black is already threatening 10...♘xe4, and that motif will resurface after 10 ♕e3 ♘bd7 11 ♕e2 (notice the time wasted on the queen moves) 11...♘c5 12 ♘d4? ♘fxe4!.

9...♘bd7 10 ♖ac1 ♖c8 11 b3 0-0 *(D)*



This is the main line English Double Fianchetto. White has to make up his mind. The plan involving exchanging the dark-squared bishop seems logical, simply because the e3-bishop can't find any employment. I tried to do just that, but the execution was less than precise.

The line 12 ♕h4 a6 13 ♖fd1 ♗c6 14 ♗h3 is recommended by GM Alec Wojtkiewicz, a great expert in the Double Fianchetto. Notice how White prepares ♗h6, while keeping his light-squared bishop away from the exchanging block.

12 ♕d2? ♘e4!

This well-timed exchanging operation equalizes on the spot.

13 ♘xe4 ♗xe4 14 ♗h6 ♘f6 15 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 16 ♖fd1 ♕d7

Black is planning to increase the pressure on the long diagonal by 17...♕b7, and I saw nothing better than to take a draw while it was there.

17 ♘d4 ½-½

A Final Word on Openings

In this rather lengthy Part 2 I have shared with you my approach to studying openings and the resulting early middlegame structures. Simply put, it is done through careful analysis of the games I play. It's not because I have delusions of grandeur or anything. For many of my colleagues any kind of analytical work would follow on the steps of theory, but I have noticed a long time ago that this way it simply doesn't work with me. Somehow I'm not able to make much sense out of anything with which I don't have first-hand experience; that's why I reverse the process.

To introduce a new set-up into my arsenal, I simply venture into unfamiliar territory and play the game! Chances are, I won't do too well first time around, but I'll take it. Of course, I'm aided by the specifics of the local (US) chess tournament structure. A good half of the time I am playing somebody well below me in rating and chess strength, so I know I can afford to experiment more, make mistakes, and yet get away with it in the absolute majority of cases. As an example, I started to play 1 e4 again in the beginning of 1998, and did it in every game I had the white pieces for about three months without suffering a significant drop in my tournament results.

So, that's the way it is. I need to play an opening before I can study it. After I have played it and got a taste of the resulting positions, the lines and variations I saw during the game would become a basis for future work. I will refer to the theory of course, but any theoretical recommendations will be taken into account with a certain dash of scepticism, if only because I believe they are based on nothing else but hasty evaluations of someone else's games, often biased by the final result. I know I can't take them for granted without a complete research of my own. The purpose of this research is multifaceted.

Firstly, I need some knowledge of openings to stay competitive. Too many players of my generation I have known and used to admire could not make the adjustment to the ever-increasing pace of the modern theory and slipped back into a simplistic approach of avoiding critical continuations. The price they pay is enormous: not only do they suffer from getting very little with White out of the opening and/or putting themselves into difficult situations with Black; most importantly, their chess style begins to change towards dry, technical play. These days you're not going to beat a lot of people by just sitting there waiting for your opponent to self-destruct. An ageing chess-player must keep rejuvenating himself by constantly sharpening up his opening repertoire. And those who do, get rewarded by the amazing longevity of their chess careers. Look at Korchnoi, Timman and Beliavsky – their openings are the cutting edge, and that's why they are still a force against the youngsters of today.

Secondly, not too many games are going to be decided by a memory contest. Somebody wins a theoretical duel, then proceeds to lose the game – an almost everyday occasion. A vast majority of theoretical variations end with the 'unclear' assessment – that means they are playable for both sides. Sooner or later players find themselves out there on their own, and the

outcome of the battle will be decided by matching their middlegame skills. And there comes a type of situation I would like to come well-prepared for. Deep analyses of opening set-ups help to extend my factual knowledge into the middlegame; that's why I decided not to cut short many of the games you saw above. One more thing is the durability of the product. Even if (realistically speaking – when) there come new developments that make your individually designed variations obsolete, the ideas will still be the same, thus valid, and they can be re-used within the newly set bounds of current fashion. Your opening just goes to the repair shop, that's all.

Thirdly, many openings can lead to the same kind of middlegame set-up. We get an isolated d4-pawn from the Panov Caro-Kann, Nimzo, Alapin Sicilian or QGA, for instance – and that brings me to another important subject, the variety of one's opening repertoire. For the practitioners of a traditional 'theory first' approach, acquiring a new opening is a torture, simply because there's so much to learn (memorize) before one feels he's ready. This 'ready' thing never ceases to amuse me. When exactly does it happen? In other words, how far do you go before you finally take your new opening to the tournament hall? I have been always been able to incorporate new openings into my repertoire seamlessly by doing things my way – through studying set-ups and structures. But it didn't come too easy.

I recall the early 1980s when I was making my breakthrough in the USSR domestic chess scene. I played a lot of openings without much of a particular knowledge of their extended variations. It had worked against half-amateur opposition in Leningrad Championships, but the real test was yet to come. Finally I qualified for a First League USSR Championship. Most of the grandmasters I met there for the first time kept narrow, well-oiled opening systems. Simple reason: they had to work it out largely by themselves, as the access to other people's games was slow and unreliable. Take Evgeny Sveshnikov, who went through his long and illustrious career with one opening each against both 1 d4 and 1 e4. The Semi-Slav and, you guessed right, the Sveshnikov Variation. Moreover, with White he played nothing but 2 c3 – the Alapin Sicilian. Hats off, he was doing well as a practical player and has made a great contribution to the theory of chess. We, the youngsters, respected him even if his dogmatic approach to the opening would sometimes bring smiles to our faces. Dealing with it was no laughing matter.

I couldn't hope to match my wits with my competitors' opening knowledge, and had to be on the run from the very first moves. This was the time when my trial-and-error method failed a high-level practical test. It was a shock. I ended up playing a lot of junk openings: the Budapest, the Benko, a highly dubious line against the Richter-Rauzer (you saw that one in the Hjartarson game back in Part 1) as Black; the Torre Attack, lots of Réti and King's Indian Attack variations as White – the reversed colours strategy. All in all, my openings were pathetic for the level I was competing on.

I remember, in 1986 I was invited to play for the Central Army Sports Club team in the European Club Championship. I played on a low board of course, and could only be trusted with home matches – for reasons I don't see fit to be described here – but, nevertheless, the pressure to win was present. I lost my first game to L.Liptay, a Hungarian IM, and then was to play Silvio Danailov (now Veselin Topalov's second) from Bulgaria. My roommate, Alexei Vyzhmanavin, watched my preparation for the expected Queen's Indian Defence for a good fifteen minutes, and then said, "Oh, that's what you are! You want to win games for free." I could probably take it easy if such criticism came from an established GM, Vitaly Tseshkovsky for example, but to hear it from somebody two years younger and, as I thought, not an ounce better in chess than me... Man, was it painful. Good thing that Danailov played a dubious line, and – you saw what happened, just go back to the Double Fianchetto chapter.

Who knows how things would have turned out had I changed anything in my approach to the opening, but I simply wouldn't! My results

stalled, and I was already pushing thirty – still I refused to follow the trends of fashion. Looking back I realize now that I may have been right. One chooses his path in chess and life, but it may take some time before everything comes around and settles into a workable pattern. Years later I finally began to accumulate the benefits of my opening philosophy. Two factors came to the rescue.

First of all, I moved out of the Soviet Union, away from tough opposition to the greener pastures of open tournaments. My ability to 'mix it' right in the opening turned out to be very practical against weaker opponents. I was scoring well with either colour, and could hardly hide a big smile while watching my former compatriots struggle to win on the black side of the QGD against somebody who'd fold in twenty moves in any of my 'junk' openings. I mentioned before the overall yielding quality of my opposition in the past 10 years. I have ran statistics on my computer, and guess what, the average rating of my opponents is just below 2400. It has allowed me a certain freedom in the opening, so I could always catch up with more aggressive set-ups without the fear of being punished for my insufficient knowledge. Before I knew it, my opening repertoire began to take a decent shape.

Second, there came the computers. The advantage Evgeny Sveshnikov and his followers-researchers had over the general mass of practical players has dissipated. From my Elista Olympiad report to *New In Chess*:

"...playing chess has never been easier! Before computers, some serious analytical work was required to keep up and not to slide to b3-g3 kind of openings as a sad necessity in facing the new generation of players. Analytical research is for young minds and bodies; even Einstein had discovered all there was for him to discover, before turning 25. When you are over 40, other obligations and interests kick in, and there's no point in continuing to work on chess, especially if you have never done it in the first place! That, in my opinion, was a real reason for fading away (as chess-players) of many I knew. Out came the computers, and suddenly you don't have to work any more! All the information and other people's ideas are there to be absorbed, and chess-players' preparation these days largely resembles managerial work: selecting, choosing and consolidating – exactly the kind of stuff old folks are good at..."

Don't be put off by the humorous tone of this excerpt. There's a lot of truth in it.

Special preparation for a particular opponent is everyday work for a professional chess-player. Computers make your games accessible to the others, just like their games are accessible to you. It becomes sort of a guessing game, how to choose a line most unpleasant for him and, yet, to be able to handle the resulting position yourself. The flexibility I have developed thanks to the many years' experience of dodging opening bullets comes very handy these days. I can do many things reasonably well, can handle many different types of pawn-structures – that gives me room to manoeuvre. Manoeuvre in order not to expose myself as a target.

I learned the hard way. In the same 1981 USSR First League Championship I had Black against Evgeny Sveshnikov. Naturally, I was preparing for his 2 c3 against the Sicilian. I had a great game-plan with an element of surprise. A few months earlier me and my then teammate IM Mark Tseitlin (now a GM living in Israel) spent a few nights in our local chess club drinking and lazily pushing chess pieces around as usual. With no particular regard to the existing theory we worked out some interesting ideas stemming from the 2...d6!? move. I won a couple of games with that idea just before the tournament, and felt quite ready to try it against Sveshnikov himself. To my bad luck, earlier in the tournament someone else (I think it was Gulko, or maybe Dorfman – my apologies to both) played this line – and spooked Sveshnikov! When we sat down to play he went to the Open Sicilian with 2 ♘f3 – something he had rarely done, if ever. With more experience behind me, I would have played any other system, rather than my pet 8...♗d7 against the Richter-Rauzer, but a 23-year-old Yermo was a green rookie. We went into my favourite set-up where I got convincingly busted in under 30 moves.

I'll never forget the ugly smile on Sveshnikov's face – the smile of a grizzled veteran.

For most chess-players theory comes first, and they invest lots of time and energy in studying the latest theoretical recommendations and up-to-date games. I won't argue with my fellow grandmasters, they do what they have to do, but, the bottom line is, they operate from a position of previous knowledge and experience. How about somebody who's not at their level yet, should he imitate this method? I think it's a dead-end street. One should never repeat a single move known to theory unless one understands why such move is made. At least I won't do it. Because I'd get confused and will be very likely to mess up.

How to catch up? Suppose, there's a theoretical line I consider useful for expanding my opening repertoire. For such cases I've got my standard operating procedure. I select a few games played (and, preferably, annotated) by top players and look at them carefully. Naturally, at first sight I won't be able to understand what was going on. Some moves are made but why? I begin with backtracking along the theoretical line move by move until I come to a familiar point, to a position I've seen and played before. That's where my knowledge ends, and the new (for me) line begins. That should become a starting point of my analysis. From there I'll begin to climb up the branches of the theoretical tree, while taking every step very slowly and constantly checking it against my database. Only at that point other games come in, not sooner. Believe me, it works! I've done that with sharpest variations there are, such as the Botvinnik Anti-Meran or Classical King's Indian. The great benefit of such a slow method is that I will remember the stuff I played and/or studied much more clearly than something I just casually saw in some ChessBase files.

I realize, of course, that my knowledge is much greater than one of a rank-and-file player, and that helps me to apply the methods described above. That's why in the studies shown in this Part 2 I often allowed myself to go back to the basics, often talking about simple things. All in an attempt to re-create the process of f acquiring the opening knowledge. Don't feel sorry for me – I do it for my own benefit. Gregory Kaidanov once told me that repeating simple statements during his lessons with lower-rated players actually helps him to improve (reorganize) his own thinking process he applies in practical play.

In this chapter, the most important part of the entire book, I gave some examples of various opening problems I have tried to solve at one or another point of my career. The solutions are not necessarily to be repeated, even if I would be pleased to see them being put in some sort of use by my dear readers. I have never meant to impose these particular opening set-ups on my YCA students, simply because the theoretical value of the material given is insignificant compared to the vastness of what can be found in books or databases. I simply use them to illustrate one possible method of acquiring a factual knowledge in chess, the one that works for me.

Think about it, suppose you decide to study the Nimzo-Indian Defence. You have never played it before and you don't know where to begin. There are thousands of games that have opened with 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4. It's impossible just to look at all of the them, let alone try to memorize anything. 'Man's gotta know his limitations' – remember that? There's no other way to get there, other than to separate the opening by the possible pawn-structure types it may result in.

For the Nimzo it would be:

a) closed formation with the white doubled pawns on c3 and c4, such as in the Hübner Variation;

b) isolated d4-pawn set-up, arising from the 4 e3 variation;

c) the Botvinnik pawn roller – see Botvinnik-Capablanca, AVRO 1938;

d) something that has no name now, but used to be called the Krause System, named after a largely forgotten German theoretician of the 1920s. It's characterized by the exchange of the white d4-pawn for the black c5-pawn with White obtaining the bishop-pair without damaging his queenside – such is the case in many lines of the 4 ♕c2 variation.

Notice that Black's choices are not always free, and largely depend on the circumstances. It seems to me that a real Nimzo player must be able to find his way around in all these set-ups. A tough job, but I don't see any alternative. You feel like giving it a shot – my compliments and good luck.

Would I recommend the Nimzo-Indian to any of my students? I don't know. When it comes to the choice of openings, any kind of universal advice proves to be wrong. Without a thorough study of the individual characteristics of a particular player, no recommendation can be given. It's easy to deal with beginners: I can operate with the commonly known advice of how to play the opening, such as 'develop pieces as fast as possible', 'try to capture space with central pawns', 'don't move the same piece twice', and so on. Fair enough, but I don't think it works beyond the beginner's level. A more advanced player knows these tips, knows that they work in the majority of cases. However, he also knows openings where one piece moves several times – the Alekhine Defence, or where the pawn-centre is largely ignored or at least not contested immediately – the Réti. They break the rules – so how do I go about explaining their existence?

It gets even more difficult as the level of sophistication goes up. 1800-2000 rated players are usually very serious about their chess. They read books, watch chess instruction videos, and use ChessBase. Still, most of them are without a clue when it comes to choosing the right openings. The key issue, as I noted earlier, is the pawn-structure, which determines a course of action, and the trick is that these actions ought to be in tune with your nature. Please go back to Part 1 and take another look at the personal characteristics chart. Are you a plus or a minus kind of person? Then take it from there. I'd suggest to select a few games and study them under a different angle. Don't bother with evaluations, just look how the top grandmasters perform immediately after the opening is set and ask yourself whether you'd feel comfortable with such a course. Also pay attention to the following characteristics:

a) Type of pawn-structure.

For many of you, openings with a fluid pawn formation would seem too sophisticated. At any point the structure, along with the entire strategic course, may be changed by actions from either side. All possible structures are to be investigated, and each move is to be assessed from the angle of any structure. Feel it's too much for you? Then, choose the French over the Pirc.

b) Pace of the events.

By that I mean how quickly play develops and confrontation begins. Nobody tells you to play the Austrian Attack against the Pirc (1 e4 d6 2 d4 ♘f6 3 ♘c3 g6 4 f4 ♗g7 5 ♘f3 c5 6 ♗b5+, etc.), if your heart is not in it.

c) Level of sharpness.

Don't be ashamed to admit that the Keres Attack makes your nervous. Forget the Sicilian, and play the Caro-Kann. However, this preference can only be applied to general tendencies, not to all possible variations. Sometimes, you have to stand up and defend your opening principles. Say, you're a 1 d4 player and you want the type of play described in the beginning of Part 2, when we talked about the Karlsbad Exchange set-up. Good enough, but if you're going to fight for an opening advantage you can't afford to duck the complications of the Botvinnik Variation of the Semi-Slav. Have faith in your position and meet the challenge face to face.

d) Simplifications.

Would a normal course of events in the selected opening involve heavy exchanges? And how would you feel about it? Some people just can't stand the thought of exchanging queens early in the game. If that's you, don't play the line of Grünfeld we discussed above, and choose the 8 ♖b1 line instead.

It's a good idea to build bridges between your openings. Say, you are happy with the Rubinstein French (3...dxe4) as Black, then consider getting to a similar pawn-structure in the Caro-Kann! It'll be easier than you think. Moreover, any structure with the black d-pawn getting exchanged early might be suitable for your style. Consider replacing your KID with the Semi-Slav!

The same principle can be applied on more general level. Some openings may not be related to each other, yet they are similar in terms of developing your play on the squares of one colour. The King's Indian and most of the Sicilians lead Black to pawn formations that naturally require a dark square-based strategy, so some ideas may be shared between these openings. Similarly, the Nimzo resembles the Winawer French – in both Black fights largely on the light squares. Sounds far-fetched, but I do consider my opening strategies in these terms.

Be aware of move-order implications. I already mentioned earlier that 1 ♘f3 would not allow you to play the Exchange Variation against the QGD, and that is only one example. Let me elaborate a little. Suppose, I like the Exchange Variation, and I open with 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♘f6, and now play 4 cxd5. Easy, right? But some players, who want to avoid this line as Black, may try a different move-order: 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6. Now, if I insist on your plans I must go 3 ♘c3, thus making the Nimzo possible. There goes my favourite Petrosian Queen's Indian, right down the drain. If I don't like to be on the white side of the Nimzo, and prefer 3 ♘f3, I must have some other system, rather than the Exchange, ready against the QGD.

Some players – myself among them – make good use of having both the Grünfeld and KID in their opening repertoire. As Black I open with 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 and keep my opponents guessing. Suppose somebody prepared a g3 system against my KID, so he goes 3 ♘f3 ♗g7 4 g3. Now I can switch to the Grünfeld with 4...d5 or even 4...c6. John Fedorowicz does this thing all the time. I don't think he ever allows the g3 set-up, because he likes closed positions on the black side of the KID. All this made possible by the fact that White gets nothing good from trying to delay g3 until after Black commits with ...d6. In the line 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 g3?! Black switches to a very favourable Benoni after 5...0-0 6 ♗g2 c5! 7 d5 e6 8 ♘f3 exd5 9 cxd5 b5!. Opening theory is full of such nuances.

Time to conclude my Part 2, but there's one more thing I'd like to mention. Grandmasters do know a lot about the openings, and, in many people's opinion, lower-rated players would do better against them if they choose less popular lines. Wrong, and I can prove it by taking the very same controversy one or two levels higher.

Years ago me and my good friend, Grandmaster Alexander Khalifman, had a little discussion about Kasparov's opening repertoire. When I suggested that it might be a good idea to avoid the main lines against Garry, El Khalif strongly disagreed. In his opinion, rank-and-file players (he was referring to himself; how's that from a perennial 2650 player?!) should go for the absolute main lines, especially with the white pieces. His reasons were following:

a) when playing the main lines you are standing on the shoulders of giants, repeating moves and ideas that were found by better players than you are, and that automatically elevates you to the next level;

b) main lines go deeper into the middlegame than side-variations, thus the final positions are easier to handle;

c) when this happens your higher-ranked opponent often faces an unpleasant choice between following a theoretical line to the end, where the final position would leave him with no chances to win, and stepping aside (could be dangerous) by making an inferior move in order to avoid simplifications.

In Linares 1999 Garry had his laughs with the black pieces. Svidler played 1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♕xd4 and lost, Adams got outplayed in the Closed Sicilian and lost, Topalov and Anand went for crappy lines in the 6 ♗e3 Najdorf and both got beaten. If these people didn't do well, who would? Garry's opponents made the same mistake – avoided the main lines at the cost of forfeiting White's opening initiative. I understand they all wanted to beat the World Number One, and they figured it would be impossible to do in the areas where Garry is well-versed, such as 6 ♗g5, 6 ♗e2 or 6 ♗c4 against the Najdorf. If they could only get him out of his preparation... That's exactly what happened in those games, but – surprise, surprise – Garry Kasparov proved to be strong

enough to find the best moves on his own. This Anti-Garry strategy backfired because Garry was getting good positions – that's the key.

In the United States, every grandmaster gets to be a little Garry every once in a while. We all play open tournaments, where in the first couple of rounds our opponents are experts or weak masters (2000 to about 2200 USCF). I will reveal a little secret: in this situation there's nothing I want more from my opponents than to step away from main-line theory. Go ahead, surprise me, throw me off balance, make me think on my own – any way you call it – but there's a catch. You give me a good position after the first 10 moves with plenty of pieces on the board, and I'll find a way to outplay anybody 300 rating points below me.

The next part of this book will tell you why.

Part 3: Tactical Mastery and Strategic Skills

Yes, it may sound heretical, but I'm going to combine these two in one chapter. I even reversed it in the title; isn't that supposed to be tactical skills and strategic mastery, not the other way around?

First, a little excursion to the past. I earned my ticket to the Leningrad chess scene when I scored my Master norm (that would be a Senior Master level in the United States; about 2300 FIDE or 2400 USCF) at the age of nineteen. At that time we had long tournaments, 13-15 rounds played on a two games a week schedule with adjournments, and that left us with plenty of time to hang out and talk chess. After a couple of evenings spent in a company of older masters I began to follow their chess chat. A dominating theme was discussing local players in terms of their level of 'positional understanding'. One of the loudest voices belonged to the sharp-tongued Slava Shishmarev, a medium-strength master who later became a professional coach. He labelled some of us 'spirited fighters' and referred to others (himself included) as 'spit-and-polishers'.

A spirited fighter would play any position to the best of his abilities, calculating variations on every move. Often he would find himself in trouble due to the unsoundness of his play, but he would pay no attention and keep on fighting until a seemingly random tactical operation would come to the rescue.

A spit-and-polisher was a totally different animal. He would build his position solidly, using opening 'schemes' to catch his naïve opponents in a carefully laid-out net of positional traps. His values lay in a better pawn-structure, and he would detest any kind of unbalanced position in principle.

I don't know where I belonged in this weird classification. Probably to the 'fighters', if only due to my age and meteoric rise to Master level. As an obedient student I spent the next two years trying to learn 'master's chess', which would earn me promotion to the spitters category. Every once in a while I would produce 'a clean game with no tactics, just outplayed him' and proudly show it to my mentors, but at the end of this period I had nothing to show for it, except for a rating loss of nearly 50 points. Then I began to think about the real value of 'positional understanding'.

It's not like I was totally unfamiliar with the cliché. The classical works of major Soviet authors Panov and Romanovsky were littered with referrals to it, and the Patriarch himself, the great Botvinnik, was using this term in every article he ever wrote. As he was getting older, Botvinnik was claiming more and more that his tactical skills were diminishing, yet the mysterious positional understanding grew. It seemed like he spoke from a position of intellectual superiority. At times the ageing Champ sounded bitter, complaining about his 'understanding' being unjustly challenged by cunning tacticians. Everything written about his matches with Tal was built on that premise: strategist vs tactician.

It was a golden age of chess journalism with all those writings about 'an ultimate clash' between 'iron logic', represented by Botvinnik, and 'diabolical tactical trickery', as shown by Tal. It appealed well to the generally well-educated masses of chess fans in the Soviet Union, who needed a little poetic flavour – describing a chess game as an intellectual duel – to keep fuelling their interest in sparsely played World Championship Matches between Soviet grandmasters. Their sympathies were more or less evenly spread between the two players. Even some 15 years later, the Botvinnik-Tal

controversy didn't seem to be dying out. Indeed, it represented a mystery: the first match saw Botvinnik losing by 4 points, and the next year he came back, winning by an even larger margin. Serious books had been written on the subject, with in-depth analysis of the players' respective styles done by the best chess journalists the Soviet Union ever produced.

I considered myself a good enough chessplayer to form my own opinion on that subject. Surely I wasn't going to take any crap from sportswriters, and one day I sat down to look at the games myself. Luckily, the books also contained the game scores from both matches. I thought of something along the lines of tracking the widely announced differences between the players' styles. I expected to see wild attacks and numerous sacrifices from Tal in one game, and deep strategic plans relentlessly implemented by Botvinnik in another. Before I could do any deep analysis I was disappointed. The difference in styles didn't show as much as I expected!

Tal, the tactician, was well aware of the positional principles listed in the books. Botvinnik, the strategist, went for tactical solutions very often. The two bashed at each other any way they could, with Tal winning the most in the first match, and Botvinnik getting the better of it in the return match. I couldn't see where the difference between them lay, except for Tal being the aggressor early and more often. Go figure. I began to suspect that I, along with thousands of others, had been led to believe in something that didn't exist.

Or maybe, such thing as style of play does exist, but on some higher level of the decision-making process that is lurking in the background only to surface in critical moments of a battle. I, at my superficial glance, of course wasn't able to detect it. The truth is, a chessplayer's main objective is to find good moves, and the last thing he should worry about is attaching them to his (or, worse, someone else's) theoretical beliefs. In retrospect it's nice to attribute your success to superior 'understanding' or 'class', but it doesn't relieve chess-players from sweating it out on every move. While it's possible to distinguish between positional and combinative play, I wouldn't put one ahead of the other, and here I disagree with the great maestro Mikhail Botvinnik.

When filling out the chart the chart of personal characteristics in Part 1, I called myself a positional player, citing my affection to long strategic battles. Technically speaking this statement is ambiguous and hence can be misleading. A few glossary items to clear up the mess.

a) What we call **positional play** means nothing else but making moves based on positional principles: such as development, centralizing, controlling open files, taking care of your pawn-structure, etc. No calculation, except for a blunder-check, is required.

b) Variations we calculate are called **tactics**. A tactic relates to the position we see on the board at the moment and continues along a calculated line as far as the moves are forced, and thus calculable.

c) **Strategy** as opposed to tactics is a long-term thing. Being a strategic player means being able to create and follow plans. A strategic plan can be conducted by tactical means, independent of the positional principles it was based on. It just doesn't happen very often, that's why we often confuse 'strategic' with 'positional'.

d) **Combinative play** consists of tactical operations linked with one another and may or may not involve a sacrifice.

Some of my readers may disagree with this classification or some of the definitions. Please, accept my apologies. I don't mean to confuse you by re-writing chess theory as we know it. I'm only trying to create a workable vocabulary that'll help me to move on with this book.

For the final part of this book I have selected a few issues related to middlegame play. There are many more of those I could discuss, but the variety of subjects is so broad that even briefly touched they'll expand this book to the 'War and Peace' proportions. I must be content with the choices I made (boy, it was tough to make cuts!), and try to make the best out of it. To achieve better representation I will attempt to combine elements of strategy and tactics the way they blend in real game situations.

What Exchanges are For

An exchange of pieces of equal value is an essential feature of the game of chess, just as check or pawn promotion. Pieces of equal value will disappear from the board as the game progresses. It's a natural thing, but at the same time, players have certain freedom when it comes to initiating or avoiding exchanges. That makes exchanging pieces a tool, a technique we use to achieve certain goals. Some inexperienced players think that the only use is to get a draw, which is not true, of course. Exchanging does not necessary simplify, let alone solve the problems presented in a given position. Mindlessly swapping pieces is a sure way to losing, and a well-conceived exchanging operation may be the only road to victory.

Alexander Alekhine wrote (I am translating from Russian): "A chess master shouldn't fear simplifications when playing an inferior opponent, or when in a must-win situation, if they're providing right answers to the needs of position." I couldn't agree more with the great maestro. In my own practice there were many decisive games I won in complex endings.

Exchanging is a powerful tactical element, an integral part of any forced sequence of moves. Obviously, when you take the opponent's piece and he has to take back, his move is forced, and you can calculate further. Exchanging is also the simplest way of eliminating a defending piece.

Yermolinsky – Kutkov
Leningrad 1972

1 d4 e5?!

I don't intend to elaborate on the hidden subtleties of this opening. I am only going to tell you that my opponent was a giant of a man, 6½ feet (2 metres) easily, and way over 200 pounds (90 kg) of muscle. He didn't want to waste a whole evening on a skinny 14-year-old kid.

2 dxe5 ♘c6 3 ♘f3 ♕e7

He probably hoped to catch me in 4 ♗f4 ♕b4+ 5 ♗d2 ♕xb2 6 ♗c3?? ♗b4, a well-known trap. By the way, isn't 4 ♕d5 what White is supposed to do here?

4 e4!?

Instead of holding on to the pawn I preferred to develop quickly.

4...♘xe5 5 ♘xe5?

Around here I could engage you in a kind of detached discussion about tempi won or lost in the opening. Old masters, beginning with Dr Tarrasch, were very good at analysing openings move by move, while paying attention to nothing else but the tempi count. Alekhine made a mockery of such 'scientific' approach in one of his game notes. Referring to the biggest (loudest) protagonist of such theory, the Russian Master Alapin (the one who gave us the 2 c3 Sicilian), the future World Champion gave an example of White being 5 (!) tempi ahead and already losing by force in a position recommended by a 'world-renowned theoretician'. Throughout his career Alekhine made a nice living beating up the people who took Tarrasch's advice too close to the heart. The good doctor himself was not that stupid. Why was he saying such things? It only proves how difficult the job of chess teacher is. You're a good player, you make good moves, and you genuinely want to help other people make good moves too. You end up being drawn into the mindless wordplay of generalization.

Even Nimzowitsch, who aimed a good portion of his writings at attacking the Classical School of Chess (and Dr Tarrasch personally), couldn't help it. In one of the first chapters of *My System* he goes on and on, explaining opening exchanges from a standpoint of tempi counting. He takes a Scotch Game position after 1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 exd4 4 ♘xd4, and criticizes the 4...♘xd4 5 ♕xd4 exchange on the grounds of White getting a one-piece (the queen) lead in development.

I wonder what Nimzo would say about my move. Something to the sense that Black gets a lead in development, but his queen prematurely goes to the centre of the board, and White can later gain time attacking it. All true.

In my opinion, 5 ♘xe5 is simply very bad as it helps Black to get his queen anywhere from the ugly e7-square. White should play 5 ♘c3 with a nice advantage.

5...♕xe5 6 ♘c3 ♗b4 7 ♗d3!?

A rather forced pawn sacrifice that my opponent didn't dare to accept. After 7...♗xc3+ 8 bxc3 ♕xc3+ 9 ♗d2 ♕d4 10 0-0 White operates with a huge lead in development. Nevertheless, I am sure there would be people willing to test White's attacking skill, especially in a situation where no other good choices were present.

7...d5?!

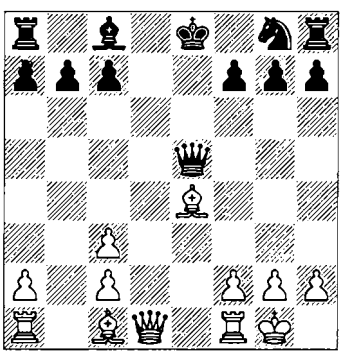
I don't believe my opponent was thinking in terms of opening the position in order to utilize his 'lead in development'. He simply wanted to win my e-pawn and forgot that I could recapture back on my 10th move.

8 0-0 ♗xc3

'Ruining White's pawn-structure at the cost of surrendering a bishop in an open position'. Please, let's not start a Congressional debate here. Like I said, I'm positive he thought he was winning a pawn.

9 bxc3 dxe4 10 ♗xe4 *(D)*

B



There's no 10...♕xe4? because of 11 ♖e1.

10...♘f6 11 ♗d3 0-0 12 ♖e1 ♕d6 13 ♕f3!

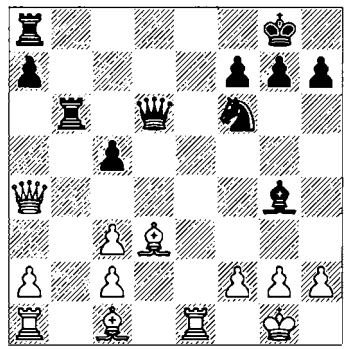
White has emerged with a solid plus. Feeling the pressure, e.g. 13...c6 14 ♗f4 ♕d8 15 ♖ab1, etc., Black now goes for a dubious pawn sac. Or did he just blunder again?

13...♗g4? 14 ♕xb7 ♖fb8 15 ♕a6

Even if it weren't forced, White wouldn't mind exchanging queens in this particular situation. He's a pawn up with the bishop-pair – should be enough to win the ending.

15...♖b6 16 ♕a4 c5? *(D)*

W



The last move was another mistake that allowed White to utilize the tactical idea of double attack, and an exchange plays the key role in the entire operation. Once again, I could be talking about the strength of the bishop-pair, and mention everyone's favourite, 'the real advantage of the two bishops is that you can always exchange one'. In fact, there's nothing to my next move but tactics. The f6-knight holds Black's position together, so...

17 ♗g5!

The first threat is simple: 18 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 19 ♕xg4. Black has to move the bishop.

17...♗d7 18 ♕h4!

Resuming the threat; now the h7-pawn is the target.

18...h6?

This move represents the culmination of my opponent's attitude. He was making moves without thinking. 18...g6 would have prevented what happened in the game and made White sweat a little: 19 ♖ad1 can be answered by 19...♖e8.

19 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 20 ♕e4 1-0

Switching to a real target – the forgotten a8-rook. A silly little game.

Any positional element (development, open file, two bishops, passed pawn) can be affected by an exchange. Say, after your opponent has doubled his rooks on an open file, you can eliminate the problem by exchanging rooks. This technique was brought to perfection by Capablanca; that's why he lost just a handful of games

throughout his career. I can refer you back to Part 1 for examples of a consistent strategy of exchanges as an equalizing technique.

Exchanging is a powerful tool in winning battles for good squares. By eliminating the defenders of a weak square in the opponent's position, we get closer and closer to establishing total control. In the eyes of many people that's what you call positional play. I have heard it put this way: positional mastery is knowing which piece to exchange and which should be left on the board. Could be true, but I think it depends on the degree of difficulty in every particular case.

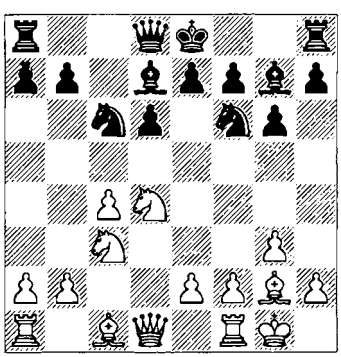
In the book of his best games the great Bent Larsen reminisces a little about his junior years, and many things he says about himself as a young player apply to other kids/chess-players. I, personally, found a lot of similarities between his descriptions and the way I felt about chess a long time ago.

Bent recalls being very proud of his first achievements in 'positional play'. With a smile he shows an old game of his (Larsen-Ax.Nielsen, Esbjerg 1953) that bears a strong resemblance to the following contest.

Yermolinsky – Martinson
Kiev 1972

1 c4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 g6 6 g3 d6 7 ♗g2 ♗d7 8 0-0 ♗g7 *(D)*

W



9 ♘c2!?

Why is White hiding his knight? In general terms, he wants to keep pieces on the board because he has more space. In this particular case the knight relocates to e3 to establish a better grip on the d5-square.

9...0-0 10 b3 ♕c8 11 ♗b2 ♗h3

The first piece exchange is initiated by Black, and it's a success. I touched this subject in my Double Fianchetto coverage: exchanging the opponent's fianchettoed bishop helps to achieve many goals, including weakening the king. Ironically, Martinson's mistake was overestimating this particular factor. The effects of the exchange of light-squared bishops don't stretch too far, not to seriously compromising White's position – he's still very solid here.

12 ♘e3 ♗xg2 13 ♔xg2 ♘e4 14 ♕c2 ♘g5?!

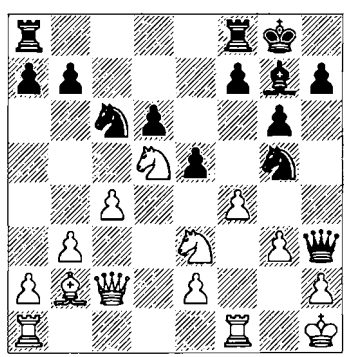
Suddenly Black becomes ambitious, too ambitious for his own good. He would have been safe, even if slightly worse, after 14...♘xc3 15 ♗xc3 ♗xc3 16 ♕xc3 ♕e6.

15 ♘cd5 ♕h3+ 16 ♔g1 e5!?

Consistent with the plan he started on move 14. Black wants to attack with ...f5-f4, and I correctly judged that it shouldn't be allowed.

17 f4! *(D)*

B



Martinson may have been concerned with the safety of his own king. He rejected 17...exf4 18 gxf4 (the position after 18 ♘xf4 ♕d7 19 ♘ed5 ♘e5 is unclear, as both sides have excellent squares for their knights; of course, White has no time to exchange the bishops: 18 ♗xg7? fxg3) on the grounds of White getting dangerous

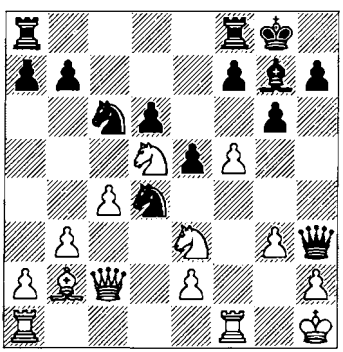
threats due to the combined power of the queen on the long diagonal, and the d5-knight. The fact is, Black could contain them: 18...♗xb2 19 ♕xb2 ♘e4 20 ♖f3 ♕h5! (avoiding a trap: if 20...♕h4? then 21 ♘f5!), and White's position is a bit loose at the joints. He has to be on the alert for Black's counterplay, such as in the sample line 21 b4 ♖ae8 22 b5 ♘e7 23 ♕d4 ♘xd5 24 ♘xd5 f5, when 25 ♕xa7 can't be recommended in view of 25...♘c5.

17...♘e6?

This move is a serious mistake. The much-valued fianchettoed bishop will become a liability as soon as White shuts the door.

18 f5! ♘ed4 *(D)*

W



19 ♗xd4?!

White's strategy is simple: exchange off everything else and the advantage based on d5-knight vs g7-bishop will increase. Good thinking for a 14-year-old, and I couldn't agree more with the plan, but it's the execution that troubles me. Black is given a chance to change the pawn-structure and he should have never let it go by. After 19...exd4! I wouldn't trust the exchange sac 20 ♘f4 ♕h6 21 ♘ed5 d3 22 ♕xd3 ♗xa1 23 ♖xa1 ♕g5, etc., so 20 f6 looks forced. Black then has a choice:

a) 20...dxe3 21 fxg7 ♔xg7 22 ♕c3+ ♘e5 23 ♖f6 ♖ae8 24 ♖xd6 f6, with some compensation for a pawn that is about to be lost.

b) 20...♗h6 21 ♘e7+ (Black will be better after 21 ♘g2 ♖fe8, because the control over the e-file easily outweighs other positional factors) 21...♘xe7!? (interesting, but hardly necessary. I'm not sure how big White's advantage is in case of 21...♔h8 22 ♘3d5 – it's certainly less significant than what I got in the game continuation) 22 fxe7 ♗xe3 23 exf8♕+ ♖xf8 24 ♕e4 ♕d7 25 ♖f6, and White keeps the pressure on thanks to the trick 25...♖e8? 26 ♖xd6! and wins.

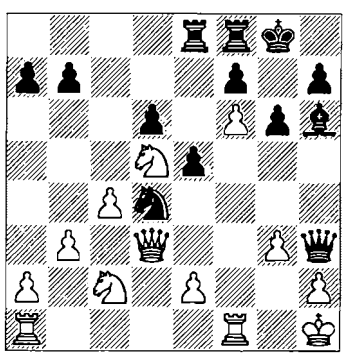
In any case, my task would be much harder. That's the problem with 'positional games' – once you look deeper you can see tactical opportunities missed or misused by the loser. It almost doesn't matter what the position was to begin with.

What should White do instead of 19 ♗xd4? As 19 ♕d3 only invites 19...e4 20 ♕xe4? ♘xe2, threatening the bishop as well as 21...♘xg3+, I would recommend the restrained 19 ♕d1.

19...♘xd4? 20 ♕d3 ♖ae8 21 f6 ♗h6 22 ♘c2! *(D)*

Not allowing 22...♗xe3, of course. From now on I keep a firm grip on the position, but how is it possible to lose it? Black is in as hopeless a situation as if he had been a rook down, for example.

B



22...♗g5 23 e3 ♘xc2 24 ♕xc2 h5 25 e4 h4 26 ♕g2 ♕g4 27 ♕f3 ♕xf3+ 28 ♖xf3 hxg3 29 hxg3 ♖e6 30 ♔g2 ♔h7 31 ♖h1+ ♗h6 32 g4 1-0

In this game White successfully employed a proven strategy: when one of the opponent's pieces is bad, exchange off the rest of his army – it's all that can be said from a classical point

of view. Ha-ha-ha. Just like if a generic knowledge of positional elements alone would guarantee success every time. It would be very primitive to attribute Black's loss to 16...e5!?; and calling it a positional mistake on the grounds of weakening the d5-square and killing his dark-squared bishop is nothing short of ridiculous. As a matter of fact, the resulting pawn-structure is very combative – just think about the Sveshnikov or other lines of the Sicilian with ...e5 – and the outcome of the game will depend on many other factors, most of those being purely tactical. A simplistic approach of exchanging any black piece except the dark-squared bishop may not work every time. Because if it did, how could these openings survive?

I'd like to offer two games from my 'spit-and-polish' period, in which I honestly tried to refute the Najdorf Variation against a player 100 rating points above me. At the time I was very proud of winning these games, attributing my success solely to the method described above. A deeper look can help us to draw some other conclusions.

Yermolinsky – Shashin

Leningrad 1977

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗e3 e5 7 ♘f3 ♕c7 8 a4?!

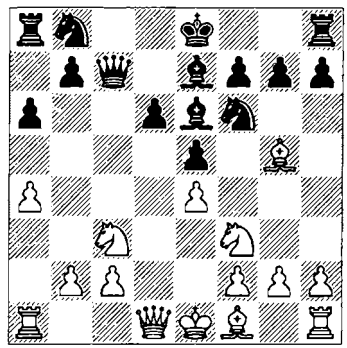
White does better by forcing a black knight to cut the light-squared bishop's access to the e6-square, as in 8 ♗g5 ♘bd7. Henrique Mecking had some success with this variation in the early 1970s, but these days it has universally been replaced by 7 ♘b3.

8...♗e7

My opponent, who was considered (locally) the best expert in the Najdorf, rejects the immediate 8...♗e6 on the account of 9 ♘g5, but wouldn't it be logical to play 8...h6, to continue with ...♗e6 and ...♘bd7?

9 ♗g5 ♗e6 *(D)*

I'd prefer 9...♘bd7, transposing to the theoretical line mentioned in the notes to White's 8th move. What happens then will be covered in the next game.



First stop here. White has to grab his chance while it's there: 10 ♗xf6! ♗xf6 11 ♘d5. Black then chooses between two different variations:

a) 11...♗xd5 12 ♕xd5 ♕xc2 (not 12...♘d7 13 c3, and White consolidates his long-term plus) 13 ♕xb7 ♕c6 14 ♕xc6+ ♘xc6 15 ♗c4 ♔e7 (15...♘d4 16 ♘xd4 exd4 17 b4 ♔e7 18 ♔d2 gives White a little edge) 16 ♗d5 ♖hc8. Take a good look at this position. White has maximized his positional gains, and now what? He's faced with strong counterplay from his better developed opponent, with 17...♖ab8 coming next.

b) 11...♕a5+ 12 b4 (if 12 c3?, then Black happily continues with 12...♗xd5 13 ♕xd5 ♕xd5 14 exd5 ♘d7 – the new pawn-structure favours him) 12...♕d8 13 a5 ♘d7 14 c4 (possibly better is 14 ♗c4) 14...0-0 15 ♗e2 g6 16 0-0 ♗g7. What we got here is a Sveshnikov with all its typical ideas, namely ...f5.

How to explain White's failure in line 'a'? Hey, look, his whole strategy was based on exchanging Black's pieces that could be used in fighting for the d5-square. What White forgot about is a little detail: his own f3-knight bears no significance to the d5-square. This piece is no better than the black dark-squared bishop, so White has been fighting a war he couldn't win.

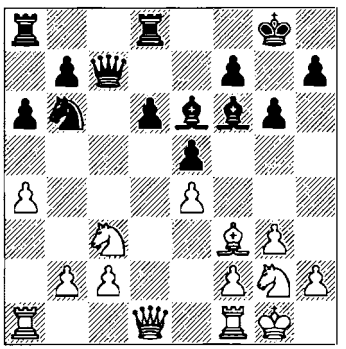
10 ♗e2 ♘bd7 11 0-0 0-0 12 ♘h4

In a view of what was said above, I can understand why I wanted to find better places for my knight. The text-move also opens a square for my light-squared bishop.

12...♖fd8 13 ♗f3

All hands to battle stations. The great fight for the d5-square is about to begin.

13...g6 14 g3 ♘b6 15 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 16 ♘g2 *(D)*



A key point of the game. By simply being consistent with his ideas Black could now obtain excellent play. One of the ways was to surrender the d5-square for a moment. After 16...♘c4 17 ♘d5 ♗xd5 18 ♕xd5 he has to resist the temptation of winning the b2-pawn:

a) 18...♘xb2? 19 ♖fb1! (not 19 ♖ab1 ♕c3) 19...♕c3 (19...♕xc2? is disastrous: 20 ♘e3 ♕c3 21 ♕a2 ♘d3 22 ♘d5) 20 ♖a2! ♕xf3 21 ♖axb2, when White will regain his pawn with a long-term advantage.

b) 18...♗g5 is not much of an improvement, as White still wins the knight after 19 ♖fd1! (19 ♗e2? ♘b6 20 ♕b3 d5 21 a5 ♘c4 is good for Black) 19...♘xb2? 20 ♖db1 ♕xc2? (better is 20...♕c3 21 ♖a2 – same as in line 'a') 21 ♕a2 ♕c3 22 ♗e2.

c) 18...♘b6 is an unexpected return. There may follow 19 ♕d3 ♕c4 20 ♖fd1 ♖ac8 21 a5, and White keeps his edge.

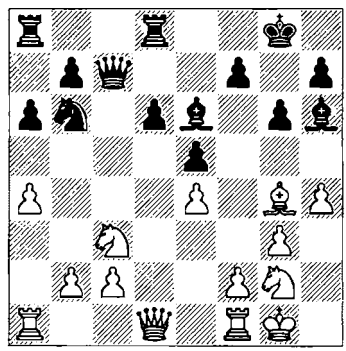
d) 18...♕c6! is the solution. White can't keep the pawn-structure the way it is, and once it changes, all his hopes evaporate.

That could be the problem with White's strategy as a whole. The Najdorf pawn-structure is sort of fixed, but not fixed for good; that's why the most consistent plan based on it may fall apart at the first sight of changes.

16...♗g5!?

Contrary to what I thought during the game, this is not a bad move. It may, actually, be even better than 16...♘c4. My estimation was based on the fact that it gives White a chance to exchange the light-squared bishops, but – look, we just talked about this stuff – it only comes at the cost of changing the pawn-structure. By the way, 17 ♗g4 immediately could be answered by 17...f5!. I saw this line and thought of an improvement.

17 h4 ♗h6 18 ♗g4? *(D)*



I gave an exclamation mark to this move in my post-game notes. I just wonder why. Black could simply play 18...♘c4 19 ♗xe6 fxe6 20 ♕g4 ♕f7 with the twin threats 21...♘xb2 and 21...♘d2. No doubt my judgement was clouded by the result of the game. I wanted to find a logical explanation for my success and I was searching in the wrong places. My 'impeccable strategy' of fighting for the d5-square by bringing all my pieces in touch with this vital square (remember Nimzowitsch?) and consistently eliminating the black defenders was in fact faulty. I would have probably lost this game, like I lost dozens of others in that dark period of my career, had my opponent not blundered on the next move.

18...f5? 19 exf5 gxf5 20 ♗xf5! ♗xf5 21 ♕h5

A simple double attack wins back one of the black bishops, leaving White with a better position due to the weakness of the opponent's king.

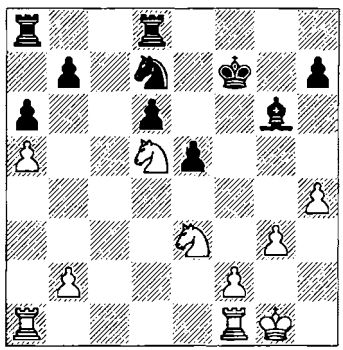
21...♗xc2 22 ♕xh6 ♕f7 23 ♘e3 ♕g6 24 ♕xg6+ ♗xg6 25 a5 ♘d7 26 ♘cd5

My knight did land on d5 after all, but for that I shouldn't credit anything but my luck.

26...♔f7? *(D)*

26...♔g7? would lose the exchange to 27 ♘c7 ♖ac8 28 ♘e6+, and my opponent wanted to prepare 27...♖ac8. Still, 26...♘c5 was a better try, as now his king becomes a target of a rare endgame attack.

W



27 f4 ♗d3 28 fxe5+! ♗xf1 29 ♖xf1+

There's now nowhere to hide: 29...♔g7 30 e6 ♘e5 31 e7 ♖g8 32 ♘f5+ ♔h8 33 ♘xd6.

29...♔e6

Alexander Shashin tries his best chance.

30 ♘c7+ ♔xe5 31 ♘c4+ ♔d4 32 ♘xd6

Suddenly White is in no hurry to regain the exchange. My patience netted me a pawn after a short tactical melee.

32...♘c5 33 ♖f4+ ♔d3 34 b4! ♖ac8

No help is provided by either 34...♖xd6 35 bxc5 ♖dd8 36 ♘xa8 ♖xa8 37 ♖f7 with an easy win, or 34...♘e6!? 35 ♖f3+ ♔e2 36 ♖f2+ ♔d3 37 ♘xa8 ♖xd6 38 ♖f7, where the white knight is quite comfortable in the corner.

35 ♘xc8 ♖xc8 36 ♖f7 ♘e4 37 g4!

and I converted it to a win.

A nice game, don't get me wrong, but if I were to include it to my best games collection, I would prefer to begin at move 20.

Anyway, next year we were to meet again, and I vowed to improve on my strategy by completing a knight journey to e3 earlier in the opening.

Yermolinsky – Shashin

Leningrad 1978

(first 7 moves as before)

8 ♗g5 ♘bd7 9 a4 ♗e7 10 ♘d2 h6 11 ♗xf6?!

Mecking played 11 ♗h4, which is of course much superior, but I was operating under the spell of my strategic concept. The bishop is exchanged for a knight – one of the contestants for the d5-square, so it must be good for White.

11...♘xf6 12 ♘c4 ♗e6 13 ♘e3 ♕b6

The first inconvenience. The absence of the dark-squared bishop is telling.

14 ♕c1 0-0 15 ♗d3 ♖fd8 16 a5 ♕c5 17 0-0

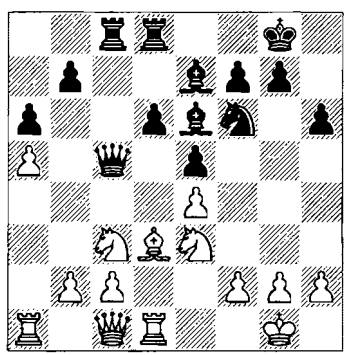
To begin with, Black could equalize on the spot with 17...d5.

17...♖ac8!?

No go – Alexander Shashin was out to avenge his loss in our previous encounter.

18 ♖d1 *(D)*

B

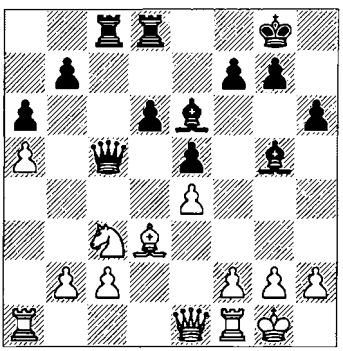


This move completes my opening set-up. The ...d5 advance is prevented, and both players had to make up their minds on what to do next. As I mentioned before, in principle Black shouldn't be afraid of ♘cd5 if it leads to a pawn-structure change after exd5; so he's allowed a certain freedom of movement. Meanwhile, his dark-squared bishop could use some relocation. Two areas with employment opportunities can be found on the map: g5, and surprisingly, d8. Both 18...♘h5 19 ♘cd5 ♗g5 20 b4 ♕c6 21 c4 ♘f4 and 18...♖e8!? 19 ♕d2 ♗d8 now deserved attention.

18...♘g4?!

My opponent went for the obvious but incorrectly associated it with a knight exchange. Try to reason why it's wrong in terms of the fight for the d5-square, and you'll be wasting your time. The real problem it brings is relieving White's cramped position. The bishop will take away some squares from the white pieces once it arrives on g5, but White can live with that as long as he gets a little bit more space than he had in the diagrammed position.

19 ♘xg4 ♗xg4 20 ♖f1 ♗g5 21 ♕e1 ♗e6 *(D)*



22 ♖a4

Nothing could be gained by 22 ♘a4 ♕d4 23 ♘b6 ♖c7, followed by 24...d5 after White takes care of his b-pawn. The same idea, 22...d5, had to be played after the text-move. Black would easily hold the ending resulting after mass-exchanges: 23 exd5 ♗xd5 24 ♘xd5 ♕xd5 25 ♕e4 ♕xe4 26 ♗xe4 ♖c7 27 ♖b4 ♖dd7. The alternative (after 23 exd5 ♗xd5), 24 ♕xe5 ♗f6 25 ♕f5 looks promising, but does it deliver after 25...♗xc3 26 ♕h7+ ♔f8 27 bxc3 ♕xc3 28 ♖g4 ♖c5? I don't think so.

Alexander Shashin was a good player armed with all the positional knowledge you may wish for, but he was never comfortable with tactical play. Later I'll show you our first ever encounter when, while outgunning me by good 200 rating points, he nevertheless went down in flames after just 22 moves. From that game on, and we have played a lot, he was carefully avoiding complications. This attitude sure cost him this game as well as a bunch of others.

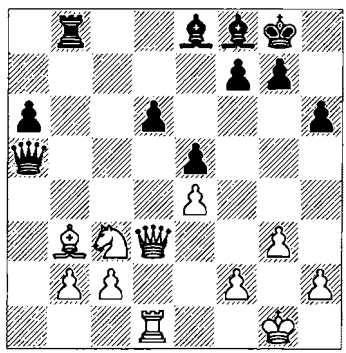
22...♗d7? 23 ♖a3 ♕b4 24 ♕e2

Last call to do something with your position. How about 24...♕xb2!? 25 ♖b3 ♕xc3 26 ♖xc3 ♖xc3? Can Black possibly lose this?

24...♗c6? 25 ♗c4 ♗d7 26 ♗d5 b5

After this move Black gets another permanent weakness. In the course of next 14 moves Shashin was only concerned with making the time-control.

27 axb6 ♕xb6 28 ♖b3 ♕a5 29 ♖d1 ♖b8 30 ♕c4 ♗e8 31 ♕d3 ♖dc8 32 ♖xb8 ♖xb8 33 ♗b3 ♗e7 34 g3 ♗f8 *(D)*



35 ♕f1!

A nice manoeuvre to help White reclaim the a-file. Black is gradually forced into total passivity.

35...♖a8 36 ♖a1 ♕b6 37 ♕c4 ♖a7 38 ♘d5 ♕b7 39 ♕c3 ♗b5 40 ♕b4 ♕d7 41 ♗a4

Give me a round of cheers for finally engineering the bishop exchange. That move was sealed and the resumption of play some two weeks later brought no surprises – White won.

With this extended analysis of the Najdorf pawn-structure – don't view it as belonging to the previous chapter, as I don't consider myself an expert on that opening – hopefully, I have convinced you in my opinion. A complex position can hardly be solved by the application of just one positional principle. Unfortunately, that's what people are taught to do.

Classics Revisited or the Miseducation of Alex Yermolinsky

Please, don't get me wrong. I am far from telling you to recycle your favourite chess books, written by Tarrasch, Capablanca or Nimzowitsch. These guys were giants of the game, and I'll never show any disrespect to them. I'm sure that any of them would do much better against the Najdorf than I did in the two games shown above. The thing is, their books can be misleading. And there are some good reasons why:

a) Just like with language, the ability to speak doesn't have much to do with the ability to teach others. Capa and Nimzo were excellent chess 'orators', and the world of chess-players starving for knowledge expected them to speak the words of wisdom. What do you do? You know you play good moves most of the time; but you find, select or reject them nearly subconsciously on some level of higher understanding, which may very well be defined by your calculating ability multiplied by the pattern recognition power developed by years of training. How do you bring it to people? The first chess teachers had no choice but to apply a 'scientific' approach (I already mentioned it earlier) of breaking it down to elements of position. The theory was born. For years it had provided great help for many people who took up chess, and I mean beginners. It's no accident that most of the classical books begin with explaining the rules of the game! One can probably go from ground zero to a respectable USCF 2000 by working exclusively on the subjects given in those excellent books. The problem starts later when a good club player wants to move up and improve in chess. The classical positional theory becomes a burden, because its postulates alone don't help you to solve problems on a new level, and sometimes can even be confusing. What I hear from my students all the time is this: I did everything right, didn't I, so how come I lost? Take Yermo's word for it, set these books aside and start working on your own. If there's one good piece of advice I would take from the classics, it was given by Capablanca: you see a good move, then make it.

b) We don't know much about the ways of society in the early 1900s. Our great heroes might have had some other agenda than bringing the light of knowledge to the masses of present and future chess-players. I'm not that versed in chess history, and sometimes can confuse dates and facts; but I think Alekhine wrote his book *My Best Games of Chess 1908-1923* in (or around) 1924, when he was desperately searching for a sponsor to organize his match with Capablanca. Alekhine had to write a book that would tell the world he was a genius, and the last thing he wanted to do was to cast a shadow of doubt on his exclusive position in the chess world. The games were selected and annotated in the most presentable way to reach the 'strategic goal' of winning universal recognition as a great player. For the same reason he gave all these crazy blindfold simuls and played idiotic consultation games. I'd never blame the great champion for such compromise. How would he look if he shared his real thoughts, his doubts and mistakes, with the rest of the world? Especially if compared with his rival, who hardly ever admitted making a slightest inaccuracy in his games? A few years later Nimzowitsch found himself in a similar situation when he was writing *My System* – all efforts to the ultimate goal of getting to play for a World Championship.

Back to the present times for a moment. Familiar to us James Schroeder writes, "Yermo is not really good in the endgame, as seen from his own analysis where he publicly admits his mistakes..." How's that for encouragement? And I'm not currently (heh-heh-heh) claiming any rights for a World Championship.

On the other hand, thinking about it, maybe WCC – World Championship Cancelled – was a blessing in disguise. Since 1995 we have already received excellent books from Shirov and Anand. Who's next in line? I've heard Kramnik is putting his games together.

Nimzo's games were not as flashy as Alekhine's, but he was head and shoulders above

the rest in his didactic powers and also was a hell of a writer – so he came up with a book we all cherish. I've read Tal's foreword to the Russian edition of *My System*. Many things he says – I think I can detect a thin layer of irony there – we all agree with, but when Mikhail Tal expresses his regrets to the fact that he hadn't read this book until he was nineteen or 'things would have been different', I rest my case. Thank God for small favours.

Many books have been written since WW2, and, guess what, a lot of them just repeat each other. Same boring lists of positional elements, same 'tactics serve strategy' and 'attack only when prepared' hollow advice, same carefully selected games, which are nothing but one-way beatings delivered by chess heavyweights to the tomato cans of amateur ranks. After the years of repetition the positional theory of chess has raised to become a religion with its sacred objects – the untouchable classical games. Take Janowski-Capablanca, New York 1916. Not a bad game, but the annotations! Is anybody out there ignorant enough to say that Dawid Janowski, the man who played two World Championship matches and contended for top prizes in major tournaments for some 20+ years, lost this game because he didn't understand simple positional principles? Gimme a break! Capa was a better player by all counts, so he won that one and the lion's share of their encounters. Fair enough, but if you want to use this particular game as learning material, then study it honestly.

Janowski – Capablanca
New York 1916

After the standard opening moves of the Slav Defence...

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 d5 3 c4 c6 4 ♘c3

...Capablanca casually developed his bishop:

4...♗f5

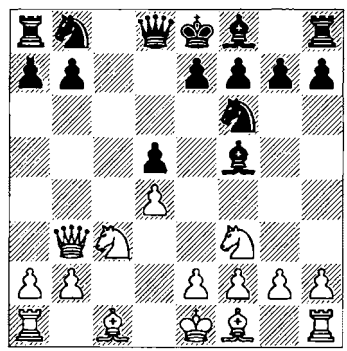
This move goes by with no comments from the great Jose, who follows with the game text.

5 ♕b3 ♕b6 6 ♕xb6

Capa stops here and expresses his pleasure with Black's position. All true, as Black has solved the main problem of the Queen's Gambit – the development of his light-squared bishop. Why did it come so easy is a natural question for somebody who tries to learn opening subtleties. No answer is provided.

Let's go back a couple of moves and think what Black would do in case of a little move transposition, 5 cxd5 cxd5 (5...♘xd5!? is what Black probably has to do, but White must be doing well after 6 ♘d2, followed by e4), and now 6 ♕b3 *(D)*.

B



How to meet this? 6...b6 leads to a dangerous weakening of the light-squares, made critical by the fact that Black's light-squared bishop took a leave of absence from his primary defensive duties. It's very hard to continue after 7 ♗f4, with an opening catastrophe just lurking around the corner, such as 7...♘c6 8 e4! ♘a5 (8...dxe4 9 ♗b5) 9 ♕b5+ ♗d7 10 ♘xd5!, etc.

6...♕b6 is met by 7 ♘xd5!, and Black will be fishing for dubious compensation if he wants to avoid the forced line 7...♘xd5 8 ♕xd5 e6 9 ♕b3 ♕xb3 10 axb3 ♗c2 11 e3 ♗xb3 12 ♗b5+ ♘c6 13 ♘e5 ♗d5 14 f3, with a clear edge to White. I can't see anything better than 6...♗c8, which is a very sad retreat indeed. With that I conclude my analysis of this opening line.

This and other attempts to put the great chess treasures under the microscope are casually dismissed as shrewd attempts to apply today's theoretical knowledge to old games. What knowledge, for crying out loud? There's no modern theory after 4...♗f5?, because it's a bad

move and nobody would play it any more. Capa himself must have figured it out pretty quickly, as I don't know of any other games of his played with this variation.

6...axb6 7 cxd5 ♘xd5!

Nicely played, as the threat of 8...♘b4 forces White to exchange.

8 ♘xd5 cxd5

It may be argued that this position is typical for the Exchange Slav, and thus the further course of the game must be studied as a perfect example of Black's strategy. Personally, I find the disappearance of a pair of knights slightly unusual, but let's take a look. It all began when Janowski played a couple of unassuming moves.

9 e3?!

I understand his concern about the ...♘b4 threat, but was it that strong to force White into a passive set-up? Couldn't he try 9 ♗f4 ♘c6 10 e3 instead? Then 10...♘b4? seems to lead Black straight to the Gates of Hell after 11 ♗b5+ ♗d7 12 ♗xd7+ ♔xd7 13 ♔d2, and White's lead in development has produced his first real threat of the game in 14 ♖hc1. OK, I agree, Black can simply play 10...e6 and he's perfectly fine. But wouldn't it be nice if Capa, or the people who used this game in their books, mentioned all this stuff? The above variations don't look excessively complicated to me, and they can hardly be confusing for a common reader.

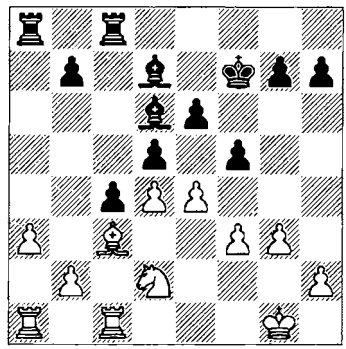
9...♘c6 10 ♗d2 ♗d7

This much-praised retreat has the idea of supporting ...b5. Let's sprint through some moves to arrive at a critical point.

11 ♗e2 e6 12 0-0 ♗d6 13 ♖fc1 ♔e7 14 ♗c3 ♖hc8 15 a3 ♘a5 16 ♘d2 f5 17 g3 b5 18 f3 ♘c4 19 ♗xc4 bxc4 20 e4 ♔f7 *(D)*

In his game overview (I can hardly call something that contains no variations 'annotations'), Capablanca mentions some relevant positional elements that constitute Black's advantage here: the bishop-pair, more compact pawn-structure, and even throws in his more active king for good measure! All this has been duly repeated by other annotators, who, just as Capa did in his analysis, paid no particular attention to White's next move.

21 e5?



Somebody, I think it was Vidmar, mentioned 21 exf5 exf5 22 f4, followed by ♘f3-e5, as an improvement on Janowski's play. Some understatement! I don't think Black can do much against this simple plan. The centralized knight effectively nullifies Black's advantages, and even Capa's glorious active king would have been slightly embarrassed.

Now, how are we going to explain Dawid Janowski's decision? He was a good enough chess-player (his career achievements attest to that) to find this idea – after all, if he was a tactician such as he's portrayed in chess literature, then pieces' energy had to be the name of the game for him; therefore improving the knight's scope would become his main priority – yet, he played the inexplicable move 21 e5??, giving Black a free hand all over the board. I say, he saw everything, including the disadvantages of his idea, but let other factors influence his decision. I'll take a liberty to suggest that he didn't want to exchange his knight for Black's dark-squared bishop, because this operation would result in an opposite-coloured bishops dead draw! As ignorant as it sounds, it may be true. Taking into the account the history of their previous encounters (Capa well on top, thus a revenge factor), and Dawid Janowski's personal characteristics (a gambling man, who always went for a jackpot) it's easy to understand his motives. I bet two-three moves later he realized what he had done to his position! For the rest of the game we see a broken man trying to stop a tsunami wave with his bare hands.

I cheer John Nunn's efforts in re-discovering classical games through modern computer analysis. In my opinion, pointing out an occasional error in no way degrades the giants of the past. Deep down, they knew they were making mistakes, otherwise they would not have become as great as they were. For every chess-player, acknowledging a problem is a first step to correcting it. Go ahead, tell me stories about Capablanca keeping no chess set in his house – and I'll laugh my head off. How come he changed his openings after losing to Alekhine in 1927? Hypermoderns came – Capa picked up new tendencies on the fly, and remained on the cutting edge of the current chess theory into the late 1930s. Talent was there in the first place, no doubt about it; but to become a great player Capa had to dig much deeper than a shallow listing of positional elements/principles might suggest.

This Capablanca-Janowski game is memorable for me, because it opened my eyes to the whole concept of the ♕b3-♕b6 confrontation, a prominent feature of many opening set-ups. We encounter it in the Exchange Slav, Symmetrical g3 Grünfeld, and in some variations of the Torre Attack. Always the question is, who benefits from doubling the opponent's pawns, or alternatively, from getting his own pawns doubled.

I was fifteen years old when I saw Capa's game and read his cheerful annotations. It seemed so easy, and I instantly felt ready to copy his play. I thought I knew everything there is to know about the queen stand-off: all I have to do is let White take on b6, then I play ...b5 and get my knight to c4! Armed with that knowledge I jumped at the first chance.

Monin – Yermolinsky
Leningrad 1973

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 e6 3 ♗g5

A little difference: White gets his dark-squared bishop out, but what's the problem? After all, in the stem game Janowski could do the same thing, but Capablanca apparently didn't consider this bishop factor to be significant. He didn't mention it, so it must be unimportant. I confidently marched on.

3...c5 4 c3 ♕b6 5 ♕b3 ♘e4

Good. Not only do I gain a tempo on his bishop, I'll save another one on my own: ...♗d7, without going to f5 first. With my active knight I will also induce a knight exchange, just like Capablanca.

6 ♗f4 ♘c6 7 e3

Imagine my surprise, when in this position my long-planned and confidently executed pawn swap turned out to be a serious mistake.

7...cxd4? 8 ♕xb6! axb6 9 exd4

Oops! Black doesn't get the b4-square, so his counterplay on the a-file is non-existent. Meanwhile, the brute threat of 10 ♗c7 forced me onto the defensive. Switching my plans to 9...d6 would have been more appropriate than what I did, but 10 ♗d3 ♘f6 11 ♘a3 still looks good for White.

9...♔d8 10 ♗d3

And I went on to lose the game.

Luckily I was a quick learner, and a few rounds later in the same tournament I refused to fall into this positional trap again.

Dushin – Yermolinsky
Leningrad 1973

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 c5 3 c3 e6 4 ♗g5 ♕b6 5 ♕b3 ♘c6 6 e3 d5

I realized that ...cxd4 would always be met by exd4, and wisely avoided swapping pawns.

7 ♘bd2 ♗e7

Now 8 ♗d3? would allow Black to take control: 8...c4! 9 ♕xb6 axb6 10 ♗c2 b5, and ...b4 can't be stopped. My opponent alertly played a more cautious move.

8 ♗e2 ♗d7 9 ♗f4

Here I became concerned with the consequences of 10 ♕xb6 axb6 11 ♗c7, and decided to untie the knot.

9...♕xb3 10 axb3 ♘h5!

A nice idea that gave me equal chances, even if later in the game White took advantage of his compact queenside pawns with a typical plan: dxc5, followed by b3-b4.

Ultimately it took a long sustained effort to discover the real issues of the queen stand-off. On that and other important matters I couldn't get any useful advice from the classical positional theory ever since I began to compete on a mere 2200 level at the age of 14.

I'm far from blaming Capablanca and other greats for the miseducation of Alex Yermolinsky. They can't be held responsible for the lack of development in the area of chess improvement methods decades after they wrote their books designed for beginners. Somebody or something had to pick up the slack and it wasn't there for me.

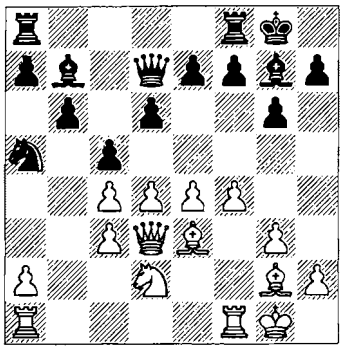
Many things have been said about the Soviet School of Chess and how it produced legions of good players due to the elaborate system of chess education. I tell you what, the picture in the western eyes is distorted. There was no building bearing such a sign, 'The Soviet School of Chess'. There were no secret methods of teaching, or 800 numbers with grandmasters standing by to provide you with chess advice 24 hours a day. 'I would have been a much better player if I had been born in the Soviet Union', is what I often hear from underachieving chessplayers, and I wonder what makes them think so. In my 30 years of tournament experience I have seen a lot of bad players, and most of them lived in the Soviet Union. With that kind of attitude, those complaining underachievers would still have been bad players if they had been born in the USSR.

My highly decorated teacher, the late Vladimir Zak, was the man who many years before my generation came around had made a name for himself by 'discovering' Korchnoi and Spassky. Indeed, he had a real knack for judging talent, and his administrative position as the head coach of the City Pioneers Palace chess club gave him a wide pool of kids to select from. The best of the best would be taken under his guidance. Most of them would eventually reach First Category – some 1800 level, I suppose, but it's difficult to judge chess strength circa 1973 by today's rating standards – and duly stop there! Vladimir Zak couldn't help us any more. What we did afterwards and how we developed any further was largely left to the Darwin theory – survival of the fittest.

His chess strength aside, Zak religiously believed in the dogma of the classical school. In his opinion, everything young chess-players needed to know was written in stone many years ago. Any new (that would be anything after 1947) ideas were ignored or vehemently opposed when brought up by the students themselves; even the openings other than 1 e4 e5 or 1 d4 d5 were frowned upon. His training methods were simple: twice a week we played our tournament games, and once a week we would hold theoretical sessions in a classroom. During those Zak would show his beloved Two Knights Opening and we were supposed to take notes. He would also monitor our individual progress. Bothered by my rebellious 1 ♘f3, Zak once gave me Keres's 'Open Games' book and told me to study it chapter by chapter. 'Studying' would mean copying variations to a workbook to be shown to the teacher. I don't think he cared if I remembered these variations; he did it in a secret hope to open my eyes to the beauty of the Two Knights Opening. I wasn't interested. Instead, I asked him about the Hübner Variation of the Nimzo. First he asked me what it was, and after I showed him the moves, 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 e3 c5 5 ♘f3 ♘c6 6 ♗d3 ♗xc3+ 7 bxc3 d6, Zak dismissed it with no second thoughts. He said that ...♗xc3 without being encouraged by White's a3 was always a mistake. I asked him why, and he said that the pawn being on a2 allows White to neutralize Black's threats (...♗a6, ...♘a5) to the c4-pawn by playing ♘d2-b3, and if ...♘xb3 then axb3 repairs White's pawn-structure. Deep positional insight, but I never got a chance to show him that in the Hübner the knight actually goes to e7, such as in the famous Spassky-Fischer game.

Nevertheless, I was impressed with Zak's idea of ♘b3, and many years later I got a chance to give it a try. It goes without saying that I was in for yet another disappointment (*see diagram overleaf*).

Here 14 a4! ♖ac8 15 d5 had to be played, but I jumped on an opportunity to show off my 'positional knowledge'.



Yermolinsky – Nikolaev
Leningrad 1980

14 ♘b3? ♕a4 15 ♘xa5 bxa5!

Now I realized what I had done. The active black queen dominates the queenside, his bishop is coming out to a6, and the battle for the b-file can only be won by Black. Later in the game he advanced his extra a-pawn, threatening to go to a3 and penetrate on b2. When I played a3 myself, his rook gained access to b3. Everything went wrong for White in this game.

We had a joke: anybody who survives these 'training methods' is guaranteed a bright future! The important thing was to leave Zak before frustration sets in and you decide to quit chess. Valery Salov and Gata Kamsky left early, and became stars in their teens. I stuck around till I finished high school, and blew a chance to achieve success in junior chess. On the bright side, I had plenty of time to learn to rely on myself. In that sense, Zak's system worked to perfection. Chess is an individual sport, and everybody has to be responsible for himself and his chess development. Better no instruction than bad instruction. In many interviews Bent Larsen said he never had a chess teacher, but in the book of his best games he corrects himself, saying that is only 99% right. He recalls a G.P. Hansen showing him and other kids 'some opening variations on the demo board'. That's OK, I think it didn't do much harm to the future World Championship candidate.

Today young up-and-coming chess-players enjoy computerized access to hundreds of thousands of games, and many can obtain one-on-one chess lessons from leading grandmasters. The only question is how to optimize all these benefits. Take my advice: it can only be done through your own work – the rest is just tools.

Can't find a good book to move past the pre-war level of chess understanding? Listen to this.

David Bronstein wrote a great book about the 1953 Zurich Candidates Tournament. What makes it great is absolute disregard to theorizing. He takes all the games from a super-strong tournament – uses no selection criteria, so no bias towards the author's agenda is there – and just invites you to watch 'em play. If I had to name one single book that helped me with my problems, not once but many times throughout my chess career, I'd know which one it is.

Fischer and Larsen wrote two of the greatest books of the late 1960s – the collections of their games. Those two books gave me a picture of true greatness when I was struggling with my chess in the mid-1970s, trying to establish my identity as a chess-player for many years to come.

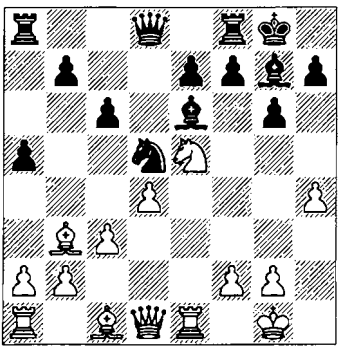
Back to the Exchanging Business – The New Liberated Approach

Open your copy of *Secrets of Modern Chess Strategy*, the book I have already referred to. John Watson makes a deep research of new developments in chess and covers a lot of ground with a broad list of subjects. Among other things, he also talks exchanging – I hope my dear reader didn't forget what I was talking about – and in many examples demonstrates today's liberal approach to 'sacred' pieces which the conventional theory would never even consider putting on the exchanging block.

I was pleased to find one game of mine – it found its way to the openings chapter, but I think it would also fit in 'Bishops vs Knights' – that I would like to use here, but not before

another quick episode kicks off the second half of my survey.

B



Kreiman – Yermolinsky
Chicago Open 1996

White has just played 13 h2-h4, and action begins to pick up around the black king. I would love to counter with ...c5, but it didn't seem like I had time to prepare it. If 13...♕c7, then 14 h5 already threatens 15 hxg6 hxg6 16 ♘xg6. After a long thought I realized that Black needs to relieve the pressure.

13...♗xe5!

The most radical solution. Parting with the bishop looks dangerous, but I knew I would have time to plug the holes. Meanwhile, Black's centralized knight does a decent job containing White's dark-squared bishop.

14 ♖xe5 ♕d7

Black doesn't have to fear 15 ♕e2 a4! 16 ♗xd5 ♗xd5 17 ♖xe7 ♖fe8! with sufficient compensation.

15 h5 f6 16 ♖e1 ♖fe8

I even thought of a more ambitious plan: 16...g5!? 17 ♗c2 ♗g4 18 ♕d3 e6, but was unsure of the consequences. White can try 19 ♕g3 ♗xh5 20 f4.

17 f3!?

Inviting 17...gxh5 18 ♗c2 ♗f5 19 ♗e4! with compensation: 19...♗g6 20 ♕c2 ♔g7 21 c4, etc. I thought better of this, and played a quiet move.

17...♗f7

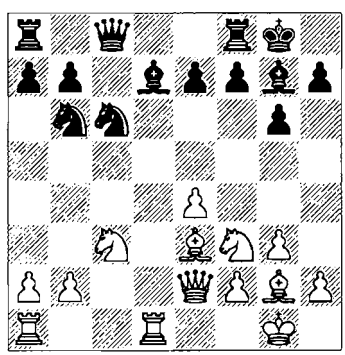
Black successfully defended.

It feels so unnatural to make a voluntarily exchange of the fianchettoed bishop that most people don't even consider the idea. And that for a simple reason, because nobody wants to get checkmated by a standard procedure: ♗f6, ♕h6. Yes, the danger is there, but the whole idea works more often than you think. John Watson gives one example, a famous game Jimenez-Larsen, Palma de Mallorca 1967. Unfortunately he stops there, while the subject is so interesting that it's certainly worth elaborating on.

I saw Larsen's game in his book – it came out when I was in my teens – and this amazing idea instantly became one of my favourites. I was absolutely fascinated with the concept: Black exchanges his fianchettoed bishop for the white knight, the white pawn is moved to e5, and that kills White's play in the centre and on the kingside. Kreiman was able to recapture with a piece, but I still survived with no particular difficulty.

It would be wrong to treat Black's idea as some sort of fire escape route. Under more favourable circumstances he parts with his strong bishop and then fights for the initiative on equal terms.

B



Goldin – Yermolinsky
US Open, Orlando 1997

This is the game John Watson found worthy of being mentioned in his overview of contemporary opening ideas. It came from the Grünfeld

Defence, and at this point we were only a couple of moves removed from the existing theory.

Earlier in the game Black had managed to bring his knight back from a5 by forcing the exchange of the white d5-pawn. I stressed the importance of this in our Grünfeld survey, but Black's local success doesn't necessarily gets him out of the woods. Here he is still a little cramped. Special concern should be given to the black queen, which doesn't have a safe square anywhere on the board, while if huddling on the back rank she interferes with the black rooks' coordination.

John Watson makes a good point, mentioning that White would get an advantage if he managed to play 16 ♖ac1. Indeed, the threat of ♘d5 would make Black's life very unpleasant. I must admit, I operated out of necessity when I uncorked Larsen's idea.

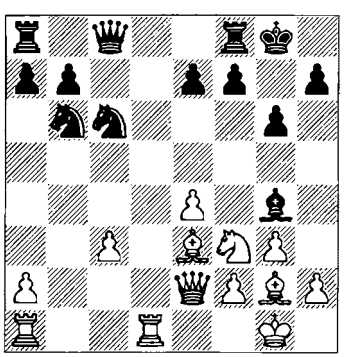
15...♗xc3! 16 bxc3

The c-file is now closed; moreover, the pawn and the square in front of it (c4) represent weaknesses in White's position. Such exchanges are common in more closed positions though. Here it seems White should be able to take advantage of the weakened black king, but exactly how? The ♗h6 move is always a possibility, but alone it can't do much damage. Just like in the previous example Black can cover with ...f6.

Important observation: White would make his initiative twice as dangerous by clearing the way for his f-pawn, and now he's got a nice d4-square to move the knight to.

16...♗g4! *(D)*

W



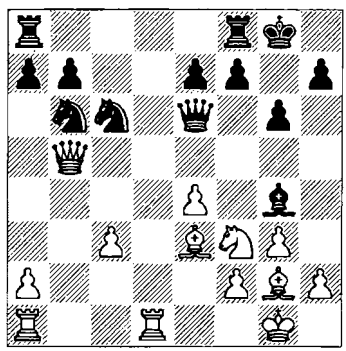
That takes care of it. Notice how annoying the pin is: Black wants to continue with 17...♘e5, and there's no 17 h3. Alexander Goldin makes a natural move, trying to unload the d1-h5 diagonal.

17 ♕b5

Nothing could be gained by 17 ♗h6 ♖e8 18 e5?! ♕f5, or 17 ♗d4 ♕e6. Now White attacks b6 twice, but Black can ignore the threat.

17...♕e6 *(D)*

W



It turns out that 18 ♗xb6 axb6 19 ♕xb6 is no good. It will not be answered by the obviously bad 19...♕xe4? 20 ♘d4 ♕e5 21 ♖e1 with a large advantage to White; instead Black has a little tactical trick, 19...♗xf3 20 ♗xf3 ♘e5 21 ♕e3 (White is lucky to have this defence) 21...♖xa2 22 ♖xa2 ♕xa2 with complete equality.

White could try to post up his rook (and cut Black's access to c4 at the same time) with the inspired 18 ♖d5!?. The problem is, it meets with 18...♗xf3 19 ♗xf3 ♘xd5 20 exd5 ♕f5. White finds himself an exchange down, and an attempt to get some pawns after 21 ♗g2 ♘e5 22 ♕xb7 leads to more trouble after 22...♘f3+ 23 ♗xf3 (23 ♔h1 ♖ab8 nearly back-ranks White, who has to go 24 ♕a6 and lose his d-pawn to 24...♖fd8) 23...♕xf3 24 ♕xe7 ♕xd5. White would have to be very lucky here to escape with a draw.

Goldin's next move is not bad, but it leads to a queen swap, removing the biggest question mark from the 15...♗xc3 move's résumé –

Black is not going to be checkmated in this game.

18 ♘d4 ♕c4 19 ♖db1

Once again a tactic helps Black. The most obvious move, 19 f3 would fail to 19...♘xd4 20 ♕xc4 ♘xf3+! 21 ♗xf3 ♘xc4, and Black wins!

19...♕xb5 20 ♘xb5?!

This could easily lead White to trouble. A more accurate road to quality is 20 ♖xb5 ♗d7 21 ♘xc6 ♗xc6 22 ♖b4.

20...♘c4 21 ♗h6 ♖fc8 22 h3 ♗d7 23 ♘d4

Here I somewhat generously took a draw. Black has a slight advantage that could have been increased in White's time-trouble, but that's not important to us now.

½-½

Let's think what happened in this game.

First of all, Black's decision didn't come from empty space, it was dictated by circumstances pertaining to a particular position. The threat of 16 ♖ac1 couldn't be ignored, so, in a way, what I did was forced. It is important to realize that, because all the resulting positions at the ends of your calculated lines must be compared to one another. Such are the specifics of a real-game situation: you calculate as deeply as you can, but still you rarely get something you can be absolutely sure of, unless your calculations produce checkmate or a large material advantage.

Secondly, the changes 15...♗xc3 introduced to the position instantly provoked a clash between different positional factors, every one of which by itself was easily recognizable. White got the bishop-pair, the newly open b-file for his rook, and a support point on d4 for his knight. In return, Black got the c4-square and certain freedom to nest his pieces on light squares. There was simply no way to tell who would prevail by simply referring to one dominating positional factor, such as with most 'positional games' shown in classical books.

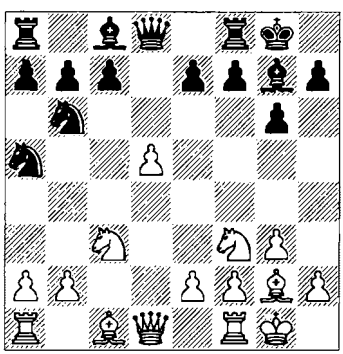
Thirdly, immediately after the exchange Black had to get back to calculating variations. The outcome of the game was not decided by Black's brilliant recognition of a positional pattern. On the contrary, it strictly depended on the accuracy of his calculation of the 'post-positional' tactics. If it hadn't been for 16...♗g4, followed by moving the queen out, Black would likely have got run over, and his failure could later have been attributed to wrongly exchanging his Grünfeld (not Gufeld, that would be in the KID) bishop.

There follow more examples to illustrate a wide variety of reasons behind the ...♗xc3 exchange.

Leveille – Yermolinsky

North Bay 1995

1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 g3 g6 3 ♗g2 ♗g7 4 0-0 0-0 5 c4 d5 6 cxd5 ♘xd5 7 d4 ♘b6 8 ♘c3 ♘c6 9 d5 ♘a5 *(D)*



Let's talk a little theory here. The black knight has gone to the rim, and the whole thing revolves around the d5-pawn. White can let it go, so there's a chance for us to track down my game with Goldin. It went 10 ♕c2 c6 (10...♘xd5 11 ♖d1 is dangerous) 11 dxc6 ♘xc6 (back from the dead) 12 ♖d1 ♗f5!? (to provoke White's answer, which will render his fianchettoed bishop less potent) 13 e4 ♗d7 14 ♕e2 ♕c8 15 ♗e3, and here you are!

If White wants to keep the a5-knight out of play, 10 e4 is his choice. In practice it's considered automatic, but once Black continues with 10...c6, White has to choose between 11 ♗g5 and 11 ♗f4. What's the difference between these two? The latter has been challenged by

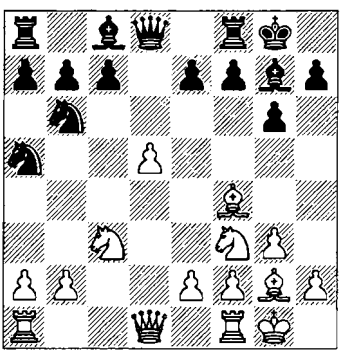
the fearless 11...cxd5 12 exd5 ♗xc3 to win the d5-pawn, and after 13 bxc3 Black can capture with either piece. Now the point of 11 ♗g5 is revealed: after 11...cxd5 12 exd5 ♗xc3 13 bxc3, there's no comfort in 13...♕xd5 14 ♗xe7, while after 13...♘xd5 White has the energetic 14 c4! ♘xc4 15 ♗h6 and due to the threat of 16 ♕d4 Black must drop the exchange.

All things considered, Black replies with 11...h6, and that pawn will always be hanging after 12 ♗f4, effectively cancelling the ...♗xc3 idea.

I had seen all this stuff in my own games and never thought I'd be taken by surprise early on, but that's exactly what happened after my opponent's next move.

10 ♗f4!? *(D)*

B



10...♗xc3!?

Strictly speaking, there was nothing obviously wrong with 10...c6 11 dxc6 ♘xc6 12 ♖c1 ♗f5, but I felt my opponent was ready for such a course of events.

11 bxc3 ♕xd5!

White gets excellent play after 11...♘xd5? 12 ♗h6 ♖e8 13 ♕c2. A rook is coming to the d-file, and c3-c4 can't be stopped. White's initiative can easily produce serious threats if Black is forced into passivity.

The text-move offers back a pawn, but that's not important. What really counts here has nothing to do with material gains. 11...♕xd5 represents a logical follow-up to Black's idea: he needs to stay active and try to establish a grip on the critical c4-square. The line 12 ♘d4 ♕h5 13 ♗xc7 ♗h3 demonstrates that Black can be comfortable in the middlegame, while the endgame after 12 ♗xc7 ♕xd1? 13 ♖fxd1 ♗e6 14 ♘d4 ♗c4 15 ♖db1 favours White. An interesting twist: despite allowing the dark squares around his king to become weak – what deters us from exchanging that bishop in most cases – Black nevertheless seeks a complex middlegame! Besides 12...♕xd1? Black can make a similar mistake with the natural-looking 12...♘ac4?!, which allows 13 ♕xd5 ♘xd5 14 ♘e5!. I tell you what, forget about endings and look at 12...♕c5!?, the move I would have probably played. After 13 ♗f4 ♘c6 14 ♘d4 ♖d8 15 ♕b3 ♗d7 I like Black's chances.

The Canadian Master detested simplifications. He was focused on punishing Black's provocative play by keeping the queens on the board. His attacking aspirations, however, were totally unfounded.

12 ♕c1? ♕c5

Here I expected him to follow up with 13 ♗h6 ♖d8 14 ♘d4. I believed White's compensation to be insufficient in any case, but to prove it I would have had to choose between the quiet 14...♘ac4 and the more aggressive 14...♘a4!?, which invites 15 ♘b3 ♘xb3 16 axb3 ♘xc3 17 ♕b2, and Black escapes all dangers with 17...♕e5! 18 ♗f3 ♕f6 19 ♖fc1 ♘b5.

White's next is just plain horrible.

13 e4? ♘ac4 14 ♖b1 ♗g4! 15 ♗h6 ♗xf3

A timely exchange to avoid the less clear consequences of 15...♖fd8 16 ♘d4 e5 17 ♕g5.

16 ♗xf3 ♖fd8

Black is better on all counts.

While the overall value of the 10...♗xc3 move can be disputed – see the note to Black's 11th – it achieved its goal of creating imbalance in a quiet position. That's what a higher-rated player has to do, if he expects to win games against today's sophisticated opposition.

It can be argued that the ...♗xc3 exchange ruins White's pawn-structure, thus earning a spot among the decisions based on positional considerations. I'd agree with that with some reservations:

a) There's no way to tell beforehand how Black's new-found positional pluses are going to fare against the bishop-pair. Only tactics can determine which one of the clashing positional elements will take over.

b) The pace of the game increases, and one mistake can lead to grave consequences. From a 'gamer's' point of view, the real value of ...♗xc3 lies in introducing some tactical content to an otherwise dull position.

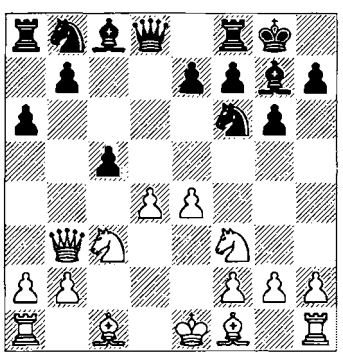
For good measure, I'll throw in an example of a purely tactical justification. No positional implications to muddy the waters this time.

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 d5 4 ♘f3 ♗g7 5 ♕b3 dxc4 6 ♕xc4 0-0 7 e4 a6!?

One of the sharpest ideas in the Grünfeld Defence. I have had a lot of success with this move, but recent developments in the 8 e5! line (Karpov-Kamsky, Kasparov-Svidler and Svidler-Anand are famous games that stemmed from there) make me feel uneasy about Black's prospects. The line I want to show you was all the rage in the early 1980s.

8 ♕b3 c5!? *(D)*

A great idea from Mark Tseitlin, then a Leningrad IM. Black eschews 8...b5, which transposes to the book line 8 e5 b5 9 ♕b3.



9 dxc5 ♘bd7 10 ♕b4 ♕c7

Black wants to win back the pawn, and if he does he'll be more than alright. White needs to protect c5, and another important line begins 11 ♘a4 a5 12 ♕c4. Well, some other time...

11 ♗e3 ♘g4

In a typical Grünfeld fashion Black invites 12 ♘d5 ♘xe3 13 ♘xc7 ♘c2+ 14 ♔d1 ♘xb4 15 ♘xa8 ♘xc5 with fantastic compensation. It seems White has the answer, though.

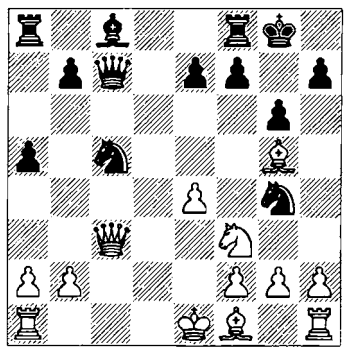
12 ♗g5

Now 13 ♘d5 is looming large, so we begin to suspect what it is all about. But first, Black throws in an important intermediate move.

12...a5! 13 ♕a3

And now he's ready.

13...♗xc3+!! 14 ♕xc3 ♘xc5 *(D)*



From a first look it seems that Black is not going to survive the dark-square weakness of his king's residence, but in fact it's White who has to be careful. Black surely benefits from his 12th move, which made b4 impossible, and he threatens 15...♘xf2!. White's best may very well be the prudent 15 ♗h4, but he hardly gets any edge after 15...b6, as Black sets his sights on the e4-pawn.

The potential of Black concept was fully realized in one of Tseitlin's games I found in my old notes (unfortunately, no game data is available).

15 ♗c4?!

White sets him up nicely. Now 15...♘xf2? is met by 16 ♗h6 e5 17 0-0!, and Black gets very little happiness from his extra pawn. Of course, 15...♘xe4?? 16 ♗xf7+ is also there. In this seemingly critical situation Mark Tseitlin fires a big-time shot.

15...b5!!

When facing this position for the first time, Mark played the inferior 15...♕b6.

16 ♗d5

If 16 ♗xb5, Black simplifies to a better ending: 16...♘xf2 17 ♗h6 ♘cd3+ 18 ♗xd3 ♕xc3+ 19 bxc3 ♘xd3+ 20 ♔e2 ♖d8 – everything works like a charm.

16...b4 17 ♕c2 ♗a6! 18 ♗xa8

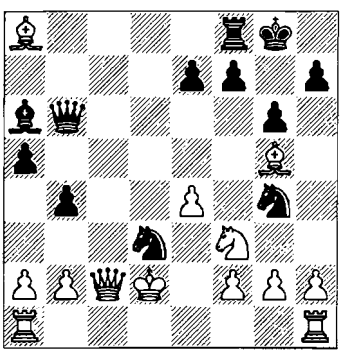
When this position occurred in practice, 18 ♗c4 ♘e6 19 ♗d3 ♕xc2 20 ♗xc2 ♘xg5 21 ♘xg5 ♖ac8 led to victory for Black, Miles-Fernandez Garcia, Dubai Olympiad 1986.

18...♘d3+

Even stronger than 18...♖xa8 19 ♖c1! ♘d3+ 20 ♕xd3 ♕xc1+ 21 ♗xc1 ♗xd3, which only gives a better ending.

19 ♔d2 ♕b6! *(D)*

W



20 ♗e3

20 ♗d5 loses to 20...♕xf2+ 21 ♔d1 ♘xb2+ 22 ♔c1 ♖c8.

20...♘xe3 21 fxe3 ♖xa8

and with both 22...♖d8 and 22...♖c8 in the air, White can't survive for long.

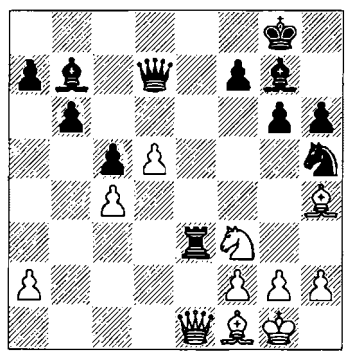
I guess that has to make my overview of the Grünfeld Bishop Exchange complete. Draw your own conclusions if you like, but, most importantly, be aware of such an opportunity should it come around.

One last thing to finish on a high positional note. We already know that exchanges are often used to introduce sudden changes in the pawn-structure. A pawn recapture moves it to an adjacent file, and that little detail can really turn things around.

Normally you force your opponent to recapture with a pawn, but it can also be done the other way around. Do you remember Botvinnik's games where he would exchange pieces on e3? He did it against a French isolated d5-pawn at least once, and also in the symmetrical pawn-structure e4 vs e5 with c- and d-files open (which I think came from the QGA). The trick was to recapture with the f-pawn, change the pawn-structure and reap the benefits soon after.

I must admit I was impressed with the idea, and once I even got a chance to use it.

W



Yermolinsky – Gusev
Kaliningrad 1983

My opponent just took my rook and was looking forward to a comfortable life after 22 ♕xe3 g5 23 ♗g3 ♘xg3 24 hxg3 ♔f8. I had a different idea.

22 fxe3!?

Voluntarily creating a backward pawn – how can that be good? What does White get in return? A lot of things:

a) The bishop finds a safe haven on f2.

b) To take the sting out of ...b5 my pawn moves to e4 and supports the centre.

Due to his misplaced knight Black will have difficulties setting up a blockade.

22...b5?

A nice try, but it only weakens the c5-pawn. The solid 22...♕d6 23 e4 ♗e5 was called for. In

case of 24 ♕e3 Black can wriggle his way out of trouble with the help of a tactic: 24...g5! 25 ♗xg5 ♗d4! 26 ♘xd4 cxd4 27 ♕f3 hxg5 28 ♕xh5 ♕f4 with an efficient dark-square blockade even in the unlikely case of White forcing a queen swap. White can try 25 ♗e1 of course, but 25...♘f6 26 h3 (not 26 ♘xe5 ♕xe5, and 27 ♗c3 can be answered by either 27...♕xe4 or 27...♕xh2+) 26...♗f4 27 ♕d3 ♘d7 28 ♗c3 f6, followed by 29...♘e5 is safe, and so is 26 g3 ♘g4 27 ♕d3 ♗g7.

23 e4 b4 24 ♕e3 g5 25 ♗f2 ♗f8 26 e5?!

I could have done a better job by playing 26 ♘e5! ♕e8 27 ♘d3. The c5-pawn can't be defended by regular means any more, and the last-ditch attempt, 27...♘f6 28 ♘xc5 ♘g4 29 ♕d4 ♗g7, fails to 30 e5! ♗c8 31 ♘d3.

The hasty pawn move allowed Black to activate two of his pieces.

26...♘f4 27 ♘d2 ♕f5 28 ♘e4

I didn't like 28 ♘b3 ♕b1.

28...♕xe5 29 ♘xc5 ♕xe3 30 ♗xe3 ♗c8 31 ♘b3

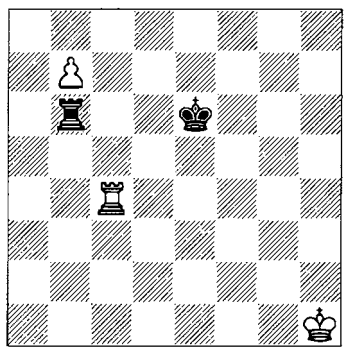
This endgame looks winning for White, but my opponent played well and managed to draw.

To sum it up, I'd like to remind you once again that exchanging pieces is a tool we use to achieve our strategic and tactical goals, but it's like a double-edged axe and must be handled with care. Many games were thrown away by underestimating the implications of an innocent-looking exchange. I'd love to return to the subject, deepening it to the extent when mass-exchanges constitute transition from middlegame to endgame, but that would take me out of this book's context.

From Calculable Tactics to Combinational Understanding

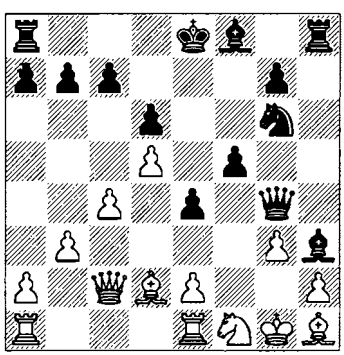
Tactics is an essential part of the game of chess, its basic skill. Without an adequate tactical ability no one can achieve success. While some people seem to possess a natural talent for instantly finding tactical resources and some don't, it is still possible to improve one's tactical vision. Many books have been written on the subject, but the general advice is to solve combinations, hundreds of them.

Despite its seemingly random appearance, there's always a reason for a tactical operation to succeed. If we have a pawn on the seventh rank (motif), and the enemy rook controls the promotion square we may be looking for a decoy or deflection (theme) to remove the obstacle.



White wins by playing 1 ♖c6+!

Another typical one-mover instantly decided the outcome of the game in this position. I still remember, I was looking, looking, and suddenly it came to me in a flash!



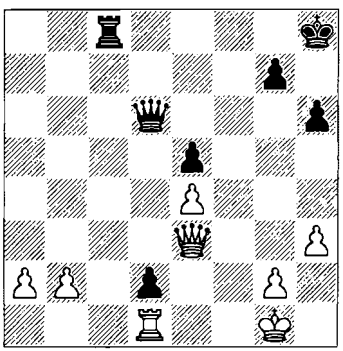
Yermolinsky – Abroskin
Leningrad 1972

Black thinks he is on the attack, but there is a little problem: his queen doesn't have too many squares. The respective position of the white rook and the black king offers a tactical theme – the discovered check. White's passivity turned out to be an illusion after just one move.

18 ♗f3! 1-0

No place to go with the queen, but after 18...exf3 19 exf3+ we've got a double attack coming out of nowhere.

Here the answer lies on the surface. One move – and all becomes clear. Incidents like this are rare occurrences. Usually you have to look a little bit deeper, at least two or three moves, before you can see the contours of a tactical idea.



Vetemaa – Yermolinsky
Leningrad 1973

Black's got a motif for tactics – a far-advanced passed pawn. The question is how to remove the blockader, the white rook.

31...♖c1!

By itself this move is nothing. It only makes sense if connected with a tactical idea.

32 ♕f3

Denying me the chance to deliver the punch line: 32 ♖xc1 ♕d4! – deflecting with the pin! 33 ♖c8+ (33 ♕xd4 dxc1♕+) 33...♔h7 34 ♕xd4 exd4. Suddenly White finds the d-file blocked, and the rook is helpless to stop the pawn.

The other queen defence, 32 ♕b3 would also fail to stop Black: 32...♕d4+ 33 ♔h2 ♕xe4 34 ♖xd2 ♕f4+.

32...♕c5+ 33 ♔h2

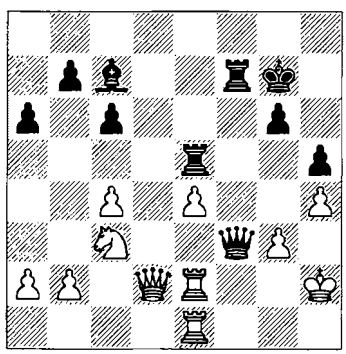
There's no perpetual check after 33 ♔f1 ♕c2, as the following continuation shows: 34 ♕f8+ ♔h7 35 ♕f5+ ♔g8 36 ♕e6+ ♔h8 37 ♕e8+ ♔h7.

33...♖xd1 34 ♕xd1 ♕c1 0-1

The first question is how to find a tactic? Computers do it by checking all existing moves, but humans can't do this due to their limited computing ability. We have to find another way.

First we establish a tactical motif. It can either be your strength (passed pawn, active pieces) or opponent's weakness (loose pieces that can be attacked, king in the open, and such). The particular position of chess pieces in relation to one another provides us with themes (double attack, interposition, etc.). In theory, every chess-player should always be on the lookout for tactics – computers certainly are – but in practice many opportunities go unnoticed. We are very good at cracking tactical puzzles from combination books, but we miss things over the board. If only we knew a combination was there, we would find it!

Quite a few times in my recent practice I let simple tactical opportunities go by. Obviously I have trouble recognizing tactical patterns.



Rohde – Yermolinsky
National Chess Congress, Philadelphia 1992

Michael was in his customary time pressure. Things had been going well for me, until in this

position I went **32...♕g4?**, and let my advantage slip to a minimum.

Question, how many of you would instantly see mate in three, 32...♕xg3+! 33 ♔xg3 ♖g5++ 34 ♔h3 ♖f3#? Simple motif, simple theme (double check), but even after a five-minute think I failed to recognize the pattern and played an indifferent move.

Right afterwards I was understandably disappointed (even if I won that game just a couple of moves later thanks to Michael's time-trouble error), and went searching for answers. I thought such failure can be attributed to brain laziness and the lack of incentives to work harder. By the latter I meant that if I had been under more pressure from White's position I would have been better motivated. Such a comforting thought. All it does is bring us right back to the subject of indecisiveness in winning positions, extensively covered on the first pages of this book. I don't care to dwell on it any more.

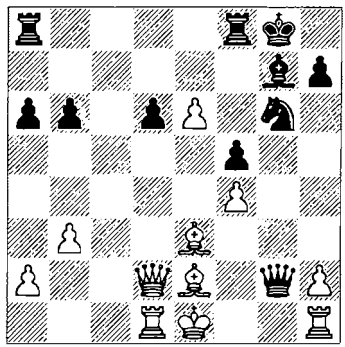
Psychological factors are very important, no doubt about that, but there's also a matter of being physically and mentally prepared. Today's mid-level grandmasters play a lot of chess, especially in the United States. Anywhere between 100 and 150 games a year is my usual workload, and on one occasion, in 1995, I hit the 200 mark. That's very demanding, even if a large chunk of games is taken by first-round mismatches. I do get very tired of chess sometimes.

Sports science tells us: when you get tired you lose your skills, beginning with the ones you acquired most recently. In my case that would be my tactical prowess. I didn't play gambits or open games as a junior when this skill could be obtained in a natural way, and later I had to push myself to sharpen my play. In time I became a more balanced player, but certain characteristics of my personality will never go away, and every once in a while when the goal is already within my reach I tend to cut myself a little slack. Read Botvinnik's memoirs, and you'll know what I'm talking about.

Here's my mistake: I was telling myself to work harder when my body was only fit to take some rest. You can push yourself only so far, and if you overdo it – you pay the price.

Less than two years after the Rohde game I suffered through the most incredible tactical miss of my career. And it came under totally different game and tournament circumstances.

W



Ehlvest – Yermolinsky
National Open 1994

A crucial penultimate round game against a strong GM from Estonia featured a sharp opening that led to a double-edged position.

Here I expected 21 ♖g1 ♕h3, and was deeply concerned with the consequences of 22 e7!?, as I knew the game was on the line and didn't particularly like my chances. My intense calculations were interrupted when Jaan played an unexpected move.

21 ♕d5??

That trashes my idea of 21...♕h3 due to the threat of 22 e7+. I instantly realized I would be totally lost in the endgame. Next I was sitting there second-guessing previously-made decisions and back-calculating 'what would have happened if I played this instead of that' and such. In frustration I finally took the queen, and, as I expected, quickly went down in the endgame. The important game was lost and it took the whole tournament with it.

After I resigned Jaan invited me for a drink. He made sure I safely parked myself on a bar stool before mentioning a move that, I bet, you all already know. One check, 21...♗c3+, forces White to interpose on d2, and he loses his queen for nothing.

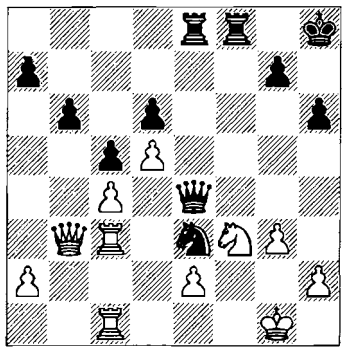
With that and other examples of 'chess blindness' that litter this chapter I feel increasingly uncomfortable. Maybe I shouldn't be telling you what needs to be done to improve your tactical vision, until I figure it out for myself. Maybe it's time to go back to the basics and study those combination books again. Then again, most of the time I'm able to handle tactics reasonably well, just like any grandmaster should. That alone, I guess, gives me a reason to continue.

A tactical operation is a sequence of attacking moves, and for it to exist your opponent's answers must be forced. There are different ways to force a move: check the king, exchange pieces, attack a piece or force the opponent to defend a vital square. Tactical sequences are relatively easy to spot, but not all of them produce anything tangible at the end. Most of them get discarded during our calculating process. Calculated variations may also grow in width (the king has three squares to go to after a check) and depth (sometimes over 20 moves), the latter for some reason being the most incomprehensible thing for non-chess-players. I'm always asked how many moves ahead I can calculate, especially these days when Deep Blue's calculating power has become a legend. It's pointless to compare a human player to a machine as we use different methods (more about this in my computer chapter), and I can't offer any definite answer. It depends on the level of complexity, of course; but more often the decision to stop calculations comes from practical reasons. Staying fresh and out of time-trouble is very important for overall success in tournament chess. Cutting your calculations just short of stumbling upon a winning line is a drawback of being practical. Take your pick which way to tilt, and find your own balance.

Stopping too early may have something to do with low self-esteem. 'Tactics are never there for me', say some players without realizing that all they have to do is try. I certainly failed to do so in the next episode, another one of those still causing pain.

In the following diagram, Black's advantage is nearly decisive. In search for ways of cashing in I thought it would be a good idea to remove

B



Van Wely – Yermolinsky
Merrillville 1997

the white knight that alone represents the entire defensive force around the white king. Indeed, as was pointed out by my lovely wife Camilla, Black wins by a forced sequence. It begins with a sacrifice, 27...♖xf3! 28 exf3 ♕xf3, threatening 29...♕g2#. I saw that, but thought White could defend with 29 ♖3c2, for example. And I never bothered to look one move deeper. 29...♖f8! introduces a new theme, checkmate on f1, which can't be defended without making serious concessions, such as in 30 ♕d3 ♘xc2 31 ♕xf3 ♖xf3 32 ♖xc2 ♔g8 with a pleasant technical task ahead.

What I did instead was aimed at exchanging knights.

27...♘f5?! 28 ♖d3 ♘d4?

Black should win easily after 28...♕g4 29 ♖c2 ♖e4 with the two threats 30...♘xg3 and 30...♖fe8. As the game went Loek calmly defended against the immediate threats with...

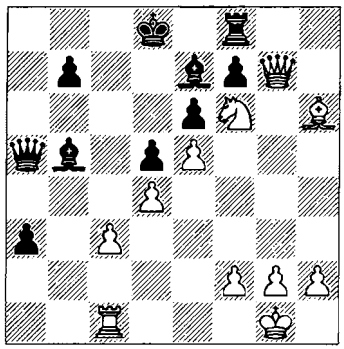
29 ♘xd4 cxd4 30 ♖e1

...and after my further mistakes, caused by frustration and time-trouble, managed to save a draw.

Once again, if I had to start from the position directly after the exchange sacrifice, 29...♖f8 would have been instantly found. I failed to look deeper because I wasn't forced to do so.

Go after me, make me do it – and I'll deliver. It has always been that way.

W



Yermolinsky – Eingorn
Dnepropetrovsk 1974

Despite White's pawn surplus, he seems to be in trouble as the black a-pawn is about to queen. A careful look will, however, discover some promising tactical ideas. White has some good things going for him: the black king is unsafe, the f8-rook has no moves and it needs to be defended by the bishop, which, in turn, happens to be on the same h4-d8 diagonal as the king.

29 ♗g5!

This move introduces a powerful mix of tactical themes: pin, discovered attack and deflection. Black can't stop the coming ♘xd5 shot.

29...a2

There's no escape for the king: 29...♔c7 30 ♘xd5+ exd5 31 ♗xe7 or 29...♔c8 30 ♘xd5. Vereslav wisely thought of pushing the pawn forward. Who knows, maybe White will forget about his back rank or something.

30 ♘xd5! ♗xg5

30...♖e8 31 ♗xe7+ ♖xe7 32 ♕f8+ ♖e8 33 ♕d6+ ♗d7 34 ♘b6 ♕b5 35 ♘xd7 ♕xd7 36 ♕a3, and White wins easily.

31 ♕xf8+ ♔d7 32 ♕xf7+ ♔c8 33 ♕xe6+

An exchange and several pawns up, White should have no problem putting Black away.

33...♔b8

The line 33...♗d7 34 ♘b6+ ♕xb6 35 ♕xb6 ♗xc1 36 ♕a5 ♗e6 may look tricky until you find a pin/double attack idea. That's 37 c4!, clearing the c3-square and inviting the other bishop to the c-file: 37...♗xc4 38 ♕c3.

34 ♖a1

The pawn is safely blockaded, and soon Black gave up.

Finding tactical resources with my back against the wall – I've done that hundreds of times. Take my game with Igor Novikov from the trend breaking tools section of Part 1 – when I had no other choice I suddenly became very brave and inventive. It was mentioned by many that Petrosian, who had a very cautious style and hardly ever initiated confrontations, was very much capable of handling tactics. Contrary to the widely shared opinion, it is rather a rule than exception. Most positional players can find tactical ideas and calculate them fairly well when needed. Tal and other attackers – and here I should mention my good friend Alexander Shabalov, who was consulting me on this chapter – are not necessarily superior to them in tactical skills. According to Shabba, extremely efficient calculating ability may even play a negative role, as it may cause the player to rely on 'hard science' when a little 'fantasy' would be just fine.

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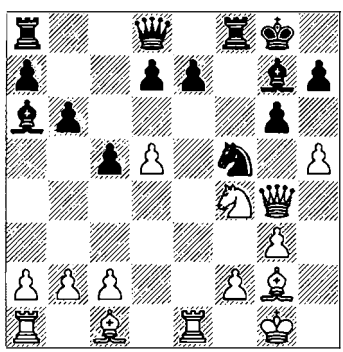


Yermolinsky – Shabalov
Woburn 1999

This example would be a perfect fit into the trend-breaking tools section. Nothing had gone right for Black after his experimental opening (1 d4 c5 2 d5 f5): his pieces are disorganized and his pawns are weak. In addition, it was a

last round game, and Shabba trailed me (one of the leaders) by half a point. So, things didn't look good for a home team.

16...g5!?

I thought Black would have to play 16...♘h6, and planned a deep retreat 17 ♕d1! to avoid 17 ♕h3 g5 18 d6 exd6 19 ♗d5+ ♔h8 20 ♗xa8 ♕xa8 with unclear consequences; or 17 ♕h4 ♘f5 with a possible repetition. My move 17 ♕d1 is based on the fact that Black can't keep the kingside closed after 17...g5 18 ♘h3.

After Shabba's surprising move I immediately understood his idea: he invites my queen to an unprotected square to push ...e7-e5 without an *en passant* capture being possible in reply. I briefly looked at the resulting position and figured that my extra pawn would play a large role in the endgame.

17 ♕xg5?

Bad, bad, bad! I had to look deeper into the position as a whole to find a refutation, 17 d6!. This move brings together a wide range of ideas.

a) Black's threat to take the knight may be ignored if White can find a way to exploit the g-file. After 17...gxf4 18 dxe7 ♘xe7 19 ♗xa8 fxg3 20 ♕xg3 with the threat of 21 h6, Black can't take the bishop, and his compensation for the exchange is non-existent: 20...♔h8 21 ♗g2 ♗d4 22 ♗f4.

b) White opens up the long diagonal. After 17...exd6 18 ♘h3! h6 White does take advantage of it, but not by grabbing the rook – I correctly judged such an operation as suicidal – instead he swings over to attack the light-squared bishop with 19 ♕a4!. Surprisingly this piece has nowhere to go, and White wins on the spot.

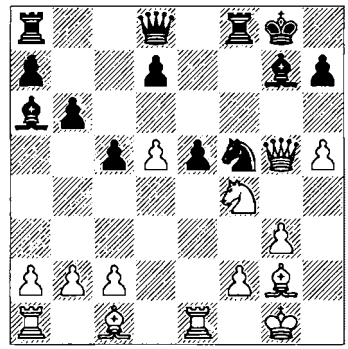
c) In case White wins the g-pawn with the queens on the board, the subsequent h6 advance comes as a killer. 17...e6 18 ♘h3 ♘d4 19 ♗xg5 ♕e8 20 h6 illustrates the point.

In combinative play a variety of tactical ideas has to be brought to the mix. I missed one (19 ♕a4!) – and missed the whole combination.

17...e5 *(D)*

18 ♘h3?

A wrong turn at the crossroads. Much better was 18 ♘d3!. I was afraid of hanging that



knight after my c-pawn is gone, but 18...♘d4 19 h6! ♕xg5 20 ♗xg5 ♗f6 21 ♗xf6 ♖xf6 22 ♖xe5 ♘xc2 23 ♖d1 saves it, and the resulting position must favour White.

18...♕xg5!

When I took on g5 I was hoping for 18...♘d4 19 h6.

19 ♗xg5 h6 20 ♗e3 ♘d4 21 ♗xd4

If I had my knight on d3 the e5-pawn would be hanging, and 21...exd4 22 ♘f4 would be nice for White. In the game continuation Shabba was able to recapture with the c-pawn, obtaining excellent play for a pawn with his bishop-pair, open c-file, and White's horrible h3-knight.

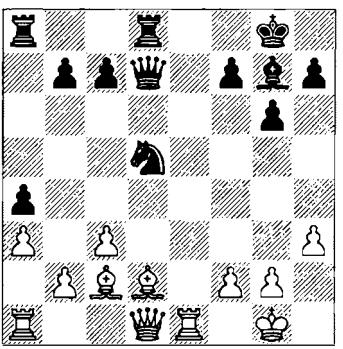
Vladimir Malaniuk once told me this: with the initiative in hand no deep calculation is required. The simple strategy of attacking your opponent's pieces and creating threats on every move has a cumulative effect; in 5-6 moves it reaches a critical mass and brings about the collapse of his defences. Essentially the same thing was Alec Wojtkiewicz's description of Judit Polgar's style: she threatens your pieces, at first one by one; for a while you are able to defend, until she attacks two at a time!

Usually the effects of such a style are described in practical terms. Indeed, the defender has to worry about a lot of things: he spends time and energy to control all tactically charged continuations, while the attacker just pushes it forward. Grandmaster Gregory Serper believes that the objective value of the resulting

complications is of little concern for somebody who plays this style. Greg gives an ice hockey analogy: the puck is dumped into the zone, it's loose, and both teams scramble to get to it.

Interesting, and I'd like to continue along these lines. If the resulting complications favour the attacker he scores, because he's in a position to score (closer to the goal); if the defender regains control he only gets a breather (throws the puck out of his zone for icing).

W



Shashin – Yermolinsky
Leningrad Ch Semi-final 1976

After something like 20 ♕f3 White would be perfectly fine here.

20 ♖e2?

This scared little move opens the floodgates. The following play is simple and energetic.

20...♕b5!

Achieving three things in one move:

a) The d-file is now open for the black rook to harass the white queen.

b) In turn, the queen is overburdened by defending the rook on e2.

c) Meanwhile Black is hitting the b2-pawn, forcing White's answer.

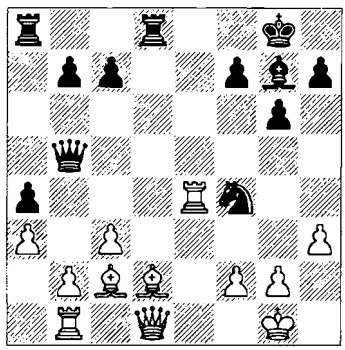
21 ♖b1 ♘f4

The d-file pin allows the knight to jump into the action. The white rook has to move.

22 ♖e4 *(D)*

It's interesting to look at 22 ♖e3!?. After 22...♕d5 the double attack seems decisive, but White finds a tactical trick of his own: 23 ♖e4 ♕xd2 24 ♖e8+!. However, it's too little too late. Black wins the ending after 24...♗f8 25 ♕xd2 ♖xd2 26 ♖xa8 ♖xc2 27 ♖xa4 ♗d6, and there's nothing White can do against 28...♘d3.

B



But what now? White has blocked the h1-a8 diagonal and even threatens the a4-pawn.

22...♗h6!

Black finds a way to spice things up, and it was probably a little too much for my opponent's taste! The pinned d2-bishop is subjected to a discovered attack after ...♘xh3+. White may already be lost as far as I can see, and I think he had to accept his fate and part with the queen: 23 ♖b4 ♘e2+ 24 ♔f1 ♕h5 25 ♗xh6. Unfortunately his troubles won't go away. After 25...♖xd1+ both recaptures have disadvantages: 26 ♖xd1 ♘xc3! 27 bxc3 ♕xh6 28 ♖xb7 ♕f4 threatens to invade on h2; and 26 ♗xd1 ♘g3+! 27 ♔g1 (27 fxg3 ♕f5+) 27...♕xh6 28 fxg3 ♕e3+ 29 ♔h2 c5!, and 30 ♖xb7 loses to 30...♕e4.

My opponent knew he had to block the d-file, but 23 ♖d4 runs into 23...♘e2+.

23 ♗xa4?

Hoping to force the black queen from the a6-f1 diagonal. It didn't take me long to find another geometrical pattern.

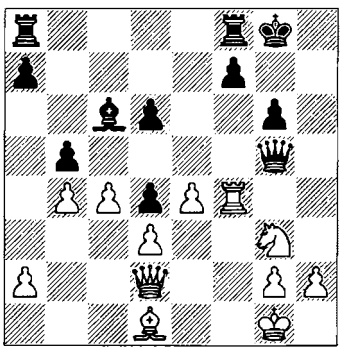
23...♕f5! 24 ♖d4 ♖xd4 25 cxd4 ♖xa4 0-1

Who would have thought White was going to lose because of the rook hanging on b1?

Such is the combinative style of chess. Brute threats and tactical ideas are combined into a

seamless string of moves, forcing the opponent's answers and opening new opportunities for the attacking player. Given certain favourable circumstances, all good players are capable of carrying out such a game plan. Another thing is that obtaining the initiative usually requires a spark provided by a sacrifice.

W



Yermolinsky – Yudasin
Leningrad Ch Semi-final 1979

White's compensation for an exchange looks questionable, until we start paying closer attention to the weakness of the black king. The queen is his only faithful defender. If only she can be driven away...

The dominating tactical theme is the pin. So far it only exists along the c1-h6 diagonal, and that seriously hampers White.

25 ♘f5!

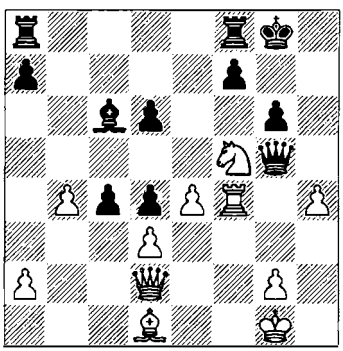
A new twist is introduced after 25...gxf5 26 ♖g4!, when due to the pin on the g-file Black has to lose his queen: 26...♕xg4 27 ♗xg4 fxg4. This is the end of the first phase of my operation, and frankly, I didn't have to calculate any deeper to appreciate the merits of 25 ♘f5.

Black has more than enough for the lost queen, but it's White's turn to move. A quick analysis proves he can get a lot out of this. The following moves are very easy to find: 28 ♕g5+ ♔h7 29 ♕h5+ ♔g7 30 ♕xg4+ ♔f6 (30...♔h7 is more prudent, but after 31 cxb5 ♗b7 32 ♕d7 ♖ab8 33 a4 White will win another pawn on d6 to retain excellent winning chances) 31 cxb5 ♗b7 (not 31...♗xb5 32 ♕f5+; always expect double attacks when the king is open to checks) 32 ♕d7 ♖ab8 33 ♕xd6+ ♔g7 34 ♕xd4+ ♔g8 35 ♕xa7. The final position is too painful to see. White has 6 (six!) pawns for a piece.

25...bxc4 26 h4 *(D)*

With this move White's objective has been achieved. Forcing the defending black queen back and breaking the pin on the rook was all I needed to grab the initiative.

B

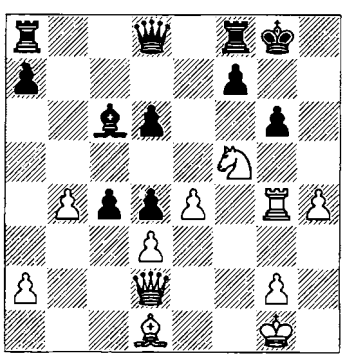


26...♕d8

Of course, 26...♕f6? fails to 27 ♘h6+; and 26...c3 27 hxg5 cxd2 28 ♘e7+ ♔g7 29 ♘xc6 ♖ac8 30 b5 is totally hopeless.

27 ♖g4 *(D)*

B



27...♕f6

The busy queen rushes back. The alternative, 27...cxd3, leads to a dangerous opening of the

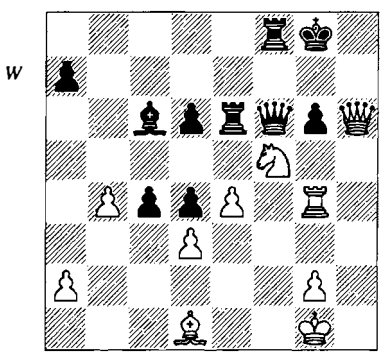
a2-g8 diagonal and promptly gets busted by 28 ♕h6 ♕f6 29 h5 ♗e8 30 hxg6 fxg6 31 ♗b3+.

28 h5 ♖ae8

Leonid Yudasin knew he had to bring together his defensive resources, but in view of White's immediate threats he was running out of options. An attacking player himself, he knew it as a bad sign for the defence.

Leonid had to reject the natural 28...♗d7 on account of 29 hxg6 ♗xf5 (29...fxg6 30 ♖xg6+ wins the queen – we will see this theme in the actual game continuation too) 30 exf5 with an overwhelming attack. Like it or not – the ugly move 28...♗e8 was his only defence. I'd call a time-out then: after simply 29 dxc4, with two pawns for the exchange and a never-ending initiative, White has all the reasons to be optimistic.

29 ♕h6 ♖e6 30 hxg6 fxg6 *(D)*

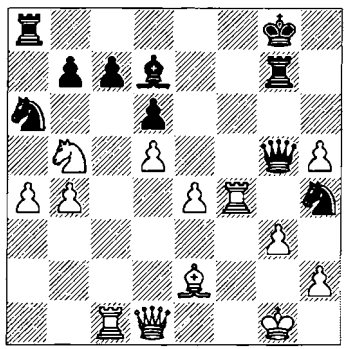


Time for yet another tactical outburst: the knight fork deflects the rook, and Black loses his queen.

31 ♖xg6+ ♕xg6 32 ♘e7+ ♖xe7 33 ♕xg6+ ♖g7 34 ♕e6+ ♔h8 35 ♕xd6 ♖c8 36 ♕xd4 cxd3 37 ♕xd3 ♗d7 38 ♗f3

and it took me just 10 more moves to force resignation.

A more complex situation usually gives both sides their chances to grab the initiative. The ability to sense your golden moments and pursue your goals in a resolute way makes the difference between a mere 2400 player and a 2600 GM. The next episode and the story of the post-mortem analysis serve as a good illustration.



Yermolinsky – Rajlich
Woburn 1999

White has just given up a piece to get rid of Black's attacking pawns. I was looking forward to capturing the stray h4-knight, which doesn't really have anywhere to go. My opponent's previous move, 26...♕g5, introduced more tactical content to the position than I would be comfortable with, and I begin to search for ways of simplification.

27 ♕d2

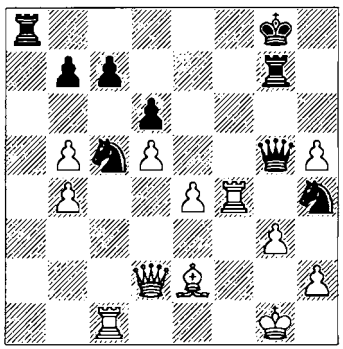
This move sets up the tactical idea used in the previous game. All White has to do is push the black rook away from g7, and ♖f4-g4 will win the game. It seemed so natural to me during the game that I hardly looked at anything else.

In fact, I had a much better move in 27 ♕d4!, after which Black has to accept the grim fate awaiting him in the endgame: 27...♕xf4 (nothing else is there: 27...♗h3 28 ♕f6; 27...c5 28 ♕f6; or 27...♗xb5 28 axb5 ♘xb4 29 ♖cf1) 28 ♕xg7+ ♔xg7 29 gxf4 ♖e8 30 ♘c3.

27...♗h3

During and right after the game I thought this was Black's best chance. That was until the former US Champion Patrick Wolff joined us in the post-mortem. Despite his long lay-off from competitive chess he was quick to find an incredible idea: 27...♗xb5 28 axb5 ♘c5!! *(D)*.

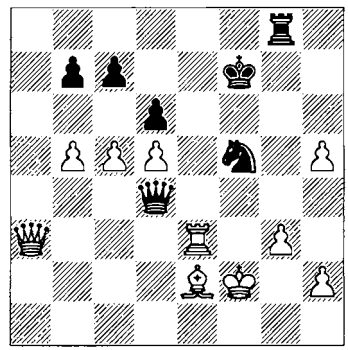
Wow, what a move. I only looked at 28...♘xb4 29 ♖cf1 ♖a2 30 ♕d1, and correctly judged Black's temporary initiative to be dead. Indeed, 30...♘c2 is duly answered by 31 ♗d3! ♘e3 32 ♖f8+ ♔h7 33 e5+ and White checkmates first.



The difference is that the knight is much more active on c5. It's not only a fork from b3; for example, my main move 29 ♖cf1? allows 29...♘xe4. After many attempts to ignore the knight – I tried 29 ♕e3 ♖a3 30 ♕xa3 ♕xf4 31 ♖f1 ♕d2 with strong threats with both suicidal knights participating; or 29 h6 ♘b3 (29...♘xe4! 30 ♕e3 ♘f5!! is the way Fritz wins the position) 30 ♖xc7 ♘xd2 31 ♖xg7+ ♕xg7 32 hxg7 ♖a1+ 33 ♔f2 ♘g6, where White has five pawns for a piece, but has difficulties containing Black's initiative spearheaded by the knight escapees – I began to concentrate on the main line of Patrick's great idea.

After 29 bxc5 ♖a2! the queen is deflected from defending my rook on f4. One line, 30 ♖f8+ ♔xf8 31 ♖f1+ ♔g8 32 ♕xa2 ♕e3+ 33 ♖f2 ♖f7 34 ♗f1, most likely leads to a draw after 34...♖xf2 35 ♕xf2 ♘f3+ 36 ♔g2 ♘e1+ 37 ♔g1, etc.

Another seems no improvement: we looked at 30 ♕xa2 ♕xf4 31 ♖c3 ♕xe4 32 ♕a8+ ♔f7 33 ♔f2 ♕d4+ 34 ♖e3. Now Black doesn't fall for 34...♘f5? 35 ♕e8+ ♔f6 36 ♕e6+ ♔g5 37 h4+, winning, but pushes the white queen away by 34...♖g8!. Taking more pawns is not going to help: 35 ♕xb7 ♖e8 36 ♕xc7+ ♔g8; so White goes back 35 ♕a3, and now 35...♘f5 *(D)*.



I gratefully shook Pat's hand, went home and analysed this one a little bit deeper. After 36 cxd6 Black has a choice:

a) 36...♖e8 37 ♕d3 ♕xe3+ 38 ♕xe3 ♖xe3 (38...♘xe3 loses a piece right away: 39 d7 ♖d8 40 ♔xe3 ♖xd7 41 ♗f3, with all the chances for White) 39 dxc7 ♖c3 40 b6 ♘d6 41 ♗g4; this could be trickier, say after 41...♖b3, as Black may get a passed pawn of his own, but still – White is on top.

b) 36...cxd6 37 ♕c3 (White needs to be able to push his kingside pawns; the line 37 g4 ♘xe3 38 ♕xe3 ♕xd5 39 ♕f4+ ♔e7 40 ♗c4 ♕c5+ 41 ♔g2 ♖f8 42 ♕e4+ ♔d8 shows that Black will benefit from the presence of queens on the board) 37...♕xe3+ 38 ♕xe3 ♘xe3 39 ♔xe3 ♔f6 40 ♔f4 ♖g5 41 ♗f3. I'm not sure this is winning for White, but I'd welcome a chance to give it a try.

Some mess, isn't it? Speaking in practical terms, I would have to be in my best shape to have any chance of finding my way out of there.

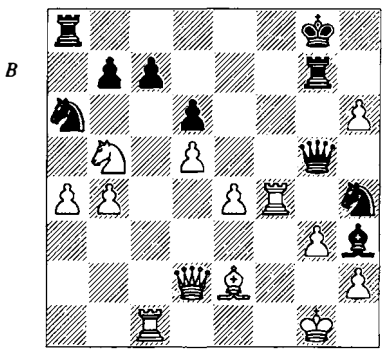
For starters, a good idea would be to recheck the 29 bxc5 ♖a2 30 ♖f8+ line. Maybe then I would have found that after 30...♔xf8 31 ♖f1+ ♔g8 32 ♕xa2 ♕e3+ 33 ♖f2 ♖f7 Black's threats are not so strong, and my suggested 34 ♗f1? was a stupid panicky move, while 34 ♗c4! simply wins.

What's that? Gee, I was bluffed! I was made to believe that 28...♘c5 was a stroke of genius, that could not be refuted by simple means. Subconsciously, I was looking for a kind of refutation to match the sacrifice in its beauty and

depth; that's how I got to find the ideas present in the last diagrammed position. I don't regret it, as I still like my work on the 30 ♕xa2 line, but the main lesson is this: beware of the mesmerizing powers of a GM sacrifice, even if the grandmaster only casually drops by to join your post-mortem analysis.

Returning to the game in question I must say that life after the text-move was much easier. First of all, I pitched in a familiar idea.

28 h6! *(D)*



Black has no real choice here: 28...♖f7 29 ♖g4 or 28...♕xh6 29 ♖f8+. The rook has to abandon the c-pawn.

28...♖g6 29 ♘xc7 ♘xc7

In case of 29...♘g2, I had the same idea, 30 h7+!. Both 30...♔xh7 31 ♖f7+ ♔g8 32 ♕xg5 ♖xg5 33 ♘e6 ♗xe6 34 dxe6 ♘e3 35 ♖xb7 and 30...♔h8 31 ♘e6 ♗xe6 32 ♔xg2 are pretty much clearly winning for White.

30 h7+!

Not 30 ♖xc7? ♕xh6, and the presence of queens unnecessarily confuses matters.

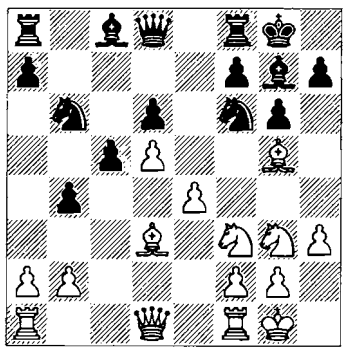
30...♔xh7 31 ♖f7+ ♔g8

A wild counterattack falls short: 31...♔h6 32 ♕xg5+ ♔xg5 33 ♖cxc7 ♖xa4 34 gxh4+ ♔xh4+ 35 ♔f2 ♖g2+ 36 ♔e3 ♖a3+ 37 ♗d3.

32 ♕xg5 ♖xg5 33 ♖cxc7

and the rest was a mop-up job.

It's too bad Patrick Wolff had to choose another career over chess. He was one of the most promising young players (young in terms of American chess, as we regularly field a team of 40-year-olds in Chess Olympiads and haven't had any success in World Championships since Gata Kamsky's departure) in the country. In the early 1990s we played a lot of exciting games with a high tactical content; you have already had a glimpse of one in the section on the Benko.



Yermolinsky – Wolff
PCA Qualifier, Groningen 1993

We stopped at this position after White's 13th move. The opening is essentially over, and a typical Benoni pawn structure will determine what the players should do next.

13...a5

This move brings a powerful message: Black considers his position in the centre and on the kingside quite solid and intends to advance his queenside majority any time he has a chance.

By the way, 13...c4?! may be premature, as after 14 ♗c2 a5 15 ♘d4 White is eyeing the important c6-square.

14 ♖c1 ♗a6

Once again, Patrick rejects 14...c4. Besides the quiet retreat 15 ♗c2, White can consider 15 ♗xc4!? ♘xc4 16 ♖xc4 ♗a6 17 ♖c6 ♗xf1 18 ♕xf1, a promising exchange sacrifice, looking ahead to 18...♖c8 19 ♘d4 h6 20 ♖xc8 ♕xc8 21 ♘c6 ♖e8 22 ♕c4 ♔h7 23 ♗f4 with compensation.

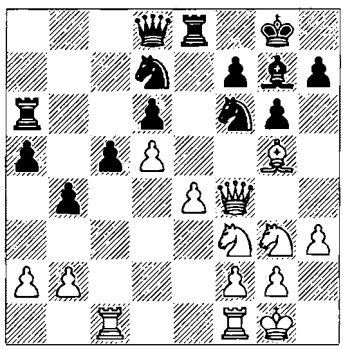
Pat's move is aimed at reducing White's attacking potential.

15 ♗xa6 ♖xa6 16 ♕d2

White has to build up slowly; 16 e5? dxe5 17 ♘xe5 ♘bxd5 18 ♕d3 ♖e6 leaves him broke.

16...♖e8 17 ♕f4 ♘bd7 *(D)*

W



18 ♕h4?!

The last two moves from my opponent (...♘bd7 and ...♖e8) are of great prophylactic value: White's e5 is all but ruled out. The fact that they didn't have much to do with the feared queenside counterplay should not have made me too optimistic. Even the relatively better move 18 ♖fe1 doesn't guarantee White anything, especially after 18...♕e7!, with the idea of meeting 19 ♕h4 with 19...♕f8. Having secured the kingside, Black would look forward to exploiting his advantages on the other side of the board.

The text-move allowed Patrick Wolff to break up the white centre.

18...h6!? 19 ♗xh6 ♘xe4 20 ♘g5

In a new situation White has no choice but to gamble on his as yet vague attacking chances. The ending after 20 ♕xd8? ♖xd8 21 ♗xg7 ♘xg3 22 fxg3 ♔xg7 is just plain miserable, while parting with the bishop cannot be advised: 20 ♗g5 ♘xg5 21 ♘xg5 ♘f8.

20...♘xg5

White gets by thanks to a tactical trick: 20...♗xh6 21 ♘3xe4 ♔g7? (better is 21...♗g7 22 b3 a4, which is unclear) 22 ♕xh6+ ♔xh6 23 ♘xf7+.

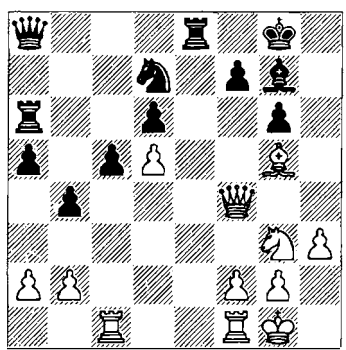
21 ♗xg5 ♕a8 *(D)*

We both had a rocky start in Groningen. This game was played in round 3, and Pat and I were as yet to light the scoreboard! As an excuse, I can mention that finishing the US Championship just two days before the start of the PCA Qualifier was a tough schedule. The in-between days were a blur of crossing nine time zones from Los Angeles to Holland and did nothing to help us rest or prepare. On the other hand, the other American participants, Gata Kamsky, Boris Gulko and Joel Benjamin, had the same plight, but did very well...

With zero points after two rounds I was looking at yet another blow in this game. White had lost his once-proud centre, and his queenside is exposed to the power of Black's pawn-majority supported by the monstrous dark-squared bishop. Two pawns are hanging, and to aggravate matters I was getting dangerously low on time. In this extremely adverse situation I had to stay positive to continue fighting.

On the bright side (if such even exists in a gloomy position like this one) Black's kingside is lacking the h-pawn, which makes it a little shaky. The lack of coordination between his rooks may cause certain back-rank problems. White begins with a move designed to underline his strategy for the remainder of the game: it's all-out attack!

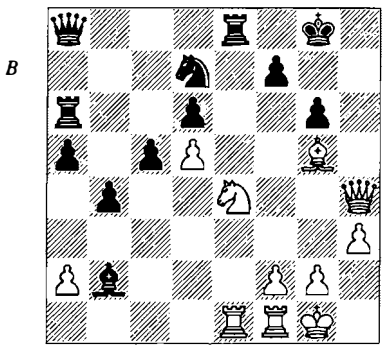
W



22 ♖ce1! ♗xb2

The first pitfall has been avoided. I hoped for 22...♖xe1 ?! 23 ♖xe1 ♕xd5? 24 ♖e8+ ♘f8 25 ♘e4 ♕d1+ (25...♖a8 26 ♘f6+ checkmates soon) 26 ♔h2 ♕d4 27 ♗f6 ♗xf6 28 ♘xf6+ ♔g7 29 ♘g4 with decisive threats.

23 ♘e4 *(D)*



Once again, the d-pawn is taboo: 23...♕xd5? 24 ♘f6+ ♘xf6 25 ♗xf6 ♖xe1 26 ♕h8#. The question is what White wants to do next. Spotting no immediate threats, Patrick made a consolidating move.

23...♗g7?

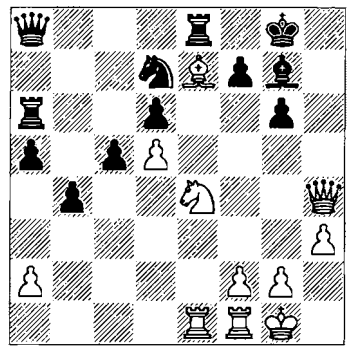
During our extensive post-mortem we kept looking for a critical moment where Black had lost the initiative. There were many questionable junctures, but we were at a loss to pinpoint the exact moment until Vishy Anand joined us for a brief period. He instantly brought our attention to the natural-looking move 23...a4!. This a-pawn is the most dangerous of them all, and White has to react quickly. My main idea was to play 24 ♗e7, when both 24...♕xd5 25 ♘g5 ♘f8 26 ♗xf8 and 24...♗e5 25 ♘g5 ♘f8 26 ♖xe5! dxe5 27 d6 are punished in resolute fashion. However, the straightforward 24...b3! is perfectly fine:

a) 25 ♘xd6 ♖xd6 26 ♗xd6 ♖xe1 27 ♖xe1 bxa2.

b) 25 ♘g5 ♘f8 26 axb3 a3 27 ♗xf8 ♔xf8 28 ♕f4 ♖a7 29 ♕xd6+ ♔g8 30 ♖xe8+ ♕xe8 31 ♕xc5 gives White extra pawns, but all those don't come close to matching the strength of Black's passed pawn, which is evident after 31...♕d7 32 ♕c2 ♕xd5 33 ♘f3 ♗f6 34 ♕a2 ♗b2.

c) 25 a3! is White's best. Black's a-pawn must be slowed down at any cost.

24 ♗e7! *(D)*



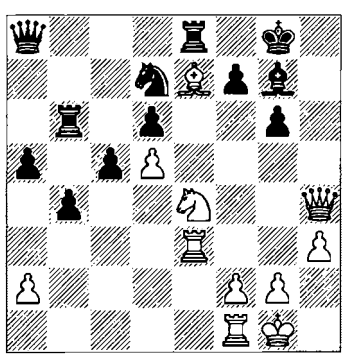
After this strong move Black begins to feel the heat. As we both saw, the d-pawn is still untouchable: 24...♕xd5? 25 ♘g5 ♘f8 26 ♗xf8 ♖xe1 27 ♖xe1 ♔xf8 28 ♘h7+ ♔g8 29 ♖e8+, while White is attacking d6. Patrick's move surprised me; I expected 24...a4 instead.

24...♖b6!?

At this point I looked at 25 ♘g5 ♘f8 26 ♗xf8 ♔xf8, but couldn't find a decent follow-up. What else? The most natural way was to regain the pawn with 25 ♘xd6, but the position after 25...♖eb8 26 ♖d1 ♕a6 (that, I presume, was the idea of 24...♖b6) 27 ♘c4 ♖6b7 is by no means clear.

This is a dilemma you face when your attack begins to bring dividends: should you cash it in? After some thought I decided to continue piling up tactical ideas in the hope of getting a bigger return on my investments.

25 ♖e3!? *(D)*



Black can't defend his d6-pawn, as seen from the following analysis:

a) 25...♕xd5 26 ♘g5 ♘f8 27 ♗xf8 ♖xe3 28 ♗xg7 would cost Black a piece, and possibly more in case of 28...♖xh3 29 ♕xh3 ♔xg7 30 ♕h7+ ♔f6 (30...♔f8 31 ♖e1!) 31 ♕h8+ ♔xg5 32 ♕d8+.

b) 25...♗e5 meets the same fate as in the note to Black's 23rd move: 26 ♘g5 ♘f8 27 ♖xe5! dxe5 28 d6 ♔g7 29 ♕c4 with a strong attack. His best defence would be 29...♖xe7 30 dxe7 ♘e6 31 ♘xe6+ fxe6 32 ♕xc5 ♖c6 33 ♕xe5+ ♔f7, but this is not enjoyable at all.

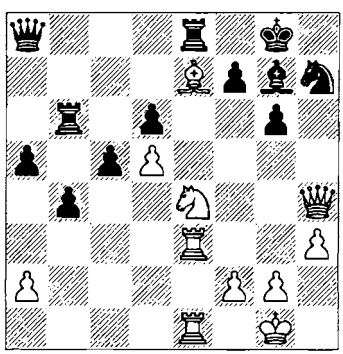
c) 25...♗d4!? could represent a good practical chance unless White finds 26 ♘g5 ♘f8 27 ♗xf8 ♔xf8 28 ♘xf7!, which gives him a powerful attack. After 28...♔g8 29 ♕h6! Black has to reject both 29...♗xe3 30 fxe3 with unavoidable checkmate on h8, and 29...♖xe3 30 ♕xg6+ ♗g7 31 fxe3 ♕xd5 32 ♘g5 with a similar outcome. The remaining option, 29...♔xf7, sends the black king on a journey from which he will not return: 30 ♕h7+ ♔f6 31 ♖f3+ ♔e5 32 ♕f7! with 33 ♖e1+ to follow.

Patrick Wolff finds the best solution under the circumstances.

25...♘f8 26 ♖fe1 ♘h7 *(D)*

Not 26...♕xd5 27 ♘f6+, but 26...♖xe7 27 ♕xe7 ♕xd5 28 ♘f6+ ♗xf6 29 ♕xf6 ♖b8 30 ♖e7 a4 deserved serious attention.

W



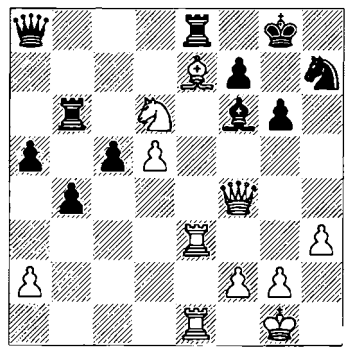
27 ♘xd6 ♗f6!?

White finally took the doomed pawn, and Patrick wants to answer it with a tactical shot of his own. The alternatives, 27...♖xd6 28 ♗xd6 ♖xe3 29 ♖xe3 ♕xd5 30 ♖e8+ ♘f8 31 ♕d8 and the relatively better 27...♖eb8 28 ♘c4, would strongly favour White.

28 ♕f4! *(D)*

More to the point than 28 ♕g3 ♖xe7, because now the white queen is keeping an eye on f7. With both players entering the time-trouble zone, the tension reached its peak.

B



The critical line would begin with 28...♕b8 29 ♗xf6 ♖xe3, with a critical decision:

a) 30 ♕xe3 is less conclusive than I would expect in such position. Black proceeds with 30...♘xf6 (30...♕xd6 31 ♗b2 leaves White with a powerful bishop, and the attempt to plug the long diagonal by 31...f6 32 ♕h6 ♘f8 33 ♖e8 ♔f7 brings no relief after 34 ♖c8 ♕e7 35 ♗c1) 31 ♘c4 ♖b5 32 d6. With all the advantages White enjoys here, I can't be sure about the outcome after, say, 32...♔g7.

I feel White's position in the above diagram deserves more, and that 'more' is delivered by yet another tactical operation:

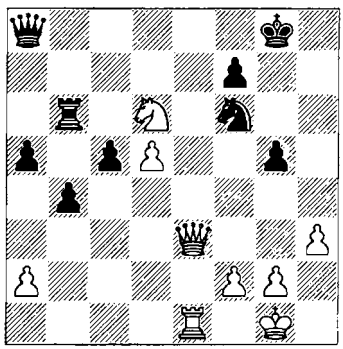
b) 30 ♖xe3! ♘xf6 (nothing else is there: 30...♖xd6 31 ♗e5 and 30...♕xd6 31 ♖e8+ ♘f8 32 ♕xd6 ♖xd6 33 ♗e7 ♖xd5 34 ♗xf8 ♔h7 35 ♖c8 both cost major material) 31 ♖e8+! ♘xe8 32 ♕xf7+ ♔h8 33 ♘xe8 ♕e5 (after 33...♕b7, 34 ♕f8+ ♔h7 35 d6 cuts Black's communication lines) 34 d6 ♕e1+ 35 ♔h2 ♕e5+ 36 f4, and Black must resign.

Pat allowed his clock to tick to the last second before making his last desperate attempt.

28...g5 29 ♗xf6! ♖xe3 30 ♕xe3 ♘xf6 *(D)*

White would have no problem containing Black's passed pawns in case of 30...♖xd6 31 ♕e8+ ♕xe8 32 ♖xe8+ ♘f8 33 ♗e7 ♖xd5 34 ♗xf8 ♔h7 35 ♖c8 ♖d1+ 36 ♔h2 ♖d2 37 ♖xc5 ♖xa2 38 ♖xg5, but the text-move allows a prettier finish.

B



31 ♕xg5+ ♔h7 32 ♕xf6 ♕xd5 33 ♘e8! 1-0

This inspired attack helped me to get back into the tournament.

The initiative doesn't lie there waiting to be picked up. In a normal course of events both players are very sensitive to the opponent's threats to the safety of their position. Being in control of events is considered important; everybody knows the concept of prophylaxis and would show great care in restricting his opponent's opportunities, even at the cost of delaying the implementation of his own ideas. That's why often it takes serious investments – sacrifices – to climb into the driver's seat. What does a sacrifice do? It releases a sudden gust of energy that allows the attacker to proceed with his ideas and put together a combination of tactical ideas. Among many definitions of combination, Botvinnik's 'Forced tactical sequence with a sacrifice' stands out as short and appealing. The great Champion was a firm believer in scientific truth, and he was annoyed by any uncertainty – we know that much. Another thing is that in his definition he left no room for colourful epithets, thus it seemed like he denied the chess combination its aesthetic value much appreciated by the fans.

That's OK by me, but I'm more bothered with the limits of Botvinnik's definition. What if the tactical sequence can't be calculated to the end? How can we tell whether or not the sacrifice will be justified? Here we once again carefully enter the mysterious world of chess intuition.

In chess language intuition is a word used to describe anything that goes beyond computation in sharp tactical positions. For more quiet situations we use a different term, Botvinnik's beloved 'positional understanding'. I'm willing to state here, on these pages, that 'intuition' in sharp positions is something that can be called 'combinational understanding'. In Part 1 we saw a lot of examples of intuitive decisions taken in positions of different degrees of sharpness. What makes them similar is uncertainty. Just like a superior positional understanding helps strong players to see the future of positional battles and tell which one of the positional elements will prevail, a trained combinational understanding allows some of us to fearlessly sacrifice pieces. In both cases intuition can be right or wrong – and that's the risk we must take.

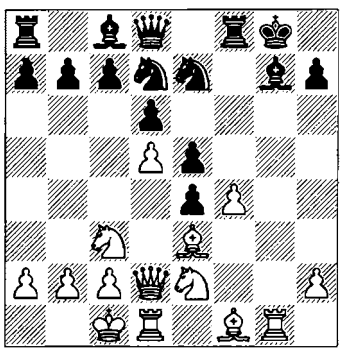
I asked Alex Shabalov what criteria, if any, he uses when he customarily sends his games into wild spins of tactical mêlée. He said that his main concern lies in a variety of ideas present in the positions he can reach in his calculations. If he feels it grow, then it's a good sign and he can go on; if it begins to diminish with every move, then the warning light comes on, hopefully before Shabba has gone too far with his sacrificial strategy. Sounds shaky and unreliable? Not more than your positional understanding has got to offer in critical situations. After all, anything in chess can refuted by the means of hard science, e.g. calculation, no matter what criteria were used in building your strategic plans.

Many great attackers, Garry Kasparov included, are not ashamed to admit calculating along the escape routes. Asked how he could possibly calculate everything in his famous game against Topalov, Wijk aan Zee 1999, he said he knew he could always make a draw by

perpetual! It gave Garry his peace of mind. He sacrificed a rook (remember, ♖xd4!!) and sent the game along the calculated line. By the time he got there he found new ideas to continue his attack, and finally it all fell into place.

I think it would be appropriate to conclude this section with an example of an unfinished attack.

I took an escape route in time-trouble when the goal was only a couple of moves away.



Yermolinsky – Azmaiparashvili
PCA Interzonal, Groningen 1993

Neither 14 ♘xe4 ♘f5 15 ♘g5 nor 14 fxe5 ♘xe5 15 ♖xg7+ ♔xg7 16 ♗h6+ ♔h8 17 ♗xf8 ♕xf8 18 ♘xe4 looked particularly promising. Instead, I made a move that looks like a blunder.

14 ♗h3!?

White is eyeing the e6-square, so Black's answer is forced.

14...♘b6! 15 ♗xc8 ♘c4

No choice but to go for it. There can't be two opinions about the position after 15...♖xc8 16 ♗xb6! axb6 17 fxe5 dxe5 18 ♘xe4 – White is much better.

But now he loses the dark-squared bishop; isn't that going to be a problem?

16 ♗e6+ ♔h8 17 ♕e1 ♘xe3 18 ♖xg7!

The solution.

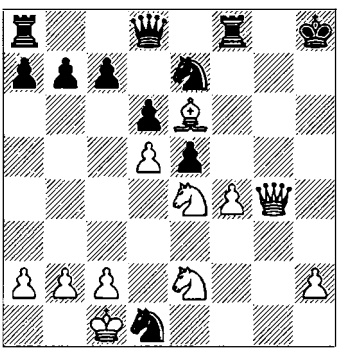
18...♘xd1

Obviously, 18...♔xg7 19 ♕g3+ ♘g6 20 ♕xe3 exf4 21 ♕d4+ could not satisfy Zurab.

19 ♖xh7+ ♔xh7 20 ♕h4+ ♔g7 21 ♕g4+ ♔h8

This is as far as I could get in my initial calculations before playing 14 ♗h3. I saw that Black had no good way to avoid the perpetual: after 21...♘g6 22 f5 ♕e8 23 ♘xd1 reinforcements would soon arrive, with decisive effect: ♘e3, ♘g3-h5. After the king move, should I take the draw now?

22 ♘xe4! *(D)*



Not yet! Despite a huge material deficit White continues the attack.

22...♘g8

Expected, but I also had to deal with three major alternatives:

a) 22...♘e3 23 ♕h5+ ♔g7 24 ♘g5 ♖h8 (or 24...♘g6 25 ♕h7+ ♔f6 26 ♘e4#) 25 ♕f7+ ♔h6 26 ♕f6+ ♔h5 27 ♘g3+ ♔h4 28 ♘f3# (actually any move with that knight mates).

b) 22...♘f2!? 23 ♕h5+ (23 ♘xf2!? slows the game down a bit, but is nevertheless playable) 23...♔g7 24 ♘g5 ♘g6. There's no mate in one now, but 25 f5 sure looks good.

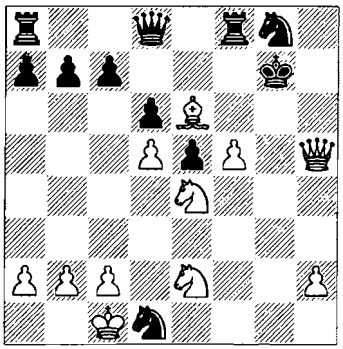
c) 22...♕e8 23 f5, cutting off the g6-square and leaving Black with a big question how to set up any defences.

23 ♕h5+ ♔g7 24 ♕g4+

At that point I allowed myself to get too low on time, and therefore had no choice but to take a perpetual. Shame on me! The win was there to be taken with 24 f5! *(D)*.

a) 24...♕e8 25 ♕g5+ ♔h8 26 ♗xg8!. Simple and efficient: 26...♖xg8 27 ♕h6#. Black

B



would be forced to give back a lot with 26...♖xf5 27 ♕xf5 ♕xg8, but even this doesn't help: 28 ♘f6 ♕f7 29 ♕g5.

b) 24...♖f6 25 ♕g5+ ♔h8 26 ♗xg8 ♖f8 27 f6! is the same winning idea.

c) 24...♘f6 25 ♕g6+ ♔h8 26 ♘g5 ♕e7. Believe it or not, I was stuck with this defence. OK, I hear it, 27 ♗f7 – enough said.

24...♔h8 25 ♕h5+ ♔g7 26 ♕g4+ ½-½

One of the most disappointing draws in my career, and I have made a lot of them.

What's the trick then, how to succeed in attacking chess? Pattern recognition (preferably beyond being familiar with a ♗xh7+ theme), good visualization powers – all true, but all that together may not be enough. You have to believe in yourself. People who play this kind of chess on a daily basis are never intimidated by the amount of sacrificed material. They play quickly, conserving time and energy for critical moments when the need to calculate will arise. It all comes with experience – and nothing, I mean, nothing can substitute for combinational understanding. To me, this style of chess can't be viewed as inferior by the proponents of the positional style. After all, they often get burned by a sudden burst of tactics. It is funny how desperately they cling to their beliefs, trying to apply positional methods to any situation on the chess board. The good old self-comforting thought, 'I did everything right positionally, so the tactics must favour me' doesn't always ring true. Believe me, I know. I used to say this every time while watching my position crumble to dust, but not any more. Instead of cursing our bad luck and wondering why things always seem to go the attacker's way, we should learn to accept the fact that the combinational style has the same right to exist as the positional approach.

Number of Pawns is just another Positional Factor

I already described my initially negative attitude towards gambit play. It carried on through my junior years, right into the times when 'spit-and-polishers' took me under their wing. You saw those two games against the Najdorf – they pretty much illustrate my chess philosophy of those days. Risk must be diminished, and ideally, avoided; as the positional play skills should be enough to bring success in chess. My results in 1977-9, however, didn't support that theory. Game after game I would find myself hitting a brick wall with my 'strategy' of exchanging pieces, especially the queens, at the first opportunity. I honestly tried to write off my shortcomings as the consequences of my insufficient technique.

Me and my good friend, another future GM Valery Loginov, spent countless hours analysing Ulf Andersson's endgames to the bone. We wished every game of ours would start from his favourite position arising after 1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 (or 2...g6, doesn't matter) 3 ♘c3 d5 4 cxd5 ♘xd5 5 e4 ♘xc3 6 dxc3 ♕xd1+ 7 ♔xd1. Ulf was our cult figure, we'd give anything to become like him. I guess, we were a bit simplistic in our definition of his style, but it's the result that counted. The hard work in the endgame area began to paid off, and by 1980 I established myself on a 2400 FIDE level – no big achievement if you consider that many players of my generation, Yusupov, Dolmatov and Psakhis to mention the most famous, were ripping apart the ranks of the Soviet chess elite. To go any further and catch up with them I needed a boost. Something very important was missing from my play, and I would never have known

what, if hadn't been for my developing friendship with Mark Tseitlin.

Fifteen years my senior, a five-time Leningrad Champion, Mark was a great guy and an amazing chess-player. He absolutely ruled our local chess scene. My mentor's 'spit-and-polishers' had no prayer against him, and surprisingly I didn't hear much grumble about it; they usually reserved their 'spirited fighter' bashing to weaker players. Mark always operated with concrete variations, yet his position never seemed to suffer from such an approach. Known in chess circles as 'Gavrila' – in reference in his similarly sounding paternal middle name and outrageously down-to-earth behaviour reminding of a certain character from the Russian cult book 'The 12 Chairs' – Mark was equally good in fierce attacks and long endgames. No dogma ever survived in his mind, he was always bursting with new ideas and was never afraid of putting them to the test. On a good day he could beat anybody. One can only regret that certain character flaws kept Mark from reaching his potential in practical chess; but every future GM from Leningrad circa 1980s, including Vladimir Epishin, Alexander Khalifman and myself, must give him a lot of credit for helping us to develop. Now Mark lives and teaches chess in Israel, and I'm never surprised at the surge of young talents coming from there. Mikhalevsky and Avrukh are only two names among many I could mention here.

From 1981 to 1989, before I left the Soviet Union, both Mark and I belonged to the Leningrad Army Sports Club chess team and were together on dozens of tournaments and training camps. The single most important thing Mark taught me was the value of the initiative. I wouldn't mind having the initiative in my games and, being quite good tactically, I knew how to use it. My mistake was viewing the initiative as the reward for a correctly chosen and steadily implemented positional plan. I would accept it falling into my lap, but I didn't know how to fight for it. Mark's approach was a real eye-opener. Before I knew it I was fascinated by gambit play, having re-discovered it at the age of 23. Ever since, I have played a lot of gambit lines, all with different strategic and tactical forms of compensation for a minimal material investment.

You know the problem with pawn sacrifices: you give a little – you get a little. The gambiteer must be patient and shouldn't expect immediate returns. I have learned to treat a loss of a pawn as yet another positional factor that must be taken into the account, no more or less than the others present. The games selected for this chapter will, I hope, reflect the variety of ideas in the modern approach to gambit play.

I begin with a simple statement, known to chess since the times of Anderssen and Morphy: keeping the enemy king in the centre is often worth more than a pawn. Classic gambits give us more than a few illustrations, but this strategy is not restricted to open games. One day I was fortunate to discover an amazing idea in a sleepy line of the Torre Attack.

Yermolinsky – Bandza
Soviet Army Team Ch, Sverdlovsk 1987

1	**d4**	**♘f6**
2	**♘f3**	**e6**
3	**♗g5**	**c5**
4	**e3**	**d5**
5	**♘bd2**	**♘bd7**
6	**c3**	

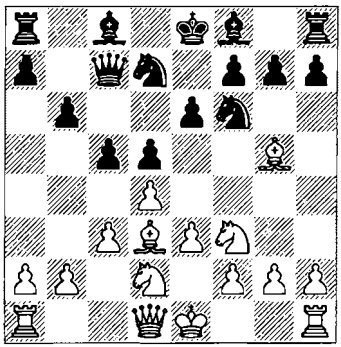
White wants to post his knight on e5, support it with f4, and aim for a kingside attack. Black's next move is designed to cut that plan down.

6	**...**	**♕c7**
7	**♗d3**	**b6?** *(D)*

More careful is **7...♗e7** as was played in **Yermolinsky – Karpman**, *USSR Ch Semi-final, Pavlodar 1987*. I couldn't make any headway towards capturing the e5-square with **8 ♗f4** because of **8...♗d6! 9 ♗g3 0-0**. Chances are equal here, and the premature push **10 e4?!** (better was 10 0-0 of course, but I was trying to force him to take on g3 in the false hope of using my rook for an attack on the h-file) was energetically rebuffed by **10...e5!**, and after **11 dxe5 ♘xe5 12 ♘xc5 ♗xe5 13 exd5** (once again, 13 0-0!) **13...♗xg3 14 hxg3 ♕e5+ 15 ♔f1 ♕xd5** White already stood worse.

With the text-move Black neglects his kingside development for a split second. I don't know why, but I saw the idea right away.

W



8 ♘e5!!

Nevertheless! Facing f4 with a familiar unfriendly squeeze, Black feels obliged to take.

8 ... ♘xe5
9 dxe5 ♕xe5?

Right where I wanted him. A more prudent decision would be to swallow his pride and accept an inferior position after 9...♘d7 10 f4 c4! (forget about 10...f6 11 ♕h5+ g6 12 ♗xg6+ hxg6 13 ♕xg6+) 11 ♗c2 ♘c5 12 0-0. Black suffers from development problems due to the pressure from White's g5-bishop, which normally gets exchanged or pushed back to f4 – compare with a regular line, 6...♗e7 7 ♗d3 b6 8 ♘e5 ♘xe5 9 dxe5 ♘d7, instead of 6... ♕c7.

10 ♗f4 ♕h5 *(D)*

The only available square on the whole board.

11 ♗b5+ ♗d7

No choice again: 11...♔d8 12 ♗c6 costs a rook.

12 ♗xd7+ ♔xd7

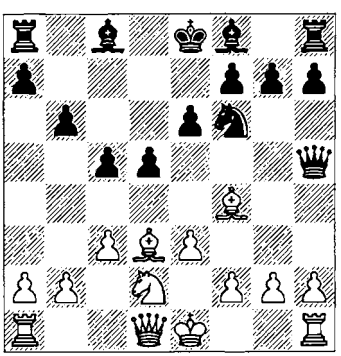
The knight is overloaded with responsibilities.

13 ♕a4+ ♔d8
14 ♘f3 ♘d7
15 ♖d1 *(D)*

Straight out of Gavrila's teachings. Keeping his king in the centre is good, but it's only a temporary factor. Some energetic play is required to take advantage of your chances while they're there. I knew I had to stay sharply focused in those situations!

White's last move is very much to the point. I planned to pry the position open with c3-c4 or e3-e4, and knew this had to be done before Black could restore the lost coordination of his pieces. Strangely enough, Black's plan can only be achieved through a counterattack with ...g5. That's why I rejected 15 0-0 ♖g8 16 e4 g5!. In such a position things can go either way; for example: 17 exd5? (better is 17 ♘e5) 17...gxf4 18 dxe6 ♖xg2+ 19 ♔h1 ♘e5, etc. Something can be said in favour of 15 0-0-0, but I felt like keeping my king away from the developing action. The sample line, 15...♕f5 16 c4 d4!?, with the f4-bishop hanging with check in case of 17 exd4? (17 ♘xd4! exd4 18 ♖xd4 gives White a winning attack, bit I didn't look that deep) made me worry about some tactical implications of castling long.

W



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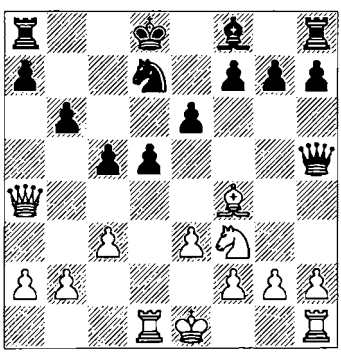


15 ... f6?

A huge blunder, but how could Black defend himself? Let's analyse some of his possibilities:

a) 15...g5 is ruined by 16 ♘e5! ♘xe5 17 ♗xe5 ♖g8 18 ♕c6 ♖c8 19 ♗f6+ ♗e7 20 ♕d6+.

b) 15...♖g8 is too slow: 16 c4 g5 17 cxd5 gxf4 18 dxe6.

c) 15...♗e7 16 c4 leads to the same thing.

d) 15...c4 stops White's main threat, but Black is unable to build on his queenside gains after 16 0-0, and 16...♘c5 loses a pawn to 17 ♕xc4.

e) 15...♕f5 can and will be met by 16 c4 d4 17 exd4 ♕xf4 (no check this time) 18 dxc5, and White wins the pinned d7-knight.

f) 15...♕g6 is his best defensive option, but with the g-pawn staying put White can afford to take his time: 16 0-0 h6 (it's necessary to guard the g5-square) 17 e4! rips Black's position apart.

16 ♕c6 ♖c8
17 ♕xe6 ♕e8
18 ♕xd5

and White won.

Analysing various gambit lines after 2...d6 against the Alapin Sicilian was our favourite pastime. I don't know if giving this variation Mark Tseitlin's name would be entirely inappropriate. He had suggested many sharp ideas for Black and I cashed in nicely on quite a few occasions.

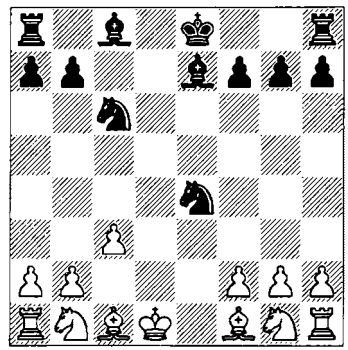
Zhuravliov – Yermolinsky

Soviet Army Ch, Odessa 1981

1 e4 c5
2 c3 d6!?
3 d4 ♘f6
4 dxc5 ♘c6

Smartly avoiding 4...♘xe4?? 5 ♕a4+, Black wants development. This line has been known for many years, but nobody paid any attention to it.

It all began when somebody in our club dug out an obscure game that saw White taking every pawn on his path with **5 cxd6 ♘xe4 6 dxe7**, and getting a better endgame after **6...♕xd1+ 7 ♔xd1 ♘xf2+ 8 ♔e1 ♘xh1 9 exf8♕+ ♔xf8 10 ♗e3.** Gavrila took one look at the board, immediately rejected the exchange, and pointed out Black's excellent compensation after **7...♗xe7!** *(D).*



W

Indeed, from the position after **8 ♗e3 ♗f5** I won two games quite easily.

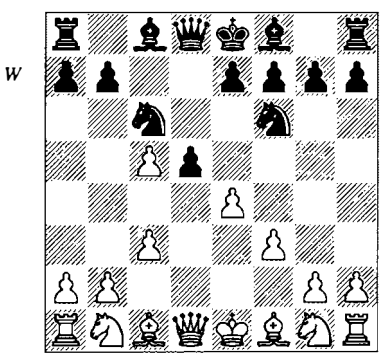
1) **Traham – Yermolinsky,** *Manhattan Chess Club, New York 1990*: **9 ♘f3 0-0-0+ 10 ♘bd2 ♗c5! 11 ♗xc5 ♘xc5 12 ♗e2** Better is 12 ♔c1, but then comes 12...♗d3!. **12...♖he8 13 ♖e1 ♘e4 14 ♖f1?** His last chance was 14 ♔c1 ♘xf2 15 b3, and my planned 15...♖e3 16 ♔b2 ♘e5 fails to put White away: 17 ♘c4!. Possibly better is 15...♗d3!? – in any case Black has won a pawn back and pushes for a win. **14...♗g4 15 ♘d4 ♗xe2+ 16 ♔xe2 ♘xc3+ 17 ♔d3 ♘b5 0-1.**

2) **Viksnin – Yermolinsky,** *Leningrad 1985*: **9 ♗b5!?** More challenging, but also fails to impress. **9...0-0-0+ 10 ♔e2 ♘e5! 11 ♘f3?** Too submissive. He had no choice but to take another pawn by 11 ♗xa7, and 11...♘d6 can be answered by 12 ♗c5 ♗g5 13 ♗xd6 ♖xd6 14 ♘f3 ♗g4 15 h3, or 12 ♗d4 ♘xb5 13 ♗xe5 ♖he8 14 f4 (14 a4 ♗g5!) 14...f6 15 a4. Tell you the truth, I don't particularly like White's position in either case. **11...♘xf3 12 ♔xf3** Better was 12 gxf3, but Black's position is simply great after 12...♘c5 13 b4 a6 14 ♗c4 ♘a4, threatening 15...♗xb1. **12...♘d6 13 ♗f1 ♗e4+ 14 ♔e2 ♘c4 15 ♘d2 ♗d3+ 16 ♔e1 ♘xb2,** with a better ending.

It's obvious that White must avoid this gambit, as he's only fighting for survival there. Our attention soon switched to 5 ♗c4. I suggested a playable ending after 5...e6 6 ♗g5 (6 f3? is a big mistake; Black replies 6...d5 with the better game) 6...dxc5 7 ♕xd8+ ♔xd8 8 ♘d2 h6 9 ♗h4 g5 10 ♗g3 ♘h5, but Mark wasn't satisfied with that. He advocated the radical solution, 5...♘xe4!? 6 ♗xf7+ (White gets himself a bad deal after 6 ♕d5 ♗e6 7 ♕xe4 d5) 6...♔xf7 7 ♕d5+ e6 8 ♕xe4 d5 9 ♕f3+ ♕f6 10 ♗e3 ♘e5. Indeed, subsequent tournament practice confirmed the correctness of his evaluation: Black is slightly better.

5 f3 d5 *(D)*

Theoretically speaking, this move is better than 5...dxc5 6 ♕xd8+ ♘xd8 7 ♗e3 ♘e6 8 ♘a3 a6, dangerously falling behind in development (Malaniuk-Yermolinsky, Kronstadt 1981), but the drawback is the simplicity of White's task after 6 exd5 ♕xd5 7 ♕xd5 ♘xd5 8 ♗c4 e6 9 ♗xd5 exd5 10 ♗e3 ♘e5 11 b3, if he's only aiming for a draw; such was the case in Russek-Yermolinsky, National Open, Las Vegas 1998, and I regretted my choice of opening for that game.



Zhuravliov was old school, an uncompromising player, and he decided to keep the pawn.

6 ♘d2!? e5
7 exd5 ♘xd5
8 ♘e4

White's idea looks attractive. He gets to keep his extra pawn without the committal advance b4, and the c5-pawn keeps Black's pieces restricted. However, I didn't panic and continued my development.

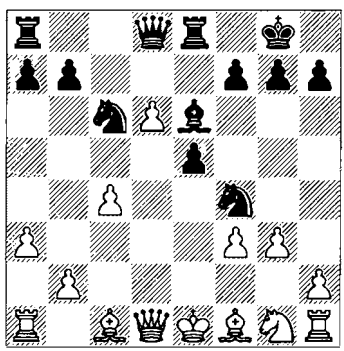
8 ... ♗e6
9 a3 ♗e7
10 c4 ♘f4

I now expected 11 g3 ♕xd1+ 12 ♔xd1 0-0-0+ 13 ♔c2 ♘d4+ 14 ♔c3 ♘g6 with nice piece play, but my fearless opponent wanted to keep the queens on the board.

11 ♘d6+ ♗xd6
12 cxd6 0-0

12...♘xg2+ is also not bad; White should decline the offer with 13 ♔f2!.

13 g3 ♖e8! *(D)*



You can't play a gambit without sacrifices! Black invites the white king for a walk: 14 gxf4 ♕h4+ 15 ♔d2 exf4 (insufficient is 15...♖ad8? 16 ♔c3 ♕f6 17 ♗e3, covering the king after 17...exf4+ 18 ♗d4) 16 ♔c3 (White is in danger after 16 ♔c2 ♗f5+ 17 ♗d3 ♖e1) 16...♕f6+ 17 ♔b3. His majesty is slightly out of breath, and naturally, Black never lets up: 17...b5!. My fantasy line is concluded after 18 ♔a2 bxc4 19 ♗h3 ♖ab8 20 ♗xe6 ♕xe6 21 ♗xf4? c3+ 22 b3 ♖xb3! 23 ♕xb3 ♖b8 24 ♕xe6 ♖b2#! There are endless opportunities for both sides, but I think Zhuravliov had to accept the sac. In the game continuation, I obtained excellent play without any further material investments. I even got my pawn back!

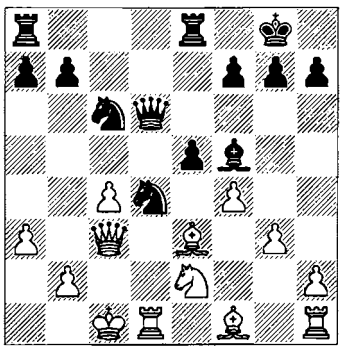
14 ♗e3 ♕f6
15 ♕d2 ♗f5!

Clearing a good square for the knight.

16	**0-0-0**	**♘e6**
17	**♕c3**	**♘ed4**
18	**♘e2**	**♕xd6**
19	**f4** *(D)*	

19 ♘xd4? exd4 20 ♗xd4 loses to 20...♖ad8. My opponent was already headed for severe time-trouble.

B



19 ... b5!?

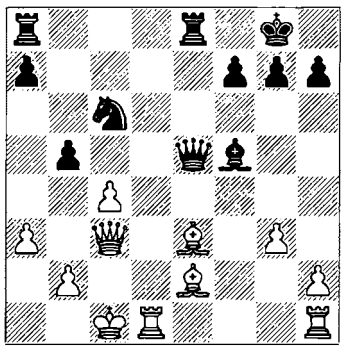
The quiet move 19...♗g6!? deserved a lot of attention here, but I couldn't resist the opportunity to send the game into a wild tactical spin. The entire course of the game was adrenaline-driven, and I expected the subsequent sober analysis to find some flaws in Black's play. It didn't. Magically, everything falls into place in every line of calculation. Is that some kind of reward for enterprising play, or I had already begun to show a rudimentary 'combinational understanding'?

20	**fxe5**	**♘xe2+**
21	**♗xe2**	**♕xe5** *(D)*
22	**♗f3?**	

With just a few minutes left on the clock my opponent couldn't possibly calculate anything beyond 22 ♕xe5 ♖xe5 23 ♗f3 ♘a5. The checkmate threat looks scary, but White can fight with 24 ♖d5! ♘b3+ 25 ♔d1 ♖xe3 26 ♖xf5. There are many ways for Black to win a pawn, but choosing the right one could be a problem:

a) 26...♖d3+ 27 ♔e2 (not 27 ♔c2 ♖xf3) 27...♖d2+ 28 ♔f1 ♖ad8 (also tempting is 28...♘d4 29 ♗xa8 ♘xf5 30 cxb5 ♖xb2 31 a4

W

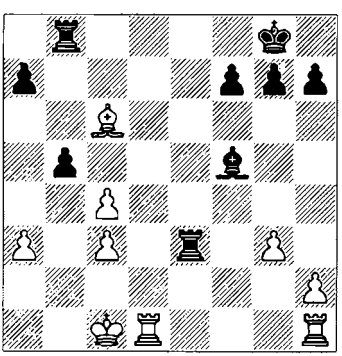


♖a2) 29 ♗d5 ♖xb2 30 cxb5 g6 (it was later found that 30...♘d4 wins material) 31 ♖e5 ♘d2+ 32 ♔e1, and White is still hanging in there, hoping for 32...♘c4? 33 ♗xc4 ♖b1+ 34 ♔e2 ♖xh1 35 ♖e7 with serious counterplay. Black should play the prophylactic 32...♔f8 instead.

b) 26...♖d8+ 27 ♖d5 ♖d3+? 28 ♔c2 bxc4 29 ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 30 ♖d1, and White is suddenly alive and kicking. Much better is 27...♖de8! continuing to play against the king and White's uncoordinated pieces.

22	**...**	**♕xc3+**
23	**bxc3**	**♖xe3**
24	**♗xc6**	**♖b8!** *(D)*

W



25	**cxb5**	**♖xc3+**
26	**♔d2**	**♖xa3**
27	**♖a1?**	**♖d8+**
28	**♔e2**	**♗g4+**

29 ♔f2 ♖d2+
0-1

It doesn't really bother me that the 2...d6 variation didn't hold up against the best line, 3 d4 ♘f6 4 ♗d3. The games I played with it in the early 1980s were more important as indications of a major change in my style. I started to believe in myself and my ability to lead complex tactically charged battles. I had learned another way to win in chess other than my usual endgame squeeze.

Zhuravliov – Yermolinsky

USSR Ch Semi-final, Blagoveshchensk 1988

1 e4 c5
2 f4?! d5!

Same opponent – another gambit. Black's compensation here is more of a structural kind.

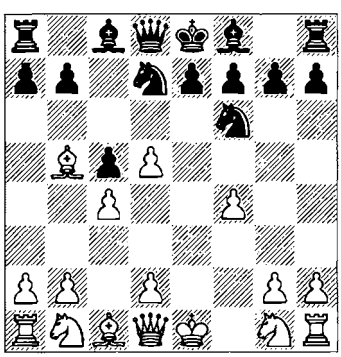
3 exd5 ♘f6
4 ♗b5+

Of course I would welcome the position after 4 c4 e6 5 dxe6 ♗xe6.

4 ... ♘bd7
5 c4 *(D)*

White is not doing well after 5 d4 ♘xd5 6 c4 (even worse is 6 dxc5? ♕a5+) 6...♘c7 or 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗xd7+?! (6 ♗e2 ♘b6 is very comfortable for Black) 6...♕xd7 7 ♕f3 b5, followed by ...♗b7. In any positional continuation his f-pawn would have been much better off on its initial square. He had to go all the way and keep the extra pawn.

B



5 ... a6
6 ♗xd7+

6 ♗a4 hardly can stop Black: 6...b5! 7 cxb5 ♘xd5 8 ♕f3 ♘7b6 9 ♘c3 e6 10 bxa6+ ♘xa4 11 ♘xa4 ♗xa6 with a tremendous initiative.

6 ... ♗xd7
7 ♘f3 e6
8 ♕e2!?

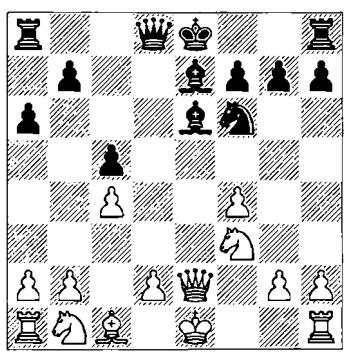
White is trying to side-step the logical line 8 ♘c3 exd5 9 cxd5 ♗e7 10 0-0 0-0 11 d4 b5, which gives Black easy play. It's possible that Zhuravliov also wanted to improve on 8 dxe6 ♗xe6 9 d3 ♗d6! 10 0-0 ♕c7 11 g3 0-0-0, where White is very weak on the light squares. In any case, as I found out much later, the text-move is recommended by the theory books.

8 ... ♗e7!?

The book line begins with 8...♗d6 9 dxe6 fxe6, followed by ...♕c7 and ...0-0-0. I considered that too, but what of my move? I was willing to test Black's compensation under a slower pace of events. The bishop-pair and White's compromised pawn-structure looked like convincing reasons to like Black's chances.

9 dxe6 ♗xe6 *(D)*

W



Another game I played from this position didn't change my evaluation of the entire line as highly favourable for Black. **Lazzeri – Yermolinsky**, *US Open, Alexandria 1996*: **10 ♘c3 0-0 11 ♘e5?! ♘d7 12 b3 ♘xe5 13 fxe5 b5!** Hitting him early. Now 14 cxb5 axb5 15 ♘xb5 (15 ♕xb5 ♕d4 looks even worse) 15...♗xb3 16 ♗b2 ♖xa2 clearly favours Black. **14 d3 ♕d7 15**

♗b2 ♖fd8 Now the d-pawn is the target. **16 0-0-0!?** An enterprising exchange sacrifice. I was hoping to see 16 0-0 ♖ab8! (better than 16...♕xd3 17 ♕xd3 ♖xd3 18 cxb5 ♖d2 19 ♖f2) 17 ♖f2, and now all Black has to do is avoid 17...♕xd3? 18 ♘d5. A quiet move, such as 17...♗f8, should do the trick. **16...♗g4 17 ♕e4 ♗xd1 18 ♖xd1** Black is better here, but I had to work hard to break through White's defences.

Zhuravliov also put his hopes on the ♘e5 move, and I think it was a mistake.

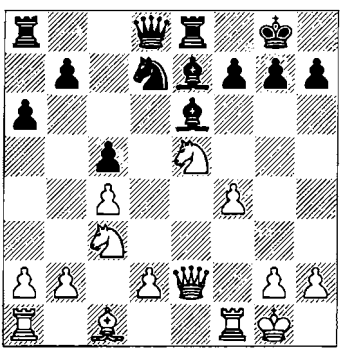
10	**0-0**	**0-0**
11	**♘c3**	**♖e8**
12	**♘e5?!**	

Better chances were offered by 12 d3 ♗f5 13 ♖d1 ♗d6 14 ♕f2, even if I still like Black's position after 14...♕c7.

12 ... ♘d7! *(D)*

A good example of a well-timed exchange.

W



13 ♔h1

Of course 13 ♘xd7 ♕xd7 would help Black a lot, but 13 f5 ♘xe5 14 fxe6 ♕d4+ 15 ♔h1 fxe6 would lose a pawn immediately. My opponent tried to improve on the line 13 d3 ♘xe5 14 fxe5 ♕d4+ 15 ♕e3 ♖ad8, by tucking his king in the corner.

13	**...**	**♘xe5**
14	**fxe5**	**♕d4**
15	**b3**	**♖ad8**
16	**♕e4**	**♖d7!**

I was very proud of this quiet move. Black calmly improves his position despite a pawn deficit.

17	**♕xd4**	**♖xd4**
18	**♖e1!**	

A good move. White is planning ♘e4 and ♗b2. I didn't see other way to play for a win than to try to open the position. Unfortunately, there was a flaw in my calculations.

18 ... f6?! *(D)*

Better was 18...♖ed8 19 ♘e4 ♗f5 20 ♘g3 ♗g6 21 ♘f1 b5, continuing the slow-developing pressure.

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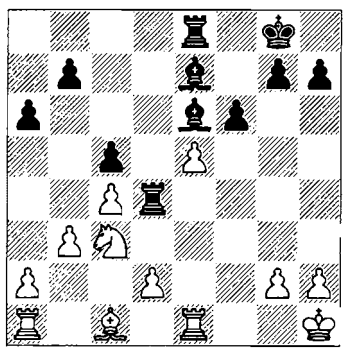


19 ♘e4?

A bad mistake. White could simplify into a slightly worse ending with 19 ♘d5 ♗xd5 20 cxd5 ♖xd5 21 exf6 gxf6 22 ♗b2 ♖xd2 23 ♗xf6 ♔f7, but 19 exf6 ♗xf6 20 ♘d5! is even better. I counted on the exchange sacrifice 20...♗xd5!? 21 ♖xe8+ ♔f7, but it doesn't work: 22 ♖e1 (but not 22 ♖e2? ♖e4!), and my planned 22...♖e4 is refuted by 23 ♗b2!. I would have to play 20...♗d8, but that is hardly convincing.

19 ... f5!

Suddenly the situation changes again. White is going to be mercilessly squeezed to death.

20	**♘f2**	**f4!**
21	**♖e2**	

Nearing time-trouble again, Zhuravliov desperately clings to his extra pawn. Not a lot of relief was offered by 21 d3 ♗h4 22 ♖e2 ♗xf2 23 ♖xf2 g5 though.

21	**...**	**♖ed8**
22	**a4?**	

That's too much. He had to accept the difficult ending after 22 d3 ♗h4 23 ♗b2 ♗xf2 24

♖xf2 ♖xd3 25 ♖xf4 ♖d2 26 ♗c3 ♖xa2 27 ♖ff1.

22	**...**	**♗f5**
23	**♖a2**	**g5**
24	**h3**	**♔f7**
25	**♔g1**	**♔e6**
26	**♔f1**	**h5**
27	**♔e1**	**g4**
28	**♗b2**	**g3!**

White could probably resign here, but it's not easy to do when you're still a pawn up. His pieces end up in a comical situation.

29	**♗xd4**	**cxd4**
30	**♔f1**	

30 ♘d1 d3 is picturesque.

30	**...**	**gxf2**
31	**♖xf2**	**♔xe5**
32	**♖a1**	**♗d3+**
33	**♔g1**	**♗h4**
34	**♖f3**	**♗e2**

0-1

In my new-found gambit affection I couldn't miss the numerous lines of the Slav Defence where White ignores losing his c4-pawn. The resulting positions are very complex with tons of theory to study. I'd like to present one game, but I will have to tone it down a little, skipping my usual theoretical survey.

Yermolinsky – Dandridge

US Masters, Chicago 1996

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 dxc4 5 e4!?

This is the Tolush Gambit, named after a ferocious attacker from the 1950s.

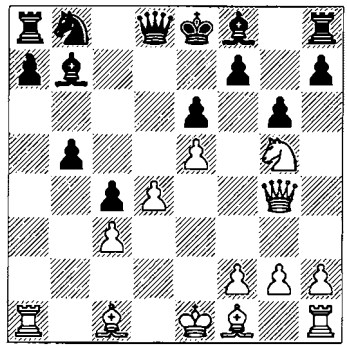
5...b5 6 e5 ♘d5 7 a4 e6 8 axb5 ♘xc3 9 bxc3 cxb5

Let's take stock. Black has secured his extra pawn, and is looking forward to exploiting the queenside majority. He also controls the d5-square, and, seemingly, has free development. So, where's White's compensation? Obviously, the e5-pawn gives him room to operate on the kingside.

10 ♘g5 ♗b7 11 ♕h5 g6 12 ♕g4 *(D)*

Having induced the weakening ...g6 move, White will proceed with h4-h5, or ♘e4 and ♗g5. It would be nice to win by direct attack, but the realistic goal is to discourage Black from castling.

B



12...h6!?

12...♗e7 13 ♗e2 is the main line of the Tolush.

13 ♘e4 ♗xe4?!

Right idea, wrong execution. He forgot to throw in the very important move 13...h5!. Then if White continues as in the game, i.e. 14 ♕f4 ♗xe4 15 ♕xe4 ♕d5 16 ♕e3, Black can execute a critical counteroffensive idea I'll mention in the next note.

14 ♕xe4 ♕d5 *(D)*

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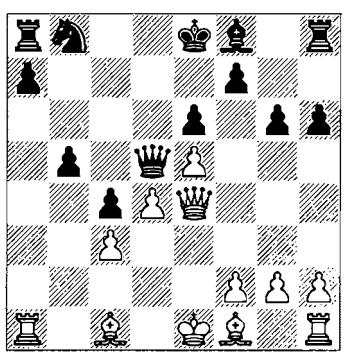
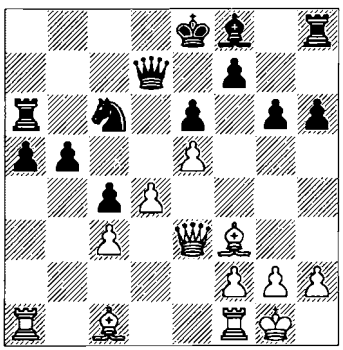


15 ♕e3

Naturally, White is not interested in a queen swap. Now he has a threat of ♗e2-f3 and Black doesn't have 15...♗h6 16 f4 0-0 17 ♗e2 ♘c6

18 ♗f3 ♕d7 19 0-0 ♘e7! – an excellent positional sacrifice, aimed at gaining control over the light squares. Most likely that would have turned the game around, but the pawn was still on h6...

15...a5 16 ♗e2 ♖a6 17 ♗f3 ♕d7 18 0-0 ♘c6 *(D)*



Second stop. White has the bishop-pair and a lead in development, but if Black were allowed to play ...♘e7-d5 things would turn ugly. So, the choice is obvious.

19 d5! exd5 20 ♖d1 d4?

My opponent made a judgement error. His three connected passed pawns will be no match for White's aggression in the centre. Marvin had to play 20...♘e7, offering White an interesting choice:

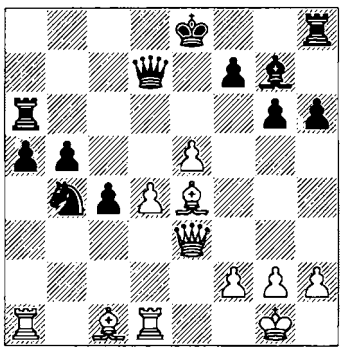
a) 21 ♗xd5 ♘xd5 22 ♕f3 ♗e7 23 ♖xd5 ♕c6. White has got one of his pawns back, but grabbing another one leads to a forced draw: 24 ♖xa5 ♖xa5 25 ♖d8+ ♔xd8 26 ♕xc6 ♖a1 27 ♕b6+, etc.

b) 21 ♗a3?! ♘f5 22 ♕f4, and now Black must avoid 22...b4? 23 ♗xd5 bxa3 24 ♗xc4, when White wins. He doesn't need to be cute, as the simple line 22...♗xa3 23 ♖xa3 ♘e7 gives him a better game.

c) 21 ♕c5!?. This risky move may represent White's only chance to play for a win.

21 cxd4 ♘b4 22 ♗e4 ♗g7 *(D)*

This is still a sharp position. The first thing that came to my mind was to proceed with 23 f4, followed by d5, but that would give him time to castle. I looked deeper and managed to find a better idea.



23 ♗a3! ♕c8?

Marvin couldn't be happy with such a passive move, but he thought the rook needed to be protected, and in case of 23...♖a7 White would resume the threat of ♗xb4 by playing 24 d5. All true, but his position was beyond any abstract considerations. Leaving his king in the centre in the line 23...♘d5! 24 ♕f3 ♘e7 25 ♗xe7 ♔xe7 may look dangerous, but how does White take advantage of it? 26 ♗b7! ♖b6 27 ♗d5 can even be met by the brave 27...a4!?. As long as Black keeps his pawn phalanx he's in the game.

24 ♕f3 ♘c6

To stop 25 ♗b7, but everything is downhill for Black.

25 ♗d6 ♘d8 26 ♗d5!

White has achieved his dream position. Black's forces lack coordination, and the three connected passed pawns are actually weak: 26...♗f8 27 ♗xf8 ♔xf8 28 ♕c3, for example. Black's game is difficult, and one slip would be fatal. In severe time-trouble Marvin made the final mistake immediately.

26...b4? 27 ♕e2! 1-0

Everything collapses after 27...c3 28 ♕b5+ ♘c6 29 ♖xa5.

What carried White to such a cruising victory? The unbalanced pawn-structure increased the value of the initiative. A few slips by Black,

and I was the one who began to make threats, to lead the game my way. Unfortunately, after many years of analytical and practical experience with the Tolush I had to stop playing this gambit. It was fun and I had managed to achieve a plus score, but slowly I grew dissatisfied with White's rather one-dimensional strategy. Black's pawn-structure is too strong to be brought down by clever manoeuvring, and the only pawn break, d4-d5, White has in his possession in most cases fails to produce anything tangible, such as it was in the game we just saw.

My experience with the Tolush is very helpful in dealing with similar pawn-structures appearing in other lines of the Slav Defence, or in the QGA and the Catalan, so I have no regrets for the time spent on analysing those fascinating positions.

Yermolinsky – Lugo

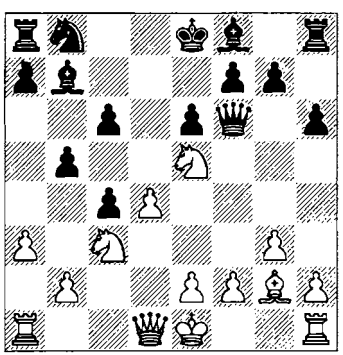
World Open, Philadelphia 1996

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 e6 5 ♗g5 h6 6 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 7 a3 dxc4 8 ♘e5 b5

Not a bad move, but 8...c5! is a simpler way to equality.

9 g3 ♗b7 10 ♗g2 *(D)*

B



White is threatening 11 ♘xb5, and 10...♕d8 won't stop him: 11 ♘xb5 ♕b6 12 ♘c3 ♕xb2 13 ♘a4 ♕b5 14 0-0, with 15 ♖b1 to follow.

10...♕e7?!

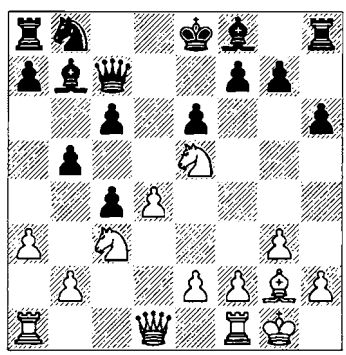
Blas Lugo was concerned with the safety of his queenside formation. Bringing the queen back assures Black's material advantage, but it costs time. Strictly speaking, the queen should return at some point; the question is choosing the right move-order. I suggest 10...a6 11 a4 ♕d8 (not 11...♗b4? 12 axb5 axb5 13 ♖xa8 ♗xa8 14 ♕a1 ♗b7 15 ♕a7, winning a piece) 12 0-0 ♗e7 as the simplest solution. White is offered to win back his gambited pawn: 13 axb5 axb5 14 ♖xa8 ♗xa8 15 ♘xb5 cxb5 16 ♗xa8, but he hardly gets any big advantage there, say after 16...0-0 17 ♗e4 ♕b6, followed by ...♗f6 and ...♖d8. Notice that after 10...a6 11 a4 ♕d8 White's idea of b3 will always be met by ...b4 and ...c3.

11 0-0

White can try to facilitate his play with 11 e3, but 11...♕c7 12 ♕f3 ♗d6 13 ♘xb5 ♕a5+ 14 ♘c3 ♗xe5 15 dxe5 ♕xe5 16 ♖d1 hardly scares Black. Also, 12...a6 is possible.

11...♕c7 *(D)*

W



I had to make up my mind about the future course of events. Should I bail out with 12 a4 a6 13 axb5 cxb5 14 ♘xb5, even if Black achieves a comfortable position after 14...axb5 15 ♖xa8 ♗xg2! 16 ♖xb8+ ♕xb8 17 ♔xg2 ♗d6? Or should I play for a kingside initiative with 12 f4? Both scenarios have one thing in common: White feels the pressure of material deficit and nervously tries to get something 'right now, before it's too late'. I'll take a liberty of stating: this kind of attitude is ill-suited for gambit play. The only way to do it right requires inner calm and a firm belief in the correctness of your

strategy, pawn down or not. The queenside pawn-mass represents Black's major asset; can it be destroyed? The black queen took three moves to get to c7; will it be comfortable there if the c-file gets open? Find the answers, and you'll find the solution to White's problems.

12 b3!

The key move. Thanks to the a3-pawn White doesn't have to worry about ...b4 and ...c3, which is Black's usual reaction to this attempt to open the position.

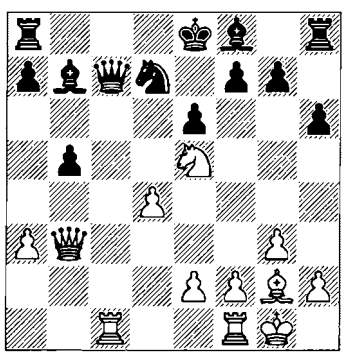
12...cxb3 13 ♕xb3

Black is feeling the heat again. 13...♗d6? loses to 14 ♘xb5 cxb5 15 ♕xb5+, while playing 13...♕b6 dangerously leaves the king without defenders. Blas Lugo makes an obvious move, trying to exchange White's most active piece.

13...♘d7 14 ♘xd7

Right after the game I realized that I missed a beautiful combination here: 14 ♘xb5! cxb5 15 ♖ac1 *(D)*.

B



The point of this is revealed after 15...♕b6 16 ♗c6!!, an incredible move designed to open the f3-square for the queen. White wins after 16...♗xc6 (16...♖d8 17 ♕f3 and 16...♕xd4 17 ♗xb7 are hopeless) 17 ♖xc6 ♕xd4 (17...♕b7 18 ♕f3, threatening both 19 ♕xf7+ and 19 ♖xe6+) 18 ♖xe6+ fxe6 19 ♕xe6+ ♗e7 20 ♕f7+ ♔d8 21 ♘c6+, picking off the queen. All this I found while annotating this game for *Informator*. Once again, I had to admit my shortcomings in the tactics department.

Let's come back to the diagrammed position. Confident in the correctness of my combination I gave it to Fritz, hoping for an official confirmation. My little German friend whirred softly for a few seconds and produced the incredible defence: 15...♗c5!! 16 ♕xb5 (16 ♘xd7 ♗xg2 gets White nowhere) 16...♗xg2 17 ♔xg2 a6!. The best White can get is a four-rook ending with marginal winning chances: 18 ♖xc5 axb5 19 ♖xc7 ♘xe5 20 dxe5 0-0. Here went my combination down the garbage chute. What would have happened if I played 14 ♘xb5 is anybody's guess, but my positional treatment was strong enough to get an advantage in the game continuation. Go figure.

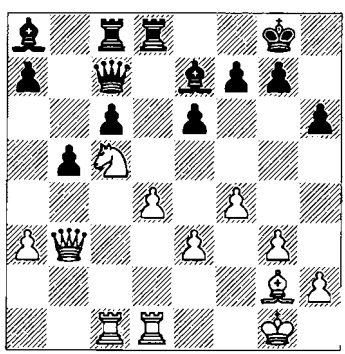
14...♕xd7 15 ♖fd1 ♗e7 16 ♘e4 0-0 17 ♘c5 ♕c7

Black says no to the grim position after 17...♗xc5?! 18 dxc5 ♕e7 19 ♖d6. The problem is, his move is no solution either – White keeps a firm grip on the c5-square, effectively killing all chances for counterplay.

18 ♖ac1 ♖ac8 19 e3 ♖fd8 20 f4 ♗a8? *(D)*

Better was 20...g6 to build some kingside defences.

W



21 h4 ♕d6?!

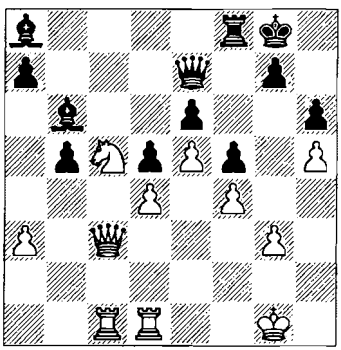
It's hard to see the purpose of this move. 21...h5 was necessary to stop White's next. Nevertheless, I find it difficult to criticize Blas Lugo, a talented attacking player, for a letdown he experienced around these parts – he had to operate under extremely adverse circumstances.

22 h5!

Setting up a standard plan of getting to the black king via the b1-h7 diagonal. Blas Lugo recognized the danger and came up with an excellent defensive plan built on the exchange sacrifice.

22...♖f8! 23 e4 ♗d8 24 e5 ♕e7 25 ♗e4 ♗b6 26 ♗b1 ♖cd8 27 ♕c2 f5 28 ♗a2 ♖d5 29 ♗xd5 cxd5 30 ♕c3 *(D)*

B



White must be better here, but the shaky king and weakness on h5 make his task very difficult.

So far we have seen pawn sacrifices imposed by the will of one player. Often it takes two to enter such a dance. Describing the modern approach to gambit lines, John Watson wisely points out a few details:

a) What is sacrificed is not only a pawn, but also the weak squares created in the attacker's camp, the squares that would have been protected by the missing pawn. A good illustration is the Poisoned Pawn Variation in the Najdorf Sicilian – look at White's queenside after the b2-pawn disappears. What a mess! No wonder White is obliged to deliver checkmate, and no less than that.

b) Active defence. The black queen fearlessly takes on b2, but the real test of her courage is passed when she stays around b2-a3, disrupting the coordination of the enemy pieces, instead of running away to safety. In other words, accepting a pawn must not necessarily lead to surrendering the initiative.

c) There's no other way to verify the soundness of a gambit (or a pawn-grabbing operation, if you look from the other side of the board) than concrete analysis.

The Poisoned Pawn Variation remains the major obstacle in White's quest to bust the Najdorf once and for all. The theory there went so far ahead that today's top players prefer 6 ♗e3, which in my opinion is less principled than 6 ♗g5. I'm not able to offer my expertise in those lines, but I have got something else to show.

Yermolinsky – Garma
Manila Olympiad 1992

1	**d4**	**♘f6**
2	**♘f3**	**e6**
3	**♗g5**	**c5**
4	**e3**	**♕b6**
5	**♘bd2**	

The Poisoned Pawn Variation of the Torre Attack carries many similar ideas in its own interpretation.

5 ... cxd4?!

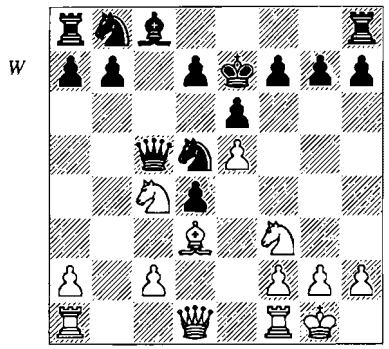
This premature exchange relieves White of his major worry: how to get things going in a closed position. I had some experience from the other side of the board as well.

Arduman – Yermolinsky
Turkey – USA, Moscow Olympiad 1994

5...♕xb2 6 ♗d3 ♕c3!

The active queen blocks the c-pawn, making White's task of opening up the position considerably more difficult. Compare this active plan with a cowardly retreat, 6...♕b6?! 7 0-0 ♗e7. It looks like Black is doing everything by the book, but then comes 8 e4! cxd4 9 e5 ♘d5 10 ♗xe7 ♔xe7 11 ♘c4 ♕c5 *(D)*.

We can see how sad Black's position has suddenly become. White has a pleasant choice between the 'positional' 12 ♘fd2 ♕c7 13 ♕g4 ♔f8 14 ♕xd4, and the more direct line 12 ♘g5 h6 13 ♕h5 g6 14 ♕h4 ♔f8 15 ♘d6. There have been literally hundreds of games with similar quick kills, one of those being the classic



Spassky-Osnos, USSR Ch, Leningrad 1963/4, which jump-started the entire line with the pawn sacrifice and renewed interest in the Torre Attack in general.

7 0-0 d5 8 ♗xf6

Another plan would involve preparing the e3-e4 advance: 8 ♖e1 c4 9 ♗f1.

8...gxf6

Now Black is threatening to lock it up with 9...c4 and 10...f5, so White's answer is practically forced.

9 dxc5 ♕xc5?!

Inconsistent. Both 9...♗xc5 10 e4 d4, and 9...♘d7!? were worthy of consideration.

10 c4 ♗g7 11 cxd5 ♕xd5

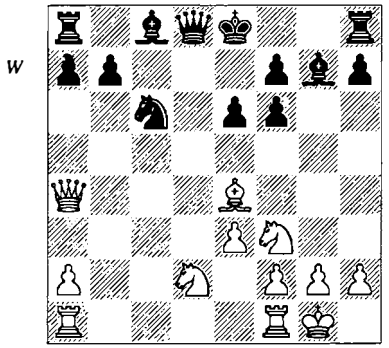
The important issue here is that White has no structural compensation for the pawn, thus his options are reduced to short-term tactical threats. My opponent did a remarkable job of generating them.

12 ♕a4+!

Having spent a lot of time on the queen moves, Black has to be realistic in his ambitions. I now rejected 12...♗d7?, because of 13 ♕g4 ♔f8 14 ♕b4+! (much stronger than 14 ♗e4 f5!) 14...♔e8 15 ♗e4 a5 16 ♕c3 – that part was easy, but 12...♘d7 was very tempting. After a good think I didn't trust my position after 13 ♗e4 ♕d6 14 ♘c4 ♕c7 15 ♘d4, as the white pieces are very active there.

12...♘c6 13 ♗e4 ♕d8 *(D)*

It is a similar story after 13...♕d7 14 ♘c4 (don't miss the threat of 15 ♘b6!) 14...♕c7 15 ♖ac1 – too much activity.



14 ♗xc6+?

What a relief! Much more to the point would be 14 ♘c4 0-0 15 ♖fd1 ♕e7 16 ♖ab1, keeping the pressure up.

14...bxc6 15 ♕xc6+ ♗d7 16 ♕d6 ♕e7 17 ♕g3 0-0, and Black was slightly better thanks to his bishop-pair.

As you can see I had a difficult time corralling White's activity in that game. Now let's see what is wrong with 5...cxd4. My game with Garma went on along strategic lines already familiar to us.

6	**exd4**	**♕xb2**
7	**♗d3**	**d5**
8	**0-0**	

It's a big question for the entire concept: when should White take on f6, if ever? On one hand, Black's pawn-structure gets damaged and the kingside shelter for the black king is no longer safe; on the other hand, parting with the bishop somewhat reduces White's attacking potential. In case of **8 ♗xf6 gxf6 9 c4** we would transpose to one of my games I can offer for you to compare with the stem game. Please, be patient with yet another deviation from it.

Yermolinsky – *Hiarcs*

G/25, Harvard Cup Computer Challenge, Boston 1994

Yes, I played a gambit against a computer. More about that strategy in the following chapter.

9...dxc4 10 ♗xc4?

Being in a Game/25 situation I couldn't afford to spend any time on opening subtleties. This natural recapture (all checks avoided, d4-d5 is in the works, etc.) lets Black off the hook.

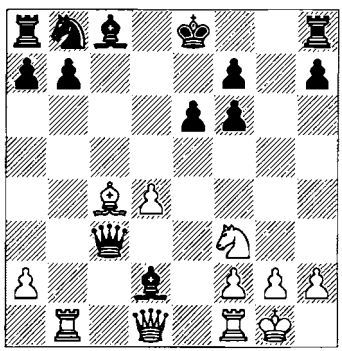
10...♗h6!

A surprise move that suddenly interferes with White's development. Now 11 ♘e4 would allow 11...♕b4+, so there was no choice but to castle.

11 0-0 0-0?

By all counts 11...♗xd2 was a must. After 12 ♖b1 ♕c3 *(D)* White faces a tough decision.

W



He can try his chances with a second pawn sacrifice, 13 ♘xd2 ♕xd4 14 ♕e2, but I doubt its soundness. More realistic is to play for practical chances after 13 ♗b5+ (exchanging my active bishop and helping Black's development surely hurts my pride) 13...♗d7 14 ♗xd7+ (after 14 ♖b3 Black can transpose with 14...♕a5, but he also has a valid option in 14...♗xb5! 15 ♖xc3 ♗xc3 16 ♕b3 ♗xf1 17 ♔xf1 ♘d7 18 ♕xc3 ♘b6!, stopping White playing d5 and securing a better position after 19 ♕c7 ♘d5 20 ♕xb7 0-0) 14...♘xd7 15 ♖b3 ♕a5 16 ♘xd2 ♕d5 17 ♕g4. White would be happy to get a draw out of this.

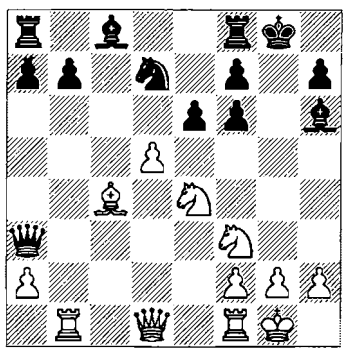
How to explain Hiarcs's move? The machine had high evaluations of its chances in every line, because White's ideas are as yet too vague to take the concrete shapes of threats that can be understood by a computer. No computer would ever accept the line I have just given (with two rooks for a queen) from a position with an extra pawn and the advantage of the bishop-pair. More about the computer's way of thinking below.

12 ♘e4 ♘d7?

Better was 12..f5 or 12...♗g7. The knight had to go to c6 to attack d4, but more importantly, on d7 it blocks his own c8-bishop, making the coming d4-d5 advance even more dangerous.

13 ♖b1 ♕a3 14 d5! *(D)*

B



From now on White effortlessly develops his initiative into a devastating attack.

14...e5?

Anything but this. Nowadays, computers are tougher, but they still tend to underestimate the deadly effects of surrendering the squares near their king's residence. Fritz has been looking into this position for a good quarter of an hour, and still he likes the materialistic 15 ♗b5 over the move I played. I'm sure any other human player would prefer my move.

15 ♘h4 ♘b6 16 ♕h5 ♗g7 17 ♖b3 ♕a4 18 ♖g3 ♔h8 19 ♗d3 f5 20 ♘g5

...and Hiarcs's response...

20...♕xh4

...spoke volumes about quality of Black's position.

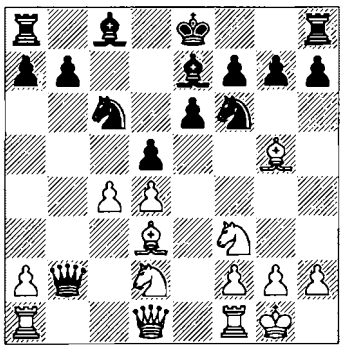
8	...	♘c6
9	**c4**	

Once again, either this or 9 ♗xf6 gxf6 10 c4.

9	...	♕c3

The correctness of my decision on move 9 largely depends on the evaluation of the line 9...♗e7! *(D)*. Now:

W



a) 10 cxd5 exd5 11 ♖e1 (nothing is gained by 11 ♗xf6? ♗xf6 12 ♖e1+ ♔f8) 11...0-0 12 ♘b3. Now White is planning ♘e5, so we must look at 12...♗g4 13 h3 ♗xf3 14 ♕xf3 ♘xd4 15 ♘xd4 ♕xd4 16 ♖ad1 ♕b4! (16...♕c5? is what White is hoping for: 17 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 18 ♕f5; now it's going to be defended by ...♕h4) 17 ♖b1 ♕d6 18 ♖xb7 with nice compensation, but hardly more.

b) 10 c5!? sends the game in an entirely different direction. White is after the black queen now. Since 10...0-0 11 ♘b3 is indeed troublesome, Black must accept another pawn. 10...♘xd4 11 ♕a4+ ♘c6 12 ♗b5 ♗d7 13 ♖ab1 ♕c3 14 ♖fc1 ♕a5 15 ♗xc6 ♕xa4 16 ♗xa4 ♗xa4 17 ♖xb7 is very much unclear.

What about the d4-pawn; can it be taken right away? My opponent must have been working on that question.

With the text-move he was trying to improve on the extremely risky continuation 9...♘xd4?! 10 cxd5 ♘xd5 (10...♘xf3+ 11 ♕xf3 exd5 12 ♖ab1 ♕d4 13 ♗b5+ is self-explanatory) 11 ♖b1 ♕a3 (11...♘xf3+ 12 ♕xf3 with ♗b5+ to follow) 12 ♘c4 ♘xf3+ 13 ♕xf3 ♕c5 14 ♘e5, and Black is fighting an uphill battle.

10 ♕e2

Insisting on the offer. Black would be quite solid after both 10 cxd5 ♘xd5 11 ♘e4 ♕a5 and 10 ♗xf6 ♕xd3.

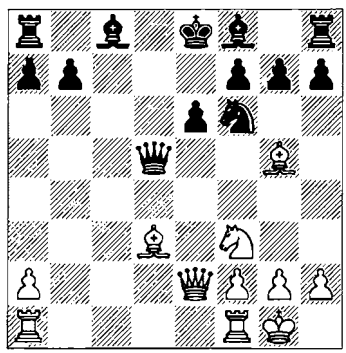
10 ... ♘xd4!?

Since 10...♘b4 is adequately answered by 11 ♗f5, and 10...♗e7 fails to stop the fire ignited by 11 ♖ac1 ♕a3 12 ♗xf6, the fearless Garma decides to go for it. His no-yield approach to such a dangerous position deserves a lot of respect.

11 ♘xd4 ♕xd4
12 ♘f3 ♕c5
13 cxd5 ♕xd5 *(D)*

It was more or less easy to judge 13...♘xd5? 14 ♗b5+ ♗d7 15 ♗xd7+ ♔xd7 16 ♘e5+ ♔e8 17 ♖ac1 ♕a5 18 ♕h5 g6 19 ♕f3 as favourable for White, but what now?

W



White is two pawns down and he must deliver some serious goods here. I checked three possibilities:

a) 14 ♗b5+ ♗d7 15 ♗xd7+ ♘xd7 16 ♖fd1 ♕a5;

b) 14 ♖fd1 ♗d7 15 ♗xf6 gxf6 16 ♗e4 ♕b5;

c) 14 ♗xf6 gxf6 15 ♗b5+ ♗d7 16 ♗xd7+ ♕xd7 17 ♖fd1 ♕a4;

and rejected them all. The centralized queen holds Black's position together, and I quickly came across the right idea.

What if it wasn't there? How could I predict it many moves ago when I started to sacrifice pawns? You may consider me lucky in this game, but isn't that a kind of luck always present in the game of chess? Think about it: somebody goes for the Exchange Variation of the QGD, concentrates his efforts on the b4-b5

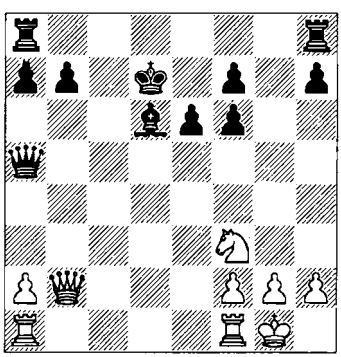
minority attack and leaves Black with total freedom elsewhere on the board. From the mid-19th century point of view it's a ridiculous strategy. What does he think he's doing? What is the significance of one little weakness so far away from where the action should be? Many moves later Black's initiative fizzles out and he's left with a bad ending, the weak c6-pawn and all. We attribute White's success to positional understanding, read intuition, that carried him through his strategic plan. The same thing, only a different kind of intuition, helped me in this game. In both cases, the strong player commanding the white pieces was able to recognize hidden patterns of the resulting positions, trusted his feelings and ultimately was rewarded. I know of no other way to win in chess.

14 ♗c4! ♕a5
15 ♗xf6! gxf6
16 ♗b5+ ♗d7

16...♔e7 is severely punished by 17 ♕c4 ♕b6 18 ♖fd1 a5 19 ♕b3, with the deadly threat of ♕a3+.

17 ♗xd7+ ♔xd7
18 ♕b2 ♗d6! *(D)*

W



19 ♕xf6

Of course I take the more important pawn. 19 ♕xb7+? ♕c7 20 ♕b2 ♔e7 would favour Black. Now his king's position is going to be very shaky.

19 ... ♕f5
20 ♕b2 ♖ac8!?

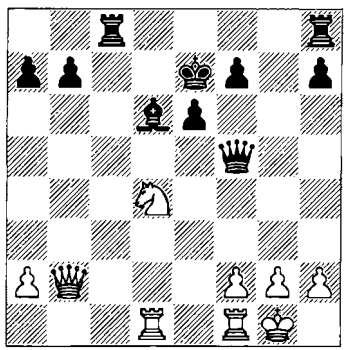
My opponent must have been a better player than his rating would suggest. He disregards the b-pawn and strives for counterplay. Unfortunately for him, he met more than his match on that day. I kept pushing hard, and later I'll reveal my inspiration source.

21 ♖ad1! ♔e7

21...b6 runs into 22 ♕a3+ ♕c5 23 ♕xa7+, regaining the gambited pawn.

22 ♘d4 *(D)*

B



The knight enters the fray, and the effects may be seen in the line 22...♕e5 23 ♕xb7+ ♖c7 24 ♕xc7+ ♖xc7 25 ♘c6+, winning an exchange.

22 ... ♕h5
23 g3 b6

This may be considered a blunder, but the alternative 23...♖hd8 24 ♕xb7+ ♔f8 25 ♘xe6+! fxe6 26 ♖xd6 was even worse.

24 ♘c6+ ♖xc6
25 ♕xh8

The part of the game relevant to our study is over. White has won the exchange and is firmly on his way to a win.

This game was my first ever played for the United States Olympic Team. In 1992 I was still a virtually unknown player on the international scene, and giving me Board Two based on my high rating (2615) was a calculated risk. The way I handled the pressure in Round 1 went a long way towards establishing me in the eyes of my team-mates. Not only I did win that game, I also won their trust.

Let's Talk Computer Chess

Chess has never been the same since ChessBase, Fritz and the Internet hit the market. Rank-and-file players around the world no longer feel isolated or separated from GM chess. They can see their games live and question every GM decision by giving it to the domesticated silicon monsters named Fritz, Rebel or Crafty. It's like having a live-in strong player ready to get to work any time day or night, with no expense involved except for a slightly higher utilities bill.

The next step was made courtesy of Deep Blue. In the eyes of the general public, chess as a game was solved when the World Number One fell victim in a 6-game match. I don't want to elaborate on the chess details – that should be done by someone involved in the event from either side – but one thing was clear: Garry wasn't at his best. He did a hell of a disservice to himself and the entire chess community by losing to a machine. I heard a rumour: a Japanese chess-player was invited to the Groningen Knockout World Championship in 1997. He went to his boss to ask for leave, but was turned down. Evidently, the boss read somewhere about the outcome of the GK-DB match, and figured chess not worthy of his employee's time. He reportedly suggested switching to Go or Chinese Checkers – or some other obscure game where man can still prove he's better than machine. I take that as an insult. One doesn't have to be a chess-player to realize that Garry's loss did nothing to degrade chess; on the contrary, it upheld chess's status as the most complex board game in a class of its own. Due to its sheer complexity, chess is a game where anybody can easily lose, even the greatest – for one mistake is all it takes. Another story is what's wrong with that sorry-ass Japanese dude, who didn't have the brains to understand such simple logic – and here we go, wondering why their economy is struggling!

A few months ago I got a phone call from a computer specialist who had invented a new board game and wanted me to evaluate it. Despite my reluctance, he insisted, and we met for a few hours in our local coffee shop. He showed me his invention, which looked like poor man's Go to me, and based on his computer expertise claimed that no machine can learn to play it. Knowing as little as I do about computers I won't argue about that; I am just using this episode as an illustration of the public's perception of chess these days. Garry is not guilty; he fought and he lost – we all do in chess – and he can't be held responsible for the twisted picture the media has created, even if he could anticipate it in the worst-case scenario.

More Man vs Machine matches followed, and all of them were won by the computers. It did one good thing, though. It shut up the IBM corporate promoters, who claimed their creation unique. I have always been suspicious about the supposed qualitative difference between DB and any of the commercially available chess-playing programs. DB may be a souped-up Fritz, or five Fritzes working together, whatever; but it used same methods in defeating Garry as your dirt-cheap Crafty does to frustrate you. Let's analyse what is happening.

We already know how our brain works in a complicated middlegame situation. We have quite a few weapons in our disposal.

A) **Knowledge**, which consists of the following parts:

A1) extensions of opening theory;

A2) positional theory (elements);

A3) endgame theory (certain familiar positions may be brought forward by calculation).

B) **Computation**, characterized by the following:

B1) we can calculate to variable depth;

B2) there's no 'horizon effect', i.e. we won't stop until we reach a position we can evaluate;

B3) lapses.

C) **Intuition**; some positions just feel right (or wrong) because:

C1) we are able to weigh out the conflicting positional elements and decide which one will prevail;

C2) subconscious calculating that sends us affirmative (or negative) beeps.

D) **Psychological elements**, such as:

D1) ability to switch sides (get into our opponent's shoes);

D2) rating difference;

D3) history of previous encounters;

D4) tournament situation.

How do computers play; do they use all the above? Of course not. Let's go over our talking points one-by-one.

A1) Computers do not make plans, so there's no bridge between opening and middlegame; once out of the opening book, the computer starts working on its own. Computers play opening moves, not openings designed to reach certain middlegame positions.

A2) Computers do use elements of positional theory, such as passed pawns, open files or the two bishops for evaluation purposes; but these things rarely come in one-dimensional form. Usually both players have something going for them, so it's a toss-up for a computer.

A3) Computers are unable to use their endgame knowledge while analysing middlegame positions; their endgame books exist separately and can only be used when the endgame is reached.

B1) The speed and precision of computer calculating are unmatched by humans.

B2) There's something called the 'horizon effect'. Computers are set to calculate to a certain depth, say, 13-ply for Deep Blue, and they stop at that point. This makes out-calculating the computer a theoretically possible thing. In Game Two of the GK-DB match the computer allowed perpetual check because of that.

B3) Nothing short of a blackout can cause a mistake in computer calculations.

C) The sheer computing power can imitate (or rather lead to the same results as) human intuition.

D) Computers don't know who and why they play. They will not adjust, but they can be adjusted to a particular opponent – opening book selection is a choice of the operators. All in all, computers are not affected by their opponents.

Years ago, when computers' calculating power was low, the optimal strategy for the humans was already familiar to us: 'positional play'. General principles alone were enough to 'outplay the computer', which essentially meant waiting for its self-destruction. Any position would be ruined by the computer's silly pawn advances.

A little theory, or rather a guess: computers like to go forward, because they always give themselves an edge; I don't know why, but a slight tilt in evaluations is built into their circuits. Active moves increase the number of possibilities of winning something in a larger percentage of the opponent's responses. Computers don't expect us to play well, because they don't think for us.

The early computer-busters were mid-level masters who had the patience to implement such strategy – fair enough. The 'spit-and-polish' method worked to perfection.

Then things began to change, and by the mid-1990s they had changed significantly. With modern opening books installed, the chess-playing programs began to look – surprise – human. They acquired the ability to continue making sensible moves deeper in the game, up to the point when the tactics would appear and their human opponents would falter. And what did the humans do? Exactly the same mistake I was repeating in the late 1970s: they began simplifying their play to avoid uncertainties. The new wave of computer slayers were 'g3-b3' kind of guys, and closing the position became Priority One. In fact, the computers were still nothing but ultimate 'spirited fighters', with no understanding of anything, but with plenty of computing power to make up for any positional or combinative shortcomings. Slowing the game down was meant to cut down the tactical element – as a result, exactly a half of the human advantage was lost in the process. Good intention gone bad.

Unfortunately, that strategy was Garry's choice in waging his war on behalf of the entire human race. By cutting out any risk – and that included abandoning his openings – he turned himself into nothing but a 'spit-and-polisher'. A good one, as good as it gets, possibly even 2500 strength.

Garry's biggest asset, the ability to put a lot of pressure on the opponent, was non-existent. With his pieces huddled deep in his own camp he wasn't able to punish Deep Blue for its risky pawn moves or occasional piece misplacement. What was he afraid of and what was he hoping for? Mistakes. Mistakes would come, but you have got to be in a position to take advantage of them, and Garry wasn't. It is very difficult to win chess games without entering the field of tactics, and by the time Garry would finally have laboured his way out from disadvantageous positions there was simply not enough wood left on the board – see the critical Games 4 and 5 of their match.

I'll take a liberty of stating on these pages that without using his advantages in areas C and D, no human player stands a chance against computers. A lot of risk is going to be taken – just like it's regularly done in the games between us fellow humans – if you're going to beat the machine. Every which way you can – positionally, tactically, setting up calculation horizon traps, gambiting pawns, whatever – but it has to be done the grandmaster way. Nobody is going to do it by turning off the very qualities that make him a strong player to begin with.

I would like to present some games I played against Fritz4 on my old Pentium 166 computer some two-three years ago. The time-control was Game in 10 minutes, quite challenging for a human grandmaster. I selected it for the reason I'll describe below and in a secret hope to get some training for future battles against the computers. The organizers of Man vs Machine events like fast time-controls, as it naturally increases their chances for an upset. I think it's the other way around already – a human victory should be considered an upset – but nevertheless, they underwrite the budget, so they call the shots.

The effects of time shortage on a human player are two-fold. He may blunder, but the fear of blundering is even worse. Risk elimination makes for a great equalizer in their respective playing abilities, and honestly, sometimes I can't even tell who was who in those listless games. Probably, the one who wins more often in long games was the computer. From my ICC experience humans always lose long games.

I wanted to create a sense of urgency that would make me go after the monster right out of the opening. I knew I would lose any long battle, so my strategy was to create complications sooner with the idea of getting myself some much-needed exercise in positions with a high tactical content.

Please, don't be misled by my selections, for the overall score was about even. However, in some games I was able to find and exploit the computers' biggest weakness. Surprise, surprise, that's greed. No commercially available chess-playing engine (I deliberately leave off Deep Blue, not to sound too cocky) will ever resist the temptation of winning material if there's no punishment coming within its calculation horizon. We are going to see how Fritz misunderstands (or plainly ignores) the concept of weak squares of one colour, and how it leads to passivity of its pieces. We will also witness its total neglect when it comes to the question of king safety. The strategy employed by me in those games seems to be the optimal game plan against the computers, despite the obvious element of risk. A lot of calculating is required from the human player, but I should mention that often the computer's resistance turns out to be surprisingly weak.

The machine begins to avoid the lines you may have considered unclear because it can see the refutations you didn't; that way you are able to turn its monstrous calculating powers against itself.

I'm convinced that offering the computer some small material gain to wrest the initiative out of its hands is the most plausible strategy we have at the time I'm writing these words. Five, ten years down the road we may become helpless, who knows?

Yermo – *Fritz4*
Game 1, 1996

1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 ♘f3 e6 4 e4!

It's a good idea to go after the monster as soon as possible. Computers tend to downplay the importance of development in favour of early material gains. Plus, you'd want to hasten the crisis while you still have time.

4...c5 5 d5 b5?!

Fritz already gives Black 0.75, a substantial advantage. A bit optimistic, I should say. According to standard QGA theory, 5...exd5 6 exd5 ♘f6 7 ♗xc4 ♗d6 is a sensible way to play for Black.

6 a4 ♘f6

Otherwise Black's queenside will be destroyed for free.

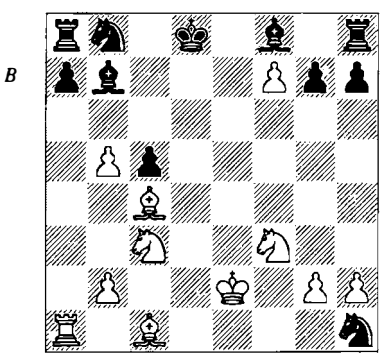
7 axb5 ♘xe4 8 ♗xc4 ♗b7

Here is the critical juncture. The computer thinks it's better and suggests 9 b6?! as the only chance for White. There's a much stronger move, however.

9 dxe6 ♕xd1+ 10 ♔xd1 ♘xf2+

From a human point of view 10...fxe6 11 ♗e3 ♗d5 was practically forced.

11 ♔e2 ♘xh1 12 exf7+ ♔d8 13 ♘c3 *(D)*



The evaluation of this position shows principal differences between human and computer assessments. A human realizes that Black's huge material advantage will be reduced to a minimum as soon as the h1-knight is recaptured, while White's positional pluses (pawn on f7, active pieces and unsafe black king) will work long-term. The game was over in a few moves.

13...♘d7 14 ♗f4 h6 15 ♖d1!

Ignoring the dead h1-knight, the white rook turns its attention to another prey.

15...g5 16 ♗e5 ♖h7 17 ♗e6 ♔e7 18 ♗xd7 ♗xf3+ 19 gxf3 ♖d8 20 ♗e8 ♖xd1 21 ♘xd1

Only at this point does Fritz change his evaluation to White's favour.

21...♖xf7 22 ♗xf7 ♔xf7 23 ♗b8 c4 24 ♗xa7 ♗d6 25 ♗g1 h5 26 ♔f1

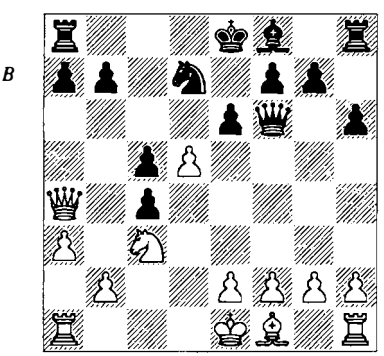
Soon White won the helpless knight and the game.

Yermo – *Fritz4*
Game 2, 1997

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 e6 5 ♗g5 h6 6 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 7 a3

Another sharp opening line, another test for the computer.

7...dxc4 8 ♘e5 c5 9 ♕a4+ ♗d7 10 ♘xd7 ♘xd7 11 d5! *(D)*



A human grandmaster will understand what this struggle is all about. The light squares in Black's camp can be made weak, and the c5-pawn only takes away a useful square from the black minor pieces. In order to keep it that way White is sacrificing his entire queenside. Some computing is required to verify the soundness of this strategy.

11...e5?

I would expect 11...exd5 12 ♘xd5 ♕xb2 13 ♖d1 ♖d8 14 ♘c7+ ♔e7 15 ♘d5+ ♔e6 – a typical computer choice. There are many possibilities for White in this position, but he can't deliver a knockout blow because of his own underdevelopment.

a) 16 ♕xc4 ♘e5 17 ♘c7++ ♔f6 18 ♕f4+ ♔e7 19 ♘d5+ ♖xd5 20 ♖xd5 ♕c3+ is perpetual. I'd think this line made the computer reject 11...exd5, but Fritz doesn't calculate that deep.

b) 16 ♘c7+ can be answered by 16...♔f6. Any computer would think Black is better here.

c) 16 g3!? is what I was going to do. There may follow 16...♘b6 17 ♗h3+ f5 18 ♘xb6 ♖xd1+ 19 ♕xd1 ♕c3+ 20 ♔f1 axb6 21 ♕b1 g6 22 ♕xb6+ ♗d6 23 ♕xb7 ♔f6 24 ♕c6, which is unclear.

12 g3 ♕a6?

In two moves Fritz has committed positional suicide. It can't understand what is wrong with Black's position, because White will not regain the pawn in a hurry, and this meaningless pawn is worth more than the light squares and activity of the pieces in the computer's eyes.

13 ♕xa6 bxa6 14 0-0-0 ♖d8 15 ♗g2 g6 16 d6!?

White is willing to exchange off his proud protected passed pawn in order to facilitate his play on the light squares. I managed to win the resulting ending, even though White's advantage was not that big.

Yermo – *Fritz4*

Game 3, 1997

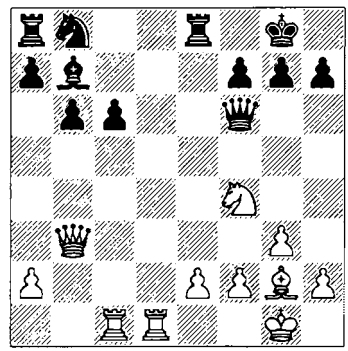
1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 b6 4 g3 ♗b7 5 ♗g2 ♗e7 6 ♘c3 ♘e4 7 ♗d2 ♗f6 8 0-0 0-0 9 ♖c1 d5 10 cxd5 exd5 11 ♗e3 ♘xc3 12 bxc3 ♕e7 13 ♘e1 c6 14 ♘d3 ♖e8 15 c4 dxc4 16 ♖xc4 ♕d7 17 ♕b3

Missing the obvious threat to the d-pawn. Who knows, this may have been a fortunate blunder, as the game took an interesting course. Of course, 17 ♘b4 a5 18 ♘c2 would keep a small plus for White.

17...♗a6 18 ♖cc1

The computer prefers 18 ♖b4?!, a move no human would ever consider.

18...♗xd4 19 ♗xd4 ♕xd4 20 ♖fd1 ♕f6 21 ♘f4 ♗b7 *(D)*

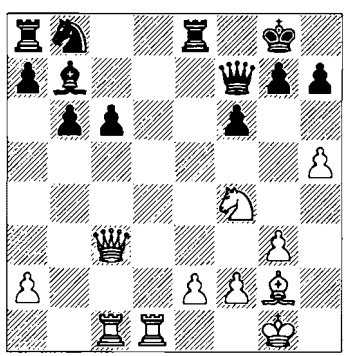


White has obvious compensation for the lost pawn. Being low on time I offered a queen swap.

22 ♕c3 ♕g5?

Keeping the queens on the board would be a risky decision in any case, but offering White a bonus tempo is plain ridiculous. There follows a typical manoeuvre I stole from Kasparov's games. The white knight forces a kingside weakness and calmly returns to the best square.

23 h4 ♕e7 24 ♘h5! f6 25 ♘f4 ♕f7 26 h5 *(D)*



26...♕xa2?

Many graduates from the Computer School of Chess would happily do the same bad business transaction, exchanging off the well-being

of their king for a meaningless pawn. We all understand, Black had nothing else but 26...♘d7 27 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 28 ♕xc6 ♘e5 with approximately equal chances, but you can safely bet against such a choice when it comes to computers.

27 h6 ♕f7 28 hxg7 ♔xg7 29 ♖d6 ♖e5 30 ♖cd1 ♗a6 31 ♗f3

Calmly preparing the final blow. Black could resign here.

31...h6 32 ♘h5+ ♖xh5 33 ♗xh5 ♕f8 34 ♕d4 1-0

Yermo – Fritz4

Game 4, 1997

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 e5 ♘e7 5 a3 ♗xc3+ 6 bxc3 c5 7 h4 ♘bc6 8 h5 cxd4 9 cxd4 ♕a5+ 10 ♗d2 ♕a4 11 ♘f3 ♘xd4 12 ♗d3 ♘ec6 13 ♔f1 ♘f5 14 h6

This has all been seen in tournament practice. Kasparov beat Nikolić, and I defended Black's colours twice against John Fedorowicz. White has a lot of play for a gambited pawn, but it's far from being clear.

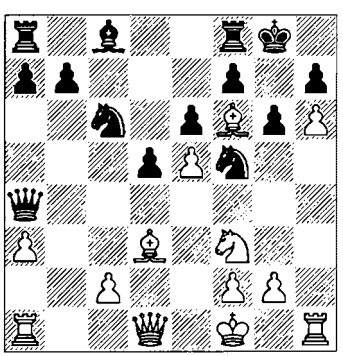
14...g6?

Surrendering the dark squares is a deadly sin in such positions. The same computer negligence as we saw before.

Both 14...gxh6 or 14...♖g8 were possible, but Fritz was out of his book.

15 ♗g5 0-0 16 ♗f6 *(D)*

B



16...♕f4?

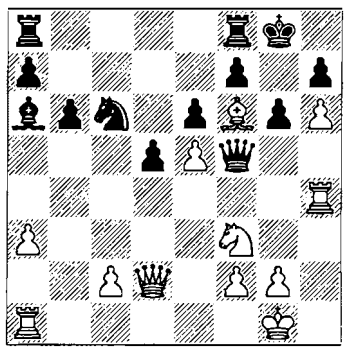
This endangers the queen. Why did Fritz play it? The queen was not going to be lost within its calculation horizon.

17 ♗xf5 ♕xf5 18 ♖h4!

White is probably just winning after this move, but it's not easy to prove it in a ten-minute game.

18...b6 19 ♕d2 ♗a6+ 20 ♔g1 *(D)*

B



20...♖ac8

Finally Fritz starts paying attention. It spots the 'threat' of repetition, 21 ♖f4 ♕h5 22 ♖h4, and changes its evaluation to 0.00. It goes without saying that White is not interested in forcing the draw. Black can't move his knight due to ♘d4, so I had all the time in the world to work on my ideas. That chesswise, but not 'clockwise'!

21 ♗g7?!

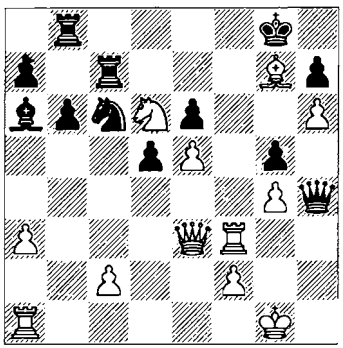
In a rush I decided to capture the f7-pawn, but 21 ♖e1! was stronger. Faced with the real threat of 22 ♖f4 ♕h5 23 ♗g5, with 24 ♖h4 to follow, Black has to jettison a piece: 21...♘xe5 22 ♗xe5 ♖xc2 23 ♕e3 ♕d3 with slim chances to survive.

21...♖fe8 22 ♖f4 ♕h5 23 g4 ♕h3 24 ♘g5 ♕h4 25 ♘xf7 ♖c7 26 ♘d6 ♖b8 27 ♕e3 g5 28 ♖f3 *(D)*

28...♘a5?

Without batting an eye Fritz lets go of the only chance to escape with the queen. In the endgame appearing at the end of the forced line, 28...♕xg4+ 29 ♖g3 ♕f4 (29...♕d4 30 ♕xg5 and wins) 30 ♗f6 ♕xe3 31 fxe3 ♘e7 32 ♗xe7

B



♖xe7 33 ♖xg5+ ♔h8 34 ♖d1, White maintains some edge thanks to the powerful knight.

29 ♖g3

Closing the cage door. I expected 29...♘c4!?, a logical continuation of Black's previous move. It would be easy to go wrong with 30 ♕f3 ♘xd6 31 exd6 ♖f7 32 ♕e3, and now not 32...♗b7 33 ♗d4!, which forces Black to drop the exchange with 33...♕xh6 34 ♕e5 ♕g7, but 32...♖e8!. The attempt to win the black queen with 33 ♔g2 allows strong counterplay after 33...d4! 34 ♕xd4 ♗b7+ 35 f3 ♖f4 36 d7 ♖ef8! (not 36...♖d8 37 ♕e3 ♗d5 38 ♖h1 ♖xf3 39 ♖xf3 ♕xg4+ 40 ♔f2 and White wins), and White has nothing better than the draw achieved after 37 ♕f2 ♗xf3+ 38 ♖xf3 ♕xf2+ 39 ♔xf2 ♖xf3+ 40 ♔e2 ♖f2+ 41 ♔e1 ♖f1+ 42 ♔e2, etc.

However, White can do much better answering 29...♘c4 with 30 ♕d4. The ever-present threat of ♔g2 and ♖h1 forces Black's hand: 30...♘xd6 31 exd6 ♖f7 (bad is 31...♖xc2 32 ♕f6 ♖e2 33 d7, or 31...♖c4 for the same reason), 32 ♖e1!, and now we can see the difference – White keeps a firm dark-square blockade. Since 32...♖e8 is impossible on account of 33 ♕a4, Black has serious problems defending his e-pawn. I doubt I would be able to handle this stuff in a blitz game, but that's not really important. Computers don't use the time factor in their decision-making, so Fritz wouldn't try to complicate my task by intentionally making inferior moves.

29...♗b7

Re-positioning the knight, 29...♘b7 30 ♕f3 ♘c5, would be associated with a nice trap: 31 ♖h3 ♗e2! 32 ♕e3 d4, but what to do in case of 31 ♖e1, followed by ♖h3?

30 ♕f3 d4 31 ♘xb7 ♖c3 32 ♕g2 ♘xb7 33 ♖xc3 dxc3 34 ♖d1 ♘c5 35 ♖d4?

A typical human time-trouble move with no particular purpose. 35 ♕f3, followed by ♔g2 and ♖h1, would immediately force resignation, and I found this plan a split-second later.

35...a6 36 ♕f3 ♖e8 37 ♔g2

Facing the threat of ♖d1-h1 Fritz soon began to shed material.

Once again, I apologize for the quality of the games and analysis presented above. I thought no profound annotations would be appropriate, or in any case required to get a picture of what was happening; and I hope my dear reader will accept those games as a parting gift.

Alex Yermolinsky
Cleveland, OH 1999

Index of Openings

Index of Players

List of Alex Yermolinsky's Opponents

Where a page number appears in **bold**, the named player had White.

Games by Other Players

When the second-named player appears in **bold**, that player had White.

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£17.99 $24.95

ISBN 1-901983-24-2